

Annual Report

Inspiring Choices

2023-
2024



Introduction

Welcome to the Inspiring Choices annual report, providing a comprehensive overview of the Uni Connect programme's delivery in York and North Yorkshire during the 2023/2024 academic year.

The overall Office for Students (OfS) Uni Connect funding remained at £30m for 2023/2024. Due to redistribution of the funding, we saw an uplift in our allocation, enabling us to recruit two additional outreach coordinators to our team. This has contributed to the continued strength of our engagement efforts, with the delivery of well-established interventions such as residentials, conferences, in-school workshops, and events.

This document focuses on some of our larger, newly developed projects, with more detailed evaluations and additional information available on our website.

Finally, this report demonstrates the impact of our work and celebrates the dedication and commitment of our entire team, as well as our partners and participants, all of whom have made this success possible. We would like to express our sincere thanks to the practitioners, teaching staff, careers leads, academics, and many others who contribute to the successful delivery of the programme.

Louisa Dobson

Head of Inspiring Choices Programme



Who are Inspiring Choices?

Inspiring Choices is a Higher Education Outreach Partnership and one of 29 partnerships within the Office for Students' Uni Connect Programme. Since 2017, our mission has been to close the gap in higher education participation between the most and least represented groups. We provide tailored support to young people across York and North Yorkshire.

Working with local secondary schools and colleges we offer guidance on the full range of routes into and through higher education (HE) in the form of workshops, activities and events. Our aim is to help young people overcome barriers to their success. These include those related to academic attainment, sense of belonging and lack of knowledge.

Mission

Our mission is to support young people living in York and North Yorkshire to achieve their ambitions by helping remove academic, financial and cultural barriers to higher education.

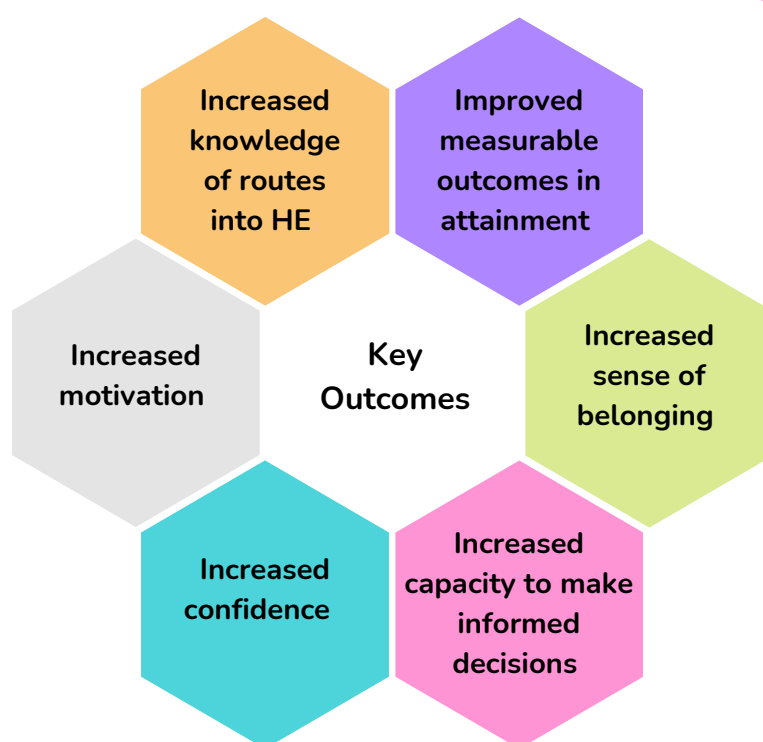
Values

Our vision is to deliver an engaging programme of activity that will empower young people in York and North Yorkshire to develop their knowledge of higher education, build their confidence and to develop academic skills leading to their continued success in education.

Purpose

To reduce the gap in higher education participation between the most and least represented groups.

To measure the success of our programme we assess these short term and intermediate term outcomes for young people who participate in our activities.



2023/24 Snapshot

We have provided....

661
Activities

Number of events for learners, staff and parents.



Activity
Contact
Hours

827.74

Number of hours of delivery.

14 Campus
Visits



Including three to FE institutions.

We have worked with....

27

Schools and Colleges

Number of schools and colleges across York and North Yorkshire engaged in the programme.



3,774

Unique Learners

Number of individual learners who took part in at least one activity. (Each learner is only counted once, no matter how many activities they have taken part in.)



9,338

Interactions

Total interactions for all learners who took part in one or more activities i.e., if a learner took part in an activity once a week, for six weeks, this would equal six interactions.



51.52%

of learners were from POLAR4 quintiles one and two.

40.12%

of learners were from IMD quintiles one and two.

Programme Overview

Our work is split into four areas:

Higher Education Outreach Workshops: Workshops on a range of HE and employability topics delivered either in school or on an HE campus. Delivered primarily to schools and colleges in geographic areas in York and North Yorkshire where participation in higher education is low or lower than expected given local GCSE attainment.

Example: HE Study Skills workshops to equip learners with the skills they need to succeed academically in higher education, and provide an insight into learning in a higher education environment

Attainment Raising Projects: Projects which focus on developing academic skills and subject knowledge so that attainment of young people is not a barrier to HE progression. Delivered primarily to schools and colleges with low attainment-8 and progress-8 scores, or in geographical areas where KS2 and KS3 educational outcomes are low.

Example: A literacy project for Year 7 working class boys in Scarborough to help to address the gap in KS2 attainment between boys and girls in North Yorkshire.

Strategic Outreach Projects: Projects for groups of young people in York and North Yorkshire whose lived experiences may cause additional barriers to educational and career progression. This includes young people with SEND, care experienced young people, military service children, and young carers.

Example: A one night residential trip to London for young people in North Yorkshire who are leaving care, supported by John Lewis Partnership.

Bespoke and Third Party Activity: Schools and colleges are given the opportunity to apply for some funding which can be used to develop learners skills or attend visits that would assist with the learners curriculum learning. Schools are also offered the opportunity to take part in bespoke activities organised and delivered by Inspiring Choices.

Example: In partnership with the National Railway Museum, learners are invited to a STEM conference, where they explore the Wonderlab, an employers fair and other STEM based activities.



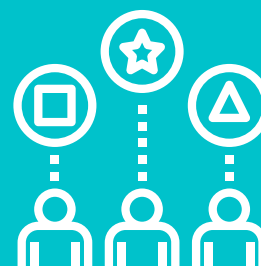
HIGHER EDUCATION
OUTREACH
WORKSHOPS



ATTAINMENT
RAISING
PROJECTS



STRATEGIC
OUTREACH
PROJECTS

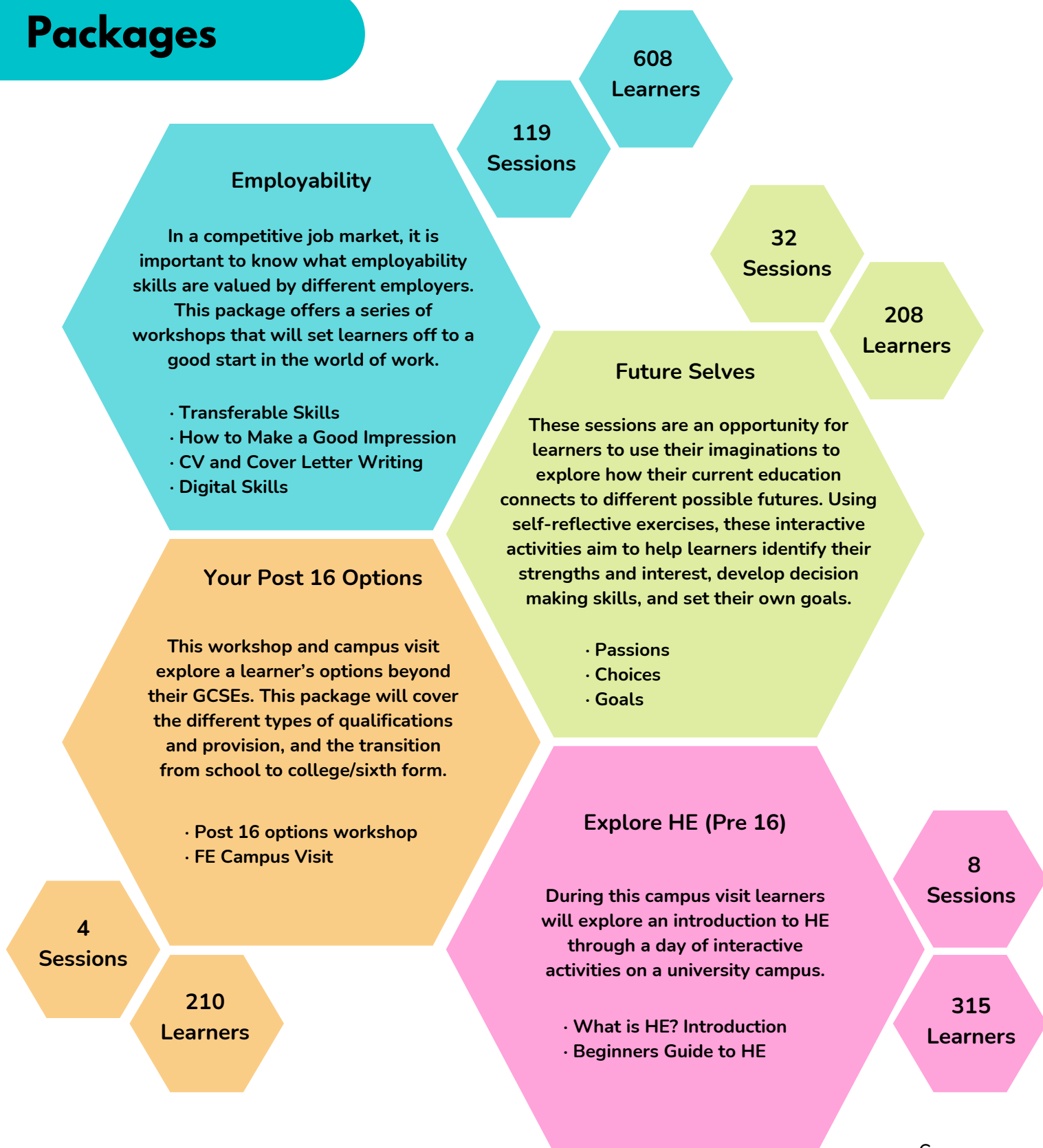


BESPOKE AND
THIRD PARTY
ACTIVITY

Higher Education Outreach

Higher education outreach includes eight packages of carefully grouped activities. Schools and colleges can choose from individual workshops or the whole package of delivery to suit the needs of their learners. These activities are designed to increase the knowledge of higher education pathways, support with applications, developing key skills, and helping learners to decide on their further education routes.

Packages



Higher Education Outreach

Packages Cont.

HE Study Skills

These workshops equip learners with the skills they need to succeed academically in higher education and provide an insight into learning in a higher education environment. These workshops focus on revision techniques and research techniques.

- Research Techniques
- Academic Writing
- Revision Techniques

1
Session

3
Learners

Explore HE (post 16)

These workshops challenge misconceptions about HE and explains what UCAS and Student Finance are. We will also consider what subjects and courses you can study at a HE level. These sessions can be delivered in schools or include a campus visit.

- Why HE? Talk
- Apply to HE

11
Sessions

164
Learners

Financing Your Degree

These workshops are for learners who have applied for or are considering an undergraduate degree. They will introduce learners to the Student Finance application process, and budgeting skills to prepare them for independent living.

- Applying for Student Finance
- Budgeting

1
Session

23
Learners

Preparing for Student Life

This workshop and campus visit is for learners who have applied for or are considering HE courses. It aims to equip learners with the skills required for student life and prepare them for their transition to Higher Education.

- Student Life
- Independent Living

23
Learners

1
Session

Higher Education Outreach

Evaluation

Where schools selected to participate in the whole package, the sessions were evaluated with pre- and post-event questionnaires made up of TASO's Access and Success Questions in higher education expectations, academic self-efficacy, knowledge of higher education and sense of belonging. The questionnaires also included items from a confidence in key skills measure and other questions where appropriate. Where schools requested single sessions, they were evaluated with post-event only questionnaires.

Four of our eight packages were selected to be delivered as whole packages with schools/colleges throughout the academic year. These packages were Employability, Explore HE (pre16), Explore HE (post 16) and Future Selves.

Higher education expectations was measured in four packages. Learners showed a small increase in their intentions to attend higher education in future for all four packages. However, only the packages that included a campus visit (Explore HE (pre 16) and Explore HE (post 16)) showed a significant difference in this increase.

Academic self-efficacy was measured in two packages (Explore HE (pre 16) and Explore HE (post 16)) and overall did not show a significant difference. Knowledge of higher education was also measured in these two packages and showed a significant increase from the start of the campus visit to the end of the campus visit.

Sense of belonging was measured in two packages (Explore HE (pre 16) and Future Selves). Explore HE (pre 16) was delivered during a campus visit and found a significant increase. Future Selves showed a very small increase in sense of belonging but this increase was not a significant difference.

Two packages asked questions about the learners confidence in key skills. The Employability package demonstrated a small and significant increase in confidence in their communication. Employability and Future Selves showed a small increase in critical thinking but the difference was not significant.

The questionnaires were analysed using a Wilcoxon Signed-Rank test which tests for a significant difference between the pre- and post-event responses. The results tables can be found in supplementary material [here](#).

For the single delivery sessions, 91.4% of the learners who participated said that the sessions helped them to think about their future and 90.1% said they would recommend the activities to a friend.

Attainment Raising Projects

In 2022, the Office for Students asked Uni Connect partnerships to use their current frameworks, local knowledge, and expertise to develop collaborative approaches to strategic school engagement in order to raise pre-16 attainment in secondary schools. Inspiring Choices delivered one project which aimed to provide targeted academic support to learners.

Literacy Project

Inspiring Choices developed a literacy project which was delivered in two schools. The first school selected 8 boys in Year 7 and the second school selected 8 boys in Year 8 to participate in the project. Each learner had the opportunity to attend 30 one-to-one sessions over 10 weeks. In total, 271 one-to-one sessions were delivered.

The aims of literacy project were:

Increase reading and writing attainment levels.

Increase confidence in reading and writing.

The literary project was supported by the charity Catch Up® who delivered intensive training on how to structure and deliver the one-to-one sessions and provided resource booklets to complete in each session. Catch Up® resources also include an extensive cataloging of books that are carefully mapped to Catch Up® reading levels which helped Inspiring Choices to choose appropriately levelled books.

Quantitative data suggested the project effectively raised literacy reading levels and qualitative data suggested the project improved confidence, enjoyment, and home engagement with reading.

Read the full report [here](#).

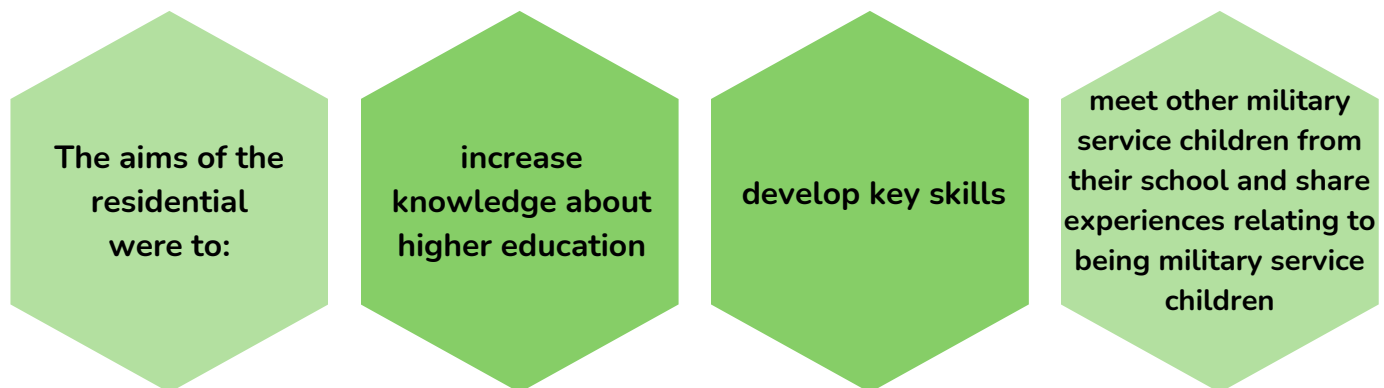
Strategic Outreach Projects

Strategic Outreach includes working with groups of learners that are underrepresented in higher education. The activities are adapted to support those whose lived experiences may cause additional barriers to education or career progression. This year we have worked with two groups, military service children and care experienced young people.

Military Service Children

Military Service Residential

Inspiring Choices funded a residential to the Peak District for nine military service children in Year 7 and Year 8.



To develop their team working skills the young people took part in outdoor activities including rock climbing, abseiling and gorge walking. In the evening, Inspiring Choices delivered a bespoke version of Explore HE workshops and facilitated discussions on what being a military service child means to them.

Learners completed a questionnaire on their intentions to attend higher education, their sense of belonging and their confidence in key skills. The results showed one significant increase, in the learners confidence towards drawing their own ideas based on analysis of numbers, facts, or relevant information. There was no significant difference in their intentions to attend higher education or sense of belonging in higher education. The results table can be found in the supplementary materials [here](#).

Strategic Outreach Projects

Military Service Children

Military Service Project

In collaboration with York St John University, Inspiring Choices piloted a three-session project with learners from military service families. Three schools in York and North Yorkshire were invited to participate with up to 20 learners from each school.

The project aimed to:

increase knowledge about higher education

increase the sense of belonging in higher education

introduce the learners to other military service children

The first two sessions were delivered in school. The first session included an introduction to higher education. The second session included an introduction to student life and learners began designing their own university society. The third session was a campus visit to York St John University and included a campus tour, finishing their design a society activity, a student finance session (including military service children specific support) and finally, presenting their society posters back to the group.

Forty-six learners from Year 7 to Year 12 from the three schools participated in the project. Thirty learners completed both a pre-event and post-event questionnaire on their intentions to attend higher education, their sense of belonging and knowledge about the services available and the where to find information and guidance. There was no significant difference between the pre- and post-event responses. This suggests that the project was not intensive enough to demonstrate change in the learners perspective. The results table can be found in the supplementary materials [here](#).

Strategic Outreach Projects

Care Experienced Young People

On Track

On Track events are designed to be fun and informative events for care experienced young people and care leavers. These events are delivered in partnership with four higher education providers in York and North Yorkshire - University Centre Askham Bryan, York St John University, University of York and CU Scarborough. The aim of On Track is to increase the knowledge of higher education options and provide care experienced young people with the opportunity to visit local HE campuses.

There were five On Track events, a launch event and then each partner organised a campus visit to their own institution. The activities included a campus tour, subject taster sessions, student life talks and a session on what support is available at the institution. The events were organised during the school holidays so the young people would not miss their mainstream education.

Lake District Residential

Inspiring Choices funded a residential trip to the Great Tower Scout Adventure Camp in the Lake District for 12 care experienced young people in Year 10 and Year 11. The aim of the residential was to improve the young people's self confidence and enable the young people to reflect and plan for their post-16 education and future careers. The young people engaged in a variety of outdoor activities including cycling, climbing, and a personalised evening session based on the Inspiring Choices Explore HE: Pre 16 workshop.

Care Leavers Residential

Inspiring Choices organised a residential to London for 14 care experienced young people aged 18-25 years. The residential included educational and employment opportunities at University of the Arts London, John Lewis & Partners, and the Science Museum, and an overnight stay in University College London student accommodation.

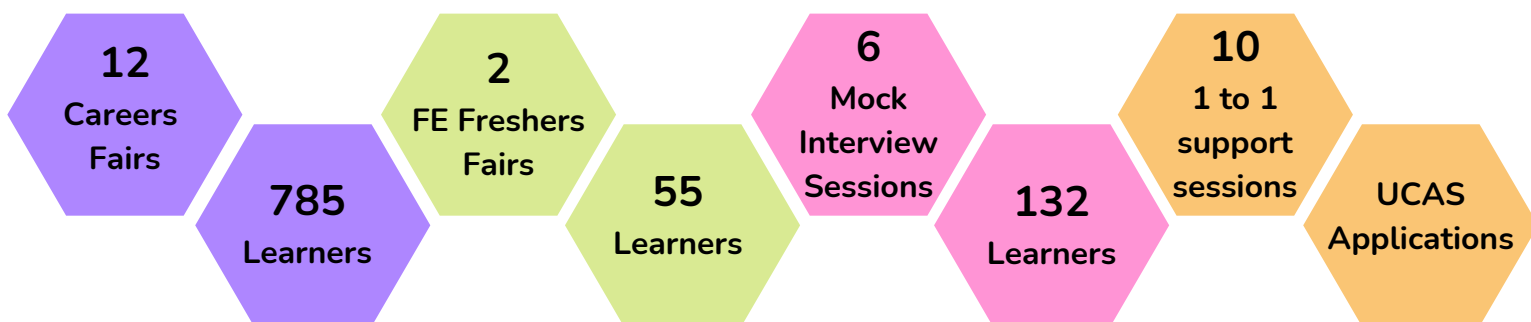
The residential aimed to increase knowledge on the different routes that are available into higher education and employment, and increase their sense of belonging in higher education. The pre and post survey results, in conjunction with the focus group feedback suggests the care leavers residential was successful in meeting its aims. There was considerable valuable feedback from the staff and young people who went on the residential, and we are in the process of incorporating this into the 2025 care leavers residential. Read the full report [here](#).

Bespoke and Third Party Activity

Bespoke and third party activity includes activity where Inspiring Choices have been invited to support with the schools activity (e.g., careers fairs) or activities where we can only offer places to a limited number of schools or learners (e.g., podcasting project). Inspiring Choices allocated money that schools and colleges could submit a bid for to support learners attainment, progression and career programme (e.g., placement with The Brilliant Club).

Supporting School Activity

Inspiring Choices supported...



Groundwork

Inspiring Choices funded five school placements with the charity Groundwork Yorkshire. Groundwork delivered six, six-hour long sessions in local outdoor spaces to 31 learners primarily in Year 10. The aim of the project was to increase learners confidence, develop new skills and increase knowledge of further education.

Learners who completed the programme achieved a Level 1 Horticulture qualification. Learners visited a specialist land-based college Askham Bryan College, which included a campus tour and subject taster session. Please read our case study [here](#) for more detail and feedback from the teachers and young people involved.

Bespoke and Third Party Activity

Podcasting Project

In collaboration with York St John University, the Podcasting Project was delivered over three sessions and engaged 24 learners from two schools in North Yorkshire. The aims of the Podcasting Project were to develop transferable skills, to link curriculum learning to careers, and to increase academic confidence in subjects related to English.

The project was delivered by a Media Production and Journalism academic supported by a group of journalism students. The first two sessions were delivered in school where learners worked in small groups to plan a podcast on a subject of their choice. The third session was a campus visit to York St John University. During the campus visit, learners used the recording studio to record their podcasts, had a tour of the journalism and media department and finished in the TV and production room, where learners experienced making a news reel.

During the campus visit, learners participated in a reflective focus groups. Learners expressed that taking part in the project had been a positive experience because they had learnt something new, developed their transferable skills, were better at communication and that they usually only get the finished podcast (e.g., online) but “process of the podcast is even cooler.”

They believed the project will help them with their subjects at school because they have developed their teamworking, social skills, and communication skills. The project has given them an opportunity to practice speaking in front of people, increased their confidence and helped them to stay focused on the topic (i.e., not waver in their answer).

The learners had positive intentions towards higher education with many suggesting that they intend to apply for university and another suggesting an apprenticeship. They wanted to attend higher education as it would be a new experience, they could learn more about a subject that they enjoyed and meet new people with shared interests. They thought studying in higher education would include more independent learning, and have more freedom and flexibility than their previous education. They believed higher education would give them more job opportunities as they would be able to develop their skills. Higher education would also allow them to earn “more money” and “get a decent job.”

In addition, four young people were interviewed for case studies and they all noted an increase in confidence from the project. Please see the case study reports [here](#).

Bespoke and Third Party Activity

Project Dare

In collaboration with York Cares, Project Dare involved York-based employers supporting learners by giving them an insight into working life (linking their curriculum to careers) and helping to develop important skills. There were three Project Dare programmes, each with a different employer - ARUP, Aviva, or Nestlé. In total, 41 learners from four schools participated. The aim of Project Dare was to link curriculum learning to careers, and develop skills.

With ARUP, learners talked to professionals in the rail industry, learnt more about STEM careers, and worked on a project to plan a new rail line. They had to consider costs, speed of the line, how many people it could carry, and the impact of the environment. Learners presented their rail line projects to industry professionals.

With Aviva, learners heard from employees across different areas of the company and were tasked with making presentations on their chosen area of insurance with a target audience of young people. The final session included a question and answer session with a senior manager, tour of the Aviva building and learners delivered their presentations in front of a panel in the boardroom.

With Nestlé, learners heard from the employees about opportunities and learned more about the different brands and products that Nestlé produce. Learners took part in “CEO for a day” where learners experienced what it is like to make big decisions while keeping in mind finances, communications and sustainability. The visit ended with a tour around the KitKat production area.

Across all three projects, the learners demonstrated an increase in confidence in their communication skills and an increase in knowledge of career pathways. The teachers reported that their learners had demonstrated an increase in confidence, motivation towards their studies and developed their teamworking and presenting skills.

“Engagement from the participants was the highlight of these sessions. Interaction with the students turned out really well. The questions asked by them were quite relatable and shows the enthusiasm of the students to become future engineers.” - ARUP employee

Bespoke and Third Party Activity

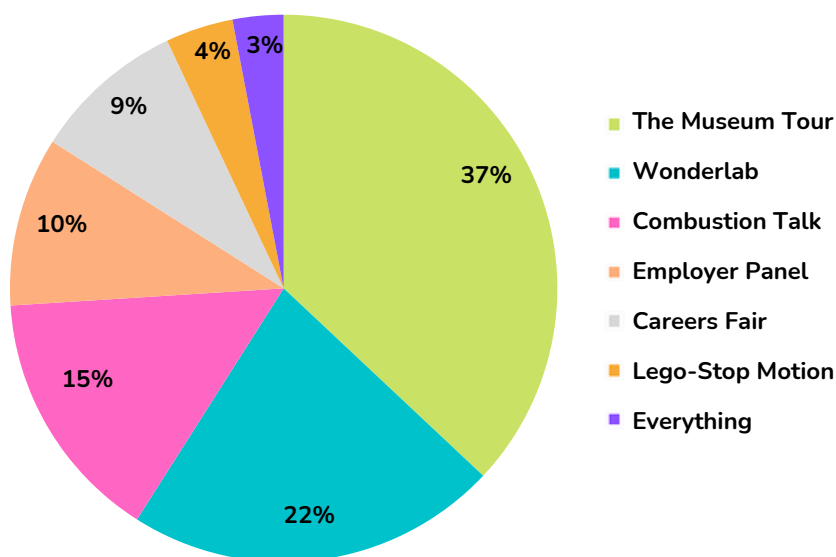
STEM Conference

In collaboration with the [National Railway Museum](#), we delivered our third annual STEM Conference. This four-hour event welcomed 69, Year 9 learners from three schools across North Yorkshire. The learners were split into groups and took part in a carousel of activities including, exploring the Wonderlab, a tour of the museum, careers fair, employer panel, stop-motion workshop and combustion demonstration. At the careers fair, learners had the opportunity to talk to STEM employers; York Archaeology, The Institution of Engineering and Technology (IET), NHS, FERA, Network Rail and Space Hub. The employers were encouraged to demonstrate how they used STEM within their careers, and some also discussed educational routes into their job roles e.g., degree apprenticeships.

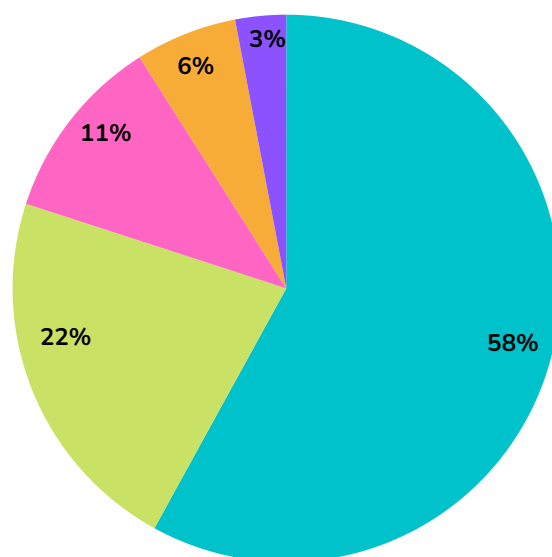
The aim of the STEM conference was to inspire learners to continue learning in a STEM pathway, to link curriculum learning to careers and to develop key skills (e.g., teamwork, problem solving).

Learners completed a pre- and post-event questionnaire which included higher education expectations and development of key skills. The results table can be found in the supplementary material [here](#). Learners who attended the STEM conference showed a significant increase in their intentions to study a STEM subject at higher education.

What was the most useful part of the day?



What was the most enjoyable part of the day?



Bespoke and Third Party Activity

In 2023/24, we approved 26 funding bid applications. Applications were approved for activities that had anticipated outcomes of supporting academic attainment, increasing knowledge of higher education, linking the curriculum to careers or the development of key skills. Many of the activities aimed to achieve more than one outcome but have been grouped below by the strongest outcome. The next pages show a sample of the activities that were delivered.

Academic Visits

- Biology Visit: Cranedale Centre
- Business Visit: Middlesbrough Football Club
- Economics Revision Conference
- GCSE PE Visit: Tees Barrage
- Geography Visit: Hornsea Beach

Skill Development

- Big Enterprise Day
- Drumming Workshop
- Motivational Speaker
- Talk the Talk (Five workshops)
- Young Enterprise Platform

Progression to HE

- The Brilliant Club (Two placements)
- UCAS Discovery Exhibition
- Unifrog (Four licenses)

Career Support

- Aviation Visit
- Bar Mock Trial Competition
- GroFar
- Work Experience Placements (organised through NYBEP)
- World Travel Market London

90% of learners said that the academic visits had increased their subject knowledge and 94% of learners said they felt more confident in their studies.

“I feel more confident because I have more knowledge and experience with practical work and knowledge of work in the course” - Year 12 Learner, Biology Visit: Cranedale Centre

“This experience made me feel certain that law is a career path which I want to pursue. Overall, it was so much fun, although it was nerve wracking at first. I feel so much more confident in myself, and my abilities having faced this challenge and I also feel so much more motivated to working hard so that this could be my potential future.” -Year 12 Learner, Bar Mock Trial Competition

Bespoke and Third Party Activity

Talk the Talk

Inspiring Choices funded five sessions with charity Talk the Talk. Talk the Talk worked with four schools and engaged with 370 learners. The full day workshop aims to develop learner's oracy skills and spoken confidence by exploring different methods of communication, how to effectively structure short talks and presentations and how to use language techniques to get their message across confidently. Four of the five sessions funded by Inspiring Choices were Talk About Communication and one session was Talk About The Future.

Three out of four schools shared the evaluation and Table 1. shows the results. The learners were asked questions on a scale from 1-10, before and after the workshop. Overall, after the Talk About Communication workshop, the learners reported being more confident in speaking in front of other people, knowing more about what skills are needed to effectively communicate with others and were confident about giving the final talk in front of the group.

“Great to see confidence grow. Students were attentive and focused. Clearly challenging in a supportive and positive way.” - Teacher

“The trainer was approachable, professional and very encouraging. He was very knowledgeable and approached tasks in a sensitive but often light-hearted manner, which created a ‘safe space’ and trust for students who found the tasks challenging. Plus, there was a good variety of ‘hands-on’ tasks.” - Teacher

“It was a pleasure to watch the students’ confidence grow throughout the day, finishing with them delivering excellent speeches. All students were engaged throughout.” - Teacher

Table 1. Talk About Communication Workshop Results

	Before	After	Average percentage increase in key measures	% Students making positive progress	% Students making ‘Breakthrough’ progress
Average Confidence	3.9	6.4	62	81	21
Average Oracy Skills Knowledge	4.7	7.3	56	84	33
Average Final Talk Confidence	4.7	6.4	37	75	21

Note. Results from 80 students who fully completed forms. Breakthrough progress = the student made 4 or more points of progress.

Bespoke and Third Party Activity

The Brilliant Club

Inspiring Choices funded two school placements of The Scholars Programme, run by The Brilliant Club. The programme, delivered by a PhD student, aims to develop the knowledge, skills and confidence of learners to secure a place at a competitive university. The programme is structured around seven tutorials and an opportunity to attend a launch event and a Graduation Event at partner university campuses. Learners work towards a final assessment which is marked using university grades.

Across both placements, 27 learners took part and had an average attendance of 94%. Twenty-six learners submitted the assignments and completed the evaluation forms. At the baseline assessment, 22 learners achieved a 2:2 and 4 learners achieved a 2:1, the average grade was 58. At the final assessment, 17 learners achieved a 2:2 and 9 learners achieved a 2:1, the average grade was 59. The baseline assignment grades were higher than the UK average, but the final assessment grade and the progress percentage was lower than the UK average.

Learners reported on their belief that they could get into and succeed at university (university self-efficacy). Learners answered questions on a scale of 1-5 (strongly disagree to strongly agree) on three components, academic skills, university knowledge and sense of belonging. The average scores are shown in Table 2. The average scores were all higher after the placement than before the placement. The greatest change was in their university knowledge which increased by 21.9% which was also greater increase than the UK comparison (i.e., the average percentage change in all The Scholars Programme placements).

Table 2. The Brilliant Club – The Scholars Programme Combined Results Retrieved from Programme and Impact Report for each school

	Before	After	% Change	UK Comparison % Change
University Self-Efficacy	3.7	3.9	5.4	7
Academic Skills	3.7	3.8	2.7	3
University Knowledge	3.2	3.9	21.9	14
Sense of Belonging	4.0	4.1	2.5	3

Collaborative Outreach

The Inspiring Choices programme operates as a collaborative network of universities, colleges, and other partners across York and North Yorkshire. It is delivered in partnership with both local and national organisations, with the core team based at York St John University.

The partnership in York and North Yorkshire includes

Askham Bryan College	NYBEP
Catch Up®	The Brilliant Club
City of York Council	University of York
CU Scarborough	Whitby School
Groundwork Yorkshire	York Cares
National Railway Museum	York & North Yorkshire LEP
North Yorkshire Council	York St John University

Programme Monitoring

As a condition of Uni Connect funding, the Office for Students require partnerships to track all learners engaged with their activity. This includes learners who live in both target and non-target wards. We are required to use an OfS-approved tracking service; Inspiring Choices use the Higher Education Access Tracker (HEAT). The HEAT service was developed by the sector to evaluate the efficacy of widening participation outreach teams. We have both Data Sharing and Service Level Agreements in place with our schools and colleges which details how we will collect this data to enable the required tracking. Participants are issued with our Privacy Notice so they understand how their personal data is being used. The tracking data enables us to understand how participation in Inspiring Choices activity impacts progression to higher education and is an essential part of evidencing the impact of Uni Connect.

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