



GO HIGHER
WEST YORKSHIRE

Annual report 2024-25



Foreword

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

It has been a privilege to be the Chair of GHWY for the past two-and-a-half years. A long-standing consortium that brings together a range of Higher Education (HE) providers in our local area, GHWY exists to help ensure that an individual's background does not determine their ability to benefit from HE, in all its forms.

During the time I have worked with GHWY, I have witnessed the importance of collaboration to help individuals make informed choices about their own future steps in education. As I prepare to step down from my role, I would like to reflect on some of our key successes in this area from 2024-25.

Our collaborative Teachers' and Advisers' Conference, which was held in July, built on the success of last year's pilot. It attracted over 60 school and college attendees, who experienced a much broader range of HE options than can usually be covered at such an event. They also learned about the many ways in which West Yorkshire HE providers support learners from underrepresented backgrounds. By sharing the costs of hosting the conference, it also benefited our member HE providers.

This ethos of working, sharing and learning together underpinned our decision to bring

in-house a key training programme. I am proud that our member institutions are investing in the futures of care-experienced young people by themselves funding our Care to Go Higher strand of work. This CPD-certified training equips carers and professionals to support care-experienced young people to make decisions about their future education options.

As the national focus on evidence-based practice increases, I would like to highlight the publication of our sector-leading evaluation reports. This includes presenting evaluation best practice to the OfS and CfE, which drew on our 'Think and Go Higher' Attainment Raising programme. We also hosted evidence briefings about our Go Higher Industry Insight Programme, which considered how industry-focused, experiential events can help learners better understand career pathways and feel a stronger sense of belonging in HE. You can read more about these on pages 15 and 7.

A renewed focus on impact also informed our decision to implement a Programme of Activity for our Uni Connect schools and colleges. This new strategic approach, which has a strong focus on attainment raising and underrepresented group programmes, ensures consistency and sustainability based on stakeholder feedback and evaluation, while avoiding duplication with broader



widening participation activity.

These successes have been delivered despite the challenges our consortium has faced this academic year. With the devastating national funding cuts to the Uni Connect programme at the end of 2023-24, I would like to personally thank the GHWY teams and the staff across our member institutions who collaborate for pulling together to respond to need and delivering yet another a hugely successful year during this difficult time.

I am confident that, as we welcome Claire Pryke (University of Bradford) as our incoming Chair, our collegiate network of collaborating partners is in a strong position to continue bringing significant benefits to our underrepresented communities.

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What is GHWY?

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

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

We do this by:

- Collaborating to support informed HE choices for those who experience inequality of opportunity
- Collaborating to respond to the needs of our target audiences and our 13 member institutions

We cover West Yorkshire.

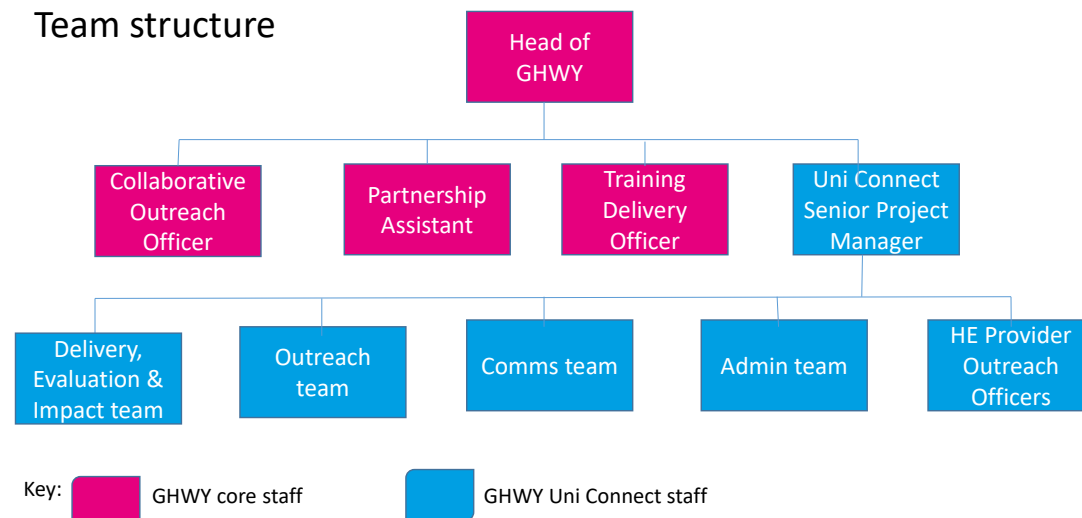
This is through:

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

Our priorities are:

- Those who experience inequality of opportunity
- Supporting informed choices
- Collaborating to develop practice
- Embedding evaluative/evidence-based practice

Team structure



Externally-funded projects

Read examples of our successful collaborative funding bids and activity. Get in touch with us at ghwy@leeds.ac.uk for support with future collaborative funding bids relevant to our partnership mission.

National Networks for Collaborative Outreach (NNCO)

Funded by HEFCE (Higher Education Funding Council for England) to support the development of local networks in our area. This laid the groundwork for collaborative outreach. [Read more about NNCO.](#)

National Collaborative Outreach Programme (NCOP)

Focused on collaborative HE outreach activity in particular areas of West Yorkshire. This scaled up HE outreach in West Yorkshire, engaging directly with schools and colleges, to support local young people to make informed decisions about their own futures. [Read more about NCOP.](#)

Degree Apprenticeships Development Fund Phase 2 (DADF2)

Led by Leeds Trinity University, this programme stimulated the development and delivery of Degree Apprenticeships (DAs) in West Yorkshire. Outputs included new DA curricula and over 150 apprenticeship starts during the project's short timespan. [Read more about DADF.](#)

Let's Talk Real Skills (LTRS)

Contracted as a delivery partner by West Yorkshire Consortium of Colleges (WYCC), the programme invested in new, employer-focused skills training. It helped to inform our employer-focused materials, and strengthened partnership working across our members and key stakeholders. [Read more about LTRS.](#)

Grad Skills

Funded by West Yorkshire Combined Authority (WYCA), this project was led by Leeds Trinity University. It supported under- and unemployed graduates to develop the skills and confidence to move into graduate-level employment. [Read more about Grad Skills.](#)

Advance HE Collaborative Development Fund (CDF)

In a joint bid with Leeds Trinity University's Race Institute, the project delivered CPD and reflective activities to help outreach practitioners decolonise their activity. [Read more about Advance HE CDF project.](#)

GHWY: delivering key mechanisms for HE providers' collaboration

Our mission is to connect our unique range of member Higher Education Providers (HEPs) and external stakeholders. We aim to develop the most effective strategies, advice and resources to help improve access to and success in HE for people from under-represented groups (URGs)..

Delivery of GHWY Teachers' and Advisers' Conference

Collaboration, reducing duplication of effort, and sharing costs underpins our annual Teachers' and Advisers' conference. Hosted in 2025 at the University of Bradford, it showcased the diversity of our 13 partners and the different routes into HE. It had a specific focus on our work with URGs, with our resources for those supporting informed choices among young people being promoted. Highlights and impact included:

- Student panel with representatives from across our diverse range of HEPs
- Keynote from Bradford City of Culture
- HE marketplace with representatives from 12 HEPs
- Attended by over 60 delegates
- Increase in pre- and post- evaluation scores indicate conference met its intended outcomes

 [Find out more about our Teachers' and Advisers' Conference.](#)



Delegate feedback:
“Everyone who presented was brilliantly engaging and super knowledgeable. The content of the sessions was relevant and useful.”

Ongoing delivery of Go Higher Industry Insight Programme

Our Uni Connect partnership supports prospective students to make informed choices by delivering the kind of activity that a single HE provider cannot do alone and by showcasing the huge range of HE options from an impartial perspective. A key strand of this activity is our 'Go Higher In...' days, which are delivered alongside stakeholders such as West Yorkshire Combined Authority. Each event focuses on a priority job sector in West Yorkshire and offers learners insights into progression pathways, employer interactions, and real-life skills development.

- Five events delivered in 2024-25
- Interacted with over 250 learners
- Engaged with 100 employers and HE staff
- Topics are guided by Local Skills Improvement Plans
- Provides a learning opportunity for employers and helps them break down barriers with learners

 [Read more about Go Higher Industry Insight Programme.](#)

 [Read Go Higher Industry Insight Programme impact evaluation 2023-24 report.](#)

Employer feedback: “It was fantastic to see young people engaging with real-world enterprise challenges, gaining insight into different industries, and connecting with professionals. Events like these are invaluable in broadening awareness of career pathways and equipping students with the knowledge and confidence to take their next steps.”

Collaborative HE awareness campaign

Our work to provide impartial information about education options is underpinned by the belief that collaboration can often lead to better outcomes than individual activities. This was the principle behind our collaborative Meta Ads campaign, which aimed to raise awareness of HE opportunities for learners that may still be undecided on their next steps.

- Campaign reached 87,389 people
- Average page duration was 2 minutes 41 seconds

GHWY: supporting expertise relating to specific groups

Our priority is to help people from underrepresented groups (URGs) best understand their options and pathways into HE. We take an evidence-based approach to empower students and learners – as well as their teachers, advisers and carers – to make informed HE choices.

Launch of care-experienced transition pack

Our extensive resource bank to support URGs on their educational journey was bolstered by the launch of our second targeted transition pack, this time designed for care-experienced students. The e-resource provides a roadmap for care-experienced students to consider when applying to HE. Drawing on the success of our disabled learners transition pack, this resource aims to increase the number of care-experienced learners progressing to HE, reduce the cohort's drop-out rates, and make them feel supported in HE.

The pack was an output of our Care-Experienced and Estranged Student Network. The Network's other outputs include:

- Presented information about the Pack at our Teachers' and Advisers' Conference.
- Our collaborative Care Leaver Covenant and Estranged Student Pledge were updated for 2024-25. They aim to support care-experienced and estranged learners respectively to make informed decisions about their progression to HE.

➡ [Read more about our transition pack for care-experienced learners](#)

Offering members a space to understand relevant discourse

Our four URG Networks are driven by the views of their members and constantly respond to changes within the sector. In response to a literature review undertaken in October 2024, our Network to support Black Asian and Minoritised Ethnic Students voted to become the GHWY Race Equity Network.

Network impact and outputs:

- Presented at [Leeds Trinity University's 2025 Race Equity and Social Justice Conference](#), resulting in a co-creation of an anti-racist manifesto with delegates.
- Conducting ongoing Systematic Review to ascertain what factors act as barriers and facilitators for Black, Asian and Minoritised Ethnicity students to access HE.
- Spotlight session at our 2025 Teachers' and Advisers' Conference with one delegate saying: "I felt the conversation and the language being used was brilliant - I loved the interactivity".
- Invited by Leeds Trinity University to contribute to its Ramadan guide.

Case study: Network participant

I participate in [the Care-experienced and Estranged Student] Network as I am the point of contact for our care-experienced students.

I have a lot of past experience working with children, young people and adults that have been children looked after. I am very familiar with the impact that being care-experienced has upon all aspects of their day-to-day life, such as, housing, employment, finances, mental health, and relationships.

I work for [a GHWY member institution] and participating in this Network enables me to provide feedback to my institution with regards to sharing best practice, what university support is available, increasing and encouraging student engagement, student success and the barriers to success which university student care leavers face.

I benefit hugely from participating in the Network as this enables me to reflect upon and improve my day-to-day practice, which ensures that I provide appropriate support and advice to students that are care leavers, and hopefully, contribute towards them having positive student experiences and achieving their future aspirations.

Launch of the West Yorkshire Boys' Impact Hub

As a trusted voice within the sector, and along with our expert Chair from member institution Leeds Conservatoire, we were able to convene HE partners and relevant stakeholders to launch the West Yorkshire Boys' Impact Hub. Part of the national Boys' Impact initiative, it will explore the issues faced by young men in our region in accessing HE study. Its work will help to increase knowledge, foster collaboration, share good practice, and drive collaborative outputs to reduce this cohort's attainment gap.

Hub impact and outputs:

- Over 30 members drawn from education, local authorities, research and charities.
- Builds on the work of our Males on Free School Meals Network.
- Successfully awarded funding to undertake research activity with young men in 2025-26.
- Shared good practice at our 2025 Teachers' and Advisers' conference.
- Connected stakeholders in West Yorkshire with one organisation offering complimentary access to a relevant workshop exclusively for Hub members
- Invited to present to relevant Local Authority committees and partnerships.

➡ [Read more about West Yorkshire Boys' Impact Hub.](#)

GHWY: contributing to and advancing sector knowledge

Our access and participation work is guided by evaluation and we widely share evidence to enable sector-wide evidence-informed interventions.

Introduction of longitudinal case studies as an evaluation method

We continue to adopt innovative evaluation methods and in 2024-25 we began longitudinal case studies. Designed to investigate the impact of Uni Connect through time, we interviewed 17 learners engaged with our programme twice during the academic year. We will return to them in 2025-26. Multi-layered analysis at each annual phase will enable rich qualitative insights about learner outcomes, the needs of learners, and the nature of decision-making to emerge.

- To investigate the impact of engagement with our programme on learners through time.
- To explore learners' decision-making processes, trajectories and tipping points through time.
- To humanise impact demonstrated by statistical data.
- To communicate a 'typical' or 'aspirational' example of a learner's experience.
- Case study data collected in 2024-25 will be published in 2025-26.

Launch of automated survey analysis tool

We have introduced a package of automated tools to help non-evaluators, especially Uni Connect Outreach Officers, to analyse and present pre- and post-survey results. These user-friendly tools make it easier to interpret what is working, what is not, and why, and to communicate impact clearly to stakeholders using visual outputs. The first phase of a comprehensive quantitative and qualitative analysis toolkit is already in use, with a full launch planned for 2025-26. Many Outreach Officers have used these tools to share findings and demonstrate the impact of their work within their institution.

An Outreach Officer said: "I used the charts and learning tools for the Think and Go Higher programme to clearly communicate the outcomes and impact of our work to colleagues. These tools helped distil complex insights into accessible, visual formats, making it easier for others to quickly grasp key achievements and areas of progress. This was particularly valuable in aligning the team around shared goals, fostering more informed discussions, and demonstrating the tangible value of our efforts. Overall, the tools supported more effective communication and reinforced the strategic direction of our work."

GHWY evidence rated 'strong'

We continue to be at the forefront of evidence creation and evaluative expertise. Attainment raising evidence we submitted to CFE Research, on behalf of OfS, was hailed as an example of best practice. Evaluation methods and findings from our [2023-24 Think and Go Higher programme](#) were also assessed as 'strong empirical' evidence. As a result of this, many other Uni Connect partnerships have reached out to us to learn from the impact of our approach to attainment raising and our approach to evaluation of this programme.

- Enable accessible engagement with GHWY Uni Connect evidence outputs, supporting continuous improvement.
- Support strategic engagement, becoming an influential voice within education policy and the HE sector.
- GHWY was one of two partnerships invited to present submitted evidence to the sector as best practice examples.



Measuring the impact of interventions

Our ability to consistently measure the impact of our interventions was underpinned by the launch of the [GHWY Outcomes Framework](#) in 2024-25. The framework of intended outcomes is based on factors that can affect the ability of learners under-represented in HE to progress to HE, mapped to five core approaches that are made possible by the Uni Connect remit.

All Uni Connect activity is now designed around intended outcomes within the framework, including the new GHWY Programme of Activity. The Programme will provide a more structured approach towards outreach delivery across our partner schools and colleges in West Yorkshire, placing a strong focus on attainment raising and URG programmes.

- Clear evaluative outcomes and mechanisms embedded into delivery content, structure and communications.
- Visibly increased team morale as a result of having clearer purpose and direction.
- Clear and concise communications support for school and college engagement with our offer.
- Guide the purpose and intentions of our interventions.
- Ensures that measurement of impact is focused on intended outcomes and deepens our understanding of impact mechanisms.

GHWY: an effective training provider

Our CPD programme offers a wide range of virtual opportunities for teachers, educators and advisers to increase understanding of post-16 and -18 progression routes into and through HE. It also offers unique opportunities to develop knowledge and understanding of URGs.

Launch of 'Understanding and supporting disabled students' e-learning

We addressed the lack of confidence that many staff members across our partnership felt in supporting disabled students with the development of an e-learning course. The free training is designed to empower staff to better understand and support disabled students, therefore enabling more to succeed in HE.

- Nearly 100 people have registered for the course.
- Presented about the course at NEON's Summer Symposium.
- [Blog about the course written for UCAS website.](#)

✦ [View 'Understanding and supporting disabled students' e-learning.](#)

Participant feedback: "Excellent course. It was easy to follow and did not overwhelm me with complex information. I really liked the knowledge checks throughout."

Update to the care-experienced and estranged students e-learning for HE staff

Our training resources are regularly reviewed to address feedback and ensure they respond to changes within the HE sector. We updated our care-experienced and estranged student e-learning for HE staff this year to highlight the risk of homelessness for these individuals. Following the closure of Stand Alone charity, we also provided signposting to other organisations that can support estranged people.

- Updates have led to renewed interest in the training.
- Updates have led to further discussion about addressing the risk of homelessness in support offered.
- Presented about the e-learning at National Network for Education of Care Leavers (NNECL) conference.

✦ [View 'Understanding and supporting care-experienced and estranged students' e-learning.](#)

CPD programme for key influencers of 14-18-year-old learners

In our role as an impartial training provider, we run a free CPD programme that aims to upskill and inform key influencers of learners who are underrepresented in HE. The sessions share good practice and sector knowledge; link research to practice to overcome barriers; and collaborate with sector partners to introduce a wide range of education and employment pathways.

- 11 CPD sessions were delivered in 2024-25.
- Collaborated with delivery partners including UCAS and the Student Loans Company.
- 27 CPD webinars on our website.
- Held two CPD sessions disseminating our own impact to high level stakeholders and practitioners.
- Over 350 unique attendees at CPD events.
- Our CPD mailing list has grown by 20%.

✦ [Access our CPD programme.](#)

Participant feedback: "I feel more informed about post-16 options, so am better placed to advise young people, including advising them on HE options when they may have different FE qualifications."

Certification of Care to Go Higher CPD programme

The high quality of our training has been recognised by CPD UK, which certified our Care to Go Higher programme. This formally recognises that the training – which gives the key influencers of care-experienced individuals the tools they need to support informed decision making in relation to HE – is structured, evidence-based, and aligned with best practice in widening participation. It also means that course participants gain a recognised qualification in their portfolios, helping to demonstrate their commitment to continual learning.

- Across 2024-25, 20 attendees completed the full six-week course and received certification.
- Certification has increased registrations.
- Certification has increased attendee trust in the quality of the course.

✦ [Read more about the certification of our Care to Go Higher CPD programme.](#)

Care to Go Higher participant: "I feel far more confident that I am giving the right advice and that I can signpost young people to lots of support."



GHWY: supporting our member institutions with their APP requirements

We help our members to meet their Access and Participation Plan (APP) requirements through collaborative activities. These work to reduce inequalities in accessing and succeeding in HE for disadvantaged groups in West Yorkshire.

Commencement of APP-focused evaluation training for HE provider staff

With evaluation remaining high on the agenda of the Office for Students (OfS), we rolled out training to help staff across our member institutions become more confident in their evaluation of APP activity, and to understand how to measure the impact of what they and their teams deliver. This will help our members to evidence strong evaluative practice to the OfS as part of their APP commitments, as well as for teams to ensure they are delivering the most impactful activities.

- 51 unique registrations, with 38 completing two or more sessions and 29 completing three or more.
- Qualitative insights reflecting on overall usefulness of the content and experience.

✦ [Read more about our evaluation training.](#)

Participant feedback: “[This training] made me reflect on the projects we run because we always have, and made me feel able to reflect on the true value of what we offer. I will definitely be taking this back to my manager to discuss the way we evaluate our projects and project delivery.”

Ongoing delivery of the Think and Go Higher programme

Now in its third year of delivery, our Think and Go Higher programme responds to the APP requirement for universities and colleges to work closely with schools to raise attainment. It aims to improve metacognitive skills that focus on processes used in planning, monitoring, critical thinking, communicating knowledge and applying logic. Our programme means our member institutions can demonstrate to OfS how they are addressing the [Equality of Opportunity Risk Register Risk 1: Knowledge and Skills](#).

- This year, we have increased reach to 10 schools and an FE college.
- Programme has included 14 campus visits.
- Programme has had 160 hours of delivery across all schools and year groups.
- Over 500 students have taken part in one or more sessions during 2024-25.
- Statistically significant impact in relation to all short-medium term intended outcomes.
- Evidence of connection between interest in HE and academic motivation.
- Learner case study produced.

✦ [Read more about Think and Go Higher Programme.](#)

✦ [Read our Think and Go Higher impact report.](#)

Participant quote: “[The programme] helps you get your point across, but also understand other people’s opinions.”

Launch of headline insights from GHWY evidence

Ongoing work to raise awareness of our headline insights and build engagement with our evidence within local and sector networks has led to the development of our online [GHWY Headline Insights](#) evidence resource. Alongside external evidence that underpins our approach, the resource synthesises evidence produced since 2017 and identifies key insights emerging across our full portfolio of engagement.

- Provide clear synthesised messaging about the holistic impact of GHWY, based on available evidence.
- Contribute to sector evidence and insight.
- Ensure GHWY evidence is accessible to our members by synthesising headlines from our available evidence in one digestible resource.
- Support partnership and sector colleagues to deliver evidence-based interventions.



Conclusion

Helen Sykes, Head of GHWY

I would like to start by thanking Professor Jane Owen-Lynch from the University of Huddersfield for her support, pragmatic approach and strategic vision during her tenure as Chair of the GHWY Board. She has been a great proponent of GHWY and we will miss working with her. We are nonetheless pleased to welcome Claire Pryke from the University of Bradford as our new Chair, with whom we are excited to start working.

Reflecting on 2024-25, we have really started to see the benefit of our decision to consolidate our activity around the Access and Success areas of Access and Participation Plans (APPs), and in influencing the influencers. This has created the scope and capacity to focus on several key areas, which we will continue to develop in 2025-26 in the following ways:

Supporting our member institutions with their APP requirements: bringing our evaluation training in-house after a successful pilot delivered by YMCA/George Williams College. This aims to equip staff across member institutions with the skills to critically evaluate their activities and enhance impact. It addresses the fact that many individuals who deliver activity related to their institution's APP are not trained to be able to critically evaluate it.

Offering key ways for our member institutions to collaborate: delivering our collaborative Teachers' and Advisers' Conference, which is going from strength to strength. For the first time, our event in



2025-26 will be hosted by an HE-in-FE college. It will further showcase the huge range of HE providers and different HE qualifications available across West Yorkshire.

Bringing our member institutions together to share effort and resources to boost the interest in HE across West Yorkshire, countering the low proportions of higher-level skills in our local areas.

Supporting the development of expertise around under-represented groups: we are particularly excited about our upcoming project in collaboration with The Youth Association and co-led by Leeds Conservatoire. This will help us better understand the experiences of young men who are at risk of becoming disengaged from education, a key group experiencing inequality of opportunity in HE.

Finally, we are looking forward to **working with the Office for Students as it continues to develop its plans around the future of collaborative outreach**. Since its inception in January 2017, Uni Connect has been hugely impactful in West Yorkshire, and we are pleased to be involved in the development of the new programme, building on this success.

Collaboration through GHWY continues to help our member institutions: we are stronger when we work together.

Coming up in 2025-26

Peer research pilot: In partnership with the Youth Association, our Boys' Impact Hub will be involved with a small-scale pilot to train young men from underserved communities as peer researchers.

Teachers' and Advisers' Conference: Returning in July 2026, building on the success of previous years.

In-house evaluation training: Four-part programme to help staff who work across our membership to strengthen how they measure and understand impact.

New schools and colleges newsletter: Launching 'How to Go Higher' to support staff in helping learners make informed choices.

Theory of Change workshop: Bespoke session for the Care-Experienced and Estranged Students Network.

Disabled students e-learning: GHWY staff, on behalf of the Disabled Students Network, to present at the World Access to Higher Education Day (WAHED) conference.

Race Equity Network: Merging with our Decolonising the Curriculum Network to broaden the focus and impact of both groups on stakeholder feedback and evaluation, while avoiding duplication with broader widening participation activity.





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