

2022-2023

Annual Report

Inspiring Choices

Table of contents

Introduction.....	4
What is Inspiring Choices?	5
Partners.....	6
Programme Management.....	7
Progression Framework.....	8
2022/23 Overview.....	10
Research.....	11
Future Selves Longitudinal Project.....	11
People and Places.....	13
Programme Overview: Package Offer.....	16
Explore HE (pre-16).....	17
Your Post-16 Options.....	20
Employability.....	22
Explore HE (post-16).....	24
Apply to HE.....	24
Preparing for Student Life.....	25
Case Study: Harry.....	27
Strategic Outreach.....	28
Flood a School.....	28
On Track.....	29
Virtual Schools UCAS Application.....	33
Care Experienced Residential.....	33
Military Service Children Focus Groups.....	36
Strive for Education.....	38
Gypsy, Roma Traveller Projects.....	38
Case Study: Freya.....	39
Attainment Raising Pilots.....	40
Drama Project.....	41
MyTutor.....	42
STEM Conference.....	43
Podcasting Project.....	44
Case Study: Paige.....	45

Table of contents cont.

Bespoke and Third-Party Funding.....	46
As Creatives- Big Enterprise Day.....	46
Bar Mock Trial Competition.....	48
Co-Create.....	49
Drama Workshops.....	49
Groundwork.....	50
Ivy House Programme.....	51
Mock Interviews.....	51
National Apprenticeship Show.....	51
Online Platforms.....	52
Personal Guidance Interviews.....	53
Project Dare.....	53
The Scholars Programme- The Brilliant Club.....	55
Talk the Talk Workshop.....	57
UCAS Discovery Day.....	57
UK University and Apprenticeship Search Event.....	57
York Mind Mentoring.....	58
Stakeholder Consultation.....	59

Introduction

Louisa Dobson, Head of Inspiring Choices Programme

Welcome to the Inspiring Choices annual report which provides an insightful analysis of the delivery of the Uni Connect programme in York and North Yorkshire for the 2022/23 academic year.

The start of the year brought many changes including a rebrand, reduced budget and a smaller delivery team. The overall picture of engagement shows a reduction in the number of learners engaged and activities delivered, but what the figures do show is how we invested our time in enhancing the quality of the activity rather than the quantity and in providing more opportunities for sustained and progressive interventions with current learners. We also received our first set of HESA data which will provide us with the answer to the important question on long term impact: Do the learners we engage in the programme end up going on to Higher Education?

Some of the interventions you will read about are tried and tested workshops such as employability and the STEM Conference co-delivered with the National Railway Museum, as well as our popular third-party projects delivered by York Cares, Groundwork Yorkshire and The Brilliant Club. The report also highlights some of our newly developed interventions that arose from expertise and experience from new members of the team, such as the Drama Project. We also report on the research projects we have undertaken this year, and the biggest piece of work we undertook which was the development of a new attainment raising framework.

Ultimately, the report is a story of continued success and growth. But you don't just have to take my word for it. You will also find the results of a stakeholder consultation which provided us with excellent feedback from teaching and support staff in our partner schools alongside case studies from young people who describe in their own words what being part of the programme has meant for them.

Reflecting on the successes of the 2022/23 academic, it is difficult to pick out just one highlight. However, a special moment came in October when, at an event celebrating Care Leavers in North Yorkshire, the team were given the 'Inspiring Futures' Award by North Yorkshire Council for the hard work and effort put into organising and developing a residential trip to London for Care Leavers. We are especially grateful to the John Lewis Partnership, the Financial Ombudsman Service, King's College London, as well as the North Yorkshire care leaving team for their role in making this a fantastic trip.

As the team continue to deliver the programme in 2024, the outcomes and recommendations outlined here are helping to inform how we develop our offer. However, we don't yet know what the future of the programme will look like, and it is likely that reduced budgets and the recommendations from the Public First review of collaborative support will impact what the widening participation landscape looks like beyond 2025.

I hope that you find this report interesting and useful. My immense gratitude goes to the practitioners, teaching staff, academics, careers leads and admin staff who contributed to the successful delivery of the programme and I would like to thank all our partners across the region for their instrumental support, advice and guidance throughout the year. Finally, a huge thank you in particular must go to the Evaluation team - Laura Fenwick and Jess Ely, in writing and compiling this report with the support of the wider team.

What is Inspiring Choices?

Inspiring Choices is part of the Office for Students Uni Connect Programme. Running since 2017, our aim is to support young people and adults who live in York and North Yorkshire to make well informed decisions about their future education.

Our work is particularly focused on geographic areas in York and North Yorkshire where participation in higher education is low overall and lower than expected given local GCSE results.

Our outreach activity is focused in 10 target wards:

Selby North

Woodlands (Scarborough)

Selby South

Scarborough Central

Westfield (York)

Streonshalh (Whitby)

Woodfield (Harrogate)

Northallerton Central

Skipton South

Colburn

In addition to working with target schools, we are also continuing to support discrete learners' groups such as Care Experienced young people, young people from the Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller community, military service children, and mature learners.



Our partners

York Cares

NYBEP

Y&NY LEP

Askham Bryan College

Craven College

Scarborough TEC

Harrogate College

York College

Selby College

City of York Council

North Yorkshire Council

University of York

York St John University

CU Scarborough

Programme Monitoring

As a condition of Uni Connect funding, the Office for Students (OfS) require partnerships to track all learners engaged with their activity. This includes learners who live in both target and non-target wards. We are required to use an OfS-approved tracking service; Inspiring Choices use the Higher Education Access Tracker (HEAT). The HEAT service was developed by the sector to evaluate the efficacy of widening participation outreach teams.

We have both Data Sharing and Service Level Agreements in place with our schools and colleges which detail how we will collect this data to enable the required tracking. Participants are issued with our Privacy Notice so they understand how their personal data is being used. The tracking data enables us to understand how participation in Inspiring Choices activity impacts progression to higher education and is an essential part of evidencing the impact of Uni Connect.

Progression Framework

All Inspiring Choices activity is carefully mapped against our progression framework, which sets out key outcomes for outreach activity at each educational stage. Inspiring Choices are part of the NERUPI¹ network. The Network for Evaluation and Researching University Participation Interventions enables members to plan, develop and evaluate our programmes and activities. Using a praxis approach (objectives based on theory and practice) it provides a sound basis for improving practice in teams across the student lifecycle from outreach to student success to graduate progression.

Our framework is based on five key strands, which focus on enabling the learner to:



KNOW: Develop young people's knowledge and awareness of the benefits of higher education



CHOOSE: : Develop young people's capacity to navigate Higher Education sector and make informed choices



BECOME: Develop young people's confidence and resilience to negotiate the challenges of university life



PRACTISE: Develop young people's study skills and capacity for academic attainment



UNDERSTAND: Develop young people's understanding by contextualising subject knowledge

¹ NERUPI. (n.d.). *Network evaluating & researching university participation interventions*. NERUPI. Retrieved December 19, 2023, from <https://www.nerupi.co.uk/>

We use a variety of methods to evaluate the Inspiring Choices programme and draw on evidence from learners, teachers, parents, outreach practitioners, plus other stakeholders. Our programme of activity is reviewed regularly as a result of this evidence, alongside the latest local and national research findings, to ensure our offer meets the needs of all learners we engage with.

Alongside our progression framework we have also mapped the Gatsby Benchmarks against our activities, a nationally recognised framework for good careers guidance.

Gatsby Benchmarks²

-  1 A stable careers programme
-  2 Learning from career and labour market information
-  3 Addressing the needs of each pupil
-  4 Linking curriculum learning to careers
-  5 Encounters with employers and employees
-  6 Experience of workplaces
-  7 Encounters with further and higher education
-  8 Personal guidance

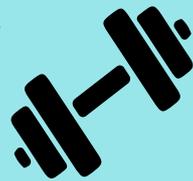
² Holman, J. (2014). *Good career guidance*. Gatsby. <https://www.goodcareerguidance.org.uk/>

2022/23 Overview

In 2022/23 we engaged in:

696 activities

Number of events for students, staff and parents, with the aim to increase awareness of the benefits of higher education and ensure that all students, no matter their background, can make informed choices about their future



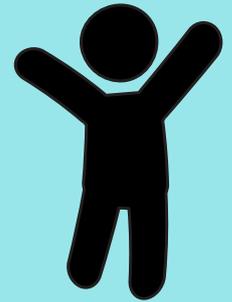
997

activity
contact
hours



2894 unique learners

Number of individual students who took part in at least one activity. Please note that each student is counted only once, no matter how many activities they have taken part in.



12,511
total number of
hours delivered

i.e., if ten learners received a two-hour activity, 20 hours received in total



9442
interactions



Total interactions of all learners who took part in one or more activities i.e., if a learner took part in an activity once a week for six weeks this would equal six interactions

Research

Future Selves Longitudinal Project

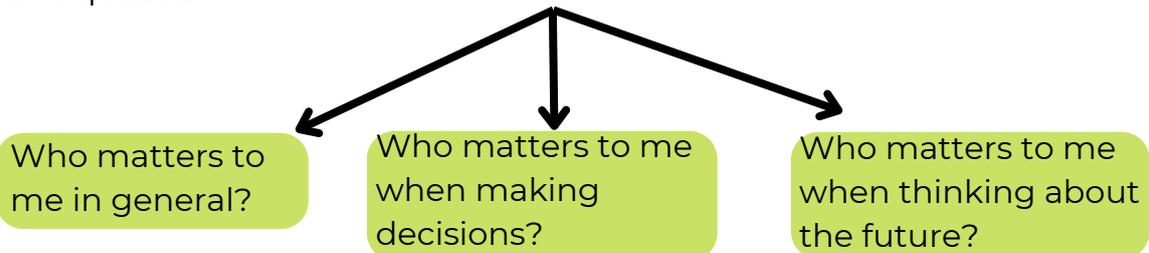
In partnership with an academic at the University of Lincoln, Inspiring Choices conducted research with young people into how they viewed their sense of self and how they imagined their future selves. The research questions we wanted to answer were: How do young people imagine their journey to Higher Education/future selves? In what way does Inspiring Choices support change in young people's sense of self? If not Inspiring Choices, who does support change in young people's sense of self? The full report will be on our website [here](#), later in the year.

From the interviews several themes were identified. The first theme was the normalisation of Higher Education. Most learners were happy with the idea of going into Higher Education, they felt like it could be an option for them although some still expressed concerns such as moving away from home and financial position. Learners who thought they would not go into Higher Education were making an informed choice not to go as they were interested in other pathways (e.g., commercial fishing). The learners were open to changing their minds and were susceptible to a shift in career trajectories due to new experiences which highlights the importance of schools providing support for opportunities and experiences. In answering the third research question, the learners identified the biggest influencers as family members; parents, but also older siblings, were important in helping to make decisions about their futures.

Session 1: April 2023

'This or That' icebreaker: learners chose one option from the board and moved across to the designated side of the classroom.

'Who matters to me?' where learners answered three versions of this question.



Individual timeline which included prompts of important things in their past, what they expect after Year 11, and something outside of education in the future.

One-to-one interview



10 x Year 10 participants

Employability package: Between the two sessions we delivered our employability package of 3 x workshops to pupils in Year 10.

Session 2: July 2023

Icebreaker

Group activity discussing achievements (personal/academic) and why they were important to the individual.

Drawing/writing a self-portrait of themselves in the future. Learners could choose how far in the future and were encouraged to think about all aspects of life not just education and careers.

One-to-one interview



5 x Year 10 participants

People and Places

In partnership with Think Higher, the Uni Connect partnership for Coventry and Warwickshire, a project was commissioned titled People and Places. The full report will be on our website [here](#), later in the year. In July 2022, two focus groups were completed with Year 9 students, one with learners from the market town Nuneaton and another with learners from the coastal town Scarborough. A second round of focus groups occurred when the learners were in Year 10 in November 2022.

In the focus groups, learners were asked to describe their sense of place, their community, their family's journey to Nuneaton/Scarborough, and how their personal characteristics impact their everyday life. The Scarborough learners started by describing their houses by how they felt in those spaces or more specifically their bedrooms. Some described how much they valued having their own space and referred to their bedrooms as comfy, calm and comforting.

When describing the local area, the learners talked about the seasonal differences, with the summer being busy with tourists and being quiet the winter. The learners thought their area was generally a safe place to be during the day but would be more cautious going out at night. In terms of a sense of community the learners struggled to see how Scarborough was a community but could describe pockets of community within their activities (e.g., football team, gymnastics). When prompted they also agreed that their school could be a community and described the school as open, friendly and accepting.

“When there's loads of people you try to avoid it. I prefer to go to the beach in the winter when there are not many people and then you can have room and you can do what you want without bumping into people”

In terms of their family's journey to Scarborough, many of the students said they were born in Scarborough and their parents and even whole family had lived in Scarborough for many years. One student had always lived in Scarborough but their family had moved from Poland. Another student had moved from Romania. One student was born in York, and had moved to the USA before moving back and settling in Scarborough. When describing their personal characteristics these learners referred to their backgrounds, considering it to be part of their identities. Others found their identities in their hobbies and highlighted the importance of their family in their life.

“Back in Romania we obviously looked up to England a lot as it was a really good holiday destination, so when we moved, I was so excited.”

When asked about their future plans, in the first focus group when the learners were Year 9, they thought it was 'too early' to think about their future. However, some learners had some ideas (e.g., care work, musical theatre, dentistry) but they were not fixed and were not necessarily clear of what steps they needed to take to reach their goal. The learner who had suggested dentistry in the first focus group had decided against that career path by the second focus group. Most learners expressed university as an option and that they would like to move away to study but not too far from home/family. They thought they might like to live and work in a city in the North such as Leeds or Manchester. London was ruled out as they thought it may be too big or too busy for their preference. One learner stated they would like to remain in Scarborough to be close to their family. The learners generally suggested that support from the school, so far, had been limited and that the school was more focused on their exams than providing future guidance.

"I would just like to be part of a bigger community, and more things. Scarborough is quite small and there is not a lot of options when it comes to jobs and things like that so maybe something bigger."

The project had planned for two groups of learners to meet each other approximately halfway between each town for a residential. However, due to reasons beyond our control this could not go ahead. Therefore, Inspiring Choices organised a residential for the Scarborough group to have a one-night stay in the Peak District. The young people engaged in raft building, a games night and rock climbing and abseiling. After the residential we asked learners to complete a short reflective piece about their experience in the project.

Through the learners' descriptions we believe they captured the NERUPI learning outcome of **KNOW**: Develop young people's knowledge and awareness of the benefits of higher education. The learners said they had learnt about potential career opportunities and opportunities in higher education for the future and that they had further improved their knowledge of higher education.

"During the focus group and the trip, I learnt that there are many options with careers and higher education locations."

The learners' captured some areas of **CHOOSE**: Develop young people's capacity to navigate Higher Education sector and make informed choices. They described being more open to new careers for example in the outdoor field of work and being influenced to look for a career path outside of their town and into a bigger field of careers. They also mentioned different universities and which ones would suit them the most.

All of the learners spoke about an increase in confidence. The activities during the trip put many of the learners out of their comfort zones by completing tasks they would not normally do, and they overcame their fears and anxieties to take part in the tasks.

Finally, the learners described how they met the outcome of **PRACTISE**: Develop young people's study skills and capacity for academic attainment and successful graduate progression. The learners described how the trip had developed a number of skills such as their problem-solving skills, teamworking ability, communication skills, and creativity.

"I feel like I'm in a position to make more responsible and informed decisions."

"I think I am now in a better place to make decisions about my future as I know about more opportunities that are to offer around the country and in Yorkshire or even Scarborough."

"I think the residential has increased my confidence as I did things that I wouldn't have done otherwise such as rock climbing which I was nervous to do at first but I did anyway."

"The trip allowed me to come out of my comfort zone and do things I wouldn't have done on my own like rock-climbing. The trip boosted my confidence and put us in the situation where we had to work together and make decisions, this has allowed me to practice my teamwork skills which will apply in future jobs."

"The trip helped boost my confidence levels as I did things I never thought I could achieve, such as rock climbing, abseiling and raft building. It helped me be able to work in a team to support each other and build things together"

"I developed and improved skills such as, teamwork when we were raft building, creativity when we were playing Alex's game and communication when we were rock climbing."



KNOW



CHOOSE



PRACTISE

Programme Overview: Package Offer

In 2022/23 we continued with our package offer which was designed so that a learner would receive three or more interventions over the academic year. As part of this provision, we offered six activity packages. The packages were designed to target particular stages of educational needs, with two packages being designed for pre-16, three for post-16, and one that covers all ages.

Our packages included:



Explore HE (pre-16)

In this package we start with the basics: Why go to university? What are the routes into Higher Education? Learners explore an introduction to HE through a range of interactive activities. This package was designed for learners in Year 10 and Year 11. The package included a campus visit to an HE provider and involved a talk of 'What is HE?', a campus tour, and a workshop titled 'Interactive Intro to HE'. Schools could also choose to have the 'What is HE?' talk delivered as an assembly at their school and/or the interactive workshop as a classroom activity. The package was intended to cover the NERUPI outcomes of Know, Choose, and Become.

In 2022/23, we delivered three campus visits in partnership with York St John University and engaged 162 Year 10 learners. We delivered four 'What is HE?' talks as assemblies and engaged 653 learners across Year 10 and Year 11 and delivered one interactive workshop with 17 Year 11's. Overall this package engaged with 815 learners.

3

campus visits, engaging 162 learners

4

'What is HE?' assemblies, engaging 653 learners

815

total learners engaged with this package

We evaluated this package using a pre and post survey with learners who received the full package (i.e., attended the campus visit). Before the campus visit 60.5% of learners reported that they were quite likely or extremely likely to apply to HE, at the end of the campus visit 66.7% reported that they were quite likely or extremely likely to apply to HE suggesting that they were more likely to apply to HE having participated in the activities. Learners were asked to complete eight questions in the pre and post survey and Figure 1 and 2 show the means for each question.

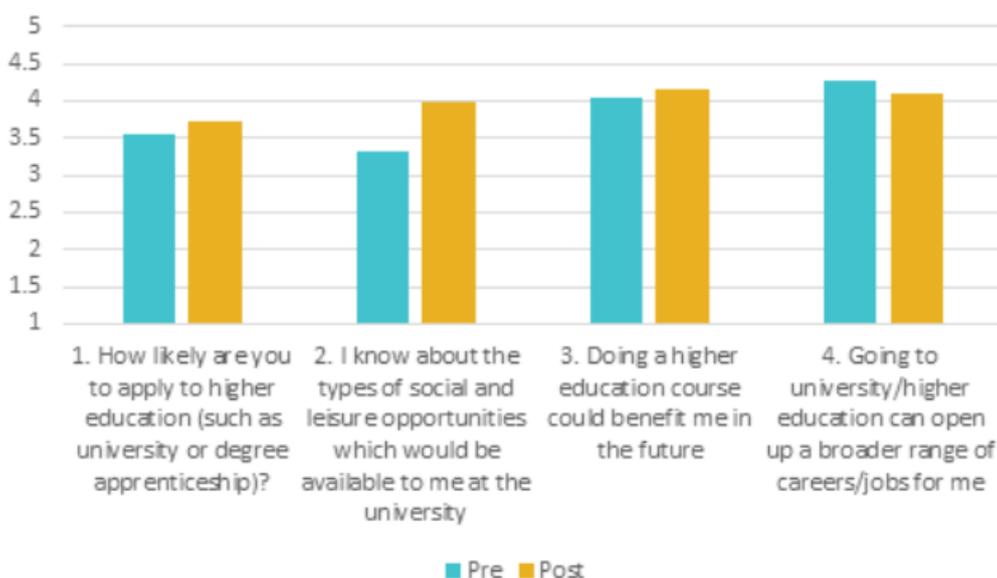


Figure 1. Mean values pre- and post-activity for Questions 1-4. (Scale Q1 1 = Extremely unlikely, 5 = Extremely likely; Q2-4 1 = Strongly disagree, 5 = Strongly agree)

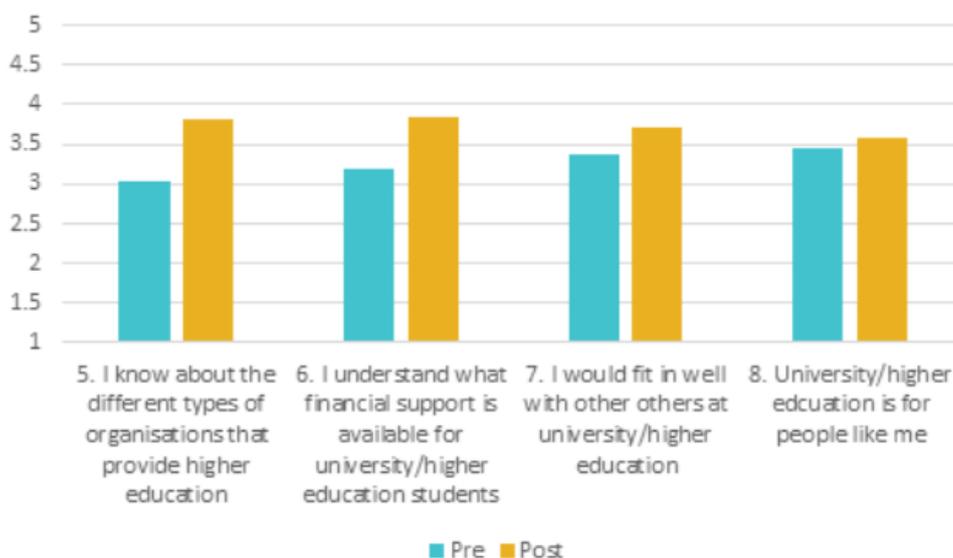


Figure 2. Mean values pre- and post-activity for Questions 5-8. (Scale 1 = Strongly disagree, 5 = Strongly agree)

To test for a significant difference between before and after the activity we used the Wilcoxon signed-rank test in SPSS (version 29). Our data violated the assumptions for a paired samples t-test and therefore, a non-parametric test was more appropriate. To preserve the sample size for each question cases with missing values were excluded test-by-test. Table 1. shows that question 1, 2, 5 and 6 had a significant difference between before and after the activities. Question 1 showed a change with a small effect size and questions 2, 5 and 6 showed a medium effect size. Therefore, this suggests that the activities have met two of the intended outcomes, the NERUPI outcomes of Know and Choose.

Table 1. Wilcoxon signed-rank test

Question	Median (before)	Median (after)	<i>n</i>	<i>Z</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>r</i>
1	4	4	46	-2.24	.025	0.23
2	3	4	46	-3.92	<.001	0.41
3	4	4	47	-0.81	.419	0.08
4	4	4	27	-1.90	.058	0.26
5	3	4	27	-3.12	.002	0.43
6	3	4	27	-2.70	.007	0.37
7	3	4	27	-1.49	.136	0.20
8	4	4	24	-1.39	.163	0.20

Note. Effect size $r = Z/\sqrt{N}$ (where *N* is the number of observations)³



KNOW

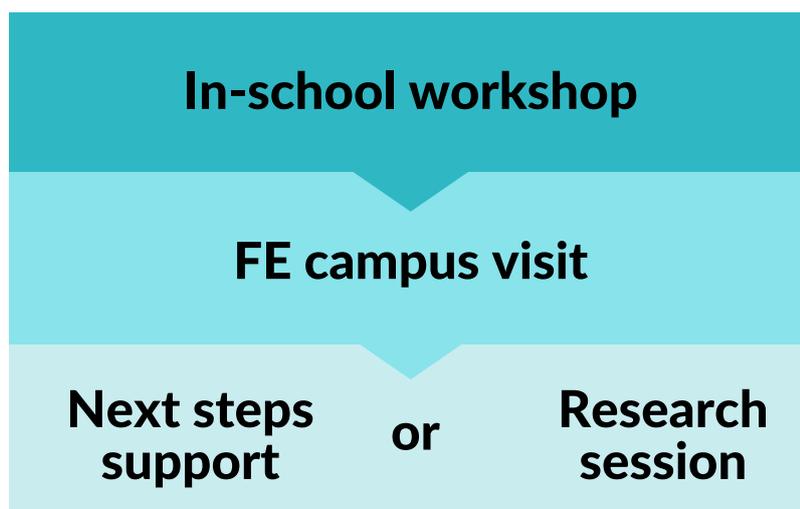


CHOOSE

³ Field, A. (2009). *Discovering statistics using SPSS* (3rd ed.). Sage.

Your Post-16 Options

In this package we explore a learner's options beyond their GCSEs. This package covers the different types of qualifications, the different types of provision, and the differences between school and college/sixth form. The package was delivered to 164 Year 10 learners at one school and included a workshop, a visit to an FE campus, and either next steps support or a research session. The package intended to cover the NERUPI outcomes of Know, Choose, Become, Practise and Understand.



We evaluated this package using a pre and post survey with learners who received the full package. Learners were asked to complete six questions in the pre and post survey and Figure 3 and 4 show the means for each question.

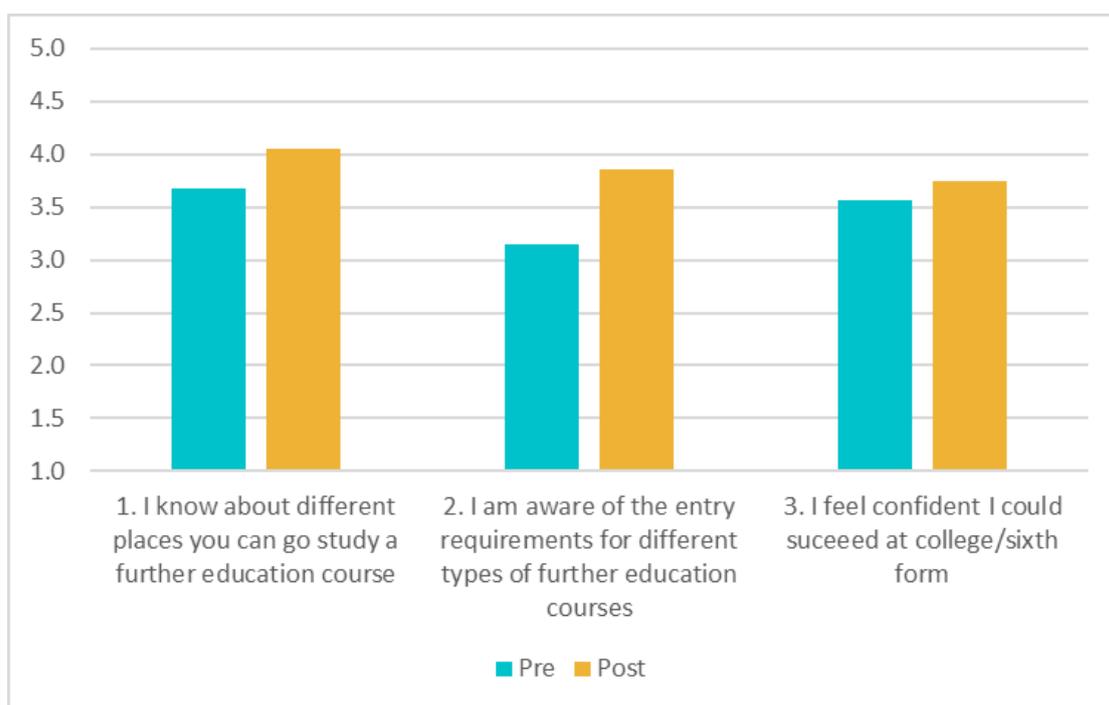


Figure 3. Mean values pre- and post-activity for Questions 1-3, 1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree or disagree, 4 = Agree and 5 = Strongly agree)

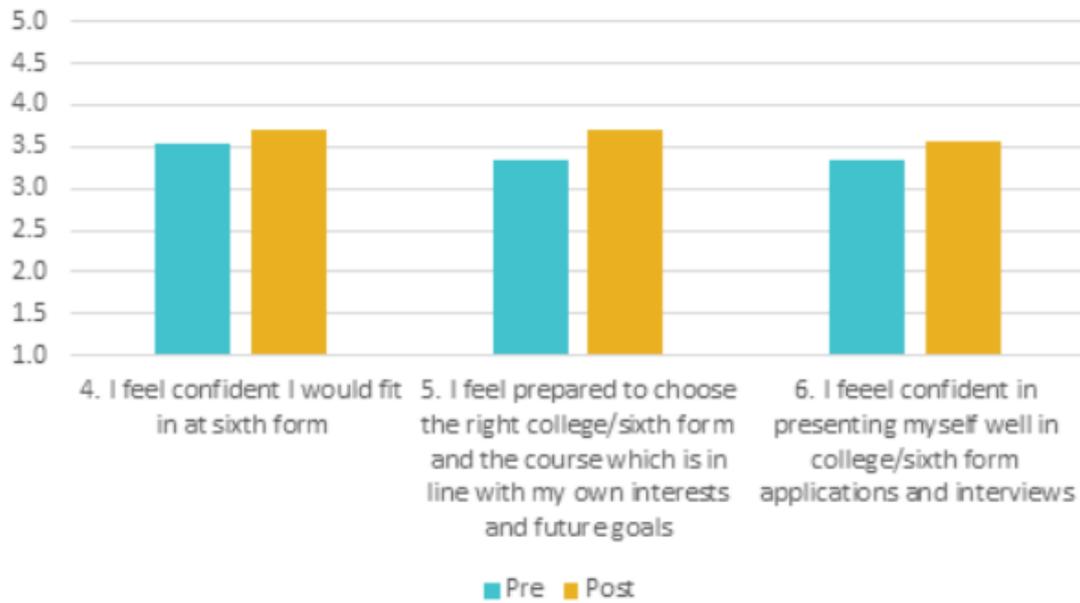


Figure 4. Mean values pre- and post-activity for Questions 4-6, 1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree or disagree, 4 = Agree and 5 = Strongly agree)

To test for a significant difference between before and after the activity we used the Wilcoxon signed-rank test in SPSS (version 29). Our data violated the assumptions for a paired samples t-test and therefore, a non-parametric test was more appropriate. To preserve the sample size for each question cases with missing values were excluded test-by-test. Table 2. shows that all questions had a significant difference between before and after the activities. Question 1 and 2 showed a change with a medium effect size and questions 3, 4, 5 and 6 showed a small effect size. Therefore, this suggests that the activities have met the intended outcomes, the NERUPI outcomes of know and choose, become, practise and understand.

Table 2. Wilcoxon signed-rank test

Question	Median (before)	Median (after)	n	Z	p	r
1	4	4	99	-4.50	<0.01	0.32
2	3	4	99	-5.82	<0.01	0.41
3	4	4	98	-2.99	.003	0.21
4	4	4	98	-2.47	.014	0.18
5	3	4	98	-3.70	<0.01	0.26
6	4	4	99	-3.80	<0.01	0.27

Note. Effect size $r = Z/\sqrt{N}$ (where N is the number of observations)³



KNOW



CHOOSE



BECOME



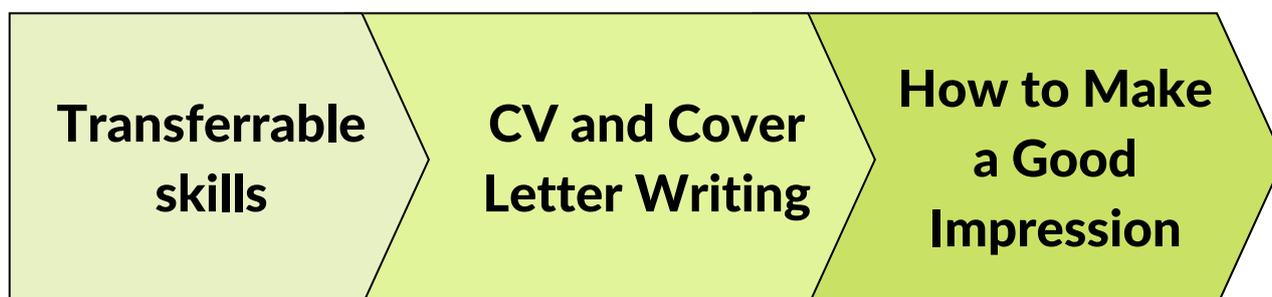
PRACTISE



UNDERSTAND

Employability

In a competitive job market, it is important to know what employability skills are needed in different job sectors and by different employers. In this package learners take part in a series of workshops designed to boost their employability and set them off to a good start in the world of work. The package included three workshops on Transferable Skills, CV and Cover Letter Writing, and How to Make a Good Impression. We also offered small-scale mock interviews delivered by the Inspiring Choices team. This package intended to cover the NERUPI outcomes of Become and Practise. Our Employability package was delivered in 7 schools and engaged 512 learners. We evaluated this package using pre and post survey with learners who received the full package.



We evaluated this package using a pre and post survey with learners who received the full package. Learners were asked to complete eight questions in the pre and post survey and Figure 5 and 6 show the means for each question.

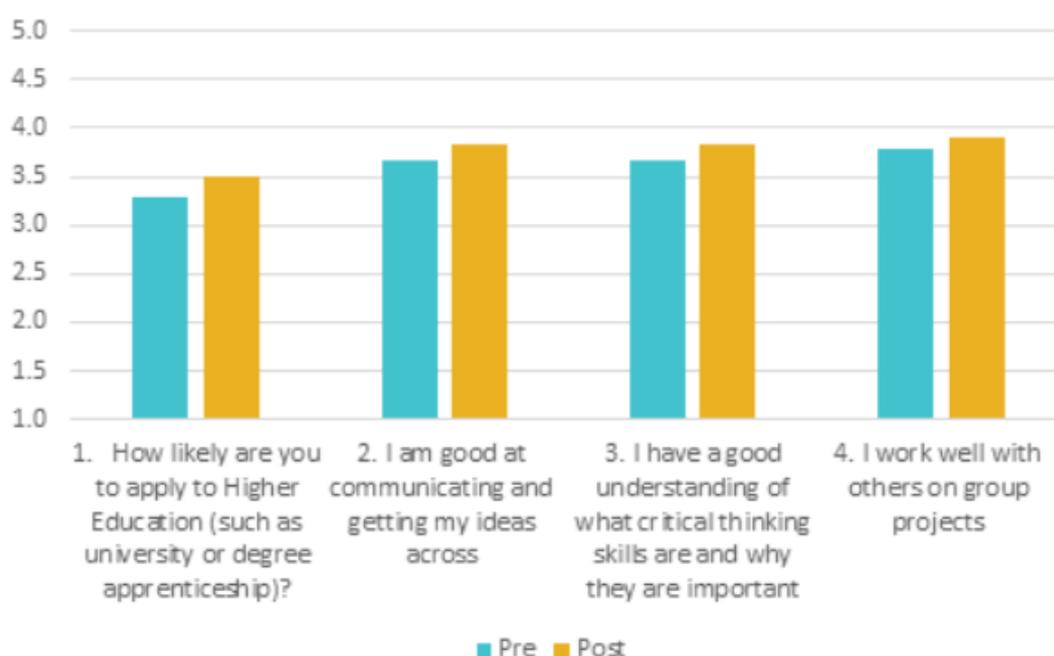


Figure 5. Mean values pre- and post-activity for Questions 1-4. (Scale Q1 1 = Extremely unlikely, 5 = Extremely likely; Q2-4, 1 = Strongly disagree, 5 = Strongly agree)

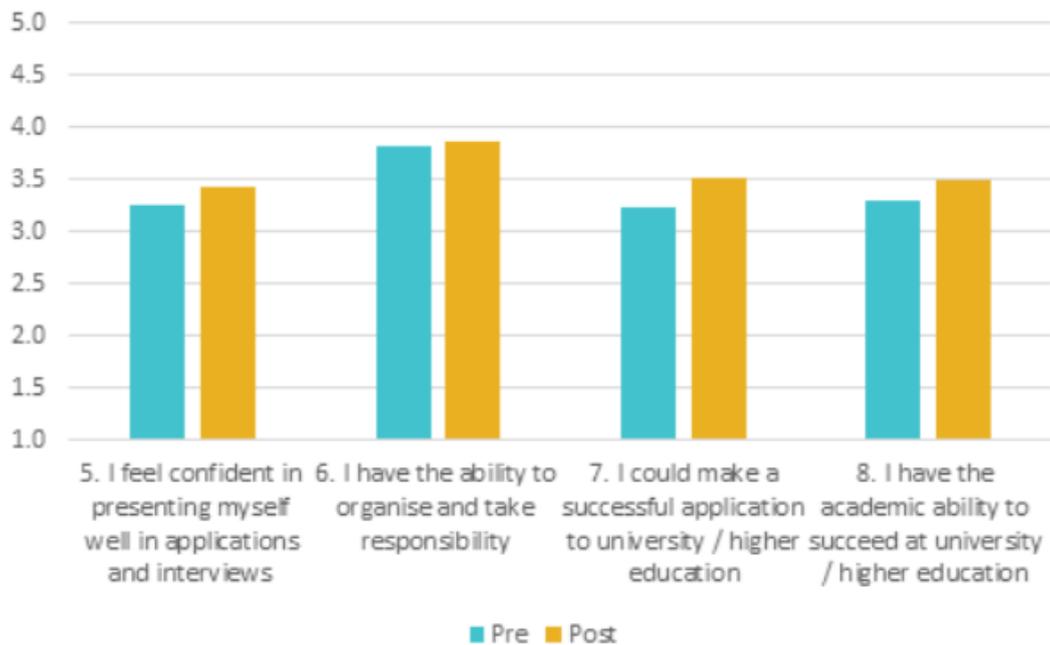


Figure 6. Mean values pre- and post-activity for Questions 5-8 (1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = Neither agree nor disagree, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly agree)

To test for a significant difference between before and after the activity we used the Wilcoxon signed-rank test in SPSS (version 29). Our data violated the assumptions for a paired samples t-test and therefore, a non-parametric test was more appropriate. To preserve the sample size for each question cases with missing values were excluded test-by-test. Table 3. shows that question 2,3,5,7 and 8 had a significant difference between before and after the activities. Therefore, this suggests that the activities have met two of the intended outcomes, the NERUPI outcomes of Become and Practise.

Table 3. Wilcoxon signed-rank test

Question	Median (before)	Median (after)	n	Z	p	r
1	3	4	165	-1.58	.115	0.09
2	4	4	169	-2.64	.008	0.14
3	4	4	167	-2.72	.007	0.15
4	4	4	169	-1.40	.162	0.08
5	3	3	167	-2.48	.013	0.14
6	4	4	167	-6.86	.493	0.04
7	3	4	167	-3.01	.003	0.16
8	3	4	168	-2.16	.031	0.12

Note. Effect size $r = Z/\sqrt{N}$ (where N is the number of observations)³



BECOME



PRACTISE

Explore HE (post-16)

This package was for learners who are at the beginning of their HE exploration. We start with the basics, challenging misconceptions about HE, and explain what UCAS and Student Finance are. This package was designed for learners in colleges or sixth forms and included a visit to an HE Campus, a talk on 'Why HE?', a campus tour, and a workshop on 'A Beginners Guide to HE.' This package intended to cover the NERUPI outcomes of Know, Choose and Become.

One college engaged with this package and brought 15 learners on a visit to York St John University.



KNOW



CHOOSE



BECOME

Apply to HE

This package offers group support and guidance for learners applying to Higher Education. This includes how to apply for student finance and the application process for all HE pathways. This package was designed for learners in college or sixth form and included a subject taster campus visit, a talk on 'Applying to HE' and a workshop on 'Applying for Student Finance.' This package intended to cover the NERUPI outcomes of Know, Choose, Become and Practise.

In 2022/23, no colleges or sixth forms received the full package, one college received two 'Applying for Student Finance' workshops which engaged with 26 learners.



KNOW



CHOOSE



BECOME



PRACTISE

Preparing for Student Life

This package was for learners that have applied to study an HE course. It aimed to equip learners with the skills required for student life and prepare them for their transition to Higher Education. This package included three workshops, a Student Ambassador led workshop on student life, a workshop on 'Independent Living and Student Accommodation' and a workshop on 'Budgeting.' This package intended to cover the NERUPI outcomes of Know, Choose and Become.

Student Ambassador led workshop on student life

'Independent Living and Student Accommodation'

'Budgeting'

Our preparing for student life package was delivered in 3 schools and engaged 338 learners. We evaluated this package using a pre and post survey where learners were asked to complete eight questions. Figure 7 and 8 shows the means for each question.

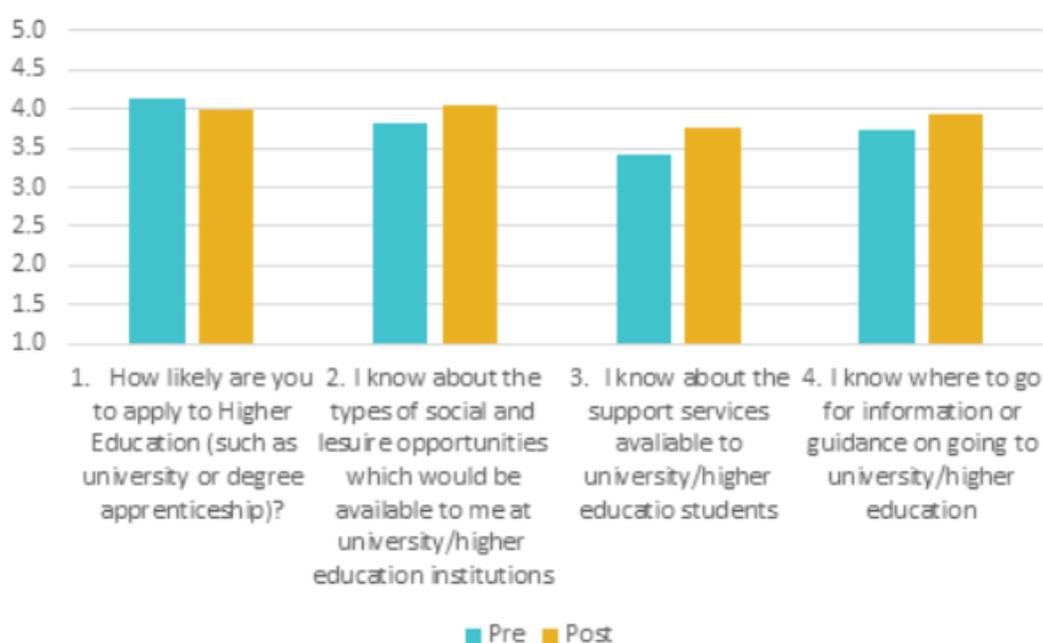


Figure 7. Mean values pre- and post-activity for Questions 1-3. (Q1 1= Extremely unlikely, 2 = Quite unlikely, 3 = Neither likely or unlikely, 4 = Quite likely, 5 = Extremely likely) Questions 2 and 3 (1 = Strongly disagree, 2 Disagree, 3 = Neither agree nor disagree, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly agree).

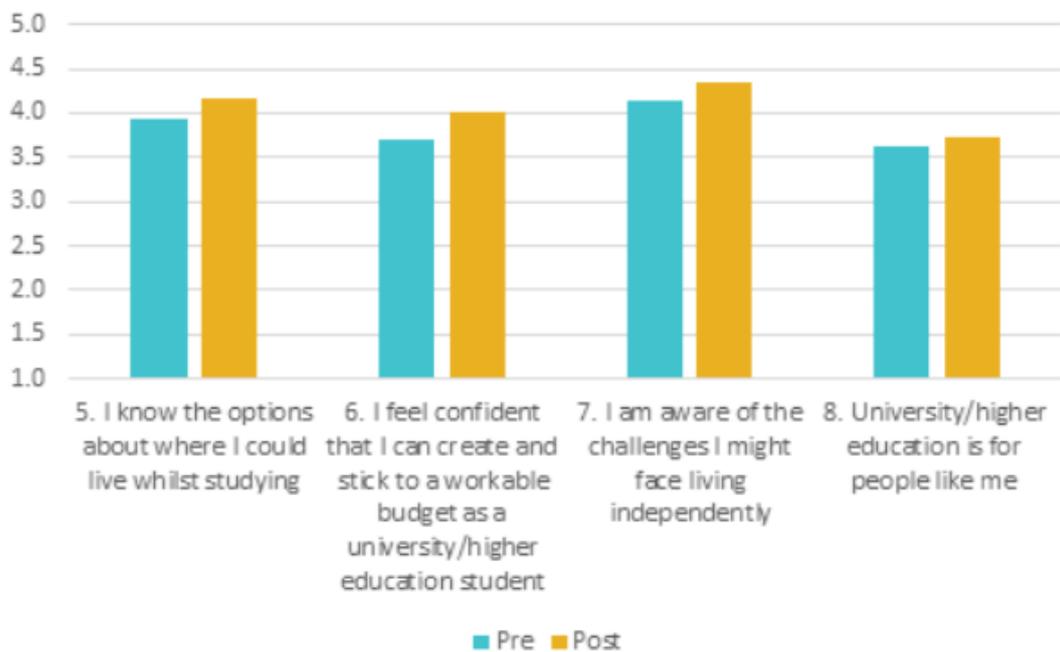


Figure 8. Mean values pre- and post-activity for Questions 4-6. (Q1 = Strongly disagree, 2 Disagree, 3 = Neither agree nor disagree, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly agree).

To test for a significant difference between before and after the activity we used the Wilcoxon signed-rank test in SPSS (version 29). Our data violated the assumptions for a paired samples t-test and therefore, a non-parametric test was more appropriate. To preserve the sample size for each question, cases with missing values were excluded test-by-test. Table 4. shows that questions 2-8 had a significant difference between before and after the activities. Questions 2,4,5,6,7 and 8 showed a change with a small effect size, and question 3 showed a medium effect size. Therefore, this suggests that the activities have met the three NERUPI outcomes Know, Choose and Become.

Table 4. Wilcoxon signed-rank test

Question	Median (before)	Median (after)	n	Z	p	r
1	5	5	106	-.90	.370	0.06
2	4	4	108	-3.55	<0.01	0.24
3	4	4	108	-4.82	<0.01	0.33
4	4	4	107	-3.02	.003	0.21
5	4	4	108	-3.76	<.001	0.23
6	4	4	108	-4.10	<.001	0.28
7	4	4	108	-2.72	.007	0.19
8	4	4	107	-2.36	.018	0.16

Note. Effect size $r = Z/\sqrt{N}$ (where N is the number of observations)³



KNOW



CHOOSE

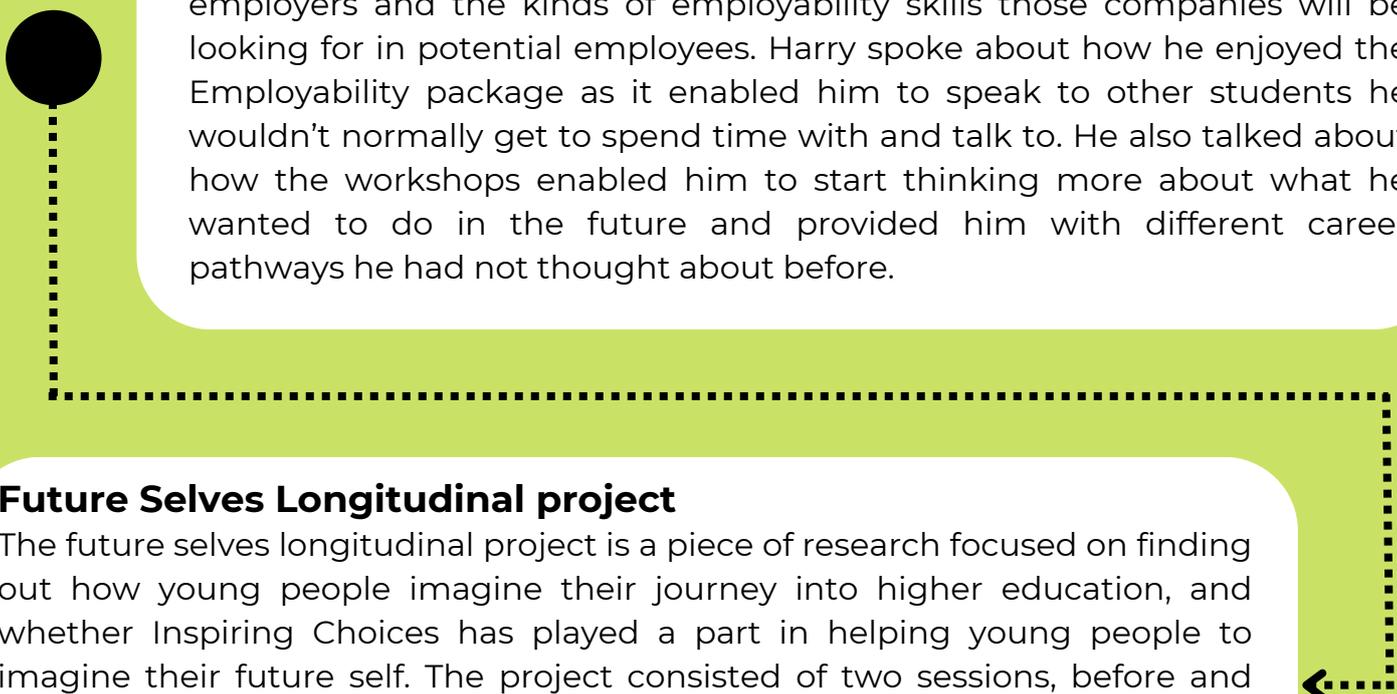


BECOME

Case Study: Harry

Year 10 | 5 activities | 8.25 contact hours

Employability



Harry received the full Employability package which consists of a workshop on Transferable Skills, CV and Cover Letter Writing and How to Make a Good Impression. This package is focused on getting students ready for the world of work by opening their eyes to a wide variety of job sectors, employers and the kinds of employability skills those companies will be looking for in potential employees. Harry spoke about how he enjoyed the Employability package as it enabled him to speak to other students he wouldn't normally get to spend time with and talk to. He also talked about how the workshops enabled him to start thinking more about what he wanted to do in the future and provided him with different career pathways he had not thought about before.

Future Selves Longitudinal project

The future selves longitudinal project is a piece of research focused on finding out how young people imagine their journey into higher education, and whether Inspiring Choices has played a part in helping young people to imagine their future self. The project consisted of two sessions, before and after the employability package. Harry spoke about how much he enjoyed the project and felt good coming out of the future selves workshops as well as the interview he did with an Outreach Coordinator working for Inspiring Choices.

Have the Inspiring Choices sessions helped you to understand more about further and higher education?

Harry spoke about how he was unsure if university would be the right path for him but is keen to do further research and find out. He is passionate about music technology and music performance and plans to investigate how he would study music at higher education. Harry enjoyed the Inspiring Choices sessions he was involved in, found they improved his confidence and enabled him to begin to think about his interests in music and how he could follow this further at a higher education level.

Strategic Outreach

In addition to working with schools and colleges, we also work in collaboration with our partners to support discrete learner groups or knowledge and skills gaps. This work is delivered to Year 7 and above. In 2022/23 we worked with three discrete learner groups: Care Experienced young people, young people from Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller communities, Military service young people and delivered projects to bring student role models into schools and delivery of projects within the community.

Flood a School

Flood a School involves student ambassadors going into any year group in a school for a full day. Inspiring Choices ran two 'Flood a School' days last year, in two schools. The student ambassadors interacted with 477 students at one high school and 335 students at a second school. Each day included between 5-10 student ambassadors, each going into a lesson of a subject that was related to their degree. The student ambassadors talked initially about general university life, then more specifically about what it would be like to study a certain subject at university, followed by answering any questions the students had. After this the ambassadors stayed and supported the classroom teacher for the rest of the school day. Flood a School is flexible in that Inspiring Choices and the student ambassadors are happy to help in whichever way is most effective for the host school, whether this means moving around classrooms or staying in one classroom or talking entirely about specific university subjects over general higher education information.

812 total learners engaged

On Track

On Track organises engaging and informative events for care experienced young people and care leavers. On Track is a partnership of higher education providers in North Yorkshire that helps young people understand what their options are after school. The partners involved in 22/23 were; University Centre Askham Bryan College, York St John University, University of York and CU Scarborough. All ages are welcome at these events, and the sessions are organised outside of the school day so that young people do not miss any mainstream education. Each partner organises and delivers their own event.

December 2022

Launch event: York Castle Museum

Introduction to programme

Overview of partner organisations

Themed scavenger hunt

'Escape room' style activity

5 young people

February 2023

University Centre Askham Bryan

Tour of campus, including the farm and motorsports facilities

Tour of the wildlife park

Insight into courses and qualifications available at the land-based college.

Focus on uniform courses on offer at the institution, as the young people had expressed interest in public service careers

12 young people

April 2023

York St John University

Campus tour

Taster session in game design and production, selected based on young people's interests

The course leader gave each young person a virtual character to design their own game around using the specialised computers and software used by game design and game development students at the university.

9 young people

May 2023

University of York

Student ambassador led campus tour

Competitive team building exercises including bridge and tower building

Opportunity to talk to student ambassadors who were also care experienced about student life at university

6 young people

August 2023

Coventry University Scarborough

Tour of facilities

Cyber security workshop, including code breaking games

Younger attendees played indoor games including bowling

Afternoon on North Bay Beach

14 young people

Each of the five sessions were well received and showcased higher education in a way which was directly inspired and organised based on the young people's passions. Our work with On Track in the current academic year is also following this process.

At each On Track visit the young people were asked questions about university and the activities they were taking part in during the visit.

There were 23 responses to 'do you know someone who has gone to university?' Fifteen young people said yes, seven said no and two said they didn't know. Of the fifteen that said yes, seven reported that it was a family member, five mentioned a friend and three someone else.

When asked whether they had enjoyed the activities they had taken part in. 29 young people strongly agreed or agreed, five neither agreed nor disagreed and three strongly disagreed or disagreed.

The young people were also asked if they could see themselves as a university student in future. Twenty three strongly agreed or agreed, seven neither agreed nor disagreed and two strongly disagreed or disagreed.

The final question asked about what their biggest concerns about going to higher education. The responses to this question, which can be seen in the word cloud below will help us to understand where support is needed for them in future.

What is your biggest concern about going to higher education?

A word cloud where the size of each word represents its frequency in responses. The words are arranged in a vertical stack, with the largest words at the top and bottom. The colors of the words are green and blue.

How I'll do it
Work being harder
Funding/accommodation
Making friends/knowing what I want to do
Knowing if I'd get on with people in a uni accommodation
That I am not smart enough
I might not get my GCSEs
Too many people
Transport

Virtual Schools UCAS application

The opportunity arose for Inspiring Choices to help some care experienced young people with UCAS application support. One of our Outreach Coordinators supported four care experienced young people in multiple sessions to think about course and career ideas and plan personal statements. One individual received guidance on searching and narrowing down degree ideas, another was supported to translate their qualifications into UCAS points, and another just wanted the opportunity to talk through their plans and gain some confidence in their decision. We are flexible with how we can support individuals with their UCAS applications, and this can be done in person, on the phone, online, across multiple sessions or within one meeting. Support for UCAS applications is open to students / young people we work with in a strategic capacity. We are passionate to provide bespoke guidance for young people navigating applying to higher education and would be able to do this in a flexible way for a limited number of young people.

Care Experienced Residential

“What an absolutely amazing experience for all our young people. Every single person benefited from the experience and has made a new connection with someone that they might not have got the chance to meet otherwise.”

Inspiring Choices and North Yorkshire Council leaving care team joined up to provide care leavers with the opportunity to explore Higher Education and career opportunities in London. The care leavers were given the chance to meet up prior to the trip at York St John University, to get to know other young people and staff going on the trip, as well as finding out about what to bring with them. The trip itself involved a visit to John Lewis head office in Westfield Stratford shopping centre, where they have a specific centre dedicated to visits as well as a programme focused on ‘Building Happier Futures for Care-Experienced People’. The young people listened to talks by two employees working in the futures focused department before engaging in a task to build a product appropriate for hypothetical John Lewis customers out of LEGO. Speed networking, with John Lewis employees from various departments as well as a discussion on careers with John Lewis and a Q and A also made up the session.

After this, all staff and young people ventured across London via the underground to King College London which provided the group with accommodation in a centrally located Halls of Residence. Evening activities included a meal in central London and a theatre trip to see the Lion King (provided by the North Yorkshire Virtual School).

The second day included a walking tour led by one of our Outreach Coordinators across the South Bank leading to Kings College Strand campus. A tour was given of the campus, and everyone was informed of what university life is like at Kings College London as well as how to apply and what support is available for care experienced young people. One young person said the campus visit enabled “an insight into what uni actually was” and to compare the support available for care leavers at different universities.

The Financial Ombudsman was the final component of the trip, where the young people were welcomed, given a tour and lunch before listening to two employees both completing apprenticeships with the Financial Ombudsman talk about their experiences. Another speed networking activity, where the young people could talk to employees in a range of departments within the Financial Ombudsman finished the session and all staff and young people made their way back to Kings Cross train station.

DAY ONE

John Lewis Partnership 'School of Service'

- Learned about their programme designed for care leavers
- Futurology session
- Speed networking

Evening Activities

- Dinner at Covent Garden
- Lion King at Lyceum Theatre

Accommodation at Kings College London

DAY TWO

Walking tour

- Led by one of our Outreach Coordinators
- Passed by London Eye, Westminster, Whitehall, Trafalgar Square

Kings College London- Strand Campus

- Tour of campus
- Learned about student life and support available for care leavers

Financial Ombudsman Service

- Tour of office at Canary Wharf
- Spoke with current apprentices
- Speed networking

'It was really nice how welcoming they were.'

'I like going around asking all the different people in 'speed dating' and asking different questions and finding out all the bits of information.'

'I think just seeing that professional world and knowing having a glimpse of it and knowing that actually I could be part of this, and I think that was absolutely inspiring.'

'Everybody got something from that, you know, even just the person that came out of the Financial Ombudsman and went, wow they treated me like a professional.'

'The staff were welcoming, I thought what they're talking about was interesting. I loved that they had different people from different departments and not just from one department.'

The young people and staff who came on the visit were invited to a reunion at York St John University where a tour and lunch was provided as well as interviews and opportunities to arrange one-to-one meetings for support with higher education and job applications. Evaluation was conducted by a Qualtrics survey as well as through an interview with two members of North Yorkshire Council staff and three care-experienced young people.

'I enjoyed spending time with everyone, that were all amazing. These two days were amazing, I haven't laughed like this for months and they made my day. I couldn't ask for a better team, and I appreciate the Leaving Care Team for making this happen for us.'

'I think it made me want to strive and be more successful in something I'm passionate about a lot.'

'It was such an amazing opportunity.'

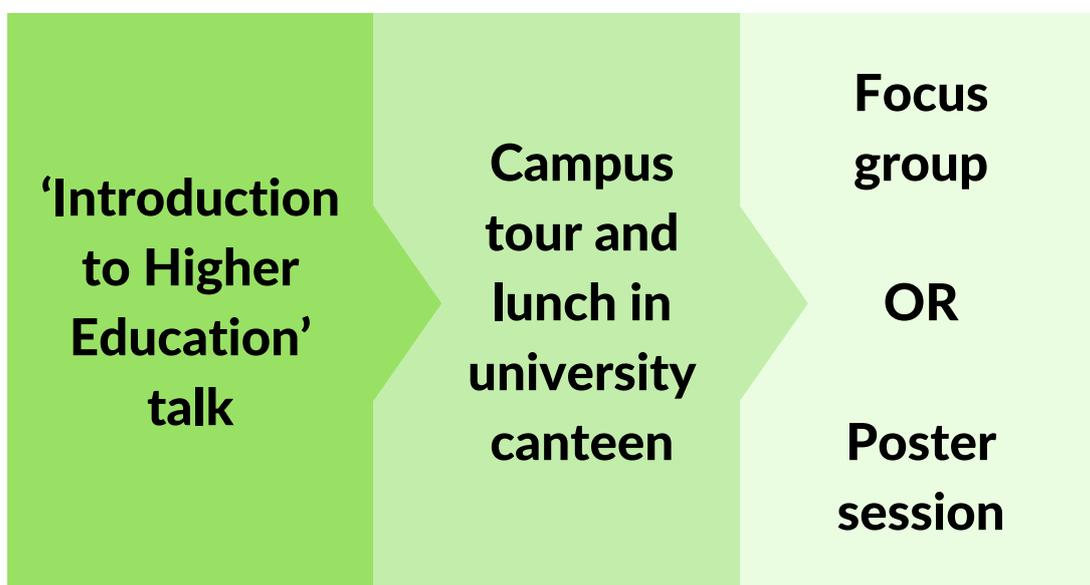
Military Service Children Focus Groups

In 2016, the Office for Students identified military service children as underrepresented in higher education after research from University of Winchester suggested that this cohort have experiences that may affect access. This research also suggested that military service children are less likely than their peers to go on to higher education. In York and North Yorkshire, 2020 census data tells us that there are 4,126 military service children aged 0-16.

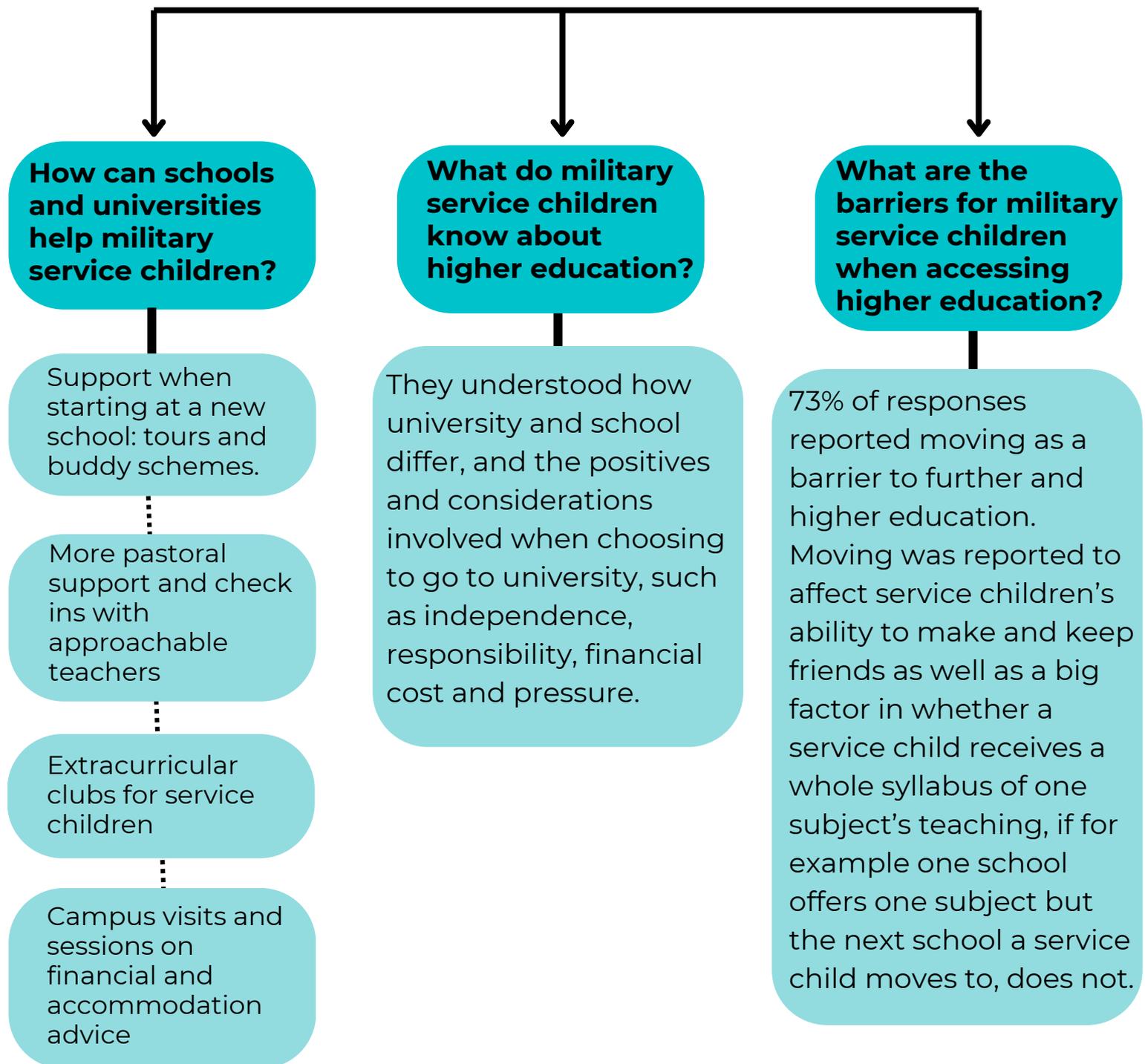
In Autumn 2022, Inspiring Choices and York St John University's widening participation team collaborated to run a series of campus visits for military service pupils.

The purpose of these sessions was to explore the choices and perceptions of young people who grow up within a military service background, focusing on attitudes, feelings, beliefs, experiences and reactions in a way which is not possible through other methods of research, such as surveys. The findings will inform Uni Connect partners, teachers, policy makers, and other stakeholders involved in planning and delivering Higher Education outreach.

Military service children from four schools all took part in a York St John University campus day where they engaged in a Higher Education activity, were given a campus tour, had lunch in the university canteen and participated in either a focus group or a poster session. The children were asked about their experiences of being a service child in secondary education, and their plans for further and/or higher education.



Three main questions emerged from the analysis of the findings:



The findings from this research have been considered by Inspiring Choices and York St John University, who will use this evidence to develop project that offers further bespoke support for military service pupils in the form of campus visits and in-school workshops.

Strive for Education

Strive for Education⁴ is an Independent Special School for learners whose needs can't be met in mainstream education. Strive for Education offers a diverse curriculum that is aimed at re-engaging student's interest in education.

One of our Outreach Co-ordinators delivered a bespoke version of our employability package to a small group of learners. This package covers transferable skills, CV and cover letter writing and how to make a good impression. It was delivered in a more relaxed style to better suit the needs of the individual learners.

Three teachers from Strive gave feedback on the sessions. All three teachers agreed that learners have increased confidence in presenting themselves well in applications and interviews. The teachers thought the sessions showed the students that further education is more accessible to them than the students thought before the sessions and gave them the beliefs that they still do have opportunities. The teachers also thought that the students would take away how they can use everyday skills such as communication in the workplace. The teachers also commented that they thought our outreach coordinator was very professional, supportive, understanding and very good at encouraging discussion and drawing out opinions from the students.

Gypsy, Roma Traveller Projects

A group of young people from Gypsy Roma Traveller and Boater communities were involved in The Achieve Program. Achieve is a Prince's Trust programme for 11- to 19-year-olds. The programme is made up of a range of units and modules which contribute towards a recognised Prince's Trust qualification and the personal, social and health education of students. All the units help young people to develop skills in key areas, preparing them to succeed in whatever they choose to do next. Up to six young people took part in 13 2-hour long sessions. This programme ran from September 2022 to July 2023.

Inspiring Choices provided funding in the Spring term for the same group of young people to engage in a 6-week project which incorporated English and maths functional skills. 26 sessions were delivered, running from February 2023 – April 2023. The sessions were designed so that the young people could choose what topic they wanted to focus on, to engage them in learning again. The aim of the programme was to increase confidence, attitude to learning and aspirations.

⁴ Strive for Education. (2023). *Strive for education*. Strive for Education - an Alternative Provision Making a Difference in Harrogate. <https://striveforeducation.co.uk/>

Case Study: Freya

Year 12 | 7 activities | 10.75 contact hours

Preparing for Student Life

Freya took part in the Preparing for Student Life workshops which are designed specifically for students who have applied to HE courses and aims to equip young people with the skills and knowledge to prepare for student life. Freya talked about how memorable the workshops were, the budgeting activity, whereby the students were asked to stick to a budget and guess the value of different food items and order them in terms of their cost without exceeding their budget. She talked about how insightful this session was as she learnt about how supermarket branded food items are likely to taste the same as a more luxury branded food item, they were just priced differently. Freya highlighted how useful it was to practise setting a budget in preparation for university life.

Employability: CV and Cover Letter Writing

Freya took part in the CV and Cover Letter Writing workshop which is one component of the Employability package. This package is focused on getting students ready for the world of work by opening their eyes to a wide variety of job sectors, employers and the kinds of employability skills those companies will be looking for in potential employees. Freya spoke about how she had never written a CV or a cover letter before the session, and how useful it was to learn about how to structure and write them effectively. She even mentioned how in her Sport lesson she was asked to write a CV so felt prepared from having already practised this in the Inspiring Choices workshop.

UniFrog

Inspiring Choices provided Caedmon College funding for all students to have access to UniFrog. UniFrog is an online platform designed to help students in secondary school find and apply to further and higher education courses that suit each student's interests. Freya explained how she had been using UniFrog during her full journey at Caedmon College. The platform had enabled Freya to write her personal statement and apply for jobs in the industry she liked best.

Have the Inspiring Choices sessions helped you to understand more about higher education?

Freya spoke about how she was passionate about studying Sport and becoming a Sports Coach. She went on to explain how if she chose to go, she would be the first person in her family to study at university and how she was apprehensive but excited about this. Freya was keen to continue her sport studies at a higher level but felt she knew very little about university before attending the Preparing for Student Life sessions. The workshops enabled her to learn more about university life and feel more confident in herself as a whole and about applying for higher education.

Attainment Raising Projects

The Office for Students (OfS) asked the Uni Connect partnerships to use their existing infrastructure, local knowledge, and expertise to support collaborative approaches to strategic school engagement by universities and other higher education providers to raise pre-16 attainment in state secondary schools. During the 2022/23 academic year, Uni Connect partnerships were asked to complete a raising attainment planning framework to help design and plan our raising attainment activities for the 2023/24 academic year and possibly the 2024/25 academic year.

Therefore, during 2022/23 academic year we delivered several activities to pilot test different methods of raising attainment. We commissioned academics at York St John University to help us analyse the impact of these activities. The full report will be available on our website [here](#), later in the year.



Drama Project



MyTutor



STEM Conference



Podcasting Project

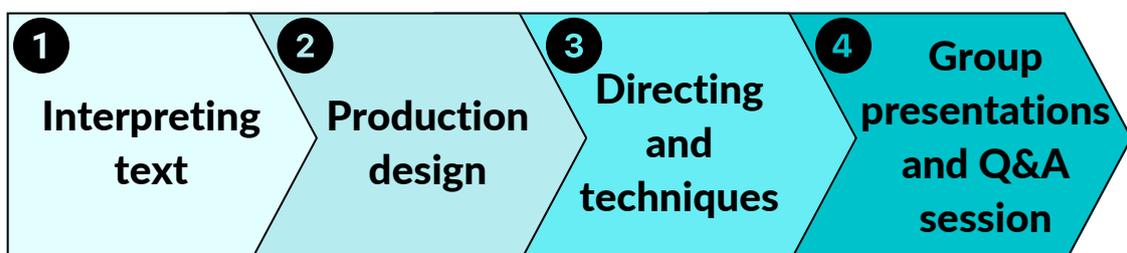
Drama Project

The Drama Project drew on expertise from within our delivery team. This activity engaged 16 learners in Year 10 and Year 12 who had selected drama as a GCSE or A-level subject at one of our schools. Collaborating with the head of drama at the school, we explored specific areas of the curriculum that the students felt they needed further support with, and different career pathways within the theatre industry, to explore how techniques used in Higher Education and professional practice can help current students with their practical assessments in devising and theatre making. The three areas we decided to explore in the workshop were interpretation, theatre design, and directing which we explored through working practices of playwrights, set and lighting designers, and directors.

16 learners 

Year 10 or Year 12 students who had selected drama as a GCSE or A-level subject

The activity was a full day event led by one of our outreach coordinators and supported by three York St John University Drama and Theatre students. As part of the learner's curriculum, they must interpret a set text and explore their own ideas and interpretations through a practical assessment. We used a set text recommended by the school, Sophie Treadwell's *Machinal*. At the end of the session, the students - in groups - delivered a show pitch with an accompanying performance, which would be followed by an invitation from their peers to ask questions about creative decisions the group had made.



After splitting into four groups, each group selected a short extract of the play to analyse before selecting a theme as a stimulus to create their show pitch. This would be the scene the group would perform at the end of the session. The groups then explored different theatre designs by comparing images from past productions with their own ideas, with an introduction to semiotics and stagecraft to emphasise that every creative decision made in theatrical design should be justified and aligned with the theme and interpretation of the piece. Using the students from York St John University as examples, the GCSE and A Level students explored directing techniques by experimenting with stage positioning, actor movement, and line delivery to encourage creative decisions that served to elevate each groups selected theme of interpretation. Each group then presented a set, lighting, and costume design to their peers and the visiting YSJ students, explaining their creative decisions and how they decided on their chosen theme from the text. After this, they performed their rehearsed scene before inviting the rest of the group to ask questions.

The Drama Project aimed to inspire learners to continue with a Drama/Performing Arts pathway into Higher Education, make progress in their Drama GCSE/A-level, and improve their academic confidence in drama.



“I can't thank you enough, the momentum a day like that gives our students is brilliant and your structuring of the session was fantastic. Thank you as well for being so adaptable.” – Drama teacher

MyTutor

Inspiring Choices funded six placements to Year 11's across five schools with MyTutor⁵. Each placement in the MyTutor Core programme was for 12 learners, for an hour session once a week, for 10-weeks. MyTutor trains undergraduates and postgraduates to deliver the one-to-one online sessions. MyTutor carefully matches learners with a university student who delivers the sessions in either Maths, English, or Science. In 2022/23 academic year, MyTutor worked with over 1300 schools to support with boosting attainment and increasing confidence through online tutoring.

⁵ MyTutor. (2013). *Online tuition for schools* | MyTutor. MyTutor. Retrieved January 2, 2024, from <https://schools.mytutor.co.uk/>

STEM Conference

Working in partnership with the National Railway Museum, we delivered our second annual STEM Conference. This four-hour event welcomed 83, Year 9 learners, from four schools across North Yorkshire.

The learners were split into groups that mixed learners from each school. They took part in a carousel of activities organised by the National Railway Museum,



and delivered by STEM ambassadors. The STEM ambassadors are volunteers from a wide range of STEM related jobs who offer their time to help bring STEM subjects to life and demonstrate the value of STEM in careers. Learners also visited an employer fair in the Great Hall of the museum. The employers were invited to set up a stand to demonstrate how they used STEM within their careers, and some also discussed educational routes into their job roles e.g., degree apprenticeships. Employers included York Archaeology, The Institution of Engineering and Technology, CU Scarborough, Portakabin, NHS, Nestle and the Ministry of Defence - York. The learners also took part in a session delivered by Inspiring Choices titled 'Intro to FE/HE.' To finish the day, learners had the opportunity to ask questions to the STEM ambassadors and employers.

The aims of the STEM conference were to inspire learners to continue learning in a STEM pathway, increase in subject knowledge (Science and Maths) and increase in their social skills (e.g., work with new people).

Podcasting Project

The Podcasting Project was developed in partnership with York St John University by a senior lecturer in Media Production and Journalism. This project engaged 40 Year 10, and four Year 9 learners across four schools in North Yorkshire. The learners were selected by the schools because they had an interest in English related subjects but may have low academic confidence.

This project included three sessions, the first two sessions were delivered in their school and the third session was a campus visit to York St John University. During the two in school sessions the learners worked in small groups to develop a podcast in a subject that they found interesting. During the campus visit, the learners used the recording studio to record their podcasts. They also had a tour of the journalism and media department of the campus. This ended in the TV and production room where the learners got to experience making a news reel. Each learner was given a different role to make the production run smoothly including director, news reader, auto cue controller, VT controller and weather presenter. For the final session of the day, learners took part in activities designed to encourage them to think about how they learn best, their future both in and outside of education, and what matters to them. The second half of this session learners engaged in a reflective focus group and topics such as what they liked about the project, and how taking part may or may not relate back to their schoolwork.

2 in-school sessions

- in small groups, developed a podcast in a subject they found interesting



Campus visit session:

- used the recording studio to record their podcasts
- tour of the journalism and media department
- experience making a news reel in the TV and production room
- Reflective focus group

The aims of the Podcasting Project were to inspire learners to continue in an education pathway, make progress in subjects reliant on technology and literacy, increase academic confidence in subjects related to English.

Case study: Paige

Year 12 | 5 activities | 33.25 contact hours

Ivy House

Paige engaged in the Ivy House Award which was funded by Inspiring Choices. The award is designed to help 15–18-year-olds develop leadership and life skills. It helps them to take ownership over their future by improving confidence, skills and knowledge. The program was designed by individuals in senior executive positions. Paige spoke about having different sessions to complete in the program, and exploring what kind of person she is. She enjoyed how it was fun to engage in something very different to the subjects she was studying in sixth form.

Project Dare

As well as Ivy House, Paige took part in Project Dare which is a project run by York Cares. York Cares is a charity that matches the skills of employers and their employees to community projects to make York a better place. Project Dare involves York employers supporting learners by giving them an insight into working life and helping to develop important skills. Inspiring Choices collaborated with York Cares to run the project with Whitby Sixth Form. The project was based at Hiscox and York St John University, and the learners were tasked with creating a new pet insurance product. Learners had to think about who Hiscox customers are, how they would price and market the product and then present their ideas to a panel.

UniFrog

Caedmon students all had access to Unifrog in 2022-2023, an online platform that encourages learners to compare and choose courses offering a range of entry requirements and think more widely about what subjects might be appropriate for them. The platform includes apprenticeships and Further Education colleges.

‘Do you have plans for higher education?’

Paige enjoys studying drama and is going to pursue a career in acting. She has applied to five universities including York St John for drama-based courses. Paige explained that she found the process of applying to higher education straightforward but found certain parts of the experience tricky such as applying for accommodation. Paige expressed she felt more confident after engaging in the Ivy House award, Project Dare, UniFrog and the Bar Mock Trial competition.

Bespoke and Third-Party Funding

A successful strand to our offer is bespoke funding bids which allow our schools and colleges to apply for funding to develop activity, work with third parties or purchase software and platforms that are most at need in their individual institutions. This year we awarded 17 funding bids across a wide range of topics from specialist workshops and events to 1-to-1 careers support.

As Creatives- Big Enterprise Day

As Creatives⁶ is a company based in Liverpool that works with schools throughout the UK to improve the future of children by enhancing learning experiences through activities that place creativity at the heart of curriculum learning.

As Creatives delivered their 'Big Enterprise Day' with 106 year 10's at Risedale School in March 2023. The three aims for the day were to:

- 1 Provide the learners with an experiential introduction to the 5Rs Skills Framework (Relationships, Resourcefulness, Risk Taking, Resilience and Reflection) through four activities.
- 2 Support their understanding that Enterprise skills are useful in all walks of life – not just those interested in becoming businesspeople.
- 3 Offer the learners meaningful opportunities to practise and develop a range of teamworking skills.

Throughout the day learners took part in four activities:

The Trading Game:

a big game in which learners work in teams and use a range of formal and informal skills to deliver on briefs, trade with each other, respond to rapidly changing circumstances.

The Bunker:

a quieter activity, deliberately challenging the learners' powers of resilience as they attempt to find the whereabouts of a radio transmitter, hidden by an unfriendly state, by cracking a series of increasingly fiendish codes.

Enterprise and Me:

enables learners to explore ways they currently use enterprise skills and how they can improve those skills by seeing the learners exploring the 5Rs through a metaphor connected to the natural world – and by playing Human Sculptures, a drama-based engineering game.

The Priorities Game:

a game which gets the learners calculating budgets to restore a turned and dilapidated community centre in a disadvantaged setting. The twist is that each group has to represent a different interest group.

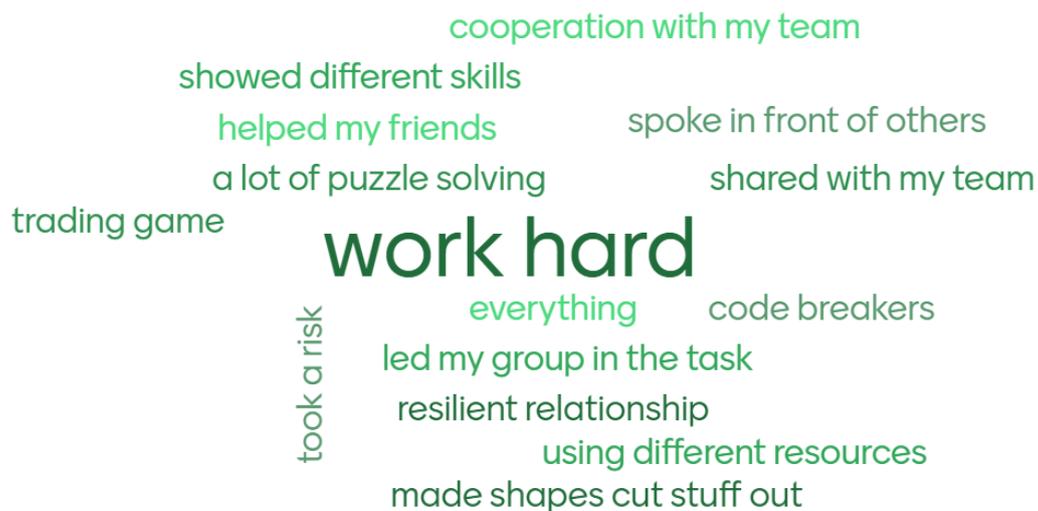
⁶ Liggins, J. (2023). *As creatives - creative learning for creative classrooms*. As Creatives. <https://www.ascreatives.com/>

To conclude the day, learners completed feedback forms designed to support them in reflecting on how they had used each of the 5Rs. Twenty learners shared their feedback forms. To assess how well the learners used their relationships and resourcefulness, the learners answered questions on a scale of 1 to 5, shown in Table 5. To gauge risk-taking, resilience and reflection learners answered short text-based questions.

Table 5. Mean scores for questions on relationships and resourcefulness.

Question	Mean
On a scale of 1-5...	
How well have you used your relationship skills today?	4.2
How well have you used the following resources?	
• Time	4.1
• Yourself	3.9
• The resources provided	4.1

What did you actually do to take a risk?



How does being resilient make you feel?



What was your biggest achievement today?



Bar Mock Trial Competition

Inspiring Choices funded entry to the Bar Mock Trial Competition for one sixth form. Fifteen learners entered as a team. The Bar Mock Trial Competition is run by the charity Young Citizens⁷, which helps young people to understand how the law touches every aspect of their lives and to gain an insight into how the legal justice system works. Participating schools receive resources that will help them to prepare legal arguments for both the prosecution and defence of specially written criminal cases. Teams are made up of fifteen members that will take on different roles during the trial; four barristers, four witnesses, a clerk, an usher and five jury members. After preparation, schools were allocated either prosecution or defence of a case and then competed against other schools at a regional heat in a crown court.

This experience aims to encourage learners to think critically and build arguments, enable learners to interact with legal professionals, and to build an understanding of the role of law and the justice system in our society.

⁷ Young Citizens. (n.d.). *Bar mock trial competition (15-18yo) - crown courts*. SmartLaw. Retrieved January 8, 2024, from <https://smartlaw.org.uk/mock-trials/bar-mock-trials-teachers-2/>

Co-Create

Inspiring Choices were involved in York St John University's Co-Create Festival. Hosted by the School of the Performance, Co-create invites schools across North Yorkshire to take part in a yearlong project where learners with an interest in drama and music create a piece of theatre to perform in the Creative Centre at York St John University. Five schools and 86 of their learners participated in the Co-create festival. Current Drama and Theatre students at YSJ facilitate workshops in school to help the groups prepare, then all participating schools attend the festival to showcase their work, take part in workshops with current practitioners, and watch work made by current university students. One of the Inspiring Choices Outreach Coordinators is also a co-artistic director of Notice this Notice Theatre Company and therefore led a workshop on 'building a comic character' as part of the festival. The aim of the project was to give the young people involved an insight into the possibilities for higher education and a career in the performing arts industry.

5 schools

86 total learners

Drama workshops

Inspiring Choices funded two 2-hour drama workshops at one school. Each workshop engaged with 24 Year 10 learners. These workshops were run at the school by the Creative Engagement team at Stephen Joseph Theatre. The sessions included acting, role play, mental health, resilience and careers in the industry. The sessions were delivered during the school's work experience week, and were intended to give learners an experience of the workplace within the creative industry.

2 sessions

48 total learners

Groundwork

Inspiring Choices funded four placements with Groundwork⁸. Groundwork is a charity that is passionate about creating a future where every neighbourhood is vibrant and green and no-one is held back by their background or circumstances. Groundwork worked with 20 learners across three schools in York and North Yorkshire. Learners worked with Groundwork for one day a week for six weeks in either their school grounds or in a community venue and worked towards a Level 1 Horticulture Certificate. This programme aimed to positively impact young people's behaviour, attendance, attainment, and mental health.

The project also included a visit to Askham Bryan College where learners took part in a horticulture taster session, an in depth tour of specific subject areas and a wider campus tour including the wildlife park. To finish, the project, learners attended a celebration event in either a school or community setting where they received certificate of participation. Parents, carers, school staff and local dignitaries were invited to the celebration.



Two teachers gave feedback on the programme. They noticed an improvement in engagement, confidence, independence, attendance and behaviour since taking part in the project. The teachers believed the learners had gained life skills from the course, a clearer idea of what they want to do post-16 and an improved level of focus to reach their goals. Both teachers would recommend the programme to other schools because learner engagement and development in communication, employability and work skills was obvious week on week.

⁸ Groundwork. (2023). *Yorkshire*. Groundwork. <https://www.groundwork.org.uk/yorkshire/>

Ivy House Programme

Ivy House⁹ is a leadership and talent development programme working with corporations and schools. Inspiring Choices funded four placements with Ivy House with up to 35 students in each placement. Ivy house had previously only delivered the programme in privately funded schools and 6th forms, so this was a good opportunity to deliver the programme to students attending 6th forms and an FE college in the public sector.

The delivery to these learners was the Ivy House Award which is a programme that supports learners in discovering and developing their character and then encouraging them to develop a set of skills built around seven recognised leadership and life skills, such as Core Strength, Proactive Well-being and Human Leadership. The Award is designed for learners aged 15-18 to prepare them for the future and to become extraordinary leaders. Thirty-seven learners started the programme and ten fully completed the programme. Feedback from the teachers who delivered the Award, said that some learners struggled to find relevance in the content of some of the modules.

Mock Interviews

Inspiring Choices helped to support three sessions of mock interviews at two of our schools. The schools organised these events and invited us to participate with other local employers. These events were organised for all Year 10 and Year 12 learners. In preparation for the session the learners completed a general job application form. The employers were given a copy of their application form and a list of interview questions. Learners then had an individual interview with an employer for approximately 15 minutes. The employers completed a feedback form for each learner that they interviewed.

National Apprenticeship Show

Inspiring Choices funded a visit to the National Apprenticeship Show for 20 Year 12 learners from one sixth form. The National Apprenticeship Show¹⁰ is an event that showcases apprenticeships from entry level through to Higher and Degree. The events allow learners to engage with local and national employers, colleges, universities and training providers. The aim of attending this event is to improve capacity to be able to make informed choices for their post-18 education.

⁹ Ivy House. (2023). *Leadership & talent development training programmes | ivy house*. Ivy House. <https://www.ivyhouse.co.uk/>

¹⁰ The National Apprenticeship Show. (2023). *Home - the national apprenticeship show*. The National Apprenticeship Show. <https://nationalapprenticeshipshow.org/>

Online Platforms

Inspiring Choices funded the subscriptions to four different online platforms.

GCSEPod¹¹

a learning and revision platform that aims to improve learners GCSE grades. The platform provides resources to help learners in over 30 GCSE subjects and all exam boards. Teachers can use the platform to set homework, track progress and monitor usage. The platform also provides resources for parents including some resources for free. GCSEPod was funded in two schools.

Kahoot!¹²

a global learning platform company that wants to empower everyone to unlock their full learning potential¹⁶. Kahoot! Offers some free content and paid access to advanced features. Kahoot! is a learning game that can be created from scratch or can use their question bank to create quizzes that can be played from anywhere with an internet connection. Kahoot was funded in two schools.

Seneca¹³

a homework and distance learning platform that provides resources from Key Stage 2 to A-Level and covers a range of exam boards. Seneca provides some resources for free and some at premium access for students, parents and teachers. Students can study and learn on Seneca, while teachers can set work and track progress. In 2022/23, one of our schools used Seneca and engaged approximately 200 learners.

Unifrog¹⁴

a platform that helps learners to make the best choices and submit their applications. Unifrog encourages learners to compare and choose courses offering a range of entry requirements and think more widely about what subjects might be appropriate for them. The platform includes apprenticeships and Further Education colleges in the UK as well as universities in the USA and Canada, and degrees taught in English across Europe, Asia, and Australasia. In 2022/23, Unifrog was funded in and used by four of our schools/sixth forms and 738 learners engaged with the platform.

¹¹ GCSEPod. (n.d.). *GCSE learning and revision*. GCSEPod. Retrieved December 18, 2023, from <https://www.gcsepod.com/>

¹² Kahoot! (2019). *Kahoot! | learning games | make learning awesome!* Kahoot! <https://kahoot.com/>

¹³ Seneca. (n.d.). *Free homework & revision for A level, GCSE, KS3 & KS2*. Senecalearning.com. Retrieved December 18, 2023, from <https://senecalearning.com/en-GB/>

¹⁴ Unifrog. (2019). *Unifrog - the complete destinations platform*. Unifrog.org. Retrieved December 18, 2023, from <https://www.unifrog.org/>

Personal Guidance Interviews

Inspiring Choices funded 39 personal guidance interviews with a trained careers advisor across two of our schools for Year 10 learners. These interviews were on a one-to-one basis and lasted approximately an hour with each student. In these structured interviews learners discussed their ambitions and were given information, advice and guidance on possible study options considering progression routes post-16. Some of the students knew they wanted to progress to their school 6th form, but others wanted to consider options offered by local FE Colleges. The careers interview was also an opportunity to start considering post-18 options and to start creating a plan to progress towards their desired career.

Project Dare

Project Dare is a project run by York Cares. York Cares¹⁵ is a charity that matches the skills of employers and their employees to community projects to make York a better place. Project Dare involves York employers supporting learners by giving them an insight into working life and helping to develop important skills. Inspiring Choices collaborated with York Cares to run a project with one of our sixth forms. Sixteen Year 12 learners worked with Hiscox in a two-part project. The first part was held at York St John University and the second part at Hiscox. Working in small groups, the learners were set a task of creating a new pet insurance product. Learners had to think about who Hiscox customers are, how they would price and market the product and then present their ideas to a panel.

We evaluated this activity using a pre and post survey where learners answered eight questions on a scale of 1-10. Figure 9 and 10 show the means for each question. Our data violated the assumptions for a paired samples t-test and therefore, a non-parametric test was more appropriate. Therefore, test for a significant difference between before and after the activity we used the Wilcoxon signed-rank test in SPSS (version 29). To preserve the sample size for each question cases with missing values were excluded test-by-test. Table 6. shows that all questions other than question 7, had a significant difference between pre- and post-activity. Question 2 showed a change with a medium effect size and questions 1, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 8 showed a large effect size. Therefore, this suggests that Project Dare is having a positive effect on the learners that take part.

¹⁵ York Cares. (n.d.). *York cares - volunteering, business, employee, York*. York Cares. Retrieved January 10, 2024, from <https://www.yorkcares.co.uk/>



Figure 9. Mean values pre- and post-activity for Questions 1-4. (Scale 1-10)

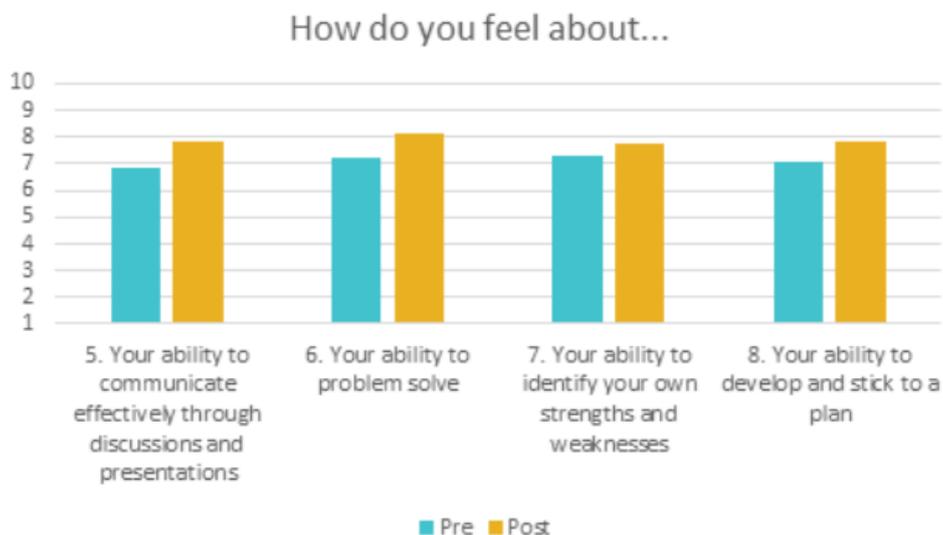


Figure 10. Mean values pre- and post-activity for Questions 5-8. (Scale 1-10)

Table 6. Wilcoxon signed-rank test.

Question	Median (before)	Median (after)	<i>n</i>	<i>Z</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>r</i>
1	7	8	13	-3.21	.001	0.63
2	7	8	13	-2.24	.025	0.44
3	8.5	9	13	-2.64	.008	0.52
4	6	7	13	-2.71	.007	0.53
5	7	9	13	-2.97	.003	0.58
6	7	9	13	-2.71	.007	0.53
7	7	8	13	-1.27	.206	0.25
8	7	8	13	-2.53	.011	0.50

Note. Effect size $r = Z/\sqrt{N}$, where N is the number of observations³

'In the short time they were here, we saw their skills flourish as they worked together in teams, practising research and presentations skills.' - Member of staff at Hiscox

The Scholars Programme- The Brilliant Club

The Brilliant Club's Scholars Programme¹⁶ is available to non-selective state schools across England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. PhD tutors are trained to deliver the programme to help develop their knowledge, skills and confidence to secure a place at a competitive university. The programme is structured around seven tutorials and an opportunity to attend a launch event and a graduation event at partner university campuses. Learner's work towards a final assessment which is marked using university grades.

Inspiring Choices funded The Scholars Programme for eight placements across five schools/sixth forms.

For the placements funded by Inspiring Choices, learners visited Newcastle University, Durham University, University of Leeds, University of York, University of Sheffield or Mansfield College, University of Oxford for the launch or graduation event.

For the three Key Stage 5 placements, one sixth form studied social science and two studied STEM. Table 7 shows the attendance and assignment details for the KS5 placements. For the social science placement, the average mark increased by 10 marks from the baseline to final assignment. For the STEM placements, the average mark increased by 13 marks from the baseline to final assignment. Learners from both social science and STEM also increased their knowledge of university and their sense of belonging at university.

Key Stage 5 Average increase in marks from baseline to final assessment

Social Sciences

↑ 10

STEM

↑ 13

¹⁶ The Brilliant Club. (2020). *The brilliant club*. The Brilliant Club. <https://thebrilliantclub.org/>

Table 7. Key Stage 5 placements.

Subject area	Learners taking part	100% Attendance	Submitted baseline assignments	Baseline assignment				Submitted final assignment	Final assignment				
				WTP	3rd	2:2	2:1		WTP	3rd	2:2	2:1	1st
Social Science	14	13	14	5	8	1	-	14	1	6	3	3	1
STEM	10	7	8	-	-	7	1	8	-	-	-	-	8

Note. WTP = Working towards a pass

For the five Key Stage 4 placements, three studied arts and humanities and two studied social science. Table 8. shows the attendance and assignment details for the KS4 placements. For the three arts and humanities placements, the average mark increased by 6 marks from the baseline to final assignment. For the two social science placements, the average mark increased by 10 marks between the baseline and the final assignment.

Key Stage 4 Average increase in marks from baseline to final assessment

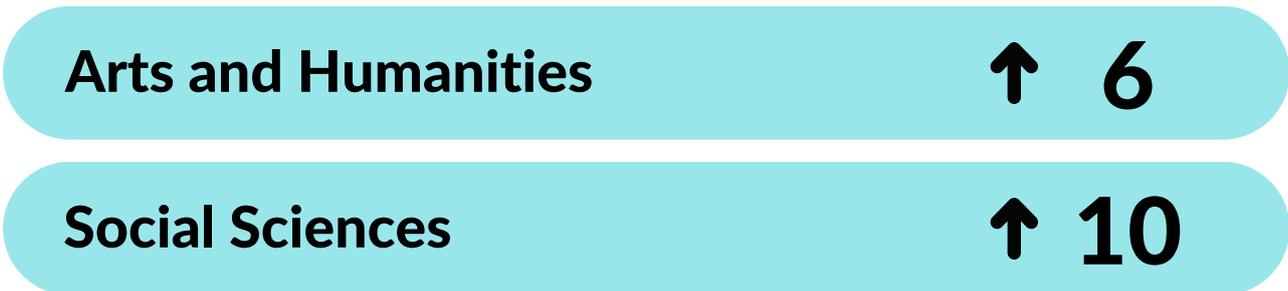


Table 8. Key Stage 4 placements.

Subject area	Learners taking part	100% Attendance	Submitted baseline assignments	Baseline assignment				Submitted final assignment	Final assignment				
				WTP	3rd	2:2	2:1		WTP	3rd	2:2	2:1	1st
Art and Humanities	40	28	34	6	7	4	17	40	-	1	20	17	2
Social Science	27	21	14	-	2	12	-	15	-	-	3	10	2

Note. WTP = Working towards a pass

Talk the Talk Workshop

Inspiring Choices funded four sessions with charity Talk the Talk¹⁷. Talk the Talk work with schools to provide learners with the skills to communicate confidently through a variety of oracy workshops. The full day workshop aims to develop learner's oracy skills and spoken confidence by exploring different methods of communication, how to effectively structure short talks and presentations and how to use language techniques to get their message across confidently. These activities engaged 45 Year 10 learners and 60 Year 12 learners across two of our schools.

UCAS Discovery Day

Inspiring Choices funded a visit to the UCAS discovery day held at Leeds Beckett University for 44 Year 12 learners from one of our sixth forms. UCAS discovery brings together universities, colleges, and employers and apprenticeship providers. This event also has qualified careers advisers that learners can speak to about their futures, listen to talks from experts in their fields, and UCAS experts where learners can get dedicated support about their options.

UK University and Apprenticeship Search Event

Inspiring Choices funded a visit to the UK University and Apprenticeship Search Event¹⁸ hosted at Elland Road in Leeds for 62 Year 12 learners from one of our colleges. This fair brings together universities, apprenticeship providers and local colleges to help learners who are starting to make decisions about their post-18 education and career choices. The event also features several seminars including UCAS Personal Statement and Application Advice, Why take an Apprenticeship, Choosing a University Course, Higher and Degree Apprenticeships, and Student Finance.

¹⁷ Talk the Talk. (n.d.). *Talk the talk - confident communication for life*. Talk the Talk - Confident Communication for Life. Retrieved January 9, 2024, from <https://talkthetalkuk.org/>

¹⁸ UK University Search. (n.d.). *UK university search*. UK University Search. Retrieved January 8, 2024, from <https://www.ukuniversitysearch.com/>

York Mind Mentoring

Inspiring Choices funded a pilot project working in partnership with York Mind,¹⁹ to deliver a mentoring project. Twelve learners across Year 8 to Year 11 had the opportunity to attend up to 12 one-to-one mentoring sessions. These sessions were an hour-long and occurred on a weekly basis in school or over the phone during the school holidays. York Mind delivered 95 mentoring sessions. The aim of the project was to increase resilience, emotional literacy, develop positive coping strategies and their ability to navigate life both in and out of school. The learners were supported to explore their mental health, emotional wellbeing, and different areas of their life to set and achieve personal goals.

Twelve learners were initially supported with the project. Eight of those learners fully completed the project. Three learners were removed from the project due to missing three consecutive sessions and refusal to attend school. Three learners had Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) consultations to assist student referral via school. The learners identified goals within their sessions and 73% of initial identified goals were met, with 12% of students meeting unexpected goals.

The majority of learners had complex emotional needs which was depicted at school through behaviour management challenges, truancy, exclusion and hostility to attending school. Certain learners only attended school at certain times of the day or daily late arrival to school. At times these were barriers to attending the mentoring sessions. However, some learners would attend school on the day of mentoring despite low attendance in the rest of the week.

Learners completed a Recovery Star at the beginning, middle and end of the project and also a resilience measure at the start and end of the project. The Recovery Star is a tool for supporting and measuring change when working with young people who experience mental health problems. It covers eight areas: mental health, physical health, friends, school, family, addictive behaviour, identity, and trust. Most of the learners showed an increase in resilience skills at the end of the project. Most learners also showed a higher score with the recovery star at the end of the mentoring project.

73% initial identified goals were met

12% of students met unexpected goals

¹⁹ York Mind. (2024). Home. York Mind. <https://www.yorkmind.org.uk/>

Stakeholder Consultation

In June we sent out a stakeholder consultation to gain feedback on how our activities and workshops had been received by staff and students. The survey covered packages, bespoke, third party, and strategic outreach that we had delivered and been involved in throughout the year. Responses were high and generally positive, with stakeholders praising our involvement in local institutions and communities. Employability and preparing for student life were considered the most successful packages on offer to students. Groundwork and The Brilliant Club were praised for being well received in our third-party category, and the chance for young people to share their opinions and visit new places were shared as highlights within our strategic outreach work. Stakeholders suggested working with Year 9s around GCSE options time, an increase in support to prepare students academically for HE, more icebreakers to include more vulnerable students, supporting students to find work experience placements, and for feedback to be shared with the students so they can understand the impact participation in workshops and activities are having. We are already incorporating suggested alterations and new activity ideas into our provision for the 2023/24 academic year and are excited to put out further stakeholder surveys at the end of the Spring and Summer terms. A presentation of the full findings can be found [here](#).



'I'd like to thank the team for the work they do, and the opportunities they give to young people. Without this support, schools wouldn't be able to do a lot of these things as cost is so inhibiting.'

'The Inspiring Choices team are absolutely brilliant.'

'We really value your help.'

'I really appreciate the work that Uni Connect have done at Askham Bryan College. The feedback from the Ivy House award and student finance workshops was positive and have made a positive difference to our students. We hope to continue to make the most of the partnership going forward.'

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March 2024