Causal evaluation with small cohorts: Contribution Analysis of a Leeds Arts University access intervention

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Executive summary

The Centre for Transforming Access and Student Outcomes in Higher Education (TASO) funded Leeds Arts University to pilot a small number (or small *n*) evaluation methodology for determining the impact of a widening participation programme.

Leeds Arts University designed, delivered, and evaluated the *Creative Pathways Programme* (CPP). The primary aim of the programme was to support students from underrepresented groups to access higher education (HE) in the creative arts by providing information, advice and guidance (IAG) around creative HE study and careers, support to develop creative practice and meet entry criteria, and the possibility for financial support for Foundation study.

The 16+ strand of the programme, evaluated here, was devised as a sustained engagement with a targeted cohort of students who had expressed an interest in progressing to post-compulsory education in the creative arts and were studying a Level 3 (Advanced Level or BTEC) creative subject in Years 12 and 13. The programme comprised a launch event; creative industry and careers session; creative and visual research session; post-18 options session; a summer brief; application and interview preparation; and a graduation and celebration event.

The small *n* pilot evaluation sought to determine the impact of the Creative Pathways Programme 16+ using contribution analysis (Mayne, 2008). The primary evaluation questions were: *Did the Creative Pathways Programme contribute to progression to creative higher education study for those who participated? If so, how did it do so and for whom?* Through the refinement of the theory of change, the change mechanism of 'supporting decision-making' was selected as the evaluation focus.

The contribution of the programme was explored through consideration of a range of evidence: on outputs; immediate, intermediate and final outcomes and impacts (for example, that 50% (n = 9) of the cohort had applied to creative arts higher education); assumptions; and other influencing factors. The evidence impacted on the strength of the links in the results chain. It acknowledges the context in which the programme was offered, such as other influencing factors in a student's sphere. These include influencers (e.g., parents/carers/guardians, teachers, and peers), programme timing in relation to progression advice and timelines at participants' education institutions, and prioritisation with other commitments. The evidence also details how meeting intended outcomes depended on participants' level of engagement.

The contribution analysis found that CPP contributed to progression to creative arts higher education study for those who participated. It did this for those who attended sessions more regularly and for whom we had survey and destinations information. The programme did this by providing the multiple programme outputs (i.e., information on creative FE, HE, and careers), and through the change mechanism of supporting participants' decision-making. This was demonstrated through the immediate outcomes of enhancing participants' awareness of their options, requirements, pathways and potential careers and how to apply. This somewhat refined their choices of options but more clearly led to a number of applications to creative arts FE and/or HE. Ultimately, the programme focus on students who meet characteristics of underrepresentation contributed to diversification of FE and HE creative arts student populations.

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Introduction

Historically, specific groups have been underrepresented in the English higher education (HE) context, including students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and students of minoritised ethnicities. HE providers have long worked to improve access and participation for students from underrepresented groups, through employing widening participation (WP) activities.

These aims have also been championed by the Office for Students (OfS), the independent regulator of English HE providers, with HE institutions using access and participation plans to outline their ambitions and strategies. There has been equal emphasis from the OfS on robust evaluation, including evaluation that explores the causal effects of an intervention (Office for Students, 2019).

However, the experimental or quasi-experimental designs often utilised for exploring causality cannot be appropriately employed to discern the impact of interventions with small cohorts. Alternatives to counterfactual designs are necessary in these contexts, and one such method is employed in this pilot impact evaluation of a multi-intervention outreach programme working with small cohorts at Leeds Arts University, the Creative Pathways Programme (CPP).

Motivation for involvement in TASO pilot

In 2022, the Centre for Transforming Access and Student Outcomes (TASO) launched an invitation to tender for a project to pilot small number (or small *n*) impact evaluation methods. As a small and specialist creative arts institution, Leeds Arts University was keen to pilot impact evaluation methodologies that both consider the small cohorts we most commonly work with and provide high-quality evidence of what works. There was also an interest in adding to the national discourse on WP evaluation the perspective of a small and specialist creative arts higher education provider in what is possible with more limited resource or capacity.

Given that the university does not have a WP evaluation team, this project presented an opportunity to further upskill the university's Progression team, who conduct both WP activity and evaluation. Crucially, the various elements of quality assurance offered as part of the pilot project were considered a valuable opportunity to support confidence and ability to conduct robust causal evaluation appropriate to the university's specific WP context.

Following the commencement of the pilot project, further rationale for involvement came via a new strategic priority, introduced by the Director for Fair Access and Participation in 2023 for higher education providers to increase the volume and quality of evaluation (OfS 2023, p8).

Selection of Contribution Analysis methodology

The team decided initially that we would look at evaluating a new multi-intervention outreach project, the Creative Pathways Programme (CPP). By the time the invitation to tender was announced, one cohort had progressed through the programme, and it was felt that evaluating this cohort would be beneficial as it would enable the evaluation, albeit retrospective, of a sustained intervention within the pilot timeframe. Given that CPP is an ongoing programme with new cohorts beginning each year, the team felt that understanding the contribution of the programme and other influencing factors at this early stage would be helpful for guiding future delivery and evaluation of this sustained programme.

When deciding which of the small *n* methods would be most appropriate, TASO's *Impact Evaluation with Small Cohorts: Methodology Guidance* (2022) introduced the team to Befani's (2020) tool for choosing appropriate impact evaluation methodologies. This tool suggested focusing first on the

research question being asked. For CPP, the team was most interested in understanding what difference the programme was making, how, why, and to whom.

The team were also interested in trying a new method, yet conscious that the chosen method would need to be aligned with the team's areas and level of evaluation expertise at that time, in particular limited quantitative capacity. We knew that overall small *n* methods would helpfully play to the team's strengths with mixed methods, enable the team to explore the complexity within and across individual cases, and thereby provide some understanding of the multiple causes leading to desired effects.

Realist evaluation was a method already in use through the university's Uni Connect partnership (as mentioned in the TASO Methodology Guidance (2022). Most Significant Change as a methodology was unlikely to work, given that it relies heavily on stories elicited directly from programme participants, which would be difficult as the team was interested in evaluating a cohort of CPP participants who had just completed the programme and therefore was not easily accessible. Due primarily to its dependence on Boolean algebra, Qualitative Comparative Analysis was considered beyond the immediate skillset of the team, though its reliance on fuller understanding of cases was also a barrier given access to the cohort. Due largely to connotations around case study methodology, the team opted against adopting Comparative Case Study. Finally, Agent-Based Simulation was seen as outside of the available skillset, in requiring expert modellers and facilitators.

Contribution Analysis was seen as most suited as a methodology; it provided a clear set of steps that focuses on a theory of change, which the team already had in place and represented an iterative approach. The team was interested in the way the method can be used to identify other influencing factors and identify challenges to the initial theory of change. Piloting this methodology, at this early point in delivering CPP, would therefore support the ongoing development of the theory of change, building of the contribution story, and inform data gathering. There were some overlaps with General Elimination Methodology and Process Tracing, so there was an option to read into the latter in particular and perhaps incorporate this into the pilot depending on the time available to read and understand two methodologies.

Creative arts in the UK context

As a programme, CPP sits within a particularly noteworthy context for the creative arts. The value of the creative industries was £116 billion per year as of 2019 (DCMS, 2021). In May 2022, the Creative Industries Council reported that the creative industries account for 6.9% of all UK jobs, up from 5.8% in 2015, and comprising approximately 400,000 new UK jobs (Creative Industries Council, 2022).

At the same time, societal and political perceptions of the value, benefits and potential financial return of a career in the creative industries represent challenges to creative arts education. This has meant that the creative arts have been experiencing systemic marginalisation in the compulsory education curriculum over time, with an emphasis on 'STEM' subjects (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) rather than 'STEAM', which includes the creative arts. More recently, Ofsted (2023) reported that "art should command an important place in every school". However, the report acknowledges that there has been an eight percent decline in the number of art and design teachers between 2010 and 2020 and that pupils are taught fewer hours of art and design at secondary level (Ofsted, 2023).

Furthermore, there is evidence of lower participation of underrepresented groups in the creative arts, from school to industry, including in terms of gender, disability, sexuality, age and socioeconomic background (Creative Industries Federation, 2017). In addition to the overall decline

in participation in arts study at GCSE (Ofqual, 2018), Mak and Fancourt (2021) have found a social gradient for out-of-school engagement in art and cultural engagement for young people.

Context of the university and the Progression team
CPP is offered by a small, specialist creative arts university based in the North of England. There are around 2,500 students across the university's further and higher education provision. The university offers entry points in further education at Year 12 for the Extended Diploma in Creative Practice, and after Year 13 for the Foundation Diploma in Art and Design (FAD) and/or HE study with a range of undergraduate and postgraduate degrees in arts, design and performance.

FAD is a one-year course that acts as a bridge into HE. Entry requirements are lower than undergraduate entry (72 tariff points versus 112 for undergraduate study) and can boost a student's undergraduate entry points, with a Pass grade providing 80 further tariff points, Merit 96, and Distinction 112. FAD offers further development of critical and creative skills, and an opportunity to refine a choice of specialism regarding career pathway into the creative sector. If the student is under 19 years of age at commencement of the course in September, there is no tuition fee.

CPP sits within the widening participation remit of the Progression team. The team consists of a full-time Progression Manager and Progression Administrator, and two part-time Progression Support Workers. The design, resourcing, delivery, evaluation and reporting of WP activity are all within the remit of the team. An annual WP report as well as Access and Participation Plan monitoring is reported to the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee, and overseen by the Academic Board, Senior Management Team, and Board of Governors internally and where relevant, to the English HE regulatory body, the Office for Students (OfS). The university and Progression team are also partners in the regional Uni Connect collaboration, working along with 12 other higher education providers and Uni Connect target schools and colleges across the region.

CPP sits alongside other outreach provision delivered by the Progression team in schools and colleges, on campus and as extracurricular provision. This provision comprises an on-campus and online six-week After School Art Club in three terms of a year (for pupils in Years 8 to 11); Easter and Summer School intensives (3 – 5 days for pupils in Years 7 to 13); a 'Preparing for Arts University' course (for Year 12 and 13s); half-term cultural activities; in-school and on-campus workshops, presentations, tours, and subject tasters; End of Year Show group tours; and information, advice and guidance (IAG) careers fairs in target schools and colleges in the region.

Context of the programme
The programme was strategically designed and developed in 2020-21 as a response to access targets for underrepresented groups within the university's Access and Participation Plan (APP). These target groups comprise students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and students of minoritised ethnicity.

In particular, the 2020-21 to 2024-25 APP states:

> New, targeted partnerships with specific schools with high BAME [*sic*] populations in low-income areas. This will include the provision of free extra-curricular courses and activities that enable pupils from under-represented groups to meet the University's entry criteria. These will be from year 9 through to year 13 and will be in the form of portfolio production for art & design and music performance and theory sessions, which will facilitate meeting the threshold standards and entry requirements as devised by the University. In addition, pupils from the targeted schools who qualify (on the grounds of

family income) but do not meet the portfolio entry threshold of undergraduate study will be able to apply for a bursary to support the costs of study for a Level 3 Foundation Diploma in Art & Design at the University in order that they may do so within one further year.

The programme was therefore designed to support students from underrepresented groups to access HE in the creative arts by providing IAG around creative HE study and careers, support to develop creative practice and meet entry criteria, and the possibility for financial support for Foundation study. The original theory of change, designed prior to the programme delivery and using the TASO theory of change template available at the time, is available in Appendix A.

The programme's design, combining multiple stage-appropriate elements, aligns with a systematic review of evidence on the effectiveness of interventions and strategies for widening participation in HE in which Younger and colleagues (2018) found that longer-term 'Black box' programmes (with multiple elements in a single programme) and financial incentives were effective.

Setting up the programme included entering deeper partnership working and communication with target schools and sixth forms in the region, facilitated by agreement with senior leadership teams and creative teachers. Target schools and sixth forms were selected on the basis of Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) quintile, POLAR4 quintile, rate of eligibility for free school meals over the last six years (FSMEver6), and proportion of pupils of minoritised ethnicity, in particular pupils of Black ethnicities.

There are two strands offered as part of the Creative Pathways Programme: a pre-16 programme for Year 9 pupils that runs until Year 11, and a 16+ programme for pupils in Year 12, that runs to the end of Year 13. This evaluation focuses on the 16+ strand, as the first cohort of this strand completed the programme in the summer that the pilot evaluation project was launched.

Teachers and careers advisors in the target schools publicised the 16+ programme to Year 12 pupils who were studying a creative arts subject. Pupils were encouraged to apply to the programme with parental consent, should they meet relevant eligibility criteria. General criteria included attending a target school or sixth form, living within one hour's travel (each way) from the university, and studying towards a 16-18 qualification (A level, BTEC, Certificate/Diploma/Extended Diploma) in a creative subject.

Applicants were informed that while applications would be considered on an individual basis, young people from groups underrepresented in HE would be prioritised, including those living in an area of low participation in higher education areas (POLAR4) and/or areas of greater relative deprivation (IMD); from a Black, Asian, Mixed or other minoritised ethnicity; with a declared disability; with experience of being in local authority care/looked after; with caring responsibilities; eligible for free school meals within the last six year; estranged from their families; from Gypsy, Roma or Traveller communities; with refugee status; or from military families. Applicants were also informed that they would be eligible to apply for a £3,000 bursary toward studying FAD should they have attended a partner school, have an annual family income of £25,000 or under, and go on to secure a place on that course at the university.

The programme cohort evaluated in this report commenced in spring 2021, with a group of eighteen Year 12 participants, who went on to complete the programme in July 2022. The characteristics of underrepresentation met by participants are shown below:

- 53% IMD quintile 1 (areas of highest relative deprivation)
- 47% POLAR4 quintile 1 (areas of lowest HE participation))
- 44% of Black, Asian or other minoritised ethnicity
- 11% declaring a disability or specific medical needs
- 39% eligible for free school meals
- 6% from a military family

Programme delivery comprised multiple points of contact in each year of the two-year extracurricular provision, including a launch event; creative industry and careers session; creative and visual research session; post-18 options session; a summer brief; application and interview preparation; and finally, an in-person graduation and celebration event. Appendix B illustrates the timeline for activities and evaluation in each year of the programme.

Due to the pandemic, the programme (with the exception of the graduation event) was offered virtually, through a mix of synchronous and asynchronous activity. This represented a modification from the Progression team's usual format of in-person engagement on campus, using the university's workshops and resources. Following the launch event, links to each online asynchronous session were sent on a Friday, with a follow-up synchronous tutorial taking place the following week. Throughout the programme, communications were sent to participants, their parents/carers/guardians and their creative arts teachers, to triangulate knowledge and support of the programme and its activities.

Methodology

Data protection and ethical approval

The LAU project team met with relevant internal and TASO data protection staff to complete a data protection impact assessment and ensure data protection standards would be met throughout the project. The LAU project team also met with the Chair of the internal Research and Ethics Committee to ensure alignment with data protection and the interests of programme participants, target schools and sixth form providers, those delivering the programme, and around dissemination. Both data protection standards and ethical considerations were approved prior to commencing the pilot evaluation.

Contribution Analysis

John Mayne's seminal paper *Contribution Analysis: An approach to exploring cause and effect* (2008) states that contribution analysis:

> 'explores attribution through assessing the contribution a programme is making to observed results. It sets out to verify the theory of change behind a programme and, at the same time, takes into consideration other influencing factors.' (p.1)

Causal claims are here based on a reasoned theory of change, stakeholders largely agreeing on plausible assumptions for why the programme should work, implementation of intended activities, evidence that verifies the theory of change and chain of expected results, and assessment and recognition of the relative contributions of other factors influencing the programme (Mayne, 2008: p.1).

Mayne (2008) identifies three levels of contribution analysis: a *minimalist contribution analysis*, a *contribution analysis of direct influence*, and a *contribution analysis of indirect influence*. This pilot evaluation attempted a contribution analysis of direct influence. A minimalist contribution analysis develops the theory of change and confirms that expected outputs were delivered (Mayne,

2008:p.3). In the case of CPP, this would mean developing the theory of change and confirming, for example, that participants left with a better understanding of creative arts further and higher education pathways.

As a contribution analysis of direct influence, however, this pilot evaluation takes a further step of building evidence that the expected results in areas of direct influence of the theory of change were observed, for example, informed decision-making to successfully apply to creative FE and HE, and that the programme was influential in bringing about those results. The analysis then considers other influencing factors.

Furthermore, the contribution story is based on observed results; confirmation that assumptions about direct influence are supported by factual evidence, and to the extent possible, consideration of the strength of the theory of change in areas of indirect influence (although more evidence would need to be gathered to provide clear support for these areas of the theory of change).

This evaluation report structure is aligned, as closely as possible, to the steps for contribution analysis outlined in Mayne's (2008) approach, as set out in the following figure:

> **Step 1:** Set out the attribution problem to be addressed.
> **Step 2:** Develop a theory of change and risks to it.
> **Step 3:** Gather the existing evidence on the theory of change.
> **Step 4:** Assemble and assess the contribution story and challenges to it.
> **Step 5:** Seek out additional evidence.
> **Step 6:** Revise and strengthen the contribution story.
>
> Following Step 6, it is possible to return to Step 4 to further develop the contribution story.

Figure 1. Contribution Analysis steps (adapted from Mayne, 2008:p.1)

Step 1: Set out the contribution problem to be addressed
Acknowledge the attribution problem

Prior to undertaking the evaluation, the project team discussed how perceived outcomes might be attributed to the programme. We were interested in whether the choices that programme participants made, following the intervention, were informed by their learning and experiences on the programme. We were also interested in what role the programme plays, for example, if and how it contributes, or enhances, students' decision-making processes regarding higher education, pursuing the creative arts, and subject choices.

Determine the specific cause-effect question being addressed

Following discussion of the attribution problem, the project team determined the following specific cause-effect questions that we were asking through this evaluation:

> *Did the Creative Pathways Programme contribute to progression to creative arts higher education study for those who participated?*
>
> *If so, how did it do so and for whom?*

We felt that this was a reasonable question, when considering other factors outside our control, such as participants doing their own research, engagement with careers advisors at their own school or college, parental and other influencers, and other progression activities that participants may be involved in. We felt that these questions would also provide the right level of information for us to understand the impact of the programme and how we might change the programme going forward in the future.

Determine the level of confidence required

The project team then moved to consider what level of proof was required in the findings of the evaluation. We knew that we would use the findings to inform any changes to the programme, the theory of change and whether to continue the delivery for future cohorts. However, we also acknowledged the small number of the cohort who had regularly participated, and the difficulty of engaging with programmes over the duration of the Covid-19 pandemic. We therefore knew that the findings would need to be considered alongside these factors. To an extent, we could not assume that if the same activities had been offered in an in-person setting, but with the same regularity, that it may have led to better results.

Explore the type of contribution expected

The project team acknowledged that the following aspects would show that the programme had made an important contribution: participants attending with regularity, participants engaging with

the Progression team members (e.g., sending in examples of work, answering evaluation surveys, exchanging emails, asking questions), participant feedback indicating satisfaction, data from the pre- and post-surveys showing increases (e.g., in intentions to pursue the creative arts, feeling better informed about the process for applying to university, creative arts subjects they could study), evidence of application, offers, and enrolment at the university, and being informed of progression to other creative arts or higher education institutions.

Across each of these outcomes, we would need evidence that these outcomes were due to the programme offering information, experience and influence that was above and beyond what participants may have accessed were they not part of the programme, and additional to what they were receiving as part of careers, information, advice and guidance in their sixth form provision or through their key influencers (e.g., parents, guardians, carers).

Determine the other key influencing factors
The following table indicates a range of key factors that may influence outcomes of the intervention (for example, progression to creative arts higher education study for those who participated in the programme). These other influencing factors could complement the programme, acting in synergy, or act against them.

Factors identified by the project team include individual participants' attributes, aspects of their sixth form provision and careers curriculum, the influential agents in their sphere of influence, interactions with the intervention or encountering unforeseen events.

These have been categorised into five groups, elaborated in Tables 1 to 5 below:
1) personal attributes,
2) intervention-related factors,
3) external influences,
4) factors related to the process of applying to higher education, and
5) alternative plans and pathways for progression.

Personal attributes	
1.1 Low engagement in intervention	Low or no attendance, loss of interest, change of education progression plans.
1.2 Perception of self	Perception that Higher Education is not for them.
1.3 Resilience, confidence, self-regulation	Varying states of capacity to address challenges to progression and critical moments of low confidence.
1.4 State of mind and student wellbeing	Low or no attendance in education, low participation in programme, low state of mental health and wellbeing.
1.5 Life-changing incident	Experience of illness, mental health issues, withdrawal from education, did not sit required qualifying exams.

Table 1. Other key influencing factors: Personal attributes

Participants' personal attributes and character may have varying levels of significance for their gain from the programme. As an example, low engagement, or having the perception that HE is not for them, may undermine the potential impact of the programme and lead to participants not progressing to creative arts higher education as a result.

If a student's perception of self becomes aligned with the prospect of higher education, this may facilitate the programme objectives. Resilience, confidence and good self-regulation might facilitate programme completion. However, an absence of these may present barriers for that individual. A

student's state of mind and encounters with unforeseen factors, such as a life-changing incident, might also impact positively or negatively, influencing programme participation and outcomes.

Intervention-related factors	
2.1 Access (digital, digital literacy, materials, space)	Access to a digital online intervention may be problematic. This might be due to household access/arrangements, shared access to digital devices in the household, economics of broadband provision, hardware and level of digital literacy. While the programme provided all necessary creative materials, participants may have wanted additional materials that they did not have access to. Participants may also have had constraints/interruptions to access to a space or work surfaces, where they could work on creative processes at home.
2.2 Digital fatigue	Having all aspects of education offered online (due to the pandemic) may result in digital fatigue, therefore leading to lower engagement with an online format of delivery. Participants not using their webcam and microphone may impact on the depth of meaningful engagement.
2.3 Duration of programme participation	Pressure of time needed for the programme may be perceived as overwhelming and lead to withdrawal.
2.4 Conflict with demands from other subjects	Pressure of the intervention's time commitment, in addition to other subjects studied at the time as part of the curriculum and other extracurricular commitments.
2.5 Relevance of intervention	Relevance or perceived gains of participation in the programme not judged adequate enough to continue. Relevance of the intervention to the individual and their progression intentions not as originally planned or considered.

Table 2. Other key influencing factors: Intervention-related factors

There are also factors related to the intervention that could influence the programme outcomes. As the programme was delivered during the Covid-19 pandemic, and therefore offered virtually, having inconsistent levels of digital access or limited digital literacy may have hindered engagement, given the targeting of the programme to students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds in terms of areas of low participation in HE and high relative deprivation.

Access to materials and a space to work or participate in the virtual sessions in the residential setting may have a similar impact. Digital fatigue, during a time when all educational aspects were delivered online, may have had a negative influence on engagement and therefore, influence on the programme outcomes. The ability to balance the demands of the programme alongside other curriculum commitments would likely influence the programme outcomes, especially given the duration over two years.

Finally, perceived relevance or gains from the programme would influence programme outcomes through resulting levels of engagement by the participants.

External influences (Before and during the programme and HE application)

3.1 Encounters with other role models and agents of influence	Encounters with other (more) influential role models – creative arts teachers and possible alumni staff within the sixth form provision; visiting creative practitioners to sixth form provision; peer influence; current university students or sixth form alumni; student ambassadors from other universities.
3.2 Counterinfluences (1)	Experience of other influential agents: schoolteachers, careers planning advisers, parents/carers or guardians, significant others (community group leaders), peers.
3.3 Counterinfluences (2)	Experience of other persuasive influences, for example, through participating in another progression intervention.
3.4 Wider societal views about creative careers	Negative societal perception of worthiness/value of creative careers.
3.5 Changes to Higher Education	Changes and potential changes, communicated by media of HE, incurred student debt, potential earnings, cost of living.

Table 3. Other key influencing factors: External influences

Encounters with other role models and agents of influence if in alignment with the intervention could be complementary but could negatively influence the outcomes if contradictory. The presence of counterinfluences could similarly sway a participant away from progression into creative arts higher education, while the participant's response to such pressures could be to reject them, depending on their independence and character. These counterinfluences exist within a wider context of often negative societal perceptions of the worthiness and value of careers in the creative industries and the context of creative arts higher education study.

Process of application to Higher Education	
4.1 Insufficient research into construction of plans for progression beyond Year 13	Does not undertake sufficient research to make a clear decision to act, choose a subject to study and/or progression destination.
4.2 Application for progression	Did not apply, decision to take a gap year, missed January application deadline. Course of choice not being available at the Clearing period following August results.
4.3 Qualifications	Does not meet entry requirements to enable progression into course and university of choice.
4.4 Level 2 qualifications	Does not meet entry requirements to achieve Level 2 entry requirements of 4 GCSEs at Grade 4 or above, including Maths and English.
4.5 Level 3 qualifications	Does not meet entry requirements for Foundation Diploma (at LAU, 72 tariff points; Level 3 A-level grades of D, D, D or BTEC National Diploma Merit, Merit, Pass or Pass at T Level). Does not meet entry requirements for undergraduate study (at LAU, 112 tariff points; Level 3 A-Level grades of B, B, C or BTEC Merit, Merit, Distinction, or Merit at T level).
4.6 Examples of work and personal statement	Does not construct a compelling personal statement in application. Does not compile a digital portfolio of examples of creative works (portfolio of creative practice) or selected works are not deemed of sufficient standard.

Table 4. Other key influencing factors: Process of application to higher education

Despite the information, advice and guidance provided as part of the programme, participants may choose not to take on this advice for their applications, personal statements, examples of work, or research about courses and institutions. This is a matter of individual autonomy and choice. Similarly, participants may not receive the grades to meet creative arts higher education entry requirements, which would influence the programme outcomes.

Alternative plans and pathways for progression	
5.1 Follows an alternative plan	Participant experiences a change of plan, mind or indecision.
5.2 Follows an alternative plan (2)	Alternative (more compelling) offer, alternative plan or no alternative plan.
5.3 Follows an alternative plan (3)	Had not been their careers plan in the first place (but wanted to take up the learning opportunity).

Table 5. Other key influencing factors: Alternative plans and pathways for progression

Finally, participants choosing to take an alternative route could influence the programme outcomes. This may be due to creative arts higher education not being their intention in the first place, they may not have been participating in the programme of their own volition (due to parental or teacher suggestion), or they may learn of a more compelling pathway through another intervention.

Assess the plausibility of the expected contribution in relation to the size of the programme
The problem we are trying to address is widely acknowledged: the underrepresentation of students from lower socioeconomic groups and of minoritised ethnicities within English HE. There are also regulatory directives around widening participation more generally.

Despite the plethora of other influencing factors, the programme design, combining multiple stage-appropriate elements, aligns with a systematic review of evidence on the effectiveness of interventions and strategies for widening participation in higher education. Younger and colleagues (2018) found that longer-term 'Black box' programmes (with multiple elements in a single programme) and financial incentives were effective in supporting progression to higher education.

The project team deemed it likely that the programme would have an important contribution, given the multiple points of contact over a sustained two-year period. In particular, the targeting of students who met characteristics of underrepresentation, who were studying Level 3 creative courses, who had individually agreed to participate in the programme and who had parental/carer consent to do so, offered a good possibility that the programme content would make its expected contribution.

Step 2: Develop the theory of change and the risks to it
Build a theory of change and a results chain and determine the level of detail
Prior to commencing the contribution analysis, a theory of change was designed for this programme (Appendix A). This detailed the inputs, activities, outputs and impact of the intervention. During the project, this was developed from a logic chain to a more refined theory of change, establishing mid-level theory. This indicated the content of each session in the intervention and suggested potential change mechanisms at play.

Feedback from the project quality assurance team suggested that due to the two-year duration of engagement with the 16+ cohort, described in Appendix B, a range of different, and potentially interacting, components and mechanisms were at play. For example, communicating with participants as well as their parents and teachers could increase immediate support and

encouragement of the participant. Another mechanism identified by the quality assurance team was how the programme worked to increase a sense of individual mattering, which might act to reinforce the relationship between the participant and their family/carers and the institution. The scale of the pilot evaluation and capacity of the project team led to the decision to focus the contribution analysis on a limited number of change mechanisms, and to develop a more focused theory of change and results chain accordingly.

The project team decided to focus on how the programme works to support decision-making, through provision of high-quality first-hand information and resources about creative arts study and careers. The resulting theory of change and results chain for this mechanism are shown below in Figure 2, focusing specifically on how the programme contributes to the immediate, intermediate and final outcomes of progression to creative arts higher education study for those who participated in the programme.
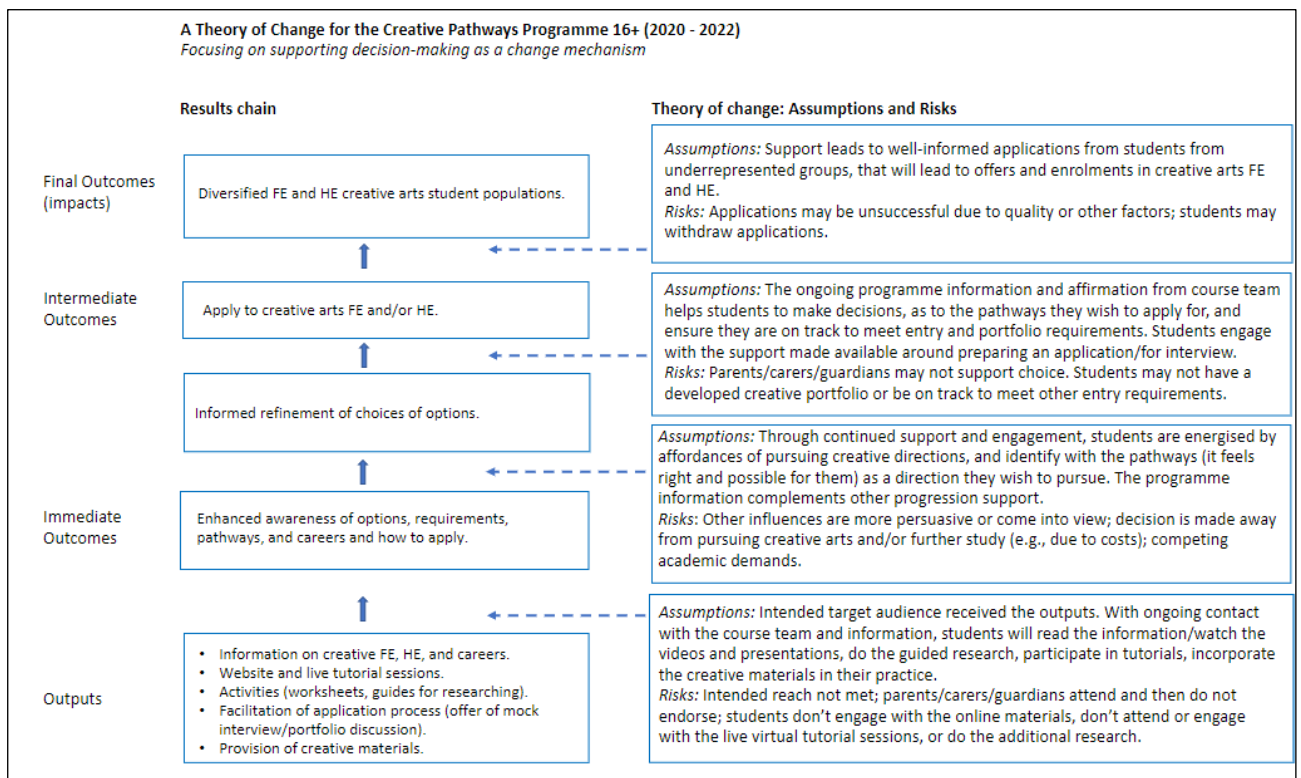
Figure 2. The refined theory of change and results chain for CPP

Determine the expected contribution of the programme
In terms of circles of influence (Montague et al., 2002), the above theory of change operates at the levels of direct control and influence. Evaluation is possible of whether the programme has delivered on its outputs. There is also direct contact with programme beneficiaries and the necessary data gathered to enable an understanding of participation leading to progression into creative arts higher education.

Include consideration of other factors that may influence outcomes
Tables 1 – 5, discussed above, indicate other factors that may influence the programme's contribution to the outcomes. These factors could intersect, multiply in influence, or even act to cancel each other out, impacting on each participant's context in a range of different ways.

Determine how much the theory of change is contested

As a small and specialist institution, the programme designers and delivery and evaluation team comprised the same individuals. The theory of change for the mechanism of supporting decision-making was not contested between this team as internal stakeholders, reflecting a shared understanding of how the programme was meant to work. Within the timescale of the pilot evaluation, and given that the evaluation was done retrospectively, it was not possible to involve other stakeholders further, such as the beneficiaries, or external stakeholders, such as schoolteachers. However, it is likely that bringing in these stakeholders would have led to greater challenge to the theory of change, and therefore refinement, given external awareness of other factors that may influence programme outcomes.

Step 3: Gather existing evidence on the theory of change

Assess the logic of the links in the theory of change

In terms of the strengths of the logic in the theory of change, it was assumed that the delivery of the outputs would most likely lead to the immediate outcomes, as there was a level of control and direct influence, in terms of delivering the programme.

However, the intermediate outcomes and the final outcomes were outside the scope of direct influence, albeit logical in their progression of the programme. While it was ultimately possible to gain an insight into applications, offers and enrolment of programme participants through the destinations survey and university's internal student data, it has not been possible to track progression to other institutions unless participants disclosed this in the programme's destinations survey.

The various assumptions in the theory of change were considered plausible, given the variety of actors and influencers, as well as other commitments in the lives of the programme beneficiaries and the affordances of receiving the information, advice and guidance provided through the programme.

The project team decided on the following as areas where concrete evidence was most needed as part of challenging the supporting decision-making change mechanism: gaining a sense of participants' increased feelings of being informed regarding the subjects of information, advice and guidance that were provided on the programme, as well as their application and progression on to creative FE and HE destinations.

Gather the evidence

Evidence on outputs

Table 6 below indicates the key outputs from the results chain. It then highlights available evidence that the programme activities were implemented as planned in the theory of change, thereby fulfilling Mayne's (2008) requirements for a *minimalist contribution analysis*.

Outputs	Occurrence (or not) of key outputs
6.1 Information on creative FE, HE and careers	**Launch event** [April 2021]: In term 2 of Year 12, participants, parents/carers/guardians and teachers were introduced online to the Progression team as creative practitioners, the university, and a talk about how creative careers are all around us. **Session 2 Creative Industries and Careers** [May 2021]: Beginning to understand whether creative arts HE study and careers are for them, including careers inspiration videos.

	Session 3 Creative practice and Visual Research [July 2021]: Focus on creative practice and visual research, and a creative activity of mark-making collage.

Session 4 Researching Pathways to Progression [July 2021]: Scoping routes and choices available for progression into Level 4 study, building familiarity with higher education, should participants choose it as an option.

Session 5 Researching Higher Education courses and open days [September 2021]: Reinforcing the information given in Year 12, identifying different entry requirements for different subjects, the HE application process and timeline, and beginning to compile a personal statement.

Session 6 Higher Education finance, personal statements and portfolio development [October 2021 & January 2022]: Selection of work and how to present it in portfolios, importance of preparing questions for open days, preparing a planning template.

Offer of optional mock interview [November 2021]: Experience of a rehearsal of a specific set of interview questions, review of portfolio in safe and supportive way.

Graduation celebration [July 2022]: Talk from a creative practitioner, tour around a creative HE institution, student ambassador talks about their student experience and acting as role models, individuals' questions about progression answered.

E-mail conversations [Throughout]: occurring with Progression Support Workers. Programme participants sending in examples of their creative work and their completed worksheets. This enabled the Progression team to provide feedback and encouragement. |
| 6.2 Website and live (online) tutorial sessions. | A webpage link was made available to participants for each online session and released on a Friday. In the following week, participants as a group would be invited to attend up to an hour-long live online tutorial with members of the delivery team in Microsoft Teams that was timed for 5pm of a mid-week evening.

In the tutorial sessions, the team would talk through the learning/activities posted on the webpage, invite interaction and discussion, and answer any questions.

Live tutorial sessions occurred throughout the programme in April, May, July, September, October (2021), and January (2022).

The webpage routinely included:
● An introduction video from the delivery team.
● A video about the week's activity such as a digital slide presentation, presented by the delivery team. |

	- Downloadable resources such as worksheets/templates and a glossary of terms.
	- Additional links for further research.
	- Videos, recorded by student ambassadors during lockdown, addressing 'Attending pre-university events', 'Budgeting and Finance', 'Applying to UCAS' and 'Writing your personal statement.'
6.3 Activities (worksheets and guides for researching)	**April 2021 Creative Industries and Careers:** Worksheet to '*Research creative roles*'. Links to '*Discover Creative Careers*' (2023) and '*Future Goals*' (2023) websites. Practical creative illustration activity.
	June 2021 Creative and Visual Research: Step-by-step guide to development of line drawings into surface pattern. Link to '*10 resources that will consistently feed your visual inspiration*' (Exokim, 2021).
	July 2021 Researching Pathways to Progression: Link to presentation slides, worksheets on 'What are your options?' and 'Research and make notes'. Link to '*UCAS and course research*'. Worksheet of 'Timetable for arts applications'. Handout 'Summer Fun project'.
	September 2021 Researching Higher Education courses and open days: Useful links to '*Choosing a course and types of courses*', Foundation in Art & Design website links, university & student life, UCAS application, student support and wellbeing, personal statements, interview skills and portfolios, finance and budgeting, creative industries, and university information.
	October 2021 Higher Education finance, personal statements and portfolio development: Student finance, personal statements, interview skills, and a guide on '*Activities to build up your portfolio'*. Worksheet on *'Portfolio Interview Questions to Practice'*.
6.4 Facilitation of application process (Offer of mock interview/portfolio discussion)	The mock interview was offered as an optional extra to participants; the dialogue focused on participants' digital portfolio (examples of their creative works, which are often requirements for application to creative arts courses).
	Acting as a rehearsal, the mock interview is focused on the participant's selection of their creative works. Conducted online, it lasts about thirty minutes: five minutes are spent greeting, making introductions and on a description of the interview format. This is followed by fifteen minutes of standard interview questions, then five minutes of verbal feedback and five minutes allocated for written feedback including a checklist of points to consider for the real interview. Participants are encouraged to reflect upon where they felt they had difficulty answering any of the questions and what they feel they could improve.
6.5 Provision of creative materials	A pack of materials was posted out to each participant at the beginning of the programme to facilitate creative activity in the home during lockdown.

| | This consisted of a box containing a tote bag with an A4 sketchbook, pencil sharpener and eraser, box of watercolours, brushes, oil pastels, charcoal sticks, fine liner pen, masking tape and glue stick.

At the winter break, a gift of a portfolio case was also provided to those who had been attending the programme.

On completion, a certificate of participation was awarded, as recognition of participation, along with a graduation gift of art materials (a set of pens that enable writing and drawing on most materials, which are highly rated by creative students). |
| --- | --- |

Table 6. Evidence on outputs

The above evidence indicates that the programme activities were implemented as planned and indicated in the outputs section of the results chain: to support decision-making, information on creative FE, HE and careers was delivered through website and live tutorial sessions, activities (worksheets, guides for researching) were made available, the application process was facilitated through the offer of a mock interview and portfolio discussion, and creative materials were provided.

However, even at this point, there are weaknesses with assuming that because these outputs were in place, these logically led to desired outcomes by impacting on participants' decision-making. For example, the following figure illustrates the varying levels of engagement with the activities for the eighteen participants, divided into four distinct categories. The project team further noted that only one participant elected to take up the opportunity of a mock interview.[1] This suggests that while the project team implemented the activities as planned, these were 'received' by a smaller proportion of the target audience than intended.

Attendance

17%	11%	39%	33%

■ Applied and sent in pre-survey, but did not attend the programme

■ Attended the launch, but did not continue

■ Sporadic attendance

■ Good attendance, participated in online sessions
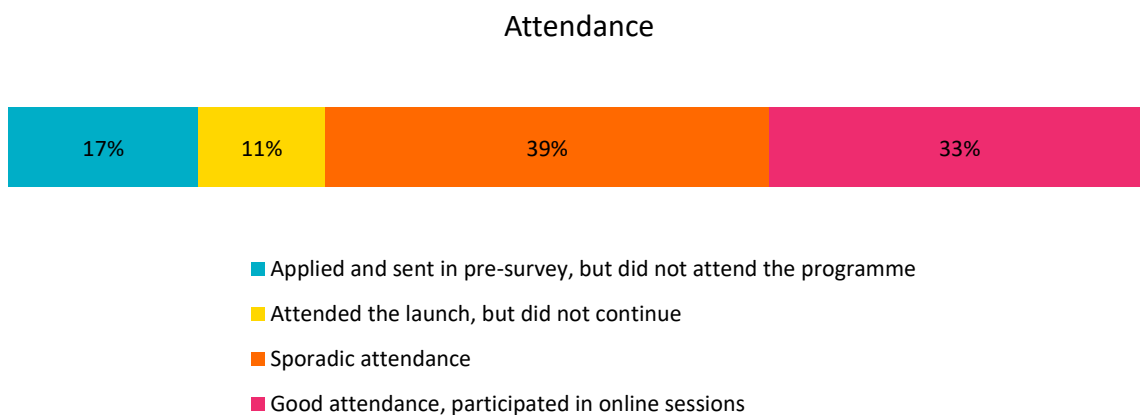
Figure 3. Attendance

Evidence on outcomes

Data was gathered throughout the programme to determine evidence of results or outcomes, representing the first step of a contribution analysis of direct influence (Mayne, 2008). This data primarily took the form of participants' responses to surveys.

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[1] Although this participant reflected on the post-survey "I found the interview prep and practice to be most helpful, as it has left me prepared for future one's, so I feel confident in doing them."

Participants were invited to complete an online pre-survey before they commenced the programme, a continuation survey at the beginning of Year 13, a post-survey following the programme graduation, and a destinations survey after the August results day. Table 7 below indicates the number of respondents to each survey stage, out of the eighteen participants accepted onto the programme.

Survey	Number of respondents	% response rate
7.1 Pre-survey	17	94%
7.2 Year 12 to 13 Continuation survey	13	72%
7.3 Post-survey	6	33%
7.4 Destinations survey	5	28%

Table 7. Number of survey respondents

Of the six post-survey respondents, five had also responded to the pre-survey. This meant a measurement of distance travelled between pre- and post-survey could only be computed for these five respondents. In addition to this small number of matched respondents, and as with any analysis of distance travelled, there is a possibility of a high level of agreement (i.e., 'strongly agree') at pre-survey stage, which then limits how much learning can be captured by similar levels of agreement at post-survey stage. This can be tricky to interpret, as respondents may realise at the later timepoint that they were not, for example, as well-informed at the pre-survey stage as they are now that they have completed the programme. Similarly, social desirability effects may be in operation with self-report surveys, where a participant is trying to 'look good' to the programme team.

In addition to survey data, following the start of the 2022-23 academic year, internal university records of applications, offers and enrolment could be drawn upon to establish if any of the CPP cohort who had not replied to the post-survey and destinations survey may have placed an application. Eight programme participants were identified within these records. For those who did not respond to the post-survey or destinations survey and did not apply to the university, data on destinations was not available, representing a limitation to the evidence on outcomes.

Evidence on immediate outcomes
Table 8 below, indicates the range of available evidence on immediate outcomes, regarding enhanced awareness of options, requirements, pathways, careers, and how to apply. Survey response options employed a Likert scale of 'strongly disagree', 'disagree', 'unsure', 'agree' and 'strongly agree', unless indicated otherwise.

Enhanced awareness of options, entry requirements and pathways (FE and HE)	
Pre- to post-survey (n = 5)	
Question	Evidence
8.1 To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: 'I feel well-prepared to go to university.'	Of the small number of matched respondents who had completed both the pre- and post-survey, 60% had moved their responses from 'unsure' to 'agree' (20%) or 'agree' to 'strongly agree' (40%). This represents a positive move. The remaining 40% gave the same response across their pre- and post-surveys, one strongly agreeing at both timepoints, indicating maintenance of agreement, while the other remained unsure.

8.2 The following section asks how well-informed you currently feel about aspects of applying for a further education or university course. I feel well-informed about... 8.2.1 'My options for after I leave school/college.'	On the pre-survey, 100% agreed (60%) or strongly agreed (40%). These positive responses were maintained at post-survey, with the exception of 20% for whom an 'agree' response at pre- changed to 'unsure' at post-survey.
8.2.2 'The process for applying to university.'	80% of matched respondents were unsure (60%) or strongly disagreed (20%) at pre-survey. This changed to 100% responding 'agree' on the post-survey.
8.2.3 'Entry requirements for getting into university.'	At pre-survey, 20% strongly agreed, 60% agreed, and a further 20% disagreed. By the post-survey, 40% strongly agreed including 20% maintaining their strong agreement and 20% moving from disagreement). For the remaining matched respondents at post-survey, 40% maintained agreement and 20% moved from agreement at pre-survey to 'unsure'.
8.2.4 'How to prepare a personal statement.'	At pre-survey, 20% strongly agreed, while 80% were unsure (40%) or disagreed (40%) on the pre-survey. This changed to 80% agreeing at post-survey (20% moving from 'strongly agree' to 'agree'; 40% moving from 'unsure'; and 20% from 'disagree'). A further 20% moved from 'disagree' to 'unsure'.
8.2.5 'How to prepare for an interview or audition as part of the application process.'	At pre-survey, responses were varied: 20% selected 'strongly agree', 'agree', and 'unsure', respectively, and the remaining 40% disagreed. By the post-survey, 60% agreed (20% moving from 'strongly agree' to 'agree'; 20% maintaining agreement, and 20% moving from being unsure). Of the remaining 40%, 20% moved from 'disagree' to 'unsure', while 20% maintained disagreement.
8.2.6 'How to prepare a portfolio as part of the application process.'	60% maintained their pre-survey response at post-survey (20% who had strongly agreed and 40% who had agreed). Of the remaining 40%, 20% moved to agreement from being unsure and the other 20% moved from disagreement to being unsure.
8.2.7 'The Creative Arts subjects I could study at university.'	100% agreed or strongly agreed at post-survey. Of the 60% strongly agreeing, 40% had agreed at pre-survey and 20% moved from disagreement. Of the 40% agreeing, 20% had been unsure or disagreed, respectively, at pre-survey.
8.2.8 'What university study is like (how you learn and are assessed).'	40% strongly agreed by post-survey, of which 20% maintained strong agreement from the pre-survey and 20% moved from agreement initially. Of the remaining 60%, respondents: 40% moved from 'unsure' to 'agree', and 20% from 'strongly disagree' to 'unsure'.
8.2.9 'What support is available at university (around study, disability, mental health).'	60% agreed at pre-survey, with 20% unsure and 20% strongly disagreeing. By post-survey, 20% strongly agreed (moving from agreement), 40% agreed (20% maintaining

	and 20% moving from 'unsure'), and 40% were unsure (20% moving from agreement and 20% from 'strongly disagree').
8.2.10 'University finance.'	At pre-survey, responses were varied: 20% agreed, 40% unsure, 20% disagreed, and 20% strongly disagreed. On the post-survey, the 20% who had agreed moved to 'unsure'. Those who had been unsure moved to strong agreement (20%) and agreement (20%). Those who had disagreed moved to being unsure and those who had strongly disagreed moved to disagreement.
8.2.11 'The process for applying for further education courses (such as a Foundation Diploma in Art & Design).'	40% maintained their responses from pre- to post-survey (20% strongly agreeing and 20% being unsure). 20% moved from being unsure to agreeing and the remaining 40% moved from disagreeing to being unsure.
Post-survey (n = 6)	
Question	Evidence
8.3 'To what extent did the Creative Pathways Programme help you feel well-prepared for making your application?' [Response options: It helped a lot / It helped a little / It didn't help / Not applicable (please select this option if you did not make any applications)]	100% indicated that CPP had helped them to feel well-prepared for making their application: 83% indicated that it had helped a lot, and the remaining 17% that it had helped a little.
Enhanced awareness of options, entry requirements and pathways (careers)	
Pre- to post-survey (n = 5)	
Question	Evidence
8.4 To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? 'I will pursue a career in the Creative Arts (such as art, design, craft, performance)'.	60% of matched respondents strongly agreed by the post-survey (20% maintaining strong agreement, but 20% respectively moving from agreement or being unsure). The remaining 40% agreed at post-survey (20% moving from strong agreement and 20% from being unsure).
8.5 To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about careers in the Creative Arts? I feel well-informed about... 8.5.1 'The variety of careers in the Creative Arts.'	By post-survey, 20% strongly agreed (moving from agreement at pre-survey). 60% agreed at post-survey, comprising 20% moving from strong agreement, 20% maintaining agreement and 20% moving from strong disagreement. The remaining 20% maintained their 'unsure' response.
8.5.2 'Routes into a career in the Creative Arts.'	80% agreed by the post-survey. This comprised 20% moving from strong agreement, 20% maintaining their agreement, and 20% respectively moving from disagreement or strong disagreement. The remaining 20% maintained their 'unsure' response.

8.5.3 'The qualifications I need to access a career in the Creative Arts.'	By post-survey, 20% strongly agreed and 60% agreed (20% maintaining and 20% respectively moving from disagreement or strong disagreement). The remaining 20% moved from agreement at pre-survey to being unsure at post-survey.

Table 8. Evidence on immediate outcomes

The following figures indicate the evidence from the above table in a more visual form. While the above table indicates distance travelled for each matched respondent (those who responded to both pre- and post-surveys, n = 5), the figures below focus on this group's overall responses at pre- and post-survey. The figures also indicate post-survey-only responses (n = 6).

I feel well-prepared to go to university

Pre	40%	40%	20%
Post	20%	20%	60%

■ Strongly disagree ■ Disagree ■ Unsure ■ Agree ■ Strongly agree
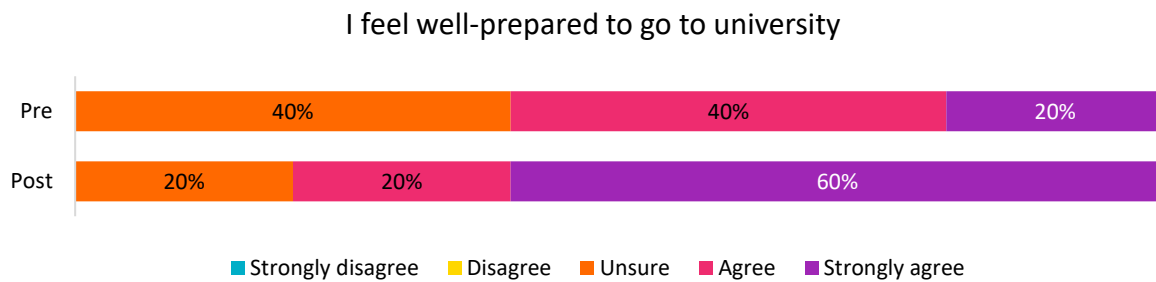
Figure 4. Matched respondents' pre- and post-survey responses

I feel well-informed about...
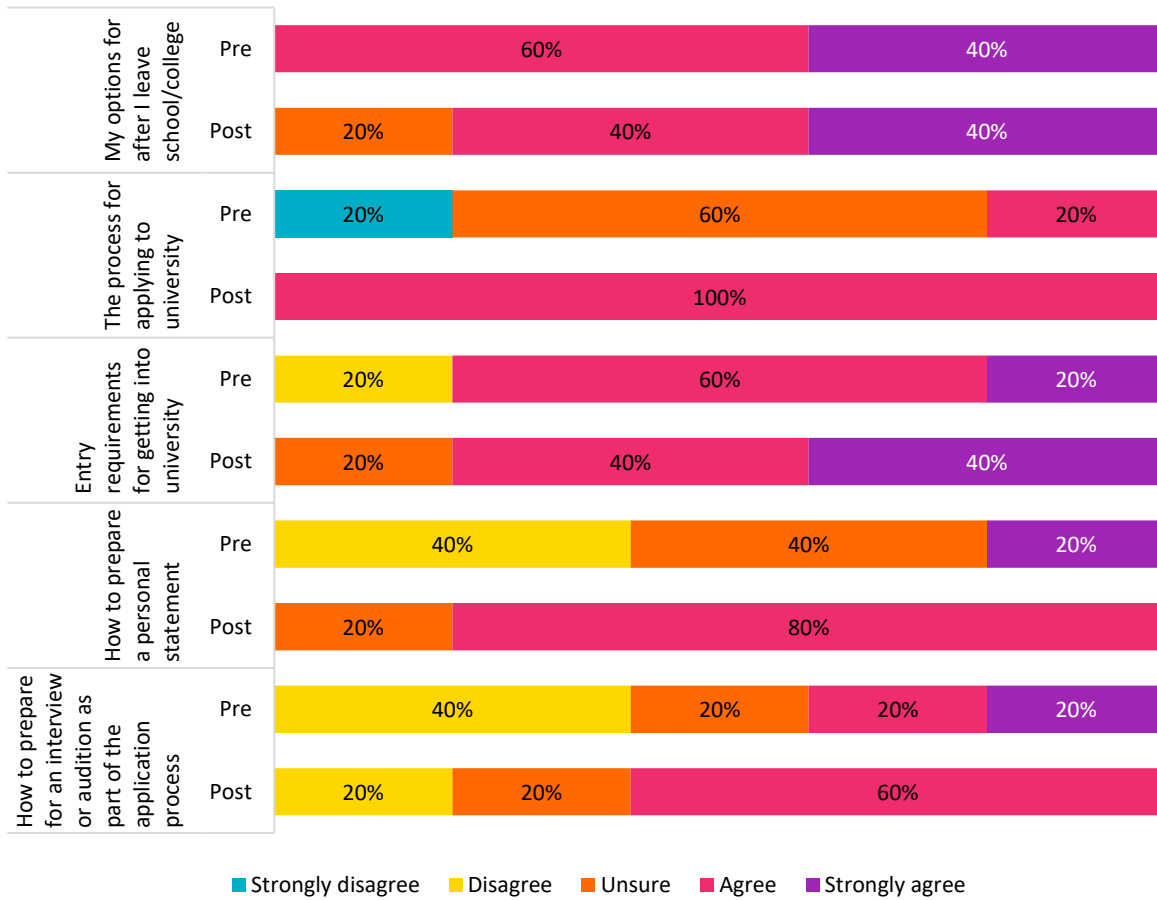
Figure 5. Matched respondents' pre- and post-survey responses

I feel well-informed about...

		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly agree
How to prepare a portfolio as part of the application process	Pre		20%	20%	40%	20%
	Post			20%	60%	20%
The Creative Arts subjects I could study at university	Pre		40%	20%	40%	
	Post				40%	60%
What university study is like (how you learn and are assessed)	Pre	20%		40%	20%	20%
	Post			20%	40%	40%
What support is available at university (around study, disability, mental health)	Pre	20%		20%	60%	
	Post			40%	40%	20%
University finance	Pre	20%	20%	40%	20%	
	Post		20%	40%	20%	20%
The process for applying for further education courses (such as a Foundation Diploma in Art & Design)	Pre		40%	40%	20%	
	Post			60%	20%	20%

Legend: Strongly disagree | Disagree | Unsure | Agree | Strongly agree

Figure 6. Matched respondents' pre- and post-survey responses

To what extent did the Creative Pathways Programme help you feel well-prepared for making your application?

It helped a little	It helped a lot
17%	83%

Legend:
- Not applicable (please select this option if you did not make any applications)
- It didn't help
- It helped a little
- It helped a lot

Figure 7. Post-survey responses (all respondents)

I will pursue a career in the Creative Arts (such as art, design, craft, performance)

Pre	Unsure 40%	Agree 20%	Strongly agree 40%
Post	Agree 40%	Strongly agree 60%

Strongly disagree ■ Disagree ■ Unsure ■ Agree ■ Strongly agree ■

Figure 8. Matched respondents' pre- and post-survey responses
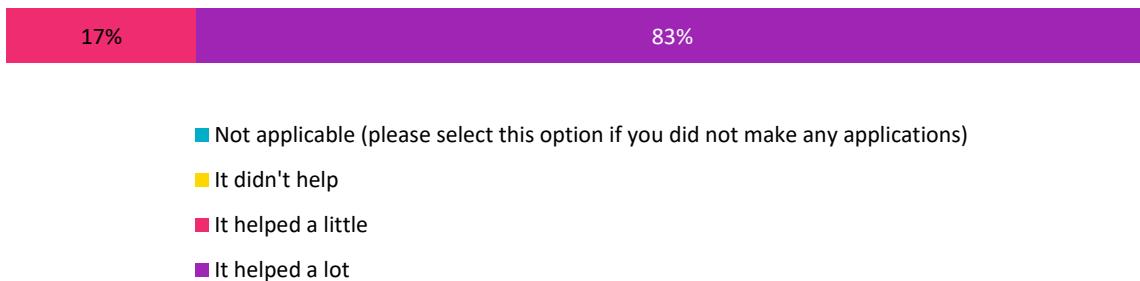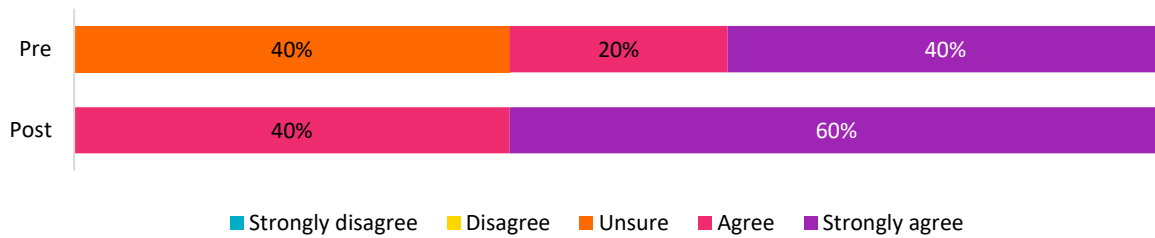
I feel well-informed about...

The variety of careers in the Creative Arts	Pre	Strongly disagree 20% / Unsure 20% / Agree 40% / Strongly agree 20%
	Post	Unsure 20% / Agree 60% / Strongly agree 20%
Routes into a career in the Creative Arts	Pre	Strongly disagree 20% / Disagree 20% / Unsure 20% / Agree 20% / Strongly agree 20%
	Post	Unsure 20% / Agree 80%
The qualifications I need to access a career in the Creative Arts	Pre	Strongly disagree 20% / Disagree 20% / Agree 40% / Strongly agree 20%
	Post	Unsure 20% / Agree 60% / Strongly agree 20%

Strongly disagree ■ Disagree ■ Unsure ■ Agree ■ Strongly agree ■
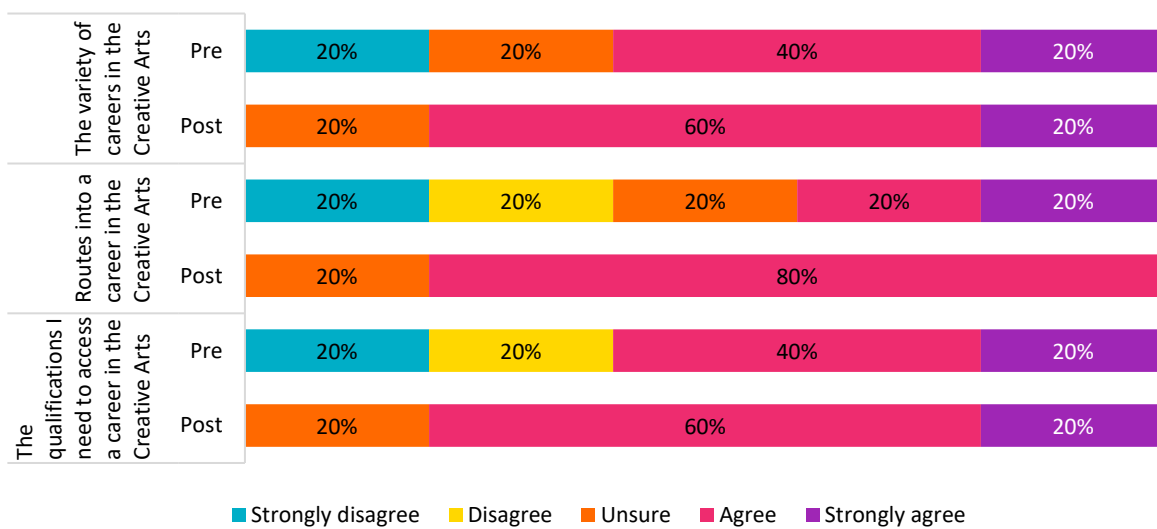
Figure 9. Matched respondents' pre- and post-survey responses

It is clear that the majority of post-survey respondents found CPP had helped a lot in helping them feel well-prepared for making their application, which is a positive outcome.

Looking through the pre- to post-survey evidence on immediate outcomes, it is possible to gauge if the intended changes were realised by comparing items to which the majority of matched respondents moved in a positive direction or maintained a positive position with items where the picture was less positive. The latter position can be illustrated by matched respondents remaining unsure, moving from strong disagreement or disagreement to 'unsure', or maintaining disagreement.

The three items with 100% agreement by post-survey were 'the process for applying for university,' 'the Creative Arts subjects I could study at university,' and 'I will pursue a career in the Creative Arts (such as art, design, craft, performance).' Following these, there was evidence of positive moves or maintenance of a positive position for 80% of matched respondents across a further nine items.[2] For

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[2] 'I feel well-prepared to go to university', 'My options for after I leave school/college', 'Entry requirements for getting into university', 'How to prepare a personal statement', 'How to prepare a portfolio as part of the application process', 'What university study is like (how you learn and are assessed)', 'The variety of careers in

a further two items, 60% of matched respondents agreed,[3] and for the final two items, only 40% agreed.[4] In sum, clear positive outcomes were observed for 12 out of the 16 items, suggesting areas in which participants were supported in their decision-making.

In terms of less positive moves, there were four items for which 20% of matched respondents remained unsure between pre- and post-survey.[5] The area in which the most matched respondents moved from disagreement to 'unsure' was 'the process for applying for further education courses (such as a Foundation Diploma in Art & Design)' (40%). For the remaining six items where matched respondents made this move, this represented 20% of matched respondents.[6] Finally, there were only two items for which a matched respondent maintained disagreement or moved from 'strongly disagree' to 'disagree'.[7] In both of these cases, this was again only for 20% of matched respondents (and not for the same respondent across both items).

It is more difficult to interpret where matched respondents provided a less positive response on the post-survey than they had given at pre-survey. This was only found to be the case for 20% of matched respondents at a time, and equally split for moves from 'strongly agree' to 'agree' (5 items)[8] or from 'agree' to 'unsure' (5 items).[9] It could be that movement from 'strongly agree' to 'agree' represents a moderation of initial overconfidence in agreement once having learned more about these areas. Interpreting the move from 'agree' to 'unsure' however, is confounded by the possibility that respondents could interpret 'unsure' as indicating they were unsure about this particular area or unsure of whether they agreed or disagreed. In any case, it is a move away from agreement, and therefore not interpreted as a positive outcome.

Evidence on intermediate outcomes
The table below indicates available evidence on intermediate outcomes regarding informed refinement of choices of options and applying to creative arts FE and/or HE.

Informed refinement of choices of options; Apply to creative arts FE and/or HE	
Continuation survey (n = 13)	
Question	Evidence

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the Creative Arts', 'Routes into a career in the Creative Arts', and 'The qualifications I need to access a career in the Creative Arts.'

[3] 'How to prepare for an interview or audition as part of the application process' and 'What support is available at university (around study, disability, mental health).'

[4] 'University finance' and 'The process for applying for further education courses (such as a Foundation Diploma in Art & Design).'

[5] 'I feel well-prepared to go to university', 'The process for applying for further education courses (such as a Foundation Diploma in Art & Design)', 'The variety of careers in the Creative Arts', and 'Routes into a career in the Creative Arts.'

[6] 'How to prepare a personal statement', 'How to prepare for an interview or audition as part of the application process', 'How to prepare a portfolio as part of the application process', 'What university study is like (how you learn and are assessed)', and 'University finance.' The remaining item represented a move from 'strongly disagree' to 'unsure': 'What support is available at university (around study, disability, mental health).'

[7] 'How to prepare for an interview or audition as part of the application process' and 'University finance.'

[8] 'How to prepare a personal statement', 'How to prepare for an interview or audition as part of the application process', 'I will pursue a career in the Creative Arts (such as art, design, craft, performance)', 'The variety of careers in the Creative Arts', and 'Routes into a career in the Creative Arts.'

[9] 'My options for after I leave school/college', 'Entry requirements for getting into university', 'What support is available at university (around study, disability, mental health)', 'University finance', and 'The qualifications I need to access a career in the Creative Arts.'

9.1 Is there anything you would like to tell us about the programme? For example, you can tell us about: ● any specific support you are hoping to receive during Year 13 ● how you are finding the programme so far ● how we might improve the first year of the programme. [free response]	Eight responses clearly communicated enjoyment of the programme. Responses indicated participants were finding the programme insightful and that it was providing a chance to try a range of activities and new techniques that they had not previously used. One respondent mentioned hoping for a chance to use a particular medium in the second year of the programme (3D cardboard). Some responses mentioned A-levels: that the programme was helping with A-level work, a wish for the programme to tie in with an A-level subject they were studying (Photography), and as providing "something different to do alongside my A level subjects." The most common response was hoping for support with creating a portfolio in Year 13, such as what to include and the order, "and what art universities might expect."
Pre-survey (n = 17)	
Question	Evidence
9.5 'I am planning to go to university in the future'.	88% strongly agreed (76%) or agreed (12%) on the pre-survey, and 12% were unsure.
(versus) Post-survey (n = 6)	
Question	Evidence
9.6 Have you already submitted an application for a further education and /or university course? [Response options: Yes/No] ● If yes, please provide details (for example, what courses, where): ● If you applied, have you received a decision? ● If you are not planning on attending further education and / or university after this summer, what are your plans?	83% responded 'yes'. 67% had applied to the university: 33% had received offers for the FAD (17% conditional and 17% unconditional), while a further 17% had a conditional undergraduate offer and the remaining 17% did not specify the qualification level but had received a conditional offer. Of the remaining respondents, 17% had an unconditional offer for a creative subject at another HE provider and 17% had answered 'no', that they had not applied. This latter participant responded that they were planning to go to university in the following year.

Table 9. Evidence on intermediate outcomes

The following figure provides a visual representation of the pre-survey responses for 9.5. Although the questions are not identical at pre- and post-survey (9.5 and 9.6 in the table, respectively), some comparison of intentions and intermediate outcomes is possible. Of those who had responded at both pre- and post-survey (n = 5), those who strongly agreed that they were planning to go to

university at pre-survey (60%) had applied by the post-survey. Those who agreed (20%) had also applied, and the 20% who had been unsure had not applied.

I am planning to go to university in the future

12%	12%	76%

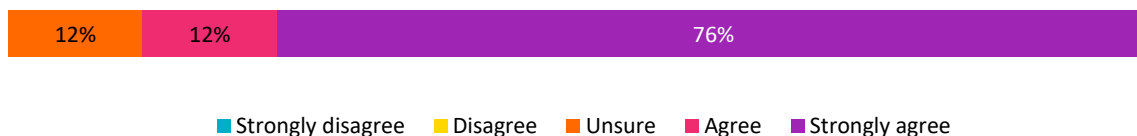■ Strongly disagree ■ Disagree ■ Unsure ■ Agree ■ Strongly agree

Figure 10. Pre-survey responses (all respondents)

Looking over this evidence, it is clear that the programme's intermediate outcomes were being realised. While not directly mentioning how the programme might be supporting decision-making in helping to refine choices of post-18 options, responses to the continuation survey indicate participants' enjoyment of the programme and their wishes to learn more about how to develop portfolios of their creative work. This can be seen as evidence of the theory of change assumption that participants would be energised by the affordances of pursuing creative directions and identify with the pathways as a direction they wish to pursue.

Further evidence for this intermediate outcome comes from Table 8 above, in which it is clear that 100% of matched respondents strongly agreed or agreed by the post-survey that they felt more well-informed about the creative arts subjects they could study at university (Section 8.2.7, compared to 40% at pre-survey) and that they would pursue a career in the creative arts (Section 8.4, compared to 60% at pre-survey).

Finally, with 83% responding that they had applied to creative arts FE and/or HE, there was clear evidence that the other intermediate outcome of applying to creative arts FE and/or HE was realised.

Evidence on final outcomes and impacts

Table 10 below indicates available evidence on final outcomes and impacts on diversified FE and HE creative arts student populations. There was some overlap between the two data sources: three of the five who responded to the destinations survey were represented in the eight participants who showed up in the institutional application, offers and enrolment data.

Diversified FE and HE creative arts student populations	
Destinations survey (n = 5), all free responses	
Question	Evidence
10.1 If you will be taking up a place in further education or university for 2022-23, what is the name of the course?	80% indicated creative subjects, while 20% replied 'no' to this question.
10.2 If you will be taking up a place in further education or university in 2022-23, what is the name of the institution offering the course?	60% responded with the university as their destination, 20% another university, and the remaining 20% answered 'no'.
10.3 If you will not be attending further education or university in 2022-23, what are your plans?	20% indicated their intention to take a gap year and apply for a creative subject in 2023.

Stage	Evidence
10.4 If you would like to tell us anything further, please do so here.	Only one responded: the respondent who had elected to take a gap year indicated that they had enjoyed the course, that it helped them understand what they would like to study at university, and that it had helped them project their knowledge on different industries that they could go into with a degree qualification.
Institution application, offers and enrolment data (n = 8)	
Stage	**Evidence**
10.5 Applications	Internal student application data indicates that 44% of the CPP cohort of 18 had applied to the university. Of these: ● 3 had just applied to the FAD ● 1 had applied to FAD and an undergraduate degree ● 1 had applied to FAD and 2 undergraduate degrees ● 2 had applied to 1 undergraduate degree ● 1 had applied to 2 undergraduate degrees

10.6 Offers/Enrolment	Of the 8 applicants to the university:
	● 3 had just applied to the FAD:
	   ○ 1 enrolled and 2 didn't progress their application
	● 1 had applied to FAD and an undergraduate degree:
	   ○ They were made offers for both, and enrolled onto the undergraduate degree
	● 1 had applied to FAD and 2 undergraduate degrees:
	   ○ They were rejected from one undergraduate degree and made an offer to the other and the FAD. They ultimately accepted and enrolled onto the FAD.
	● 2 had applied to 1 undergraduate degree:
	   ○ 1 was rejected for not meeting entry requirements while the other was accepted and enrolled.
	● 1 had applied to 2 undergraduate degrees:
	   ○ They were rejected for not meeting entry requirements.

Table 10. Evidence on final outcomes/impacts

While 80% on the destinations survey indicated that they had received offers, enrolments data was limited to applicants to the university so evidence on final outcomes/impacts is partial. The offers and enrolments suggest well-informed applications, but risks identified in the theory of change were realised. For example, a few applications were unsuccessful, and some applicants did not progress their applications. The project team was unable to identify if these participants had also applied or been accepted elsewhere.

These aspects contribute to a difficulty in concluding regarding the final outcome of diversified FE and HE creative arts student populations, especially given the scale of the programme and those with good attendance. All programme participants met characteristics of underrepresentation, but we are not aware of all their outcomes. Nevertheless, those programme participants who did progress to creative arts FE and HE identified with characteristics of underrepresentation

(minoritised ethnicity, coming from areas of low HE participation and areas of high relative deprivation, being eligible for free school meals, and coming from a military family).

Evidence on assumptions

Table 11 below examines the assumptions that are presented in the refined theory of change (Figure 2). Evidence comes from programme delivery, engagement monitoring, survey responses, an interview with a teacher from one of the participating schools/colleges, and another with one of the Progression Support Workers (PSW) responsible for delivering the programme. The two interviews aimed to provide these individuals' perspectives on the intervention to further test the programme assumptions.

Assumption	Evidence
11.1 Did the intended target audience receive the outputs?	All 18 of those accepted onto the programme identified with at least one criterion of underrepresentation. 67% identified with 2-4 criteria. Table 6 outlines the key outputs from the results chain. It highlights that the programme activities had been implemented as planned. All participants of the programme, their parents/guardians and their teachers received the emailed weblinks of sessions. The session content was reinforced and explained further in the follow-on online tutorial. To gain the full benefits of the outputs, programme participants would need to: 1) Open up the weblink, 2) view the videos, 3) take part in the suggested activities (including worksheets and templates), 4) attend the follow-on session, and 5) engage in the session, contributing to discussion or asking any questions. The attendance records indicate that 50% (n = 9) had attended 5-8 of the 9 possible contact opportunities. Of that group of 9 participants, all matched respondents for the pre- and post-survey (n = 5) had attended 6-8 of the possible points of contact, meaning that they received between 67% to 89% of the programme content.
11.2 Do we have evidence that participants read the information, watched the videos and presentations, did the guided research, participated in the tutorials, incorporated the creative materials in their practice?	Participation necessitated going online, watching the videos, and taking part in the suggested activities (including worksheets and templates). All the worksheet templates were downloadable. However, this assumed that participants had access to a printer connected to their computer, ink and paper, or could work directly on templates on their screen. The limited post-survey responses indicated participants' appreciation of receiving tasks to complete before the live session, the interactivity of the live sessions, and of the delivery team's friendliness and encouragement. These responses also indicated that the new techniques introduced helped them create more creative work and develop new skills.

	61% of the 18 participants emailed in examples of their engagement and creative work 3-5 times over the duration of the programme. This was tracked throughout the programme as evidence of their participation. The Progression Support Workers responded to participants' emails with individualised constructive and positive feedback; this provided a further opportunity to engage with participants. The PSW in interview commented: "They did send work in and then there would be some kind of a dialogue - that was really good."
11.3 Evidence of continued support and engagement?	In addition to support over email, the live online sessions were the key way for participants to engage and the project team to support them. However, due to running online as a result of the pandemic, some aspects of the digital interaction contributed to distance between the delivery team and participants, and between participants, creating difficulty in building rapport and identifying where participants needed support. The delivery team observed participants would tend not to use their webcam and only communicate through the chat facility, rather than switching on their microphones. This contributed to stilted dialogue. It was also suspected that participants may be accessing the online live sessions over their mobile phones, which could have presented a further barrier to full engagement in viewing the presented materials. Having the ability to observe the participants' engagement and to have real-time, in-person interaction was highlighted as an advantage for adequately supporting the participant and their engagement by the Progression Support Worker: "…it was hard to connect students to names, because they would not necessarily put their faces online. So that was a little difficult making those connections".
11.4 Evidence that participants were energised by affordances of pursuing creative directions?	As indicated in 9.1, responses to the continuation survey indicate participants' enjoyment of the programme halfway through and their wishes to learn more about how to develop portfolios of their creative work. Furthermore, regular attendance, participation and communication, as well as their applications to creative FE and HE confirm participants were energised by the affordances of pursuing creative directions and identified with the pathways as a direction they wish to pursue.
11.5 Evidence that participants identified with the pathways as feeling right and possible to them / as a direction to pursue?	At the earliest stage, applying to the programme reflects an identification with the possibility that pursuing the creative arts at FE or HE was right for them. This information was clearly provided through application materials.

	Participants' qualitative responses in the pre-survey provide evidence that they identified with these areas feeling right. For example, a participant that went on to apply for creative arts FE stated:
	"My interests lie in fine art, I love painting and drawing traditionally with oil painting, gouache, watercolour, coloured pencil, pencil, inks, pro-markers and charcoal. It has always been a passion. Looking into the future, my interests also touch on the history of art, the different era's of paintings and how far the art industry has come is amazing."
	Furthermore, all matched respondents agreed they would pursue a career in the creative arts, and at least 9 applied to creative arts FE and/or HE.
11.6 Evidence the programme information complements other progression support?	The interviewed teacher mentioned that participants were receiving information, advice and guidance from all directions, in their sixth form provision, from alumni of the sixth form provision, from teachers and more. The teacher stated:
	"We also duplicate it in the art department. We focus, usually, specifically on the university and for the Foundation and then further afield to the degrees and mainly because we can give examples of our students who have gone on to leave that uni and then most of us in the department did that Foundation as well. So that is usually what we talked to them about…We definitely do one to one support; applications, portfolio presentation skills and interview skills…The interviews are done with the careers team, not through the art department and the portfolio. Again, we do that one to one because they all seem to tend to apply at slightly different times and get asked to send the portfolio at slightly different times."
11.7 Evidence the ongoing information and affirmation from the course team helped participants make decisions regarding pathways to apply for and being on track to meet entry and portfolio requirements?	The Progression Support Worker stated that in their opinion: "[the programme] not only gives students insight into what their next progression step might be, it gives them information about how to make those steps and to build up the skills that they need to go on to towards higher education."
	Matched respondents' responses to the pre- and post-survey indicated that 100% were well-informed on the process for applying to university and 80% on the entry requirements and how to prepare a portfolio by the post-survey.
11.8 Evidence that participants engaged with the support made available around preparing an application / for interview?	The university's internal applications data, combined with regular attendance and submitting examples of their work, worksheets, and email exchanges as part of the programme, indicate that the participants had engaged with the support on preparing an application. One participant also took up the offer of a mock interview.
11.9 Evidence that support led to well-informed applications from participants?	The interview with the teacher indicated that the participants had received generic tutorials about applying to university but commented that the conversations were not specialist, providing the likelihood that the programme was providing the information needed to make applications to creative arts FE and/or HE.

	The teacher stated: "We normally do a whole course I guess briefing about the foundation course and applying to arts university. We do that because we find that students do have those discussions outside of the class, so they have tutorials about applying to university, but **those conversations are not specialist** [project team emphasis]…The interviews are done with the careers team, not through the art department and the portfolio." The university's own application data evidences that 78% of the 9 attendees who attended the programme the most had applied to FAD or an undergraduate degree at the university. Of the whole participating group of 18, 44% had applied to the university.

11.10 Evidence that applications led to offers and enrolments in creative arts FE and HE?	At the time of reporting (May 2023):
	● 3 had just applied to the FAD:
	    ○ 1 enrolled and 2 didn't progress their application
	● 1 had applied to FAD and an undergraduate degree:
	    ○ They were made offers for both, and enrolled onto the undergraduate degree
	● 1 had applied to FAD and 2 undergraduate degrees:
	    ○ They were rejected from one undergraduate degree and made an offer to the other and the FAD. They ultimately accepted and enrolled onto the FAD.
	● 2 had applied to 1 undergraduate degree:
	    ○ 1 was rejected for not meeting entry requirements while the other was accepted and enrolled.
	● 1 had applied to 2 undergraduate degrees:
	    ○ They were rejected for not meeting entry requirements.
	In total, 4 are now enrolled at the university (2 on FAD, 2 on undergraduate degrees) and a fifth participant had an unconditional offer to another creative arts HE institution. Of the remaining participants who responded to the destinations survey or showed up in the university records, 2 applied to the university and were rejected, 2 applied and didn't progress their applications, and a further participant took a gap year.

Table 11. Evidence on assumptions

As indicated in the table above, assumptions in the theory of change were largely met. Again, these were impacted by the regularity of engagement of programme participants. There was less clear evidence of *how* the information helped participants make their decisions regarding the pathway they wished to apply for and around their expected grades in terms of entry requirements. This could represent an area of further data collection with a longer timescale for the current pilot evaluation. This could also provide insight into why two participants did not continue with their applications or why others were rejected, to understand whether this could be addressed in some way by the programme going forward. There was also limited data regarding offers and enrolments to other creative arts FE and HE for those who did not respond to the later programme surveys or apply to the programme university.

Evidence on other influencing factors

Some key points for consideration regarding other influencing factors are presented in the following Table 12.

Continuation survey (n = 13)	
Question	Evidence
12.1 Is there anything you would like to tell us about the programme? For example, you can tell us about: ● any specific support you are hoping to receive during Year 13 ● how you are finding the programme so far ● how we might improve the first year of the programme. [free response]	One respondent mentioned illness had impacted their attendance while another replied: "Nothing other than more time to complete tasks as I found it hard balancing my schoolwork alongside." Another responded that they appreciated the programme not operating on a tight deadline, presumably because they could do it within their own time scales and thereby balance it with other commitments. Other respondents mentioned how the programme was helping, working well, or could further tie into their A-level creative arts work.
Post-survey (n = 6)	
Question	Evidence
12.2 Please feel free to provide feedback on the Creative Pathways Programme here. For example, you can let us know: ● what you enjoyed or learned from most, ● what you'd like to know more about in future, ● how we might improve the programme. [free response]	Setting the time of the live online tutorials posed some problems for participants due to other commitments and the hours of their institutions end of day and travelling home. One respondent commented in the post-survey: "…something that could have been improved is that the time the sessions were at were a bit too close to when college finished. I understand this will not be the same for everyone, but I did find it difficult to attend some sessions as my college timetable finished an hour before the session and returning home in time for the session was often a challenge."
Interviews with Teacher and Progression Support Worker	
Other influential agents and factors	Evidence
12.3 Parents/guardians /carers	Parental/guardian/carer consent had been requested for participation in the programme so that parents were aware of their young person's participation in the programme. Email communications and the links to the online sessions were also sent to parents/guardians/carers to support their understanding of their young person's activities and commitments. Some would email explanations regarding the participants' engagement or use their email accounts to send in examples of the participant's work.

	They were recognised by the PSW as another influencing factor: "In terms of their progression, there are the parents, they are a contributing factor, I think sometimes. When a student has an idea as to where they want to go, their parents might have another view about that. That is a factor in terms of if they were interested in doing CPP and they might have wanted to go on to do art and parents might want them to do something else."
12.4 Difficulty of prioritisation of planning for future destinations	The interviewed teacher commented on needing to stress prioritisation of planning for future destinations, and noted that it was hard at times: "I think that's always, that's been hard to get around, with some students, especially when we speak to their parents, trying to make them see that it's part of a longer-term goal of the decision-making process."
12.5 Participants' current education institution	The PSW pointed out that a participant's school or college's perception of the creative arts and therefore support for progressing in the creative arts was important: "Definitely school or college, that is a factor, because in terms of what they're actually doing, what subjects they're actually doing, and how much the schools look to push them or encouraging them, in terms of going towards art."
12.6 Financial concerns about the Foundation Diploma in Art & Design	The teacher highlighted parental concerns regarding the impact of students undertaking a Foundation Diploma which equates to a further year in education without maintenance loan support or a salary: "There's always worries about money - I think for some of the students and certainly parents not sure about the foundation because they see it as just another year that they're not earning."
12.7 Location of university	The location of the university as a potential place to study was raised by the teacher, commenting how some students decide to move away from home: "Location is always a thing. They either are very happy to be here in Leeds, or they do not want to be here. So, it does not really matter how much they enjoyed the creative pathways, or how much they enjoy the foundation and the open days. They are just never going to go because they want to get out. They are usually quite forward about that if that is the way they want to go."
12.8 Timing of the programme in the teaching year	Session 6 on HE finance, personal statement writing, and portfolio development took place in October and January of Year 13. The teacher in interview raised that the timing of the programme scheduling needed tighter alignment with their institution's Year 13 cycle of applications: "I just think some things could have maybe been scheduled a little bit earlier…Internally they bring the UCAS deadline forward by several months. So even though the university

	deadline is January, the students are especially expected to have personal statements and those kinds of decisions made and they, their personal statement deadline was two weeks ago [October] this year and the same normally applies. And because then there's a kind of internal verification and checking process and they want to get them in sooner rather than later."

Table 12. Evidence on other influencing factors

This table indicates the evidence on influencing factors, which surfaced through participants' responses to surveys but mostly came from the interviews with the teacher and Progression Support Worker. These indicate the manifestation of some of the theorised other influencing factors covered in Tables 1 to 5 above. It is also worth noting the context at the time this cohort was experiencing the programme: a global pandemic, lockdowns, school/college disruption, increased pressure on digital access and devices in the home, limited personal space for creative work with working and schooling from home, impact on mental health and virtual fatigue. It is clear that speaking to the participants themselves about what other influential agents and factors were involved in their decision-making could have provided further insights.

Step 4: Assemble and assess the contribution story, and challenges to it

The following section assembles and assesses the contribution story and challenges to it. To aid in this process, Mayne (2008) offers a number of questions:

- Which links in the results chain are strong (good evidence available, strong logic, low-risk, and/or wide acceptance)?
- Which are weak (little evidence available, weak logic, high-risk, and/or little agreement among stakeholders)?
- How credible is the story overall? Does the pattern of results and links validate the results chain?

The link between outputs and immediate outcomes is moderately strong due to good evidence available that the outputs were delivered and the majority of matched correspondents agreed by post-survey with 12 out of the 16 key survey items. While the number of matched respondents was small, most had comparatively good attendance of the programme. This link could have been stronger if good attendance was more widespread and there were more participants who had completed both pre- and post-surveys.

Evidence of the link between immediate outcomes and the intermediate outcome of informed refinement of choices of options came from survey responses. These were regarding the creative arts subjects that participants could study at university and pursuing a career in the creative arts. While this was clear and the link is therefore described as strong, there was less clear evidence in free responses on the surveys of *how* the programme was refining these choices. At present, it is possible that this element of the results chain could equally be described as informed affirmation of choices of creative post-18 options.

Evidence of the link between immediate outcomes and the intermediate outcome of applying to creative arts FE and/or HE was partially evidenced. This link is weakest given that evidence was limited by lower survey response rates to later surveys and lack of access to applications/offers/enrolments for other institutions. While the available data showed 50% of

programme participants did apply to creative arts FE and/or HE, it is also unclear why some applications were unsuccessful (i.e., which entry criteria they did not meet) or were not progressed.

Finally, evidence is also partial regarding the link between the intermediate outcome of applying to creative arts FE and/or HE and the final outcome of diversified creative arts student populations. This is due to the scale of the programme in comparison to entire creative arts institutional populations, but also reflects the smaller number who more regularly attended the programme. While all programme participants met characteristics of underrepresentation, we are not aware of all their outcomes. However, all programme participants who we know did progress to creative arts FE and HE met one or more criteria of underrepresentation.

This supports the conclusion that the pattern of results and links validates the results chain. The story is credible, especially when considered alongside the original evaluation questions, shown below:

> *Did the Creative Pathways Programme contribute to progression to creative arts higher education study for those who participated?*
>
> *If so, how did it do so and for whom?*

CPP contributed to progression to creative arts higher education study for those who participated. It did this for those who attended sessions more regularly and for whom we had survey and destinations information. The programme did this by providing the multiple programme outputs (i.e., information on creative FE, HE, and careers), and through the change mechanism of supporting participants' decision-making. This was demonstrated through the immediate outcomes of enhancing their awareness of their options, requirements, pathways and potential careers and how to apply. This somewhat refined their choices of options and also led to a number of applications to creative arts FE and/or HE. Ultimately, the programme focus on students who meet characteristics of underrepresentation contributed to diversification of FE and HE creative arts student populations.

The figure below illustrates the contribution story for CPP. The blue arrows indicate the elements where there is evidence the programme was supporting decision-making. The decreasing size of the arrows indicates the decreasing support required with each consecutive stage. The size of the green arrows indicates the strength of the links in the results chain, based on the available evidence as discussed above.
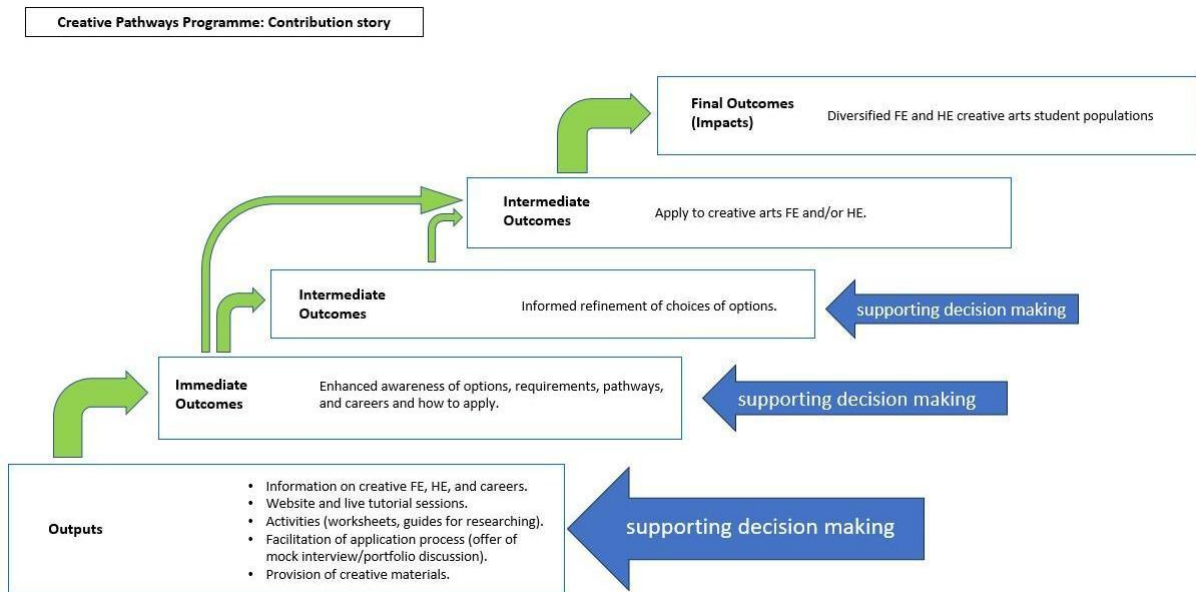
Figure 11. Creative Pathways Programme: Contribution story

- Do stakeholders agree with the story – given the available evidence, do they agree that the programme has made an important contribution (or not) to the observed results?

Due to the size of the institution, the programme team have carried out the design, resourcing, delivery, evaluation and reporting of CPP. The team members, as stakeholders, agree with the contribution story given the available evidence. Additional stakeholder voices were involved in the contribution analysis, for example the participants via the survey responses, and interviews with a teacher at a target school/college and a Progression Support Worker involved in the delivery.

However, the retrospective nature of the evaluation, that participants were no longer accessible given agreed permissions, and the timescale of the pilot evaluation, prevented the opportunity of further consultation with the participants, teacher and Progression Support Worker regarding the credibility of the resulting contribution story. However, it is likely that those interviewed would agree with the story given their views on the relative benefits of the programme and perceptions of other influencing factors. Further consultation with these individuals and programme participants, as well as senior management, would likely provide further areas for consideration and challenge.

- What are the main weaknesses in the story? E.g., is it clear what results have been achieved?

While the story of the programme's overall contribution is credible and results have been achieved, the completeness of this evidence could be improved. The key weaknesses result from participant attendance, survey completion, and access to complete destinations data. Attendance of sessions is likely to have affected the potential benefit of the programme for individual participants. This is, of course, linked to the online delivery necessary at the time and its impact on rapport and support, but also to participants' other commitments.

- Are the impacts of other influencing factors clearly understood?

In advance of gathering the existing evidence, the project team conducted an exercise to identify other influencing factors, as shown in Tables 1 to 5. Through the interviews with the teacher and Progression Support Worker, as well as in limited areas within the surveys, those factors that were

identified have been simple to understand. It is likely that there were more influencing factors at play, and additional consultation with the programme cohort would have been able to surface these and the role they played in their decision-making.

- What additional data or information would be useful?

Additional data that would be useful is listed below as part of Step 5 of the contribution analysis, on seeking out additional evidence with a view to revise and strengthen the contribution story.

Step 5: Seek out additional evidence and Step 6: Revise and strengthen the contribution story

Due to time constraints for this pilot evaluation, the project team was unable to seek out additional evidence or further revise and strengthen the contribution story, representing Steps 5 and 6 of Mayne's (2008) approach. However, based on the contribution story compiled so far, and identifying the weaker areas of the results chain, we are able to identify the following as areas where additional data would be helpful in strengthening the contribution story for future iterations of CPP.

From a practitioner's perspective, there are a few aspects regarding the collection of this additional data that merit consideration. For example, achieving the optimum balance between evaluating and the experiential learning and the developmental opportunities of creative participation. Part of this is the aspect of 'survey fatigue,' which may deter, rather than enhance, some opportunities for meaningful exchange. Other creative modes of evaluation and methods of observing changes occurring could be considered, for example, through reflective journals for participants. These methods could provide further insight into the depth of participation and learning gain.

In terms of engagement, it would be helpful to have better data on how many of the worksheets and templates were downloaded and how many of the participants watched the full videos of activities. In terms of destinations, it would be helpful to have a better understanding of the trajectories for all participants, whether they engaged a lot or a little, and potentially their classmates from similar backgrounds who did not attend the programme. Additional stakeholder views would also be helpful for further assessing the contribution story and theory of change.

The following section indicates a non-exhaustive selection of further areas where additional information or data would be helpful, and for which aspect of the intervention:

With participants
Practical aspects: ● Whether they were able to easily access the digital technology (hardware, creative software, bandwidth)   ● Whether they found the online offer fatiguing or felt comfortable with the level of interactivity   ● What the reasons were for non-attendance   ● What other commitments and responsibilities a participant may have had that may impinge upon their participation   ● Whether they felt they needed more activities or fewer   ● How they perceived the timing of the sessions and how they were spaced out through the year   ● Looking back, if they felt anything crucial was missing   ● What the impact of the creative materials provision was   ● Whether they would have preferred worksheets/templates printed out and sent in advance

● If they had been able to find an appropriate space to engage (watch the videos, complete the activities, attend the live, online follow-up session)
Decision-making: ● How they refined their post-18 choices ● Whether they experienced any counterinfluences to pursuing the creative arts ● Whether they were involved in any other programmes with FE or HE ● Where else or what other options they were considering (and whether they were all creative arts) ● Their expected grades and whether they were likely to meet entry requirements (so we could provide tailored advice earlier if necessary)
Applying: ● Whether they referred to the programme in their personal statement as part of applying to creative FE and/or HE ● Why some did not continue their application
Surveying: ● How much of the gains, defined in this report as distance travelled between pre- and post-survey for matched respondents, were due to the programme rather than their own individual research, school/college influences, and beyond ● Where they had responded strongly agree at pre-survey, their rationale and basis for this response ● Where they had moved from 'strongly agree' to 'agree', what this meant ● Where they had responded with 'unsure', what they interpreted this as
With admissions team
● Why some of the applicants were rejected
With parents/carers/guardians
● How they perceived the project team sending them the information as well, whether they read it too and used it to support their young person's decision-making
With teachers
● A better understanding of the provider's own curriculum and timetable for post-18 progression ● Views on whether delivery of the programme within the education institution's timetable might be preferable to staging extracurricular delivery, due to conflict of participants' other commitments and extracurricular demands ● If providing a combination of blended online and in–person, whether face-to-face opportunities may be a preferable option, staged only in half-terms or holiday breaks

Table 13. Further areas where additional information or data would be helpful

Areas that could also be considered in developing the theory of change further could include exploration of change mechanisms beyond supporting decision-making. For example, the importance of developing a meaningful, sustained relationship with the university to create a 'sense of belonging' prior to joining the university community. A further consideration could include recognition, through formal accreditation of tariff points, for participation and completion of the programme, to assist meeting the entry requirements to the university.

Limitations and reflection on challenges and learning

In the following section, the project team reflects on the limitations, challenges and learning involved in being part of the small *n* pilot evaluation and using contribution analysis.

Limitations

There were a number of key data limitations. Decreasing response rates with successive surveys equated to less information regarding the impact of the programme, in particular affecting the analysis of distance travelled for matched respondents (those completing both pre- and post-surveys). This compounded the effect of the programme being offered to a small number of participants, but also these participants' varied attendance. Furthermore, for those who did not respond to the post-survey or destinations survey and did not apply to the university, data on destinations was not available. The university is not part of an external tracker scheme such as the Higher Education Access Tracker and did not have the relevant permissions or timescale to make a data request to the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA).

As aforementioned, there were also limitations to the reliance on survey methods involved in measuring distance travelled. These included participants 'strongly agreeing' at pre-survey, social desirability characteristics, and the possibility for multiple interpretations of the 'unsure' response option. On the few occasions where matched respondents disagreed at both timepoints, only using survey data meant it was hard to interpret whether this was because they had attended and did not find the information useful, if they found it useful but felt unconfident about it (different from feeling well-informed – the actual wording of the question), or if they had not attended and therefore still did not feel well-informed.

Evaluating retrospectively also presented some limitations. This meant it was not possible to get multi-stakeholder input on development before programme delivery, participant input beyond the data that had already been collected, and multi-stakeholder views on the contribution story developed.

Another limitation was regarding the pilot project timescale. The project team selected CPP to be evaluated as this represented a sustained, multi-intervention programme, and we were in a position to have collected most of the data that was likely necessary. However, as a sustained, multi-intervention programme, CPP involves a number of change mechanisms. These could include a trusting relationship, broadening cultural capital, acquisition of creative skills or raising attainment. It would be helpful to have a resource representing a bank of change mechanisms, from which institutions could identify relevant and likely change mechanisms depending on their theory of change.

The selection of one of these change mechanisms, supporting decision-making, simplified our approach. However, the time involved in exploring this meant that the project team was unable to explore other change mechanisms that may have been at play. Nevertheless, this mechanism was agreed as being the most important and best to communicate to external stakeholders.

Reflection on contribution analysis

The contribution analysis was largely appropriate for our purpose and evaluation question, as discussed in the introduction. The method did not prioritise a particular evidence source, and therefore fit CPP, for which the project team had previously collected pre-, continuation and post-surveys and monitored participation and attendance.

With the constraints of time and team capacity, adhering to steps 5 and 6 presented a challenge. WP teams without evaluation officers or support could struggle to conduct this level of evaluation for sustained programmes when operating in the short timescale of a school year before starting the next annual cycle with a new cohort of Year 12 students. These constraints can impact on the depth

of evaluation and knowing where and when to stop evaluating, particularly with such small numbers in the data and the resulting focus at times on individual cases.

It is important for other institutions looking to use this method to not conflate small *n* methodologies with being less resource-intensive. Becoming familiar with the method and the level of scrutiny required in piloting to evaluate CPP, and therein, focusing only on one change mechanism, took time that the project team is unlikely to be able to spend on routine evaluation and multiple change mechanisms. At the same time, the methodical testing of all aspects of even the more limited focus on supporting decision-making as a change mechanism is something that can be transferred to the team's routine evaluation approach.

Initial reading of the contribution analysis literature suggested a clear set of steps to take, with a level of flexibility to use a variety of evidence sources. However, it became clear from Mayne (2019) that not all published approaches using the method truly represent a contribution analysis. As such, the project team made the decision that this pilot evaluation report should align clearly with the suggested steps.

As a result of participating in the pilot evaluation, the project team will test the change mechanism and similar outputs in closer partnership with the target schools/colleges. The reliance of CPP on sustained extracurricular engagement over the two final years of schooling, with its impacts on results described above, could merit a move to offering the programme over one year, but relatively consecutively and during schooling hours. This would require deeper partnership with schools, including understanding of their timescales for progression information and applications, and therefore could improve understanding of other influencing factors and relative contribution.

Learning

Through this evaluation pilot, the project team has learned a great deal. The team learned more about evaluation terminology, including change mechanisms; how to create a mid-level theory of change, over and above the original one-page logic chain model previously used; about contribution analysis as a methodology; and how to translate the programme into various diagrams all represented a learning curve. The project team also learned how to put together a protocol indicating the evaluation plan before conducting the evaluation, in the same way as experimental evaluation designs commit to their approach prior to commencing. However, the project team learned that this process was not as malleable to contribution analysis.

There were a number of other areas for learning. For example, the complexity of the programme we were delivering quickly became apparent. The theory of change[10] originally constructed on a simple template was wide-ranging, with outcomes that are difficult to measure, particularly in the longer term. Participating in this project will help refine theories of change going forward and their alignment to methods used to measure if the results were achieved.

Time and timing of interactions became an important factor for the programme participants, as well as for the team delivering the project, and this will be an area that the project team considers more carefully going forward. The team has also learned what level of causal evaluation for small numbers

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[10] Focusing on the theory of change also led the project team to reflect on the students we have engaged with. The team acknowledged that these participants were making an important and conscious step towards the creative sector, firstly by their choice of a Level 3 qualification before even hearing of the programme, and secondly in their interest in participating in the programme. While all participating in CPP met criteria of underrepresentation, target schools/colleges may have entry requirements that select a particular population of students.

is likely to be possible alongside everything else the team does as WP practitioners in the tight space of an academic year. Finally, the team reflected on those institutions involved in the pilot evaluation project and felt it important for the sector to more clearly understand the routes into working in WP. This may give an insight into the motivations and skillsets of many WP practitioners, which can vary from those of social scientists, evaluators, and researchers.

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Appendix A

Theory of Change
Creative Pathways Programme – 16+ (Years 12 & 13)

1 Situation

Some groups of students are underrepresented in higher education participation, including students from areas of low HE participation, low household income or low socioeconomic status, some Black, Asian and minority ethnicity students, mature students, disabled students, care leavers, carers, people estranged from their families, people from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities, refugees, and children from military families.

2 Aims

The Creative Pathways 16+ Programme aims to support students from these underrepresented groups to access higher education in the creative arts by providing IAG around creative HE study and careers, support to develop creative practice and meet entry criteria, and the possibility for financial support for Foundation study.

7 Inputs	5 Activities	6 Outputs	3 Outcomes	4 Impact
Process			**Impact**	
Participants and parents Partner schools Student Ambassadors Visiting Creative Professionals Progression Team & APDM SMT support WP Budget for programme (art packs, trips) APP Budget for bursary Marketing support for materials IT support for online platforms Covid-19 University campus and local creative venues Data for tracking/monitoring	Engagement with participants and parents (launch, +1 annually) Careers insights Offer of 1:1 choices tutorial Student Ambassador Q&A Creative Professionals Q&A Creative visual research Collection engagement University tour End of Year shows Use of University facilities Portfolio development Provision of materials Application support Portfolio presentation skills Interview skills Offer of mock interview Exhibition and graduation	Better understanding of: • creative arts FE and HE pathways including finance • applications & requirements • HE style of teaching & student experience • university campus & resources available • creative arts careers and value of industry Access to: • different cultural capital • personalised IAG about future options to aid planning • how to plan and catalogue creative work Practice: • presentation/interview skills • new creative skills	• Increase in number of underrepresented students applying to creative FE/HE • Informed decision-making to successfully apply to creative FE and HE • Improved personal statement writing and interview skills • Increased confidence in creative ability, research, presentation & portfolio • Improved planning, development, and cataloguing of work • Increased identification with creative FE/HE • Receipt of FAD financial support for eligible students	• Increased offers at creative FE/HE • Increased enrolment at creative FE/HE • More diversified student body at creative HEIs • More diversified sector-wide creative student body • Broadened cultural, academic, and social capital • Increased sense of belonging • Reduced financial pressure during FAD

8 Rationale & Assumptions

Research has suggested students from underrepresented backgrounds are less likely to apply and gain a place in HE, due to a complex causal process including attainment in secondary school, perception of barriers to HE progression, and university offer-making. According to a systematic review of evidence on the effectiveness of interventions and strategies for widening participation in HE, Younger et al. (2019) found that longer-term 'Black box' WP programmes (with multiple elements in a single programme) and financial incentives were effective. Further data highlights the rationale for inclusion of the specific programme components: Callender & Mason (2017) highlight adversity to debt/concerns over cost as an access barriers; specialist study requires a portfolio of creative work drawing on a range of materials and processes subject to discretionary parental resources and cultural capital needed to recognise possible careers in creative subjects.
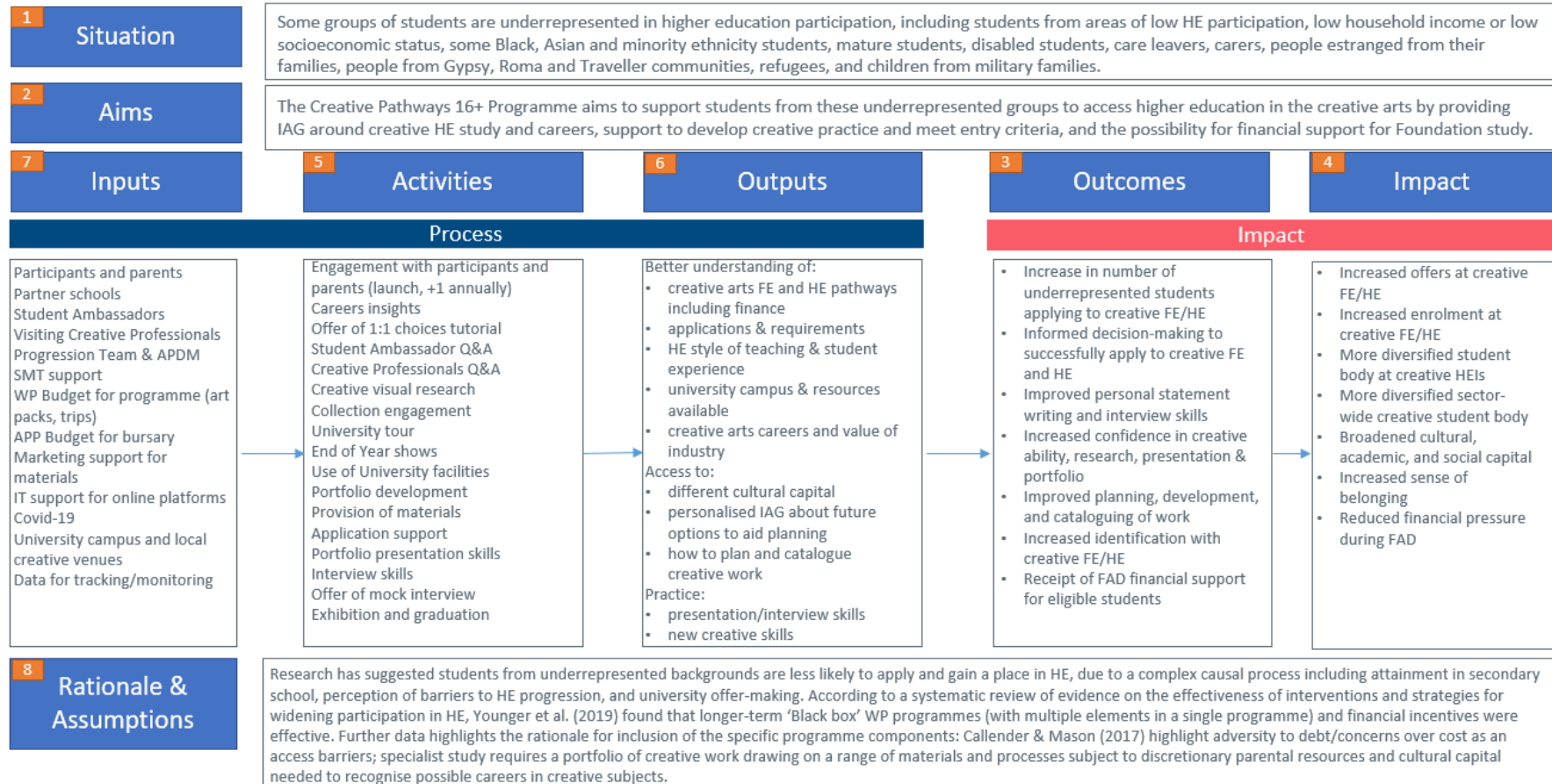
Figure 12. Original theory of change for CPP 16+ prior to commencing TASO small *n* pilot evaluation project

Appendix B

Figure 13. Year 12: Creative Pathways Programme

Creative Pathways Programme 16+

YEAR 13

Sept Year 13
Welcome back, relaunch of CPP Programme. Looking to the Year ahead. Your progression planning, gathering participants hopes and dreams
- Retention
- Congratulations
- Communication
- Affirmation
- Imagined future selves

Sept/Oct Year 13
Researching Universities, Attending Open Days, Finance and personal statement writing Preparation for portfolio focused interviews Worksheets and templates for planning submitted for feedback.
- Planning
- Preparing
- Researching

Oct/Nov
Offer of optional mock Interviews: 30 minute one to one live online session of rehearsal of interview questions, verbal feedback, reflection.
- Rehearsal
- Presentation Skills
- Practice
- Oracy

Jan Year 13
Portfolio Presentation, group critique session (online)
- Presentation skills
- Reflection

July Year 13
Celebration and graduation in person (Post Covid restrictions). Talk from a creative professional. reward and acknowledgement (gift and certificate of participation). Tour of campus, opportunity to meet and question Student Ambassadors
- Re-affirmation
- Reward
- Recognition
- Sense of achievement
- Role models

Aug/Sept
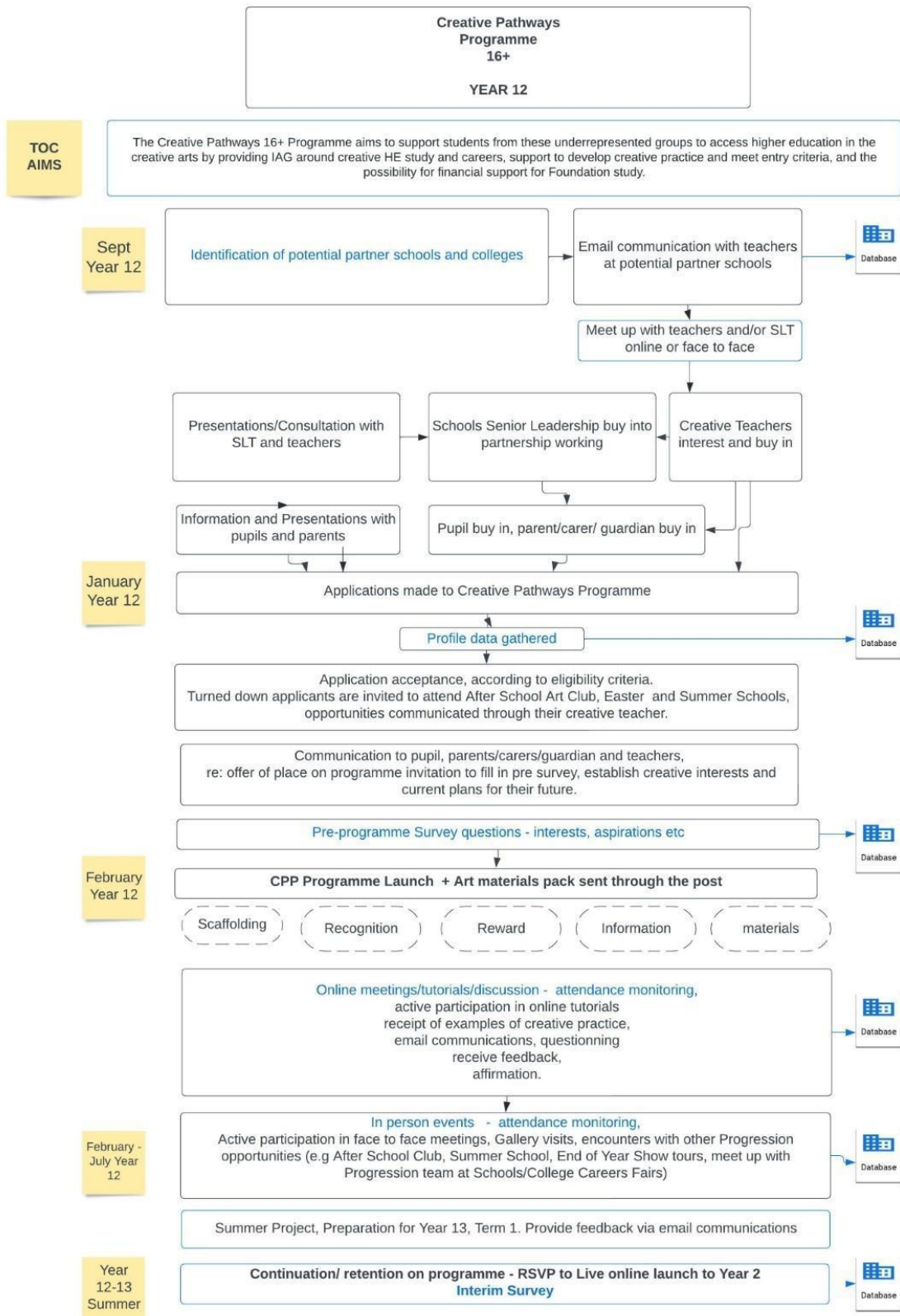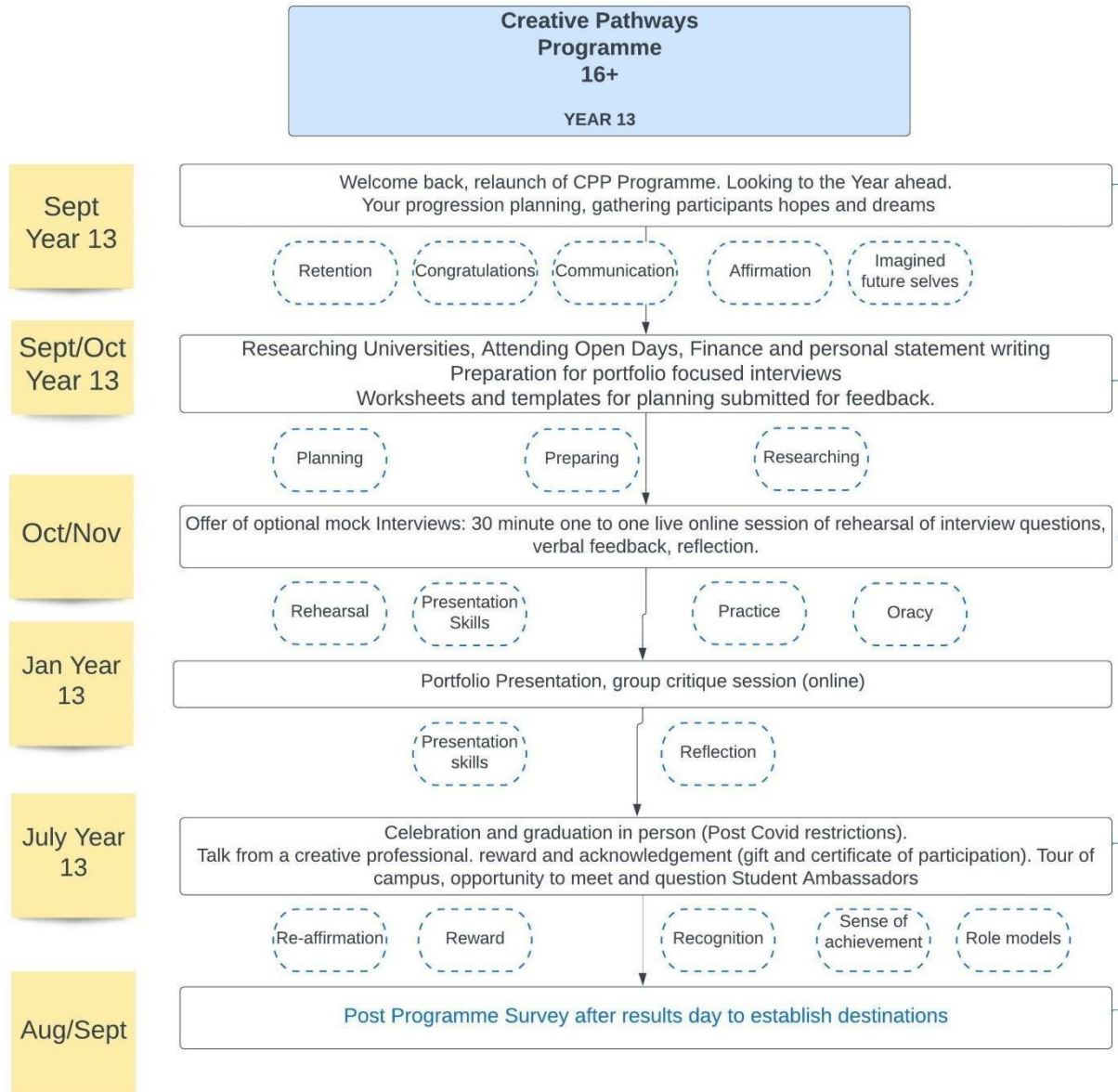Post Programme Survey after results day to establish destinations

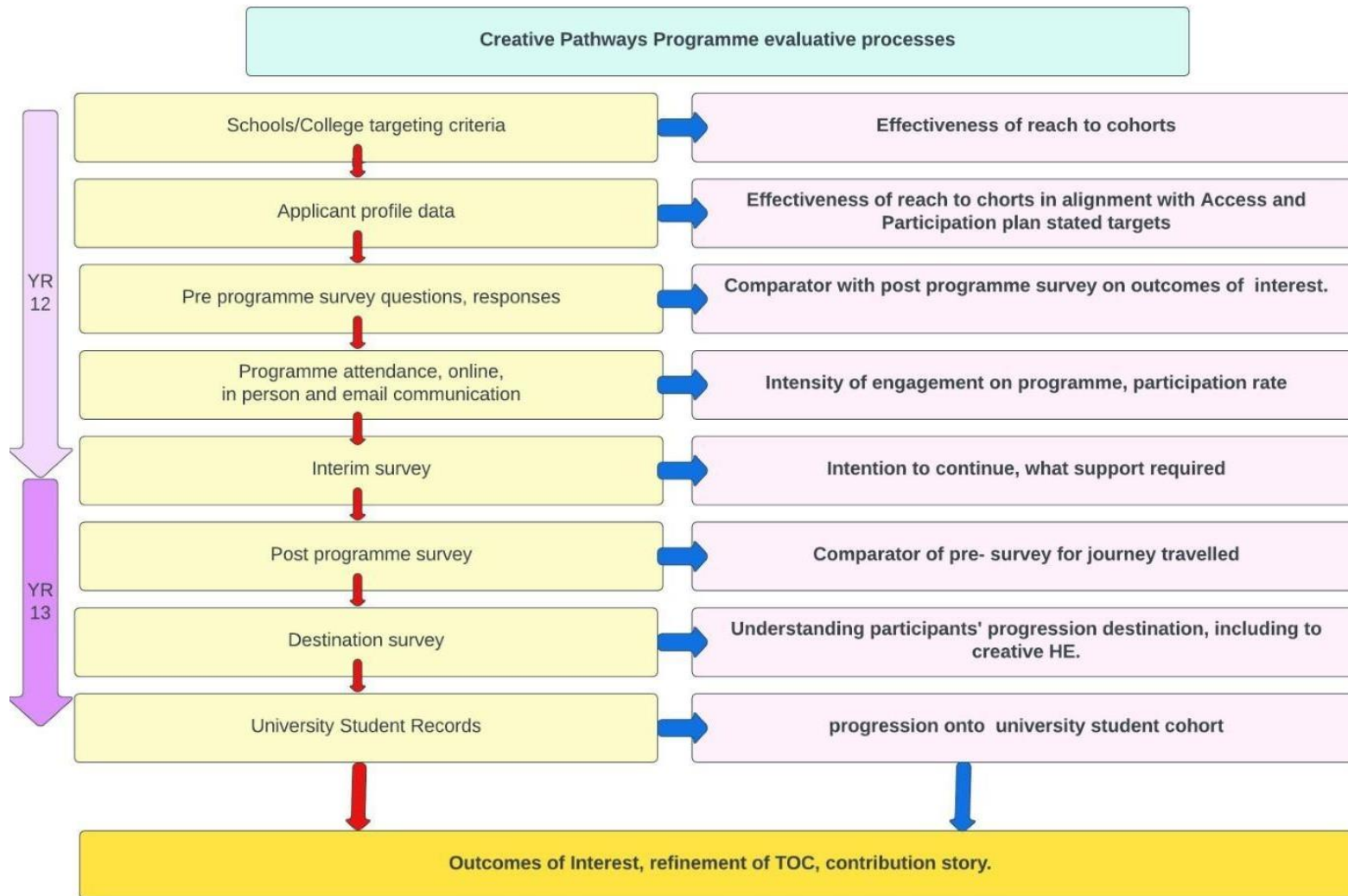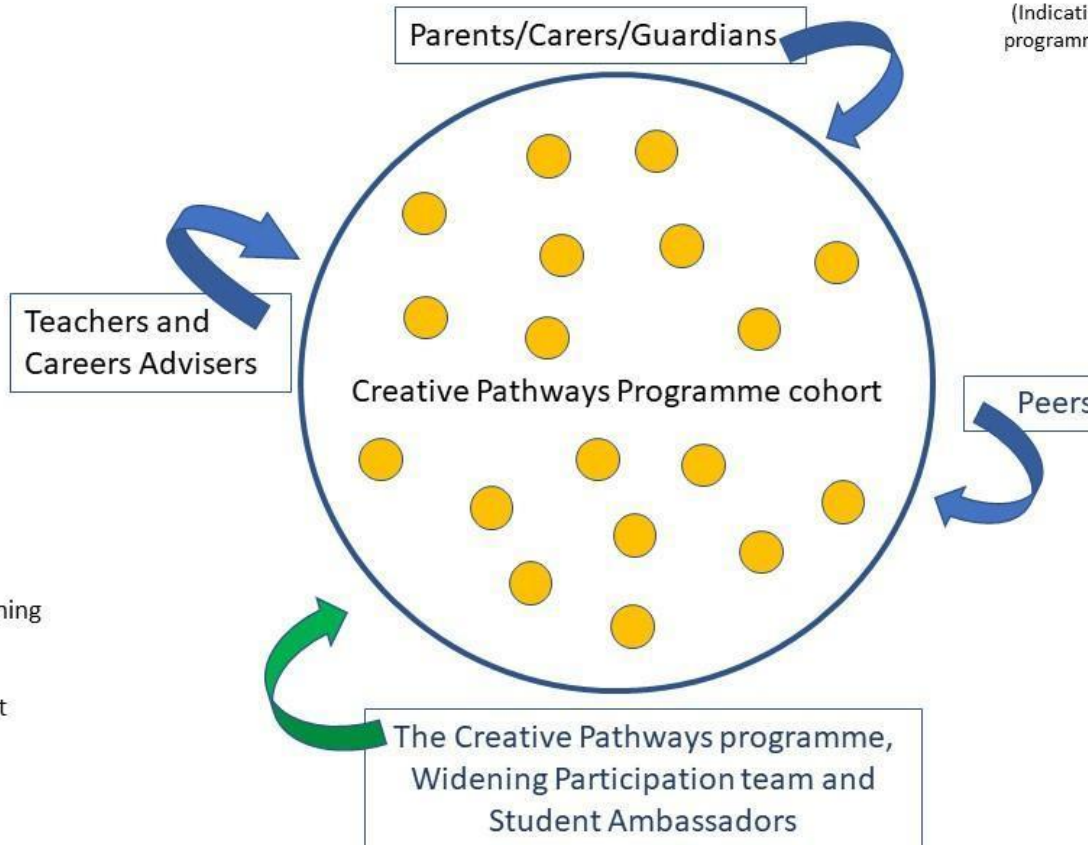**Figure 14. Year 13: Creative Pathways Programme**

Figure 15. Creative Pathways Programme 16+ Evaluative processes

Appendix C

Inputs of the programme:

information
guidance
materials
creative skills
oracy
dialogue
communication
affirmation
recognition
scaffolding
researching
planning
preparation
rehearsal
presentation
practice
reflection
role models
cultural capitals
experiential learning
reassurance
reward
acknowledgment
celebration
progression

The contribution story of the Creative Pathways programme.

(Indicating the spheres of influence and how the programme how decision making was supported).

Parents/Carers/Guardians

Teachers and Careers Advisers

Creative Pathways Programme cohort

Peers

The Creative Pathways programme, Widening Participation team and Student Ambassadors

Figure 16. Spheres of influence, how the programme contributes additional information, experience and guidance, and how decision-making was supported through the Creative Pathways programme