

Evaluation of the National Networks for Collaborative Outreach (NNCOs)

Final Report to HEFCE by

The Sheffield Institute of Education, Sheffield
Hallam University

June 2017

Authors

Jacqueline Stevenson, Colin McCaig, and Manuel Madriaga

With thanks to Gill O'Toole and Graeme Atherton

Contents

| | | |
|-------|--|----|
| 1 | Executive summary..... | 5 |
| 2 | Description and methodology | 7 |
| 2.1 | The NNCO Scheme | 7 |
| 2.2 | Evaluation of the NNCO scheme..... | 8 |
| 2.3 | Research questions..... | 9 |
| 2.4 | Approach to the evaluation..... | 10 |
| 2.4.1 | Data collection | 10 |
| 2.4.2 | Evaluation timeline..... | 11 |
| | Table 1: Summary of survey responses..... | 11 |
| 2.4.3 | Analysis..... | 12 |
| 2.4.4 | Presentation of findings..... | 12 |
| | Table 2: Mapping of evaluation findings | 13 |
| 2.4.5 | Terminology | 13 |
| 2.5 | Summary and recommendations | 13 |
| | Recommendation 1 | 13 |
| 3 | The networks..... | 14 |
| 3.1 | Introduction | 14 |
| 3.2 | Features and characteristics of the networks | 14 |
| | Table 3: Provenance and locus of Networks..... | 15 |
| 3.3 | Network partners..... | 16 |
| 3.4 | Network structures | 16 |
| | Table 4: Network structure (typical)..... | 17 |
| 3.5 | The SPoC as broker..... | 18 |
| 3.6 | Aims and objectives of the networks | 19 |
| 3.7 | Changes to aims and objectives..... | 20 |
| 3.8 | Summary and recommendations | 21 |
| | Recommendation 2 | 21 |
| 4 | Benefits of the NNCO scheme: innovations | 21 |
| 4.1 | Introduction | 21 |
| 4.2 | Theorising innovation | 21 |
| | Table 5: Number of different types of innovation | 22 |
| 4.2.1 | Newness or innovation | 22 |
| 4.3 | Network innovations | 24 |
| 4.3.1 | Product and process innovations | 24 |
| 4.3.2 | Marketing innovations | 26 |

| | | |
|-------|---|----|
| 4.3.3 | Organisational innovations | 26 |
| 4.4 | Summary and recommendations | 28 |
| | Recommendation 3 | 29 |
| | Recommendation 4 | 29 |
| | Recommendation 5 | 29 |
| | Recommendation 6 | 29 |
| | Recommendation 7 | 29 |
| 5 | Benefits of the NNCO scheme: value and impact | 29 |
| 5.1 | Introduction | 29 |
| 5.2 | Networks' perceptions: overall impact of their work..... | 30 |
| 5.3 | Networks' perceptions: impact on schools/colleges..... | 31 |
| 5.4 | Schools and colleges: perceptions of impact | 34 |
| 5.5 | Networks' perceptions: impact on partners | 35 |
| 5.6 | Network partners: perceptions of impact..... | 36 |
| 5.7 | Summary and recommendations | 37 |
| | Recommendation 8 | 38 |
| | Recommendation 9 | 38 |
| | Recommendation 10..... | 38 |
| 6 | Effectiveness of the networks | 38 |
| 6.1 | Effectiveness of the networks..... | 38 |
| 6.2 | Types of challenge to effectiveness..... | 41 |
| 6.3 | Models of effectiveness..... | 45 |
| 6.4 | Summary and recommendations | 45 |
| | Recommendation 11..... | 46 |
| | Recommendation 12..... | 46 |
| 7 | Sustainability..... | 46 |
| 7.1 | Introduction | 46 |
| 7.2 | Summary and recommendations | 47 |
| | 7.2.1 Recommendation 13 | 47 |
| | 7.2.2 Recommendation 14 | 47 |
| 8 | Evaluation support | 47 |
| | Table 5: Evaluation support indicated as needed/desired by the networks | 48 |
| 8.1 | Summary and recommendations | 50 |
| | Recommendation 15..... | 50 |
| 9 | References..... | 51 |
| 10 | Appendices..... | 51 |
| 10.1 | The networks..... | 51 |

| | | |
|--------|--|----|
| 10.2 | The NNCO projects | 52 |
| 10.3 | Typology of the networks..... | 55 |
| 10.4 | Reference data for selection of case studies | 60 |
| 10.5 | Surveys | 63 |
| 10.5.1 | All Networks Survey 1: Network Leads..... | 63 |
| 10.5.2 | Case Study Survey 1: Network Leads | 64 |
| 10.5.3 | Case Study Survey 1: Network Partners | 64 |
| 10.5.4 | Case Study Survey 1: Schools and Colleges..... | 64 |
| 10.5.5 | All Networks Survey 2: Leads/SPoCs..... | 65 |
| 10.5.6 | Case Study Survey 2: Network Leads..... | 66 |
| 10.5.7 | Case Study Survey 2: Network Partners | 66 |
| 10.5.8 | Case Study Survey 2: SPoCs..... | 67 |
| 10.5.9 | Case Study Survey 2: Schools..... | 68 |
| 10.6 | Glossary of terms..... | 68 |

1 Executive summary

The HEFCE-funded National Networks for Collaborative Outreach (NNCO) scheme was designed to support a collaborative approach to outreach activity across England. HEFCE allocated £22 million to fund the scheme from December 2014 to December 2016. Thirty-eight networks were funded: 34 regional and four national networks, comprising 200 universities and further education colleges (FECs), as well as an extensive range of other formal and informal partners. The scheme was evaluated by the Sheffield Institute of Education (SIOE), Sheffield Hallam University and the Institute for Policy Studies in Education (IPSE), London Metropolitan University. This evaluation had a twofold focus; an evaluation strand, which was mainly qualitative, and a support strand, designed to build evaluation skills and capacity amongst the networks.

Overall success of the NNCO Scheme

The NNCO scheme had three goals:

1. To create networks of universities, colleges and other partners to deliver outreach in their sphere of operation,
2. To provide national coverage of outreach so that all state-funded secondary schools and colleges knew how to access information about outreach activities,
3. To establish a Single Point of Contact (SPoC) for each network.

The evaluation shows that all three aims were achieved. The findings were as follows in relation to each of the following research questions:

1. **Features and characteristics of the networks:** The 38 networks included 16 new networks, 16 networks based on pre-existing relationships/networks and six which comprised aspects of both. They were led by 37 higher education institutions (HEIs), plus London Higher (aligned to the University of London) and included 299 HEFCE-funded partners (HEIs and further education colleges, FECs) as well as 139 other partners (including Local Enterprise Partnerships, schools, voluntary sector organisations, businesses, local authority departments).
2. **Engagement with Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) and/or leveraging European Social Fund (ESF) matched funding:** there was limited engagement with the LEPs (mainly because they were still nascent) and no evidence of any ESF funding being accessed. However, networks engaged with multiple partners including many of those local authority departments and businesses which are now part of a LEP.
3. **Effectiveness in delivering the primary aim:** the networks were in contact with all state funded schools and colleges who were apprised of information on how to access information on outreach activity. Engagement with the networks was, however, understandably variable. Actual outreach activity took place with a focussed and purposefully targeted smaller number of schools.
4. **Economies and efficiencies:** targeting was undertaken to ensure that activity could be focused on where it was most needed, or in response to local context or partner concerns. Further targeting took place to avoid duplication or overlap of activity between or across networks and as the networks evolved many sought to share resources. The use of social media and new technologies helped ensure efficiency of activity. Challenges to effectiveness came from: timing and issues related to being a new network; power imbalance within the networks; residual problems relating to an inter-

institution culture of competition; and initial issues around clarity of mission and network management. The overall successes of the networks are a testament to the work done, particular by the SPoCs, to minimise the effect of such challenges.

5. **New or innovative approaches to collaboration/outreach:** along with the use of social media and new technologies, evidence of innovation included: the development of new knowledge, new repositories, new resources and/or new best practices guidelines. The SPoC (person and website) made available to all schools across the sector was also innovative, as was the amount and extent of collaboration across the whole sector.
6. **Value of the scheme to schools:** schools involved with the scheme were almost wholly positive about the value of being involved with one or more network. Schools reported an impact on learning, as well as an overwhelming appreciation of the time and resources offered to their pupils more generally. The networks indicated that they saw a level of organisational changes in the schools in relation to how involvement in outreach activities might be undertaken by schools in the future.
7. **Value of the scheme to partners and stakeholders:** the partners, in particular the FECs, reported that the NNCO scheme has been of significant value, enabling them to deliver their own outreach activities and participate in collaborative events although this has been variably experienced. The networks consider that the NNCO scheme has changed the ways in which the FECs think and operate in relation to outreach. HEIs and other partners are almost wholly positive about involvement in the scheme, once initial difficulties relating to management structures, organisational ways of working and patchy communication, in particular for new networks, were resolved.
8. **Benefits and the lessons learnt:** the NNCO scheme has been successful in terms of additionality (resources and activities) as a result of effective collaboration, an overall expansion of provision and resources, and a better evidence base for activities. There are now stronger and more coordinated relationships between HEIs, FECs and other new partners; there is better strategic direction at network level and better formal and informal links between academics and practitioners. As a result greater engagement has been demonstrated with schools that had not previously participated in activities.
9. **Sustainability:** the majority of networks are part of the new national collaborative outreach programme (NCOP). Other aspects of activity (primarily the websites and the provision of new resources) are likely to be sustained by HEIs. There is evidence that some new outreach activities will continue regardless of the NCOPs, as well as, to a lesser extent, the appointment of new staff to support such activities.

Recommendations

This evaluation has resulted in the following recommendations being made:

1. For the evaluation of future large-scale collaborative outreach schemes consideration should be given to developing a narrower set of research questions with clearer and more measurable indicators of success and/or the adoption of a theory or change or logic model and/or a set of testable assumptions or hypotheses.
2. Those involved in collaborative outreach activity should determine and clarify which schools/colleges they will work with from the outset and offer a clear rationale for doing so.
3. Dissemination of on-going innovations arising from the NNCO scheme should continue beyond the lifetime of the scheme. It is the responsibility of the lead HEIs to ensure this happens.
4. Collaborative and/or institutional outreach programmes should develop frameworks for measuring and analysing innovation and report back against the four OECD domains of innovation adopted in this report.

5. Future evaluations of collaborative outreach schemes should ask questions of how networks or projects could have been more innovative and what may have worked for and against innovation.
6. Ownership of, and copyright relating to, resources should reside with funders to ensure that knowledge innovations are retained beyond the life of any particular scheme or project.
7. Future collaborative outreach programmes should undertake longitudinal tracking to determine how innovations have been sustained and adopted as well as a cost-benefit analysis.
8. Funders of outreach schemes or initiatives (at a national, local or institutional level) should determine what 'value' might look like (for providers, partners and beneficiaries) from the outset and in ways that are measurable.
9. Funders of these schemes or initiatives should determine what levels of impact it would be expected that the scheme might attain, in relation to providers, partners and beneficiaries) from the outset in ways that are measurable.
10. These funders should also support all stakeholders to develop an impact plan so they can determine key indicators of impact and map attainment of these over time.
11. For national (or local) collaborative outreach programmes consideration should be given to more equitable funding allocation across all partners, or for such funding being centralised.
12. Funders should collate and offer models of effective collaboration.
13. All new collaborative outreach programmes should develop sustainability plans from the outset.
14. HEFCE should continue to support the development of relationships between LEPs and other potential regional stakeholders to enable the networks to enhance the likelihood of their sustainability over time.
15. Those funding outreach programmes should establish clearer guidance as to what should be measured, what hypotheses might be tested and what indicators of success might look like.

2 Description and methodology

2.1 The NNCO Scheme

The HEFCE-funded National Networks for Collaborative Outreach (NNCO) scheme was designed to support a collaborative approach to outreach activity across the whole of England. The overarching objective was to ensure that accurate and quality information, advice and guidance (IAG) was made easily available for young people in schools, their teachers and other professionals working with young people, thus enhancing access to higher education (HE).

In short as stated by HEFCE:

The National Networks for Collaborative Outreach scheme aims to encourage more young people into higher education. It brings together universities and further education colleges (FECs) into local networks to provide coordinated outreach to schools and colleges (HEFCE, 2016, np).

The scheme had three goals:

1. To create networks of universities, colleges and other partners to deliver outreach in their sphere of operation.
2. To provide national coverage of outreach so that all state-funded secondary schools and colleges knew how to access information about outreach activities.
3. To establish Single Points of Contact (SPoCs) for each network.

HEFCE allocated £22 million to fund the NNCO scheme for two years from December 2014 to December 2016. The scheme involved 200 universities and FECs and was designed to reach

4,300 secondary schools and colleges. Thirty-eight networks were funded: 34 regional and four national. The full list of regional and national networks appears in Appendix 10.1

The funding provided to the networks was to enable them to enhance existing outreach and to establish new networks where there was a gap in provision (HEFCE 2015). This would ensure that outreach activity would cover all geographic areas, in particular schools located in geographic 'cold-spots' which may have previously received little or no outreach activity. It was also intended that this approach would avoid duplication of coverage by supporting multiple HE institutions (HEIs) to work together in more targeted ways.

Each network appointed a SPoC who would:

- Help teachers and advisers find out about the outreach activity which HEIs run in their area
- Provide general advice about progression into HE.

Each network also hosted a website with information about outreach activity and signposted other information to support schools and colleges. A full list of networks and the universities, FECs and other organisations involved in each network was made publicly available along with a searchable tool designed to enable organisations and/or individuals determine which networks worked with a specific school or college and help them to find SPoC and website details.

In addition, under the NNCO scheme, HEFCE funded a number of specific projects – the first eleven of which were designed "to solve some of the persistent problems with outreach activities in rural and coastal areas, and urban areas where groups display significant and multi-layered disadvantage" (HEFCE, 2016, np). Eight of these were rural and coastal projects. The other three projects supported, respectively, progression to Russell Group institutions, vocational progression in the North East and progression into the professions in Greater London. A further seven projects were funded to explore, variously, gaps in participation relating to GCSE attainment; patterns of participation/progression/IAG needs of black and minority ethnic (BME) groups; and exploration of means of embedding the work of the networks in the wider skills strategies of the local area, including working with Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs). These projects are not included in the overall evaluation of the NNCO scheme but are described in Appendix 10.2.

2.2 Evaluation of the NNCO scheme

The Institute for Policy Studies in Education (IPSE), London Metropolitan University, and Sheffield Institute of Education (SloE), Sheffield Hallam University, were commissioned to conduct the evaluation of the overall NNCO scheme with Dr Graeme Atherton, Director of the National Education Opportunities Network (NEON), acting as a consultant to the project. The evaluation was designed to run alongside the establishment and operation of the NNCO networks from December 2014 until December 2016.

The overarching purpose was to evaluate the NNCO scheme rather than the networks' own outreach activities. The aims and objectives of the evaluation, as laid out in the Invitation to Quote (UKSBS, 2014) were therefore:

Aims:

1. To conduct an evaluation of NNCO networks to assess their value, beyond existing activity, in terms of enabling co-ordinated, efficient and effective outreach with schools and colleges.
2. To work with the networks to help to embed and share good practice in effective evaluation methodologies relating to outreach activities.

Objectives:

- A. To undertake a comprehensive mapping of NNCO networks in relation to their features, characteristics and the extent to which they have built on previous networks.
- B. To evaluate:
 - i. The perceived value and benefits of NNCO networks
 - ii. The extent to which they added value beyond existing activity; were engaged in innovative practice and have engaged with their LEP
 - iii. The efficacy of NNCO networks in achieving intended aims of the scheme
- C. To identify best practice and possibilities and requirements for sustainability beyond 2015-16.
- D. To work iteratively with and support the networks to assist them in building robust evaluation methods which demonstrate the impact of their work to widen participation through collaborative outreach.
- E. To produce a final report that incorporates both the findings from the evaluation and the development work with the networks.

The research questions, as determined by HEFCE (UKSBS, 2014), were designed to meet the aims and objectives of the evaluation.

2.3 Research questions

1. What were the features and characteristics of the networks? How did they build on previous partnerships, such as Aimhigher and Lifelong Learning Networks (LLNs)?
2. Have networks engaged with their LEP and used NNCO funds to leverage European Social Fund matched funding? Did this engagement bring additional benefits to networks and partner HEIs?
3. How effective were the networks in delivering the primary aim “to ensure that all state-funded secondary schools and colleges understand how they can access HE outreach activity and to simplify the way in which they can do so”?
4. Did networks enable any economies of scale, efficiencies in operation and service, and reduction of duplication?
5. Did networks develop and pilot new or innovative approaches to collaboration or outreach during this period? Was there wider learning and best practice that can be shared?
6. What do ‘users’ (such as schools, colleges and LEPs) consider the value of this scheme to be?
7. What did the partners and stakeholders of a network perceive the value of it to be?
8. What did networks and their partners believe the benefits and the lessons learnt from this scheme to be?
9. What features of the networks were likely to be sustained beyond 2015-16 and what may be needed to secure this activity? What were the key challenges for universities and FECs in funding this activity?

In summary these asked questions related to:

- The features, characteristics and effectiveness of the networks,
- Any innovation in relation to collaboration or outreach,
- The value and impact of the scheme for partners and stakeholders,
- Any lessons learnt and issues for sustainability.

Answering these questions would allow the evaluation team to determine whether the overall scheme had met its three goals.

2.4 Approach to the evaluation

The evaluation had a twofold focus: an evaluation strand and a support strand. The evaluation strand (Strand 1) involved two stages of data collection: the first comprised a scoping stage (May-June 2015) followed by case study data collection (June–September 2015) replicated for a second time in 2016. Overall responses are detailed in Table 1 below. The second strand (Strand 2) of the evaluation involved identifying and providing support to assist networks in building robust evaluation methods to evaluate their own outreach activities. Potential support needs were identified through the first year survey and two regional workshops held in June 2015. Evaluation support was then offered through researcher support via email and/or telephone and through the HEFCE Jiscmail¹ forum as well as through two one-hour drop-in sessions held in Sheffield in conjunction with NEON events but specifically for those involved in the NNCO scheme.

Ethical approval was gained from London Metropolitan University and agreed by Sheffield Hallam University in advance of any data being collected. The networks and partner organisations have been anonymised throughout the analysis section of this report except where not naming them would not make sense, e.g. when talking about the national projects.

2.4.1 Data collection

A qualitative approach to the evaluation was adopted throughout in order to gather the perspectives and perceptions of key stakeholders (SPoCs, lead partners, other partners, and schools), enhance understanding of their experiences of participation in the NNCO scheme, draw out the complexities and intricacies of this participation, and address the research questions. It should be noted, therefore, that the qualitative data on which this report is based is drawn from the subjective responses of those that participated in the evaluation. It should also be noted that the evaluation deliberately differs in design, intent and method from the more quantitative monitoring process carried out simultaneously by HEFCE in order to avoid any repetition.

Each data collection tool was drafted and then agreed with HEFCE at each point in the evaluation process.

Data was collected from all networks (twice) as well as from ten networks selected as case studies. This selection was based on a range of criteria including: size and structure of network, geographical location, different models/approaches, involvement of a range of stakeholders, priorities, and whether they were new or existing networks (see reference data used to draw up the typology of the networks in Appendices 10.3 and 10.4).

Throughout the lifetime of the NNCO scheme the evaluation team were in contact with the SPoCs, each of whom was allocated a member of the evaluation team as primary contact. During both phases of the evaluation and the evaluation support process, at the workshops, and during other informal conversations which took place over the two years of the programme, many SPoCs focussed at length on the challenges and problems they were facing. These concerns are reflected in the data collected during Phase 1 and Phase 2. However, during the last few months of 2016 discussions focussed more on how proud the SPoCs were about what they had been able to achieve, despite these challenging circumstances.

To enable the SPoCs to share these successes they were invited by the evaluation team to write a short reflective account to indicate what they perceived to be the greatest achievements of their networks; the strategies and practices they had implemented in order to achieve these successful outcomes; and how effective they perceived their own network had, ultimately, been. Nineteen of the networks responded to this request. These reflections have been included,

¹ Jiscmail enables individuals to set up email discussion lists to support UK education and research communities

primarily, in the section on Effectiveness. Examples have also been included elsewhere in the report.

2.4.2 Evaluation timeline

March 2015: an online survey (Survey 1) was conducted with all 38 network leads (see Appendix 10.5.1). The survey gathered information on the aims, rationale, structure, characteristics and proposed delivery mechanisms of each network, as well as anticipated benefits and challenges. It also enabled the evaluation team to gather information on the anticipated needs for evaluation support for Strand 2 of the evaluation.

April 2015: all network leads and SPoCs were re-contacted and invited to review their original survey responses to enable them to update the information.

May 2015: the case study lead partner, other partners, and schools/colleges were surveyed (see Appendices 10.5.2-10.5.4).

June 2015: two one-day workshops were organised by the evaluation team for all network leads/SPoCs, one in Sheffield and one in London. The workshops involved the dissemination of findings from the online survey, discussion groups on key questions from the survey, and sessions on specific aspects of evaluation methods and approaches. In addition the workshops provided opportunities for networks to share experiences and for networking and peer support.

September - November 2015: analysis and production of an interim report.

May - June 2016: a second survey (Survey 2) was sent to all the networks (leads/SPoCs)². The questions explored changes to aims and foci, material changes to the context in which the network has been working, changes to partnerships, perceived impact, achievements, successes and innovations, governance and management structures, challenges and collaborations, evaluation and sustainability (see Appendix 10.5.5).

July - October 2016: the second case study survey was sent to SPoCs, leads, partners and schools (see Appendices 10.5.6-10.5.9]. The respective surveys focussed on perceived impact, achievements, successes and innovations, challenges and resolutions, sustainability, and suggestions for future collaborative activities.

October 2016: a one-day workshop for all network leads/SPoCs was held in London. The workshops involved the dissemination of findings from the scheme and sessions on evaluation methods and approaches, report writing and dissemination.

November 2016: all SPoCs were contacted and invited to provide a short reflective summary on network successes.

November - December 2016: analysis and production of the final report.

Table 1: Summary of survey responses

| | Number of responses | | | |
|--------------------------------|---------------------|------|----------|---------|
| | SPoC | Lead | Partners | Schools |
| Survey 1 | 37 | | | |
| Case study data ³ 1 | 9 ⁴ | 10 | 21 | 24 |
| Survey 2 | 38 | | | |
| Case study data 2 | 10 | 9 | 23 | 39 |
| SPoC final reflections | 19 | | | |

² These were sent to SPoCs but some were completed by the lead partner and some by the SPoC.

³ This comprises survey and/or telephone interviews.

⁴ One SPoC felt unwilling to complete the survey question despite reassurances of confidentiality.

2.4.3 Analysis

Data derived from surveys and interview responses from representatives of networks (leads, SPoCs and partners) and schools (see Table 1 above) were subjected to rigorous thematic analysis. This method, commonly used in 'grounded theory' evaluative research, ensured that the analysis was informed not just by theoretical understandings that underpinned the agreed research questions but by themes emerging in the data itself; in other words, analysis was driven in part by the subjective responses of participants. In doing so we utilised a General Inductive Approach "to allow research findings to emerge from the frequent, dominant, or significant themes inherent in raw data, without the restraints imposed by structured methodologies" (Thomas, 2006, p. 238). Thus the data we refer to in this evaluation also explores themes and issues beyond the agreed research questions, reflecting the concerns of participants.

This allowed the analysis to better reflect the grounded reality of network relationships and activities, and also to be contextualised by external factors such as competing pressures on actors, in this case countervailing pressures such as an inter-institutional culture of competition and the differentiated impact of funding allocations. The first stage was that of data reduction, described by Miles and Huberman (1994, p. 10) as the process of "selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming the data that appear in written up field notes or transcriptions". This was a crucial element of the analysis since there were almost 200,000 words of data. Each set of interview questions was then taken in turn, all responses relating to that question were collated, read and re-read in detail and, finally, patterns and common themes were drawn out and discussed by the evaluation team.

In addition, the analysis was informed by a variety of other interactions including notes from workshops, one-to-one support by emails and scanning of issues raised on Jiscmail. This data was used to check findings from the wider data for "their plausibility, their sturdiness, their 'confirmability' – that is, their validity" (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p. 11).

2.4.4 Presentation of findings

The focus across the data analysis was on understanding and distilling what different groups of respondents perceived about their experiences of participating in the NNCO scheme. However, as the research questions are largely descriptive rather than evaluative, as the indicators of success for the overall NNCO scheme are very broad and as the participants' responses are subjective, we have structured responses not just in relation to the themes arising from the data but have also:

- Made claims in relation to effectiveness by drawing on the joint OFFA/HEFCE (2014) 'National strategy for access and student success in higher education' which makes recommendations for effective collaborative outreach activity,
- Made claims in relation to innovation by drawing on a range of definitions of innovation and, in particular, the OECD's (2005) four strands of innovation: product, process, marketing and organisational,
- Made claims about impact by drawing on levels of impact as outlined in HEFCE's Evaluation Capacity Building ECB 'Toolkit'.

In addition, analysis from the above has been drawn together to make a set of recommendations in relation to lessons learnt and sustainability.

Throughout the report extensive quotes have been used to illustrate the rigour of the analysis as well as to indicate the strength of the evidence garnered, in particular in relation to the claims being made.

A mapping of the objectives and research questions with an indication of where findings are presented is indicated in Table 2.

Table 2: Mapping of evaluation findings

| | | Section of the report | | | | | |
|--------------------|------|-----------------------|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| Objectives | A | ✓ | | | | | |
| | Bi | | | ✓ | | ✓ | |
| | Bii | | | | ✓ | | |
| | Biii | | ✓ | | ✓ | | |
| | C | | | | | ✓ | |
| | D | | | | | | ✓ |
| | E | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Research questions | 1 | ✓ | | | | | |
| | 2 | | | | | ✓ | ✓ |
| | 3 | | ✓ | | ✓ | | |
| | 4 | | ✓ | | | | |
| | 5 | | | ✓ | | | |
| | 6 | | | | ✓ | | |
| | 7 | | | | ✓ | | |
| | 8 | | | | ✓ | | |
| | 9 | | | | | ✓ | |
| Goals | 1 | ✓ | | | ✓ | | |
| | 2 | | | | ✓ | | |
| | 3 | ✓ | | | | | |

Strand 2 (evaluation support) is presented separately in Section 8.

2.4.5 Terminology

As identified above, this report draws on quantitative and qualitative data drawn from the surveys, feedback from SPoCs and network leads during the workshops and from the final dissemination event, as well as informal conversations held as part of the evaluation support strand of the overall evaluation. From this point forward this combined information will be referred to as **evidence**.

2.5 Summary and recommendations

The fact that the NNCO scheme allowed for high levels of flexibility is, arguably, one of its strengths – in that it allowed for a variety of approaches to outreach, attuned to differing contexts and to the needs of different individuals and groups. However, because the aims and scope of the NNCO scheme were so broad and because the research questions were largely descriptive, it did not lend itself to a traditional programme evaluation. These same factors also, necessarily, limited the possible claims that could be made from the evidence collated as part of the evaluation.

Recommendation 1

For the evaluation of future large-scale collaborative outreach schemes consideration should be given to developing a narrower set of research questions with clearer and more measurable indicators of success and/or the adoption of a theory or change or logic model and/or a set of testable assumptions or hypotheses.

3 The networks

3.1 Introduction

Networks can be conceptualised as a continuum between relatively weak or voluntary forms of partnership to stronger forms that are based on formalised partnerships. Dhillon's notion of a continuum, derived from a grounded theory approach, (Dhillon 2013, 739) consists of four key variables:

- Trust – the types and levels of trust between partners,
- Network type – from single formal networks through to networked multi-level governance structures,
- Norms and values – from formal relations based on business and financial objectives to mutual support based on reciprocity, openness and inclusivity,
- Motivations of participants – from self-interest to mutual interest.

The following section outlines the features and characteristics of the 38 networks, including changes to the aims and objectives and the governance and management models of networks over the lifetime of the programme; Section 6 explores the effectiveness of the networks.

3.2 Features and characteristics of the networks

Networks can be categorised in relation to whether they were new, based on pre-existing networks (e.g. Aimhigher or Lifelong Learning Networks that continued post-funding) or some combination of both (see Table 3). This latter category ('aspects of both') usually combined a grouping of institutions that had worked collaboratively in the past and who, for the purposes of the NNCO programme, came back together, sometimes along with other partners.

Table 3: Provenance and locus of Networks

| New network | Pre-existing | Aspects of both |
|---|---|---|
| Combined Universities in Cornwall | HEART (West Yorkshire) | Southern Universities Network |
| Herts AHEAD | Sussex Learning Network | Western Outreach Network (WON) |
| North East Midlands Collaborative Outreach Network (NEMCON) | Explore University (Staffordshire) | North East Raising Aspiration Partnership |
| GROWS (Gloucestershire Reaches Out With Schools and Colleges) | Higher York Collaborative Outreach Network | Greater Manchester Higher |
| Suffolk and Norfolk Network of Collaborative Outreach | National Network for the Education of Care Leavers | |
| Devon Collaborative Outreach Network | Linking London | |
| Greater Merseyside Collaborative Outreach Network (subject to change) | Kent & Medway Outreach Network (originally KMPF Outreach Network) | |
| Higher Education Outreach Network HEON (Surrey) | Federation of Regional Colleges for Engagement (FORCE) | |
| Aspire Northamptonshire | Open University National Network for Collaborative Outreach (Social Partnerships) | |
| Cumbria Collaborative Outreach Network | REACH (Leicestershire) | |
| Magna Carta – Education for Liberty – Lincolnshire Outreach Network | Aimhigher London South | |
| Lancashire National Network for Collaborative Outreach | Aimhigher West Midlands | |
| Essex Collaborative Outreach Network | Higher Education Progression Partnership (South Yorkshire) | |
| Oxford and Cambridge Collaborative Network | AccessHE (London) | |
| Bedfordshire and Milton Keynes Network for Collaborative Outreach | Study Higher (Oxfordshire, Wiltshire, Berkshire) | |
| NNCO – Cambridgeshire | Coventry and Warwickshire Network for Collaborative Outreach | |

3.3 Network partners

The 38 networks between them comprised the following partners at the point of application for NNCO funding:

- 37 lead HEIs, plus London Higher⁵,
- 299 HEFCE-funded partners (HEIs and FECs),
- 139 other partners (including LEPs, schools, voluntary sector organisations, businesses, and local authority departments).

There were a number of changes in partner representatives, particularly among the FECs who went through a time of flux during 2014-2016, causing a level of challenge to the smooth running of the partnerships:

In light of the significant change taking place within the college sector there have been numerous changes to the representation at steering group on a personnel level, which impacts on the smooth running and consistency of the programme. (SPoC)

Some members of the Operational Group have changed although institutional partners have remained the same. This has meant that new people have had to pick up very quickly what the network is doing. (SPoC)

Other challenges to the material context in which the networks operated included:

- The rise in the number of academies and growth of other new providers,
- Qualification reform and the need for new/enhanced IAG/careers advice sought from the networks,
- The growth of apprenticeships and again the need for IAG/careers advice,
- Further education (FE) strategic area reviews and the challenges faced by the FECs,
- The establishment of the LEPs.

During the life of the NNCO scheme, changes were therefore made to the formal and informal partnerships as need arose to include in particular:

- Additional FECs and more specialist providers,
- Further representatives from schools, particularly the academies,
- The LEPs.

The number and range of partners offers clear evidence that the NNCO Scheme achieved the first part of **Goal 1**, namely the bringing together of "networks of universities, colleges and other partners".

3.4 Network structures

Evidence from our evaluation suggests that at the programmatic level a 'typical' network structure would take the following form:

A Lead institution with responsibilities for: human resource (HR) processes for post holders in the central team; engagement with (and accountability to) HEFCE on behalf of the network; and finances (although partner institutions retained responsibility for their formulaic spend).

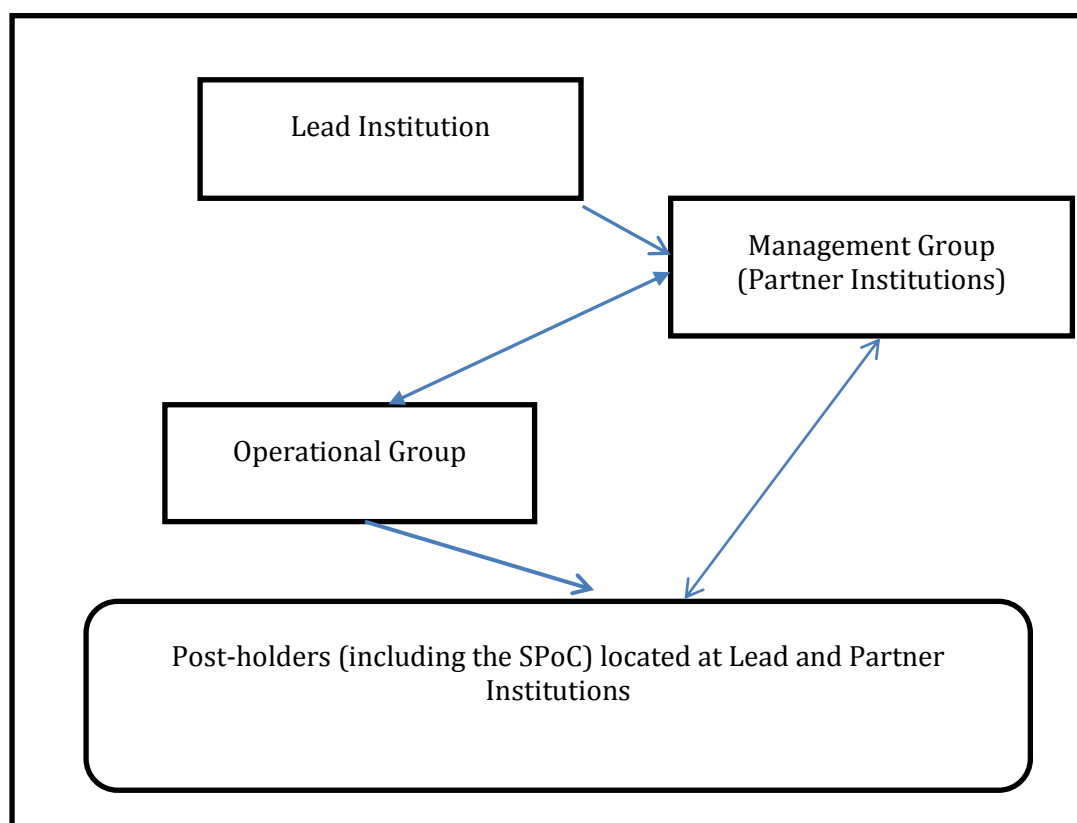
A Management group comprised of named managers from the lead and partner HEIs/FECs, and with responsibility for the vision and direction of the network.

An Operational group with specific responsibility to identify outreach priorities for the network, receiving reports on performance and resources, overseeing evaluation and financial monitoring and providing overall context of education landscape.

⁵ London Higher is an umbrella body representing nearly 50 HEIs in London

Post Holders (SPoCs and their staff) with responsibility for developing an understanding of local outreach provision, developing and maintaining a web presence, seeking to reduce outreach duplication and identify gaps via engagement with schools, and undertaking self-evaluation and reporting. They reported to the Management group and engaged with network HEI & FEC Outreach Teams, state-funded schools and colleges and other networks as appropriate

Table 4: Network structure (typical)



(Arrows indicate reporting lines and lines of responsibility)

Case study evidence allows us to explore the actual working practices and experiences of networks in detail, in particular the relationship between working practices and organisational structure as networks evolved and, often, as aims and objective developed.

The partnership with [network] was a brand new group project. Whilst partners had worked together on other events and have links academically, this was the first time anything had been organised formally. Our specific purpose was to work collaboratively across the county to increase activity and outreach levels, encourage young people to engage with us as outreach workers and ultimately raise aspirations. (Partner HEI)

Across the networks the most common sets of activities for partners were regular meetings to review the work of the networks; regular communication updates (i.e. email); shared opportunities to participate in HE promotion events; and regular opportunities for network staff to come out to partner colleges more.

Where networks' structures worked effectively this facilitated networking and greater and shared understanding between partners. It also allowed for collaboration with, and greater tie up of, HEIs with other partners such as local education partnerships, charities,

businesses and enterprises, etc. This has enabled some networks to develop activities which are more tailored to meet the need of the specific region, rather than just increasing the scope of generic HE awareness. As one partner institution noted:

The network initially agreed activity plans – both centrally and per partner. This allowed conversations about overlap in plans and joint delivery. We have had regular (bi-monthly) meetings of management and steering groups: however sometimes information was not cascaded up or down groups and full attendance could be a problem... but there has been plenty of good will and where there were instances of good communication I believe this played a big part in successful operation.... It seems to have worked OK. Overall some plans were challenging for individual institutions where they might clash with internal aims for meeting access agreements and recruitment targets. (Partner HEI)

Respondents (networks, partners, SPoCs, stakeholders) were generally positive about working collaboratively, not least the opportunity to think about what regional partners could do together that would create additional opportunities and activities. Such activities included increased liaison in order to better target Pupil Referral Units (PRUs), developing Champions for Looked After Children, developing models of working with key adults to support groups of learners, and better engagement with schools that have previously been hard to engage with.

3.5 The SPoC as broker

The role of the SPoC was “to ensure all state-funded secondary schools and colleges in their locality have a clear access route to information on outreach events and activities” (HEFCE, 2014). Their remit was to establish, develop and promote the effectiveness of each network. Structurally the role had a dual focus:

1. To be the main point of contact with schools and the main liaison between schools, other stakeholder organisations and the network.
2. To take a leading and/or ‘figurehead’ role in the network.

At the point of Survey 1 only seven SPoCs were in place and their role was still evolving. Within a few months however all the networks had a SPoC in place and thus the NNCO scheme had achieved **Goal 3**, namely “to establish Single Points of Contact (SPoCs) for each network”.

Moreover, by Survey 2 the overall importance of the SPoCs’ role in enabling the success of the networks was evident.

In terms of acting as a main point of contact, all the networks used the SPoC as the public face of their outreach activities. They were also tasked with ensuring that new activities and new ways of working with schools were determined, developed and implemented; they carried out development and research that helped identify cold-spots and overlapping provision; and they developed programmes that improved awareness among school-based staff and other stakeholders.

In terms of taking a ‘leading’ role more broadly, the picture is more mixed. First, it is clear that the SPoC role was pivotal to the success of many of the networks, in particular in brokering and stimulating links between schools and partners as the networks became established.

In some cases this also involved additional piloting of projects designed to enhance collaborative activity and more direct activities with schools where demand was evident. In addition, across the majority of networks, the SPoC was often brokering arrangements between the schools and the networks:

Nuanced brokerage is required to inform and manage the expectations of schools and colleges, some of whom make requests for support at very short notice. (SPoC)

Some schools and colleges request large-scale activity for entire year groups of 150+ students, and this can present difficulty for network members. In these instances we often try to broker a programme of smaller activities delivered by a number of partners on the same day, to decant unmanageably large groups into a series of smaller activities that provide greater opportunities for meaningful exchanges. However, this is more complex to coordinate, and does increase the transport and staff support costs for the schools involved. (SPoC)

The SPoCs also acted as a broker between the partners, particularly where there was tension between partners arising from 'devolution' of activities within networks. Here the role of the SPoC as broker and as a representative of what one termed a 'united front' for the network was important in demonstrating both impartiality and additionality:

Being a united front also means that more and more schools have been keen to get involved with the network where before they were wary of the traditional 'selling' of courses and institutions. (SPoC)

In short, the brokerage effect can be seen to have worked two ways. Not only were schools more satisfied (in the sense of having a better understanding of what the network provided over and above what individual institutions could offer) but the partners were also encouraged to more readily accept collaborative ways of working.

There were also a small number of comments (from those partners who had only a small amount of allocated funding) that, at times, the SPoCs appeared to be working to benefit the lead (and employing) institution:

There has been some tendency for the SPoC to lean towards the lead institution rather than remain wholly impartial and represent the network as a whole. I do also feel that the SPoC could have been more proactive in engaging partners, particularly during meetings and making them engaging and productive. (Partner FEC)

It is important to note, however, that some of the SPoCs were working for lead partner institutions which, they felt, were not keen on collaboration. In the workshops held in 2015 this was a significant concern expressed by a small number of SPoCs who felt that they were being unfairly required to focus on their own institutions' outreach activity rather than on collaborative activity for the network. A number of similar comments were made by four (out of ten) of the SPoCs surveyed as part of Case Study 2.

Challenges also arose from being associated too closely with the lead institution, where some wariness was evident from partners and other organisations about the impartiality of the SPoC and the true objectives of the network. (SPoC)

Of note, the two comments above are made by those working in new networks which have no or little history of collaboration.

3.6 Aims and objectives of the networks

In Survey 1 the aims of the networks reflected the overarching aims of the NNCO scheme, namely to "encourage more young people into higher education... [by providing] coordinated outreach to schools and colleges" (HEFCE, 2015).

- All networks (except for the Open University National Network which worked with adult learners) had working with young people (and relevant organisations) as their key aim, with the majority focusing on secondary schools (listed as either 11-16 age group or as school years 7-11).
- Only three networks mentioned working specifically with primary schools (year 6), four specifically with sixth form schools or colleges (years 12-13) and seven working with FECs.

- In addition the networks listed sub-aims as being to work specifically with young people in public care (specifically identified by 16 networks); with young people with disabilities (four networks); and/or with young carers and their families (one network).
- In this first survey there also was a particular focus on ensuring coverage of previous geographic 'cold-spots' (with ten networks specifically mentioning this as part of their aims), avoiding duplication (the majority mentioned this), and, from the outset, ensuring continuation beyond the life of the initial HEFCE funding, with sustainability a strong theme across all responses.

In this first survey the networks did not indicate changes to networks' aims and objectives except to note slow progress.

3.7 Changes to aims and objectives

The aims described in Survey 1 were submitted when the NNCO scheme (and the networks) was in relative infancy. By Survey 2, in the main, the networks' aims had been changed, revised, restricted or expanded - to a lesser or greater extent. Amendments were made to:

- Make more manageable the overall scale of the aim of the NNCO scheme (namely to work with *all* state funded schools and colleges),
- Meet the needs of learners (with one network noting that they had removed the notion of working with a smaller number of priority schools in favour of making a general offer available to all and another reporting that: *The central team has prioritised the delivery of large-scale ongoing projects over hosting additional on-campus events for the time-being*),
- Ensure that the overall network aims fully reflected each partner's evolving aims and objectives for the partnership,
- Allow the focus to move from simply engaging and enabling collaboration between schools or organisations, to identifying areas of best practice that could be shared across the network,
- Ensure that impact could be evidenced – particularly where networks took some time to set up,
- Focus on particular groups, schools or work with other stakeholders, in recognition of, variously, where greatest need was perceived to be, and to ensure cost/time efficiencies (as described further in Section 6),
- Meet partner priorities (with a number of networks allowing specialist interests at the partner level to benefit the whole network as in the quotation below).

We have looked to primarily work with other HEIs to deliver new collaboratively-run activities where our specialisms and expertise can add value (e.g. creative arts events) and also to a lesser degree, to increase the range of our current activity offer to more state schools and groups within the [unnamed] region, where we have not had the budget capacity to do so from our access agreement funding and particularly with schools we have had no previous history of working with. (Partner HEI)

For others partners, institutional imperatives and aims sometimes had to be subsumed in the collective aims. For example, several FEC partners reported that pursuing collaborative network-wide agendas was at the expense of FEC-specific agendas. Moreover some of the shifts in focus were commented on by those partners who had initial expectations as to where activity was going to be focussed but had seen this change over time, not always to their satisfaction.

3.8 Summary and recommendations

The 38 networks comprised those that were wholly new, those that were built on pre-existing networks and those combining new and existing provision. There is some evidence that pre-existing networks with a recent history of collaborating on outreach activities were more easily able to build on existing relationships than those without that history (this is explored further in Section 6 on the Effectiveness of Networks). Where relationships and collaborations took time to build, the SPoCs frequently played a brokerage role, which was often a demanding activity particularly where the partners perceived that the SPoCs were favouring the lead institution. Despite these difficulties all the networks produced workable, if variable, structures that in many cases are planned to lead to sustainable future collaborations. In part this was helped by revisiting the networks' aims and reducing them down to be more manageable (in terms of scale) and more focused (in terms of which schools to work with).

Recommendation 2

Those involved in collaborative outreach activity should determine and clarify which schools/colleges they will work with from the outset and offer a clear rationale for doing so.

4 Benefits of the NNCO scheme: innovations

4.1 Introduction

As part of the second survey the networks (all SPoCs and the case study network leads, partners and schools) were asked to:

- Give examples of specific innovations which have been enabled through the NNCO scheme.
- Describe, for each innovation, what makes them innovative and whether they had drawn on any research or practice in developing them.

The questions relating to innovation resulted in some of the lengthiest and most detailed data given by respondents. From the 14 main and 13 sub-questions asked of the networks (SPoCs and/or lead partners) almost a sixth of the overall responses related to claims of innovations.

4.2 Theorising innovation

In analysing the evidence we have used the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development's (OECD) definition of innovation as being "the implementation of a new or significantly improved product (good or service), or process, a new marketing method, or a new organisational method in business practices, workplace organisation or external relations" (OECD/Eurostat, 2005: 46). The OECD thus classifies innovation in to four domains: product, process, marketing and organisational. Drawing on these classifications, all responses given by the networks were coded as one or more types of innovation:

1. Product (for example a new resource pack),
2. Process (for example a new on-line delivery of an existing resource pack),
3. Marketing (for example a new media campaign to promote the resources),
4. Organisational (for example a new form of a cross-institute working group set up to develop and deliver the above).

Table 5 below offers a broad summary of the different types of innovation described by the networks (SPoCs and/or lead partners). This summary should, however, only be regarded as a guide. First, the level of detail offered by the networks is variable; for

example one network might list 'a new set of resources' (a product innovation) whilst another might give the detail of each of the component parts of these resources, (e.g. 'a set of resources including: a new website for pupils, a new resource pack for teachers, and a new information pack for parents'). The former example would be recorded as a single product innovation; the latter could be recorded as either one or as three. We have chosen in this instance to count it as just one, as it comes under the overarching description of 'a set'. However, where each of these examples has been listed as different innovations by the network they have been recorded three times. However, descriptions were sometimes ambiguous and we have therefore had to make judgments.

Table 5: Number of different types of innovation

| Type | No. |
|----------------|-----|
| Product | 115 |
| Process | 41 |
| Marketing | 9 |
| Organisational | 21 |
| | 186 |

In addition, whilst we have separately recorded each *type* of innovation the majority of the innovations actually included a combination of, for example, marketing and process, process and organisation, and, in particular, product and process (indeed most of the product innovations involved process innovations and for this reason the two types are presented together below). There are many examples of multifactorial innovations. Where this was clear in the data we have recorded these as more than one type of innovation; where it was not we have made a judgement and recorded it as just one. On this basis most examples were more readily definable as product innovations and they have been recorded as such; however, these examples may well have involved other forms of (unknown) innovative activity and for this reason the evidence presented in the table may not provide the full picture. Moreover while there are clearly many more examples of product innovations than there are of the other types, marketing or organisational innovations frequently created the climate through which other innovations could occur, as the following example evidences:

The NNCO has brought together three existing networks working to support Fair Access to Higher Education. The three networks have worked together strategically and operationally to offer greater coverage of joined-up outreach provision across London. We have developed a website directory of over 40 London institutions' offers of outreach and we have pooled expertise and collaborated to develop resources to support schools new to outreach and all that it offers. (Lead partner)

4.2.1 Newness or innovation

Across all of the data claims of innovation were made, primarily, in relation to 'newness' and/ or 'originality' as proxies for innovation. This was evident across all networks' responses.

The FECs in particular, which perhaps have less of a history of being involved in outreach work than the universities, were likely to regard as innovative activities which are already common to HEIs – such as taster days/sessions, summer schools, and mentoring – but which were new to them:

A 36-week mentoring project with a local pupil referral unit; HEI Ambassadors going in and working 1:1 in a student support role, followed by HEI and FEC campus taster/visit days. (FEC partner)

This was also true of the schools who declared as innovative approaches such as *clear advice; real expertise*, or activities such as *the website* and *all year groups able to access the provision not just sixth form*. Indeed schools that had previously had very little experience of outreach activity also cited as innovative the fact that they were involved in any activities as opposed to none:

It isn't so much that the pupils were involved in anything particularly innovative rather they had the chance to get involved in something. (School)

Initiatives such as the European Commission's Horizon 2020 'Innovation Union' and the UK Government's 'Innovate UK' also make a link between innovation and 'newness'. Newness is not always, however, the same as innovation.

Mike Biddle of 'Innovate UK' makes a helpful distinction between 'new' (innovative) and 'new to me' (not innovative) (Biddle, 2015).

Therefore whilst recognising that there are many activities or initiatives which are examples of excellent practice, in the following section we consider innovation only in relation to:

- Activities which are new to the sector,
- Existing activities delivered in a new way.

Of note, we have chosen to take claims of 'newness to the sector' at face value, recognising that the networks will have a level authority to make such claims. Throughout the lifetime of the NNCO scheme the networks have been involved in sharing good practice through Jiscmail, as well as through the sector-wide networking events which have taken place throughout the lifetime of the scheme. In addition, the established networks were able to draw on their knowledge of historical precedents to make claims of innovation:

Whilst the practice of funding schools more directly is not innovative in historical terms (there are many examples from the past such as Aimhigher coordinators and Building Pathway Ambassadors) it is more innovative in the context of the current NNCO project where little funding has been directed at the school to support the development of infrastructure required to engage with initiatives such as the NNCO. (SPoC)

In contrast, whilst all of the networks considered impartiality to be one of their key achievements, six also specifically referred to impartiality as an innovation. This is a contestable claim since offering impartial advice was one of the key tenets of the former Aimhigher scheme; so to that extent delivering impartial outreach/IAG is not new to the sector. However, those working for the newer networks, or who had not worked under Aimhigher, as well as the FECs who had historically experienced significant competition for students from the HEIs, considered impartiality to be a key innovation of the NNCO scheme:

It's just been fantastic to be there as an equal partner not in competition. That has been the most important thing for us because we are normally left out in the cold by the universities as they just see us as trying to steal 'their' potential students. (FEC partner)

As a final note, whilst the SPoCs self-reported innovations which had been implemented, some partners were less sure that these innovations were actually in place rather than being in progress.

In the last few months I feel that we have finally started to move towards some real benefits. The Trumps game, the planned animations for the assembly

programme and the careers events planned for next year all seem to be real deliverables that could make some difference. (FEC partner)

Assembly presentations and resources for distribution through social media are in the planning stage, as well as a careers game to be used in schools. (FEC partner)

4.3 Network innovations

4.3.1 Product and process innovations

Product innovations involve "the introduction of a good or service that is new or significantly improved with respect to its characteristics or intended uses" (OECD/Eurostat, 2005: 48) and include innovations that utilise new knowledge or new technologies, provide new goods or services, and/or work with new groups. Process innovation refers to "the implementation of a new or significantly improved production or delivery method. This includes significant changes in techniques, equipment and/or software" (OECD/Eurostat, 2005: 49) and may include the method of delivery of an activity or product. So innovations can relate to a new product/activity or initiative, or an existing product/activity or initiative delivered in a new way.

New knowledge

There is clear evidence across the innovations that the networks have drawn on a range of existent research to help support their practice. Thirty three made specific references to research-informed practice and 14 to research-informed innovations, although as discussed below many of these research-informed activities are not in effect innovative. However, the Networks have also created 'new knowledge', particularly where gaps were identified in relation to understanding 'what works'. Eleven of the networks cited the research they had undertaken or commissioned as innovation:

[Undertook an] action research project to identify what parents' aspirations are for their children, their own experiences of post compulsory education and how they would like to access more information. (SPoC)

However, it is only at the point that such new knowledge has been used that actual innovation takes place. There is evidence, however, that the research has indeed been used to sharpen focus, increase usage, and avoid duplication or wastage of effort:

Desk-research and interviews with potential end users were carried out (as relevant) to ensure each course was not duplicating resources readily available on the market. (SPoC)

Following a review of Google Analytic data and user surveys the [network] Team are currently redesigning some elements of the website to facilitate easier access to Partner universities' own websites. (SPoC)

Moreover, the networks have taken robust steps to codify knowledge by using their websites in particular to establish new repositories, new resources and/or new best practices guidelines which will be made accessible to others:

The outcomes of the research will be the production of resources developed for tutors to address the challenges they face, that can be shared across the network and the sector. (SPoC)

This project has been supported and underpinned by the Brightside Online Mentoring platform which the [network] has purchased. The project serves as a model which could be taken forward by partner institutions via the new NCOP project. (SPoC)

New technologies

The use of new technologies is strongly evident across all the data. Of note, many of the SPoCs are relatively young (perhaps because many of the SPoC appointments have been temporary and funded at a relatively low-grade). This may have led to a greater and more confident willingness to envisage technological solutions to existing problems and engage with new technologies than might otherwise have been the case.

New technologies or new technological approaches are being used to work with new groups, work across large cohorts, work in ways that are appealing and fun, and, crucially, work in ways that are directly relevant to the target groups:

The [HEI] is relatively new to the concept of digital badging⁶, and has recognised this to be a way of allowing adult learners to receive recognition for non-formal online learning. (SPoC)

The [network] case study publication will be interactive with the use of an App called Aurasma⁷. This along with the social media campaign has allowed [the network] to engage the identified audience and cold spots in a very targeted and specific way. (SPoC)

In developing these innovations the networks have drawn on a wide range of external partners as well as creating new resources in-house, primarily by the lead HEI and on one occasion by students. Of note, all networks have, to a greater or lesser extent, used student ambassadors in the delivery of outreach activities; however, using students for other purposes – such as acting as project advisors or contributing to research or evaluation activities – is much less evident across the data (although there are some examples) and could be reconsidered for future similar schemes.

Labster have produced a series of award winning virtual labs that allow participants to get actively involved in seeing and experiencing what scientists do without actually leaving the classroom. (SPoC)

Students from the University of [unnamed] are creating an online careers game, as part of their course work [for academic year] 2016/2017.... Developing this online resource will make us much more appealing to young people and will also increase participation in and use of the [network] website. (SPoC)

The widespread use of online platforms does, however, give rise to questions of how such resources will be maintained and updated in to the future particularly where the NCOP networks do not neatly dovetail with the NNCO ones.

New goods or services

Using new technologies has been fundamental to the development of activities and resources. As evidenced above not all resources developed are innovative. However, some are, as this quote evidences:

A series of online courses which will accompany student ambassador delivered outreach work.... Through these innovative courses, students will explore subjects such as homelessness and migration in 'Social Problems & Issues', and will use a popular online game to explore chemical structures in 'Molecules in Minecraft'. (SPoC)

In addition, all the networks were required to set up websites to offer a single point of access for information, with additional sites set to meet the needs of particular groups. Overall 22 networks cited their website(s) as being innovative or being an innovation as exemplified by the following example claimed as innovative:

⁶ Digital badges are a way to document ongoing learning, professional development, or other accomplishments.

⁷ Aurasma is an Augmented Reality Platform; see <https://www.aurasma.com/>

[Network] have co-funded and endorsed the Career Pilot website to purchase the new section on the site called 'ParentZone' which is a dedicated section to help parents with key questions in their children's education. (SPoC)

Just being able to go to one place and get all that you need about outreach and information for our young people has been incredible. We have never had this; rather we have had to scramble around looking for information; but beyond that there is also a single person we can go to for this support. (School)

In the 21st century having a website is not innovative. However, the fact that the website offered a single point of contact for schools is; moreover, the single point of contact (as a named person) should also be claimed as an innovation; indeed eight of the SPoCs cited their own roles as indeed being an innovation. Although there are precedents of similar roles operating during the Aimhigher era, and indeed some of the networks developed from networks which had survived following the end of Aimhigher, the model of operation and the funding supporting the work of the SPoCs is new to the sector.

Working with new groups

Innovations in relation to new groups refer to both new service users and new service providers. New groups claimed as 'innovations' included working with PRUs, care leavers, carers, parents, adult learners, students with disabilities or specific learning difficulties, and others not normally targeted by particular HEIs for outreach interventions. For example, working with white working class boys was cited as innovative by six of the networks, as were a number of initiatives involving pupils from BME groups. However, working with such groups is not new to the sector and such activities are not in themselves innovative.

There are however, a small number of examples of working with new groups that might be termed 'new to the sector' and thus innovative:

Where this project could be considered to be innovative was that it went a step further and targeted a particular group of young people (in this case, young people aged 16-18 who are currently living independently). (SPoC)

One innovative project... was a localised project in conjunction with the charity TWISTA. They worked with eight white working class boys who had been in trouble at school, had registered a need for sexual health advice, and had a criminal conviction or caution. (SPoC)

4.3.2 Marketing innovations

Marketing innovations refer to "the implementation of a new marketing method involving significant changes in product design or packaging, product placement, product promotion or pricing" (OECD/Eurostat, 2005: 50). The use of online platforms and/or other forms of media to provide services also enabled innovations in marketing:

The [Network] Team have also begun using social media platforms to manage our twitter profile resulting in a 91% increase in twitter followers since February 2016 and increased traffic to the website in line with a heightened social media presence. (Lead partner)

4.3.3 Organisational innovations

Organisational innovations relate to business practices, workplace organisation and external relations. The innovation here is in relation to collaboration, with a reallocation of funding to enable collaboration across all partners where necessary, and with external partners.

Collaboration was mentioned by 34 of the networks as being either innovative in itself or as being fundamental to supporting other innovations:

Although perhaps not innovative in initial event ideas (a collaborative conference and a collaborative taster day), the concept of bringing together engaging workshops from a variety of HE providers to the same venue does show innovation. (SPoC)

Through the collaboration, the network partners were able to come together to secure a prominent position amongst the displays at this year's festival and put on a substantial and interactive, family friendly exhibition. (SPoC)

The formulaic funding allocation had, perhaps, the potential to threaten straightforward collaboration where some partners were in the position of receiving substantially less money than others. A number of networks, therefore, either pooled the formulaic funding or ring-fenced a certain amount of funding to support the less well-funded FECs, which they regarded as innovative:

The decision to ring-fence funding for our FECs was a consequence of the way in which the funding was distributed via the NNCO programme, which saw FE partners receive substantially less funding than the majority of our HEIs. The projects developed via these sources of funding have enabled the colleges to use their local knowledge to identify cohorts and groups which would benefit from additional activity. (SPoC)

In terms of relationships outside of the formal NNCO partnerships, the networks referred to a range of new types of collaborations with external partners which were regarded as innovative. This includes working with new businesses to deliver traditional activities, new activities, and/or bringing together multiple different external partners – in particular businesses and employers:

The programme was innovative as we worked with our local hospital that provided the taster sessions. (SPoC)

The Your Future Your Choice events were innovative as they pulled together a wide and varied range of local employers and HE and FE providers into one place. (SPoC)

A second strand of external partnerships developed as part of the NNCO scheme was with the 'community' – that is community organisations, or in community settings and/or working with individuals in the community:

The PRU programme includes a Cameras for Kids type initiative which is being led, on a voluntary basis, by a local photographer who had a difficult time at school and who has gone on to run his own photography company for the last 22 years. (SPoC)

Again collaboration with partners and with external organisations is not in itself innovative to the sector, though it clearly is to the networks. In addition, as described later in this report, ways of collaborating and the levels of success this has engendered are highly diverse.

However, what is innovative here is the amount and extent of collaboration. The NNCO scheme involved 34 regional and four national networks bringing together 200 universities and FECs, and reaching 4,300 secondary schools and colleges. In addition, over 140 organisations were named as non-funded partners on the successful bids for NNCO funding whilst as evidenced in the body of this report the networks also worked with an extensive range of additional business, community, voluntary sector, local authority and other partners:

One of our greatest successes is just how much collaboration has taken place across the lifetime of the scheme. This has not just been with our formal partners but also with a wide range of other organisations – which we have drawn in to help us deliver our activities. This has meant that schools have had access to activities and resources which they would never have had otherwise. (SPoC final reflection)

4.4 Summary and recommendations

The questions relating to innovation were designed to answer the following research question:

1. Have networks developed and piloted new or innovative approaches to collaboration or outreach during this period? Is there wider learning and best practice that can be shared?

And, in doing so, make broader claims about the features and characteristics of the networks in relation to co-ordination, efficiency, effectiveness and overall value.

As evidenced at the beginning of this section, all of the networks considered that they had done things which could be described as innovative/innovation. Moreover they were extremely proud of what they had achieved – as evidenced by the fulsome nature of their responses. Innovation is, however, a relative concept and what is innovative to one network may not be anything new or unusual to another, or new to the sector. Moreover (for this report) innovation it is also a subjective measure, since the evaluation did not set out to measure the impact of innovation. Nonetheless a range of claims in relation to actual innovation (new to the sector) can be made:

1. The networks have developed new knowledge and used this to inform practice,
2. Building on this, they have developed new repositories, new resources and/or new best practices guidelines and, to a lesser extent, worked with new groups in ways that can be deemed innovative,
3. They have used new technologies to deliver new or existing activities and used online platforms to market them,
4. The SPoC (people and websites) made available to all schools across the sector is an innovation – and perhaps less recognised as such by the networks than might be expected,
5. The amount and extent of collaboration across the whole sector is (though perhaps arguably) also innovative.

In terms of the broader aims of the NNCO scheme, these innovations have allowed the networks to operate in ways that have made better use of existing resources (for example creating on-line versions of existing activities). This has, in turn, meant that they have been able to target larger numbers, or different cohorts, of pupils and thus achieve greater effectiveness. Moreover they have developed new ways of working, particularly in terms of organisational or marketing innovations which should also be regarded as exemplars of best practice. This includes new ways of collaborating with community organisations, local authority departments, and business representatives – on a previously unseen scale. Finally as evidenced throughout this section of the report the networks have developed a wide range of new resources which are also examples of best practice.

The climate in which innovation has been made possible is also evident across the networks' (and partners') accounts. This includes: the overall funding made available from HEFCE as well as the pooling of allocated funding; the cooperation and collaboration which has taken place between partners including new staffing arrangements; and the effort that has been put in to marketing and disseminating innovative activities or resources (as well as, more broadly, new activities and resources).

There are questions, however, over how these innovations can be made openly available across the sector, as well as the extent to which knowledge innovation will be retained beyond the life of the networks. The challenge is ensuring that this is done in a systematic and cost-effective manner to the benefit of all those working in outreach.

In addition, through innovative activities, in particular working with groups new to the networks, the NNCO scheme has provided coverage of localised gaps in provision. This has

arisen in part from research undertaken by the networks. Certain groups are, however, more cited as the beneficiaries of new activities (such as white working class boys) than others (such as those from BME groups).

Finally, the resources developed by the networks (innovative or not) are of wider benefit to the sector. However, the cost of developing these has been borne by, and will be retained by, the individual networks. This gives rise to questions, again, as to how these resources might be shared across the sector, although the HEFCE resource pool might offer a much needed repository for such resources.

In summary, the networks were fulsome in their belief that they had been innovative. However, utilising the OECD criteria in relation to innovation, as well as the distinction between types of 'newness', the evidence shows that much of what is claimed as innovation is not actually innovative (though that should not deduct from claims of success since innovation is just one element of success). Clarification on what innovation actually is and how it can be measured would help evidence actual innovation. Moreover disseminating ways in which networks have been able to develop and implement innovation and develop innovative practices would reinforce such clarification. This is particularly important in a climate of short term funding and of frequent staff turnaround when institutional 'muscle memory' can be easily lost.

Recommendation 3

Dissemination of the on-going innovations arising from the NNCO scheme should continue beyond the lifetime of the scheme. It is the responsibility of the lead HEIs to ensure this happens.

Recommendation 4

Collaborative and/or institutional outreach programmes should develop frameworks for measuring and analysing innovation and report back against the four domains of innovation used in this report.

Recommendation 5

Future evaluations of collaborative outreach schemes should ask questions of how networks or projects could have been more innovative and what may have worked for and against innovation.

Recommendation 6

Ownership of, and copyright relating to, resources should reside with funders to ensure that knowledge innovations are retained beyond the life of any particular scheme or project.

Recommendation 7

For future collaborative outreach programmes longitudinal tracking should be undertaken to determine how innovations have been sustained and adopted as well as a cost-benefit analysis undertaken.

5 Benefits of the NNCO scheme: value and impact

5.1 Introduction

This section of the report seeks to evidence what value and impact the networks consider the NNCO scheme to have had on schools and colleges as well as what the stakeholders (lead partner, other partner, other stakeholders and schools/colleges) consider the value and impact of the NNCO scheme to be.

Value is, of course, a subjective concept and can relate to social, economic or other benefits. We have, therefore, used a grounded theory approach to elicit what schools, partners and the wider networks perceive value to be in terms of benefits arising from the scheme as well as what they consider to be additionality arising from the scheme.

In order to make claims of actual impact the interventions put in place by the networks would require a counterfactual analysis – that is a comparison to be made between what actually happened and what would have happened in the absence of the intervention. Without this, determining an explicit causal relationship between a particular activity/intervention and a specific outcome is either very difficult or impossible. We have therefore, again, used a grounded theory approach to identify examples of networks' (SPoCs, leads and partners) and schools' perceptions of impact and have made claims about impact by drawing on levels of impact as outlined in HEFCE's Evaluation Capacity Building (ECB) 'Toolkit' in relation to:

- Impact on **learning**,
- Impact in terms of the **transfer of learning** to new environments and practices,
- Impact in terms of **institutional or sector change**,
- Impact in terms of **change to strategic objectives**,
- Impact in terms of **changes in sector wide practices**.

5.2 Networks' perceptions: overall impact of their work

The networks, despite citing a number of issues as discussed elsewhere in this report, overwhelmingly perceived that the NNCO scheme had been a significant success. The value of the scheme is seen in relation to better co-ordinated outreach activities, reaching new and wider groups of young people and working with more schools, resulting in new opportunities to engage with schools and pupils:

The NNCO funding has provided a catalyst to review the work of [network] and reinvigorate the interest of partners in one of our agreed aims, 'continuous improvement in our partnership practice'. This has been evidenced at board and practitioner level and is particularly driven by the need to explore and agree means for sustainability. We are confident that the [network] partnership has become stronger and more active than it was prior to receipt of NNCO funding and will sustain a remit as a single point of contact for schools (this being additional to our original remit). (SPoC)

The SPoC Outreach and Activity Coordinator has benefitted the network in a number of ways, not least providing challenge to partners in how they work and communicate with schools, the language they use with young people, conducting research with teachers, parents/carers and young people to better understand requirements and the style of communicating that would be most easily digested. By employing a SPoC we have been able to make considerable progress in coordination of outreach information for the Target 16 schools. (SPoC)

However, and of note, the networks consider the greatest value arising from the NNCO scheme to have resulted from the high levels of collaboration between partners. This has generated increased interest and motivation to effect change, allowed the networks to learn from other experts to the benefit of schools and pupils (as well as other groups such as parents):

Bringing together such a broad range of partners would not have been possible without the network infrastructure as a catalyst. Activities have been delivered collaboratively with a number of partners involved. This has not happened in the interim years since the end of Aimhigher funding. (Lead partner)

The NNCO scheme has encouraged greater levels of communication across all partner institutions, in addition to the ability to work collaboratively, both within the network, and across networks. (SPoC)

Overall, this has enabled the networks, on a sector-wide basis, to enable more pupils to have enhanced opportunities to progress to HE.

In terms of impact the networks consider that they have impacted on learning. They also consider that they have generated impact in terms of the transfer of this learning to new environments and practices:

The NNCO has encouraged partners to share their activities openly, discuss what has had a positive impact in their areas, and has encouraged partners to work together when organising events for local schools and colleges. It is becoming increasingly apparent that the benefits of collaborative working (e.g. sharing resources, costs and knowledge) are more obvious to partner institutions, post-NNCO. (SPoC)

There is some evidence that the NNCO scheme has changed how the HEIs are operating – in terms of them becoming more collaborative. Not all HEIs needed support to develop better ways of collaborating either with each other or with schools as they already had effective working practices in place. For others however this has been a significant outcome of the scheme:

Possibly the greatest achievement has been the increased engagement of college based higher education in the collaborative outreach process and the development of capacity in these institutions through the appointment of specific NNCO staff, HE student ambassadors etc. (SPoC)

Finally and most significantly (although there is as yet no evidence of impact) in terms of changes in sector wide practices the networks consider that this will eventually be one of the legacies of the NNCO scheme:

Another benefit will undoubtedly be the renewed focus for teachers on widening participation (WP) as a national priority and re-energising of WP activity. (SPoC)

The NNCO will leave a legacy of stronger (and new) collaborative relationships and activity and knowledge that will inform future WP practice and the NCOP consortiums that will follow. (Lead partner)

5.3 Networks' perceptions: impact on schools/colleges

As part of their overall remit networks were asked to ensure that "all state-funded secondary schools and colleges knew how to access information about outreach activities".

This was achieved. Between them, the networks had contact with all schools, all schools were made aware of the work of the networks, and all schools had free and open access to the networks' websites, as well as any resources made available through these. To that extent therefore the NNCO scheme achieved **Goal 2**.

However, it would not have been possible for the networks to have intensively worked with and delivered outreach activities to all state schools. Therefore, not unreasonably, all of the networks engaged in some level of targeting to determine which schools to work with on a more intensive or sustained basis. This necessarily meant that engagement with schools was mixed: most networks offered 'core' activities/engagement with all schools (primarily promoting awareness of the website) and 'enhanced' activities to a smaller number of targeted schools. This targeting used a range of methods:

- Indicators of deprivation: POLAR 3 classification; students on free school meals (FSM); postcodes ranked within the most deprived areas through the index of multiple deprivation (IMD),

- Other geographic determinations: schools in cold spots; schools in areas with difficulty accessing provision (primarily rural); schools in close proximity to a specific project's HEIs,
- Academic criteria: schools in low-participation neighbourhoods; schools where attainment and progression are issues,
- Localised knowledge: held by personnel within the networks or partners, including the local authority (LA); the current outreach support on offer including that delivered by partners,
- Additional criteria: including likelihood of sustainability; specialised criteria such as at least one candidate per year achieving three A grades at A-level/no strong record of successful applications to Oxford or Cambridge.

The majority of networks used multiple criteria to make decisions as to which schools they worked with:

In respect of this, a formula (points-based system) was created to prioritise the state schools in [county] (as approved by HEFCE), to allow all levels of targeting to take place over the course of the project, and ensure reasonable sustainability of any successful activity. Furthermore, and based on this reasoning, a 'Progression Framework' was developed to place more intense focus and resources on five schools in the network area that scored most highly in points. (Lead partner)

The Central team further refined the Polar 3 data, overlaid with information regarding FSM, and then comparisons made with partner activity information. We have aimed to triangulate information rather than view the data from a single dimension. Insight into particular individuals in schools is also vital and the development of personal contacts in schools will be valuable going forward. (Lead partner)

However, of those schools targeted some did not take up opportunities for engagement. Engagement with previous 'cold spot' schools was particularly mixed (*From the 23 cold spot schools, 16 schools have engaged with the activity provided; Some cold spot schools have proven difficult to engage with as they often have other priorities*). Engagement with Academies was also mixed (although some were very keen to engage):

Not all of the schools we wanted to work with have been as enthusiastic. We spent a long time trying to engage all schools but in the end focussed our efforts because it was a better use of our time. (SPoC)

As a result of both targeting and because of this mixed engagement, it is reasonable to suggest that, across the sector there are schools which did not gain any substantial value from the NNCO scheme. Overall, however, the networks reported a much greater level of engagement with schools than they had previously had:

For the academic year 2015-16 the Partnership has completed 70% more Supporting Secondary visits than in 2014-15 and reached over 15,000 more beneficiaries. (Lead partner)

Such clarifications notwithstanding, the networks (SPoC or lead respondents) consider that the NNCO scheme has, collectively, had value in terms of actual provision/delivery, and enhanced knowledge and understanding for schools and students of access routes to HE.

In terms of actual provision schools have benefitted by being the recipients of greater outreach activity overall, and in particular outreach related to the coverage of 'cold spots'. New groups and, in particular, younger pupils have benefitted by being supported and receiving outreach interventions as well as by being able to attend large-scale collaborative events; and schools and pupils have benefitted by being the recipients of new resources:

Engagement of a wider range of organisations has also been beneficial to schools as it has opened up the range of subjects offered at higher education level beyond those that can be addressed by individual institutions. (SPoC)

The cold-spot schools have demonstrated their appreciation for the additional support provided by the [network] and many have recognised the additionality the network provides, in that it offers impartial information and advice to their students about post-16 opportunities. (SPoC)

In terms of enhanced knowledge and understanding, the networks perceive that the schools are now more aware of the opportunities available and how to access them; in a better position to understand what education and career pathways are available to them; and have a better understanding of the subject areas on offer at degree and sub-degree levels. In addition such information has been offered in a manner that is impartial and involved collaboration between a range of partners:

We have seen students beginning to be much more self-aware and increasing their own hope, happiness and confidence resulting in better relationships at school and/or at home and considering their future options more carefully. (SPoC)

As a result of these activities, the networks perceive that schools and/or individual pupils are better able to see the network as offering collaboration, rather than individual organisations competing against each other. Such collaboration has meant that schools have been afforded the opportunity to engage with all partners at certain events, rather than attending a variety of different events at individual organisations. This in turn, the networks believe, means that they have established contacts and developed relationships that will be sustained beyond the life of specific projects. These relationships are perceived as one of the greatest benefits to arise from the NNCO scheme as they have resulted in a renewed focus and energy on working with younger year groups to raise their HE awareness and aspirations. They have also resulted in more schools having a named contact and link and thus more positive relationships being built with schools:

Every school that we have visited has been keen to engage with us on some level. For many this was discussing a range of interventions, the most popular being taster days for younger pupils, but other activities such as the teacher's survey and engagement with teachers at a range of events has opened the doors to further activity. (Network lead)

By inviting students to take part it helps breaks down barriers, enables students to form positive perceptions of HE and helps them make informed decisions about their future. Students are exposed to new environments, role models and experiences which through their school and community they might not have otherwise been able to access. (Network lead)

For those schools who have been fully engaged the networks consider that their outreach work has had an impact on learning, in that schools now have a much greater awareness of routes in to HE, activities which will enhance students' access to HE and how to elicit additional information as required. All 38 networks gave similar sorts of responses:

We could say with a fair degree of certainty the project has a positive impact on schools including greater levels of engagement with the [network] and individual institutions within the partnership; greater understanding of the breadth of HE provision within the partnership, particularly though the participation of college based higher education in the project; greater understanding of the outreach offer available. (SPoC)

The next level of impact would be where schools are able to transfer such learning to new environments and practices. Most of the networks suggested that such transfer was likely to have taken place. However these are perceptions of *potential* impact, although there were many examples of these in the responses from the SPoCs and the leads:

Our work has strengthened existing relationships between schools and HEIs, as well as fostering new ones, and has built new links between schools and business relevant to school need(s). Some of our planned continuing professional development (CPD) work aimed at practitioners will have direct and meaningful impact in the classroom, with practical pedagogy and increased careers education IAG (CEIAG) knowledge which is beneficial for the staff member themselves, their students and the wider school network to share best practice. (Lead partner)

In terms of impact in relation to schools-based institutional changes (greater/new outreach activities delivered by schools) there were only a few examples given. There were fewer again in relation to schools-based changes to strategic objectives (for example changes to qualifications offered to enhance progression). This lack of institutional impact is unsurprising since effecting institutional change was not, of course, an aim of the scheme; moreover it takes time for such changes to become absorbed and enacted. It is therefore an unexpected and gratifying outcome to see a number of examples of where this had happened:

The school has now changed how it does things so that more pupils can benefit from outreach work; they have done this because they can see the value of outreach. (SPoC)

Some FECs had problems because they only had a small amount of money but we could employ a WP officer because we had enough money – which was the best thing we did.... She was so successful that we are keeping her on and she will be recruiting for the college. The college saw that there was a real benefit in having a WP person recruiting to HE in FE. (Network partner)

5.4 Schools and colleges: perceptions of impact

Of the 39 schools who gave responses, feedback was almost wholly positive (35 of the 39):

- Twelve schools cited greater awareness of routes and pathways in to HE,
- Ten schools cited additional access to information, particularly impartial information (six schools),
- Eight schools cited aspiration-raising activities,
- Five schools commented on the SPoC (*hard working; dedicated; professional*)

Other responses were the 'friendliness' of the NNCO staff, as well as the benefit from having had their time and resources (a further three schools):

I was not sure what to expect. To be honest many of the university outreach people that I work with seem to change regularly and I was probably expecting it to be similar/short lived, but it's been fantastic. There have been no problems at all. A really engaging and supportive team who enable school staff to engage with aspiration work.... Biggest strength has been the people who run NNCO. (School)

Only one school suggested there had been no value to their participation. Three stated that they either were not yet sure or were more tentative: *Well... it is another voice, which is always useful. It has encouraged us to use the website which may prove useful for some of our students.*

In terms of impact, 34 of the schools felt that the involvement with the NNCO scheme had led to direct impacts on their school or on their pupils.

- IAG given by NNCO staff (eleven schools), with a particular focus on impartiality,
- Provision of practical support and delivery of activities (ten schools),
- Signposting for further advice (seven schools),
- Getting students motivated and engagement mentioned (six schools),
- Working with young groups or with all groups (four schools).

Others mentioned making Oxbridge applications and focussed careers advice including on a one to one basis:

Information, impartial advice, allowing the pupils (and staff) to make informed choices in a non-pressurised environment, with the chance to have fun and feel positive about thinking about higher education. (School)

It is helping us have a more sustained focus on raising the aspirations of our students. As a secondary school with a grammar school down the road, we have to work especially hard to get students to set their sights high. Having some young fresh faces to work on this is a great help! (School)

Indeed the value of the scheme might be summed up by one school who stated that the network gave: *Energy, time, commitment, effort and resources.*

Only one school said there had been no impact; two felt unsure about the impact with a further two signalling that they felt it was still too soon to say.

5.5 Networks' perceptions: impact on partners

Every network stated, to a lesser or greater degree, that being part of the NNCO scheme has been of significant and widespread value to their network partners. In particular high value benefit has been perceived for the FECs, particularly those who historically have undertaken little outreach work:

The NNCO has enabled FE-HE providers to deliver outreach programmes. Since FE-HE providers don't have dedicated outreach teams, their focus has been on recruitment. By upskilling their staff to design programmes which have a broader focus on meeting widening participation aims, it has allowed them to offer schools activities which have previously never been supported by FE-HE providers. For schools this has helped teachers understand the range of HE providers in their local area, meaning they can offer their students stronger information and guidance. (Network lead)

I think we have made a huge difference to our partners. We have had access to money to buy them in to undertake everything from drama productions to employability workshops. We could never have done that without the funding. (SPoC final reflection)

Participation in the scheme has, the networks believe, energised the FECs, offered them new opportunities to collaborate and work in partnership, and given them the resources to deliver activities themselves. None of this would have been possible without the NNCO scheme:

In having a staff team and SPoC the [network] has been able to facilitate and support dialogue between disengaged partners to establish new collaborative relationships between HE/FE practitioners, local authorities and virtual schools. (SPoC)

Through the scheme and it's funding the network has been able to fund activity and research which there was no possibility of institutions having the resources to fund themselves previously, despite having the will. This has particularly been the case with the FECs. (Lead partner)

Moreover the networks also strongly consider that being part of the scheme had an impact on the partners. This is in relation to impact on learning – particularly in relation to how effective outreach works. In addition the networks consider that the NNCO scheme has had an impact for the FECs in terms of their ability to transfer learning to their own institutional practices. The consequence of the transfer of learning has been impact in terms of institutional change:

Through the network, a number of FE partners have also recognised the need for their school & college liaison/marketing teams to develop generic HE awareness-raising activities. They are considering membership of national forums such as NEON to support this, and outreach resources gathered from partners are now shared with all partners on the network Dropbox. (Lead partner)

HE in FE partners have increased, or commenced widening participation work through their own college as well as in collaboration with other partners to deliver or share good practice. Collaboration is becoming increasingly integrated into working norms and customs with impartial approaches to progression IAG activities becoming more prominent. (SPoC)

5.6 Network partners: perceptions of impact

Partners' perceptions of impact were almost wholly positive. The majority of those who responded to the survey were HE providers however; only three responses were from other types of organisation. We have included these responses but recognise that this might not be representative.

Most of the FEC partners were very positive about being part of the NNCO scheme, primarily because it has given them the chance to undertake outreach activity and work in partnership with other providers, in ways that were collaborative, not competitive, and impartial:

Just being able to go to one place and get all that you need about outreach and information for our young people has been incredible. We have never had this, rather we have had to scramble around looking for information; but beyond that there is also a single person we can go to for this support. (FE partner)

The biggest benefit from the NNCO has been being able to go into schools who had been very negative; they saw us as non-threatening; we were able to go into schools we have never been into before under the banner of the networks. Doing it under the banner of the NNCO made access to Academy 6th forms, well they suddenly let us in, we could do HE master classes – which is one of the biggest benefits. (FE partner)

About half of the FECs commented that the slowness of some of the networks in getting going had affected their involvement; nonetheless they all recognised that they had gained new insights in to delivering outreach activities which would enable them to do things in new ways in the future. Although most of the FECs felt that it was a little too early to have made systematic changes to practices or organisational processes some had already done so:

We could employ a WP officer because we had enough money – which was the best thing we did, they have been superb; they could really focus on events and every time she went to events she was doing so not recruiting for the college but for the network; she was so successful that we are keeping her on and she will be recruiting for the college. The college saw that there was a real benefit in having a WP person recruiting to HE in FE. (FE partner)

We have learned new ways of delivering outreach which has made a fundamental change to how the college thinks about its practice and I am sure that we will see benefits from these changes in to the future. (FE partner)

However, as this comment evidences the partners were not always clear what indicators might offer evidence of impact even though the networks were being asked to evaluate the outcome of their activities. This is most likely to have occurred where the relationship between the lead and other partners was not robust, leading to a lack of effective communication or engagement.

One of the problems is that when the NNCO was being set up the aims were so broad and there was no demand to evidence impact so we don't really know what the impact has been; we can't track the impact as such but if we ask questions in a few years, if they can remember coming to an event, that is what impact is. (FE partner)

Although this was most keenly felt by the FECs the HEI partners also commented on issues of communication, difficulties encountered in collaborating, and challenges in relation to management of the network (as described in the section on Effectiveness). Such comments aside, however, the feedback from HEI partners was almost wholly positive. Through the NNCO scheme the HEIs had been able to access a significant amount of funding which they were able to use to add to (albeit in different ways) the outreach activities they were already delivering, particularly the universities. This meant a significant level of additionality (time and resources) for the HEIs as well as enabling them to focus on specific target groups (such as higher performing schools) whilst the network focussed on, for example, schools in LPN areas):

It has been a win-win for us. It took time to get going and we had a lot of challenges to resolve in the early days in terms of good working practices, but once these were resolved it has been nothing but beneficial. (HEI partner)

As mentioned above we received little feedback from non-HEIs; however the feedback we did get (all from community organisations) was, again, wholly positive about involvement in the NNCO scheme – with comment focussed primarily on how much the organisations had enjoyed working alongside the universities in particular, as well as, of course, the fact that they had been the recipients of funding:

We have benefitted a lot. It has been good to see the university wanting to work with us as we have always felt we had a lot to offer. It would be good if that involvement could continue and it has been a good relationship. (Community organisation partner)

Partnerships between universities and the voluntary sector are hugely important. This has been a way to bring very different bodies together for the benefit of schools which can only be good. (Community organisation partner)

5.7 Summary and recommendations

This section of the evaluation was designed to determine what ‘users’ (networks, partners, schools and other stakeholders) consider the value of this scheme to be.

For the networks, the NNCO scheme is regarded as a significant success. The value has been perceived in relation to better co-ordinated activities, high levels of collaboration between multiple partners, new opportunities to engage with schools and undertake new activities, learning from other experts and, overall, enabling, on a sector-wide basis, more schools and thus pupils to have enhanced opportunities to understand how to more effectively progress to HE. The networks also perceive that their work has been of great impact across all levels:

Whilst previously there were subtle links between the partners and a willingness to work together, there was no co-ordinated or consistent relationship. By being part of the network, what has been achieved has been a more fundamental understanding of the provisions offered by each organisation, the sharing of updates and information about wider networks, events and speculations on changes to local and national education policies. (Lead partner)

The schools perceive the value of being involved with the NNCO in multiple ways (resources and opportunities, support and advice, time and effort) although strictly in terms of impact this has been limited to impact on learning. This is not to say that there have been no wider (or deeper) impacts which may evolve over time; rather that the longer term impact of being involved with the networks cannot yet be ascertained. The

networks, however, see this differently considering that the NNCO scheme has had somewhat wider impact with some cited organisational changes as an outcome.

The HEI partners and FECs perceive that the NNCO scheme has been of significant value. It has enabled them to deliver additional outreach activities and participate in collaborative events. However for the FECs this has been so where they have had sufficient funding to deliver their own activities or participate as an 'equal' partner in the network. They have perceived being part of the scheme as of less value where this has not been the case. In terms of impact the network leads/SPoCs consider that the NNCO scheme has changed the ways in which the FECs think and operate in relation to outreach whilst the FECs themselves have given a more mixed response.

It is clear, however, that both value and impact can be difficult concepts to measure and it would be helpful if collaborative outreach projects clarified both the concepts and how it is expected that these might be measured.

Recommendation 8

Funders of outreach schemes or initiatives (at a national, local or institutional level) should determine what 'value' might look like (for providers, partners and beneficiaries) from the outset and in ways that are measurable.

Recommendation 9

Funders of outreach schemes or initiatives should determine what levels of impact it would be expected that the scheme might attain (in relation to providers, partners and beneficiaries) from the outset in ways that are measurable.

Recommendation 10

Funders of outreach schemes or initiatives should support all stakeholders to develop an impact plan so they can determine key indicators of impact and map attainment of these over time.

6 Effectiveness of the networks

6.1 Effectiveness of the networks

Examples of effective practice are encapsulated in the preceding section on innovations, whilst innovation would not have been possible in the absence of effective practices. The actual notion of effectiveness was, however, conceptualised differently by the different sorts of networks. Those built on existing partnerships were more likely to describe effectiveness in relation to identifying cold spots and minimising overlap or duplication, as well as the coherent allocation of resources for outreach activity. Those established as new partnerships were more likely to describe effectiveness in relation to developing new partnerships, the allocation of funding between partners, and the delivery of collaborative events.

Indicators of effectiveness

Indicators of effectiveness as evidenced by the survey and case study data as well as the SPoCs final reflections, fall into three categories:

1. The enhanced sharing of resources, ideas and understandings,
2. A greater understanding of when collaboration and retained autonomy can best offer additionality,
3. The time, resource and space for experimentation enabling better support for specifically vulnerable groups.

The enhanced sharing of resources, ideas and understandings

Networks reported that they were keen to avoid duplication of activities, ensure the streamlining of contact with schools, and, where possible, share resources across and between partners:

We spent the first six months making sure we were clear about who was going to do what and where, a mapping activity, so we knew we had all bases covered and weren't going to be stepping on anyone's toes. (SPoC)

We clarified what we were going to do collaboratively and what we were not so that all the partners were clear. (Lead HEI)

The networks went beyond effective collaboration with their initial network partners, however, drawing in new partners as and when this would enable greater effectiveness:

The NNCO funding has enabled our partnership to expand from an existing partnership of three universities to all five universities in the region, increasing the scope and reach of activity [and] resulting in considerable cost savings and a consistent and quality assured level of information and advice on HE options. (SPoC final reflection)

Moreover, as the scheme evolved over time some networks were able to build enhanced links with other networks with similar profiles:

We have really benefited from working with two other networks. This has allowed us to share expertise and advice and also share experience of what has worked. And since the networks are similar in some ways this has made sure that we don't repeat mistakes and can take advantage of others' experience. (SPoC)

We consider our collaboration with the NNCO networks in the South to have been a great success. We have been able to share resources, which can be rebranded, link to useful network information and minimise duplication. Through meeting regularly, the networks are all able to highlight best practice and deliver larger scale initiatives such as our teacher/advisor webinar programme which comprised 13 topics that are now all available to view online. (SPoC final reflection)

Collaborative additionality

An important element in the evolution of the networks was the development of a blend of collaborative additionality and a shared understanding of where retained autonomy would be more productive. In other words, many of the networks, through a process of effective dialogue built up over time, reached a consensus as to when they would work collaboratively and when they would maintain autonomy in the delivery of outreach activities:

The [network] is particularly proud of its collaborative working arrangements. With their funding allocation all partners took responsibility for at least one collaborative 'themed' project. This ensured that all partners contributed to the success of the network. Each project had to benefit the wider network in one or more of the following ways: the project must include at least one other institution; if a pilot, all findings must be shared with all partners within the network; project outcomes should be made available to all schools and colleges within the [network] region. (SPoC final reflection)

What worked well for us was to be allowed to continue with the activities which we knew worked well for us and which we had developed over time, whilst also benefitting from participating in shared activities. (FEC partner)

Moreover, as many of the networks noted, the collaboration mandated by the NNCO programme enabled the piloting of new ideas and concepts:

The NNCO scheme has enabled the successful trial of a practical collaboration between 24 universities for the benefit of teachers, advisers and learners. During consultation, our target audience noted that they needed clear information and advice, in one central location, on the most competitive entry universities and courses. The NNCO scheme has enabled universities to work together to bring this information and advice.... This has led to a legacy of collaboration that each partner is committed to continuing. (SPoC final reflection)

One of the biggest successes has been the delivery of very large scale collaborative events. We could not have done anything like this on our own... it just meant we could scale everything up. (FEC partner)

Enabling greater reach and effectiveness

Such additionality was effective in allowing for greater reach, in terms of:

1. Geographical coverage, particularly the opportunity to work with schools in historically geographic cold spots, primarily in the rural and coastal areas which require greater resource investment than those schools closest to HEIs.

The vision of our project has been to support and enable flexible e-resources through embedding innovative and stimulating technologies in effective and thought provoking ways. Working with the [other network] teams we have reached schools across [large geographical region] through activities with years 8-11, student and parent workshops, careers events, interactive presentations and parents evening activities. By recruiting Student Ambassadors, we have been able to extend our reach and offer outreach activities across the region. (SPoC final reflection)

We have never been able to work with the schools at greatest distance from us, unless they were willing to travel a very long way to get to us. It was never cost effective for us to go to them. The NNCO funding has meant that we have been able to do exactly that, not only because we have had the money to do so but also because we have been able to collaborate with a network who overlaps with some of these schools so we haven't had to do everything. (SPoC)

2. The opportunity to work with new schools, wider age groups, and additional target cohorts. Of particular note, the streamlining of activities and the sharing of resources resulted in greater time- and cost-effectiveness. This meant that many networks were able to liberate funding to work with mature learners and parents, for example. Whilst HEFCE had noted from the outset that the networks could target groups other than those stated in their initial proposals if they had the resources to do so, one of the measures of the effectiveness of the networks is that this happened. For a number of networks effectiveness was also demonstrated by the identification of particularly vulnerable sub-cohorts that may have otherwise not received as much attention from a programme based on scalable outcomes:

As a Partnership we have also developed a number of strands of activity to support specific vulnerable groups and provided improved information to teachers and advisers. Again the aim is to add value to existing provision and work on new areas of activity where a regional coordinated approach would be most effective. The NNCO funding has provided a catalyst to extend our collaboration across the region and a good basis to continue to work together to support shared aims and objectives. (SPoC final reflection)

Our children [in a PRU] have never had these sorts of opportunities before and they have hugely benefitted from a scheme which has funded such activities. (School)

3. The development of new, particularly electronic, resources also meant that the networks were able to work in cost-effective ways as well as have greater impact on users:

The [network] developed some great free online resources for anyone looking for learning opportunities that will help them to improve not only their knowledge and skills but also their long term career prospects. (SPoC final reflection)

In summary, the evaluation found evidence of effectiveness in terms of delivery of:

- **Additionality** as a result of effective collaboration. For example in relation to the establishment of the SPoC and the website; on the delivery of specific projects and the establishment of collaborative delivery shared between FE and HE providers; and in many cases in the establishment of FE-led delivery.
- **Expansion of provision** and of resources to undertake projects and activities, as well as the requisite research to develop new developments. In general, network provision is reported to have delivered more intensive, and more widely-focused, additional work and established broader geographic coverage as a result of geographic mapping of cold and hot spots.
- **A better evidence base** for activities and evidence that the majority of what has been delivered has been genuinely collaborative and impartial, with no direct focus on recruitment.
- **Fruits of collaboration** in terms of the achievements of the networks. This is evidenced by the development of governance and management structures where they did not exist before, much of which can be carried forward into the NCOP scheme where partners are coterminous.
- **Stronger and more coordinated relationships** between HEIs, FECs and other new partners, better strategic direction at network level, and – due in part to the evaluative support provided by HEFCE and the Evaluation Team – better formal and informal links between academics and practitioners.
- **Greater engagement** with schools that had not previously participated in activities e.g. where they were not the focus of institutional outreach. Overall the profile of genuinely collaborative outreach work and many network partners has been raised.

The effectiveness of the NNCO scheme is manifested in the range of different collaborative models, outputs and outcomes as described above. This level of effectiveness led to clear and direct benefits for partners and schools.

Collaborative projects have come about due to discussions round the table by institutions who may not normally have come together in this fashion. The results of these will be far-reaching and hopefully will encourage further collaborative approaches to engaging with these young people. We have begun to compile a 'lessons learned' log for more effective working together in the future. (Lead partner)

However it is also important to note that the evaluation team also found evidence of significant challenges – faced by the SPoCs in particular. These challenges were extensively articulated in Survey 1. The majority of these were overcome by the end of the scheme, as evidenced in Survey 2. Nonetheless we report them here not only to help inform future collaborative activities or schemes, but also because overcoming these challenges is further evidence of the effectiveness of the networks and the wider NNCO scheme.

6.2 Types of challenge to effectiveness

Much of the literature on collaborative networks notes that, as well as benefits, there can be tensions and conflicts within such partnerships (Dhillon 2013; Cheminais 2008; Wiggans 2012) and it is unsurprising that these were also experienced during the implementation of the complex, large-scale, time-limited NNCO scheme. The challenges described focus around three overarching and interconnected key issues: the time

limitation; differential funding (and its differential impact on institutional behaviours); and the absence of a culture of collaboration between institutions.

1. Timing and issues related to being a new network

For most respondents the short-term nature of NNCO funding represented a challenge to the successful establishment of collaborative networks, and as we noted in the interim report this was not an issue that only affected entirely new partnerships:

There have been many challenges, particularly with institutions where partnerships were already established prior to NNCO and were already working together as part of Access Agreement work; it has been hard to break into these activities as an outside institution.... (Partner HEI)

There were other aspects to the time-scale that impacted on networks' ability achieve meaningful change. One of these was the time-scales for appointing key staff who could then lead and direct change. This was evidenced in relation to SPoCs, who had the critical role of co-ordinating activities, recruiting other support staff, developing website resources and building databases of school contacts. In addition the SPoCs often had the role of attempting to bring together usually more senior colleagues within the host institution and those located at partner institutions. In some cases, difficulties establishing a NNCO Lead also slowed progress in the first year of operation. One network partner noted that:

Much of the initial planning was led by the HEI partners or via 1:1 meetings with the SPoC. This, I feel, contributed to an overly lengthy period whereby there were funds in place but without an NNCO programme Lead to co-ordinate and drive forward further planning and delivery. Our NNCO Lead was only in post with 12-14 months left of programme. Having a programme lead in place or recruited more swiftly would have cultivated a much stronger atmosphere to coordinate the initial phases of the NNCO programme. (Partner HEI)

This was compounded by issues of staffing for some FEC partners who found that *It proved difficult for us to use our funds without creating unworkable extra workload, whereas I think a larger HEI can filter down this workload among a wider team* (Partner FEC). This is explored more fully below in relation to the effect of funding allocations.

A second issue relating to timescale was felt to be the lack of guidance about what networks could or should do (this was a concern noted in our regional workshops in the summer of 2015 and highlighted in the interim report of January 2016). This is understandable given the open brief that networks were given which encouraged pluralism and flexibility sensitive to local contexts, and HEFCE did offer guidance via the Jiscmail forum and sector-wide events. However, some networks felt that a lack of knowledge of what (particularly) former Aimhigher/LLN partnerships around the country had been doing meant that a lot of best practice in relation to processes and activities was not shared with those networks that were 'starting from scratch'. This may be seen as a critique of strategic leadership among the networks; they were not competing against each other and could perhaps have been more proactive in developing inter-network collaboration from the outset, although this did arise over time, particularly across some regions.

Work with schools was also potentially hampered by the lack of continuity of partnership working; again in the short term there was little opportunity to develop new relationships with schools that already had strong links with individual institutions. In this sense, the networks often contained institutions that had in recent years been either competing with each other in the same schools, or had no tradition of working with certain schools. Given the short timescale building effective collaboration was challenging and there is evidence from that the direct impact of the networks on some schools was, consequently, limited.

Several networks also mentioned the effect of the announcement of the NCOP programme on their ability to establish a coherent focus. One partner respondent noted that:

There was a long gap in management, and then when a new manager was appointed, the focus shifted nearly entirely to bidding for – and then planning for – NCOP. This took away a huge amount of the focus from NNCO, and meant that I spent more time [on that]. (Partner HEI)

This had a dual impact on some networks: because NCOP consortia do not in many cases completely map onto NNCOs, the shift in focus and effort was compounded by the need to establish new working relationships. For example, while Leicestershire and Northamptonshire were served by separately led NNCOs they are combined for NCOP purposes. So while there are undeniable benefits from the continuity of collaborative funding at the network level, this is far from universal.

2 Low leverage of NNCO funding on institutional priorities

The differences in the distributed funding allocations not only shaped the nature of what was offered but also the level of institutional buy-in where the resource was limited. For some smaller institutions (e.g. partner FECs) the resource was not substantial enough to change management priorities, especially where such changes would involve participating in network-wide outreach more likely to benefit other kinds of institutions:

The network would have been more effective if each partner had the same level of investment. In my view, the small amount of funding FE colleges received resulted in a low level of commitment. This seemed to be the situation in our network. (Partner HEI)

Of equal importance, for some, was the size of allocations being insufficient for the required additional staff recruitment and this was seen to be the cause of unequal commitment to the networks from smaller HEI and FEC partners. Many respondents noted that with institutions each receiving their own allocation from HEFCE it was more difficult for the network management board/steering group to direct activity centrally.

3 Power imbalances within the networks

While there is a clear effect of distributed funding allocations on the ability of some institutions to fully participate in or share the benefits of network membership, there were other power imbalances relating to institutional size and differential interests, as noted above. A true separation of the SPoC from the lead institution may have obviated this perceived problem.

Differential interests that marginalised the needs of smaller participants in a network also led to sub-optimal coverage of opportunities, including some degree of poor engagement with isolated schools:

Whilst attempting, for several months, to collaborate on a shared event across three partner colleges, it has been clear that this proposal was more of a priority for us than the other two colleges... With small marketing teams in each of the colleges' based in the south of the county, it is extremely challenging to do anything in addition to that which is already factored into the annual plan. Schools have been overwhelmingly poor in engaging with the network and this has been extremely disappointing for everyone involved. (Partner FEC)

Such effects of perceived power imbalances, whether derived from the allocation of funding or from genuinely differing outreach priorities or from both, were very prevalent among FE respondents. Some smaller HEIs in networks with several HEIs also found the effectiveness of the network restricted in this way.

4. Residual problems of inter-institution culture of competition

As noted in Section 3 (above) whilst many localised collaborations were in place across the sector, the NNCO scheme was launched in the context of a culture of competition between institutions for student numbers. The presence of HEFCE-funding and the attendant scrutiny of institutional behaviours (such as HEFCE monitoring and Office for Fair Access access agreement reporting) has unsurprisingly led to senior managers taking a high level of interest in these shared activities. Even where networks were not new, often the terms of reference (i.e. scope and range of outreach activities) or membership were different to some degree. In this context, even some of the many gains (e.g. better engagement with a wider range of schools) have had to be hard-won due to residual competitive behaviour from partners: *It has been difficult to be open and transparent when working in a group with competing colleges* (Partner FEC). Other networks reported that HEIs continue to use their own means of communicating information about events to their partner schools and colleges in a way that is, apparently, more effective than the SPoC.

In some cases the lack of a shared set of aims across a diverse network contributed to a lack of a shared focus. Some partners have been more engaged in collaboration than others, perhaps due to the individual demands of each institution. For example, several network respondents noted that the Russell Group University in their partnerships was 'uninterested' in local WP outreach work, given their ability to select – rather than recruit – from a national pool of young people.

5. Clarity of mission and management of networks

There were several comments about the management practices of networks which were perceived (largely by the SPoCs, but to a lesser extent also by partners) as impacting on effectiveness. This included the length of time it took to determine and implement effective management and operational ways of working, as well as issues rooted in differential funding allocations and/or power imbalances within networks which were exhibited as conflicting network aims, and which needed resolution in order to determine the balance of types and scale of activity that the network should offer. More strategically there was evidence that in some networks the operational groups (containing WP and Outreach practitioners based in partner institutions) were bypassed by the management groups and in such cases this had a demotivating effect:

Personally, I have felt that my role has had little impact on the activity that was developed and delivered via the NNCO and that better work could have been undertaken if proper collaboration between the HEIs via the Operational Steering Group had been allowed to take place. (Partner HEI)

Moreover, a number of SPoCs recommended a more targeted approach to collaborative outreach as despite efforts to minimise overlap and duplication a level of such activity remained. At the school level in particular this overlap worked against the principle of the NNCO scheme, that it identify and deliver additionality:

Giving partnerships more autonomy about how they work based on existing relationships would have been useful. I'm not convinced that lots of partnerships around the country creating lots of similar resources/websites signposting to the same resource was effective, it would have been better to pool resources to create something more thorough centrally. (SPoC)

[The NNCO programme could have had] a clearer vision from the beginning and timeframes and better collaborative work/vision nationally. There was a lot of repetition across the networks (i.e. with designing very similar web pages) and time would have been better developing national resources that we could have all contributed to, or had regional working parties etc. (SPoC)

The prevalence of such comments suggests that, while HEFCE did issue guidance alongside the programme-level aims and objectives that encouraged networks to develop

aims and objectives in response to the local context, it was perhaps somewhat unrealistic to expect these to develop un-husbanded in such a short timescale, given the perceived need for networks to demonstrate impact.

6.3 Models of effectiveness

Using Booth's model of partnership working (Booth 2007 in Wiggans 2012) as an evaluative guide it is clear that the networks largely adopted federalist structures with a combination of central and devolved functions, within which authority was allocated in accordance with the agreed division of functions. These networks were generally effective. However, the precise relationship between institutions responsible for these functions was often fluid and occasionally dysfunctional.

The notion of 'co-opetition' in which institutional autonomy was maintained within a structure that combined the strengths of partners in order to pursue goals that met both institutional and shared objectives was also evident. Again, however, this manifested at times in a sense of tension between shared aims and institutional struggles to retain autonomy where those aims were not relevant to some (smaller) partners. Overall, however, and not always by direct design, partners made different contributions to the networks and to specific projects. This combination of shared and own efforts produced much higher quality outputs than would otherwise have been possible. In this sense the creative tension inherent in the notion of 'co-opetition' often led to more effective outcomes than would have been produced without collaboration.

We also found much evidence of 'sharing platforms', in which the product was more important than the partnership. Here partners combined some elements of their own activities to build a bigger picture while maintaining the distinctiveness of individual providers and the development of networked organisations. These were manifested when individual organisations came together to share ideas, discuss approaches and sometimes, but not always, to act together. Evidence of sharing and pooling research data, as outlined above, produced additional value and enhanced the effectiveness of the networks.

Finally, it is not the existence or the creation of networks per se that matters, however, but how they function and what they actually do (Fullan and Rincon-Gallardo 2016). Networks consist of people and organisations and the direct and indirect connections that exist among them; collaboration is only present when they work together voluntarily with a shared purpose, where all partners have something to gain from involvement. Networks can work well and produce additionality even without collaboration. However, where networks have collaborated there is evidence of greater effectiveness, reflecting Fullan and Rincon-Gallardo's model of collaboration in which it:

- Deepens the understanding and engagement of partners,
- Enhances the professional capital of outreach practitioners to continuously improve design and delivery of programmes,
- Becomes a force of improvement in the whole system.

Across our evaluation we see clear evidence of all three outcomes. This has worked most effectively and is most evident where strong and effective collaboration is in place.

6.4 Summary and recommendations

Despite some of the challenges highlighted in this section, overall the networks not only clearly function as effective networked organisations in action but they also manage to overcome most of these challenges.

To this extent therefore the NNCO scheme can again be deemed to have achieved Goal 1 of creating "networks of universities, colleges and other partners to deliver outreach in their sphere of operation".

However, as our evidence shows, a number of partners indicated that they had been disadvantaged against, for both structural and financial reasons. More equitable funding would have allowed the partners to play a more equitable role and have obviated some of the tensions between different partners. Moreover significant effort may be necessary to change 'hearts and minds' across large and largely autonomous institutions, where the visibility of HEFCE directives can quickly be obscured by the interplay of competing messages and agendas. In addition, centralised funding of networks and a clearer overall direction from HEFCE may have avoided the duplication of research and production of similar resources.

Recommendation 11

For national (or local) collaborative outreach programmes consideration should be given to more equitable funding allocation across all partners, or for such funding being centralised.

Recommendation 12

Funders of outreach schemes or initiatives should collate and offer models of effective collaboration.

7 Sustainability

7.1 Introduction

Sustainability can be evidenced in terms of:

- Structures and working relationships, and the extent to which these will be continued after the funding period,
- The continuation and/or re-usability of resources, such as websites and the outcomes of research funded through network funding.

In relation to structures and relationships, the vast majority of networks will be continuing as NCOPs (only two of the 38 networks that responded to our 2016 survey said they were not involved in NCOPs); in other cases institutions intend to work with some of their NNCO partners in NCOPs with a broader or refocused network of institutions. In these cases despite the context change, the habit of working collaboratively will be a transferable benefit from the NNCO programme (of course, almost half of the funded networks (17) were pre-existing networks that might naturally persist post-NNCO funding even in the absence of NCOP). In some areas with little NCOP funding (e.g. London) networks will continue and make ongoing use of the resources developed either as part of an NCOP network or otherwise:

...our aim was to work with those cold spot schools and to bring them into the partnership on a subscription basis.... We will continue to work with these schools as subscribers where feasible. (SPoC)

The prospects are good and the lead institution and partners have all agreed that it should continue in some capacity moving forward to NCOP. The website will continue to provide a central point of information but I am unsure what other elements will be used. (SPoC)

Sustaining a SPoC enquiry and referral service and website outreach search tool forms part of our planned NCOP programme, in order to ensure alignment and complementarity between NCOP and wider outreach activity, as per HEFCE guidance. (SPoC)

We are part of an NCOP bid though the university are treating this separately and not involving the same partners or strategic leads. (SPoC)

In relation to resources, 24 networks stated (in Survey 2) that they had some plans for sustaining their work. Sustainability of websites and online resources was the most common element (mentioned by almost all networks) followed by all or some NNCO developed activities (20 networks proposed to continue these). Others noted that management structures and partnerships developed would be continued, either as part of the NCOP or alongside given the narrow range of NCOP activities and target groups. Various types of activities would be sustained:

I anticipate that the successful and well received multi-campus visits and HE conferences will continue as these have been well attended, are fairly easy to organise and support participating schools with their IAG requirements. It is also anticipated that the FE colleges will sustain some of the projects which they have delivered using the funds which were ring-fenced via [the NNCO]. (SPoC)

It is intended that the website will remain but will go through transition to become a tool for NCOP. Some of our projects may well leave some legacy. This will become clearer as we move forwards. (Lead)

The SPoC is making recommendations for 2016-17 outreach delivery, some of which has been written into access agreements. Work with the PRU will continue, as well as extending our [work] to other schools, and the project has had a sustainable outcome with the development of a free teaching resource. The website and its key functions will all continue past NNCO regardless of NCOP bid. (SPoC)

7.2 Summary and recommendations

This aspect of the evaluation set out to explore what features of the networks were likely to be sustained beyond 2015-16 and what may be needed to secure this activity. In general the NNCO programme can be seen to have successfully stimulated a high degree of activity and working practices (including relationships) that are envisaged as being sustainable, albeit often in the context of NCOP funding and the fact that half of the 34 regional networks were pre-existing and therefore not dependent on HEFCE funding for their existence. Moreover in advance of the NCOP programme being announced most networks were not sure what sort of legacy there may be and it would be helpful to ensure that sustainability plans are more readily and systematically developed, post-NCOP.

One of the intentions of the overall NNCO scheme, however, was that the networks would draw in other funding sources, e.g. from LEPs or the European Social Fund. Across all surveys, however, there was a dearth of evidence that this had happened (either that initiatives had been implemented or that they had been successful). In September 2015 HEFCE funded New College Durham (see 10.2) to develop a project to stimulate involvement from the still nascent LEPs. The outcome of this project may offer a model of how other collaborative outreach projects may develop similar successes.

7.2.1 Recommendation 13

All new collaborative outreach programmes should develop sustainability plans from the outset.

7.2.2 Recommendation 14

HEFCE should continue to support the development of relationships between LEPs and other potential regional stakeholders to enable the networks to enhance the likelihood of their sustainability over time.

8 Evaluation support

In order to fulfil the second aim of the project (namely 'to work with the networks to help to embed and share good practice in effective evaluation methodologies relating to

outreach activities') between March 2015 and December 2016 evaluation support was offered by the research team to the leads and SPoCs of all networks as an integral part of the project. The evaluation team worked iteratively with networks to assist them in building robust evaluation methods to evaluate their own activity.

In the first survey the networks were asked to indicate what forms of support would be helpful from either HEFCE or the evaluation team. Thirty-one networks answered this question and responses are detailed in Table 5

Table 5: Evaluation support indicated as needed/desired by the networks

| Question | No. of responses |
|---|------------------|
| Advice on evaluation frameworks and different methodological approaches | 25 |
| Examples of evaluation tools, banks of generic questions, etc. | 21 |
| Advice on developing data generation tools | 22 |
| Guidance on appropriate methods of data gathering (when to use surveys, when to use interviews or focus groups, etc.) | 25 |
| Guidance on making sense of the data | 22 |
| An opportunity to talk through emerging issues or challenges | 25 |

The results from the survey, as well as feedback from the workshops in 2015, were used to identify support needs. Support was then offered through:

- One-to-one researcher support via email and/or telephone,
- Project website with documents related to evaluation methodologies and links to other relevant sites (e.g. the Evaluation Capacity Building 'Toolkit') etc.,
- Online forum for: exchange of information; peer support and learning including sharing approaches, ideas, issues etc.; and to answer queries. This was subsequently superseded by use of the Jiscmail which served the NNCO community more effectively.

The evaluation support activities included providing information about guidance materials (including those available on the evaluation team website) reviewing strategic/evaluation frameworks; providing support in the development of research activities and instruments – including ongoing review and revision of questions for activities such as focus groups and interviews; and supporting the development of new research proposals going out for tender.

In Survey 2 – sent to all networks – 23 networks stated that they had either sought support or indicated that they would be in contact with the evaluation team to discuss their support needs prior to the end of the NNCO scheme:

Yes, I have used both the NNCO evaluation team and the resources they've posted on the jisc group. I regularly use the resources recommended by the team – especially during activity planning in constructing evaluation plans. I have also used the expertise of the evaluation team in putting together a bid through HEFCE for a specific NNCO project funding whereby I was asked to put together an evaluation plan together for the project proposal. (Network SPoC)

With the support and guidance from the NNCO evaluation team, the [network] NNCO has developed a series of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) that evaluate the reach of the [network] website, engagement via social media and newsletter subscriptions, activity enquiries, external engagement e.g. presentations and stands

at meetings and conferences, engagement from different stakeholder groups uploading targeted activities and new resources developed. (Network SPoC)

At times this support has been quite extensive and has included giving advice on how to develop an evaluation framework, helping write evaluation hypotheses, helping develop the invitation to tender for a network's evaluation and being invited to contribute to the selection process, and helping to write the call for tenders for new pieces of research. Several networks also asked for and received quite extensive advice on draft outreach frameworks.

Engagement with the evaluation team was, however, patchy with some of those seeking support doing so on a more minimal basis:

[Network] has drawn minimally on the NNCO evaluation team, but has asked questions when needed. The evaluation specialist has spoken with the NNCO evaluation point of contact to confirm their approach is correct. [Our own] evaluation team were asked to present at the annual HEFCE conference. (Network SPoC)

In addition, 15 networks did not make use of the evaluation team, some because they felt it was not needed:

We have not drawn on the NNCO evaluation team. [Network] is a well-established network and we do not feel this support is necessary. While we appreciate that the support is there, we are able to undertake this evaluation independently. (Network SPoC)

We did not use the NNCO evaluation team as we replicated the evaluation framework that was already embedded within the Access and Outreach Team and the University of [city]. (Network SPoC)

Others commissioned external evaluation (as well as or instead of using the evaluation team):

We felt it appropriate that the funded projects are first evaluated by those coordinating them. The overall network evaluation will then draw together findings from the collated evaluations in the autumn. We may seek support from the NNCO evaluation team at that point. (Network lead)

We have developed the above evaluation framework over time with the support of the university's WP and Outreach specialists, and now seek input from the NNCOs evaluation team. (Network lead)

The remaining group drew from their own pre-existing resources such as support and evaluation expertise at their own institutions.

We have not used the NNCO evaluation team to support our evaluation. Given that the steer from HEFCE was largely granting the autonomy over spend and moulding the project, we felt that within the central team of three, we were better placed to evaluate what we saw as our main targets: to engage with as many young people as possible, to change attitudes through quality provision and to enact a catch-all policy, but with the ethos of the network being driven by WP principles and light touch targeting in light of that. (Network SPoC)

As part of the second survey the networks (all SPoCs and the case study network leads) were also asked:

- What aspects of provision have you evaluated?
- Have you drawn on the NNCO evaluation team to support your evaluation? If yes, in what ways? And, if no, why not?

The necessity of a network standard evaluation framework

The majority of networks indicated in the second survey that they evaluated their provision by means of website engagement (via Google Analytics), social media traffic, attendance to individual institutional events and measuring attitudinal change by surveys of outreach activities and projects. The issue with much of this evaluative activity was the lack of standardisation and a level of confusion as to what comprises evaluation and how this is different from monitoring.

One of the key concerns expressed by those networks who attended the workshops in 2015 was having an encompassing, standardised evaluation framework within each network. This was working well in some areas.

From the start of the scheme we have evaluated every piece of activity. This has been through the use of one standard evaluation form based around attitudinal questions. The use of a standard form has enabled us to collect evaluation statistics for the project as a whole, while also seeing how well individual sessions have been received. (Network SPoC)

However, as discussed in the 2015 and 2016 workshops, there were on-going issues in relation to partnership working amidst competition between institutions for prospective students. In order to establish a standardised evaluation framework within a network, partnership working needs to be cultivated in which evaluation tools and outreach data are shared. From the evidence in Survey 2 it is promising, therefore, to see that several networks have indeed made a commitment to share data:

An evaluation form has been created for both students/pupils and teachers/advisers and [network] partners have agreed to use this form too at [network]-funded activities. (Network SPoC)

8.1 Summary and recommendations

Whilst the evaluation team offered support to all 38 networks, only 23 made use of the team. The capacity of the networks to evaluate themselves was variable, which in part accounts for why they made variable use of the evaluation team. It is clear however that a significant number of networks needed to seek external evaluation not only for reasons of impartiality/good practice but because they did not feel sufficiently skilled to do this themselves. Moreover as conversations at our 2015 workshops in particular evidenced, there remained a level of confusion as to exactly what the networks were being asked to evaluate, as opposed to monitor.

In undertaking their subsequent evaluations, however, a range of data collection and evaluation tools have been developed which have the potential to be of significant benefit not just to the NCOP networks but more broadly, if deposited in an open access on-line repository. In recognition of such a need, HEFCE have developed an accessible, online repository of good practice as well guidance and toolkits for WP practitioners to draw upon. There remains some doubt as to what can be shared (without copyright) however, which warrants clarification, and there is also a need for clarity over how such a repository will be sustained and regularly updated when HEFCE is merged with the Office for Fair Access to become the Office for Students (OfS).

Recommendation 15

Those funding outreach programmes should establish clearer guidance as to what should be measured, what hypotheses might be tested and what indicators of success might look like.

9 References

- Biddle M. (2015) *Defining innovation*. Innovate UK blog. Available at <https://innovateuk.blog.gov.uk/2015/10/26/defining-innovation/>
- BIS (2014) *National strategy for access and student success in higher education*. HEFCE and OFFA, Bristol, April 2014
- HEFCE (2014) *Guidance for National Networks for Collaborative Outreach* at <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/year/2014/cl.202014/> Accessed 5 October 2015
- HEFCE (2016) *National networks for collaborative outreach*. Website page available at <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/sas/nngo/>
- HEFCE (nd) *Evaluation Capacity Building ECB 'Toolkit'*. Available at <http://www.lancaster.ac.uk/fass/events/capacitybuilding/toolkit/>
- OFFA/HEFCE (2014) *National strategy for access and student success in higher education*. Published by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills. Available at https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/299689/bis-14-516-national-strategy-for-access-and-student-success.pdf
- Office for Fair Access (OFFA) (2014) *How to Produce an Access Agreement for 2015-16*. Bristol. Published by the Office for Fair Access. Available from: www.offa.org.uk/guidance-notes/how-to-produce-an-accessagreement-for-2015-16/
- Rincón-Gallardo, S. and Fullan, M. (2016) *Essential features of effective networks in education*. Journal of Professional Capital and Community, Vol. 1 Iss 1 pp. 5 - 22
- Wiggans, J. (2012) *Collaboration and partnership working in a competitive environment. A literature synthesis of the Widening Access Student Retention and Success National Programmes Archive*. [online]. York: Higher Education Academy. Available from: http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/detail/WP_syntheses/Wiggans

10 Appendices

10.1 The networks

1. AccessHE; Lead institution: London Higher c/o University of London
2. Aimhigher London South; Lead institution: Kingston University
3. Aimhigher West Midlands; Lead institution: University of Birmingham
4. Aspire Northamptonshire; Lead institution: University of Northampton
5. Bedfordshire and Milton Keynes Network for collaborative outreach; Lead institution: University of Bedfordshire
6. Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Collaborative Outreach Network; Lead institution: Anglia Ruskin University
7. Cumbria Collaborative Outreach Network; Lead institution: University of Cumbria
8. Devon Collaborative Outreach Network; Lead institution: Plymouth University
9. Essex Collaborative Outreach Network; Lead institution: University of Essex
10. Explore University; Lead institution: University of Wolverhampton
11. Federation of Regional Colleges for Engagement (FORCE); Lead institution: University of Hull
12. Gloucestershire Reaching Out with Schools (GROWS); Lead institution: University of Gloucestershire
13. Greater Manchester Higher; Lead institution: Manchester Metropolitan University
14. HEART; Lead institution: University of Leeds

15. Herts AHEAD; Lead institution: University of Hertfordshire
16. Higher Education Outreach Network (HEON); Lead institution: University of Surrey
17. Higher Education Progression Partnership and Collaborative Outreach (HEPP&CO); Lead institution: Sheffield Hallam University
18. Higher Horizons; Lead institution: Keele University
19. Higher York; Lead institution: York St John University
20. Kent and Medway Collaborative Network; Lead institution: Canterbury Christ Church University
21. Lancashire Collaborative Outreach Network; Lead institution: University of Central Lancashire (UCLAN)
22. Lincolnshire Outreach Network; Lead institution: University of Lincoln
23. Linking London; Lead institution: Birkbeck University
24. Merseyside Network for Collaborative Outreach; Lead institution: University of Liverpool
25. Next Steps Cornwall; Lead institution: Falmouth University
26. North East Midlands Collaborative Outreach Network; Lead institution: University of Derby
27. North East Raising Aspiration Partnership; Lead institution: Newcastle University
28. REACH; Lead institution: University of Leicester
29. Southern Universities Network; Lead institution: University of Southampton
30. Study Higher; Lead institution: Oxford Brookes University
31. Suffolk and Norfolk Collaborative Network; Lead institution: The University of Suffolk
32. Sussex Learning Network; Lead institution: University of Brighton
33. Think Higher Coventry and Warwickshire; Lead institution: University of Warwick
34. Western Outreach Network; Lead institution: University of Bath

The national networks

35. The National Network for the Education of Care Leavers
36. The Open University NNCO
37. HE in London
38. Oxford and Cambridge Collaborative Network

10.2 The NNCO projects

January 2015 (projects 1)

1. **Progression to Russell Group institutions** Twenty-four leading universities worked together with schools and colleges to develop continuing professional development resources for teachers and advisors who support learners making their Key Stage 4, Key Stage 5 and university choices.
2. **Vocational progression in the North East** A group of nine FECs, led by New College Durham and involving the Association of Colleges North East, worked together to increase awareness, understanding and responsiveness in relation to professional, technical and vocational qualification progression routes at Level 4 and above.
3. **Progression into the professions in Greater London** The University of Westminster Collaborative Outreach Partnership ran an employer-led engagement programme in the greater London area. The partnership provided information, advice and guidance to students at schools and colleges in the form of 'real life' advice from employers and professional bodies.

Enabling innovative outreach in rural, coastal and urban settings:

4. **Anglia Ruskin University, Cambridgeshire and Essex Networks** The Mobilising the Marginalised Middle (3M) project worked to build confidence and self-efficacy through the medium of digital skills in order to assist a cohort of children to aspire to engage with studies through a more exciting and innovative medium; one they have at their fingertips: their smartphone device.
5. **Plymouth University, Devon Network** The pilot project trialled and tested the use of innovative digital technologies, including social media, in rural, coastal and urban areas which align with the HEFCE Devon Network for collaborative provision.
6. **Falmouth University, Universities Cornwall Network** Through a multi-channel, targeted social media campaign, Falmouth University worked with the HEFCE Devon Network to address issues and barriers into HE. The campaign focused on parents (of under 19s) who did not go on to HE; teachers; and parents of disabled learners.
7. **Arts University Bournemouth with the University of Bath, Southern Universities Network and Western Outreach Network** This project aimed to address the issues of HE progression in rural areas through outreach work with young people living in rural communities to explore aspirations and post-16 options.
8. **University of Bedfordshire, Bedfordshire and Milton Keynes Network and Sport England** The aim of this project was to address multiple and layered disadvantages experienced by students with disabilities in the main urban areas of the network, Bedford, Luton and Milton Keynes, using sport as a medium for engagement.
9. **University of Suffolk, Suffolk and Norfolk Network and Suffolk County Council** This pilot project engaged a targeted group of parents of children aged 12-15 and initially focused on Ipswich, which has a HE participation rate of around half the national average. The project used a peer approach using social media to enable parents of students already engaged in HE to share their experience with those who may not have previously considered this as an option.
10. **Canterbury Christ Church University, Kent and Medway Collaborative Network and The Sussex Learning Network, The University of Portsmouth and The Brightside Trust** This pilot project built upon institutional expertise in this area and used The Brightside Trust as a delivery partner. The project developed, tested, evaluated and made targeted online mentoring available for young people at four particular points of transition (years 9, 10, 12 and 13).
11. **University of Hull, University of Hull Federation of Regional Colleges for Engagement, in partnership with Higher York, and Lincolnshire Outreach Network** This pilot project involved working with 10 schools in 8 towns: Whitby, Scarborough, Filey, Bridlington, Withernsea, Cleethorpes, Skegness and Boston, covering a stretch of 183 miles of coastline. These towns have particular shared issues with: significant pockets of low aspiration; high unemployment; high levels of deprivation; and geographical remoteness.

September 2015 (projects 2)

1. **REACH Partnership – Greater Manchester Higher, Kent and Medway Collaborative Network, Merseyside Network for Collaborative Outreach, National Education Opportunities Network** GCSE Attainment: Examining the gaps (understanding) why certain schools and colleges, despite having large numbers of disadvantaged learners, have a higher level of participation in HE than predicted by their GCSE attainment. Investigating school culture (investigating school culture and the attitudes of governors, teachers and students. Developing interventions (trialled with schools and colleges that have a lower than expected level of participation in HE).

2. **Explore University – Universities of Wolverhampton, Harper-Adams, Keele and Staffordshire, and Telford College of Arts and Technology** Breaking Through the GCSE Barrier: This project looked at schools that have a higher number of learners progressing to HE than would be predicted by GCSE achievement rates.
3. **University of London** Prepare to Succeed: Better student outcomes for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) Learners in London: looked at how to improve outcomes for BAME students in HE and beyond.
4. **Oxford Brookes** HE-related IAG for Pakistani and Bangladeshi girls: The project aimed to explore the HE IAG needs of Bangladeshi and Pakistani girls for greater success in their HE courses.
5. **New College Durham** Action-Oriented Partnerships embedding NNCOs within LEP Plans: The project extended the 'Vocational progression in the North East' project, in particular the focus on improving the provision of HE skills to the needs of employers.
6. **University of Leeds** Mapping the Local Skills Plans Landscape and Embedding the NNCO: This project built on the success of the HEART NNCO to increase the proportion of the workforce with higher level qualifications and skills.
7. **Sheffield Hallam University** Developing cohesive skills and higher or degree apprenticeship routes for construction and engineering employers in the Sheffield City Region. This project aims to provide employers within the Sheffield City Region (SCR) with much needed information on how to develop their workforce through apprenticeships.

10.3 Typology of the networks

| Geographical location | Type of lead HEI | Types of HEFCE-funded partners | Types of other partners | Number of schools/colleges listed | New network? | Specific groups | Specific schools |
|-----------------------|------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------------|
| London/South East | N/A | HEIs and FECs | Private HEIs | 500+ | Based on existing partnership | No specific focus | No specific focus |
| London/South East | Alliance | HEIs and FECs | VCOs, Other | 200-500 | Mixture of both | Multiple foci | Mixed including special schools |
| Midlands | Russell Group | HEIs and FECs | VCOs, Other | 500+ | Based on existing partnership | Multiple foci | Mixed including special schools |
| Midlands | Non aligned | HEIs and FECs | LA, VCOs | 50 or less | New | Gifted and talented | No specific focus |
| Midlands | Million+ | HEIs and FECs | LEP, LA, Other | 50-100 | New | Multiple foci | Multiple foci |
| Midlands | Million+ | HEIs and FECs | FECs | 50 or less | New | No specific focus | Multiple foci |
| South West | Non aligned | FECs | LEP, Other | 50 or less | Based on existing partnership | Geographical cold-spots | Multiple foci |

| | | | | | | | |
|------------|------------------|---------------|----------------|------------|-------------------------------|---|-------------------------|
| Midlands | Russell Group | HEIs and FECs | LEP, LA | 50-100 | Based on existing partnership | No specific focus | No specific focus |
| North West | Million+ | HEIs and FECs | None listed | 50-100 | Mixture of both | LAC | No specific focus |
| South West | Alliance | HEIs and FECs | None listed | 50-100 | New | underrepresentation in disciplines and subjects | 16-18 including FE |
| South East | Former 1994 | HEIs and FECs | LA | 50-100 | New | No specific focus | Multiple foci |
| Midlands | Non aligned | HEIs | LEP, LA, Other | 100-200 | Based on existing partnership | No specific focus | No specific focus |
| South West | Cathedrals group | HEIs and FECs | None listed | 50 or less | New | Socio-economic | 11 to 16 |
| North West | Alliance | HEIs and FECs | FECs | 100-200 | Based on existing partnership | Multiple foci | 11 to 16 |
| North West | Russell group | HEIs and FECs | VCOs, Other | 100-200 | New | LAC | 11 to 16 |
| North East | Russell group | FECs | None listed | 100-200 | Based on existing partnership | LAC | Geographical cold-spots |

| | | | | | | | |
|-------------------|------------------|---------------|-------------|------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------|
| South East | Alliance | HEIs and FECs | LEP, LA | 50-100 | New | Key WP schools | Key WP schools |
| South East | Non aligned | HEIs and FECs | None listed | 100-200 | New | No specific focus | Multiple foci |
| North East | Alliance | HEIs and FECs | LA | 100-200 | Based on existing partnership | Adult learners | No specific focus |
| North East | Cathedrals group | HEIs and FECs | LA, VCOs | 50-100 | Based on existing partnership | Multiple foci | Multiple foci |
| South East | Million+ | HEIs and FECs | LA | 100-200 | Based on existing partnership | Socio-economic | Multiple foci |
| North West | Non aligned | HEIs and FECs | None listed | 100-200 | New | Multiple foci | Multiple foci |
| London/South East | Former 1994 | HEIs and FECs | None listed | 50 or less | Based on existing partnership | FE | 16-18 including FE |
| North East | Alliance | HEIs and FECs | None listed | 50-100 | New | Geographical cold-spots | Multiple foci |
| North West | Non aligned | HEIs and FECs | None listed | Unknown | New | Multiple foci | Multiple foci |

| | | | | | | | |
|-------------------|---------------|---------------|-------------|------------|-------------------------------|--|--------------------|
| London/South East | N/A | N/A | None listed | Unknown/NA | Based on existing partnership | No specific focus | No specific focus |
| North East | Russell group | HEIs | None listed | 200-500 | Based on existing partnership | Key WP schools | Multiple foci |
| Midlands | Former 1994 | HEIs and FECs | LA | 50-100 | Based on existing partnership | Multiple foci | Multiple foci |
| South West | Russell group | HEIs | None listed | 200-500 | Based on existing partnership | Under-representation in disciplines and subjects | 11 to 16 |
| Midlands | Alliance | HEIs and FECs | None listed | 100-200 | New | No specific focus | No specific focus |
| South East | Non aligned | HEIs and FECs | FECs | 100-200 | New | Multiple foci | Multiple foci |
| South East | Non aligned | HEIs and FECs | None listed | 100-200 | Based on existing partnership | Socio-economic | Multiple foci |
| North East | Non aligned | HEIs and FECs | None listed | 200-500 | Based on existing partnership | LAC | Key WP schools |
| South West | Non aligned | HEIs and FECs | None listed | 200-500 | Mixture of both | Multiple foci | 16-18 including FE |

| | | | | | | | |
|----------|-------------|---------------|-------------|---------|-------------------------------|-----|-----------------|
| Midlands | Non aligned | HEIs and FECs | None listed | 100-200 | Based on existing partnership | LAC | Virtual schools |
| | | | | | | | |

Note: 'FE' = 'further education'; 'FEC' = 'further education college'; 'HEI' = 'higher education institution'; 'LA' = 'local authority'; 'LAC' = 'looked after children'; 'VCO' = 'voluntary and community organisations'; 'WP' = 'widening participation'.

10.4 Reference data for selection of case studies

| Location | Representatives |
|-------------------|-----------------|
| South West | 1 |
| London/South East | 1 |
| National | 1 |
| South East | 1 |
| Midlands | 3 |
| North West | 1 |
| North East | 2 |

| Mission Group | Representation |
|------------------|----------------|
| Non aligned | 2 |
| Cathedrals group | 1 |
| Million+ | 0 |
| Former 1994 | 0 |
| Russell group | 5 |
| Alliance | 2 |
| N/A | 0 |

| HEFCE Funded Partner | Representation |
|----------------------|----------------|
| FECs | 1 |
| N/A | 0 |
| HEIs | 1 |
| HEIs and FECs | 8 |

| Other Partners | Representation |
|----------------|----------------|
| None listed | 5 |
| LEP | 0 |
| LEP, Other | 0 |
| LA, | 0 |
| LEP, LA | 1 |
| LEP, LA, Other | 0 |
| VCOs, Other | 3 |
| VCOs | 0 |

| | |
|--------------|---|
| FECs | 0 |
| Private HEIs | 0 |

| Number of Schools Worked With | Representation |
|-------------------------------|----------------|
| 50 or less | 2 |
| 50-100 | 2 |
| 100-200 | 3 |
| 200-500 | 1 |
| National | 1 |
| Unknown/NA | 0 |
| 500+ | 1 |

| Existing Partnership? | Representation |
|-------------------------------|----------------|
| New | 5 |
| Based on existing partnership | 4 |
| Mixture of both | 1 |

| Specific Groups | Representation |
|---|----------------|
| Multiple foci | 3 |
| No specific focus | 0 |
| TBC | 0 |
| WP Groups | 1 |
| Socio-economic | 2 |
| Gifted and talented | 2 |
| LAC | 2 |
| Geographical cold-spots | 1 |
| Underrepresentation in disciplines and subjects | 0 |
| FE | 0 |
| Adult learners | 0 |

| Specific Schools | Representation |
|-------------------|----------------|
| No specific focus | 1 |
| Multiple foci | 2 |
| TBC | 1 |
| Adult learners | 0 |

| | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| Geographical cold-spots | 1 |
| Virtual schools | 0 |
| Mixed including special schools | 2 |
| 11 to 16 | 2 |
| 16-18 including FE | 0 |
| 11 to 18 | 1 |
| Teachers, providers | 0 |
| Key WP schools | 0 |

Note: 'FE' = 'further education'; 'FEC' = 'further education college'; 'HEI' = 'higher education institution'; 'LA' = 'local authority'; 'LAC' = 'looked after children'; 'VCO' = 'voluntary and community organisations'; 'WP' = 'widening participation'.

10.5 Surveys

10.5.1 All Networks Survey 1: Network Leads

Name of the network

1. Is this a new network or based on a previous network (e.g. AimHigher, LLN etc)? Please specify
2. Please describe the key aims of the network
3. What will the NNCO scheme enable you to do that you might not otherwise have been able to do?
4. Within the scope of the NNCO scheme, are you planning any particular focus or differentiated offer for specific groups (e.g. age, socio-economic groups, etc.)?
5. Within the scope of the NNCO scheme, are you planning any particular focus or differentiated offer for specific schools and colleges (e.g. 11-16, 11-18; special schools, PRUs?)
6. How did the network select partners?
7. What arrangements are being made for the governance (or oversight) and management of the network?
8. What arrangements are you making to employ the SPoC (e.g. advertise a new post, buy out someone from an existing post, etc)?
9. How is the network choosing to distribute the formulaic funding?
10. If your network is based on a previous one, does the NNCO scheme mean you are moving to different model or structure?
11. Will the network coordinate all the outreach activity of partners?
 - a. If no, how do you see the network aligning with other institutions' outreach activities?
12. Do you have any plans to collaborate or affiliate with other local NNCOs?
13. What features do you intend to include on your network website?
14. What added value do you anticipate the network providing and to whom?
15. What do you see as the key challenges that you face in delivery of this network?
 - a. How do you propose to manage these challenges?
16. Do you yet have plans in relation to sustainability of the network after the ending of the funding?
17. What capacity and/or dedicated resource do you have for evaluation activity?
18. How well do you feel you evaluate outreach activities?
19. Would you find assistance in any of the following useful? (Please tick all that apply):
 - a. Advice on evaluation frameworks and different methodological approaches
 - b. Examples of evaluation tools, banks of generic questions, etc.
 - c. Advice on developing data generation tools
 - d. Guidance on appropriate methods of data gathering (when to use surveys, when to use interviews or focus groups, etc.)
 - e. Guidance on making sense of the data
 - f. An opportunity to talk through emerging issues or challenges
20. Would you be willing to be a case study if selected?
21. Do you have any other comments that you would like to add?

10.5.2 Case Study Survey 1: Network Leads

1. Leadership and management of the network
 - a. What do you see as your role in leading and managing the network? In particular, how do you see your role in relation to:
 - i. The work of the SPoC?
 - ii. Any governance or advisory committee/arrangements?
 - b. Have you faced, or do you foresee, any challenges and/or opportunities in this role?
2. Communication and engagement with the NNCO network, partners and schools
 - a. What strategy or plans do you (and/or your NNCO) have for communicating with and engaging schools and colleges, partners or other stakeholders?
 - b. How have you engaged with schools and colleges, partners, etc. to date? How would you describe your experiences of this?
 - c. Do you think that schools and colleges have a realistic expectation of what you are able to offer? Why is this?
 - d. What is working well and what opportunities have arisen or do you foresee? Do you have any good practice that you think might be useful to share with others?
 - e. Are you facing any challenges in engaging and collaborating with your network, partners, schools and colleges? If so, how are you working to overcome these?
3. Anything else you want to add?

10.5.3 Case Study Survey 1: Network Partners

1. How did the partnership with the NNCO come about?
2. Roles and benefits
 - a. How do you see your role in the NNCO?
 - b. What do you see as the benefits for your organisation of being part of the NNCO?
 - c. How do you see the role of the SPoC working?
3. Collaboration and communication
4. What arrangements are in place for partners within the NNCO to collaborate to meet the aims of the network?
 - a. How well is this working?
5. Have you faced any challenges in collaborating with others in the NNCO? If so, please explain
6. Do you have any suggestions about how the network might work more effectively?
7. Anything else you want to add?

10.5.4 Case Study Survey 1: Schools and Colleges

1. We are interested in your experiences of accessing information about higher education (HE) outreach/widening participation activities for your students prior to the recent establishment of the NNCO scheme.
 - a. How have you tended to access information about HE for your students prior to the setting up of these new networks? For example, are there any particular sources you have accessed and/or contacts in HE you have drawn upon?
 - b. How well has this worked for you (or not)? Please explain, giving examples if relevant
2. Please tell us about your knowledge of the NNCO scheme and any engagement you have had with your local network(s).
 - a. Had you heard of the NNCO scheme before our contact with you? If yes, how had contact been made?
 - b. Are you aware of your local network and named contact and/or website?

- c. Have you engaged with your local network? If so, in what way(s) and how would you describe your experiences of this? If not, what are the reasons for this?
3. What are your expectations of your local NNCO?
 - a. What do you hope that the network will provide?
 - b. What do you think the benefits of the network will be for your school?
 - c. Do you foresee any likely problems with the NNCO scheme meeting your needs?
4. Please add any other comments about the NNCO scheme and/or your local networks.

10.5.5 All Networks Survey 2: Leads/SPoCs

Name of the network

Network lead/co-ordinating institution

Your name

SPoC or Lead Partner?

1. What are the aims of your network?
 - a. Have these changed since the inception of your network?
 - b. If so in what ways and, importantly, why?
 - c. Please describe how far the existing aims have been met.
2. Have there have been any material changes to the context in which the network has been working (for example changes resulting from FE area reviews, growth of Academies/changes to the schools sector, careers advise, qualification reform etc.)?
 - a. If so what are they?
 - b. How have they shaped the work of the network?
3. What governance and management structures are in place to support your network?
4. Have the original network partners changed?
 - a. If so how and why?
5. Please give examples of specific innovations which have been enabled through the NNCO scheme. For each innovation, please describe below:
 - a. What makes it innovative (in particular have you drawn on any research or practice)?
6. How did you select which schools/colleges to work most intensively with?
 - a. What impact do you consider your work has had on the school/its pupils?
7. What has the network achieved which would NOT have been possible without the NNCO scheme?
8. What other benefits have you achieved which you would like to draw attention to?
9. What key challenges have you faced in being part of the network?
10. What aspects of provision have you evaluated?
 - a. Have you drawn on the NNCO evaluation team to support your evaluation? If yes, in what ways? And if no, why not?
11. What aspects of provision do you intend to sustain?
 - a. Have you developed a sustainability plan?
 - b. Have you (are you due to) bid for NCOP funds?
12. What model of collaboration has been implemented in your network?
 - a. In what ways have you collaborated with 'formal' network partners (named on the bid)?
 - b. In what ways have you collaborated with 'informal' partners (not named on the bid)?
 - c. What has enabled collaboration to work well and why?"

- d. What has been more problematic and why?"

10.5.6 Case Study Survey 2: Network Leads

1. Leadership and management of the network
 - a. What has been your role in leading and managing the network? In particular, how have you seen your role in relation to:
 - i. The work of the SPoC?
 - ii. Any governance or advisory committee/arrangements?
 - iii. Sustainability of the Network beyond the NNCO funding period, for example if you are leading or participating in a National Collaborative Outreach Programme network?
 - iv. Relationships with other NNCOs e.g. sharing good practice, resources etc. e.g. lessons to take forward to NCOP (if same partners)
 - b. Can you provide any other comments about the challenges and opportunities associated with this role?
 - c. Have you faced any challenges in collaborating with others in the NNCO? If so, please explain.
 - d. Do you have any suggestions about how the network might have worked more effectively?
 - e. Have there have been any material changes to the context in which the network has been working (for example changes resulting from FE area reviews, growth of Academies/changes to the schools sector, careers advise, qualification reform etc.); If so what are they and how have they shaped the work of the network?
2. Communication and engagement with the NNCO network, partners and schools
 - a. What strategy or plans do you (and/or your NNCO) have for communicating with and engaging schools and colleges, partners or other stakeholders in the last few months of the scheme?
 - b. How would you describe your experiences of engaging with schools and colleges, partners, etc. to date?
 - c. To what extent have schools and colleges had a realistic expectation of what the network was able to offer?
 - d. What has worked well and what opportunities have arisen (or indeed may arise in the NCOP if you are involved in this)? Please describe any good practice that you think might be useful to share with others or carry forward into new collaborative ventures?
 - e. Have you faced any challenges in engaging and collaborating with your network, partners, schools and colleges? If so, how are you working to/have you overcome these?
3. Please add any other comments about the NNCO scheme, including anything relating to future collaborations such as NCOP.

10.5.7 Case Study Survey 2: Network Partners

1. How did the partnership with the NNCO come about?
 - a. e.g. pre-existing partnership; for a specific purpose; to work with specific new partners?
2. Roles and benefits
 - a. How have you seen/regarded your role in the NNCO?
 - b. What have been the benefits for your organisation of being part of the NNCO?
 - c. How has the role of the SPoC worked in practice?

- d. Have you faced any challenges in collaborating with others in the NNCO? If so, please explain.
 - e. Do you have any suggestions about how the network might have worked more effectively? (e.g. NCOP if relevant)
3. Collaboration and communication
 - a. What arrangements have been in place for partners within the NNCO to collaborate to meet the aims of the network?
 - b. How well has this worked?
 - c. Have you faced any challenges in collaborating with others in the NNCO? If so, please explain.
 - d. Do you have any suggestions about how the network might have worked more effectively? (e.g. NCOP if relevant)
4. Achievements and impact
 - a. Please give examples of specific innovations which have been enabled through the NNCO scheme.
 - b. What has the network achieved which would NOT have been possible without the NNCO scheme?
5. Please add any other comments about the NNCO scheme.

10.5.8 Case Study Survey 2: SPoCs

1. When did you take up the post of SPoC? Please also let us know if you were previously involved with the network in any way
2. How have you seen your role as SPOC evolve?
3. What other responsibilities do you have, e.g. within the institution where you are employed?
4. Have you been in contact with other NNCO SPoCs? Has this been beneficial, e.g. in terms of sharing good practice, resources etc?
5. Have you faced any challenges in collaborating with others in the NNCO? If so, please explain.
6. Have you faced, or do you still foresee, any challenges and/or opportunities in your work as SPoC? Please explain.
7. How have these been resolved (if at all)?
8. Do you have any suggestions about how the network might have worked more effectively? (e.g. NCOP if relevant)
9. What have been your greatest achievements as the SPoC?
10. Have there been any aspects of the role which you would have benefitted from more support or training? If so please explain.
11. If you were starting in the role again what might you do differently?
12. What are the prospects of sustaining this collaborative work once the NNCO funding period is over e.g. as part of a National Collaborative Outreach Partnership (NCOP)?
13. Was there more that HEFCE could have done to support your role and/or that of NNCOs?
14. Please add any other comments about the NNCO scheme and/or working with HEFCE.

10.5.9 Case Study Survey 2: Schools

1. We are interested in your experiences of accessing information about higher education (HE) outreach/widening participation activities for your students prior to the recent establishment of the NNCO scheme.
 - a. How had you tended to access information about HE for your students prior to the setting up of these networks? For example, were there any particular sources you have accessed and/or contacts in HE you have drawn upon?
 - b. How well had this worked for you (or not)? Please explain, giving examples if relevant.
2. Please tell us about your knowledge of the NNCO scheme and any engagement you have had with your local network(s).
 - a. Had you heard of the NNCO scheme before our contact with you? If yes, how had contact been made?
 - b. How did you become aware of your local network and named contact (i.e. Single Point of Contact) and/or website?
 - c. How have you engaged with your local network? How would you describe your experiences of this?
 - d. What were your expectations of your local NNCO?
 - e. What has the network achieved for your school/college?
 - f. Were there any problems with the NNCO scheme meeting your needs? How were these resolved?
3. Achievements and impact
 - a. Please give examples of specific innovations which have been enabled through the NNCO scheme if there are any.
 - b. What do you think your school/college has gained which would NOT have been possible without the NNCO scheme?

10.6 Glossary of terms

| | |
|-------|--|
| BAME | Black and Minority (or Minoritised) Ethnic |
| BME | Black and Minority Ethnic |
| BIS | Department of Business, Innovation and Skills |
| CEIAG | Careers Education Information, Advice and Guidance |
| CPD | Continuing Professional Development |
| ECB | Evaluation Capacity Building |
| FE | Further Education |
| FEC | Further Education College |
| FSM | Free School Meals |
| HE | Higher Education |
| HEAT | Higher Education Access Tracker |
| HEFCE | Higher Education Funding Council for England |
| HEI | Higher Education Institution |
| HR | Human Resources |

| | |
|-------|---|
| IAG | Information, Advice and Guidance |
| IMD | Index of Multiple Deprivation |
| IPSE | Institute for Policy Studies in Education, London Metropolitan University |
| KPI | Key performance indicators |
| LA | Local Authority |
| LAC | Looked After Children |
| LEP | Local Enterprise Partnership |
| LLN | Lifelong Learning Network |
| NCOP | National Collaborative Outreach Programme |
| NEON | National Education Opportunities Network |
| NNCO | National Network for Collaborative Outreach |
| OECD | Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development |
| OFFA | Office for Fair Access |
| PRU | Pupil Referral Unit |
| SCR | Sheffield City Region |
| SIoE | Sheffield Institute of Education |
| SPoC | Single Point of Contact |
| UKSBS | UK Shared Business Services Ltd |
| VCO | Voluntary and Community Organisations |
| WP | Widening Participation |

Evaluation of the National Networks for Collaborative Outreach (NNCOs)

STEVENSON, Jacqueline <<http://orcid.org/0000-0002-3097-6763>>, MCCAIG, Colin <<http://orcid.org/0000-0003-4364-5119>> and MADRIAGA, Manuel <<http://orcid.org/0000-0003-2725-1718>>

Available from the Sheffield Hallam University Research Archive (SHURA) at:

<http://shura.shu.ac.uk/19106/>

Copyright and re-use policy

Please visit <http://shura.shu.ac.uk/19106/> and <http://shura.shu.ac.uk/information.html> for further details about copyright and re-use permissions.