

## **SUN Flagship Evaluation Report**

**ARE UNI CONNECT TARGET STUDENTS  
MORE LIKELY TO PROGRESS TO HIGHER  
EDUCATION IF THEY ENGAGE IN AT  
LEAST ONE 1:1 SESSION WITH A SUN  
PROGRESSION MENTOR?**

The SUN Research and Evaluation Team

**NOVEMBER 2022**

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## Executive Summary

### Background

The Southern Universities Network (SUN) is a collaborative partnership comprising high education (HE) providers in Hampshire, Dorset and the Isle of Wight. The SUN provides outreach activities for schools and colleges as part of Uni Connect – an Office for Students (OfS)-funded project. The Uni Connect Programme is a national initiative helping teachers and careers advisers to encourage young people to take advantage of the opportunities in Higher Education<sup>1</sup>.

The SUN fund Progression Mentors roles in 18 Further Education (FE) Colleges and Sixth Form Colleges across the partnership. The SUN Progression Mentors are tasked to support Uni Connect<sup>2</sup> target students in their college in accessing support and advice about higher education options. This includes activities such as workshops, taster sessions and bespoke 1:1 appointments to support students to form a sustained and progressive outreach programme which is suggested to have a positive impact on student progression to higher education (Burgess, Horton and Moores, 2021).

1:1 activity is a requirement of SUN Progression Mentors within target colleges across the SUN region. 1:1s offer direct personal advice with target Uni Connect students and are delivered by the SUN Progression Mentors. IAG (information, advice, and guidance) has been identified as an area where students from low areas of higher education progression need additional support specifically post-Covid 19 (Huband-Thompson, Joshua and Mulcahy, 2020; Southern Universities Network and Participation People, 2020). This is linked to 'hot' and 'cold' knowledge acquired by students from their family/friends and/or school or college provision (Bickle, Dr and Hunt, 2019).

SUN Progression Mentor-led 1:1 support includes a variety of topics depending on individual student needs. Sessions could include signposting to relevant student support services within or external to the college, general higher education information or advice about applying to higher education or student finance.

This flagship evaluation project took place over the 2021-2022 academic year and sought to understand if, and how, the 1:1 support provided by SUN Progression Mentors had a positive impact on the likelihood of Uni Connect target students applying to higher education.

### Methodology

TASO's approach to evaluation was undertaken for this project. Split into a four-stage cycle (see page 8), the SUN Research and Evaluation team worked in partnership with the FE Project Leader team to create a Theory of Change and a detailed evaluation plan for this project.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ofsuniconnect.org/>

<sup>2</sup> For the purposes of this report Uni Connect target students mean any student who lives in a Uni Connect target ward or a student who lives in an Outreach Hub postcode

A mixed-methods approach including pre-to-post-test design was supported by qualitative data gathered from focus groups and interviews with students who had received 1:1 support. The evaluation was ethically approved by the SUN's lead institution the University of Southampton.

A total of 1,725 students received at least one 1:1 in the 2021-22 academic year. A total of 404 pre-surveys were collected, this reduced to 117 at post-survey level. A total of 88 students completed pre and post surveys with 45 students who had received at least one 1:1 and 41 students who had not engaged in a 1:1. The findings outlined within this report are based upon pre-to-post-survey t-test scores and effect sizes of those who engaged in at least one 1:1 during the 2021-2022 academic year. A thematic analysis was conducted on qualitative data gathered from student focus groups and interviews to correlate emerging topics of interest linked to the Theory of Change.

### **Key Findings**

- Students are already considering applying to higher education before engaging in a 1:1. However, they still require support in developing knowledge about higher education and increasing their confidence in making informed decisions
- Students who engage in 1:1 support are more likely to understand where to find information on higher education and how to apply
- Students who engage in 1:1 support are more likely to understand how their education choices link with career choices
- Students who engage in 1:1 support are more likely to understand the qualifications and grades needed for different types of higher education qualifications
- Students found the SUN Progression Mentor a vital resource in providing information and advice about higher education

### **Key Recommendations**

- SUN Progression Mentors should continue to provide 1:1 support for Uni Connect target students
- FE Project Leaders and the SUN Research and Evaluation team should work in collaboration with SUN Progression Mentors and respective in college line managers, where relevant, to develop a consistent way of identifying which students may need additional 1:1 support to ensure that resources are directed to students most in need e.g., those who are unsure about higher education or have not yet considered it
- SUN Progression Mentors should seek advice from their relevant careers and progression teams to identify key transferable skills from subject areas/courses which contain large proportions of Uni Connect target students and explore alternative career opportunities to provide as examples to students

- SUN Progression Mentors should continue to make strong connections with student support, careers and advice teams and subject staff within their college to ensure links are made across further education colleges and awareness of the SUN Progression Mentor role is increased for Uni Connect target students

## Introduction

### Background

The Uni Connect Programme is funded by the Office for Students (OfS) and aims to increase the number of young people from under-represented groups to progress to higher education.

Twenty-nine partnerships across England provide collaborative outreach activity between Universities, Further Education Colleges, Sixth-Forms, Schools, and other education providers. Outreach programmes include activities such as mentoring, subject taster sessions and Summer Schools.

The Southern Universities Network (SUN) is a collaborative partnership comprising of HE providers in Hampshire, Dorset, and the Isle of Wight. As part of its Uni Connect programme, the SUN fund Progression Mentors in 15 target Further Education Colleges and Sixth Form Colleges across the partnership.

The purpose of the SUN Progression Mentor role is to support target students make informed choices about higher education and to facilitate sustained and progressive engagement in outreach activities. This includes activities such as workshops, taster sessions and bespoke 1:1 support. Engagement in a sustained and progressive outreach programme is suggested to have a positive impact on student progression to higher education (Burgess, Horton and Moores, 2021).

1:1 activity is a requirement of SUN Progression Mentors within target colleges across the SUN region. 1:1s offer direct personal advice with target Uni Connect students and are delivered by the SUN Progression Mentor. IAG (information, advice, and guidance) has been identified as an area where students from low areas of higher education progression need additional support specifically post-Covid 19 (Huband-Thompson, Joshua and Mulcahy, 2020; Southern Universities Network and Participation People, 2020) . This is linked to 'hot' and 'cold' knowledge acquired by students from their family/friends and/or school or college provision (Bickle, Dr and Hunt, 2019).

SUN Progression Mentors provide a programme of 1:1 support depending on college and individual student needs. The support provided via 1:1s could include signposting to relevant student support services within, or external to, the college, general higher education information or advice with regards to applying to higher education or student finance. All Uni Connect target students are invited to take part in a 1:1 with the SUN Progression Mentor at their college. It is a self-selecting activity meaning that students choose to engage themselves.

The way students find out about 1:1s varies from college to college but could include the SUN Progression Mentor contacting students directly, providing an information talk during tutor time, or subject tutors signposting students to contact the SUN Progression Mentor for

further information. The contact hours for a 1:1 will vary from student to student depending on their own needs and could vary from 15 minutes to >10 hours over the course of an academic year. The average contact time a student received in the 2021-2022 academic year was 1 hour.

SUN Progression Mentors are supported by a team of FE Project Leaders who are employed by the SUN's lead institution, the University of Southampton. The role of the FE Project Leader is to provide strategic guidance on activities within FE Colleges to ensure the overall aims of the Uni Connect Programme are achieved. The FE Project Leaders also ensure SUN Progression Mentors link with partner University outreach teams and access CPD opportunities provided by the SUN and other Uni Connect partnerships.

Previous SUN-funded evaluation has found that the SUN Progression Mentor role has promoted the widening participation agenda within colleges and has strengthened internal relationships between students and support services (Cosmos Ltd, 2018). This flagship evaluation project looked to understand if the 1:1 sessions provided by SUN Progression Mentors had a positive increase in Uni Connect target students' likelihood of applying to higher education.

Existing Uni Connect evaluation (Tazzyman *et al.*, 2018; Burgess, Horton and Moores, 2021; Ofs, 2021; Patel *et al.*, 2021) suggests that students who engage in sustained, progressive, and bespoke activities, such as mentoring, are more likely to consider and apply to higher education. Through the evaluation of the 1:1 programme, the SUN partnership can contribute to sector understanding of what works and increase the evidence base to support the development of the Uni Connect programme at a national level.

The evaluation project took place during the 2021-2022 academic year. All SUN target colleges were invited to take part in the evaluation project to ensure any findings were representative of the partnership's geographical location and post-16 education provision.

## **Objectives**

The objectives of this project are outlined below.

### Short-term objectives:

- Students can explain how higher education courses link with their future career plans
- Students can identify who to go to for support with education and career choices in their Further Education College
- Students can confidently explain how to make decisions about education and career choices
- Students are more likely to want to apply to higher education

### Medium-term objectives:

- Students who have engaged in this activity are more likely to make an application to a HE course
- Students who have engaged in this activity feel more confident in making choices about their education and career choices

- Students can identify how engaging in a 1:1 session has supported them in decision making
- Students have identified how the SUN partnership can improve the 1:1 activity and increase positive the impact

Long-term objectives:

- Students who have engaged in 1:1 activity apply to higher education courses
- Students are more likely to receive and accept an offer to study their chosen higher education course
- Students are more likely to enter higher education
- SUN Progression Mentors can identify areas of improvement to ensure positive progression to higher education for students who engage in 1:1 activity

# Methodology

## Research Design

The evaluation approach for this intervention was ethically approved by the SUN’s lead institution the University of Southampton. The evaluation approach for this project followed TASO’s recommended evaluation cycle – see Figure 1. The following sections of the methodology are structured to reflect the evaluation cycle.

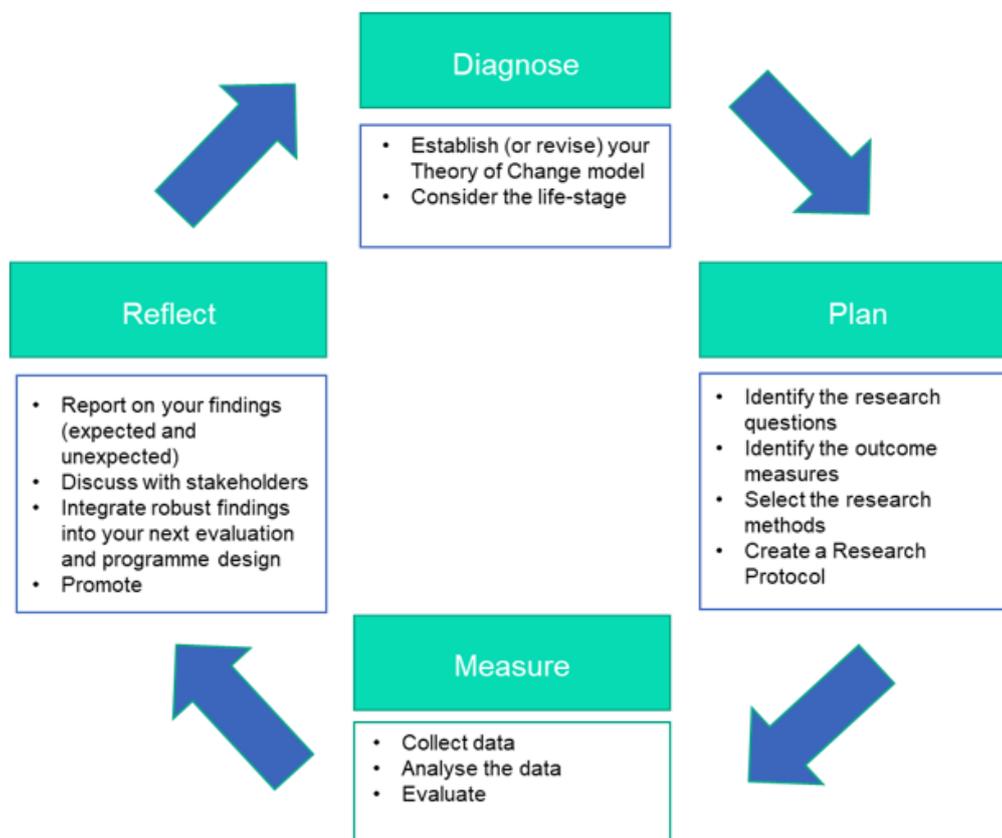


Figure 1: TASO's recommended approach to evaluation - The Evaluation Cycle

## Diagnose

A Theory of Change was created for this project which supported decision-making with regard to the evaluation approach for this project. The Theory of Change is found in Appendix A. This was created collaboratively with the FE project team and SUN Research and Evaluation Officer to ensure the approach was deliverable and appropriate based on contextual factors with colleges.

The previous section of this evaluation report outlines the reasons behind the SUN’s approach to providing 1:1 support in FE to Uni Connect target students in addition to the contextual approach provided by individual FE Colleges in their approach to supporting target students.

The FE Project Leader team identified the long-term impact measures they would hope to see from the 1:1 interactions, alongside short and medium-term outcomes. In addition to this,

the FE Project Leader team identified initial assumptions, inputs, and outputs of the 1:1 activity provided by SUN Progression Mentors.

The Theory of Change provided discussions as to the best evaluation approach to this project. The Research and Evaluation team and the FE Project Leader team agreed that a mixed-methods approach was appropriate for the 1:1 intervention. This approach included a pre-to post-test design supported by qualitative data gathered from semi-structured student focus groups and student interviews.

**Plan**

A mixed methods approach including pre-to-post-test design aligns with the Office for Students standards of evidence Type 2 Empirical evidence. Table 1 outlines the three types of evaluation outlined by the Office for Students. Uni Connect-funded programmes and projects are expected to evaluate projects using Type 2 or Type 3 evaluation methods.

<b>Evaluation Type</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Evidence and claims you can make.</b>
Type 1	<b>Narrative</b> - The impact evaluation provides a narrative or a coherent theory of change to motivate its selection of activities in the context of a coherent strategy	Evidence of impact elsewhere and/or in the research literature on access and participation activity effectiveness or from your existing evaluation results.  We have a coherent explanation of what we do and why our claims are research-based.
Type 2	<b>Empirical</b> - The impact evaluation collects data on impact and reports evidence that those receiving an intervention have better outcomes though does not establish any direct causal effect	Quantitative and/or qualitative evidence of a pre/post-intervention change, or a difference compared to what might otherwise have happened  We can demonstrate that our interventions are associated with beneficial results.
Type 3	<b>Causation</b> - The impact evaluation methodology provides evidence of a causal effect of an intervention	Quantitative and/or qualitative evidence of a pre/post-treatment change on participants relative to an appropriate control or comparison group who did not take part in the intervention.  We believe our intervention causes improvement and can demonstrate the difference using a control or comparison group.

Table 1: Standards of Evidence Types of Evaluation

Due to the complexities of recruiting students who did not engage in the 1:1 offer, it was decided that the evaluation approach should only engage students who engaged in a 1:1. This meant that establishing a counterfactual group was not possible for this project. The results detailed in this report are not causal, meaning we cannot claim that any positive or negative impact is directly due to students engaging in a 1:1. However; we can draw suggested correlations between the findings in this report.

The fundamental evaluation question to be answered by this project was identified as:

**ARE UNI CONNECT TARGET STUDENTS MORE LIKELY TO PROGRESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION IF THEY ENGAGE IN AT LEAST ONE 1:1 SESSION WITH A SUN PROGRESSION MENTOR?**

The main evaluation question was supported by three sub-questions:

1. Has student knowledge about higher education options increased since engaging in a 1:1?
2. Has student knowledge about how to apply to higher education increased since engaging in a 1:1?
3. Has the likelihood of students applying to higher education increased since engaging in a 1:1?

These evaluation questions were matched to the SUN Progression Framework, a tool used by the SUN to ensure a consistent and comparable approach to evaluation across the partnership’s outreach programmes. The SUN Progression Framework forms a critical element of the SUN evaluation plan. It outlines how programmes funded by SUN provide sustained and progressive and contribute towards successful progression to higher education for target students.

The SUN Progression Framework comprises of 30 ‘I can’ statements (known as learning objectives) and is divided into three stages and the partnership’s three core evaluation themes of:

- Knowledge of Higher Education
- Attainment
- Positive Possible Selves

The full SUN Progression Framework can be found in Appendix B of this evaluation report.

Table 2 outlines the learning objectives identified from the SUN Progression Framework:

<b>Learning objective number</b>	<b>Learning objective</b>	<b>Evaluation theme</b>	<b>Progression Framework stage</b>
22	I can explain how higher education courses link with my future career plans	Knowledge of Higher Education	Consolidation
27	I can identify who to go to for support with education and career choices in my 6th form or college	Positive Possible Selves	Consolidation

30	I can confidently explain how I make decisions about my education and career choices after finishing 6th form or college	Positive Possible Selves	Consolidation
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Table 2: Learning Objectives selected from the SUN Progression Framework

A full list of pre- and post-survey questions are outlined in Appendix C. Survey questions included Likert scale questions and free text responses. Survey questions were sourced from the CFE Uni Connect nationwide survey and directly from the SUN Progression Framework (outlined in Appendix B).

Qualitative data collection was agreed to take place via student focus groups with four FE colleges identified by the FE Project Leader team. It was agreed that collecting qualitative data from four FE Colleges across the SUN partnership would:

- Ensure geographical representation
- Use resources in a cost-effective way

The purpose of collecting qualitative data was not to achieve any statistical threshold, instead, it sought to provide contextual and lived experiences of students who had engaged in at least one 1:1. It sought to gain experiences of how students engaged in this activity, why they engaged and if their engagement had provided positive or negative experience. It also sought to gain an understanding of how the 1:1 provision could be developed in future academic years.

Colleges were chosen due to the number of 1:1s conducted in the previous academic year and contextual information on the college for example, the chosen college had a high proportion of Uni Connect target students across all subject areas or the SUN Progression Mentor had been focussing on developing their 1:1 offer. The following data collection section outlines how the approach to qualitative data collection had to change due to external challenges faced by the SUN Progression Mentors.

Focus groups were planned to be semi-structured to ensure the facilitator was able to respond dynamically to areas of interest raised by students (Brown and Danaher, 2017). Students were recruited by the SUN Progression Mentor to ensure communication with students was from a known contact. Participants were provided with an information sheet which outlined the purpose of the focus group to ensure they were able to make an informed decision about their consent to participate in a focus group.

A focus group protocol was developed by the SUN Research and Evaluation team in collaboration with the FE Project Leaders. The protocol document can be found in Appendix D. The protocol document was used by the SUN Research and Evaluation Officer who conducted the focus group. It contained information about the purpose of the focus group, and key information for students before the focus group began. The protocol document was separated into three sections outlined in Table 3 below:

Area of interest	Examples of questions asked
Knowledge of higher education	Identifying key themes in how, and where, students find information about higher education and identifying areas

	for future development in the wider SUN Progression Mentor programme.
Experience of 1:1s	Identifying key themes arising from lived-experience of engaging 1:1s provided by the SUN Progression Mentor.
Support with accessing higher education	To identify common themes in students' needs in accessing information, advice and guidance from their college and the SUN Progression Mentor specifically.

Table 3: Qualitative data themes

### Data Collection

SUN Progression Mentors were supported throughout the evaluation of this project by the SUN Research and Evaluation team and the FE Project Leader team. The evaluation was launched in November 2022 and SUN Progression Mentors were introduced to the evaluation aims, approach, timelines, roles and responsibilities.

SUN Progression Mentors were then supported by their relevant FE Project Leader during regular catch-up meetings throughout the project timeline. During these catch-up meetings, SUN Progression Mentors were able to discuss their approaches to ensuring a high-response rate to both pre- and post-survey data collection.

Surveys were created and collected before students engaged in a 1:1 with a Progression Mentor and towards the end of the academic year. Surveys were collected via physical paper forms and via an online survey platform JISC online surveys.

For those students who completed a paper survey, it was the responsibility of the SUN Progression Mentor to collect the surveys and enter the data into the online survey platform.

The pre-survey was open for five months between November 2021 and March 2022. Students were asked to complete their pre-survey before engaging in a 1:1 with their SUN Progression Mentor.

It is important to note that pre-survey collection methods varied from college to college. Examples of data collection for pre-surveys included:

1. Pre-surveys collected as part of the booking process for students
2. Pre-surveys collected at the start of a 1:1 session
3. Pre-surveys were collected as part of wider college events, e.g., careers fairs
4. Pre-surveys were sent to all target students directly via student email
5. Pre-surveys were collected during tutor group times or subject classes where a large proportion of students were target students

The post-survey was open for four months between April 2022 and July 2022. Students were asked to complete the post-survey no earlier than four weeks after their last 1:1 engagement with their SUN Progression Mentor. It is also important to note that post-survey data collection also included a variety of approaches including:

1. Post-surveys collected via final 1:1 session with Progression Mentors
2. Post-surveys collected via direct emails out to students by Progression Mentors scheduled over the Spring and Summer term

3. Post-survey reminder emails sent from the Research and Evaluation team direct to students who had completed a pre-survey and provided a contact email

With regards to qualitative data collection, four colleges were approached in early February 2022 and invited to organise one focus group with students who had engaged in at least one 1:1. SUN Progression Mentors were informed that focus groups could take place at any point in the summer term, anytime between April and July 2022.

In the first instance, three colleges agreed to arrange a focus group and one college declined due to staffing challenges in organising the focus group. However, only one college was able to provide a focus group by the end of the 2021-2022 academic year. Unfortunately, due to external challenges of ongoing Covid restrictions and staffing resources within colleges, the two colleges that had originally been supportive of a focus group had to withdraw.

This meant that the SUN Research and Evaluation team had to review their approach to qualitative data collection. Student interviews were included in the approach to data collection to ensure we were able to gather adequate and robust qualitative data. In agreement with the FE Project Leader team, an additional college was invited to take part in qualitative data collection.

In total, qualitative data was collected from ten students across two SUN Further Education colleges. One focus group with nine Level 3 students and one student interview with a Level 3 student. All students had received at least one 1:1. The students in the focus group were all studying the same subject and qualification. The student who took part in the interview was studying a different subject from those in the focus group but was studying the same type of qualification.

Both focus groups and interviews were conducted face-to-face in the Further Education Colleges students attended. The SUN Research and Evaluation Officer conducted the focus group and student interview. The SUN Progression Mentor was present for the focus group but not for the student interview as it was felt having an additional member of staff present for the interview may influence responses from the student.

Both focus groups and the interview lasted for thirty minutes, and both were recorded for evaluation analysis purposes only.

### **Sample**

This section of the report is with reference to the survey sample only. As previously outlined the qualitative data approach was not to gain a statistically valid sample size, rather a snapshot of student lived experience.

The initial approach for sample size was to achieve a statistically significant sample size. Data provided by the Office for Students on the predicted population of FE College age students across the SUN's 70 target wards suggests that there are 14,232 Uni Connect target students<sup>3</sup>.

However, from the SUN's own live data, gathered by SUN Progression Mentors in our 18 target FE Colleges, the true population of Uni Connect target students is closer to 14,591.

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<sup>3</sup> Data taken from ONS Ward-level population estimates 2018

Using standard survey sample size calculations, this provides a target of 365 pre-and post-survey responses to ensure representative findings for the total participation<sup>4</sup>.

Figure 2 below outlines the process taken for surveys and outlines the attrition rates between pre-and post-surveys. It is important to note that the final pre-survey total reached the validity threshold, however post-survey and final pre-to post-survey matching failed to meet the statistical validity threshold. Therefore, the data analysis and findings of this project cannot be understood as providing a statistically representation of the wider Uni Connect target population.

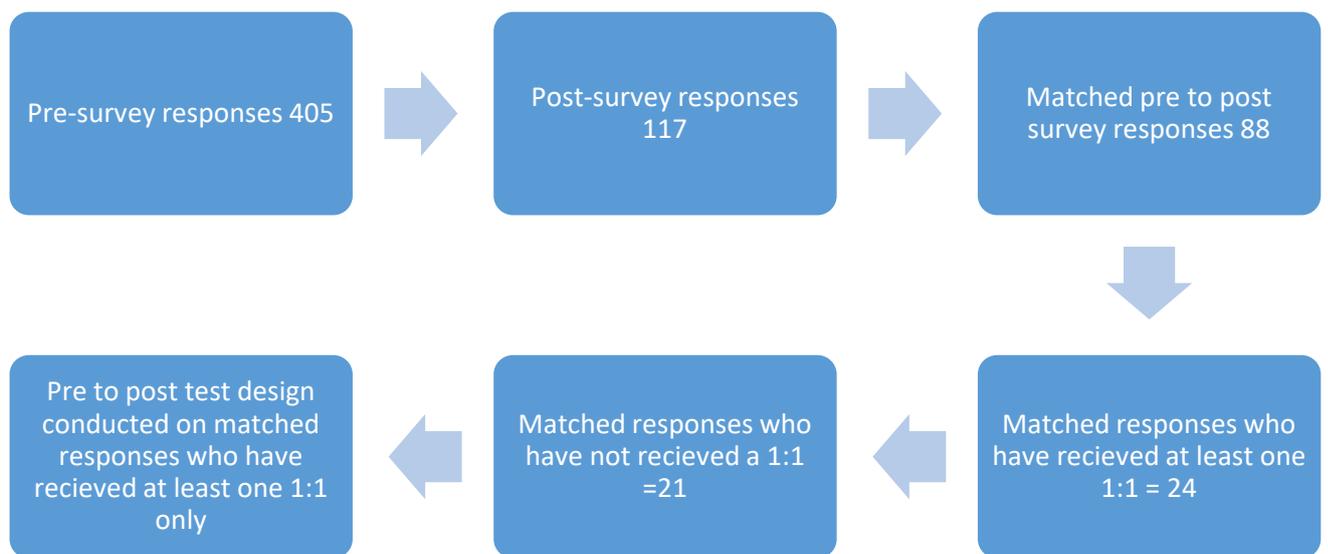


Figure 2: Pre to the post-survey matching process

Pre-and post-surveys were matched using the following unique identifiers:

- First name
- Surname
- FE college name
- Student ID
- Student home postcode
- Student HEAT ID

Those students who did not have a HEAT ID but were matched using the other listed identifiers were still included in the data analysis. It is important to note that during the 2021-2022 academic year, the SUN required consent as the legal basis for collecting student personal data. This impacted on the quantity of students being tracked on the HEAT database.

<sup>4</sup> [Power analysis allows us to determine the sample sizes needed to detect statistical effects with high probability. Power and sample size estimations are used by researchers to determine how many subjects are needed to answer the research question](#)

## Data Analysis

### Quantitative data analysis – Analysis of survey responses

For the purposes of this evaluation report, only the responses of those students who had completed both pre-and post-surveys and had engaged in a 1:1 are included in any analysis. Due to the small response number and as this project was not planned to be undertaken with a counterfactual group, it was not appropriate to compare results to those students who had completed both pre-and post-surveys but did not engage in a 1:1.

The three I can statements taken from the SUN Progression Framework were given a four-scale Likert question with each response assigned a number between 1 – 4:

- Very true (4)
- A little true (3)
- Not that true (2)
- Not true at all (1)

The questions taken from the CFE national survey were given a three-scale Likert question with each response assigned a number between 1-3:

- A lot (3)
- A little (2)
- Nothing at all (1)

Pre-to-post responses were inputted into an excel spreadsheet and responses were compared. The process used for comparing pre-to-post-survey responses followed the TASO pre-to-post-test survey design toolkit (TASO, 2021).

Responses were checked to ensure there was a normal distribution. A t-test score was then undertaken using Excel. The Hypothesized Mean Difference score was set at 0 to reflect the null hypothesis and the Alpha value was set at 0.05 to ensure the significance value was consistent across all survey questions and responses.

To understand if there was a statistically significant difference between pre- to post surveys, the p-value was assessed for each question ( $P(T \leq t)$  one-tail). To understand if there was an observed effect size, the Cohen's d was used to show the standard difference between two means. The calculation undertaken to arrive at an effect size was as outlined in Figure 3 below:

$$\text{Cohen's } d = (M_2 - M_1) / SD_{\text{pooled}}$$

*Equation 1: Cohen's d effect size calculation*

Table 4 below outlines the general way of interpreting Cohen's d effect size:

Cohen's d result	Effect size
0.2	Small effect
0.5	Medium effect
0.8	Large effect

*Table 4: Cohen's d effect sizes*

The results section of the report provides findings of calculations with regard to this project. It is important to note that some results may show an effect size but not be statistically significant. The most important calculation for understanding if the 1:1 support has a positive impact on students is to look at the effect size.

**Qualitative data analysis – Analysis of the Student Focus Group and Student Interview**

A deductive approach was taken in analysing the qualitative data gathered from student focus groups and interviews. A deductive approach was appropriate to ensure that evaluation questions were able to be answered in relation to this project’s aims and objectives.

The following four broad themes were agreed before data analysis began to ensure only relevant qualitative data was used in gathering evidence of the impact of SUN Progression Mentor 1:1 activity:

- Attitudes towards higher education – if students are intending to apply, decision-making processes surrounding progression to higher education
- Knowledge of higher education – understanding of the different types of higher education, higher education subjects and understanding of how to apply
- Experience of 1:1 support from the SUN Progression Mentor – why did they engage in 1:1 support, what topics did they discuss, and was it beneficial?
- Areas for consideration to further support positive progression to higher education – what gaps still exist in the SUN Progression Mentor role? How could the SUN partnership better support students in Further Education progress to higher education?

The data gathered was analysed using Braun & Clarke (2006) systematic approach to thematic analysis. Table 5 below outlines how data was analysed at each step in the six-step process.

Step	Data Analysis Process
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Familiarise yourself with the data</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recordings were transcribed using Amberscript<sup>5</sup> software</li> <li>• Recordings were re-listened to before checking transcription created by the transcription software</li> <li>• Protocol sheet included reflections and notes taken from the interview/focus group – these were re-read before inductive codes assigned</li> <li>• Transcriptions were read and re-read and, where relevant, amendments were needed where software had incorrectly transcribed words</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Generating initial codes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inductive codes initially assigned via Nvivo 12, a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS)</li> <li>• Codes:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Attitudes towards higher education</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.amberscript.com/en/>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Knowledge of higher education</li> <li>→ Experience with 1:1 support from the SUN Progression Mentor</li> <li>→ Areas for consideration to further support positive progression to higher education</li> <li>• Approach to initial coding included selecting key quotes that specifically highlighted the above codes in a clear way</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Searching for themes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transcripts re-read to ensure no other key themes were missed due to using a deductive approach</li> <li>• Due to the nature of this evaluation, it was agreed to not assign sub-themes to the four key themes outlined above</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reviewing themes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Theme inclusion and exclusion criteria were reviewed using the coded extracts to ensure groupings were appropriate</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Defining and naming themes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Final inclusion and exclusion criteria established</li> <li>• Key themes assigned</li> <li>• Coding analysed to explore links between key themes across focus groups and interview</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Producing the report</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Production of this evaluation report</li> <li>• Ensuring detailed methodology to ensure a robust approach to qualitative data analysis</li> </ul>

Table 5: Braun & Clarke, 2006 Creating themes

## Limitations

The following limitations have been identified for this evaluation project:

- High attrition from pre-to-post-survey means findings are not statistically valid
- The evaluation approach is not causal as it was not designed as a randomised control trial (RCT) therefore any findings should be understood as suggested rather than as actual
- Although a counterfactual group was organically established, refined matching was not appropriate due to the low numbers and design approach to this project evaluation
- Pre-to-post-test design was only measured for those students where pre-to-post surveys were able to be matched, and they had engaged in at least one 1:1
- Due to Covid qualitative data gathering was a challenge so the qualitative data gathered provides a small sample of students from the SUN partnership
- Differing approaches to survey data collection means that there are likely to be inconsistencies in when and how survey data (both pre and post) may have been collected

- Student qualification level was collected but the year of study, of course, was not, therefore we are unable to understand if Level 3 students were in their first or second year – this may have an impact on their pre-to-post-survey responses
- The evaluation did not include questions specifically around decision-making processes in relation to the SUN Progression Mentor 1:1 offer, or in relation to when students make decisions about progressing to higher education
- The evaluation did not include questions around who may influence decisions relating to higher education. This may have provided a further detailed understanding of who engaged in 1:1s and why

## Measure – Results

### Summary of results

Students felt able to link how higher education courses linked to future career plans, where to find information about higher education and the relevant qualifications and grades needed to progress to higher education.

Survey results show that students who engaged in at least one 1:1 showed an increase in feeling confident about making informed choices about their next steps. There was also a small increase in confidence of who students can go to in their college for support in regard to career and education choices.

Overall, there was no increase in Uni Connect target students' likelihood to progress to higher education if they engaged in at least one 1:1 session with a SUN Progression Mentor. However, it is important to state that most students were already considering progressing to higher education before they engaged in a 1:1 so it would have been difficult to see any statistical increase for this objective.

The results are outlined in further depth over this section of the evaluation report.

### Sample demographic

The analysis of student demographics highlights that SUN Progression Mentors are targeting the right students for 1:1 support with regard to widening participation criteria.

A total of 24 students completed a pre- and post-survey and engaged in at least one 1:1 during the 2021-2022 academic year. Of this, 88% were Uni Connect target students meaning they were either from a Uni Connect target ward or lived in an Outreach Hub postcode.

58% were female students and 42% were male students. 92% of the sample size were studying a Level 3 qualification with 21% studying A-Levels and 89% studying a vocational qualification such as a BTEC. 25% of students were from BME groups and 75% were White.

42% of students were from the 2011 Census Hard-Pressed Living areas meaning in these areas there are lower numbers of people with higher qualification levels. Unemployment is usually higher in this group than in others and those who are employed are employed in manufacturing, retail and transported related industries<sup>6</sup>. Other 2011 Census areas included

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<sup>6</sup> ONS Classification of Output Areas

Constrained City Dwellers, Urbanites and Rural Residents. A common link between all groups is lower education qualifications and slightly higher unemployment levels compared to the national average.

The sample size was from across the SUN geographical area meaning that any findings are not specific to one area, city or target ward.

### **Students can explain how higher education courses link with their future career plans**

Post-1:1 responses were higher (M= 3.417) than pre-1:1 responses (M= 3.125). A paired sample t-test showed this difference to be statistically significant ( $P(T \leq t)$  one-tail = 0.0348). The effect size is 0.402 meaning that there was a medium positive effect size from pre-to-post-1:1 engagement.

This is a positive result and suggests that students engaging in at least one 1:1 are more likely to be able to explain how higher education links with their future career ambitions.

### **Students can identify who to go to for support with education and career choices in their Further Education College**

Post-1:1 responses were marginally higher (M=3.333) than pre-1:1 responses (M=3.458). A paired sample t-test showed this not to be a statistically significant difference ( $P(T \leq t)$  one-tail = 0.287381999). The effect size is 0.2 meaning there was a small effect size seen from pre-to-post-1:1 engagement.

This result suggests that, based on our sample survey data, students who engaged in at least one 1:1 showed a small change in their knowledge of who they could go to in their college or sixth form to support them with their education and career choices.

This result is surprising as engaging in a 1:1 the students will have encountered the SUN Progression Mentor – a role to support students with questions related to higher education. However, the results could suggest that students need additional communication either about what the SUN Progression Mentor can support with, or additional communication relating to the wider careers and advice teams situated within SUN target Further Education Colleges.

The survey results contrast with the qualitative data. Students within the focus group were confident in other areas of support within their colleges they could reach out to in addition to the SUN Progression Mentor role as outlined in the student quote below.

*“they've always told us about the advice and support team here and why they are there just to help us with our progression, whether we want to go into apprenticeships, want to go to uni, whether we want to start for some people in level one or two going to level three and what they need and things like that.”*

## **Students can confidently explain how to make decisions about education and career choices**

Post-1:1 response rates were higher (M=3.333) than pre-1:1 responses (M=2.833). A paired sample t-test showed this to be a statistically significant difference ( $P(T \leq t)$  one-tail = 0.015). The effect size is 0.7 meaning there was a medium effect size seen from pre-to-post-1:1 engagement.

This result suggests that, based on our sample survey data, students who engaged in at least one 1:1 showed a positive change in confidently making decisions about their future.

Qualitative data gathered provides further detail as to how the SUN Progression Mentors have supported raising students' confidence with regard to making choices. Students spoke about the risk involved in decision-making with regard to higher education on several occasions. Many of the students were concerned that if they chose to progress to university, they may end up either in a career they were unsure of and with a significant amount of debt to pay off:

*"that's kind of why I think people are struggling to think about university because I think if you go to university, you're setting yourself for that one path."*

Indeed, some students highlighted that their choice of college course may have narrowed their choices of where, and what, to progress to next meaning they were even more concerned about making a similar narrowing choice with regard to higher education:

*"It's a bit difficult and I'm just thinking to move on to something different, which like keeps a little bit of sport on the side, but a wider job opportunity. So that's why I'm looking at employment over university"*

Students outlined the importance of the SUN Progression Mentor in providing a space in which to discuss options. Students complimented the support they had received with regards to signposting for further detailed information and, vitally, the opportunity to engage with taster sessions and visits to university and other higher education provider campuses.

*"because I didn't know if I wanted to go to university or employment, the Progression Mentor gave me like two different options of how I could do it, or I could defer the university and go for work or go straight into work"*

Some students were certain of their career path and were grateful for the support the SUN Progression Mentor had provided with regards to other areas of progressing to higher education.

*"I didn't know what to write in the personal statement, so she helped me with that, given me. And. Just I just didn't know what to write in it. And I found that the most helpful."*

*"The Progression Mentor gave me some pointers for my personal statement to go off of and just got my head down one time back home and went off the notes and got it done. And I got offers from all five places that I think."*

### **Increase in knowledge about higher education including how to apply**

This short-term objective was split into five questions on both pre- and post-surveys:

- Knowledge of the subjects available to study at higher education
- Knowledge of the different types of higher education qualifications
- Knowledge of where to find information about applying to higher education
- Knowledge of applying to higher education
- Knowledge of the qualifications and grades needed to progress to higher education

Overall, there was a positive impact in all five areas for students who engaged in at least one 1:1. The effect sizes were consistent across all five areas suggesting a medium effect size in relation to knowledge about higher education.

Post-1:1 responses were higher (M=2.583) than pre-1:1 responses (M=2.291) in relation to knowledge of where to find information about applying to higher education. A paired sample t-test showed this to be a statistically significant difference ( $P(T \leq t)$  one-tail = 0.003). The effect size is 0.5 meaning there was a medium effect size from pre- to post-1:1 engagement.

This effect size is seen again with regard to students' knowledge of the qualifications and grades needed to progress to higher education. Post-1:1 responses were higher (M=2.667) than pre-1:1 responses (M=2.417). A paired sample t-test showed this to be a statistically significant difference ( $P(T \leq t)$  one-tail = 0.015). The effect size is 0.4 meaning there is a medium effect size from pre- to post-1:1 engagement.

A medium effect size was seen in students' knowledge of how to apply to higher education. Post-1:1 responses were higher (M=2.541) than pre-1:1 responses (M=2.25). A paired sample t-test showed this to be a statistically significant difference ( $P(T \leq t)$  one-tail = 0.015). The effect size is 0.5 meaning there is a medium effect size from pre- to post-1:1 engagement.

A medium effect size was also seen in students' knowledge about the different types of higher education and courses available.

Post-1:1 responses were higher (M= 2.782) than pre-1:1 responses (M= 2.521) for knowledge of the subjects available at higher education. A paired sample t-test showed this to be a statistically significant difference ( $P(T \leq t)$  one-tail = 0.027). The effect size is 0.5 meaning there is a medium effect size from pre- to post-1:1 engagement.

Post-1:1 responses were higher (M= 2.541) than pre-1:1 responses (M=2.333) for knowledge of the types of higher education courses available. A paired sample t-test showed this not to be statistically significant in difference ( $P(T \leq t)$  one-tail = 0.067). The effect size is 0.4 meaning there is a medium effect size from pre- to post-1:1 engagement.

The qualitative data supports the effect sizes seen in the survey analysis. Students spoke of having low confidence and knowledge with regard to the mechanisms of applying to higher education. They also spoke of the challenge with regard to understanding the different courses available at higher education and if they were 'right' for them. This refers to the theme of risk within decision-making about higher education.

For example, a student spoke of the confusion over what course to apply for:

*“I think if I'm going to work with children on an international scale, I need something that's going to work internationally. So, then I just thought international law, probably international relations. I've gone to different universities and then I've read the course of the offer. If I find anything similar, then I compare like the content and what they're going to teach me”*

### **Students are more likely to want to apply to higher education**

It is important to highlight that before pre- to post-survey matching was undertaken, the pre-survey responses already showed a high proportion of students who wanted to progress to higher education. Of those who responded they were going to apply, the majority outlined that a university degree was what they would apply to. Other higher education qualifications of interest were Higher Degree Apprenticeships and HE in FE courses.

The pre-existing high-level responses mean that the results outlined below should be taken into consideration with regard to the difference in mean (average) score, t-test result, and Cohen's d-effect size result.

Post-1:1 responses were slightly lower (M= 4.75) than pre-1:1 responses (M=4.833) with regards to students wanting to apply to higher education. A paired sample t-test showed this not to be statistically significant in difference ( $P(T \leq t)$  one-tail = 0.397). The effect size is -0.1 meaning there is no effect size seen from pre- to post-1:1 engagement.

This means that there was no change in students' responses relating to the likelihood to progress to higher education. However, it is vital to understand that this does not mean the SUN Progression Mentor 1:1s do not have any impact on students' likelihood to progress. Instead, this result shows that many students are already seriously considering applying to higher education before engaging in a 1:1 with the SUN Progression Mentor.

What this does suggest is that further targeting needs to take place that is more nuanced than if a student is a target Uni Connect student or not. More nuanced data needs to be collected, potentially at an early point in the academic year, to gather students' intentions to progress to higher education. This data could support SUN Progression Mentors better identifying those students who are unsure about higher education or have not yet considered it. This is reflective of wider Access evaluation evidence which suggests that targeting has critical importance in ensuring that interventions are undertaken with appropriate students (Hatt, Baxter and Tate, 2005; Harrison, 2010; Harrison, Neil; Waller, 2017; Benson-Egglenton, 2022).

Combined with the previous survey findings relating to knowledge and confidence, it is also important to highlight that even though students self-report they are likely to progress to higher education it does not necessarily mean they will. The medium effect sizes in the other areas measured suggest that even though students may be considering applying, they still require support and advice in ensuring they are making confident and informed decisions and understand how to make a successful application.

It is important to state that the 1:1s offered to students do not solely focus on advice and information relating to higher education. In the post-survey, students were asked to outline the topic areas they discussed with the SUN Progression Mentor. 42% of students stated that

they spoke to the SUN Progression Mentor about personal challenges they were experiencing in college, 21% of students stated that they spoke to the SUN Progression Mentor about personal challenges they were experiencing outside of college and 8% of students stated 'Other'. This highlights that the SUN Progression Mentor role includes a pastoral aspect for students in addition to other student support services located within colleges and sixth forms.

Qualitative data highlights the important role the SUN Progression Mentor has in supporting students who are considering applying to higher education. Both with regards to practical elements such as how to write a personal statement, what courses may be of interest, but also with regards to ensuring students have the confidence they will make a successful application should they decide to do so:

*"Can I see you today, please, or I just show up. I'm usually just a show-up for a person. I just show up. And if she's available, fine. If she's not available, I'll come back tomorrow. it's nice to know that she's actually just always in the office and that I can just go there when I need to go there and that she'll be there."*

*"I think it's good guidance because it's a stressful process, you know, applying for money or the future, especially if you don't know like it sucks. So, you know, you need support in some way most of the time."*

### **How the SUN Progression Mentor and wider SUN outreach programme could develop to improve the likelihood of Uni Connect target students applying to higher education**

The findings for this area of evaluation are taken from data collected via student focus groups and student interviews. With regards to the development of the SUN Progression Mentor role and wider SUN outreach programme, students were overall positive with the experiences they had engaged in.

Students specifically mentioned campus visits were helpful in their understanding of what a university degree may be like and the types of careers it would help them progress to. However, a key development point that came out of this was that students felt it would be beneficial for representatives from university courses to be explicit in the types of careers directly linked to the subject that students may have progressed to. Students were interested in understanding the transferable and employment skills a university degree would help them develop and the different career opportunities this may open them up to:

*"It would probably be better to go and find out more about it and learn about the universities and all the different courses rather than just learning about sport in general. Because I think for me, I like the universities that we went to, but I didn't know a lot about the different courses, so I didn't know if there was more that I could go and do to find out about it or if there was anything else I could do to find out more about the courses or what"*

With regards to the SUN Progression Mentors, students were keen to engage in a variety of different activities that would enable them to make confident choices about their future. They were all positive about the 1:1 advice they had received from their SUN Progression Mentor. Specifically, those students who would be the first in their family to progress to higher

education stated the SUN Progression Mentor had provided them with advice and information not available at home:

*"I spoke to my parents. But they didn't have a clue because they've never been to uni."*

It was clear that strong connections between subject tutors and the SUN Progression Mentor were key in students feeling confident in seeking out the SUN Progression Mentor. Students also stated it was vital for the SUN Progression Mentor to be welcoming, easily accessible and as quick as possible to respond to queries they had:

*"She is very accessible, she's positive, and then she's always like willing to go all out to just help you, which I find is very nice. And she's always smiling as well."*

*"I think a lot of us didn't know what we wanted to do, how we needed to get there. And whilst obviously our teachers and lecturers would help us figure out the basics of what we want to do or that if you want to go to university. So, if you kind of get a pathway or most of how we could get to some places if we knew how to get there."*

## **Reflective - Recommendations**

Based on the results from the evaluation of the SUN Progression Mentor 1:1 project, the following recommendations are suggested:

- SUN Progression Mentors should continue to provide 1:1 support for Uni Connect target students
- FE Project Leaders and the SUN Research and Evaluation team should work in collaboration with SUN Progression Mentors and respective line managers, where relevant, to develop a consistent way of identifying which students may need additional 1:1 support to ensure that resources are directed to students most in need e.g., those who are unsure about higher education or have not yet considered it
- SUN Progression Mentors should seek advice from their relevant careers team to identify key transferable skills from subject areas/courses which contain large proportions of Uni Connect target students and explore alternative career opportunities to provide as examples to students
- SUN Progression Mentors should continue to make strong connections with student support, careers and advice teams and subject staff within their college to ensure links are made across further education colleges and awareness of the SUN Progression Mentor role is increased for Uni Connect target students
- The SUN FE Project Leader team should inform University Access teams of the importance of highlighting the wide range of career opportunities available from degrees e.g., a Sports Science degree does not mean a career in sport is the only option

- The SUN FE Project Leader team and SUN Progression Mentors should explore further with students the feeling of 'risk' with regards to higher education and develop tools, resources, or programmes of activity to support students in how to make informed decisions
- SUN FE Project Leaders and SUN Progression Mentors should explore if a workshop covering how to effectively search for information on higher education options and courses on the internet would be helpful for students. Qualitative data suggests that students are unsure of where to start in the search for information on higher education
- It would be beneficial to further explore students' understanding of higher education qualifications, specifically considering the current Level 3 qualification reform, and how this may impact students studying vocational qualifications
- It would be beneficial to further explore students' decision-making processes and if there is potential to develop an intervention that would support students in understanding how to make an informed decision e.g., what do we mean by informed decision? What information do you feel you need to make a decision? Etc.
- Application data should be matched to students who have engaged in at least one 1:1. The data will be provided by the UCAS STROBE service, and this data will be made available in December 2022. The SUN hopes to share the findings of this to target colleges in early 2023

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## Appendices

### Appendix A – Theory of Change

<b>Situation</b>	IAG (information, advice and guidance) has been identified as an area where target Uni Connect learners need additional support. This is linked to 'hot' and 'cold' knowledge acquired by students from their family/friends and/or school or college provision. TASO outline that there is emerging evidence to this area of outreach work, but further causal evidence needs to be undertaken. This project aims to provide an empirical approach to evidence generation where students who engage in 1:1s are measured in their expectation to progress to higher education.
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<b>Aims</b>	1:1 activity is a requirement of SUN Progression Mentors within target colleges across the SUN region. 1:1s offer direct personal advice with target Uni Connect students and are delivered by the SUN Progression Mentor.
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Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Short-Term Outcomes	Mid-Term Outcomes	Long-Term Outcomes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>SUN Progression Mentors to deliver 1 :1s to SUN target students</li> <li>Funding for the SUN Progression Mentor roles in SUN target FE Colleges and Sixth-Form Colleges</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1:1 intervention based on individual student need</li> <li>1:1 engagement varies from one intervention to multiple over an academic year</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>At least 1000 target Uni Connect students receive at least one 1 :1 in the 2021-22 academic year</li> <li>Evaluation report</li> <li>Data sets to return to target colleges engaged in this project</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students can explain how HE courses link with their future career plans</li> <li>Students can identify who to go to in college for support with education and career choices</li> <li>Students can confidently explain how they make decisions about their education</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Uni Connect target learners who have engaged in this activity will make or are more likely to make an application to a HE course</li> <li>Uni Connect target learners who have engaged in this activity feel more confident in making choices about</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Uni Connect target learners apply to higher education courses</li> <li>Uni Connect target learners are more likely to receive and accept an offer to study their chosen higher education course</li> <li>SUN Progression Mentors can identify areas of improvement to ensure positive progression of Uni Connect target learners</li> </ul>

			<p>and career choices</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students are more likely to want to progress to HE</li> </ul>	<p>their education and career choices</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Uni Connect learners are able to identify how this activity has supported them in decision making</li> <li>• Uni Connect target learners can identify how we can improve this activity for an increased positive impact</li> </ul>	
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<b>Rationale &amp; Assumptions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consistent staffing across SUN FE team and target colleges</li> <li>• In-person teaching is not affected by Covid in the 21/22 academic year</li> <li>• SPMs remember to ask students to complete HEAT forms and pre- and post-surveys</li> <li>• SPMs remember to prompt students to complete post-surveys (including those who did not receive a 1:1)</li> <li>• SPMs regularly update their operating plan with correct information on who has taken part in a 1:1</li> <li>• SPMs can organise a focus group for qualitative data collections</li> <li>• SPMs keep to deadlines and share the requested information in the correct way</li> <li>• We get enough survey responses to ensure representative findings from the population</li> <li>• We are able to access UCAS STROBE data and it provides us with the needed information for evaluation</li> </ul>
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- Students to complete HEAT forms

## Appendix B – SUN Progression Framework

Learning Objective number	Evaluation Theme	Learning objective measurable statement	Progression Stage	Year Group or Education Level	Gatsby Benchmark
1	Knowledge of HE	I can list the local education options available to me after I finish school	INTRODUCTORY	9 /10	1,7,8
2	Knowledge of HE	I can describe the benefits of higher education for my future career	INTRODUCTORY	9 /10	7
3	Knowledge of HE	I can list the subject areas linked to my interests for future study and career	INTRODUCTORY	9 /10	4
4	Attainment	I can list the subject areas I need to improve on to pass my GCSEs	INTRODUCTORY	9 /10	3
5	Attainment	I know what skills I need to develop to improve my schoolwork	INTRODUCTORY	9 /10	3
6	Attainment	I can list the strengths I have in certain subject areas	INTRODUCTORY	9 /10	3
7	Positive Possible Selves	I can list the skills I already have in helping me cope with challenges outside of school	INTRODUCTORY	9 /10	3
8	Positive Possible Selves	I can list the skills I need to develop to help me cope better with challenges outside of school	INTRODUCTORY	9 /10	3
9	Positive Possible Selves	I feel confident in putting myself forward for educational, or extra-curricular, events (e.g. University outreach activities, FE College	INTRODUCTORY	9 /10	3,7

		taster days, National Citizenship Service)			
10	Positive Possible Selves	I can list the things I want to achieve in my life	INTRODUCTORY	9 /10	3,4
11	Knowledge of HE	I can explain the choices I have made in my next steps after GCSEs	DEVELOPMENTAL	10/11	1,3,4,7
12	Knowledge of HE	I can confidently make decisions about my next steps after GCSEs	DEVELOPMENTAL	10/11	1,3,4,7
13	Knowledge of HE	I can list the benefits of studying at Level 3 (A-levels, T-levels, BTEC, Apprenticeships)	DEVELOPMENTAL	10/11	7,4
14	Knowledge of HE	I can confidently find out information about local employment opportunities	DEVELOPMENTAL	10/11	2,5
15	Attainment	I can describe the skills I need to develop and succeed in my education and my future career choices	DEVELOPMENTAL	10/11	3,4,7
16	Attainment	I can describe the skills I already have and how these will enable me to succeed in my future education and career choices	DEVELOPMENTAL	10/11	3,4
17	Attainment	I can explain how achieving my GCSEs will support my future education and career choices	DEVELOPMENTAL	10/11	3,4
18	Positive Possible Selves	I can recall at least one occasion where I have met people from my local area who have studied at higher education	DEVELOPMENTAL	10/11	7,4,5

19	Positive Possible Selves	I can summarise my personal barriers to making future education choices (e.g knowledge, finance etc)	DEVELOPMENTAL	10/11	3,8
20	Positive Possible Selves	I can identify who I can go to for support if I am unsure about my options after I finish my GCSEs	DEVELOPMENTAL	10/11	3,8
21	Knowledge of HE	I can summarise the different application processes of higher education qualifications	CONSOLIDATION	12/13	7
22	Knowledge of HE	I can explain how higher education courses link with my future career plans	CONSOLIDATION	12/13	4,7
23	Knowledge of HE	I can explain how higher education courses are financed (e.g., fees, student loans, higher-level apprenticeships etc.)	CONSOLIDATION	12/13	7
24	Attainment	I can explain the academic or technical skills needed for different types of higher education courses	CONSOLIDATION	12/13	7
25	Attainment	I am confident I have the skills and knowledge needed to successfully pass my Level 3 qualification (A Level, T Levels, BTEC, Apprenticeship)	CONSOLIDATION	12/13	3
26	Attainment	I can explain how achieving my Level 3 qualification (A Level, T-Levels, BTEC, Apprenticeship) increases my higher education and career choices	CONSOLIDATION	12/13	3,7

27	Positive Possible Selves	I can identify who to go to for support with education and career choices in my 6th form or college	CONSOLIDATION	12/13	3,8
28	Positive Possible Selves	I can identify how to solve a problem, either an academic one or a problem in my personal life, and describe the skills I will use to solve it	CONSOLIDATION	12/13	3,8
29	Positive Possible Selves	I can identify the skills, knowledge and ambitions I have and describe these in an application to my chosen higher education course or career application	CONSOLIDATION	12/13	7,4
30	Positive Possible Selves	I can confidently explain how I make decisions about my education and career choices after finishing 6th form or college	CONSOLIDATION	12/13	7,4

## Appendix C – Pre and Post Surveys

### Pre-Survey

# SOUTHERN UNIVERSITIES NETWORK 1:1 EVALUATION PROJECT

## PRE-ACTIVITY SURVEY AND HEAT DATA COLLECTION FORM 2021-22

### 1. About this project

The Uni Connect programme is a government-funded project providing opportunities for young people to access additional support when making decisions about their education and careers.

The Southern Universities Network (SUN) is part of the Uni Connect programme. The SUN provides activities for young people in Hampshire, Dorset, and the Isle of Wight. The activities aim to support you in making an informed decision about the next steps in your life - whether that be education or employment and training.

As part of our funding, we need to see what activities provide you with the best support to help you make informed decisions. To do this we would like you to provide some information about yourself and your opinions about our activities. For full information on how we will manage, store, and share your data please see our Data Privacy Notice on our website: [www.sunoutreach.org.uk](http://www.sunoutreach.org.uk)

We are asking you to complete this short three-question survey and HEAT data collection form to help us understand if the 1:1 sessions offered at your college support you in making decisions about your next steps. We will also ask you to complete a similar survey in spring 2022 and we may ask you to take part in a focus group too.

By completing the survey and HEAT data collection form, you are agreeing to take part in the evaluation of this project. If you would prefer not to take part in the evaluation of the project, please do not complete this survey. If you choose not to take part in the evaluation this will not affect your right to take part in 1:1s or other SUN-funded activity.

**You will need your student number or student id to complete this form.**

### PLEASE READ THE BELOW STATEMENTS AND TICK THE RELEVANT BOX

As a participating student, we would like your consent to collect the following personal data about you to enable us to carry out this project:

	YES	NO
I agree to take part in monitoring, evaluation and research activities linked with the Southern Universities Network project. I have read and understood the information given to me and agree to my data being stored and used in an evaluation report and associated publications.		
I agree for my information to be shared for the purposes of this project with only those named in the data privacy notice.		

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason. I understand that I have the right to refuse to provide this information without my rights being affected.

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**Today's date (the date you are completing this form):**

(dd)	(mm)	(yyyy)
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## 2. Collecting Information

### PERSONAL DETAILS (PLEASE USE BLOCK CAPITALS)

Name of the Sixth Form or College you currently attend:

[PROGRESSION MENTOR TO COMPLETE THIS SECTION BEFORE DISSEMINATING TO STUDENTS - THIS NEEDS TO BE THE FULL AND OFFICIAL NAME OF THE COLLEGE]

Forename:

Surname:

Date of birth: (dd/mm/yyyy)

Home Postcode: *(where you live most of the time)*

Your house/  
flat number  
and street  
name:

Email Address  
*(please print  
clearly):*

Name of  
city, town or  
village you  
live in:

Would you like to  
receive information  
on activities via your  
email address?

YES

NO

**Gender:** *(Please tick or complete as necessary)*

Male

Female

I prefer to self-identify as

**Your Student Number/id**

**Level of qualification**  
Please circle the most  
appropriate

Level 2 (e.g. GCSE or  
equivalent)

Level 3 (e.g. Extended  
BTec Diploma or A-  
Levels)

A mixture of Level 2 and Level  
3

Course title/Subjects studied	
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### DO YOU HAVE A DISABILITY?

No known disability		Two or more impairments and/or disabling medical conditions	
A specific learning difficulty such as dyslexia, dyspraxia or AD(H)D		A social/communication impairment such as Asperger's syndrome/other autistic spectrum disorder	
A long-standing illness or health condition such as cancer, HIV, diabetes, chronic heart disease, or epilepsy		A mental health condition, such as depression, schizophrenia or anxiety disorder	
A physical impairment or mobility issues, such as difficulty using arms or using a wheelchair or crutches		Deaf or a serious hearing impairment	
Blind or a serious visual impairment uncorrected by glasses		A disability, impairment or medical condition that is not listed above	
Information refused			

**PLEASE TURN OVER FOR ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS...**

**ETHNICITY (PLEASE TICK ONE BOX)**

White British		White Irish		Other White background	
Black or Black British - Caribbean		Black or Black British - African		Other Black background	
Asian or Asian British - Indian		Asian or Asian British - Pakistan		Asian or Asian British - Bangladeshi	
Chinese		Other Asian background		Mixed - White and Black Caribbean	
Mixed - White and Black African		Mixed - White and Asian		Other mixed background	
Other ethnic background		Rather not say			

**FURTHER INFORMATION ABOUT YOU**

	Yes	No	Don't know
Has anyone in your immediate family been to university?			
Have you ever had free school meals?			
Is a close family member (Mum/Dad/Carer) in the military?			
Are you, or have you ever been, in care?			
Would you consider yourself a young carer?			

**PLEASE TURN OVER FOR THE SURVEY QUESTIONS...**

## SURVEY QUESTIONS

The following questions will ask you about your knowledge and intention to progress to higher education. Higher education refers to the study for level 4 qualifications (anything after a level 3 e.g. Extended BTEc Diploma or A-Levels).

1. Read the below statements. For each one, think about how true they are to you at this present moment in time:

	1	2	3	4
Statement	Not at all true	A little true	Quite true	Very true
I can explain how higher education courses link with my future career plans				
I can identify who to go to for support with education and career choices in my 6th form or college				
I can confidently explain how I make decisions about my education and career choices after finishing 6th form or college				

2. How much do you know about the following things about higher education?

	Nothing at all	A little	A lot
The subjects that I could study			
The type of course I could take, such as: degree, foundation degree, higher/degree apprenticeships			
How to apply to study higher education			
Where to find information about applying			
The qualifications and grades needed to get into higher education			

3. Please complete the below table:

	Definitely won't apply	Very unlikely	Fairly unlikely	Fairly likely	Very likely	Definitely will apply	Don't know
How likely are you to apply to higher education at age 18 or 19?							

# POST-ACTIVITY SURVEY

## 1. About this project

The Uni Connect programme is a government-funded project providing opportunities for young people to access additional support when making decisions about their education and careers.

The Southern Universities Network (SUN) is part of the Uni Connect programme. The SUN provides activities for young people in Hampshire, Dorset, and the Isle of Wight. The activities aim to support you in making an informed decision about the next steps in your life - whether that be education or employment and training.

As part of our funding, we need to see what activities provide you with the best support to help you make informed decisions. To do this we would like you to provide some information about yourself and your opinions about our activities. For full information on how we will manage, store, and share your data please see our Data Privacy Notice on our website: [www.sunoutreach.org.uk](http://www.sunoutreach.org.uk)

We are asking you to complete this short survey to help us understand if the 1:1 sessions offered at your college support you in making decisions about your next steps.

If you would prefer not to take part in the evaluation of the project, please do not complete this survey. If you choose not to take part in the evaluation, this will not affect your right to take part in 1:1s or other SUN activity offered at your college.

**You will need your student number or student id to complete this form.**

**Today's date (the date you are completing this form):**

(dd)	(mm)	(yyyy)

## 2. Collecting Information

**PERSONAL DETAILS (PLEASE USE BLOCK CAPITALS)**

<b>Name of the Sixth Form or College you currently attend:</b> [PROGRESSION MENTOR TO COMPLETE THIS SECTION BEFORE DISSEMINATING TO STUDENTS - THIS NEEDS TO BE THE FULL AND OFFICIAL NAME OF THE COLLEGE]	
Forename:	Surname:
Date of birth: (dd/mm/yyyy)	Home Postcode: <i>(where you live most of the time)</i>
Your Student Number/id	

## SURVEY QUESTIONS

The following questions will ask you about your knowledge and intention to progress to higher education. Higher education refers to the study for level 4 qualifications (anything after a level 3 e.g., Extended BTEC Diploma or A-Levels).

1. Read the below statements. For each one, think about how true they are to you at this present moment in time:

	1	2	3	4
Statement	Not at all true	A little true	Quite true	Very true
I can explain how higher education courses link with my future career plans				
I can identify who to go to for support with education and career choices in my 6th form or college				
I can confidently explain how I make decisions about my education and career choices after finishing 6th form or college				

2. How much do you know about the following things about higher education?

	Nothing at all	A little	A lot
The subjects that I could study			
The type of course I could take, such as: degree, foundation degree, higher/degree apprenticeships			
How to apply to study higher education			
Where to find information about applying			
The qualifications and grades needed to get into higher education			

4. Please complete the below table:

	Definitely won't apply	Very unlikely	Fairly unlikely	Fairly likely	Very likely	Definitely will apply	Don't know
How likely are you to apply to higher education at age 18 or 19?							

*Continues over page...*

5. If you are considering applying to higher education, what type of course are you considering? (Tick as many that apply)

Type of higher education course	Tick if applies
University Degree	
Higher Degree Apprenticeship	

Higher education in Further Education e.g. Higher National Diploma, foundation degree, Level 4 or 5 NVQ, diploma or certificate	
Other (please state)	

**6. When meeting with the SUN Progression Mentor at your college, what topics did you discuss during your one to one? (Tick as many that are relevant)**

<b>Topic</b>	<b>Tick if relevant</b>
What higher education is	
Higher education courses that would be relevant to my career goals	
Higher education courses that would be relevant to my current qualification and predicted grades	
Local higher education opportunities	
Information about university degrees	
Information about higher degree apprenticeships	
Information about higher education in further education colleges (Higher National Diplomas etc)	
Finance for higher education	
How to apply to higher education	
Opportunities to discover more about specific subjects I am interested in	
Personal challenges I am currently having at college	
Personal challenges I am currently experiencing outside of college	
Other (please tell us what you talked about if you feel comfortable to)	

**Thank you for completing this survey. Please return this form to your SUN Progression Mentor.**

## Appendix D – Focus Group and Interview Protocol

### FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS AND PROTOCOL

#### Colleges who have agreed to arrange a focus group:

College name	Date, time and location information for the focus group
Number of students who attended	Level of students who attended the focus group

#### Purpose of the focus groups:

- Provide student perspectives on the benefits and areas for development for SUN-funded 1:1s
- Provide additional information on areas where the pre-project survey has outlined higher education (HE) knowledge is low
- Provide further information on what students are planning to do after college and any perceived barriers to these plans

#### Focus Group Protocol:

##### Welcome and introductions:

1. Evaluators to introduce themselves and remind the group what the topics of discussion will be for the focus group:
  - Experiences of SUN-funded 1:1s
  - Knowledge of higher education opportunities
  - Plans students have after they finish college
  - Challenges experienced/perceived on HE and how the SUN Programme could support with this
2. Reminders and consent:
  - Focus Group will not be recorded but the researcher will be making notes throughout the session to capture key information
  - Students' names and college names will not be used in the final project report so students will not be identified
  - Evaluator will be taking notes – just to remind for later when will be listening back to the recording
  - Check that everyone is happy to go ahead, a reminder that students can withdraw consent at any time during the focus group by leaving (no questions will be asked)

-----**FOCUS GROUP TO START**-----

#### Knowledge of Higher Education

Could you tell me what you consider higher education to be? (prompts: what types of qualification do you think are under the name 'higher education')

How many are considering progressing on to a higher education course? (If the group are not planning on progressing to HE, ask about the route they want to take next, why they don't want to progress, and if they think they will do training on the job or other HE courses in the future?)

How do you find out about what options are available to you after you finish college? (Do you speak to anyone specifically at home/college or make use of any services at college?)

What types of resources have you found useful in finding out about your higher education options?

Are there any challenges/issues in accessing support in general when trying to get information about your next steps?

Have you heard about the SUN? If yes, could you explain what you know about it and if not, have you seen or heard anyone in college talking about it perhaps? If they haven't then tell them a bit about it and ask how the college can promote the opportunities more.

Do you feel you know how to apply to your chosen higher education course(s) if you want to do this after college? (If the group are not planning on progressing then switch the question to be about applying to jobs/careers) If not, what else do you need to know, or skills to develop?

### Experience with SUN-funded 1:1s

Could you tell me more about the 1:1 support you have had through the college's SUN-funded member of staff **[insert name]**? Their job name is slightly different in each college but you might know them either as progression mentors or part of the careers team or student support team...

How did students find out about the 1:1s, was this through tutors or direct from the SPM or other?

What were they expecting from the 1:1?

Did it achieve what they hoped it would?

Did they go and action anything talked about?

Were they signposted to any other areas within the college for additional information or perhaps external organisations (e.g. websites etc), advice or guidance? What were they (if happy to answer)?

## Support with accessing higher education

If you are hoping to progress to higher education – are there any aspects of higher education you are currently unsure about? This could be anything from what HE qual to choose, entry requirements, finance or even travelling to the HE location (If the group are not planning on HE then switch this to a question about what made them decide not to progress – anything specific explore practical barriers such as transport and attitudinal barriers such as confidence or knowledge)
Going back to the 1:1 and careers support you receive from your college, what encourages you to access careers advice?
Have you experienced any challenges accessing this type of support? What could your college do to lessen these types of challenges?

## FINAL INFORMATION

- Questions are now over, is there anything anyone would like to ask the evaluator or discuss further before we finish?

### ----*FOCUS GROUP STOPS*----

- Final project report will be available in September/October 2022 the SUN PM will provide you with a copy if you would like one
- If you haven't yet completed a post-project survey, please do so as it helps with the evaluation of this project (show them what the post-project survey looks like and have paper forms to hand if they need one)
- If students have any questions after today, they should contact their SUN Progression Mentor
- Final thanks