



Higher
Horizons+



Sense of belonging in HE for working class students

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What I'll be talking about

- What is the Higher Horizons programme?
- Who is the programme for?
- Activity design – why these activities?
- Evaluation framework
- How do we know it works?
- Implementing this in your own practice

- Part of the Uni Connect programme – existing partnership dating back to Aimhigher
- Existed in the current form since 2015 (NNCO funding – 2 members of staff)
- Since 2017 – Uni Connect funding massively expanded staffing and delivery capacity
- Now – 28 members of staff across four universities
- One central management team at Keele which oversees the programme
- Four delivery hubs at Keele, Staffs, Chester, Harper Adams
- Delivery hubs each serve approx. 20 to 25 high schools and colleges which have at least 40% intake from TUNDRA Q1 and Q2 areas
- Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire, Cheshire, Shropshire (not Telford)
- Typically work in post-industrial working-class towns within these areas i.e. Stoke, Crewe, Warrington etc.
- Place-based approach – Uni Connect target wards and areas with low participation in HE (TUNDRA)

Progression Framework



All activities we deliver fit within our **Progression Framework**

There are 3 themes: 1) INFORM 2) EXPERIENCE 3) ENABLE

Inform – information, advice and guidance

Experience – campus visits

Enable – subject specific workshops, and study skills

We focus on these three themes because we think this includes everything a young person needs in order to make an informed choice about university:

- practical knowledge about what university is like, how to choose a university, student finance and how UCAS works (INFORM)
- firsthand experience of what it's like, what to expect, becoming comfortable (EXPERIENCE)
- subject interests, and confidence in their study skills (ENABLE)

- Not a deficit view of the young people we work with – they have aspirations, but may not know how to realise them or face practical barriers to realising them
- “It’s like making them do a play without a script” – Jessica Bok, 2010.
- It is also not about taking working class young people and asking them to behave in a different way to fit into a middle-class institution like university
- Role modelling that people who look and sound like them go to university and progress out into all sorts of careers
- Developing sense of belonging in HE – if they want to go, it is for them and is an environment they can feel comfortable in without having to change
- Note on language: we don’t use the term “disadvantaged” to describe young people we work with

Evaluation Framework



PF THEME	OUTCOME	OUTCOME LABEL
INFORM	Increased knowledge of post-16 options inc. academic, vocational, technical routes	FE OPTIONS
	Increased knowledge of post-18 options inc. university, apprenticeships and technical routes	HE OPTIONS
	Reduce common misconceptions about HE inc. finance	HE MYTHS
	Increased knowledge of graduate outcomes	HE BENEFITS
EXPERIENCE	Increased knowledge of university academic experience	HE LEARNING
	Increased knowledge of university social/extracurricular experience	HE LIFE
	Increased knowledge of vocational/technical HE experience	VOCATION
	Increased sense of belonging in HE	BELONGING
ENABLE	Increased academic self-efficacy	SELF-EFFICACY
	Increased motivation to succeed at school and college	MOTIVATION
	Increased knowledge of study strategies and confidence in how to use them	SKILLS
	Increased sense of agency and control	AGENCY

Example of the areas we work in: Stoke-on-Trent



Post-industrial working-class town – pottery industry and mining

35% progress to higher education by 19 (below national average)

- 83.5% white British; 9.9% Asian or British Asian
- 19% of the population was income-deprived in 2019. (25th most income deprived local authority out of 316)
- Only 21.9% of the population over the age of 16 have a level 4+ qualification
- 25.9% have no qualifications at all
- 25.8% of the population are educated to level 1 (11%) or 2 (14.8%)
- 20.3% work in wholesale and retail trades; 9.9% work in manufacturing; 17.5% work in human health and social work; 7.6% work in education

Part of the “red wall” but went Conservative in 2019; majority voted for Brexit

Strong working-class identity; “northern” sensibility despite being in the Midlands

Why did we decide on this approach?

- Based on research literature
- Based on own lived experiences – same leadership since 2015, who also wrote the bid for Uni Connect funding = consistency of approach
- We were also reflecting on our own experiences of university life as people who were first in their family to go, from similar backgrounds to our learners – what did we wish we knew?
- Did not want to be patronising to the young people we work with
- Biggest barrier? Misconceptions about what university is like, the benefits of HE, and fitting in
- Tracking data shows it works (more later)

What do we deliver?

- IAG – typically delivered in schools by our staff
- Campus visits – full day on campus with some sessions run by our staff and some by academics and student ambassadors
- Study/revision skills – typically delivered in schools by our staff
- Subject specific workshops/programmes – often delivered in collaboration with academic schools but also sometimes by our staff

- It sounds simple... and it is!

- Activities are designed using a theory of change which uses the outcomes in our evaluation framework, and pre/post evaluation surveys to measure the outcomes

- Standardised programme – all use the same theory of change
- EITHER – a student life day, designed to show students what university life is like
- OR – a subject taster day which is designed to show students what studying at university is like

- Sense of belonging is an outcome for both, but they also have secondary outcomes that differ

- Student life day includes more time with student ambassadors including a student life talk and Q&A
- Subject taster day does not include this element, but focused on taster lecture/seminar

- Pre/post evaluation – standard suite of questions so all events can be added to the same dataset for analysis

Everyone does campus visits, what makes these special?



- Student Ambassadors carefully selected to be from similar backgrounds – local students with similar accents – particularly important for student ambassadors doing student life talks
- Relatable experiences discussed throughout the day – more impactful to hear from students who have had similar journeys
- If possible – academics from similar backgrounds can be really powerful
- Big focus on allowing them to feel comfortable in the environment
- Helping them understand how university is different to school
- Subject taster sessions not about attainment – though we do run attainment focused days on campus also, linked to the curriculum

Role Models

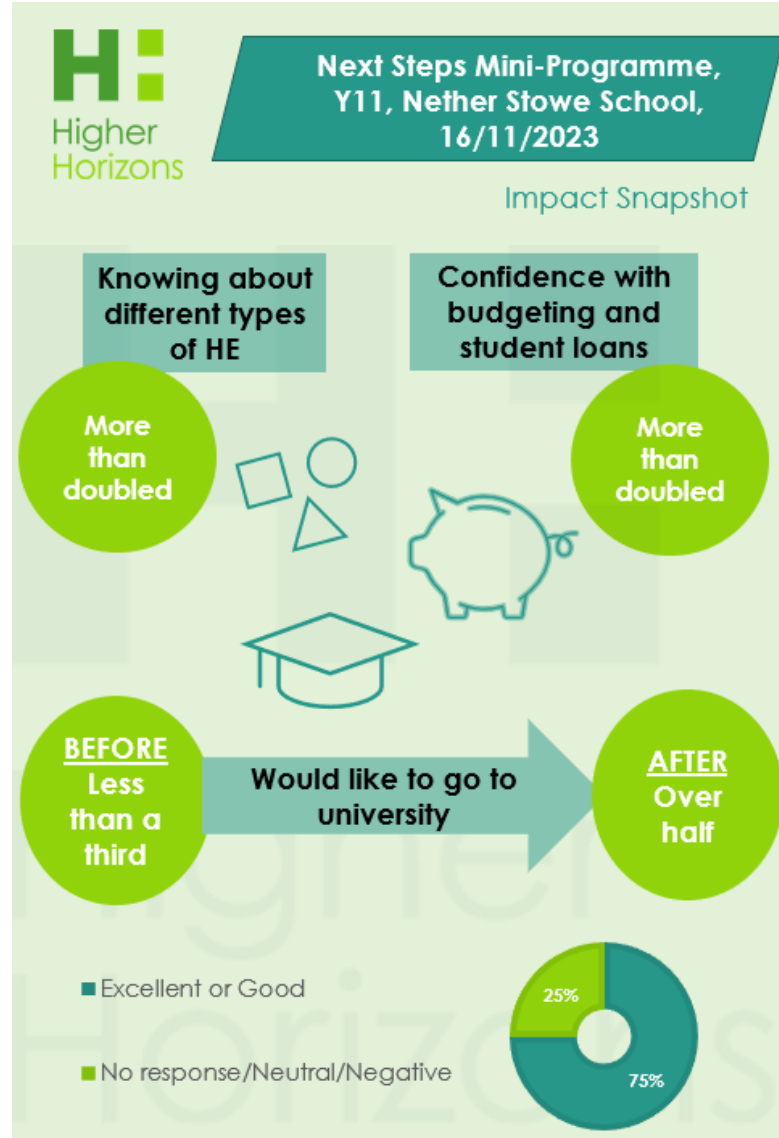
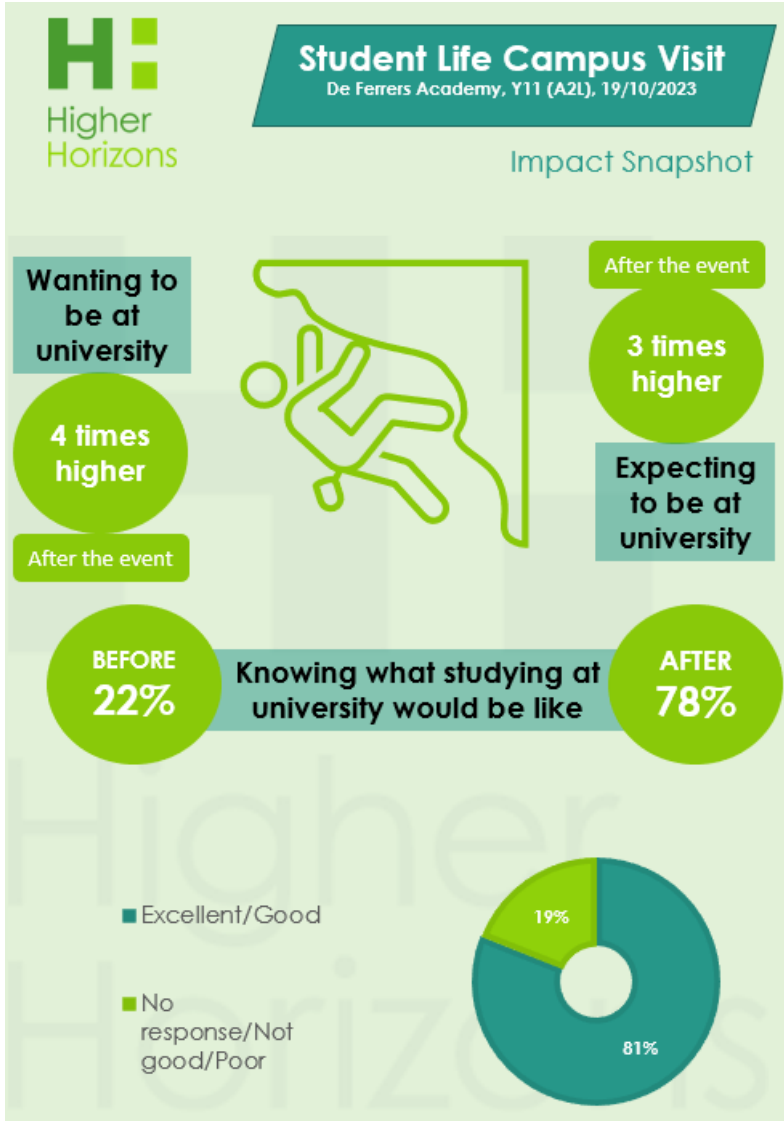


- Many of our students think that university is not for them and they won't fit in
- We show them there are lots of people like them at university
- Try to visit a wide variety of universities – within and outside of our partnership
- Impartially presenting the options can help them refine their options and expectations

- Oxford is one of our partners – we regularly take high attaining students to visit
- Sometimes they come away feeling Oxford isn't the right environment for them and they will definitely not apply – but they now feel more confident about exploring other high tariff institutions

- We want all of our students to choose an environment that fits both their academic abilities and that they will feel comfortable in

Does it work?



Next Steps Mini Programme

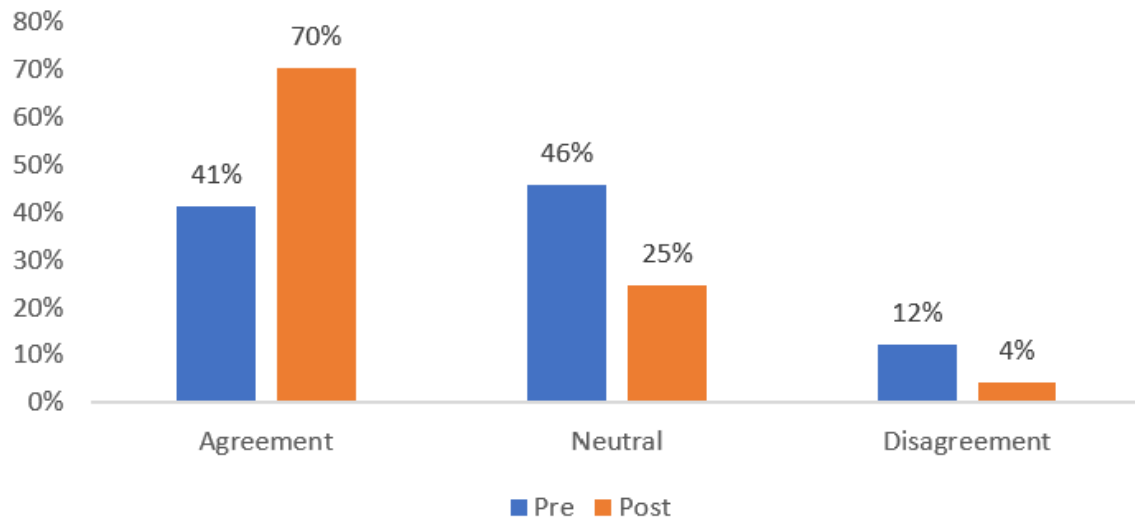


100+ responses across 10 programmes

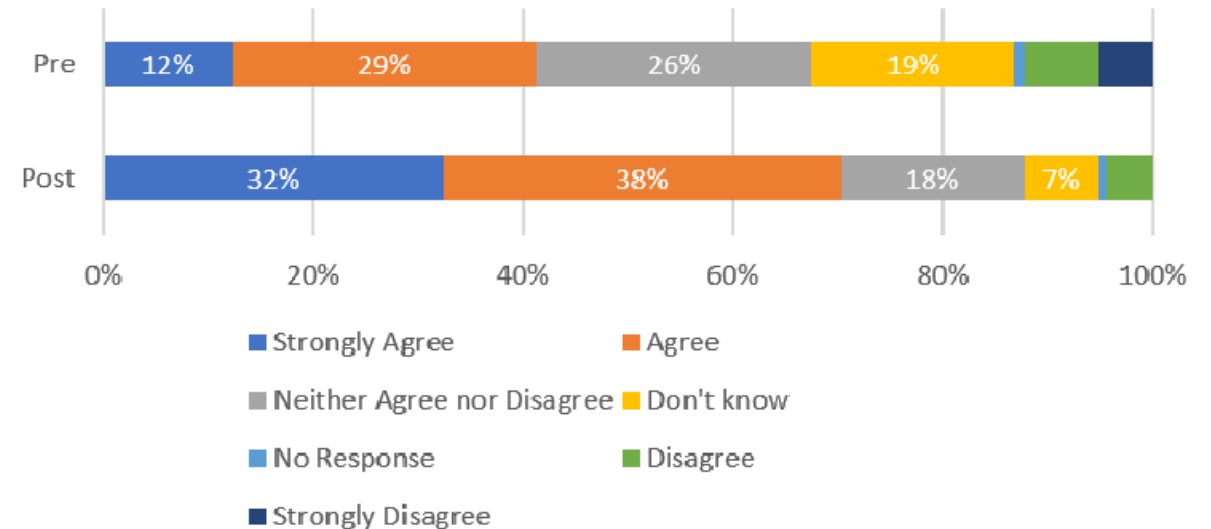
Pre to Post shifts: statistically significant

Y10 – 3 workshops

'I understand how post-16 qualifications lead to Higher Education'



'I understand how post-16 qualifications lead to Higher Education'



Evaluation Outcomes (so far this academic year)



Programme	Next Steps Mini Programme (Y10/11 IAG)	240 learners
Outcome	Increased knowledge of the post-16 options including academic, vocational, and technical routes through FE	
Q1	I know the difference between an A Level, a T Level, and an apprenticeship	17pp increase
Q2	I know where to find more information about sixth form/college	13pp increase

Programme	Subject Taster Day Campus Visit	132 learners
Outcome	Increased knowledge of the university academic experience	
Q1	I understand the difference between school and university	13pp increase
Q2	I know what studying at university would be like	35pp increase

How do we know it's working?

- Track all learners via EMWPREP
- 4 cohorts tracked to age 19 (two years after leaving post-16 education) (2017/18 – 2020/21)
- Overall progression rate of HH learners is **48.3%** (regional progression rate for this period is 41.3%)
- Overall progression rate of HH TUNDRA Q1 and Q2 learners is **42.4%**
- Overall progression rate of HH FSM learners is **38.2%** (regional average for this period is 18.3%)

Stoke-on-Trent

- Average progression rate for this time period in Stoke is 35% (FSM learners = 20%)
- The progression rate for our learners from Stoke-on-Trent is **52.2%**
- Those who took part in a high intensity package of activity = **60.4%**
- Stoke-on-Trent learners, TUNDRA Q1 and Q2
 - High engaging cohort (5+ hours including at least one visit) = 59% progressed to HE
 - Vs. Low engaging cohort (under 3 hours, no visit) = 24.8% progressed
- Stoke-on-Trent FSM learners
 - High engaging = 55%
 - Low engaging = 21.5%

How do we know it's working? Campus visits key



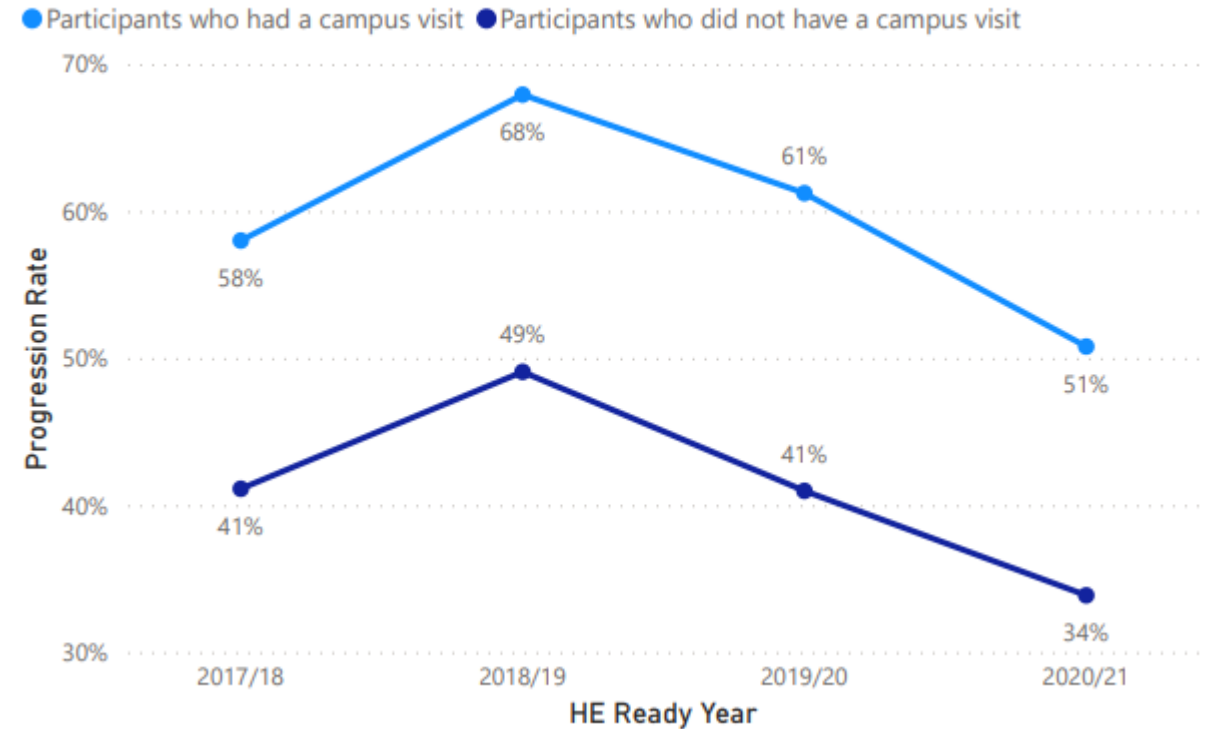
There is a real difference in our data in the progression rates of those who have and haven't had a campus visit

Gap maintained across years

20pp in 2019/20

17pp in 2020/21

Progression Rate - Campus Visits vs No Visits



How do we know it's working? High vs Low intensity



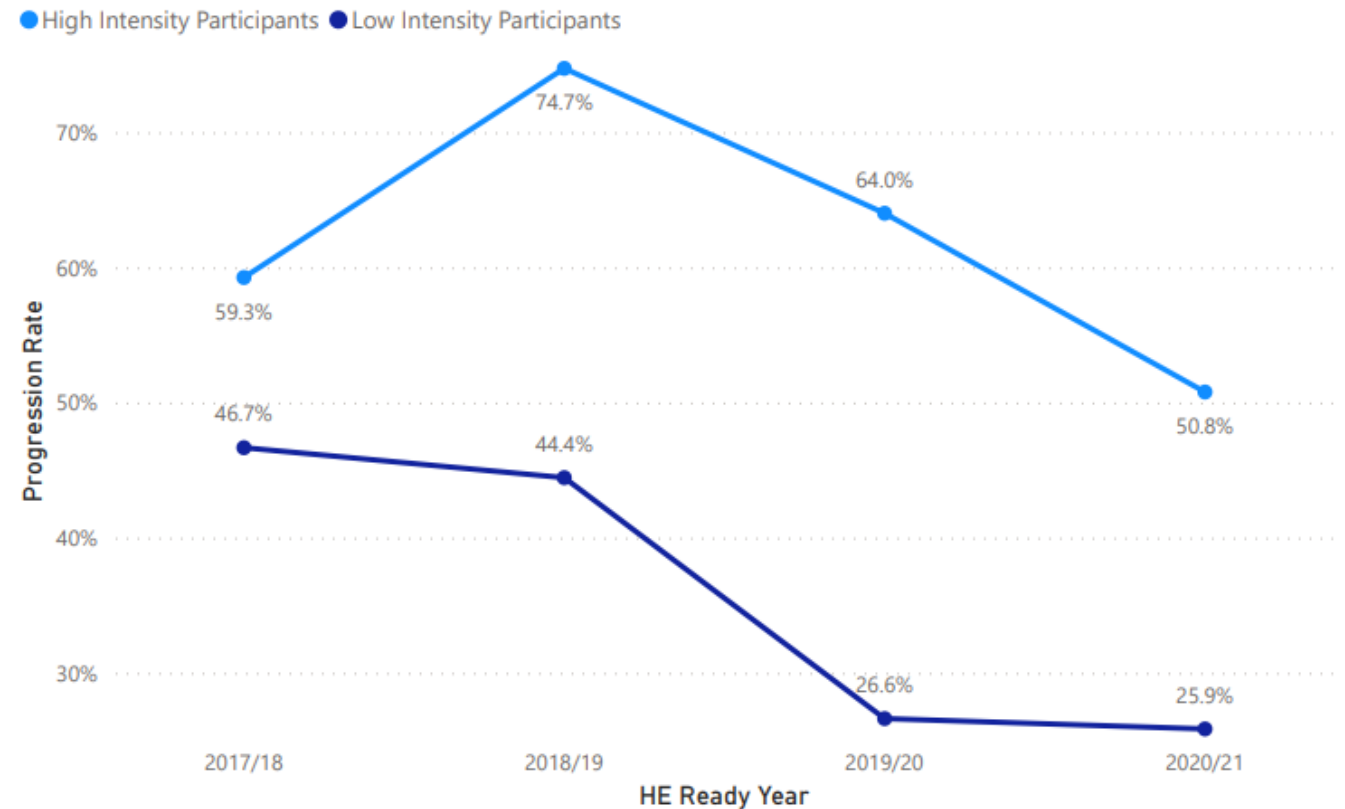
HEAT did some work on Uni Connect datasets where they identified 11 hours as a key tipping point to higher progression rates

In our data this tipping point is 5+ hours activity including at least one visit

High intensity cohort = 5+ hours inc. at least one visit

Low intensity cohort = under 3 hours and no visits

Progression Rate of TUNDRA Q1 and Q2 High Intensity vs Low Intensity Participants



Why does this work?

- The activities we do are quite straight forward – almost every university in the country will do the same ones
- We create sessions from the point of view of the young people we work with – we try to meet them where they are – and we know what it feels like because we've been there
- Regularly review feedback, conduct focus groups, get a 'sense check' from the young people, teachers and schools we work with
- Young people from working class backgrounds have got the ability to spot when you're trying to 'sell' to them or being insincere – so we don't, we just show them what it's like and trust them to make their own decisions

Key takeaways from our evaluation

- One off sessions don't work
- Showing them what the university environment is like is key
- Creating pathways – post 16 options are incredibly important as is correcting misconceptions about university
- A mixture of IAG and campus visits is the 'best' activity package

Break out questions

- How do you consider the needs and experiences of those communities your activities are designed for? Do you co-produce them? Consult with teachers, learners, parents/carers etc.
- Campus visits are integral to developing a sense of belonging in HE for Higher Horizons participants - how important do you see campus visits within your own practice? Will you make any changes to their design following this workshop?
- Consistent evaluation of our programme has allowed us to identify these outcomes, and what works for our participants - does your evaluation practice allow you to do the same thing? Will you make any changes following this workshop?
- Do you use role models within your activities? How do you ensure deliverers or student ambassadors are relatable for the cohorts you are working with?
- What will you take away from this workshop and/or consider when you are next designing activities for working-class students?



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Thanks for listening. Any questions?

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