

CONNECTOR
PROGRAMME

Connector Programme

Impact Report 2021

US

UNIVERSITY
OF SUSSEX



Rob

Hello, I'm Rob and I've been a Connector since the programme's launch in January 2020. Being a Connector has been an important, fulfilling part of my university career and I'm so glad to be able to share some of what we've been working on with you. What you are about to read in this report is the culmination of the last year of work from a lot of talented people.

The Connector Programme gives so many great opportunities to students by not just offering them employment, but involvement. Involvement in how the university is run and organised. It's a genuine chance for us students to have our views and beliefs represented and actioned and cocreate something positive with equal say, treated as adults.

This is why it is so important to hold the Programme to the highest possible standards, hence the need for a strong evaluative process such as this one. This comprehensive overview that our team has put together of our work is necessary to reveal our many successes and illuminate what we can do better going forward. There's an unmistakable sense of pride in showing our work, but there's an even stronger one in trying to improve upon it. So without further ado, let's get on with it.

Robert Furey

American Studies Student & Student Experience Connector



Polly

Hello everyone! The Connector Programme has had a really exciting first 18 months. In January 2020 it started with 12 Student Connectors, collaborating with staff to develop the beginning of the Spirit of Sussex Award and the Connector Programme itself, and as of July 2021 there have been over 230 Student Connectors partnering with staff on more than 30 different projects across the university! It has been wonderful to see the university embrace this new style of co-creation and the enthusiasm with which both students and staff have approached working together.

We are thrilled to share the achievements of all our Student and Staff Connectors in our first impact report. Here you will learn more about the experiences and achievements of the Connectors - from developing new course modules, to designing entrepreneurship support to building a sense of belonging during lockdown – and how the Connector Programme as a whole is supporting Sussex to foster an inclusive student community.

It has been a brilliant year supporting the programme to grow, and myself and the team are looking forward to strengthening and expanding the Connector Programme in the years to come. We hope you enjoy our report and reach out to work with us in 2021/22!

Polly Wallace-Kruger

Student Engagement and Co-Creation Adviser & Staff Connector

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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](#) 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. The Connector Programme has been developed to address each of these institutional goals, by offering accessible paid roles to a diverse student body, fostering collaborative and equal relationships between students and staff and providing opportunities for Connectors to make meaningful contributions to the university community.

The Connector Programme sees students and staff working as equal partners; learning, innovating and co-creating together to improve the student experience at Sussex. In this APP funded and supported programme, areas of work are identified across the University which would benefit from a co-creative approach between students and staff, from embedding technology in learning to co-designing new modules to increasing student engagement with schools and services. Student and Staff Connectors have equal input and responsibility as they work together on key areas, finding solutions which truly reflect the needs and wants of our community.

“Working with staff has been a great new experience for me which has developed my personal and professional skills.”
Hafsah Butt, Student Experience Connector

Therese Reinheimer-Jones, Associate Director for Student Engagement & Achievement, says: *“The Connector Programme, the foundation of the success and progress elements of the Access and Participation Plan, is growing as staff and students see how important, impactful and rewarding co-creation really is. Valuable skills, innovation and partnerships are already developing, with clear benefits for the University community, so growth of the programme will be really crucial over the next couple of years.”*

“The best part, as the role's name suggests, is connecting people together and connecting with them!”
Alessandra Giuliani, Residential Life Connector



Who benefits from the Connector Programme?

Student Connectors are valued partners, bringing their own ideas and perspectives to their work as well as tapping into student networks, in order to have a tangible impact on the University whilst leaving a legacy for their peers. Student Connectors gain valuable real world experience in a supportive environment which builds personal and professional skills and confidence in a paid role. This not only enriches the student experience but provides evidence and demonstrations of core skills which will appeal to future employers across all sectors.

Through partnering with students, staff gain a fresh, diverse and informed student perspective, as well as intrapreneurial, passionate and energetic new team members. This supports and pro-actively feeds into continuous improvement work. In addition, new initiatives are born that reflect student needs; relationships between staff and students are strengthened and the wider student body becomes more engaged.

Across the University, the work of Connectors and the act of co-creation initiates positive change whilst creating a more connected community at Sussex.

“One thing that I really value that has come from being a Connector is the friendships I have made with other Connectors.” William Howlett, Lead Welcome Connector

“Thanks to the Connector Programme I have had the chance to make a real change to many students’ lives.” Ángeles Garrido González, Student Focus Connector



Our Impact

The Connector Programme aims to offer inclusive and supportive roles to Student Connectors themselves, and to facilitate projects which have a positive impact on the student experience. As such, we evaluate the programme in three ways:

1.

HOW INCLUSIVE AND ACCESSIBLE IS THE CONNECTOR ROLE?

We review the make up of the Student Connector community as a whole, and ensure that it includes a diverse range of students, including those from target groups identified in the Access and Participation Plan.

2.

HOW DO CONNECTOR ROLES IMPACT ON INDIVIDUAL STUDENT CONNECTORS?

We use the [NERUPI Framework](#) for widening participation evaluation, to devise a comprehensive system for Connectors to self-evaluate their own skills and development. Therefore the data gathered is subject to Connector's self-evaluative abilities.

One of the unique benefits of the Connector Programme is the mutually beneficial nature of its development. The Connectors' personal development is the result of their work implementing the programme. In turn, they help

develop each other. As one Connector wrote in their feedback: "Innovation, new ideas, collaboration and skill sharing with each other, builds confidence in tasks and develops the Connector role." The data suggests a correlation between the successes of the programme and the personal development of Connectors, though of course the university offers student lots of opportunities for growth beyond the Connector Programme which may have impacted the results.

3.

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

We use qualitative data and story-telling from the viewpoint of our Student and Staff Connectors to explore and demonstrate how the Connector Programme has an impact on the experience of the wider student body at Sussex.

1. How inclusive and accessible is the Connector role?

Since the programme began, 231 Connectors have worked over 23'500 hours on more than 30 different projects.

The Connector Programme supports the aims of the Access and Participation Plan, which identifies specific student groups who are under-represented at university. We aim to engage these target groups of students as Connectors, to enable them to gain the benefits of the role. The two primary target groups within the APP are students who identify as Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) and students who declare a disability.

Our aim as a programme is to over-represent students from these groups in our Connector community, in comparison to the wider student population at Sussex. **47% of the student Connector cohort identifies as BAME**, compared to 35% of the wider student population at Sussex. **24% of the student Connector cohort have declared a disability**, compared to 21% of the wider student population at Sussex.

We also aim to support students from a wide range of other under-represented groups.

“By breaking down some of the formalities between the different groups of people in an equal and open manner and by encouraging groups that may not usually interact, a sense of community is created.” Josh Francis, Student Focus Connector

Our Connector community includes:

80

students who are the first in their families to attend university

44

mature students

11

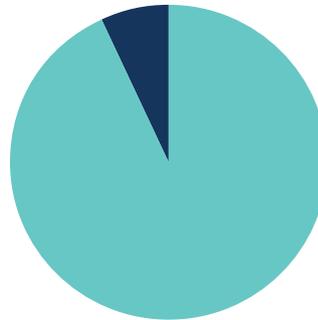
students who are or have been carers for others

7

students from military families

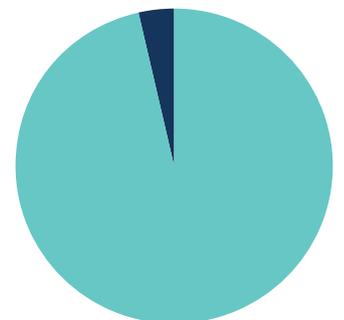
1. How inclusive and accessible is the Connector role?

At the end of their work on the programme, 100% of Connectors felt like they had developed positive and productive relationships with members of staff. 93% of Connectors felt the programme gave them the opportunity to work with people from a variety of backgrounds. 97% of Connectors felt like a part of a friendly and respectful community when working on their projects.



I have the opportunity to work and connect with other students from a variety of social, cultural and ethnic backgrounds

● % that disagreed (6.9%)
● % that agreed (93.1%)



I feel like part of a respectful and friendly community of students and staff

● % that disagreed (3.4%)
● % that agreed (96.6%)

100%

of Connectors said they had developed positive and productive relationships with members of staff

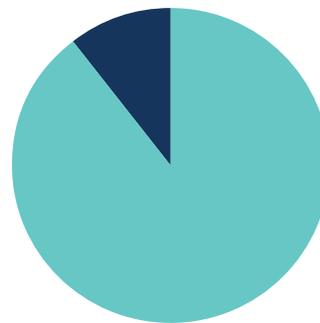


2.

How do Connector roles impact on individual Student Connectors?

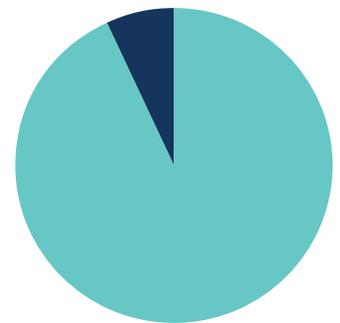
The Connector Programme is committed to developing Connectors' skills to support their future ambitions. 93% of our Connectors said it was true that the programme was engaging them in activities relevant to their personal goals and 96% of them said they left the programme having developed skills relevant to them. 98% of Connectors felt that the skills they developed whilst working for the programme made them viable candidates to potential employers.

Skills that Connectors singled out as having developed include better verbal and written communication, teamwork and organisational skills and general digital media skills including using Instagram and Excel.



I am confident in my teamwork skills and work well with others on group tasks

● % that disagreed (10.3%)
● % that agreed (89.7%)



I participate in activities which are relevant to my personal goals

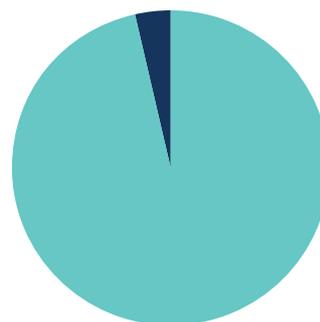
● % that disagreed (6.9%)
● % that agreed (93.1%)

100%

of Connectors said they were confident in their communication abilities and they were confident in their online literacy skills upon completing their projects

93%

of our Connectors said it was true that the programme was engaging them in activities relevant to their personal goals



I am confident my present skills set makes me a viable candidate to potential employers

● % that disagreed (3.4%)
● % that agreed (96.6%)

3.

Spotlight on Media Arts and Humanities Connectors

Mary

In our new school of Media, Arts and Humanities, I oversee the Student Advisory Board which is comprised of three Connector groups: there is a communications group, a wellbeing group and a curriculum group.

One of the things I love about our Connector groups is that each works a bit differently. On some projects the Connectors discussed issues around assessment and feedback and then they produced briefs for us, including recommendations to give faculty. On other projects, Connectors have proposed projects that they've largely developed independently with faculty acting as mentors. I think that the flexibility to support different styles of co-creation is a key reason the Connector Programme is so great.



Mary Krell
Professor of Creative Media, Director of Teaching and Learning in the School of Media, Arts and Humanities & Staff Connector

Emma

I am one of the Media Arts and Humanities Connectors working within a subgroup focused on improving student wellbeing. Our main project so far is the forthcoming student podcast titled 'On the Record...with M.A.H.'. The podcast creates a space for all MAH disciplines, allowing students the freedom to express themselves and their interests.

On a practical level, the Connector Programme has improved and expanded my skill set. I am now more efficient with time management and prioritisation and have gained greater confidence in my communication skills.

I work alongside a great group of academics and university personnel who champion our work, value our opinions, and continually provide support and guidance.



Emma Green
American and Film Studies Student & Media, Arts and Humanities Connector

3.

Spotlight on Spirit of Sussex Award Connectors

Maddie

A team of seven Student Connectors work to design, shape and deliver the Spirit of Sussex Award. From the very beginning of the project we knew that it would be important for students to co-create the Award; by having student input we can be sure that the Award is relevant, exciting and accessible for all students.

The students bring such a fresh and unique perspective to the Award and have been responsible for the design and development of some really crucial elements. They have shaped every aspect of the Spirit of Sussex Award, from how many points activities are worth, to the visual identity and branding.



Maddie Taylor
Access and
Participation Manager
and, previously, Spirit
of Sussex Award
Manager & Staff
Connector

Abby

Working with staff as a Connector isn't just helping the staff complete their tasks. Instead, it is working alongside staff to create ideas together and even creating your plans then contacting staff to see how they can help you to further your plans.

A lesson that I didn't expect to learn is that the divide that we assume to be between students and staff isn't as big as we'd expect it to be. Sometimes its daunting to step into work environments which are surrounded by people who are much older than you, but as a Connector you work with people from a vast range of ages. You learn that when you have something to say, people will listen. I learnt that I shouldn't hold myself back from sharing my opinions. A good idea is a good idea.



Abby Aladesuru
Engineering Student &
Spirit of Sussex Award
Connector

3. Spotlight on Digital Connectors

Claire

The Digital Connectors are key members of the University team responsible for the digital environment. They have direct meetings with the Head of Technology Enhanced Learning, Director of IT and Deputy Pro Vice Chancellor for Education and Innovation. Hence Co-creation is right at the heart of decisions and strategic discussions.

I have been surprised by their excellent skills at working with different groups and adjusting to different and senior levels of meetings. I have been really impressed by the Connectors- so very positive.

This is the first year, so I knew the role would develop over time and keeping this in mind has been key as it's also allowed the Connectors the trust and freedom to follow what they see as important to the study body as well as to staff.



Professor Claire Smith

Head of Anatomy at BSMS, Deputy Pro Vice Chancellor for Education and Innovation at Sussex & Staff Connector

Jessie

As a Digital Connector I act as the student opinion on all matters brought up in team meetings and raise any concerns and suggestions about areas of the online environment that need improvement, making them as accessible and easy to use as possible.

I think Digital Connectors are really important, and especially so since the pandemic started and teaching has moved entirely online. Moving forward, I think this role is crucial because if the university has learnt one thing from 2020, it is the importance of using technology as a teaching tool.

The staff that I work with as a Connector are very open to having conversations and are willing to work with students on many matters.



Jessie Phillips
Psychology Student & Digital Connector

3.

Spotlight on Business School Assessment Connectors

Susan

The Business School Assessment Connector project was established to revise the School's assessment criteria. Working with Connectors helped us gain a student perspective which had been lacking in prior work related to assessment and feedback.

The relationship was positive and proactive with all team members working to understand each other's perspectives and develop the criteria, supporting materials, training and communications plan.

The School now has a unified, level-specific set of assessment criteria which students can easily understand.



Susan Smith
Associate Dean at the
University of Sussex
Business School &
Staff Connector

Ilina

The Connector projects are usually inspired by student feedback and so as a Student Connector, I felt encouraged to give my opinion on my assessment experience. Lecturers and university staff value the views of the student and it was also very interesting to see how they received our ideas and used them as a basis for the project.

This project was extremely beneficial to my professional growth as I got to work in a diverse team and have an intellectual and creative input into something that helps students with their academic experience. I feel a part of an amazing community and I have made a lot of new connections that would benefit me both professionally and personally.

Lastly, I would say that the Connector Programme has given me confidence in my employability skills and I feel encouraged to keep working on myself and develop my potential.



Ilina Stanimirova
Media Studies Student
& Student Connector

Connector Teams

Teams of Student and Staff Connectors work across the university on a broad range of topics in a variety of departments. Please see below for the list of all current and completed Connector teams.

CONNECTOR TEAM	STAFF CONNECTOR
Alumni Relations Developing the connection between current and previous Sussex students, so current students can benefit from the experience and expertise of alumni.	Sally Atkinson Alumni Relations Manager
Academic Skills Improving the support provided by the Skills Hub and ensuring it reaches the student body effectively.	Clare Hardman Academic Skills Manager
Business School Assessment Criteria Reviewing and improving assessment criteria for the Business School, to make it more accessible for all students.	Susan Smith Associate Dean at the University of Sussex Business School
Business School Communications Improving communications between the Business School and its students.	Susan Smith Associate Dean at the University of Sussex Business School
Business School Community Building a stronger sense of community for first years in the Business School.	Fraser Hamilton & Philip Jarman Lecturers in Marketing
Business School Community for Direct Entrants Building a stronger sense of community for direct entry students in the Business School.	Alison Bailey Lecturer in Management
Careers in Schools Reviewing, designing and communicating the careers programmes for students in each academic school.	Sarah Coleman Careers and Employability Consultant
Class Module Co-designing a new Sociology module on social class in the UK, which will put the work, voices and perspectives of working class people at the centre of its teaching.	Carli Rowell Lecturer in Sociology
Coaching Supporting the creation and delivery of a new Coaching programme designed to support students.	Melinda Finn Retention and Progression Manager
Digital Developing ideas and plans for supporting Digital Learning and the integration of technology in education.	Claire Smith Deputy Pro Vice Chancellor Education and Innovation
Economics Creating a greater sense of community between students studying Economics.	Susan Smith Associate Dean at the University of Sussex Business School

Connector Teams

CONNECTOR TEAM	STAFF CONNECTOR
<p>Entrepreneurship Supporting the creation and delivery of the new entrepreneurship programme for both undergraduate and postgraduate students.</p>	<p>Luke Mitchell Business Adviser</p>
<p>Innovating Reading in Law Reviewing reading lists and other online learning resources for specific modules within Law courses, to improve accessibility and diversify content.</p>	<p>Teresa Sutton Lecturer in Law</p>
<p>International Business School Providing insight in to the international student awarding gap and propose practical steps to address barriers to student success.</p>	<p>Susan Smith Associate Dean at the University of Sussex Business School</p>
<p>International Link Encouraging the integration of international and UK students, with particular focus on how international students from the ISC connect with the wider student community at Sussex.</p>	<p>Olly Walker Progression Support Team Leader</p>
<p>International Student Support Communicating the support and resources available to international students.</p>	<p>Eileen Laffan International Student Support Assistant</p>
<p>Internships Designing and promoting a summer internship offer for 1st year Sussex Bursary students, and 2nd year First-Generation Scholars.</p>	<p>Andrea Wall Employer Engagement Manager</p>
<p>Library Services Aiming to ensure the Library meets the needs of students.</p>	<p>Grainne MacDermott Frontline and Building Manager</p>
<p>Media Arts and Humanities Advising on development of the newly merged school, supporting with communications, community and student welfare.</p>	<p>Mary Krell Dean of the School of Media, Arts & Humanities</p>
<p>Placements Devising and delivering events and resources to support students preparing for placements, in each academic school.</p>	<p>Claire Colburn & Jasmi Tse Placements Manager, Placements Coordinator</p>
<p>Psychology Communications Creating resources for students that enable them to better engage with school communications.</p>	<p>Helen Drew Lecturer in Psychology</p>
<p>Residential Life Delivering comprehensive and personal support to students living in campus residences.</p>	<p>Amy Moorhouse & Miriam Sharma, Rebecca Lehman Residential Support Managers, Residential Services Manager</p>

Connector Teams

CONNECTOR TEAM	STAFF CONNECTOR
<p>Service Delivery Co-developing the services and facilities which the new Student Centre will provide on campus.</p>	<p>Agatha Jones Project Officer</p>
<p>Situate Aiming to enhance mental and social health and wellbeing at Sussex.</p>	<p>Sophie Valiex Project Coordinator for Situate</p>
<p>Social Work Reviewing and improving how the BA Social Work course is organised and developing the sense of community for students.</p>	<p>Tam Cane Lecturer in Social Work</p>
<p>Spirit of Sussex Award Creating, managing and promoting the new Spirit of Sussex Award across the university.</p>	<p>Becky Hart Spirit of Sussex Award Manager</p>
<p>Student Engagement and Co-Creation Delivering and continuously improving the central Connector Programme.</p>	<p>Polly Wallace-Kruger Student Engagement and Co-Creation Adviser</p>
<p>Student Focus Improving the sense of community in the Schools at Sussex.</p>	<p>Graeme Pedlingham Deputy Pro-Vice Chancellor for the Student Experience</p>
<p>Welcome Week Support the delivery of Welcome Week 2021.</p>	<p>Melinda Finn Retention and Progression Manager</p>
<p>Welcome Week Lead Co-creating activities and the programme for Welcome Week and supporting delivery during Welcome Week.</p>	<p>Melinda Finn, Anna Izykowska & Eileen Laffan Retention and Progression Manager, Logistical Support Officer & International Student Support Assistant</p>

A Look Forward

After a fantastic first year and a half of the Connector Programme, we are looking ahead to how we can develop and improve the programme further. Our key priorities during academic year 2021/22 are:

- To grow the programme and see a greater number of Connectors and projects at work across the university.
- To ensure that Connector roles are accessible to all students, our community is diverse and includes and prioritises students from under-represented groups.
- To implement new and improved ways to support our Student and Staff Connectors to collaborate and develop skills.
- To utilise evaluation tools which will help us better understand the impact the programme has on the student experience at Sussex.

As a collaborative and co-creative team, we always welcome feedback and input from our community. If you would like to share your ideas for how we can develop and improve our programme in these ways or others, please get in touch.

If you would like to work with the Connector Programme please do contact us! We welcome proposals for new work from staff and are regularly advertising new Connector roles for students on CareerHub.

We look forward to hearing from you!

Email: connectorprogramme@sussex.ac.uk

Find us on Instagram: [@connectorprogramme](https://www.instagram.com/connectorprogramme)

Thank you

Finally, we at the Connector Programme would like to thank everyone involved in our programme so far.

This has been our first full academic year being up-and-running and the successes achieved would not have been possible without all the incredible hard work of everyone involved.

Thanks to a lot of talented, creative and collaborative individuals, we have developed strong roots that will continue to flower for years to come. We are so proud of what we have achieved together, knowing that it will bring lasting, positive change to the University of Sussex.

Thank you very much to everyone involved!

**All the best,
The Connector Programme Team**



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