

National Collaborative Outreach Programme

*Year one report of the national
formative and impact evaluation,
including capacity building with
NCOP consortia*

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Hallam
University**

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Institute
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THE
BEHAVIOURAL
INSIGHTS TEAM.

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Abbreviations and glossary

AWM	Aimhigher West Midlands
BAME	Black, Asian and minority ethnic
BIT	The Behavioural Insights Team
EMWPREP	East Midlands Widening Participation Research and Evaluation Partnership
FEC	Further Education College
FTE	Full-time equivalent
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
HE	Higher Education
HEAT	Higher Education Access Tracker
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England
HEI	Higher Education Institution
IAG	Information, Advice and Guidance
LA	Local Authority
Lead HEI	Accountable institution
LEP	Local Enterprise Partnership
LSYPE	Longitudinal Study of Young People in England
NCOP	National Collaborative Outreach Programme
NNCO	National Networks for Collaborative Outreach
NPD	National Pupil Database
Partner	Core partners involved in the design and delivery of NCOP funded activity. This can include HEIs, FECs and in some cases schools. Schools and FECs in receipt of NCOP funded activity are excluded from this definition
RCT	Randomised Controlled Trial

SFC

Sixth Form College

SHU

Sheffield Hallam University

Third Party
Organisations

Not part of the core consortium partnership but subcontracted
to deliver activity

Executive Summary

NCOP aims to boost higher education (HE) participation rates amongst disadvantaged young people in England in order to contribute to the achievement of current Government goals to double the proportion of disadvantaged young people going in to HE and increase by 20 per cent the number of students from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds by 2020. In addition, the Government has highlighted concerns about the continuing gap in HE participation rates between men and women, with particular reference to boys from disadvantaged backgrounds.

NCOP funds 29 consortia formed of HE institutions (HEIs), further education colleges (FECs), schools and other organisations such as employers, third sector bodies and Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) to deliver focused activity to pupils living in areas with low absolute levels of HE participation and where participation is lower than expected given GCSE attainment. All except three of the 29 consortia have built on pre-existing partnerships. However, in some cases the exact composition of consortia has changed due the scale of activity and the number of schools and FECs engaged with.

Aims and objectives of the national evaluations

CFE Research, in partnership with Sheffield Hallam University (SHU), the Behavioural Insights Team (BIT), Professor Jennifer Roberts and Dr Shqiponja Telhaj, was commissioned by HEFCE to undertake the formative and impact evaluations of NCOP. The key objectives of the *formative evaluation* are to examine the effectiveness of the processes involved in the design and implementation of collaborative approaches to outreach and to contribute to a fuller understanding of what works, in what context and why. The principal aim of the *impact evaluation* is to assess the consequential changes resulting from the diversity of NCOP interventions, by using a range of experimental and quasi-experimental methodologies. In addition, the team is helping to develop the capacity of consortia to evaluate their activities at the local level.

Across the evaluations, we have implemented a mixed-methods approach which involves: a survey of consortia staff and six field visits, a baseline survey of NCOP learners, two flagship randomised controlled trials (RCTs) and desk research of programme documentation and monitoring information. In addition, we have delivered a programme of capacity building which involved two workshops, two webinars, associated good practice guides and case management.

Key findings

This report draws on evidence from the desk research, survey of staff and participants, and field visits to consortia. It explores: how consortia partnerships are working and which approaches appear to be most effective; the barriers and enablers to school and FEC engagement and perceptions of engagement with NCOP learners; progress with local evaluations and the extent and nature of the measures that are in place to capture NCOP outcomes and impacts at the local level; and learners' aspirations, knowledge of HE, and

intentions to progress to HE prior to their involvement in NCOP. The report concludes with a summary of the emerging lessons and next steps for the evaluation.

Consortia partnerships

- A key impact of NCOP to date is enhanced collaboration between diverse partners and the benefits this brings. Collaboration across a range of partners helps to enhance expertise, generate fresh ideas and ensure a varied offer of experiences and opportunities for learners. FECs in particular offer different insights and an alternative pathway to HE that is potentially very beneficial to the NCOP.
- Establishing partnerships with appropriate staff, processes and a collaborative ethos takes time. Staff recruitment in particular can be very time consuming. Where consortia have built on existing partnerships this has been helpful, but it is vital that structures and processes are fit for purpose and that the important ways NCOP is different to previous collaborative outreach initiatives is clearly communicated.
- A degree of central control from consortia is needed to ensure the NCOP offer is coherent and coordinated. More effort is needed in highly-devolved funding models to ensure overarching aims and objectives are effectively communicated, understood and adhered to.
- Employing all staff centrally helps ensure consistency and focus. Consortia are better able to direct staff and ensure they remain assigned to NCOP activity. Team members have the same terms and conditions, removing potential areas for disharmony.
- This does not necessarily mean all staff need to be centrally located. Community-based outreach teams are effective in building local relationships, understanding needs and developing tailored responses. Embedding staff in a variety of locations helps consortia to cover often wide geographic areas. Staff embedded within other organisations need to ensure they maintain their NCOP identity so that they are seen as providers of impartial information and advice.
- There is scope to improve communication between the different lead and partner institutions and between strategic and operational teams, in particular, ensuring that all understand the targeting of learners and the rationale for this.

School and FEC engagement

- To date over 1,200 schools have been actively engaged with the programme.
- A major barrier is that some schools and FECs do not have the time and resource to prioritise and engage with NCOP. This can be helped by aligning outreach activity with the school curriculum and other priorities, allowing lead-in time to plan activity and providing funding or other resources to support schools and FEC engagement.
- Building new relationships with schools and FECs can be time-consuming. In particular, FECs can be more challenging to engage. Consortia may benefit from greater involvement of FECs as part of their core partnership.
- Outreach staff may require further support to communicate effectively to schools and FECs the ways NCOP is distinct from other outreach activity and the rationale for this. There is a strong perception among some outreach staff that the targeted nature of NCOP is problematic and could present a barrier to school and FEC engagement. These same concerns were not expressed by schools and FECs.

- The consortia we visited are delivering a combination of generic activities and programmes tailored to individual school/FEC needs. Bespoke programmes are seen to be more effective in addressing particular needs and complementing other outreach activity. Generic approaches have been used to deliver activity quickly and engage schools and FECs.
- Engaging parents of target learners is recognised as key, but how to do this effectively is a challenge. Undertaking activity in the community rather than in educational settings is one promising approach.
- It is too early to strongly evidence the impact of the NCOP activities, although there is some emerging evidence of positive effects on IAG and on school and FEC cultures of aspiration and progression.

Evaluating NCOP at a local and national level

- The review of consortia evaluation plans identified a number of common areas that could be improved to ensure alignment with the national evaluation. Some evaluation plans would be significantly strengthened by providing further clarity on the underpinning theoretical framework/model that has been used (e.g. more detail about the logic chain) and the addition or clarification of commentary about the intended outreach and evaluation activities that will take place.
- Specifying and quantifying objectives, targets and detailing success indicators would further improve some consortia evaluation plans. A number of plans did not include outcomes beyond the broader NCOP aims and objectives as set out by HEFCE. Evaluation plans and activities would be strengthened if plans could break down overarching outcomes into more discreet, measurable, shorter-term outcomes. Quantifying the intended improvement, either by number or proportion, would strengthen evaluation plans and ensure that consortia have clear markers of success by which to assess their outreach activities.
- Employing a dedicated evaluation role as part of consortia staffing models is important. Consortia should view this as integral to their staff model. In the absence of a dedicated evaluation post, it will be challenging for consortia to appropriately plan, implement and analyse evaluation activities and ensure that there is alignment with the national evaluation. Drawing upon evaluation expertise from other academic departments or commissioning specific elements of local evaluation plans can be beneficial, but should be viewed as supplementary to a dedicated evaluation post.
- Implementing and maintaining effective communication of local evaluation aims and objectives. Effective evaluation largely depends on the extent to which evaluation plans are fully embedded. Developing a local evaluation plan is a crucial step towards embedding effective evaluation procedures. A coordinated approach should be taken to communicate evaluation plans to all consortia staff to ensure a consistent and coherent evaluation approach is adopted. Involving consortia staff in the design and delivery of evaluation activity is important to secure consortia and school/FEC buy-in and transparency of approach.
- Evaluation should be viewed as an iterative and on-going activity, of critical importance. To achieve this, it is important that evaluation plans and progress are regularly reviewed and updated in light of changes to approach to ensure that they are aligned with the NCOP objectives and the national evaluation. Maintaining a risk-log to mitigate against potential challenges and time slippage should also be considered.

- Considerable progress has been made to use experimental methods to evaluate NCOP activity. Two flagship RCTs are in field to evaluate the effectiveness of a text-based intervention and e-mentoring programme on student aspirations, knowledge, intentions and actual progression to HE. A third RCT to evaluate summer schools is planned for later in 2018. Several consortia have expressed plans to employ quasi-experimental methodologies as part of their local evaluation activity. The meta-review of local evaluation evidence in 2018 will enable progress to be mapped out.
- Establishing school engagement with evaluation activities has been challenging for some consortia. Some consortia highlighted that it has taken significant resource to engage with, and secure school/FEC buy-in for evaluation activities. Schools have limited time and competing priorities, which has prevented some from engaging in the participant baseline survey. Ensuring all consortia outreach staff are fully briefed about evaluation aims and establishing key points of contacts in schools/FECs may help to secure engagement.

NCOP learner perceptions of HE

- A baseline of aspirations, knowledge of HE, and intentions to progress to HE has been set with over 28,000 NCOP learners in Years 9 to 13 studying in schools, sixth form colleges (SFCs) and FECs across 27 consortia.
- Learners' knowledge of how HE can benefit those who study at that level and their confidence in their ability to cope with the demands of HE is high and increases with age; the closer a young person gets to the transition point aged 18, the greater their self-reported confidence and knowledge of the benefits of HE are. Black and Asian learners report the highest levels of knowledge and confidence; disabled students are typically less positive about the likely benefits of HE for them and their ability to cope with the demands of studying at a HE.
- A third of NCOP learners are aware that they would be the first in their family to attend HE should they progress. Interestingly, a similar proportion do not know whether anyone else in their immediate family has HE experience. Despite their relative lack of direct HE experience, family is one of the strongest influences on learners' decision-making. Reaching out to parents/carers to ensure they are equipped to help their child make an informed decision about whether HE is right for them could be one way NCOP consortia could impact progression rates.
- Learners are, overall, less knowledgeable about the practical elements of HE, including the costs, funding available, and accommodation options. Information for parents, as well as young people, on the costs of HE and the funding available may be particularly impactful given this is an area learners report they know least about and there is existing research¹ to suggest that the perceived cost of HE can (negatively) influence parental views, particularly amongst disadvantaged groups.
- The majority of younger students who know what they want to do post-16 aspire to remain in education. Years 12 to 13 learners studying at sixth form are twice as likely to aspire to study at a university away from home as those currently studying at an FEC. Conversely, FEC learners are more than twice as likely to aspire to full time work as those

¹ For example BMG Research and CFE Research (2017) *Understanding the changing gaps in HE participation in different regions of England*. London: DfE.

in sixth form. Interestingly, a similar proportion of Year 11 and FEC Level 2 learners aspire to an apprenticeship. This suggests that the transition aged 16 is crucial, often setting learners on a path to either work or further study. Influencing learners at this stage may therefore be more impactful than post-16 when plans appear to become more fixed. This also suggests that the type of support required by learners on different routes may vary. It is important that students make the right decision for them, up to and following GCSEs, whether that be an academic or technical route (perhaps via a higher or degree apprenticeship). This highlights the importance of aligning outreach activity with that of the Careers & Enterprise Company.

- Learners in sixth form are more likely to have applied or report that they intend to apply to HE than those studying in FECs. The majority of older learners who have not applied to HE report that they are unlikely to do so in the future, irrespective of where they are currently studying. Male learners, in particular, are more likely to aspire to full-time work, driven by a desire to earn money, rather than HE. This suggests there is a group of learners who believe HE is not for them and underscores the importance of engaging learners earlier in the student lifecycle in order to influence their attitudes and aspirations, in order to ensure they consider all the options available to them.

Emerging lessons and next steps

- Many consortia have required much of the first year of the programme to recruit staff teams, develop effective partnership working and engage schools and FECs. Pressure to deliver activity and engage learners quickly means it is less likely to be strategic and tailored to meet local needs.
- Consortia have expended a great deal of time, effort and resource in developing their partnerships and outreach offers and are beginning to see the benefits. It is important that consortia have the opportunity to capitalise on this initial investment and realise the full benefits. This opportunity is limited if the programme is not extended beyond the initial phase (December 2018).
- The substantial funding available through NCOP has helped to engage stakeholders, including organisations that HEIs may not have worked with previously, such as employers, community groups and third-party providers of outreach activity. The NCOP funding also allows consortia to create highly tailored packages of support for individual schools and FECs.
- Collaboration with a diverse range of partners is a key feature and benefit of NCOP. To ensure that programmes of activity are coherent and that staff understand consortium aims, objectives and priorities, there does need to be *some* degree of central control and coordination within consortia.
- The baseline survey of NCOP learners has offered a positive glimpse that young people do recognise the benefits of HE. Overall, NCOP learners aspire to progress to HE and are confident in their ability to do so. However, there are certain groups that do not reflect this overall trend. Disabled learners have lower levels of knowledge about the benefits of HE and are less confident in their ability to fit in and cope with student life. White, working-class learners, and in particular young men, are less likely to aspire to HE. They are more likely to want to move into the labour market quickly and are more attracted to

full-time work or apprenticeship routes that offer opportunities to earn and learn. Consortia should consider developing tailored outreach activity for these specific groups.

- There is a stark difference in attitudes between post-16 learners in sixth-forms and those in FECs. Many NCOP learners located within FECs see their future progression taking place locally. Once learners progress to sixth form, many appear to be on a clear trajectory to participation in HE. This is not typically the case for FEC learners, although HE options may be available to them locally. Therefore, there is a case for consortia focusing on engaging FECs. It will also be important for consortia to focus their efforts on engaging young NCOP learners (pre-16) and providing a progressive programme for them that builds each year.
- Parents are a huge influence on the decisions that young people make about careers and education, yet a substantial proportion of NCOP learners know of no-one in their family who has experience of HE. Consortia recognise the importance of engaging parents but this is challenging and there is yet little evidence that they have plans for how they will achieve this. However, some are seeking to reach out to parents in their communities in recognition of the fact that not all parents are willing to engage in a school/educational setting.
- This report is necessarily limited and tentative in its findings. NCOP has been planned as a four year programme, and it will take a number of years before its impact can be evidenced through any increased participation rates in HE. It is therefore too soon to offer much evidence of impact. A good understanding of which approaches are most effective in engaging and supporting different groups will be crucial to inform the ongoing development of consortia programmes. Resource for local evaluation is finite, so it may be more useful for consortia to focus on understanding what works with regard to supporting specific groups, such as disabled students and white working-class boys, and/or on evaluating approaches that are genuinely new and untested. Some of the consortia are planning to take such an approach to their evaluations. This would complement the national evaluations, which are working on a broader scale to understand the overall impact.

Next steps

Year 1 of the evaluation has identified a number of issues which warrant further exploration as the evaluation progress in year 2. These include:

- Examining the prevalence of the different models in operation across the consortia and how they are evolving in response to the experience of delivering NCOP during year 1. A particular focus will be placed on the effectiveness of governance arrangements.
- Exploring the extent to which consortia are working with schools and FECs to up-skill staff in order to ensure the sustainability of the activity post-NCOP.
- Investigating effective approaches to engaging parents and ensuring the learner voice informs the ongoing development of the programme and individual activities.
- Evaluating the extent to which consortia develop genuinely innovative approaches as they become more established and the effectiveness of these activities.

- Further exploring learners' aspirations, knowledge of HE and future plans through a follow-up survey of participants. The primary survey data will be linked to longitudinal tracking data to begin to explore the impact of the programme.
- Ongoing review of local evaluation plans and findings to ensure robust evidence and synergy between the national and local evaluations.
- Assessing the challenges of designing and implementing RCTs in the context of NCOP and how these can be addressed to ensure experimental methods can be used to best effect to demonstrate the impact of outreach activities.

1. Introduction

The National Collaborative Outreach Programme commenced in January 2017, at which point CFE Research and partners were commissioned to undertake a formative and impact evaluation of the programme and deliver capacity building to support local evaluations. This report summarises the findings from the first 12 months of the national evaluation and sets out the priorities for year 2.

Funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), the National Collaborative Outreach Programme (NCOP) aims to boost higher education (HE) participation rates in the most disadvantaged areas in England in order to contribute to the achievement of current Government goals to double the proportion of disadvantaged young people going into HE, and increase by 20 per cent the number of students from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds by 2020. In addition, the Government has highlighted concerns about the continuing gap in HE participation rates between men and women, with particular reference to boys from disadvantaged backgrounds.

The funding available for NCOP is £30m in academic year 2016/17 and £60m per year from 2017/18. A total of 29 consortia² formed of HE institutions (HEIs), Further Education Colleges (FEC), schools and other organisations such as employers, third sector bodies and Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) are being funded through the programme to deliver focused activity to pupils living in areas with low absolute levels of HE participation and where participation is lower than expected given GCSE attainment, as identified through HEFCE's analysis 'Gaps in young participation into higher education'³. All except 3 of the 29 consortia have built on pre-existing partnerships, established through the National Networks for Collaborative Outreach (NNCO), Aimhigher or Lifelong Learning Networks.⁴

In order to make the rapid progress required to increase access to HE to the level needed to achieve the Government's goals, the consortia are focusing their work on the older age groups in schools and FECs, targeting activity primarily at Key Stage 4 and 5 learners from Years 9 through to 13. In this way, the programme will complement existing investment by HEIs and Government in broader outreach which supports learners from their early school years as well as older learners to aspire and successfully progress to HE.

A key element of the NCOP is to strengthen the evidence base on the impact of outreach initiatives by fostering a step-change and embedding monitoring and evaluation within outreach activity at the local and national level. The formative and impact evaluation and

² Please refer to Appendix one for details of the 29 NCOP consortia

³ 'Gaps in young participation in higher education', HEFCE is available at www.hefce.ac.uk/analysis/yp/gaps/

⁴ Information on the map of target wards and funded consortia is available at www.hefce.ac.uk/sas/ncop/maps/

capacity building being undertaken by CFE and its partners form two strands of a wider programme of research which will monitor outputs from the programme, examine return on investment, track participants into long-term outcomes and examine ‘what works in what context and why’ at a local level⁵. Figure 1 illustrates how the different pieces of the ‘jigsaw’ fit together to develop the evidence base and identifies the organisations that are responsible for each element.

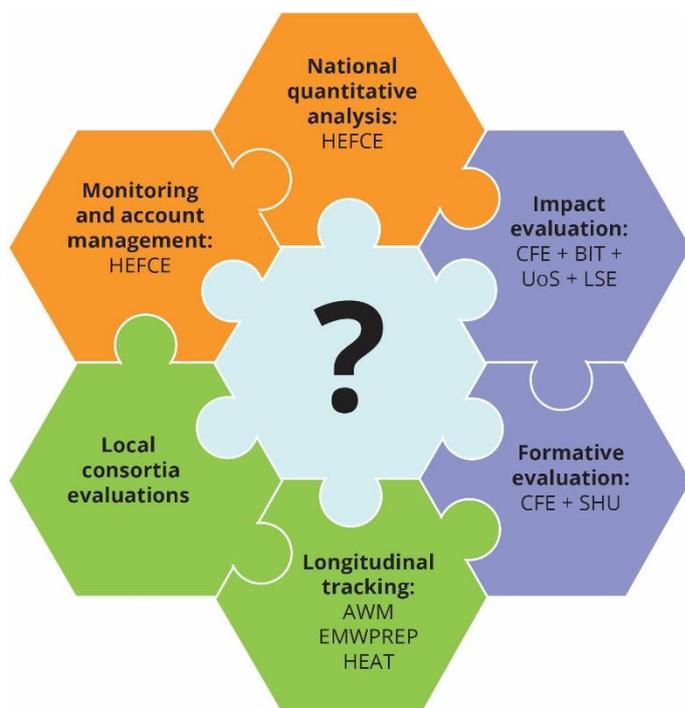


Figure 1: NCOP: building the evidence

Key:	
HEFCE: Higher Education Funding Council for England	SHU: Sheffield Hallam University
CFE: CFE Research	AWM: Aimhigher West Midlands
BIT: The Behavioural Insights Team	EMWPREP: East Midlands Widening Participation Research and Evaluation Partnership
UoS: The University of Sheffield	HEAT: Higher Education Access Tracker
LSE: The London School of Economics and Political Science	

HEFCE: Each consortium has been assigned a dedicated account manager at HEFCE whose role is to provide advice on the implementation of the programme, including delivery targets and monitoring requirements. The consortia are currently required to submit quarterly financial monitoring returns in addition to biannual monitoring against local operational plans to assess progress towards local targets and objectives. In addition to collating and analysing the monitoring data, HEFCE’s analytical services department will be undertaking quantitative analysis of national administrative datasets to assess target area outcomes in terms of: rates of progression into pathways at Key Stage 5, and HE entry and progression rates. This includes econometric analysis on the return on investment.

⁵ An overview of the evaluation of NCOP is available at www.hefce.ac.uk/sas/ncop/eval-monitor/

Local consortia: Each consortium is required to demonstrate the impact of NCOP at a local level. Each has developed an evaluation framework and is undertaking a range of activities to understand the effectiveness of individual outreach activities as well as the impact of the programme as a whole at the local level. The findings from the local evaluations will be synthesised in meta-review by the national evaluation team.

Longitudinal tracking: Each consortium is required to record the activity that NCOP learners engage in on one of three longitudinal trackers – AWM, EMWPREP or HEAT. These organisations will link the activity data with national administrative data in order to facilitate analysis of the impact of individual activities on target learners. The national evaluation team intend to link primary participant survey data to the longitudinal tracking data in order to analyse the impact of NCOP at the national level.

National formative evaluation: HEFCE has commissioned CFE Research in partnership with Sheffield Hallam University (SHU) to undertake the formative evaluation of NCOP over the course of its operation. The key objectives are to examine the effectiveness of the processes involved in the design and implementation of collaborative approaches to outreach and to contribute to a fuller understanding of what works, in what context and why. In addition, the team is helping to develop the capacity of consortia to evaluate their activities at the local level. The national formative evaluation will triangulate local and national evidence to understand how effectively NCOP partnerships are operating and delivering outreach to students in the target wards, and to identify good practice and areas for improvement.

National impact evaluation: CFE is also working in partnership with The Behavioural Insights Team and two academics, Professor Jennifer Roberts (The University of Sheffield) and Dr Shqiponja Telhaj (The London School of Economics and Political Science), to evaluate the national impact of the NCOP. The principal aim of the impact evaluation is to assess the consequential changes resulting from the diversity of NCOP interventions, by utilising a range of experimental and quasi-experimental methodologies. To date, relatively little use has been made of experimental and quasi-experimental methodologies to evaluate outreach policy and practice. NCOP is providing an important test-bed which it is hoped will result in a step-change in evaluation practice within this field.

National evaluation framework

The framework for the national formative and impact evaluations is underpinned by a Theory of Change approach. The Theory of Change along with the associated logic chain and indicator bank builds on earlier work by CFE for HEFCE to understand the impact of Student Opportunity funding and the wider work that takes place to widen access, improve retention and success, and support disabled students across the HE sector. This previous programme of research comprised two related strands which combined to develop a framework for quantifying and assessing impact, and evidencing the role that the Student Opportunity allocation played in helping to deliver key outcomes.⁶ The development of the

⁶ The report 'Student opportunity outcomes framework research: in depth study' is available at: www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/rereports/year/2015/sodepth/

national evaluation framework for NCOP was informed by a series of scoping interviews with HEFCE, consortia staff and the three longitudinal tracking organisations⁷ AWM, EMWPREP and HEAT, along with the findings from a desk-based review of programme documentation including consortia applications and operating plans. It was further refined following introductory workshops with consortia.

The national evaluation framework underpins both strands of evaluative activity and is designed to meet HEFCE's objectives, while also ensuring:

- the framework is practical to implement and the burden on consortia and young people is minimised
- synergy between the national and local evaluation plans, so that duplication or conflicting data collection processes are avoided
- flexibility to respond to emerging findings and/or changes in policy or programme delivery.

The national evaluation framework comprises:

- A logic chain which articulates the resources (inputs) and activities which will be delivered by the consortia, and how these are linked to expected outputs, outcomes and impacts of NCOP.
- An indicator framework detailing the measures against which the success of the programme will be assessed and the sources of information and the methods of data collection.

The logic chain and indicator bank for the entire programme (encompassing impact and formative evaluations) was circulated to consortia to help inform the development of local evaluation plans. The logic chain and indicator bank is included in Appendix 2.

Activity to date

Over the course the first 12 months of NCOP, the national evaluation teams have undertaken a wide range of activities to develop the capacity of local evaluation teams, to capture evidence on the initial set up and implementation of NCOP, and to establish the protocols required for the impact evaluation.

To date the formative evaluation has delivered:

- a review of the operating plans that consortia submitted to HEFCE in January 2016
- a consortia survey of 849 governors, consortia leads and staff working within the lead and partner organisations exploring their views and experiences of partnership working and perceptions of the impact of NCOP to date
- field visits to six consortia to identify and explore the effectiveness of different operating models and approaches. Consortia were identified to ensure geographical coverage and

The report 'Student Opportunity outcomes framework research programme: Data return project' is available at www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/rereports/year/2015/sodataret/

⁷ Each consortium is required to work with one of these tracking organisations to log their activity with individual NCOP students.

degree of progress. DANCOP, Future U, Go Higher West Yorkshire, Higher Horizons, Make Happen and Study Higher were approached. All six consortia agreed to the visit and were extremely welcoming and accommodating. We consulted with over 150 stakeholders through 57 individual and paired face-to-face interviews, telephone interviews and focus group discussions. Staff in a range of roles were consulted, including consortia leads, evaluation leads, managers, and outreach and delivery staff employed by the lead and partner organisations. We also consulted with staff within the schools and FECs where NCOP-funded activities are being delivered

- a review of local evaluation plans and emerging evidence produced by consortia
- an analysis of NCOP JISCMail postings.

The capacity building has delivered:

- an introductory workshop for consortia members. The workshop was run twice in different locations and was attended by 83 staff from 28 of the 29 consortia that were operational at that point, HEFCE and members of the three longitudinal tracking organisations
- two webinars. The first focused on survey design and delivery and was attended by 37 delegates. The second focused on quasi-experimental methods, including the use of HEAT to track participants and control groups, and was attended by 39 delegates. Following these webinars, two papers were produced to provide consortia with further information and guidance to support them with their own evaluation practice
- ongoing support from a case manager and information and resources shared through HEFCE's NCOP JISCMail. Support to date has focussed on local evaluation plans, the design and administration of the baseline survey, and the development of GDPR⁸ compliant consent and data sharing agreements. In addition, consortia that are engaging with the Randomised Controlled Trials have received support from BIT to design and administer trial protocols
- ongoing advice to HEFCE on programme monitoring to minimise duplication with the evaluation and burden on consortia.

The impact evaluation has delivered:

- 19 scoping interviews with HEFCE, members of the three longitudinal tracking organisations and consortia staff including heads of access and outreach, NCOP project co-ordinators, data analysts and research officers and evaluation leads
- a baseline survey of almost 58,000 pupils⁹. The baseline survey was administered by consortia on CFE's behalf via schools and FECs. The survey was available for completion in paper-based format or online. The majority of the consortia administered and/or input the survey data using CFE's system – Confirmit. A small number of consortia captured the data in their own software and transferred the data to CFE in an agreed format. In some instances the survey comprised two parts. Part one comprised the baseline survey

⁸ The General Data Protection Regulation which comes into effect in the UK in May 2018. For more information see: <https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/guide-to-the-general-data-protection-regulation-gdpr/>

⁹ This total was accurate at the time of writing. Additional survey responses have since been received and the data analysis will be included in the next report. The data will also be used by consortia in their local evaluations.

questions for the national evaluation; part two included questions for the local evaluations. Only part one data has been analysed by CFE and is reported here

- two flagship randomised controlled trials (RCTs). CFE and BIT have supported the NEACO consortium to design and implement an RCT to measure the impact of a text messaging intervention. A second RCT to measure the impact of e-mentoring has recently commenced by the SUN consortium and Brightside
- ongoing liaison with the three data tracking organisations to facilitate data sharing and a consistent approach in terms of data capture and definition of activities.

Report structure

This report summarises the early findings from formative and impact evaluation activities to date in order to:

1. explore the extent and nature of collaborative approaches and partnership working to achieve the NCOP objectives
2. provide evidence of the mechanisms and procedures that consortia have implemented to capture the impact of NCOP at the local level and the extent to which this is informing the national formative and impact evaluation
3. provide a baseline position of pupils' perceptions of HE, including their aspirations, knowledge and intentions towards HE before engaging in NCOP, to enable the impact of NCOP activity to be captured at follow-up
4. identify the challenges and emerging lessons in relation to the evaluation of outreach at a local and national level.

Following this introduction, the report is presented in five chapters:

Chapter 2: Consortia partnerships: This chapter examines the composition and structure of the 29 consortia. It explores how the partnerships are working and emerging evidence of the operating models and approaches which appear most effective. The chapter concludes with emerging evidence of the benefits that collaborative approaches bring to the delivery of outreach.

Chapter 3: School and FEC engagement: Drawing on the findings from the consortia survey and field visits, this chapter explores the barriers and enablers to school/FEC engagement and perceptions of school/FEC engagement with NCOP learners. The targeted nature of NCOP and how this has shaped and influenced delivery in schools and FECs is also explored. The strengths and limitations of current delivery models and examples of innovative activity are identified, along with emerging evidence of the early impacts of NCOP.

Chapter 4: Evaluating NCOP at a local and national level: This chapter draws on primary research with consortia and our desk-based review of local evaluation plans in order to explore the extent and nature of the measures that are in place to capture NCOP outcomes and impacts at the local level, the extent to which consortia evaluation frameworks are aligned with the national framework and the challenges encountered when designing and implementing evaluation plans. It concludes with a summary of the progress that has been in terms of implementing experimental methodologies to evaluate outreach activity.

Chapter 5: NCOP learner perceptions of HE: This chapter provides an initial analysis of the top-line findings from the participant survey which was administered to learners in the Autumn Term of the 2017/18 academic year. It explores learners' aspirations, knowledge of HE and intentions to progress to HE prior to their involvement in NCOP overall as well as by year group and pupil characteristics such as gender, ethnicity and disability.

The report concludes with **Chapter 6** which summarises the emerging lessons and next steps for the evaluation.

2. Consortia partnerships

A key objective of NCOP is to develop effective collaborative approaches to outreach in order to target and support learners with the potential to progress to HE. The formation of partnerships and partnership working are therefore at the heart of the programme.

Summary of key findings

- A key impact of NCOP to date is enhanced collaboration between diverse partners and the benefits this brings. Collaboration across a range of partners helps to enhance expertise, generate fresh ideas and ensure a varied offer of experiences and opportunities for learners. FECs in particular offer different insights and an alternative pathway to HE that is potentially very beneficial to the NCOP.
- Establishing partnerships with appropriate staff, processes and a collaborative ethos takes time. Staff recruitment in particular can be very time consuming. Where consortia have built on existing partnerships this has been helpful, but it is vital that structures and processes are fit for purpose and that the important ways NCOP is different to previous collaborative outreach initiatives is clearly communicated.
- A degree of central control from consortia is needed to ensure the NCOP offer is coherent and coordinated. More effort is needed in highly-devolved funding models to ensure overarching aims and objectives are effectively communicated, understood and adhered to.
- Employing all staff centrally helps ensure consistency and focus. Consortia are better able to direct staff and ensure they remain assigned to NCOP activity. Team members have the same terms and conditions, removing potential areas for disharmony.
- This does not necessarily mean all staff need to be centrally located. Community-based outreach teams are effective in building local relationships, understanding needs and developing tailored responses. Embedding staff in a variety of locations helps consortia to cover often wide geographic areas. Staff embedded within other organisations need to ensure they maintain their NCOP identity so that they are seen as providers of impartial information and advice.
- There is scope to improve communication between the different lead and partner institutions and between strategic and operational teams, in particular, ensuring that all understand the targeting of learners and the rationale for this.

Introduction

This chapter examines the composition and structure of the 29 consortia. It explores how the partnerships are working and emerging evidence of the operating models and approaches which appear most effective. The chapter concludes with emerging evidence of the benefits that collaborative approaches bring to the delivery of outreach.

Building on legacy programmes

All except 3 of the 29 consortia have built on pre-existing partnerships, established through the National Networks for Collaborative Outreach (NNCO)¹⁰ or earlier outreach programmes such as Aimhigher and Lifelong Learning Networks. However, NCOP is distinctly different from these other initiatives, being more targeted, with increased levels of funding and activity and a particular emphasis on robust evaluation. The legacy of previous programmes such as NNCO and Aimhigher was highlighted in the field visits.

Some consortia have clearly benefitted from being able to draw upon the experience and maturity of partnerships and knowledge of what works. This has enabled them to make informed decisions fast about funding allocations, staffing models and strategic priorities and thus get off the ground relatively quickly. Those without these foundations can feel it has taken them longer to get established.

I don't think I appreciated how much setting up time we would need, actually. As far as I know, [the consortium] isn't as established as some of the other partnerships. I know some of the other partnerships since Aimhigher have been quite strong. [...] I think that's the challenge, coming from almost nothing. (Consortium lead)

However, some consortia members have experienced challenges in building on earlier initiatives, particularly NNCO. In some cases partners have assumed that NCOP is a straightforward continuation or have not adjusted their approach or staffing to address the different aims and objectives of NCOP.

NNCO did lay the ground work for a lot of this, and there have been misconceptions, from staff that worked under NNCO. They expected NCOP to be a continuation of that, and it's much more targeted, much more specific, particularly including things like the community engagement strand. (Consortium staff member)

Some consortia welcomed the opportunity to design partnership and governance structures from scratch to ensure they work for NCOP. One newly-established consortium not involved in NNCO were excited by the opportunities presented by NCOP to draw on a range of different expertise and ideas from other organisations to help shape their offer.

Consortia membership and governance

Consortia typically comprise HEIs, schools, FECs, businesses, Local Authorities (LAs), LEPs and community or voluntary organisations. Partners have different levels of involvement in consortia. Across the 29 consortia there are a total of 345 'core' members – that is, organisations that are actively involved in the management, design and/or delivery of the programme. HEIs and FECs are widely represented among core partners, with smaller

¹⁰ The NNCO programme was designed to support a collaborative approach to outreach activity across England and ran from December 2014 to December 2016 with £22m of funding from HEFCE. See <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/rereports/year/2017/nncoeval/> for further information.

numbers of other organisations. There is a larger number of wider partners (504 in total), with most of these being schools (see Figure 2).

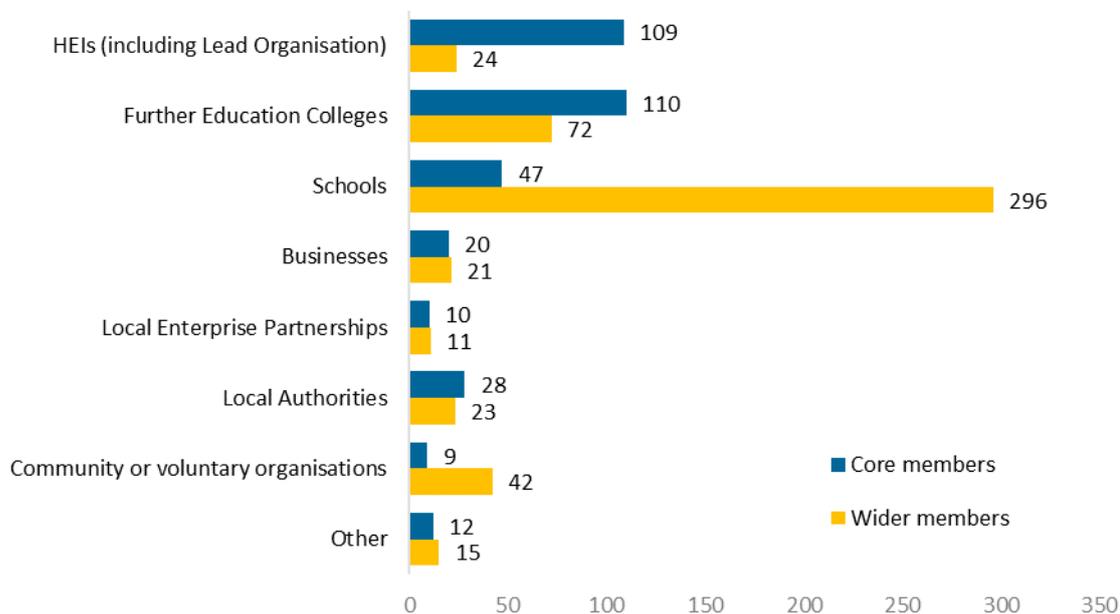


Figure 2: Total number of different types of core and wider consortia members

While the largest group of partners are schools, consortia members are only a sub-set of the schools that consortia are working with to deliver outreach to their pupils. Recent HEFCE monitoring data indicates that just over 1,200 schools are actively engaged with the programme.

Overall, there is strong agreement from the lead HEI and partner organisations that consortia are comprised of appropriate organisations. A clear benefit of the NCOP is the extent to which it has enabled the development of new partnerships and partnerships between a more diverse range of organisations. There is a high level of agreement among consortia survey respondents that they have developed new partnerships with HE and FE providers, FECs, local organisations and schools, including those that have not engaged with outreach previously or for a number of years (for example, since Aimhigher) (see Figure 3).



Figure 3: Mean rating of agreement with statements about developing new partnerships. 1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree. Bases in brackets.

Fieldwork highlighted the importance of ensuring FEC representation within the core partnership. FECs can provide alternative expertise on outreach initiatives and on the needs of learners in a particular locality that some HEIs may not have:

The FECs are far more in touch with widening participation than the majority of the universities. Part of that is because they provide all the things that we were talking about like strong civic engagement. (Consortium lead)

As NCOP learners in FECs are less likely to aspire to HE and/or apply (see Chapter 5), understanding the particular barriers to progression for this group and effective ways of overcoming them is one way that NCOP could usefully impact progression rates.

There is also a perception that NCOP has provided the opportunity to develop more equal and stronger partnerships with FECs, which have historically been seen as harder to engage in similar initiatives. In earlier programmes, such as Aimhigher, HEIs were perceived to be more senior than other partners.

Through the network collaborations with NCOP, we're around the table on a much more level playing field; it feels like a truer collaboration, and we're working with the FE FECs. (Staff member, partner HEI)

At least one of the consortia we visited highlighted challenges with engaging FEC partners, identifying the right contacts and securing their buy-in, especially if they had not been involved in steering groups or similar activities at the planning and implementation stage of NCOP. One interviewee from an FEC also felt that the potential contribution of FECs to meeting NCOP targets had not been fully appreciated by their particular consortia as similar levels of funding were allocated to local schools as to FECs.

It seems that people don't really understand how FECs work. The people running our NCOP programme are fantastic, they really get what needs to be done but they don't understand the volumes we're working with. (Staff member, partner FEC)

While most consortia reported having FECs represented among core partners, six reported having none. As the programme progresses, consortia should review their involvement of FECs and the role they play.

Having a range of educational providers, both at FE and HE levels, helps to ensure that learners can engage with and experience a range of different routes into and through HE. Partnerships have also been built with employers, such as construction companies, local institutions such as football clubs and third sector providers of IAG and enrichment activity, such as Brightside, Curious Minds and URPotential. Engaging with a diverse range of organisations means consortia have access to specialist expertise, knowledge and skills and can provide bespoke packages to engage target learners that take the local context into account. Third sector organisations can sometimes offer new insights into involving harder to reach groups, including parents. This in turn provides opportunities for consortia to up-skill their outreach staff.

A lot of the third sector organisations have a more in-depth understanding of some of the challenges in some of the groups that we're working with, as well. From a HEI perspective, due to the resource and scale of what we're covering, it's often a broad-brush approach, so there's a lot we can learn. (Staff member, partner HEI)

Some of the new partnership working could be considered 'innovative' in that it provides opportunities to gain new insights or deliver new types of activity. This includes working with business to deliver outreach activities and bringing together different external partners. For example, consortia made reference to collaborations with a zoo and the Army Cadets to help engage with NCOP target learners.

A key facilitator in developing partnership is the substantial NCOP funding, which is attractive to many partners; as one interview from an HEI put it, the investment is such that "it's more that you can't not be part of it". However, this has also resulted in some consortia receiving lots of approaches from third-party providers of outreach activity. This creates a challenge for consortia in having to work reactively to identify which offers they wish to pursue.

Some of the difficulties are working [out] which are quality organisations, where the alignment is with what you're trying to do and working out who has got something to offer that would benefit what you're trying to do. It can be overwhelming, the amount of approaches you get on a weekly basis. (Steering group member)

The number of core members in any one consortia ranges widely, from 2 to 50. Similarly, the number of wider members ranges from none to 128. The average number of core members in consortia is 14 and most report having between 10 and 20 members. However, a couple have substantially more (45 and 50). This raises questions about the extent to which consortia can effectively coordinate activity across such a large number of core partners. Conversely, those that report very small numbers of core partners (two consortia state they had only two core partners at the time of the survey) may be missing out on some of the benefits of working collaboratively with a wider range of organisations.

Certainly, in terms of governance, it is important that governing boards are not too large. Several consortia referred to the size of their governing body as being critical to fostering effective partnerships and allowing for key decisions to be made to ensure NCOP operates efficiently. Too many board members is perceived as being counter-productive to ensuring decisions are reached and progress made.

We don't have a huge governance structure. I'm not really a big believer in massive sets of working groups and subcommittees because you don't get stuff done. People spend their time sitting in meetings instead of doing the work. (Steering group member)

Some consortia have chosen to implement two-tiered governance structures, with a strategic board and a more operationally focused group. For example, one consortium has a senior governance board chaired by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Pro Vice-Chancellors from partner institutions and Principals from FECs. An operational steering group comprises a group of stakeholders who were involved in writing the original NCOP proposal. This group draws upon support from other stakeholders and organisations as and when required. This consortia felt that the two-tier approach to governance is working successfully and ensures that NCOP aims and objectives do not become diluted with differing perspectives. Similarly, the lead of one consortia visited questioned whether their single tier approach was the most appropriate as this has meant a relatively large group of core members. Ensuring that the governance structure allows for both strategic and operational direction is important. One consortia felt their steering group was too operational at the start and was not being strategically driven. This has now been addressed by recruiting more strategic stakeholders to the group.

Another approach to ensuring specialist expert input into the work of the consortia is to set up an advisory group to act as critical friends to the programme.

It's not just about sharing what we're doing, or good practice, but for people external to us to advise, what they think we're doing well, and if there are any issues from their perspective that we could take on board. (Consortium staff member)

Funding models

From the six consortia visits we identify two broad approaches to managing programme funding: centralised and devolved. We will use future rounds of the consortia survey and visits to explore the prevalence of these approaches across consortia and develop our understanding of their strengths and weaknesses.

Centralised funding model

In the centralised model the lead institution holds the budget and commissions partner organisations to deliver activities. This approach ensures delivery is centrally co-ordinated and duplication is avoided. The centralised approach also helps ensure that funding is ring-fenced for NCOP activity and not subsumed within general outreach budgets. Some partner staff interviewed felt that a centralised model can detract from partnership working, as individual partners take their direction from the central team rather than working collectively. It is important, therefore, in central funding models to ensure that key decisions involve representatives of core partners.

Overall, partners within centrally-driven consortia are largely positive about the approach, not least because they perceive they are still afforded the flexibility to set their own targets and goals within the overarching framework of NCOP, as well as the opportunity to integrate NCOP staff into their outreach departments. A few partner interviewees, perhaps understandably, felt that the centralised model imposes frustrating restrictions on them in terms of how resource is used. Some partner HEIs would have preferred it if a proportion of the funding had been allocated directly to them. In their view, devolving a proportion of the budget to partner HEIs would be more cost-effective and reduce the amount of staff and infrastructure required to manage the programme centrally.

It would have just been easier to say... you've got to ring fence this amount of budget for collaboratively working together. Please give us a proposal on how you're going to do that.' I think that would have been much more sensible. I do worry about the amount of infrastructure that's been built, and money spent on building the consortia as an organisation. (Steering group member)

Devolved funding model

In contrast to the centralised model, other consortia have adopted a devolved model whereby partner institutions are allocated funding to manage and use in line with overarching objectives. Under this model, partners are expected to recruit staff and manage their work independently.

A key advantage of the devolved funding model expressed in interviews with consortia staff is that it provides greater freedom and flexibility to design and deliver an outreach offer that is tailored to the needs of learners that different partners are engaging with. A model that is too rigid runs the risk of not delivering the appropriate portfolio of activity to learners. A potential drawback of adopting a devolved funding model is that coordination of the programme as a whole is reduced and communication can be more challenging.

The HEI partners were given entire autonomy to use their [NCOP consortium] money to decide on what they wanted. [...] It has been quite tricky at times to ensure that there's a good line of communication between [the consortium and HEIs], and even between the [HEI] management and their staff. (Consortium staff member)

There is also an increased risk that NCOP funding will be allocated to activity that is not aligned to the NCOP objectives and targets.

Other NCOPs seem to have given a chunk of money to an HEI and expected them to recruit, manage and guide their work. From experience with the NNCO, and best practice that [a colleague] got from other institutions, she was noticing that where that was happening, those members of staff were asked to do non-NCOP work, which is not acceptable. (Staff member, partner HEI)

A variant on the devolved funding approach, adopted by a few of the consortia we visited, is to provide a pot of funding for which partner organisations can bid to develop activities. This is felt to be beneficial in enabling schools and other partners to have a degree of control and

ownership over activities. One consortia felt that devolving budgets and control to partners had helped them to get activity going quickly. A partner in another consortia with a similar approach argued that the bureaucracy involved in preparing and submitting a bid slowed things down. One consortium lead reflected that the bidding approach has added another layer to the programme (another organisation approaching schools with an offer) and has potentially reduced the overall coordination and coherence of the offer (lots of organisations doing their own thing).

The devolved approach clearly has benefits, but requires careful planning and management to ensure that devolved activity still forms part of a coherent and progressive offer. Good systems and communication are needed to ensure partners adhere to consistent approaches to marketing and monitoring and evaluation too. Devolving funding and decisions about how to spend it could potentially dilute some of the benefits to be had from a more collaborative and coordinated approach – which is a key feature of what NCOP is seeking to achieve. Central decision-making about funding would appear to increase coordination of activity across partners. Ensuring partner engagement and that offers are tailored to local needs is important too. However, this can be achieved through other means. We explore this further in the following section on staff models.

Staffing

There were a total of 309.9 full-time equivalent (FTE) NCOP-funded posts within lead organisations at the time of the consortia survey, and a further 265.4 posts within partner institutions. This includes filled and vacant posts. The size of NCOP funded staff teams varies greatly between consortia, from 3.5 FTEs to 69.

Recruitment

The consortia survey results and insights from the field visits highlight that consortia are all at different stages in terms of their setup and delivery. While some consortia were already in existence and had staff in post, most have had to put considerable effort into recruiting a new team at both the strategic and operational level. Most of the NCOP-funded posts were newly created – 87 per cent of posts within the lead organisations and 91 per cent within partner organisations.

Some consortia have experienced challenges in recruiting the staff they require. The short-term nature of the funding is a particular barrier to both recruitment and retention. Staff on fixed-term contracts seek alternative and/or more permanent positions as their contract nears completion. Just the length of time it takes to recruit and establish a new team has had a major impact on the ability of some consortia to deliver a coordinated package of activity quickly.

I think one of the biggest challenges around that is staff recruitment and retention, and that is one of the things that takes the longest to set up. [...] You then have to build up an entire team, and we've got a large team now because of the quantity of funding, but that's taken nearly a year to get that infrastructure sorted. (Staff member, partner HEI)

Fostering good team working within newly formed teams and ensuring that all understand the NCOP aims and targeting has also taken time to achieve.

As it's a newly formed team with people from different backgrounds, it's a struggle to get everyone working in the same direction. (Consortium staff member)

Employing organisation

Like funding models, staffing models also reflect varying degrees of centralisation, both in terms of where staff are based and who employs them.

One consortium has a fully devolved model, with all staff employed by partner organisations. A further ten consortia have 50 per cent of more of their staff team employed in partner organisations. Four consortia have fully centralised staffing models with no funded staff employed by partner organisations.

Centrally employing staff, even if they are based elsewhere, has a number of benefits as highlighted by interviewees. It gives the lead institution direct control over how staff time is used. NCOP team members are all employed on the same pay-scale with the same terms and conditions, removing potential areas for disharmony within teams. A further advantage of this approach expressed by partner organisations is that it relieves them of the responsibility for recruitment and employer liabilities. This was particularly welcomed by partners who were in the process of restructuring and where other posts within their organisations were at risk.

In contrast, those consortia where NCOP funded staff were employed by different partners were more likely to report challenges relating to duplication of effort, unclear reporting lines and lack of accountability between NCOP staff and central teams. Not employing NCOP staff directly also increases the risk, highlighted in numerous instances, of staff being asked to work on non-NCOP activity.

I have a really clear understanding of what I would expect each of our HEIs to be achieving, but I'm not a project officer's line manager. I've got no clout over how they organise their time and what they're doing. (Consortium lead)

Roles

Staff employed by lead organisations undertake the full range of roles, including management, delivery, monitoring and evaluation, communications and administration (including finance). Most lead organisations have staff in all of these roles.

Staff employed by partner organisations generally fulfil delivery functions – all consortia with staff employed by partner organisations said at least some of them have delivery roles. In three consortia delivery roles are fully devolved to staff employed by partner organisations – there are no delivery roles fulfilled by lead organisation employees.

Staff employed by partners also fulfil other roles in some consortia, including administration (17 consortia), monitoring (13 consortia) and management roles (9 consortia).

In addition, all 29 consortia plan to use student interns and/or ambassadors as part of the NCOP. The student interns/ambassadors fulfil a variety of roles ranging from delivering and supporting outreach (11 consortia) providing mentoring (10 consortia) to supporting the evaluation (6 consortia) and planning and administration (5 consortia).

Staff location

Having staff employed by the lead organisations does not necessarily mean that they are all based within the lead institution. While most (18) base all the staff they employ within the lead organisation, five base all their staff elsewhere and five base staff at a mix of lead organisation and other locations. Locations where NCOP staff employed by the lead organisation are based include other HEIs (five consortia), other partner organisations (eight consortia) and schools or FECs that are not members of the consortium (two consortia).

Consortia visited to date have generally designed staffing models to ensure they are outward facing, can effectively work across their geographical areas and have a local community focus. Staff teams based in different HEIs can also draw directly on their host organisation's expertise.

We wanted to recognise the strengths and the expertise of our HEIs, and have someone based in each of those HEIs for our consortia so that we could learn from these HEIs, but I think centrally we didn't want everyone to be based here because our geographical region is massive. So I think having our officers who are based across the whole region that came from the Aimhigher model. (Consortium Lead)

Adopting a dispersed, community-based staffing model has several advantages. It enables consortia to gain a deeper understanding of the locality and the needs of their target learners so that they are able to provide a tailored outreach offer. Staff can more easily identify local resources and build contacts and connections.

This role means you are very close to the school, you are in the area, you can easily access resources, teachers, organisations.... (Consortium staff member)

Some consortia have gone further and based their outreach staff in target schools and FECs. This has a number of advantages. It provides a visible presence within the school and someone who staff and students can approach for advice. Having a single point of contact within a school or FEC is perceived to help to foster partnerships with neighbouring target schools and FECs, encouraging them to engage in NCOP activities. It can help to ensure programmes are more aligned with the school/FEC careers service. Basing outreach staff within schools and FECs is also perceived to help ensure the NCOP leaves a legacy by up-skilling school and FEC staff in outreach or careers roles so that they can continue the role once NCOP ends. It will be interesting to explore further whether this is happening as the evaluation progresses.

Many of those we spoke to highlighted the importance of NCOP being seen to provide impartial advice, rather recruiting for a particular institution. The decision made by one consortia to base all outreach staff at local FECs was viewed as a potential risk as schools may not perceive them to be impartial. However, in this instance there have been no problems in communicating the outreach officer's independence from their host organisation.

Actually, I think we were a little bit worried about our outreach officers being based in FECs, because we thought some schools might, kind of, close the doors to us and say, 'Oh no, if they're based there, we don't want anything to do with them'. But actually it's very, very clear that they are coming from this impartial, kind of, setting, it's really clear to the school that it's just because they're based there. It's easier, it doesn't mean anything else. (Consortium lead)

Having staff based within schools is not necessarily the only way to facilitate effective engagement. One consortium's approach includes school co-ordinator roles. These roles are undertaken by existing members of school staff and NCOP 'buys' their time and provides the resources for them to undertake NCOP related activity. One consortia felt that their approach of having dedicated NCOP staff assigned to particular schools was also working well in terms of building good working relationships.

I think what's working really well is having a dedicated member of staff for a school, and that school knowing who their consortium representative is. I think that's invaluable. [...] I can think of, you know, at least a couple of standout staff members that we've got within the team who I know that their school knows exactly who they are, can call upon them, call them up, can email them, have a chat and is really honest with them. (Consortium lead)

The success of this approach depends on outreach staff having a small and manageable caseload of schools in order to build meaningful relationships.

A potential challenge for any consortium with staff based in a number of different locations is ensuring that effective communication is maintained between central staff and staff in satellite locations. There is a risk that operations become disjointed and it can be more challenging to monitor progress against targets and milestones. Being based remotely within a school or FEC can also be isolating for individual outreach officers and can result in staff working in silos. We explore effective communication between lead and partner institutions in greater detail later in the following section.

Collaboration within consortia

Good communication is key to effective collaboration between consortia members. This is particularly important where staff are based in multiple locations and different organisations across a region. Both employees of lead and partner institutions tended to agree that partners effectively communicate with each other and that the lead organisation communicates effectively with consortium members (although partners had slightly lower levels of agreement on this latter point). There was also a high level of agreement from lead and partner staff that they understood the aims and objectives of the consortium and other members understood them too – see Figure 4 below.

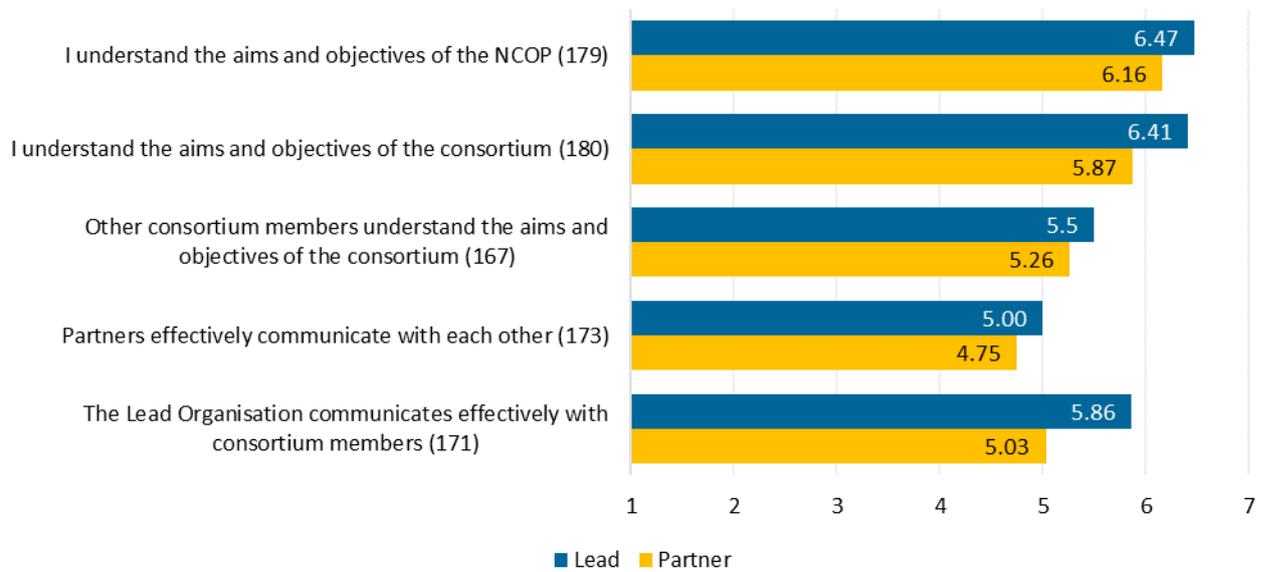


Figure 4: Mean agreement with statements about understanding aims and objectives and communication. 1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree. Bases in brackets.

However, there is potentially still room for improvement in communication between parts of consortia. When asked what, if anything, still needed to be done to ensure all partners understood NCOP and consortia aims and objectives, the most common answer was increased communication between strategic and operational teams. One in ten respondents think that there needs to be ‘increased collaboration between the lead and partner institutions’ – see Figure 5.



Figure 5. Consortia perceptions of action required to understand the strategic priorities of NCOP as a percentage (base = 155).

These views are reflected in findings from the field visits. Some interviewees expressed the view that the strategic vision of NCOP could be communicated more widely, with more work

required to ensure understanding of the core NCOP objectives around targeting. One partner interviewee suggested that in some instances there is a lack of communication about the precise roles and responsibilities of outreach officers based in schools or FECs. Another interviewee highlighted how pressure to deliver the programme has meant that detailed communication with some partners was not always prioritised.

The third parties. I recognise that sometimes I probably haven't had the time to communicate with [the third party providers] exactly what's going on in [the consortium], but because we're funding them to get on with it, I sometimes think, 'Get on with it'. They've informally arranged their own group. That's something we need to approve and I'm getting someone in post to support that, hopefully. (Consortium lead)

Our fieldwork also uncovered effective practice in ensuring good communication between different partners and between strategic and operational levels, with regular formal and informal communication on progress and opportunities to contribute.

Although the governance board only meets twice a year, I'm in communication with all of them separately, about different things. They all input on an informal basis. I send a monthly verbal report, a monthly update on numbers and schools engaged, and the board and operational team gets our quarterly monitoring as well. (Consortium lead)

Ensuring effective communication with and between staff based across different locations is also important to ensure consortia staff work effectively as a team and do not feel isolated. One consortium we visited, that was operating a hub model, had set up 'link groups' to bring peers together.

[The officers from each hub] get the opportunity to meet regularly. All the officers who run the Year 12 might be linked, so they can go share good practice with each other.... It's just making sure that there's good communication between us and the hubs, and then encouraging the communication between them, as well. (Consortium staff member)

With a myriad of stakeholder organisations and initiatives focusing on related goals, such as working with schools to improve IAG, working collaboratively with these wider programmes and partners is important. This can particularly help with ensuring schools receive a coordinated offer and are therefore more likely to be receptive. Consortia have both the infrastructure and knowledge to ensure that outreach resource is being effectively targeted to the schools and FECs most in need of interventions.

It's very difficult to get into some of the schools. You get Opportunities Area, Department for Education, and The Careers & Enterprise Company that's part funded by them and us, but there's no actual you must participate in this. It's a choice. We've found it much more effective to work together. We've also been working a lot smarter. (Consortium lead)

Another key ingredient in effective partnership working is ensuring that programme aims align with individual partners' objectives and core work. The consortia survey responses from both lead and partner staff suggests that generally NCOP aligns with partners' aims and

objectives. Both groups also tend to agree that senior leaders within their organisation understand and prioritise NCOP, although partner staff are slightly less likely to agree compared to lead organisation staff members (Figure 6).

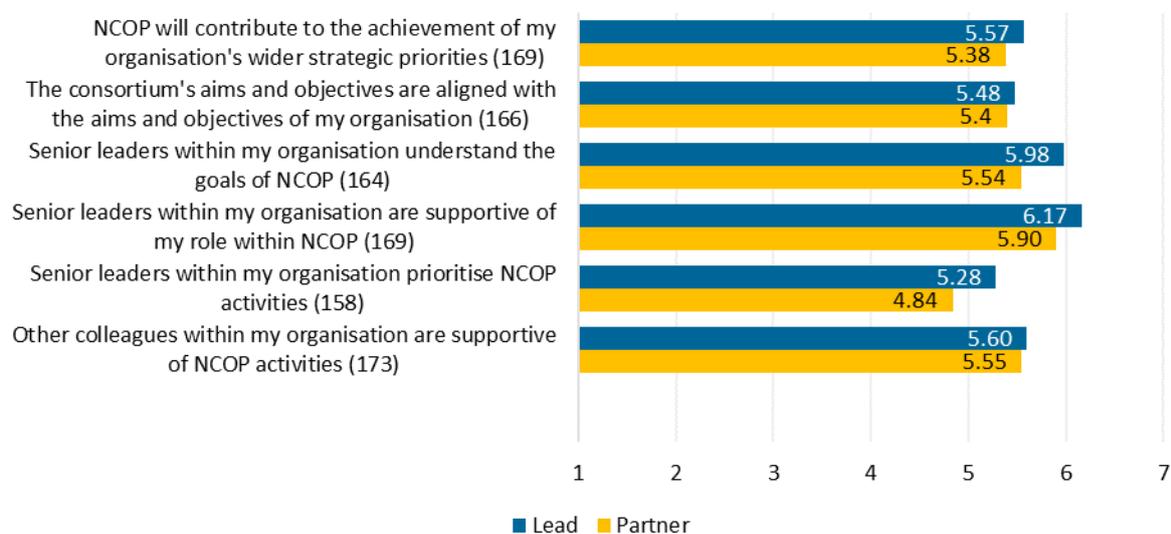


Figure 6: Mean rating of agreement with statements about alignment of NCOP with partner organisation's aims and objectives. 1 = Strongly disagree, 7 = Strongly agree. Bases in brackets

The increasing marketization of HE over recent years means that HEIs working together in NCOP consortia are also potential competitors. Consortia staff interviewed felt that minimising competition between consortia partners is facilitating more effective collaboration.

There's a really good principle within the NCOPs that everybody is up for sharing. It doesn't feel like a competitive environment. It's very much about, 'If we can learn from each other for the benefit of the young people, then let's do that'. (Consortium lead)

The variety of HEIs involved in consortia may also help in facilitating collaboration in a competitive environment. Where consortia HEI partners have distinct offers and target audiences and are not in direct competition, this was felt to help facilitate effective partnership working.

I think because our four HEIs are quite different that helps a great deal because although they do consider themselves to be competitive at some point, generally, I think they are four quite different institutions, so that's why we've been able to get on quite well. (Consortium lead)

However, there are still competing priorities for student recruitment across some partner institutions and for certain schools and FECs. There is also the potential for conflicting priorities within partner institutions to affect collaboration and, perhaps more importantly, the extent to which NCOP is seen as a source of independent advice. This may account for lower levels of agreement with the statement that "Senior leaders within my organisation prioritise NCOP activities". Some NCOP staff based in HEIs may come under pressure to

contribute to institutional recruitment rather the broader aims of NCOP to support young people to make informed decisions about HE more generally.

There's one hub that often gets quite a bit of pressure from their recruitment team, to try and support them on things. We've had to be quite firm about that, particularly when members of our staff were seen on the UCAS circuit. (Consortium lead)

One of the consortia we visited had made a strategic decision to locate their NCOP team separately from the university's outreach and recruitment teams to avoid this. This was designed to clearly differentiate the roles and responsibilities of the NCOP team from the institution's wider outreach activity and help ensure the impartiality that is so important.

The institution made a really smart move in physically locating the team. They're not with the recruitment and outreach team. It's a physical difference, but it gives them their own identity as working as part of a separate project, and not just an add-on to what the institution is already doing. (Consortium staff member)

However, other consortia felt that basing their NCOP team alongside the institutional outreach team increased coordination between the two to ensure that schools and FECs received a coordinated offer and did not receive similar communications and offers of support from the institution via different routes. As we report in Chapter 3, schools and FECs receive many offers of interventions and support, and ensuring a coordinated and streamlined offer is important to ensure their buy-in.



Figure 7: Mean rating of agreement with statements about added-value and duplication. 1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree. Bases in brackets

There is strong agreement from both lead and partner organisation staff that NCOP is adding value to their organisations' activities. Survey respondents tended to disagree that NCOP was duplicating existing activities, although disagreement was not as strong as agreement with other statements. There was general agreement that organisations would have delivered outreach activity regardless. Insights from the field visits suggests that where consortia perceive greatest impact of the NCOP to date is through bringing together partners and encouraging collaboration that would not otherwise have happened (Figure 7).

I think what the NCOP money has done, is it's provided a catalyst to encourage people to work together. (Staff member, partner FEC)

Collaboration between consortia

There are a number of notable examples of collaboration between consortia, which have helped consortia to address strategic and operational challenges together and provide the opportunity for staff to share ideas and pool resources. Consortia recognise the programme as providing valuable opportunities to amass evidence and for learning across partners.

What we've got here with NCOP is a fantastic opportunity to share best practice, and to support each other, in terms of what really works. [...] We can learn a lot, regionally; it's important to build up those networks nationally, outside of what HEFCE can provide for us, in terms of the national get-togethers. (Staff member, partner HEI)

For example, the Evaluation Working Group has been formed to support local evaluations and consortia contributions to the national evaluation. Two workshops have taken place to date and have been positively received by consortia members. In another example, cross-consortia regional meetings such as the 'Northwest Consortia Network' are organised to discuss progress and challenges encountered and to share examples of best practice.

Two consortia are exploring the possibility of undertaking 'NCOP swaps' where NCOP learners from each will be invited to a residential at a campus of the other. This provides learners the opportunity to stay at a university campus outside their immediate locality that they may not otherwise have visited and adds value through collaboration between as well as within consortia.

Cross-consortia collaboration is also having a positive impact through the sharing of evaluation and research evidence. This can provide consortia with insights about which areas should be targeted.

So some of the research other consortia have done, they give it to us. We look at it, and say, 'This is an area we're going to focus on'. So the evidence is being shared, and some of the baseline work they did before the government gave the money, they shared that baseline data with us. So we are looking at it now and contextualising it in terms of our programme design. (Consortium staff member)

A key mechanism for low-level collaboration across consortia is the NCOP JISCMail group.¹¹ It enables members to share and seek feedback from other partnerships on presenting issues and concerns, ideas, challenges they have encountered and mechanisms to overcome these. Analysis of JISCMail interactions between its inception in late February 2017 and November 2017 shows that many consortia were still developing their offer. For example, JISCMail is used to circulate details of job vacancies. There were 17 vacancies advertised on the JISCMail list during the time of analysis. Three of these vacancies were advertised as recently as

¹¹ JISCMail provides an email discussion list service for the UK educational and research community. See <http://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/>

November 2017. JISCMail has also been an important resource to enable consortia to share practice and resources. This was exemplified by one consortium asking colleagues for copies of partnership and service level agreements with schools, FECs and partner organisations to inform their own. Fifteen of the twenty-nine consortia positively responded to this request for information. Other discussions have included the use of incentives with participants, the role of summer schools and technological solutions for managing activity bookings.

3. School and FEC engagement

Effective engagement of target schools and FECs is central to NCOP. Understanding the barriers to doing so and what works in overcoming these will help consortia and the programme achieve their ambitions.

Summary of key findings

- To date over 1,200 schools have been actively engaged with the programme.
- Schools and FECs not having the time and resource to prioritise and engage with NCOP is a major barrier. This can be helped by aligning outreach activity with the school curriculum and other priorities, allowing lead-in time to plan activity and providing funding or other resources to support school and FEC engagement.
- Building new relationships with schools and FECs can be time-consuming. In particular, FECs can be more challenging to engage. Consortia may benefit from greater involvement of FECs as part of their core partnership.
- Outreach staff may require further support to communicate effectively to schools and FECs the ways NCOP is distinct from other outreach activity and the rationale for this. There is a strong perception among some outreach staff that the targeted nature of NCOP is problematic and could present a barrier to school and FEC engagement. These same concerns were not expressed by schools and FECs.
- The consortia we visited are delivering a combination of generic activities and programmes tailored to individual school/FEC needs. Bespoke programmes are seen to be more effective in addressing particular needs and complementing other outreach activity. Generic approaches have been used to deliver activity quickly and engage schools and FECs.
- Engaging parents of target learners is recognised as key, but how to do this effectively is a challenge. Undertaking activity in community rather than educational settings is one promising approach.
- It is too early to strongly evidence the impact of the NCOP activities, although there is some emerging evidence of positive effects on IAG and on school and FEC cultures of aspiration and progression.

Introduction

This chapter explores consortia experiences of engaging with target schools and FECs and gaining access to NCOP learners. The barriers and enablers to school/FEC engagement are examined followed by how partnerships have negotiated the targeted nature of NCOP. We identify two broad approaches to delivering outreach activity and assess the strengths and weaknesses of each. We also consider innovation and the role of parents. We conclude by outlining emerging evidence of early impacts of NCOP outreach activity.

Barriers and enablers in engaging schools and FECs

One of the key aspects of implementing the NCOP effectively is the extent to which consortia can successfully engage schools, FECs and their learners. Gaining school/FEC access has been easier for some consortia than others and it has required significant resource and time. But once consortia have been able to foster a relationship with a key member of school or FEC staff, schools and FECs have generally been keen to engage. The main issue has been accessing schools where no previous relationships exist. Staff describe the difficulty in identifying the right person to speak to and then having the opportunity to speak with that person. Sometimes this is a careers advisor but consortia staff recognised that it also needs to be someone with sufficient seniority to ensure that relevant decisions about NCOP activity can be made. Lack of awareness about NCOP can be a barrier here.

The teachers are thinking, 'Well, who the hell are you? Is it like Aimhigher?' People know that, they don't know NCOP. That's really challenging, but I think it's the key contact in the school that is important. We can have really poor engagement with the school, there's a change in staffing, and that person is really keen to progress the school outreach, and your whole experience changes. (Consortium staff member)

Some consortia expressed that it has been more challenging to engage with FECs compared to schools. This is for two main reasons. Firstly, student life in FECs has a flexibility that schools do not have. FEC learners have more independent and flexible timetables, and are often based across different campuses. This has implications for releasing learners from timetabled lessons to take part in outreach activity. Secondly, consortia have experienced difficulties in identifying the relevant staff members to speak to. Interviewees explained that in the past FECs have been involved in less outreach work than schools and therefore do not have the appropriate mechanisms in place to accommodate initiatives such as NCOP. Consortia are having to work with FEC staff to develop and implement mechanisms to accommodate such activity.

I have an FEC that I look after, and the real difficulty is, within the FECs, the infrastructure is so different to schools, that actually saying to someone, 'Who are your gap students?' is a nightmare.... I've had an experience where I've been bumped from contact to contact to contact within the FEC. (Consortium staff member)

This underlines the importance of engaging FECs as core partners and on steering or advisory groups discussed in the previous chapter. Involving FECs in this way provides a mechanism to better understand the ways they operate and how best to work with them.

There is also a view that having ex-teachers as part of the consortium staff team, and in particular as outreach officers, is beneficial to building and sustaining relationships with schools. Former school and FEC staff offer a useful and different perspective and provide helpful insights to develop interventions, provide a credible point of contact and have experience of outreach from the school/FEC perspective. As a result they are in a position to further enhance outreach offers and develop and strengthen links with schools and FECs.

Once the relevant person has been identified, schools and FECs need to be willing and able to engage. As highlighted in the previous chapter, an important first step for consortia to secure school and FEC engagement has been to stress the impartiality of the NCOP partnership.

The impartiality of NCOP is key. When we're building relationships with schools, they know that we're not pushing any particular agenda. (Consortium staff member)

A recurring barrier reflected by partnership staff is that schools and FECs are stretched with their resources and can feel that they do not have any teacher capacity to devote to outreach activity. There is agreement across lead and partner consortia members that schools and FECs have competing priorities which makes it difficult for them to engage in the NCOP (Figure 8).

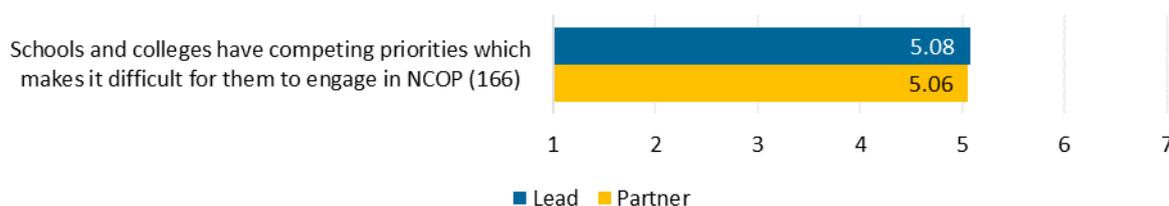


Figure 8: Mean agreement with statement on schools and FEC priorities. 1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree. Base in brackets

A common initial reaction reported from schools is that they are keen to be involved but do not have the time or the capacity to dedicate to NCOP.

I've also noticed that schools lack resources and they all really want the offering that we're making but they don't necessarily have the time to implement what we're offering. (Consortium staff member)

Consortia staff have made considerable efforts to address school and FEC preconceptions about the amount of teacher time required for NCOP. One solution implemented by some consortia has been to provide NCOP funding for outreach roles within schools and FECs to ease their capacity and resource constraints.

When we set up the proposals we were very aware of how stretched schools are in terms of staff resource, administrative resource and finance generally, so as part of the package that they get is a financial amount for them to fund either a small amount of administrative time or cover for students to be able to take part in trips. (Consortium lead)

Some consortia report that once a school has positively engaged, it can still be difficult to find time for the learners to be released for outreach activities. However, in responding to our survey, lead and partner staff generally agreed that schools and FECs allow NCOP staff to work with young people (Figure 9).

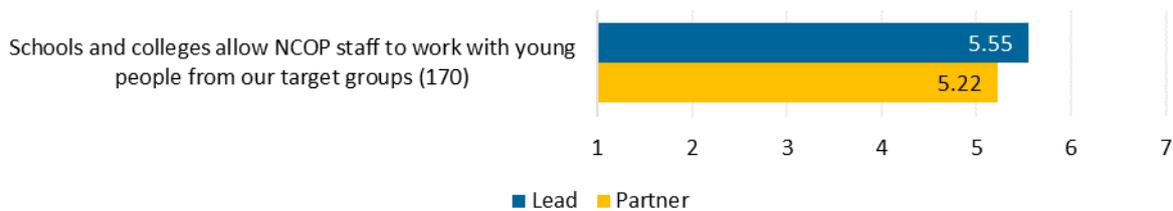


Figure 9: Mean agreement with statement on school and FECs allowing access to young people. 1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree. Base in brackets

Given the emphasis and pressure on schools and learners to meet targets in core subjects, outreach activity is viewed by some as of secondary importance. It is evident that in-depth negotiations are needed to stress the wider benefits of NCOP activity. One partnership emphasised that they always approach schools and FECs with evidence of the potential benefits, and believe that this helps to break down barriers. Making links between outreach activity and the curriculum and potential for improving attainment is key in this regard.

One of the biggest limiting factors in terms of engaging with young people is schools is how much time can you get off curriculum? That actually means that you can only have the kids for small amounts of time or for one day. Somebody in school has got to have the argument with the maths teacher that this kid needs to come out of maths because they will benefit, and it will improve their maths attainment. (Consortium lead)

A particular challenge faced by several consortia has been the engaging with learners in schools with already full schedules of activity. Consortia are acutely aware that there are narrow windows of opportunity in which they can successfully engage schools and substantial lead-in time can be needed to get activity into calendars planned.

Due to the development of the programme, we're on the back-foot this year, in terms of working with schools, to ensure that we can get that programme developed into their school calendar, because they plan so far in advance. (Consortium lead)

Insights from consortia staff indicate that they are aware that schools and FECs, particularly those in socio-economically disadvantaged areas, can be inundated with outreach engagement opportunities. This can negatively impact their enthusiasm to be involved in more outreach activity, despite recognising the benefits of doing so.

I think it's not just a hesitation to engage in NCOP. Schools have so much pressure on their time, it's just another person knocking on their door... it becomes a saturation point. It's to try to filter and influence the approaches basically. (Steering group member)

Consortia are making considerable efforts to work collaboratively with schools and FECs to ensure that NCOP activity is aligned with other activities. As highlighted in the previous chapter, ensuring coordinated approaches and offers within NCOP is crucial. Where there are already strong partnerships with universities, consortia staff are keen not to duplicate

work or replace what they already have, particularly given the short-term nature of NCOP funding.

A further barrier reflected by consortia is that some schools and FECs are reticent to commit to NCOP activity that potentially has a finite and relatively short life span. Consortia are aware of this barrier and are making concerted efforts to up-skill staff within schools and FECs to ensure that activity can be sustained beyond NCOP.

At a schools and FECs level, there are challenges because NCOP is a project with a shelf-life. Sometimes schools are reluctant to engage for that reason. (Consortium lead)

The flexible and individualised nature of NCOP is considered a key strength in engaging schools and FECs, but this requires considerable resource. However, the level of funding available to deliver NCOP activity is also considered as a key enabler in engaging schools. The flexibility of NCOP and the funding available means that bespoke, school-led approaches to outreach are more achievable. This is welcomed by schools and FECs. Consortia staff felt that schools saw the value of the individualised approach advocated by NCOP, which is tailored to specific learner cohorts.

It's been more of a conversation that we've had with schools rather than, 'Right, this is our programme of activity, you need to sign up to it'. (Consortium lead)

Targeting students

Consortia identify the highly targeted nature of NCOP, focusing on learners in Years 9 to 13 from particular wards (identified by their postcode), as a potential challenge in engaging schools and FECs. Some consortia have further identified sub-sets of NCOP learners to target, such as those from under-represented ethnic groups.

Consortia staff recognised that this approach is rather different to the previous outreach activity that schools may have been involved with. However, most consortia expressed that although they were concerned that schools would find the NCOP targeting difficult to embrace, if it was explained clearly at the outset, schools have been more likely to respond positively.

It's not unusual for those schools to identify particular individuals to take part in activity. I wasn't sure how comfortable schools would be in identifying particular ethnic groups to take part in an activity. Actually, the schools were very happy to engage and select on that basis. (Staff member, partner HEI)

In fact, one consortium lead believes that the specific nature of targeting schools is helping with engagement. Schools recognise that the targeted nature of NCOP means it is not a generic outreach programme being offered to all schools.

Because we've had an approach where we've actually contacted the school rather than them, kind of, blanket advertising, I think the schools understand why they're a target, and why a school might not be a target. (Consortium lead)

While lead and partner staff agree that schools and FECs understand the aims and objectives of NCOP, partner staff are less convinced that they understand how NCOP differs from other outreach activities (Figure 10). Outreach staff working in partner organisations may need additional support to help explain the targeting and its rationale.

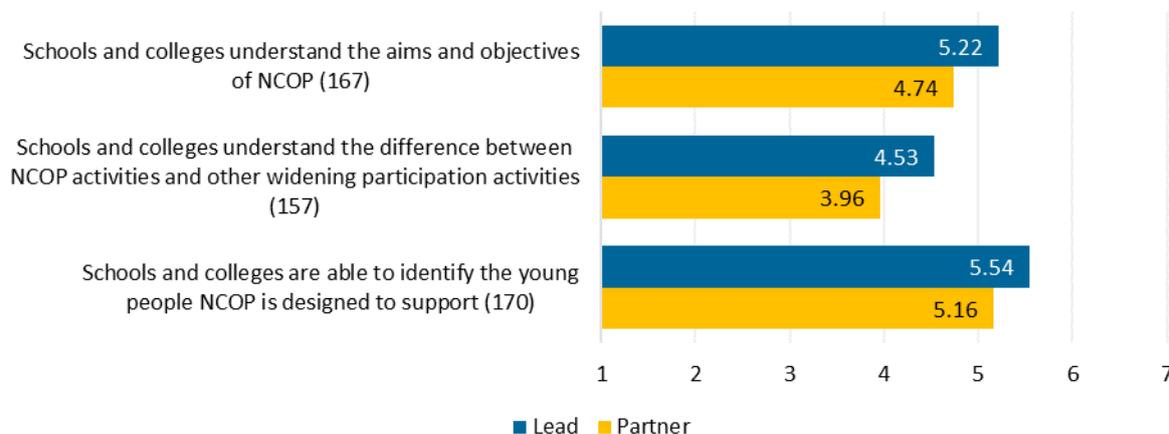


Figure 10: Mean agreement with statements about understanding NCOP and being able to identify target students. 1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree. Bases in brackets

Lead and partner staff generally agree that schools and FECs are able to identify their NCOP learners. Feedback from school stakeholders also suggests that overall NCOP targeting is appropriate and hitting the right cohort of learners.

Usually, once you've told them which are their NCOP students, they say, 'Those are the kids we want you to be working with anyway'. (Consortium staff member)

Some interviewees feel that NCOP should be able to work with younger students than the target Years 9 to 13 and that outreach work needs to start earlier if progress is to be made towards raising aspirations. One interview highlighted the fact that learners will already have made GCSE choices and that this can limit future options.

The biggest frustration we've got is it's not early enough. We choose options in Year 8 and the kids will do that in February. If you want to raise aspirations for different careers and sectors, it's too late.... They're locked into those pathways for GCSE, and if NCOP could be used to open their eye to different varieties.... (Consortium staff member)

A further benefit raised of engaging with primary school children is that parental engagement becomes necessary.

I felt right from the beginning of NCOP, it seems bizarre that it's limited from Year 9 to Year 13, [...] trying to change parents' views and perceptions, parents are de facto much more engaged at a primary school level. It's much easier to actually speak with parents at the school gates and everything at primary school than at secondary school. (Consortium staff member)

Others consider the ward-based targeting to be not specific enough, or that it misses other learners who could benefit. The use of postcodes to target learners was described by one consortia as ‘impersonal’. This may pose barriers to engaging with schools if they are more accustomed to selecting outreach students based on a range of factors.

When you get to conversations with schools about targeting, it's difficult. With Aimhigher you can use a set of criteria, like first in family to go to university, or from specific backgrounds or specific challenges. NCOP is more black and white, it's on postcode. It's impersonal. (Consortium lead)

It is clear that consortia partners and outreach staff believe that the inflexibility of postcode targeting could exclude learners who are in need of outreach support. There is certainly the perception amongst some institutions that there are schools and FECs that are not included as an NCOP target postcode that have students that are gaining good GCSEs that would benefit from similar activity.

[A stakeholder said] 'There are pockets of deprivation and schools that aren't performing, and students that need this. Why aren't we a target?' and I agreed with him, actually, because there are some schools where the students are getting good GCSEs, but they're not on our target list. (Consortium lead)

It is important to note that many concerns relayed about the targeted nature of NCOP were voiced not by the schools and FECs but from outreach staff and other partners. There are clearly concerns among some consortia and outreach staff about implementing strict NCOP targeting. They are taking a more flexible approach to engaging with learners to overcome the barriers that targeting is perceived to create.

Adopting a flexible approach to NCOP targeting

Consortia provided several examples of the flexible approach they are taking towards NCOP targeting. Some consortia are offering outreach activities, such as trips, to non-NCOP learners in cases where school staff feel that students would benefit from them. Joint funding activities by the school and the NCOP outreach team can allow some activities to be offered to whole year groups or class groups. Another consortia allows for schools to offer activities to non-NCOP students as long as an agreed proportion of places is filled with NCOP target students.

The last thing we want to do is discriminate students for not living in certain areas... if we're doing a campus trip, we might say if you can fill up a coach with 70 per cent NCOP students, you can top up the other 30 per cent with who you feel would benefit from that event. (Consortium staff member)

HEFCE guidance¹² advocates that the NCOP infrastructure should complement broader outreach offered by partner institutions and that other funding sources are expected to cover

¹² http://www.hefce.ac.uk/media/HEFCE,2014/Content/Student.access.and.success/NCOP/NCOP_consortia_guidance.pdf

the staffing resource necessary to coordinate wider outreach. However, HEFCE recognise that adopting a pragmatic approach is necessary. Consortia report that this is important at the local level where it is necessary to use flexible targeting as a hook to engage those schools and FECs who have resisted involvement with NCOP because of the targeted nature of the programme.

It is evident from interviews with consortia staff that schools and FECs generally understand that it is inappropriate to open up all outreach activities to non-NCOP students. In such cases, consortia have noted that it is important to signpost them to alternative outreach activity outside of NCOP. Thus it is important for outreach staff to be familiar with other outreach activities in their local area.

There are some schools that have been contacting me to say, 'You came in and did this last year, are you doing this again?' and I've had to say, 'Unfortunately our priorities have changed. You're not a target, but our partner HEIs are still doing this and this, so feel free to contact them'. (Consortium lead)

Whilst some features of NCOP are perceived to act as a barrier to school engagement, consortia interviews indicate assurances that they have developed mechanisms to challenge these and are continuing to work with schools and FECs to ensure that they are delivering a model that meets their needs and the needs of their target students.

NCOP outreach delivery models

Consortia acknowledged that their delivery plans are still evolving. However, evidence from the field visits suggests that consortia are making efforts to ensure that programmes are progressive – that is, activities complement one another and build on what learners have participated in previously.

We're trying to finely tune what they're doing, rather than it being lots of ad-hoc activities; we're thinking, 'How can this be adhesive, and coherent, and a structured programme for students, that is almost like a building block from Year 9 to Year 13, and avoids duplication, and is structured, and a seamless journey for that young person'. (Consortium staff member)

Two main approaches are being adopted by consortia to deliver their outreach: a menu-led model, where schools and FECs choose activity from a set list, and school-led models, where a highly bespoke offer is developed in close collaboration with individual schools and FECs.

Menu-led outreach

A key benefit of a menu-led approach is the speed with which it can be rolled out. Given the time it has taken for some consortia to establish themselves (see previous chapter) and the pressure to deliver activity quickly, some consortia began with an initial generic offer.

The nature of the project, and how quickly we've had to hit the ground running, means that we started with what we already knew and could deliver immediately. We need to have some time to identify what's missing. (Consortium lead)

Consortia often have activities within their delivery models, such as mentoring and campus visits, that are generic and offered to all schools. Even so, outreach officers have modified the way in which the activity is delivered depending on the needs of the school and the target students.

Several of my team members are mentoring students by going into schools every half term for group mentoring, whereas others are basing themselves in their schools for an entire day a week to do mentoring or drop-ins much more regularly. (Consortium staff member)

However, a major limitation of a menu-led approach is that a ‘one-size-fits-all’ may not adequately meet the needs of anyone. Many of the target wards are characterised by different underlying factors which contribute to why learners are not progressing to HE. For example, the needs of rural ward schools are very different to urban wards. Some of the city regions have high-salary non-graduate employment opportunities that can be attractive, although progression routes are limited. Differing cultural barriers to progression also require a more bespoke approach. This means that a single-strategy approach will not work.

The initial mind-set was to just go into the schools, send emails and say, ‘We can offer this series of activities. We can run them so you just have to point out dates, make students available, and we’ll be in there to run activities.’ What we didn’t realise was that every school is different, so you can’t just provide the same series of offerings to all of them. (Consortium staff member)

School/FEC-led outreach

A key benefit of NCOP described by many interviewees, and a major part of its additionality, is having the resources and the staff to work with schools and FECs on an individual basis and offer bespoke, school-led activity programmes that are flexible to their needs.

Having outreach officers based within or close to target schools and FECs has allowed consortia to develop a deeper understanding of learner requirements. In some instances, consortia have provided schools/FECs with a budget to produce an outreach programme that is bespoke to their requirements. This has the benefit of creating activity that closely complements schools’ existing offers.

One of the things that we’ve done is we’ve given schools a budget, and asked them to produce a delivery plan. Some schools already have a regular programme of campus visits. If we were going to offer campus visits, they already do that. We’re not adding any value then. For them, they need to do a different activity that builds on those campus visits, and is more intensive for those students. (Consortium lead)

Although of significant benefit, developing a bespoke outreach offer for every school in the partnership is resource-intensive and not sustainable over the duration of NCOP.

From the consortia field visits it appears that partnerships are generally delivering a combination of menu-led and school-led activities. For example, they are working with

schools individually to design bespoke plans but are still offering generic activities such as mentoring.

Each area has been given three options, which is an amount of money that they will be allocated depending on how many students they have in their area. The school gets to pick a certain number of activities that total up to the total budget they've got, but the officers have also got a budget that they can use to put on bespoke activity for the school. (Staff member, partner HEI)

Starting with a more generic approach means that partnerships can refine this once school relationships have been established and their needs identified. Streamlining activity by providing a combination of menu- and school-led activities is perceived to be a positive way to successfully engage schools and meet the aims of the programme within the resources available.

Innovative approaches

Innovation can be a difficult identify. Many of those we interviewed identified practice that they considered innovative. However, as Stevenson et al point out in their evaluation of the NNCOs,¹³ newness and originality are often used as proxies for innovation, but they are not necessarily the same. Some activities may be new to the stakeholder, but not necessarily innovative.

It was difficult to identify the ways in which consortia may be implementing innovative practice from such a small number of field visits. We expect innovative practice to be more evident as the NCOP evolves, partnerships strengthen and collaboration is embedded. Certainly, some felt that the NCOP provided a valuable opportunity to develop new and innovative activity that might not be possible otherwise.

Being able to test out new ideas, which previously wasn't possible, perhaps programmes were too rigid. So, because NCOP has not been too prescriptive, that's been really beneficial. (Consortium staff member)

The funding is opening doors with new partners and can cover what might otherwise be prohibitive costs of developing and testing new activities.

Three of the six consortia visited have set up an innovation fund to encourage partners to submit proposals for innovative outreach activity.

We wanted to actually use NCOP as an opportunity to broaden out. We've had bids from schools, local authorities, individuals, commercial companies, charities, universities with things that are a little bit different, and we've had some really interesting things come through. (Staff member, partner HEI)

¹³ Stevenson, J., McCaig, C. and Madriaga, M. (2017) *Evaluation of the National Networks for Collaborative Outreach*, HEFCE. See <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/rereports/year/2017/nncoeval/>

However, some consortia also highlighted that they are being cautious to spend funding efficiently to maximise the impact on learners – this may mitigate against trying new and untested approaches.

Whilst the nature of the examples of what was considered innovative were all different, they generally fall within three categories: working with new types of non-educational, community-based partners, responding to the needs of a particular group of learners and flexibility of approach. For example, one consortium highlighted the example of working in partnership with a football club, using the football to encourage and motivate white working-class boys to learn and progress. Learners are invited to participate in a behind the scenes tour of the football stadium, meet the staff and see the environment. This is followed by a careers talk about possible routes into football and associated occupations.

Fostering collaborative partnerships provides the platform for consortia to develop innovative learning environments. This can provide access to additional technological expertise and other partner resources. One consortium spoke about the development by a partner HEI of interactive digital activities on board a bus.

We've also got [university] developing, what I can only refer to as a 'magic bus', but it is basically an immersive interactive experience. It's a vehicle that opens out and can be programmed to have different interactive digital environments.... (Staff member, partner HEI)

Engaging parents and the wider community

Consortia consider it vital to adopt a holistic, community-based approach to working with schools. In particular, they are finding that schools are responsive to outreach activity that includes engaging with parents through innovative and creative means as opposed to just inviting them into school, which is seen to have a limited impact.

Working with parents, carers and communities was something we are talking about. So, yes, the new staff that have come on and developed it, we're saying our target audience are the young people in all our communications, but the secondary audience is parents, carers and working with the community. It's counterproductive to work with one and not the other. (Consortium staff member)

Many of those we spoke to recognised the importance of engaging parents of NCOP learners. This is emphasised in Chapter 5, where we report the influence of parents on young people's decision making. However, they also acknowledged that engaging parents can be particularly challenging. Taking activities and engagement outside of traditional educational sites, such as schools, FECs and campuses, into community settings is recognised by some as being important in engaging those who may have had less positive experiences of education. For example, one consortia are seeking to engage parents of NCOP target students via the local rugby club.

One school said, 'If you want to engage with our parents, you need to go to [rugby club] on a weekend.' That's what we're doing. (Consortium staff member)

Engaging parents is clearly important and an issue we recommend returning to as the programme progresses.

Early impacts

Unsurprisingly, many feel that it is too early to say whether there has been a positive impact of their activity. Despite this, there is emerging evidence of early NCOP impacts in some areas. Figure 11 shows that 60 per cent of consortia survey respondents consider there has been some or a great deal of impact on access to IAG for learners in the target wards. Just over half of respondents suggest that there has been some or a great deal of impact on the quality of IAG and teachers’ knowledge and awareness of the options for students in HE. Least impact is perceived to be achieved in improving parents’ knowledge and awareness of HE opportunities – this reflects the challenges in engaging parents as outlined above.

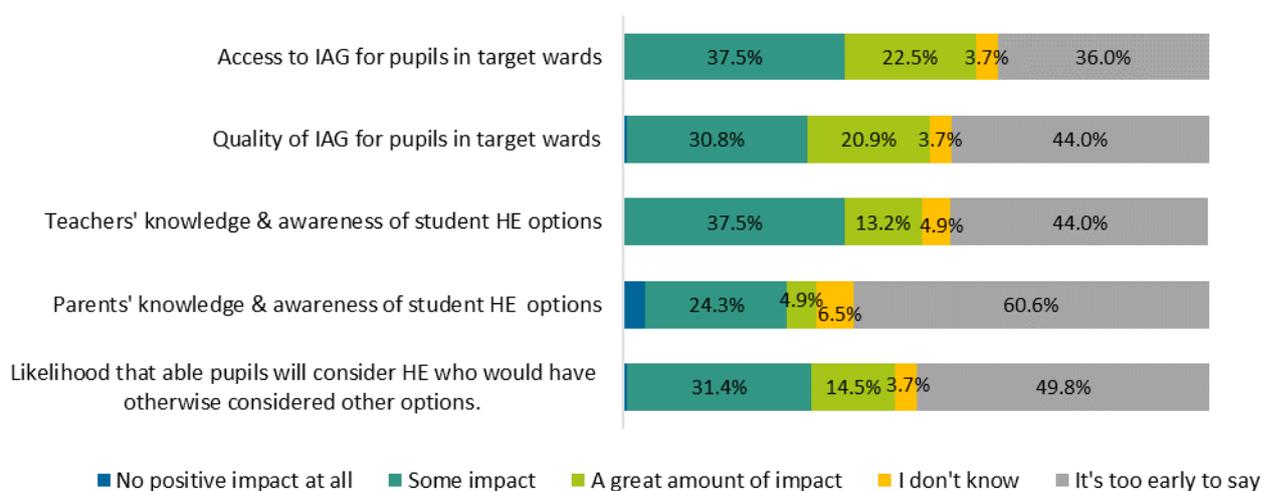


Figure 11: Perceptions of early impacts of NCOP as a percentage (Base=325)

The survey findings are supported by qualitative evidence from the field visits. For example, one consortia has seen a positive shift in the way careers guidance is being offered in schools. One school with the support from their consortium has launched a new careers platform that provides information and guidance about universities and other post-sixteen education routes. Further progress is demonstrated through an early careers coaches’ programme where Year 9 students have been trained to work with Year 7 students to provide careers guidance. This is already starting to establish better communication links between students to upskill their knowledge about the range of careers available. There is also evidence that teaching staff are becoming more equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to provide guidance about the range of careers available that students can progress to.

I think for the students it's starting those conversations earlier and earlier about university. It's letting them know what's out there, and what university can do for them. Our motto at the school is 'aspire to be more' and I think it feeds into that. Starting those conversations with teaching staff in the lessons, about what careers they can go on to with different degrees. It's about awareness, it's building that up. I think for the teaching staff, they are establishing links now. (School staff member)

The two most commonly reported impacts are a cultural shift in thinking around HE and aspirations, and secondly the building of collaborative partnerships through NCOP.

There have been developments in new relationships with schools that weren't being engaged with before. They're now benefitting from that engagement. There are deeper relationships with schools as well. Schools might have been invited to an HE fair once a year, but there was no further engagement. Now there's more sustained engagement with an HEI. There's already a real benefit with school relationships. (Staff member, Partner HEI)

Where impacts reported relate to student progression to HE these are small, but still considered a reward of the efforts that consortia have put into outreach activities so far.

24 of the Year 13s that we worked with last year ended up applying to [university], for this intake. I don't know how many of them actually ended up at [university], but we know 24 of them applied. That was really good for us. (Consortium staff member)

4. Evaluating NCOP at a local and national level

The NCOP consortia are required to develop a framework to guide their local evaluation activity. In addition to informing practice at the local level, the local evaluation findings will contribute to an understanding of the impact of the programme and the effectiveness of collaborative approaches to outreach at the national level. Ensuring robust plans are in place and synergy with the national evaluation framework is, therefore, crucial.

Summary of key findings

- The review of consortia evaluation plans identified a number of common areas that could be improved to ensure alignment with the national evaluation. Some evaluation plans would be significantly strengthened by providing further clarity on the underpinning theoretical framework/model that has been used (e.g. more detail in the logic change) and the addition or clarification of commentary about the intended outreach and evaluation activities that will take place.
- Specifying and quantifying objectives and targets, and detailing success indicators, would further improve some consortia evaluation plans. A number of plans did not include outcomes beyond the broader HEFCE NCOP aims and objectives. Evaluation plans and activities would be strengthened if plans could break down overarching outcomes into more discrete, measurable, shorter-term outcomes. Quantifying the intended improvement, either by number or proportion, would strengthen evaluation plans and ensure that consortia have clear markers of success by which to assess their outreach activities.
- Employing a dedicated evaluation role as part of consortia staffing models is important. Consortia should view this as an integral aspect of their staff model. In the absence of a dedicated evaluation post, it will be challenging for consortia to appropriately plan, implement and analyse evaluation activities and ensure that there is alignment with the national evaluation. Drawing upon evaluation expertise from other academic departments or commissioning specific elements of local evaluation plans can be beneficial, but should be viewed as supplementary to a dedicated evaluation post.
- Implementing and maintaining effective communication of local evaluation aims and objectives. Effective evaluation largely depends on the extent to which evaluation plans are fully embedded. Developing a local evaluation plan is a crucial step towards embedding effective evaluation procedures. A coordinated approach should be taken to communicate evaluation plans to all consortia staff to ensure a consistent and coherent evaluation approach is adopted. Involving consortia staff in the design and delivery of

evaluation activity is important to secure consortia and school/FEC buy-in and transparency of approach.

- Evaluation should be viewed as an iterative and on-going activity, of critical importance to the delivery of effective outreach activity. To achieve this, it is important that evaluation plans and progress are regularly reviewed and updated in light of changes to approach to ensure that are aligned with the NCOP objectives and the national evaluation. Maintaining a risk-log to mitigate against potential challenges and time slippage should also be considered.
- Considerable progress has been made to use experimental methods to evaluate NCOP activity. Two flagship RCTs are in the field to evaluate the effectiveness of a text-based intervention and e-mentoring programme on student aspirations, knowledge, intentions and actual progression to HE. A third RCT to evaluate summer schools is planned for later in 2018. Several consortia have expressed plans to employ quasi-experimental methodologies as part of their local evaluation activity. The meta-review of local evaluation evidence in 2018 will enable progress to be mapped out.
- Establishing school engagement with evaluation activities has been challenging for some consortia. Some consortia highlighted that it has taken significant resource to engage with and secure school/FEC buy-in for evaluation activities. Schools have limited time and competing priorities, which has prevented some from engaging in the participant baseline survey. Ensuring all consortia outreach staff are fully briefed about evaluation aims and establishing key points of contacts in schools/FECs may help to secure engagement.

Introduction

This chapter draws on the primary research with consortia and our desk-based review of local evaluation plans in order to explore the extent and nature of the measures that are in place to capture NCOP outcomes and impacts at the local level. The extent to which consortia evaluation frameworks are aligned with the national framework is considered to assist in ensuring the causal link between HEFCE and local consortia investment and the overall outcomes. The logic chain for the national evaluation sets out the expected activities, outputs and outcomes required to achieve the overarching programme objective of making rapid progress towards the Government's goals for widening access to HE. For each of the outputs and outcomes identified in the logic chain, a set of indicators have been developed. Each indicator highlights the source from which data will be collected and the approximate timescales for particular activities. An iterative and progressive approach is adopted for the evaluation framework to ensure the activities, outputs and associated outcomes are aligned with the overarching programme objectives (see Appendix 2 for the national evaluation framework and indicator bank). This chapter also provides an overview of the challenges encountered when designing and implementing evaluation plans, together with progress made in implementing experimental methodologies to evaluate outreach activity. Evidence of good practice and consortia next steps for embedding evaluation are provided.

Consortia evaluation frameworks

A coding framework was developed to guide the desk-based review of consortia local evaluation plans. The coding schedule was independently coded by two individuals to ensure high levels of inter-rater reliability. In the minority of instances where there was

disagreement, the coders met to reach agreement on the rating. Generally speaking, the overall quality of consortia evaluation frameworks varies. Evaluation frameworks presented by 29 consortia reflected a range of detail, specificity and commentary on their plans for capturing NCOP outcomes and impact.

Evaluation frameworks were given a 1 – 5 score (1 poor – 5 excellent) based on their overall quality, the level of detail included and clarity. As can be seen in Figure 12, four consortia presented frameworks that were deemed to be of an excellent quality and given a score of 5. However a large number of consortia evaluation frameworks (16) were deemed to be of poor quality and were scored either a 1 or 2. Whilst some could easily improve their overall and component scores with relatively little effort, a small number of consortia provided only a summary figure or model, and included little or no supporting commentary, making it difficult to assess how effective their evaluation framework will be in practice.

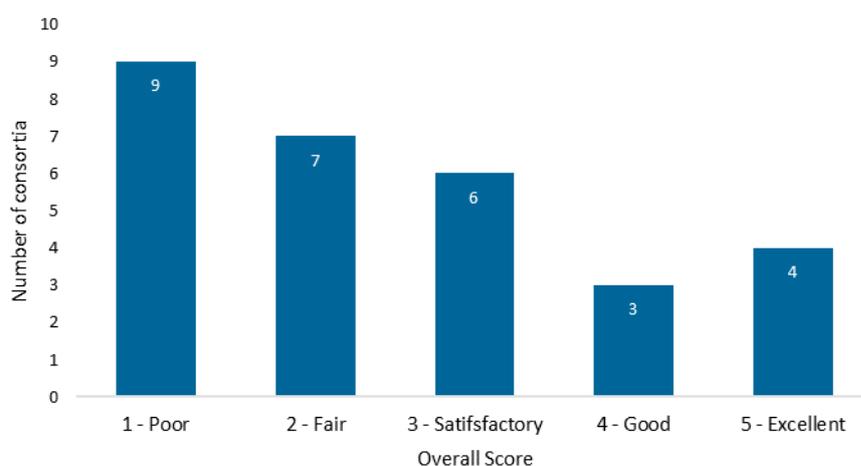


Figure 12: Overall score of consortia evaluation frameworks

Presentation of evaluation frameworks

Consortia presented their evaluation frameworks by various means. Of the 29 consortia, 13 presented their evaluation frameworks in a Logic Chain model, mirroring the national evaluation framework. Three consortia presented a Theory of Change model and two consortia presented a combined Theory of Change and Logic Chain model. A third (10) of consortia presented their evaluation frameworks by other means. This includes consortia who did not specify a particular framework (5), and two who presented the NERUPI evaluation framework¹⁴ (Figure 13). These figures reflect our assessment of the type of framework used – some consortia described their frameworks differently (for example, describing something as a logic chain that we did not recognise as such).

¹⁴ <http://www.nerupi.co.uk/>

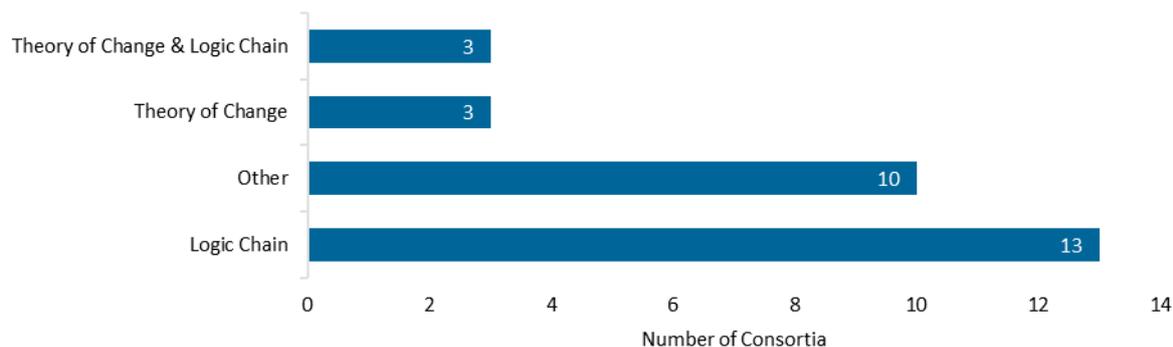


Figure 13: Presentation of evaluation frameworks

A third of consortia frameworks (12) were informed by theoretical frameworks, such as the RUFDATA model¹⁵, Realist evaluation methods, Gatsby bench-marking¹⁶, critical action research, the Kirkpatrick model¹⁷ and, as mentioned above, the NERUPI framework. Some of the theoretical frameworks underpinning evaluation plans were described in great detail, and clearly linked to evaluation activities, whereas others provided only a brief reference to theoretical frameworks and they were not explicitly linked to planned activities.

Eight of the 29 consortia included indicator banks in their evaluation frameworks. Again, the level of detail included in these varied. Those evaluation frameworks deemed to be ‘stronger’ tended to stipulate specific and detailed outcome targets and were supported by clear indicators of success. It is important in planning an effective evaluation strategy that success indicators are clearly identified and specified early on. Lack of such detail may result in ambiguity of what success ‘looks like’, resulting in the likelihood of not being able to capture and demonstrate success and impact.

Articulating aims and objectives

Evaluation frameworks were given a score from 1 (not specified) to 5 (clear and concise) indicating the degree to which they had clearly articulated their evaluation aims and objectives. Ten of the 29 consortia did not specify any objectives. Only one consortium articulated aims and objectives that were clear and concise. For those consortia who did specify aims and objectives, the quality of articulation was variable. For some consortia no supporting commentary was provided and the only objectives specified were outlined in the logic chain whereas others specified no objectives beyond HEFCE’s aims for NCOP. Some consortia did not distinguish between national and local evaluation objectives and others repeated objectives across multiple activity streams or short-, medium- and long-term outcomes and thus lacked specificity (Figure 14).

¹⁵ <http://www.lancaster.ac.uk/fass/events/capacitybuilding/docs/3A%20Evaluation%20Planning-RUFDATA%20Theory%20V1.pdf>

¹⁶ <http://www.gatsby.org.uk/education/focus-areas/good-career-guidance>

¹⁷ <https://www.kirkpatrickpartners.com/Our-Philosophy/The-Kirkpatrick-Model>

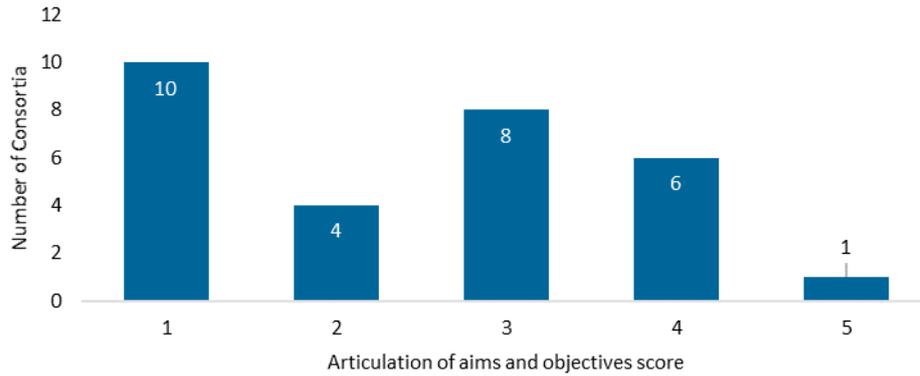


Figure 14: Articulation of aims and objectives

Short/medium/long-term outcomes

Almost all evaluation frameworks attempted to specify outcomes at a broad or overarching level. However, there was significant variability in the level of detail and specificity of short-, medium- and long-term outcomes by consortia. The strongest frameworks clearly detailed distinct short-, medium- and long-term outcomes that were aligned with programme activities, were quantified and expressed success indicators specific to each of the activities. In some instances the level of detail or commentary within consortia evaluation plans was not necessarily associated with the breakdown of short-, medium- and long-term outcomes (Figure 15).

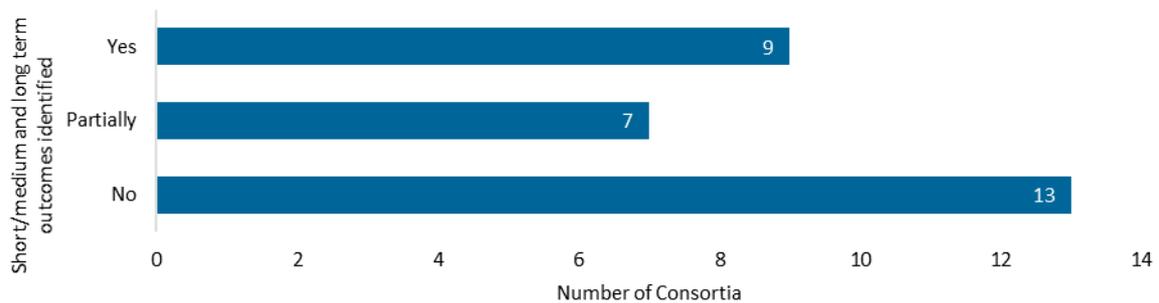


Figure 15: Specification of short/medium/long-term outcomes

The long-term outcomes specified by consortia tended to refer to access to HE generally, despite apprenticeships being specifically referenced in some consortia programme activities. When quantifying outcomes consortia may wish to consider distinguishing varied routes into HE. For example, differentiating between degrees, apprenticeships and other post-16 routes, in order to demonstrate impact achieved for each. This will help to ensure that outreach activity is aligned to academic or technical routes and with that of the Careers Enterprise Partnership.

Assumptions

Sixteen consortia made some reference to the underlying assumptions and preconditions for the NCOP, such as NCOP target students being high achievers and for consortia to provide targeted and intensive activity. It is useful for consortia to address the underlying

assumptions in their evaluation plans in order to accurately interpret findings and help understand causal mechanisms.

Quantified targets

Twelve consortia evaluation plans did not quantify any targets while a minority of consortia evaluation plans (4) had specified targets for most or all of their outcomes. The range of detail in consortia evaluation plans who partially quantify their targets was broad. This included those consortia that had indicated that targets would be quantified but this had not been done as yet and those that had only included HEFCE targets or a total target number of young people. A small number of consortia provided a breakdown of statistics from their target wards, demonstrating a good awareness and understanding of their consortia target wards, schools and individuals. However, this was not necessarily associated with targets for activities or outcomes.

Activities

The extent to which consortia detailed their programme and evaluation activities was similarly varied. Specification of activities by consortia was a key element in contributing to the overall quality of the evaluation plans, as it plays an essential part in linking overarching aims, objectives and outcomes with what the NCOP consortia will do. The strongest frameworks provided a clear breakdown of programme activity streams, with accompanying aims and objectives, and linked these to quantified targets, evaluation activity and specific indicators of success (Figure 16).

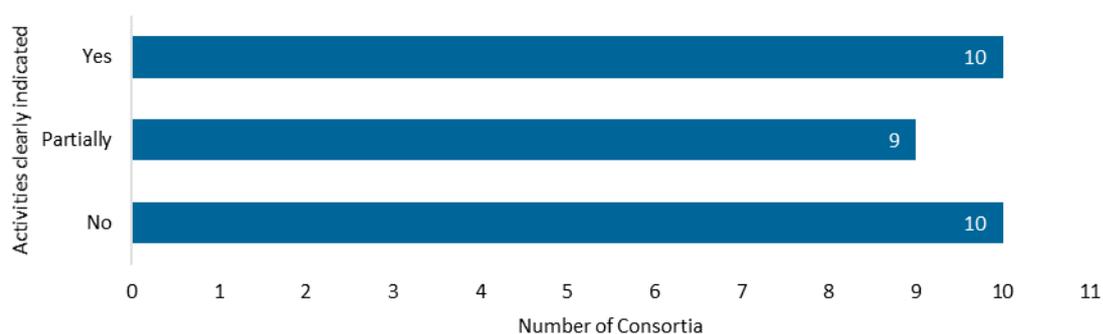


Figure 16: Clear articulation of activities

It was evident that those consortia who scored lower *overall* tended not to specify programme and evaluation activities clearly and concisely. Evaluation plans that only partially fulfilled this criteria included those that: provided detail of a broader evaluation approach, but did not link this to programme activities; only briefly summarised or provided a list of activities; or broke down activity in detail across multiple programme streams/components, but whose associated outcomes did not go beyond the broader NCOP aims and objectives.

Methods and data sources

Twenty out of the 29 consortia evaluation plans included some indication as to their selected methods and measures to monitor progress and success against objectives. However, these varied greatly in the level of detail and clarity provided. Indicating how outcomes and impact will be measured is critical in order to determine whether the planned evaluation will be able

to isolate and demonstrate success and impact. Understanding what success looks like, and having strategies in place to measure progress, allows the evaluation to grow and adapt with the project.

Most evaluation plans detailed where they would source data to support the evaluation, (for example, surveys, focus groups, national datasets, monitoring data etc.) either in the form of a table, or embedded within the commentary text. Evaluation plans that did not provide supporting commentary and/or breakdown of activities, also tended to lack reference to specific data sources.

Plans to use experimental and quasi-experimental methods

Eleven consortia evaluation plans specified intentions to implement experimental and quasi-experimental methods, including Randomised Controlled Trials (RCTs) (8) and matched comparator groups (3), to measure impact of specific activities. Seven consortia noted that they were unclear as to whether they would implement any such methods in their local evaluations. Five of those proposing RCTs provided no further details. It will be important for consortia to consolidate and refine their evaluation activity plans over the next 12-months to ensure solid evidence is provided about the effectiveness of various outreach activities on NCOP target learners' intentions and actual progression to HE.

Flagship randomised control trials

Initial scoping interviews with consortia during February and March 2017 also enabled us to explore interest towards, and the feasibility of developing three flagship RCTs. Ten consortia initially expressed an interest in finding out more about RCTs and whether they could be aligned with their local evaluation plans. This initial scoping exercise and support provided by the BIT and CFE has resulted in two flagship RCT trial protocols being designed and implemented. One RCT is focused on a light-touch nudging text-based technique with Year 11 and 13 students, whilst the other RCT involves a higher intensity -outreach activity, e-mentoring, with Year 12 FEC students. A further flagship RCT on summer schools/residential is planned for later in 2018. Details of the two RCTs are illustrated in Table 1 overleaf.

A further objective of the RCTs is to capture data on the costs of delivering the outreach activities and the outcomes they achieve, in order to inform judgement on whether or not it has provided good value for money. A proforma has been designed to run alongside each of the flagship RCTs to collate the costs associated delivering e-mentoring and text-based outreach activities. The proforma will assist consortia and Brightside to record data on the actual resources used to deliver the interventions for the RCTs (for example, staff time and grade, travel, consumables, software). The analysis team will then assign unit costs to these resources using the best available national sources of information in order to estimate the costs of delivery.

Consortium	Intervention	Sample	Design	Timeline	Outcome Measures
NEACO (a)	Light touch 'nudging' text-based intervention Weekly text messages to support students in applying to HE	Year 13 students (n=531)	Individual-level randomised trial No wait-list element to the trial	Intervention delivered 31 st October 2017 until mid-January 2018 Analysis planned for July 2018 onwards	Number of students applying to and entering HE (Spring 2019) Knowledge about HE (July 2018) Likelihood of applying to HE one-question survey (Spring 2018) Endline survey about student aspirations and intentions (July 2018)
NEACO (b)	Light touch 'nudging' text-based intervention Weekly text messages to support students information and guidance about post-16 choices and different educational routes	Year 11 students (n=810)	Individual-level randomised trial No wait-list element to the trial	Intervention commenced in January 2018	CFE participant survey about student knowledge and intentions (July 2018) Student attainment (actual qualifications) and subject choices from student survey and NPD administrative data (Sept 2018-2019)
SUN	Six-week E-mentoring (Brightside)	182 Year 12 FEC students (98 NCOP learners)	Individual-level randomised trial No wait-list element to the trial	Intervention delivered February 2018 until mid-March 2018 Survey administered Spring and summer 2018 Progression data spring 2020	Number of students entering university Number of students entering HE in FE (FEC-based level 4 courses) Level 4 apprenticeships HE knowledge and student aspirations

Table 1: Progress on the NCOP Flagship RCTs

Most consortia have not previously undertaken RCTs, therefore considerable preparatory time has been required to discuss the feasibility of running RCTs and review the practicalities of what an RCT entails. The amount of support required has been higher than anticipated, partly due to many consortia not having evaluation posts in place. In addition, many consortia have been unable to confirm their programme of NCOP outreach activity during the first year as their priority has been to employ staff and develop their wider project plans. In many instances RCT plans have not fully evolved as consortia are not yet in a position to fully engage with the in-depth requirements of deriving the sample and implementing the intervention. However, significant progress has been achieved amongst consortia in raising awareness and knowledge about using RCTs to evaluate outreach activity. Our next wave of field visits will seek to explore in more detail the enablers and barriers to planning and delivering RCTs, highlighting good practice and the necessary experience and resource required to enable a successful RCT.

Quasi-experimental methods

Fewer consortia have confirmed plans to conduct quasi-experimental activity with matched comparator groups as part of their local-evaluation offer. Many consortia have spent the first 12 months recruiting staff and developing their programme of delivery. Therefore, we expect that consortia will be undertaking experimental work as part of their evaluation activity in year 2, including research into effective interventions for specific target groups, such as working class boys. Some consortia are planning to determine the extent to which non-NCOP learner data collected through the participant baseline survey will comprise a suitable comparison group for local evaluation activity once it has been linked to the relevant tracking data later in 2018. Consortia will be required to share outputs and evidence from their local evaluation activity at quarterly intervals during 2018.

Inclusion of learner voice

Twelve consortia planned to integrate the learner voice in the design and/or evaluation of NCOP outreach activity. However consortia tended to refer to collecting data from NCOP target students as opposed to involving them as co-producers in the design of outreach activity and/or the evaluation approach. As such, these activities primarily serve as an evaluation of young people's experiences of NCOP programme activities. No consortia explicitly stated that young people would be involved in the initial design or development of the outreach programme and evaluation activity. Fourteen consortia did not mention inclusion of the learner voice in the design and/or evaluation of NCOP outreach activity.

Timelines

Almost a third of consortia evaluation plans (10) included a timeline, and those that did varied in the level of detail, from a year-by-year headline overview to a month-based Gantt chart detailing the programmes of work/activities by month. A Gantt chart based timeline, broken down by individual work packages or delivery and evaluation streams is useful in managing slippage and risk, and to identify where work packages are being delivered as intended.

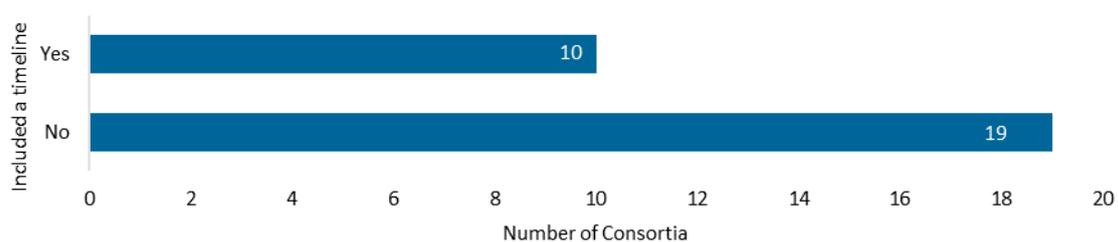


Figure 17: Specification of timeline

Risks

Only two consortia evaluation plans included consideration of risks. Consortia would benefit from considering risks within their evaluation frameworks, in order to ensure that risks, and the subsequent impact, are considered and strategies are in place to mitigate these.

Barriers and enablers to designing and implementing rigorous evaluation plans

Field visits with consortia revealed a number of barriers and enablers to effective and rigorous evaluation. These insights are particularly useful in understanding some of the challenges consortia face in implementing evaluation practice.

In terms of enablers, the development of relationships with external stakeholders and other consortia was seen to be beneficial, to allow for a reciprocal relationships to develop and for feedback to be gained on local evaluation approaches being adopted by consortia. One consortium planned to implement an advisory panel comprised of stakeholders to allow for evaluation plans to be shared and for the consortium to seek advice and implement ideas. Working collaboratively across consortia was also identified as being beneficial. Another interviewee noted that evaluation teams across consortia seem to have forged tight links to share ideas and learn from one another.

We're looking to put together an advisory panel, so they'll act as critical friends. It's not just about sharing what we're doing, or good practice, but for people external to us to advise, what they think we're doing well, and if there are any issues from their perspective that we could take on board. (Consortium staff member)

Consortia also highlight the positive impact that having designated evaluation and monitoring roles within the team can have. Previously, monitoring and evaluation duties would have been undertaken by outreach officers. However, these post holders often did not have the time or the expertise to collect appropriate data and to conduct robust evaluation. Having a dedicated resource has meant that evaluation has become more embedded in the work of consortia.

Having a go-to person is a strong resource, specifically to be able to direct our school and our innovation project holders directly. She's got oversight, and there's that consistency, which is really important. (Consortium staff member)

However, given the level of importance placed by HEFCE on evaluating NCOP-funded activities at the local as well as the national level, it is perhaps concerning to note that three consortia do not have an evaluation role and two did not have any fulfilling a monitoring role as part of their staffing model at the time the consortia survey was conducted. Ensuring the appropriate skill sets are in place, including for monitoring and evaluation purposes, is an important enabler for the successful set-up, implementation and delivery of NCOP.

It is evident that not every consortia has opted to create a dedicated 'evaluation post' as part of their staffing model, but instead they have chosen to draw on the expertise available to them within their consortia. The opportunity to draw on evaluation as well as wider expertise within the network of institutions that form the consortium is identified as a key benefit of the collaborative approach being fostered through NCOP.

When you want to learn something or you want to ask questions, somebody may not really be there, but we are lucky here to get one professor. She's into Widening Participation and she's supporting us. (Consortium staff member)

However, a potential drawback of not having a dedicated ‘evaluation post’ is that academics in other departments have competing priorities with teaching and research, and may only have limited availability to support consortia. Employing a specialist who is integral to the outreach team who understands the aims and objectives of NCOP is viewed as more beneficial.

Being part of a wider HEI network and being able to draw upon expertise from different areas of the HEI was also identified as an enabler to implementing evaluation. In particular, being able to draw expertise about consent issues, the upcoming GDPR regulations and data compliance was seen to be particularly useful. Having someone with specific expertise in the area of evaluating outreach initiatives is also important in guiding the direction of the evaluation and ensuring that robust evidence is gathered.

Consortia identified several barriers to implementing evaluation activity. Broadly speaking these included:

- the time it takes to engage and win the support of schools
- overcoming the challenges of gaining consent from NCOP target students
- the break clause at the end of 2018 (funding for the further two years to December 2020 will be subject to consortia making satisfactory progress towards meeting the Government’s goals)
- the level of resource available for evaluation and monitoring
- gaining access to secondary data
- gaining the buy in of partners
- challenges of the national evaluation.

Engagement with schools and FECs has been a challenging exercise for consortia. When consortia were probed about engagement with schools in terms of monitoring and evaluation, interviewees highlighted the time it takes to brief and win the support of schools was a particular barrier. Several consortia spoke about the time and resource required of schools to coordinate and implement programme and evaluation activities, alongside their other priorities. This is problematic given the number of demands being placed on schools.

I suppose I’ve also noticed that schools lack resources and they all really want the offering that we’re making but they don’t necessarily have the time to implement what we’re offering. (Consortium staff member)

Consortia recognised that schools who are supported by careers teams are easier to engage. However, for schools who do not have access to this resource, engagement with evaluation activities requires considerable time, effort and coordination.

It’s very difficult to get hold of people in the schools, and it’s very difficult for them to have time to reply, it’s very difficult for them to have time to engage. (Consortium staff member)

Tensions were also expressed at the demands being put on schools to engage in the local *and* national evaluations. One consortium noted that they had already established mechanisms to administer their own baseline survey and the requirement for schools to administer the national baseline survey too was an additional burden.

Realistically what we said to schools was, 'If you can do this national baseline online, that would be preferable. Again, the problem we had was a lot of schools said, 'You're already asking us to do a lot of stuff, we're feeling overburdened already, no.
(Consortium staff member)

The upcoming GDPR regulations concerning the consent of minors is also seen to be a barrier to engaging with monitoring and evaluation activities. A certain amount of ambiguity exists as what activities students need to consent for. Concerns were relayed about those NCOP students who do not consent to tracking and evaluation activities and/or where postcode details are not provided. This limits the ability to identify NCOP eligible students and to monitor their engagement and outcomes.

Linking to GDPR, students have got to voluntarily consent to opt-in, we can't say they can't take part without giving us their postcode, so we haven't got [consent] in huge amounts. [...] I have to anonymise the data as they've not agreed to be tracked. I can use the post code as it's not unique but there will be a portion of those where the numbers don't add up. I can't really put them on HEAT. (Consortium staff member)

One of the challenges for consortia relates to enabling delivery staff to manage the tension between programme delivery and evaluation activities. Several interviewees recognised that delivery staff have many demands on their time and that evaluation can be seen as lower priority to the delivery of outreach activity. One consortium noted that few delivery staff were confident in coordinating and implementing evaluation activities, and staff generally needed additional training and coaching to ensure that delivery of evaluation activities was consistent across the board.

There are a lot of demands on all of the staff in the project... there's the surveys, there's the learner agreements, the delivery plans, there's a lot being asked of those officers.
(Consortium staff member)

One of the challenges is about equipping front-line staff to do it, and managing that tension between what is essentially quality-improvement or delivery-improvement or improvement of own personal practice evaluation, with our evaluation of the overall project. (Consortium staff members)

The uncertainty surrounding the break clause in the funding and the implications for delivering activity was also identified by one interviewee as a barrier for some engaging with monitoring and evaluation activities. Because of the short timeframe for initial delivery, some partners were focused on ensuring the activities were delivered to ensure funding that has been allocated is spent before the break clause.

'We haven't got time for all that. Let's just get [on] and do.' I think there is a tension there between people, and I think that's been evidenced within the partnership.
(Consortium staff member)

Gaining buy-in for the evaluation of outreach activities from partners was seen as an additional challenge. For one consortium, helping partners to understand the various and complex elements of the NCOP programme has been challenging, and in particular to understand the importance of evaluation.

We've had to work quite hard on relaying the message about what our approach is, as the central team, where we're trying to evaluate the whole of our activity.... I do think that we can do a bit more work in terms of getting something fairly user-friendly and reasonably relatable for the whole partnership to get an understanding and to get them on board with what we're doing. (Consortium staff member)

Meeting the needs of the national evaluation was also cited as a challenge by some consortia. The resource needed by consortia and schools to coordinate the national evaluation baseline was seen as a burden.

As we were already in delivering activity we had a rhythm going with schools, so to say, 'By the way you have to do this, and then exclude students we've already worked with because it's not a true baseline.' (Consortium staff member)

5. NCOP learner perceptions of HE

CFE, with support from the consortia, administered a survey to pupils in schools and FECs that are engaging with NCOP. The aim was to establish a baseline against which the impact of the programme can be measured over the course of the national evaluation.

Key findings

- A baseline of aspirations, knowledge of HE, and intentions to progress to HE has been set with over 28,000 NCOP learners in Years 9 to 13 studying in schools, sixth form colleges (SFCs) and FECs across 27 consortia.
- Learners' knowledge of how HE can benefit those who study at that level and their confidence in their ability to cope with the demands of HE is high and increases with age; the closer a young person gets to the transition point aged 18, the greater their self-reported confidence and knowledge of the benefits of HE are. Black and Asian learners report the highest levels of knowledge and confidence; disabled students are typically less positive about the likely benefits of HE for them and their ability to cope with the demands of HE.
- A third of NCOP learners are aware that they would be the first in their family to attend HE should they progress. Interestingly, a similar proportion do not know whether anyone else in their immediate family has HE experience. Despite their relative lack of direct HE experience, family is one of the strongest influences on learners' decision-making. Reaching out to parents/carers to ensure they are equipped to help their child make an informed decision about whether HE is right for them could be one way NCOP consortia could impact progression rates.
- Learners are, overall, less knowledgeable about the practical elements of HE, including the costs, funding available and accommodation options. Information for parents, as well as young people, on the costs of HE and the funding available may be particularly impactful given this is an area learners report they know least about and there is existing research¹⁸ to suggest that the perceived cost of HE can (negatively) influence parental views, particularly amongst disadvantaged groups.
- The majority of younger students who know what they want to do post-16 aspire to remain in education. Year 12 and 13 learners studying at a SFC are twice as likely to aspire to study at a university away from home as those currently studying at an FEC. Conversely, FEC learners are more than twice as likely to aspire to full time work as those in sixth form. Interestingly, a similar proportion of Year 11 FEC Level 2 learners aspire to an apprenticeship. This suggests that the transition aged 16 is crucial, often setting learners on a path to either work or further study. Influencing learners at this stage may

¹⁸ For example BMG Research and CFE Research (2017) *Understanding the changing gaps in HE participation in different regions of England*. London: DfE

therefore be more impactful than post-16 when plans appear to become more fixed. It is important that students make the right decisions for them, up to, and following GCSEs, whether that be an academic or technical route (perhaps via a higher or degree apprenticeship). This highlights the importance of aligning outreach activity with that of the Careers and Enterprise Company.

- Learners in sixth form are more likely to have applied or report that they intend to apply to HE than those studying in FECs. The majority of older learners who have not applied to HE report that they are unlikely to do so in the future, irrespective of where they are currently studying. Male learners, in particular, are more likely to aspire to full-time work, driven by a desire to earn money, rather than HE. This suggests there are a group of learners who believe HE is not for them and underscores the importance of engaging learners earlier in the student lifecycle in order to influence their attitudes and aspirations, in order to ensure they consider all the options available to them.

Introduction

This chapter describes the process of designing and administering the baseline survey and provides an overview of the response and consent rates. We provide an analysis of the top-line findings exploring learners' aspirations, knowledge of HE and intentions to progress to HE prior to their engagement with NCOP activities.

About the survey

The participant survey forms a key part of the national impact evaluation of the NCOP. The longitudinal survey is designed to capture NCOP target learners' aspirations, knowledge of HE and intentions to progress to HE at key stages in the student lifecycle. By linking the survey data to longitudinal tracking data and national administrative datasets, the aim is to establish the impact of the NCOP on these key measures. The baseline survey provides a snapshot of learner knowledge, views and aspirations at the start of the programme. We will survey learners in future years to determine the extent to which their knowledge and attitudes to HE have changed.

CFE designed the baseline survey which was subsequently administered by the consortia via schools and FECs on our behalf. The survey was designed to be completed online or by 'paper and pencil'. Some consortia administered the survey online using a survey link provided by CFE; others chose to include our standard questions in their own surveys and administer the survey using their own online survey software. Similarly, data captured using the paper version of the survey was either entered by consortia staff directly into CFE's online survey software, or into a database which was then shared with CFE. It was anticipated that, ideally, the baseline survey should collect information from learners before they take part in NCOP-funded activity. The survey was conducted between September and November 2017, before most consortia started delivery of their outreach programmes. However, a minority of consortia began delivery of outreach activities in the 2016/17 academic year. As a result, some respondents had already engaged in NCOP activities before completing the survey.

Our aim was to complete the baseline by the first half term of the 2017/18 academic year. However, a deadline was eventually set for Friday 3rd November 2017 to enable those

consortia who were yet to engage and establish relationships with key schools and FECs in their locality at the point at which the survey was launched, to participate. The date was further extended to Friday 17th November 2017 by which point we received a total of 57,894 useable survey responses.

For practical reasons, and because many schools and FECs were reluctant to single out NCOP learners, in most cases, surveys were administered to *all* learners in a class or year group rather than just learners eligible to participate in the NCOP. An advantage of this approach, as noted in Chapter 4, is that it creates a potential comparison group which can be used to facilitate the use of quasi-experimental methods by consortia in their local evaluations of NCOP-funded activities.

We identified NCOP-eligible learners from their postcodes (those who live in the target wards). Just under half of all respondents ($n = 28,121$) were identified as NCOP learners. In this chapter we provide the top-line findings for NCOP learners only and explore NCOP learner perceptions by year group, gender, ethnicity and disability. Comparisons with non-NCOP respondents are not appropriate at this stage as the data required to assess the suitability of non-NCOP respondents as a comparison group and to enable us to control for the other observable factors that may explain any differences in the responses given by the respective groups is not currently available. In Autumn 2018 the survey responses will be linked to information collected by consortia on the activities learners have participated in. This will help us to identify any additional NCOP participants and control for learners receiving interventions before the baseline survey.

Full details of the survey design, administration, response rates and data cleaning are provided in Appendix 3. Results for the NCOP learner sample demographics for gender, ethnicity and disability can be found in Appendix 4.

Survey implementation and response rate

Twenty-seven consortia disseminated the participant baseline survey and achieved at least one response; two consortia were not able to capture any NCOP learner survey data ahead of the November 2017 deadline for inclusion in this report. Some consortia still have outstanding baseline data and other consortia plan to collect additional baseline data as and when they engage with new target NCOP learners. Any further participant baseline survey data that is shared with CFE will be included in the sample for the Autumn 2018 follow-up activity, linking via the tracking systems and broader analysis. The total NCOP population is an estimate based on analysis of the latest available data and, as such, it is not possible to calculate a fully accurate response rate the survey.

The proportion of the target NCOP populations successfully engaged in the baseline survey varies considerably across consortia. Our interactions with consortia through case management and field visits highlighted a number of factors that have impacted on the response rates achieved by some consortia. These include:

- **Level of engagement with schools and FECs:** A number of consortia were still recruiting key staff and were yet to develop partnerships with schools and FECs at the time that the CFE survey was launched. In addition, consortia that were in the process of developing new relationships with schools/FECs experienced greater

challenges securing their buy-in to the survey, alongside the programme itself, than those with well-established links with their target schools/FECs. Both these factors limited the number of survey responses that were achieved in the initial fieldwork window which closed on 17th November 2017.

- **Timing of the survey:** More established consortia began delivery of outreach activities in the 2016/17 academic year and had already started to capture baseline survey data using their own surveys. The CFE baseline survey was only implemented within new schools and FECs and/or with learners that were engaged in NCOP from September 2017.
- **Survey design:** CFE made considerable efforts to engage consortia in the design of the survey to ensure that the data collected was valuable for the local as well as the national evaluations. Consortia were invited to provide feedback on the core questions (part 1) and were permitted to add a series of their own questions (part 2). This process of consulting with and securing final agreement on the survey design and mode of administration (see next point) for each of the 29 consortia was time consuming and led to delays which impacted on the amount of lead-in time that consortia had to liaise with schools/FECs to secure their co-operation and subsequently administer the survey. A longer lead-in time may have enabled some consortia to 'hit the ground running' once the survey was launched and thus increase their response rate.
- **Mode of survey administration:** In order to accommodate consortia and school/FEC preferences and requirements such as the use of IT for survey administration to pupils, the survey was disseminated in a number of different ways: it was administered online, using either a CFE generated survey link or a link created by consortia using their own online survey software, and in hard copy. Some used a combination of online and paper versions of the survey. Although this flexibility was essential to maximise response rates, it also led to delays, both in terms of survey administration and capturing and cleaning the data ahead of the November deadline.
- **Ethics approval and GDPR:** A minority of consortia encountered delays in securing ethical approval for their NCOP evaluation work, including the baseline survey, which meant that they were unable to disseminate the survey within the designated time frame. Institutional legal departments were also facing an increased number of requests to review data-sharing agreements in light of the forthcoming GDPR, which also resulted in delays to survey implementation and impacted on the number of survey responses achieved in the fieldwork window.

As a consequence of the variable levels of engagement and response to the baseline survey, there is lower representation from some geographical regions than would have been expected if all consortia had engaged with the baseline survey to the same degree. A follow-up survey is planned as part of the national evaluation. The evaluation team will, therefore, take account of the issues encountered at baseline to streamline the process.

Learner profile

Seventy percent of the NCOP learners responding to the survey are in Years 9 to 11 and are studying at school rather than in an FEC context (Figure 18). This reflects what consortia told us; that they have found it easier to engage and subsequently disseminate the survey through schools than FECs. It could also be an indication that consortia are targeting younger learners as they are the most appropriate audience for a sustained and progressive programme of activity.

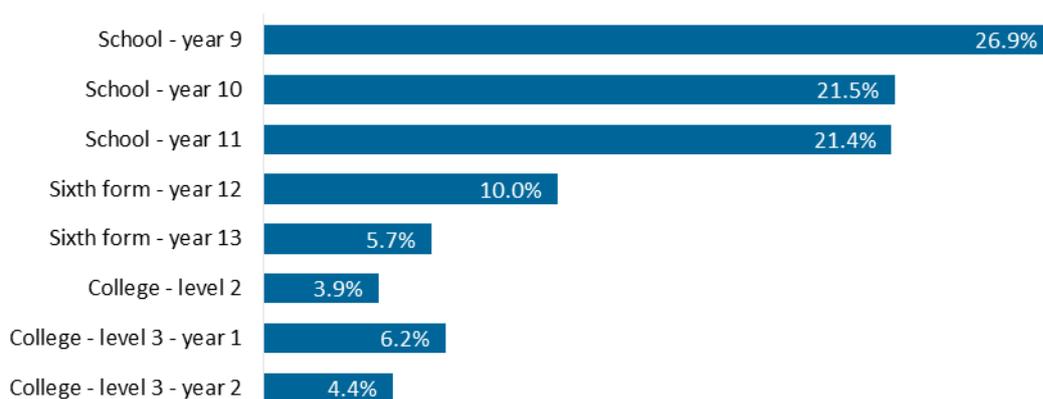


Figure 18: Which year of study are you in? (Q1) Base = 27,975

Slightly more females (54%, n=13,324) responded to the survey compared to males (43%, n=10,602). The majority of respondents are White (83%, n=20,330); 5.4 per cent are Asian (n=1,321), 3.4 per cent, are Black (n=821) and 2.7 per cent describe themselves as Mixed (n=668). Just over one in ten students reported that they have a disability (11.2%, n= 2,739).

One third of NCOP learners (Figure 18) would be the first in their family to progress into HE if they were to attend. Interestingly, over a quarter of respondents (28%) do not know if they would be the first person in their immediate family to attend HE. People who are first in their family to attend HE are traditionally targeted for outreach and other outreach activities because they often lack ‘cultural capital’ and, as a result, are less prepared for or knowledgeable about HE when compared with more advantaged groups with a family history of engagement in HE.

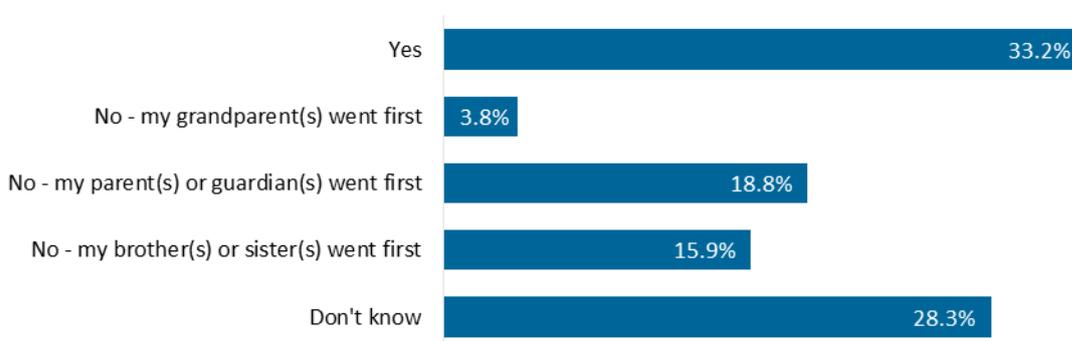


Figure 19: If you go on to higher education, would you be the first person in your immediate family to go? Base = 24,740

Further analysis reveals that younger students in Years 9 to 11 are more likely not to know if they would be the first in their family to go on to HE. This is in contrast with over half of Year 13 students (54%) who are aware that they would be the first in the family to go on to HE. More White students compared to students from other ethnic groups do not know whether they will be the first in their family to go on to HE. Black students are more likely than other ethnic groups to report that their parent/guardian was the first to go on to HE in their family.

Considering respondents' broader networks, almost a fifth of NCOP learners (19%) do not know anyone who has gone to HE. A further 16 per cent are not sure if they know somebody who has gone to HE (Figure 20).

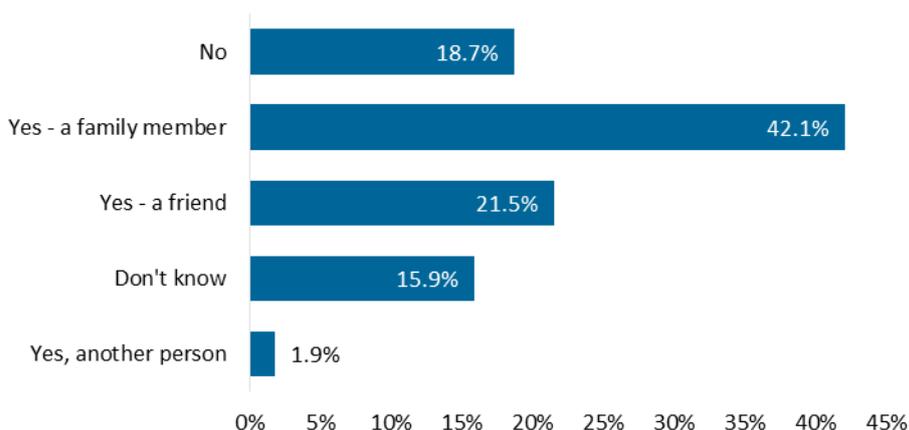


Figure 20: Do you know somebody else who has gone on to higher education? Base = 24,578

Older students¹⁹ are the more likely to report knowing somebody else who has gone on to HE, with similar proportions of older students reporting that they know a friend (42%) or family member (39%) with HE experience. In contrast, younger students²⁰ are more likely to report that they do not know whether they know someone who has gone to HE. This suggests that a higher proportion of younger students are yet to have conversations with family or friends about their HE experiences.

Over two thirds of NCOP learners overall (67%) report that their family has had the greatest influence over their decisions about what to do after they have completed their current studies; this compares with less than one in ten respondents who report other individuals, including friends, teachers and careers advisers, have had most influence (Figure 21). Further analysis reveals that the influence of family is greatest for Black students (73%) and lowest for students from 'other' ethnic backgrounds (64%). The role of friends is equivalently influential in decisions about what to do next across all ethnic groups. This overarching finding on the role and influence of friends and family is in line with wider research by CFE for HEFCE²¹ and more recently DfE²² which found that young people generally use informal

¹⁹ Year 13 and college Level 3, Year 2

²⁰ Years 9 to 11 and college Level 2

²¹ For example: CFE Research (2015) *Research on information use by students and their advisers. A report to the UK higher education funding bodies by CFE Research*, which fed into the Review of the Provision of Information about HE.

sources of IAG, such as parents and friends, to inform their post-16 choices. This presents a potential challenge for NCOP consortia. As reported in Chapter 3, consortia recognise the importance of engaging parents, but also acknowledge the difficulties in doing so effectively.



Figure 21: Who has had the greatest influence on your decision about what to do next? NCOP learners only. Base = 27,308

The role of teachers becomes more important for older students; 14 per cent of Year 13 students state that teachers have had the greatest influence on their decision about what to do next, compared with 5 per cent of Year 9 students. This also reflects the findings of previous work by CFE which suggests that parents and friends can be particularly influential during the early stages of the decision-making process but the closer a young person gets to the transition point at age 18, the more they engage with formal information sources as well as trusted adults outside their family, including teachers.²³

Knowledge of and attitudes to HE

Overall, NCOP learners generally have good knowledge of the advantages of HE. Most tend to agree with statements about the benefits of HE in terms of providing valuable life skills, getting a better job and earning more. A fifth of students are not fully convinced about the potential benefits to their social life, although 63 per cent agreed (Figure 22). Fifteen per cent of students overall also ‘don’t know’ whether HE will broaden their horizons. With such positive views at baseline, there is limited progress to be made against this measure.

Further analysis demonstrates that younger students are the least likely to have good knowledge of the advantages of HE, as reflected in the higher proportion of ‘don’t know’ responses. This contrasts with older students who demonstrate high levels of knowledge about the potential benefits of HE. Knowledge about the advantages of HE is equivalently high across ethnic groups and gender. Students with a disability are slightly less positive in

²² CFE Research and Hughes, D. (2017) *User insight research into post-16 choices*. Department for Education https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/664227/User_insight_research_into_post-16_choices.pdf

²³ Evans, J. et al (2015) *Understanding progression into higher education for disadvantaged and under-represented groups*. London: BIS

their views about the advantages of HE. In particular, they are less likely to agree that going to HE will improve their social life.

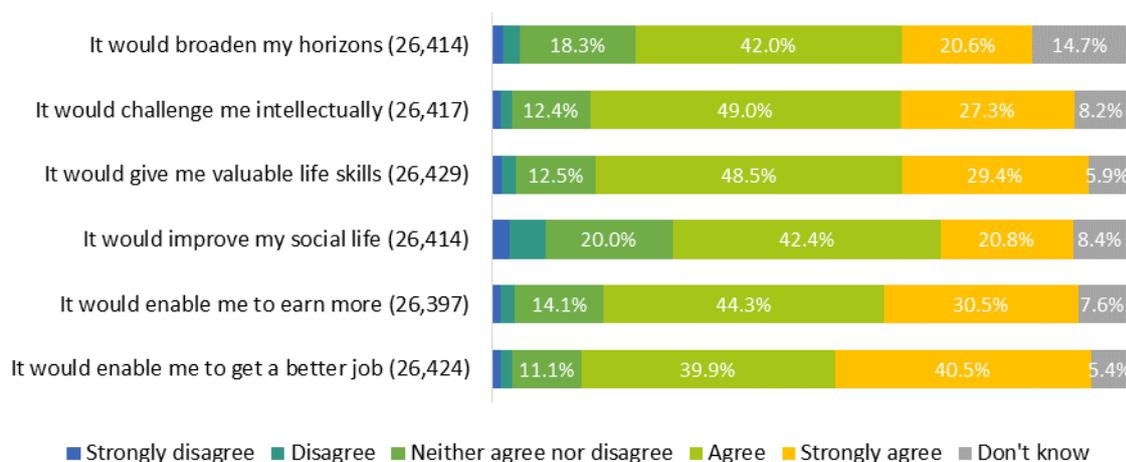


Figure 22: How much do you agree with the following statements about higher education? Bases in parentheses

NCOP learners are generally positive about their ability to cope with the demands of HE; all mean scores are above the mid-point. More than half agree that they would fit in well, have the academic ability and could cope with the study (Figure 23). Whether HE is ‘for people like me’ draws a slightly more equivocal response than other statements, with just under a third neither agreeing nor disagreeing. Age is clearly an important factor in relation to whether a respondent perceives that they could cope with the demands of HE, with a higher proportion of older students consistently agreeing that they will be able to cope compared to younger students. Younger students are more likely to report that they ‘don’t know’ whether they would be able to cope. Black and Asian students are consistently the most likely to perceive that they will be able to cope with demands of HE compared to White and Mixed students and those from other ethnic groups. Students with a disability are twice as likely to state that they do not have the ‘academic ability’ or would not ‘cope with the level of study’ compared to students who do not declare a disability. Age-specific and bespoke activities designed to improve confidence and provide direct experience of HE life for students with a disability and for some ethnic groups might be expected to have some impact on the attitudes of these particular groups of students.

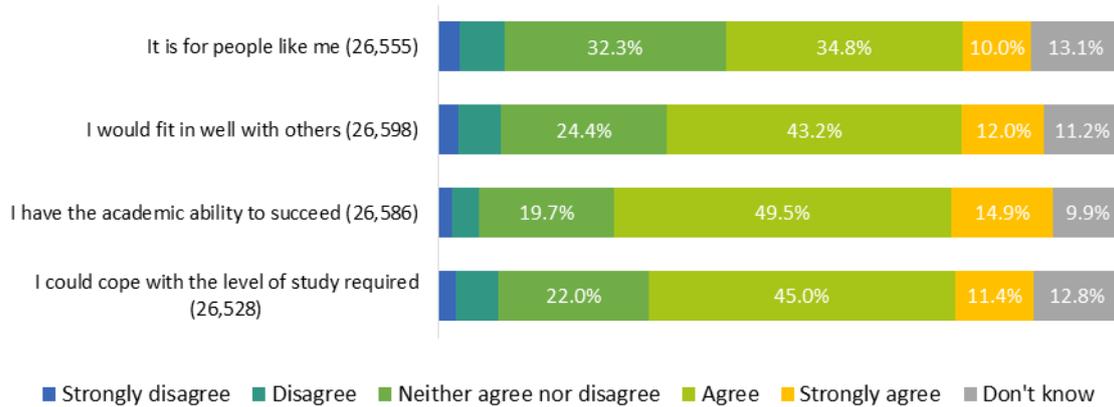


Figure 23: How much do you agree with the following statements about higher education? Bases in parentheses

NCOP learners’ knowledge of the more practical elements of HE is less good, with the exception of ‘how it leads to careers that I may be interested in’. Respondents know least about financial and other types of support available (Figure 24). Once age is taken into account, older students have more knowledge about the costs and financial support available. Targeted activity about financial support and the broader support available for younger students and how to access this is an area that the NCOP consortia could usefully focus on. No differences in knowledge emerged for ethnicity, gender or disability.

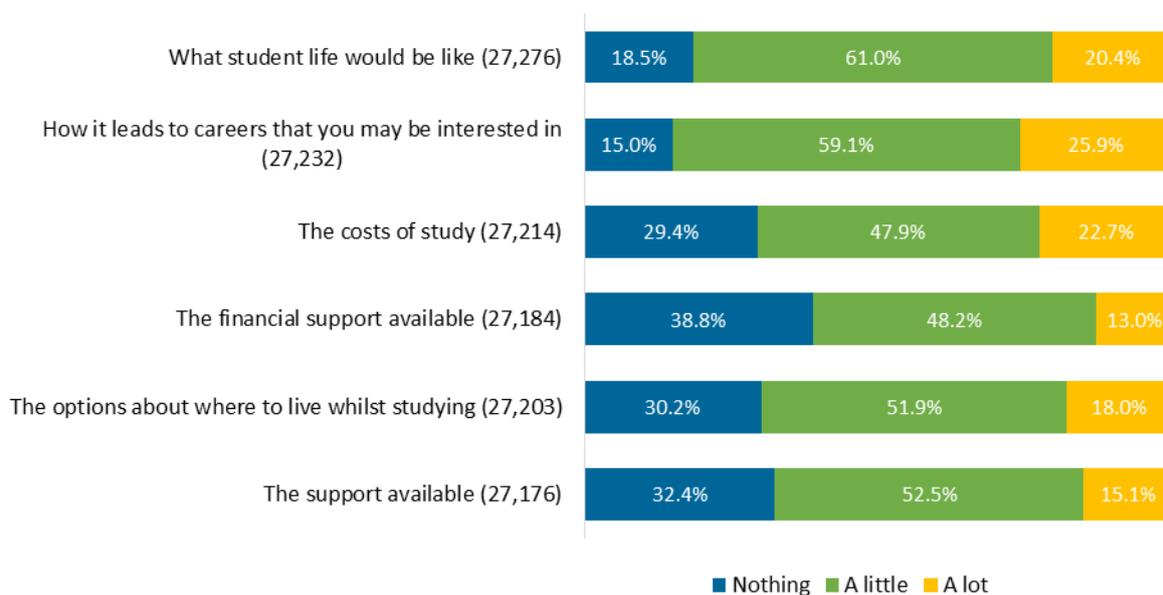


Figure 24: How much do you know about the following aspects of higher education study? Bases in parentheses

NCOP learners’ self-reported knowledge of the HE application process varies by age. For instance, over 90 per cent of Year 13 students responded that they knew ‘a little’ or ‘a lot’ about all the statements concerning the different elements of the HE application process. Knowledge is greatest amongst all groups on the ‘grades required’ and the ‘courses that are available’. Nearly three-quarters of Year 9 students report that they know ‘a little’ or ‘a lot’

about this but this percentage increases for each year group. Students choose their GCSE options in Year 9 and it is important that they can make fully informed decisions on which GCSEs to study. Given that a quarter of the students do not feel informed about what courses are available at HE and the required grades, NCOP activity targeted to provide more knowledge and the implications of different choices for progression to HE may be beneficial. Furthermore, over a third (37%) of Year 9 students reported knowing ‘nothing’ about where to find information and the different routes into HE.

How to apply through UCAS is the area where respondents overall are least informed. However, these findings are not surprising given that IAG about routes into HE and the application process is generally provided in Years 12 to 13. It will be interesting to see how this knowledge develops over the course of the NCOP for younger students (Figure 25). Minimal differences emerge for ethnicity, gender and disability in relation to self-reported knowledge of the HE application process.

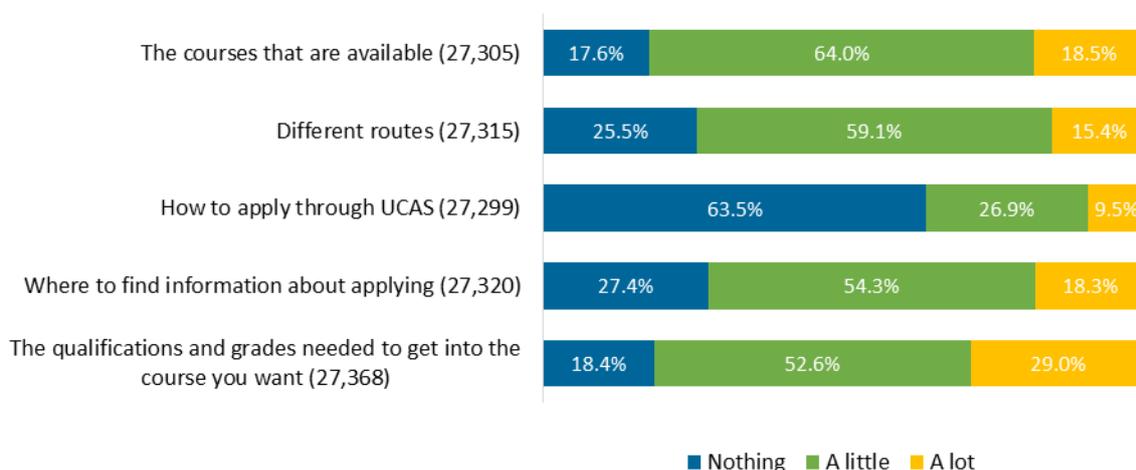


Figure 25: How much do you know about the following aspects of applying to higher education? Bases in parentheses

Future plans and aspirations

The majority of NCOP learners (87%) identified that they are motivated to do well in their studies. Over three-quarters believe they can get the grades required for further study and secure a place on a good course if they want to (Figure 26). These aspirations are consistently high across all year groups. Students with a disability are less positive about their aspirations for future study. Confidence building activities and study skills tailored for students with a disability could be explored. Overall, with such positive views there is limited progress that can be made on this measure. However, it will be interesting to monitor any changes, as learners may adjust their perceptions based on further experience, such as mock examination results, as well as engagement in NCOP activities.

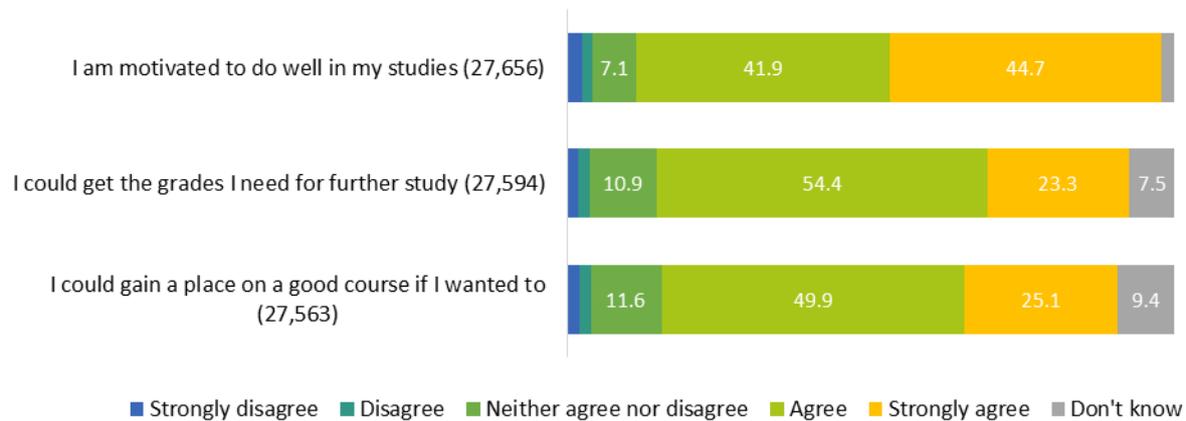


Figure 26: How much do you agree with the following statements about your aspirations for the future? Bases in parentheses

Over half of Year 9 and over two-thirds of Year 11 NCOP learners are planning on further study at a SFC or FEC. A higher proportion of younger learners ‘don’t know’ what they would like to do next when they finish their current studies (Table 2). SFC Year 13 students are more likely than FEC students to state that they plan to study away from home at an HEI (45%). FEC students are more likely than school students to state that they plan to get a full-time job when they finish their current studies. It will be important to ensure that students in Years 9 to 11 are provided with the necessary support and guidance to progress to SFC/FEC for further study. Once at a FEC it is important to ensure that learners are aware of the routes to HE that are available to those studying technical/vocational qualifications (as opposed to A Levels), including higher and degree apprenticeships. It is important that students making the right decisions for them up to, and following GCSEs, whether that be an academic or technical route (perhaps via a higher or degree apprenticeship). This highlights the importance of aligning outreach activity with that of the Careers and Enterprise Company.

	Yr 9	Yr 10	Yr 11	Sixth form – Yr 12	Sixth form – Yr 13	FEC – level 2	FEC – level 3 – Y1	FEC – level 3 – Y2
Study at school or SFC	26.6%	25.4%	34.8%	13.9%	0.0%	0.8%	0.0%	0.0%
Study at FEC	29.3%	29.3%	32.9%	10.3%	2.1%	24.2%	5.6%	3.4%
Study HE in FEC	0.0%	0.6%	0.0%	2.9%	2.9%	2.1%	3.1%	4.1%
Study at a local university or another HEI	0.1%	2.0%	0.0%	12.2%	19.7%	2.0%	19.9%	22.6%
Study away from home at university or another HEI	0.6%	5.9%	0.1%	22.1%	44.7%	4.0%	20.6%	23.0%
Get a job and study at the same time	0.1%	0.8%	0.2%	5.1%	3.5%	5.1%	12.1%	6.1%
Begin a higher/degree apprenticeship	0.0%	0.4%	0.0%	2.6%	4.1%	0.9%	3.0%	4.7%
Get a full-time job	8.5%	6.1%	3.6%	7.0%	7.2%	26.1%	17.0%	16.5%
Get a part-time job	5.8%	3.6%	3.0%	3.2%	1.1%	5.7%	2.2%	2.5%
Begin an apprenticeship	9.8%	12.0%	15.7%	10.1%	6.8%	14.7%	5.9%	7.4%
Some other type of training	1.5%	1.0%	0.8%	0.8%	0.4%	1.8%	0.6%	0.4%
Other	1.8%	1.4%	1.2%	0.8%	1.8%	1.8%	1.0%	1.6%
Don't know	16.0%	11.7%	7.6%	9.2%	5.6%	10.8%	9.0%	7.9%

Table 2: When you finish your current studies, what would you most like to do next? Base = 27,749

Females are more likely to state that they plan to study at school SFC or FEC. In contrast, a higher proportion of males state that they plan to begin an apprenticeship or get a full-time job. An equivalent proportion of males and females ‘don’t know’ what they plan to do next after they finish their current studies. Students with a disability are less likely to state that they plan to study at SFC or FEC after they finish their current studies. It would be worth exploring the reasons behind these views to establish whether students with a disability can be further supported.

Respondents in Year 13 or in the Level 3 Year 2 study at FEC were asked whether they had applied to HE (n=7,382). A third of NCOP learners stated that they have (n=2,779). SFC students are more likely to have applied to study at HE than FEC students (40% vs. 23%).

Respondents who could not yet apply to HE (those in Years 9-12 and those in Level 2 study or the Year 1 of Level 3 study) and those who said that they had not yet applied to HE (in the previous question, above) were asked whether they were likely to do so. Over two-thirds reported that they are likely to apply to HE and 15 per cent ‘don’t know’ yet whether they will apply (Figure 27).

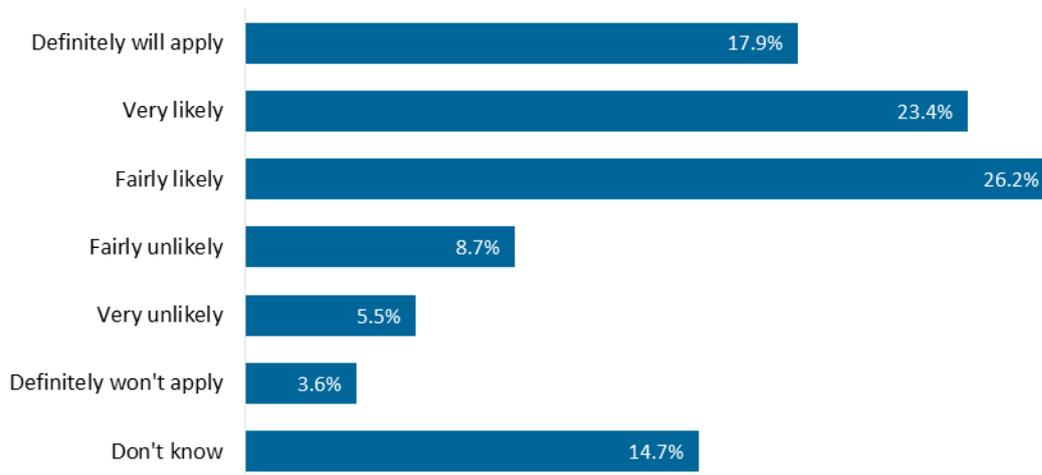


Figure 27: How likely are you to apply to higher education at age 18 or 19? Base = 26,399

When year group is taken into consideration, FEC Level 2 and Level 3 Year 2 students are most likely to state that they definitely won't apply to HE at age 18, whilst Year 13 SFC students are the most likely to state that they will definitely apply. It will be interesting to determine whether NCOP activity targeted at FEC students results in an increase in students planning to progress to HE at age 18. A relatively equivalent proportion of students from each year group 'don't know' whether they will apply to HE at age 18. It will be interesting to see if NCOP activity helps students to decide one way or another what to do next at age 18/19.

Asian and Black students are the most likely to state that they plan to apply to HE at age 18, whilst White, Mixed and Other ethnic minority students are the most likely to state they 'definitely won't apply'. Twice as many males stated that they 'definitely won't apply' to HE at age 18 and more females state that they 'definitely will apply'. This reflects the previous finding that more males plan to start an apprenticeship or get a full-time job. HE participation rates for white working class boys have been the focus of political attention and previous research and outreach activities. They are also a key target group for NCOP, and activity specifically tailored and targeted at males may help to shift their attitudes and aspirations. Finally, twice as many students with a disability stated they definitely won't apply to higher education at age 18 (6.8% vs. 2.9%). Once again, exploring the barriers to HE progression that disabled students face is an important consideration.

Respondents who said that they are unlikely to apply to HE at age 18 or 19 (including 'Fairly unlikely', 'Very unlikely' and 'Definitely won't apply' or 'Don't know' – see Figure 27) were asked to state the likelihood of applying to HE in future. The findings demonstrate that there is a cohort of NCOP learners who consistently do not intend to progress to HE when they are 18 or 19, or in the future. Mean scores for NCOP learners are below the mid-point (3.5), which shows that they are on average unlikely to apply to HE in future (Figure 28). This is particularly the case for FEC Level 2 students, FEC Level 3 Year 2 students, SFC Year 13 students and Year 11 students. Targeting younger students in Years 9 and 10 will be important to ensure that they develop and maintain positive aspirations and consider all the options available to them.

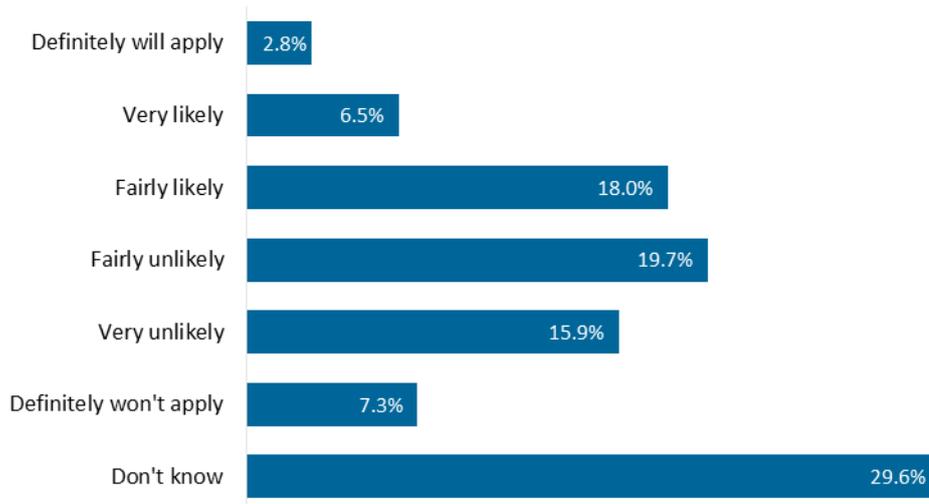


Figure 28: How likely are you to apply to higher education in the future? Base = 8,884

Respondents who said that they are unlikely to apply for HE were asked why. The most frequently cited reasons consistently reported across all year groups are because they want to ‘work and earn money’ and because they were ‘undecided’ (Figure 29). Males are more likely to state that they want to ‘work and earn money’ and more females are ‘undecided’. Progression for a third of respondents is dependent on ‘the grades I get’; this response was more frequently selected by females than males. This reason was also more likely to be selected by school pupils in Years 9 to 12. Interestingly, FEC students from all year groups and SFC Year 13 students are more likely than younger students to cite ‘it does not appeal to me’ as the main reason for not wanting to apply to HE. NCOP activity focused on confidence building and self-efficacy skills and information/guidance highlighting the benefits of further study may see shifts in these perceptions at follow-up.

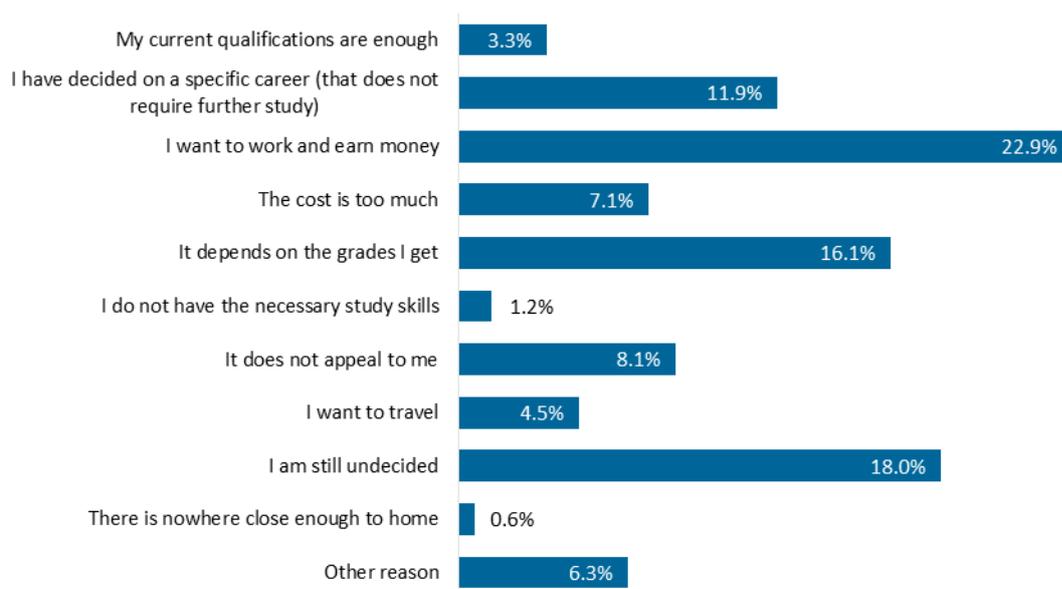


Figure 29: What is the main reason you might NOT go on to study further? Base = 8,885

6. Emerging lessons and next steps

In this chapter we draw together the key findings from the formative and impact evaluations to date to identify the emerging lessons and recommendations for the future of the NCOP.

Even where consortia are building on pre-existing partnerships, it takes time to recruit staff teams, develop effective partnership working and engage schools and FECs. Pressure to deliver activity and engage learners quickly means it is less likely to be strategic and tailored to meet local needs. There is also a risk that consortia may focus on perceived ‘quick wins’, rather than working with those organisations and groups of learners that may be harder to engage but where there is most need to enhance aspiration and progression to HE.

Consortia have expended a great deal of time, effort and resource in developing their partnerships and outreach offers and are beginning to see the benefits. It is important that consortia have the opportunity to capitalise on this initial investment and realise the full benefits. This opportunity is limited if the programme is not extended beyond the initial phase (December 2018). Furthermore, uncertainty about the future of the NCOP beyond the first phase and relatively short timescales are presenting real barriers to retaining staff and developing meaningful relationships with schools and FECs.

The substantial funding available through NCOP has helped to engage stakeholders, including organisations that HEIs may not have worked with previously, such as employers, community groups and third-party providers of outreach activity. The NCOP funding also allows consortia to create highly tailored packages of support for individual schools and FECs, ensuring the offer complements other outreach activity and addresses particular needs. This is welcomed by the schools and FECs. It is providing an opportunity to further develop ‘tried and tested’ activities for new target groups, or new and innovative outreach activities to learners.

Collaboration with a diverse range of partners is a key feature and benefit of NCOP. To ensure that programmes of activity are coherent and that staff understand consortium aims, objectives and priorities, there does need to be *some* degree of central control and coordination. In particular, employing staff centrally allows the lead partner to direct the work of the team and ensure they are not pressured into taking on non-NCOP activity by their host organisation. However, there need to be appropriate mechanisms for partner organisations and other stakeholders to feed into the design and direction of consortia plans. Simply devolving *all* responsibility for funding, designing and delivering activity to partners risks NCOP becoming little more than a collection of different activities. There is evidence that some consortia are striking a balance between the two operating models, ensuring central direction while allowing staff located within the partner institutions and communities the flexibility to develop locally-responsive solutions.

The baseline survey of NCOP learners has offered a positive glimpse that young people do recognise the benefits of HE. Overall, NCOP learners aspire to progress to HE and are

confident in their ability to do so. However, there are certain groups that do not reflect this overall trend. Disabled learners have lower levels of knowledge about the benefits of HE and are less confident in their ability to fit in and cope with student life. White, working-class learners, and in particular young men, are less likely to aspire to HE. They are more likely to want to move into the labour market quickly and are more attracted to full-time work or apprenticeship routes that offer opportunities to earn and learn. Consortia should consider developing tailored outreach activity for these specific groups.

There is a stark difference in attitudes between post-16 learners in SFCs and those in FECs. Many NCOP learners located within FECs see their future progression taking place locally. The collaborative nature of NCOP, where diverse providers are working together, means there is a real opportunity to show learners a wider range of local educational opportunities than they might otherwise be aware of.

Once learners progress to sixth form, many appear to be on a clear trajectory to participation in HE. This is not typically the case for FEC learners, although HE options may be available to them locally. Therefore, there is a case for consortia focusing on engaging FECs. Some have found this more challenging than working with schools although others have made good progress in this regard. FECs have different cultures and practices and their learners have different needs. Ensuring FECs are well represented among core partnerships and on steering and advisory groups is important in enabling consortia to develop a fuller understanding of how best to work with them. It will also be important for consortia to focus their efforts on engaging young NCOP learners (pre-16) and providing a progressive programme for them that builds each year.

Parents are a huge influence on the decisions that young people make about careers and education. Yet a substantial proportion of NCOP learners know of no-one in their family who has experience of HE. Consortia recognise the importance of engaging parents but this is challenging and there is yet little evidence that they have plans for how they will achieve this. However, some are seeking to reach out to parents in their communities in recognition of the fact that not all parents are willing to engage in a school/educational setting. Existing research highlights that parents of disadvantaged students are more likely to be debt-averse and to question the value of HE. Understanding the costs of HE and the financial support available is an area that learners know least about. So a focus on demystifying student finance and helping parents to understand the costs and benefits should also be a priority.

This report is necessarily limited and tentative in its findings. NCOP has been planned as a four year programme, and it will take a number of years before its impact can be evidenced through any increased participation rates in higher education. It is therefore too soon to offer much evidence of impact. A good understanding of which approaches are most effective in engaging and supporting different groups will be crucial to inform the ongoing development of consortia programmes. Resource for local evaluation is finite and it is not feasible for consortia to evaluate all aspects of what they are delivering. It may be more useful for them to focus on understanding what works with regard to supporting specific groups, such as disabled students and white working-class boys, as outlined above, and/or on evaluating approaches that are genuinely new and untested. Some of the consortia are planning to take just such an approach to their evaluations. This would complement the national evaluations, which are working on a broader scale to understand the overall impact.

Next steps

Year one of the evaluation has identified a number of issues which warrant further exploration as the evaluation progress in year 2. These include:

- Examining the prevalence of the different models in operation across the consortia and how they are evolving in response to the experience of delivering NCOP during year 1. A particular focus should be placed on the effectiveness of governance arrangements.
- Exploring the extent to which consortia are working with schools and FECs to up-skill staff in order to ensure the sustainability of the activity post-NCOP.
- Investigating effective approaches to engaging parents and ensuring the learner voice informs the ongoing development of the programme and individual activities.
- Evaluating the extent to which consortia develop genuinely innovative approaches as they become more established and the effectiveness of these activities.
- Further exploring learners' aspirations, knowledge of HE and future plans through a follow-up survey of participants. The primary survey data will be linked to longitudinal tracking data to begin to explore the impact of the programme.
- Ongoing review of local evaluation plans and findings to ensure robust evidence and synergy between the national and local evaluations.
- Assessing the challenges of designing and implementing RCTs in the context of NCOP and how these can be addressed to ensure experimental methods can be used to best effect to demonstrate the impact of outreach activities.

Appendix 1: Overview of NCOP consortia

Consortium (* denotes participation in a CFE field visit)	Accountable institution (Lead HEI)	UK region	Data tracking system
Aimhigher West Midlands	The University of Birmingham	Midlands	Aimhigher
Aspire Higher	University of Bedfordshire	East	Heat
Aspire to HE	The University of Wolverhampton	Midlands	Heat
Cumbria Collaborative Outreach Programme	The University of Cumbria	North west	Heat
Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire Collaborative Outreach Programme (DANCOP) *	University of Derby	Midlands	EMWPREP
Essex Collaborative Outreach Network (Make Happen) *	The University of Essex	South east	Heat
FORCE	The University of Hull	Yorkshire and the Humber	Heat
Future Quest	University of the West of England	South west	Heat
Future U *	University of Central Lancashire	North west	Heat
Go Higher West Yorkshire *	The University of Leeds	Yorkshire and the Humber	Heat
Greater Manchester Higher	Manchester Metropolitan University	North west	Heat
GROWS (GAP)	University of Gloucestershire	South west	Heat
HEPP SY	Sheffield Hallam University	Yorkshire and the Humber	Heat
Higher Horizons+ *	University of Keele	Midlands	EMWPREP
Higher York	York St John University	Yorkshire and the Humber	Heat

Consortium (* denotes participation in a CFE field visit)	Accountable institution	UK region	Data tracking system
Kent and Medway Collaborative Outreach Programme	The University of Kent	South east	Heat
Linc Higher	Bishop Grosseteste University	Midlands	EMWPREP
London NCOP	Kingston University	South east	Heat
Merseyside Collaborative Outreach Programme	The University of Liverpool	North West	Heat
Network for East Anglian Collaborative Outreach (NEACO)	University of Cambridge	East	Heat
Next Steps South West	University of Plymouth	South west	Heat
North East Collaborative Outreach Programme	University of Newcastle upon Tyne	North east	Heat
Pathways	The University of Leicester	Midlands	EMWPREP
Southern Universities Network	University of Southampton	South east	Heat
Study Higher *	Oxford Brookes University	South east	Heat
Sussex Learning Network	University of Brighton	South east	Heat
HEON	The University of Surrey	South east	Heat
Think Higher	The University of Warwick	Midlands	Heat
Wessex Inspiration Network	The University of Bath	South west	Heat

Appendix 2: NCOP evaluation logic chain and indicator bank

Objective: To make rapid progress towards the governments' goals for widening access to HE (that is, the goals are reached by 2020 rather than the projected 2027)

Inputs	Resources	Activities	Outputs	Short- to medium-term outcomes (up to Dec 2018)	Longer-term outcomes	Impacts
<p>2-4 years of NCOP funding from HEFCE: - 2016/17 £30m - 2017/18 £60m - 2018/19 £60m - 2019/20 £60m</p> <p>Consortia investment (e.g. additional funding, overheads, expertise)</p> <p>Contracts for national formative and impact evaluations</p> <p>HEFCE investment (staff time etc.)</p> <p>Stakeholder input</p>	<p>1) 29 consortia (HEIs, private HE providers, FECS, SFCS, schools, charities, LEPS and other partners)</p> <p>2) Consortia staff (directly employed/time purchased)</p> <p>3) Other staff and volunteers (e.g. coaches/mentors, ambassadors)</p> <p>4) Physical infrastructure (e.g. staff desk space, computer networks, delivery space)</p> <p>5) Virtual, printed and other physical resources</p> <p>6) External resources (e.g. consultancy, external evaluation)</p> <p>7) Capacity building and other support from national evaluation partners and HEFCE project managers</p> <p>8) Tracking systems (HEAT, EMWPREP, AWM)</p> <p>9) HEFCE monitoring return documentation</p>	<p>1) Consortia establish strategic leadership, management and governance arrangements to deliver a collaborative approach</p> <p>2) Consortia develop strategic plans to deliver outreach activities</p> <p>3) Consortia effectively engage with schools and other stakeholders to target and deliver their activities.</p> <p>4) Consortia develop and deliver collaborative IAG and outreach activity, including new and innovative approaches, in target wards</p> <p>5) CFE and SHU provide capacity building support webinars and case studies</p> <p>6) Consortia develop and implement plans for rigorous evaluations.</p> <p>7) Consortia record quarterly funding profile to document actual spend</p>	<p>1) Consortia operate as effective partnerships</p> <p>2) Consortia are sustainable over the lifetime of the NCOP programme</p> <p>3) Consortia meet their targets and milestones for engaging schools and other stakeholders</p> <p>4) Consortia meet their targets and milestones for engaging people in IAG and outreach activities</p> <p>5) Consortia take-up of webinars and other capacity building support</p> <p>6) Consortia collect reliable and valid data</p> <p>7) Consortia deliver credible and useful evaluation findings at appropriate intervals</p> <p>8) Consortia track actual spend against forecast spend for each quarter and return completed funding profile to HEFCE</p>	<p>1) Teachers in schools serving the target wards have increased knowledge of the benefits of HE and available routes</p> <p>2) More young people from target wards express an interest in HE</p> <p>3) Young people from target wards have increased knowledge of the benefits of HE and how to get there</p> <p>4) Parents from target wards have increased knowledge of the benefits of HE and available routes</p> <p>5) More young people from target wards aspire to go to HE</p> <p>6) Young people study the necessary subjects/ qualifications at Key Stage 5 to facilitate access to HE</p> <p>7) Increased number and proportion of young people from the target wards that apply to HE</p> <p>8) Consortia, HEFCE and national evaluators produce sufficiently robust evidence of progress to secure continued funding for NCOP</p> <p>9) HEI consortia members have improved understanding of the best and most appropriate methods for evaluating widening access</p> <p>10) Interim findings on the costs per learner for participating in the range of NCOP activities.</p>	<p>1) Increased number and proportion of young people from the target wards apply to HE.</p> <p>2) Increased number and proportion of young people from the target wards are successful in their applications to HE</p> <p>3) Increased number and proportion of young people from target wards start HE</p> <p>4) There is sufficient culture change in target wards so that HE becomes seen as a positive and realistic choice for young people from all backgrounds</p> <p>5) Improved, more robust, evidence base on what works in widening access to HE, for whom and in what circumstances</p> <p>6) Cost-effectiveness of the NCOP on academic attainment, life skills and aspiration, and HE participation</p>	<p>1) Double proportion of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds in HE by 2020</p> <p>2) Increase by 20% number of students in HE from ethnic minority groups</p> <p>3) Address the under-representation of young men from disadvantaged backgrounds in HE</p> <p>4) Positive step-change in how widening access is evaluated by HEIs</p> <p>5) Establishing whether the NCOP has been value for money</p>

Assumptions/context

- 1) Young people achieve necessary levels of attainment at Key Stages 4 and 5 to progress to HE
- 2) Consortia effectively identify and manage risks
- 3) Consortia develop their strategies and activities based on learning and evidence from previous initiatives such as NNCO
- 4) Consortia adapt their approach/activities to reflect changes in the local and/or national context
- 5) Consortia use data and emerging findings from evaluations to adapt and change their approach
- 6) NCOP activity is aligned with broader outreach activity

Organisations responsible for measuring the achievement of each element

Organisation	Logic Chain element responsible for	Specific aspects of element responsible for (see logic chain numbers above)
HEFCE		
	Resources	1-9
	Activities	3, 4, 5, 7
	Outputs	3, 4, 8
	Short-/medium-term outcomes	8
	Longer-term outcomes	1, 2, 3
	Impact	1, 2, 3, 4
CFE formative evaluation		
	Activities	1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7
	Outputs	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8
	Short-/medium-term outcomes	1, 2, 3, 4, 8, 9
	Longer-term outcomes	4, 5
	Impact	4
	Assumptions	2, 3, 4, 5, 6
CFE impact evaluation		
	Short-/medium-term outcomes	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 10
	Longer-term outcomes	1, 2, 3, 6
	Impact	1, 2, 3, 5
	Assumptions	1
Data tracking systems		
	Short-/medium-term outcomes	6, 7
	Longer-term outcomes	1, 2, 3
	Assumptions	1
Consortia		
	Resources	1 – 6, 9
	Activities	1 – 4, 6, 7
	Outputs	1 – 8
	Short-/medium-term outcomes	1 – 9
	Longer-term outcomes	1 – 5
	Impact	1 – 4

Indicator Bank

ACTIVITIES and OUTPUTS

Activity	Outputs	Line of enquiry	Indicator	Data source
(1) Consortia establish strategic leadership, management and governance arrangements to deliver a collaborative approach	(a) Consortia operate as effective partnerships (b) Consortia are sustainable over the lifetime of the NCOP programme	Membership of consortia	Number and type of consortia member organisations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - HEIs - FECs - Local schools - Local businesses - Community and voluntary organisations Role and seniority of staff representing the membership organisations on the consortia Extent of senior staff buy-in to consortia and NCOP among member organisations	Case studies Formative consortia surveys Monitoring reports
		Models of collaborations	Consortia structure and organisation of leadership, management and operational functions. Division of labour between partners and extent to which tasks and responsibilities are appropriately assigned and duplication avoided	Case studies Formative consortia surveys
		Effective partnership working	Mechanisms for and channels of communication between consortia members. Extent to which members have positive and trusting relationships with each other	Case studies Formative consortia surveys

Activity	Outputs	Line of enquiry	Indicator	Data source
(2) Consortia develop strategic plans	(a) Consortia operate as effective partnerships (b) Consortia are sustainable over the lifetime of the NCOP programme	Consortia vision and long-term aims.	Clarity of consortia vision, aims and objectives. Extent to which these align with the overarching NCOP objectives. Extent to which partners in each consortium support the vision, aims and objectives. Extent to which consortia vision, aims and objectives align with member organisations' concerns and priorities	Document review Case studies Formative consortia surveys Monitoring reports
		Resources are focused and used appropriately to make progress toward their aims	What resources are being funded? Why have these resources been selected? Who made the decision to fund these resources?	Case studies Formative consortia surveys
		Strategic planning	Consortia understanding of the particular needs and challenges of their locality. Delivery plans setting out how the consortia objectives will be met. Consortia milestones, targets and timelines for delivery. Extent to which plans have sound theoretical and/or evidential foundation	Document review
(3) Consortia effectively engage with schools and other stakeholders to target and deliver their activities	Consortia meet their targets and milestones for engaging schools and stakeholders	Engagement with schools and stakeholders	<p>Number of schools targeted and number of schools engaged</p> <p>Number and type of other stakeholders targeted and engaged, e.g. parents, businesses, community or voluntary organisations. Extent to which number and type of schools engaged is in line with targets. Extent to which schools are supportive of NCOP and prioritise work with consortia. Methods used to engage with schools and evidence/perceptions from consortia on which are the most effective</p> <p>Partners think that schools are receptive to the work of consortia and make it easier for consortia to identify and access NCOP learners</p>	Case studies Formative consortia surveys HEFCE monitoring forms

Activity	Outputs	Line of enquiry	Indicator	Data source
(4) Consortia deliver collaborative IAG and outreach activity, including new and innovative approaches, in target wards.	Consortia meet their targets and milestones for engaging people in IAG and outreach activities	Partners in each consortium have developed a joint delivery plan to achieve the consortium's aim. Consortia work to date is on target as detailed in their individual delivery plans	Consortia operating plans and actual delivery demonstrate a joined up approach for engaging with young people in outreach activities. Types of activities delivered Number of activities delivered by each partner. Number of young people who benefited from activities	HEFCE monitoring forms Case studies Formative consortia surveys
(5) Consortia develop and implement plans for rigorous evaluation	(a) Consortia take up webinar and other capacity building support (b) Consortia collect reliable and valid data (c) Consortia deliver credible and useful evaluation findings at appropriate intervals	Consortia engagement in capacity building activities and the evaluation plans	Total attendance numbers from consortia, including percent of consortia in attendance at event. Each consortium has developed their own evaluation plan/framework Consortia are engaging with the national evaluation, including baseline methodology Senior stakeholders are engaged with and supportive of evaluation plans Consortia are 'on track' with implementing their evaluation plans. Consortia have had their plans for evaluations reviewed by a 'critical friend'.	CFE attendance records Meta review/assessment of local evaluations
(6) Consortia record quarterly funding profile to document actual spend	Consortia accurately complete HEFCE monitoring forms on a quarterly basis to detail actual spend	Extent of consortia engagement with HEFCE monitoring forms	Actual number of actual learners engaged in NCOP activity against forecast number of learners Type of activity learners have engaged in Total spend per activity per quarter	HEFCE monitoring forms CFE/consortium survey evaluation data Data tracking data on progression rates to HE

SHORT- to MEDIUM-TERM OUTCOMES

Outcome	Outcome detail	Indicator	Data source
(1) Teachers in schools serving the target wards have increased knowledge of the benefits of HE and available routes	(a) Teachers have an increased knowledge of the benefits of HE	Teachers can identify social, academic and career benefits	Local evaluations Qualitative interviews Formative consortia surveys
	(b) Teachers know where to get information about HE	Teachers know what information they need Teachers know how/where to find the information Teachers find it easy to access information on HE	
	(c) Teachers understand the different HE options/routes	Teachers can identify different routes – HE, Higher Apprenticeships, distance learning Teachers can describe the difference in the routes	
	(d) Teachers are able to signpost relevant outreach activities to help learners to increase their knowledge about the benefits and routes in to HE	Teachers are aware of NCOP activities and how they may help learners	
(2) More young people from target ward express an interest in HE	Learner intentions regarding study a HE	Numbers of learners who express an interest in applying to HE Numbers of learners who have explored potential institutions/courses/ career paths requiring a HE qualification Intention to apply to HE e.g. likelihood to apply to HE (also to understand the reasons why learners may not want to go to university and if would consider applying in the future) Intention to attend HE	HEAT records Learner impact survey Formative consortia survey
(3) Learners have increased knowledge and understanding of the benefits of HE and routes	(a) Learners have an increased knowledge of the benefits of HE	Learners can identify social, academic and career benefits e.g. what life would be like at university, how HE leads to careers I'm interested in, improved social life	Learner impact survey Local evaluations Formative consortia surveys RCT/experimental methodology Qualitative interviews
	(b) Learners know where to get information about HE	Learners know what information they need Learners know how/where to find the information Learners find it easy to access information on HE	

	(c) Learners understand the different HE options/routes	Learners can identify different routes – HE, Higher Apprenticeships, distance learning Learners can describe the difference in the routes	
	(d) Learners understand the financial implications of going to university	Learners are aware of the costs associated with HE (fees, cost of living) Learners are aware of the financial support available (student loans, bursaries/grants, parental support)	
	(e) Learners have an awareness of support they can access when at university	Learners are aware of learning and pastoral support available at HE	
	(d) Consortia understand what activities work best to help learners increase their knowledge of the benefits of HE	What outreach activities have learners engaged with to increase their knowledge of the benefits of HE Location of activities What activities and intensity of engagement in activities? Increases in learners' knowledge levels	
(4) Parents have increased knowledge and understanding of the benefits of HE and routes	(a) Parents have an increased knowledge of the benefits of HE	Have an increased knowledge of the benefits of HE (social, academic and career benefits)	Qualitative interviews Local evaluations
	(b) Parents know where to get information about HE	Parents know what information they need Parents know how/where to find the information Parents find it easy to access information on HE	
	(c) Parents understand the different HE options/routes	Parents can identify different routes – HE, Higher Apprenticeships, distance learning Parents can describe the difference in the routes	
	(d) Consortia understand what activities work best to help parents increase their knowledge of the benefits of HE	What activities learners engaged with have increased their knowledge of the benefits of HE Location of activities What activities and intensity of engagement in activities? Increases in parents' knowledge levels	
(5) More young people from target wards aspire to go to HE	(a) Young people have a positive attitude towards HE	Motivation to go to HE e.g. going to university will broaden my horizons Learners have a positive attitude towards HE e.g. University is for people like me	Learner impact survey Local evaluations RCT/experimental methodology Formative consortia surveys
	(b) Young people have sought information and advice on HE qualifications	Learners have explored one or more career paths requiring a HE qualification Learners have discussed their aspirations to go to HE with	

	(c) Young people know what grades they need for their desired course and university	teacher(s)/parent(s)/friend(s')/careers advisor/mentor Learners have accessed information about potential universities, courses, entry requirements Learners have knowledge about what grades they need to achieve to get on to their desired course and their choice of university	
Outcome	Outcome detail	Indicator	Data source
(6) Young people study the necessary subjects/qualifications at Key Stage 5 to facilitate access to HE	Young people study the necessary subjects/qualifications at Key Stage 5 to facilitate access to HE	Learners make informed and considered choices about the subjects they wish to study at Key Stage 5, which are aligned with potential career paths	Learner impact survey Local evaluations Qualitative interviews Secondary data sources
(7) Increased number and proportion of young people from Years 12 and 13 in the target wards apply to HE	Increased number and proportion of young people from Years 12 and 13 in the target wards that apply to HE	Number of learners who have applied to HE	Secondary data sources
(8) Consortia, HEFCE and national evaluators produce sufficiently robust evidence of progress to secure continued funding for NCOP	Consortia, HEFCE and national evaluators produce sufficiently robust evidence of progress to secure continued funding for NCOP	Local evaluation reports stand up to scrutiny. Funding is secured for the next two years	Meta-review of local evaluations HEFCE board decision on funding
(9) Consortia members have improved understanding of the best and most appropriate methods for evaluating widening access	Consortia members have improved understanding of the best and most appropriate methods for evaluating widening access	Consortia can begin to identify what works, for whom, in what circumstances	Formative consortia survey Meta-review of local evaluations
(10) Consortia, HEFCE and national evaluators have evidence of the cost-effectiveness of the NCOP to secure continued funding	Consortia, HEFCE and national evaluators produce evidence of the cost-effectiveness of the NCOP to secure continued funding	Consortia, HEFCE and national evaluators develop an understanding of the overall cost-effectiveness of the NCOP and what activities are the most cost-effective, costs per student participating in the NCOP and cost-effectiveness in terms of attitudes and knowledge towards HE	HEFCE monitoring form CFE/consortium survey evaluation data Data tracking data on progression rates to HE

LONG-TERM OUTCOMES

Outcome	Indicator	Data source
(1) Increased number and proportion of young people from the target wards apply to HE	Number of young people from target ward who apply to HE Number of young people from target ward who are eligible to apply for HE (to give proportion) Motivation to apply to university	Secondary data collected from consortia and other national databases Learner impact survey
(2) Increased number and proportion of young people from the target wards are successful in their applications to HE	Number of young people from target ward who are successful in securing a place at university Number of young people from target ward who applied to HE (to give proportion)	Secondary data collected from consortia and other national databases
(3) Increased number and proportion of young people from target wards start HE: - Double proportion of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds in HE by 2020 - Increase by 20% number of students in HE from ethnic minority groups - Address the under-representation of young men from disadvantaged backgrounds in HE	Numbers of learners from the target ward who enrol on a HE course	Secondary data collected from consortia and other national databases (HESA)
(4) Progress towards a cultural change in target wards is one where HE is seen as a positive and realistic choice for young people from all backgrounds	Perception from NCOP staff that HE is seen by learners from the target ward as a realistic choice for young people like them. Perception from NCOP staff that HE is seen by parents and teachers from the target ward as a realistic choice for young people 'like theirs'	Formative consortia survey
(5) Improved, more robust, evidence base on what works in widening access to HE, for whom and in what circumstances	Consortia have developed and implemented rigorous evaluations Consortia have developed thorough understanding of who influences young people's decision making	Meta-review of local evaluations Evidence from RCTs
(6) Detailed understanding of the cost-effectiveness of the NCOP	Consortia have provided detailed monitoring returns to enable detailed cost-effectiveness analysis of the overall NCOP, cost-effectiveness of specific activities and returns on progression to HE	HEFCE monitoring form CFE/consortium survey evaluation data Data tracking data on progression rates to HE

Appendix 3: Baseline Survey

Survey Implementation

The survey questions and format were designed through a collaborative process of suggestions and feedback involving CFE and consortia. Most of the questions were taken or adapted from surveys that had been validated (e.g. the LSYPE survey). The final design was piloted in schools with selected consortia. A few changes were made following the feedback from the pilots.

Consortia were given two options for administering the survey:

- A. Running their own survey
- B. Using the online survey run by CFE on the Confirmit system.

The survey comprised two parts. Part 1 was agreed to form the basis of the national evaluation of NCOP, whereas part 2 was optional extra questions that consortia could add as part of their local evaluations. This report includes only the results of part 1.

The CFE survey could be deployed online or in paper format. Where schools lacked the IT resources to use the online survey, they used the paper version. Data collected via paper surveys had to be digitised first, either by entering the responses into a version of the CFE online survey created for data entry, or by sending the data to us via secure encrypted file transfer systems. A few consortia have been unable to get a data-sharing agreement in place. In these cases, because we have yet to receive the baseline data, these consortia are excluded from the current analysis.

The online survey operated by CFE started collecting data from the end of September 2017. It is still open now, as a few consortia are continuing to gather data. The survey will close when data collection is complete, and the analysis in this report will be updated to include the full dataset.

Data Cleaning

The dataset collected at the cut-off date of 17/11/2017, which combines CFE survey data with data from consortia surveys, totals 75,401 responses. This includes test responses, those who didn't consent to data collection, duplicate entries, errors, missing data, and partial responses – all of which need excluding from analysis.

Consent

Following information for respondents about the purpose of the survey, two questions asked for consent to data collection (by CFE and consortia) and data sharing (with tracking organisations). Unless consent is given for both questions, the survey response is marked as 'complete' and the respondent is asked no further questions. Without consent for data sharing, a response cannot be used for the evaluation of NCOP, which requires matching (and therefore sharing) with data held by tracking organisations. For this reason, any

response that failed to provide consent for both questions is excluded from the dataset (missing data is treated the same as non-consent).

Of the 75,401 responses in the dataset at the cut-off point (17/11/2017), a total of 14,826 responses lacked consent, either through explicit refusal (3,716) or through missing data (11,110). This left 60,575 responses with full consent.

A large number of respondents didn't complete the survey, and a small proportion of responses had technical errors. All errors were excluded from the dataset. Partial responses have been retained where they are not duplicates of complete responses (see notes on duplicates below).

	Frequency	Percent
complete	61548	81.6
incomplete	13644	18.1
error	209	0.3
Total	75401	100.0

Table 3: Status of responses before data cleaning

Duplicates

Duplicate survey responses were cleaned out based on the identification of multiple entries in the following variables: Forename, surname, date of birth, home postcode, and email address. Where duplicate entries were found, only the most complete or the most recent response was retained. A total of 2,673 duplicate responses were excluded from the dataset.

Missing data

In order to facilitate tracking via HEAT etc., the survey asked respondents for personal information, including forename, surname, date of birth and home postcode. These data are vital for the national evaluation of NCOP because they are the basis for matching with other datasets. If any of these data are missing, then the response cannot be included in the national evaluation. For this reasons, survey responses that omit any of these four key variables were excluded.

Variable	Number
Forename	158
Surname	7
Postcode	800
DoB	623
Total	1588

Table 4: Number of cases with missing data

Identifying NCOP learners

Using a list of NCOP target postcodes supplied by HEFCE, we checked each postcode provided by respondents to see if it is included in the list. If so, a respondent is labelled "NCOP".

In the version of the online survey created for data entry from paper surveys, there was a question for consortia, “Is this learner part of NCOP?”, with three options: 1) ‘Yes, NCOP learner’; 2) ‘No, comparison group’; 3) ‘Don’t know’. Where consortia sent their baseline survey data to CFE by other means, we asked them to identify NCOP learners where possible, by adding an extra variable into their dataset, using those same three categories. The current dataset combines these two sources of information into one variable, with three categories.

Back-coding

Some questions included an ‘Other’ option which, if selected, prompted respondents to specify what this choice represented. In many cases, respondents’ answers mirrored existing answers. These cases were ‘back-coded’ from ‘Other’ to the relevant answer. The number of these adjustments varied across questions, but in most cases was in the order of a few thousand cases.

Current dataset

After cleaning, the dataset comprises a total of 57,894 responses. 35,834 of these are responses from the CFE online survey and 22,060 are from consortia surveys. This dataset is the basis of the results in this chapter. Because baseline data collection is still occurring in some consortia, however, we intend to update the analysis when data collection is complete. Figure 30 summarizes the flow of data in terms of the number of responses collected, cleaned and analysed.

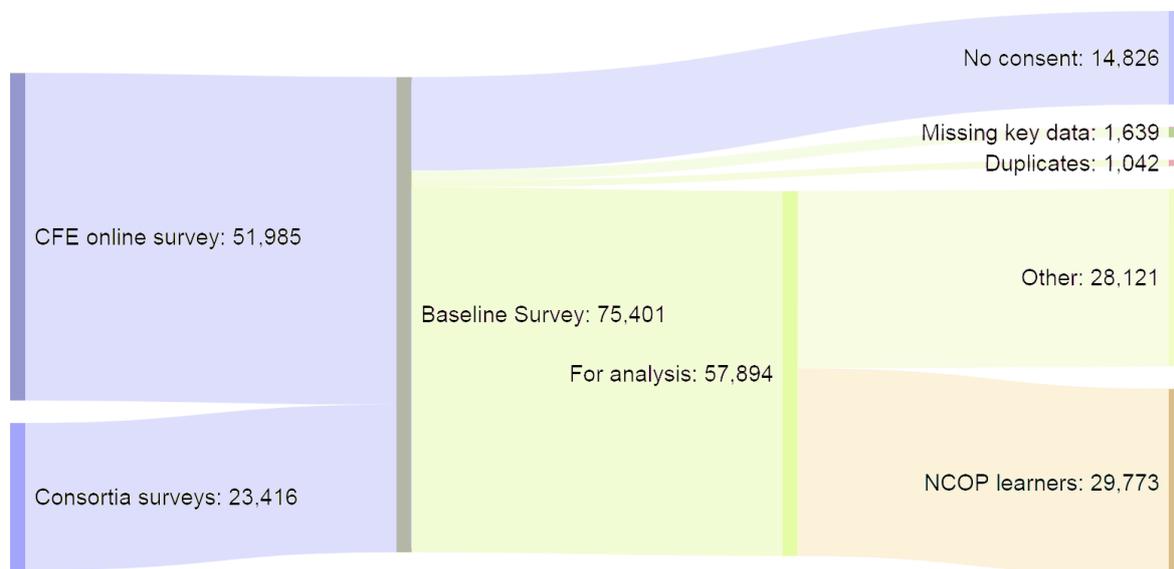


Figure 30: Sankey diagram of data collection and cleaning

Appendix 4: Baseline survey respondent profile

Gender

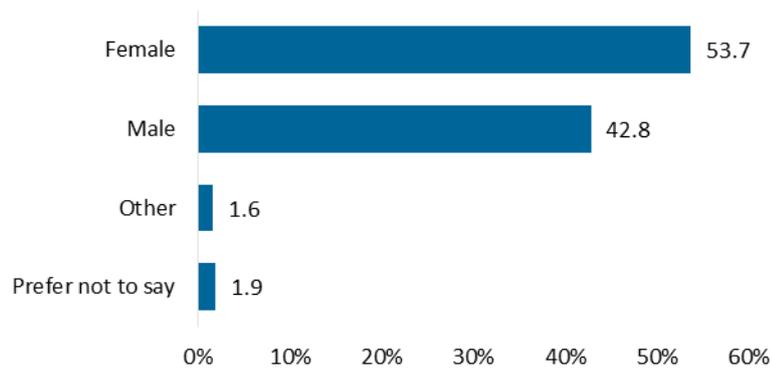


Figure 31: What is your gender? Base = 24,790

Ethnicity

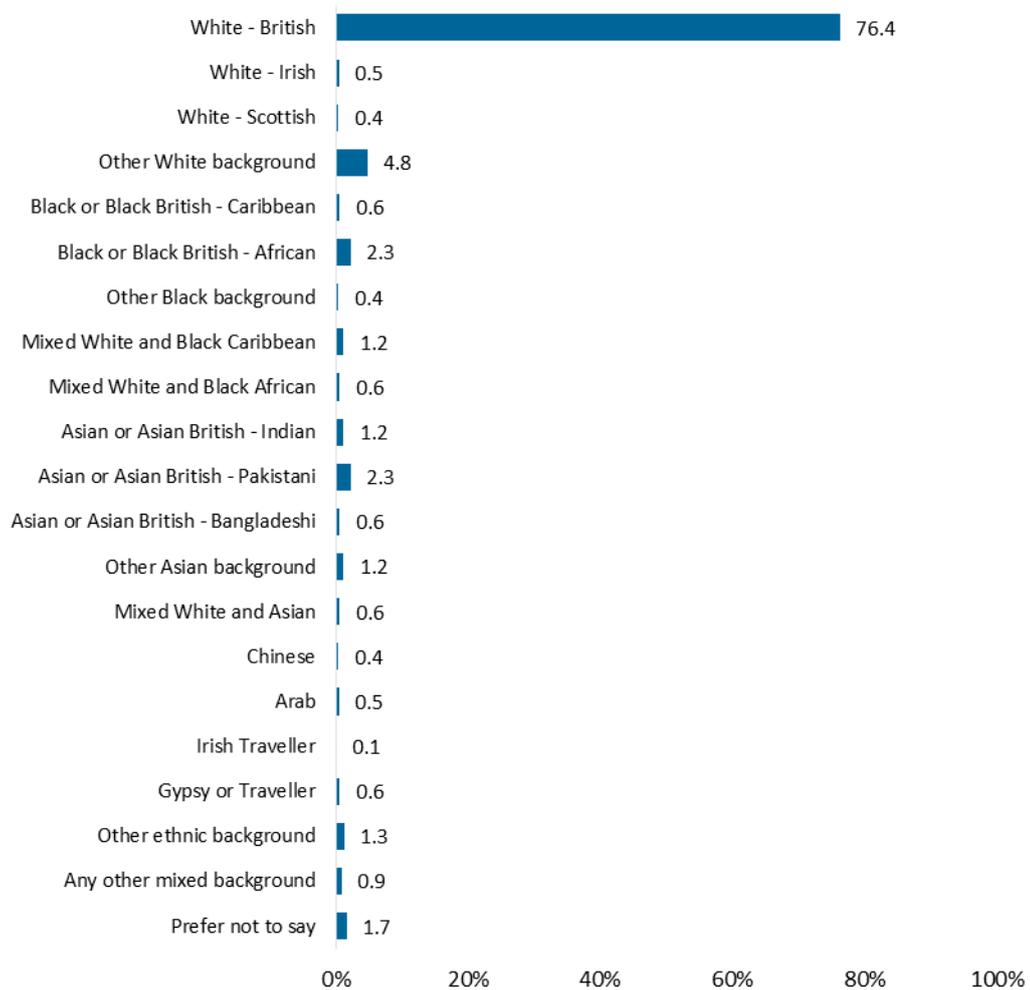


Figure 32: Which of the following ethnic groups do you belong to? Base = 24,408

The survey question that asked about ethnicity used the same categorisation as the tracking organisations, to facilitate consortia entering data into those systems (Figure 32). This variable was re-coded to the same classification used by HESA, which comprises fewer groups (Figure 33). This makes it more amenable to analysis, and reduces the risk of implications for data protection and anonymity.

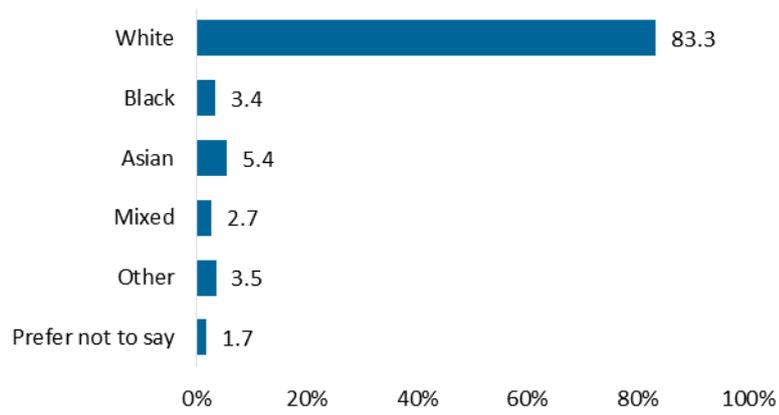


Figure 33: Ethnicity, re-coded. Base = 24,408

Disability

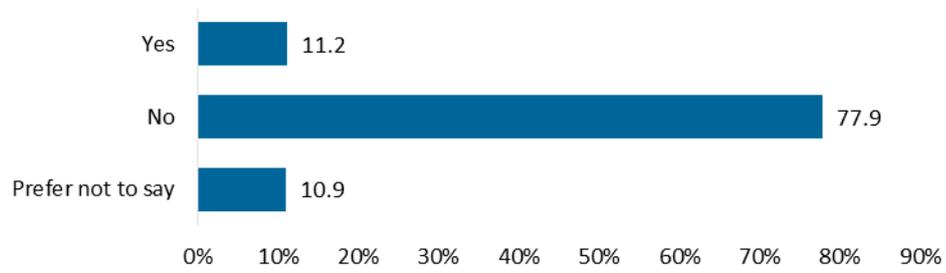


Figure 34: Do you have a disability, learning difficulty or long-term physical or mental health condition? Base = 24,371