

## STRATEGIC ENGAGEMENT

This Learning Digest identifies learning points for Uni Connect partnerships in relation to strategic engagement of partners and stakeholders. 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 strategic engagement, rather some useful learning points from partnerships' experiences so far. This learning digest is produced by lpsos Mori, from independent research commissioned by the OfS. It does not necessarily reflect the OfS's views or position.

Strategic engagement of local, regional and national partners is critical to effective delivery of Uni Connect. It involves partnerships working with key stakeholders to identify shared objectives and collaborative approaches to addressing these.

Uni Connect is not delivered in isolation; there are a wide range of stakeholders involved in outreach at a regional level. Effective engagement with key

stakeholders to understand need and existing provision can help ensure a joined-up and coordinated approach, avoid duplication and maximise the value and impact of Uni Connect.

Strategic engagement can incorporate sharing data and intelligence on learner need and existing provision. It can also incorporate joint initiatives with partners and stakeholders.

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

- Beka Avery and Emma Angell Pathways, reach@le.ac.uk
- Gerarde Manley and Sonal Morjaria, Leicester & Leicestershire Enterprise Partnership, Gerarde.manley@llep.org.uk
- Hello Future, hellofuture@cumbria.ac.uk
- Sussex Learning Network, admin@sussexlearningnetwork.org.uk

#### **KEY CONSIDERATIONS**



### Prior to engaging partners and

PRE-ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

- stakeholders, it is useful to have an understanding of the wider landscape of outreach provision within the area (see the Mapping and Gapping Learning Digest in this series for further details)
- dataset (with interactive maps) is a useful source of information on outreach provision across England Identifying and researching

The national outreach coverage

- organisations with similar or shared objectives to Uni Connect as a whole, as well as individual
- informing a targeted approach to strategic engagement Partnerships need to be

partnerships can be helpful for

- knowledgeable about the key issues and challenges prior to any engagement
- Key partners (where they exist locally) could include Local Enterprise Partnerships, Careers and Enterprise Coordinators and Careers Hubs, as well as others who align with the strategic priorities identified by partnerships

#### **STAKEHOLDERS** This can involve identifying existing partner organisations, including

APPROACHES TO ENGAGING KEY PARTNERS AND

relevant networks and partnerships, and asking to join It can also involve inviting key partners and stakeholders to join

Uni Connect governing boards to

- ensure ongoing and continuous engagement at a strategic level Engaging organisations with a long history of outreach activity within the area can be helpful in generating insight and intelligence
- on the key issues faced by different cohorts of learners and how best to reach them Developing relationships with key individuals within partner organisations can facilitate access to wider networks of potential
- basis for engagement and a shared language that is understood across

It can be useful to agree a common

partners and stakeholders

on the Gatsby benchmarks and / or another relevant framework Clarity and transparency on the respective roles and responsibilities

schools and colleges, e.g. based

- of each partner organisation, as well as how available resources will be used, can help build trust In some cases, formalising partner
- roles and responsibilities through "Memoranda of Understanding" can help bring clarity and avoid duplication of effort by different partners – for example, the Gatsby benchmarks can be used to delineate organisational contributions

Objectives can be aligned rather

than identical - for example, Uni

#### **IDENTIFYING SHARED OBJECTIVES** identified as strategic priorities for Shared objectives could be at a Uni



outcomes for underrepresented groups Objectives could also be at partnership level, such as improved outcomes for specific cohorts of learners (such as care leavers or

Connect programme level, such as

improving higher education (HE)

Connect activities can contribute to LEP priorities around addressing skills shortages in key and growth sectors

the area

those from military families) SUSTAINING STRATEGIC ENGAGEMENTS Shared objectives could be at a Uni Connect programme level, such as

improving HE outcomes for

Objectives could also be at

underrepresented groups

outcomes for specific cohorts of young people Regular and ongoing strategic meetings with partners can be helpful to review and sense check

partnership level, such as improved

work of Uni Connect and partners through sharing good practice examples can help increase visibility and credibility, as well as

organisations' objectives and re-

Promoting and showcasing the

iterate / reinforce shared objectives

Uni Connect and other

It can be resource intensive to establish and maintain meaningful engagement with strategic partners

Uni Connect cannot be 'all things to all people' - engagement should

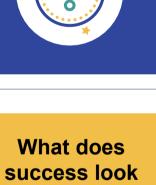
demonstrate the value and impact of strategic engagement sometimes be a barrier to engagement and collaboration

Schools and colleges can

sometimes feel overwhelmed by

multiple approaches from outreach

providers - aligning activities and



**Potential issues** 

to be alert to

strategic importance Perceived competition between providers for learners can

Comprehensive and tailored

shared and evidence-based

existing provision

outreach is delivered to schools.

colleges and learners based on a

understanding of need and gaps in

focus on a few key areas of

- communications can help address

Partners and stakeholders are

regional needs. Solutions are

developed and implemented quickly and easily, especially in

mobilised to identify appropriate

and creative solutions to address

times of crisis such as COVID-19

like?



Leicestershire

- Duplication is avoided and gaps in outreach provision are identified and addressed School, college and learner reach and engagement is increased
- A more joined up, high quality, impartial and locally coherent offer for HE information, advice and guidance / Outreach, careers advice and other relevant local initiatives is achieved

# **WORKING TOGETHER**

Pathways and the Leicester and Leicestershire

Enterprise Partnership (LLEP) collaborated on "Unbox Your Future". • The LLEP curated a package of career-related

• The box was sent to 1,500 young people aged 16-18 who were particularly hard to reach or not in education, employment or training - a physical box was sent to help overcome any potential barriers for those in digital poverty

The package included information from numerous partner organisations on potential career pathways and a 'voucher' with dedicated helpline to call a careers advisor

items and sent this to target individuals across

- enabling learners to "tour" university and college campuses Pathways also provided evaluation support and expertise so that the initiative was evaluated
- Pathways included information and guidance on different choices and a virtual reality headset,



**IMPACT: A survey of students** who were sent the box found that: 75% of students reported that they had received the box, and

of these, 96% said they had

62% of young people said that

opened it

they were happy to receive it, were interested in the contents, and / or felt valued 68% reported that they spoke with someone else about the

box, usually a parent



robustly

"

What worked really well...We put together a VIP voucher which was a call to action for a service that already existed but we wanted to test, 'If we give you this voucher that looks like a high street voucher, and it says you're a really important young person, call this professional, they're ready to talk through careers advice with you.' We actually ended up with over 30 young people, NEET or unknown, cashing in that voucher and it drove traffic to those services. Gerarde Manley, LLEP