End of Year 1 Phase 2 Uni Connect Evaluation Report to LiNCHigher

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Executive Summary

This interim report presents the evaluation findings for the end of Year 1 Phase 2 Uni Connect *Raising Higher Education Aspirations* project funded by the Office for Students and managed locally by the LiNCHigher partnership. The project delivers targeted Higher Education outreach activities to young people in Years 9 to 13 in areas of the County where the Higher Education participation of young people is both low and much lower than expected based on GCSE-level attainment.

Methodology: Evaluation approach

The report is based on evaluation activities conducted between March and July 2020, during the Covid-19 national lockdown when all schools were closed. The data was collected from the six case study schools and the two case study colleges that agreed, at the start of the school year (September 2019), to take part in the evaluation and included the following activities:

- An online student activity survey (in the six case study schools only) which received 672 valid responses

- Eight semi-structured interviews with each of the case study School and College Leads

- Four semi-structured interviews with the Area Engagement Officers (AEOs) in-post and active in June 2020

- Two student focus groups, conducted at the beginning of March 2020 with 12 students, in one of the case study schools.

The impact of all activities that students engaged with was assessed against the Network for Evaluating and Researching University Participation Interventions (NERUPI) Framework, the aims which are detailed below.

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.

It should be noted that this report does not detail all activities carried out by the evaluation team during the year, nor ongoing evaluation work and should be considered alongside the update reports already submitted to the Steering Group and the Governing Board at regular intervals throughout the year.

Key findings

- Pre-Covid-19 School and College Leads felt they had made good progress raising the aspirations of their students to progress onto Higher Education or higher-level apprenticeships.

- The results of the online student activity survey showed medium-term impact on student Higher Education aspirations for several of the LiNCHigher Higher Education-funded outreach activities, specifically, the National Enterprise Challenge, campus visits, career fairs and revision sessions. However, it also highlighted that student do not necessarily have to

enjoy a session for it to be beneficial. Overall, the survey showed that students want more time with most of the activities (e.g. campus visits, careers fairs), want them to be more fun (revisions workshops, Finance4Kids), more interactive (motivational speakers, workshops) and linked more closely to the curriculum and their work in class (English travel writing workshop, Finance4Kids). Students also noted when presenters were not enthusiastic or did not appear to engage with the students as they expected them to.

- In terms of improving specific activities, students would like campus visits to be longer and include opportunities to visit and experience more of the facilities, such as the science labs and seminar rooms. At career fairs they would like more stands with a greater variety of careers and employers to be represented, especially representatives from the arts and music. Students would like revision workshops to provide them with new ideas of how to approach revision. Whilst popular, the main issue students had with events such as the National Enterprise Challenge was presenting in front of large groups of other students.

- The impact of motivational speakers varied depending on who the speaker was and what they were trying to motivate in the students.

- The results of the activity survey do not appear to show any overall difference in impact between Uni Connect and non-Uni Connect students. However, some differences were observed at an activity or year group level. For example, the Grenade Challenge had a bigger impact on students in Year 10 than in Year 9 with the difference most marked for improving confidence (NERUPI category C) or My Perfect University which had the biggest impact on Uni Connect students, particularly in enabling them to know what to look for when choosing a university (NERUPI category B).

- The online activity platform was welcomed by the School and College Leads. However, most had not had the opportunity to use it to its full potential at the time of the interviews.

- It is too soon to assess the impact of the online activity platform as it is early in its inception and content is still being added.

- The relationship between School Leads and LiNCHigher, especially their designated AEO, is strong, productive and open. Communication generally works well, in both directions, and School Leads undoubtedly value the work of LiNCHigher in raising the aspirations of *all* their students, especially in the area of Higher Education progression.

- The relationship between the colleges and LiNCHigher could be stronger and needs further developing and attention if the programme is going to have an impact on their Level 2 and 3 students in the second year of Phase 2.

- The colleges would like to see the outreach activities for their Level 2 and 3 students start much earlier in the year than they have previously, ideally by the end of September.

- Student ambassadors are currently underused.

Overall, the work of LiNCHigher and the outreach activities they fund are well received and valued by the School and College Leads. There is a particularly good working relationship between AEOs and School Leads. Anecdotally, interventions were starting to have a positive impact on all students' Higher Education aspirations prior to Covid-19, and this is evidenced through the online activity survey data.

Implications of the findings from Year 1 Phase 2

A good working relationship between the LiNCHigher AEOs and School and College Leads is key to driving the project forward. Overall, the data indicates that raising Higher Education aspiration activities funded by LiNCHigher are having a positive impact on students in the case study schools. There is now a good foundation on which to build next year's programme and the opportunity to embed Higher Education aspirations into the culture of schools and colleges across the county by the end of Phase 2.

Recommendations for Phase 2 Year 2 (2020-21)

- Endeavour to keep AEOs with their allocated schools throughout the school year. This stability will enhance the relationship between School Leads and LiNCHigher and improve the potential for the programme to have a positive, longer-term impact on student Higher Education aspirations.

- Inspirational speakers should be selected carefully.

- Ensure workshops are interactive, engaging and set at the level of the students they are delivering to.

- Place a LiNCHigher member of staff on-site in each of the colleges, at least one day a week, to engage the colleges and their Uni Connect students with Higher Education. This is in line with the good practice of other partnerships as evidenced in the recently published '*Levelling up and supporting young people to progress and succeed in Higher Education*' paper co-produced by the 29 Uni Connect partnerships.

- Begin the work with Colleges earlier in the school year, ideally by the end of September.

- It will be important to ensure all activities on the online learning platform have evaluation built into them from the start to enable impact to be measured.

- Embed appropriate attainment raising activities into the online learning platform to help students to bridge the gap that Covid-19 has created.

- Reconceptualise the role of student ambassadors. One suggestion might be to consider recruiting young people from local colleges. This would resolve the issue of travel and access, at least in part.

Limitations of the impact evidence

Due to Covid-19, and the subsequent closure of all UK schools in March 2020, it was not possible to carry out the full range of planned Phase 2 Year 1 evaluation activities, the majority of which were scheduled for the summer term (specifically student focus groups). Furthermore, since all delivery of activity in school ceased in March the number of interventions students received this school year was significantly reduced, with two terms of activities rather than three. Therefore, the student activity survey only covers outreach activity the students received prior to the lockdown (September 2019 to early March 2020) rather than a full year of activity, as originally planned. In the absence of being able to talk to the students directly, some open questions were added to the survey to try to capture the student voice.

The response rate to the activity survey was lower than originally anticipated since students were entrusted to complete the survey from home rather than in a school setting.

Data are also limited to the case study schools and therefore not necessarily representative of all schools across the county that received support from LiNCHigher this year. However, the findings can be viewed as indicative across the project with some key themes emerging that the LiNCHigher team might like to consider when planning next year's programme delivery.

Potential project challenges for Phase 2 Year 2 (2020-21)

- Ongoing implications of Coivd-19, specifically the potentially limiting of student access to ICT, such as laptops.

- Re-engaging and motivating students, especially Year 10.

- The delivery of meaningful outreach activities virtually.

- LiNCHigher maintaining their good relationship with schools and in some cases developing new relationships where AEOs have been allocated different schools.

- Accessing the student voice directly to assess impact, given the ongoing Covid-19 restrictions that are likely to be in place when schools reopen in September.

- Encouraging School Leads to keep raising Higher Education aspirations on the agenda of School Leadership Teams.

1. Introduction

This interim report presents the evaluation findings for the end of Year 1 Phase 2 Uni Connect raising Higher Education (HE) aspirations project, funded by the Office for Students (OfS) and managed locally by the LiNCHigher partnership. The report is based on the results of the following evaluation activities conducted between March and July 2020, during the Covid-19 lockdown, with the six case study schools and the two case study colleges:

- An online student activity survey (in the six case study schools only) which received 672 valid responses
- Eight semi-structured interviews with each of the case study School and College Leads
- Four semi-structured interviews with the Area Engagement Officers in-post and active in June 2020
- Two student focus groups, conducted at the beginning of March 2020 with 12 students, in one of the case study schools.

All interviews were conducted remotely either by telephone or video call, recorded and sent out for transcription. Interviews took a broad-brush approach, exploring not only the perceived impact of HE outreach activities during the first two terms of the school year, but also school/college engagement with LiNCHigher and the new online activity platform launched during lockdown as well as their plans for next year.

The six case study schools, whose key characteristics are summarised in Table 1 below, are geographically distributed across the county and all receive a high-level of support from LiNCHigher (i.e. they are classed as 'Green' schools).

For the purpose of this report, the names of participating schools and colleges have been anonymised. Therefore, throughout this report, the case study schools are referred to as School A, B, C, D, E and F and the colleges as College 1 and 2.

Table 1: Key characteristics of the case study schools

School	Area	% Uni Connect	Ofsted rating	Sixth Form	Size / Students on role
School A	East Coast	64%	Requires Improvement	Yes	Large ~950
School B	Boston	50%	Requires Improvement	No	Large ~1165
School C	Grantham	61%	Inadequate	No	Small ~235
School D	South Holland	52%	No report – Academy 2019	No	Medium ~700
School E	East Lindsay	19%	Requires Improvement	No	Medium ~700
School F	City	37%	Good	Yes	Large ~920

Caveats to this report

Due to the Covid-19 global pandemic, and the subsequent closure of all UK schools during the national lockdown in March 2020, it was not possible to carry out the full range of planned Phased 2 Year 1 evaluation activities, especially those scheduled for the summer term (i.e. school visits and student focus groups). Therefore, the student activity survey *only* covers outreach activity the students received before the lockdown (September 2019 to early March 2020) rather than the full year of activities as originally planned. In the absence of being able to talk to the students directly, some open questions were added to the survey to try and capture the student voice.

Note, this report *does not* detail all activity carried out by the evaluation team during the year, (for example, the published literature review - see appendix B - staff training on research and evaluation methods or conferences attended) nor does it include ongoing work, namely the evaluation of the online outreach activities that recently went live on the LiNCHigher platform. Therefore, this report should be considered alongside the update reports submitted to the Steering Group and the Governing Board at regular intervals throughout the year.

The main body of this report is divided into three further sections:

- Pre-Covid-19 (September 2019 – March 2020)
- During school shutdown (March – July 2020)
- Plans for next year (September 2020 onwards)

The final section of the report draws out some key findings from the Year 1 Phase 2 evaluation with recommendations for the partnership to consider taking forward when planning the programme of outreach activity for next year.

2. Pre-Covid (September 2019 – early March 2020)

2.1 Relationship between case study schools/colleges and LiNCHigher

All School Leads were very happy with the working relationship they had with LiNCHigher, especially with their designated AEO. One School Lead described it as "*really great*", another as "*absolutely brilliant*" and one (School A) commented: *"I can't thank LiNCHigher enough, I think we work really well with them. Everything that we have from them is really well received."* Another (School B) said, "*we have a good working relationship and there are lots of things that we just wouldn't be able to do without them*." School Leads felt supported and listened to by their AEO, that communication was effective and that AEOs were willing to attend events when invited. The AEOs were viewed as reliable, delivering what they promised, when they promised. One School Lead (School A) further commented: "*when we email, there's always a response within a few days. If they're organising a bus, they organise the bus. There's always communication.*" The AEOs reported having a strong working relationship with all of their schools, not just the case study schools. They also felt that this year the level of school engagement with the project across the board had been good, with one AEO describing it as "*the best we have had to date.*"

The good relationship between LiNCHigher and the schools persists despite all six case study schools experiencing some form of disruption either at the start or part-way through the year with their allocated AEO, something the AEOs themselves were only too aware of. Two case study schools were assigned a new AEO at the start of this school year, one had a change of AEO after December and two changed AEOs during lockdown. In the case of the sixth school (School C), it was the School Lead that was new in post at the beginning of the school year. However, the experience of taking on the role had reportedly been a positive one, with the School Lead commenting:

> *It felt like I was on the back foot a little bit, but the AEO has been great, really supportive. I found that we've built up a really strong partnership. I was really pleased with how it's gone.*

Other comments from School Leads on the transition from one AEO to another included:

> *I was surprised at how well the transition went actually. I thought we might have some problems but no, it was really good.* (School B)

> *We've had a lot of changes over the last few years, we've seemed to not have had the same sort of stability as some of the other schools…but every single one* [AEO] *that we've worked with has been absolutely brilliant. I feel that everything runs extremely smoothly.* (School D)

> *It was absolutely brilliant; I can't fault the team. It's just disappointing that we've had changes again, but these things happen.* (School E)

The AEOs recognised that some of the schools have faced more disruption than others but felt that overall they each have a good working relationship with their School Leads, that schools were engaging well with the project and they were welcomed by both members of staff and students alike at their respective schools. One AEO commented: "*I know the Head and he knows me…the students know my first name now, so that's good. In terms of rapport with students I think it's pretty good*".

This AEO had gone as far as volunteering to work with the school Cadets every week to build her relationship with both staff and students.

The case study schools were also reported to be engaging with the Confident Choices initiative[1]. Three of the School Leads specifically mentioned that they had found the AEOs support in this area of their work particularly helpful.

Colleges

The relationship between LiNCHigher and the two colleges appeared to be less robust than it was with the schools. College 1 continued to feel a sense of frustration as if they were "*a bit of an add-on*" when it came to LiNCHigher engaging with their Uni Connect students (UC students). College 2, despite being in a stronger position having had a member of the LiNCHigher team on-site in previous years, were uncertain of the implications of the proposed restructuring to how colleges were going to be managed within the project next year for their working relationship, commenting: "*there are some restructuring that makes it a bit less secure, that doesn't really help when you're building up relationships.*"

2.2 Evidence of impact

Methodology

This section considers the impact of LiNCHigher outreach activities on changing HE aspirations of students in the case study schools. Evidence was drawn primarily from the results of the student activity survey sent out to all students at the six case study schools during May and July 2020 when schools were closed due to Covid-19. The quantitative evidence from the survey was supplemented by the interviews with School Leads and the AEOs. In addition, qualitative evidence came from two student focus groups (consisting of six students in each) conducted at one school (School C) just prior to lockdown and provider feedback of a particular outreach activity funded by LiNCHigher at one of the case study schools (School B).

Limitations of impact evidence

Due to the Covid-19 school shut down both the quantitative and qualitative data the evaluation team were able to collect was less than initially planned. The response rate to the activity survey was lower than originally anticipated since students were trusted to complete the survey from home rather in a school setting. There may also have been an element of 'self-select' in the completion of the survey as it is possible that those students that were most engaged with their schools during the shutdown period were more likely to have completed the survey. It was also not possible to directly access students in the summer term, as planned, to run focus groups. Whilst the data is limited and, in the case of the interviews, anecdotal, together the two different types of datasets (the student activity survey and staff and AEO interviews) helps to build a picture of the impact LiNCHigher outreach activities were having in terms of raising student HE aspirations, prior to Covid-19.

2.3 Quantitative evidence: Student activity survey

The activity survey was administered online, via a link which was emailed to students by the School Leads. The survey asked students to rate the outreach activities they liked most and least. The impact of all activities that students engaged with was also assessed against the Network for Evaluating and Researching University Participation Interventions (NERUPI) Framework (see Table 2 below). Students were only asked about activities that took place in *their* school and for *their* year group. The activities took place between September 2019 and March 2020, the survey responses therefore provide students' reflections of their experience and indicates some medium-term impact. Details of each of the activities that took place within each school and the number of responses collected for each are presented in the Appendix.

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[1] https://www.lincolnshireteachingschoolstogether.co.uk/page/?title=Confident+Choices&pid=66

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.

A total of 853 student responses were received in the survey. However, after data cleaning this reduced by 21% to 672 valid responses. Removal criteria included incomplete or duplicate responses and test responses completed by teachers or AEOs. Responses for each case study school and year group are detailed in Table 3 below. Table 4 shows the response rate by demographic characteristics (gender and UC students).

Table 3: Student activity survey responses by school and year group

School	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11	Year 12	Year 13	Total
School A	61	44	27	33	14	179
School B	57	89	37	N/A	N/A	183
School C	17	28	7	N/A	N/A	52
School D	32	10	14	N/A	N/A	56
School E	42	35	9	N/A	N/A	86
School F	0	43	38	21	14	116
Total	*209*	*249*	*132*	*54*	*28*	*672*

Table 4: Student activity survey responses by demographic characteristics

Demographic characteristic		Number of responses	(%)
Gender	Female	362	(53.9%)
	Male	260	(38.7%)
	Other	4	(0.6%)
	Prefer not to say	5	(0.7%)
	Not given	41	(6.1%)
UC Students	Yes	247	(36.8%)
	No	425	(63.2%)

The response rate for some schools, and some year groups within schools, was low, even though several reminder emails were sent to students by the School Leads. This meant that the impact of some activities might not be as reliable or representative as desired. However, completing the survey during lockdown may have mitigated the possibility of an individual's response being influenced by other students, perhaps providing a truer reflection of both the impact of the activity and how well the activities were received.

The activities reviewed in this report are combined where possible to present evidence of impact at an *activity type* level. Whilst not all activities are covered in this report due to an insufficient number of responses, each activity has been reviewed on a school by school basis within year groups and is available as supplementary material on the Evaluation drive at Bishop Grosseteste University for LiNCHigher members of staff and members of the Governance Board.

A total of 672 responses to the activity survey were received: 247 (37%) UC students and 425 (63%) non-UC students. This does not reflect the actual split within the case study schools which overall is 47% UC students and 53% non-UC students. The lower than expected number of UC students responding to the survey could be due to limited or no access to suitable technology to attend online learning, reducing inclination to access school email.

Campus Visits

Survey responses were received from 63 Year 12 and 13 students (UC students n=28, non-UC students n=38) that had taken part in campus visits to four different universities. A combined Year group from School A visited both Sheffield Hallam University and University Centre Grimsby. Year 12 School F students visited De Montfort University and Year 13 visited the University of Lincoln. The visits were well received with the most popular reasons selected for liking the visit being 'seeing the campus', 'seeing the facilities' and that it 'gave an idea of what university life would be like'.

Students were asked a series of questions based on the NERUPI Framework as a measure of impact. The biggest impact of campus visits was in gaining a better understanding of the benefits of Higher Education where 72% of UC students and 92% non-UC students either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. Overall, the four campus visits had a bigger impact on non-UC students, however a positive impact was observed for both groups (Figures 1 to 4 below).
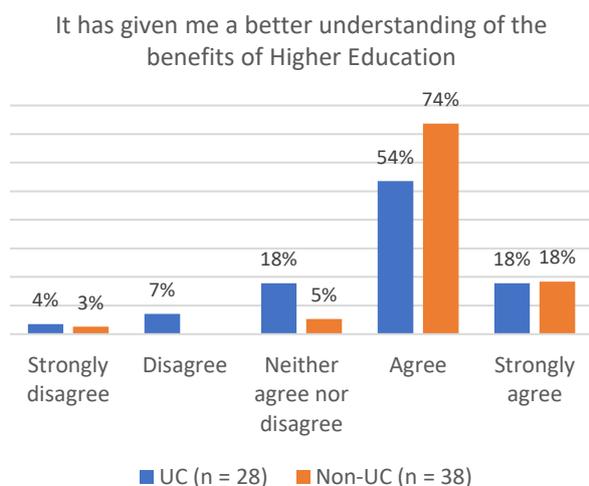
Figure 1: Years 12 and 13 Campus Visits – 'It has given me a better understanding of the benefits of Higher Education'
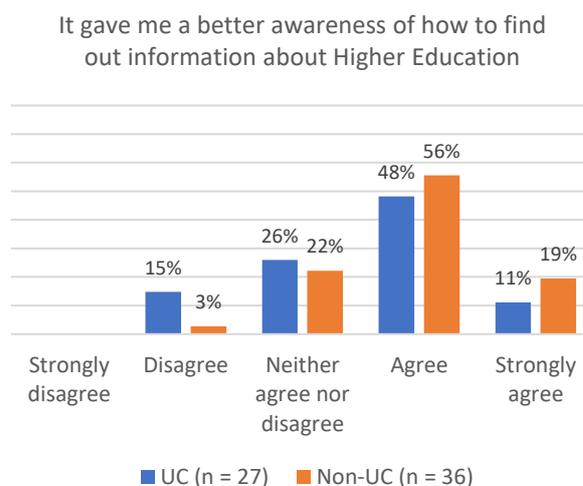
Figure 2: Years 12 and 13 Campus Visits – 'It gave me a better awareness of how to find out information about Higher Education'

It helped me imagine myself as a future university student
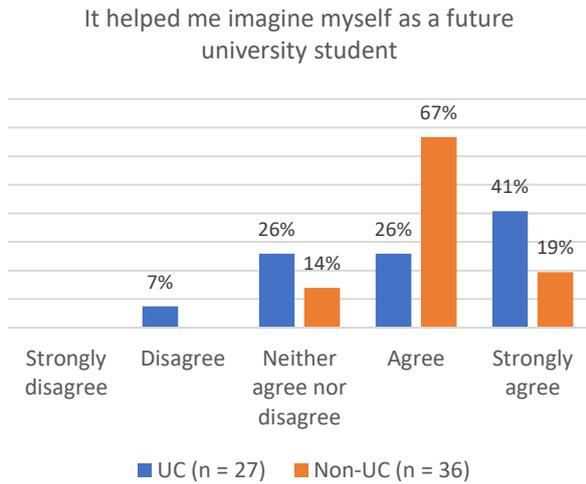
Figure 3: Years 12 and 13 Campus Visits – 'It helped me imagine myself as a future university student'

It gave me a better understanding of the options available to me post-school
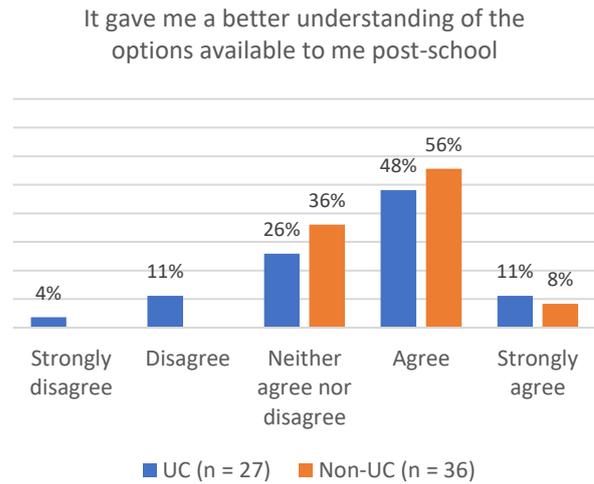
Figure 4: Years 12 and 13 Campus Visits – 'It gave me a better understanding of the options available to me after I leave school'

Students comments on the trip were mostly positive, however recurring themes were wanting to have additional time in order to see more of the campus and to be able to explore more of the facilities, particularly to see where lectures and seminars take place.

Careers Fairs

Students at School A attended a school careers fair in which all year groups took part in February 2020. In total 91 survey responses from students in Years 9 to 11 (UC students n=45, non-UC students n=46) and 40 students in Years 12 and 13 (UC students n=25, non-UC students n=15) that attended the fair were received.

The fair had a positive impact on most students in Years 9 to 11 (Figures 5 to 7 below), with the biggest impact for UC students being a better understanding of post-school options available and the benefits of Higher Education, where 78% and 76% respectively either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement.

It has given me a better understanding of the benefits of Higher Education
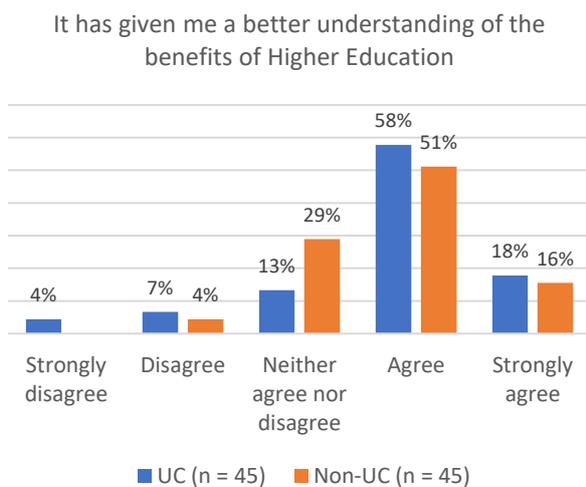
Figure 5: Years 9 to 11 Careers Fair – 'It has given me a better understanding of the benefits of Higher Education'

It has given me a better understanding of the options available to me after I leave school
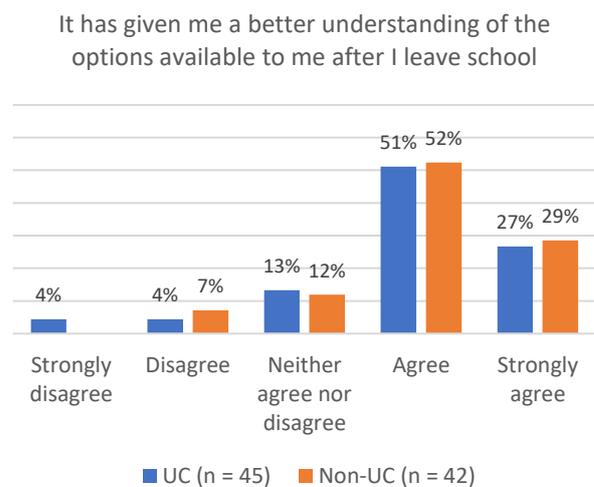
Figure 6: Years 9 to 11 Careers Fair – 'It has given me a better understanding of the options available to me after I leave school'

It has given me a better understanding of the subjects I need to take and how they link with careers

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
UC (n = 45)	4%	4%	29%	47%	16%
Non-UC (n = 43)	5%	5%	9%	56%	26%
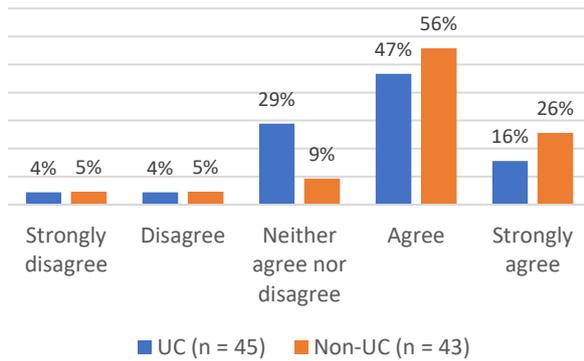
Figure 7: Years 9 to 11 Careers Fair – 'It has given me a better understanding of the subjects I need to take and how they link to careers I may be interested in'

The fair had a bigger impact overall for non-UC students in Years 12 and 13, however a positive impact was observed for both year groups (Figures 8 to 10 below).

It has given me a better understanding of the benefits of Higher Education

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
UC (n = 25)	8%	4%	20%	56%	12%
Non-UC (n = 15)			27%	67%	7%
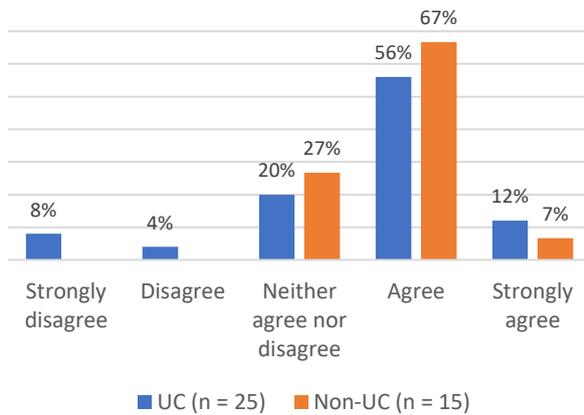
Figure 8: Years 12 and 13 Careers Fair – 'It has given me a better understanding of the benefits of Higher Education'

It has given me a better understanding of the options available to me after I leave school

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
UC (n = 25)	8%	8%	20%	44%	20%
Non-UC (n = 15)			13%	67%	20%
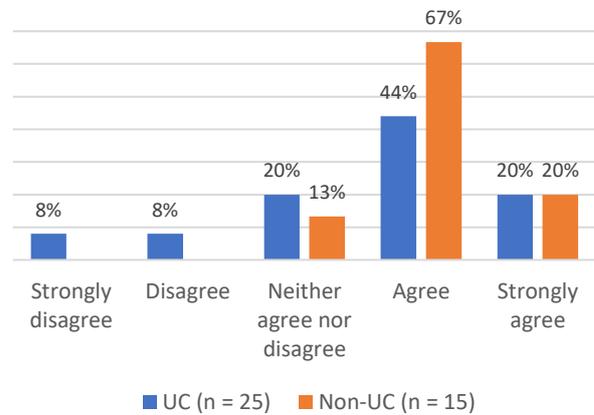
Figure 9: Years 12 and 13 Careers Fair – 'It has given me a better understanding of the options available to me after I leave school'

It has given me a better understanding of the subjects I need to take and how they link with careers
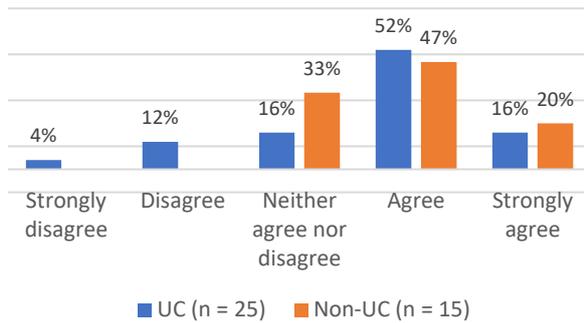
Figure 10: Years 12 and 13 Careers Fair – 'It has given me a better understanding of the subjects I need to take and how they link to careers I may be interested in'

The fair was mostly well received by students with the most popular reason selected for enjoying the activity 'being able to discover opportunities that might be available to me after leaving school' for Year 9, 'the variety of different employers' for Year 10 and 'being able to get information from different colleges and universities' for both Years 11 and 12.

Year 12 students, however, would have liked more universities to be represented at the fair and more information about alternative routes with one commenting: "*Have more options for post 16 and 18; such as apprenticeships or different pathways to degrees*".

Comments received from students in Years 9 to 11 were mostly positive, with several students wanting to spend longer at the event and a wider variety of careers represented.

Students in Year 9, from Boston schools, attended a World of Work Festival (WoW Fest) in February 2020. Feedback on the event was collected through 39 responses to the survey from School B students (UC students n=11, non-UC students n=28). The fair had a positive impact on most of those that responded, and a similar impact to the school careers fair at School A, with the exception of giving a better understanding of the options available after leaving school where the School A careers fair had a bigger impact (83% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement) compared with the WoW Fest (60%) (Figures 11 to 13 below).

It has given me a better understanding of the benefits of Higher Education

It has given me a better understanding of the options available to me after I leave school
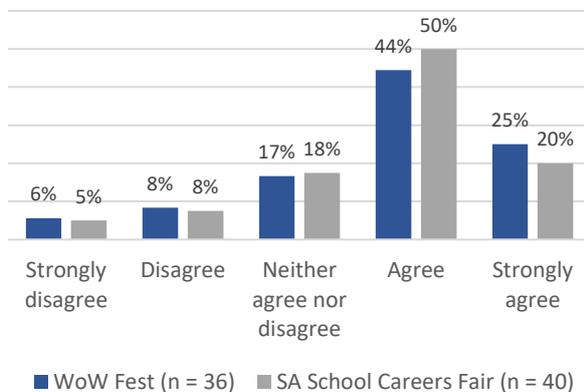
*Figure 11: Year 9 Careers Fairs - 'It has given me a better understanding of the benefits of Higher Education'*
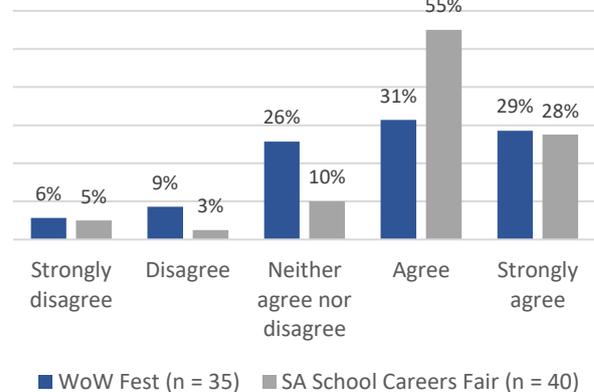
Figure 12: Year 9 Careers Fairs - 'It has given me a better understanding of the options available to me after I leave school'

It has given me a better understanding of the subjects I need to take and how they link with careers
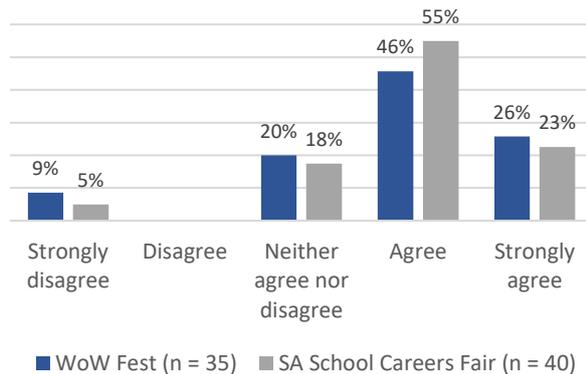
Figure 13: Year 9 Careers Fairs - 'It has given me a better understanding of the subjects I need to take and how they link to careers that I may be interested in'

The WoW Fest was mostly well received, 18 students said that they either enjoyed the activity or enjoyed it the most with a further third of those that responded saying they liked the fair but just not as much as the other activity they had participated in. Comments from students about the WoW Fest were similar to those received from students at School A, mostly requests for more variety, specifically representatives from music and the arts, or more types of career options.

Motivational Speakers

Three groups of students received talks by motivational speakers: Paul Hughes with Year 9 students at School E (18 responses), and Khadija Kalifa with Year 10 students at School A and Year 11 students at School E (total of 25 responses; UC students n=10, non-UC students n=15). The content of the two talks and the intended impact were slightly different, whilst both focused on confidence building (Figure 14 below), Paul Hughes also placed an emphasis on team building and resilience. The Paul Hughes talk had a bigger impact on confidence with 62% agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement compared with 35% for the talk by Khadija Kalifa.

Overall, it has improved my confidence
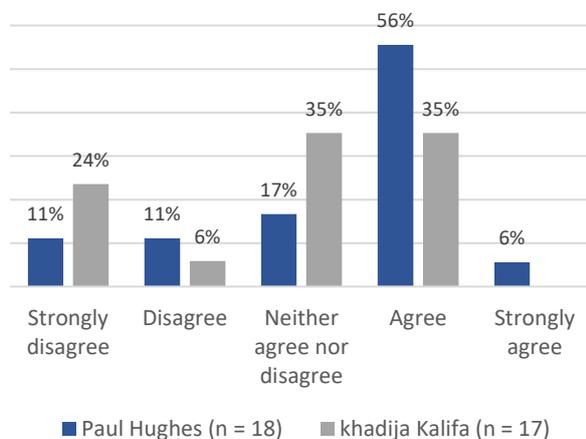
Figure 14: Motivational Speakers - 'Overall, it has improved my confidence'

The 18 responses from students at the Paul Hughes talk at School E comprised three UC and 15 non-UC students. Twelve of the participants either agreed or strongly agreed that the talk had improved their resilience, however fewer than half agreed that they had a better understanding of how to work well with others. There were very few comments from students, two would have liked the session to be shorter, whilst one would have liked more time for questions. Two wanted it to be more active.

The 24 responses from across the two sessions with Khadija Kalifa were mixed (Figures 15 and 16 below). Four out of ten UC students agreed that the talk had improved their self-motivation, however a further four neither agreed nor disagreed and two strongly disagreed. The impact was slightly bigger for UC students' confidence to make positive choices where six agreed; although the number of responses in each of the two groups were low. However, student feedback indicated that the talk was particularly poorly received at one school (School A). Students did not like the speaker's attitude towards them, finding her quite dismissive, one student said: "*she was boring and made me feel inferior*", another commented: "*she was very self-orientated…we mainly heard about her and not what we could do*".
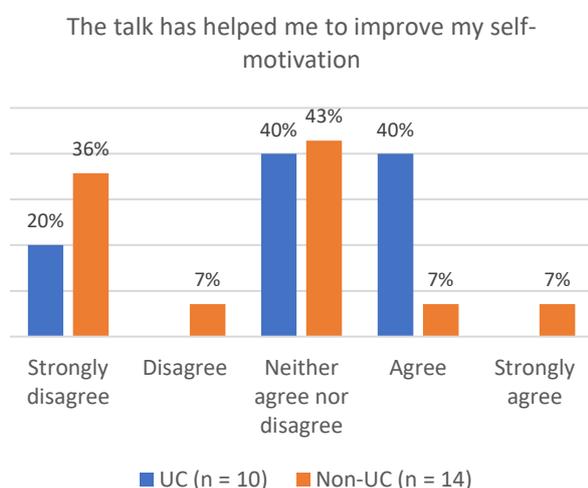
Figure 15: Khadija Kalifa - 'The talk has helped me to improve my self-motivation'
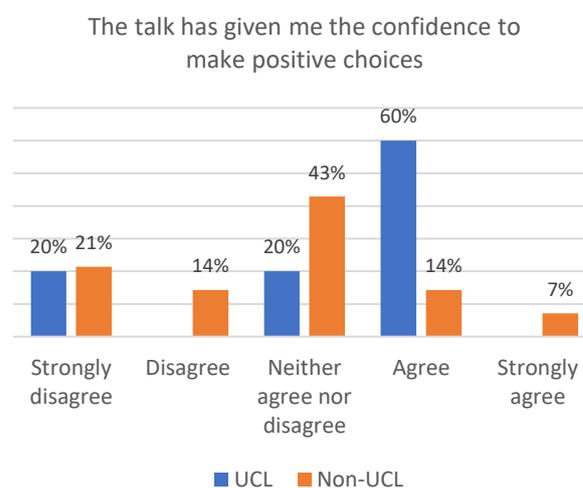
Figure 16: Khadija Kalifa - 'The talk has given me the confidence to make positive choices'

Workshops - Finance4Kids

Four groups of students participated in Finance4Kids, School E, Year 9, 10 and 11 students and School C Year 10 students, 42 responses to the survey were received (UC students n=11, non-UC students n=31). Finance4Kids aimed to teach students personal finance skills through a session involving an interactive financial literacy game. The workshop had a fairly positive impact on students, with the biggest impact being on improved confidence in money management where 82% of UC students agreed with the statement (Figure 17 below). In addition to participating in the financial literacy game, the Finance4Kids workshop included a session on linking finance/mathematics with different careers to contextualise subject knowledge with careers and the benefits of graduate careers. The survey suggests that this section of the workshop had a bigger impact on UC students than non-UC students, where 73% of UC students agreed they had a better understanding of the subjects they need to take and how they link with careers compared with non-UC students (48%) (Figure 18). Similarly, but less marked, 64% of UC students agreed that the workshop had helped them with post-school decisions compared with 52% of non-UC students (Figure 19). The data are shown across all four groups in aggregate because of the small number of

responses per year group. However, inspection at an individual group level suggests a more positive impact on Year 10 School C students than either Year 9 or Year 10 School E students.

The workshop has improved my confidence in money management
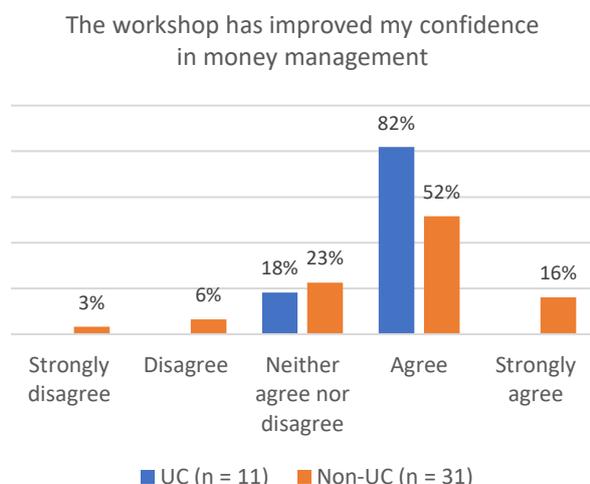
Figure 17: Finance4Kids - 'The workshop has improved my confidence in money management'

The workshop has given me a better understanding of the subjects I need to take and how they link to careers
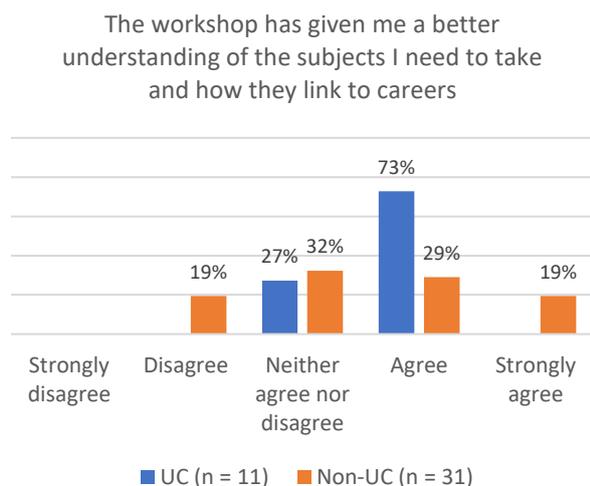
Figure 18: Finance4Kids - 'The workshop has given me a better understanding of the subjects I need to take and how they link to careers that I may be interested in'

The workshop has helped me make decisions about the options available to me after I leave school
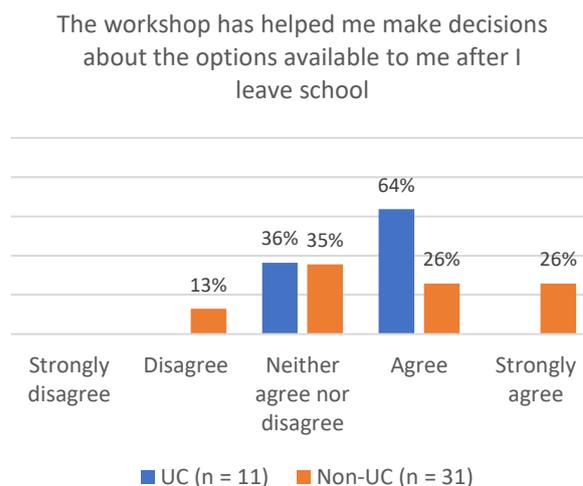
Figure 19: Finance4Kids - 'The workshop has helped me make decisions about the options available to me after I leave school'

The student comments about Finance4Kids were mostly regarding ways to improve the workshop: "*explain it better*" (both Years 9 and 10), "*make it more fun*" (Year 9) and "*make it more interesting*" (Year 10). One Year 10 student commented that it "*was done incredibly well and taught me valuable information*". Whilst one Year 11 student thought "*it was good but felt as if it was for a younger age range*".

Workshops – Revision (Exams MADE Easy)

Four groups of Year 11 students participated in an Exams MADE Easy revision workshop: School A, B, E and F. A total of 56 responses to the survey were received (UC students n=23, non-UC students n=33). The workshop had a positive impact on both groups of students, however a bigger impact overall for non-UC students was observed (Figures 20 to 22 below).

I feel more motivated to revise
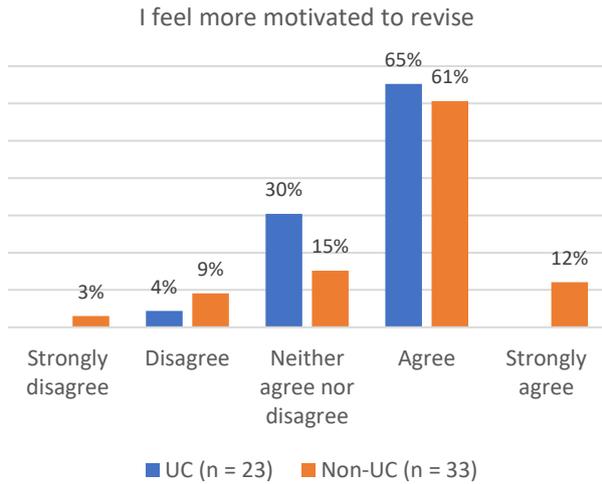
Figure 20: Year 11 Exams MADE Easy - 'I feel more motivated to revise'

The workshop has helped me improve my revision/study skills
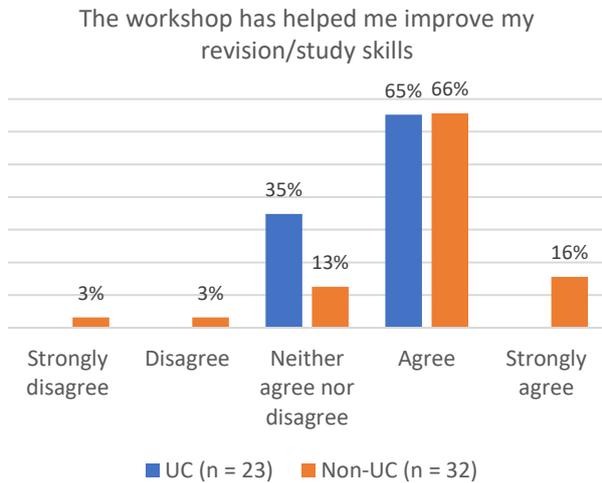
Figure 21: Year 11 Exams MADE Easy - 'The workshop has helped me improve my revision/study skills'

Better understanding of how to study/revise for different subjects
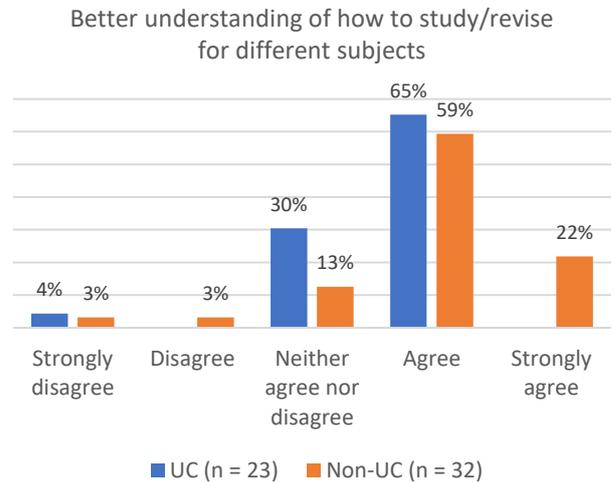
Figure 22: Year 11 Exams MADE Easy - 'The workshop has given me a better understanding of how to study/revise for different subjects'

Fifty Year 10 students (UC students n=17, non-UC students n=33) from School B also took part in an Exams MADE Easy revision workshop. The impact was mixed and less than the combined Year 11 groups (figures 23 to 25 below).

I feel more motivated to revise

UC (n = 17)   Non-UC (n = 33)
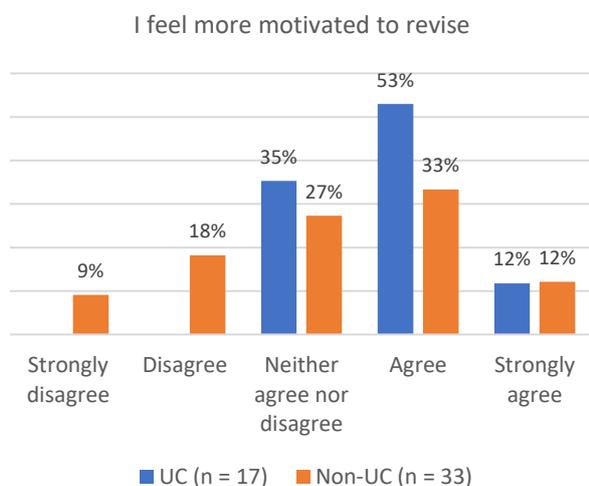
Figure 23: Year 10 Exams MADE Easy - 'I feel more motivated to revise'

The workshop has helped me improve my revision/study skills

UC (n = 17)   Non-UC (n = 33)
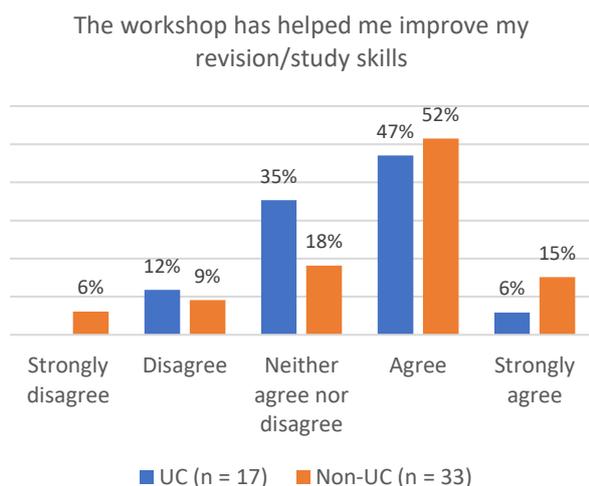
Figure 24: Year 10 Exams MADE Easy - 'The workshop has helped me improve my revision/study skills

Better understanding of how to study/revise for different subjects

UC (n = 17)   Non-UC (n = 33)
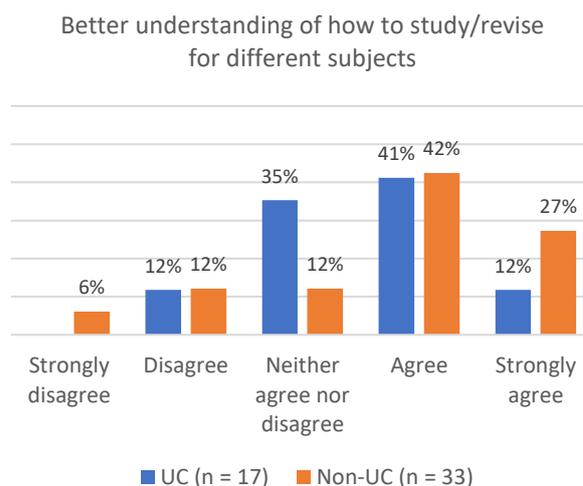
Figure 25: Year 10 Exams MADE Easy 'The workshop has given me a better understanding of how to study/revise for different subjects'

Mostly the comments about the activity were suggestions for improving the workshop by making it more interactive, engaging and fun. Some students wanted more revision tips and practical examples. The workshop was not particularly rated as an enjoyable activity, and over 70% of the Year 10 group rated the workshop as the activity they enjoyed least.

Medium intensity one day workshops – National Enterprise Challenge: Grenade Challenge

School B students in Years 9 and 10 participated in the Grenade Challenge. A total of 127 survey responses from students that had taken part were received across the two year groups (UC students n=39, non-UC students n=88). The challenge involved designing a new protein bar for Grenade, a sports nutrition brand. Students worked in teams and presented their design for their final product to the other groups at the end of the day. The challenge focused on teamwork, communication, time management, problem solving and presentations.

The challenge objectives were furthering understanding of graduate careers, improving confidence and encouraging teamwork. The evidence of positive impact is strongest for the UC students, 87% thought the challenge had given them a better understanding of the benefits of teamwork and over half (57%) said the challenge had improved their confidence. The challenge had a bigger impact on students in Year 10 than in Year 9 with the difference most marked for improving confidence. Figures 26 to 31 below show the responses to the three impact questions split by UC students and non-UC students and additionally by year group.

Better understanding of the careers that different HE courses might lead to
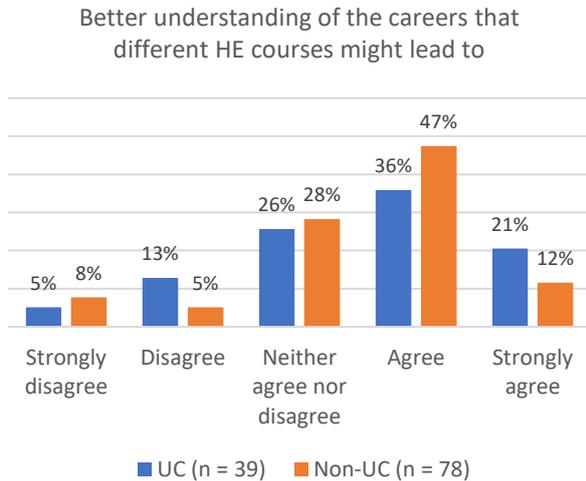
Figure 26: Years 9 and 10 Grenade Challenge – 'It has given me a better understanding of the careers that different Higher Education courses might lead to'

Better understanding of the careers that different HE courses might lead to
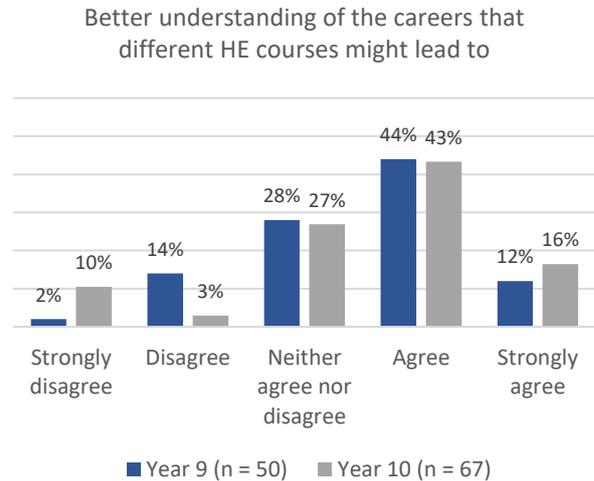
Figure 27: Years 9 and 10 Grenade Challenge – 'It has given me a better understanding of the careers that different Higher Education courses might lead to'

The challenge has improved my confidence
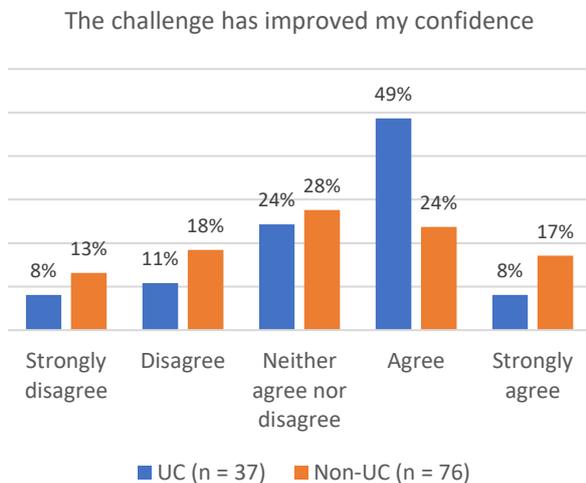
Figure 28: Years 9 and 10 Grenade Challenge – 'It has improved my confidence'

The challenge has improved my confidence
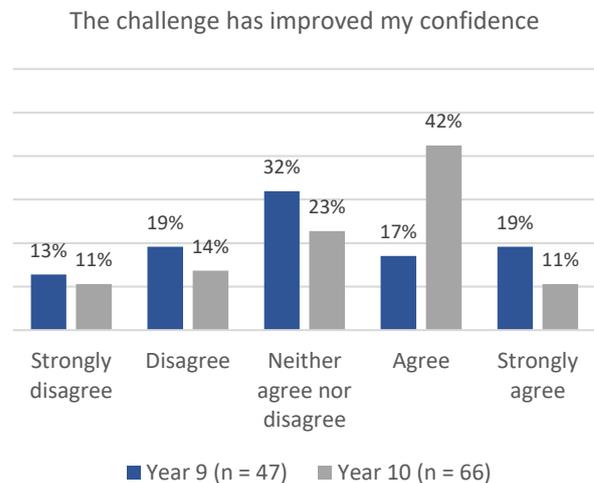
Figure 29: Years 9 and 10 Grenade Challenge – 'It has improved my confidence'

The challenge has given me a better understanding of the benefits of teamwork

UC (n = 37) ■ Non-UC (n = 77)
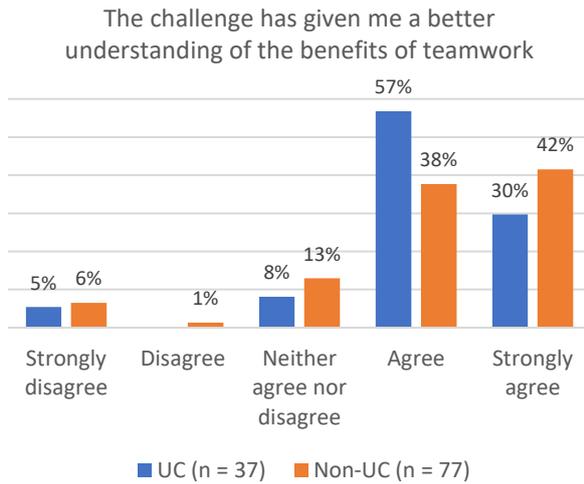
Figure 30: Years 9 and 10 Grenade Challenge – 'It has given me a better understanding of the benefits of teamwork'

The challenge has given me a better understanding of the benefits of teamwork

Year 9 (n = 47) ■ Year 10 (n = 67)
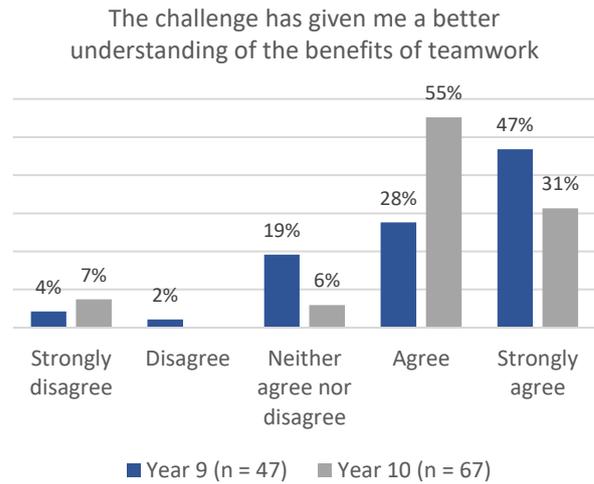
Figure 31: Years 9 and 10 Grenade Challenge – 'It has given me a better understanding of the benefits of teamwork'

Comments on the Grenade Challenge were very positive, it was described as "*amazing"* and "*perfect"*, one Year 10 student commented: "*I have enjoyed the activities especially the Grenade Challenge, it was fun, challenging and if I had the chance I would do it again".* However, several students also noted that they disliked having to present in front of the whole group and not being given a choice about whether to do so.

Medium intensity one day workshops – Inspirational Learning Group: My Perfect University

A total of 66 Year 10 students from School B that responded to the survey took part in the 'My Perfect University' Challenge (UC students n=23, non-UC students n=43). The students chose a course to specialise in at their university, created a logo, designed a campus map and a marketing campaign. Students worked in teams and presented their design to the other groups at the end of the day. The challenge particularly had a positive impact on UC students' knowledge of the benefits of Higher Education and knowing what to look for when choosing a university to apply to, where 78% and 70% respectively said that the challenge had given them a better understanding (Figures 32 to 35 below).

Better understanding of the benefits of Higher Education

UC (n = 23) ■ Non-UC (n = 43)
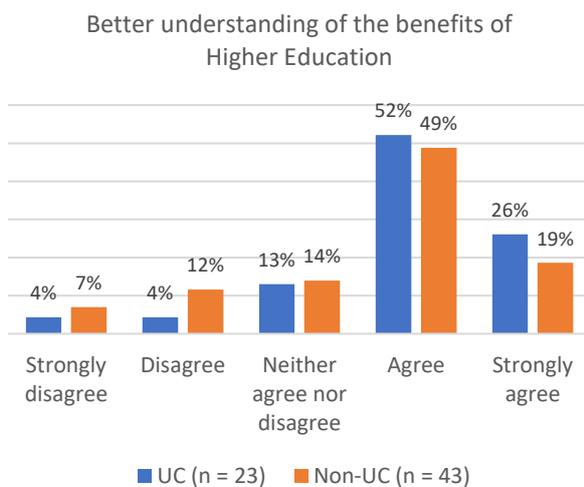
Figure 32: Year 10 My Perfect University – 'The challenge has given me a better understanding of the benefits of Higher Education'

Better understanding of how to find information about Higher Education

UC (n = 23) ■ Non-UC (n = 43)
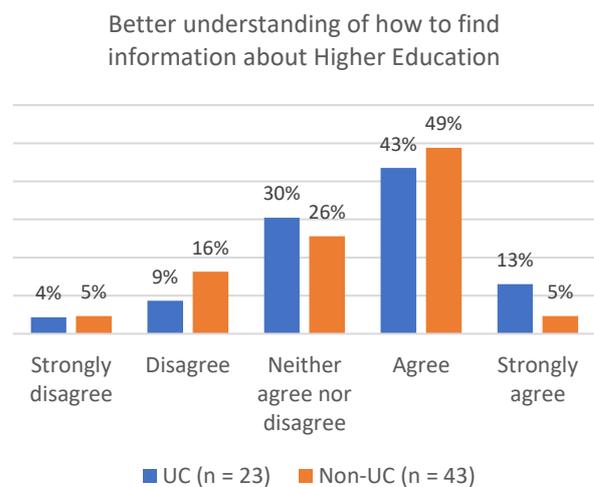
Figure 33: Year 10 My Perfect University – 'The challenge has given me a better understanding of how to find information about Higher Education'

Better idea of what to look for when choosing a university to apply to

UC (n = 23)   Non-UC (n = 43)
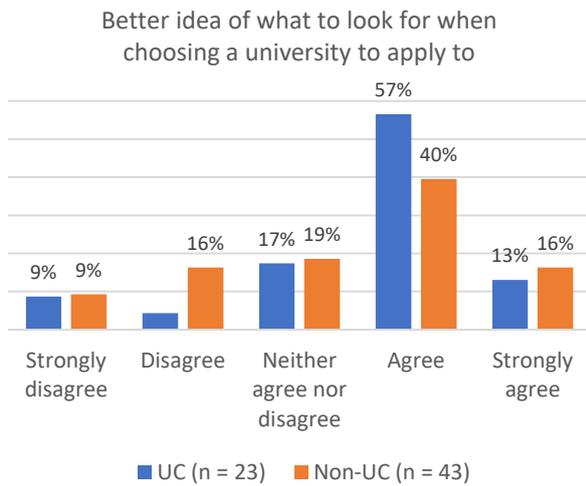
Figure 34: Year 10 My Perfect University – 'The challenge has given me a better idea of what to look for when choosing a university to apply to'

It has helped me to imagine myself as a future university student

UC (n = 22)   Non-UC (n = 43)
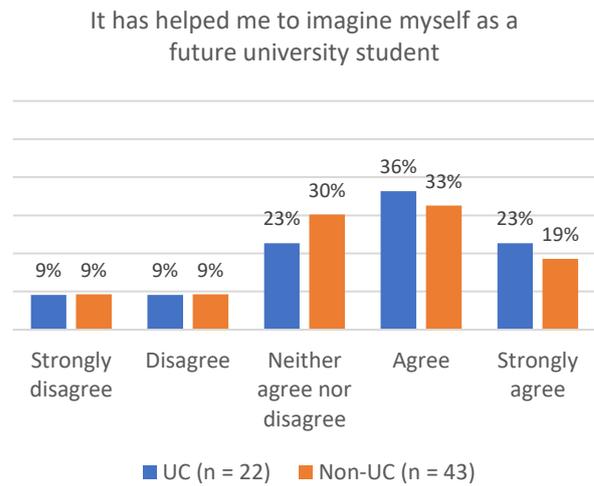
Figure 35: Year 10 My Perfect University – 'The challenge has helped me to imagine myself as a future university student'

Much like the Grenade Challenge, some students did not want to present their Perfect University design in front of such a large audience, one student suggested that smaller groups in separate classrooms might be a more favourable option.

Medium intensity one day workshops – National Enterprise Challenge: AirProducts Challenge

A total of 26 Year 11 School B students that responded to the survey took part in an AirProduct challenge (UC students n=13, non-UC students n=13). Students designed a new product made with expired AirProucts' gas cylinders, identified environmental issues and designed branding and a marketing campaign before presenting their design to the other groups at the end of the day. The challenge particularly had a positive impact on UC students' confidence, where 85% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement (Figures 36 to 38 below). Interestingly, compared with the Grenade Challenge, the AirProducts challenge did not have the same level of impact on helping students to understand the benefits of teamwork. This particular activity was held at School B and was additionally attended by another Boston school, the students worked on the challenge in mixed school groups. In the comments two students noted that they would have liked to be able to select their own groups.

Better understanding of the careers Higher Education courses might lead to
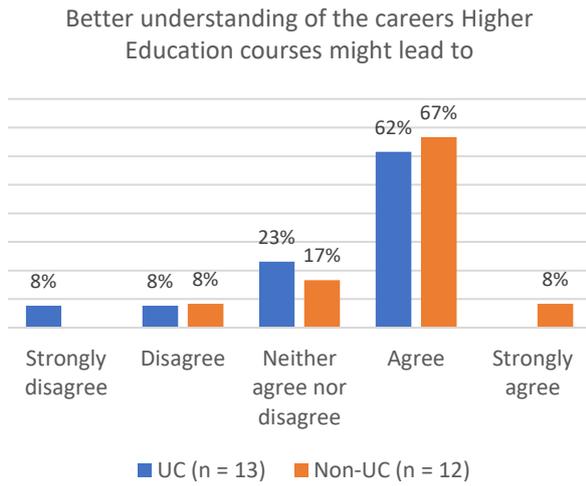
Figure 36: Year 11 AirProducts Challenge – 'It gave me a better understanding of the careers Higher Education courses might lead to'

Better understanding of the benefits of teamwork
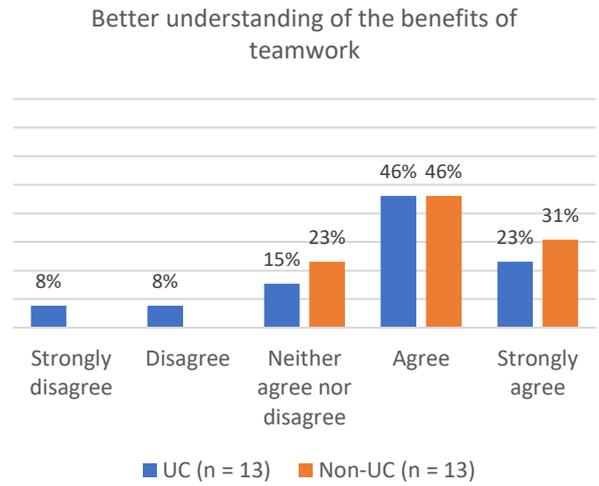
Figure 37: Year 11 AirProducts Challenge – 'It gave me a better understanding of the benefits of teamwork'

The challenge improved my confidence
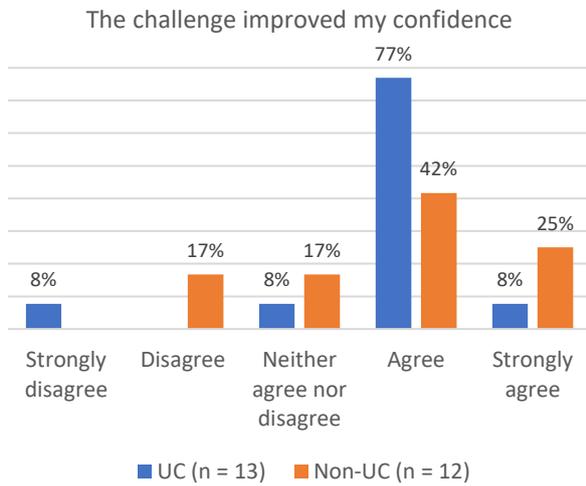
Figure 38: Year 11 AirProducts Challenge – 'It improved my confidence'

Table 5 below summarises the activities by year group and by UC/non-UC students where some impact was observed. The activity and NERUPI category are only included in the table if at least 60% of the students agreed or strongly agreed with the statement.

Table 5: Activities with the most impact by Year group and UC/non-UC students

	UC students (NERUPI category)	Non-UC students (NERUPI category)
Year 9	Careers Fair (A, B and E)	Careers Fair (A, B and E)
	Paul Hughes Motivational speaker (C)	
	The Grenade Challenge (D)	The Grenade Challenge (D)
Year 10	Careers Fair (A, B and E)	Careers Fair (A, B and E)
	Khadija Kalifa (C)	
	Finance4Kids (A, C and E)	
	Exams Made Easy (D)	Exams Made Easy (D)
	My Perfect University (A and B)	My Perfect University (A)
Year 11	Careers Fair (A, B and E)	Careers Fair (A, B and E)
	Khadija Kalifa (C)	
	Exams Made Easy (D)	Exams Made Easy (D)
	AirProducts Challenge (A, C and D)	AirProducts Challenge (A, C and D)
Year 12	Campus Visit (A and E)	Campus Visit (A, B and E)
	Careers Fair (A, B and E)	Careers Fair (A, B and E)
Year 13	Campus Visit (A and E)	Campus Visit (A, B and E)
	Careers Fair (A, B and E)	Careers Fair (A, B and E)

The survey enabled six types of activity, comprising 27 individual sessions, to be considered: campus visits, careers fairs, motivational speakers, workshops, revision-specific workshops, and medium intensity one day workshops. Overall, data for 74 individual sessions were received via the online activity survey and this data is available at a school and year group level as supplementary material (see para.1 section 2.3).

2.4 Qualitative data: Interviews and focus groups

All School Leads reported that their students, UC and non-UC alike, were making good progress in terms of HE aspirations during the first two terms of the school year, prior to Covid-19. This was largely seen as a result of LiNCHigher funded outreach activities. Impact was viewed in the broadest sense and included students' increasing engagement with outreach activities and their awareness of LiNCHigher. The AEOs also agreed that, in general, good progress was being made. One AEO commented that students at some of the case study schools (specifically Schools A, B and D) appeared to be more aspirational than the same year groups two years prior.

The School Lead at School B had noticed a more positive outlook across all year groups. She felt students were more aware of the options available to them post-18 and they were more willing to try new things. She felt students were taking *"steps in the right direction"*, growing in confidence and some now felt "*able to compete with neighbouring schools"*, both of which are grammar schools. The school has increasingly been taking a holistic approach to raising student aspirations, with outreach activities being followed up in lessons. This has stimulated discussion between both students and staff. The School Lead commented:

> *We have tried to move away from a series of ad hoc events that are really good on the day and then forgotten about and building it more into a programme and for the students to recognise that is what is happening.*

Some members of staff have enquired how activities can be replicated in-house. Activities are promoted throughout the school by staff and students, specifically through the Student Council. Student Career and Enterprise Ambassadors have also been introduced and part of their role is to

further promote the HE outreach activities programme in school. The National Enterprise Challenge was specifically mentioned as an event that had a positive effect on the students. The School Lead felt the immediate impact of students attending HE outreach activities was sustainable. Overall, LiNCHigher has become increasingly recognised and established throughout the school.

Two providers, Made Training (Exams MADE Easy) and the Inspirational Learning Group (ILG) (both National Enterprise Challenges and My Perfect University) collected student feedback immediately after their activity was delivered and fed back to the School Lead. The Made Training feedback for Year 10 and 11 students was very positive. Of the 180 Year 10 students that provided feedback about the session, 96% said they enjoyed the workshop and a further 92% said they would be using the techniques they had learnt in the future. Amongst the 165 Year 11 students the figure was 96% for both. Student comments were all positive and included:

Year 10 students:

> *It has made me more confident towards revision as I know new methods I didn't know before.*

> *This workshop has helped me to avoid mistakes when revising and ways to improve my methods.*

> *It will help me improve the amount of information I will remember.*

Year 11 students:

> *Thank you, it was amazing! Made me see revision from a different point of view.*

> *Made me think more seriously about revision.*

> *It made me realise how I can revise effectively.*

The school also received feedback from the ILG on the Year 11 National Enterprise AirProducts Challenge days. In the first group of Year 11 students that took part in the activity, 67% agreed or strongly agreed that they felt more confident at tackling work-related challenges as a result of attending the activity. A further 62% said they were more confident communicating ideas. 80% of students rated the activity as good or excellent overall. For the second group of Year 11 students that attended the session, the figures were 70%, 72% and 79% respectively. Survey responses were also very positive about the event and showed signs of longer-term sustainable impact in understanding HE career paths, improving confidence and showing them the benefits of teamwork (which comprise NERUPI categories A, C and D).

Whilst such provider feedback needs to be treated with caution due to when and how it was collected, and it should be noted that no negative comments were included by either provider, it does indicate that both of these activities were well received by students at the school.

Both the AEO and the School Lead at School D reported a shift in culture at the school as a result of LiNCHigher activity. The School Lead commented: "*we have found there is a difference. Students are talking about university more. They're talking about looking at higher level apprenticeships*". According to the AEO, staff at the school are now "*much more engaged in the idea of careers education and embedding careers into their normal teaching*". Whilst recognising that LiNCHigher is not a careers service, the AEO believes that if careers education is properly embedded into the curriculum and the life of the school, it "*becomes much much easier to talk about aspirational careers and to then have a conversation about HE*". Recently he noticed the conversation around careers had started to widen considerably.

The School A Lead had anecdotal evidence of a positive impact on raising students HE aspiration as a result of LiNCHigher engagement. The School Lead reported positive student feedback from all the activities they had attended and that students were talking more about the events. Next year the School Lead hopes to have in-house empirical evidence of impact.

According to the School Lead at School C, LiNCHigher activities were beginning to have an impact on student aspirations prior to Covid-19. The School Lead commented that he had "*really noticed a turning point*" following their last visit to College 1 with Year 9 students, describing the impact as '*powerful*'. Whilst only five students that responded to the survey had taken part in this visit, they all

either agreed or strongly agreed that the visit had had a positive impact. As a result of the visit teachers had been able to start conversations with students about what their next steps might be with the School Lead commenting: "*it was almost a culture shift*". To consolidate this cultural shift, teachers at the school had started embedding careers into their medium and long-term lesson plans.

The Year 9 English travel writing workshop was not so well received. According to the AEO, whilst the teachers really enjoyed the session, it was too academic for the students and went "*over their heads*". This was corroborated by the students through both the focus groups and the survey responses.

Two Year 9 focus groups - one with UC students and one with non-UC students, each consisting of six students - were conducted at the school in early March, four months after the workshop, to explore student views concerning the session and to assess medium-term impact. Whilst UC students appreciated the idea for the session, none of the students had particularly enjoyed the workshop. The UC students had found it more difficult to follow than their non-UC counterparts. They felt the workshop leader was difficult to understand as her language was too complex and the session had little or no connection with what they had been doing in class. In addition, there was limited follow-up by their English teachers and the students had not heard of the travel authors used in her examples. One student described the session as '*confusing*', another commented: "*in my opinion, it didn't help us at all. I'm not saying it wasn't good, but it didn't help us with anything we were doing in lessons*". The other students in the group agreed this was the case. Other comments from the UC students included:

> *It showed us what lectures are going to be like if we ever go to university, and how you have to listen to them and take notes.*

> *A lot of us were saying, "We don't know what that means, what does that mean, can you explain that more?" It was just so different to what we're doing in lessons and so complex, it was, like, everything she was saying, we needed to have it explained more to us.*

When asked what they would have liked in the session, one student commented:

> *Something a little less grown-up, something less complex, because it was quite complex language in terms of the writing, and it wasn't really something that we were interested in.*

The UC students would have liked the session to have been at a lower level and more interactive, activity-based: "*so it's not just constant talking, talking, it's where we can actually read it for ourselves and having to actually pull it into our head instead of just listening to it*".

The non-UC students had mixed views about the session with one describing it as "*good*" one as "*quite interesting*" and another as "*quite insightful*", even if they also felt it had "*dragged on a bit*". However, others felt it went on too long, was "*a bit boring*" and "*dull*". These students felt the session had more connection to their writing in class and provided useful tips and strategies on how to approach their own writing, including the use of language devices and paragraphs. One student commented*: "it helped with how to structure it properly. Instead of just writing something down like a story, it told us how to do it in, like, a non-fictional way*". The non-UC students also wanted the session to have more interactive activities. Other comments included:

> *She didn't seem like she was enjoying what she was doing.*

> *She seemed a little bit just nervous.*

> *It could be more fun, like, games, and all that. I think instead of, like, just talking and discuss, to have, like, a worksheet to work through, and stuff like that.*

These students would have liked an opportunity during the session to have developed their own travel writing ideas.

Whilst only 11 survey responses were received from students that took part in the workshop, 10 said they *did not* enjoy the activity or enjoyed it the *least* with just four giving any positive responses to the impact questions. Open text survey responses from students showed they wanted the session to be more fun, interactive and relevant to their work in class with one student commenting: "*If the lady that was doing it was explaining things better and if it was linked with what we were doing in our lessons at the time as we had finished travel writing*".

The outreach activities at School F were described by the School Lead as "*hugely successful*", specifically Made4Life (unfortunately there were no survey responses for this activity) and Crag Rats, (also known as #GotTheJob) which were seen as "*absolutely brilliant*" with extremely high student engagement. According to the School Lead, the students "*gained a lot from them. They gained a lot of skills*". Student responses to the survey for #GotTheJob, whilst small in number (just 13), were also positive with most agreeing or strongly agreeing that this activity had given them a better understanding of the benefits of HE, a greater awareness of the subjects they could study and how they link with careers (NERUPI categories A and E). Broadly speaking, the impact was similar for both UC and non-UC students.

According to the School Lead, First Story was another successful activity reportedly enjoyed by the students. In school pre and post surveys were carried out for this activity, which ran for six sessions and was open to Years 10, 11 and 12. Unfortunately, the post-surveys were destroyed by the school when they closed down in March due to Covid-19 before they could be inputted. In addition, the planned student focus groups were also cancelled because of the pandemic. Whilst activity survey responses were too low to draw any robust conclusions, (with 14 responses received in total, 11 from Year 10, 2 from Year 11 and 1 from Year 12 students), the data suggests, that overall, the activity was positively received with none of the students reporting that it had not met the NERUPI framework objectives.

University campus visits, under the Next and First Steps programme, were particularly well received, especially the visit to Bishop Grosseteste. The visit included a lecture and a seminar experience and social media workshops, all of which appeared to have a positive impact on the students, with the School Lead commenting of the students whilst they were on campus: "*you could see they were buzzing*". The visits, by Years 10, 11 and 12, resulted in several students applying for the university's residential summer school. The visits had opened the students up to the possibility of attending university and reportedly boosted their confidence with students willing to speak during the seminars and workshops. The School Lead commented on the impact of the visits:

> *We had quite a few that said: "oh my gosh, we absolutely loved that!" Just being on a campus and that idea of being there. I think in terms of confidence and confidence in a future in higher education, that was fantastic!*

Whilst the School E Lead at did not report any direct, visible impact of LiNCHigher outreach activities in the first two terms, the project was said to be running well. However, the Lincoln university campus visit had been a little disappointing, mainly because students were unable to enter spaces such as the laboratories, the sports hall and lecture theatres.

In terms of the colleges, there is little evidence of impact in the interviews. However, in June College 2 ran a short survey asking students on what basis they decided to go to university. Of the 92 responses 15 (16%) said the main reason they had chosen to go to university was because they had been on a campus visit. One AEO commented that college students appeared to be raising their aspirations stating: "*within the colleges they do aim higher than they did*". Initially, College 2 were looking at models of sustainable delivery and how they might extend the LiNCHigher programme with their own students.

2.5 Challenges between September 2019 and March 2020 (pre-Covid-19)

Apart from the changes in LiNCHigher staff, few challenges were reported by School Leads in the first two terms of the school year. However, School F did mention that not having a sense of the budget allocated to them for the project made it difficult to plan and prioritise outreach activities. They hope that in the future they will have this information so that they can make informed decisions and priorities where necessary, around which outreach activities they should commission. The AEOs agreed that their work with schools had been running smoothly with no significant challenges coming to light. The AEO that took over School D felt the main challenge he had faced was trying to educate the staff in all the schools he worked with on LiNCHigher's role, where support could be offered and where it could not. For one AEO the main challenge was simply pinning down her School Lead as she was always very busy.

College 2 would like to have progressed further with two projects, one aimed at engaging apprenticeship learners in HE study and the second working more intensely with Level 2 students on raising their aspirations for HE. However, this had not been possible due to Covid-19.

Using student ambassadors effectively was reported by the AEOs to be challenging. Whilst they were viewed as a valuable asset in being able to connect with the students and share their experiences, student ambassadors had mainly been used for large one-day events such as the WoW Festival and the National Enterprise Challenge days. However, they had not been utilised as much as the AEOs had hoped. One of the main reasons for this was seen to be the logistics of getting student ambassadors to schools, which usually meant them using public transport to reach schools in rural areas.

3. During lockdown (early March – July 2020)

3.1 Impact of Covid-19 on the delivery of outreach activities and students HE aspirations

All in-school delivery of HE outreach-related activities in schools ceased in early March. Whilst all School Leads felt it was too early to assess the full impact of Covid-19 on student HE aspirations and career progression, some had noticed subtle changes amongst some of their students in this respect. For example, students at School F were reported to be worried and concerned about what going to university in September will look like and staff there had welcomed the Bishop Grosseteste University and University of Lincoln virtual university material which had helped allay students concerns. School E felt that some of their students would be concerned about the financial implications of going to HE and that following Covid-19 they would need convincing that the resulting student debt would be worth it. The School A Lead felt that some students might use the crisis as an excuse to fail their exams and stay local for employment:

> *I think a lot of them are going to have the attitude of "I've missed too much; I won't be able to catch up" I do think there'll be a defeatist attitude amongst our students. They will think that they can use this as an excuse for failing.*

The School C Lead was concerned that the crisis would impact on student aspirations: "*I think we were making really good progress in raising aspirations with our students, I just hope that this doesn't set back that work*".

College 2 had not seen any changes in the number of applications from students in school to study at the college. However, they had seen a slight increase amongst their own Level 3 students applying to stay on for further study. College 1 had seen a small shift towards students wanting to study more locally, commenting:

> *I think my perception is that there is some change of heart. Not a reduction in what they want to achieve, just a bit of a shift from the original "I want to go as far away from home as possible" to "I might like to stay a bit more local and have a bit more familiarity in this strange time".*

The impact of Covid-19 was seen more in terms of school year groups, rather than UC and non-UC students, with Year 10 students causing the most concern. One School Lead (School B) pointed out that Year 10 students will miss out on most of their post-16 progression work which, although drip-fed from year 7, occurs mainly at the end of year 10 and the start of year 11. Some AEOs agreed that Year 10 students had the most to lose:

> *My genuine fear is with Year 10. My fear is that we're going to end up with a group of students who haven't had access or the opportunity and that in a year's time we'll all of forgotten that and we'll be expecting them to sit exams to the same standards as the previous years.*

The School C Lead also felt the crisis had adversely affected Year 10s: "*I will go as far as to say it's the Year 10s that are putting in the least effort, which is a concern*".

The Covid-19 crisis had, in more general terms, thrown students out of their routine and disengaged some with education and learning. School Leads felt these will be some of the key challenges that will need to be addressed when schools re-start in September.

3.2 Support from LiNCHigher

All case study School Leads reported feeling well supported by the LiNCHigher team during the Covid-19 crisis. AEOs have kept in touch by email and telephone and took responsibility for cancelling activities and arranging refunds from providers. They also kept schools informed of developments such as the online learning platform. One School Lead commented: "*everyone's been really supportive. I think there's a strong relationship forming, and our school certainly appreciates it, and I know the students do*", (School C). Unfortunately, some schools (E and F in particular) reported being unable to fully take-up the support offered by the AEOs during this time due to changing priorities at their school. Whilst the AEOs were all too aware they were not their school's priority during lockdown, they had all made great efforts to continue their good relationship with School Leads and in some cases, (i.e. at School D, E and F) began to develop new ones. One AEO commented: "*I'm confident that the relationship hasn't suffered*".

3.3 Online activities - views and experience

The online HE outreach activity platform has been designed for students to access on demand, at home, using a personalised login which is allocated to the student by LiNCHigher and sent out by the School Leads. The platform is a direct response by LiNCHigher to the Covid-19 crisis to allow students some access to HE-related outreach activities whilst schools were closed. The first set of programmes (three National Enterprise Challenges and two Made Training) went live in June. More activities have been gradually added and this will continue into the next school year. Each programme, or set of modules (depending on length), has an evaluation element built in.

Whilst the online activities were generally welcomed by the case study School and College Leads, at the time of the interviews most of them had *not* accessed the online outreach activities. However, some (i.e. Schools B, C and F) planned to do so during the last few weeks of term. Some School Leads had been instructed by their Senior Leadership Team that all career-related activities would have to take a backseat and that the focus during lockdown was the delivery of core subjects.

The case study schools all took different approaches to how students' access and use the online learning platform. For example, for some it was on an individual student basis, whilst for others, such as School F and School B, it was delivered as part of timetabled PSHE (personal, social, health and economic) lessons. At School F it formed part of their Aspire curriculum, whilst at School B a teacher logs on and shares their screen before guiding students through the activities. The School B School Lead commented: "*it's not a case of sending all the logins out for students to do just what they want, when they want, we have to put it into a timetable*". Whilst the AEOs welcomed the online platform as a way of delivering outreach activities during this time, there were concerns raised around the level of student engagement which has naturally dropped off, and students' ability to retain or consolidate, the HE messages.

Several schools reported that they had been inundated with online learning activities from a number of organisations, including the Careers Enterprise Company (CEC), the universities and local colleges, during lockdown. They had been careful not to pass everything onto their students because they were concerned students might become overwhelmed or overloaded.

3.4 Challenges of students accessing the online activities

Some of the case study schools were unaware that the platform was going live. Some had not received logins for students at the time of the interviews. Therefore, not everyone had accessed the system or had sight of the activities. One School Lead that had reviewed the platform commented on the lack of differentiation within the activities. She felt this would disadvantage some of their learners, especially their SEN (special educational needs) and EAL (English as an additional language) students, commenting that whilst she had not looked at the platform or the activities in great detail*:*

> *…in a school you differentiate everything for everyone, that* [the online learning platform] *hasn't, to the best of my awareness, been differentiated. Some of our younger ones, and especially our*

SEN and EAL students are going to really struggle just to get on there, let alone anything else. I don't think it is as user-friendly as it could be. (School B).

This School Lead would also have liked printed packs available for students that do not have access to either a computer or sufficiently fast internet connection and felt that login passwords were too complicated for their students. Some School Leads had requested teacher logins.

Five of the six case study schools reported that at least some of their students were struggling to access online learning, either because the household had a limited number of devices – usually just one between the whole family - or slow or no internet connection. Two schools had ordered around 50 laptops under the government scheme and another had applied for 29 but were allocated just nine, two of the schools were still waiting for their devices to arrive in late June. As a result, one school was spending over £1,000 a week posting work out to students.

4. Plans for the next school year (September 2020 onwards)

The interviews with the School Leads took place prior to the Government's announcement that they expect all children will be back in school, full-time, from September. At the time of the interviews the situation was unclear, and all of the case study schools were in the early stages of planning for a mixed or 'blended' approach to incorporate both face-to-face and online teaching across the school with the flexibility to switch between the two as necessary. The AEOs were also planning activities on the same flexible basis. What was clear at the time of the interviews, was the need for everyone to be adaptable in their approach to delivering outreach activities next year. Accordingly, it quickly became apparent to the LiNCHigher team that the online platform, developed initially as a response to the Covid-19 shutdown of schools, will become a key mechanism for delivering activities in September with one AEO commenting:

I think that's where we're going to be quite fortunate in September. We've got a mechanism to deliver online workshops and track it. As opposed to just pushing out downloadable resources on the website. If the schools do go back to full capacity the chance of them letting little old LiNCHigher in, or one of our third-party providers to deliver anything is unlikely.

In terms of HE outreach activity, schools are aiming to have a programme of what one School Lead called "*meaningful activities in this climate"* (School F). School E is planning to target their careers and HE interventions specifically to individual student need, especially in terms of their UC students. Whilst recognising that this has not been the approach taken by schools so far during the project, interventions have been available to all students, they feel that from September they will need to justify in-school activities more than ever and this will only be achieved by offering targeted interventions, the School Lead commented:

I can't see any other way for it, because we're going to have to play the card that these kids have got that entitlement…otherwise they're just not going to get those experiences because people [teachers] *are going to say no.*

Another School Lead (School B) commented: "*I have loads of things that I would love to do but it's how we go about doing them and who can offer what under the 'new normal'"*.

All case study School Leads were in the process of working with their respective AEO to plan an appropriate programme of outreach activities for next year. One School Lead (School D) had already booked an Enterprise day for Year 9s in November and rebooked several other events for later in the autumn term. The AEOs would like to be able to move forward next year, especially with Year 11 students into what one AEO called a more structured approach where concepts are introduced in Year 9, developed in Year 10 and consolidated in Year 11. In this way the AEO hopes that when students' progress onto Level 3 they will be better equipped to make decisions about their future. AEOs also hope to improve the quality of delivery to schools. In some cases, this may mean switching providers and concentrating on quality rather than quantity.

Whilst none of the case study schools, except one, had seen their Explaining the Gaps[2] report at the time of interview, the AEOs planned to share the reports with the schools in early July when they would be using them to inform and shape the delivery of HE outreach activities for the new school year. None of the case study schools appeared to be aware of changes to the way LiNCHigher propose operating next year, namely the introduction of a core offer across different wards.

One School Lead (School A) is planning to assess the impact of all career and LiNCHigher activity next year, in-house. It has been written into her Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) which she hopes will provide the school (and the evaluation) with robust impact data.

4.1 Challenges Phase 2 Year 2

Even if schools and colleges are fully open in September to all students, as currently planned, the situation regarding providers (and external visitors in general) going into schools to deliver outreach activities is still far from clear. However, in terms of this project, outreach activities being effectively delivered remotely, was cited as the major challenge by both School Leads and the AEOs for next year. The AEOs are hopeful that the good working relationship they have with their School Leads will enable them to deliver effective and meaningful activities, whatever the situation. Other concerns include: motivating the students, having adequate ITC facilities and engaging students remotely, especially given the predominantly passive nature of online delivery which allows for little, if any, student engagement or interaction. Everyone viewed flexibility as key to planning for the next school year.

Several School Leads talked about focusing more on opportunities available within the local labour market and encouraging students to consider, where appropriate, modern apprenticeships. Accessing work experience, in person, was raised as another issue for students next year. College 1 specifically mentioned that they would like to see more LiNCHigher presence and input earlier in the year.

5. Conclusion and summary of the Year 1 Phase 2 evaluation

Key findings

- This has been a challenging year for everyone, not least those in education. However, School and College Leads felt they had made good progress raising the aspirations of their students to progress onto HE or higher-level apprenticeships pre-Covid-19. This view is largely corroborated by the results of the online student survey.

- The results of the online student activity survey, covering activities that took place between September and March of this school year, shows medium-term impact for several of the LiNCHigher HE-funded outreach activities, specifically, the National Enterprise Challenge, campus visits, career fairs and revision sessions. However, it also highlighted that students do not necessarily have to enjoy a session for it to be beneficial. This juxtaposition demonstrates why relaying largely on pre and post-surveys, conducted at the time an activity takes place, can be misleading in terms of impact. Such feedback also omits to capture potential improvement that could be made to activities to enhance the student experience and increase impact.

- The activity survey suggest that campus visits were well received by students and particularly demonstrated high levels of impact on students' understanding of the benefits of HE. The visits gave non-UC students in particular, a sense of what being a university student would be like. The School A careers fair had a bigger impact overall on Year 9 to 11 students than those in Years 12 and 13 but demonstrated impact across both UC students and non-UC students in all year groups. Overall, the Year 11 Exams MADE Easy workshops helped improve revision, motivation and helped with subject-specific revision. The Grenade

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[2] Explaining the Gaps is a project run concurrently with the evaluation that coordinates the analysis and dissemination of the Lincolnshire-specific data collected through the Uni Connect annual national learner survey.

Challenge was well received, and the aggregated Year 9 and Year 10 data demonstrated a bigger impact for UC students. However, when comparing the two year groups, the impact is greater for Year 10 than Year 9. The feedback on the two motivational speakers reviewed was mixed, and in particular the impact of one of the speakers was minimal.

- Overall, the survey showed that students want more time with most of the activities, want them to be more fun, more interactive and linked more closely to the curriculum and their work in class. Students also noted when presenters were not enthusiastic or did not appear to engage with the students as they expected them to.

- In terms of improving specific activities, students would like campus visits (be they to Colleges or Universities) to be longer and include opportunities to visit and experience more of the facilities, such as the science labs and seminar rooms. This may also have the benefit of giving UC students a sense of what being a university student would be like. At career fairs they would like more stands with a greater variety of careers and employers represented, especially from the arts and music sector. Students would like revision workshops to provide them with new ideas of how to approach revision. Whilst popular, the main issue students had with events such as the National Enterprise Challenge was presenting in front of large groups of other students.

- The impact of motivational speakers varies depending on who the speaker is and what they were trying to motivate in the students. One was received more positively than the other. Likewise, the impact of Finance4kids is also mixed both in terms of year groups and schools. The survey data suggests there was a greater impact on Year 10 School C students than either Year 9 or 10 School E students. However, the data also suggests a more positive impact on School E, Year 10 students than Year 9. Unfortunately, the student comments did not illuminate the reasons why this might be the case. One potential reason for the difference could be that the programme is more suited to the older year group, despite one student's comment to the contrary.

- The results of the activity survey do not appear to show any difference in impact between UC and non-UC students. However, some differences were observed at an activity or year group level. For example, the Grenade Challenge had a bigger impact on students in Year 10 than in Year 9 with the difference most marked for improving confidence (NERUPI category C) or My Perfect University which had the biggest impact on Uni Connect students, particularly in enabling them to know what to look for when choosing a university (NERUPI category B).

- The online activity platform was welcomed by the School and College Leads. However, most had not had the opportunity to use it to its full potential at the time of the interviews.

- It is too early to assess the impact of the online platform as it is early in its inception and content is still being added.

- The relationship between School Leads and LiNCHigher, especially their designated AEOs, is strong, productive and open. Communication generally works well, in both directions, and School Leads undoubtedly value the work of LiNCHigher in raising the aspirations of *all* their students, especially in the area of HE progression. However, schools would, ideally, like to see more stability in relation to their LiNCHigher contact.

- The relationship between the Colleges and LiNCHigher could be stronger and needs further developing and attention if the programme is going to have an impact on their Level 2 and 3 students in the second year of Phase 2.

- The colleges would like to see the outreach activities for their Level 2 and 3 students start much earlier in the year than they have previously, ideally by the end of September.

- Student ambassadors are currently underused.

Overall, the work of LiNCHigher and the outreach activities they fund has been well received and valued by the School and College Leads. There is a particularly good working relationship between

AEOs and School Leads. Anecdotally, interventions were starting to have a positive impact on all student's Higher Education aspirations prior to Covid-19, and this is evidenced through the online activity survey data.

Implications of the findings from Year 1 Phase 2

A good working relationship between the LiNCHigher AEOs and School and College Leads is key to driving the project forward. Overall, the data indicates that raising Higher Education aspiration activities funded by LiNCHigher are having a positive impact on students in the case study schools. There is now a good foundation on which to build next years' programme and the opportunity to embed Higher Education aspirations into the culture of schools and colleges across the county by the end of Phase 2.

Potential project challenges Phase 2 Year 2 (2020-21)

- Ongoing implications of Coivd-19, specifically the potentially limiting of student access to ICT, such as laptops.
- Re-engaging and motivating students, especially Year 10.
- The delivery of meaningful outreach activities virtually.
- LiNCHigher maintaining their good relationship with schools and in some cases developing new relationships where AEOs have been allocated different schools.
- Encouraging School Leads to keep raising HE aspirations on the agenda of School Leadership Teams.

Potential evaluation challenges Phase 2 Year 2 (2020-21)

- Accessing the student voice directly (i.e. through focus groups) given the ongoing Covid-19 restrictions that are expected to be in place when they reopen in September, specifically the likelihood that they will not be allowing external visitors, at least for the first term.
- Finding alternative ways of collecting student impact data, for example via group video calling. This option has already been offered by one of the case study schools.
- Ensuring schools understand the importance of evaluation, not just to LiNCHigher but to the schools and how it can benefit both their current and future students.

5.1 Recommendations for Phase 2 Year 2 (2020-21)

- Endeavour to keep AEOs with their allocated schools throughout the school year. This stability will enhance the relationship between School Leads and LiNCHigher and improve the potential for the programme to have a positive, longer-term impact on student HE aspirations.
- Inspirational speakers should be carefully selected.
- Ensure workshops are interactive, engaging and set at the level of the students they are delivering to.
- Place a LiNCHigher member of staff on-site in each of the colleges, at least one day a week, to engage the colleges and their UC students with HE. This is in line with the good practice of other partnerships as evidenced in the recently published Uni Connect partnership paper[3] to the OfS.
- Begin the work with Colleges earlier in the school year, ideally by the end of September.
- It will be important to ensure all activities on the online platform have evaluation built into them from the start to enable impact to be measured.

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[3] Prendergast, N. (July 2020) *Technical Annex: Levelling up and supporting young people to progress and succeed in Higher Education* (Page 4, Objective a3).

- Embed appropriate attainment raising activities into the online learning platform to help students to bridge the gap that Covid-19 has created,
- Reconceptualise the role of student ambassadors. One suggestion might be to consider recruiting young people from local colleges. This would resolve the issue of travel and access, at least in part.

Appendices

Appendix A – summary of student responses by activity, case study school and year group

School A– Year 9	Type of Activity	NERUPI	Responses
Let's Pitch It workshop	Workshop	A, C and E	21
School Careers Fair	Careers Fair	A, B and E	41

School B – Year 9	Type of Activity	NERUPI	Responses
Grenade Challenge	Workshop (med intensity)	A, C and D	52
WoW Fest	Careers Fair	A, B and E	39

School C – Year 9	Type of Activity	NERUPI	Responses
English travel writing workshop	Workshop	A, C, D and E	11
Employability/LMI workshop	Workshop/Careers	A, C and E	12
Campus visit – College 1	Campus visit	A and C	5

School D – Year 9	Type of Activity	NERUPI	Responses
Medical Mavericks	Workshop	A, B and E	9
Introduction to Architecture	Workshop	A and E	10
Student Finance session	Workshop	A, C and E	6
Campus visit to Stamford College	Construction event	A B, C and E	6

School E – Year 9	Type of Activity	NERUPI	Responses
First Steps	Workshop	A, B and D	0
Finance4Kids	Workshop	A, B, C and E	8
Zakon Forensic workshop	Workshop (med intensity)	A, C and E	3
Do Dance	Workshop/presentation	A, C and E	3
Lego Education workshop	Workshop (STEM)	A and E	4
Let's Pitch It	Workshop	A, C and E	11
Paul Hughes	Motivational speaker	C and D	18

School F – Year 9	Type of Activity	NERUPI	Responses
No responses received for Year 9			0

School A – Year 10	Type of Activity	NERUPI	Responses
Khadija Kalifa	Motivational Speaker	C	18
School Careers Fair	Careers Fair	A, B and E	29
Studying MADE Simple	Workshop (revision)	D	15

School B – Year 10	Type of Activity	NERUPI	Responses
Grenade Challenge	Workshop (med intensity)	A, C and D	75
Exams MADE Easy workshop	Workshop (revision)	D	54
My Perfect University challenge	Workshop (med intensity)	A, B and C	75

School C – Year 10	Type of Activity	NERUPI	Responses
Finance4Kids	Workshop	A, B, C and E	18
Employability/LMI workshop	Workshop/Careers	A, C and E	13
Medical Mavericks	Workshop	A, B and E	23

School D – Year 10	Type of Activity	NERUPI	Responses
Aspire2Achieve	Workshops	C and D	6
NHS Health Careers Fair	Careers Fair	A and E	4
YMCA Mental Health & Stress	Workshop	C	3
Christmas Carol workshop	Workshop	A B and E	4

School E – Year 10	Type of Activity	NERUPI	Responses
First Steps	Workshop	A, B and D	6
Finance4Kids	Workshop	A, B, C and E	13
Zakon Forensic	Workshop (med intensity)	A, C and E	0
Do Dance	Workshop/presentation	A, C and E	2
Lego Education workshop	Workshop (STEM)	A and E	2

School F – Year 10	Type of Activity	NERUPI	Responses
First Steps	Workshop	A, B and D	8
First Story	Workshop (med intensity – 6 weeks)	C and D	11

School A – Year 11	Type of Activity	NERUPI	Responses
MyTutor 1:1 Tuition	1:1 Tuition	C and D	5
School Careers Fair	Careers Fair	A, B and E	21
Exams MADE Easy workshop	Workshop (revision)	D	6

School B – Year 11	Type of Activity	NERUPI	Responses
AirProduct Challenge	Workshop (med intensity)	A, C and D	27
Exams MADE Easy workshop	Workshop (revision)	D	25

School C – Year 11	Type of Activity	NERUPI	Responses
Revision workshop	Workshop (revision)	D	2
Careers Guidance	Careers	A and E	4
Marginal Gains workshop	Workshop	C	2

School D – Year 11	Type of Activity	NERUPI	Responses
YMCA Mental Health & Stress	Workshop	C	6
Future Proof You workshop	Workshop	A	4
Revisions Skills workshop	Workshop (revision)	D	9
Christmas Carol workshop	Workshop	A B and E	7

School E– Year 11	Type of Activity	NERUPI	Responses
First Steps	Workshop	A, B and D	4
Finance4Kids	Workshop	A, B, C and E	3
Zakon Forensic workshop	Workshop (med intensity)	A, C and E	0
Do Dance	Workshop/presentation	A, C and E	0
Lego Education workshop	Workshop (STEM)	A and E	0
Exams MADE Easy	Workshop (revision)	D	3
Khadija Kalifa	Motivational speaker	C	7

School F – Year 11	Type of Activity	NERUPI	Responses
First Steps	Workshop	A, B and D	10
Exams MADE Easy	Workshop (revision)	D	22
First Story	Workshop (med intensity – 6 weeks)	C and D	2

School A – Year 12	Type of Activity	NERUPI	Responses
YMCA confidence and team building	Workshop	C and D	7
Campus visit – SHU	Campus visit	A, B and C	6
Campus visit – UCGrimsby	Campus visit	A, B and C	15
Peer Tutoring workshop	Workshop	C	4
Wellbeing Day with Think2Speak	Workshop	C	13
School Careers Fair	Careers Fair	A, B and E	30

School F – Year 12	Type of Activity	NERUPI	Responses
#GotTheJob	Workshop	A and E	13
Bridging the Gap	Workshop (revision)	D	10
Campus visit - DMU	Campus visit	A, B and C	10
First Story	Workshop (med intensity – 6 weeks)	C and D	1

School A – Year 13	Type of Activity	NERUPI	Responses
YMCA confidence and team building	Workshop	C and D	4
Campus visit – SHU	Campus visit	A, B and C	11
Campus visit – UCGrimsby	Campus visit	A, B and C	8
Peer Tutoring workshop	Workshop	C	5
Wellbeing Day with Think2Speak	Workshop	C	8
School Careers Fair	Careers Fair	A, B and E	10

School F – Year 13	Type of Activity	NERUPI	Responses
University Challenge	Workshop	A and C	6
Campus visit – University of Lincoln	Campus visit	A, B and C	13
Bridging the Gap	Workshop (revision)	D	2
First Story	Workshop (med intensity – 6 weeks)	C and D	0