

# Annual Report 2024/25

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**Inspiring Choices**

February 2026



# Introduction

Welcome to the Inspiring Choices Annual Report, which provides a comprehensive overview of the Uni Connect programme's delivery across York and North Yorkshire during the 2024/2025 academic year.

As in previous years, this report highlights a selection of our most impactful projects and activities. For those wishing to explore our work in greater depth, a range of detailed evaluation reports is available on our [website](#).

By the time we come to reflect on the year, it can often feel like a distant memory, with the team already immersed in delivering another year of workshops, visits, and festivals. This report therefore serves as an opportunity to acknowledge and celebrate the dedication and commitment of our team, as well as the invaluable contributions of our partners and participants. Their collective effort has made this year's achievements possible.

Above all, we hope this report demonstrates the impact of our work and the progress we can make when we collaborate with shared purpose. We extend our sincere thanks to the practitioners, teaching staff, careers leads, academics, and many others who contribute to the successful delivery of the programme.

**Louisa Dobson**  
Head of Inspiring Choices Programme

# Who are Inspiring Choices?

Inspiring Choices is a Higher Education Outreach Partnership and one of 29 partnerships within the Office for Students' Uni Connect Programme. Since 2017, our mission has been to close the gap in higher education participation between the most and least represented groups. We provide tailored support to young people across York and North Yorkshire.

Working with local secondary schools and colleges we offer guidance on the full range of routes into and through higher education (HE) in the form of workshops, activities and events. Our aim is to help young people overcome barriers to their success. These include those related to academic attainment, sense of belonging and lack of knowledge.

## Mission

Our mission is to support young people living in York and North Yorkshire to achieve their ambitions, by helping remove academic and cultural barriers to higher education.

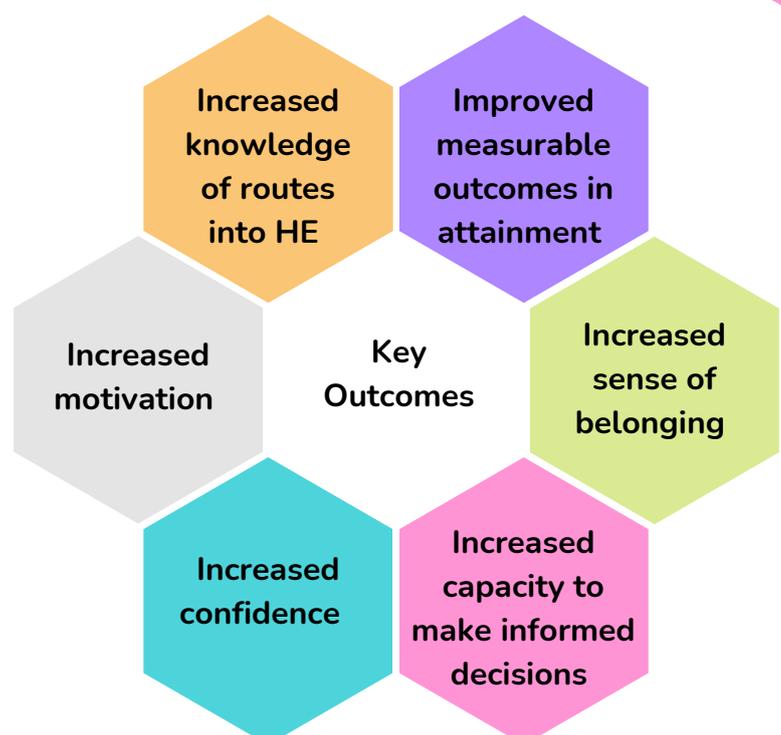
## Values

Our vision is to deliver an engaging programme of activity that will empower young people in York and North Yorkshire to develop their knowledge of higher education, build their confidence and develop academic skills leading to their continued success in education.

## Purpose

To reduce the gap in higher education participation between the most and least represented groups.

To measure the success of our programme we assess these short term and intermediate term outcomes for young people who participate in our activities.



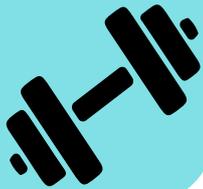
# 2024/25 Snapshot

We have provided....

## 704

### Activities

Number of events for learners, staff and parents.



### Activity Contact Hours

## 743.32

Number of hours of delivery.

## 31

### Campus Visits



Including six to FE institutions.

We have worked with....

## 36

### Schools and Colleges

Number of schools and colleges across York and North Yorkshire engaged in the programme.



## 3,311

### Unique Learners

Number of individual learners who took part in at least one activity. (Each learner is only counted once, no matter how many activities they have taken part in.)



## 8,456

### Interactions

Total interactions for all learners who took part in one or more activities i.e., if a learner took part in an activity once a week, for six weeks, this would equal six interactions.



## 49.53%

of learners were from POLAR4 quintiles one and two.

## 40.70%

of learners were from IMD quintiles one and two.

# Programme Overview

Our work is split into four areas:

**Higher Education Outreach Workshops:** Workshops on a range of HE and employability topics delivered either in school, college or on an HE campus. Delivered primarily to schools and colleges in geographic areas in York and North Yorkshire where participation in higher education is low or lower than expected given local GCSE attainment.

Example: Employability workshops that equip learners with the knowledge of CV's and application forms, how their hobbies and interests can provide useful transferable skills, and techniques to help them to succeed in interviews.

**Attainment Raising Projects:** Projects which focus on developing academic skills and subject knowledge so that attainment of young people is not a barrier to HE progression. Delivered primarily to schools with low attainment-8 and progress-8 scores, or in geographical areas where KS2 and KS3 educational outcomes are low.

Example: A literacy project for Year 7 and Year 8's to help to address the gap in KS2 attainment in North Yorkshire.

**Strategic Outreach Projects:** Projects for groups of young people in York and North Yorkshire whose lived experiences may cause additional barriers to educational and career progression. This includes young people with SEND, care experienced young people, military service children, and young carers.

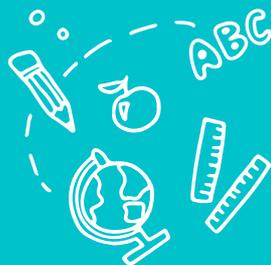
Example: A one night residential trip to Cambridge for young people from Military Service Families, visiting a HE campus, staying in university accommodation and activity by charity Never Such Innocence.

**Bespoke and Third Party Activity:** Inspiring Choices offer support with events organised by schools and colleges such as careers fairs and mock interviews. Schools are also offered the opportunity to take part in bespoke activities organised and delivered by Inspiring Choices or our partners.

Example: In partnership with the National Railway Museum, learners are invited to a STEM conference, where they explore the Wonderlab, an employers fair and other STEM based activities.



HIGHER EDUCATION  
OUTREACH  
WORKSHOPS



ATTAINMENT  
RAISING  
PROJECTS



STRATEGIC  
OUTREACH  
PROJECTS



BESPOKE AND  
THIRD PARTY  
ACTIVITY

# Higher Education Outreach Workshops

This section gives a summary of our Higher Education Outreach workshops. For more detail [download the Student Postcard report.](#)

## Employability

These workshops covered employability skills, helping learners to develop an understanding of what employer's value in the workplace. These workshops were delivered 63 times across eight schools and colleges and engaged with 554 learners in Year 10 and above.

- 84.5% would recommend the activity to a friend
- 85.1% said it helped them to think about the future
- "I feel more confident about my future."

### Activities:

- Transferable Skills
- CV and Cover Letter Writing
- How to Make a Good Impression
- Digital Communication
- What is AI?

## Explore HE Pre-16

This campus visit was delivered to pre-16 learners who were at the beginning of their HE exploration. Workshops covered the basics around HE through a day of interactive activities on a university campus. Ten schools were welcomed to campus across 15 visits, and engaged with 503 learners in Year 9 and Year 10.

- 92.7% would recommend the activity to a friend
- 92.5% said it helped them to think about the future
- "Helped me in making choices about the future."

### Activities:

- Talk - What is HE?
- HE Campus Tour
- Workshop - Interactive Intro to HE
- Subject Taster Session (subject to availability)

## Explore HE Post-16

This campus visit was delivered to post-16 learners who were at the beginning of their HE exploration. Workshops covered the basic around HE through a day of interactive activities on a university campus. Five sixth forms and colleges engaged in three campus visits and 16 in-school workshops. Therefore, 464 learners engaged with these activities.

- 79.7% would recommend to a friend
- 89% said it helped them to think about the future
- "Uni isn't just about the lessons and there's much more to it."

### Activities:

- HE Campus Tour
- Workshop - Why HE?
- Workshop - Apply to HE
- Subject Taster Session (subject to availability)

## Financing Your Degree

These workshops were delivered to learners who had applied for or were considering an undergraduate degree. Workshops introduced learners to the Student Finance application process, and budgeting skills to prepare them for independent living. Budgeting was delivered as an assembly to 42 Year 12 learners.

### Activities:

- Applying for Student Finance
- Budgeting

## Future Selves

These workshops were designed to help learners explore how their current education connects to different possible futures. Using self-reflective exercises, these interactive activities aimed to help learners identify their strengths and interests, develop decision making skills, and set their own goals. These workshops were delivered 29 times across five schools and colleges and engaged with 245 learners in Year 10 and above.

- 92% would recommend the activity to a friend
- 93.2% said it helped them to think about the future
- “It was fun and I like how it helped planning my future.”

### Activities:

- Choices
- Passions
- Goals

## Preparing for Student Life

This workshop and campus visit was delivered to learners who had applied for or were considering a HE course. The aim was to equip learners with the skills required for student life and prepare them for their transition to Higher Education. One school had a campus visit and another school received three workshops. Overall, 106 learners in Year 12 engaged with these activities.

- 93.8% would recommend the activity to a friend
- 100% said it helped them to think about the future
- “Uni is better than I expected/thought.”

### Activities:

- Student Life Workshop (led by a student ambassador)
- Campus Tour
- Independent Living & Student Accommodation

## Study Skills

These workshops equipped learners with the skills they need to succeed academically in higher education and provided an insight into learning in a higher education environment. These workshops were delivered 27 times plus two assemblies across five schools and colleges and engaged with 711 learners in Year 10 and above.

- 79.4% would recommend the activity to a friend
- 82.5% said it helped them to think about the future
- “[I’ve learned] how to improve my study.”

### Activities:

- Research Skills
- Revision Techniques

## Your Post-16 Options

This workshop covered the different types of post-16 qualifications and provision, and the transition from school to college/sixth form. This workshop was delivered once and once as an assembly in one school and engaged with 175 learners in Year 10.

- 94.7% would recommend the activity to a friend
- 89.5% said it helped them to think about the future
- “I learned about NVQs and apprenticeships.”

### Activities:

- Your Post-16 Options Workshop

# Attainment Raising Projects

## Literacy Project

The literacy project is a one-to-one intervention scheme, focused on supporting reading strategy, comprehension and developing writing skills. The project was supported by Catch Up® Literacy who provided training and access to their resources. Alongside the development of practical skills, such as reading fluency, the literacy project also aims to build learners confidence with their reading. In building confidence, the learners will be able to feel more comfortable with written texts and comprehension in their lessons. Learners from two schools participated in one-to-one 20-30 minute sessions twice a week for ten weeks. One school selected Year 7's to participate and the project was delivered by the Inspiring Choices team. The other school selected Year 8's to participate and the project was delivered by two university students studying Primary Education and Teaching Studies degree.

### Literacy Levels and Reading Ease

Combining the results from the two schools together, a paired samples t-test showed a statistically significant difference in pre-tutoring intervention literacy levels and post-tutoring literacy levels:  $t(18) = -4.558, p < .001$ . Literacy levels increased by an average of 1.24 levels. Learners were asked how easy they found reading on a scale of 1-10 (1= difficult, 10 = easy), a paired samples t-test showed there was no statistically significant difference in the reported ease of reading pre and post-intervention:  $t(12) = -1.620, p = .131$ .

### Perceptions of Reading Enjoyment, Purpose, and Value

At the start and end of the project learners completed a reading interview (n =16). At the start, only two learners expressed enjoyment of reading. Six learners were “in the middle,” sometimes they enjoyed reading and “sometimes not in the mood.” Eight learners said that they did not like reading. At the end of the project, four learners still did not like reading, they found it “boring” and preferred other activities. Ten learners were indifferent about reading, it was “ok, not the best but like it a bit more now [than at the start],” and “kind of [like it] it can be boring or fun.” The two learners who expressed enjoyment at the start still enjoyed reading and one liked it more now due to “experiencing new genres of books.” Regardless of their enjoyment, all learners recognised that reading was important because “reading is in every lesson, need to do it for a lot of stuff.” Reading was also important “for the future,” “to have a good career,” and “in all parts of your life, on your phone, recipes.”

### Teacher School 2:

“The students really enjoyed the sessions and helped build more positive engagement with school. The information we received about their reading progress was also invaluable and has already been shared with staff to help better support these students in lesson.”

### Reading Confidence, Difficulties, and Solutions

When learners were asked pre-intervention how they would feel if someone asked them to read out loud, the responses were mainly negative. They would feel “shy,” “nervous,” “worried” and find it “a bit scary.” Two learners said that they felt “okay” about it. One learner was “quite confident, but wouldn’t really enjoy it,” and only one learner said they would “enjoy it, it increases

confidence.” Post-intervention around half the learners felt “the same as before,” that they got “stage-fright” and “don’t like the looking and listening and chance of making a mistake.” The other half reported feeling “more confident now,” “can read a bit better now,” and “can read faster and it’s easier to keep up.” Learners suggested some people may find reading difficult for a wide range of reasons. They suggested it could be due to dyslexia, that they speak another language, find it frightening to read in front of others, long/hard words, hard pronunciations, and the size, font style and colour of the text. The learners also suggested potential solutions such as lots of practice, “ask them if they need an overlay,” “break it down into shorter words first,” “find a book you like,” and “start with a smaller book and work your way up.”

### **Teacher School 1:**

“The structured literacy sessions, engaging reading materials, and opportunities for practice were particularly valuable. The project appears to have helped students build confidence in their reading skills, especially those who had some foundational literacy abilities. The one-to-one support provided allowed students to receive more personalised guidance, while the opportunity to read in a non-judgemental environment helped to foster a sense of comfort and encouragement. The progress seen in several students suggests that the programme created a supportive and positive space for reading development.”

### **Cross-curriculum change in reading**

Around half the learners noted progress in reading and writing in their English lessons and other lessons, that they “feel a bit more confident now,” and it was “a bit easier now.” However, a third of the learners felt “about the same as before.” There was a preference for writing over reading, and enjoyment of the subject areas seemed to influence their responses.

### **Teacher Feedback**

One teacher from each school completed a short questionnaire about the project. Both teachers agreed that participating in the project their learners had 1) increased their academic confidence, 2) increased their motivation towards their studies, 3) improved attitudes towards learning, 4) improved ability to comprehend, interpret and analyse written text, 5) increased participation within lessons, and strongly agreed that students had 6) increased confidence to engage with subjects with substantial reading.

### **CU Scarborough Placement Student Experience**

In one school the literacy project was delivered by two university students, this project contributed towards their placement hours of their degrees. These students completed a short qualitative questionnaire to assess how delivering the project has impacted their studies and potential career pathway. Engaging with this project helped the students with their own studies by gaining experience with “how important it is to build a relationship with the children in order for them to open up to you,” and gave them experience of “delivering a reading intervention and giving me confidence when speaking to children and other members of staff.” They gained skills and knowledge of “different ways to educate children so that they are learning in the best way possible for them,” “how to report safeguarding issues to teachers and how to spot them,” and a greater understanding of “empathy with children that are having a bad day that aren’t in the headspace to concentrate on their work and just letting

### **Placement Student:**

“I wanted to be able to make a difference to the children who don’t usually get as much attention as they need in school.”

them try their best.” When asked has delivering this project impacted on your intended career progression the students said “definitely, it has improved my confidence and helped me to understand how to communicate with children more,” and “it has opened my eyes to secondary education and has made me consider looking into it further.”

### **Conclusion**

The quantitative data suggests the literacy project has had a positive impact on the learner’s literacy levels but did not effect the reported ease of reading. However, the small sample size limits the scope of the quantitative analyses. The qualitative responses suggest some improvement in learners’ perception of confidence and enjoyment of reading and all learners recognised the importance of reading. The teachers also reported increased confidence and engagement from their learners. There was no significant difference in learners literacy levels between delivery by the Inspiring Choices team and delivery by university students, however the project also had a positive impact on the university students as the project contributed towards their degree placements hours and the students gained experience and developed their skills and knowledge.

### **Placement Student:**

“I believe that the most valuable aspect of the project was building relationships with the children. Towards the end of project we had made such a strong bond that many of children were upset with us not returning after the Christmas period.”

# Strategic Outreach Projects

## Care Leaver Residential

Two members of the Inspiring Choices team travelled to Edinburgh with a group of 13 young people who are leaving care, along with two ambassadors who had attended a previous residential and five Leaving Care Team staff for a two-day residential. The first activity was a campus visit to the University of Edinburgh. Here, the young people received a talk from staff from Edinburgh Cares, a campus tour with a current student and an opportunity to ask questions about university life, course options, the application process and all the support options that the university provides. In the evening, the young people explored the city with a tour of historical Edinburgh by Mercat Tours. The young people got to experience student accommodation, and spent the night at Pollock Halls.

### Care Leaver:

“The whole experience itself was amazing experience, I especially loved seeing all the uni different sections like medical bit, the library, it was huge, and with the info you got about the courses they offer was amazing and detailed”

On day two, participants went to Charteris Community Centre, for an activity with Edinburgh Fringe. Here the young people learnt about the organisation of the biggest ticketed festival in the UK and participated in a creative scavenger hunt. As the young people were all over 18 years old, no activities were planned for the afternoon and they could decide what they wanted to do which included climbing to the top of Arthur’s Seat, visiting the Scottish Parliament building, and the National Museum of Scotland.

## Focus Group Results

Six weeks after the residential, five young people, one ambassador and four of the leaving care team participated in a focus group. Participating in the residential helped the young people to think about their possible futures and opportunities in terms of career aspirations and potential logistics of attending higher education. For example, one of the Leaving Care Team said “It inspired some of the people to think about other opportunities or other opportunities working abroad and things like that. So I think it just broadened their horizons and raised those aspirations in them that there are other things out there and that they can look further afield as well.” Additionally, one of the young people commented “When we were having that [talk with Edinburgh Cares] to go over like the cost of a university year, I noticed that everyone had taken a keen interest at one point or another on the opportunities and offers that the university would be willing to help with if there was a course within the university that was available, like covering cost of cost of living in one of the dorm rooms for a year and the bills.” Another said “I’ve been struggling to think about uni or next steps but it’s really opened my eyes to what’s available and the help and support as well.”

### Care Leaver:

“I’ve been looking at going to university for a couple weeks and would like to get a degree in something, as I would be the only one in the family with one, and that would be an accomplishment for me”

The Leaving Care Team noticed an increase in self-confidence with some of their young people, “I think I really saw you grow throughout the time in Edinburgh, from being quite worried and about being in a new place, which is natural, being away from your support networks and I think even in

those two days, you really grew from that, which I'm sure will help you in the future.” The Leaving Care Team will also use information they learned on the residential to support other young people that they work with, “I thought it was really powerful and I've had conversations with other young people that if you've got a talent, if you're into filmmaking or an artist then you can go to the Fringe Festival and they'll try and support you to market what you want to do. I wasn't aware of that before, and we had that discussion and I've been able to share that with another young person that I support that plays a musical instrument.”

## Military Service Children Residential

Thirteen Year 9 and Year 10 Military Service Children from a school in North Yorkshire participated in a two-day residential in Cambridge. The residential included visiting Anglia Ruskin University where they learnt about higher education and had a tour of the Anglia Ruskin University campus. They then had a guided tour of historic Cambridge. The learners stayed in the University accommodation overnight to get a feel for student life and living with their peers. On day two the learners participated in a creative workshop led by Never Such Innocence, a charity dedicated to empowering military service children through creative mediums. The learners took part in a stop motion animation workshop, where they explored their voices, stories, and experiences through animation.

Learners completed a pre- and post-residential questionnaire and answered questions on a scale of 1-5 (strongly disagree to strongly agree). A paired samples t-test showed there was no significant difference in their expectation to attend higher education in future ( $t(12) = .805$ ,  $p = .436$ ;  $M_{\text{pre-residential}} = 4.00$ ,  $M_{\text{post-residential}} = 3.85$ ), and in their sense of belonging ( $t(12) = .912$ ,  $p = .380$ ;  $M_{\text{pre-residential}} = 3.85$ ,  $M_{\text{post-residential}} = 3.67$ ). However, there was a significant increase in their knowledge of higher education ( $M_{\text{pre-residential}} = 3.58$ ,  $M_{\text{post-residential}} = 4.12$ ) particularly in their self-reported understanding of what subjects you can study in higher education ( $t(12) = -2.809$ ,  $p = .016$ ).

## Beyond the Barracks

In collaboration with York St John University widening participation team, Beyond the Barracks is a pre-16 mentoring scheme working with military service children. Three secondary schools across North Yorkshire participated in the programme. The aim of Beyond the Barracks was to equip the learners with skills for their future and help them to recognise the skills they already have, including those they have gained from their experiences of being a military service child. Working with a Student Ambassador, learners discussed pathways into higher education, CV writing, wellbeing week, revision skills and life as a military service child. The project ended with participants from all three schools joining a HE campus visit, giving the learners an opportunity to tour the campus and meet other military service children from across the county. [Read the full report.](#)

## Spark Programme

Inspired by attendance at the Boys' Impact Conference in September 2024 and the work of its founder, Alex Blower, Inspiring Choices launched a new pilot programme, entitled the Spark Programme. Spark is directed at male learners in Year 11 that have become disengaged with their

education, acknowledging that working class boys are one of the lowest attaining groups at GCSE and are more likely to make decisions about their future later than their peers. Utilising the Taking Boys Seriously Principles (TBS) (Ulster University), the aim of Spark is to encourage boys to make considered and timely decisions about their future learning and recognise that they can be successful. Specific focus was placed upon their interests and local FE pathways. Spark was designed to prioritise a small group, allowing for positive relationships to develop. **[Read the full report.](#)**

## Young Carers Project

Learners who were identified as young carers from a North Yorkshire school participated in two campus visits at York St John University. During the first visit, learners participated in a workshop with the university's disabled student support and inclusion team where discussions were around the support young carers can receive at university. Learners received a campus tour led by student ambassadors and experienced lunch in the university canteen. Learners also participated in a beginners guide to higher education workshop where they explored what higher education is like and what it could offer them as young carers.

For the second visit to York St John University, learners participated in a workshop which covered accommodation options including living at home. Potential travel options and support options provided by different universities for young carers and commuter students were also discussed. Learners also engaged in a fun navigational task around York Museum Gardens, where they had to find and answer questions hidden around the garden. Learners received a small prize for their correct answers.

# Bespoke and Third Party Activity

## UCAS Application Support

We supported three care experienced learners with their UCAS application and personal statement over nine one-to-one sessions.

## CEIAG Interviews

We delivered eight one-to-one career, education, information, advice and guidance interviews with five learners.

## Talk the Talk

We funded three Talk about Communication sessions and two Talk about the Future sessions, engaging with 87 learners.

## Unifrog

We funded three online platform subscriptions to Unifrog which was used by 1177 learners.

## Careers Fairs

We attended 14 careers fairs and FE fresher's fairs and engaged with approximately 1190 learners.

## Mock Interviews

We attended eight Mock Interview sessions and our team delivered 247 one-to-one interviews.

## UCAS Talk

We delivered six sessions on how to completing a UCAS application to 110 post-16 learners.

## Creativity Lab

In collaboration with York Cares and the University of York, there were two visits to the Creativity Lab. The first visit included 19 Year 9 learners and the second visit included 15 Year 12 learners. Learners participated in a two-hour workshop in the Creativity Lab where learners were able to explore creative technologies and use handheld 3D printers and Lego building. The visit also included lunch in one of the university canteens and a tour of the university campus and a question and answer session with student ambassadors about university life.

The Year 9 learners completed evaluation postcards. All of the learners would recommend the activity to a friend and 89.5% said the activity helped them to think about their future. When asked to write one thing they had learned from the visit, 26.3% of learners mentioned the campus size and life at university, for example, "how university life works." A further 26.3% mentioned "history facts about the school," that they had learnt on the campus tour. Skills they had developed, such as "teamwork," and "how to animate," was mentioned by 21.1% of learners. The final 26.3% was also related to the campus tour and made a popular culture reference to "Long Boi."

## Destinations Festival

Inspiring Choices and partners hosted the first ever Destinations Festival, held on campus at York St John University. The festival was aimed at young people in Year 9 and above from any

background who have an interest in attending University and would like to know more information. The event was held out of term time so parents and carers were also welcome to attend the event. The festival included a range of activities, professionals from local colleges and universities shared their advice at careers stands, drop-in sessions provided support on how to apply for student finance, how to complete a UCAS application, and support for students eligible for disabled students' allowance (DSA), and taster sessions with the Policing department at York St John University. There were also other activities to get involved with like adding your own design to a collaborative art banner (with North Yorkshire Voice), creating hot water bottle covers (with charity Quilts for Care Leavers) and trying to set the fastest time on the rowing machine (with YSJ Active).

### **Parent of a Year 10 Learner:**

“For us, it really was a chance to step a toe in the water of what being at university would be like without the stress or time pressure that comes later down the line when you have to make those crucial choices and also in a less crowded environment than the Open Days aimed at Y12/Y13. It was also really good to see what was available on the doorstep which I think is relevant in the current economic climate and housing crisis where non-residential attendance with commuting might be the only option for some and something we as a family are certainly mindful of.”

## **Groundwork Project**

In collaboration with Groundwork Yorkshire, three schools across York and North Yorkshire participated in the Groundwork Project (15 Year 10's and two Year 9's). Throughout the six week project, learners worked with a member of the Groundwork team to transform an area of land on their school site or a neighboring site. Through completion of the project learners achieve a NOCN Level 1 award in Horticulture. The learners also completed coursework which included health and safety, soil types, using and maintaining hand tools. The aim of the project was to give learners who struggle to focus within a classroom the opportunity to gain a practical qualification, and to explore their post-16 options. To support with this aim, each school had a campus visit to Askham Bryan College, a specialist land-based and agricultural college in York, with a University Centre. This visit provided learners with an insight into what they could achieve with their horticultural qualification, and information on the range of courses and facilities they have on site. The visit included a guided tour of the grounds including the farm and wildlife park, and a frog dissection (Animal Science taster session).

### **Learner Interviews**

Learners participated in short one-to-one interviews. Here they expressed that they enjoyed being a part of the project, that they had fun, and some found it “better than school,” would “rather be out than in school,” and “do it everyday if I could.” Learners commented on new skills and knowledge they had gained, mainly around using tools and equipment correctly and safely, but also considerations they had to make such as “how to grow in different sections, so like the North bit of the garden.” The development of transferable skills such as teamwork, communication and listening skills were also mentioned. Some learners commented on how their experience in school had changed, for example “doing more days in school and less naughty,” others reported not being suspended, not getting into trouble, and being “a lot more chill.” Many of the learners had negative feelings around their GCSE exams, feeling nervous, worried, stressed and didn't want to do badly.

However, some learners said they felt good, alright and “pretty confident” they would get the results they need to progress.

### **Post-16 Options**

Participating in the Groundwork project has helped some learners with their post-16 options. One learner commented “I didn’t really know what I was doing, like, what I wanted to do before I did it [Groundwork Project], and then I started building and stuff and I just liked it, and then I thought of doing bricklaying.” Similarly, another learner said, it was “helping me choose what I want to do when I’m older. Either a joiner or a tree surgeon.” The project has made the learners more aware of the options available to them, “Yeah it’s made me like ‘oh wow’ sometimes I go on Google Maps looking at colleges and how they look and all that.” One said it hadn’t really helped as they were still unsure about what to do after Year 11. Whereas others had said “not really” because they knew what they wanted to do before participating, “I had the idea of working with animals before Groundwork.” Other examples included apprenticeships in a trade, gaming, and mechanics.

### **Higher Education**

Learners were unsure about progression to higher education, some had “not really thought too much about it.” One learner said it would depend on what they chose to do at college, another learner would possibly go and do a business course but wanted to stay local. Likewise, another student said they would not go to university as they did not want to move away from home. Other reasons for potentially not going to higher education included it being perceived as “more school,” going in to the family business instead, and not knowing enough about university to make a decision.

### **Heritage Project**

In collaboration with York Museums Trust (YMT), two learners from a school in North Yorkshire were invited to participate in four days of work experience. Working across YMT's three sites - York Castle Museum, the Yorkshire Museum, and York Art Gallery - the two learners had the opportunity to gain behind-the-scenes insight into the heritage sector. At York Castle Museum, the learners shadowed a visitor assistant working along Kirkgate, dressed appropriately in Victorian clothing, and were taught to handle museum objects whilst engaging with the public. During their day at the Yorkshire Museum, they received a tour of Museum Gardens, and put into practice their object-handling skills from their previous training. Whilst at the Art Gallery, the learners had the opportunity to work in retail, speak with curatorial staff, and ensure that the lighting and temperature were suitable for the artwork, giving them an understanding of how to care for a variety of collections. The work experience was an opportunity for young people to gain practical

### **Teacher:**

“We have had an array of children joining in, many of whom find it extremely difficult to easily communicate with adults they are not familiar with. Each and everyone of them have taken a shine to Steve [Groundwork Tutor] as he has such a way with them, he easily engages them in conversation and gets them involved.

Beyond that the project helps them all in different ways, not only have they gained skills and knowledge they will use throughout life, but confidence growth has been a massive thing. ...The visits to Askham Bryan have also opened up a whole new world for them and given them much to think about the opportunities they previously didn't know were available to them.”

work experience and discover the range of careers in the heritage sector.

### Learner 1:

“I never thought about uni before this. I've opened it as a possibility.”

The two learners completed reflective workbooks throughout the four days. Both learners suggested that the work experience had increased their knowledge of higher education and had helped them to explore their futures within higher education and employment. “I learned a lot on how if you have a degree it won't take you one place you can do many things with it.” “It has helped me a lot. The knowledge from others who have done higher education has been very useful. I got to understand that your degree or education won't mean you do exactly that, but it's your experience.”

Further, specifically around employment “My interest for a job in museums has been deepened by a lot and I really want to design costumes either for them or if I can't then theatres.” Learners stated the work experience has improved their communication skills and their confidence in communicating within a work place, “even though we only did a little - retail skills - watching somebody with a great amount of enthusiasm and confidence really helps, very important.” The learners mentioned gaining a greater understanding of the workplaces and differing job roles, and some practical skills such as object handling.

### Learner 2:

“It was very different [to what I expected] more interactive and I got more knowledge about how you do things or get into things [i.e. educational/career pathways] instead of just being the job. It was a real experience.”

## Project Dare

With facilitation from York Cares, there were two Project Dare programmes this year. Two different schools from North Yorkshire participated. The first programme was with Hiscox Insurance and 15 Year 12 learners participated, and the second was with Nestlé where 16 Year 10 learners participated.

The first day of Project Dare was hosted on a university campus. The first session of the day the learners hear about the company, the job roles within the company, and opportunities offered. Learners had the opportunity to ask current employees questions about their job roles and their educational journey to access the company (e.g., apprenticeship). The second session of the day the learners were set group tasks, such as developing a pet insurance product.

The second day for both Project Dares was spent on the company's premises. In the case of Hiscox, this was in their headquarters in the centre of York, and with Nestle, it was in their boardroom before being taken into the factory to see KitKats being produced. Learners then presented their work from the first day of the programme to a small team from each company and received feedback on their ideas and presentation skills. Both of the Project Dare programmes gave the learners insight into two very different organisations and what job roles and educational opportunities are available to their employees.

## STEM Conference

In collaboration with the National Railway Museum, the fourth annual STEM Conference provided



an opportunity for learners to learn about careers in STEM subjects and explore the museum's facilities. Three schools across North Yorkshire brought a total of 73 Year 9 learners. The morning included a carousel of three activities; i) a visit to the Wonderlab - an interactive and experimental gallery, ii) an employers fair featuring a model railway from Network Rail, some plants from Fera Science LTD, and robots from the Institute of Engineering and Technology, iii) a question and answer employer panel, featuring Anglo-American, Croda and Fera Science LTD who spoke about their education and careers and the various pathways you can take when working in STEM. In the afternoon, the museum Explainers provided another carousel of activities, i) a tour of the National Railway Museum, ii) a stop-motion Lego challenge, and iii) a fiery Wonderlab display around combustion engines.

## **Teacher CPD - Service Children Advocates Networking Event**

In collaboration with the York Service Pupil Liaison officer and North Yorkshire Service Pupil Champion, Inspiring Choices hosted a CPD event to bring together practitioners from schools, local services, and partner organisations to strengthen support for Service children across the region. Topics covered included an overview of the North Yorkshire Service Children's Promise, Supporting Transition to FE and HE, The Military Human, Support from the Wellbeing in Mind Trust, and The Service Child Lived Experience. The day finished with an opportunity for attendees to start writing an action plan for their own school settings.

The event was received well by attendees, who valued the opportunity to network and share ideas. They also reported an increased understanding of the support available for Service children and increased confidence in their roles within school. Suggestions for future CPD included more varied speakers, involvement from military welfare personnel, and continued training for both practitioners and school leaders.

# Collaborative Outreach

The Inspiring Choices programme operates as a collaborative network of universities, colleges, and other partners across York and North Yorkshire. It is delivered in partnership with both local and national organisations, with the core team based at York St John University.

The partnership in York and North Yorkshire includes

<b>Askham Bryan College</b>	<b>NYBEP</b>
<b>Catch Up®</b>	<b>The Brilliant Club</b>
<b>City of York Council</b>	<b>University of York</b>
<b>CU Scarborough</b>	<b>Whitby School</b>
<b>Groundwork Yorkshire</b>	<b>York Cares</b>
<b>National Railway Museum</b>	<b>York &amp; North Yorkshire LEP</b>
<b>North Yorkshire Council</b>	<b>York St John University</b>

## Programme Monitoring

As a condition of Uni Connect funding, the Office for Students require partnerships to track all learners engaged with their activity. This includes learners who live in both target and non-target wards. We are required to use an OfS-approved tracking service; Inspiring Choices use the Higher Education Access Tracker (HEAT). The HEAT service was developed by the sector to evaluate the efficacy of widening participation outreach teams. We have both Data Sharing and Service Level Agreements in place with our schools and colleges which details how we will collect this data to enable the required tracking. Participants are issued with our Privacy Notice so they understand how their personal data is being used. The tracking data enables us to understand how participation in Inspiring Choices activity impacts progression to higher education and is an essential part of evidencing the impact of Uni Connect.

### Social Media Links

 <https://www.inspiring-choices.co.uk/>

 @inspiring.choices.uc

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 **OfS Uni Connect  
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