Higher education outreach with underrepresented groups: Go Higher West Yorkshire's approach and impact
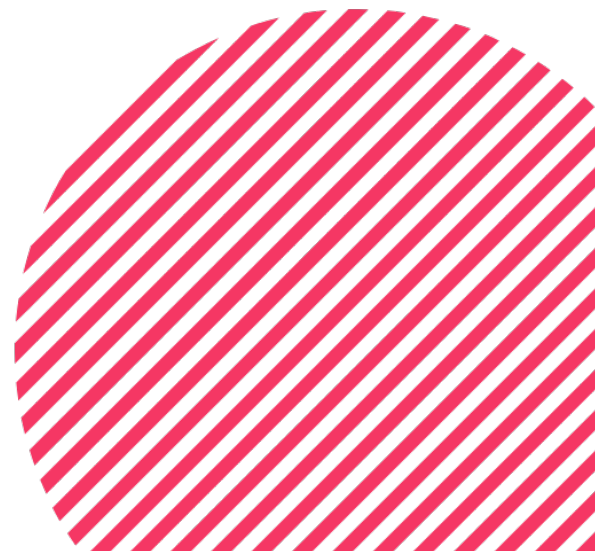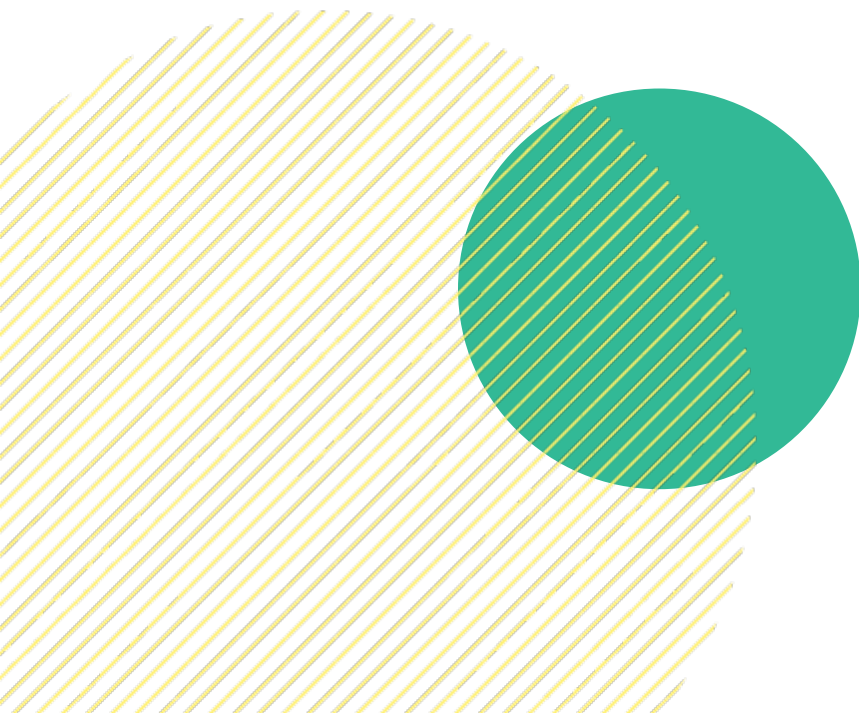
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1. Welcome

Go Higher West Yorkshire (GHWY) is a partnership of 13 Higher Education (HE) providers, working collaboratively to reduce long-standing inequalities in access to, success in, and progression from HE. GHWY hosts the Uni Connect programme, connecting schools, colleges, and universities across West Yorkshire.

GHWY provides targeted support to specific groups of learners who are all underrepresented in higher education (HE), and to their teachers and parents/carers. These groups are:

- Black, Asian, and Minoritised Ethnicity learners
- Disabled learners
- Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller learners
- Male learners on free school meals (FSM) (previously called white working-class male learners within GHWY).

Collectively, using Office for Students (OfS) terminology, these learners are referred to as learners from underrepresented groups (URGs). By working with learners from URGs and their teachers, advisers, carers, and potential employers, GHWY strives to overcome the barriers, misinformation, and uncertainty surrounding HE, and to ensure learners make confident and informed HE choices.

Having produced a series of research reports exploring the barriers that these learners face and how to support them (which can be read here), GHWY commissioned The Brilliant Club to carry out a review and evaluation of their URG activities. This review included four stages:

1. **Rapid review**: A rapid review was conducted to explore research evidence and examples from the sector on best practice for supporting learners from URGs through HE outreach work.
2. **Theory of change**: Key GHWY staff members attended a theory of change workshop. Insights from this session were used to produce an overarching theory of change that summarises GHWY's URG work across the different groups.
3. **Staff survey**: GHWY and partner organisation staff that work with learners from URGs completed a survey on their work.
4. **Focus groups**: GHWY staff were trained to carry out focus groups with learners from URGs. Focus groups were conducted with male learners on FSM and Black African learners, from which the data was analysed to identify themes.

This report summarises the results of each evaluation stage and provides a series of recommendations based on the findings.

2. Rapid review: Higher education outreach with underrepresented groups

A key strategic approach to achieving fairer access and success in higher education is to target support and provision at learners facing the biggest barriers.

This focus has been supported by the introduction of the Equality of Opportunity Risk Register (EORR) by the OfS, which identifies how different risks to equality of opportunity are likely to affect students in specific groups, such as Black students or FSM eligible students.

To address these risks, it is important for HE providers to use effective approaches for working with specific URGs. Wider evidence shows that outreach interventions are most effective when they are tailored to the learners they support[1], with a nuanced understanding of how different socio-economic characteristics intersect. However, there is currently a lack of robust research evidence to show what approaches to supporting different URGs are most effective. This review summarises insights from the available evidence base on programmes working with URGs.

In 2020-21, a comprehensive evaluation report was published, reviewing the impact of Uni Connect provision on students' attitudes, knowledge and behaviours relating to higher education. The Uni Connect evaluation collected data from over 18,000 learners and reported the breakdown of results by demographic characteristics, therefore showing how the outcomes differ between groups of students. Findings from the Uni Connect evaluation highlight the outcomes in which learners from specific URGs report lower scores, which in turn informs which areas interventions should focus on. Overall, the evaluation found that for all learners, it was the number of hours of engagement in activities that had the biggest impact on knowledge about HE, rather than the number or types of activities they engage in. Regardless of their characteristics, it is important that learners have sustained involvement in outreach activities to experience the maximum benefit possible.

Black, Asian, and minoritised ethnicity learners

Black, Asian, and minoritised ethnicity learners have higher rates of progression to HE than white learners. In 2019, rates of HE participation stood at 45 per cent for Black British young people, 50 per cent for British South Asians, and 68 per cent for British Chinese, compared to just 30 per cent for White British young people[2]. Concurrently, the Uni Connect evaluation[3] found that, compared to all other Uni Connect learners included in the analysis, learners from Black, Asian, and minoritised ethnicity groups were more likely to:

- Hold positive views about the benefits of HE.
- Report higher levels of self-efficacy and confidence in their academic abilities.

[1] Robinson, D. & Salvestrini, V. (2020) The impact of interventions for widening access to higher education. A review of the evidence. *EPI & TASO.*
[2] Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) (2021) *2020 Entry UCAS Undergraduate Reports by Sex, Area Background, and Ethnic Group.* Cheltenham: UCAS.
[3] Bowes, L., Tazzyman, S., Birkin, G., & Roberts, J. (2022) An independent evaluation of Uni Connect's impact on intermediate outcomes for learners. *CFE research.*

- Agree that HE is 'a place for people like them'.

However, Black, Asian, and minoritised ethnicity learners are less likely than white learners to enter high tariff institutions[4] and less likely to complete their degrees[5]. Further, there are significant differences between ethnic groups and intersections of ethnicity, socioeconomic status and gender, as for example Black Caribbean male learners on free school meals are much less likely to progress to HE than Chinese male learners not on free school meals[6]. Once at university, there are significant differences in degree outcomes for Black, Asian, and minoritised ethnicity HE students, as they are 13% less likely to get a 1st or 2.1 degree when they graduate than white students[7], also known as the degree awarding gap.

In the Widening Participation (WP) sector, there are numerous interventions targeting Black, Asian, and minoritised ethnicity learners, particularly Black learners. One example is the University of Manchester[8], who run a range of activities in partnership with a local race relations resource centre, including a mentoring scheme for Black year 12 students with high academic potential, who are linked with a Black University of Manchester student to provide mentoring and support with university choices and applications. A more subject-specific intervention is their Black Lawyers Matter programme, where Black male students in year 9-11 take part in workshops run by law students and Black and minoritised ethnicity law professionals and visit the university campus. Often WP teams work together with Black current students to develop programmes, such as the University of York's Black Access Programme[9], where Black learners in years 12-13 take part in various outreach activities. No evaluation results were found for these initiatives. While it is positive that there has been sector-wide recognition for the need to support learners from Black backgrounds, there are fewer examples of interventions targeting Asian learners and other minoritised ethnicities (with the exception of Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller learners, who are discussed below).

Despite the relative prevalence of WP interventions targeting Black, Asian, and minoritised ethnicity learners, there is a lack of evidence on best practice for working with them, with the majority of research in this field focusing on closing the degree awarding gap. Sanderson and Spacey (2021) produced a literature review on WP interventions aimed at Black, Asian, and minoritised ethnicity learners and learners from lower socio-economic groups, but found that there was very little data regarding access for Black, Asian, and minoritised ethnicity learners. They provide some reflections on which factors should be considered when running WP interventions for Black, Asian, and minoritised ethnicity learners:

[4] Sanderson, R., & Spacey, R. (2021). Widening access to higher education for BAME students and students from lower socio-economic groups: A review of literature. *IMPact, 4*(1).
[5] Office for Students (OfS) (2020) Access and participation data dashboard.
[6] Department for Education (2018) Widening Participation in Higher Education, England, 2016/17 age cohort. – Experimental Statistics.
[7] Universities UK & National Union of Students (2019) Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Student Attainment at UK Universities: #Closingthegap.
[8] BAME Engagement Programme. The University of Manchester.
[9] Black Access Programme - Schools and colleges. University of York.

- Financial support may be an effective way to encourage Black, Asian, and minoritised ethnicity learners to apply to HE, as there is some evidence to suggest that these learners value bursaries as an access measure to a greater degree than other learner groups[10]. Providing financial support specifically for Black, Asian, and minoritised ethnicity learners, such as the Stormzy Scholarship for Black students at the University of Cambridge, also demonstrates to prospective learners that they have a place in higher education. Since the launch of the scholarship, applications from Black UK students to the University of Cambridge have risen, dubbed the 'Stormzy Effect'[11].
- Fostering a sense of belonging among Black, Asian, and minoritised ethnicity learners is important and studies from the US have shown that this can be achieved through relatively small-scale interventions[12]. An important aspect of this is recognising the importance of family, community, and place for Black, Asian, and minoritised ethnicity learners[13]. Wider initiatives such as decolonising the curriculum will contribute to improving sense of belonging for both current and prospective students, as this demonstrates a commitment to meaningful inclusion in the sector.

In general, WP interventions aimed at Black, Asian, and minoritised ethnicity learners tend to focus on similar activities as generic WP interventions, such as mentoring, information, advice, and guidance sessions (IAG), and career taster activities, but involve HE students and professionals from similar backgrounds to the learners they are targeting. Given the underrepresentation of Black, Asian, and minoritised ethnicity learners in higher tariff universities, outreach activities can focus on encouraging learners to see these institutions as an option for them through boosting their prospective sense of belonging and working within institutions to improve the visibility of Black, Asian, and minoritised ethnicity students. For WP staff, this could mean planning activities where Black, Asian, and minoritised Ethnicity learners have opportunities to engage with current HE students from similar backgrounds. Further research is needed to establish what kinds of WP activities are most effective for Black, Asian, and minoritised ethnicity learners.

Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller learners

Compared to all other ethnic groups, Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller learners have the lowest attainment at school and are more likely to be excluded from school, which impacts their access to HE. In 2020-21, only approximately 660 Gypsy or Traveller learners were registered in higher education, and just 30 of those were attending Russell Group universities[14]. HE access and success activities focused on this group are still at an early stage of development, which means there is a lack of evidence on what kind of support is most

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[10] Davies, P., Slack, K., Hughes, A., Mangan, J. and K. Vigurs (2008) *Knowing Where to Study? Fees, Bursaries and Fair Access.* Institute for Educational Policy Research and Institute for Access Studies, Staffordshire University.

[11] Stormzy Scholarships (2023). University of Cambridge.

[12] Brady, S. T., Cohen, G. L., Jarvis, S. N., & Walton, G. M. (2020). A brief social-belonging intervention in college improves adult outcomes for black Americans. *Science advances, 6*(18).

[13] Sanderson, R., & Spacey, R. (2021). Widening access to higher education for BAME students and students from lower socio-economic groups: A review of literature. *IMPact, 4*(1).

[14] Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities. Office for Students.

effective for this group. Due to the nature and rhythm of their lives, Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller learners are additionally often in and out of the school system and therefore hard to engage in HE access interventions and their evaluations.

In 2014, the Department for Education identified several examples of schools showing successful practice in improving the attainment and attendance of Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller learners[15]. A key element of this support was engaging with the wider Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller community, particularly with parents/carers. For example, one primary school ran sessions for parents/carers to introduce them to what their children would be learning and expectations for attendance and behaviour. Another school identified a designated teaching assistant to work with parents/carers to identify and alleviate common concerns. In a secondary school, teachers have worked on integrating Roma pupils by learning more about their culture and setting up a Roma football team. These approaches indicate it is important for education providers to recognise the concerns of Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller parents/carers, work with them to address these, and ensure that staff understand the barriers this group of learners face. As Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller learners are not only underrepresented in HE but also less likely to be attending school, WP activities targeting them should start early on[16].

A research study published in 2020[17] interviewed Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller learners in HE about their experiences of education, including how best to facilitate access and support the transition to HE. The learners shared several strategies for supporting Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller learners interested in HE:

- Building relationships through outreach before entering HE. This helps both prospective HE students know what to expect, and HE staff know what support they should offer Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller learners. Additional pre-entry opportunities such as taster days and short courses can also help to build connections. Some of the learners in the study found open days useful, but some noted that these can be quite alienating for family members if no specific provision is offered.
- Additional support with applications. The learners in the study flagged that they were all the first in their family to attend HE and found the application process confusing, particularly those who were mature students and therefore not receiving support from schools. They flagged the prevalence of assumed knowledge during the application process, such as knowing how alternative qualifications would be equivalent to UCAS points or A-levels.
- Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller learners should be given contextualised offers, to recognise the barriers that they are likely to have faced during their education. Additionally, they could be better supported during the application process by including more conversational elements, as their verbal communication skills are likely to be stronger than their written skills.

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[15] Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils: supporting access to education - Case study. GOV.UK.
[16] Forster, N. et al (2022) Representations of Gypsy, Traveller, Roma, Showmen and Boater Communities in higher education widening participation discourse. *Society for Research Into Higher Education.*
[17] Forster, N., & Gallagher, M. (2020). Exploring how Gypsy, Roma and Traveller students can best be supported to participate and thrive in higher education. *Northumbria University.*

- Scholarships should be made available specifically for Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller learners.

In practice, King's College London's Widening Participation Department has run some targeted activities for Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller learners as part of the RomBelong programme, launched in 2018 and developed in partnership with current students from Traveller communities[18]. The programme created six short films showing first-hand experiences of Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller learners in HE, showing younger learners that HE is an option for them, and provided tutoring to learners aged 5-18. Additionally, Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller learners are prioritised when they apply to wider WP initiatives at King's.

In general, interventions with Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller learners should focus on involving their wider community, showing learners from an early age that HE is an option for them, and providing additional tailored support for the application and transition process. Further, HE staff working with Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller learners should be encouraged and supported to learn more about Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller culture and build connections with learners from these communities.

Male learners on FSM

White British males from the lowest socioeconomic status backgrounds are less likely than any other group to access higher education[19]. The Uni Connect evaluation[20] found that being male is consistently linked to negative perceptions about the benefits of HE, to lower self-efficacy and confidence in academic abilities, and to a lower prospective sense of belonging in HE, but did not provide data on the intersection of being male, white, and from a low-income background. A 2016 report[21] identified several reasons for the underrepresentation of male learners on FSM in HE:

- Male learners on FSM tend to have low school attainment, which is a barrier to HE entry.
- Male learners on FSM prefer to take post-16 routes that lead to more guaranteed and immediate financial returns over building up debt through attending HE.
- White working-class families are less familiar with HE and are less likely to see it as an option for their children, making it more difficult for male learners on FSM to access information about applying to and attending HE and be exposed to role models who have attended HE.

The same report presents some concrete suggestions for the most effective ways WP practitioners can have an impact on the HE progression of male learners on FSM:

- Engaging parents and carers and informing them of all aspects of HE, as they are less likely to have knowledge of HE but will influence their children's decisions.

[18] Providing bespoke support for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller students during COVID-19. King's College London.
[19] White British males from low socioeconomic status backgrounds. Office for Students.
[20] Bowes, L., Tazzyman, S., Birkin, G., & Roberts, J. (2022) An independent evaluation of Uni Connect's impact on intermediate outcomes for learners. *CFE research.*
[21] Baars, S., Mulcahy, E., & Bernardes, E. (2016) The underrepresentation of white working class boys in higher education - the role of widening participation. *LKMco & King's College London.*

- Work with learners from a young age to introduce them to the idea of HE, for example through student-to-pupil mentoring programmes. Earlier interventions such as tutoring can also make a bigger difference to attainment.
- Make learners aware of the financial returns of HE, part-time and distance learning options, and courses that include vocational training.

Similarly, the OfS[22] identified several examples of emerging practice related to white economically disadvantaged male learners through reviewing HEPs' Access and Participation plans for 2020-21 to 2024-25. These practices include:

- Using role models at all stages of the student lifecycle, drawing from the student body, alumni, and local employers.
- Focusing interventions on raising confidence and awareness of HE pathways, as well as providing information on budgeting, moving away from home, and what HE life is like.
- Using peer mentoring to engage learners.
- Staff regularly engaging with learners to understand the needs, concerns, and barriers for this group regarding HE, for example through annual focus groups.

An example WP initiative putting some of these guidelines into practice is HE Can, a project run by the Higher Education Progression Partnership South Yorkshire (HeppSY). HE Can involved Year 9 male learners in a sustained programme of activities, including mentoring by role models, workshops at different HE providers, and a residential visit. Further, the learners' parents/carers were included by attending graduation events, and learners received continuing careers support from HeppSY after completing the programme. Qualitative evaluation results indicate that learners found the programme helpful and that it taught them more about HE. A further example is the FutureMe enterprise challenge, run by the North-East Collaborate Outreach Programme in partnership with three local football clubs. Over the course of a term, white year 9 male learners from low participation backgrounds learned about business and enterprise through a football club and attended a visit at an HE provider, culminating in producing a 30-second advert to encourage young men into HE[23].

A key difficulty in working with male learners on FSM in WP is the lack of consensus about who this group of learners are. Some HE providers additionally take ethnicity into account and focus on *white* male learners on FSM, and some use "working-class" over "FSM", which is a broader and less well-defined term. In addition, imposing one identity on an intersection of ethnicity, class, and gender homogenises a wide range of learner experiences who will identify more with some aspects of their identity than others[24]. It is therefore difficult to draw together evidence on how to best support this group to access

[22] White British males from low socioeconomic status backgrounds – Examples. Office for Students.
[23] White British males from low socioeconomic status backgrounds – Examples. Office for Students.
[24] Hunter, J., Hewings, S., & Suddards, A. (2018). White working-class boys: The challenges of translating widening participation policy into practice. *Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning, 20*(3), 27-49.

HE, and important that HE providers maintain awareness of how they are identifying learners to target.

Disabled learners

In 2018, the proportion of UK-domiciled students self-reporting a disability was 16.7%, a number that has been steadily increasing, particularly for students disclosing a mental health condition. However, they are still underrepresented in HE and less likely to attain highly and complete degree courses compared to their non-disabled counterparts[25]. The UniConnect evaluation[26] found that compared to all other learners, disabled learners are more likely to report that they:

- Don't know much about HE.
- Have negative perceptions about the benefits of HE.
- Have lower levels of self-efficacy and less confidence in their academic abilities.
- Don't identify with HE.

Disabled learners face additional barriers in all stages of their education, but particularly during the transition to HE. These barriers include additional administrative burdens due to inaccessible processes, concerns around discrimination and stigmatisation due to carrying a label of disability, a lack of inclusive teaching, having to repeatedly disclose their disability, and differences in terminology between school and HE (e.g. "disabled learners" in HE vs "having special educational needs and disabilities/SEND" in schools)[27]. While it is therefore clearly important to provide additional support to disabled learners, this is a broad category of individuals, and care must be taken to ensure that activities are addressing the needs of the learners they are focusing on.

There are a range of written resources available for disabled learners who are applying to HE, including GHWY's disabled learners transition pack, the Disabled Students' Commission's considerations when applying to undergraduate courses[28], and guidance from UCAS[29]. HE providers also offer in-person activities to support disabled students during the transition to HE. The University of Greenwich for example runs a disabled student ambassador scheme[30], where ambassadors go to schools and colleges to run workshops on being a disabled student in HE with those in Year 11 and above. In addition, the ambassadors attend taster days and careers fairs, provide staff training, and support with a transition day that is held for incoming disabled students every year. The scheme means that disabled students in schools are exposed to similar peers in HE and learn about the support available to them first-hand, and that school staff have a better understanding of how disabled learners might experience HE. At University College London (UCL), an annual

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[25] Disabled students. Office for Students.

[26] Bowes, L., Tazzyman, S., Birkin, G., & Roberts, J. (2022) An independent evaluation of Uni Connect's impact on intermediate outcomes for learners. *CFE research.*

[27] Rowan, A. (2022) Go Higher West Yorkshire: Disabled learners' HE transitions and student experiences. *Advance HE.*

[28] Disabled Students' Commission (2021) Considerations for disabled applicants applying to undergraduate courses. *Advance HE.*

[29] Disabled Students Advice and Financial Support. UCAS.

[30] STAART. University of Greenwich.

Autism Welcome Event is held for incoming students and their parents/carers[31]. The day includes in-person and online sessions with the aim of reducing autistic students' anxieties around the unknowns of studying in HE, through introducing them to the campus, running talks on key topics, and meeting with UCL staff. Evaluation data was not available for either of these interventions.

In terms of best practice, there is emerging evidence from the US on what kinds of interventions work to support disabled learners during the transition to HE. One research study found disabled students who used support services targeted to them at a large US college were more likely to persevere and to perform better, especially if they used services in the first term[32]. Another study ran a randomised trial where students with autism took part in a pre-entry transition intervention, which included parent-teacher consultation, goal-setting, and coaching for teachers and student. The students who took part in the intervention were more likely to reach their transition goals than those who did not receive the intervention[33].

However, some interventions for disabled learners have also been found to be less effective, as a mentoring programme for learners with developmental and intellectual disabilities improved disability awareness for mentors but did not lead to any changes for learners[34]. More research is needed to assess what works best to support disabled learners through WP, particularly in a UK context, and specifically what works for different types of disabilities.

Overall, support for disabled learners should focus on providing them with information about the specific support available to them and give them opportunities to engage with similar students already in HE, so they can get a sense of how studying in HE with the available support would look for them in practice. These interventions will be more effective if they are tailored to address the specific needs of learners, for example physically disabled learners might be more interested in the accessibility of a campus and neurodivergent learners might be more interested in the teaching adjustments available and how to apply for these in practice. Relatedly, HE providers should be aware of their own administrative processes to ensure that learners are not asked to disclose conditions on multiple occasions, both during WP activities and during the transition to HE. Finally, WP staff should ensure they understand the experiences of disabled learners in HE and during the transition into HE and how these differ for different kinds of disabilities.

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[31] Being autistic at UCL: students share their experience. UCL News.
[32] Safer, A., Farmer, L., & Song, B. (2020) Quantifying difculties of university students with disabilities. *Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability, 33*(1), 5-21.
[33] Ruble, L. A., McGrew, J. H., Toland, M., Dalrymple, N., Adams, M., & Snell-Rood, C. (2018) Randomized control trial of COMPASS for improving transition outcomes of students with autism spectrum disorder. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 48*, 3586-3595.
[34] Agarwal, R., Heron, L., Naseh, M., Burke, S. (2021) Mentoring students with intellectual and developmental disabilities: Evaluation of role-specific workshops for mentors and mentees. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 51*, 1281-1289.

3. Theory of change: GHWY's URG work

The aims, activities, and outcomes of GHWY's URG work can be summarised in a theory of change. A theory of change is a document that comprehensively describes how and why an activity will lead to a desired change in a particular context. It generally outlines the aims and content of an activity, the desired short-term and long-term outcomes, and *how* the activity will lead to those outcomes.

Developing a theory of change has multiple benefits – it helps those involved in organising and delivering activities to ensure they are aligned in what they are trying to achieve, it can uncover points of disconnection between the planned activities and the desired outcomes, it can be used to communicate an intervention to external audiences, and it can inform the evaluation of activities. Generally, a theory of change is intended to be a live document, that practitioners can refer to while delivering an activity and adjust as needed. More information and resources on theory of change can be found on TASO's website. The theory of change below summarises GHWY's work with all URGs. Please see Appendix 1 for theories of change for individual URGs.

Situation	Learners from certain demographic backgrounds are less likely to progress to HE than their peers, including disabled learners, Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller learners, male learners on FSM, and Black, Asian and minoritised ethnicity learners (collectively referred to as learners from underrepresented groups/URGs). Further, the GHWY staff, teachers and parents/carers supporting these learners often don't feel confident in their ability to guide them through their educational choices, given the specific barriers they face.
Aims	1. Increase knowledge and awareness of HE as an option for learners from URGs through targeted activities, leading them to be more likely to apply to HE in future. 2. Provide GHWY staff, teachers, and parents/carers with information on HE pathways and the experiences of learners from URGs, to enable them to better support learners from URGs with their educational choices.

Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Outcomes	Impact
	Process		Impact	
Staff: - GHWY staff - Staff from partner and member organisations Participants: - Learners from URGs - Teachers and parents/carers of learners from URGs Resources: - Funding - Research evidence - Student ambassadors/role models - Links to communities - Venues for activities	Learners: - Take part in activities such as IAG sessions, contact with mentors, HE campus visits - Have access to resources with information on HE and how to progress there GHWY staff, teachers, and parents/carers: - Take part in CPD sessions about learners from URGs - Have access to information and resources about HE and learners from URGs - Engage with learners from URGs to better understand their experiences.	- Activity attendance and engagement data - Materials produced during activities, such as podcasts - Engagement of GHWY staff with relevant academic literature and learner voice	Learners: - Increased awareness and knowledge of HE and the steps needed to progress there - Increased confidence and motivation - Increased sense of belonging in HE GHWY staff, teachers, and parents/carers: - Increased awareness of barriers facing students from URGs and how they can support them to achieve their educational goals	- Learners are more likely to consider HE as a realistic option and can make informed choices about their future education

Rationale & Assumptions	- Learning more about HE and meeting similar peers already in HE will increase the likelihood that learners from these URGs will apply to HE. - Learning more about barriers faced by URGs and how to support them will increase GHWY staff's, teachers', and parents/carers' ability to support learners, and in turn increase their likelihood of applying and progressing to HE.

4. Survey of staff working with URGs

A survey was disseminated to the GHWY central team and delivery team staff working with URGs in June 2023. Staff were asked how much they agreed with a series of statements about working with each URG, and some open-ended questions on GHWY's URG work more generally. Please note that in this section, male learners on FSM are referred to as white working-class male learners, in line with the terminology used by GHWY in 2022-23. The full staff survey can be found in Appendix 2.

In total, 24 responses to the survey were received, of which 20 were full responses.

Respondents' work

The majority of the survey respondents were based in the delivery team, with 13 Progression Officers (working in partner schools and colleges) and six Outreach Officers (working in partner HEPs). Five members of the central team responded. Further, 16 respondents were based in schools and colleges, six in higher education. institutions, and two at GHWY.
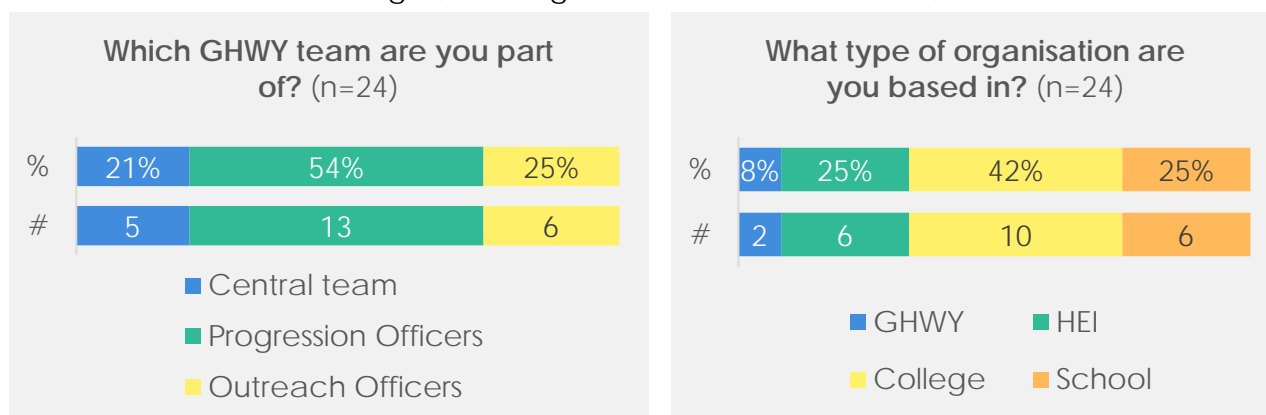
The biggest proportion of URG activities carried out by respondents was with white working-class male learners, which 36% of staff said they had focused on in 2022-23. Just over a quarter of staff had focused on Black, Asian, and minoritised ethnicity learners, a fifth on disabled learners, and only 9% on Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller learners. The two respondents who responded "other" had not focused on a specific URG.
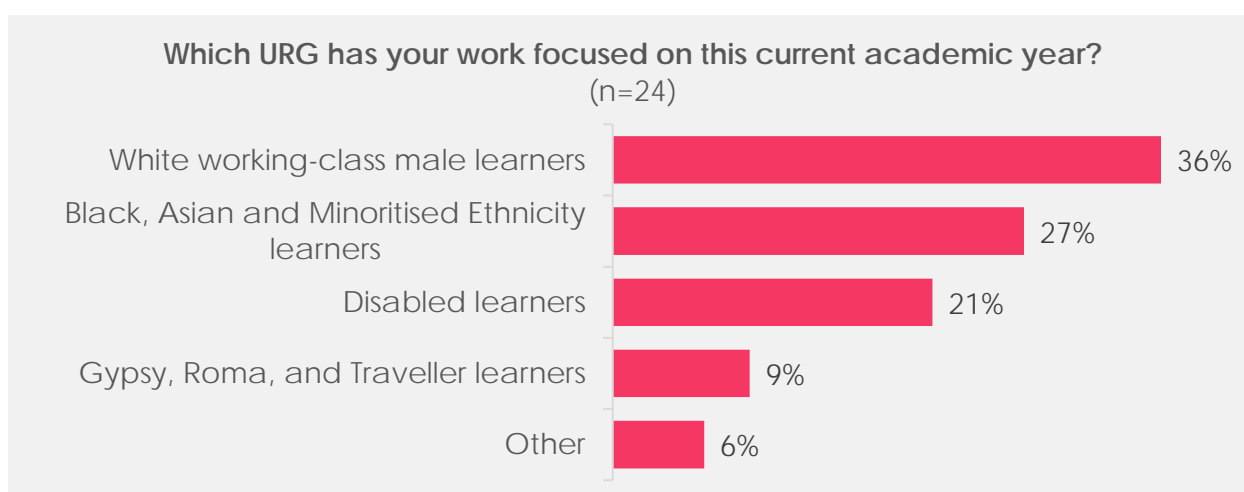
To find out what types of URG activities were carried out, the survey asked respondents to describe their activities and the responses were coded by theme. A single activity could include more than one theme if it focused on multiple outcomes. For example, one taster day could include an HE information talk and a hands-on career activity. Results showed that 31% of respondents said they had led an activity focused on careers, such as taster days in specific industries. A fifth of respondents had focused on skills development, for example oracy skills or interview skills. Fewer activities included mentoring. Overall, most URG activities were about connecting learners with future education and career options and strengthening the skills related to accessing these opportunities.

Describe any activity you have led with URG(s) in the current academic year (n=24)

Activity	Percentage
Careers activity	31%
Skills development	20%
External speaker event	17%
Site visit	11%
HE IAG	9%
Mentoring	6%
Forum meetings	6%
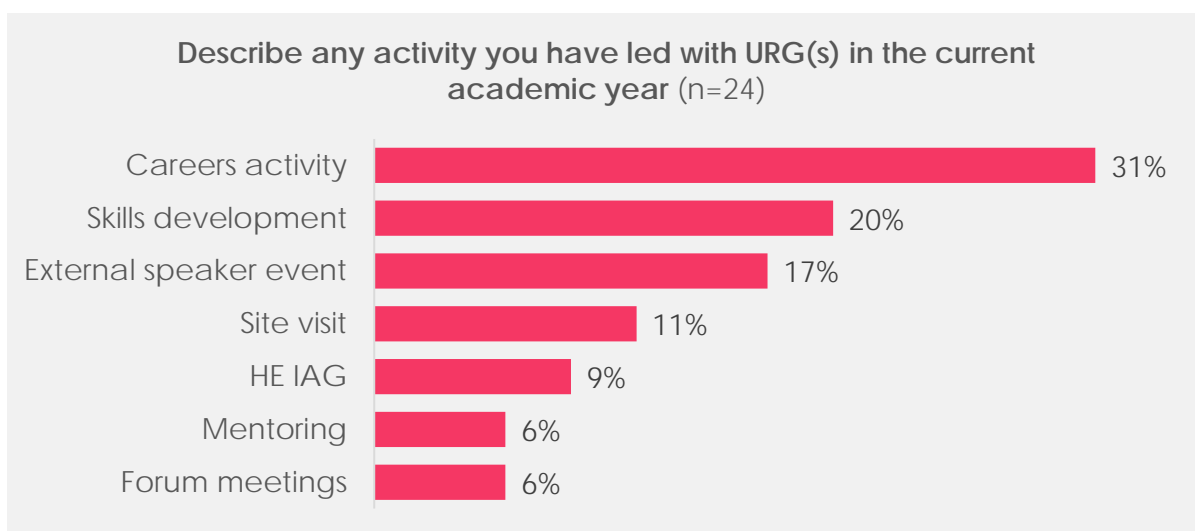
Confidence in working with URG learners

The next section of findings focuses on how respondents feel about working with the four URGs; namely white working-class male learners (abbreviated to WWCM in graphs), Black, Asian, and minoritised ethnicity learners (abbreviated to BAME in graphs), disabled learners, and Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller learners (abbreviated to GRT in graphs).

First, to compare overall level of confidence in working with different URGs, a summary confidence score was calculated for each URG based on responses to the following statements:

1. I understand the barriers these learners face during their education.
2. I know these learners well enough to understand what kind of support they need.
3. I have the time and resources I need to support these learners effectively.
4. I know how effective the activities GHWY does with these learners are (e.g., through evaluation).
5. The work GHWY does with these learners is making a difference to them.
6. I am able to make changes to activities based on feedback from these learners.

The sample size varies for the confidence scores as not all survey respondents provided answers to questions about all URGs.

Results show that staff felt the most confident in working with white working-class male learners, as 66% agreed or strongly agreed with statements about working with this URG. This is followed by Black, Asian, and minoritised ethnicity learners, statements about which 61% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with. For statements on working with disabled learners, just over half of respondents agreed or strongly agreed. Finally, respondents felt the least confident about working with Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller learners, with 39% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with statements about working with this group.

The pattern of confidence in working with the different URGs directly parallels the number of respondents who said they worked with URGs in the previous question. Therefore, it makes sense that staff feel more confident about working with the learners they focus their activities on.

Confidence in working with learners - scores per URG (n=20-22)

	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Neutral %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %
WWCM learners	23%	43%	29%	4%	2%
BAME learners	13%	48%	31%	6%	2%
Disabled learners	8%	44%	34%	12%	2%
GRT learners	2%	17%	42%	34%	5%
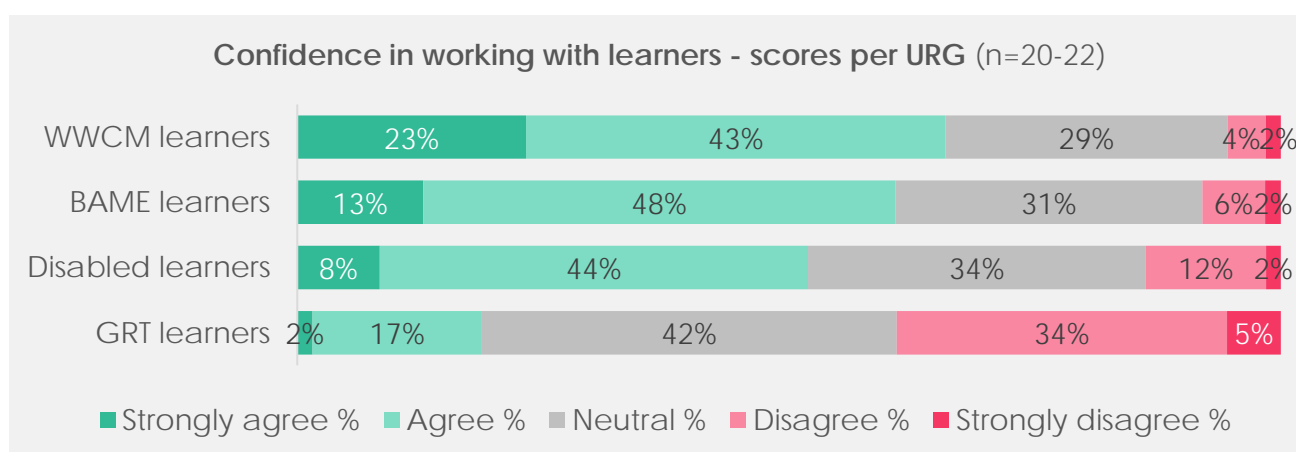
To gain further insights into which type of staff felt most confident working with which URG, the responses were broken down by staff teams, namely Outreach Officers, Progression Officers, and the central team. However, these results should be interpreted with caution as there were differing numbers of respondents from each team – five central team staff responded, six Outreach Officers, and 13 Progression Officers.

Outreach Officers felt most confident working with Black, Asian, and minoritised ethnicity learners, followed by white working-class male learners, disabled learners, and Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller learners. Progression Officers and central team staff followed the same pattern as the overall results and felt most confident working with white working-class male learners, followed by Black, Asian, and minoritised ethnicity learners, disabled learners, and Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller learners. The levels of confidence for Outreach Officers and Progression Officers were relatively similar across URG groups, apart from Black, Asian and minoritised ethnicity learners, where 73% of Outreach Officers agreed or strongly agreed with the statements compared to 51% of Progression Officers. Further, 51% of Outreach Officers disagreed with statements about working with Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller learners, compared to 37% of Progression Officers. Central team staff generally had higher levels of agreement with statements than delivery staff, apart from for Black, Asian, and minoritised Ethnicity leaners, where Outreach Officers felt slightly more confident.

Confidence in working with white working-class male learners - scores by staff team (n=20-22)

Team	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Outreach Officers	3%	60%	33%	3%	
Progression Officers	35%	28%	32%	3%	3%
Central team	15%	63%	15%	7%	

■ Strongly agree ■ Agree ■ Neutral ■ Disagree ■ Strongly disagree
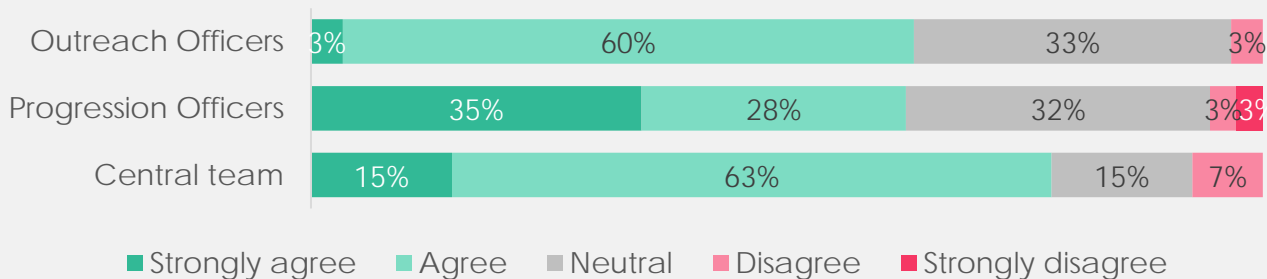
Confidence in working with Black, Asian and Minoritised Ethnicity learners - scores by staff team (n=20-22)

Team	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Outreach Officers	20%	53%	20%	7%	
Progression Officers	9%	42%	38%	8%	3%
Central team	14%	55%	28%	3%	

■ Strongly agree ■ Agree ■ Neutral ■ Disagree ■ Strongly disagree
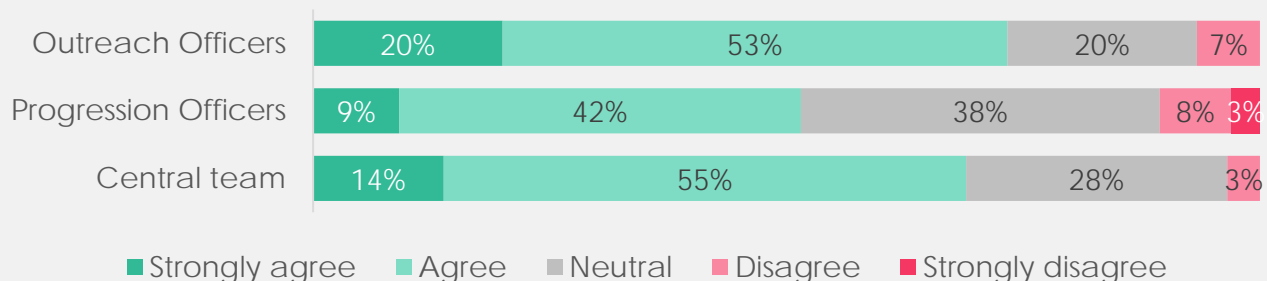
Confidence in working with disabled learners - scores by staff team (n=20-22)

Team	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Outreach Officers		50%	37%	13%	
Progression Officers	4%	43%	36%	14%	3%
Central team	28%	38%	28%	7%	

■ Strongly agree ■ Agree ■ Neutral ■ Disagree ■ Strongly disagree
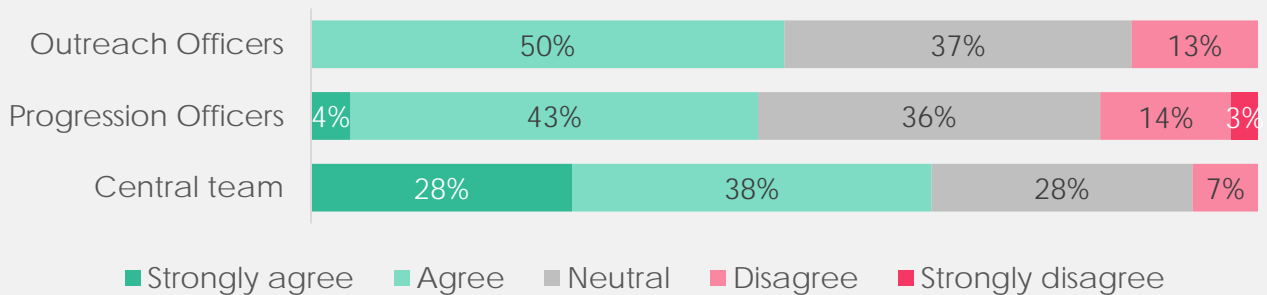
Confidence in working with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller learners - scores by staff team (n=20-22)

Team	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Outreach Officers		26%	23%	51%	
Progression Officers	6%	14%	44%	26%	11%
Central team	7%	30%	37%	26%	

■ Strongly agree ■ Agree ■ Neutral ■ Disagree ■ Strongly disagree
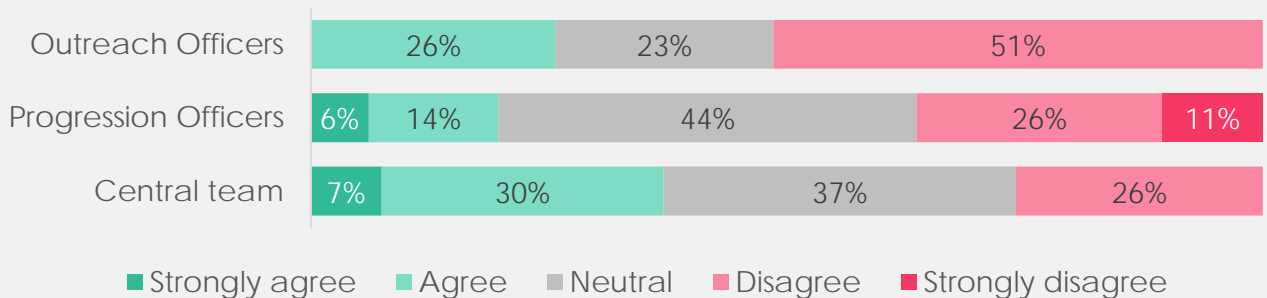
To understand in more depth why staff felt more confident working with some URGs than others, their responses to all the statements about URGs in the survey were examined.

In the case of disabled learners, 78% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they understand the barriers these learners face during their education. However, only 32% agreed that they know them well enough to understand what kind of support they need. This suggests that knowing about the barriers learners face does not automatically mean knowing how to address them in practice. Only 24% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they had the time and resources to support disabled learners effectively. This is not necessarily a negative finding, as it may reflect the staff that do not work with disabled learners regularly and therefore would not need to access resources.

Disabled learners (n=21-22)

Statement	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Neutral %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %
I understand the barriers disabled learners face during their education.	14%	64%	18%	5%	
I know disabled learners well enough to understand what kind of support they need.		32%	45%	23%	
I have the time and resources I need to support disabled learners effectively.	5%	19%	57%	14%	5%
I know how effective the activities GHWY does with disabled learners are (e.g., through evaluation).		50%	32%	18%	
The work GHWY does with disabled learners is making a difference to them.	14%	50%	36%		
I am able to make changes to activities based on feedback from disabled learners.	18%	45%	18%	14%	5%

■ Strongly agree % ■ Agree % ■ Neutral % ■ Disagree % ■ Strongly disagree %

Results generally show higher levels of agreement with the statements about Black, Asian, and minoritised ethnicity learners than about disabled learners, as 81% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they understand the barriers these learners face. Positively, 72% agree or strongly agree that they are able to make changes to activities based on feedback from learners, suggesting that staff feel like they have the flexibility to tailor their activities to learners' needs. Around half of respondents strongly agreed or agreed with the statements "The work GHWY does with Black, Asian, and minoritised ethnicity learners is making a difference to them" and "I know how effective the activities GHWY does with Black, Asian, and minoritised ethnicity learners are (e.g. through evaluation)", suggesting there is scope to improve the evaluation and dissemination of results for this URG. As with disabled learners, respondents were least confident about having the time and resources needed to support Black, Asian, and minoritised ethnicity learners effectively, although 45% agreed or strongly agreed in this case.

Black, Asian, and minoritised ethnicity learners (n=20-21)

Statement	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Neutral %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %
I understand the barriers Black, Asian, and Minoritised Ethnicity learners face during their education.	14%	67%	19%		
I know Black, Asian, and Minoritised Ethnicity learners well enough to understand what kind of support they need.	5%	62%	24%	10%	
I have the time and resources I need to support Black, Asian, and Minoritised Ethnicity learners effectively.	5%	40%	45%	5%	5%
I know how effective the activities GHWY does with Black, Asian, and Minoritised Ethnicity learners are (e.g., through evaluation).	14%	33%	33%	19%	
The work GHWY does with Black, Asian, and Minoritised Ethnicity learners is making a difference to them.	14%	38%	48%		
I am able to make changes to activities based on feedback from Black, Asian, and Minoritised Ethnicity learners.	24%	48%	19%	5%	5%

■ Strongly agree % ■ Agree % ■ Neutral % ■ Disagree % ■ Strongly disagree %

The overall pattern of results for white working-class male learners follows that of Black, African, and minoritised ethnicity learners. However overall, higher percentages of respondents agreed and strongly agreed with the statements for this group, with 87% agreeing or strongly agreeing that they understand the barriers white working-class male learners face during their education. No respondents disagreed that the work GHWY does with white working-class male learners is making a difference to them. Once again, the statement with the least agreement was "I have the time and resources needed to support white working-class male learners effectively", which just over half of respondents felt neutral about.

White working-class male learners (n=21-22)

Statement	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Neutral %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %
I understand the barriers white working-class male learners face during their education.	32%	55%	9%	5%	
I know white working-class male learners well enough to understand what kind of support they need.	27%	41%	23%	9%	
I have the time and resources I need to support white working-class male learners effectively.	19%	24%	52%	5%	
I know how effective the activities GHWY does with white working-class male learners are (e.g., through evaluation).	14%	45%	32%	9%	
The work GHWY does with white working-class male learners is making a difference to them.	19%	48%	33%		
I am able to make changes to activities based on feedback from white working-class male learners.	29%	43%	24%		5%

■ Strongly agree % ■ Agree % ■ Neutral % ■ Disagree % ■ Strongly disagree %

Lastly, as expected based on the summary confidence scores, there were higher levels of disagreement with statements about working with Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller learners than for any other URG. More respondents disagreed than agreed that they understand the barriers these learners face (45% and 36% respectively). Only 5% agreed that they have the time and resources needed to support these learners effectively, which also reflects that less work was done with this group in 2022-23. In total, 60% disagreed or strongly disagreed that they know Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller learners well enough to understand the support they need. In general, respondents did not feel particularly well informed about this group and about how best to work with them.

Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller learners (n=20-22)

Statement	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Neutral %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %
I understand the barriers Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller learners face during their education.	9%	27%	18%	36%	9%
I know Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller learners well enough to understand what kind of support they need.		14%	27%	55%	5%
I have the time and resources I need to support Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller learners effectively.		5%	43%	48%	5%
I know how effective the activities GHWY does with Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller learners are (e.g., through evaluation).		14%	50%	32%	5%
The work GHWY does with Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller learners is making a difference to them.		29%	67%	5%	

■ Strongly agree % ■ Agree % ■ Neutral % ■ Disagree % ■ Strongly disagree %

Overall, respondents agreed the most strongly that they know about the barriers that learners in the different URGs face during their education, however this did not always mean that they also agreed that they know what kind of support those learners need. This suggests that theoretical knowledge about learners is strong among staff, but that this does not necessarily translate into knowing how to support them in practice. This result reflects the way staff work with a particular URG when planning activities.

Respondents agreed the least that they have the time and resources they need to support learners from the URGs effectively. When this result was shared with staff, they reflected that grouping time and resources together in this question influenced their response. Staff may not have the resources immediately available but felt they would know who to ask or where to find them, and might not have the time because their work focused on a different URG. In future, it would be helpful to add the statement "I know where to find resources and information about supporting these learners" to the staff survey.

Across the survey questions, there was a relatively high number of "neutral" responses. A likely explanation for this is that respondents were asked to answer questions about working with all the URGs, including the ones that their work was not focused on. Therefore, they may have frequently chosen the neutral option to reflect that they did not know much about working with that URG. In future, it would be helpful to add a "Not applicable" option to the response scale.

Qualitative feedback on GHWY's URG work

In the survey, respondents were asked what they key strengths of GHWY's URG work are. Several key themes emerged:

Theme	Staff feedback
The targeted nature of URG activities	"I think that we have a clear focus on the group's needs, but that we approach our work with them considerately and openly. I think we empower members of these groups to take information and make better choices." – Progression Officer "Impartial focus on targeted groups who may not receive attention elsewhere within their academic institution due to curriculum priorities." – Central team staff member
The opportunities and resources on offer for students	"I think we share the work we do with URGs really well and have produced some fantastic resources and toolkits." – Outreach Officer "Students can have a full day or more to have the focus on them and learn about HE/meet people from the same background as them." – Progression Officer "Targeted activities and CPD opportunities are really useful." – Progression Officer
Coordination and collaboration, both within and beyond GHWY	"Collaborative approach to avoid duplication between HEPs. Improves reach to underrepresented numbers. Able to broker reach and contact with organisations." – Central team staff member "Our ability to connect and learn from other Uni connect programmes across the UK, strengthening our knowledge and approach." – Central team staff member
Making use of staff members' skills	"Our range of experience and passions within the team which lend themselves to focusing on different URGs. We have a range of skill sets in the GHWY team which mean we can be creative and innovative with our ideas." – Central team staff member

	"Collaborating to ensure that all staff are working together and using their skills to the best effect." – Central team staff member
Continuous improvement	"Well planned, constantly striving to improve and strengthen this area of work." – Central team staff member
Evaluation and research efforts	"The events we have run for URGs and the effectiveness of them, as discovered through evaluations." – Outreach Officer "The efforts made to be inclusive and to use research to drive activity choices." – Outreach Officer

Staff were also asked what GHWY could do to improve their work with URGs, and had the following suggestions:

Theme	Staff feedback
Expanding activities	"I think we could and are expanding our work and we welcome the option to work with younger students next year from year 7." – Outreach Officer "More collaborative taster days - ideally one for each group that could be accessed by schools." – Progression Officer "Expanding activity while still being very targeted." – Central team staff member
Organising activities more effectively	"Provide a more streamlined approach across the year as well as aim to provide more focused interventions for young people." – Central team staff member "Larger planning groups for events." – Outreach Officer "I think creating more resources and a database of successful outcomes to refer to would be very helpful in increasing our works potential for development and greater success." – Progression Officer
Increasing and improving evaluation	"More research- qualitative interviews with URG to see how can improve work." – Progression Officer "More robust evaluation." – Outreach Officer "It would be great to have an overall impression from this academic year about which activities were completed for which URGs and which were most effective. We could then use this insight to plan future activities." – Progression Officer

	"Further sharing results of activity and evaluation with schools and colleges to show impact on learners." – Central team staff member
Revisiting terminology	"Perhaps look at rephrasing some terminology. This is apparent from other GHWY staff." – Progression Officer "Transition pack not to use the word "disabled"." – Progression Officer "Challenging some of the language used at HE and OfS." – Progression Officer
Collaborating more effectively internally and externally	"Better marrying of what UC programme do and the core team." – Central team staff member "Working as a partnership to work collaboratively involving all partners, not in isolated silos that focuses on a few partners." – Central team staff member

Some further suggestions emerged when staff were asked what would help them to work more effectively with URGs:

Theme	Staff feedback
More ideas for activities	"Activity Menu which highlights certain activities which benefit and impact more on certain URGs." – Central team staff member "Ideas of specific in school activities to do before or follow up CTD *(collaborative taster days)*." – Progression Officer
Working more closely with schools and colleges to establish their needs	"Better engagement with the schools/colleges- speaking their language. Asking which gaps the schools have and what they are trying to address and creating projects which work with the schools to address these gaps." – Central team staff member "Whether or not I can work with URGs using the resources and opportunities GHWY has to offer depends on the willingness within school to support that. This can be difficult." – Progression Officer
Having more staff training	"Provide further training for staff to ensure that they are fully aware of the barriers that students from different groups face and the steps which can be taken to overcome this." – Outreach Officer "More hands on training or peer-mentoring with staff working with similar groups." – Progression Officer

Guidance on how to speak to students about why they have been selected for an activity	"It is sometimes difficult to address to the students why they have been chosen for a specific activity and make it seem like a positive thing." – Progression Officer

Finally, staff shared learnings from their work with URGs and questions for colleagues working with other URGs.

In terms of learnings, respondents said that the Black African podcasting event was well-received by students, so it may be beneficial to use a similar approach with other URGs. Several respondents wrote about how difficult it can be to engage learners from URGs, and that it is important to make them feel comfortable, explain to them why they are taking part in an activity, and engage with them on their level. One respondent also highlighted the importance of engaging parents/carers in careers events.

In terms of questions for colleagues, respondents were keen to have more face-to-face opportunities to speak to their colleagues about their activities and findings from evaluations.

5. Focus groups with URGs: "It gave me a different view of higher education."

Focus group approach

To evaluate the impact of URG activities and gather in-depth feedback from learners on their experience of taking part, several learners participated in focus groups after activities. The focus groups were conducted by members of GHWY staff working with those learners, who attended a focus group training workshop and received support for writing their questions from The Brilliant Club. The questions asked in the focus groups can be found in Appendix 3. The resulting focus group recordings were then transcribed and analysed by The Brilliant Club.

One focus group took place with Black African learners and one with white working-class male learners. While Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller learners and disabled learners were targeted URGs in 2022-23, it was difficult to recruit enough learners from these groups for a focus group. Therefore, no focus group was carried out with these learners.

Black African podcasting session

Learners in this group had taken part in a two-day activity where they created and recorded a podcast in which they interviewed a current HE student about their route to HE, working with student ambassadors and role models from similar ethnic backgrounds. They also received an HE information talk. The focus group took place at the end of the second day in the same venue where they had been producing their podcasts, with eight learners.

<u>Feedback on the podcasting session</u>

Focus group participants' feedback on the two-day podcasting session was unanimously positive. One learner shared: "It gave me a different view of higher education, it made it seem not like something that you have to do in life, something that's gonna be really boring and annoying. It made it seem like something we would enjoy to do and we would love to contribute our time to doing". Participants also mentioned missing out on school as a positive aspect of the activity and said the sessions could have lasted longer than two days.

Feedback from the focus group participants suggests that the format of creating a podcast with student ambassadors was an effective way of engaging learners in an activity that exposed them to role models, taught them about higher education, and developed their skills. Two focus group participants spoke about listening to podcasts in their own time, which meant they enjoyed having the opportunity to create their own version ("To be part of something that you've always wanted to be part of is really good. Like, maybe I want to do one [a podcast] in the future, I don't know"). One participant said that the activity was hard work, but that they were motivated by the outcome of producing a podcast ("It's just so exciting, but then you have to work quite hard with it as well [...] But I think because the outcome is like so great, I feel like we kind of forgot that it's so hard").

The focus group participants enjoyed working with ambassadors and podcast practitioners due to their supportiveness and the insights they gave them into student life ("I enjoyed getting to know the ambassadors and what it's like for them to go uni"). They felt they were able to engage with the ambassadors easily as they perceived similarities with them ("I think as well because they're young, no offence, but I feel like they kind of understand things") and this helped them feel more comfortable as time went on ("In the beginning we weren't comfortable and then we got more comfortable with them […] and now we're cool with them"). They felt that the podcasting practitioners were all supportive and helped them to create a good podcast.

As part of the two days, learners also attended a HE IAG session. In the focus group, learners fed back that the information that was presented was useful, but that it could be more engaging ("The information that was given was really valuable. I think it could be presented a lot more interesting").

Skills gained

When focus group participants were asked about the skills they had gained over the past two days, communication came up frequently. One learner said they had more confidence in talking in front of small groups, and another felt that podcasting had taught them to "sound as clear as possible". The participants also recognised that conducting interviews had given them valuable interview experience, "cause if you're getting interviewed and you remember your experience here, you'll be able to understand the interviewer's point of view. So you'll be able to imagine what would make them more likely to hire you for the job you are applying for". These insights demonstrate that participants were aware of and benefitted from the range of communication skills the podcast activity fostered.

Career plans and HE knowledge

The learners in the focus group had clear plans for their future careers and education, and for the majority this involved attending HE. Plans included studying psychology and becoming a criminal psychologist, studying midwifery, studying English, working in real estate, working with animals, and doing a software engineering degree.

Several participants mentioned getting their ideas for future plans from family members ("my plan is to work in […] stock markets then hopefully, once I become experienced in that, teach other people to do that too […] My cousin, he does it and obviously he's very successful with it now"), but some had changed their minds from these initial inspirations ("because my dad's really good with cars as well, so I wanted to do that. But then later I changed my mind because now I started liking English and started writing"). This suggests that family may have been an initial influence, but that participants also looked beyond their immediate circle for ideas.

This is supported by the way focus group participants spoke about the careers support available to them at school ("I get my advice off the careers team at school, they've given us opportunities to learn more about careers […] It's great, but then as well I get it off people who are at university, or people who have gone to university"). The participants were knowledgeable and positive about their school's support ("Like the careers team at school, you can just go and ask them, or you can book an appointment with them. So they can help you discuss what we want to do in the future and where you want to go") and

their teachers ("I feel like teachers in general do try and help us as much when it comes to careers"). In general, learners in the focus group had a positive outlook on their future and knew where to go for support.

<u>Being underrepresented in HE</u>

At the end of the focus group, learners were asked how they felt about the underrepresentation of Black students at university. One participant reflected that "I feel like mainly when I see university students, I don't see many Black university students. I mainly see white people that have gone to university, and so it makes me feel like I'm a bit underrepresented". This evolved into a discussion where female learners shared different experiences. One participant felt that it was important to take up opportunities and to be proactive: "For me, as a Black girl, I don't think I've ever really experienced being underrepresented, I think from around the community that I've been in [...] it's about taking advantage of the opportunities when you see it […] I think if you see an opportunity or a chance to go there, you want to go into a university, search it up. It can't be given to you on a platter. You have to find it". Another participant agreed: "Instead of being like, oh, I'm not represented in here and getting upset about it, prove them wrong […] It's not gonna be as if, you're somebody of colour, that means you can't have it. It's not like that anymore. You need to fight for it." A third participant shared that stereotypes from their community had made them more determined to pursue their ambition ("I've been told by, even some of my neighbours and stuff, it's not a job that most Black women are in [midwifery]. So as a Black girl, then I want to take this opportunity to prove them wrong and do it"). Male participants were less vocal in this part of the discussion.

In general, while focus group participants acknowledged that Black students may be underrepresented in HE, for female participants in particular this was a motivational factor for them to pursue HE, rather than a deterrent. In light of a sector focus on ensuring all students feel like they belong once at university, it is interesting that these students did not mention immediate concerns about their sense of belonging, however they represent only a small sample of Black learners from one school.

White working-class male collaborative taster day

Learners in this group had attended a one-day collaborative taster day, where they took part in a carousel of careers activities on construction and building design, health and social care, and game design. The focus group took place several weeks after the activity, with five learners.

<u>Feedback on the collaborative taster day</u>

Potentially due to the delay between the activity and the focus group, participants struggled to recall exactly what the taster day involved. Further, they had not been aware of the activities that would be on offer ahead of the activity, so came to it with no particular expectations ("I didn't know what there would be"). One participant said "I just know I'm missing school. That's all I cared about", suggesting he was not necessarily motivated to learn more about careers.

The learners in the focus group came into the taster day with different levels of interest in the specific career sessions on offer at the taster day. One learner said he had never been

interested in a career in medicine, so "instantly kind of like factored that one out". Two learners were interested in game design and construction as potential careers, so were more motivated to take part ("I liked the idea of the game design one"), however the learner interested in construction found the session quite difficult and therefore frustrating ("I've been using Blender to render some stuff before, but the construction one I found was a lot more complicated […] it was frustrating").

Participants had mixed feedback on how much they learned during the day. One participant shared that he had a sibling at university so had some knowledge of higher education already, but still enjoyed seeing "what goes on behind the scenes". Another participant enjoyed seeing that there was a wider variety of courses on offer than at school and discovering that "in university you could get apprenticeships while you was actually doing your course". However, participants were not sure they had learned much new information about how to get into higher education and the different careers they could pursue.

Career plans and HE knowledge

When focus group participants were asked about their career plans, some had very specific ideas and some were unsure. They mentioned career ambitions such as rugby player, animator for Disney or Pixar, building games console hardware, photographer, and working in restaurants. None of the participants felt confident that they knew how to get into careers ("I don't really know about all the jobs you can get into through photographers, or how to even sign up to actually get a job") and some felt overwhelmed by all the options available to them ("there are so many different things you can do, I just don't know that many of them"), as they only know about mainstream jobs ("you only know the main titles"). None of the participants mentioned the pathways they might take to achieve these jobs, such as going to university.

When asked, participants had good suggestions for where they could find out more about careers, including teachers, internet research, family members, and talking to someone in a job they were interested in, though none of them mentioned careers advisors.

Gender stereotypes

At the end of the focus group, participants were asked why they thought a day had been arranged just for boys. The explanations they came up with included because fewer boys go to university and because girls have a better idea of what they want to do in future. They identified that the gaming and construction industries generally have more males than females working in them ("So with these jobs, maybe there's more boys in these jobs") and that this could be due to gender stereotypes. One learner noted that stereotypes could attract people to a job or put them off it: "some jobs they have, like, stereotypes and who works them […] same with like if males get a job people would usually associate females to get, it depends […] where you're working"). Participants were also aware of how gender stereotypes affected women in jobs ("maybe you get less pay and that. Maybe you won't get promoted").

Overall, the white working-class male learners in the focus group were less engaged with giving feedback about the collaborative taster day than the Black African learners. However, the discussion showed that some of them had clear career goals in mind and had a good awareness of gender stereotypes in the workplace and how gender might affect career choices. Again, the learners represent a small subset of all white male learners on FSM.

Disabled learners

Due to difficulties in signing students up, no focus group took place with disabled learners, where feedback on the disabled learners Transition Pack was to be gathered. However, a disabled learner and GHWY's disabled learners strategic lead provided some written feedback.

<u>Learner feedback</u>

One learner provided written feedback on the Transition Pack. The learner felt the pack was good overall and informed the reader about what HE is like, but made several suggestions for improvements.

The learner fed back that addressing the pack to disabled learners as a general category "dehumanises them and knocks their confidence", as they themselves are neurodiverse so would prefer for this term to be used. GHWY have identified this terminology as a common barrier when working with disabled learners, and use the term because HEPs refer to those who are "SEND" in school environments as "disabled learners" in HE environments. It may be helpful to explain to learners what the term "disabled learners" encompasses in the pack and clarify why it is being used.

The learner also felt that the information in the Transition Pack was presented too formally for its audience and that it did not have enough examples of students' experiences in HE. As these comments only come from one learner, it would be useful to gather more feedback on the Transition Pack and consider how disabled learners can best be reached to achieve this.

<u>Strategic Lead feedback (John Hague)</u>

During the academic year 2022/23 GHWY have explored a range of tools and strategies for collecting data in relation to underrepresented group projects working with disabled learners. Despite a wide range of contingencies in place, it has proved difficult to capture an evidence base of what works in this field based on a student perspective.

In order to progress work with The Brilliant Club and collect verbal feedback from students around their future pathways and thoughts on the Transition Pack resource, GHWY hoped to implement an in-person focus group with students from a partner institution. GHWY staff are reliant on external staff within member institutions to drive the evaluative aspects of delivery internally, particularly on student-facing projects where the central team do not have direct links to students.

In 2022-23, three of GHWY's partner college institutions were approached for a focus group in relation to disabled learners. Unfortunately, no focus groups were able to take place this year due to recruitment issues within each institution. It was also flagged that college learners may struggle to attend during the spring/summer term due to exam clashes and early college closures for summer. Time of year and year group should be considered in future practice, as college cohorts were targeted this year due to the nature of the Transition Pack (aimed at 16+ learners).

In addition to planning a focus group, GHWY implemented an insight hub via FlexMR to collect anonymised responses from a range of learners. This tool had been recommended due to previous successes in external projects related to disabled learners, suggesting learners within this group prefer opportunities to give feedback anonymously. To capture data relevant to the focus group content, GHWY used the same questions on FlexMR to allow students to take part within the survey from the comfort of their own environments. In 2022-23, one student completed the virtual version of the focus group using the insight hub (response listed above).

Terminology within this group (i.e. categorising students as 'disabled') often creates barriers preventing learners from coming forwards to share their thoughts/feelings as they do not want to identify with such labels. This seems to be consistent across the sector based on our discussions with other Uni Connect partnerships.

Lessons learnt from this academic year suggest that GHWY should consider building direct student-facing rapport as early as possible within disabled learner projects. This should improve the understanding of our research and add a human element to the surveys, as opposed to asking students to complete as a 'tick-box' activity.
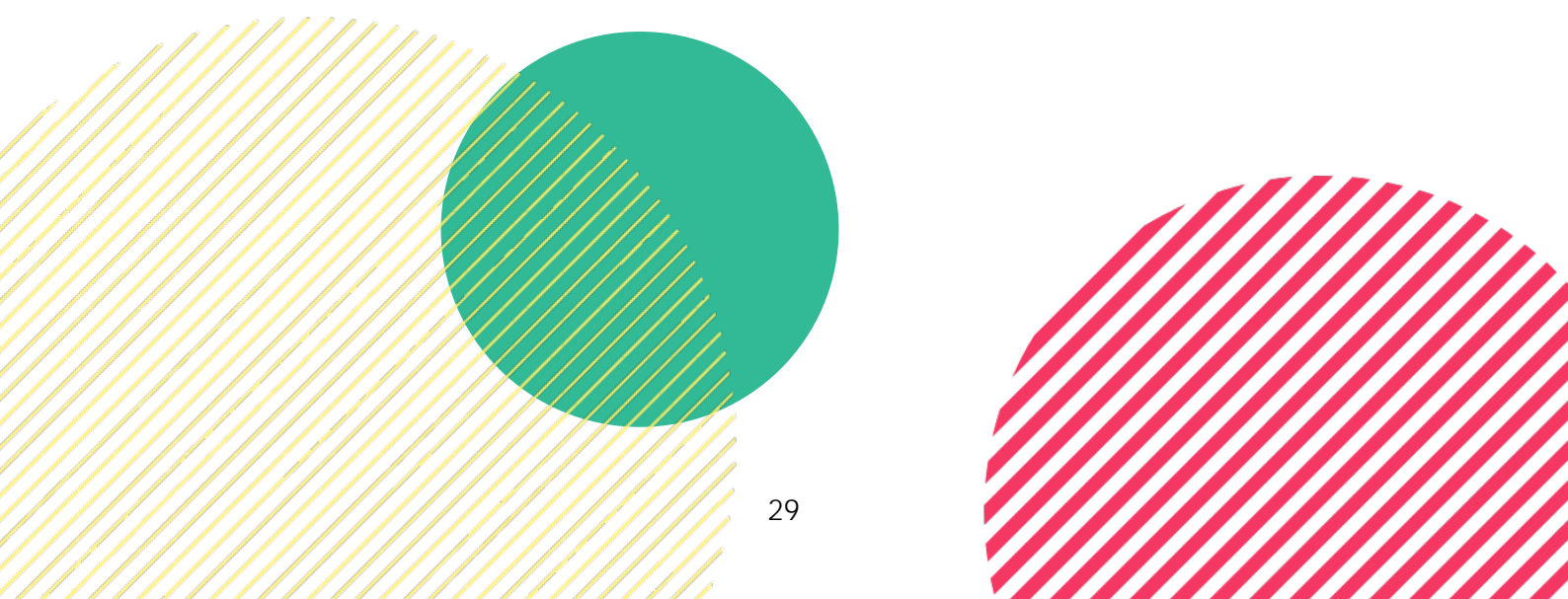
6. Recommendations for future practice

Based on the insights gathered from the rapid review, the staff survey, and the learner focus groups, several recommendations for working with URGs can be made:

Recommendations for working with learners

- For learners from all URGs, it is important that they have sustained engagement in outreach activities. To achieve this, consider developing multi-intervention outreach and mentoring programmes, where learners in a group are systematically engaged in an ongoing programme of support at different stages of their education. More information on multi-intervention outreach and mentoring programmes, including an evidence review and evaluation reports for case studies, is available on TASO's website.
- Expose learners to current HE students from a similar background to them in a setting where they can spend time getting to know them.
- Engage learners in activities that allow them to explore a range of skills and interests while exposing them to HE. For example, the podcasting activity with Black learners allows learners to use different skills, work with role models, and learn about HE simultaneously, which makes it more likely that they will find an aspect of the activity relevant to their interests than an activity focusing on one career, for example.
- Engage learners' parents/carers and communities in WP activities. This is particularly important for learners from URGs, whose families may have less familiarity with HE.
- Provide tailored support to URG learners throughout the HE application process and the transition to HE.
- Bring in learner voice to the design of activities, so they can be tailored to their needs. This could involve both school and HE students.

Recommendations for staff

- Continue to provide staff training on the barriers URG learners face and expand this to include guidance on how to support them in practice.
- Provide more opportunities for staff to learn about the cultural backgrounds and lives of URG learners, for example through written resources, engagement with practitioners from other organisations working with URGs, and engagement with URG learners themselves.
- Provide staff with regular opportunities to share feedback (for example through a staff survey) and best practice with each other (for example through in-person learning events). In particular, provide opportunities for connection for staff working in different teams but with the same URG. This will also help to facilitate more ongoing support for learners across stages of their education as recommended above.

Recommendations for research and evaluation

- Develop theories of change for all activities and use them as live documents to inform activity delivery, inform evaluation, and interpret results. More resources on theory of change can be found on the TASO website.

- Strengthen evaluation practices by regularly engaging learners in evaluation activities such as focus groups and surveys, with a focus on evaluating impact and gathering activity feedback. Embedding evaluation activities in sessions with learners and working with provider staff to identify barriers to data collection (such as exam periods and access to online surveys) will help to increase learner engagement in evaluation. Consider making parts of the evaluation consistent across different activities and/or between different URGs to allow for comparison and larger data sets.
- Measure learner progress in intermediate outcomes relevant to your activities using validated tools where possible. TASO's Access and Success Questionnaire includes items on sense of belonging, HE knowledge, and cognitive skills, among others.
- Make evaluation findings and examples of best practice publicly available.

7. Appendices

Appendix 1: URG theories of change

Situation	Evidence suggests that while learners from **Black African** backgrounds have good knowledge of traditional courses and pathways for HE, they can benefit from having a broader awareness of HE courses and alternative routes into employment, to help them make informed decisions. Research indicates that these learners can benefit from interactions with positive role models from shared ethnic heritage, real life experiences of potential future careers, and confidence building.

Aims	1. Learners engage with role models 2. Learners build confidence through developing communication skills 3. Learners find out more about HE and career pathways

Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Outcomes	Impact
Process			**Impact**	
• 14 Year 9 Black African learners from Ruth Gorse Academy • Chapel FM: tour of building and broadcast rooms, meet practitioners and role models • Student ambassadors • Uni Connect staff	2-day programme including: • Working with role models, student ambassadors and staff from Chapel FM to create a podcast • Learning interview and podcast skills • Touring a creative arts centre • HEI IAG session	• Podcasts produced by students are disseminated through the Chapel FM radio station ELFM (and other suitable outlets) and saved in the British Library archive • Podcasts are shared through school and college network as a resource for other learners	1. Learners engage with positive role models while making the podcast 2. Learners are more confident in articulating themselves through developing their interviewing and podcasting skills 3. Learners are more aware of the broad range of their post-16 options	• Learners are more likely to consider HE as a realistic option and can make informed choices about their future education • Learners' confidence and sense of belonging in HE and future careers increases

Rationale & Assumptions	• Rationale: Research suggests Black African learners have a good understanding of traditional subjects but not always aware of other options and pathways. Support should focus on careers and the future and provide positive role models from similar backgrounds. • Assumptions: Black African learners have not yet considered non-traditional routes or courses for the future or met positive role models in an HE/career setting.

Situation	Evidence shows that **disabled/SEND learners** experience barriers during educational transitions, as they may not be aware of the support they can access when changing educational establishment. Further, parents/carers and teachers aiming to support disabled/SEND learners are not yet confident with the terminology, barriers and challenges faced by learners with additional needs.
Aims	1. Learners increase awareness of support available and feel more confident in sharing their needs when progressing to FE/HE. 2. Teachers and parents/carers increase awareness of the barriers learners face and the resources available to support learners, and feel more confident to provide support.

Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Outcomes	Impact
Process			Impact	
• Disabled learners transition pack • Uni Connect staff • Disabled Learners Network (partner HEP Disability Services) • LEP SEND Community of Practice • Role models • Student ambassadors	• Dissemination of GHWY's transition pack to support disabled learners (with LEP) • Online transition pack launch to promote resource • Online CPD session for teachers, parents/carers, and learners, covering terminology and support available in HE, including motivational speaker with SEND background	• Engagement with transition pack and comms materials • Attendance at transition pack launch • Attendance at CPD	1. Learners feel more confident and motivated that they could progress to HE through increased knowledge of the support available and exposure to role models. Learners feel confident in disclosing their needs. 2. Parents/carers and teachers feel more confident in supporting learners though increased knowledge of the support available and make use of the resources.	• Learners make informed decisions about their future educational pathways and are more likely to progress to HE. • Learners will feel enabled to communicate their additional needs during transition and make use of available support.

Rationale & Assumptions	• Disabled/SEND learners have concerns over social belonging, accommodation, employment potential, and disclosing additional needs to educational establishments. Providing resources and role models will address these concerns and increase confidence. • Upskilling staff confidence will lead to greater levels of support available for SEND learners and awareness of key resources to support student progress. Highlighting barriers around transition and social belonging will enable greater understanding within the sector to allow more practitioners to contribute and more students to feel confident about their future.

Situation	Evidence shows that **white working-class male (WWCM) learners** hold gendered expectations of subject and career choices, are focused on earning money as soon as possible, and are averse to the debt associated with HE. They are therefore more receptive to HE activities that focus on the long-term financial value of HE.
Aims	1. Learners gain insights into the variety of post-16 options, student finance, and provide information about future careers. 2. Learners are inspired and motivated though interactions with relatable role models who have overcome challenges 3. Teachers gain knowledge about HE

Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Outcomes	Impact
Process			Impact	
• Year 9 and 12 WWCM learners from different schools • Role model student ambassadors • Leeds Beckett University and Leeds College of Building partnership • Uni Connect staff • Funding • Research evidence	• Learners attend collaborative taster days including HE campus visit, careers sessions, interactions with role models • CPD for teachers	• Learner attendance at taster days • Teacher attendance at CPD • Learner voice survey responses	1. Learners are informed about post-16 options and future careers and can make confident informed decisions 2. Learners are motivated about their future 3. Teachers are informed about post-16 options and feel confident in supporting learners	• Learners are more likely to consider and progress to HE in future

Rationale & Assumptions	• Campus visits and role model interactions are an effective way of positively influencing WWCM learners' attitudes towards HE. Learners will be more likely to engage in activities aligned to their interests. Including student finance information will combat fears around debt. • Teachers and learners have a gap in knowledge about potential post-16 options and career paths. • Providing staff with information will enable them to better support learners.

Appendix 2: Staff survey

Welcome to this survey about Go Higher West Yorkshire's (GHWY) underrepresented group (URG) work. The aim of this survey is to gather feedback and reflections from staff about delivering URG activities. The results of the survey will feed into an evaluation report and a GHWY learning event where learnings and best practice will be shared with colleagues working across the URGs.

The survey should take around 10 minutes to complete and is being run by the Brilliant Club's research team on behalf of GHWY. If you have any questions about this survey, please get in touch with Hannah (Senior Research & Evaluation Officer) at hannah.thomson@thebrilliantclub.org.

About you

1. Your name
2. Which GHWY team are you part of? Choose one of the following answers.
   - Progression officers
   - Outreach officers
   - Central team
3. Which organisation are you based in?
4. Which underrepresented group(s) (URG) has your work focused on this current academic year? Check all that apply.
   - Disabled learners
   - Black, Asian and minoritised ethnicity learners
   - White working-class male learners
   - Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller learners
   - Other
   - You selected other - which URG has your work focused on?
5. Please briefly describe any activity you have led with URG(s) in the current academic year.

Underrepresented group activities

The following questions ask you about your work with four URGs (disabled learners, Black, Asian and minoritised ethnicity learners, white working-class male learners, and Gypsy, Roma and Traveller community learners). We appreciate you may not feel confident/knowledgeable enough to answer these questions in relation to all URGs, but we would be very grateful if you respond as best you can to each of these questions. If you are really unsure, choose the "no answer" option.

Note: This question was repeated four times for each URG for all respondents.

6. How much do you agree with these statements about [insert URG] learners? Please choose the appropriate response for each item:
   Strongly Agree/Agree/Neutral/Disagree/Strongly Disagree
   - I understand the barriers [insert URG] learners face during their education.

- I know [insert URG] learners well enough to understand what kind of support they need.
- I have the time and resources I need to support [insert URG] learners effectively.
- I know how effective the activities GHWY does with [insert URG] learners are (e.g., through evaluation).
- The work GHWY does with [insert URG] learners is making a difference to them.
- I am able to make changes to activities based on feedback from [insert URG] learners.
7. Use this box to expand on your answers about [insert URG] learners if you like.

GHWY's work

8. Please share your feedback about GHWY's URG work.
9. What are some key strengths of GHWY's work with learners from URGs?
10. What could GHWY do to improve their work with learners from URGs?
11. What would help you to more effectively support learners from the URG(s) you work with?
12. Are there any learnings you would like to share with colleagues working with other URGs? For example, what has gone well, what has been challenging.
13. Do you have any questions for colleagues working with other URGs? For example, around best practice, implementation, challenges, learnings.

Appendix 3: Focus group questions

Black African podcast session
Welcome
- Welcome to this focus group, we really appreciate you taking some time to speak to us today. This session will last for about 45 minutes.   - The aim of this session is for us to gather some feedback from you on the activities you took part in over the past two days, and to get an idea of your ideas for your education in the future. This is part of a bigger research project we are doing to make sure the activities we are doing are helpful for you and the best they can be. Therefore, we really value your feedback and thoughts.   - Some ground rules for today's session: you can be open and honest with us; this is a non-judgmental space, and we would like to hear from everyone. However, if there are any questions you don't want to answer, you don't have to,   - I am recording the session today; this is so we can go back and listen to your comments and share them with our colleagues who are helping us with this research project. However, your feedback will be anonymised before it is shared with anyone else. Is everyone ok with me recording?
Engagement question
How are you feeling after the podcasting sessions?
Programme feedback
- How did you find working with student ambassadors and Lanre? *Prompt*: did you feel they understood you and your experiences?   - How did you find working with practitioners (Jake, Max, Henry etc) and being at an arts centre? *Prompt*: how was it different to doing a project at school?   - Thinking about all the activities you have taken part in, what was the most useful part and why?
Skills development

• Are there any skills you feel you have developed over the last two days?
• How could these skills be useful in the future?
• *Prompt*: how have the activities influenced your confidence?

Progression to HE
- Can you tell me about your ideas or plans for your education and course options in the future? *Prompt*: how easy do you find it to plan your future options?
- Have you had any support for thinking about going on to higher education in the future? Could you tell me about it? What sort of support would be helpful?
- How much do you think people like yourself are represented in higher education?

Wrap-up
- Is there anything else you would like to share with us that we haven't talked about today?
- Thank you all so much for your time!

White working-class male collaborative taster days

Welcome
- Welcome to this focus group, we really appreciate you taking some time to speak to us today. This session will last for about 45 minutes.
- The aim of this session is for us to gather some feedback from you on the activities you took part in at the collaborative taster days, and to get an idea of your thoughts about yout future. This is part of a bigger research project we are doing to make sure the activities we are doing with students are helpful for you and the best they can be. Therefore, we really value your feedback and thoughts.
- Some ground rules for today's session: you can be open and honest with us; this is a non-judgmental space, and we would like to hear from everyone. However, if there are any questions you don't want to answer, you don't have to.
- I am recording the session today; this is so we can go back and listen to your comments and share them with our colleagues who are helping us with this research project. However, your feedback will be anonymised before it is shared with anyone else. Is everyone ok with me recording?

Engagement question
- What lessons are you missing today?

Taster day feedback
- Which of the carousel sessions did you like the most? Why did you enjoy that session in particular?
- Can you tell me something new you learned today about what you can study at university and college?
- This event had information on both studying and the careers you can do afterwards. What did you think of that mix? *Prompt: would you rather have more information about studying or careers in future?*

Future goals
- Do you have a clear idea of what kind of career do you want to do in the future? Can you tell me about it?
- How do you feel when you think about your future?
- What information and support would be helpful for you when thinking about your future?

Being a WWCM
- Why do you think we put on a day especially for male students?
- How much does being a boy influence your ideas about what you'll do with your career in the future?
- Who influences your ideas about what you might do in the future?

Wrap-up
• Is there anything else you would like to share with us that we haven't talked about today?
• Thank you all so much for your time!

Disabled learners transition pack
Welcome
• Welcome to this focus group, we really appreciate you taking some time to speak to us today. This session will last for about 45 minutes.
• The aim of this session is for us to gather some feedback from you on the transition pack, and to get an idea of your thoughts on your future. This is part of a bigger research project we are doing to make sure the activities we are doing with students are helpful for you and the best they can be. Therefore, we really value your feedback and thoughts.
• Some ground rules for today's session: you can be open and honest with us; this is a non-judgmental space, and we would like to hear from everyone. However, if there are any questions you don't want to answer, you don't have to.
• I am recording the session today; this is so we can go back and listen to your comments and share them with our colleagues who are helping us with this research project. However, your feedback will be anonymised before it is shared with anyone else. Is everyone ok with me recording?
Engagement question
• What are you currently studying?
Social barriers & support
• How supported do you currently feel by your teachers/tutors?
• What are the main obstacles you face on a day-to-day basis at school/college?
• Do you feel like the staff around you in school or college understand the obstacles you face? Are they confident in supporting you?
• *Follow-up:* How do the barriers and support you experience at school/college differ from those at home?
Future pathways
• Do you have an idea of what you would like to do in the future? *Prompt:* What is your dream career?
• What support do you feel you would need to live away from home in future?
Transition pack
• How do you feel about the transition pack?
• How do you see yourself using the pack to support your journey?
• Is there anything missing from the pack which you would like to see added in future?
Wrap-up
• Is there anything else you would like to share with us that we haven't talked about today?
• Thank you all so much for your time!

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