

PRESS RELEASE

EMBARGOED UNTIL 10.00 Tuesday 15 October 2024

Uni Connect programme collaborates successfully with state secondary schools in effort to raise attainment

A formative evaluation of Uni Connect's work to raise attainment in schools finds high levels of satisfaction among schools partnered with local higher education providers.

Attainment-raising activities have been well received by schools partnered with higher education providers as part of Uni Connect, according to a formative evaluation of the programme's progress in 2023-24.

Established in 2017 by the Office for Students (OfS), Uni Connect links universities and colleges with schools to offer impartial activities, advice, and information, with an aim to increase the number of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds in England who go into higher education.

The evaluation, which was commissioned by the OfS and carried out by Ipsos UK, focuses on Uni Connect's ongoing third phase, in which partnerships are developing and implementing attainment-raising activities in schools. This phase began in August 2021 and is due to run until July 2025.

Key findings include:

- All activities received a high percentage of very satisfied/satisfied ratings from schools surveyed as part of the evaluation
- Activities focused on study skills, non-academic barriers, and the ways learners can self-monitor and purposefully direct their learning, ranked the highest with 94 per cent, 93 per cent, and 96 per cent satisfaction respectively
- Most school staff surveyed (82 per cent) would continue to engage with attainment-raising activities in the long term and most thought that the attainment-raising activities would contribute to positive outcomes for young people
- Of those surveyed, 91 per cent agreed/strongly agreed that it would lead to improved confidence, 76 per cent agreed/strongly agreed it would lead to improved educational attainment and 70 per cent agreed/strongly agreed it would reduce the attainment gap between learners.

John Blake, Director for Fair Access and Participation at the OfS, said:

'This evaluation shows that the attainment-raising activities undertaken as part of the Uni Connect programme so far have been well received by schools.

‘We know that investing in intervention in earlier phases of education takes patience, as it will take years for the full effects to become clear, but we’re encouraged that participating schools felt that learners were showing improvements in confidence, engagement, motivation and ambition, and the development of new skills.

‘Young people from disadvantaged backgrounds may have less chance to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to progress into higher education, or to achieve grades that reflect their potential.

‘Our aim is that everyone with the talent and desire to benefit from higher education can do so, regardless of their background or where they come from. We know that higher education can deliver life changing benefits for individuals, as well making a positive impact on society and the economy.

‘It’s important that we continue to support and challenge the higher education sector to improve equality of opportunity for students, prior to entry to HE and whilst students are studying, whether that’s through the Uni Connect programme or through our requirement for every university or college that wishes to access public funding to have approved access and participation plans.’

Read the evaluation [LINK]

ENDS

For further information contact 0117 905 7676 or press@officeforstudents.org.uk.

Notes

1. The Office for Students is the independent regulator for higher education in England. Our aim is to ensure that every student, whatever their background, has a fulfilling experience of higher education that enriches their lives and careers.
2. Uni Connect brings together 29 partnerships of universities, colleges, and other local partners to offer activities, advice and information on the benefits and realities of going to university or college. The programme was set up in 2017 and supports our strategic goal that students’ access to higher education is not limited by their background, location, or characteristics.
3. The Uni Connect programme comprises three phases. Phase One (January 2017 to July 2019) involved the delivery of targeted outreach focused on 997 specific wards in England where participation in higher education was lower than expected given the GCSE results of the young people who lived there.
4. Phase Two (August 2019 to July 2021) saw Uni Connect build on Phase One and continue to deliver targeted outreach. This phase included an additional strand (outreach hubs), which enabled partnerships to develop strategic collaborations with local partners to deliver outreach in schools and colleges beyond the target wards to address outreach cold spots in the partnerships’ regions.
5. Phase Three (August 2021 to July 2025), in which the objectives shifted away from direct delivery of targeted outreach towards more collaborative strategic interventions, including new responsibilities for partnerships around developing an attainment-raising offer to be delivered from academic year 2023-24 (funding subject to confirmation on an annual basis).