

An independent evaluation of Uni Connect's impact on intermediate outcomes for learners

A report for the Office for Students on the
2020/21 (Wave 3) learner survey findings

September 2022

This work was produced using statistical data from ONS. The use of the ONS statistical data in this work does not imply the endorsement of the ONS in relation to the interpretation or analysis of the statistical data. This work uses research datasets which may not exactly reproduce National Statistics aggregates.

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Contents

Glossary	1
Executive summary	3
Methodology.....	3
Key findings from the Wave 3 learner survey	5
Knowledge of Higher Education.....	5
Knowledge of the benefits of Higher Education	5
Characteristics associated with perceived ability to succeed in Higher Education	6
Impact of Uni Connect on future plans	6
Conclusions	7
Recommendations	8
01. Introduction	9
02. The Phase Two impact evaluation	10
Evaluation aim and objectives.....	10
Learner survey.....	10
Wave 3 survey administration	12
Data linking	12
Data analysis	13
Regression analysis	14
03. Impact of Covid-19	16
The impact of Covid-19 on the learner experience	16
Learner characteristics and the impact of Covid-19	17
Impact of Covid-19 on the delivery of Uni Connect.....	18
Impact of Covid-19 on knowledge of Higher Education.....	18
Impact of Covid-19 on likelihood to apply to Higher Education.....	19
04. Knowledge of Higher Education	20
Summary	20
Overall perceptions	21
Knowledge of the Higher Education offer.....	21
Impact of Uni Connect activity.....	21
Characteristics associated with knowledge of the Higher Education offer.....	22
Role of key influencers.....	22
Knowledge of how to apply	22
Impact of Uni Connect activity	23
Characteristics associated with knowledge of how to apply.....	23

Role of key influencers	24
Knowledge of student life	24
Characteristics associated with knowledge of student life	25
Role of key influencers	25
Knowledge of cost and financial support	26
Impact of Uni Connect activity	27
Characteristics associated with knowledge of cost and financial support	27
Role of key influencers	27
05. The benefits of Higher Education.....	28
Summary	28
Overall perceptions	28
Financial benefits of Higher Education	28
Non-financial benefits of Higher Education	29
Impact of Uni Connect activity	29
Role of key influencers	30
Characteristics associated with perceptions of the benefits	30
06. Perceptions about the ability to succeed in Higher Education	32
Summary	32
Overall perceptions	32
Impact of Uni Connect activity	33
Learner characteristics and self-belief towards Higher Education.....	34
Gender	34
Disabled learners	34
First in family to go to Higher Education.....	35
Ethnicity	35
Socio-economic disadvantage (FSM status and IDACI).....	36
Key Stage 2 attainment	36
Target learner status	36
07. Impact of Uni Connect on future plans.....	37
Summary	37
Likelihood of applying to Higher Education.....	38
Impact of Uni Connect activity	40
Role of key influencers	40
Characteristics associated with applying to Higher Education.....	40
08. Conclusions	42
Key insights	42

Recommendations	44
Appendix 1: Logic model for the national evaluation of uni connect	45
Appendix 2: Summary table of findings	47
Appendix 3: Wave 3 survey – Part 1 (core) questions	52
Appendix 4: Additional questions for Wave 3 survey	57

Glossary

ATT	Average treatment effect on the treated
AWM	Aimhigher West Midlands – tracking organisation
CPD	Continuing professional development
DiD	Difference in difference (analysis)
EMWPREP	East Midlands Widening Participation Research and Evaluation Partnership – tracking organisation
FSM	Free School Meals
HE	Higher education
HEAT	Higher Education Access Tracker – tracking organisation
LAG	Information, advice and guidance
IDACI	Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index
ILR	Individualised Learner Record
ITT	Intention to treat
KS	Key Stage (in the educational journey)
NPD	National Pupil Database
OfS	Office for Students
ONS	Office for National Statistics
POLAR	Classifies local areas into five groups (quintiles) based on the proportion of young people who enter higher education aged 18 or 19
PSM	Propensity score matching
SAT	Standard Assessment Test – national curriculum tests for pupils in Key Stage 2
SRS	Secure Research Service
TASO	Transforming Access and Student Outcomes in Higher Education – affiliate What Works Centre
UCAS	Universities and Colleges Admissions Service
Wo	Baseline learner survey (Autumn 2017)
W1	Wave 1 – first follow-up of the learner survey (Autumn 2018)
W2	Wave 2 – second follow-up of the learner survey (Autumn 2019)
W3	Wave 3 – third follow-up of the learner survey (Autumn 2020)

Wi-Fi Wireless technology used to connect computers, tablets, smartphones and other devices to the Internet

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Uni Connect is a national outreach programme funded by the Office for Students (OfS). It is delivered by 29 partnerships of universities, colleges and other local organisations across England. In support of the government's social mobility goals, Uni Connect aims to increase the number of young people from under-represented groups that go into higher education (HE) by providing sustained and progressive outreach to target learners in Years 9-13 and young adults aged 19 and over studying in local further education colleges. The partnerships focus on 997 areas¹ where HE participation is lower than might be expected given the GCSE results of the young people who live there.

The programme was launched in January 2017. Phase Two began in August 2019 and ran until July 2021. The delivery of this second phase has, therefore, been significantly impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. Despite the challenges, almost 370,000 learners engaged with the programme in 2019-20 and 429,000 in 2020-21, just under half of whom were Uni Connect target learners.²

This is the latest report from the independent national impact evaluation of Uni Connect. It examines the *intermediate* outcomes for learners who participated in the Wave 3 (W3) learner survey administered between October 2020 and February 2021. Additional questions on the impact of Covid-19 were added to this survey. The results therefore take account of the impact that learners perceive Covid-19 has had on their educational experience and future intentions.

Methodology

The annual learner survey, administered by schools and colleges via Uni Connect partnerships on CFE's behalf, provides the basis for the national impact evaluation. The survey is designed to measure change in intermediate outcomes to understand the impact of Uni Connect and the extent to which it is meeting its aims. The survey explores:

- learners' knowledge of the HE offer and its potential benefits
- learners' skills and attributes and their ability to make informed choices about their future education
- learners' intentions to apply for a HE course when they finish school or college.

In administering the survey, partnerships are encouraged to target learners who have responded to previous waves of the survey to maximise the longitudinal sample available for analysis. However, to ease the administrative burden, some invite whole classes or year groups to complete the survey. As a consequence, the sample comprises a

¹ Uni Connect learner population estimates are [available online](#).

² See the [Uni Connect annual report for phase two](#).

range of learners, including those who have not responded to a previous wave and learners who are not explicitly targeted by Uni Connect.

During the pandemic, the targeting for the Uni Connect programme was relaxed and partnerships were encouraged to engage a wider range of under-represented groups³ in their activities. The sample achieved at W3 therefore includes non-target learners who have engaged in Uni Connect interventions. This, coupled with the high rate of attrition in the longitudinal sample between the baseline (Wave 0; W0) in 2017 and W3, has had implications for this analysis of W3. It has not been possible to create a suitable comparison group of learners using the primary survey data because most respondents have engaged in some Uni Connect activity, irrespective of their target status; neither has it been possible to measure changes in intermediate outcomes between baseline and W3 because the remaining longitudinal sample is too small.⁴ The key findings presented in this report are, therefore, based on regression analysis which explores a range of factors that are associated with the intermediate outcomes achieved by learners at W3, including: personal characteristics (sex, ethnicity, age, disability status, socio-economic status and prior attainment); elements of the Uni Connect programme (whether engaged, hours of activity, number of different activities and activity types); key influencers; and the barriers to studying that learners experienced during Covid-19. The outcomes for the W3 sample are compared with the Wave 2 (W2) sample to identify potential trends. However, it is important to note that this analysis is based on *descriptive* statistics and does not take account of any differences in the characteristics of the two samples.⁵

A sample of 25,056 responses to the W3 survey was achieved. These responses were linked to previous waves of the survey to form a master dataset. This was matched to activity data held by three tracking organisations⁶ and then to key variables in the National Pupil Database using the Office for National Statistics (ONS) Secure Research Service (SRS). These variables include Key Stage 2 (KS2) attainment based on two standardised measures of Maths and Reading and free school meals (FSM) status. The maximum sample available for the regression analysis was 18,725. For consistency, the descriptive statistics for W3 are also based on this sample.

³ The OfS considers the following groups to be under-represented in HE and a priority for outreach: students from areas of low higher education participation, low household income or low socio-economic status; some black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) 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.

⁴ Please refer to the technical annexe and separate methods paper detailing the options explored for the impact evaluation published as part of this evaluation.

⁵ The respondent profile at W3 is similar to W2 in terms of key characteristics such as gender, age and ethnicity.

⁶ AWM, EMWPREP and HEAT.

Key findings from the Wave 3 learner survey

Knowledge of Higher Education

- Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) and campus visits have a positive effect on learners' knowledge about how to find information on the HE application process and the financial support available. There is no association between the number of hours or the number of types of outreach activity engaged in and learners' knowledge of HE.
- W3 learners overall are slightly less knowledgeable about HE compared with learners at the W2 position. There could be several reasons for this, but the impact of Covid-19 on the delivery of IAG and outreach interventions that are shown to increase knowledge, such as campus visits, is likely to be a contributing factor.
- Although a broader range of learners participated in Uni Connect during the pandemic, there is evidence that those the programme was designed to target have particularly benefited, with a positive association between Uni Connect target learner status and knowledge of how to apply to HE and the accommodation options available.
- Key influencers, such as teachers, careers advisers and family members, typically have a positive impact on learners' knowledge of HE. However, there is sometimes a negative association between HE knowledge and speaking to or being influenced by friends.
- Higher KS2 attainment is associated with being more knowledgeable about HE.
- Learners with a disability and those who would be the first in their family to go to HE are consistently less likely to report that they are knowledgeable about HE.

Knowledge of the benefits of Higher Education

- Learners' perceptions of both the financial and non-financial benefits of HE are positively influenced by sustained engagement in Uni Connect. It appears, however, to be the number of hours, rather than the number of different types of activity, that is key to enhancing impact; mentoring in particular appears to have a positive impact on learners' knowledge of the benefits of HE.
- Speaking to someone about HE has a positive impact on learner perceptions about the financial and non-financial benefits of HE. However, those who report that their friends have had the most influence on their decision about what to do next are most likely to report negative perceptions of HE.
- Learners from BAME groups, those who know someone who has gone to HE, and students who have higher KS2 attainment in Maths and Reading are more likely to hold positive views about the benefits of HE.
- Being male, having a disability and being the first in the family to progress to HE is consistently linked to negative perceptions about the benefits of HE.

Characteristics associated with perceived ability to succeed in Higher Education

- Most learners are motivated to do well in their studies. Participating in more hours of outreach activity, and engaging in masterclasses in particular, is positively associated with being motivated to do well. This has important implications for the ongoing development of Uni Connect, given the shift in focus to include attainment-raising as a core part of the outreach offer.
- A high proportion of W3 learners who have received Uni Connect activity do not identify with HE. They do not perceive HE to be a place for ‘people like them’ and do not think that they would ‘fit in well with others’.
- Males, learners with a disability, those who would be the first in their family to go to HE, and learners from more economically-disadvantaged groups are most likely to report lower levels of self-efficacy and confidence in their academic abilities and are less likely to identify with HE. This suggests that tailored interventions for these groups are needed to challenge perceptions and address specific barriers.
- In contrast, learners with higher attainment in KS2 Maths and Reading and BAME learners are more likely to report higher levels of self-efficacy and confidence in their academic abilities. They are also more likely to agree that HE is ‘a place for people like them’.

Impact of Uni Connect on future plans

- Sustained engagement in outreach activity has a positive impact on young people’s intentions to apply to HE, with learners who participated in more hours of outreach more likely to state they will apply to HE in the future. Neither specific activities nor the number of different types of activities are associated with learners’ intentions to apply to HE.
- Graduates’ earning potential is a motivation for learners who are intending to progress to HE. Many of those who report that they are unlikely to go to HE are still undecided whether it is the best option for them or are waiting until they receive their results to make a final decision, suggesting that some may be uncertain that they will achieve the necessary grades.
- Covid-19 does not appear to be a key factor in the decision about whether to go to HE or not and the pandemic does not appear to have negatively impacted on learners’ intentions to apply to HE.
- Speaking to someone about HE is positively associated with intentions to apply to HE. Teachers and careers advisers are key influencers who positively shape learners’ intentions. Conversely, friends have a negative impact on learners’ intentions to apply to HE.
- W3 learners who intend to apply to HE are more likely to be from a BAME group, have higher KS2 Maths and Reading attainment, know someone that has been to HE, be in Year 10, 12 or 13, and come from more economically-deprived groups

(measured by IDACI). In contrast, males, disabled learners, those who would be the first in the family to go to HE and learners in receipt of FSM are less likely to intend to apply to HE.

- Uni Connect target learners are no more or less likely to intend to apply to HE than non-Uni Connect learners at W3, suggesting the gap in the progression rate is more likely to appear when the final decision about post-18 transitions has to be made.

Conclusions

Despite the challenges faced by Uni Connect partnerships and the schools and colleges they worked with during the pandemic, delivery of Uni Connect has been successfully sustained and a significant number of learners across England have accessed the support on offer. Although the impact of Covid-19 and the features of the design and delivery of the programme mean that it is not possible to *attribute* learner outcomes to participation in Uni Connect, there is evidence that the programme is continuing to have a positive influence and contributing to the outcomes achieved by target learners.

The analysis of the W3 learner survey offers several insights which have not been reported previously. These include the differential impact of Covid-19 on the learning experience of different groups and how this has affected their knowledge of HE and future plans, and the association between attainment and under-represented groups' knowledge, skills and attitudes towards HE.

The findings also add to the existing evidence base on the specific elements of the programme and learner characteristics that are positively or negatively associated with certain outcomes, as well as on the role of key influencers in the decision-making process. Being male, having a disability and being the first in the family to go to HE, along with experiencing barriers to home learning during the pandemic, are consistently associated with more negative outcomes. These specific groups appear to require more tailored support to ensure they develop the confidence and belief that HE is a viable option.

Engaging in more hours of sustained Uni Connect activity is required to achieve maximum impact. Although there is often no association between outcomes and specific types of activity, there are a few notable exceptions: mentoring, IAG, campus visits and masterclasses are all shown to fulfil important roles in relation to the achievement of specific outcomes and are valuable components of multi-intervention programmes. While speaking to teachers, careers advisers and family members about HE can have a positive influence on learners' intentions, speaking to friends can have a detrimental effect. This emphasises the importance of ensuring these key influencers have access to accurate, up-to-date information about HE.

Recommendations

The OfS has committed to supporting Uni Connect until 2024-25, subject to funding. Although it has not been possible to establish any causal impacts of the programme, there is a growing body of evidence at a local and national level to suggest that sustained and progressive outreach can have a positive influence on learners' outcomes. The analysis presented in this report provides insights into the groups who appear to gain most from Uni Connect as well as those who could benefit from further, more tailored support. The following recommendations are designed to support partnerships in their ongoing development and delivery of Uni Connect in Phase Three:

- Continue to offer sustained and progressive outreach to maximise the impact of Uni Connect on learners' outcomes. Focus primarily on the number of hours rather than the number of types of activity and draw on the wider evidence to determine which activity types are most likely to achieve desired outcomes.
- Deliver immersive experiences such as campus visits to ensure learners develop their knowledge of HE and a fuller understanding of student life, including the diverse range of people who study in HE.
- Provide access to mentoring to enable learners to develop their awareness of the financial and the wider benefits of HE.
- Ensure IAG focuses on the financial support available (in addition to the costs of HE) and the non-financial (as well as financial) benefits of HE to ensure concerns about cost do not deter learners from considering HE.
- Explore the factors that create negative perceptions of HE among males, disabled learners, those who would be the first in their family to go to HE and those who are more economically-disadvantaged, and which could deter them from applying
- Deliver masterclasses to equip learners with the skills, confidence and self-belief that HE is an option for them.
- Use role models in the delivery of interventions for those who do not have access to networks of people with direct experience of HE.
- Deliver continuing professional development (CPD) for teachers and careers advisers to ensure they have the necessary skills and knowledge to support learners with their decision-making.
- Ensure other key influencers, such as friends and family members, have access to up-to-date and accurate information about HE.

01. Introduction

Uni Connect was established in 2017 to increase progression to higher education (HE) among target young people from under-represented groups. Since its launch, 29 partnerships have been funded by the Office for Students (OfS) to deliver a range of outreach activities and information, advice and guidance (IAG) on the benefits and realities of HE through direct engagement with schools and colleges and via Outreach Hubs. The partnerships focus on 997 areas⁷ where HE participation is lower than might be expected given the GCSE results of the young people who live there. They work with learners in Years 9-13 as well as young adults aged 19+ studying in local further education colleges. In Phase Two⁸, Uni Connect was designed to support the OfS to achieve its strategic objective that “*all learners, from all backgrounds, with the ability and desire to undertake higher education, are supported to access, succeed in, and progress from higher education*”.⁹ It sought to do this by helping learners to make well-informed decisions about their education and act on their intentions towards HE.

Uni Connect was significantly impacted by Covid-19 during Phase Two. Measures to limit the spread of the virus included the closure of schools and colleges to the majority of pupils for large parts of the 2019-20 and 2020-21 academic years. This caused considerable disruption to programmes like Uni Connect which were designed to be delivered primarily face-to-face. Partnerships rapidly adapted their approaches and were required to take ‘all reasonable steps’ to maintain 20 per cent learner engagement during this period. The OfS encouraged partnerships to widen their reach in order to support a broader range of under-represented learners, including those living outside Uni Connect target wards. Given the disruption to examinations caused by the pandemic, partnerships were also asked to pay particular attention to the IAG needs of those making a transition.¹⁰ Despite the disruption, the latest figures indicate that almost 370,00 learners were supported in 2019-20 and 429,000 in 2020-21, just under half of whom were Uni Connect target learners.¹¹

This report is the latest in a series for the independent national impact evaluation of Uni Connect. It summarises the results of Wave 3 (W3) of the learner survey which was carried out between October 2020 and February 2021.¹² The findings explore the intermediate outcomes achieved by learners in 2020-21, taking account of the perceived impact of Covid-19 on young people’s learning and experience of school or college during that time.

⁷ Uni Connect learner population estimates are [available online](#).

⁸ Phase One ran from January 2017 to July 2019. Phase Two ran from August 2019 to July 2021.

⁹ See information on the [OfS’s strategy](#).

¹⁰ OfS [guidance](#)

¹¹ See the [Uni Connect annual report for phase two](#).

¹² The survey window was extended compared with previous years to enable partnerships to maximise the response rate in view of the ongoing disruption to delivery caused by Covid-19.

02. The Phase Two impact evaluation

Uni Connect is based on a Theory of Change that *high-quality, impartial, sustained and progressive outreach will reduce barriers to access and increase the rate of progression to HE among learners who have the ability, but who are less likely to go than other groups*. This theory was summarised in a logic model at the outset of the programme and which was subsequently updated for Phase Two (see Appendix 1). This logic model provides the framework for the national, independent impact evaluation of Uni Connect, which is being delivered by CFE Research, as well as for partnerships' local evaluations.

Evaluation aim and objectives

The aim of the national impact evaluation is to measure the change in *intermediate* outcomes for learners and establish whether this can be attributed to Uni Connect. To achieve its aims, in Phase two the national impact evaluation has involved:

- administering two further waves of the longitudinal survey (W2 and W3) tracking outcomes for learners in schools and colleges where partnerships deliver Uni Connect-funded activities
- linking the primary survey data with information collected by three tracking organisations¹³ and national administrative data
- undertaking a meta-review of partnerships' local evaluation evidence on the impact of Uni Connect activities to understand what works, in what context, why and for whom.

The findings from CFE's work complement analysis of national datasets by the OfS that aims to establish whether Uni Connect leads to *longer-term* outcomes, including an increase in the proportion of target learners who successfully apply and progress to HE. This analysis, along with CFE's latest report on the independent review of partnerships' local evaluation evidence, is published online by the OfS.¹⁴

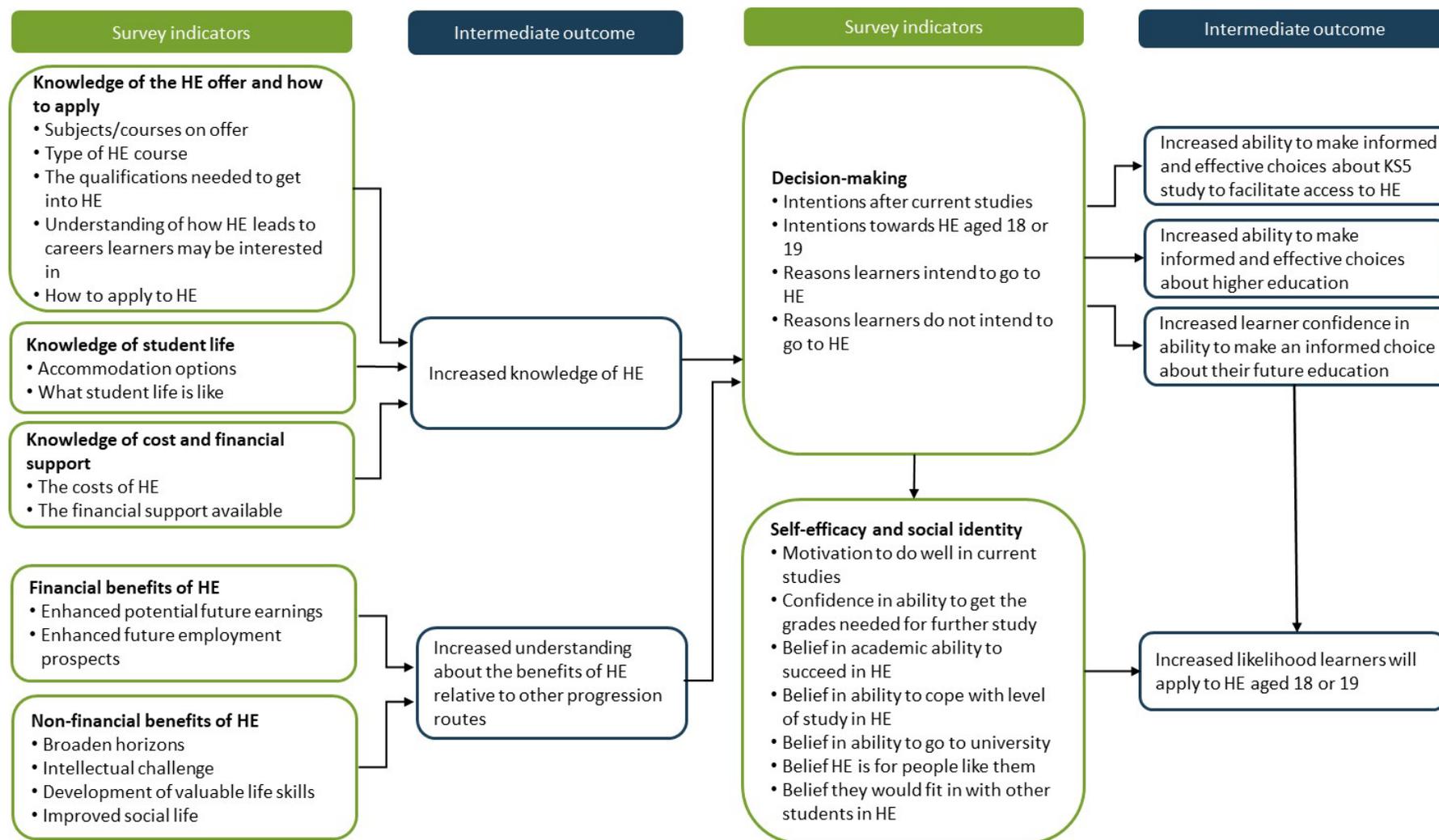
Learner survey

The learner survey forms the central plank of the national impact evaluation. It has been administered annually by partnerships on CFE's behalf from the baseline (Wave 0; W0) in autumn 2017. A bank of indicators designed to measure learners' intermediate outcomes provides the basis for the questions in the core (part 1) learner survey (Figure 1).

¹³ [HEAT](#), [EMWPREP](#) and [AWM](#)

¹⁴ The latest analysis is published on the [OfS website](#).

Figure 1: Mapping of survey indicators and the intermediate outcomes being measured



The core (part 1) questions have remained largely unaltered since the baseline (W0) to enable changes over time to be tracked and measured. However, additional questions to capture the perceived impact of Covid-19 on learners' education and engagement with Uni Connect were added to part 1 at W3 so the effects of the pandemic could be accounted for in the analysis (see Appendix 3 for the survey instrument).

At each survey wave, partnerships have had the opportunity to include questions to support their local evaluations. Only learners who engage with the relevant partnership answer these 'part 2' questions and this data is not analysed for the national impact evaluation.

Wave 3 survey administration

The W3 survey was administered by partnerships via schools and colleges between October 2020 and February 2021. Learners could complete the survey online (using a survey link provided by CFE or generated by a partnership using their own survey software) or by 'paper and pencil'.

Schools and colleges were open to all pupils when the survey was launched and remained open for the autumn term. They were subsequently closed to most young people for the majority of the spring term.¹⁵ As in the first lockdown, schools and colleges were required to provide a face-to-face service for children of critical workers and vulnerable pupils and also support the majority of young people to learn from home.

Partnerships were strongly encouraged to target learners who had responded to a previous survey wave to maximise the longitudinal sample. However, in practice, some schools and colleges adopted a census approach, administering the survey to whole classes or year groups to minimise the logistical burden. In addition, targeting was relaxed in 2020-21 as partnerships were encouraged to engage with a broader range of under-represented groups in the context of Covid-19. As a consequence, a range of learners responded to the survey, including those who moved into Year 9 in the 2021-22 academic year and those in Years 10-13 who did not respond to a previous wave of the survey.

Data linking

Once the W3 survey closed, partnerships inputted any data they had collected via paper and pencil into a spreadsheet using a codebook provided by CFE. This, along with any online survey data collected using a partnership's own survey software, was cleaned and securely shared with CFE. CFE merged this data with the data collected

¹⁵ A phased re-opening of schools began on 8th March 2021. See <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/spring-term-2021-how-covid-19-affected-englands-state-funded-schools/>.

via its online survey software to create the W3 dataset which comprised 25,056 responses from learners who engaged with 24 out of the 29 partnerships.¹⁶ This data was then matched with the previous waves of the survey and with activity data collated by the tracking organisations to create a master longitudinal dataset.

CFE applied to access administrative data from the National Pupil Database (NPD) for learners who had completed the survey in any of the first four waves (Wo – W3) via the Office for National Statistics' (ONS) Secure Research Service (SRS). The master longitudinal dataset was imported into the SRS and linked to the NPD and ILR using unique identifiers. Two standardised Key Stage 2 (KS2) attainment measures were generated based on learners' Standard Assessment Test (SAT) scores for Maths and English.¹⁷ This, along with a measure of socio-economic disadvantage contained in the NPD (Free School Meal status; FSM), were subsequently used to support the analysis.

Data analysis

Comparing the outcomes of the treatment group (Uni Connect target learners) with a matched control group and taking account in the analysis of factors that are known to affect outcomes, such as prior educational attainment, ethnicity and socio-economic status, is one of the most robust ways to establish impact. Several factors affected the national evaluation team's ability to create a control group to measure the impact of Uni Connect, primarily the high rate of attrition between survey waves and the way the programme was delivered. According to tracking data, non-target learners received almost as much 'treatment' as target learners and, as such, it was not possible to discern the impact of the programme as intended. Instead, we created two artificial cohorts to provide the basis of the impact analysis - Cohort 1: Year 9 (Wo) to Year 11 (W2) and Cohort 2: Year 9 (Wo) to Year 12 (W3) – using a repeated cross-section difference-in-difference (DiD)¹⁸ analysis. Kernel propensity score matching (PSM)¹⁹ was used to match a control group to the treatment group because the longitudinal sample was not large enough to measure change over time for the

¹⁶ Nine partnerships did not achieve sufficient responses to the baseline to be included in the subsequent follow-ups. All partnerships were, however, invited to engage in the survey at W3 (and subsequently at Wave 4 in Autumn 2021) and 24 chose to take part.

¹⁷ A standardised measure was created to account for changes in the way SATs scores were calculated for the cohorts participating in Uni Connect.

¹⁸ DiD is a statistical technique used in econometrics and quantitative research in the social sciences. It attempts to mimic an experimental research design using observational study data by studying the differential effect of a programme on a 'treatment group' versus a 'control group' in a natural experiment.

¹⁹ Kernel PSM is a quasi-experimental method which uses statistical techniques to construct an artificial control group by matching the group of treated individuals with a group of non-treated individuals with similar characteristics.

same individuals.²⁰ The impact estimates²¹ for the two cohorts identified significant results²² for 11 out of the 22 outcomes measured. However, the effects are more likely to reflect unobserved differences between the two groups, so it is not possible to draw any robust conclusions about the impact of Uni Connect based on these results. The impact analysis does not, therefore, provide the basis for the findings in this report. A separate methods paper²³ has been produced which describes our approach in more detail and discusses the limitations and possible reasons for the results.

The findings in this report are based on regression analysis which explores whether the intermediate outcomes achieved at W3 are associated with particular types and/or volumes of Uni Connect activity, learners' personal characteristics, and wider factors, such as level of knowledge and experience of HE in the family. This analytical approach identifies which groups appear to be benefiting most (and least) from Uni Connect in order to offer insights into the impact of the programme. The maximum sample available for the regression analysis was 18,725. This comprises 7,700 (41%) respondents defined as 'Uni Connect target learners' and 11,025 (59%) non-target learners. Where appropriate, the outcomes for the W3 sample are compared with the W2 sample to identify potential trends. However, it is important to note this analysis is based on *descriptive* statistics and does not take account of any differences in the characteristics of the two samples.²⁴

Regression analysis

Multivariate regression analysis was carried out on the 24 indicators measured in the learner survey (see Figure 1). A number of factors were accounted for in the analysis, as summarised in Table 1 overleaf.

Probit regression models were calculated for binary outcomes (yes/no) and linear models for ordinal outcomes (scaled responses, such as strength of agreement). Linear models treat ordinal scales as if they were continuous. In all cases, the signs of the coefficient estimates resulting from the regression models are meaningful, to show the direction of the association. However, it is not possible from this analysis to consider the magnitude of the coefficients/findings.

²⁰ Just 1,935 learners who completed the baseline (W0) were still in the sample at W3.

²¹ Two models of analysis were run: intention to treat (ITT) and average treatment effect on the treated (ATT).

²² At a minimum of $p > 0.05$

²³ See the methods paper published alongside this evaluation.

²⁴ The respondent profile at W3 is similar to W2 in terms of key characteristics such as gender, age and ethnicity.

Table 1: Factors used in regression

Personal characteristics	Programme characteristics	Social capital	Perceived impact of Covid-19
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sex • Ethnicity • Age (year group) • Disability status • Socio-economic status (IDACI & FSM) • Key Stage 2 attainment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Type of intervention • Number of different interventions • Total number of interventions engaged in 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whether the respondent would be the first in their family to go to HE • Whether the respondent knows someone who has gone to HE • Who learners spoke to about HE • Who influenced learners' decisions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Factors that made it difficult to study during Covid-19

Several regression models were computed:

- 1) Core set of learner characteristics (explanatory variables) as predictors of the outcomes, including sex, ethnicity, disability status, deprivation (FSM status and IDACI), first in family to go to HE, knowing someone in HE, KS2 attainment in Maths and Reading, a dummy variable for whether they are a target learner, and a year group dummy variable (Year 9 was omitted as the baseline category).
- 2) Activity data as predictors of the outcomes, together with the core set of explanatory variables.
- 3) Who learners spoke to about HE as predictors of the outcomes, together with the core set of explanatory variables.
- 4) Those who had the most influence on learners as predictors of the outcomes, together with the core set of explanatory variables.
- 5) Covid-19 variables are predictors of the outcomes, together with the core set of explanatory variables.
- 6) Predicting Covid-19 outcomes to determine whether Uni Connect target learners were differentially affected by Covid-19. First, a simple model was calculated that included the year group and the target learner dummy. The second model included the core set of explanatory variables.

Further details of the sample characteristics and the approach for the regression analysis are provided in a technical annexe published separately.²⁵

²⁵ See the technical annexe to this evaluation.

03. Impact of Covid-19

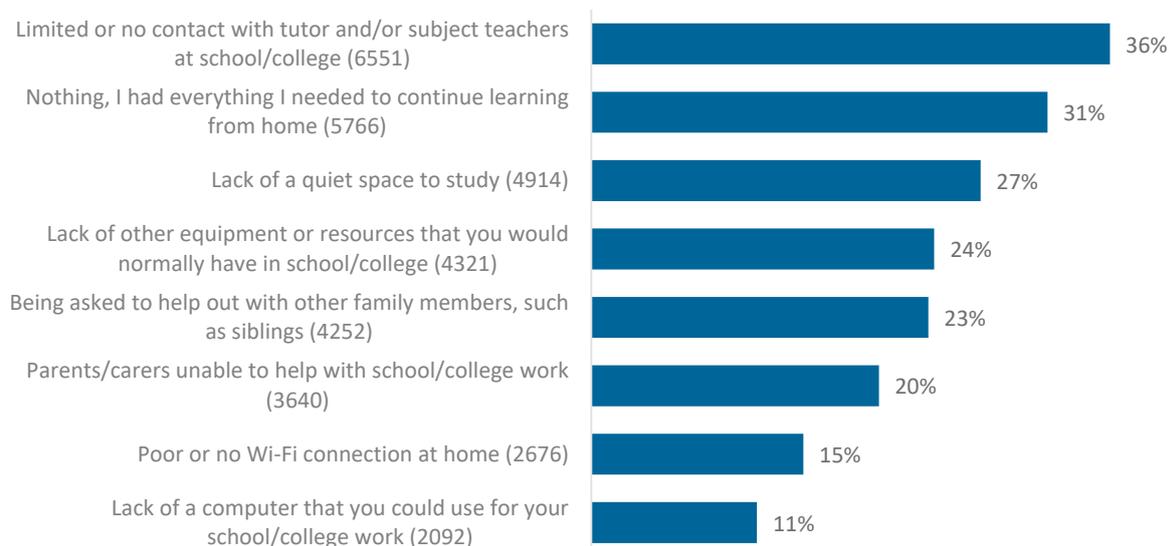
This chapter explores young peoples' perspectives on how Covid-19, and the first lockdown in particular, impacted their learning experience and the extent to which this may, in turn, have affected levels of engagement with Uni Connect and their knowledge and attitudes towards HE. The characteristics of those affected by Covid-19 are also considered to understand whether Uni Connect learners have been more adversely impacted by the pandemic.

The impact of Covid-19 on the learner experience

Most learners who responded to the W3 survey studied from home during the first lockdown (84%) in the 2019-20 academic year. Just 4 per cent remained in school or college full-time while the rest (12%) moved between school or college and home-based learning.

Those who learned at home during the first lockdown were asked about the challenges that made it more difficult for them to continue learning. Having limited or no contact with tutors and subject teachers at school or college is the most frequently cited barrier to learning. A lack of a quiet space to study is cited by over a quarter of learners as an issue. In contrast, nearly a third of learners did not experience any issues and perceive that they had everything they needed to continue learning from home (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Barriers to home learning during the first Covid-19 lockdown



Learner characteristics and the impact of Covid-19

A substantial body of wider evidence suggests that disruption to learning during the first phase of school or college closures widened existing inequalities and the attainment gap between the most and least disadvantaged groups. In response, government-funded initiatives to address learning loss have been introduced.²⁶ The addition of Covid-19 questions to the W3 survey provides an opportunity to explore whether Uni Connect target learners' learning experience was differentially affected by the pandemic and the extent to which this could influence their education and career decisions.

In the simple regression model, which included 'target learner status' only, Uni Connect target learners are *more likely* to report challenges with home learning. Specifically, they were more likely to experience problems accessing a computer, finding a quiet space to study and getting help from parents. Uni Connect target learners were also more likely to be asked to help out with other family members, which could have impacted on the time available for their own studies. Further analysis suggests that learners from a BAME group in particular are likely to report that they had been asked to help out with other family members during lockdown. Uni Connect target learners are, however, *less likely* to report that they had limited contact with their teachers. The effect on target learners does not, however, remain once other learner characteristics, particularly gender, year group and measures of socio-economic status, are included in the regression models. This demonstrates the importance of the *intersection* between characteristics when exploring outcomes for learners.

Characteristics negatively associated with challenges of home learning

Indicators of economic disadvantage are negatively associated with learning challenges. Learners in receipt of FSM, those from more deprived areas (IDACI) and disabled learners are more likely to report that they experienced challenges with learning in the context Covid-19 than other learners. This reflects wider evidence that economically-disadvantaged groups, and low-income households in particular, were more adversely affected by the pandemic.

The analysis also demonstrates a strong association between gender and age and barriers to learning. Females and learners in Year 9 are more likely perceive they experienced barriers than males and learners in Years 10-13. Younger learners had gained less experience of secondary school prior to lockdown and, as a consequence, were likely to be less well-equipped to study independently from home.

Finally, the analysis reveals that those with higher KS2 attainment in Maths and to a lesser extent Reading, are more likely to report that they experienced issues with

²⁶ Institute for Fiscal Studies (2021) [*Inequalities in response to school closures over the course of the first COVID-19 lockdown*](#). Working paper 21/04

access to equipment and help from teachers and parents. They are also more likely to report that they were required to help with other family members.

Impact of Covid-19 on the delivery of Uni Connect

Partnerships had to rapidly upskill and adapt their approach to delivery while schools and colleges were closed to the majority of pupils during the first lockdown. Partnerships successfully moved much of their provision online, however, the restrictions still resulted in 7,278 Uni Connect activities²⁷ being cancelled between February and July 2020 (a substantial proportion of the academic year which provides the focus for the W3 survey). The latest monitoring data (see Chapter 1) demonstrates that the new online offer enabled many learners to engage in some Uni Connect activities remotely, but this approach did not overcome all of the barriers to access. The lack of access to internet-enabled devices and a stable Wi-Fi connection, which impacted on some young people's ability to engage with their learning, is also perceived by partnerships to have impacted on their ability to engage with Uni Connect.²⁸ As a result, the programme did not always reach target learners and other under-represented groups that most needed the support during the pandemic. According to monitoring data, 17 per cent of learners in the most recent cohort received the full amount of activity and approximately one in ten received no activity.²⁹

Impact of Covid-19 on knowledge of Higher Education

Overall, not experiencing any of the challenges that made it more difficult for some learners to continue learning at home during the pandemic is positively associated with the majority of outcomes relating to learners' knowledge of HE. In contrast, those who did not have access to a computer and other equipment, a stable Wi-Fi connection and a quiet space to study were significantly less likely to report they had some knowledge of the different aspects of HE, including the application process, the subjects and types of courses on offer, student life, and the costs of HE. A lack of access to help and support from teachers and parents, and being asked to help out with other family members, also appear to have had a negative effect on these outcomes for learners overall.

It is interesting to note that issues associated with home learning are more negatively associated with outcomes that relate to the acquisition of knowledge about HE rather than the financial and wider benefits. We discuss the relationship between specific aspects of HE knowledge and the impact of Covid-19 in more detail in Chapter 4. The

²⁷ For more information on the number of activities delivered and the disruption caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, see pages 12 and 22–28 of Office for Students (2021) [Uni Connect annual report: Phase two, August 2019 to 2020](#)

²⁸ CFE Research (2021) [COVID-19 and Uni Connect](#). Emerging Insight Report

²⁹ Office for Students (2022) [Uni Connect national evaluation. An updated analysis of young participation in higher education in England in the areas targeted by Uni Connect](#).

impact of Covid-19 on learners' awareness and understanding of the benefits of HE are explored in Chapter 5.

Impact of Covid-19 on likelihood to apply to Higher Education

There is evidence that the challenges associated with learning during the pandemic have had a *positive* effect on some learners' intentions towards HE. For instance, the likelihood of applying to HE aged 18 or 19 is higher among learners who were asked to help out with other family members during lockdown. This group is also more likely to agree that HE will enhance their future earning potential. Furthermore, the Uni Connect target learners who responded to the survey at W3 are more likely to report that Covid-19 has made them more likely to apply to HE aged 18 or 19 than non-target learners. This is encouraging in the context of recent analysis published by the OfS which demonstrates that the actual gap in the application rates between learners living in Uni Connect target areas and those in non-target locations increased by 0.9 percentage points in 2021, having narrowed between 2016 and 2020.³⁰ Covid-19 is likely to be a factor in this increase given the significant impact it had on KS5 examinations and the uncertainty this created for many learners making the transition to HE in 2021, as well as the impact on the HE student experience which was widely reported in the media at the time. We explore how Covid-19 appears to have influenced learners' intentions towards HE further in Chapter 7.

³⁰ Office for Students (2022) [*Uni Connect national evaluation. An updated analysis of young participation in higher education in England in the areas targeted by Uni Connect.*](#)

04. Knowledge of Higher Education

Lack of knowledge about HE can act as a barrier to progression and inhibit a learner's ability to make an informed choice about whether HE is the best option for them. Uni Connect aims to ensure learners are able to make informed decisions by providing them with up-to-date and accurate information about HE. This chapter explores the learner characteristics, including extent of engagement in Uni Connect, that are associated with knowledge and understanding of HE at W3.

Summary

- IAG, campus visits and masterclasses have a positive effect on learners' knowledge about the subjects on offer and the types of courses available, how to find information on the HE application process and the financial support available. There is no association between the number of hours or the number of types of outreach activity engaged in and learners' knowledge of HE.
- W3 learners overall are slightly less knowledgeable about HE compared with learners at the W2 position. There could be several reasons for this, but the impact of Covid-19 on the delivery of IAG and outreach interventions that are shown to increase knowledge, such as campus visits, is likely to be a contributing factor.
- Although a broader range of learners participated in Uni Connect during the pandemic, there is evidence that those the programme was designed to target have particularly benefited, with a positive association between Uni Connect target learner status and knowledge of how to apply to HE and the accommodation options.
- Key influencers, such as teachers, careers advisers and family members, typically have a positive impact on learners' knowledge of HE. However, there is sometimes a negative association between HE knowledge and speaking to or being influenced by friends.
- Higher KS2 attainment is associated with being more knowledgeable about HE.
- Learners with a disability and those who would be the first in their family to go to HE are consistently less likely to report that they are knowledgeable about HE.

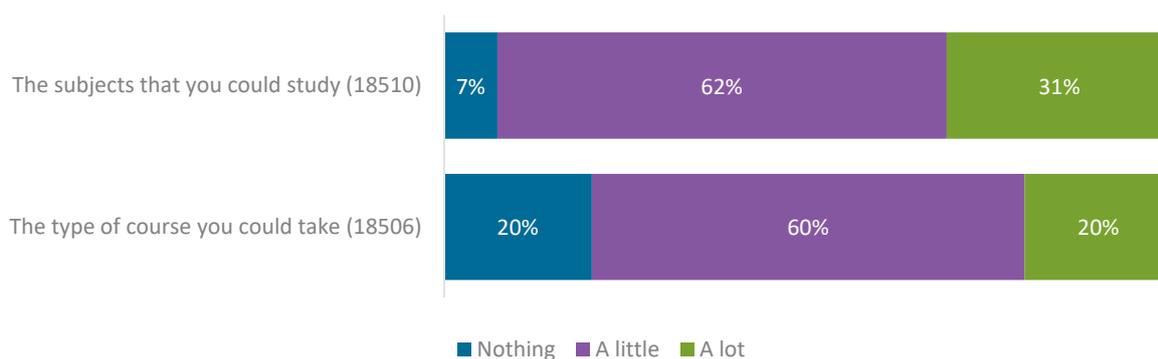
Overall perceptions

Although there is no association between the number of hours of outreach engaged in or the number of activities undertaken and knowledge outcomes, there is evidence that certain types of Uni Connect activity appear to enhance learners' understanding of some elements of HE. There is also evidence that personal characteristics, particularly KS2 attainment in Maths, disability and first in family status, and a learners' networks and influences are all associated with the achievement of knowledge outcomes for learners. The other factors that are associated with each of these outcomes are outlined in the sections that follow.

Knowledge of the Higher Education offer

The vast majority of respondents at W3 (93%) report that they have at least some knowledge of the 'subjects you can study in HE'. Although most also have some knowledge of the different 'types of course they could take', a fifth of respondents have no knowledge of these (20%) (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Level of knowledge about the HE offer



A comparison with the W2 position suggests learners overall are slightly less knowledgeable about the HE offer: at W2, 96 per cent of respondents reported that they had some knowledge of the subjects on offer and 13 per cent reported they knew nothing about the types of courses they could study. Although this difference may be accounted for by differences in the characteristics of the sample at each wave, it may also reflect the impact that Covid-19 had on opportunities for prospective learners to develop their understanding of the HE offer.

Impact of Uni Connect activity

In line with findings from the meta-review of local impact evaluation evidence, participating in IAG and campus visits is positively associated with knowledge about the subjects that could be studied at HE. Masterclasses also appear to support the acquisition of knowledge about HE, with higher levels of knowledge about the types of courses that can be taken among those who have participated in them. Uni Connect target learners are more likely than non-target learners to report that they

have knowledge about the subjects they could study, indicating that the programme is supporting learners in the intended way.

Characteristics associated with knowledge of the Higher Education offer

Several learner characteristics are significantly associated with knowledge of the HE offer in addition to KS2 attainment and disability and first in family status; these include gender, age and socio-economic disadvantage (IDACI). Males, along with those who achieved higher KS2 attainment in Maths, are more likely to report being knowledgeable about the types of courses available. In contrast, learners from economically-disadvantaged backgrounds and those in Year 10³¹ and above, along with disabled learners and those who would be first in family to go to HE, are less likely to report being knowledgeable about the types of courses available. A similar pattern emerges for knowledge about the subjects on offer. Targeted activity involving IAG, campus visits and masterclasses should be considered for these specific learner groups.

Role of key influencers

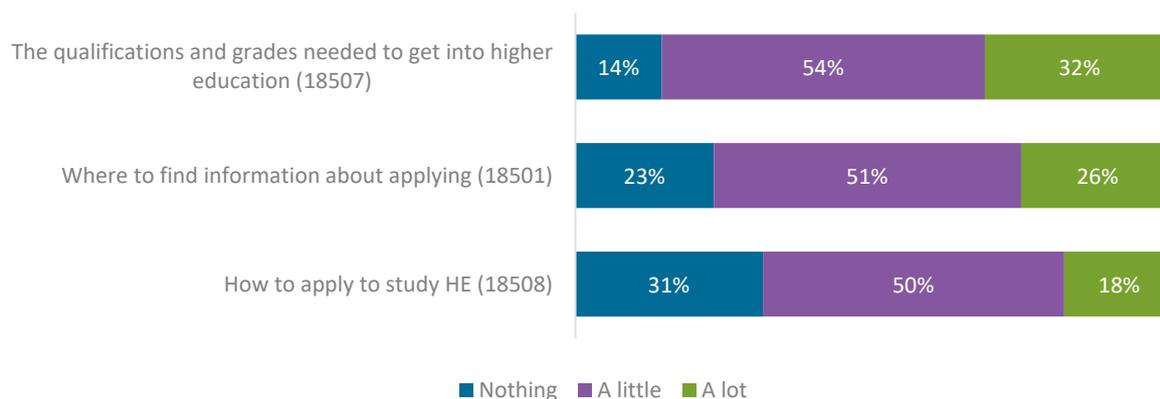
Speaking to family, friends, teachers or a careers adviser about HE and knowing someone in HE is positively associated with learner knowledge about the subjects on offer and the types of courses that could be studied in HE. Learners who report that a teacher or a careers adviser has most influenced their decision about what to do next are significantly more likely to report being knowledgeable about the subjects on offer. Teachers also appear to have an important role in supporting learners to acquire knowledge about the types of courses available. In contrast, those who report that their friends have had most influence on their decision about what to do next, are less knowledgeable about the types of courses available.

Knowledge of how to apply

Most learners overall (86%) report that they have at least some knowledge of the ‘qualifications and grades needed to get into HE’. While almost a third of learners (31%) report that they currently know nothing about ‘how to apply to HE’, more than three-quarters (77%) have some awareness of ‘where to find information about applying’ at the appropriate time (Figure 4).

³¹ Year group is included in the analysis to highlight potential fluctuations in learner knowledge about the HE offer and their perceived academic abilities. It is well documented in the literature that younger students often over-estimate their knowledge levels and ability to obtain the grades required for HE. As learners progress through school, they acquire more knowledge and insight into their potential attainment (e.g. from mock exam results) and often recalibrate their perceptions in light of this information. It is not possible to draw conclusions about differences in perceptions by age/year group over time as the current analysis is based on one time point only (Wave 3).

Figure 4: Level of knowledge about the HE application process



A comparison with the W2 position suggests once again that learners in the W3 cohort are slightly less knowledgeable about how to apply to HE. At W2, nine out of ten respondents knew at least something about the ‘qualifications and grades needed to get into HE’ and 85 per cent knew at least something about ‘where to find information about applying to HE’; just over a fifth (22%) reported that they knew nothing about ‘how to apply to HE’. Covid-19 is likely to be a factor in this decline as access to interventions that have been shown previously to be effective for increasing knowledge of the application process, such as IAG, was more limited during the pandemic.³²

Impact of Uni Connect activity

Reflecting the findings of the meta-review of partnerships’ local impact evaluation evidence, the regression analysis suggests that IAG may be particularly effective for increasing knowledge of the HE application process as there is a positive association between participation in IAG activities and learners’ knowledge about where to find information about how to apply. Uni Connect target learners are more likely than non-target learners to report that they know how to apply to HE, suggesting that the programme is having a positive influence on the knowledge of the learners it was designed to support.

Characteristics associated with knowledge of how to apply

In addition to KS2 attainment in Maths, gender, age and disability status are all significantly associated with levels of knowledge about the HE application process. Learners who achieved higher KS2 attainment Maths are more likely to report being knowledgeable about how to apply to HE. Learners in Year 10 and above report a higher level of knowledge than learners in Year 9. This might be expected given older learners are closer to the transition to HE and some of the respondents in Years 12

³² CFE Research (2022) [Fourth independent review of impact evaluation evidence submitted by Uni Connect partnerships](#). Page 15. Published online by the OfS.

and 13 had already applied to HE before completing the W3 survey. Males typically report higher levels of knowledge than females, with males significantly more likely to report they know where to find information about how to apply to HE and how to go about applying. In contrast, disabled learners and those who would be the first in their family to go to HE are less likely to report that they know about any of the aspects of the application process. As such, these groups could provide a focus for more targeted IAG.

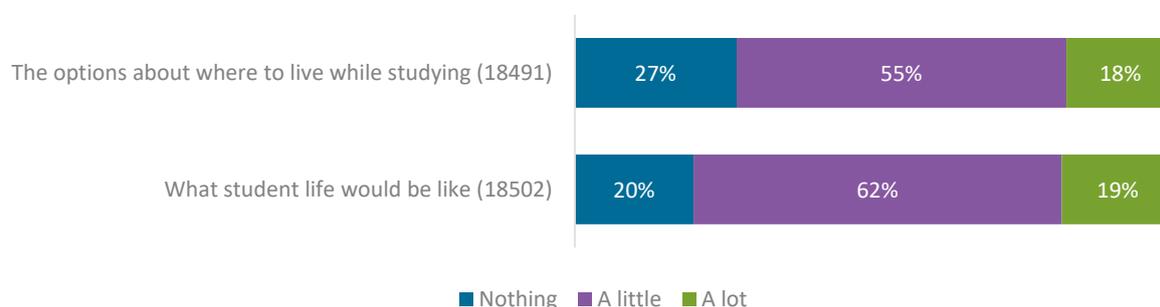
Role of key influencers

A learner’s personal networks appear to have a strong influence on their knowledge of the application process. Those who know someone in HE and those who report that the person who has most influenced their decisions about what to do next is a careers adviser are significantly more likely to report that they have knowledge of all the aspects of the application process explored in the survey. Furthermore, those who report that their decision about what to do next has been most influenced by a teacher are more likely to report they are knowledgeable about the qualifications and grades needed to get into HE. Once again, those who report being most influenced by their friends tend to be less knowledgeable about the application process. This further reinforces previous findings that equipping teachers and other advisers with accurate, up-to-date information about HE, including the application process, should remain a priority for Uni Connect partnerships and will help to ensure learners’ decisions are appropriately informed.

Knowledge of student life

Just over four-fifths of learners overall (81%) have at least some knowledge of ‘what student life is like’ and almost three-quarters (73%) have some awareness of ‘the accommodation options available’ (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Level of knowledge about student life



The proportions of learners with knowledge about student life and accommodation options at W3 are slightly lower than at W2 (86% versus 77%). One possible explanation is the impact of Covid-19 on opportunities for prospective students to develop their understanding of student life. Evidence from the meta-review suggests that direct experience on campus is an effective way to develop learners’

understanding of the realities of life in HE.³³ However, interventions that offer this experience, such as campus visits, were among those most adversely affected by the restrictions imposed. Many partnerships cancelled these activities altogether and while some attempted to move them online, feedback suggests they were less effective when delivered remotely.³⁴

Characteristics associated with knowledge of student life

Although none of the associations between the characteristics of the Uni Connect programme and learners' knowledge of student life are significant, target learners are significantly more likely to report that they have some knowledge of the accommodation options than non-target learners. This once again suggests that the programme is having a positive influence on this aspect of the knowledge of the primary target audience for Uni Connect.

The regression analysis suggests there are gaps in some learners' knowledge of student life. Learners in Years 10-13, along with disabled learners and those who would be the first in their family to go to HE, are less likely to report that they have knowledge about student life or accommodation options. In addition, males are less likely than females to say they have knowledge of accommodation options. Some disabled learners will have specific accommodation requirements. It is therefore important to ensure tailored information is available.

Role of key influencers

Further analysis to understand the role that key influencers play in the development of learners' knowledge of student life suggests that friends and family members, particularly those with experience of HE themselves, are an important source of information. Learners who know someone in HE, have spoken to a friend or family member about HE, and who report their family has most influenced their decisions about HE, are significantly more likely to say they possess some knowledge of what student life is like and the accommodation options. There is also a positive association between speaking to a teacher or careers adviser about HE and knowledge of student life and accommodation options. This suggests that in the absence of interventions that provide direct experience of the university environment, such as campus visits, prospective students will turn to those around them for advice. This further emphasises the importance of ensuring learners who do not have access to such networks are able to obtain this information elsewhere.

³³ CFE Research (2022) [Fourth independent review of impact evaluation evidence submitted by Uni Connect partnerships](#). Published online by the OfS.

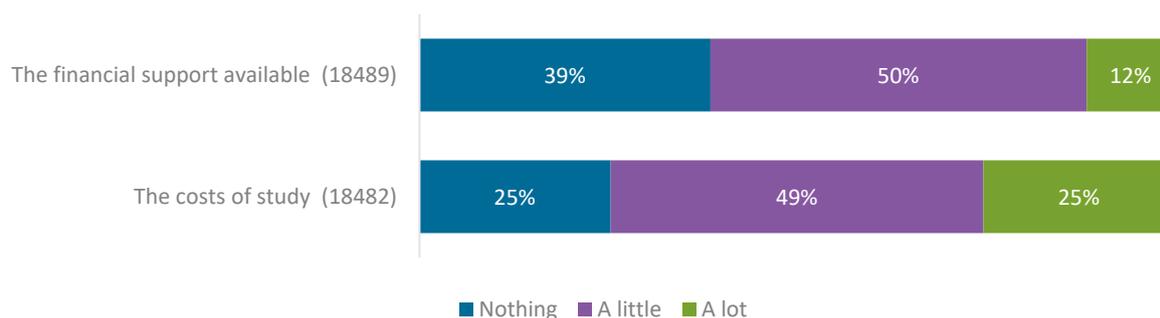
³⁴ CFE Research (2021) [Emerging insight report: Covid-19 and Uni Connect](#). Published online by the OfS.

Knowledge of cost and financial support

HE represents a significant financial investment for learners and their families; the tuition fee for learners from England who study HE in any part of the UK is up to £9,250 per year and those who leave home to study can expect to pay, on average, £5000 per year for accommodation.³⁵ Most learners will take out a tuition fee loan along with a means-tested maintenance loan to meet these and their wider living costs. As a result, those from the lowest income households could accumulate debt in excess of £57,000 over the course of a three-year degree.³⁶ The high cost of HE is commonly perceived as a barrier to progression, particularly for economically-disadvantaged groups. Wider research suggests that this could be exacerbated by a lack of understanding of the student finance available, including bursaries and scholarships offered by individual institutions.³⁷

There are gaps in some learners' knowledge about the costs of HE, and the financial support available in particular. A quarter of learners overall (25%) report that they know 'nothing' about the costs of HE; this proportion rises to two-fifths (39%) in relation to knowledge about the financial support available (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Level of knowledge about the cost of HE and financial support



A comparison with the W2 position once again suggests that W3 learners are less informed about the costs of HE and the financial support available. Previously, a fifth of learners (20%) reported that they knew nothing about the costs of HE and 29 per cent knew nothing about financial support. Once again, the regression analysis provides some insight into the potential reasons for this difference.

³⁵ www.timeshighereducation.com/student/advice/cost-studying-university-uk

³⁶ www.thecompleteuniversityguide.co.uk/student-advice/finance/university-tuition-fees-and-financial-support-in-england#University_tuition_fees

³⁷ Fagence, S. & Hansom, J. (2018). *The influence of finance on higher education decision-making*. London: Department for Education

Impact of Uni Connect activity

Although no association between the number of hours of outreach or the number of types of activity engaged in and knowledge of financial issues was found, the regression analysis demonstrates that participating in campus visits increases learners' knowledge about the financial support available for HE. Wider evidence³⁸ also suggests that campus visits are an effective way to provide institution-specific information, including the financial support packages available and the eligibility criteria which typically vary depending on the HE provider.

Characteristics associated with knowledge of cost and financial support

As with other aspects of knowledge of HE, learners with higher KS2 Maths attainment scores are more likely to say they have knowledge of the costs of HE and financial support available. There is an association between year group and knowledge of financial issues; however, in contrast with previous analysis, learners in Years 10-13 are *less* likely to report they have knowledge of financial issues than Year 9 learners. Disabled learners and those who would be the first in their family to go to HE are also less likely to be knowledgeable about student finance. In contrast with previous analysis, no association between ethnicity and knowledge of student finance was found.

Role of key influencers

Once again, key influencers fulfil an important role in the development of learners' knowledge of the cost of HE and the available financial support. Learners who know someone in HE and those who have spoken to a friend, family member, teacher or careers adviser about HE are significantly more likely to say they possess some knowledge on these issues. This further emphasises the importance of ensuring learners who do not have access to such networks are able to obtain this information elsewhere.

³⁸ CFE Research (2022) [Fourth independent review of impact evaluation evidence submitted by Uni Connect partnerships](#). Published online by the OfS.

05. The benefits of Higher Education

To make an informed decision about whether to go to HE, and what and where to study, learners need to be able to weigh up the pros and cons; this includes whether they are likely to achieve a return on their investment measured in financial or other terms. This chapter explores learners' understanding of the financial and wider benefits of HE at W3. It considers the impact of outreach activity, together with the learner characteristics associated with perceptions about the benefits of HE. The role of speaking to someone about HE and key influencers is also explored.

Summary

- Learners' perceptions of both the financial and non-financial benefits of HE are positively influenced by sustained engagement in Uni Connect. It appears, however, to be the number of hours, rather than the number of different types of activity, that is key to enhancing impact; mentoring in particular appears to have a positive impact on learners' knowledge of the benefits of HE.
- Speaking to someone about HE has a positive impact on learner perceptions about the financial and non-financial benefits of HE. However, those who report that their friends have had the most influence on their decision about what to do next are most likely to report negative perceptions of HE.
- BAME learners, those who know someone who has gone to HE and have higher KS2 attainment in Maths and Reading are more likely to hold positive views about the benefits of HE.
- Being male, having a disability and being the first in the family to progress to HE is consistently linked to negative perceptions about the benefits of HE.

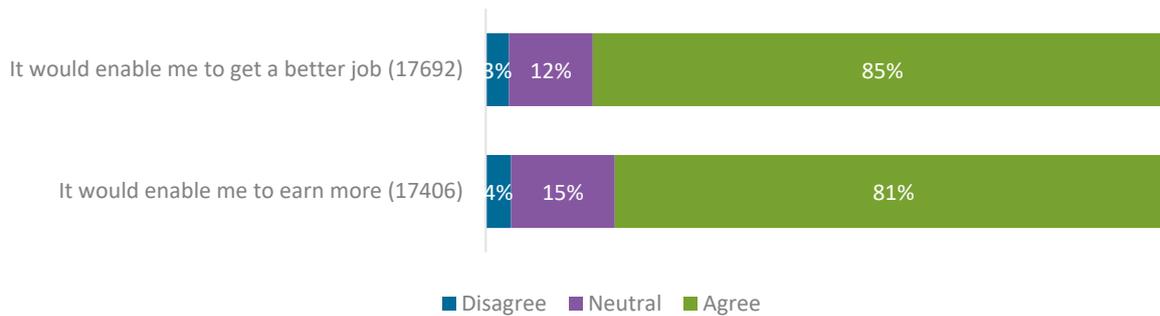
Overall perceptions

Financial benefits of Higher Education

Most learners at W3 (87%) report having some knowledge about how HE can lead to interesting careers. This is slightly lower than the 90 per cent of learners who reported that they knew something about this at W2. Overall, most learners hold positive views about the potential financial benefits of HE – over four-fifths agree that going to HE will enable them to 'earn more' (81%) and 'get a better job' (85%) (

Figure 7). This is a slightly higher proportion compared with the W2 position, where 84 and 80 per cent of learners respectively agreed with these statements.

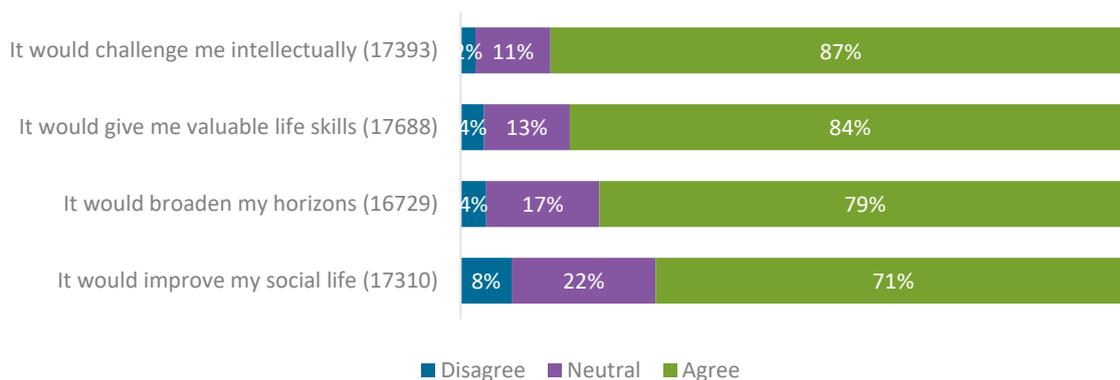
Figure 7: Level of agreement with statements about the financial benefits of HE



Non-financial benefits of Higher Education

The survey explored the extent to which learners agreed with a series of statements about the non-financial benefits of HE. A higher proportion of learners agree that HE will ‘challenge them intellectually’ (87%) than perceive that going to HE will ‘improve their social life’ (71%) (Figure 8). Learner perceptions of the non-financial benefits at W3 are all slightly *higher* than at the W2 position.

Figure 8: Level of agreement with statements about the non-financial benefits of HE



Impact of Uni Connect activity

The results of the regression analysis suggest that it is the number of hours of engagement in Uni Connect, rather than whether a learner takes part in the programme at all or the number of different types of activities they engage in, that is positively associated with knowledge about the benefits of HE. Mentoring is the only specific activity that is positively associated with these outcomes.

These findings resonate with the W2 survey findings and the latest meta-review of local evaluation evidence and further emphasise the importance of sustained involvement in Uni Connect for learners in order to maximise impact. Both online and face-to-face mentoring is reported to have a positive impact by enhancing

learners' knowledge of and attitudes towards HE.³⁹ Mentoring is shown to be particularly effective when learners perceive their mentor to be 'like them' and can offer insights into the HE experience, including the potential benefits for learners with similar backgrounds.

Role of key influencers

The important influence that learners' schools and their wider networks have on their decisions are highlighted in the W3 survey findings. Learners who report that teachers, careers advisers and family have most influenced their decisions about what to do next are more likely to agree that HE offers financial as well as non-financial benefits.

Key influencers do, however, appear to play different roles in shaping learners' perceptions about the financial and non-financial benefits of HE. Teachers and careers advisers support learners to understand the financial and academic benefits of HE, whereas family help learners to consider the wider benefits, particularly that HE will help them to 'gain valuable life skills' and 'improve their social life'. Friends typically have a negative influence on learners' perceptions of both the financial and non-financial benefits.

Characteristics associated with perceptions of the benefits

Similar learner characteristics are associated with positive and negative perceptions of the financial and non-financial benefits of HE at W3.

BAME learners and those with higher KS2 attainment in Maths and Reading are more likely to hold positive perceptions of the benefits of HE. Those who know someone who has gone to HE are also more likely to agree that HE offers non-financial benefits.

Learner age appears to be an important factor in the formation of attitudes towards HE. Although learners in Years 11-13 are *more likely* to hold positive perceptions about the financial benefits of HE, those in Years 10-13 are *less likely* to hold positive views about the non-financial aspects. Chapter 4 highlights that older learners are more informed about the costs of HE than younger learners. This may be understandable given older learners are closer to the transition and are likely to have accessed IAG about the costs. This knowledge, rather than any understanding of the wider benefits of HE, may therefore influence their perceptions at this stage.

Learners from more economically-disadvantaged backgrounds (measured by IDACI) are more likely hold positive views about the financial benefits – earning potential and job prospects – that going to HE could offer them. Although there is no

³⁹ CFE Research (2022) [Fourth independent review of impact evaluation evidence submitted by Uni Connect partnerships](#). Published online by the OfS.

association between learners' perceptions of the financial benefits of HE and the other main measure of economic disadvantage – FSM status – this group is less likely to agree with two statements about the non-financial benefits of HE – ‘it will broaden my horizons’, and ‘it would improve my social life’. The analysis, therefore, suggests that achieving a financial return, rather than the wider benefits of HE, could be a more important consideration for learners from lower socio-economic groups. In contrast, males, disabled learners and those who would be the first in the family to go to HE tend to be less likely to agree that HE will benefit them.

06. Perceptions about the ability to succeed in Higher Education

A lack of confidence and self-belief can be a barrier to progression and deter some from acting on their intentions towards HE. The aim of some Uni Connect activities, particularly mentoring and masterclasses, is to enhance learners' self-efficacy by challenging ideas of social identity and developing learners' confidence, motivation, and study skills. This chapter explores the extent to which perceptions about the ability to succeed in HE differs according to learner characteristics and the impact of Uni Connect activity in shaping perceptions.

Summary

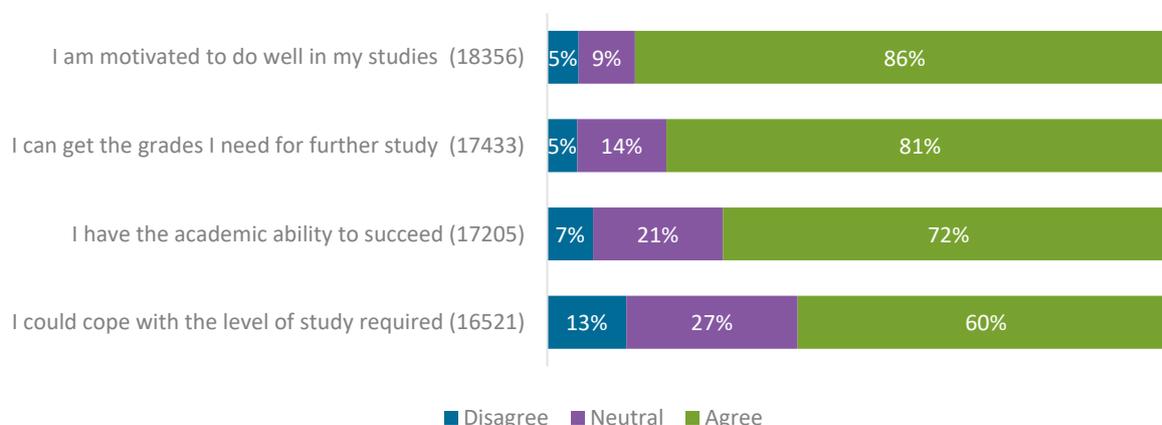
- Most learners are motivated to do well in their studies. Participating in more hours of outreach activity, and engaging in masterclasses in particular, are positively associated with being motivated to do well. This has important implications for the ongoing development of Uni Connect, given the shift in focus to include attainment-raising as a core part of the outreach offer.
- A high proportion of W3 learners who have participated in Uni Connect activity do not identify with HE. They do not perceive HE to be a place for 'people like them' and do not think that they would fit in well with others.
- Males, learners with a disability, those who would be the first in their family to go to HE, and more economically-disadvantaged learners are most likely report lower levels of self-efficacy and confidence in their academic abilities and are less likely to identify with HE. This suggests that tailored interventions for these groups are needed to challenge perceptions and address specific barriers.
- In contrast, BAME learners and those with higher attainment in KS2 Maths and Reading are more likely to report higher levels of self-efficacy and confidence in their academic abilities. They are also more likely to agree that HE is a place for people like them.

Overall perceptions

Most W3 learners are motivated to do well in their studies (86%); just 5 per cent report that they are not motivated. Levels of motivation have been consistently high across the survey waves, with 90 per cent of learners agreeing that they were motivated to well in their studies at the W2 position. Overall, learners also agree that they could achieve the grades needed to enter HE. In contrast, learners are less confident that they have the academic ability to succeed at HE and that they could

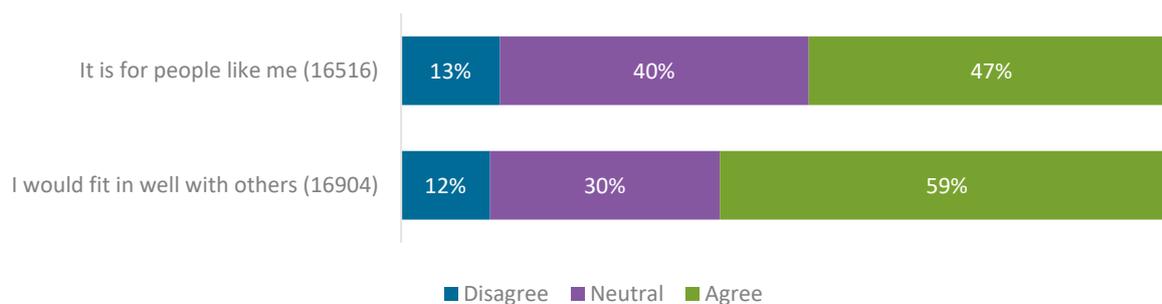
cope with the level of study required (Figure 9). These proportions are also comparable with the W2 survey position.

Figure 9: Learner perceptions of their self-efficacy towards HE



Some outreach activities are specifically designed to improve learners’ social identity with HE. The W3 findings show that less than half of learners (47%) think that HE is a place for ‘people like them’ and approximately two-fifths (42%) do not perceive that they would ‘fit in well with others’ at HE (Figure 10). These findings are similar to the W2 position. Lack of social identity could be acting as a barrier to progression, particularly for learners from under-represented backgrounds, and could usefully provide a focus for outreach activity.

Figure 10: Learner perceptions about their social identity with HE



Impact of Uni Connect activity

Evidence from the W3 survey findings suggests that outreach activity has a positive influence on learners’ perceptions about their ability to succeed in HE. Learners who engage in more hours of outreach activity are more likely to be motivated to do well in their studies, as are those who engage in masterclasses in particular. No associations are found between learners’ perceptions about their ability to succeed in HE and the number of different activity types engaged in, whether learners participated in activity and other specific activity types. These findings are in line with partnerships’ local evaluation evidence that demonstrates masterclasses focused

on building interpersonal skills and attributes can have a positive impact on learners' motivation to do well, resilience and confidence levels.⁴⁰ Collectively, these findings have important implications for the development of Uni Connect in the future, given the shift in focus to attainment-raising as a core part of the outreach offer.

Learner characteristics and self-belief towards Higher Education

In this section, we explore the different learner characteristics that are associated with perceptions of self-belief towards HE. Insights are designed to help partnerships refine their outreach offer to ensure it is tailored to the needs of different groups of individuals.

Gender

The gender disparity in progression to HE is more acute for males from economically-disadvantaged backgrounds. In particular, disadvantaged White boys are the least likely of all the demographic groups to go to HE.⁴¹ The findings from the regression analysis show that male learners are *less* motivated to do well in their studies compared with females. They are also less likely to positively identify with HE and see it as place for 'people like them'. However, males are *more likely* to perceive that they can achieve the grades necessary for further study and be confident that they have the academic ability to succeed in HE. This broadly reflects the findings at the W2 position, although the perception among males that HE is not a place for people like them only emerges at W3. This could suggest that males have been more adversely affected by the impacts of Covid-19, such as the transition to remote learning and outreach delivery.

Disabled learners

Students with disabilities enter HE at a lower rate than their non-disabled peers.⁴² Outreach activities tailored to address the concerns of disabled learners may help increase the progression rate. At W3, learners with a disability have less confidence and self-belief that HE is an option for them, compared with learners without a disability. Disabled learners are less motivated to do well in their studies and are less likely to think they have the academic ability to succeed at HE and could cope with the demands of higher-level study. Disabled learners are also less likely to positively

⁴⁰ CFE Research (2022) [Fourth independent review of impact evaluation evidence submitted by Uni Connect partnerships](#). Published online by the OfS.

⁴¹ www.hepi.ac.uk/2016/05/12/3317/

⁴² Mamboleo, G., Meyer, L., Georgieva, Z., Curtis, R., Dong, S., & Stender, L.M. (2015) '[Students with disabilities' self-report on perceptions towards disclosing disability and Faculty's willingness to provide accommodations.](#)' *Journal of Rehabilitation, Counselling and Education*. Vol. 8 No. 2 pp 8 -19.

identify with HE – being disabled is associated with being less likely to view HE as a place for ‘people like them’ and where they would ‘fit in well with others’. This resonates with the findings at the W2 position and further reinforces the need for tailored activities for learners with a disability. Disaggregating whether specific disabilities are more or less associated with perceptions of self-efficacy, confidence and social identify may be beneficial.

First in family to go to Higher Education

It is well established that ‘first in family’ learners can face barriers to HE that often start early in their educational journey. This group are more likely to lack the social and cultural capital that non-first generational learners possess, as well as the resources to increase their knowledge and skills.⁴³ A similar pattern to that found for disabled learners emerges for learners who would be the first in their family to go to HE. They are less likely to have self-efficacy as well as confidence in their ability to get the grades needed, succeed in HE and cope with the demands of HE-level study. First in family learners are also less likely to identify with HE – they do not think HE is for ‘people like them’ or that they would ‘fit in’ with other learners. These findings offer new insights, not reported for previous survey waves, and suggest that ‘first in family’ learners would benefit from activities focused on developing their self-efficacy skills, confidence and self-belief.

Ethnicity

While BAME learners overall have higher rates of progression to HE than White learners, there are significant differences between ethnic groups. The intersection between gender and socio-economic status is associated with lower progression to HE for some BAME learners.⁴⁴

Insights from the regression analysis at W3 reveal that perceptions of self-efficacy among BAME learners do not differ from those of White learners. BAME students are also as likely as White learners tend to be motivated to do well in their studies, perceive that they can achieve the grades needed for further study and that they could cope with HE level of study. However, White learners are *less* likely to perceive that they have the academic ability to succeed at HE and would fit in compared with BAME learners. This resonates with the W2 findings that BAME learners had higher levels of self-efficacy.

⁴³ <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/jcop.22834>

⁴⁴ Sanderson, R & Spacey, R (2021) ‘Widening access to higher education for BAME learners and learners from lower socio-economic groups: A review of literature’. **IMPact – Journal of Higher Education**, Vol 4 No. 1

Socio-economic disadvantage (FSM status and IDACI)

Two measures of socio-economic disadvantage – FSM status and IDACI – show different patterns in terms of self-efficacy, confidence and social identify. Students who have ever been in receipt of FSM are less likely to be motivated to do well in their studies. They are also less likely to perceive that they could achieve the grades need to progress to HE, have the academic ability to succeed and could cope with level of study required at HE. FSM status is also negatively associated with perceptions that HE is for ‘people like them’ and that they would ‘fit in with others’. Just one outcome is significantly associated with IDACI as a measure of socio-economic disadvantage – learners residing in more economically disadvantaged areas are less likely to think that they will ‘fit in with others’ in HE.

Key Stage 2 attainment

New insights gained from the inclusion of prior attainment in the regression models show that KS2 attainment in Reading, and particularly in Maths, is positively associated with self-efficacy, confidence in academic ability and social identification with HE. Students with higher Maths attainment are also more likely to be motivated to do well in their studies, perceive that they can achieve the grades necessary to progress to HE, cope with the academic demands of HE and cope with the level of study required. Higher KS2 Maths attainment is also strongly associated with HE identity – this group is more likely to think that HE is for ‘people like them’ and that they will ‘fit in well with others’. These findings emphasise the importance of attainment raising initiatives to support learners to achieve the necessary grades and develop competent study skills.

Target learner status

Being a target Uni Connect learner is not associated with perceptions about self-efficacy, confidence in academic ability and socially identifying with HE. There is, however, one exception – target learners are *less* likely than non-target learners to perceive that they will ‘fit in with others’ at HE.

07. Impact of Uni Connect on future plans

One of the principal aims of Uni Connect is to support learners to acquire the knowledge to help them make a fully-informed decision about what to do after they finish their current studies. This chapter explores learners' perceptions of the likelihood that they will apply to HE aged 18 or 19. We explore the characteristics of learners and the Uni Connect programme that are associated with this decision. The impact of speaking to someone and key influencers is also considered.

Summary

- Sustained engagement in outreach activity has a positive impact on young peoples' intentions to apply to HE, with learners who participated in more hours of outreach more likely to state they will apply to HE in the future. Neither specific activities nor the number of different types of activities are associated with learners' intentions to apply to HE.
- Graduates' earning potential is a motivation for learners who are intending to progress to HE. Many of those who report that they are unlikely to go to HE are still undecided whether it is the best option for them or are waiting until they receive their results to make a final decision, suggesting that some may be uncertain that they will achieve the necessary grades.
- Covid-19 does not appear to be a key factor in the decision about whether to go to HE or not and the pandemic does not appear to have negatively impacted on learners' intentions to apply to HE.
- Speaking to someone about HE is positively associated with intentions to apply to HE. Teachers and careers advisers are key influencers who positively shape learners' intentions. Conversely, friends have a negative impact on learners' intentions to apply to HE.
- W3 learners who intend to apply to HE are more likely to be from a BAME group, have higher KS2 Maths and Reading attainment, know someone that has gone to HE, be in Year 10, 12 or 13, and come from a more deprived area (measured by IDACI). In contrast, males, those with a disability, those who would be the first in the family to go to HE and learners in receipt of FSM are less likely to intend to apply to HE.
- Uni Connect target learners are no more or less likely to intend to apply to HE than non-Uni Connect learners at W3, suggesting the gap in the progression rate is more likely to appear when the final decision about post-18 transitions has to be made.

Likelihood of applying to Higher Education

Many of the learners who responded to the W3 survey aspire to apply to HE, with nearly four-fifths stating that they are likely to apply aged 18 or 19. Just over a fifth of learners are unlikely to apply (Figure 11). The proportion of learners overall who intend to apply has increased compared with the W2 position (67%).

Figure 11: Likelihood that learners will apply to HE aged 18 or 19



Students cite the earning potential of graduates as a key reason for wanting to progress to HE. This reflects the W2 survey findings, where the financial benefits of HE were among the main reasons why learners wanted to go. The second most common reason for intending to apply to HE is 'enjoyment of learning' which suggests that motivations to study in HE extend beyond the potential financial returns. Students do not appear to be influenced by friends' intentions to progress to HE or labour market conditions in the context of Covid-19 (Figure 12).

Figure 12: Reasons why learners want to go to HE



The main reasons for not wanting to apply to HE are more diverse. Many of those who are unlikely to go to HE are still undecided whether it is the best option for them, and some will make a final decision once they receive their results, suggesting they may be concerned that they may not achieve the necessary grades. Some of those who are unlikely to go are driven by a desire 'to work and earn money'. One in ten learners cite a 'lack of appeal' and 'concerns about the cost' as their main reason for not wanting to progress.

There was much uncertainty during the pandemic about the impact of Covid-19 on application and progression rates to HE, and whether under-represented groups would be more adversely affected. Analysis published by UCAS demonstrates that applications to HE overall actually increased, with a record 40.5 per cent of all UK 18-year-olds applying by the June 2020 deadline.⁴⁵ Additionally, UCAS reported that for the first time ever, over a quarter (25.4%) of young people who applied were from economically-disadvantaged backgrounds (measured by POLAR4).⁴⁶ Subsequent OfS analysis reports that the gap in the application rate between Uni Connect target learners and non-target learners widened in the 2021 application cycle.⁴⁷ The W3 survey analysis reflects the wider pattern identified by UCAS – less than 3 per cent of respondents state that their main reason for not wanting to go to HE is that the pandemic has put them off applying (Figure 13).

Figure 13: Reasons why learners do not want to go to HE



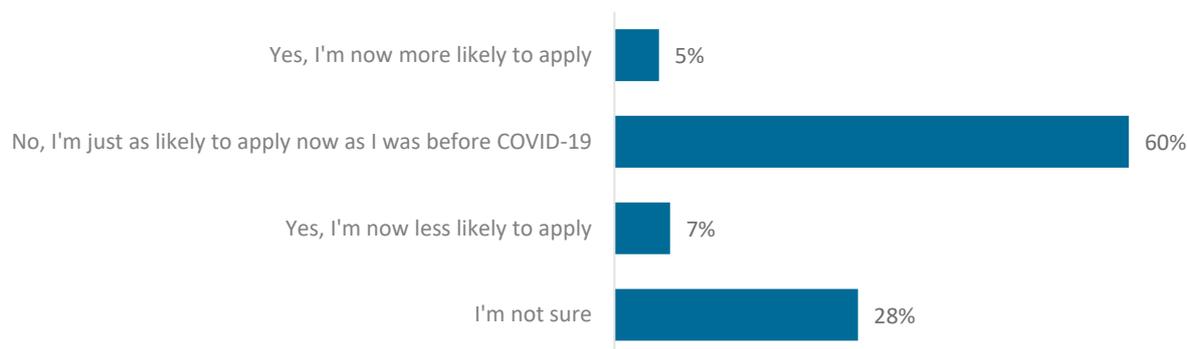
Learners were asked explicitly whether Covid-19 had affected their decision about whether to apply to HE or not. For three-fifths of learners (60%), the pandemic does not appear to have had any impact and they are just as likely to apply as they were before Covid-19. Only a minority of respondents state they are less or more likely to apply because of Covid-19 (Figure 14).

⁴⁵ www.ucas.com/corporate/news-and-key-documents/news/university-applications-rise-during-lockdown

⁴⁶ www.ucas.com/corporate/news-and-key-documents/news/university-applications-rise-during-lockdown

⁴⁷ Institute for Fiscal Studies (2021) *Inequalities in response to school closures over the course of the first COVID-19 lockdown*. Working paper 21/04

Figure 14: Impact of Covid-19 on learner decisions about whether to apply to HE or not



Impact of Uni Connect activity

As with other outcomes, it is the number of hours that learners engage in Uni connect activity that has a positive impact on the likelihood that they will apply to HE age 18 or 19; there is no association between this outcome and whether learners engage in Uni Connect, the number of different types of activities they engage in or any specific activity types. This reflects the W2 findings and provides further evidence that it is sustained engagement in outreach that has most impact, rather than the variety of activities or specific activity types that learners participate in.

Role of key influencers

Learners who have spoken to a teacher, careers adviser, family member or friend about HE are more likely to intend to apply than those who have not spoken to anyone. Teachers and careers advisers also appear to have a positive influence on learners' HE decisions. Ensuring teachers and careers advisers are equipped with accurate information and have access to continuing professional development about HE is therefore important. However, learners who report that their decision about what do next has been most influenced by their peers, are less likely to apply to HE, that those who have been influenced by other types of people. These findings reflect wider evidence about the interplay between a learner's networks and their decisions about HE.⁴⁸

Characteristics associated with applying to Higher Education

Several learner characteristics are associated with a higher likelihood of applying to HE aged 18 or 19. BAME learners, those with higher KS2 Maths and Reading attainment and those who know someone who has gone to HE are more likely to state that they will apply to HE. Learners in Years 10, 12 and 13 are also more likely

⁴⁸ Brooks, R (2010) 'Young People's Higher Education Choices: The role of family and friends'. **British Journal of Sociology and Education**, Vol 24, No. 3 pp283 - 297

to state they will apply. Interestingly, Year 11 learners are less likely than these other age groups to state that they will apply and are just as likely to apply as learners in Year 9. This reflects the findings from previous waves of the survey which suggests learners' intentions fluctuate between educational stages and in accordance with their knowledge and awareness of the realities of HE and their perceived confidence in their ability to study at this level.

While learners in receipt of FSM are *less* likely to say they will apply to HE, those living in more deprived areas (IDACI) are *more* likely to say they will apply. This group is attracted by the earning potential and job prospects for graduates (see Chapter 5). This could, therefore, be one of the principal drivers influencing their decisions.

Consistent with previous findings, males, disabled learners and those who would be the first in their family to go to HE are less likely to say that they will apply to HE aged 18 or 19. Being a Uni Connect target learner is not associated with the likelihood a learner will apply. These findings emphasise the importance of a tailored outreach offer which ensures learners with specific characteristics are supported to make fully informed decisions about what to do after their current studies.

08. Conclusions

Continued investment in Phase Two of Uni Connect has resulted in the successful delivery of outreach activity to many young people. The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, together with features of the design and delivery of the programme, have precluded the possibility of attributing learner outcomes to participation in Uni Connect with any certainty. However, the findings from Wave 3 (W3) of the learner survey (carried out between October 2020 and February 2021) presented in this report offer several new insights not previously reported.

For the first time, learner attainment was included in the analysis, contributing to our understanding of its role in the development of knowledge and the likelihood that a learner will apply to higher education (HE). Exploring the impact of Covid-19 on the learning experience and the delivery of Uni Connect offers further insights into how the pandemic has affected perceptions of HE and which learners have been most adversely affected. The analysis adds to the existing evidence, including local evaluation findings by Uni Connect partnerships, on the specific elements of the programme that have a positive impact on learners' intermediate outcomes. Finally, these latest findings add to the growing body of evidence about which learner characteristics are positively or negatively associated with certain outcomes. This will enable future interventions to be appropriately targeted.

The key insights and recommendations presented below are designed to support partnerships to enhance their outreach offer so that the impact of Uni Connect is maximised and further progress towards the achievement of the programme's objectives is achieved.

Key insights

Covid-19 has adversely impacted the learner experience, with the W3 findings supporting wider evidence that economically-disadvantaged learners experienced significant barriers. These barriers also impacted the ability of learners to engage in programmes, such as Uni Connect, that had been designed to be delivered primarily face-to-face via schools and colleges.

In response to the pandemic, Uni Connect partnerships rapidly redesigned their activities so they could be delivered online. As a result, many learners were able to continue to access Uni Connect remotely. However, there is evidence that the barriers some learners experienced to home learning also inhibited their ability to engage with Uni Connect both during the first lockdown and also subsequently when schools and colleges reopened but were focussed on addressing learning loss. As a result, it appears that the effects of Covid-19 may have lessened the impact of Uni Connect on those who found it hardest to engage in the programme during this time.

Those that reported barriers to home learning appear to have acquired less knowledge of HE compared with those who experienced no issues. A reduction in the volume of face-to-face delivery and the cancellation of activities such as campus visits, which have been shown to have a positive impact on knowledge of HE, are likely to be a factor in the lower levels of knowledge acquired by some learners at W3 compared with W2. Interestingly, learners who experienced barriers to home learning do recognise the financial and wider benefits of HE. They are also slightly more likely to say that they intend to apply to HE aged 18 or 19. It will be important for future analysis to explore the characteristics of those that do and do not progress to HE to understand the ‘true’ impact of the pandemic on learners’ decisions.

In line with W2, tracking data shows that learners most frequently participate in multiple sessions of one type of activity, rather than a range of activities that constitute multi-intervention programmes. The W3 analysis suggests that it is the total number of hours spent engaging in Uni Connect that is associated with positive outcomes rather than the number of different types of activity, mirroring the way in which most learners engage with the programme.

While there is less evidence about the impact of individual activities on learner outcomes, evidence has emerged that corroborates local evaluation evidence: information, advice and guidance (IAG) along with campus visits appear to have a positive effect on learners’ knowledge, while mentoring appears to support learners to develop positive views about the benefits of HE. There is also evidence that masterclasses help to motivate learners to do well in their studies. Given the link between motivation and attainment, as well as the shift in the focus of Uni Connect towards attainment-raising, partnerships to continue to offer this type of provision. Incorporating IAG, mentoring and masterclasses as part of multi-intervention programmes is likely to enhance certain learner outcomes, particularly when role models that learners can identify with are involved in delivery.

A range of learner characteristics are consistently associated with higher levels of knowledge, attitudes and intentions towards HE, including being a BAME learner and Key Stage 2 (KS2) attainment. In contrast, several learner characteristics appear to be associated with less positive outcomes. Males, those with a disability and learners who would be the first in their family to go to HE have more negative attitudes towards HE, are less knowledgeable about HE and are less likely to intend to apply. Students in receipt of free school meals (FSM) are also less likely to intend to apply to HE. Further research into the specific barriers that these learners face will support the development of bespoke activities to help achieve Uni Connect’s ambition to reduce inequalities for under-represented groups.

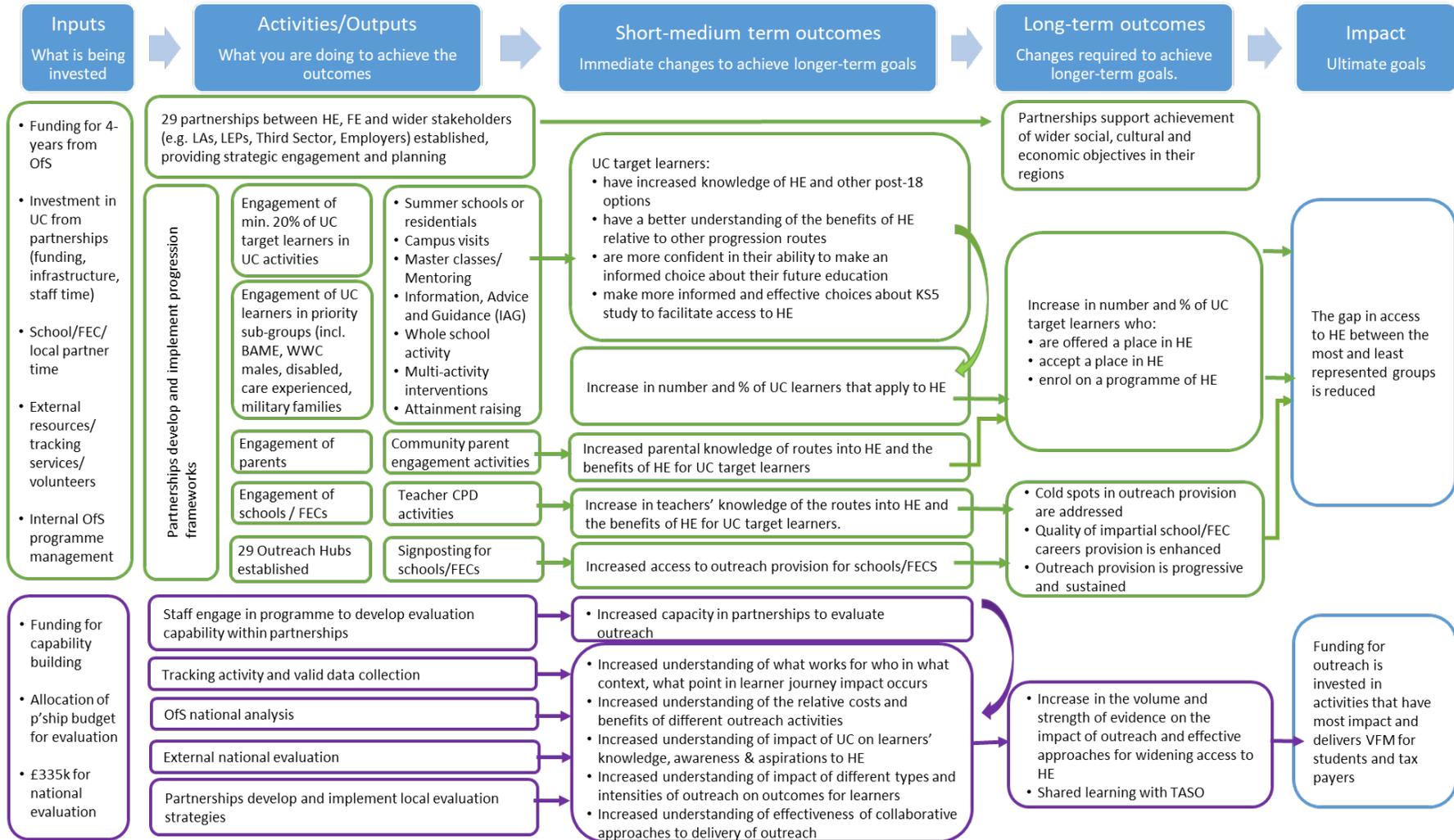
Speaking to someone about HE and key influencers such as family, teachers and careers advisers fulfil a positive role in supporting young people to acquire knowledge about HE. Friends appear to have a less positive influence. This highlights the key part that Uni Connect should continue to play in ensuring young people, their families and friends receive timely, accurate and impartial IAG to help them make fully-informed decisions.

Recommendations

The OfS has committed to supporting Uni Connect until 2024-25, subject to funding. Although it has not been possible to establish any causal impacts of the programme, there is a growing body of evidence at both local and national levels to suggest that sustained and progressive outreach can have a positive influence on outcomes for learners. This latest analysis of learner survey W3 provides some useful insights into the groups who appear to be gaining most from the programme as well as those who could benefit from further, more tailored support. The recommendations below are designed to support Uni Connect partnerships with the ongoing development and delivery of Uni Connect in Phase Three.

- Continue to offer sustained and progressive outreach in order to maximise the impact of Uni Connect on learners' outcomes. Focus primarily on the number of hours rather than the number of types of activity and draw on the wider evidence to determine which activity types are most likely to achieve desired outcomes.
- Deliver immersive experiences such as campus visits to ensure learners develop their knowledge of HE and a fuller understanding of student life, including the diverse range of people who study in HE.
- Provide access to mentoring to enable learners to develop their awareness of the financial and the wider benefits of HE.
- Ensure IAG focuses on the financial support available (in addition to the costs of HE) and the non-financial (as well as financial) benefits of HE to ensure concerns about cost do not deter learners from considering HE.
- Explore the factors that create negative perceptions of HE among males, disabled learners, those who would be the first in their family to go to HE and those who are more economically-disadvantaged, and which could deter them from applying.
- Deliver masterclasses to equip learners with the skills, confidence and self-belief that HE is an option for them.
- Use role models in the delivery of interventions for those who do not have access to networks of people with direct experience of HE.
- Deliver continuing professional development (CPD) for teachers and careers advisers to ensure they have the necessary skills and knowledge to support learners with their decision-making.
- Ensure other key influencers, such as friends and family members, have access to up-to-date and accurate information about HE.

APPENDIX 1: LOGIC MODEL FOR THE NATIONAL EVALUATION OF UNI CONNECT



Assumptions

- Partnerships provide strategic leadership, management and governance arrangements to maintain delivery of a collaborative approach
- Partnerships implement strategic plans to deliver a sustained and progressive programme of targeted outreach for young people in Years 9 and upwards in target wards
- Partnerships effectively engage with schools/FECs/SFCs and other stakeholders to target and deliver their activities
- Partnerships adapt their approach/activities to reflect changes in the local and/or national context
- Young people are on track to achieve the necessary levels of attainment at KS4 and KS5 to progress to HE
- Partnerships use data and emerging findings from evaluations to adapt and change their approach
- UC activity is aligned with broader outreach activity and outreach hubs

APPENDIX 2: SUMMARY TABLE OF FINDINGS

Knowledge of Higher Education

	HE offer (subjects on offer, routes and types of courses on offer at HE)	How to apply (qualifications and grades needed, where to locate information about how to apply, application process)	Knowledge of student life (what student life would be like, accommodation options)	Knowledge of costs and financial support available
Top line W3 learner survey findings for those who have participated in UC activity	<p>At W3, 93% of learners know about the ‘subjects on offer’; 80% know about the ‘types of courses on offer at HE’</p> <p>Slightly lower levels of knowledge at W3 compared to W2</p>	<p>At W3, 86% of learners know about ‘qualifications and grades needed’; 77% know ‘where to locate information about how to apply’; 68% know ‘how to apply’</p> <p>Slightly lower levels of knowledge at W3 compared to W2</p>	<p>At W3, 76% of learners are knowledgeable about ‘the options about where to live while studying’ and 68% know ‘what student life would be like’</p> <p>Slightly lower levels of knowledge at W3 compared to W2</p>	<p>At W3, 74% know about ‘the costs of study’ and 72% know about the ‘financial support available’</p> <p>Slightly lower levels of knowledge at W3 compared to W2</p>
Impact of duration of activity, number of different activities and individual activities	<p>No significant association between knowledge about the HE offer and duration of participation in Uni Connect (UC) activity and total number of different types of UC activity</p> <p>Positive association between IAG, campus visits and masterclasses and learners’ knowledge about the HE offer</p>	<p>No significant association between knowledge about how to apply and duration of participation in UC activity and total number of different types of UC activity</p> <p>Positive association between IAG and learners’ knowledge about ‘where to locate information about how to apply’</p>	<p>No significant association between knowledge of student life and duration of participation in UC activity and total number of different types of UC activity</p> <p>No individual activities associated with knowledge about student life</p>	<p>No significant association between knowledge of costs and financial support available and duration of participation in UC activity and total number of different types of UC activity</p> <p>Positive association between campus visits and learners’ knowledge about the ‘financial support available’</p>
Learner characteristics associated with the outcomes	<p>Higher levels of knowledge about the HE offer amongst:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learners who achieved higher KS2 Maths and Reading score 	<p>Higher levels of knowledge about how to apply amongst:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learners who achieved higher KS2 Maths score • Males • Learners in Year 10 and above 	<p>Higher levels of knowledge about how to apply amongst:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learners who achieved higher KS2 Maths score 	<p>Higher levels of knowledge about costs/financial support amongst:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learners who achieved higher KS2 Maths score

	<p>Lower levels of knowledge about the HE offer amongst:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disabled learners • First in family • Males • Learners from more economically disadvantaged backgrounds (IDACI) • Learners in Years 10-13 	<p>Lower levels of knowledge about how to apply amongst:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disabled learners • First in family 	<p>Lower levels of knowledge about student life amongst:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disabled learners • First in family • Males • Learners in Years 10-13 	<p>Lower levels of knowledge about student life amongst:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disabled learners • First in family • Learners in Years 10-13
<p>Wider factors associated with the outcomes</p>	<p>Higher levels of knowledge about the HE offer amongst:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Those who know someone in HE • Being influenced by careers advisor and teachers <p>Lower levels of knowledge about how to apply amongst:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Those influenced by friends • Those who experienced challenges with home learning during Covid-19 	<p>Higher levels of knowledge about how to apply amongst:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Those who know someone in HE • Being influenced by careers advisor and teachers <p>Lower levels of knowledge about how to apply amongst:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Those influenced by friends • Those who experienced challenges with home learning during Covid-19 	<p>Higher levels of knowledge about student life amongst:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Those who know someone in HE • Being influenced by family • Speaking to someone about HE <p>Lower levels of knowledge about how to apply amongst:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Those who experienced challenges with home learning during Covid-19 	<p>Higher levels of knowledge about costs and financial support available amongst:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Those who know someone in HE • Speaking to someone about HE

Understanding about the benefits of Higher Education relative to other progression routes

	Financial benefits of HE (careers that may be interested in, ability to earn more, ability to get better job)	Non-financial benefits of HE (broaden horizons, intellectual challenge, development of life skills, enhance social life)
Top line W3 learner survey findings for those who have participated in UC activity	<p>At W3, 85% of learners agree that HE would 'enable them to get a better job' and 81% agree that HE would 'enable them to earn more'</p> <p>Slightly higher proportion of learners hold positive perceptions about the financial benefits of HE at W3 compared to W2</p>	<p>At W3, 87% of learners agree that HE would 'challenge them intellectually'; 84% agree it would 'give them valuable life skills'; 79% agree it would 'broaden their horizons'; 71% agree it would 'improve their social life'</p> <p>Slightly higher proportion of learners hold positive perceptions about the financial benefits of HE at W3 compared to W2</p>
Impact of duration of activity, number of different activities and individual activities	<p>Participating in more hours of UC activity is positively associated with perceptions that HE enables learners to 'earn more'. No association with number of different activities</p> <p>Positive association between mentoring and perceptions about the financial benefits of HE</p>	<p>Participating in more hours of UC activity is positively associated with perceptions about the non-financial benefits of HE (exception 'development of life skills'). No association with number of different activities</p> <p>Positive association between mentoring and perceptions about the non-financial benefits of HE (exception 'development of life skills')</p>
Learner characteristics associated with the outcomes	<p>More positive outcomes about financial benefits amongst:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BAME learners • Learners who achieved higher KS2 Maths and Reading attainment • Learners in Years 11-13 • Learners from more economically disadvantaged (IDACI) backgrounds <p>More negative outcomes about financial benefits amongst:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disabled learners • Males • First in family learners 	<p>More positive outcomes about non-financial benefits amongst:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BAME learners • Learners who achieved higher KS2 Maths and Reading attainment <p>More negative outcomes about non-financial benefits amongst:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disabled learners • Males • First in family learners • Learners in Years 10-13 • Learners in receipt of FSM
Wider factors associated with the outcomes	<p>More positive outcomes about financial benefits amongst:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Those who know someone in HE • Those influenced by teachers, careers advisers and family members <p>More negative outcomes about financial benefits amongst:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Those influenced by friends 	<p>More positive outcomes about non-financial benefits amongst:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Those who know someone in HE • Those influenced by teachers, careers advisers and family members <p>More negative outcomes about financial benefits amongst:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Those influenced by friends

Likelihood learners will apply to Higher Education aged 18 or 19

	Self-efficacy (motivated to do well in studies, belief that can get grades needed for further study)	Confidence in academic abilities (academic ability to succeed, ability to cope with level of study required)	Social identity (HE is for people like me, belief that would fit in with other learners in HE)	Likelihood of applying to HE
Top line W3 learner survey findings for those who have participated in UC activity	<p>At W3, 86% of learners agree that they 'are motivated to do well' and 81% agree that they 'could get the grades'</p> <p>Slightly lower proportion of learners hold positive perceptions about their self-efficacy at W3 compared to W2</p>	<p>At W3, 72% agree that they have the 'academic ability to succeed' and 60% that they could 'cope with the level of study required'</p> <p>Comparable proportion of learners hold positive perceptions about their academic abilities at W2 and W3</p>	<p>At W3, 47% agree that HE is 'for people like me' and 59% agree that they would 'fit in well with other learners in HE'</p> <p>Comparable proportion of learners hold positive perceptions about their social identity towards HE at W2 and W3</p>	<p>At W3, 79% of learners intend to apply to HE aged 18 or 19. This has increased from 67% at the W2 position</p>
Impact of duration of activity, number of different activities and individual activities	<p>Participating in more hours of UC activity is positively associated with being motivated to do well in studies. No association with number of different activities</p> <p>Positive association between masterclasses and perceptions about motivations to do well in studies</p>	<p>No significant association between confidence in academic abilities and duration of participation in UC activity and total number of different types of UC activity</p> <p>Negative association between skills and attainment workshops and learner confidence in academic abilities.</p>	<p>No significant association between social identity and duration of participation in UC activity and total number of different types of UC activity</p> <p>No individual activities associated with knowledge about student life</p>	<p>Participating in more hours of UC activity is positively associated with likelihood of applying to HE</p> <p>Total number of activities and no individual activities associated with likelihood to apply to HE</p>
Learner characteristics associated with the outcomes	<p>Higher levels of self-efficacy amongst:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learners who achieved higher KS2 Maths attainment • Males (although they report being less motivated) 	<p>Higher levels of confidence in academic abilities amongst:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learners who achieved higher KS2 attainment in Maths and Reading • Males • BAME learners 	<p>Higher levels of social identity amongst:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learners who achieved higher KS2 attainment in Maths and Reading • BAME learners 	<p>Higher likelihood to apply to HE amongst:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BAME learners • Higher KS2 Maths and reading attainment • Learners in Years 10, 12, 13 • More economically disadvantaged learners (IDACI)

	<p>Lower levels of self-efficacy amongst:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disabled learners • First in family learners • More economically disadvantaged learners (ever in receipt of FSM) 	<p>Lower levels of confidence in academic abilities amongst:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disabled learners • First in family learners • More economically disadvantaged learners (ever in receipt of FSM) • Learners in Years 10-13 	<p>Lower levels of social identity amongst:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disabled learners • First in family learners • More economically disadvantaged learners (ever in receipt of FSM and IDACI) • Learners in Years 10-13 • Males 	<p>Lower likelihood to apply to HE amongst:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disabled learners • Males • First in family learners
<p>Wider factors associated with the outcomes</p>	<p>Higher levels of self-efficacy amongst:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Those who know someone in HE • Those who have spoken to someone about HE • Being influenced by careers adviser and teachers <p>Lower levels of self-efficacy amongst:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Those influenced by friends • Those who experienced challenges with home learning during Covid-19 	<p>Higher levels of confidence in academic abilities amongst:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Those who know someone in HE • Those who have spoken to someone about HE • Being influenced by careers adviser and teachers <p>Lower levels of confidence in academic abilities amongst:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Those influenced by friends • Those who experienced challenges with home learning during Covid-19 	<p>Higher levels of social identify amongst:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Those who know someone in HE • Those who have spoken to someone about HE • Being influenced by careers adviser and teachers <p>Lower levels of social identity amongst:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Those influenced by friends • Those who experienced challenges with home learning during Covid-19 	<p>Higher likelihood to apply to HE amongst:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Those who know someone at HE, speaking to someone about HE and when teachers and career advisers are key influencers • Those who were asked to help out with family members during Covid-19 home learning <p>Lower likelihood to apply to HE amongst:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Those influenced by friends

APPENDIX 3: WAVE 3 SURVEY – PART 1 (CORE) QUESTIONS

1. Which year of study are you in?

- School - year 9
- School - year 10
- School - year 11
- College - level 2
- Sixth form - year 12 (lower sixth)
- Sixth form - year 13 (upper sixth)
- College - level 3 - year 1
- College - level 3 - year 2

2. When you finish your current studies, what would you most like to do next? [response options routed according to Key Stage]

- Study at school or a sixth-form college
- Study at a further education college
- Get a full-time job
- Get a part-time job
- Study higher education at a further education college or other further education provider
- Study at a local university or another higher education institution
- Study away from home at university or another higher education institution
- Get a job and study at the same time
- Begin an apprenticeship
- Begin a higher/degree apprenticeship
- Take a gap year
- Other (*please specify*) _____
- Don't know

3. Who have you spoken to about higher education?

- Family
- Friend(s)
- Teacher(s)
- Careers adviser(s)
- Other (*please specify*) _____
- Nobody

4. Apart from yourself, who has had the greatest influence on your decision about what to do next?

- Family
- Friend(s)
- Teacher(s)
- Careers adviser(s)
- Other (*please specify*) _____

5. How much do you agree with the following statements?

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Don't know
I am motivated to do well in my studies	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can get the grades I need for further study	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I believe I could go to university if I wanted to	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

6. How much do you know about the following things about higher education?

	Nothing	A little	A lot
The subjects that you could study	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Different types of course, such as: degree, foundation degree, or higher/degree apprenticeships	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
How to apply to study higher education	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Where to find information about applying	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The qualifications and grades needed to get into higher education	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

7. How much do you know about the following aspects of higher education?

	Nothing	A little	A lot
What student life would be like	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
How it leads to careers that you may be interested in	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The costs of study	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The financial support available	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The options about where to live whilst studying	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

8. Have you applied to study at higher education? [Sixth form year 13 (upper sixth) or College level 3 (year 2) only],

Yes *Please go to question 11*

No *Please go to question 9*

9. How likely are you to apply to higher education at age 18 or 19?

Definitely won't apply *Please go to question 10*

Very unlikely *Please go to question 10*

Fairly unlikely *Please go to question 10*

Fairly likely *Please go to question 11*

Very likely *Please go to question 11*

Definitely will apply *Please go to question 11*

Don't know *Please go to question 10*

10. What is the main reason you might NOT go on to study higher education?

- My current qualifications are enough
- I have decided on a specific career (that does not require further study)
- I want to work and earn money
- The cost is too much
- It depends on the grades I get
- I don't have the necessary study skills
- It does not appeal to me
- I want to travel
- I am still undecided
- There is nowhere close enough to home
- Other reason (*please specify*) _____

11. What is the main reason you want to go to higher education?

- I enjoy learning
- To enable me to get a well-paid job
- It's what my parents expect me to do
- It's what all my friends are planning to do
- My teachers have encouraged me to go
- I don't know what else to do
- I don't feel ready to start working yet
- Other reason (*please specify*) _____

12. How much do you agree with the following statements about higher education?

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Don't know
It is for people like me	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would fit in well with others	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have the academic ability to succeed	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I could cope with the level of study required	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

13. How much do you agree with the following statements about higher education?

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Don't know
It will broaden my horizons	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It will challenge me intellectually	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It will give me valuable life skills	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It will improve my social life	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It will enable me to earn more	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It will enable me to get a better job	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

14. If you go on to higher education, would you be the first person in your immediate family to go?

- Yes
- No - my grandparent(s) went first
- No - my parent(s) or guardian(s) went first
- No - my brother(s) or sister(s) went first
- Don't know

15. Do you know somebody else who has gone on to higher education?

Please select all that apply

- No
- Yes - another family member
- Yes - a friend
- Don't know
- Other (please specify) _____

16. Do you have a disability, learning difficulty or long-term physical or mental health condition?

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say

17. What is your gender?

- Female
- Male
- Other
- Prefer not to say

18. Which of the following ethnic groups do you belong to?

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="radio"/> White - British | <input type="radio"/> Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi |
| <input type="radio"/> White - Irish | <input type="radio"/> Other Asian background |
| <input type="radio"/> White - Scottish | <input type="radio"/> Mixed White and Asian |
| <input type="radio"/> Other White background | <input type="radio"/> Chinese |
| <input type="radio"/> Black or Black British - Caribbean | <input type="radio"/> Arab |
| <input type="radio"/> Black or Black British - African | <input type="radio"/> Irish Traveller |
| <input type="radio"/> Other Black background | <input type="radio"/> Gypsy or Traveller |
| <input type="radio"/> Mixed White and Black Caribbean | <input type="radio"/> Other ethnic background |
| <input type="radio"/> Mixed White and Black African | <input type="radio"/> Any other mixed background |
| <input type="radio"/> Asian or Asian British - Indian | <input type="radio"/> Prefer not to say |
| <input type="radio"/> Asian or Asian British - Pakistani | |

APPENDIX 4: ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR WAVE 3 SURVEY

Has Covid-19 influenced your decision about what to do next?

- No, not at all
- Yes, to some extent
- Yes, a great deal
- I'm not sure

Where did you study between March and July 2020 during the Covid-19 lockdown?

- I stayed in school / college (1)
- I went to school/college and studied from home (2)
- I studied from home (3)

[Respondents who studies from home all or some of the time] Did any of the following make it more difficult for you to continue learning at home? Please tick all that apply

- Lack of a computer that you could use for your school/college work
- Lack of other equipment or resources that you would normally have in school/college to help you learn
- Poor or no Wi-Fi connection at home
- Limited contact with tutor and/or subject teachers at school/college
- Lack of a quiet space to study
- Being asked to help out with other family members, such as younger brothers and sisters
- Parents/carers unable to help with school/college work
- Nothing, I had everything I needed to continue learning at home [exclusive]

Has Covid-19 affected your decision about whether or not to apply to higher education at age 18 or 19?

- Yes, I'm now more likely to apply
- Yes, I'm now less likely to apply
- No, I'm just as likely to apply to now as I was before Covid-19
- I'm not sure

What is the main reason you want to go to higher education? [Option added to core question 11]

- It will be too hard to get a job because of Covid-19

What is the main reason you might not go on to higher education? [Option added to core question 10]

- Covid-19 has put me off going to higher education