

NSSW Phase 3 Evaluation Strategy – Summary

Introduction

Next Steps South West (NSSW) is committed to ensuring that the Uni Connect project remit is delivered in line with the Office for Students (OfS) guidance and legal requirements, and that funding is spent on activity that provides the greatest possible impact and social return. Evaluation strategic direction is provided to NSSW through membership of the Uni Connect Evaluation and Data Working Groups. Ethical approval has been obtained for NSSW Phase 3. NSSW will continue to support a dedicated Evaluation Team, but with reduced FTE in Phase 3.

A full description of the evaluation strategy, theory, processes, targets, risk and budget is provided in the full NSSW Phase 3 Evaluation Strategy document, available on request. This document details how NSSW ensures secure, confidential data management and timely and accurate analysis and reporting.

Targeting

Targeting will continue to be by individual, according to POLAR3 Q1 and Gaps Q1&2, but will no longer include further sifting by predicted or achieved GCSE grades. From Phase 3, UC targeting will also include Adult Learners (aged 19+) on Level 3 courses in FE Colleges.

The NSSW 'Theory of Change'

The NSSW Theory of Change underpins all NSSW provision, through the 6 identified barriers to HE progression. All NSSW outreach and supporting communications address at least one of the six barriers. Outcomes and distanced travelled against these barriers are measured, evaluated and reported. Logic chains, measures and indicators are specified for each type of activity.

Rationale for Activity Design

In Phase 3 there will be a greater emphasis on the use of the NSSW local evidence gathered by the Evaluation Team in earlier phases to inform the development of new and existing activities. The Phase 3 progression framework for sustained and progressive outreach has been designed based on evidence of impact, sustainability, value for money and stakeholder feedback. ([link to Progression Framework](#)).

Short and Long Term Evaluation

The majority of NSSW evaluation is short term and measures the direct impact of an intervention against stated barriers. Medium and long term evaluation is conducted at national level by CFE Research. NSSW will continue to submit local evaluation evidence to CFE Research to contribute to medium-term findings. NSSW will continue to use HEAT HESA track reports and UCAS STROBE reports to access available progression data for target students who have engaged with NSSW. The OfS confirms that it is too early in the overall timeframe of UC to use progression to HE statistics as a definitive measure of success for the programme. In Phase 3, NSSW will explore methods for collecting counter-factual data.

Data Collection

In Phases 1&2, NSSW used Consent as the legal basis for data collection. In Phase 3, Public Task will be used predominantly. This will help streamline processes and increase the accuracy and volume of data processed, and is consistent with our duty to collect and report data to the OfS. Data will be collected online wherever possible. Student baseline and follow up data will be collected, and from Phase 3, this data will be submitted direct to CFE, no longer via NSSW. From Phase 3, Uni Connect partnerships are required to submit data on all participants, not just target students, as in Phases 1&2.

Reporting

Evaluation reports will continue to be submitted to the NSSW governing Board. Monitoring and HEAT Returns are submitted biennially to the OfS. NSSW will publish an End of Phase 2 executive report in autumn 2021 and a dedicated area of the NSSW website is being developed in order to improve interim reporting to partners.