University of **Kent**

Evaluating the effectiveness of outreach targeting boys from low socio-economic backgrounds: A case study of 'Championing Boys: Exploring Who You Could Be' Pilot

2023

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Executive Summary

Overview

The University of Kent Outreach and Widening Participation department piloted 'Championing Boys: Exploring Who You Could Be' in the Spring of 2023. This intervention worked with Year 7 boys from low-socio economic background status groups in two schools within the same Multi-Academy Trust (MAT).

The Championing Boys Programme began initially with a series of five in-school workshops and a campus visit delivered on the University of Kent Canterbury campus. Prior to the project starting a launch event was held, whereby selected students and their parents, guardians or supporters were invited to find out more about the programme and the potential benefits for the students participating.

Project Aims

Aligned with the Taking Boys Seriously Project (TBSP) principles, the project aims to:

1. Maintain and strengthen an attachment to education
2. Explore a range of different potential identities through exploration of subjects which extend past the curriculum and link into potential future careers
3. Allow students to challenge traditional gender stereotypes within subjects and careers
4. Students can articulate an appreciation of their abilities and potential
5. Provide opportunities for students to critically reflect on what it means to be male whilst simultaneously challenging narrow and potentially harmful gender stereotypes

Male Student Ambassadors as Role Models

A central part of the design of the Championing Boys pilot was the employment of male student ambassadors who could act as role models for secondary school students for the extended duration of the intervention. A core team of three male student ambassadors worked with the Championing Boys project from beginning to end, with their main responsibility being the support of students in workshops. All were undergraduate students in the final stage of their degree programme.

Participants

The university and the MAT worked collectively to identify and target specific learners to participate in this activity. Students were specifically targeted for the intervention based on multiple widening participation indicators and were considered 'mid-level' attaining students within the school. All students were targeted if they identified as male, were in receipt of free school meals and met three or more of the following criteria:

- Resided within a POLAR 4 Quintile 1 postcode[1] or UC postcode[2]
- Currently residing in or has previously been in local authority care
- Had a CAT score[3] between 90-105, based on school attainment data and in line with national school standards.

[1] For further Information please see the Office for Students website: https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/young-participation-by-area/about-polar-and-adult-he/
[2] For further Information, please see the Office for Students website:

https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/uni-connect/evaluating-uni-connects-impact/
[3] Cognitive Ability Testing (CAT) scores assess as student's ability to reason with and manipulate different types of material. These assessments are part of the standard assessments in secondary

A group of 15 students per school were identified and a further 15 from each school were identified as comparator groups. The students identified to participate were all eligible for free school meals, lived within the targeted postcodes listed above and were considered mid-attaining students (scores of 90-105). Some students were also in local authority care, and were prioritised for participation in the programme based on this.

Data Collection Methods

Intervention observation

Throughout the duration of the programme a research and evaluation assistant was present to observe the sessions. The research and evaluation assistant gathered written data about each session and the boys' engagement within each session. The researcher was independent of the project's development.

Focus groups

The boys were separated into 4 separate groups, and participated in a 50 minute focus group. During which time, the boys were asked to complete a mixture of activities and answer discussions to help gauge both their thoughts on the programme and education more generally.

Pre and post activity surveys

Pre and post survey questionnaires were distributed to students at the start of the first workshop and at the end of the visit day. The surveys were designed to capture students' opinions on education, their capabilities and engagement with education as well as engagement with the programme.

Methodological limitations

Survey design

Following the results of the surveys, it became apparent that the survey design was flawed. The questions used were broad for what was realistically

achievable In six weeks, and not aligned with the programme aims. It should also be noted that there was a general lack of motivation to complete the surveys from participants.

Comparator group surveys

It would have been beneficial to ask the comparator group to complete pre and post evaluation questionnaires at the same time points, in line with what the participants completed. However, due to time constraints and capacity, this was not possible, instead only collecting data at one time point.

Researcher capacity

This project was funded through Uni Connect and there were restrictions in terms of when the project needed to be delivered and completed by. These restrictions impacted capacity to be able to complete additional elements of research which may have yielded additional data.

Findings

Aim 1: Maintain and strengthen an attachment to education

A series of questions were asked through the survey to assess students' attachment to education. Responses were mixed, but overall the survey would suggest that students had less of an attachment to education following the project.

The focus groups shed some light on these findings, and help us contextualise why students may have responded more negatively. Through the focus group it became clear that most students had some attachment to education, and all were able to identify lessons that they found valuable. They were happy to attend the Championing Boys programme when they were missing lessons that they disliked, but were upset when they were missing their 'favourite' lessons. One of the students was particularly disruptive in the sessions, because they were missing a lesson which they deemed to be more valuable. It may be the case that this is a necessary risk of the intervention, as this year group does not have free

schools.

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periods in which students can participate in Championing Boys—classes need to be missed. Nevertheless, should Championing Boys continue, the potential negative effects of missing classes should be communicated with participating schools, which may have their own solutions to mitigate any antipathy towards missing lessons and, in turn, ensure students have as few barriers in their engagement with the programme as possible.

The timing of the surveys may therefore have had an impact on students' answers – if they happened at a time when students had more lessons they did not enjoy, they were more likely to give negative responses.

In addition, students highlighted substitute teachers has a significant disruptor of their education and educational attachment. Without casting aspersions on the schools, which are operating within a broader context of a nationwide staff recruitment and retention crisis, we should take very seriously this feeling among students.

It is not conclusive that the programme enhanced students' attachment to education – the focus groups seem to indicate that students already had a positive attachment to education on the whole. However, these are young learners in a new educational setting, and therefore more likely to disengage and be less attached to education in future years.

Aim 2: Explore a range of different potential identities through exploration of subjects which extend past the curriculum and link into potential future careers

In the focus groups, some students could articulate how the programme had encouraged them to think about their future and possible future careers. Other students weren't interested in a career in particular, but could articulate how the programme had encouraged them to focus on their education, so that they could progress to further study.

Overall, there was evidence to support that the programme had motivated students to think about future career opportunities and potential progression into higher education.

Aim 3: Allow students to challenge traditional gender stereotypes within subjects and careers

Students felt safe and heard through the Championing Boys Project. Through the focus groups, it became apparent that students felt the programme was nurturing and inclusive. The student ambassadors played a pivotal role in this; their ability to listen and support students was integral to the success of the programme. It became apparent through the focus groups that students were craving the connection and understanding from staff delivering the sessions.

Students voiced a perception that in schools girls were treated differently from boys. In their view, whereas girls were allowed to ask questions when they did not understand the materials, if boys were to do the same they were more quickly perceived as being 'troublemakers' or intentionally wanting to disrupt the class. In their opinion this was more strongly felt when supply teachers were present. In contrast, they felt that the Championing Boys project encouraged them to ask questions, and they felt heard in return.

However, the purpose of the sessions were not always clear to students. There was a desire to better understand the link between certain sessions and future skills and careers. An example of this was the Physical Theatre workshop, which students enjoyed but could not understand what skills they gained from this.

Aim 4: Students can articulate an appreciation of their abilities and potential

The survey results seemed to indicate that students were less confident in asking for help, or sharing their thoughts and feelings with others. The students ranked slightly more positive post-programme in questions around doing something they do not think they are good at, or trying something new. However, none of these findings were statistically significant.

Through the focus groups, it became apparent that some students recognised their abilities and potential, especially in relation to further study and careers. This was enhanced by the Campus Visit, where students reported feeling that studying in a HE environment could be something they envisage for themselves in the future.

Aim 5: Provide opportunities for students to critically reflect on what it means to be male whilst simultaneously challenging narrow and potentially harmful gender stereotypes

The programme failed to address male stereotypes explicitly, and did not provide students with enough opportunities to engage with or challenge any assumptions or commonly held beliefs. This aim was not met in this iteration of the programme.

Recommendations

1. The presence of engaged male ambassadors who can build good relationships with the students is important to the success of the programme. Even though some students mentioned that they would be ok with female ambassadors, the overwhelming feedback was around being able to relate to ambassadors and identifying with them. Some students also remarked that they liked being an 'all male cohort'. Given the high proportion of female teaching staff across the profession, this is an important addition to a programme like this and feature which should be retained if possible.

2. Where students have to miss lessons, it is recommended that the project delivery team work with the school to ensure that students are missing different lessons each week. This will mean that students are not always missing their 'favourite' lesson which might have a detrimental effect on their educational attachment.

3. Ensure that there are clear objectives for each session and that these are communicated to students. It became apparent that students would like to understand the purpose of the sessions, and how they can apply the skills they are learning. For example, the Physical Theatre workshop didn't have the intended outcomes. Students weren't able to articulate why they had participated in the session, and what skills they had gained from it, despite enjoying it.

4. There needs to be stronger explicit links to gender identity (what it means to be male) whilst simultaneously challenging narrow and potentially harmful gender stereotypes. This wasn't evident to the students, and this aim

of the project wasn't met. As per above, in sessions like physical theatre the connection wasn't made by students. This needs to be a much more explicit element in the programme.

5. The Campus Visit was a highlight for students, and allowed them to view themselves as a university student. Where possible, this element should be incorporated into future iterations of the project.

6. The observations and the relationship with the researcher was obvious during the exchanges in the focus group, and this was very beneficial in being able to have meaningful conversations with students. If affordable, it is recommended that the observations continue so that students can build a rapport with the researcher and are able to freely communicate during the focus groups. It is likely that without previous knowledge of the researcher, the students wouldn't have felt as comfortable sharing their experiences. The researcher's first hand knowledge of their experiences also helped inform the focus groups.

7. The surveys need to be re-designed if used in future. The questions were general, and possibly too difficult for a group of young learners (with low literacy levels). It should also be considered whether students can engage with the survey better, to wield more relevant results. It should also be noted that the comparison group methodology will require the survey to be administered at the same time at the beginning and end of the project. For logistical reasons, this was not possible in this iteration of the project and has meant that the comparison group data has not been used for this analysis.

8. There were a lot of findings that are specific to the school setting. For the project to achieve its ambition of allowing students to remain attached to education throughout their school career, staff CPD should be considered as part of this programme. At a minimum, Senior Leadership Team (SLT) within the schools should be provided with a report and/or presentation outlining key findings and what students felt could improve their educational experience.

1. Introduction

Inspired by the "Learning to 'Level-up'? Supporting Working Class Boys' Progression to Higher Education" conference 2022, the University of Kent embarked on designing a school based programme specifically aimed at engaging boys from low socio-economic backgrounds with education.

Championing Boys started as a project for Year 7 boys in two secondary schools in Kent, within the same multi-academy trust. The project was developed in collaboration with the trust and is grounded in academic research. The aim of the project was to maintain and strengthen an attachment to education and allow students to explore a variety of different potential identities through exploration of subjects which extend past the curriculum and link into potential future careers.

As part of the pilot for the Championing Boys Programme the university incorporated research to extensively evaluate the impact of the programme and to gain further insights and understanding surrounding boys' engagement with school. The research took a mixed methods approach incorporating pre and post survey data, comparator group surveys, alongside qualitative observations and focus groups. The focus groups were held with students to ensure their voice was put at the forefront of the research. It also incorporated feedback from the academies trust and the parents.

This report will first define the problem, describe the intention and the rationale behind it and then outline the findings of this research. The report will conclude by making recommendations for future developments aiming to work with boys from low socio-economic backgrounds.

2. Programme Rationale

Why Boys?

"Boys underperform at all key stages of primary and secondary education compared to girls. Boys are more likely to be excluded from school. Boys are less likely to go to university: boys are less likely to become apprentices: boys are less likely to find paid work between the ages of 22 and 29. And when these boys become young men, they are three times more likely than women to be victims of suicide. They also belong to the gender that makes up 96% of the UK Prison population" (Pinkett & Roberts, 2019).

Nationally, 22.08% of disadvantaged boys achieved 5+ GCSEs including Mathematics and English compared to 27.55% of girls; in Kent, this figure drops to 16.2% (Boys Impact Coalition, 2018/2019). For white British males in receipt of free school meals only 10% progress into Higher Education, which represents a lower progression rate than both young people that have been in local authority care and those who speak English as a second language (Baars et al, 2016).

Despite this, in 2019 an Access and Participation Plan review by the Office for Students suggested that of the 838 targets set relating to university access, success and progression by providers, only 11 gave specific mention to white working-class males (Blower, 2022).

Additionally, in the Kent region, traditional approaches to outreach activities tend to reach more female learners than male learners, despite significant efforts to address gender imbalances from outreach teams. For example, in April 2020, of the students Kent and Medway Progression Federation (KMPF)[4] partners had worked with 54% were female as oppose to 41% male learners[5].

With this in mind, It was clear that an alternative approach to outreach and widening participation was needed to specifically address the needs of boys and one which sought to do something outside the realm of traditional outreach interventions.

Key areas identified

The programme design was grounded in academic research, as outlined below, which specifically addresses boys from low socio-economic backgrounds' engagement with education and higher

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[4] KMPF HEI Partners are the University of Kent, Canterbury Christ Church University, University for the Creative Arts and the University of Greenwich. This statistic refers specifically to the work funded by the Kent and Medway Collaborative Outreach Project. For further Information about KMPF, please see: https://kmpf.org/
[5] The remaining 5% were students who selected "Other" or whether their sex Is unknown.

education. There were a number of areas identified as interacting with boys' engagement with education. These were:

1. Celebrating positive masculine identities

It is widely accepted that there is no set way to be masculine. However, as a society there are still deep rooted assumptions and beliefs around what it means to be male. Research show that perceptions of masculinity can Influence how boys Interact with education. Reay (2002) argues that traditional masculinity is in opposition to educational engagement, particularly with subjects perceived as more feminine. She further adds that for boys from low socio-economic backgrounds, social class acts as a 'fixing mechanism' for traditional masculinity (Reay, 2002, p.224).

Ingram and Waller (2014) also found that social class impacted the 'negotiation of gendered identities' (p.48). Their research investigated how a student's background influenced their experiences of undergraduate study. During this research, male focus groups were held with both working and middle-class males, where participants were asked to share images which represented masculinity for them (Ingram and Waller, 2014,p.41-42). It was found that middle-class students were more comfortable experimenting with different forms of masculinity (Ingram and Waller, 2014, p.48). Compared to working-class males, who despite already moving away from traditional working-class masculinity to some extent by progressing to HE, found it more challenging to integrate other forms of masculinity (Ingram and Waller, 2014, p.48). Ingram and Waller thought that for these men, they were holding onto positive aspects of traditional working-class masculinity whilst also avoiding aspects which could marginalise them.

Given the link between masculine identity and educational engagement, it was felt that providing a space for students to explore masculinity and reflect on what it means to be male was essential to the programme and perhaps where traditional outreach interventions are falling short of engaging with this audience.

2. Transition

The transition between primary school and secondary school is a key point in young boys' educational journeys and can be a point at which boys disengage with education. Harland and McCready (2012) found that boys took longer to adjust to the transition between primary and secondary school and often caused boys anxiety. They argue "Boys appeared to be unprepared for key transitional stages during adolescence" (Harland and McCready, 2012, p.82).

3. Gender based stereotypes

Gender stereotyping can exist within education with regard to their specific abilities (e.g. boys are good at STEM subjects) and with regard to their behaviour in school (e.g. boys are more likely to misbehave) (Heyder & Kessels, 2015). These stereotypes can impact the opportunities presented to students as well as how they are perceived and interacted with in an educational setting. Heyder and Kessels (2015) studied the effects of gender stereotyping on teachers perceptions of students. They found that teachers were more likely to describe boys as troublesome and this Increased for boys who "enacted their masculinity" (Heyder and Kessels, 2015, p. 478).

The Championing Boys programme wanted to challenge engagement myths outlined by Pinkett & Roberts, in their book 'Boys Don't Try'. In this book, the authors established 3 'myths' that are frequently shared around working with boys from low socio-economic backgrounds. One particular myth is described as 'make learning relevant to boys interests'. The authors push against this, arguing that this risks assuming boys all like the same things which reinforces stereotypes, encourages low expectations by letting boys know they are not necessarily suitable for things outside their current interests, and can prevent them from building social capital. With this in mind, workshops look to allow boys to experience things outside the curriculum whilst avoiding making assumptions about 'what boys like'.

In a 2016 report, NEON highlight both a lack of interventions which specifically target male learners, and of those which do a high concentration of interventions focusing specifically on sport (Webster & Atherton, 2016).

"Sport is undoubtedly an important and proven way that can be used in order to engage with this particular cohort. There are examples of members working with both professional football and rugby league clubs on this agenda...[However] Not all young males engage in or follow sports. Jones et al. (2011) point out that nearly 24% of boys, aged 11-15, do not take part in any sport outside of school lessons with just over a further 26% participating in three hours or less. Other popular areas amongst boys (and girls), included computing, film and reading and widening access should utilise a broad range of areas in seeking to engage them" (Webster & Atherton, 2016).

4. Avoiding a deficit model
Integral vision for the programme was recognising and celebrating the boys and their strengths by adopting a strengths-based approach. Clarke et al (2008) implemented a programme which focused on "Helping students realize their strengths and then building upon them, as well as conveying these strengths to teachers, administrators, and parents who can reinforce the strengths, is key to this approach" (Clarke et al, 2008, p127). Their research found that boys' attendance improved, discipline issues reduced and grades for the majority of boys (apart from those in the gifted stream) increased (Clarke et al, 2008, p.130).

5. The importance of male role models
Baars et al (2016) argued that students are more likely to experience a shift in both their knowledge and perception of HE if they have access to a role model who has experience of going to university (Baars et al, 2016). These role models act as sources of information and provide opportunities for students to interact with university students who they perceive to be 'just like them' (Baars et al, 2016). This programme wanted to explore the value of role models, particularly male role models and provide opportunities for students to interact with a range of different male ambassadors and staff members.

3. Programme Design

Possible Selves Theory

Markus and Nurius (1986) theory of possible selves refers to the possible identities individuals perceive available in the future. Harrison (2018) addresses how the theory of possible selves can be used to address widening participation to Higher Education. Harrison argues that these perceptions are shaped partly by our social and cultural backgrounds, and therefore those from under-represented backgrounds are more likely to have a narrower view of what is possible.

Harrison (2018) describes the implications for widening participation of using a number of intervention points which can utilise possible selves as a model to support the creation of interventions which support the progression of young people into HE. Building on the Possible Selves Theory, the Championing Boys Programme intervention points support and underpin the programme design. For example:

Intervention Point 1: describes how disadvantaged students are likely to envisage fewer possible selves that are 'predicated on requiring a degree' (p. 12). Interventions therefore should try to "expand the pool of possible selves available that have a relationship to higher education— o r to education more generally" (p.12). Championing Boys allows students to explore subjects which sit outside of traditional school curriculum and sessions were designed to link potential university courses to future careers.

Intervention Point 2: "relates to engaging with the young person's beliefs about their ability to exercise control over their future and their ability to succeed at tasks that are important to them" (p.13). Championing Boys encourages students to reflect on possible selves and their own future ambitions.

Intervention Point 3: "This process involves translating their vision of themselves in the future into something that is vivid and detailed in order to provide the motivational impetus that results from integrating this vision into their working self-concept" (p.13). Given that the pilot programme works with Year 7 over a period of six weeks, this intervention point could not be achieved within the initial programme. However, it will be incorporated as the programme develops.

Intervention Point 4: This intervention point involves making HE desirable and realistic. "Typically, this includes exposure to a campus environment, involvement in inspirational experiences, collaboration with current students, and information about graduate careers and other opportunities to envisage oneself as a student and/or graduate" (Harrison and Waller 2017, 2018) (p.14). Championing Boys sits most comfortably within this intervention point. This is because, students experience a campus visit and work closely with current students and staff. The boys are also exposed to thinking about future careers which link to the higher education courses which they have been exposed to.

Taking Boys Seriously Principles

Taking Boys Seriously (TBS), a longitudinal research project undertaken by the University of Ulster, was established in 2006 and has secured funding to continue until 2028. This project worked with a range of different educational and community partners to explore why boys from low socio-economic backgrounds were less likely to reach expected attainment outcomes and have low progression into higher education.

As a result of their research, TSB created a set of principles, which they argue should be embedded into all educational settings which work with boys and young men to support them in thriving in that environment[6].

The Championing Boys Programme embedded these principles within the programme, namely:

1. Engage meaningfully with boys (TBSP 8)
2. Utilise a strengths-based approach to learning (TBSP 3)
3. Challenge and affirm masculine identities (TBSP 4)
4. Value the voice of boys (TBSP 10)
5. Enable creative learning environments (TBSP 9)

Programme Aims

Aligned with the TSB principles, the project aims to:

1. Maintain and strengthen an attachment to education
2. Explore a range of different potential identities through exploration of subjects which extend past the curriculum and link into potential future careers
3. Allow students to challenge traditional gender stereotypes within subjects and careers
4. Students can articulate an appreciation of their abilities and potential
5. Provide opportunities for students to critically reflect on what it means to be male whilst simultaneously challenging narrow and potentially harmful gender stereotypes

Programme Overview

The University of Kent Outreach and Widening Participation department piloted 'Championing Boys: Exploring Who You Could Be' in the Spring of 2023. This intervention worked with Year 7 boys from low-socio economic background status groups in two schools within the same multi-academy trust.

The Championing Boys Programme began initially with a series of five in-school workshops and a campus

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[6] These principles are available on their website here: Ulster University Taking Boys Seriously Principles

visit delivered on the University of Kent Canterbury campus. Prior to the project starting a launch event was held, whereby selected students and their parents, guardians or supporters were invited to find out more about the programme and the potential benefits for the students participating. The format for the programme can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Championing Boys Programme Format

Workshop	Aim	Description
Launch Event	• Students and supporters to find out more information about the programme • Reflect on the skills the students have an opportunity to develop on the programme. • Reflect on the skills or qualities the students can bring to the programme	Students, parents, guardians and supporters joined university and school staff to find out more about the project and why it was being piloted. They were able to meet university staff and ambassadors and reflect on the skills they could develop as well as the skills or qualities they could bring to the programme.
Build a University (Architecture)	• To raise students' awareness of what a university is, how they differ from each other, and what it might be like to study at a university	Students were introduced to the idea of universities and introduced to the range of different facilities you might find at a university. Afterwards they designed their own universities and, in so doing, were able to gain a better understanding of university life and what they would value most in a university experience.
Diagnostic Detectives (Healthcare)	• To build students' confidence and widen knowledge of healthcare professions through collaborative problem-solving activities	Students completed a range of different healthcare tasks such as taking a patient history, interpreting clinical tests to identify abnormalities, diagnose a fictional patient and research different healthcare professions.
Creative Writing	• To build students' confidence in being creative and explore storytelling through the art of zine making.	Students worked together to create a zine.
Physical Theatre	• Discover Physical Theatre as a subject which can be studied at university	Students experienced a range of physical theatre activities.

Digital Arts	• Discover Digital Arts as a subject which can be studied at university and the careers it can lead to. • Experience editing a live action movie, using digital software	During this workshop, students had the opportunity to learn video editing skills for live action movies. Each student embedded a character into a real life scene in London. They learned how to incorporate light, shadows and colour to make the character look realistic in the scene.
Campus Visit	• Explore the University of Kent Canterbury campus • Find out more about university study • Discover two new university courses which are not offered as subjects at school.	
Campus tour	• Explore the University of Kent Canterbury campus and see facilities firsthand	Led by our student ambassadors, students were taken around the campus and shown social and academic facilities the campus has. They were also afforded opportunities to ask ambassadors questions and find out more about the ambassadors own experiences of the campus.
Bones, Bugs & Biodiversity (Forensic Anthropology)	• Discover Forensic Anthropology as a subject which can be studied at university. • Get hands on experience with biological samples (bones, plants, bugs, etc.)	This session took place in the Darwin Laboratory and was designed to get students thinking about how local wildlife can help to solve tough crimes. Students had the opportunity to view different bugs, plants and skeletons and discover how they might contribute to knowledge on crimes.
Fingerprinting (Forensic Science)	• Discover Forensic Science as a subject which can be studied at university • Experience how to collect physical fingerprint evidence and how experts might identify and match fingerprints	Throughout this workshop students were able to use different methods of physical fingerprinting and had an opportunity to practice these techniques inside a forensic laboratory.

Male Student Ambassadors as Role Models

A central part of the design of the Championing Boys pilot was the employment of male student ambassadors who could act as role models for secondary school students for the extended duration of the intervention. A core team of three male student ambassadors worked with the Championing Boys project from beginning to end, with their main responsibility being the support of students in workshops. All were undergraduate students in the final stage of their degree programme.

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4. Methodology

Research Aims & Questions

The principle aim of the research was to evaluate the effectiveness of Championing Boys in its pilot year. The research aimed to explore whether an attachment to education among boys from low socio-economic backgrounds can be strengthened and maintained by learning interventions that extend beyond the curriculum, allow students to explore future identities and challenge assumptions about masculine interests.

The research also wanted to explore the importance of the inclusion of male role models within widening participation interventions. Therefore a secondary aim of the research was to assess whether access to role models will occasion a shift in both knowledge and perception of HE among participants.

In doing so, the following research questions were developed:

1. What impact did the programme have on the boys perceptions of education or higher education?

2. How effective was the programme in achieving its programme aims?

3. Can specifically targeted outreach programmes strengthen an attachment to mainstream education?

4. Did university staff or ambassadors acting in a role model capacity influence the students perceptions of education or higher education?

Research Design

A mixed methods approach was developed, incorporating four different data sources. The rationale behind this approach being to explore less traditional methods of evaluation which can provide rich context, and to challenge assumptions within widening participation which advocate for experimental approaches to research and evaluation. Quasi-experimental and randomised control trials (RCT) are currently viewed by policy makers as the 'gold standard' for research which identifies impact (Office for Students, 2019). Yet, by solely focusing on scientific methods, researchers and practitioners are negating the value of qualitative research which has been used as a valued educational research method for decades.

Furthermore, by taking a mixed methods approach, we were able to include the potential for data triangulation within the research design. Yin (2018) argues that findings or conclusions will be more accurate if based on multiple sources of information (Yin, 2018, p.128).

Participants

The university and the MAT worked collectively to identify and target specific learners to participate in

this activity. Students were specifically targeted for the intervention based on multiple widening participation indicators and were considered 'mid-level' attaining students within the school.

This data was anonymised and students were targeted if they identified as male, In receipt of free school meals and met two or more of the following criteria:

- Reside within a POLAR 4 Quintile 1 postcode[7]
- Reside within a UC postcode[8]
- Currently residing in or has previously been in local authority care
- Had a CAT score[9] between 90-110, based on school attainment data and in line with national school standards. (This data was only provided in one of the two schools)

Given that a high percentage of the schools' cohorts met the identified criteria, the school reviewed the targeted students and selected the final cohort, using individual knowledge they have on the students they felt would most benefit. A group of 15 students per school were identified and a further 15 from each school were identified as comparator groups. The students identified to participate were all eligible for free school meals, lived within the targeted postcodes listed above and were considered mid-attaining students (scores of 90-105). Some students were also in local authority care, and were prioritised for participation in the programme based on this.

Participation in the programme and the research were both completely voluntary and students and their parents were informed that participating in the research is voluntary and that choosing not to participate in the research will not impact them participating in the pilot itself. Despite this 29/30 consented to participate in the research alongside the pilot programme.

A comparator group of male students who did not participate within the programme but meet the above criteria also completed an evaluation survey at the end of the programme. Students in the comparator group were excluded from the programme, due to restrictions of group size.

The programme evaluation received a positive ethical opinion from the Central Research Advisory Group at the University of Kent.

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[7] POLAR refers to the participation of local areas (POLAR) and classifies group areas across the UK based on the proportion of young people who participate In Higher Education. For further Information please see the Office for Students website: https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/young-participation-by-area/about-polar-and-adult-he/

[8] The Uni Connect (UC) programme Identified target wards. These were postcode areas where on average students were progressing to HE at lower than expected levels, taking Into account KS4 attainment. For further Information, please see the Office for Students website: https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/uni-connect/evaluating-uni-connects-impact/

[9] Cognitive Ability Testing (CAT) scores assess as student's ability to reason with and manipulate different types of material. These assessments are part of the standard assessments In secondary schools.

Data Collection Methods

Intervention observation

Cotton et al (2010) argue "observation of students provides a far more direct route to obtain information about their behaviour, and there are many situations where observational data —collected by a researcher or by students themselves using video, audio or written diaries— may provide a deeper insight into their experience" (p.463). Given that other methods of data collection were not taken at the time of delivery, this method provides a unique perspective that other methods cannot. Through observation, the researcher was able to collect data in its naturally occurring setting in 'real time' (Cotton et al, 2010, p.465).

Throughout the duration of the programme a research and evaluation assistant was present to observe the sessions. The research and evaluation assistant gathered written data about each session and the boys engagement within each session. The researcher was independent of the project's development.

Focus groups

Focus groups were held with the participants at the end of the programme. The focus groups were designed to incorporate the voice of the boys into the evaluation. This aligns with Taking Boys Seriously Principle 10: to value the voice of boys. Gibbs (2017) discusses how participants engaging focus groups can lead to the participants feeling "empowered by the group dynamic" (p.191). This is a secondary advantage of undertaking the focus groups, as part of the research design. It was intended that the boys feel that their opinions mattered in the process and that their opinions could serve to impact change for future iterations of the programme.

The boys were separated into 4 separate groups, and participated in a 50 minute focus group. During which time, the boys were asked to complete a mixture of activities and answer discussions to help gauge both their thoughts on the programme and education more generally.

Pre and post activity surveys

Pre and post survey questionnaires were distributed to students at the start of the first workshop and at the end of the visit day. The surveys were designed to capture students opinions on education, their capabilities and engagement with education as well as engagement with the programme.

The reading age of the questionnaires were checked using Microsoft word software to ensure that they were understandable by the students. Ambassadors were also on hand to support with reading and understanding the questions when completing.

Comparator groups

Comparator group survey data was collated as mentioned above. The comparator group completed one survey towards the end of the programme. The questions they were asked were the same as those completed by the students in the pre-programme questionnaire.

Data analysis methods

Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data collected in the focus groups. The process of analysis followed that advocated by Braun and Clarke (2006) (p.87):

- familiarizing yourself with the data,
- generating initial codes,
- searching for themes,
- reviewing themes,
- defining and naming themes, and
- producing the report.

Methodological limitations

Survey design

Following the results of the surveys, it became apparent that the survey design was flawed. The questions used were broad for what was realistically achievable in six weeks, and not aligned with the programme aims. As will be discussed within the analysis, the majority of survey questions did not show improved weighted average scores and in many instances were lower than the initial scores. However, the questions that did see positive improvements were more specifically linked to our programme aims. For some questions within the survey design, there would be too many variables which would impact their answers. For example, 'I enjoy what I am doing at school', whilst this may be useful to ascertain fluctuations in feelings towards education over time, it is not realistic that the programme could influence their general enjoyment of school, particularly in a short period of time. The quantitative analysis is directly contradicted by the qualitative data obtained throughout the programme.

It should also be noted that there was a general lack of motivation to complete the surveys from participants. It was apparent during observations that students found them boring and there was a general lack of focus during completion. It Is unclear whether students just 'ticked the boxes' or whether they engaged with the survey.

This also raises the question as to whether surveys are an appropriate method for students of that age and for the time frame of the project.

Comparator group surveys

It would have been beneficial to ask the comparator group to complete pre and post evaluation questionnaires at the same time points, in line with what the participants completed. However, due to time constraints and capacity, this was not possible, instead only collecting data at one time point. In future cohorts, comparator groups will be asked to complete surveys at the same time points as the participants.

Observations

The observations were valuable to identify aspects of the programme which need improvement. In addition, they helped inform the content and context of the focus groups. The students' familiarity with

the researcher was also found to be of benefit to the focus groups, meaning that the students felt more comfortable in expressing their opinions. It should however be noted that Observations are expensive, and do not yield as much evaluative insight as other methods of data collection such as the focus groups.

Researcher capacity

This project was funded through Uni Connect and there were restrictions in terms of when the project needed to be delivered and completed by. These restrictions impacted capacity to be able to complete additional elements of research which may have yielded additional data. Despite obtaining consent from parents or guardians to contact them about their students' experiences of the programme, due to time constraints this was not completed. In the future iterations, it is hoped that this data will be collected.

5. Findings

Strengthen and Maintain Attachment to Education

Attitude to School

Given that the Championing Boys pilot aimed to strengthen and maintain an attachment to education (Aim no. 1) among participants, it pays to consider the general attitude towards education held by this cohort. Now, the story can be told here is a necessarily general one, constrained by the conditions of our cross-sectional research. The researchers were not embedded in the students' regular classes, nor did they have any extensive conversations with them about their attitudes to education. The contact of the researcher, practitioners and student ambassadors with the students occurred only in the parameters of the workshops, the campus visit, and the focus group sessions, meaning the sense of students' attitude to school derives from data collected from evaluation surveys, observations of workshops, and focus group discussions. Still, while a longitudinal approach might tell a different and more comprehensive story of how these students' feel about education, our cross-sectional research nevertheless yielded insights and compelling contradictions on the matter. In particular, the data captured in pre- and post-evaluation surveys and the data captured in focus groups tell quite different stories.

The story about the students' attitude towards school that can be told using the data from pre- and post-evaluations is a broadly positive one. Students were given a pre and post questionnaire exploring different areas of attachment to school and education in general (see Appendices A and B). Overall, students ranked their responses quite highly to most of the questions, as per Figure 1 below. For example, all students (pre and post) tended to agree or strongly agree with the statement "I enjoy what I am doing In school", and overall they also tended to agree with the statement "I am motivated to do well In my studies".

However, it should be noted that both the delivery team and researcher felt the survey questions were too complex for the year group, which therefore raises questions about its validity. As mentioned above, It is also unclear the extent to which the students engaged with the content of the surveys rather than 'ticking' boxes.

Figure 1. Weighted average response to show how strongly students agree to a series of statements before and after the Championing Boys programme (where 1=Strongly Disagree and 5 = Strongly Agree)

The story that can be told using the data collected from the focus groups is much more complex and illuminating.

Missing Lessons

One way of testing attitudes to school and learning is to capture a sense of how students responded to missing their regular lessons to attend the various Championing Boys workshops (see Programme Overview for more on how this was arranged). When asked in focus groups about their feelings regarding missing lessons, the response from students was generally positive. We should, however, be careful about straightforwardly moving from this observation to the conclusion that their attitude to education is negative. In the first focus group, for instance, a student reported that he was "very happy" about missing lessons, "except when it was maths because I really like maths — it's my favourite." When asked whether this negatively affected his engagement with the workshop he did instead of maths, he responded that it did not. Nevertheless, that this student was not "very happy" about missing maths evidences a preexisting attachment to education — even if we can only concretely conclude from our data that this attachment is to maths. Another student in this group echoed this sense of ambivalence, saying that his response to missing lessons depended "on what lesson it is."; the same student later remarked they "did not like the ones where I missed PE". We were, however, unable to follow up on this point, which was lost in the crosstalk that is to be expected in a group of excitable Year 7 students.

In the second focus group, the response appeared to be more roundly positive. "We missed all the lessons

we didn't like," said one student, while another, who was generally less engaged in the programme, admitted that "I'm just happy because we missed most of the lessons that I don't like." Yet another student was missing history to participate in the focus group, but he did not mind so much because it was "only history." The one exception in this group was provided by a student who mentioned that he missed PE, a subject he enjoys very much, "multiple times." When asked about whether missing PE affected his enjoyment of those workshops he did instead, he responded, "Maybe, but not as much as you'd think." Again, while it is undoubtedly positive that this student's engagement with the programme was not significantly affected by any ill feeling about missing a favourite lesson, his testimony nevertheless speaks to a preexisting attachment to at least some parts of his education.

However, the second group was able to go beyond simple like and dislike of subjects and discussed the practicalities of missing lessons. One student explained that missing lessons (in an unspecified subject) "wouldn't have affected our test, because my teacher, if we don't know anything, we can just ask him while we're planning, and he would help us and write on the board." In other words, this student trusted his teacher to support him, to afford him the space to catch-up and thus mitigate those potential negative effects of missing a lesson that bear upon exams. Another student mentioned that he missed two periods of science when attending the campus visit, but "it didn't really bother me, because as soon as I got back, I just studied. Well, not studied, but paid attention a lot. So I didn't miss much." This student clearly demonstrates here both self-motivation and a belief in his academic abilities, which are likely linked to his attachment to science. However, another student responded to this by pointing out that he would be unable to replicate this strategy in his history class. "We fill out a booklet and then we look back at the booklet for the questions," he explained "Our booklet will be empty for that [class he missed]." It would be empty because his teacher "just gets on with it and when we try to ask, she won't let you [return to the work he missed]." When asked whether this made him feel worse about missing history lessons, he reported that it did. Self-efficacy and -motivation do not exist in a vacuum, and this student felt that the support was not in place for him to catch-up with the learning he missed, which in turn affected his enjoyment of the subject.

As the fourth focus group began, a few students entered the room expressing their excitement about missing history to take part in our discussion. This positivity about missing lessons returned later, when discussing the Forensics workshop, two students agreed that one of the positives of that workshop, being a part of the campus visit, was that "you got to miss school for the whole day." This might be said to evince a generally negative attitude towards education. However, there was one student in this group, let us call them Student A, who was very clear that he did not appreciate missing classes he enjoyed. When discussing the Diagnosis Detectives workshop, Student A remarked that he "was angry because it was PE I was missing out on [to attend the workshop]." Later, Student A remarked that Build a University was among his least favourite workshops because "It was long, hot in the room, I missed a good lesson. I don't know what it was." In this workshop, Student A told the ambassador working with him that the lesson he missed was maths — a favourite subject of his, according to his pre-evaluation survey. As this suggests, Student A made it abundantly clear in the workshops that he did not appreciate missing favoured lessons, being unwilling to engage with content and distracting friends in three workshops: Build a University, Diagnosis Detectives, and Physical Theatre. In the latter of these, Student A was removed early by a member of school staff because his bad behaviour, attributable to him missing another favourite lesson (music), was negatively affecting other students. Instead of participating in the workshop, he went to his music lesson, where we can assume he was much happier.

The case of Student A was somewhat unique within the cohort; as we have seen, most of the students who spoke in focus groups seemed to either enjoy missing lessons or could at least tolerate missing their favourite lessons. This much was reflected in the workshops, as many students engaged enthusiastically in the new experiences that Championing Boys provided. It should be noted that Student A was among those enthusiastic students when he was not missing a favourite subject; his experience was not wholly negative, but rather complex and ambivalent. Nevertheless, the negative aspects of Student A's experience should be heeded. Where Championing Boys aimed to strengthen students' attachment to education, here we can see that in practice it has the potential to disturb an already strong attachment to particular subjects among some students. If this were to happen in a future intervention, we cannot rule out the possibility that a student will react more negatively to such a disturbance and close themselves from the programme. This could also negatively affect the experience of other students, as we saw Student A distracting his friends who were otherwise willing to engage. It may be the case that this is a necessary risk of the intervention, as this year group does not have free periods in which students can participate in Championing Boys — classes need to be missed. Nevertheless, should Championing Boys continue, the potential negative effects of missing classes should be communicated with participating schools, which may have their own solutions to mitigate any antipathy towards missing lessons and, in turn, ensure students have as few barriers in their engagement with the programme as possible.

The Substitute Problem

Among the most striking features of the focus groups was the students' awareness of and ability to articulate the issues that school staffing shortages can pose to their learning. In particular, students discussed candidly and keenly their negative feelings towards their substitute teachers, which were contrasted with their positive experience of the programme. Without casting aspersions on the schools, which are operating within a broader context of a nationwide staff recruitment and retention crisis, we should take very seriously this feeling among students. This feeling cannot give us the whole picture, of course, even if it seemed to be shared by many of the students; nevertheless, it suggests at least one reason why this cohort may be less inclined to engage with education, and in turn brings into sharp relief the positive intervention made by Championing Boys. Moreover, while the issues discussed in the following are retrospectively evident in the observation data, they only emerged as a salient theme for analysis after conducting the focus groups, largely because the observations necessarily occluded the students' regular experience of school. The following analysis, then, demonstrates the value of incorporating student voice in our mixed methods approach.

Substitute teachers came up in all but one of the focus groups, but most illuminating discussion about their impact came in the first group. When proffering an idea for "kids, sort of, university for mature students" in which students that had participated in the Championing Boys programme "could actually learn more," a student, let us call him Student C, explained why he thought such an institution would be beneficial:

> Student C: Honestly, I haven't had a history or geography teacher for three terms, and I haven't learnt anything in the past three terms. They both left. Then [substitutes] expect us to write an essay when I haven't had a teacher for three terms. And we've had different subs every single lesson who don't know how to teach in my opinion.

In response to Student C, another student, let us call him Student D, added:

Student D: That's like me in maths at the minute. Our teacher's been off and so every day it's just the same sub and she doesn't really know what she's doing. In maths, I really struggle with my learning and so, like, my teacher sometimes [gave] me some extra help. I'm not getting it because [the substitute] doesn't really know me.

Student C: If I fail history and geography, I'm blaming it on my substitutes.

This exchange prompted a short discussion among the group about their geography teachers, which ended as another student sarcastically summarised the feeling in the room: "Yes, it's just sub, sub, sub.". This was echoed in the third group, where Student H said: "Some substitutes don't even help you a lot. They expect you to know it all".

The conversation moved elsewhere from here, so we did not have the opportunity to flesh out the frustrations articulated by Student C, Student D or Student H. Nevertheless, we can identify in their testimony a growing sense of disillusionment. Those three students demonstrated a desire to learn and articulated how this desire had been weakened in classes led by substitute teachers. The idea proposed by Student C is premised on the notion that students might learn more than he feels he is learning in some of his lessons. As he tells it, his learning has been adversely affected by a lack of consistent support from a rotating cast of substitute teachers, who he perceives as setting unrealistic expectations. Student D expressed a longing for the additional support he once received from his teacher, and seemed frustrated that his individual needs were not being adequately addressed. The reasons why students might disengage with their learning are of course multifarious, but in this instance, we can identify a feeling shared by these boys that their needs are being ignored and that they are falling through the cracks. And indeed, we can already see the long-term consequences of this negative feeling starting to take shape in Student C's declaration that he not be responsible if he fails in history and geography. Another facet of the disillusionment attributed to substitutes was discussed earlier by the first group. When discussing what the programme might have looked like if their female classmates were included, the boys discussed a perceived leniency towards poorly behaved girls from their teachers. The boys were particularly aggrieved by female substitutes, who, according to one student, "let girls get away with more," and who, according to another, are "a lot more biased." This prompted the following exchange:

Student C: I feel like substitutes shouldn't have as much powers as they do. I don't think they should be able to give people detentions if it's absolutely necessary. Substitute teachers park more students than actual teachers.

Student E: They do actually, and most of the time they won't even park the right people. They'll park people who are just sitting there doing their work quiet, and there'll be people around them making noise.

Student F: I literally got parked for doing my work in my geography sub-lesson. Oh my god!

To reiterate, we are reporting here the perceptions and feelings that inform the students' response to

Championing Boys; the full picture, we can assume, is much more complex. Nevertheless, the salient feeling in the above exchange was yet again frustration, albeit of a different sort. Whereas Student C and Student D spoke of their substitute teachers failing to provide adequate support in their learning, the above exchange characterises substitutes generally as rash, overzealous disciplinarians. While we cannot assess the validity of this characterisation, the boys' feeling that they cannot win with their substitute teachers is what is most important for our purposes of exploring the factors that might affect their attachment to education.

Exploring a range of different potential identities

Aim 2 of the programme was to explore a range of different potential identities through exploration of subjects which extend past the curriculum and link into potential future careers.

Some students expressed how the programme had encouraged them to think about their future and possible future careers. Student D particularly enjoyed forensic science, as exemplified by the following exchange:

> Student D: "I have just researched for the salary and what qualifications you need to become a forensic scientist (…) I've already talked to my mum and family about It"

Some students weren't interested in a career in particular, but felt the programme had encouraged them to think about their future education and what they could do after school. One student in particular remarked that he understood he had to "pay a bit more attention in classes to (…) get somewhere".

There are strong links here with possible selves, with some students suggesting that during the campus visit they were imagining themselves as a university student.

Challenging Traditional Gender Stereotypes

The third aim of the programme was to allow students to challenge traditional gender stereotypes within subjects and careers.

The answers to the surveys (see fig. 2) seem to suggest that the programme had limited/no impact in the range of metrics measured by the survey. We believe that this again was due to the survey methodology being flawed, and the questions too general for students to engage with.
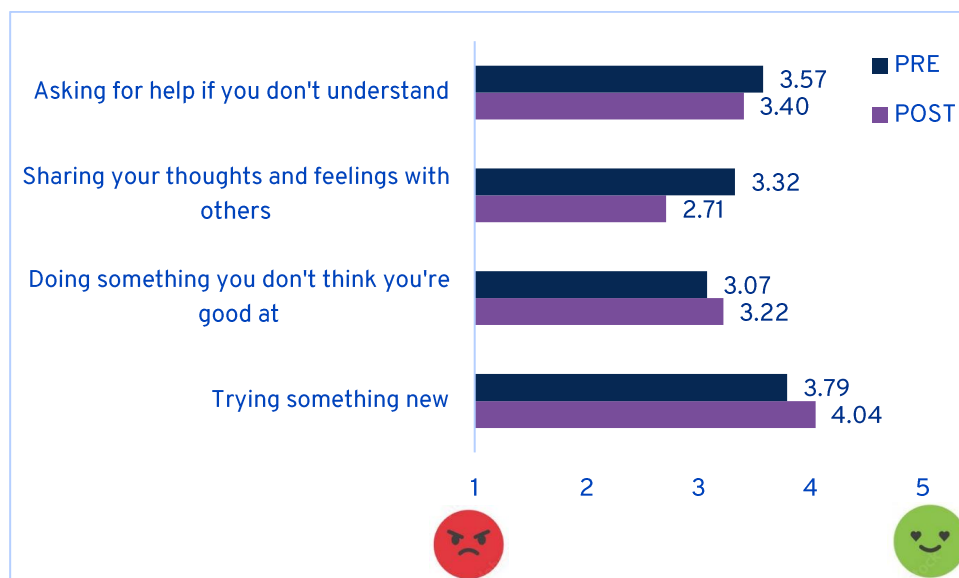
Figure 2. Weighted average response when students were asked 'How happy do you feel about the following...' before and after the Championing Boys programme (where 1= 😠 *and 5 =* 😍 *)*

Inclusivity and Curiosity

Discussing why the Bones, Bugs, and Biodiversity workshop ranked among their favourites, the boys in the third focus group brought into sharp relief one of the most positive aspects of the Championing Boys programme: its inclusivity and nurturing of curiosity. *"If you got confused on something, they [the facilitators] would tell you it,"* reported one student, speaking to his appreciation of not being left behind by the facilitators. Another student added to this, *"They'd say it in easier words to comprehend."* When asked if they appreciated having the space to ask questions of facilitators and have them answered, the second student, let us call him student G, responded:

Student G: Yes. I don't want to say it's, like, a normal classroom because sometimes you ask a question and then the teacher would — in school, some subjects we have substitutes, and they just shout at you just asking a question for no reason.

We can see this as an extension of the antipathy towards substitute teachers discussed previously, as the notion that Student G's questions are regularly shut down by his substitutes contributes to the overall feeling that students are participating in an unwinnable game when it comes to taking classes with substitutes. However, it also resonates with the testimony of several students across the focus groups, who reported that they felt as if they were being penalised for not fully understanding the material of their school lessons and were disincentivised from asking questions, irrespective of whether their teacher was a substitute.

Here is an instructive exchange from the second focus group, which came in response to the question of whether they preferred the style of learning practised in Championing Boys to that practised in school:

Student X: Yes. Because you're in groups and if you don't know but someone next to you does, you can ask them for information about it.

Student Y: Normally, we'd get told off, if we said that kind of stuff in school. Like, 'Can you please help me with this?' 'Oh, no talking. That's a behaviour point'.

The prompt about learning styles was intended to open a discussion about the active pedagogical approach utilised by most of the facilitators, compared a didactic or rote approach with which we assumed the students might be more familiar. What Student X and Student Y took from the question, though, was an opportunity reflect on the open environment that was cultivated in the Championing Boys workshops. Implicitly, they do indeed speak positively to the active and collaborative approach taken by facilitators; what is perhaps surprising, however, is that Student X and Student Y expressed this via an appreciation of the space they were afforded to ask questions, a space in which information did not only flow down from facilitators or ambassadors but could move freely among students. The latter here point cannot be overstated. While the idea of support is central, we should not assume that the students desire only the support of an authority figure, like facilitators or ambassador. Rather, there was a concomitant desire to support, and be supported by, their peers. It is thus notable that the question posed by Student Y, "Can you please help me with this?" does not have an object: it could be asked of a teacher or a friend.

Later in that same group, another student added to this rather oppressive picture:

Student W: In school, my maths teacher, if you put your hand up, recently she's been asking me to put my hand down, even though she's answering other people. They're not really helping you, because we've got tests and a lot of them [lessons] are revision now. Every time we ask her to help us to discover something, she's not helping. She's just saying, 'Oh, I'm going to put the answers up in a minute'.

Researcher: So, did you feel that was a different story in the Championing Boys project? You felt a bit more supported and listened to?

Student W: Yes, because they all answered your questions that you had.

We can take from this that Student W felt unable to speak in their classroom. This can, of course, happen for a variety of reasons and we do not intend to apportion blame on the school or particular teachers. It is however a recurring theme in interactions with school students which should be documented.

When discussing the facilitator of the Zines workshop, one student remarked that *"he was not like teachers where if you ask the wrong question, then he gets mad. He's just like chill all the way through and really nice."* When moving to talk about facilitators generally, another student noted, *"It was like they actually listened to your questions. It wasn't like some teachers where you ask them a question and they just interrupt midway through."*

Student W: And Digital Design, you had to do it step-by-step, but you could ask the person next to you, or if they didn't know, walk to someone who knows it, and then get them to help you, or get a member to help you.

Supportiveness

Student ambassadors play a significant role in all outreach interventions delivered by the University, and they are trained to listen and be supportive to secondary school students. As part of this programme, their ability to listen and support students was integral to the success of the programme. It became apparent through the focus groups that students were craving the connection and understanding from staff delivering the sessions. This was evidenced by the bond they had with the student ambassadors towards the end of the programme.

A student said that the ambassadors were *"really understanding when we didn't get something."*

When asked about the people who they felt a greater connection to with the programme, in Focus Group 1 students were able to name the student ambassadors but couldn't recall the other facilitators. Student C remarked: *"The student ambassador. They were the ones that I personally talked to the most. They were the most understanding".* The use of the word *understanding* is quite telling In this context.

The ambassadors' role in supporting students' understanding was noted by students. One student remarked: *"…we did not know anything about it [a task in a session] until the ambassadors helped us then we found it more interesting and more inclusive"*

They described the ambassadors as *kind, nice, funny, energetic and positive.*

The importance of the students' perception of student ambassadors being from the same background as them cannot be underestimated, as illustrated by Student B:

> Student B: We could relate to them because obviously, like you said, they could- some of them are from a similar background.

Uncertain of workshop purpose

Some learners were unsure of the purpose of the Championing Boys sessions. This was mentioned by students in all the focus groups, as the following exchange exemplifies:

> Facilitator: "You identified really well the skills that you learned in some of them [the activities] but was it clear on all of them?"

> Student C: "Not really with the zines. I get that it was, sort of, trying to get that we could be an author but I didn't really get how the zines help us."

 Students mentioned it would be helpful if at the end of the session they could be told the purpose, of how what they learned could translate into a job or skills they can use along the way. Interestingly, even when students enjoyed the session, some mentioned it being "the worst" because they couldn't see how they could apply the skills they learned to their day-to-day activities or future career. One student explicitly mentioned the potential benefits of linking the sessions to future careers.

Communication from the school

Some students mentioned that they only found out about upcoming sessions on the day they were being

delivered. For at least one school (two out of the four groups) they mentioned only having found out the period before. It was implied that their main concern was missing the sessions. Student F mentioned:

> Student F: "Say, one day you're not in, you could miss one of them, just because you weren't in for one day, because you were sick (…) I didn't want to miss it"

The teacher intervened in one of the focus groups to explain that they did not want them to forget, and therefore told them last-minute to ensure that they were at the sessions.

Students also mentioned wanting to have a timetable for the sessions (Including what would have been discussed) so that they could do some research about the topics beforehand.

Enjoyment of the programme

Students mentioned enjoying the programme, and referred to it as something they looked forward to. One of the suggestions was ensuring that the sessions were on a Monday so that students had something to look forward to.

In all focus groups, students also mentioned that they would like the programme to continue in Year 8.

6. Recommendations

1. The presence of engaged male ambassadors who can build good relationships with the students is important to the success of the programme. Even though some students mentioned that they would be ok with female ambassadors, the overwhelming feedback was around being able to relate to ambassadors and identifying with them. Some students also remarked that they liked being an 'all male cohort'. Given the high proportion of female teaching staff across the profession, this is an important addition to a programme like this and feature which should be retained if possible.

2. Where students have to miss lessons, it is recommended that the project delivery team work with the school to ensure that students are missing different lessons each week. This will mean that students are not always missing their 'favourite' lesson which might have a detrimental effect on their educational attachment.

3. Ensure that there are clear objectives for each session and that these are communicated to students. It became apparent that students would like to understand the purpose of the sessions, and how they can apply the skills they are learning. For example, the Physical Theatre workshop didn't have the intended outcomes. Students weren't able to articulate why they had participated in the session, and what skills they had gained from it, despite enjoying it.

4. There needs to be stronger explicit links to gender identity (what it means to be male) whilst simultaneously challenging narrow and potentially harmful gender stereotypes. This wasn't evident to the students, and this aim of the project wasn't met. As per above, in sessions like physical theatre the connection wasn't made by students. This needs to be a much more explicit element in the programme.

5. The Campus Visit was a highlight for students, and allowed them to view themselves as a university student. Where possible, this element should be incorporated into future iterations of the project.

6. The observations and the relationship with the researcher was obvious during the exchanges in the focus group, and this was very beneficial in being able to have meaningful conversations with students. If affordable, it is recommended that the observations continue so that students can build a rapport with the researcher and are able to freely communicate during the focus groups. It is likely that without previous knowledge of the researcher, the students wouldn't have felt as comfortable sharing their experiences. The researcher's first hand knowledge of their experiences also helped inform the focus groups.

7. The surveys need to be re-designed if used in future. The questions were general, and possibly too difficult for a group of young learners (with low literacy levels). It should also be considered whether students can engage with the survey better, to wield more relevant results. It should also be noted that the comparison group methodology will require the survey to be administered at the same time at the beginning and end of the project. For logistical reasons, this was not possible in this iteration of the project and has meant that the comparison group data has not been used for this analysis.

8. There were a lot of findings that are specific to the school setting. For the project to achieve its ambition of allowing students to remain attached to education throughout their school career, staff CPD should be considered as part of this programme. At a minimum, Senior Leadership Team (SLT) within the schools should be provided with a report and/or presentation outlining key findings and what students felt could improve their educational experience.

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| 1. How much do you agree with the following statements: | Strongly disagree

(Definitely not!) | Disagree

(No) | Neutral

(Maybe, maybe not) | Agree

(Yes) | Strongly agree

(Yes, definitely) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I enjoy what I am learning in school | | | | | |
| I am motivated to do well in my studies | | | | | |
| It is important **to me** that I get good grades | | | | | |
| It is important **to my family** that I get good grades | | | | | |
| I feel like a real part of the school | | | | | |
| People at school notice when I am good at something | | | | | |
| I am included in lots of activities at school | | | | | |

Appendix A: Pre-programme questionnaire

2. WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE SUBJECT AT SCHOOL? WHY?

3. How happy do you feel doing the following?					
Trying something new.					
Doing something you don't think you're good at.					
Sharing your thoughts and feelings with others.					
Asking for help if you don't understand.					

4. WHAT WOULD YOU MOST LIKE TO DO AFTER GCSEs? *Please circle one.*

6. How much do you agree with the following?	Strongly disagree *(Definitely not!)*	Disagree *(No)*	Neutral *(Maybe, maybe not)*	Agree *(Yes)*	Strongly agree *(Yes, definitely)*
University is for people like me .					
I have the ability to make decisions about my future.					
I understand the options that are available to me when I'm older.					
I can develop the skills to achieve my ambitions.					

Go to college	Stay on at school	Get an apprenticeship	Something else	I don't know

5. HOW LIKELY DO YOU THINK IT IS THAT YOU WILL EVER APPLY TO UNIVERSITY? *Please circle one.*

Very Likely	Fairly Likely	Not Very Likely	Not At All Likely

THANK YOU!

Appendix B: Post-programme questionnaire

1. How much do you agree with the following statements:	Strongly disagree (Definitely not!)	Disagree (No)	Neutral (Maybe, maybe not)	Agree (Yes)	Strongly agree (Yes, definitely)
I enjoy what I am learning in school					
I am motivated to do well in my studies					
It is important **to me** that I get good grades					
It is important **to my family** that I get good grades					
I feel like a real part of the school					
People at school notice when I am good at something					
I am included in lots of activities at school					

2. How much do you agree with the following statements:	Strongly disagree (Definitely not!)	Disagree (No)	Neutral (Maybe, maybe not)	Agree (Yes)	Strongly agree (Yes, definitely)
I enjoyed participating in the workshops					
At least one subject explored in the workshops was completely new to me.					
I am interested in exploring **at least one** subject explored in the workshops further					
Participating in championing boys has allowed me to explore new interests that I want to carry forwards					
I found it useful meeting and speaking with the student ambassadors					
I felt that I could relate to the student ambassadors after meeting with them					
Visiting the university campus helped me to imagine myself as a future university student					
As a result of participating in championing boys, I feel more motivated to do well in my studies					
After participating in championing boys, I feel like I would fit in at university					

3. What was your favourite workshop? Why?

4. What was your least favourite workshop? Why?

5. How much do you agree with the following?	Strongly disagree (Definitely not!)	Disagree (No)	Neutral (Maybe, maybe not)	Agree (Yes)	Strongly agree (Yes, definitely)
University is for people like me .					
I have the ability to make decisions about my future.					
I understand the options that are available to me when I'm older.					
I can develop the skills to achieve my ambitions.					

6. How happy do you feel doing the following?	😠	🙁	😐	🙂	😍
Trying something new.					
Doing something you don't think you're good at.					
Sharing your thoughts and feelings with others.					
Asking for help if you don't understand.					

7. Is there anything you would change about the championing boys programmes? If so, what is it and why?

THANK YOU!

University of
Kent