

# **Fourth independent review of impact evaluation evidence submitted by Uni Connect partnerships**

A summary of the local impact evidence to date for the Office for Students

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# 01. Executive summary

Uni Connect is a national outreach programme funded by the Office for Students (OfS) to reduce the gap in higher education (HE) participation between the most and least represented groups. This report provides insights into the impact of activities delivered through the programme, drawing on partnerships' local evaluation evidence to date (including that from the fourth call for evidence in August 2021).

Despite the impact of COVID-19 on the delivery and subsequent evaluation of Uni Connect activities in 2019/20 and 2020/21, a high volume of good quality evidence was submitted in response to the latest call. A total of 69 new sources are included in this review, the majority of which relate to interventions categorised as 'multi-intervention' (19), 'information, advice and guidance' (IAG) (17), and 'skills and attainment workshop' (11). This adds substantially to the body of evidence on the impact of sustained and progressive outreach and the effectiveness of some interventions. Although the evidence is still largely *indicative* and it is not possible to *attribute* impact to the interventions in the majority of cases, confidence in the findings increases with the growing weight of evidence that Uni Connect is having a positive effect. This represents a further significant step towards the achievement of the OfS's objective to enhance the evidence base through Uni Connect.

## Key findings

- Although a relatively small proportion of evaluations have assessed the impact of Uni Connect on longer-term outcomes to date, this call has generated evidence that **online mentoring** and **multi-interventions** have a positive impact on the **number of applications to HE**. New causal evidence also indicates that a higher level of engagement in a multi-intervention programme is associated with a higher probability that a learner will be **accepted onto a HE programme**. This builds on the findings of previous causal studies that indicated learners who participate in a greater number of activities are more likely to apply and accept a place at HE.
- The evidence that Uni Connect interventions have a beneficial impact on medium-term outcomes, such as **intentions to apply to HE**, is mixed. **Information, advice and guidance (IAG)** and **workshops/masterclasses** appear to be most effective for increasing the likelihood that a learner will apply to HE, particularly when the intervention is tailored to their career interests.
- A principal aim of Uni Connect is to support learners to make informed decisions by providing high-quality impartial IAG on the benefits and realities of going to university or college. The evaluation evidence suggests that **all types of intervention** that have been examined for the purposes of the meta-review can contribute to **increased knowledge of HE**. In particular,

IAG is shown to increase learner **confidence to make informed choices** and help ensure learners' decisions are well-informed.

- Strong empirical evidence submitted in response to the latest call for evidence challenges a previous assumption that **online mentoring** is less beneficial than face-to-face mentoring. All the new evidence demonstrates that online mentoring has a positive impact across all outcomes measured, including on learners' **ability to make informed choices** and the **likelihood of applying to HE**.
- One of the underpinning assumptions of the Theory of Change for Uni Connect is that supporting under-represented groups to develop their subject knowledge, interpersonal skills and attributes, and self-belief – particularly in their ability to study in HE – will lead to higher rates of progression. There is evidence to suggest that some interventions, particularly **summer schools** and **masterclasses/workshops**, can have a positive impact on these outcomes and are effective ways to develop **confidence, motivation and resilience**. Evidence on the impact of other types of intervention on these outcomes is mixed and less conclusive.
- Due to the impact of Covid-19, particularly on the ability of partnerships to organise **campus visits**, the evidence base for this intervention has not changed in this call for evidence.
- Evidence on the impact of activities **for parents and carers** and **staff development activities** on outcomes for learners is still limited.

## Recommendations

The following recommendations for delivery emerge as a result of the additional evidence:

- Deliver multi-intervention programmes linked to progression frameworks that engage learners in a range of interventions over a sustained period of time to maximise impact.
- Continue to integrate high-quality, impartial IAG into activities to ensure learners (as well as parents and teachers) have access to up to date, accurate information on which to base their decisions.
- Deliver workshops and masterclasses as a series to maximise impact on learners' subject knowledge, attainment, interpersonal skills and attributes.
- Involve role models that learners can relate to in the planning and delivery of interventions such as mentoring and campus visits. Tailor campus visits for younger learners (pre-16) to positively influence their intentions towards HE.
- Consider blended approaches which combine face-to-face with online delivery for activities such as mentoring and IAG to achieve outcomes in a cost-effective way.

## 02. Introduction

Uni Connect is a national outreach programme, funded by the Office for Students (OfS), that supports 29 partnerships of universities, colleges and other local partners across England. Since January 2017, the programme has been working to reduce the gap in higher education (HE) participation between the most and least represented groups and contribute to the development of a stronger evidence base around ‘what works’ in HE outreach. The partnerships focus on areas where HE participation is lower than might be expected given the GCSE results of the young people who live there. They deliver a range of outreach activities designed to help learners develop the knowledge, skills and confidence needed to make well-informed decisions about their future education and realise their long-term career ambitions.

This summary is the latest in a series of outputs produced by CFE Research exploring the impact of Uni Connect.<sup>1</sup> It has been produced following the fourth call for partnerships’ local evaluation evidence, which closed in August 2021. It presents a synthesis of the evidence submitted across all four evidence reviews on the impact of the range of outreach activities being delivered through Uni Connect. The findings are intended to inform the ongoing planning and delivery of Uni Connect in the new phase of the programme.<sup>2</sup>

### Understanding the impact of Uni Connect

The OfS is striving to strengthen evaluation practice within the HE sector and enhance the evidence base around ‘what works’ in HE outreach through programmes such as Uni Connect and other initiatives such as Transforming Access and Student Outcomes in HE (TASO)<sup>3</sup>. Since the outset of Uni Connect, work has been underway to understand the effectiveness and impact of the programme at a local and national level. CFE Research, in its role as the independent national evaluator for Phases One and Two<sup>4</sup> of Uni Connect, has collated and independently reviewed partnerships’ evaluation evidence to understand the impact of activities at the local level. In addition, CFE administers a longitudinal survey tracking changes in learners’

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<sup>1</sup> Further information on the evaluation of Uni Connect and the previous reports published by the national evaluation team are available on the OfS’s [website](#).

<sup>2</sup> Phase Three of Uni Connect will run from 1<sup>st</sup> August 2021 to 31<sup>st</sup> July 2025.

<sup>3</sup> [Transforming Access and Student Outcomes in HE](#) (TASO) is a new affiliate What Works Centre funded by the OfS on an initial grant until 2023.

<sup>4</sup> Phase One of Uni Connect ran from 1<sup>st</sup> January 2017 to 31<sup>st</sup> July 2019. Phase Two ran from 1<sup>st</sup> August 2019 to 31<sup>st</sup> July 2021.

knowledge, attitudes and intentions towards HE and the extent to which they can be attributed to Uni Connect.

## **The meta-review of local evaluation evidence**

Each partnership is responsible for evaluating the effectiveness and impact of its Uni Connect activities at the local level. Partnerships have been encouraged to share their evidence with CFE throughout the programme and via four formal calls for evidence conducted in April 2019<sup>5</sup>, March 2020<sup>6</sup>, January 2021<sup>7</sup> and August 2021.

After each call, CFE analyses and synthesises the evidence in order to provide a fuller understanding of the impact of different interventions on a range of outcomes for learners. Partnership activities are categorised within the programme as:

- multi-intervention approaches, sometimes referred to as ‘black box’ interventions
- subject masterclasses
- skills and attainment workshops
- mentoring
- summer schools
- information, advice and guidance (IAG)
- campus visits
- parents and carers
- staff development

Drawing on the evidence, CFE produces recommendations for the OfS and partnerships to support programme development. Findings are also used to support the interpretation of the longitudinal learner survey findings. Feedback to partnerships on ways to further strengthen their evaluation evidence is provided at both an individual and programme level to help build capability.

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<sup>5</sup> The findings are published in the [End of Phase One report](#).



<sup>6</sup> The findings are published in [An independent review of the evaluation evidence submitted by Uni Connect Partnerships](#).

<sup>7</sup> The findings are published in [Third independent review of impact evaluation evidence submitted by Uni Connect Partnerships](#).

## The review process

All sources of evidence submitted by partnerships are initially screened against the criteria in Table 1. Those that fall outside of the scope of the review are excluded at this stage.

**Table 1: Inclusion and exclusion criteria**

|  Included in the evidence review   |  Out of scope for the evidence review  |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Submissions with a focus on the <b>impact</b> of individual outreach interventions or programmes of activity on outcomes for Uni Connect learners.</li> <li>• Quantitative or qualitative evidence of <b>impact</b>.</li> <li>• Evidence that an outreach intervention or programme has a <b>positive impact</b>, <b>negative impact</b> or <b>no effect</b>.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Submissions with a focus on the effectiveness of <b>systems and processes</b> associated with the delivery of Uni Connect, such as student or teacher feedback on what they liked or disliked about an activity, what worked well and what could be improved</li> <li>• Submissions with a focus on <b>operational issues</b>, e.g. the effectiveness of governance arrangements or partnership membership and collaborative working practices.</li> </ul> |

A total of 19 partnerships submitted **102** sources of evidence in response to the latest call. Of these, **31** were screened out during the initial sift because they did not meet one or more of the inclusion criteria. The remaining **71** submissions were reviewed in more detail and a further **2** were screened out at this stage. A total of **69** sources of evidence have therefore been added to the evidence base as a result of the latest call.

**The 69 sources of evidence were assessed and categorised as either ‘Type 1 – Narrative’, ‘Type 2 – Empirical Enquiry’ or ‘Type 3 – Causal’ using the Standards of Evaluation Evidence<sup>8</sup> (see Table 11 in Appendix 1 for further details). The number of the different types of evidence reviewed at each call is summarised in Table 2.**

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/evaluation-and-effective-practice/standards-of-evidence-and-evaluation-self-assessment-tool/>



**Table 2: Classification of the evidence submitted**

|                      | Number and type of evidence sources submitted at each formal call |            |              |             |            |
|----------------------|---|------------|--------------|-------------|------------|
|                      | April 2019  | March 2020 | January 2021 | August 2021 | Total      |
| Type 1 – narrative   | 15  | 4          | 6            | 6           | 32         |
| Type 2 – empirical   | 23  | 46         | 62           | 59          | 189        |
| Type 3 – causal      | 5 <sup>9</sup>  | 2          | 2            | 4           | 13         |
| <b>Total sources</b> | <b>43</b>   | <b>52</b>  | <b>70</b>    | <b>69</b>   | <b>234</b> |

Each output was then reviewed and coded using a framework based on criteria developed by TASO<sup>10</sup> to identify the key features of the evaluation, including the research questions and the outcomes being measured, sample size achieved relative to the population that participated in the activity, and the methodological approach, along with the key findings and any evidence of impact – positive or negative (see Figure 12 in Appendix 1 for further details).<sup>11</sup>

**The overall rating of the quality of the evidence takes account of the type of evidence as well as the strength of the evaluation design. As the purpose of the national evaluation is to establish the impact of Uni Connect on outcomes for learners, well-designed, implemented and executed evaluations that demonstrate a causal relationship between the intervention and the outcomes achieved are considered the highest quality evidence and prioritised in the analysis. Each item was classified according to the categories in Figure 1.**

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<sup>9</sup> This includes papers based on three randomised control trials (RCTs) undertaken as part of the national evaluation with support from the Behavioural Insights Team.

<sup>10</sup> TASO is an affiliate What Works Centre initially set up with funding from the OfS to help improve access to high-quality evidence about effective practice in widening participation and student outcomes. <https://www.taso-he.org/>

<sup>11</sup> Further details of the methods used to code and assess the strength of evidence are provided in Appendix 1.

The highest quality evidence is represented by the dark green square and the weakest by the grey square. Different types of evidence of equivalent quality are represented by the same colour. All the results of the analysis are recorded in an evidence bank.<sup>12</sup>

**Figure 1: Assessing the quality of evidence**

|                  |           |                             |         |          |
|------------------|-----------|-----------------------------|---------|----------|
| Type of evidence | Causal    |                             |         |          |
|                  | Empirical |                             |         |          |
|                  | Narrative |                             |         |          |
|                  |           | Weaker                      | Average | Stronger |
|                  |           | <b>Strength of evidence</b> |         |          |

## Synthesis of evidence

The evidence on the impact of individual Uni Connect-funded activities<sup>13</sup> on short, medium and long-term learner outcomes is synthesised in the next section. The number of pieces of evidence of each type and strength for each intervention is presented in a series of figures; the number in brackets in these figures indicates the number of new pieces of evidence submitted in response to the latest call.

A summary for each intervention focuses on where the evidence submitted in response to the latest call corroborates and adds weight to previous analyses as well as where it offers new insights and a more nuanced understanding of impact. Evidence that challenges earlier findings is also highlighted.

Details of the extent and nature of the impact of each intervention is then synthesised in a series of tables ordered from strongest to weakest evidence. It is important to note that, as a result of the evidence submitted in response to the latest call, further insights into the impacts of sustained and progressive outreach on outcomes for learners and the effectiveness of some individual interventions are now available. But there remains an important note of caution – the evidence is still largely empirical and therefore *indicative* of impact; it is not possible to claim that the outcomes achieved are *attributable* to the interventions in the majority of cases. However, given the challenges of isolating the effects of Uni Connect at the activity,

<sup>12</sup> Available on the OfS website at <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/fourth-independent-review-of-impact-evaluation-evidence-submitted-by-uni-connect-partnerships/>.

<sup>13</sup> A mapping of the outcomes by intervention is presented in Appendix 2.

local and programme levels,<sup>14</sup> confidence in the findings increases as the weight of evidence that Uni Connect is having a positive effect grows.

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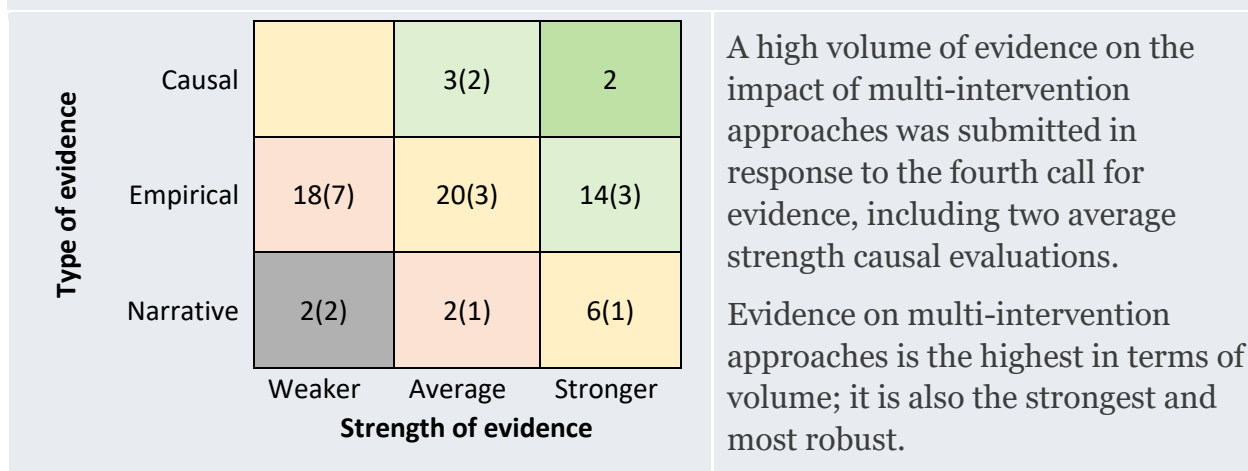
<sup>14</sup> The limitations of the available data and the implications for findings on the impact of Uni Connect are discussed in detail in the [technical annex](#) that accompanies the latest report on the longitudinal survey.

# 03. Synthesis of evidence

## Multi-intervention approaches

*A multi-intervention approach, sometimes referred to as a ‘black box’ intervention, combines two or more activities into an ongoing programme of support for the same cohort of learners.*

**Figure 2: Number of sources and strength of evidence on the impact of multi-intervention approaches (number of new sources submitted in the latest call in parentheses).**



## Key findings and new insights

- Across the 19 sources of evidence that were submitted and coded as multi-intervention in this round of evidence, 11 reported positive impact and a further 8 reported mixed impact.
- The additional evidence further supports the body of strong evidence that a multi-intervention approach has a positive impact on learners’ **knowledge of the HE offer and how to apply**, their **knowledge of the benefits of HE** and their **confidence in their ability to make informed choices**.
- Evidence on the impact of Uni Connect on the **likelihood that learners will apply to HE** remains mixed. One strong empirical study suggests that the likelihood of applying to HE *increases* as learners progress through Years 9 to 13; however, one slightly weaker study (average empirical) suggests that the desire to go to HE can *decrease* over this period.
- Previous evidence suggested there may be a link between the number of sessions learners receive as part of a multi-intervention programme and the likelihood of acceptance onto a HE programme. New causal evidence confirms that a higher level of engagement in a multi-intervention is associated with a higher probability of being accepted onto a HE course.

**Table 3: Evidence of the impact of multi-intervention approaches**

| Outcomes measured  | Impacts achieved   |
|--|--|
| <p><b>Short term:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased knowledge of the HE offer and how to apply</li> <li>• Increased knowledge of the benefits of HE</li> <li>• Increased knowledge of student life</li> <li>• Increased knowledge of the cost of HE</li> <li>• Increased confidence in ability to make informed choices</li> <li>• Development of interpersonal skills and attributes</li> <li>• Development of subject knowledge/study skills</li> <li>• Attainment raising</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All evidence submitted in response to previous calls demonstrates a <b>positive</b> shift in learners’ knowledge of the HE offer. Submissions to the latest call are equally unequivocal. One study reports that the increase in knowledge was greater among Year 13 learners, which is important given their proximity to the post-18 transition point.</li> <li>• There is now additional evidence to suggest a <b>positive</b> shift in learners’ knowledge of the benefits of HE. One new strong empirical study reports statistically significant differences between pre and post measurement for this outcome.</li> <li>• Two new pieces of evidence suggest that Uni Connect can have a <b>positive</b> effect on learners’ knowledge of student life and the cost of HE. However, both of these studies are rated as weak empirical so more robust evaluation is needed before firm conclusions about the impact of multi-interventions on these outcomes can be drawn.</li> <li>• Three new sources provide evidence on the impact of multi-interventions on the ability of learners to make informed choices. All report a <b>positive</b> shift, with the most convincing evidence demonstrating increases in learners’ certainty about their decisions. However, this evidence is limited in strength (average narrative, weak empirical and average empirical) so further, more robust evaluation is needed before firm conclusions can be drawn.</li> <li>• Key skills developed through multi-interventions are self-efficacy, confidence and independence, and motivation. However, one new strong empirical study notes a difference between age groups: levels of self-efficacy increased for Year 9 learners but not for learners in Year 10. Although 15 out of the 16 studies reviewed previously demonstrate that multi-interventions can have a <b>positive</b> impact on inter-personal skills, this new evidence provides more nuanced insights into the effects at different stages in the learner journey.</li> <li>• The evidence base now comprises three studies (one average and two weak empirical) that explore impact on attainment. One new source identifies an <b>increase</b> in attainment between the intervention group and those that did not receive tutoring as part of a multi-intervention. Although another of the new sources provides evidence of more limited impact on attainment, it does suggest that multi-interventions can <b>increase</b> learners’ motivation to work hard.</li> <li>• Three weak empirical sources provide new evidence on the impact of multi-interventions on subject knowledge or study skills. Two show a <b>positive</b> shift in knowledge relating to STEM subjects and improvements in collaborative skills and critical thinking. One source provides <b>mixed</b> evidence relating to learners’ ability to manage their own learning: some learners reported an improvement in this skill; whereas a small number reported that the intervention had no effect on their ability to manage their own learning.</li> </ul> |

| Outcomes measured  | Impacts achieved  |
|--|---|
| <p><b>Medium term:</b></p> <p>Increased intentions/likelihood of applying to HE</p>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is no consensus in relation to this outcome. The evidence reviewed previously is mainly positive; however, the evidence submitted in the latest call is more <b>mixed</b>. For example, one (strong empirical) study indicates that the likelihood that a learner will apply to HE <b>increases</b> as they progress through the school years. In contrast, another source (average empirical) reports a <b>negative</b> impact, with the desire to go to HE decreasing with age.</li> <li>• Two further sources report a <b>mixed</b> impact in relation to learners' intentions towards HE and two sources (average and weak empirical) identify <b>no impact</b> in relation to this outcome.</li> </ul>  |
| <p><b>Long term:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase in applications/offers/acceptances at HE</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The cumulative evidence suggests that consistent engagement with multi-interventions has a <b>positive</b> impact on applications to HE and the likelihood of receiving an offer.</li> <li>• A new causal study (rated average) finds that engagement with multi-interventions is associated with a <b>higher probability</b> of being accepted onto a HE course. Although the type of engagement, the extent of engagement and the combination of types of engagement all matter, any engagement significantly enhances the learner's chance of success.</li> <li>• The impact of level of engagement in multi-interventions is also assessed by a strong empirical study that demonstrates each additional hour of engagement results in a statistically significant <b>increase</b> in the probability of progressing to HE by 0.073%. This extends the findings of the causal studies submitted previously that indicate those who participate in a greater number of activities are more likely to apply and accept a place at HE.</li> </ul> |

## Summer schools

*These consist of two or more days of intensive activity aimed at providing a real insight into university life and all that it entails. They include Easter Schools and can be residential and non-residential.*

**Figure 3: Number of sources and strength of evidence on the impact of summer schools (number of new sources submitted in the latest call in parentheses).**

|                  |           |                      |         |          |
|------------------|-----------|----------------------|---------|----------|
| Type of evidence | Causal    |                      | 3       | 1        |
|                  | Empirical | 5(1)                 | 13(2)   | 2(1)     |
|                  | Narrative | 3                    | 4       |          |
|                  |           | Weaker               | Average | Stronger |
|                  |           | Strength of evidence |         |          |

Delivery of summer schools has been negatively affected by COVID-19. The volume of new evidence is therefore lower than in previous years.

All new evidence is empirical and demonstrates positive impact. This adds weight to the cumulative evidence base on summer schools, which is high in volume and amongst the most robust – second only to multi-interventions.

## Key findings and new insights

- The empirical evidence submitted in the latest call focuses on short-term outcomes only. It does not provide any new evidence of impact for the medium- or long-term outcomes relating to intentions to apply and applications/offers.
- All the evidence submitted to date supports the assertion that summer schools have a positive effect on learners' **knowledge of HE**, including their **knowledge of student life**, **the cost of HE** and **student finance**.
- Summer schools are also shown to have a positive impact on learners' **ability to make informed choices** and **interpersonal skills and attributes**, particularly **confidence** and **self-efficacy**.

**Table 4: Evidence of the impact of summer schools and residentials**

| Outcomes measured   | Impact achieved   |
|---|---|
| <p><b>Short term:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased knowledge of the HE offer and how to apply</li> <li>• Increased knowledge of the benefits of HE</li> <li>• Increased knowledge of student life</li> <li>• Increased knowledge of the cost of HE and financial support</li> <li>• Increased confidence in ability to make informed choices</li> <li>• Development of interpersonal skills and attributes</li> <li>• Development of subject knowledge/ study skills</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Most existing evidence (five out of six studies) demonstrates that summer schools <b>increase</b> learners' knowledge of HE.</li> <li>• Two new studies (strong empirical and weak empirical) report summer schools have a <b>positive</b> impact on specific aspects of learners' knowledge, such as the cost of HE and student finance. This corroborates the findings of three average empirical studies submitted in previous calls.</li> <li>• A strong empirical source identifies that the summer schools have a <b>positive</b> impact on learners' ability and confidence to write a personal statement for their UCAS application. This finding is supported by qualitative insights from another study (weak empirical), which reports that students were more familiar with the application process following the summer school.</li> <li>• One of the four studies (strong empirical) submitted in response to the latest call shows an <b>increase</b> in the proportion of students agreeing with the statement, 'I understand the benefits of HE' (increase from 85% to 100%) following the intervention.</li> <li>• Two of the new studies (average and strong empirical) indicate that learner's knowledge of student life <b>increased</b> following their intervention.</li> <li>• Three of the four new studies provide more evidence of the <b>positive</b> role summer schools can play in developing learners' confidence to make informed choices, drawing on pre/post surveys to elicit evidence of change. However, one (average empirical) study shows a small (but not significant) <b>decrease</b> in learners' confidence to make decisions.</li> <li>• A new strong empirical study triangulated survey provides results and qualitative comments to demonstrate that summer schools can <b>increase</b> learners' confidence and self-efficacy. This strengthens existing qualitative evidence to suggest that summer schools support students to develop skills including teamwork and communication.</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>Medium term:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased intentions/likelihood of applying to HE</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No new evidence was submitted on the impact of summer schools on medium- and long-term outcomes.</li> <li>• A Phase One RCT of a summer school for Year 10s showed <b>no significant impact</b> on likelihood of applying to HE. Participants were <b>less likely</b> to perceive that university is for 'people like me' but <b>more likely</b> to perceive that 'university will broaden my horizons' and that university will 'help me to get a better job' compared with the sample as a whole, but these findings were not significant.</li> <li>• Two empirical studies that measured changes in learners' intentions to apply to HE found summer schools and residentials have a <b>positive</b> impact. However, one average empirical study reported a slight <b>decrease</b> in this outcome.</li> </ul>   |



## Information, advice and guidance (IAG)

*This refers to light touch events for students, usually lasting a day or less, which tend to involve university staff visiting schools or colleges to give information and advice on university life, how to apply, course choices and student finance. Such events include fairs and exhibitions. They can be broadly subject specific and aimed at a group or an open audience with very limited interaction.*

**Figure 4: Number of sources and strength of evidence on the impact of IAG (number of new sources submitted in the latest call in parentheses).**

| Type of evidence | Strength of evidence |         |          |
|------------------|----------------------|---------|----------|
|                  | Weaker               | Average | Stronger |
| Causal           |                      | 3       |          |
| Empirical        | 18(6)                | 16(8)   | 2(2)     |
| Narrative        | 2(1)                 | 4       |          |

The majority of new evidence on the impact of IAG is empirical and as such it is not possible to draw further conclusions on the cause and effect of this intervention. However, the increase in the volume of evidence adds weight to the existing findings; the current IAG evidence base, which includes three causal studies, is amongst the strongest.

## Key findings and new insights

- Of the 17 new pieces of evidence submitted in relation to IAG, 11 identified a positive impact, four demonstrated some mixed evidence, and it was too early to say for two of the studies.
- The key outcomes on which IAG interventions have positive impact relate to **knowledge of HE** (including the HE offer and how to apply, student life, and the cost of HE), learners' **ability to make informed choices** and **intentions to apply to HE**. This builds on previous evidence demonstrating that IAG is particularly effective for increasing knowledge of HE and enhancing learners' confidence in their decision-making.
- The response to the fourth call also consolidates the evidence that emerged in response to previous calls in relation to learners' **intentions towards HE**. All pieces of evidence submitted in the latest call show IAG can have a positive influence on the likelihood learners will apply, or consider applying, to HE.

**Table 5: Evidence of the impact of IAG**

| Outcomes measured  | Impacts achieved   |
|--|--|
| <p><b>Short term:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased knowledge of HE offer and how to apply</li> <li>• Increased knowledge of student life</li> <li>• Increased knowledge of the benefits of HE</li> <li>• Increased knowledge of the cost of HE and financial support</li> <li>• Increased confidence in ability to make informed choices</li> <li>• Development of subject knowledge/study skills</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ten new studies were submitted that provide evidence in relation to learners' increased knowledge of the HE offer and how to apply, and all of these studies demonstrate <b>positive impact</b>. The evidence rated as strong empirical reported an 18% <b>increase</b> in generic knowledge of HE following the IAG intervention. This strongly supports the existing evidence of the benefit of IAG sessions improving knowledge of the HE offer.</li> <li>• Learners who participate in IAG activities that concentrate on knowledge of student life report <b>increased awareness</b> of what it is like to be a student. However, one average empirical study also gives <b>mixed</b> results, including that learners continued to overestimate the amount of time HE students spend in taught sessions as opposed to self-directed learning.</li> <li>• One average empirical study shows that there was a <b>statistically significant increase</b> from 10% to 80% for learners' knowledge of the benefits of HE.</li> <li>• All five new studies that reported on the knowledge of the cost of HE and financial support identify a <b>positive</b> shift in knowledge. One strong empirical study shows that learners had a 23% positive shift in positivity about student finance. A further study (rated average empirical) also shows a strong effect on learners' increased knowledge of student finance. These are examples of <b>strong and robust evidence</b> to support the role of IAG in developing knowledge around student finance and the cost of HE.</li> <li>• Previous calls for evidence have documented the benefits of IAG sessions on <b>improving</b> learners' ability to make informed choices. Eight studies report <b>positive</b> outcomes. One strong empirical study demonstrates that 50% of participants identified the intervention as helping provide information for them to make informed decisions. One weak empirical study reports mixed findings relating to this outcome, but this was measuring learners' plans and career goals, and was not specifically addressing this outcome.</li> <li>• There is weaker empirical evidence to suggest that IAG activities can <b>increase</b> communication skills, although the level of attribution to the IAG in particular is relatively weak.</li> </ul> |

| Outcomes measured   | Impacts achieved   |
|---|--|
| <p><b>Medium term:</b></p> <p>Increased intentions/likelihood of applying to HE</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Six of the seven new pieces of evidence submitted demonstrate that there were <b>positive</b> shifts in learners' intentions to apply to university or HE. This adds to the evidence from empirical studies submitted in the previous call for evidence that showed some positive change.</li> <li>• One study (average empirical) shows that learners in Year 9 were <b>less likely</b> to say that they intended to go to university after the intervention. They were also less likely to say they intended to get a job, suggesting that at this stage in the student life cycle many learners are unsure about their post-18 intentions.</li> <li>• Two pieces of evidence were rated as strong empirical and these both add <b>significantly</b> to the evidence base to suggest that IAG sessions can <b>increase</b> learners' intention to apply to HE.</li> </ul> |

## Subject masterclasses and skills and attainment workshops

*A masterclass is an activity designed to provide an insight to a subject(s) or to increase awareness of a subject(s) at HE. It can be a structured subject-specific event.*

*A skills and attainment workshop is an activity designed to increase knowledge, skills and understanding. Workshops have a clear aim and can be used to help, for instance, students with their Key Stage curriculum, contribute to increasing attainment or personal development.*

**Figure 5: Number of sources and strength of evidence on the impact of subject masterclasses and skills and attainment workshops (number of new sources submitted in the latest call in parentheses).**

| Type of evidence | Strength of evidence |         |          |
|------------------|----------------------|---------|----------|
|                  | Weaker               | Average | Stronger |
| Causal           |                      | 1(1)    |          |
| Empirical        | 17(10)               | 13(6)   | 5        |
| Narrative        | 3                    | 1       |          |

A total of 17 new studies on the impact of masterclasses and workshops were submitted. There is now a high volume of evidence in relation to these interventions. Although the majority of new studies (10) are weak, the addition of six average empirical and one average causal source helps improve the strength of the evidence overall. The addition of one causal study provides some more robust evidence to support the effectiveness of this type of intervention.

### Key findings and new insights

- The majority of evidence continues to support the finding that workshops and masterclasses have a positive impact across a variety of short- and medium-term outcomes. Of the 17 pieces submitted in the latest call, 13 report positive impact. While there is no evidence of a negative impact, one study reports a mixed impact and 3 others are unable to draw firm conclusions.
- The latest evidence shows masterclasses and workshops have a positive impact on learners' ability to **make informed choices** and their **intentions to apply to HE** in particular.

- Previous evidence on the impact of masterclasses and workshops on **interpersonal skills and attributes** was mixed. The new studies provide more compelling evidence that these interventions can have a positive impact by developing **resilience**, improving **confidence** and increasing **motivation**.
- Evidence submitted suggests that workshops and masterclasses can have a positive impact on the development of learners' **subject knowledge** and/or **study skills**. One new empirical study (albeit weak) suggests that, according to teachers, improvements in subject knowledge are maintained in the longer term.

**Table 6: Evidence of the impact of subject masterclasses and skills and attainment workshops**

| Outcomes measured   | Impacts achieved   |
|---|--|
| <p><b>Short term:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased knowledge of the HE offer and how to apply</li> <li>• Increased knowledge of the benefits of HE</li> <li>• Increased confidence in ability to make informed choices about future education</li> <li>• Development of interpersonal skills and attributes</li> <li>• Development of subject knowledge / study skills</li> <li>• Attainment raising</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Most existing evidence suggests that workshops and masterclasses have a positive effect on knowledge of HE. Five additional sources of evidence on the impact of this intervention report <b>increases</b> in learners' knowledge of the HE offer and how to apply.</li> <li>• Two new studies report on the impact on knowledge of the benefits of HE. One (average empirical), states that learners' self-reported knowledge of HE <b>increased</b>; the findings from the other (weak empirical) are <b>inconclusive</b>; however, it is noted that explicitly linking careers to HE options might help to achieve this outcome.</li> <li>• New evidence (three average empirical studies) shows that workshops/masterclasses can <b>positively</b> influence learners' confidence to make informed decisions. According to one study, 74% of learners were more confident to make an informed decision about their HE options following the intervention. This strengthens the existing body of evidence, which also demonstrates the positive influence workshops/masterclasses have on decision-making.</li> <li>• All the new evidence suggests that workshops and masterclasses are <b>positively</b> associated with the development of interpersonal skills and attributes. The most common skills developed include resilience (three sources), confidence (five sources), and motivation/goal-setting (four sources). This contrasts with average empirical evidence submitted previously that reported <b>negative</b> shifts in learners' confidence.</li> <li>• Most new evidence shows that workshops/masterclasses have a <b>positive</b> influence on the development of subject knowledge and/or study skills. One new weak study reports <b>mixed</b> findings in relation to improvements in study skills but does show that learners used more learning strategies as a result of taking part. This evidence builds on the two strong empirical evaluations from the last call that demonstrated an <b>increase</b> in learners' preparedness for exams.</li> </ul> |

|  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One new strong empirical evaluation reports that subject masterclasses/workshops help to <b>increase</b> attainment, with all participants passing the associated exam and those that were involved in the intervention reporting higher levels of confidence.</li> </ul>  |
|--|---|
| Outcomes measured  | Impact achieved   |
| <p><b>Medium term:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased intentions/likelihood of applying to HE</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Previous evidence suggests that a proportion of learners are less likely to agree that HE ‘is for people like me’ (average empirical) and some will change their minds about going to HE (average and weak empirical) following a workshop/masterclass. One new source of evidence (average empirical) finds the intervention had <b>no impact</b> – the numbers considering HE stayed the same before and after the intervention.</li> <li>• However, mirroring the findings of the seven studies submitted previously, most of the new evaluation evidence shows workshops and masterclasses have a <b>positive</b> impact on learners’ intentions towards HE. Three-fifths of participants (61%) in one strong empirical evaluation report that the likelihood of them considering going to university increased following the intervention.</li> <li>• In two studies, the focus of the intervention was tailored according to the characteristics and career interests of the participants, which may have contributed to the <b>positive</b> effect. Workshops and masterclasses are typically not tailored in this way and this was previously reported to mitigate the effects of the intervention.</li> </ul> |

## Mentoring

*Mentoring is an activity with repeat interactions and sustained engagement designed to achieve a range of outcomes. It involves a dedicated relationship between a mentor and student mentee(s). Activities can be face-to-face and/or online.*

### Face-to-face mentoring

**Figure 6: Number of sources and strength of evidence on the impact of face-to-face mentoring (number of new sources submitted in the latest call in parentheses).**

|                  |           |                      |         |          |
|------------------|-----------|----------------------|---------|----------|
| Type of evidence | Causal    |                      |         |          |
|                  | Empirical | 4                    | 8(1)    | 5        |
|                  | Narrative | 2                    | 1       |          |
|                  |           | Weaker               | Average | Stronger |
|                  |           | Strength of evidence |         |          |

Most partnerships shifted to online delivery of mentoring in the context of COVID-19, so only one new piece of evidence was submitted relating to face-to-face delivery.

There is a higher volume of evidence on face-to-face than other forms of mentoring. However, it is slightly weaker in terms of strength, with no causal studies.

### Key findings and new insights

- Reflecting earlier findings, the new empirical evidence (rated average) suggests face-to-face mentoring can have a positive impact on learners' **knowledge of HE and student life**. Existing evidence suggests that face-to-face mentoring is particularly effective for improving learners' knowledge when delivered by student ambassadors that learners can relate to.
- Previous evidence submitted suggests that face-to-face mentoring can have a positive effect on learners' **confidence in their ability to succeed in HE** and **interpersonal skills and attributes**. In contrast, the additional evidence reports a decline in skills and attributes such as **critical thinking**, **self-efficacy** and **motivation**, although it does suggest face-to-face mentoring can have a positive effect on learners' **attainment** by improving their written **communication skills** and **subject knowledge**, evidenced by the strong grades achieved in a final assessment. The response rate for the post-intervention survey was very low (5%) so these conclusions must be treated with some caution.

**Table 7: Evidence of the impact of face-to-face mentoring**

| Outcomes measured  | Impacts achieved  |
|--|---|
| <p><b>Short term:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased knowledge of HE</li> <li>• Increased knowledge about the benefits of HE</li> <li>• Increased knowledge of student life</li> <li>• Increased confidence in ability to succeed in HE</li> <li>• Greater confidence in ability to make informed choices</li> <li>• Development of interpersonal skills and attributes</li> <li>• Attainment raising</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mentoring is <b>positively</b> associated with an increase in knowledge and awareness of HE and the benefits gained from pursuing courses in HE in particular.</li> <li>• New evidence suggests that face-to-face mentoring can <b>enhance</b> learners' knowledge of the different aspects of student life. Across two of the six statements relating to this outcome, improvements were higher than the national average.</li> <li>• One previously submitted strong empirical study found that mentoring is associated with a statistically significant <b>positive</b> change in learners' confidence in their ability to succeed in HE.</li> <li>• Mentoring is <b>positively</b> associated with an increase in learners' confidence in their decision-making abilities.</li> <li>• One strong empirical study reported an <b>increase</b> in learners' communication skills after mentees had been given an opportunity to present.</li> <li>• Previous evidence suggests that face-to-face mentoring is an effective way to <b>increase</b> the self-awareness, motivation, resilience and confidence of White males from lower socio-economic groups, which contributes to increased intentions to progress to HE.</li> <li>• In contrast, the new average empirical study shows a <b>decline</b> in learners' critical thinking skills and self-efficacy and <b>no change</b> in learners' motivation. There are a range of skills within the umbrella term 'interpersonal skills', and more evidence is needed to understand which can be enhanced through this type of intervention and for whom.</li> <li>• New evidence shows that face-to-face mentoring can have a <b>positive</b> impact on attainment by enhancing learners' written communication skills and subject knowledge</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>Medium term:</b></p> <p>Increased intentions/likelihood of applying to HE</p>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No new evidence of impact on medium-term (or long-term) outcomes was submitted. Previous evidence suggests face-to-face mentoring has a <b>positive</b> impact on learners' intentions to apply to HE, although one evaluation (strong empirical) reported a <b>negative</b> change in the likelihood that learners will apply to HE.</li> </ul>   |



## Online mentoring

**Figure 7: Number of sources and strength of evidence on the impact of online mentoring (number of new sources submitted in the latest call in parentheses).**

|                  |           |                      |         |          |
|------------------|-----------|----------------------|---------|----------|
| Type of evidence | Causal    | 1                    |         |          |
|                  | Empirical | 3                    | 7       | 4(3)     |
|                  | Narrative |                      | 1(1)    |          |
|                  |           | Weaker               | Average | Stronger |
|                  |           | Strength of evidence |         |          |

Four new pieces of evidence on the impact of online mentoring were submitted, three of which are rated as strong empirical. This has added to the evidence base for online mentoring which is now similar in terms of volume to face-to-face mentoring, and slightly stronger with one causal study (albeit weak).

## Key findings and new insights

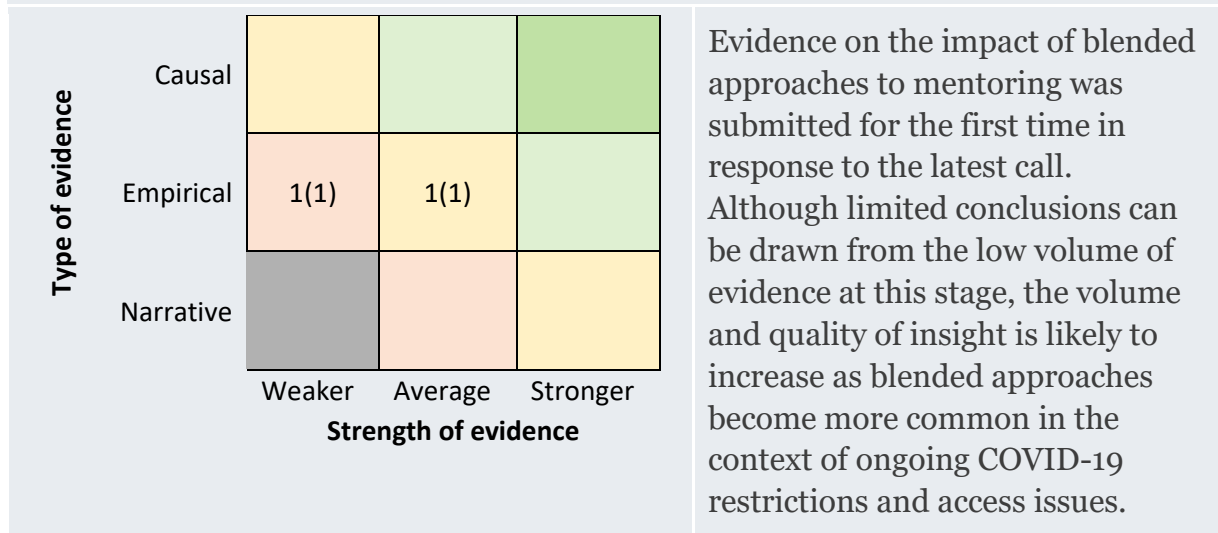
- The evidence submitted in the latest call challenges the previous assumption that online mentoring is less beneficial for learners than face-to-face mentoring. All evidence submitted in this call demonstrates positive impact across all outcomes measured. This suggests that continuing online mentoring could be a cost-effective way for partnerships to garner positive outcomes for learners.
- Adding to the evidence submitted in previous calls, this evidence further demonstrates the benefit of online mentoring for improving learners' **ability to make informed choices**.
- The third call for evidence concluded that evidence on the extent to which online mentoring increases learners' **intentions to towards HE** is limited and weak. However, one of the strong empirical studies submitted in this review shows that the **likelihood of applying to HE**, and the **confidence** to do so, increased for learners engaging with the mentoring programme.

**Table 8: Evidence of the impact of online mentoring**

| Outcomes measured   | Impacts achieved   |
|---|--|
| <p><b>Short term:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased knowledge of the HE offer and how to apply</li> <li>• Increased knowledge of student life</li> <li>• Knowledge of the benefits of HE</li> <li>• Knowledge of the cost of HE and financial support</li> <li>• Increased ability to make informed choices</li> <li>• Attainment raising</li> <li>• Development of interpersonal skills and attributes</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One new strong empirical study found that, following online mentoring, the number of Year 12 and 13 learners who knew how to apply to HE <b>increased</b> from 0% to 91%, supporting previous evidence that showed online mentoring increases learners’ knowledge of the application process.</li> <li>• Online mentoring has been shown to have a <b>positive</b> impact on learners’ knowledge of other aspects of HE. One strong empirical study shows that knowledge of student life increased from 0% to 18%, while knowledge of accommodation options at university increased from 0% to 27%.</li> <li>• Learners identify that their relationship with their mentor helps to <b>increase</b> their knowledge about the benefits of HE. These qualitative results are triangulated with changes measured in pre-post test results (strong empirical).</li> <li>• One new study (strong empirical) shows that knowledge about the cost of HE and financial support <b>increased</b> from 0% to 18% following online mentoring.</li> <li>• All three strong empirical studies submitted in the latest call demonstrate, based on pre-post test scores, a <b>positive</b> shift in learners’ confidence to make informed choices. This supports the findings of five studies submitted in response to previous calls for evidence.</li> <li>• Online mentoring appears to have a <b>positive</b> impact on attainment. Two new studies evaluated this outcome, and the strong empirical study reports that students perceive that mentoring improves their academic performance.</li> <li>• Two new strong empirical studies measured impact on interpersonal skills and attributes, reporting increases in learners’ skills awareness, perception of agency, confidence and self-efficacy. In relation to self-efficacy, the study found that this <b>increased</b> for 64% of Year 12 and 13 learners. This strengthens the evidence on online mentoring, which was previously weak and drew mixed conclusions about its impact on interpersonal skills and attributes, and confidence in particular.</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>Medium term:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased intentions/likelihood of applying to HE</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New strong empirical evidence finds that online mentoring <b>increases</b> the likelihood of learners applying to HE and their confidence to do so. In contrast, another strong empirical study shows <b>no impact</b> on the likelihood learners will apply. However, most participants in this intervention reported that they were ‘already going to apply’. Positively, the mentoring appears to have helped affirm learners’ commitment to studying at HE.</li> <li>• The mixed results for this outcome reflect those reported previously based on weaker evidence. This suggests that the impact of mentoring depends on the starting position of the learner.</li> </ul>  |

## Blended (online and face-to-face) mentoring

**Figure 8: Number of sources and strength of evidence on the impact of blended mentoring (number of new sources submitted in the latest call in parentheses).**



### Key findings and new insights

- The two pieces of evidence largely demonstrate that blended approaches to mentoring have a positive impact across the outcomes measured.
- Like online only and face-to-face only mentoring approaches, blended delivery appears to have a positive effect on the development of learners' **interpersonal skills and attributes**, their **ability to make informed choices** and level of **attainment**.
- There is some tentative evidence emerging that the blended approach can have a positive impact on learners' **intention to apply to HE** and also on **applications and offers**, suggesting positive long-term impacts of mentoring.

**Table 9: Evidence of the impact of online mentoring**

| Outcomes measured  | Impacts achieved  |
|--|---|
| <p><b>Short term:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development of interpersonal skills and attributes</li> <li>• Attainment raising</li> <li>• Increased confidence in ability to make informed choices</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One average empirical study reports that three-quarters of learners showed <b>improvements</b> in their resilience and two-fifths increased their confidence following blended mentoring.</li> <li>• In relation to attainment, an average empirical evaluation shows <b>mixed</b> results: 40% of learners' attainment improved, compared with 20% where attainment declined. In contrast, a weak empirical study presents two case studies where attainment scores <b>improved</b>.</li> <li>• The stronger paper in this category shows that learners <b>increased</b> their knowledge of post-18 options and were more confident to make a decision about what they wanted to do next, following mentoring.</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>Medium term:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased intentions/likelihood of applying to HE</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One study (weak empirical) showed that 37% of the Year 12 learners involved in the intervention were intending to apply to university following the intervention, providing some limited evidence for the <b>benefit</b> of mentoring on medium-term outcomes.</li> </ul>  |
| <p><b>Long term:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase in applications / offers / acceptances at HE</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The weak empirical study also shows that 74% of Year 13 learners who took part in mentoring applied to HE and 58% received an offer from their first-choice institution. This intervention was targeted at Year 12 and Year 13 learners and focused explicitly on post-18 choices. The findings suggest that mentoring can have <b>positive</b> long-term impacts if it is tailored to specifically address these issues.</li> </ul>   |

## Campus visits

*Learners visit a university campus for a tour where they meet university students and staff and find out about university. This category includes activities related to HE in further education (FE) on a FE campus.*

**Figure 9: Number of sources and strength of evidence on the impact of campus visits (number of new sources submitted in the latest call in parentheses).**

| Type of evidence | Strength of evidence |         |          |
|------------------|----------------------|---------|----------|
|                  | Weaker               | Average | Stronger |
| Causal           |                      |         |          |
| Empirical        | 7(1)                 | 2       | 1        |
| Narrative        | 1                    | 1       |          |

Campus visits, like summer schools, have been affected by COVID-19 restrictions. Only one new piece of evidence on the impact of this intervention was submitted.

The volume of evidence on campus visits remains relatively low and weak in terms of strength. It is still not possible to draw firm conclusions about the benefit of campus visits from the current evidence base.

## Key findings and new insights

- The new piece of weak empirical evidence of the impact of campus visits suggests this intervention can help to **increase knowledge of student life and intentions to apply to HE**. It also suggests that campus visits can be particularly useful for **younger learners** (pre-16), as this group is shown to be statistically more likely to think ‘HE is for them’ and to intend to apply to HE following a visit. This reflects earlier findings that campus visits can be beneficial to learners in Year 10.
- These new findings are based on analysis of post-intervention surveys only, so it is not possible to say it is the intervention that has led to changes in knowledge or intentions with any certainty. The existing evidence base on the impact of campus visits on learners’ intentions towards HE is mixed.

**Table 10: Evidence of the impact of campus visits**

| Outcomes measured   | Impacts achieved   |
|---|--|
| <p><b>Short term:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased knowledge of HE</li> <li>• Knowledge of student life</li> <li>• Increased knowledge of the benefits of HE</li> <li>• Increased confidence in ability to make informed choices</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supporting the findings of evidence submitted in previous calls, the latest evidence demonstrates a <b>positive</b> shift in learners' self-reported knowledge of student life and other aspects of HE, particularly student finance and the range of courses on offer.</li> <li>• All the studies measuring the impact of campus visits on learners' understanding of the benefits of HE found a <b>positive</b> effect but there is <b>no evidence</b> that campus visits have an impact on subject knowledge.</li> <li>• Previous evidence suggests that campus visits are a particularly <b>effective</b> way to ensure learners know where to find information about HE, which ensures their decisions are well-informed.</li> </ul>   |
| <p><b>Medium term:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased intentions/likelihood of applying to HE</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evidence on the effect of campus visits on learners' intentions towards HE remains <b>mixed</b>.</li> <li>• There is new and some existing evidence that campus visits can have a <b>positive</b> impact on learners' intentions towards HE. Additional insights captured in the latest call for evidence corroborate previous findings that campus visits can be particularly influential for pre-16 learners who, as a result, are <b>statistically more likely</b> to think that HE is for them and want to apply than older learners.</li> <li>• In contrast, existing strong empirical evidence shows a slight <b>decrease</b> in learners' intentions to apply to HE and another finds <b>no impact</b>. Tailoring campus visits to learners' needs and interests can help to maximise impact.</li> </ul> |

## Staff development

*This is activity aimed at staff in HE, schools and colleges where students are not directly involved.*

**Figure 10: Number of sources and strength of evidence on the impact of staff development (number of new sources submitted in the latest call in parentheses).**

|                  |           |                      |         |          |
|------------------|-----------|----------------------|---------|----------|
| Type of evidence | Causal    | 1(1)                 |         |          |
|                  | Empirical | 1(1)                 | 2(1)    |          |
|                  | Narrative |                      |         |          |
|                  |           | Weaker               | Average | Stronger |
|                  |           | Strength of evidence |         |          |

Three new pieces of evidence were submitted on the impact of staff development activities. Although one of these studies is causal, the overall volume and strength of evidence remains weak and limited conclusions can be drawn as a result.

## Key findings and new insights

- Three new pieces of evidence consider the impact of staff development activities on outcomes for teachers and learners, some of which align with the desired outcomes for Uni Connect.
- Previous evidence shows that staff development activities help to improve staff **knowledge of the HE landscape** and the **UCAS application process** as well as their **confidence** to support learners with their HE applications.
- The new weak causal study evaluates bespoke support for maths teachers designed to build capacity and develop their subject expertise. The evidence tentatively suggests that the intervention **increased attainment** by between 0.28-0.37 of a grade per student.
- The weak empirical study suggests that IAG for teachers increases their knowledge of student finance, including the disabled student allowance.

## Parents and carers

*This category refers to activity aimed at parents/carers where students are not directly involved.*

**Figure 11: Number of sources and strength of evidence on the impact of activities targeted at parents (number of new sources submitted in the latest call in parentheses).**

| Type of evidence | Strength of evidence |         |          |
|------------------|----------------------|---------|----------|
|                  | Weaker               | Average | Stronger |
| Causal           |                      |         |          |
| Empirical        | 2(1)                 | 1       |          |
| Narrative        |                      |         |          |

One new piece of evidence was submitted based on an evaluation of an intervention that had one element aimed at parents/carers (the other elements were focussed on learners).

It is not possible to draw firm conclusions about the impact of parent and carer activities based on the low volume of relatively weak evidence at this stage.

## Key findings and new insights

- The limited evidence suggests that activities targeted at parents/carers can have a positive influence on their **knowledge of HE** and its **potential benefits**, including for young people with experience of care.
- The one new (average empirical) study shows that in addition to increasing **knowledge of HE**, interventions for parents/carers can improve their awareness of **where to find information** about education and career options for young people and their **confidence to access and make use of information** when advising those in their care.
- It is likely that the provision of high quality and impartial information will be key to enhancing knowledge of HE among parents and young people alike and contribute to ensuring young people's decisions are well-informed. However, more evidence is required to corroborate the early findings and to understand the impact of parental activities on learners themselves.



## 04. Conclusions and recommendations

The evidence base on the impact of interventions delivered through Uni Connect has grown in volume and, in many cases, also in strength as a result of the fourth call for local evaluation evidence. We can say with increasing confidence which interventions contribute to the achievement of short- and some medium- to long-term outcomes for learners.

A principal aim of Uni Connect is to provide high quality and impartial information, advice and guidance (IAG) to learners on the benefits and realities of going to university or college in order to support and encourage those with the ability to act on their intentions and progress to higher education (HE). The evidence to date suggests that all the types of interventions considered as part of this review help to increase learners' knowledge of HE and help to ensure their decisions are better informed. There is also growing evidence on the impact that support for parents, teachers and other advisers can have on outcomes for learners.

The Theory of Change for Uni Connect is based on a series of assumptions, including that supporting under-represented groups to develop their subject knowledge, interpersonal skills (such as communication) and attributes (such as confidence, self-efficacy, motivation and belief in their ability to study in HE) will lead to higher rates of progression. Evidence on the impact of most types of intervention on learners' interpersonal skills and attributes is mixed and inconclusive. Although there is some evidence to suggest that summer schools and masterclasses/workshops can have a positive impact, there is also evidence that they can have a negative effect, particularly on younger learners' perceptions of whether university is for 'people like them'. Based on current evidence, it is not possible to identify whether there is an association between learners' perceptions of and intentions towards HE and their actual behaviour. However, we can hypothesise that learners who do not perceive that university is for 'people like them' may be less likely to apply; challenging this perception is therefore important as it could help to close the participation gap in the longer term.

COVID-19 had a significant impact on the delivery of Uni Connect in both the 2019/20 and 2020/21 academic years. As a result, the volume of new evidence on the impact of some interventions is more limited. However, as partnerships have adapted their activities in response to the restrictions, opportunities to evaluate the relative effectiveness of different approaches to delivery have emerged. Mentoring programmes have been delivered in three ways: face-to-face, online, and through a blended approach. Further emerging evidence suggests that elements of this activity can be successfully delivered online and achieve similar outcomes for learners. It is important to understand whether online delivery is also more *cost-effective* as any

cost savings could be used to support higher cost activities which wider evidence<sup>15</sup> suggests can be both challenging to deliver remotely and less impactful when learners engage only in this way.

Based on our analysis of the additional evidence, the conclusions and recommendations set out in our previous report<sup>16</sup> remain largely unchanged.

## Recommendations to inform planning and delivery

It is recommended that partnerships:

- Deliver multi-intervention programmes linked to progression frameworks. It remains advisable that these programmes involve learners over a period of time as there is strong evidence to indicate that sustained, high-level engagement results in more positive outcomes.
- Continue to integrate high-quality, impartial IAG into activities for learners. There is strong evidence to suggest IAG improves knowledge of the different elements of HE, including the associated benefits. Access to up-to-date, accurate information for all those involved in the decision-making process, including parents, carers and teachers, is important because it helps to ensure learners' final decisions are well-informed and are the right choice for them.
- Deliver workshops and masterclasses as a series rather than as 'one-off' sessions to maximise impact on learners' subject knowledge, interpersonal skills and attributes, as well as their intentions towards HE.
- Involve role models that learners can relate to when planning and delivering interventions such as mentoring and campus visits. Target tailored campus visits for younger learners (pre-16) to positively influence their intentions towards HE.
- Consider blended approaches which combine face-to-face with online delivery for activities such as mentoring and IAG, as emerging evidence suggests this method can be equally impactful and potentially more cost effective than face-to-face only delivery.

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<sup>15</sup> See [Emerging Insight Report: COVID-19 and Uni Connect](#).

<sup>16</sup> The findings are published in [Third independent review of impact evaluation evidence submitted by Uni Connect Partnerships](#).

## Recommendations to inform future evaluation

Through their local evaluations, it is recommended that partnerships:

- Continue to analyse the impacts of interventions that are delivered to multiple year groups by year group (where sample sizes allow) to understand the differential impacts as well as fluctuations in attitudes and intentions towards HE at different stages in the learner journey.
- Continue to track learners to establish whether the immediate, positive impacts are sustained in the longer term and lead to progression to HE.
- Measure the impact of interventions on under-represented and other sub-groups which the longitudinal learner survey suggested are achieving less positive outcomes than other learners, including disabled learners, learners from minority ethnic groups and those who would be the first in their family to go to HE if they successfully applied.
- Establish the causal relationship between outreach interventions and outcomes for learners where it is feasible and proportionate to do so. If this is not possible, capture pre- and post-intervention data to ascertain the impact of the intervention on established outcomes. Implement measures to track learners at the individual level from pre- to post-intervention and maximise response rates at the post-intervention stage to ensure the findings are representative of participating learners overall.

**Table 11: Classification of standards of evidence**

| Type 1: Narrative  |   | Type 2: Empirical Enquiry<br>(includes Type 1 and the following) |  | Type 3: Causal Claims<br>(includes Type 2 and the following) |                                      |
|--|---|--|--|--|--------------------------------------|
| Yes  | No  | Yes  | No                                       | Yes  | No                                   |
| Coherent strategy  | Disjointed activities                               | Clear aim of what activities seek to achieve                     | Aims developed after activity            | Have a target as well as a control or comparison group       | Using groups that are not comparable |
| Approach and activities underpinned by evidence from literature or other evaluations | No rationale for developing approach and activities | Select indicators of impact                                      | No concept of measuring success          | Could use an experimental or quasi-experimental design       | Selection bias in comparator groups  |
| Shared understanding of processes involved   | The model of change is not shared                   | Quantitative and/or qualitative data – triangulation is good!    | Information not systematically collected | Think about selection bias and how to avoid it               |                                      |
| Reasons for activity   | Ad hoc activities                                   | Pre- post-activity data (minimum of two time points)             | Only collect information once            |  |                                      |
| Clear conception of why the changes you seek to make are important                   | No understanding of needs of target group           | Analysis competently undertaken                                  | Data not related to the intervention     |  |                                      |
| Programme reviews  | No review of evaluation                             | Sharing of results and review of activity                        | Results not used to inform decisions     |  |                                      |

The evidence was coded using a framework aligned to criteria developed by TASO as part of its evidence review. In addition to the standard of evidence and overall quality score, the following information was recorded for each source of evidence:

**Figure 12: Coding framework**

- Partnership
- Date and timeframe for evaluation
- Format of material
- Activity type and description
- Length & intensity of activity
- Mode of activity delivery
- Target group
- Outcomes evaluated
- Type of evaluation approach
- Rational for approach
- Data collection methods
- Total no. participants in intervention
- Total no. participants in evaluation sample
- Total no. respondents and response rate
- Attrition rate (pre- and post-activity studies)
- Data analysis
- Results
- Impact achieved
- Notes on demonstrable impact
- Challenges/limitations of evaluation

# Appendix 2: Mapping of outcomes to interventions

Figure 13a illustrates the **volume** of evidence that an intervention does (or does not) contribute to the achievement of short-, medium- and long-term outcomes for learners.

**Figure 13a: short-term and medium/long-term outcomes**

|   | Multi-intervention approaches | Summer schools | Information, advice and guidance | Subject masterclass | Skills and attainment guidance | Mentoring | Campus visits | Staff development | Parents and carers |
|---|-------------------------------|----------------|----------------------------------|---------------------|--------------------------------|-----------|---------------|-------------------|--------------------|
| Increased knowledge of HE offer and how to apply  | ●                             | ●              | ●                                |                     | ●                              | ●         | ●             | ●                 | ●                  |
| Increased knowledge of student life   | ●                             | ●              | ●                                |                     |                                | ●         | ●             |                   |                    |
| Increased knowledge of the cost of HE and finance options                                   | ●                             | ●              | ●                                | ●                   |                                | ●         | ●             | ●                 |                    |
| Increased understanding about the benefits of HE  | ●                             | ●              | ●                                |                     |                                | ●         | ●             |                   |                    |
| Increased confidence in ability to make informed choices                                    | ●                             | ●              | ●                                |                     | ●                              | ●         |               |                   | ●                  |
| Improvements in interpersonal skills  | ●                             | ●              | ●                                |                     | ●                              |           | ●             |                   |                    |
| Development of subject knowledge/study skills   | ●                             | ●              | ●                                |                     | ●                              | ●         | ●             |                   |                    |
| Attainment raising  | ●                             | ●              | ●                                |                     | ●                              | ●         |               | ●                 |                    |
| Increased intentions/likelihood of applying to HE aged 18 or 19                             | ●                             | ●              | ●                                | ●                   | ●                              | ●         | ●             |                   |                    |
| Increased in number of UC target learners who apply, receive an offer/accept an offer to HE | ●                             | ●              | ●                                |                     |                                | ●         |               |                   |                    |

- Positive impact - large amount of evidence
- Positive impact - moderate amount of evidence
- Positive impact - small amount of evidence
- Mixed, negative or no impact - small amount of evidence
- Mixed, negative or no impact - moderate amount of evidence
- Mixed, negative or no impact - large amount of evidence