Teacher Choices:
Does guided use of Microsoft Copilot reduce the time teachers[1] spend on lesson planning in 16-19 education?

College Information Sheet

This trial is funded by the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) and run by the Behavioural Insights Team (BIT).

Summary

- FE and sixth form colleges across England are invited to take part in a trial testing whether short, practical guidance on **Microsoft Copilot**, a GenAI tool many colleges have, saves time on lesson planning without lowering quality.
- Each college nominates at least five departments to take part. Each department is randomly allocated to receive the Copilot guide or to carry on with planning as usual (including use of any AI tools) from January to May 2027.
- An EEF trial found that ChatGPT guidance reduced secondary science teachers' lesson preparation time, with no evidence of lower quality. Similar guidance is untested in further education.
- Taking part is free. Teachers receive vouchers for completing a short surveys and a brief weekly diary; departments carrying on as usual get the guide after the trial.
- We have places for up to 22 college sites. **Register your interest by 4 December 2026** here or scan the QR code.

1. What does taking part involve?

Within each college site, all nominated departments are randomly allocated to one of two groups:

Group	Teachers receive	Teachers do
Copilot guide	Digital guidance on using Copilot to plan lessons and resources	Use the guide when planning, as and when it helps
Carry on as usual	The guide from 1 June 2027	Carry on as normal with planning, including use of any AI tools

All teachers in the nominated departments, whatever their group:

- complete an online survey in January and again in May (no more than 15 minutes each).
- between the surveys, complete weekly online diaries (up to 5 minutes each), including February half term and Easter holidays. Every fourth diary includes extra questions on total working hours.
- if asked, share one lesson plan with learners' details removed (about half the teachers in each group), or take part in a one-hour online interview or lesson observation visit.

Your college:

- names a **Research Champion** to coordinate the trial, support the teaching staff in the nominated departments to complete the evaluation activities, and be our main contact.
- The Research Champion gives all teachers in nominated departments our teacher information sheet, then sends us the teacher list at least two weeks later, by 5 January 2027. If your college has multiple campuses with separate teaching staff, your college has the option to name a different Research Champion responsible for each campus.

[1] When we say teachers, we mean all teaching staff, including course tutors, lecturers, trainers and instructors.

- ensures Copilot is available to teachers in nominated departments throughout the trial (until 28 May 2027).
- asks teachers who are assigned to the guide group not to share the guide outside their department until the end of the trial period (28 May 2027).
- tells BIT about any staff AI training or AI policy changes planned for the trial period.
- if asked, hosts a 90-minute, in-person focus group for five to seven learners in June 2027, arranged by BIT to avoid exams, with a college staff member present. Each learner receives a £20 voucher.

2. Who can take part?

To take part, each college site must:

- be part of a general FE college or sixth form college in England.
- have at least five of our list of 11 departments, offering courses to learners aged 16-19
- ensure staff in selected departments can access Copilot Chat with their college Microsoft 365 account. A paid Microsoft 365 Copilot licence is not needed; the *Teach* module is welcome but optional have an AI policy that lets staff use Copilot for lesson planning
- accept random allocation of departments, including the *carry on as usual* group
- complete the first survey in January and stay in the trial until 28 May 2027
- not include departments that are taking part in another EEF trial involving the same learners or subject area in 2026/27

3. What are the benefits?

- Lesson planning support: the guide group receives the Copilot guide in January; *carry on as usual* departments receive it in June.
- Teacher vouchers: each teacher can receive up to £75 for completing surveys and weekly diaries (providing the teacher completes the first survey in January), plus £10 for sharing materials and £30 for an interview, if asked. See the teacher information sheet for details.
- £100 per site towards staff time, where the evidence we can reasonably gather suggests the guide was not shared with *carry on as usual* teachers during the trial.
- After the trial, a site-level summary of teachers' AI use, total working time and time spent on different tasks, provided only where at least five teachers at that site respond.
- A certificate from the EEF recognising your college as an EEF Project Partner.

4. What will it cost, and how much time will it take?

- There is no charge to take part. Colleges need Copilot Chat for the nominated departments (the paid Microsoft 365 Copilot license is not needed).
- Staff time:
    - **Research Champion:** about 10 hours across the trial, mostly in December and January.
    - **Each head of department:** about one hour to confirm teacher lists.
    - **IT lead:** about one hour to complete the readiness form and allow our web addresses.
    - **Staff member attending a focus group, if your college hosts one:** 90 minutes.
    - **Teachers:** about two hours across the five months for diaries and surveys.

5. Why a randomised controlled trial?

- Random allocation within each site helps us find out whether the guidance makes a difference by creating comparable groups.
- Departments learn their group in w/c 1 February 2027, after the January survey.
- *Carry on as usual* departments are as important as the guide group: without them, we cannot measure the guide's impact.
- We will compare the groups' time spent planning lessons and preparing resources, and a sample of their lesson plans.

6. What if our plans change?

A college can withdraw at any time. If a department stops using its guide, please keep its teachers completing the diary and surveys: the results depend on hearing from every department.

7. Who is running the trial?

- The **Behavioural Insights Team (BIT)**, a global research and innovation consultancy with deep local expertise, wrote the guidance and runs the evaluation. BIT is your main contact.
- The **Education Endowment Foundation (EEF)**, an independent charity dedicated to breaking the link between family income and educational achievement, funds the trial and will publish the results.
- Academics at the **UCL Knowledge Lab** and FE practitioners approached through the **Association of Colleges** advised on the guidance, which we piloted with teachers in three colleges.
- **Microsoft** does not fund the trial or see teachers' answers.

8. How will data be used?

- **Who is responsible:** BIT is the data controller, and processes data on the basis of legitimate interests.
- **What we collect:** teachers' names, work emails and departments, from each college; their diary and survey answers; and which guide pages they visit, if they enter their email on the guide. BIT never receives the content of anything teachers create in Copilot.
- **Materials and interviews** require teachers' agreement. Identifying details are removed before materials are assessed for quality, with AI assistance, checked by the evaluation team's expert advisors from the UCL Knowledge Lab at the UCL Institute of Education.
- **Keeping data:** at the end of the trial, pseudonymised teacher-level diary and survey data go to the EEF's data archive, where they may be linked to other data for later research. **BIT** keeps personal data for up to 7 months after the end of the trial (December 2027) then deletes it.
- **What your college sees:** a summary for each site, never by department or teacher.
- **What we publish:** No college, teacher or learner will be named in any report. Data that we present will be anonymised. Our privacy notice explains more in the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU).

9. Key dates

What happens	When
Express interest	By 4 December 2026
Briefing call; technical readiness form	November to December 2026
Sign the memorandum of understanding	By 14 December 2026
Teacher information sheet to every teacher	By the end of the Autumn term
Teacher lists to BIT, at least two weeks later	By 5 January 2027
First survey	January 2027
Departments told their group; guide emailed	w/c 1 February 2027
Weekly diaries	1 February to 21 May 2027
Lesson materials shared (about half the teachers in each group)	April or May 2027
End survey	May 2027
The Copilot guide is shared with *carry on as usual* departments	1 June 2027
Interviews and focus groups (some colleges)	June 2027
Vouchers	January, April and June 2027
Site payments and site summaries	Summer 2027
Results published by the EEF	2028

10. Next steps

Register your interest by 4 December 2026 here or scan the QR code above. We will reply within one working day with a link to book a short call. Questions to: Casey Tran, BIT, aiforteachers@bi.team. More about the trial here.