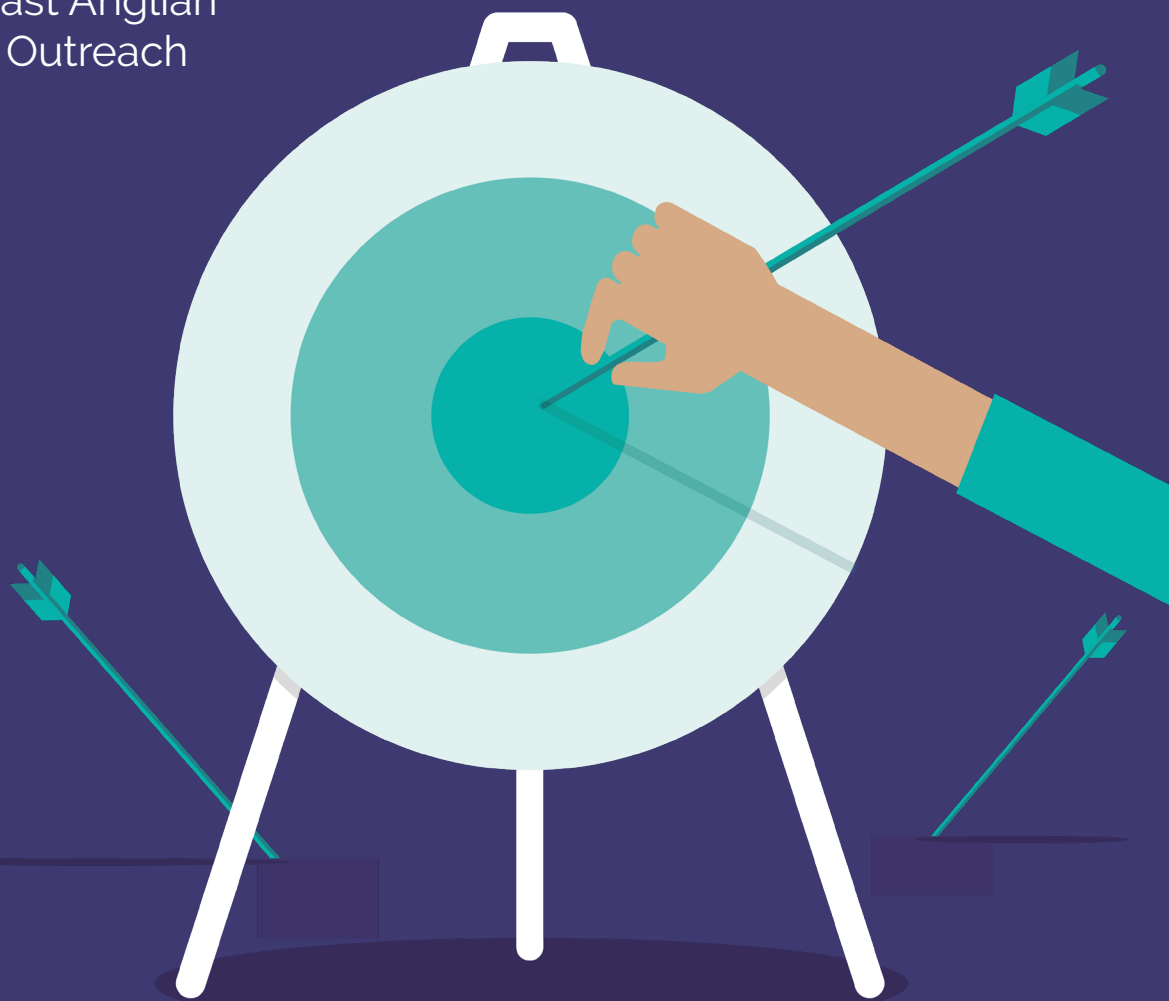


# TAKE YOUR PLACE

## ANNUAL REPORT

Network for East Anglian  
Collaborative Outreach  
2021



neaco

# WHO WE ARE

In parts of East Anglia, young people are less likely to access further and higher education than in other areas of the country despite similar GCSE results. The Network for East Anglian Collaborative Outreach (neaco) is one of 29 partnerships across England that have been funded by the Government through the Office for Students (OfS) as part of the Uni Connect programme. The national aim is to deliver outreach in these low participation areas in order to increase the proportion of students progressing into higher education and higher and degree apprenticeships. These local partnerships give inspiration, increase aspiration and support young people in planning their future education.

neaco is a local partnership of five universities and eight further education colleges in Norfolk, Suffolk, Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. We work closely with schools, local enterprise partnerships, local authorities and other key stakeholders.

neaco is taking a non-prescriptive approach to widening participation, intuitive to the needs of students, staff and local communities. At the centre of this approach is our Take Your Place framework, a fully funded programme for underrepresented students. It includes several strands, each addressing our target students' identified needs and aims to increase progression to further and higher education.

The framework focuses on improving our students' understanding and preparedness towards applying for further and higher education, developing their passion and ambition towards the idea of further study as well as making informed choices to enable progression.

# CHAIR'S FOREWORD AND 2021 OVERVIEW



After the challenges the pandemic brought to all areas of our lives in 2020, many of us hoped that 2021 would see a return to a calmer and more predictable state of affairs. While vaccinations have transformed the response to COVID-19, announcements of nationwide school closures and exam cancellations on 4 January set the tone for another year of significant disruption. We know that disadvantaged students have often faced the greatest difficulties during the pandemic, and we are committed to supporting students, schools and colleges to overcome the hurdles in their path.

### Hybrid approach

With ever-changing circumstances, we've taken a flexible approach to our outreach work this year. Wherever possible, our team have returned to working in schools or brought students to see our university campuses, as we've found there is no substitute for meeting students face-to-face. However, where that hasn't been an option, we've used hybrid and online approaches to ensure that students can access the information they need to realise their ambitions.

### Evaluation and impact

Our programme has always had a strong commitment to evaluation. As each year of students we work with leave school or college and take their next steps in the world, we analyse the data to understand the difference our work is making. As the dataset grows, we're increasingly seeing a clear positive relationship between participation in specific Take Your Place activity and progression to higher education. Furthermore, we see that students who have participated in more activities are even more likely to progress, as each additional hour of Take Your Place activity is associated with an increase in students' observed likelihood of progression to higher education. We always aim to work closely with students and get to know them as individuals, as we believe that students benefit from ongoing support that is tailored to their needs.

### The year ahead

I'm sure 2022 will continue to bring new challenges, and the impact of the pandemic on the lives and education of young people will be felt for years to come. I'm equally sure that we will meet these challenges with an ever greater commitment to helping realise the ambitions of young people across East Anglia, both now and for years to come.

**Tom Levinson**  
Chair of the Steering Group  
Network for East Anglian Collaborative Outreach

## OUR PARTNERS:



# MISSION AND VALUES

## OUR MISSION

We support students in making informed decisions about their future.

Our vision is one of equal rates of progression to further and higher education and higher and degree apprenticeships, between students living in target and non-target wards across East Anglia.

- 1 Delivering and coordinating outreach activities that raise aspirations and support target students to make informed choices.
- 2 Supporting the development of 'Information Advice and Guidance' (IAG) related systems and infrastructure and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for staff in target schools and colleges.
- 3 Evaluating our approaches to ensure we learn which interventions work best.



## OUR VALUES

Each of our values aligns Take Your Place activities with our mission and framework.

### Collaborative



We work in partnership with target educational institutions, organisations and initiatives which have missions aligned to neaco.

### Impartial



We promote all available pathways, further and higher education providers within and beyond East Anglia.

### Sustainable



We deliver and support activity which embeds systemic change in schools Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG); we prioritise initiatives which are scalable and could be sustained post-neaco.

### Learn



We undertake research to inform practice and better understand decision making of target students; we thoroughly monitor and evaluate impact; we develop staff.

### Responsive



We operate within an agreed framework, while supporting and responding to the needs of target schools and students.



# THE YEAR IN REVIEW

Total number of targets students engaged

**13,498**

Total number of schools and sixths forms engaged with

**378**



Total number of Further Education Colleges engaged with

**8**



Total number of activities delivered

**4,737**



Total number of students engaged

**35,391**



**WEBSITE USERS**

**3,846**

East of England

**11,491**

All

## WE HAVE WORKED WITH

### CAMBRIDGESHIRE & PETERBOROUGH

All Students: **7,975**

Uni Connect Target Students: **2,700**

### NORFOLK

All Students: **14,199**

Uni Connect Target Students: **5,053**

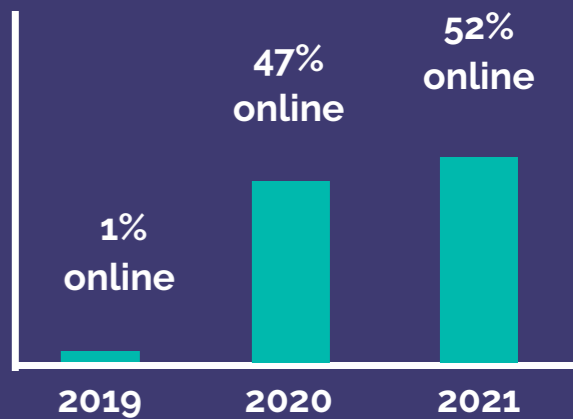
### SUFFOLK

All Students: **13,182**

Uni Connect Target Students: **5,739**



## PROPORTION OF ONLINE ACTIVITIES



# OUR WORK WITH STUDENTS

If you were to ask us what the most integral part of the Take Your Place programme is, we would undoubtedly say our Higher Education Champions. After a year of unprecedented challenges we were excited to start 2021 knowing that our experienced education and outreach professionals would continue working to successfully support our target students.

The start of 2021 arrived with the promise of a more hybrid approach; both online and in-person activities were developed, ranging from webinars and online mentoring programmes to in person university visits and taster days.

In July 2021, the week-long **Explore Your Future** programme helped students improve employability skills and engage with employers in a series of sector-led live sessions. It also helped schools achieve **Gatsby Benchmark 5** by providing their students with the necessary encounters with employers to develop the tools they need to plan their career pathway.

Last year we also aimed to better address the needs of adult learners and their pathways to higher education. The **Never Too Late conference** was specifically designed for those students who would be over 21 at the start of their course and/or studying for an Access to Higher Education Diploma. Whether they did not have the chance to go to university as a teenager, were considering a career change or just wanted to learn more about a subject that they loved, Never Too Late was their chance to find out about life as a mature student. An attendee described the session as 'welcoming, relaxed and informative'.

After so many remote events it was great to welcome students back to a face-to-face Prep4Success day at Inspire Education Group in October. **neaco** staff worked collaboratively with the Careers teams to host universities and other higher education providers at Peterborough College and at Stamford College. Over 500 students had the opportunity to speak directly to universities and to take part in a variety of presentations including post-18 options, writing an effective personal statement and student finance.

In 2021, **neaco** and **The University of Suffolk** published a report called '**University, is it for me? Access to Higher Education!**'. The report was prepared by Katie Tyrrell and Lanai Collis-Phillips and it presented findings from a small-scale in-depth qualitative study exploring perceived barriers and facilitators to accessing higher education amongst Black, Asian, and Eastern European young people, aged 13-19, and current university students in Ipswich. The report reflected on the value of approaching and working collectively with local community groups with specialist knowledge and expertise in working with and supporting Black, Asian and Eastern European communities; utilising robust evaluation methodologies at institutional levels.

## Brightside Mentoring Programme

The Brightside Mentoring Programme offers inspirational online mentoring, introducing sixth form students to trained current university students. Between February and June 2021, we worked with the Brightside programme with the aim to help young people make confident and informed decisions. In total 323 students from Years 10 and 12, across 32 schools and colleges in Norfolk, Suffolk and Cambridge and Peterborough, took part in the HE Explore programme, including highly able students in Year 12.



Both student and mentor feedback in the **Brightside HE Explore Mentoring report** was positive. 86% of Year 12 highly able mentees recorded positive change in feeling that they knew enough about where to find support for higher education applications to make an informed choice, while 91% of mentors felt they had a positive impact on their mentees.

"My mentor was brilliant, and really helped me to understand more about what I needed to do and what was likely to happen at university. She gave me really useful information on what I need to be ready for when applying for university, as well as what the environment is like at uni."

**Year 12 mentee**  
Cambridgeshire/Peterborough

"An amazing experience especially to anyone who is struggling to find a career path or even stressed about their future. It's a great safe space to learn how to take control of what happens in your future."

**Year 10 mentee**  
Suffolk

Total number of target students engaged

13,498



Total number of activities delivered

4,737



# OUR WORK WITH PARENTS AND CARERS IN THE COMMUNITY

Parents and carers play a major role in a young person's decisions about their future and we know that families who are new to the world of higher education can sometimes need some extra support. Our parent ambassadors have helped their children go on to university or a degree apprenticeship and are perfectly placed to give a parent's perspective on topics like student finance and the application process.

In the summer of 2021, a small team of Parent and Carer Ambassadors were recruited for the Norfolk region. They have recent experience of supporting their young people through key education transitions, including GCSEs, post-16 and post-18 pathways. Using this experience, their role was to offer other parents and carers in similar situations support, reassurance and guidance, as well as adding a valuable and honest 'parent voice' to **neaco**'s parental engagement.

To better understand the experiences of parents and carers, **neaco** commissioned Alterline, a higher education research agency, to complete a piece of research on parental perceptions and engagement. The parents and carers that participated lived in areas with identified low rates of progression to higher education and had no previous experience of higher education themselves. The participants were invited to share their experiences of the barriers they face to engaging with their young person's education and school or college through online surveys and in-depth researcher-led interviews. The research identified some clear wants and needs of the parents and carers, and valuable insight into how we can develop responsive and supportive parent and carer activity.

In 2021, the **neaco** Parent and Carer Cross-County team hosted several successful information events, including a Higher Education Information evening in September. The event attracted nearly 50 participants and offered parent/carer and student insight into university and apprenticeship pathways. Parents and carers were encouraged to submit questions for the panel of experts.

Parent and Carer Ambassadors have been supporting the **neaco** team to co-create articles, guides and parent

and carer-focused social media content, whilst also giving feedback on some of our current resources and activities. The support of this team was invaluable, as it ensured our parental engagement going forward was relevant and responsive to such a key audience. It also ensured parents and carers feel supported to help their young people make informed decisions about their future.

## Parent Ambassador

"Starting university, although exciting, can also be something of a daunting prospect. It is important to ensure young people feel secure and confident about their transition into university life."

When considering higher education options, parents are often guided by their young person's initial thoughts and opinions. There's a great deal of information to digest as a parent and **neaco** is on hand with impartial advice that breaks down the facts and provides information that will make this first part of the decision-making process as stress free as possible. It's an exciting time and encouraging your young person to stay open-minded is a fantastic reminder that will benefit you both."

**Sophie Waring**  
Parent & Carer Ambassador



# SUPPORTING SCHOOLS AND SIXTH FORMS

Our work in schools and colleges is a key influence on the outcomes for our target students. Our approach is localised and targeted, supporting the aspiration and progression of young people to higher education.

One of neaco's values is to learn. We support schools and colleges by sharing data from neaco's activity monitoring and annual survey with them via individual school and college reports. These reports aim to help schools and colleges understand their learners' attitudes towards higher education, to compare their results with the rest of the region, and to understand the support neaco is providing. In 2021, we provided reports to 83 different schools and colleges.

When supporting schools and sixth forms, teachers' continuing professional development (CPD) is integral both to teachers' confidence in facing workplace challenges, and students feeling supported and guided through their education. In 2021 we provided a series of online teacher CPD sessions. Following our research into the content and key themes which would be most valuable to staff, our team at The University of Suffolk crafted sessions around implementing Gatsby Benchmarks and linking curriculum to careers, exploring concepts and tools to support boys' progression to HE and beyond, supporting students to use Labour Market

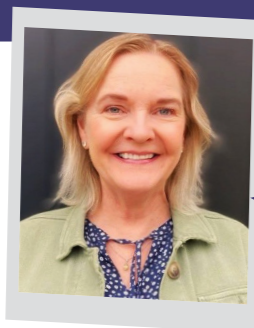
Information (LMI) and identifying future trends. Feedback on what was most useful about the sessions pointed to the value of sharing practical solutions: "not only highlighting issues, but presenting some strategies for combatting them".

New to the University of Suffolk's neaco offer in 2021 was their 'Lesson in a Box'. The boxes provided a unique opportunity for students to take part in academic taster sessions, from the comfort of their own classrooms. All boxes were aimed at Year 12 and 13 students and were designed to be used during school time to introduce different higher education courses. Each box was unique and contained classroom materials with accompanying digital content, offering a fun and interactive session for students to explore topics of various courses and support the development of insight into and interest in higher education.

We also helped Year 10 students at Breckland School in Norfolk prepare for work experience, highlighting the value of taking part and the logistics involved during an assembly. Over the following weeks, our Higher Education Champions met with selected groups of students to guide them in finding placements and using professional language to approach employers.

"Since I began my role as Careers Co-ordinator at Nene Park Academy I have worked extremely closely with neaco. They have supported us and enabled us to do things we otherwise would not have been able to achieve. From paying and supporting on school trips to universities and apprenticeship fairs, organising and delivering HE and FE workshops and helping us create a Careers hub which included providing furnishing and laptops. Luci, our Higher Education Champion, is a committed, passionate and driven individual, her individual efforts in line with the project have had a massive impact on our students and improved our Gatsby Benchmark outcomes significantly. Our most successful trip was a recent year 9 outing to Anglia Ruskin University. We took 200 students with the hope of opening their eyes to the possibility of university. The day was a complete success with students fully engaged throughout. We look forward to all future events with neaco."

**Vicki Barkney**  
Careers Lead,  
Nene Park Academy



"We have been fortunate to work with NEACO for a number of years now; the support and information provided by the HE Champions has really opened students' eyes to the opportunities available to them and this has given them the encouragement and confidence to succeed."

**Caroline Davies**  
Assistant Head of Sixth Form and Careers Facilitator,  
Open Academy,

# WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP

## A collaborative approach

The Take Your Place project's collaborative approach enables us to provide the best possible support for target students in their schools and colleges, giving students in East Anglia access to the right level of guidance and information about their post-18 educational choices for them to make confident decisions about their future.

Working with Mildenhall College Academy, our Higher Education Champions joined forces and collaborated closely with their Enterprise Coordinator, Darian Vomund, on various projects including National Apprenticeship Week and National Careers Week. Speakers from a variety of industries joined assemblies at the school to talk to students in Years 12 and 13; during National Apprenticeship Week, this included speakers from Norfolk Constabulary, Balfour Beatty, Treatt, Astex Therapeutics and Knights Lowe.

National Careers Week offered students another opportunity to hear first-hand experiences from a range

of speakers, with a different career focus each day, including journalism, sport, art, tourism and the energy sector. It was a wonderful opportunity for students to hear what it could be like to be a newspaper editor, or what is involved in a creative technologist role! Working with the [Council for Exceptional Children](#) facilitated networking with local employers and industries and enabled students to gain a better understanding of the roles and the potential opportunities that could be available to them, whilst helping to raise their aspirations around their future choices.

During the summer term we worked with [Future Female Society](#) to create and deliver a short programme of workshops for a group of Year 10 students from Chantry Academy. The focus of the workshop was around female empowerment, developing key skills such as teamwork, communication, and confidence through the use of radio. Over the four weeks, the students created their own mini radio show, including a session interviewing inspirational women from Ipswich across a number of sectors.

## Virtual Work Inspiration Suffolk

The **Virtual Work Inspiration Suffolk programme** was delivered between April and July 2021 by a team comprising Suffolk County Council, the New Anglia Careers Hub and Enterprise Adviser Network, and neaco. The pilot programme, called **Discover Your Future**, aimed to engage employers, employees and self-employed individuals to enable meaningful and informative virtual experiences for students, in order to help raise aspirations, equip them with 21st century skills and broaden their understanding of the local jobs market and pathways. Across ten sessions, the programme covered five themes and a mock interview for over 300 students in Years 10 and 11 in two mainstream and one specialised school in Suffolk.

"The project was an excellent example of a success greater than the sum of its parts, as it would have been challenging for any one organisation to undertake the project on their own. Collaboration made the project happen utilising each organisations unique strengths to support the planning and implementation."

**Glen Todd**  
Enterprise Adviser Network and Hub Manager,  
New Anglia LEP



## Apprenticeships - podcast series

In 2021, our Apprenticeships Cross-County Team brought together neaco staff in Norfolk, Suffolk and Cambridgeshire & Peterborough to successfully maintain and extend our [series of apprenticeship podcasts](#), created in 2020 to help raise awareness of higher and degree apprenticeships opportunities. The podcasts were created in collaboration with a number of employers, apprentices and training providers from a range of sectors including healthcare and the NHS, policing and engineering. The team also curated various resources now available on our [Take Your Place Apprenticeships page](#)



# WORKING WITH FURTHER EDUCATION COLLEGES

Our work with FE colleges is focused on students studying Level 2 & 3 courses and mature learners. These students might be studying A-levels at the college or studying an Apprenticeship, BTEC, T-levels, Access to Higher Education courses, or a vocational study programme. Our team looks to work with students on a variety of courses, to ensure they understand the pathways to higher education and what this might mean for them.

In 2021, our college-based staff saw a continuation of hybrid-learning, working with colleges and students in person and remotely. With ongoing Public Health England advice, staff acted quickly to minimise disruption and adapt activities where appropriate. We recognised the value of college-based staff, resulting in an increased offer of 1-to-1 sessions with target students. College teams actively engaged

with the wider project throughout the year to co-produce and deliver activities either virtually or in person.

As we move forward into 2022, this blended way of working will help Take Your Place to continue its ambition to support as many underrepresented students as possible and help them to progress to the next step in their education.

neaco  
partners with

8

Further  
Education  
Colleges

## Take Your Place Fair

In May 2021 neaco hosted its first ever virtual Take Your Place Fair. The Fair was a three-day event incorporating a series of virtual sessions designed to help those in Year 12 - 13 or on a Level 2/3 course explore different routes from their current study to higher education. Our virtual talks were led by experts from colleges, universities and employers, giving students the chance to discover local employers, find out about local apprenticeships, hear from current higher and degree students, ask questions, and invite parents and carers to dedicated evening sessions.

Over 600 people registered for the event, and 70 sessions were offered in total.



"In 2021, collaboration became the foundation for all our work across the further education colleges. As a result, colleges have frequently invited students from across the region's nine colleges to their activities. I am proud of how all staff have managed to continue to inspire underrepresented students despite ongoing challenges faced within education environments."

**Heloise Evans**  
FE College Coordinator



## Liberate & Educate: Inspirational Women

A series of workshops and talks from a range of inspirational women was held at the University of Suffolk. There were sessions on mindset, confidence, and resilience in the face of adversity. Students had the opportunity to hear from academics about their journeys and women who have inspired them.



"I found the exhibition about feminist movements throughout history very inspiring. I really liked the diversity of speakers as they all had very different yet very amazing stories to tell. I learnt how habits and the ways of addressing situations can impact my mood."

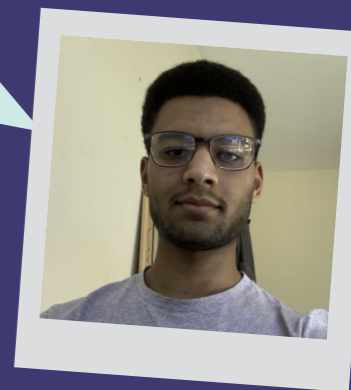
**Heidi Francis-Corke**  
East Coast College Student at Lowestoft Sixth Form College



"I knew that I wanted to go to university after I finish my current college course, however I had little to no knowledge about the university application process etc. before getting in touch with Georgena and having regular 1:2:1 sessions from the start of November. The regular sessions helped me massively as my knowledge of university was growing more and more and my personal statement was slowly but surely building up to the best it can be.

The feedback I got on my personal statement whether it was in person or over email was quite convenient and helpful. Something which was a major help and boosted my confidence was being taught how to use the UCAS website, things like adding in the options and personal information were beneficial and that help was always available when needed, whether on Google chats or in person."

**Ziad Yasin**



# EVALUATION

Assessing and understanding the difference our activities make to the pupils we work with is central to neaco's approach. Through research and evaluation, we are able to improve the evidence base of widening participation work and help inform practice within neaco, as well as the broader outreach landscape.

## Tracking our students' journeys towards Higher Education

Tracking learners' engagement with Take Your Place and their progression to Higher Education (HE) is at the core of our evaluation work. Using the HEAT database, we are able to follow students as they progress through their educational journey, combining participation in Take Your Place activities with data from annual surveys and the Higher Education Statistics Agency. As a result, we are able to create a rich dataset and evaluate how participation in our activities impacts upon students' progression.

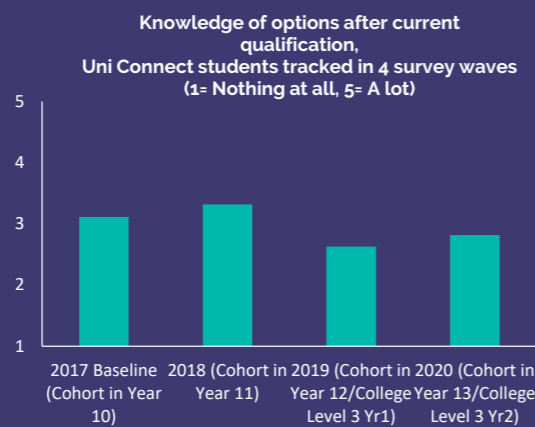
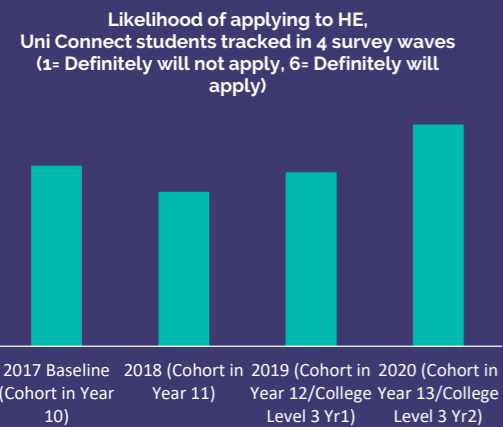
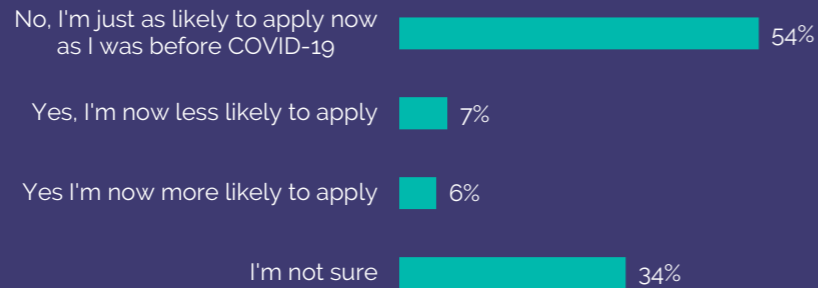
## Latest evaluation findings

The results of statistical analysis using data from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) show a small but statistically significant positive effect of each additional hour of Take Your Place activity on rates of higher education progression amongst learners.

The evaluation team, led by Dr Sonia Ilie at the Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge, concluded in relation to Phase 1 and the first half of Phase 2 of the Take Your Place programme (2017 to October 2020) that "Take Your Place is contributing to an overall improvement in students' understandings, attitudes, and intentions regarding higher education".

Annual survey responses from 10,241 learners across East Anglia in late 2020 and early 2021 indicated that only 13% reported a change to their decision about whether or not to apply to higher education at 18 or 19 due to COVID-19. Over half said they were just as likely to apply now as they were before the pandemic.

### Has COVID-19 affected your decision about whether or not to apply to higher education at age 18 or 19?



Tracking a cohort of Uni Connect learners who participated in all four surveys between 2017 (in Year 10) and 2020 (in their last year of compulsory education) reveals an overall rise in how likely they are to apply to HE. Self-reported knowledge of options available after the qualification they were studying rose as they reached the final year of each qualification.

## Annual Survey

Since 2017, neaco has conducted an annual survey of students aged 13-19, providing key information about their knowledge and attitudes towards higher education, to help us understand their decision-making and any changes over time, including the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. With five waves of annual survey data, we can explore changes over time for cohorts and for individual students. Results feed into both the evaluation of the Take Your Place programme, and the national evaluation of the Uni Connect programme.

In 2021, neaco collected survey responses from 13,394 students across the region.

Over 57,000 learners in East Anglia have filled in at least one annual survey since 2017.

# FINANCE

neaco is funded by the Office for Students (OfS) as part of the Uni Connect programme.

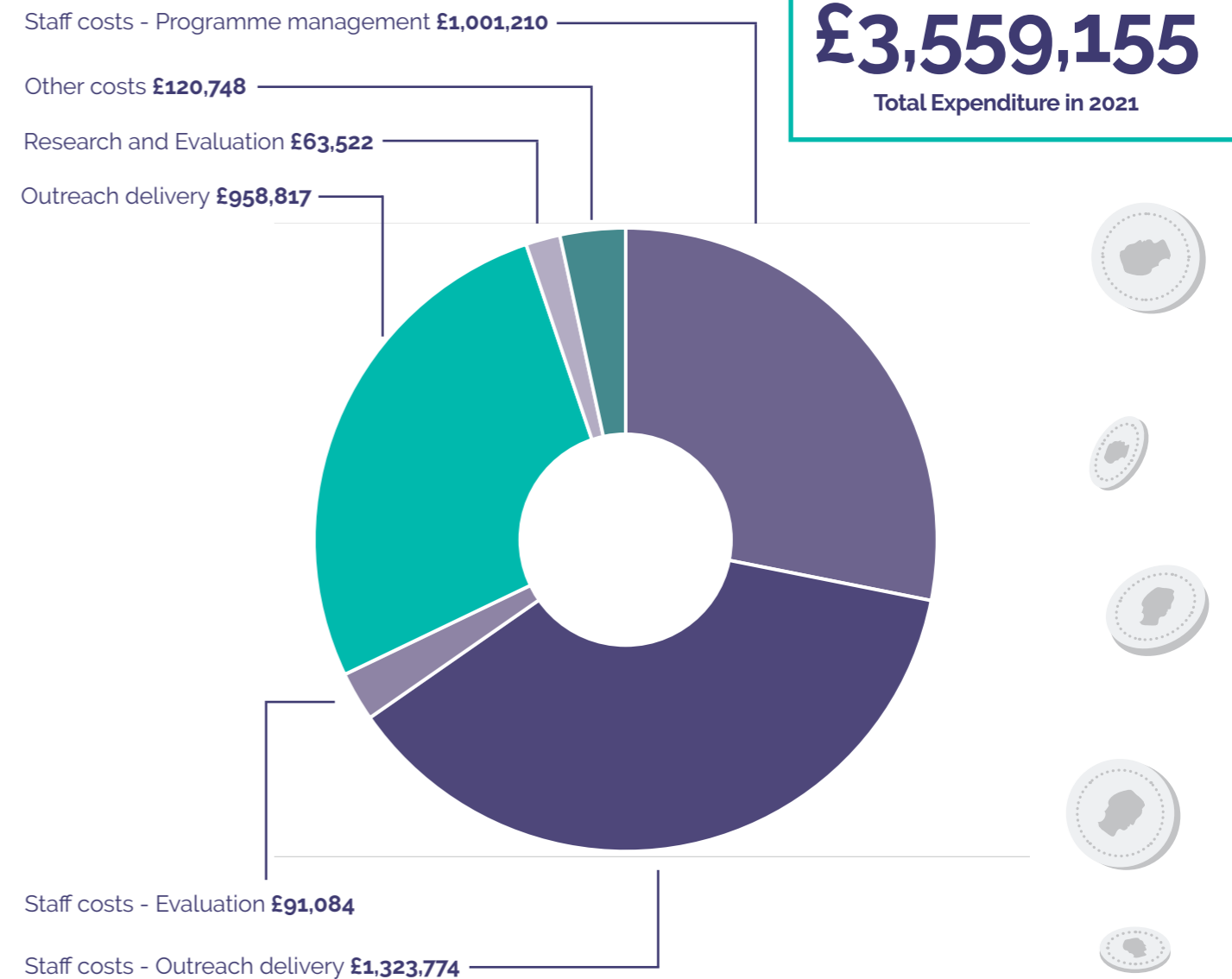
During the 2021 calendar year, our total expenditure was £3.56m. This is a 6% decrease compared to 2020. The funding provided for the Uni Connect programme nationally was reduced by a third in August 2021, from £60m to £40m, and consequent reductions in our delivery costs were implemented from August onwards.

Our primary area of expenditure is staff costs (£2.42m). Despite reductions in funding, we have maintained our team of 39 staff based in schools and colleges delivering outreach activity to our target young people. We spent £1.32m employing outreach delivery staff, which was 1% less than our 2020 expenditure due to vacancies this year.

Non-staff costs were lower this year (£1.14m), a

decrease of 13% compared to 2020, and 39% lower than 2019. Throughout much of the year, face-to-face events and activities were replaced by online activity due to the ongoing impact of COVID-19.

Looking to the future, the OfS have consulted on proposals to provide funding for the Uni Connect programme through to the end of academic year 2024-25. However, the funding levels will be subject to decision making in Spring 2022.





# TAKE YOUR PLACE

neaco

