



Inspiring Choices Stakeholder SWOT Analysis: Summary Report

24th February 2026

Overview

In February 2026, Inspiring Choices invited local stakeholders to an event hosted at York St John University to participate in a review of the Inspiring Choices programme. Stakeholders, who are made up of local universities, schools, colleges, local authorities and other local organisations, are crucial in supporting the local infrastructure of the programme. Therefore, they are best placed to provide a wide range of perspectives on the challenges and opportunities for delivering collaborative outreach in York and North Yorkshire.

The event had two key aims.

1. To set out the impact the programme has made since 2017, including providing recent HE Track data and a programme case study.
2. To conduct a SWOT analysis of the programme. Framing the discussion as a SWOT helped us to quickly understand what works well, identify what stakeholders value, what is getting in the way, and finally how stakeholders could work better and collaborate more effectively.

The purpose of the analysis was to answer the following two questions:

- **What opportunities are there to improve our outreach?**
- **What challenges do we need to address to improve our impact?**

Summary

Strengths

Stakeholders highlighted several strengths of the Inspiring Choices programme, including acknowledgement of its strong relationships, targeted support, and impartial delivery.

The programme was recognised for its impact on strategic groups, particularly military service children and care-experienced young people. Campus visits and personalised support, including 1:1 guidance for care leavers, were seen as highly effective in building confidence and aspirations. Stakeholders also emphasised the programme's role in connecting local and national partners and creating long-term relationships built on trust.

Weaknesses

Key weaknesses identified related primarily to communication challenges, inconsistent school engagement, and limited capacity/data availability. Stakeholders acknowledged that schools can often struggle to respond promptly or to identify the right contacts to lead programme activity, limiting effective delivery. It was noted that some sectors, notably FE colleges and groups such as unaccompanied asylum seekers, remained underserved in HE outreach.

Stakeholders noted that the ability to track young people's long-term outcomes has been limited due to data gaps, including restricted access to FE data. Geographical constraints across a large rural region was identified as a challenge to outreach coverage. It was also noted that some schools do not prioritise some strategic groups or do not fully understand the programme's aims, reducing buy-in.

Opportunities

Stakeholders identified a wide range of opportunities for future development of the programme. These include expanding the offer to new and underserved groups (e.g., NEET young people, military young carers, Children in Need/Child Protection cohorts) and enhancing post-16 and transition support.

There were also suggestions for how the programme could be delivered, for example developing longer-term programmes, bespoke interventions and mental health support. Stakeholders also suggested that policy shifts, including the new SEND regime and emerging youth strategies offer pathways to strengthen alignment with regional and national priorities. One example was an opportunity to access better data by using tools such as the RONI tool for identifying those at risk of becoming NEET.

Developing new partnerships, engaging new schools, and using champions or public advocates were also suggested as growth areas.

Threats

The most significant threats identified stem from funding uncertainty, policy changes, and logistical barriers affecting delivery. Specifically, schools' restricted timetables, staff shortages, school holidays, and transport limitations were identified as possible reasons that reduce the ability of young people to attend events. There were also external factors discussed, such as persistent absence, home education, and students moving mid-programme, that also threaten sustained delivery.

Stakeholders acknowledged a range of external threats, such as government policy changes and the ongoing uncertainty around the future of collaborative outreach that pose strategic risks. Locally, targeting the appropriate cohorts remains challenging, especially where schools do not clearly identify groups or hold sufficient wider contextual information.

Next steps

This report, which forms part of our wider stakeholder consultation work, will be an important addition to the growing evidence on effective collaborative outreach, as planned reforms are developed and implemented. This includes major structural changes and a new Theory of Change. Inspiring Choices will continue to collect the views of all stakeholders including, crucially, young people themselves to deliver our mission to support young people living in York and North Yorkshire to achieve their ambitions by helping remove academic and cultural barriers to higher education.

At the date of publication, the future of collaborative outreach remains uncertain, with the Office for Students having recently postponed the publication of outcomes from the recent call for evidence on regional access partnerships. Uni Connect funding is expected to roll forward for one year on the current model (subject to DfE).


You can view our wider stakeholder consultation work on our website [here](#).


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Inspiring Choices

Gateway House, York St John University, York, YO31 7EX

inspiringchoices@yorks.ac.uk

