12 May 2026

WELCOME TO

TASO

Annual conference

Collaborate to evaluate

Opening and welcome

Dr Omar Khan
CEO, TASO

Improving equality of opportunity: the role of collaboration

Professor Chris Millward
Interim Director for Fair Access and Participation, Office for Students

How do we address the higher education postcode lottery?

> **Professor Graeme Atherton**, University of West London

> **Alex Proudfoot**, Independent Higher Education

> **Dr Shaid Mahmood MBE**, Durham University

> **Dr Kate Wicklow**, GuildHE

Refreshment break and networking

Up next: Paper presentations: pre-entry interventions

Paper presentations: pre-entry interventions

> Chaired by **Dr Molly Rowlands**, TASO

> **Professor Elisabeth Moores**, Aston University

> **Sirin Tangpornpaiboon,** The Open University

> **Sarah Dirrane,** Imperial College London

> **Tom Broom & Alex Bairstow,** Higher Education Progression Partnership

TASO

Submit your questions

#TASOCon26

A randomised controlled trial of a multi-intervention outreach programme: what happened next?

Professor Elisabeth Moores
Aston University

Aston University
BIRMINGHAM UK

A randomised controlled trial of a multi-intervention outreach programme for entry to higher education: what happened next?

Elisabeth Moores, Rob Summers, Adrian Burgess and Amy Slater-McGill

12th May 2026

TASO

Why this project matters

Multi-intervention outreach pathways are:

- a common approach to widen access (Robinson & Salvestrini, 2020)
- often associated with positive outcomes for participants (e.g. Burgess, Horton & Moores, 2021)

BUT most current evidence

- focuses on impact on student **aspirations/attitudes** rather than HE attendance
- provides **correlational** rather than causal evidence due to methodologies used

Our aim (back in 2020!): use a pilot **randomised controlled trial (RCT)** to evaluate impact of programme on progression to HE

Pathway to healthcare: overview

Aston University
BIRMINGHAM UK

18-month programme:

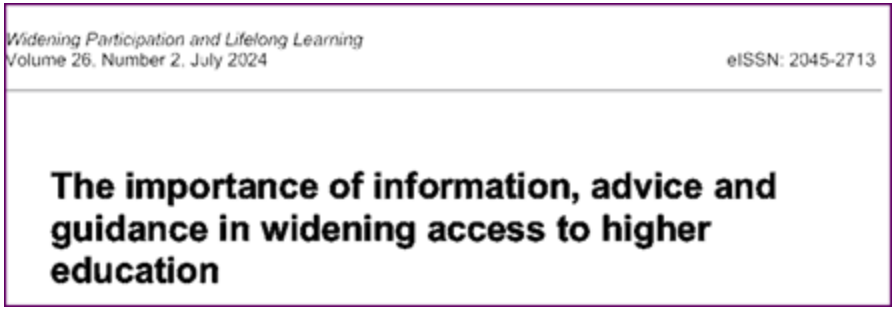
- induction session
- healthcare subject taster days
- attainment-raising
- careers advice
- university interview preparation
- work experience
- UCAS personal statement day
- summer school
- graduation and transition event.

Participants:

- Year 12 students meeting at least one WP criterion
- Randomised and tracked two cohorts from 2020-21 and 2021-22
- First cohort n=152: randomly allocated to the *treatment (n=110)* and *control (n=42)* groups

Attitudes, perceptions and knowledge of HE

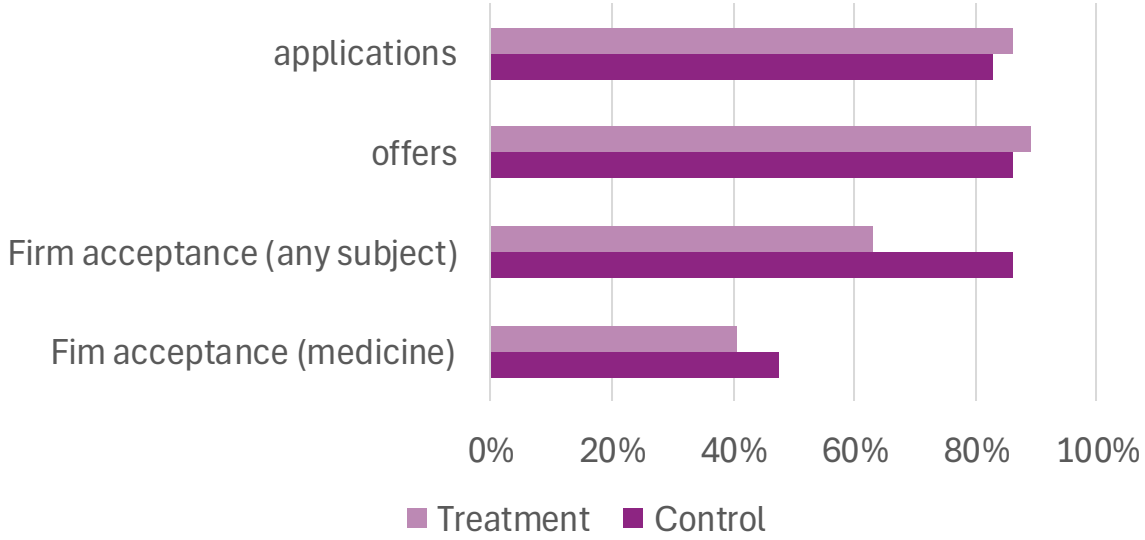
Midway analyses of survey data and focus groups (Summers *et al.,*2024):



- At the start of the programme**, attitudes were already positive** towards studying at - and belonging in - HE i.e. no lack of aspiration
- Confidence in **applying to and funding HE was relatively low** at the start of the programme and increased significantly during it
- The perception of being able to **afford to participate in HE was relatively low** throughout

Pipeline: applications, offers and acceptances to HE

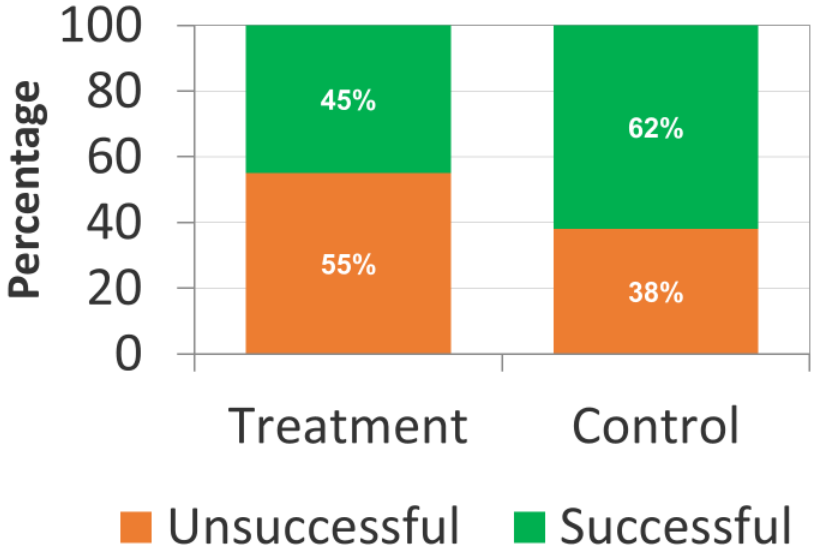
Results from UCAS Outreach Evaluator



i.e. treatment group: (i) marginally more applications (ii) greater proportion of offers **but (iii) less likely overall to make a firm acceptance**

Enrolment success

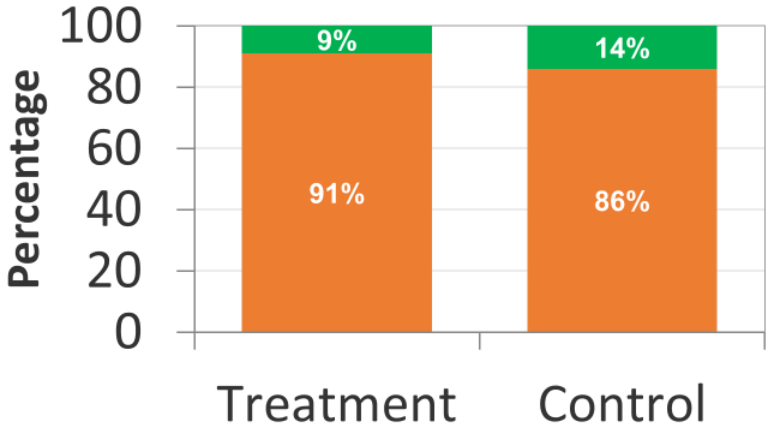
Enrolment to HE



Fisher Exact test, p=0.10

No statistically significant difference

Enrolment to medicine



Fisher Exact test, p=0.381

No statistically significant difference

Independent predictors of enrolment: Logistic regression

Aston University
BIRMINGHAM UK

More likely to go into medicine:

- First generation students (12.3% vs. 5.3%)
- Pupils with higher GCSE grades (8.18 mean GCSE score vs. 6.97)
- Pupils from areas with lower GCSE gap quintile (i.e. less disadvantaged areas in terms of GCSE attainment)

More likely to go into HE:

- Pupils with higher GCSE grades

NOT predictive for either:

- **Treatment group** (marginally NEGATIVE effect for entry to HE: p=.07)
- Free School Meals
- TUNDRA
- Sex
- Ethnicity

Discussion

Findings (at this point in time):

- GCSE grades are the only strong and consistent predictor
- Pathways programme does **not** significantly increase enrolment in HE or medicine

Possible Explanations:

- Possible deferrals/ A level retakes for medicine – treatment group **less** likely to have a firm acceptance – may be holding out for healthcare offers?
- Randomisation was not blind – control group may have gone elsewhere or become more determined
- COVID year – not delivered in normal way

BUT

Second cohort – yet to analyse – data just become available!

Examining success for multi-touch point, pre-enrolment STEM programmes

Sarah Dirrane
Imperial College London

COSMOS

External evaluation

Examining success for multi-touch point, pre-enrolment STEM programmes

STEM Futures & STEM Potential: what we found, and what it means for the sector

Sarah Dirrane · Co-Founder & Research Director, Cosmos

TASO Annual Conference 2026 · 12 May 2026 · Woburn House, London

IMPERIAL

COSMOS

THE PROGRAMMES

Two Imperial pre-enrolment programmes

Both supporting students from disadvantaged or underrepresented backgrounds onto STEM pathways. Both pre-enrolment, multi-touchpoint, on Imperial's campus.

STEM POTENTIAL

Underrepresented students, all ethnicities

Launched 2014 · Year 10 -13

- Practical sessions, masterclasses, lab visits, lectures
- Summer School, field trips, guest speakers
- A-Level revision & university application support

STEM FUTURES

Black Heritage students, co-designed

Designed in 2022 with Black students (Cosmos research) · Year 10–13

- Same multi-touchpoint format as STEM Potential
- Culturally competent curriculum, Black role models
- Explicit focus on belonging, identity, community
- Personal development woven through every element

Shared aim: build confidence, belonging and STEM identity to support informed choices about university and STEM careers.

IMPERIAL COSMOS

THE RESEARCH

Two programmes, one qualitative evaluation

Imperial commissioned Cosmos in 2025 to qualitatively evaluate both programmes against their theory of change. External and qualitative – to amplify student voice, limit internal evaluator bias, and create space for students to speak openly.

7

focus groups

7 × 90-minute virtual focus groups with current students across Years 11, 12 & 13 on both programmes

49

students

27 STEM Potential
22 STEM Futures

2

stakeholder interviews

Both programme coordinators

ToC

evaluation framework

Mapped against Imperial's Theory of Change outcomes

ALSO DRAWN ON

Student journals (pre-task) · Literature review · Internal data review · Programme satisfaction surveys

IMPERIAL COSMOS

HEADLINE FINDINGS

What the research told us – and what it means beyond Imperial

01

Identity & lived experience shape programme choice

Black Heritage students self-selected into STEM Futures for cultural fit - for community, role models, and not to be the only Black student in the room. Programme naming and framing carry weight.

02

Personal development is as important as the STEM content

Resilience, self-efficacy, social skills and mental health emerged as core outcomes. STEM Futures' explicit focus on personal development was its strongest differentiator.

03

Programmes broaden students' understanding of STEM

Both programmes moved students from a narrow view (often Medicine only) toward a diverse range of degree and career options. They now want more depth on niche routes - Engineering, Computing, Biomedical.

04

The coordinators are the programme

Trusted, long-running relationships with coordinators were highly valued & celebrated by both cohorts. For STEM Futures, the coordinator became a culturally relevant role model and advocate.

A CRITICAL TENSION

Belonging in STEM ≠ belonging at Imperial

An honest, unintended outcome - and one of the most transferable lessons from this evaluation.

WHAT THE DATA SHOWS

Belonging in STEM: Both programmes successfully build STEM identity and confidence - most ToC outcomes met or nearly met.

Belonging at Imperial: A clear gap remains. STEM Futures students became acutely aware of Imperial's 4% Black student population.

The unintended outcome: Exposure to a positive Black Heritage cohort raised the bar - some are now deterred from applying.

Compounding factors: Imperial's rigorous admissions and London cost of living add to drop-off risk at the application stage.

46% → 21%

Year 13 STEM Futures students agreeing

'people similar to me go to Imperial'

before vs. after STEM Futures · Source: internal survey

37% STEM Potential **29%** STEM Futures

of Year 13s confident they'd get a place at Imperial if they applied

For evaluators: success in one ToC outcome can complicate another - and the gap only shows if you track it explicitly.

IMPERIAL COSMOS

WHAT THIS MEANS

For others designing pre-enrolment programmes

FOR ANY PRE-ENROLMENT PROGRAMME

01

Build theory of change tracking into rolling surveys

Not just end-point evaluation. Tensions between outcomes show up over time - and have the potential to be missed if you only ask at the end.

02

Pair external qualitative evaluation with internal data

Independent voice creates space for honesty and lets students speak openly. Triangulate with internal surveys to reduce bias.

03

Be open about unintended outcomes

Including findings that may not flatter the host institution. They are often where the biggest learnings are gained.

FOR PROGRAMMES DESIGNED FOR BLACK HERITAGE STUDENTS

01

Embed cultural representation at every level

Coordinators, mentors, ambassadors and content. STEM Futures' impact came from culturally grounded design - not just from adding diverse speakers alone.

02

Build belonging at the institution, not just within the programme

Strong programme-level belonging can highlight, rather than close, the institution-level gap. Plan for the application stage from the start.

Get in touch · Sarah Dirrane, Cosmos · hello@cosmosltd.uk · cosmosltd.uk ·

COSMOS

External Evaluation

Cosmos

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T 0113 887 0191

Research and Evaluation | Higher Education Access & Participation | Recruitment

Nexus, University of Leeds, Discovery Way, Leeds LS2 3AA

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The impact of understanding your place: Hepp's regional data dashboard

Tom Broom & Alex Bairstow
Higher Education Progression Partnership

The impact of understanding your place:

Hepp's regional data dashboard

Alex Bairstow and Tom Broom

TASO, 12th May 2026

A partnership of
Sheffield Hallam University
and the University of Sheffield

Sheffield Hallam University

University of Sheffield

Who are the Higher Education Progression Partnership (Hepp)?

- Formed in 2011 by the two Sheffield Universities, Sheffield Hallam University and the University of Sheffield
- Works across South Yorkshire to encourage more children, young people, and adults to consider higher education opportunities
- Additionally hosts our regional, government funded Uni Connect partnership and our locally driven South Yorkshire Children's University partnership
- As a collective, with our university funding partners we work together to increase and widen participation of our region's learners to higher education

Introduction/context

South Yorkshire, like all places, is not one homogeneous region

Historically, our outreach programmes haven't always recognised this

This risks a "one size fits all" approach

This in turn risks an overgeneralised programme theory, which doesn't account for how context shapes change mechanisms and outcomes

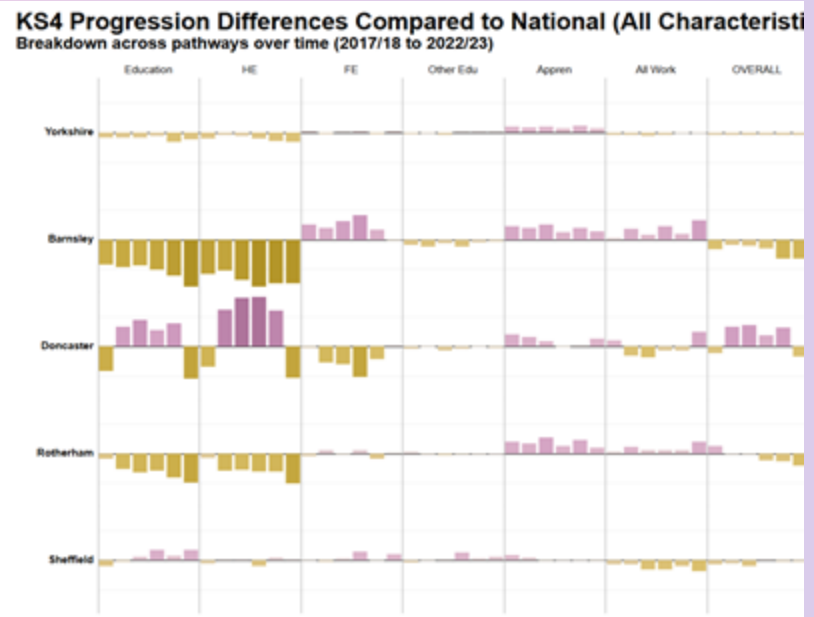
What is the Regional Data Dashboard and why was it developed?

Partnership for dashboard development

Hepp partnered with Visualising Data Ltd to build a multi-year data dashboard to inform our partnership outreach interventions.

Understanding and addressing diverse educational needs

The dashboard was created to enable us to understand the distinct educational contexts across South Yorkshire's varied areas.



What data does the dashboard include?

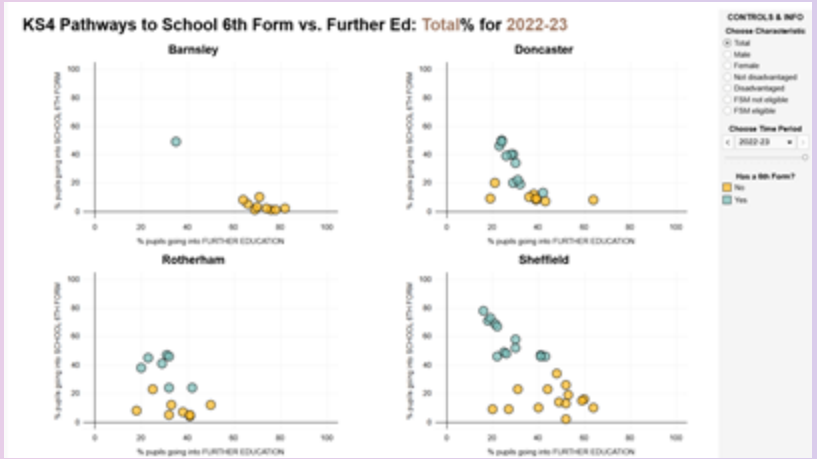
Demographic mapping indicators
Demographic data includes POLAR, TUNDRA, Adult HE participation.

Tracking progression destinations
After both Key Stage 4 and Key Stage 5 - by region, time, and disadvantage.

Layering
Multiple data sets can be integrated for more nuanced analysis.

Multiyear analysis
Data sets of up to 10 years to allow for longitudinal analysis

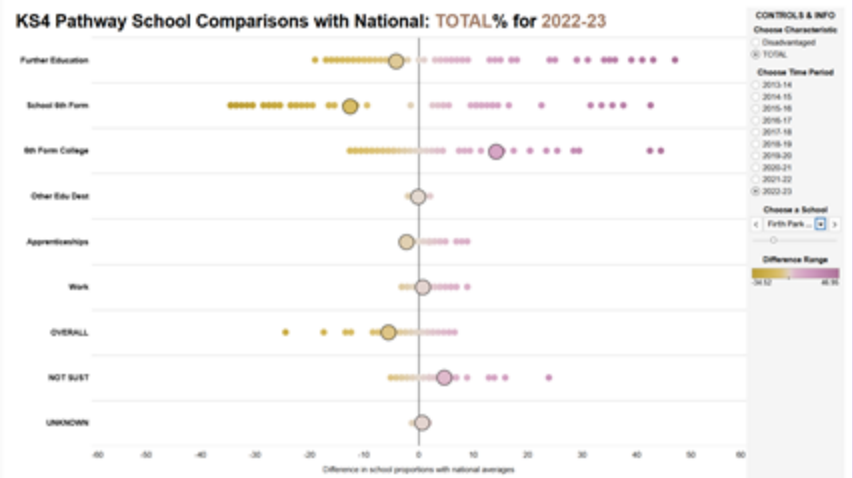
Institutional comparison
This data can be filtered at regional, sub regional and centre level.

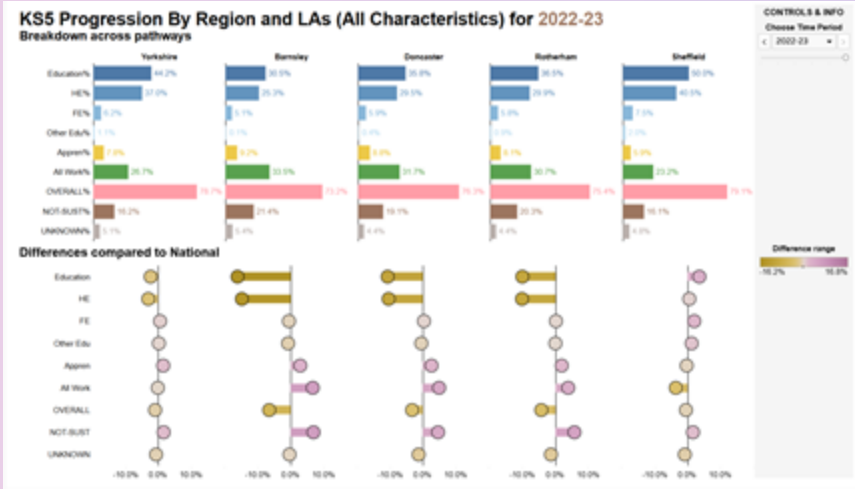


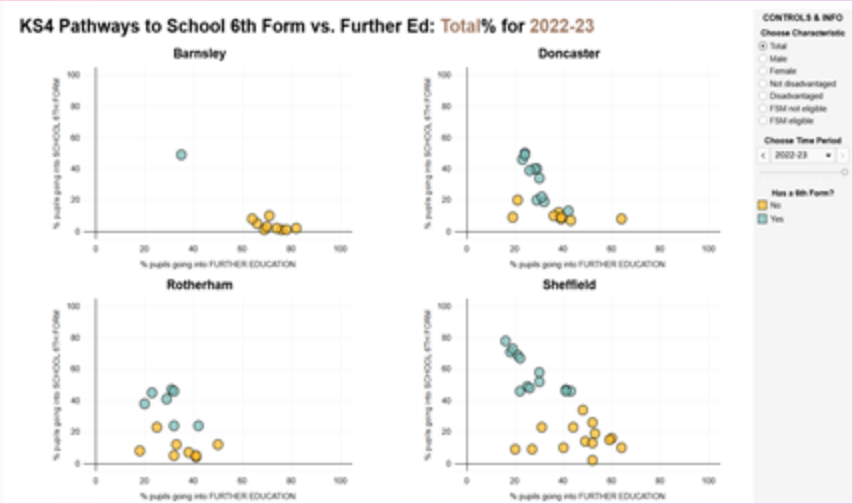
A partnership of Sheffield Hallam University and the University of Sheffield

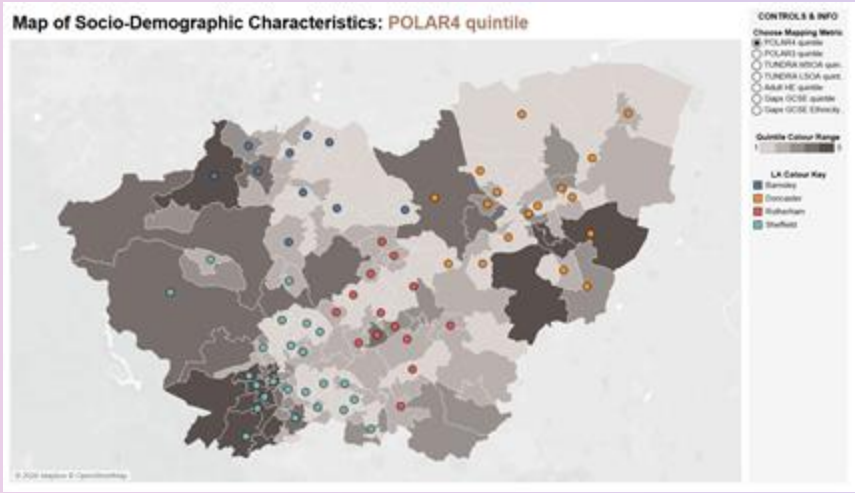
Sheffield Hallam University

University of Sheffield

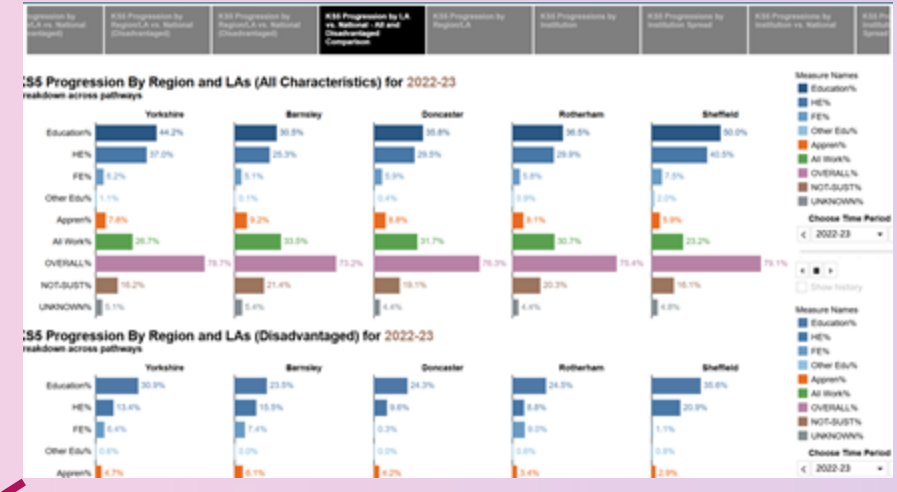

KS4 Pathway School Comparisons with National: TOTAL% for 2022-23
Further Education
School 6th Form
6th Form College
Other Edu Dest
Apprenticeships
Work
OVERALL
NOT SUST
UNKNOWN
Difference in school proportions with national averages
CONTROLS & INFO
Choose Characteristic
Disadvantaged
TOTAL
Choose Time Period
2013-14
2014-15
2015-16
2016-17
2017-18
2018-19
2019-20
2020-21
2021-22
2022-23
Choose a School
Firth Park ...
Difference Range


KS5 Progression By Region and LAs (All Characteristics) for 2022-23
Breakdown across pathways
Yorkshire
Barnsley
Doncaster
Rotherham
Sheffield
Education%
HE%
FE%
Other Edu%
Appren%
All Work%
OVERALL%
NOT-SUST%
UNKNOWN%
Differences compared to National
Education
HE
FE
Other Edu
Appren
All Work
OVERALL
NOT-SUST
UNKNOWN
CONTROLS & INFO
Choose Time Period
2022-23
Difference range


KS4 Pathways to School 6th Form vs. Further Ed: Total% for 2022-23
Barnsley
Doncaster
Rotherham
Sheffield
% pupils going into SCHOOL 6TH FORM
% pupils going into FURTHER EDUCATION
CONTROLS & INFO
Choose Characteristic
Total
Male
Female
Not disadvantaged
Disadvantaged
FSM not eligible
FSM eligible
Choose Time Period
2022-23
Has a 6th Form?
No
Yes


Map of Socio-Demographic Characteristics: POLAR4 quintile
CONTROLS & INFO
Choose Mapping Metric
POLAR4 quintile
POLAR3 quintile
TUNDRA MSOA quin.
TUNDRA LSOA quint.
Adult HE quintile
Gaps GCSE quintile
Gaps GCSE Ethnicity
Quintile Colour Range
LA Colour Key
Barnsley
Doncaster
Rotherham
Sheffield

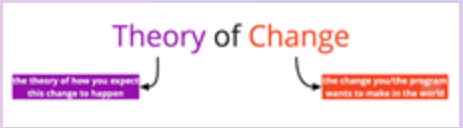
How will our partnership use the dashboard?



Targeting

Activity Development

Evaluation Planning



A partnership of
Sheffield Hallam University
and the University of Sheffield

Sheffield Hallam University

University of Sheffield

Specific examples of where it has informed our approach

Targeting
Sheffield schools feature much more predominantly in our ranking if we target solely using FSM. However, when factoring in HE progression metrics such as TUNDRA, schools located outside of Sheffield (Rotherham, Barnsley, Doncaster) feature much more predominantly.

Program development
Insight re: increased likelihood of students from schools with sixth forms attending a sixth from, and students from 11-16 schools attending a FEC have informed program and activity development.

Evaluation planning
Building a more context-sensitive programme theory strengthens our analysis and our ability to understand differential programme effects. By integrating our monitoring and evaluation returns into the dashboard, we can further our understanding of how outcomes and causal mechanisms vary across different settings.

What next?

- Encouraging our partnership to use the dashboard and explore the data
- Working with partners to identify additional relevant data sets:
  - OFSTED rating
  - School attainment metrics
  - Progression to HE by type
- Ensuring most up to date data sets are being used
- Incorporating our own data into the dashboard

Impact beyond our partnership

Encouraging critical evaluation

The dashboard inspires stakeholders to critically assess their understanding of local educational contexts beyond basic metrics.

Promoting place-informed outreach

Showcasing contextual data helps foster more nuanced and effective outreach strategies tailored to specific environments.

National and international influence

The approach aims to influence educational outreach practices, encouraging adoption of similar tools for equity.

Questions?

Panel discussion

Paper presentations: pre-entry interventions

> Chaired by **Dr Molly Rowlands**, TASO

> **Professor Elisabeth Moores**, Aston University
> **Sirin Tangpornpaiboon,** The Open University
> **Sarah Dirrane**, Imperial College London
> **Tom Broom,** Higher Education Progression Partnership

Lunch break and networking

Up next: Paper presentations: post-entry interventions

Paper presentations: post-entry interventions

> Chaired by **Katherine Drew**, TASO

> **Eleanor Turpin**, Nottingham Trent University

> **Dr Jake Hinks and Vikki Potts,** Wolverhampton University

> **Shivani Wilson-Rochford and Cain Clark,** Birmingham City University

> **Professor Sonia Ilie**, University of Cambridge

Is everything ok? Success in using compassionate comms in nudge emails

Eleanor Turpin
Nottingham Trent University

Nottingham Trent University

Is everything ok? Success in using Compassionate Comms in nudge emails

Dr Eleanor Turpin

Learning Analytics Research Manager, The Centre for Student and Community Engagement, Nottingham Trent University

12th May 2026

NTU Attendance and Engagement policy

- Escalating levels of support for students with repeated non-engagement. Policy is not punitive
- First stage: students who have not engaged with their studies for 7 days are sent a nudge email to encourage re-engagement and signpost to support.
- Universal design of service for all UG students, but particular benefit to APP target groups as 1.2 to 1.5 times more likely to be sent a 7-day nudge.
- Engagement and non-engagement monitored through an instance of StREAM from Kortext
- Emails sent via manual mail merge

Compassionate Communications

- Guidance launched by Academic Registrar's Council following work by the Higher Education Mental Health Implementation Taskforce
- Requirement for *'clear, empathetic, action-focused and supportive'* communications.

NTU

Prompted to review wording of nudge email

Original wording

- Subject: NTU Support
- General introduction acknowledging common challenges
- Signposting to support services
- Inoffensive to avoid causing alarm or irritation

Amended wording

- Subject: Is everything ok?
- Explicitly references 7 days of no engagement and the link between low engagement and the risks to progression
- Signposting to support services

Trial details

- AB trial
- Alerts calculation runs continuously during teaching periods
- Dates: 27th Jan – 27th March 2025 (term 2 24/25) and 22nd Sept – 5th Dec (term 1 25/26)
- Outcomes:
  - Escalation to next stage of Engagement and Attendance policy due to further periods of sustained non-engagement
  - 10/14-day alert
  - 10/14-day alert within the same period of non-engagement

Trial details: Randomisation

Trial Arm	A		B		Total
Term 2 24/25	13,642	50.1%	13,599	49.9%	27,241
Term 1 25/26	14,897	49.8%	14,992	50.2%	29,889
Combined totals	20,787	49.9%	20,835	50.1%	41,622

Trial details: Outcomes

	Term 2 24/25				Term 1 25/26				Combined			
	A		B		A		B		A		B	
Initial Population	13,642		13,599		14,897		14,992		28,539		28,591	
7-day alert	3,134	23.0%	3,089	22.7%	4,574	30.7%	4,576	30.5%	7,708	27.0%	7,665	26.8%
10/14-day alert	875	6.4%	922	6.8%	1,613	10.8%	1,735	11.6%	2,488	8.7%	2,657	9.3%
10/14-day alert same period	550	4.0%	623	4.6%	922	6.2%	1,050	7.0%	1,472	5.2%	1,673	5.9%

Analysis

- Logistic regression to model the relationship between email wording A or B, and the outcomes of further periods of sustained non-engagement.
- Models included gender, academic school, new /continuing/ repeating, clearing application, ethnic group, disability and IMD.
- Fee status (home or international), age and entry qualification excluded as did not enhance model
- Combined results analysed using mixed effects method to account for some students triggering 7-day alerts in both terms; disability and IMD excluded to aid convergence.

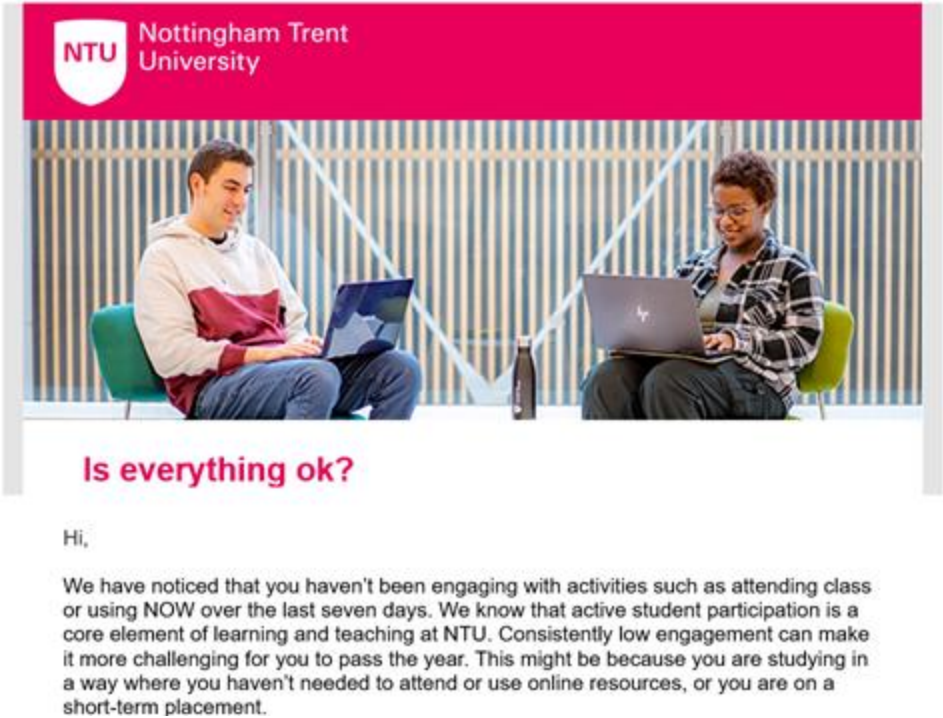
Result

- A student with the amended wording is 14% less likely to generate a 10/14-day alert, with a statistical significance of p=0.00007, if all other factors are the same.
- A student with the amended wording is 18% less likely to generate a 10/14-day alert within the same period of non-engagement, with a statistical significance of p=0.000003, if all other factors are the same.
- The amended wording had a **small, but statistically significant effect** on additional periods of non-engagement.

NTU

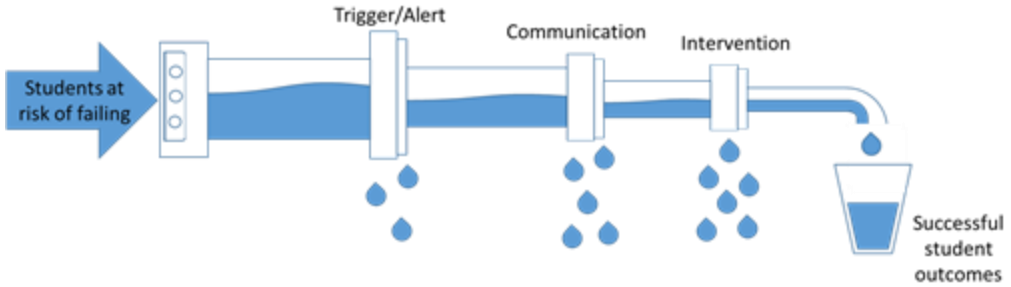
But that's not all…

- Between Sept 2023 and March 2025 ~26,000 emails sent with original wording with no single reply to StudentEngagement@ntu.ac.uk inbox.
- 200+ direct email replies to new wording - including many where students went on to receive meaningful support.



Reflections

- Focus on ‘wellbeing’, but comparable work as triggers were non-attendance and engagement score, and outcomes were increased attendance for two HEIs.
- *‘The assumed link between light-touch communication based on analytics data, wellbeing and academic engagement is not supported by the evidence from these trials’*
- Number of participants 1-2 orders of magnitude smaller.
- Conflates communication with intervention; previous work by our team identifies these as distinct steps on causal pathway (https://oflaproject.eu/)



Summary

- Wording of nudge emails redesigned following Compassionate Comms guidance
- New wording resulted in a small but significant reduction in periods of sustained non-engagement, as evaluated via AB trial.
- New wording also resulted in an increase in opportunities to offer meaningful support to students

Empowering student success through assessment choice to reduce inequalities in attainment

Dr Jake Hinks and Vikki Potts
Wolverhampton University

‘Empowering student success through assessment choice to reduce inequalities in attainment’

Dr Jake Hinks and Vikki Potts

Welcome

Dr Jake Hinks
Senior Lecturer in Law

Vikki Potts
Head of School, Business and Law

When assessment becomes a barrier

- Level 6 Core Module on LLB.
- Nearly 1 in 4 students mitigated.
- Stress. Workload. Delayed Graduation. Summer resits.

This wasn't about ability – it was about the system.

Academic Year	Fail		MITS		NS		Pass		Total student count
	%	SC	%	SC	%	SC	%	SC	
2019/0	7%	7	19%	19	4%	4	69%	69	100
2020/1	2%	2	20%	22	6%	7	68%	73	108
2021/2	9%	11	3%	4	14%	16	72%	84	117
2022/3	18%	14	18%	14	9%	7	52%	40	77
2023/4	12%	11	24%	22	8%	7	55%	51	92

AM, WD, LOA removed*

Why it matters

- Equity gaps: Declared Disability, Global Majority, BTEC entrants
- Traditional exams = structural barrier
- Direct alignment with TEF and APP
- Improved continuation, attainment, student voice

> I instantly felt more relaxed in the module as I knew I had a choice and instantly felt included.

What we did

- Introduced assessment choice:
  - **Option A:** Closed-book exam
  - **Option B:** Time-Constrained Assessment (TCA)
- Supported by student feedback and inclusive pedagogy
- Managed via MS Forms (95%+ completion) and manual portals

What changed

- **Mitigation rate:** 23.9% → 4.84%
- **First-sit pass rate:** 55.4% → 89%
- **Overall pass rate:** 86.8% → 98.5%
- Attainment gaps **closed**

Student Group	Academic Year	6LW004 Pass Rate (Sem 1)	6LW012 Pass Rate (Sem 2)	Attainment Gap
Declared Disability	2022/23	68.2%	95.8%	27.6%
	2023/24	85.2%	90.0%	4.8%
	2024/25	94.7%	94.7%	0.0%
Global Majority	2022/23	73.6%	90.0%	16.4%
	2023/24	87.1%	94.6%	7.5%
	2024/25	100.0%	100.0%	0.0%
BTEC Entrants	2022/23	41.7%	81.8%	40.1%
	2023/24	78.9%	100.0%	21.1%
	2024/25	100.0%	100.0%	0.0%

> Made the world of difference... I don't think I would've passed without choice.

Impact

- Embedded choice in LLB revalidation
- Focus on authentic assessment
- University Pilot
  - Need for digital infrastructure to scale
- Sharing findings across university and sector

Thank you.

Connect with us:
Dr Jake Hinks
Vikki Potts
(Both on LinkedIn)

Assessment choice is not a compromise on standards,
it can be a powerful lever for equity.

Learning from evaluation failure but intervention success

Professor Sonia Ilie and Dr Ellie Greer
University of Cambridge

Panel discussion

Paper presentations: post-entry interventions

> Chaired by **Katherine Drew**, TASO

> **Eleanor Turpin**, Nottingham Trent University

> **Dr Jake Hinks and Vikki Potts,** Wolverhampton University

> **Shivani Wilson-Rochford & Cain Clark**, Birmingham City University

> **Professor Sonia Ilie & Dr Ellie Greer**, University of Cambridge

Peer-led poster session with refreshments

Collaboration in practice: risks and rewards

> Chaired by **Dr Omar Khan**, TASO

> **Professor Paul Morgan,** Buckinghamshire New University

> **Leanne Taher-Bates,** Liverpool John Moores University

> **Dr Morag Duffin,** The University of Law

> **Jared Patel,** Loughborough University

In-conversation

> **Professor Eunice Simmons**, Vice Chancellor, University of Chester

> **Will Gaines,** President-elect, VP Student Life, Chester Students' Union

Reflections and close

Dr Omar Khan
CEO, TASO

TASO

Thank you for joining us!

Drinks reception