

ALIGNING UNI CONNECT WITH ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION PLANS

This Learning Digest identifies learning points for Uni Connect partnerships in relation to aligning Uni Connect with Access and Participation Plans (APPs). It is based on interviews and a workshop with partnership leads conducted as part of Uni Connect's formative evaluation (2019-2021), commissioned by the Office for Students. It is not intended to provide a definitive approach to aligning Uni Connect with APPs, rather some useful learning points for consideration. This learning digest is produced by Ipsos Mori, from independent research commissioned by the OfS. It does not necessarily reflect the OfS's views or position.

Underrepresentation of some groups of learners in higher education (HE) remains a stubborn problem for most regions. Progress can take time and the recruitment of underrepresented groups can be challenging.

Regional collaboration offers the potential to contribute to significant improvements and accelerate progress in improving representation of some groups of learners.

Effective collaboration depends on partners' buy-in, including their perceptions of the usefulness of the partnership they are a part of.

Aligning Uni Connect activity with Access and Participation Plans (APPs) has been identified as a key success factor in supporting buy-in and reducing duplication, particularly in relation to specific targeted access programmes for underrepresented groups.

With special thanks to all Uni Connect partnerships and particularly to:

- FutureMe, info@futureme.ac.uk
- Glazier, Katy and Michelle Anson, AccessHE part of the London Uni Connect partnership K.Glazier@kingston.ac.uk, michelle.anson@londonhigher.ac.uk, ncophub@londonhigher.ac.uk
- Mike Garnock-Jones, HeppSY, M.Garnock-Jones@shu.ac.uk

Key considerations



MAKING THE CASE FOR ALIGNMENT WITH APPS

- Emphasise the benefits of taking a holistic and joined-up approach to the provision of outreach support for underrepresented learners
- Highlight the potential contribution of such a joined-up approach to the achievement of APP outcomes
- Explain that a holistic and joined-up approach requires collaboration, and sharing of data and intelligence on regional need and existing provision
- Use tangible examples and case studies to demonstrate that by sharing data, student journeys can be tracked, enabling appropriate and timely support to be offered
- Insights generated from shared tracking data can contribute to generating evidence on the effectiveness and impact of different types of activities for different groups of learners



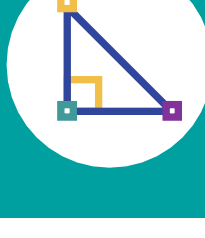
WORKING TOWARDS A PLAN

- Establish a small 'core' group of partners to review and discuss potential alignment between Uni Connect and APPs which can be helpful in bringing initial focus and momentum
- Carefully consider how best to engage senior leaders from universities, colleges and schools in these discussions, whilst emphasising the impartial nature of Uni Connect
- Consider how best to add value to the work of partners (and avoiding competition) through:
 - developing a shared understanding of the needs in the area
 - reviewing data on access and participation of under-represented groups
 - identifying 'gaps' in provision where partners can work together
- identifying what is working in relation to APP outcomes and where Uni Connect can add value through enhancing current activities or creating new activities / collaborations
- Work with partners to collectively review and assess progress towards APPs and the implications of this assessment for targeting future activity
- Use the emerging policy agenda on HE and FE pathways as a framework to inform and support alignment activities
- Once established, widening membership of the initial core group could bring new insights and opportunities for collaboration
- Collating and analysing data from a wider range of partners, such as local authorities, Opportunity Areas (OAs) and LEPS, can contribute to developing a more comprehensive understanding of the profile and needs of learners identified as needing additional support



DELIVERING AND MAINTAINING ALIGNMENT

- Ongoing review and evaluation of progress towards aligning Uni Connect activities to APPs can help identify what is working well / less well, thereby supporting continuous development and improvement of the approach to alignment
- Speaking with 'one voice' to schools and colleges can be helpful in supporting consistent messaging about outreach provision and priorities within the area



Potential issues to be alert to



- Wider stakeholder APP agendas could distract from Uni Connect core priorities
- It may be challenging to find common ground between Uni Connect objectives and multiple regional and national-level APPs within an area
- Perceived competition between universities and colleges for learners could be a barrier to aligning Uni Connect activities with APPs
- Supporting some underrepresented groups could be challenging due to cohort sizes being small and dispersed amongst the wider student population, making it difficult to create and target specific programmes of activity. However, this also creates opportunities for collaboration between Uni Connect partnerships and universities and colleges

What does success look like?



- Uni Connect partnership activities align with APP priorities, thereby contributing to:
 - Building trust
 - Increasing confidence in the impartiality of Uni Connect
 - Greater clarity on roles and responsibilities
 - Progress towards shared strategic objectives
- Improved sustainability of Uni Connect activities
- Available resources are aligned around a shared agenda to maximise value and impact, reducing duplication
- There is improved support available for underrepresented groups through regional collaboration, contributing to improved outcomes for learners

Futureme and the North East Raising Aspiration Partnership (NERAP) case study – working together on shared Uni Connect and app priorities

The context

- The North East Raising Aspiration Partnership (NERAP) is funded by the five universities in the North East (Newcastle, Durham, Northumbria, Sunderland and Teesside)
- NERAP aims to support students to explore higher education opportunities at partner institutions and delivers specific programmes of activities for underrepresented groups as outlined in the OfS APP guidance
- The partnership collectively reviews provision and the needs of underrepresented groups and approves the development of targeted activity

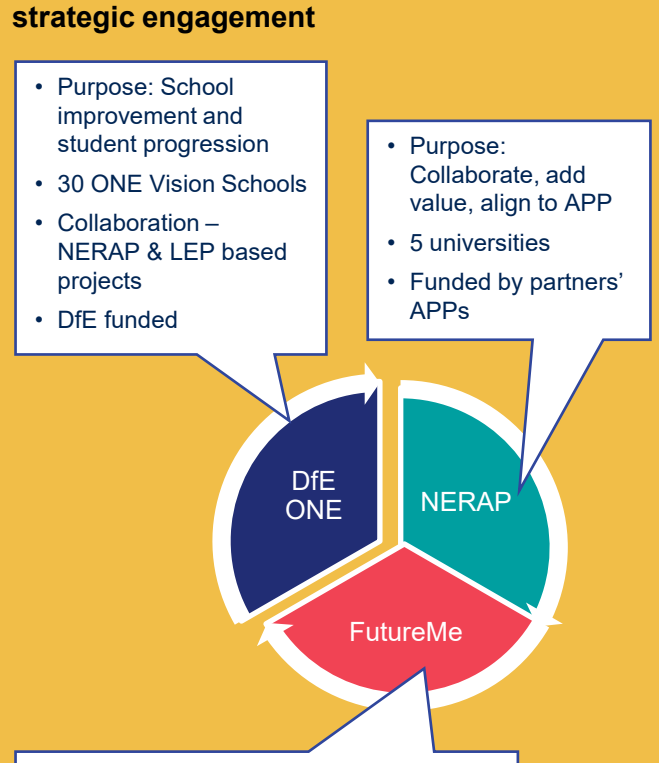
Trying to find opportunities for alignment

- FutureMe reviewed the APPs of each of the individual institutions that make up NERAP to identify shared priorities
- FutureMe then facilitated a discussion with these institutions to ascertain whether the needs of any particular underrepresented groups could be addressed through collaboration

Alignment achieved

- In the north east, there has been a long-standing programme of support for pre-16 students who are care experienced, which is funded through partners' APPs
- Through collaboration with FutureMe, this provision was expanded to include post-16 students
- NERAP and FutureMe are working together to develop a Regional Care Leavers Covenant which will provide support to access, succeed and progress to higher education

Regional collaborative provision and strategic engagement



ACCESSHE FUTURE FOCUS PROGRAMME CASE STUDY – A PROGRAMME SUPPORTING UNI CONNECT AND APPs

In Spring 2021, AccessHE, part of the London Uni Connect partnership, and Creative Futures partnered to deliver the Future Focus programme – a creative education programme for care experienced young people aged 15 – 25 in London. Participants took part in a film-making project covering a range of arts disciplines including scriptwriting, poetry, drama, and postproduction.

How was alignment achieved?

- Creative HEIs with care leaver access targets in their APPs were approached
- Four of AccessHE's partner HEIs were invited to collaborative project planning meetings
- Each HEI designed and delivered a 45-minute, online information, advice and guidance session covering creative careers and pathways, and the support available to, and while at, university
- The online information, advice and guidance sessions were interwoven in the programme, led-between the online creative sessions that were, in-by an artist from Creative Futures
- To recruit to the programme, AccessHE and Creative Futures hosted 'Meet the Artist' drop-in sessions for Virtual Schools and Leaving Care teams, as well as promoting the opportunity via third party organisations and charities who work with care-experienced young people
- Seven young people were recruited from four local authorities, with five young people completing the programme

What was the programme seeking to achieve?

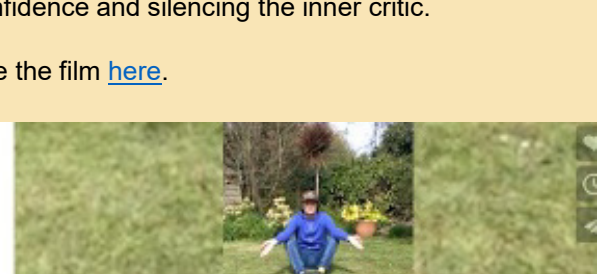
- The programme objectives were to provide care experienced young people with new opportunities to: visit and engage with HEIs; enhance their self-confidence and ambitions; create artistic work; access information on the support available to them through the HEI sector; and strengthen their vocational and life-skills as they prepare to move to independent living

How was the programme delivered?

- The programme was delivered online
- It lasted three months and consisted of creative sessions, information, advice and guidance, an online Easter project and an in-person celebration event
- Participants created a video on their mobile phones which was then edited by a Creative Futures artist

What was the output?

- A final film included young people's creations as well as a collaborative group piece that looked at experiences of, and roles within, the care system. The films also explored themes of identity, displacement, childhood, confidence and silencing the inner critic.
- See the film [here](#).



Future Focus - final film

Feedback questionnaire comments from participants

- "Not only has this experience been comforting but it's been challenging and very fun. I have learned so much, especially not to give up and to let things happen naturally."
- "I enjoyed everything. Because I got to meet new people and do things I had never done before and it was a lot of fun."
- "I'm enjoy for everything like new friends, and I have experience now for making videos."
- "I enjoyed the chance to gain more experience and knowledge about the Acting Industry and I got to make some new friends and an amazing project!"
- "I am very excited as within the short time I've spent in the workshop, I have acquired a new insight to creativity and the creative minds of other young people which I will cherish moving forward in my life."