End of Phase 2 Uni Connect impact evaluation report to LiNCHigher

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This report presents the findings for Phase 2 of the local evaluation of the Lincolnshire Uni Connect raising Higher Education aspirations project. Funded by the Office for Students, this national initiative is managed locally by the LiNCHigher partnership. Phase 2 ran from August 2019 to July 2021. Delivery of the programme, and therefore the evaluation, encountered much disruption due to the global Covid-19 pandemic which began in the UK in March 2020. The evaluation assessed the impact of the Uni Connect programme on school and college students in Lincolnshire.

The evaluation team, based in the Lincoln Higher Education Research Institute (LHERI) at the University of Lincoln, produced an interim report at the end of the first year of Phase 2 that presented key findings and made recommendations for the second year of the Uni Connect programme (Rose and Mallinson, 2020a). The full report is available on the LHERI website whilst a condensed version was published in the online journal, *New Directions in the Teaching of Physical Sciences* (Rose and Mallinson, 2021). A literature review outlining the programme's theoretical underpinnings has also been published (Rose and Mallinson, 2020b).

Methodology: evaluation approach

The evaluation took a mixed methods approach consisting of both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis. This final report is based on data collected during the second year of Phase 2 (August 2020 to July 2021) through the following evaluation activities:

- An end of year student outcome survey
- Student activity surveys
- Student focus groups
- Semi-structured interviews with programme leads in schools and colleges.

The surveys were available to all LiNCHigher schools to use. The student focus groups were carried out in five schools and one college. The programme lead interviews were conducted in six schools and the three main colleges that LiNCHigher work in partnership with.

All questions, for both of the surveys and the focus groups, were mapped onto the LiNCHigher progression framework (Progressive Framework (thefuturefocus.co.uk)), which is based on the Network for Evaluating and Researching University Participation Interventions (NERUPI) outcomes. Survey and focus group questions were based on the NERUPI question bank. The NERUPI framework was subsequently used to measure impact across all datasets.

The following table summarises the NERUPI framework and associated categories:

NERUPI Framework Five Overarching Aims (www.nerupi.co.uk)	
NERUPI Category A: Know	Develop students' knowledge and awareness of the benefits of Higher Education and graduate employment
NERUPI Category B: Choose	Develop students' capacity to navigate Higher Education and graduate employment
NERUPI Category C: Become	Develop students' confidence and resilience in Higher Education and graduate employment
NERUPI Category D: Practice	Develop students' skills and capacity for student and career success
NERUPI Category E: Understand	Develop understanding through contextualised subject knowledge and attainment raising

End of year student outcome survey

The outcome survey, which was not activity specific, was available to all LiNCHigher schools and ran from May to July 2021. The survey consisted of five questions based on the NERUPI framework outcomes stated above, one per outcome. A total of 757 valid responses from 15 schools were received: 223 (29.5%) from Uni Connect students; 404 (53.4%) from non-Uni Connect students and 130 (17.2%) with no or invalid postcodes. Postcodes are the measure on which a Uni Connect student is identified, therefore for those students where the data were missing it was not possible to positively identify which category the response belonged. The proportion of responses by gender were: 451 (60.8%) female, 255 (32.9%) male, 18 (2.4%) other and 29 (3.9%) preferred not to say.

Student activity surveys

A student activity survey was designed for each of the outreach activities delivered by LiNCHigher under the Uni Connect programme. Surveys were available to all LiNCHigher schools throughout the year to use with their students. Responses were received for 13 different types of activities e.g. Motivational Speakers, Study Skills / Revision workshops and Marginal Gains. A total of 4,029 responses were received from students of which: 681 (16.9%) were from Uni Connect students; 2,183 (54.2%) non-Uni Connect students and 1,165 (28.9%) responses with missing or invalid postcodes. In terms of gender breakdown, of the 97.3% students who answered this question; 1618 (41.3%) were male; 2107 (53.7%) were female; 92 (2.3%) were other and 104 (2.7%) preferred not to say. Data were only reported for activities that received 50 or more responses.

The surveys asked pre- and post-activity questions that directly related to the main intended NERUPI outcome. Whilst all NERUPI outcomes were covered by the 13 surveys, some were more prevalent than others; NERUPI A was covered by one activity, NERUPI B by seven, NERUPI C by three, NERUPI D by two and NERUPI E by one activity. One activity (Personal Statements) covered two NERUPI outcomes (B and D).

Student focus groups

Student focus groups took place with Years 9 to 13 in five schools across the county and AS level students in one college during the summer term (May to July 2021). A total of 32 focus groups were conducted, 15 with Uni Connect students, 15 with non-Uni Connect students and two that were a mix of both. Six focus groups were carried out at each of the five schools and two at the college. The focus groups varied in size from four to eight students. In total, 164 students took part in the focus groups; 85 were male and 79 female (51.8% and 48.2% respectively). Eight of the focus groups were carried out online using Microsoft Teams and 24 were conducted in person, the method was dependent on the school's preference and the Covid-19 situation in each school at the time.

Programme lead interviews

Interviews with school and college leads took place either in person or online using Microsoft Teams, during June and July 2021. The aim of the interviews was to capture their views on how Phase 2 had gone, what they had learnt and what they would take forward from engaging with the programme, as well as how they felt about Phase 3.

Ethics

The evaluation received full ethical approval through the University of Lincoln.

Limitations of the evaluation

The evaluation team were unable to collect data of all types from any one school to use in order to triangulate datasets. The survey responses were lower and less distributed than anticipated, despite numerous efforts to boost the response rate. There was a large percentage of missing or invalid postcodes, especially amongst the student activity survey responses. Missing postcodes ranged from 17.0% to 56.3% depending on the activity. As noted previously, without a postcode it is not possible to identify if students are Uni Connect or non-Uni Connect. Covid-19 restrictions and disruption meant the evaluation team were unable to carry out focus groups in one of the schools as planned due to a last minute cancellation. Focus group participants were not always the students

identified at the outset of focus group preparations due to the Covid-19 situation at the school on the day.

Uni Connect outreach activity was mainly delivered in the summer term due to the pandemic and the subsequent closure of schools to most students between January and March 2021. This followed disrupted delivery in the autumn term (September to December 2020) when most of the activity that did take place was delivered virtually. Consequently, there was little opportunity to assess the medium or long-term impact of outreach activity.

Key findings

The key findings from the evaluation are divided into three sections: those relating to the NERUPI outcomes, general findings and those that are Covid-19 specific.

NERUPI A - Develop students' knowledge and awareness of the benefits of Higher Education and graduate employment:

- The NatWest Challenge had a positive impact on students' understanding of different careers that different Higher Education courses might lead to, whilst the AirProducts Challenge did not achieve its desired outcome in terms of NERUPI A.

- The focus groups found that students in the older year groups (i.e. Years 11 to 13) were more likely to be aware of the benefits of further study. In addition, Uni Connect students were least likely to be aware of the benefits of Higher Education and graduate employment. However, students in the focus groups found campus visits – some of which would have been under the banner of First Steps – beneficial.

NERUPI B - Develop students' capacity to navigate Higher Education and graduate employment:

- More student activity surveys addressed this outcome than any other. Whilst Personal Statements had the most impact on all students in terms of how to write one successfully, both Uni Connect and non-Uni Connect pupils, the data is predominantly for Year 9 students who would have had no previous experience of writing, or knowledge of, personal statements. It was therefore not possible to assess the impact on older year groups.

- Most focus group students had given serious consideration to their future career paths, even in Year 9. However, issues of transition, from both GCSE to college or sixth form and then into university or the workplace, were key concerns for many focus group participants, both Uni Connect and non-Uni Connect alike. Overall, students would like more information, advice and guidance on their next steps as well as more opportunities to hear from those on college courses and from a wider range of careers.

NERUPI C - Develop students' confidence and resilience in Higher Education and graduate employment:

- Motivational Speakers and Marginal Gains both proved effective at addressing NERUPI C as evidenced in both the survey and focus group data. Marginal Gains had the biggest overall impact on self-motivation and recorded the highest score for student engagement of all activities surveyed.

- Focus group students, especially Uni Connect and those in the younger year groups (i.e. Years 9 and 10), reported a lack of confidence in their ability to pass exams and to make up the learning they had lost as a result of the disruption caused by the pandemic, as the two biggest challenges they faced to obtaining the grades required to be accepted onto their chosen course on leaving school.

NERUPI D - Develop students' skills and capacity for student and career success:

- Evidence from both the survey and focus group data shows that participating in category D activities helps students develop the skills they need to succeed. Study Skills / Revision workshops were particularly effective.

- Academic achievement, rather than family, financial or social considerations, was cited as the main difficulty focus group students faced to being able to study further and gain a Higher Education qualification.

NERUPI E - Develop understanding through contextualised subject knowledge and attainment raising:

- There is limited and conflicting survey data in relation to the impact of NERUPI E activities on students understanding through contextualised subject knowledge. However, to have meaningful impact, the timing of when these activities are delivered appears to be crucial and needs to be ahead of any subject-specific decision making, as evidenced in the focus group data.

- Older, non-Uni Connect students were the most informed about the training and courses they needed to take for them to pursue their chosen career.

General findings

- In general, whilst drawn from different student pools, the focus group data (qualitative) supported the survey data (quantitative).

- Evidence from the outcome survey suggests that students that had participated in more activities were more likely to agree with the relevant outcome question.

- There were differences at a school level in the responses to the outcome survey, with students at one or two schools consistently being most likely to agree with the outcome question. Similarly, at the other end of the scale, students from the same two or three schools were the least likely to agree, across all outcome questions.

- Students were more likely to feel they had improved in each of the six skills presented to them in the outcome survey (which included teamwork, communication and revision skills) if they had taken part in one or more activity. The exception was problem solving for non-Uni Connect students.

- Some activity surveys had a high proportion of postcodes either missing or invalid meaning that comparisons between Uni Connect and non-Uni Connect participants need to be treated with caution.

- It is not possible to draw conclusions in relation to impact and the different areas across Lincolnshire due to an uneven distribution of survey responses, for example, there were very few survey responses from schools in the city of Lincoln, even to Motivational Speakers, for which the most responses were received.

- For Uni Connect students, six activities had particular impact - Motivational Speakers, Study Skills / Revision workshops, Marginal Gains, Preparation for Further Education, Personal Statement workshops, and University of… In general, of the students that took part in the focus groups, across all year groups, Uni Connect students were less aspirational and less confident than their non-Uni Connect peers regardless of the outreach activities they had participated in.

- Generally, where an activity had a positive impact it was greater for female students than male students. Conversely when a negative impact was observed it was greater for male students than female students.

- As might be expected, students in the older year groups were more confident, aware and knowledgeable about further study and graduate employment opportunities, regardless of whether they were a Uni Connect or a non-Uni Connect student, than younger year groups. The school they attended was a bigger influencing factor than student type.

- Focus group students were largely unaware that the activities they had taken part in were delivered by LiNCHigher as part of the Uni Connect programme; impact was more indirect

and relational to leadership and the Higher Education and aspirational culture that exists within a school or college.

- Some of the non-Uni Connect student focus group participants exhibited the characteristics of Uni Connect students, i.e. they were the first in their family to consider going to university. This reflects the crude measure of using postcodes to identify students eligible for funding through the Uni Connect programme.

- The Uni Connect programme is most effectively delivered where there is a designated, full-time qualified member of staff, assigned to career development and aspiration raising, as evidenced by both the focus group and outcome survey data. Schools could learn much from the model used at one of the schools where they had a full-time member of staff responsible for careers and the Uni Connect programme with a job title that was more inspiring than simply careers advisor. The data showed that schools without sixth forms were more likely to focus on Years 9 to 11 students, opposed to those with sixth forms where the focus appeared to be on Years 11 to 13.

- Students that were the least engaged, aspirational and informed were from the smallest school which was also the school that had seen the most disruption during Phase 2 of the Uni Connect programme. The school that had experienced at least two changes of identity in terms of academy chains and new Headteachers. It also has the lowest Ofsted rating – inadequate – of all the focus group schools. In addition, due to its size, members of staff take on multiple duties with responsibility for ensuring the delivery of the Uni Connect programme in school forming a small part of the school lead's overall role. It could therefore be argued that the school faced the biggest challenges in terms of raising student aspirations and that this may not be a priority for a school in a state of flux.

- Programme leads valued being part of the Uni Connect programme with most reporting a cultural shift at the school to how further and Higher Education is perceived by both students and staff.

- Although parents play a key role in influencing and encouraging their young people in terms of their future career plans, schools continue to struggle to engage parents in the further and Higher Education discussion. Whilst schools do provide parents with information, both in written form and through open evenings, few, if any, engage with parents in a meaningful way. This is an area that requires further development.

- The specific benefits for schools of engaging with LiNCHigher included the funding, the opportunities it provided for networking with external organisations and the expertise and knowledge of the Area Engagement Officers.

- For the colleges, having a designated officer in place for the last two terms of Phase 2 proved extremely valuable and productive. The logistics of delivering activities to target students was the main challenge cited by college leads.

- In schools, the impact of the Uni Connect programme was mainly measured in terms of positive destination data with all schools, except one, reporting an increase in the number of students applying to go on to study at further or Higher Education.

Covid-19 specific findings

- Students preferred it when outreach activities were delivered in person rather than virtually. In-person activities appeared to have the greatest impact on students in all aspects of the NERUPI framework.

- All students, but especially Uni Connect students, struggled to access lessons during lockdowns and periods of self-isolation whilst learning remotely from home.

- Most students found remote learning less than satisfactory, even when they were able to access lessons online without any difficulty. Many became demotivated and struggled with not being able to ask their teachers for help and clarification if and when they needed to.

- Students preferred to be in school having face-to-face interaction with both their teachers and their peers. They also missed the routine of the school day.

- Some students reported they had lost confidence in their ability to pass exams following lost learning and lack of exam experience.

- The pandemic had a specific impact on Year 9 students when it came to choosing their GCSE options. Many found the remote nature of options and parent evenings, along with a lack of information on what specific subjects would cover, unsatisfactory.

- Many students mentioned poor mental health as a result of the disruption the pandemic caused to their education.

- Some positives did emerge from the disruption caused by the pandemic with some students, especially those in the older year groups, taking the opportunity it gave them to stop, think, and assess whether or not their career choices were the right ones for them.

- Programme leads felt more progress would have been made had it not been for the pandemic.

Recommendations for Phase 3

For schools and colleges

- Members of the Senior Leadership Team and teachers should undertake continued professional development to better understand the needs of students from underrepresented groups.

- All schools should consider appointing a full-time qualified member of staff designated to careers development with an appropriate aspirational title.

- Schools with sixth forms should consider having two career leads: one for Years 9 and 10 and one for Years 11 to 13.

- It would be beneficial for schools to provide additional career resources, workshops and activities, specifically for identified underrepresented students or for students with low aspirations, from Year 9 onwards.

- Careers leads and Senior Leadership Teams would benefit from engaging with other schools, both locally and county-wide, to enable the sharing of best practice.

- Parent Engagement – Engagement with parents can be challenging, and schools and colleges should seek ways to more effectively engage with parents, particularly those of children identified as having low aspirations. For example, looking at ways to have parents engage in certain activities relating to jobs/skills/careers i.e., careers fairs, information events, University and College campus tours.

- In colleges, the Uni Connect programme lead should sit in career development rather than marketing or widening participation.

For Schools, Colleges and LiNCHigher

- Deliver more activities that address NERUPI E, to develop students understanding through contextualised subject specific knowledge and attainment raising. These should also be delivered earlier.

- Ensure Goal Mapping workshops are delivered to students before they make subject-specific decisions e.g. choosing their options at GCSE and A-Level.

- Run Study Skills / Revision workshops earlier in the school year, ideally before mock exams, so that students can improve both their grades and exam confidence.

- Consider delivering the Personal Statement sessions in two parts at two different times. Part 1: 'How to prepare for a Personal Statement' session to be delivered in Year 9 or 10 to ensure

students have time to secure potential content. Part 2: 'How to write a Personal Statement' session to be delivered to older year groups, ideally late spring / early summer, Year 12.

➢ Encourage more campus visits (when permitted) as these are highly valued by students and were the only activity that showed longer-term impact.

➢ Consider additional activities to address student concerns around key transition points in their educational and career journey.

For LiNCHigher and the Governance Board

➢ Conduct a full evaluation of the First / Next Steps programme. There has not been an independent evaluation of this high intensity targeted programme and, due to the pandemic, there was little opportunity to evaluate it in full during Phase 2.

➢ Encourage schools to carefully consider the timetabling of when outreach activities and workshops are delivered in school to maximise impact.

➢ Work more intensely with schools that have multiple challenges to raise student aspirations, build confidence and ensure they are better informed about further and Higher Education opportunities.

➢ Work with schools and colleges to reinforce the importance of collecting postcode data when evaluating activities and make it clear the school postcode should not be used in place of home postcodes.

➢ Include at least one female motivational speaker in the activities programme.

➢ Help schools to engage parents in an active and meaningful way, opening up a dialogue between parents and the school.

➢ For colleges, produce literature that is specific and distinct to that of schools.

For policymakers / funders / the Office for Students

➢ The impact of the pandemic, specifically lost learning, reduced student confidence and the lack of exam experience, especially amongst the current Year 12 and 13s (academic year 2021-22) needs to be taken into consideration when comparing the progress and achievement of these students with other cohorts both now and for the foreseeable future.

➢ Schools that have a high proportion of Uni Connect students should be given additional support as their students are more likely to have been adversely affected by the pandemic.

➢ Fund activities for whole year groups, rather than students living in specific postcode areas, to ensure the programme reaches as many disadvantaged students as possible.

➢ Continue programme funding for Years 9 to 13 throughout Phase 3 and expand to the younger year groups, e.g. Year 8, especially in light of the disruption caused by the pandemic.

Acknowledgments

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References:

Rose, A. and Mallinson, L. (2020a) Interim Findings from the Uni Connect Raising Higher Education Aspirations Evaluation in Lincolnshire, https://cpb-eu-w2.wpmucdn.com/blogs.lincoln.ac.uk/dist/c/8316/files/2020/11/End-of-Yr1-Phase-2-Uni-Connect-Evaluation-Report_Oct20.pdf

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Rose, A. and Mallinson, L. (2021) Interim Findings from the Uni Connect Raising Higher Education Aspirations Evaluation in Lincolnshire, New Directions in the Teaching of Physical Sciences, 16:1 Interim findings from the Uni Connect Raising Higher Education Aspirations evaluation in Lincolnshire | Rose | New Directions in the Teaching of Physical Sciences (le.ac.uk)

1. Introduction

This report presents the findings for Phase 2 of the local evaluation of the Lincolnshire Uni Connect (UC) raising Higher Education (HE) aspirations project. Funded by the Office for Students (OfS) this national initiative is managed locally by the LiNCHigher partnership. Phase 2 ran from August 2019 to July 2021. Delivery of the programme, and therefore the evaluation, encountered much disruption due to the global pandemic (Covid-19) which began in the UK in March 2020.

The evaluation team produced an interim report at the end of the first year of Phase 2, in October 2020[1] that presented key findings and made recommendations for the second year. A literature review outlining the programme's theoretical underpinnings has also been published[2].

The evaluation took a mixed methods approach consisting of both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis (i.e. surveys, focus groups and interviews). The evaluation process followed the University of Lincoln's ethics procedures, in line with the latest British Education Research Association (BERA) guidelines[3].

This final report looks at the impact of the UC programme on Year 9 to 13 students in Lincolnshire and is based on the results of data collected via the following specific evaluation activities during the second year of Phase 2 (August 2020 to July 2021):

- An end of year student outcome survey
- Student activity surveys
- Student focus groups
- Semi-structured interviews with School and College Leads.

Both types of surveys were open to all schools that LiNCHigher delivered outreach activities to under the UC programme. A total of 757 valid responses were received to the student outcome survey from 15 schools. There were 4,029 valid responses to the student activity survey covering 13 different activity types.

There were 32 student focus groups and nine programme lead interviews; six in schools and three in colleges geographically distributed across the county.

The key characteristics of the six schools, at the time the qualitative data was collected, are detailed in Table 1. For the purpose of this report, the names of participating schools and colleges have been anonymised. Therefore, throughout this report, the focus group schools are referred to as School A, B, C, D, E and F and the colleges as College 1, 2 and 3.

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[1] https://cpb-eu-w2.wpmucdn.com/blogs.lincoln.ac.uk/dist/c/8316/files/2020/11/End-of-Yr1-Phase-2-Uni-Connect-Evaluation-Report_Oct20.pdf.

[2] https://cpb-eu-w2.wpmucdn.com/blogs.lincoln.ac.uk/dist/c/8316/files/2020/10/Rose-and-Mallinson-Uni-Connect-2020.pdf

[3] British Education Research Association (BERA) (2018) *Ethical Guidelines for Education Research, fourth edition.* London: BERA. [Available at: https://www.bera.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/BERA-Ethical-Guidelines-for-Educational-Research_4thEdn_2018.pdf]

Table 1: Key characteristics of participating schools

School	Area	% UC	Ofsted rating	Sixth Form	Size
School A	Coastal	64%	Requires Improvement – Jan 2020	Yes	Large
School B	Market Town	61%	Inadequate – Nov 2020	No	Small
School C	Rural North	19%	Requires Improvement – Feb 2019	No	Medium
School D	City	37%	Good – March 2016	Yes	Large
School E	Market town	50%	Requires Improvement – Jan 2019	No	Large
School F	Rural South	52%	No report – Academy 2019, Rated as Good in March 2019	No	Medium

All six schools were receiving a high-level of support from LiNCHigher as part of the UC programme. Both the interviews and student focus groups were conducted either in person or online using Microsoft Teams, depending on the school's preference and the Covid-19 situation in each school at the time.

The evaluation was based around the Network for Evaluating and Researching University Participation Interventions (NERUPI) framework which was used to measure impact across both types of datasets. Table 2 summarises the framework and associated categories.

Table 2: NERUPI Framework

NERUPI Framework Five Overarching Aims (www.nerupi.co.uk)	
NERUPI Category A: Know	Develop students' knowledge and awareness of the benefits of Higher Education and graduate employment
NERUPI Category B: Choose	Develop student's capacity to navigate Higher Education and graduate employment
NERUPI Category C: Become	Develop students' confidence and resilience in Higher Education and graduate employment
NERUPI Category D: Practice	Develop students' skills and capacity for student and career success
NERUPI Category E: Understand	Develop understanding through contextualised subject knowledge and attainment raising

All questions, for both the surveys and the focus groups were mapped onto the LiNCHigher progression framework which is based on the NERUPI outcomes. Questions were drawn from the NERUPI question bank, a toolkit developed in conjunction with several other UC partnerships.

Caveats to this report

The year 2 of Phase 2 evaluation and data collection occurred during disruption caused by the ongoing global pandemic at a time when the situation, particularly in schools, was constantly changing. This presented a number of challenges for the evaluation team and these are explained later in the report. Comparisons within sub-groups (i.e. year groups and gender) should be treated with caution, as whilst there is a wealth of both qualitative and quantitative data, when broken down numbers can be small and/or relate to just one or two schools.

Report structure

The report presents the results of the quantitative and qualitative data separately, before drawing out the joint key findings from Phase 2 of the project. The report concludes with a series of recommendations for LiNCHigher, schools, colleges and policymakers/funders to consider in Phase 3 which began in August 2021 and which is due to run for four years until July 2025.

2. Quantitative findings

Quantitative data were collected through two different surveys:

1. An end of year outcome survey consisting of five questions based on the NERUPI framework outcomes which were not activity specific. This survey was conducted between May and July 2021.

2. Activity surveys designed for each distinct outreach activity LiNCHigher delivered in schools and colleges during the academic year (September 2020 – July 2021), either in-person or virtually. Surveys were available to all LiNCHigher schools and colleges throughout the year.

Both types of surveys were implemented on Jisc, the online survey platform used by the University of Lincoln. Depending on the schools' preference, students completed the surveys either online or as a paper version. LiNCHigher Area Engagement Officers (AEO) and Bishop Grosseteste University (BGU) student ambassadors input the paper versions into Jisc. The surveys are included in Appendix A (end of year outcome survey) and Appendix B (an example activity survey).

2.1 End of year student outcome survey

The end of year outcome survey asked students to provide demographic information (name, school, year group, postcode, gender), which LiNCHigher activities they had participated in, and asked questions addressing outcomes based upon the NERUPI framework drawn from the NERUPI question bank. In addition, students were also asked to select which skills, from a list of six, they felt they had improved on during the school year.

A question was also asked about accessing the LiNCHigher online learning platform. However, less than 20% of respondents reported using the platform and they offered no further information about their experience of using it.

All outcome questions were asked on a five-point scale from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree and were as follows:

- Since September I have developed greater knowledge and awareness of the benefits of HE and graduate employment (NERUPI Category A)

- Since September I have gained a better understanding of the options available to me after I leave school (NERUPI Category B)

- Since September I feel more confident to make decisions about my future for when I leave school (NERUPI Category C)

- Since September I have developed skills I need to succeed in the future (NERUPI Category D)

- Since September I have developed a better understanding of the subjects I need to take and how they link to careers I may be interested in (NERUPI Category E).

Data collection was carried out between May and July 2021. Overall, 757 valid responses were received from students at 15 schools across the county. Of these, 595 had participated in at least one activity during the academic year; 1,442 activity sessions or an average of 2.4 activities per student. The data were cleaned and analysed during August and September 2021. Demographic questions were not compulsory fields and whilst most learners had provided at least their first name, school, year group and gender, there were a large number of either missing or invalid postcodes. As this is the measure on which a UC student is identified, testing impact for UC students over non-Uni Connect (non-UC) is subject to being able to positively identify into which category the response falls. Postcode data were missing or invalid for 130 responses (17.2%). Table 3 below details the

participant information. The response rate for the 15 schools ranged from less than ten from three to over 150 from one school.

Table 3: Participant information – end of year outcome survey

Aspect	Details	Frequency	Proportion
Gender (n=742)	Female	451	60.8%
	Male	244	32.9%
	Other	18	2.4%
	Prefer not to say	29	3.9%
Student (n=627)	UC	223	35.6%
	Non-UC	404	64.4%
Year group (n=756)	Year 9	235	31.1%
	Year 10	205	27.1%
	Year 11	223	29.5%
	Year 12	72	9.5%
	Year 13	21	2.8%

The proportion of identifiable UC students that responded to the end of year outcome survey was 35.6%. This is a larger proportion than the percentage of UC students across all Lincolnshire schools, which is 23.2%. This is unlikely to indicate an overrepresentation of UC students in the aggregated data, it is more likely that it is a reflection of the school composition from which student responses predominately came.

Table 4 below details the outreach activities and the number of students that reported they had participated in that activity. In addition, the NERUPI outcome category most relevant to each activity is shown.

Table 4: End of year outcome survey list of activities, number selecting activity and NERUPI outcome category

Activity	Responses selecting activity	NERUPI outcome
AirProducts (National Enterprise Challenge)	52	A
Apprenticeships talks	104	B
Campus visits (to a university or a college)	26	B
Careers Fair	167	A
Employability workshop	18	B
Exam Revision workshop	68	D
Finance workshop	20	B
First Steps	63	B
Goal Mapping	78	E
Human Utopia	12	C
Introduction to Higher Education workshop	121	A
Let's Pitch It	2	B
Marginal Gains	18	C
Motivational Speakers	154	C
My Perfect University	28	B
NatWest Dream Bigger (National Enterprise Challenge)	36	A
Next Steps	64	B
Preparation for Higher Education	69	B
Study Skills workshop	191	D
Talk the Talk	67	C
None of the above	160	-

In addition to the outcome questions, students were also asked to select from a list, all the skills they felt they had improved on during the school year. UC students were more likely to feel that they had improved in each of the skills, if they had taken part in one or more activity in particular teamwork, study skills and revisions skills. Similarly, non-UC students were also more likely to feel their skills had improved if they had taken part in one or more activity with the exception of problem solving. However, the effect of participating in LiNCHigher activities was more pronounced for UC students (tables 5 and 6 below).

Table 5: Skills improved upon during academic year – UC students

UC students – skill	No activities (n=42)		One or more activities (n=181)	
	Student count	Proportion	Student count	Proportion
Study skills	17	40.5%	96	53.0%
Revision skills	12	28.6%	78	43.1%
Independent research	20	47.6%	97	53.6%
Teamwork	14	33.3%	97	53.6%
Communication	22	52.4%	99	54.7%
Problem solving	15	35.7%	74	40.9%

Table 6: Skills improved upon during academic year – non-UC students

Non-UC students – skill	No activities (n=100)		One or more activities (n=304)	
	Student count	Proportion	Student count	Proportion
Study skills	41	41.0%	140	46.1%
Revision skills	45	45.0%	151	49.7%
Independent research	48	48.0%	154	50.7%
Teamwork	36	36.0%	141	46.4%
Communication	53	53.0%	175	57.6%
Problem solving	39	39.0%	108	35.5%

The responses to the outcome survey questions were compared for nine schools where there were more than 20 responses. There were differences in the proportion of students that disagreed, agreed or who were undecided for each of the five outcome questions, with students at one or two schools consistently being most likely to agree. Similarly, at the other end of the scale, students from the same two or three schools were the least likely to agree, across all outcome questions.

The following five sections relate to each NERUPI framework category A to E and show the responses to each question for both UC and non-UC students by the number of activities participated in (figures 1 to 5). When comparing those students that had taken part in activities relating to each of the categories with students that had not, in nearly all categories students that had participated were more likely to agree with the outcome question. In most cases this increased with taking part in additional activities relating to the specific outcome. For example, UC students had a better understanding of the options available to them after they leave school (category B – Choose) if they had taken part in one category B activity (table 4), 83.7% agreed versus 66.4% of those who had not participated (figure 2). Participating in two relevant activities increased this proportion marginally to 84.6% and it increased again for those who had taken part in three or more to 100%. Although, it should be noted that across all categories the number of students taking part in more than one activity is smaller than the number who have not taken part or taken part in just one.

Category A

UC (n=220)

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
No cat A activities (n=137)		7%	34%	53%	4%
1 activity (n=52)			27%	67%	4%
2 or more activities (n=31)	7%	13%	19%	58%	3%

Non-UC (n=399)

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
No cat A activities (n=262)	3%	8%	30%	48%	11%
1 activity (n=102)	3%	8%	25%	55%	10%
2 or more activities (n=35)	6%	9%	17%	60%	9%

☐ Strongly disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neither agree nor disagree ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly Agree

Figure 1: Since September 2020 I have developed a greater knowledge of the benefits of HE and graduate employment

Category B

UC (n=215)

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
No cat B activities (n=149)		9%	24%	58%	8%
1 activity (n=43)			14%	72%	12%
2 activities (n=13)			15%	85%	
3 or more activities (n=10)				80%	20%

Non-UC (n=396)

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
No cat B activities (n=254)		6%	24%	54%	13%
1 activity (n=85)		7%	22%	54%	14%
2 activities (n=36)			17%	67%	11%
3 or more activities (n=21)				71%	29%

☐ Strongly disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neither agree nor disagree ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly Agree

Figure 2: Since September 2020 I have a better understanding of the options available to me after I leave school

Category C

		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
UC (n=215)	No cat C activities (n=152)		7%	30%	55%	8%
	1 activity (n=52)	8%	10%	27%	50%	6%
	2 or more activities (n=11)		9%	18%	64%	9%
Non-UC (n=397)	No cat C activities (n=302)	4%	9%	31%	46%	11%
	1 activity (n=81)	9%	6%	24%	48%	14%
	2 or more activities (n=14)			29%	57%	14%
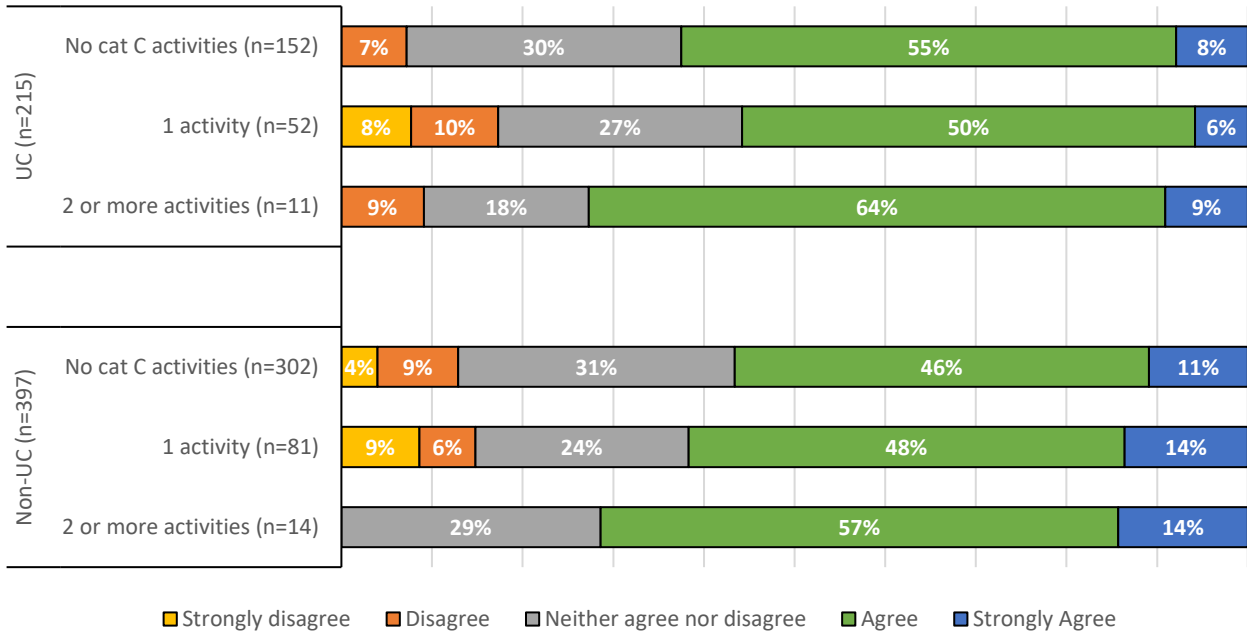
Figure 3: Since September 2020 I am more confident to make decisions about my future

Category D

		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
UC (n=215)	No cat D activities (n=135)	3%	10%	42%	40%	6%
	1 activity (n=70)		7%	20%	63%	9%
	2 activities (n=10)			20%	80%	
Non-UC (n=397)	No cat D activities (n=286)	6%	12%	34%	41%	7%
	1 activity (n=92)	5%	9%	22%	58%	7%
	2 activities (n=14)		11%	26%	58%	5%
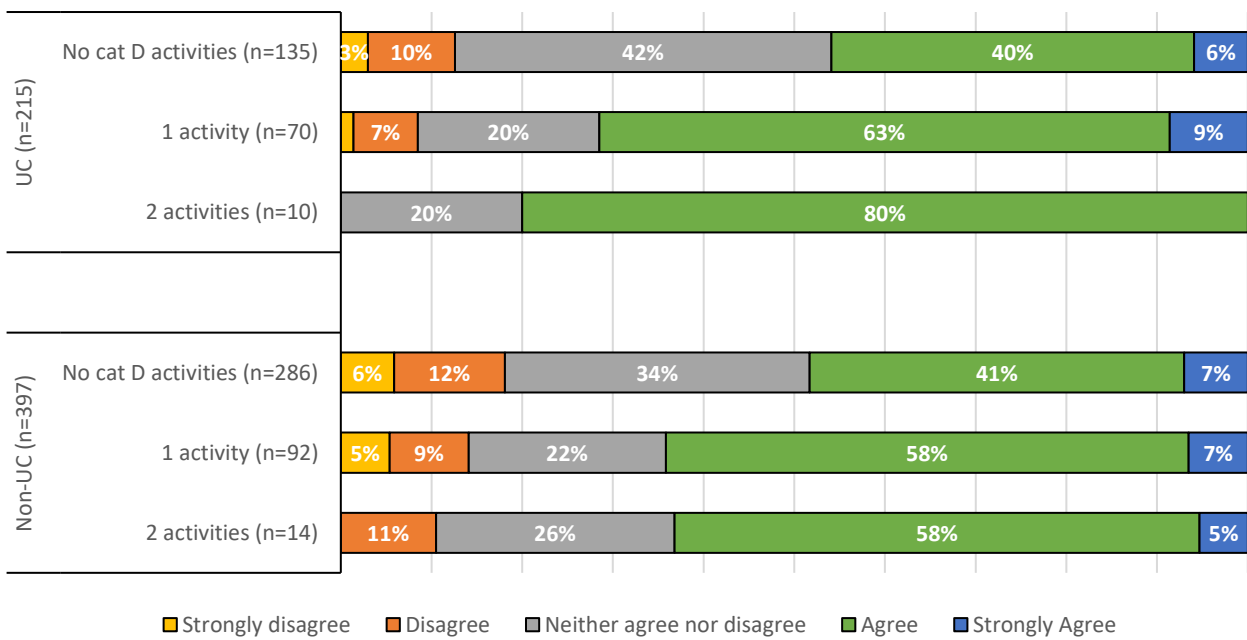
Figure 4: Since September 2020 I have developed skills I need to succeed in the future

Category E

| | Strongly disagree | Disagree | Neither agree nor disagree | Agree | Strongly Agree |
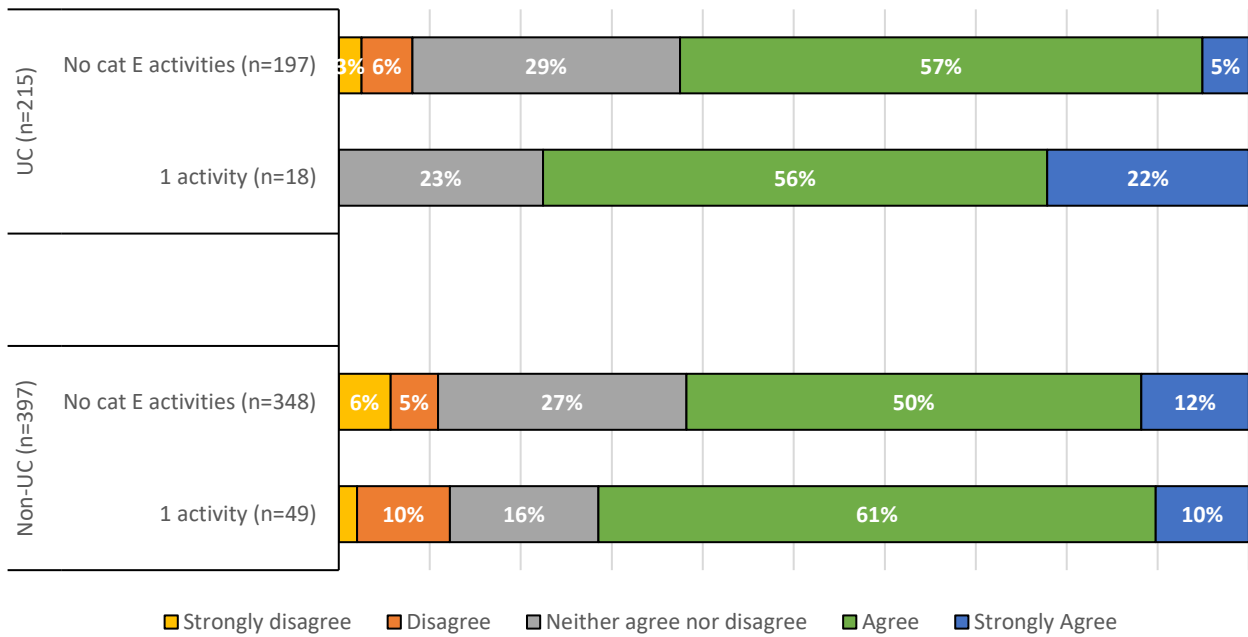
Figure 5: Since September 2020 I have developed a better understanding of the subjects I need to take and how they link to careers

2.2 Student activity surveys

The activity surveys were identical in format, each asked students for demographic information (name, school, year group, postcode, gender) and contained two categories of questions about the activity itself: the first were impact questions, addressing the outcomes based upon the NERUPI framework, drawn from the NERUPI question bank, and the second were questions about students' experience of participating in the activities. All surveys included one impact 'pre-activity' question at the beginning and the same question posed as 'post-activity' at the very end of the survey. The scores for the delivery questions were aggregated for each activity to create a mean score for 'student engagement' (the SE score). All impact questions included a five-point rating scale from 1 = strongly disagree, to 5 = strongly agree. The delivery questions were asked in a similar way using a five-point rating scale with the exception of one question asking the students to rate the sessions overall, which used a one to five star rating.

A total of 4,029 responses were received for 13 activities (minimum of 50 responses) to the activity-specific evaluation surveys. Table 7 below lists the activities, number of responses received and the NERUPI outcome measures.

Table 7: Activity surveys, response rate and NERUPI outcome measures

Activity	Responses	NERUPI framework categories	
		Pre- and post-activity question	Additional impact questions
Motivational Speakers	1,500	C	C
Study Skills / Revision workshops	706	D	-
Personal Statements	420	B & D	C
Goal Mapping	359	E	A & C
Marginal Gains	224	C	C
My Perfect University	188	B	A & C
National Enterprise Challenge	145	A	C & D
Preparation for Further Education	125	B	B
Talk the Talk	87	C	C
Introduction to UCAS	78	B	B
College Employability workshop	73	B	A & E
University of…	70	B	A & C
First Steps	54	B	A & D

Data collection was kept open until the end of the academic year (end of July 2021) in order to maximise the response rates. The data were cleaned and analysed during August and September 2021. As with the end of year outcome survey, demographic questions for the purpose of activity evaluation were not compulsory fields. Most learners provided at least their first name, school, year group and gender, however, there were a large number of either missing or non-valid postcodes. As this is the measure on which a UC student is identified, testing impact for UC students over non-UC is subject to being able to positively identify which category the response falls. Across the 13 surveys, postcode data were missing or invalid for 1,165 responses (28.9%); the proportion between surveys ranged from 17.0% (Marginal Gains) to 56.3% (Talk the Talk).

The median response for the pre- and post-activity questions was assessed using the related-samples Wilcoxon signed-rank test. The number of participants and the magnitude of the difference determine whether the difference in the medians is statistically significant or not. Correlations were

tested using Spearman's rho and a P-value of less than 0.05 was the criterion for statistical significance. The impact was assessed for several groups of students:

1. All students

2. UC and non-UC

3. Female and male students (the number of responses selecting 'other' and 'prefer not to say' were mostly too small to analyse separately)

4. Year group (and school where possible), and

5. Grouped by mode of delivery.

The purpose for the fifth group, mode of delivery, was to assess if there were any differences in the same activity being delivered in-person (i.e. the presenter was physically in the classroom) or virtually (i.e. via Microsoft Teams, Google Classroom etc., either live or pre-recorded). With the exception of the Study Skills / Revision workshops, this was difficult to establish as there were not enough responses for activities that had been delivered using both methods.

Whilst statistical significance is determined based on the difference in the medians, the mean is used in table 8 below to better show the impact of each activity as measured by the pre- and post-activity questions for all students, UC, non-UC, female and male participants. Table 9 details impact by each of the school and college year groups. A mean increase in the post-activity score of more than 0.50 has been taken as high impact, between 0.20 and 0.49 as medium impact and less than 0.20 as low impact. The same negative thresholds are used and are indicated in red on both tables. 'No impact' is recorded if there was no reported change in the pre- and post-activity score.

Table 8: Activity impact by all students overall, UC, non-UC, female and male participants

Activity	Impact				
	All students	UC	Non-UC	Female	Male
Motivational Speakers	+Medium*	+High*	+Medium*	+High*	+Medium*
Study Skills / Revision workshops	+Medium*	+High*	+Medium*	+Low*	+High*
Personal Statements	+High*	+High*	+High*	+High*	+High*
Goal Mapping	-Low*	-Low	-Low	-Low	-Low
Marginal Gains	+High*	+High*	+High*	+High*	+Medium*
My Perfect University	+Medium*	+Medium*	+Medium*	+High*	+Medium*
AirProducts Challenge	-Medium	-High	-High	-Medium	-High
NatWest Challenge	+Medium*	+Low	+High*	+Medium	+Medium
Preparation for FE	+Medium*	+High*	+Medium	+Medium*	+Medium*
Talk the Talk	+Medium*	+Medium	+Medium	+High*	+Medium
Introduction to UCAS	+High*	+High	+High*	+High*	+High*
College Employability workshop	+Low	+Low	+Low	-Medium	+Medium*
University of…	+High*	+High*	+High*	+High*	+High*
First Steps	-Low	-Low	-Low	No impact	-Low

* Related-samples Wilcoxon signed rank test statistically significant *p* < 0.05; + positive impact; - negative impact

Table 9: Activity impact by school and college year group

Activity	Impact							
	Yr9	Yr10	Yr11	L2	Yr12	L3Y1	Yr13	L3Y2
Motivational Speakers	+Med*	+Med*	+High*	No impact	+High*	+High*	+High*	+Low
Study Skills / Revision workshops	-Low	+High*	+Med*		+Med	+High*	+High	+High
Personal Statements	+High*	+High*			+High*	+High*		
Goal Mapping	+Low	-Med*						
Marginal Gains		+Med*		+Low	+High*	+High*	+High*	+Med
My Perfect University	+Med*	+Med						
AirProducts Challenge		-Med						
NatWest Challenge		+Med*						
Preparation for FE		+High*	-Low					
Talk the Talk	+Med*							
Introduction to UCAS					+High*	+High*		
College Employability workshop				+Low		+Med		+Low
University of…		+High*						
First Steps		-Low	No impact					

* Related-samples Wilcoxon signed rank test statistically significant $p < 0.05$; + positive impact; - negative impact

Motivational Speakers (various providers)

The number of responses received for this survey was 1,500 from students attending 13 schools and 3 colleges. The response rate varied from 5 responses from one college to 346 from one school. Talks were delivered by six different motivational speakers to all year groups from Year 9 through to Year 13/College Level 3 Year 2 (L3Y2). Table 10 below details the participant information.

Table 10: Motivational Speakers – participant details

Aspect	Details	Frequency	Proportion
Gender (n=1,472)	Female	747	50.7%
	Male	639	43.4%
	Other	38	2.6%
	Prefer not to say	48	3.3%
Student (n=1,004)	UC	204	20.3%
	Non-UC	800	79.7%
School/college year group (n=1,496)	Year 9	631	42.2%
	Year 10	566	37.8%
	Year 11 / L2	181	12.1%
	Year 12 / L3Y1	64	4.3%
	Year 13 / L3Y2	54	3.6%
Mode of delivery (n=1,490)	In-person	84	5.6%
	Virtually	1,406	94.4%
Speaker (n=1,494)	Paul Hughes	103	6.9%
	David Hyner	63	4.2%
	Luke Staton	355	23.8%
	Stephen Seki	750	50.2%
	Dan Hargreaves	177	11.8%
	John Borland	27	1.8%
	Other	19	1.3%

The pre- and post-activity questions and the additional impact questions were all measured against the NERUPI framework category C (Become). The responses for the pre- and post-activity questions for all students and by UC/non-UC are shown below (figures 6 and 7 below). The impact questions were as follows:

1. Before attending the motivational speaker session, I felt I was self-motivated (pre-) (C)
2. Taking part in the session will help me to improve my resilience (C)
3. Overall, the session has improved my confidence (C), and
4. Having taken part in the session I feel more self-motivated (post-) (C).

The motivational speaker sessions had a statistically significant positive impact on all students overall, UC and non-UC and across all year groups with the exception of College L2 and L3Y1, however the number of responses for these were small (n = 10 and n = 23 respectively) therefore limited conclusions can be drawn from this. Additionally, impact was significant across all modes of delivery. The SE score, was positively and statistically significant, associated with the change in pre-

and post-impact. It was interesting to note that the sessions had greater impact on female students than male students, despite all of the speakers being male. For the additional two impact questions, the sessions had an impact on resilience and confidence for more than half of all students (57.9% and 50.4% respectively). However, within the sub-groups these proportions varied from 34.7% (College L3Y2) to 81.3% (in-person delivery) for question 2 (*taking part in the session will help me to improve my resilience*) and 39.1% (College L3Y2) to 78.0% (in-person delivery) for question 3 (*overall, the session has improved my confidence*).

The impact for UC students was greater than that of non-UC, although both were statistically significant. UC students' SE score was also higher than their non-UC counterparts. Impact was positive and significant for all modes of delivery, however the sessions delivered in-person had the biggest impact. The SE scores followed the same pattern. There were two factors to consider when comparing the mode of delivery: the majority of the in-person sessions were delivered by the same speaker (David Hyner) and his talks were to just one year group within one school. Therefore, it is not possible to say that in-person delivery of motivational talks have more impact than when delivered virtually, it could be that it was the specific motivational speaker that had the impact, or even that the students at the school were particularly receptive.

Of all the year groups, the motivational speaker sessions had the biggest impact on Year 11 students, and they reported the highest SES, however a third of these students received David Hyner's in-person session.
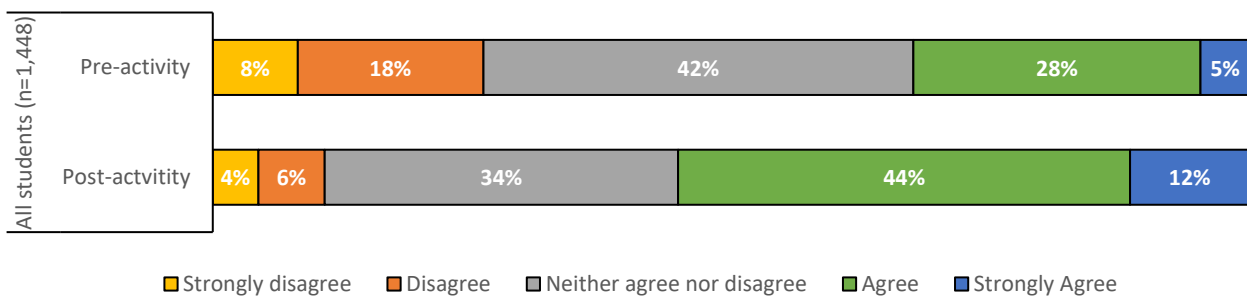
Figure 6: Before taking part in the motivational speaker session I felt I was self-motivated / Having taken part in the session I feel more self-motivated (all students)
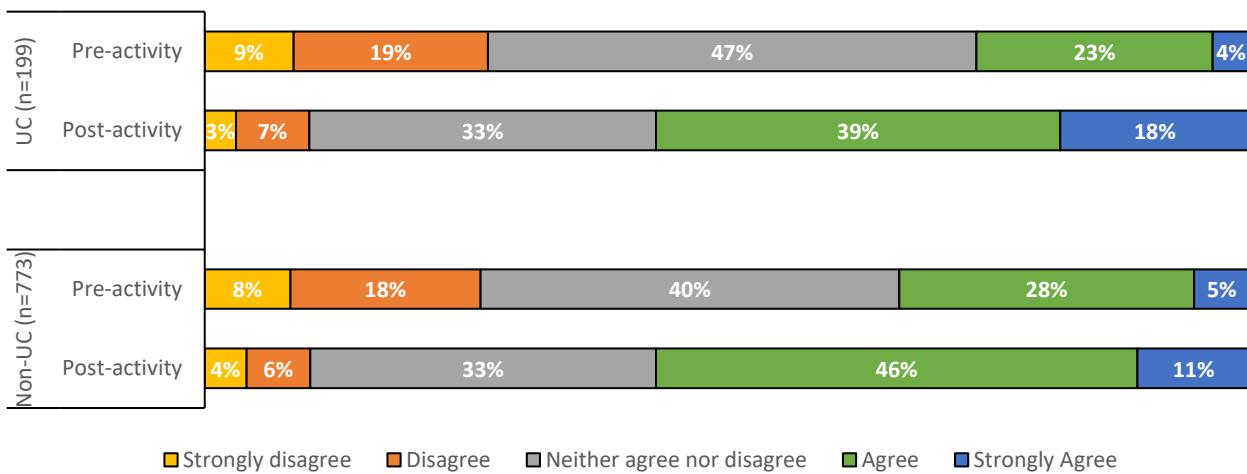
Figure 7: Before taking part in the motivational speaker session I felt I was self-motivated / Having taken part in the session I feel more self-motivated (UC and non-UC students)

Study Skills Revision workshops (various providers)

The number of responses to this survey was 706 and they covered students taking part in eight different Study Skills / Revision workshops delivered by five different providers. Table 12 shows the breakdown by school/college and year group and the participant information is detailed in table 13 below.

Table 11: Study Skills / Revision workshops - participant details

Aspect	Details	Frequency	Proportion
Gender (n=674)	Female	438	65.0%
	Male	211	31.3%
	Other	10	1.5%
	Prefer not to say	15	2.2%
Student (n=542)	UC	177	32.7%
	Non-UC	365	67.3%
School/college year group (n=700)	Year 9	56	8.0%
	Year 10	112	16.0%
	Year 11 / L2	422	60.3%
	Year 12 / L3Y1	90	12.9%
	Year 13 / L3Y2	20	2.8%
Mode of delivery (n=705)	In-person	396	56.2%
	Virtually	309	43.8%
Provider (n=691)	Exam Skills Workshop	85	12.3%
	MAD4Life	251	36.3%
	MADE Training	250	36.2%
	LiNCHigher working from Home	17	2.5%
	BGU Study Skills	71	10.3%
	Other	17	2.5%

The pre- and post-activity questions were measured against the NERUPI framework category D (Practice). The responses for the pre- and post-activity questions for all students and by UC/non-UC are shown below (figures 8 and 9 below). The impact questions were as follows:

1. Before taking part in the workshop I felt confident to organise my study time/exam revision (D)
2. Having taking part in the workshop I now feel more confident to organise my study time/exam revision (D).

The workshops had a positive impact on all students overall and all sub-groups with the exception of Year 9 students whose score for the post- question was lower than for the pre-activity question. All Year 9 students participated in either a MAD4Life Exam Skills or MAD4Life Study Skills workshop. The impact was statistically significant for all students, UC and non-UC, both female and male students and for Years 10, 11 and college L3Y1. The positive impact of both modes of delivery was also statistically significant, however the in-person delivery was slightly more impactful. Comparing within the sub-groups, the biggest impact was for UC students, female students, and for Year 10

students. For almost all the SE scores were positively and significantly associated with the change in the pre- and post-activity impact.
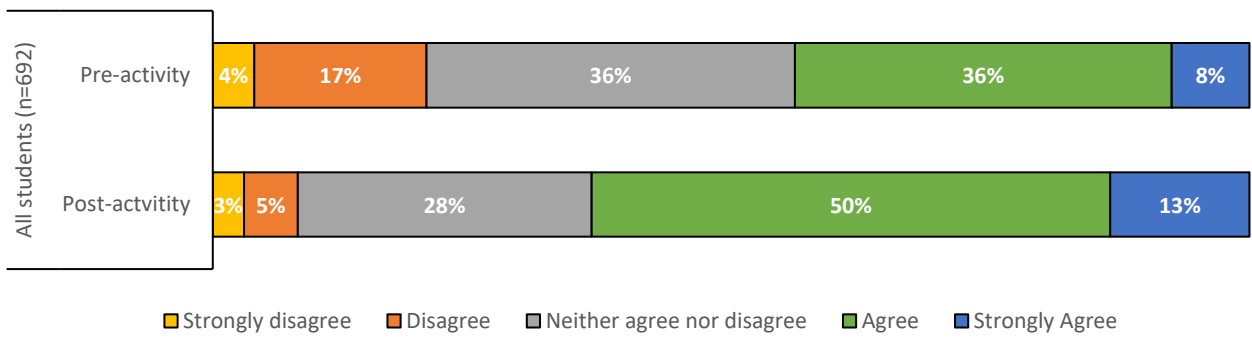
Figure 8: I am confident to organise my study time / exam revision (all students)
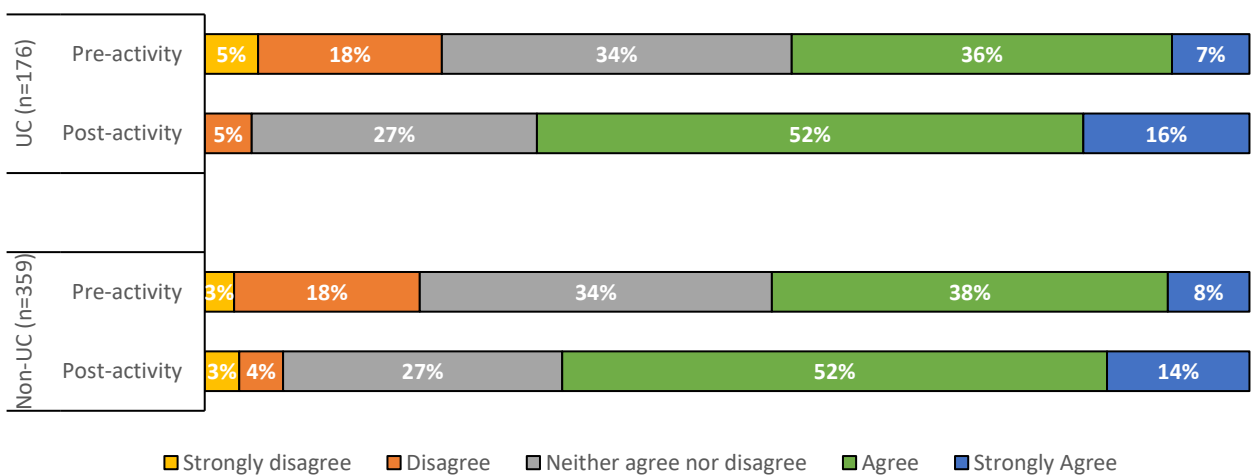
Figure 9: I am confident to organise my study time / exam revision (UC and non-UC students)

Personal Statements (various providers)

The number of responses to this survey was 420 of which 393 were from roughly equal numbers of Year 9 and 10 students at one school. The participant information is detailed in table 12, however it should be noted that no statistically significant conclusions may be drawn for the UC students; this is because the sample size was small (n = 15).

Table 12: Personal Statement workshop – participant details

Aspect	Details	Frequency	Proportion
Gender (n=415)	Female	202	48.7%
	Male	196	47.2%
	Other	12	2.9%
	Prefer not to say	5	1.2%
Student (n=322)	UC	15	4.7%
	Non-UC	307	95.3%
School/college year group	Year 9	189	45.0%
(n=420)	Year 10	194	46.2%
	Year 12/L3Y1	37	8.7%
Mode of delivery (n=415)	In-person	0	
	Virtually	415	100%

The pre- and post-activity questions were measured against the NERUPI framework categories B and D (Choose and Practice) and the additional impact question addressed category C (Become). The responses for the pre- and post-activity questions for all students and by UC/non-UC are shown below (figures 10 and 11). The impact questions were as follows:

1. Before I took part in the session I knew how to write a successful personal statement (pre-) (B and D)

2. Taking part in the session has given me confidence to promote my skills and abilities (C)

3. Taking part in the session has given me a better understanding of how to write a successful personal statement (post-) (B and D).

Of the 15 activities for which survey responses were recorded, Personal Statements had the biggest impact, the mean change in score between the pre- and post-activity question was 0.98. Interestingly, the aggregated 'before' score was the second lowest of all the activities. Whilst the number of responses for Year 12 and college L3Y1 was small (n = 37 combined), the workshop had the biggest impact on these students. The positive impact was statistically significant for all students and all sub-groups of students and was positively and significantly associated with the SE score.

The additional confidence question was less impactful however, less than half of all students agreed that the session have given them the confidence to promote their skills and abilities (49.6%). Comparing the year groups that took part in the sessions however, the proportions are as follows: Year 9 48.4%, Year 10 47.4%, Year 12 90.0%% and L3Y1 59.2%.
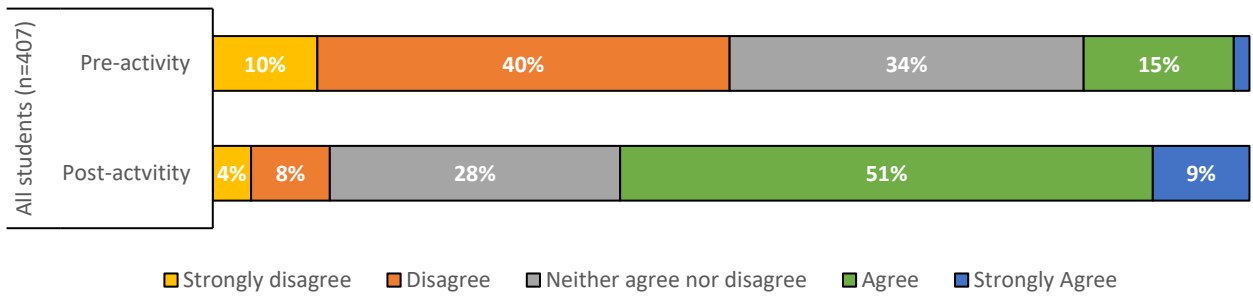
Figure 10: I know how to write a successful personal statement (all students)
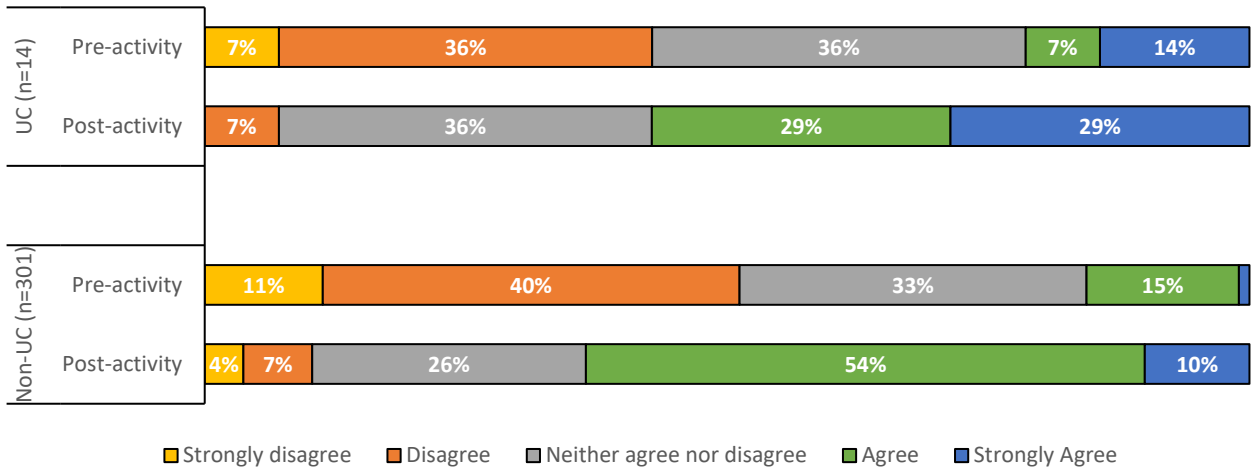
Figure 11: I know how to write a successful personal statement (UC and non-UC students)

Goal Mapping (various providers)

Survey responses for the Goal Mapping workshops were received from 359 students in Year 9 and 10. The participant information is detailed in table 13.

Table 13: Goal Mapping workshop – participant details

Aspect	Details	Frequency	Proportion
Gender (n=348)	Female	201	57.8%
	Male	130	37.4%
	Other	10	2.9%
	Prefer not to say	7	2.0%
Student (n=260)	UC	43	16.5%
	Non-UC	217	83.5%
School year group (n=358)	Year 9	143	39.9%
	Year 10	215	60.1%
Mode of delivery (n=352)	In-person	0	
	Virtually	352	100%

The pre- and post-activity questions were measured against the NERUPI framework category E (Understand) and the additional impact questions addressed categories A (Know) and C (Become). The responses for the pre- and post-activity questions for all students and by UC/non-UC are shown below (figures 12 and 13). The impact questions were as follows:

1. Before taking part in the workshop I had a good understanding of the subjects I need to study to achieve my goals (pre-) (E)

2. Taking part in the workshop has given me a better understanding of the benefits of HE (A)

3. Taking part in the workshop has given me the confidence to make positive choices (C)

4. Having taken part in the workshop I have a better understanding of the subjects I need to study to reach my goals (post-) (E).

Overall, the Goal mapping workshop had a positive impact on Year 9 students and a negative impact on Year 10 students that responded to the survey. However, breaking these data down to UC and non-UC and female and male participants demonstrates that the impact of the workshop was mixed. There was a positive impact on Year 9 non-UC students but a negative impact on UC students. A marginal positive impact was observed when comparing the scores for Year 9 female and male students. Conversely the workshop had a negative impact for Year 10 non-UC students, female and male participants which was statistically significant for the Year 10 male students. Whilst only a small number of UC students from Year 10 responded to the survey (n = 10) the workshop was impactful for them.

More than half of all students agreed that the workshop had given them a better understanding of the benefits of Higher Education and that the session had given them the confidence to make positive choices.
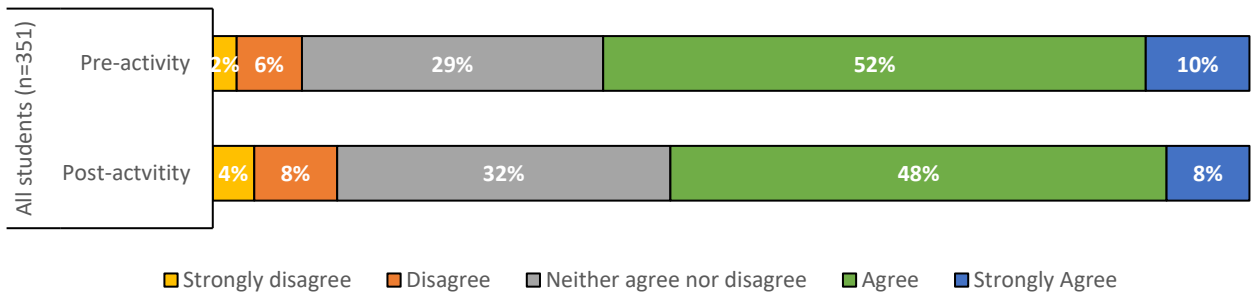
Figure 12: I have a good understanding of the subjects I need to study to achieve my goals (all students)
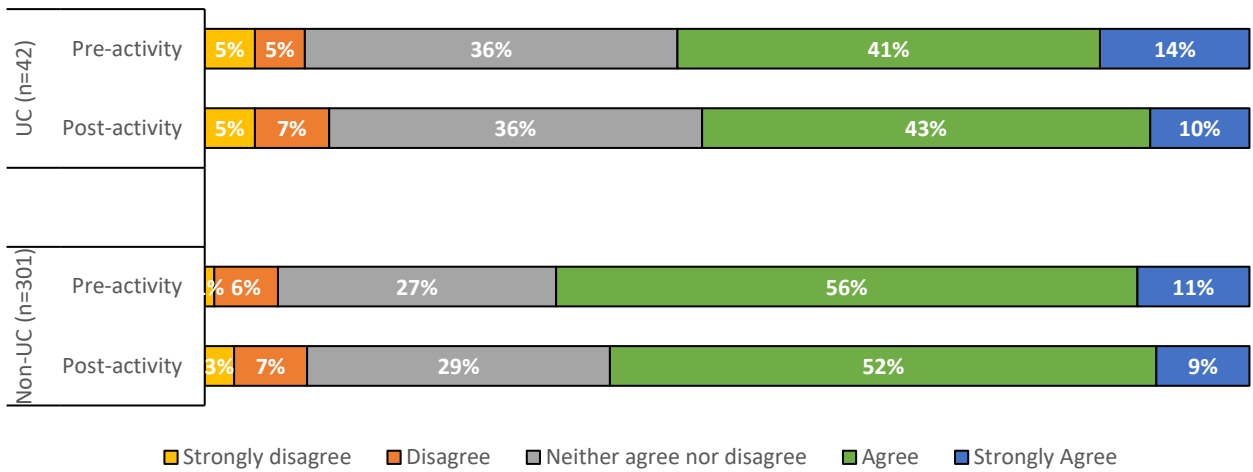
Figure 13: I have a good understanding of the subjects I need to study to achieve my goals (UC and non-UC students)

Marginal Gains (various providers)

The number of responses received for the Marginal Gains survey was 224, the participant information is detailed in table 14 below.

Table 14: Marginal Gains workshop – participant details

Aspect	Details	Frequency	Proportion
Gender (n=222)	Female	125	56.3%
	Male	86	38.7%
	Other	3	1.4%
	Prefer not to say	8	3.6%
Student (n=186)	UC	50	26.9%
	Non-UC	136	73.1%
School/college year group	Year 10	89	39.7%
(n=224)	Year 11/L2	15	6.7%
	Year 12/L3Y1	85	37.9%
	Year 13/L3Y2	35	15.6%
Mode of delivery (n=224)	In-person	0	
	Virtually	224	100%
Provider (n=223)	Luke Staton	91	40.8%
	MADE Training	87	39.0%
	Future Toolbox	22	9.9%
	NLP	13	5.8%
	Other	10	4.5%

The pre- and post-activity questions and the additional impact questions were all measured against the NERUPI framework category C (Become). The responses for the pre- and post-activity questions for all students and by UC/non-UC are shown below (figures 14 and 15). The impact questions were as follows:

1. Before attending the Marginal Gains workshop, I felt I was self-motivated (pre-) (C)
2. Taking part in the workshop will help me to improve my resilience (C)
3. Overall, the workshop has improved my confidence (C), and
4. Having taken part in the workshop I feel more self-motivated (post-) (C).

The responses to the Marginal Gains workshop survey were almost all received from students from two institutions. The workshops had a significant positive impact on all students overall, UC, non-UC, female and male participants and all year groups. Similarly, the SE score was positively and significantly associated with the change in the pre- and post-activity impact for all students and all sub-groups.

The additional two impact questions, questions 2 and 3 above, addressed resilience and confidence. The majority of students reported that the sessions had a positive impact on resilience, the biggest impact was reported by UC students (82.0%). Similarly, the majority of respondents reported the sessions had a positive impact on confidence, however the exception for this question was for the students from Year 10 students from one school (47.7%).

The Marginal Gains workshops addressed the same NERUPI framework category – C (Become) as Motivational Speakers (above), and the questions for both surveys were identical. Both activities had similar, significant impact on students, however for female participants the Marginal Gains workshops had a bigger impact than Motivational Speakers.
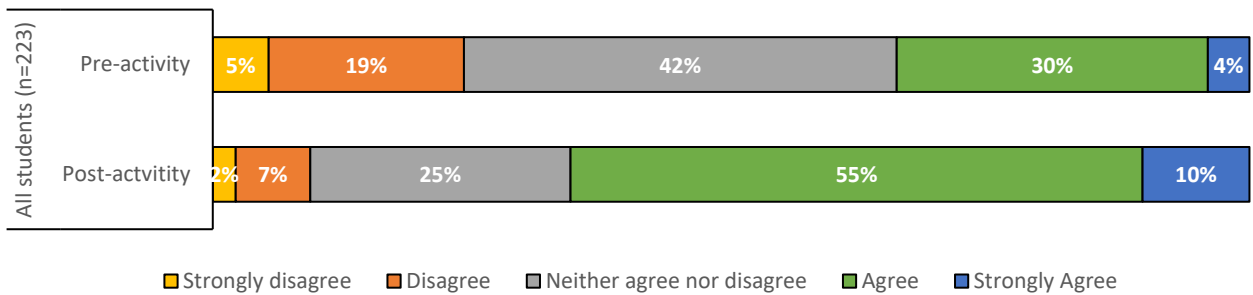
Figure 14: Before attending the Marginal Gains session I was self-motivated / Having taken part in the session I feel more self-motivated (all students)
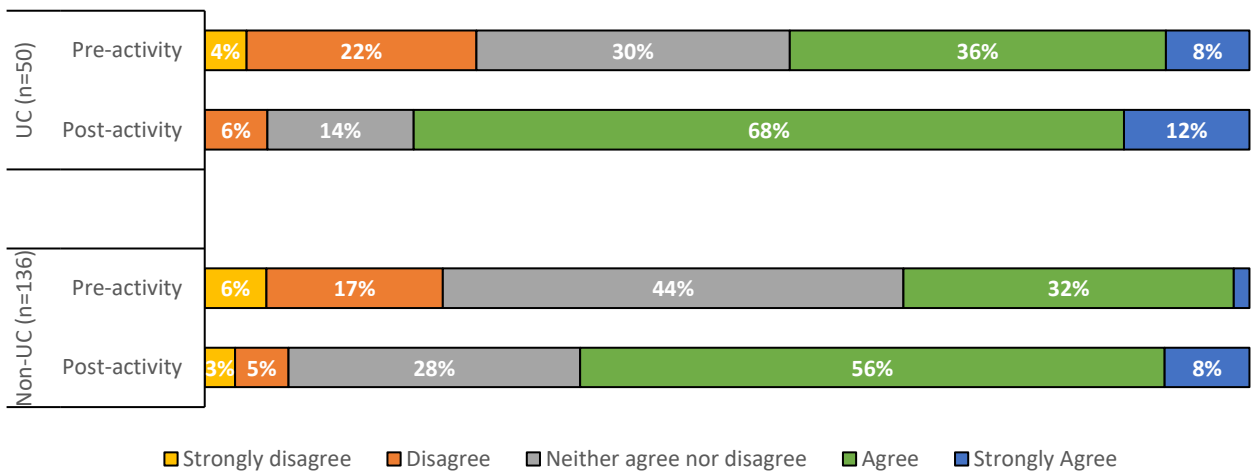
Figure 15: Before attending the Marginal Gains session I was self-motivated / Having taken part in the session I feel more self-motivated (UC and non-UC students)

My Perfect University (Inspirational Learning Group)

A total of 188 survey responses were received for My Perfect University, the participant information is detailed in table 15 below.

Table 15: My Perfect University – participant details

Aspect	Details	Frequency	Proportion
Gender (n=185)	Female	96	51.9%
	Male	84	45.4%
	Other	2	1.1%
	Prefer not to say	3	1.6%
Student (n=109)	UC	15	13.8%
	Non-UC	94	86.2%
School year group (n=184)	Year 9	114	61.6%
	Year 10	71	38.4%
Mode of delivery (n=188)	In-person	188	100%
	Virtually	0	

The pre- and post-activity questions and a further additional impact question addressed the NERUPI framework category B (Choose), the other additional impact questions addressed categories A (Know), and C (Become). The responses for the pre- and post-activity questions for all students and by UC/non-UC are shown below (figures 16 and 17). The impact questions were as follows:

1. Before taking part in the Challenge, I knew what to look for when choosing a university to apply to (pre-) (B)

2. Taking part in the Challenge has improved my knowledge of HE (A)

3. Taking part in the Challenge has helped me to imagine myself as a future university student (C)

4. Taking part in the Challenge has given me a better understanding of how to find out information about HE (B), and

5. Having taken part in the Challenge I have a better understanding of what to look for when choosing a university to apply to (post-) (B).

Measured by the pre- and post-activity questions the challenge had a positive impact on all students overall, UC and non-UC students, female and male participants both year groups. The impact was larger for non-UC students than UC, on female versus male students and on Year 9 students versus Year 10. The number of responses from UC students was small however (n = 15). The SE score was also higher for non-UC, female students and Year 9. The SE score was positively associated with the change in pre- and post-activity score.

The responses to the additional impact questions were mixed. Over half agreed that the Challenge had improved their knowledge of HE: all students 62.7%, UC 73.4%, non-UC 67.1%, female participants 66.7%, male participants 58.4%, Year 9 66.7% and Year 10 57.7%. However, fewer agreed that it had helped them to imagine themselves as a future university student: all students 44.4%, UC 33.3%, non-UC 45.8%, female participants 52.1%, male participants 36.1%, Year 9 43.4% and Year 10 46.5%. The proportion that agreed that the Challenge had given them a better understanding of how to find out information about HE was as follows: all students 54.8%, UC 53.3%,

non-UC 67.0%, female participants 60.4%, male participants 50.0%, Year 9 65.8% and Year 10 38.0%.
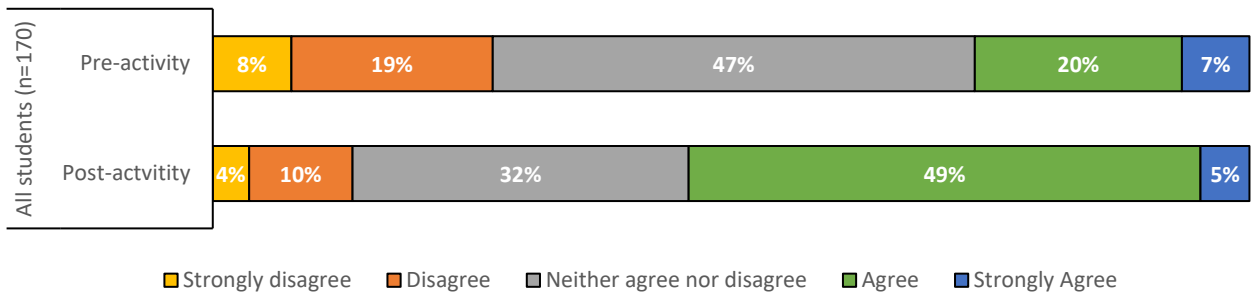
Figure 16: I know what to look for when choosing a university to apply to (all students)
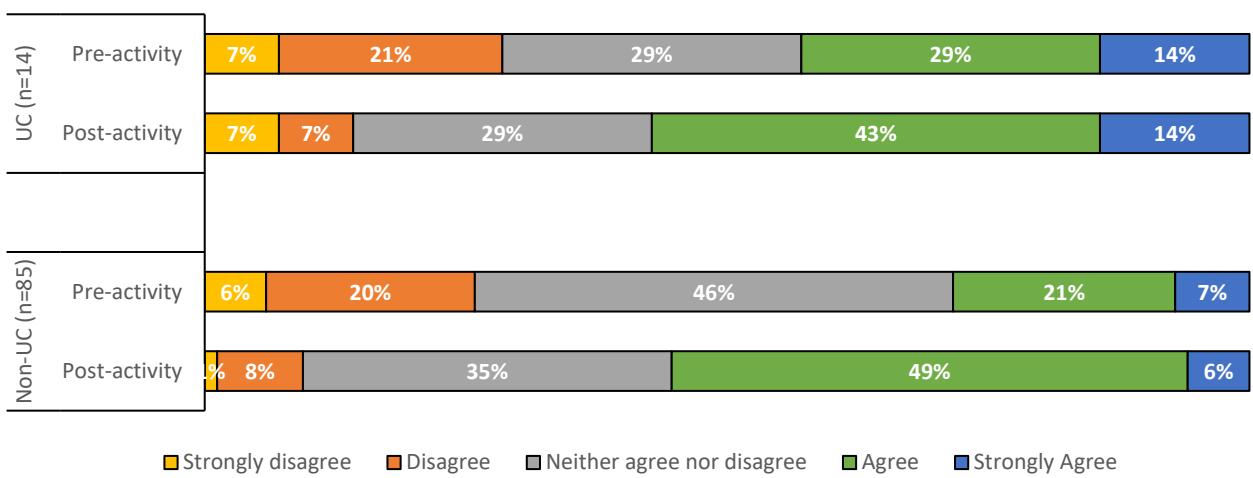
Figure 17: I know what to look for when choosing a university to apply to (UC and non-UC students)

The National Enterprise Challenge (NEC) is provided by the Inspirational Learning Group in partnership with two different national companies: NatWest and AirProducts. A total of 145 survey responses were received from students that had participated in the Challenges. The participant information is detailed in table 16 below.

Table 16: National Enterprise Challenge – participant details

Aspect	Details	Frequency	Proportion
Gender (n=139)	Female	75	54.0%
	Male	55	39.6%
	Other	5	3.6%
	Prefer not to say	4	2.9%
Student (n=88)	UC	41	46.6%
	Non-UC	47	53.4%
School year group (n=145)	Year 10	145	100%
Mode of delivery (n=145)	In-person	145	100%
	Virtually	0	

The pre- and post-activity questions were measured against the NERUPI framework category A (Know), the additional impact questions addressed categories C (Become) and D (Practice). The responses for the pre- and post-activity questions for all students, the NatWest Challenge for UC/non-UC and the AirProducts Challenge for UC/non-UC are shown below (figures 18 to 20). The impact questions were as follows:

1. Before taking part in the Challenge, I had a good understanding of the different careers that different HE courses might lead to (pre-) (A)

2. Taking part in the Challenge has improved my confidence (C)

3. Taking part in the Challenge has given me a better understanding of the benefits of teamwork (D), and

4. Having taken part in the Challenge I have a better understanding of the careers that different HE courses might lead to (post-) (A).

The NatWest Challenge was delivered to Year 10 students from one school whilst the AirProducts Challenge was delivered to Year 10 students at another school, both Challenges were delivered in-person within the respective schools, however the impact of each was quite different.

For the pre- and post-activity question, the NatWest Challenge had a positive impact for all students. The SE score was also higher for the NatWest Challenge. Whilst, the Challenge increased students understanding of the benefits of teamwork (77.0% agreed), it had less impact on student confidence (41.5% agreed).

The AirProducts Challenge was less well received, the score for the post-activity question was lower than before the Challenge. The Challenge appeared to have very little impact on students' confidence (11.1% agreed) and less than half agreed that it had given them a better understanding of the benefits of teamwork (48.2%). It was not possible to compare the impact on UC students as the number of responses were small (n=8). There was very little difference in the impact on female and male students, both had lower scores for the post-activity question than before the challenge, whilst very few felt that the challenge had improved their confidence (female students: 16.7%; male

students: 5.6%). Female students were more aware of the benefits of teamwork than the male students (60.0% vs 38.9%).
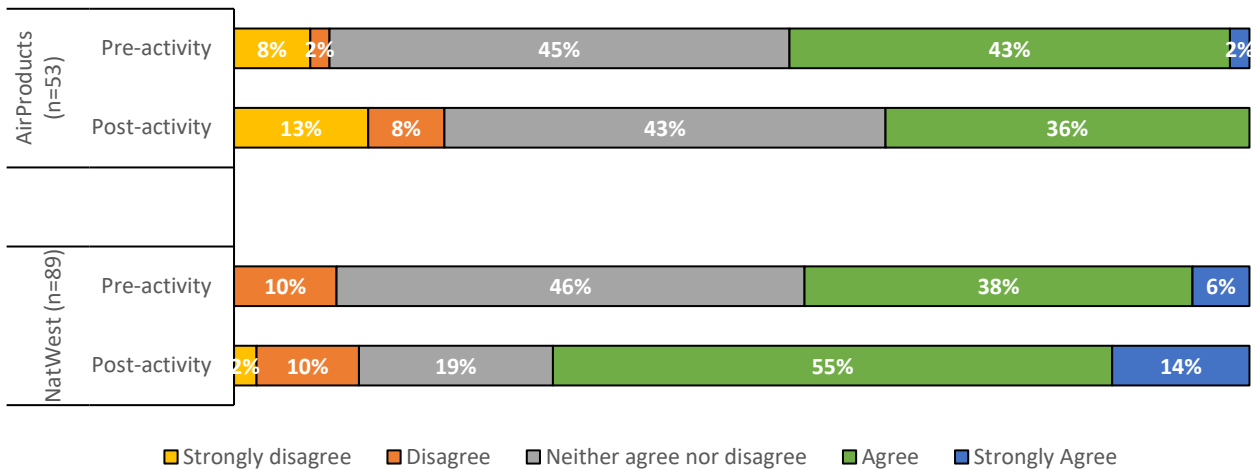
Figure 18: I have a good understanding of the different careers that different HE courses might lead to (all students)

NatWest Challenge
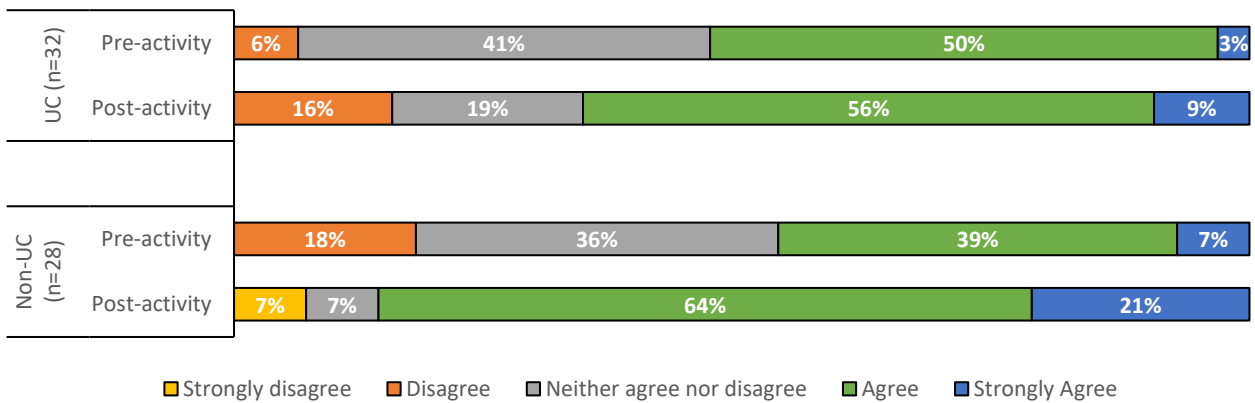
Figure 19: NatWest Challenge – I have a good understanding of the different careers that different HE courses might lead to (UC and non-UC students)

AirProducts Challenge
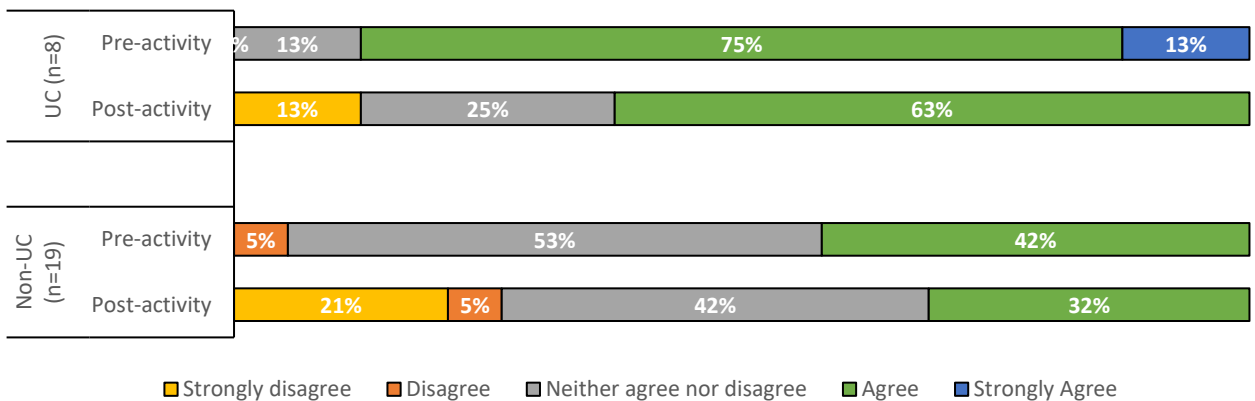
Figure 20: AirProducts Challenge – I have a good understanding of the different careers that different HE courses might lead to (UC and non-UC students)

Preparation for Further Education workshop (various providers)

Survey responses for the Preparation for Further Education (FE) workshop were received from 125 students from two schools. The participant information is detailed in table 17 below.

Table 17: Preparation for FE workshop – participant details

Aspect	Details	Frequency	Proportion
Gender (n=117)	Female	67	57.3%
	Male	41	35.0%
	Other	3	2.6%
	Prefer not to say	6	5.1%
Student (n=90)	UC	46	51.1%
	Non-UC	44	48.9%
School year group (n=125)	Year 10	80	64.0%
	Year 11	45	36.0%
Mode of delivery (n=125)	In-person	80	64.0%
	Virtually	45	36.0%

The pre- and post-activity questions and the additional impact questions addressed the NERUPI framework category B (Choose). The responses for the pre- and post-activity questions for all students and for UC/non-UC are shown below (figures 21 and 22). The impact questions were as follows:

1. Before taking part in the session I had a good knowledge and understanding of what going to FE would be like (pre-) (B)

2. Taking part in the session has helped me understand the options available to me after I leave school (B)

3. The session has given me a better idea of what the first week of FE will be like (B)

4. Taking part in the session has given me the confidence to plan the practical things I need to prepare for FE (B), and

5. Having taken part in the session I have a better knowledge and understanding of what going to FE will be like (post-) (B).

Overall, the workshop had a positive impact, for UC and non-UC students, female and male participants. However, there was a marked difference when comparing the two schools as the workshop was delivered differently. The Year 10 students one school received the workshop in-person whilst the Year 11 students at the other school received their workshop virtually. The Year 11 students reported a lower post-activity score for their knowledge of what going to FE would be like than the pre-activity score. The SE score was positively and significantly associated with the change in the pre- and post-activity impact for all students. There was also a difference in the additional impact questions between the two schools, 86.3% of the Year 10 students agreed that the session had helped them understand the options available to them after leaving school compared with 48.9% of the Year 11 students. A similar pattern was observed for questions 3 and 4 (see above) where the proportions were as follows: Q3. 68.4% Year 10 vs 60.0% Year 11; Q4. 66.3% Year 10 vs 43.1% Year 11.

It is not clear if these differences are a result of the mode of delivery, whether the activity was better received by Year 10 students or whether they were more receptive to the workshop or if the students

in Year 11 were less prepared for the session. Another factor could be that the workshops were presented by different providers: LiNCHigher delivered the session to the Year 10 students and Lincoln College delivered the session to the Year 11 group.
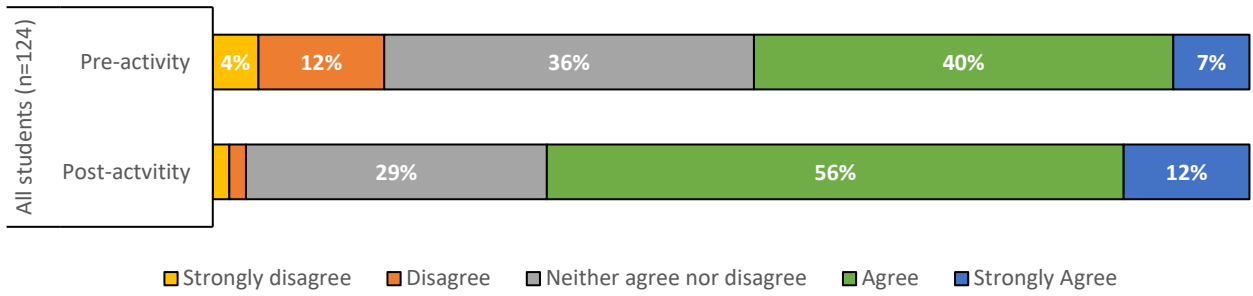
Figure 21: I have a good knowledge and understanding of what going to FE would be like (all students)
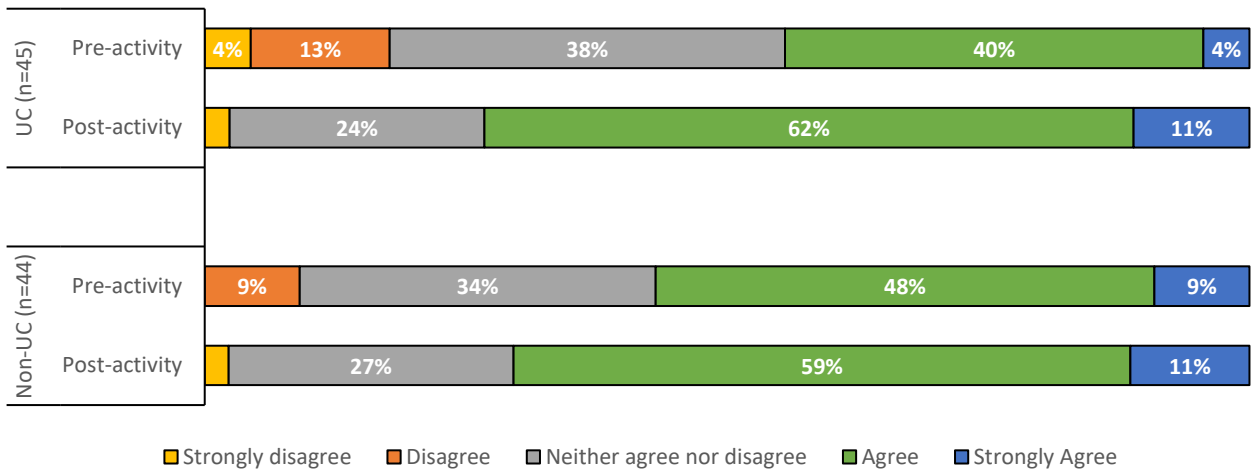
Figure 22: I have a good knowledge and understanding of what going to FE would be like (UC and non-UC students)

The number of responses to this survey was 87, all Year 9 students from one school. The participant information is detailed in table 18.

Table 18: Talk the Talk – participant details

Aspect	Details	Frequency	Proportion
Gender (n=79)	Female	31	39.2%
	Male	41	51.9%
	Other	3	3.8%
	Prefer not to say	4	5.1%
Students (n=38)	UC	20	52.6%
	Non-UC	18	47.4%
School year group (n=87)	Year 9	87	100%
Mode of delivery (n=87)	In-person	87	100%
	Virtually	0	

The pre- and post-activity questions and the additional impact question addressed the NERUPI framework category C (Become). The responses for the pre- and post-activity questions for all students and for UC/non-UC are shown below (figures 23 and 24). The impact questions were as follows:

1. Before attending the workshop I felt I was confident to speak in public (pre-) (C)

2. Taking part in the workshop has helped me to improve my confidence overall (C), and

3. Having taken part in the session I feel more confident with public speaking (post-) (C).

The session had a positive impact on all students overall and all sub-groups of students. However, both the pre- and post-activity scores were the lowest recorded among the evaluated activities. The biggest impact was for female students; however their post-activity score was still in the disagree range (i.e. less than three). Similarly, the post-activity score was in the disagree range for both students overall and UC students.

Less than half of students agreed that the workshop had improved their confidence: all students 37.6%, UC 20.0%, non-UC 47.0%, female participants 33.4% and male participants 47.5%. The SE score was weakly associated with the change in the pre- and post-activity score.
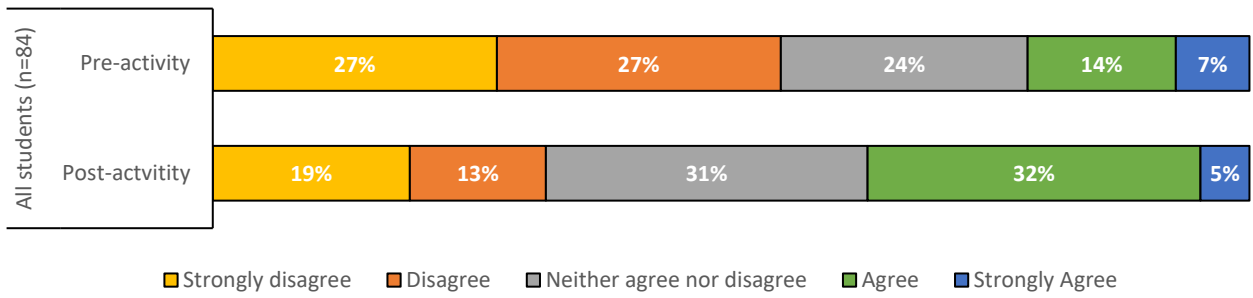
Figure 23: I feel confident with public speaking (all students)
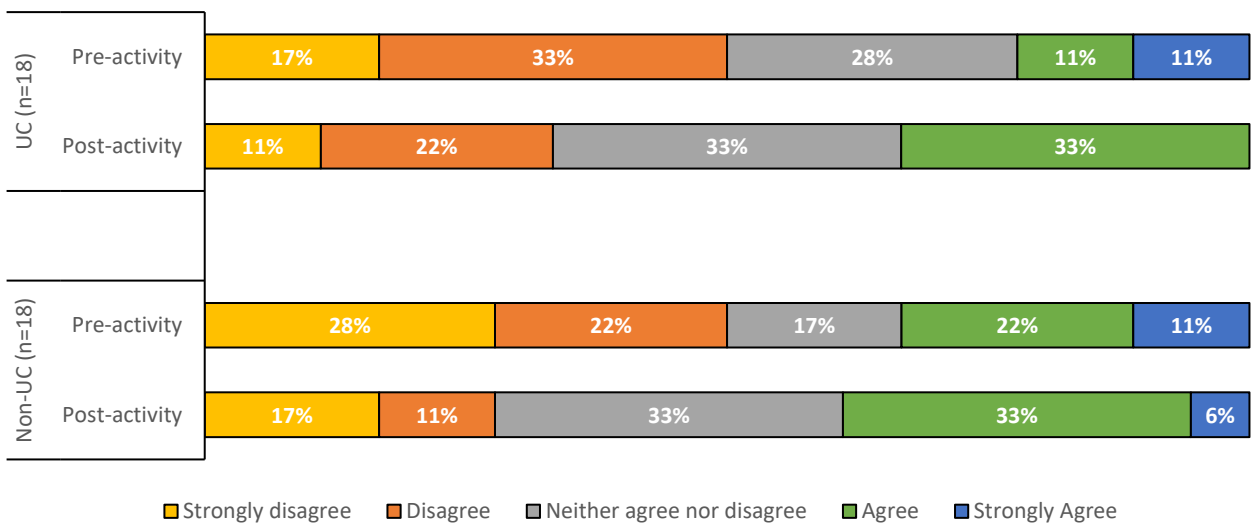
Figure 24: I feel confident with public speaking (UC and non-UC)

The responses to the activity survey for the four workshops in the table 27 below were small. The table summarises the number and characteristics of participants.

Table 19: Additional workshops participant details

Activity	Aspect	Details	Frequency	Proportion
Introduction to UCAS (n=78) (various providers)	Gender (n=78)	Female	53	67.9%
		Male	21	26.9%
		Other	2	2.6%
		Prefer not to say	2	2.6%
	Student (n=66)	UC	4	6.1%
		Non-UC	62	93.9%
	Mode of delivery (n=87)	In-person	0	
		Virtually	78	100%
College Employability (n=73) (various providers)	Gender (n=73)	Female	18	24.7%
		Male	54	74.0%
		Other	1	1.4%
		Prefer not to say	0	
	Student (n=70)	UC	19	27.1%
		Non-UC	51	72.9%
	Mode of delivery (n=87)	In-person	46	64.8%
		Virtually	25	35.2%
University of…(n=70) (LiNCHigher)	Gender (n=65)	Female	37	56.9%
		Male	24	36.9%
		Other	3	4.6%
		Prefer not to say	1	1.5%
	Student (n=48)	UC	25	52.1%
		Non-UC	23	47.9%
	Mode of delivery (n=70)	In-person	70	100%
		Virtually	0	
First Steps (n=54) (BGU)	Gender (n=54)	Female	17	31.5%
		Male	36	66.7%
		Other	0	
		Prefer not to say	1	1.9%
	Student (n=41)	UC	22	53.7%
		Non-UC	19	46.3%
	Mode of delivery (n=54)	In-person	0	
		Virtually	54	100%

All pre- and post-activity questions addressed the NERUPI framework category B (Choose), with additional impact questions covering categories A and E (College Employability workshop, categories A, B and C (University of..) and categories A and D (First Steps). All but one of the workshops had a positive impact, the exception was First Steps where the score for the post-activity question was lower than the pre- question, however this was not statistically significant (due to the low number of responses). There was a bigger impact on non-UC students versus UC and male participants versus female participants for the Introduction to UCAS, College Employability and University of.. sessions. In the case of the College Employability workshop, female participants' post-activity score was lower than pre-activity.

3. Qualitative findings

Qualitative data were collected through student focus groups and individual semi-structured interviews with school and college leads. Student focus groups were carried out at five schools – School A, B, C, D and E and one of the colleges, College 1. Staff interviews were conducted with six schools – the aforementioned plus School F and all three of the colleges. All interviews and focus groups were audio-recorded and transcribed then coded and analysed thematically using the qualitative data analysis software NVivo.

It was not possible to conduct focus groups with students at School F, as originally intended, due to an outbreak of Covid-19 at the school.

3.1 Student focus groups

Student focus groups took place between May and the end of July 2021 with Years 9-13 and AS level students. Six focus groups were carried out at each of the five schools and two at the college. A total of 32 focus groups were conducted; 15 with UC students, 15 with non-UC students and two that were a mix of both UC and non-UC students (table 28 below). The script for the focus groups is included in Appendix C.

Table 20: Distribution of focus groups by year group and student type

Year group	No. of FGs	UC	Non-UC	Mixed
Year 9	9	4	4	1
Year 10	9	4	4	1
Year 11	8	4	4	
Year 12 / AS	4	2	2	
Year 13	2	1	1	
Total	*32*	*15*	*15*	*2*

Focus groups varied in size from four to eight students. In total, 164 students took part in the focus groups; 85 were male and 79 female (51.8% and 48.2% respectively).

Some of the focus groups were carried out online using Microsoft Teams and some were conducted in person depending on the Covid-19 situation in the school at the time. A number of the focus groups had to be rescheduled several times due to the pandemic. Of the 32 focus groups, 24 were conducted in person and eight over Teams. All six of the student focus groups at School A were conducted online via Teams, with the students logged into one laptop computer by their teacher whilst in the classroom. The remaining two Teams focus groups were with Year 11 School E students, *after* they had left school (in June 2021). The students were all in different locations, logged onto their individual devices from home. Due to the school's safeguarding policy there were no visuals and the UC group, which consisted of four male students, had no audio; the session was conducted solely via the chat function available in Teams. The evaluators labelled this session a 'silent focus group'.

On average, students had participated in three LiNCHigher activities during the academic year; two of which could be described as substantial, i.e. more than a talk introducing them to FE or HE. Activities included Goal Mapping, Motivational Speakers, The University of…, Introduction to FE and HE talks, Study Skills / Revision workshops and some elements of the First Steps programme. Most activities, particularly Motivational Speakers which was the most common session attended, were delivered virtually, either live or recorded. In many cases the session had been accessed from home during one of the national lockdowns or whilst students were self-isolating due to a positive Covid-19 case or test within their bubble.

3.2 LiNCHigher activities

How outreach activities were delivered

The majority of LiNCHigher outreach activity for the school year 2020-21 was delivered virtually, either as pre-recorded or live sessions. Students accessed the sessions in a variety of different ways, some via their own personal devices whilst at home either during lockdown or whilst self-isolating and some students were logged on by the teacher as a group in the classroom. Few in-person sessions took place.

Students held mixed views over whether they preferred sessions to be delivered online or in person. In general, years 12 and 13 were more positive about on-line delivery; possibly because of their maturity and ability to carry out self-directed learning to some degree. Advantages of online sessions reported by the students included: it was easy to access; there were fewer distractions; it was more comfortable, for example there was no requirement to get dressed to attend; it was flexible, and it gave some students the confidence to ask questions, by typing into the chat, that they would not have asked if the session had been delivered in person, as the exchange below between two Year 13 non-UC focus group participants at School A illustrates:

Student 1:   Typing your questions is a lot better as well to be honest with you, definitely.

Student 5:   I feel like people felt more confident giving feedback when they were able to type it, than if they were sat in a room with people and having to speak up.

Student 1:   Yeah, definitely. The one with the student finance, a lot of questions were asked…like last year when they did it, they came into school and hardly anyone asked any questions. But because it was virtual there was loads this year.

However, younger students identified a number of disadvantages to online sessions including: the lack of interaction with the facilitator or speaker, making sessions boring or difficult to understand; making learning stressful and frequently there were technical issues, such as poor internet connection and delays, as illustrated in the following focus group extracts:

Lack of interaction

Facilitator: In what way was it boring?

Student 1:   It was because they talked a lot and didn't really explain.

Student 2:   Yeah, and we just sat there

(Yr 9, non-UC, School B)

Stressful:

Student 1:   It was a lot less stress. A lot less stress.

Student 2:   Yeah, it was more stress, but that's what high school's like. The teachers, they don't know what I'm doing or what level you are. So, you were always just like, all right, we are moving on while we may be writing stuff. We don't know how we're actually doing.

(Yr 9, non-UC, School C)

Technical issues:

Student 1:   I think it's easier to talk to them and in general, to understand each other, because sometimes the audio quality isn't the best online. And it's just better to see them face to face.

(Yr 11, non-UC, School B)

Student 8:   It was horrible.

Facilitator: Horrible?

Student 4:	Yeah, because you can't really interact with them and you can't really ask questions. So it just feels like…
Student 8:	You're talking to yourself.
Student 4:	Yeah, you're talking to your screen.

<div align="center">(Yr 10, non-UC, School C)</div>

The majority of the disadvantages cited were identified by students in Years 9, 10 and 11, and all by non-UC students. Whilst the reasons for this is unclear, it could be that non-UC students have higher expectations of their lessons and their teachers than UC students. On balance, given the choice, students, UC and non-UC, preferred face to face delivery.

Which outreach activities students remembered

In general, students were unable to identify or recall much about the specific LiNCHigher outreach activities they had attended over the past school year, even when the activity had only recently taken place or when heavily prompted by their teacher or the focus group facilitators.

Overall, Year 9 students remembered the least with Year 9 UC students at School C remembering the most amongst this cohort. Whilst Year 10 and 11 students did recall some activities from this school year, such as Study Skills / Revision workshops and apprenticeship talks, they were more likely to recall activities from the previous year, pre-Covid-19, for example the Grenade Challenge, My Perfect University, Let's Pitch It, or attending a careers fairs (i.e. the World of Work – WoW – festival). These sessions would have been delivered in school, in person, rather than virtually.

This year, motivational speakers were most likely to have been remembered across all year groups with Year 9 students most likely to recall the talk by Paul Hughes and Year 10 the David Hyner session. This is probably because Motivational Speakers was the most common type of activity to take place in school. The session by David Hyner made a particular impression on one student:

> I don't remember all the specific details, but he had a bunch of figurines in the room of rhinos and cows and he was talking about how cows are the people who are conformists and they're really simple and they don't have the drive that takes people to higher places in life. And it's okay to be a cow but if you want to go anywhere and live your life you should be a rhino which are the bigger people who explore more things.

<div align="right">(Yr 10, non-UC, School D)</div>

Which outreach activities students enjoyed

Most students attending the focus groups enjoyed the outreach activities they remembered. Some of the Year 9 students at School D had enjoyed their recent visit to BGU as part of the First Steps activity. They particularly enjoyed looking around the campus but were disappointed they had not been able to go into any of the buildings because of Covid-19 restrictions. Year 9 and 10 students at School B particularly enjoyed the Aim a Little Higher session with one Year 10 non-UC student commenting that it had been 'very interactive and funny'. When asked why, he responded:

> They were in similar positions that we were in. They spoke about how they did their mocks and how they struggled on it and what subjects they should have done, and I think that connected with a lot of us because some of us are struggling with them and they all came out with pretty high grades. So, it's proof that we can also do that as well.

However, it should be noted that this activity had only taken place a few days before the focus groups and was one of the few sessions that had been delivered face to face in school.

At School E revision sessions were particularly popular with Year 9 non-UC and Year 11 UC students as were finance workshops with sixth form students. One AS level UC college student commented: 'I didn't understand anything before, and now I do.'

Some non-UC Year 9 students at School E enjoyed the Goal Mapping session. Year 10 UC students at the school commented that they had enjoyed the WoW festival and Year 11 non-UC students the Grenade Challenge, both of which had been delivered in the previous school year.

At School C, Year 10 non-UC students had enjoyed taking part in the Let's Pitch it activity which also ran the previous year. They had been looking forward to entering the competition but unfortunately this had been cancelled due to the first Covid-19 lockdown.

The students enjoyed most aspects of the outreach activities they attended. However, some did comment they had found the revision sessions boring or repetitive and, on the whole, they would have liked sessions to have been more interactive. However, the quote below sums up how many students felt about the outreach activities they had attended:

> In terms of the events themselves there weren't really any negatives, they were just good opportunities to give us different viewpoint and different bits of information. So, it is kind of an opportunity that you know we kind of wouldn't have got otherwise, so there are not really any negatives.

(Yr 13, non-UC, School A)

What students learnt from taking part in LiNCHigher outreach activities

Students learnt much from participating in LiNCHigher outreach activities including: the range of options and different routes available to them after they leave school, both in terms further study and career paths; different revision technics; their strengths and weaknesses, confidence; perseverance, how to market their ideas and that going to university was not as expensive as they feared with one AS level UC student at College 1 commenting: 'it reassured me that university debt is not scary.'

Many were surprised by the number of opportunities available to them both in further and Higher Education and in the workplace, especially in their local area. This was particularly true for Year 11 students at School A. One Year 10, non-UC student at School E commented:

> We've learned more about apprenticeships, which for me before wasn't really a thing that I ever thought about, but that kind of told us what it is, and what to expect from it, and what you can do with it.

Year 12 non-UC students from School D were also surprised to learn how many universities there were and the 'vast amount of courses' they have to offer with one commenting: 'we thought we were limited to only a certain few but when we found out how many there were, there's a lot more we can actually do.'

Some students said they had learnt not just about the educational side of going to university but the more practical side, for example living accommodation and socialising.

Students, both UC and non-UC, from across the year groups, reported feeling more confident going into their exams this year having attended revision sessions and learnt new strategies and ways to revise. One student commented: 'it went a lot better than it had done before... the revision session helped' (Yr 9 non-UC, School E). An AS level UC student further commented 'I wasn't very good at studying before, but it helped broaden my different types of revision, so it helped me learn more.'

As a result of attending a motivational speaker session, one Year 9 non-UC student learnt that 'it doesn't really matter where you come from or who you are, you can be successful either way.' Other students also reported they had learnt that if they work hard they can succeed and to 'never give up when you find something difficult' (Yr 11, UC, School B). Some reported that whilst they may face challenges in life or have a specific learning difficult (i.e. dyslexia) that does not mean they cannot succeed if they put their minds to it.

The following focus group extract illustrates some of the learning that took place amongst Year 11, non-UC students at School E as a result of the Grenade Challenge the previous year:

Student 1:   I liked the grenade one as well because it also brought a bit of competition between each other, which would get us prepared for normal life because you have to compete for certain jobs.

Student 2:   Also, time management from it.

Facilitator: Was there anything else you learn from it?

Student 2:	Where it put us out of our comfort zone. We had to do a lot of team building, it made us a lot more open to working with people that we wouldn't normally choose to. And obviously, like I said the time management part of it. We were under like a deadline we had to be doing this and that by a certain time. It gave us a good idea for the future and stuff like that like in jobs where we'd have to think about that.
Student 3:	And also working under stress and that and not to punch your teammates in the face.
Facilitator:	Was there anything else that you enjoyed about the activities, or anything else you learned?
Student 3:	Leadership skills...
Student 2:	Yeah, someone had to take charge of the groups and it was normally the loud ones. When nobody really talks to each other, and you're not really doing anything someone kind of had to go; "alright come on, we need to be doing something, you do that, you do that". And we'd all kind of get it done.

(Yr 11, non-UC, School E)

Other support students would like to help them plan for their future (NERUPI B – Choose)

Students would like more information on, and opportunities for, work experience to help them decide on their future career paths and how to get there. Year 9 students, particularly, would like to have more information on the content of college and university courses as well as what they can do with the course afterwards. Year 9 students were concerned with what happens after they complete their studies, as one Year 9 UC student from School E said: 'I'd like to know what happens after university, like what do you do?' They would also like teachers and career advisors to be more honest with them about how difficult it can be to pass courses and gain the qualifications they need for some careers '…be more honest, instead of them saying "it's actually quite easy", they could be saying stuff like, "Actually, you might struggle with it, but you will get there." Instead of saying it's easy'. (Yr 9, non-UC, School E)

Year 9 students would also like more help when choosing their options, especially the non-UC students at School B (see the Voting 4: Impact of Covid-19 section), more input from specialists working in specific sectors, more visits to universities, colleges and workplaces and tailored learning and work experience for those who have already decided on their career paths. They would also like to know more about local opportunities. For example, one Year 9 non-UC student at School C would like more information on agricultural opportunities available locally. Some students would also value help with practical life skills such as how to manage their finances, get car insurance and so on.

Year 10 students were more concerned about being prepared for their exams, with one student suggesting a revision club would be helpful, and information on what actually happens at key transition points, i.e. moving from school to college or sixth form or from university into the workplace. Overall students would like to be better prepared for their next step. UC Year 10 students at School E suggested a one-or two-week placement in college before their GCSEs so that they can experience exactly what it is like before they go with one student commenting that: 'we just get thrown into the real world'. Another UC student explained why a two-week placement would be a good idea:

Get an idea, if you get accepted to a specific college or sixth form or apprenticeship, if you would like to go. You can have at least a two-week experience so you know what it's like, the surroundings, and then if [you have] any further questions you can get prepared for them instead of at the last minute….

(Yr 10, UC, School E)

In terms of preparing for their next step, students would also like to talk to people already at college about their experiences and, like Year 9 students, have more information on courses and careers in

general, including local opportunities. Some students suggested career advice sessions specifically for those who have not decided what they would like to do after they leave school and more targeted activities for those who have.

Year 11 UC students at School A would like to know more about the logistics of getting to college or university, as they explained:

Student 2:   I think because we are so far out, maybe a bit on travel. About how we would get there, what buses to catch maybe, what trains there are.

Student 5:   Knowing there is a way to get to places that aren't directly in [the town], because especially ones that are like an hour and half, two hours away, even if it is a good school it feels a bit farfetched to try and get there every day.

The non-UC students at School D would have liked career advice to be less focused on the university path with more information on modern apprenticeships and the other options available to them, as the following extract highlights:

Student 1:   A lot of it was very sort of pushing for uni. I think maybe some more talks on apprenticeships or going into jobs or stuff to do with college, a lot of it does seem to be uni which is fine if you want to go into that. But I feel like some more variety…

Student 2:   I think more apprenticeship sort of stuff needs to be spoken about really.

Student 3:   There were small amounts that we got told but if we got told as much on them as we did university then I think that would be better for us. Because it's almost like basically saying, "Uni is the best option for you" when it may not necessarily be the case.

Student 4:   Maybe it wasn't intentional, but it sometimes felt a little bit, "Uni is the option, there's also other things", it seemed very heavily focused on uni which is fine for people that want to go and do that.

Section summary

Whilst the type of outreach activities delivered last year was limited due to Covid-19, meaning there were no large events such as career fairs, national challenges or campus visits, evidence from the focus groups suggests that students are more likely to remember activities when they are delivered in person and when they are substantial in nature, i.e. longer than one hour. Whilst these activities appear to have had a longer-lasting impact that is not to say that the other, shorter, activities will not also have a sustainable impact, especially where students have developed new skills such as how to study and revise effectively (NERUPI D) or knowledge around the opportunities open to them in the future (NERUPI B). Students would also like more opportunities to experience the workplace and hear from those who have already made the transition. Many students, particularly UC students, were concerned with what happens after they take their GCSEs and they would like more information, or have direct experience in advance of, the transition from school to college or sixth form (also NERUPI B). Since most of the activities were delivered in the final term of the school year, and in many cases the last half term, and the focus groups were run shortly afterwards, it was too soon to measure medium or long-term impact.

3.3 Vote 1: How sure are students about what they want to do when they leave school or college (NERUPI B – Choose)

Students were asked to vote on a scale of 1-5 how sure they were about what they wanted to do when they leave school or college. Voting a 1 meant they were very unsure about what they wanted to do next whilst voting a 5 meant they were very sure.

How students voted and why

The majority of students participating in the focus groups either had a very good idea or some idea of what type of career or courses they wanted to pursue with 97% voting a 3 or above when asked how sure they were about what they wanted to do next. Just five students voted a 1 or a 2 indicating that they were very unsure; all five were UC students, three were in Year 10 and two were in Year 12 and from either School C or School D. Three of the five said that they wanted to do something that they enjoyed.

In general, and perhaps not surprisingly, students in Years 9 and 10 were less sure of what they wanted to do after they leave school than those in Years 11, 12 and 13 with more of the students in the older year groups voting a 4 or a 5. The notable exception was the AS level students at the college where no one voted a 5 and just four students across both focus groups voted a 4. However, it should be noted there was slightly less data for the older year groups (14 focus groups ran over the three older year groups against 18 across the two younger year groups).

Year 9 and 10 students at School B – both UC and non-UC – were the least sure of what they wanted to do after leaving school and School C students the most sure. Most School B Year 9 and 10 students voted a 2 or a 3, and whilst some voted a 4, just one student voted a 5. In contrast the majority of Year 9 and 10 students at School C voted either a 4 or a 5 – with seven students voting 5 across the two year groups – and just one student from each year group voting a 3.

Whilst students at School E, School D and School A were more certain overall than those at School B, in each school the non-UC students were noticeably more certain than their UC peers. For example, three Year 9 non-UC students at School E voted 4 or 5 and just one voted 3 opposed to two UC students voting 4 and three voting a 2 or a 3. In Year 10, three non-UC students voted a 5 and just one a 3 against one UC student voting a 5 and four voting a 2 or a 3.

Overall, the data suggests that, across all year groups, the non-UC students are more sure about their future career plans than their UC peers and those most certain are the students at School C. Surety generally increased with age. This would be expected as students have had more time to both think about and research possible career paths and opportunities. They will also have had more career input either directly through the school or via LiNCHigher as part of the UC programme.

Career options

As we have seen, many students had a good idea of what career they wanted to pursue. Table 29 below shows the range of careers being considered by students. The table is set by UC and non-UC and by year group. Note: where a career has been mentioned several times by a year group it is only included in the table once.

Table 21: Career options by year group and student type

Year group	UC students		Non-UC students	
9	Actor Airline Pilot Beautician Chef Crime-scene cleaner Hairdresser IT	Lawyer Mechanic Nurse Police officer Teacher Teacher – PE Vet	Actress Agriculture Author Beautician Business Construction Doctor Engineering English Literature / Human politics at Cambridge Games designer	Join the Navy Music producer Nurse Nursery nurse Production designer (media – TV & film etc) Psychologist Teacher Therapist Work with father – admin Zoology
10	Actor Archaeologist Childcare Construction Creative design Electrician Engineering Joiner Lorry Driver Mechanic	Midwife Police horses Musician Railway industry Solicitor Social worker Sports Teacher	Animal Welfare Business Electrician Engineering Professor of Maths Forensic Science Hairdressing Interior/exterior designer International Freight	Journalism Law Media & IT Nurse Nursery Nurse Psychology Surgeon Teacher Teachers – sports
11	Bricklaying Business Entertainment – holiday clubs & cruise ships Game designing Hair and Beauty Media and travel	Modern Apprenticeship Music Physiotherapist Police force Sports Teaching	Arts and fashion Business Careers Coach Counsellor Hairdressing Human Biology ICT	Journalism Midwife Marine Biologist Personal Coaching Science Travel & Tourism Teacher – Sports
12 / AS	Forensic psychology Health & Fitness Pilot		Counsellor Forensic psychology Health & social care Psychology	RAF Nurse Subway Teaching assistant
13	Teacher – PE Sports	Teacher – primary school	Lawyer Music via UoL	Medicine – Neurosurgery Primary school teacher Sports injuries coach

Year 9 UC students were considering a narrower range of careers than their non-UC counterparts.

It is noticeable that the career choices of the Year 11 students at School A, both UC and non-UC, were significantly lower than those of other schools and year groups. Their career choices included staying on at School A in the sixth form – but no further thoughts – and going to a local Tec. Half of the Year 13 School A UC students were staying on at sixth form for an extra year to complete their studies.

In general, across all year groups, the non-UC career choices were more defined and ambitious than those of the UC students. The career choices of the college UC AS level students appear to be less well thought through and not as diverse as their non-UC peers. In terms of NERUPI B 'Choose' this was more developed and advanced in non-UC students than UC students.

Impact / influence of LiNCHigher activities

Some Year 9 and 10 students reported that LiNCHigher outreach activities had given them a better understanding of what they could do in the future and shown them the range of options and qualifications open to them. One Year 9 UC student at School E commented that as a result they were aware of more courses. Students at School E found the activities most useful with some Year 10 students, both UC and non-UC, reporting it had helped them decide which pathways to take and to understand what grades they would need to be accepted on their chosen courses (NERUPI B) with one Year 10, UC student stating it had 'opened a lot more doors for us'. Some Year 10 UC students at School C agreed that it had helped by 'clearing things up'. Year 11 non-UC students at School E reported the LiNCHigher activities had made them think more carefully about opportunities available to them and whether or not they were making the right decision.

The motivational speakers were particularly influential for the School B Year 11 non-UC students with one student commenting that 'he really got his point across. If you want to do something, then you kind of go and do it. Don't stop anybody from stopping you to do it.'

LiNCHigher UC outreach activities had some, if limited, direct impact on influencing students future career choices. This is likely to be because students are unable to specifically identify the activities that have been delivered under the banner of the programme as their interaction with the programme, this year, was limited due to Covid-19. This is particularly true in the case of Year 9 students who would not have received specific outreach activities under the programme prior to this year. Students at School E seem to have been the most aware of LiNCHigher activities and were most likely to report they had influenced or helped them decide what to do next, to some degree.

Impact of Covid-19

Students were split as to whether or not Covid-19 had impacted on how sure they felt about their future career choices, with some stating that it had had no impact whilst others felt it had impacted significantly. For some it had had a negative impact whilst for others it had been positive.

Positive impact

Students reported several positives to come out of Covid-19 in terms of deciding on their career direction. Some reported that the first national lockdown when schools were closed to all students except vulnerable children of those of key workers, had led to more learning and the opportunity for work experience with the family that would not have otherwise been possible. Others felt it had improved their time-management skills.

Many, mainly non-UC students and particularly but not exclusively the older year groups, felt the time they had spent at home during the lockdown had provided them with a breathing space that had helped them confirm or rethink what they really wanted to do in the future or help them narrow down or refine their options, as these Year 11 non-UC students at School B stated:

Before Covid I didn't really have any idea what I wanted to do, where I wanted to go, what should I do in my future, but after those six months, I believe it really helped me.

At the start of the lockdown, I wanted to do sports, but we had so much time off I got more into studying different countries and helping my little sisters out with their homework, which involved

geography, and I just thought I want to go into that after school and just learn about the whole world and go and see places on my own.

A Year 13 non-UC student at School A had also taken time over lockdown to reassess their career path:

Pre-Covid I was kind of in the same situation that I am in now, where I didn't really know what I wanted to do, but for quite a long while I got obsessed with the idea that I was going to go to stage school. Obviously the first lockdown happened, and Covid happened, and it was quite a traumatic time for me, and it kind of made me asses a lot of things and I have kind of had to go a little bit deeper and think, "Is this what I actually want?" And in the end, I decided that that industry isn't really compatible with the way that I work and the way that my mental health survives best. So, it helped me realise that that wasn't the pathway for me.

For another student, in the same focus group, Covid-19 had reaffirmed their career path:

I think it has just made me more sure about going into medicine, so that I can actually try and make a change. Because I mean, going into a pandemic and seeing so many people pass, if it just makes one person want to make a change even more, whoever wants to go into medicine, because I have a few friends as well who agree.

(Yr 13, non-UC, School A)

Finally, an AS Level non-UC College 1 student commented:

I would say Covid benefitted me a little bit because it gave me more time to think about how I'd like to go in future. Because, I mean, before Covid, I was just going to go straight back to my school's sixth form and then just go on from there, whereas coming to college, I feel like I've got a lot more understanding of different things I can do. And it's given me a lot more time to think about what I actually want to do in life and given me a lot more options. So, in a way, it's benefited me.

However, students reported more negative impacts than positive.

Negative impact

Students reported many negative impacts to their future as a result of Covid-19 including:

- It had slowed down their learning
- A lack of interaction with their teachers
- Difficulties in learning at home, alone
- The cancelling of work experience
- Loss of self-motivation and enthusiasm
- Lack of access to resources and information around careers
- Reduced / no social interaction with their friends
- Mental health issues

AS level students at the college reported an impact on activities outside of class, such as losing a part-time job and not being able to pass their driving test. Year 13 students also reported the latter. Students felt this would have a negative impact on their career plans with one commenting:

I would say so. Just in the structure of things, like, I planned to be able to know how to drive by now, but I can't because of Covid, and because of Covid, I lost my job, which meant then I couldn't afford to do the things that I wanted to do, so that's put a massive setback on a lot of things.

(AS level, non-UC, College 1)

Year 9 students – both UC and non-UC – were the most concerned that they had missed learning and that their grades had suffered as a result, with one student commenting that as a result of Covid-19 they were:

> A bit disappointed because I feel I have lost time where I could have been getting further and further in my learning, so it's set me back a bit, but over the next two years we should be able to make that time back.
>
> (Yr 9, non-UC, School D)

Many other students made similar comments:

> Before Covid my grades were really good and high. Because I didn't have that much revision or time to do much work as we would do in school, my grades just got lower and lower. That's why Year 10 has had been a really hard year for me, because it's really hit…. Because I've been doing self-isolating for most of the time, and we missed half of Year 10, so we didn't really get much of Year 10 business done.
>
> (Yr 10, UC, School E)

> I think if you have a problem with work, it's more difficult to get across, because obviously, you're going back and forth. If you have an issue and you need to show them something, it's a little more difficult to physically showing them.
>
> (AS Level, UC, College 1)

Some students reported suffering from a lack of motivation and low morale, particularly in relation to what their future might look like:

> I just had this huge lack of motivation throughout the whole thing. I just felt dire. I just lost everything that sort of drove me to be able to have a future… With a pandemic like this I sort of had the idea that one faulty screw up in life and everything goes into this discourse where people can't see each other, nothing is possible, etc, and I just had the worst case of am I going to be able to do anything in the future.
>
> (Yr 10, non-UC, School D)

> I think it's just really hard staying motivated whilst you're at home, because it just feels a bit pointless when you're at home because you lie on the bed and are still doing the work.
>
> (AS Level, UC, College 1)

Missing out on work experience, visits to sixth form or college and career days were also reported as negative impacts of the pandemic with online or virtual experiences viewed as less valuable with one student commenting:

> We've been quite restricted in that aspect of actually having that experience… We haven't had the option of that experience because of Covid obviously, but we have been offered an online experience, but at the same time it's not quite the same as being in person and like going in and looking around places and getting a feel for it.
>
> (Yr 11, non-UC, School E)

Year 10 non-UC students at School C commented on their virtually delivered careers day:

Student 1: There was only one career day wasn't there? One Step Up thing…

Student 8: I know but it was horrible because…

Student 1: Because none of it really worked. The first ones that we did, we were on online lessons for two hours. But I think we just had to go on a website and not many people understood what to do. And then, for the last two hours, it was with Miss... Because there were so many people in one Teams group, I feel like it crashed a lot.

However, whilst many students said they had lost a lot of their motivation during lockdown or periods of self-isolation at home, they had found being back in school had led to renewed enthusiasm and motivation for their studies. Many students were determined to work hard to catch up, recognising that they had lost the best part of two years of their education.

Other influences on students' career choices

Students reported a number of other influences on their choice of career with non-UC students having a noticeably wider range of influences than UC students. The main influences for UC students were parents, especially fathers, followed by teachers, friends, neighbours, celebrities and inspirational leaders. One UC Year 11 student at School C explained who had influenced his decision to become a police officer:

> Most of my mates are police officers. I think some neighbours as well are police officers. They were talking to me about what I can do and how good it is, and I wanted to be one since I was young…I knew I sort of wanted to go down that route, but I wasn't properly fixed on it. And obviously once they described what would be happening and what you need and what to do, I just thought I'd do it.
>
> (Yr 11, UC, School C)

Non-UC students were also influenced in their career choice by all of the above and more, such as instructors in the forces cadets, social media and aspire days. Non-UC students were more likely to very specific about who influenced them within each group, for example naming specific teachers or members of their family i.e. brothers, sisters and grandparents. Non-UC students gave many more examples of influencers than UC students.

Students at School E – both UC and non-UC – specifically mentioned how much their careers lead, known as the 'Director of Aspirations', and the new Head Teacher had been both influential and helpful in deciding which career path to take, as the following extract from the Year 11 non-UC focus group illustrates:

Student 1: We have got a lot of support at school like the Inspiration Manager and stuff like that. Formal title 'Director of Aspiration' I believe. But having someone there that we can always go to. I was very unsure for a long time. I'd go to her crying I have no clue what I'm going to do for my future. But we'd sit down, we'd have this massive bit of paper and we'd write everything that I like, everything I'm good at, everything local places offer and what I would have to do for that job. And it really helped having that at school and having a local nearby source of like "lets breathe, let's get it all out on the table. Here are your options". I've got hundreds of books next to me about every way you could go, everything you could do. And having someone you could just go to like at lunchtime but having them in the school it was really lovely.

Student 2: Miss helped me with mine as well. She helped me recently, last week, she helped me get onto work experience with a coaching company, and the person who worked at the coaching company that worked with me influenced me a lot. He's taught me different areas of coaching.

Student 3: Oh yeah, Miss did a career meet with me discussing about my plans and I basically told her yeah I'm just going to get a job with good paying money and all that and she said you know you can have other options you know it's not all about money, do something you enjoy, where you're not gonna be miserable.

(Yr 11, non-UC, School E)

The new Head Teacher had also impacted on some of the students' behaviour and attitude as this Year 10 student explained:

> Ever since [the new Head Teacher] joined this school he's changed it around a lot, and I've noticed a big difference even with me, before he joined I was naughty and all that, and I didn't focus, and I didn't care about my grades. But as soon as he joined, my grades went up.
>
> (Yr 10, UC, School E)

3.4 Voting 2: How much students know about the courses or training that will help them with what they want to do next (NERUPI E – Understand)

How students voted and why

Students were split around the issue of how much they knew about the courses or training that would help them with their chosen career path. Even where students were certain about what they wanted to do they did not necessarily know everything about the courses offered that would help them reach their goal. However, most students voted either at the lower (1 or 2) or the upper (4 or 5) end of the scale with very few voting in the middle (3).

Those who voted at the lower end of the scale were, in the main, still undecided about what career they wanted to pursue, or they had not yet researched the courses they would need to apply to, or they wanted more information about the course content, as one student explained:

> I've gone for a 2 because I did have an interview with the A-level place, but they didn't tell me what the course would be. They didn't tell me any information about what we're going to do, the stuff you're going to learn about, all the activities you're going to do.
>
> (Yr 11, non-UC, School B)

School D students – both UC and non-UC – were the most likely to vote at the lower end of the scale. All of their Year 9 UC students voted a 1 or a 2 and the majority of the Year 10 students (6 out of 7 non-UC and 4 out of 6 UC students) voted this way. Most of the School B Year 9 students, UC and non-UC, also voted a 1 or 2. Comments from School D students illustrate how they were feeling about choosing courses and the information they had been given so far:

Yr 10, School D non-UC students:

> This school… They try to give us all the information we need, but they never ask us what specific field we wish to go into and they just sort of throw us into the situation of, "Okay, here's five completely unrelated things to do with work experience in fields none of you will probably ever go into. Read them and then we'll do this again in like a year." And that's all we ever get.

> We just haven't talked specifically about how to get to do stuff, but I presume later on in Year 11 and later years we'll get told more.

Other comments received from students who voted a 1 or a 2 about their courses included:

> I've gone for a 1. Like I said, I don't know what I want to do as a job, so I just don't know what courses I need to take. But if I was to be an engineer, I'd probably want to go into an apprenticeship instead. I don't know.
>
> (Yr 10, UC, School C)

> I think I'm only going to really look at courses when I find out what I want to do. I have no idea, so therefore I can't plan it out.
>
> (Yr 10, UC, School D)

> I feel like, obviously I'm not 100% about what I feel like I want to do but I just have no clue what courses would be offered to my age and what I could actually do now to help myself in the future. Obviously, six months, stuff like that but I feel like that's still school I'm thinking quite small minded like I wouldn't know for the future what I could look at now.
>
> (Yr 11, non-UC, School E)

Most of the students who voted a 3 did so because they were still looking at the courses available or refining their career path as these two Year 10 UC students at School C commented:

> I know I want to do something in the music industry, but I know there's a lot of options. So, it's something I want to explore. It's something I want to be able to know what's do-able for me. Because I don't know exactly what I want to do. I could be a composer. I could be anything. I'm not sure at the moment.

> I put a 3 because I don't know what job I want to do. But I've been looking online, because I know I want to go to uni. I've been looking at the university courses and how wide the range of opportunities that gives me.

Many students had made a start researching the courses available to them, regardless of whether or not they had decided on a specific career path. Year 9 and 10 UC students at School C and Year 9 School E students were the most likely to vote a 3, followed by all Year 11 students at School A.

However, by Year 11, School E, School C and School A UC students were more likely to vote a 4 or a 5, with all four students in each of the School E and School C Year 11 focus groups and the majority of the Year 11 School A students, voting this way. Overall, students from School B and School D were the least likely to vote a 4 or a 5 with just three students overall, 2 in Year 9 and one in Year 12, doing so.

The two extracts below, both from non-UC students, show how older students had gained knowledge and made decisions on which courses they should take next:

> I've spoken to a lot of people about it. I've spoken to a Marine biologist and seen where they've gone through the courses and stuff. And also, I've got a lot of friends in college. So, they have given me a heads up on you're going to find this difficult. And I've also spoken to the teachers that are going to be teaching me as well. So, I know what's on the courses, I know what I'm going to learn and that can benefit me when I want to go to uni.
>
> (Yr 11, non-UC, School C)

> I have put a 5, because even though I don't 100% know what I want to do, I do know there are certain pathways…And so, because I have been kind of wanting to do so many different types of pathways, I have done so much research into different pathways for what different degrees can lead into and what different types of institutions can offer different types of courses. So, even though I don't know what I want to do, I think I am very knowledgeable about what I could do.
>
> (Yr 13, non-UC, School A)

It is probably not surprising that the lower year groups (9 and 10) were more likely to vote a 3 or less as they are the furthest away from having to decide which courses to take next. In relation to NERUPI E, i.e., a student's understanding of how much they know about the courses or training that will help them with what they want to do next there are two factors at play. Firstly, students who know what careers they wish to pursue are more likely to have researched the courses they will need to take and secondly, the older the student is the more likely they are to have decided on both their career path and the course or training they need to get there.

Impact and influence of LiNCHigher activities

LiNCHigher activities had helped some students find out about the courses or training available to them that they had previously been unaware of. Non-UC students were more likely to report that the LiNCHigher activities had made a difference than the UC students with School D and School A students (with the exception of Year 13s) the least likely to report the activities had been influential. The impact had been mainly in helping students understand the number of options available to them and the different career paths they could take with one Year 10 School E UC student stating it had 'opened a lot of doors for us'. A Year 11 UC student at School C felt it had made him feel better about 'the whole thing' and a Year 12 UC student at School D reported that the activities had helped them gain a basic understanding of the courses available. Amongst UC students the biggest impact appeared to be for the AS Level students at College 1 in relation to course choice and allaying their concerns over university fees, as the following extracts illustrate:

> I think it just made me look deeper into what the differences between unis that are offering the same course… like, which ones have the better offers with finance, because it just made me look into it a little more and think which one would be better for me.
>
> (AS Level, UC student 1, College 1)

> I think I kind of knew what it entails, but you still, in the back of your mind, you think, how could I afford that? When do I have to pay for that? Now it's kind of just reassured. It's like, you don't think about it as much. You think… instead of thinking, I want to go to uni, how do I pay for it? You think, I want to go to uni because I want to go, and the money's more of a back thought because you know that it's not such a worry.
>
> (AS Level, UC student 2, College 1)

Comments from non-UC students were that the activities had shown them different paths they could take, made the options available to them clearer and that they had been a good starting point for where to go for more information and what they should be looking at. A Year 10 student at School E commented: 'it told me how to get to the course and the ones I need,' another Year 9 student at School B stated: 'they've given you a bunch of different options'. Other comments included:

> The talk definitely motivated me to get the grades…So it's definitely motivated me to put the work in now so I can have a better future.
>
> (Yr 9, non-UC, School C)

> They spoke about other subjects, for instance, like different career paths and that kind of helped because you knew what courses there were within FE…It helped me know where to go and look for colleges and requirements.
>
> (Yr 10, non-UC, School B)

> I think they did, yeah. It was very much here's everything you could look at, here's all the opportunities, here are all the people that have done them, you've got to look outside of the town, you've got to look outside of [the town], what more can you do. And it was quite inspirational to be fair, having someone sit there and show you everything you could do. It was quite helpful.
>
> (Yr 11, non-UC, School E)

> It helped with making sure you picked the right uni for what you want to do. As with sports, and like medicine, and music, they have wide varieties of where you can do it, but I think the sport, I looked at about 15 different courses doing a similar thing, and it is like which one do you pick? And when you are on UCAS you get given options, and you are like… But I think LiNCHigher as well helped push me to make sure I kept picking it perfectly for me.
>
> (Yr 13, non-UC student 1, School A)

> Yeah, I think you know that they provide a great foundation of what your journey and transition from sixth form to university is. It gets you in that frame of mind that you need to start thinking about, "Okay, what am I doing next? What do I need to prepare for?" and things like that.
>
> (Yr 13, non-UC student 2, School A)

Non-UC Year 9 students at School B would have liked the activities before they chose their options to help them make informed decisions about which subjects to take in relation to their chosen career paths.

3.5 Voting 3: How students rated their level of knowledge and awareness of the benefits of studying further. (NERUPI A – know)

How students voted and why

The majority of students were aware of at least some of the benefits of studying further either at college or university, with just 20 students voting a 1 or a 2, i.e. they were unaware of the benefits. The majority (15) of these students were UC (16) and attended either School B or School D (15). Five students came from School B (three in Year 9, one non-UC, 2 UC, and two in Year 10, both UC) and ten from School D (three in Year 9, and Year 10, of which one was non-UC and two UC for Year 9 and all three were UC for Year 10, and four in Year 12, all UC students). The remaining five were UC students from School C (1), School E, (2) and School A (2).

Year 9 students, both UC and non-UC, were most likely to vote a 3 for how aware they were of the benefits of studying further, particularly students from School B, School E and School D. In Year 10 School B students, UC and non-UC, and School C UC students were most likely to vote a 3 as were Year 11 School A UC students. One Year 12 non-UC student at School D voted a 3 not because they were unaware of the benefits of further study per se, but they were unsure if it was the right path for them to take commenting:

> I sort of went with a 3 because it's like we know the benefits of it. It's just whether or not it's right for me as a person, you know, do the benefits outweigh the cons? Do the pros outweigh the cons? That sort of thing. We're told that uni is this great thing, that everybody is sort of, in a way sort of pushing it, but we don't really know the cons to it as well to fully decide if it's right.

A Year 10 UC student at School A made a similar point stating:

> I know that there are benefits of doing higher education, but I'm still sort of in the middle if I should do it or what to do there.

Some students who voted a 3 would like to know the different benefits of taking the further study or the apprenticeship route.

Whilst students in the older year groups were more likely to vote a 4 or a 5 overall, across all age groups this was most likely to be School E and School C students. For example, all but one Year 9 student at School C voted a 4 or a 5; the exception was a UC student who voted a 3. Year 9, 10 and 11 Students from School B and School A were least likely to say that they had a high level of awareness of the benefit of studying further. For example, just one Year 10 School B UC student voted a 4 and three Year 11 non-UC students voted a 5. Most of the AS level students at College 1 voted either a 4 or a 5 as did all School A students – UC and non-UC – in Year 13.

Non-UC students were more likely to explain why they voted the way they did than UC students. The following extracts illustrate why some students – UC and non-UC – voted either a 4 or a 5 and highlight their understanding of the benefits of further study:

> I put 4, because there's not just university, you can do college, sixth form apprenticeships, and that will always give you extra qualifications and what not for what's needed to go into a profession that you want.

> (Yr 9, UC, School C)

> Well, for me I just see it as more beneficial because it's kind of the type of learner I am. I don't think it would be as beneficial for me to go straight into work. And I think for me, I think university would help me.

> (Yr 9, UC, School A)

I think I understand a lot that having the extra qualifications can broaden your pay barrier and just your overall knowledge of it. So, if I went for a job and only had A-levels, even though it's the same job, I'm going to be offered a lot less because of how much I know, and I've studied and I've taken and dedicated time to studying that. Whereas, if I went for higher education, I've clearly got more experience and spent more time there, so I'm going to be offered a bigger opportunity.

(AS Level, UC, College 1)

It gives you essentially more versatility, so if you come out of school with just GCSEs, I'm not discrediting them, but you come out of school with GCSEs, but then you compare it to someone who has A-levels, you're likely to pick the person with the A-Levels because they obviously have that part of education, they have more knowledge and information about the specific sector. So let's say you're in a job interview, a person has good GCSEs, a person with good GCSEs along with A-Levels, you're very likely to pick the person with more A-Levels. So, it gives you more versatility when you are applying for a job.

(Yr 11, non-UC, School B)

Obviously, higher education is really important if you're going to go on to be really successful and I aim to go higher. I aim to be quite successful in myself. I hope so, obviously, sounds strange but I think I'll always plan on going to university and that's the dream. And my mom was the first one in our family to ever go to university and she raves about it. She says, you're always going to go to uni, you've got go to uni, please. You know she wants us to push ourselves and go further. And it can give you a lot more opportunities. And obviously I don't want to be stuck working at One Stop nights in [the town] for the rest of my life, I want to get out there, I want to do stuff.

(Yr 11, non-UC, School E)

I put 5, because to me there are just so many benefits to going to uni and to staying in education. I come from quite a large family and if I go to uni I will be pretty much the first person in my family to actually go to uni and get a degree. And I have just seen how people in my family have struggled, how they have been limited in terms of their education. And there are just so many benefits to going to uni, getting a degree. You are instantly on a better footing for doing a degree because you can instantly get so many more career opportunities. And you also get so much life experience as well from university that I feel like if you didn't go to university, it is kind of like you are just thrown directly into adulthood, whereas I feel like university will be that kind of bridge between college or sixth form and you know the world of work and careers.

(Yr 13, non-UC 1, School A)

I will be one of the first people in my family to go to university and get that degree. Within my family unit I have no-one to give me any experience or any advice of how it would be, so with programmes such as going to the uni and being spoken to about how uni is, it really helps seeing that life and seeing how that can completely build a future for what I could go on to do.

(Yr 13, non-UC 2, School A)

The results highlight that with age comes a greater level of knowledge including about the benefits of further study, as might be expected.

The benefits cited by students of studying further were both academic and social and included:

- Getting a higher-paid, higher-skilled (better) job
- Being more employable, makes it easier to get a job
- Improving your skill set
- Learning more
- Giving you more options and opens up opportunities
- Gaining experience
- Learning to be independent
- Meeting new people.

Impact and influence of LiNCHigher activities on students' knowledge and awareness of further study

The LiNCHigher activities did not appear to have a direct influence on student's awareness of the benefits of going on to study at further or high education. Whilst most agreed the activities had informed them of the benefits, they were somewhat vague as to how and exactly what this meant. A Year 13 non-UC student at School A felt it had helped them allay any financial concerns they may have had and Year 9 UC students at School B made a similar point, as the following extract shows:

Student 1:   I think it helped out, when they talked about this, there's really no negatives of going to university, because obviously with the loans, they are big money you have to pay back but it's like you're not forced to pay it back straightaway, so you don't always have to be worrying about it. It's good to go there, it's good to experience it. It's good to learn about things, there's really no need to *not* go to university.

Student 2:   The person we had, when he came in, he said about the financial side, people talk about how much debt they're in, he said he's only paid seven pounds of it. He said that they scrap it at a certain age anyway, so you don't need to be really worried about it.

3.6 Voting 4: How confident students felt about getting the grades they require to be accepted onto their chosen course or training programme. (NERUPI C – Become)

How students voted and why

When students were asked how confident they felt about getting the grades they required to get accepted onto their chosen course or training programme, most voted a 3 or above with less than 20 students voting either a 1 or a 2. Whilst these students were spread across the age groups and schools, the majority (two-thirds) were UC. The main reasons for voting a 1 or a 2 was that the student lacked confidence when it came to taking exams or they had not yet decided which course they would be taking after leaving school. One non-UC Year 9 student at School D commented: 'I don't do well on tests and stuff', another stated: 'I think I could get my grades, but when it comes to exams I do horrible on them', (Yr 10, UC student, School E).

Students in Years 9 and 10 were more likely to vote a 3. All five of the Year 9 School D students voted a 3. Across all five case study schools, Year 10 UC students were more likely to vote a 3 than their non-UC peers (11 opposed to 4). In general students who voted a 3 were quietly confident about their abilities to achieve their grades but had some underlaying doubts mainly linked to confidence. The reasons students voted a 3 included:

- Being strong in some subjects but not others.
- Being unsure how well recent exams or tests had gone. Some reported that their grades had gone down as a result of the pandemic and lost learning.
- Lacking in confidence when it comes to taking exams.
- Being stressed about exams, especially because of the pandemic.
- Assessments (which replaced exams for Year 11 students) had not gone as well as expected.

The following quotes highlight some of the concern's students had:

> I understand some of it, but it's more the remembering and the revising and how I can do it, to actually present it in exams instead of in lessons which are easier.
>
> (Yr 10, non-UC, School E)

> For me, I'm pretty confident in the work I do, and I know that I'm going to organise it. For me, it's just more of a stress thing. Like I'm going to overthink it and I'm going to write down everything I know.
>
> (Yr 10, UC student 1, School E)

> For me, it's probably that I know I can achieve the grades I have, but it's the mental health stage of it where it says you can't do it and that's what usually puts me down a lot, and it makes me stress out.
>
> (Yr 10, UC student 2, School E)

> I feel I've done well in some tests. So, my English, my math certainly I've done well in. However, I remember about a week ago, a really bad chemistry test. I forgot a lot of the questions. I had to leave quite a few blank, and I just know that that one can potentially downgrade my grade because of the way it's being marked. So, I don't feel confident in some of my subjects. One, because of not knowing how well I've done because teachers legally can't tell us. And two, because I feel like I've been marked down in some of the tests.
>
> (Yr 11, non-UC, School B)

> I think anything can always go wrong in a day. There's always a chance that things aren't going to go right.
>
> (Yr 10, UC, School C)

> I'm better at coursework than exam work, so I feel like I'd do well in that side of things, but then my confidence drops when it comes to exams.
>
> (Yr 12, UC student 1, School D)

> We haven't sat exams before, because we didn't sit them in Year 11, and then this year we haven't really had that experience of actually doing them, whereas we have with coursework.
>
> (Yr 12, UC student 2, School D)

> I know that I can get where I want to be, because it's just the type of person I am, but then this period of time with the pandemic and everything made me really stressed about it, because everything can change. So, I think that's what is stressing me the most…
>
> (AS Level, non-UC, College 1)

Some Year 11 students were unsure how well the teacher assessments, which replaced GCSE exams this year due to the pandemic, had gone. One Year 11 non-UC student (School E) explained how they felt and why:

> I'm really nervous about my results. Obviously, I was a little bit upset we couldn't actually sit our GCSEs because I feel that's like the final chance to prove yourself and obviously we have a lot resting on our mocks. A lot of pressure was put on our mocks…. but I didn't do my revision for my mocks and then we didn't do GCSEs and everything was put on the mocks, and obviously I worked really hard towards the end of the year. It just feels like it's very out of my hands. I'm very nervous about my results, but I'm hoping, fingers crossed, it's going to be alright.

UC students were more likely to mention stress as an issue than non-UC students, to doubt their ability and lack confidence. Year 12 students were concerned with how they would cope with exams next year as they had not had any experience of taking exams since they were cancelled last year (summer 2020) when they were due to take their GCSEs because of the pandemic.

Many students voted either a 4 or 5 indicating that they were very confident in achieving the grades they needed to be accepted onto their chosen course. Year 9 non-UC students at School C and UC students at School E were most likely to vote a 4 or a 5. Year 11 to 13 students were more likely to vote a 4 or a 5, especially Year 11 students at School B and School C and Year 13 students at School A (both UC and non-UC). Year 11 UC students at School A also all voted either a 4 or a 5. Students at School D, across all year groups, UC and non-UC, were least likely to have voted a 4 or a 5. Note, there is no voting data on this question for the non-UC School A focus group due to time restrictions. All AS Level UC students at College 1 also voted a 4 or 5. The following quotes illustrate the different levels of confidence amongst students:

> I do a lot of revision in my own time, so that helps with remembering stuff. And I think the courses will be slightly harder, it'll challenge me, but that's good because it's always good to learn new things.
>
> (Yr 9, UC, School B)

> I put a 4 because generally I am pretty good at the subjects I do take, it's just that I can't really follow through with putting in the revision to actually pursue that subject. It's like I'm good at it but I don't pursue and finish up with it.
>
> (Yr 9, UC, School E)

> I'm pretty confident where I am at the moment. I'm pretty sure I can get good grades. I know I can do things when I really try. So, I'm pretty confident I can get what I want if I try hard enough.
>
> (Yr 10, UC, School C)

> I'm feeling like all the tests I've been doing very, very well. Yeah. My teacher has been telling me I've been doing well as well.
>
> (Yr 11, non-UC, School B)

I'm quite confident because basically over the Christmas time when we did our first set of mocks, nearly every teacher, three times a day, was saying, "make sure you revise these mocks, make sure you revise these mocks", so I did revise. I don't normally revise for mocks, but I did for these ones, because in the back of my mind I knew the cases were going up at the time and I thought there might be a chance we don't come back after Christmas, so I treated them seriously and then once I've got my grades back for the Christmas ones, they were really good. And I just feel like I kept putting the effort in during the lockdown. And I feel like I've just kept on improving.

(Yr 11, non-UC, School E)

I know that I could get in if I tried hard enough, so I'm not worried about not getting in. I've always got decent grades, so if I just put the work in.

(AS Level, UC, College 1)

I mean, I said a 4 because I'm pretty confident, I mean, although I have a bit of self-doubt I consistently usually get grades that would be good enough to go into the sort of things I'd like. But once again it's the issue of opportunities where we live, because say I wanted to do an apprenticeship, they're quite rare and a lot of people would be going for it, so it's just the opportunity of whether I would get accepted for that.

(AS Level, non-UC, College 1)

How confident students felt about getting the grades they require to get accepted onto their chosen course or training programme (NERUPI C – Become) largely depended upon what year group they were and whether or not they were UC or non-UC students. The older age groups were more confident in their ability to succeed.

Impact / influence of LiNCHigher activities

Some students had found the LiNCHigher activities useful when reflecting how they felt about getting the grades they required to go on to study their chosen course, specifically the different exam revision strategies they had learnt. A few also reported that the motivational speakers had inspired them, made them think more about working hard and not giving up, especially as they had missed so much school due to the pandemic as the following quotes illustrate.

It's made more ways of revising. I only thought of one way and that was writing it down and trying to remember it, but there's more ways to actually remember how to remember things.

(Yr 10, non-UC, School B)

I feel like a lot of people sort of gave up with what they wanted to do because of the pandemic thinking, "Oh we'll try and get in next year". But the LiNCHigher motivational speakers, they helped a lot of people think that they didn't have to give up. They could do what they wanted this year despite what was going on.

(AS Level, UC, College 1)

The impact of Covid-19 on students' confidence in gaining the grades they require

The biggest issue for how confident students felt about obtaining the grades they needed to study further was the impact of the pandemic and the learning they had lost whilst studying at home during the national lockdowns and periods of self-isolation when bubbles had been sent home, which for some students had been numerous. Students from all year groups and all schools were keenly aware they had missed a substantial amount of their education and were very concerned with how it would affect their exam results and future prospects. Many students felt they were behind as a result of the pandemic and that it would be a struggle to catch up, but many were motivated to do just that. One student commented 'I feel like I'm quite far behind on my education in some subjects' (Yr 10, non-UC student, School B). Year 9 students at School A pointed out that, in total, they had missed nearly two years of schooling, feeling like they were still stuck in Year 8 despite coming to the end of Year 9. One student said, coming back into school after the lockdowns:

> Made me more motivated because at home doing the work online, I noticed that from when I was at school before in terms of how good the quality of the work was from when we'd been at school. So now I have to work harder in school.
>
> (Yr 9, UC, School E)

Other comments included:

> Covid has definitely been a setback for the majority of us. But I think that it just makes you work even harder because it highlights the areas that you've missed out on or that you haven't caught on. It also makes you want to achieve higher.
>
> (Yr 9, non-UC, School C)

> I'm scared that because Covid has come and we've gone into so many lockdowns, that we might not get the grades we want.
>
> (Yr10, UC, School B)

> For me, I'll probably just barely pass them because of Covid. It made my work slow down because I work better in a school environment, because I know I can get my head down and do my work without your parents nagging me, "Hey, go clean your room, or hey come for dinner" but I'm in the middle of class, or you get distracted by your phone and stuff.
>
> (Yr 10, UC, School E)

Facilitator: Why do you think you're not doing as well in the subjects as you feel you should be?

Student: I did miss a lot of work due to Covid; and even though we had the online classes and courses, they didn't work as well as I think they should have, because most of the people either couldn't attend them due to a reason, or they didn't attend them due to the fact that they were at home – but I feel like, if they were reinforced more, then we probably could have learned a lot more than we did.

> (Yr 10, UC, School D)

> It slowed it [our learning] down and we've missed a lot of things that we were supposed to do in actual school. And we've had to do most of it online, which was incredibly difficult for certain people.
>
> (Yr 10, non-UC, School E)

> I think I always had confidence issues, and things like that, but during Covid I think my motivation has got worse because obviously we've been at home a lot of the time and things like that. I'm not very self-motivated when I've got no-one pushing me along. So, I think it's sort of limited me in that respect…
>
> (AS Level, non-UC student 1, College 1)

Many students reported that their grades had dropped as a direct result of the pandemic. In general, students had not learnt as effectively online as they did in the classroom and many had lacked motivation whilst learning at home:

> Because of the lack of motivation I've started getting slightly lower grades. I mean, it's still not an issue at all, but I went from being, if I'd got an A I'd be upset with myself because that wasn't good enough, to now getting all Bs, which is obviously not an issue, but it's still had an effect on my grades because of the struggle to motivate myself.
>
> (AS Level, non-UC student 2, College 1)

Students were also concerned about taking exams, particularly Year 12 students as they did not sit their GCSEs last year. There was a lot of anxiety about what would happen next year with exams, especially amongst Year 10 students as this Yr 10 non-UC student at School B commented: 'we're still a little bit unsure of next year and the situation on exams. So that's kind of played a role'. However, some students preferred the shorter one-hour tests that had replaced the GCSEs this year with one student commenting:

> If you mess one up, it's not the end of the world. I feel like I will probably get a better grade because usually when it is a big test, I stress out a lot. And with this, since the tests are not that

big, they're normally one-hour or so, I'm more confident. So I feel like my overall grade should be higher than it would be.

(Yr 11 non-UC, School B)

When we were doing work at home, it felt like we weren't really taking it in because we weren't in school, so some of it we probably missed out on or don't fully understand, so we're not really prepared properly for exams that fully.

(Yr 12, UC, School D)

Students at School E also preferred the short assessments:

I think I preferred the way they've done the exams because I'm terrible when it comes to exams. I have loads of knowledge but when it comes to exams, I forget everything because I worry, but the way it's happened this year, being told given the criteria, what could potentially be in the exams, it's helped me out massively.

(Yr 11, non-UC student 1, School E)

Students were also apprehensive about what the ongoing pandemic situation would mean for them both in the short and longer-term and how they were going to navigate the ever-changing situation.

I think Covid has impacted massively… having to think about "oh my god, these numbers are going to affect the next three years of my life". Everyone says, not everything is your GCSE results. I understand that but it's quite big at the moment, you know, this is our life at the moment. This is what we're doing now. And it's quite scary but I just think If Covid wasn't around it would have been a lot more relaxed and it would have been a lot easier to deal with everything.

(Yr 11, non-UC student 2, School E)

Many students had missed being at school and the face-to-face interaction they usually have with their teachers and the individual support they receive. They learnt and understood less during the pandemic when lessons were online, one student commented: 'don't ever have online lessons ever again. It was awful. It was so un-motivating. I just laid in your bed, watching a teacher' (Yr 11, non-UC student, School C). Students also disliked being away from their friends and teachers. UC students and those in Year 9 were more likely to comment on the lack of face-to-face interaction with their teachers and the difficulties of working from home than their non-UC peers. Comments included:

I think with Covid, when you're doing it at home and there's no motivation to go and finish because you're not face-to-face with a person, there's not that connection with a teacher screaming do this, do that.

(Yr 9, UC, School E)

I'd rather have face-to-face. I struggle to do it on my own. So when the teacher tells me to get on with it I just can't. So when Covid hit, my brain went down a lot and my attention span went down because I wasn't understanding it, and you feel pressured to not ask stuff because it felt stupid online, where in lessons you'd feel okay.

(Yr 9, non-UC student 1, School E)

I lack confidence when my voice is on camera, so never once did I unmute myself on Teams. It's really hard because when you're face-to-face you can have that one-to-one talk and say: "I don't get this". And the teacher can sit down and explain it to you, whereas when you're online, that's a lot more difficult to have…

(Yr 9, non-UC student 2, School E)

All the lessons were cancelled most of the time. It's hard when you're in a house, you get distracted easier. It's not really a place for you to be learning. I think we should be given a something to help us out during the exams. Like maybe easier questions or an easier exam paper, since we missed out on a year of good learning.

(Yr 10, UC, School C)

You don't get the one-to-one online either. If you want more support or your answer checking, you can't just pop in the chat box, "Oh I've got this." Because then everyone else might see it.

<div align="right">(Yr 10, non-UC, School C)</div>

If there's something you don't get you just put your hand up, the teacher will come over and help you. Obviously in a call they can't really individually talk to you. It takes the risk of distracting other people…

<div align="right">(Yr 11, UC, School C)</div>

Some students had more specific concerns around the impact of Covid-19, in particular the choosing of options for Year 9 students. For example, the Year 9 non-UC students at School B had found choosing their options and attending parents' evenings online rather than in person during the pandemic less than satisfactory, as they explained:

Student 1:   I would say two main things. Parents' evening and GCSE option night. We tried this new thing called School Cloud. I don't know how it works, but it's like a timer and you get five minutes with the teacher, and that's it, it just cuts off after five minutes.

Student 2:   And we felt that was pretty rubbish because GCSE options night and parents' evening, we didn't get the time we wanted to talk to the teachers because it was set in stone, five minutes and that was it.

Facilitator: Did anyone else enjoy that experience?

Student 3:   I didn't do parents' evening because I can't get online at home. Well obviously I've got my mum's laptop but it's for work so we can't.

Student 1:   I reckon the parents' evening should have been done first, and then we had all the talks, and then we had options night because parents' evening would have helped us decide what subjects we're doing.

Year 9 students at School A and School D also commented on the difficulties of choosing options during the pandemic:

We're right at the start of getting our options and looking into it more. So people are choosing all their options as their GCSE but we've barely had any time to really look into the subjects before we've looked into future careers.

<div align="right">(Yr 9, UC, School A)</div>

They were going to have an open evening with little booths for us to learn a bit more about each subject, but with Covid we couldn't have that, so we were just given the booklets to decide.

<div align="right">(Yr 9, non-UC, School D)</div>

Finally, one group of female-only students had found learning during lockdown challenging because they had also had to take on caring responsibilities for younger siblings, one commented:

I tried to help a lot with my siblings, they're by themselves, and they can't do a lot on their own. So, I had to go and help them, leave my work, go back and work later. If I didn't get it done, I'd just have to carry on the day and not do it.

<div align="right">(Yr 9, non-UC, School E)</div>

Not all students viewed the disruption the pandemic brought as negative with some reporting it had benefited them by, for example, allowing them to take their time with some lessons, to work at their own pace, which in turn took the pressure off for some students. For Year 13 students at School A and AS level students at College 1, the pandemic had afforded them time out to think and reassess their future career path, as reported earlier (see Voting question 1):

I think with the times that we had off school we all looked into what we wanted to do after leaving. And researching where we wanted to go and what courses we wanted to do, which has made it a lot easier for us to choose what we're doing after.

<div align="right">(Yr 13, UC, School A)</div>

I think it's affected the way I think about my future, because I realise, I don't have to do everything I've always been told in order to be successful, and I've sort of got a lot more freedom, I feel.

And it's also encouraged me, like, to make personal changes to help me deal with my mental health and things like that, seeking help that actually helps me, because I've had therapy in the past and that never did anything, but now I'm on medication which has made a huge difference for me.

(AS Level, non-UC, College 1)

Whilst some students reported positives had come out of the pandemic in terms of their learning, overall students had found the whole experience disjointed, unsettling, demotivating and difficult to negotiate at times. The majority of students preferred being back in the classroom with both their friends and their teachers. They also valued and appreciated education more than they had prior to the pandemic, as one Year 9 non-UC student at School D commented:

I appreciate it a bit more, because beforehand I was just like, "Oh, school, whatever" but now it's like there are a lot of people who don't have the opportunity to go to school, so, yeah, it is quite important.

Others agreed:

You talk about the idea of being at home you get to stay in bed longer but when it actually comes to it, it gets boring when it's constant.

(Yr 9, UC, School E)

3.7 Voting 5: How difficult students felt it would be for them to go on to study further and gain a Higher Education qualification (NERUPI D – Practice)

How the students voted and why

Students were asked how difficult they felt it would be for them to go onto study further and gain a HE qualification. They were asked to vote 1 - 5 with 5 being extremely difficult and a 1 if it would not be an issue. Most students voted 3 or below. However, some students both UC and non-UC, voted either a 4 or a 5 indicating that it would be very challenging for them to gain a HE qualification. Roughly half of the students who voted a 4 or a 5 attended either School B or School D and were most likely to be Year 9 students. The main reasons students voted a 4 or a 5 was that they lacked confidence, they did not think they would get the grades required, their course was very competitive or going to university would be outside of their, or their families, experience. One Year 9 UC student at School B commented: 'I'm just not smart enough'. The older year groups were more likely to be able to articulate why they felt gaining a HE qualification would be difficult than students in the younger year groups. Comments from students who voted a 4 or a 5 included:

> It will be a new world of work, and it will be very different for all of us and a huge step in our life so I believe it will be difficult for some and easy for others.
>
> (Yr 11, UC, School E)

> Just, like pressure, because when you go to uni, you're spending a lot of money, so it's kind of like you have pressure to do well.
>
> (Yr 12, UC, School D)

> It's like a completely new situation, you're not used to it, you're going to be surrounded by people you might not like, it's just going to be very different. Very different work, a lot of work in a completely new place. It's just going to be completely uprooting everything and shoving you into the unknown.
>
> (AS Level, non-UC student 1, College 1)

> Another thing for me is that no-one in my family's been to university, no-one I know has been to university. So, it's completely unknown to me, and I'd be surrounded by people who have, the complete opposite from me, really smart, really rich and don't have to go in debt to be in uni. And, like, I'm not an extrovert, so I would just stay in my room, do my work, and have to work multiple jobs in order to pay for it. So, I don't think I would enjoy it, that's why.
>
> (AS Level, non-UC student 2, College 1)

Other obstacles facing students included:

- Family and challenges at home
- Requiring a positive mind-set
- Mental health issues
- Having to make new friends
- Finances.

Most students that voted a 3 did so because they felt it would be challenging to gain a HE qualification but not impossible, especially if they worked hard. The voting was spread across the year groups, student type (i.e. UC and non-UC) and schools. The reasons students voted a 3 included:

- Not getting the grades they require for their chosen course
- Passing the course could be difficult
- Financing further study
- Concerns over living independently
- The logistics of getting to places

- Having to make new friends

- Nervous in new settings / a new environment.

Some of the Year 11 students voted a 3 because they felt unprepared for the transition into college, largely because of the pandemic which had meant they had missed out on campus trips and actually seeing places for themselves as one student explained:

> I think not having had any experience and not actually having been anywhere. We haven't looked around anything. We haven't had those open days. We haven't had tester days. They did virtual open days but it's not the same watching it through your phone and actually being there and getting a feel for the teachers and the courses and having those lessons where you get used to it. We're going into it a bit blind, and we don't know what it's gonna be like. It is quite scary.
>
> (Yr 11, non-UC, School E)

Other comments on why students voted a 3 included:

> …the change of friends, having a different friend group. So people have got to get to know you and find some sort of mental health issue and you don't really want to open up to people, too shy or have anxiety, it's a lot harder to open up and get to know more people.
>
> (Yr 10, UC, School E)

> I feel confident that I'm going to be able to go to college and university. I didn't put a 1 because there's still the learning that's necessary to be able to get good GCSEs that needs to be done.
>
> (Yr 10, non-UC, School E)

> Because you think everything that you do is hard. Nothing is ever is going to be easy. I just think that everything will be hard.
>
> (Yr 10, UC, School C)

> I think it's going to be a very different environment. Obviously, all we've known for the past, what, five years is secondary school, you've got teachers there next to you every step of the way doing this for the hour then you're doing that, obviously, Sixth Form, you've got to manage your own time. You've got to do a lot of stuff independently and I find it quite hard to make myself work independently and actually tell myself to sit down and do my work, but obviously, I've got to get used to that for university and sixth form, but yeah, I think that's my only worry.
>
> (Yr 11, non-UC, School E)

Students who voted a 1 or a 2, signifying they felt gaining a HE qualification would not be problematic, were more likely to be Year 9 and 10 students from School C and least likely to be students from School A, all years. Many students felt if they worked hard and stayed motivated, they would achieve their goal. One student stated: 'as long as I put in the work then I should be able to get there,' (Yr 10, non-UC student, School B) another, 'I put a 2 because I know when it comes down to it, I'm going to be really motivated to do what I need to do,' (Yr 9, UC student, School E). Other comments from students who voted a 4 or a 5 included:

> Basically, I'm going to study a lot harder and spend a lot of my day revising when it comes to the exams, so then I can get into a college, and then I'll study even more so then I can pass and then get the job I've always wanted.
>
> (Yr 9, UC, School B)

> For me I am very confident that I will get the grades I need. For me it's more of will I be able to stay on track, or will I stop myself? You did all this hard work, just relax. And to get into uni, I know it's competitive. The thing is once you're in uni, everybody's the same. No one's different at that point.
>
> (Yr 10, UC, School E)

> I know I'm quite good at my music. And even though it can be challenging at times, when you know what you're doing, it's basically like a labour of love. You just think, well, I'm enjoying this.

If it's something that you can enjoy, it shouldn't be as hard. If you know what you're doing and you want to do it, then it should make it a bit easier.

(Yr 10, UC, School C)

I have pretty decent grades, so I think as long as I maintain those grades, I can get into a good university, whatever the subject is.

(AS Level, UC, College 1)

I think it is not too bad, well my whole family has been to uni, so they all know what to do. And my course, yeah it's hard, but it's not one of the hardest degrees. Talking to the students that are on the course now, they say if you put your mind to it and learn it, it comes quite naturally.

(Yr 13, non-UC student 1, School A)

I believe that I am quite an independent person anyway and I think that the transition from where I am now to uni won't be too difficult in that respect. I do think that being away from family will be somewhat difficult sometimes, but I know that they are always going to be there, you know they are not too far away.

(Yr 13, non-UC student 2, School A)

Impact / influence of LiNCHigher activities

LiNCHigher activities had, mainly through Motivational Speakers, encouraged students to build their confidence, reassured them about the financial side of going onto study further and helped them focus on exam revision. A Year 11 School A UC student commented: 'it has given us information to make us more confident about the choices that we want to make'. However, it should be noted here that the above relate to the views of students in just five of the focus groups.

Summary on the voting questions

- In general, the UC programme resulted in greater impact for non-UC students than UC students.

- Non-UC students were more likely to be making good progress in each of the NERUPI framework areas, particularly in relation to choosing their future career paths (NERUPI B – Choose) and associated courses or training (NERUPI E – Understand).

- Whilst the impact of LiNCHigher activities was minimal, it was important where it is reported to be making a difference.

- Motivational Speakers were the most likely to have an impact and be the activity students – UC and non-UC alike – remembered most.

- Campus visits were the second most remembered activity; whilst these were predominantly pre-Covid-19, it does suggest they have lasting impact.

- The main impact of the pandemic was reported by students to be the negative effect on their expected exam grades and how students felt about obtaining the results they require to get onto their chosen course or training programme (NERUPI C – Become). Students were most concerned about making up lost learning, their grades slipping and having to take exams next year, especially Year 12 students who missed out on their exams in the summer of 2020.

- Reduced motivation, isolation and the lack of social interaction were also reported as negative impacts of Covid-19, especially for UC and Year 9 students.

- Students preferred to be learning in the classroom with their teachers rather than at home, alone.

- Students felt the main challenge they faced in terms of going on to study further and gaining a HE qualification was their ability to get the required grades (NERUPI D – Practice). Students saw the difficulty as being academic rather than social or familial.

School D and School B Year 9 students were the most likely to report studying further would be problematic.

- Students at School E reported the greatest level of school support not just in terms of general careers advice but in helping them understand the benefits of further study (NERUPI A – Know), followed by students at School C. This is probably because both schools have a designated member of staff working in this area. At School E it comes under the auspicious title of 'Director of Aspirations' whilst at School B, where student aspirations were noticeably lower than at other schools, it forms a small part of the school leads' role.

- Overall, students at School D and School B were the least aspirational, confident and informed whilst those at School E were the most. Even where students had not decided on a definite career path, students at School E had given it serious consideration often ruling things out, even if they were undecided on their specific way forwards.

4. Programme leads

Interviews with programme leads (six in schools and three in colleges) took place either in person or over Microsoft Teams, during June and July 2021. The aim of the interviews was to gain their views on how Phase 2 had gone, what they had learnt and what they would take forward from engaging with the programme as well as how they felt about Phase 3.

Relationship with LiNCHigher

All of the programme leads reported having a good working relationship with LiNCHigher and commended them on how flexible, communicative and accommodating they had been especially during the pandemic. One school lead (School A) commented: 'I can't praise them enough really', another 'I want to thank [our AEO], who's done a lot of work with us. He has really, really been really, really helpful and we really appreciate that' (School B Lead).

Since January 2021, the colleges have had a designated contact running the UC programme from LiNCHigher. All the programme leads reported that this had significantly improved their engagement with the programme and LiNCHigher resulting in progress being made in a very short time, especially at College 1 and 3 where both the programme leads were also new in post at approximately the same time. One commented: 'she is a godsend. She is fantastic, so flexible. She's been very professional, very accommodating very flexible, very creative... (College 1), the other stated:

> The amount of activity we have done with [the new AEO] has been quite staggering really. We've only been working with her since January. And from January till now, which is only a few months, we've been able to achieve lots and lots, which is testament to her. She's really enthusiastic. She doesn't take no for an answer.
>
> (College 3 Lead)

The programme lead at College 2 reported that their relationship with LiNCHigher was much improved this academic year commenting, 'I think it's been much better than it has been previously. I think the programme manager is really fantastic'. It should be noted here that at College 2 the programme lead sits in HE recruitment and widening participation whereas at College 1 and 3 both of the programme leads are based within careers and this is generally where responsibility for the programme sits within schools. Evidence from other partnerships (see the *Levelling up and supporting young people to progress and succeed in Higher Education* paper co-produced by the 29 UC partnerships in 2020) suggest that the UC programme is more successful in colleges when based in careers rather than recruitment and/or widening participation.

What went well

School leads felt that where outreach activity had been delivered this year it had been successful with one school lead commenting: 'anything that we do with LiNCHigher is always valid' (School A). At School D being able to run part of the First Steps programme for some of their Year 9 students and at School F the Super Learning Day had both been beneficial. For School C it was all about the opportunities that the UC programme generated for the students whilst at School E they appreciated the swift move to online delivery during Covid-19.

From the college perspective, having the funding allocated to them and knowing and understanding that allocation had worked well. In addition, the expertise that LiNCHigher brought in terms of what works for their students and having direct access to the relevant contacts was highly valued as one college lead explained:

> The financial support is undoubtedly very very important. Also, the expertise. They know what works and what doesn't, and especially from my point of view again of someone who is new, that this massively important. And the infrastructure that they have already established that we can just tap into it.
>
> (College 1 Lead)

At College 3 offering students outreach workshops aimed at certain levels or year groups (i.e. all Level 3 students) rather than by subject area or student type (i.e. just UC students) had proven to be very successful. They had also found that taking the burden away of organising such activities from tutors had worked well:

> What really helped was that we were able to say to the tutors, "you don't need to worry about this we will organise it all. We'll set the time. All you need to do is let your students know that we'll be there at that time. And here's the invite." And so all that was taken away, they didn't have to organise anything which helped.
>
> (College 3 Lead)

College 2 had predominantly used the funding to develop in-house career resources.

The benefits of being part of the UC programme

The two main benefits of being part of the UC programme was the funding that came with it and the connectiveness of LiNCHigher, as the programme lead at School A explained:

> Funding for me was probably one of the best benefits. I don't physically have a pot to fund what they can provide us, and without LiNCHigher our children would be severely disadvantaged because we wouldn't have those resources. And also, they connect us with people so once we've kind of used someone and we get a good relationship with them they're like that connective bond as well.

The expertise and knowledge LiNCHigher brought with them was also seen as hugely beneficial to both students and the school or college as a whole.

Being able to offer their students opportunities, especially campus visits, was also seen as a major benefit of being part of the programme, especially for the students at School F as the programme lead commented:

> An example of that was the University of Lincoln trip that our students went on. That was paid for, the coaches were paid for by Uni Connect funding and that really raised aspirations for the majority of students that participated [and] in June 2019 the Uni Connect funding paid for a taster day at the college, and again that was brilliant. That actually helped us with a lot of our pupils…the overall impact has been brilliant. I've noticed, when I'm interacting with a student, in a careers appointment, there's a lot more knowledge around university, and higher level apprenticeships and students seem to be a lot more knowledgeable, and I am getting a feel that more and more students are looking more at universities, you know for after they finished their post-16 education.

Staff at participating schools and colleges were also reported to have benefited from being part of the UC programme. They had become more positive about HE, better informed about the options available to their students and more engaged and encouraging of outreach activities. The programme lead at School E explained how the attitude of staff at the school had shifted over the lifetime of the programme:

> I would say that the staff at the moment are much more likely to take part in these activities they will get on board. They're much more receptive to me saying "oh by the way, this period next week I'm hijacking it because we're doing this". Once upon a time you would get people moaning but now, they say "oh yeah, what are we doing this time?" So, I definitely think they're taking it on board.

Many of the programme leads reported a shift in culture at their school in relation to aspiration raising and a willingness to promote and engage with LiNCHigher activities.

Challenges this last academic year (beyond Covid-19)

Away from Covid-19, few challenges were reported by the school leads in delivering the UC programme. School C would like to get parents more involved in the conversations around higher aspirations. Whilst parents are supportive and the school does send regular updates home, communication is generally passive and one-way. They would like to encourage a more interactive two-way approach with parents to help raise students' aspirations. School D was the only school that

reported facing substantial challenges. They had found their new AEO for this year had a very different way of working compared to their previous AEO which had taken time to get used to. The school as a whole, and the AEO appeared to have very different views on what would work for the students causing what the school lead termed a 'bit of a mismatch' between:

> What we as a school felt we needed, and would like, and what was available. So, for example, some of our Heads of Year wanted Paul Hughes. He's been a big hit with the school previously. The students have given excellent feedback on him before. And it felt like he's made a real difference. And so, all three Heads of Year asked if they could have Paul Hughes as the motivational speaker. When I asked about Paul Hughes initially, I was told that possibly we couldn't necessarily have Paul Hughes, there might be a better option and David Hyner.
>
> (School D Lead)

Despite reservations from the school lead, feedback from the students in the focus groups for the David Hyner talk were very positive (see Year 10 student quote in section 3.2).

The School D school lead reported that a similar mismatch had occurred with the CragRats programme. They found the seemingly 'one size fits all approach' frustrating and difficult to understand.

The main challenges for the colleges were logistical. For example, getting students in one place at any one time; unlike schools there is no common time when everyone is available or in the same space such as assemblies. Accessing and logging into virtual platforms was also reported to be problematic for college students. One of the college leads also felt that some of the literature produced by LiNCHigher is more appropriate for use in schools than it is in colleges and they would like to see different versions available for college students.

Impact of the UC programme

 All of the school and college leads felt it was difficult to assess the full and actual impact of being part of the UC programme for both their students and the school as a whole; especially this year in light of the disruption caused by the pandemic as the school lead at School A explained: 'I wouldn't say I know exactly what the impact is because we've not been able to review it like normal.' However, they did say that without the UC programme and LiNCHigher they would not have had any external links this year and that it had enabled them to at least keep things going during the pandemic.

Tangible success of the programme was mainly measured in terms of student destination data and was only preliminary at the time of the interviews. The School B lead reported that for the second year running 100% of their students had secured places at college or sixth form. School E, School F, School D and School C school leads all reported an increase in what they termed 'positive destinations'. At School E a former student had applied to Oxbridge and some Year 11 students were now applying to go to the local grammar school, something the school lead said would never have happened in the past. The school lead at School C felt that the number of students going on to university had 'definitely increased' recently. The number of students taking up apprenticeships had also gone up. The programme leads at School C were keen that students should have the information they need to be able to make the best choice for them, seeing the fact that more and more students were doing just that as tangible evidence of the success of the UC programme stating:

> They're clear in their minds whether or not university is the right choice for them. Whether that's the right decision or not the right decision is another matter, but they've been informed about it. They've experienced what it might be like to go to university so they're clearly as informed as they could be. I would take that as tangible evidence that at least they've been able to make decisions based on the information they've been given.

It is difficult for some of the schools to obtain destination data, especially where they do not have a sixth form. Some have agreements with students that enable them to contact them directly and one school (School F) has set up an alumni. School D, which has a sixth form, does have its own destination data and this year 67% of their Year 13s were on track to go to university with 82% of these students being first generation in their family to go to university. Additionally, more students than ever were staying on at sixth form this year.

Whilst the reported increase in positive destinations for students in recent years cannot be directly or solely attributed to the UC programme, school leads did consider it to be a substantial contributing factor. The programme lead at College 3 felt it was too early to talk of impact in terms of student destination as they had only recently started working in earnest with their Level 3 students. Impact will be measured this calendar year against future university applications.

Anecdotally, school and college leads reported a more positive attitude by their students towards HE and a greater level of interaction with specific outreach activities. For example, the programme lead at School B reported that, following the recent 'Aim A Little Higher' workshop funded by LiNCHigher the students had been thinking a lot more about their future and asking more questions than they were before. The programme lead at College 1 also reported an increase in students' questions, interaction and engagement following activities delivered in college.

Did schools and colleges achieve what they hoped in Phase 2?

Schools and college leads were asked if they had achieved what they hoped when they first agreed to take part in the UC programme. Whilst everyone felt more could have been done and that Covid-19 had set them back significantly, overall, the programme leads agreed that they had achieved, at least to some degree, what they had set out to do at the beginning of Phase 2. For example, students at School E had reportedly grown in confidence, were aware of a broader range of opportunities open to them and staff were more receptive to activities outside of the main curriculum and were having conversations with students about 'professional' careers that require university. For the School A school lead being part of the programme had resulted in the school now having an embedded careers programme. Table 30 below shows how school leads judged their intended outcomes, set out at the start of Phase 1, have been met.

The colleges were unsure whether or not the original intended outcomes had been met, mainly because two of the three leads had not been in post very long and were unclear exactly what the programmes aims and objectives had been at the start. The third, College 2 felt that progress had been made.

Table 22: Schools leads' intended outcomes for Phase 2

School	Intended outcome		
	For the school	**For students**	**For teachers**
School A	● To develop the grades and the curriculum framework. ● To promote employee engagement across all areas of the Academy. ● To embed an effective alumni network.	● Students to understand the link between their subject work & the world of work. ● Boost student grades and attainment.	● That all staff understand they need to integrate employability into their teaching.
School B	● Cultural shift in the school towards being more open to HE.	● Encourage more students to consider HE.	● Link into the curriculum more. ● Get buy-in from Heads of Departments.
School C	● Provide students with high quality careers education and IAG. ● Meet all Gatsby benchmarks.	● Raise student aspirations. ● Raise girls' self-esteem. ● Students will have a wider understanding of career routes open to them, beyond HE.	● Teachers to raise the aspirations of all students.
School D	● Provide sustainable in-house careers provision. ● Social mobility is a school priority.	● Raising of student aspirations. ● Expanded student opportunities. ● Improved self-worth, confidence, resilience.	● Having a fully trained careers lead. ● Getting staff on-board.
School E	● To prepare students to be citizens of the future. ● Access to destination data.	● Change mind-sets so that students talk about university. ● Raise student aspirations. ● Students will be confident in the choices they make about their future.	● Staff to talk about university more.
School F	● More students progressing to HE study. ● More information on student destination. ● More parental engagement.	● Open students up to other experiences and opportunities. ● University is an option for everyone. ● Raise student aspirations. ● Improve student mental health and wellbeing.	● Teachers know students have options.

Table Key: Green text indicates intended outcome was met, amber that they have been partially met or are in progress and red that they have not been met at all.

Overarching Impact of the pandemic on the UC programme

Inevitably the pandemic had impacted on the delivery of the UC programme and its potential impact in both schools and colleges. However, there were some reported positives as well as negatives.

Positive impact of Covid-19

Students at School E were reported to be considering a wider range of career options including ones that had not previously been considered, specifically nursing and teaching. The programme lead felt this was a direct result of the pandemic commenting:

I thought it would put people off, but I think the NHS have been so publicly praised over this that it's made people think, I'll have a piece of that, which genuinely surprised me I thought they'd be running for the hills.

At School D some students had taken the time to reassess their options and their career paths, with one student deciding to withdraw her university application for this year to pursue her passion of dancing. The programme lead commented: 'I think what they've done is they've used lockdown positively and they've sat down and actually planned and thought about it'. The number of students planning to stay on at sixth form was also higher than usual. Some virtual delivery had been very successful at School C, specifically Motivational Speakers. The programme lead felt the formula of students watching the talk in small groups in their classrooms rather than as one big group in the main hall meant students were more confident to ask questions than usual, either directly to the speaker or via the teacher. The programme lead plans to carry on with this format next year if possible commenting: 'that's something I think we would still carry on going forward because we certainly had more engagement and more questions of students'.

The programme leads at College 1 and 3 felt remote delivery had meant they reached more students than when sessions were face-to-face. This was particularly so for students at College 1 living in rural areas that are poorly serviced by public transport, with the programme lead calling the technology a 'godsend' for such students. At College 1 the programme lead had noticed that students were more comfortable discussing issues and asking questions when engaging virtually. The College 2 programme lead said it had 'just looked very different' this year, with no campus visits being possible.

Negative impact of Covid-19

Unsurprisingly the programme leads reported more negative than positives, specifically the lack of face-to-face delivery and the ongoing uncertainty of what would be possible and when making it difficult to plan. Year 10s had been particularly affected by the pandemic as this is a key year group for input to their future options and study skills as the programme lead at School E explained:

I think there's a massive impact on all of the activities that we have had booked in. So many things got cancelled, I think particularly for the Year 11s that have just gone and our current Year 10 that are about to go into Year 11. Year 10 is a huge year for a lot of this sort of input in terms of planning for post-16. So, trips out to all the different colleges all the different providers, they've all been cancelled. Now many people, ourselves included, have started doing virtual open events but it's not the same. It's really not the same whether you do it live or whether it's pre-recorded it's still not quite the same as going out to get a feel for the place… They've missed a lot of the Independence that we give them in those years. So, for example, we might take them out to Lincoln or Nottingham and get them to have a little wander on their own, obviously within reason, but just to make them feel a bit more grown up. Or take them to college and show them how much they have to be responsible for their own time management in a college environment. They've missed a lot of that so I think sometimes their decisions have not been as well informed. That's been a problem this year.

The extract above sums up how others also felt about the negative impact of the pandemic on students. Whilst virtual delivery was viewed as better than nothing. Students at School F particularly struggled to engage virtually. In most cases virtual delivery was not seen as a longer-term satisfactory substitute by either programme leads or students, as highlighted by the comments received from students during the focus groups.

School D reported specific challenges delivering activities online effectively either because of the unreliability of the internet connection at school or home or because students, especially in the first national lockdown, did not have access to suitable devices. The school's laptop allocation from central government only arrived two weeks before the end of the first lockdown. The programme lead commented: 'we had an awful lot of students who were really struggling to access activity'.

The colleges reported that the pandemic had led to difficulties accessing students face-to-face and at College 2 the main casualty had been the planned summer school which was unable to go ahead.

Future plans – views on Phase 3

All school leads were looking forward to the next phase of the UC programme. Whilst School C were disappointed not to be a target school in Phase 3 they hoped to take what they have learnt from being part of the programme forward and apply the principles locally. Their main concern was how they will fund future aspirational outreach activities. After two years of disruption caused by the pandemic, all school leads were looking forward to being able to deliver a full programme of aspirational learning activities in the next academic year, in person. One of the School D leads commented:

> I'm just looking forward to some normality in terms of some of the some of the face-to-face things again because our students just love other people, not us all the time. And I think they just react to other people and they just love other people coming in and doing stuff with them.

School B are aiming to have a 'solid plan' in place for the beginning of the new school year.

The college leads were particularly excited about the plans for Phase 3. They each felt it will be beneficial to have a member of LiNCHigher based at the college and they liked the broader focus the UC programme will have on FE students. To complement the UC programme, College 2 is implementing a new strategic, cohesive plan to ensure all of their students receive the same information about HE progression which will be centrally coordinated.

For College 3, having a LiNCHigher representative on site will make it easier to work with UC students throughout the college, help build relationships with tutors and enable the delivery of more focused and targeted outreach activities, with the programme lead commenting: 'having somebody on site is going to be a lot easier because the person will know where the UC students are and be able to go and speak to them on a one-to-one'. The programme lead at College 3 would like to see students receive information on all the options available to them when they finish college and to instigate activities such as industry days, akin to those already being delivered at College 1, through the programme. Ideally they would like a 'balance between subject specific aspiration raising activities and the more career focused activities'.

Section summary

Programme leads valued being part of the UC programme. Most had a very positive relationship with LiNCHigher finding their support in helping to raise aspirations at the school amongst both students and staff leading in many cases to a cultural shift at the school to how FE and HE is perceived. The specific benefits of engaging with LiNCHigher included the funding, the opportunities it provided for networking with external organisations and the expertise and knowledge of the AEOs. For the colleges, having a designated officer in place for the last two terms proved extremely valuable and productive. Overall, college leads reported their engagement with LiNCHigher had much improved this academic year (2020-2021). The main challenge cited by the colleges leads was the logistics of delivering activities to target students. This is due to the way colleges operate which means students are dispersed across different sites and disciplines and there is no common time when they are together, unlike in schools.

The impact of the UC programme was mainly measured in terms of positive destination data with all schools, except one reporting an increase in the number of students applying to go on to study at FE or HE. Overall, programme leads felt students were better informed of the post-16 and post-18 options opened to them. Programme leads felt, they had achieved what they set out to when they first engaged with LiNCHigher and UC. They also felt more progress would have been made had it not been for the pandemic. Programme leads felt being part of the programme had been a valuable undertaking and they were keen to engage with Phase 3. The colleges were particularly looking forward to having a member of LiNCHigher in situ.

5. Findings and recommendations

Findings: drawing together the evaluation data

This final section of the evaluation report brings together the main findings from both the qualitative and quantitative data before a summary of the key findings and recommendations to the LiNCHigher partnership to consider when planning the delivery of Phase 3 of the UC programme. The findings are presented according to their relevant NERUPI framework outcome.

NERUPI Framework Category A – Know

The responses to the end of year outcome survey showed that students that had taken part in one category A activity were more likely to feel that they had developed greater knowledge and awareness of the benefits of HE and graduate employment since the beginning of the academic year. This was particularly evident for UC students where 71.2% of those that had participated in one activity agreed compared with 56.9% of those who had not participated. For non-UC students their awareness was greater when they had taken part in two or more category A activities, 68.6% agreed compared with 56.9% of those who had not taken part. Of the UC students that did not think their knowledge had increased, they were more likely to be unsure than to disagree.

The National Enterprise Challenge was the only activity where the pre- and post-activity question evaluated the impact of category A. The impact was mixed - with a positive impact being recorded for the NatWest Challenge and a negative impact for the AirProducts Challenge. However, this is not an indication of one Challenge being more suitable than the other at addressing category A as responses were only received from two schools with each school participating in just one of the Challenges. The SE score for the NatWest Challenge was the second highest recorded of all the activities whilst the SE score for the AirProducts Challenge was within the lowest three.

The Challenges combined had a bigger impact on non-UC students, with a negative impact being recorded for UC students. Underlying this was a positive impact for the NatWest Challenge and a negative impact for the AirProducts Challenge. However, this is not conclusive as almost 40.0% of postcodes for this survey were either missing or invalid.

Overall, focus group students had a good grasp of the benefits studying further would bring (voting question 3). A student's level of knowledge and awareness of the benefits of studying further increased as they got older. However, there were also some clear indications that some schools are better at informing students about the benefit of further study than others. For example, students at School E and School C consistently voted higher than those from School B and School D. Students from School A appear better informed once they reach sixth form.

NERUPI Framework Category B – Choose

The outcome survey data shows that a sustained and progressive approach for this category is enabling students to gain a better understanding of the options available to them after they leave school. In particular UC students appear to benefit from these activities as 83.7% said they were more aware of the options after one activity compared to 66.4% who had not taken part in any activities. Once students had participated in three or more activities, 100% agreed, although this number was small (UC, n = 10; non-UC, n = 21).

Seven activities evaluated category B through the pre- and post-activity question, making this category the one most commonly measured. Overall, the activity with the most impact was the Personal Statements workshop, despite having the second lowest SE score. The activities that had the biggest impact on UC students were the Personal Statement workshops and University of... The Personal Statement workshops are also covered in Category D below.

In terms of the focus groups and NERUPI B, (voting question 1) whilst the career paths of some students were more developed than others, most students had given their future serious consideration. In general, non-UC students were more certain about their career paths and had considered a wider range of options, most of which required higher level qualifications, e.g. a university degree. Year 9 non-UC students, across the board, were noticeably more aspirational than

their UC peers. Students at School E found the LiNCHigher activities most useful and valued the support of both their Head Teacher and their Director of Aspirations in helping them decide which career paths to take.

However, many students, particularly UC students, were concerned with what happens after they take their GCSEs and they would like more information, or have direct experience in advance of, the transition from school to college or sixth form. Students would like more opportunities to experience the workplace and hear from those who have already made the transition from full-time study into the workplace.

NERUPI Framework Category C – Become

Interestingly, the responses to the outcome survey showed that UC students who had taken part in one category C activity were less confident about making decisions about their post-school future compared to those students that had not participated in any (55.8% versus 62.5%). Non-UC students were only marginally more confident than those that had not participated (61.7% versus 56.6%). The biggest impact on student confidence to make decisions, for both UC and non-UC was for students that had participated in two or more category C activities (72.7% of UC students, 71.4% of non-UC).

Three activities – Motivational Speakers, Marginal Gains workshop and Talk the Talk – evaluated category C through the pre- and post-activity question. Motivational Speakers was the activity with the largest response rate. Marginal Gains had the biggest impact on confidence, although all three activities recorded a statistically significant impact. Out of the three activities Marginal Gains also had the highest SE score.

Both the pre- and post-activity scores for Talk the Talk were the lowest recorded among the evaluated activities. Whilst the overall impact was positive, the post-activity score was within the disagree range (i.e. less than three) for all students, UC students and female students. The reason for this could be the nature of the activity which involves public speaking which some students find uncomfortable, as previously cited in the interim report (Rose and Mallinson, 2021[1]) in relation to the National Enterprise Challenges.

There were large proportions of missing postcodes for two of these activities (Motivational Speakers: 33.1% and Talk the Talk: 56.3%), therefore it is not possible to say which activity had the biggest impact on UC students.

Female students recorded the lowest pre-activity score for category C activities than any other evaluated activity. However, all three activities, and in particular the Marginal Gains workshop, had a bigger impact on female students' self-motivation compared with male students. For the male students Motivational Speakers was the most impactful.

Regarding the mode of delivery, nothing of note emerged from data analysis, as only Talk the Talk and one of the motivational speaker sessions were delivered in-person with the rest delivered online. Motivational Speakers were the only category C activity delivered to multiple year groups and the biggest recorded impact was for Year 11.

The focus group students (voting question 4) also reported that Motivational Speakers had the most impact on their confidence levels. Online lessons were not seen as a viable long-term way of learning or of delivering activities. The biggest challenges facing students, both UC and non-UC, across all year groups, in terms of how confident they felt obtaining the grades they require to be accepted onto their chosen course on leaving school, were confidence in their ability to pass assessments and making up the learning they lost as a result of the disruptions caused by the pandemic. The older year groups and the non-UC students were generally more confident that this would be achievable than the UC or younger students.

NERUPI Framework Category D – Practice

The outcome survey demonstrated that participating in category D activities helps students to develop skills they need to enable them to succeed in the future. Less than half of the students that had not participated felt that since September 2020 they had achieved this goal (45.9% of UC

students and 48.3% of non-UC), whereas this proportion rose to 80.0% of UC students that had participated in two or more category D activities. The proportion was lower for their non-UC counterparts (63.2%).

Two activities evaluated category D - Study Skills / Revision and Personal Statement workshops. Whilst they were addressing the same category the two types of workshops are not comparable as they each address different skills. Responses to both surveys were missing a postcode in almost a quarter of cases. It is not possible to say if the Personal Statement session had a bigger impact on UC or non-UC students as less than 4% of responses were from identified UC students. Of the identifiable students that responded to the Study Skills / Revision workshop survey, there was a bigger impact observed on revision strategies and exam confidence, for UC students.

The activities had a bigger impact on female participants' confidence in their study/revision skills and their ability to write a personal statement when compared with male participants. Whilst all the Personal Statement sessions were delivered online, the Study Skills / Revision sessions were delivered both online and in-person and the biggest impact was seen for the in-person sessions.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the Personal Statement sessions were most impactful for students in Year 12 and college equivalent (L3Y1), whilst the Study Skills / Revision workshops were most beneficial for students in Years 10 and 13. However, the number of Year 13 students responding to this survey was low (n = 15).

The focus group students reported finding Study Skills / Revision workshops boring or repetitive but went on to say that as a result they had more confidence when it came to taking their exams and they had put into practice the different revision techniques they had learnt.

Overall, most of the challenges described by students in the focus group (voting question 5) were around achieving the grades required by courses to be accepted. Few students mentioned their family situation, finances or other social factors, beyond having to make new friends, as difficulties they would need to overcome.

NERUPI Framework Category E – Understand

The outcome survey demonstrated that taking part in a category E activity, of which there was just one (Goal Mapping), enabled both UC and non-UC students to gain a better understanding of the subjects they needed to take and how they would link with different careers. For UC students, 77.8% agreed, if they had participated in the activity, compared with 62.4% who had not; for non-UC students the proportions were 71.4% and 61.8% respectively.

Conversely, the Goal Mapping activity survey appeared to have a negative impact on students. However, survey responses were received from students in Year 9 and 10 across six schools and broken down by year group there was a very small positive impact on the Year 9 students and a negative impact on Year 10. Underlying the effect on Year 9 students was a negative impact on UC students coupled with a positive impact on non-UC students. Whilst this does not follow the same pattern as the outcome survey, it must be noted that the responses to each type of survey were not from the same pool of students.

There may be an element of timing with this specific activity, as during the focus groups some students (specifically at School B) talked about choosing their options and making decisions about which subjects to study at GCSE. Most students would have liked information prior to choosing their options, which for some students happens at the end of Year 8. Timing of delivery may explain the difference between the year groups.

Additionally, many students that participated in the focus groups (voting question 2) felt they needed more support and information to help them choose the most suitable course to help them succeed in their chosen career, especially students at School D and School B. Students at School B were the least likely to have in-depth knowledge of the courses they would need to take to follow their chosen career path. Older, non-UC students were the most informed and knowledgeable about the courses they would need to pursue, and the grades required to be accepted onto their chosen course.

Key findings

The key findings from the evaluation are divided into three sections: those relating to the NERUPI outcomes, general findings and those that are Covid-19 specific.

NERUPI A - Develop students' knowledge and awareness of the benefits of Higher Education and graduate employment:

- The NatWest Challenge had a positive impact on students' understanding of different careers that different HE courses might lead to, whilst the AirProducts Challenge did not achieve its desired outcome in terms of NERUPI A.

- The focus groups found that students in the older year groups (i.e. Years 11 to 13) were more likely to be aware of the benefits of further study. In addition, UC students were least likely to be aware of the benefits of HE and graduate employment. However, students in the focus groups found campus visits – some of which would have been under the banner of First Steps – beneficial.

NERUPI B - Develop students' capacity to navigate Higher Education and graduate employment:

- More student activity surveys addressed this outcome than any other. Whilst Personal Statements had the most impact on all students in terms of how to write one successfully, both UC and non-UC pupils, the data is predominantly for Year 9 students who would have had no previous experience of writing, or knowledge of, personal statements. It was therefore not possible to assess the impact on older year groups.

- Most focus group students had given serious consideration to their future career paths, even in Year 9. However, issues of transition, from both GCSE to college or sixth form and then into university or the workplace, were key concerns for many focus group participants, both UC and non-UC alike. Overall, students would like more information, advice and guidance on their next steps as well as more opportunities to hear from those on college courses and from a wider range of careers.

NERUPI C - Develop students' confidence and resilience in Higher Education and graduate employment:

- Motivational Speakers and Marginal Gains both proved effective at addressing NERUPI C as evidenced in both the survey and focus group data. Marginal Gains had the biggest overall impact on self-motivation and recorded the highest score for student engagement of all activities surveyed.

- Focus group students, especially UC and those in the younger year groups (i.e. Years 9 and 10), reported a lack of confidence in their ability to pass exams and to make up the learning they had lost as a result of the disruption caused by the pandemic, as the two biggest challenges they faced to obtaining the grades required to be accepted onto their chosen course on leaving school.

NERUPI D - Develop students' skills and capacity for student and career success:

- Evidence from both the survey and focus group data shows that participating in category D activities helps students develop the skills they need to succeed. Study Skills / Revision workshops were particularly effective.

- Academic achievement, rather than family, financial or social considerations, was cited as the main difficulty focus group students faced to being able to study further and gain a HE qualification.

NERUPI E - Develop understanding through contextualised subject knowledge and attainment raising:

- There is limited and conflicting survey data in relation to the impact of NERUPI E activities on students understanding through contextualised subject knowledge. However, to have meaningful impact, the timing of when these activities are delivered appears to be crucial and

needs to be ahead of any subject-specific decision making, as evidenced in the focus group data.

- Older, non-UC students were the most informed about the training and courses they needed to take for them to pursue their chosen career.

General findings

- In general, whilst drawn from different student pools, the focus group data (qualitative) supported the survey data (quantitative).

- Evidence from the outcome survey suggests that students that had participated in more activities were more likely to agree with the relevant outcome question.

- There were differences at a school level in the responses to the outcome survey, with students at one or two schools consistently being most likely to agree with the outcome question. Similarly, at the other end of the scale, students from the same two or three schools were the least likely to agree, across all outcome questions.

- Students were more likely to feel they had improved in each of the six skills presented to them in the outcome survey (which included teamwork, communication and revision skills) if they had taken part in one or more activity. The exception was problem solving for non-UC students.

- Some activity surveys had a high proportion of postcodes either missing or invalid meaning that comparisons between UC and non-UC participants need to be treated with caution.

- It is not possible to draw conclusions in relation to impact and the different areas across Lincolnshire due to an uneven distribution of survey responses, for example, there were very few survey responses from schools in the city of Lincoln, even to Motivational Speakers, for which the most responses were received.

- For UC students, six activities had particular impact - Motivational Speakers, Study Skills / Revision workshops, Marginal Gains, Preparation for Further Education, Personal Statement workshops, and University of… In general, of the students that took part in the focus groups, across all year groups, UC students were less aspirational and less confident than their non-UC peers regardless of the outreach activities they had participated in.

- Generally, where an activity had a positive impact it was greater for female students than male students. Conversely when a negative impact was observed it was greater for male students than female students.

- As might be expected, students in the older year groups were more confident, aware and knowledgeable about further study and graduate employment opportunities, regardless of whether they were a UC or a non-UC student, than younger year groups. The school they attended was a bigger influencing factor than student type.

- Focus group students were largely unaware that the activities they had taken part in were delivered by LiNCHigher as part of the UC programme; impact was more indirect and relational to leadership and the HE and aspirational culture that exists within a school or college.

- Some of the non-UC student focus group participants exhibited the characteristics of UC students, i.e. they were the first in their family to consider going to university. This reflects the crude measure of using postcodes to identify students eligible for funding through the UC programme.

- The UC programme is most effectively delivered where there is a designated, full-time qualified member of staff, assigned to career development and aspiration raising, as evidenced by both the focus group and outcome survey data. Schools could learn much from the model used at one of the schools where they had a full-time member of staff responsible

for careers and the UC programme with a job title that was more inspiring than simply careers advisor. The data showed that schools without sixth forms were more likely to focus on Years 9 to 11 students, opposed to those with sixth forms where the focus appeared to be on Years 11 to 13.

- Students that were the least engaged, aspirational and informed were from the smallest school which was also the school that had seen the most disruption during Phase 2 of the UC programme. The school that had experienced at least two changes of identity in terms of academy chains and new Headteachers. It also has the lowest Ofsted rating – inadequate – of all the focus group schools. In addition, due to its size, members of staff take on multiple duties with responsibility for ensuring the delivery of the UC programme in school forming a small part of the school lead's overall role. It could therefore be argued that the school faced the biggest challenges in terms of raising student aspirations and that this may not be a priority for a school in a state of flux.

- Programme leads valued being part of the UC programme with most reporting a cultural shift at the school to how FE and HE is perceived by both students and staff.

- Although parents play a key role in influencing and encouraging their young people in terms of their future career plans, schools continue to struggle to engage parents in the FE and HE discussion. Whilst schools do provide parents with information, both in written form and through open evenings, few, if any, engage with parents in a meaningful way. This is an area that requires further development.

- The specific benefits for schools of engaging with LiNCHigher included the funding, the opportunities it provided for networking with external organisations and the expertise and knowledge of the AEOs.

- For the colleges, having a designated officer in place for the last two terms of Phase 2 proved extremely valuable and productive. The logistics of delivering activities to target students was the main challenge cited by college leads.

- In schools, the impact of the UC programme was mainly measured in terms of positive destination data with all schools, except one, reporting an increase in the number of students applying to go on to study at FE or HE.

Covid-19 specific findings

- Students preferred it when outreach activities were delivered in person rather than virtually. In-person activities appeared to have the greatest impact on students in all aspects of the NERUPI framework.

- All students, but especially UC students, struggled to access lessons during lockdowns and periods of self-isolation whilst learning remotely from home.

- Most students found remote learning less than satisfactory, even when they were able to access lessons online without any difficulty. Many became demotivated and struggled with not being able to ask their teachers for help and clarification if and when they needed to.

- Students preferred to be in school having face-to-face interaction with both their teachers and their peers. They also missed the routine of the school day.

- Some students reported they had lost confidence in their ability to pass exams following lost learning and lack of exam experience.

- The pandemic had a specific impact on Year 9 students when it came to choosing their GCSE options. Many found the remote nature of options and parent evenings, along with a lack of information on what specific subjects would cover, unsatisfactory.

- Many students mentioned poor mental health as a result of the disruption the pandemic caused to their education.

- Some positives did emerge from the disruption caused by the pandemic with some students, especially those in the older year groups, taking the opportunity it gave them to stop, think, and assess whether or not their career choices were the right ones for them.

- Programme leads felt more progress would have been made had it not been for the pandemic.

Recommendations for Phase 3

For schools and colleges

➢ Members of the Senior Leadership Team and teachers should undertake continued professional development to better understand the needs of students from underrepresented groups.

➢ All schools should consider appointing a full-time qualified member of staff designated to careers development with an appropriate aspirational title.

➢ Schools with sixth forms should consider having two career leads: one for Years 9 and 10 and one for Years 11 to 13.

➢ It would be beneficial for schools to provide additional career resources, workshops and activities, specifically for identified underrepresented students or for students with low aspirations, from Year 9 onwards.

➢ Careers leads and Senior Leadership Teams would benefit from engaging with other schools, both locally and county-wide, to enable the sharing of best practice.

➢ Parent Engagement – Engagement with parents can be challenging, and schools and colleges should seek ways to more effectively engage with parents, particularly those of children identified as having low aspirations. For example, looking at ways to have parents engage in certain activities relating to jobs/skills/careers i.e., careers fairs, information events, University and College campus tours.

➢ In colleges, the UC programme lead should sit in career development rather than marketing or widening participation.

For Schools, Colleges and LiNCHigher

➢ Deliver more activities that address NERUPI E, to develop students understanding through contextualised subject specific knowledge and attainment raising. These should also be delivered earlier.

➢ Ensure Goal Mapping workshops are delivered to students before they make subject-specific decisions e.g. choosing their options at GCSE and A-Level.

➢ Run Study Skills / Revision workshops earlier in the school year, ideally before mock exams, so that students can improve both their grades and exam confidence.

➢ Consider delivering the Personal Statement sessions in two parts at two different times. Part 1: 'How to prepare for a Personal Statement' session to be delivered in Year 9 or 10 to ensure students have time to secure potential content. Part 2: 'How to write a Personal Statement' session to be delivered to older year groups, ideally late spring / early summer, Year 12.

➢ Encourage more campus visits (when permitted) as these are highly valued by students and were the only activity that showed longer-term impact.

➢ Consider additional activities to address student concerns around key transition points in their educational and career journey.

For LiNCHigher and the Governance Board

➢ Conduct a full evaluation of the First / Next Steps programme. There has not been an independent evaluation of this high intensity targeted programme and, due to the pandemic, there was little opportunity to evaluate it in full during Phase 2.

➢ Encourage schools to carefully consider the timetabling of when outreach activities and workshops are delivered in school to maximise impact.

➢ Work more intensely with schools that have multiple challenges to raise student aspirations, build confidence and ensure they are better informed about FE and HE opportunities.

➢ Work with schools and colleges to reinforce the importance of collecting postcode data when evaluating activities and make it clear the school postcode should not be used in place of home postcodes.

➢ Include at least one female motivational speaker in the activities programme.

➢ Help schools to engage parents in an active and meaningful way, opening up a dialogue between parents and the school.

➢ For colleges, produce literature that is specific and distinct to that of schools.

For policymakers / funders / the Office for Students

➢ The impact of the pandemic, specifically lost learning, reduced student confidence and the lack of exam experience, especially amongst the current Year 12 and 13s (academic year 2021-22) needs to be taken into consideration when comparing the progress and achievement of these students with other cohorts both now and for the foreseeable future.

➢ Schools that have a high proportion of UC students should be given additional support as their students are more likely to have been adversely affected by the pandemic.

➢ Fund activities for whole year groups, rather than students living in specific postcode areas, to ensure the programme reaches as many disadvantaged students as possible.

➢ Continue programme funding for Years 9 to 13 throughout Phase 3 and expand to the younger year groups, e.g. Year 8, especially in light of the disruption caused by the pandemic.

Appendices

Appendix A – End of year outcome survey

Over the past school year, you will have taken part in a number of LiNCHigher activities. We would like to ask you a few questions about how effective the activities have been. This is a short survey and will take you no more than 10 minutes to complete.

All the information that we will collect will be used for research purposes only. You can notify LiNCHigher at any time if you would like us to delete your personal data. LiNCHigher@bishopg.ac.uk

Q1. Which of the following LiNCHigher activities have you taken part in this school year (since September 2020)? Select all that apply.

- AirProducts / Enterprise Challenge
- Apprenticeships talks
- Campus visits (to a university or a college)
- Careers Fair
- Employability workshop
- Exam revision workshop
- Finance workshop
- First Steps
- Goal Mapping
- Human Utopia
- Introduction to Higher Education workshop
- Let's Pitch It
- Marginal Gains
- Motivational speaker
- My Perfect University
- NatWest Dream Bigger / Enterprise Challenge
- Next Steps
- Preparation for Higher Education
- Study Skills workshop
- Talk the Talk
- None of the above
- Other

Q2. Have you taken part in any of the Online Learning Platform activities? (via https://linchigherlearning.co.uk/)

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

Please provide the following details:

Q3. Your name:

Q4. Your home postcode:

Q5 Are you:

- Female
- Male
- Other
- Prefer not to say

About your school:

Q6. Which school do you attend?

Q7. Which year of study are you in?

Year 11 and 13 students only

Q8. Have you decided what you want to do next when you finish your current studies?

- Yes
- No
- I'm still unsure

Q9. Please tell us which school or college (or other e.g. apprenticeship) that you are hoping to attend in September 2021.

We would like to know how effective you think the activities have been.

Q10. Thinking about the LiNCHigher activities you have taken part in this school year (since September 2020), please select the most appropriate response to the questions below according to how much you agree or disagree with the following statements:

- Since September I have developed greater knowledge and awareness of the benefits of Higher Education and graduate employment
- Since September I have gained a better understanding of the options available to me after I leave school
- Since September I feel more confident to make decisions about my future for when I leave school
- Since September I have developed skills I need to succeed in the future

Q11. Please select all the skills you feel you have improved in this school year:

- Study skills
- Revision skills
- Independent research skills
- Teamwork
- Communication
- Problem solving
- Other

And finally,

Q12. Since September I have developed a better understanding of the subjects I need to take and how they link to careers I may be interested in.

Thank you for completing this short survey!

Appendix B – Example activity survey

You have recently taken part in a motivational speaker session and we would like to ask you some questions about it. This will help us to plan sessions with speakers in schools for the future. This is a short survey and will take you no more than 10 minutes to complete.

About the session:

Q1. How was the talk delivered?

- In-person (with the presenter physically in the classroom with you)
- Live via technology (i.e. over Microsoft Teams, Zoom, Google Classroom etc)
- It was a pre-recorded session

Q2. Please tell us who delivered the session you attended:

- Paul Hughes
- David Hyner
- Luke Staton
- Stephen Seki
- Dan Hargreaves
- John Borland
- Other

Your Details:

Q3. Your name:

Q4. Your home postcode:

Q5. Are you:

- Female
- Male
- Other
- Prefer not to say

About your school:

Q6. Which school do you attend?

Q7. Which year of study are you in?

Questions about the session:

Q8. Please select the most appropriate response according to how much you agree or disagree with the following statements:

- Before attending the session I felt I was self-motivated
- Taking part in the session will help me improve my resilience (the ability to bounce back after a setback or change)
- Overall, the session has improved my confidence

Q9. Thinking about the delivery and content of the session, please select the most appropriate response according to how much you agree or disagree:

- The speaker maintained my interest
- The speaker was inspiring
- The topic of the talk was relevant to me

Q10. Please tell me how much you enjoyed the session (one to five stars)

And finally,

Q11. Having taken part in the session I feel more self-motivated.

Thank you for completing this survey!

Appendix C – The focus group script

1. Introduction

- Introduce yourself and the co-facilitator, if used.
- Thank everyone for attending and explain the purpose of the session and how the information will be used.
- Make sure they have seen the privacy notice /consent to take part and give them the opportunity to ask questions/clarifications if needed.
- Assure students of confidentiality and anonymity. They have the right to withdraw at any time without giving a reason.
- Ask **permission to audio** record the session.
- Ask the students to introduce themselves.
- Set some ground rules – e.g. just one person to talk at a time, respect other people's views. Ask them to suggest any other ground rules.

2. Student demographic information

Note number attending, student's year group, gender, and which Uni Connect activities they've been involved in (or not).

3. Views on Uni Connect / LiNCHigher outreach activities

*3.1 Which Uni Connect / LiNCHigher activities have you taken part in this school year? (Have a list at hand to act as a prompt)

3.2 How were the activities delivered? (i.e. virtually – recorded or live / in person in the classroom)

      3.2.1. Which format do you prefer and why?

3.3 Which activity did you **enjoy the most** and why? *(Prompts: What did they think of the presenters, format of delivery / length / topics and information covered, etc)*

3.4 Which activity did you **enjoy the least** and why?

*3.5 What did **you learn** from taking part in the activities? (i.e. new skills, information, about F/HE etc)

4. Voting questions (note: adapt questions to reflect the year group of the students)

- Use coloured post-it notes or any paper available.
- Ask the students to vote by holding up a number between 1 and 5 as indicated under each question.

Career Plans

*4.1 **How sure are you about what you want to do next when you leave school/college?** (Vote 1 if you are *not at all sure* what you want to do next and 5 if you are *very sure*) (NERUPI B)

    a) Explore why the students voted the way they did.

    b) What career(s) are you considering/decided on and why?

    c) Has the COVID-19 pandemic and school lockdowns affected your plans for the future?

        If YES How? (i.e. has it been in a negative or a positive way).

    d) How has taking part in the Uni Connect / LiNCHigher outreach activities affected your decision on what you will do next?

e) What, or who, else has helped you with making decisions about what to do when you leave school/college (e.g. teachers – which ones specially, parents, friends, the internet, etc)?

Knowledge
*4.2 **How much to do you know about courses or training that will help you with your future career and what you want to do next?** (Prompts: for example, the courses and qualifications needed to be a teacher or a nurse, or to work in hospitality or in business). (Vote 5 if you *know a lot about* the courses that will help you with your career and 1 if you have *not yet looked* into it.) (NERUPI E)

a) Explore why the students voted the way they did.

b) Has taking part in Uni Connect / LiNCHigher activities helped you find out about courses or training that you were previously unaware of and if so how?

c) What else has helped you to find out about courses and training (e.g. their family, friends, the internet etc)?

Benefits of HE
*4.3 **How would you rate your level of knowledge and awareness of the benefits of studying in further / Higher Education?** (Vote 5 if it is *very high* and 1 if it is *very low*) (NERUPI A)

a) Explore why the students voted the way they did.

b) How, if at all, has taking part in Uni Connect / LiNCHigher activities improved your knowledge and awareness of the benefits of going to F/HE.

Confidence
Years 9, 10 and 12
4.4 How confident do you feel about getting onto your further / Higher Education course if that's what you decide you want to do?

Years 11 and 13
4.4 How confident do you feel about meeting the entry criteria to get onto your chosen course?

(Vote 5 if you are *very confident* and 1 if you are *not at all confident*) (NERUPI C)

a) Explore why the students voted the way they did. Why do or don't they feel confident of getting onto their chosen course?

b) How, if at all, has taking part in Uni Connect / LiNCHigher helped you with your confidence, especially in relation to getting on the course you want to go onto?

c) What, or who else, has helped you with your confidence in this area (e.g. teachers – which ones specially, parental support etc)?

Challenges
*4.5 **How difficult will it be for you personally to go to college / university and gain a further / Higher Education qualification?** (Vote 5 if you think it will be *extremely difficult* or challenging and 1 if you are confident that it will *not be a problem*) (NERUPI D)

a) Explore why the students voted the way they did.

b) Has the COVID-19 pandemic made going to college or university more or less difficult for you and why?

c) How has taking part in the Uni Connect/ LiNCHigher activities has helped you with strategies or tips on how to overcome or negotiate some of the difficulties you face?

5. What else?

5.1 What is important to you when deciding what to do after your exams?

5.2 What sort of help or support would you like to help you plan for your future?

*5.3 What else would you like to help you succeed in your future career?

6. Uni Connect

6.1 How, if at all, has taking part in Uni Connect / LiNCHigher outreach activities influenced your decision of what you will or might do when you leave school?

  a) Has it changed your mind and if so how?

  b) Has the COVID-19 pandemic influenced you in any way and if so how?

*6.2 Is there anything else anyone would like to say about their experience of Uni Connect / LiNCHigher activities or the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their future plans?

7. The Focus Group

*7.1 How have you found taking part in the focus group today?

7.2 Is there anything you've enjoyed about this group session or anything that you've not liked about it? If so, what?

Thank you all for taking part in the group today.

Note: Questions with a * are the priority questions – if you are short of time focus on the starred questions only.