

Student Researchers Pilot: A peer evaluation approach to assessing impact

A report to LiNCHigher

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Executive summary

Overview

This academic year (2021-22), the LiNCHigher evaluation team, based in the Lincoln Higher Education Research Institute (LHERI) at the University of Lincoln, were tasked with piloting the setting up and running of student researcher groups in schools and colleges. The aim of the pilot was to encourage student voice, enhance student engagement and improve the quality and impact of LiNCHigher's Uni Connect outreach delivery through peer feedback.

In recent years the importance of student voice has grown considerably following the 1989 legally binding Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) which states that the views of the child should be assured and given due consideration in all settings, including education. To this aim, Lundy (2007)¹ proposed a four-pronged model of child participation comprising of space, voice, audience, and influence to ensure the student voice is heard and duly considered. These interlinking prongs aim to not only capture the student's voice but enable their views to be expressed, listened to, and acted upon as appropriate. This model formed the main aim of the student researcher pilot.

Approach taken

The pilot took a qualitative approach and involved establishing student researcher groups in four schools and one college across the county. A small number of students (40 in total) from Years 9, 10 and Level 3 Year 1 and 2 were asked to gather feedback from their peers on LiNCHigher outreach activities delivered in their school or college, to their year group. Their findings were then feedback to the evaluation team at follow-up sessions during the school year. At the end of the school year the students were invited to attend a student researcher conference. The college students were invited to Bishop Grosseteste University (BGU) and the school students to the University of Lincoln (UoL). The conferences were an opportunity for the student researchers to present their findings to the LiNCHigher team. This ensured the student voice was not only heard and considered, but acted upon as deemed appropriate, in accordance with Lundy's child participation model.

Key findings

The pilot found that student researcher groups are most effective when participating students are willing and informed volunteers, where the students already have a good level of confidence, the ability to talk to others, are self-motivated and have a designated member of staff as a point of contact. They were less effective when schools faced internal challenges, such as a change in leadership, priorities or staffing. The COVID-19 pandemic also continued to have a detrimental impact on schools in the first half of the year and therefore, by default, the success of some of the student researcher groups.

The student researchers enjoyed taking part in the pilot and particularly appreciated and valued the opportunity the conference gave them to give their feedback directly to LiNCHigher as the organisation in a position to put their findings and recommendations into action. They felt listened to.

Main output

The pilot, led by the LiNCHigher evaluation team, formed part of a collaborative venture with three other Uni Connect partnerships: Humberside Outreach Programme (HOP), Inspiring Choices and the Sussex Learning Network. The collaboration resulted in the production of two guidance documents that set out how to establish and run student researcher groups in schools and colleges. The guidance documents will be available on all participating partnerships' websites in due course.

Lundy, L. (2007) Voice is not enough: Conceptualising Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, BERJ, 33 (6) pp. 927-942 <https://pure.qub.ac.uk/en/publications/voice-is-not-enough-conceptualising-article-12-of-the-united-nati>.

1. Introduction

This academic year (2021-2022), one of the LiNCHigher evaluation team's main strands of work has been to establish and run student researcher groups in schools and colleges with the aim of enhancing student engagement, encouraging student voice, and improving the quality and impact of LiNCHigher's delivery.

With the ongoing Office for Students' (OfS) requirement that Uni Connect programmes should be fully and properly evaluated to establish what works, coupled with a year-on-year reduction in funding to the programme which will require schools and colleges to have the capacity to self-evaluate in the future, it was timely to explore how the student voice could be more effectively utilised in the Uni Connect context.

The importance of the student voice has grown considerably in recent years, largely due to the legally binding Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) which came into effect in 1989 and decrees:

States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

(UNICEF, 1990:5)²

The Article applies to all aspects of a child's life, including educational settings. Lundy (2007)³ suggests a four-pronged model of child participation consisting of space, voice, audience and influence to ensure the student voice is heard and duly considered. These prongs are interlinked and aim to do more than simply pay lip service to capturing the student's voice, they enable their views to be expressed, listened to and acted upon as appropriate; this formed the main aim of the student researcher pilot.

Whilst the pilot was led by the LiNCHigher evaluation team based in the Lincoln Higher Education Research Institute at UoL, it was a collaborative venture with three other Uni Connect partnerships: Humberside Outreach Programme (HOP), Inspiring Choices and the Sussex Learning Network. The collaboration resulted in the production of two guidance documents which set out how to establish and run student researcher groups in schools and colleges. The guidance documents will be available on all four participating partnerships' websites in due course.

Report structure

This report details how the pilot operated, what worked well, the challenges encountered and how the students felt about being a student researcher. It concludes by summarising the key findings and lessons learnt from the pilot that need to be considered when running future student researcher groups in schools and colleges. The report begins by outlining the approach taken by the evaluation team to the pilot.

² UNICEF (1990) The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), UNICEF London, https://downloads.unicef.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/UNCRC_united_nations_convention_on_the_rights_of_the_child.pdf.

³ Lundy, L. (2007) Voice is not enough: Conceptualising Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, BERJ, 33 (6) pp. 927-942 <https://pure.qub.ac.uk/en/publications/voice-is-not-enough-conceptualising-article-12-of-the-united-nati>.

2. Approach taken / pilot design

The student researcher pilot aimed to take a new approach to gathering student feedback on the delivery of LiNCHigher outreach activity and an alternative way of assessing the programme's impact. The initial intention was to set up student researcher groups in schools and colleges this year and work with the same students over the remaining lifetime of the Uni Connect project. The student researchers were tasked with carrying out peer evaluation of LiNCHigher outreach activities delivered in their school or college, to their year group, which they would then feed back to the evaluation team at regular, termly workshops throughout the academic year. At the end of the year the students would be invited to attend a student researcher conference at either Bishop Grosseteste University (BGU) or the University of Lincoln (UoL) where they would meet with other student researcher groups and present their findings to the LiNCHigher team to ensure the student voice was not only heard and considered but acted upon appropriately, in accordance with Lundy's child participation model.

The approach was designed to provide in-depth rich qualitative data and insights into how students engaged with Uni Connect activities, what impact they have and help to improve the delivery of the programme for future cohorts. In addition, the pilot had the potential to identify other factors that influence students in terms of their knowledge, understanding and aspirations to study further, post-16/18.

This qualitative pilot was originally designed to involve 40 students from four of LiNCHigher's target schools and one college, spread throughout the county of Lincolnshire. The table below summarises some of the key characteristics of the case study schools and the college that took part in the pilot.

School / College	Area	Size	Sixth form	Ofsted rating	Careers Lead status
The College	Boston	Large	N/A	Good (2017)	New - September 2021, LiNCHigher employed
School 1	Boston	Large	No	RI* (2019)	New - September 2021
School 2	Lincoln	Large	Yes	Good (2018)	New – December 2021
School 3	East Coast	Large	Yes	RI* (2020)	In place, has several years of experience. On maternity leave this school year (September – June) - no cover.
School 4	Fens/rural	Medium	No	Good (2019, pre-academy)	In place 6 years – experienced

Key: *Requires improvement

Each school was asked to identify eight students, four from Year 9 and four from Year 10, to take part in the pilot. The college was asked to select eight AS level students to participate. In each case a mix of genders and Uni Connect and non-Uni Connect students were also requested. With the exception of School 2 and School 4, it was unclear how the students had been selected to take part. Students at School 4 were selected by their respective Heads of Year for their confidence and ability to make the most of the task set, in accordance with information provided to them by the Careers Lead. Students at School 2 had previously registered their interest to be a Career Champion with the Careers Lead who then selected a cross-section of students they felt would engage most readily with the research activity.

Unfortunately, not all schools recruited fully, some students did not attend the workshop when asked to do so and some dropped out after the first session. Therefore, the final number of student researchers that took part in the pilot was 33: 21 boys and 12 girls. Of these, 16 were Year 9 students, 11 Year 10 students, 3 Level 3 Year 1 and 3 Level 3 Year 2 students.

The evaluation team’s intention was to establish the student researcher groups in each school/college before October half term (2021), revisit them in January and again in April (2022), with the student researcher conference scheduled to take place late June/early July. Unfortunately, due to constraints and challenges in the schools, largely as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic which was still causing schools difficulties in the Autumn term, the evaluation team were not able to access schools to begin setting up the student researcher groups until early December 2021. This was despite having a good working relationship with three of the schools (School 2, 3 and 4) - having carried out evaluation activity with them previously. The evaluation team also had a good relationship with the college, as the new Careers Lead was employed by LiNCHigher. Whilst the fourth school, School 2, was new to the evaluation team, the Careers Lead was known as they were an ex-LiNCHigher employee, however, they were not in post until December 2021. The timetable of visits for each school/college is set out in the table below.

School / College	Visits
The College	3 visits plus the conference – December, February, April and June
School 1	1 visit plus one phone call with the Careers Lead – December and March
School 2	2 visits – February and May
School 3	2 visits – December and March
School 4	2 visits plus the conference – February, March and July

In each case the first workshop lasted up to 90 minutes with subsequent sessions of approximately one hour. This level of student engagement, in conjunction with other LiNCHigher activities the students had participated in during the school year, fulfilled the OfS criteria of ‘sustained and progressive’ engagement and was therefore logged on HEAT, LiNCHigher’s system for capturing Uni Connect student participation hours, accordingly.

Uni Connect partnership collaboration

In addition to the above approach, the evaluation team invited other Uni Connect partnerships interested in the pilot to work in collaboration. Three other partnerships, HOP, Inspiring Choices and the Sussex Learning Network registered their interest. Whilst not all were planning to run any such groups this year themselves, they were interested in how they would go about establishing and running student researcher groups in the future. The Sussex Learning Network did establish a small group of student researchers in one of their colleges and another group in a local school later in the year, around Easter. They drew on our experience of setting up the student researcher groups to inform their practice and running of the groups. For example, they used our workshop templates and other materials such as our peer feedback questions.

It was agreed that the output from the collaboration would be a guidance document detailing how to set up and run student researcher groups in schools and colleges that could be shared with other Uni Connect partnerships. This guidance has now been completed and will shortly be available on all the participating partnerships’ websites, including LiNCHigher’s Future Focus.

3. What we did - workshops and conferences

The main elements of the pilot were the workshops and the student researcher conferences - the successful and more challenging components of both are explored in the following section.

The initial workshops

What worked well

The first workshop, which aimed to inform the students about the pilot and provide them with the skills and knowledge they would need to carry out the task of gathering peer feedback, went well. The workshop format, which included an icebreaker activity, a discussion to name the group, a session on what questions students could ask their peers and how they would collect and collate the information they gathered, worked well. An outline of Workshop 1 can be found in Appendix A and the questions they were asked to gather peer feedback on are available in Appendix B.

Specific aspects of the workshops that worked well included the naming of the group, brainstorming possible questions and students working together, including across different year groups (i.e., Years 9 and 10). The students also appreciated the LiNCHigher starter pack (which included items such as a note pad, pen and pencil case) that they were given. Each group of student researchers were keen to choose a name by which they could be identified throughout the school or college. Group names included: Young Researchers (School 4), Career Champs (School 2) and LiNCBack (the College). Students came up with some excellent questions and were encouraged to ask them in their own words as long as they retained the essence of the original question. Most of the student researcher groups elected to provide their feedback at the next session in a MS Word document or as a MS PowerPoint presentation. Whilst more innovative options were offered, such as a blog, a recorded podcast or a tweet, they all elected to use more conventional feedback methods.

What did not work so well

Arranging the first workshops was challenging, mainly due to the COVID-19 pandemic which was still an issue in the Autumn term of 2021 for most schools. Whilst schools were open, many, including the schools taking part in the pilot, reported high levels of student and staff absences and the continuation of some Covid-19 restrictions. This led to a shortage of space both in the timetable and rooms to accommodate extra curricula activities as well as the prioritising of Senior Leadership Teams (SLT) on catching up on lost learning. At this time career sessions and evaluation were viewed as a low priority. The net effect was a significant delay in setting up the student researcher groups which did not occur until mid-December 2021 in three cases (School 1, School 3 and the College) and February 2022 for two (School 2 and School 4).

Other issues included students not turning up to the session or not knowing why they had been asked to attend. The latter led to several students feeling they would not be able to carry out the tasks required and they subsequently withdrew after the first session.

Subsequent workshops

What worked well

The second, and in the case of the College, the third visit to the student researcher groups was largely successful with students having gathered feedback from their peers on LiNCHigher activities they had participated in. The outline for the subsequent workshops can be found in Appendix C. Most student researchers favoured an informal approach to gathering peer feedback through friendship or tutor groups and by asking the questions in their own way. Some noted responses down afterwards, rather than at the time. One of the college student researchers asked her questions via text as she was very shy. Students found they gained the most information when they had the opportunity to ask questions shortly after the activity had been delivered; the message from students was the sooner you can

gather feedback the better. Three of the groups (School 2, School 4 and the College) set up an online forum where they were able to communicate with each other and arrange meetings whilst the School 2 student researchers used their private Instagram accounts, School 4 students communicated via school email and the College researchers had a designated group on the College MS Teams, set up by the Careers Lead. They found this very helpful as it allowed them to post any queries in the chat and helped them to be organised, especially in the latter stages of the pilot when they were compiling their PowerPoint for the student researcher conference. They found it particularly helpful to have the peer feedback questions posted into the forum. All groups, except one, (School 4) gave their findings to the evaluation team verbally from handwritten notes or, in the case of the College students, from notes they had made on their mobile phones.

The evaluation team revisited School 2, School 3 and the College where the students all had valuable feedback to share, as well as useful information on how they were finding carrying out the tasks set. However, the most successful follow-up visit was to School 4 where the student researchers had been effectively working together as a group with the support of the Careers Lead. This group of students - known as the Young Researchers - had taken it upon themselves to meet regularly to help, support and motivate each other and feedback their findings in a timely fashion. The Careers Lead commented: *'they were really self-motivated as a group. I've not had to do any chasing around. Everyone was on board'*.

The Careers Lead at School 4 arranged badges to be made with the group's name so that they could be easily identified throughout the school whilst carrying out their research; most reported wearing their badge with pride. The name gave the group an identity and something for their fellow students to ask about; many were 'curious' about what it meant. The Year 10 students had divided their year group into sections, by tutor groups, to ensure feedback was collected from as many of their peers as possible without duplication. The Year 9 students had mainly solicited feedback from their friendship groups. Whilst they found it 'quite easy' to ask the feedback questions, they found getting in-depth and varied responses from their peers more problematic; something other groups also reported.

For the evaluation team's second visit, the Young Researchers at School 4 had put together, with the help of the Careers Lead, a full PowerPoint presentation detailing what they had been doing and what they found. They presented this to the evaluation team and were the only student researcher group to do this. They had each played a role in putting together the presentation and the Careers Lead was so impressed by their work that she had recommended they all be awarded extra points and hot chocolate rewards by their Form Tutors. Even without the rewards the group were highly motivated, with most of the students regularly attending their self-arranged meetings. They were also inclusive and respectful of the different talents each had to bring to the group. They divided tasks and allocated roles according to each members' particular strengths, especially when it came to compiling and presenting the presentation. For example, they elected one student to lead the group and another to put the presentations together. Overall, they had a good working relationship with the Careers Lead and with each other, despite coming from different friendship and year groups.

What did not work so well

There were a number of operational issues at the participating schools which unfortunately impacted on the students' ability to take part in the pilot. For example, it was not possible to re-visit School 1 due to unexpected changes at the school with their principal, which led to a re-prioritising of careers within the school by SLT and all such activity being put on hold until late in the summer term. This had a significant impact on the pilot as it left the students with little outreach activity to gather feedback on and in May the school withdrew from the pilot altogether. Similarly, whilst the evaluation team did revisit School 3 and the students had gathered some, if limited, peer feedback, unfortunately the group were not supported by the school in their tasks as no cover had been arranged whilst the Careers Lead was on maternity leave. Therefore, the group had not operated collaboratively and found it difficult to carry out tasks and maintain focus or motivation.

Not all students returned for the second or third workshop, in some cases (especially the College) this was due to timetabling clashes. It proved particularly challenging at the college to arrange a time to visit when all students were free of lessons *and* on-site. The COVID-19 pandemic continued to have an impact on schools, particularly in terms of the delivery of LiNCHigher activity which limited the opportunities for some groups (especially at School 2) to gather peer feedback.

Whilst each group of student researchers had a name, with the exception of the College and School 4 student researchers, most groups did not find it particularly helpful when gathering peer feedback nor did they feel it gave them an identity; some even forgot that the group had a name. However, the groups that did not find it useful were also the ones that were not cohesive or effective.

Challenges reported by the student researchers

The student researchers reported several challenges in gathering peer feedback on LiNCHigher activities. They felt their fellow students did not always take them seriously and they were not willing to talk to them in their own, free time, i.e., lunchtime. They particularly struggled to elicit answers from their peers to the questions about future career options and the benefits of Higher Education. Some, particularly the School 4 student researchers, reported a lack of support from their Form Tutors, who did not always appear to understand what they were doing or why. This also meant they were not always able to find a suitable time or space to talk to their peers to gather the feedback they sought. One School 4 student researcher explained the issue:

We can't go into an English lesson or a lesson like that and impede on their lesson to ask [about LiNCHigher activity] whilst they are doing serious working. But if we try and go at a time when it's supposed to be theirs, for example breaktime, they are not going to take it seriously because they just want to go. So, it's hard to get proper feedback because they don't listen in the sessions and after that they mess about when you question them.

Finally, some student researchers, especially the Level 3 Year 2 college students, reported conflicting priorities, specifically around exams and assignment deadlines, which made it difficult to find the time to gather the peer feedback.

The student researcher conference

An important aspect of the pilot was providing an opportunity for the student researchers to feed back their findings directly to LiNCHigher, as the organisation that delivers the outreach activities to schools and colleges. Two conferences were planned, one for the College student researchers on June 23 at BGU and one for the school student researchers on July 13 at UoL. The College and the three actively participating schools were invited to their respective event. Both days involved a presentation by the student researchers to LiNCHigher staff on what they had been doing and what they found, as well as campus tour, a student life talk (in the case of the college students) and lunch. In addition, students were presented with a certificate for taking part and a small reward in the shape of a £10 Amazon voucher as a thank you for the work they had carried out during the year. The proposed timetable for both conferences can be found in Appendix D.

Unfortunately, just one of the three schools were able to attend the event in July, both cancelling at short notice. One (School 2) cancelled due to staffing shortages at school which meant the Careers Lead was unable to get permission from SLT to take the students off site. The other school (School 3) cancelled because, in the absence of the Career Lead (who had been on maternity leave most of the school year), the students had not been able to fully undertake the tasks required. However, both Career Leads hope to run the student researcher groups next year when the situation in both schools is more stable.

Both student researcher conferences went very well on the day. The 13 students that attended (six from the College and seven from School 4) all fully participated; they were clear, concise in their

delivery and responsive to questions from the floor. Their respective presentations were delivered to LiNCHigher staff, the evaluation team, and their teachers. The LiNCHigher staff took the opportunity to ask the student researchers questions about their findings and their experience of the activities they had been gathering feedback on. Presentations were well received by LiNCHigher staff with one commenting afterwards that *'the students were inspiring and a true credit to their school'*. The School 4 Careers Lead commented that the event *'was wonderful'*.

The student researchers were asked to complete a simple, short, end-of-conference survey, after the event, online (Appendix E). Nine responses were received, five from the College and four from School 4, broken down as: one from Year 9, three from Year 10, two from Level 3 Year 1 and three from Level 3 Year 2.

All those who responded felt their presentation and feedback would help LiNCHigher with the future delivery of their programme and that their presentation had been well received. This was the key point of the exercise as one member of the LiNCHigher staff later acknowledged, stating: *'Now to put what we have learned into future activity and project delivery planning'*.

They enjoyed all aspects of the day, with one Year 10 student researcher commenting: *'I loved it and would love to do it all again next year if I could'*. They particularly enjoyed the campus tour and delivering their presentation. Students' comments included:

I enjoyed speaking my mind and having conversations with others in the room, it was a friendly environment - Yr 10

All the different views we got back from the PowerPoint - Yr 10

The tour of a smaller university. It's made me rethink where I want to go – L3/Yr1

Students were asked what part of their research they felt would help LiNCHigher and the future delivery of programmes the most. Overall, they felt that sharing their findings and experience of the programme would lead to improvements. Below are their responses in full:

The HE fair needs to be in a bigger space and more universities should be there to represent more courses. – L3/Yr1

Introduction days and maybe residentials. – Yr 9

I would say that during the presentation our team raised good problems with LiNCHigher activities which will help them to improve with such feedback. – L3/Yr2

Research about LiNCHigher activities and how it affected the students. – L3/Yr2

The improvements suggested at the end of the presentation it will make activities better in the future for students. – L3/Yr1

Mainly the key points on the 2nd to last slide with the list of improvements because you got to ask us questions and then you got a better insight into our views and how you can improve. – Yr 10

Students' comments on improvements and what they would feel comfortable with. – Yr 10

How the student researchers felt about taking part in the conference

The School 4 students were very excited to have been invited to attend the conference. Many of the students had not been to Lincoln or the university before. They concluded their presentation by thanking everyone for inviting them and said they would *'love to do it again next year'*. At the end of the conference the students were asked to comment on their experience of being part of the research group and/or attending the conference:

It was interesting experience I would surely do it again. – L3/Y2

It was fun and interesting. I'm glad that I participated in this :). – L3/Y2

Great for building confidence / getting to know new people. – L3/Y1

It was really fun, and I enjoyed it a lot. – L3/Y1

It has been a pleasure working with you and I do it again any day thank you for giving me the opportunity to do this. – Yr 10

It was fun and I felt really comfortable being myself there and more comfortable moving on from secondary school. – Yr 10

What the students learnt from being a Student Researcher

Students reported numerous benefits and learning as a result of taking part in the student researcher pilot including:

- Teamwork – they learnt the need to work as a team and how to do this effectively.
- Growth in confidence – some students reported that initially, they had struggled to ask the feedback questions but the more they did it the easier it became. Some were also more confident asking questions themselves in class (a School 2 student), having taken part in the pilot. The School 4 students reported that they had all grown in confidence as a result of being part of the pilot.
- Improved communication skills.
- Better time management.
- Clarity of their next steps – it gave students a greater understanding of the options open to them post-16/18.
- Making new friends – one of the School 4 student researchers stated '*it was fun*' – getting to work with people you do not usually work with and getting to know everyone. Often the students did not know each other prior to taking part in the pilot; coming from different friendship groups.

Overall, School 2, School 4 and the College students felt very supported by their Careers Lead. The College students said their Careers Lead had been '*brilliant, really helpful and had made them more aware of the opportunities available after College*'. All of the School 4 and College students said they would like to see other students given the opportunity to be student researchers as they had found it very beneficial. The School 4 students felt it would encourage others to be more excited about moving onto college or university, as it had them.

The School 4 and College students that participated this year would like to continue and do more peer research next year, if their timetables and workloads allow. All said they would be willing to be ambassadors to future student researcher groups.

The School 4 Careers Lead felt the pilot had been of great benefit to both the students that had taken part and the school as a whole. The student researcher conference and the campus tour were particularly welcomed. The Careers Lead commented on the whole experience:

I feel that the main benefit [of taking part] has been that it has helped to raise aspirations as many of the pupils in the group have not seen what is on offer at a University.

All of these pupils are the ones that are sometimes not recognised for their hard work in school and I feel that this has given them some recognition and has enabled them to bond. As a school I feel we need to be promoting more of these activities.

It has been a great project and the pupils will always remember it, I know I will.

How the pilot could be improved

Whilst both the School 4 and the College students felt the pilot worked well and that they had been full prepared to carry out the tasks asked of them, they made some helpful suggestions as to how it could be improved:

- Invite more students to the first meeting to allow for attrition.
- Make sure the students taking part are willing volunteers. One of the College students had received a message on Teams telling her to attend the first session without knowing why or what it was about. They pointed out the reason some students that had attended the first session but subsequently dropped out was almost certainly because they had been *told* to go to the session as they had a free period in their timetable.
- Run an information session during the college induction week to talk about LiNCHigher activities and becoming a student researcher.
- Ensure that there are student representatives from all departments across the College, perhaps one from each course. This would provide LiNCHigher with a more rounded view of how their programmes are being received by different types of students.
- Incentivise students to take part by explaining that it would be a good addition to their CV or material for their personal statement. They felt this would be a '*big draw*'.
- Peer feedback gathering works best when students are asked to concentrate on just one or two specific activities, for example, a campus visit or a particular speaker.

Suggested improvements to LiNCHigher programmes

Whilst the student researchers gave comprehensive feedback to the LiNCHigher team at the conferences, it is worth summarising here the key areas of improvement they, and their fellow students, would like to see in future programmes.

For College:

- More time on campus visits.
- Talk about apprenticeships earlier.
- More HE fairs.
- More UCAS fairs at different locations, further afield.
- More guest speakers.
- More relatable employers relevant to the careers that people are interested in.
- More variety of universities with specialist subjects. Canvas the opinions and interests of students *before* arranging activities.

For schools:

- Campus tours to include visits inside buildings.

- Small-group campus visits.
- More interesting activities.
- More consultation with the students as to what they are interested in for targeted activities.
- Greater course insights – what do college or university courses actually entail?
- Discuss other post-18 options available besides university.
- Information about what student support is available at university.
- Detailed information on university financial support.

The student researchers also made the following suggestions as to how to better engage students during campus visits:

- Freebies.
- More practical activities.
- Provide food.
- Smaller group sizes.
- Having current students available to meet with and talk to.

The student researchers also talked about the importance of the transition from school to College/Sixth Form or into university suggesting that the more they know, understand and experience, the more comfortable and confident they will feel about the transition.

Overall, the student researchers felt the LiNCHigher activities they had participated in had had an impact on them and their fellow students. They were more aware of the options available to them after school or college and had a better understanding of how subjects are linked to careers. They also reported that students felt more confident making decisions about their future and had developed the skills to do this effectively.

4. Key findings

This section summarises the key findings of the student researcher pilot:

- Students should be willing, informed volunteers. A good level of confidence and the ability to talk to others is essential. Potential avenues for recruitment could be the school Council, the Student Union or Course Reps.
- The groups worked best where students were self-motivated and had a designated member of staff as a point of contact.
- Having a designated shared online forum for the group, such as MS Teams, school email or personal social media, was important to the student researchers. It helped students organise their time, acted as a prompt and provided them with peer and teacher support.
- The student researchers appreciated having a question framework but liked the freedom to rephrase them into their own words.
- Students tend to mainly solicit peer feedback from their immediate friendship group or those in their tutor group or course.
- For some of the college student researchers, texting the questions to peers was an effective way of gathering feedback on activities.

- There was a high level of student drop-out at the college after the first meeting. This was because students were told to attend as they had a free period in their timetable. They did not receive any information about the meeting in advance.
- Level 3 / Year 2 college students found it challenging to find the time to participate and complete the tasks, largely due to the pressure of exams.
- The student researchers at School 4 and the College appreciated and valued the opportunity to give their feedback directly to LiNCHigher as the organisation in a position to put their findings and recommendations into action. They felt listened to.
- Whilst the student researchers were all invited to name their group to give them an identity, in practice not all groups found this useful; those that did were the two most successful groups.
- Badges are a good idea – they gave the student researcher an identity and something for others to talk to them about, and even aspire to. They enabled the student researchers to stand out from their peers and provided them with status.
- Internal school/college factors affected the success of the groups, for example, a sudden change of Headship or a change in the SLT priorities.

5. Lessons learnt and conclusions

Lessons learnt

This final section outlines the lessons learnt from the pilot that should be considered when running future student researcher groups in schools and colleges, as detailed in the Do and Don't section of the guidance documents.

Do

- ✓ Get buy-in from key members of staff i.e., the Careers Lead, and ensure appropriate support is in place.
- ✓ Provide the school or college with a detailed brief of what the initiative involves and the skills and attributes the students will require.
- ✓ Ensure the project brief is effectively communicated to all staff involved from the outset.
- ✓ Explain clearly to the students what they are being asked to do and why.
- ✓ Go to the student session with a list of the activities they have had / will be having.
- ✓ Encourage students to use the question framework as a guide but also to use their own wording as appropriate.
- ✓ Actively include the Careers Lead (or designated member of staff) in the workshops where possible.
- ✓ Encourage students to use an appropriate method of group communication such as school email or MS Teams.
- ✓ Schools should concentrate on working with Years 9, 10, 12 and College Level 3/Year 1 students.
- ✓ Provide the students with appropriate incentives such as freebies, vouchers or school reward points.
- ✓ Encourage students to meet as a group in between sessions, with or without their teacher.
- ✓ Use student feedback, or even lack of feedback, as talking points to gain a deeper understanding of the issues and concerns students are facing relating to their future.

- ✓ Refresh peer feedback questions around future careers paths and aspirations to avoid duplication of answers and to maintain student interest.
- ✓ Book follow-up visits at the time of the initial workshop visit.
- ✓ Arrange a day when students can share their findings more widely, i.e., to their local partnership, ideally together with students from other participating schools.
- ✓ Draw on student ideas and listen to them.
- ✓ Be appreciative of their efforts.
- ✓ Encourage participants from previous academic years to act as student researcher mentors.

Don't

- ✗ Expect the students to know why they are attending the initial workshop session.
- ✗ Rush your time with the students, it is recommended that the first session runs for approximately 90 minutes with follow-up sessions lasting about one hour.
- ✗ Involve Year 11 or 13 students, unless they have participated previously, i.e., in Year 10 or 12.
- ✗ Give the students too many activities to gather feedback on at any one time.
- ✗ Ask them to gather feedback on activities that were a long time ago or *not* substantial / memorable.
- ✗ Expect to get all the students you ask for, in the right combination. Often you get who is available on the day.
- ✗ Expect everyone to have been productive.
- ✗ Expect everyone to turn up for follow-up sessions.
- ✗ Expect the feedback to be neatly packaged / summed up in a PowerPoint presentation or a MS Word document; if it is, then this is a bonus.
- ✗ Require students to participate.

Conclusions

The pilot had a tangible and positive effect on the students that took part, particularly those at the College and School 4. The student researcher conference was particularly impactful on those that attended. The students felt they had provided valuable feedback for LiNCHigher to consider when delivering future programmes that would enhance the student experience and better equip them for their next steps. It was important that the students felt listened to as this was a key aim of the pilot from the outset. However, the student voice should not only be heard by those directly responsible for delivering local outreach programmes in schools and colleges, i.e., LiNCHigher, in line with Lundy's model of child participation, but acted upon. The feedback from the student researchers shows they felt strongly that this would be the case.

In terms of developing the ability of schools and colleges to self-evaluate the impact of Uni Connect outreach delivery, the pilot demonstrated it is possible to do so successfully where conditions are favourable. For example, where the Careers Lead and SLT are fully supportive of the principle of student voice and are willing to give the students time and space to carry out the peer feedback, as was the case at School 4 where the pilot was very successful. The pilot was also effective at the College where the Careers Lead was a LiNCHigher employee. However, where the school situation was less stable, be it due to internal or external factors, i.e., changes in staffing, especially at SLT level, where the delivery of activity was delayed or where there was ongoing disruption due to the pandemic, the pilot was less successful.

The evaluation team hope that the guidance documents, which were developed as a result of the pilot and partnership collaboration, will help schools and colleges establish and run their own student research groups in the future. The pilot has demonstrated that there is the potential for student voice to provide SLTs with honest feedback in a sustainable, low-cost effective manner, on what is working and what is not, as well as how delivery can be improved. There is also the potential for the model to be used to gather students' views on the impact and effectiveness of other school and colleges, activities such as general careers provision, and for students to provide feedback directly to their SLT.

Appendix A: Workshop 1

Proposed running order and activities

- ~90 minutes
- 6-8 students, ideally 3-4 UC and 3-4 NUC from each school, half year 9s and half year 10s.
- All timings are rough and can be amended depending on how the group are responding.
- Each child to receive a pack which will include a notepad and a pens.
- Print out the questions we want them to gather feedback on.

Activity	Lead	Timings
Introductions and ice breaker		20 mins
Explanations – explain what the Uni Connect project is about and what we are asking the students to do.		10 mins
<p>Future me – ask students to imagine who they will be in 20 years' time and introduce themselves (to show levels of aspiration). Get their peers or us to ask them questions such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How did you get there? - What training did you do? - Did you go to university? - What grades did you get in all of your courses? - What job are you doing? - Have you always had that job? - Who are the important people around you? - Who's most proud of you? Why? - Something around money/earnings 		30 mins - 5 mins to brainstorm. 2-3 mins per student to introduce themselves and answer questions
Break - comfort and refreshment		10 mins
<p>Preparing the students to gather peer feedback</p> <p>Split the group into year 9s and year 10s for the following tasks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What would they like to be called? Provide options to be ranked and a blank piece of paper for other suggestions. 		5 mins
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What questions would you like to ask your fellow students about the activities? Brainstorm & feedback 		10 mins
<p>Show them / tell them the questions we want them to ask.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How would you ask these questions? <p>Ask for suggestions from the students for each one in turn.</p>		10 mins
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How would you like to report on what you find? <p>Students to spend 5 mins in groups and then feedback ideas</p>		10 mins
<p>Finish by giving students a paper copy of the questions we want them to ask and getting them to write them down in their notebooks, one per page. They can ask them however they like as long as they keep the essence of the question.</p> <p>Tell them the activities they need to be feeding back - Term 1 activities they are going to have in Term 2.</p>		10 mins
Any questions or concerns		5 mins
Book in the next workshop		

Appendix B: Peer feedback questions

Student researchers' questions - round 1

1. What did you enjoy most about the activity?
2. What didn't you enjoy about the activity?
3. What did you learn about the topic from taking part in the activity? (*This could be anything from teamwork, a new revision skill or more about the options open to you when you leave school*)
4. What career do you want to go into when you leave school and why?
5. How do you think what you learnt will help you with what you want to do after you take your GCSEs?
6. Why might you or your friends want to go onto university? What are the benefits of going to university?

Questions – round 2

1. What did you enjoy most about the activity?
2. What didn't you enjoy about the activity?
3. What did you learn about the topic from taking part in the activity? (*This could be anything from teamwork, a new revision skill or more about the options open to you when you leave school*)
4. How confident do you feel about making decisions about your future having taken part in the activity?
5. How much more aware are you of the options available to you after leaving school / college having taken part in the activity?

Appendix C: Workshop 2

- ~60 minutes
- Name labels for everyone
- Re-do introductions

Ice breaker – (10 mins) – Careers Lead or LH

Gathering peer feedback: (20 minutes)

In pairs discuss the following and feedback to the group:

- When / how / from whom you gathered your peer feedback?
- How easy you found it to do?
 - How well did the 6 core questions work?
 - How willing were your fellow students to talk to you?
 - How honest were their replies?
 - How much of the activities did they remember?
 - What were the challenges of gathering and recording the feedback?
 - How useful was your group name as an identity? Badges?
- What, overall, does your feedback tell you about the activities – headline summary?

Sharing your findings: (40 minutes)

- Ask students how they would like to feedback what you have found so far.
- **Feedback** – 5 minutes each or longer if it is group feedback, depending on format. Include:
 - Details of how many students they talked to / genders / check year group
 - Summary of the responses to each of the 6 questions and any follow-up questions (Q4 – Future career / Q5 – how what you've learnt will help / Q6 - Benefits of HE)

Reflection: (10 minutes)

In pairs discuss and feedback to the whole group:

- What new skills have you learnt from being part of the group so far?
- What, if anything, have you learnt about yourself from taking part in the Student Panels?
- What will you do differently next time?
- What else, if anything, they would have liked, from us, from their teachers etc.

Next steps: (10 minutes)

- How do you feel about gathering more feedback? (Task students with gathering feedback from just one, substantial, activity per year group.)
- What, if anything, would you like us to recap on?
- Go through questions 1-3 (about the activity) again and ensure they are happy with them and give the students the new questions (**4 & 5 – about their future aspirations**).
- Book next session

Appendix D: Student Researcher Conference Timetable

Who: College Students (from one college)

Where: At the university

Timings: 10:30AM-2:30PM

- 10:30am-10:45am- Introductions and icebreaker activity (15 mins)
- 10:45am-11:35am- Feedback session on being a young researcher (50 mins)
- 11:35am- 11:45am- Comfort Break- (10 mins)
- 11:45am-12:30pm- Presentation to the LH (45 mins)
- 12:30pm- 12:35pm- Certificates (5 mins)
- 12:35pm-1:20pm- Lunch (45 mins)
- 1:20pm-2:00pm- Campus tour (40 mins)
- 2:00pm-2:25pm- Student Life Talk (25 mins)

Who: School students (from more than one school)

Where: At the university

Timings: 10:30AM-2:00PM

- 10:00 – 10:30- Welcome to the conference and introductions
- 10:30 – 12:00- Student presentations and awarding of certificates
- 12:00 – 12:30- Lunch
- 12:30 – 1:15- Feedback session with Group A / Campus tour Group B
- 1:15 – 2pm- Feedback session with Group B / Campus tour Group A
- 2pm- Close

Appendix E: End of day Student Researcher Conference feedback form

We hope you enjoyed the Student Research conference; we would like to ask you a few questions about the day, so we can make sure that any future events are as beneficial for students as possible. This survey is part of the evaluation of the Student Researcher project and is being collected by the evaluation team.

1. Which school or college do you attend?
2. Which year group/level of study are you?
3. What did you enjoy *most* about the Student Researcher conference?
4. Thinking about the presentation given to the LiNCHigher team at the conference: How much do you agree that the presentation was well received?
 - Strongly disagree
 - Disagree
 - Neither agree nor disagree
 - Agree
 - Strongly agree
5. Do you feel the presentation and feedback you gave the LiNCHigher team at the conference will help them in the future (for example, in their activity planning, deciding which types of activity to run, when to run them and so on)?
 - Yes
 - No
 - I am not sure
6. [If yes] Please tell us what part of your research you think will help LiNCHigher most and how it might help current and future students at your school or college.*
7. [If no] Please tell us why you don't think it will be helpful.*
8. [If not sure] Please tell us why you are not sure that it will be helpful.*
9. What, if anything, did you *not* enjoy about the Student Research conference?
10. Finally, is there anything else you would like to tell us about your experience of the being part of the Student Researcher group or about the conference?

Thank you for your feedback!

*These three sub questions will have conditional formatting and will route to Q6, Q7 or Q8 depending on the answer to Q5.