

Evaluation of the Levelling Up Widening Participation Pilot Programme

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What is the Levelling Up pilot Widening Participation programme?

Levelling Up is a national academic and pastoral online support programme spanning two academic years, targeted at Year 12 students in England who have an interest in potentially pursuing the study of Chemistry, Maths or Physics at University.

There were six Spokes in the pilot programme, with three Hubs coordinating the overall running of each subject strand. Durham University led the Chemistry strand (1 Spoke), the London Mathematical Society led the Maths strand (2 Spokes), and the Institute of Physics led the Physics strand (3 Spokes).

The pilot cohorts started the programme between February 2021 and July 2021 and the last sessions ran between March 2022 and June 2022.

In total, 226 students accepted places on the pilot cohort of the programme.

226 students

Evaluation of the pilot programme

Before the Levelling Up programme started, a detailed Theory of Change model was created in collaboration with the Chemistry, Maths and Physics Hubs. The programme activities identified in the model are shown in table 1 and the impact aims in table 2. The evaluation of the programme used a Contribution Analysis Evaluation Framework to answer the overarching research questions.

Research questions:




1. Have the intended impact aims and outcomes for the Levelling Up programme been achieved?
2. Is it reasonable to conclude the Levelling Up programme of activities contributed to the achievement of these impact aims and outcomes?











































Table 1. Activities within the six Spokes of the Levelling Up pilot programme

	Chemistry - Durham	Maths - Durham	Maths - Leicester	Physics - Birmingham	Physics - Durham	Physics - Oxford
Subject specific tutorials	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Separate mentoring sessions	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Guest lectures	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Onsite/remote university visits	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
Guaranteed conditional university offer	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
Graphics tablets provided to students	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No

Table 2. Impact aims of the Levelling Up programme and whether they were achieved by each Spoke.

Key:  aim fully met,  aim met but with weaker findings,  aim not met.

Impact aim	Chemistry - Durham	Maths - Durham	Maths - Leicester	Physics - Birmingham	Physics - Durham	Physics - Oxford
1 Participants aspire to study chemistry, physics, mathematics, or a directly related STEM discipline to their programme subject, at university.						
2 Participants apply to a high ranked university as listed in the Times Good University Guide						
3 Participants aspire to study at their Levelling Up host university.						
4 Participants aspire to study at university (in any subject).						
5 Participants consider that the programme has helped them achieve higher grades at A level in their subject.						
6 (Chemistry and physics) Students consider that the programme has helped them achieve higher grades at A level in maths within their subjects		N/A	N/A			
7 Participants received offers to study the courses which they have applied for on their UCAS applications						

Findings

Were the activities delivered as planned?

All activities were delivered as planned, to some extent. There were, however, variations in delivery across Spokes as well as in the engagement from participants.

Did the expected outcomes occur and were the impact aims achieved?

The evaluation found evidence that the intended outcomes had taken place.

Four out of the six Spokes met all the impact aims (table 2).

- However, achieving the aim of participants applying to a high ranked university as listed in the Times Good University Guide was slightly weaker for two Spokes.
- Two Spokes did not meet the aim of students applying to their host university, however, this was not of concern to the two Spokes affected as this was not a driver within their university widening participation remits.

Could anything else have impacted on the programme?

There were no external contextual factors found that may have negatively affected the intended outcomes or impact for the programme. The data highlighted the complexity of differing needs of the students.

Conclusion

Based on the evidence collected, the evaluation considers it reasonable to conclude that the Levelling Up programme contributed to achieving the stated impact aims for the programme.

Based on the findings from the evaluation, five recommendations for future refinement of the programme are:

- 1) Run with small group sessions (max 6 students), with the same students, tutors/ mentors in a group week on week.
- 2) Provide an opportunity for students to communicate with each other outside the organised weekly sessions.
- 3) Provide support to tutors and mentors in tailoring topics and differentiating difficulty of activities for the interests and needs of students within their group.
- 4) Provide graphics tablets for all subjects to support drawing graphs and writing equations.
- 5) Consider best practice for most effectively working with students that are not visible on screen (e.g. camera off) or audible (e.g. microphones off).



Full report

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