Theory of Change for Leeds Arts University access intervention: Creative Pathways Programme
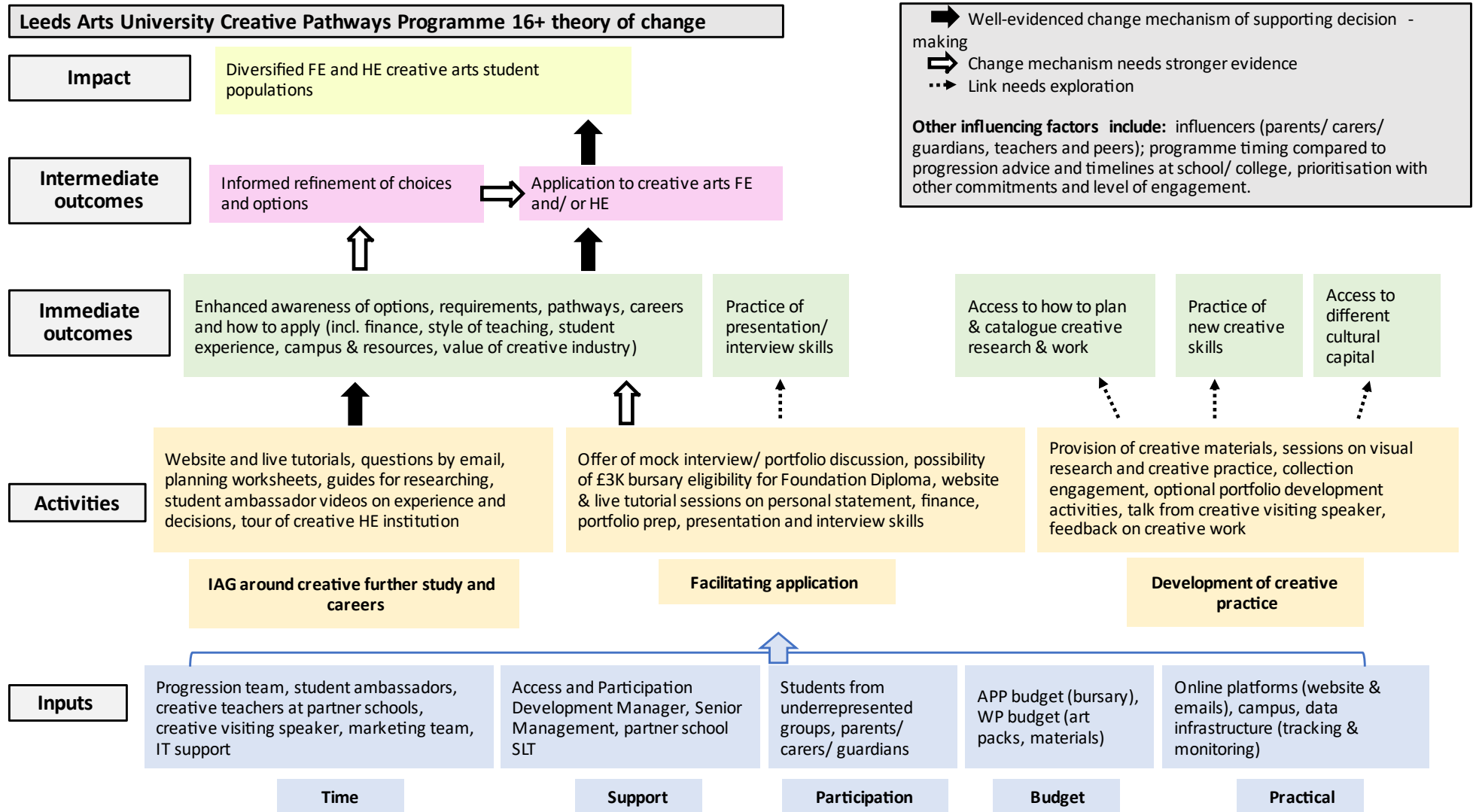
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Theory of Change for Creative Pathways Programme

Leeds Arts University Creative Pathways Programme 16+ theory of change

Impact

Diversified FE and HE creative arts student populations

Intermediate outcomes

Informed refinement of choices and options

Application to creative arts FE and/ or HE

➡ Well-evidenced change mechanism of supporting decision - making

⇨ Change mechanism needs stronger evidence

⇢ Link needs exploration

Other influencing factors include: influencers (parents/ carers/ guardians, teachers and peers); programme timing compared to progression advice and timelines at school/ college, prioritisation with other commitments and level of engagement.

Immediate outcomes

Enhanced awareness of options, requirements, pathways, careers and how to apply (incl. finance, style of teaching, student experience, campus & resources, value of creative industry)

Practice of presentation/ interview skills

Access to how to plan & catalogue creative research & work

Practice of new creative skills

Access to different cultural capital

Activities

Website and live tutorials, questions by email, planning worksheets, guides for researching, student ambassador videos on experience and decisions, tour of creative HE institution

Offer of mock interview/ portfolio discussion, possibility of £3K bursary eligibility for Foundation Diploma, website & live tutorial sessions on personal statement, finance, portfolio prep, presentation and interview skills

Provision of creative materials, sessions on visual research and creative practice, collection engagement, optional portfolio development activities, talk from creative visiting speaker, feedback on creative work

IAG around creative further study and careers

Facilitating application

Development of creative practice

Inputs

Progression team, student ambassadors, creative teachers at partner schools, creative visiting speaker, marketing team, IT support

Access and Participation Development Manager, Senior Management, partner school SLT

Students from underrepresented groups, parents/ carers/ guardians

APP budget (bursary), WP budget (art packs, materials)

Online platforms (website & emails), campus, data infrastructure (tracking & monitoring)

Time

Support

Participation

Budget

Practical

EXPANDED THEORY OF CHANGE UNDERPINNING DOCUMENT

VERSION

May 2023

NAME

Creative Pathways Programme (16+), Leeds Arts University

WHY IS THE INTERVENTION BEING RUN?

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.

Aims: The Creative Pathways Programme 16+ aims to support students from underrepresented groups to access higher education 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 Diploma study.

Rationale and assumptions: Research has suggested that 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. (2018) 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 barrier; 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.

WHO IS THE INTERVENTION FOR?

Year 12 students from underrepresented groups, who are studying creative arts subjects at Level 3 and are considering applying to study the creative arts at further or higher education.

WHAT IS THE INTERVENTION?

The programme was designed as a series of activities: 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. Due to the pandemic, the programme was offered virtually, with the exception of the celebration event.

Parental/carer/guardian consent was obtained at sign-up and creative teachers put the opportunity forward to their cohort. Online content consisted of videos, creative activities, and downloadable learning resources as a weblink followed by a live online tutorial. The delivery team sent feedback on submissions of examples of work and enquiries. E-mail communications were sent out to students, teachers and parents/carers/guardians. Attendance reports were provided to the teachers to encourage sustained attendance throughout the programme duration.

The intervention consisted of the below:

1. **Information on creative FE, HE and careers**
    a. **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.
    b. **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.
    c. **Session 3 Creative practice and Visual Research** [July 2021]: Focus on creative practice and visual research, and a creative activity of mark-making collage.
    d. **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.
    e. **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.
    f. **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.
    g. **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.
    h. **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.

     i.   **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.

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:
   a. An introduction video from the delivery team.
   b. A video about the week's activity such as a digital slide presentation, presented by the delivery team.
   c. Downloadable resources such as worksheets/templates and a glossary of terms.
   d. Additional links for further research.
   e. Videos, recorded by student ambassadors during lockdown, addressing 'Attending pre-university events', 'Budgeting and Finance', 'Applying to UCAS' and 'Writing your personal statement.'

3. **Activities (worksheets and guides for researching)**
   a. **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.
   b. **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).
   c. **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'.
   d. **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.
   e. **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'.

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.

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).

WHO IS DELIVERING THE INTERVENTION?

The Creative Pathways Programme was delivered by the Progression team, whose remit is widening participation and outreach. The team were responsible for design, delivery and evaluation. A rapid switchover to online delivery was required due to pandemic. This meant the need for rapid acquisition of web design and content generation skills.

HOW IS THE INTERVENTION DELIVERED?

A weblink to online content was emailed on a Friday and followed by a live online tutorial the following week where the delivery team could go through the content, expand upon it, encourage discussion and answer questions.

WHERE IS THE INTERVENTION DELIVERED?

The programme was intended to be engaged with in non-school/college times, so as not to interfere with formal study times. Live online tutorials occurred at 5pm in the week following the release of the session as a weblink the previous Friday. Creative activities were done in students' own time. Careful consideration had to be made of students' homeworking spaces, the limitations of creative processes in the home, access to creative materials, and the implications of shared digital technology and equipment in the home at that time.

HOW MANY TIMES WILL THE INTERVENTION BE DELIVERED? OVER HOW LONG?

The intervention was designed to be offered once in its totality to its participants, with events lasting over Year 12 and 13, and recruited a new cohort of Year 12 students each successive year.

WILL THE INTERVENTION BE TAILORED?

Amendments to the programme could be made through answering students' individual enquiries by providing individualised feedback via email but also through live responses in online tutorials. Students' interim views were also communicated through their responses to the continuation survey, so that these could be taken on by the delivery team.

The programme is being refined and adapted for future iterations, in consultation with teachers to see if rather than being extra-curricular, it could be delivered in school/college timetable periods to enable more consistent engagement and align more closely to the institution's timelines for applying for next steps.

HOW WILL IMPLEMENTATION BE OPTIMISED?

Strategies that were adopted to maximise effective implementation were:

- The triangulation of communications with students, teachers and parents/carers/guardians to ensure that the communications got through to students was a key consideration to encourage continued participation.
- Art materials packs were posted to participants at the outset to enable participation.
- Intention of continuation was considered using an interim survey.
- Individualised feedback was given to all submissions of examples of work and queries via email.

ASSUMPTIONS / CHANGE MECHANISMS

This theory of change examines the change mechanism of '**supporting decision-making'**. There were other change mechanisms that were theorised as playing a role in this intervention (e.g., possible selves, mattering, engaging a student's wider support systems in provision of information, financial support, role models), but they are not included in this document or the accompanying theory of change due to complexity and focus on one change mechanism during the scope of this evaluation pilot project.

The theory of change illustrates where the evaluation has so far indicated evidence the programme supported decision-making and where the links required further evidence. For example, survey evidence as part of the evaluation indicated that provision of IAG around creative further study and careers, which are not easily accessible in schools and colleges, supported decision-making toward enhanced awareness of options, requirements, pathways, careers and how to apply. This link relies on assumptions that participants attended the sessions to receive this information, engaged with it, and felt that it enhanced what they already knew.

It was assumed this could lead to informed refinement of choices and options: there was not enough clear evidence through the evaluation measures used of this link, however it could be partially assumed through the subsequently evidenced applications of programme participants to creative arts FE and/or HE. Enhanced awareness was also assumed to lead to applications to creative arts FE and/or HE and this occurred, providing evidence of a contribution to a diversified FE and HE creative arts student population given the programme participants all met characteristics of underrepresentation. Assumptions underlying these links were that the enhanced awareness was something that aligned with participants' sense of what they could see themselves doing, their interests and intentions for their futures; that they then took action to put an application together; that they would ultimately achieve the grades to meet entry requirements; and that they would be offered a place and take it up.

WHAT IS THE EVALUATION AIM?

The aim of the evaluation was to understand the contribution of the programme and other influencing factors to the programme outcomes (including progression to creative arts HE) following the completion of the first cohort.

WHAT ARE THE EVALUATION QUESTIONS?

The key 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?

WHAT METHODOLOGY ARE YOU USING?

Contribution analysis (Mayne, 2008) was the primary methodology for the evaluation. 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).

RISKS AND LIMITATIONS

The main risks and limitations to the theory of change are listed below:
- The theory of change only covers one of the change mechanisms that may be operating within the programme
- Other influencing factors such as personal attributes, intervention-related factors, external influences, factors relating to the process of applying to higher education and alternative plans and pathways for progression could also impact on the results
- Other risks are:
  - Data on outcomes is limited (e.g., due to response rates or access to destinations data)
  - Reliance on survey data and its limitations
  - Insufficient input from a wide range of stakeholders
  - Participant engagement
  - The materials are not deemed helpful
  - There are competing academic/life demands for participants
  - Participants may not have the support, portfolio or grades to be able to pursue creative arts FE or HE and applications may be unsuccessful

REFERENCES

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