



# Past, present and future

# Impact

Launched in 2017, Uni Connect is the current iteration of government-funded higher education outreach and builds on its predecessors, Aimhigher, National Networks for Collaborative Outreach and National Collaborative Outreach Programme.

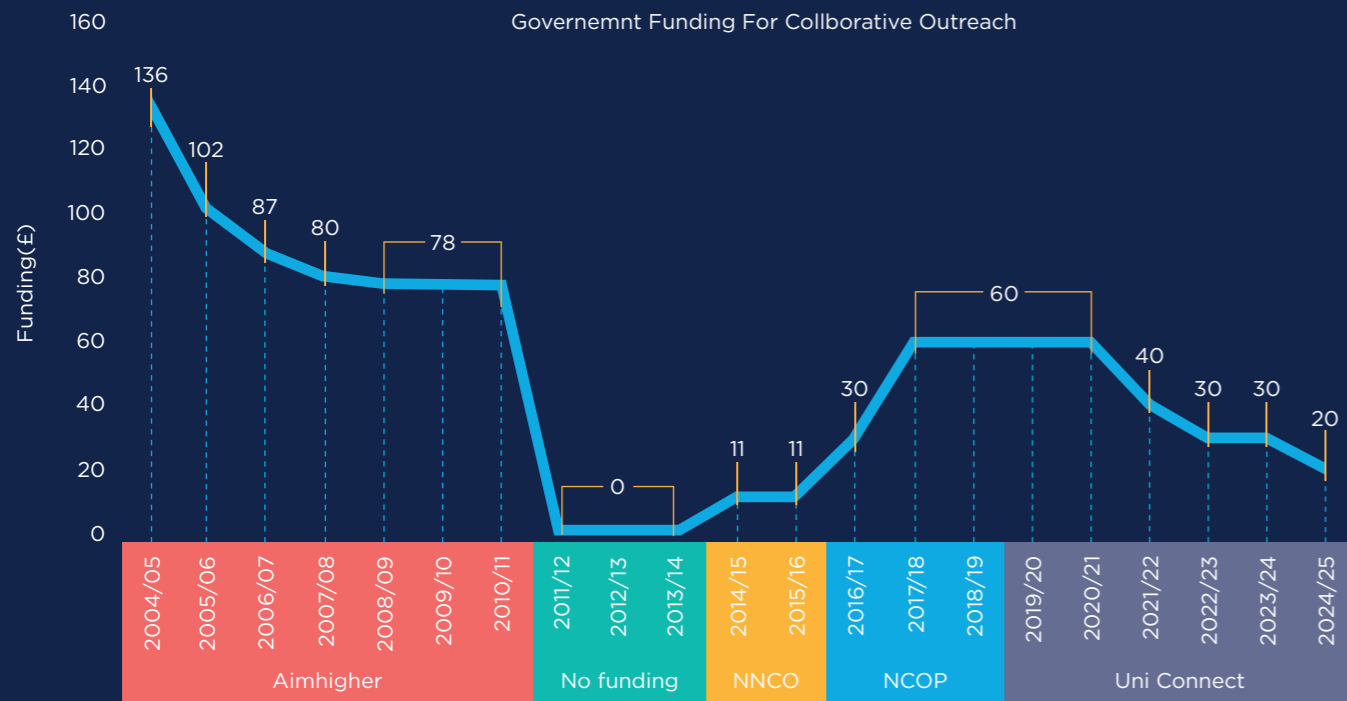
Uni Connect aims to widen access to higher education for the most underserved and underrepresented young people in society by delivering activities which support them to make informed choices about the right educational pathway for them. Uni Connect is delivered by 29 regional partnerships based in English universities.

Uni Connect works with groups of pupils who are under-represented in higher education or who may face additional barriers to accessing higher education such as pupils in areas with low participation rates to higher education; care-experienced young people; young people at risk of becoming NEET; or young people who have been eligible for free school meals.

Since **2017**

- 185,000+** higher education outreach activities delivered
- 2,000+** schools and colleges engaged with the programme.
- 1.5m** young people from underrepresented groups engaged in the Uni Connect programme

Since 2021/22 funding for Uni Connect has reduced. Over the same time period, activities delivered by the programme have reduced from 26,000 a year in 21/22 to 19,000 in 23/24. Learner engagement with the programme has reduced from 455,000 young people in 21/22 to 300,000 in 23/24.



# Uni Connect: discovering what works in higher education outreach

Uni Connect delivers half of all higher education outreach activity recorded in England. Since its launch it has also been committed to discovering what works to widen access to university and has significantly contributed to the evidence base in the last seven years, leading to more impactful outreach being delivered across the country.

Those who engaged in a high intensity package of activity with the programme have a university progression rate one and a half times higher than a closely matched comparison group<sup>1</sup>

Engagement in the programme is associated with an increased likelihood of progressing to HE, with more intensive engagement in the programme linked to higher rates of progression to higher education.<sup>2</sup>

Those who have engaged in 5+ hours of activity and attended at least one campus visit are twice as likely to attend higher education as those who took part in under 3 hours of activity in school.<sup>3</sup>

Two independent reviews have shown that every pound spent on the programme delivers between £5 - £9 back to treasury. The most recent review, by Public First, set out the clear case for a national collaborative outreach programme and recommendations for how this programme should work.<sup>4</sup>



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<sup>1</sup>Research by HEAT <https://heat.ac.uk/research-evidence/heat-track-impact-reports/uni-connect-heat-hesa-track-impact-report/>

<sup>3</sup>Research by Higher Horizons Uni Connect partnership <https://higherhorizons.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/2023-HH-HESA-Dashboard-PDFs.pdf>

<sup>2</sup>Research by AimhigherWM partnership <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2405844021016212>

<sup>4</sup>Public First Review of Collaborative Outreach <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/uni-connect-a-review-of-collaborative-support-in-access-to-higher-education/>

# Recommendations for future

## What next for collaborative outreach?

Uni Connect is uniquely positioned to serve as a key regional connector. By encouraging and overseeing regional outreach work, including Access and Participation Plan activities delivered by universities, Uni Connect can ensure that efforts to support young people in accessing and succeeding in higher education are well-coordinated across our region.

Based on the success of the last decade of impactful evidence-based direct delivery, this should continue to be the key deliverable for

any nationally funded access scheme to ensure support to access HE remains accessible and available to all young people who need it. Direct delivery of higher education outreach should be delivered against the following Outreach Benchmarks, ensuring all young people have access to the information, advice and guidance to make an informed choice about their education and into a career. This framework closely aligns with many of the key benchmarks within 'Good Career Guidance - The Next 10 Years', November 2024.

### 1. IMPARTIAL INFORMATION, ADVICE AND GUIDANCE

Pupils should take part in at least 5 hours worth of IAG activities delivered in school such as workshops including sessions on:

- Student finance mythbusting
- Post-16 qualifications / FE options
- Post-18 qualifications / HE options
- How to choose a university
- UCAS process

### 2. CAMPUS EXPERIENCES

Pupils should visit at least two universities to allow them to understand the differences between institutions. Campus experiences should focus on showing pupils the differences between how you learn at university vs school, and the realities of student life.

### 3. CURRICULUM LINKS

Pupils should take part in subject-taster days on campus or in school workshops which demonstrate links between the curriculum and studying related subjects at higher education.

The aims of these activities are both to further subject interests, enhance curriculum learning, and also demonstrate how these subjects can be studied in further and higher education.

### 4. APPRENTICESHIPS AND ALTERNATIVE ROUTES

Pupils should be given the opportunity to learn about advanced, higher, and degree apprenticeships during their time in school as well as other alternative provision and routes, in a truly impartial manner.

This should include:

- Information, Advice and Guidance activities and workshops on apprenticeship levels, subjects, and availability in their locality (delivered in school)
- Apprenticeship simulation day, which includes mock interviews and assessments as well as information about how to apply for apprenticeships (delivered in school or on campus)
- Information, Advice and Guidance activities and workshops on other routes, their levels, subjects, and availability in their locality (delivered in school)

### 5. STUDY SKILLS

Pupils should be given the opportunity to practice and develop their study skills throughout their time in school. Opportunities to reflect on which learning strategies work best for them, and being taught good study skills practices will ensure that pupils are prepared for their GCSE exams. Based on local need activities and workshops could include:

- General study skills
- Soft skills
- Revision skills
- Metacognition