Higher Education Outreach to Widen Participation

Toolkits for practitioners

1 Partnership

Second edition

About the toolkits

This suite of publications, the toolkits, are a distillation of the learning, methods and resources developed by Aimhigher and the Lifelong Learning Network programmes to support the effective strategy, management and delivery of outreach work to encourage progression to higher education for under-represented groups. The toolkits recontextualise the learning from these programmes to fit the current higher education environment. This is the second edition of the toolkits. They were revised in December 2013 following initial publication in December 2012 to take account of relevant changes in the field.

The toolkits are not meant to be prescriptive but are designed to promote discussion and development. They comprise the following:

- Overview
- **Toolkit 1 Partnership**
- Toolkit 2 Targeting
- Toolkit 3 Programmes
- Toolkit 4 Evaluation
- Resources and glossary

Who they are for

The toolkits are aimed at widening participation managers and those they work with. They provide:

- guidance, materials and ideas for the development of programmes
- materials that are useful for strategic leaders
- practical tools for those involved in delivery.

The guidance and resources in the toolkits are most effective when delivered as part of a comprehensive approach that fits within a whole-institution strategy that addresses the topics covered by each of the four toolkits: partnership, targeting, programmes and evaluation.

Structure and navigation

Each toolkit in the series has four sections. The header at the top of each page indicates where in the document the user is at any one time. For example, this document has the four stages shown below, and you are looking at the 'Manage' section:

Understand ▸ Create ▸ **Manage** ▸ Review

Authors

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Key questions provide prompts for things to be considered. Reflecting on these helps to develop programmes and activity more closely suited to each higher education provider's unique context.

Tools help to develop and deliver effective programmes and activities. Templates for use and development by practitioners are available on the Higher Education Academy's website.

Examples are actual practices or suggestions that can provide ideas and inspiration.

Links provide a signpost to other useful information and resources.

List of tools

The following tools are referred to throughout this document. They link to Microsoft® Word templates that practitioners can use and develop in their outreach work.

The tools are listed in the order that they appear in the toolkit.

- Partnership mapping template
- Mapping partnership activity template
- Cost, benefit and risk analysis
- Developing a strategic plan template
- Terms of reference template
- Partnership agreement template
- Template for risk management
- Template for project progress reporting
- Summarising partnerships' perspectives template

Aims of this toolkit

This toolkit:

- sets out the rationale for building partnerships to deliver WP activities
- helps HE providers address the requirements of their access agreements through effective work with other organisations
- identifies a process through which effective partnerships can be built, managed and reviewed
- helps HE providers identify appropriate partners for WP activity and understand the range of approaches to partnership
- identifies resources to support partnership working.

Understand

This toolkit provides a rationale for partnership working, and emphasises the crucial role that partnerships play in the overall achievement of the widening participation (WP) agenda. It offers methods to achieve effective partnership work which bears dividends to all participants and where every partner has a clear understanding of their roles and expectations. The toolkit offers tried and tested approaches, and makes the case for investing resources in developing and maintaining partnerships. Throughout readers are provided with examples of practice and interactive tools which can be used and modified to meet the needs of a variety of partnerships.

Why partner?

Partnership working is essential to the successful widening of participation in higher education. Learners move through a range of other learning organisations before they reach HE. It is while they are in these other contexts that they make decisions about their future learning and progression routes. It is therefore vital for HE providers to develop and maintain effective partnerships with these and other organisations. This toolkit is written specifically to support HE providers in choosing and managing their relationships with other organisations to improve the progression to HE of under-represented groups.

Organisations choose to work in partnership for the following reasons:

- **mission** – the institution's values encourage partnership, for example, a commitment to being engaged with the local community or employers
- **efficiency** – cost-effective operation is facilitated by resource-sharing and reduced duplication
- **effectiveness** – better outcomes are achieved through working with others
- **market awareness** – it increases understanding of the broader education system
- **compliance** – it satisfies a funder's and/or regulator's requirements.

Up until recently WP partnerships were directly and centrally funded via the Aimhigher and Lifelong Learning Network programmes. These provided a framework for much educational collaboration and formal partnership. Both programmes have now ended, and some HE providers have seen this changed situation as an opportunity to re-focus and re-prioritise their commitment to collaboration and partnership.

OFFA guidance on the role of partnerships in WP

The Office for Fair Access (OFFA) signals the benefits of partnership working in its guidance on producing an access agreement:

> *'There are some successful, long-established partnerships and projects, and new collaborations are beginning to emerge. But we strongly encourage all institutions to consider how you can further strengthen and grow your collaborative work. We particularly encourage you to explore and develop collaborative evaluation and targets that allow*

> *you to demonstrate the effectiveness of your outreach work, including where these mainly contribute to improving participation to the sector as a whole, rather than directly translating into recruitment to your institution.'*
> (OFFA, 2013)

OFFA's guidance on access agreements encourages the development of stronger collaborations to improve impact, longer-term outcomes, the sharing of effective practice, and cost-effectiveness. OFFA's 2013 guidance on access agreements also suggests that HE providers work with partners to:

- provide impartial HE-related advice and guidance to support learners to make appropriate choices for GCSE and beyond
- develop joint monitoring and evaluation of activity
- set targets for collaborative work alongside institutional targets
- employ collective peripatetic staff to work in schools in Years 9 and 11
- provide links with schools where progression rates are low or where there are significant numbers of students from groups under-represented in HE.

OFFA also encourages partnerships with schools and colleges to provide:

- sponsorship of academies, free schools, trust schools and University Training Schools
- participation in governance and teaching in schools.

Further emphasis is also given to partnership in HEFCE's Request for widening participation strategic assessments document which asks institutions to provide:

> *'...a summary account of the scale and nature of commitments to WP that are characteristic of that institution and reflect its strengths. So, for example, this might include: links with schools, colleges and communities; compact arrangements; school/college and institutional partnerships.'*

This is also highlighted in the HEFCE circular letter, Interim WP strategic statements for 2012-13, and arrangements for future years, which states:

> *'National progress to widen participation depends very much on the long-term strategic approaches developed and implemented by institutions that look beyond the immediate, individual targets set within access agreements... they [HE providers] can often work beyond the boundaries of the individual institution to involve collaborative approaches across the educational sectors.'*

This toolkit offers HE providers a range of options to further develop their collaborative partnerships in line with expectations expressed in the guidance from OFFA and HEFCE. In addition the Higher Education Academy has produced a synthesis of literature from the Widening Access, Student Retention and Success (WASRS) archive about partnership working and collaboration to widen participation (Wiggans, 2012).

A spectrum of partnership approaches

Partnerships may be formed and partnership agreements framed with a range of objectives in mind. At one end of the spectrum are **mission-level partnerships**, where partners work together to achieve long-term, high-level outcomes such as improving the progression of under-represented groups into HE. At the other end of the spectrum are **task-level partnerships** where partners seek to achieve short-term objectives and outputs, for example, deliver a summer school or run a mentoring programme. Mission- and task-level relationships can coexist within a single partnership structure, if the partnership concerned has both strategic and operational objectives. Senior representatives within a partnership are more likely to be focused on the mission, while those involved in directly delivering programmes will be more task-focused. Figure 2 summarises common differences between the two types. However, partnerships often have many purposes and will include a complex mix of these features.

Figure 2: Mission-level and task-level partnerships

Partnership type	Agreements focus on partners'…	Likely time span	Purpose	Scale
Mission-level	Relationships	Ongoing, long-term	Improvement of overall outcomes	Programmes
Task-level	Roles	Fixed, short-term	Production of specific outputs	Projects

Partnership objectives

When you are creating partnerships it is important to think about your objectives and to consider what level(s) they operate on. For example:

- What aims are you trying to fulfil by partnering? Are they more strategic, or more operationally focused?
- Who should be in the partnership?
- How big is the partnership?
- How long do you want the partnership to last?

What is partnership?

Partnership implies that all parties both give something to and get something from the relationship. There are no rules as to what constitutes a partnership, so each partnership is different. Partnership can consist of informal arrangements between two organisations, or a multi-agency group governed by a formal agreement.

This toolkit considers three aspects of partnerships: purpose, scale and degree. When making decisions about creating, managing and evaluating partnerships you should consider the following questions:

- Purpose: what aims are you trying to fulfil by partnering?
- Scale: how big is the partnership, and who should be in it?
- Degree: how closely should you partner?

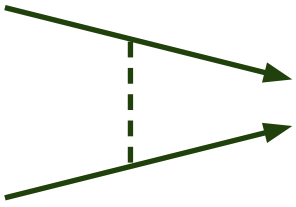
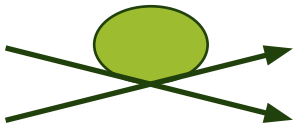
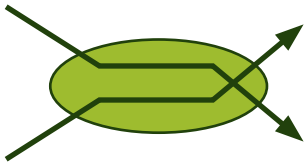
Figure 3 shows how understanding how the purpose of a partnership relates to its degree and scale.

Figure 3: How the degree and scale of partnership relate to its purpose

Purpose	**Degree of partnership** → **Closer partnership**
Scale of partnership ↓ **More partners**	The nature and operation of the partnership should be developed to meet the clearly defined purpose. The purpose will inform who is involved (scale) and how closely they work together (degree).

Much has been written about partnership, and various terms are used to describe increasing levels of closeness in partnership relationships. Figure 4 sets out four types of partnership that are used in a WP context.

Figure 4: Types of partnership

Networking	**Co-operation**	**Collaboration**	**Integration**
			
Organisations share information about strategy and/or activities. Potential overlaps are noted and addressed.	Organisations work together on areas where strategies and/or activities overlap.	Organisations develop strategy and activity together to achieve shared aims.	Organisations develop a single strategy and co-ordinate activities. This might include the development of new jointly funded organisations.

One important consideration in approaching partnership working is the degree of control the institution wants to retain. The closer partnerships become the more control is shared. Appropriate governance and good communication will help address the challenges raised by close partnerships. For further guidance see the **Create** section.

Figure 5 describes the potential benefits and drawbacks of the four types of partnership outlined above.

Figure 5: Pros and cons of different types of partnership

Type	Characteristics	Pros	Cons	Exemplar
Networking	Aware of organisations/ initiatives. Loosely defined roles and relationships. Little communication. All decisions are made independently.	Less resource-intensive for individual partners.	Limited efficiency benefits. Frequent duplication.	Partners recognise other organisations and initiatives. Have a basic understanding of different roles and contexts. Interaction and communication is infrequent and informal. Limited connectivity.
Co-operation	Independently developed strategies are shared. Somewhat defined roles and relationships. Formal communication. All decisions are made independently.	Less duplication.	Limited potential for bridging gaps in provision.	Partners have a basic knowledge of each other's strategic priorities and objectives. Some distinction between roles and relationships exists. Interaction and communication are regular, formal and informal.
Collaboration	Proactive alignment of strategies. Defined roles and relationships. Shared ideas and combined resources. All partners have a vote in decision-making. Consensus is reached on all decisions. Frequent and prioritised communication.	Development of complementary provision between partners.	Increased risk of conflict.	Different strategies take account of each other. Shared strategic objectives are clearly defined. Joint resourcing to achieve common goals. Well defined roles and relationships. All decisions agreed collectively. Early and proactive sharing of information with identified audiences.
Integration	A single strategy and partnership. Partners belong to one system with joint ownership of decision-making. Shared responsibility for outcomes. Frequent communication is characterised by mutual trust.	Multiple barriers addressed and impact maximised by developing holistic solutions. Increased knowledge, experience and skills from multiple partners.	Requires significant and ongoing commitment from all partners. Highly formal and complex.	A single, clear vision and strategy exist. Autonomy is relinquished to support the strategy. Strong and visible leadership and support. Leadership capitalises on diversity and partnership strengths. Individuals have the authority and flexibility to engage in mutual decision-making. Communication is clear, frequent and prioritised, formal and informal.

Internal partnerships

Higher education providers are commonly large, complex organisations with a range of competing agendas. Widening participation may not be a top priority. Consequently WP professionals must work to engage internal partners in the WP agenda. As with external partners, it is important to identify the appropriate internal partner and consider their priorities.

HE providers have the following groups or functions, although their names vary and they may be organised differently:

- academic departments
- admissions
- alumni services
- development team
- marketing
- senior management
- student support services
- students' union.

All of these groups have resources and expertise that are useful for WP. It is therefore valuable for institutional leads on WP to think about how they connect to these other internal partners and to consider why and how they might be involved in WP.

The following areas of work that HE providers are involved in have a strong overlap with widening participation:

- community engagement
- completion
- employability
- graduate careers and destinations
- links with industry and employers
- public engagement
- recruitment
- retention
- student experience
- work-based learning
- STEM (science, technology, engineering and maths).

When working to embed WP in HE providers' strategies it is useful to find ways to explicitly connect with these agendas. Senior management will be keen to ensure any investment of resources meets as many of the institution's strategic objectives as possible. It is therefore important to consider

how WP connects with a wide range of institutional objectives and to build internal partnerships which support this.

Internal partnerships

- Who are the key stakeholders in the WP agenda in your organisation?
- How can they contribute to WP priorities?

Connecting agendas

Many HE providers run ambassador schemes where current students volunteer to work in schools. The schemes can be consciously set up so that students work with schools to address WP. This also improves the HE provider's reputation within the local community and can have positive impacts on recruitment. Furthermore, the student volunteers also get something out of it, for example it can contribute to them having a positive student experience and enhance their employability. Examples of this kind of ambassador/mentoring scheme include:

- providing reading partners
- curriculum support in subjects such as Modern Foreign Languages or Maths
- foreign students working with pupils with English as an additional language
- societies running school clubs that help raise awareness and aspirations.

What external organisations can you partner with?

In the best kinds of partnership all participants achieve some or all of their aims. One important element of working with others is therefore to understand more about their organisations and why they might be interested in partnership. This section provides an overview of several types of organisation that are likely to be involved in WP. It also provides links to information sources and questions that are helpful in developing understanding about local contexts. While you read about the types of individuals or organisations that could be potential partners, consider the questions below.

External partnerships

The following questions may be useful in helping shape your partnerships.

- Who are you going to work with?
- What do they do when they are not working on WP?
- Why would they be interested in partnering?
- What resources do they have that they could put into the partnership?
- What are the likely limits of their involvement?

Schools

Government department:	Department for Education	DfE website
Funded by:	Education Funding Agency	EFA website
Regulated by:	Ofsted	Ofsted website

Schools are where most learners are found up to the age of 16 and a large minority up to 18. Good schools will be committed to supporting learner progression, and may have an interest in WP as a result. There are a number of government policies that frame the way in which schools are likely to engage with WP. These include:

- the raising of the learner leaving age in England (to the end of the year in which a learner is 17 from 2012 and to their 18th birthday from 2015)
- the introduction of a new statutory duty on schools to commission career guidance for 14 to 16 year-old learners (the age range may be extended in the future)
- the conversion to academy status, which moves the school out of the control and support structures of the local authority
- the introduction of the 'progression measure' which will identify where young people have progressed post-16.

These changes may create new needs in schools that offer HE providers opportunities to partner with them to try to address these needs.

In addition, the advent of academies has created a new environment within which to pursue the widening of participation to HE. Academies are state-funded schools which have been set up with the help of sponsors and enjoy considerable freedom to innovate and raise standards. These include:

- freedom from local authority control
- the ability to set their own pay and conditions for staff

- freedoms around curriculum delivery
- the ability to change the lengths of terms and school days.

In some cases HE providers fulfil the role of the sponsor for academies and build very close relationships with these schools. These relationships often actively include a WP component. HE providers wishing to establish partnerships with academies will need to explore school priorities and procedures, and recognise that these may differ from those of other schools.

Partnerships with schools may also include access to data which can aid in the identification of WP cohorts. More information about the ways in which this kind of targeting can work can be found in **Toolkit 2: Targeting.**

eg A school in Greater London runs an annual 'sharing good practice' event for post-16 institutions from London and the Midlands. Through partnerships with several universities and other organisations, workshops are offered on topics such as:

- transition to 6th form and beyond
- developing a whole-school approach to progression
- supporting effective practice in the extended project
- delivering effective information, advice and guidance
- learning to learn
- creating effective personal statements.

? Schools and academies

- What relationships does your institution have with schools and would there be value in reviewing or broadening these?
- How are current policy shifts impacting on what schools are doing?
- What research and planning do you need to do to keep up to date?
- What schools forums or networks exist, and is there a co-ordinator who could be approached?
- Who leads on school support in the local authority?

Colleges and other further education providers

Government department:	Department for Business, Innovation and Skills	DBIS website
Funded by:	Skills Funding Agency	SFA website
Regulated by:	Ofsted	Ofsted website

An increasing number of young people in the 14-19 age range are undertaking learning programmes in colleges and other further education (FE) providers. FE providers are also important educators of adult learners, many of whom may seek to progress to HE.

Several key policies currently frame the way in which FE providers engage with the WP agenda. These include:

- a move towards a 'demand-led' skills system as laid down in the Government's strategy 'Skills for Sustainable Growth' (DBIS, 2010). This approach seeks to enable employers to influence the range and type of programmes on offer in response to their skills shortages
- an increase in the number and level of apprenticeships on offer including the implementation of higher level apprenticeships
- a move to the provision of increased targeting of financial support to learners through student bursaries administered and delivered by FE providers.

In addition to academic programmes of study, colleges can provide vocational or work-based pathways to HE. Importantly, colleges also offer a lot of information, advice and guidance (IAG) on HE to their students. Colleges therefore play a vital role in delivering and preparing students for HE, and are pivotal in the development and implementation of WP plans and activities.

Finally, it is also important to note that some FE providers are also providers of HE, which can introduce tensions into partnership working with other HE providers (for example universities).

Further education providers

- How are local colleges of FE organised?
- What useful course links exist between the colleges and the HE provider?
- Are they single campus or multi-campus sites?
- How can you find out who the most appropriate contact is?

Work-based learning and training providers

Government department:	Department for Business, Innovation and Skills	DBIS website
Funded by:	Skills Funding Agency	SFA website
Regulated by:	Ofsted	Ofsted website

Work-based learning or training providers provide government-funded skills training and employability programmes throughout England. Most of these organisations are private, not-for-profit or voluntary third sector independent training organisations delivering government-funded skills and welfare-to-work programmes. This group also includes some further education colleges which offer programmes of this sort alongside other academic or vocational programmes. Work-based learning and training organisations can be local, regional or national.

Work-based learning pathways to HE are likely to grow significantly over the next few years with the announcement by the Government (DBIS, 2011) of 19,000 new higher level apprenticeships. There may also be learners in the age range of 14-19 on apprenticeship schemes linked to training providers. These learners are an important group who should have the opportunity to consider whether HE provides them with useful progression routes. Training provider partners can therefore be useful as they extend the reach of WP programmes.

Work based-learning and training providers

- Which work-based learning and training providers are offering programmes that offer potential progression to HE programmes?
- How might partnering with these organisations help to meet your strategic plan for WP?
- Is there an association of training providers where the training providers already meet together?

Local authorities

Government department:	Department for Communities and Local Government	DCLG website
Funded by:	Department for Communities and Local Government and Central Government	DCLG website
Regulated by:	Ofsted • early years and childcare • children and families services • adult learning and skills Local Government Ombudsman	Ofsted website LGO website

Local authorities are evolving their services in response to changes in legislation which affect their resources and duties to deliver IAG and to support the development of the school curriculum. In the past, local authorities have held responsibility for the provision of universal careers IAG in schools. Schools are now required to commission their own career guidance services and the funding for local authority universal career guidance provision has been removed. This move, alongside the increase in the number of academies, has reduced local authorities' funding and remit to support schools in their area.

Despite the reduced role of local authorities in this capacity under the Education Act 2011, they retain the duty to support vulnerable young people's successful transitions into learning and work. In some areas this has been extended to provide careers IAG through local authority multi-agency teams (MATs). These teams share common goals of raising community aspiration and improving neighbourhoods by reducing crime and poverty, and improving the behaviour and engagement of young people. Local authorities can therefore be seen as stakeholders in the WP agenda and, as such, are potentially valuable partners.

eg Sheffield College has a partnership with local authority groups including social services and housing as well as a few schools and the police in a particular part of Sheffield. They have worked together to create a programme for Romany young people.

? Local authorities

- What plans does the local authority have to widen participation in education?
- What local authority priorities align with your aspirations for working in partnership?
- Who in the local authority is the most appropriate person to contact?

National Careers Service

Government department:	Department for Business, Innovation and Skills	DBIS website
Funded by:	Skills Funding Agency	SFA website
Regulated by:	Matrix	Matrix website

The National Careers Service provides information, advice and guidance to help individuals make decisions related to learning, training and work opportunities. A primary contractor in each region is responsible for delivery of the National Careers Service. The service offers confidential and impartial advice, supported by qualified careers advisers. The service is mainly targeted at adults, though it does have a limited remit with young people. The service is run by a prime contractor in each area,

but usually sub-contracted through a number of smaller, more local contractors. HE providers will therefore need to understand how the National Careers Service is delivered in their area and form partnerships which ensure maximum coverage of their information and prospectuses.

Careers services

- Who is the primary contractor for the National Careers Service in your area?
- Where is the service delivered from and who is responsible for delivering it in key sites?

Wider community partners

Schools, colleges, work-based learning providers and HEIs all need to be sensitive to the ways other networks and provision complement WP activities.

The voluntary sector (also referred to as the community sector or third sector) is complex and dynamic, ever-changing to meet the needs of society and growing at a significant rate as a not-for-profit employer and service provider. For FE or HE education providers there are many benefits to working in partnership with the community and voluntary sectors. They often have links with communities and access to learners and families who are currently under-represented in HE.

In addition, several non-statutory organisations, funded through a variety of means (including European funding, national and local government funding and commercial activities), exist to enhance the design and delivery of the curriculum and to assist progression through education and into work. This is an important consideration for WP. WP partnerships will therefore need to be aware of, and forge relationships with:

- information, advice and guidance services
- Gifted and Talented initiatives
- third sector initiatives such as those delivering the Youth Contract
- poverty reduction initiatives
- curriculum enrichment agents such as STEMNET and Education Business Link Organisations (EBLOs).

Working with third sector organisations requires considerable networking skills. There are no national approaches to compiling databases of local third sector organisations. However, local authority websites or members of other partnerships may be able to help in establishing a list of organisations worth contacting because they share a common agenda to widen participation and improve access to HE.

Wider community partners

- Which community partners might have an agenda that aligns with WP?
- Who might be able to help you establish a list of useful contacts?
- Which organisations work with your target groups or work to address the issues you are focusing on?

Create

This section helps HE providers make decisions about who to partner with, and what kind of partnership to have, in order to achieve the identified purpose. It is structured as follows:

- identify the purpose
- identify partners
- consider the benefits, cost and risks
- defining aims and objectives
- agree governance and management structures.

Identify the purpose

Partnerships are most effective when they have a clear rationale and aims. Potential partners are more likely to make a commitment to working in partnership if they can see a clear purpose, and outcomes that address their priorities.

If partnership is necessary to achieve the identified purpose it is important to consider how partners' priorities will be addressed. Reviewing the various partners' priorities, success measures, and common and contradictory interests will give HE providers attractive messages with which to approach organisations in relation to potential partnership. See Figure 6 for an example of what this might look like.

Figure 6: A model for reviewing partners' priorities

Organisation	Overall purpose	Core success measures	Common aims/ interests	Conflicting aims/ interests (if any)
School A	11-18 education. Pupil success.	Attainment at 16, 17 and 18 Attendance. Behaviour. Quality of teaching and learning. Progression.	Attainment. Pupil aspiration and motivation. GCSE choices. Independent learning skills. HE choices.	Academy with a focus on vocational education – may not realise the full potential for accessing HE programmes with vocational qualifications.
College A	16-19 and adult education. Learner success.	Retention and success rates. Course completions. Progression.	Learner success. Aspiration and motivation. HE choices.	College has its own HE provision in sector-specific areas.
Training provider A	16-19 vocational training routes. NEET engagement. Learner success and progression.	Retention and success rates. Progression.	Aspiration. Motivation. Employer engagement.	Has strong links to other local universities.

Identify potential partners

When developing partnerships around the identified purpose it is worthwhile considering the partnerships that already exist. They may provide everything you need, or at least provide a good start and ways into other organisations.

HE providers' aims for their WP activities provide the context within which partnerships can be sought. Information used for targeting purposes (see **Toolkit 2: Targeting**) is likely to provide further ideas about which are the key organisations to work with. Organisation-level targeting will identify the providers, and learner-level targeting will help identify specific cohorts and start to define specific aims. Targeting can therefore provide a starting list of providers with which to forge partnerships. HE providers can then map their organisation's network to identify potential partners and notice gaps. Once gaps are found, it is possible to work with existing partners to identify new organisations that fill them.

Identifying partners

- What are the gaps in your network of partnerships?
- What groups or forums do your potential partners belong to? Could you address (or join) these groups?
- What internal and external partnerships already exist between groups and departments in your institution?
- Which is the easiest and most obvious partner? For example, does your institution sponsor an academy or is there a nearby FE college?

Building partnerships

HE providers typically have a range of existing relationships maintained by a variety of different elements within the institution. These may not have been considered in the framework of WP, but might include:

- Students' union supported volunteering in local schools
- Schools of education/education departments within universities which have strong partnerships with schools
- Institutional engagement with national initiatives around particular issues (for example, STEMNET or the Children's University) which encourage the formation of partnerships with schools
- Individual departments that have developed relationships with schools and other partners around a particular subject area, for example to encourage young people to consider studying Physics
- Student support teams that sometimes have relationships with service providers and local authorities in relation to particular cohorts (for example, students with learning difficulties or disabilities, looked-after children and care leavers).

Mapping existing and potential partners will help HE providers understand their options and identify both first steps and longer-term targets to support the development of relationships. Figure 7 provides some ideas, sources of information and ways of developing a map of existing and potential partners.

Figure 7: Mapping partnerships

	Internal	External
Existing	• e-mailing staff for information on links with providers • meeting students' union staff (especially volunteering groups) • addressing relevant institutional committees • meeting with colleagues who have partnership elements in their roles • meeting with colleagues in the university's education department • meeting with colleagues in the marketing department.	• e-mailing external circulation lists re existing and/or potential partners • meeting with colleagues from other organisations • attending local professional network meetings • joining networking groups in, for example, LinkedIn.
New/ Potential	As above and: • asking existing partners about other partnerships they are involved in.	As above and: • networking with other HE providers, schools, colleges, training providers and local authorities to find out about their partnerships.

Download the Partnership mapping template

Mapping existing partnerships

Reflecting on existing partnerships allows WP practitioners to think strategically about how they wish to develop the organisation's network of partners. A good way to do this is to produce a mapping document which sets out the different types of partnership the HE provider is involved in and the purpose of each.

It may be useful to create a 'living document' that can be updated as more is learned about the partners. A partnership mapping document should record the following kinds of information:

- purpose of the partnership
- HE provider's contribution
- partnership governance structures
- meeting schedules
- contact details.

Figure 8 provides an example of partnership activity mapping.

Figure 8: Mapping partnership activity

Organisation or partnership	Purpose	University contribution	Governance	Details of last meeting	Contact details
St Stephen's 11-19 academy	Focus on maths and sciences at A-level. High number of NEETS Area of high deprivation.	CEIAG programme at careers fair and via STEM activities. University on school governing body.	Partnership agreement	To review partnership agreement June 2012.	Jim Smith Park Road Nottingham Tel: 0115 000 871
North Nottinghamshire area partnership	Partnership convened by local authority has education & business members. Aims to develop community aspiration.	University attends monthly meetings.	Joint vision statement Minutes of meetings record actions	Meeting on 15/6/2012 to review vision statement and to hear information re local business enterprise.	Partnership lead Mary Brown Tel: 0115 0003 851

Download the Mapping partnership activity template

Mapping partnership activity across your organisation can be a challenge as other people may not see their partnership activities as having anything to do with WP. However, getting an overview will help avoid duplication and provide you with useful connections to potential partners.

Once you have contacted other people within the institution who are involved in partnerships, think about how you are going to maintain communication with them and ensure that information flows both ways. This will ensure you are in ready receipt of intelligence about potential new partners, and that you can feed into the organisation's wider strategic aims.

Reviewing partners

- What do you know about your partners already?
- What else do you need to find out?
- How will you undertake this research?
- Who can help?

Consider the benefits, costs and risks

Partnerships are more likely to thrive if all participants understand their individual roles and the expectations placed upon them by others in the group. Before embarking on a partnership, potential members need to consider several specific issues, guided by the questions below.

Benefits, cost and risks

- What will your organisation get out of the relationship? (benefits)
- Working with others takes time and effort. What are the 'transaction costs' of the relationship? (costs)
- Will working in a partnership present new risks or reduce existing ones? (risks)

Figure 9 provides an example of how to map the benefits, costs and risks of partnership activity.

Figure 9: Costs, benefits and risks analysis

Partner	Potential benefits	Potential costs	Potential risks
Higher education provider	Access to funding or other resources, including expertise, data, equipment, buildings, routes to learners.	Meetings, administration, decision-making processes.	The level of commitment may not be clear at the outset.
School A	Improving ability to identify learner/employer/ provider needs and plan for the future.	Organisation's time, resources and people taken up with projects.	Could lose some autonomy.
School B	Developing the organisation's capabilities.	Having to consult with others on things it would be quicker to do on one's own.	Some of the partners may not deliver.
College A	Expanding the scale of capacity to deliver.	Supporting others to deliver to consistent quality standards.	Involvement might cause other organisations to view partners differently.
Local authority A	Joining up things up for learners.	Learners select options offered by others.	Might pull the organisation in new policy directions.
	Creating new ideas and services.	Research and development.	Loss of focus.
	Improving long-term sustainability of services.	Funding opportunities tend to focus on short or medium-term outcomes.	Tied in with the fate of others.

Download the tool Cost, benefit and risk analysis

Defining aims and objectives

Having a shared vision and goals translates into practical benefits for partners in terms of cost, quality, impact and innovation. Partnerships should set out the partnership's strategic objectives, the indicators of success associated with these, and a timescale for delivery. (For more information on using indicators of success as part of an evaluation strategy see **Toolkit 4: Evaluation**). A strategic plan can also contain a brief statement setting out an overall vision and an indication of strategic priorities.

Defining aims and goals

- Who will take the lead role in steering the process?
- How will you share the strategic plan with stakeholders?

Download the Developing a strategic plan template

Agree governance and management structures

It is important that partnerships are made between individuals and groups who have the correct mix of expertise and the capacity to deliver the activities required. To identify suitable potential partners, consider:

- the structure of their organisation
- how decisions are taken and by whom
- financial and planning processes
- what constraints partners face
- what partners are capable of doing
- what partners find difficult to do
- the partner's planning cycle.

It is helpful if early discussion regarding the relative relationship of each partner takes place. This will provide the partnership with a firm foundation based on clarity and transparency, and avoid future misunderstandings and concerns. Such discussions may include issues of resources, administration and management roles.

Partnerships are likely to meet regularly. In order to ensure the smooth running and effectiveness of partnership meetings, a chair will need to be appointed to run the meeting. This can be a fixed post or one which rotates through each of the members.

Critical to the smooth and effective running of a partnership is the need to agree at the outset a set of 'terms of reference' which makes explicit such issues as:

- purpose of the partnership
- context for the operation of the partnership

- individuals' and organisations' roles and responsibilities
- decision-making
- governance arrangements
- meeting administration and management
- meeting schedules
- arrangements for formal partnership agreements
- data sharing protocols.

Some partners may wish to come together to create new independent delivery organisations such as social enterprises, charities or companies. These are jointly funded by partners and may offer cost-effective, practical solutions to a range of WP challenges which less formal structures might struggle to overcome. In these instances, partners invest financially in the new organisation and are involved through the governance structures of the new organisation.

eg London Higher and HE in London

London Higher is an umbrella body representing over 40 HE providers in London, as well as several universities with centres in London and a small number of private providers.

The organisation's activities include research, workshops, parliamentary lobbying, advisory groups and networks.

London Higher works closely with partner organisations including the Greater London Authority (GLA), London First, the business sector and HE bodies.

The effective operation of partnerships depends to a great degree on the individuals managing them. WP practitioners may not have any influence over who they work with, but clear expectations will help to ensure success. The following 'wish list' is a guide to qualities all partners should aspire to. Good partners:

- want the partnership to succeed
- are open, clear and honest about their own priorities and goals
- are willing to be flexible in the pursuit of mutual goals
- listen to, acknowledge and respond to others' views
- are trustworthy and prepared to trust
- have time and resources to attend appropriate meetings
- are able to engage their colleagues/management in support of the partnership
- deliver on their tasks and responsibilities on time
- respect others and their contributions
- do not shelve difficulties, but are prepared to discuss and deal with them openly.

Download the Terms of reference template

More information about data sharing protocols and data protection legislation is contained in **Toolkit 2: Targeting**.

Develop a partnership agreement

Documenting the arrangement between partners in a 'partnership agreement' is a useful way of working through the main elements which need to be in place. These include clarifying roles and responsibilities, the timeframe and key milestones for the activity under consideration. This type of document can then operate as a tool for monitoring and reviewing the partnership's effectiveness.

Common elements to think about, discuss, agree and document include:

1. **Aims and objectives:** What is the purpose of the partnership? What are you trying to achieve and how will you know when you have succeeded?
2. **Strategy and activities:** What is the timetable of activity and what are each of the partners' roles and responsibilities in this?
3. **Membership and decision-making:** What should be the basis for membership of the partnership? How will you take decisions?
4. **Management and operation:** Will the partnership be managed through a steering group and/or operational group? Who will be responsible for day-to-day management? Where this is shared, who is responsible for what? What principles or ground rules will govern the partnership? How and when will performance be reviewed?
5. **Resources:** How is the partnership to be resourced, including cash, personnel and in-kind contributions?
6. **Information:** What information do you need to share? Be aware that consent may be required to share some data. Partnerships should work within the boundaries of data protection legislation. More information about codes of practice and guidance on data sharing protocols are contained in **Toolkit 2: Targeting**.
7. **Evaluation:** How will you evaluate the success of the partnership overall and for individual partners? How can you each ensure you learn something of value for the future?
8. **Resolving conflict:** When areas of tension or issues resulting in disagreement develop, how will these be handled? Who will have responsibility for resolving conflicts?
9. **Ending the partnership:** What will each partner be expected to do as the end of the partnership period approaches? What outputs need to be completed and co-ordinated? Are there circumstances which might force any partners to withdraw earlier? How will you deal with this?
10. **Risk assessment:** What might go wrong, and what mitigating actions can be taken to keep the partnership on course?

Download the Partnership agreement template

Manage

WP partnerships are relationships. Their successful operation relies on maintaining effective relations between the partners and fulfilling the purposes for which the partnership exists. The best way to ensure success is to set up the relationship around its purpose in clear and open ways in the first place. Successful management of the partnership is concerned with operating in accordance with aims, plans and agreements made in its creation.

Fundamental to effective partnership activity are:

- project and programme management
- project planning
- communication
- risk management
- monitoring and review
- reporting progress.

Each of these is dealt with in more detail below.

Project and programme management

> *'Project management gives you a framework – at certain points it prompts you to take a step back and think "have I done this?", "have I considered that?", "do I understand this fully?", "what will we do should 'x' happen?", "how should I deal with this?"'*
> (JISC infoNet, 2012)

This section focuses on project management, which is more relevant to task-level partnerships than mission-level partnerships, although many of the principles will be useful to both. Mission-level partnerships are likely to include many different task-level activities between partners.

The management of large-scale activities containing many projects is called **programme** management. The JISC infoNet site provides advice and tools for programme management. The topic is not dealt with further in this toolkit.

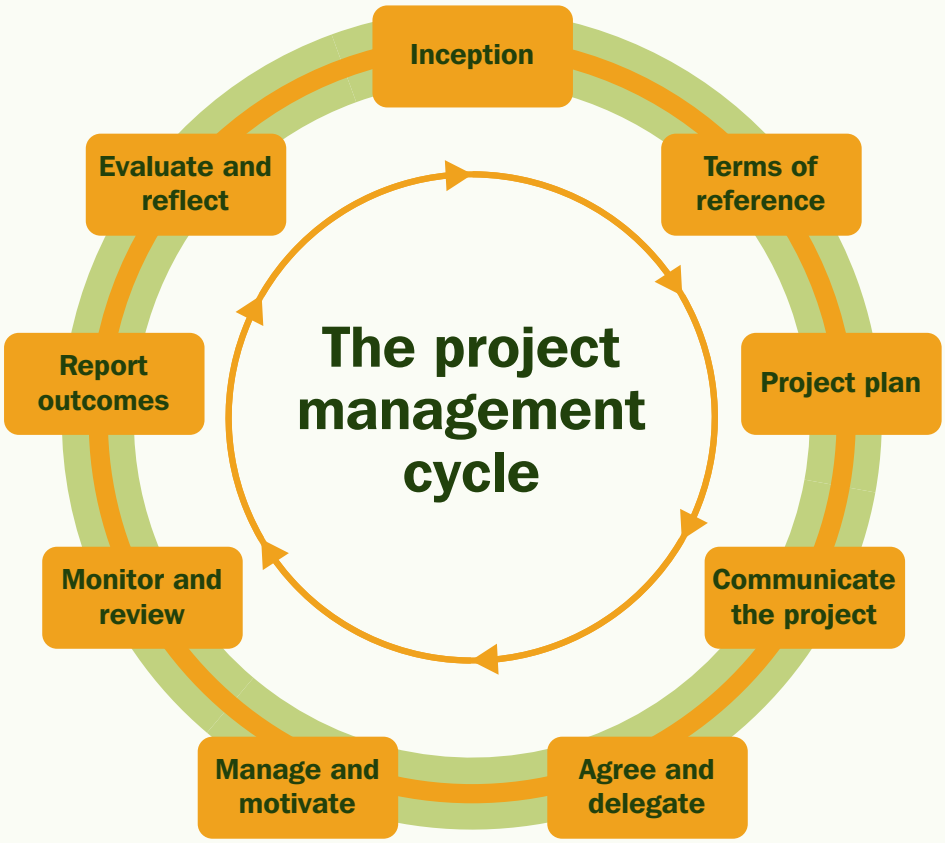
Many excellent project management resources are available, ranging from the very simple to the extremely complex.

Project management can helpfully be thought of as a cycle, as follows.

1. **Project inception:** funding and approval is gained for the project.
2. **Terms of reference:** agreeing precise specification for the project.
3. **Project plan:** develop an explicit plan for time, personnel, activities, resources and financials.
4. **Communicate:** disseminate the project plan to the project team and to any other interested people and groups.
5. **Agree and delegate:** assign project actions.

6. **Manage and motivate:** inform, encourage and enable the project team.
7. **Monitor and review project progress:** adjust project plans and inform the project team and others.
8. **Report project outcomes:** review and report on project performance; recognise project team's contributions.
9. **Evaluate and reflect:** appraise the project process.

Figure 10: The project management cycle



Though the following sections provide further guidance on project management, many HE providers have dedicated project management units, which may be available to support WP teams. Even one-day project management training is likely to be a worthwhile investment for most practitioners.

Project planning

Effective project planning can be summarised in the management of:

'Who does what, how, when… and why?'

- **Who:** clear roles and responsibilities for every input and outcome
- **What:** clearly defined tasks and resource planning
- **How:** careful resource and process planning (such as costs and support)
- **When:** appropriately sequenced and timed activity
- **Why:** clear aims, objectives, targets and outcomes.

Each project should have a written plan. This should be a flexible document which is reviewed and altered in line with progress. A project plan will develop in stages – from an initial broad plan for the outcomes of the project, to becoming a more detailed document as the project deepens and actions lead to further developments. For this reason the plan should be regularly updated and shared among the team and interested parties.

The plan should be broken down into stages which should relate to project milestones, key dates and project outputs. There are many versions of a project plan which range from a simple graphic representation of a project timeline (a basic Gantt chart is shown in Figure 11) to a complex spreadsheet which details financial and resource issues alongside timelines for project output completion.

The example below is simple to create either in a word processing or spreadsheet application.

Project planning

- How will your project plan be presented?
- What will the process of reviewing your project plan be?

Detailed project management advice and tools can be found in the JISC infoNet Project Management Infokit.

Communication

This section deals with the role of communication in developing and maintaining effective partnerships. Good communication can provide many benefits to a partnership. It can advertise services and projects to those for whom they are being provided, celebrate successes and raise the profile of the partnership. Communication is also useful for keeping partners up to date and in touch. Good communication processes will ensure all partners are engaged and involved. This can improve relationships between partners and reduce misunderstandings and suspicions.

Partnerships should develop a communication strategy which details individual partners' roles and responsibilities regarding communication, including:

- publicity arrangements
- circulation of meeting schedules, agendas, deadlines and outcomes
- use of e-mail, Skype, work platforms and social media.

A communication strategy will provide a focus for regular monitoring and review. Effective publicity and communication can also aid the partnership through joint launch events, seminars, workshops and conference appearances which focus on common interests and shared agendas. Not all members of a partnership will be familiar with certain communication approaches and may need to be supported to develop new skills, such as how to use new media and work platforms. Part of the communication strategy may therefore involve training and support in new methods of

communication. Monitoring should therefore ensure that all partners are becoming familiar with the agreed methods of communication and are using them.

Figure 11: A Gantt chart for project planning purposes

	Apr 2013	May 2013	June 2013	July 2013	Aug 2013	Sept 2013	Oct 2010	Nov 2013	Dec 2013
Stage 1: Inception From April 1st 2012									
Inception meeting with project funders	■								
Inception meeting with project team	■								
Agree terms of reference	■								
Agree detailed project action plan	■								
Agree communication plan	■								
Allocate tasks	■								
Stage 2: Implementation									
Develop project outputs		■	■	■	■				
Test project outputs						■			
Review project outputs							■		
Finalise project outputs							■		
Stage 3: Reporting									
Communicate project outputs								■	
Final actions									
Evaluate project									■
Acknowledge team efforts									■
Close project									■

In developing a communications strategy the following issues will need to be considered.

Audience: What groups and individuals does the partnership need to communicate with? What do they need? Are their needs changing?

Culture: is communication viewed as an important element of our partnership?

Skills and resources: does the partnership have the skills and resources needed to communicate its messages?

Messages: what messages does the partnership need to communicate? How will success be communicated among partnership members and to wider stakeholders?

Branding: does the partnership have a clear brand? Are there limitations on the way that this brand is used? Is there a need to develop branding guidelines? Are all members of the partnership aware of the brand and the guidelines?

Monitoring: how and when does the partnership monitor its activities?

Communication

- Who will take responsibility for generating, monitoring and reviewing a communication strategy?
- What methods of communication are available to the partnership?
- What messages need to be communicated, and to whom?

Risk management

This section deals with the issue of risk and how this can be managed to reduce its impact as well as how to prevent potential risks becoming a liability which might threaten the life of a partnership.

A risk is defined as a possible event or circumstance that can have negative influences on the project in question. Its impact can be on resources (human and capital), products and services, or beneficiaries of the project, as well as external impacts on the community, or the environment. In most cases, it is possible to develop mitigation strategies well in advance of risks becoming a reality, making the process of managing them easier and less costly. Risks are more likely to occur at critical points throughout the project, such as during busy holiday periods, approaching key dates for outputs, or due to events outside our control, such as unexpected weather conditions. All of these issues can be mitigated through forward planning of contingency measures.

Risk management includes the following activities:

Planning how risk will be managed in the particular project. Plans should include risk management tasks, responsibilities, activities and budget.

Assigning a risk officer – a team member other than a project manager who is responsible for foreseeing potential problems.

Preparing a plan which describes the processes adopted to avoid risks, how risks will be handled and by whom.

Risk management

- What are the critical points in the life cycle of your partnership?
- What contingency measures will help you respond to these potential issues?
- Who will have responsibility for this?

Download a Template for risk management

Monitoring and review

It is vital to monitor and review key aspects of the project or activity to ensure its effective management and eventual successful and timely outcome. Processes for monitoring and review will need to be agreed at the outset. They should also be included in both the terms of reference and project plan where this involves gathering and sharing data which may have resource implications for each partner. Monitoring and reviewing progress should form part of the collective responsibility of the partnership, but will be led by the project manager. Monitoring progress is important in order to create contingencies where progress is not meeting the project's original requirements. There is considerable value in generating a collective sense of achievement. While milestones are often written into funding documents, their importance in helping maintain and sustain a partnership is often overlooked.

Milestones can also be used to celebrate success and achievement with the project team, and can encourage and motivate those involved. Taking time to acknowledge when a milestone has been reached, celebrating achievement and ensuring it is communicated to all partners – and if possible to their stakeholders – can help cement relationships and refresh enthusiasm.

Monitoring and review

- How will your partnership review progress against targets and recognise success?
- How will your partnership acknowledge and communicate success?

Reporting progress

This section deals with the issue of progress reporting. This is not only a critical issue in the life of a project but can provide a valuable resource which can be used in the evaluation process. Progress reporting is a key element of project management, and involves the project manager providing regular reports on progress to key personnel, including:

- project sponsors
- stakeholders

- senior managers
- team members
- budget holders
- other identified personnel or organisations.

Key issues to report on include:

- overall progress against milestones and targets
- emerging challenges
- identified risks
- points which need clarification, discussion or decisions
- tasks and next steps including those responsible
- critical and future dates
- financial issues related to the project.

Progress reporting

- Who will need to receive project progress reports?
- What issues will be covered in the project progress reports?

Some partnerships may wish to agree an approach for reporting including a schedule and template. There are clear benefits to having an approach to reporting as it strengthens the partnership's own review processes and makes communicating success easier.

Download a Template for project progress reporting

Review

Partnerships should not exist on an open-ended basis, but should have monitoring, review and evaluation built into their cycle of activities to ensure that they remain appropriate and effective. This section considers ways of achieving this.

This toolkit refers specifically to reviewing the effectiveness of partnership working and not to evaluating the impact of the partnership's work in relation to its aims. The tools and resources in this section are formative: they help HE providers review the quality of their partnership work and make decisions as to how to improve them, or, if appropriate, end them.

Partnerships should also develop an evaluation strategy, which will underpin their activities and provide targets and milestones for impact assessment. More information and details about processes of evaluation can be found in **Toolkit 4: Evaluation**.

This section describes the following processes that can be used to evaluate partnerships:

- share partner perspectives
- review partnership themes and types

Share partner perspectives

Providing an opportunity for partners to share their views openly enables everyone to be heard and ensures a good depth of information in highlighted areas. It can be useful to ask partners to complete a bullet-point summary before a review meeting showing how they think the partnership has been functioning and how they would like it to develop. Figure 12 shows a simple framing tool that can be helpful in shaping this.

Figure 12: Summarising perspectives

Factors helping partnership work (including funding, regulation, policy, technology, communication):	**Factors hindering partnership work** (including funding, regulation, policy, technology, communication):
What could be done to maximise these opportunities?	**What could be done to reduce these barriers?**
Quick and easy wins: **More challenging, but important:**	**Quick and easy wins:** **More challenging, but important:**

Download a Summarising partnerships' perspectives template

eg Sharing partners' perspectives at a meeting

- ask partners to submit their summaries in advance
- provide a few minutes for each partner to talk through their main thoughts at the meeting
- produce a brief synthesised version showing all partners' perspectives to create a shared picture of the partnership view.

Review partnership themes and types

Having shared partner perspectives, it is valuable to develop a synthesis of the areas of current and potential future work. Different partners will have different reasons for valuing the partnership work, and open discussions about this provide an opportunity to make these desires clear and begin discussions about how to proceed so that all partners benefit.

Reviewing current partnership work could be done through informal discussions about the value and impact of specific small-scale activities or via a more formal evaluation of the full range of partnership themes, including collaborative projects, common interests, shared services, strategic overlaps and more. More information about approaches to evaluation can be found in **Toolkit 4: Evaluation**.

Reflecting on the themes of activity provides partners' with the opportunity to refresh the shared understanding of their changing priorities. Using the types of partnership outlined in Figure 4 (see the **Understand** section) partners could:

- develop a shared understanding of the current nature of their partnership work (networking, co-operation, collaboration, integration)
- share their perspectives on how it might need to change in different areas of their work (i.e. move from networking to co-operation to improve summer school provision, or from integration to collaboration to reflect changing institutional plans)
- identify areas of consensus about where the partners would like to go in the future
- identify trends, priorities and 'quick wins' as well as areas of divergence, which can be acknowledged and reviewed again at a later stage.

Exercises like this not only provide ways of developing partnership plans, but also ensure that views and perspectives are heard, acknowledged and acted on (or not) by consensus.

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OFFA

Sheffield College

St Angela's Ursuline School

St Mary's University College

The Open University

UCAS

University of Birmingham

University of Bristol

University of Cumbria

University of Derby

University of Greenwich

University of Leicester

University of Sussex

Acronyms

ASDAN	Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network
BERA	British Educational Research Association
CEIAG	Careers education, information, advice and guidance
CURDS	Centre for Urban and Regional Development Studies
DBIS	Department for Business, Innovation and Skills
DCLG	Department for Communities and Local Government
DfE	Department for Education
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
EBLO	Education Business Link Organisation
EFA	Education Funding Agency
FE	Further education
FFT	The Fischer Family Trust
FSM	Free school meals
GLA	Greater London Authority
HE	Higher education
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England
HEI	Higher education institution
HEPF	Higher Education Progression Framework
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Agency
IAG	Information, advice and guidance
IMD	Index of multiple deprivation
IMRaD	Introduction, methods, results discussion
ITT	Initial teacher training
LLN	Lifelong Learning Network
LPN	Low participation neighbourhood
LSC	Learning and Skills Council
MAT	Multi-agency team
NEETS	Not in education, employment or training
NS-SEC	National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification
OFFA	Office for Fair Access
POLAR	Participation of Local Areas
SEN	Special educational needs
SFA	Skills Funding Agency
SMART	Specific, measureable, attainable, relevant and timely
SSCLLN	Skills for Sustainable Communities Lifelong Learning Network
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering And Maths
STEMNET	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics Network
UPN	Unique pupil number
UTC	University Technical Colleges
WASRS	Widening Access and Student Retention and Success
WP	Widening participation
WPSA	Widening Participation Strategic Assessment
WPSS	Widening Participation Strategic Statement

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