

GO HIGHER

West Yorkshire

Annual Report
2022-23

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Foreword

Jane Owen-Lynch Chair of Go Higher West Yorkshire (GHWY) and Pro Vice-Chancellor (Teaching & Learning) of University of Huddersfield



GHWY is a long-established partnership of 13 Higher Education (HE) Providers across our county that spans HE-in-FE and universities across all mission groups. The reason our diverse group of institutions work together is to reduce inequalities in access to, success in and progression from HE, in all its forms.

I am delighted to take over as Chair of GHWY as I have worked with them for several years and seen the significant benefits they bring to our disadvantaged communities. In my career I have worked on many different initiatives aimed at increasing representation in HE and look forward to continuing this work with GHWY. I would like to express my thanks to Tracey Lancaster, the outgoing Chair, and I hope that I can follow in her footsteps to maintain and enhance the impact that springs from our collegiate network of collaborating partners.

The past academic year has seen GHWY's 'Underrepresented Groups' networks bring together staff from across our partnership from a range of roles and perspectives. This has directly led to various outputs, including the development and promotion of our Disabled Learners Transition Pack (see page 11 for more information) and a review of the language used in student host/ambassador job advertisements to help them appeal to a broader range of applicants (see page 12).

Our racial equality work has continued, in particular working alongside member institution Leeds Trinity University (LTU). We were proud to collaborate with LTU on their Black Lives Matter conference in May. Our network of staff looking at the experiences of learners from Black, Asian and minoritised ethnicities is bringing together academic and non-academic staff to undertake a systematic review of existing academic research (see page 10).

Our flagship 'Care to Go Higher' programme continues to develop. The content, which supports participants to help their care-experienced young people to understand the whole range of future HE options, has been adapted to support a wider audience – including local charities and Designated Teachers. It has also been rolled out nationally. You can read more about this on page 16. This comes alongside our work to make our institutions more accommodating towards those from a care-experienced background.

GHWY's Uni Connect programme piloted an innovative attainment raising programme during 2022-23, ready for refined and scaled-up delivery in the coming year. The programme brings together a range of evidence-based practices which research shows support improved attainment. Most importantly, our evaluation has offered multiple ways for the young people involved to have their voices heard in relation to the impacts they have seen from the programme. You can find out more on page 13 and also read about other excellent Uni Connect work throughout this report.

The West Yorkshire Combined Authority-funded 'GradSkills' programme has experienced some challenges getting off the ground, but we have been delighted to see the excellent feedback from those undertaking the fully-funded skills programmes. It is undertaking great work to support graduates – particularly those from GHWY's target groups – to move into their next steps after their studies (see page 17).

Our activity across our member institutions and our funded projects genuinely demonstrates the power of collaboration, and how much more we can achieve when we work together. We look forward to another positive year of partnership in 2023-24.

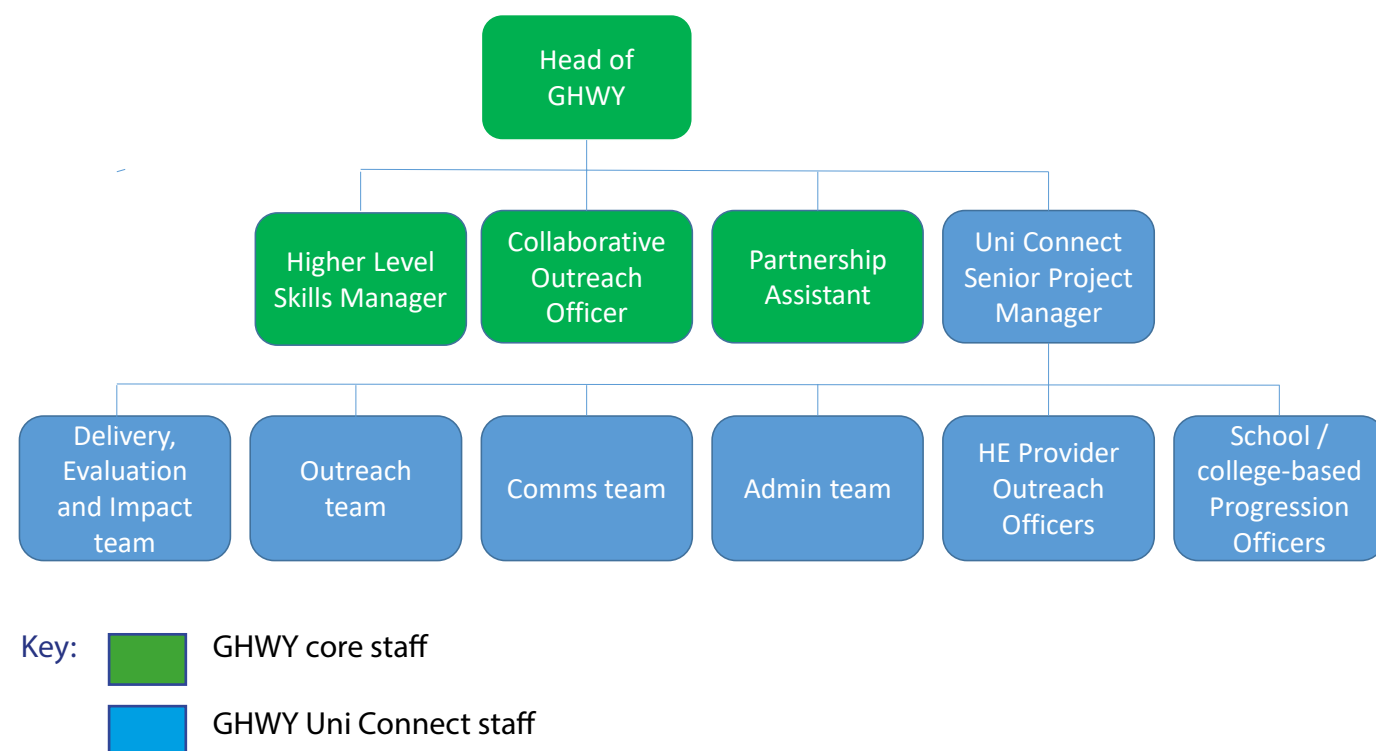
Go Higher West Yorkshire (GHWY) is a partnership of Higher Education (HE) providers in our local area, working to reduce inequalities in HE access, success and progression.

Our mission is to achieve common goals relating to those from underrepresented groups in HE, by connecting our unique range of HE provider members with each other and with external stakeholders.

We do this by:

- Collaborating to support informed HE choices for those from underrepresented groups
- Collaborating to respond to the needs of our target audiences and our 13 member institutions

Team structure



This is through:

- Bringing together strategic networks of staff to share information, ideas and learning, and to collaborate on activity. Alongside the Board, our main groups are the Access and Participation Strategy Group and the Go Higher Skills Group, plus associated sub-groups.
- Delivering and supporting collaborative bids for externally-funded projects such as Uni Connect (OfS-funded) and GradSkills (WYCA-funded). You can find out more about past funded projects on the next page.

Our priorities are:

- Underrepresented groups
- Informed choices
- Evidence-based practice
- West Yorkshire

Read examples of our successful collaborative funding bids and activity. Get in touch for support with future collaborative funding bids relevant to our partnership mission!

National Networks for Collaborative Outreach (NNCO)

Under GHWY's previous guise – HEART (Higher Education Access Rewarding Transforming) – we secured Higher Education Funding Council for England's (HEFCE) 'NNCO' funding to support the development of local networks in our area and enable greater access to HE.

The work laid the ground for our collaborative outreach, and kickstarted our skills strand of work, supporting greater connectivity with West Yorkshire Combined Authority.

Read more: www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/2d55ab17-7108-4e1d-b883-6bf8d1504e72/ncop-end-of-phase-one-evaluation-report.pdf

National Collaborative Outreach Programme (NCOP)

The precursor to Uni Connect, NCOP focused on collaborative HE outreach activity in particular areas of West Yorkshire.

NCOP enabled us to more directly engage with local schools and colleges, and to significantly scale up our ambition to support local young people to make informed decisions about their own futures by broadening horizons to a wide range of options.

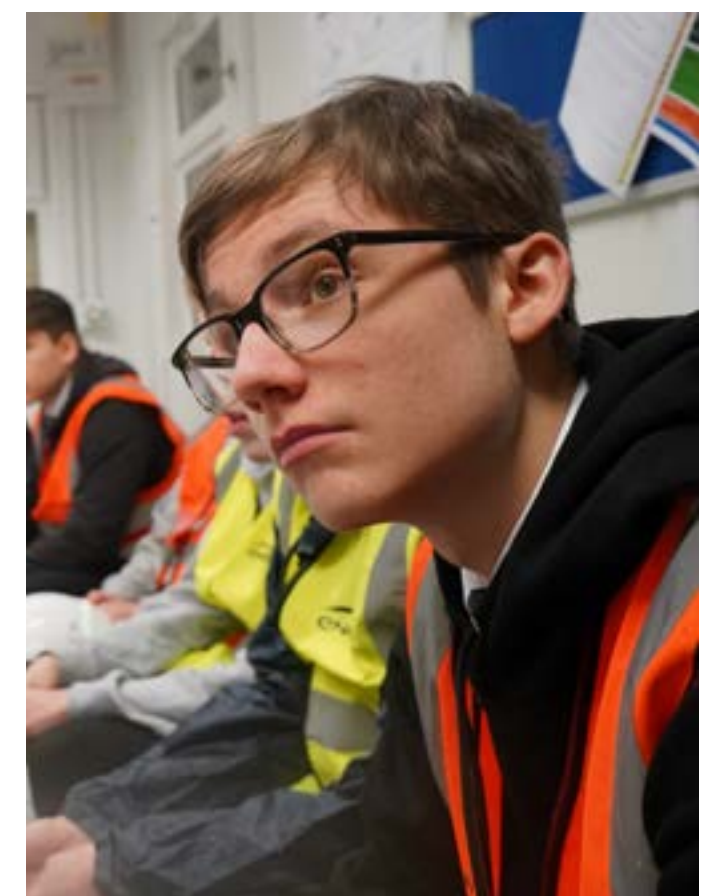
Read more: <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/ncop-two-years-on/>

Degree Apprenticeships Development Fund Phase 2 (DADF2)

In a bid led by Leeds Trinity University, our partnership was awarded funding through HEFCE's highly competitive DADF2 programme.

The project aim was to stimulate the development and delivery of Degree Apprenticeships (DAs) in West Yorkshire. Outputs included new DA curricula, new systems and processes for the recruitment of apprentices, and over 150 apprenticeship starts during the short time-span of the project.

Read more: <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/skills-and-employment/degree-apprenticeships/degree-apprenticeships-for-providers/the-degree-apprenticeship-development-fund/>



Let's Talk Real Skills (LTRS)

West Yorkshire Consortium of Colleges (WYCC) contracted GHWY as a delivery partner for LTRS. The programme invested in new, employer- focused skills training.

Members used the programme's labour market insight to develop their training offers for SMEs and we used it to inform our employer-focused materials, aiming to support greater access to HE across a wider range of people.

LTRS also strengthened partnership working across our members, WYCC and the West Yorkshire Combined Authority, bringing benefits to collaborative responses to regional skills priorities.

Read more: <https://www.westyorkshirecolleges.co.uk/contracted-projects/lets-talk-real-skills>

Would you like to discuss a collaborative funding bid with us? Please contact us at ghwy@leeds.ac.uk marking it F.A.O Head of GHWY



GHWY values the full range of HE provision available across our member institutions and our priority is ensuring that all HE qualifications are showcased equally alongside each other in our activity, to support informed choices.

OfS cites GHWY's Collaborative Taster Days as example of good practice

The Office for Students (OfS) has cited our Collaborative Taster Days (CTDs) as an example of good practice in its Supplementary access and participation plan guidance: <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/110a2d5e-b6f2-4e2b-b339-628c2a8294ab/regulatory-advice-6-how-to-prepare-an-access-and-participation-plan.pdf>

The events provide students with impartial careers information across a range of industry sectors and highlight the different study pathway options to careers in the sector. Different providers, along with local employers and other industry partners, collaborate to provide subject specific introductions and an insight into the different education options in West Yorkshire.

The four CTDs we delivered in 2022-23 were attended by learners from year groups 10-12 (age 14-17). They were based on Leeds City Region skills growth areas and the needs of our schools/ colleges. These focused on Health and Social care; TV and Media; Policing; and Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM). The activities were supported by Student Ambassadors.

Our Data, Evaluation & Impact team is evaluating the CTDs and its findings will inform the activities planned throughout 2023-24. These will be based on Local Skills Improvement Plans and will focus on key sectors, including healthcare and digital, and key skills, such as leadership and management skills.

Find out more: <https://gohigherwestyorks.ac.uk/blog/ghwy-collaborative-taster-day-at-leeds-college-of-building>



Our Uni Connect project delivered a wide range of activities to help young people make informed choices about their educational journey and future career options.

Jamie Peacock visits Titus Salt School

Jamie Peacock MBE delivered an inspirational talk at Titus Salt School to help students manage stress and raise their aspirations.

The former professional Rugby League player and international captain, who is now a motivational coach, encouraged the Year 10 students to dig deep and be prepared to go 'that extra mile'. He also urged them to think about the decisions and choices they now have, and gave them the motivation to go after whatever it is they want to do.

The talk received positive feedback from students, with many agreeing they could use some of Jamie's advice in their studies. One said: "It's so cool Jamie Peacock is in our school!" Another one said: "I think the things he said, I can do."

Find out more: <https://gohigherwestyorks.ac.uk/blog/jamie-peacock-visits-titus-salt-school/>

Collaborating to support informed choices

Helping young people to develop resilience

Resilient Me delivered workshops in resilience, accelerated learning, and personal development to 279 Year 11 students at Castleford Academy.

Learners need to develop resilience throughout their educational and professional journey so they can successfully adapt to change or overcome challenges, such as delivering a presentation or transitioning into HE. Some young people naturally acquire it through life experience, but the full-day workshop provided an opportunity for others to discover it.

The programme was designed to help participants recognise triggers that cause their own stress, and to find an affinity and understanding from people who have experienced, or who are experiencing, many of the things they are dealing with. It combined creative skills with more academic practice.

Find out more: <https://gohigherwestyorks.ac.uk/blog/helping-young-people-to-develop-resilience/>



New College Pontefract students focus on their future

Motivational speaker Adam Corbally, who reached the final in The Apprentice in 2012, delivered an interactive presentation as part of a Future Focus Day. The immersive session helped to prepare a group of Year 13 learners at New College Pontefract for life after college.

The day also included an employability workshop, which focused on key employability skills, with Wakefield Employment Hub talking about the services it offers and running mock interviews.

One young person said of the session: "I gained a more stable understanding of how to become more employable and how to approach an interview with more confidence."

Find out more: <https://gohigherwestyorks.ac.uk/blog/new-college-pontefract-students-focus-on-their-future>

Collaborative working is an essential element of our events and resources. This includes forging links with key organisations in the region.

Development of digital skills resources

We worked in collaboration with West Yorkshire Combined Authority (WYCA) to develop and promote new Digital Skills resources throughout the academic year 2022-23.

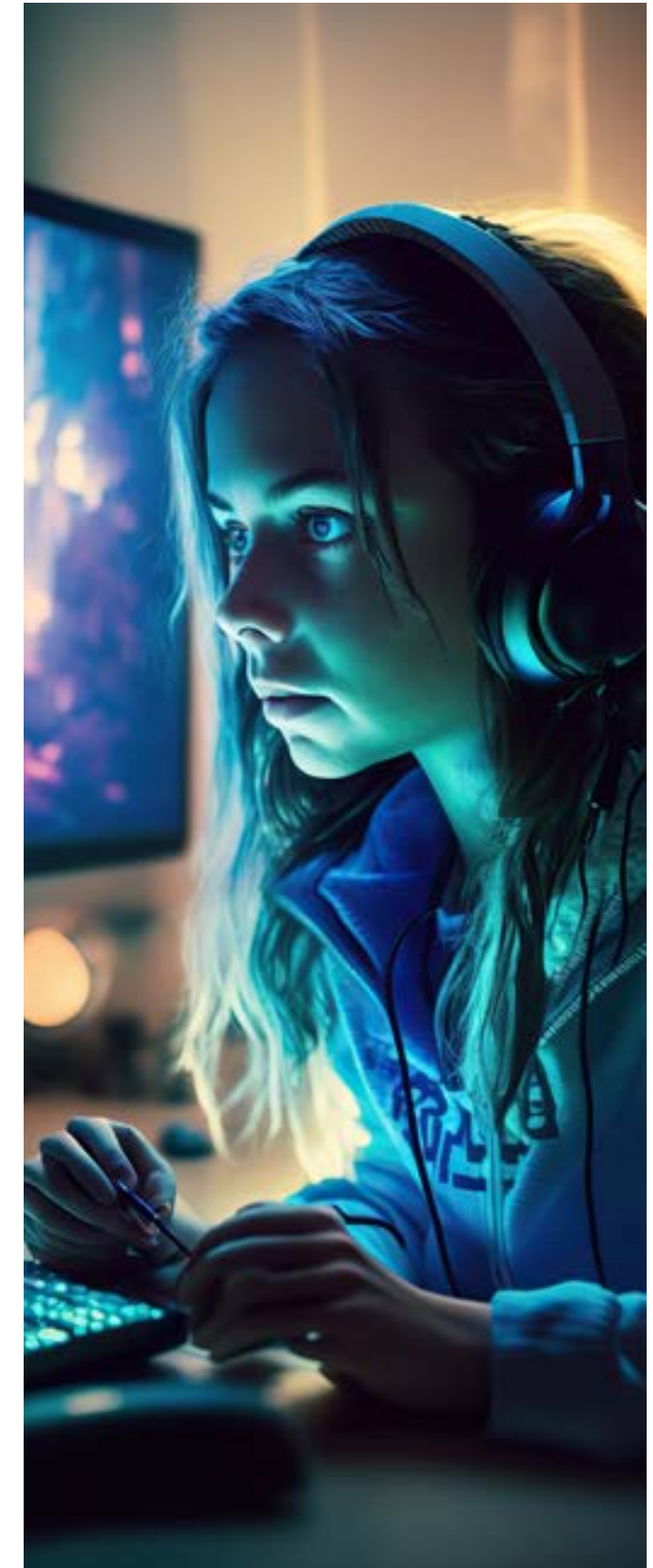
The resources help to develop confidence with the five 'essential' digital skills addressed by the government. They are split into two main parts - an animated video and accompanying resource - that can be used to enhance a short session or be delivered as a full one-hour session, with accompanying class discussions.

The resources have been showcased at Leeds Digital Festival. We also ran a collaborative campaign with WYCA to promote them to teachers and advisors across West Yorkshire. Receiving funding from WYCA, we were able to deliver a successful campaign that saw our total downloads improve from 13 to 6,360 (across all 16 of the resources available) and total views grow from 37 to 903.

We will continue to raise the profile of the resources in 2023-24 to help support the development of a highly in-demand skill set. We also hope to focus on evaluation of the use of the resources.

If you have any questions about the resources, please contact ghwy@leeds.ac.uk

View our Digital Skills resources: <https://gohigherwestyorks.ac.uk/resources/teachers-carers-advisors/key-downloads-workbooks-and-tools/digital-skills/>



Collaborating to respond to need

We have engaged with activities and developed resources for several underrepresented groups in order to improve their access, success and progression.

Underrepresented groups networks

The work of our underrepresented groups (URGs) networks really took off during 2022-23. The networks bring together a range of voices and perspectives that focus on activities for four specific groups. These are:

- Students from some Black, Asian and minoritised ethnicities
- Care-experienced and estranged students
- Disabled students
- Males on free school meals (formerly White working-class boys)

These were identified in the previous academic year as the groups that our member institutions would most value collaborating on. Bringing together staff from across the partnership in this way to collaborate, share and transfer learning and good practice is one of the reasons that GHWY exists.

Read about some the outputs of the networks over the next couple of pages.



We are also taking an overview of various elements that have enhanced understanding and contributed to the work of the networks. These will be drawn together into a framework approach for work with URGs. Some of the key elements identified so far are:

- Research: learning from and contributing to the evidence base
- Discourses: awareness and understanding of potentially disabling assumptions and labels applied to groups
- National picture/sector knowledge: understanding the wider sector and the implications for our work
- Learner voice: inclusion of the voices and perspectives of those from our underrepresented groups, so that activity feels relevant to them
- Representation: considering how individuals might see themselves as being authentically represented in our activity

Work underway on Systematic Review

Members of our Black, Asian and Minoritised Ethnic Students Network are carrying out a systematic review of access to HE for this particular cohort.

The work will update the evidence base in this area, which is an important undertaking because the last review was over a decade ago. During this time there have been many policy changes within HE and it is vital to understand whether these have had a positive impact on access rates.

The review findings will help to inform the Network's work, with plans to disseminate this research via conferences and journal articles throughout 2023-24.

Find out more: <https://gohigherwestyorks.ac.uk/blog/collaborative-working-learnings-from-the-initial-stages-of-a-systematic-review/>

E-learning to support care-experienced and estranged students launched

An e-learning course that helps HE staff to understand and support care-experienced and estranged students has been developed by GHWY.

The course, which was piloted at two of our member institutions in April 2022, was updated in response to feedback. It was also informed by pre- and post- evaluation surveys, and suggestions from Stand Alone, the country's only charity dedicated to estrangement.

The course, which takes approximately 90 minutes to complete, was developed as an output for our Care-Experienced and Estranged Students Network. It will be officially launched during Tick the Box campaign in September 2023.

Feedback includes: "The different definitions of care-experienced children introduced some new concepts for me."

Find out more: <https://gohigherwestyorks.ac.uk/ghwy-launches-e-learning-to-help-he-staff-support-care-experienced-and-estranged-students/>

"I found the information about care leavers' strengths to be really interesting - a great way of focusing on the positives of their experiences and what these can bring to the HE context."



Continued promotion of Disabled Learners Transition Pack

GHWY has continued to promote and disseminate its Disabled Learners Transition Pack, which was launched in November 2022.

The resource addresses the lack of confidence among teachers, parents/carers, and students when supporting special educational needs and disabled learners (SEND) during transition from mainstream education through to Further/Higher Education and employment.

GHWY staff have presented about the pack at a number of conferences, including Open University's 7th Biennial International Conference on Access, Participation and Success. It has also been promoted as a blog on NEON's website: <https://www.educationopportunities.co.uk/neon-blog/resource-helps-disabled-students-overcome-barriers-when-transitioning-to-he/>

The pack has been downloaded 158 times and printed copies have been distributed within GHWY's networks. We are now seeking student feedback as part of its ongoing evaluation.

One young person said: "I've had a read through it and it seems really informative and helpful regarding differences and is very easy to read."

Find out more: <https://gohigherwestyorks.ac.uk/resource/disabled-learners-transition-pack/>

Encouraging greater diversity of student ambassadors

GHWY's Males on Free School Meals Network (previously White Working-Class Males Network), conducted a review of student ambassador job descriptions. This was in response to the comparative lack of male student ambassadors across the partnership. These are important role models, helping children see that people like them can succeed in HE.

The work involved an analysis by Leeds Beckett University into its data on the student ambassador pipeline, which found that students who apply broadly remain in the recruitment process. It also ran student ambassador job descriptions from across the partnership through gender decoders, which found that all of them were feminine or strongly feminine.

The gendered language of the job descriptions may not encourage as many males to apply to the role. To support the use of research and evidence among practitioners, members of the Network will review and update their job descriptions to encourage more male applicants.



Inaugural underrepresented groups (URG) showcase

Our inaugural URG showcase was held at Leeds Beckett University in May 2023. The event brought together members of GHWY's four URG networks for the first time to share best practice, learn from each other, and provide updates on outputs.

In response to participant feedback, the event will be held annually. We are also exploring ways to keep the networks better appraised of each other's work, including regular updates in our newsletter for HE providers.

The participants shared their event highlights, with one attendee saying they 'took away several ideas for continuous improvement and development across the groups presented.'

Find out more: <https://gohigherwestyorks.ac.uk/blog/collaboration-role-models-and-student-voice-highlighted-at-under-represented-groups-showcase/>

As a partnership bringing together networks of staff, we can help those across our member institutions learn together and respond to new challenges and opportunities. We can also collaboratively support the needs of our school and college partners and future skills needs of the region.

Attainment Raising programme piloted

In line with OfS priorities, GHWY Uni Connect delivered its pilot Attainment Raising (AR) programme Think and Go Higher! across five schools for Years 8-10.

The programme, which offered five consecutive in-school sessions and a campus visit to one of our 13 HE members, focused on developing learners' awareness and skills of meta-cognition and development of meta-cognition, and study skills across all school subjects. It was led and supported by our member institutions, learners, and schools.

Initial evaluation into the pilot found that overall it had a positive effect on learners' recognition of and confidence in their learning skills and abilities. Outreach Officers and key school personnel unanimously agreed on its benefits and observed learner development over the six-week intervention period.

Other more specific findings included:

- Learners expressed higher confidence in understanding new concepts, utilising feedback to improve their work, and communicating ideas in the classroom.
- Year 8 learners particularly recognised an improvement in their ability to communicate ideas in the classroom.

Focus group learners reported improvements in grades, especially in subjects like maths and science. They attributed their success to techniques learned during the programme, such as the Lotus Blossom method. They were able to identify and articulate the skills they had acquired or improved.

AR activity aims to address Risk 1 in the Equality of Opportunity Risk Register: 'Students may not have equal opportunity to develop the knowledge and skills required to be accepted onto HE courses that match their expectations and ambitions.' It is designed to improve the academic attainment and progress of pupils that are underrepresented in HE, thereby contributing to greater proportions of them accessing HE.

"You had more confidence speaking in front of people. Because there were quite a few people in a room you had to pitch your idea and say it out loud in front of everyone." - Y8/9 student, Castleford Academy

"It's easy to connect to [Outreach Officers], more than teachers. It just feels really calm." - Y10 student, Ruth Gorse Academy

Collaborating to respond to need

Developing presentation skills

Our Outreach Officers took part in a wide range of training this academic year to enhance professional skills development. One of the most successful sessions was with Talk the Talk, who delivered presentation and delivery skills training.

Attendees remained engaged and challenged throughout the day, during which they were asked to present at both the beginning and end of the session about a last-minute topic. This encouraged them to compare their confidence and skill set from the beginning to the end of the day.

The feedback was very positive. Staff noted that it was bespoke to the needs of their job roles, which made it feel even more worthwhile.

Stakeholder engagement

We have maintained and developed sustained relationships in 2022-23 with a wide range of strategic and operational partners in local/central government, careers, education, skills and industry.

The benefits of stakeholder engagement include sharing best practice, joint delivery, influencing and embedding widening participation in stakeholders' practice, policies and strategies.

Examples include:

- Joint delivery of CPD with the West Yorkshire Combined Authority linked to Labour Market Information, and our Disabled Learners Transition Pack
- Employers supporting the delivery of Uni Connect activities including mock interviews, podcasts
- Sitting on strategic boards and steering group meetings, including Wakefield Council NEET Strategy Group
- Hosting collaborative project spaces for stakeholder groups including Wakefield Youth Partnership Group

- Collaborative working with fellow Uni Connect Partnerships to share resources, develop strategy and deliver joint training sessions across the nation. We are now proactively working with partnerships such as Next Steps (Plymouth), HOP (Hull) and KMPF (Kent)

Supporting mature learners

Mature learners represent a significant proportion of students nationally. They are equipped with important life skills but they often face unique challenges. This is why we created dedicated webpages to help those returning to education as an adult. The pages include practical information about available support, deciding on the right course, and how to apply.

Find out more: <https://gohigherwestyorks.ac.uk/what-we-do/students-learners/adult-learners/>

As part of our work to support this cohort, we also ran a Good Practice Programme event that focused on how best to engage mature learners in HE. We recognise the importance of student voice and were delighted to have a former mature student, who is now a staff member at the University of Leeds, as one of the speakers.

The event also provided insights from GHWY staff about a visit to Calderdale College, where they spoke with several adult learners about their educational journey, the barriers they faced, and the support they had received.

Read more: <https://gohigherwestyorks.ac.uk/blog/engaging-mature-students-in-he/>

Event feedback was positive and constructive. One attendee said: "Excellent, insightful, shifted some of my own thinking and understanding." Another person said: "I really enjoyed this event, a really welcoming atmosphere." There was also an acknowledgement of the need to foreground mature students within Access and Participation Plans.

We continued to develop our offer of free CPD that is aimed at supporting young people to make informed choices about their education.

CPD programme goes from strength to strength

It has been a record year for GHWY Uni Connect's CPD programme. We organised 26 training opportunities for staff members between September 2022 and July 2023, of which 22 were open to external networks. These were attended by 547 people, compared with 277 across last academic year. Of these, 104 attended two or more of our sessions.

The sessions covered a wide range of subjects, from Youth Mental Health First Aid Training through to Mentoring. They also focused on our chosen underrepresented groups.

Elizabeth Wright, Paralympian and University of Leeds alumni, presented at our session focused on supporting Disabled Learners. She discussed her own stories and experiences and attendees commented that the session had been 'both inspiring and practical'.

Mark Roberts, author of Boys Don't Try? Rethinking Masculinity in Schools, spoke about engaging white working-class males. The session had the year's highest attendance with people commenting that it had allowed them to 'challenge stereotypes' as well as consider practical tips for engaging and motivating this group.

Shames Maskeen, Lecturer in Developmental Psychology at Leeds Trinity University, discussed his research into the experiences of Pakistani and Bangladeshi students at university. Attendees commented on the presence of student voice throughout this session being a real highlight, 'a refreshing session with student voice at the heart of it'.

We have also offered information sessions to help support teachers and practitioners with the latest up to date information and knowledge about HE and progression. These focused on a range of topic areas from personal statements, student finance, and how to use labour market information within schools.

We have received positive feedback on our sessions. Online delivery has proved useful in regard to accessibility for staff in schools and colleges. It has also allowed people who are unable to attend the live session to access the information at a later date without concern of missing out.

One participant said, "The sessions are really informative and the ability to access them virtually increases the opportunity to attend."

Internally, we have offered opportunities to develop skills in project management and mentoring. Staff have commented on the usefulness of these sessions as these are highly applicable skill sets for their roles managing and coordinating outreach projects, as well as working with and inspiring young people.

We plan to track the use of this training next academic year to see how attendees are implementing the knowledge and strategies covered in these sessions.

"Tips on how to approach difficult situations and manage time to achieve maximum results within projects was a good learning tool for myself moving forward."

"One thing I'm trialling today [as a result of the Project Management training] is the 'Model for Managing Complex Change' and seeing if it helps me highlight areas to work on for a more successful day."

Care to Go Higher CPD programme rolled out nationally and for bespoke audiences

Our Care to Go Higher CPD programme, which is aimed at the key influencers of care-experienced young people, recruited nationally for the first time.

The training aims to give participants the tools needed to support care-experienced students make informed decisions about HE. Attendees had a variety of needs, including refugees in foster care and special guardianship orders.

Initial programme evaluation found increases (on a scale of 1-10) in rating on a range of topics. "I am familiar with the tools I can use with young people to set goals and plan for the future" increased from an average of 5.2 to 8.3, and "I have good knowledge and understanding of the student experience" from 5.3 to 9.2.

A tailored version of the programme was also run for the first time, aimed at Designated Teachers who support care-experienced students. Organised in conjunction with the Wakefield Virtual School and delivered in May, the session was condensed into two hours instead of the usual six two-hour sessions. It focused on the benefits, support, and options available for care-experienced students entering HE.

Feedback from the programme was that it was clear and comprehensive, and that participants would be sharing their learning with colleagues to support their students. As such we are exploring ways to run the session with the Virtual School in the future.

Find out more: <https://gohigherwestyorks.ac.uk/resources/teachers-carers-advisors/care-leavers/care-to-go-higher/>

"Great training session! I enjoyed learning about supporting care leavers in HE and the wealth of support and opportunities available to them. The additional speakers were good and I particularly enjoyed hearing from them. Also having the opportunity to hear from a care-experienced student was great. I would highly recommend this training session."

"I found this course very helpful and very informative. It has opened my eyes to a different prospective of HE. It has also given me a lot of things I hadn't thought about, like what happens after the care leaver leaves and has finished their courses."

Supporting employers to better understand how and why to engage with HE meets several aims of the Go Higher Skills Group, and our activity involves raising awareness in this area.

Employer engagement resource

Regional employers were helped to understand the benefits of higher level skills in their workforce through engagements with HE partners through our 'A guide to engaging with higher education providers in West Yorkshire'.

The e-brochure, alongside our extensive webpages for businesses and employers, provides information and examples on how organisations can train their existing staff, recruit a diverse workforce, build their business, and access specialist knowledge.

It includes a summary of education qualifications, including those before HE; an indicative employer engagement calendar that shows when might be the best times for employers to connect with HE providers; case studies that provide examples of what other employers have done, and the benefits of different approaches; and contact details so employers can get in touch with the right people to discuss opportunities.

It was written with input from our members and following consultation with partners including West Yorkshire Combined Authority, Yorkshire Universities and West Yorkshire College Consortium, drawing on our collective wealth of experience in business engagement across the region.

Find out more: <https://gohigherwestyorks.ac.uk/guide-for-employers-demonstrates-full-range-of-he-opportunities>

Helping under- and unemployed graduates

Recent graduates across West Yorkshire who are under- and unemployed are being supported to confidently take their next steps towards a great career through the GradSkills programme.

Funded through West Yorkshire Combined Authority's Skills Connect banner, GradSkills recognises that it is often graduates from groups under represented in HE who are less likely to progress into graduate-level destinations. It therefore offers fully-funded skills training to help them to identify their skills, find new job opportunities, and demonstrate their suitability to employers.

Feedback to date has been excellent. One participant said that undertaking the suite of modules had made them realise, "there are amazing opportunities in many places undiscovered (and quite local)," while another said it allowed them, "to have hope and get excited about finding [my] new job and career."

Read more: <https://www.leedstrinity.ac.uk/gradskills>



Our work is underpinned by a strong evidence and research base to ensure it is having an impact.

Data highlights

Using the Higher Education Access Tracker (HEAT) database, we logged, tracked, and delivered 580 activities throughout 2022-23 across our partnered institutions. Within these activities we were able to:

- Interact with 14,356 learners, including 7,560 Uni Connect targeted learners and 6,463 POLAR4 Quintile 1 learners
- Of these total learners, 82% (11,723) attended more than one activity within the academic year. Over half of these learners (6,604) live within a UC target ward

In addition to the HEAT data, we received the most recent HESA track data that allows us to understand the further destinations of learners we worked with up until 2020-21. From this data, some highlights were:

- In 2021, 6,070 of our outreach participants entered HE in their expected year of entry. This was 2,795 more than the previous year.
- 30.6% of our POLAR4 Q1 participants entered HE within one year of their expected year; 4.4% more than the national average.

As the HESA data is so vast, we will continue to analyse and report on it. On this trajectory, and with other considerations such as Covid becoming less of an issue, we nonetheless can anticipate that the number of learners we work with entering HE will continue to increase over the coming years.

Evidence-based programme development

We are working hard to ensure that evidence of need and impact is directly influencing our Uni Connect programme planning. Some of the highlights from 2022-23 are:

- Our attainment raising pilot programme was designed around research into meta-cognition and the impact of oracy programmes, in order to address the Covid-19 skills gap.
- Our Enhanced Careers Guidance programme was re-delivered on the back of promising evidence of impact from our quasi-experimental evaluation of this offering in 2021-22.
- We launched an Activity Menu, allowing schools and colleges to easily deliver tried and tested activities. This is being further developed in 2023-24, with greater emphasis on ensuring clear theories of change and a more comprehensive menu of standardised activity.



The power of inclusive recruitment practices

GHWY is aware that having a more diverse workforce can foster greater innovation and help us challenge assumptions that may inadvertently disadvantage some groups of individuals. We have therefore explored strategies and techniques for more inclusive recruitment practices.

As part of a trial, we gave interview questions to candidates 24 hours in advance. This provided more time for them to focus their preparation. It received positive feedback, with one candidate saying the practice, "helped me feel comfortable enough to be able to talk about everything that I wanted to. It helped to ease most of the pre-interview nerves."

We have also diversified our recruitment channels to reach a broader range of talent pools. Vacancies are now advertised on social media platforms, dedicated webpages, and professional associations where possible.

Inclusive recruitment practice is now in place at GHWY to increase the likelihood of finding the best fit for the job.

Find out more: <https://gohigherwestyorks.ac.uk/blog/go-higher-west-yorkshire-the-power-of-inclusive-recruitment/>



Streamlined website launched

Our website was re-launched in November 2022 following a major re-design to improve its functionality, accessibility and navigation.

We have created a clean, modern design and improved site navigation to help users find exactly what they are looking for and better represent who we are as an organisation.

The site's e-learning platform was also updated to meet industry standards with advanced reporting and improved user journeys.

In comparison to previous versions, the overall accessibility rating of our website has increased from 20% to an impressive 93%.

Throughout 2023-24 we will work to spotlight more of our key success stories on the site.

Find out more: <https://gohigherwestyorks.ac.uk/ghwy-launches-new-streamlined-website/>

Uni Connect podcast launched

In January 2023 we launched a monthly podcast series that shares information, advice and guidance around HE progression and future options for our target learners in an engaging format.

In each episode, presenters from GHWY Uni Connect are joined by guests from a range of HE institutions, student ambassadors, career experts, admission gurus to share their real-life experience and advice. Topics covered so far have been UCAS, Apprenticeships, Student Finance and Student Experience. From 2022-23 the podcasts have been streamed a total of 490 times collectively over 9 episodes.

Past episodes are available on Spotify and our website, with more episodes planned for 2023-24.

Find out more: <https://gohigherwestyorks.ac.uk/introducing-the-go-higher-west-yorkshire-uni-connect-podcast/>



Final thoughts

Helen Sykes, Head of GHWY



2022-23 has been yet another year where the teams across Go Higher West Yorkshire (GHWY) – including the Uni Connect programme – have achieved a huge amount. I wish to start by thanking all staff for their many and varied contributions to this, particularly the enthusiasm and ideas that individuals at all levels bring to their work. Whilst we have said a fond farewell to several team members as well as contact staff in our member institutions, we are delighted to welcome and work with those who have joined us.

The new academic year will see a significant collaboration across GHWY's member institutions, as the vast majority move towards using a common definition of 'care experienced'. This is important because it removes one of the barriers in the Higher Education (HE) applications process for those who have had experience of the care system, and means they can be confident that they will be eligible for additional support if they apply to HE at a GHWY member institution. It demonstrates the ethos behind our partnership which seeks to reduce inequalities in access to, success in and progression from HE, by recognising the inequitable experiences of this group and ensuring that those who need this additional support are enabled to get access to it.

We are excited to continue our work focusing on the experiences in HE of individuals from underrepresented groups. This will include the systematic review of evidence being undertaken by the Network looking at experiences of learners from Black, Asian and Minoritised Ethnicities, and some e-learning to help student-facing staff in HE better understand and support the needs of disabled learners. This is to support activity that aids increasingly inclusive and equitable environments in which all students can thrive.

The implementation of and early findings from our Uni Connect Attainment Raising pilot programme have proven excellent. Feedback to date has been

extremely encouraging, and we look forward to refining and continuing to roll this out. We will also be piloting additional support for evaluative activity with staff across our Uni Connect teams as well as those working on their institution's Access and Participation Plan.

The GradSkills programme, hosted by Leeds Trinity University, continues to work to understand the needs of under- and unemployed recent graduates from a range of backgrounds, and to test a range of ways to reach them. Moving into the new academic year, more recent activity on this programme has been extremely positive, with exceptional feedback from participants.

Finally, as an organisation and a recruiter of our own staff, at GHWY we have been reflecting on our recruitment processes and whether these offer a level playing field across all groups of potential staff members. During 2022-23, with support from our host institution – the University of Leeds – we started piloting some processes to try to make the recruitment process more equitable. This will continue to be a focus during this academic year.

We look forward to continuing to collaborate during 2023-24.



Coming up in 2023-24

Expanding Attainment Raising programme

Our Attainment Raising programme will be rolled out to eight schools in 2023-24. We will use our evaluation findings to develop the programme, including linking more specifically to the curriculum to enhance the impact it has upon learner attainment.

We will also continue our evaluation in 2023-24, disseminating findings and sharing best practice.

GHWY additional schools 2023-24

Previous partner schools/colleges who no longer have an appointed Progression Officer in post have been assigned a lead/deputy Outreach Officer. They will receive a minimum of two outreach activities in 2023-24, including GHWY activity menu sessions, collaborative taster days, and CPD. This will ensure continued outreach support and build and encourage sustained relationships.

Seven out of nine additional schools engaged with two or more GHWY related engagements in the last academic year. We are now refining the programme and will continue to work collaboratively with a broader range of partner schools in 2023-24, as well as hoping to onboard new schools that are seeking support.



Launching common definition of care-experience

All 13 of our members have made a pledge to move to a common definition of 'care-experience' for students applying from 2023-24. This will remove at least one of the barriers to HE progression, which is the confusion of trying to navigate and make sense of different definitions for access to support. The move is part of a wider drive to encourage students to tick the UCAS care-experienced box on their applications.

Access & Participation Plan webinars

Three of our member institutions will deliver webinars to support all members participating in Wave 2 Access and Participation Plans (APPs) under the new OfS process. It is vital that institutions begin the process as early as possible, and these GHWY-hosted webinars will help ensure our members can make a great start to it.

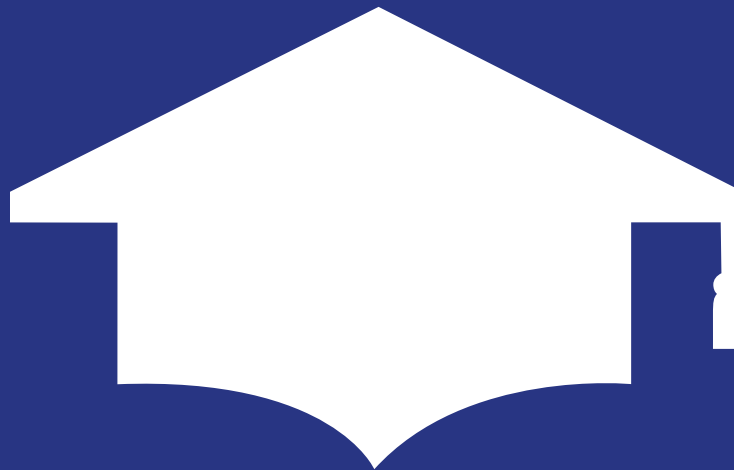
E-learning to better understand and support the needs of disabled students

We are developing e-learning to help HE staff to better understand and support the needs of students who have a disability. The training will consider the challenges that the young people may face, including accessibility requirements, and how this may impact on their time in HE. It will also outline ways in which the students can be supported, and where to find more information and resources.



Find out more about our work: www.gohigherwestyorks.ac.uk





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