

Regional Coverage of Outreach Activity

An examination of the regional coverage of outreach activities delivered by HEAT member organisations in 2024/25

This report explores the extent to which outreach is reaching schools and colleges in areas with the largest disadvantage gaps in higher education (“cold spots”), the intensity of that engagement, and the types of organisations delivering activity.

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Summary

This report analyses national outreach activity data recorded through the HEAT system to examine patterns of delivery across English regions in 2024/25. It explores the extent to which outreach is reaching schools and colleges in areas with the largest disadvantage gaps in higher education (“cold spots”), the intensity of that engagement, and the types of organisations delivering activity.

While overall coverage of outreach is high, the analysis highlights variation in sustained engagement, differences in delivery by provider type, and patterns of delivery across and beyond regional boundaries. These findings provide insight into how current outreach delivery aligns with regional need.

Introduction

Used by approximately 90% of large higher education providers with an Access and Participation Plan, alongside Uni Connect Partnerships and a growing number of third sector organisations, the HEAT database provides a near-national picture of outreach delivery in England.

With the [increasing focus](#) on addressing inequalities in access to higher education (HE) in regions with the largest participation gaps (“cold spots”), this report examines patterns of outreach delivery across regions.

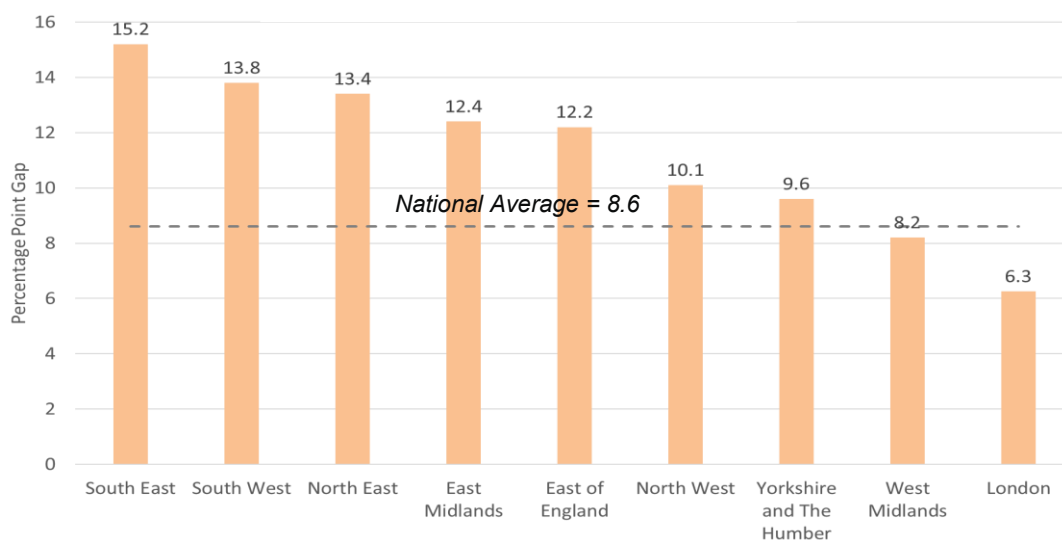
Given that [HEAT’s impact research](#) has shown that intensive outreach is effective in increasing HE participation amongst disadvantaged students, this report examines variation in regional outreach delivery, enabling the sector to ensure high coverage of outreach delivery within regions with the largest disadvantage gaps.

Which are the ‘cold spot’ regions?

Data published by the Department for Education reports the following disadvantage gaps in HE participation at regional level, for 2021/22.

Chart 1: National disadvantage gaps in HE Participation (2021/22)

Source: Department for Education (2025) - Progression to higher education and training local authority level destinations



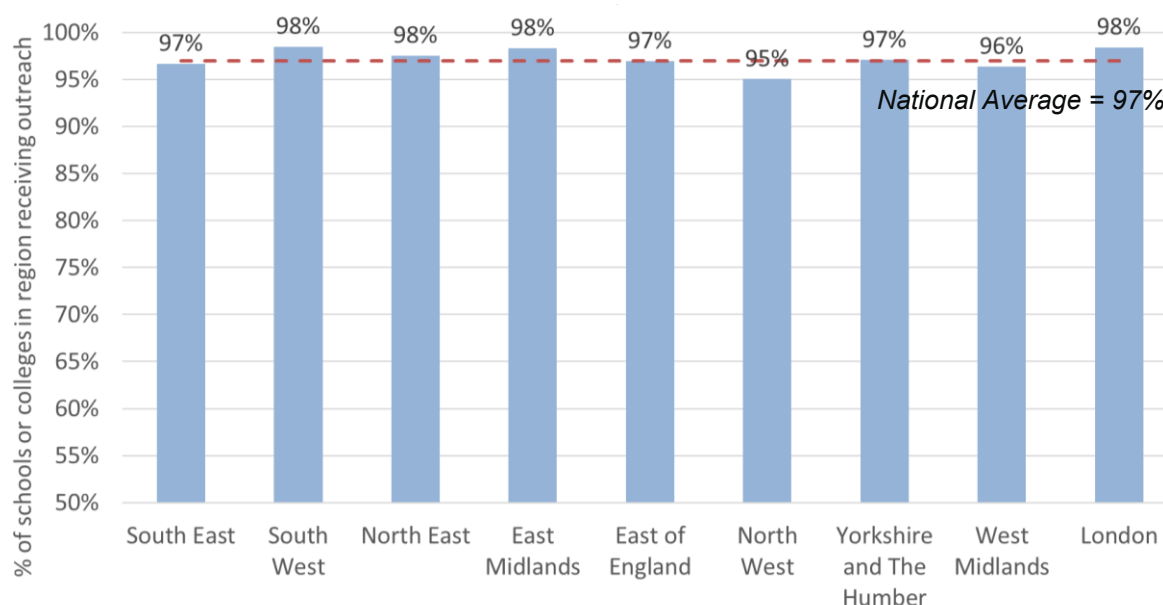
Understanding these regional disparities provides an important context for assessing whether outreach delivery is aligned with areas of greatest need.

What proportion of schools and colleges received outreach?

Data for outreach Activities delivered in 2024/25 and recorded on the HEAT database shows:

- Very high coverage in all regions, with minimal variation (approximately 3 percentage points)
- Nationally, 97% of state-funded schools and colleges (n=3450) received at least one outreach activity in 2024/25

Chart 2: Percentage of State-funded mainstream schools & colleges receiving at least one outreach activity in 2024/25



This indicates that outreach activity is widespread across the school and college system. However, high coverage alone does not indicate that outreach is delivered at a level of intensity likely to influence HE progression outcomes. The next section therefore considers sustained engagement.

What proportion of schools and colleges received at least 11 hours of outreach?

HEAT research has identified 11+ contact hours as a useful proxy for sustained engagement associated with improved HE participation for disadvantaged students.

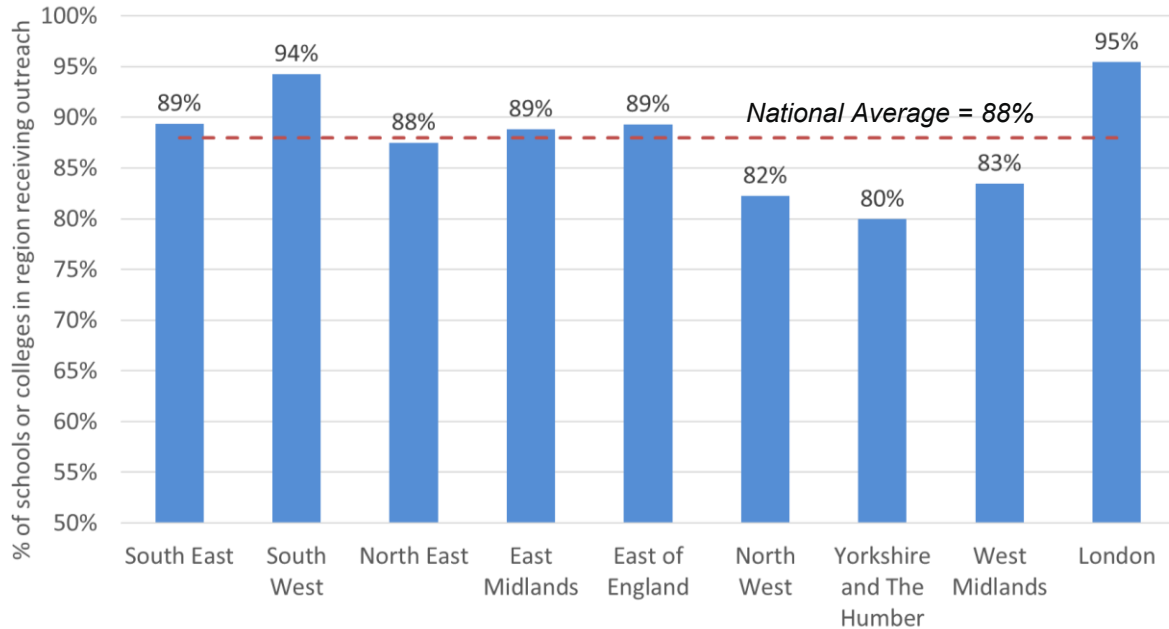
While recognising that effective thresholds may vary across learner groups and interventions, it remains a useful threshold for monitoring coverage.

When applying this threshold:

- Coverage remains high but shows greater regional variation (approximately 80%–95%).

- Nationally, 88% of schools and colleges received at least 11 hours of outreach activity.

Chart 3: Percentage of State-funded mainstream schools & colleges receiving at least 11 hours of outreach activity in 2024/25



This suggests that while sustained outreach is widespread, there is variation in intensity across regions. It may therefore be useful to consider how outreach provision could be further aligned with areas with greater disadvantage gaps.

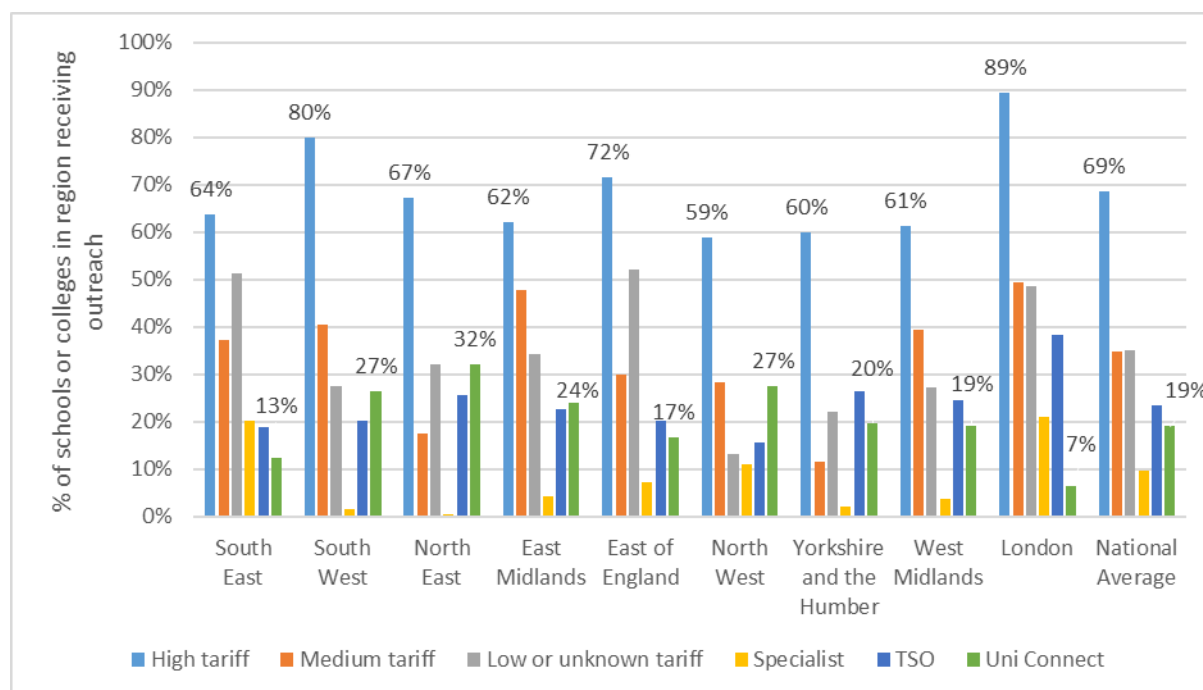
To explore this, we next examine the types of organisations that are currently delivering in each region.

Which types of providers deliver in each region?

Analysis of delivery by provider type (high, medium and low tariff higher education providers, specialist providers, Uni Connect Partnerships and third sector organisations) shows that:

- A range of providers deliver outreach in all regions
- Schools and colleges are most likely to receive outreach delivered by high-tariff higher education providers
- Many schools and colleges receive sustained outreach from multiple provider types, i.e. many providers work in the same schools (please note: this is why percentages do not add up to 100).

Chart 4: Percentage of State-funded mainstream schools & colleges (n=3450) receiving at least 11 hours of outreach activity in 2024/25, by Provider Type



This pattern is notable in the context of wider evidence suggesting that outreach delivered by higher-tariff providers may be more likely to focus on higher-attaining learners. This has implications for how outreach activity contributes to addressing broader participation gaps.

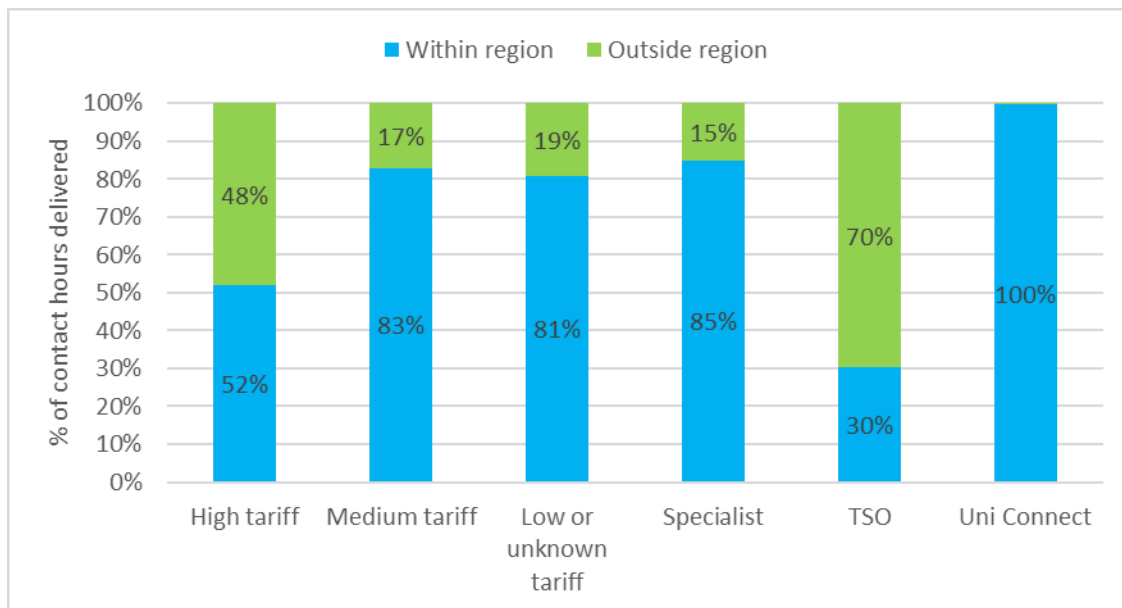
Next we examine the extent to which this pattern reflects the types of providers based within each region by exploring whether providers delivered within, or outside, their region.

Are providers delivering within their regions?

Next we explore the proportion of outreach that each type of provider is delivering to schools and colleges located within their own region, or within a different region. The data show that:

- High-tariff providers are more likely to deliver outside their region than other higher education providers
- Medium and low tariff providers, and specialist providers, are more likely to deliver locally
- Uni Connect Partnerships operate within defined regional boundaries
- Third sector organisations tend to deliver nationally

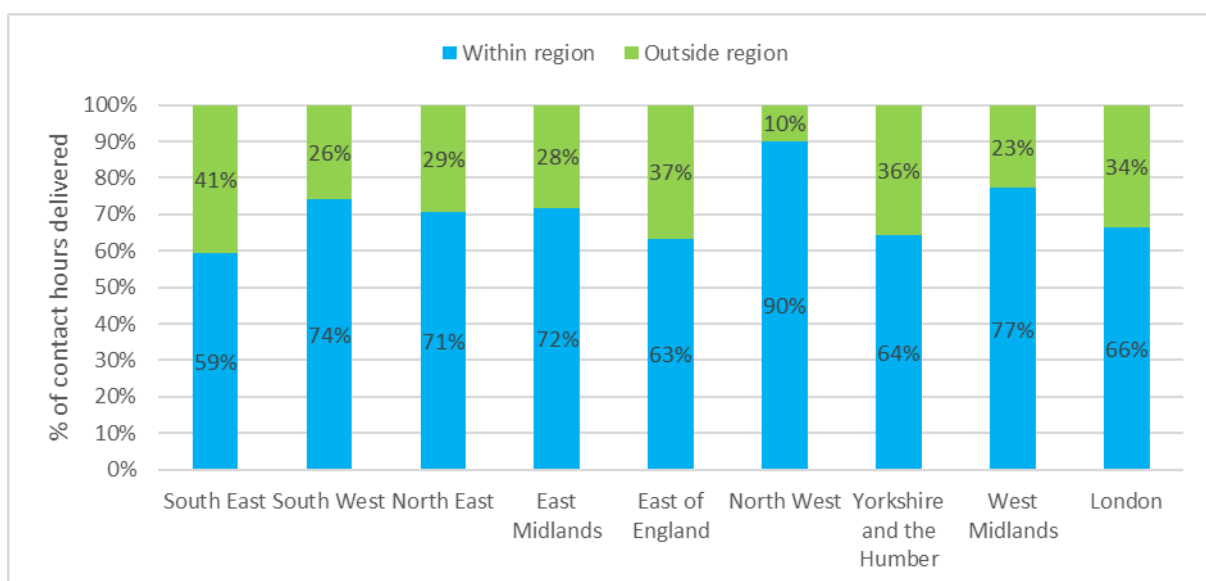
Chart 5: Percentage of outreach delivered to schools and colleges within, or outside, the region of the provider delivering the outreach, by Provider Type



Further analysis shows that:

- A proportion of outreach delivered by providers based in the regions with the largest participation gaps is directed towards schools and colleges outside those regions
- This pattern indicates that outreach delivery is not always geographically aligned with areas of greatest need, particularly in regions with the largest participation gaps.

Chart 6: Percentage of outreach delivered to schools and colleges within, or outside, the region of the provider delivering the outreach, by region of Provider



Conclusion

This analysis shows that outreach coverage across English schools and colleges is high, including in regions with the largest participation gaps. However, variation in the intensity of engagement, the types of providers delivering activity, and the extent to which delivery is aligned with regional need suggests that high coverage alone is unlikely to translate into reductions in participation gaps.

These findings suggest that, while outreach is widespread, there may be scope to strengthen its impact through coordinated regional collaborative partnerships.

Limitations of the data

The following limitations may have the effect of under-reporting coverage through incomplete data capture:

- The HEAT data includes outreach activity delivered by the majority of higher education-led outreach providers in England. However, it should be acknowledged that it does not currently include data for one Uni Connect Partnership and approximately 10% of large higher education providers with an APP.
- Furthermore, as recording of activity data is not mandatory for providers (with the exception of Uni Connect Partnerships), some HEAT members may choose not to record all of their outreach activities. Whilst it is important to acknowledge this, we also know through member surveys that most HEAT subscribers do record the majority of their activities on the HEAT system.

The following limitation may have the effect of over-reporting coverage through including activities with only a few students from a schools/colleges:

- There may be activities where only a few students from a school attends. In these cases, the school will still be represented in this analysis as having received outreach. This may therefore suggest a deeper level of engagement with the school than the reality. However, with the exception of Chart 1, in this report only those schools and colleges that received at least 11 hours of outreach are included. This will, to some extent, reduce the inclusion of one-off events which target small numbers of students from multiple schools, and reflect more intensive involvement of the school in outreach.