

TAKE YOUR PLACE

ANNUAL REPORT

Network for East Anglian
Collaborative Outreach
2020



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 apprenticeships. These local partnerships provide guidance, increase aspiration, and support young people in planning their future education.

neaco is a local partnership of five universities and nine 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 in order 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 where further study may take them, as well as making informed choices to enable progression.

OUR PARTNERS:



CHAIR'S FOREWORD AND 2020 OVERVIEW



In a year like no other, the Network for East Anglian Collaborative Outreach (neaco) partnership was challenged to adapt and overcome extreme circumstances brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic and the wider impact on the education sector. I am enormously proud of the continued passion and commitment shown by our fantastic collaborative teams, in their support and largely virtual delivery to our region's schools, colleges and young people across the Take Your Place programme.

We started 2020 similar to previous years, adhering to our mission of supporting under-represented young people across East Anglia progress into further and higher education, providing aspirational workshops and mentoring across our schools and colleges. Our commitment continued, supporting our parents and local communities, hardworking teachers, education staff and young people in over 100 institutions. In January 2020, we were proud to attend the launch of the Office for Students Uni Connect programme, replacing the previous National Collaborative Outreach Programme (NCOP).

COVID-19 response

From March 2020, we recognised the significant challenges the pandemic would cause young people nationally, particularly those from disadvantaged areas. This year, we have seen the biggest adaptation of the Take Your Place programme since we began in 2017. It has been a challenge, but one we have faced head on, with all staff pulling together in a time of unprecedented change and uncertainty. With a mass movement to home working and study, we continued to support schools where needed, whilst moving our programme delivery almost entirely online. Our continued creative and collaborative approach has led to an exciting new chapter for Take Your Place. Our website was re-launched in response to the need for increased online support. It has been tailored to the specific needs of our students, parents and teachers, with guidance pathways, free educational resources and information on events.

Our teams across the region have been delivering online workshops in close collaboration with teachers and tutors during national lockdowns and local restrictions. This enhanced collaboration has strengthened our partnership relationships and virtual offerings. We have built a targeted and effective range of online resources

to help us deliver a sustained level of support, and positively impact our target communities. We saw a total of 13,102 students engage 1,358 online activities and the number of Take Your Place website users increased by 52% in 2020 compared to 2019.

Evaluation and impact

Our programme remains committed to a thorough evaluation process. Tracking students' engagement with the Take Your Place programme is key to monitoring the impact of our work. Our 2020 analysis concluded that the neaco programme; "is positively supporting young people to make the best possible decisions about their higher education". In addition, there was found to be a substantially higher rate of higher education participation for the most disadvantaged group (39.9% for our students compared to 27.3% nationally).

The year ahead

Looking ahead, 2021 continues to present similar challenges to 2020, with the potential for further disruption to schools and colleges. We remain committed to continue to develop our support offering across East Anglia in the year ahead, as we move into phase 3 of the Take Your Place programme. While we hope to soon be able to return to face-to-face engagement and delivery, we will continue to apply creative and innovative solutions to fulfil our ambition to support under-represented students and help them to take their next steps in their education journey.

I would like to extend my sincere thanks to our team and the young people, teachers and parents we work with for their patience and flexibility throughout the last year.

Tom Levinson

Chair of the Steering Group
Network for East Anglian Collaborative Outreach

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 apprenticeships, between students living in target and non-target wards across East Anglia. We work towards this through:

- 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 with

9,800

Total number of schools and sixths forms engaged with

88



Total number of Further Education Colleges engaged with

9



Total number of activities delivered

2,889



Total number of students engaged

23,451



WEBSITE USERS

2019

3,252

East of England

7,014

All

2020

4,323

East of England

10,660

All

WE HAVE WORKED WITH

CAMBRIDGESHIRE & PETERBOROUGH

All Students: **6,391**

Uni Connect Target Students: **2,305**

NORFOLK

All Students: **7,579**

Uni Connect Target Students: **3,291**

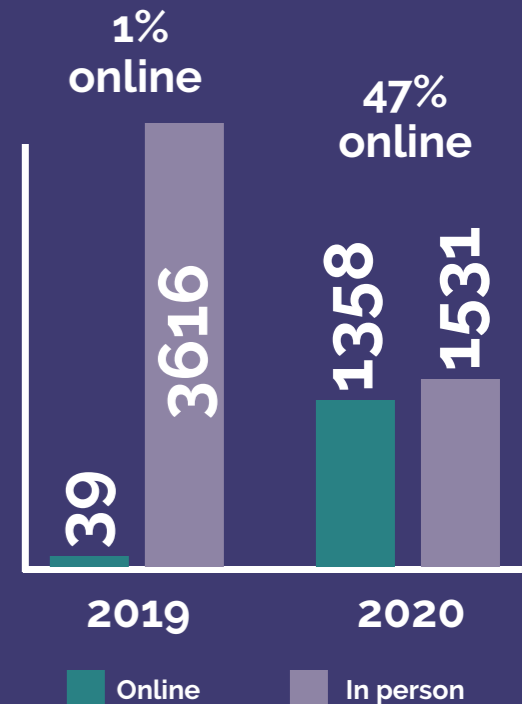
SUFFOLK

All Students: **9,481**

Uni Connect Target Students: **4,204**



PROPORTION OF ONLINE ACTIVITIES



OUR WORK WITH STUDENTS

When the world changed in March, our partners quickly adapted, and by moving all student support provision online and using innovative online delivery platforms, it has been possible to continue to successfully deliver our outreach activities to students. All online resources are designed to encourage student participation and engagement, develop understanding and ultimately support progression to higher education.

Our Higher Education Champions organised the 2020 annual Liberate and Educate: Inspirational Women conference, hosted at the University of Suffolk. The event focused on encouraging and empowering young women to take up careers in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics). Over 100 Year 10 students attended a full day of events at the University.

The [Applications Unlocked programme](#) provided pupils with guidance about the application process for universities and other higher education (HE) providers. The online sessions were very well received by both students and parents.

'[My work experience week](#)' was created and piloted in response to the COVID-19 crisis to help year 10 students in Norfolk explore the world of work in the absence of work experience opportunities. Daily live online

sessions from a variety of employers helped students research careers, learn about the labour market and receive insights into the working world. Supported by Norfolk County Council and the Careers and Enterprise Company, the event had 2,628 unique online visitors in 2020.

The Brightside Highly Able project offers inspirational online mentoring, introducing 6th form students to current university students. We worked with the Brightside charity during 2020 to help develop their post-16 online programme for highly able students in Suffolk. Despite the COVID-19 crisis, a significant proportion of mentees accessed the Brightside Mentoring app during 2020. School feedback was also positive. In the 2020 online evaluation survey, 90% of mentees reported that they had 'Learned new things, received useful feedback and felt more optimistic about the future.'

Art packs initiative



Artwork from Ha Dong, Castle Manor Academy, Suffolk.

"Their art equipment is really helpful and good quality too. Tell them that I say thank you."

neaco funded art resource packs were distributed during lockdown to Year 9 to 13 students unable to access art materials at home. This helped them to complete their course work and maintain their interest in pursuing a creative arts degree. The University of Suffolk and Norwich University of the Arts provided a total of 2343 art packs to 40 schools across both regions.

"During a time of disruption and uncertainty, working from home has become increasingly difficult and many students have limited access to materials. neaco provided all Year 10 art students with resources which are invaluable to them in continuing their studies."

Jo Westgate
Head of Art, Ormiston Denes Academy, Suffolk

Undercover Authors

Created in partnership with neaco and UEA, the project continues to encourage expression and inspire pupils. Across Norfolk, over 160 students took part in creative writing workshops, highlighting potential creative industry career options. After winning her school's Undercover Authors competition, Year 10 student Bili's story was published in an anthology of 83 stories from Norfolk schools.



Bili from Ormiston Victory Academy, Norfolk.

The experience has confirmed Bili's commitment to continue her education to University level.

Total number of target students engaged

9,800



Total number of activities delivered

2,889



OUR WORK WITH PARENTS IN THE COMMUNITY

2020 has been a different year for us all and we have all had to embrace the virtual world and find new ways to collaborate. We recruited our team of Parent Ambassadors (parents of children who have attended university) in 2019. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, they attended open days and school parent events to talk to parents, peer to peer. In 2020 in response to the pandemic, the project was successfully moved online.

The Suffolk HE Family Zone Facebook page was created and supported by the outreach team at the University of Suffolk. It aims to engage a wider audience during lockdown with informative posts, videos and competitions. Two highly successful competitions; 'Design a University' and 'Design a course' had an impressive uptake.

This year also saw the start of the collaboration with the IConnect project, with Ipswich Community Champions facilitating a training day at the University of Suffolk. Workshop. Subjects included: UCAS, student finance and student life, equipping participants with the skills to be able to fully support their local communities and improve access to higher education.

Building on the neaco grant-funded 2018 Ipswich & Suffolk Council for Racial Equality (ISCRE) report "It Takes a Village to Raise a Child", the University of Suffolk and ISCRE have set up a programme of listening and engagement activities, with trained community champions providing targeted higher education and access information.

The neaco team recently surveyed our Parent Ambassadors about their [experiences of supporting young people into higher education](#). In addition, the neaco Parent/Carer Guide is available online and reviewed regularly, providing useful information and guidance about key topics such as: student finance, UCAS and student support.

Parent Ambassador

"Student life during COVID-19 has been very challenging especially for young people looking to apply for university. When speaking to my son George about his decision to apply, he said he is happy that he decided to go this year. Although it won't be the same experience as before the pandemic, he felt he was well prepared for what to expect."

Pete Rampling
Parent Ambassador



SUPPORTING SCHOOLS AND SIXTH FORMS

School Grant Scheme

In 2020 we implemented the third phase of our successful [grant programme](#) for target schools and sixth forms. By providing support for them to access provision and implement innovative approaches, they can continue to support their target students in making informed decisions about their future.

In total 28 grants, with a combined value of over £70,000, were awarded to neaco schools across East Anglia. The grants support students and staff, help learners explore their options and embed systemic change around Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) provision.

Despite the challenges of COVID-19 and the unavailability of services, we have been determined to ensure schools can still benefit, working closely with recipients to respond and adapt to the challenges presented. We have been truly impressed and excited by the resilience shown by schools and the innovative approaches demonstrated.

Supporting schools and colleges is a key component of neaco's work and has been more significant than ever this year. Our teams and staff at target schools and sixth forms have gone above and beyond, to ensure the continued support of projects for learners and teachers, even during the uncertainty and disruption of lockdowns.



Total number of grants

28

With a total value of over **£70,000** were awarded to neaco schools across East Anglia



Ken Stimpson Community School, Peterborough

Focus on attainment - webinar success

One such project, focused on improving the attainment of boys, was the Anglia Ruskin University ['Boy's Don't Try' webinar](#). Since June 2020, over 600 teachers from neaco target schools have watched the webinar, guest hosted by the author Matt Pinkett. With 98.36% of attendees stating that they found it extremely useful, teacher feedback was used to produce a fantastic series of blogs written by our teachers, for our teachers. A follow-up webinar on the under-performance of Pakistani boys, was delivered to Thomas Deacon Academy in Peterborough.



New school Hub - Careers & Higher Education

neaco have worked closely with Andrea Ayre at Ken Stimpson Community School in Peterborough to support the creation of a Careers & Higher Education Hub at the centre of the school.

The Hub provides students with resources to develop their understanding of their post 16, higher education, apprenticeship and future career options. With our support, the Hub was made accessible during COVID-19 and has remained beneficial for all students from Year 9 upwards, connecting students to resources whether in school or at home.

Our Higher Education Champions used the hub to facilitate weekly group activities, both in-person and virtually. Looking ahead, the school plans to invite lecturers, student ambassadors and employers to the Hub to engage with students and present workshops. It will also be used to encourage participation in after school and lunch time guidance groups, based on higher education and future pathways, using the framework to structure sessions and outcomes.

In addition, our Careers in the Curriculum funding has given the school's subject teachers the opportunity to apply for up to £300 each. This will help fund the development of additional resources, experiences and activities. Enhancing their lessons will further inspire students, incorporating close links to careers and higher education.

WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP

A collaborative approach

Despite continued COVID-19 restrictions throughout 2020, our Take Your Place team continued to collaborate effectively with all of our outreach partners. Work continued remotely, ensuring that schools and colleges could still access all higher education opportunities and outreach programmes available to under-represented young people across East Anglia.

Using innovative alternative virtual and digital platforms, our teams worked to deliver the most up-to-date guidance and information. During the summer term and even during the summer holidays, a number of new online collaborations enabled us to continue to support student's post-16 educational choices.

neaco worked with the Norwich and Ipswich Opportunity Areas to support the transition of over 30 students from Year 11 to Suffolk New College and City College Norwich. The [What a Difference a Day Makes programme](#) supported numeracy and literacy targets and helped improve wellbeing with mentoring and study skills support for post-16 study.

At the end of the programme:

- 69% of the students reported they were likely to apply to higher education aged 18/19 compared to 39% at the start

- 19 students from the Ipswich programme completed the summer WADADM course and all went on to gain a place at Suffolk New College
- Suffolk New College have reported strong retention and progress for attendees compared to students with a similar profile in previous years

In another cross-county collaboration in support of school pupils working remotely across the region, staff created a range of [creative arts taster videos](#). These provided inspiration and ideas for developing creative portfolios, as well as insider information on a range of creative careers.



"The programme has had a significant impact on young people experiencing difficulties during the COVID-19 lockdown and has supported their transition to further education study."

Katie Francis
neaco Assistant Head, UEA



CHANGING LIVES TOGETHER



What a Difference a Day Makes

"We really appreciate the collaboration with neaco that provided these young people with much needed support on managing their wellbeing and thinking about their future. It is comforting to know that there is something for Year 11 pupils that supports their skills and wellbeing needs so effectively".

Jacqueline Bircham
Programme Director,
Ipswich Opportunity Area



Apprenticeships - podcast series

In response to the COVID-19 restrictions, our Apprenticeship specialists from Cambridgeshire, Norfolk and Suffolk successfully collaborated on a project to create a [series of new podcasts](#), created to help raise awareness of higher and degree apprenticeships opportunities. The podcasts were created following collaboration with a number of employers, apprentices and training providers from a range of sectors including healthcare and the NHS plus policing and engineering. The team also curated various resources to be delivered digitally during National Apprenticeship Week next year.



WORKING WITH FURTHER EDUCATION COLLEGES

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

In 2020, our college-based staff saw a transition from working with colleges and students in person, to working with them remotely. The importance of not overloading students at this challenging time was recognised. College teams worked with the wider project team to co-produce and deliver a series of online activities and resources for students studying from home and unable to meet in person. Support was also increased for the delivery of 1-to-1 sessions, either virtually or via email, to ensure students could still access the same opportunities as before the pandemic.

This period of intense collaboration has strengthened our virtual offering, where little existed previously. As we move forward into 2021, 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

9

Further Education Colleges

neaco funds

15

staff members



Helping individuals through the application process

Miyah Curtis, Higher Education Liaison Coordinator, Suffolk New College

'neaco supported me with my whole university application, they helped me to understand what university is like and the best content to include in my personal statement. Miyah helped me to understand how to find information about the university and the course I was applying for. I was struggling to pay my UCAS application fees and neaco supported me by funding my application.

They were extremely helpful and supported me not only in my academic career, but also in looking for a job in childcare, alongside my university course. I would recommend neaco to other students.'

Courtney Mill
Suffolk New College Student

'Our son has additional learning requirements and due to COVID-19 and working online, he was late in applying for University. We had roughly 48 hrs to get his application completed and submitted, but with the help of neaco, we completed the application on time.

neaco were fantastic, talking us through the application and student finance process. They advised us on what websites to look at, providing us with links to disabled student allowance information and guidance on tuition fees. They also provided guidance on what universities and courses would suit our son's specific needs and looked at his personal statement suggesting what information it should contain and alternative wordings to make his statement the best it could be.

We were lucky to receive their support and exceptional knowledge, it made the process a lot less stressful. I would definitely recommend neaco to other applicants and parents.'

Kenny Elvin
Suffolk New College Parent



'Throughout 2020 further education colleges have continued to work collaboratively in supporting students across the Take Your Place project. I am proud of how all staff have managed to adapt to virtual delivery whilst continuing to inspire underrepresented students.

Staff at our further education colleges have been innovative in creating resources and activities for students, allowing neaco to continue supporting students in progressing through their educational journey.'

Heloise Evans
FE College Coordinator



Miyah Curtis

EVALUATION



Central to the neaco mandate is assessing and understanding the difference our activities make to the pupils we work with. 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 students' engagement with Take Your Place programming is at the core of our evaluation work. In 2020, we recorded 2,889 individual outreach activities delivered by our project partners on our Higher Education Access Tracker (HEAT) database. Across these activities, we worked with 23,451 individual students, of whom 9,800 were target students. Using the HEAT database, we have been able to follow students as they progress through their educational journey. By combining this with annual surveys of students and data from the Higher Education Statistics Agency, we are analysing how participation in our activities impacts students' progression.

Adapting to the COVID-19 pandemic

We also routinely collect feedback on Take Your Place activities through questionnaires shared at the end of activities, and over the past year these questionnaires have been adapted to reflect new ways of working during the COVID-19 pandemic. In order to respond to the increased demands on teachers as a result of pandemic-related measures, planned practitioner-led evaluations of sustained activities that were launched in January 2020 have been adapted or paused.

Annual surveys

A key component of our local evaluation is its integration with the national evaluation of the Uni Connect project. Since 2017, neaco has helped deliver an annual survey of students aged 13-19. These surveys include questions designed by the central Uni Connect project, as well as neaco-specific questions to help further our own evaluation.

Together, the results from these national and local questions provide key information about the knowledge and attitudes students have about higher education; these help us understand their decision-making around higher education, what factors influence these, and how they may change over time. This year, additional questions were added to help shed some light on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on these decisions.

Despite the challenges resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic and school closures, in 2020, neaco collected responses from 12,410 students. Now that the survey is in its fourth year, we are able to compare results to the baseline survey from 2017, as well as the follow-up responses from 2018 and 2019. Additionally, for those pupils we are tracking in HEAT, we are able to link the survey responses to these students' activity and progression records in HEAT. This combined data from the annual surveys and HEAT database, provides a rich dataset that enables us to evaluate the impact of Take Your Place programming.

Evaluation findings

The evaluation team led by Dr Sonia Ilie at the Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge, concluded in relation to the Phase 1 (2017-2019) that "the results of the impact and process evaluation, point to a broadly positive, and on rare occasion mixed, picture of the impact of Take Your Place on a range of higher education application intentions and relevant education knowledge". The evaluation team also concluded that "the programme is addressing a complex decision space, and overall is positively supporting young people to make the best possible decisions about their higher education".

Indeed, when we use the latest data from the Higher Education Statistics Agency to look at students who took part in Take Your Place activities and who were ready to attend higher education in 2018/19, we find a substantially higher rate of higher education participation for the most disadvantaged group (39.9% for our students compared to 27.3% nationally). We also find that the gap in higher education participation between the most and the least disadvantaged students is much smaller for Take Your place participants (6.8 percentage points) than nationally (30.5 percentage points).

FINANCE

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

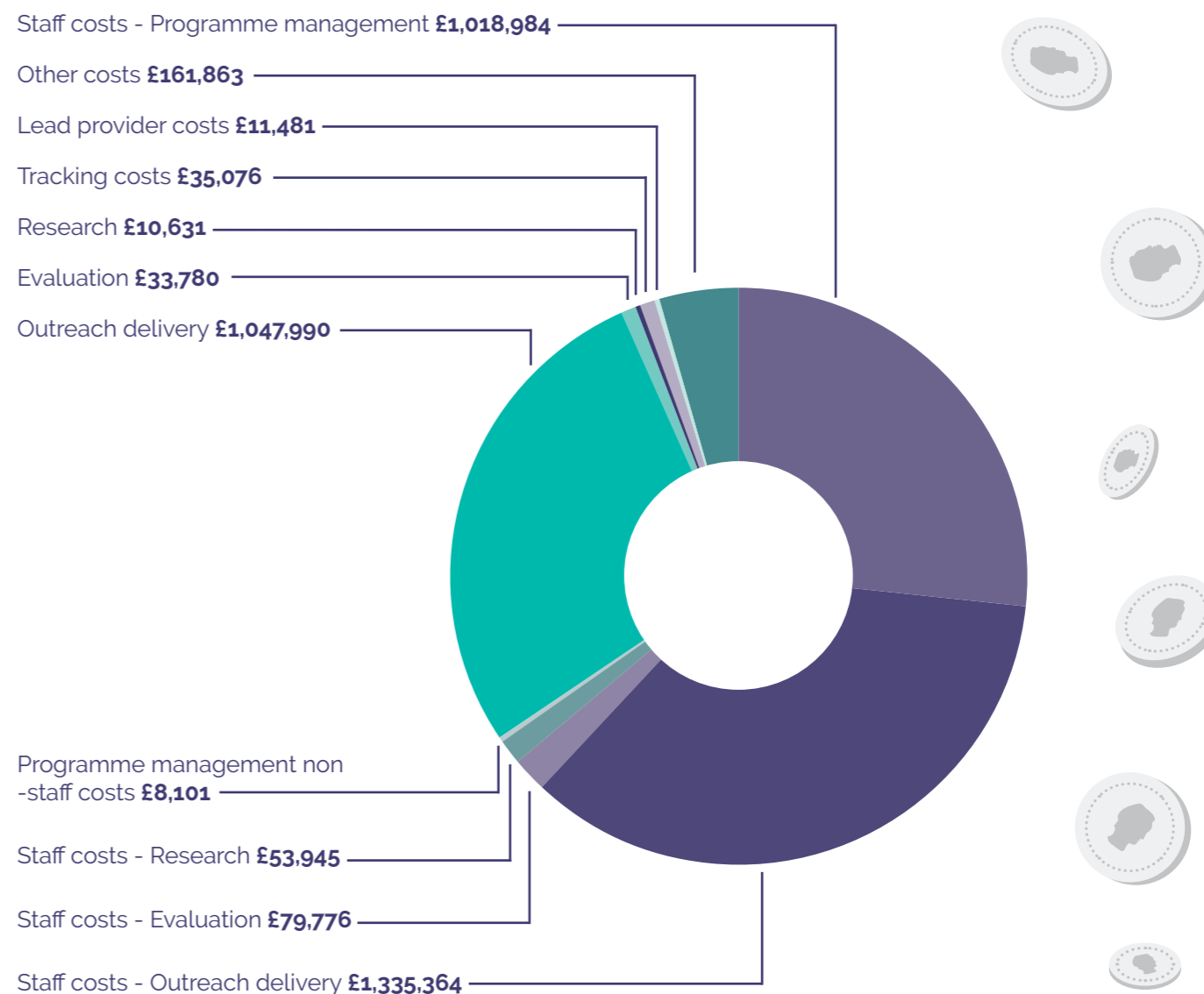
During the 2020 calendar year, our total expenditure was £3.80m. This is a 6% decrease compared to 2019. Outreach delivery costs were significantly lower this year (£1.05m, a decrease of 34% compared to 2019) as face-to-face events and activities were cancelled or replaced by online activity due to COVID-19.

Our primary expenditure has been on staff costs (£2.49m). This includes £1.34m spent on outreach delivery staff, which enables us to employ 39 staff based in schools and colleges delivering outreach activity to our target young people.

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. The proposals include 2021-22 as a transitional year, using a similar funding methodology as has been used in 2019-21. However, the funding levels will be subject to decision making in Spring 2021.

£3,796,992

Total Expenditure in 2020



TAKE YOUR PLACE

neaco

