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Evaluating Three Models of School–University Partnership at the University of York:

Learning Lessons and Planning for the Future

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The University of York Links Project team
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Conflicts of interest
The authors have no known conflicts of interest. In respect of the Advisory Group, Connie Cullen has responsibility for the three programmes being studied. Colin Mellors is Chair of Higher York (all Higher York partners collaborate on Green Apples), a Pro Vice-Chancellor of the University of York, and a member of HEFCE's Widening Access and Participation Strategic Advisory Committee.

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Background

Widening participation in higher education is widely regarded as valuable both socially and economically through reducing earning disparities, increasing high level skills in the population and contributing to social equality. It is seen as a key priority for higher education policy and a number of recent reports have focused on ways to widen participation, particularly for people from under-represented and disadvantaged communities, and to increase social mobility (HEFCE, 2007, The Panel on Fair Access to the Professions, 2009, Universities UK, 2009). This research explores the impact of three school–university link programmes from the experiences of school/college partners, and of University of York organisers. In particular, the role of appropriate, timely and effective Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) in young people's decision-making about participation in higher education has been highlighted as a key intervention (Foskett, 2004, NCEE, 2008, Pring et al., 2009). The many excellent existing partnerships between local universities, schools and colleges have been recognised, and models of school–university links, particularly those between individual schools with low progression rates and local universities, have been recommended (The Panel on Fair Access to the Professions, 2009).

This research is, therefore, very timely, especially its focus on three distinctive forms of school–university links. The programmes considered differ in their scope, focus and goals in ways that permit useful comparison and the potential for valuable learning.

The three programmes are:

1. **Green Apples** – a selective and targeted early-outreach programme provided in all York schools and offered by the University of York in collaboration with three other local further and higher education providers (York St John University, Askham Bryan College and York College), and guidance services. It aims to increase aspiration and improve progression, working mainly with pupils in Years 9–11.

2. **Durham Aimhigher** – supports a variety of activities provided by the University of York including residential experience for Year 10/11 pupils, healthcare days, visits for mature Access students and training for IAG staff. These aim to raise aspirations and widen participation in a geographical area very different from the City of York.

3. **University of York Schools and Colleges Network** (UYSCN) – a national, dialogue-based programme aiming to promote mutual understanding between the sectors; to assist better informed policy-making and mutual staff development; and to develop student aspiration and effective university applications. Intended to grow to a group of approximately 25-30 members, it started in 2008 with eleven schools and colleges spread across England and will double in size this year.

Our research questions are:
- *What is the impact of the three school–university link programmes – from the experience of school/college partners and University of York organisers?*

- *What are the advantages and disadvantages of each sort of link; and what are the factors that contribute to or inhibit success?*

The three main aims of the research are to:
- Understand and interpret stakeholders' perceptions of the three models of school–university links through focus groups and interviews with key personnel, with an emphasis on IAG issues (qualitative component).
- Consider levels of participation in each of the programmes and the University of York's spending, so as to move towards a measure of cost-effectiveness (quantified outcomes component).
- Disseminate the key findings and lessons from the research.

Methods

We have conducted the evaluation using a mixed methods approach that combines quantitative and qualitative outcomes. The quantitative element considers the numbers of school and college staff and students involved, and the University of York's direct costs. The qualitative element of the evaluation was achieved through the use of focus groups and in-depth interviews which sought to elicit the views and perceptions of the various stakeholders involved in all levels of the programmes.

In-depth interviews were undertaken with staff involved in the three programmes at both strategic and organisational levels:

- Directors of the programmes
- University-based programme co-ordinators
- Representatives from Aimhigher

These one-to-one interviews explored the roles of different partners, placing the programmes within a policy context. The aim was to understand the significance of the programmes with respect to policy objectives and strategic planning arrangements, and to identify opportunities and barriers to developing programmes from the perspectives of non-school partners. Although shared governance and curriculum development are not currently features of the link programmes investigated at this stage, it was seen as important to explore the interest that partners might have in developing the partnerships in these new directions in the future.

Focus groups involved head teachers and nominated contact teachers at the schools and, combined with the in-depth interviews, offer three case studies for analysis which help identify critical features that make each programme work.

The data from the focus groups and interviews were analysed jointly using Framework, a qualitative method designed by the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) for policy and evaluation analysis. As themes emerged during the analysis, they were developed iteratively to ensure that the views of the participants were comprehensively and accurately reflected. When writing up the results, efforts were made to ensure that all group and individual views were accurately and consistently represented; that all participants were given a voice in the discussion; and that explanations for phenomena

were sought. A clear evidential base drawn from the focus groups and interviews was established, to show the range and diversity of the accounts provided by participants.

The quantitative element of the research covers the levels of engagement with all elements of each of the programmes in terms of numbers of schools, individual pupils, teachers, head teachers or guidance staff involved. We also quantified the level of involvement of the University of York and other higher education partners in each of the programmes, with an associated average annual cost per pupil participating.

Results

The results present aspects of the data that relate to:

- Programme characteristics

    - Programme aims, activities and aims of the activities

    - Programme characteristics and uniqueness

    - Aspects of the programmes that do or do not work

- The aims of link programmes in terms of IAG

    - IAG for students in the short and long term

    - IAG in schools, provided by universities, provided by other organisations or provided informally

    - Best practice for IAG

- The aims of link programmes in terms of relationships

    - Why relationships are valued

    - The 'feelgood' factor

    - Shared improvement

    - Social contribution

- The aims of link programmes in terms of widening participation

- Selection criteria for the programmes

- Measuring the success of the programmes

- Best practice for school–university link programmes

- Barriers for school–university link programmes

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions: School–University Link Programmes

- The three school–university link programmes included in this evaluation are highly valued by those involved, demonstrating that good programmes provide benefits for all stakeholders, whether schools or higher education institutions.

- Effective programmes are individualised towards the community they are trying to serve and adaptable to changing circumstances or in response to demand.

- Trust between stakeholders is the foundation for a superior programme, which can help build a reputation for providing a high-quality experience. It is built up over time by establishing good relationships between stakeholders, although conflicts between stakeholders' goals can undermine trust.

- To build trust, programmes must have good communication between stakeholders. Quality can be increased through using feedback to inform programme development.

- Relationships are central to successful programmes.

- A programme's quality is strongly associated with the training and skills of those involved in providing it, particularly Student Ambassadors and Mentors.

- Residential visits, including an overnight stay, are effective at imparting condensed IAG into a short period, and can engage students with the idea of higher education through challenging inhibitions which may reduce aspirations.

- Adequate funding is crucial, particularly since having an individualised approach for schools is relatively resource-intensive.

- The central aim of school–university links is about providing IAG for higher education; that is where the expertise of higher education institutions can be most valuable to schools and colleges.

- Recruitment is part of the reason for providing these programmes.

- Widening participation is another aim, which can have two aspects. The first aspect is about improving progression by opening up higher education in general to any student. The second aspect is focussed on raising aspirations among potentially high-achieving students, whatever their social background, about going to the most competitive, academically-challenging, research-intensive universities.

- Shared governance, strategic planning arrangements, and curriculum developments were not highly cited by participants, suggesting that this type of situation is still relatively uncommon and that the arrangements are created *ad hoc*, in response to a particular need or when a particular situation arises.

- Programmes can provide social and local benefits far beyond their official stated aims.

Conclusions: Evaluation of School–University Link Programmes

- Programme evaluations will need to ensure a robust design, appropriate data collection and analysis, and methods to minimise biases that could undermine the conclusions for quantified impact assessments.

Recommendations: Key Challenges for the Three Programmes

- Green Apples – Effectively communicating the reasons and importance of the changes to the programme, managing their impact and getting buy-in from all stakeholders over the future of Green Apples should be a priority.

- Durham Aimhigher – In order to develop the relationship with Durham Aimhigher and the schools it should be a priority to identify innovative ways of providing different opportunities compared to what is available through other higher education institutions, such as through clear branding of York events and appropriate follow-up with the individual schools.

- UYSCN – The main challenge will be establishing trust between the stakeholders and building the relationships that will be central to the programme's potential future successes. Communication and clarification about the purpose of the programme is an identified need from this research.

Recommendations

- Implementation of the recommendations for best practice and efforts to reduce barriers that affect the quality of a programme and participation rates will help improve provision.

- School–university links can take on distinctly different structures; the right model for any programme will be one that is based on the needs of its recipients and is responsive and adaptable to the specific environment in which it operates.

- Programmes should work on promoting good communication and building trust between stakeholders to establish the close relationships which are central to a programme's success.

- Structures need to be built in to programmes for collecting data to allow for empirical, quantitative analyses of hard outcomes. This would also generate data that could be used for detailed cost-effectiveness analyses.

Background and Introduction

1. This research explores the impact of three school–university link programmes from the experiences of school/college partners, and of University of York organisers, to understand the advantages and disadvantages of each sort of link; and the factors that contribute to or inhibit success. This section discusses the motivations for running these types of programmes, with the importance of education and widening participation, looking at the role of Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) in young people's decision-making for higher education, and then presenting the rationale for the evaluation.

Education and Widening Participation

2. Widening participation in higher education is generally regarded as valuable both socially and economically by reducing earning disparities, increasing high-level skills in the population, and contributing to social equality. The societal benefits of having a highly educated population are also associated with individual benefits. For an individual, it has been estimated that the benefits of a degree on *"gross additional lifetime earnings is now approximately £160,000 or between 20 and 25%"* (Universities UK, 2007).

3. In terms of social and economic benefits, the Nobel prize-winning economist Amartya Sen has suggested that *"widening the coverage and effectiveness of basic education can have a powerfully preventive role in reducing human insecurity of nearly every kind"* (Sen, 2003). Along with reducing individual deprivation through personal innumeracy and illiteracy, and through creating opportunities for increasing lifetime earnings, Sen argues that education has become "globally necessary" because of changes in the type of employment available where the shift from subsistence agriculture to manufacturing requires a more educated workforce (Sen, 2003). He also argues that, socially, a lack of education leads to alienation of basic human rights and legal rights – particularly for women – class structure entrenchment, and a reduced ability to participate in political debates which weakens democratic processes; that education makes important contributions to public health programmes, reducing infant mortality, and even to world peace through mitigating the impact of religious extremism; and that education is closely associated with economic growth – it is an investment in "human capital" that leads to an increase in national outputs (Sen, 2003). Linked to this, education can contribute towards reducing income inequality, where *"it is clear that greater equality, as well as improving the whole population, is also key to national standards of achievement and how countries perform in lots of different fields"* (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009, p.29). Wilkinson and Pickett went on to identify associations with social problems from health and welfare to crime, drugs, anti-social behaviours, obesity, social anxiety and the loss of community.

4. In the UK policy arena, the most recent statement of the importance of participation and skills is to be found in the Leitch Report which makes a powerful case for the collective and individual benefits of higher-level learning and sets a target of 50 per cent for those in work having graduate level qualifications by 2020 (Leitch, 2006).

5. Against this background, a number of recent reports have highlighted ways to widen participation, particularly for those from under-represented and disadvantaged

communities where, despite many initiatives over recent years, much still remains to be done to raise both aspirations and achievements.

6. In 2007, the Higher Education Funding Council for England's (HEFCE) paper "Higher education outreach: targeting disadvantaged learners", provided guidance on effective ways to target outreach activities at people from communities under-represented in higher education, and re-defined the target group for Aimhigher and outreach activities (HEFCE, 2007). The document also aimed to make targeting more effective and included a methodology to facilitate this, and lastly set out a process for measuring the effectiveness of targeting.

7. More recently, the independent and cross-party Panel on Fair Access to the Professions recommendations included prioritising ways of increasing social mobility, through, for example, rebranding and reforming the Gifted and Talented Programme for learners aged 14–19, and introducing a national career mentoring scheme for young people by young professionals and university students (The Panel on Fair Access to the Professions, 2009).

8. Earlier this year, a Universities UK survey formed the basis of evidence submitted to the National Council for Educational Excellence (NCEE) (Universities UK, 2009). The survey found a degree of consensus on what appears to work well among the universities surveyed, and identified a number of key characteristics associated with successful participation (Universities UK, 2009). These included: effective strategic leadership; appropriate targeting, material and timing of interventions; sustained and strategic engagement with ease of access, sustained funding and timely information, advice and guidance; and the use of academic role models and experts, Student Ambassadors and master classes (Universities UK, 2009). Finally, the review highlighted the importance of evidence of success of school–university links and partnerships, in particular through feedback from relevant stakeholders and measurable outcomes (Universities UK, 2009).

The Role of Information, Advice and Guidance in Young People's Decision-making

9. In many studies, the role of appropriate, timely and effective IAG in young people's participation decision-making has been highlighted.

10. For the Nuffield Foundation's independent review of 14-19 education, Foskett (2004) studied the role of IAG in young people's participation decision making and noted that school–university link programmes can contribute towards reducing the negative perceptions about higher education that students may have acquired from other sources, through lack of experience and appropriate information (Foskett, 2004). However, he also concluded that *"IAG is challenged by the sheer complexity of choice beyond 16 and by the continuing tension between the need for young people to be informed and advised and the needs of institutions to compete for young people's choices in the education and training market place"* (Foskett, 2004, p.1).

11. In 2008, the NCEE recommended that widening participation programmes need to focus on raising the aspirations and attainment of young people from lower socio-economic groups who currently do not progress to higher education (NCEE, 2008).

Appropriate and timely IAG for young people is sometimes lacking, so school–university links are to be encouraged. Some of these links can help to raise aspirations about the potential to study at research-intensive institutions (NCEE, 2008).

12. The final report of the Nuffield Foundation's independent review of 14–19 education has recently been published (Pring et al., 2009). The aims of the review were very wide and looked at all elements of 14-19 education and training. As part of the review Wright (2005) conducted a literature review of young people's decision-making in 14–19 education and training. She concluded that alongside individual preferences and family and peer influences, schools have an important role in determining what happens to students at the end of compulsory education through IAG that is provided (Wright, 2005). The final report of the Nuffield Review concluded, amongst other things, that more effective IAG needs to be developed (Pring et al., 2009). It also highlighted the importance of "*strongly collaborative local learning systems*" involving higher education institutions (Pring et al., 2009).

13. The Panel on Fair Access to the Professions recognised the many excellent existing partnerships among local universities, schools and colleges and recommended models of school–university links, particularly those between individual schools with low progression rates and local universities (The Panel on Fair Access to the Professions, 2009). Additionally, the panel recommended that universities should work with schools to provide higher education-related IAG from primary school level onwards (The Panel on Fair Access to the Professions, 2009).

Evaluation of Three School–University Link Programmes

14. Our research is, therefore, timely, in its focus on three distinctive forms of school–university links. We have evaluated the effectiveness of the three programmes, identifying – from the experience of school and college partners as well as University of York organisers – the advantages and disadvantages of each sort of link, and the factors that contribute to or inhibit success. The three programmes differ in their scope, focus and goals in ways that permit insightful comparison:

15. **Green Apples** – a selective targeted early outreach programme provided in all York schools in collaboration with four local further and higher education providers (University of York, York St John University, Askham Bryan College and York College) and guidance services. It aims to increase aspiration and improve progression. Although it works mainly with pupils in Years 9–11, there is also some primary school activity and continued support into Years 12 and 13.

16. **Durham Aimhigher** – supports a variety of activities provided by the University of York including residential experience for Year 10 and 11 pupils, healthcare days, visits for mature Access students and training for IAG staff. These aim to raise aspirations and widen participation in a geographical area very different from the City of York.

17. **University of York Schools and Colleges Network** (UYSCN) – a new national, dialogue-based programme aiming to promote mutual understanding between the sectors; to assist better informed policy-making and staff development; and to develop student aspiration and effective university applications. It began in 2008 with 11 schools/colleges and has just expanded to include 26 members. Its national scope provides particular challenges. It is not primarily focused on widening participation

(WP), though for some member schools it is a particular issue. Improving IAG is a key objective, through links with teachers, to ensure they are up-to-date in their knowledge of higher education and admissions, and that they are confident in their use of school/college liaison services in higher education.

18. The three programmes are different: one is established, local to York and collaborative, aimed principally at younger learners; a second is brokered by Durham Aimhigher, and includes provision for mature students and staff, as well as pupil contact; whilst the third is national in its scope, a novel blend of policy forum and provision for pupils and staff.

19. The prominence of the University of York in the partnerships also differs: the University of York is one of four higher education partners – and the contract lead – for Green Apples; one of many higher education institutions inputting into the extensive Durham Aimhigher programme; and the sole higher education member of UYSCN. However, all three programmes are designed to broaden participation and create improved understanding between schools and the University of York's departments and senior management.

Research Question

20. Our research question is:

- *What is the impact of the three school–university link programmes – from the experience of school/college partners, and University of York organisers?*

- *What are the advantages and disadvantages of each sort of link; and what are the factors that contribute to or inhibit success?*

Aims

21. The three main aims of the research are to:

- *Understand and interpret stakeholders' perceptions of the three models of school–university links through focus groups and interviews with key personnel, with an emphasis on IAG issues (qualitative component);*

- *Measure outcomes, for example, levels of engagement with the programmes (quantified outcomes component);*

- *Disseminate the key findings and lessons from the research.*

22. The qualitative component describes schools' perceptions, attitudes, and desired outcomes; explores what schools/universities want from the partnerships; identifies how to encourage participation and engagement with schools; and investigates key factors in success and interprets the lessons for a wider audience. Throughout, the emphasis is on IAG, in particular on determining the schools' perspectives on how this aspect of the three link programmes could be improved.

23. Although the main focus of this research is to explore stakeholders' views and perspectives, the quantified outcomes measure actual levels of engagement and participation and combine this with a value-for-money analysis.

Methods and Analysis

Introduction: Rationale for the Methods

24. The evaluation uses a mixed methods approach that combines quantitative and qualitative outcomes. This approach takes the strengths of different research methods to provide a comprehensive and detailed examination of all aspects of these programmes, where any method alone would be insufficient. It allows the researchers to identify the most appropriate research method for each question that is being asked about the programme, as well as creating the opportunity for completeness by triangulation of results, helping to increase the validity and credibility of the research (Bryman, 2008).

25. The choice of design for each component of the research has been influenced by a pragmatic approach to identifying the best available method given the restrictions imposed on the research. The focus groups and in-depth interviews allow the investigators to probe deeply for meaning, providing a comprehensive understanding of how these programmes influence their participants.

26. Focus groups allow participants' answers to be qualified or expanded on, exploring topics in detail and providing rich data for analysis. They allow participants to focus on the aspects of a programme that are important to them, encouraging greater reflection and discussion, rather than the aspects that the researcher believes to be important (Mauthner, 1997, Stewart et al., 2007). This group dynamic encourages greater reflection and discussion, challenging pre-conceived ideas while demonstrating within-group differences where views differ (Mauthner, 1997, Stewart et al., 2007). Focus group sessions provide a more relaxed environment, encouraging participants to share ideas and experiences with each other, without attention being directed at any single individual (Peterson-Sweeney, 2005). From a researcher's point of view, focus groups collect a greater amount of data within a shorter timescale (Woolfson et al., 2006), a relevant consideration given the period of time available for this research. Focus groups are most appropriate when they are able to focus on a single and relatively narrow topic that all participants have experienced (Stewart et al., 2007); schools' experiences of these programmes is a clear example of this. Furthermore, focus groups can have direct benefits for participants (Gibbs, 1997), since contact with researchers in academic environments can reduce unfamiliarity with research, contributing towards further enhancing the impact of these programmes through building links directly with the schools, and raising awareness.

27. In-depth interviews are also a valuable method of data collection, allowing individuals the freedom to provide a detailed personal account of a situation from their own perspective (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003, Bryman, 2008). Providing some structure to the interview (termed "semi-structured", to distinguish it from unstructured and fully–structured interviews) in the form of a topic guide, takes advantage of the researcher's need to ensure that certain topics are discussed, while providing participants with sufficient flexibility to explore what they believe to be important (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003, Bryman, 2008). It also allows the researcher to probe responses in greater detail, and to respond to what participants are saying with further follow-up questions (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003, Bryman, 2008). While focus groups use the dynamic

between individuals to explore how their ideas develop during a discussion, individual in-depth interviews seek to obtain one person's views in greater depth and detail, to identify the factors underpinning them (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003).

28. Measuring the quantified outcomes of a programme is useful in terms of providing an objective analysis of impact. Such an analysis can complement the rich data obtained using qualitative methods (in this instance interviews and focus groups) to demonstrate that the perceived impact is measurable.

29. The cost-effectiveness analysis estimates the extent to which a programme is a good use of resources, enhancing the value of the analysis for decision-makers.

30. A protocol or plan of the research was written and circulated to our Research Advisory Group for comments, before ethical approval was sought from the University of York Humanities and Social Sciences Ethics Committee. We made the required clarifications and amendments to the protocol, and ethics approval was granted on 28/05/2009. The protocol and ethics approval were completed before commencement of the fieldwork.

In-depth Interviews

31. In-depth interviews were undertaken with staff involved in the three programmes at both strategic and organisational levels:

- Directors of the programmes;

- University-based programme co-ordinators;

- Representatives from Aimhigher

32. These one-to-one interviews investigated the roles of different partners, placing the programmes within a policy context. The aim was to understand the significance of the programmes to policy objectives and strategic planning arrangements, and to identify opportunities and barriers to developing programmes from the perspectives of non-school partners. Although shared governance and curriculum development are not specific features of the link programmes investigated at this stage, it was important to explore the interest that partners might have in developing the partnerships in these new directions in the future.

33. Each interview involved one participant and one interviewer. They took place face-to-face and were recorded for verbatim transcription. The interviews were semi-structured, based around a topic guide to ensure consistency between different interviewers.

Participants Identified

34. Interviewees were identified and selected to represent key providers from the three programmes, who were purposively sampled to ensure maximum variation and which included a representative sample of potential participants. This sample aimed to reflect the diversity of the roles of the participants within the programmes and to ensure that,

as far as possible, certain types of individual were not excluded from the sample (Kitzinger, 1995, Barbour, 2005).

35. For example, typical roles at a *strategic* level included individuals such as the Director of Admissions and Student Recruitment, Pro Vice-Chancellor with a remit for partnerships and widening participation, and Chair of the Area Partnership Committee York and North Yorkshire Aimhigher, and those who were involved with one or more of the programmes. Typical roles at an *organisational* level included individuals involved in the day-to-day management, co-ordination and organisation of the three programmes. Appropriate individuals were selected for interview at both strategic and organisational levels within Green Apples, Durham Aimhigher and the University of York Schools and Colleges Network.

Participants Approached

36. An initial letter of approach was sent out to the potential participants, to summarise the proposed research and invite their consent (Annex 2-4). As needed, individuals were followed up by telephone or email to confirm receipt of the letter, and to ask whether they would consider participating in the research.

Participants Recruited

37. Participants were recruited from all three programmes. Each step of the recruitment process was recorded, including a log of all contacts, to establish a rigorous audit trail and secure the informed consent of the participants.

38. The in-depth interviews sought to recruit around 10-12 participants, with around four from each programme, providing a representative sample of strategic and organisational levels for all the programmes. Some participants, because of the nature of their work, are involved in more than one of the programmes, so their views on all relevant programmes were explored during the one interview.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

39. Participants were included if they have a key role in the relevant programmes, and if they were willing to participate in the research. The typical roles are described above. Participants were identified and selected as described, using purposive sampling for maximum variation.

40. Teachers and head teachers from the schools involved in the programmes were excluded from the potential participants for the in-depth interviews, since they would have had an opportunity to express their views during the focus groups, unless there was sufficient justification that an individual has an important role elsewhere in one of the programmes to merit a one-to-one interview.

Focus Groups

41. Focus groups were held with head teachers and nominated contact teachers at the schools which, combined with the in-depth interviews, provide three case studies for

analysis to identify critical features that make each programme work. These focus groups were described as 'conferences', with one conference being conducted for each of the three programmes. Each conference consisted of a presentation to participants about the aims of the programmes and the research, before dividing into focus groups for the discussion. Estelle Morris (former Secretary of State for Education and currently chair of the Institute for Effective Education Strategy Board) opened one of the conferences and spoke at another. Participants were invited to an after-school event either at the University of York or in Durham (depending on the programme).

42. Each focus group had two moderators (VH and HA; VH and JB-M; HA and CT; VH and JH; HA and CT for the five focus groups which are described later), as recommended in the literature (Gibbs, 1997, Kennedy et al., 2001, Gibson, 2007, Peterson-Sweeney, 2005). The purpose of the first moderator is to focus on facilitating the discussion, while the second is there to take charge of the recording, take notes, deal with logistics and see to any other needs of the participants or any interruptions (Kennedy et al., 2001, Gibson, 2007, Peterson-Sweeney, 2005).

Participants Identified

43. Participants were identified and selected from among the schools participating in the three programmes. The aim was to purposively sample for maximum variation (Kitzinger, 1995, Barbour, 2005). Individuals were actively selected based on known characteristics, to reflect the diversity of the group or groups they represent, and ensuring that as far as possible, certain groups were not excluded from the sample. The research attempted to include a representative sample of schools. The groups were relatively homogeneous, because of the official roles of those taking part – having homogeneous groups can be an advantage since it can contribute towards a more productive discussion (Stewart et al., 2007).

44. Each of the three programmes selects and recruits schools using different processes. The Green Apples programme is open to all post-16 institutions in York, and includes 10 institutions. The Durham Aimhigher programme looks at the higher education participation rates of all post-16 institutions in the Durham region, and institutions with low higher education participation rates are then particularly targeted for involvement with the programme. The University of York Schools and Colleges Network (UYSCN) is a new programme. Initially, eleven schools of interest were invited by the University of York to take part in the programme, although it will be expanding from this year. Schools and colleges were selected to be broadly representative of the University of York's undergraduate intake. The selection criteria included institutions of different types, different geographical locations and other features of interest such as an ethnically diverse student population; criteria for membership were multifaceted and included factors such as widening participation, increasing diversity, encouraging aspirations, and improving IAG.

Participants Approached

45. An initial letter of approach was sent out to the named-contact teachers and head teachers of schools, which summarised the proposed research and invited their consent (Annex 5-7). As required, individuals were followed up by telephone or email

to confirm receipt of the letter, and to ask whether they would consider participating in a focus group during the conference.

Participants Recruited

46. Participants were recruited from across all schools participating in the three programmes. Each step of the recruitment process was recorded, including a log of all contacts, to establish a rigorous audit trail for the focus groups and secure the informed consent of the participants.

47. The focus groups sought to recruit around 6–8 participants to each group. While focus groups can be smaller and larger than this, a smaller group may not provide the same level of dynamic interaction between participants while a larger group can be intimidating for some participants. It has also been suggested that studies should over-recruit by two participants per group, to account for no-shows (Peterson-Sweeney, 2005).

48. There was also a verbal reminder at the start that the focus groups are taking place. This gave participants a further opportunity to ask for information about the research, and to reconfirm their consent to participate, or to retract it if they wished.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

49. Participants were included if their schools are participating in the relevant programmes. Participants were identified and selected as described, using purposive sampling for maximum variation. Participants were included on the basis of their willingness to participate in the research; there were no explicit exclusion criteria. If a school had taken part in any relevant activities their contact teacher and head teacher would be eligible to be included in the focus groups.

Quantified Component

50. The quantified component measured the levels of engagement with all elements of each of the programmes in terms of numbers of schools and individual pupils involved. We also reported the budget for each programme, with an associated average annual cost per pupil participating. Providing an accurate account of costs was difficult since only part of the expenditure was within the University of York.

Ethics

Qualitative Focus Groups and In-depth Interviews

51. The research observed all the standard ethical considerations. In terms of consulting with concerned communities during the course of the research, all contacts between the researchers and those affected by the programmes were used as an opportunity to solicit feedback and to ask questions. The focus groups and the planned in-depth interviews were explicitly intended as opportunities for obtaining feedback about the programmes and about the research, to inform their development (Annex 8).

52. For participants, the predictable risks and inconvenience of undertaking this research were low compared to the potential benefits. The conferences were designed to disrupt other activities as little as possible, and to minimise any inconvenience to participants. The research team anticipated that, through close contact, providing information and building relationships with the teachers and stakeholders, we would gain their support and interest in the research, which would in turn help minimise any feelings of inconvenience. In this way, the researchers planned to emphasise to the participants that since they can have a role in influencing how activities develop in the future, there should be direct benefits which will outweigh the commitments involved in taking part. As part of this aim, at the start of each of the conferences, a short presentation was given to the teachers and head teachers. The presentation explained the aims and structure of the research, how the programmes would be evaluated, and how the participants could help with the evaluation by providing feedback during the focus groups. The research team were then available to talk to the teachers and head teachers, and to answer any questions they had.

53. To control for potential 'researcher effects' or 'researcher bias' an independent Advisory Group was put in place to help guide the research. The researchers themselves are independent of the three programmes, and do not have an interest in influencing the results. To control for potential bias in data collection and analysis, the research team collectively analysed the data, with advice and support from expert members of the Advisory Group where appropriate. The data for all the analyses were anonymised as early as possible, and the analysis was blind (as far as possible).

54. Data processing and management abide by current data protection regulations. All electronic data are stored on secure servers that are password protected, with access by the named researchers only. All participants were given a unique number. Names are stored separately from results.

55. Focus group and individual in-depth interviews were transcribed anonymously and the interviewees' identities protected. Their names have not been reported at any stage, and potentially identifying remarks have been removed from the transcripts. Institutions have been identified by category alone to maintain anonymity. Personal details have been securely retained for contact purposes only and all information collected about participants during the course of the research has been kept strictly confidential and anonymous. The only people who have had access to participants' identities are the named researchers who ensured that steps were taken to maintain security and confidentiality. Recordings and paper copies of the transcripts are stored in a locked filing cabinet in the chief investigator's office and will be destroyed when no longer required. Access to data stored on computers is password restricted to the researchers. Data will be stored until the project is completed in its entirety and then disposed of securely or archived, as appropriate. Electronic data will be retained on the secure servers at the University of York indefinitely.

56. Participation in the focus groups and in-depth interviews was entirely voluntary, and participants were able to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. It did not affect their ability to participate in the three programmes, or any other activities. Consent was therefore ongoing throughout the research.

Consent: Focus Groups and Interviews

57. After they were identified, potential participants were sent a covering letter, information sheet and consent form for the focus groups and for the interviews (see attached annexes). To participate, they needed to sign and return the consent form prior to the start of the focus group or to the date of the interview. If this consent form was not completed and returned prior to the event, then the participant was not be able to take part in the research. Contact details were provided on all the paperwork, and the researchers were available by telephone and email to answer any further questions about the research. If consent forms were returned participants were politely followed-up by telephone, email, or through schools, where possible, prior to the date of the event.

58. Consent was considered to be ongoing throughout the research, and could be withdrawn at any time without giving a reason or suffering any consequences.

59. At the start of each event, there was a verbal reminder that the research was taking place, which gave participants an opportunity to reconfirm their consent or ask questions. There was also a brief introduction to the research at the start of each focus group, reiterating what participants had agreed to and giving the opportunity to ask any further questions.

60. For those wanting any further information, contact details were provided on all the paperwork; and the researchers were available by telephone and email to answer any further questions about the research. All contacts with participants, or schools, were recorded for audit purposes.

Ethics: Quantitative Outcomes

61. Data were collected from the University of York datasets on each of the programmes. In the quantified outcomes section of our report we describe the overall levels of engagement with each of the three programmes. We have not requested consent from the schools involved to report their data in the report, but as no schools, teachers or individual pupils are named, we do not consider that there are any ethical issues arising from this aspect of the research.

Dissemination

62. A stakeholder summary of the report will be disseminated to all relevant stakeholders. This will include good practice guidelines for higher education institutions on the range and timing of activities valuable in partnership development. The findings will be drawn together to identify the elements of successful school–university partnerships, which can be applied to existing programmes and evaluated using empirical methods in the future.

63. By reporting back to the schools, it may help schools in implementing the effective characteristics for a wider range of pupils, if the school is keen to develop its own programme. The research will also provide benefits to the universities involved, guiding the design of similar programmes in the future, as well as for other organisations running these programmes.

64. For the University of York, the findings will crucially influence the development of UYSCN and inform future commitment to Aimhigher programmes. For the higher education sector as a whole, it is hoped that this research can shed light on some of the current issues in widening participation: how links can be most effective, how parents can be reached, whether targeted or whole year group experiences are preferred, and how effective IAG can be supported.

Analysis of Focus Groups and Interviews

Participant Characteristics: Interviews

65. From the potential participants approached, there was an exceptionally good response rate, with 10 out of the potential purposive sample of 12 agreeing to be interviewed. A total of 10 participants were interviewed: three strategic, two strategic and organisational, and five organisational (Table 2-1). For the convenience of the participants, participants 6 and 7 were interviewed together in a joint interview since their roles and responsibilities significantly overlapped for all three Links programmes. Because of the time constraints of the project, more interviews were conducted than it was possible to analyse. For the analysis, one strategic-level and two organisational-level interviews were held back for later analysis, should resources permit. These were interviews 3, 5 and 9. These were strategically selected by the research team after extensive discussion in order to maintain the maximum variation of the sample, so that it would continue to reflect the full diversity of the views of the participants.

Interview	Links programme(s)	Role	Included in analysis?
1	**Green Apples, Durham Aimhigher, UYSCN**	**Strategic**	**Y**
2	**Green Apples, Durham Aimhigher, UYSCN**	**Strategic**	**Y**
3	Green Apples, Aimhigher	Strategic	x
4	**Durham Aimhigher**	**Organisational**	**Y**
5	UYSCN	Organisational	x
6 (joint)	**Green Apples, Durham Aimhigher, UYSCN**	**Strategic and Organisational**	**Y**
7 (joint)	**Green Apples, Durham Aimhigher, UYSCN**	**Strategic and Organisational**	**Y**
8	**Green Apples**	**Organisational**	**Y**
9	UYSCN	Organisational	x
10	**UYSCN**	**Organisational**	**Y**

Table 2-1: Interview participants

66. Participants were interviewed either in their own office, where possible, or in a quiet room arranged by the interviewer in the Institute for Effective Education. All interviews

were face-to-face, and lasted between 40 minutes and two hours, depending on the amount of involvement a participant had with the programmes. Participants involved with the greatest number of programmes had the longest interviews, since all three programmes were discussed during the single interview. Every effort was made to fit these interviews conveniently into the schedules of the participants, and to accommodate any requests.

Participant Characteristics: Focus Groups

67. Five focus groups were conducted overall (Table 2-2). A single opportunity was arranged for each programme, and focus groups were organised around who was able to participate. Because of this, the characteristics of each event were slightly different, as described earlier.

68. As with the interviews, because of the time constraints of the project, more focus groups were conducted than it was possible to analyse. For the analysis, one of each of the Durham Aimhigher and UYSCN focus groups were held back for later analysis, should resources permit. These were DAimH2 and UYSCN2 in the table below. These were strategically selected by the research team after extensive discussion in order to maintain the maximum variation of the sample, so that it would continue to reflect the full diversity of the views of the participants and to maintain a perspective on all of the programmes.

Focus Group	Links programme	# in group	Roles	Included in analysis?
DAimH1	**Durham Aimhigher**	**7**	**Head teacher, Assistant Heads, Aimhigher Co-ordinators, and Aimhigher Mentors**	**Y**
DAimH2	Durham Aimhigher	6	Head teacher, Assistant Heads, Aimhigher Co-ordinators, and Aimhigher Mentors	x
GA	**Green Apples**	**4**	**Heads of Year, and Link Contact Teachers**	**Y**
UYSCN1	**University of York Schools and Colleges Network**	**6**	**Assistant Principals, Head of 6th form, Careers Leader, and Programme Manager**	**Y**
UYSCN2	University of York Schools and Colleges Network	5	Principal, Head and Deputy Head of 6th forms, Course Leader, and Student Welfare Officer	x

Table 2-2: Focus Group participants

69. Recruitment for the Green Apples event was lower than for the two other programmes for a number of reasons. In part, the time of year reduced availability because of exams in schools. The UYSCN event "piggybacked" onto a larger one-day event that

members were invited to, which helped increase attendance. In Durham, the event was facilitated by the local Aimhigher Project Manager, who had a close relationship with the invitees. Despite these differences, the Green Apples focus group was one of the most successful, with participants eager to discuss the programme with each other, and to exchange ideas about the latest developments.

Themes from Focus Groups and Interviews

70. The data from the focus groups and interviews were analysed separately using Framework, a qualitative method designed by the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) for policy and evaluation analysis. Framework is "targeted towards providing 'answers' about the contexts for social policies and programmes and the effectiveness of their delivery and impact" (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003, p.201). This approach is associated with thematic analysis, where central themes are developed a priori and identified from the data during the analysis, then organised using a matrix-based structure to arrange and synthesise (Bryman, 2008). The a priori themes were developed through familiarity with the topic guide, as well as with reference to the broader literature, to the funder's guidelines for the research, and from consultation with key stakeholders about their interests.

71. As themes emerged from the data during the analysis this framework was modified to ensure that it comprehensively and accurately represented the views of the participants. When writing up the results, efforts were made to ensure that all group and individual views were accurately and consistently represented; that all participants were given a voice in the discussion; and that explanations for phenomena were sought. A clear evidential base drawn from the focus groups and interviews was established to show the range and diversity of the accounts provided by participants. Deviant cases were scrutinised for explanations. Verbatim quotation is used and anonymously attributed. All identifying remarks or features have been removed and excluded from any materials or documents prior to dissemination, if they were not already removed prior to the data analysis. Finally, the separate analyses have been combined, to contrast the perspectives provided by schools and by other stakeholders.

72. This generated the following themes (Figure 2-1):
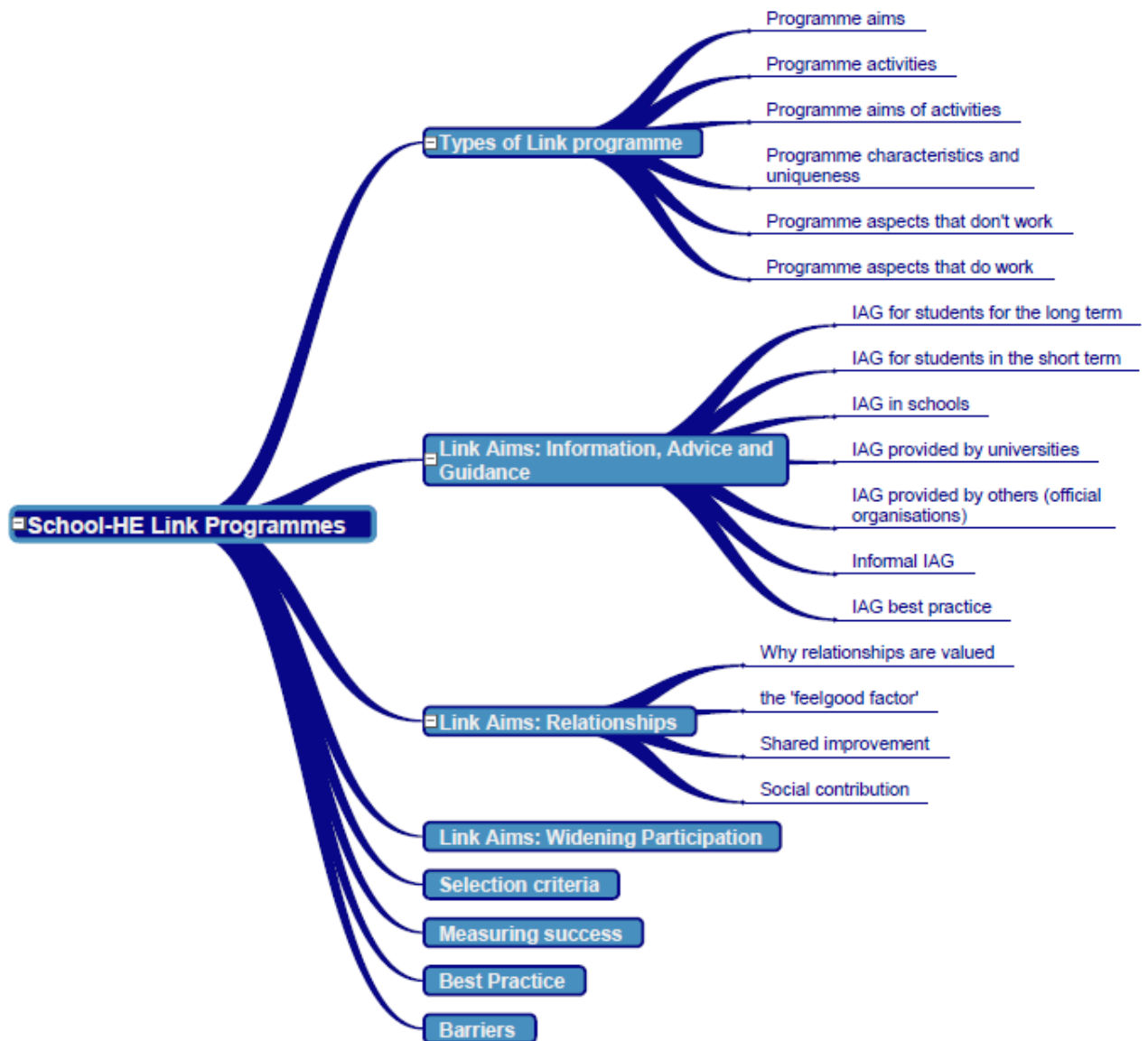
Figure 2-1: Themes

73. These have been illustrated using the MindGenius programme (MindGenius Ltd). The definition for each of these themes for the coding of the data is attached in Annex 9, and the analysis in the next chapter of this report follows the structure in this figure.

Quantitative Data Collection

74. Quantified outcomes for each of the programmes were collected from the strategic and organisational leads at the University of York, and are presented in Section 3.11.

Results and Dissemination

75. Quotations are verbatim, reporting participants' exact words as recorded during the interviews and the focus groups. This is to ensure the quotations closely reflect what participants said, retaining their personal linguistic characteristics, so hesitations and repetition are included although remarks have been lightly edited for clarity.

76. An ellipsis … indicates where a participant has paused to collect their thoughts.

77. Square brackets [ ] indicate where text has been changed to clarify a quote or remove an identifying remark. For example, an ellipsis in square brackets […] indicates that text has been removed from the quotation.

78. A simplified distinction between participants is that programme providers were interviewed and programme recipients took part in focus groups.

79. In the discussion, the points raised were frequently common to all three programmes and so have been combined under general headings.

The Three Links Programmes: Programme Aims

80. As described earlier, the three programmes have quite different structures in terms of how they function, although there are numerous similarities in the aims, the activities available, and the type of information provided.

> *"It's about giving* [students] *more information to make an informed decision about whether or not they might want to go to university one day in the future. And it does that in a way that gives them insight into what happens in university."* [Interview 8, paragraph 7]

> *"To raise their... knowledge, but their aspirations for higher education. Not necessarily in York."* [Participant A, interview 6&7, paragraph 7]

> *"It's a combined programme of academic activity; and social activity; and information advice and guidance; careers."* [Participant B, interview 6&7, paragraph 176]

Green Apples: Aims

> *"The idea of the programme was to ensure that pupils in York schools who were able to benefit from higher education knew enough about the higher education opportunities available to them, to aspire to them. So it was a classic widening participation programme."* [Interview 1, paragraph 8]

81. Green Apples is the longest running programme, and while the aims still focus on aspiration and awareness raising, it has altered over time as funding sources have changed (discussed further in the section on Selection Criteria). It is a collaborative effort between the four further and higher education providers in York (University of York, York St John University, Askham Bryan College and York College). Overall, the programme is extremely popular and highly valued by those involved.

"We've all seen it being such a good thing." [Participant A, Green Apples focus group, paragraph 108]

"On the whole, teacher feedback on all the activities that we do is very positive." [and] *"Teachers have really bought-in to the programme, and feel that it's a worthwhile project for all the students."* [Interview 8, paragraph 15]

"Green Apples is, I think, unusually good and well regarded and strong." [Interview 2, paragraph 72]

"B: I think it's a very, very well thought of scheme in all our schools.
A, C: Yeah, yes, yes"
[Participants A, B & C, Green Apples focus group, paragraphs 310-311]

82. Schools are able to select up to 20 students to take part annually:

"It's not for all students, but it's for students who have some ability but maybe don't have the confidence, because they don't have any knowledge about higher education. And so it introduces them to university through a series of activities." [Interview 8, paragraph 7]

83. The basic programme is for students in Years 9–11, with a Year 9 Celebration Day which includes parents and a visit to one of the further or higher education providers; a Year 10 Residential at the University of York and York St John University; and a Year 11 one-day or half-day event (this has changed over time). Additionally, schools may be offered occasional workshops around IAG, and this year funding has become available to do some activities with Year 7 students in a sub-set of the schools, as well as weekly visits for one school.

"This year, we have an enhanced programme where Connexions[1], we have a Green Apples Connexions adviser who is working with the four Aimhigher schools involved with Green Apples to deliver some extra sessions in school just for the Green Apple students. And that's trying to meet the need of delivering them the IAG that they need in schools but also continuing the Green Apples scheme in between the larger events each year." [Interview 8, paragraph 13]

84. Recent changes to Green Apples have, in part, come about because of changes in the funding source for the programme. Feedback from participants indicated that the change to Green Apples funding followed recommendations from HEFCE and Aimhigher for more precise targeting of widening participation project funding. Only four of the 10 schools in York participating in Green Apples lie within areas of multiple deprivation, and it appeared that those schools received full funding to allow continuing access to the Year 10 residential. The four higher education providers in York decided to continue to offer the day events to the other six schools by defraying the event costs from core widening participation budgets, while asking the schools to cover their own transport costs and any necessary supply cover. Also, for one year (2008/9) outside funding was obtained which made it possible to offer the Year 10 residential event to these six schools. The future of this Year 10 Residential is in doubt unless extra external funding can be secured to pay to let all the schools send their Green Apples students. Participants were anxious to retain this element of the programme.

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[1] Connexions: multi-agency government-provided service offering IAG to young people age 13-19.

"D: But it was under threat for this year until we all said, you know, this is a real experience...
C: Well it is, yeah, absolutely
D: ...and if Green Apples is to try and provide as near a possible experience of life on a university campus then the overnight stay has got to be...
C: Got to be.
D: ...an integral part of it."
[Participants C & D, Green Apples focus group, paragraphs 37-41]

85. Participants and providers were also sensitive to wider risks to what is perceived as a successful programme as a consequence of funding constraints. The reduction in activities offered to some schools lead to participants expressing their concerns about the school's ability to continue to take part in something they feel is enormously beneficial for their students, as well as for the school as a whole. Also, there was clearly a significant amount of communication between the schools about Green Apples, so participants were extremely aware of the differences between what was being offered to the schools.

> *"C: They have to fund it properly. It's as simple as that, as it is, you're right; it's going to die, isn't it.*
> *D: You're all being pessimistic!*
> *A: Well, I think part of the fact* [is] *that we do think so highly of it. That we are quite downhearted about it, you know."*
> [Participants A, C & D, Green Apples focus group, paragraphs 106-108]

> *"It could be a big impact if it continues in the way that it is at the moment. I think if schools know that the residential is going to consistently not be part of the programme then it might not be as an attractive package as it has been in the past. And I think students lose out as well."* [Interview 8, paragraph 25]

86. Along with the issues around the selection criteria, one of the recurring challenges faced by this programme is getting the timing right for the events. The gap between the Year 9 events and the Year 10 residential is generally felt to be too long while, because of the other pressures on Year 11 students, it is hard to find the right time of year and the right style of event to provide (ie whether a full day, half day, or evening; and which day of the week). There was little consensus about ways to resolve these challenges.

> *"Most of the schools find there's a big drop in take-up in Year 11, and so a lot of them don't get that Year 11 experience. I haven't got an ideal answer about how you'd do... how you could possibly change that, but I think that is the least successful."* [Participant B, Green Apples focus group, paragraph 82]

87. Another challenge which can arise relates to the practical details of organising a programme across the four different institutions and ten schools:

> *"You have to be extra... organised in terms of, you know, linking with the schools to make sure they know what's going on. And that can sometimes be a bit of an issue."* [Participant A, interview 6 & 7, paragraph 246]

88. In part, this arises because the further and higher institutions can have differing agendas because of the different age groups that they are targeting.

89. Despite such challenges, participants were positive about the ability of the programme to adapt to the needs of the recipients:

> *"The University of York has been doing this for such a long time. And they do it with, not just with our group, but lots of others as well, that their programme is really, really fine tuned. And it gives them the information. It gives them the experience of going to somewhere new."* [Participant B, Green Apples focus group, paragraph 77]

> *"We strive to deliver all of whatever the teachers ask us for, we try to provide, and so we always listen to their feedback, and so I feel that the programme meets the needs of, you know, the teachers* [by] *providing progression opportunities to the students."* [Interview 8, paragraph 15]

90. Among the students chosen for the programme, there was also evidence that it was highly regarded:

> *"Green Apples now has its reputation, and as soon as they're chosen as a Green Apple, then people from other years tell them what's going to happen, and that's what they're coming for."* [Participant B, Green Apples focus group, paragraph 88]

91. Because of factors such as this, stakeholders felt the need to try to maintain a programme that was as similar as possible to the previous version:

> *"Because Green Apples is so ingrained in York schools, in all ten senior secondary schools, the* [Green Apples] *partnership felt it very important to continue the project for all schools rather than just cut down to the four."* [Interview 8, paragraph 21]

Summary: Green Apples Aims

- Green Apples focuses on aspiration and awareness-raising for students in local York secondary schools in Years 9–11.

- Overall, this established programme is extremely popular and highly valued by those involved, both schools and the pupils who take part.

- Funding constraints have led to a reduction in activities offered, although there is enthusiasm across the partnership to try to find ways of maintaining the current portfolio of activities.

- There are inevitable practical challenges in organising a programme by four providers across ten local schools.

Durham Aimhigher: Aims

> *"Durham Aimhigher fits into the national structure of what Aimhigher is about in that it is about raising the aspirations of young people who have the potential to go to university but for whatever reason... have not necessarily considered it."* [Interview 4, paragraph 11]

92. The association with Durham Aimhigher came about through a specific personal connection:

> *"The relationship is based largely on the relationship with* [name] *and her network of contacts there."* [Participant B, interview 6 & 7, paragraph 45]

93. The relationship is based on the fact that individuals at the University of York have a personal connection with Durham Aimhigher, and schools in the Durham area have a connection with Durham Aimhigher, but the University of York itself does not have a direct link with schools around Durham, instead it is mediated through Durham Aimhigher.

94. This link has led to three different types of activity connected to the University of York:

- Residential with Year 10 and subject-specific activities with Year 11 students;

- Subject-specific one-day events for mature Access students (with York St John University);

- One-day event for Careers Advisors and Personal Advisors.

> *"Aimhigher isn't specifically about raising achievement, it's raising aspiration... we hope that through raising aspirations, achievement will also be raised, and I think that's something that schools tend to focus in."* [Interview 4, paragraph 17]

95. Since this link is based on relationships, the activities are individually developed through discussions between staff at the University of York and Durham Aimhigher, and have grown organically as new needs have been identified.

> *"We do certainly get feedback which is extremely positive about the York experience. It's probably too soon to see whether or not they end up applying to York, but that really isn't the purpose of it. You know, the purpose of it is that they think about university and consider themselves seriously as potential university students."* [Participant B, interview 6 & 7, paragraph 47]

96. Durham Aimhigher's programme is relatively centrally organised, with schools offered a 'menu' of opportunities to select from. While this means that funding for the programme is retained centrally, rather than being distributed to schools (as other areas have chosen to do), it has also reduced the burden on schools to individually arrange for activities for their students.

> *"When we started up Aimhigher in Durham we had lots of discussions about what we thought would be the most appropriate way to do it here... given that it's a national programme* [where] *each Aimhigher partnership runs things very differently according to what works best for them."* [Interview 4, paragraph 13]

"G: Because of the way the funding is done now, and the money is held centrally, and events put on that you can go to. And that's great. But it's cut back on that little bit of flexibility as individual schools would have had. So, in an ideal world we would like to do what we're doing this year and also have some finance to be able to choose ourselves on what I think a good Aimhigher activity is.
D: 'Because you could include more students …"
[Participants D & G, Durham Aimhigher focus group, paragraphs 542-548]

97. The feedback from participants about the programme and the activities that Durham Aimhigher offered was extremely enthusiastic:

"A: We've had a visit this year to [university name] *and like you say it's just well organised, very personable, for staff and students, and it improves their aspirations for going into further education whereas some of them have never thought about it before.*
G: And it's also an opportunity for students to do things at the school in general which they probably wouldn't be able to do."
[Participants A & G, Durham Aimhigher focus group, paragraphs 27-29]

"I think these opportunities are absolutely fantastic." [Participant D, Durham Aimhigher focus group, paragraph 35]

98. As with Green Apples, any challenges for the programme were not intended as criticisms of the programme itself, but of the selection criteria used:

"The complaint I've got is not anything to do with Durham Aimhigher […] *We still have, in our school, a good percentage of students that you can't put on activities for, because there are not enough places because there's not enough finance. And you're having to make a judgement really on which case deserved to go, and which kids don't deserve to go."* [Participant G, Durham Aimhigher focus group, paragraph 162]

99. From the discussion, it emerged that for the providers there was a strong personal link between the organisations, but for the recipients it was not clear that York was distinguished by Aimhigher members as any different to the many other higher education institutions who also provide activities through Aimhigher. Schools felt that they did have personal relationships with some higher education institutions, but York was generally not among those listed. In terms of developing this type of relationship with schools through Durham Aimhigher, the main consideration should be how it would affect outcomes for the students involved.

> **Summary: Durham Aimhigher Aims**
>
> - Durham Aimhigher activities are individually developed through discussions between staff at the University of York and Durham Aimhigher, and have grown organically as new needs have been identified.
>
> - This programme focuses on three types of activity: Residential with Year 10 and subject-specific activities with Year 11 students; Subject-specific one-day events for mature Access students (with York St John University); one-day event for Careers Advisors and Personal Advisors
>
> - The feedback from participants about the programme and the activities it offered was extremely enthusiastic.

University of York Schools and Colleges Network (UYSCN): Aims

100.   UYSCN is a new and novel type of links programme for the University of York. To create this national network, schools have been invited to join based on whether they are 'top senders' of students, as well as whether they contribute to widening participation and social diversity, with a view to UYSCN being broadly representative of the student profile at York. The programme has just completed its first year, with 11 schools taking part, although the intention is to expand the programme up to 30-40 schools over the next two years. Its aim is to facilitate the 'general interflow of information' between the institutions through building up relationships, and activities have been organised for both students and staff:

"The purpose of it was twofold. One was for us to learn from these various schools, you know, how they're being affected by new initiatives such as the diplomas. And for the schools to learn what's happening in terms of higher education, UCAS, what institutions are looking for, what the barriers are for their students' to [make an] *application, what … sorts of standards are required."* [Participant B, interview 6 & 7, paragraph 81]

"If you're developing relationships with your stakeholders, it seems perverse that you don't have a dialogue, a direct dialogue with schools and colleges, not just about student recruitment, but about changes in curriculum, changes in teaching methods, about the issues about making the transition from school to university, et cetera. So it's much... about staff development opportunities." [Interview 2, paragraph 18]

"We have over a hundred [students] *apply every year to York, so it was wanting to build up those relationships."* [Participant B, UYSCN focus group, paragraph 7]

101.   At this early stage, views differed among participants on the impact of UYSCN so far, and there was recognition that the arrangement will take time to become established. While the general feeling towards UYSCN was very positive, some participants were also uncertain at this stage where the value lay.

"I think the whole network is very proactive and very enthusiastic and I have been very impressed by that." [and] *"I am very impressed by the way that the network works but I do wonder whether it really is of great benefit to us or to you having us."* [Participant W, UYSCN focus group, paragraph 3]

102. This has arisen, in part, since at this stage the partnership is still being built and the aims of the programme are relatively broad, in order to allow schools to influence how they would like to relationship to develop. While some schools enjoyed this freedom, others would have preferred a more defined purpose, to clarify the reasons for joining UYSCN and to help justify their participation. There was confusion among some participants about whether the programme was purely about widening participation, whilst others appreciated the broader aims.

"Last year they were very open and it was very much to do as much or as little as you want, which was to be mutually beneficial, and the aims are very wide." [Participant B, UYSCN focus group, paragraph 27]

103. Participants from schools noted the national scope of UYSCN differed from their more usual experiences since most had predominantly local and regional links with higher education institutions.

"It seems really odd to me that the network actually extends as far away as London. I mean, we are involved in networks with a number of other regional universities as well but regional universities to us, we're certainly not involved in any in London when we're in the North East." [Participant E, UYSCN focus group, paragraph 4]

104. Participants involved in delivering UYSCN felt that it was an innovative venture that differed from the more traditional type of arrangement with a narrower geographical focus. They argued that it was deliberately designed to bring together different kinds of schools and colleges to reflect the university's national recruitment profile, so it was ambitious in intent. As noted earlier, it is still early to judge how far it will fulfil these ambitions. The challenges that UYSCN faces as it expands is that since it is trying to do something distinctly different to more traditional links such as Green Apples, it will need to work harder to obtain and retain the support of schools that are not used to being part of this type of initiative. This will include bringing real value to the schools, while providing them with the justification for participation that they would like, as well as clearly explaining the choices that have been made in terms of membership, relationships, and the activities and opportunities on offer.

105. In terms of how the programme could develop, participants expressed a desire to see more opportunities for staff development:

"More links between our teaching staff and [the] *centre for effective learning, because I think looking at the sort of stuff that you do, a lot of it's primary and secondary related but there's a huge need for support for CPD[2] and in the post-16 sector."* [Participant E, UYSCN focus group, paragraph 16]

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[2] CPD: Continuing Professional Development

Summary: UYSCN Aims

- UYSCN is a national network of 11 schools which can contribute to widening participation and social diversity. The current membership of eleven will grow to around 30-40 over the next two years.

- The aims of the programme are relatively broad, so as to allow schools to define how they would like to relationship to develop: to facilitate the 'general interflow of information' between the institutions, as well as more focused student and staff activities.

- At this early stage, views on the impact of UYSCN were generally very positive, although some participants were unsure about why they were taking part. Participants felt the precise value of the partnership would take some time to demonstrate.

Characteristics/Uniqueness

"Green Apples is a very nice project, a very compact project that they can buy in to and see some results out of it as time progresses. So I think it achieves that."
[Interview 8, paragraph 15]

106. One of the key strengths, and a factor that was considered to characterise Green Apples uniquely, was the fact that it is a collaboration between all four further and higher education providers in York:

"It's quite unique to have all higher and further education providers involved in a project within the same city, and so the schools feel like they're getting a lot for their participation because they've got interaction with all of the higher education and further education providers in York. So everyone's working together." [Interview 8, paragraph 19]

'[It] is a bit different to the other two [partnerships] *because we're dealing with a partnership with the schools, as opposed to one institution with the schools. So with Green Apples we're developing the relation, that relationship as a foursome as it were, as opposed to just the University of York."* [Participant A, interview 6 & 7, paragraph 244]

107. Participants felt that the success and uniqueness of the programme came from factors such as having partners who worked well together, the strong support of local schools, aims which were clearly defined, and activities which had built up a reputation for excellence over time.

108. Although Aimhigher is a national programme, the organisation is done at the regional and local levels. Durham Aimhigher is unique through the structure of its

relationship with the University of York, as well as in the organisation of the programme by taking a much more centralised approach to organising events.

> *"It's actually really good partnership working. And I don't think there will be many examples, where a university has got together with somebody like me. And we've put the programme together... in a way that meets... is not about promoting our respective organisations."* [Interview 4, paragraph 49]

109.   This centralised structure appears to work well in this area, since participants were distinctly positive about this aspect of the programme, although it is not necessarily a structure that will translate well to other areas that face a different set of stakeholders and challenges. Part of its success can be linked to the demographics of the population which has historically had low participation rates in higher education, so any increase from the baseline is significant. Success can also be linked to the well-established relationships between individuals working for schools, Aimhigher, and the universities participating in the programme.

> *"From the start we knew that our programme needed to be, yes, targeted but it needed to be more than very narrow targeting... because I know that some areas are extremely strict, you have to tick all of these boxes before you can do anything... if we did that we wouldn't be raising the numbers going to higher education."* [Interview 4, paragraph 13]

110.   UYSCN is certainly rare in trying to develop a national network of schools, and relatively unusual in trying of develop a programme that offers a basic set of activities to all schools as well as offering to develop individually-tailored aspects of the programme for each school.

> *"We've got – within schools liaison team – one person who,* [in] *commercial jargon, but there's a customer relationship manager as it were. So each school will have one person who's the conduit into the university itself."* [Interview 2, paragraph 22]

111.   Since this programme is still in the early stages of development, the extent to which schools will take up on this opportunity and its impact have yet to be assessed.

> *"The network will be, if it works, if we can make it work, because it is unusual. To try and attempt to do something, which is a kind of, is, it's almost our advisory board from schools. Where we have a council, and some departments had an advisory board, this is an advisory board of a group of stakeholders, and if we can make that work well, I think that will be pretty unusual."* [Interview 2, paragraph 72]

112.   In addition, with all of the programmes' participants, it was felt to be important to put the available resources directly into activities:

> *"I actually think that unlike a lot of other initiatives and programmes, we do what we say we do... we spend our money on young people and we've had thousands of young people actually do things... it's not just a 'talk about it' programme, it's an active programme."* [Interview 4, paragraph 21]

> *"A quality experience probably costs money; I would prefer the experience to be quality rather than just sort of, I wouldn't say the usual, but I think for it to be a bit more special to the kids. It's perhaps cost a bit of money."* [Participant R, UYSCN focus group, paragraph 147]

Aspects That Do Work

113.   This section provides examples of aspects of the programmes that participants particularly liked, or felt worked particularly well. It highlights some of the factors that participants believe are contributing to the programmes' successes. It is not exhaustive, and others are discussed in detail elsewhere in the report.

114.   Participants liked a cohesive, well-organised and sustained programme, with attention to detail.

115.   Participants from schools also valued extra places for activities for their students, when they became available.

116.   Programmes that targeted younger children were valued for their ability to generate enthusiasm for higher education from an early age, and help challenge negative messages from peers or family. These earlier activities may also help prevent students making mistakes that will reduce the options available to them later on. Small, selective programmes reinforce this message by making students feel special for being chosen.

117.   As noted, an overnight stay in university accommodation, particularly one with an attractive campus to show off, was praised for showing 'real' life in a university, and for giving the students freedom and confidence, since many would not have been away from home overnight before. Simple freedoms such as giving students the ability to select what they ate from the student canteen or using the vending machines, and giving them the trust that they are capable of making those choices responsibly were valued.

> *"It's all those adult choices that we take completely for granted, that they don't have access to."* [Participant C, Green Apples focus group, paragraph 155]

> *"A: That's what I love as well. Never mind what the universities offer as activities,* [it's] *the fact, it's the social setting, meeting other people and things like that, and eating out, it's just…*
> *G: It's life skills isn't it."*
> [Participants A & G, Durham Aimhigher focus group, paragraphs 194-198]

118.   Touches such as having Student Ambassadors who return to their old schools, and mature or other non-traditional representatives for higher education and as Mentors were seen and noted, since participants associated better programmes with ones which paid attention to details like this.

119.   While particular subjects were mentioned within particular programmes, it was clear that the success of activities varied from year-to-year. Particular types of activities were valued for their ability to engage students, to make things 'fun but interesting', to challenge them a little intellectually, and to encourage them to interact socially. Activities which pushed students out of their comfort zones to try something new were also seen as important.

120.   Where participants had feedback about changes they felt were needed within an activity or a programme, they liked to feel that their suggestions were listened to, and assimilated into the programme where possible. This also applied to new ideas about

how to develop the programme, such as novel ways for building links between teachers and departments.

121. Participants mentioned the need for supportive, well-organised programme managers, who help with planning and arrangements from the school's side as well as arranging events. A well-structured programme with continuity among staff can help facilitate this. While school-based participants liked having a structure to the selection of activities provided, they also liked to feel that there was freedom within that structure to take part in the aspects which appealed to them.

122. Having partners in other organisations who collaborate on providing programmes was also considered a bonus, since it broadened the range of information available to students as well as increasing trust in the impartiality of the information and advice provided. Over time, programmes can build up a reputation for quality, which will attract schools to return year after year.

123. The links and relationships that are central to the success of these programmes have often been built up outside the programme, and are brought into it when an individual joins. These form the basis for the extended network of contacts that were important to participants. Good communication between these contacts also mattered.

Summary: Aspects That Do Work

- Participants liked a cohesive, well-organised and sustained programme.

- Programmes that targeted younger children were valued for their ability to generate enthusiasm for higher education from an early age.

- An overnight stay in university accommodation was praised for showing 'real' life in a university, and for giving the students freedom and confidence.

- The need was highlighted for supportive, well organised programme managers, who help with planning and arrangements from the school's side as well as arranging events.

Aspects That Don't Work

124. As emphasised earlier, participants' perceptions of particular aspects that might be improved reflected their commitment to maintaining, or adding to, a successful and important programme. In particular, participants emphasised that they were providing examples of situations, activities, establishments, or individuals which would reduce the impact of a popular programme. In general, these arose when the individuals involved may have had inadequate training or where an establishment had not fully thought through the logistics of what it would be doing (especially difficult when there

are multiple parties involved), and these factors do change over time, for example, when activities were not appropriately tailored to the needs or interests of the age group targeted.

125.   For Green Apples, the main concerns were about ensuring the sustainability and the future of the programme; differences between what is now available to different schools; and the impact of the changes in the selection criteria. In this case, information about these changes appeared to have been sent out at short notice, creating a rush to get everything ready on time for the start of the programme. Issues with the selection criteria themselves have been discussed elsewhere. The unequal provision between schools (which is now strictly based on measures of need) was disliked in contrast to the way the programme functioned before. In particular some schools appeared to be generously funded while others had no extra funding to facilitate supply cover or transport costs for events. These changes were felt to have introduced inequity between schools, and to be undermining a programme that had originally been designed to bring local schools together.

126.   Some participants felt that more work needed to be done in terms of measuring and reporting the success and impact of the programmes, although this desire was not universally expressed.

127.   Sometimes aspects of a programme that do not work are structural, and the problem may not have any clear solutions. This encompassed a diverse area from sufficient funding for programmes to finding the right time for Year 11 events, since students have a different set of priorities by that point. Another example would be the Year 10 residentials, which many participants would like to see expanded, but which would be extremely difficult because of current capacity limits for university accommodation, staff and other resources. In addition, there was the issue of providing enough events to keep students interested in a programme, but not so many that activities will interfere with schoolwork. With students increasingly wishing to study at their local university, distance and the ability to live at home may be a factor in student choices for higher education, which will affect some more than others and perhaps some schools more than others:

> *"The other characteristic of County Durham that we felt we needed to address was the fact that young people, well and their parents and families, don't move. They want to stay in the area."* [Interview 4, paragraph 13]

128.   For factors such as this, challenging such attitudes is difficult, and may be a structural factor that affects the ability of a links programme to influence participation in higher education.

129.   Similarly, the extent to which a programme should be selective about targeting particular groups of students does not have clear answers, but difficult choices need to be made by all programmes since resources can only go so far.

130.   For UYSCN, the main aspect of concern is the wider rationale for participation, since some participants did not have a clear sense of being part of a programme – although this is something that could change as the relationships develop within the programme. In particular, UYSCN looks like it will take a bit more time to settle in to a structure:

"Maybe we haven't done quite as much as we would have wanted... some things have taken a long time to get organised because of getting messages to and from the right people and those sorts of things, but that said we are really pleased."
[Interview 10, paragraph 15]

131. Timescales for organising events can also create problems, since different organisations tend to work to different timescales, logistics and priorities. Linked in to this, ensuring sufficient communication between organisations is necessary for links programmes to function effectively. Practical issues that can impede the functioning on the ground can also affect how well a programme works, so finding ways to improve this is valuable, as well as building in feedback and evaluation to assess the success of a programme.

132. On occasion, despite being designed through extensive consultation, events under-recruit participants, or are even cancelled. It was difficult to identify the reasons for this, since individuals who turn down these opportunities also tend to be ones who do not participate in this type of research. Overall, there was clearly enthusiasm for the postponed event although the earlier date appeared to not fit with the schedules of those invited. There may have been other reasons apart from poor timing, but participants were not articulating them if so.

Summary: Aspects That Don't Work

- Green Apples: there were concerns about the future of the programme, the differences between what is now available to different schools, and in particular, the impact of the changes in the selection criteria.

- UYSCN: there is more to be done to establish a sense of the partnership among members – although this is something that could change as the relationships develop within the programme.

Programme Activities: Green Apples, Durham Aimhigher and UYSCN

133. This section summarises the activities provided through each programme, with some of the participants' thoughts relating to each of those activities.

Programme Activities: Green Apples

Green Apples Activities	Event	Comments on Activities Provided
	Year 7 one-day visit to a partner F&HE provider (4 schools)	*"We had a full day at the university doing all sorts of things. So we were able again to bring lots and lots of them, which I'm hoping will continue to be involved next year when they start it properly."* [Participant C, Green Apples focus group, paragraph 8]
	Year 9 one-day visit to a partner F&HE provider	*"At that stage we're not providing much in the way of academic input, so it's information about what universities are, the kinds of things people can study, what university students are like, and the kinds of backgrounds they come from, usually working in small groups with one of our own students as a Mentor or buddy to the group."* [Interview 1, paragraph 12]
	Year 9 Celebration Event at Guildhall with parents	*"It seems to be nothing. People turn up, someone says a few words from the front, shake hands with the Lord Mayor, have their photograph taken with a whole lot of dignitaries, and you go back and sit down, and it's all over within 45 minutes, and they all leave. And you think, what was all that about? But in actual fact, the enthusiasm that's generated by, I was going to say, the parents is fantastic."* [Participant D, Green Apples focus group, paragraph 120]
	Year 10 overnight residential	*"On this occasion although there is more of the general awareness-raising, there is also a little bit of academic input in the way of taster sessions on a variety of subjects."* [Interview 1, paragraph 22]
	Year 11 day conference	*"At the Year 11 conference there is usually a session on choosing post-16, and so there's more advice there in terms of what we deliver on the programme."* [Participant 8, paragraph 33] *"That's usually round about Christmas time and here we get much more formalised input about planning for the future."* [Interview 1, paragraph 26]

Table 3-1: Green Apples Programme Activities

134. As well as post-16 choices, the Year 11 event offers information on interviews, revision, study skills, skills for getting into higher education, funding higher education and living on a budget. In addition, occasional workshops are arranged individually with schools, as are Year 12 and 13 information events. Mentoring is offered to one school, and there is a growing interest in activities with younger age groups.

> *"They're tapering in a little bit, so they now have some primary school activity and earlier secondary years' activity as well, and I think that that can be quite valuable."* [Interview 1, paragraph 120]

Programme Activities: Durham Aimhigher

135. For this link, it should be noted that Durham Aimhigher is involved with many more activities than are listed here; the list purely documents those participants mentioned in connection with the link to the University of York.

Durham Aimhigher Activities	Event	Comments on Activities Provided
	Year 10 overnight residential	*"That is one of the main strands of our programme: the residential programme and taking young people out of their comfort zone in to another part of the country."* [Interview 4, paragraph 13]
	Year 11 Subject-specific one-day events	*"At the moment I am just gathering students to actually come to York because of your* [York's] *Health Days[3]. And we're a Science College and obviously these are the sorts of things that we want our students to be exposed to, and on our own we couldn't do it."* [Participant D, Durham Aimhigher focus group, paragraphs 31-35]
	Subject-specific one-day for mature Access students	*"We do have a successful Access student link with York and York St John where we take a bunch of... well it was 50 last time... Access students for a taster day at both universities – morning at York St John, afternoon at York. And we've chosen areas that they are particularly interested in for them to try out... and... we've run it for two years and it's been very successful."* [Interview 4, paragraph 31]
	Event for Careers Advisors and Personal Advisors	*"Coming up, in* [month] *we have a CPD session for personal advisor staff in the Durham area that we're running in collaboration with Durham Aimhigher and with support from* [organisation]. *So it's become quite a multi-faceted relationship."* [Interview 1, paragraph 54]

Table 3-2: Durham Aimhigher Programme Activities

136. With Durham Aimhigher, activities have been developed gradually as needs have been identified. In practice, the residential events for Year 10s appear to have a similar structure of activities and to be passing on similar types of information:

"They do things like play Pictionary, draw a student, what student life is like, have a campus tour, have lunch on campus as well. Year 10 they look more particularly at subject areas. They have a two-day residential, so they find out what it's like living

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[3] Health Days: Open days specifically for degrees in health-related subjects (e.g. medicine, nursing)

on campus. And they go to some academic sessions during that time. They'll go to some social events as well." [Participant A, interview 6 & 7, paragraph 9]

Programme Activities: UYSCN

137.   Since the intention of UYSCN is predominantly to arrange activities individually with each school, and the partnership is in its early stages, it is harder to generalise about events schools take part in.

> *"Throughout the year we've had at least one more contact with everybody, and then we've run a number of activities at the school or college or at the university that the schools, if it's in the university, they've been invited to. Or we've been invited to go into the schools to do extra activities. So we're really pleased with the way it's gone this year."* [Interview 10, paragraph 15]

138.   At present, the main activities which all the schools appear to have taken part in are the launch events/plenary meetings. Several schools have had visits from speakers from the University of York who have worked with staff and students. Participation in other York-based events has been partly driven by proximity to York, or the distance a school needs to travel in order to take part, since schools further away reported finding it harder to come to York for only one day. While this has reduced opportunities for some schools, it has increased the number of places open to students who are more locally or regionally based.

> *"If I come back to our situation... if you are trying to target students who are in that category, you said what sort of activities, I think you're right, I think anything that's a one-day, in practical speak, is probably difficult for us to perhaps organise."* [Participant R, UYSCN focus group, paragraph 32]

139.   Further activities are intended to try to increase to cohesiveness of the network of contacts involved in UYSCN.

> *"It's at its early stages, and I think the hope for next year is for us to provide a programme of events that schools can engage in."* [Participant B, interview 6 & 7, paragraph 81]

UYSCN Activities	Event	Comments on Activities Provided
	Day events	*"We came on the independent study day last week which was fabulous. You know, they had the Student Ambassadors in… and the students got a lot out of it."* [Participant H, UYSCN focus group, paragraph 15]
	Conferences for teachers	*"We have had a lot of interest from our staff in the science conference which was postponed and will happen in the autumn I'm told"* [Participant B, UYSCN focus group, paragraph 7]
	Individual school-based activities	*"I'm going next week to deliver our workshop on writing references for staff at one of our network colleges. One of our physicists, who's an astrophysicist, went to one of the member schools in* [area] *and did an assembly on astronomy for them, so it's quite a mix of activities and we're trying to be very responsive."* [Interview 1, paragraph 112]
		"One of the schools […] *had been invited to one of the study skills session that I was talking about, and actually they contacted us and asked that we run the same or similar session for the whole of their year group, because they brought a selection of students, but they would like us to go back in September and do the session for the whole year group, so that is wonderful."* [Interview 10, paragraph 19]
	'Menu' of activities for all schools	*"[What] we need to do is develop a kind of backcloth, which is a range of communications and offers and activities which is standard to everybody, and which reinforces the idea of it being a network. That's what I think we need to build the network."* [Interview 1, paragraph 126]
		"Maybe linking a departmental visit with a sort of pseudo open day. We can attract students who might want to come to York as well as maybe get interested in chemistry, which is the latest thing they have asked about. That would perhaps make it a bit more attractive and target specific students in that way." [Participant B, UYSCN focus group, paragraph 7]

Table 3-3: UYSCN Programme Activities

Programme Activities: Aims

140. The key to the success of these activities is getting the balance right between giving the students a good time and giving them a realistic picture of university life.

"The dilemma, I think, for the providers is getting that balance between giving the pupils a good day, and at the same time making them realise this is really just a taster. It isn't actually quite like that all the time. But you don't want to put them off, because if you put them off, you've had it, you've lost them." [Participant D, Green Apples focus group, paragraph 65]

"The whole scheme is about making them realise that university isn't a big scary place and that it is accessible for them." [Interview 8, paragraph 7]

"They're learning a lot of skills within that, and preferably all the ones that have been on a residential, so they know what they're talking about, and they'll come out and do presentations, and the more of that that goes on, that's really good and they're hearing it from their peers rather than an adult and that goes a long way as well." [Participant M, Durham Aimhigher focus group, paragraph 867]

141. The activities for students tended to aim towards providing information in a fun engaging way, while maintaining interest in the programme and in higher education:

"That's really a bit about getting young people used to the... progression journey, the learning journey that they might be going on. Because it's an important transition stage. So the idea was to talk to them, excite them, enthuse them, about higher education." [Participant A, interview 6&7, paragraph 9]

"It seemed to be great fun and seemed to keep some of those pupils, especially those who might have drifted away and lost the impetus, still made them feel part of a group, and part of a scheme and a process and a project that was going on." [Participant D, Green Apples focus group, paragraph 56]

"It enables people to just get the flavour that there are things out there that you can do at university that most people don't get a chance to do in school." [Interview 1, paragraph 22]

142. It was an additional bonus if students felt they could see immediate benefits to the activities as well:

"R: So not only are they leaving with a nice impression of York and, but they've also left thinking 'crikey, that's going to help my A level next year, thanks very much for doing that for us'. They are a bit brutal about it.
P: 'What's the point?'
E: 'What am I going to get out of it?'
R: 'What's the point', yes [inaudible] *That's just the way I think youngsters are, a bit more like that it's probably quite a good thing, you know, if we're all a bit literal."* [Participants E, P & R, UYSCN focus group, paragraphs 36-39]

"These students will often be at an age where they may be wanting Saturday jobs or whatever, so we feel that it's functional for them at that point, but also it's looking towards the future where they may need to use these skills to get a place on a university programme." [Interview 1, paragraph 34]

143. For teachers as well, the activities can be a valuable resource:

"By coming to these events it's also putting me in touch with other people within the Aimhigher and [programme]*, so for me being local it's a huge pool of network and*

resources that are fantastic for me." [Participant H, UYSCN focus group, paragraph 6]

144. For all of these programmes, participants made the further point that however good a programme is overall, that success is:

> *"Very dependent on the provision on a particular day from which ever establishment they're going to."* [Participant D, Green Apples focus group, paragraph 63]

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<u>Summary: Programme Activities and their Aims</u>

- It is important to achieve a balance between enjoyment and giving students a realistic picture of university life.

- Value is added if students can see practical benefits for the experience

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The Aims of School–University Link Programmes

145. From the perspective of all participants, both school and university-based link programmes are valued for a variety of reasons. Participants felt that, for a programme to be successful, the benefits needed to be mutual, so both schools and university partners needed to feel they were benefitting directly from being in the partnership. This is in part associated with the recognition that successful relationships require an investment of time, effort, commitment and enthusiasm, and thus need to be worthwhile and productive for all members. Participants emphasised aspects such as: engagement, mutual respect, and enlightened self-interest. Particularly when a link programme is newly established, its aims might be unclear to participants, although being part of the programme in itself created benefits.

> *"I suspect there's a little bit of vagueness still about what it is really going to mean. The mere fact that we've approached them has generated some good will, and that's helpful."* [Interview 2, paragraph 37]

> *"For me I am looking towards the future, and I see a really bright future in terms of increase in contact between our subjects and your subjects. I think there is massive potential"* [Participant H, UYSCN focus group, paragraph 15]

> *"Each partner has to get something out of it; I mean each partner has to be willing to give, but it's giving and receiving."* [Participant A, interview 6 & 7, paragraph 96]

> *"Schools and universities like to have partnerships because partnerships, well, it's like having friends isn't it? If you have friends, especially if you have impressive friends, it reflects well on you."* [Interview 1, paragraph 138]

146.   In other words, in each programme the main aim is to provide something that will clearly, and directly, benefit students and schools and universities that are taking part by "smoothing the journey" for those most likely to encounter barriers. To help people engage with a programme, it also needs to have a clear purpose, building on existing foundations from other programmes or relationships. In its early stages, before there is a history to the relationship, before it is established, it can be challenging both to build a relationship, and for stakeholders to understand the purpose of the link.

147.   Funding is central to developing successful link programmes, and the need for adequate resources in terms of both funds and people underpins a programme's ability to meet its aims, as well as to provide appropriate activities and events for schools and students. Lack of funding is a key barrier to participation, and heavily influences what can be provided to schools.

Benefits for Schools

148.   From the schools' perspective, participants felt that multiple links allowed students to be exposed to a range of higher education institutions, and were willing to maintain links with any programme that had the potential to benefit the school and its students. Such programmes help directly by making students more informed about the wide range of alternative courses and universities that are available, as well as demonstrating accessibility through "demystifying" the experience of higher education and challenging preconceptions about university.

> *"The main aim of the programme is to demystify higher education. It's to try and get students or pupils from backgrounds where they wouldn't normally progress into higher education, so they might not have anybody at home that had a higher education, and maybe don't have, they don't have many role models around them to tell them about what higher education's about. So it's about giving them more information to make an informed decision about whether or not they might want to go to university one day in the future."* [Interview 8, paragraph 7]

> *"For a lot of pupils there is this idea that universities are like Hogwarts... and that, you know, students wear the black capes all the time. They've seen Harry Potter, and they think that's what university life is about."* [Interview 10, paragraph 63]

149.   Consultation with schools also helps universities maintain a successful link relationship through generating ideas and through using the relationship to change a school's perception of a university. For example, the collaborative, active involvement of more than one further and higher education institution was seen as a key strength of the Green Apples programme by participants, demonstrating the value of city-wide partnerships. This, in turn, was felt by participants to have a positive impact on what was happening in schools:

> *"I'm sure all of that then makes us come back and discuss things in our schools that we wouldn't have done otherwise. So other things happen, are happening in our*

schools because of our involvement with the scheme that wouldn't have happened otherwise." [Participant B, Green Apples focus group, paragraph 317]

150. This demystification of higher education was not simply about the concept of going to university, but took in explicit and practical guidance for applications and admissions, as well as issues that might arise once students became undergraduates. For example, the financial costs of completing a degree or potential job prospects. This aspect is explored more fully in the section dealing with IAG provided through link programmes (Section 3.4).

151. For example, schools reported wanting:

"Lots of opportunities for students at Key Stage 3, Key Stage 4 and Key Stage 5 to get a taste of what university might offer them, and many opportunities to raise their aspirational and motivational levels with a real opportunity; well thought out activities." [Participant D, Durham Aimhigher focus group, paragraph 25]

152. Part of the demystification process was also about giving students the opportunity to experience life in a higher education institution, and to stretch them by providing them with some more academically challenging work, particularly students who are Gifted and Talented (G&T). Misconceptions about higher education are only one of the barriers to participation that effective IAG attempts to address. Ongoing activities for students help maintain the impetus or momentum; in contrast, long gaps between activities can result in the loss of momentum towards higher education. For example, in terms of the activities offered, participants reported that the impact of a visit to a university's campus should not be underestimated, and schools felt there was a huge impact on student's decisions after physically being on a campus, particularly if there was the opportunity to stay overnight in student accommodation.

"The residential really opens up their eyes to thinking about whether or not they want to live away from home. What happens on campus, it isn't just the academic side of things, but also the social life, and the extra-curricular activities that they can take part in, and just generally feeling comfortable in their surroundings. So that they can see themselves attending a university one day in the future." [Interview 8, paragraph 7]

153. Integral to this was the desire to increase student's aspirations, self-belief and self-confidence.

"It's a great opportunity to raise awareness of the young people; to get some self-belief. A lot of our young people don't have that self-belief so it's about believing in their potential, and what they have to do to maximise that potential." [Participant N, Durham Aimhigher focus group, paragraph 37]

154. The existence of a link creates a relationship, a distinguishing feature of that university, which can help differentiate between the many alternatives for higher education. The quality of the university providing the link may be a factor in a school's perception of the benefits, although this was reported to go both ways. The schools taking part in this research were keen to provide their students with the opportunity to visit selective research-intensive universities (if they were likely to get the appropriate grades), and these universities frequently did provide an excellent experience for their

students. Likewise, universities that actively recruit students also provide excellent experiences, in part because they are keen to fill their courses.

155. Overall, schools were more concerned with the quality of the link, and of the activities on offer, than with the quality of the university since they were keen to give their students as many opportunities as possible to see the full range of alternatives available, and to associate university with good things.

> *"B: They felt it was a treat...*
> *C: Absolutely!*
> *B: And therefore that associates... higher education with being a treat, and something...*
> *C: Special...*
> *B: ... that has nice aspects to it, not a boring trip out.*
> *C: Yes, and that they're special to be able to do it."*
> [Participants B & C, Green Apples focus group, paragraphs 156-161]

> *"You have to deliver what you say you're going to deliver, and usually more than... so, yes... quality is absolutely essential."* [Participant B, interview 6 & 7, paragraph 105]

156. This links into the concept of responsibility, taking on the responsibility to ensure that there is quality in a programme. Because of these positive benefits, schools wanted to see programmes that would allow as many students as possible to benefit from the experiences. At the same time they were also extremely aware that making the programmes too broad would reduce their exclusiveness, and potentially their effectiveness.

157. Schools reported that having continuity of personnel across years for co-ordinators – having the same person in the school stay in charge of co-ordination – enhanced the value of the programme to the school through reduced duplication of effort, and also reflected the importance of the programme to the school through their willingness to dedicate 'a' person to be in charge.

158. These links may also lead to universities providing support for project work in schools, as well as providing staff development opportunities, both of which were strongly valued by participants from schools, and both of which schools would be keen to see expanded. Staff development through link programmes is likely to become increasingly important, in addition to the basic provision for students. Furthermore, with increasing interest in action research, schools are interested in collaborating on research projects with academics.

Benefits for Universities

159. Participants discussed the benefits for a university of being involved with schools, particularly the impact on an institution's reputation and credibility, and thus its attractiveness to potential students. Universities value links because it keeps them in touch with schools and colleges in terms of what incoming students study before arrive, how students learn, what students find difficult about transition to university, and what new qualifications and syllabuses are like. This can help guide admissions policies and shape university curricula.

"It's good for the university to be shown to be interactive in the schools" [and] *"The university does get a lot of good reputation for doing this kind of activity."* [Interview 8, paragraph 48]

"Two objectives. One is it's very specifically functional about helping us address, by having links with schools, which help us reach communities we wouldn't otherwise reach. And the second one is about more generalised relationships, helping schools understand higher education, and us having a kind of reference group that would help us understand what's happening in the world of non-university education." [Interview 2, paragraph 18]

"Some of the schools have told us that when the school has a special relationship with a partner institution, the students feel more favourably inclined to that institution and they often see, without it being particularly a recruitment-oriented activity, they often see applications to that school or college increase or, even if applications don't increase, the level of commitment of the students to those applications." [Interview 1, paragraph 116]

160. This special relationship is also directed, in part, towards finding out what schools want from relationships with higher education institutions, which can help bridge gaps between organisations.

    "It's partly about trying to find a way of creating a community of schools that we have a special relationship with, but the reason we want to have a community of schools with a special relationship is to keep us well informed about what is going on in schools." [Interview 1, paragraph 72]

161. A further aim may include the desire to affect applications, by getting a better match between students and courses, resulting in more appropriate students in terms of skills, ability and qualifications; and potentially reduced drop-out rates for the university. Participants also noted that funding can be a motivating factor, because of the financial benefits they perceived to be attached.

    "You get people applying hopefully who... have benefited from the advice, and are better.... apply for the programme which is most suited to them. So you get a better match between... the skills and abilities of the student to the programme to which they end up studying. I think the figures are that the biggest drop out rate, at universities generally, are those students who come through clearing. That's where the match is poorest." [Participant B, interview 6 & 7, paragraph 152]

    "We have students applying from very varied backgrounds, and the more we understand about that the better we are going to be at making fair decisions in admissions. And, of course, at helping people to make an effective transition into higher education." [Interview 1, paragraph 80]

162. This can be particularly important for courses which have specific qualifications as a prerequisite, ensuring that potential students make the appropriate choices early enough in their school careers to enable them to take their desired course later. A good match benefits both students and universities. Despite this, recruitment is usually an implicit aim rather than an explicit one, with programmes appearing to promote the idea of 'going to university' rather than 'going to our university'. Explicit recruiting is becoming less popular with recipients and may backfire if a particular university is

heavily promoted. In contrast, indirect promotion of higher education *in general* can be much more successful course for a university to pursue, and tends to be better-received by recipients. In other words, participants essentially felt that recruitment was more effective when it was not an explicit aim of the programme, while still recognising that it was a motivating factor behind universities' desire for links.

> *"However, from the university's perspective we hope that if they come to university, have a really nice time, know that we're friendly and accessible, then that will have in a more subtle approach. And they might remember us in the future."* [Interview 8, paragraph 58]

> *"I go to a lot of events, and I would say that myself and my colleagues are very good at being impartial and offering impartial advice... I would say that not everybody is, however, so I wouldn't want to speak for every single person that does my job at every university."* [Interview 10, paragraph 65]

163. Links are often maintained through a co-ordinator, who is based either within a university or within other organisations with a remit to promote further and higher education such as Aimhigher, with contacts maintained through personal communication. While a variety of media are used such as telephone, email and internet, face-to-face meetings were preferred for promoting cooperation. When working collaboratively across more than one higher education or other institution, such as in Green Apples, these links will also be based on reputation and leadership ability, in deciding who will take charge of managing the programme. These partnerships allow resources to be combined to increase what is provided for students and schools, enhancing their experience, while allowing all the partnership institutions to benefit.

> *"Everything really is done through partnership or collaboration of one sort or another... there is very little that's just specific to York."* [Participant B, Interview 6 & 7, paragraph 180]

164. Cross-university links have the further benefit that they can provide students with experiences of more examples of the different types of university available. Since universities are able to collaborate in this way, it implies that they are not directly competing for the same students, or have found that the pool of good students is large enough to make collaboration worthwhile.

> *"Green Apples works very well because of its relationships; it's a partnership. It's the schools; it's the universities and colleges; and it's people like NYBEP[4] and Connexions and the other partners involved. Because we all work in close proximity with each other, I think we can offer a lot of support, and support each other's events."* [Interview 8, paragraph 66]

165. This is a good example of a successful local programme with support and involvement from all the local organisations, particularly the ones who are also involved with providing IAG.

166. Participants suggested that there was further scope for increasing links between schools and universities at a departmental or disciplinary level. For example by

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[4] NYBEP: Business and Education Partnership for York and North Yorkshire

matching Music, Media Studies, Biology or Law to schools and colleges which also specialised in those disciplines, or by connecting individuals within the disciplines for their mutual benefit.

> *"That would be good actually, if we could have one direct contact between subject departments and admissions tutors for certain subjects because, you know, they would be able to give us very good advice about what they look for every year in that subject"* [Participant E, UYSCN focus group, paragraph 103]

> *"There've been moves towards, sort of, linkages between academic departments and academic areas within schools and colleges"* [Participant B, Interview 6 & 7, paragraph 81]

167.   One broader benefit identified by participants was the advantage to universities of information-sharing through having a set of "reference schools" with which to discuss issues such as curriculum changes or newer qualifications such as A*s for A-level, IGCSEs, Baccalaureates, and Diplomas that might affect university applications and admissions. Additionally, schools benefit from having "reference universities" that they could go to, for example for application information, and details of new courses or course changes. In this way, the links between schools and universities serve as a two-way conduit for information exchange. In particular, these types of partnerships can help ensure that information is timely and accurate.

168.   A further pragmatic influence on universities is funders, who, in turn, have their own reasons for funding these programmes:

> *"The other thing, which I would never want to under-estimate the importance of, is pleasing government and HEFCE. Because universities are expected, for quite understandable reasons, to show a commitment to widening participation, and a university which is heavily over-subscribed and which may have, in some programmes, to be academically very selective, is going to be scrutinised very carefully."* [Interview 1, paragraph 154]

Summary: Aims and Benefits of Link Programmes

- A successful school–university link programme has to have clear mutual benefits, ie benefits for both schools and higher education institutions.

- Benefits for schools include "demystification" of the experience of higher education, particularly the considerable impact of a residential visit for students, although this is resource-intensive.

- Benefits for higher education institutions include enhanced reputation and information exchange with schools about a variety of factors that could affect recruitment.

- Adequate funding is crucial, as is long-term commitment and continuity of key personnel.

Link Aims: IAG

169. Information, advice and guidance is regarded as a central component of any link programme. The central aim of school-university links is to provide IAG for higher education. Participants frequently returned to the idea of informed choice: that these programmes are run in order to ensure students have the right information to enable them to make the appropriate decisions for their future. Implicitly, this future tended to include higher education, but some participants took the concept to encompass a broader notion of "successful and happy given their skills and potential".

> *"It was very much* [about] *a greater understanding of two institutions… which helps us to give better advice to students if we know more about the place, and maybe helps you to understand more about the participating schools and colleges, and the nature of the students who might come. So I think it's very broad, which is good; it's not too focused."* [Participant B, UYSCN focus group, paragraph 27]

170. Participants were aware of the factors that can make it challenging to deliver appropriate IAG.

> *"IAG is always a real challenge, and also it's resource intensive because it's not something you can do necessarily as a one-way fix. It's got to be offered, tailored to individuals, and it's time consuming."* [Interview 2, paragraph 43]

> *"E: Updating is just a constant nightmare in education, so anything that can keep you up-to-date fairly quickly and easily is always valuable.*
> *W: Yes, but in a more limited way than the people… obviously you can have access to when they do the visits.*
> *E: I mean, some of the information can be electronic and written and still be really useful."*
> [Participants E & W, UYSCN focus group, paragraphs 99-101]

171. The latter exchange reinforces the need to stay up-to-date with information about higher education through good communication channels, and through personal contact between individuals. It was also emphasised that this personal contact between schools and universities can be used to help resolve any unique or unusual issues that may occur. Tied into this was the need for well-informed and experienced IAG staff, and to find ways of using existing but untapped expertise at universities, whether in admissions, IT, management or education.

> *"If they can get input from us into staff development, or higher education and application advice, and the pupils' success at getting, at wanting to go to higher education, at getting in, is better, then that helps."* [Interview 1, paragraph 164]

172. Parents have an important role to play within these relationships – providing support for the children – and can strongly influence aspirations for higher education, so programme deliverers should be aware of the need to communicate with parents. Programmes need relationships with parents, as well as with students and schools, in order to win their support for their children taking part in the programme, and to communicate the value of higher education. Some of this is done by including parents in activities, but it is also done through emphasising the fact that their children have been specially picked to take part in the programme, communicating that the students are part of a select group:

"It was also quite nice for them just to feel important, to feel chosen." [Participant B, Green Apples focus group, paragraph 145]

"The involvement of the parents at that point is particularly important because it signals to the parents that higher education is something that their child could be part of." [Interview 1, paragraph 20]

173. The impact of parents can also be felt indirectly, by showing what the alternatives can be, and whether they provide good role models for higher education.

174. Participants felt that the role of these link programmes was mainly to provide information, with some guidance, which schools would need to provide anyway, thus reducing the burden on schools of searching it out for themselves. That is, the nature of the programmes was to provide IAG about the possibilities for university and for courses, while other aims, for example, widening participation or recruitment, would be supplemental to this core. Because of this, the programmes maintained strong links with advisory services such as Connexions as well. The links with Connexions were also a source of inspiration for activities within the programmes, particularly in terms of staff development for Connexions staff and careers advisers, which enhanced their ability to provide timely and accurate IAG.

"Interaction with the learners is always the thing which is most rewarding and pleasurable, but actually they are one cohort. If you can actually influence the teachers or the advisers you can influence several cohorts" [Interview 1, paragraph 122]

175. The role of the programmes was also seen as complementary to the schools' main IAG activities, to support and inspire.

"To plant the seeds, which is what Green Apples is, planting the seeds. And that needs following up in schools to make sure that that then filters through to when they do make... because we're not there for every step of them making their choices for post-16, and so it needs some backup." [Interview 8, paragraph 35]

176. This supportive role is, in part at least, dictated by the limitations to what these programmes are able to provide in terms of time, staff and resources, as well as funding limitations.

Summary: IAG as an Aim for Link Programmes

- IAG is a crucial element of any link programme.

- A central aim of school–university links is to provide IAG for higher education, with widening participation or recruitment supplemental.

- Parents should not be overlooked: they too have an important role to play and, where appropriate, might be built into programmes.

IAG for Students

177.   IAG for students has two uses, one short term and one long term. Short term, the intention is to provide students with skills or information that they can make use of immediately or in the near future. Long term, it is to provide them with the skills or information they will need to do well in life. For example, interview skills and social confidence are lifetime skills but will also be useful in the immediate short term for acquiring work experience or weekend jobs, and for learning to interact with people beyond their immediate circle of family and friends. Similarly, information on writing applications can directly help with getting into university in the short term, but will also be something that will remain useful after they have graduated in the long term. University visits can also provide the physical experience of moving into a new and unfamiliar environment, and learning to cope, or even to flourish in it.

> *"Broadening their outlook on what they can do in the future, and making them want to try a little bit harder, and just generally making them feel more comfortable in maybe slightly awkward surroundings."* [Interview 8, paragraph 9]

178.   Participants had noticed that students that they had had contact with were much more focussed on the impact of short term skills, asking 'how does it help me now' type questions, and that this was the aspect that needed to be emphasised in order to encourage them to acquire long term skills and information. The example given was where subject-specific activities during university visits would also contribute towards helping them do better in their GCSEs or A-levels.

> *"A successful sort of idea, for instance, on the sciences, where students went to a different university and did something with a bit of science at the university – not ridiculous amounts but they did get into the labs. They did do a bit, it was sort of A2 related, and of course they were AS students so they could see that it was quite good for them."* [Participant R, UYSCN focus group, paragraph 54]

179.   These short term influences are important since they can have lifetime consequences. Poor subject choices in Year 9 can have an impact on all possible future subjects to study, which is why there was a lot of enthusiasm for getting IAG for higher education started early, and helping students to acquire a realistic conception of their potential and skills.

> *"It's about lifelong learning, and looking at the personal development, the social inclusion, and the economic argument, as well for all this. We try and keep, I think, we try and keep all of those things in our head... not just getting people into higher education."* [Participant A, interview 6 & 7, paragraph 161]

IAG in Schools

180.   In addition to the IAG offered by outside organisations, some schools also make their own arrangements, for example with one-to-one individual interviews in Year 9, or through building activities into Personal, Social, and Health Education (PSHE) or Citizenship classes. Some schools also mentioned setting the 'preparation for working life' exam. While perhaps inevitably these activities would primarily focus on higher education, participants who were also teachers were keen to emphasise that it was

wider than that, to encourage their students to aspire to something, whatever their eventual qualifications.

181.   IAG in schools can be variable, depending partly on the school itself but also on the teacher who is personally responsible for co-ordinating what is provided. Participants felt that there was insufficient time dedicated to IAG in school timetables, although they could not see where more could be found in an extremely full curriculum. Furthermore, participants felt that at present there were disparities between what was provided to students, with the highest-achieving students best placed to access available information, and those with greatest need targeted with the most resources, while the average students who did not fall into either of these groups received the least IAG.

> *"Some schools concentrate really hard on providing information, advice and guidance up to the point of applying. Because it's all about applying and getting a place. Really good schools continue* [… to] *provide a programme after that, which is about making a good transition to university."* [Interview 1, paragraph 207]

182.   One area that participants mentioned where they were keen to have more information was with the new Diplomas, particularly the consequences for students who change their minds about what they would like to study. There was an emphasis on trying to get IAG going in younger age groups, such as in Years 6 and 7, and particularly ensuring information about the impact of subject choices was provided well before these choices were made in Year 9. It was felt that this was an age group where generating enthusiasm for continuing education beyond 16 could have a significant impact, and also where teachers experienced less pressure to remain up-to-date and so were more likely to be misinformed about higher education compared to teachers who more frequently dealt with advising students from age 14 upwards.

> *"Some of the advice that they have been given in schools is so out of date, because that's not their main job is it. I mean, we are all used to dealing with advising 16 to 19 year olds but some of the people who are advising the Key Stage 3 students about what to do in Key Stage 4, it's a long time since they were involved so they are still giving them the old advice."* [Participant E, UYSCN focus group, paragraph 86]

183.   Participants were also keen to see all students entitled to a careers interview with a Connexions advisor in Year 11.

184.   Additionally, IAG activities find it significantly more straightforward to inform students about traditional subjects and destinations with defined qualifications for entry, compared to newer, non-traditional ones.

IAG by Universities

185.   Universities represent one of many sources of IAG, although they appear to be an important one. Universities can provide information around applications and admissions procedures; writing personal statements; interview techniques; financing higher education; living on a student budget; revision and study skills; how to search for information on higher education; detail on particular degree courses; and subject-specific information relating to future careers. They can also contribute towards generally enlightening students about a lifestyle which they may never have

experienced before. The training programmes for teachers, careers advisors and personal advisors are seen as a way to affect IAG provision in the long term for a wider set of students than are able to participate in student-targeted activities. Staff events are likely to be based around CPD; on writing references and advising students on competitive courses or personal statements; information about careers and guidance; aptitude testing students; and subject-specific events.

186. Programmes offering IAG to students have become increasingly inventive. Previously they would simply sit students down for a lecture about the subject. Now they try to have much more interactive and inventive activities to show the potential from studying the subject and its practical applications, using fashion shows, mini law courts, and even learning to use chopsticks to pick up Polo mints. These activities can be particularly effective if they give students the opportunity to do something interesting with state-of-the-art equipment, which they would not have the chance to find elsewhere. York has also used 'Dragon's Den' style entrepreneurial competitions, while others have used 'The Apprentice' as a model, and most universities offer 'ACE (Aiming for College Education) Days' to widening participation groups to help raise aspirations. Likewise, mediated by universities' schools liaison, academics are increasingly going into schools to provide one-off lectures on their specialist topic in a way that ties into what students are studying under the National Curriculum.

IAG by Others

187. In terms of IAG by groups or individuals other than official sources, schools were aware that each organisation was not necessarily impartial but by having as many as feasible gave students a rounded perspective on the range of options available.

> *"Having somebody who's experienced it firsthand. And then for the students to be able to pick and choose, and make informed choices."* [Participant A, Green Apples focus group, paragraph 284]

188. Some of the other ways students were provided with IAG included:

- NYBEP technology challenges (Business and Education Partnership for York and North Yorkshire)

- Police and Army road shows

- Crag Rats performances

- Careers fairs and 'options at 18' fairs

- The Aimhigher bus

- Connexions personal advisors and post-16 conferences

- Enhanced IAG with psychometric testing

- HEFCE summer schools and other university-based summer schools

- Motivational speakers who also do activities with students and aptitude testing, or external speakers who do talks on personal development

- Aimhigher Associates and other mentoring schemes

- UCAS higher education conventions

- Projects organised directly with local health care trusts and local businesses

189. Staff development was also being done through the Higher Education Liaison Officers Association (HELOA).

Informal IAG

190. In addition to official sources of IAG, students also receive informal IAG from a variety of sources. These sources can be extremely influential on students' choices, but may not be well-informed or up-to-date about higher education choices. They can include anyone not trained to provide formal IAG, but who have a role in guiding choices. This group can include family and family friends, peers, acquaintances, and teachers who do not have official responsibility for IAG. Since their main role is not concerned with providing IAG, and their aims will differ, then the advice that is offered may conflict with, contradict, or undermine, messages about aspiring to higher education.

191. This may arise through a lack of familiarity with higher education:

"[We] still have a population who really on the whole, you could say, would not know anything about university, and would not come from families who have any background in that kind of atmosphere at all." [Participant C, Green Apples focus group, paragraph 8]

192. It may also link to familial, social or financial circumstances that affect aspirations:

"In so many families young people are expected to go on and do this, and some families where it's not the tradition, you know, there is no expectation particularly, of that. But all parents want their children to do well so, you know, you've just got to change that into the expectation they will go on." [Participant A, interview 6 & 7, paragraph 130]

"We've not mentioned parents very much. I think, in my previous experience back in [location]*, parents were absolutely fundamental."* [Interview 2, paragraph 92]

193. Students may feel peer-group pressure towards or away from achievement:

"[For] some of them having friends who were intending to go on, has been a motivation for some of them. Perhaps more of a motivation than their parents or anything else that we can do with them." [Participant D, Green Apples focus group, paragraph 9]

194. Teachers in schools, particularly subject teachers, are also able to influence students who ask their opinion:

"There's been research recently which suggests that one of the problems about young people from certain schools and colleges is that they are almost discouraged by their teachers in saying, you know, university X is not the sort of place where you would feel comfortable. So, that's been one push." [Interview 2, paragraph 17]

"There is very little timetable time available, and sometimes the timetable time that there is, is not structured by or in the hands of people with any specialist knowledge so even the official information, advice and guidance may be very limited and very... non-specialist." [Interview 1, paragraphs 185-187]

195. Because of this influence, it is important that informal IAG providers become better informed about the options available, so that they are able to provide accurate and timely IAG, but there are challenges to reaching these groups for two reasons. Firstly, they already believe they are well-enough informed to provide an opinion based on their own experience, and secondly since they are not formal advisers they are not particularly susceptible to inducements to update their opinions on higher education.

Summary: Sources for IAG

- Students are focussed on the impact of short term skills.

- The highest-achieving students are best placed to access available information, and those with greatest need are targeted with the most resources. The average students who do not fall into either of these groups receive the least IAG.

- Universities are an important source of IAG, providing information around applications and admissions procedures; interview techniques; financing higher education; living on a student budget etc. They also enlighten students about a lifestyle which they may never have experienced before.

Best Practice for IAG

196. In terms of best practice for IAG, participants identified the following criteria for programmes:

- Fun but interesting, and focussed

- Academically stretching students

- Innovative variety of activities that link in to National Curriculum assessments

- Selected student groups, appropriately targeted

- Providing something 'special'

- Being 'realistically ambitious' about what it is possible for students to achieve

- Age-appropriate and timely

- Broad and comprehensive interpretation of 'guidance'

- Making use of personal knowledge and experience of those who know the students

- Impartial, up-to-date and independent

- Sustained and sufficiently frequent activities over a number of years that start early and follow through to transition to undergraduate

- Knowledgeable, professionally trained and well informed advisors with expertise in higher education

  - With a careers qualification?

  - Some basic training for all involved in tutoring students

- Well funded

- Tying into other careers and guidance structures

- Provision for staff training

- Involvement of parents in activities, and information directed at parents

- Using undergraduates as exemplars for students

- Bringing university staff into schools as well as schools into universities

- Universally available

- Forward planning for activities

Link Aims: Relationships

197.   Relationships, and the reasons for wanting them, are many and varied. Participants were clear about the need for good relationships within links programmes, in order for the link to function effectively, and for the programme to have an impact. Involvement in links programmes appears frequently to have come about through existing personal relationships and contacts, as has the development of new ideas. Since relationships are built up slowly over time, their importance also re-emphasises the need to build ongoing arrangements with the students participating in programme activities, to sustain their engagement. Because of this, the structure of the relationships varies between programmes, linked to the aims and activities of that programme. For Green Apples, it was considered an important feature that all of the higher and further education providers in the area collaborated on the programme. Furthermore, this programme was directly responding to a local need:

"Really at the request of local head teachers, because what they said was, they sometimes felt that York is a 'city of walls', and people sometimes don't think outside the walls. And they really wanted the young people to aspire higher than they were at that stage. So, a group of people got together to think of what... how we could actually do that." [Participant A, interview 6 & 7, paragraph 7]

198. Relationships also allow universities to build up a reputation with schools for providing successful (or unsuccessful) activities, which in turn affects participation rates for events.

"When you hand your students over into the care of other adults you have to be very confident that those adults are going to have a good relationship with the students. Because, you know, it can result in either the kids don't enjoy themselves and get nothing out of it, or students can play up if they think that the staff… they're not respecting the staff." [Participant G, Durham Aimhigher focus group, paragraph 240]

199. Successful programmes and activities, in their turn, are believed to influence applications and undergraduate recruitment in a positive way:

"The university does get a lot of good reputation for doing this kind of activity. And I think it means that students do see York as a very friendly and accessible place. And, so particularly for students who might not be thinking about going to university at all, they might see a very high-achieving university as York is as something that isn't for them, because that's quite a scary prospect." [Interview 8, paragraph 48]

"[UYSCN arose from a] wish to have a more, sort of, powerful network of contacts nationally with schools and colleges, which would help feed recruitment to some extent." [Participant B, interview 6 & 7, paragraph 81]

200. Relationships were also about the exchange of information between institutions.

"To keep them [schools], of course, well informed about what is going on at the University of York, in admissions processes nationally, in changes in subject offer and popularity, and so on. So, we wanted to be able to provide them with the information, but we also want information from them." [Interview 1, paragraph 76]

Role of the Individual

201. The role of the individual cannot be overemphasised; central to the success of these links are the individuals involved and their relationships with others involved in the programme.

"I'm really very happy with the links with York. I would say that there are particular aspects of particular programmes that haven't worked well as others, but I have a good relationship with the staff, so that means that we can sit down and review it properly." [Interview 4, paragraph 47]

202. Although some had minor criticisms about particular aspects of the programmes or specific activities that were unsuccessful, overall the links programmes were viewed as successful by all the participants. Furthermore, there was a general feeling that there was the opportunity to articulate any issues and difficulties, and that the programme

organisers had either successfully solved a problem or that a problem was an ongoing one which was being addressed. Recognition of the good relationships existing within the link programmes was frequently associated with the ability to successfully deal with or solve any problems.

"I think the fact that we're consulted so much makes us feel part of a team."
[Participant B, Green Apples focus group, paragraph 166]

203. Programmes need support at all levels to ensure their success, and appeared to expand and develop by using personal relationships across the regions, or with others in similar roles, as well as directly with individual schools.

"There has to be the buy-in at the top, but then there also has to be the understanding, and the willingness to participate, with the people who are actually going to be doing some of the work." [Participant A, interview 6 & 7, paragraph 98]

204. This leadership at the top helped ensure that those at departmental or programme levels were also committed, and understood the importance of the activities, with engagement filtering between levels.

"Each school has its own, like [name]*'s mentioned, their own systems. And it's building relationships with staff, not just the students, particularly if you're not as fortunate as I am with my co-ordinators who can work as a team, then you've got to look into management as well, and working with the senior management as well, and I think that's a skill in itself, developing relationships, not just teenagers"*
[Participant M, Durham Aimhigher focus group, paragraph 296]

205. Individuals can be seen as both reliable and unreliable sources of information, so trust between individuals, and trust in the information being exchanged is paramount.

"They know the information she gives is correct, and she's not quite the voice of all universities but she's a voice that is you can rely on. So, I think that professional side of it, they would certainly want to know that whoever was giving the information, they could rely on that information, it was correct and it was worth passing on." [Interview 10, paragraph 33]

"There is a deal of anxiety and suspicion about what universities are up to when they do admissions, so the more partnerships that you can have which create trusting relationships between schools and colleges on the one hand and universities on the other, the better that will be." [Interview 1, paragraph 268]

206. Thus, reputation is central to trust in the information that is being exchanged between schools and universities.

207. Changes can affect the relationships within the programme, and on the level of trust between schools and the further and higher education institutions involved. This issue strongly emphasised the importance of good communication, particularly when changes occur that require "buy-in", for understanding and support of the changes, and for solving problems.

"If I'm their link person I hope they would ring me and say 'do you think this is okay' or 'what do you think I can do about this', so it's hopefully a personal link as well...

not just at university level, but at the personal level I hope... they would feel comfortable." [Interview 10, paragraph 21]

208. Participants were also aware of the need for staff to appear approachable to students and their teachers, as well as maintaining the relationships with other stakeholders, for the successful running of the programme.

> *"I think the most useful is the personal contact so that you know who to get in touch with. I know who to get in touch with now if I've got a problem."* Participant H, UYSCN focus group, paragraph 102

209. An adaptable programme – one of shared learning – which could change to meet the needs or desires of its participants was also valued:

> *"If I was just told, 'this is what's on, not on offer even, this is what's going to happen, this is what you're going to do. Take it or leave it.' Then I don't think I would be as happy with the scheme as I am now, where I always feel that I can, you know, say* […] *So it's not a prescriptive sort of programme to be in; you feel very much as if you're... you can change things."* [Participant B, Green Apples focus group, paragraph 166]

> *"We would listen to what schools told us. So each project manager has a number of schools they specifically work with, and we meet with them several times during the year. So we'd listen to their feedback about what they wanted. But also it's a case of... networking."* [Interview 4, paragraph 77]

210. Good relationships depend on a number of factors, with participants often citing a shared background, which had grown out of informal, chance, historical or geographical personal connections. In addition, links programmes appear to use existing relationships to build on previous experience and contacts, to expand an existing or establish a new programme, and as a source for new ideas. Links can vary in their strength within, as well as across, programmes, partly affected by geography within national programmes as discussed elsewhere, but also in terms of the strength of the personal relationships of the individuals involved.

> *"It's a multi-layered one* [programme]*, and you can't do that very easily outside your local area. Every university has links with its local schools, but it's more difficult to do it across geography, and across types of schools and colleges."* [Interview 2, paragraph 18]

211. Good links programmes also depend on an ongoing and sustained effort to ensure the link is maintained over time, since the unsuccessful examples cited by participants were associated with programmes where this did not happen. Feedback from stakeholders can help develop the relationship, inform future developments, and help assess the value of the link to others. Successful link programmes will have this form of ongoing and formative feedback built into the system, using discussion to develop or refine link activities. The aim of having relationships within links programmes is to ensure their success by keeping the links strong, and people actively involved and enthusiastic, facilitated by good communication, organisation and collaboration. The factors also help maintain the sustained aspects of the programme:

> *"The sustained elements of their programme are, I think, very important and very successful, because working with the same group of students over a period of time*

is the best way that we can monitor whether or not we're having an impact on students and it's great to see them develop over the years." [Interview 8, paragraph 17]

212. Participants felt that good links programmes were targeted at specific groups of students, built on sustained relationships with the schools, and progressive over time for the students involved through offering them activities over a number of years.

213. The rhetoric around the three schemes, in particular UYSCN, is based on the concept of a tailored, targeted programme. While programme events would be available to all the schools equally, the aim would be to work with each school to tailor that programme to their specific needs and opportunities. Such an approach generates the greatest benefit for schools which are best able to articulate their needs, potentially reducing wastage and inefficiencies, while strengthening the relationship through the focus on the personal aspects of the relationship. There is a risk that if this structure is not well-managed it could result in a 'hierarchy' of schools within a link programme, with the most demanding schools reducing the opportunities available to others, generating inequalities within the system and reducing the resources available for those schools which need it most. There was some evidence from the UYSCN focus groups that disparities in access may mean that schools closest geographically to York found it significantly easier to take up opportunities that were on offer.

"We need to work harder at making a real relationship out of it because it is a... it is deliberately trying to be very... very bespoke to the different institutions that we are relating with, whilst still making a network out of it. And because of the geographical spread – which was deliberate because the University [of York] *is a national recruiter – it is actually going to take some work to make a real network out of this."* [Interview 1, paragraph 126]

214. Traditionally, it was acknowledged that most link programmes have been local, with a tendency to work with the local constituency – this may be gradually changing, since the newer link programmes included in this evaluation are breaking these local geographical boundaries either by working with Durham or through creating a national network of schools with UYSCN. The impact of such an approach will be strongly influenced by the willingness of partners, schools and colleges to actively participate in the programmes despite the barrier imposed by physical distance.

215. There was a general feeling that successful links were based on:

"Clear expectations... well organised and communicated and... a willingness of those people who are both delivering it and participating in it, to make it work" [Interview 2, paragraph 39]

216. Successful programmes adapt to the needs of students and schools, developing new programmes and new activities in response to demand. Some participants cited examples where a particular idea that had worked successfully in another part of the country had been adapted to work in a local context as well, showing that demonstrated success can encourage best practice. Furthermore, it was not always universities that originated new ideas, since participants identified examples of successful ones which had come directly from schools. Shared practice, borrowing good ideas from other areas, and encouraging all partners to input into the design and

development of programmes, were all seen as factors that made for successful link programmes.

217. A further key group of individuals who make an important contribution to the success of school–university link programmes are Student Ambassadors; the undergraduates who represent a university at events and activities, while providing important role models for students.

> *"The role of the Student Ambassadors is very important in all of this. The current York students, the role model they provide. We do have a very good relationship with our ambassadors throughout all our programmes, but in Green Apples... in some cases they might even come across the same ambassador year-on-year. Or they might have already come across them through* [programme] *which is a volunteer programme in* [area] *schools. So the relationship is built up in many and complex ways"* [Participant B, interview 6 & 7, paragraph 29]

218. In this way, Student Ambassadors can also contribute to the continuity of a programme, when students are able to meet them at more than one event. In addition to links programmes having relationships with schools, participants were also keen that students felt they had a personal involvement with the programme, using Student Ambassadors and activities to help create relationships with students and their families that might be sustained beyond a particular event. Therefore, it is crucial that ambassadors have been provided with appropriate training and support.

> *"We went to one in* [university name] *on an open day and the student who met us was one of our former students which was good; they'd gone to the trouble of finding… And we felt that that was well within the range of all the schools and universities."* [Participant G, Durham Aimhigher focus group, paragraph 601]

219. Mature students as Student Ambassadors came in for particular praise, for their enthusiasm and for demonstrating that higher education was a positive life choice that could still be made beyond 18, rather than as something only possible directly after A-levels. In part, mature students will have a different attitude to higher education since they are a self-selecting pool of those who are particularly keen to increase their skills and qualifications, compared with students straight out of school who may view university as just the next step in their education.

220. Durham Aimhigher also had full-time Mentors employed by Aimhigher who worked with schools in the area. Like Student Ambassadors, these Mentors were seen as important role models for the students, often coming from backgrounds that the students could relate to, although as full-time employees they were able to have significantly more direct interaction with the schools, usually visiting weekly.

> *"Working with schools as a Mentor, certainly the point I'm making is that I'm not a teacher. It's the very first thing I say, so the young person knows that right from the start. So I think you do build up a slightly different relationship, and they do open up, and it's totally different for them to talk to someone who's not a teacher, who's not a parent, who's not a relation, but somebody who is interested in them."* [Participant N, Durham Aimhigher focus group, paragraph 252]

"In [school name] *what's worked particularly well is that the Mentor is an ex-pupil, so knows the school well, and I think that's why Mentors can bring different things to different schools."* [Participant S, Durham Aimhigher focus group, paragraph 274]

'[The Aimhigher Mentor]'s interviewed students, like I say she comes in on one day a week and it's been amazing to me to actually see the list and the information that she's got out of students, you know, their aspirations and what they want to do but mainly, like you, it's just time, it's been a relief to me." [Participant A, Durham Aimhigher focus group, paragraph 282]

<u>Summary: Relationships and Role of the Individual</u>

- Individuals and their relationships with others are key.

- Trust in the information being exchanged and good communication are paramount.

- Successful link programmes should be viewed as joint endeavours – sharing idea, learning from all partners and adapting to the needs of students.

- Student Ambassadors and Mentors are key.

Relationships: The 'Feelgood' Factor

221.   Contributing to the success of relationships is the positive feeling generated by being part of that relationship, sometimes described as the 'feelgood' factor. It links into the idea of the goodwill created by creating and running these programmes for those taking part, as well as the programme's responsiveness to stakeholder's requests.

"They listen to our feedback. I think... What always comes over to me that they have actually listened, and they have 'tweaked', based on what we've said from the previous sessions." [Participant A, Green Apples focus group, paragraph 80]

222.   The 'feelgood' factor is based on an emotional response to the programme:

"The reason that Green Apples is so successful is because it been taken into the, sort of, hearts of the schools in the area, and because the partners work so well together, because we're in a close proximity." [Interview 8, paragraph 66]

223.   As a result of this sense of attachment and ownership, changes to the programme elicit a strong response compared to programmes that have not established the same level of emotional "buy-in". This positive feeling can also be generated through a programme's activities, by creating an environment that takes students away from their usual activities and opportunities:

"B: It was also quite nice for them just to feel important, to feel chosen. And, you know, by having the lunch, and I know it sounds a daft thing...
A: Oh, yeah!
C: Yes, huge! Absolutely!
B: But to get one of these things free. And to go into a canteen to do these things, without parents looking on... then choosing for themselves. I think that whole feeling of... getting these things that they wouldn't... that everybody else at school wasn't getting, and so on.
A: Especially in healthy schools, when they can then choose chips!"
[Participants A, B & C, Green Apples focus group, paragraphs 145-153]

"What happens on campus, it isn't just the academic side of things, but also the social life and the extra-curricular activities that they can take part in, and just generally feeling comfortable in their surroundings." [Interview 8, paragraph 7]

224.   As noted earlier, factors such as this help associate higher education with the idea of being something special, and for students feeling special by having that opportunity. The chance to mix socially with students from other schools was frequently cited in this context.

225.   The 'feelgood' aspects also extend to teachers, to help ensure a successful programme:

"The way that it's developed, the way that we've been involved, and continue to be involved in it, makes us feel very wanted. And it makes us very positive about it which, I'm sure, then extends itself into our schools and therefore to the pupils."
[Participant B, Green Apples focus group, paragraph 312]

"We've put everything into a newsletter, which will be good because we can see, sort of, celebrate what we've done this year and then take it forward for next year."
[Interview 10, paragraph 17]

226.   From a higher education institution's perspective, this goodwill is linked to the fact that these activities are seen as relatively altruistic, through making a social contribution:

"For the university to be seen to do, you know, to contribute in some way has huge advantages." [Interview 8, paragraph 60]

227.   It also links into the consequences of the decision to study at a particular institution:

'[University is] *going to be your life for three years, it's not just where you're going to study, it's your life for three years. And if you feel unhappy, which is why I do think it's eminently, it's really sad that people don't always go and look at the places that they want to, they might be thinking of going to."* [Interview 2, paragraph 66]

228.   So by developing this positive relationship with a university before applying, a student is also better placed to apply to the right institution, and more likely to make it through the course.

Summary: Relationships: The 'Feelgood' Factor

- Being part of a partnership can bring its own intrinsic benefits for participants, both staff and students.

- Although difficult to quantify, there are more tangible benefits that can accrue from the positive feelings of such associations.

Relationships: Shared Improvement

229. The concept of shared improvement encompasses the more pragmatic ideas about the mutual benefits for institutions through these relationships. It includes ideas about shared governance, contributions towards curriculum development, strategic planning arrangements, school improvement, and collaboration between organisations. As illustrated elsewhere, the idea of 'collaboration' between organisations in more general terms, and its multiple benefits, is a theme that recurs throughout our findings, and is pivotal to understanding of the key principles behind links programmes.

> *"[Links are] the kind of high-level, sharing of professional knowledge and tensions, you know, about, I don't know, all the things that institutions face, government funding and changes in priorities, building programmes and organising them, change management."* [Interview 1, paragraph 134]

Shared Governance

230. Ideas about shared governance were largely linked to improving self-governance through sharing information and improving mutual understanding.

> *"We're just creating a* [discipline name] *department, and might not be able to do this when the numbers grow. But at the moment we're interviewing every applicant we're looking to making an offer to, and as part of the interview process we've got a teacher from* [name] *school who sits on* [some of] *the panel*[s]*, and has equal weight in the... deciding who we admit to the members of our academic staff. So, it's good for him, it's good for us to get a perspective, and it's a way of, sort of, joint learning."* [Interview 2, paragraph 20]

231. With the exception of this notable example from UYSCN, shared governance arrangements were not highly cited by participants, suggesting that this type of situation is at a developmental stage, and that current arrangements are created *ad hoc* in response to a particular need or when a particular situation arises.

> *"B: Tentatively, maybe there might be some academic staff here* [at the university] *who would appreciate a day looking at how teaching is done in sixth form colleges and/or sixth forms generally, and with colleagues who are preparing students for university which might then also be of benefit. Just as* [inaudible] *our staff coming*

and shadowing here in certain areas. So that's something we discussed last year briefly, and we haven't followed up particularly, but the offer would still be there. E: I just think that's a really good idea, and that would be something we would be very interested in as well."
[Participants B & E, UYSCN focus group, paragraphs 19-20]

Curriculum Development

232. While there was little evidence of *direct* input into curriculum development, the links programmes facilitated the ability of both sides to keep up-to-date with curriculum changes for 14–19 year olds and with changes to undergraduate programmes. There was a suggestion that communicating information about curriculum developments could be an aspect of UYSCN that will be developed more actively over time if the suggested links between schools and departments within the programme develop.

> *"We'd quite like every department – and there are 20 odd departments – if they would just agree to partner, of this special network, they would partner with say, two or three schools. So between them each school or college might have a link with two of our academic departments, and each of our academic departments would have a link with two or three schools."* [Interview 2, paragraph 20]

233. Should this development occur, this could be one method that may lead into formalising input into curriculum development between schools and universities.

Strategic Planning Arrangements

234. As with shared governance and curriculum development, there was little evidence that strategic planning arrangements expanded beyond the scope of the activities offered by the programmes. Again, if this is something that schools or other organisations are keen to develop, the feedback systems and the structure of the links programmes and the relationships that facilitate their success should be able to adapt to accommodate it.

> *"We provide input to the programme* [activities] *and I suppose… I suppose from a purely selfish point of view, to have more engagement with kind of planning the programme so that we could help identify where we could contribute or how we could be involved. That might be nice, but it's not our programme."* [Interview 1, paragraph 122]

> *"One other thing we did last year, when we were looking at developing the University of York Access scheme. We actually consulted with the* [school] *heads at the meeting when we were looking at the criteria for how students would be able to... could, could get on to the scheme. And we changed it because of some of the comments they made."* [Participant A, interview 6 & 7, paragraph 84]

235. This illustrates how strategies and plans can be influenced through consultation; even though no formal strategic planning arrangement may exist.

School Improvement

236. In terms of input into school improvement:

"Teachers report that these youngsters – who are sometimes chosen because they need that bit of encouragement – relate to them and to the school in a more constructive way when they are part of the Green Apples programme, because they feel positive about having been chosen, and they feel it gives them a special relationship with that teacher and with the school." [Interview 1, paragraph 42]

237. In this way, there is ongoing feedback for students who are selected for the programme, and how they behave in school, which indirectly contributes to improving the school environment.

"Teachers like a sustained programme as well. I think they like the fact that something happens in each year and it's therefore, you know, helping them with their progression in the type of activities and targets." [Interview 8, paragraph 11]

"E: It's quite nice now there a few courses here, new ones developing isn't there. In, sort of, media and drama, and those areas which the university hasn't been involved in, in the past.
Moderator: They're currently building the new department.
E: Yes, it would be really good to find out about those. And we've got creative media diplomas starting, so it would really good to have some input into that."
[Participant E, UYSCN focus group, paragraphs 115-117]

238. A further aspect of this shared improvement through relationships is using collaboration and partnership to ensure that the messages being sent out to schools are consistent, since this coherence will help schools to improve the information that they pass on to their students, which again contributes to school improvement. The growing interest in action research in schools could potentially be a way to facilitate links that are directly about school improvement.

239. Overall, for participants the idea of shared improvement was grounded in the idea of sharing expertise between organisations, which then allowed the other partner to assay some self-improvement; rather than external advisers determining what the improvement should be.

"Some of the institutions that we partner in a variety of different partnerships do reckon that the university also has expertise, like about education, or about management, or about IT, that could contribute to their development within their institutions, so they want to have a kind of – not that they want us to do the work for free – but they want to have a kind of friendly adviser who may have a particularly broad understanding of this because of it being a professional interest." [Interview 1, paragraph 134]

240. Furthermore, these arrangements, where they do exist, are informal and tend to respond to a particular identified need, rather than as formal standing arrangements between institutions. In this way, schools and universities are able to use their relationships to establish these specific arrangements for shared governance, contributions towards curriculum development, strategic planning arrangements, school improvement and collaboration between organisations, which depend on context and circumstance.

Summary: Relationships: Shared Improvement

- Shared governance and strategic planning arrangements and curriculum developments do not feature strongly in these programmes currently, although there were several *ad hoc* instances of such activity, and may develop further (especially in curriculum areas) as arrangements mature.

- The idea of shared improvement was grounded in the idea of sharing expertise between organisations, which then allowed the other partner to assay some self-improvement; rather than external advisers determining what the improvement should be.

Relationships: Social Contribution

241. One of the aims of links relationships can relate to an altruistic desire to make a social contribution. This might be in the local community, or through reducing social disparities, social barriers to achievement, or using the programmes as opportunities to combat disadvantage.

> *"We're going to get satisfaction of our social conscience."* [Interview 1, paragraph 146]

> *"There's a certain amount of social responsibility in terms of giving something back to school students and, you know, providing a service in a sense for the university."* [Interview 8, paragraph 48]

> *"Some of them are located in quite deprived areas, and they cover a spread from London, Birmingham, Leeds, North Yorkshire. And a number of them have a high proportion of BME* [Black and Ethnic Minority] *students, which is another prong to the institution's... wish, you know, to, sort of, change the... to improve the diversity of students that are attracted to York."* [Participant B, interview 6 & 7, paragraph 81]

> *"It's about trying to get across a kind of barrier, it's almost an intellectual barrier, that stops some people aspiring, and people aspiring into higher education. It's for those who can benefit, so those who can do it can benefit, and will enjoy it. It is something that ought to be an opportunity. It's about social justice. It's about... it's about giving people a stake in their own lives. If they have a stake in their own lives they'll have a stake in life; in society as a whole."* [Interview 2, paragraph 43]

242. This can be done either directly through the aspirational messages that a programme delivers or indirectly through awareness-raising activities that boost students' confidence in general.

> *"We find it very much increases the confidence of pupils, I think that's the main thing that I see. Over the three years they find themselves at home in that*

environment and can therefore imagine themselves being part of that later on."
[Participant B, Green Apples focus group, paragraph 7]

"They [colleagues] *have often felt that it is better to involve a larger cohort even if a smaller group of it is the widening participation group because it raises the level of commitment from everybody if they do it as a group."* [Interview 1, paragraph 58]

243. The aim of making a social contribution was rarely explicitly articulated by participants; instead it underpinned the discussion about widening participation aims and the contributions that these programmes can make to the local community. Essentially, this contribution becomes a spill-over effect, a bonus outcome that increases the reasons for wanting to have links.

"We should be reaching out to the local community especially the City of York, especially working with the schools, the local schools... and I think we should be reaching out in a variety of ways. And I think we do it well with our York Students in Schools, with all of our volunteering." [Interview 10, paragraph 63]

"It should be the case that youngsters in York should be able to depend on their local university to encourage them. So there is a kind of social obligation on us there. And one of the things that we get is a sense of satisfaction from having contributed to social justice and the promotion of education, which can't be bad!" [Interview 1, paragraph 150]

244. The activities offered by the programme attempt to challenge social backgrounds that reduce aspirations, and potential parental opposition to higher education in some cases, in order to reduce the barriers to participation. Every aspect of the programme tends to be used to reinforce these positive messages about aspiration, from the formal IAG or subject-specific activities and the informal social mixing, to using Student Ambassadors and Mentors as role models.

245. This idea of making a social contribution also extends to the aspects of the programmes directed at teachers and other staff:

"He [school teacher] *would love, and he's now able, to come to our staff research seminars in the* [discipline name] *department. So he's just, you know, in a previous generation he probably would have been a university lecturer. And he's not, and he works in a school, on his own, and there's an opportunity for him to engage with an academic community."* [Interview 2, paragraph 20]

246. While the circumstances which inhibit aspirations are often beyond the scope of the programme itself, the experience of being part of the programme may influence later decisions in life:

"Things happen in kids' lives that stop them doing what we would really like them to do ideally. But the fact that they've had that confidence going on means that once their lives have settled down, they have felt then that they can start looking at higher education. Which I think if they hadn't had the Green Apples experience, there's no way that they would have done. And a lot of kids have very difficult lives, so I think that we do do a lot for them in that way." [Participant B, Green Apples focus group, paragraph 71]

"The knock-on effect of students being made to understand that university's very different, and they can enjoy studying at university, that particular subjects might be for them which they might not have thought about before. I think the knock-on effect over a number of years is that they will have more students interested in their courses in years to come, so that's another reason for them to put in the effort is that." [Interview 8, paragraph 48]

247. Factors such as these led to some participants expressing the desire to see these types of programmes contributing towards equipping students for life in general, rather than focussing solely on higher education opportunities:

"This thing about 50% of students should be going to university, I'm not so sure about that. You know, you can't get a plumber for love nor money can you so I do think there is an issue about having alternatives." [Participant E, UYSCN focus group, paragraph 115]

"G: [For] *the student who has no chance of getting into university, Aimhigher should be to aim* [to be] *the best that they can be...*
D: To reach their potential
G: We don't really encourage those students do we?"
[Participants D & G, Durham Aimhigher focus group, paragraphs 456-460]

"B: The kids need more guidance in a broad sense about opportunities outside.
C: Realistic guidance, because a lot of them have completely no concept of anything beyond GCSE."
[Participants B & C, Green Apples focus group, paragraphs 212-213]

248. In other words, some of the participants felt there was also an opportunity for links programmes to make a contribution to society in a way that would last significantly longer than the three or four years of an undergraduate degree, by helping guide students towards being productive members of society whatever their qualifications.

"It is also about remembering about... remembering about the excitement of education, and the way in which education takes people out of their situation, and gives them extra experiences and opportunities in life." [Interview 1, paragraph 164]

> **Summary: Relationships: Social Contribution**
>
> - Links relationships can include an altruistic desire to make a social contribution either directly through the aspirational messages that they promote, or indirectly through awareness-raising activities that boost students' confidence in general.
>
> - While the circumstances which inhibit aspirations are often beyond the scope of the programme itself, the experience of being part of the programme may influence later decisions in life.
>
> - Links programmes can make a longer-term contribution, by helping guide students towards being productive members of society whatever their qualifications.

Link Aims: Widening Participation

249.   University significantly influences a student's prospects in life, and their potential lifestyle and future earnings.

> *"To be blunt, going to university changes your life. It means I can write a cheque out, and know it's not going to bounce."* [Interview 2, paragraph 43]

250.   Widening participation intends to increase the range of students that have this opportunity, regardless of their background. Some link programmes include an explicit aim to widen recruitment, particularly to increase diversity from among ethnic minority communities, although this is rarely their sole focus, and most programmes are aimed at the types of student they are trying to target.

> *"A lot of universities have these kinds of friendship links with a range of local institutions, which then are multi-faceted, you know, they are promoting widening participation but they are also promoting effective applications and they are promoting a range of things."* [Interview 1, paragraph 272]

251.   While one purpose of widening participation is to facilitate recruitment, social diversity and social inclusion, the concept of widening participation used by participants was relatively broad. It encompassed all forms of non-traditional background including deprivation, black and ethnic minority (BME), disability, looked-after children, white working class, mature students and women, while acknowledging that in some areas (and in some disciplines) these groups are proportionately better represented than others. Because of this, the ability to widen participation is also affected by the courses a university offers, since it is harder to increase recruitment on courses that do not attract these types of student. Similarly, there can be distinct variation in catchment groups between universities, in part because of reputation and students' preconceptions, but also arising from a university's dependence on local recruitment and the distribution of ethnicities in the local population.

> *"It's about trying to penetrate particular communities who wouldn't normally aspire to university."* [Interview 2, paragraph 43]

> *"We would hope particularly that that* [widening participation] *will be the case. In the case of the partners where they could contribute to the diversity of the university community, either by widening participation socially, or by greater cultural diversity."* [Interview 1, paragraph 116]

252.   This reflects some of the challenges in attracting students who would tend to go to their home university.

> *"70% of our students* [are] *on* EMA[5] *et cetera,* [of which] *there's probably about 45% are Asian or ethnic minority. So what I would say is that they would almost certainly consider a home university first."* [Participant R, UYSCN focus group, paragraph 13]

253.   Messages about widening participation from these programmes tended to mix together subject-specific information with generic aspiration raising, and practical

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[5] EMA: Educational Maintenance Allowance

information on navigating the applications and admissions process. In one sense, too, widening participation programmes have spill-over effects:

"By promoting widening participation in our area, we are part of a national movement promoting widening participation, and that increases the student numbers but also the social diversity of university communities, including York. So that will be one of the benefits to us; improved social diversity of our community, and, of course, improved numbers, as well." [Interview 1, paragraph 152]

254. Widening participation aims can be met in a number of ways, whether through trying to directly raise aspirations or more indirectly through allowing the students a chance to mix socially and become comfortable in a new environment. For example, raising aspirations was considered to be one of the main successes of the Green Apples programme:

"It's opened a lot of eyes, and that's been one of the great things. It's made them realise that, for a lot of them, you don't have to be incredibly intelligent; don't have to come from a wealthy family; you don't have to have had your uncles, aunts, mothers, fathers and everyone else to have had a history of higher education; that it can be for everyone." [Participant D, Green Apples focus group, paragraph 72]

255. The activities themselves, which create opportunities for social mixing between students from different schools, also came in for praise:

"Some of those kids – well certainly some of mine – would not mix willingly with other people unless they were pushed into it, but they've actually got used to one another and things now, and they make good friends, don't they." [Participant G, Durham Aimhigher focus group, paragraph 80]

"I liked the celebration evening last year because a lot of our students went, 'oh well we was with him, he was at [university name]', *or 'he was at* [another university]' *and things, and they got together and chatted. I thought that was wonderful."* [Participant A, Durham Aimhigher focus group, paragraph 88]

"The other good thing […] *they're often mixing with students from another school again. So it's this idea that, in higher education, you broaden your social horizons, and meet people from a wider variety of backgrounds, is reinforced by the fact that there are students from five or six schools rather than the two or three that were there for the first time. And also because it's residential there is a little bit more mixing. There's usually a social event, bowling or a disco or something and the students mix a bit."* [Interview 1, paragraph 22]

256. Social opportunities mixed into the activities provide students with the chance to meet others like themselves, and to mix with new people, giving them experience and confidence in different and sometimes strange social situations. These are skills which, potentially, will help students throughout their lives. Social opportunities help bring students together within a programme, to give the group a more cohesive feel, which is also a factor in its success. There was the general feeling that while there was a tendency among students to complain initially about these types of 'enforced' mixing, it was definitely something that they benefitted from and something that they would acknowledge at the end of an activity. Students involved in these programmes

frequently had narrow geographical boundaries, with little concept of what lay beyond their immediate area.

> *"A lot of our pupils live in very closed little... you know, they only live two miles from the middle of the city, but they really think it's a big deal coming into the city."* [Participant B, Green Apples focus group, paragraph 77]

> *"Although York isn't hugely far away, for a lot of our young people it might as well be another country."* [Interview 4, paragraph 13]

257. Comments like this illustrate the impact of social conditions on opportunities and on perceptions about the world; how socio-economic circumstances and social groups affect group aspirations:

> *"Particularly if your role models, the people you live with, the people you play with, the people you associate with... don't naturally aspire, you know, that creates a kind of culture which becomes reinforcing. Which is why the white, working class lads on the council estates are still the ones most difficult for most universities to get through to."* [Interview 2, paragraph 47]

258. In contrast to the view that these programmes are beneficial for students came the caution that the purpose of these schemes can also be mistaken:

> *"This is your problem with widening participation schemes, and if your aim of this is to really get at the students that are really widening participation that's one thing, if it is simply to promote yourselves to all the usual people who go to university anyway, you know from the usual backgrounds, that's another thing."* [Participant R, UYSCN focus group, paragraph 13]

259. Because of this risk, programmes need to focus on their aims, and ensure that the activities really do offer initiatives that are specifically concerned with making university more accessible and attractive to students from non-traditional backgrounds. The activities must take the opportunity to challenge the view among potential undergraduates that university is not a possibility. Furthermore, programmes need to continue to have broad aims, since purely widening participation aims can be alienating for teachers and students, who may feel 'labelled'. This broadening of opportunities may feel scary, intimidating and unfamiliar to a potential undergraduate, with significant risks associated with taking up that opportunity – the aim is therefore to try to deal with those concerns and provide them with the information they need to make an appropriate decision.

260. In practice as well, it is important to appreciate and, if possible, address unintended constraints which can pose a tension between the stated aims of a programme and the day-to-day issues that can impede its success.

> *"The other thing is that, unfortunately, sometimes it concerns costs. If you have got to pay for a bus to get them here, and you haven't got funding for that, and you have to ask students for a contribution, you do have an issue. And that obviously doesn't help with regards to widening participation as well."* [Participant E, UYSCN focus group, paragraph 44]

Summary: Widening Participation

- Some link programmes include an explicit aim to widen a university's recruitment, particularly among ethnic minority communities, although this is rarely their sole focus.

Selection Criteria

261.   Traditionally, selection criteria have focused on students who had the ability to achieve but might not progress to higher education without encouragement, in the hope that being part of an aspiration-raising programme would help motivate them. These criteria tend to use family circumstances or geographical measures of disadvantage to pick students, and choices must be made about the most suitable way to pick students for a particular programme, to tie in with the programme's aims. As funders and funding sources have changed over time, so have the criteria used to select the students.

> *"We're trying to be fair to everyone. We want as many people as possible to see what's available here, but at the same time we've got to be realistic about what we can offer."* [Participant A, interview 6 & 7, paragraph 202]

262.   For example, with Green Apples in 2009, following a change of guidance from funders, the criteria changed for schools and students. It was reported by participants that all schools were provided with lists of children in the top 50% of performance (from Fischer Family Trust data) and whose post codes lay within areas of multiple deprivation. The change has clearly affected the structure of the programme, as well as having knock-on effects on schools and students. Previously, schools were provided with guidelines, and had some leeway about selecting students within the guidelines:

> *"C: I haven't been involved for a couple of years and when I did it* [previously]*, it was purely me as a Head of Year deciding which of my kids I felt was right.*
> *A: That's really almost I think how we'd do it. We had the* [organisation name] *and postcode recommendations, when they actually covered far more than the twenty or so that we were allowed. So we then, within that group, had scope if you like, to then use professional judgement."*
> [Participants A & C, Green Apples focus group, paragraphs 13-14]

> *"It was more flexible, and so the criteria was something that teachers could use to pick the students that they felt were going to benefit the most out of it but from an area where, you know, they needed that support because they didn't have any role models back at home. However, now it's much more structured."* [Interview 8, paragraph 29]

263. The criteria appear to have narrowed, imposing restrictions and reducing the scope for teachers to use their own judgement to either include or exclude students from the Green Apples programme, to decide which students would benefit most from taking part. The criteria are trying to explicitly target specific types of student and school. From the perspective of the programme providers, schools were invited to use the lists as a starting point for choosing children for the programme. Providers believed that teachers were allowed to go beyond the lists, and to choose children they felt would particularly benefit whose names did not appear on the list.

"Most of the ones that we brought were from that list, but we did add some of our own because we knew full well they actually did fit the criteria that we'd always worked from." [Participant A, Green Apples focus group, paragraph 14]

"That has really changed the list of students that comes up. We didn't think it would because that's kind of what we were aiming for anyway: the students that were able and within a particular demographic. But the data that's coming through from Aimhigher […] has thrown up some interesting results. And teachers are feeling that the students that are coming up on their lists aren't necessarily the students that they would have chosen in the past." [Interview 8, paragraph 29]

264. From the perspective of the teachers in the focus group, the introduction of more restrictive selection criteria has reduced rather than increased the programme's ability to meet its widening participation aims, and they believe it has done so in three ways. First, they believe the programme is now over-selecting students who would have gone to university anyway, for example, those whose parents have academic backgrounds but who live in a deprived postcode through either circumstances or lifestyle choice. Second, they think the programme is under-selecting students who would benefit from the programme but don't fit neatly into the criteria – usually for not living in the right postcode. Third, they feel the programme is mis-selecting students who "tick all the boxes" but have no intention of going on to higher education, and for whom taking part in the programme is unlikely to change that intention.

"I would like us to be able to get back to choose[ing] *pupils. And we've all seen, when you're forced into a situation of choosing pupils that you know are only going to go on the residential... 'Ah, two days out of school here! Great, no problem!' And they've... Not only has it been a pointless exercise for them, but many of them ruin the experience for other pupils as well."* [Participant D, Green Apples focus group, paragraph 105]

"By choosing students just on their stats rather than some internal knowledge of the student has caused a bit of, I don't know, a bit of friction for the teachers, in terms of they know how it worked before, and now it's different and I think they would like it to go back to how it was before." [Interview 8, paragraph 29]

265. Irrespective of the actual extent to which professional judgement remains built in to the selection criteria, it appears that the changes needed to have been communicated in a way that elicited the support of the schools, rather than exacerbating their concerns about the future of the programme.

266. One apparent result of the change in the selection criteria noticed by the teachers has been a reported fall in participation rates. The change to the "pool" of eligible students has resulted in more students and their parents who are resistant to or simply

not interested in taking up spaces on Green Apples. This resistance from parents appears to be associated with taking a more short-term view of the implications of higher education. It is seen as something that is "not affordable now", rather than considering the long-term consequences for their child.

> *"I've not necessarily felt the enthusiasm* [from students] *for Green Apples that I've felt in the past. And I'm becoming worried that what started out as a really, really valuable and worthwhile project is, for a number of reasons, is just going to gradually fade."* [Participant D, Green Apples focus group, paragraph 105]

> *"The other thing that I am sure schools and universities would both like to resolve, and maybe through partnership we can resolve it better, and that is communicating with parents."* [Interview 1, paragraph 243]

267.   In addition to targeting pupils by postcode, the Green Apples programme has also started differentiating among schools in terms of the support, funding and access they are able to obtain for activities. Schools with a history of underachieving are starting to receive distinctly more resource inputs, while those who do better are finding that their resources have been reduced. The result of these changes is that different schools are now provided with distinctly different opportunities by Green Apples.

> *"D: It's quite ironic isn't it? Green Apples was there to provide for as many pupils as possible, as we thought, to have experience and aim towards higher education. And that is, just gradually... Quite simply, it's just becoming...*
> *B: It's just eroding away.*
> *D: It's being taken away. And it is becoming almost divisive again, in that some schools are getting the funding for this whereas within other schools, arguably, there are still pupils who would benefit from this as well.*
> *A: A lot of pupils."*
> [Participants A, B & D, Green Apples focus group, paragraphs 46-50]

268.   This targeting of resources based on average achievement and area neglects the issue that within schools there can be broad distributions in achievement, even if average achievement is relatively high. While some pupils can be influenced by the cohort effect of high-achieving peers in high-achieving schools, the view was that all schools had some pupils who would benefit from access to the programme, which until recently Green Apples has been able to support. Since the changes are still relatively new, it is unclear what their impact on the programme will be in the long run. In the short term, the impact of changes to Aimhigher funding – focussed now on four schools – has been somewhat ameliorated by local higher education providers supporting some of the activities for other schools out of their own widening participation funds, but that has also meant some reduction in what is offered. What is clear from this research is that the intention is to increasingly focus resources into lower-achieving schools. This raises questions about the motivation, willingness and ability of higher-achieving schools to remain part of the Green Apples programme.

269.   Essentially, Green Apples is moving from a form of "horizontal equity", where all schools were treated equally regardless of their needs, to a form of "vertical equity", where the perceived need of the school is used to inform the availability of resources.[6]

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[6] 'Horizontal equity' is defined as the equal treatment of equals; 'vertical equity' as the unequal treatment of unequals based on a measure of need.

Neither form is inherently "fairer" than the other, but it is understandable that introducing this conception of "need", thus creating a hierarchy across the schools, has introduced a significant element of concern among the schools who now feel they are losing out compared. In contrast, other schools have benefitted from the change, which has brought in more targeted activities with younger children than before.

> *"It's really to start opening doors for them. In Year 7 we've done some more targeted work with one particular school in York. And that's really getting them to think a little bit more about themselves, and where they fit into the world, and where they might fit in to higher education in the future hopefully."* [Participant A, interview 6 & 7, paragraph 9]

270. This experience is distinctly different to the view that seems to be held in Durham Aimhigher. Durham Aimhigher appears to select more flexibly than is recommended by York and North Yorkshire Aimhigher, which funds Green Apples:

> *"I think Durham Aimhigher would reckon it is all about widening participation, but I think one of the things that they try not to be too fussed about is about excluding people who may be not from a chosen target group."* [Interview 1, paragraph 58]

> *"Many of the young people will also be on our Aimhigher cohort as well. But some of them won't be. But you know, that's fine because there was no point in missing somebody off who'd really like to do it, who was keen, if simply they don't have the right postcode... so as long as we have a percentage then we're fine."* [Interview 4, paragraph 15]

271. So there appear to be different levels of restrictiveness between programmes about whether specific individuals are part of the target group or not.

272. In contrast to this, from the start UYSCN has been set up as a programme that will provide different opportunities to all the different schools that are taking part:

> *"It's long term, it's multi-layered, and it is targeted at particular kinds of institutions."* [Interview 2, paragraph 20]

273. The implication of this is that selection of students will remain much more in the hands of the schools, and will depend on the activities in which they take part. The extent to which the schools involved in UYSCN are happy with this arrangement over the long term has not been assessed, since, as yet, very little differentiation between schools has occurred within the programme.

Measuring Success

"In terms of making a difference, again, we come back to this, you know, the targeted and progressive approach is the one research tells us works." [Participant A, interview 6 & 7, paragraph 202]

274. Participants had a broad understanding of the importance of evaluating the 'success' of the programmes, based on both quantitative outcomes such as whether there were changes to university admissions and qualitative assessments, for example whether students enjoyed an experience.

"Many of our pupils come back from the sessions really excited, 'we've had a good time'; they've enjoyed it. They seem to have got something out of it." [Participant D, Green Apples focus group, paragraph 63]

"The evaluation forms that we get – and we do evaluation forms on the day they leave – are overwhelmingly positive. I'd say about 96–97%. And we ask the students for their, you know, overall perceptions as well as what they thought about individual bits of the programme." [Interview 4, paragraph 17]

"The feedback that we get on their experiences, they come, particularly to the residential experience where they stay for two days, one night and their, just general, sort of, confidence and enthusiasm for continuing their education and for trying to work that little bit harder really comes through in their feedback." [Interview 8, paragraph 9]

"To have a comment that 'we'd like the whole year group to have it', that is a success. And to look at the feedback, and see that the teachers as well as the students have found it valuable that's the measure of our success. So something where we're evaluating it, I suppose it's easier to look at how successful it's been... I mean I think it's a success if I get a 'thank you'!" [Interview 10, paragraph 41]

275. One measure of success derived from this was the demand for the programmes, in terms of how many students and schools wanted to take part in the activities on offer, as well as the extent of the support from stakeholders:

"[It] has been hugely successful. I mean, it's not something that, you know, I think the partners need to advertise a great deal. I mean there is just more and more demand isn't there." [Participant B, interview 6 & 7, paragraph 14]

"I also have more people wanting to partake than there are places, and that's because schools see it as a way to motivate their more able students to perform harder and better." [Interview 4, paragraph 17]

"It's been very useful for us because we initially had six for that and we ended up with 36 places. But because we're near we could access it, and for us it was brilliant." [Participant H, UYSCN focus group, paragraph 6]

276. Success was also measured in terms of the repeat business that a programme was able to generate from year to year.

277. Measuring success was one area where views differed between programme providers and programme recipients. On the whole, programme providers felt they possessed sufficient information about the success of a programme to know its impact, while programme recipients were less confident that they had access to the information they wanted.

"Consistently those at 16 going on to full time further education has been a significant percentage above the normal going on to further education. When we look at age 18 progression we can see that, you know, quite a number have gone on to higher education. The information at 18 isn't as robust as that at 16 so we're always a bit... we've been very tentative about publicising too much of that." [Participant A, interview 6 & 7, paragraph 19]

"G: They'll judge the success by the number of students that eventually go into higher education.
A: That's right; they track them through Connexions don't they?"
[Participants A & G, Durham Aimhigher focus group, paragraphs 112-114]

278. The drawback to these types of measures is that since one of the criteria for selecting students for a programme is that they have more potential to progress to higher education than their peers, progression rates that do not account for the impact of selection provide a biased estimate of the impact of the programme. This limitation also applies to measures that ask how students' views have changed between starting and completing a programme, since it is likely that their views of higher education will change rapidly around ages 14–16 irrespective of the programme.

279. Although praising the programmes, a few recipients stated that, while they valued knowing about students' enjoyment of the programmes, they were also keen to see an increase in harder outcomes, such as changes in the proportion of students going on to higher education as a result of being part of a programme:

"I've never known how successful Green Apples has been. I have never ever had any feedback to tell me these pupils have obviously, because of their participation in Green Apples, have gone on to do something that they wouldn't otherwise have done. And that to me is absolutely crucial." [Participant D, Green Apples focus group, paragraph 52]

280. Such concerns, however, should not be seen as critical since they were voiced by those who clearly wished to continue their participation. Indeed, perhaps perversely, it was their very support that caused their concerns. Rather, because participants felt the programmes were successful, they wanted empirical evidence to support their view, rather than feeling they were relying on anecdotal evidence or hearsay.

> *"D: That, for me, is a concern that I have. I don't know the results, of how successful it's all been. And to all intents and purposes it might have been an absolute failure.*
> *B: They have tried, haven't they. I think they have tried...*
> *D: They did try within the first couple of years, to try and...*
> *B: They're still trying, I've been asked for information and so on. But how do you get those ones who've gone into a job and then gone back in again?*
> *D: Absolutely, you don't. I mean, that tracking of those people is very, very difficult."*
> [Participants B & D, Green Apples focus group, paragraphs 52-56]

281. Differences in views about the need for (or even feasibility of obtaining) hard data between providers and recipients of programmes may have arisen because of differences in an individual's access to information and level of involvement. Recipients would usually have some involvement with a small number of activities a year, and would only have information on programme impact provided by the programme, as well as many competing demands for their attention and time. Providers (in their roles as programme organisers), on the other hand, spent a significantly greater proportion of their time directly immersed in this information and would be expected to feel that the information available was sufficient to 'know' the success of a programme. Furthermore, to establish the impact of any one single intervention would require rigorous empirical evaluation to eliminate confounding from other associations or causal factors amongst the multiplicity of influences which may have made the difference between a young person deciding whether or not to proceed to higher or further education.

> *"My feelings are based on perception, talking to young people in schools, and seeing the evaluations and, I am, I hope it doesn't sound smug, feel pretty pleased with how things go and it's, it's really... The thing that makes the most difference is seeing the young people."* [Interview 4, paragraph 21]

282. Since evaluating the success of a programme is increasingly tied into potential future funding, it is likely that pressure will grow for programmes to collect the data for quantitative evaluations of a programme's direct impact. However, it can be difficult to obtain accurate information about outcomes post-18.

> *"Now, the Government from time to time says that progression, continuing your education into higher education, should be a measurement of success in schools and colleges, but it's never made it part of any reporting yet. They are suggesting it may be in the future, but they have not yet made it part of any reporting."* [Interview 1, paragraph 162]

283. To assemble such evaluations, one of the challenges will be to ensure a robust design, appropriate data collection and analysis, and methods to minimise biases that could undermine the conclusions.

284. In addition to demonstrating the success of a programme through tracking students into higher education, knowing more about students' choices post-16 was also information that all schools valued, particularly for schools where students move elsewhere at 16, since some did not feel they necessarily had the resources to track individual students themselves.

> *"C: I have no idea, actually. Until these kids go to university and I find out about it, how am I ever going to know? And I think there is a problem with that. Particularly in a school like mine that doesn't have a sixth form, so they leave me at the end of Year 11. With the best will in the world, it would be nice to find out what they did at the end of college. But two years later you're involved with another year, and it just doesn't happen.*
> *A: At least if you've got the sixth form on site like we have, you do at least see whether they do carry on after the sixth form."*
> [Participants A & C, Green Apples focus group, paragraphs 61-62]

> *"Green Apples, I think there is very solid evidence of effectiveness post-16. Post-18 it has been somewhat surprisingly difficult to track effectively and so we don't have such good data."* [Interview 1, paragraph 100]

> *"We are able to track them because obviously we know who was offered places, well, who applies, when you send the UCAS forms and, you know, if they've got places or not."* [Participant D, Durham Aimhigher focus group, paragraph 118]

285. Because of this, some participants felt that this level of student tracking was needed to accurately assess the impact of different intensities of programme, to explore whether increasing numbers of activities (and of which particular activities) could make a difference, or otherwise.

Summary: Measuring Success

- Programme providers felt more confident about measuring the 'hard' success of programmes than some participants; programme recipients were less confident that they had access to the information they wanted to be sure of their knowledge.

- It is likely that pressure will grow for programmes to collect the data for quantitative evaluations of a programme's direct impact.

- For such evaluations, one of the challenges will be to ensure a robust design, appropriate data collection and analysis, and methods to minimise biases that could undermine the conclusions.

Best Practice

"B: It's very difficult to think about what else ideally we would like to have because you just don't let yourself think like that...
D: Wishlist. Unattainable wishlist."
[Participants B & D, Green Apples focus group, paragraphs 257-8]

286. Across all participants and all the programmes who participated in this research, successful programmes were identified as having the following characteristics:

- Clear and established mutual benefits

- Being responsive to feedback on activities and programmes, and willing to adapt or offer suggestions

- Having been developed over time with a view to programme longevity

- Having been built on the strength of personal relationships and a reputation for quality

- Having committed, enthusiastic and organised stakeholders, and staff continuity

- Having approachable, trained and specially selected programme organisers, Mentors, Student Ambassadors and other stakeholders who are good at communicating with each other

- Having Mentors and Student Ambassadors who go back to their old schools as examples of what is possible for students

- Being tailored to the articulated needs of schools

- Providing training for advisors and teachers as well as students

- Being sustained for the participating students, with an engaging and age-appropriate pattern of activities and information

- Involving parents in some activities

- Having a broad and adaptable view of eligibility criteria; teachers prefer more discretion over selection

- Having sufficient funding

- Providing impartial IAG that may also include further education and non-higher education post-16 options

- Giving timely, accurate and appropriate IAG

- Having schools that value need for IAG

- Encouraging students to think independently and creatively

- Having visible quantifiable impact assessment, which is reported back to schools

- Having residential events which include an overnight stay

- Having sustained personal contact between organisers and recipients

- Working with younger age groups, such as Years 6 and 7, to generate interest in higher education earlier in life

- Having sufficient activities to keep students interested, but not too many, with smaller fill-in activities in schools between main events

- Timing events to facilitate attendance and avoid timetable clashes with school or other commitments

- Good communication, giving schools sufficient notice to recruit students for events and prepare paperwork

- Embedding activities into the National Curriculum, school improvement plans or independent learning plans

- Having trust and communication at the core of the programme – between stakeholders and in the information provided

- Building in flexibility to develop areas of the programmes that deal with shared governance, curriculum input, strategic planning, school improvement or other types of collaboration between schools and higher education institutions to share expertise

- Challenging preconceptions and stereotypes about higher education and undergraduate students

  "It's marketing, but they go the extra mile don't they?" [Participant M, Durham Aimhigher focus group, paragraph 605]

287. From the three types of programme examined here, it appears that there is a trend towards increasingly individualising schedules of activities for schools, and away from generic programmes that provide the same things across all schools. This has been developing over time, and has been partly linked to changes in funding that encourage "enhanced programmes" for specific schools linked to Aimhigher or Connexions. These "enhanced programmes" are also encouraging activities that promote the concept of higher education with increasingly younger children, as well as delivering extra interaction with the 14-16 age groups. Within these, programmes are also interacting with increasingly targeted and pre-specified groups of students, which will further encourage the development of distinctly different types of activities to engage the students. It also allows programmes to develop according to local need and local infrastructures. This method of working with schools may also aid schools in deciding which programmes to participate in, since a large number of alternatives are available.

   "Schools have so many requests, and there are so many different initiatives out there, they find it very difficult sometimes to see the wood for the trees, I think. And actually working out which, you know, what's going to be best for their students, and again that might come back to the individual relationships and trust and knowing that individual institutions will offer a good programme of activities."
   [Participant A, interview 6 & 7, paragraph 224]

Barriers

288.   Barriers for links programmes have been touched on elsewhere in this report and this section brings these barriers together to summarise the key issues. Barriers may occur with respect to any aspect of a programme, and it should be noted that these are the ones participant felt were important, and were not necessarily associated with any of the three programmes in this evaluation – frequently they were generic observations. These barriers are:

- Social and economic barriers facing students from non-traditional higher education backgrounds

- Financial constraints as to what a programme can offer, and the extent to which it is able to support schools to attend activities, as well as for schools and students

- Timetabling: constraints about when universities, schools and students are all available for an activity

- Competing priorities: time pressures from other commitments with higher priorities

- Loss of focus in students if there are large gaps between events

- Family, peer, social and cultural, or financial pressures on students not to think about the possibility of higher education or to take a particular direction in life

- Students' feelings of unfamiliarity and misconceptions about higher education, as well as a lack of understanding of what is involved in taking a degree or studying at a research-intensive university

- Students' shyness and lack of self-confidence which may prevent them from taking up a programme, or limit what they get out of taking part through lack of engagement

- Large amounts of potential information to be transferred, and prioritising that information appropriately; prioritising between the many different options available to schools to work out what is best for their students

- Appropriately limiting and selecting the schools to have a relationship with from the wider pool of potential schools, and the transaction costs of building relationships

- A slightly one-sided relationship, which may be more important to the university than to the school; both sides of the partnership must be willing to put in the effort to make it work

- Geographical barriers and logistical barriers to building relationships with schools beyond the local region

- Limitations to student numbers because of transport or accommodation capacity, and financial constraints

- Schools' institutional barriers such as other commitments, insufficient notice for activities and events, limits to the time students can take out of schools and lack of teaching cover

- Lack of the necessary time for teachers to prepare for and arrange events

- Schools' resistance to specialised programmes if they think higher education advice should be for everybody, and could feel their own internal provision is sufficient

- Schools and teachers may create barriers by reinforcing attitudes and stereotypes about higher education or particular universities, and may place IAG as a low priority

- Ill thought-out and organised events can create a barrier that reduces future participation rates and generates psychological barriers about going on to higher education

- Practical logistical barriers such as lack of or poor communication between individuals who are part of a programme, or partners in a link

- Barriers that prevent successful relationships being built between individuals within a programme, and sustaining a programme over the long term

- Barriers which make it harder to identify the right individuals to build relationships with

- Barriers to keeping up-to-date with information. Frequent changes in the school curriculum or to programme activities can create a barrier between what schools are focussing on and what programmes are geared-up to provide

- Potentially, labelling a programme as widening participation may discourage participation, although there was little evidence from this research that this might be occurring

- Selection criteria that are too rigid or counter-productive, which may mis-select students, increasing barriers for those who fall through the gaps for not being in the correct postcode or failing to tick all the appropriate boxes

- Lack of transparency in the university applications system

- Barriers around understanding the value of a degree and concerns about job prospects after graduation

- Legislative barriers such as Government and union regulations for supply cover in schools, or health and safety, and risk assessments which increase the administrative burden of participating in a programme

- Lack of leadership for a programme, or lack of buy-in from stakeholders

- Lack of national support for building a comprehensive careers service or developing IAG

- Conflicting goals and lack of trust between stakeholders

- Using programmes as a sales or marketing pitch

- Academic barriers, a lack of or inappropriate qualifications

- Conflicting information

- Universities' values systems that rate research and teaching more highly than other activities, which is particularly likely in departments that select rather than recruit, and which can make it hard to involve academic staff in outreach

- A need for an individualised approach to IAG consumes resources

- Lack of trained advisers for delivering IAG

- Sometimes the barriers are not clear, when activities are offered but participation rates are low.

Results of Quantitative Analysis

Green Apples

289. **Number of pupils participating each year:** The core programme involves approximately 600 pupils in Years 9-11 (10 York state secondary schools x 20 pupils x 3 year groups). The programme also works with a number of primary school pupils and provides continuing advice and support for Green Apples students in Years 12 and 13. For 2008-9 the total number of participants was 829 students, with 167 parents also attending events.

290. **Budget:** £77,200 per year, estimated as follows:

291. Aimhigher York and North Yorkshire supports the programme for four of the ten secondary schools, for the primary events and for the work with Green Apples students in Years 12 and 13. The Aimhigher allocation is £44,000 per year. Costs of the other six secondary schools which participate are borne by the schools themselves or by the four further and higher education institutions which collaborate in the programme. University of York direct costs are estimated to be in the order of £5,000 per year (and it should be reckoned that the other three institutions spend similar sums). Grant monies in 2008/9 to support the residential event for non-funded schools came to £11,200. In addition £2,000 was given to support Green Apples' primary work.

292. **Number and type of events:** The programme is a mix of open-day-based visits and school-based events and includes:

293.   For Year 9 – after a visit to the school, each pupil visits one of four higher education providers in York for a day of awareness raising activities. There is also a high profile celebration event involving parents and pupils.

294.   For Year 10 – a school-based activity followed by an overnight residential programme for each pupil, which is a mix of more awareness and aspiration-raising, academic input and team building. (From 2009 onwards only four schools will be fully funded for this part of the programme but in 2008/9 they were able to obtain some funding to support other schools.) Some pupils also have access to enhanced IAG.

295.   For Year 11 – each pupil attends a day conference that covers post-16 choices, some more detailed information about higher education finance, study and life skills.

296.   These events also reach some 60 staff in local schools, who accompany the pupils on visits.

297.   Average cost for 2008-9 per pupil participating (including administrative and other costs for the four higher education providers, excluding parents' attendance): £93.12

298.   Some ten staff from the University of York are involved in the planning and delivery of events, five from support offices and five from academic departments. Student Ambassadors participate in all events (in the proportion 10 pupils to 1 ambassador). Costs of hourly pay for student helpers are included in the figures above.

Durham Aimhigher Links

299.   **Number of pupils participating each year:** Some 150 students from Durham Aimhigher participated in events organised and run at the University of York. Numbers of students participating in the whole Durham Aimhigher programme were not available.

300.   **Budget:** £2,100 for York event costs borne by the University of York. Note that Aimhigher Durham funds transport, lunches, refreshments and accommodation costs in all cases; there was an annual budget of £835,780 for Durham Aimhigher in 2008/9, to cover all events and services.

301.   **Number and type of events involving the University of York:** Mature students' one-day event (60 participants), Year 10 Health one-day event (43 participants), Year 11 two-day residential (42 participants). This gives a total of three events with 147 participants.

302.   **Average annual cost per pupil participating (including administrative costs):** Could not be calculated for the whole Durham Aimhigher project. For York events, the University of York's costs were £14.29 (excludes transport costs, accommodation costs, and the costs of refreshments and lunches, which were borne by Durham Aimhigher).

The University of York Schools and Colleges Network

303. **Number of pupils participating each year**: In its first year of operation, UYSCN involved over 800 students and 100 teachers in activities and events, from the 11 member schools and colleges in different parts of the UK.

304. **Budget:** £27,000 estimated as follows: £10,000 per year for events costs plus cost of additional staffing to service UYSCN £17,000 per year in the first year (rising to £34,000 per year from 2009/10 with staff in place for the full year).

305. **Number and type of events:** All network schools and colleges have had two getting-to-know-you visits from York staff, have been represented at an inaugural meeting at York, have been invited to send students to an Independent Learning event (and those who did not attend will be given online access to materials) and to send staff to a science teachers' event at the National Science Learning Centre. Several UYSCN schools and colleges have had visits from York academic staff to provide input into curriculum and from education liaison staff to contribute to CPD for IAG staff or directly to higher education advice for students.

306. **Average annual cost per pupil participating (including administrative costs):** £30.00 per participant.

307. Note that all costs above may be under estimates because of the complexity of calculating full costs of administrative support and facilities. It is also the case that levels of engagement in UYSCN activities is expected to increase in 2009/10 as the partnership matures and as schools and colleges that have benefited from particular events recommend them to other members.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions: School–University Link Programmes

308.   The three school–university link programmes included in this evaluation are highly valued by those involved.

309.   Effective programmes are individualised towards the community they are trying to serve, and adaptable to changing circumstances or in response to demand.

- Getting the details right is vital, since it adds a personal touch.

- Timing programme activities appropriately can be challenging.

- There is a trend towards programmes that offer more tailored experiences for individual schools.

310.   Good programmes provide benefits for all stakeholders, whether a school or a university.

311.   Trust between stakeholders is the foundation for a superior programme, which can help build a reputation for providing a high-quality experience. It is built up over time by establishing good relationships between stakeholders, although conflicts between stakeholders' goals can undermine trust.

312.   To build trust, programmes must have good communication between stakeholders. Quality can be increased through using feedback to inform programme development.

313.   Relationships are central to successful programmes.

- Personal relationships between individuals are the foundation on which a programme is built.

- Positive feelings are generated in stakeholders by them being part of that relationship.

- Stakeholder relationships are developed over time with a view to programme longevity.

- This facilitates staff continuity, which is another factor contributing to a programme's success.

314.   A programme's quality is strongly associated with the training and skills of those involved in providing a programme, particularly Student Ambassadors and Mentors.

315.   Residential visits, including an overnight stay, are effective at imparting condensed IAG into a short period, and can engage students with the idea of higher education through challenging inhibitions which may reduce aspirations. The key to the success of these activities is getting the balance right between giving the students a good time and giving them a realistic picture of university life.

316. Adequate funding is crucial, particularly since having an individualised approach for schools is relatively resource-intensive.

317. The central aim of school–university links is about providing information, advice and guidance for higher education; that is where the expertise of higher education institutions can be most valuable to schools and colleges. Widening participation and recruitment are additions to this core. It is important that programmes:

- Provide training for advisors and teachers as well as students.

- Are sustained for the participating students, with engaging and age-appropriate activities.

- Provide impartial IAG that may also include further education and non-higher education post-16 options.

- Give timely, accurate and appropriate IAG.

318. Recruitment is part of the reason for providing these programmes, since universities can benefit from an enhanced reputation and information exchange with schools about a variety of factors that influence recruitment, but it is a subsidiary consideration. Helping people to understand admissions processes and criteria is important to all types of schools, not just those in widening participation target areas. Anything that aids the transparency of university admissions processes helps with fairness, and enhances confidence with students and their advisers who use the system. Programme activities prefer to focus on general information or subtle promotion rather than a hard-sell, believing it to be more effective.

319. Widening participation is another aim, which can have two aspects. The first aspect is about improving progression by opening up higher education in general to any student. The second aspect is focussed on raising aspirations among potentially high-achieving students whatever their social background about going to the most competitive, academically-challenging, research-intensive universities.

- Working with younger age groups, such as Years 6 and 7, can help generate interest earlier in life.

320. Shared governance, strategic planning arrangements and curriculum developments were not highly cited by participants, suggesting that this type of situation is still relatively uncommon, and that the arrangements are created *ad hoc*, in response to a particular need or when a particular situation arises. The idea of shared improvement was grounded in the idea of sharing expertise between organisations, which then allowed self-improvement, rather than external advisers determining what the improvement should be.

- Participants valued embedding activities into the National Curriculum, school improvement plans or independent learning plans.

- It is important to build in flexibility to allow for potential future development of areas of programmes that deal with shared governance, curriculum input,

strategic planning, school improvement or other types of collaboration that share expertise.

321. Programmes can provide social and local benefits far beyond their official stated aims, such as an altruistic desire to make a social contribution either directly through the aspirational messages that a programme gives out or indirectly through awareness-raising activities that boost students' confidence in general. Programmes can make longer-term social contributions by helping guide students towards being productive members of society.

Conclusions: Evaluation of School–University Link Programmes

322. Programme evaluations will need to ensure a robust design, appropriate data collection and analysis, and methods to minimise biases that could undermine the conclusions for quantified impact assessments.

Recommendations: Key Challenges for the Three Programmes

323. In terms of prioritising the next steps for each of the programmes in this evaluation, the key challenges for the three programmes are:

324. Green Apples – The changes to the selection criteria and funding are potentially going to significantly affect the impact of the programme on future students as provision of activities changes. Teachers would like more discretion over selection, although it is unclear whether this is possible or viable. Effectively communicating the reasons and importance of these changes, managing their impact and getting buy-in from all stakeholders over the future of Green Apples should be a priority.

325. Durham Aimhigher – The link with Aimhigher is based on individual contacts, not with schools directly. As such, the University of York is not distinguished by schools from among all the other universities providing activities through Aimhigher; it has a low visibility with individual schools. In order to develop the relationship with Durham Aimhigher and the schools it should be a priority to identify innovative ways of providing different opportunities compared to what is available through other universities, such as through clear branding of York events and appropriate follow-up with the individual schools.

326. UYSCN – There are geographical barriers and logistical barriers to building relationships with schools beyond the local region; the pragmatic issues include limitations to student numbers because of transport or accommodation capacity and financial constraints. The main challenge will be establishing trust between the stakeholders and building the relationships that will be central to a programme's potential future successes. Again, communication and clarification about the purpose of the programme, to justify schools' participation and demonstrate that these barriers can be overcome, is an identified need from this research.

Recommendations for School–University Link Programmes

327. For all programmes, implementation of the recommendations for best practice and efforts to reduce barriers that affect the quality of a programme and participation rates will help improve provision.

328. As illustrated by this research, school–university links can take on distinctly different structures; the right model for any programme will be one that is based on the needs of its recipients and is responsive and adaptable to the specific environment in which it operates.

329. Programmes should work on promoting good communication and building trust between stakeholders to establish the close relationships which are central to a programme's success.

330. To provide robust recommendations about the measurable impact of school–university programmes and their effect on progression to higher education, structures need to be built in to programmes for collecting data to allow for empirical, quantitative analyses of hard outcomes. This would also generate data that could be used for detailed cost-effectiveness analyses that could be used to determine the value-for-money of these programmes and the opportunity costs of investing further resources in particular areas. At present there is insufficient evaluation of their impact or of their financial value.

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Abbreviations

'ACE Day': Aiming for College Education Day

CPD: Continuing Professional Development

BME: Black and Ethnic Minority

EMA: Educational Maintenance Allowance

F&HEI: Further and/or Higher Education Institution

G&T: Gifted and Talented

HEFCE: Higher Education Funding Council for England

HE: Higher Education

HEI: Higher Education Institution

HELOA: Higher Education Liaison Officers Association

IAG: Information, Advice and Guidance

NatCen: National Centre for Social Research

NCEE: National Council for Educational Excellence

NYBEP: Business and Education Partnership for York and North Yorkshire

PSHE: Personal, Social and Health Education

UYSCN: University of York Schools and Colleges Network

WP: Widening Participation

Annex 1: Development Work Associated with this Research

331.   A budget of £15,000 out of the funding for this project has been allocated for development work that will be informed by the results of this research. The development funds enable the University of York to address issues that have been revealed in the research, to provide materials and information that will be of lasting value to the link programmes and to trial a training format in which schools and colleges work together to share good practice in the provision of IAG.

332.   The areas of development will be as described below. While the research has shown a number of areas where the three programmes would benefit from further investment, these are the things that have been identified by the programme organisers as particularly important, that will add value to current link programmes and that will bring benefit to participants:

Green Apples Project – Development of Longer-day Provision

333.   Aimhigher funding in support of the Green Apples project is now targeted at four particular schools, which means that the other six schools participating do not enjoy financial support. The four York higher education providers have agreed to continue to provide day events for the unfunded schools by absorbing the costs into their own widening participation budgets, while expecting the schools to defray the costs of transport and any necessary supply cover.

334.   Additionally, in the first year of operation of the new system 2008/9 additional funding was obtained to continue a residential experience for the remaining six schools. (Note that at these schools, the participating pupils are from widening participation groups, although the schools themselves are not target schools.) This report makes it clear that the likely loss of the residential experience from 2009/10 is regretted by teachers and may even jeopardise their continued engagement with this long running programme. We are allocating £5,000 to follow up this research by developing longer-day provision, in which the academic and skills development events of the day for the unfunded six schools are followed by a meal and social event in the evening, without the experience of an overnight stay. This useful pilot will enable us to see whether some of the benefits of a residential experience can be achieved in a less costly format. If matching funding from other partners or charities became available, the £5,000 *could* be used to reinstate the residential event for another year, but the difficulty of obtaining funding for residential events is likely to continue, so developing longer-day arrangements may be a more effective long term solution.

Training Event – for Higher Education Advisers and Guidance Staff

335.   The University of York is planning a two-day training event for information advisers and guidance staff from UYSCN schools. The event will be targeted at those schools and colleges in UYSCN where widening participation is a priority. A successful format for such an event has recently been trialled, with the collaboration of Durham Aimhigher, for Connexions personal advisers in the North East. The format could be adapted to use UYSCN effectively – bringing some successful schools with good higher education advice programmes into contact with less successful schools that

may have less familiarity with UCAS processes and university selection procedures. Schools and colleges in UYSCN have shown an eagerness to learn from one another.

336.   A budget of £5,000 will provide 30 places at a two-day event.

Developing the Role of University Careers Staff

337.   Drawing on the results of this research and on regular conversations with those involved in University of York link programmes makes it clear that it is important to provide information about the careers prospects of graduates. Teachers are keen to know more about the career paths of graduates in different subjects and to understand how prospects can be improved, especially for students from widening participation backgrounds. In order to provide such information – and to demonstrate how the university experience in its widest sense contributes to employability – the University of York has identified a need to engage careers professionals from the university in its school/college link programmes. The development budget of £5,000 will contribute to any additional staff costs and the costs of developing materials.

338.   Having more information about skills for employment and graduate careers will also be useful in engaging the parents of widening participation students and reassuring them about the cost-benefit of higher education.

Annex 2: Example Covering Letter for Interviews

THE UNIVERSITY _of York_

Institute for **Effective Education**
Empowering educators with evidence

Date

Dear XXX,

**Evaluating Three Models of School–University Partnership at the University of York:
Learning Lessons and Planning for the Future**

The Institute for Effective Education at the University of York is independently evaluating three school–university partnerships associated with the University of York. As part of this evaluation, we would like to interview you about your perceptions and experiences of these programmes. The three programmes involved in the research are: Green Apples; Durham AimHigher; and the University of York Schools and Colleges Network (UYSCN).

The study seeks to understand and interpret stakeholders' perceptions, exploring issues around IAG (information, advice and guidance), what schools and universities want from having partnerships, describing schools' perceptions, attitudes and desired outcomes, and identifying how to encourage participation and engagement with schools. Interviews will take about 1–1½ hours, and will be recorded for anonymous transcription.

Your opinions are important for our evaluation, so we hope that you will be willing to take part. This research will influence the events and activities offered by the University of York, as well as influencing how similar programmes would be provided for other students in the future. Please take the time to read the enclosed information sheet, which has more information about the interviews, and the aims of our research.

If you have any questions about the research, please feel free to get in touch with me on 01904 328158 or email vlh500@york.ac.uk.

Yours sincerely,

Dr. Vivien Hendry (Research Fellow and Project Coordinator)
Hannah Ainsworth (Research Fellow)
Dr. Carole Torgerson (Reader and Chief Investigator)

Version 1, 27/04/09

Institute for Effective Education ARRC, Alcuin College, University of York, York, YO10 5DD
tel. 01904 328151 fax. 01904 328156 email. iee@york.ac.uk www.york.ac.uk/iee

Annex 3: Information Sheet for Interviews
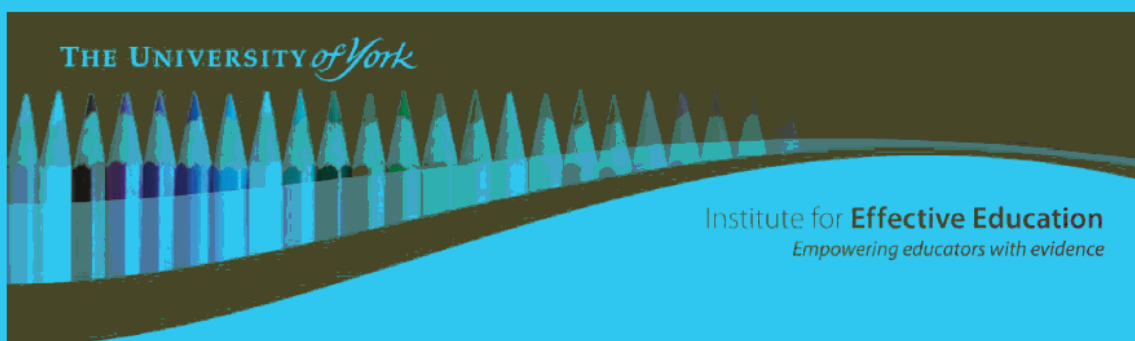
THE UNIVERSITY *of York*

Institute for **Effective Education**
Empowering educators with evidence

Evaluating Three Models of School–University Partnership at the University of York:
Learning Lessons and Planning for the Future

Information Sheet for Interview Participants

Can you help us?
We doing an evaluation of three of the school–university partnerships linked to the University of York, to find out more about schools experiences. We want to hear what you think about the activities or events that you have taken part in, and how these programmes could be made more useful for schools.

Who is taking part in the research?
Stakeholders who are involved in Green Apples, Durham AimHigher, and the University of York Schools and Colleges Network (UYSCN) will be asked to take part in the research.

Why am I being asked to take part?
We are looking for stakeholders who can tell us about their experiences. We would like to hear about your views about the programme or programmes that you are involved with.

What is the study about?
The study is part of a wider research project which seeks to understand and interpret stakeholders' perceptions of three models of school–university links, exploring issues such as IAG (information, advice and guidance), what schools and universities want from having partnerships, describing schools' perceptions, attitudes and desired outcomes, and identifying how to encourage participation and engagement with schools.

What will I have to do?
Interviews will be one-to-one and will take place during May and June 2009. We will organise a time and date at your convenience. Each interview will be recorded for anonymous transcription so that we can get an accurate record of your views. These recordings will be kept confidential, and will only used for our research.

Interviews will take about 1–1½ hours.

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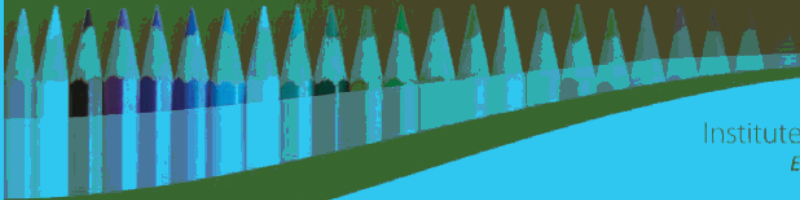
What will happen to the information?
Everything that is discussed during the interview will be kept private and confidential. We will not discuss what you say with anyone outside the evaluation without your permission. When we write the report about the project, we will not use your name at any point. We will use the data to write a report on the views and experiences of those involved in the three programmes. We will send you a summary of the report. The report will also be sent to those who asked for the research to be done. We hope that the report will be used in planning future events, so that you can benefit directly as the programmes develop. We also hope that the report will influence similar programmes and activities in the future.

Who are the researchers and how is the study funded?
Vivien Hendry, Hannah Ainsworth and Carole Torgerson are the researchers. We work in the Institute for Effective Education at the University of York. We have been funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) to independently evaluate these programmes.

Do I have to take part?
No. Your participation in the research is voluntary; it is up to you to decide whether you would like to take part. If you do decide to take part you can still change your mind at any time. Refusal to take part will not affect your ability to take part in any activities offered by the University of York.

What happens next?
If you think you **might** be interested in taking part and telling us your views please sign the consent form, and return it in the envelope provided. You can withdraw at any time, without giving a reason. Once we have received your consent form we will be in touch to organise a mutually convenient time, date and place for your interview.

Any questions?
If you have any questions or if you would like to talk to us about the project, please contact:
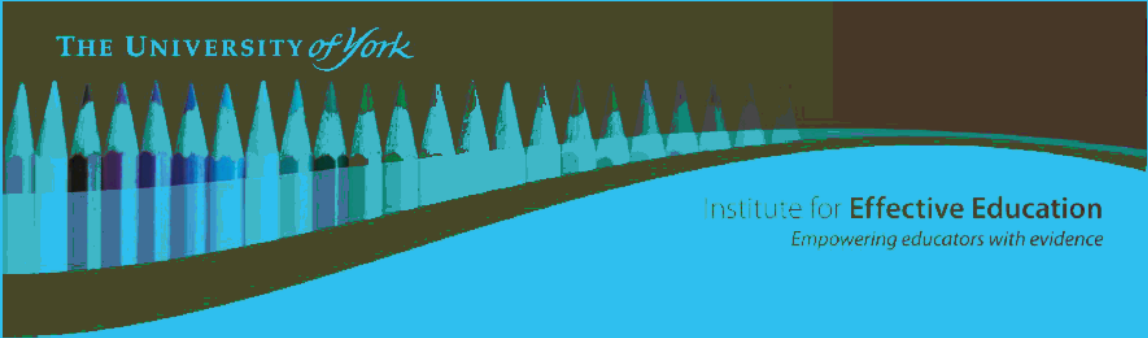**Dr. Vivien Hendry** (Research Fellow and Project Coordinator)
Hannah Ainsworth (Research Fellow) and **Dr. Carole Torgerson** (Reader and Chief Investigator)
Institute for Effective Education, University of York, York, YO10 5DD.
Tel: 01904 328158, Fax: 01904 328156, Email: vlh500@york.ac.uk

Annex 4: Consent Form for Interviews

THE UNIVERSITY *of York*

Institute for **Effective Education**
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Evaluating Three Models of School–University Partnership at the University of York: Learning Lessons and Planning for the Future

Consent Form for Interview Participants

	Please tick the boxes	
1. I have read the 'Information Sheet for Interview Participants'	Yes ❐	No ❐
2. I understand what the project is about and what taking part involves, and I have had the opportunity to consider the information and ask questions	Yes ❐	No ❐
3. I understand that the interview will be recorded for transcription	Yes ❐	No ❐
4. I understand that each interview is strictly private, and that all the information I give will be treated confidentially	Yes ❐	No ❐
5. I understand that I can leave the interview at any time, without giving a reason, if I decide to take part and later change my mind	Yes ❐	No ❐
6. I would like to participate in the research	Yes ❐	No ❐

Please write your name here (in BLOCK letters): _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

To be completed by staff at the Institute for Effective Education:

Interviewer's name: _____ Date: _____

One copy to be retained by the research team, one copy to be retained by the participant.
Consent Form for Interview Participants, Version 1 27/04/09

Institute for Effective Education ARRC Alcuin College University of York York YO10 5DD
tel 01904 328151 fax 01904 328156 email iee@york.ac.uk www.york.ac.uk/iee

Annex 5: Example Covering Letter for Focus Groups

THE UNIVERSITY of York

Institute for **Effective Education**
Empowering educators with evidence

Date

Dear XXX,

Evaluating Three Models of School–University Partnership at the University of York: Learning Lessons and Planning for the Future

The Institute for Effective Education at the University of York is independently evaluating three school–university partnerships associated with the University of York. As part of this evaluation, we would like to invite you to a half-day conference on DATE, and to take part in a discussion of your perceptions and experiences of these programmes. The three programmes involved in the research are: Green Apples; Durham AimHigher; and the University of York Schools and Colleges Network (UYSCN).

Presentations will be given by:

The study seeks to understand and interpret stakeholders' perceptions, exploring issues around IAG (information, advice and guidance), what schools and universities want from having partnerships, describing schools' perceptions, attitudes and desired outcomes, and identifying how to encourage participation and engagement with schools. The conference will take about 3 hours, and discussion groups will be recorded for anonymous transcription. Refreshments will be provided.

Your opinions are important for our evaluation, so we hope that you will be willing to take part. This research will influence the events and activities offered by the University of York, as well as influencing how similar programmes would be provided for other students in the future. Please take the time to read the enclosed information sheet, which has more information about the focus groups, and the aims of our research. If you have any questions about the research, please feel free to get in touch with me on 01904 328158 or email vlh500@york.ac.uk. We are happy to reimburse travelling expenses for the event.
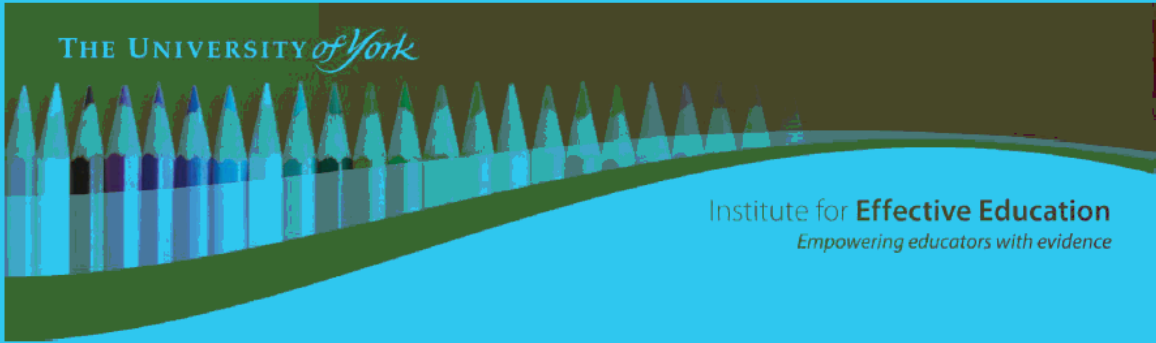
Yours sincerely,

Dr. Vivien Hendry (Research Fellow and Project Coordinator)
Hannah Ainsworth (Research Fellow)
Dr. Carole Torgerson (Reader and Chief Investigator)

Version 1, 27/04/09

Annex 6: Information Sheet for Focus Groups

THE UNIVERSITY *of York*

Institute for **Effective Education**
Empowering educators with evidence

Evaluating Three Models of School–University Partnership at the University of York: Learning Lessons and Planning for the Future

Information Sheet for Focus Group Participants

Can you help us?
We doing an evaluation of three of the school–university partnerships linked to the University of York, to find out more about schools experiences, and we would like you to attend a half-day conference to discuss them. We want to hear what you think about the activities or events that you have taken part in, and how these programmes could be made more useful for you and your school.

Who is taking part in the research?
Schools who are involved in Green Apples, Durham AimHigher, and the University of York Schools and Colleges Network (UYSCN) will be asked to take part in the research.

Why am I being asked to take part?
We are looking for people who can tell us about their experiences. We would like to hear your views about the programme or programmes that your school is involved with.

What is the study about?
The study is part of a wider research project which seeks to understand and interpret stakeholders' perceptions of three models of school–university links, exploring issues such as IAG (information, advice and guidance), what schools and universities want from having partnerships, describing schools' perceptions, attitudes and desired outcomes, and identifying how to encourage participation and engagement with schools.

What will I have to do?
Focus groups will take place during a half-day conference organised by the Institute for Effective Education during June 2009. We will let you know where and when once the programme for the event has been finalised. All you need to do is turn up. We would like to record each focus group, so that we can get an accurate record of your views and the views of the rest of the group. These recordings will be kept confidential, and will only used for our research.

The conference will last around 3 hours, and each focus group will take about 1–1½ hours.

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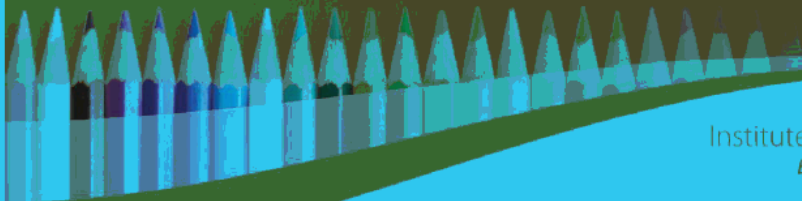
What is a focus group?

Focus groups involve 6 to 8 people discussing a particular topic as a group. Participants are encouraged to discuss issues with each other, and to identify the issues that are important to them, although the general topics discussed by the group are directed by the researcher (moderator).

What will happen to the information?

Everything that is discussed during the focus group will be kept private and confidential. We will not discuss what you say with anyone outside the evaluation without your permission. When we write the report about the project, we will not use your name at any point. We will use the data to write a report on the views and experiences of those involved in the three programmes. We will send you a summary of the report. The report will also be sent to those who asked for the research to be done. We hope that the report will be used in planning future events, so that you can benefit directly as the programmes develop. We also hope that the report will influence similar programmes and activities in the future.

Who are the researchers and how is the study funded?

Vivien Hendry, Hannah Ainsworth and Carole Torgerson are the researchers. We work in the Institute for Effective Education at the University of York. We have been funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) to independently evaluate these programmes.

Do I have to take part?

No. It is up to you to decide whether you would like to take part. If you do decide to take part you can still change your mind at any time. Refusal to take part will not affect your schools' ability to take part in any activities offered by the University of York.

What happens next?

If you think you **might** be interested in attending the conference and telling us your views please sign the consent form, and return it in the envelope provided. Even if you feel you are not sure at this stage, please sign and return the form. You can withdraw at any time, without giving a reason.

Any questions?

If you have any questions or if you would like to talk to us about the project, please contact:
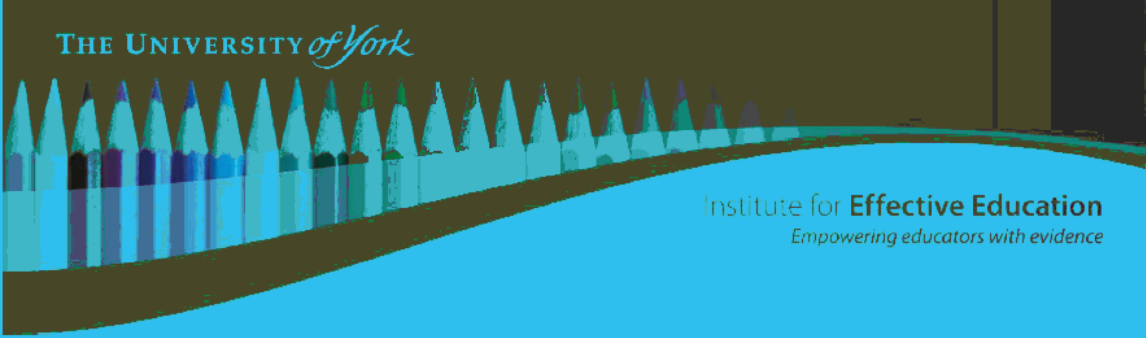**Dr. Vivien Hendry** (Research Fellow and Project Coordinator)
Hannah Ainsworth (Research Fellow) and **Dr. Carole Torgerson** (Reader and Chief Investigator)
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Annex 7: Consent Form for Focus Groups

THE UNIVERSITY of York

Institute for **Effective Education**
Empowering educators with evidence

Evaluating Three Models of School–University Partnership at the University of York: Learning Lessons and Planning for the Future

Consent Form for Focus Group Participants

	Please tick the boxes	
1. I have read the 'Information Sheet for Focus Group Participants'	Yes ❒	No ❒
2. I understand what the project is about and what taking part involves , and I have had the opportunity to consider the information and ask questions	Yes ❒	No ❒
3. I understand that each focus group will be recorded for transcription	Yes ❒	No ❒
4. I understand that each focus group is strictly private, and that all the information I give will be treated confidentially	Yes ❒	No ❒
5. I understand that I can leave the focus group at any time, without giving a reason, if I decide to take part and later change my mind	Yes ❒	No ❒
6. I would like to participate in the research	Yes ❒	No ❒

Please write your name here (in BLOCK letters): _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

To be completed by staff at the Institute for Effective Education:
Interviewer's name: _____ Date: _____
One copy to be retained by the research team, one copy to be retained by the participant.
Consent Form for Focus Group Participants, Version 1 27/04/09

Institute for Effective Education ARRC Alcuin College University of York York YO10 5DD
tel 01904 328151 fax 01904 328156 email iee@york.ac.uk www.york.ac.uk/iee

Annex 8: Topic Guides for Interviews and Focus Groups

Example Topic Guide – Revised For Interviews

Hello, Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed! I'm [*interviewer's name*] and I work in the Institute for Effective Education at the University of York. We're doing an evaluation of three school–university link programmes associated with the University of York. These are: Green Apples, Durham Aimhigher and the University of York Schools and Colleges Network. Today's interview will be structured around 4 areas: the aims of the programme(s) that you have been involved with; the role of information, advice and guidance; how the programmes fit into wider provision; and barriers to participation. The interview will take around an hour to an hour and a half. Our research has been funded by the Higher Education Funding Council (HEFCE).

I'd like to remind you that the interview is confidential and all data will be analysed and reported anonymously; we will not use name at any point. I will be recording the discussion to provide us with a full account of everything that has been said, to help our analysis. These recordings will be kept confidential and anonymous. We will use the information to write a report, and to publish academic papers. We will send you a summary of the report as well, if you wish.

1. **Aims and perceptions of programme – Green Apples/Durham Aimhigher/UYSCN**
   - What is the programme?
     - What activities does it offer? What resources does it offer?
     - How does it differ from other programmes you have experienced?
   - What are the aims of the programme?
     - How well does the programme fulfil its aim?
     - How does it differ from other programmes you have been involved with?
     - Are they appropriate aims?
     - What works/what doesn't work? What could have been done differently?
     - How do you measure the success of the programme? What measures of success are important? or How would you measure or evaluate the impact of the programme?
   - What have schools told you they need and want out of taking part in a programme?
     - How does this fit with your perceptions of what should be provided to schools?
   - Has taking part made a difference for the schools? In what way? How does this differ between programmes?
   - What characteristics do you look for in a "good" programme? What characterises a programme that does not work?

- o Anything else to say about the aims and perceptions of the programmes that we have not covered?

2. Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG)
- o What are the characteristics of good practice for IAG provision – what should be offered by a school?
  - ▪ Perceptions from strategic level
  - ▪ From schools
    - • What a school should provide, do they provide all that they should?
    - • Whether they recognise what needs to be done, and extent to which they are making an effort
  - ▪ What programmes outside schools should be offering to schools – what is their role?
- o Need for expertise and knowledge
- o How these programmes can help improve provision in schools
  - ▪ What schools need from a programme
- o What have you seen in terms of variation in provision between schools, what is offered?

3. How each programme fits into the 'wider scheme' of partnership programmes
- o What alternative programmes have you been involved with? What other programmes are on offer? Any school-uni link programmes
- o How do the alternatives compare? Characteristics that work/don't work?
- o Targeted (groups within a year group) compared to full cohort (year group) programmes? Are there any issues with targeting particular groups?
- o What are the benefits to universities from providing these programmes? What are the drawbacks? In your experience, are universities able to be impartial in the advice they offer?
  - ▪ Should these programmes be the responsibility of universities? Who else might be responsible?
  - ▪ National or local provision? What are the alternatives?

4. Barriers to taking part in school-uni link programmes
- o What are they?
- o What can be done to overcome them?
- o Who needs to do something to overcome the barriers? E.g. Universities, schools, teachers, students, parents, specific individuals, organisations...
- o Any experience of activities within a programme that don't or have not worked? Why?

5. Anything else??

Example Topic Guide – Revised For Focus Groups

Hello, Thank you for agreeing to be part of the discussion today! Just to remind you, I'm [*interviewer's name*] and I work in the Institute for Effective Education at the University of York.

We're doing an evaluation of three widening participation programmes associated with the University of York. These are: Green Apples, Durham Aimhigher and the University of York Schools and Colleges Network. **Today's focus group will be structured around 4 areas: the aims your programme; the role of information, advice and guidance; how the programme fits into wider provision; and barriers to participation. The focus group will take around an hour** to an hour and a half.

The focus group is confidential and all data will be analysed and reported anonymously; we will not use your name at any point. The discussion will be recorded to provide us with a full account of everything that has been said. These recordings will be kept confidential and anonymous. We will use the information to write a report, and to publish academic papers. We will send you a summary of the report as well, if you wish. Our research has been funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England.

Before we start, there are a few ground rules to cover. **This session takes the form of a discussion; if you have something you want to say, don't wait to be invited to talk. BUT please try not to talk at the same time! Respect what others have to say. There are no right or wrong answers. We want to hear from everyone, and would like to hear as many different ideas as possible.**

Please treat what other people say during the session as confidential, and do not repeat what they have said outside the session.

[Topics to discuss, with typical example questions and probes:]

1. **Aims and perceptions of the programme – the Network**
   - What is the programme?
     - What activities does it offer?
     - What activities have you (your school) taken part in?
   - What are the aims of the programme?
     - How well does the programme fulfil its aims?
     - Are they appropriate aims?
     - What works/what doesn't work?
     - What could be done differently?
   - What do schools need and want out of taking part in a programme?
   - Has taking part made a difference for the school? In what way?
   - What characteristics do you look for in a "good" programme? What characterises a programme that does not work?
   - Anything else to say about the aims and perceptions of the programmes that we have not covered?

2. **Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG)**
   o What are the characteristics of good practice for IAG provision – what should be offered by a school?
      ▪ What should a school provide?
         • Can they or do they provide all that they should?
      ▪ What schools would like to be offered by programmes outside schools (e.g. such as Aimhigher)?
      ▪ What is the role of such programmes in providing IAG?
   o How can these programmes help improve provision in schools?
      ▪ What schools need from a programme?
   o What have you seen in terms of variation in provision between schools, what is offered?

3. **How each programme fits into the 'wider scheme' of programmes**
   o What alternative programmes have you been involved with? What other programmes are on offer?
   o How do the alternatives compare? Characteristics that work/don't work?
   o Targeted (groups) compared to general (full cohort) programmes? Are there any issues with targeting particular groups?
   o What are the benefits to universities from providing these programmes? What are the drawbacks? In your experience, are universities able to be impartial in the advice that they offer?
      ▪ Should these programmes be the responsibility of universities? Who else might be responsible?
      ▪ National or local provision? What are the alternatives?

We're almost done – last couple of questions!

4. **Barriers to participation**
   o What are they?
   o What can be done to overcome them?
   o Who needs to do something to overcome the barriers? E.g. Universities, schools, teachers, students, parents, specific individuals, organisations...

5. **Anything else??**
   o There is potentially some money to help develop the Network – where would you like to see it spent? DO NOT GIVE AN AMOUNT! A **wishlist** of how they would like to see the Network develop.
   o How could programme develop, to help meet your needs?
   o What can Network do to help you?

Annex 9: Definitions of Codes for Analysis

Explanations in italics below each code

Barriers
Any barriers to taking part in school-uni link programmes; may include wider barriers to participation in HE

Best practice
Best practice for school-uni link programmes

IAG best practice
Best practice for information, advice and guidance

IAG by others
IAG from other organisations or official sources, not purely higher education; options on leaving school. Includes types of IAG, attitudes towards it, benefits/drawbacks, etc.

IAG by Unis
IAG provided by universities. Can include types of IAG, attitudes towards it, benefits & drawbacks, etc.

IAG in schools
IAG provided by schools. Can include types of IAG, attitudes towards it, benefits/drawbacks, ability of schools to provide adequate/comprehensive IAG, etc.

IAG informal
IAG from any informal sources e.g. may include subject teachers, family, friends, peers...

IAG students LR
Long run aims of providing IAG to students e.g. life goals, career, qualifications, etc. IAG to affect how students' do in life.

IAG students SR
Short run or immediate aims of providing IAG to students e.g. getting good GCSE/A-levels, getting first or summer jobs, getting into Uni.

Link aims
The reasons or aims of creating school–university links, why a link is valuable or wanted.

Link aims IAG
The aims of link programmes that relate to IAG

Link aims relationships
The aims of link programmes that relate to having or building relationships. These themes are expanded under 'Relat aims' below.

Link aims WP
The aims of link programmes that relate to widening participation and contribute to ethnic diversity and to recruitment

P activities
Programme activities. What people do when they take part, what activities a programme offers.

P activities aims
Programme's aims of the activities, why those particular activities are offered.

P aims
Programme aims, what the programme is trying to achieve.

P char/unique
Programme characteristics that make it unique or different to other programmes.

P dislikes/not works
Parts or aspects of the programme that are disliked or do not work. And reasons why.

P likes/works
Parts or aspects of the programme that are particularly liked or work well. Reasons why.

P measuring success
Measuring the success of the programmes

P selection criteria
Selection criteria for the programmes

Ptypes
Programme types, description of what the programme is, including history, geography, etc.

Relat aims
Relationships as an aim of school–university link programmes, who the programmes have relationships with.

Relat aims feelgood
Relationship aims of links that relate to a 'feelgood factor', warm glow or mutual benefit...

Relat aims shared improve
Relationship aims of links that relate to shared improvement such as shared governance, contributions to curriculum development, strategic planning, school improvement or collaboration between organisations.

Relat aims social contribution
Relationship aims of links that relate to making a social contribution; a contribution to society more broadly e.g. in the local community, or through reducing social disparities, social barriers to achievement, opportunities to combat disadvantage.

Relat why?

Relationships as part of the reasons for creating school-university link programmes, and why they are valued and valuable to individuals.