

The North East Uni Connect Programme Annual Review 2019 – 2020



Universities

Durham University
Newcastle University
Northumbria University
Teesside University
University of Sunderland

Colleges

Bishop Auckland College
City of Sunderland College
Darlington College
Derwentside College
East Durham College
Gateshead College
Hartlepool College of Further Education
Middlesbrough College
Newcastle College
New College Durham
Prior Pursglove and Stockton Sixth Form College
Queen Elizabeth Sixth Form College
Stockton Riverside College
The Northern School of Art
Tyne Coast College



Contents

- 4 The North East Uni Connect Programme - FutureMe and Outreach North East
- 6 The FutureMe Programme
- 10 FutureMe in Figures
- 12 Outreach North East
- 13 HE Fest 20
- 14 Celebrating our work
- 18 Moving Forwards



Welcome

I am pleased to introduce this report detailing the activity, impact and achievements of the North East Uni Connect Programme in 2019-2020. The programme has continued to build on its strong foundations and collaborative working and found creative solutions to the challenging circumstances during the spring and summer terms.

The FutureMe programme saw a very successful year with the number of activities and number of target students engaged at record numbers. During the period of school and college closure, activity was adapted to a blended model of online and face-to-face delivery to allow the continuation of support to students considering their future options and transition into higher education.

In addition to the longstanding activities delivered across the region, the launch of Outreach North East has provided the opportunity to strengthen the work in the region, reach a wider audience and engage with key sector organisations to create a 'joined up' approach to higher education outreach.

In the 2019-20 academic year the programme gained local and national recognition for a range of initiatives. We held the region's first online higher education festival, HE Fest 20. The week of activity saw students, parents and teachers access a number of different activities delivered from the North East Uni Connect Programme and our partner institutions. This truly collaborative event showcased the huge amount of support available regarding higher education progression in the region. We were also delighted to be nominated by the Times Higher Education Awards for Widening Participation Initiative of the Year 2020.

As we begin a new academic year the partnership is continuing to deliver activity to young people, parents and teachers across the region and we look forward to supporting the region for another academic year.



Kate Murray
Head of Regional Partnerships
(Widening Participation)

The North East Uni Connect Programme – FutureMe and Outreach North East

Uni Connect, brings together 29 regional partnerships of universities, colleges and local partners to offer information and activities about the benefits of progressing onto higher education.

Established in January 2017, the Partnership in the North East has delivered targeted outreach activity to students residing in areas where progression to higher education was low and lower than expected based on GCSE attainment. In 2019, we introduced additional activity through our Outreach Hub to help teachers and advisers in schools and colleges access the higher education outreach information they need and provide a platform for wider collaboration. Through the Uni Connect Programme, we now offer two strands of activity.



FutureMe

FutureMe is the programme of activity offered to students in targeted areas, within schools and colleges. Students taking part in FutureMe will have access to a range of activities and events to support them in considering their future options to gain an enhanced knowledge and understanding of educational pathways available to them. By taking part in FutureMe activities we want young people to:

- Have the opportunity to plan for their future and gain an understanding of what can support them in reaching their goals;
- Have access to high quality information and support to help them consider whether higher education is the right option for them;
- Have an increased awareness and understanding of higher education opportunities and progression pathways in the region.

In addition to the sustained and targeted support students receive in schools and colleges the FutureMe programme has a strong digital presence with a website containing impartial information and resources to support all young people across the region access the information they need to make an informed choice about their future.



Outreach North East

Outreach North East is a single point of contact for teachers and advisers which signposts and improves access to information and support to encourage progression to higher education.

Outreach North East provides impartial information about higher education to help teachers and advisers best support their students in making informed choices about their futures.

Outreach North East provides:

- A website designed specifically for teachers and advisors to source impartial advice and guidance on higher education progression support and a search engine providing details of the outreach opportunities provided by our universities, colleges and key stakeholders;
- A platform for key stakeholders to collaborate across the region to support higher education progression;
- CPD opportunities for teachers and advisers, both face to face and online to support improved information and advice for young people in the region.

The FutureMe Programme

Activity for Schools and Schools with Sixth Forms

In the autumn and spring terms of the 2019-20 academic year the FutureMe programme of activity was delivered in 96 target schools, with record numbers of activities delivered and students reached. Programme targets for the year were exceeded in 2020. Schools benefitted from face-to-face undergraduate mentoring programmes for years 9-11 and 27 higher education ambassador sessions with content covering all of the learning outcomes of the North East Regional Progression framework. Students also had the opportunity to take part in skills-based workshops, motivational speaker sessions, theatre group presentations, and to visit institutions as part of the 'Exploring my FutureMe @...' on campus visits.

September 2019 saw the first FutureMe Schools' Programme awards ceremony. This inaugural event took place on 12th September hosted at the Quayside Exchange, Sunderland and celebrated the achievements of students, FutureMe mentors and staff in target schools across the region during the 2018-19 academic year. The event attended by students, parents/carers, school staff and staff from the Uni Connect team was a huge success and has inspired participating schools to ensure their school/students are amongst those being recognised in the future.

We expanded our HE Champion programme by 85% to create a team of teaching staff within schools to strategically and operationally embed a culture of higher education support within their schools. We now have in place 63 HE Champions across the region.

A launch event was held for HE Champions and members of school senior leadership teams on 15th October 2019. The 73 delegates, including school senior leaders, were provided with an opportunity to learn more about the role, take part in CPD on Excellence in HE Guidance and hear best practice case studies. Following the launch, the HE Champions have been instrumental in working to ensure the language of higher education is embedded into their school culture.



The Covid-19 outbreak and school closures meant that in-person delivery of activity was no longer possible from March 2020. The FutureMe programme was therefore quickly redeveloped into a robust virtual offer that was openly accessible on the FutureMe website expanding our reach to ensure that all young people were able to take part, including those from broader groups currently under-represented in higher education.

Activities were delivered via live interactive webinars, pre-recorded sessions and interactive online activities and also included specific information and support for year 13 students considering applying to higher education for 2020 admission. Materials were also provided for schools to download into hard copy resources to share with young people who did not have access to technology. All activities within the virtual offer continued to be developed based on the principles in the North East Regional Progression Framework to ensure young people continued to be offered a sustained and progressive programme.



Finding My FutureMe Online is an example of our online delivery. A series of themed content and interactive activities was released weekly, providing young people with insights into what it is like to study in higher education.

Passport to FutureMe, an online alternative to our planned residential event, enabled students to experience higher education activities and support to help make informed decisions. Participants had the opportunity to take part in virtual campus tours, scavenger hunts, and key tasks all leading to the completion of their Passport to FutureMe.

FE activity

Our colleges across the region, designed and delivered a wide range of HE sessions, workshops, masterclasses and one to one support to provide interventions that reflected the diversity of the student cohort and the varying programmes of study, both A Level, vocational, technical and apprenticeship programmes.

In 2019-20 our college partners across the region engaged with 4,550 students and delivered over 600 activities. More than half of participating students completed three or more activities with 60% participating in 4+ hours of additional activity.

Prior to the initial period of the Covid-19 lockdown in March 2020, over 45 university visits were undertaken along with more than 200 masterclasses in a wide range of curriculum areas including Law, Art & Design, Nursing, Education, Engineering, IT & Computing, Fashion, Business, Travel & Tourism, Public Services, Cyber Security, Architecture & Construction.



All colleges engaged with local employers in the delivery of FutureMe and the majority also integrated activity relating to the National Citizen Service (NCS) in their programme. Each college's FutureMe programme included activity designed to develop students' "soft skills" through creative activities including team building skills, interview techniques and public speaking. In addition, in 2019-20 activity designed to support positive mental health and personal resilience featured strongly in college FutureMe programmes.

During the Covid-19 lockdown period from mid-March onwards all colleges and sixth form colleges were able to continue engaging with students and delivering FutureMe effectively. This was achieved by college FutureMe staff quickly adapting a significant number of their planned activities to make them suitable for delivery via online methods including use of their own in-house Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) platforms.

Regional activity

FutureMe Challenge is a virtual alternative to the FutureMe Enterprise Challenge and was open to all students in Y9-Y13. Young people were invited to contribute to the FutureMe marketing activity to ensure messages and designs are relevant to young people in the region. Students were provided with weekly higher education content and tasked with designing a higher education story board supported by worksheets and resources. Shortlisted entries have been converted into a comic book and the winning design produced as a short YouTube advert, both designed to promote key higher education messages created by students for students.

Opportunity North East

During 2019-20, Uni Connect was delighted to work with colleagues at the Department for Education to be able to extend the FutureMe offer into additional schools across the region as part of the Opportunity North East project. This joint funded project enabled an additional seven schools, in geographic areas not previously reached, to receive the FutureMe offer. A further nine schools are being invited to join the programme from 2020-21. The partnership is working closely with the North East Local Enterprise Partnership (NELEP) and the Tees Valley Combined Authority (TVCA) to align the offer to the project they lead with Opportunity North East to add value and maximise impact.





FutureMe in Figures

13,466 students engaged (8,902 school students, 4,564 college students)



Uni Connect Target Schools	94
Opportunity North East Target Schools	6
Uni Connect Colleges	15
Other schools or colleges	5
TOTAL	120



Over **1,800** activities took place

 **8,902** target students engaged in activities in schools

621 target students engaged in face-to-face mentoring sessions

6,867 target students engaged in HE sessions (face-to-face and online)

3,113 target students engaged in third party activity, online and face-to-face

57 target students engaged in finding my FutureMe online

20 target students took part in passport to FutureMe

116 target students engaged in virtual FutureMe challenge 

 **4,564** target students engaged in activities in colleges

601 activities delivered in colleges (student-focused) 

45 

activities for teachers/advisers and parents/carers delivered

1,785 parent/carer engagements

294 teacher/adviser engagements

Outreach North East



Outreach North East is a new, single point of contact hub for teachers and advisers to signpost and improve access to information and support to encourage progression to higher education.

Outreach North East was established in March 2020 and provides an opportunity for our Partnership to build further collaborative activity across the region. Outreach North East has three strands of activity:

- Signposting: Enabling teachers and advisers to access information on all higher education outreach opportunities across the north east to support their students;
- Support: Enabling a broader range of schools and students from groups currently under-represented in higher education to access support;
- Strategic Engagement: Enabling effective and impactful collaboration between partnership members and key stakeholders (e.g. Careers & Enterprise Company, National Citizen Service, Opportunity North East).



Outreach North East provides:

- A website containing information of the outreach activities available from our partner universities and colleges, allowing teachers to view all activity that may be useful to their students in one place;
- Telephone support for all teachers and advisers wanting more information on how they can access and utilise outreach opportunities in the region;
- Opportunities to collaborate with key stakeholders in the region delivering related support for young people;
- Free CPD opportunities for teachers and advisers to support improved information and advice for young people in the region.

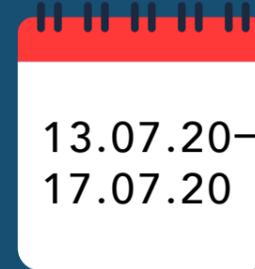
To help teachers and advisers navigate the online help, advice and support available during Covid-19 from both regional and national partner organisations we created the Outreach North East Toolkit. This Toolkit is an online collection of information and resources on subjects such as: exams and assessments, confirmation and clearing processes, student support resources and professional development opportunities. The Toolkit also directs to each of our partner institution websites, specifically the pages containing Covid-19 related information.

HE FEST 20/

THE SESSIONS

THE EVENTS

THE AUDIENCE



5 days of activity



18 partner sessions



2 exhibitions



students: 28%



21 sessions delivered



delivered by

9 partner institutions



16 partner institutions



teachers / advisers: 68%



totalling 15.5 hours



55 presenters



6 employers



parents / carers: 4%

Celebrating our work

Over the last year, the North East Uni Connect Programme has led on the delivery of innovative outreach provision. This included the creation of a new annual event HE Fest and led to a nomination for the Times Higher Education Award, Widening Participation Outreach Initiative of the year.

HE Fest 20

The impact of Covid-19 and the resulting school closures provided many challenges for the education sector, but it remained a priority for Uni Connect Programmes across England to continue to support young people, their parents, and teachers and advisers to access high quality, impartial information to help them make informed choices about their futures.

At the end of the summer term the North East Uni Connect Programme delivered a week of online activity aimed at creating a positive message around progression to higher education, to further support students and their key influencers in the lead up to results day 2020.

HE Fest 20 saw 16 partner institutions, alongside a number of employers and key sector organisations, come together to deliver a range of virtual activities across the week with each day of the festival focussing on one of the learning outcomes from the North East Regional Progression Framework.

Attendees also had the opportunity to speak to institutions and employers in the region during a virtual exhibition and could network with peers in the online 'social spaces'.

The week of activity drew upon areas of expertise in the region and, although it showcased the local offer, the online nature of this activity meant that it was able to be accessed nationally. The wide range of activity available meant that festival goers were able to create a truly unique programme, allowing them to get the most out of the event and access information to suit their goals and prior knowledge. The support for students, parents/carers, and teachers didn't stop as the week came to an end, with many sessions and resources being made available on-demand as well. The last few months have created uncertainty for young people and their influencers so the activities provided an opportunity to create a positive message and to celebrate the achievements of students, parents and teachers, as they have adapted to new ways of working, studying and making decisions about their futures. This event has showcased what is possible with online delivery and has provided future opportunities to bring people together in the new virtual world - which the education sector is embracing.

[From the UniTasterDays Teachers Guide 2020]



The North East Uni Connect Programme has been shortlisted for the Times Higher Education (THE) Awards for Widening Participation/Outreach Initiative of the Year for the FutureMe Enterprise Challenge programme. Despite the challenges faced by the sector this year there were still hundreds of entries made so it is an honour to have been shortlisted in such a competitive category.

The FutureMe Enterprise Challenge is an innovative project created in partnership with the local football club education teams (Foundation of Light, Middlesbrough FC Foundation and Newcastle United Foundation). It is an intensive 12 week programme which utilises the Premier League Enterprise Programme to inspire young people and increase their aspiration and skills and to support informed decisions about higher education. The programme incorporates school focused frameworks such as the Gatsby Benchmarks; the Careers Development Institute framework and PSHE/national curriculum.

The programme is underpinned by a competition in which the boys must create their own storyboard for a digital/media advertisement aimed at encouraging their male peers to consider higher education in the North East. In 2019, the winning team had their storyboard turned into a 30 second YouTube advertisement (viewed 46,937 times) and each area winner had their storyboard adapted into a comic book which is now being used in schools across the region. This advertisement was launched on North East Live and broadcast on Tyne and Wear TV.

Enterprise Challenge provides an immersive experience into higher education and related careers and enables us to understand and develop key messaging created by boys for boys to help redress the low expectation of higher education progression - capturing the learner voice and using it to affect change.

[From THE Awards Submission 2020]

The North East Regional Progression Framework

A sustained, intensive and progressive programme of interventions has been shown to have a greater impact in raising aspirations and supporting progression to higher education. The North East Regional Progression Framework has been designed to support practitioners to develop a programme of interventions to help learners and key stakeholders to understand more about higher education in all its forms and how to successfully achieve their progression goals.

Structured across three phases and six learning objectives, the framework can be applied regardless of the learner's age, prior knowledge, and mode or level of study. The North East Regional Progression Framework enables practitioners to report on the key components of the Ofsted Education Inspection Framework, in addition to supporting the basis of a solid careers programme (Benchmark 1), useful for including in monitoring tools such as COMPASS.

Since its launch the North East Regional Progression Framework has been redeveloped to further support practitioners in their evaluation of activities by providing sample evaluation questions for each learning objective, phase and audience. The framework has been endorsed by the Network for Evaluating and Researching University Participation Interventions (NERUPI) and an additional document has been developed to align the Regional Progression Framework to the NERUPI Framework for pre-application outreach.

In addition to this endorsement the **North East Regional Progression Framework** has also been recognised by the Careers & Enterprise Company as an example of best practice and has been added to their national resource directory.



Moving Forwards

The 2020-21 academic year will continue to see the FutureMe programme of activity delivered in 106 target schools and all partner colleges following a blended model of delivery to suit the needs of young people during the current climate.

Passport to FutureMe

Passport to FutureMe will take place during June and July 2021 and will be an exciting opportunity for year 10 students in our FutureMe and Opportunity North East target schools. This sustained programme, running over five weeks, will give young people the opportunity to explore what it's really like to be a student in the North East and to develop their understanding of the range of higher education options available.

Passport to FutureMe will commence with a launch event for participants, parents and carers, followed by a thematic programme of content and weekly activities delivered online during July. Passport to FutureMe participants will be assigned an undergraduate Mentor to support them throughout the programme and provide a first-hand perspective on student life. The programme will conclude with a day-long celebration event held on campus to allow young people to explore the region's HE offer and celebrate their achievements.

Should any face-to-face aspects of the programme not be possible due to Covid-19, alternative online activities will be offered to ensure young people don't miss out on the learning experience.

Study Buddy App

The partnership is redeveloping the Study Buddy app, originally created by Sunderland College, the aim of which is to support academic resilience in students across the region, helping them to achieve their future goals. The app will include a study planning tool, articles and worksheets about academic resilience and information and videos about progression to higher education.

The app will launch across the region in **January 2021** and will primarily target learners studying for **level 3** qualifications.

CPD

To support teachers and advisers in the 2020-21 academic year Outreach North East will deliver a range of FREE online CPD opportunities to provide teachers and advisers with the information and knowledge to best support their students' higher education decision making. We are delighted to be working with UCAS to deliver a range of sessions which are outlined below.

Month	Session
January	Preparing for the January UCAS deadline, Live Q&A
March	Preparing students to choose their options Live Q&A with UCAS
May	Are you ready for 21/22? Live Q&A with UCAS
June	Confirmation and Clearing

To encourage engagement, sessions will be delivered online and will be available 'on-demand'. Live Q&A sessions will take place in the early morning and content will be made available after the session. In addition to these sessions the Outreach North East podcast will be released at regular intervals during the academic year, covering a range of topics and guests.

Planning for Phase 3

The Uni Connect Programme was established by the Office for Students (OfS) in 2017 as a four year programme, which will come to an end in July 2021. The OfS will be conducting a national Consultation on the future direction of the programme beyond this point in January 2021.

As part of this Consultation, they will be requesting responses from a wide range of regional stakeholders. We will provide a link to this Consultation document on our website if you or your organisations would like to comment. Planning for the next phase of the programme will take place in April 2021.



Contact Us:

If you have any questions about the contents of this report, or would like to stay informed about our activity please contact us using the channels below.

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