

CONNECTOR
PROGRAMME

Connector Programme Impact Report 2022

US

UNIVERSITY
OF SUSSEX



We are excited to share our 2022 Impact Report as the Connector Programme reaches 2.5 years of life at Sussex!

In 2020/21 we focused on testing how co-creation could work at the university and raising awareness of its benefits, whilst this year we had the experience to hone and expand the programme; improving development opportunities for Connectors, exploring new ways to evaluate the impact of co-creation, and seeing projects set up in more schools and departments. Our programme will always be iterative, but we are proud to say that a year spent refining means a more effective programme than before, as reflected in this report. Within our central team, key highlights from our year include:

- Initiating the 'Connector Cabinet' in which all project proposals are reviewed by a staff and student panel, ensuring projects are co-created from their first inception.
- Engaging a team of trained and experienced Student Connectors to support in recruiting new students, facilitating accessible, peer-led entry to the programme.
- Creating the Graduate Connector role, in which recently graduated Student Connectors support the Student Engagement and Enhancement team on a fixed term basis, developing project management skills on their way into graduate employment.
- Growing as a team, to include 3 full-time staff members, a Graduate Connector and a team of Student Connectors - bringing us the diversity of perspective and capacity to meaningfully develop our programme.

We look forward to sharing more about our Connectors in the following report, and would like to say thank you for reading and an even bigger thank you to all the Student & Staff Connectors who have made this another fantastic year!

Anna, Christy & Polly
Staff Connectors, Co-Creation Team

Welcome to the Connector Programme! We are the team of Student Connectors in the Student Engagement and Co-creation team, and we've been working together since July 2021. We're excited to share some of what we've been working on with you! The Impact Report 2022 is a summary of the last year's work by all our Staff and Student Connectors.

The Connector Programme offers opportunities for students to enhance the student experience by co-creating the university environment with staff. Co-creation is the cornerstone of the Connector Programme, but due to its abstract nature it is not easy to evaluate the quality or impact of co-creation. However, through the collaboration with various professors, staff and students at the University of Sussex, we are gathering data, extracting meaningful insights, and building a framework for evaluating the quality of co-creation in the Connector Programme. We present this using a wide range of data collected through evaluative processes, including interviewing Staff, Student and Alumni Connectors.

In this report we present to you the process and individuals' experiences of co-creation, as well as the impact on Connectors and the whole student community. Through the Connector Programme, we are excited to build a model of co-creation at the University of Sussex..

Deborah, Tom, Woochang, Yonnie
Student Connectors, Co-Creation Team

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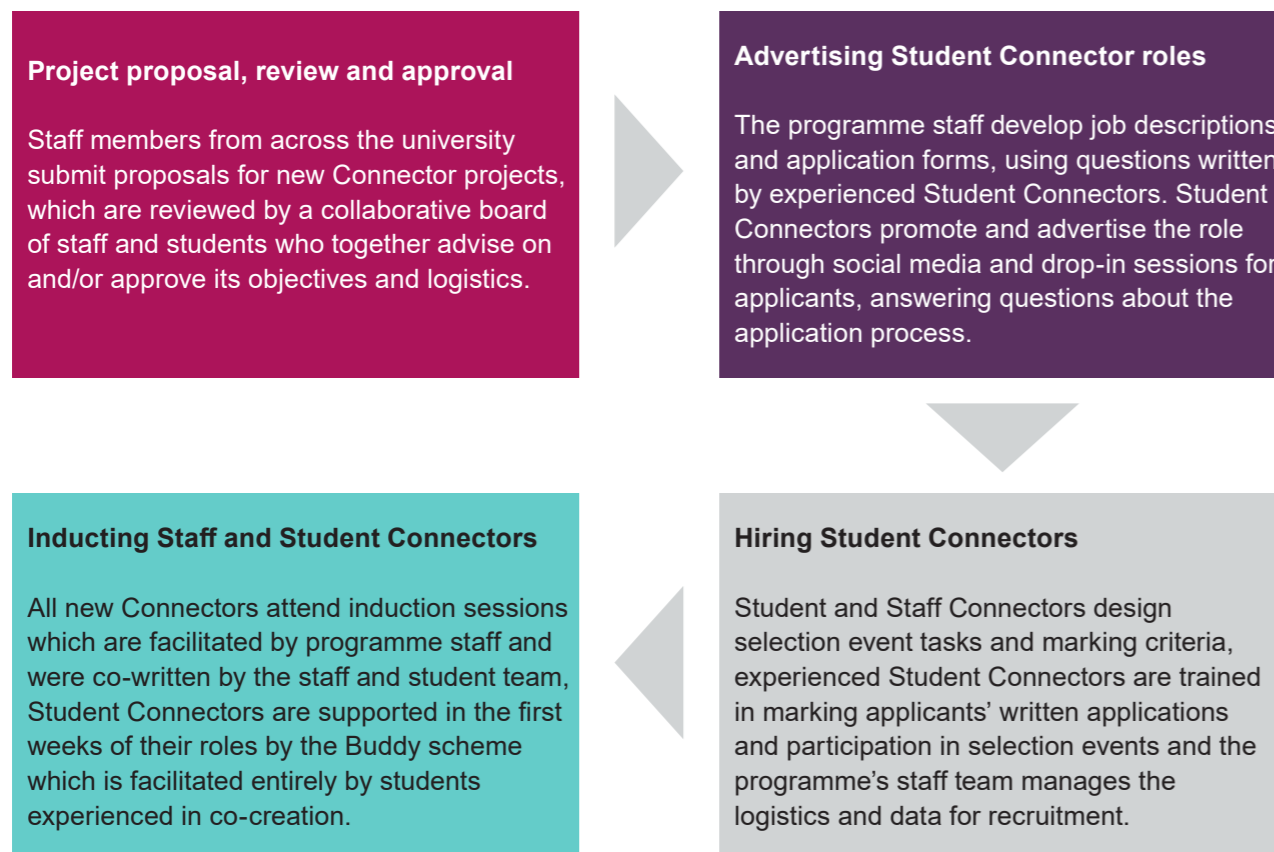
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What is the Connector Programme?

The Learn to Transform goals within the Sussex 2025 Strategic Framework aim to make students partners in the big decisions that shape our university's future and to foster an inclusive student community. The university's Access and Participation Plan (APP) outlines strategies to reduce the attainment gap between Black and white and Asian and white students, and between those with and without a disability. The APP also intends to embed an ethos of co-creation between students and staff through employment opportunities that enable students to shape their experiences. Co-creation provides a space to acknowledge that no particular group has all the answers, and that it is only through collaboration that we can gather fresh, relevant and varied ideas to develop solutions which truly reflect the wants and needs of our university community and create an environment which fosters success for all.

The Connector Programme facilitates co-creative projects across the university, in which students and staff work together in equal partnership on projects which positively impact the student experience. As a collaborative staff and student team ourselves, we aim to embed co-creative practices throughout our central functions. For example, the process for initiating a new Connector project includes:

Forming a Connector Team: A Co-Creation Timeline



Our Impact

The Connector Programme measures success in the following ways, all of which are explored in depth over the following pages.

1.

HOW INCLUSIVE AND ACCESSIBLE IS THE CONNECTOR ROLE?

We review the Student Connector community and the pathway into it regularly. We proactively work to ensure that it includes a diverse range of students and is accessible to and inclusive of students from under-represented groups as identified in the Access and Participation Plan.

networks and sense of belonging at the university. We use pre-post methodology to measure each of these objectives, as well as using 'pulse surveys' to understand the experience of Connectors in role.

For graduated Student Connectors and Staff Connectors, we use qualitative data and story-telling to explore and demonstrate how the Connector Programme has an impact on their experience of working at the university and collaborating with students.

2.

HOW DO CONNECTOR ROLES IMPACT ON INDIVIDUAL STUDENT AND STAFF CONNECTORS?

We used the NERUPI Framework for evaluation to measure programme outcomes for both students and staff. Student Connectors engage with our mixed-methodological approach to self-evaluate their skills and personal development. We aim to improve and develop students' skills and expertise, increase opportunities to engage with new tasks and responsibilities, and grow their

3.

HOW DOES CONNECTOR WORK IMPACT ON THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE AT SUSSEX?

Connector work aims to impact the experience of students across the university. Projects fall into any of three themes; academic experience, career development and engagement with the university community. We are exploring how to gather and analyse quantitative and qualitative data from a variety of sources to understand and demonstrate how the Connector Programme has an impact on the experience of the wider student body at Sussex, across these themes. We share early data from our pilot evaluations in this report.



1. How inclusive and accessible is the Connector role?

Over the past year the Connector Programme has employed 275 Student Connectors into ongoing roles and increased the percentage of students from under-represented groups.

The Connector Programme supports the aims of the Access and Participation Plan (APP), which identifies specific student groups who are under-represented in Higher Education. We aim to engage those from these priority groups, to enable them to gain the benefits of being engaged in meaningful paid employment at the university as well empowering them to contribute to decision-making and create a university environment which is more inclusive of students from under-represented backgrounds.

The primary student groups described as underrepresented by the APP are students who identify as Black or Asian, and students who declare a disability. The APP identifies further student groups who experience barriers to university, including students from other Minority Ethnic backgrounds, care experienced students, estranged students, young carers, forced migrants and refugees, mature students, children of military families and students from a Gypsy, Romany, Traveller background.

Our aim as a programme is to be inclusive of and to over-represent students from these groups in our Connector community in comparison to the wider student population at Sussex. On application to roles, we collect demographic data to monitor how inclusive and accessible our recruitment is; providing personal background information is optional so all data here is taken from those who have opted to respond. In our Connector community hired over the past year:



51%

Identify as BAME (Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic) - a 4% rise since last year

27%

Declare a disability - a 3% rise since last year

This increase accounts to an additional 19 students from under-represented backgrounds engaged in Student Connector roles.

To demonstrate how the Connector community compares to the wider student body at Sussex, we have segmented and compared our data as below:

	UK		International	
	UG	PG	UG	PG
Black Students	17.9% 5.8%	27.2% 4.0%	0.1% 3.5%	0.3% 11.7%
Asian Students	18.5% 9.3%	0.0% 5.3%	45.8% 45.8%	50.0% 58.2%
Students with disabilities	33.9% 26.4%	27.2% 24.8%	18.0% 10.9%	0.6% 6.4%

Key: Connector Community Student body

In addition, our Connector community includes students from the following under-represented student groups as identified in the APP:

24

students who are or have been carers for others

10

students from military families

5

students who are forced migrants or refugees

51

mature students

10

estranged students

3

care experienced students

2.

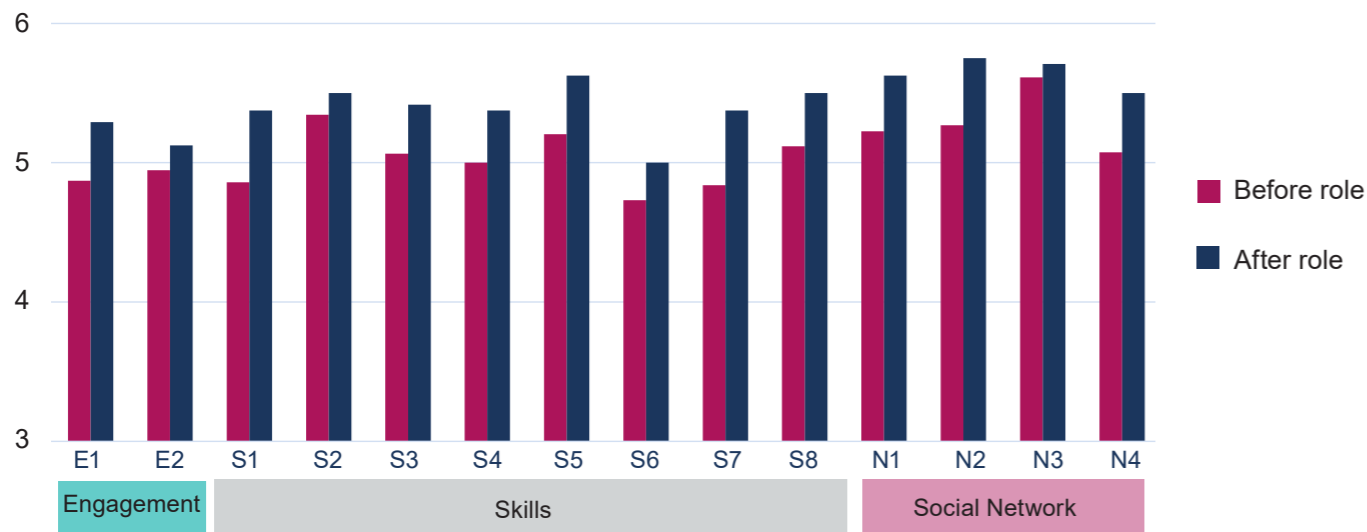
How do Connector roles impact on individual Connectors?

Student Connectors

The Connector Programme is committed to supporting and developing students during their roles. We use mixed methodologies based around the NERUPI framework to gather Student Connectors' self reflections on their experiences within their roles and the community.

We survey students before and after they work on a Connector project, asking questions using a 1-6 Likert measurement scale. We look to understand how students have developed across three areas: their engagement with the university, skills and expertise and social networks.

Below is a summary of the responses received from Student Connectors over 2021-22, by question and area:



Student Connectors reported an increase in every area after participating in a Connector project.

Student Connectors reported:

The greatest increase in:

- I can evaluate the effectiveness of a project. (S7)
- I am confident in my communication skills and am able to express myself clearly in different settings. (S1)

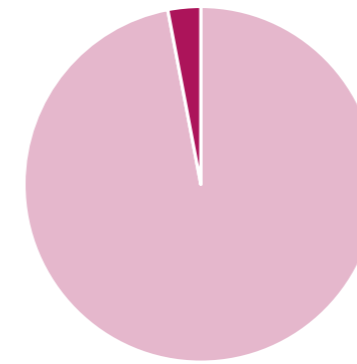
The highest overall score after projects

- I have opportunities to work and connect with other students from a variety of social, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds. (N2)
- I can collaborate with others to set and achieve project objectives. (N3)

The lowest overall score after projects:

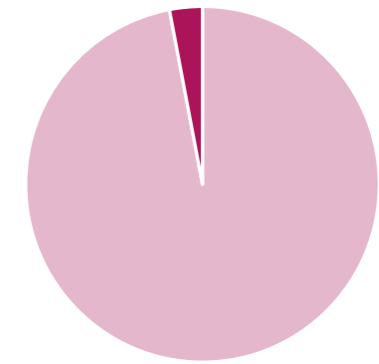
- I can coordinate the logistics of a project, such as manage a budget or create a risk assessment. (S6)
- I participate in activities which are relevant to my personal goals/future plans. (E2)

In addition to asking Connectors about their experiences in the beginning and end of their roles, we also ask them to fill out a monthly survey throughout their roles. From this survey we have found the following:



I have received support from the Connector community when I needed it

- % that disagreed (3%)
- % that agreed (97%)



There has been an equal and co-creational partnership between me, other Connectors, and my Staff Connector

- % that disagreed (3%)
- % that agreed (97%)

100%

of Connectors said they use “we/ us” rather than “they/them” when speaking about the Connector community

100%

of Connectors said the Connector community has offered them the opportunity to take part in interesting and beneficial activities



Graduated Student Connectors

Graduated Student Connectors have used their skills and experience to pursue a whole range of different pathways, post-Sussex. For example:

Graduate Connector Role

In 2021 we created the Graduate Connector role, in which recently graduated Student Connectors work on a part-time, fixed term basis as staff members in the Student Engagement and Enhancement (SEE) team. Connectors use their experience in co-creation to support the SEE team's workstreams such as the Spirit of Sussex Award, Welcome and Transition, Student Voice and more.

The Graduate Connector roles were created to be a stepping stone between education and further career paths, providing graduates with opportunities to gain skills through training and new tasks and to take on greater responsibility to innovate and lead on strategically important workstreams.

After a successful pilot and positive feedback from Connectors and the SEE team, we are running and expanding this new role in 2022

"I have learned how to work in a team, collaborate with others and provide assistance to my colleagues."

Other Graduate Pathways

Christy Bishay: Connector Programme Graduate Associate

Georgia Shakeshaft: Social Media Officer for Stroke Association

Zoë Bonnell: Research Analyst at Itad | Monitoring, Evaluation, Learning & Strategy

Georgia Ambrose: Supervisor at the Bank of England
Hennia Chowdhury: Executive Officer at UK Ministry of Defence

Tia-J'Nae Murray: MSc in International Finance and Economics

"I went from having a fear of public speaking to enjoying it and having the desire to look for other speaking engagement opportunities."



Philippa Rule: Executive Assistant for the Department of Health and Social Care

Wyane Fong: Placement Administrator at the University of Sussex

Rosie Jiggins: Business Support Manager at Skanska

Cheryl Moyo: YouTuber, lifestyle content creator

Samirah Bello: Strategic Partnerships Associate at Thrive Agric

Suzannah Eastman: Graduate Data Analyst at HSBC

Staff Connectors

We look to facilitate positive and developmental experiences for staff and below include reflections on projects from Staff Connectors.

1. BENEFITS OF CO-CREATION

Staff Connectors noted that co-creation with students benefitted their areas of work by providing an opportunity to understand student's perspectives and gaining meaningful input on how to enhance the student experience at Sussex.

"Student Connectors brought their own voices in thinking of ideas about how to communicate with the student body as a whole."

Another advantage of co-creation was building strong relationships with their Student Connectors. They believe that building this trusting and honest relationship was one of the biggest contributors to having successful outcomes in their projects.

"Co-creation was a very positive experience; we built strong and trusting relationships."

"I love being a Staff Connector - I find it is one of the spaces at work I get to develop and grow in a professional capacity - both the opportunity to take part in work I am very passionate about and to work with students who represent those areas or who are very engaged with them."

2. PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Several Staff Connectors stated that they gained new knowledge about the student experience from their Connectors. There were also many mentions of learning how to work effectively with students and developing communication strategies.

"It enhanced my planning, organisation and communication skills by ensuring the content was understood by our Connector team."

Another Staff Connector stated that their project helped them develop communication skills through knowing when to stand back and give the students the space to develop their own ideas.

"In the gaps and silence would often emerge the most interesting comments and ideas."



3. How do Connector projects impact the Student Experience?

All Connector projects aim to have a positive impact on the student experience, and we are looking to find new and meaningful ways to understand how these co-created interventions impact the entire student body.

This year we developed a set of objectives, aligned to the NERUPI framework and differentiated according to the three key themes of Connector projects. These objectives are:

Theme	Quantitative Objective	Qualitative objective
Academic	Students who undertake a co-created curriculum are more likely to achieve a 1st or 2:1 degree than students from the same demographic who don't	Students who undertake a co-created curriculum are more likely to report a positive attitude to their course than students from the same demographic who don't
Careers	Students who participate in co-created career opportunities are more likely to progress to highly skilled employment or further study within 15 months of graduating than those from the same demographic who don't participate	Students who participate in co-created career opportunities are more likely to be confident in using and articulating their professional skills than those from the same demographic who don't participate
Engagement	Students who participate in co-created and peer-led community building programmes are more likely to complete their courses than those from the same demographic who don't	Students who participate in co-created and peer-led community building programmes demonstrate higher levels of wellbeing than those from the same demographic who don't

We then selected three Connector projects to run pilot mixed-methods evaluations to understand their outputs and impact. We chose projects which ran during 2020/21 and/or 2021/22 and selected one from each of the three key themes. The projects are:

Theme and project	Aims and reach	Methods
Academic: Business school team	Please see full exploration of this project on consequent pages	
Careers: Placements team	Supporting students to find, apply and prepare for undergraduate placement opportunities. All undergraduate students can apply for placements, meaning around 9000 students can access this co-created support. Each year around 1000 express interest and 250 undertake a placement.	Quantitative: utilising pre-existing data gathering processes within the placements team to discover how many students who successfully secured a placement were supported by Connectors. Qualitative: using survey data and interviews using a quasi-experimental approach to compare how those who were and were not supported by Connectors experience finding, applying and preparing for their placement.
Engagement: Product design team	Co-creating engagement tools and opportunities for students struggling to engage with Product Design and Engineering modules The 2021-2022 cohort in Product Design includes 20 students. However, the tools created by this Connector team will continue to be used by future cohorts in the module, and would hopefully be recreated for other Engineering modules, so this project has the potential to reach a wider audience in the future.	Quantitative: using a quasi-experimental approach to analyse pre-existing data collected by the lecturer and Staff Connector such as attendance rates, participation in unmarked weekly quizzes, and module assessment grades to determine engagement within the course after tools had been co-created, and comparing that to previous years where they had not been utilised. Qualitative: thematically analysing pre-existing interviews done by the Connector team, speaking to the students in the cohort and finding out how engaged and satisfied they feel with the new tools put in place

By the end of 2021/22 we will have gathered all quantitative and qualitative data for each of the pilot evaluation projects and will use this to understand the outcomes and impact of each of these three projects on the student experience. Crucially we will then review this process in order to:

- Identify how we can develop guidance for robust and adaptable evaluation processes against projects in each of the three themes
- Develop evaluation toolkits for Connector projects, which can be tested and rolled out by future Connector teams

Exploring the impact of an academic-focused Connector project within the Business School.

PURPOSE AND REACH

From perspectives gathered via the National Student Survey (NSS), the school found that students did not feel that the assessment criteria were sufficiently clear. From further feedback gathered from staff and students, the school identified that a new assessment criteria was important to the community for the following reasons:

- for transparency, so students understand how their work is evaluated
- so the progression between levels of study is clear
- motivation for students to improve academically

Therefore this Connector project aimed to co-create a new school-level assessment criteria for all students studying within the Business School, of which there are around 5000 studying at any one time (around 1500 new each year).

APPROACH

From July to September 2020 a team of Student Connectors and academic staff from the Business School worked together to co-create assessment criteria which students understand and faculty can adapt effectively to their requirements. The project progressed as follows:

Stage 1: Mapping

- Students and faculty mapped the SEEC credit level descriptors into useful criteria, including reference to the Quality Assurance Agency frameworks. Agreement was reached over 6 criteria.
- Thresholds of performance were mapped for each level, to ensure consistent progression through the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications.

Stage 2: Criteria development

- Consistent wording was agreed for each standard of performance, at a grade level. This included differentiation for performance >85% and in the compensation zone of 35-39% UG/45-49% PGT from clear fails.
- Course directors who were members of the group adapted the generic criteria to their courses, 2 UG courses and 1 PGT course.

Stage 3: Launch

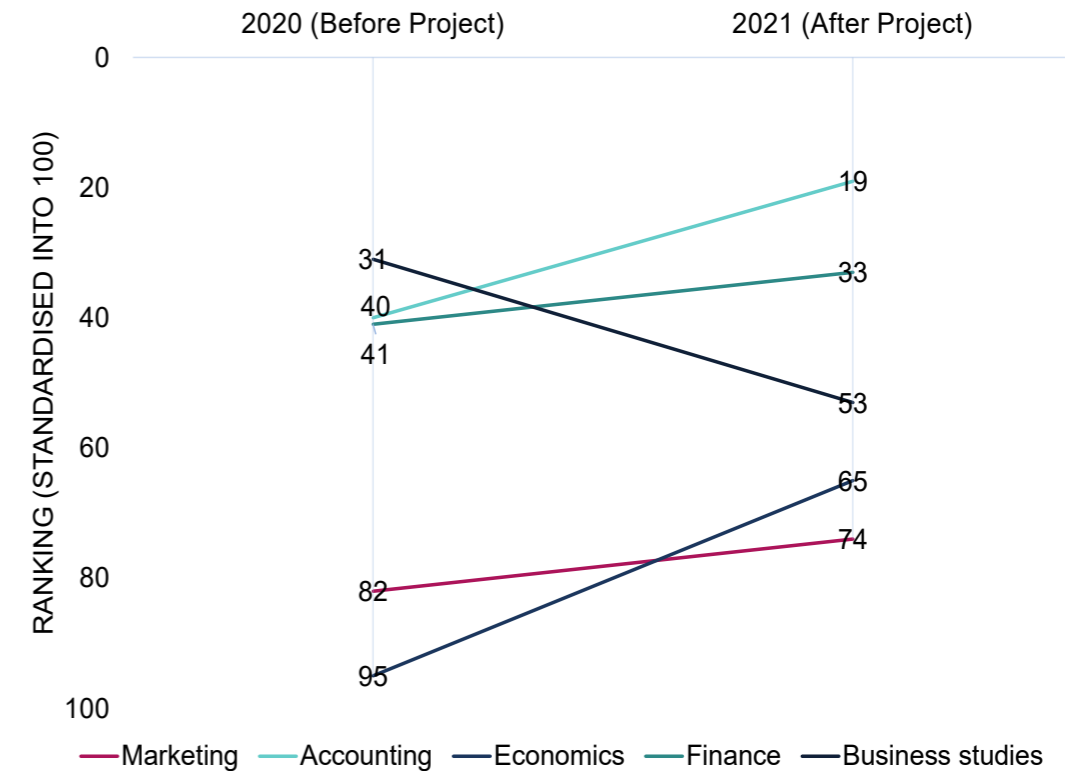
- A communications plan was created for students and staff, including a brief explanatory animation which is embedded into all module Canvas sites
- Training was organised for staff on using rubrics in turnitin and feedback techniques including the use of exemplars to help calibrate student assessment literacy.



IMPACT OF PROJECT

University of Sussex rank on National Student Survey (NSS) Q08 'The criteria used in marking have been clear in advance' has improved from Quartile 3 to Quartile 2 with the new assessment criteria.

NSS Q08: Marking and assessment has been fair.



	2020 (BEFORE PROJECT)	2021 (AFTER PROJECT)
MARKETING	Q4	Q3 ↑1
ACCOUNTING	Q2	Q1 ↑1
ECONOMICS	Q4	Q3 ↑1
FINANCE	Q3	Q3 -
BUSINESS STUDIES	Q2	Q3 ↓1
OVERALL	Q3 (57.8)	Q2 (48.8) ↑1

IMPACT BEYOND THE PROJECT

There have been two staff-student publications in the International Journal of Students as Partners. Other Schools have adopted this model to develop their own assessment criteria, including the School of Media, Arts and Humanities.

Connector Teams

Academic Theme: Inclusivity in Foundation Year

Liam, a Student Connector, and Katherine, a Staff Connector, are part of Inclusivity in Foundation Year Connector team. The project aims to involve students in reviewing Foundation Year curricula and pedagogies.

'Our first goal this year was to establish ways to evaluate the Foundation Year modules. The idea is that this will improve understanding of the diversity of student experiences of content and teaching. We expect to be able to evaluate the full impact on the student experience at the end of the next academic year.

'Every aspect of the project was achieved in collaboration. We met as regularly as possible and, especially in the early stages, brainstormed ideas extensively. It was important for us to reflect after every step of the project, which helped keep us on even terrain and on track. **The student team really took a lead in the creation process!**

'We're hoping to re-run the project with an anti-racist focus and create another stream of review materials with a focus on improving the experience of disabled students. Clearly everyone had something unique – a voice, a perspective, a skill – to bring to the project. What, in retrospect, was most important was actively thinking about the issues posed by race: the questions that need to be asked and the language that needs to be developed.

'Being part of a team that unanimously values each other's perspectives was certainly the highlight of the project. They've been terrific to work with – a really committed, responsive, eager and thoughtful group of people.'



Katherine Kruger

Student Academic Success Advisor in the school of Media, Arts, and Humanities and Staff Connector



Liam Harper

Literature Student and Student Connector

Connector Teams

Careers Theme: Entrepreneurship

The Entrepreneurship team includes Student Connectors Emmanuel and Saira, and Staff Connector Luke. Emmanuel and Saira are both in their final year, and work with all students across the university to develop their entrepreneurial skills, such as creative thinking and pitching ideas.

'Our work is about representing the student body within the team by making sure entrepreneurship services and events are student focused. We want all students from all years and academic schools to benefit from this. One of our main projects this year has been about 'engaging the disengaged' and finding ways to get more people involved with the events, workshops, and other services.

'The co-creation is great, we have weekly 1-to-1 sessions with our Staff Connector, and we also have regular team meetings. There is an open line of communication, and we can get a lot of support in our work. **There is a real level of responsibility and flexibility given to us which allows us to explore and execute our ideas.**

'Bottom line: Connectors have made the staff's job easier while also adding unique additional value to the support service we provide for students. It has helped us become more involved with another side of University; we are able to assist on events that aren't related to our courses. We are able to meet new and different types of people this way and connect with people from different schools who are interested in entrepreneurship.

'Working as Connectors has helped us understand the amount of planning and preparation required to run a workshop or put on an event. All the Connectors we've worked with have been enthusiastic self-starters who take the initiative and understand their brief. That said, the more you invest in working with them, the more value they provide.'



Emmanuel Oyemade: Product Design (with Industrial Placement) Student and Student Connector

Saira Sadiq: LLB Law with a Language Student and Student Connector



Jamal Edwards MBE, University of Sussex Entrepreneur-in-Residence 2021-22

Luke Mitchell: Business Adviser-CDEC and Staff Connector

Connector Teams

Engagement Theme: Spirit of Sussex Award

Student Connector Riko, Graduate Connector William, and Staff Connector Becky are part of the Spirit of Sussex Award project in the Connector Programme. They aim to create, develop and promote the award scheme.

'The Spirit of Sussex Award is created by students, for students, to recognise and celebrate engagement in co-curricular activities such as joining clubs and societies, volunteering in the local community and representing the student body.

'Staff Connectors provide direction, strategy and goals, and students provide insight, ideas and a real sense of passion for their work, which is so nice to see. Students have fantastic ideas and being a Connector really allows you to have the platform for these to be heard, as well as have an active role in developing and shaping the University. We now feel a positive, strong connection with other Student Connectors and Staff Connectors – this proves that we really work hand-in-hand towards our collective goals.

'We have been able to speak with industry professionals in this role and have daily experience working with professionals across the University. We are always trying to learn and collaborate to make our projects more successful. Everyone goes at their own pace, and we all have moments in life that catch us off-guard, so **as long as we treat each other as individuals then there will always be a strong partnership.**

'Every small mistake made us a little more courageous than before and every success boosted our confidence further. The Spirit of Sussex Award is now building a strong community, uniting students to be part of something more than themselves, all the while contributing to the Award's ongoing success.'



William Howlett
Graduate Connector
working on the Spirit
of Sussex Award



Riko Kunisue
Anthropology and
International
Development Student
and Student
Connector



Becky Hart: Spirit of Sussex
Award Manager and Staff
Connector
and **Spirit of Sussex Award
Connector Team**

Connector Teams

Central Programme: Connector Committee

Student Connectors Kayley and Kamil are members of the Connector Committee. Kayley is a final year Law with Criminology (LLB) student and joined the Connector Programme via the Innovating Reading in Law project. Kamil is second-year Psychology with Criminology student and is currently a Connector on the Spirit of Sussex Award.

Tell us about the Committee's aims and impact.

Kayley: Our aim was to create a sense of community in the Programme and engage Connectors to get to know and support one another.

Kamil: Moreover, Connectors are valued members of the Programme and we wanted to help show this.

Kayley: Definitely, it shows that being a Student Connector goes beyond our initial projects and extends to the wider community, showing that student voices are valued and continue to be respected even after our projects are finished.

What was your experience like working on the Committee?

Kayley: During our meetings, I always felt encouraged to participate and that my contribution was appreciated. We assisted in organising socials and would also support each other by evaluating each other's work in a constructive manner.

Kamil: Helping to plan committee events has been a wonderful experience and has helped me understand event planning and what goes into it. The teamwork has also been excellent.

Kayley: Many people experience imposter syndrome or feel overwhelmed when entering a new workforce/ community and being part of the committee helped me to feel less anxious around my colleagues.

Kamil: My highlight is having the opportunity to meet different connectors from the other projects. I think it is wonderful to put faces to all the numbers that we are shown (such as in this Impact Report), and it truly shows how vast, wonderful, and inclusive of a programme this is.

Kayley: I would like to say a huge thank you to all the Committee members for being so kind and to the Connector staff for being so supportive. The skills you learn from being a Connector are incredibly valuable and transferrable. I would encourage any student who feels they are missing something from their university experience to become a Connector!



Kamil Czarnecki:
Psychology with Criminology
student and Student
Connector

Kayley Davidi: Law with
Criminology LLB student and
Student Connector
and **Connector Committee**

Connector Teams

Connector Alumni

Emma

Emma came to Sussex in 2017 to take a joint degree in American Studies and Film Studies “as a ‘mature’ student and proud First-Generation Scholar”.

Emma’s main Connector project was in the School of Media, Arts, and Humanities: “my team and I looked at how the school could improve the wellbeing of its students, its curriculum and assessments, and communications between staff and students”. Key achievements included raising awareness of support resources available to MAH students and creating innovative new ones such as the podcast ‘On the Record...with MAH’, available on Spotify! “The idea being that students could talk about whatever interested or irked them. We even got to interview the Chancellor – all made possible by working in partnership with staff.”

After graduating from Sussex, Emma is now studying a Masters in Screenwriting at Edinburgh Napier University with ambitions that her writing “will be coming to a television screen near you very soon!” Emma reflects that her Connector experience helped her develop many personal and professional skills which she continues to use now: **“Most of all, the Connector Programme boosted my confidence, increased my leadership skills, and gave me a huge sense of accomplishment.”** Emma feels that the programme provides “the best kind of employment for a student” and takes great pride in everything her and her team achieved in the Connector Programme.



Emma Green
American & Film Studies graduate and Connector Alumna

Alex

Alex took History and American Studies at Sussex and describes himself as an extroverted problem-solver and is passionate about “using creativity as a force for good”.

During his time at university Alex set up and ran a range of different event and clothing companies. This “entrepreneurial mindset” led him to join the Connector project in the Entrepreneurship team which inspires and supports students to get involved with entrepreneurship. Alex states that one of his personal priorities was “to make entrepreneurship more inclusive and move away from the idea that being an entrepreneur was about being a white man.” He felt this goal was achieved as many female and BAME students joined the programme, with many of those students then being supported to run their own start-up companies.

Since graduating Alex has worked at a youth powered marketing start-up, responsible for running and creating a growth strategy for the start-up’s social media. He is currently working in advertising, learning about the industry with future plans to set up his own agency.

Reflecting on his Connector project, Alex says “being in the Connector Programme was a great way for me to keep on developing my skills.” **“The best part about the programme was doing stuff outside of my comfort zone.”** Alex highlights that tasks such as research or logistical work on excel pushed him to learn and gain confidence in different professional skills. Alex adds that in the Connector project he “really learnt the benefits of co-collaboration and having a diverse team. It was an amazing experience!”



Alex Singhal
History & American Studies graduate and Connector Alumnus

Connector Alumni

Hafsah

Hafsah studied Geography with International Education and Development Studies at Sussex. She was born in Canada but is local to Brighton and has lived here since she was 2 years old.

Hafsah was part of the very first Connector team in January 2020, developing the start of the programme itself and finding “ways in which staff and students can co-create and shape the programme”. As the programme formed Hafsah took on further responsibilities, firstly building online presence through managing the Connector Instagram page and writing content for student and staff facing Sussex websites. Secondly, community building by co-chairing the Connector Committee and organising the Connector Celebration Event to recognise students’ and staff collaborative achievements on the programme. After university, Hafsah worked as a Graduate Connector, delivering Student Voice initiatives and working “closely with staff to find innovative ways to engage students in activities, co-creation, and feedback at Sussex”.

Now Hafsah works in the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport. She manages recruitment for the department, communicating with key stakeholders and hiring managers to run campaigns. In this role she has also published a blog and taken part in a photoshoot for the launch of the department’s new vision and values. Hafsah expresses that she is incredibly happy working in this role, she greatly enjoys the work she does, her colleagues and the extra opportunities she has in the workplace.

“The Connector Programme has undoubtedly been a key factor in my personal and professional development which has helped me to secure a role in the Civil Service months after graduating.”

Hafsah feels that she developed her leadership, communication, project management and problem solving skills through her activities as a Connector. She gained public speaking skills through training when working as a Graduate Connector, which pushed her outside of her comfort zone. Hafsah found that her roles gave her a lot of great opportunities to put skills to use, for instance featuring in four professionally shot videos and speaking in front of over 300 students during Welcome Week. These experiences gave Hafsah lots of examples with which to demonstrate her skills in applications, and she notes they also improved her confidence and gave her the motivation and drive to apply for different roles, and to secure her Civil Service role.



Hafsah Butt
Geography graduate and Connector Alumna

A Look Back

In our first impact report published last summer, we identified our priorities for the academic year 2021/22. Here we share how we have progressed towards our targets:

PRIORITIES SET FOR 2021/22	PROGRESS
<p>To grow the programme and see a greater number of Connectors and projects at work across the university.</p>	<p>In the first 18 months of the programme we hired 231 Connectors to work on 30 projects.</p> <p>During 2021/22 we hired 275 Connectors to work on 38 projects. We have seen Connector projects hosted in more academic schools and in more professional services divisions, which then means that more students are engaging with the outcomes of co-creative work across the university.</p>
<p>To ensure that Connector roles are accessible to all students, our community is diverse and includes and prioritises students from under-represented groups as identified in the Access and Participation Plan.</p>	<p>Last academic year we were proud to report that the Connector community over-represented students from APP-identified under-represented groups, in comparison to the wider Sussex student population. 47% of the student Connector community identified as BAME, and 24% as a student with a disability.</p> <p>In 2021/22 of the 275 Connectors hired into ongoing roles, 51% of the student Connector community identifies as BAME, and 27% as a student with a disability.</p>
<p>To implement new and improved ways to support our Student and Staff Connectors to collaborate and develop skills.</p>	<p>Over the past year we have implemented the following new activities to support Connectors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff Connector inductions • Staff/student social events • Evaluative debrief sessions <p>This is in addition to the continued running and development of Student Connector inductions, staff and/or peer-led training sessions, Connector Buddy support for new recruits, student-only socials, toolkits for tracking personal and professional development, and ad hoc support as requested</p>
<p>To utilise evaluation tools which will help us better understand the impact the programme has on the student experience at Sussex.</p>	<p>This year we have developed a set of objectives aligned to the NERUPI framework and differentiated according to the three key themes of Connector projects.</p> <p>We have initiated a pilot evaluation for projects across each of the three themes, gathering and analysing quantitative and qualitative data to understand their impact on the student body. The pilot is still in progress as we gather data over the year, but we are able to draw positive conclusions from evaluation on the co-created Business School assessment criteria. We are also able to begin drawing conclusions and learning from these evaluative exercises to begin developing guidance for evaluation of further and future projects</p>

A Look Forward

In response to our progress and learning over the past year, our refreshed priorities for the coming year are:

- To grow the programme and see Connectors and projects in every academic school across the university. Ensuring that students across all academic fields have the opportunity to benefit from co-created academic experiences and have the option to participate in co-creation projects which are relevant to their studies.
- To develop thematic evaluation tools, to be rolled out by project teams, which will demonstrate the impact of co-creation on the student experience.
- To prioritise community building within the programme, to ensure that we create an accessible and inclusive programme and to foster warm and productive working relationships between staff and students, so all feel a sense of belonging.
- To implement further opportunities for development of communication skills - providing Connectors new opportunities to practice and gain confidence in communicating in different settings and facilitate potential applicants from the wider student body to complete high quality role applications.

Thank you!

Finally, we at the Connector Programme would like to thank all of our Student and Staff Connectors.

As we come to the end of our second year of the programme, we continue to see such incredible levels of innovation and collaboration amongst all of our Connectors.

We could not be more proud of all the things we have achieved this year and the remarkable work of our Connectors that will continue to bring positive change to the University of Sussex.

