

Office for
Students



National Collaborative Outreach Programme: The first year

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National Collaborative
Outreach Programme



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Summary

This is the first annual report on the National Collaborative Outreach Programme (NCOP). It sets out key information on what the programme does, why it is needed and what it has delivered in its first year.

The reasons why young people may not be progressing onto higher education will be varied and are often complex. NCOP consortia are tasked with developing programmes of sustained and progressive outreach that are appropriate to the needs and aspirations of the young people living in their allocated target areas. The findings of this report show how NCOP consortia are forecasting to collectively engage with 115,000 young people in 2018.

How does the programme aim to achieve this? Collaboration is a key feature of the programme and critical to its ongoing success. By working together those involved in NCOP consortia are able to develop approaches which are tailored to the needs of local areas rather than specific higher education providers. This report showcases who is involved in NCOP consortia partnerships, outlines the volume of learners and education providers engaged in the programme, and highlights the impact of the relationships fostered across a variety of stakeholders. It includes case studies and insights from a range of NCOP consortia across England to show how these networks have been forged.

A strong and comprehensive plan for evaluation of the NCOP is in place. It is too early to evidence the actual impact of the programme or activities in terms of students progressing to higher education. However a key element of the programme is to strengthen the evidence base on the impact of outreach initiatives at a local and national level. In this way the report adds to a CFE Research programme evaluation report, which was published in March 2018¹.

The NCOP represents a significant investment by the Office for Students (OfS) as one of many ways to enhance opportunities for young people to understand and experience higher education. This report will feed into a review that will inform decisions about the programme from August 2019 onwards, alongside emerging evidence, the wider higher education policy environment, and the OfS strategy.

¹ See www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/rereports/year/2018/ncopyear1/.

Foreword



Chris Millward
Director for Fair Access and Participation
Office for Students

Access and participation is key to the Office for Students. We want to make higher education more representative of wider society – to ensure that, to quote the first of our four regulatory objectives, ‘all students, from all backgrounds, are supported to access, succeed in, and progress from, higher education’. This is definitely not the case at the moment, and we want that to change.

We know that one thing that is essential to this is targeted, sustained and progressive outreach that offers inspiration, increases aspiration and supports teenagers to make the right choices that open the doors to higher education. It helps young people to navigate a complex and often unfamiliar system, and to prepare them properly for life as a student if that is the path they choose to take at 18.

So I am very pleased to see the progress made by the OfS-funded NCOP partnership, which enables exactly this kind of outreach in an effective and efficient way. As this report shows, NCOP’s first year of operation is already showing signs of success. There are three key reasons: it is targeted; it is collaborative; and it is local.

NCOP brings together higher education providers, further education colleges, schools, the third sector, local agencies and employers, forming in-depth partnerships that mean young people get the robust advice, information and guidance at key transition points that they need. It is an intelligent, joined-up way to target resources where they are most needed – and specifically onto the geographical localities that will most benefit from investment because, while progress has been made nationally on widening access to higher education, the picture still varies greatly between different parts of the country.

Whether urban or rural, NCOP consortia help to ensure that the opportunities for social mobility that higher education provides are not limited by place, but open to all. In many areas NCOP activity is aligned at a local level with other initiatives and programmes such as the Department for Education’s opportunity areas and the Careers and Enterprise Company. And, by adopting a range of experimental techniques, as well as utilising longitudinal tracking, the programme provides a unique opportunity to understand better what approaches to outreach are most effective in different contexts.

I am pleased at how well the local partnerships are working and the impact that their activities and tailored support are beginning to have on learners from the targeted wards, and I want to build on this to bring even more benefit to prospective students. During 2018 we will be working closely with the NCOP consortia to support them to increase their impact still further, and we will review the whole NCOP programme and develop proposals for the future that ensure we maximise the benefits of collaboration in local areas.

Introduction to the NCOP

The National Collaborative Outreach Programme aims to rapidly increase the number of young people from under-represented groups who go into higher education. It started in January 2017 and is funded by the Office for Students (OfS).

The NCOP brings together 29 partnerships of universities, colleges, schools and other local agencies to deliver sustained and progressive programmes of higher education outreach with young people in Years 9 to 13.

Their work is focused on geographic areas in England where participation in higher education is low overall and lower than expected given local GCSE results. These are areas where evidence suggests there is the greatest potential for increased higher education participation during the coming years.

The NCOP is a national programme that can be developed and shaped locally to meet the needs of the young people living within the target areas.

A robust evaluation is in place to understand the impact of the programme and some of the interventions within it.

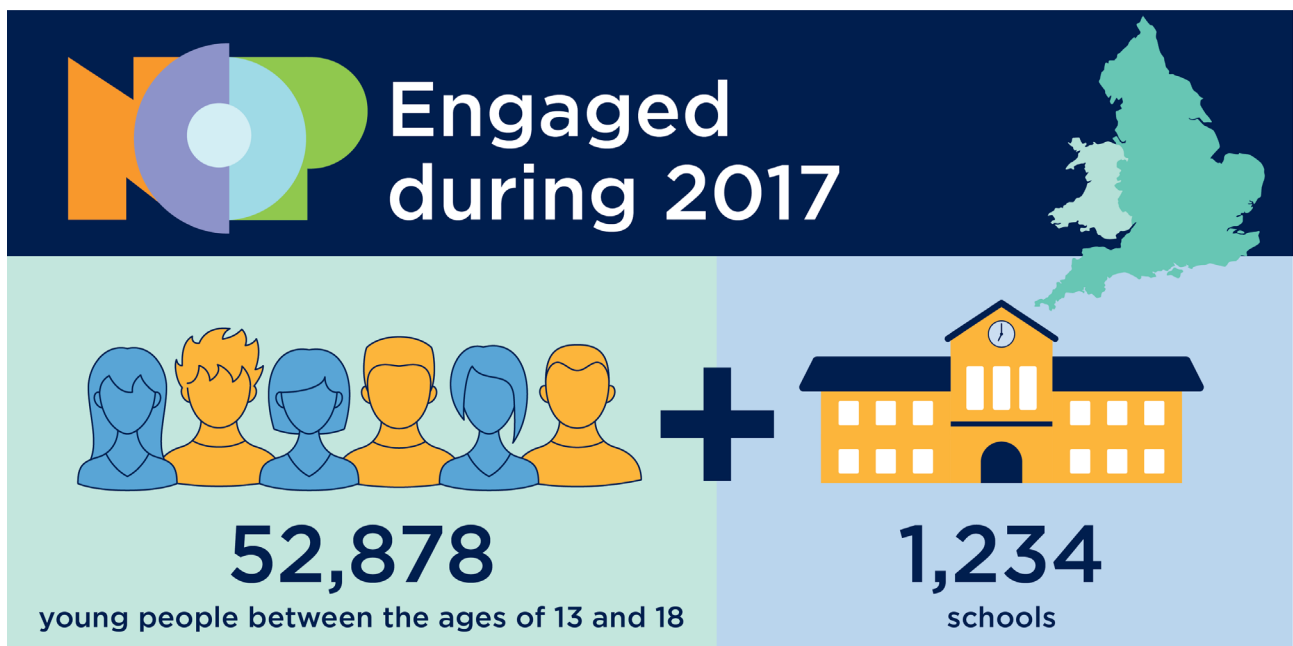
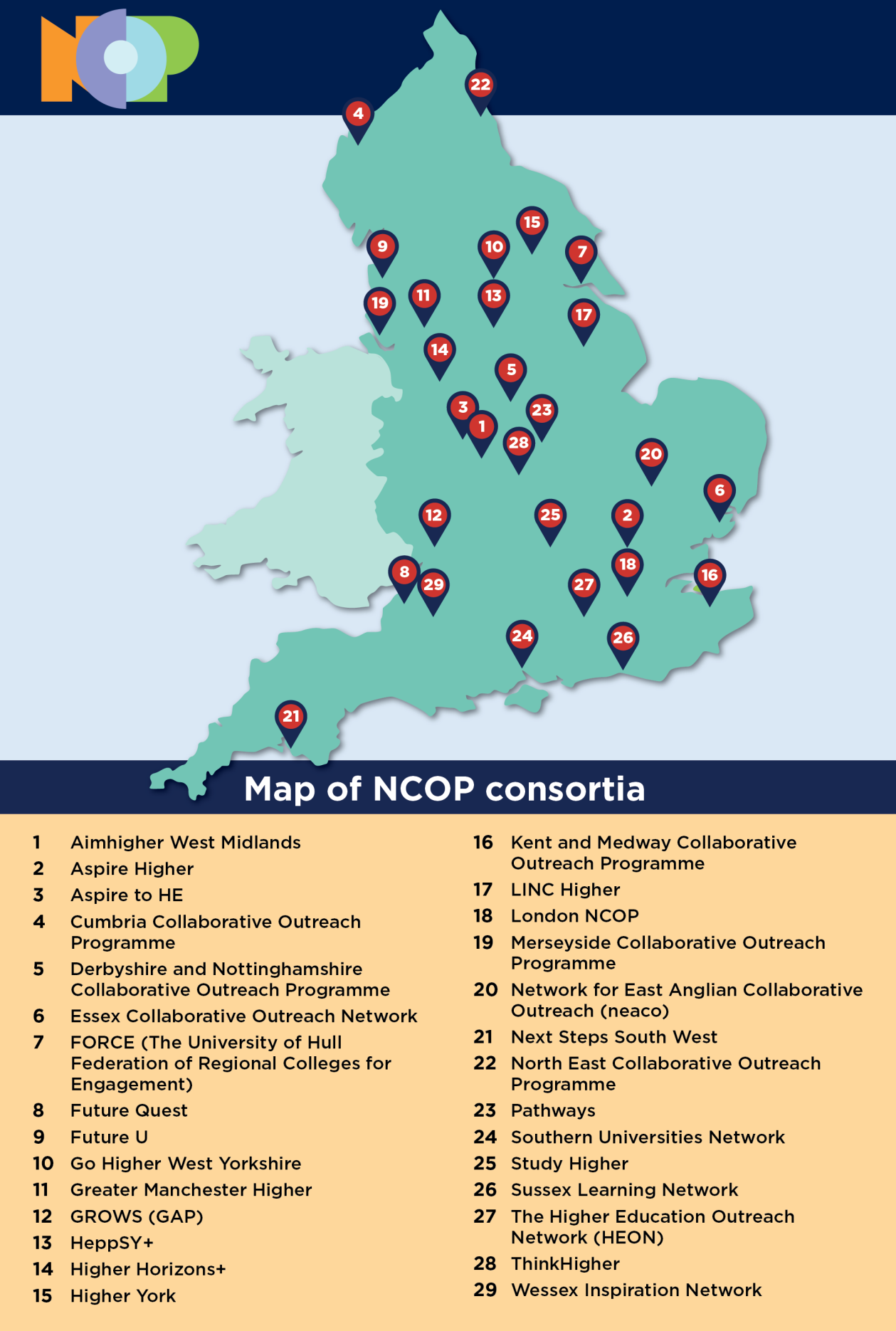


Figure 1: Map of NCOP consortia lead institutions



Nationally developed, locally focused

Higher education can improve and even transform lives for those who gain access to and succeed in it, while entrenching disadvantage for those who don't. However not everyone has the same chances to go into higher education.

The participation of young people aged 18 and 19 in higher education in England has increased in the last decade. But the level of participation varies significantly across the country with large differences occurring between local areas. Young people who live in the geographic areas of England with the highest rates of participation in higher education are around three times more likely to enter higher education than those who live in the areas with the lowest rates of participation².

The NCOP uses research by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) into areas where the higher education participation of young people is below the level expected, based on their GCSE level attainment³. This is used to determine where investment can be most effectively targeted to boost the numbers of young people from under-represented groups going into higher education.

This is a challenging ambition requiring a highly tailored approach because the reasons why young people in some areas choose to go to university in much lower numbers than others are complex and multi-layered. Different factors combine in unique ways in different places to affect participation. The activity and approach of the NCOP can be tailored at a local level to respond to the specific needs and conditions within an area.

NCOP activity is led by 29 consortia that between them cover the whole of England. Through close collaboration with local higher education providers, further education colleges and local bodies, these partnerships have developed progressive and sustained outreach activities to reflect the particular needs and approaches that would best suit the young people in their areas.

Describing how their approach is informed by being rooted in their localities NCOP partnership Higher York said: 'Understanding the wards themselves, by walking the wards and engaging with a variety of community groups and institutions, is the bedrock of Higher York's approach.'

The NCOP consortia target their activity on 997 wards⁴ in England with an unexplained 'gap' in participation (controlling for GCSE attainment) and work with young people in Years 9 to 13 (ages 13 to 19) to drive a rapid increase in the proportion who choose to go into higher education.

'Understanding the wards themselves, by walking the wards and engaging with a variety of community groups and institutions, is the bedrock of Higher York's approach.'

² See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/polar-participation-of-local-areas/.

³ See www.hefce.ac.uk/analysis/yp/gaps/.

⁴ The NCOP is geographically targeted on a ward basis (ONS 2001 CAS Wards) with, in general, an allocated consortium taking responsibility for all the wards within a county/combined county (ONS NUTS2).

By emphasising collaboration and focusing on the specific needs of local areas where there is the greatest potential and need, the NCOP represents a significant shift in targeting and approach from any previous outreach programmes.

The CFE Research programme evaluation report⁵ found that:

‘A key impact of NCOP to date is enhanced collaboration between diverse partners and the benefits this brings. Collaboration across a range of partners helps to enhance expertise, generate fresh ideas and ensure a varied offer of experiences and opportunities for learners. Further Education Colleges in particular offer different insights and an alternative pathway to higher education that is potentially very beneficial to the NCOP.’

Details of individual NCOP consortia and their approach are given in Annex A.

A strong focus on evidence and impact

The NCOP aims to drive a rapid increase in the number of young people from under-represented groups who go into higher education. It is contributing to the government's goals to:

- double the proportion of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds in higher education by 2020
- increase by 20 per cent the number of students in higher education from ethnic minority groups
- address the under-representation of young men from disadvantaged backgrounds in higher education.

A strong and comprehensive plan for evaluation of the programme has been put in place to help create a robust evidence base. Through its focus on evidencing impact and success NCOP provides an opportunity to make a ‘step change’ in the sector's approach to measuring the effectiveness and impact of its outreach work, and in the ability of the OfS to demonstrate this in the context of a national programme.

The NCOP programme evaluation is considering the key factors that have influenced whether consortia are successful, and will ascertain the immediate and potential longer-term economic, social and cultural benefits of the programme. This requires a robust and wide-ranging evaluation that builds on the recommendations from independent research for HEFCE in 2015⁶. The overall aim of the national evaluation of NCOP is to assess how successfully the programme is meeting its objectives by considering the developing wider context and the programme's alignment with, and impact on, the broader coverage of outreach activity and investment through access and participation plans.

⁵ See www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/rereports/year/2018/ncopyear1/, page 8. From here, referred to in the text as CFE Research programme evaluation report.

⁶ See www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/rereports/year/2015/sodepth.

The essential components of the evaluation are:

1. Regular monitoring and account management by the OfS.
2. Local evaluation undertaken by each NCOP consortium.
3. Quantitative analysis of national administrative data sets to measure progression into post-16 pathways, and higher education entry and progression rates.
4. Longitudinal tracking of young people involved in NCOP. Participants are being tracked through one of the three recognised higher education tracking systems (Aimhigher West Midlands, East Midlands Widening Participation Research and Evaluation Partnership (EMWPREP) and Higher Education Access Tracker (HEAT)⁷) so there is robust data on the pathways that are taken during and after their engagement with NCOP.
5. An externally commissioned formative and capacity building evaluation with reports at key points in the programme. This includes support for NCOP consortia in developing and implementing high quality evaluation plans and a systematic review of the evidence emerging from local partnerships. This work is being conducted by CFE Research in conjunction with Sheffield Hallam University.
6. An externally commissioned impact evaluation that assesses the consequential changes resulting from the diversity of NCOP interventions, by using a range of quantitative, experimental methodologies. This work is being conducted by CFE Research in conjunction with the Behavioural Insights Team, the University of Sheffield and the London Schools of Economics and Political Science.

We use a jigsaw to represent the different elements of the evaluation which, as they are brought together, provide a strong, comprehensive and coherent evidence base.

⁷ Aimhigher West Midlands, <http://aimhigherwm.ac.uk/network-partners/targeting-and-data>, EMWPREP, www.emwprep.ac.uk/, HEAT, <https://www.highereducationaccesstracker.org.uk/login.aspx>.

Figure 2: The evaluation jigsaw



Longitudinal tracking is an important element of the evaluation jigsaw. Longitudinal tracking services such as Aimhigher West Midlands, EMWPREP and HEAT enable the providers and partnerships that use the service to track individual students through the outreach process and, subject to appropriate consent, through administrative datasets such as the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) Student Record. By linking participant data to student outcome data, higher education providers and NCOP consortia using the service can explore the relationship between participation in outreach programmes, pupil attainment and higher education access in detail. As part of the impact evaluation CFE Research, in partnership with the Behavioural

Insights Team, is working with selected consortia to implement three randomised controlled trials (RCTs) of NCOP activity. These are:

- a light-touch intervention using supportive text messages concerning the process of applying to higher education via UCAS, led by the Network for East Anglian Collaborative Outreach (neaco)
- e-mentoring from an undergraduate student mentor, led by the Southern Universities Network (SUN) in partnership with the Brightside Trust
- a summer school or residential visit, which is at the design stage.

A 12-month report covering the externally commissioned evaluations by CFE Research was published in March 2018⁸. It is too early to evidence the causal impact of the programme in terms of which interventions have the most impact on students progressing to higher education. However, the researchers draw out key themes relating to NCOP consortia, school and college engagement, evaluating NCOP at a local and national level, and NCOP learner perceptions of higher education. Relevant findings have been included throughout this document.

Local evaluation, undertaken by each NCOP consortia, is a key part of the 'evaluation jigsaw' and an iterative and ongoing activity of critical importance to the delivery of effective outreach activity. CFE Research undertook a review of consortia local evaluation plans and its report sets out some significant recommendations for how these could be improved to ensure alignment with the national evaluation. It also highlights how developing a high quality, local evaluation plan is a crucial step towards embedding effective evaluation procedures.

The national evaluation team suggest that employing a dedicated evaluation role as part of NCOP consortia staffing models is important. Consortia should view this as integral to their staff model. In the absence of a dedicated evaluation post, it will be challenging for partnerships to appropriately plan, implement and analyse evaluation activities and ensure that there is alignment with the national evaluation. As part of the programme evaluation CFE Research will be providing capacity building support to consortia to aid the development and refinement of their local plans. An Evaluation Working Group has been formed by consortia themselves to provide peer-led support to local evaluations and enhance consortia contributions to the national evaluation.

Evaluation is a core component of the work of the Southern Universities Network (SUN) and its role is seen as integral to all activities it offers and funds. Early on in the project, SUN developed a theory of change, which ensures transparency in decision making and links all activity back to NCOP aims.

⁸ See CFE Research programme evaluation report.

From this, its evaluation framework, stakeholder framework and participant framework were developed. Consultation has been a key feature of the frameworks, by facilitating discussion sessions with key stakeholders. The intensity matrix systematically assigns evaluation resource across all activity offers. SUN is keen to instil innovative evaluation methods into its work and is engaged in a flagship RCT run in collaboration with Brightside, CFE Research and the Behavioural Insights Team. SUN works closely with the national evaluation team on ensuring its processes are robust and reflect national plans. Strong collaborative working and understanding of stakeholder aims and objectives is based upon effective evaluation.

The benefits of collaboration

Collaboration is a key feature of the programme and critical to its ongoing success. By working together those involved in NCOP consortia are able to develop approaches which are tailored to the needs of local areas rather than specific higher education providers. Having a range of educational providers involved, both at further and higher education levels, helps ensure that learners can engage with and experience a range of different routes into and through higher education.

The CFE Research programme evaluation report⁹ found that:

‘Collaboration across a range of partners helps to enhance expertise, generate fresh ideas and ensure a varied offer of experiences and opportunities for learners.’

The providers involved in the Kent and Medway Collaborative Outreach Programme have a track record of working collaboratively:

‘By building on our previous work across the region as part of National Networks for Collaborative Outreach (NNCO) and other programmes, our school and community partners understand and value the work of collaborative outreach in supporting progression to higher education.’

‘...our school and community partners understand and value the work of collaborative outreach in supporting progression to higher education.’

Through working with a diverse range of local agencies NCOP consortia have access to specialist expertise, skills and knowledge that enables them to create

⁹ See CFE Research programme evaluation report, page 25.

bespoke approaches that take local context into account. The benefits of collaboration were highlighted in the evaluation of the earlier NNCO programme¹⁰:

‘Where networks’ structures worked effectively this facilitated networking and greater and shared understanding between partners. It also allowed for collaboration with, and greater tie up of, higher education institutions with other partners such as local education partnerships, charities, businesses and enterprises, etc. This has enabled some networks to develop activities which are more tailored to meet the need of the specific region, rather than just increasing the scope of generic higher education awareness.’

Building partnerships takes time and resources. It took many of the NCOP consortia more time than they had anticipated to fully establish their local structures, including putting in place the appropriate staff, processes and a collaborative ethos. However, the creation of the collaborative infrastructure is central to the NCOP offer to local areas and it also provides a platform for collaboration around a range of other issues should local partners wish to do so.

Figure 3: NCOP local partners



¹⁰ The National Networks for Collaborative Outreach (NNCO) programme was funded by HEFCE and operated between January 2015 and December 2016, see www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/rereports/year/2017/nncoeval/.

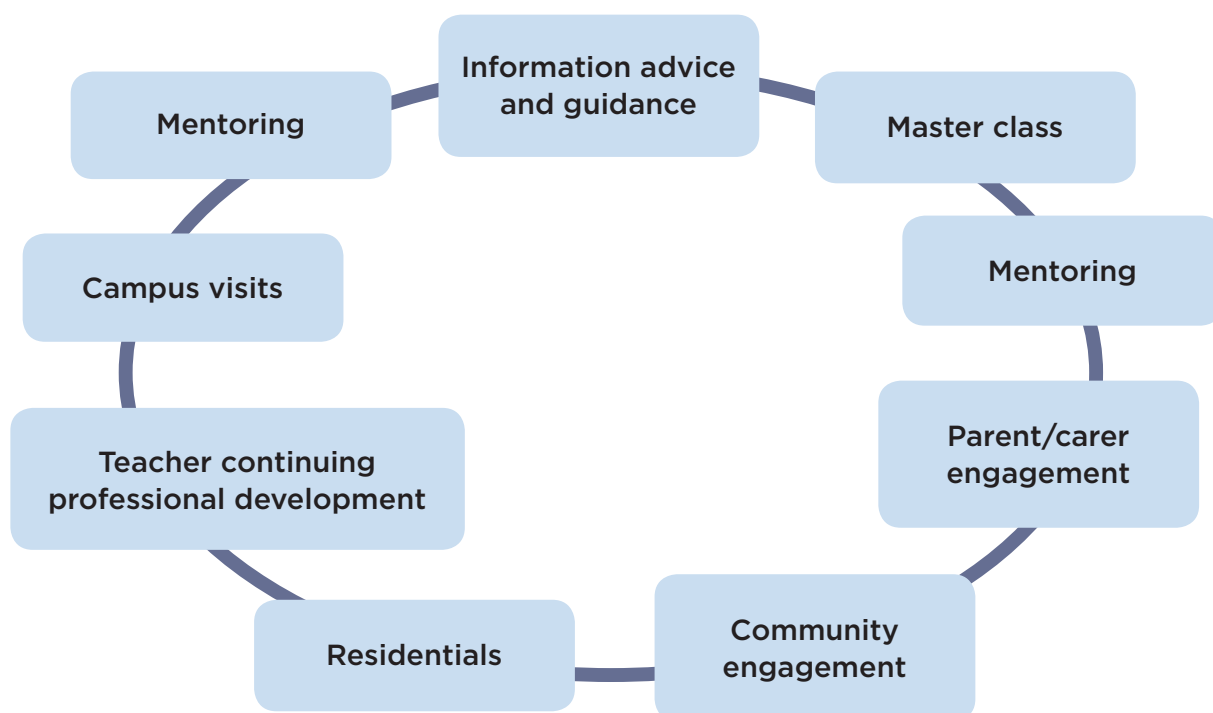
A sustained and progressive approach

Higher education outreach is most effective when delivered as a progressive, sustained programme of activity and engagement over time¹¹. NCOP consortia are tasked with developing programmes of sustained and progressive outreach appropriate to the needs and aspirations of the young people living in their allocated target areas. Individual activities do not necessarily need to be intensive in nature but are expected to build up over time into a coherent package of engagement for each young person. We expect that young people involved in the NCOP would typically be involved in a range of activities throughout their time on the programme.

Kent and Medway Collaborative Outreach Programme (KaMCOP) have established the SUCCEED programme which is a sustained, targeted and progressive programme for Year 12 students to explore the opportunities and challenges offered by higher education. It is delivered by university staff and student ambassadors. It is based on campus at weekends and culminates in a residential summer school. In its first year, 2017-18, it has attracted over 20 students from across the region. KaMCOP staff are working hard to support students in areas with poor transport links to maintain good engagement.

The kinds of activities consortia are delivering as part of their local programmes of sustained and progressive outreach is set out in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Overview of the types of activities delivered through NCOP



¹¹ Department for Business, Innovation and Skills National Strategy for Access and Student Success in Higher Education (London: BIS, 2014). Available from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-strategy-for-access-and-student-success>.

A participant in an activity organised by Staffordshire-based NCOP consortium Higher Horizons said:

‘The most important thing I have learnt today is that I can achieve anything I set my mind to.’

One teacher responded positively to the activities put in place by Higher York for young people in her school:

‘Some boys on this programme have difficult home backgrounds and it has been really positive to have a young, male role model inspire them and get them to consider their potential and help raise their aspirations.’

‘Some boys on this programme have difficult home backgrounds and it has been really positive to have a young, male role model inspire them...’

The CFE Research programme evaluation report identifies a number of short- and medium-term outcomes which will contribute to increased progression to higher education for the young people involved in the NCOP. These include:

- Teachers in schools serving the target areas have increased knowledge of the benefits of higher education and available routes.
- More young people from target areas express an interest in higher education.
- Young people from target areas have increased knowledge of the benefits of higher education and how to get there.
- Parents from target areas have increased knowledge of the benefits of higher education and available routes.
- More young people from target areas aspire to go to higher education.
- Young people study the necessary subjects/qualifications after their GCSEs to facilitate access to higher education.
- Increased number and proportion of young people from the target areas apply to higher education.

The sustained and progressive programmes of outreach that are put in place by NCOP consortia are intended to contribute to one, or more, of the above outcomes.

Greater Manchester Higher has established the ‘Go Further’ Year 10 mentoring project which has been developed in consultation with young people. The programme is delivered in school to a group of eight to 10 young people, for up to one hour a week over a six to 10 week period by current higher education students.

One of the student mentors from the University of Manchester said:

‘The students were happy to participate in activities and answer questions. They were also willing to share their own experiences as well as plans for the future and how to accomplish those. The students were asking questions and seeking advice.’

A teacher from Our Lady’s High School, Manchester, said:

‘Both I and the students felt that it raised aspirations and personal development helping them to make choices. They felt that it also helped them in working towards their target grades and enabled them to prepare themselves for higher education.’

The 2018 ‘Go Further’ programme is now running in 36 schools with 438 learners and 44 mentors.

Raising attainment is not one of the direct outcomes sought from the programme but may be a welcome indirect benefit. The NCOP programme is targeted at those students who are on track to achieve or have already achieved adequate GCSE results, and so attainment-raising activity is not a main focus of NCOP partnership activity. However, raising attainment above the minimum requirement at GCSE level in English and maths will open up a wider range of options for young people. Therefore some consortia are working closely with schools in their target areas to determine whether some students with the potential to go onto higher education would benefit from such activity.

The North East Collaborative Outreach Programme (NECOP) have created a new programme for Year 10/11 pupils focused on the relationship between attainment, aspiration and likelihood to progress to higher education. Teachers identified pupils who have the academic ability to progress to higher education but low levels of academic self-concept or predicted borderline pass rates in both English and maths. These pupils are being tutored by NECOP’s team of 250 undergraduates using an innovative online platform, Peerz Academy, to deliver attainment/aspiration-raising content that has been developed by local teachers and a team of NECOP coordinators. The programme has proven extremely popular with both teachers and students. A teacher from Harton Technology College said:

‘They went from anxiety-ridden teenagers to enthused individuals keen for more! The response was far better than I thought possible.’

As part of their evaluation, NECOP hypothesise that academic self-concept will be generated through this innovative new intervention to increase progression rates to higher education.

Individual activities are sometimes linked to different aspects of the curriculum, for example focusing on law; art; science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM); healthcare; or sport.

Final year students on a sports degree at the University of Bedfordshire, which is part of Aspire Higher, have run a community engagement project with a selection of Year 9 pupils who attend the Mark Rutherford School. The project aimed to encourage engagement in sport and physical activity to support wellbeing, individual development and consideration of pathways into higher education. The project was delivered by two undergraduate students as five weekly after-school clubs, with a final session on campus.

The programme provided pupils with opportunities to explore different sports through practical and theory sessions. The final day was held on campus, with practical sessions in the lab, followed by lectures delivered by masters students. The evaluation suggests the sessions helped the young people focus their thinking about life after school, whether to attend higher education, do an apprenticeship or other options.

Aspire to HE has established a Saturday Arts Club at the University of Wolverhampton offering a sustained and progressive opportunity to experience a university environment, facilities and teaching. The Saturday Arts Club offers a variety of arts-related activities to young people aged 13-16 within the Aspire to HE targeted population. Young people within the NCOP target areas are invited from partner schools and colleges to meet every Saturday for 30 weeks.

Currently between 60-80 NCOP learners attend every week, often travelling independently to the University of Wolverhampton. As well as exposure to different teachers, modes of art and techniques, the students get to use the university facilities and experience lessons as a university student. Participation has and will provide a series of firsts for many of the learners: the first time they have visited a university campus, the first time they have visited Wolverhampton, and eventually, the first time they will visit London.

Understanding the specific needs of the young people involved lies at the heart of a successful sustained and progressive approach to outreach activity. NCOP consortia are then able to put in place specific provision to meet the needs of some or all of the target learners. In some instances this can involve working with partners in the charity sector who can bring specialist knowledge and experience to complement the other aspects of the partnerships' activities. For example a number of consortia have put in place activity to specifically target young people with support as they transition from school into a college setting. In each case local evidence pointed to the first few months of college as high risk times for young people falling out of education, despite often having good GCSE attainment. Working with the schools and colleges involved, as well as the local authorities and third sector providers, they have put in place targeted programmes of activity to support the young people through this key time.

Engaging with young people

During 2017 outreach activity commenced in 965 (97 per cent) of the 997 areas identified for targeting under the NCOP and in 917 areas (92 per cent of all identified) learners had been engaged with as part of a sustained and progressive programme.

NCOP consortia are expected to engage with at least 20 per cent of the NCOP-eligible learners in their allocated areas through a sustained and progressive programme of outreach. Engagement levels have been increasing throughout 2017, with consortia forecasting to collectively reach 25 per cent of eligible learners in 2018.

Table 1 sets out the number of NCOP learners the consortia report were engaged in a sustained and progressive programme of activities during 2017 as well as their forecasts of how many learners they estimate they will engage with during 2018. They also reported on the number of individual NCOP learners they have entered into a tracking system. These figures have been analysed against the estimated target population data for the NCOP areas to determine the proportion of target learners that have been engaged by the partnerships to date, and the proportion of those expected to be reached in 2018.

Table 1: NCOP target learner engagement¹³

	Number of learners (rounded to 100)	Percentage of estimated population¹⁴
NCOP learners captured in chosen tracking system (Jan-Dec 2017)	79,400	18%
NCOP learners engaged in a sustained and progressive programme of activities (Jan-Dec 2017)	52,900	12%
Forecast NCOP learners to be engaged (Jan-Dec 2018)	114,700	25%

Table 2 sets out the number of NCOP learners engaged in a sustained and progressive programme of activity by region during 2017 and highlights the variation across the country. However, the number of target NCOP learners within each region varies and so direct comparison is not possible. For example the London region has the smallest number of NCOP ward areas of any English region. Furthermore, some of the variation may be due to differences of approach between the three different tracking systems (HEAT, EMWPREP and Aimhigher West Midlands) to record learner numbers.

¹³ As reported in NCOP consortia monitoring returns, January 2018.

¹⁴ The estimated population in areas covered by NCOP partnerships is 454,000 (2017-18 academic year, Years 9 to 13). Contains data sourced from the Department for Education's National Pupil Database (NPD). The DfE do not accept responsibility for any inferences or conclusions derived from the NPD Data by third parties.

Table 2: NCOP target learners engaged in a sustained and progressive programme of activity, by region in 2017¹⁵

Region (England)	Total number of NCOP learners engaged in a sustained and progressive programme in 2017
South West	11,037
South East	12,237
West Midlands	7,351
Yorkshire and The Humber	7,972
North West	6,947
North East	2,337
East of England	3,096
London	445
East Midlands	1,456
Total	52,878

The reasons why young people may not be opting to go onto higher education will be varied and are often complex. NCOP consortia have worked with local agencies to understand what is needed in particular areas and with particular groups of young people to give them the best opportunity to progress to higher education.

The NCOP consortium HeppSY+ (Higher Education Progression Partnership South Yorkshire Plus) has contracted with Sheffield City Council and its Lifelong Learning Skills and Communities - Targeted Support Service (LLSC-TSS) to carry out a piece of intensive work with black, Asian and minority Ethnic (BAME) communities in Sheffield. This will target BAME young people who live in NCOP areas and attend local schools and a college with the higher proportions of BAME students in the region. Initially focus groups with students will take place in schools and colleges facilitated by LLSC-TSS in addition to focus groups with BAME community groups. The resulting data from these sessions will then be used to inform the planning of a conference to begin to feed back to students, parents and carers and school staff and look at how to address these issues through subsequent activity.

¹⁵ As reported in NCOP consortia monitoring returns, January 2018.

As part of the programme evaluation, a baseline survey was undertaken with 28,000 NCOP learners in Years 9 to 13 in schools, sixth forms and colleges. The survey explored aspirations, knowledge of higher education, and intentions to progress to higher education. It offered a positive insight that in general, young people did recognise the benefits of higher education and aspired to progress. The survey showed that overall, NCOP learners aspire to progress to higher education and are confident in their ability to do so. However, there are certain groups that do not reflect this overall trend. Disabled learners have lower levels of knowledge about the benefits of higher education and are less confident in their ability to fit in and cope with student life. White, working-class learners, and in particular young men, are less likely to aspire to higher education. They are more likely to want to move into the labour market quickly and are more attracted to full-time work or apprenticeship routes that offer opportunities to earn and learn.

Addressing the under representation of young men from disadvantaged backgrounds in higher education is one of the goals of the NCOP. Several NCOP consortia are undertaking local research to understand the aspirations and motivations of white, working-class young men to inform local programme design. This enables them to tailor their local offer to better meet the needs and ambitions of these learners.

‘Perspectives and prospects: the educational ambitions and intentions of young white British males from five disadvantaged areas in North West England’ is a qualitative study which is currently under way and has been commissioned by five NCOP consortia (Higher Horizons+, Merseyside Collaborative Outreach Programme, Greater Manchester Higher, Future U, and Cumbria Collaborative Outreach Programme). It is exploring the educational ambitions and motivations of young, white, British males from a sample of areas of educational and economic disadvantage in North West England. The study draws on the insights of learners at two distinct transition points in their educational journeys. The first of these relates to school Year 10, as pupils commence their GCSEs. The second focuses on Year 12, as post-16 options are embarked upon and attention is turned to longer-term plans.

The ‘Through the Eyes of Boys’ project, developed by Merseyside Collaborative Outreach Programme (MCOP), is focused on selected MCOP target areas and works with male Year 10 pupils who are from working-class communities with a traditionally high proportion of white, British citizens. The project is designed to address the under-representation of white, working-class boys in higher education and is built on both regional and national research into the inter-related aspirational and attainment issues negatively affecting higher education participation rates. As such, the aims of the project can broadly be divided into three themes:

- higher education aspiration raising
- targeted attainment support via mentoring
- enhancing life skills, including boosting cultural capital and learner confidence.

Listening to young people’s voices has been built into the heart of the project, with events adjusted in response to feedback from students.

Learner voice and empowerment

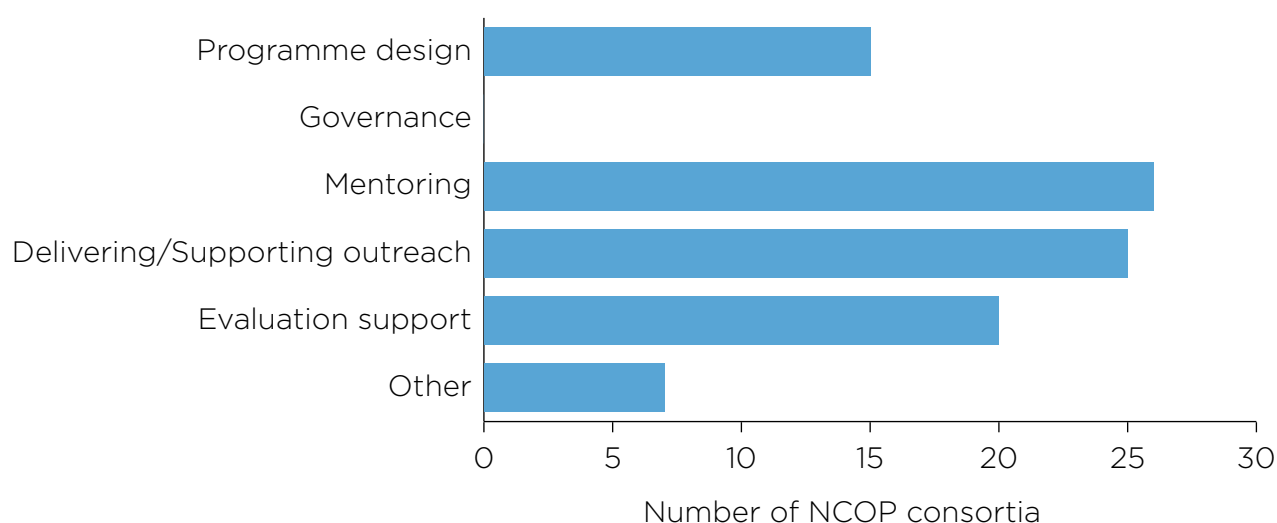
Current undergraduates and recent graduates are important contributors to the work of NCOP consortia. Many are involving them in the delivery of consortia activities, including as mentors and higher education ambassadors. For example, ThinkHigher, who are based at Warwick University, has a pool of student ambassadors which includes not only students from its core partner universities and colleges, but also pupils from sixth forms in its target NCOP schools. ThinkHigher believes that this not only provides relatable role models to Year 9, 10 and 11 pupils, but is also developmental for the self-esteem, self-confidence and 'soft skills' of the sixth-form ambassadors themselves.

Young people who are the target of NCOP activities and current undergraduates are helping to shape the approach that some consortia are taking by being involved in local research and planning activities. For example, Go Higher West Yorkshire's Young Researchers project is designed to offer the partnership insight into the communities where they work, as well as having a positive impact on the participants. Their pilot project, with one of their partner schools (Castleford Academy in Wakefield), worked with a school-selected, mixed-gender group of 12 Year 9 pupils. It sought to support their development as action researchers charged with exploring options and opportunities available to them when they eventually leave school and progress to the next stage in their lives. The programme has now been extended in two further pilot phases.

Study Higher is working with an academic based at a consortium member institution and a community development association to use participatory research methods which, among other things, aims to: increase schools' awareness of aspirational strategies and impact on attainment; increase knowledge and skills in building stronger links between home and school – particularly with those parents/guardians more distant from school contact; and improve community awareness of enabling strategies and practices that encourage access to higher level jobs, qualifications and access to higher education. One key strand of this locally focussed project trains target students as young researchers, gaining peer and the community views on opportunities and barriers associated with higher education.

At the end of 2017 NCOP consortia reported on the ways they are involving young people, including current undergraduates in their work. This showed a wide variety of approaches being adopted, with most partnerships involving young people in mentoring, delivering or supporting outreach, or supporting their local evaluations. However, currently no young people are involved in consortia governance.

Figure 5: Approaches to involving young people being taken by NCOP consortia¹⁶



Effective approaches to ensuring that young people's voices inform the ongoing development of the programme and individual activities will be an area of investigation for the NCOP evaluation during 2018.

Over 100 volunteers across Lancashire are engaged in the delivery of NCOP consortium Future U. Many volunteers from community groups support NCOP participants at events as part of their own commitment to the National #IWill Social Action Campaign.

Thirty very engaged volunteers from Blackpool Youth Council, URPotential and Wonderful Things, received training from Future U as participatory 'Peer Researchers'. These volunteers support Future U outreach officers with running interventions collecting and interpreting data on what the perceived barriers are to accessing higher education in their areas and have contributed 720 hours of planning and delivery time to the project (to date) equating to £9,072 value added using National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) base rate of pay for volunteer impact assessment.

Working with schools and colleges

During 2017 NCOP consortia engaged with 1,234 schools across England and identified a further 342 schools as targets for engagement in the future¹⁷.

While it is too early to strongly evidence the impact of NCOP activities, the CFE Research programme evaluation report found emerging evidence of positive effects on information, advice and guidance and on school and college cultures of aspiration and progression.

¹⁶ As reported in NCOP consortia monitoring returns, January 2018.

¹⁷ As reported in NCOP consortia monitoring returns, January 2018.

Schools and colleges are key partners in the success of the NCOP. Consortia have used local data to identify the schools and colleges which serve young people from the NCOP target areas. Some schools and colleges had existing relationships with members of the partnership but others did not, and in these cases building a new relationship was often time-consuming. NCOP consortia have put considerable effort into establishing and deepening their links to relevant schools and colleges, seeing this as critical to the success of their local plans.

Working closely with schools is a fundamental aspect of supporting young people in developing their higher education aspirations. Aspire to HE has approached this by working closely with target schools, and funding Aspire to HE lead teacher positions. These are additional responsibilities taken on by current teaching staff, who are well placed to identify and work closely with targeted NCOP learners within their school setting. The Aspire to HE lead teachers are supported by a central team of senior partnership officers, through regular visits, lesson observations and termly continuing professional development (CPD) meetings with all regional lead teachers. Aspire to HE runs an innovation award to support lead teachers in developing local interventions for their specific group of NCOP learners.

Where appropriate, NCOP consortia sought to align outreach activity with the school curriculum and other priorities to help facilitate school and college engagement. In some cases resources were offered to the school, in the form of funding or staffing, to better equip them to engage with the programme.

Aimhigher West Midlands' NCOP activity is embedded in schools and colleges via Aimhigher Progression Ambassadors (APAs). APAs are recent graduates who mentor selected young people, deliver aspiration-raising, parental-engagement and information, advice and guidance (IAG) activity, and facilitate access to the wrap-around programme offered by delivery partners. APAs are valued, as Head teacher Damian McGarvey of Balaam Wood School observes:

'Our APA shows high degrees of independence and initiative and has formed strong relationships. Her powerful presence has captured some of our hard-to-reach parents.'

The NCOP consortium HeppSY+ have placed a number of staff within local schools with a brief to focus on higher education engagement. A spokesperson from Mexborough Academy said:

'This role [higher education engagement assistant] is absolutely vital for our young people. We currently have CEIAG [careers education, information, advice and guidance] in school but haven't got a key person responsible for raising the profile of higher education with our learners. Emma has begun to work with staff and

students to increase levels of understanding of the benefits of higher education and to increase students' ability to identify their careers interest and career pathways. Emma has the time to focus solely on these priorities – a rarity in schools.'

Where funding has been allocated to schools in some cases this is held centrally by the NCOP consortium for the school to use as required, in others funding is allocated directly to the school to support their engagement in the NCOP.

Essex Collaborative Outreach Network, known locally as Make Happen, is working on a school-led model where an allocated budget per school is held centrally by the partnership. These budgets have been worked out by allocating funding per NCOP learner and multiplying this by the total number of NCOP learners in a school or college. A dedicated outreach officer for each school/college then works closely with them to map a progression framework, across all year groups, which fits the needs of the school/college, their learners, the parents/carers of those learners and the school/college staff. Outreach activity then takes place which links back to the progression framework and is delivered either by the consortium's outreach team or is purchased from another provider if this is more appropriate.

Some schools and colleges were offered the opportunity to develop a bespoke programme together with their NCOP consortium whilst others were offered a more generic approach. The programme evaluation found that bespoke programmes are considered more effective in addressing particular needs and complementing other outreach and widening participation activity. However, generic approaches have enabled the quick delivery of activity to engaged schools and colleges.

As a relatively small partnership, GROWS, which is active in Gloucestershire, has been able to build very close relationships with the 10 schools and one college it targets for engagement. It provided funding to them to allow for capacity and also encourage school-driven projects for their learners. Schools have co-created a framework to work within, which identifies needs-based activities and gaps within their provision. By enhancing the current offer rather than duplicating or replacing it, schools feel they have a real opportunity to provide a wide range of interventions for their students. The provision of activity outside curriculum time (as well as within) allows schools to have more activity than if activity was only delivered in school time.

Further education colleges have an important role to play within the NCOP. Many are members of consortia governing bodies and involved in programme delivery. They bring different insights from higher education institutions and offer an alternative pathway to higher education that is potentially very beneficial to the programme.

The CFE Research programme evaluation report¹⁸ found that:

‘Fieldwork highlighted the importance of ensuring further education college representation within the core partnership. Further education colleges can provide alternative expertise on outreach initiatives and on the needs of learners in a particular locality that some higher education institutions may not have.’

‘Further education colleges can provide alternative expertise on outreach initiatives’

‘Having a range of educational providers, both at further education and higher education levels, helps to ensure that learners can engage with and experience a range of different routes into and through higher education.’

In one example of the ways in which further education colleges are contributing to the programme six further education partners are members of Aimhigher West Midlands’ rural management group. Two colleges employ staff to co-ordinate and deliver activities in house and mentoring in local schools. Collectively the colleges are engaging learners and parents to raise awareness of higher education in further education.

A survey of young people living in NCOP areas, undertaken as part of the programme evaluation¹⁹, showed a stark difference in attitudes between post-16 learners in sixth forms and those in further education colleges. It found that learners in sixth form are more likely to have applied or report that they intend to apply to higher education than those studying in further education colleges. This underscores the importance of engaging with learners earlier in their studies, to influence their attitudes and aspirations. It also highlights the importance of sustained and progressive programmes of outreach for students within further education colleges to help them make an informed choice about future study.

The Innovations and Partners Group (IPG) is a key feature of the Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire Collaborative Outreach Partnership (DANCOP). The IPG gives colleagues from partner colleges the opportunity to devise projects tailored to addressing specific issues relating to progression to higher education in further education, and to bid for funds to implement these. Some are subject-specific, for example one further education college is leading on the development of a STEM outreach hub. Other colleagues are currently working on a proposal for a creative industries hub. Both these hubs support local economic partnership (LEP) priorities. Others support progression more generally and include CPD for further education staff as well as delivery with learners. They have also appointed a Higher and Degree Apprenticeships Officer whose work is to solely look at this non-traditional route and to provide learners, partners and stakeholders across the partnership with information about these routes; this includes CPD for outreach staff.

¹⁸ See CFE Research programme evaluation report, page 24 and 25.

¹⁹ See CFE Research programme evaluation report, page 12.

Engaging with parents and the wider community

Research exploring how young people make decisions about their future indicates the importance of parents and family in influencing their choices. This was also borne out by the findings of the CFE Research baseline survey of young people living within NCOP target areas. This found that parents have a significant influence on the decisions that young people make about careers and education, yet a substantial proportion of the young people surveyed know of no-one in their family who has experience of higher education. Engaging with parents and carers to ensure they are equipped to support young people to make an informed decision forms part of the approach of almost all NCOP consortia with 28 of 29 reporting that they are engaging with this group²⁰.

The Sussex Learning Network has been working closely with a number of priority schools and colleges to train a group of parents and carers currently supporting young people at university to share their experience and knowledge with other parents and carers. There are 17 parent and carer ambassadors across Sussex who attend community and school-based events to talk about choosing a university, supporting young people at university and other common queries, including student finance. Both the University of Sussex and the University of Brighton will also be using the services of the parent and carer ambassadors at several large scale widening participation events which will have parents in attendance.

Reaching out to parents and successfully engaging with them can be challenging. Some partnerships have opted to undertake activity in the community, rather than in educational settings, as a way of connecting with parents they might not otherwise reach. For example, Staffordshire-based Higher Horizons+ has worked on numerous community events, and continues to work closely on projects with the local authorities in its region. One such project, due to begin in January 2018, will see groups of learners working with one of the partner institutions to create and premiere a film about a public health issue. Higher Horizons has also developed a programme where small groups of NCOP learners work with it intensively for a week to write and publish a book. They and their families are later invited to a book signing, and their book is available to purchase online.

NCOP consortia have undertaken local research to ensure they understand the needs of the areas in which they operate and the young people and families who live there. For families in particular circumstances, for example military families, some partnerships are adopting specific targeted approaches to engage with the parents and carers of the young people who live in areas targeted by the NCOP.

²⁰ As reported in NCOP consortia monitoring returns, January 2018.

Understanding the areas within which NCOP learners live is central to Higher York's approach. Whilst target schools are key partners in all NCOP work, not all NCOP learners attend these institutions, thus making it difficult for them to access the resulting outreach activity. This has inspired Higher York to engage with NCOP learners from the perspective of the community within which they live. By 'walking the wards', Higher York officers have developed an understanding of local community groups and as a result, commissioned 21 local projects to support engagement with NCOP learners. Another key finding from this initial identification and mapping work is the relatively large number of NCOP learners within military bases. Higher York has connected with the Service Children's Progression (SCiP) alliance, funded by the Ministry of Defence, a partnership of organisations focused on improving outcomes for children from military families, and created its first regional practice hub.

By working with families and the wider community NCOP has the potential to deliver a 'ripple effect' whereby parents and carers are inspired to consider higher education not only for their children but also potentially for themselves. Following a local enterprise event one parent messaged Higher Horizons+ to say:

'I loved listening to David [event speaker] – he was making me think as much as he was my daughter, and it makes me wonder what else I can do.'

Parental engagement will be a key focus of the national evaluation during 2018.

'I loved listening to David – he was making me think as much as he was my daughter, and it makes me wonder what else I can do.'

Innovation

Many consortia are keen to use the NCOP in ways that they consider to be innovative. They will use their local evaluations to test their success and provide valuable information to inform future approaches to higher education outreach.

In their evaluation report CFE Research reflect on how innovation can be difficult to identify. As Stevenson et al point out in their evaluation of the National Networks of Collaborative Outreach (NNCOs)²¹ newness and originality are often used as proxies for innovation, but they are not necessarily the same. Some activities may be new to the stakeholder, but not necessarily innovative. At this early stage there have been too few field visits to state what is and is not innovative. As the programme evolves, partnerships strengthen, and collaboration is embedded, the national evaluation team expect to assess innovation more systematically.

Certainly, many of the staff working on the programme report it as a valuable opportunity to develop new and innovative activity that might not be possible otherwise.

²¹ See www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/rereports/year/2017/nncoeval/.

As part of their end of year monitoring responses, consortia reported on activity which they considered to be innovative. Analysis of the responses suggests that the ways in which they believe their activity to be innovative tend to fall into one of seven categories as shown in Table 3:

Table 3: Innovation categories, as identified by NCOP consortia²²

Innovation categories	Percentage of responses
Operational	36%
Local	18%
Stakeholders	19%
Use of data and feedback	9%
Evaluation methods	8%
Activities and interventions	9%
Ideals, goals and working practices	1%

Next Steps South West delivered a Law and Criminology day which included a reconstructed crime scene and mock courtroom. In a series of short workshops, students were provided with an overview of the criminal justice system including crime scene investigation, police station procedures, and a criminal law seminar before acting as the jury for the crown court session. Higher education ambassadors were employed in a variety of roles, including acting in role as the suspects and as technical legal advisers, in addition to providing an insight into student life. Academics from Plymouth University and Truro and Penwith College worked collaboratively to develop the teaching materials for the day.

A particularly innovative aspect included filming of the event in real time using a Mevo Facebook live, to produce promotional digital resource targeted at 13 to 19 year olds and parents in Devon, Cornwall and Somerset. The edited video provides legacy educational material for future use in Public Services, Law, Criminology and General Studies workshops. The social media feedback to date has been very positive with over 3,000 video views, and a total reach of almost 10,000.

CFE Research report that whilst the nature of the examples of what was considered innovative were all different, they generally fall within three categories: working with new types of non-educational, community-based partners; responding to the needs of a particular group of learners; and flexibility of approach.

²² As reported in NCOP consortia monitoring returns, January 2018.

Linking locally and nationally

The NCOP represents a significant investment by the OfS in enhancing the opportunities for young people to understand and experience higher education. This work aligns with a range of activities, initiatives and programmes delivered by other organisations both nationally and locally, as well as the government's wider social mobility agenda.

The local flexibility of the NCOP enables consortia to shape their approach to match the needs of local areas. This includes linking up with other local and national initiatives operating within their target areas. Aligning and coordinating activities at a local level can create additionality for the young people involved in the programme, reducing the risk of duplication and confusion across local partners and participants.

The CFE Research programme evaluation report²³ found that:

'A clear benefit of the NCOP is the extent to which it has enabled the development of new partnerships and partnerships between a more diverse range of organisations.'

As part of their end of year monitoring returns consortia reported on the stakeholders they are working with at a local level. Stakeholders might be formally involved in NCOP partnership structures or the relationship might be a looser one focused on mutual information sharing, coordination and alignment, as appropriate.

Table 4: NCOP consortia stakeholder engagement²⁴

Stakeholder	No. of consortia (n=29)
Careers and Enterprise Company	26
Employers	25
Housing associations	10
Jobcentre Plus	9
Local authorities	28
Local enterprise partnerships	25
NHS trusts	14
Opportunity area leads	11
Student Loans Company	17

²³ See CFE Research programme evaluation report, page 23.

²⁴ As reported in NCOP consortia monitoring returns, January 2018.

The government's social mobility action plan²⁵, launched in December 2017, places social mobility at the heart of education policy and seeks to provide a framework for action to help transform equality of opportunity. It emphasises the importance of leaving no community behind with resources targeted at the people and places that need it most. The NCOP is an example of a place-based programme squarely focused on social mobility and equality of opportunity, and its contribution is highlighted in the plan.

The government recognises the importance of place to social mobility and is keen that the higher education sector plays its role alongside government, employers and the third sector to tackle the barriers to opportunity and ensure that all young people have equal opportunity. This extends beyond the NCOP to the wider work of higher education providers in supporting access to, successful participation in and progression from higher education for under-represented groups. The creation of the OfS and the new regulatory framework, including the requirement for access and participation plans and statements, provides an opportunity to strengthen and develop the alignment of the NCOP with higher education providers' wider outreach offer.

There are 12 opportunity areas²⁶ in England which focus on ensuring that all children and young people in those areas have the chance to reach their full potential, from early years through to higher education and employment. There are NCOP target wards within each opportunity area. Engagement by NCOP consortia with each of the opportunity areas teams ensures that there is a cohesive approach to working with young people in these areas and that the benefit of strong support from both programmes can be maximised.

There are three wards (of 17) in the Oldham opportunity area which are within scope for the NCOP and Greater Manchester Higher has identified eight out of the 18 schools with secondary provision as targets for engagement. The consortium has delivered projects together with Gallery Oldham and Oldham Coliseum Theatre and are running a collaborative community day with First Choice Homes Oldham. The objectives of the day include educating parents and young people on the benefits of further and higher education in innovative ways. Staff representing the Careers and Enterprise Company, Oldham Council and the opportunity area lead meet regularly with the local NCOP hub manager to join up activities within Oldham opportunity area where appropriate.

²⁵ See https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/667690/Social_Mobility_Action_Plan_-_for_printing.pdf.

²⁶ See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/social-mobility-and-opportunity-areas>.

Three of the 12 opportunity areas are located within NCOP consortium neaco's target areas and a quarter of all the partnership's NCOP learners are in these three opportunity areas. While opportunity areas have a broader social mobility mission, neaco is contributing through its support for specific NCOP learner target populations by collaborating with schools, further education colleges and local organisations including local enterprise partnerships and local authorities. neaco's strong focus on addressing local barriers means there is much common ground between these two programmes. To this end, neaco is a member of each of the local opportunity areas' post-16 committees.

Senior leaders within higher education providers have an important role to play in helping to integrate the work of the NCOP with the wider strategic environment. Professor Kathryn Mitchell, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Derby and chair of Derby opportunity area partnership board, said:

'I take the university's role as a strategic partner in the Derby opportunity area and as lead institution for the Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire Collaborative Outreach Programme (DANCOP) seriously. Working in collaboration across the joint agendas has allowed us to put in place seamless programmes to develop tailored

'Working in collaboration across the joint agendas has allowed us to put in place seamless programmes to develop tailored solutions for the local area...'

solutions for the local area through from improvements in early years' developments to driving a step change in progression into higher education. This requires the complete commitment of all partners to assure the success of these projects. The positive alignment of both projects' missions and priorities presents a unique opportunity to bring together key local stakeholders to create genuine opportunities to improve the life chances of our young people. DANCOP's strong partnerships with identified schools in the local area enables a provision of activities not available elsewhere which adds real value to the experiences of young people and supports the achievement of their ambitions.'

The careers strategy²⁷ published by the Department for Education (DfE) in December 2017, signals the importance of careers provision to help everyone achieve their potential and, ultimately, have a successful and rewarding career. As set out in the report, 'students from disadvantaged groups, and those who are unsure of their aspirations, have been shown to be the least likely to receive careers guidance'²⁸.

While NCOP focuses on the delivery of outreach activities, good careers advice in schools is important to the young people being targeted through the programme. In

²⁷ See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/careers-strategy-making-the-most-of-everyones-skills-and-talents>.

²⁸ Percy, C. and Mann, A. (2013) Employer Engagement in British Secondary Education: Wage Earning Outcomes Experienced by Young Adults. Journal of Education and Work.

recognition of this, HEFCE and the Careers Enterprise Company (CEC) wrote jointly to NCOP consortia to encourage alignment, where appropriate, to avoid multiple approaches being made to schools and to highlight the range of opportunities available to them, with a focus on higher education and graduate employment (through NCOP) and more direct employer engagement (through the CEC). The CEC has a remit of inspiring and preparing young people for the world of work, bringing together schools, colleges, employers and providers to build local networks that deliver careers support for young people. In the latest monitoring return, 26 NCOP consortia reported that they were working with CEC.

Claudia Harris, Chief Executive of the CEC, said:

‘The work done by the National Collaborative Outreach Programme is incredibly important. Together, we have been working closely in many geographical areas to ensure that young people from disadvantaged backgrounds are provided with the very best opportunities to succeed in higher education and the world of work. We look forward to continuing this vital work in the future.’

Future Quest, led by the University of the West of England (UWE Bristol), have a strand of work focused on strategic change. This sees the senior leadership of UWE working with the local authorities, the third sector and senior leadership of schools and multi-academy trusts to prioritise and develop a long-term sustainable plan collectively across the city region. Within this they are working with the West of England Enterprise Advisor Network to give local schools access to support to build careers plans and make connections to local and national employers. The involvement of the consortium has helped facilitate access to the support of the network for schools that are involved with the NCOP.

The Southern Universities Network (SUN) is utilising an online careers platform offering a wealth of impartial information about routes to higher-level study in England. It helps students to identify their GCSE, post-16 and post-18 options, with sections dedicated to qualifications, finding providers and researching job sectors. All progression pathways are included, enabling students to make informed choices about work-based, vocational, and academic opportunities. SUN is providing this platform to all target schools free of charge, with further opportunities delivered by SUN staff which include Year 10 workshops and one-to-one sessions with Years 12 and 13. Engagement from schools has been very positive so far with a number of workshops delivered during the autumn term.

In developing local partnerships 25 NCOP consortia reported that they are working with their local enterprise partnerships (LEPs). LEPs are partnerships between local authorities and businesses that determine the local economic priorities and lead economic growth and development. In addition to advising on local infrastructure requirements, the partnerships have a strong interest in addressing local skills gaps and understanding the skills needed to boost the local economy.

The North East Collaborative Outreach Programme (NECOP) consortium has been working with the North East LEP to inform the development of Gatsby Benchmark²⁹ 7: 'Encounters with FE and HE' and are extending this collaboration to support the pilot of Next Generation Learning. This new pilot programme focuses on Gatsby Benchmark 4: 'Careers in the Curriculum' through the creation of a project that improves teachers' and young peoples' understanding of job opportunities in the region through project-based learning, and the skills required to support the Regional Skills Strategy.

Through engagement with LEPs and local employers, NCOP consortia are aware of local skills needs and are able to connect this to the outreach they deliver, including information, advice and guidance. For example, Lancashire-based Future U is embedded within the collaborative work of the Blackpool opportunity area. Working with the LEP they have developed an approach to higher education outreach that is focused on the skills and sectors that are likely future areas of economic growth in the region. As a member of Blackpool opportunity area Priority 3 Careers Enterprise, Advice and Support Delivery Partners Group, Future U works alongside colleagues from the CEC, Lancashire Enterprise Partnership, Blackpool Council, National Citizenship Service, education providers and community organisations.

HeppSY+ have contracted with Business in the Community to broker successful school partnerships between eight schools and high-profile, often national graduate employers with a South Yorkshire presence. The programme features a series of interventions for a number of students in each school, designed to broaden horizons and awareness of graduate employment. The programme also features engagement with teaching staff and parents.

Chris Starkie, CEO of New Anglia LEP and Partnership Board member for the Advice, Transitions and Destinations working groups in Norwich and Ipswich opportunity areas has described the contribution made by neaco, the NCOP consortium that covers East Anglia, to a number of local agendas:

'neaco are an important partner in supporting our ambitions to enable 40 per cent of young people in Norwich and Ipswich to go onto higher education or a higher level apprenticeship by 2021. neaco have already established a presence in our secondary schools and colleges by providing a Higher Education Champion, who is not only helping schools to provide appropriate activities and advice, but helping to deliver a streamlined package of careers and enterprise support with our other key partners, National Citizen Service and the Careers and Enterprise Company. The neaco small grant scheme is also enabling local partners to deliver bespoke and innovative projects to raise aspirations.'

²⁹ The Gatsby Careers Benchmarks seek to define good quality careers guidance, for more information see www.gatsby.org.uk/education/focus-areas/good-career-guidance.

During 2017, 17 NCOP consortia reported working with the Student Loans Company (SLC), specifically with the SLC Funding Information Partners' Account Manager Team. By working closely with the SLC, consortia are able to ensure that student finance information is accurately presented to learners. The service provided ensures that young people can make informed choices about the funding that is available. Paul Smith, Head of Partner Services at the Students Loans Company said:

'The National Collaborative Outreach Programme is an important partner for the Student Loans Company as our engagement provides a strong contribution to the Student Loans Company's objective to ensure all students have access to information and guidance when considering their higher education options.'

The links with the opportunity areas, and other developing local partnerships are a likely focus of year two of the evaluation.

Programme funding and finances

The OfS provides the funding for NCOP and oversees the work that consortia do through regular monitoring. During 2017 NCOP consortia spent a total of £34.3 million to support their activities.

Figure 6: Percentage of funding spent on budget items in 2017

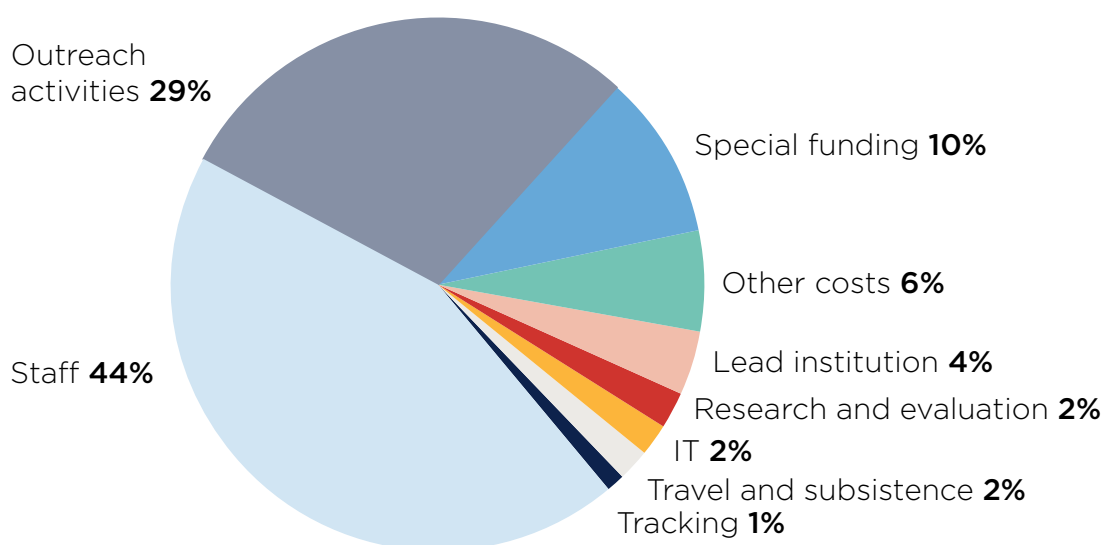


Figure 6 above sets out the categories of expenditure for NCOP consortia during 2017, which highlights that almost three-quarters of spending was used on staffing and outreach activities. Many consortia are using the 'special funding' category as a project bidding pot, where partners (schools, further education colleges and other higher education providers) can submit proposals for funded activities.

Many NCOP consortia required much of the first year of the programme to recruit staff teams, develop effective partnership working and engage schools and colleges. They have expended a great deal of time, effort and resource in developing their partnerships

and outreach offers and are beginning to see the benefits. The substantial funding available through NCOP has helped to engage stakeholders, including organisations that higher education providers may not have worked with previously, such as employers, community groups and third-party providers of outreach activity. The NCOP funding also allows consortia to create highly tailored packages of support for individual schools and colleges.

Looking to the future

The first year of the programme has been focused on creating local partnership infrastructures based on an in-depth knowledge of the different localities in which NCOP is being delivered. As the CFE Research programme evaluation report found³⁰:

‘Many consortia have required much of the first year of the programme to recruit staff teams, develop effective partnership working and engage schools and further education colleges. Pressure to deliver activity and engage learners quickly means it is less likely to be strategic and tailored to meet local needs. Consortia have expended a great deal of time, effort and resource in developing their partnerships and outreach offers and are beginning to see the benefits. It is important that consortia have the opportunity to capitalise on this initial investment and realise the full benefits.’

‘Consortia have expended a great deal of time, effort and resource in developing their partnerships and outreach offers...’

The NCOP will continue in its current form through to the end of the 2018-19 academic year. With local partnership infrastructures firmly embedded we expect to see significant increases in the numbers of young people engaged as part of sustained and progressive programmes of higher education outreach during this time.

The OfS will continue to actively manage the programme during 2018-19 to ensure that the lessons emerging from the evaluation are influencing local and national practice where appropriate. CFE Research has identified a number of issues which warrant further exploration as the evaluation progresses during 2018. These include:

- Examining the prevalence of the different models in operation across the consortia and how they are evolving in response to the experience of delivering NCOP during year one. A particular focus will be placed on the effectiveness of governance arrangements.
- Exploring the extent to which consortia are working with schools and further education colleges to up-skill staff in order to ensure the sustainability of the activity post-NCOP.

³⁰ See CFE Research programme evaluation report, page 11.

- Investigating effective approaches to engaging parents and ensuring the learner voice informs the ongoing development of the programme and individual activities.
- Evaluating the extent to which consortia develop genuinely innovative approaches as they become more established, and the effectiveness of these activities.
- Further exploring learners' aspirations, knowledge of higher education and future plans through a follow-up survey of participants. The primary survey data will be linked to longitudinal tracking data to begin to explore the impact of the programme.
- Ongoing review of local evaluation plans and findings to ensure robust evidence and synergy between the national and local evaluations.
- Assessing the challenges of designing and implementing Randomised Control Trials (RCTs) in the context of NCOP and how these can be addressed to ensure experimental methods can be used to best effect to demonstrate the impact of outreach activities.

An OfS review³¹ is currently under way to inform decisions about the programme from August 2019 onwards. Decisions about the future approach to the NCOP will be informed by:

- the prevailing policy priorities and spending review position
- the OfS strategy, particularly with regard to access and participation, information, advice and guidance, and engagement in local areas
- the latest evidence from the national evaluation of the programme
- information from the monitoring and expenditure returns partnerships submit to the OfS
- stakeholder views.

Find out more about NCOP

Further information about the NCOP is available from the OfS website www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/national-collaborative-outreach-programme-ncop/.

Updates on the programme from NCOP consortia and the OfS can be found on Twitter and other social media through following #WeAreNCOP.

³¹ More information on the NCOP review is available from www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/national-collaborative-outreach-programme-ncop-ncop-in-the-future/.

List of abbreviations

APA	Aimhigher Progression Ambassador
AWM	Aimhigher West Midlands
BAME	Black, Asian and ethnic minority
CEC	Careers and Enterprise Company
CEIAG	Careers education, advice, information and guidance
CPD	Continuing professional development
DANCOP	Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire Collaborative Outreach Programme
DfE	Department for Education
ECON	Essex Collaborative Outreach Programme
EMWPREP	East Midlands Widening Participation Research and Evaluation Partnership
HEAT	Higher Education Access Tracker
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England
HeppSY+	Higher Education Progression Partnership South Yorkshire
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Agency
IAG	Information, advice and guidance
KaMCOP	Kent and Medway Collaborative Outreach Programme
LEP	Local enterprise partnership
MCOP	Merseyside Collaborative Outreach Programme
MTAS	Minority Targeted Access Service
NCOP	National Collaborative Outreach Programme
NCVO	National Council for Voluntary Organisations
neaco	Network for East Anglian Collaborative Outreach
NECOP	North East Collaborative Outreach Programme
NERUPI	Network for Evaluating and. Researching University Participation Interventions

NNCO	National Networks for Collaborative Outreach
OfS	Office for Students
RCT	Randomised controlled trial
SCiP	Service Children's Progression
SLC	Student Loans Company
STEM	Science, technology, engineering and mathematics
SUN	Southern Universities Network
UWE	University of the West of England

Annex A: NCOP consortia information

Aimhigher West Midlands

Active in: Herefordshire, Worcestershire and Warwickshire, Shropshire and Staffordshire, West Midlands

Lead institution: University of Birmingham

Website: www.aimhigherwm.ac.uk

Contact name/details: Mike Thompson, 0121 415 8176, m.a.thompson@bham.ac.uk



Aimhigher West Midlands is a partnership of six of the region's universities (Aston University, Birmingham City University, University College Birmingham, Newman University, University of Birmingham and the University of Worcester) and a number of further education colleges. We work to improve social mobility by widening participation in higher education through programmes of outreach activity.

The Aimhigher Plus programme directs NCOP funding to the front line, providing much needed support for in-depth and aspirational activity. Aimhigher Progression Ambassadors (APAs) are recent graduates who work as mentors and facilitators in two schools or colleges. Schools and colleges also work with their link university to fund project work with undergraduates and third-sector organisations. In rural areas where distance limits opportunities for physical embedding, the model has been adapted with a cadre of Graduate Ambassadors and further education mentors providing a blended programme of online, visiting and commissioned support.

Aspire Higher

Active in: Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire

Lead institution: University of Hertfordshire

Website: <https://twitter.com/aspirehighernet>

Contact name/details: Stephane Farenga, 01707 286442, s.farenga@herts.ac.uk



Aspire Higher has been successful in establishing:

- enhanced and sustained schools outreach and out-of-school outreach activities. This includes a blend of subject-specific Discover Days, masterclasses and taster sessions, a long-term sports development project, mentoring, a mental health awareness project in addition to parental engagement, IAG sessions and online tutoring.
- a Youth Advisory Panel to ensure that the student voice is key in the development of the activities that the partnership undertakes.

Aspire to HE



Active in: West Midlands, Black Country and Telford and Wrekin

Lead institution: University of Wolverhampton

Website: <https://www.wlv.ac.uk/about-us/schools-and-colleges/aspire-to-he/>

Contact name/details: Daniel Howells, 01902 322404, d.howells@wlv.ac.uk

Aspire to HE's vision:

By the time they leave school, we want every young person we work with to be in the position to make an informed and ambitious decision about higher education and their future; to have secured a place on their route of choice and have the skills and mind-sets which will help them to succeed – and crucially sustain – their place on that pathway.

Importantly, for Aspire to HE, success is not simply enrolment onto a higher education course, but graduation, social mobility and fulfilment of potential. In pursuit of these aims, Aspire to HE has established an exciting network of 40 schools and six further education colleges, each serving young people from the partnership's priority wards and playing a crucial role in the work of the partnership.

Cumbria Collaborative Outreach Programme



Cumbria Collaborative
Outreach Programme

Also known as: Hello Future

Active in: Cumbria

Lead institution: University of Cumbria

Website: www.hellofuture.ac.uk

Contact name/details: Lisa Martin, 01228 634763, lisa.martin@cumbria.ac.uk

The Hello Future programme has been created based on a range of feedback from young people, teachers and advisors and our partners. The feedback highlighted the importance of developing the confidence, self-esteem, resilience, determination and independence of young people. Other themes included practical skills development and developing a 'growth mindset'. The programme has three strands focusing on young people, parents and carers and teachers and advisors covering these areas. It is underpinned by our Evaluation Framework as well as the Cumbria LEP skills plan, Ofsted and CEIAG guidance, all of which we aim to support throughout the delivery of activities.

Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire Collaborative Outreach Programme



Active in: Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire

Lead institution: University of Derby

Website: www.teamdancop.co.uk/

Contact name/details: Megan Hubbard, 01332 592698, megan.hubbard@teamdancop.co.uk

The consortium executes delivery through three hubs, which has brought successes in being able to build some really strong relationships with schools and colleges. The key for the partnership is to offer programmes of activity not available elsewhere on a school-by-school basis with a number of key activities being available across the board. A combination of hub, third-party and college-led provision has increased our reach. Further engagement through school-led provision is currently being arranged with various posts coming to fruition. Information taken from key documentation such as the LEP's Skills Mismatch Report ensures that projects are relevant.

Essex Collaborative Outreach Network

Also known as: Make Happen

Active in: Essex

Lead institution: University of Essex

Website: <https://makehappen.org/>

Contact name/details: Claudia Carey, 01206 872002, makehappen@essex.ac.uk

**MAKE
—
HAPPEN**

Make Happen has created a schools/college led model whereby outreach staff work with a key contact in the school/college to identify what they need to help increase progression to higher education. A progressive framework has been designed to ensure sustained interventions with young people. Key stakeholders such as teachers and parents are included to ensure they have the most accurate and up-to-date messages about higher education. Make Happen partners and external providers can bid to Make Happen to run their own project aimed at NCOP students. Innovative ideas are encouraged but funding can also be used to enhance existing activity.

FORCE (The University of Hull Federation of Regional Colleges for Engagement)



Active in: East Yorkshire and Northern Lincolnshire

Lead institution: University of Hull

Website: www.force-higher.co.uk

Contact name/details: Lesley May, force@hull.ac.uk

FORCE is a regional network whose aim is to help schools and education professionals support their students to achieve their potential through raising aspirations and increasing participation in further and higher education.

We offer access to workshops, talks and activities to encourage educational progression and support careers advice and guidance. We understand that the students within our schools and colleges have differing priorities. Our consortium activity offer has been designed to provide schools, colleges and academies with a 'menu' of activities to choose from, as well as providing bespoke packages and sessions to suit the needs of their students.

Future Quest



Active in: Gloucestershire, Wiltshire and Bath/Bristol

Lead institution: University of the West of England, Bristol

Website: <https://www.futurequest.org.uk/>

Contact name/details: Stacey Giles, 0117 328 7284, stacey.giles@uwe.ac.uk

Future Quest has taken a dual-programme approach designed to inspire, instil confidence, and develop young people's skills in preparation for higher education. The Future Quest Cohort Programme involves intensive, targeted activities for small cohorts. Activities focus on character development, building communication skills, and understanding cultural capital, along with one-to-one mentoring. Parents/carers are offered the opportunity to take part in events and this engagement forms a key part of the programme. The Future Quest Wider Programme offers complementary activities and support to whole year groups, including body image education, subject-specific careers and progression guidance, enriched learning experiences and study skills.

Future U



Active in: Lancashire

Lead institution: University of Central Lancashire

Website: <http://lancashirefutureu.org.uk/>

Contact name/details: Rebecca Steel, RSteel@uclan.ac.uk

The consortium focuses on developing outreach programmes and implementing research and evaluation as innovative evidence-based practice to address societal challenges which may have formed perceived barriers to young people accessing higher education. This serves to educate key influencers in their communities around areas of future career opportunities.

Future U has a membership of 20 partners from further education, higher education, business and local authorities, working within a network of 50 schools and 100 volunteers. The partnership links into broader national initiatives (opportunity areas, Enterprise Advisor Network, and National Citizenship Service) to encourage a step change in social mobility through education.

Go Higher West Yorkshire



Active in: West Yorkshire

Lead institution: University of Leeds

Website: www.gohigherwestyorks.ac.uk

Contact name/details: Alice Taylor, 01133 435522, A.Taylor3@leeds.ac.uk

Go Higher West Yorkshire is a long-standing partnership between 12 higher education providers including universities and colleges with higher education provision.

Our approach to NCOP is to work in partnership with each other, with other organisations in our region, and especially with our target groups.

We have established a post in each of our NCOP partner schools, enabling us build strong relationship with staff, pupils and parents and to deliver bespoke activity tailored to local need.

Our Young Researchers project has offered us insight into communities where we work, as well as having a positive impact on our participants.

Greater Manchester Higher



Active in: Derbyshire, Greater Manchester

Lead institution: Manchester Metropolitan University

Website: www.gmhigher.ac.uk

Contact name/details: Sam Kalubowila, 0161 274 1234, s.kalubowila@mmu.ac.uk

Greater Manchester Higher is a collaborative network providing opportunities for 114 (NCOP target) schools and 12 colleges to engage with our five consortium higher education providers in the Greater Manchester region. With a devolved structure of five regional hubs, supported by dedicated outreach staff in partner institutions, and overseen by a dedicated central team, the project has seen over 628 events delivered with nearly 4,000 engagements with learners from NCOP-targeted wards. The partnership continues to deliver programmes for young people that are curriculum connected and industry insightful; these span IAG, university taster events, Uni:4U summer schools, face-to-face and online mentoring programmes, and external projects. GM Higher is a targeted, impartial and collective network working towards highlighting the positive outcomes of widening participation activity, evidencing that outreach works.

GROWS (GAP)



Active in: Gloucestershire

Lead institution: University of Gloucestershire

Website: <https://www.grows.ac.uk/>

Contact name/details: Becky Tomkins, 01242 714447, grows@glos.ac.uk

GROWS (GAP) works predominantly with 10 target schools and one college to provide a progressive programme of activities for all year groups (9-13), their parents and teachers.

Activities are mapped onto a progression framework along with activities the schools undertake with any higher education provider or other professional relating to progression to higher education. This allows for deep relationships with schools where programmes are built in collaboration. Activities run both in and outside curriculum time, covering aspiration-raising as well as skill-acquisition activity (industry tasters, residentials, family open events, theatre performance, careers IAG, study skills and teacher CPD).

HeppSY+ (Higher Education Progression Partnership South Yorkshire)



Active in: South Yorkshire and some wards in Derbyshire and North Nottinghamshire

Lead institution: Sheffield Hallam University

Website: www.HeppSY.org

Contact name/details: Mike Garnock-Jones, Hepp Director, 0114 225 3559, hepp@shu.ac.uk

Following a 'learner identification' phase 36 schools (including two large multi-academy trusts) and six colleges are now active partners with HeppSY+.

Data-sharing agreements, tracking and delivery plans are in place around a core offer with four strands addressing specific progression barriers (resilience, attainment, knowledge of higher education, and careers).

School/college engagement has been enhanced through providing resources or the placement of a full-time higher education engagement assistant.

The partnership has strong support from both local universities enabling developments such as HeCan (programme for white boys) and new summer school programmes.

Further innovation includes a mobile classroom, higher education careers specialist posts, an employer project (Business in the Community) and a curriculum project (Brilliant Club).

Higher Horizons+



Active in: Cheshire, Shropshire and Staffordshire

Lead institution: Keele University

Website: www.higherhorizons.co.uk

Contact name/details: Ant Sutcliffe, 01782 733164, a.g.sutcliffe@keele.ac.uk

Higher Horizons+ has a dedicated team of 32 professionals who are based across four offices at Keele University, University of Chester, Staffordshire University and Harper Adams University. Higher Horizons+'s ethos is simple: to take direct, and unbiased, action to provide solid platforms for informed decision making with regards to the progression to further and higher education for our young people.

The partnership provides funded activities such as eight annual summer schools, mentoring, campus visits and interactive sessions in-school, plus much more.

Higher Horizons+ saw over 30,000 engagements in the first 12 months of the NCOP. Over 6,000 of these interactions were intense or sustained with identified young people from the NCOP-targeted wards. The network engages with 109 schools and colleges and has interacted with learners from each of 57 wards.

Higher York



Also known as: FutureHY

Active in: North Yorkshire

Lead institution: York St John University

Website: www.higheryork.org

Contact name/details: Phill Gray, 01904 876641, p.gray@yorks.ac.uk

It is the wards themselves, rather than just the schools and colleges within them, which form the bedrock of the Higher York approach. Known locally as FutureHY, the partnership is focused on walking the wards to gain deeper local knowledge, making it better able to address both school and community need. This consultative approach gives individuals, groups and institutions the chance to access evidence-based core activity while allowing them to tackle their own, most pertinent issues, via targeted bespoke funding opportunities. Sustained interlocking interventions are mapped clearly to the partnership's NERUPI-based evaluation framework.

Kent and Medway Collaborative Outreach Programme



Active in: Kent and Medway

Lead institution: University of Kent

Website: www.kmpf.org/about-us/kamcop/

Contact name/details: Daniel Berry, 01227 816586, NCOP@kent.ac.uk

The KaMCOP partnership works closely with the Kent and Medway Progression Federation, the established collaborative organisation in Kent and Medway, in order to ensure that KaMCOP delivery complements the existing outreach taking place in schools and colleges. KaMCOP has provided a range of innovative activities to KaMCOP students aimed at engaging and supporting them over a sustained period. The main strands of activity include:

- bespoke CEIAG training for staff working with KaMCOP students
- peer mentoring for targeted KaMCOP students
- sustained Creative Careers workshops
- flexible, alternative Level 3 provision for KaMCOP students
- a range of campus-based progression programmes.

LiNC Higher



Active in: Lincolnshire

Lead institution: Bishop Grosseteste University

Website: <https://linchigher.co.uk/>

Contact name/details: Naomi Prendergast, 01522 583712, Naomi.prendergast@bishopg.ac.uk

The partnership is delivering a 'total school approach', across all six clusters; adding value to existing widening participation and IAG activities in all our 42 schools/colleges. A bespoke core offer is in place for every school with a target of a minimum of four sustained interventions per year group.

A three-tier strategy of delivery model is providing targeted and generic activities delivered via the central team and third-party providers which is underpinned by student voice sessions.

A robust management plan is delivering evaluation of impact and informing our future delivery. Parental and community engagement are key drivers in each cluster, but the individual is at heart of delivery; understanding what their personal barriers are shapes our future practice.

London NCOP

Active in: London

Lead institution: Kingston University London

Website: n/a

Contact name/details: Andrew Jones (as.jones@bbk.ac.uk), Suzanne Marchment (s.marchment@kingston.ac.uk), Naz Kahn (naz.khan@londonhigher.ac.uk)

The London NCOP is composed of three established networks: Aimhigher London South, AccessHE and Linking London. The consortium is working in collaboration with seven local authorities, 18 schools, seven colleges and 20 higher education institutions across its 13 targeted wards, to develop and evaluate innovative, progressive and sustained programmes of activity for Years 9-13. The approach of the partnership is to focus on and share the local knowledge and relationships established through the respective networks and their specific areas of expertise. We are employing mixed methodologies to capture the attitudinal (quantitative) as well as aspirational/experiential (qualitative) impact of the programme.

Merseyside Collaborative Outreach Programme



Also known as: Shaping Futures

Active in: Merseyside (Liverpool City Region)

Lead institution: University of Liverpool

Website: <http://shaping-futures.org.uk/>

Contact name/details: Yvonne McCreath, 0151 795 8474, Yvonne.Mccreath@liverpool.ac.uk

Our consortium has adopted an information and guidance model of service delivery, providing impartial higher education-related activities and progression advice to our target learners in 43 priority secondary schools and across our partner further education/sixth form colleges. We are aligned to our local LEP/ Combined Authority's economic priorities and complement and add value to the existing widening participation offers of our 12 partner institutions. All of our delivery is aspirational and aims to instil a 'love of learning' in target pupils. It can also be tailored to meet specific learner needs/demands e.g. by tailoring campus visits to reflect subject interest.

Network for East Anglian Collaborative Outreach (neaco)



Active in: East Anglia

Lead institution: University of Cambridge

Website: www.takeyourplace.ac.uk

Contact name/details: Tom Levinson, 01223 336181, info@takeyourplace.ac.uk

neaco partners include the five universities and eight further education colleges in East Anglia. To address the high level of need across the region, we collaborate with organisations whose aims closely align, including the three opportunity areas, LEPs and local authorities.

At the centre of our approach is our Take Your Place framework. This progressive programme is delivered by the 28 higher education champions we have employed, based in schools and colleges across the region. The programme includes several strands, each addressing target students' identified needs. The framework also forms the basis for our local evaluation, providing measurable key outcomes and objectives.

Next Steps South West



Active in: Devon, Cornwall and Somerset

Lead institution: Plymouth University

Website: <https://nextstepssw.ac.uk/>

Contact name/details: Charlotte True, 01752 585560, charlotte.true@plymouth.ac.uk

Next Steps South West (NSSW) provides a suite of core activities to raise awareness of opportunities and spark interest in higher education. NSSW partners also collaborate to design and deliver bespoke projects which reflect their institutional expertise and bring an added dimension to outreach activities. Our in-school coordinators are able to champion NSSW in our target schools, and our partner-hosted outreach officers work closely with the central team to deliver our message across the South West. The NSSW website provides information and signposting to support our activities.

The consortium consists of 13 higher education institutions across Cornwall, Devon and Somerset: City College Plymouth, Exeter College, Falmouth University, Petroc, Plymouth College of Art, Plymouth Marion University, University of Plymouth, Strode College, The Cornwall College Group, Truro and Penwith College, University Centre Somerset, University Centre South Devon, and University of Exeter; it is led by University of Plymouth.

North East Collaborative Outreach Programme



Also known as: FutureMe

Active in: Northumberland, Tyne and Wear, Durham and Tees Valley

Lead institution: Newcastle University

Website: www.futureme.ac.uk

Contact name/details: Kate Murray, 0191 208 3162, info@futureme.ac.uk

Through its FutureMe programme, the North East Collaborative Outreach Programme (NECOP) is supporting higher education progression by delivering sustained and progressive support to young people in schools and colleges in the North East. The FutureMe programme of activity is developed to meet the needs of schools/colleges and their cohorts with available support including undergraduate mentoring, online tutoring, higher education ambassador sessions, masterclasses, and self-confidence/resilience workshops. Alongside the main programme of FutureMe activity, NECOP is also working to improve progression rates through regional marketing, teacher CPD, and sub-regional projects to address key issues influencing higher education progression.

Pathways



Active in: Leicestershire, Northamptonshire

Lead institution: University of Leicester

Website: n/a

Contact name/details: Katie Bonner, 0116 252 3162, REACH@le.ac.uk

Pathways is a collaboration of higher education providers in Leicester City, Leicestershire, Rutland and Northamptonshire. By building relationships with local schools and colleges, Pathways has identified a programme of activities and events suited to the specific needs of young people and their families in these local areas. It gives participants additional tools to raise attainment, develop transferable skills and gain knowledge of higher education opportunities. Working together, Pathways partners are able to reach those who would benefit most from the interventions it provides and offer insight into the wide range of higher education options offered among them.

Southern Universities Network



Active in: Dorset, Hampshire and Isle of Wight

Lead institution: University of Southampton

Website: <https://www.sunoutreach.org/>

Contact name/details: Claire O'Neill, 023 8059 1727, Sun@soton.ac.uk

The partnership has had a three-pronged approach:

- a core offer led by SUN staff of a more traditional outreach model offered directly to NCOP learners with a particular focus on resilience, transitional skills and building confidence
- a project proposal bid process which means there are over 70 projects being led by frontline staff working in schools, colleges and partner organisations (such as the Education Business Partnership (EBP)) across the region, working with NCOP learners and their key influencers
- strong partnership work between local authorities and the partner higher education institutions to look holistically at the region, with particular focus on identified growth areas and skills gaps.

Study Higher



Active in: Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, Swindon

Lead institution: Oxford Brookes University

Website: <https://www.studyhigher.ac.uk/>

Contact name/details: Lucinda Morton, 01865 488460, info@studyhigher.ac.uk

Study Higher's approach focuses on building strong relationships with target schools across the region, designing and delivering a multi-intervention and progressive outreach programme for their NCOP students. Activity delivered by the partnership is wide-ranging, innovative, and draws upon the expertise and knowledge of partner institutions and stakeholders. Mentoring, both online and face-to-face through peer mentoring schemes, is a key area of activity, as well as the delivery of summer schools and a variety of in-school workshops and campus visits. Study Higher is also working with teachers, parents and communities by hosting tailored events and engaging community groups and organisations to broaden the reach of the key messages and information. Participatory research in communities is an exciting area of development, as well as action-based research projects.

Sussex Learning Network (SLN:COP)



Active in: Sussex and Surrey

Lead institution: University of Brighton

Website: www.sussexlearningnetwork.org.uk

Contact name/details: Sarah Williams, 01273 642532, s.williams4@brighton.ac.uk

Through an intensive period of consultation with schools, colleges and community groups, the partnership determined a number of interventions considered to be effective at inspiring and raising the aspirations of learners across Sussex. The offer is broad and varied: enhanced STEM outreach, apprenticeship awareness, support for subject specific curricula; CPD for teachers; higher education champions; a parent and carer ambassador network; peer mentoring; role models; BAME mentoring for school pupils, city-wide CEIAG programme; new Level 4 curriculum development and transition support for young people not in education, employment or training. Projects are delivered by higher education institutions, further education colleges, schools, local authorities, the third sector; independent training providers and community organisations which ensures the programme is far reaching, widely recognised and maximising impact. Thus far, the SLN:COP has engaged with over 6,000 young people and has been welcomed for providing new opportunities and establishing new ways of working.

The Higher Education Outreach Network (HEON)



HEON

HIGHER EDUCATION OUTREACH NETWORK

Active in: Surrey and Northeast Hampshire

Lead institution: University of Surrey

Website: www.heon.org.uk

Contact name/details: Nancy Bentley, 01483 683893, heon@surrey.ac.uk

HEON's eight partners are working with 29 schools and colleges to support their students from the 11 HEON wards on their journeys to higher education. The partnership has designed a comprehensive programme of activity, and works flexibly to tailor the delivery to each school's needs. Highlights include Business in Sport events, delivered at the world-leading Surrey Sports Park, residential summer schools, and e-mentoring programmes. Activities are evaluated against the partnership evaluation theory of change framework, which states that increased knowledge can lead to improved attitude towards higher education, which in turn influences behaviour, increasing progression to higher education.

ThinkHigher



Active in: Warwickshire

Lead institution: University of Warwick

Website: www.thinkhigher.ac.uk

Contact name/details: Martin Price, 02476 573036, m.r.price@warwick.ac.uk

Delivery of the ThinkHigher programme is based on close partnership with Warwickshire County Council and schools in the target wards. Through developing an understanding of the challenges facing young people, teachers and schools, ThinkHigher is able to build tailored interventions that make a real difference to pupils. By embedding ThinkHigher staff in schools, ThinkHigher targets interventions at pupils for whom the impact can be greatest. Interventions in schools and on university campuses focus on promoting: increased aspirations; positive attitudes towards education; improved self-esteem and self-confidence; and increased knowledge of higher education. This intensive programme of linked, tailored interventions supports NCOP learners to make ambitious and informed choices about their futures.

Wessex Inspiration Network



Active in: Bath, Weston-super-Mare, Wiltshire

Website: www.won.ac.uk/win

Lead institution: University of Bath

Contact name/details: Colin Mather, 01225 383301, C.H.Mather@bath.ac.uk

Wessex Inspiration Network is working directly with schools and colleges to engage with students; WIN higher education advisors are based in a number of partner institutions to facilitate an ongoing programme of activities, aimed at both students and parents, which demonstrate the benefits that can be gained from studying at higher education level. These include one-to-one mentoring, Careerpilot, higher education awareness (delivered through Western Outreach Network), personal development sessions to increase confidence, workshops to enhance academic skills and visits to inspire student interest in their chosen subject field. Collaborative working and relationships with the institutions have been successfully developed over the past year.



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