



Uni Connect annual report

Phase two, August 2020 to July 2021

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Summary

The Office for Students (OfS) Uni Connect programme brings together 29 partnerships of universities, colleges and other local partners to offer activities, information, advice and guidance on the benefits and realities of going to university or college. The partnerships focus their work on local areas where higher education participation is lower than might be expected given the GCSE results of the young people who live there.¹

The Uni Connect programme began in 2017 and is currently in its third phase. Phase two of the programme took place between August 2019 and July 2021 during which a total of 368,328 Uni Connect target learners took part in at least one programme-funded outreach activity, despite the impact of COVID-19 and the variations in regional lockdown. During this time, partnerships have maintained a strong presence, continuing to drive the programme forward, engaging schools, colleges and learners as they go.

This report showcases programme achievements in the second year of phase two, from August 2020 to July 2021. During this period:

- 182,409 Uni Connect target learners took part in at least one programme-funded outreach activity
- 2,937 schools and colleges engaged in Uni Connect activity
- 565 partner members were involved in the 29 partnerships across England, from a range of organisations including colleges, universities, local organising bodies, charities and employers.

One of Uni Connect's aims is contributing to a stronger evidence base around 'what works' in higher education outreach and strengthening evaluation practice in the sector. The latest impact review from external evaluator CFE Research² incorporated 69 new partnership submissions; this contribution adds considerably to the volume and quality of evidence on the impact of outreach.

Evidence submitted by partnerships has shown the effectiveness of interventions undertaken in a sustained and progressive approach, and the impact this has on the most disadvantaged students. In the summer 2021 monitoring returns, partnerships reported that 393,551 unique Uni Connect learners had engaged in sustained and progressive outreach activity since the launch of the programme in January 2017.

Evaluation evidence continues to provide valuable feedback and help strengthen programme delivery. While it is too soon to see evidence of impact on higher education participation, evidence from the longitudinal learner survey analyses indicates that the sustained and progressive nature of the programme does benefit learners, with improvements in their self-reported knowledge, attitudes, and intentions towards higher education.³

¹ Annex C of this document lists the 29 partnerships and the areas they cover.

² See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/fourth-independent-review-of-impact-evaluation-evidence-submitted-by-uni-connect-partnerships/.

³ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/uni-connect-national-evaluation/.

Greater engagement in Uni Connect activities was associated with learners being better informed about higher education – with improved knowledge of the subjects offered, course types, entry qualifications, student life, potential careers supported, and the financial and non-financial benefits of higher education.

£3.9 million of other investment was secured during phase two, which complemented the £120 million of funding provided over two years by the OfS.

Background

The Uni Connect programme was established in January 2017 and has since adapted to support changing government priorities. Programme aims for phase two were to:

- Contribute to reducing the gap in higher education participation between the most and least represented groups.
- Equip young and adult learners from underrepresented groups to make an informed choice about their options in relation to the full range of routes into and through higher education, and to minimise the barriers they may face when choosing the option that will unlock their potential.
- Support a strategic local infrastructure of universities, colleges and other partners that can cut through competitive barriers, offer an efficient and low-burden route for schools and colleges to engage, and address outreach 'cold spots' for underrepresented groups.
- Contribute to a stronger evidence base around 'what works' in higher education outreach and strengthen evaluation practice across the sector.

Further information on the background of the Uni Connect programme can be found on our website.⁴

⁴ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/uni-connect/.

Phase two overview

Phase two of the Uni Connect programme started on 1 August 2019 and finished in July 2021. Building on phase one, it supported two strands of activity (see Figure 1):

- Delivering targeted higher education outreach within the local areas where it can have the most impact (these are the same areas targeted under phase one)
- Establishing outreach hubs within the 29 local partnerships across England to help schools and colleges access the higher education outreach they need and provide a platform for wider collaboration.

Figure 1: Elements of the phase two programme



Targeted outreach

The targeted outreach aspect of the phase two programme uses analysis of areas with both low overall levels of participation and a gap in higher education participation to determine where investment can be targeted to boost the numbers of young people from underrepresented groups going into higher education. The target learners in phase two of the programme were learners in Years 9 to 13 who live in these identified areas. More information is available on this in the Uni Connect annual report: Phase two (August 2019 to July 2020).⁵

Outreach hubs

A new outreach hub element was added to the programme in phase two: to deliver collaborative outreach activity to address local priorities and offer a range of support to schools, colleges, and other organisations. You can read more about the outreach hubs, the activities they were involved in and what was expected of them in the Uni Connect annual report: Phase two (August 2019 to July 2020).⁶

⁵ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/uni-connect-annual-report-phase-two/.

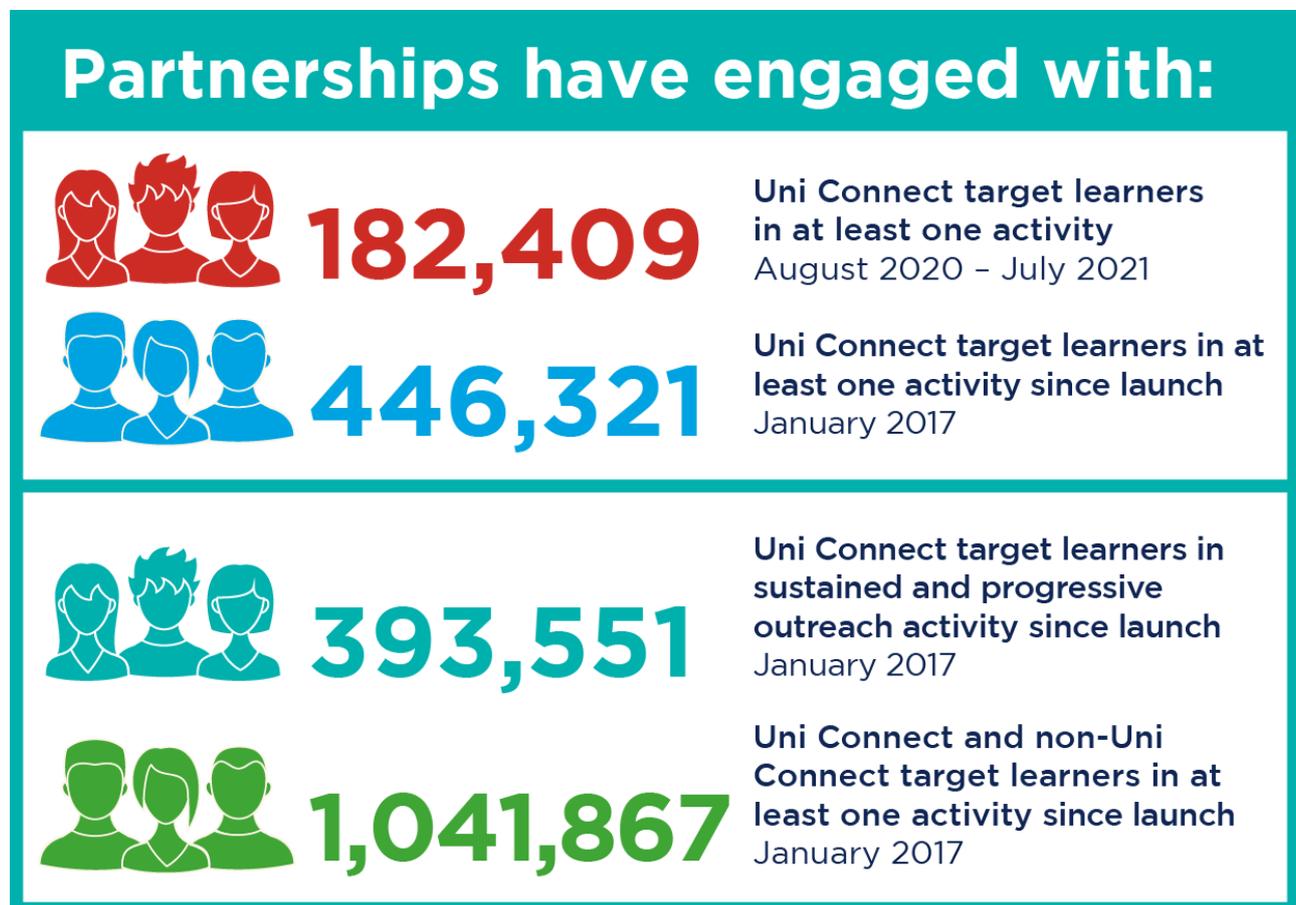
⁶ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/uni-connect-annual-report-phase-two/.

What has the programme achieved in phase two, year two?

Monitoring reports submitted by partnerships in February and October 2021 provide detailed information on the delivery of outreach activity and learner engagement in phase two of the programme between August 2020 and July 2021. Despite the impact of the coronavirus pandemic, the data suggests that Uni Connect partnerships have continued to deliver a wide range of activities to a high number of learners to meet the aims of the programme. Partnerships also continued to engage in collaborative activity to support learners from a range of underrepresented groups through the outreach hubs.

Engaging learners

Figure 2: Uni Connect learner engagement as reported in Uni Connect summer 2021 monitoring returns and tracking reports



During the second year of phase two (August 2020 to July 2021), partnerships have continued to engage with high numbers of learners, building on the success of phase one of the programme (see Figure 2). During this year, partnerships engaged 182,409 Uni Connect learners in at least one activity. Since the launch of the programme in January 2017, partnerships have engaged with a total of 1,041,867 learners in at least one activity, of which 352,164 are Uni Connect target learners.⁷

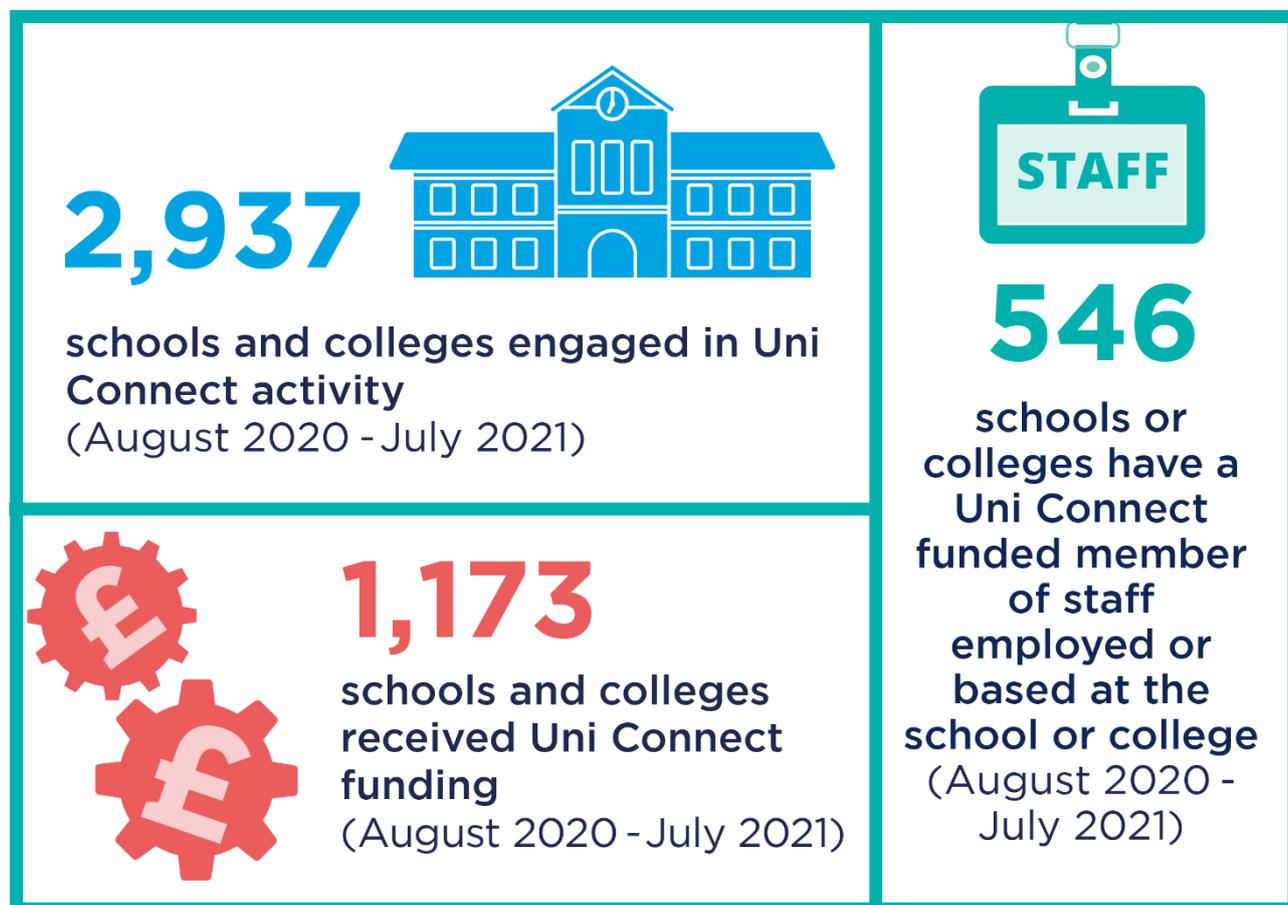
⁷ These figures are taken from the winter 2020 and summer 2021 monitoring and tracking reports.

Although a single interaction with the programme can be helpful, evidence from the externally commissioned evaluation of the programme, conducted by CFE Research,⁸ demonstrates that multiple engagement with learners has a positive impact on the most disadvantaged pupils, including on their confidence in making decisions about their course of study. In the summer 2021 monitoring returns, partnerships reported that 393,551 unique Uni Connect learners had engaged in sustained and progressive outreach since the launch of the programme in January 2017.

Engaging schools and colleges

Figure 3 shows how schools and colleges have engaged with Uni Connect in the second year of phase two.

Figure 3: Uni Connect engagement with schools and colleges as reported in Uni Connect summer 2021 monitoring returns and tracking reports



Since reporting figures in last year's annual report, engagement with Uni Connect by schools and colleges has continued to grow:⁹

- 457 more schools and colleges have been engaged in the programme, bringing the total to 2,937
- 22 more schools and colleges received Uni Connect funding, bringing the total to 1,173

⁸ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/third-independent-review-of-evaluation-evidence-submitted-by-uni-connect-partnerships/.

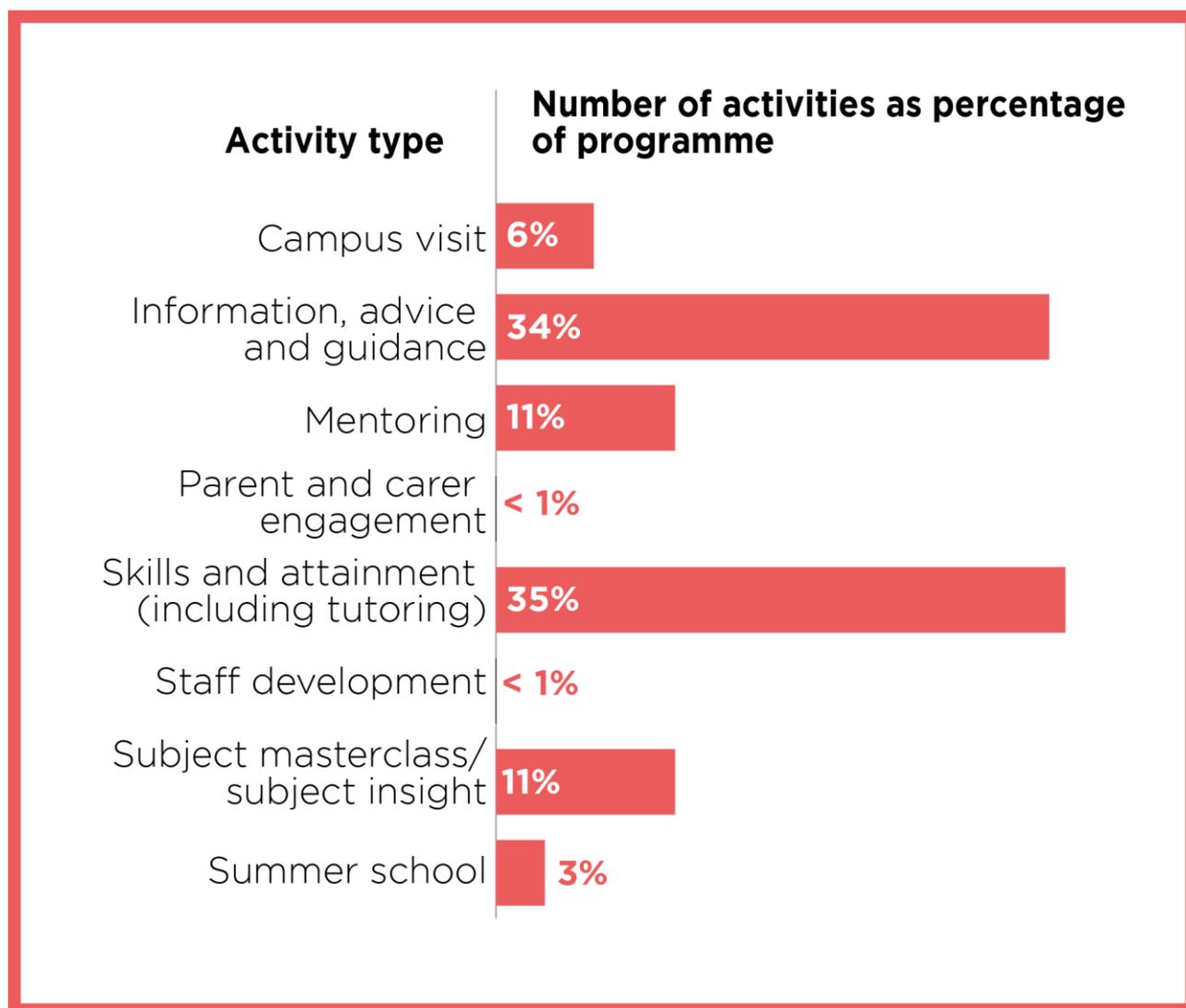
⁹ Figures from 2019-20 and 2020-21 tracking reports and monitoring returns.

- 5 more schools have a Uni Connect funded member of staff employed or based at the school or college, bringing the total to 546.

Figure 3 shows how schools and colleges have engaged with Uni Connect in the second year of phase two.

Activities and working with young people

Figure 4: Activity types delivered as a percentage of the programme during August 2020-July 2021 as reported in the summer 2021 tracking reports¹⁰



During the second year of phase two, partnerships continued to offer a range of activity types with the majority of delivery through skills and attainment, and information advice and guidance activities. Figure 4 shows mentoring and subject masterclasses were widely offered while summer schools and campus visits were low this year. Staff development and parent and careers activities also dropped off this year compared to last year. This is likely due to the effects of COVID-19, when in-person activities were legally restricted to reduce the spread of the virus.

¹⁰ Figure 4 reports on the number of activities by type where >0 participants engaged and activity types were recorded in the tracking report.

The review of impact evaluation evidence published in March 2022¹¹ found that there is evidence to suggest that some interventions, particularly summer schools and masterclasses/workshops, can have a positive impact on learners' subject knowledge, interpersonal skills and attributes and self-belief, and are effective ways to develop confidence, motivation and resilience. However, evidence of the impact of other types of intervention on learners' subject knowledge, interpersonal skills and attributes and self-belief is mixed and less conclusive. The review also found evidence that the impact of activities for parents and carers, and staff development activities on outcomes for learners, is still limited.

The case studies below look at work undertaken by the partnerships.

Sussex Learning Network

Role Models is a student-led project where university learners share 'what they wish they'd known when they were younger' with younger learners (year 9 to 13). Through workbooks, videos and teacher resources, the project tackles a range of topics relevant to higher education including: body image, failure, fake news, climate change, worry, wellbeing and COVID-19, gender and sexuality, and your future. This project was previously delivered in school and was adapted to virtual delivery throughout the pandemic. The project has been very successful at building confidence and raising aspirations of young people, encouraging them to progress through education.

Network for East Anglian Collaborative Outreach (NEACO)

NEACO's Parent and Carer work aims to better understand the needs of target parents and carers, and to identify effective methods to equip them with the knowledge and understanding required to better support young people. The Parent and Carer Ambassador role has been developed to support schools to increase parent and carer activity and develop effective parental engagement strategies.

Working across counties, the network has recruited and trained 14 (six Norfolk and eight Suffolk) Parent and Carer Ambassadors, sharing recruitment and delivery for the Parent and Carer Ambassador project. They have collaborated on virtual higher education Open Day events, engaging over 100 parents and carers, and presented on their collaborative work at the Opportunity Area Sharing Learning events (2021) and National Education Opportunities Network (NEON) Summer Symposium (2021). The experiences and insights provided by the ambassadors embed the Parent and Carer voice into NEACO activity, enhancing bespoke parent and carer talks, parents' evenings, higher education events, social media articles, and resources.

¹¹ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/fourth-independent-review-of-impact-evaluation-evidence-submitted-by-uni-connect-partnerships/.

Humber Outreach Programme (HOP)

The Ambassador Platform is a pop-up chat function on the Humber Outreach Programme website which appears on most pages on the website as well as its own 'chat to HOP' page. Users can access this by clicking on a pop-up, creating an account, then simply asking the coordinators questions, which are answered within 48 hours. Each coordinator has a profile on the ambassador programme (TAP) with a bio on who they are and their individual career pathways. An FAQ section is available, with coordinators taking it in turns to answer questions and add relevant signposting.

The intention behind this function came about as a response to the pandemic, to ensure that digital resources were available for students to access, and make sure that information was within reach when required. The function was not accessed as much as was anticipated, likely due to a digital overload as well as coordinators offering video call sessions with each school.

The plan going forwards is to add the platform to all delivery sessions to encourage students to continue conversations with their school/college coordinator. It is at the end of every PowerPoint presentation and HOP are currently creating postcard-sized handouts giving the QR code and the website details. They believe this function works best once the student has met the coordinator in sessions and wants to carry on discussing their pathway. The marketing printed materials are reminders of how to access this.

Make Happen

Workplace Wednesday is a series of 30-minute interviews with professionals about their work, with a focus on their journey via higher education. Originally, the videos were streamed online weekly during the 2020-2021 academic year and, since then, recordings have been available by request. As of September 2022, the recordings will be available on demand via our new online learning platform, the Make Happen Academy.

The Gatsby benchmarks is a framework which supports delivery of good careers guidance in schools. However, the COVID-19 pandemic meant that encounters with employers and employees (Gatsby benchmark 5) were severely limited. Workplace Wednesday was created to fill this gap by allowing students to gain an authentic insight into a wide range of careers through personal stories. The series also aimed to showcase diverse education and career pathways, including adult learners and those who completed apprenticeships, to demonstrate the variety of opportunities available to students.

Over 500 people registered to watch the series live and recordings have been viewed over 850 times. 100 per cent of students who completed the evaluation survey said that they learned something new. 90 per cent of students thought that the series was helpful and 81 per cent would recommend the videos to a friend.

Outreach hubs

Between August 2019 and July 2020, partnerships sought to develop their approaches and implement the outreach hub element of the phase two programme; by the end of July 2020 most partnerships' outreach hubs were fully established.

Partnerships have also supported schools and colleges in areas of low participation to access higher education outreach, via the outreach hubs, by:

- a. Engaging with those schools and colleges to understand their outreach needs
- b. Facilitating access to existing outreach provision, either locally or nationally
- c. Working collaboratively to help develop new or expanded outreach provision to meet identified needs, using the combined resources of the providers in the area and drawing on the investment set out in their access and participation plans¹² where appropriate.

Higher Horizons

The High Aspiring Students Programme, run by Higher Horizons (HiHo) and supported by the Stoke-on-Trent Opportunity Area, saw 100 Year 10 learners from Stoke-on-Trent take part in three masterclasses at the City of Stoke-on-Trent Sixth Form College over the academic year. These 100 young learners ended the programme with a residential stay at HiHo partners, Somerville College at Oxford University. Oxford University match-funded the residential stay and 25 of the HiHo learners enrolled at the university after the programme. The masterclasses were led by teachers from local schools or university academics. During masterclasses, students received a 30-minute presentation covering a supra-curricular topic, an hour-long workshop and time to work on a research project to be completed across the course of the year.

Uni Connect provides a platform for other local collaborative activity by:

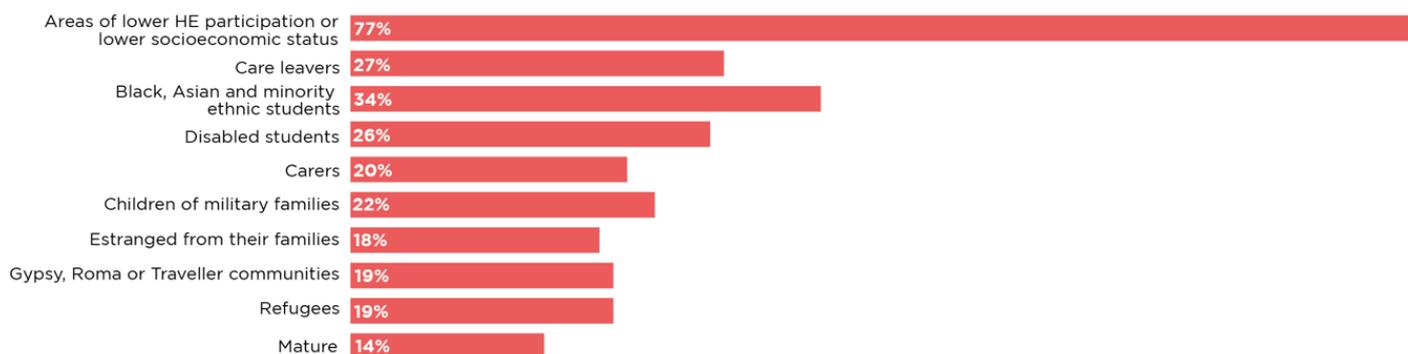
- a. Engaging strategically with local authorities, LEPs (local enterprise partnerships), employers and others to understand the landscape of educational disadvantage, high level skills needs and joined-up careers advice in the area
- b. As far as possible developing innovative and locally tailored approaches to address the challenges identified through the above engagement, drawing in additional funding and support from available sources.

When considering where to focus outreach activities, partnerships are encouraged to prioritise student groups where data shows gaps in equality of opportunity in relation to access to higher

¹² Find provider access and participation plans at www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/the-register/search-for-access-and-participation-plans/#!/AccessPlans/.

education.¹³ Figure 5 shows the proportion of outreach hub initiatives that have been reported as targeting specific underrepresented groups.

Figure 5: Proportion of outreach hub initiatives targeting underrepresented groups as reported in the summer 2021 OfS monitoring return



Study Higher

The outreach hub worked with Student Action for Refugees (STAR) to deliver a webinar to support refugees to consider the educational landscape and their future educational options.

The webinar included a presentation from STAR, that focused on how students (both refugees and asylum seekers) can find applications and help on the application process. A current refugee student also talked to attendees about his journey through the education system and the barriers he overcame. Following the webinar, attendees received follow-up resources and additional information.

Signposting

During 2020-21, the partnerships continued to host a website specifically to signpost to local outreach initiatives.

Wessex Inspiration Network (WIN)

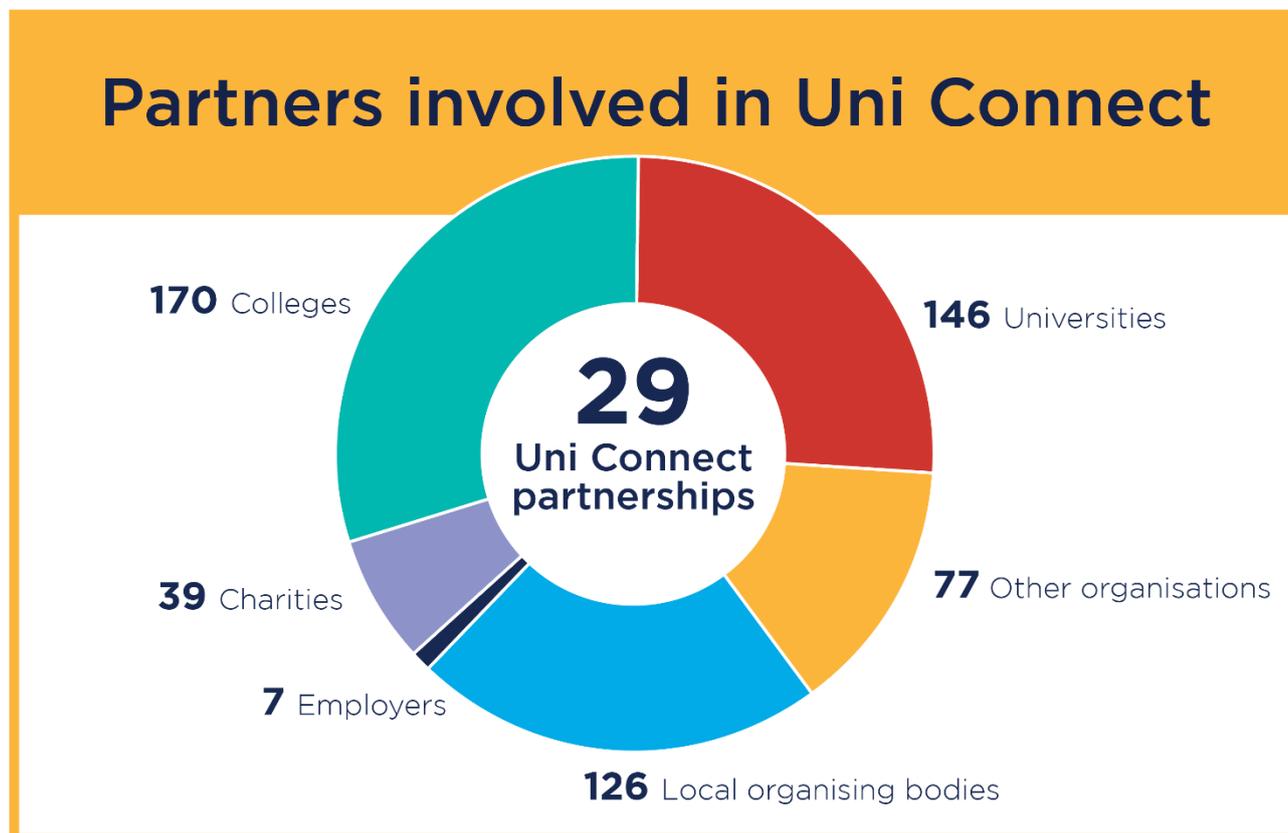
The WIN has developed a Bath & North East Somerset and Wiltshire Hub Working Group that comprises a variety of partners: currently including Wiltshire Council, National Citizen Service, Swindon & Wiltshire Local Enterprise Partnership and the Royal United Hospital NHS Trust. This group has met on two occasions to date with a view to developing a portfolio of information that will be used for both signposting and engaging proactively with the relevant schools. It is the intention to add partners to this group and representatives from the Ministry of Defence will be attending the next meeting. It is also the intention of the WIN to develop a similar group covering North Somerset.

¹³ See OfS Regulatory notice 1: Access and participation plan guidance for 2019-20 (OfS 2019.05), at www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/regulatory-notice-1-access-and-participation-plan-guidance/.

Strategic engagement and collaborative partnerships

Within the 29 Uni Connect partnerships, a wide range of organisations are involved as core members, as outlined in Figure 6, and in Table of Annex A. This demonstrates the diversity of organisations involved, highlighting the breadth and strength of collaboration across providers of further and higher education and key local organisations.

Figure 6: Core members of the 29 Uni Connect partnerships, as reported in the summer 2021 OfS monitoring return

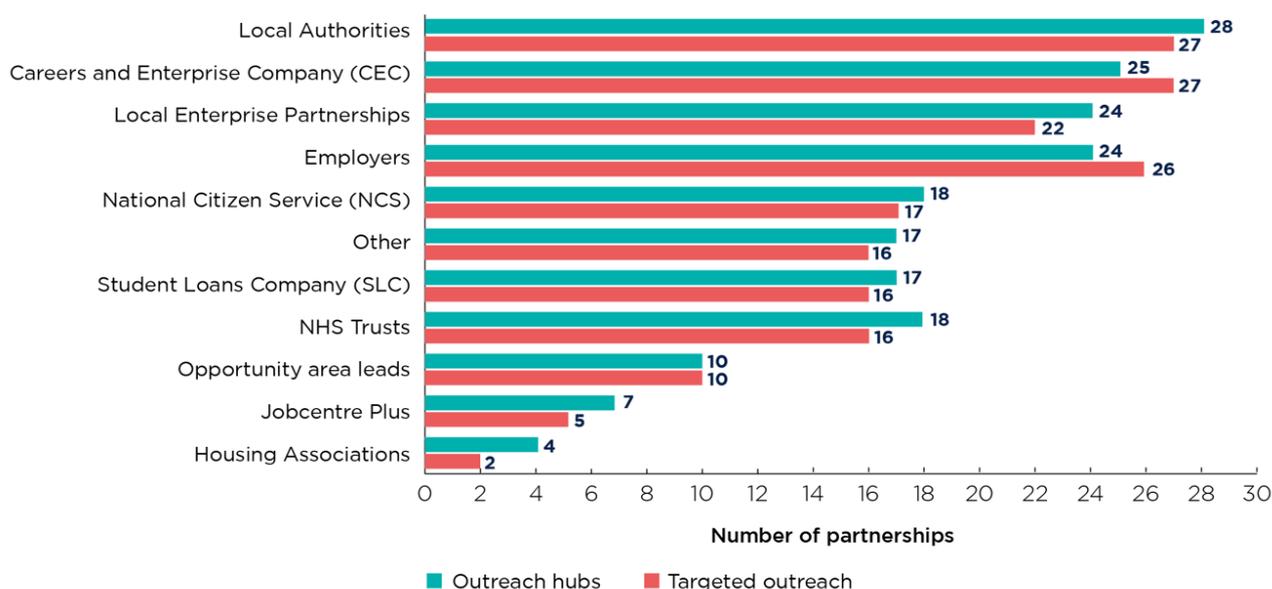


Aspire Higher

Aspire Higher has engaged with strategic partners to develop relationships and plan engagement opportunities for schools and colleges. Collaboration with the partnership's LEPs is essential to the identification of local need. For example, local labour market information identified a logistics gap – this has led to subsequent engagement with the Logistics Forum, resulting in a planned logistics day in April 2020. Engagement with the partnership's Virtual Schools has led to the development of Care Experienced events. Aspire Higher has also worked with the Engineering Development Trust to provide a number of opportunities for learners including after school clubs and holiday programmes. Working with the Engineering Development Trust has resulted in match-funded opportunities. The continued development of strategic relationships, which has been a crucial part of the development planning in the first monitoring period, is paying dividends in the development of targeted higher education outreach for schools across the partnership. Aspire Higher is also working with Chamber & Young Chamber of Commerce, Virtual Schools, and Military Covenant within the local authority.

Strong local collaboration has continued to be at the heart of the Uni Connect programme in phase two. Partnerships have engaged with a wide variety of stakeholders as part of both targeted outreach and outreach hub activity, as shown in Figure 7. The key strategic partners for Uni Connect are local authorities, the Careers and Enterprise Company and LEPs. These have been prioritised by partnerships in terms of their strategic engagement, with almost all reporting that they are working with them on outreach hub activities. Most partnerships are also working with employers and the National Citizen Service and around half are working with the Student Loans Company and NHS Trusts. Beyond that, partnerships cite a broad range of partners, including Opportunity Areas, housing associations and community and third sector organisations (see Table 4 of Annex A).

Figure 7: Number of partnerships working with stakeholders via outreach hubs and targeted outreach as reported in the summer 2021 OfS monitoring returns



Greater Manchester Higher (GM Higher)

The Parent Power Oldham project is run in collaboration with Oldham Council Department For Education, Women's Chai Project and GM Higher.

Greater Manchester Higher is match-funding, and co-delivering, a bespoke project developed by the Opportunity Area which aims to upskill and empower parents to increase the aspirations of high performing disadvantaged young people in Oldham. Parents on the project have access to one-to-one meetings and are able to decide for themselves which activities will be of most benefit. Activities include tailored visits to universities, visits from university alumni, as well as training on tutoring, student finance and university access. Parent Power engages parents online and has expanded through the creation of a podcast series, securing additional external funding for laptops for families in need, gaining exposure on local radio stations, and speaking at conferences including the Open University Biennial Access Summit, and the NEON Symposium.

Shaping Futures

The Shaping Futures' black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) working group identified a need to provide outreach opportunities which specifically addressed the concerns of the BAME community, and the barriers they may face in accessing higher education. A local community group, current undergraduates, and recent graduates from BAME backgrounds made up a focus group to identify and discuss the challenges and barriers they face. The group identified specific concerns, such as making friends, lacking confidence and fitting in. The outcome of the focus group resulted in the creation of a performance piece, including original music and spoken word poetry created by local BAME artists. The performance highlights issues made by the focus group and wider education experiences of the BAME community. The production is available on film and with a discussion guide.

Understanding our impact

Programme evaluation approach

Uni Connect is being evaluated at a national level to understand how successfully the programme meets its aims, in addition to programme output monitoring and local partnership evaluation activity. The OfS uses evidence from the evaluation to support our funding decisions and refine guidance for partnerships at a local level. Partnerships draw on and generate evaluation evidence to improve their delivery.

The core elements of the national evaluation are described briefly in the table below.

<p>OfS national dataset analysis impact evaluation</p>	<p>OfS national dataset analysis uses UCAS applications and National Pupil Database (NPD) school data to measure differences in higher education participation in Uni Connect target areas compared with other areas. Future analyses will incorporate HESA data.</p>
<p>Independent impact evaluation</p>	<p>Longitudinal learner survey to measure changes in Uni Connect learners' knowledge, attitudes and intentions towards higher education (intermediate outcomes) between Years 9 and 13.</p> <p>Meta evidence review of partnerships' local evaluation outputs.</p>
<p>Independent formative evaluation</p>	<p>Formative evaluation research aims to support programme learning and increase the impact during the programme. Understanding 'how' and why' Uni Connect is working informs policy decisions, strengthens programme governance, and supports establishing a causal link between programme activity and impact.</p>
<p>Partnership local evaluation</p>	<p>Partnership local evaluations focus on generating evidence of how their activity impacts learners, to improve their outreach delivery. Each partnership has a local evaluation plan aligned with their progression frameworks. Many incorporate the learner survey and all use longitudinal tracking, in addition to other approaches.</p>
<p>Partnership longitudinal tracking</p>	<p>Longitudinal learner tracking through to higher education entry. Partnerships collect learner and activity data using longitudinal tracking services. The tracking services use NPD and HESA data with counterfactual groups to understand whether Uni Connect learners are more likely to progress to higher education. Some partnerships are also working with UCAS using Strobe, a service that can track individuals into the UCAS applications system, and report anonymously on their outcomes or characteristics at aggregate levels.</p>

We do not expect to be able to fully evidence the programme's impact at this stage, as much of Uni Connect's targeted outreach activity is designed to have impact over five years – engaging the same learners from Years 9 to 13. Additionally, the higher education national datasets that are needed to assess higher education participation are only available between 6 to 18 months after actual higher education entry. However, some positive evidence on the short to medium term impact of the Uni Connect programme has emerged from the evaluation to date.

During this year we commissioned external capability building training to help partnerships develop their work further.

The 2019-20 annual report¹⁴ summarises the findings from all elements of the evaluation in phase two available at the time. All the evaluation reports are available on the OfS website.¹⁵

Impact of the programme to date

While it is too soon to see evidence of impact on higher education participation, evidence from the longitudinal learner survey analyses indicates that the sustained and progressive nature of the programme does benefit learners, with improvements in their self-reported knowledge, attitudes, and intentions towards higher education.¹⁶

Greater engagement in Uni Connect activities was associated with learners being better informed about higher education – with improved knowledge of the subjects offered, course types, entry qualifications, student life, potential careers supported, and the financial and non-financial benefits of higher education.

Sustained engagement in multi-intervention programmes is found to have a positive impact on short, medium and long-term outcomes for learners, including the likelihood that a learner will successfully progress to higher education.

The collaborative approach of the programme is successfully addressing 'cold spots' in outreach provision. As a result of Uni Connect some schools and further education colleges are engaging in outreach for the first time, or after a number of years.

Uni Connect outreach activities are perceived by schools and colleges to be high quality and to offer something different to other outreach provision in terms of their impartiality, level of support provided, range and quality of activities.¹⁷ Schools and colleges

Partnerships responded to COVID-19 through adapting existing activities and materials for online delivery, which in some cases supported learners with more flexibility and choice and enabled

¹⁴ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/uni-connect-annual-report-phase-two/.

¹⁵ Evaluation reports are available at www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/uni-connect/evaluating-uni-connects-impact/.

¹⁶ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/uni-connect-national-evaluation/.

¹⁷ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/formative-evaluation-of-uni-connect-phase-two-survey-of-school-and-college-staff/.

outreach to be offered to a wider range of learners. However, there were additional barriers to reaching the most underrepresented groups most in need of support.¹⁸

The programme evaluation is contributing to building a stronger evidence base around 'what works' in higher education outreach and strengthening evaluation practice across the sector. Over 200 local evaluation submissions have been reviewed to date, adding substantially to the volume and quality of evidence on the impact of outreach,¹⁹ and a number of learning digests have been published.²⁰

Recent analysis of national datasets shows that higher education application rates have gone up in Uni Connect areas, but not as much as they have in non-Uni Connect areas.²¹ This has led to an increased gap between Uni Connect and non-Uni Connect areas. However, this period was disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic and so must be set against the context of record numbers of young people applying to higher education from all backgrounds/areas and meeting their offers.

¹⁸ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/emerging-insight-report-covid-19-and-uni-connect/.

¹⁹ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/fourth-independent-review-of-impact-evaluation-evidence-submitted-by-uni-connect-partnerships/.

²⁰ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/uni-connect-learning-digests/.

²¹ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/uni-connect-national-evaluation-updated-analysis/.

A new approach to Uni Connect

Phase three of the Uni Connect programme began in August 2021 and will, in principle, run through to the end of July 2025. Funding for the programme is subject to confirmation and consultation on an annual basis.

The Uni Connect programme aims from 2022-23 to 2024-25 are to:

1. Contribute to reducing the gap in higher education participation between the most and least represented groups.
2. Equip young people from underrepresented groups to make an informed choice about their options in relation to the full range of routes into and through higher education and to minimise the barriers they may face when choosing the option that will unlock their potential, including barriers relating to academic attainment.
3. Support a strategic local infrastructure of universities, colleges and other partners that can cut through competitive barriers, offer an efficient and low-burden route for schools and colleges to engage with higher education outreach, enable schools to engage with attainment-raising activity, and address outreach 'cold spots' for underrepresented groups.
4. Contribute to a stronger evidence base around 'what works' in higher education outreach and strengthen evaluation practice across the sector.

The programme will achieve its aims through supporting a local partnership infrastructure to provide impartial, collaborative, targeted and strategic higher education outreach and information, advice and guidance to young people and supporting schools and higher education providers to work together to raise the attainment of young people. The partnerships will also signpost schools and colleges to sources of higher education outreach and attainment-raising activities in their area.

Annex A: Monitoring data 2020-21

During 2020-21 Uni Connect partnerships submitted monitoring reports to the OfS every six months. These allowed us to gain a clear picture of how the partnerships are delivering targeted outreach activity and establishing outreach hubs to:

- meet the programme aims
- inform evaluation of the programme
- inform future policy and funding development.

Partnerships submit an activity and learner engagement tracking report, produced by their chosen tracking system, which provides aggregated data on activities delivered and learners engaged. This is alongside a monitoring return which collects information on finances, governance and operations.

The data in this annex is taken from the summer 2021 tracking reports and OfS monitoring returns, and the winter 2020 OfS monitoring returns, covering the academic year August 2020 to July 2021.

Table 1: Activity types delivered between August 2020 and July 2021, as reported in the summer 2021 tracking reports

Activity type	Number of activities as percentage of programme
Campus visit	6%
Information, advice and guidance	34%
Mentoring	11%
Parent and carer engagement	<1%
Skills and attainment (including tutoring)	35%
Staff development	<1%
Subject masterclass/subject insight	11%
Summer school	3%
Total	100%

Table 2: Number of Uni Connect initiatives during February to July 2021, as reported in the summer 2021 OfS monitoring returns, by underrepresented group supported

Underrepresented group supported	Percentage of total initiatives
Areas of lower higher education participation or lower socioeconomic status	77%
Black, Asian and minority ethnic	34%
Mature	14%
Disabled	26%
Care leavers	27%

Underrepresented group supported	Percentage of total initiatives
Children of military families	22%
Carers	20%
Estranged from their families	18%
Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities	19%
Refugees	19%

Note: Initiatives could be recorded as supporting more than one group, so percentages do not sum to 100%.

Table 3: Core members of the 29 Uni Connect partnerships, by type, as reported in the summer 2021 OfS monitoring returns

Type of organisation	Number of partners
Charities	39
Employers	7
Further education colleges	170
Higher education providers (e.g. universities)	146
Local organising bodies	126
Others	77
Total	605

Table 4: The number of Uni Connect partnerships engaging with external stakeholders, as reported in the summer 2021 OfS monitoring returns

Type of stakeholder	Partnerships engaged in outreach hubs	Partnerships engaged in targeted outreach
Careers and Enterprise Company (CEC)	27	25
Employers	26	24
Housing associations	2	4
Jobcentre Plus	5	7
Local authorities	27	28
Local enterprise partnerships (LEPs)	22	24
National Citizen Service (NCS)	17	18
NHS Trusts	16	18
Opportunity Area leads	10	10
Student Loans Company (SLC)	16	17
Other	16	17

Annex B: Glossary

Abbreviation	Meaning
Baker Clause	Schools must allow colleges and training providers access to every student in Years 8 to 13 to inform them about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.
BAME	Black, Asian and minority ethnic
Careers and Enterprise Company (CEC)	Careers and Enterprise Company – the national body for careers education in England
cold spots	Areas where there is no outreach delivery
Gatsby benchmarks	These benchmarks are enshrined in statutory guidance and form a framework of eight benchmarks that secondary schools and colleges use to improve their career guidance programme.
LEPs	Local enterprise partnerships are responsible for local economic development in England. They are business-led partnerships that bring together the private sector, local authorities and academic and voluntary institutions.
NCS	National Citizen Service Trust – NCS is a not-for-profit organisation, established to bring people together, cross divides, build confidence and equip young people for adulthood
NEON	A professional organisation supporting those involved in widening access to higher education
NPD	National Pupil Database
OfS	Office for Students – the OfS is an independent public body, responsible for the regulation of higher education in England
Opportunity Area	Opportunity Areas are part of the government’s plan for improving social mobility through education. From September 2022, the Opportunity Areas programme will end and the areas will become 12 of the 24 priority education investment areas.
SLC	Student Loans Company
supra-curricular	Extending and deepening learner knowledge in curricular topics which have already been covered
Underrepresented groups	<p>Underrepresented refers to groups of people who are insufficiently or inadequately represented in higher education.</p> <p>The OfS considers underrepresented groups to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> students from areas of low higher education participation, low household income or low socioeconomic status

Abbreviation	Meaning
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • some black, Asian and minority ethnic students • mature students • disabled students • care leavers • carers • people estranged from their families • people from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities • refugees • children from military families
UCAS	The Universities and Colleges Admissions Service

Annex C: List of Uni Connect partnerships

Uni Connect partnership	Further information
Aimhigher West Midlands	Active in: Herefordshire, Worcestershire and Warwickshire, Shropshire and Staffordshire, West Midlands
Aspire Higher	Active in: Bedfordshire, Hertfordshire and Northamptonshire
Aspire to HE	Active in: West Midlands, Wolverhampton, Sandwell, Dudley, Walsall and Telford and Wrekin
Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire Collaborative Outreach Programme (DANCOP)	Active in: Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire
Future Quest	Active in: Gloucestershire, Wiltshire, Bath and Bristol
Future U	Active in: Lancashire
Future HY York and North Yorkshire – Inspiring Choices	Active in: York and North Yorkshire
Go Higher West Yorkshire	Active in: West Yorkshire
Greater Manchester Higher (GM Higher)	Active in: Derbyshire, Greater Manchester
GROWS (GAP)	Active in: Gloucestershire
Hello Future	Active in: Cumbria
HeppSY	Active in: South Yorkshire and some wards in Derbyshire and North Nottinghamshire
The Higher Education Outreach Network (HEON)	Active in: Surrey and Northeast Hampshire
Higher Horizons+ (HiHo)	Active in: Staffordshire, Shropshire and Cheshire
Humber Outreach Programme (HOP)	Active In: East Yorkshire and Northern Lincolnshire
Kent and Medway Collaborative Outreach Programme (KaMCOP)	Active in: Kent and Medway
LiNC Higher	Active in: Lincolnshire
London Uni Connect	Active in: London
Make Happen	Active in: Essex
Network for East Anglian Collaborative Outreach (NEACO)	Active in: East Anglia
Next Steps South West	Active in: Devon, Cornwall and Somerset

Uni Connect partnership	Further information
North East Uni Connect Programme (NEUCP – FutureMe)	Active in: Northumberland, Tyne and Wear, Durham and Tees Valley
Pathways	Active in: Leicestershire
Shaping Futures	Active in: Merseyside
Southern Universities Network (SUN)	Active in: Dorset, Hampshire and Isle of Wight
Study Higher	Active in: Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, Swindon
Sussex Learning Network (SLN: COP)	Active in: Sussex and Surrey
Think Higher	Active in: Coventry and Warwickshire
Wessex Inspiration Network (WIN)	Active in: Bath, Weston-super-Mare, Wiltshire



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