The Next Chapter in attainment-raising programmes at UCL

Vij Zorba, Data and Impact Manager

Access and Widening Participation

Research-led design

A **literature review** informed the programme design and decided key factors, such as delivery in-person by trained undergraduate tutors.

We **commissioned external research by Chloe Arnold** to understand what support would be most beneficial for students and teachers, including

- initial stage online survey of teachers, covering areas such as attainment barriers and programme structure, followed by in-depth interviews with eight respondents.

Attainment Barriers (top 2 box agreement)
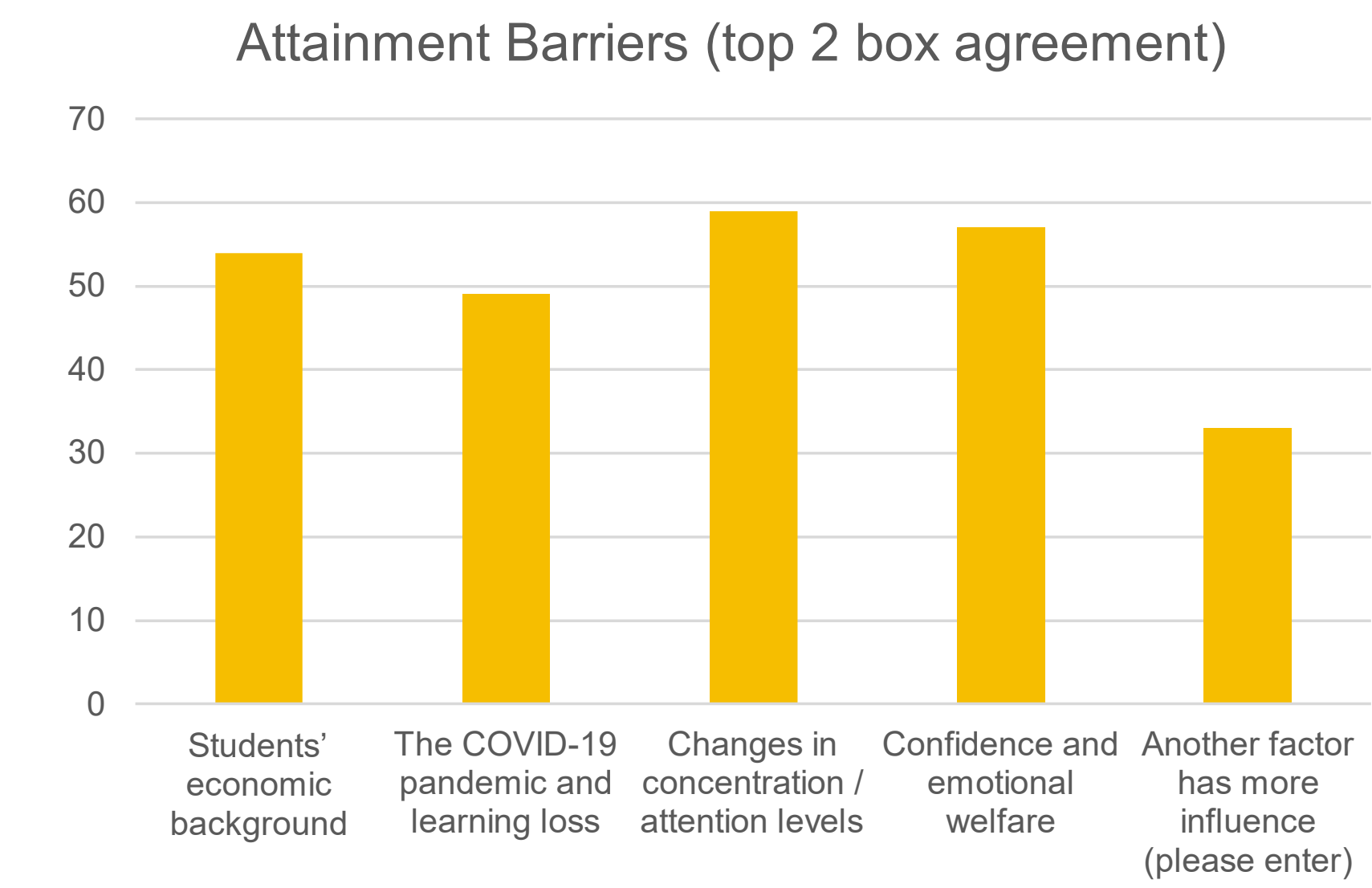
Q: How much would you agree that the following factors influence attainment levels for KS3 and KS4 students? (Agreement Scale)

Teachers identified missing building blocks to learning in literacy, holding students back from higher learning skills such as critical thinking.
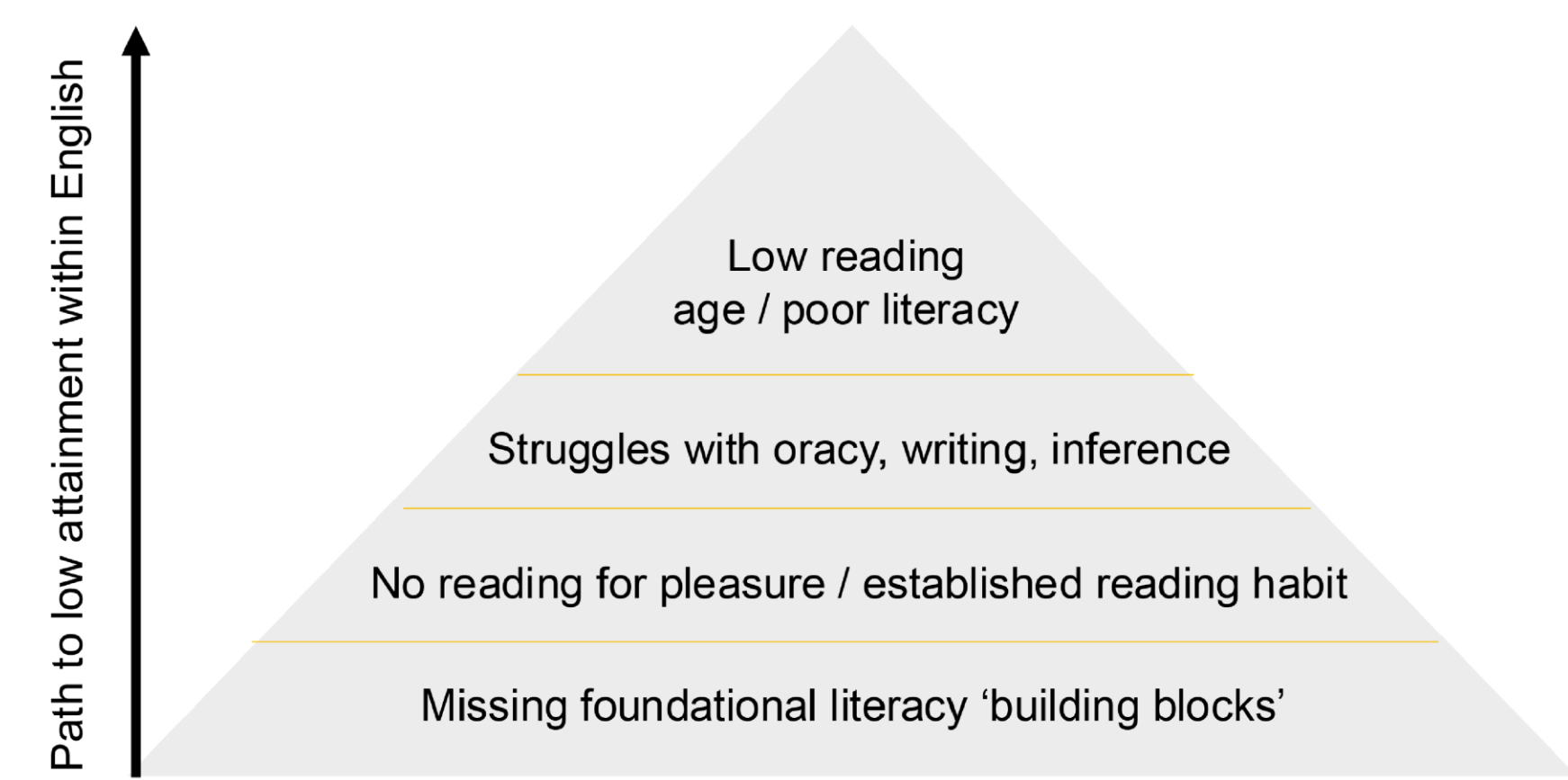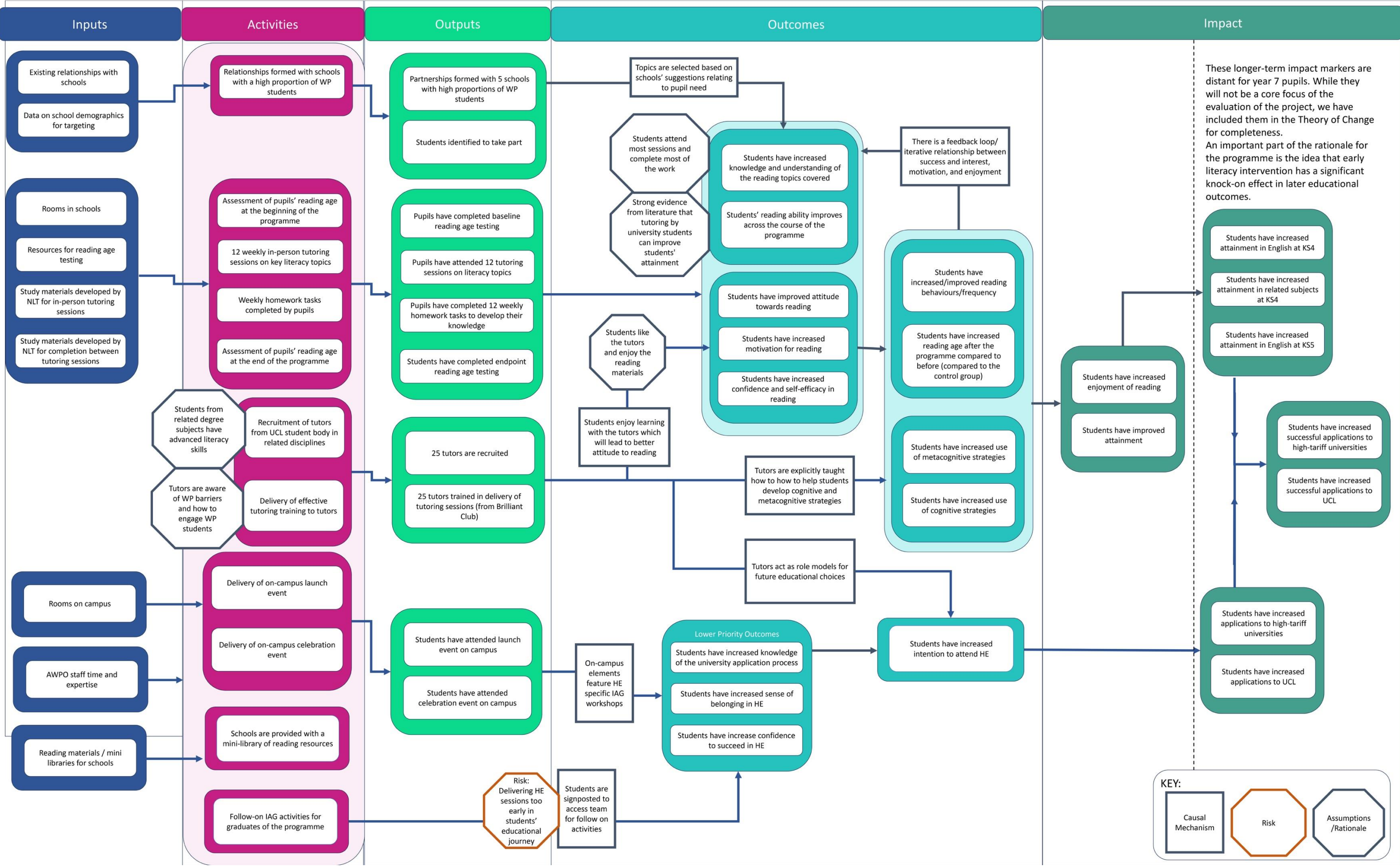

The vocabulary gap and literacy deficit is particularly striking in the transition from primary to secondary school and **early intervention is crucial**. This prompted a change in focus from Year 9 to Year 7.

Context and background

Attainment is the biggest determiner and indicator of a young person's chances of progressing to higher education. It is a key barrier to higher education for students from disadvantaged groups, especially to higher tariff institutions such as UCL.

Reflecting one of the Office for Students' key priorities to raise the attainment of young people, **UCL's Access and Participation Plan** aims to create flagship school programmes to address attainment gaps in Maths and literacy. Our evaluation and research informed the design of two new interventions: UCL Next Chapter (literacy programme for Year 7) and UCL Accelerate (Maths programme for Year 10).

Theory of Change for Next Chapter literacy programme

Evaluation design

The study is a **randomised control trial**, approved by UCL's Research Ethics Committee, comparing outcomes (attainment and likelihood of progressing to HE) for the participant group and a control group.

Attainment testing (a reading age test and a levelled maths assessment for respective strands) compares changes in attainment from a pre-programme baseline.

We used **TASO's Access and Success Questionnaire (ASQ)** scales 2, 3, 5, 7, and 9 and TASO's Toolkit for Access and Participation Evaluation to create a pre/post questionnaire on students' reading behaviours and attitudes to maths.

We plan to:

- compare **post-programme assessments** of pre-programme baseline and post-programme results for participant and control groups

- compare questionnaire responses and investigate any **correlation between responses and increase in attainment**

- compare **GCSE outcomes** between groups

- analyse **UCL internal admissions data** to ascertain applications, offers and enrolments to UCL, comparing rates between participant and control groups

- hold **focus group discussions** with teachers to capture their views on programmes' impact.

Development and implementation

We worked with the charities **National Literacy Trust** (NLT) and **MEI** (Mathematics Education Innovation) to design and deliver the programmes.

We partnered with **the Brilliant Club** to deliver high-quality tutor training in conjunction with NLT and MEI and incorporated a recommendation from schools that tutors observe a Maths or English lesson as part of training.

Next Chapter and Accelerate pilots are each running in five partner schools. Feedback from teachers and partner schools has shaped the programmes. For example, teachers selected the maths topics in which students need most support; these topics form the basis of Accelerate.

Maths Topics (top 5 multiple choice)
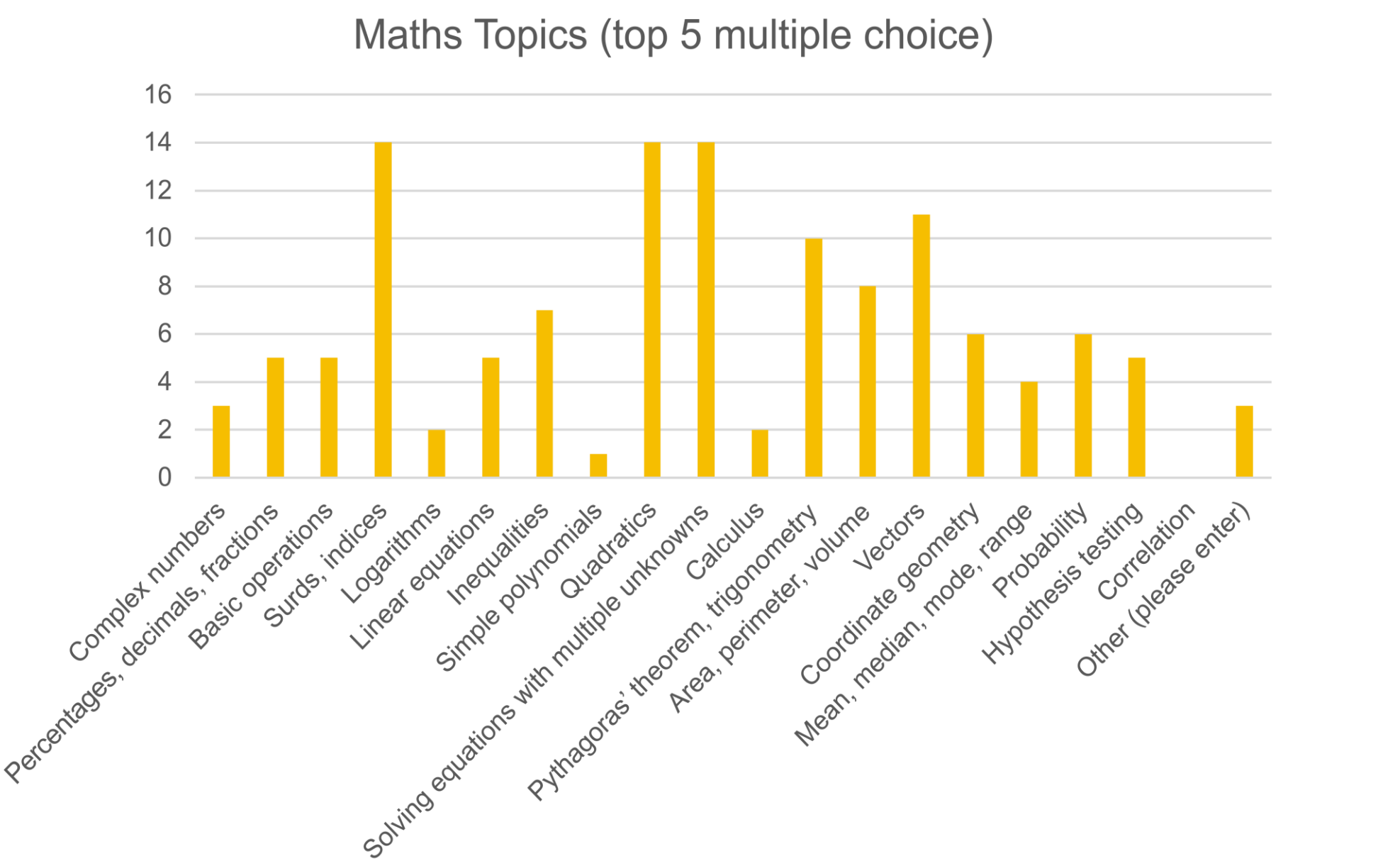
Q: Which of the following topics within the KS4 Maths curriculum do you feel that students struggle most with / could benefit from extra support?

The pilot programmes launched successfully in Spring 2025. Participants are engaged, attendance is high and tutors are receiving good feedback.

Next steps include:

- concluding delivery and finalising data collection
- analysis and reporting
- refining programme models based on initial evaluation findings from this pilot year.