

Lorna Ellis, Uni Connect Coordinator at Carshalton Boys Sports College in Sutton, south London has worked with Aimhigher London (AHL) for 20 years!

This year, 210 learners from her school attended 11 events, nine of which were on-campus. We trialled Cutting Through the Noise sessions in the school's sixth form – our response to the anxiety learners were expressing in relation to their experience of the loss of opportunities during lockdown.

Lorna was awarded the AHL Practitioner Award for 'Inspiring: demonstrating an ability to inspire and motivate and be a positive role model to learners'.



Aarti Jaswal is the Strategic Hub Lead for West London Careers Hub (WLCH).

AHL is a member of the steering group of WLCH. The Careers Hubs are partnerships of local authorities, employers, schools, colleges and apprenticeship providers.

AHL and WLCH share a desire to amplify a diversity of routes to higher education, support schools' fulfilment of Gatsby benchmarks, and help learners understand LMI in relation to London growth areas.

This year we held a degree apprenticeship event for year 12 learners, a collaboration between South Thames Colleges Group and the University of West London.



Simon Hart is Principal of Springwest Academy in Hounslow. 82% of the learners on the programme from Springwest Academy are the first generation to go to university and 94% live in post codes with IMD 1, 2 and 3.

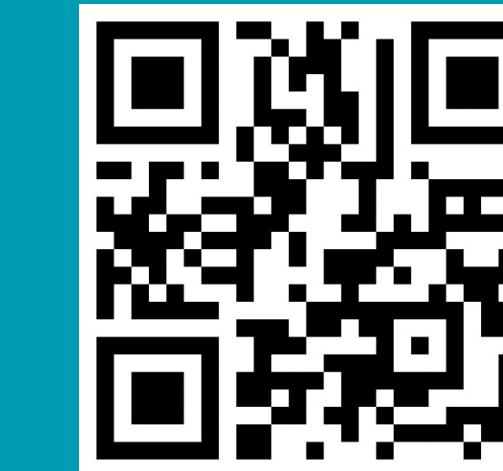
Simon sits on the London Uni Connect Board and was instrumental in helping us establish what attainment raising activities local schools would value.

In July at AHL's Award Ceremony Simon said, 'It's important to make students aware of their disadvantages, but do so in a way that this awareness becomes a beacon of determination and focus. AHL can instil students with a strong sense of social justice which results in an attitude of rising to challenges rather than shrinking from them.'

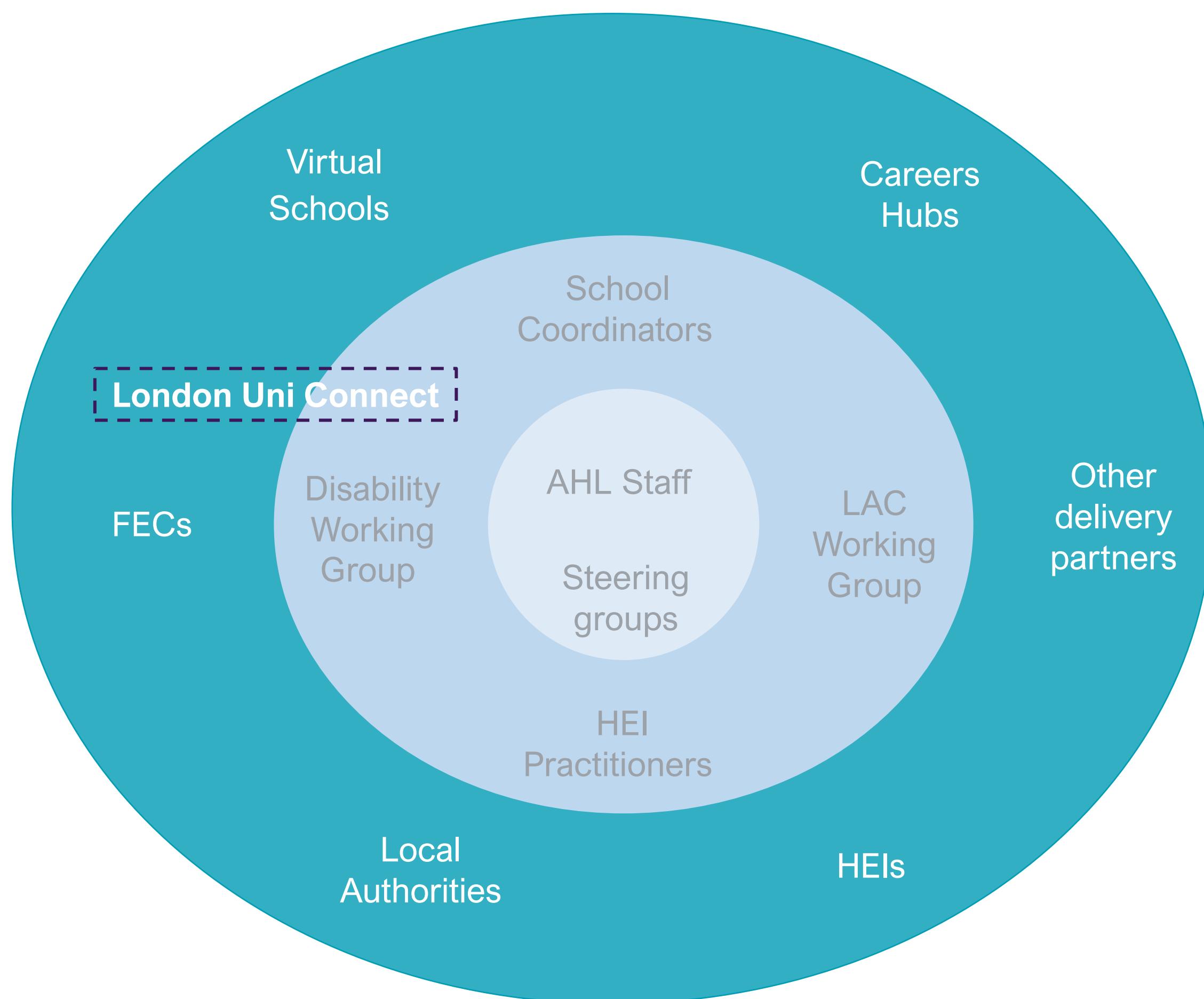


Suna Marfe is Head of Marketing Recruitment and Admissions, South Thames Colleges Group. This year she helped us organise a conference for UASC students and their advisors, which was hosted at Kingston College and Kingston University. Four other universities presented and provided seven student ambassadors. Staff from six local virtual schools attended a CPD session led by Refugee Education UK.

90% of young people said they had a better understanding of the benefits of studying at university. One student said 'I was worried about how can I go to university...people helped me so much. I also learnt about the types of university there are and the different kinds of courses.'



Partnership in Practice



Aimhigher London (AHL) started life as an 'enacted' partnership¹ in 2003, part of a national widening participation programme introduced by the then Labour government. It became a member led organisation in 2011.

Currently based at Kingston University, it is an autonomous entity and sits between its main partners: HEIs, colleges and schools. AHL manages to avoid the potentially destabilising effects of power dynamics within partnerships² and strives to be impartial, building sustainable relationships for the benefit of young people's attainment, progression and success.

AHL is one of the three networks in London Uni Connect, delivering a sustained and progressive programme of support across twenty-five schools and virtual schools, in collaboration with our member universities; and provides strategic support to students with disabilities, and experience of care.

AHL's partnership model

Seddon et al¹ define partnership as 'the interactive and collaborative process of working together to identify, negotiate and articulate shared goals, and to develop processes for realising and servicing those goals'. We use Dowling's³ identification of nine key elements of successful partnership. To break this down these are divided into process and outcome indicators:

Process Indicators

High levels of partner engagement and commitment. 'Engagement' is an AHL KPI and is monitored monthly: concern leads to action to reengage. Annual reviews reinforce informed and active commitment to the partnership.

Agreement about the purpose of and need for the partnership. AHL's strategic plan is built on an annual survey of members, agreed at the steering group, and shared with all members. Objectives reflect member interests, government WP strategy and organisational priorities and our common purpose is reinforced through annual collaborative targets. Consultation with our beneficiaries ensures our offer meets the current IAG needs of young people.

Satisfactory accountability arrangements. Data gathering and interpretation is a priority. In addition to returns to OfS, we produce impact reports for each member institution and ensure shared understandingg monitoring and evaluation.

Leadership and management of the partnership. Our steering group is made up of representatives of HE, school, college and LAs and meets 3 times a year. AHL staff have long and varied experience in WP practice.

High levels of trust, reciprocity and respect between partners. Trust is built on shared values which underpin the work we do. However, we recognise that trust needs to be continually 'enacted, negotiated and remade' and agree with Dhillon⁴ that social capital is vital to sustaining a partnership. We celebrate partners' engagement and commitment in our annual award ceremony and continually seek to develop our understanding of the needs of all our partners to strengthen relationships.

Favourable environment. A delivery model focused on the learner has enabled AHL to successfully adapt to deliver Government WP strategy or new priorities such as attainment raising or apprenticeships. London Uni Connect Partnership funds are an acknowledgement of the value AHL brings to the fulfilment of OfS objectives.

Outcome Indicators

Accessibility of services is improved. Our brokering role reduces the transaction costs that schools and universities would otherwise encounter. We give HEIs access to underrepresented groups, including highly dispersed groups such as UASC, and schools partner with us to access quality assured outreach experiences.

Distribution of services is more equitable. Partnership enables horizontal equity through a sustained and progressive programme (see case study of alumnus Kieran); and interventions which support SEND and LAC students provide vertical equity.³

The quality of life or well-being experienced by people using services is improved. UCAS data shows that AHL alumni learners who were eligible to go to university in 2022: 58% applied; 97% of those were offered a place; and 87% accepted. 21% of learners applied to our partner institutions.

References:

¹ Seddon, T., Bilett, S., and Clemans, A. 2005. "Navigating Social Partnerships: Central Agencies-Local Networks." *British Journal of Sociology in Education*

² Cardini A. (2006) *An analysis of the rhetoric and practice of educational partnerships in the UK: an arena of complexities, tensions and power*. *Journal of Education Policy*

³ Dowling, B., Powell, M., & Glendinning, C. (2004). *Conceptualising successful partnerships*. *Health and Social Care in the Community*

⁴ Dhillon, J. K. (2007) *Trust, shared goals and participation in partnerships: reflections of post-16 education and training providers in England*. *Journal of Vocational Education and Training*

Nikki Anghileri is Head of Widening Participation at St Mary's University in West London.

This year, St Mary's hosted campus visits for keystages 3, 4 and 5, as well as a residential for year 12. 10 partner schools took part in these events, and a total of 155 learners benefitted from them.



St Mary's Disability Service Manager, Helen Duncan, is chair of AHL's Disability Working Group. St Mary's hosted and ran an event for year 12 SEND students, in collaboration with two other universities and the local FE college. 80% of attendees said they were more likely to disclose their disability to an HEI as a result.

For two years running St Mary's University has been awarded Institution of the Year in recognition of their outstanding contribution to Aimhigher London's partnership.

Kieran is a 21-year-old professional futsal coach, analyst and coordinator, an ex-student of Carshalton Boys Sports College and a recent graduate of UFCB, a part of the University of East London.

Kieran took part in nine AHL events between year 9 and year 12. These included visits to four London HEIs, a forest skills excursion, theatre visit, study skills session, and a summer school in Liverpool which was a collaboration with four Liverpool HEIs and involved various cultural visits and experiences.



Tracey Lewis is a post-16 advisory teacher for Merton's Virtual School. Tracey is a member of AHL's Looked After Children Network, along with staff from six other local virtual schools, and staff working with care experienced children in schools, colleges and universities.

The network aims to address the barriers care experienced learners face through sharing and enhancing the knowledge and expertise of the key adults around them.

The group was instrumental in commissioning and helping to organise the UASC information day and is working on upskilling personal advisers and foster carers to better support young care leavers who are interested in higher education.



Learner outcomes. In 2022/2023 participants of partnership activities reported:

71% were able to make informed CHOICES

63% had developed KNOWLEDGE of HE

71% had increased CONFIDENCE to navigate HE

62% understood how their SUBJECT knowledge linked to HE

52% had the SKILLS to progress