

**Consultation**

**Office for  
Students**

The logo for the Office for Students, featuring a dark blue square with a yellow square in the top right corner containing the letters 'OfS' in white.

**OfS**

# **Consultation on a new approach to the Uni Connect programme from 2021-22 to 2024-25**

**This consultation runs from 15 December  
2020 to 19 January 2021.**

**Reference** OfS 2020.49

**Enquiries to** [unicconnect@officeforstudents.org.uk](mailto:unicconnect@officeforstudents.org.uk)

**Publication date** 15 December 2020

# Consultation on a new approach to the Uni Connect programme from 2021-22 to 2024-25

The Office for Students is seeking views on a new approach to the Uni Connect programme from academic year 2021-22 to 2024-25. We would like to hear your views on the proposals in this consultation.

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## Timing of consultation

Start: **Monday 15 December 2020**

End: **Tuesday 19 January 2021**

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## Who should respond?

Anyone with an interest in equality of opportunity in education, including higher education providers, further education colleges, schools, third sector organisations, current and prospective students, and learners in schools and colleges.

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## How to respond

Please respond by **Tuesday 19 January 2021**.

Use the online response form available at <https://survey.officeforstudents.org.uk/s/uni-connect-consultation/>.

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## Enquiries

Email [uniconnect@officeforstudents.org.uk](mailto:uniconnect@officeforstudents.org.uk).

Alternatively, call our public enquiry line on 0117 931 7317.

We are holding an online consultation event on 14 January 2021. This event will provide an opportunity for you to ask any questions you may have.

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The Office for Students is the independent regulator for higher education in England. We aim to ensure that every student, whatever their background, has a fulfilling experience of higher education that enriches their lives and careers.

### **Our four regulatory objectives**

All students, from all backgrounds, and with the ability and desire to undertake higher education:

- are supported to access, succeed in, and progress from, higher education
- receive a high quality academic experience, and their interests are protected while they study or in the event of provider, campus or course closure
- are able to progress into employment or further study, and their qualifications hold their value over time
- receive value for money.

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## About this consultation

The proposals in this document aim to support our ambition that students from all backgrounds have equal opportunities to access higher education. We set out, and invite responses to, proposals that will support efficient and joined up collaborative higher education outreach through the Uni Connect programme from the academic years 2021-22 to 2024-25. The proposals set out a new approach to targeting high-priority schools and colleges rather than areas, and they give greater focus to progression from non-traditional routes into and through higher education, including through further education and among mature learners.

The proposals in this consultation relate to the Office for Students' (OfS's) powers under the Higher Education and Research Act 2017 (HERA) in relation to funding (section 39). The detailed funding levels for each year of the programme will be subject to decision making from spring 2021 by the OfS, having regard to the level of teaching grant funding in each year and any statutory guidance.

Future decisions on the scope of and funding for Uni Connect will need to be made in the round, taking into account guidance from government and the conclusions reached at future spending reviews. This means we are not in a position to commit to the level of funding to Uni Connect in future years. Our intention with this consultation is to develop a view of how Uni Connect may operate in the future, with a view to informing the decisions on subsequent funding allocations.

We will publish a summary of responses to this consultation in spring 2021 on the OfS website (and in other formats on request). We will explain how and why we have arrived at our decisions, and how we have addressed any concerns raised by respondents.

The consultation questions are listed in full in Annex A.

For more information about our work to date on Uni Connect please visit [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/uni-connect/](http://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/uni-connect/).

## Who should respond to this consultation?

We welcome responses from anyone with an interest in access and participation in English higher education, including current and prospective students and learners in schools and colleges.

We are also interested in the views of schools and further education colleges, local authorities, local enterprise partnerships, employers, third sector organisations, policy bodies, and others with an interest in equality of opportunity in education.

## How to respond

The consultation closes at **1700 on Tuesday 19 January 2021**.

Please submit your response by completing the online form at <https://survey.officeforstudents.org.uk/s/uni-connect-consultation/>.

If you require this document in an **alternative format**, or need assistance with the online form, please contact [digitalpublishing@officeforstudents.org.uk](mailto:digitalpublishing@officeforstudents.org.uk). This email address should **not** be used for submitting your consultation response.

## Consultation event

We will be holding an online consultation event on Thursday 14 January 2021. The aim is for you to ask any questions you may have and, more broadly, to discuss the proposals with OfS staff and other attendees. To register to attend, use the link on our event webpage.<sup>1</sup> If you are not able to attend, you will be able to access the event presentations on the OfS website shortly afterwards.

## Consultation principles

We are running this consultation in accordance with the government's consultation principles.<sup>2</sup>

At the OfS we are committed to taking equality and diversity into account in everything we do. We have considered issues in relation to the Public Sector Equality Duty.

## How we will treat your response

We will publish or summarise the responses to this consultation on the OfS website (and in alternative formats on request). This may include a list of the providers and organisations that respond, but not personal data such as individuals' names, addresses or other contact details. If you want the information that you provide to be treated as confidential, please tell us, but be aware that we cannot guarantee confidentiality in all circumstances. An automatic confidentiality disclaimer generated by your IT system will not be regarded by us as a confidentiality request.

The OfS will process any personal data received in accordance with all applicable data protection laws (see our privacy policy<sup>3</sup>).

We may need to disclose or publish information that you provide in the performance of our functions, or disclose it to other organisations for the purposes of their functions. Information (including personal data) may also need to be disclosed in accordance with UK legislation (such as the Freedom of Information Act 2000, Data Protection Act 2018 and Environmental Information Regulations 2004).

## Next steps

We will publish a summary of responses to this consultation in spring 2021 on the OfS website (and in other formats on request). We will explain how and why we have arrived at our decisions, and how we have addressed any concerns raised by respondents.

The outcomes of the consultation will inform decisions to be made by the OfS in spring 2021 about the future of the Uni Connect programme and our teaching grant allocations for academic year 2021-22. We will have regard to our general duties, our public sector equality duty and any future statutory guidance when we make decisions.

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<sup>1</sup> See [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/news-blog-and-events/events/consultation-event-new-approach-to-uni-connect-programme/](http://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/news-blog-and-events/events/consultation-event-new-approach-to-uni-connect-programme/).

<sup>2</sup> See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/consultation-principles-guidance>.

<sup>3</sup> Available at [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/ofs-privacy/](http://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/ofs-privacy/).

The outcomes of the consultation will inform further policy and development work on our approach to Uni Connect, including further developing our approach to identifying priority schools and colleges. We anticipate conducting a second consultation during 2021 to explore the details of our approach to identifying priority schools and colleges from 2022-23.

## Introduction

### Introduction to the Uni Connect programme

1. The Uni Connect programme (formerly the National Collaborative Outreach Programme or NCOP) was established in January 2017 as an initial four-year programme creating 29 partnerships of universities, colleges, local authorities, local enterprise partnerships, employers and other local partners. The partnerships deliver information, advice and guidance (IAG) and support for progression into university or college. This work was originally focused solely on the delivery of sustained and progressive programmes of targeted outreach with young people in Years 9 to 13 who live in areas where higher education participation is both low and lower than might be expected given the Key Stage 4 results of the young people who live there.
2. Phase one of the programme was initiated by the Higher Education Funding Council for England, and aimed to support the then government's goal to rapidly increase the number of young people from underrepresented groups<sup>4</sup> going into higher education. Phase two of the programme was agreed by the OfS and commenced on 1 August 2019. This continued to support targeted outreach, but it expanded the scope of learners involved by removing the upper age limit imposed in the first phase.<sup>5</sup> Phase two also introduced a new outreach hub element to coordinate the access activities individual higher education providers delivered through their access and participation plans. Through the hubs, partnerships are involved in:
  - a. Signposting teachers and advisors to wider outreach activities in their local areas (this is available to all publicly funded schools and colleges) and supporting schools and colleges to access these opportunities.
  - b. Providing a platform for local collaboration to support progression for people of all ages through tertiary education involving universities, colleges, employers, third sector organisations and local agencies.
3. Uni Connect as currently constituted aims to:
  - reduce the gap in higher education participation between the most and least represented groups

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<sup>4</sup> 'Underrepresented groups' are the focus of access and participation plans and include all groups of potential or current students for whom the OfS can identify gaps in equality of opportunity in different parts of the student lifecycle. For more information see 'Regulatory notice 1: Access and participation plan guidance' (OfS 2020.25), available at [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/regulatory-notice-1-access-and-participation-plan-guidance/](http://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/regulatory-notice-1-access-and-participation-plan-guidance/).

<sup>5</sup> In phase one, outreach was targeted towards learners in target areas in Years 9 to 13 who would be 19 or younger on their year of entry into higher education. In phase two this upper age limit was removed and partnerships could engage with older learners in target areas so long as they were studying on a Level 2 or 3 further education course.

- support young people to make well informed decisions about their future education
  - support effective and impactful local collaboration by higher education providers working with schools, colleges, employers and other partners
  - contribute to a stronger evidence base around ‘what works’ in higher education outreach and strengthen evaluation practice in the sector.
4. The programme is intended to complement and add value to the work that higher education providers undertake through their access and participation plans, in particular work that is best delivered in collaboration.
  5. The success measures for the programme are focused on progression to any course of higher education, whatever the mode of study or qualification aim (for example HNC, HND, foundation degree, or any other degree). Partnerships are expected to shape their offer in terms of information about diverse routes into higher education, including through further education and through higher and degree apprenticeships, so that students take the best route for them.
  6. Uni Connect is subject to robust monitoring and evaluation, which consists of:
    - internal OfS monitoring processes
    - programme-level formative and impact evaluations commissioned by the OfS
    - local partnership evaluation, including longitudinal tracking of participant outcomes.
  7. It is not yet possible to provide evidence of the programme’s long-term impact on outcomes for students,<sup>6</sup> but there is robust evidence from these evaluations that the programme’s sustained and progressive approach has a positive impact on intermediate outcomes. For example, the phase one evaluation report found a positive correlation between the number of Uni Connect activities learners take part in and improvements in their self-reported knowledge, attitudes and intentions towards educational progression. Evidence from the evaluation has strongly supported the importance of outreach being delivered in a sustained and progressive way. The independent formative programme evaluation found that, in phase one of Uni Connect, the partnerships: delivered impartial outreach; addressed ‘cold-spots’ in outreach delivery; built strong relationships with schools, colleges and key stakeholders; minimised the engagement burden for schools and colleges; facilitated innovative new approaches; and made progress in engaging teachers and parents.

## **Why we are consulting on our approach to Uni Connect**

8. As Uni Connect was initially constituted as a four-year programme, we want to consult before making decisions about whether and how to continue the programme. Consultation provides an opportunity for Uni Connect partnerships, schools, colleges and other stakeholders to help

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<sup>6</sup> Evidence of the programme’s long-term impact outcomes is not yet available as no learners have yet received the full four to five years of sustained and progressive outreach and made their higher education entry decisions. We expect important evaluation evidence to be generated over the next year or two as those learners who have received sustained and progressive outreach from Year 9 make their higher education decisions and are tracked in the evaluation through Higher Education Statistics Agency data.

inform our future approach. We are seeking feedback on our proposed approach and are open to considering alternative solutions.

9. Our current commitment to the programme runs to July 2021, when phase two is due to end. We want to determine our future approach to the programme for 2021-22 to 2024-25, to ensure that we maintain the momentum of this important strand of our access and participation strategy.
10. The detailed funding levels for each year of the programme will, however, be subject to decision making from spring 2021 by the OfS, in the light of the teaching grant available to us each year and having regard to our general duties, our public sector equality duty and statutory guidance. We expect to consult further on our broader approach to budgets and funding for 2021-22 once we have received details of our funding settlement from the government for the 2021-22 financial year.

## How we have developed our proposals

11. This consultation builds on the OfS board decisions announced in December 2018, including around Uni Connect phase two, following a consultation on our overall approach to access and participation regulation and funding.<sup>7</sup> It forms part of a wider suite of activity that the OfS is undertaking, to review our funding method for future years to ensure that it supports our duties and regulatory objectives.
12. The proposals in this consultation relate to the OfS's powers under HERA 2017 in relation to funding (section 39). In developing our proposals, we have regard to all of the general duties set out under Section 2(1) of HERA. We are proposing to place particular weight on our general duties under 2(1)(e) (relating to the promotion of equality of opportunity in connection with access to and participation in higher education) and 2(1)(b) (relating to promoting quality, and greater choice and opportunities for students), and our separate duty under section 149(1) of the Equality Act 2010 to have due regard to advancing equality of opportunity.<sup>8</sup>
13. In developing our approach to Uni Connect we have engaged with a range of stakeholders through methods including:
  - a meeting of the OfS student panel where we discussed our approach to funding for access and participation
  - two workshops with representatives of sector groups, which examined our overarching approach to the teaching grant
  - a roundtable discussion with providers, students and other stakeholders, which explored the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the access stage of the lifecycle

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<sup>7</sup> See 'A new approach to regulating access and participation in English higher education: Consultation outcomes' (OfS 2018.53), available at [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/a-new-approach-to-regulating-access-and-participation-in-english-higher-education-consultation-outcomes/](http://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/a-new-approach-to-regulating-access-and-participation-in-english-higher-education-consultation-outcomes/).

<sup>8</sup> See Higher Education and Research Act 2017, available at <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2017/29/contents/enacted>.

- discussions with the chairs and leads of Uni Connect partnerships through routine programme engagement.
14. We also considered feedback received as part of the mid-point review of the programme that informed our approach to phase two.
15. We have also drawn on a range of evidence sources including:
- analysis of the access and participation plans submitted by higher education providers to the OfS for the period 2020-21 to 2024-25<sup>9</sup>
  - findings from the external formative and impact evaluations of the Uni Connect programme, alongside insights from the local evaluations and longitudinal tracking of target learners.<sup>10</sup>
16. As part of developing our approach we have considered the impact on persons with protected characteristics, as is required by the legal duties that apply to the OfS under the Equality Act 2010, and to further support our strategic objectives and our equality and diversity objectives and action plan.<sup>11</sup>
17. In developing this consultation, we have considered alternative options for securing our objectives. These options, and the reasons why we have decided not to take them forward, are set out in Annex C.

## Objectives

18. Funding is an OfS regulatory lever that can support the delivery of our strategic objectives in ways that regulatory conditions alone cannot.<sup>12</sup> Since 2017 we have provided funding of £60 million per year to support collaborative outreach through the Uni Connect programme. This funding complements the commitments providers themselves make and the outcomes they agree with us through their access and participation plans.
19. We want to target our access and participation funding to support the reduction of equality gaps across the student lifecycle through activities that have been proven to be successful, but are not likely to be delivered through our regulation of access and participation plans alone. The pressure we can apply to individual providers through their access and participation plans is critical to reducing and eventually closing the equality gaps that providers identify among their own students, and will make a significant contribution to our goal to achieve equality of

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<sup>9</sup> See 'Transforming opportunity in higher education' (OfS 2020.06), available at [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/transforming-opportunity-in-higher-education/](http://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/transforming-opportunity-in-higher-education/).

<sup>10</sup> See [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/uni-connect/evaluating-uni-connects-impact/](http://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/uni-connect/evaluating-uni-connects-impact/).

<sup>11</sup> See [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/about/equality-and-diversity/objectives-for-student-equality/](http://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/about/equality-and-diversity/objectives-for-student-equality/).

<sup>12</sup> Section 39 of HERA gives the OfS broad funding powers towards providers in the Approved (fee cap) part of the register, to fund 'the provision of education by the provider [and] the provision of facilities, and the carrying on of other activities, by the provider, which its governing body considers it is necessary or desirable to provide or carry on for the purposes of, or in connection with, education'.

opportunity. However, provider regulation through the plans will not be sufficient on its own to meet all our access and participation objectives.

20. For example, we would like to encourage providers to collaborate with each other in two areas:
  - a. Firstly, to ensure that the engagement with schools and colleges in local areas is efficient and targeted, does not place unnecessary burden on schools and colleges, provides impartial information and advice, and ensures coverage across all parts of the country. This is delivered through our funding for the Uni Connect partnerships.
  - b. Secondly, to enable the sharing of evaluation findings so that the investment in access and participation is focused on approaches that have been demonstrated to be successful. This is delivered through startup funding for the national 'what works' Centre for Transforming Access and Student Outcomes, and we will want in due course to explore the levels of funding needed to ensure this becomes a sustainable service sector-wide.
21. The proposals in this document aim to support our ambition that students from all backgrounds have equal opportunities to access higher education. We will use our funding to support activity that complements providers' access and participation plan commitments. This will be achieved by investing in collaborative outreach that creates pathways to further and higher education, helping remove the academic, financial and cultural barriers to progression and supporting underrepresented learners to achieve their ambitions.<sup>13</sup>
22. Subject to funding levels, we propose to do this by supporting the Uni Connect programme from the academic years 2021-22 to 2024-25, which would enable the partnerships to work in tandem with the five-year access and participation plans agreed with universities and colleges from 2020-21 until 2024-25. In this consultation, we set out a proposed new approach to targeting schools and colleges in the programme, and outline how we propose to give greater focus to progression from non-traditional routes into and through higher education, including through further education and among mature learners.

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<sup>13</sup> We use the term 'underrepresented learners' to mean young and mature people from underrepresented groups (see footnote 4) who are attending school or college.

# Consultation proposals

## The higher education access challenge

23. Policies and activities to make higher education more representative of wider society have been a feature of the sector for over 20 years. While the participation of young people from the least represented areas has increased, the gap between the most and least represented groups remains stubbornly high.<sup>14</sup> There has also been a steep decline in the number of mature students in higher education, with the number of entrants over the age of 25 halving since 2012.<sup>15</sup>
24. Evidence suggests that when young people from underrepresented groups attain at the same levels as their peers at age 16, they are almost equally likely to go on to higher education.<sup>16</sup> However, the future options for these young people can be significantly limited by persistent knowledge, skills, support and confidence gaps. For some young people, mapping a meaningful future, including the right path through post-compulsory education, can be challenging. Mature learners face specific barriers to accessing and participating in higher education, including commitments and responsibilities outside their studies, such as caring responsibilities and employment.<sup>17</sup> They may also be less geographically mobile and have constraints on their mode of study, and may not have access to effective information, advice and guidance.<sup>18</sup>
25. Recent research by the Education Policy Institute found that even prior to the COVID-19 pandemic the attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers had stopped closing for the first time in the last decade.<sup>19</sup> Analysis by the Education Endowment Foundation suggests that this pattern is likely to have been exacerbated by the pandemic, potentially

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<sup>14</sup> In 2018-19, there was a gap of 29.9 percentage points between young entrants from the most and least represented groups, across all English higher education providers (see [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/about/measures-of-our-success/participation-performance-measures/gap-in-participation-between-most-and-least-represented-groups/](http://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/about/measures-of-our-success/participation-performance-measures/gap-in-participation-between-most-and-least-represented-groups/)). UCAS data for the current cycle indicates that, while the number of 18-year-olds from the least represented areas placed in higher education has increased, the gap between the most and least represented groups has widened (see <https://www.ucas.com/data-and-analysis/undergraduate-statistics-and-reports/statistical-releases-daily-clearing-analysis-2020/>).

<sup>15</sup> See 'English higher education 2019: The Office for Students annual review', available at [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/english-higher-education-2019-the-office-for-students-annual-review/](http://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/english-higher-education-2019-the-office-for-students-annual-review/).

<sup>16</sup> See Whitty, Geoff, Hayton, Annette, and Tang, Sarah, 'Who you know, what you know and knowing the ropes: A review of evidence about access to higher education institutions in England', available at <https://doi.org/10.1002/rev3.3038>.

<sup>17</sup> See MillionPlus, 'Forgotten learners: Building a system that works for mature students', available at [www.millionplus.ac.uk/policy/reports/forgotten-learners-building-a-system-that-works-for-mature-students](http://www.millionplus.ac.uk/policy/reports/forgotten-learners-building-a-system-that-works-for-mature-students).

<sup>18</sup> See 'Understanding effective part-time provision for undergraduates from underrepresented and disadvantaged backgrounds', available at [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/understanding-effective-part-time-provision-for-undergraduates-from-underrepresented-and-disadvantaged-backgrounds/](http://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/understanding-effective-part-time-provision-for-undergraduates-from-underrepresented-and-disadvantaged-backgrounds/).

<sup>19</sup> See Education Policy Institute, 'Education in England: Annual report 2020', available at [www.epi.org.uk/publications-and-research/education-in-england-annual-report-2020/](http://www.epi.org.uk/publications-and-research/education-in-england-annual-report-2020/).

returning to the position at the start of the decade.<sup>20</sup> Alongside this, we have seen an increased demand for further and higher education in recent months, especially for adults seeking to study locally, supported by government commitments to help people retrain and to address public service priorities such as nursing.

## Investing in collaborative outreach

26. Outreach to schools by universities and colleges is an important tool for enabling learners to make well informed decisions about their futures and to support them with their next steps. It is of particular importance to those from disadvantaged or underrepresented groups.
27. Collaborative outreach can offer impartial approaches covering a broader range of options than higher education providers working in isolation with a focus on their own recruitment. This can include a stronger focus on progression from further to higher education. Providers working together can: bring economies of scale; minimise the burden of engagement on schools and colleges; minimise duplication through divergent approaches; ensure that all areas of the country are covered so that there are no 'cold spots'; and secure better targeting, tracking and evaluation through sharing skills and resources.
28. All the indications are that the COVID-19 pandemic will have a disproportionately negative effect on the academic performance of young people from disadvantaged and underrepresented groups, and so schools will be understandably focused on mitigating such impacts as far as possible. This underlines the importance of a coordinated outreach offer which allows schools to continue to engage with higher education efficiently and effectively.
29. The OfS is ambitious about ensuring that all students, regardless of background, with the ability and desire to undertake higher education, are supported to access, succeed in, and progress from higher education. To support this, we want to target our funding to support the reduction of equality gaps across the student lifecycle through activities that have been proven to be successful, but are not likely to be achieved through our regulation of access and participation plans alone.
30. Analysis of the 2020-21 to 2024-25 access and participation plans suggests a number of conclusions: there may be some student groups, such as mature learners, who are not adequately addressed; collaboration between providers may be at risk as providers focus on closing their own gaps; and this focus may lead to cold spots of access activity.<sup>21</sup> By investing in impartial collaborative outreach, we can counter these challenges, making an efficient contribution to the national effort to close gaps in access to higher education for underrepresented groups that cannot be addressed through provider-level regulation alone. A programme approach to distributing funding enables this investment to be directed to the places where it can have the greatest impact, and for that impact to be understood through effective tracking and evaluation.

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<sup>20</sup> See Education Endowment Foundation, 'Impact of school closures on the attainment gap: Rapid evidence assessment', available at <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/covid-19-resources/best-evidence-on-impact-of-school-closures-on-the-attainment-gap/>.

<sup>21</sup> See Transforming opportunity in higher education (OfS 2020.06), available at: [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/transforming-opportunity-in-higher-education/](http://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/transforming-opportunity-in-higher-education/).

## Proposal 1: Funding of Uni Connect

The OfS's current commitment to Uni Connect is to July 2021, when phase two is scheduled to end. Subject to funding levels, we propose to provide funding for the Uni Connect programme through to the end of academic year 2024-25, a timeline that brings the partnerships into line with the duration of the 2020-21 to 2024-25 access and participation plans.

## Our ambitions and approach to phase three of the Uni Connect programme

31. Through supporting collaboration and partnership, Uni Connect can offer a powerful, strategic and flexible network with local and regional partners, able to support the levelling up agenda and delivery of other government priorities in local and regional communities.
32. Our investment in phase three of the Uni Connect programme aims to:
  - a. Contribute to reducing the gap in higher education participation between the most and least represented groups.<sup>22</sup>
  - b. Support young and mature learners from underrepresented groups to explore their options and make well informed decisions about tertiary education, including considering pathways from further education into higher education and exploring non-traditional routes into and through higher education.
  - c. Support a strategic local infrastructure of universities, colleges and other partners that can cut through competitive barriers, offer an efficient and low-burden route for schools and colleges to engage, address outreach 'cold spots' and offer different routes to progression into higher education.
  - d. Contribute to a stronger evidence base around 'what works' in higher education outreach and strengthen evaluation practice across the sector.

## Proposal 2: Approach to Uni Connect

Through the programme we will invest in a network of Uni Connect hubs with cross-England coverage. These hubs will work strategically and collaboratively to address programme goals, providing clear and efficient routes through which schools and colleges can find out about and access the higher education outreach available in each area.

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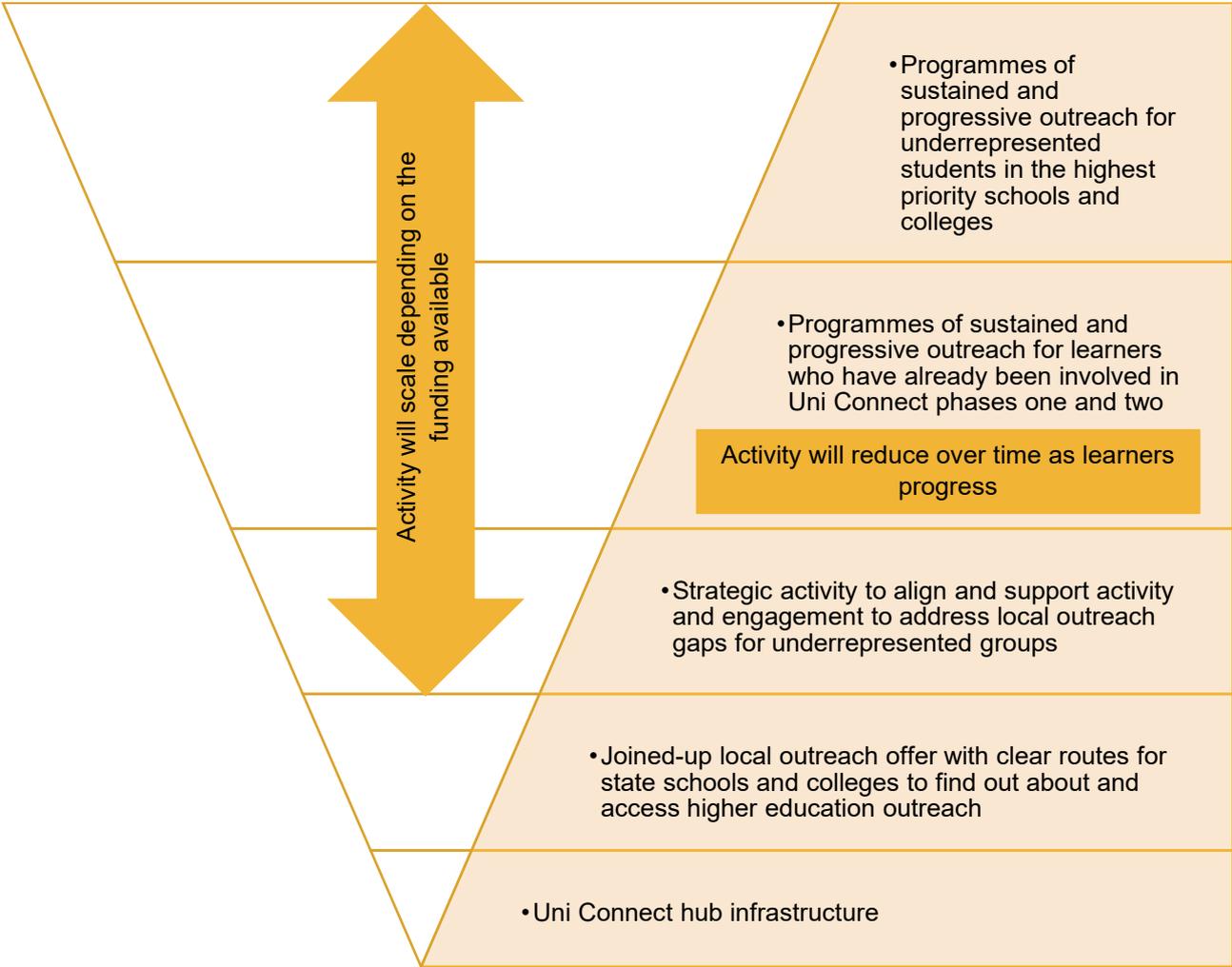
<sup>22</sup> By 'most and least represented groups' we mean those from underrepresented groups based on the Participation of Local Areas (POLAR) classification in line with OfS key performance measure 1 (see [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/about/measures-of-our-success/participation-performance-measures/gap-in-participation-between-most-and-least-represented-groups/](http://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/about/measures-of-our-success/participation-performance-measures/gap-in-participation-between-most-and-least-represented-groups/)). However, we also recognise that the programme has the potential to contribute to closing gaps in participation for learners from other underrepresented groups, including those where the effect of multiple characteristics may limit progression to higher education. As part of our impact evaluation we will explore the wider impact of the programme on progression for a range of different groups.

We will identify the highest priority schools and colleges and work with them to provide programmes of sustained and progressive higher education outreach for their underrepresented pupils and students, as well as supporting learners who have already begun their Uni Connect journey during phases one and two of the programme and who would benefit from ongoing outreach and support.

We will continue to invest in a robust approach to the evaluation of the Uni Connect programme to understand and improve impact.

33. The funding available to support the programme will be subject to decision making from spring 2021 by the OfS, in the light of the teaching grant available to us each year and having regard to our general duties, our public sector equality duty and statutory guidance. We cannot preempt these decisions, but the approach to phase three that we have set out in this consultation is intended to be scalable and can adapt to a number of different funding scenarios. Future decisions on the scope of and funding for Uni Connect will need to be made in the round, taking into account guidance from government and the conclusions reached at future spending reviews. This means we are not in a position to commit to the level of funding to Uni Connect in future years. Our intention with this consultation is to develop a view of how Uni Connect may operate in the future, with a view to informing the decisions on subsequent funding allocations.

**Figure 1: A scalable approach to Uni Connect phase three**



## Question 1

To what extent do you agree with the proposed approach to phase three of the Uni Connect programme? Please provide a brief explanation for your answer. If you believe our approach should differ, please explain how and the reason for your view.

### Targeted outreach with learners in the highest priority schools and colleges

34. Uni Connect partnerships currently deliver multi-intervention approaches that combine to form a sustained and progressive programme of support for target learners over the course of their journey through Years 9 to 13. These comprise both well established and innovative approaches and are tailored to the ages and circumstances of learners, school or college type and the local context. This targeted outreach is currently focused on local areas where higher education participation is low and lower than might be expected given the Key Stage 4 results of the young people who live there.<sup>23</sup>
35. Some schools and colleges do not have the time and resource to prioritise and engage with the programme, which can make it more challenging to deliver the kinds of sustained and progressive engagement with learners that evidence suggests is most likely to yield successful outcomes. Locating programme staff in schools and colleges to co-ordinate and deliver outreach activities has been shown to boost the capacity of the schools and colleges to engage with the programme. It can also help to support the professional development of teaching staff by raising their awareness of the routes to, and opportunities in, higher education.<sup>24</sup>
36. Current programme targeting, which is focused on small geographies, means that some partnerships need to work across many more schools and colleges than others to reach the same number of programme target learners. This dilutes the programme offer to some schools and colleges in some areas and may also result in a higher proportion of non-target learners receiving programme activities.
37. Changing programme targeting from an area-based approach to a focus on the highest priority schools and colleges will provide economies of scale and will be more efficient, while still directing funding where it is most needed. We propose to provide guidance to support partnerships to prioritise their engagement with underrepresented learners in priority schools and colleges. Partnerships will work with the schools and colleges identified to understand the IAG and outreach needs of these learners, and identify what outreach provision might already be in place and what gaps remain.

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<sup>23</sup> During phase one and two the programme targeted wards (Office for National Statistics 2001 Census Area Statistics wards) that had low levels of young participation (POLAR3 quintile 1), and lower than expected levels of young participation, considering Key Stage 4 attainment and ethnicity (quintiles 1 or 2) or low levels of young participation (POLAR3 quintile 1) and lower than expected levels of young participation, considering Key Stage 4 attainment only (quintiles 1 or 2). For more information see [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/polar-participation-of-local-areas/](http://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/polar-participation-of-local-areas/).

<sup>24</sup> See 'NCOP: end of phase one report for the national formative and impact evaluations', available at [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/ncop-end-of-phase-one-evaluation-report/](http://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/ncop-end-of-phase-one-evaluation-report/).

38. Through such an approach the programme will target IAG and outreach towards learners in the schools and colleges where they can have the greatest impact, taking into account the wider landscape of provider and third party outreach. The programme evaluation has demonstrated the value of situating outreach interventions within a sustained and progressive framework and we expect the use of progression frameworks to continue in phase three.<sup>25</sup>
39. We anticipate that our proposed approach will strengthen local alignment between outreach supported by the programme and that provided by others, including by higher education providers, and that we will therefore see increased efficiency and effectiveness across the programme. However, in the event of a significantly reduced level of funding we would expect a reduction in the scale and intensity of the outreach provided and also expect the number of learners engaged by the programme to reduce. Partnerships will need to prioritise their engagement with learners, and will be supported in this through guidance from the OfS.

### **Proposal 3: Targeting of the highest priority schools and colleges**

Uni Connect hubs will deliver programmes of sustained and progressive outreach to address outreach gaps for underrepresented pupils and learners in the highest priority schools and colleges encompassing activity funded by Uni Connect, as well as interventions that are not OfS-funded, such as provider, third sector or other provision.

We will develop a new approach to identifying the highest priority schools and colleges. This will replace the current area-based targeting and will be used to direct programme funding and targeting from academic year 2022-23 onwards. We will consult further on our approach to identifying the highest priority schools and colleges.

We will work closely with the Department for Education to develop our methodology for identifying the highest priority schools and colleges, which will draw on higher education participation rates and contextual information examining participation with regard to Key Stage 4 attainment. In doing this our approach will mirror that taken to identify the original Uni Connect target areas.

### **Question 2**

To what extent do you agree with our proposal to change programme targeting from an area-based approach to one based on identifying the highest priority schools and colleges? Please provide a brief explanation for your answer. If you believe our approach should differ, please explain how and the reason for your view.

## **An increased focus on further education and mature learners**

40. Analysis of the 2020-21 to 2024-25 access and participation plans suggests that mature students have not been prioritised by many providers, despite low and decreasing proportions

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<sup>25</sup> For phase two of the programme, all Uni Connect partnerships developed progression frameworks that clearly set out the specific changes and outcomes that would be expected for an individual learner over time as a result of the multi-intervention approaches they would engage with through their educational journey.

of such students in their own populations and the sector more broadly.<sup>26</sup> We recognise that more interventions may be needed to raise the participation rates of mature learners, and that Uni Connect could play a stronger role here through supporting collaboration so that adults seeking higher education can find out about and access different types of courses.

41. Alongside this, the Uni Connect baseline learner survey highlighted the importance of engaging with younger learners, ahead of the transition to sixth form or college.<sup>27</sup> It underscored the importance of engaging learners earlier in the student lifecycle, to influence their attitudes and ambitions and ensure they consider all the options available to them. It also identified Year 12 to 13 learners studying at sixth form as being twice as likely to aspire to study at a university away from home as those currently studying at a further education college, and further education college learners as more than twice as likely to aspire to full-time work as those in a sixth form. This suggests that the type of support required by learners on different routes may vary.
42. We will consider the balance of funding directed towards engagement with different year groups in schools and between schools and colleges, to ensure that our investment is as impactful as possible in addressing our goals. Given the different aspirations of learners in school sixth forms compared with colleges, we anticipate an increased focus on learners in Years 12 to 13 in further education colleges.
43. Recognising the benefits of early engagement, we expect to continue to provide funding to support work in schools from Year 9 upwards. We propose to continue to provide support for outreach with school-based learners in Years 12 to 13, but we expect partnerships to ensure that any OfS-funded provision complements, and does not duplicate, outreach delivered in support of provider access and participation plans or through third parties.
44. We want the programme to do more to support collaborative IAG and outreach for mature learners studying at Level 3 at those further education colleges we identify as a high priority, recognising the changing pattern of interest and engagement in education by adults in the light of the pandemic. We also want to strengthen the role of further education colleges in partnership governance and, where the college provides higher education, in the delivery of outreach.

#### **Proposal 4: Work across different age groups and types of provider**

We will continue to focus on early engagement and will fund targeted outreach in the highest priority schools and colleges with young people from Year 9 upwards.

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<sup>26</sup> See Transforming opportunity in higher education (OfS 2020.06), available at: [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/transforming-opportunity-in-higher-education/](http://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/transforming-opportunity-in-higher-education/).

<sup>27</sup> See Higher Education Funding Council for England, 'National Collaborative Outreach Programme: Year one report of the national formative and impact evaluation, including capacity building with NCOP consortia', available on the archived website at <https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20180405115436/http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/rereports/year/2018/ncopyear1/>.

We want to see a greater focus on further education colleges in the programme – in partnership governance, as outreach delivery partners and through the delivery of outreach to learners in the highest priority colleges.

Uni Connect hubs will provide programmes of sustained and progressive outreach for mature learners studying at Level 3 in the highest priority colleges.

### Question 3

To what extent do you agree with our proposals to strengthen the focus on further education colleges in the programme? Please provide a brief explanation for your answer. If you believe our approach should differ, please explain how and the reason for your view.

### Question 4

Do you have any comments about what the OfS should consider in developing its advice to partnerships on engaging with mature learners studying at Level 3?

## Engaging with learners who have already begun their Uni Connect journey

45. In 2018-19, over 180,000 target learners were engaged in sustained and progressive outreach by Uni Connect partnerships, delivered across more than 1,600 schools and colleges.<sup>28</sup> Our new targeting approach will result in hubs working more intensively across a smaller number of schools and colleges. While many of the learners currently engaged by the programme will attend priority schools and colleges we recognise that a new approach to programme targeting could result in a loss of engagement with some learners who have already been involved in sustained and progressive programmes of Uni Connect activity.
46. Programme evaluation evidence demonstrates that engagement in multiple interventions is more likely to deliver positive outcomes than one-off interventions. There is a positive correlation between the number of Uni Connect activities learners take part in and improvements in their self-reported knowledge, attitudes and intentions towards higher education. A higher level of engagement in Uni Connect activities is also associated with greater knowledge about higher education, graduate careers prospects and learner confidence in where to find information about courses, financial support and university accommodation.<sup>29</sup>
47. The benefits of interventions are enhanced if the activity is targeted and tailored to specific groups, with care to determine the most appropriate time of year and stage in the student lifecycle for delivery. Prematurely withdrawing outreach from learners who are partway through their time in school or college may be detrimental to the outcomes we want to achieve. We therefore want to facilitate access to higher education outreach for learners who have already

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<sup>28</sup> See 'National Collaborative Outreach Programme (NCOP): Two years on' (OfS 2019.45), available at [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/ncop-two-years-on/](http://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/ncop-two-years-on/).

<sup>29</sup> See 'NCOP: end of phase one report for the national formative and impact evaluations', available at [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/ncop-end-of-phase-one-evaluation-report/](http://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/ncop-end-of-phase-one-evaluation-report/).

begun their Uni Connect journey during phases one and two of the programme and who would benefit from ongoing outreach and support. Doing this protects our past investment, supports ongoing evaluation, and limits any negative impact on learners from changes to programme targeting.

### **Proposal 5: Engaging learners who have already been involved in the programme**

Uni Connect hubs will facilitate access to sustained and progressive outreach to support learners who meet all of the following criteria:

- they live or have lived in the existing Uni Connect target areas
- they have already received targeted outreach through phase one or two of the programme
- they would benefit from ongoing engagement with the programme
- they are unlikely to receive higher education outreach appropriate to their needs without this intervention.

### **Question 5**

To what extent do you agree with our proposal that Uni Connect hubs will facilitate access to programmes of outreach for target learners who have already been involved in the programme and would benefit from ongoing engagement? Please provide a brief explanation for your answer. If you believe our approach should differ, please explain how and the reason for your view.

## **A coordinated local outreach offer**

48. The landscape of higher education IAG and outreach is complex and can be difficult for schools and colleges to navigate. Outreach is provided by a range of actors including providers responding individually and collectively to their access and participation plan commitments; charities and third sector providers; and private companies. Providing a single point of contact for local schools and colleges improves efficiency for all involved by ensuring that university and college engagement with schools is targeted, joined up and professional, so that there is no duplication of effort and so that learners, schools and colleges who need it most are supported.
49. Through phase three we propose to continue to fund a network of Uni Connect hubs that between them cover every part of England and bring together universities, further education colleges and other local partners to deliver the programme goals. In addition to delivering the targeted outreach these hubs will seek to join up the local outreach offer, providing efficient and effective routes for all local state schools and colleges to find out about and access the outreach available in the area.

50. Hubs will also undertake strategic activity to consider outreach gaps across their geographies, working with local partners to prioritise and shape approaches to addressing these challenges. In the context of reduced programme funding we will strengthen our expectations around matched funding to support any new provision (outside the targeted outreach as outlined in paragraphs 34 to 39).

### **Proposal 6: Providing a joined-up local outreach offer**

The Uni Connect hubs will provide a joined-up local outreach offer across OfS and non-OfS funded activities, to provide clear routes through which all state schools and colleges can find out about and access the higher education outreach available in each area.

They will do this through:

- acting as a point of contact and information for all secondary schools and colleges in their geographic remit, facilitating access to existing outreach provision, either locally or nationally
- hosting a website with details of the local outreach offer and other information to support schools and colleges.

Uni Connect hubs will undertake strategic activity to align and support activity and engagement to address local outreach gaps for underrepresented groups, including for learners from underrepresented groups that, based on their small size, may be more appropriately tackled across the whole local partnership area than at school or college level.<sup>30</sup>

They will do this through:

- drawing on local and national data<sup>31</sup> to understand the extent of local IAG and outreach gaps ('cold spots') for different underrepresented student groups in their geographic remit
- engaging strategically with schools, colleges, local authorities, local enterprise partnerships, employers and others to prioritise activity to address these outreach gaps, taking into account available resources and local context

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<sup>30</sup> 'Small underrepresented groups' in this context refers to groups of students where the OfS can identify gaps in equality of opportunity for access to higher education and who may benefit from regional or potentially national partnership engagement alongside other local stakeholders. This includes: care leavers; carers; people estranged from their families; people from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities; refugees; and children of military families.

<sup>31</sup> For example, the OfS is funding a project with the Higher Education Access Tracker to develop national outreach coverage maps. This aims to develop an efficient targeting tool to identify cold spots of outreach provision to assist the sector with intelligence to tailor future outreach activity. The project will investigate the depth and breadth of outreach across England, including type of outreach and sustained delivery across time, and will examine student participation in outreach where possible. It will also increase understanding of the range of outreach being delivered to individual schools and colleges and to different groups of underrepresented learners in these institutions.

- working collaboratively to help develop new or expanded outreach provision to address these priorities, drawing in additional funding to support this where hub resources allow.

### Question 6

To what extent do you agree with our proposals to provide routes through which schools and colleges can find out about and access local outreach provision? Please provide a brief explanation for your answer. If you believe our approach should differ, please explain how and the reason for your view.

### Question 7

To what extent do you agree with our proposals to support strategic activity to address local outreach gaps for underrepresented groups? Please provide a brief explanation for your answer. If you believe our approach should differ, please explain how and the reason for your view.

## Arrangements for funding and targeting Uni Connect in 2021-22

51. Phase three of the Uni Connect programme will commence in academic year 2021-22, with a stronger focus on progression from non-traditional routes into and through higher education, including progression through further education and among mature learners.
52. Paragraphs 34 to 39 outline proposals for a new approach to targeting the sustained and progressive outreach supported by the programme from an area-based approach to a focus on high priority schools and colleges. We will develop and consult on our approach to identifying these schools and colleges during 2021. We therefore see 2021-22 as a transition year with respect to introducing our new approach. Table 1 outlines our proposed approach to funding and targeting of the programme during 2021-22.

**Table 1: Funding and targeting of Uni Connect phase three during academic year 2021-22**

Elements of the phase three programme	Proposals for programme targeting in 2021-22	Proposals for programme funding in 2021-22
Uni Connect hub infrastructure	We are not proposing changes to partnership lead providers or their geographic coverage for 2021-22.	Use the existing 'outreach hubs' methodology, modified to ensure a minimum allocation of £300,000 per partnership, to distribute £10 million per year to partnerships.
Joined-up local outreach offer with clear routes for state schools and colleges to find out about and access higher education outreach	All state secondary schools and colleges in the partnership geography can access information and signposting.	This element will be supported by the 'outreach hubs' funding outlined above.

Elements of the phase three programme	Proposals for programme targeting in 2021-22	Proposals for programme funding in 2021-22
Strategic activity to align and support activity and engagement to address local outreach gaps for underrepresented groups	Partnerships will draw on local and national data and work strategically with partners to prioritise activity considering available resources and local context.	This element will be supported by the 'outreach hubs' funding outlined above.
Programmes of sustained and progressive outreach for learners who have already been involved in Uni Connect phase one and two	Partnerships will identify learners who: live in Uni Connect target areas; have already been in receipt of targeted outreach through phase one or two of the programme; would benefit from ongoing engagement; and are unlikely to receive any further higher education outreach without this intervention.	Use the existing 'targeted outreach' methodology to allocate the balance of remaining programme funding to partnerships.  Overall programme funding levels will shape expectations of how many learners can be engaged.
Programmes of sustained and progressive outreach for underrepresented students in the highest priority schools and colleges	Partnerships will use the existing Uni Connect target areas, supplemented by their knowledge of local context, to identify the highest priority schools and colleges.	This element will be supported by the 'targeted outreach' funding outlined above.  Overall programme funding levels will shape expectations of how many schools and colleges can be prioritised.

53. The funding available to support the programme will be subject to decision making from spring 2021 by the OfS, in the light of the levels of teaching grant allocated by government to the OfS and having regard to our general duties, our public sector equality duty and statutory guidance. We cannot pre-empt these decisions, but the approach to phase three that we have set out in this consultation is intended to be scalable and can adapt to a number of different funding scenarios. We expect to consult further on our broader approach to budgets and funding for 2021-22 once we have received details of our funding settlement from the government for the 2021-22 financial year.

54. We have set out in Annex B our proposed approach to distributing funding for the programme during 2021-22. We propose to use the existing funding methodology to allocate £10 million through the 'outreach hubs' methodology, modified to ensure a minimum allocation of £300,000 per partnership, and allocate the remaining balance of funding using the 'targeted outreach' methodology.

## Proposal 7: Funding in 2021-22

Phase three of the Uni Connect programme will commence in academic year 2021-22 with a stronger focus on progression from non-traditional routes into and through higher education, including through further education and among mature learners.

Academic year 2021-22 will be a transitional year for the provision of sustained and progressive programmes of outreach with the highest priority schools and colleges. Partnerships will use the existing Uni Connect target areas, supplemented by their knowledge of local context, to identify the highest priority schools and colleges. Overall programme funding levels will shape expectations around how many schools and colleges can be prioritised.

It is proposed that programme funding for academic year 2021-22 will be allocated as outlined in Annex B.

## Question 8

To what extent do you agree with our proposed approach to funding and targeting Uni Connect during academic year 2021-22? Please provide a brief explanation for your answer. If you believe our approach should differ, please explain how and the reason for your view.

## Additional consultation questions

55. We are also interested in your views on the following questions.

### Question 9

Do you have any comments about any unintended consequences of our proposed approach to the Uni Connect programme, for example for particular types of provider, schools or colleges, or for particular types of student?

### Question 10

Do you have any comments about the potential impact of our proposed approach to the Uni Connect programme on individuals on the basis of their protected characteristics?<sup>32</sup>

### Question 11

Do you have any other comments on our proposals for Uni Connect?

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<sup>32</sup> Protected characteristics are defined in Part 11 of the Equality Act as: age; disability; gender reassignment; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; and sexual orientation. See [www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/part/11/chapter/1](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/part/11/chapter/1).

**Question 12**

Are there aspects of the proposals you found unclear? If so, please specify which, and tell us why.

**Question 13**

In your view, are there ways in which the objectives of this consultation (as set out in paragraphs 18 to 22) could be delivered more efficiently or effectively than proposed here?

## Annex A: List of consultation questions

<b>Question 1</b>	To what extent do you agree with the proposed approach to phase three of the Uni Connect programme? Please provide a brief explanation for your answer. If you believe our approach should differ, please explain how and the reason for your view.
<b>Question 2</b>	To what extent do you agree with our proposal to change programme targeting from an area-based approach to one based on identifying the highest priority schools and colleges? Please provide a brief explanation for your answer. If you believe our approach should differ, please explain how and the reason for your view.
<b>Question 3</b>	To what extent do you agree with our proposals to strengthen the focus on further education colleges in the programme? Please provide a brief explanation for your answer. If you believe our approach should differ, please explain how and the reason for your view.
<b>Question 4</b>	Do you have any comments about what the OfS should consider in developing its advice to partnerships on engaging with mature learners studying at Level 3?
<b>Question 5</b>	To what extent do you agree with our proposal that Uni Connect hubs will facilitate access to programmes of outreach for target learners who have already been involved in the programme and would benefit from ongoing engagement? Please provide a brief explanation for your answer. If you believe our approach should differ, please explain how and the reason for your view.
<b>Question 6</b>	To what extent do you agree with our proposals to provide routes through which schools and colleges can find out about and access local outreach provision? Please provide a brief explanation for your answer. If you believe our approach should differ, please explain how and the reason for your view.
<b>Question 7</b>	To what extent do you agree with our proposals to support strategic activity to address local outreach gaps for underrepresented groups? Please provide a brief explanation for your answer. If you believe our approach should differ, please explain how and the reason for your view.
<b>Question 8</b>	To what extent do you agree with our proposed approach to funding and targeting Uni Connect during academic year 2021-22? Please provide a brief explanation for your answer. If you believe our approach should differ, please explain how and the reason for your view.
<b>Question 9</b>	Do you have any comments about any unintended consequences of our proposed approach to the Uni Connect programme, for example for particular types of provider, schools or colleges, or for particular types of student?

<b>Question 10</b>	Do you have any comments about the potential impact of our proposed approach to the Uni Connect programme on individuals on the basis of their protected characteristics?
<b>Question 11</b>	Do you have any other comments on our proposals for Uni Connect?
<b>Question 12</b>	Are there aspects of the proposals you found unclear? If so, please specify which, and tell us why.
<b>Question 13</b>	In your view, are there ways in which the objectives of this consultation (as set out in paragraphs 18 to 22) could be delivered more efficiently or effectively than proposed here?

# Annex B: Technical information on the Uni Connect funding model for 2021-22

1. The proposed approach to funding Uni Connect for the 2021-22 academic year reflects the fact that this will be a transitional year that uses the existing funding methodology from phase two of the programme to allocate £10 million through the 'outreach hubs' methodology, modified to ensure a minimum allocation of £300,000 per partnership, and the remaining balance of funding using the 'targeted outreach' methodology.

## Outreach hubs

2. We propose to continue to allocate funding for the existing nationwide coverage of the 326 English Local Administrative Unit Level 1 (LAU1) regions<sup>33</sup> by Uni Connect partnerships.
3. Learner populations for each area are derived by summing the total number of 15-year-olds in the area using the Office for National Statistics single-year-of-age mid-year estimates<sup>34</sup> for 2014 and 2015, adjusted to the academic year 2014-15. The learner population in each area is split according to Participation of Local Areas (POLAR4) quintile. Learners in POLAR4 quintiles 1 and 2 are assigned a weighting of five while those in quintiles 3, 4 and 5 are assigned a weighting of 1. A total weighted population for each area is calculated by summing the weighted learner numbers from each quintile together.
4. Funding is allocated for each LAU1 region, pro rata to its share of the total weighted population for England as a whole. The allocation for each partnership is the higher of the sum of the allocations for the LAU1 regions covered by the partnership and £300,000. The funding model is iterative, to keep the total cost within the £10 million budget.

## Targeted outreach

5. Partnerships will continue to focus outreach activities in the 997 target areas (Census Area Statistics wards) identified in phase one of the programme. These are geographic areas where young participation in higher education is low in absolute terms, and also relative to attainment at Key Stage 4. The target areas are those assigned both to POLAR3<sup>35</sup> quintile 1 and to Gaps<sup>36</sup> quintile 1 or quintile 2, where the Gaps quintiles account for Key Stage 4 attainment only, or for Key Stage 4 attainment and ethnicity.

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<sup>33</sup> For more details see <https://www.ons.gov.uk/methodology/geography/ukgeographies/eurostat>.

<sup>34</sup> See

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/dataset/s/lowersuperoutputareamidyearpopulationestimates>.

<sup>35</sup> The POLAR classification groups areas across the UK based on the proportion of the young population that participates in higher education. POLAR classifies local areas into five groups (quintiles) based on the proportion of 18-year-olds who enter higher education aged 18 or 19 years old. Quintile 1 areas have the lowest rates of participation: quintile 5 areas have the highest. For more details see [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/young-participation-by-area/](http://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/young-participation-by-area/).

<sup>36</sup> Gaps analysis looks at the level of young participation in higher education relative to the Key Stage 4 attainment by areas across England. This results in a classification of five groups (quintiles) that identifies

6. Learner populations for each target area are calculated by summing learner numbers for five young cohorts, as reported in school records of state-maintained education, aged 15 in academic years 2011-12 to 2015-16.<sup>37</sup> These cohorts form a proxy for the population in school Years 9 to 13 in the academic year 2013-14. A weighting of 1.5 is applied to areas in rural counties or combined counties according to the 2011 rural-urban classification,<sup>38</sup> by multiplying the learner population by 1.5. If a county or combined county has greater than 50 per cent of its total population (all age groups) from rural areas according to the classification, it is considered to be rural.<sup>39</sup>
7. Funding is allocated for each target area, pro rata to its share of the total weighted population for the 997 target areas. The allocation for each partnership is the sum of the allocations for each targeted area covered by the partnership.

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low participation relative to school attainment. For more details see [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/young-participation-by-area/](http://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/young-participation-by-area/).

<sup>37</sup> For more details see the 'NCOP phase two learner population estimates', available at [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/uni-connect/resources-for-partnerships/](http://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/uni-connect/resources-for-partnerships/), which contains data sourced from the Department for Education's National Pupil Database. The Department for Education does not accept responsibility for any inferences or conclusions derived from this data by third parties.

<sup>38</sup> See <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/2011-rural-urban-classification-of-local-authority-and-other-higher-level-geographies-for-statistical-purposes>.

<sup>39</sup> The rural weighting applies to target areas in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, Cumbria, East Anglia, Lincolnshire and North Yorkshire.

## Annex C: Consideration of other approaches to funding outreach provision

1. In developing the proposals for Uni Connect we considered whether there were other ways of supporting higher education outreach that would meet our objectives. There were three alternative approaches that we explored:
  - Allocate funding formulaically to eligible providers to support their institutional access activity. We do not consider that this would deliver our objectives as it would lead to duplication and inefficiency, and would not secure impartial higher education outreach activity. It would not, therefore, be as effective at incentivising collaboration between providers. It would also not be as effective at promoting systematic approaches to engaging schools and colleges across England or contributing to a stronger evidence base around 'what works' in higher education outreach.
  - End the Uni Connect programme in July 2021 and establish an alternative collaborative outreach programme. Considerable time and resource has been invested in developing the infrastructure of the programme, including local relationships with schools and colleges and between members of the partnerships. Establishing this infrastructure anew would cause a significant loss of momentum and therefore we do not consider this an efficient or effective approach.
  - Continue to deliver the programme with no changes to its targeting or approach. We do not consider that this would deliver our objectives as it would be less responsive to findings from the first phase of the programme and changes in programme investment over time. Programme targeting for phases one and two is based on analysis that would need to be updated to reflect changing patterns of progression to higher education if we were to continue with this approach. It is therefore timely to look at alternative approaches that we consider will better meet our objectives.



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