



# 2021/2022 HeppSY Partnership Report

July 2022

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Produced by the HeppSY Data & Evaluation Team

# Foreword

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This year's partnership report provides an insightful analysis of the latest wave of the national survey carried out in HeppSY partner schools and colleges between October 2021 and January 2022.

With over 7,000 responses, the survey and subsequent report offer HeppSY and the wider region valuable insights into young people's perceptions, attitudes, and knowledge of higher education, situated within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, this report provides the most extensive overview of young people's educational ambitions and perceived options since the beginning of the pandemic.

The outcomes and recommendations outlined here will inform HeppSY as we develop our core offer for 2022/23.

We would like to extend our gratitude to our partner schools and colleges across the region for the instrumental support in administering the survey, particularly during periods of rapid and unpredictable change linked to COVID-19.

**Mike Garnock-Jones**

Director, Higher Education Progression Partnership

# Executive Summary

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From October to January 2021, HeppSY partner institutions administered Wave 4 of the Uni Connect survey to students in Years 9 to 13, those studying at college Level 2 and Level 3, and for the first time, learners over the age of 19.

Key findings include a slight increase in students' understanding of higher education (HE) benefits, but a decrease in respondents indicating that they "definitely will apply" to HE when compared with Wave 2, as well as a decrease in knowledge of life at an HE institution. There is also evidence that a greater number of UCP students and White students intend to study away from home, whereas Non-White students felt more inclined to study locally. While the impact of COVID-19 on students' plans was generally weakened in 2021, nearly a quarter of respondents indicated that it had influenced their decision on what to do next.

Recommendations arising from the analysis of the Uni Connect survey include:

- Additional interventions for students entering Year 11 who have not participated in enough activities while in their previous year.
- Bespoke interventions for Level 3 Year 2 students who have not participated in activities aiming to improve their understanding of HE in their previous year of study.
- Bespoke interventions to increase HE knowledge, motivation, and self-efficacy among Black students.
- Bespoke interventions, such as SHE Can and HE Can, to reverse negative changes in HE knowledge, confidence, and likelihood to apply to HE since Wave 2 among Non-White male and female students.
- Consider the possible trend that more White students intended to study away from home in the post-pandemic era.

## Introduction

The Higher Education Progression Partnership South Yorkshire (HeppSY) is part of the Uni Connect Programme, funded by the Office for Students. The main focus of Uni Connect is to provide targeted HE outreach to young people in Years 9 to 13 living in particular geographic areas. From August 2021 this broadened out to include the targeting of adult learners (learners aged 19 and above). HeppSY is working in partnership with Sheffield Hallam University, The University of Sheffield and South Yorkshire schools and colleges.

This report reviews the outcomes from Wave 4 of the Uni Connect survey. The survey was completed by students in Years 9 to 13 and college Level 2 and Level 3<sup>1</sup>, online and in HeppSY schools and colleges during October to January of 2021/2022, and forms part of the national evaluation being conducted by CFE research. Overall, 7,071 complete student responses across 50 schools/colleges (with sample from 1 to 726) were included in the final dataset.

The responses were collected during the fourth coronavirus infection wave caused by Omicron. Some school closures and student absences affected the response rate. The responses did not reach the same level as the Wave 2 survey (about 50% less). However, comparing the Wave 2 and Wave 4 survey is better than between Wave 3 and Wave 4. First of all, the Wave 3 survey might not represent the whole student population well because of the low response rate. Second, the comparison between Wave 2, just before the global pandemic, and Wave 4, when the long-haul pandemic was no longer threatening lives, could capture the impact caused by the pandemic. The changes in learning outcomes could help practitioners differentiate the changes expected to see after interventions and the unexpected ones that might be affected by COVID-19.

The main aims and objectives of the report are as follows:

- To outline the attitudes of young people in South Yorkshire towards HE and its potential benefits.
- To make evidence-based recommendations that support HeppSY in appropriately targeting provision for the next academic year.
- To inform and influence outreach activity planning by partnership members including local universities and South Yorkshire schools and colleges.
- To provide an overview of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the HE expectations and home learning experiences of school and college students in South Yorkshire.

The outcomes reported here provide an indication of how young people in HeppSY partner schools and colleges across South Yorkshire conceptualise HE, and their potential place within it. Crucially, we can use the insights generated to highlight existing gaps and tailor subsequent provision, ensuring students are supported in the most appropriate and impactful way possible.

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1 In general, Year 12 and 13 refers to students completing their A-Levels and Level 3 Year 1 and 2 refers to students completing Level 3 courses other than A-Levels, such as BTEC and NVO vocational qualifications. Level 2 equivalent to GCSEs or First Diploma Level. Students' year groups were self-reported, and not verified through any objective measure.

## Findings and recommendations

The key findings of the research are detailed below, split by substantive section.

### Likelihood of applying to HE at age 18/19

- Fewer students in Wave 4 responded that they “definitely will apply” than their counterparts in Wave 2.
- Male, Year 11, and Year 10 students responded less likely to apply for HE at 18 or 19 than their counterparts.
- There was no statistically significant difference between the students with or without disability in likelihood to apply for HE.
- Four groups of students’ inspiration demonstrated a sign of shifting away from HE when comparing the survey outcomes from Wave 4 and Wave 2. They are Level 3 Year 1 students, the students with disabilities, Black students, and Asian students.
- UCP students and White students showed more interest in study away from home for HE in Wave 4, whereas Non-White female and Non-White male students were more inclined to pursue HE in local HE or further education institutions in Wave 4 than in Wave 2.

### HE knowledge

- Overall, the students in the Wave 4 survey did not significantly differ in the knowledge of HE application from those in Wave 2. However, fewer students in the Wave 4 survey reported that they knew about “student life”, “costs of study”, “financial support”, and “where to live” than those in the Wave 2 survey. This pattern was more distinct among UCP students. Fewer UCP students knew about knowledge of HE life in Wave 4 than in Wave 2.
- Year 10, Year 12, and college Level 3 Year 1 students fared worse across many aspects of HE knowledge in the Wave 4 survey than their counterparts in Wave 2.
- Female, Black, and Asian students in the Wave 4 Learner Survey showed a decrease in terms of the number of students who said they knew about HE knowledge in many aspects when compared to their counterparts in Wave 2.

## Perceived benefits

- The students who responded to the Wave 4 survey showed a slightly better understanding of four out of six aspects of HE benefits than their counterparts in the Wave 2 survey.
- Many student groups with protected characteristics fared better in understanding HE benefits in Wave 4 than their counterparts did in Wave 2, a sign of positive outcomes of interventions.
- Year 11 and college Level 3 Year 2 students fared better with perceived HE benefits in Wave 4 than their counterparts in Wave 2, while Year 13 and college Level 3 Year 1 students fared worse.
- Female students' understanding of HE benefits declined from Wave 2 to Wave 4, whereas male students and the students who selected "other gender" increased.
- White students' understanding of HE benefits in Wave 4 was not as good as in Wave 2. Still, the students who identified themselves as "Mixed Ethnicity" or "Other ME" demonstrated a much better understanding of HE benefits in Wave 4 than in Wave 2.
- The students with disabilities also showed a significantly better understanding of all the six aspects of HE benefits than their counterparts in the Wave 2 survey.

## Perceived sense of belonging and fit within HE

- The proportion of the students who agree or strongly agree with "would fit in with others" decreased in Wave 4 (48.1% vs 49.7% in Wave 2).
- For college Level 3 Year 1 students, the sense of belonging indicator increased from 42% in Wave 2 to 47.1% in Wave 4, whereas perceived fit in HE and capacity to "cope with study" decreased significantly.

## Self-efficacy

- A decline in motivation to do well from the Wave 2 to the Wave 4 survey appeared across many student groups.
- Some groups also showed a decline in the proportion of students who were confident in grades and accessing HE, for example, Black and White female students.

## COVID-19 impact

- COVID-19's impact on the students' study and plan to do next generally weakened in 2021.
- The sixth form students were the least impacted by COVID-19 in terms of likelihood of applying to HE than the students in other year groups. Comparing to 95.3% of Year 13 students who reported that their likelihood of applying for HE was the same or more than before, only 70% of Year 10 students said so.
- Nearly a quarter of students reported that COVID-19 influenced their decision about what to do next.
- The student groups with more students who reported that their decisions were affected by COVID-19 were also those with more students reporting substantial changes in the indicators of future plans, i.e. less likely to apply for HE at the age of 18 or 19, plan to study at FE colleges rather than sixth forms, or plan to get a job rather than to study at a HE institution.

## Recommendations for practice

Based on the learning outcomes reported above, the following recommendations are made for HeppSY and partners to consider how to best support the students.

- If Year 10 students had not participated in enough activities since the Wave 4 survey point in this academic year, they would need more interventions to boost HE knowledge when they progress to Year 11 in the next year. This recommendation is based on the following evidence from the surveys:
  - Fewer pre-16 students planned to study in sixth form, and more intended to study at a FE college in Wave 4 than in Wave 2.
  - A higher proportion of Year 10 students reported that their likelihood of applying for HE was affected by COVID-19, and fewer knew about many aspects of HE knowledge in Wave 4 than in Wave 2.
- If Level 3 Year 1 students had not participated in the activities needed to improve their understanding of HE, they would need bespoke interventions as early as possible in the next academic year when they progress to Level 3 Year 2. This recommendation is based on the following evidence from the surveys:
  - Level 3 Year 1 students' responses to what to do next showed that fewer plan to study HE courses in Wave 4 than in Wave 2.
  - Level 3 Year 1 students fared worse across many aspects of HE knowledge, HE benefits and perceived fit in HE in the Wave 4 survey than their counterparts in Wave 2.
- Black students need bespoke interventions to boost HE knowledge, motivation, and academic self-efficacy. This recommendation is based on the following evidence from the surveys:

- Black and Asian students' likelihood of applying for HE was affected by COVID-19 negatively more than other ethnic groups.
- Black students' motivation and academic self-efficacy declined from Wave 2 to Wave 4.
- Fewer Black students said they knew about HE in Wave 4 than in Wave 2.
- Non-White males and White females might need bespoke interventions to reverse the negative changes from Wave 2 to Wave 4. HE Can and SHE Can need to continue in the next academic year. The recommendation is based on the following evidence from the surveys:
  - Non-White male students fared worse with their likelihood to apply for HE and HE knowledge in Wave 4 than their counterparts in Wave 2.
  - Fewer White female students said they knew about HE knowledge and were confident in their grades and accessing HE.
- Supposing HeppSY partner universities want to attract local students to study locally, they need to consider the possible trend that more White students intended to study away from home in the post-pandemic era.

## **Acknowledgements**

Thanks go to Jessica Whitby and Joanna Grace for their contribution to writing the report.

We are also grateful to Daniel Fletcher (our Senior Insight Analyst) and Guy Birkin from the CFE for data quality assurance, and Mike Garnock-Jones (HeppSY Director) for his guidance and support to the five waves of Learner Survey.

This report would not have been possible without the participation of students and school/ college staff. A special thank you goes to those who completed the questionnaires. Your voice has been part of the reports that will be spread and acknowledged by the stakeholders who would use the findings and recommendations to provide better support to students like you.



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