

# How do I design a programme of impactful encounters with Russell Group Universities?



# Coming up

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The wider picture

Why this matters

How can HEIs help?

Designing an effective  
plan



# The wider picture

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# Careers strategy

- Higher education interactions are a key part of a well-rounded careers strategy
- They help students make informed decisions about their future
- Aligns with Careers strategies such as the Gatsby Benchmarks, Gatsby Benchmark 7 (encounters with further and higher education)

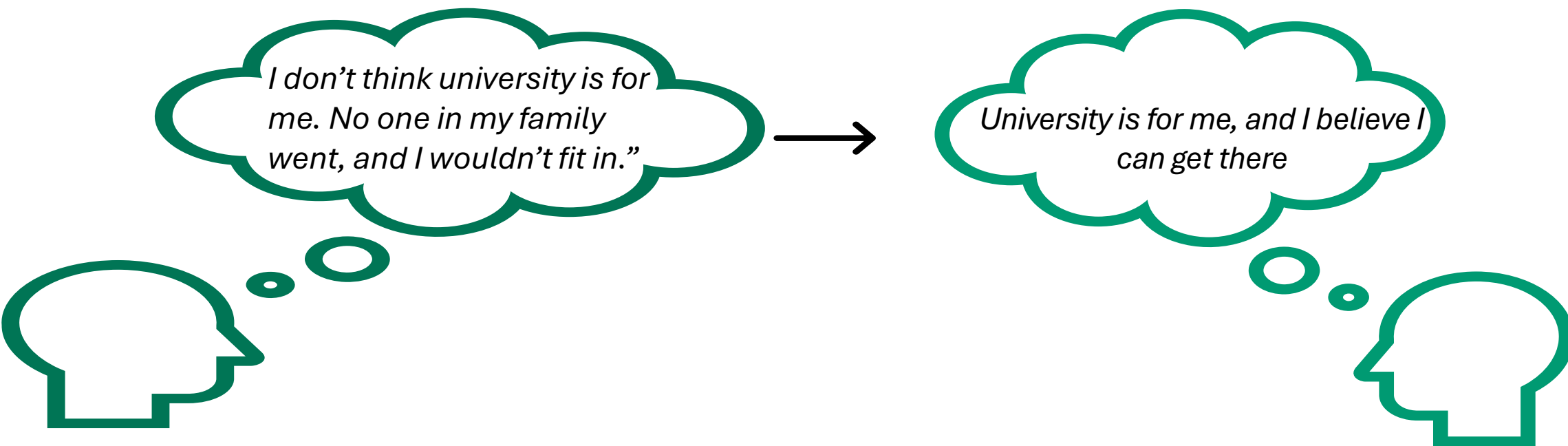
*“Disadvantaged students’ decisions to attend ‘lower quality’ universities closer to home may be driven by information constraints, or fear of not fitting in at universities typically attended by more advantaged students,” Dr Wyness, UCL Institute of Education*



# Engaging with HEIs can lead to...

“After the summer school, I feel more confident about applying to university and life at university.” –  
**Georgia, The Sutton Trust Summer School Programme**

“Being the first person in my family to go to uni at 18 and also from an area of low progression, the Programme helped me realise that university was an option ...and this definitely influenced my decision to come to university” – **Shannon, Access to Sheffield Programme**



*I don't think university is for me. No one in my family went, and I wouldn't fit in.*

*University is for me, and I believe I can get there*

# Why this matters?

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- 26% of young people who received free school meals (FSM) in year 11 are not in education or employment (NEET) aged 18-24, compared to 13% of non-FSM students
- The progression rate to high tariff HE by age 19 increased to 6.1% in 2022/23, the highest recorded level.
- The gap in progression rates to high tariff HE between FSM eligible pupils and non-FSM eligible pupils increased to the highest recorded level in the series at 10.6 percentage points - up from 9.0 percentage points last year [DFE website](#)

# What initiatives exist?

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# Widening participation & outreach

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## Universities have specific goals relating to

- Widening participation/ Widening access/ Outreach
- Addressing national statistics around underrepresented groups accessing HE
- Social responsibility – Access and Participation Plans





# Widening participation & outreach



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<b>Initiative</b>	<b>Who for?</b>
<b>Campus visits</b>	All student groups
<b>In-school visits</b>	All student groups
<b>IAG sessions delivered at your institution</b>	Pre- and post-16
<b>Attainment raising programmes (e.g. Tutoring)</b>	Target schools/individuals
<b>Summer Schools/Residentials</b>	Targeted cohort
<b>Pathways Programmes (The Sutton Trust)</b>	Targeted cohort
<b>Bespoke programmes for specific groups</b>	Targeted cohort (e.g. Care-Leavers/refugees etc.)
<b>Uni Connect programmes</b>	All student groups
<b>Subject-specific events</b>	All student groups

# Examples

## Ambition Nottingham Post 16

The activities of each programme support progression and application to a university of your choice.

### Examples of past activities:

- Subject taster events
- University application masterclasses
- Student life sessions

## Investigate series - University of Bristol

The Investigate workshops aims to promote the development of core scientific skills, whilst covering content from the Key Stage 3 Science curriculum. The sessions are designed to compliment each other if offered as a series, or as stand-alone, 50-minute lessons.

## Oxplore – Oxford (Online)

Oxplore is an engaging digital resource from the [University of Oxford](#). As the ‘Home of Big Questions’, it aims to challenge those from 11 to 18 years with debates and ideas that go beyond what is covered in the classroom.

## UniTracks – Warwick

Each year has a different focus that form a series of stepping stones on the participant's journey to Higher Education: **Explore, Develop, Equip and Attain**

UniTracks members are supported through events and workshops designed to build their skills, confidence, and academic attainment.

## Study Skills – University of Leeds (Online)

A selection of short videos full of top tips to help students understand and develop essential academic skills to support their current studies and the transition to university.

# Recruitment

## Activities to promote specific universities, aimed at post-16



- UCAS fairs
- Higher Education/Careers Fairs
- Talks about specific universities/courses/student life
- Webinars
- Open days!

# How to design an effective plan

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# Building a structured approach

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## Start backwards –

Define the end goal (e.g., university readiness in Year 11/13) and work back to Year 7

### Ask yourself:

- What knowledge, experiences and skills should students have by the time they reach year 11/year 13?
- What barriers might they face at different stages?
- What interventions can you introduce to support progression?



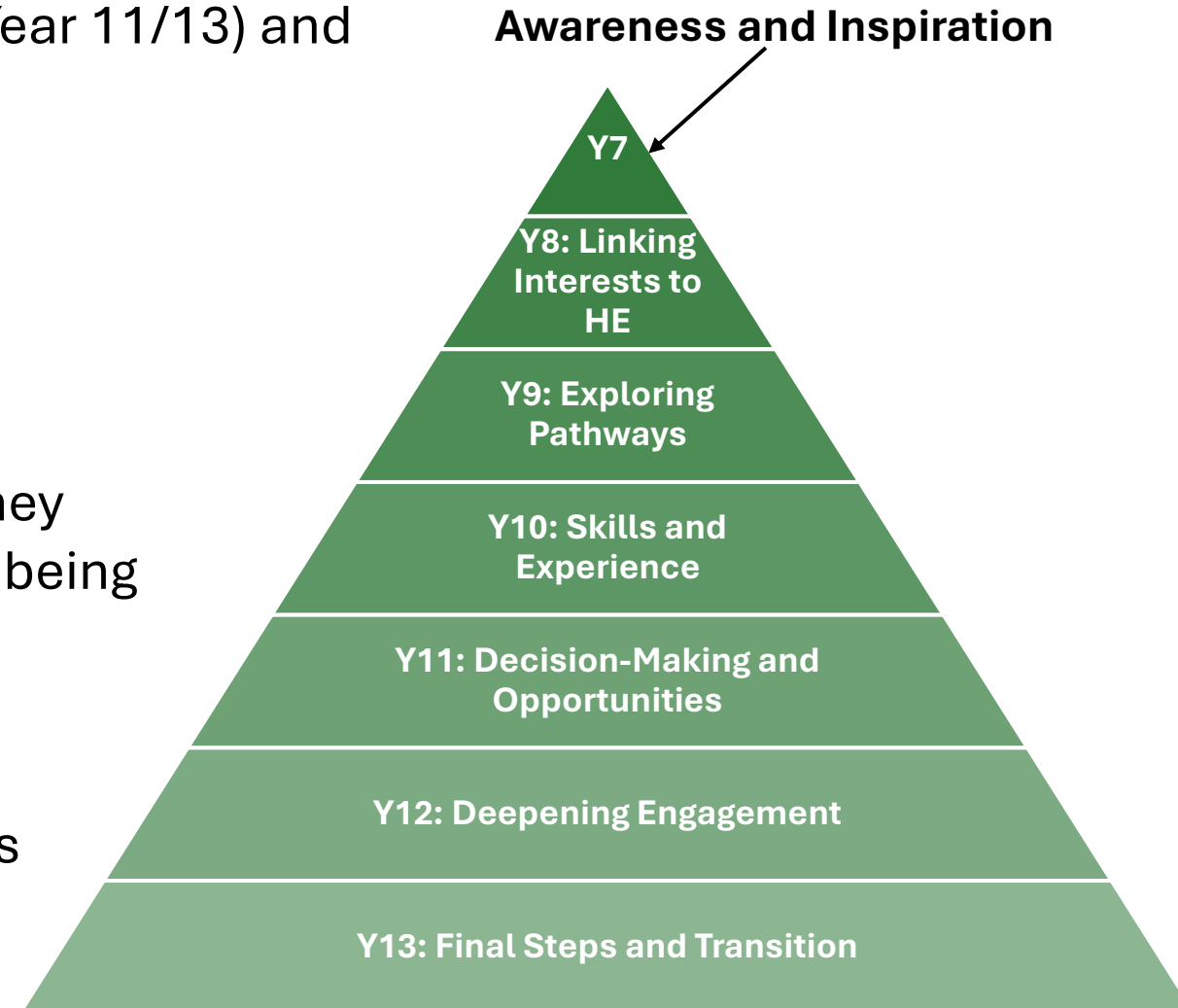
# Setting goals for each year group

## Start backwards –

Define the end goal (e.g., university readiness in Year 11/13) and work back to Year 7

## This may lead to...

- Ownership (and confidence!) from early on to navigate their future
- May increase attainment at school/college if they have a vested interest in the “why” – the “why” being their future choices!
- Finding and completing experiences e.g. work experiences, engaging with university initiatives



# Linking activities

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You can then start to consider activities

What can they do in each year group to explore their options?

Year group	Goal	Activity
7	Awareness and inspiration	Introduction to HE Assembly
8	Linking interests to HE	Role model visits

# Go one step further...

- Consider pre and post tasks for students to complete

Year group	Goal	Activity	Pre-task	Post-task
7	Awareness and inspiration	Introduction to HE Assembly delivered by a local university	Complete activity sheet: What is a university?	Fill in the blanks
8	Linking interests to HE	Role model visits, delivered by alumni or university students	Create a “dream job” profile outlining an ideal career and its requirements.	Reflective task: What new opportunities have I discovered and how do they relate to my goals?



# Designing activities

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## Making the most of Higher Education Fairs

### Self-assessment and research

Higher Education Fairs are a great way to help you decide if university is the right option for you, and which university might be the best fit - but they can be overwhelming! With the right preparation, you can ensure that you get all the information you need, and make the best use of your time.

Complete pages 1 and 2 ahead of your event

#### Self-assessment questions

What are your academic interests? What course would you like to study?

What predicted grades are you expected to achieve?

Would you prefer a large or small university?

What extracurricular activities would you like to engage with at university?

What location would you like to live in? Near/far from home? Urban/rural?

What is your preferred learning style (lectures, seminars, practical work)?

#### Spend some time researching universities

Universities vary in many ways, take some time to research their differences. Use university websites and UCAS to compare how they can be different. You could consider:

- Teaching methods (research-led or industry-focused?)
- Location (city or campus?)
- Assessments (exams, coursework, or group projects?)

Tip: Use the DiscoverUni website to compare different options

Note your findings below to help guide your decision

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## Making the most of Higher Education Fairs

### Your turn: Matching your priorities to universities

It's the day of your HE Fair! Here are some of our top tips:

- Wear comfortable clothes and shoes.
- Pick up prospectuses from all the university stands that you visit.
- Speak to student ambassadors to get a unique and personal take on the university.
- There's never a silly question - ask as many as you like!
- Don't limit yourself! If you see a university that you've not heard of advertising your chosen course - go and speak to them!

#### Complete the table below

1. List your top five criteria in the top row of the table
2. Write each university's name in the left-hand column
3. After speaking with representatives and asking your questions, mark a  or  to show whether each university meets your criteria

	My Criteria				
Universities					

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## Making the most of Higher Education Fairs

### What have you learned?

Congratulations! You've completed your HE Fair - we hope you found it fun and informative. Now it's time to reflect on your experience. Read the prospectuses that you collected, and look over the notes that you made. Let's evaluate how well each university matches your criteria.

#### Which universities met your criteria best?

Look through your table. Which universities met most of your criteria? Make a note of them below. Are there any universities who weren't at the event, who you think might meet more of your criteria?

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#### Do you still think that university is right for you?

What are your other options?

Have you considered a degree apprenticeship? Would you like to take a gap year? Use this time to research your other options.

Tip: Visit the UCAS and Prospects webpages to help with your research.

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#### Next steps

- When are the Open Days for your favourite universities? Can you book onto them?
- Use university websites to compare the course content between your top choices.
- Visit the social media accounts of your top choice universities.
- Talk to your loved ones, friends and teachers about your options.
- See if you can arrange to visit the town or city of your top choice!

# Building a meaningful plan

Reflect on your plan and connect the dots...

Make experiences meaningful for students and foster a culture of independence

## Activity for Year 7 students:

Postcard to Your Future Self:

Write a post-card imagining their future self in Year 7, give this back to them in Year 11 on Results day

## Celebrate success and progress

Acknowledge milestones to keep students motivated

Example: Recognise students when they complete specific career-related tasks, such as completing a UCAS form or attending a university fair.



# Measuring success

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## Tracking & Data Collection

- **Tools** like Compass+ - Future skills questionnaire
- **Participation rates** – Are students engaging with activities?
- **Goal articulation** – Can students clearly express their plans for their future?
- **Application & progression data** – How many students apply to higher education, apprenticeships, or alternative pathways?

# Measuring success

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## Gathering Student Insights

**Feedback surveys** – Capturing student reflections on what they gained

- "Do you now feel more confident about applying to a Russell Group university?"
- "Can you identify specific steps you'll take to reach your goal of attending a Russell Group university?"
- "What was the most inspiring part of today's session?"

**Focus groups & discussions** – Hearing first-hand experiences

- "How did today's session change the way you think about your future?"
- "What barriers or challenges do you feel are still in your way, and how can we help?"

# Building a meaningful plan

These activities aim to equip students to overcome common challenges

Year group	Goal	Activity	Pre-task	Post-task	How will I measure impact?
		Activity			
		Activity			
		Activity			
		Activity			
		Activity			

# Questions

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[enquiries@advancingaccess.ac.uk](mailto:enquiries@advancingaccess.ac.uk)



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# Advancing Access

**A service for Teachers and Advisers, to keep you updated on the latest higher education insights!**

*Very informative and will have a real impact on my own professional development as well as improving the provision to students, which I am now motivated to deliver.*  
Feedback from the 2023 Stevenage Conference

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## Teachers and Advisers Conference 2025



Tuesday 15th July 2025, 9:30-15:15



Luton Sixth Form College,  
Bradgers Hill Rd, Luton, LU2 7EW

Join local teachers, careers advisers, and Russell Group university experts, at this free event to boost your professional development.

### What's included?

- > Workshops covering the latest Higher Education insights
- > A marketplace to meet Russell Group University experts
- > Network with local schools and colleges
- > Lunch and refreshments

Free to attend  
- funded by the  
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place now:**  
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