



ASPIRE HIGHER END OF YEAR REPORT

Monitoring and Evaluation Report

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Executive Summary

In 2022-23, Aspire Higher continued to deliver a sustained and progressive programme of outreach to students in Bedfordshire, Hertfordshire, and Northamptonshire. This academic year also marked the beginning of a transition to a focus on attainment raising in line with the changing national objectives of the Uni Connect programme, which will continue into 2023-24.

This report showcases the approach of the Aspire Higher Uni Connect partnership during this year. The partnership engaged with 4,905 learners from target wards during the 2022-23 academic year. Of these learners, 2,275 had three or more instances of engagement within the academic year.

Findings Overview

Spotlight evaluations submitted to Aspire Higher Steering Groups across the academic year demonstrated the impact of our programme. Outreach initiatives that helped build student confidence and resilience, or allowed them to experience a new educational style, showed evidence of impact and received positive feedback from participants (*PGL Project, ESOL Project, Saturday Club*). Information, Advice and Guidance outreach also proved to be beneficial to students. IAG outreach covered not only routes to HE, but also information about student finance, subject choices, and student life (*Wayfinder Days, Pathfinder Days, Why Study at University?*).

To address concerns about grade barriers and maintaining grades in terms of progression to higher education, outreach focusing on HE subject insight and attainment raising was implemented (*Positively U, First Give, Crime scene to Courtroom, Media Taster Day*). Overall, there was an increase in the number of skills and attainment activity delivered by Aspire Higher in 2022-23. This reflects that changing national aims of the Uni Connect project and is a trend expected to continue into next year.

The desire to include teachers and parents in conversations about higher education continued in 2022-23. Previous Aspire Higher evaluation showed that students from target wards rarely had conversations with their families about university. With this evidence, the successful parent and teacher webinar series delivered in collaboration with the Study Higher aimed to ensure that key influencers of students receive communication and support regarding HE. In addition, institutions provided additional parent resources and teacher CPD. A total of 12 parent and teacher interventions were delivered in 2022-23 across the partnership.

While HESA Progression data for students who engaged with Aspire Higher in 2022-23 will not be available for at least another two years, the findings from 2022 HESA track release suggest that the three engagements approach to sustained outreach correlates with progression to HE. Students who have had 3 or more engagements since the programme started in 2017 are slightly more likely to progress to HE than those who have less than three engagements at 28.43% (2,065 students) and 28.01% (1,185 students).

1. What is Uni Connect?

Uni Connect, formerly known as the National Collaborative Outreach Programme (NCOP), brings together 29 partnerships of universities, colleges and other local partners. The programme aims to offer activities, advice and information on the benefits and realities of going to university or college. Uni Connect phase one started in January 2017 and ran until July 2019, phase two started on 1st of August 2019 and ran until July 2021, and a transition year into phase 3 took place in 2021-22. Phase one was aligned with the government's social mobility goals and aimed to support and increase the number of young people from underrepresented groups go into higher education. The partnerships worked with students who come from or live in local areas where there is not a high number of people engaging in higher education. Building on phase one and two, and reflecting the move towards attainment raising, the current national objectives for Uni Connect are:

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

(This list is taken from Office for Students' [website](#))

2. Who are we?

Aspire Higher is the collaboration of Higher Education providers at the University of Hertfordshire, University of Bedfordshire, and University of Northampton. We have identified a programme of activities and events developed to suit to the specific needs of young people and their families in Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire, and Northamptonshire. Through these, we aim to provide the student's tools to enable them to raise their attainment, increase their transferable skills and gain knowledge of Higher Education opportunities. Aspire Higher works within 21 urban area wards, identified by the Office for Students (OfS). Aspire Higher works with schools and colleges within these wards across a range of different interventions, allowing students who take part in the events to experience life at university, develop new skills, explore future careers and more.

3. Evidencing Impact

This section covers our approach to evaluation which blends the Kirkpatrick model (1994) to measure the impact of our activity on young people in our target wards as we feel it represents a structured and robust approach (Table 1). Our evaluation methodology includes both quantitative data collection and analysis primarily through HEAT surveys and focus groups. Our surveys measure change against our Learner Progression Framework learner outcomes and the New General Self Efficacy Scale.¹

We use the Higher Education Access Tracker (HEAT) to monitor our sustained engagement with learners. Our definitions of engagement and sustained are:

- An engagement: Attendance at activity, initiative or event
- Engaged learner: A learner with engagement/s in at least one activity
- Sustained learner: A learner with more than three engagements

We also monitor engagement hours of 6 or more in our Steering Group evaluation reports. These evaluation reports monitor engagement by target ward and also provide spotlight activity evaluations from each institution.

Category	What is measured?
Reaction	How participants feel about their experience of the activity
Learning	Increase in participants knowledge and skills (knowledge of HE routes, confidence building etc.)
Behaviour	Ability to make informed decisions about HE Increased applications to HE and FE
Results	HE participation in target wards

Table 1: Kirkpatrick evaluation model

Evaluation of our activities is dependent on the type and intensity of intervention. Level of intensity have been identified by levels, based on the Higher Horizons+ framework. Table 2 contains our adapted version of this framework.

Level	Kirkpatrick impact measurable	Example activity	Evaluation method
1. Low Single sessions, off campus	N/A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HE fairs • Parents' evening • In-school talks • Short activity sessions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attendance is monitored through HEAT • Informal teacher feedback • YAPs
2. Medium Single day sessions, on or off campus	Reaction Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Campus visits • Subject taster days • Youth Advisory Panel 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre and post evaluation forms completed on first and last day • Interaction recorded on HEAT as multiple

¹ Chen et al, 2001, New General Efficacy Scale <https://sparqtools.org/mobility-measure/new-general-self-efficacy-scale/>

			exchanges or multiple events
3. High Mutli-day sessions or multiple engagement with the same cohort	Reaction Learning Behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mentoring • eMentoring/tutoring • Residential Summer Schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus groups • Reflective journals • Visual image tools (e.g. photo elicitation, collage) • Randomised Control Trials (where applicable)

Table 2: Aspire Higher’s adapted Kirkpatrick evaluation model.

4. Institutional Activity 2022-23

The next three sections of this report will provide information on each institution's activity including engagement numbers, ward information and the activities that run throughout the year. It will also present the data analysis from spotlight activities. Spotlight activities are medium or high engagement level with the students and ran for single or multi-day sessions or multiple engagements with the same cohort, which have been presented at Steering Group meetings in the 2022-23 academic year. This report will focus on one spotlight activity evaluation report from each institution.

4.1 University of Northampton

The ISII team at the University of Northampton gathered data from a different number of activities running throughout the year. The table below shows the number (and percentage) of young people in 16 Aspire Higher target wards that the team from the University of Northamptonshire worked with in the 2022-23 academic year.

4.2 Engagement numbers and ward information

The figure below indicates the number of Uni Connect students engaged with who consented to be tracked as part of the programme from 16 wards in the Northamptonshire area.

Ward	Total engagement 22/23		Sustained engagement 22/23 (3 or more engagements)		Sustained engagement 22/23 (6 or more hours)	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Avondale	220	84.62%	80	30.77%	105	40.38%
Central	285	82.61%	190	55.07%	195	56.52%
Delapre	420	80.76%	180	34.62%	140	26.92%
Drayton	240	71.64%	135	40.29%	185	55.22%
East	160	91.43%	110	62.86%	105	60%
Hazelwood	285	85.07%	205	61.19%	225	67.16%
Hill	305	71.76%	180	42.35%	215	50.59%
Kingswood	355	100%	230	64.79%	260	73.24%
Queensway	300	76.92%	160	41.03%	135	34.62%
Rushden West	195	46.43%	55	13.09%	60	14.29%
Shire Lodge	165	70.21%	85	36.17%	90	38.29%
Spencer	390	63.41%	80	13.01%	135	21.95%
St. Andrews	220	75.86%	100	34.48%	140	48.28%
St. James	285	57.58%	105	21.21%	80	16.16%
Thorplands	250	45.45%	70	12.73%	185	33.64%
Warkton	200	68.97%	80	27.59%	145	50.00%

Table 3: Ward engagements as of August 17, 2023. Number rounded to nearest 5.

4.3 Activities

In total, the University of Northampton's Uni Connect team delivered 140 activities in 2022-23, 10 are highlighted below. The majority of these (60) are classed as information, advice, and guidance-based outreach by the Office for Students, and 37 were classed as Skills and Attainment. The team also delivered campus visits, subject masterclasses, and mentoring. A snapshot of activities is below.

Event Title	Activity Type	Description
Women into STEAM	Subject Masterclass / Subject Insight	All day fair introducing students to STEM careers.
Car Crash Careers	Campus Visit	All day event introducing students to careers with the NHS and emergency services.
Crime scene to Courtroom	Subject Masterclass / Subject Insight	An interactive workshop in which students examine a crime scene and present their case in a mock court.
Medical Mavericks	IAG / General HE Information	A careers workshop introducing students to medical, sports and STEM careers.
Importance of GCSEs and Beyond	IAG / General HE Information	Assembly discussing the importance of GCSE's and progression paths for students.
Personal Statement Writing	IAG / General HE Information	A workshop seeking to help students with future interviews.
The Saturday Club	IAG / General HE Information	A workshop aimed at helping students write their personal statements for potential University applications.
Careers Speed Dating	IAG / General HE Information	An event where students meet a range of individuals working in different careers.
Unifrog 2022/2023	Other	A platform that allows students to look at and compare potential university courses.
Mentoring	Mentoring	One-to-one sessions where students get support with their studying.

Table 4: Selection of activities and type carried out by the University of Northampton.

4.4 Spotlight Activity: Crime Scene to Courtroom

Crime Scene to Courtroom workshops are learning activities where students use forensic science equipment and professional techniques within a staged scenario. The students are giving training equivalent to present their case in a crown court scenario. During the workshop students will hold mock interviews with suspects, evaluate evidence, before drawing a conclusion to be presented in a courtroom. Students are encouraged to work as part of a team, in pairs, and as individuals, and opportunities are created to explore potential career paths, whilst being introduced to a range of potential careers. The evaluation was conducted through an online post-survey (n=28) and teacher interviews (n=2) across three schools. The post-survey focused on students' opinions on the Crime Scene to Courtroom, any changes to their preferences toward Higher Education, and subjects they may wish to study further. The teacher interviews concerned what activities such as this add to the curriculum, the benefits for students, and how they are incorporated into the school schedule.

Activities, such as Crime Scene to Courtroom, engage students well by offering opportunities outside their regular classroom interactions, as well as introducing them to new careers:

“And obviously all the fun workshops that we get to put in place, like the crime scene to courtroom one that we did, amongst others. It’s a great way for me to make sure that the kids are getting the careers overview that they need that will go on to help” (Teacher 1)

“Events like this introduce students to the careers, behind the careers [...] They know what a police officer is, but they might not know the careers that exist to support them” (Teacher 2)

A secondary benefit is giving students new classroom experiences which are unique and engaged with them in a non-traditional manner:

“I think for most people sitting there for hours on end and having someone talking at you, it’s not the most fun. You need to be a particular person to be able to get through that and students that are age 15 and younger don’t have the tendency to sit there for longer than probably 20-30 minute with someone talking at them unless it’s being made in a fun way” (Teacher 1)

The students enjoyed how the day was set out, with the presenter laying out the room as a courtroom and giving students particular roles with duties to fulfil throughout the day:

“We rearranged the classroom, that got through to them as they were running the courtroom and they had their roles to do.” (Teacher 2)

“I enjoyed the most interactive parts, such as when we did the courtroom segment.” (Student 4)

“It was entertaining most of the time, especially the crime scene and courtroom.” (Student 2)

This needs to be balanced, however, and students noted that there were parts of the day that were negative with less interactive elements:

“I didn’t like how wordy the day was, it was quite dull in places.” (Student 3)

“In some parts it was slightly boring and too wordy, and the random assigning of groups was uncomfortable.” (Student 2)

“Quite long and lots of listening and reading” (Student 5)

Student overall did enjoy the day, with the majority agreeing with the statement ‘I would recommend Crime Scene Investigation of a friend’.

In particular, students enjoyed the investigatory parts of the day and the role play, seeing it as an opportunity to see a career from a new angle:

“I enjoyed looking at the actual crime scene and all the details were great. I really enjoyed the court roleplay at the end” (Student 6)

“I enjoyed the solving of the case and hearing the calls and watching interviews and building the case from the beginning and finding all the evidence and getting to see a crime scene as well. I also liked that it was a real case, a true crime” (Student 7)

A related impact was the increased likelihood of students seeking to study Law or Criminology at A Level, at 35.7% (Figure 1). This dropped, however, for university, with only 17.8% believing they would take it to degree level (Figure 2):

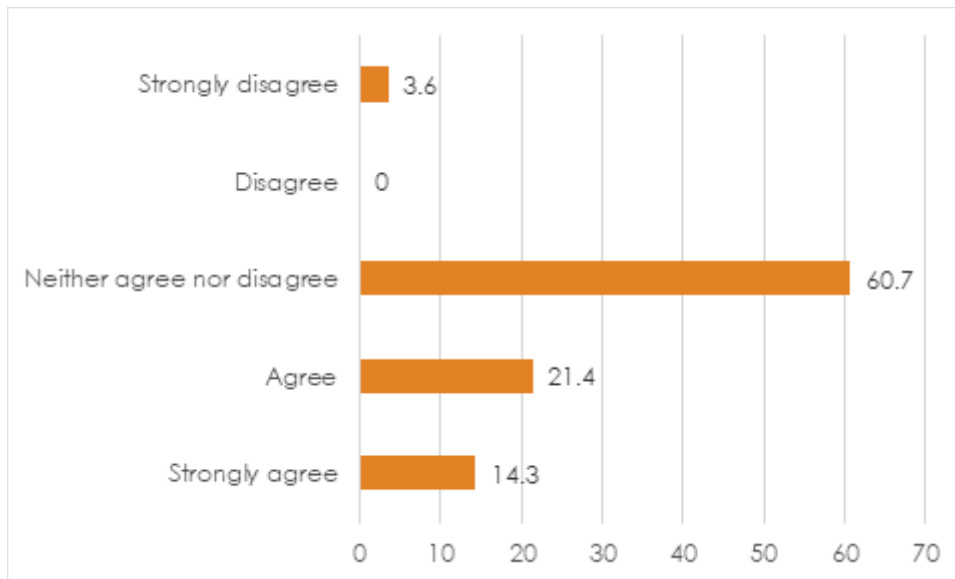


Figure 1 "I am more likely to study Law or Criminology at A Level than I was before attending Crime Scene Investigation" (%)

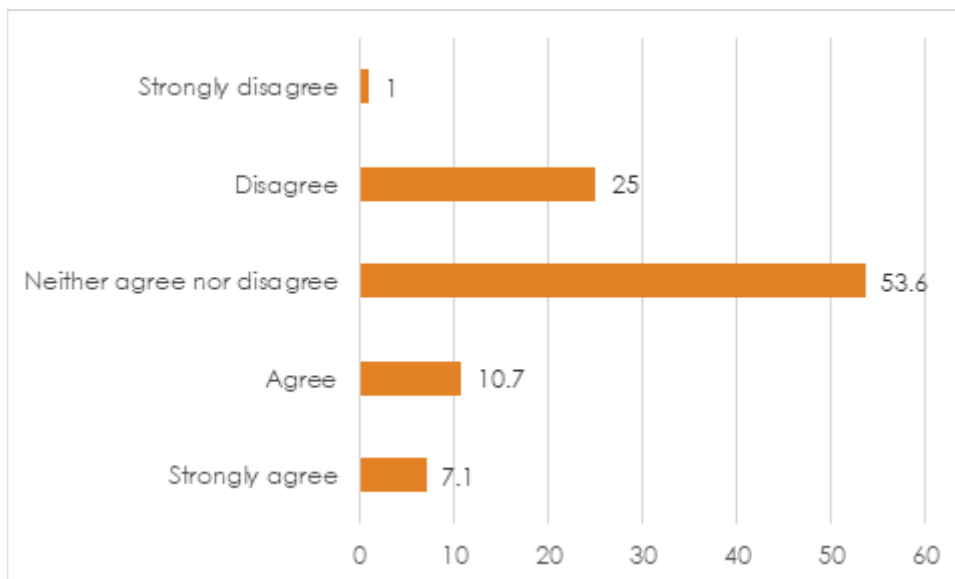


Figure 2 "I am more likely to study Law or Criminology at university than I was before attending Crime Scene Investigation" (%)

On the administrative side, consideration should be given to the student invited to partake in Crime Scene Investigation to ensure it aligns with the Uni Connect objectives. For one school, the call for participation only went out to students who were already interested in the subject:

“We aimed it at students who were interested in that type of career, so the ones who were there wanted to be there and made the most of it.” (Teacher 2)

The quantitative numbers supported this, with 85.2% of involved students either likely or very likely to attend university, compared to other activities this year which saw more students on the fence, such as Stretch Development that saw 42.19% of targeted students likely to go to Higher Education. Overall, Crime Scene to Courtroom is successful in engaging students with new careers and taking them outside of the classroom environment to introduce them to career options they may not have considered previously. Teachers felt the program was received well by both staff and students, though there is a need to ensure that the delivery of the project is aimed at targeted students, rather than those who are already assured of their higher education choices.

4.5 University of Hertfordshire

4.6 Engagement numbers and ward information

The table below shows the number (and percentage) of young people in Aspire Higher target wards that the team from the University of Hertfordshire worked with in the 2022-23 academic year. The team also worked with a large number of students who attend schools in target wards, as well as looked after children and students from areas of low progression to higher education.

Ward	Total engagement 22/23		Sustained engagement 22/23 (3 or more engagements)		Sustained engagement 22/23 (6 or more hours)	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Bedwell	80	14.81%	35	6.48%	5	0.93%
Grove Hill	130	32.75%	45	11.34%	105	26.45%
Highfield and St. Pauls	115	28.97%	30	7.56%	70	17.63%
Northwick	5	1.26%	5	1.26%	0	0%

Table 5: Ward engagements as of August 17, 2023. Number rounded to nearest 5.

4.7 Activities

In total, the University of Hertfordshire team delivered a total of 93 Aspire Higher activities, events and initiatives in 2022-23. The majority of these were classed as IAG/General HE Information (40) - based outreach by the Office for Students, and 30 were determined as campus visits. The team also delivered skills and attainment-based outreach, subject masterclasses and a residential. A snapshot of activities is below.

Activity title	Activity Type	Description
Wayfinder Day	IAG / General HE Information	An educational pathways-focused all-day campus visit to the University of Hertfordshire for KS5.
Pathfinder Day	IAG / General HE Information	An educational pathways-focused all-day campus visit to the University of Hertfordshire for KS3.
Personal Statement Support	IAG / General HE Information	Support (including 1-1 support) for Year 13 students with the UCAS personal statements.
Positively You	Skills and Attainment (incl Tutoring)	A workshop focusing on developing skills and confidence.
Year 10 Choices	IAG / General HE Information	A workshop exploring educational life after GCSEs.
Theatre Groups Performance in Education	IAG / General HE Information	An interactive theatre performance focused on education pathways.
PGL Residential	Other	A residential for a target Aspire Higher school aimed to develop confidence, social skills and resilience.
UCAS Application Process	IAG / General HE Information	A workshop exploring applying to university.
Why go to university?	IAG / General HE Information	An assembly that explores the benefits of higher education.
Applying for Student Finance and	IAG / General HE Information	An assembly that explores the benefits of higher education.

Table 6: Selection of activities and type carried out by the University of Hertfordshire.

4.8 Spotlight activity – PGL Residential Project

25 Year 10 Aspire Higher students from Astley Cooper, a ‘Tier 1’ priority school serving students the Grove Hill and Highfield & St Paul’s wards of Hemel Hempstead, were invited to participate in the PGL residential project. Aspire Higher postcode students were selected by their head of year, based upon a number of other intersecting WP measures. The trip was completely free for the students, including costs for activities, accommodation and travel.

Many students who attended the residential attended all three pre-trip sessions, however there were some students who discontinued with the project and were replaced, as is it to be expected. Of the 22 students who attended the residential, 20 were UC Target students, and 21 were POLAR 4 Quintile 1 or 2. Four of the students were in receipt of Free School Meals. (There are 170 students in the year group, 45 of these are FSM, equivalent to 26%)

From the outset, four objectives were set for the project:

- Develop confidence, social skills and resilience.
- Practice communication, problem solving, leadership and teamwork skills.
- Improve understanding of educational pathways including higher education.
- Support students to develop study skills and academic success.

Prior to the residential students attended 3 workshops led by Widening Access Staff.

For the first workshop, students were introduced to the project aims and voted for activities they wanted to participate in, several of which (including Archery and Sensory Trail) were included in the final activity itinerary. They were also challenged to think like a student and work in teams in a game based on student skills. The winners were revealed in the following session.

The second workshop was part of an on-campus visit, with learners learning about authentic university experiences, facilities and the reasons for choosing higher education during an interactive mentimeter quiz and a campus tour led by Student Ambassadors. Students were also given information about post-16 choices and pathways.

For the final pre-residential workshop, Widening Access Officers recapped previous learning on post-16 pathways, and linked this to study skills which could be applied to their current work at KS4. The learners also gave suggestions which were used to co-create a code of behaviour that would be implemented on the trip.

The following week, officers ran a half hour parents and carers information evening, which ran through information about the trip, much of which had been previously communicated in letters home, distributed resources for the trip (branded bags, hoodies, water bottle and charger). Attending students also signed the Code of conduct which they had co-created.

The project culminated in a two-night residential in the PGL activity Centre in Osmington Bay during the easter break. Students were supported by staff in completing various adventure activities including archery, sensory trail, zip wire, Jacob’s ladder and climbing. Students also visited Lyme Regis to conduct a coastal management survey.

Intended outcomes and objectives

Learning Outcome 1 - Learner understands what higher education (HE) is and the benefits of attending HE as applied to them.

This was introduced in the first workshop, with a student skills game asking students to consider the day to day decisions and skills that a HE student would encounter. This was also achieved by the on-campus workshop, whereby quizzes, collaboration with student Ambassadors, and the campus tour taught learners about the benefits of higher education and facilities they may use as a HE student. Finally, this conversation came up ad-hoc with some learners throughout the trip, the informal setting meaning the students had a more natural conversations about HE benefits than could be achieved by a group workshop.

Learning Outcome 2- Learner understands the choices available to them including different progression routes, courses, and institutions, and can identify the best pathway for them.

This is achieved by the workshop on post 16 choices, which was covered during the second workshop, and revised during the third workshop. Learners are shown the various routes available to them, and asked to consider which route would be best for them- considering factors such as practical versus academic style assessment.

Learning Outcome 3 - Learner recognises the link between attainment in their current studies and future pathways. Skills are improved that raise attainment.

During both sessions on pathways, the link was made between current studies and future pathways, for example in showing the greater availability of options for post 16 study for a student with 5 GCSEs or more. Also, the third workshop focuses on study skills, with learners considering and feeding back on the tools and processes for effective study.

Students were also supported with their GCSE geography study, participating in a PGL-run session on coastal management, with a combination of classroom learning and off-site activities.

Finally, the Evaluation data shows significant improvement in the Resilience, Confidence and Communication of the learners, all of which are skills which will support the students to persevere in their current and future educational attainment.

Learning Outcome 4 - Learner develops their understanding of how to apply to HE, including financial support available.

Learners were taught about financial support available during the on-campus session. Using an interactive mentimeter, learners tested their understanding of how student finance loans support students and how repayments are made in manageable amounts and in line with earnings. This conversation also came up ad-hoc with learners throughout the trip, meaning they could have meaningful 1-1 conversations in a way which the workshop format would not allow.

Learning Outcome 5 - Learner is able to understand the academic and personal skills needed to make a successful transition into post-16 study and beyond.

The link of personal skills was made during the first session, where students used real life student scenarios to consider skills such as time management, budgeting, as well create their own student societies. Evaluation data showed Learners' Resilience, Communication and Confidence significantly improved throughout the residential. These are tangibly linked to the skills and independence these students would need to navigate a successful transition into post-16 study and beyond.

Evidence base

The decision to structure the project as a multiple intervention residential - engaging with the learners several times as opposed to as part of a single trip - was based on impact evidence from the Office for Students (OfS). The fourth independent review of impact evaluation evidence submitted by Uni Connect partnerships reviewed findings of 19 cases of multiple intervention projects. Of this, 11 indicated a positive impact on the learners, and eight reported a mixed impact.

This corresponds with an existing evidence base which suggests multi-intervention approaches positively impact on learners' understanding of HE and likelihood of making an informed choice about their future.¹ In the same review, impact data also showed that summer schools, demonstrate a positive impact on learners' interpersonal skills and confidence, which aligned well with the project objectives.²

The decision to run the residential project, was based partially on previous experiences within the team from the impact data of a similar project that ran in 2019. This showed strong impact data in terms of student enjoyment, engagement, and likelihood to apply to university. We also took on board constructive feedback from this previous report. For example, previous learners identified the lack of campus exposure as an area for improvement, which was addressed by running the second pre-Residential session on campus.

Discussions with Widening Access colleagues who had been on previous PGL Residentials allowed them to share knowledge and lessons learnt. For example, previous PGL residentials had been challenging when the selected students were from multiple different target schools. This made it difficult to arrange pre residential sessions with the learners and to sufficiently fill spaces.

In contrast, by selecting Astley Cooper, a school with a high proportion of Uni Connect target learners, and by forming a good working relationship with the head of year 10 (who had previously engaged with the programme when learners were in year 9), activity groups were selected with a good understanding of existing group dynamics. It also meant that any students who dropped out could be quickly replaced by suitable substitutions.

Finally, collaboration with the school and the students was sought throughout, in order to co-create a programme which was suitably engaging for the learners. For example, student votes for preferred activities informed the final selection of adventure activities, and their suggestions for appropriate behaviour co-created a code of conduct which learners signed prior to the trip. This, in combination with the buy in of senior members of school staff, meant students interacted well with the activities throughout their time.

Method and type of evaluation

All students who attended the residential completed pre and post trip surveys. Of these, 17 had also completed pre-programme surveys in December 2022, and the data from these 17 students has been analysed to track measurable change. Stand out results have been highlighted below, and full results can be found here.

The response rate was very positive because every student who attended the residential conducted evaluation via paper forms at scheduled times during the residential. Though five students had not completed pre-programme evaluation, this was not through lack of engagement with the project, this was due to them joining the project later due to previous students dropping out, as mentioned previously.

The additional five students' feelings on the trip prior to and following the trip are included in the word cloud listed below (Figure 3).



Figure 3: Student responses to describing their trip in 3 words, pre and post.

Pre-residential responses suggest the learners had a good understanding of what to expect from the project going in, and as such were positively anticipating the activities. Responses post residential suggest they were strongly engaged throughout and enjoyed the challenges they participated in throughout.

Findings

The evaluation reflected a measurable positive impact on learners in confidence and resilience rates, which we hope can have a tangible impact on their education journey going forwards.

Confidence - Overall confidence increased across the project, with 64.7% agreement at the start of the programme increasing to 82.4% at the end of the programme.

I feel confident in myself			
	Pre-Programme	Pre-PGL	Post-PGL
Strongly disagree	5.9%	5.9%	0%
Disagree	5.9%	0%	0%
Not sure	23.5%	35.3%	17.6%
Agree	52.9%	58.8%	76.5%
Strongly agree	11.8%	0%	5.9%

Table 7: Student responses to the statement "I feel confident in myself."

The Widening Access team were pleased to observe this increase in self-confidence, which reflects the achievement of the students by way of having thrived in a new environment and stepping out of their comfort zone whilst trying new activities and experiences.

Resilience- Measured by students’ belief they could perform well even when things are tough, resilience increased from 35.3% to 70.6% across the PGL weekend.

Even when things are tough, I can perform quite well		
	Pre-PGL	Post-PGL
Strongly disagree	0%	0%
Disagree	23.5%	5.9%
Not sure	41.2%	23.5%
Agree	35.3%	64.7%
Strongly agree	0%	5.9%

Table 8: Student responses to the statement “Even when things are tough, I can perform quite well.”

This corresponds with the behaviour Widening Access Staff observed throughout the trip. Often students were confronted with new challenges which they did not believe they could perform well in, but with the encouragement of their peers were able to surpass these expectations. On several occasions, students did not perform as well as they would have liked on their first attempt, but tried multiple times and noticed their performance and their attitude towards their own ability improved. Students were also encouraged to focus on what they had achieved, rather than on their perceived shortcomings or in negatively comparing themselves to others.

Communication- Students agreeing that they can communicate with others well increased over the PGL weekend from 47.1% to 76.5%.

I can share my thoughts and ideas well with others		
	Pre-PGL	Post-PGL
Strongly disagree	0%	0%
Disagree	17.6%	5.9%
Not sure	35.3%	17.6%
Agree	47.1%	64.7%
Strongly agree	0%	11.8%

Table 9: Student responses to the statement “I can share my thoughts and ideas well with others.”

This can be linked to activities such as sensory trail where students were challenged to trust in and communicate with each other well to complete the task. In other activities, such as Jacob’s ladder, learners were responsible for each other’s safety. Throughout the trip, students were split into three activity groups, chosen by the Head of Year to reflect existing group dynamics, whilst challenging the students to work with new people. The positive result in this particular measure highlights the value of collaborating with someone who knows the group well whilst organizing a residential.

The significant impact on the above project objectives of improving students’ soft skills in confidence, resilience, teamwork reflects a good selection of adventure skills which suitably challenged the learners to step outside their comfort zone.

University- The data does not reflect significant change in learner’s likelihood to attend university. However, this may be expected as 64.7% of students identified themselves as likely or very likely to apply to university prior to the project. This could be said to be unusually high for UC target ward students and suggests they had been exposed to information about university previously, either from family, school, or the Widening Access on campus event some of them had attended in the previous year.

How likely are you to apply to university?		
	Pre-Programme	Post-PGL
Not sure	35.3%	40%
Likely	52.9%	53.3%
Very likely	11.8%	6.7%

Table 10: Student responses to the question “How likely are you to apply to university?”

On the current findings, though we have imparted information and guidance regarding Higher Education and education routes, we cannot say to have made a measurable impact on these. This may be measured again with longer term impact, were the project officers to have a follow up intervention such as a focus group.

“The students are back at school and are still buzzing and talking about the it! It has been incredible to see how those students involved with Aspire higher have developed. They were talking during the trip about University in a very positive and informed way. I have no doubt that their aspirations have been widened.” (Ian Tilbury, Assistant Head of School)



Figure 4: Students on the PGL Project.

Summary and Going Forward

The Widening Access Team were very happy with how the intervention went and would advocate repeating the project with a priority school in the next academic year. The impact data indicates significant progress for the learners regarding confidence, resilience and team working. Considering a high proportion of the learners were already considering University going into the project, we hope that the progress in these soft skills combined with the strong positive experiences with HE facilities, students and staff will support the students in their educational pathways and making an informed choice about their future.

Looking forward, we intend to build on the strong connection made with learners. Following up with the learners would allow us to measure the educational outcomes over a longer-term period, perhaps by funding and jointly attending a theatre or museum trip in the following academic year. The relationship also presents an opportunity to use student and parent/carer voice to cocreate future Widening Access programme elements.

As ever, there are areas that can be improved upon as we work towards more Widening Access residential in the future, following a long absence due to the pandemic. PGL have acknowledged some poor communication on their part ahead of the trip, whereby messages about students observing Ramadan were not communicated to the relevant members of staff. The Widening Access team will also consider how to ensure more students can attend who have not tried the adventure activities before, which would make it a more unique and transformational experience for the attending students.

From the school's perspective, they have suggested parents and carers are asked for a small, refundable deposit, in order to ensure fewer students drop out, and the students attending the residential have participated in the project in full. Though this would have positive impact from an administrative perspective, the Widening Access team will have to consider whether they would prevent certain students from low-income families from considering the project in the first place. Regardless of whether this suggestion is taken forwards, the relationship with the Widening Access team and the school staff was very positive. I would recommend, where possible, future PGL residential mirror for the format of selecting students from one school and collaborating with senior members of staff.

These areas for improvement should not overshadow what was overall a thoroughly positive experience for the staff and students involved. The Widening Access Team intends to return to running more residential and will use the experiences and lessons learned from this trip to create a residential toolkit going forwards, including drafted comms and suggested timelines.

4.9 University of Bedfordshire

4.10 Engagement Numbers and Ward Information

The Aspire Higher team based at the University of Bedfordshire work with one Uni Connect target ward. The table below shows the number (and percentage) of young people in the target ward that the team from the team worked with in the 2022-23. The team also worked with a number of non-Uni Connect students who attend schools in the target ward.

Ward	Total engagement 22/23		Sustained engagement 22/23 (3 or more engagements)		Sustained engagement 22/23 (6 or more hours)	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Goldington	300	49.59%	115	19.01%	70	11.57%

Table 11: Goldington ward engagements as of August 17, 2023. Number rounded to nearest 5.

4.11 Activities

The University of Bedfordshire delivered a total of 198 Aspire Higher activities, events, and initiatives in 2022-23. The majority of these were classed as Skills and Attainment (106) and 37 were classed as mentoring. The team also delivered IAG/General HE Information, subject masterclasses, and mentoring. A snapshot of activities is below.

Event Title	OfS Activity Type	Description
EAL Mentoring	Mentoring	Student associates mentor students at secondary schools and FE colleges to support them with their English language skills.
Maths interventions and tutoring	Skills and Attainment (incl Tutoring)	Maths revision support for Year 11 students to get higher grades to around 4 o5 at Maths GCSE.
UCAS Applications, Open Days and Personal Statements	IAG / General HE Information	Interactive session delivered to 1 st year level 3 college students on UCAS applications, UCAS Hub and how to research courses.
Why Study at University?	IAG / General HE Information	Interactive session for 1 st year level 3 college students introducing them to HE, benefits of university.
Peer Mentoring	Mentoring	Interactive session for Year 13 students focusing on UCAS offers and clearing.
Climate Change Summit	Subject Masterclass / Subject Insight	Run in partnership with STEMPOINT East to highlight challenges faced with regards to climate change and the possible solutions including new technologies.
Positively You	Skills and Attainment (incl Tutoring)	Interactive workshops for students in Year 8 to Year 10 covering stress, future decisions, and revision.
First Give	Skills and Attainment (incl Tutoring)	A ten-session programme empowering young people in Year 8 to ignite a spark of social conscience.
EDT Bronze Project	Skills and Attainment (incl Tutoring)	Five-week programme for Year 10 students about a range of STEM-based industry experts.
Innerscope Coaching	Mentoring	Five-week coaching programme, looking at applied emotional intelligence, revision hacks, reflection and problem-solving skills, leadership, and careers support.

Table 12: Selection of activities and type carried out by the University of Bedfordshire.

4.12 Spotlight activity – Media Taster Day

A Media Taster Day was held for Year 10 students from Goldington Academy in Bedford. 16 students took part in workshops using the video cameras in the Film Studio, learning about the equipment and speaking in front of the camera. They also took part in the Radio Lab session – they wrote a script, spoke on the radio and introduced a song. Both sessions were led by the academics from Radio and TV Production.

Intended outcomes and objectives

Learning Outcome 1

Learner understands what Higher education (HE) is and the benefits of attending HE as applied to them.

Learning Outcome 2

Learner understands the choices available to them including different progression routes, courses, and institutions, and can identify the best pathway for them.

Learning Outcome 3

Learner recognises the link between attainment in their current studies and future pathways. Skills are improved that raise attainment.

Evaluation

Due to the short length of the session, it was evaluated using a post survey and measuring change between the Learning Outcomes isn't possible. The majority of students found these sessions 'somewhat useful', 'useful' and 'very useful.' The students really enjoyed their sessions and found it very positive, taking part in both radio and TV activities and meeting some students from the University.

“For me, the radio session was really interesting and fun because we could speak to a microphone whilst introducing a song that we chose ourselves. It was great that we got the opportunity to choose a song from their list and that we were able to enter the space where radio broadcasts and recordings take place.”

“We spoke to a lovely lady beforehand and she was very encouraging particularly with the little introduction we had to say about ourselves and how to really express our personalities through them. The radio and audio teacher who brought us to the studio was a very enthusiastic and nice person and he was lovely to learn from.”

“The student that stayed with us throughout the experience was so kind and lovely and I really enjoyed her company and speaking to her about what she does at university. Although the filming part of the trip was interesting, I personally did not enjoy it as much because I much prefer not being in front of a camera and speaking about myself. With the radio I did not have to show my face on camera. Overall, the opportunity to visit the facilities and teachers at the university was amazing and I am very grateful to have gone. I also like how the university is trying to incorporate more environmentally friendly initiatives and that they have various types of bins available throughout the campus. It shows their commitment towards environmental sustainability and enabling their students to understand the environmental issues we are facing”.

“I enjoyed learning about how to operate the cameras in the television studio, and also learning about the university’s own radio station.”

“They gave us a lot of information on how the day-to-day life of a regular student was.”

Some people felt that the day was rushed, but the school was only able to have 3 hours at the campus – so this will be good if the timings can be increased, so they can have more time at the University. When students were waiting to go to the Radio sessions, they were sitting not doing much as the turnaround was quick, so it would be good to have an activity whilst they are waiting to go in.

“Too rushed however not the university’s fault and I as the trip leader will ask school for more time.”

“On the radio session, it felt as if we spent too much time waiting for the other groups, there was nothing to do while we waited”.

“I enjoyed all of it - they wasn’t anything I didn’t enjoy. All of the staff were very friendly, and encouraged everyone to get involved with the tasks (recording in the TV studio, operating the cameras and recording in the radio room)”.

Summary and Going Forward

The school have requested that their next group of Year 10 students on the Media GCSE will visit in September, and we will also be able to give this group of students longer on the trip. This trip will also be in early September before University starts and so academics will be around to deliver.

5. Concluding Remarks

Reflecting on this academic year, the Aspire Higher team has seen measurable changes when using the adapted Learner Progression Framework. Additionally, using the New General Self-Efficacy with more accessible language appears to have improved response rates, although more work is needed to evidence this impact.

Sustained engagement, defined as three or more engagements within the monitoring period, has dropped slightly across most wards for 2022-23 compared to 2021-22. The reasons for this can vary, but factors could implementation of a further definition as to what counts as an activity and the Partnership shifting focus to prepare for the upcoming attainment objectives of the Uni Connect programme. This report spotlighted three examples of activity from each Partnership institution. They show the impact that Aspire Higher is having in supporting development of resilience and confidence of learners (PGL Project) and introducing students to new subjects and career options and higher education (Crime Scene to Court Room, Media Taster Day). Although not spotlighted, the increase in Skills and Attainment activity shown by the activity snapshots is indicative of the shifting focus to raising attainment.

Going forward into the 2023-24, a new challenge for evaluation will be developing a more robust way to measure the impact of our attainment raising strands. As a partnership, we aim to do this by including more validated scales into our local evaluation from the newly released TASO Access Survey Questions and incorporating monitoring of GCSE grades for participants where possible.