Understanding IntoUniversity’s impact on attainment:

A qualitative research study

Report by Renaisi, September 2019
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Acknowledgements

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Renaisi, September 2019
Executive Summary

Introduction

IntoUniversity is a charity that aims to advance the education of children and young people living in areas with high levels of social and economic disadvantage and increase participation in Higher Education or support students towards another destination of their choice. The charity primarily operates through 30 local learning centres and extension projects, and works with over 42,000 students each year aged 7-20.

The main programmes consist of Academic Support sessions (in the local centres); Mentoring; and Primary and Secondary FOCUS (multi-year workshop packages delivered in centres and at partner schools). Additional programmes involve building employment skills, enrichment opportunities, holiday programmes, and hands-on work and leadership experiences.

Aims of this research

In order to progress to university or another chosen pathway, young people need the required grades at Key Stage 5. IntoUniversity knows that the students with whom they work are more likely to progress to university than their similarly disadvantaged peers, but it is harder to establish to what extent these improved progression rates are the result of an impact on attainment.

A further challenge is that the programme is multi-year and complex, which means there are different student ‘journeys’ and wide variation in the amount of contact students have and the length of their engagement.

IntoUniversity commissioned Renaisi to undertake a research project to:
- Understand the impact that IntoUniversity’s work has on students’ attainment
- Develop a theoretical model to underpin this and the work of the charity more generally

The link between attainment and young people’s subsequent progression to Higher Education is an important question for the Widening Participation sector as a whole. This research explores IntoUniversity’s particular approach to this challenge.

Approach and methodology

An evidence review of studies on educational attainment and progression to Higher Education helped to inform the research. This drew on a wide range of sources to help understand the potential for increasing attainment in each part of IntoUniversity’s work, taking into account that the evidence base is still developing and some studies are small scale and exploratory.
The research involved qualitative fieldwork with eight IntoUniversity centres, engaging with 319 people including young people, parents, teachers, IntoUniversity staff and volunteers, and other local stakeholders. This provided the opportunity for an in-depth exploration of people’s experiences, drawing on their knowledge and insight into the difference IntoUniversity makes for young people.

A draft theoretical model was developed, tested and revised throughout the project. This helped to articulate IntoUniversity’s goals; the barriers young people face in progressing to university; the outcomes that young people achieve through engaging with the charity; and the ways that different activities, programme design features, and a distinctive culture might be linked to increased attainment.

The research has helped to advance IntoUniversity’s theoretical understanding of their approach, what is essential in how their programme operates, and how people experience it – culminating in a holistic theoretical model that validates the way that IntoUniversity addresses a range of needs, and an attainment theoretical model which focuses on how the charity’s work supports increased attainment.

**Does IntoUniversity have an impact on attainment?**

Throughout the qualitative research young people and parents provided many examples of increased attainment which they attributed in part to their engagement with IntoUniversity. Examples included: moving up levels of sets in school; receiving better marks; gradual improvements in core academic skills; and catching up when they were behind. Importantly, the research found that in some cases impact on attainment can be achieved over a relatively short period of time.

"With my reading, I’ve got the highest marks. I think that IntoUniversity has helped me with it and I think I’ve really improved because my last one was 27 out of 50 and now it’s gone up to 49."

"I feel like if I didn’t join IntoUniversity in Year 6, I wouldn’t be able to be in Set 3 for English."

"I know that I have definitely improved. At the start of Year 2, I used to be below average, my teacher now says I’ve improved."

"Her spelling’s getting better, writing’s getting better, reading’s getting better, it’s all slowly improving."
The relationship between outcomes and attainment

At the outset, IntoUniversity identified the main barriers that disadvantaged young people face in progressing to university, recognising that there are individual, home and community factors that can all impact on disadvantaged young people in different ways. These were accompanied by a cluster of high-level outcomes that cut across IntoUniversity’s programmes and support young people to mitigate the impact of the barriers. The relationship between these outcomes and attainment was then explored through the qualitative fieldwork and existing literature.

Key findings from the research

- **Attitudes to learning**: Positive attitudes to learning are important for progression to Higher Education. IntoUniversity addresses this barrier in ways that help young people to value education more and by equipping them with metacognitive and other core skills that support their learning.

- **Lacking softer skills**: Softer skills such as confidence, resilience and communication have a positive link to future educational outcomes. IntoUniversity supports the development of social and life skills, builds young people’s confidence and opens up opportunities to enriching experiences.

- **Motivations and aspirations**: Motivations and aspirations play an important role in determining whether a young person progresses to university. Not all disadvantaged young people lack aspiration – the barrier is often more to do with the challenges of living in deprivation. IntoUniversity supports young people to have greater optimism about the future.

- **Knowledge of HE progression and pathways**: Knowledge of Higher Education and pathways is a key barrier to university access. IntoUniversity supports young people to acquire this knowledge and gives them the skills to make more informed choices, and navigate opportunities.

- **Supportive and aspirational familial and community contexts**: It is important to ensure that parental knowledge of Higher Education and pathways grows alongside their children’s. IntoUniversity was seen as helping to increase this knowledge and also help with some wider positive aspects of family life.

Link to attainment

- **Positive attitudes to learning** are important for learning and attainment. Metacognition and self-regulation have a high level of impact on attainment, as do approaches that help young people think about what they learn.

- **Softer skills** such as confidence, resilience and communication have a positive link to future educational outcomes. IntoUniversity supports the development of social and life skills, builds young people’s confidence and opens up opportunities to enriching experiences.

- **Motivations and aspirations** play an important role in determining whether a young person progresses to university. Not all disadvantaged young people lack aspiration – the barrier is often more to do with the challenges of living in deprivation. IntoUniversity supports young people to have greater optimism about the future.

- **Knowledge of HE progression and pathways** is a key barrier to university access. IntoUniversity supports young people to acquire this knowledge and gives them the skills to make more informed choices, and navigate opportunities.

- **Supportive and aspirational familial and community contexts** are important for helping young people to progress to Higher Education. However, stakeholders found it harder to isolate which outcomes made the most difference to young people’s grades.

The research confirmed that the key outcomes that IntoUniversity focuses on are all important for helping young people to progress to Higher Education. However, stakeholders found it harder to isolate which outcomes made the most difference to young people’s grades.

The discussions focused on the interrelated nature of the changes young people experience - reflecting the holistic way in which the programmes operate. As a result, a recommendation from the research was to cluster the outcomes into three main groupings that mirror the key features of IntoUniversity’s programme – developing social and emotional skills; improving academic and learning experiences; and support for the future.
The research has helped to develop IntoUniversity’s understanding about which changes for young people might have most impact on attainment. The revised attainment theoretical model identifies:

- **Essential outcomes**: these are vital for academic success. IntoUniversity supports development of metacognitive skills, literacy and numeracy skills, and confidence in academic abilities.

These essential outcomes are supported by:

- **Motivational support**: this enables young people to link learning to future success, increases their expectations of what can be achieved in the future, and bolsters enjoyment of learning.

- **Foundational outcomes**: these play an important role in attainment but are also key outcomes for young people more generally. These require ongoing reinforcement, especially for those from disadvantaged backgrounds. These outcomes include confidence and wellbeing, and resilience to persevere and cope with difficult circumstances.

**Relationship between programme activities and attainment**

IntoUniversity provides a range of different activities for students across their standard and additional programme strands. Supporting academic learning is fundamental in some of the activities, enhancing core academic skills; whilst others are more focused on raising aspirations or developing key life skills.

The research explored which combinations of programme strands and activities were viewed as making the most significant contribution to attainment.

The evidence from the literature and the fieldwork both support the value of Academic Support and the model of small-group tutoring outside of school.

Stakeholders also felt that the combination of Academic Support and Mentoring can enhance impact – especially when the mentor is chosen for a student based on their academic needs.

The research identified other aspects of IntoUniversity’s work that might have less impact on attainment but open doors to a range of opportunities that young people might not otherwise have – particularly extra-curricular activities through the additional programmes.

In order to capture the different ways in which young people experience IntoUniversity’s support (for example the Secondary FOCUS programme reaches the highest number of students but is less focused on attainment), the attainment model that was produced as part of this research...
focuses on the **components and activities within strands** that support attainment, capturing the cross-cutting elements with which young people come into contact with during their journey:

- Having **1-2-1** attention and tailored support from highly trained practitioners – helping with revision, coursework and exams

- Direct **practical support** at critical moments – e.g. preparing for SATs, GCSEs, and the transition to university

- Opportunities for **self-directed learning** – e.g. independent learning projects

- Opportunities to be **curious about learning** with activities that bring the curriculum to life and practical groupwork tasks

- Being **pushed outside of comfort zones** with a variety of enrichment activities

### The other features of IntoUniversity’s work and the relationship to attainment

There are a number of **conscious design choices** IntoUniversity has made, to approach their work in a particular way, as well as a **distinctive culture and ethos**. These features are viewed as unique compared to IntoUniversity’s competitors.
The following aspects of IntoUniversity’s programme design emerged in the research as most likely to play a contribution in closing the gap in attainment:

- **Early and long term:** Young people’s aspirations and motivations start to form at a relatively young age. Interventions that start early help to normalise participation in university. Stakeholders in the research also felt that it is important to spark an early interest in education and provide much-needed continuity and stability in young people’s lives.

- **Differentiated/adaptable:** This aspect of the model gives staff a range of tools to refer young people between different strands and hone in on what young people need. Students in particular valued the adaptability of IntoUniversity’s model and described how the programme ‘grows with them’ throughout their journey.

- **Non-selective or mixed-ability student cohorts:** This has been shown to have positive effects on raising attainment, especially for those with low prior attainment. Teachers were especially positive towards IntoUniversity’s decision not to exclude students based on prior attainment as doing so often leaves out those who have the potential to flourish but fail to meet criteria associated with high achievers.

Evidence on the impact of place-based or partnership working on attainment is more limited. However, the way that centres are developing partnerships, and responding to their local context is reflected in the literature as good practice and fundamental to IntoUniversity’s offer.

IntoUniversity’s culture and ethos are integral to the way they work with young people and intertwined with other features of the programme. Stakeholders felt that the following were essential in indirectly helping to support attainment by creating conditions where young people can thrive and develop a commitment to learning:

- **A friendly, safe and welcoming space:** Young people highlighted that centres were places to which they liked to come at the end of the day where they felt more relaxed, were free from distraction, and where they could concentrate on their school work.

- **Support and encouragement from peers, staff and volunteers:** The high staff-to-student ratio in centres enables relationship building in a meaningful way. It was apparent that a focus on wellbeing is a key part of IntoUniversity’s culture and this weaves through many aspects of the programmes, with the pastoral aspects of support being particularly valued.

- **Interactions based on trust and respect:** The IntoUniversity approach is based on positive action which runs through its behaviour management and culture. Students regularly receive positive feedback and praise, and staff and volunteers avoid negative judgement. This helps to foster a sense of self-belief and builds academic confidence.
Isolating the impact of IntoUniversity’s unique approach to working with young people on attainment is difficult, as the research suggests that these features are at the core of how the charity operates. The research has drawn out key ingredients and experiences that bolster the impact that IntoUniversity’s work has on attainment and supporting young people’s engagement.

**Implications and recommendations**

The key message of this research is that IntoUniversity delivers a holistic and supportive programme and can be confident that there are many ways in which this supports increased attainment. The holistic model is explored in more detail and presented in the full report.

The attainment model, presented below, captures the “attainment story” and begins to address the complex relationship between all of IntoUniversity’s work and its impact on attainment. The attainment model presents the main outcomes and activities that are well supported by evidence from existing literature and the insights generated from the qualitative research, as well as the key ingredients that stakeholders highlighted as being important.

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**OUTCOMES:**
- IntoUniversity supports young people across a range of outcomes: academic and learning; support for the future and social and emotional.
- The changes for young people that have most impact on attainment are...

**ACTIVITIES:**
- IntoUniversity provides a range of activities for young people with a programme that is adaptable, mixed ability and for some, starts early and is there for the long term. Many of these are well-evidenced as supporting attainment and/or are fundamental to the charity’s ethos and way of working.

**KEY INGREDIENTS:**
- These bolster the impact IntoUniversity’s work has on attainment and support young people’s engagement.

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**Young people need grades that reflect their potential and enable them to take their desired pathway. A key moment in a young person’s educational journey is their KSS results.**

**Essential outcomes for attainment**
- Having 1-2-1 attention and tailored support from highly trained practitioners (AS, M)
- Direct practical support at crucial moments e.g. mock exams, SATs, GCSEs, university applications (AS, SeCF, M)
- Opportunities for self-directed learning (AS, M)
- Opportunities to be curious about learning with activities that bring the curriculum to life, and practical groupwork tasks (AS, F)
- Being pushed outside of comfort zones with a variety of enrichment activities (F, M, additional programmes)

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**Having ongoing reinforcement**
- Positive interactions and relationships based on trust, respect, feedback and kindness
- Being in a space where it’s OK to ask questions, learning is valued and there is a consistent focus on academic study
- A spark being ignited that encourages young people to enjoy learning
- Inspirational experiences that expand horizons, stretch and challenge
Based on the findings, the report makes a number of recommendations for aspects of *existing programmes that could be adapted* and areas that *IntoUniversity* could develop with future resource in order to potentially increase their impact on attainment. These include:

- Provide **more opportunities for group-based learning** in Secondary Academic Support in order to develop key learning skills and techniques in combination with focused and 1-2-1 academic support.

- Include more **direct and targeted support** at Academic Support and FOCUS for key academic milestones such as mock exams, GCSEs, A-Levels, and SATs.

- Adapt **Primary and Secondary FOCUS programmes** to include more content that targets the development of metacognitive skills. Where possible, hold more Secondary FOCUS workshops **out of schools** and in centres.

- Develop the **specialisms of staff and volunteers** across both Academic Support and mentoring – for example, in English and STEM, EAL, SEN, and A-Level subjects.

- Deliver programmes that aim to **increase parental engagement** in their children’s learning given the importance of this for young people’s attainment and progression, and *IntoUniversity*’s goal of creating a supportive community.

The report also recommends that *IntoUniversity* could do more to understand their **reach** and identify **strategies** that might help them engage more excluded young people.
1. Introduction

1.1 Background

IntoUniversity is a charity that aims to advance the education of children and young people living in areas with high levels of social and economic disadvantage, helping them to secure a place at university or another destination of their choice. Founded in 2002, IntoUniversity runs an integrated education programme primarily through 30 local learning centres and extension projects, and partnering with local Primary and Secondary schools, universities and other organisations in the area. The charity’s view is that young people’s futures should be determined by their own choices, talent and ability, not their background. IntoUniversity work with those young people who are least likely to go to university and supports and encourages them to achieve their potential.

In the academic year 2018-19, IntoUniversity supported over 42,000 children and young people from Primary school children as young as 7, through to young people in their early years at university aged 19-20.

IntoUniversity is currently going through a period of expansion with new centres and extension projects opening across England – the ambition is to grow into a network across England, Scotland and Wales that transforms the lives of more than 50,000 young people each year.

IntoUniversity’s model has three main programme strands and a range of activities that also feature as part of delivery. In addition to the standard programmes (FOCUS, Academic Support, Mentoring) there are a number of one-off or more ad-hoc enrichment opportunities. Figure 1 below provides a high-level summary of the overall programme.
The IntoUniversity model was designed based on the experience and knowledge of staff who were involved at the beginning of the charity’s journey, as well as through a process of piloting and then redesigning activities as the organisation evolved. It has been increasingly codified in a series of strand manuals, and staff are involved in reviewing the different programme elements on a regular basis.

### 1.2 The aims of this research

In order to progress to university, or another chosen pathway post compulsory education, young people need the required grades at Key Stage 5. This is a key moment in a young person’s educational journey that can either open up or narrow down their options.

IntoUniversity compare the progression rates of their students with national benchmarks produced by the Department for Education and the Higher Education Funding Council for England. In 2018, 70% of IntoUniversity students progressed to Higher Education, compared to 26% of Free School Meals (FSM) students nationally. However, it is difficult to conclusively say that those young people with whom IntoUniversity work have higher grades than their peers.
In March 2019, **IntoUniversity** commissioned Renaisi to undertake a qualitative research project driven by a desire to understand a) to what extent the improved progression rates amongst the students with whom they work is due to having an impact on their attainment; and b) clarify the theoretical model that underpins the charity’s work on attainment and more generally. Exploring the contribution the charity’s work makes to young people’s grades and exam results will also help to communicate this more clearly in the future, and the learnings will be used to consider how to adapt IntoUniversity’s programmes.

The need for this is significant within the context of there being many other charities that offer support to young people to go to university, and the fact that IntoUniversity has had considerable success in partnering with universities and accessing funding via this route. In addition, understanding what contributes to raising attainment and subsequent progression to Higher Education is an important question for the Widening Participation sector as a whole, and whilst this research report explores IntoUniversity’s approach to this challenge, it has wider relevance for other stakeholders working in this field.

The two key research questions were:

1. **What combination(s) of programmes and factors in IntoUniversity’s work contribute to increased attainment?**
2. **What recommendations can be made for future programme design and delivery to help improve IntoUniversity’s impact for students**

The research has involved focusing on perceptions from different stakeholders (primarily students, IntoUniversity staff, parents and teachers) on the contributory factors to attainment, based on their observations and direct experience of the programme.

This sits alongside a parallel piece of quantitative work that IntoUniversity have commissioned using the National Pupil Database. Prior attainment scores (at Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1) and attainment scores (at Key Stage 2) for young people accessing Academic Support will be analysed using a comparison group. This will help to see whether attainment improves for the cohorts with which IntoUniversity work, and whether the effect of the programme varies with respect to the number and duration of sessions young people attend.

For the purposes of this report, attainment is defined as being broader than the exam results that young people achieve at the end of key stages (Year 6 SATs and GCSEs). It encompasses the different forms of attainment that happen along the way – for example, feedback on homework and marks in school tests. It is worth bearing in mind that these are hard to measure and capture compared to the ‘end result’ of an exam mark.
1.3 IntoUniversity’s impact on attainment – what is known so far

The headline metric that IntoUniversity uses is the percentage of students who go to university, but they also capture information about those who go to the workplace, apprenticeships, further education, are in the process of applying/deciding what to do next, or are unemployed. They receive data on progression for approximately 50% of the young people with whom they work.

IntoUniversity does not hold data on students’ exam results or grades, as it has been challenging in the past to arrange with schools to share this. Although students are asked in evaluation forms to self-report on whether they feel their grades have improved, IntoUniversity do not have robust pre-and-post data on attainment for the young people who have taken part in their programmes.

It is hard to establish whether the impact of IntoUniversity’s work is more diluted if students only do certain programme strands, or what the threshold might be (for example, the minimum number of sessions a student would have to attend) to see an impact on attainment. The self-reported data from students does not show any particular trends (for example, by the number of Academic Support or mentoring sessions attended), although students’ perceptions of the impact of attainment are slightly higher for the mentoring cohort than the Academic Support cohort.

IntoUniversity’s data contains some patterns that do not accurately capture or explain their impact.

- It is difficult to measure the impact of dosage because the students with the lowest dosage are those who join the programme in Year 12/13 when they are already most of the way along the pathway to university. This can make it appear as if the less time a student spends with IntoUniversity, the more likely they are to go to university.

- As a centre becomes more established, overall progression rates go down. This is because in a centre’s first year all their alumni will be students who joined the programme in Year 13 for personal statement support so were very likely to go to university anyway, whereas established centres will have more alumni with whom they first worked at Primary school level. The figures for these centres, therefore, include the full range of students with varying chances of going to university.

These issues highlight the importance of this research, and the parallel quantitative study, in both helping to unpick the relationship between IntoUniversity’s work and attainment, but also what each student gets from the experience.

1.4 Structure of this report

The research presented in this report combines feedback from IntoUniversity’s stakeholders and evidence from wider literature. The project started with a theoretical model to test the
relationship between IntoUniversity’s work and attainment, and the overall hypothesis was that everything that IntoUniversity does to improve outcomes for young people supports attainment in some way – but it is not clear exactly in what ways. This report is structured as follows:

**Section 2** provides a brief overview of the key research activities and an explanation of some of the limitations in the methodology.

**Section 3** presents the research findings on the main barriers young people face in progressing to Higher Education, the outcomes for young people that access IntoUniversity’s work and the relationship between these and attainment.

**Section 4** explores the relationship between different programme strands, programme design features and the culture and ethos of IntoUniversity’s work and attainment. This focuses on how these different aspects interrelate and might play a role in supporting attainment.

**Section 5** discuss the implications of the findings for IntoUniversity and proposes a revised theoretical model.

**Section 6** outlines key recommendations for IntoUniversity to take into account when adapting their programme in the future.

**1.5 Key considerations**

There is a further level of complexity in the link between IntoUniversity’s work and attainment that needs to be taken into account when reading this report. Whilst the main strands that make up IntoUniversity’s support for young people are relatively easy to understand, the reality of how students engage with them is far more complex. There are multiple journeys through IntoUniversity, and there is a wide variation in both the amount of contact students have and the length of their engagement. The key variables to consider are that it is a multi-year programme through Primary, Secondary and sixth form. The impact of the variations in Figure 2 below are explored more fully throughout this report.
Some students may start during Primary School, others may join through Secondary FOCUS or during Years 12 and 13. The programme can both gain and lose a lot of students at Years 12 and 13 because they leave their Secondary School, or go to 6th forms or colleges that IntoUniversity are not working with.

On average 57% of Year 7 students have participated in the primary programmes, but subsequently may drop off due to no longer meeting the criteria, or their secondary school is further away from the centres.

The number of students who take part in all aspects of the programme is relatively small. This is mainly down to the nature of the different strands, as there are far more places on Primary FOCUS than Secondary FOCUS, and even fewer spots on Academic Support and Mentoring.

This can range from a minimum of twice a year for those only doing the FOCUS programme, or at the other end of the scale, weekly Academic Support, mentoring sessions, FOCUS workshops and a variety of non-core activities.

**Figure 2: The main IntoUniversity variations**
2. Methodology

The main research activities that took place between March-August 2019 are outlined in this section.

2.1 Developing a draft theoretical model

Renaisi’s research team spent time in the initial stages of the research in March 2019 developing an understanding of the way that IntoUniversity operates. This involved reviewing programme documents and understanding the nature of the internal data collected by the impact team. Scoping interviews were conducted with a number of key individuals working at a senior level within the organisation, as well as some university partners, in order to explore their views on different components of IntoUniversity’s support, how these might link to attainment, and some of the features that distinguishes IntoUniversity’s provision from other similar organisations.

In April 2019, Renaisi convened a workshop with representatives of IntoUniversity’s Head Office and delivery teams to explore how young people experience IntoUniversity’s support, and the different anticipated outcomes at each stage of their educational journey. This was important as each programme strand has distinct aims and outcomes, and whilst these are closely related, the list of potential outcomes that young people might experience is long and hard to quickly grasp and communicate.

These discussions and activities led to the creation of a draft theoretical model (developed collaboratively between Renaisi and the IntoUniversity team) to help articulate the different factors or ingredients that contribute to attainment.1 These were:

- **Outcomes** – supporting young people to achieve certain outcomes that help to mitigate against the key barriers they face in getting to university – opening doors for them in the future

- **Activities** – the different opportunities for enhanced learning around the curriculum and hands-on immersive experiences that are offered through the three key programme strands and the additional programme elements

- **Programme design** – the unique features in IntoUniversity’s programme that have consciously been built into the design

1 See page 24 for the draft theoretical model, and Section 5 for the amended version and the rationale for this
• **Culture and ethos** – the way that IntoUniversity works which means there is a distinctive experience for young people

Each of these contributory factors was tested throughout the research in order to establish which make more of a direct and explicit impact on attainment, and which ones are more indirect (yet still playing a vital role in supporting young people in their journeys). Another output from the scoping stage was a more detailed set of research questions to help keep the focus of the research on testing the combination of factors and their relationship to attainment. These lines of enquiry and the original draft theoretical model are included in the Appendix. As outlined earlier, this report is structured around the feedback on the different features of the model.

### 2.2 Evidence review

The research was underpinned by an evidence review of existing studies on educational attainment and progression to Higher Education, as well as evaluation and impact reports of similar programmes that also seek to support those from lower socio-economic backgrounds to go to university. The main questions that informed the evidence review were:

**Evidence review questions**

- What are the **most common** causes of lower educational attainment, and for whom?
- What are the **key factors** that impact on attainment for disadvantaged groups?
- What are the **key differences** for those from more deprived backgrounds?
- What do **different interventions** focus on, and how are these designed and delivered?
- Do these similar programmes show impact in **closing the attainment gap** and supporting students from disadvantaged backgrounds into university?

The evidence review was closely mapped against the key elements of the draft theoretical model in order to establish if there is any evidence that supports (or contradicts) the features of IntoUniversity’s work that have an impact on attainment. This directly informed the revised theoretical model that is presented in Section 5 of this report.

The review involved 91 sources in total, drawing on a combination of academic journal articles, reports from think tanks, **evaluations of education programmes and policy papers**. The findings from the evidence review are presented throughout this report.
2.3 Fieldwork in IntoUniversity centres

A sample of eight IntoUniversity centres were included in the qualitative fieldwork for the research. The aim was to understand the experiences of those involved with IntoUniversity centres in detail, exploring the value that people attach to the charity’s work, their perceptions of how it supports attainment, as well as identifying learning about programme design and delivery from different perspectives. A purposive sample was used to select the case study centres, taking into account a variety of characteristics such as the length of time the centre had been open, student demographics and the local context.²

The fieldwork took place in June and July 2019, and was organised through the Centre Leaders, following an agreed fieldwork plan. It primarily involved visits to the centres and their partner schools, alongside telephone interviews to fit around participants’ schedules. The main methods are summarised in Figure 3 below:

![Figure 3: Main research methods](image)

2.4 Additional research activities

In addition to the fieldwork in the centres, Renaisi researchers interviewed additional stakeholders involved with IntoUniversity’s Board and governance in July 2019 and

² The Appendix includes a list of the centres included in the sample, the rationale for the choice, and the key features of each
supplemented the research with further interviews with IntoUniversity alumni focusing on attainment.

Renaisi also attended a meeting for all Centre Leaders in July 2019 and ran a workshop session to explore the main research questions, giving those Centre Leaders that had not been part of a case study location the chance to contribute their views.

At the end of the research, the initial findings and proposals for a revised theoretical model were presented to original group of Head Office representatives and delivery staff to discuss and refine these ahead of the report being finalised.

2.5 Engagement with the research

The research engaged with 319 people in total.⁴

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>People engaged</th>
<th>Number</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IntoUniversity staff</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteers</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Primary students</td>
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<td>Parents</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Engagement with the research

2.6 Methodological considerations

There are a number of considerations that need to be taken into account when reading this report.

⁴ A fuller breakdown of respondents is included in the Appendix
The research took place over a short timescale with the main opportunity for fieldwork being during the summer term of 2019 and prior to young people receiving their GCSE and A-Level results in August 2019. This placed some constraints on the research design – for example, it would not have been possible within the timings to survey this year’s Year 11s and Year 13s about their results and how their perceptions of how IntoUniversity’s support contributed to these.

The insights in this report are qualitative, focusing on the different perceptions of stakeholders based on their insights and experiences on the ground. A degree of caution is necessary in claiming firm and direct links between IntoUniversity’s impact on attainment. The value of this research has been to access in-depth insights from a large range of stakeholders, exploring the nuances of their attitudes, feelings and behaviours first hand. Qualitative research provides depth and detail – in this case, shedding light on which parts of IntoUniversity’s work might support increased attainment, but stopping short of direct causal links. The study should be seen alongside the NPD research in order to form a more rounded view, balancing both types of data.

The study involved a case study approach which was a pragmatically-driven decision given the number of centres that IntoUniversity operates, and the number of young people with whom they work. Whilst the centres were chosen for a reason in order to produce a mixed sample with different characteristics (see Appendix for more information), it is important to recognise that this is a snapshot of provision and people’s views at a certain point in time, rather than a comprehensive survey of everyone involved with IntoUniversity.

Whilst Centre Leaders and Renaisi researchers made every effort to speak to young people involved in IntoUniversity in different ways (accessing Primary Academic Support, Primary FOCUS and Secondary Academic Support), in practice, many of the discussion groups included young people who had experience of a mixture of different programme strands. There was a larger sample size than originally anticipated of young people who are involved in all three standard programme strands, and in Academic Support and FOCUS. This mainly relates to the fact the fieldwork was based in centres, and the challenge of accessing young people who only engage with IntoUniversity through the Secondary FOCUS programme (where the researchers would have been reliant on schools to allow access).

In order to adapt to this challenge, in the interviews with Secondary school pupils and IntoUniversity alumni in particular, researchers explored as far as possible the different experiences young people had with programme strands. However, it was not always possible in the analysis to see the differences in responses between young people depending on the strand combination they were involved with.

There are gaps in the available literature which means it was not possible to evidence all aspects of the IntoUniversity model. The resources and summaries of the Education
Endowment Foundation (EEF) are one source in this report, as the toolkit is acknowledged as a repository of available evidence in the education sector. However, other sources have also been reviewed, as for some educational interventions that are relevant to IntoUniversity’s work the evidence is more small scale or exploratory, and therefore does not meet EEF’s criteria on the evidence hierarchy. When thinking about how evidence can be used to inform future decisions about IntoUniversity’s programme, it is important to consider that elements of the approach are unique, understand relevant available evidence from elsewhere in context, and recognise the value of both robust and more emerging evidence.

The report discussed the implications of the research findings on IntoUniversity’s impact on attainment, and makes recommendations for further steps that the charity could take in the future to improve understanding of this relationship and test it over a longer period with young people.
3. The relationship between IntoUniversity’s outcomes and attainment

3.1 Introduction

One of the challenges explored at the outset was that while IntoUniversity is confident in what they do, why they have designed their support in a particular way, and the difference it makes for young people, there is a fundamental difficulty in articulating at a granular level exactly how each component part of IntoUniversity’s programmes and support contributes to academic attainment. It can also be challenging to capture exactly what each student gets from the IntoUniversity experience which then translates to improved attitudes and behaviour at school, and potentially increased attainment across different stages of their educational journey.

Figure 4 below is the original draft theoretical model that was developed in the early stages of the research. It was necessary to start with a broad conceptualisation of IntoUniversity’s work for two main reasons – firstly, activities within IntoUniversity’s programme that explicitly focus on attainment are relatively small; and secondly, IntoUniversity’s work is holistic, and aspects that relate more directly to attainment cannot be divorced from this wider picture. IntoUniversity know that they support the development of a wide range of outcomes for students, including developing their skills, aspirations and knowledge about future pathways.

This section of the report explores the findings from the fieldwork and evidence review that tested the following parts of the draft theoretical model:

- The long-term overarching aims of IntoUniversity
- The barriers that young people from disadvantaged backgrounds face in progressing to university
- The different outcomes that young people achieve as a result of engaging with IntoUniversity’s support
3.2 The problem IntoUniversity is seeking to address

This section sets out the overall goals of IntoUniversity and the problem the charity is seeking to address. This provides context for the subsequent discussion on the barriers and outcomes.

One of the primary motivations for IntoUniversity’s mission is tackling inequality and some of the fundamental injustices that are built into the education system in the UK. There are areas across the country where young people’s life chances continue to be reduced by a lack of opportunity and underachievement. There are strong correlations between low university participation rates and factors such as household income, geography, gender and ethnicity. The relationship between disadvantage and attainment is a complex one, as different individual, home and community factors can all impact in different ways on the outcomes that disadvantaged young people achieve, as well as their overall experiences of school.
The attainment gap - the gap in achievement between disadvantaged students and their more privileged peers - starts early and increases throughout a student’s education. The gap is most prominent among young people eligible for free school meals (FSM) and those with special educational needs (SEN) (EEF, 2018b). The Education Policy Institute estimate that at the current rate that the attainment gap is closing, it would be 2070 before disadvantaged children did not continue to fall behind other students (EPI, 2017).

In terms of university access, ethnic minorities and those from the highest socio-economic backgrounds are substantially more likely to go to university than White British pupils and those from the lowest socio-economic backgrounds (DfBIS, 2015). More females than males progress across all ethnic categories.

The young people with whom IntoUniversity work

IntoUniversity works in areas of disadvantage. Before establishing a new centre, IntoUniversity conducts a comprehensive feasibility study of the local area to determine whether they will be able to reach their target population. For Primary FOCUS, IntoUniversity works with partner schools that have a FSM percentage that is considerably above the national average. For the other standard programmes (Academic Support, Secondary FOCUS, and Mentoring), IntoUniversity work with young people who:

- Meet one or more of the following primary criteria: Eligible for FSM, Pupil Premium (PP), Looked After, living in social housing, in receipt of post-16 Bursary Support, household income of below £25,000

- Students who do not meet any of the primary criteria but meet two or more of the following secondary criteria: first generation to go to university, refugee or asylum seeker, English as an Additional Language (EAL), Special Educational Needs (SEN), challenging behaviour, at risk or have been excluded, young carer

IntoUniversity’s internal data show that the children and young people that they reach are largely from disadvantaged backgrounds - in 2018-19 79% of Secondary students were on FSM or PP, and 90% of Academic Support students were on FSM, had a household income below £25,000, lived in social housing or were/had been in care. 90% of students fall within the two most deprived quintiles of the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index.4

The challenges facing the young people with whom IntoUniversity work

In the fieldwork, staff, volunteers and teachers were asked about the general life circumstances of the young people with whom they work. Across all the centres, the challenges that young people face were consistent, including:

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4 This is a measure of the proportion of young people living in income-deprived households in an area.
- **Unstable home lives and complicated relationships** – coming from single-parent families, child-protection issues, parents being in prison, having a large amount of responsibility (for siblings and other relatives), parents working long shifts and not being around

- **Poor quality housing** – living in overcrowded conditions, and often lacking a quiet space free from noise and distraction

- **Living in poverty** – with little money for food, any extra resources to support studying or to go on trips/holidays

Overall, a common theme for the young people with whom IntoUniversity works is being at risk of falling behind or not reaching their potential, due to a combination of personal, family and wider community factors.

**IntoUniversity’s goals**

Figure 5 above shows how IntoUniversity’s overarching goals were described in the theoretical model. In the research, IntoUniversity staff, teachers, and local stakeholders described IntoUniversity’s goals in diverse ways but these broadly fitted under the three main groupings in the model.

> "The main thing is to support young people with their aspirations and making sure that they achieve those, whatever that may be, and giving them the access to knowledge that they may not have just because of circumstances". (Centre Leader, London, established centre)

Figure 6 below summarises the main feedback on goals.
Stakeholders often highlighted that whilst supporting young people to achieve a university place is an important part of what the charity does, the ultimate goal was often broader. Closing the gap was not only about future academic destinations, but helping young people more holistically and to make informed decisions about their future.

“A lot of people think we’re just focused on university. Actually, the goals we set for mentoring relationships really summarise it – academic, social and future”. (Education Worker, Regional, established centre)

Building a wider community tradition of Higher Education participation was less commonly mentioned by IntoUniversity staff and teachers as a key IntoUniversity goal. Most were clear that an aim of the charity was to fulfil a supportive role in local communities, but did not automatically associate this with influencing families and the community on their wider attitudes to participation in Higher Education. The fact that this did not emerge that strongly in the fieldwork is understandable as it is not something that centres are asked to prioritise, and is a longer-term ‘ripple effect’ that IntoUniversity would like to have. However, a Centre Leader from a regional centre, did describe raising the aspirations of families in addition to those of young people as a central goal of the organisation.

“The central goal is working with, not just young people in this area, but families of young people in this area to talk about aspirations and ambition beyond this area”. (Centre Leader, Regional, established centre)
3.3 Testing the barriers and outcomes

As Figure 7 illustrates, the theoretical model presents five main barriers that IntoUniversity believes young people face, highlights the importance of getting grades at Key Stage 5 in order to progress on their desired pathway, and the headline outcomes IntoUniversity supports to mitigate the impact of these barriers.

There are a large number of outcomes which sit under each standard programme strand. For the purposes of this research, an attempt was made to identify at the highest level the key outcomes for young people that cut across IntoUniversity’s different programmes in order to communicate this in a concise and accessible way to an external audience in the future.\(^5\)

The main hypotheses being tested through exploring the relationship between outcomes and attainment were:

- There are outcomes that IntoUniversity supports which are likely to be more directly linked to attainment
- There are outcomes that IntoUniversity supports which are less directly linked to attainment, but are likely to play another function in a mutually reinforcing way which then leads to improved attainment
- There might be clusters, a hierarchy or a particular sequence of outcomes that describe how IntoUniversity impacts on attainment.
- There may be some outcomes IntoUniversity supports that have no direct links to improving attainment but are still valued within the overall model of support

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\(^5\) A longer, more detailed list of outcomes for each barrier is included in the Appendix
The following sections present each barrier and cluster of outcomes in turn. This draws on the findings from the evidence review and feedback from the fieldwork in order to explore:

- Whether the barriers resonated and reflect those that young people from more disadvantaged backgrounds face
- Whether there was consensus on the outcomes that young people achieve through their engagement with IntoUniversity
- Perceptions of how these outcomes link to attainment

Where possible, any differences amongst different stakeholders interviewed as part of the research has been emphasised, with priority given to the many voices of young people accessed through the fieldwork.

### 3.4 Attitudes to learning

**Figure 8: Attitudes to learning outcomes tested in the fieldwork**

What does the evidence review say about barriers around attitudes to learning and how these link to attainment?

Attitudes to learning are seen as playing an important role in determining whether a student progresses to university. The Department for Business Innovation and Skills (DfBIS, 2015a) highlights that amongst the group least likely to progress to university (White disadvantaged communities) attitudes towards education are less positive than amongst those in more privileged groups. A Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) report suggested that among some in this group, there exists a desire to not to better than their parents at school and so 'leave their class', as well as the perception that 'school is not cool'. (JRF, 2007). Students from disadvantaged backgrounds have also been shown to face discrimination in the classroom, have lower self-esteem, only have access to out-of-date and limited curriculum resources and poor facilities, all of which can negatively impact their attitudes to learning (Banarjee, 2016).
Perceptions of the link between attitudes to learning and attainment are varied in the literature. A review of the evidence conducted by JRF in 2012 argued that not enough evidence exists to suggest a link between student attitudes and attainment. However, the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD, 2016) suggest that students’ attitudes towards learning have a considerable impact on their academic performance and highlight the importance of the amount of time and effort students invest and their perseverance and motivation in completing their work as key determinants of educational outcomes. Furthermore, a 2016 study of Secondary pupils found that a positive attitude towards education is a key predictor of how highly a pupil achieves (Verešová & Malá, 2016).

Another aspect of attitudes to learning to consider is metacognition or self-regulation, which the EEF defines as approaches which aim to help pupils think about how they learn, often by introducing ways to help students monitor their learning. In their review, the EEF concluded that metacognition and self-regulation approaches have a high level of impact, with strategies proving even more effective when taught in groups where students can discuss their thinking with peers. It is also suggested that such approaches can be especially effective for older students and those with lower attainment (EEF, 2018).

**What were the views of stakeholders on attitudes to learning as a barrier?**

Stakeholders agreed that challenges around attitudes to learning are faced by many young people, but that this barrier did not apply to all of the IntoUniversity target cohort in the same way.

Young people who voluntarily attend a centre every week for Academic Support were described as being more likely to have an existing positive attitude to learning. However, they still may be facing a range of challenges – for example, not being able to work and learn in their own way at school, maintaining focus, and having a quiet space for revision and homework.

“I feel like a lot of our Academic Support students, especially, are quite proactive, more than I would expect students of that age. I guess that’s because they’re actively going to something after school to help them in the future, which I think is a concept that doesn’t necessarily rest with a lot of young people”. (Education Worker, Regional, established centre)

This could also be manifested in the Secondary FOCUS programme, with two of the case study areas highlighting that schools selected their top or most well-behaved students for workshops, and these young people faced fewer barriers around their learning at the start.

Stakeholders explained that IntoUniversity does work with many young people who have more negative attitudes towards learning, including disengagement, not taking things seriously, disruptive behaviour in school, and a lack of belief in their own academic abilities. For these young people, participation in IntoUniversity activities may not always start from the young person themselves being proactive – for example, they may start because the young person is a part of Secondary FOCUS where schools select pupils, or where they have been referred to Academic Support by the school or parent recognising a need for support.
“I think attitudes to learning that you might see in programmes where they haven't chosen to be there, something like Secondary FOCUS you might see more challenging behaviour and you might see more, like, apathy towards some of the content”. (Cluster Manager, Regional, established centre)

In addition, staff at several of the centres highlighted challenges young people faced with SEN (sometimes undiagnosed), and for children who have EAL, where having a sustained conversation in English outside of the home was not the norm. These factors might impact on their engagement with their learning.

Overall, IntoUniversity staff felt that attitudes to learning among students are varied and that Academic Support in particular might not be reaching those who are the most disengaged from learning. Many felt that this was one of the biggest challenges that centres face, and this is discussed further in the recommendations section. Despite this issue, it is worth noting that as participants in Academic Support, these young people meet IntoUniversity’s referral criteria and are experiencing multiple forms of disadvantage. Barriers around attitudes to learning might not be a factor when young people first get involved with IntoUniversity, but this can easily change due to life events or other changes. The programme focuses on working with young people from a young age to build their resilience, and help them stay on track at times when their motivation to learn and attitudes to learning might be threatened.

**What changes for young people through engaging with IntoUniversity?**

There was a high degree of consensus that IntoUniversity helps to improve young people's attitudes to learning. Reigniting enjoyment of learning and enabling young people to feel more confident in their academic abilities seem to be of particular importance. The main ways this was explained by young people in the fieldwork are summarised below.
Understanding IntoUniversity’s impact on attainment: A qualitative research study

Young people’s voices: attitudes to learning

Encouraging young people to enjoy learning – young people of all ages repeatedly emphasised that IntoUniversity was fun, with practical activities that bring learning to life and offer the chance to engage with new subjects. This had a knock-on effect of viewing learning in a different light and being more motivated, often in stark contrast to their experiences at school.

“I feel like it is enjoyable here…and you can take time to think about your learning. At school, everything is in a hurry”. (Primary student; AS & FOCUS, Regional centre)

Developing positive habits around learning and a strong work ethic – many young people compared how they were before coming to IntoUniversity with now and described being more disciplined and focused with their studies.

“I do a load of work at home, after I get in from school, because I feel like it’s become a habit now. Because of IntoUniversity…you’re more organised”. (Secondary student, AS, Regional centre)

Helping young people see the value of education for their future – with young people of all ages accessing Academic Support in particular recognising the importance of homework and how it might help them in the long term.

“I didn’t really find homework exciting and I just thought it was a bit random that you had to do extra work at home. But now I have come to IntoUniversity I realised it benefits you in the long term, because in high school you have to get GCSEs”. (Primary student, AS & FOCUS, Regional centre)

“It actually made me realise how important education is, and how valuable it is…Think about all of the successful people, they typically go to university, So, if anything, being a nerd is a great thing. It shouldn’t be something to be looked down upon”. (Secondary student, AS & FOCUS, London)

Developing young people’s confidence in their academic abilities – improving numeracy and literacy and learning revision techniques; and developing metacognitive skills – such as planning and organising their learning and reflecting on it.

“I feel more intelligent because I’ve just had an hour of learning, and it feels just great to be intelligent”. (Primary student, AS & FOCUS, London)

Supporting young people as independent learners improving their focus, concentration and ability to self-direct their learning.

“Because there’s not a specific subject. You can take a task and change it into your own. At school, you have to have a set assignment and you have to do it about this thing, and about this time and where it is. But here you can do it about anything and any time you want”. (Secondary student, AS, Regional centre)
The feedback from parents also supported the views of young people. Comparing attitudes to learning before Into University and now, parents described their children as being more focused, taking more responsibility for their studies, and being more driven to improve.

"The boy who was never interested in studying become very seriously interested in studying. We were told that he didn’t really have a chance of passing any of his SATs. He actually became so serious that he passed them all with quite high scores". (Parent of Secondary student, Regional centre)

Staff and volunteers emphasised most how young people become more independent in their learning. They explained that young people often have a greater belief that they can improve through effort and a growth mindset, asking for help more, and being able to direct their own learning. Staff and volunteers also reported that young people develop a greater drive to reach university or a particular goal – so working with Into University helps them to see the value of education and why it is important to put in the extra effort.

“Through their attitude to wanting to progress through school and having that goal in the future of going to university, they know that these things will be important. And they understand the value of it”. (Cluster Manager, London, established centre)

Some of the teachers interviewed explained how improved attitudes to learning could translate back to the classroom, and attributed this partly to the support students receive from Into University. This was particularly apparent amongst Primary teachers, with reports that young people returning from Into University activities and workshops were more motivated and excited to learn, which has a positive impact on their focus in the classroom.

“The next week in school or the next day, the children are so much more ready to learn that it has been such a positive, for me, so then I can make that impact. It’s almost like they open the gate and I come through”. (Primary teacher, Regional centre)

Secondary school teachers interviewed felt that the students who attended Into University improved their attitudes to learning. However, this could depend on which students a school selected at Secondary level – for example, if a school selects students that are highly engaged then they are likely to have positive attitudes already, and Into University’s main effect is to help develop these more rather than addressing the issue of disengagement.

“Most of them are well-behaved, good children anyway. The main thing is it pushes them on further, rather than solving the issues of pupils who may be previously disengaged”. (Secondary teacher, Regional centre).
How do these outcomes contribute to attainment?

The draft theoretical model proposed that outcomes relating to attitudes to learning were most closely linked to attainment, as they have the potential to more directly influence how young people feel about their school work, their approach and commitment to it, and subsequently their ability to progress academically.

These outcomes were the ones that stakeholders in the fieldwork were most likely to link to attainment. Staff and volunteers in particular felt that academic confidence is essential for attainment and without it, young people’s journeys can be significantly hampered.

“Whatever your level of ability, I think you can’t do anything without confidence”. (Volunteer, London, established centre)

Staff and volunteers were also able to easily explain how metacognition was linked to attainment. It gives young people the skills to become independent learners, and an awareness of what they needed to do to improve academically. These skills, combined with practical skills such as revision techniques, planning and organising ultimately could improve the quality of their work and have a direct impact on their academic performance.

“To know how you learn, how you learn best, gives the student more agency, more ownership of their learning. And it means that even if they aren’t maybe having the best interactions at school…it empowers them to be able to still engage with their education in a positive way”. (Education Worker, Regional, established centre)

Enjoyment of learning was also emphasised as being essential for attainment (and closely linked to confidence) because if the young person is enjoying what they are doing and believes they are good at something, then they will be committed to it. Enjoyment of learning was seen as essential over the long term and helpful for making choices about the future.

“Without that enjoyment of learning, you can’t make the most of the opportunities presented to you. You’re not going to make the most of your education. If your motivation is lacking, it’s then impossible to achieve grades that reflect your potential”. (Education Worker, Regional, established centre)

There were discussions in the fieldwork about how improved attitudes to learning interrelate with other outcomes to support attainment. Stakeholders highlighted that attitudes to learning are closely linked to young people’s motivations and aspirations. For example, enjoyment of learning can raise a young person’s aspirations by opening their eyes to new learning experiences and broadening their understanding of what they can study in the future.

Young people often mentioned that IntoUniversity had motivated them to improve their attitudes to learning, and see it as more purposeful – which could then lead to improved grades.
“I don’t think I was always super attentive in school. I got good GCSEs, and I don’t think that would have been if I hadn’t gone to IntoUniversity. I think left to my own devices, I wouldn’t have had that push to do the work”. (Alumni, AS, FOCUS & Mentoring, London)

ATTITUDES TO LEARNING: SUMMARY

1. The evidence suggests that positive attitudes to learning are important for progression to Higher Education.
2. There is some evidence to show that there is an important link between attitudes to learning and attainment particularly with metacognition and self-regulation.
3. Stakeholders felt that many young people with whom IntoUniversity work face challenges around attitudes to learning – but not all in the same way, and are closely linked to other challenges such as experiences at school, home, or having additional needs.
4. There was a high level of agreement that IntoUniversity helps to improve attitudes to learning in a variety of ways – that ultimately help young people value education more and invest more in it.
5. Stakeholders felt that the outcomes IntoUniversity supports around improved attitudes to learning were most closely connected to increased attainment.

3.5 Lacking softer skills such as confidence and self-efficacy

![Figure 9: Lacking softer skills outcomes tested in the fieldwork](image)

What does the evidence review say about barriers around softer skills and how these link to attainment?

There are some definitional challenges around any discussion of non-cognitive skills – for example, social and emotional skills tend to focus on how young people see themselves, their self-control, resilience and general social skills; whereas others fit more broadly under the ‘softer skills’ label of teamwork, communication, problem-solving etc. EEF defines ‘character and essential life skills’ as a set of attitudes, skills and behaviours that support young people’s...
learning and personal development and list self-control, confidence, social skills, motivation and resilience. Their SPECTRUM database, which aims to build the evidence around social and emotional skills, covers seven main domains: motivation, goal orientation and perseverance; emotional intelligence; social and emotional competence; mental health and wellbeing; resilience and coping; perceptions of self; and metacognition – but again acknowledges the overlap and interrelated nature of these. In the draft theoretical model, confidence, self-efficacy and softer skills were singled out, to try and allow for a range of interpretations, whilst accepting that this did not entirely help with the definitional issues.

Social and cultural capital was included in this grouping of outcomes on the theoretical model as it can be closely related to softer skills and confidence to embrace opportunities around Higher Education. However, it also relates to wider family circumstances and knowledge about Higher Education and therefore overlaps with the familial and community context barrier. The Education Policy Institute (EPI, 2017) defines social capital as ‘social networks, collective knowledge, norms and opportunities’ and cultural capital as ‘social assets including education, knowledge and ways of speaking and dressing that signify status’. This is important in terms of understanding the contrast between more affluent households where families can mobilise different resources to help improve the educational performance of their children, and young people growing up in disadvantaged contexts where they might lack access to networks and opportunities.

The Sutton Trust (2017) state that softer skills, including confidence, motivation, resilience and communication are linked to better education outcomes and future prospects. Their report highlights the socio-economic gap in the take up of the kinds of extra-curricular activities which can help to develop these skills, with ‘better off’ pupils more likely to have access to beneficial activities such as debating clubs or trips. One study found that extra-curricular activities can play an important role in attainment by creating an incentive for students to remain engaged in their learning and by contributing to a sense of achievement and raising confidence (Banerjee, 2016). Furthermore, when considering the confidence and self-efficacy required for university applications, The Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) (2016) found that students from more disadvantaged backgrounds tended to be far more concerned about ‘fitting in’ when they are considering whether or not to apply for university.

Several studies have suggested a strong positive relationship between confidence, happiness and academic attainment (See for example: Aryana, 2010 for self-esteem and attainment and Tabbodi, Rahgozar, Mozaffari Abadi, 2015 for happiness and attainment). A 2017 study showed that, on average, having high academic self-concept increases the chances of taking A-Levels, increases the odds of taking part in Higher Education and increases the odds of studying at a high-status university. The study further notes that while academic self-concept is important, it does not completely explain the differences in university participation between social-economic groups (Henderson, Hansen and Shure, 2017).
The literature also suggests an important link between happiness and wellbeing and academic attainment, with Public Health England (2014) arguing that students with better health and wellbeing are more likely to achieve academically.

From the evidence reviewed, it is not clear exactly what impact social and cultural capital can have on academic attainment. In one study, researchers tested the interaction of parents’ cultural capital and educational attainment and found that parents’ reading behaviour was a strong predictor of children’s educational success (de Graff, 2000). Sikora et al (2019) reviewed a number of international studies and found growing evidence that children from homes with many books, and parents who encourage their children to read, obtain higher grades at school. Overall, the message from the literature suggests that social and cultural capital can have an enabling effect through the transfer of skills, knowledge, and behaviours which help young people navigate and negotiate the Higher Education system.

**What were the views of stakeholders on lacking soft skills as a barrier?**

Stakeholders agreed that confidence and self-efficacy were barriers for young people. The young people with whom IntoUniversity works were often described as shy, reluctant to speak to, or work, with people they do not know and lacking confidence.

“I think this lack of self-confidence is there. We have loads of kids who do really great stuff, but they don’t recognise that it’s great”. (Education Worker, Regional, new centre)

However, this was not universal, again reflecting the diversity of experiences amongst the IntoUniversity cohorts. Some young people were seen by staff as ‘brimming with confidence’.

There were many comments about school being a negative experience for young people where they lacked the confidence to speak up in class and seek help from their teachers. Some also felt that the pressure at school to perform well had made young people more anxious and fearful of taking risks as they might get it wrong.

“A lot of my children in my class don’t like getting things wrong. They’re worried about getting things wrong and failing. They think ‘If I get that wrong, I won’t be able to get to university’”. (Primary teacher, Regional centre)

Teachers and other local stakeholders interviewed frequently mentioned resilience and perseverance as a barrier for young people because those from disadvantaged backgrounds are faced with more challenges than an average student.

“Some of our students need more resilience. Because they just give up at the first hurdle, they really do. And I’ve just seen it with my sixth formers. A bit of their student finance went wrong and they’re like, ‘Oh, that’s it, I’m not going’”. (Secondary teacher, Regional centre)

Staff and volunteers working with young people also highlighted a lack of social and cultural capital being an issue many young people faced.
“In this area, there’s not loads that students can be getting on with. We see a lot of students outside a lot of the time in parks, which is nice, but I think there might be a lack of opportunity in terms of resources. But also having somebody that can take them to these places that have a lot of cultural capital”. (Education Worker, London, established centre)

What changes for young people through engaging with IntoUniversity?

In the fieldwork, young people emphasised a range of personal changes, as well as opportunities to enhance their more practical soft skills. These are summarised below.

**Young people’s voices: softer skills**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social skills such as being more comfortable meeting new people, developing new friendships, empathy with other young people of different ages, and communicating confidently with others were expressed by all age groups and most consistently highlighted by young people.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“I wouldn’t really talk to many people. I only moved [here] when I was in Year 8, and when I started at my school. I didn’t want to talk to any of these people. When I first started here [at the centre] I didn’t really have any choice but to talk to these adults who I didn’t know”. (Secondary student, AS, FOCUS &amp; Mentoring, Regional centre)</td>
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<tr>
<th>Practical life skills that young people felt might help in the world of work such as leadership, team-working, and problem-solving and entrepreneurial attitudes were also a key feature of many of the discussions with young people.</th>
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<tr>
<td>“You have to work in groups and build networking skills. It opened up different conversations with people you might not speak to in school”. (Secondary student, AS &amp; FOCUS, regional)</td>
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<tr>
<td>“They got this company to come in and work with us on developing a product…that taught me about retail, and the importance of allocating roles to the team, not always having to be the leader and stepping back and letting other people shine and express their talents”. (Secondary student, AS, FOCUS &amp; Mentoring, London)</td>
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<tr>
<th>Managing emotions was something that Primary and Secondary students alike identified as being a positive effect of coming to IntoUniversity centres, in particular not getting as upset or anxious when they got something wrong as they did before.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“I get in trouble less - I used to walk out of class as I didn’t like my maths teacher… IntoUniversity helped me with that - you can always try and avoid the situation”. (Secondary student, AS &amp; FOCUS group discussion, London)</td>
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The responses from adult stakeholders in the fieldwork mirrored the young people’s responses above. The most commonly mentioned change by the majority of respondents was confidence, which they saw as being linked to developing the key social and emotional skills that are essential for young people as they grow and develop.

Teachers interviewed felt that IntoUniversity helps to increase young people’s resilience, and related this to confidence, self-belief, and attitudes to learning.

IntoUniversity was seen as addressing some of the social and cultural capital barriers by helping to expand young people’s social networks through a range of volunteers, mentors, and corporate partners, combined with enrichment activities such as trips out and cultural experiences, teamwork activities, mentoring, and enterprise challenges to help young people build the social and practical skills that they need to succeed but that do not get enough emphasis at school.

Teachers stressed that this was invaluable, as they would not have the time to arrange these themselves. There were examples given of IntoUniversity finding relevant people in different industries based on students’ interests, and creating enrichment opportunities at local businesses.

There was one area that stakeholders felt needed to be more prominent as a key outcome for young people. They emphasised that IntoUniversity supports young people to have an increased sense of wellbeing and more positive mental health. This was also echoed by many young people talking about how they feel less stressed and anxious, more relaxed, and generally happier through their engagement with the programme. Stakeholders felt that this highlights the holistic nature of the support, helping young people be the best version of themselves, rather than just focusing on attainment.

“Before IntoUniversity I used to cry a lot in lessons, and I used to get really bad anxiety and I used to use my fiddle twig all the time. But now I don’t cry as much…And I don’t get as anxious and I don’t use my fiddle twig”. (Primary student, AS & FOCUS student, Regional centre)
How do these outcomes contribute to attainment?

The draft theoretical model placed outcomes relating to softer skills as potentially having some close links to attainment, but recognised that these might be less direct than attitudes to learning outcomes.

Stakeholders felt that personal changes such as confidence, self-efficacy and wellbeing could be linked to attainment but found it difficult to pinpoint or articulate why, as they tended to see these as essential components of young people’s growth and development more broadly. Staff and volunteers discussed these in terms of being essential ingredients for more well-rounded and happier young people.

These outcomes were also regarded as being closely related to attitudes to learning – underpinning and intersecting with these in different ways. For example, confidence and the sense of agency that young people develop through IntoUniversity could have a knock-on effect on attainment as back in the classroom as young people are increasingly able to express themselves more, ask questions or for help, and be more willing to try new things.

“Before IntoUniversity I felt really shy and I had to recheck my work, because I was too shy to go out to the teacher just in case I got it wrong. Since coming to IntoUniversity, I feel like I can speak to the teacher, and not be shy”. (Primary student, AS and FOCUS, Regional centre)

In terms of the softer skills that are developed through IntoUniversity (such as teamwork, communication, leadership etc.), stakeholders described how these skills could be seen as providing a strong foundation that might then have a positive effect on attainment – for example, through encouraging young people to take greater ownership over their learning.

“I do think [it is] this thing of empowerment, of a student taking control in a positive way. I’ve had students who have way exceeded their expectations that I would have for them. And it’s not always the most academic students who do the best. I do think it’s the attitude and the self-belief and that’s what IntoUniversity work on”. (Secondary school teacher, London)

Resilience was felt to be potentially important for attainment as young people will inevitably face set-backs and challenges in their education and would therefore need both the skills and the mindset to persevere and achieve their goals.

“My key one is perseverance. If they haven’t got that perseverance, that resilience...we’ve had so many students that they fail the first couple of exams, they fail a couple of marks and their head goes down. It’s just having that self-confidence as well to just keep on going”. (Secondary teacher, London)

Social and cultural capital was seen as helping doors open for a young person, rather than having an explicit link to attainment – although this is still an important part of the education journey as it supports young people to take the next step.
“I see social and cultural capital as helping them to apply for jobs in the future or it might help them apply for internships, or it might help them with practical life skills that are going to help them achieve in the future.” (Education Worker, Regional, established centre)

SOFTER SKILLS: SUMMARY

- The evidence suggests that there is a positive link between some softer skills such as confidence, resilience, and communication to future educational outcomes and prospects
- Several studies have emphasised a strong positive relationship between confidence, happiness and academic attainment
- Stakeholders felt that many young people they work with could face barriers around softer skills, confidence and self-efficacy, and lacking social and cultural capital – but this was not apparent for all. They also emphasised that resilience could be something young people lacked
- There was consensus that IntoUniversity supports the development of social skills, life skills, builds young people’s confidence, and opens up opportunities for them
- It was often harder for stakeholders to explain exactly how these changes could link to attainment – as they emphasised that they are the essential ingredients for young people – providing a strong foundation for learning, and subsequently attainment
3.6 Motivations and aspirations to go to university

What does the evidence review say about barriers around motivations and aspirations to go to university and how these link to attainment?

Motivations and aspirations are seen as playing an important role in determining whether a young person progresses to Higher Education (JRF 2010). DfBIS (2015b) highlight that interests, motivations and aspirations develop at a young age and draw a direct line from this to whether a young person ultimately applies to university. This study also stated that White disadvantaged young people were more likely than Black and Minority Ethnic disadvantaged individuals to: state that they did not plan to apply for Higher Education; intend to leave full-time education at the end of Year 11 and believe that the best jobs did not always go to those who had been to university.

Importantly, some studies have drawn a distinction between aspirations and expectations. It is argued that expectations differ from aspirations in that they are more influenced by external factors – such as attitudes of parents, role models in society, or stereotypes about what certain groups ‘can achieve’ - while aspirations reflect internal hopes. Placing too great a focus on aspirations is seen as placing an unfair burden, or even blame, on students from disadvantaged backgrounds in terms of what they lack, rather than focusing on the ways that society has shaped what a young person feels they can expect from life (See for example: Harrison, 2018; NESTA, 2018, LSE, 2018).

Evidence of whether raising motivations and aspirations can have an impact on attainment is mixed. A 2015 longitudinal study showed that pupils with high aspirations achieved higher at school than those with low aspirations (Khattab, 2015). In their review of the literature, JRF (2012) confirmed the link between aspirations and attainment but stated that the evidence was not enough to say whether this is a causal relationship.
The EEF (2018) has been clear that interventions which aim to raise aspirations appear to have little or no positive impact on educational attainment. It is argued that most young people already have high aspirations (a claim supported by JRF’s 2011 evidence review), and so underachievement is more likely to be due to a gap between aspirations and the knowledge and skills needed to achieve them. The EEF did however find that aspiration interventions which have shown evidence of raising attainment tend to also provide additional Academic Support, rather than focusing purely on aspirations.

**What were the views of stakeholders on motivations and aspirations to go to university as a barrier?**

There were mixed views from stakeholders on this barrier – some felt that it was a misconception that young people from disadvantaged backgrounds do not have aspirations for their future. In many cases the issues are more the practical challenges of living in areas of deprivation where it can be difficult to look forward to something that does not feel familiar, like university.

“Coming from some of the households and backgrounds they come from, just having space and time to pursue their academic goals I think is often a struggle and I would imagine it’s largely why they, a lot of them, why they come here”. *(Education Worker, Regional, established centre)*

Some teachers reported that among the students they worked with, those with certain characteristics such as meeting the Pupil Premium criteria were more likely to have lower aspirations than their more affluent peers.

**IntoUniversity** staff and volunteers described seeing a contrast in young people’s aspirations, which tended to fall into two groups; those who have aspirations for professional jobs that require high qualifications like a doctor, and those that have aspirations for jobs that do not require qualifications, or at least did not require a university degree.

Staff and volunteers in White working-class communities or in areas where there was a lot of intergenerational unemployment, felt that the motivations and aspirations barrier was more prevalent compared to communities that were made up of migrant families.

“There is a lot of apathy in this area towards education. And there is third, fourth generation unemployment. This is a very White, working class area. But if you look at the students that come through the door, they are second generation immigrant children”. *(Cluster Manager, Regional, established centre)*

Staff and volunteers from centres based in White-working class areas also emphasised that although it can appear that aspirations are lower in these communities, in reality it is more that the perception is that Higher Education is not essential for success.

“There are a lot of people who’ve been successful here without Further or Higher Education. So maybe the attitude is that it is not necessary or it’s not the most valuable thing. You’re better off
This highlights that the barrier that was tested in the fieldwork was phrased too narrowly, and did not accurately capture how IntoUniversity supports young people to achieve their potential, whatever that might be (university, employment, further education etc.). There is a risk that IntoUniversity’s work is misperceived unless the importance of other pathways alongside university are also emphasised.

IntoUniversity staff also felt that barriers around motivations and aspirations could look different depending on where a young person was in their educational journey. For younger children, the barrier being addressed might be more about them not having that understanding of what is out there and available to them (which relates to the knowledge of university and pathways barrier), rather than lacking aspiration.

At Secondary school, there may be a greater risk of young people lacking optimism about what they can achieve and their motivations and aspirations dipping. This might be because they do not think university is tangible, or because they think their grades are not good enough and begin to feel it is not an option for them. These issues can also interrelate with other factors having a negative impact on their lives such a stress and poor mental health.

“In terms of motivation to go to university, the older our students get I think they feel it seems less and less possible once they get GCSE predicted grades and things like that, and I think they sort of ‘um and ah’ quite a lot”. (Centre Leader. Regional, established centre)

In some cases, the biggest challenge for young people is a mismatch between their aspirations and expectations, not making the right choices, or not having that understanding of what they need to do to get where they want to be.

“They are very aspirational, but what it will take to get there, and whether or not actually that is the right choice for them in the end, I think that’s a big issue”. (Cluster Manager, Regional, established centre)

What changes for young people through engaging with IntoUniversity?

Young people talked about how IntoUniversity supports them to feel more optimistic about the future, and develop long-term goals.
Understanding IntoUniversity’s impact on attainment: A qualitative research study

Young people’s voices: Motivations and aspirations

**Young people are supported to believe they can succeed.**

“I know that if I try, then I can get where I want to. I can go to university and I can get a job, and I can put myself out there now”. (Secondary student, AS, FOCUS & Mentoring, Regional centre)

“They told me that you could go to these top universities, you can become a lawyer or doctor, a midwife, paramedic. I could become anything I wanted to. And that’s what they place in front of you, which I think school didn’t do at the time”. (Alumni, AS, FOCUS & Mentoring, London centre)

Primary students tended to emphasise the future felt a long way off but they recognised the importance of beginning to think about what they might do (even though it might not be connected to university at this point in time).

“IntoUniversity gives you a variety of things that you might be doing when you’re older. So you get to learn many things you could be doing”. (Primary student, AS and FOCUS, Regional centre)

Secondary students talked about having clearer visions of what they want to achieve due to IntoUniversity’s support and what they needed to do to reach their goals.

“I used to think that whatever happens, happens, and not have a plan, but now I know that having a plan is important and that you shouldn’t just get carried away by life“. (Secondary student, AS & Mentoring, Regional centre)

Secondary students also spoke about how IntoUniversity gave them more motivation to push themselves and understand how to achieve their future goals.

“I think from a young age [working with IntoUniversity] made me very well-driven. There’s been some moments in my life where I’ve suffered grief, and I think the only thing that kept me waking up and, in a sense, continue living is the confidence and the drive to go to university and make good out of myself“. (Secondary student, AS & FOCUS, London centre)

“I’m more assured. I had my career in mind since very early on but they just helped me solidify that. And I’m happy doing it and how I’m going to get there“. (Secondary student, AS & FOCUS, London centre)

For those young people who already had the aspiration to go to university, IntoUniversity helped them to aim even higher and apply for a top university.

“I thought everyone already had their place and my place wasn't necessarily at Durham, or somewhere like Durham. I didn’t think that I was necessarily smart enough before coming to IntoUniversity and being shown that actually, it is attainable”. (Alumni student, AS, FOCUS & Mentoring, London centre)
Feedback from adult stakeholders was consistent with the voices of young people with regards to the changes in motivations and aspirations that they had seen amongst those with whom they were working. Alongside the wider boosting effect around aspirations they expressed how IntoUniversity make university a “normal” part of young people’s lives, which enables them to perceive it as a realistic prospect.

**How do these outcomes contribute to attainment?**

On the theoretical model, outcomes around motivations and aspirations to go to university sit further away from having a direct link to attainment. This was supported by the feedback from stakeholders who broadly felt that motivations and aspirations to go to university do influence attainment but stopped short at suggesting that there was a direct link. This was because motivations and aspirations are often reinforced over the long term, and a lot of things can happen along a young person’s journey which means that they can fluctuate.

As the young people’s quotes in the previous section indicate, the encouragement to think about goals and raise aspirations could help young people stay motivated and have the drive to succeed. Staff echoed this, and talked about the importance of instilling a sense of optimism about the future, and setting longer-term goals, that then encourage young people to take their exams seriously and be more motivated to study – although it is again hard to identify what impact this subsequently has on attainment.

“Young people are going to work harder and put in more effort into their work. And they are going to want to improve their attainment, and are going to want to get the best grades possible if they’ve got a clear goal or clear vision of what it is they want to do with their lives.” (Cluster Manager, London, established centre)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MOTIVATIONS AND ASPIRATIONS: SUMMARY</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• The evidence suggests that motivations and aspirations play an important role in determining whether a young person progresses to Higher Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Evidence on whether raising motivations and aspirations can impact on attainment is mixed</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Stakeholders felt that it can be a misconception that young people from disadvantaged backgrounds lack aspiration – and the issues can be more to do with the persistent challenges of living in areas of deprivation</td>
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<tr>
<td>• There was broad agreement that IntoUniversity does support young people to have greater optimism for the future, to recognise their potential and set long-term goals – and this is manifested differently depending on their educational stage</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Stakeholders felt it was harder to identify what impact raised aspirations and motivations might have directly on attainment – although they felt it could encourage young people to take their studies more seriously</td>
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3.7 Knowledge of Higher Education and pathways

What does the evidence review say about barriers around knowledge of Higher Education and pathways and how these link to attainment?

Knowledge of Higher Education and pathways continues to be seen as a key barrier to university access. This is most often linked to family background and whether a student's parents are graduates (JRF, 2010). A 2016 UCAS study found that practical concerns about university, such as finances and accommodation, are particularly prevalent among students from more disadvantaged backgrounds. In their 2015 review of the widening participation literature, ARC Network Ltd stated that access to information and guidance related to Higher Education has been linked to improved success rates of applications and to improved Higher Education retention rates.

Still, there is little evidence of a link between knowledge of Higher Education and pathways and attainment. However, it could be argued that improved knowledge of Higher Education and potential pathways can feed into increased aspirations and expectations for both students and parents, in terms of what a student may view as a realistic or achievable ambition (see for example DfBIS, 2015; JRF 2012).

What were the views of stakeholders on knowledge of Higher Education and pathways as a barrier?

There was consensus among stakeholders that this is a key barrier for young people with whom IntoUniversity work and an area where IntoUniversity makes a tangible impact. Many of the themes raised in relation to this barrier overlapped with motivations and aspirations to go to university, recognising that the main challenge for young people is that they do not have others in their lives with the knowledge and experience of a range of careers and educational pathways, and who provide access to a range of opportunities.
Many young people also do not receive much support for the practical things like personal statements and their UCAS application and are often underprepared as a result.

“You read their personal statements and you realise, sometimes, not always – that they haven’t had very much support at all with their application. I notice they’re often underprepared for applying to good universities or to universities in general”. (Education Worker, Regional, established centre)

As with other barriers, young people’s needs change over the educational journey – with younger students lacking general awareness of university, students in lower Secondary school needing support to explore different interests and what subjects might support their aspirations and goals, and as young people reach the point of applying for university, needing more practical and bespoke advice to navigate the process.

What changes for young people through engaging with IntoUniversity?

Young people valued the space and support that IntoUniversity provides to understand their pathways through to Higher Education. The main feedback is summarised below:

### Young people’s voices: Knowledge of Higher Education and pathways

**At Primary stage, young people talked about having more awareness of future options. They also emphasised acquiring practical knowledge about university much earlier than their peers.**

“It gives you an idea what university is like. It gives us an idea of what we might be looking for in the future. It helps to know the subjects you can do”. (Primary student, FOCUS, Regional centre)

The benefits of this were not age specific – many Secondary students also highlighted the value of trips to universities.

“I went to an Oxford thing in Year 10 and that was kind of seeing what university life was like. So, attending some of the lectures, seeing some of the courses they offer, actually staying on campus as well”. (Alumni student, AS, FOCUS & Mentoring, London centre)

Many Secondary school students highlighted that IntoUniversity had supported them by increasing their knowledge and experience of different subjects and careers which could open up new goals or help narrow them down.

“I would make my choices more clearly. So, I think about the benefits of going to sixth form compared to going to a college or going to a specific one”. (Alumni student, AS, FOCUS & Mentoring, Regional centre)
Understanding IntoUniversity’s impact on attainment: A qualitative research study

Young people’s voices: Knowledge of Higher Education and pathways

Young people who had been through the UCAS process, and/or were applying for internships also stressed how much IntoUniversity had helped with this.

“It’s made me feel comfortable writing personal statements for Big City Bright Future and for other opportunities that I want to do. So now they’ve taught me how to do a structure for it, so I can go, I know how to do this. I can be more confident”. (Secondary student, AS & FOCUS, Regional centre)

Young people and adult stakeholders also emphasised that one of the main benefits of IntoUniversity’s work is ensuring that young people are better equipped to navigate their way towards and through the Higher Education system and have more confidence about the choices they make.

“The fact that it’s at the forefront of their mind when they get those AS results and they’re straight away thinking, ‘Right, what do I need to adjust on my personal statement draft, what do I need to be aiming at on this paper to ensure I get these grades?’. They are more focused, which is great”. (Secondary teacher, London centre)

How do these outcomes contribute to attainment?

Knowledge about Higher Education and pathways was placed further away from attainment on the draft theoretical model. Stakeholders felt that the link between knowledge of Higher Education and attainment is less tangible but could still have an indirect impact.

Examples of this in practice included how understanding the connection between GCSE and A-Level exams and future options could enable young people to choose the subjects that match their potential, resulting in better attainment. Some staff highlighted that the skills to navigate future options might have more of an impact on attainment for older pupils:

“I don’t necessarily think that is the biggest thing that supports their level of attainment whilst they’re at Primary school or even in lower Secondary. I think it, much more, evens things out towards the top”. (Education Worker, Regional, established centre).

All stakeholders felt that motivations and aspirations to go to university and knowledge of Higher Education can be mutually reinforcing. Having greater understanding of future options can lead to greater optimism about the future and vice versa, which results in young people making more of an effort.

“They do a bit more reflective stuff as they get older about what they’re interested in, what their strengths are. Where they might like to go. So this knowledge and resulting desire to go [to university] are interlinked”. (Cluster Manager, Regional, established centre)
IntoUniversity staff were also clear about the potentially transformational effect of young people being taken to university campuses to see what it involved – and how this might translate to a motivation to improve grades at school.

“There was one boy in Year 8 and he’d been flagged to us as having quite a lot of behavioural issues. He got to the university and he was just walking along going, ‘this is amazing, I’m going to come here. I’m going to get the grades’. He was just so focused throughout the day, and it was apparent he’d never been to a university before”. (Centre Leader, Regional, established centre)

KNOWLEDGE OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND PATHWAYS: SUMMARY

- The evidence suggests that knowledge of Higher Education and pathways continues to be a key barrier to university access – often linked to family background
- There is little evidence of a link between knowledge of Higher Education and pathways and attainment
- Stakeholders agreed that many young people with whom IntoUniversity do not have others in their lives with knowledge or experience of Higher Education and career pathways or can provide access to opportunities to navigate these
- There was considerable agreement that IntoUniversity supports young people to acquire more knowledge about their options, different subjects, careers and gives them the practical skills and confidence to make choice
- Stakeholders felt that there was unlikely to be a direct link between this aspect of IntoUniversity’s work and attainment but that there could be an indirect connection – for example, reinforcing other outcomes around motivations and aspirations to go to university
3.8 Supportive and aspirational familial and community contexts

What does the evidence review say about barriers around supportive and aspirational social contexts and how these link to attainment?

Supportive family contexts can be explored from a number of angles - for example, through socio and economic circumstances; the attitudes and behaviours of families towards their children’s education; and aspects of social and cultural capital that were explored earlier. Despite consensus around the link between those from less affluent backgrounds having poorer educational outcomes, there is still much debate about the size and nature of the impact of different factors and circumstances. The literature suggests that it is hard to establish to what extent these differences are attributed to income, as well as other factors such as parental ability and education, attitudes, the home environment, and other experiences of disadvantage.

The role of supportive family contexts has been explored in some of the evidence. JRF (2011) states that there is clear alignment between what parents say they want for their children and what a child aspires to themselves. JRF therefore argues that supporting aspirations in disadvantaged communities requires working with parents as well as young people. A small-scale study (Wainwright & Watts, 2019) explored the possible impacts of older siblings going to university and suggested that they could also play an important role within the context of parental impact on aspirations. However, they also highlighted the need for more research into this area.

Improving parental knowledge of future pathways is also seen as key, with a 2015 DfBIS report showing that parents of White disadvantaged pupils, the group in the UK least likely to progress to university, were more likely than parents from other groups to believe that leaving school at 16 did not necessarily limit their child’s career opportunities.
A 2012 review of interventions from JRF found evidence of an association between parental expectations and their child’s attainment. However, JRF stopped short of suggesting a causal influence between the two. What is clearer is the relationship between parental involvement in a child’s education, through help with homework or attendance at parent’s evenings for instance, and a student’s attainment. In this area, JRF was able to identify a causal relationship, particularly where parents showed an interest in their child’s education from an early age (JRF, 2012).

In its teaching and learning toolkit, the EEF (2018) stated that, despite mixed evidence, parental involvement and aspirations have repeatedly been shown as important for student outcomes. EEF stated that it is often easier to secure the engagement of parents of younger pupils, and that considering how to maintain this engagement should be a key consideration. Approaches to involve parents also need to be flexible to fit around busy schedules and should be welcoming, particularly for those parents who may have had a negative experience at school themselves. With the direct involvement of parents in a child’s work highlighted as especially impactful, EEF also suggests considering strategies to boost parents’ key numeracy and literacy skills, so they in turn can support their child. EEF is continuing to explore the role of parents in attainment through further trials.

What were the views of stakeholders on supportive familial and community contexts as a barrier?

Community and family context were perceived as having a strong influence on young people’s progression to Higher Education, especially parent attitudes and support for education. However, this barrier was also the most contested in the fieldwork.

On one hand staff and volunteers often felt that the families coming to the centre for Academic Support already had good attitudes towards education, but lacked the tools to support their child with what they need. Parents acknowledged that they did not always have the time, resource, or knowledge to support their child with school work, or help them explore different options.

“Because I’m dyslexic, a language disorder…it’s quite hard for me to do things for the kids”. (Secondary parent, Regional centre).

“I work in the afternoon, and [his father] works at nights, so we can’t always give them the support they need. It’s so helpful here”. (Primary parent, London centre).

At the other end of the spectrum, staff had seen families who did not believe in the value of Higher Education, and this had an influence on their child’s attitude toward education (as outlined earlier in the discussion on motivations and aspirations). They were cautious about claiming that this was a barrier that applied to all families with whom IntoUniversity engage.

“They want them to do well at college and eventually, maybe, go to university or an apprenticeship, whichever route the child wishes to take. So, their attitudes towards Higher Education is that, actually I want them to do better than what I did”. (Education Worker, Regional, established centre)
Another wider contextual barrier was frequently mentioned in the fieldwork related to schools and their culture which could hinder young people from reaching their potential. Stakeholders noted that many of the young people with whom IntoUniversity works do not thrive in school for various reasons such as large class sizes, a lot of classroom disruption, poor relationships with teachers, and being bullied. Some teachers acknowledged that they do not always know their students well enough to tailor their support to those who need it. The effect of this can be to create a negative environment for learning, which impacts on students’ attitudes and engagement.

“There are some schools where it seems to be quite an antagonistic relationship between learning and teachers and the students and what their aims are and how they want to spend their time”. (Education Worker, London, established centre)

What changes for families and the local community through engaging with IntoUniversity?

Parents reported that IntoUniversity has helped them to gain a better understanding of their children’s strengths, but also where they need more support. This enabled parents to be more engaged in their child’s education and in some cases to increase their own capacity to help with homework.

“Sometimes they have these meetings for parents and members of university come here and they give tips on how to help your child with these things. So, the last time my mom came to one of these meetings, she got a book, how to help your child with their maths”. (Secondary student, AS & Mentoring, Regional centre)

IntoUniversity also helps to dispel myths that parents might have about university, the types of people who go to university, and relieves their concerns about it being unaffordable. Parents explained that IntoUniversity helped them see that university was a possibility for their child.

“We don’t come from a rich family…my generation think it’s all the rich people that got to go. But knowing that my kids could actually do something they want to do is good”. (Primary parent, Regional centre)

Engagement with IntoUniversity was also identified as having a wider impact on the family. Parents and young people described feeling more relaxed and able to enjoy time at home. This is because there were fewer arguments over school work and because young people felt less stressed about their school work. Having a place to go where they could focus on their school work meant that they could more easily separate their family life from their school life.

“It’s made quite a difference in my mum because I used to go home, and I used to bite my mum’s head off. I used to fight with my brother. But once I started coming to IntoUniversity twice a week, it just calms me that little bit. So, when I go in, I’ll sit, rather than going and fighting my dogs or my brother”. (Secondary student, AS, FOCUS & Mentoring, Regional centre)
There were a few examples given in the fieldwork of positive individual impacts on parents. This included being able to more confidently communicate with teachers by talking through issues ahead of school meetings at the IntoUniversity centre and then going into the school more able to express their views, and ‘fight their corner’. A parent in a regional centre had been to university herself as a mature student following her children accessing Academic Support. Other parents also highlighted that it has made them think about their own education.

“It made me think of going back to school. There was a time I even asked one of the staff if they do it for grownups”. (Secondary parent, Regional centre)

Opinions on the impact IntoUniversity could have on wider community attitudes were more mixed – mainly as it was accepted this was hard to capture in a meaningful way beyond being aware that many families knew each other and word of mouth about the centres could spread – this is explored more fully in Section 4 (on the role of centres in local community).

**How do these outcomes contribute to attainment?**

The draft theoretical model placed supportive familial and community contexts furthest away from having an impact on attainment. Stakeholders felt that there is a definite link between parental attitudes towards education in general and a young person’s progression to Higher Education, but it was hard to see how this might improve attainment in a direct way.

However, even though the relationship might not be direct, stakeholders felt that having a network of people who care about them and encourage them was a key ingredient in young people’s success, and centres felt that getting buy-in and engagement from parents was an important part of their work.

“It think here [at this centre] we’re really focused on needing to think about the family and the wider community and so yes, we try and get parents in as much as we can”. (Centre Leader, Regional, established centre)

**SUPPORTIVE FAMILIAL AND COMMUNITY CONTEXTS: SUMMARY**

- The evidence suggests that there is a need to ensure parental knowledge of Higher Education and other pathways grows alongside their children’s
- The evidence suggests **parental involvement** in education has a positive causal link with attainment, but the relationship between parental expectations and attainment is less clear
- Stakeholders felt that many families involved in IntoUniversity were supportive and aspirational – but faced issues to do with knowledge about pathways
- IntoUniversity was seen as helping to increase this knowledge and help with some wider positive impacts on family life
3.9 Further insight from the fieldwork

There was also an opportunity in the fieldwork to test some of the outcomes more consistently across the Primary aged cohort that were part of the case study sample.

Several statements about the changes young people might have experienced as a result of IntoUniversity were read aloud and the children were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with the statement. They were also given the option to choose “unsure”.

The results of this exercise were tallied to assess whether the changes described in the statements were ones with which the Primary students identified. Whilst this was designed to be a fun exercise to introduce the topic, and young people could often influence each other’s choices (even with their eyes closed), the results in Figure 12 demonstrates some useful insights - the top two statements with the most agreement amongst Primary students relate to attainment and attitudes to learning. Thinking about the future and confidence in meeting new people also features strongly – relating to the overall outcomes around aspirations, and developing confidence.

![Figure 13: Results of the outcomes statement exercise with Primary school students](image)

6 104 Primary children took part in this exercise, though not everyone answered every question, and group numbers fluctuated during some of the sessions, and responses were hard to capture. The table presents the positively worded statements only for ease of comparison.
3.10 Key messages from testing the theoretical model – goals, barriers and outcomes

This section summarises the main feedback from the evidence and fieldwork on the goals, barriers and outcomes from testing the theoretical model. The implications and suggested revisions are explored more fully in Section 5 of the report.

Do the goals on the model accurately capture IntoUniversity’s purpose?

There was consensus that the goals on the model reflect the main aims of the charity. Whilst there was less emphasis on ‘building a community tradition of Higher Education participation’ this is a longer-term goal to which IntoUniversity is committed. It relates to shifting narratives and having an impact beyond the day-to-day work of centres.

Are the identified barriers the right ones?

Overall, the evidence review suggests that the five barriers currently identified on the theoretical model all do play a role in limiting the opportunities for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds to accessing Higher Education.

However, the evidence points to the need for further nuance in the framing of two of the barriers: motivation and aspiration to go to university and softer skills.

- When considering aspirations, recent literature suggests considering ‘expectations’ rather than aspirations, to avoid implying that low achievement is due to what a young person lacks rather than the exterior socio-economic barriers that have shaped their view of what they can expect from life.

- For the soft skills barriers, the evidence points to the importance of considering the role of wellbeing, and particularly emotional wellbeing, in supporting young people to achieve. It is suggested that good health and happiness should be seen as a central foundation to a young person achieving academically.

Although stakeholders agreed with the barriers on the theoretical model, it was emphasised that these did not apply universally to all the children and young people with whom IntoUniversity works. This point is reflected in the literature, emphasising that disadvantaged young people are not a homogenous group, and the impact of their circumstances are experienced both cumulatively, across different contexts (home, community and school), and are deeply interconnected with other factors such as wellbeing and skills development (EPI, 2007).

There were discussions in the fieldwork as to whether poor attitudes to learning, lacking motivations and aspirations to go to university and an absence of supportive familial and community contexts were as prevalent as one might expect in areas of disadvantage. Stakeholders felt that many of the young people (and families) that come to the centres for Academic Support are choosing to be there, so to some extent they already have the positive
attitudes and support. The barriers they face are often more about knowledge to navigate to Higher Education, access to networks and opportunities, and other wider contextual factors in the local area.

Finally, many stakeholders pointed out that the language of barriers and using phrases such as “lacking skills” is too negative and does not fit with the values and positive approach of IntoUniversity as a whole. It places too much emphasis on what disadvantaged young people lack rather than emphasising their assets and strengths despite the challenges they might experience personally and in their local environment.

**Are these the outcomes that reflect the key changes for young people?**

As outlined earlier, the outcomes that were tested on the draft theoretical model were simplified in order to explore the key changes that occur for young people across all of the barriers as a result of their engagement with IntoUniversity. The findings from the evidence suggest that these are all important outcomes that help to support progression to Higher Education. In addition, the feedback from the fieldwork presented throughout this section of the report has demonstrated the many positive impacts that arise from IntoUniversity’s work – from supporting young people to enjoy and take more ownership over their learning, focusing on young people’s self-belief and optimism for the future, and giving them a range of practical tools and opportunities to navigate to their next stage. The outcomes on improving parental and community attitudes to Higher Education were the most contested in the discussions, and the changes that stakeholders emphasised were more focused on increasing knowledge and understanding of pathways, and some positive impacts on family life.

The interrelated nature of the outcomes for young people was repeatedly emphasised, which reflects the fact that the way IntoUniversity works is holistic – the ways that this happens is explored more fully in Section 4 of the report. The research also suggests that some outcomes are short-term while others are more long-term. Changes in motivations, aspirations and confidence, for example, emerge more gradually over time while others can be more immediate – such as developing certain practical skills or knowledge about university.

Reflecting both the feedback and the evidence, the following aspects could be emphasised more when identifying a set of high-level key outcomes:

- Taking into account some of the definitional issues around soft skills, being more precise about which social and emotional skills IntoUniversity supports
- Including increased wellbeing as a key outcome for young people
- Highlighting the importance of increased resilience for young people
- Reflecting more clearly that IntoUniversity contributes to social and cultural capital in different ways – through developing personal skills to navigate, as well as networking and wider enrichment opportunities
Which of these outcomes are most important for attainment?

The evidence from the literature is mixed as to whether all outcomes can be shown to support attainment. The ones that have more consistent evidence include metacognition; some social and emotional skills (particularly confidence); wellbeing and happiness and the positive impact of parental involvement. Evidence is more mixed around the relationship between attitudes to learning and attainment; and whether raising motivations and aspirations can have an impact on attainment. In addition, the link between parental aspirations/expectations and their child’s attainment is less clear cut. There is little evidence of the impact of knowledge of Higher Education and pathways on attainment.

In order to test the outcome/attainment relationship, IntoUniversity Education Workers and volunteers were asked to rank the eleven outcomes identified in the draft theoretical model in terms of their relevance to attainment. The exercise was repeated with Centre Leaders at a session in July. This meant that the groups had to make choices about which outcomes were most directly related to attainment at the top (tier 1) and place outcomes that had a less direct link to attainment were placed further down, Figure 14 summarises the results of this ranking exercise.

![Figure 14: Ranking outcomes summary](image-url)
There was a strong consensus that academic confidence and enjoyment of learning are the most related to improved attainment. These outcomes were the most likely to be ranked closest to attainment.

Metacognition skills, optimism for the future, and ability to set long-term goals were also felt to have a strong link to attainment. They were most likely to be ranked at tier 1 or tier 2.

Softer skills, a sense of agency, understanding of future options, and practical skills to navigate from a young age were perceived as having a less direct impact on attainment.

Social and cultural capital and parental attitudes towards Higher Education were most likely to be ranked in bottom tiers and furthest away from having an impact on attainment.

This exercise generated some heated discussions, and many found it hard to reach a consensus. This was particularly apparent in some of the groups at the Centre Leader workshop. When reflecting on the exercise, staff and volunteers repeatedly emphasised how the outcomes connected in order to support attainment, and could not fit into a neat hierarchy – for example, although the relationship between optimism for the future and attainment was thought to be less direct than attitudes to learning, stakeholders felt that motivations and aspirations mutually reinforce young people’s attitudes to learning, and therefore could be equally important to attainment.

Overall, there was agreement that IntoUniversity supports attainment through the different outcomes that young people achieve. For the outcomes of the theoretical model that were placed further away from contributing to attainment, they understandably found it harder to isolate how these elements might be directly linked to attainment.

IntoUniversity staff were more likely to perceive that they have a direct impact on attainment (particularly for students who attend Academic Support), although they recognised that it is something that they cannot always prove in terms of hard outcomes. Students and parents were also more likely to perceive that IntoUniversity had a direct impact on attainment, which they felt was evident from having moved up a level/set or having achieved better marks or grades in school since they had started working with the charity. This is explored in greater detail in section 4.2, particularly in relation to the difference that Academic Support makes.

Teachers were more reluctant to claim that IntoUniversity has a direct impact on attainment, because it could be hard to isolate the impact of IntoUniversity’s work from other factors. Nonetheless they felt that IntoUniversity makes an impact on a range of outcomes that contribute to attainment in some way. A small number of volunteers were also cautious about claiming that improvements in attainment were attributable to the work they do with young people. Other stakeholders such as local partners and Widening Participation partners were only able to talk about IntoUniversity’s wider impact, since their direct involvement with the
programmes was limited, but felt that what IntoUniversity achieves is increased confidence, self-belief, resilience and improved learning skills and techniques - which they saw as being relevant to attainment.

Overall, the research emphasises that there is no simple hierarchy or sequence of outcomes that lead to increased attainment, and that the labels ‘direct’ and ‘indirect’ also oversimplify the relationship.

Based on the perceptions of the different IntoUniversity stakeholders (and some of the available evidence) a possible way of conceptualising the relationship between outcomes and attainment is presented later on in this report in Section 5, where a revised theoretical model is set out.
4. How IntoUniversity’s work impacts on attainment – activities, design and culture

4.1 Introduction

This section of the report explores three elements of IntoUniversity’s support – the programme activities, design features and culture/ethos. These three broad groupings were all tested through the qualitative fieldwork and the evidence review. The previous section explores what changes for young people who engage with IntoUniversity, whereas the focus here is on how these changes occur, and how the different parts of the programme support attainment. There is inevitably a degree of overlap, reflecting the holistic way that most stakeholders viewed and described IntoUniversity’s work. However, this section aims to capture more fully what is unique and distinct about the way IntoUniversity operates.

The different programme strands were introduced earlier in this report, and table 2 below sets out in more detail the degree of variation in terms of the length and intensity of engagement that young people have with the different strands, and the composition of the different strand cohorts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strand</th>
<th>Length of engagement</th>
<th>Cohort</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary FOCUS</td>
<td>Year 3: one workshop</td>
<td>Whole year group in the partner Primary school which meets school level criteria for disadvantage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Year 4: one workshop</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Year 5: one workshop, one FOCUS Day</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Year 6: a FOCUS week, one Transition workshop</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary Academic Support</td>
<td>Each student can attend one night a week at the centres after school</td>
<td>30 different students at each session, from pupils taking part in Primary FOCUS or who live near the centre. All students meet criteria for disadvantage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary FOCUS</td>
<td>14 workshops in total (two per year between Years 7-13) – available for three cohorts per year group</td>
<td>25-30 students per cohort Selected by school against the disadvantage criteria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Aim is for the same group in each year to take part in every workshop</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strand</td>
<td>Length of engagement</td>
<td>Cohort</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Secondary Academic Support</strong></td>
<td>Two nights a week at the centres after school</td>
<td>30 students per session – students can attend both nights. All students meet criteria for disadvantage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mentoring</strong></td>
<td>Available to ages 10-19 with different sub-schemes</td>
<td>University student mentoring pairs selected from Academic Support cohorts. Corporate, Oxbridge and Future Fast Track mentoring includes Academic Support students, students referred by schools, and students from Secondary FOCUS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Additional programmes</strong></td>
<td><strong>Holiday FOCUS</strong> – 3-5 days in school holidays for Years 7-13</td>
<td>Students must meet one primary criteria or two secondary criteria; mostly taken from FOCUS or Academic Support students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Student Enrichment</strong> – one-off opportunities, Insight Days and work experience placements open to Years 10-13</td>
<td>Students must meet one primary criteria or two secondary criteria; mostly taken from Secondary FOCUS or Academic Support students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Careers in FOCUS</strong> – a series of workshops delivered by volunteer professionals</td>
<td>Students must meet one primary criteria or two secondary criteria; mostly taken from Secondary FOCUS or Academic Support students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Buddy</strong> – three-hour workshop, and a day at university for Year 8s</td>
<td>Students must meet one primary criteria or two secondary criteria; mostly taken from Secondary FOCUS students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Leadership in FOCUS</strong> – three-day programme for Years 9-11</td>
<td>Students must meet one primary criteria or two secondary criteria; mostly taken from Secondary FOCUS students</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Understanding IntoUniversity’s impact on attainment: A qualitative research study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strand</th>
<th>Length of engagement</th>
<th>Cohort</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Business in FOCUS</strong></td>
<td>one day interactive simulation at a corporate office for Years 8-13 supported by</td>
<td>Students must meet one primary criteria or two secondary criteria;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>corporate volunteers</td>
<td>mostly taken from Secondary FOCUS</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 2: Programme strand engagement and cohort*

Alongside intensity of engagement, there are two other key variables in the way the programme is experienced by young people:

- **When?** After-school for Academic Support; during the school day for FOCUS; other aspects during the holidays

- **Where?** In IntoUniversity centres for Academic Support and Primary FOCUS; in schools for Secondary FOCUS; other aspects of provision take place in schools, visits to universities, workplaces.

In terms of the number of students on each strand or combination of strands, the latest figures from IntoUniversity are:

- **A:** Primary/Secondary FOCUS = 33,117 students
- **B:** Academic Support (AS) = 1,861 students
- **C:** Mentoring = 33 students
- **AB:** FOCUS and AS = 2,754 students
- **AC:** FOCUS and Mentoring = 137 students
- **BC:** AS and Mentoring = 437 students
- **ABC:** All three = 943 students

*Figure 15: Current participation numbers*

As outlined in the introduction to this report, these variations are important to take into account when considering the impact of different programme activities as not all young people have the same experience with IntoUniversity.
4.2 Programme activities and attainment

IntoUniversity provides a range of different activities for students across the standard and additional programme strands. Supporting academic learning is fundamental in some of the activities within these strands. For example:

- In Academic Support sessions, students receive support from staff and trained volunteers with homework, coursework and revision or take part in a bespoke IntoUniversity curriculum. During the holidays revision sessions are also provided to support students preparing for exams including SATs, GCSE and A-Level.

- At Primary level – the FOCUS programme and Primary Academic Support curriculum are designed to support and enhance the National Curriculum whilst being themed on a university degree topic.

- Academic Support includes independent learning projects for KS3 and a Future Readiness programme which is designed to build metacognitive skills.

- As part of the Primary FOCUS programme, students experience university style learning on a curriculum area chosen by the school.

- For Secondary FOCUS, some workshops focus on independent learning, and learning techniques.

- Mentoring includes a focus on Academic Support, sharing study and learning techniques, and group events on study skills.

The approach to learning is the same across all programmes and educational stages, and all recognise the importance of improving literacy and numeracy skills – reflecting the evidence of the importance of maths and English in helping to overcome barriers to progression in Higher Education (see for example, Fabian Society, 2015).

There are some different emphases depending on the attainment stage. For example, for KS2 pupils sitting SATs, the focus is on improving skills building on the National Curriculum, awareness of strengths and weaknesses, beginning to shape independent learning and beginning to understand learning styles. For Secondary school pupils in the years before GCSE exams, the focus is on critical thinking, planning and monitoring their learning, knowing which areas they need to develop and having good revision techniques.

The hypotheses below were tested in the research in order to understand which parts of the programme might have most impact on attainment.
- There are programme strands that are more explicitly central to attainment.
- The programme strands that are less focused on learning might also be important and play a role in improving attainment – although it might be harder to identify how.
- There is likely to be a combination of different strands that people perceive as having more or less of an impact on attainment.
- It might be the case that people perceive the impact on attainment to be more diluted if young people only do one strand, or a certain combination of strands.

Figure 16 shows how the connection between programme activities, outcomes and barriers might be conceived on the original draft of the theoretical model. The right-hand side of the model represents aspects that are closest to attainment. The dots against the different programme activities represent IntoUniversity’s hunches over which are strongest in relationship to attainment and different outcomes.7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overall IntoUniversity goals</th>
<th>Build community tradition of HE participation</th>
<th>Young people from disadvantaged backgrounds attain a university place or another chosen aspiration</th>
<th>Close the gap in destinations between young people from disadvantaged backgrounds and the rest</th>
<th>Lacking softer skills such as confidence and self-efficacy</th>
<th>Attitudes to learning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Main barriers facing young people</td>
<td>Supportive and aspirational familial and community contexts</td>
<td>Knowledge of HE progression and pathways</td>
<td>Motivation and aspiration to go to university</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IMPROVING OUTCOMES</td>
<td>Supporting young people to mitigate the impact of key barriers</td>
<td>Young people need grades that reflect their potential and enable them to take their desired pathway. The key moment in a young person’s educational journey is their KS5 results</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROGRAMME ACTIVITIES providing opportunities for enhanced learning and hands-on experience across programme strands</th>
<th>Non-core activities</th>
<th>Primary focus</th>
<th>Secondary focus</th>
<th>Mentoring</th>
<th>Primary Academic support</th>
<th>Secondary A5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Improved attitudes towards HE amongst families</td>
<td>Greater understanding of future options</td>
<td>Greater optimism about the future</td>
<td>Improved key softer skills</td>
<td>Increased confidence in academic abilities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | |

Figure 16: The link between activities, outcomes and barriers on the draft theoretical model

7 The revised theoretical models are presented in Section 5 of the report.
The next section of the report presents the findings from the evidence review and the feedback from the fieldwork on the relationship between different programme activities and attainment.

**Findings from the evidence review**

The IntoUniversity model is unique, and so drawing direct comparisons between this model and other similar education interventions is a challenge. However, by considering the three strands of the model individually, it is possible to draw comparisons with similar programmes and trials and consider what has been shown to have the greatest impact on attainment.

**Small-group tutoring and after-school support:** For Academic Support, evidence can be drawn from literature on small-group tutoring and after-school support. Interventions of this nature have been shown to have a positive impact on student outcomes, and the EEF has stated that overall, small-group tutoring is an effective delivery approach. Specific examples of evidenced impact include a 2018 EEF trial which trained university students and recent graduates to give disadvantaged Primary pupils small-group tuition. The study found that the students made three months’ additional progress in their maths compared to those who did not take part.

An independent evaluation conducted by UCAS (2016) of the Brilliant Club found that students who took part in the charity’s tutoring programme had a higher university progression rate than their peers, with 54% progressing to a selective university, compared to a national average of 12%. The evidence suggests that the most effective tutoring approaches take the form of a ‘learning conversation’, actively involve students in learning and provide clear assessment and feedback (see for example Leper 2002; Graesser 2011; Chi, 2000).

**Mentoring:** There is some evidence from meta-analyses that mentoring can have a positive effect across academic, social and emotional, behavioural and attitudinal domains (DuBois et al, 2011). There is also the likelihood this is higher for some disadvantaged young people. Mentoring has been found to have a beneficial impact on student wellbeing, particularly for students from a disadvantaged background (US Department of Education, 2009).

The link to attainment for mentoring and aspiration focused programmes has been difficult to establish from the current evidence – partly because academic outcomes are not always the main function of mentoring and sit alongside other potential positive impacts such as school attendance and behaviour. The Children’s Commissioner (2018) reference that the EEF (in a previous version of its teaching and learning toolkit on mentoring) found an additional benefit from mentoring of one month’s progress on academic attainment for disadvantaged pupils relative to their more affluent peers. However, this was balanced against the potentially negative effects of mentoring relationships being unsuccessful – something that is echoed elsewhere in the literature.

Overall, EEF’s toolkit (2018) largely suggests that mentoring has little impact on academic outcomes, and that the impacts of individual programmes vary. School-based Mentoring programmes appear to be less effective than community-based approaches, potentially due to
there being fewer opportunities for young people to develop lasting relationships with adult role models (EEF, 2018). It has been suggested that the characteristics of successful Mentoring programmes may include recruiting mentees with intermediate levels of difficulties, providing ongoing training and support to mentors, matching mentors and mentees on personality styles and regular monitoring and evaluation (Podmore et al, 2015).

Reviewed studies tend to find a positive but modest impact of mentoring, with only small effect sizes. The current evidence base is limited, and there is a lack of longitudinal studies exploring long-term impacts of mentoring, for example on career opportunities and earnings in later life. Evidence supporting the positive impacts of mentoring on young people, and the factors that influence this is still developing and is an area that needs more research.

Workshops and enrichment activities: Several of the key elements of the FOCUS programmes, including aspiration raising, developing key skills for the future and encouraging enjoyment of learning have already had their link to attainment outlined in the discussion of outcomes and barriers earlier in this report. Evaluations of similar programmes can, however, shed further light on the potential impact of FOCUS. The Children’s University programme provides activities including after-school clubs, visits to universities and museums, and volunteering opportunities with the aim of improving the aspirations and attainment of pupils aged 5 to 14. Students who took part were rewarded with credits, certificates and a ‘graduation’ event. The trial found positive impacts on Key Stage 2 Maths and reading results equivalent to about two months’ additional progress. The students also made small improvements in other outcomes such as teamwork, social responsibility, and aspirations. Students who took part in the programme were more likely to name a professional occupation as their future aspiration, and to report feeling more empathy, self-confidence, resilience, and happiness compared to those in a control group. (EEF/Durham University, 2017)

Programme activities central to attainment – Academic Support

There was consensus across the fieldwork that Academic Support has the most direct impact on attainment. It provides an environment that meets a variety of different student needs – from those who might be struggling at school, to those who want to enhance their learning and push themselves further. Some IntoUniversity staff also felt that it is important that young people are proactive about making the most of the sessions and using time effectively for Academic Support sessions to have the most impact.

“In terms of Academic Support, it really depends how the student chooses to access that strand. If there are students who come, and they make the most of our volunteer who has recently retired as a chemistry teacher, and they say, ‘I don’t get my science homework’, that is more direct impact”. (Education Worker, Regional, new centre).

There were many direct examples that Academic Support students and parents gave of improvements to attainment which included:

- Moving up levels or sets
I feel like if I didn’t join Into University in Year 6, I wouldn’t be able to be in Set Three for English. And if I didn’t continue going to Into University in the first couple of terms of school, I wouldn’t have moved up a Set in maths either”. (Secondary student, AS & Mentoring, Regional centre)

- Receiving better marks

“My reading where because I’ve got the highest marks I think that IU has helped me with it and I think I’ve really improved with it because my last one was 27 out of 50 and now it’s gone up to 49”. (Primary student, AS, Regional centre)

- Gradual improvements to attainment

“Her spelling’s getting better, writing’s getting better, reading’s getting better, it’s all slowly improving”. (Primary parent, AS, Regional centre)

- Catching up when they are behind

“I know that I have definitely improved, in the start of Year 2 I used to be below average, my teacher now says I’ve improved, that I’m higher than average and she says she doesn’t know what’s happened and that I’m turning into a butterfly”. (Primary student, AS, London centre)

Different stakeholders provided considerable insight into how Academic Support could improve attainment:

- **1-2-1 support**: This element of the sessions was highly valued, with staff and volunteers on hand with knowledge to help students. At all levels (but particularly Primary) young people spoke about the value of checking and consolidating their learning – for example, being able to have more time to go over things they had not understood at school, and breaking tasks down into more manageable parts. They often described how Into University staff and volunteers made the content easier to understand. This was the same for Secondary students, but they also emphasised the value of specialist support on a range of subjects.

“When it came to sociology, my teacher wasn’t always available to help me individually. I feel like the fact that [Into University staff member] had a degree was helpful. The times I needed help and wasn’t getting it from my own teacher, it was a good feeling that there was someone else I could get help from”. (Secondary student, AS, FOCUS & Mentoring, London centre)

“If you are struggling with anything at school, it’s a bit of back up education. At school, you might have to do assessments and things. Here it is a bit more relaxed education and it gives you a bit of a boost”. (Primary student, AS & FOCUS, Regional centre)

- **Focusing on core skills in a more creative way**: Primary students highlighted how they developed core numeracy and literacy with the sessions helping with handwriting, spelling, reading and maths in a way which made learning fun and engaging.
"In English, I used to get a whole page of spelling mistakes and I used to get upset. But since I have been coming to IntoUniversity I have been making less mistakes, one or two and it has also boosted my confidence". (Primary student, AS & FOCUS, Regional centre)

“They can be more creative than schools can be with learning. If you’re doing maths, it’s applied in a way to a subject, rather than just, let’s do the times tables. So, it’s the practical application. I think some of it’s the pacing”. (Primary parent, Regional centre)

- **Practical support** to prepare for exams with revision and mock exam sessions as part of Academic Support was a significant element for Secondary students—who had benefitted from this ahead of their GCSEs or A-Levels.

“I remember actually doing it...I actually sat in the exam. I chose to do a further maths stat exam, obviously. And time was tight. But it was actually very good to sit a paper, to be in the exam mode. I actually felt like I was doing an exam”. (Secondary student, AS & FOCUS, London centre)

“We have a GCSE room for Academic Support so everyone in there is revising. We’ll print out past papers, and usually the ratio in the GCSE room is one to six, which is pretty good. So they get quite focussed support”. (Education Worker, Regional, established centre)

Although the majority of stakeholders were positive about the effect of Academic Support on attainment, there were a small number of young people and parents who did not feel IntoUniversity improved their marks and attainment at the point in time they were interviewed.

“He performed less than expected…He got a seven in maths, which is great. Obviously I cannot fault that, but what I’m trying to say is he got below every grade he was predicted on. I don’t know why that was, but it’s not a real problem because he passed all his GCSEs”. (Secondary parent, Regional centre)

These included some Academic Support students who could not yet see the link between homework and improved grades. Some students who had been involved for longer were also hesitant about linking any change to IntoUniversity, either because they had remained consistent in their marks, or had not achieved the grades they were expecting.

“I managed to get one A star, but everything else did remain Bs, so I don’t know. I think they’ve pushed me a bit more, but I still hold back a bit, I don’t know why”. (Alumni student, all strands, London centre)

**Programme activities central to attainment - mentoring**

Mentoring was also perceived as having a direct impact on attainment by different stakeholders – although this was less clear-cut than with Academic Support, and relatively small numbers of students receive just mentoring support. The academic components of the session could have a
real impact in terms of fostering a positive attitude to learning, as well as providing more intensive support on subject knowledge and skills.

“I think mentoring can have a really positive impact on attainment because you’ve got that one to one relationship…We certainly have pairs that are really academically minded. They weren’t necessarily building their communication skills because they’d sit in silence doing maths together. But arguably they were having a direct impact on attainment”. (Cluster Manager, Regional, established centre)

Examples that students and staff gave of improvements to attainment as a result of mentoring included:

- Helping to organise and plan learning activities such as revision

“He’s definitely brought a lot more structure to my life. We plan things out now that are coming up, which I don’t think I’d be doing if I didn’t have him. A month or two before my exams for A-Levels, he gave me revision, which definitely helped”. (Alumni, AS, FOCUS & Mentoring, 21 mentoring sessions)

- Tailored support from someone who is aligned with their interests and needs

“Academically, you’re getting that one on one help with someone that’s been chosen for you, so knows what you’re like, what your interests are, what your subjects are, where your strengths and weaknesses are”. (Alumni, AS, FOCUS & Mentoring, 33 mentoring sessions)

- Being role models that could open young people’s eyes to future opportunities and help guide choices

“Just the fact that they were someone that you picture yourself being when you grow up. They’ve been to university, something that I was planning on doing and he helped me make that choice. He had a steady job, kind of just someone you wanted to be”. (Alumni, AS, FOCUS & Mentoring, 21 mentoring sessions).

However, there were also many comments from staff that the quality of the mentor/mentee relationship could have an impact on how impactful mentoring could be. In addition, the mentoring programme has some flexibility within it, and if mentees choose to focus on the future or social elements in their sessions the impact on attainment can be limited. Stakeholders felt that this could still support important outcomes such as aspirations, motivation and soft skills, from role models that could inspire young people to achieve.

Programme activities with components that have some links to attainment – Primary FOCUS

Primary FOCUS was identified as having some impact on attainment, and this was highlighted by staff in particular, as well as some teachers. They felt that taking part in kinaesthetic activities and teamwork, could help to develop confidence and many important soft skills, which could
then have a positive impact on attainment. They also valued having the space to focus on a topic that schools had chosen.

“This year, for example, we did the Stone Age and so the whole week it was really a whole term’s worth of history so we didn’t have to do history for the rest of that term because we’d already covered it”. (Primary teacher, London centre)

However, it was also acknowledged that the main goal of the Primary FOCUS programme was on encouraging aspirations at an early age rather than SATs results.

Although the impact on attainment might be less direct than Academic Support, the FOCUS week in Year 6 was also regarded by some as an important experience. The full day visit to a university and graduation ceremony have significant benefits for young people such as increased aspiration and excitement for learning.

“The graduation is helpful. They put caps on, it’s wonderful. And other trips as well. He’s been to visit a lot of universities, and the last trip he went on three nights. And they’re excited to go there as well, when he came back he said, ‘Mummy, when I grow up I want to go to university”’. (Primary parent, London centre)

This could have a lasting impact for some students, looking back:

“I don’t think I would have gone to university if it wasn’t for the fact that I was exposed to them from such a young age...even when I came in at Year 7, I still had in mind, ‘when I finish these educational years, I’m going to be going to university’”. (Secondary student, AS & FOCUS, London centre)

The FOCUS week also has benefits for teachers as they spend more time with their students in settings outside of school. This enables them to get to know their students better, what interests them, and their preferred learning styles.

“I sit around as an observer and when you’re with the class on your own, you don’t really always pick up little skills that they have. But when you’re observing someone in a group with another adult, it’s really effective to pick up on how they’re behaving”. (Primary teacher, Regional centre)

**Programme activities that have less links with attainment – Secondary FOCUS**

Secondary FOCUS was seen as less central to attainment. Although there is an emphasis on learning techniques in the FOCUS programme, these sessions are not regular enough to have a demonstrable impact on attainment, and are often more skills-based. At Year 12-13, the workshops focus on support with personal statements and the UCAS process. However, there were some cases where young people in the research did remember the revision workshop and had taken away useful information from them.

“The workshops are very limited. But it’s still having a lot of sources to improve your education and your work at school. So I found that probably did help improve my grades but I think the kind
of Academic Support was a lot more useful than the workshops, apart from the one workshop where we did learn revision techniques”. (Secondary student. AS & FOCUS, London centre)

Staff reflected that another reason Secondary FOCUS is more removed from attainment is that compared to other aspects of IntoUniversity programmes, there are fewer opportunities for staff to get to know students as their time together is short, and more sporadic. This was supported by Secondary teachers, who valued the programme (particularly around being able to offer something additional to pupils around knowledge of Higher Education and work experience), but were cautious about there being any link to attainment – mainly because they did not have this data, or were in roles where they worked across the whole school so did not know the students well enough.

“It definitely reiterates messages that are key to the school and in a different format and with a different body of people. But without the evidence it’s hard to say. But the school must feel it’s effective as we keep running the programme. Kids talk about the workshops, and there’s a lot of enthusiasm from the students”. (Secondary teacher, London centre)

During the fieldwork observations, it was apparent that Secondary FOCUS is a different form of engagement for students, largely due to the workshops taking place in classrooms in schools, where IntoUniversity has less control over the set up and feel of the sessions. IntoUniversity also has less influence over how the workshops are presented in the wider school, and how teachers communicate with pupils.

There were some discussions and observations with staff in the fieldwork about how the wider context of a school could have an impact on how Secondary FOCUS was delivered in practice. For example, in schools where the culture is very academic, teachers noticed that the boundaries were more relaxed in the workshops, and noisier than usual classroom settings, and wanted to feel reassured all students were getting the most out of the sessions, given the pressure of having to take large groups off timetable. In these schools, it was also seen as being beneficial that there were other opportunities to signpost young people to in between workshops (for example, other providers, or staff in the school supporting young people with UCAS applications). In schools with more challenging environments, engagement in workshops could be low (with some students even walking out), but just as equally have the potential to be transformational as there might not be anything else on offer in the school. This again highlights the different way that Secondary FOCUS is delivered.

Additional programme activities that are less directly linked to attainment

Additional activities were identified as having less of a link to attainment. Staff emphasised how they worked well alongside other programme activities, and added significant value throughout a young person’s educational journey, with an emphasis on practical skills, allowing young people to explore different interests and talents, and being a gateway to other opportunities. In some of the student interviews, young people were very enthusiastic about the additional activities they had taken part in, but tended to identify changes in softer skills such as confidence and motivation, rather than connecting these experiences directly with attainment.
“The Holiday FOCUS [was the most helpful], because that one mainly boosted my confidence. We went to this circus and then we all had to perform tricks. I didn’t really want to perform any tricks because I know that I would have failed it. But because of that everyone was giving me confidence...they gave me the courage to try and then that actually perfected it”. (Secondary student, AS, FOCUS & Mentoring, London centre)

Young people found some programmes and workshops (including Business in FOCUS and Career in FOCUS) most useful for providing insight into different pathways, exploring their career interests, and helping with CVs and personal statements.

“The workshops always give me insight into different pathways and what I’m interested in. So, the workshops have been very instrumental in who I am today, because it’s taught me what I like, what I don’t like, what I’m willing to explore and what I’m willing not to explore”. (Secondary student, AS, FOCUS & Mentoring, London centre)

Teachers emphasised that these activities are most effective when followed up with guidance and information tailored to the young person. IntoUniversity was seen as being particularly good at avoiding a drop-off in support:

“You may have a very inspirational speaker or something that fires the students up. These things fade and there isn’t always a follow up and it can be quite hard to maintain that level of engagement and the enthusiasm that one-off programmes offer”. (Secondary teacher, London centre)

Combination of strands that contribute to increased attainment

The majority of stakeholders felt that the greatest impact on attainment comes from a combination of Academic Support and mentoring. Mentoring provides that extra person in a young person’s life who can provide care, support and encouragement, which is important for building resilience, as well as focusing on the foundational elements of attainment such as academic confidence and motivation. Alongside this Academic Support can provide a constant supply of 1-2-1 support for learning.

“I felt like my mentor gave me more wellbeing, emotional support that I needed to balance things out and then Academic Support made me more productive and made me use my time more wisely. Not to just, oh, I want to do things in bulk but just, slow down, narrow down on what things you want to do...”. (Secondary student, AS, FOCUS & Mentoring, Regional centre)

For Primary students, Primary FOCUS and AS could also be an important combination as Academic Support helps to maintain the benefits that young people get from FOCUS, while also helping to develop positive learning habits from an early age.

I think in Primary school, Primary FOCUS and Academic Support go very well together. Because when you see your Academic Support students in the Primary FOCUS strand, I think they are often especially engaged. They’re so excited to see the staff and to be confident and to know the space”. (Education Worker, Regional, established centre)
Conclusions

The outcomes that were tested in the research are all supported to some extent by each of the programme strands. This means there is a challenge in being precise about which combination of strands support attainment, alongside the key consideration that not every young person receives the same level and intensity of support.

In light of this, it may be more useful to draw out the components within strands that support attainment in different ways, capturing the cross-cutting elements, and how young people will come into contact with different parts of this during their journey with IntoUniversity (however short or less frequent that engagement might be). This is presented in Section 5 of this report on the implications for a revised theoretical model.

PROGRAMME ACTIVITIES AND ATTAINMENT: SUMMARY

- The evidence from the literature and the fieldwork both support the value of Academic Support and its impact on attainment – particularly using small-group tutoring outside school
- It is hard to find direct comparisons in the literature with FOCUS – but similar programmes have been found to have some impact
- Although the evidence is more mixed about mentoring, with the right conditions in place (primarily around the matching process, and ongoing reflection on how well that works), mentoring was viewed positively, especially alongside Academic Support
- Both Academic Support and Mentoring can be influenced by what young people want to take from them, so not all may see an improvement in their grades and marks
- Some FOCUS and additional activities may have a less direct impact on attainment, but they open doors to a range of opportunities that young people might not otherwise have
4.3 Programme design

There are common features of IntoUniversity’s programme design which are viewed as unique compared to some of the charity’s competitors. These are the conscious choices IntoUniversity has made to approach their work in a particular way. Figure 17 below summarises these features.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feature</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Long-term and early</td>
<td>starting with children as young as age 7 (many other programmes do not start until Year 10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differentiated/adaptable</td>
<td>with the multi strand model allowing for elements to be tailored to students’ needs (other interventions are more ‘fixed’ in their approach)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-selective based on attainment</td>
<td>taking part is not dependent on having a strong academic record (the target is disadvantage) (other programmes tend to prioritise those who are seen as having high potential)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place-based</td>
<td>with centres located in the heart of disadvantaged communities where the target students live. A significant proportion of students are recruited from households near the centre.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A partnership model</td>
<td>the centres work with partner schools in the local area, and each centre also has a partnership with the university in the area. National and local organisations/individuals provide volunteers. Staff engage with the community through open days and information sessions. Other partners in the local area include service providers (e.g. museums, sites of interest, corporate partners, funders and other local community organisations).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 17: Programme design features of IntoUniversity’s model*
The hypotheses below were tested in the research in order to understand whether any of these conscious design choices had an impact on attainment.

- There are design features which might have more of a direct impact on attainment
- Different people involved (young people, staff and volunteers, teachers) may value different elements of the design features and feel they have more of an impact on attainment
- There may be elements of these design features which stakeholders feel have little relationship to attainment – but are still valued or seen as being beneficial

Figure 18 shows how the connection between programme design features, outcomes and barriers might be conceived on the draft theoretical model (with the programme activities removed to make it easier to follow). As you move further down the draft theoretical model, it is apparent that the link to attainment is more dispersed and there are fewer dots to indicate the strength of the relationship with attainment. This challenge was addressed in the fieldwork by asking stakeholders to reflect on how the design elements related to the engagement of young people more generally, as this could then contribute in a positive (though indirect) way to attainment. This section integrates the evidence review findings with that feedback.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overall IntoUniversity goals</th>
<th>Build community tradition of HE participation</th>
<th>Young people from disadvantaged backgrounds attain a university place or another chosen aspiration</th>
<th>Close the gap in destinations between young people from disadvantaged backgrounds and the rest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Main barriers facing young people</td>
<td>Supportive and aspirational familial and community contexts</td>
<td>Knowledge of HE progression and pathways</td>
<td>Motivation and aspiration to go to university</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IMPROVING OUTCOMES</td>
<td>Lacking softer skills, such as confidence and self-efficacy</td>
<td>Atitudes to learning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting young people to mitigate the impact of key barriers</td>
<td>Improved attitudes towards HE amongst families</td>
<td>Greater understanding of future options</td>
<td>Greater optimism about the future</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Improved key softer skills</td>
<td>Improved key softer skills</td>
<td>Increased confidence in academic abilities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 18: Programme design features on the draft theoretical model**
Findings from the evidence review

Several of the common features of the IntoUniversity model, unique to its programme, are often drawn out in the literature as being best practice in education programmes. First, early and long-term interventions have been highlighted as key guiding principle for closing the attainment gap. A longitudinal study in Chicago found that students who attended a pre-school programme were more likely to stay in school longer, finish school and attend university (Ou and Reynolds, 2009) The Brilliant Club (2018) agreed that starting early is essential, while acknowledging that the majority of similar interventions target 16-18-year-olds.

DfBIS states that young people’s interests, attitudes, motivations and aspirations start to form at a relatively young age and this has an impact on whether a young person eventually applies to university. It is further argued that interventions which engage young people early could help to break down negative associations with Higher Education and normalise participation. Better quality information on future pathways from an early age is also seen as potentially beneficial (DfBIS, 2015).

An extensive study into after-school programmes conducted by Harvard University found that sustained and frequent participation in programmes is more likely to produce positive improvements than one-off or infrequent programmes (Harvard Graduate School of Education, 2008). Finally, JRF (2012) argues that interventions focused on aspiration-raising should focus more on ‘maintaining’ aspirations, rather than ‘raising’ them, suggesting a need for a longer-term intervention.

Similarly, multi-aspect approaches to tackling the attainment gap have also been highlighted as beneficial in the literature. A 2015 report from DfBIS stated that, in recognition of the fact that lack of progression to university cannot be attributed to one single barrier (other than attainment), the most effective interventions are likely to both address barriers and promote the benefits of Higher Education within a coherent programme. The ‘ideal’ approach outlined by DfBIS contains many of the same elements as the IntoUniversity model, including starting early, tailoring support according to need and providing the knowledge needed for next steps.

Across the literature, there is consensus over the positive effects of mixed-attainment groups. EEF (2018) states that students who are taught in setsstreams make slightly less progress than pupils taught in mixed attainment classes. The evidence suggests that setting and streaming has a very small negative impact for low and mid-range attaining students, and a very small positive impact for higher attainers. EEF stresses that the effects are small and that some studies have found evidence to the contrary, but that overall, it can be concluded that separating students according to prior attainment is not an effective way to raise attainment for most pupils. Separating students according to attainment may also have negative impacts on wider outcomes such as the confidence, attitudes and engagement of low-attaining pupils, by making them feel as though they cannot improve through hard work (EEF, 2018). Mixed-attainment grouping has
been shown to be especially appreciated by students with low prior attainment, due to its inclusive and collaborative environment (Tereshchenko et al, 2018).

In a review of after-school programmes and extra-curricular activities, Harvard University identified having strong partnerships as one of the three key markers of a successful programme. It was stated that high-quality programmes create effective partnerships with a variety of stakeholders, especially families, schools and communities (Harvard Graduate School of Education, 2008). The Department of Education (DofE) supports this by stating that senior leaders in more successful schools tend to work collaboratively with the local community and create links with networks outside the school (DofE, 2015). Others have highlighted the importance of university involvement in pre-entry interventions through close partnerships, to ensure that students are supported through transitions into Higher Education (The Higher Education Academy, 2012).

In their review of place-based approaches from the past 50 years, Lankelly Chase/The Institute of Voluntary Action Research (2017) concluded that there is no single correct approach. Local circumstances will vary greatly from place to place and are a key factor in determining whether the approach is successful. The report did however identify key factors that can help a place-based approach succeed, including: taking enough time to understand the local context and build strong relationships; being clear about aims and motives; working at several levels to link local developments to the wider system and ensuring that change is not dependent on individuals but is embedded in the community. In terms of examples of community-based education, EEF states that community-based Mentoring programmes tend to be more effective than those based in schools. This is assumed to be due to the opportunity for students to engage and build relationships with a wider range of new adults in a community setting. (EEF, 2018). There is some evidence to suggest that programmes and interventions around widening participation should ideally be near to where young people live – for example, Browitt & Walker (2009) found that, in a programme run at the University of Glasgow, distance from home to the programme was a key risk factor for young people withdrawing.

**Programme design features that support attainment and engagement**

Across all stakeholders, three aspects of the programme design emerged as being more central to attainment: long-term and early intervention, the adaptable model and non-selective based on prior attainment. The long-term and adaptable elements were also highlighted as being crucial to young people’s engagement more generally.

“To me IntoUniversity offers that holistic approach from Primary through to university. A lot of other organisations are very short-sighted. Whereas IntoUniversity it’s always about ‘how can we carry this forward and keep being successful and keep bringing these students up’?...It’s that whole life approach to these students rather than ‘here’s a couple of workshops’”. (Secondary teacher, Regional centre)
Long-term and starting early
The long-term and early nature of the support was identified as having a number of benefits on engagement and attainment:

- Starting the programme early is viewed as essential for stopping students getting onto the wrong track, to prepare them ahead of time for next steps and to spark an early interest in education.

- Creating a pattern of attendance that encourages young people to attend again and again – crucial for raising and maintaining levels of attainment.

- Providing much-needed continuity and stability in a young person’s life, where they are supported to develop a positive mindset and attitudes towards education in a sustained way.

- Building positive relationships over time - this was most noticeable for Academic Support, although some teachers did highlight the impact of having FOCUS workshops delivered in schools year after year.

“Once we’ve established a relationship with them, it means they’re much more likely to carry on and stay with us throughout those important years. I think it’s a lot easier to engage young kids in our fun Primary academic programme then for them to realise the benefits and continue on”. (Education Worker, Regional, established centre)

Young people who had been involved for a long time with IntoUniversity were able to articulate the benefits clearly, often speaking passionately about the difference that the programme had made to them over the years.

“Looking back, IntoUniversity’s goal is to help disadvantaged children from disadvantaged backgrounds to realise their potential. And I think that is a bold statement to make. And it’s a huge task because they’re trying to change perception. Firstly, my perception of myself as a student about where I can go, and then other people’s perception of me as a student…I’m now at one of the top universities in the country, and if you’d asked me then or asked my family then when I was at Primary school if that was going to be the case, it probably wasn’t going to be. Nobody in my family knew how to make that happen”. (Alumni, AS, FOCUS & Mentoring, London centre)

However, it was also apparent that an impact on attainment could be achieved over a short period of time.

"I was getting twos and threes. I was failing hard. I was so far behind my art coursework, there was no way of me coming back. I finished with a five. I can't go wrong with that". (Secondary student, AS, FOCUS & Mentoring, involved for one year)
Young people whose first contact with IntoUniversity was in Year 12 also reported that the programmes had made a significant difference and they reported being more informed and better prepared for Higher Education, and that they had improved their grades.

**An adaptable model**

As outlined earlier in this report, the needs of young people accessing IntoUniversity’s support do differ, and these can also fluctuate depending on their stage in the educational journey. Stakeholders appreciated that the model was adaptable, and gave IntoUniversity staff a range of tools at their disposal with the ability to refer or signpost young people between different elements of the programme, or hone in on what young people needed.

“I think one of the great things about the multi-strand is just the huge range of opportunities that are available to one single student, regardless of ability. They get access to loads of stuff. It’s a perk”. (Education Worker, London, established centre)

“So, it could be we need to help you with your maths or it could be we need to go and visit some museums, or it could be let’s bake something. So what I think is the biggest impact is this holistic way of looking at a person and what they need”. (Volunteer, Regional, established centre)

The long-term nature of the programme was also seen as allowing IntoUniversity to better understand the individual needs of students and therefore tailor support more effectively. Moreover, it was highlighted that it is rarely possible for this kind of individual approach to be delivered in schools. For example, IntoUniversity are able to provide additional focused support on a particular topic with which a student may be struggling, in an effort to improve attainment.

Students who had taken part in all programme strands, Secondary students and alumni spoke more often about the benefits of the adaptability of the IntoUniversity model, compared to the other programme design features. Students with greater levels of involvement highlighted how the programmes 'grow with them'. This leads students to feel that they can get the support they need, whether this is for academic, career or personal questions. For Secondary AS in particular, choice and ownership plays a key role, as young people increasingly decide what they want to work on. Some young people were also very clear that they needed help with a particular thing, and appreciated that IntoUniversity respected and responded to this with useful support.

“Each of them are tailored to your age and to what you're doing at the time. And I think that’s really important because I'm not the same student that I was in Primary school. I've changed”. (Alumni Student, AS, FOCUS & Mentoring, London centre)

During the workshop with Centre Leaders towards the end of the research, participants were asked to think of different student needs and the combination of strands that might best support attainment. These have been combined and summarised below to show the different ways the programme can be deployed to increase impact.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student circumstances and need</th>
<th>Which combination of strands might best support improved attainment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student</strong>: Highly engaged and motivated. Beginning to choose options but family has no experience of Higher Education (Secondary)  &lt;br&gt;<strong>Needs</strong>: Help and support to clarify options and apply for university</td>
<td>Secondary FOCUS– support with statements  &lt;br&gt;Mentoring – on academic and future goals  &lt;br&gt;Buddy programme  &lt;br&gt;Visits to universities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student</strong>: Academically strong but lacks confidence and in danger of not reaching full potential (Primary Year 6)  &lt;br&gt;<strong>Needs</strong>: Encouragement, stretching and challenging</td>
<td>Mentoring to help on social aspect and transition  &lt;br&gt;AS sessions – to meet students from other schools and get more tailored ‘push’ on learning, and help with SATs revision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student</strong>: Disengaged from learning and displaying disruptive behaviour. Chaotic home life (Primary)  &lt;br&gt;<strong>Needs</strong>: More intensive and holistic support, space away from home, encouragement to see the value and enjoyment in learning for their future</td>
<td>AS sessions to support curriculum learning, engage with the family  &lt;br&gt;Primary FOCUS to instil a love of learning  &lt;br&gt;Holiday FOCUS – break from home life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student</strong>: Has SEN and EAL (Secondary)  &lt;br&gt;<strong>Needs</strong>: Support for learning, space to practise English, and help for the family as a whole to understand the English education system</td>
<td>AS with the differentiated curriculum sessions  &lt;br&gt;Mentoring for 1-2-1 support  &lt;br&gt;Enrichment activities tailored to interests</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Non-selective**

Stakeholders highlighted the fact that IntoUniversity’s programme is non-selective based on prior attainment as being important in having an impact on attainment. Given the attainment gap starts early, stakeholders agreed that students should not be punished for this.
“Not dependent on academic record is really important because it doesn’t exclude people or make people think that they’re not clever enough or too clever and then don’t need to work. Having a mixed group means that we bring different ideas to the table”. (Education Worker, London, established centre)

Teachers were especially positive towards IntoUniversity’s decision to not exclude students who may have the potential to flourish but may not meet the criteria of more academically selective programmes.

“I don’t believe [in sorting students according to their attainment] because then already children are thinking, ‘I’m the one that can’t’. Everybody is mixed. They learn better and research does show that children learn better from their peers”. (Primary teacher, London centre)

The main other benefits identified by stakeholders were:

- Mixed attainment groups allow students to develop the communication and collaboration skills which can, in turn, support their own attainment and development. Students spoke about how they value the chance to help and be helped by their peers during sessions.

  “On my table, lots of people don’t know some words and then we’ll look for them. I’m the only one that knows a lot of words and I can help other people”. (Primary student, AS & FOCUS, London centre)

- Mixed attainment groups playing an important role in boosting students’ confidence in their academic abilities. This is particularly true for lower attaining students, who are able to work alongside those of a higher attainment in a positive and encouraging environment, rather than at school where they might be placed in a lower set which can undermine their confidence in their abilities and limit their aspirations.

  “That’s the type of things that bolster up their attainment, their confidence levels, everything like that. They’re not being measured up against anyone but themselves. I think that’s really important”. (Volunteer, London, established centre)

The role of partnerships and place-based working in IntoUniversity’s approach

There was agreement among stakeholders that of all aspects of the programme design, the place-based and partnership features are less central to attainment. However, in the stakeholder discussions, it was apparent that these elements are essential parts of what makes IntoUniversity unique. Without these core components in place, the programme could not be delivered in the same way, or be able to support the aspects that do more directly link to attainment. This section explores the feedback on local partnership and place-based working from staff, teachers and parents.
Local partnerships

The strongest partnerships centres we have are with schools, and the proximity to centres was seen as a real strength (they are typically within a 3.5km radius of the centre). In some cases, there were examples of IntoUniversity staff having strong relationships with teachers and being able to align their support for individual students.

“If we notice something in the student, we’ll call the school and say, ‘okay, we notice that that student struggles in this. How do you work with the student on a daily basis?’ They’ll give us what they do and then we’ll do that in Academic Support”. (Centre Leader, London, established centre)

The majority of IntoUniversity centres has a university partner, and in several of the case study sites there was the opportunity to interview those working in the Widening Participation teams. The opportunities these partnerships presented were seen as beneficial on both sides – with universities being able to increase their reach into local communities, and centres having access to university buildings to help students explore the campuses and what is on offer.

“Working with local universities…I think it’s amazing. If you spoke to one of our average students, they will have been to Bristol or Bath multiple times. I think that’s really important”. (Education Worker, Regional, established centre)

IntoUniversity staff highlighted the importance of wider partners in terms of the resources upon which they are able to draw from the local community as volunteers or through leading sessions where partners can share knowledge and support students. The fact that large corporate firms in London wanted to work with IntoUniversity to provide volunteers was described as a huge benefit – both in terms of freeing up centre staff time to work with more Academic Support students, but also through creating further work experience opportunities.

“They do get opportunities and their contacts are incredible. If you have a student who has an interest in a particular area…They will find somebody in the industry or the field of work or whatever, and try and connect”. (Secondary teacher, London centre)

However, one area that several centres mentioned that they would like to develop further was having a wider web of partners in the local area. Centre leaders in London (where both centres were more established) did talk about making the most of other opportunities locally - for example, museums and community farms - as well as working with other organisations and services that support families. This could either be when it was necessary (such as a safeguarding concern), but also to draw on the expertise of voluntary organisations to benefit students - for example, asking a young carers organisation to come to a centre and present on their work. However, they also acknowledged they were pushed for time, and would like to do more to meet other people and groups in the local community.

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8 One of the case study centres in the fieldwork did not have a university partner
Place-based approach

For internal purposes, IntoUniversity define place in terms of a geographical boundary around a centre that forms part of the feasibility study work ahead of a new centre opening. Being ‘place-based’ is more than this in practice, and is a fundamental part of the centre model. The significance of being place-based was not a major focus in the fieldwork interviews, given the difficulties in drawing a clear line between place-based working and attainment. However, there were many benefits of a place-based model that were identified that are broader than forming and developing local partnerships.

Centres are often in community buildings, alongside other local organisations (youth centres, libraries, local authority services) and groups that hire the space on a more ad-hoc basis. Having a permanent and physical presence was regarded positively.

“It's not just there and gone, and that happens a lot in education…It's that sustained element there and consistent and that's what's different. It's in a physical state”. (Primary teacher, Regional centre)

All stakeholder groups were quick to emphasise the importance of community-based centres, that are local, free and open all year round in terms of accessibility. Parents in particular praised the local location of the centres, which allow students to either make their own way to and from the centres themselves or do not place additional travel burdens on busy parents who need to pick up their children.

“I think it’s definitely better that it’s completely independent, because they feel like they’re going to their place rather than another round of schooling. It’s more like a club to them, focused on learning”. (Primary parent, Regional centre)

Many stakeholders across all groups interpreted ‘place-based’ as being a space in the community where young people and families go to (that was different from school, and a ‘home away from home’), rather than having a wider impact or ripple effect on the area.

“A lot of the parents either know each other anyway, because their children are all at school together, and they see each other when they’re here and that supports those family links as well…to be known in the community as a safe place that they can bring their children to and can pick them up and have a chat to someone when they’re here”. (Centre Leader, Regional, established centre)

Whilst several of the centres did describe being at the heart of the community and well-integrated in the local area, there were also some who questioned how well they might be known beyond the young people, friends and families involved. Whilst there was undoubtedly a ‘buzz’ around the centres in some cases, it could be harder to establish if people in the wider neighbourhood were aware of the centres.

The other main aspect of being ‘place-based’ that was emphasised was the ability of centres to understand, respond and adapt to the influence of the local context. This was seen as
being vitally important when working with young people and parents, and avoiding any potential charge that the centres do not understand the area and people living there.

In the London centres, some of the challenges of living in the capital were raised, such as the reputation of an area, gentrification, tensions with the police and not feeling safe in certain postcodes. Staff were aware that some of their young people could be directly influenced by these experiences, and emphasised that they tried to make sure that the centres were safe spaces where young people could talk about these issues.

“There’s lots going on…seeing your areas changing but seeing that it’s not necessarily changing for you, and it’s changing for people that are not from here and feeling that there is no hope”.

(Centre Leader, London, established centre)

In some of the regional centres, living in areas where there were few opportunities, and visible cuts to local youth services, community centres and leisure facilities were also mentioned as challenges. Centre Leaders were often very conscious of the influence of this on young people.

“Young people are easily drawn into drug and alcohol and crime, we have county lines, and there are gang issues. There are more opportunities to not succeed I think, than there are to succeed”.

(Local stakeholder, Regional, new centre)

The local context could also impact on what centres can access or deliver – for example, in areas where there are fewer resources, or options for trips, or where parents were reluctant for their children to travel far from the area. However, this issue was not unique to regional centres, and it was recognised that outer London boroughs experience the same challenge – being further away from businesses and large cultural sites that help with enrichment activities. Some centres felt they struggled to recruit volunteers because of their locations being too far away from workplaces, and therefore too inconvenient for people to make a regular commitment.

Although IntoUniversity’s programme is well codified and delivered in a standard way, staff felt that it was a positive that they could adapt aspects of the content to reflect the local area and demographics. For example, they could integrate content that was relevant to local history or adapt to different school priorities, as well as take into account differences between communities at a very local level. In cities where there was more than one centre operating, the centre leads were clear about the different ways they needed to respond – for example, a challenge in one part of the city might be a high number of students with EAL, whereas in another part of the city, capitalising on high levels of motivation amongst young people could be a priority.

“There might be different priorities to deal with for student attainment. But it is always with the young person. I think that is why being based in a community is so important to get to know what the barriers are. And then have a tailor-made solution to that”. (Cluster Manager, Regional, established centre)
Conclusions

Overall, the insights from the fieldwork suggest that the design features are fundamental to the holistic nature of IntoUniversity’s support. However, it is difficult to pinpoint the exact impact on attainment. There was also an indication in the research that not all young people require a long-term approach – for some who engage with IntoUniversity later on, the programme can still be impactful in the short term, depending on their needs at that particular point. This points to the importance of continuing to understand the different types of students that IntoUniversity engages and understand their journeys through the programmes.

PROGRAMME DESIGN FEATURES AND ATTAINMENT: SUMMARY

- There is significant evidence of the positive impact of early and long-term interventions on attainment, and narrowing the gap that is present from the beginning of education. An adaptable approach is well supported in literature looking at similar programmes (although there is less hard evidence for this).
- This highlights the value of IntoUniversity’s model where support is tailored to a young person’s needs and interests, ensuring they can signpost and create the right opportunities that bolster their attainment.
- Mixed attainment groups have also been identified as being important for supporting attainment, and the collaborative environment this fosters at centres was particularly valued.
- There is little evidence on the impact of place-based or partnership working on attainment. However, the way that centres are developing partnerships, and responding to their local context is reflected in the literature as good practice, and are fundamental parts of the IntoUniversity offer to students and families.

4.4 Culture and ethos

IntoUniversity feel they create a distinctive experience for students which is engrained in the culture and ethos of the organisation and the way they work with young people. This is primarily based around a set of environmental factors (settings), people (the relationships involved in the model) and the approach taken to working with young people, summarised in Figure 19 below.
The hypotheses below were tested in the research in order to understand any possible relationship between culture and ethos and attainment.

- There are aspects of the culture and ethos elements that are likely to have more of an impact on attainment
- Different people involved (young people, staff and volunteers, teachers) may perceive certain aspects of IntoUniversity’s support as having an impact on young people’s engagement which then might indirectly impact on attainment
- Young people might not experience IntoUniversity in the intended way – impacting on their engagement and motivation

On the draft theoretical model (see Figure 20), it was apparent that isolating different culture and ethos elements against outcomes for young people (the dots showing the strength of the attainment relationship) was not the most useful way of exploring the significance of these to attainment.
A further challenge is that because the different culture/ethos elements cut across all aspects of IntoUniversity’s work, searching for findings in the literature from comparable programmes is not straightforward.

Many of the themes that are relevant to IntoUniversity’s people, settings and approach to working with young people have already been introduced throughout this report. As a result, this section of the report presents the findings from the fieldwork in a different format, describing how each element plays out in practice in IntoUniversity’s centres, summarising insight from stakeholders’ experiences of these, and unpicking how they support all aspects of IntoUniversity’s work – highlighting where possible if these support attainment more clearly.

IntoUniversity’s core organisational values are not discussed separately, as the majority of respondents felt these cut across all of the work the charity does.

Findings from the evidence review

Educational culture and ethos appears to have a critical impact on attainment. This has not been explored in the literature in contexts that are directly applicable to IntoUniversity’s delivery, but through the evidence review, literature on culture in schools and the impact on attainment was taken into account. A school’s culture is by its nature difficult to define, due to it often centring on atmosphere and unwritten values. This lack of an agreed definition has in turn meant that it is difficult to consistently measure and therefore replicate a school climate or culture. In spite of this, Maxwell et al (2017) have highlighted three key areas that have been shown to contribute to school climate and culture: the emphasis placed on the personal growth or academic goals of

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**Figure 20: The connection between culture and ethos features and outcomes on the draft theoretical model**

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students; high quality and consistent interpersonal relationships within a school, and agreed norms, including a shared understanding of acceptable behaviour.

School climate has been shown to be an important predictor of a students' emotional and behavioural outcomes. In various studies from the United States, culture has been shown to impact on a students' self-esteem (Way et al., 2007) and mental health (Brand et al., 2003; Roeser et al., 2000). School culture also appears to have an impact on students' behaviour, with positive cultures shown to have reduced: bullying (Espelage et al., 2014; Turner et al., 2014), delinquency (Gottfredson et al., 2005), and alcohol and drug use (Brand et al., 2003). Finally, not only is school climate an important predictor of attainment, but a student’s perception of their school’s culture has also been shown to be a key factor in improving student learning and achievement. A 2017 study found that students who feel that their school has a more ‘positive’ climate tend to achieve higher results (Maxwell et al, 2017).

There are also insights in the literature relating to relationships between young people and staff which have some relevance to IntoUniversity’s approach. According to the Department of Education, high performing schools in disadvantaged areas are those that develop positive relationships between staff, parents and pupils, encourage the aspirations of students and regularly celebrate success and achievements, involving parents in these celebrations where possible (DofE, 2018). Moreover, a 2018 study which explored the impact of teachers positively greeting students at the door found that classes using the strategy saw significant increase in the amount of time that students engaged with a lesson and a decrease in disruptive behaviour. Teachers also reported finding this strategy to be a reasonable addition to their day, suggesting that it could be a low-effort yet high-impact strategy.

As discussed earlier, the literature has outlined some benefits of provision that takes place outside of school, and in community settings, such as the higher impact shown for mentoring schemes that take place outside of schools due to the opportunity to meet a wider range of adults (EEF, 2018). The majority of the research in this area explores the impact of after-school provision within a school (see for example Callanan M et al, 2016 for the value of after-school clubs for disadvantaged children), with little evidence of comparisons being made between delivering activities inside or outside a school. In terms of the impact of settings, the EEF (2018) concluded that the built environment is unlikely to impact on attainment except in extreme circumstances, such as extreme noise or heat.

The IntoUniversity experience

In the fieldwork, young people were asked to sum up in three words what the IntoUniversity experience meant to them. The word clouds for Primary and Secondary students are presented below.
Figure 21: Primary student word cloud

Figure 22: Secondary student word cloud
Across all the feedback, stakeholders repeatedly emphasised that IntoUniversity was built on kindness and calmness, often contrasting with experiences elsewhere in young people’s lives which were stressful, unhelpful, and disempowering.

“She actually calls it ‘kind club’. That’s what she refers to it to. She says everyone’s so kind. She doesn’t refer to it as IntoUniversity. She’ll say, ‘am I at kind club tomorrow?’”. (Primary parent, Regional centre)

Although this was explained in a myriad of ways, the feedback from young people and other stakeholders supports the general hypothesis that the distinctive culture/ethos elements are based around the three key ingredients identified in the theoretical model that mean when a young person attends a centre they have a positive experience:

- Accessing a friendly, safe and welcoming space (settings)
- Receiving support and encouragement from peers, staff and volunteers (people)
- Interactions based on trust and respect (approach)

**IntoUniversity settings**

As outlined throughout this report, IntoUniversity strongly asserts the value of a ‘home-from-home’ environment that provides a fresh start at the end of the day. This supports attainment by providing a positive setting where learning is celebrated, and young people could be with like-minded peers, whereas at school, lessons could be disrupted by people who do not want to learn.

“I feel like everybody here wants to do well, and it's kind of, a little bit easier to get along with people who have the same kind of mind-set as you and want to do the same thing you do”. (Secondary student, AS, FOCUS & Mentoring, Regional centre)

In young people’s responses, the value of centres was repeatedly highlighted and it was clear that the centres were places they liked coming to at the end of the day, even when they were tired, or had been through a bad day at school.

“It’s nice to come at the end of the day. School is tiring. Here you can work, you can sit. It’s nice to come to an environment where you can do what you want and also have a goal. It doesn’t feel a place where you have to have wars”. (Secondary student, AS & Mentoring, London centre)

The feedback was consistent across different ages – for example, many respondents talked about having a space free from distraction where they could concentrate, and that it felt safe and free from ‘drama’ or ‘commotion’. Homework was often the first word they used to describe what they had been doing at the centre, or what IntoUniversity meant to them.
“You’re in an environment where there’s just work. If I was at home, I would find any opportunity to distract myself or to justify, ‘oh, I’ll give myself a break’. But because everyone’s working around you, you have to work”. (Secondary student, AS, FOCUS & Mentoring, Regional centre)

There were a number of other aspects about the settings that different young people drew out:

- Primary students talked about feeling welcome and noticing people greeting them, as well as being more relaxed

“Sometimes you have to pretend to be someone you’re not but at IntoUniversity you can just be yourself”. (Primary student, AS & FOCUS, Regional centre)

- Secondary students often emphasised valuing the resources that were available, the fact that spaces were quiet, and that they could knuckle down and focus, but also walk around open spaces and approach people for help when they needed

“If you need to do homework on a laptop, there’s a laptop to use. If you need to draw something, there’s a table for that and different things available to use”. (Secondary student, AS, FOCUS & Mentoring, Regional centre)

“I would describe it as a safe zone. Every time I come here I know what’s going to happen, I know the gist and what to do inside. I know what I’m doing.”. (Secondary student, AS, FOCUS & Mentoring, London centre)

- Some of the older pupils reflected back that the centres were also spaces to try things out and be silly – which was a more relaxed environment than school

“It’s this studious place that’s not always serious and hard work, but you can just come and talk to someone, whether it's just about work or anything in general. This is more of a fun environment, but still you’re working”. (Secondary student, AS, FOCUS & Mentoring, Regional centre)

IntoUniversity people

There is a high staff to student ratio at IntoUniversity centres which enables relationship building over time to take place in a meaningful way. Many of the different elements already identified in this report as supporting attainment – such as the level of 1-2-1 support, the specialisms of staff, and the ability to shape aspects of the programme around young people’s needs – are down to the personal attributes and knowledge of staff that ultimately mean young people trust them, want their advice, and feel able to ask questions in ways that they cannot always do with other adults in their lives.

The fieldwork was a chance to explore what makes these staff/student relationships unique, and the value young people place in them. IntoUniversity operate a six-week training programme which all centre staff go through. This emphasises the importance of having a positive outlook on work and life, being imaginative and creative, good at relating to people and wanting to see
change in the world. The need to be passionate and enthusiastic about young people and flexible in their approach is a key feature.

Many staff interviewed in the fieldwork described how they had worked in roles involving young people before, been teachers, or were interested in going into teaching. IntoUniversity appealed because there was more flexibility to work with young people from a wide age range over the long term, and address gaps in the education system. They also had strong motivations aligned to IntoUniversity’s mission which translated into their enthusiasm for working with young people.

“I’ve always had that passion of raising aspirations. I’m from the North East. And a lot of my friends, not very many students went off to university. I felt very privileged to have been able to go, and want to share that experience with other people”. (Centre Leader, Regional, established centre)

It was apparent that staff operated in a very different way to the usual interactions students might have with adults, which meant they could be more open and friendly in their approach.

“We call ourselves adults and first name and we’re just supposed to be role models and responsible adults who don’t teach them things but we learn about subjects together”. (Education Worker, Regional, established centre)

Alongside the workers, volunteers (from a variety of different sources) are expected to provide inspiration and encouragement and have strong interpersonal skills in line with the IntoUniversity values. Older volunteers often described their motivations as wanting to give something back, having been in educational roles previously, or being passionate about the value of education. Younger volunteers (for example, who were at university), often spoke about coming from similar backgrounds as the students, wanting to share their subject knowledge, alongside developing their own skills

“I think especially because I grew up in quite a similar social background to all of these kids, I know how important and how impactful a good education can be. I thought I wanted to give back because of what I’ve been able to achieve”. (Volunteer, London, established centre)

In the observations in the settings during the fieldwork, it was apparent that volunteers are essential to the running of the Academic Support sessions, and fully integrated into the delivery. Staff and volunteers were also full of praise for each other in the interviews.

Primary students particularly highlighted that staff were friendly, and Secondary students tended to reflect more on how staff were their advocates, and that they trusted their advice. Older students valued that staff were very relatable, often having just been through university themselves, and they noticed small things like staff keeping in touch during stressful periods such as exams. The quotes below from young people are just a small snapshot of the many ways young people talked about their relationships with staff:

- Staff having a positive outlook
“You never feel like they’re going to judge you for getting it wrong or be angry at you, or think you’re stupid. They’re just really nice people to work with”. (Alumni, AS, FOCUS & Mentoring, London centre)

- Staff being caring

“The staff will give you a smile and cheer you up, even with one look they’ll make you feel better. The staff are just like you, they are people that will help you, they are kind and caring and they are just like friends”. (Primary student, AS, London centre)

- Staff believing in young people

“They had a really nice personality, they were really optimistic and they never underestimated my ability. I will always be grateful because it gave me that nice push towards believing in myself and trying to achieve what I wanted to achieve, without thinking that my differences would put me at a disadvantage”. (Alumni, AS, FOCUS & Mentoring, Regional centre)

- Staff being approachable

“Teachers are in a higher position so they keep the student and teacher relationship whereas at IntoUniversity sometimes they act as friends so they are very easily approach and they share their life stories with us. So, you can relate”. (Secondary student, AS & FOCUS, London centre)

- Staff having normal conversations

“We were both quite into maybe just trainers or something like that. Yes, I know it sounds silly but it’s the small stuff, that human element that makes you feel warmer and engaged”. (Alumni, AS, FOCUS & Mentoring, Regional centre)

IntoUniversity staff often become important role models for the young people involved in the programme and students were frequently able to recall the universities that staff had attended. This impact is intensified when students are able to strongly identify with the staff member, particularly if they were of the same ethnic background.

“We have a really diverse community. We have more non-White students than we have White students. I think it’s important that we have people of colour in our centre working here...Across IntoUniversity, we could definitely increase the diversity of our staff”. (Education Worker, London, established centre)

The importance of young people being able to see people in their community that they have grown up with being part of the centres was emphasised, so they could relate to people from similar backgrounds who have had different journeys.

“And [the university] has been great in that we’ve had a number of ambassadors who have grown up locally and are now there. So, we’re not holding up these ambassadors as people they have nothing in common with, they’re just normal people which makes it seem more real”. (Centre Leader, Regional, new centre)
All stakeholder groups spoke of the pastoral role that centres provide to some students (and families). Part of this relates closely to the environment (being calm and relaxed), and the encouragement young people consistently receive. However, it is also more nuanced than that, and young people talked about the way staff could recognise their emotional needs, and proactively reach out to them.

“I feel like they can really tell when you’re not quite on your game or, you’re not really on this. They’ll always make an effort to have a chat with you when we first come here”. (Secondary student, AS, FOCUS & Mentoring, Regional centre)

It was common for students of all ages to talk about feeling unhappy and stressed (for older students this was often related to exams), and the positive impact IntoUniversity could have.

“They look at your mental health, they support you in anything you need. But they also make sure that you can keep up with it emotionally. A-Levels for me were very emotionally challenging”. (Alumni, AS, FOCUS & Mentoring, Regional centre)

“There are always adults watching over you making sure nothing happens to you. One time I was really sad because something happened at school, but they pulled me aside and made me cheer up”. (Primary student, AS, London centre)

Although this section has focused on relationships between staff and young people, reflecting earlier themes in this report, it is also important to acknowledge that IntoUniversity features relationships between young people, and between staff and families – which further support engagement with the programme.

The IntoUniversity approach to working with young people

The IntoUniversity approach to working with young people is based on positive action which runs through its behaviour management approach and culture. There is a shared set of beliefs and expectations in the interactions between staff and students. Centres have Positive Action Zones which also encourage students to be positive to their peers. The approach links closely to the growth mindset approach in supporting learning.

The different aspects of this have already been explored throughout the report, with the strong focus that IntoUniversity has on encouraging young people to believe in themselves and not give up, and young people recognising the level of support and encouragement they receive at the centres. In the fieldwork, it was apparent how much this approach runs through all interactions.

“We’re trying to celebrate with them as much as possible, their achievements and the fact that they have chosen to use their time to invest in themselves by coming to IntoUniversity”. (Cluster Manager, London, established centre)

Staff were clear that positive feedback and praise and avoiding negative judgments could feed into confidence in academic abilities. Many young people receive attention for positive aspects of learning, instead of behavioural issues.
“When you’ve left you know that there’s somebody in here that is going to be proud of you no matter what you’ve done”. (Secondary student, AS & Mentoring, Regional centre)

In this sense, the approach to working with young people is perhaps the element of IntoUniversity’s culture and ethos that can be most directly linked to attainment, but it was also a key factor in engagement – encouraging young people to return to centres, and identifying them as places where it was OK to have had a bad day, and to come in and start again.

Other examples highlighted in the fieldwork included:

- Staff do not shout at students, or reprimand them for bad behaviour, and instead explore young people’s frustrations.

  “Allowing them to test boundaries is important, and not just shutting them down. ‘I can see that you’re frustrated or angry but do you want to tell me why?’ Rather than saying ‘go outside’ or ‘you’re not allowed here’. Exclusion doesn’t work. It’s important that the young people know our values are compassion and school’s not easy. Being a young person’s not easy and we get that”. (Centre Leader, London, established centre)

- The value of reward systems in motivating students

  “When I get star of the week it makes me feel really happy and it makes me feel appreciated. And when I don’t it encourages me to work harder”. (Primary student, AS, London centre)

- Phrasing feedback positively

  “I might say ‘you got four out of ten and yesterday you got two out of ten, that’s so great. That’s two marks more’. Whereas if I was ‘where did the six marks go’?’. It’s such a huge difference”. (Education Worker, London, established centre)

- Not being afraid to ask – a culture of ‘no wrong answers’

  “We don’t really understand this. The way they teach it at school, everyone else gets it, but I don’t. Please could you find a way in which we can work it out together?”. (Alumni, AS, FOCUS & Mentoring, London centre)

Conclusions

The findings from the fieldwork suggest that the aspects of IntoUniversity’s programme that are about settings, people and the approach are essential in supporting young people’s engagement with the programme. These interact to create neutral environments that young people want to come back to, and where they want to establish relationships with people that show a genuine interest in them. Amongst the alumni sample interviewed it was apparent that staying in touch with the centres was important – an endorsement of the role it had played in their lives.

It was apparent that a focus on wellbeing is a key part of IntoUniversity’s culture, again weaving through many aspects of the way the programmes are delivered to create the right conditions for
young people to thrive. If young people feel relaxed and happier, they are likely to be more confident and more interested in learning.

IntoUniversity’s ethos is applied across all programmes as far as possible (although this can be constrained by school policy for in-school workshops), so any benefits from factors such as reward systems, positive feedback style, the culture of no wrong answers etc. might apply to all young people who engage with the programme, regardless of which strand. However, it is still important to acknowledge the different patterns of engagement and intensity and that a comparatively small proportion of young people and families experience Academic Support.

CULTURE AND ETHOS: SUMMARY

- The evidence suggests that educational culture and ethos can have a critical impact on attainment, emphasising personal growth, academic goals and consistent interpersonal relationships, as well as regularly celebrating success and achievements
- There is little evidence of the precise impact of settings on attainment although some studies have looked at the impact of school climate on behaviour
- There are some elements of the culture and ethos aspects of IntoUniversity’s work that more clearly link to attainment – notably the positive approach to young people, the level of 1-2-1 support, and having a space away from school to approach learning in a different way – but these are very much intertwined with other features of the programme, and not uniquely cultural or ethos aspects
5. Implications: Revising the theoretical model

5.1 The original theoretical model

One of the key aims of this research was to understand the combination of programmes and factors in IntoUniversity’s work that contribute to increased attainment. The draft theoretical model (see page 24) that was developed at the outset was a useful guide to shape the fieldwork and explore stakeholders’ perceptions of what IntoUniversity does that makes a difference to young people’s attainment. This report has explored each element of the draft model:

- The overall goals of IntoUniversity
- The barriers that young people from more disadvantaged backgrounds can face in their pathways to Higher Education
- Outcomes – the changes for young people that help to mitigate against these key barriers
- Activities – the different opportunities that IntoUniversity provide through the three standard programme strands and additional programme elements
- Programme design – the unique features that have consciously been built into the design
- Culture and ethos – the way that IntoUniversity works which means there is a distinctive experience for young people

In the final stages of the research, the findings from the evidence review and the qualitative research in centres were presented to the IntoUniversity team along with recommendations on how to revise the model.

Throughout the research the holistic and interrelated nature of IntoUniversity’s work was repeatedly emphasised. This highlighted a number of issues with the existing draft theoretical model:

- The existing draft has too many dots that indicate a high contribution to attainment – whilst the fieldwork and evidence suggest many ways IntoUniversity supports increased attainment, there are also elements where the connection is much less direct. The current layout of the model means it is hard to isolate meaningfully what the impact on attainment actually is
In an attempt to map every aspect in some way against attainment (through the grids and dots), the nuance of the programme as a whole is at risk of being lost, and the more mutually reinforcing and holistic aspects are under-emphasised.

Towards the bottom of the model – looking at programme design features and culture/ethos elements - it is harder to relate these to attainment, and this is in line with the initial hypotheses. However, without these, the IntoUniversity experience would be very different – they are essential features, but there is a risk of over-claiming their relationship to attainment if they remain on the model in the current format.

There are a number of challenges that have been discussed throughout this report which relates to the fact that not all young people with whom IntoUniversity work receive the ‘full package’, and the long-term, sustained aspects of the programme; there are different entry points for young people; and despite the common features across all strands of the programme, there are elements that are more differentiated according to students’ needs, their desire to focus on a specific area (subject, technique, work experience etc.), and their age. The model does not communicate how young people’s needs and journeys differ according to their age or educational stage, and pathway through IntoUniversity’s support.

In order to address these challenges, IntoUniversity’s work is best captured in a model that tells the story of the work as a whole without focusing explicitly on attainment. Using this as a starting point, a separate model can then be presented that articulates the work IntoUniversity does to support increased attainment. The remainder of this section of the report explores the different components that could make up these two models and the rationale behind this, drawing on the feedback from the IntoUniversity Head Office team.

### 5.2 A model that captures all of IntoUniversity’s work

#### Overall goals

The proposed goals for the model are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IntoUniversity goals</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Young people develop the skills necessary to succeed in education and the workplace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young people from disadvantaged backgrounds attain a university place or another chosen aspiration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closing the gap in destinations between young people from disadvantaged backgrounds and the rest.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building a tradition of educational participation including Higher Education</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Two goals that capture the work that the centres focus on

These are two longer term goals that IntoUniversity feel are important and are broader than the work with individuals

*Figure 23: Revised goals for the new theoretical model*
Barriers - opportunities that all young people are entitled to

The new model will reframe the barriers young people face as opportunities that they do not have access to, and that IntoUniversity helps to facilitate or enable. This is in response to the feedback that the language could be more positive and asset based, and reflect the way that IntoUniversity talk about their work already.

Figure 24: Revised barriers as opportunities for the new theoretical model

The thread of ‘Young people need grades that reflect their potential and enable them to take their desired pathway. The key moment in a young person’s educational journey is their KS5 results’ will still feature as a thread that runs across this part of the model.

Outcomes for young people

The research demonstrated the interrelated nature of the outcomes that IntoUniversity supports young people to achieve. The new model will move away from grouping outcomes under barriers, and instead cluster these reflecting the key features of IntoUniversity’s programme – academic and learning; social and emotional; and the future. Revisions have also been suggested based on the feedback on which outcomes could be emphasised more or rephrased.
The rationale for the changes are as follows:

- **Social and emotional skills**: There are a range of skills that could be highlighted, but confidence was consistently emphasised by stakeholders, and self-belief was seen as being fundamental to IntoUniversity’s work. Wellbeing and resilience have been included given the prominence of these in the stakeholder discussions.

- **Academic and learning**: There was considerable agreement about these in the research, and many different outcomes that could be highlighted. These reflect the key ones, and capture the unique way that IntoUniversity help connect the importance of learning to future goals.

- **The future**: This is simplified to capture the different angles – personal motivations and expectations, practical knowledge and support about pathways and future life skills. This moves away from using ‘social and cultural’ capital in the model, which is covered in the ability to form relationships and wider networks (under social and emotional skills) and in the wording of outcomes here round increasing knowledge and expectations for young people and their families.
Capturing what IntoUniversity does: Young people’s experiences

The benefit of having a model that captures all of IntoUniversity’s work is that there is an opportunity to highlight young people’s experiences more explicitly. It was very apparent in the research that IntoUniversity’s work is about relationships, and championing young people so that no one feels left behind. The passionate way in which many young people talked about how IntoUniversity makes them feel was very apparent and helps to convey the importance they attach to the support. Three key phrases that aim to capture what young people feel as part of their IntoUniversity experience have been included alongside the core outcome groupings.

The fieldwork also highlighted the different journeys young people have – some develop over the long-term, and others might come to IntoUniversity towards the end of their time at school. Their needs can differ – for example, at the Primary stage, children’s needs are much more about having a broad view of their future and maintaining or boosting their enthusiasm for learning. At the Secondary stage, young people’s needs become more individualised and they start to gradually narrow down, and by Key Stage 5 the support they need becomes much more focused (and even transactional). Figure 26 below captures what young people want at different points and that this can be both cumulative for some young people over the long-term, or more targeted for those coming into the programme at a later stage.

![Figure 26: Young people's experiences - needs at different stages](image_url)
The research revealed many reasons why young people stay engaged with IntoUniversity – although the helpful and fun elements were crucial, it was apparent that there are some elements that encourage young people to return to centres, or enthusiastically take up additional opportunities. In addition, schools and parents show a high level of commitment and engagement. This can be summarised as:

![Figure 27: Young people's experiences - aspects that support engagement](image)

**Capturing what IntoUniversity does: Key ingredients and activities**

There is an opportunity on the new model to more clearly express what sets IntoUniversity apart from other interventions and similar programmes, emphasising the holistic elements:

The new model will summarise more succinctly what IntoUniversity does and explain which programme strands are available at different educational stages.
Understanding IntoUniversity’s impact on attainment: A qualitative research study

Figure 28: Key ingredients and activities on the new model

Revised model
The revised model that captures all of IntoUniversity’s work is presented in Figure 29 below:
Understanding IntoUniversity’s impact on attainment: A qualitative research study

Figure 29: Revised model of IntoUniversity’s work

IntoUniversity runs local centres providing a range of programmes at Primary and Secondary age, and additional opportunities in schools, workplaces and university. These are delivered by trained staff and volunteers who support and mentor young people aged 7-18+

Primary: Academic Support, FOCUS
Secondary: Academic Support, FOCUS
Both: Mentoring & additional programmes
5.3 A model that describes the impact on attainment

Ultimately, IntoUniversity delivers a holistic and supportive programme, and can be confident that there are many ways in which this supports increased attainment. However, as anticipated in the initial hypotheses, not all elements of IntoUniversity’s work can be linked directly to attainment.

One of the overriding messages from this research is that it is hard to isolate and be precise about what exactly supports increased attainment, given a) the holistic nature of the model b) young people do not all experience IntoUniversity in the same way c) young people are not homogenous in their needs and journeys. Therefore, a model that takes the ‘attainment story’ out of the main model is a more useful way to start to address this complexity, and validate the way that IntoUniversity addresses a range of needs in the round. There is also potential in the future for IntoUniversity to highlight other key impacts from their work in the same way – for example, drawing out the difference they make to wellbeing or social and emotional skills.

Figure 30 captures the relationship between outcomes and attainment. Moving away from describing them as ‘direct’ or ‘indirect’, and instead capturing the fact that all of the outcomes identified play a role, but in different ways.

**Figure 30: Attainment model: outcomes**

**The activities that contribute to attainment**

Figure 31 below expands on the activities box from the main model to explain which parts of different programme strands contribute to attainment. The ones near the top are more well-evidenced in the literature. This way of presenting the contribution also helps to indicate how not all of the programme strands are directly about raising attainment but support a range of
behaviours and outcomes within and between strands that complement each other. There are also some pre-conditions that enable these activities to happen, and throughout all the programmes motivations and future goals are constantly reinforced.

Figure 31: Attainment model: activities

Figure 32 looks across the main model and highlights aspects of the experience and key ingredients that might encourage young people to put in more effort to their studies and increase their attainment. This aims to capture what is unique about IntoUniversity and fundamental to the experience for young people. Many of these are not sufficient in their own right to have an impact on attainment – but combine to enable young people to focus on their work.

Figure 32: Attainment model: key ingredients

The complete revised attainment model is in Figure 33 below.
Understanding IntoUniversity’s impact on attainment: A qualitative research study

Figure 33: Revised attainment model

OUTCOMES:
- IntoUniversity supports young people across a range of outcomes: academic and learning; support for the future and social and emotional.
- The changes for young people that can have most impact on attainment are...

Confidence and self-belief
- Sense of wellbeing
- Resilience to persevere and cope with difficult situations

METACOGNITIVE SKILLS
- Literacy and numeracy skills
- Confidence in academic abilities

ABILITY TO LINK LEARNING TO FUTURE SUCCESS
- Expectations about the future/long-term goals
- Enjoyment of learning

ESSENTIAL OUTCOMES FOR ATTAINMENT
- Young people need grades that reflect their potential and enable them to take their desired pathway. A key moment in a young person’s educational journey is their KS5 results.

ACTIVITIES:
- IntoUniversity provides a range of activities for young people with a programme that is adaptable, mixed ability and for some, starts early and is there for the long term.
- Many of these are well-evidenced as supporting attainment and/or are fundamental to the charity’s ethos and way of working.

KEY INGREDIENTS:
- These bolster the impact IntoUniversity’s work has on attainment and support young people’s engagement.
- Positive interactions and relationships based on trust, respect, feedback and kindness
- Being in a space where it’s OK to ask questions, learning is valued and there is a consistent focus on academic study
- A spark being ignited that encourages young people to enjoy learning
- Inspirational experiences that expand horizons, stretch and challenge

Having 1-2-1 attention and tailored support from highly trained practitioners (AS, M)
- Direct practical support at crucial moments e.g. mock exams, SATs, GCSEs, university applications (AS, SecF, M)
- Opportunities for self-directed learning (AS, M)
- Opportunities to be curious about learning with activities that bring the curriculum to life, and practical groupwork tasks (AS, F)
- Being pushed outside of comfort zones with a variety of enrichment activities (F, M, additional programmes)
6. Recommendations

6.1 Summary of the findings

At the start of this research, IntoUniversity wanted to find out what impact their work has on young people’s attainment. Through engaging with over 300 people this research has provided the opportunity to explore the perceptions of those who are closest to the programme. Qualitative research of this nature allows for people’s experiences to be at the fore, providing a space outside of the day-to-day to discuss and reflect on the difference being involved with IntoUniversity makes for young people.

The combination of detailed insights from the case study centres, a review of available evidence, and ongoing discussions with the IntoUniversity Head Office team has also led to the development of a theoretical model – for all of the charity’s work, and for attainment. This has helped to progress IntoUniversity’s theoretical understanding of their approach, and appreciate the different ingredients and unique design choices that are essential for both how it operates, and how people experience it.

Although a key message from the research is that IntoUniversity’s programme works in a holistic way, the findings suggest that the main ways that it contributes to young people’s increased attainment is through:

- **Supporting young people** to achieve academic success through developing metacognitive skills; literacy and numeracy skills; and building their confidence in their academic abilities. This is bolstered by motivational support that increases young people’s expectations about what they can achieve in the future, as well as continually reinforcing a range of outcomes that are foundational for all young people (for example, wellbeing and resilience).

- Providing **activities** that give young people access to 1-2-1 tailored support from highly trained practitioners that focuses on core skills as well making learning more fun and engaging. This support also helps young people through key moments (for example, SATs, GCSEs, A-Levels and university applications), as well as providing opportunities for self-directed learning and to be curious.

- There was consensus that Academic Support had most impact on attainment, but that the combination of Academic Support and mentoring could also be powerful for young people.

However, as the holistic and attainment theoretical models both demonstrate, there are many other aspects of IntoUniversity’s work that contribute to attainment in a less direct (though still
important) way. There are **a number of key ingredients** that bolster the impact **IntoUniversity** has, which include positive interactions and relationships; spaces where learning is valued; igniting a spark that encourages young people to enjoy learning; and inspirational experiences that expand horizons, stretch and challenge.

This report has highlighted that there is evidence on effective approaches to increasing attainment from programmes that have some common elements with **IntoUniversity**’s model – particularly starting early, being there for the long term, having an adaptable model and having non-selective cohorts.

Building the evidence base around what helps to support increased attainment is a challenge across the sector and continues to be addressed through different studies and evaluations. This means that there are gaps and aspects of **IntoUniversity**’s model that have not yet been fully explored in the evidence. These include:

- The impact of the wider community on attainment
- The relationship between increased knowledge about future options and attainment
- The role of quiet space outside the home and in the community on attainment
- Further evidence on the different impacts from Mentoring programmes.

These following sections outline recommendations from the research on how **IntoUniversity** could increase their impact on student attainment. This section also includes more general recommendations that came from the feedback from different stakeholders during the fieldwork.

### 6.2 Adapting and enhancing existing programme content and delivery

Given there are many aspects of **IntoUniversity**’s work that are well-supported by existing evidence, and the qualitative findings from the research, the following elements should continue as part of the multi-strand approach:

- Intervening at an early age to mitigate the effects of disadvantage on children and young people’s achievement
- A strong focus on developing metacognitive skills
- An emphasis on developing numeracy and literacy skills in Primary school
- Combining aspiration-raising/motivational interventions with Academic Support
- Small-group learning support with mixed-ability groups and a strong peer/collaboration element, combined with targeted 1-2-1 learning support
• Creating a supportive learning environment, using a positive reward system to motivate young people, and celebrating achievement

• Providing pastoral support to young people and families to help increase young people’s wellbeing and happiness

• Having an adaptable programme with a range of activities that young people can be signposted to according to need

Aspects of existing programmes that could be adapted or tweaked

There are parts of IntoUniversity’s existing programmes that could be adapted or developed further within existing resource to potentially increase the impact on attainment. This is particularly the case for the Secondary FOCUS programme which was generally perceived as being highly valued, but furthest away from directly supporting increased attainment:

• Adapt Primary FOCUS and Secondary FOCUS programmes to include more content that targets the development of metacognitive skills.

• More direct and targeted support at Academic Support and FOCUS for key academic milestones such as mock exams, GCSEs, A-Levels, and SATs. This would be particularly useful for Year 12/13s to make sure that the programmes are most appropriate for the needs of A-Level students at this stage.

• Provide more opportunities for group-based learning in Secondary Academic Support in order to develop key learning skills and techniques in combination with focused and 1-2-1 Academic Support - the evidence review and the qualitative research suggest that there is a need for both.

• Prioritising students who have fallen behind in English or maths for additional 1-2-1 support or mentoring, to capture those that are at the greater risk of academic underachievement.

• Hold more Secondary FOCUS workshops out of schools and in centres

• Continue to encourage centres to tailor content of programmes to reflect local demographics

• The programme is highly valued by teachers, and their buy-in and engagement are essential. There are benefits to more information sharing with partner schools to understand what is being covered in schools, students’ academic progress and areas for improvement. For example, IntoUniversity could share students’ goals and schools could share attainment data so progress can be tracked.
6.3 Areas to develop with additional resources required

Expanding mentoring

As this report has outlined, evidence of the impact of mentoring on attainment is limited, but has a range of other positive impacts on young people, and is well supported by the qualitative fieldwork and young people’s views. Stakeholders suggested that mentoring and Academic Support combined could have a positive impact on attainment, as well as the aspects of the mentoring relationship that focuses on academic study, with the mentor selected for the young person based on their academic needs. The research highlights several factors associated with increased impact of mentoring, including:

- High quality relationships between mentor and mentee
- Pre-match and on-going training, support and supervision for mentors
- Structured activities for mentors and mentees
- Frequent and long-term contact
- Driven by the needs and interests of the young person

With more resource, IntoUniversity could consider developing and adapting the academic Mentoring programme further so that more young people can benefit, and try to boost frequency of contact for existing pairings. However, this will be dependent on the availability of volunteer mentors and may require a more targeted recruitment approach in areas where centres have struggled to find and retain volunteers.

Given that the impact of mentoring is an area that requires more research, it is also recommended that IntoUniversity focuses on measuring mentoring outcomes to monitor its effects and to contribute to the wider body of evidence.

Staff specialists

There are opportunities for IntoUniversity to develop the specialisms of staff and volunteers and deploy these across both Academic Support and mentoring. This would help to increase both the quality and tailored nature of the support for young people.

- Providing additional training and development for staff in common subject areas (for example, English and STEM subjects) that students need support in so that they can provide more individual support in the absence of volunteers with subject expertise.
- Recruiting additional staff or volunteers whose focus is to provide Academic Support in specialist areas such as EAL, SEN, or A-Level Academic Support.
Wider programme development opportunities that will help to support attainment

There are several areas that IntoUniversity could develop more with additional resource that will help to support increased attainment – though in a less direct way, and primarily as part of the holistic approach that is at the heart of the programmes.

These resources could be targeted at the following:

- Providing more opportunities for cohorts of students to participate in extra-curricular programmes – e.g. by offering more Leadership in FOCUS, Business in FOCUS activities, or other extra-curricular activities. IntoUniversity could consider first expanding these opportunities to FOCUS students as these students have less regular and sustained engagement with the programme and therefore might see greater benefit from taking part.

- Prioritising approaches that aim to increase parental engagement in their children’s learning given the importance of this for young people’s attainment and progression, and IntoUniversity’s goals of creating a supportive community. Effective interventions could include ensuring that there is an increased two-way exchange of information on their child’s progress between parents and IntoUniversity staff; giving parents the confidence and practical tips and tools to help their children at home; and raising parents’ expectations of what their children can achieve.

- The research highlighted the importance of role models in supporting and raising young people’s aspirations, and local role models that young people can relate to and see as “someone like them”. There is a need to ensure that the recruitment strategy ensures that the workforce in centres reflects local demographics. This includes targeting local graduates for the graduate scheme and also recruiting university students who are originally from the local area to become mentors.

IntoUniversity’s reach and engagement strategies

The report has highlighted that there is a need for IntoUniversity to explore more fully how to reach young people where lower aspirations and disengagement from education are an issue. This could start by interrogating the data on the existing cohort to understand with whom IntoUniversity currently does not work, and through conversations with local stakeholders around centres, begin to understand where young people who are more disengaged are located (for example, in PRUs, youth centres etc.). Further research on this specific issue would also help IntoUniversity understand their aspirations around working with more excluded young people, and which engagement strategies might work with different cohorts.

Future options could involve adapting aspects of the programme to help re-engage young people with learning – for example, having a more mobile aspect of the model, where Academic Support sessions could take place in settings such as PRUs rather than expecting young people to come to a centre; and providing shorter taster sessions.
A key message from the research has been the importance of the dedicated support that IntoUniversity provides in its centres. However, there is a limit to how many young people can attend Academic Support sessions without diluting the quality of that support and ability to build up relationships with adults over time. It is important for IntoUniversity to balance growth sensitively going forward. This means ensuring that centres have enough staff to continue to deliver the programme in an individualised way with low student to adult ratios that maximise the chances of a positive impact on attainment.

### 6.4 Recommendations for future evaluation

IntoUniversity’s impact reporting has been developed considerably in recent years (with support from Impetus). Currently, the data collected by IntoUniversity is primarily used for performance management, with dashboards that allow centres to see how they are performing against their targets and KPIs (for example, programmes delivered, numbers of students participating, retention, and student feedback). The research has identified a few areas where IntoUniversity could consider developing their evaluation approach in the future:

- Revise the outcomes for each programme strand, and review student surveys to ensure these are aligned.

- Measure the impact IntoUniversity has on the development of skills more consistently. The Skills Builder Partnership of which a number of schools and charities are a part provides a useful framework.

- As stated above, IntoUniversity should monitor and measure the effectiveness of mentoring. Evaluation should focus on tracking the quality of the mentor-mentee pairing as well as key measures in each of the three outcome clusters. Evaluations should incorporate perceptions from both parties of the mentoring relationship on progress towards outcomes.

- Monitor students’ academic progress and use this data to set individual goals/targets for students. The ideal scenario would be to collect attainment data from schools, such as mock exam results and predicted grades, although it is recognised that there are likely to be significant challenges in relation to data sharing with schools. In the absence of hard data, impact on attainment could be measured indirectly through internal assessment of students’ progress and/or by measuring the key academic and learning outcomes identified in the revised model.

- Some methods for assessment-based approaches to measuring impact on attainment include:
  - Student ‘snapshot’ surveys beginning of Years 6, 11, and 13 and a follow up survey after key exams (SATs, GCSEs, and A-Level). IntoUniversity would need
to develop their own measurement scale to measure for the key academic and learning outcomes or use existing validated measures where possible.

- Teacher assessments on student engagement in learning and academic progress, using absolute scales to track degree of change.

- Evaluating increases/changes in students’ metacognitive skills. Examples of validated questionnaires measuring metacognition includes Myself-as-a-learner, Pattern of Adaptive Learning survey, Student Engagement Instrument, and Student Success Skills.

- Using informal tests to assess academic needs and progress. Tests do not need to be written but could include oral methods or through direct observation.

- **IntoUniversity** could also consider enabling students to self-assess their academic progress and include this information as part of the end of programme evaluation. Self-assessment could be linked to personal learning objectives/goals, or key objectives from the National Curriculum. The information from these self-assessments could be fed into the annual programme evaluation.
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## Appendix

### Research questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Research questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Programme rationale</strong></td>
<td>• What are the main needs/barriers that IntoUniversity’s intervention is addressing?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What are the characteristics of the students IntoUniversity works with? What challenges do they face?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What are the different needs students face at different stages of the educational journey?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• To what extent do those involved feel IntoUniversity are targeting students who will benefit most from the intervention?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Are the key barriers that IntoUniversity feel young people from disadvantaged backgrounds face the right ones?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Outcomes for young people</strong> (to address the key identified barriers)</td>
<td>• What are the essential skills and capabilities that stakeholders feel students need to develop in order to improve their grades?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Under each of the four barriers (knowledge of university, motivations and aspirations, softer skills, attitudes to learning) how do different stakeholders feel IntoUniversity makes a difference to young people? Intention is to let them articulate this in their own words and will then probe on how they link</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• How do stakeholders see these outcomes connecting to improved attainment?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Which do they feel are most clearly linked? Which are more removed? What order do changes for young people need to happen in to have most impact on attainment?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• To what extent does knowledge of university/pathways impact on attainment?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Programme activities/strands</strong></td>
<td>• Which aspects of IntoUniversity's programme have a direct impact on attainment? What evidence have they seen of this?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What do stakeholders feel young people get from a minimum level of engagement (e.g. one strand only)?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Programme design
- What are the views of different stakeholders on the overall programme design features?
- Do stakeholders feel that these elements have an impact on attainment? If so, in what ways?
- For those elements that are perceived as having no direct impact on attainment, what value/benefits do stakeholders place on these?
- How does the local context influence programme delivery and the centre programme?
- How is IU perceived by local people in the community?

### Culture and ethos
- How do students/other stakeholders describe their IntoUniversity experience? Intention is to ask people to articulate this in their own words. Further questions will then probe further on the key culture/ethos themes in the model.
- Are there any key differences in how young people experience IntoUniversity?
- To what extent do different stakeholders identify IntoUniversity’s approach as having a distinctive ethos and culture? Probe around settings, relationships, approach to working with young people.
- What do different stakeholders value about the culture and ethos of IntoUniversity? (probe around settings, relationships, approach to working with young people)
- To what extent might IntoUniversity’s culture and ethos influence students’ engagement with the programme?
- Is there any link between culture and ethos and students’ motivations to go to university?
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Programme delivery - overall</th>
<th>What difference to stakeholders feel that the culture and ethos of IntoUniversity makes on attainment?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Are there any factors that make some centres more or less successful than others?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Are there any elements of programme design/delivery that different stakeholders would like to see changed/improved?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What support is required from schools (and others?) in order to help the programme run smoothly?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What are the greatest risks to programme delivery?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Are there any unintended consequences or negative effects from IntoUniversity’s work?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Are there any barriers in the way that IntoUniversity’s programme is designed and delivered to improving attainment? If so, what are these?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional insights from IU data</td>
<td>Are certain types of students more or less likely to progress to Higher Education than others (after being involved with IntoUniversity)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Is there any relationship between intensity/length of involvement/involvement in particular programme stands with IntoUniversity and student progression to Higher Education?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Are there any trends in the responses students give to the difference IntoUniversity is making to their grades?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participant breakdown

There was a total of 319 research participants across the eight fieldwork sites. A summary of participants by stakeholder group is included in Section 2 (Methodology). A more detailed breakdown of the IntoUniversity staff and volunteers and young people involved in the research is provided below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Breakdown of IntoUniversity staff involved in the research</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cluster Managers</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centre Leads</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education Workers</td>
<td>27</td>
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</table>
### Volunteers

| Volunteers | 31 |

### Breakdown of age group of young people involved in the research

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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alumnae</td>
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<tr>
<td>Year 3</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 4</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 5</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 6</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 7</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 8</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 9</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 10</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 11</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 12</td>
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<td>Year 13</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
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<td>Unknown</td>
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### Number of young people involved in each programme strand

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Programme Strand</th>
<th>Number</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic Support</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FOCUS</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentoring</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
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### Breakdown of young people’s engagement in programme strands

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Engagement</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic Support only</td>
<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td>FOCUS only</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AS &amp; FOCUS</td>
<td>59</td>
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### Length of young people’s engagement

<table>
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<th>Duration</th>
<th>Count</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than a year</td>
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<tr>
<td>1-2 years</td>
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<td>3-5 years</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-9 years</td>
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### Demographic breakdown of young people involved in the research

#### Breakdown by Gender

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
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<td>Female</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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#### Breakdown by ethnicity

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<td>Asian background</td>
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<td>Black background</td>
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<td>Mixed background</td>
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<td>White background</td>
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<td>Other background</td>
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<tr>
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</table>

### Details of the case study locations

Eight centres were selected for the qualitative fieldwork. A mixed sample of centres was agreed for the research, taking into account different characteristics such as length of time the centre
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has been open, student demographics, and the local context. A list of the centres selected is included below, with a brief rationale for why it was chosen and background information based on programme management data collected from **IntoUniversity**.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Centre</th>
<th>Rationale</th>
<th>Background information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lambeth</td>
<td>One of IU’s oldest centres and has an active involvement of King’s College London</td>
<td>1,278 students engaged&lt;br&gt;Majority of students from a Black background&lt;br&gt;Average contact hours per student = 36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haringey North</td>
<td>The centre has experienced a lot of challenges but is a successful centre, and is a very different set up from other centres as it is located in a council building.</td>
<td>1,445 students engaged&lt;br&gt;Diverse mix of students – majority from a White or Black background&lt;br&gt;Average contact hours per student = 34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nottingham West</td>
<td>Embedded in a White working-class area that has historically been seen as having low aspirations. The centre is seen as a model programme where students stay on the programme</td>
<td>1,194 students engaged&lt;br&gt;Diverse mix of students – greater percentage from a White background&lt;br&gt;Has the highest number of contact hours per student across the fieldwork (48)&lt;br&gt;Has highest percentage of students on all three strands (3.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nottingham East</td>
<td>More ethnically diverse and located in the inner city, faces a lot of challenges including crime and violence and a lot of families that are disengaged in education as a result.</td>
<td>1,198 students engaged&lt;br&gt;Diverse mix of students from all backgrounds&lt;br&gt;Average contact hours per student = 47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clacton</td>
<td>A newer centre but has a very established team and there have been challenges</td>
<td>1,021 students engaged&lt;br&gt;Majority of students from a White background</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Understanding IntoUniversity's impact on attainment: A qualitative research study

| Leeds East, West, Ext | Three centres which includes an extension project, all three centres in Leeds were included to explore a place-based angle. | 3,004 students engaged across all three centres
Diverse mix of students – has highest percentage of students from Asian backgrounds across the fieldwork
Average contact hours per student = 39 (East), 44 (South), 18 (Ext) |
|----------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Oxford South East    | Location is out of the city centre and a bit more isolated geographically.                                                                                                                                 | 1,190 students engaged
Diverse mix of students from all backgrounds
Average contact hours per student = 37 |
| Bristol South        | Selected to provide insight into White working-class communities.                                                                                                                                 | 1,146 students engaged
Majority of students from a White background
Average contact hours per student = 30 |

Longer list of outcomes

Initial mapping of outcomes against the key barriers, indicating which programme strand contributes to these.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome area</th>
<th>Student outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of university access and pathways</td>
<td>• Increased knowledge about Higher Education options and pathways (SF, M)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Increased knowledge about university life and learning (PF, SF, M)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Increased knowledge of a range of degree subjects (PF, AS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Increased understanding about the world of work and the skills needed to succeed (SF)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Increased understanding of the complexities of the education system (SF)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivations and aspirations</td>
<td>Attitudes to learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| • Students can identify university as a possible future aspiration (PF, SF)  
• Increased readiness for Secondary school (PF, AS)  
• Students persist in their education to achieve a place at university, despite setbacks (AS, SF)  
• Increased understanding of how and when decisions affect future pathways, and can apply this to their own decision making (SF, M)  
• Increased ability to make informed decisions about post-16 options that facilitate progression to HE (SF, M)  
• Increased motivation and enjoyment of learning (PF, AS)  
• Increased curiosity – seeking opportunities for enrichment/widening knowledge (SF, AS) | • Increased understanding that attitudes to learning are linked to future goals (PF, SF)  
• Improved numeracy and literacy skills (PF, AS)  
• Improved study skills (AS, SF, M)  
• Improved critical thinking (SF, AS)  
• Increased ability to identify and set learning goals (AS, M)  
• Increased ability to shape their own independent learning (SF, AS, M)  
• Improved revision skills (AS, SF, M)  
• Improved awareness of their strengths and weaknesses (AS, M)  
• Improved ability to plan, monitor and evaluate their learning (AS, M)  
• Improved understanding of their own learning styles (AS, M)  
• Increased confidence about their academic progress (AS, M)  
• Students know more precisely which academic areas they need to develop (AS, M)  
• Students feel confident they will achieve grades required for chosen university (AS, M)  
• Students have a plan for revision and good revision techniques (SF, AS, M)  
• Improved motivation to persist in the face of challenges and setbacks (AS, M) |
### Soft skills - confidence and self-efficacy
- Improved ability to manage and regulate their emotions (AS)
- Improved social skills (AS, SF, PF, M)
- Improved communication and presentation skills (PF, SF)
- Increased cultural capital – through opportunities outside of school/home (PF, SF, M, AS)
- Stronger sense of identity (PF, SF, M)
- Improved behaviour in the classroom (AS)
- Improved teamwork skills (SF, AS)
- Improved leadership skills (SF)
- Improved organisational and time management skills across education, personal and professional settings (AS, M)
- Improved skills at goal-setting (AS, M)
- Increased confidence communicating to a range of audiences, media, settings (SF)
- Increased confidence to take risks and try new things (SF, M)
- Increased ability to manage stress (AS, M)
- Increased resilience and grit – ability to navigate choices during a potentially difficult period (M, AS)
- Increased sense of agency and independence (All)
- Increased understanding of the skills and behaviours necessary for success in the workplace – including cues and adapting (SF)

### Attainment outcomes
- Improved attainment in KS2 SATs (AS, PF)
- Improved grades and GCSE attainment (AS, SF, M)
- Students achieve the grades they need at KS5 to take up their place at university/other destination (AS, M)