

# A Process Evaluation of Phase Two of the Higher Education Progression Partnership South Yorkshire (HeppSY)

Full Report

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# Evaluation Summary

- The Higher Education Progression Partnership South Yorkshire (HeppSY) is part of the national Uni Connect programme (UCP) that aims to help school and college students aged 13-19 across South Yorkshire who are most at risk of missing out on higher education.
- The Uni Connect programme consists of 29 regional partnerships of universities, colleges, local authorities, local enterprise partnerships, employers and others who work together to develop and deliver the programme of activity to reduce the gap in higher education participation between the most and least represented groups.
- In the autumn of 2020 an evaluation team from Student Engagement, Evaluation and Research (STEER) at Sheffield Hallam University (SHU) was commissioned to undertake a qualitative process evaluation in relation to phase two of the HeppSY programme, its legacy and the impact of Covid-19.
- The evaluation captured the views and experiences of 54 stakeholders from the HeppSY central teams, partner organisations, and schools and colleges through 19 semi-structured individual and group interviews.
- The evaluation sought to explore how the HeppSY programme had performed against its output targets contained in its logic model. Five themes were identified from the logic model: developing a collaborative approach; relationships with partners; programme implementation; evaluation and monitoring; and legacy. These were used to structure the data collection along questions on Covid-19.
- The following questions also informed the evaluation and data collection:
  1. How has the HeppSY programme and collaborative partnership been developed from phase one to two?
  2. To what extent has a culture of evaluation and monitoring developed across phase two?
  3. What is the anticipated legacy of HeppSY, and how has this been developed across phase two?
  4. What impact has Covid-19 had on the implementation of the HeppSY programme in phase two?
- Findings have been presented in five themes; **developing a collaborative approach; programme implementation; evaluation and monitoring; legacy;** and **Covid-19**. Relationships with partners was not separated out into its own theme, as relationships were fundamental and embedded in all the other themes.
  1. **Developing a collaborative approach** examines how HeppSY has established and maintained a collaborative approach with its partners in the programme over phase one and two. HeppSY provided strong and clear leadership in relation to the programme and what it wants to achieve by **establishing strategic leadership**. It was also evident that a flexible and open approach to communication and consultation together with a strong brand helped establish **effective engagement with partners and centres**.
  2. **Programme implementation** focuses on the processes and methods used by HeppSY to deliver the programme in the South Yorkshire region. **Financial incentive and support** provided by HeppSY allowed them to build capacity in relation to staff and time across the region, while also raising the profile of the programme within partner organisations and centres. **Delivery of activities** was bespoke and tailored to each centres' needs and made possible through delivery plans.
  3. **Evaluation and monitoring** outlines the processes implemented by HeppSY and how a deeper understanding has been developed about evaluative practices and their importance. **Targeting young people for interventions** and identifying who had the potential for higher education was challenging for centres. There was evidence of HeppSY **establishing rigorous evaluation practices** and developing a culture of evaluation amongst its stakeholders. The national **survey** was found to provide useful insights that could be used to shape the programme. However, some centres found it challenging to deliver it in their schools and colleges.

4. **Legacy** shares participants' anticipated hopes and expectations about the long-term impact of the HeppSY programme in the South Yorkshire region. Online **resources** were seen to ensure HeppSY's legacy, although challenges and barriers to the longevity of those resources were identified by participants. Participants had begun to observe the programme's **impact on centres**, because of its influence in raising aspirations of young people and centres for their students. Participants also hoped there would be an **impact on collaboration** as partners and centres continue to build on their relationships beyond HeppSY.
  5. **Covid-19** focuses on the impact of the global pandemic on the HeppSY programme and their response to it. The **initial response, and transition to online**, created several challenges for centres which led to a temporary pausing of the programme. However, HeppSY used this time to create a flexible online offer. The pandemic also offered new **ways of working and relationship building** that had benefits and challenges which were experienced very differently by participants. There were also negative and positive impacts relating to the **programme's reach and students' engagement** with online delivery and the ability of practitioners to access and engage with young people in the region.
- Discussion builds on the extensive findings that provided a significant amount of evidence that HeppSY is meeting, or working towards, its output targets, as identified in its logic model (Appendix 1). It highlights some of challenges and opportunities for the future within the context of the evaluation questions.
  - Recommendations
    1. As **HeppSY** move into phase three, they should consider adopting the same approach to collaboration based on open communication and consultation that was established in the transition to phase two.
    2. **HeppSY and partners** should consider how they can support their partners (SHU, TUoS and Hepp) to strengthen the identity in centres and develop structures that facilitate collaborative ways of working, to help ensure: capacity and resources to deliver outreach activities are maximised in the absence of HeppSY; higher education remains a priority in the centres; and processes such as data sharing agreements can be maintained.
    3. **HeppSY's** continuing professional development offer to the centres should be maintained and expanded to help support the legacy of the programme.
    4. **HeppSY** should maintain their approach to evaluation and monitoring, including providing opportunities for knowledge exchange and sharing practices. They should also explore how best to apply evaluation practices in a digital environment, to support the creation of robust and valid insights and gather case studies which demonstrate the impact of the programme.
    5. **HeppSY** should consult with its partners and centres and, perhaps more importantly, young people, about how best to incorporate the digital environment into the programme. If the digital space is to be maintained then HeppSY should also consider how it supports its staff and stakeholders to develop their skills and knowledge of online pedagogies, evaluation methods and relationship building in a digital environment.
    6. **The Department for Education, Office for Students, Higher Education Providers**, and other organisations should consider working with centres to align and identify measures that can be used by all stakeholders consistently at all levels of education to select students at risk of not reaching their potential.
    7. **Office for Students** should ensure that any decisions made about the future funding of the Uni Connect Programme are made in a timely manner to help partnerships and centres plan for the delivery of activities in upcoming years.

# Introduction

## Evaluation Context

The Higher Education Progression Partnership South Yorkshire (HeppSY) is part of the national Uni Connect programme (UCP) that aims to help school and college students aged 13-19 across South Yorkshire who are most at risk of missing out on higher education. HeppSY is working in partnership with Sheffield Hallam University, The University of Sheffield and South Yorkshire schools and colleges. In 2019, HeppSY undertook two evaluations: one with the HeppSY central team (Brown, 2019<sup>1</sup>) and another with its school and college partners (Clague, Brown & Squire, 2019<sup>2</sup>), to assess how the consortia had established and implemented a collaborative approach to outreach in South Yorkshire across phase one of the programme. These evaluations also sought to make recommendations in relation to possible programme developments, ongoing relationship building and collaborative working, and how the legacy of the programme could be ensured.

This report builds on these previous evaluations by examining the ongoing implementation, performance and evaluation of the programme against its targets set out in the programme's logic model (Appendix 1) during phase two. The report also seeks to provide insight into how HeppSY responded to societal changes caused by Covid-19 and how it is working to secure a legacy going forward. An external evaluation team from Student Engagement, Evaluation and Research (STEER) at Sheffield Hallam University (SHU) was commissioned to undertake a qualitative process evaluation and make recommendations for future work and programme legacy.

## Uni Connect Programme Context

The Uni Connect Programme (UCP), formally known as the National Collaborative Outreach Programme (NCOP), is an initiative that aims to support the government's social mobility goals in England, by rapidly increasing the number of young people from underrepresented groups who go into higher education. Uni Connect consists of 29 regional partnerships of universities, colleges, local authorities, local enterprise partnerships, employers and others who work together to develop and deliver the programme locally. The programme targets young people in compulsory education years 9 to 13 living in particular geographical areas, where higher education participation is historically lower than might be expected given the GCSE results of young people in those areas. During the second phase of the UCP, it aims to:

1. Reduce the gap in higher education participation between the most and least represented groups.
2. Support young people to make well-informed decisions about their future education.
3. Support effective and impactful local collaboration by higher education providers working together with schools, colleges, employers and other partners.
4. Contribute to a stronger evidence base around 'what works' in higher education outreach and strengthen evaluation practice in the sector.

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1 Brown, G (2019) HeppSY+: delivering a collaborative approach? Sheffield: HeppSY

2 Clague, L, Brown, G, & Squire, R (2019) HeppSY: school and college views. Sheffield: HeppSY

The Office for Students (OfS) who administer the programme nationally on behalf of the government, have identified 997 target areas in England with an unexplained gap in higher education participation. Each regional UCP has responsibility for a proportion of these areas and is required to engage with at least 20% of the young people living in those areas. HeppSY oversees 45 of the identified target areas, which have over 29000 eligible young people for HeppSY's activities and support. On average HeppSY have engaged with over 30%<sup>3</sup> of those young people through sustained activity. HeppSY have built their programme around four key strands; confidence and resilience; attainment; higher education knowledge; and careers knowledge to support achieving the aims set for all UCPs. Each of HeppSY's activities aligns to one of these strands and aims to develop knowledge and skills of students.

Phase one of the programme ran from January 2017 to July 2019. Phase two received confirmation that it would continue in June 2019, started on the 1 August 2019, and is due to finish in July 2021. Phase 3 was confirmed in January 2021 and will start in August 2021 and run through to the end of 2025, with a change to the programme aims introduced. Funding for phases one and two had an annual budget of £60 million; funding for phase three is expected to be reduced to £40 million, which will be subject to confirmation and consultation on an annual basis for the remainder of the programme.

## Covid-19

The global pandemic Covid-19 and the resulting social restrictions introduced in England to contain the virus have caused significant disruption to everybody's lives and in particular the educational experience of young people. On 20 March 2020, schools and colleges in England closed to all but key workers and vulnerable children. Home schooling was introduced to varying degrees of success<sup>4</sup> as educational centres struggled to respond to the societal and economic challenges of Covid-19. Schools and colleges began a wider opening from 1 June 2020 under continued social distancing and other Covid-19 restrictions. The Autumn term of 2020 began under continued restrictions with many students still experiencing home schooling intermittently as a result of self-isolation because of rising Covid-19 transmission. On 6 January 2021 schools and colleges were closed again and home schooling was reinstated until the 8 March 2021 when all students returned to school. There is growing evidence that the young people most negatively impacted by the disruption to their education because of Covid-19 are those that already experience educational barriers and challenges.<sup>5</sup>

HeppSY have aimed to support their partner schools and colleges through this unprecedented time and have reshaped their offer and delivery methods so it is still accessible in an online environment. While HeppSY has continued to deliver its programme, the full impact of Covid-19 on its ability to achieve the aims of phase two may take some time to become fully apparent. The young people they are targeting are those that might have been most negatively impacted by the pandemic and the educational disruption.

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- 3 HeppSY: working partnership with schools and colleges to increase the number of young people progressing to higher education (2019). Available from <https://extra.shu.ac.uk/heppsy/assets/2019/02/190205-HeppSY-8-Page-Overview-v3d3.pdf>
- 4 Ofsted (2020) COVID-19 series: briefing on schools, November 2020. Available from <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-series-briefing-on-schools-november-2020>
- 5 Renaissance Learning, Education Policy Institute (2019) Understanding progress in the 2020/21 academic year: Interim findings January 2021. Available from <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/pupils-progress-in-the-2020-to-2021-academic-year-interim-report>

# Evaluative Approach

## Evaluation Objectives

This evaluation sought to capture the views and experiences of various stakeholders (HeppSY central teams, partner organisations, and schools and colleges) about the ongoing implementation, performance, and evaluation of the HeppSY programme during phase two. The outputs from the programme's logic model have been used to structure the data collection and these have been themed into five areas: developing a collaborative approach; relationships with partners; programme implementation; evaluation and monitoring; and legacy. The evaluation also sought views concerning the impact of Covid-19 on the HeppSY programme during phase two. The evaluation will endeavour to answer the following questions:

1. How has the HeppSY programme and partnership been developed from phase one to two?
2. To what extent has a culture of evaluation and monitoring developed across phase two?
3. What is the anticipated legacy of HeppSY, and how has this been developed across phase two?
4. What impact has Covid-19 had on the implementation of the HeppSY programme in phase two?

## Methodology

This evaluation will use the same methodological approach used by Brown (2019) and Clague et al. (2019) during the phase one evaluations. A process evaluation was applied where the focus is on "evaluating the mechanisms through which an intervention takes place", with an emphasis on providing "evidence of how (well) an intervention has been implemented... against expectations" and "how it operates" (Parsons, 2017, p. 16<sup>6</sup>). In line with the other studies in phase one, a qualitative methodology of semi-structured individual and group interviews was used to gather data for this study. The interview schedule was structured around the four themes developed from the output targets identified in the programme's logic model and adapted according to the participant's role in the HeppSY programme.

Interview transcripts were transcribed by a professional transcription service. They were then organised and analysed in NVivo 12 by two STEER evaluators. Each evaluator read all the transcripts and then divided them so they could be analysed deductively using a pre-set coding structure, which aligned with the five areas of the programme output targets and the evaluation questions. The evaluators also undertook inductive coding that was informed by their interpretations of the data. This synthesis and triangulation of the inductive and deductive analysis allowed the most prominent themes to be identified in relation to the evaluation's objectives. This approach allowed both evaluators to familiarise themselves and be immersed in the data and enabled the evaluators to check for consistency, ensuring the trustfulness of the data (Lincoln and Guba, 1986<sup>7</sup>).

Ethical approval was sought and granted on the 4 November 2020 via Sheffield Hallam University's ethical approval process. All project data was held on a password protected drive, in folders only accessible to the evaluation team. Each participant was emailed an information sheet that outlined what the interview would cover, and how their responses would remain confidential. Participants were also asked to sign and return informed consent forms.

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6 Parsons, D. (2017). *Demystifying evaluation: Practical approaches for researchers and users*. Policy Press.

7 Lincoln, Y & Guba, E (1986) But is it rigorous? Trustworthiness and authenticity in Naturalistic Evaluation. Is 30



## Data Collection

Nineteen semi-structured individual and group interviews were conducted with 54 participants between 27 November 2020 and 1 February 2021 (Table 1 provides a full breakdown of the interviews). The interviews lasted around an hour and were conducted online via Zoom because of the ongoing Covid-19 restrictions. The interview schedule was adapted to the stakeholder group (Appendix 2). A pragmatic, purposeful sampling approach was adopted given the focus and scope of the evaluation. Participants from HeppSY central teams and partner organisations were identified and invited to participate by the central HeppSY Data and Evaluation team (HDET).

The HDET worked with the HeppSY School and College Programme Managers (SCPM) to identify school and college (referred to collectively as “centres”) key contacts to participate in the evaluation. It was anticipated that the same number of interviews would be conducted with four different types of centres: schools with no post-16 provision; schools with post-16 provision; further education colleges; and academy trusts. However, because of the challenging circumstances in centres as a result of Covid-19, this was not possible as some centres felt they did not have the time or capacity to participate in the evaluation.

**Table 1** - Breakdown of the interviews

Affiliations	Role	Type of Interview	Number of Participants	Abbreviation in Findings
HeppSY	Director	Individual	1	SLT
	Programme Manager	Individual	1	
	School and College Programme Manager	Group	4	SCPM
	HeppSY Evaluation and Data Team	Group	2	HEDT
	Higher Education Progression Advisor	Group	7	HEPA
	HeppSY engagement assistant – Centre-based	Group	8	EAs
	HeppSY engagement assistant – Centrally-based	Group	4	
Partner	University of Sheffield Outreach Team	Group	7	Partner
	Sheffield Hallam University Outreach Team	Group	6	
	Hepp	Group	3	
	Evaluation and Data contact at Sheffield Hallam University, University of Sheffield and Hepp	Group	3	
Centres	Further Education College	Individual	1	FEC
	School no post-16 provision	Individual	1	CnP16
	School no post-16 provision	Individual	1	
	School no post-16 provision	Individual	1	
	School with post-16 provision	Individual	1	CwP16
	School with post-16 provision	Individual	1	
	Academy Trust	Individual	1	AT
	Academy Trust	Individual	1	

## Limitations of the Evaluation

It is important to highlight several limitations of this evaluation, and their impact on the findings and recommendations put forward in this report. It is perceived that Covid-19 had a significant impact as participants have experienced unprecedented upheaval in their professional and personal lives which may have shaped how people responded to the evaluation questions. Some participants also experienced changes to their roles and responsibilities due to the move to online working, such as the Higher Education Engagement Assistants (referred to as EAs) who had been based in centres up until March 2020 and have not returned during the pandemic. Covid-19 also restricted the availability of some of the school and centres key contacts and resulted in them not being able to participate in the evaluation.

Confirmation that UCP phase three would take place happened in January 2021, which was halfway through the data collection period and it might have impacted on some participants' views about the legacy of HeppSY. Several of the interviewees were new to the HeppSY programme or did not have a full understanding of how it works which limited their knowledge or experience about how the programme has progressed and changed during phase one and phase two.

The findings were generally positive about the perceived differences that HeppSY has had on centres and partners up until phase two of the programme. However, this does not establish any direct causal effect. The complex environment in which the programme operates means causality would be very difficult to determine due to the difficulty of isolating other factors which might influence the partners, centres and students. Future work that may involve conducting an impact evaluation of HeppSY should consider the counterfactual perspective, which explores what would have happened if an initiative had not taken place (Parsons, 2017).

It is important to highlight aspects of the sampling approach which may have partially contributed to a positive skew in the findings. While the purposeful sampling approach was useful for accessing participants who were closely aligned to the implementation of the programme, this could have limited the opportunities to capture a wider range of perspectives of intended beneficiaries. Furthermore, there is the possibility that those participants who were closely engaged with HeppSY were more likely to volunteer to take part. Nevertheless, the triangulation of different groups of participants, the use of two different evaluators in collecting and analysing the same evidence and a continuation of the methodology used in previous evaluations of HeppSY's implementation provides robustness to the evaluation process (Parsons, 2017). It will be useful to corroborate the findings of this evaluation with other evaluative work HeppSY are undertaking.

The perceived impact of HeppSY on students is discussed but this evidence is based on observations made by staff within centres and across the partnership, rather than directly with students. However, this report should be read alongside the impact evaluation conducted by HeppSY with students during phase 2.

# Findings

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## Overview

The findings have been presented below under five main themes, four of which align with the programme's logic model: **developing a collaborative approach; programme implementation; evaluation and monitoring; legacy; and Covid-19**. Relationships with partners, while identified as a theme from the programme's logic model, was embedded within all themes and fundamental to HeppSY's working practices. All of the themes below relate to a wider theme of building and maintaining relationships with partner organisations, schools and colleges. Findings have been shared below, following which the discussion section reflects on how the evidence gathered answers the evaluation questions.

**Developing a collaborative approach** examines how HeppSY have established and maintained a collaborative approach with its partners and centres over phase one and two of the programme. This theme is broken down into two sub-themes. The first, **establishing strategic leadership**, outlines how HeppSY have provided strong and clear leadership in relation to the programme and what it wants to achieve. The second sub-theme, **effective engagement with partners and centres**, is focused on how HeppSY's flexible and open approach to communication and working with partners/centres and the creation of consultation spaces has allowed them to engage effectively with all stakeholders, which aided the programme's transition into phase two. Effective engagement was aided by the recognition of HeppSY as a strong brand which is viewed as standing for professionalism and quality, but also being proactive, responsive, and personalised so it could support the individual needs and requirements of centres.

**Programme implementation** focuses on the processes and methods used by HeppSY to deliver the programme in the South Yorkshire region. The first sub-theme examines how **financial incentive and support** provided by HeppSY allowed them to build capacity in relation to staff and time across the region, while also raising the profile of the programme within partner organisations and centres. The funding allowed centres and partners to deliver a bespoke and tailored programme and maximise the number and quality of activities. The second sub-theme is concerned with the **delivery of activities** and how delivery plans are used to tailor HeppSY's offer to meet the needs of the centres and their young people. The bespoke approach to delivery also appears to have been made possible due to the support structures and relationships in place between centres and HeppSY.

**Evaluation and monitoring** outlines the data processes implemented by HeppSY and how a deeper understanding has been developed about evaluation and its importance in phase two. The first sub-theme, **targeting young people for interventions**, explores the challenges of identifying and accessing the students that the programme is designed for. The second sub-theme, **establishing rigorous evaluation practices**, outlines the development of the evaluative and monitoring culture in the region and peoples' shifting perceptions and understanding about the need to demonstrate the impact of activities on young people. The final sub-theme, **survey**, discusses the annual national UCP survey and its perceived benefits and challenges.

**Legacy** shares participants' anticipated hopes and expectations about the long-term impact of the HeppSY programme in the South Yorkshire region. The first sub-theme, **resources**, outlines the hope that stakeholders will continue to engage and use the resources created by HeppSY. It also identifies some of the challenges or barriers to the longevity of those resources. The second sub-theme, **impact on centres**, explores how HeppSY have influenced the culture, staff, and

aspirations in centres in relation to higher education access and young peoples' options. The final sub-theme, **impact on collaboration**, sets out the desire that the collaborations and relationships built between the partners and centres will continue beyond HeppSY.

**Covid-19** focuses on the impact of the global pandemic on the HeppSY programme and their response to it. The first sub-theme, **initial response, and transition to online**, considers HeppSY's immediate approach to the unprecedented social circumstances caused by Covid-19. The second sub-theme, **ways of working and relationship building**, looks at how HeppSY adapted their approach to collaboration and delivery and highlights some of the benefits and challenges experienced by participants. The final sub-theme, **programme reach and students' engagement**, considers the impact of online delivery on the ability of practitioners to access and engage with young people in the region.

# Developing a Collaborative Approach

## Establishing Strategic Leadership

HeppSY plays a key role in providing strategic leadership between the Department for Education and the Office for Students and the partners and the centres in HeppSY. A member of senior leadership emphasised “we have to manage that partnership at a very macro level, between the Office for Students and the Department for Education...when one flexes, the other moves...we’ve had to very much balance that” (SLT). However, HeppSY have created a unique identity that allows them to navigate challenging political situations, action national policy and deliver on key priorities.

HeppSY has a senior leadership team that are present and accessible to partners. The senior leadership team provide a clear “philosophy” and “vision” for the programme, that is rooted in a passion for social justice, and is shared by all the HeppSY staff and partners at all levels. The clear vision coming from the senior leadership team meant that centres understood what HeppSY were planning for phase two and what it wanted to achieve in the future. The centres felt like everyone in the partnership was “working to the same agenda of raising aspirations” (FEC). HeppSY as an organisation and especially its senior leadership team has been very successful in developing strong collaborative relationships and trust amongst its stakeholders. One centre described how they were initially hesitant when they were first approached by HeppSY (“What are they selling? What’s the catch?” (CnP16 3)), but they quickly realised that there were no ulterior motives and a “really successful” partnership subsequently developed.

These strong relationships also helped the partnership transition through the uncertainty associated with phase two of the programme. The centres felt that the leadership from the senior leadership team and their openness was very beneficial as it allowed them to plan for any eventuality; for example, HeppSY was described as being “honest” (CnP16 4) about the scenarios of whether or not phase two was going to happen. HeppSY felt that the “solid foundation” laid in phase one, the strength of the partnership, strong leadership, open communication with staff, and funding allowed them to “navigate that last six months of uncertainty before phase two” (SLT). This approach allowed them to retain staff and successfully steer the partnership through uncertainty which made the transition into phase two much easier.

## Effective Engagement with Partners and Centres

Embedded in HeppSY’s strategic approach in both phase one and two is an understanding that “one size doesn’t fit all”, which has led to a collaboration where “each centre has been allowed to... contribute to how HeppSY will work within their centres” (SCPM). To support collaborative working, HeppSY built strong networking opportunities for all stakeholders to invest in, at “very different levels across the partnership, from board, to consultation groups, to steering groups, to working groups, to managerial operational meets” (SLT). The development of these networks has enabled HeppSY to share its vision as well as strategic aims and objectives. It is also highly valued by centres as it allowed them to invest in the programme and develop relationships beyond HeppSY within the South Yorkshire region. Regarding collaboration in network meetings, one academy chain commented: “certainly our school staff found them really useful too because it was another time to not just network with [our academy] schools but other schools as well.” (AT 2)

HeppSY have proactively created “consultation spaces outside of practice” for the partners that allows them to “scope out what each of us will offer, and each of our own identities, before we even get to delivery” (SLT). The partners have valued this way of working because it meant decisions could be taken collaboratively, as it allows them to “talk through our processes

and make sure that we're working together to get things straight and working for everybody hopefully in the partnership as best as we can" (Partner 2). A more strategic approach to partnership working has also allowed each partner's offer to become "much more complementary", which has allowed the partnership to maximise its reach into centres so "everybody gets some provision because of that top level collaboration" (Partner 1). However, there were concerns expressed that the centres "struggled with each individual identity" of the different partners (Partner 3). Another of the partners said that there was still a "challenge... sometimes just seeing the bigger picture of the project as opposed to just who we're working with" (Partner 2).

HeppSY have continued to endeavour to build effective engagement mechanisms with centres that support them in achieving their overarching "objectives to enhance progression and to continue to raise the profile of higher education" (SLT). Part of this strategy has been to create a "brand" that provides a "high quality professional approach" that is trusted and valued by partners and centres (SLT). Centres expressed their trust in HeppSY saying "we always knew that whatever was delivered was going to be professional" (AT 1). They also praised HeppSY for their high quality offer that is current and engaging, delivered by "excellent staff" (CwP16 2). One centre reflected that out of all the projects they had ever worked on they "never known one so focused and executed so well" (CnP16 1). The successful establishment of the brand and their reputation meant HeppSY were able to bring additional schools into the programme during phase two that had declined to participate in phase one.

In one HeppSY focus group the participants put this success down to their ability to clearly share with centres what they "want to achieve", which "students they want to work with", and how those students are identified (HEDT). HeppSY said they were very keen to "talk people through the processes of working with us, as well as the work itself" (SLT). It was felt that this process means that the "partner schools and colleges... definitely understand our [HeppSY] aims as a programme" (HEDT). This collaborative approach is supported by a "softer communication" strategy of "newsletters and regular updates, end of term addresses, welcome back addresses" (SLT), which make centres feel that they are at the "heart" of the work that is undertaken.

In all the HeppSY focus groups there was strong agreement that the key contacts in centres understood the aims and objectives of the programme and the key contacts from the centres that were interviewed all agreed. One of the centres stated that it is "quite clear what strands they are offering" (CwP16 2). However, HeppSY staff did debate how much further knowledge about the HeppSY programme and its aims permeated beyond the key contacts in the centres; for example, the EAs perceived that staff in centres generally have a basic understanding and believe it is "something to do with higher education".

It was suggested in the HeppSY focus groups that a lack of knowledge in the centres "makes things more difficult just to get delivery out there and get things booked" (EAs). However, for some centres it is what HeppSY are championing that is important and they chose to not promote HeppSY as a "product" but incorporate the offer into the centre's existing careers education. One centre emphasised it is the overarching "themes of what they're trying to achieve and the goals that they're trying to achieve" that need to be promoted rather than a single brand, due to the finite duration of HeppSY (CnP16 3). HeppSY are proud of the successful relationships they have built with their centres and partners, with one interviewee stating:

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"We're incredibly protective of the relationship of schools and colleges, and that we treat those with incredible respect, and access to young people with respect... I think they see us as an institution that does good and can be trusted with quality. And I think that is really somehow at the heart of our success" (SLT)

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The centres thought the relationships they have with HeppSY were “absolutely fantastic” and that they “supported the school wholeheartedly” and had “always made it clear they’re looking to support schools” (CwP16 3). The relationships with the centres were strengthened even further during the successful transition into phase two, when HeppSY changed how they worked with the key contacts. In phase one HeppSY found that they had staff working with “schools and colleges distributed everywhere across South Yorkshire” (SLT). However, in phase two they took a regional approach where staff took on responsibility for specific areas. Focus group participants agreed that HeppSY had been very successful, enabling them to have “more direction and focus...to think strategically [about]...an area rather than individual schools” (SCPM).

The Higher Education Engagement Assistants (EAs) played a significant role in helping establish relationships between the HeppSY central teams and the centres. Those EAs based in schools and colleges felt that they helped make “HeppSY part of the centres culture” and helped facilitate “partnership with the schools and colleges on that ground level” (EAs). For the centres, having EAs based in their organisation was hugely beneficial because they “get a knowledge and an understanding of the needs of these students” (FEC). The partners also found the EAs beneficial as centres with them “were more likely to book events” or activities with the partners (Partner 2). However, partners did sometimes feel removed from the centres, because they often had to work through HeppSY points of contact to access students or deliver activities in a school or college.

The relationship with each centre was approached from an individualised perspective and HeppSY tried to understand the “challenges and context from a schools or college’s point of view” (SLT). HeppSY have been flexible and responded to the needs and resources of different centres. They have found that centres with more restricted resources or less established careers offers have “pulled on [their] support a lot more” (HEPA). The knowledge that HeppSY have acquired about the centres over phase one meant that the support, sessions, and activities they offer are less “reactive” and more “proactive” and “dynamic” in phase two (SCPM). It also means HeppSY can use their experience and knowledge about the centres to anticipate where new initiatives or activities will be most beneficial. Centres trusted HeppSY to make recommendations about activities or interventions, especially those delivered by external organisations, such as the Brilliant Club, which centres would not have taken advantage of otherwise.

Phase two of the programme has seen HeppSY move towards supporting centres to meet their own individual strategic plans; support success through external drivers such as the Gatsby benchmarks, or making curriculum changes or other improvements that will support good student outcomes. This approach has helped facilitate effective engagement with the centres. One centre spoke about how HeppSY colleagues had supported them to see how the HeppSY programme connects to other aspects of the school’s work, such as “pupil premium and careers, the careers strategy and meeting the Gatsby Benchmarks and thinking about that framework” (CwP16 3). Other centres spoke about the challenges of taking students out of timetabled classes to participate in activities. However, HeppSY responded to this challenge by “adapt[ing] more to the curriculum” (CwP16 2), allowing students to stay in class and still receive the additional support that they require.

The collaborative approach HeppSY have taken in building the partnership has resulted in very successful and mutually beneficial relationships. HeppSY use their knowledge of the centres to deliver a tailored offer for each centre and the embedding of EAs in the centres means that the HeppSY programme has become “integral to the centre’s day to day process[es]” (EAs). The strong brand and reputation associated with HeppSY also means that centres and partners are willing and eager to work with them. The strong senior leadership also means that HeppSY was able to transition successful into phase two of the programme.

# Programme Implementation

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## Financial Incentive and Support

The funding model adopted by HeppSY was centralised so decisions about expenditure and delivery were made by HeppSY rather than by partners and centres. This placed restrictions on the type of activities that the funding could be used for. It allowed HeppSY to control the quality of activities in centres and ensure they were consistent with the programme aims. The central team emphasised the way to engage with schools was through “professional high-quality provision that’s relevant and appropriate” (SLT) and by building capacity. The viewpoint about the importance of controlling the funding was shared by one of the academy trusts, while only one of the centres expressed an element of frustration that they were not able to access more finances directly. The distribution of funding to centres was dependent on their proportion of students who met the HeppSY criteria.

The senior leadership team emphasised that they appreciated the individual circumstances of centres and there was an amount of discrete funding “to localise and individualise the work that they want to do with us...we do appreciate your school, your village, your context” (SLT). Finally, other funds were used specifically “for the development of very intensive work, for a very select number of students” (SLT) which are determined by a working group.

In return for receiving resources, there were high expectations set by HeppSY for how centres and partners were expected to engage and justify their use of the funding. A member of the senior leadership team explained the supportive but challenging arrangements that were in place with centres, including the “need to have service level agreements each year” in addition to “termly reports...and a manager who liaises with them” (SLT). One of the centres used the phrase “if you take the money you’ve got to deliver” (CwP16 2) in relation to the accountability of centres to the programme, but this expectation was perceived to be a positive as it allowed their activities to be prioritised. There was a clear aim to provide sufficient resource to centres so that it would be noticeable to head teachers and senior leadership within centres, with a number of centres commenting that the resources help to raise the profile of the activities. A participant from a centre expressed the view that schools are “historically not used to” having to provide a “certain amount of accountability and administration” (CwP16 2) when they receive funding, with high expectations set by HeppSY in terms of demonstrating how funding has been used and how students have benefited.

A key anticipated benefit of the funding was to increase the capacity of centres and partners to focus on HeppSY activities. In phase one, each school and college was eligible to hire an EA or to recruit their own member of staff, or allocate time to existing staff, to facilitate and promote the coordination and delivery of the programme. The majority of schools in phase two were only allowed to recruit their own staff, although a number of schools had opted to do this from the outset. Colleges were still permitted to use EAs. A few interviewees commented that some schools had become reliant on EAs. The change was implemented in an attempt to embed practices within schools as part of a shift in focus towards a legacy model. It is difficult to establish the impact of this change within schools and to make comparisons with previous years, due to the impact of Covid-19 on delivery and the presence of confounding variables. In general, EAs were deemed to be important for building capacity in schools and colleges. A small number of participants expressed the view that, in cases where the funding has been used to ‘buy out’ staff time as an additional responsibility, time pressures may limit the influence that they can have: “they are so busy that it is just they don’t really have additional capacity, they are just trying to force it in somewhere into their role” (Partner 1).



Funding was used to increase the administration capacity of HeppSY within centres and trusts. The funding allowed staff in some centres to spend several hours a week on HeppSY administration, rather than covering for other staff, which helped to bring some stability. In the case of one centre, they employed “the same Administrator all the way through so it means that we’ve never had to induct anyone new” (CwP16 3). In centres, funding was also used to pay for a senior leader, some of which were careers leaders, to oversee and champion the work of HeppSY, with money being used to build time into their working week. There were varied perceptions about how effective this was. Some participants acknowledged that it had been beneficial as it took “pressure off” their roles and freed up staff to focus on work so that “schools [have] been able to take it seriously” (CnP16 4). Others in centres identified capacity issues for senior leaders who were also required to teach, which was perceived to be a reason “why some people haven’t gotten very much accomplished” (CnP16 2). The same participant also described how they had to “fight tooth and nail and eventually give them [the centre] the ultimatum” to secure even a small amount of time each week to spend on careers (CnP16 2).

Schools and colleges perceived that the funding had enabled trips to take place, particularly in relation to overcoming barriers such as the costs incurred from travel. One school claimed that they have “made strides in WP because HeppSY’s been able to give us that additional funding” for travel costs that “normal school budgets can’t afford” (CnP16 1). The scale and scope of activities has been increased due to the funding, for example, some schools were able to secure additional places for students on the Brilliant Club, in addition to those being paid for by HeppSY. In other cases, the budget enabled parents of students to attend events, with one school detailing that “we’ve not only been able to take the kids but for the graduation we’ve taken families who’ve never stepped foot in a University before” (CnP16 2). The funding from HeppSY have contributed to the costs of guest speakers, presentations and videos for websites. A number of schools and colleges emphasised the importance of how the funding had allowed them to have a more direct role in designing and delivering activities.

The importance of using the funding efficiently and prudently was evident across the partnership. A member of the senior leadership team emphasised that HeppSY “spend with the behaviour that our partners would approve” of (SLT). This corresponded with perspectives across the partnership. There was a preference to involve more than one centre in the delivery of activities so that there was greater reach, and so that more students can participate, which was seen as a more justifiable use of funding: “[for] one school it wouldn’t have been enough...to bring anyone in but two schools together made it purposeful...we could put a bit of a role together” (CnP16 3). This was described as a member of an academy trust as the “economies of scale” (AT 2). There were occasions where HeppSY would scale up activities centrally so that multiple centres could experience the benefits, which would save individual centres expenditure.

## Delivery of Activities

Delivery plans are a record of the sessions or trips that are scheduled to take place within each centre, which contains information about the activity, dates and the groups of students involved. Each centre is encouraged to set between three to six hours of activities for each HeppSY student. Centres were encouraged to shape their delivery plans at the beginning of each year to help embed flexibility into their proposals. Systems and processes were in place to support centres, but the engagement of centres with planning and in developing plans varied. EAs appeared to be more relied upon in centres where there was a lack of capacity and experience in staff. Some centres needed “spoon feeding” which may involve the EA creating a “skeleton plan” for staff to develop, while other centres “have just literally ran with it because they’re so experienced” (SCPM).

The core offer of HeppSY is a set of activities that are funded on the programme, in addition to funding that is given to partners to conduct their own activities. A member of the senior leadership team stated that HeppSY works out how many schools and colleges are eligible for the core offer and whether there is sufficient capacity for it to be delivered. The offer

was described as a “brochure” of activities comprised of pre-made sessions which are aimed at different year groups and across four strands: confidence and resilience; attainment; higher education knowledge; and career knowledge. It was also noted that some resources and activities in the offer were standalone that were used by staff in centres, while others were delivered by HeppSY staff.

Many schools and colleges welcomed the proactivity of HeppSY in promoting their offer, who used a range of approaches in accordance with the preferences of the centres, such as menus, postcards and videos. This was deemed to be helpful in making the process “easy” to arrange for centres who were usually busy. The willingness and desire of HeppSY staff to meet with centres was identified as an important factor in clarifying their offer. A staff member who was new to the role emphasised that they could “read through pamphlets and information” but “none if it [would mean] anything”, which is “why those meetings have been really beneficial” and it enabled them to book in a lot of activity during the first term (CnP16 2). There was only a small number of participants who felt that there had been a lack of clarity about the HeppSY offer, for example, one participant from an academic trust stated “if it hadn't been for the HEPA offer then I think I would have been struggling to tell career leads exactly what's on offer.” (AT 1).

It was common for centres to report a range of HeppSY activities that had been delivered to reach different year groups. One centre specified that their “biggest success” was in the “variety of things that we've had and the variety of year groups we've hit” (CnP16 2). The same centre also regarded HeppFest as an ideal opportunity to reach a high volume of students. Responses from the EAs indicated that the strands of higher education and career knowledge were the most sought after by centres. This presented a challenge as the EAs faced the task of balancing the preferences of staff within the centres with promoting other, often lesser-known, activities in the offer that could be valuable. An EA specified that the “survey shows that students aren't comfortable about other strands” (EAs) but “they all want UCAS application process and student finance”. A small number of centres were regarded as being repetitive in their choices while the focus on two interventions meant there was a perceived lack of opportunity to engage with the other strands. The EAs had a key role in promoting the offer to the centres and in determining which activities were relevant for their specific context, with one of the EAs describing the process as striking a “balance between planning in advance and having things in place like the HeppSY core offer...but then being responsive to what's going on”.

The activities within the offer that were deemed to be particularly ‘enjoyable’ were those that were described as being “fun”, “engaging” and “having presence”. The Brilliant Club was singled out by many interviewees as a particularly useful activity, with many centres stating that it had a notably positive impact on the students involved. Another popular activity was the bus which brought a mobile classroom on-site to schools and colleges.

A particularly successful aspect of organising and delivering activities was the flexibility of HeppSY to adapt their offer and their understanding that a generic approach would not be suitable for meeting the needs and context of each centre. A school and college programme manager described the offer as being so extensive that “no institution really ends up with the same thing...they'll always pick and choose...you develop where the need is.” One centre detailed how they were able to identify and work with a particular cohort of Year 9 students, “who wouldn't look at University...and wouldn't consider themselves to be that academic”, to help them explore “the creative subjects” (CnP16 3). In another example, two centres “put together the little pots of funding that we had” to create a mentoring project that was aimed at students whose first language was not English (CnP16 3).

Apart from time and the capacity of centres, a key barrier to implementation was in arranging appropriate times and dates for activities to take place. The delivery of activities was dependent on students being allowed to leave their lessons but teachers in centres were less willing to do this if they were not aware of HeppSY, or if they did not deem their work to be important: “They often have to take kids out of lessons and if a teacher doesn't know why they're just going to be annoyed.” (SCPM).

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# Evaluation and Monitoring

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## Targeting Young People for Interventions

In order to identify students who are most at risk of missing out on higher education, a coding system is used by centres to identify students with potential to progress to higher education. Students are coded as 'green' if they are deemed by the school to have potential, while those deemed to not have the potential are coded as 'red'. HeppSY provides guidance but centres were perceived to be predominantly responsible for the decision-making process about which students are identified, on the basis that staff in centres are well positioned to comment on students' capabilities.

Nevertheless, the potential inconsistency of this approach was raised and it was seen by some as the cause of a degree of misunderstanding and confusion: "that's the problem...it's down to the schools themselves so everyone's using a completely different approach" (HEDT). The targeting of students was described as a "tricky subject" (HEDT) by one member of the central team due to the need to dedicate significant resources to only those with potential whilst also wanting to avoid excluding students. This participant referred to evidence from the first phase evaluation and the tendency of some centres to "just code every student as green", leading to "no consistency in how that's being done" (HEDT). There was some evidence that centres were reluctant to exclude students, with a few describing that they would adopt a "blanket approach" with all students, providing that there was "a significant number [of HeppSY students] within a group" (EAs). However, it was not clear whether these centres did this consistently across all activities. A scaled approach is adopted, where more resource-intensive activities are expected to maximise engagement with those students who are coded as 'green' (i.e. considered to have the potential to progress to higher education) in order to "have a certain ratio of HeppSY students" (EAs). There was more flexibility with activities that required less resource. Targeting, especially in funded projects, was seen by some centres and partners as potentially "divisive" and "alienating for students and their parents" (CwP16 2).

From the viewpoint of some centres, the approach adopted by HeppSY to narrowly target activities towards specific students was different to their own measures they used to identify students who were at risk of not reaching their potential. Furthermore, a small number of centres reported that some of their most deprived students did not meet the criteria due to their postcode:

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"We serve the most deprived estate that falls in a very affluent postcode which you think must qualify [students] for support from HeppSY and then they often don't" (CwP16 3).

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There were notable differences in the logistics of targeting activities at students across centres. For those centres with a high proportion of students who meet the HeppSY criteria, it was feasible to run an activity with a whole class or school, such as an assembly, as this would have great reach. In contrast, it was more challenging for centres with a small proportion of HeppSY students, as "you'll have one HeppSY student in one group, another [student] in another [group], so trying to co-ordinate was difficult" (EAs). The difficult task of centres predicting the potential of students was sometimes accentuated by a perceived lack of data to support their decision-making. One participant commented that "the younger the year group the less information you're going to have", such as the potential absence of "projected GCSE grades" (HEDT).

## Establishing Rigorous Evaluation Practices

A key part of monitoring is the data collected on registers, which contain a record of activities that have taken place in each centre and the students that have participated and their demographic information. The register data is pivotal for a number of reasons, such as the OfS' data return, where HeppSY are required to submit details about the number of students they have engaged with to provide evidence that they are hitting targets. Without the registry data, HeppSY's aims are compromised as they face the prospect of not knowing how many students have had at least two interventions and they are unable to target activities. The register data is also connected to Higher Education Activity Tracker (HEAT), the CFE self-report survey data and other evaluation activities on headline programmes.

The interviews and focus groups indicated that centres were generally quite proactive in submitting the register data on time. Nevertheless, members of the central team and partners commented that there was some variation in centres, with a small number being slow.

There was unanimous agreement across participants that there had been significant improvements in the process of collecting and uploading register data. At the beginning of HeppSY, the process was described as onerous and time consuming, for example, one centre commented "it took a lot of time to get that information up to date on their spreadsheet about who our students were... we were having to put everybody in individually" (FEC). This has become less burdensome for centres due to a more streamlined approach that was introduced in phase two. The school and college programme managers reported that advancements have been made in the reporting of activities. Centres were now able to filter by department and course, which helped them to identify which areas their HeppSY students were based in, and this strengthened the role of data in their decision-making. One of the school and college programme managers detailed how their decisions were "more informed" due to the use of data, whereas "a lot of the information we used to rely on was anecdotal... that's obviously not accurate" (SCPM).

Reflecting on developments since the inception of HeppSY, partners and the central team emphasised that a key area of progression across the partnership has been the establishment of data sharing agreements. These agreements, which are shared between HeppSY, Hepp, the University of Sheffield and Sheffield Hallam University, were considered unanimously beneficial for the whole partnership, as data collected by one partner could be shared with another partner to target activities. Establishing the data sharing procedures at the inception of the programme had been identified as "one of the biggest challenges" by an academy trust, which they described as a process of "muddling our way through to try and find a solution" (AT 2). HeppSY were credited for helping to build a narrative about the importance of the data and for shifting the expectations of partners and the centres, with one participant reporting that "we've not had many issues at all in terms of our schools and colleges coming back and saying, 'Why are you sharing this data with them?'" (HDET). There was an aspiration for the data sharing agreements to remain in place across the partnership as a legacy of HeppSY. There were only a few issues observed about arranging data sharing agreements with centres. A small number of participants identified potential inconsistencies in data sharing across the partnership due to the varied approaches taken by centres, for example, in relation to their consent procedures, willingness to share demographic data and the classifications used for demographic data. These factors could result in missing data which cannot be shared more widely across the partnership.

There was evidence that evaluation has been embedded into centres and across the partnership during phase two. The EAs indicated that surveys were commonly used to evaluate individual HeppSY sessions and activities. In some examples, post-session survey feedback had been instrumental in informing future changes, although one member of the central team felt that comments were often too broad and lacking in criticality. There were examples of staff members involved in the delivery of provision, such as EAs and other staff based in centres and partners, who had the opportunity to input and reflect on the activities. One of the EAs detailed how that they would "self evaluate how every session went" and change activities based on "how we thought it went but also we'd use what the students would write about the sessions". It was clear that HeppSY

are proactive in seeking feedback from the partnership. The network meetings, workshops and 'away days' with the Data and Evaluation team were deemed to be particularly informative for discussing matters relating to evaluation. The EAs also indicated that they have become increasingly involved with evaluation activities in phase two.

There was evidence that the more resource intensive projects were now being evaluated in a more robust manner compared to the beginning of the programme. One centre referred to measures that are in place for the Brilliant Club to measure pre- and post-intervention impact. The empirical evaluation design used for the '*He Can*' and '*She Can*' projects has helped them receive external recognition for their impact in the form of "a case study on Office for Students website" (SCPM). Participants felt that the standards of evaluation have progressed considerably since the beginning of the projects. A school and college programme manager commented that there is a "consistent approach" adopted for the evaluation of the *He Can* and *She Can* projects.

There was evidence that HeppSY have contributed to the development of cultures in centres and partners that value evaluation. Access to 'expertise' and knowledge within HeppSY and greater exposure to evaluation principles helped the partnership realise the importance of evaluation. A focus group with partners highlighted that they were not undertaking monitoring and evaluation systematically before HeppSY, with one participant stating that "it wasn't anything meaningful or rigorous... it was literally, how many people are in a room and a bit of a straw poll of who was there." (Partner 4). Furthermore, there was a common viewpoint expressed by partners that they felt more included in the planning of data collection and evaluation. One centre identified the importance of having an evaluation framework underlying each higher education intervention to measure impact, stating that it has helped them to "track careers interventions and career meetings and how we're recording aspirations data" (CwP16 6). There were examples of how centres have conducted their own evaluations for non-HeppSY activities, with one centre describing how they were monitoring and evaluating their activities for Year 7 and Year 8 students. A small number of participants felt that the perceived importance of evaluation was dependent on the staff group within centres, with one participant stating that "staff on the ground" (HEPAs), such as Heads of Year and Curriculum leads, are less familiar with evaluation.

## Survey

OfS commissions CFE Research to deliver an annual national survey for all the whole UCP that is used to evaluate progress being made in each region, with the same questions being used which explore areas such as students' awareness and knowledge of higher education. The survey was described as a "key part" (HDET) of the evaluation of the programme which was mutually beneficial for individual centres, trusts and the entire partnership. By taking part, centres are provided with individual reports which provide the results of how their students have responded. The survey was deemed to contribute to the effectiveness of HeppSY as it was routinely used across the partnership to inform the planning of activities and to identify gaps in students' knowledge. One centre commented "our involvement in *She Can* came from seeing the girls self-evaluating that they're confidence was much lower than their male counterparts" (CwP16 3). Members of the central team stated that a benefit of the survey data is that analysis can be undertaken to monitor year-on-year differences and explore links between the activities of students and changes in their knowledge. One of the academic trusts found the survey data to be informative for the trust and for individual schools, as it enabled them to see "what their [students'] interests were in their next steps at university, before the programme and then after and whether that's changed their minds or not, or whether they needed a bit more work" (AT 2).

The viewpoints of the central team and senior leadership highlighted that a significant number of students participate in the survey each year, with one participant specifying that "we've secured over 10,000 kids each year" (SLT). However, a few centres identified several factors that inhibited student engagement with the online survey, predominantly due to access to technology. Engaging students with the survey was particularly problematic during the pandemic, as fewer students were

able to visit IT rooms with social distancing measures being in place and the absence of some students which would have a negative impact on participation levels. There were a small number of comments from centres that indicated that the survey design, such as its length and focus, were disengaging for some students. Two centres had doubts about the validity of the data, with one expressing concern about students' interpretations of the questions, specifically that it is not "a true reflection because I don't think kids understand what they're being asked" (CnP16 1). Although survey runs between October and December each year, one centre felt that the data was not comparable due to their belief that the survey is launched "at different times" each year (FEC).

# Legacy

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## Resources

There were hopes expressed that, as a minimum expectation of its legacy, that the resources and activities created by HeppSY will continue to be used by centres and partners. A number of interviewees envisaged the creation of a hosting site that would be used to house resources and guidance that would be accessible to current stakeholders, such as an “online portal just full of resources, full of other links where careers leads, parents, students themselves, can go to and they can find the resources that they need” (AT 2). The Covid-19 pandemic was perceived to be a catalyst in the development of online resources and activities which has helped accelerate the legacy of HeppSY. The pause in the delivery of activities provided HeppSY with an opportunity to concentrate on the creation of resources, with EAs being placed in working groups for each of the four strands in the offer.

A common concern expressed was the prospect of resources becoming out-of-date and obsolete if they are not updated on a continuous basis. A central member of HeppSY made reference to the rapidly changing nature of knowledge and they questioned “how do we make those [resources] last?” (HEPA). The legacy of the resources was deemed to be partially dependent on having staff available to update and/or promote their use, with an EA expressing doubt “that in two years’ time people are going to be accessing things online made by us, just because I think it’s hard enough to get people to access things anyway” (EAs). The existence of a set of resources without the involvement of staff was considered to be potentially insufficient for students who require active engagement and support. For some, having points of contact who are “relatable role models like EAs or student ambassadors that are studying at the moment” is a “key point of encouraging students” and “sustaining engagement” (Partner 3).

In the absence of designated staff, there was hope expressed that existing staff based in the centres would adopt the resources. The EAs mentioned that they were modifying existing provision so that the activities could feasibly be ran without them, for example, by “having viable activities and data booklets that future centres could run on their own... some of the previous projects that shows She Can and He Can are being transformed into You Can”. In preparation for the next phase, there was a focus by HeppSY to bestow centres with greater autonomy and to enhance knowledge within the wider staff base, rather than with individuals. One interviewee described this as setting “foundations for the schools to brand it up themselves but still pass the same message on” (EAs). Building the skills and knowledge of staff in centres was seen by some as a legacy in itself. Central team members mentioned that “upskilling staff is something that’s been really popular this academic year” (HEPA) and they believed that the CPD delivered to centres, and increasing understanding about higher education and careers, will be crucial to the lasting legacy of HeppSY. There was a clear focus on developing resources that are readily embedded into the practices of the centre. The focus group with the HEPAs highlighted that creating resources that are relevant and compatible with the existing subject curriculum is one way of encouraging centres to use them.

## Impact on Centres

Perceptions were expressed that HeppSY have been successful in raising the profile of higher education and careers in schools and colleges, with acknowledgement that leadership and other staff now recognise their value: “it’s moved careers and HE a little bit higher up in people’s agenda... we’ve got a meeting at school tonight to look at how we can integrate all the HeppSY stuff in different curriculum areas” (CwP16 2). Several centres indicated that there had been a “change



in culture", with a greater appreciation for careers and there was evidence that provision within centres had changed significantly since the inception of HeppSY. An example provided by a centre focused on how their provision has "layers built up from Year 7 right up to Year 11 and with parents on board" (CnP16 3). For some participants, a key indicator of impact will be in the extent that HeppSY have influenced centres that have previously had minimal or no higher education interventions. Findings from the interviews and focus groups highlighted that this has been achieved in some centres, with one participant specifying that HeppSY's "impact in our own school has been in terms of Year 9, 10 and 11 where there possibly wasn't that much HE intervention going in" (CsFE 7).

Several participants hoped that a legacy of HeppSY will be for centres and trusts to be more aspirational in their hopes and expectations for their students. There was an emphasis on students looking "more at what is possible from university... pushing to get onto the courses that they really want and being more aspirational in their choices" (FEC). A number of centres credited HeppSY for helping them to recognise that they need to tailor their approaches to the cohort of students rather than relying on a single approach. However, while many centres understood 'aspirational' to mean the most appropriate university for the student, a small number of other centres also stated that this might involve "students applying and getting into Russell Groups" (FEC).

The impact of HeppSY on staff within centres was posited by a few participants. One centre expressed the view that HeppSY have partially changed the culture within their workforce, with staff perceived to be more aspirational as a result of witnessing their students' progression. A school and college programme manager hoped that, as a result of HeppSY, staff in the centres will be equipped with more knowledge about higher education and, importantly, that this information will be retained within centres. A member of the senior leadership team felt that "some of our own delivery styles and techniques, our pedagogy and craft, I think, is starting to have a legacy on teachers, as is their own desire to upskill" (SLT).

A key benchmark of HeppSY's legacy for several participants will be the extent to which they have supported young people to make well-informed decisions about their future education. Reference was made to the anticipation that, as a result of having an increased understanding of higher education, students will demonstrate greater "ownership of their futures" (CwP16 2) and be more confident and critical of their decisions. Senior leadership at HeppSY expressed the hope that there will be "a group of more discerning young adults questioning, "why would that be the right decision for me?" (SLT). By having students with more self-belief, there was hope that this would materialise into "more progression into higher education, Degree, Apprenticeships" (CwP16 2). However, it was emphasised by a couple of centres that any evidence to demonstrate impact is only beginning to emerge due to the infancy of the HeppSY programme. Staff based in one of the academy trusts reported anecdotal evidence about the improvements seen in their students: "the careers advisors have said they've thought more about their pathways...they're beginning to see how their pathway can plan out with different training...and achieving the best that they can be" (AT 1)

Many of the centres referred to detailed examples of the transformative effect that HeppSY activities have had on individual students. One centre provided an account of one student who's "going to break the mould" by "moving from a traditional working-class family" to "going to a University" and finishing with good grades (CnP16 3). Another centre described how, as a result of an initiative funded by HeppSY, the experience changed a student's opinion that higher education was "just for posh people" (CnP16 2) and they are now studying on an extended diploma with the intention of progressing onto university. In another account, a centre stated that, as a result of HeppSY funding, students who had engaged with the Brilliant Club had begun to "see themselves differently", giving them the "confidence in Year 11 to run to be Head Boy, Head Girl" (CnP16 3). It was evident that HeppSY have had a role in 'normalising' and demystifying higher education in centres and for their students.

A member of the senior leadership team and a participant from a centre hypothesised about the potential legacy of HeppSY on the family of the students who have engaged in activities. The participant from a centre stated that "you've got parents and families [who] would recognise that [the centre] take this sort of things seriously and support students to find out more



about University and find out more about really positive destinations" (CnP16 4). However, a participant from an academy trust felt that the challenge of "breaking those boundaries...and changing the mindset of parents" (AT 2) had not been completely addressed.

The absence of staff to co-ordinate and deliver activities within the programme was identified as a key concern that may inhibit the legacy of HeppSY in centres. One of the senior leadership expressed the view that the "maintenance function of a programme could be at risk at some schools and colleges when there's so many other pressures" (SLT). A key challenge facing HeppSY is how the relationship between centres and partners will continue. Central team members and trusts were confident that the impact of HeppSY in embedding higher education into the culture of schools and colleges will encourage them to continue with the delivery of HeppSY provision, even potentially with less funding. One participant stated "we can but hope that schools have had it for three years and they see the benefit of it, and they're prepared to carry it on and keep raising that aspiration" (AT 1). The lack of certainty about funding for phase 3 was identified by the senior leadership team as a barrier to preparing centres for the upcoming year, amid concerns that they will not be able "to do all of the planning...to the level we'd like" (SLT) due to funding restraints and the late timing of decisions.

## Impact on Collaboration

There was a common desire for the centres and partners to continue to work together and to be more receptive to collaborating with external groups. The EAs spoke about how "everyone has had a positive experience working with HeppSY and they've seen the impact it's had on their students" which will encourage centres and partners to be more proactive in seeking out opportunities. The same participants also referred to examples of connections that centres have made with external organisations and partners without the direct involvement of HeppSY. According to a small number of participants, an indicator of impact of HeppSY will be in the extent that centres are willing to approach other partners as a result of engaging with HeppSY. Another key reason for continuing collaborations across the partnership is the maintenance of processes and procedures for sharing data.

The prospect of utilising existing relationships within the HeppSY partnership to alleviate the void left by HeppSY was mentioned by several participants. Continuing the collaboration within the partnership in some format was deemed to be logical, with one participant expressing the belief that it might be consistent with the OfS' consultation. Hepp was deemed to be well-positioned to be part of the legacy of HeppSY and to assume greater responsibility and more of a strategic role in the future, albeit with less funding, in part due to Hepp's longevity and its partnership with the University of Sheffield and Sheffield Hallam University. One participant from the data and evaluation team hoped that Hepp would be able to "navigate all the different offers and be like a one stop shop port of call for...what exists" (HEDT).

# Covid-19

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## Initial Response and Transition to Online

Schools and colleges in the South Yorkshire region experienced unprecedented challenges in responding to the circumstances created by Covid-19. While schools and colleges have always had their individual practices, and HeppSY have responded to these through the nurturing of bespoke relationships with each centre, Covid-19 has caused “even greater fragmentation of schools and colleges in their general practices” (SLT). During the initial response to home schooling, it was observed by HeppSY that centres had “just got so much on at the moment... they can't engage with any sort of external support” (SLT). One academy trust stated that during “those early days it was really difficult” and their overarching priority was not to “overload our schools with other things, other than just actually giving students the curriculum offer and diet that they were missing from a school” (AT 2). This sentiment was shared by the other centres who said they had to focus on delivering the curriculum and saw “anything else as a bonus” (CnP16 1). In these circumstances it could have been easy for higher education to be lost as a priority within the centres, especially given the financial burden caused by Covid-19 and the need for schools and colleges to cover extra costs incurred from “cleaning and new technology for students” (CwP16 3). However, one centre suggested that it was the “ring fenced funded” provided by HeppSY which “meant that HE remained a priority” (CwP16 3).

While the centres responded to immediate challenges of home schooling, HeppSY paused their normal proactive approach. However, centres still felt they could draw on their relationship with HeppSY for support, one centre stated they felt that if they needed any “support or anyone to talk to at any time then all I've got to do is get in touch with... anybody there [at HeppSY] and they're more than happy to help me out” (AT 1). While another centre noted that right from the first lockdown, HeppSY made it clear “we're here to help, how can we help? What can we do?” (CnP16 3). Some centres responded to this offer of support quickly. One centre stated that they needed “a tutorial on attending digital interviews, because all of a sudden, students weren't going for in-person interviews, for nursing, for teaching – they were going for digital interviews. This is new. This is different” (FEC). HeppSY worked with this centre to develop reusable resources for digital interviews, and they also supported the delivery of online mock interviews for HeppSY students. Another centre said you knew HeppSY “listened to schools” because they have “responded when... we have asked them to” (CnP16 1), such as setting up a telephone line for next steps advice for school leavers during the holidays and implementing virtual careers guidance.

While schools adjusted to home schooling HeppSY took that time to redesign their offer and delivery model. HeppSY's initial response was to provide guidance and outline the “parameters we were going to have in relationship with schools and colleges”, which they have continued to update according to government guidance (SLT). HeppSY also worked with its partners to provide a “consistent narrative that went out” to the centres, that outlined resources and support available from them or their partners, this communication also delivered “co-promotion of one another's work, with the signalling and signposting out to each other's webpage offers” (SLT). Moving to a digital offer according to one HeppSY focus group consisted of “looking at what it was and how it was that we were delivering activity and engagement with our students and rip it up and start again” (HEDT). One of the partners stated the move online provided an opportunity to examine their offer and actually look “at what was really impactful” and what they can “deliver and what do the schools and colleges want” (Partner 1).

It was felt within HeppSY that as an organisation they “responded really quick” in putting the “programme back together and move everything digitally” (EAs). While the initial response was at pace, HeppSY “spent a lot of time in the summer creating digital resources” and a “new offer” that includes “digital activities, blended activities and then face to face” ones (EAs). This

three-way model of delivery has meant HeppSY can easily adapt its offer to any changes in Covid-19 restrictions and future lockdowns. “Even though everything’s digital now” one of the partners reflected that the team “still offer[s] a huge amount of flexibility to schools and teachers and students in terms of what they’re offering” (Partner 2).

The “instability” caused by Covid-19 in centres and “the shock of coping with connecting with kids digitally”, meant some centres “could not think about... [HeppSY] because they’re in a really, really tough state” (SLT). This meant it took some time, especially considering the changing restrictions in centres, to gain traction with the new digital offer. One HeppSY focus group agreed that “we’re in a position where we are ready to go, I think now it’s just a waiting game and can we get our foot in the door, as soon as the door opens, before it closes again” (EAs). However, through their existing relationships and running unique online events, HeppSY and its partners have begun to gradually build up the delivery of its programmes again.

In the summer of 2020 Hepp ran an online conference which saw high attendance from HeppSY schools. In December 2020 HeppSY (alongside partners) delivered HeppFest which was a week-long programme that broadcast over 100 sessions into schools and colleges in the South Yorkshire region. The festival was an opportunity to “raise the profile of the support and the partnership that’s out there” (SLT). Some sessions drew audiences of over 500 students, and attendance from “parents and stakeholders, teachers”, which would not have been possible pre-Covid-19 as one partner noted “I don’t think we would have got anywhere near the engagement that we got with it being virtual” (Partner 4). The centres also praised HeppSY for their new digital offer, with one academy chain stating that they have “had some really positive feedback” from staff and students commenting that the “presentations have been really informative and really easy to follow” (AT 1).

## Ways of Working and Relationship Building

The impact of Covid-19 has had a wide range of implications on HeppSY work. While there have been some new opportunities and benefits, there have also been new challenges while existing issues have been “magnified” (SLT). It was suggested that remote working “has really dramatically improved everybody’s digital competency in schools, colleges and universities” (SLT). Partners in HeppSY said the move to online has “not actually been massively different”, because they are already based across different locations (Partners 2). One interviewee from HeppSY felt that relationships had improved with partners because it has “taken a much more informal feel” and that it had “been much more warm and encouraging” (SLT). While problems did arise, these were due to technology and the use of different platforms among partners, but these were easily overcome by HeppSY’s flexible approach.

For HeppSY staff who had been based in the office they found the transition to online working more challenging. These staff missed the spontaneous office environment where “an idea might come from one person but then the whole room would input into an idea and it would be done instantaneously” (EAs). However, for HeppSY staff not based in the office and those “scattered across the region” they found collaboration easier because they are “around each other virtually all the time” and that made it easier to “get information and work on projects” (EAs). The move to online working has also allowed some HeppSY staff to engage with centres in new ways now that they are not restricted by travel time and geography. Working remotely has allowed staff to build on existing relationships and has meant meetings with “schools are really easy to have more frequently” and attending those meetings has enabled staff to “make those links” that have “definitely resulted in quite a... lot of early delivery” (HEPAs).

Some HeppSY staff suggested that the reach and accessibility of the programme for staff in the centres has increased, as they had seen a significant “uptake in CPD this year for some centres” now that teaching and careers staff were not restricted by travel and location (SCPMs). However, building new relationships with staff in centres was seen as extremely challenging if they were new to a role or had been assigned to a different centre. Some HeppSY staff suggested “you still

can't really build relationships with people because it is just through emails, and because you're not physically there [in the centre], it's just difficult to do" (EAs). Prior to the pandemic the challenges in building relationships were staff time and capacity, especially teaching staff in the centres who have limited time to respond to emails and calls, however this seems to have been magnified in the digital world. Barriers to relationships also seemed to be experienced more by new staff or less senior staff who are making their first career steps after graduation.

## Programme Reach and Student Engagement

Some HeppSY staff have found that they are delivering more digitally than they did compared to pre-Covid-19 and that "things have become more accessible to more learners" (SCPM). This sentiment was also echoed by the centres where they suggested digital delivery "can actually reach more students" (CwP16 2), and some centres have found that student attendance has improved for things "like career one to ones and advice" (FEC). Centres and HeppSY agreed it has been easier to organise large digital engagements, than it would have been face-to-face. One HeppSY staff member said they were able to deliver a session to every Year 9, 10 and 11 student at one centre over three half-an-hour sessions.

Digital delivery was deemed to be "incredible" in terms of coverage and "if the technology works and schools are behind it" (HEPA). However, this is not the experience of all HeppSY staff, partners, or centres. One HeppSY colleague said that centres have "been tentative about booking online sessions because the tech can fail or they've had bad experiences" (HEPA). Another participant stated that, during this term, "I've done a lot less delivery than previously" (HEPA), which was an experience shared by the partners as well, who said they were delivering far fewer activities. Concerns were also expressed that centres were "saturated with digital delivery" and that students are experiencing digital fatigue (SLT). However, one of the centres did not see this as a barrier as "we've now got a generation of digital learners who know how to communicate, know how to attend things [online] and are more willing to do so because they've become used to that now" (CwP16 2).

HeppSY are working with centres to build confidence and encourage engagement but they have had to change how they deliver sessions because of technology restrictions in centres. In many centres they do not have cameras, or students are unable to access the session via one device, which significantly restricts the engagement and interactions that can be had with students. An EA described how the absence of non-verbal feedback, which "was so useful when delivering in person", "makes it difficult to be as adaptable and to be as responsive because you don't get to see...how they're physically responding to your session" (EAs).

Concerns were expressed about the impact of activities on students and how this would be measured, as there had been less engagement in evaluation activities. However, sessions have received good feedback from centres and have been praised for their quality. It was observed by HeppSY and its partners that there is an element of criticality missing which then makes it challenging to develop and improve "activity in the future" (Partner 2). In one of the HeppSY focus groups there was also a debate about how value can be attached to different activities (HEPA).

Both HeppSY and its partners expressed a commitment to developing their practice and future activities. Many participants expressed a belief that digital delivery would continue to play a role in their engagement with centres and students even after everything has returned to normal. In one focus group HeppSY staff already noticed that they were getting "more sophisticated with digital of pedagogy" and they thought that the delivery of the programme would be a "combination of activity" of online and face to face (SCPM).

# Discussion

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The extensive findings outlined above provide a significant amount of evidence that HeppSY is meeting or working towards its output targets identified in its logic model (Appendix 1). The findings are discussed below within the context of the evaluation questions. Overwhelmingly the evidence presented in this report is positive, however there are limitations to the data, these are outlined at the beginning of the report.

## ***Q: How has the programme and collaborative partnerships been developed from phase one to phase two?***

HeppSY have been successful in communicating a clear vision of what they want to accomplish and achieve in the region, which has resulted in collaboration that is built on relationships of trust. This has led to the continued successful implementation of the programme during phase two and aided the response to Covid-19. These relationships were spearheaded by a senior leadership team that are accessible, and open in their approach to all partners. HeppSY's approach to collaboration, open communication and consultation was particularly beneficial during the uncertainty around the future of the UCP nationally going into phase two. This allowed the partners to plan for all possible scenarios while also allowing HeppSY to retain staff. As the programme moves into phase three, a similar approach to phase two should be adopted, especially as the impact of reduced funding and different programme aims are explored and implemented.

Building on the foundations set in phase one, HeppSY have developed a strong brand that was perceived to be professional and high quality by evaluation participants. The shift to a regional approach to the management of centres in phase two also meant HeppSY could be more proactive and responsive to the individual needs of each centre. This also enabled greater understanding about the reach of the programme in those areas. Centres appeared to be willing and eager to work with HeppSY. The centres have also come to rely on HeppSY as an accessible conduit for all higher education access activities and support. This could be because of well-developed relationships, that have been established at multiple levels in centres from senior leadership teams to teachers, careers advisors and administrative staff by a range of HeppSY colleagues. The resources and capacity of HeppSY have also helped them to coordinate and deliver a flexible and bespoke programme to the centres it engages with.

This presents a number of challenges for HeppSY's partner organisations (Hepp, SHU and UoS), as they might not have the resources or capacity to fill the void left by HeppSY after its expected completion in 2025. The partners expressed concerns about: their lack of individual identity amongst the centres; the centres' over-reliance on HeppSY to coordinate their access offer; and the ability to manage the centres' high expectations. HeppSY should consider how they could support their partners in developing collaborative ways of working with each other, that can maximise capacity and resources in the region in the delivery of outreach activities.

According to the centres, a success experienced by the HeppSY programme in both phase one and two was their ability to create capacity and resource in their organisations. HeppSY achieved this through multiple means such as buying out staff time in centres, providing additional staff such as EAs, or by giving the centres access to funds to support outreach activities. The allocation of funding in centres has also meant that HeppSY could expect the centres to actively engage in the programme and deliver on certain requirements. However, there were some concerns expressed that persistent time pressures on staff in centres, even with the funding, was limiting their ability to engage with HeppSY. The reciprocal relationship created through the funding has benefited stakeholders and has helped the programme succeed. Having the funding guaranteed in two-year blocks during phase one and two was also beneficial as it allowed stakeholders

to plan further ahead into the future. This may become more challenging if the funding in phase three is subject to annual confirmation and consultation, as the pace of decision making at a national level will have a direct impact on the programme's design and implementation at a regional level.

Centres agreed that higher education has been raised and maintained as a priority within their organisations. They also perceived that the value of HeppSY had increased during phase two as staff in centres began to see the impact it was having on their students. However, there needs to be careful consideration about how higher education access is kept as a priority within centres when capacity and resources are reduced or removed. This is especially necessary given the impact of Covid-19 on education, which might in turn reshape immediate priorities within centres.

### ***Q: To what extent has a culture of evaluation and monitoring developed across phase two?***

There was evidence from all stakeholders that HeppSY had developed a strong culture of evaluation and monitoring during phase two of the programme. This was aided by the work carried out in phase one that established the processes and procedures allowing participant data to be shared across the partnership. HeppSY's evaluation and data team had worked with centres and partners to refine and standardise how data was being collected and submitted for registers. There was also a good understanding and appreciation of the importance of having data that demonstrates the impact of the programme. There were only a few issues observed about arranging data sharing agreements with centres, with potential inconsistencies in data sharing across the partnership due to the varied approaches taken by centres. The partners expressed their hopes that these practices would continue beyond HeppSY, as they found them very beneficial for their own outreach work. However, there were concerns that without the financial incentives offered by HeppSY this would cease.

The evaluation and data team have created more opportunities for the outputs of evaluation activities to be shared, either through regular meetings or accessible reports for the centres. Participants from HeppSY, the partners and the centres shared experiences of using evaluation outcomes to shape what they do and their practice. Using evidence to inform activities and practice is a good demonstration of an evaluative culture. Practitioner reflections were a significant element of many of the evaluative practices of HeppSY staff, although many expressed concerns that the move to online had impeded their ability to use this form of evaluation. Others expressed concerns about young peoples' engagement in evaluations of online activities and how this may result in data that provides limited insight into the impact of these activities. It may be necessary for HeppSY to explore how best to apply evaluation practices in a digital environment that support the creation of robust and valid insights.

Centres shared the challenges around identifying the most appropriate young people to participate in the HeppSY programme. Centres felt hesitant about determining the potential of young people to progress to higher education, especially for younger students where a few centres felt that there was a perceived lack of data to support their decision-making, which may lead to inconsistencies in the approach. Some centres expressed the view that all young people could have the potential given the right support and circumstances. Other centres also highlighted that the national approach of using postcodes to identify students sometimes excluded young people from the programme, who the centres felt needed additional support to reach their potential. Some of these discrepancies arise because of the different measures used, such as free school meals eligibility, pupil premium and English as a second language to identify students that face additional barriers in education. DfE, OfS, higher education providers, and other organisations should consider working with centres to align and identify measures that can be used by all stakeholders consistently at all levels of education to select students at risk of not reaching their potential.



## ***Q: What is the anticipated legacy of HeppSY, and how has this been developed across phase two?***

Participants commonly hoped that the HeppSY legacy would involve young people making well informed decisions about their futures and that higher education participation increases for those that have been involved in the programme. Centres stated they have already observed a change in aspirations; firstly, in the young people that had participated in the programme, and secondly, to a lesser extent, in the staff working in centres and what outcomes they expected for their students. While this would need further evaluative activity to establish the validity of these observations, many of the centre key contacts interviewed shared experiences of where the HeppSY programme had benefited an individual. HeppSY should endeavour to collect these case studies as they will help contextualise the quantitative measures of success. The centres also thought that part of the HeppSY legacy stemmed from the targeted investment that had helped raise the profile of higher education and careers in their organisations.

The evaluation participants were all committed to building a HeppSY legacy in the South Yorkshire region, especially HeppSY staff who were very focused on how they can support the legacy of the programme. Some of the evaluation participants suggested the impact of Covid-19 had brought legacy to the forefront of their thinking, especially as they created online resources in response to the social restrictions. It was felt that a hub of resources that was freely available for centre staff and young people could help extend the impact of the programme beyond HeppSY. However, the usefulness of such resources was debated as without the funding to keep them up to date and staff to drive engagement with them, they would quickly become irrelevant. However, a solution to this is to continue to deliver and increase the CPD offer to staff in the centres and to ensure that resources can be readily embedded into the practices of the centres. Some HeppSY colleagues thought that a strong CPD offer could help secure the long-term impact of the programme and part of this offer could include how to use and adapt HeppSY resources.

HeppSY can help secure its legacy by supporting the continued collaboration of partners and centres after the end of the programme. While the removal of capacity and resources may cause challenges for collaboration, the maintenance and development of these relationships will help the programme aims to be kept as a priority within the centres and the South Yorkshire region.

## ***Q: What impact has Covid-19 had on the implementation of the HeppSY programme in phase two?***

As outlined in the findings about Covid-19, HeppSY paused the implementation and delivery of the programme while its partners and the centres moved to the digital environment and established new ways of working. The move to a digital environment has brought new opportunities and challenges and, in some cases, has magnified existing barriers for the programme's implementation. Some HeppSY staff felt that working digitally allowed them to be more effective, attend more meetings at centres, and reach more young people in a shorter period because they do not have the same time or geographical restrictions. Others felt that digital delivery was less impactful and hindered the opportunity to interact with young people in a meaningful way. Some HeppSY staff, especially those new to the programme or to a particular centre found it hard to develop relationships and establish contact with staff in centres. A major concern was the ability to effectively communicate with centre staff, who always had multiple pressures on their time, which have increased significantly because of Covid-19.

As society returns to normal over the coming months, HeppSY needs to carefully consider how they adapt their offer again. There was a consensus amongst evaluation participants that the digital environment would play a greater role in the programme's delivery. However, there were diverse opinions about to what extent and in what ways the digital environment

would be incorporated into the programme. While the digital environment offers many benefits and may make some kinds of delivery easier, it may not be the best option depending on what outcomes are being worked towards. HeppSY should consult with its partners and centres and perhaps more importantly young people about how best to incorporate the digital environment into the programme. If the digital space is continued to be used then HeppSY should also consider how it supports its staff and stakeholders to develop their skills and knowledge of online pedagogies, evaluation methods, and relationship building in a digital environment.



# Recommendations

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1. As **HeppSY** move into phase three, they should consider adopting the same approach to collaboration based on open communication and consultation, that was established in the transition to phase two.
2. **HeppSY and partners** should consider how they can support their partners (SHU, TUoS and Hepp) to strengthen the identity in centres and develop structures that facilitate collaborative ways of working, to help ensure: capacity and resources to deliver outreach activities are maximised in the absence of HeppSY; higher education remains a priority in the centres; and processes such as data sharing agreements can be maintained.
3. **HeppSY's** continuing professional development offer to the centres should be maintained and expanded to help support the legacy of the programme.
4. **HeppSY** should maintain their approach to evaluation and monitoring, including providing opportunities for knowledge exchange and sharing practices; they should also explore how best to apply evaluation practices in a digital environment that support the creation of robust and valid insights, and gather case studies that demonstrate the impact of the programme.
5. **HeppSY** should consult with its partners and centres and, perhaps more importantly, young people, about how best to incorporate the digital environment into the programme. If the digital space is to be maintained then HeppSY should also consider how it supports its staff and stakeholders to develop their skills and knowledge of online pedagogies, evaluation methods and relationship building in a digital environment.
6. **The Department for Education, Office for Students, Higher Education Providers**, and other organisations should consider working with centres to align and identify measures that can be used by all stakeholders consistently at all levels of education to select students at risk of not reaching their potential.
7. **The Office for Students** should ensure that any decisions made about the future funding of the Uni Connect Programme are made in a timely manner to help partnerships and centres plan for the delivery of activities in upcoming years.

# Appendix 1 – HeppSY Logic Model Programme Outputs

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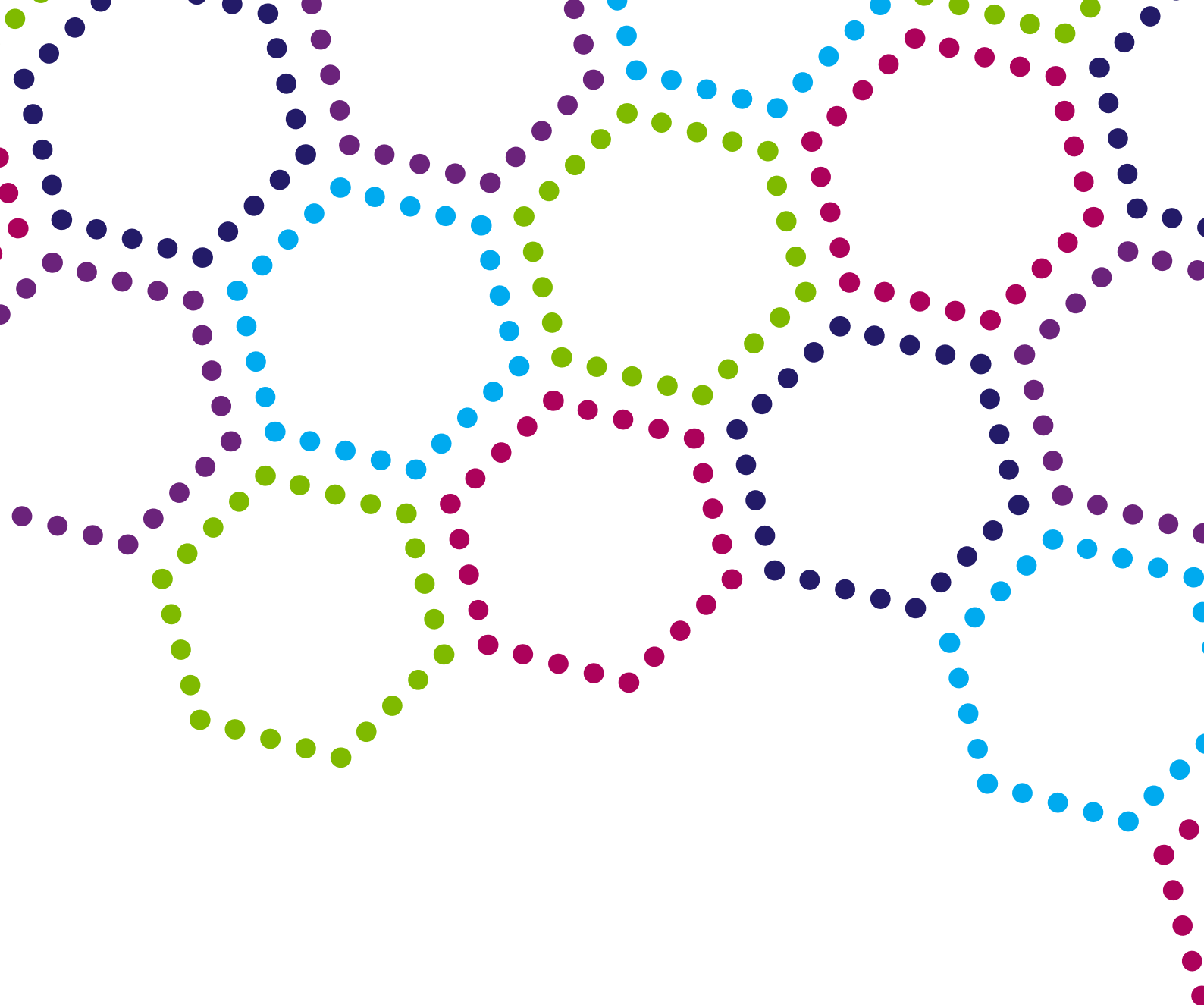
- 1A Establish strategic leadership, management and governance arrangements to deliver a collaborative approach
- 1B Effective engagement with local schools and colleges
- 1B Effective engagement with local schools and colleges
- 1B Effective engagement with local schools and colleges
- 1C Links with other regionally based UCP consortia
- 1D Collaboration with other national based projects (e.g. local opportunity area)
- 1E School/college financial incentive
- 1H A range of activities at differing levels of intensity covering the four strands
- 1I Individual annual school and college reports to enable bespoke delivery targeted at individual needs
- 1I Individual annual school and college reports to enable bespoke delivery targeted at individual needs
- 1J Engagement with CFE webinars, briefing documents and ongoing communication with case manager.
- 1K Workshops and conferences for participating schools and colleges
- 1K Workshops and conferences for participating schools and colleges
- 1L Plan and delivery of rigorous evaluation of programme and specific activity
- 1M/3M Legacy of resources covering four strands
- 1M/3M Legacy of resources covering four strands
- 1N Sub-contracted and internal research projects provide localised context to aid delivery planning
- 1O Capturing learner voice
- 1P Delivery plans for each school/college
- 1P Delivery plans for each school/college
- 3L Impact on institutional policy and culture

# Appendix 2 – Interview/Focus Group Schedule (generic questions)

Question Theme/ Section	Question
What role and responsibilities does the participant have?	Can you begin by telling me about your role and how it contributes to the HeppSY programme?
To what extent has HeppSY developed its collaborative approach to outreach across the South Yorkshire region in Phase 2?	Who do you usually collaborate with? Who are your partners?
	What has worked well in developing a collaborative approach to outreach?
	What challenges have you experienced in developing a collaborative approach to outreach?
How have effective relationship with partner schools and colleges been maintained and developed across Phase 2 of the project?	How has the funding and staffing into schools contributed to this partnership?
	Can you tell me about how you targeted and engaged local schools and colleges with the HeppSY Programme?
	What have you found to be the most effective way of engaging schools and colleges?
	Were there any challenges in engaging schools and colleges?
	How have you secured buy in from the school/college leaders as well as other school staff?
	Have the schools and colleges engaged with the delivery plans?
	Have the delivery plans been a helpful resource for ensuring schools and colleges are able to plan an effective and/or bespoke programme of activity?
How has activity been organised and delivered across the region in line with HeppSY aims and objectives (strands of the programme)?	How do you think the aims and objectives of the programme have been understood by the partners? What has influenced this?
	What successes do you think there has been in organising and delivering activities across the region?
	What challenges have you experienced in organising and delivering activities with schools and colleges?

**Appendix 2 – Interview/Focus Group Schedule (generic questions)**

Question Theme/ Section	Question
How has the monitoring and evaluation of the programme developed across Phase 2 of the programme?	How have you supported the monitoring and evaluation of the programme?
	How successful do you think phase 2 has been at embedding evaluation and monitoring within the partner organisations and activities?
	What challenges has there been at developing evaluation and monitoring?
How has Covid-19 impacted the implementation of the programme, and how successful have efforts to work around this been?	Can you tell me about how HeppSY supported its partners to develop alternative arrangement to delivering the programmes aims and objectives?
	Has it changed your role, or the way you do your role?
	How will the long-term impact of Covid-19 affect HeppSY aims and objectives?
What will the legacy of HeppSY be, and has this been developed across Phase 2?	How will the legacy of HeppSY manifest itself across the region?
	What would long-term success of HeppSY look like for you?
	What do you think the legacy will be within the schools and colleges?



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Student Engagement,  
Evaluation and  
Research



# Sheffield Hallam University

*A process evaluation of phase two of the higher education progression partnership South Yorkshire (HeppSY)*

PICKERING, Nathaniel and DONNELLY, Alan

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