Raising attainment through university-school partnerships: the current landscape

Key points

- There are around 60 HEIs currently in sponsorship arrangements with schools.
- Arrangements between schools and universities are diverse, reflecting the high level of diversity across both the higher education and schools sectors.
- These partnerships are based on the local circumstances of universities, schools and the region or local area.
- There is evidence to demonstrate the positive impact of such arrangements, as shown by the case studies below.
- The objectives underpinning this range of engagement are:
  - Raising attainment within the region
  - Providing an insight for young people into higher education
  - Raising aspirations locally
  - Supporting the development of the teacher workforce
  - Providing governance expertise
  - Providing subject-level expertise

Activity across the landscape

The current landscape for university-school engagement is diverse, and arrangements are developed based on local need. This briefing provides an overview of the diversity of these relationships, and is supported by institutional case studies to demonstrate how existing initiatives are delivering on wider objectives around raising attainment.
**Direct school sponsorship**

Around 60 higher education institutions in England already sponsor schools and there are many more successful partnership arrangements in place. Often, these build upon existing relationships and capitalise on the expertise of a particular university.

Just over half of UUK members in England are currently engaged in sponsorship activity, either with an individual school, with multiple schools or with schools in one or more Multi-Academy Trusts (MAT). Some of these arrangements are extensive, such as the University of Wolverhampton, which sponsors 17 schools and regards this as part of its core mission and contribution to the local area. The example below sets out the sponsorship activity Staffordshire University is engaged in. This example illustrates the extent of the commitment universities make to schools in becoming a sponsor as it is currently understood; not all universities would have the capacity to undertake all this activity, nor would the relevant local academies necessarily need this level of involvement.

---

**Sponsorship model: Staffordshire University**

Staffordshire University sponsors three schools within a multi-academy trust, which began in 2011 and has been followed by two primary schools being converted into the trust in 2014. An example of the type of activity and support required for the academic year 2015–16 is set out below:

- The release of £100,000 from the reserve at Staffordshire University Academy to target support to the new Year 11.

- With the support of the School Improvement Partner (provided by the School of Education at Staffordshire University), 28 students had their timetables adjusted for the start of Year 11 (of which 25 are boys); 16 of the 28 were students in receipt of pupil premium funding of which 13 were boys. All of these students received additional English, maths or study skills sessions in these slots on their timetables, supported by undergraduates at the university.

- ‘Skillforce’ – the university brokered a meeting with a charity that works in partnership with schools drawing on the skills of ex-forces personnel. The work challenged disaffection and raised aspirations. Towards the end of the 15-week programme, the staff went into lessons to act as mentors and support the raising of confidence and motivation within the students' lessons. An accredited award was achieved as part of this work.

• Advertisement for additional tutors who started in the autumn term to deliver maths and English teaching for targeted Year 11 students.

• Investment in staff training, through the School of Education, to support the continued development of teaching and learning.

• The sponsor brokered support from the Priory School Teaching Alliance (based in Shrewsbury) who provided SLEs (Specialist Leader of Education).

The university carried out its own internal review of Year 11 revision sessions, which revealed a gap in attendance between pupil premium and non-pupil premium students. This will be a focus from September onwards.

**IMPACT**

• Each of the three schools have now been brought out of special measures; this has involved extensive effort across many areas of activity within the ‘sponsorship’ arrangement.

---

**School membership**

The current activity across the sector displays that a variety of arrangements are already in place and contributing to the objective of raising attainment. For example, the University of Essex has developed an innovative approach to engagement by establishing a membership relationship with local schools, which it regards as fulfilling the same role as a sponsorship arrangement.

**Schools membership model: University of Essex, Schools Membership Plus (SMP)**

The university plays an ‘anchor’ role in the region for existing schools. The Schools Membership Plus (SMP) programme involves relationships with 32 schools, which benefit from 25 different types of support methods. This includes: specialist A-level plans, dedicated teacher CPD, annual teachers’ conference, free access to university library online resources, twilight subject sessions in schools, access to an online learning platform for students, and fee discounts for teachers studying at postgraduate level. PhD students deliver research methods training to support Extended Project Qualification (EPQ) as well as deliver subject sessions. The university also provides SMP schools with travel grants to
enable engagement with activities on-campus and bursaries to support school engagement activities.

The university also has an established governor network so that members of staff already acting as governors of local schools can share experiences and offer support and guidance. Academic and professional staff are encouraged to take on governor roles to contribute expertise, skills and experience for the benefit of primary and secondary schools in the area.

**VI6 programme**

As part of SMP, the university also runs the VI6 (six-six) partnership scheme, which brings together six schools in the local area. This involves jointly teaching eight A-level subjects which the schools would not be able to deliver themselves, and providing teaching facilities for this at no charge. Around 170 students study on the university site each week for two years across a range of subjects: further maths, French, law, economics, geography, sociology, art history, philosophy and ethics.

The partnership is developing annually with more subjects being included. There are plans to expand the provision past A-levels and include BTEC’s as well as engaging with parents and carers to break down barriers to university.

**IMPACT**

- At the end of the first year, 87% of students indicated they would apply to university.

- Teachers involved in the scheme have been hugely positive, highlighting the lived experience of university life that it delivers to students on a regular basis and also pointing out that students have become more engaged when in school.

- Teachers have also noted the impact it has had with teacher recruitment and retention as teachers are given new opportunities to teach at A-level, and take on a new and innovative challenge.

- VI6 enables students to have a wide choice of A-levels and continue studying in an environment they are comfortable with and builds on the academic achievement they have previously demonstrated.

- The Tendring region is home to half of the students benefiting from VI6. This area has some of the lowest progression rates in the UK to university. For these
students, regular access to a university not only builds up self-confidence and aspiration, but also aids attainment by enabling them to access excellent teaching both in the secondary and HE sector.

**Key academic partner and academic support**

The below example from Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU) describes another form of collaborative engagement to support attainment. This involves the university acting as a ‘key academic partner’ to the Co-operative Academies Trust. This partnership entails activities that would be expected of a sponsorship arrangement, with a specific focus on how the academic expertise of the university can be harnessed to help raise school-level attainment. The second example below describes some of the ways in which the University of Cambridge harnesses its academic expertise to improve attainment and widen access to higher education, which we have termed an ‘academic support’ model.

**Bespoke partnership model: Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU), ‘Key academic partner’**

MMU has been the ‘key academic partner’ of the Co-operative Academies Trust (CAT) in respect of its academies in Manchester since 2010. CAT currently has eight academies in Manchester, Leeds and Stoke, all serving disadvantaged areas. The trust is regarded as having very strong governance arrangements by the DfE and Ofsted. Pupil outcomes are also improving faster than the national average.

The outcomes described below include activities that would be expected of a sponsorship arrangement, but with a specific focus on how the academic expertise of the university can be harnessed to help raise school-level attainment.

**IMPACT**

Positive outcomes of this collaboration for students, teachers and the university include:

- Creation of a bespoke MA programme focusing on cooperation
- CAT colleagues supporting MMU initial teacher education programmes through delivering sessions to students and staff, including staff development days on the role of academies
- Faculty of Education (FoE) staff leading staff development sessions in co-operative schools, supporting curriculum development and conducting research on teacher recruitment in CAT schools
- CAT sponsoring PhD students in the Faculty of Education
- FoE providing two governors for the Co-operative Academy of Manchester and the Manchester Creative and Media Academy

**Academic Support Model: University of Cambridge – harnessing the university’s academic expertise to raise attainment at local schools**

**Underground Mathematics**

This programme began in 2012 and is funded by a grant from DfE. Underground Mathematics provides free web-based resources that support the teaching and learning of post-16 mathematics. Many of the resources combine solving problems, mathematical reasoning and fluency. The programme aims to help students build firm foundations for mathematical understanding and are designed to encourage students to pose questions, reflect and collaborate, thereby deepening their individual understanding. A Head of Key Stage 5 has commented that working with Underground Mathematics 'has been transformative for me as a teacher and has helped to shape how I teach sixth form mathematics lessons. The lessons I teach look very different to the sixth form lessons I experienced as a student (some years ago).'

**Isaac Physics**

This platform offers support and activities in physics problem-solving to teachers and to students transitioning from GCSE (Year 11), through to sixth form (Years 12 and 13), to university. It combines an online study tool with face-to-face events at partner schools and institutions across the UK.

**The collegiate university’s Subject Masterclasses**

These masterclasses offer Year 12 students subject enrichment and the opportunity to explore topics of interest beyond what is covered within the A-level syllabus. Subjects have included chemistry, engineering, genetics, geography, history, languages, mathematics,
music and psychology. 27% of the students who attended the university’s Subject Masterclasses in 2013 went on to apply to the university and 47% of those applicants were made offers of a place.

**The collegiate university’s Subject Matters initiative**

This provides guidance for Year 10 and 11 students on A-level subject choice. At these sessions, admissions tutors explore the opportunities that higher education can offer; provide guidance on A-level (or equivalent) subject choice; and outline what universities look for in applications. The constituent colleges of the university also undertake subject workshops, giving secondary school students of different ages the opportunity to experience subjects as they are taught at university.

**Community outreach**

Nottingham Trent University’s work with schools in the local area provides an example of where partnership working with schools is successfully designed around the needs of the city.

**Addressing regional need: Nottingham Trent University (NTU) – Schools and Colleges Community Outreach (SCCO)**

The projects run within this programme reach around 120 schools and educational providers. The programme is designed to address the specific needs of the city, which is among the ten lowest ranking local authority areas nationally for GCSE attainment. For the majority of schools in the city, over half their intake is from areas identified by HEFCE as ‘cold spots’ – low participation neighbourhoods with lower than expected progression rates to higher education when taking account of the schools’ Key Stage 4 attainment.

**Students in Classrooms Scheme**

NTU recruits around 500 of its students each year to work in schools, particularly in those communities where progression rates into university are lower than expected. The Students in Classrooms scheme provides pupil support for activities including classroom, literacy, and maths assistance as well as one-to-one mentoring. It has helped to close the gap in educational achievements for children from more disadvantaged backgrounds. The scheme has reached over 30,000 pupils in its twelve years of operation.
The targeted interventions carried out by Brunel University London to raise attainment also provide examples of how universities can use their expertise to have a far-reaching impact in the local area. The case study below includes current projects, as well as future plans and how the impact of these will be measured.

**Targeted interventions: Brunel University London**

**The Urban Scholars programme**

The Urban Scholars Saturday-school began in 2001 and focuses specifically on interventions with gifted and talented students in receipt of free school meals from the **Children's University**

The Children's University recognises and rewards the learning and activities that children take part in outside normal school hours and is open to children aged 7 to 14 if their school has signed up to the scheme. Participation in the Children's University is voluntary. Children receive a Passport to Learning from their school and they can collect credits for each activity in which they participate. Credits can be given for taking part in learning experiences and activities at after school clubs, sports clubs, museums, activity centres and music groups. This learning does not need to be purely academic; often, it is focused on developing the skills that help children go on to university and many of the activities link with university subjects. If children gain 100 credits they are invited to attend an awards ceremony at Nottingham Trent University.

In addition to the above activities, SCCO also covers:

- Chemistry Outreach – funding from The Royal Society of Chemistry supports an extended project which aims to increase pupils' interest and participation in chemistry
- Summer School and Residential Summer School activities – provide pupils with first-hand insight into and experience of higher education at subject level
- Nottingham Trent Volunteering – matches 1,000 volunteers to a range of associated community projects across the city

**University staff act as school governors**

More than 40 members of university staff also serve as school governors.
London area. It is based upon proven techniques in raising aspirations and channelling talent through improving core subjects and critical thinking skills and is supported by a body of evaluative evidence from parallel research undertaken by Brunel University London’s Education Department in previous years.

Around 1500 pupils have passed through the programme since 2013. Pupils are drawn from across London or within a satellite programme in Milton Keynes.

**IMPACT**

The impact of the scheme can be seen in destination data which is available for 60% of our 2012/13 cohort:

- 65% had an HE orientation on entry to the programme, rising to 96% on leaving
- 85% of the cohort are now studying in university, of which 22.8% are at Russell Group universities

**Widening Participation Attainment Raising Programmes**

For a number of years Brunel University London has offered local schools a forensic science day for gifted and talented school pupils. Experiments and tasks are carefully designed for 11-18 year olds. The target group for the scheme has now been expanded to include pupils in lower sets. During a pilot project at Hatch End High School in Harrow, the team delivered activities to enable the forensic science unit of a BTEC Level 2 science course to be taught in the university laboratories.

**IMPACT**

- Underperforming students in the lower set not only achieving the ‘Pass’ grades they were predicted but in most cases, exceeding them and achieving Merits and Distinctions.
- Feedback from teachers demonstrated that the intervention of working in an adult learning environment, raising expectations and using a range of assessment methods helped students to remain focused, work to their strengths and fulfil their academic potential.
In a further expansion of the scheme, Brunel delivered this initiative to Harrow and Brent schools, resulting in two new schools signing up to take part in this science attainment-raising project in the new 2017/18 academic year.

The team have also run a pilot project in Stockley Academy (Hillingdon) for Year 11 white males from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds with the aim of boosting English GCSE attainment.

**Inspire**

Inspire is the Brunel STEM Learning Centre, a multi-million pound construction project on campus. Launching in autumn 2017, Inspire will deliver age-relevant, curriculum-linked science education for children from Key Stage one to Key Stage four. Once operating at full capacity, the centre will cater for 30,000 pupils per annum. The intention of the Centre is to encourage pupils to study STEM subjects and to increase the number of women studying and working in engineering.

The activities of the Centre are being co-created by a Curriculum Board consisting of local school and college staff, the OFSTED Excellent-rated Education Department and Inspire staff. An early intervention for the Centre is to improve the ability of local secondary schools to deliver mandatory science practical examinations which are proving difficult to replicate effectively in school. It is likely that this is both a facilities and a teaching CPD issue and Brunel is examining how it can use Inspire laboratory space to deliver this activity.

The Higher Education Attainment Tracker (HEAT) system will be used to measure impact, monitoring individual pupils as part of a long term study into whether regular exposure to STEM activities throughout KS1 to 4 encourages greater participation and performance in STEM subjects.

**Developing the school workforce: Teacher Education**

The excellence of initial teacher training (ITT) provision in England is underpinned by strong university-school partnerships. Universities across the UK are important hubs for their local area, training the people that every community relies on, including 63,000 nurses, 62,000 doctors and dentists, and 75,000 teachers. A university’s commitment to teacher education is part of the institution’s core mission and, in many cases, the history of the institution too.
However, recent changes in training place allocations between the different routes into teaching have coincided with government missing its overall teacher training recruitment targets for the past five years, and to some regions having high teacher vacancy rates at a time when pupil numbers are forecasted to increase by as much as 450,000 by 2020.

In its submission to the Education Select Committee’s inquiry into the supply of teachers (November 2015), the DfE noted that:

Evidence shows that high-quality teachers are the single most important factor in determining how well pupils do in school.¹

In support of this, many universities have emphasised to UUK the importance of the role of universities in delivering effective Initial Teacher Training in contributing to school attainment.

Universities providing teacher education have longstanding relationships in place with schools in the area for the placement of their students. These students often become teachers locally, as seen at Bath Spa University, where 82% of PGCE graduates go on to work in schools within Bath and north-east Somerset. These teachers have graduated from a professional programme rated ‘outstanding’ by Ofsted.

By building on these ITT relationships with local schools, such as that described in the Brunel University London case study below, universities can become more involved in improving attainment, gaining a deep understanding of the particular context of a school and working in close partnership with staff in schools to intervene effectively.

**Developing the school workforce: Continuing professional development for school teachers**

Continuing professional development (CPD) is another way in which universities provide sustainable support to schools. For example, University of the Arts London (UAL) work with an academy chain to provide CPD to secondary teachers. This represents an effective way to reach a larger group of art and design teachers and helps to build relationships and networks across all the schools within the academy group.

The University of Cumbria also makes a significant contribution to teacher CPD. It provides forums for sharing practice and engaging with the latest research, for example, the Research Institute for Professional Learning in Education (RIPLE), and hosts teacher development events such as #LearningFirst. Additionally, the University of Cumbria hosts the Teacher

¹ DfE submission to Education Select Committee inquiry (SOT0046), November 2015
Education Advancement Network (TEAN). This national network impacts positively on the quality of teacher education nationally through providing CPD opportunities for the teacher education sector.

**Teacher and educational development support model: Brunel University London – the contribution of teacher education**

Brunel University London has a commitment to primary and secondary initial teacher education, offering outstanding provision which demonstrates direct impact not just in mainstream schools but in a range of different settings, by providing teachers locally as well as at a regional and national level.

The university also offers a range of other programmes supporting the profession, such as a BA in education. Graduates from this programme pursue a range of careers in education, such as educational welfare officers, who intervene to ensure the most disadvantaged in society are able to continue to progress in school while experiencing challenging circumstances.

The Masters in education offers academic study that enhances the ongoing professional education of teachers and other professionals working in different settings, developing leaders who will go on to shape the provision that makes a difference to young people’s education.

The university’s professional doctorate also ensures that these leaders are developed across the full span of their career. For example, headteachers use research they have conducted to directly inform school improvement.

Brunel has an extensive partnership network of schools that includes those rated as ‘requires improvement’ because of a commitment to supplying high quality teachers to those schools with the greatest need. The concept of partnership is crucial and this is wide ranging in its scope. This includes:

- working directly with schools in the local London borough on projects which seek to close gaps in attainment between different groups of young people in schools (see pp. 9-10)
- coordinating collaborative steering groups with colleagues which examine specific priority areas in schools
**Educational research**

The UK university sector is world-renowned for its excellence in research, and universities across the country carry out vital research about education, exploring what works, and disseminate this research to policymakers and teachers. This can inform the development of evidence-based policy and institutional practice.

**The contribution of educational research: School of Education, University of Nottingham**

The School of Education at the University of Nottingham is a leading centre for research in education, as well as offering high quality teaching and professional education. It is one of the largest university education departments in the UK, and is ranked 28th in the world in the QS World University Rankings by Subject 2016.

Research projects focus on topics such as subject teaching and learning, community, social justice, and school leadership. Teachers in partner schools are offered free continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities, for example in relation to teaching specific subjects and to special educational needs and disability, and discounted fees for Masters and higher-level degrees in education.

Through the Schools of Education on their campuses in China and Malaysia, the university also brokers international engagement for local teachers, school and student exchanges and comparative research.

**Current School of Education research projects to raise attainment in schools**

**Maths-for-life**

Students re-sitting GCSE mathematics are more likely to be disengaged, and to have problems with key concepts. Maths-for-Life teaches these concepts through problems designed to re-engage learners and cement their understanding of fundamental areas. It aims to make GCSE retake classes more student-centred, focusing on problem-solving and discussion through approaches such as dialogic teaching.

The resources were initially tested 10 years ago, in post-16 settings, with government funding, and found that across groups of GCSE retake students there was a difference on algebra tests between those who received “many” of the lessons to those who had received
none of the lessons, with an effect size of 0.38. Now the resources will be updated and will be accompanied by support for teachers to ensure the practices are used effectively.

The first year will be a formative pilot, with a small group of teachers focusing on developing the content and structure of the training, as well as feeding back on the feasibility of the model. The Behavioural Insights Team will collect independent assessments on the feasibility of the intervention which will be used to make a decision in Spring 2018 about whether to proceed with a randomised controlled trial.

**Increasing Competence and Confidence in Algebra and Multiplicative Structures (ICCAMS)**

ICCAMS is designed to teach two mathematical areas that are a key part of the Key Stage 3 curriculum, but which cause particular problems to students – algebra and multiplicative reasoning (e.g., percentages and proportions). The programme is comprised of 40 evidence-informed lessons and extensive teacher professional development. A matched controlled trial of ICCAMS in 2010 indicated progress equivalent to making a gain in attainment of about two years’ normal progress in one year.

A team at the University of Nottingham will develop the existing ICCAMS materials and create a two-year CPD package consisting of 9 days of training and support in between. The recruitment of schools to the trial, and the training and support for locally-based trainers, will be carried out by Durham University. The trial itself will be an “effectiveness trial” to assess the potential and impact of delivering the intervention independently of the developers, as well as its suitability for scalability and wider roll-out.

**Specialist institutions**

One of the UK university sector’s strengths is its diversity, and this can be seen for instance through the range of specialist providers of higher education in areas such as music and the arts to veterinary education. These specialist institutions use their expertise in their subject specialism – as their own strength – in order to support attainment in schools. Many of these institutions are too small for school sponsorship to be feasible – the majority are smaller than most secondary schools – and therefore do not have the necessary resources or expertise to establish or run a school across the entire curriculum.
Specialist institutions currently undertake a range of activity to support attainment in secondary schools, focusing on the expertise they have in their subject areas, which is often less readily available to school students through the state system. The institutions can therefore make an extremely valuable contribution through supporting the delivery of the curriculum in their specialist area. The focus is often on providing learning opportunities for students from disadvantaged backgrounds who might also be disadvantaged by lack of access to specialist disciplines such as art and design, music and drama.

For example, members of Conservatoires UK all currently run: Junior Conservatoires; Centres for Advanced Training, or extensive outreach, collaboration and partnership programmes – and in most cases a combination of all three. Junior Conservatoires – which provide training for children and young people who show exceptional commitment in music, dance and drama – make a valuable contribution to higher education in the performing arts as well as to the sector more broadly, with 85% of students succeeding in gaining places in higher education, more than 40% progressing to undergraduate studies at a conservatoire and more than 25% studying music at a university. A further 15% go on to study other subjects at university. Across specialist institutions more generally, many provide governors from their senior leadership teams and so play an important part in the running of a school.

University of the Arts London (UAL) is the largest specialist institution in the UK and carries out a great deal of work with schools. It has developed a model of ‘extended partnerships’, which go beyond outreach to support the development of the art, design and communication curriculum. In some cases, this also extends to school governance. Of these partnerships, UAL reports direct impact on attainment through the Newham Creative Hub, an initiative with schools and further education colleges in East London. The Saturday Club for Year 10 students has resulted in a positive impact on attainment for GCSE art and design, and has subsequently been rolled out to students in south London (Camberwell site) and north London (King’s Cross site). UAL reports that they have greatest impact on attainment where they work with a group of targeted schools and focus on their specialism. Their experience of focusing on a single school has been that this is not the most effective use of resources.

The example below provides a further example of the type of work specialist institutions already undertake with schools, outlining the initiatives of the Centre for Young Musicians (CYM) run by Guildhall School of Music and Drama. This harnesses the institution’s subject expertise to open up opportunities for young people and help them progress to higher education.

Such activities are able to reach a much wider group of young people than would be likely through close working with a single school. The latter also risks the concentration of specialist
provision and resources, as well as diminution of expertise, rather than expanding the provision of specialist subjects across a much greater area and number of schools and pupils.

Subject expertise model: The Centre for Young Musicians (CYM), Guildhall School of Music and Drama

CYM is a division of the Guildhall School of Music and Drama that provides high quality progressive music training for children under 18 years of age from all of London’s boroughs and beyond.

As well as the London centre, it has five branches in Norwich, Taunton, Saffron Walden, Bristol and Peterborough. The Peterborough CYM is designed to enhance progression routes in music education in the area in collaboration with Ormiston Bushfield Academy, with support from Peterborough Music Hub. Bristol Centre for Young Musicians opened in September 2016, working in partnership with the Music Education Hub for Bristol and based at Bristol Cathedral Choir School and Henbury School. The Norwich CYM is a similar partnership between the Guildhall School, Norwich Music Service and local academy, City of Norwich School.

All CYMs offer young musicians from age 7 to 17 a broad programme of activities including tuition with music teachers from the Guildhall School, visiting music teachers from other conservatoires, and players from leading UK orchestras. More than 420 young musicians aged 8 to 18 attend the London Saturday centre alone for 32 weeks of the school year, each following an individual programme of study across a range of genres. Still more children benefit from CYM holiday courses, ranging from junior and intermediate courses to participation in ensembles such as the London Schools Symphony Orchestra and the London Youth Wind Band. The CYM Saturday centre is a Centre for Advanced Training within the DfE’s Music & Dance Scheme.

Many students on Guildhall’s CYM and Junior Guildhall programmes are supported by means-tested bursaries, whether through the DfE Music and Dance Scheme, bursaries or Guildhall-funded bursaries and scholarships.
How universities can work with government

Universities are strongly supportive of the government’s ambition to raise standards across schools and remove the attainment gap between advantaged and disadvantaged pupils. Universities UK is keen to work with government to develop the definition of sponsorship to maximise the impact of university-school partnerships on increasing attainment and the number of good school places in England.

Different universities come to collaborations with schools with very different contributions to make. How universities engage will depend on an institution’s mission, strengths, size and local circumstances. To maximise the impact of their investment, institutions will take account of all these factors when developing their access strategies. Any new expectations from the Director for Fair Access (DFA) should take this into account. This would not detract from the DFA setting stretching and challenging expectations for institutions.

As set out in this briefing, UUK’s engagement and the experience of our members shows that raised aspirations, improved attainment, increased teacher ability and retention, and improved school success can all be achieved through a number of partnership and engagement mechanisms with schools. These broaden the concept and practice of sponsorship to a wider set of effective mechanisms.

To ensure that the impact of university-school engagement is maximised, taking into account what the current evidence suggests, UUK proposes that a more flexible approach is adopted to achieve the policy objective of raising attainment and increasing the number of good school places. This can be implemented by recognising a number of models of engagement, which align the expertise, resources and mission of the university with the needs of the school, and the local context within which both are operating. Any number of these may be in place at any one time – the crucial focus should be an assessment of need and potential impact to determine what type of model/s might be adopted, extended or run in addition.

This approach builds on the idea of a sponsorship continuum, in which universities utilise their different capacities and circumstances to contribute to the education system and pupil attainment. The policy should be implemented in a way that supports the overall effectiveness of the sector’s efforts to promote fair access and to deliver the greatest benefit for potential students from disadvantaged and under-represented groups, while taking account of any unintended consequences.
Further impact evaluation of what ‘works’

UUK also proposes to work with government to gather and share evidence to disseminate best practice on raising attainment.

To maximise the impact of ‘sponsorship’ arrangements, these should be based as far as possible on evidence of what works, including what works locally. The initial evaluation of the case studies gathered by UUK suggests that this range of models can work alongside each other to achieve the government’s objective. The university sector’s experience of carrying out this work suggests that outcomes will be more impactful when the policy objective is approached in this more flexible way, as opposed to a prescriptive approach on how universities and schools should work together to raise attainment.

The evidence in this area is currently limited; UUK is keen to work with government to expand this so that future arrangements are founded on a knowledge of what works before time and resource is dedicated from both schools and universities. UUK suggests that the following further detailed evidence would be helpful to implementing this policy in the most effective way:

- the impact of different types of university-school engagement on pupil attainment
- the conditions needed to implement different types of engagement, and what is likely to be most impactful taking into account these conditions
- the resource implications of different types of university-school engagement, for both parties
- the constitution of current sponsorship arrangements
- the school capacity needs of the regions in England

Once established, UUK envisages a role for the Evidence and Impact Exchange proposed in The Social Mobility Advisory Group’s report on higher education and social mobility, Working in partnership: enabling social mobility in higher education. This will systematically evaluate and promote the evidence relating to the role of higher education in supporting social mobility.² This evaluation function should provide a valuable resource for determining what works in terms of raising school-level attainment and support institutions to develop ways of working with schools. In the meantime, the evidence currently being collated by the Office for Fair

---

Access (OFFA) on the impact of activities to support attainment will provide a useful benchmark for the sector.