

The impact of Uni Connect on intermediate outcomes for learners

A report on the learner survey
findings after Wave 4

October 2023

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Glossary

APP	Access and participation plan
AWM	Aimhigher West Midlands – tracking organisation
BAME	Black, Asian and minority ethnic
CPD	Continuing professional development
EMWPREP	East Midlands Widening Participation Research and Evaluation Partnership – tracking organisation
EORR	Equal Opportunities Risk Register
FE	Further education
FEC	Further education college
FSM	Free School Meals
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
HE	Higher education
HEAT	Higher Education Access Tracker – tracking organisation
IAG	Information, advice and guidance
IDACI	Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index
KS2	Key Stage 2 – stage in primary education from Year 4 to Year 6 when pupils take Standard Assessment Tests (SATs)
KS4	Key Stage 4 – stage in secondary education from Year 10 to Year 11 when pupils take GCSEs or equivalent qualifications
LA	Local authority
LEP	Local Enterprise Partnership
NPD	National Pupil Database
OfS	Office for Students
ONS	Office for National Statistics
SAT	Standard Assessment Test – national curriculum tests for pupils in Key Stage 2 (Year 6)
SFC	Scottish Funding Council
TASO	Transforming Access and Student Outcomes in Higher Education – affiliate What Works Centre
UC	Uni Connect
UCAS	Universities and Colleges Admissions Service
VFM	Value for money

W0	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)
W4	Wave 4 – fourth follow-up of the learner survey (Autumn 2021)
Wi-Fi	Wireless technology used to connect computers, tablets, smartphones and other devices to the Internet
WWC	White working class

Executive summary

The national impact evaluation of the Uni Connect programme has been tracking learners' perceptions of their knowledge, attitudes and intentions towards higher education (HE) through an annual learner survey since the 2017-18 academic year to provide insight into the likely impact of the programme on the progression of underrepresented groups. This report has been produced following the final wave of the survey (Wave 4) administered in 2021. It explores the characteristics of Uni Connect that are associated with higher levels of knowledge and positive attitudes towards HE among respondents. It also examines the extent to which the programme has contributed to changes in learners' knowledge and attitudes since 2019-20 (Wave 2). The report draws on the findings to identify the ways in which Uni Connect is currently helping to reduce the risks that can act as barriers to access and its potential to have further impact in the context of the new approach to regulating equality of opportunity in English HE.¹

Aims of Uni Connect

Uni Connect was launched² in January 2017 to help increase the proportion of learners applying to HE from areas where participation was low overall and lower than expected given their GCSE attainment.³ Since its launch, the programme has evolved in response to changes in policy and strategic priorities as well as the Covid-19 pandemic. It has, however, remained true to its original aims of reducing the participation gap between the most and least represented groups and developing a stronger evidence base on 'what works' in HE outreach. Since the outset, 29 university-led partnerships have been funded to deliver activities to learners in Years 9 to 13 to help them understand the benefits and realities of HE and make informed decisions. The programme is now placing greater emphasis on minimising other barriers that present a risk to HE access, including lack of attainment. From 2023-24, partnerships will work with schools to help the raise the attainment of learners in Years 7 to 11.

Impact evaluation

The national impact evaluation has involved an annual survey of learners' perceptions of their knowledge, skills, attitudes and intentions towards HE and regular syntheses of partnerships' evaluation evidence on the impact of their activities at a local level. The baseline survey was conducted in autumn 2017 before most learners had engaged in any Uni Connect activity. Four follow-up waves were subsequently conducted to monitor and measure change (See table overleaf).

¹ Twelve key risks impacting the sector are identified in an [Equality of Opportunity Risk Register](#).

² Funding for the programme was distributed by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) until it was replaced by the Office for Students (OfS) in 2018.

³ Learners in 997 wards were targeted by partnerships during the initial phases of the programme.

Survey waves

Uni Connect Phase	Survey wave	Academic year
Phase 1	Baseline – Wave 0 (W0)	2017-18
Phase 1	Wave 1 Follow-up (W1)	2018-19
Phase 2	Wave 2 Follow-up (W2)	2019-20
Phase 2	Wave 3 Follow-up (W3)	2020-21
Phase 3	Wave 4 Follow-up (W4)	2021-22

Both Uni Connect target learners and non-target learners in Years 9 to 13 completed the baseline and each follow-up survey. Although partnerships were encouraged to disseminate the follow-up surveys to learners who had completed the baseline (or a previous survey wave), only a small proportion of respondents has been successfully tracked across multiple waves.⁴ Each year, the sample included first time respondents (including new Year 9s) and a proportion of those who completed the baseline dropped out as they progressed into post-18 options. Throughout the programme, but particularly after targeting was relaxed, some ‘non-target’ learners received Uni Connect activity. Both Uni Connect target and non-target learners are also likely to have received outreach from individual HE providers. The size and characteristics of the samples at each wave, the attrition rate between waves, and changes in the way Uni Connect was targeted and delivered have determined the possible and limited the extent to which the evaluation can attribute impacts to the programme. The challenges of establishing the impact of Uni Connect at a programme level have been summarised in a previous paper.⁵

The findings in this report are based on regression analysis to identify the characteristics associated with perceived knowledge, skills, attitudes and intentions towards HE among a cohort of 42,466 respondents to the W4 (2021-22) survey, and the characteristics associated with changes between W2 (2019-20) and W4 (2021-22) based on a sub-sample of 4,034 learners who completed both surveys. The survey data has been linked to tracking information and the National Pupil Database to enable the following factors to be accounted for in the analysis:

- **Learner demographics:** gender, ethnicity, disability, socio-economic status, prior attainment and age (year group).
- **Programme characteristics:** engagement in Uni Connect, number of hours of engagement, number of types of activity engaged in, and activity type.

In addition, indicators of social capital (first in family to go to HE, knowing someone with HE experience, speaking to someone about HE and key influencers on learners’

⁴ Further details on the sample and rate of attrition is provided in CFE (2023) [The impact of Uni Connect on intermediate outcomes for learners after Wave 4: Technical annex](#).

⁵ CFE (2022) [Establishing the impact of Uni Connect at the programme level. Lesson learned from implementing a quasi-experimental approach](#). Published online by the OfS.

decisions) and perceptions of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic are also included in the regression models.

It is important to note when considering the findings that all outcomes measured in the survey are self-reported and based on learner perceptions. The baseline measures (W0, 2017-18) for all outcomes were high and the outcomes remain unchanged for a large proportion of respondents between W2 (2019-20) and W4 (2021-22).⁶ The lack of variability in the responses limits our ability to identify the predictors of change. Furthermore, the high baseline could mean that the impact of Uni Connect is under-reported.⁷

Key insights

One of the Office for Students' (OfS) principal strategic objectives is that 'all students, from all backgrounds, with the ability and desire to undertake HE are supported to access, succeed in, and progress from HE'.⁸ Uni Connect is supporting the achievement of this objective by enabling learners to make informed decisions, motivating them to do well and helping them to develop the skills and confidence to successfully apply. In the future, the programme will also help to reduce barriers to access by supporting learners to achieve high attainment. The key insights from the evaluation are the following:

There is evidence that Uni Connect can have a positive influence on learner outcomes when delivered as a multi-intervention approach. The level of change in learners' outcomes is limited because most learners perceived that they had some knowledge of HE and agreed that they were motivated and had the capability to succeed prior to engaging in the programme. However, it is also possible that learners overestimated their level of knowledge at baseline (W0, 2017-18), and despite their knowledge increasing over time, they provided the same (but more accurate) responses at subsequent waves, thus masking any change. Although the latest analysis provides limited evidence that Uni Connect contributed to the changes that did occur between W2 (2019-20) and W4 (2021-22), there are positive associations between key programme characteristics (particularly engagement in different types of activity) and specific interventions (particularly campus visits and mentoring) and a number of reported outcomes for the W4 (2021-22) cohort. Continuing to deliver these interventions is, therefore, likely to help mitigate the risks to equality of opportunity to access HE for underrepresented groups in the future.

Certain characteristics continue to be associated with more and less positive learner outcomes among the W4 (2021-22) cohort. Those who have ever been eligible for free school meals (FSM), learners with a disability and those who are, or are likely to be, the first in their family to go to HE consistently report lower outcomes than higher achievers and those who are networked with people who have HE

⁶ The modal change is zero in all cases.

⁷ This is known as the Dunning-Kruger effect.

⁸ [Office for Students Strategy for 2022 to 2025](#). Published online in March 2022. Ref OfS 2022.15

experience. Being a target learner has no effect on reported outcomes when individual learner characteristics are accounted for. This suggests that targeting at this level may be less effective and that current interventions are not addressing barriers for some sub-groups. More tailored interventions for particular groups may have more impact.

The evaluation findings provide further evidence that Covid-19 has disproportionately affected some groups of learners who were already disadvantaged and underrepresented in HE. The implications of Covid-19 for young people's educational attainment and social and emotional wellbeing present a risk to equality of opportunity and the achievement of access and participation goals. Encouragingly, and despite the challenges many survey respondents reported they experienced during the pandemic, only a small proportion of the W4 (2021-22) cohort are now less likely to apply to HE and, for some, it has provided the impetus to progress. However, in view of the learning and wider opportunities for young people to develop their skills and confidence that were lost during this time, disadvantaged learners in particular are likely to need additional support to catch up and achieve their own goals. With an increased emphasis on attainment raising and continued focus on improving access to information and guidance and challenging perceptions of HE, Uni Connect can help to mitigate some of the risks to equality of opportunity posed by the pandemic.

The W4 (2021-22) cohort are equally knowledgeable about HE and the associated benefits as previous cohorts of respondents overall. Knowledge levels may have been expected to drop in view of the challenges many learners faced during the pandemic and the impact these had on their engagement in learning and Uni Connect, particularly while activities were delivered remotely. Encouragingly, respondents at W4 (2021-22) continue to recognise that HE can lead to careers they are interested in, and those who aspire to HE are commonly motivated by a desire to get a good job. Learners also recognise some of the ways in which HE supports their personal development, by challenging them intellectually and supporting the development of valuable life skills. Learners are less convinced that HE will broaden their horizons and enhance their social life. Wider evidence suggests that financial pressures brought on by the current cost of living crisis are resulting in more HE students undertaking paid part-time work to support their studies.⁹ This is having a detrimental impact on the HE student experience of those in lower income households in particular, including opportunities to socialise and engage in extra-curricular activities. It is therefore important for Uni Connect to continue to provide information on the costs of HE, the financial support available and the benefits of HE, including the potential return on the investment, to help learners make informed decisions and mitigate the risk of them being put off by financial concerns.

The people learners talk to and are influenced by appear to have a significant effect on their perceptions of HE and their ability to fit in and succeed. Key

⁹ Advance HE and the Higher Education Policy Institute (2023) [Student Academic Experience Survey 2023](#). Published online.

influencers have contributed to changes in learners' outcomes and have shaped current knowledge, perceptions and intentions. The evaluation findings provide further evidence that engaging key influencers in outreach is essential and could help to mitigate the risks to access to HE. However, information on the HE offer and practical considerations such as cost and financial support is unlikely to be sufficient. Influencers also have a role in supporting and encouraging learners to believe in themselves and that HE is an option for them. Staff development and parent and carer interventions should, therefore, also seek to address this. This insight also suggests that the role of personalised interventions such as mentoring could be growing in importance, given the emerging evidence that they are effective for developing confidence, resilience and positive perceptions of HE. This is particularly the case when interventions are delivered by people with whom learners identify and who reflect their own characteristics.

Risks to equality of access for Uni Connect target learners

The national impact evaluation findings suggests that some learners within the Uni Connect target group remain at risk of experiencing inequality of opportunity to access HE. These learners should therefore be a priority for Uni Connect partnerships and institutional outreach teams going forward.

Learners from lower socio-economic groups, those with a disability, and those who would be the first in their family to go to HE are at particular risk of not developing an accurate understanding of HE, including the costs and financial support available, and the potential return on the investment in HE. This is, in part, because they are less likely to have access to informal networks, which the evaluation demonstrates have a significant influence on learners' knowledge and decision-making; a further contributing factor is that for financial reasons they are less able to engage with activities that the evaluation shows have a positive impact on learners' knowledge and understanding of HE, such as campus visits, and this is exacerbated by the rise in the cost of living.¹⁰

The national evaluation also provides further evidence that the Covid-19 pandemic had a detrimental impact on engagement in learning and outreach activities for the Uni Connect target group. Although aspirations and intentions towards HE remain high, without support to address learning loss, some learners will be at risk of not attaining at the level required to progress into HE and to the providers and courses that will enable them to fulfil their potential. However, the evaluation findings suggest that support to improve learners' self-efficacy is equally important for challenging negative perceptions of HE, which can be more prevalent among Uni Connect target learners, and ensuring learners have the motivation, self-confidence, self-belief and resilience to progress to and succeed in HE.

¹⁰ UCAS (June, 2023). [Student lifestyle report 2023 – The cost of living.](#)

Recommendations

This latest analysis of the learner surveys provides further insights into the groups who appear to be gaining most from Uni Connect as well as those who could benefit from further, more tailored support. It also highlights which characteristics of the programme and wider influences appear to impact most on learners' knowledge, attitudes and behaviours. The recommendations below are designed to support Uni Connect partnerships with the ongoing development and delivery of the programme as well as the wider sector as it seeks to respond to the new approach to regulating access and participation and develop risk-based approaches to ensuring equality of opportunity.

In the context of the new risk-based approach, Uni Connect partnerships and individual HE providers should:

- Continue to offer sustained and progressive outreach to maximise the impact of Uni Connect on learners' outcomes.
- Embed personalised support, such as mentoring and masterclasses, with lighter-touch activities, such as campus visits, in a multi-intervention approach to ensure learners develop confidence and resilience as well as knowledge and skills.
- Continue to ensure information, advice and guidance (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 that concerns about cost do not deter learners from considering HE and from considering providers outside their local area in the current economic climate.
- 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 deliver targeted interventions to challenge 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 interventions for key influencers, including continuing professional development (CPD) for teachers and careers advisers, and information for parents/carers, so they have the necessary knowledge to support learners with their decision-making and help learners understand that HE is an option for them.
- Work with schools and colleges to support attainment-raising to ensure learners achieve the level required to fulfil their potential and realise their ambitions.

1. Introduction

The aim of the national impact evaluation of the Uni Connect programme is to provide insight into the likely impact of the programme on progression to higher education (HE) by measuring changes in learners' knowledge, skills, attitudes and intentions towards HE, and establishing the extent to which these can be attributed to Uni Connect. This final report of the independent national evaluation by CFE Research examines changes between 2019-20 (Survey Wave 2) and 2021-22 (Survey Wave 4) and the learner and programme characteristics that are associated with reported outcomes. As the period covered by this analysis includes the academic years most affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, learners' perceptions of the impact of the pandemic on their ability to engage in their education are accounted for in the results.

The Uni Connect programme

Uni Connect was launched¹¹ in January 2017 to contribute to the achievement of two policy commitments made by the government of the time: to increase the proportion of disadvantaged young people and those from Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) backgrounds going into HE. Uni Connect funded 29 university-led partnerships to provide sustained and progressive outreach to learners in Years 9 to 13 in areas¹² where HE participation was low overall and lower than expected given the GCSE attainment of the young people who lived there. Partnerships worked with schools and colleges to deliver a range of activities to help target learners develop the knowledge, skills and confidence to make well-informed decisions, with a view to increasing the proportion that successfully progressed to HE.

The fundamental aims of Uni Connect, to reduce the gap in HE participation between the most and least represented groups, and to develop a stronger evidence base on 'what works' in HE outreach, have remained largely unchanged. However, the objectives have evolved in response to changes in policy and strategic priorities, as well as to the Covid-19 pandemic which disrupted education and the delivery of Uni Connect in academic years 2019-20 and 2020-21. In the current phase.¹³ partnerships are focussing on the development of 'a strategic local infrastructure' to address 'cold spots' in provision (geographical and for specific under-represented groups, including adults if appropriate) and provide signposting to HE information, advice and guidance (IAG) and outreach for any school and college.¹⁴ A greater emphasis is also being placed on minimising barriers for learners, including low

¹¹ Funding for the programme was distributed by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) until it was replaced by the Office for Students in 2018.

¹² Learners in 997 wards (administrative/electoral area to which postcode has been assigned) were targeted by partnerships during the initial phases of the programme.

¹³ Phase one ran from January 2017 to July 2019 and Phase two ran from August 2019 to July 2021. Phase three will run from August 2021 to July 2025.

¹⁴ The programme aims are set out in full on [the Uni Connect section](#) of the OfS website.

attainment. Partnerships are developing evidence-based collaborative approaches to raise attainment among learners in Years 7 to 11 from 2023-24. This represents a significant departure from the original programme aims which sought to target learners from Year 9 upwards who were already on track to achieve the level of attainment necessary to progress to HE.

The shift in emphasis for Uni Connect reflects broader changes in the priorities and regulation of access to and participation in HE in England, including the introduction of a new risk-based approach to addressing barriers to equality of opportunity for under-represented groups.¹⁵ The Office for Students (OfS) has issued new guidance¹⁶ and regulatory advice¹⁷ for HE providers on preparing their access and participation plans (APPs). When writing their plans, providers are now expected to consider 12 sector-wide risks identified in an Equality of Opportunity Risk Register (EORR)¹⁸ that may affect a student's opportunity to access and succeed in HE. Although access and participation plans are a requirement for certain HE providers¹⁹ and not Uni Connect partnerships, the programme has the potential to fulfil a role in mitigating the risks to equality of access identified in the register:

- **Risk 1: Knowledge and skills:** Students may not have equal opportunity to develop the knowledge and skills required to be accepted onto HE courses that match their expectations and ambitions.
- **Risk 2: Information and guidance:** Students may not have equal opportunity to receive the information and guidance that will enable them to develop ambition and expectations, or to make an informed choice about their HE options.
- **Risk 3: Perception of higher education:** Students may not feel able to apply to HE, or to certain types of providers within HE, despite being qualified.

This report draws on insights from the evaluation to identify the ways in which Uni Connect is currently helping to reduce these risks and its potential to have further impact in the context of the new regulatory environment.

¹⁵ The Office for Students launched a [consultation](#) on its proposals for a new approach in October 2022. It published its [response](#) along with its intention to proceed with its proposals in March 2023.

¹⁶ [Regulatory notice 1: Access and participation plan guidance:](#)

¹⁷ [Regulatory advice 6: How to prepare your access and participation plan](#)

¹⁸ [About the risk register](#)

¹⁹ A university or college must have an APP if it is registered with the OfS in the 'Approved (fee cap)' category and it wants to charge above the basic tuition fee cap.

2. Evaluating the impact of Uni Connect

This chapter summarises the methodology used to collect and analyse the data presented in this report. Further details on how the dataset was constructed, the analytical approach and the outputs from the regression models undertaken are provided in a separate technical annex.²⁰

Evaluation aim and objectives

The aim of the national impact evaluation of Uni Connect is to measure reported changes in intermediate outcomes that can impact on learners' propensity to apply to HE. This includes knowledge of HE and its potential benefits, motivation and confidence, and future intentions, and establishing the extent to which these can be attributed to Uni Connect. The findings complement the OfS's analysis of national datasets that is seeking 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' evidence on the impact of Uni Connect at a local level, is published online.²¹

Learner survey

Learners' intermediate outcomes have been collected via an annual longitudinal survey. The survey design was informed by a Theory of Change which was developed at the outset of the programme and updated in 2019 (see Appendix 1) and an associated bank of indicators (Figure 1 overleaf). A baseline (Wave 0) was set in autumn 2017 by surveying learners in Years 9 to 13 in schools and colleges that were engaging with the 29 Uni Connect partnerships but before most learners had engaged in any Uni Connect activity. Four follow-up survey waves have subsequently been administered, as outlined in Table 1.

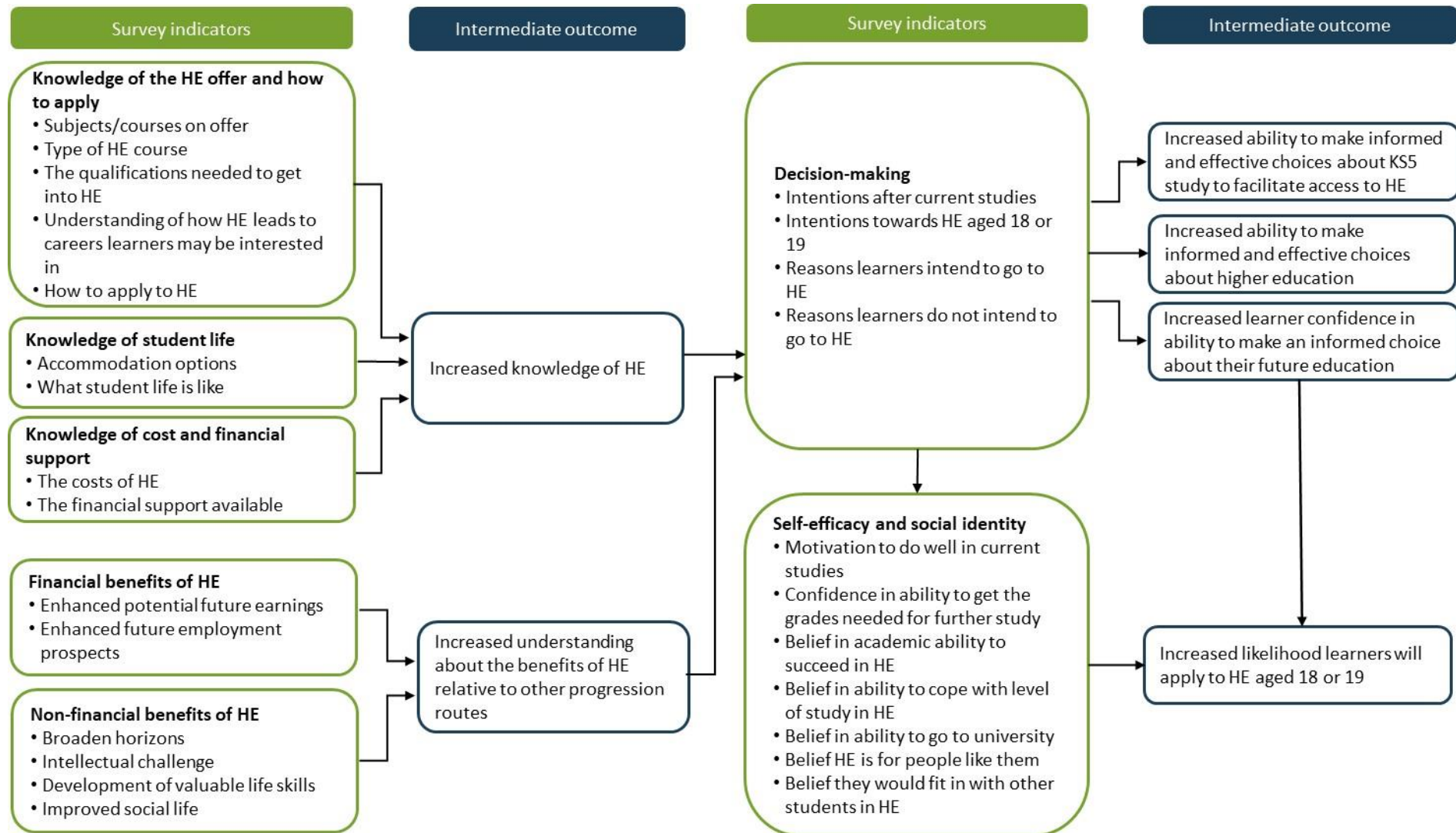
Table 1: Survey waves

Uni Connect phase	Survey wave	Academic year
Phase 1	Baseline (Wave 0)	2017-18
Phase 1	1 st Follow-up (Wave 1)	2018-19
Phase 2	2 nd Follow-up (Wave 2)	2019-20
Phase 2	3 rd Follow-up (Wave 3)	2020-21
Phase 3	4 th Follow-up (Wave 4)	2021-22

²⁰ CFE (2023) [The impact of Uni Connect on intermediate outcomes for learners after Wave 4: Technical annex](#).

²¹ The latest analysis is published on the [OfS website](#).

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



The baseline (W0, 2017-18) survey was administered by partnerships via schools and colleges. Respondents included both target and non-target Uni Connect learners. At each follow-up wave, partnerships were strongly encouraged to administer the survey to learners who had responded to a previous survey wave to enable changes to be tracked at the level of the individual. In practice, some schools and colleges adopted a census approach, administering the survey to whole classes or year groups to minimise the logistical burden. Consequently, a range of learners responded to each follow up, including those who had moved into Year 9 that academic year and those in Years 10-13 who had not respond to a previous wave of the survey.

Wave 4 survey

The Wave 4 (W4) survey was administered between October and December 2021. The core (part 1) questions in the survey have remained largely unaltered since the baseline (W0, 2017-18). However, additional questions to capture learners' perceptions of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on their education and engagement with Uni Connect were added at Wave 3 (W3, 2020-21) so that the effects could be accounted for in the analysis (see Appendix 2). These questions were also included at W4 (2021-22). At each survey wave, partnerships have also 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.

Data linking

Once the W4 (2021-22) survey closed, the data was matched with the responses from the W2 (2019-20) and W3 (2020-21) surveys to create a master longitudinal dataset.²² This dataset was then matched with the latest available activity data collated by the tracking organisations at the level of the individual.²³ This dataset was then matched with administrative data on learners' socio-economic status and prior educational attainment in the National Pupil Database (NPD).²⁴ Two standardised Key Stage 2 (KS2) attainment measures were generated using the NPD data based on learners' Standard Assessment Test (SAT) scores for maths and reading.²⁵ These, along with a measure of socio-economic disadvantage 'EVERFSM'²⁶ and Key

²² By W4 (2021-22), a significant number of respondents to the baseline (W0, 2017-18) and first follow-up survey (W1, 2018-19) had dropped out of the longitudinal sample. The remaining sample was insufficient to analyse change at the level of the individual between W0 and W4.

²³ Tracking organisations include Aimhigher West Midlands (AWM), the East Midlands Widening Participation Research and Evaluation Partnership (EMWPREP) and the Higher Education Access Tracker (HEAT).

²⁴ The NPD data, provided by the Office for National Statistics, was accessed via the Secure Research Service. On the ONS metadata catalogue, this dataset is called 'Grading and Admissions Data England-Ofqual-DfE', with the DOI: <https://doi.org/10.57906/4phz-dq28>

²⁵ A standardised measure was created to account for changes in the way SATs scores were calculated for the cohorts participating in Uni Connect.

²⁶ Pupils who have ever been recorded as eligible for free school meals (FSM) on Census Day in any Spring census up to their current year.

Stage 4 (KS4) attainment²⁷ were used in conjunction with demographic data collected in the survey to support the analysis. It was not possible to link every survey response with NPD data. As a result, the sample available for the regression analysis described below is smaller than the number of responses to each survey wave overall.

Data analysis

Previous reports for the independent national impact evaluation have demonstrated that it is not possible compare the outcomes of learners who engage in Uni Connect (the treatment group) with the outcomes of those with the same characteristics who do not (the control group) in order to robustly establish the impact of the programme.²⁸ In order to provide insight into the characteristics of the programme, along with other factors, that may be contributing to the outcomes achieved by learners, descriptive and multivariate analysis has been undertaken on the linked master dataset.

Descriptive analysis

Each section of this report begins with a description of the outcomes reported by all respondents at W2 (2019-20) and W4 (2021-22). Although a small subset of learners responded to both surveys (see below), these samples are largely comprised of different individuals. The descriptive analysis therefore compares the raw differences between the respondents to the two survey waves without taking into account learner characteristics or level of engagement in Uni Connect; as such it is possible that any differences in outcomes could be explained by differences in samples, rather than Uni Connect. The purpose of this analysis is to highlight potential trends across the survey waves and place the multivariate analysis described below in context. The descriptive analysis is based on the achieved samples before the data was linked to the NPD, which were 83,385 at W2 (2019-20) and 55,177 at W4 (2021-22).²⁹

Multivariate analysis

Regression analysis was carried out using the master dataset linked to the NPD data on the 25 outcomes measured in the learner survey (see Figure 1). Probit regressions were carried out on binary outcomes (e.g., learners with some knowledge compared with learners with no knowledge) and linear regressions on ordinal outcomes (e.g., level of agreement). The first set of models focussed on the outcomes for the Wave 4 (2021-22) cohort. The maximum sample available for this analysis was 42,466. The second focussed on the changes in outcomes between W2

²⁷ Pupils who have achieved five or more GCSE and equivalents at grades A*-C/9-4 including English and Maths.

²⁸ CFE (2022) [Establishing the impact of Uni Connect at the programme level. Lessons learned from implementing a quasi-experimental approach](#). Published online by the OfS.

²⁹ Nine partnerships did not achieve sufficient responses to the baseline to be included in the follow-ups at W1 (2018-19) and W2 (2019-20). All partnerships were, however, invited to engage in the survey at W3 (2020-21) and W4 (2021-22). At W4, 25 chose to take part.

(2019-20) and W4 (2021-22) among the sub-sample of learners who responded to both survey waves. The maximum sample available for this analysis was 4,034.

In both instances, the aim of the analysis is to identify the factors that best predict outcomes for learners that are associated with progression to HE to provide insight into the relative effect of Uni Connect.

A range of learner- and programme-related characteristics, as well as the perceived impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, are explored in the regression models, as summarised in Table 2. By controlling for these in the analysis we can account for the observable differences between W2 (2019-20) and W4 (2021-22) and enhance the robustness of the results. All the findings in this report are significant at a minimum of $p > 0.05$.

Table 2: Factors used in the regression analysis

Personal characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Gender – Ethnicity – Whether the learner has a disability, learning difficulty or long-term health condition – Socio-economic status (IDACI & FSM) – Prior attainment (KS2 & KS4 where available)³⁰ – Age (year group) – Uni Connect target learner status
Social capital	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Whether the respondent would be the first in their family to go to HE³¹ – Whether the respondent knows someone who has gone to HE – People learners spoke to about HE – People who have most influenced learners' decisions about what to do next
Programme characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Number of hours of intervention – Number of different types of intervention engaged in – Total number of interventions engaged in – Type of intervention
Perceived impact of Covid-19 pandemic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Factors that made it difficult to study during Covid-19

³⁰ The findings focus on KS2 unless otherwise stated, as there is a high correlation between achievement at KS2 and KS4. The use of KS2 attainment is consistent with analysis of previous waves of the survey. Furthermore, KS2 provides a larger sample for the analysis as only a sub-set of the sample have completed KS4 examinations.

³¹ The analysis considers the association between the outcomes and those who know they would be the first in their family to attend HE as well as those who do not know if they would be the first in their family to go.

Limitations of the data

We know based on feedback from partnerships that, throughout the programme, non-target learners have received Uni Connect activity and some Uni Connect target learners have not. We also know that learners in both groups may have received outreach delivered by HE providers funded through their APPs which is very similar to the activity delivered through Uni Connect. Up until this point, it was not possible to take account of the non-Uni Connect activity received by learners in our analysis. For the first time at W4 (2021-22), tracking information on non-Uni Connect activity has been provided by HEAT and as such it has been possible to account for this to enhance the robustness of the analysis.

It is important to note when considering the findings that all outcomes measured in the survey are self-reported and based on learner perceptions. The baseline measures (W0, 2017-18) for all outcomes were high; that is, most respondents perceived that they had some level of knowledge of HE and its benefits and tended to agree with statements about their motivation and confidence in their abilities. Furthermore, the analysis reveals that outcomes remain unchanged for a large proportion of respondents between W2 (2019-20 and W4 (2021-22)).³² The lack of variability in the responses limited our ability to identify the predictors of change. The high baseline could mean that the impact of Uni Connect is under-reported, particularly as it is common for learners to overestimate their knowledge and abilities before engaging in a programme.³³

³² The modal change is zero in all cases.

³³ This is known as the Dunning-Kruger effect.

3. Impact of Covid-19

This chapter explores how respondents to the W4 (2021-22) survey perceive the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on their learning and the extent to which this may, in turn, have affected their engagement in Uni Connect and their knowledge of and attitudes towards HE. The characteristics of those affected by Covid-19 are also identified to provide insight into whether Uni Connect target learners were more adversely impacted.

Key findings

- Three-quarters of W4 (2021-22) survey respondents studied from home during the first lockdown, while 6% remained in their educational setting. Two-thirds of those who studied at home experienced barriers to learning, most commonly limited or no contact with teachers and the lack of quiet space to work.
- Uni Connect target learners in the W4 (2021-22) cohort are more likely to report challenges with home learning than non-target learners, however target learner status does not remain significant once other characteristics are taken into account. Being female, disabled and from a lower socio-economic group is associated with experiencing barriers to learning during the pandemic
- Learners in the W4 (2021-22) cohort that did not experience any barriers to learning during lockdown are more likely to report that they are knowledgeable about HE, agree that HE offers some financial and non-financial benefits, believe they have the ability to progress to HE and believe they will fit in and succeed at HE than with those who did experience difficulties.
- The challenges associated with learning at home during the pandemic have had a limited effect on what learners in the W4 (2021-22) cohort plan to do next and their intentions towards HE.
- The pandemic has affected the decisions of learners with similar characteristics in different ways, suggesting other factors are also influencing what learners would like to do next and the likelihood of them progressing to HE.

Although learners completed the second follow-up survey (W2, 2019-20) before the first lockdown was imposed in March 2020, their learning and opportunities to engage in Uni Connect were impacted for the remainder of the 2019-20 academic year. Ongoing restrictions, including a second lockdown, affected learners throughout the 2020-21 academic year and also impacted on the delivery and evaluation of Uni Connect. The government introduced measures to address learning loss³⁴ in recognition of the disruption to young people's education caused by Covid-19, and the impact it had on existing inequalities, including the attainment gap.³⁵ Uni Connect

³⁴ The catch-up efforts included a series of funding announcements for catch-up premiums and tuition programmes totalling nearly £5 billion. Reference: House of Commons Education Committee (2022) [Is the catch-up programme fit for purpose. A fourth report of session 2021-22](#).

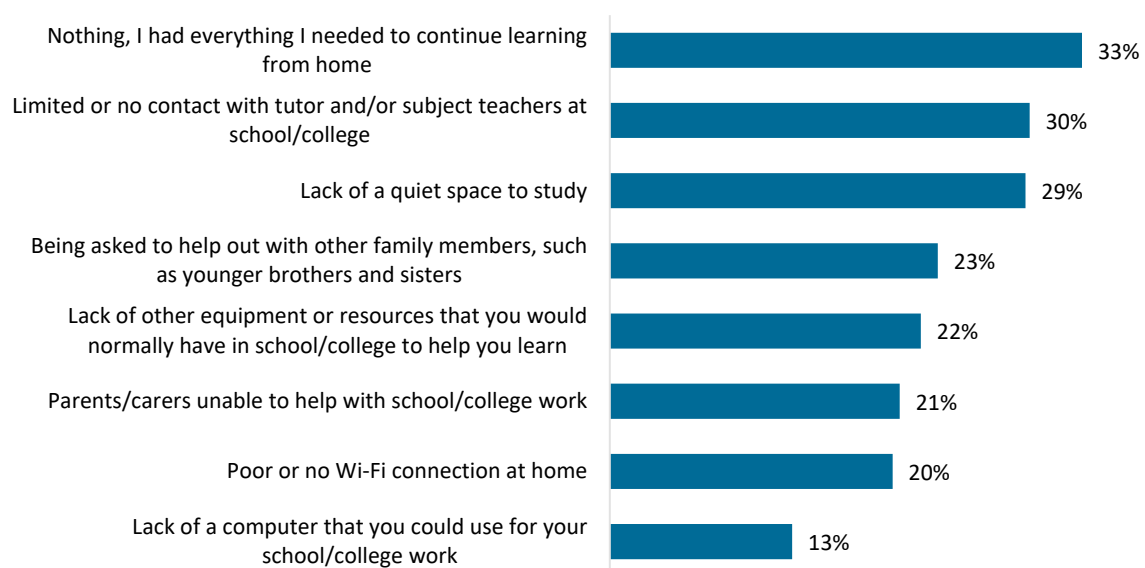
³⁵ Institute for Fiscal Studies (2021). [Inequalities in response to school closures over the course of the first COVID-19 lockdown](#). Working paper 21/04.

also evolved to support a broader range of learners who were underrepresented in HE and from 2023-24 will deliver attainment raising activities. Although all Covid-19 restrictions were lifted by October 2022, the effects on young people were still being felt³⁶ and are likely to be evident for some years to come.³⁷ This provides important context for the evaluation of Uni Connect and our understanding of its impact on learners' outcomes.

The impact of Covid-19 on the learner experience

Three-quarters of learners (76%) who responded to the W4 (2021-22) survey studied from home full-time during the first lockdown between March and July 2020. A further 15% moved between school or college and home-based learning. Children of critical workers and those defined as vulnerable³⁸ were permitted to continue attending their educational setting throughout the lockdowns. A total of 6% of survey respondents report that they remained in school or college.

Figure 2: Barriers to home learning during the first Covid-19 lockdown between March and July 2020 (bases = 43,360 – 45,017)



Although a third of those who studied at home during the lockdown (33%) report that they had everything they needed to continue their education, most faced challenges (Figure 2). As in Wave 3, having limited or no contact with tutors and subject teachers (30%) and the lack of a quiet space to study (29%) were the two most common barriers. The impact of the lack of access to teachers is likely to have been exacerbated for the fifth of learners (21%) whose parents or carers were unable to help them with their school/college work. The proportions of W4 (2021-22)

³⁶ As documented in [Research and analysis: Education recovery in schools. Spring 2022](#).

³⁷ As referenced in the [Education Committee Inquiry on the Government's catch-up programme](#).

³⁸ [Guidance](#) on children of critical workers and vulnerable children who could access schools or educational settings during Covid-19 lockdowns.

respondents who were unable to access equipment and resources, a computer, and Wi-Fi are higher compared with W3 (2020-21) respondents.

The differential impact of Covid-19 on learners

Uni Connect target learners are more likely to report challenges with home learning than non-target learners. Specifically, they were more likely to experience difficulties getting access to a computer, equipment and resources, a quiet space to study and help from their parents/carers. Uni Connect target learners were also more likely to be asked to help with other family members during lockdown, which could have impacted on the time available for their own studies. In contrast, Uni Connect target learners are less likely to report that they had limited contact with their teachers.

Target learner status does not remain a significant factor once other learner characteristics, particularly gender, disability status, measures of socio-economic status, prior educational attainment and year group, are included in the regression models. Overall, being female, disabled and from a lower socio-economic group (defined in terms of ever having been eligible for FSM) is associated with experiencing barriers to learning during the pandemic. Those with higher KS2 attainment in reading, and to a lesser extent maths, were also more likely to have experienced barriers. Both groups were more likely to report that they had limited or no contact with teachers and were required to help with other family members while learning from home.

These trends largely mirror those identified among W3 (2020-21) survey respondents and is further evidence of the importance of taking account of the intersection between characteristics when exploring outcomes and the impact of programmes like Uni Connect on learners.

Impact of Covid-19 on knowledge and self-belief

Not experiencing any barriers to learning during lockdown is positively associated with having knowledge about some aspects of HE (where to find information about applying to HE, the costs and financial support available and accommodation options) and a belief in some of the financial (higher earnings) and non-financial (broader horizons and valuable life skills) benefits. Furthermore, not experiencing difficulties with home learning is positively associated with all outcomes that relate to learners' motivation to do well and confidence in their ability to progress to HE and fit in and succeed at HE.

In contrast, those who experienced challenges, including lack of a computer, equipment and resources, and a quiet space to study were significantly less likely to report that they had knowledge of some aspects of HE, particularly the types of courses on offer, how to apply, the financial support available and where to live. Lack of access to help and support from teachers, and parents/carers in particular, appears to have had a negative effect on learners' knowledge of HE.

The difficulties that learners experienced during lockdown had a more variable effect on their perceptions of the benefits of HE and their motivation and confidence. Those who were unable to access a computer or help from their parents/carers are less

likely to believe that they could get the grades needed and go to university if they wanted to, or that they would 'fit in' and succeed academically. Although perceptions of the benefits of HE are not significantly associated with a lack of support from parents/carers, those without access to a computer are also less likely to perceive that HE would broaden their horizons and challenge them intellectually. Conversely, those who report that a lack of contact with their teachers made it difficult for them to continue learning during lockdown are more likely to believe they could get the grades needed and go to university if they wanted to. These learners are also more likely to believe that HE would benefit them financially, through better jobs and higher earnings, and personally, by broadening their horizons, challenging them intellectually and giving them valuable life skills.

Impact of Covid-19 on future plans and likelihood of applying to higher education

In contrast with the W3 (2020-21) cohort, in this cohort the challenges associated with learning during the pandemic have had a limited effect on what learners plan to do next and their intentions towards HE. Although the likelihood of continuing in education and applying to HE aged 18 or 19 is higher among learners who had limited contact with their teachers during lockdown, it is lower amongst those who did not have access to a computer while studying at home.

There is a positive association between being a Uni Connect target learner and whether the decision about applying to HE aged 18 or 19 has been affected by the pandemic. However, this association does not remain significant when other characteristics are also accounted for. Gender, eligibility for FSM, attainment at KS2, being the first in family to attend HE and year group are all associated with being more likely as well as less likely to apply to HE because of Covid-19, suggesting the pandemic has affected the decisions of learners with similar characteristics in different ways. Overall, there is a positive association between being likely to apply to HE aged 18 or 19 and being more likely to apply because of Covid-19. Similarly, those who are less likely to apply in the future are also less likely to apply because of Covid-19.

Summary

The analysis of W4 (2021-22) respondents' perceptions of the impact of Covid-19 highlights that many of the groups that are underrepresented in HE experienced challenges and barriers to learning during the pandemic. These have subsequently had an influence on some respondents' future plans. Although the pandemic has provided a further impetus for some respondents to remain in education with a view to progressing to HE, for others, it has had the opposite effect. The evaluation findings therefore suggest that the ramifications of the pandemic present direct and indirect risks to equality of opportunity which could slow or even reverse the progress that has been made to narrow the gap in the rate of progression to HE more broadly. Supporting young people, including those defined as Uni Connect target learners, to catch-up on lost learning and raising their attainment so that they develop the knowledge and skills required to be accepted onto HE courses that match their

expectations and ambitions is imperative in this context. The emphasis on attainment raising, along with the continued focus on improving access to high-quality information and challenging perceptions of HE, will therefore ensure Uni Connect helps to mitigate the risks posed to access by the pandemic. It will also help to ensure the programme contributes to the achievement of wider policy objectives, including the levelling up agenda.

4. Knowledge of higher education

The opportunity to receive information and guidance that could help to shape a young person's ambitions and inform their decisions about appropriate HE options is impacted by a range of factors, including their home circumstances, school and resources in their local area.³⁹ Uni Connect is helping to mitigate this risk to equality of opportunity to access HE by providing signposting for schools and delivering high-quality and impartial IAG on the benefits and realities of HE to learners. The programme aims to equip learners with the knowledge and skills to make informed choices, successfully apply to HE and ultimately realise their ambitions. This chapter explores changes in learners' knowledge of HE between 2019-20 (W2) and 2021-22 (W4) and the characteristics, including extent of engagement in Uni Connect, that are associated with their understanding of HE at W4 (2021-22).

Key findings

- The baseline survey (W0, 2017-18) demonstrates that the majority of learners perceived they knew something about all aspects of HE prior to Uni Connect.
- Only a small proportion of learners perceive their knowledge has changed between W2 (2019-20) and W4 (2021-22) and this limits the extent to which any impact of the programme (or other factors) on knowledge can be detected.
- Respondents across all survey waves are most likely to know about the subjects they could study and the qualifications and grades needed to apply to HE, and least likely to know about the application process and financial support.
- There is little evidence that engagement in Uni Connect has contributed to changes in learners' knowledge between 2019-20 (W2) and 2021-22 (W4).
- There are, however, positive associations between some programme characteristics (e.g. number of types of intervention engaged in) and types of activity (mentoring, summer schools and campus visits in particular) and knowledge outcomes among the W4 (2021-22) cohort, suggesting Uni Connect has a positive influence.
- A range of learner characteristics are also associated with knowledge outcomes among the W4 (2021-22) cohort: higher attainers, males, those who know someone in HE and those who have spoken to somebody about HE tend to be more knowledgeable; learners who would be, or don't know if they would be, the first in their family to go on to HE, learners with a disability and those who have been eligible for FSM tend to be less knowledgeable.
- Key influencers, including family, friends, careers advisers and teachers, play an important role in developing learners' knowledge but only contribute to changes in two aspects – where to find information and accommodation options – over time.

³⁹ Equal Opportunities Risk Register – [Risk 2: Information and guidance](#)

Knowledge of the HE offer

The majority of respondents reported that they knew ‘a little’ or ‘a lot’ about the HE offer at W2 (2019-20). A similar proportion of the W4 (2021-22) cohort report they know something about these outcomes (Table 3) despite potential variations in the characteristics of the two samples and the impact that Covid-19 had on the opportunities for some learners to develop their knowledge of the HE offer (see Chapter 3).

Table 3: Proportion of respondents overall that have ‘a little’ or ‘a lot’ of knowledge about the HE offer

	Wave 2	Wave 4
Subjects you can study	91%	92%
Types of courses you can take	77%	78%

Programme characteristics associated with knowledge of HE offer at W4 (2021-22)

Analysis of the characteristics of the Uni Connect programme that are associated with the W4 (2021-22) cohort’s knowledge of the HE offer suggests that engaging in **different types of activity** has a positive effect on learners’ knowledge of the types of courses available. Several interventions are identified as having a positive effect: **campus visits**, **mentoring** and skills and attainment **workshops** are positively associated with knowledge of the types of courses available. **Campus visits** are also positively associated with knowledge of the subjects a learner could study.

Learner characteristics associated with knowledge of HE offer at W4 (2021-22)

Analysis of the outcomes reported by respondents at W4 (2021-22) suggests that a range of learner characteristics are associated with knowledge of the HE offer:

- Learners from more **deprived areas** are more likely to report good knowledge of the subjects they could study, reflecting an increase in knowledge detected among the sub-group between W2 (2019-20) and W4 (2021-22) (see section below).
- Learners who **know someone in HE** and those in **Year 11** are more likely to report they have some knowledge of the HE offer compared with those who do not know anyone with HE experience and those in other year groups. In addition, **males** are more likely to report they have a least some understanding of the types of course available, while those with higher **KS2 attainment** in reading and maths are more likely to report good knowledge of the subjects they can study.
- Learners with a **disability**, those who have ever been eligible for **FSM** and those who don’t know if they would be the **first in family** to go to HE are less likely to have knowledge of the subjects they could study. The latter group are also significantly less likely to understand the types of course they could take.
- Being a Uni Connect **target learner** is not associated with level of knowledge of the HE offer in the W4 (2021-22) cohort as a whole, although Uni Connect

target learner status is associated with a change in knowledge (see next section below).

Change in learners' knowledge of HE offer between W2 (2019-20) and W4 (2021-22)

Given the large proportion of learners who report they know something about the HE offer at each wave, analysis of the change between W2 (2019-20) and W4 (2021-22)⁴⁰ reveals very few significant results. There is no association between the changes in these knowledge outcomes and any of the programme characteristics. Change is, however, associated with some learner characteristics:

- Knowledge of the subjects that learners can study in HE increases for those living in more **deprived areas** and decreases for Uni Connect **target learners** and learners who **know someone with HE experience**.
- Knowledge of the types of course learners could take increases for those who have **spoken to a friend** specifically about HE.

Knowledge of the application process

At W2 (2019-20), most respondents reported that they knew 'a little' or 'a lot' about the application process. Once again, knowledge levels among the W4 (2021-22) cohort are similar. Learners in both cohorts are most knowledgeable about the qualifications and grades needed to get into HE and least knowledgeable about how to apply to study HE (Table 4).

Table 4: Proportion of respondents overall that have 'a little' or 'a lot' of knowledge about the application process

	Wave 2	Wave 4
The qualifications and grades needed to get into HE	83%	84%
Where to find information about applying	73%	73%
How to apply to study HE	63%	65%

Programme characteristics associated with knowledge of the application process at W4 (2021-22)

The analysis of Uni Connect programme characteristics that predict whether learners will have a higher level of knowledge of the application process suggests that **campus visits** are an effective way to ensure learners understand the qualifications and grades needed to get into HE and how to apply. Participating in **different types of activity** also supports learners to develop their understanding of the qualifications and grades needed.

⁴⁰ Actual change measured at the level of the individual for those respondents who completed the W2 and W4 surveys.

Learner characteristics associated with knowledge of the application process at W4 (2021-22)

In addition to the impact of the challenges experienced by learners during Covid-19, a range of other characteristics are associated with higher levels of knowledge of the application process:

- Learners who **know someone in HE** and those in **Year 11** are more likely to report that they have some knowledge of all aspects of the HE application process: the qualifications and grades needed, where to find information about applying and how to apply. In addition, **males** perceive they have better knowledge of how to apply and where to get information than females.
- In contrast, learners with a **disability** and those who don't know if they would be the **first in their family** to go on to HE are less likely to say they have knowledge of all aspects of the application process.
- There is a variable association between level of knowledge and prior attainment. While learners with higher **KS2 maths** scores report higher levels of knowledge of the grades needed, learners with higher **KS2 reading** scores report lower levels of knowledge of how to apply and the information available.
- Socio-economic status is also associated with knowledge of the application process. While learners who have ever been eligible for **FSM** are less likely to report they have some knowledge of the qualifications and grades needed to get into HE than those who have not, those living in more **deprived areas** are more likely to report they have this knowledge.
- A learner's status as a Uni Connect **target group** member has no effect on their knowledge of the application process.

Change in learners' knowledge of the application process between W2 (2019-20) and W4 (2021-22)

Once again, analysis of the change in learners' knowledge of the application process between W2 (2019-20) and W4 (2021-22) reveals very few significant results.

Engaging in fewer **different types of activity** and **no Uni Connect activity** are positively associated with change in knowledge, suggesting learners obtain information on the application process from other sources (see section Role of key influencers below):

- Knowledge about the qualifications and grades needed to get into HE increased for those with higher **KS2 reading** scores. Conversely, there was a decrease in this outcome for learners who **know someone in HE**.
- Those who don't know if they will be the **first in their family** to go to HE report increased knowledge of where to find information about applying to HE
- Knowledge about how to apply to study HE increased for those with higher **KS2 reading** scores and those who don't know if they will be the **first in their family** to go to HE.

Knowledge of the student experience

As with other aspects of HE knowledge, most learners perceived that they knew something about elements of the student experience at W2 (2019-20) and the proportion remains largely unchanged at W4 (2021-22) (Table 5).

Table 5: Proportion of respondents that have 'a little' or 'a lot' of knowledge about the student experience

	Wave 2	Wave 4
What student life is like	82%	80%
Options about where to live while studying	72%	70%

Programme characteristics associated with knowledge of the student experience at W4 (2021-22)

Again, **campus visits** are associated with higher levels of knowledge about student life and accommodation options. **Summer schools** are also an effective way to increase learners' knowledge of both aspects of the student experience. In addition, those who participate in **mentoring** and several **different types of activity** are more likely to be knowledgeable about where to live while studying.

Interestingly, taking part in **no Uni Connect activity** is positively associated with knowledge of the student experience. This group are likely to be getting their information from another source, such as friends and family (see section Role of key influencers below).

Learner characteristics associated with knowledge of the student experience at W4 (2021-22)

A similar range of characteristics that are associated with knowledge of the application process is associated with knowledge of the two aspects of the student experience:

- Learners with a **disability**, those who don't know if they would be the **first in their family** to go to HE, those who have ever been eligible for **FSM** and learners with higher **KS2 reading** scores are more likely to report lower levels of knowledge.
- **Year 11s**, those who **know someone in HE** and those with higher **KS2 maths** scores are more likely to report that they are knowledgeable.
- A learner's status as a Uni Connect **target group** member has no effect on their knowledge of the application process.

In contrast with knowledge of the application process,

- **Male learners** are less likely to know about the accommodation options.
- **BAME learners** are more likely to report a higher level of knowledge of both aspects of student life.

Change in learners' knowledge of the student experience between W2 (2019-20) and W4 (2021-22)

None of the Uni Connect programme characteristics are associated with the changes in learners' knowledge of the student experience. Change is, however, associated with some learner characteristics:

- Knowledge about what student life is like increased for learners who don't know if they will be the **first in their family** to go to HE. In contrast, there has been a decrease in perceived knowledge of student life among Uni Connect **target learners**.
- Knowledge of accommodation options increased for learners who don't know if they will be the **first in their family** to go to HE. In contrast, there has been a decrease in perceived knowledge of accommodation options among learners who **know someone in HE**.

Knowledge of cost and financial support

The proportion of learners who know something about the financial support available is lower than for the other aspects of HE measured in the survey. Longitudinal analysis examining changes between baseline (W0, 2017-18) and W2 (2019-20) demonstrated that knowledge increased. However, the proportion that reported they know something about financial issues at W4 (2021-22) is similar to W2 (2019-20) for the cohort overall (Table 6).

Table 6: Proportion of respondents that have 'a little' or 'a lot' of knowledge about HE finance

	Wave 2	Wave 4
Costs of study	74%	72%
Financial support available	61%	60%

Programme characteristics associated with knowledge of HE finance at W4 (2021-22)

Those who participate in several **different types of activity** are more likely to be knowledgeable about the costs of HE and the financial support available.

Campus visits, summer schools and **masterclasses** are all positively associated with knowledge of these financial issues. **Mentoring** is also positively associated with knowledge of financial support.

Learner characteristics associated with knowledge of HE finance at W4 (2021-22)

A range of characteristics are associated with knowledge of the two HE financial issues:

- Although knowledge increased for some learners who don't know if they would be the **first in family** to go to HE (see section below), among the W4 (2021-

- 22) cohort as a whole, this group is still less likely to report that they are knowledgeable about the costs and financial support available.
- Learners with a **disability** are also more likely to report lower levels of knowledge.
 - Learners in **Year 11, males, BAME** learners and those who **know someone in HE** are more likely to have knowledge of financial issues.
 - While learners from more **deprived areas** are more likely to perceive they have a good understanding of financial issues, those who have ever been eligible for **FSM** are less knowledgeable.
 - Learners with higher **KS2 reading** scores are more likely to report lower levels and those with higher **KS2 maths** scores more likely to report higher levels of knowledge of the costs and financial support available.
 - Being in the Uni Connect **target group** does not have a significant effect on knowledge levels.

Change in learners' knowledge of HE finance between W2 (2019-20) and W4 (2021-22)

Knowledge of financial issues has increased most significantly for learners who don't know if they will be the **first in their family** to go to HE. Learners from more **deprived areas** are now more knowledgeable about the costs of studying HE, but **males** perceive that their knowledge decreased between the two survey waves.

Engaging in **no Uni Connect activity** is positively associated with change in knowledge, once again suggesting that learners may obtain information from other sources (see section Role of key influencers below).

Role of key influencers

The W4 (2021-22) cohort's knowledge of all aspects of HE is positively associated with speaking to someone about HE, whether that is a family member, friend, teacher or careers adviser. Being most influenced by a family member or a careers adviser is also positively associated with knowledge of the application process, including where to find information and how to apply. Those who are most influenced by a teacher are also confident they know where to find information about applying to HE and have some knowledge of the accommodation options.

However, speaking to someone about HE or being influenced by someone when making decisions does not appear to have contributed to any change in learners' knowledge over time between W2 and W4. There are two exceptions: change in learners' knowledge of where to find information is positively associated with being influenced by a friend, family member or careers adviser. The influence of family and teachers is also associated with changes in knowledge about the accommodation options.

Summary

The proportion of learners with some knowledge of the different aspects of HE is similar for the W2 (2019-20) and W4 (2021-22) cohorts overall. Although the samples

are not directly comparable, this finding is encouraging given the disruption caused by Covid-19 between the two survey waves. In this period, access to both formal and informal sources of information was restricted and a dip in knowledge levels may have been expected. Ensuring equality of access to information and guidance to address prevailing gaps is, however, important in the context of the new risk-based approach to the regulation of access and participation.

There is limited evidence that engagement in Uni Connect has been a significant contributing factor in changes in knowledge between 2019-20 (W2) and 2021-22 (W4). The effects of Uni Connect were unfortunately reduced within the wider context of Covid-19. The analysis, as well as evidence from partnerships' local evaluations⁴¹, suggests that campus visits and summer schools are effective ways to develop learners' understanding of HE, but these activities were most severely affected by Covid-19 restrictions. Although some partnerships (and individual providers) moved their activities online, many suspended delivery until restrictions were lifted. Furthermore, the analysis reveals that knowledge levels for a high proportion of learners did not change between the two waves. Coupled with the high proportion of learners who reported some knowledge at baseline, these factors are also likely to be impacting on the extent to which it is possible to detect the effect of Uni Connect on learner outcomes.

There are, however, positive associations between some programme characteristics and specific types of activity and the knowledge outcomes for the W4 (2021-22) cohort. As noted above, **campus visits** are commonly associated with knowledge of the different aspects of HE, along with **mentoring** and **summer schools** in some instances. Engaging in **different types of activity** is also positively associated with some knowledge outcomes, providing further evidence that the multi-intervention approach delivered by Uni Connect partnerships is likely to be effective. These findings also resonate with TASO's evidence toolkit that access to activities offered as part of a multi-intervention approach is likely to be the most effective.⁴²

⁴¹ CFE (2023) [Fifth independent review of impact evaluation evidence submitted by Uni Connect partnerships](#). Published online by the OfS.

⁴² <https://taso.org.uk/intervention/information-advice-and-guidance/>

5. The benefits of higher education

Assuring equality of access to information and guidance on the benefits of HE is as important as providing access to information on the HE offer and considerations such as the cost and financial support available. In the current economic climate, it is more important than ever for learners to understand the advantages that a higher education can afford young people in the labour market to inform their decision-making. This chapter explores changes in learners' knowledge and understanding of the financial and non-financial benefits of HE between 2019 (W2) and 2021 (W4) and the characteristics that are associated with positive perceptions of HE at W4 (2021-22). The role of key influencers is also considered.

Key findings

- Most learners at baseline (W0, 2017-18), prior to Uni Connect, perceived they had some knowledge of how HE can lead to careers of interest. Knowledge levels have remained high across all survey waves and as such there is limited change.
- Learners at W4 (2021-22) appear just as confident as those at W2 (2019-20) that HE will benefit them professionally, through access to better jobs and higher earnings, as well as personally, by providing intellectual challenge and valuable life skills. Both cohorts are less persuaded that HE will broaden their horizons and improve their social lives.
- A wide range of learner characteristics are both positively and negatively associated with the perceived benefits of HE.
- Level of engagement in Uni Connect and some specific interventions are associated with positive perceptions of the benefits of HE among W4 (2021-22) respondents:
 - IAG and masterclasses are associated with positive perceptions of the financial and non-financial benefits of HE.
 - Those who engage in different types of activity are more likely to perceive that HE will enable them to earn more, broaden their horizons, provide intellectual challenge and enable them to develop valuable life skills.
 - Taking part in at least one Uni Connect activity increases the likelihood that a learner will agree HE will enable them to get a better job and deliver the full range of non-financial benefits. Those who engage in more hours of activity are more likely to perceive that going to HE would improve their social life.
 - Campus visits are associated with a positive shift in the perception that HE will enable learners to earn more in the future.
- The people learners talk to appear to have a significant influence on their perceptions of the benefits of HE and also contribute to changes in learners' knowledge and understanding of the benefits of HE over time.

Financial benefits of HE

At baseline (W0, 2017-18), most respondents (84%) reported that they knew ‘a little’ or ‘a lot’ about how HE leads to careers they may be interested in. This increased to 90 per cent of learners overall at W2 (2019-20) and, as such, the potential for Uni Connect to increase learners’ knowledge between W2 (2019-20) and W4 (2021-22) was limited. A similar proportion (86%) of respondents in the W4 (2021-22) cohort perceive they know something about this issue.

There was a high level of agreement with the statements about the potential financial benefits of HE among respondents to earlier waves of the survey. The proportion that agrees with the statements at W4 (2021-22) is similar to W2 (2019-20), reflecting the pattern for other outcomes (Table 7).

Table 7: Proportion of respondents that agree⁴³ with statements about the financial benefits of HE

Higher education will enable me to...	Wave 2	Wave 4
earn more	75%	75%
get a better job	80%	79%

Non-financial benefits of HE

At baseline, the majority of learners agreed with the series of statements about the non-financial benefits of HE. Longitudinal analysis of the change in knowledge between W0 (2017-18) and W2 (2019-20) demonstrated that the proportion of learners that agreed with three of the statements increased.⁴⁴ Although there was a slight decline in the proportion that agreed HE would give them valuable life skills, most of the W2 (2019-20) cohort still agreed with this statement. Once again, a similar proportion of the W4 (2021-22) cohort agree with the statements compared with W2 (2019-20) respondents overall (Table 8).

Table 8: Proportion of respondents that agree⁴⁵ with statements about the non-financial benefits of HE

Higher education will...	Wave 2	Wave 4
challenge me intellectually	77%	76%
give me valuable life skills	77%	76%
broaden my horizons	65%	63%

⁴³ Respondents were asked to rate the statements on a scale where 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree. Respondents also had the option to state ‘Don’t know’. ‘Agree’ is based on the proportion of respondents who rated their level of agreement as 4 or 5 on the scale.

⁴⁴ CFE (2021) [An independent evaluation of Uni Connect’s intermediate outcomes for learners. A report for the OfS on the first three waves of the longitudinal survey of Uni Connect target learners.](#) Published online by the OfS

⁴⁵ Respondents were asked to rate the statements on a scale where 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree. Respondents also had the option to state ‘Don’t know’. ‘Agree’ is based on the proportion of respondents who rated their level of agreement as 4 or 5 on the scale.

improve my social life	64%	62%
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Programme characteristics associated with perceived benefits at W4 (2021-22)

In contrast with knowledge outcomes (see Chapter 4), the level of engagement in Uni Connect and some specific intervention types are associated with positive perceptions of the personal and professional benefits of HE among W4 (2021-22) respondents:

- Learners who engage in **different types of activity** are more likely to perceive that HE will enable them to earn more in the future. There is also evidence that those who take part in different types of activity have more positive perceptions of the non-financial benefits of HE, including that it will broaden their horizons, provide intellectual challenge and enable them to develop valuable life skills.
- Taking part in **at least one Uni Connect activity** increases the likelihood that a learner will agree HE will enable them to get a better job in the future and deliver the full range of non-financial benefits.
- Those who engage in **more hours of activity** are more likely to perceive that going to HE would improve their social life.
- **IAG** and **masterclasses** are associated with positive perceptions of the financial and non-financial benefits of HE. Both interventions increase the likelihood that learners perceive HE will result in higher earnings and a better job. Those who have received IAG also perceive that HE will help them develop valuable life skills and improve their social life. Masterclasses appear to have a positive effect on perceptions that HE can broaden horizons and provide intellectual challenge.

Learner characteristics associated with perceived benefits at W4 (2021-22)

Several learner characteristics are also associated with perceptions of the benefits of HE:

Knowledge of how HE leads to careers that learners might be interested in

- **Males**, those who **know someone in HE**, those with higher **KS2 maths** scores and those in **Year 11** are more likely to report that they understand how HE could lead to careers that they are interested in.
- In contrast, learners with a **disability**, those who don't know if they would be **first in family** to go and those who have ever been eligible for **FSM** are less likely to report that they know about how HE leads to careers that they are interested in.

Financial and non-financial benefits of HE

- **Year 11s** are more likely to agree that HE will deliver financial benefits (higher earnings and better job prospects) and some non-financial benefits (broadening horizons and intellectual challenge). They are, however, less likely to agree that HE will provide them with valuable life skills.

- While learners from more **deprived areas** are more likely to agree that HE will deliver financial outcomes, they are less likely to believe that HE will broaden their horizons.
- Learners who have ever been eligible for **FSM** are less likely to agree that HE will benefit them personally by broadening their horizons, challenging them intellectually and helping them develop valuable life skills.
- Those who know they will be the **first in their family** to go to HE are more likely to agree that HE will provide them with intellectual challenge.
- Being in the Uni Connect **target group** does not have a significant effect on perceptions of the financial benefits of HE. However, this group of learners is less likely to report that going to university would improve their social life.

Change in perceptions of the benefits of HE between W2 (2019-20) and W4 (2021-22)

Financial benefits

Uni Connect engagement is not a contributing factor in the change in learners' knowledge of the how HE leads to careers of interest or in their perceptions of the financial benefits of HE, with one exception. **Campus visits** are associated with a positive shift in the perception that HE will enable learners to earn more in the future.

Over three-quarters of the W4 (2021-22) cohort (76%) had not applied to HE when they completed the survey. One in ten of these learners reports that their decision about whether or not to apply was affected by Covid-19, including 4% who report they are less likely to go. The analysis indicates that those who are less likely to apply to HE as a result of the pandemic are now also less likely to agree that HE will enable them to earn more than they did at W2 (2019-20).

The only learner characteristic that is associated with change in knowledge about how HE leads to careers that they might be interested in is **first in family** status. Knowledge of potential future careers is more likely to have increased for those who don't know if they will be the first in their family to go to HE.

Non-financial benefits

Few learner characteristics are associated with a change in perception of the non-financial benefits of HE and, for those that are, there has been a reduction in their level of agreement. **Males** are less likely to agree HE will improve their social life and those who **know someone in HE** are less likely to perceive that going to HE would broaden their horizons, challenge them intellectually or provide them with valuable life skills at W4 (2021-22) compared with W2 (2019-20). The level of significance of prior educational attainment is similar, irrespective of the measure (KS2 or KS4) used for most outcomes. However, in this instance, while there is no association between perceptions of the non-financial benefits of HE and KS2 attainment, learners with higher **KS4 attainment** report an increase in their belief that university would challenge them intellectually and improve their social life.

Learners who are **less likely to apply to HE as a result of the pandemic** are more likely to agree that HE would provide valuable life skills and improve their social life at

W4 (2021-22) than at W2 (2019-20). However, they are less likely to agree that HE will **challenge them intellectually** which may be another contributing factor in their decision not to apply.

Role of key influencers on knowledge of the benefits of HE

Speaking to someone about HE, irrespective of whether that is a family member, friend, teacher or careers adviser, helped to develop W4 (2021-22) learners' knowledge about how HE can lead to careers that are of interest to them. However, the only group to report a significant increase in their knowledge since W2 (2019-20) is learners who spoke to a **family** member. Interestingly, **speaking to no one** about HE is also positively associated with knowledge of graduate careers among the W4 (2021-22) cohort overall, suggesting learners are obtaining information from elsewhere, including through Uni Connect.

Learners who spoke to a **teacher** about HE are now more likely to believe that attending HE will enable them to earn more, as well as improve their social life and develop valuable life skills, than they were at W2 (2019-20). **Speaking to someone about HE** is also positively associated with perceptions of the wider financial and non-financial benefits of HE among the W4 (2021-22) cohort. Those who have spoken to **family, friends** and **teachers** about HE, and those who have been most influenced in their decisions about what to do next by a **careers adviser**, are more likely to agree that HE will deliver all the stated benefits.

Summary

Most learners had some knowledge of how HE leads to careers of interest and understood the potential benefits of HE-level qualifications before engaging in Uni Connect. Overall, learners at W4 (2021-22) appear just as confident as those at W2 (2019-20) that HE will benefit them personally and professionally. However, a small proportion at W4 (2021-22), who are now less likely to apply to HE because of the impact of the pandemic, are less likely to agree that HE will deliver higher earning than they were at W2 (2019-20). Covid-19 had a significant impact on the labour market and employment opportunities for young people. It is possible that this influenced some learners' perceptions of the financial benefits of HE and their views on the potential return on investment of a degree.

More knowledge and positive perceptions of HE are associated with some learner characteristics, as is engagement in Uni Connect activities and specific interventions. However, the people learners talk to appear to have the most significant influence. When seeking to mitigate Risk 2 in the EORR⁴⁶ which is concerned with ensuring equal access to information and guidance to inform decision-making, Uni Connect partnerships and individual HE providers should, therefore, consider their strategies for engaging these key influencers. It is important to ensure they, as well as learners, have access to information and guidance to help them understand the benefits of HE.

⁴⁶ Equal Opportunities Risk Register – [Risk 2: Information and guidance](#)

6. Perceptions about the ability to succeed in higher education

One of the risks to access identified in the EORR is that students do not feel able to apply to HE, or to certain types of provider, despite being qualified.⁴⁷ This risk has been a target for Uni Connect, particularly during the first two phases. While situational factors, such as a learners' family circumstances, and institutional factors, such as entry requirements, are likely to play a part, learner characteristics, such as a lack of confidence and self-belief, can also be a barrier and impact on intentions towards HE. Uni Connect seeks to enhance learners' self-efficacy by challenging ideas of social identity and developing their confidence, motivation and study skills. This chapter explores the extent to which perceptions about ability to progress to and succeed in HE have changed over time and differ according to learner characteristics and programme engagement.

Key findings

- Although learner confidence in their ability to get the grades needed is lower at W4 (2021-22) than in previous cohorts, most are motivated to do well and confident that they could go to university if they wanted to.
- W4 (2021-22) respondents are equivocal about whether they would 'fit in' at HE. While most agree that they have the ability to succeed in HE, some are less sure about their ability to cope with the academic demands.
- Learners who experienced difficulties studying at home during the pandemic are less confident in their ability to progress to and succeed in HE than those who experienced no problems.
- Higher attainers tend to be most motivated and confident in their abilities; learners with a disability and those who have ever been eligible for FSM tend to be least confident.
- Although Uni Connect is not shown to contribute to changes in learners' outcomes, engagement in the programme and specific interventions (IAG, masterclasses and mentoring) are associated with positive outcomes at W4 (2021-22).
- Learners with higher KS4 attainment report an increase in their belief that that university is for people 'like them', that they have the academic ability to succeed and could cope with the study required. This corroborates previous analysis that suggested confidence and self-belief increases as learners approach post-18 transition.
- The people learners have spoken to contribute to changes in learners' motivation, confidence and self-belief. Teachers and family members are particularly influential.

⁴⁷ Equal Opportunities Risk Register – [Risk 3: Perceptions of higher education](#)

Motivation and perceived ability to progress to HE

The analysis of the W4 (2021-22) cohort overall presents a mixed picture compared with W2 (2019-20) regarding learners' motivation and perceived ability to progress to HE. W4 (2021-22) learners are more motivated to do well in their studies and more likely to believe they could go to university if they wanted to than W2 (2019-20) learners. However, W4 (2021-22) learners appear less confident than W2 (2019-20) learners in their ability to get the grades they need to progress to further study (Table 9).

Table 9: Proportion of respondents that agree⁴⁸ with statements about motivation and ability to progress

	Wave 2	Wave 4
I am motivated to do well in my studies	77%	81%
I can get the grades I need for further study	77%	71%
I believe I could go to university if I wanted to	65%	70%

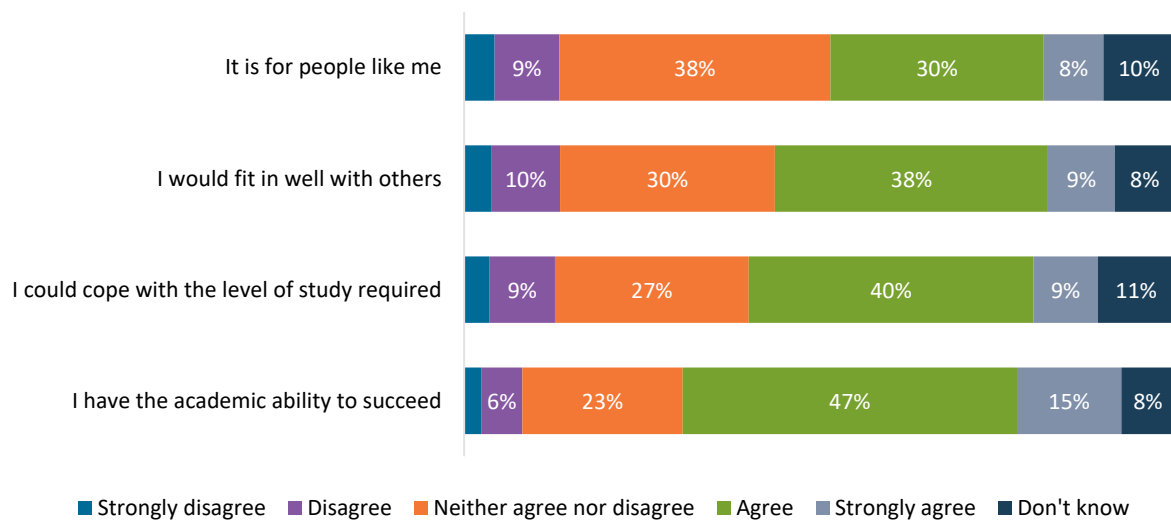
Perceived belief in ability to succeed in HE

Learners' confidence in their ability to fit in, cope and succeed in HE is variable. The W4 (2021-22) cohort is equivocal about whether university is for people 'like them'. The same proportion (38%) agrees with this statement as neither agrees nor disagrees with it, and almost a quarter do not agree or don't know (24%) if people 'like them' go to HE. A similar pattern emerges in relation to learner perceptions of whether they would fit in, with less than half of W4 (2021-22) respondents agreeing with this statement (47%). Learners are most confident that they have the academic ability to succeed (62% agree with this statement), however approximately half have some concerns about their ability to cope with the level of study required (51% do not agree with this statement) (

⁴⁸ Respondents were asked to rate the statements on a scale where 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree. Respondents also had the option to state 'Don't know'. 'Agree' is based on the proportion of respondents who rated their level of agreement as 4 or 5 on the scale.

Figure 3). This pattern mirrors the pattern observed among the W2 (2019-20) cohort.

Figure 3: Level of agreement with statements about ability to succeed in HE among respondents overall at W4 (2021-22)



Several programme and learner characteristics are associated with learner motivation and perceived ability, as set out in the section below. However, as discussed in Chapter 3, the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic is a particularly significant factor. Just over half of the sample (51%) were in Years 9 and 10 when they completed the W4 (2021-22) survey. As such, their transition from primary school and the formative years of their secondary education were severely disrupted by the pandemic and they had limited time to develop the skills to study independently at home before the restrictions were imposed. While learners who reported having no problems studying from home during lockdown are more likely to be motivated and have confidence in their ability to progress, fit in and succeed at HE, the opposite is true for those who did experience problems, particularly those who could not get help from their parents/carers and did not have access to a computer and a quiet space to study.

Programme characteristics associated with motivation and perceived abilities at W4 (2021-22)

Level of engagement

Engaging in a number of **different types of activity** is positively associated with the belief that a learner can get the grades required and go to HE if they want to. It is also associated with the perception they would fit in well with other students. Those who have received **no Uni Connect activity** are less likely to agree with these statements; they are also less likely to perceive that they would have the ability to cope with the level of study and succeed academically in HE.

Activity type

IAG is positively associated with learners' perceptions of their ability to succeed in HE. Those who have engaged in IAG are more likely to be motivated to do well in their current studies, believe they can get the grades needed and go to university if they want to. They also perceive that they have the academic ability to succeed and

could cope with the level of study in HE. **Masterclasses** are shown to have a positive influence on motivation and **mentoring** on a learners' belief in their ability to get the grades needed for further study.

Learner characteristics associated with motivation and perceived abilities at W4 (2021-22)

Several learner characteristics are associated with motivation and perceived ability to progress to and succeed in HE.

- Learners who are more likely to be motivated and agree that they could progress to and achieve in HE are **BAME** learners, those with higher **KS2 attainment**, particularly in maths, and those who **know someone in HE**. Conversely, those who are less likely to be motivated and hold positive perceptions of their abilities are learners with a **disability** and those who have ever been eligible for **FSM**.
- Not knowing **first in family status** is negatively associated with motivation to do well and learners' perceptions of their ability to go, fit in and succeed in HE. However, there is a positive association between a learner knowing that they would be the first in their family to study HE and motivation as well as a perception that they could get the grades needed to progress to further study.
- **Males** are less likely to be motivated and think they could go to university if they wanted to than females but are more likely to agree that they will fit in if they do progress.
- Learners in **Year 11** are more likely to be motivated and to think they could get the grades needed but less likely to think they could go to university if they wanted to.
- Although being a Uni Connect **target learner** has no effect on perceived ability to fit in, cope with the level of study and succeed in HE, this group are less likely to believe they could go to university if they wanted to.

Change in learner motivation and perceived abilities between W2 (2019-20) and W4 (2021-22)

As noted previously, a small proportion (4%) of learners in the W4 (2021-22) cohort report that they are less likely to apply to HE because of the pandemic. The analysis suggests that this group are now less confident in their ability to cope with the level of study required and succeed in HE than they were pre-pandemic. Gender, whether a learner has a disability and a learner's social networks are the characteristics associated with a reduction in these outcomes:

- Motivation and confidence in their ability to go to university if they wanted to and being able to cope with the level of study required decreased for learners with a **disability** between W2 (2019-20) and W4 (2021-22).
- While for **males** there is an increase in motivation to do well in their current studies between Waves 2 and 4, there is a decrease for those who **know someone in HE**.
- Confidence in their ability to get the grades needed for further study decreased for learners who would be the **first in their family** to go to HE.

Prior attainment is the primary predictor of increased outcomes, along with ethnicity:

- Learners with higher **KS2 maths** scores are more likely to believe they could get the grades needed at W4 (2021-22) compared with W2 (2019-20). This group, along with **BAME** learners, are also more likely to believe they could go to HE if they wanted to.
- Confidence that they could cope with the level of study increased for learners with higher **KS2 reading** scores. They are also more likely to believe that university is for people ‘like them’.
- Learners with higher **KS4 attainment** also report an increase in their belief that that university is for people ‘like them’, that they have the academic ability to succeed and could cope with the study required. This group is comprised of learners in Years 12 and 13 and corroborates the analysis of earlier cohorts⁴⁹ which suggests confidence and self-belief increases as learners approach the transition to HE aged 18.

The survey data indicates that participation in Uni Connect is not, overall, associated with changes in learner motivation, confidence or self-belief. The exceptions are mentoring and skills and attainment workshops. However, while those who engaged in **mentoring** report increased motivation, engagement in **skills and attainment workshops** is associated with decreased motivation. Participating in **different types of activity** is also associated with a reduction in learners’ confidence in their academic ability to succeed in HE.

Role of key influencers on perceived ability to succeed in HE

Once again, the analysis suggests that the people learners speak to about HE and those who have an influence on their decisions play a key role in motivating learners and shaping their self-perceptions and ambitions. Key influencers are associated with changes in outcomes as well as the outcomes reported by the W4 (2021-22) cohort.

At W4 (2021-22) there is a positive association between learners’ perceptions of all the outcomes that relate to their ability to progress and succeed in HE and speaking to someone about HE. **Teachers** appear to fulfil a key role in developing learners’ self-confidence and belief in their abilities, and being most influenced by a teacher is also positively associated with all these outcomes. Those who are most influenced by their **family** are also more likely to feel motivated to do well.

Learners who have **not spoken to anyone** about HE are less motivated to do well in their studies at W4 (2021-22) than they were at W2 (2019-20). Conversely, learners who have spoken to a **friend** about HE are more likely to believe that they could go to university if they want to. Speaking to **family** members about HE increases a learners’ belief that HE is for people ‘like them’ and those who have spoken to a **teacher** report an increased belief that they would ‘fit in’ well with others.

⁴⁹ CFE (2021) [An independent evaluation of Uni Connect’s impact on intermediate outcomes for learners. A report for the OfS on the first three waves of the longitudinal survey of Uni Connect target learners](#). Published online by the OfS.

Summary

The latest analysis reveals similar patterns and trends in learner motivation, confidence and self-belief to earlier cohorts. However, the pandemic appears to have had a negative effect on some learners. Although Uni Connect has had a limited impact on the changes in these outcomes, those in the W4 (2021-22) cohort who have engaged in some (as opposed to no) activity and those who have participated in specific interventions report more positive outcomes. Speaking to someone about HE is positively associated with change, as well as learners' current perceptions of their ability and motivation to do well.

The findings provide further evidence that engaging key influencers in outreach is essential. Providing information on the support available for those who need to relocate to study a course or attend a provider that matches their expectations and ambitions would help to mitigate the risks associated with perceptions of HE.⁵⁰ However, the analysis also highlights the importance of interventions that are designed to encourage and support learners to believe in themselves and that HE is an option for them. Teachers are well placed to provide this support and encouragement, but the findings also suggest that there is a role for more personalised interventions, such as mentoring, delivered through Uni Connect. Wider evidence, including from Uni Connect partnerships⁵¹, suggests that mentoring is particularly effective when it is delivered by people who learners identify with. This helps to challenge perceptions by conveying a message that HE is for people 'like them' and that they will 'fit in' if they choose to go.

⁵⁰ Equal Opportunities Risk Register – [Risk 3: Perceptions of higher education](#)

⁵¹ CFE (2023) [Fifth independent review of impact evaluation evidence submitted by Uni Connect partnerships](#). Published online by the OfS.

7. Impact of Uni Connect on future plans

By targeting learners, at least initially, who were likely to achieve the required level of attainment but unlikely to progress to HE, Uni Connect sought to increase the number who went on to successfully apply and study a course at a provider that reflected their expectations and ambitions. The first step towards that goal is increasing the likelihood of learners applying by equipping them to make informed decisions, while also challenging and inspiring them to think differently about HE. This chapter provides insight into the potential impact of Uni Connect on HE progression in the longer term by examining learners' current intentions and the factors influencing the likelihood that they will apply aged 18 or 19.

Key findings

- Previous analysis has demonstrated that learner perceptions of the likelihood that they will apply to HE aged 18 or 19 can fluctuate over the course of the learner journey.
- Among the W4 (2021-22) cohort, the proportion of learners who report that they could go to university if they wanted to is similar to the proportion that report they are likely to apply aged 18 or 19.
- Most learners are motivated to apply to HE because they perceived it will enable them to get a well-paid job. Those who perceive they are unlikely to apply at this stage in their journey give a variety of reasons. Some are motivated to start earning a salary as soon as possible, others are yet to make a firm decision.
- The pandemic has influenced a minority of learners' intentions towards HE, both positively and negatively; however, the proportion overall that report they are likely to apply at W4 (2021-22) is similar to pre-pandemic levels.
- Other factors, particularly the influence of friends, family, teachers and careers advisers, have a more significant impact on what learners aspire to do next and their future ambitions than engagement in Uni Connect.
- Wider characteristics, and not Uni Connect target group status, are more likely to affect learners' aspirations towards HE, including gender, socio-economic status and prior educational attainment.
- Campus visits are positively associated with the likelihood that a learner will apply to HE aged 18 or 19.

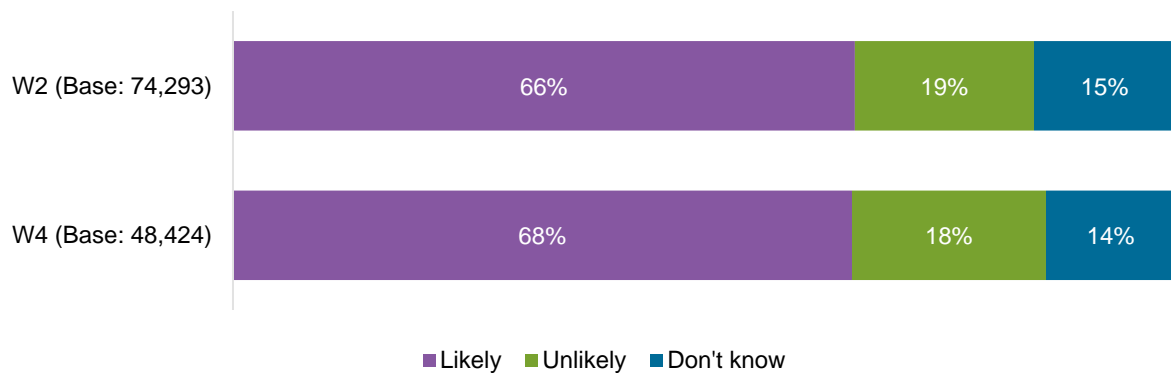
Likelihood of W4 (2021-22) learners applying to HE

Over three-quarters of learners in Years 9 to 11 in the W4 cohort (2021-22) who know what they want to do when they complete their GCSEs (or equivalent qualifications) plan to continue in education (77%). Of these, just over half (56%) intend to study at their school or a sixth form college, the remainder intend to apply to their local further education college. Just over two-thirds of the W4 (2021-22) respondents in Years 12 and 13 who know what they want to do next would most like to progress to some form of HE, including a higher or degree apprenticeship (67%).

Among the W4 respondents (2021-22), eligibility for FSM and being in the Uni Connect target group reduces the probability that a learner plans to continue in education.

At the time that learners completed the W4 (2021-22) survey, almost a fifth of those in Years 12 and 13 had applied for a place in HE (24%). All other W4 (2021-22) respondents were asked how likely they were to apply aged 18 or 19. The results at W4 (2021-22) are largely comparable to W2 (2019-20) overall, with just over two-thirds reporting that they are likely to or definitely will apply (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Likelihood that learners will apply to HE aged 18 or 19

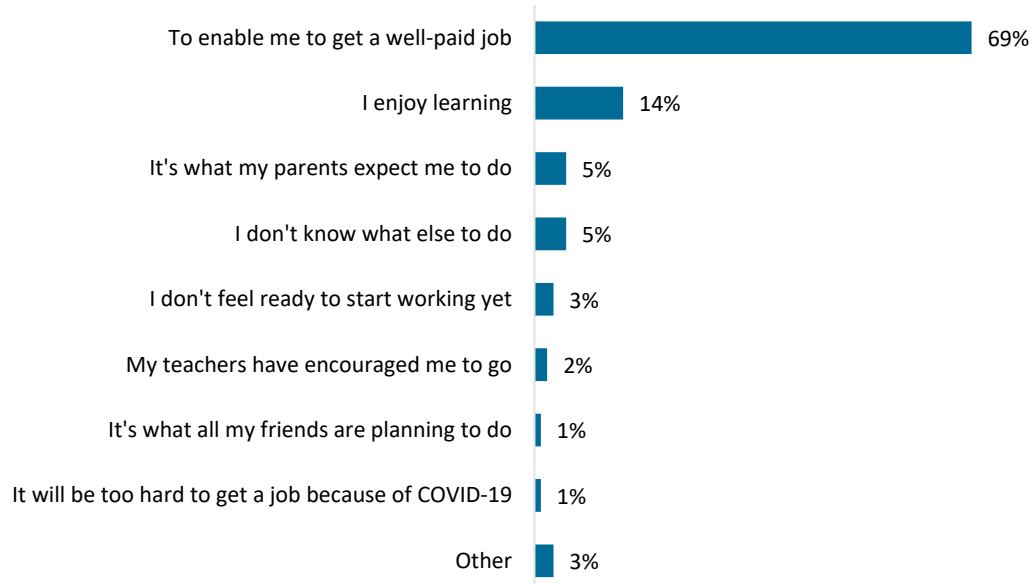


Reasons for likelihood of applying

Although most of the W4 (2021-22) cohort of learners' intentions towards HE remain unchanged as a result of the pandemic (62%), for some (6%), it has had a positive effect by increasing the likelihood that they will apply. The perception that it will be hard to get a job as a result of the pandemic is a driver for only a very small minority, while most learners are motivated by a perception that studying HE will enable them to get a well-paid job, irrespective of the external context (Figure 5).

Reasons why W4 (2021-22) learners want to go to HE

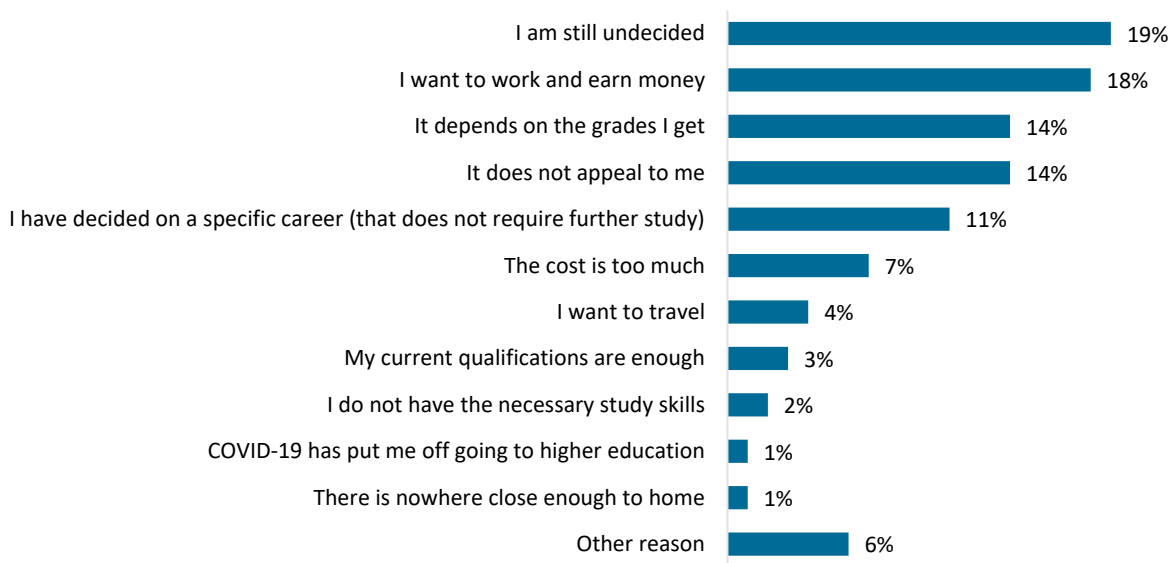
Figure 5: Reasons why learners want to go to HE (Base: W4 (2021-22) respondents who are likely to go to HE, 34,147)



Reasons why W4 (2021-22) learners do not want to go to HE

The pandemic also acted as a disincentive to apply to HE for a minority of learners (4%) in the W4 (2021-22) cohort. However, the most common reason why learners report that they are unlikely to apply at this stage in their educational journey is that they are still undecided. This is perhaps unsurprising as just over half of the sample (51%) at W4 (2021-22) are in Years 9 and 10 and, as such, some distance from the transition point at age 18. The other most common reason why learners are unlikely to apply to HE is that they would prefer to work and earn money (Figure 6). The proportion providing this reason is slightly higher at W4 (2021-22) (18%) than at W3 (2020-21) (16%), the other cohort that was significantly impacted by the pandemic. As noted in Chapter 5, Covid-19 severely affected the labour market which, in turn, impacted household incomes through loss of earnings or redundancy. This could have increased pressure on learners from economically disadvantaged backgrounds to seek work or an apprenticeship, rather than remain in full-time education post-18.

Figure 6: Reasons why learners do not want to go to HE (Base: W4 (2021-22) respondents who are unlikely to go to HE, 16,587)



Characteristics associated with likelihood of applying at W4 (2021-22)

Campus visits are the only activity or programme characteristic that is positively associated with the likelihood that a learner will apply to HE aged 18 or 19.

In terms of learner characteristics:

- Learners are more likely to apply if they are from a **BAME background**, have higher **KS2 attainment** in reading and maths, **know someone in HE**, and live in a more **deprived area**.
- Learners are less likely to apply if they are **male**, have a **disability**, would be **first in their family** to go to HE or do not know if they would be the first to go.

Change in likelihood of applying between W2 (2019-20) and W4 (2021-22)

There is no association between engagement in Uni Connect and change in the likelihood of a learner applying to HE. Furthermore, a learner's status as a member of the Uni Connect **target group** has no effect on the likelihood of applying to HE at W4 (2021-22) or on the change in the likelihood of applying between W2 (2019-20) and W4 (2021-22).

A range of learner characteristics are associated with change in the likelihood that a learner will apply between W2 (2019-20) and W4 (2021-22). Reported likelihood of applying increased significantly for learners with higher **KS2 reading** scores and decreased for **males** and those who would be the **first in their family** to go to HE. Being from a more **deprived area** is associated with a reduction and being eligible for **FSM** an increase in the likelihood of a learner applying. There is also a decrease in the likelihood that a learner who **knows someone in HE** will apply themselves between the two waves.

Role of key influencers on future plans

All the people who most influence learners' decisions and all those they speak to about HE (except careers advisers) have a significant impact on what learners in the W4 (2021-22) cohort choose to do after their current studies. There is also a strong positive association between being most influenced by a teacher and speaking to someone about HE, irrespective of who that is, and the likelihood that a learner will apply to HE. However, neither speaking to someone about HE or being influenced by someone are associated with changes in learners plans between W2 (2019-2020) and W4 (2021-22).

Summary

Although the proportion of learners overall who report that they are likely to apply to HE has remained constant since W2 (2019-20), there are some groups of learners who are less likely to apply. These include males, those who would be the first in their family to go to HE, learners who know someone in HE and those whose learning and future plans were negatively impacted by the pandemic. To reduce risk and shift perceptions of HE⁵², the evidence, therefore, suggests that a focus on specific sub-groups would be effective, in addition to engaging key influencers who shape learners' intentions.

⁵² Equal Opportunities Risk Register – [Risk 3: Perceptions of higher education](#)

8. Conclusions

One of the OfS's principal strategic objectives is that 'all students, from all backgrounds, with the ability and desire to undertake higher education are supported to access, succeed in, and progress from higher education'.⁵³ Uni Connect is supporting the achievement of this objective by enabling learners to make informed decisions, motivating them to do well and helping them to develop the skills and confidence to successfully apply. Although the independent national impact evaluation has not been able to track learners through their entire journey, it has assessed changes in outcomes that can influence progression to HE. The findings presented in this report highlight the range of intersecting factors that shape learners' attitudes and behaviours towards HE and the complexity of the challenge to widen access and ensure equality of opportunity for all.

Key insights

There is evidence that Uni Connect can have a positive influence on learner outcomes when delivered as a multi-intervention approach. The level of change in learners' outcomes is limited because most learners perceived that they had some knowledge of HE and agreed that they were motivated and had the capability to succeed prior to engaging in the programme. However, it is also possible that learners overestimated their level of knowledge at baseline (W0 2017-18), and despite their knowledge increasing over time, they provided the same (but more accurate) response at subsequent waves, thus masking any change. Although the latest analysis provides limited evidence that Uni Connect contributed to the changes that did occur between W2 (2019-20) and W4 (2021-22), there are positive associations between key programme characteristics (particularly engagement in different types of activity) as well as specific interventions (particularly campus visits and mentoring) and a number of reported outcomes for the W4 (2021-22) cohort. Continuing to deliver these interventions is, therefore, likely to help mitigate the risks to equality of opportunity to access HE for underrepresented groups in the future.

Certain characteristics continue to be associated with more and less positive learner outcomes among the W4 (2021-22) cohort. Those who have ever been eligible for free school meals (FSM), learners with a disability and those who are, or are likely to be, the first in their family to go to HE consistently report lower outcomes than higher achievers and those who are networked with people who have HE experience. Being a Uni Connect target learner has no effect on reported outcomes when individual learner characteristics are accounted for. This suggests that targeting at this level may be less effective and that current interventions are not addressing barriers for some sub-groups. More tailored interventions for particular groups may have more impact.

⁵³ [Office for Students Strategy for 2022 to 2025](#). Published online in March 2022. Ref OfS 2022.15

The evaluation findings provide further evidence that Covid-19 has disproportionately affected some groups of learners who were already disadvantaged and underrepresented in HE. The implications for young people's educational attainment and their social and emotional wellbeing present a risk to equality of opportunity and the achievement of access and participation goals. Encouragingly, and despite the challenges many survey respondents reported they experienced during the pandemic, only a small proportion of the W4 (2021-22) cohort are now less likely to apply to HE, and for some, it has provided the impetus to progress. However, in view of the learning and wider opportunities for young people to develop their skills and confidence that were lost during this time, disadvantaged learners in particular are likely to need additional support to catch up and achieve their own goals. With an increased emphasis on attainment raising and continued focus on improving access to information and guidance and challenging perceptions of HE, Uni Connect can help to mitigate some of the risks to equality of opportunity posed by the pandemic.

The W4 (2021-22) cohort are equally knowledgeable about HE and the associated benefits as previous cohorts of respondents overall. Knowledge levels may have been expected to drop in view of the challenges many learners faced during the pandemic and the impact these had on their engagement in learning and the delivery of Uni Connect, particularly while activities were delivered remotely. Encouragingly, respondents at W4 (2021-22) continue to recognise that HE can lead to careers they are interested in, and those who aspire to HE are commonly motivated by a desire to get a good job. Learners also recognise some of the ways in which HE supports their personal development, by challenging them intellectually and supporting the development of valuable life skills. Learners are less convinced that HE will broaden their horizons and enhance their social life. Wider evidence suggests that financial pressures brought on by the current cost of living crisis are resulting in more HE students undertaking paid part-time work to support their studies.⁵⁴ This is having a detrimental impact on the HE student experience of those in lower income households in particular, including opportunities to socialise and engage in extra-curricular activities. It is therefore important for Uni Connect to continue to provide information on the costs of HE, the financial support available and the benefits of HE, including the potential return on the investment, to help learners make informed decisions and mitigate the risk of them being put off by financial concerns.

The people learners talk to and are influenced by appear to have a significant effect on their perceptions of HE and their ability to fit in and succeed. Key influencers have contributed to changes in learners' outcomes and have shaped current knowledge, perceptions and intentions. The evaluation findings provide further evidence that engaging key influencers in outreach is essential and could help to mitigate the risks to HE access. However, information on the HE offer and practical considerations such as cost and financial support is unlikely to be sufficient.

⁵⁴ Advance HE and the Higher Education Policy Institute (2023) [Student Academic Experience Survey 2023](#). Published online.

Influencers also have a role in supporting and encouraging learners to believe in themselves and that HE is an option for them. Staff development and parent and carer interventions should, therefore, also seek to address this. This insight also suggests that the role of personalised interventions such as mentoring could be growing in importance, given the emerging evidence that they are effective for developing confidence, resilience and positive perceptions of HE. This is particularly the case when they are delivered by people with whom learners identify and that reflect their own characteristics.

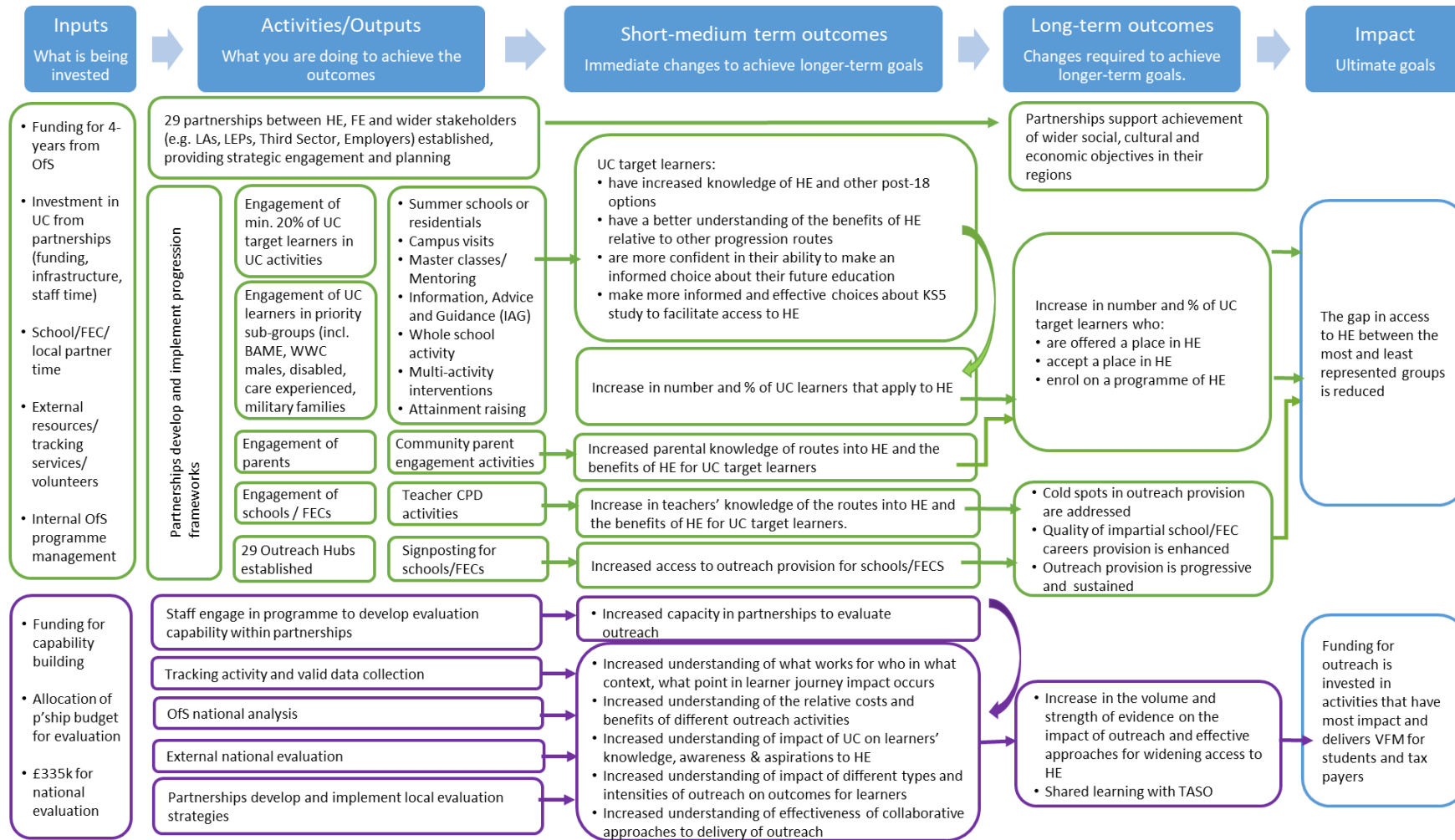
Recommendations

This latest analysis of the learner surveys provides further insights into the groups who appear to be gaining most from Uni Connect as well as those who could benefit from further, more tailored support. It also highlights which characteristics of the programme and wider influences appear to impact most on learners' knowledge, attitudes and behaviours. The recommendations below are designed to support Uni Connect partnerships with the ongoing development and delivery of the programme as well as the wider sector as it seeks to respond to the new approach to regulating access and participation and develop risk-based approaches to ensuring equality of opportunity.

In the context of the new risk-based approach, Uni Connect partnerships and individual HE providers should:

- Continue to offer sustained and progressive outreach to maximise the impact of Uni Connect on learners' outcomes.
- Embed personalised support, such as mentoring and masterclasses, with lighter-touch activities, such as campus visits, in a multi-intervention approach to ensure learners develop confidence and resilience as well as knowledge and skills.
- Continue to ensure information, advice and guidance (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 that concerns about cost do not deter learners from considering HE and from considering providers outside their local area in the current economic climate.
- 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 deliver targeted interventions to challenge 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 interventions for key influencers, including continuing professional development (CPD) for teachers and careers advisers, and information for parents/carers, so they have the necessary knowledge to support learners with their decision-making and help learners understand that HE is an option for them.
- Work with schools and colleges to support attainment-raising to ensure learners achieve the level required to fulfil their potential and realise their ambitions.

Appendix 1: Logic model for the national impact 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: Wave 4 survey (2021-22) – 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	<input type="radio"/>	<i>Please go to question 11</i>
No	<input type="radio"/>	<i>Please go to question 9</i>

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?

- White - British
- White - Irish
- White - Scottish
- Other White background
- Black or Black British - Caribbean
- Black or Black British - African
- Other Black background
- Mixed White and Black Caribbean
- Mixed White and Black African
- Asian or Asian British - Indian
- Asian or Asian British - Pakistani
- Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi
- Other Asian background
- Mixed White and Asian
- Chinese
- Arab
- Irish Traveller
- Gypsy or Traveller
- Other ethnic background
- Any other mixed background
- Prefer not to say

Additional questions added to survey at Wave 3 (2020-21) and Wave 4 (2021-22)

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
- I went to school/college and studied from home
- I studied from home

[Respondents who studied 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

Appendix 3: Summary table of key findings

Knowledge of higher education (HE)

	HE offer (subjects on offer, types of courses on offer at HE)	Application process (qualifications and grades needed, where to find information about how to apply, how to apply)	Student experience (what student life would be like, where to live)	Costs and financial support available
<i>Descriptive statistics</i>	At W4, 92% of learners know about the 'subjects they could study' (91% at W2); 78% know about the 'types of courses I could take' (77% at W2)	At W4, 84% of learners know about 'qualifications and grades needed' (86% at W2); 73% know 'where to find information about how to apply' (73% at W2); 65% know 'how to apply' (63% at W2)	At W4, 70% of learners are knowledgeable about 'the options about where to live while studying' (72% at W2) and 80% know 'what student life would be like' (82% at W2)	At W4, 72% know about 'the costs of study' (74% at W2) and 60% know about the 'financial support available' (61% at W2).
Programme characteristics associated with outcomes at W4 (2021-22)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive association between undertaking different types of Uni Connect activity, mentoring and skills and attainment workshops and knowledge of the types of courses a learner could take. • Positive association between campus visits and both knowledge outcomes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No significant association between taking part in some Uni Connect activity or number of different types of activity and knowledge of the application process. • Positive association between the number of hours of Uni Connect activity and knowledge of the qualifications and grades needed. • Positive association between campus visits and knowledge of how to apply and the qualifications and grades needed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No significant association between number of hours of activity and number of different types of activity and knowledge of student life, or between taking part in Uni Connect activity and number of hours of Uni Connect activity and knowledge of where to live. • Positive association between campus visits and summer schools and both knowledge outcomes. • Positive association between undertaking no Uni 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No significant association between knowledge of costs and financial support available and participation in Uni Connect and number of hours of Uni Connect activity • Positive association between number of different types of activity, campus visits and summer schools and both knowledge outcomes. • Positive association between knowledge of the financial support available

	HE offer (subjects on offer, types of courses on offer at HE)	Application process (qualifications and grades needed, where to find information about how to apply, how to apply)	Student experience (what student life would be like, where to live)	Costs and financial support available
Programme characteristics associated with outcomes at W4 (2021-22)			<p>Connect activity with knowledge of student life.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mentoring and undertaking different types of activity are positively associated with knowledge of where to live. 	and mentoring and masterclasses.
Learner characteristics associated with the outcomes at W4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher levels of knowledge amongst learners who know someone in HE and Year 11s. • Learners with higher KS2 attainment have higher level of knowledge of subjects on offer • Males have a higher level of knowledge about the types of courses • Those who don't know if they would be first in their family to go to HE have significantly lower levels of knowledge of both outcomes. • Lower level of knowledge of the subjects on offer amongst disabled learners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learners who know someone in HE and Year 11s have higher levels of knowledge of all aspects of the application process. • Higher levels of knowledge about the qualifications and grades needed amongst learners living in deprived areas and those with higher KS2 maths scores. • Males have a higher level of knowledge of how to apply and where to find information. • Lower levels of knowledge about all aspects of the application process among disabled learners and those who don't know if they would 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher levels of knowledge about the student experience among those with higher KS2 maths score and learners who know someone in HE • Higher level of knowledge of what student life is like among Year 11s. • Lower levels of knowledge about the student experience among disabled learners, those who have ever been eligible for FSM, and those who don't know if they would be the first in their family to go to HE. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher levels of knowledge about costs/financial support among males, learners from BAME groups, those who achieved higher KS2 maths scores, those who know someone in HE and Year 11s • Learners in deprived areas also have higher knowledge of the costs of HE • Lower levels of knowledge about the student experience among those who don't know if they would be the first in their family to go to HE • Disabled learners and those who have ever been eligible for FSM have lower levels

	HE offer (subjects on offer, types of courses on offer at HE)	Application process (qualifications and grades needed, where to find information about how to apply, how to apply)	Student experience (what student life would be like, where to live)	Costs and financial support available
Learner characteristics associated with the outcomes at W4	and those who have ever been eligible for FSM.	<p>be the first in their family to go to HE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learners with higher KS2 reading scores have a lower level of knowledge of how to apply and where to find information. Learners who have ever been eligible for FSM have lower level of knowledge of the qualifications and grades needed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lower level of knowledge of accommodation options among males and Year 11s. 	<p>of knowledge of the costs of HE.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learners with higher KS2 reading scores have lower levels of knowledge of the financial support available.
Wider factors associated with the outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Higher levels of knowledge about the HE offer among learners who speak to someone about HE. Knowledge of the types of courses is positively associated with being influenced by a careers adviser and being more likely to apply to HE as a result of the pandemic. Those who did not have support from parents/carers with their learning during 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Higher levels of knowledge of all aspects of the application process among those who have spoken to their family, a teacher or a careers adviser about HE and those who are most influenced by a careers adviser. Speaking to a friend about HE is positively associated with knowledge of the qualifications and grades needed and where to find information. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Higher levels of knowledge about student experience among those who have spoken to someone about HE and learners who are more likely to apply to HE as a result of the pandemic. Lower level of knowledge of the student experience among those who did not have access to support from their teacher, space to study and support from their parents/carers during lockdown. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Higher levels of knowledge of the costs and financial support among those who have spoken to their family, a teacher or a careers adviser about HE, those who are most influenced by a teacher and those who are more likely to apply to HE as a result of the pandemic. Friends also have a positive influence on knowledge of the costs of HE Lower level of knowledge of costs and financial support

	HE offer (subjects on offer, types of courses on offer at HE)	Application process (qualifications and grades needed, where to find information about how to apply, how to apply)	Student experience (what student life would be like, where to live)	Costs and financial support available
Wider factors associated with the outcomes	<p>lockdown have lower levels of knowledge of the HE offer.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Those who did not have access to a computer during lockdown have lower levels of knowledge of the subjects on offer. Those who did not have access to materials and resources, support from their teacher or space to study during lockdown have lower levels of knowledge of the types of courses. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Being most influenced by family is positively associated with knowledge of where to find information and how to apply. Learners who are most influenced by teachers also have higher level of knowledge of where to find information. Those who did not have access to support from their parents/carers or space to study during lockdown have lower levels of knowledge the application process. Lack of materials and resources and support from a teacher during lockdown is associated with a lower level of knowledge of how to apply to HE. Lower level of knowledge of where to find information among those who did not have access to a computer during lockdown. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not having access to a computer and materials and resources during lockdown is associated with lower levels of knowledge of the accommodation options. Learners who experienced no problems during the Covid-19 lockdown have a higher level of knowledge of the accommodation options. 	<p>among those who did not have access to a computer, materials and resources, and support from parents/carers during lockdown.</p>

	HE offer (subjects on offer, types of courses on offer at HE)	Application process (qualifications and grades needed, where to find information about how to apply, how to apply)	Student experience (what student life would be like, where to live)	Costs and financial support available
Characteristics associated with change in outcomes between W2 (2019-20) and W4 (2021-22)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No significant associations between changes in learners' knowledge of the HE offer and any programme characteristics, except for masterclasses, where there is a reduction in knowledge of the subjects they could study. • Knowledge of the subjects on offer increased for learners living in deprived areas and decreased for learners who know someone in HE and Uni Connect target learners. • Knowledge of the types of courses increased among those who spoke to a friend about HE and decreased among BAME learners. • No significant associations between change in knowledge and the problems experienced during lockdown. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Campus visits are associated with an increase in knowledge about how to apply and the qualifications and grades needed. Taking part in no Uni Connect activity and being asked to help with family members during lockdown is associated with an increase in knowledge about where to find information. • Taking part in mentoring and skills and attainment workshops is associated with a reduction in knowledge of where to find information. • Higher KS2 reading score associated with an increase in knowledge of how to apply and the qualifications and grades needed. Increase in knowledge of how to apply among those who don't know if they would be first in their family to go to HE. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No significant associations between change in knowledge and engagement in Uni Connect. • Increase in knowledge of student experience among those who don't know if they would be the first in their family to go to HE. • Knowledge of what student life will be like decreased among Uni Connect target learners and increased for those who spoke to their family about HE. • Knowledge of accommodation options decreased among those who know someone in HE but increased for those who were most influenced by a friend or a teacher and for those who experienced problems accessing a computer during lockdown. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge of cost of HE increased among those who don't know if they would be the first in their family to go to HE, those living in more deprived areas and those who spoke to a family member about HE; it decreased for male learners. • Knowledge of cost of HE increased among those who took part in no Uni Connect activity and decreased for those who received IAG. • Knowledge of the financial support available increased for those who spoke to a teacher about HE and among those who experienced no problems during lockdown.

	HE offer (subjects on offer, types of courses on offer at HE)	Application process (qualifications and grades needed, where to find information about how to apply, how to apply)	Student experience (what student life would be like, where to live)	Costs and financial support available
Characteristics associated with change in outcomes between W2 (2019-20) and W4 (2021-22)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduction in knowledge of how to apply among learners from a BAME group. • Reduction in knowledge of qualifications and grades needed among those who know someone in HE. 		

Understanding about the benefits of higher education

	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)
<i>Descriptive statistics</i>	At W4, 75% agree that going to HE will ‘enable me to earn more’ ((75% at W2) and 79% agree that ‘it will enable me to get a better job’ (80% at W2).	At W4, 76% agree that HE will ‘challenge me intellectually’ (77% at W2); 76% agree it will ‘give me valuable life skills’ (77% at W2); 63% agree it will ‘broaden my horizons’ (65% at W2) and 62% agree it will ‘improve my social life’ (64% at W2)
Programme characteristics associated with outcomes at W4 (2021-22)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No significant association between knowledge of how HE leads to careers learners may be interested in and engagement in Uni Connect. • Higher level of agreement that HE will enable learners to earn more among those who have taken part in different types of Uni Connect activity and lower level of agreement that HE will enable learners to earn more among those who have undertaken no Uni Connect activity. • Higher level of agreement that HE will delivery financial benefits among those who have participated in IAG and masterclasses. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taking part in different types of Uni Connect activity is associated with higher agreement that HE will broaden horizons, provide intellectual challenge and help learners develop valuable life skills. Number of hours of engagement in Uni Connect is positively associated with perception that HE will improve learners’ social life. • Taking part in IAG is positively associated with perception that HE will provide valuable life skills and enhance learners’ social lives. Those who take part in masterclasses are more likely to agree that HE will broaden horizons and provide intellectual challenge. • Those who take part in summer schools are less likely to agree that HE will provide intellectual challenge.
Learner characteristics associated with the outcomes at W4 (2021-22)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • KS2 attainment in maths, knowing someone in HE and being in Year 11 is associated with a higher level of knowledge of how HE leads to careers learners may be interested in. Learners with a disability, those who have ever been eligible for FSM and those who don’t know if they would be the first in their family to go to HE have lower level of knowledge of this outcome. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learners from a BAME group, those with higher KS2 attainment, those who know someone in HE and Year 11s hold more positive perceptions of the non-financial benefits of HE. • Males, learners with a disability, those who have ever been eligible for FSM hold more negative perceptions of the non-financial benefits of HE.

	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)
Learner characteristics associated with the outcomes at W4 (2021-22)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Higher KS2 attainment, knowing someone in HE and living in a more deprived area is associated with positive perceptions of the financial benefits of HE Males, disabled learners, those who don't know if they would be the first in their family to go to HE and Year 11s have more negative perceptions of the financial benefits of HE. 	
Wider factors associated with the outcomes at W4 (2021-22)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learners who speak to someone about HE have a higher level of knowledge of how HE can lead to careers they might be interested in. Speaking to and being influenced by a teacher or family member is associated with positive perceptions of the financial benefits, as is speaking to a friend and being influenced by a careers adviser. Learners who were required to help out with family members and found it difficult to get support from their teacher during lockdown are more likely to agree that HE will deliver financial benefits. Those who experienced no problems also agree that HE will enable them to earn more. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Speaking to someone about HE is associated with positive perceptions of the non-financial benefits of HE. Those who are most influenced by family, teachers and careers advisers agree that HE will provide them with valuable life skills and a better social life. Being influenced by a teacher and careers adviser is positively associated with a belief that HE will broaden horizons. Those who experienced problems accessing a computer during lockdown are less likely to agree that HE will broaden their horizons and provide intellectual challenge. Lack of access to a teacher is associated with more positive perceptions of these outcomes, as well as a perception that HE will provide learners with valuable life skills. Experiencing no problems during lockdown is positively associated with a belief that HE will broaden horizons and provide valuable life skills.

	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)
<p>Characteristics associated with change in outcomes between W2 (2019-20) and W4 (2021-22)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No significant association between engagement in Uni Connect and changes in knowledge of how HE leads to careers learners may be interested in. Agreement that HE will enable learners to earn more increased for those who took part in campus visits. • Knowledge of how HE leads to careers that learners may be interested in increased for those who don't know if they will be the first in their family to go to HE. No other significant associations between learner characteristics and change in perceptions of the benefits of HE. • Speaking to a family member is associated with an increase in knowledge about how HE leads to careers learners may be interested in. Speaking to a teacher leads to an increased belief that HE will enable learners to earn more. • Those who are less likely to apply to HE as a result of the pandemic are now less likely to believe that HE will enable them to earn more. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IAG is associated with an increase in the belief that HE broadens horizons. • Speaking with a teacher about HE is associated with an increase in the belief that HE will enable learners to develop valuable life skills and enhance their social life. • Males are now less likely to perceive that HE will enhance their social life and those who know someone in HE are now less likely to perceive that HE will broaden horizons, provide intellectual challenge and enable them to develop valuable life skills. • Higher KS4 attainment is associated with an increase in the belief that HE will challenge learners intellectually and enhance their social lives. • Those who experienced no problems and those who lacked a quiet place to study are now more likely to believe that HE will enhance their social life. • The learners who are less likely to go to HE as a result of the pandemic, are less likely to believe the HE will challenge them intellectually but more likely to believe that HE will enhance their social life and enable them to develop valuable life skills.

Likelihood learners will apply to higher education aged 18 or 19

	Self-efficacy (motivated to do well, belief that can get grades needed for further study; belief could go to university)	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
Descriptive statistics	At W4, 81% of learners agree that they 'are motivated to do well' (77% at W2); 71% agree that they 'could get the grades' (77% at W2); 70% agree that they could go to university if they wanted to (65% at W2).	At W4, 62% agree that they have the 'academic ability to succeed' (61% at W2) and 49% that they could 'cope with the level of study required' (51% at W2).	At W4, 38% agree that HE is 'for people like me' (39% at W2) and 47% agree that they would 'fit in well with other learners in HE' (50% at W2).	At W4, 68% of learners who have not already applied intend to apply to HE aged 18 or 19 (66% at W2).
Programme characteristics associated with outcomes at W4 (2021-22)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participating in a number of different Uni Connect activities is positively associated with the belief a learner can get the grades needed and go to university if they want to; those who participate in no Uni Connect activity are less likely to report these outcomes. Learners who receive IAG report higher self-efficacy outcomes. Masterclasses are positively associated with learner motivation and mentoring with a belief that a learner can get the grades needed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learners who have participated in no Uni Connect activity are less likely to have confidence in their academic abilities. Those who have received IAG are more likely to have confidence in their academic abilities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learners who participate in different types of Uni Connect activity are more likely to perceive they will 'fit in'. Those who have participated in no Uni Connect activity are less likely to perceive they will fit in. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Campus visits are positively associated with likelihood to apply to HE.

	Self-efficacy (motivated to do well, belief that can get grades needed for further study; belief could go to university)	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
Learner characteristics associated with the outcomes at W4 (2021-22)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher KS attainment and knowing someone in HE is positively associated with self-efficacy outcomes. • Disabled learners, those who don't know if they will be the first in their family to go to HE and those who have ever been eligible for FSM report lower self-efficacy. • Although males are more likely to perceive they could get the grades necessary, they are less likely to be motivated to do well and agree that they could go to university if they wanted to. • Year 11s are also less likely to agree they could go to HE but more likely to be motivated and believe they could get the grades needed. • BAME learners are more likely and Uni Connect target learners less likely to report they could go to HE if they wanted to. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Males, BAME learners, high KS2 attainers (particularly in maths) and those who know someone in HE are more confident in their academic abilities. • Learners who are disabled, who have ever been eligible for FSM and who don't know if they will be the first in their family to go to HE are less confident in their academic abilities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social identity is positively associated with being from a BAME group, higher KS2 attainment and knowing someone in HE. Males and Year 11s are also more likely to report they will 'fit in'. • Learners who are disabled, who have ever been eligible for FSM and who will be or don't know if they will be the first in their family to go to HE have lower self-identity outcomes. Learners from deprived areas are also less likely to report they will 'fit in'. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BAME learners, those with higher KS2 attainment, and those who know someone in HE are more likely to apply to HE aged 18 or 19. • Males, learners with a disability, Year 11s and those who don't know if they will be the first in their family to go to HE are less likely to apply to HE aged 18 or 19.

	Self-efficacy (motivated to do well, belief that can get grades needed for further study; belief could go to university)	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
Wider factors associated with the outcomes at W4 (2021-22)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speaking to someone about HE is positively associated with self-efficacy outcomes. • Being influenced by family and teachers has a positive influence on motivation. Those who are most influenced by teachers are also more likely to perceive they could get the grades needed and go to university if they want to. • Not experiencing any barriers to learning during lockdown is positively associated with self-efficacy. Those who experienced problems accessing their teacher are also more likely to agree they could get the grades and go to university if they wanted to. • Those who experienced challenges accessing a computer, a quiet space to study, and support from parents/carers are less likely to agree with one or more self-efficacy outcomes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speaking to a teacher, a family member, friends or a careers adviser about HE is positively associated with learner confidence in their academic abilities. • Speaking to no one about HE is also positively associated with learner confidence in their academic abilities. • Those who were most influenced by their family, teachers and careers advisers are more confident in their ability to cope with the level of study. • Friends have a negative influence on learner confidence in their academic ability to succeed in HE. • Not experiencing any barriers to learning during lockdown is positively associated with confidence in academic abilities. • Those who did not have access to help from their parents/carers during 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speaking to someone about HE and being influenced by family, teachers and careers advisers are positively associated with self-identity. • Not experiencing any barriers to learning during lockdown is positively associated with social identity. • Those who did not have access to a quiet space to study and help from their parents/carers during lockdown are less likely to perceive their HE is for people like them and they would fit in at HE. • Those who did not have access to a computer are also less likely to perceive people 'like them' go to HE. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speaking to someone about HE and being influenced by a teacher are positively associated with likelihood of applying. • Those who did not experience any barriers to learning during the lockdown are more likely to apply to HE, as are those who experienced problems accessing support from their teacher. • Those who did not have access to a computer during lockdown are less likely to apply to HE.

	Self-efficacy (motivated to do well, belief that can get grades needed for further study; belief could go to university)	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
Wider factors associated with the outcomes at W4 (2021-22)		lockdown are less likely to perceive they have the ability to succeed and cope in HE. Those who did not have access to a computer are also less likely to perceive they have the academic ability to succeed.		
Characteristics associated with change in outcomes between W2 (2019-20) and W4 (2021-22)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mentoring is associated with an increase and skills and attainment workshops are associated with a decrease in motivation. • Increase in the motivation of males to do well. • Increase in the belief learners with higher KS2 maths scores could go to university if they wanted to. • Higher KS4 attainment is associated with an increase in the belief that learners can get the grades needed and go to university if they want to. • A reduction in the motivation of learners with a disability. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learners with a disability now less likely to believe they could cope with the demands of study. • Those who have taken part in different types of Uni Connect activity now less likely to perceive they have the academic ability to succeed in HE. • Higher KS4 attainment is associated with an increase in learner confidence in their ability to succeed and cope with the level of study required in HE. • Those who have spoken to a family member about HE are now more likely to perceived that they could cope with the level of study required. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No significant associations between engagement in Uni Connect and change in perceptions of social identity. • Learners with a higher KS2 reading scores and higher KS4 attainment are more likely to believe people 'like me' attend university. • Those from more deprived areas and those who lacked access to support from their teacher during lockdown are now less likely to perceive they would 'fit in'. • Speaking to a family member is associated with an increase in learners' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No significant associations between engagement in Uni Connect or speaking to someone or being influenced by someone and change in the likelihood that learners will apply. • Reduction in the likelihood males will apply to HE. • Increase in the likelihood that that those with higher KS2 reading scores and KS4 attainment will apply.

	Self-efficacy (motivated to do well, belief that can get grades needed for further study; belief could go to university)	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
Characteristics associated with change in outcomes between W2 (2019-20) and W4 (2021-22)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Those who would be the first in their family to go to HE are now less likely to believe they could get the grades needed. • Speaking to a friend about HE is associated with an increased belief that a learner could go to university if they wanted to. • Speaking to no one about HE and being influenced by a careers adviser is associated with a reduction in motivation. • Those who did not have access to a computer in lockdown are now more likely to believe they could get the grades needed. • Those who are less likely to go to HE because of the pandemic are now less motivated. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Despite being less likely to apply to HE as a result of the Covid-19, learners are now more confident in their ability to succeed and cope with the level of study required in HE. 	<p>perception that that people 'like me' got to HE. Those who have spoken to a teacher about HE are now more likely to perceive that they will 'fit in'.</p>	