

# Year 10 Summer School

2023/24



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# Executive Summary

## Overview

The University of Kent ran a two night residential summer school for 47 Year 10 students from partner schools in summer 2024. It was designed as an opportunity for students to explore their options and experience university life and included academic tasters, social activities and project work. Students were supported by experienced Outreach & Widening Participation (OWP) staff and student ambassadors.

## Project Aims

This evaluation seeks to ascertain how well the summer school met its aims, which were as follows:

1. Learners gain an insight into academic, social, economic and personal benefits of progressing to higher education (short-term)
2. Increase confidence in their capacity to progress onto higher education (short-term)
3. Increased study skills through educational projects which encourage active learning (short-term)
4. Higher KS4 attainment (medium-term)
5. Learners have an increased interest in participating in further outreach activity (medium-term)
6. Increased progression to HE (long-term)

## Data Collection Methods

A mixed methods approach to the evaluation was implemented, which involved:

### Pre- and Post- Surveys

Participants completed a short survey upon application and on the final day of the summer school, asking questions linked to the intended outputs and outcomes based on TASO's validated Access and Success Questionnaire (Sense of Belonging, Knowledge of Higher Education and Higher Education Expectations).

### Focus Groups

Participants joined a focus group on the final day of the summer school, which included questions around whether the summer school met their expectations, whether their feelings towards university had changed and whether they can see themselves fitting into university life.

### HEAT Tracking

A matched comparator group was formed from unsuccessful applicants and both the comparators and participants were added to the Higher Education Access Tracker (HEAT) database for tracking in order to investigate the impact of the summer school on KS4 and KS5 attainment and HE progression. 32 of the attendees were able to be matched to a comparator based on sex, ethnic group, TUNDRA and FSM status. We are anticipating Tracking data to be available from 2026.

### Practitioner Feedback

Insights from student ambassadors, OWP staff and academics on their experiences and perceptions were

collected through semi-structured interviews or surveys.

## Findings

35 of the 47 attendees consented to being included in the research. The survey results showed that for this group, their weighted average response increased for the statements surrounding Knowledge of HE (+0.33) and HE Expectations (+0.05), but surprisingly decreased for the statement regarding Sense of Belonging (-0.09). Despite this, in the focus groups the participants described making new friends and expanding their social circles. The participants were overwhelmingly positive about the student ambassadors, describing them as friendly, welcoming and supportive.

Participants gained academic and personal skills and could recognise the benefits of going to university. A key take-away from the focus groups was the sense of independence that had been afforded to the participants – in academic, financial and personal terms. Participants spoke favourably about freedom and trust from staff.

Although one of the aims of the summer school was to increase progression to HE, 86% were already thinking about going to HE when they applied for the summer school, and this figure did not change by the end of the residential. However attendees spoke about being better prepared if they do go to university in the future, so the summer school may have had an impact on their confidence in their ability to progress.

“I feel like I just wanted to take education further in the future anyway, just to open more opportunities for myself. And this just seems like a really nice place to be to do that.”

## Recommendations

- The summer school should continue offering a diverse range of academic and extracurricular activities –such as the popular Nerf games and Kent One card lunch budgets –to reflect university life.
- To improve the accuracy of feedback, Sense of Belonging questions will be asked after participants are accepted, reducing bias from application-stage optimism.
- Ongoing evaluation of the programme’s intended outcomes is essential, particularly as most participants already intend to pursue higher education. Once HESA Track data is available, the relevance of “Increased progression to HE” as an outcome will be reassessed, and greater emphasis may be needed on clarifying the long-term benefits of a degree. An Enhanced Theory of Change will help refine the programme’s goals and better understand its impact.

# 1. Introduction

The University of Kent has a long history of working with local schools and colleges in order to support students from all backgrounds to access, succeed in and progress from HE. As part of this commitment to ensuring equality of opportunity, we have offered a residential summer school to Year 10 pupils from partner schools<sup>1</sup> since 2006, as part of a sustained pre-16 outreach programme.

Summer schools are an intensive outreach activity and sector-wide evidence has shown them to be associated with:

- an increase in confidence and attitude towards HE (Robinson & Salvestrini, 2020; TASO, 2022)
- an increase in Attainment 8 scores at KS4 (TASO, 2021)
- an increase in acceptance onto an HE course (Burgess, Horton & Moores, 2021)
- an increase in HE progression (TASO, 2021)
- an increase in progression to a top third university (TASO, 2021)

The University adds summer school participants to the Higher Education Access Tracker (HEAT) database for tracking through to HE. The latest data showed that 51.0% of 155 tracked summer school participants had entered HE, compared to 30.1% of all outreach participants<sup>2</sup>. It is the activity type with the highest rate of progression for the University's outreach activities, although there may well be a selection bias as the summer school is a self-sign up activity and therefore applicants already show high motivation. The University of Kent's summer school participants also had a higher continuation rate (95.3%) compared to all outreach participants (86.3%).

Evidence of causality is currently limited, although a recent case study of the Medicine & Dentistry summer school at Queen Mary University of London found that attendees entered Medicine & Dentistry programmes at a higher rate than a group of matched non-participants (HEAT, 2022). Further strong Type 2 and Type 3 evidence is imminent (both at the University of Kent and across the sector) once attainment and progression data for recent cohorts and comparator groups becomes available through HEAT.

It is therefore important to evaluate summer schools' short, medium and long-term outcomes in order to fully understand their impact. As part of our commitment to rigorous evaluation, we evaluate the summer

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<sup>1</sup> The University of Kent's Outreach & Widening Participation team work in partnership with non-selective secondary schools in Kent and Medway that have high proportions of disadvantaged learners.

<sup>2</sup> University of Kent HEAT HESA Tracking Report - HE Entry from 2018/19 up to 2021/22



school each year to ensure it is meeting its intended aims. This report provides interim findings in the form of implementation and process evaluation of the 2023/24 cohort. We detail the activities associated with the summer school, its intended aims, our evaluation methodology and short-term findings and recommendations for practitioners.

## 2. Programme Design

### Programme Overview

Every year the Outreach & Widening Participation (OWP) department runs a summer school for Year 10 students studying at a University partner school. The provision of this summer school is included in our recently approved Access and Participation Plan (APP). The APP outlines the University's commitments to ensuring that disadvantaged and underrepresented groups are able to access and succeed in HE and progress onto graduate employment or further study. The summer school is designed to give students an opportunity to explore their options and experience university life.

### Programme Aims

1. Learners gain an insight into academic, social, economic and personal benefits of progressing to higher education (short-term)
2. Increase confidence in their capacity to progress onto higher education (short-term)
3. Increased study skills through educational projects which encourage active learning (short-term)
4. Higher KS4 attainment (medium-term)
5. Learners have an increased interest in participating in further outreach activity (medium-term)
6. Increased progression to HE (long-term)

### Summer School Activities

The summer school took place between Tuesday 30th July 2024 and Thursday 1st August 2024. Participants stayed in accommodation on the University of Kent's Canterbury campus for the duration and were supported by a team of experienced OWP staff and student ambassadors.

The content of the summer school was designed around the theme of 'Breaking Barriers', and adapted from previous iterations of the Year 10 summer school. Activities included academic tasters, meals and

social activities and reflective periods and were scheduled between 9:30 and 23.00 each day. The timetable was as follows:

### Day 1:

- Welcome talk and campus tour
- Introduction to Breaking Barriers
- Learning at University (participants sign up for their academic taster sessions - Film, Forensics, Bioscience or Law)
- Society Tasters
- Meal and quiz night at on-campus catering outlet
- Corridor time (participants return to accommodation and socialise with their peers and ambassadors)

### Day 2:

- Academic tasters
- Reflection activities
- Introduction to projects and time to create their pitches
- Sports tasters
- Formal meal and music social
- Corridor time

### Day 3:

- Project work (including creating a physical resource to supplement their project) & preparing for the showcase
- Showcase
- Focus group evaluation
- Reflection
- Goodbye talk and awards

Students were tasked with creating a project in small groups, based on the theme of breaking barriers. They had to think of a barrier (e.g. access to books) and propose a solution (e.g. free small libraries). They then presented these at the showcase on the final day.

## 3. Methodology

### Research Aims & Questions

Principal research question: Were the project's intended outcomes achieved?

Secondary research question: Did students who attended the summer school progress to academic study at post-16, apply to HE and/or enrol in HE at a greater rate than students who did not attend the summer school? If so, how do summer schools enable this?

### Research Design

A mixed methods approach was implemented, which incorporated four sources of data collection. The programme evaluation received a positive ethical opinion from the Central Research Ethics Advisory Group at the University of Kent.

### Data Collection Methods

#### HEAT Tracking

Applications for the summer school were taken through HEAT. A matched comparator group was formed from unsuccessful applicants and both the comparators and participants were added to HEAT for tracking in order to investigate the impact of the summer school on KS4 and KS5 attainment and HE progression. Participants were matched in SPSS v.29 to a similar applicant from the non-participant group. 32 of the attendees (68%) were able to be matched to a comparator based on the following criteria:

- Sex
- Ethnic Group
- TUNDRA (+/- 1)<sup>3</sup>
- FSM Status

Prior attainment data was not available to us, but applicants were from the University's partner schools which will have similar academic performance profiles. It is considered that as both groups had applied to

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<sup>3</sup> There was a strong correlation between IMD and TUNDRA quintiles for this group of students ( $p < 0.01$ ), therefore it was decided to match on only one of these metrics.



the summer school, they will have similar levels of motivation.

### Pre- and post- surveys

Students completed a short survey on the final day of the summer school, asking questions linked to the intended outputs and outcomes based on TASO's validated Access and Success Questionnaire (Sense of Belonging, Knowledge of Higher Education and Higher Education Expectations). They were asked the same questions as part of their application to the summer school, so comparisons can be made between the two timepoints.

### Focus Groups

Students also joined a focus group on the final day of the summer school, which included questions around whether the summer school fulfilled their expectations, whether their feelings towards university had changed and whether they can see themselves fitting into university life. A combination of inductive and deductive analysis was used to group the qualitative data into themes – firstly to relate the responses to the summer school's intended aims, and then to explore other themes which had emerged.

### Practitioner feedback

Practitioners (including student ambassadors, OWP staff, postgraduate students and academics involved in the design and delivery of the summer school) provided their feedback via semi-structured interview or survey (dependent on availability) after the summer school, to gather understanding of their experiences and perceptions.

### Participants

243 applications were received for the 2023/24 Year 10 summer school. Applicants were assessed and students selected to take part in the summer school on the basis of meeting multiple widening participation criteria. Criteria considerations are as follows:

- Students must be studying at a University of Kent partner school
- Area based measures such as POLAR 4 & IMD
- Free school meal eligibility or pupil premium
- Currently experience or have experienced local authority care
- Have a registered disability
- Are a member of an under-represented group (e.g. Gypsy/Traveller/Roma/Showman/Boater, young carer, refugee or asylum seeker, child of a military family)
- First generation higher education

60 applicants were offered a place and 47 attended.

## 4. Findings

Although the summer school was attended by 47 students from WP backgrounds, the following data only relates to the 35 participants who consented to take part in the research.

### Participant Demographics

Demographic data of the research sample (35 attendees) is shown in tables 1-5.

Male	20
Female	15

*Table 1. Breakdown by Sex of Research Cohort*

Q1	19
Q2	3
Q3	9
Q4	2
Q5	2

*Table 2. Breakdown by TUNDRA MSOA Quintile of Research Cohort*

Q1	14
Q2	12
Q3	6
Q4	2
Q5	1

*Table 3. Breakdown by IMD Quintile of Research Cohort*

First Gen HE	22
Not First Gen HE	13

*Table 4. Breakdown by First Gen HE Status of Research Cohort*

FSM	20
Non-FSM	15

*Table 5. Breakdown by FSM Status of Research Cohort*

### Baseline and Residential Surveys

The weighted average responses for each of the ASQ Outcomes are shown in Figure 1, where 1 = Strongly disagree and 5 = Strongly agree.

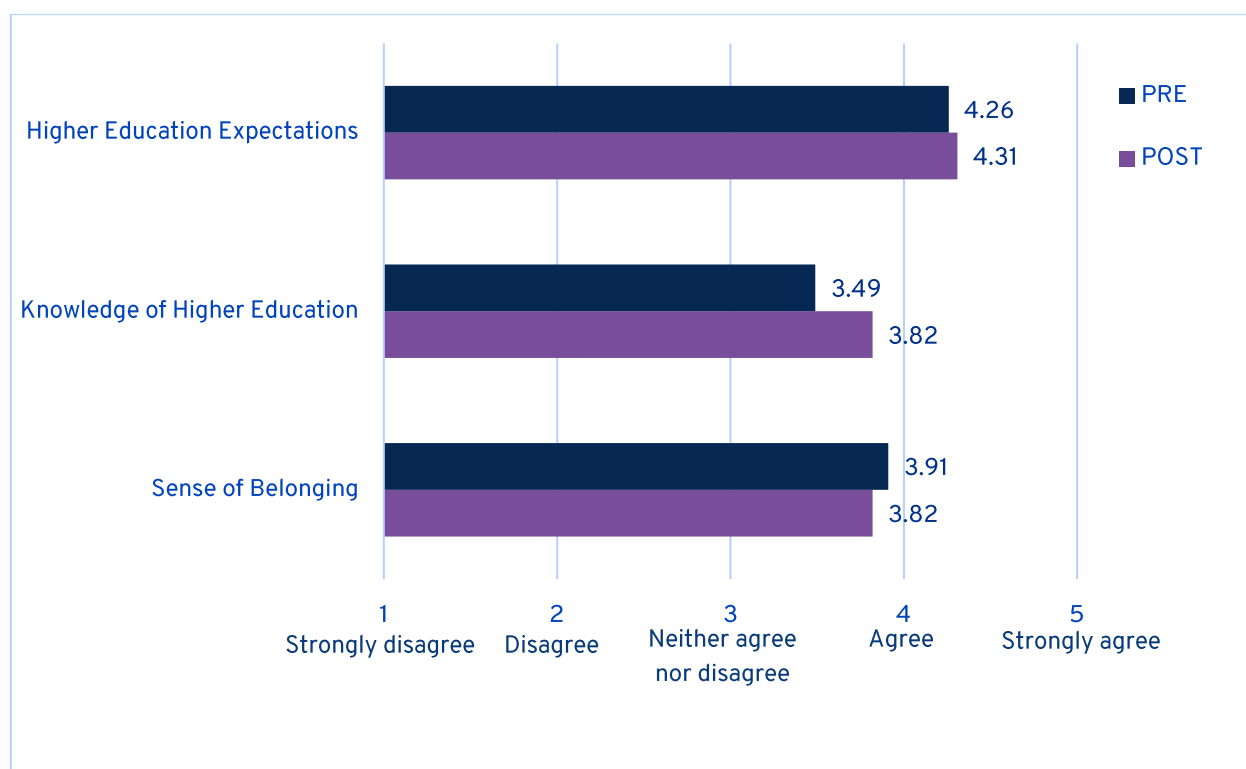


Fig. 1. Weighted average response for three outcomes from TASO's ASQ. Participants were asked on their application and at the end of the residential.

As a group, the participants had a slight increase in their agreement with the statement concerning HE Expectations (+0.05), and a more marked increase with the statements for Knowledge of HE (+0.33). However, surprisingly, their agreement with the statements for Sense of Belonging decreased (-0.09). The breakdown of average response per statement is shown in Table 6.

		PRE	POST	Difference
Higher Education Expectations	I am thinking about going to Higher Education in the future	4.26	4.31	0.05
Knowledge of Higher Education	I know what studying in higher education would be like	3.17	3.71	0.54
	I know how studying in higher education is different from studying in school or at college	3.77	4.29	0.52
	I believe that if I	3.54	3.57	0.03

	apply to higher education, I will get a place			
Sense of Belonging	Higher education is for people like me	3.69	3.66	-0.03
	I would fit in well academically with others in higher education	3.97	3.97	0
	I would fit in well socially with others in higher education	4.09	3.80	-0.29

Table 6. Weighted average response for each statement

The statements related to their knowledge of study within HE show the greatest increase in weighted average responses of the group. This indicates that they have gained an insight into academia (linked to the first programme aim).

## Results from Participant Focus Groups

Qualitative feedback gathered from the participant and staff focus groups are shown below, linked to each of the programme aims.

### *1. Learners gain an insight into academic, social, economic and personal benefits of progressing to higher education (short-term)*

As above, participants were clear that they had increased knowledge of academic study at university, and how this differs to their experiences at school. Participants recognised the benefits of being able to choose what to study, the different formats studying at university can take and how this compares to school, the variety of facilities available, having a more relaxed timetable and being able to study independently.

**“There has been a mix of group activities and also lectures. I think that is more what university is about and we got to experience that a little bit.”**

Despite the group's average weighted response for the Sense of Belonging statements decreasing since application, participants were able to describe making new friends on the summer school, broadening their social circles. In fact, they said that meeting new people was one of the things they looked forward to most about going to university in the future. They particularly related this to the society tasters and evening social activities and highlighted the benefits of this in relation to their experiences at secondary school.

“I’m feeling glad that I’ve met people actually like me and are actually interested in the things that I like as well. Because I don’t get that at school, because it’s a very mixed environment and it’s super hard. And everyone that I’ve met on this summer school has been super nice and [had] very open arms ... it’s been great.”

As ever, the student ambassadors play no small part in helping the participants feel comfortable in this unfamiliar setting. The participants were overwhelmingly positive about the student ambassadors, describing them as friendly, welcoming and supportive. They appreciated hearing about the experiences of people who were closer in age to them and have much more recent experience than other influencers such as their parents or teachers.

“We fit in with them and they fit in with us and it makes life a lot easier to relax and know you're with someone who can help you if you need it.”

The student ambassadors also recognised how working on the summer school had helped them to develop their own skills in a professional setting - in particular flexibility and adaptability, supporting each other and the importance of their own role within outreach activities.

Participants identified personal skills that they had developed as part of the summer school, such as confidence, but also how university itself can be a transformative experience - "a new chapter in your life".

"When you're independently working on things by yourself, you develop more trust in yourself so you feel like you can achieve more, I guess."

Throughout the focus groups participants recognised the independence that the experience had afforded them – in academic, financial and personal terms. Participants spoke about freedom and trust from staff.

“It feels like a home because you know that you're trusted, they trust you and you can trust them sort of thing.”

One aspect that was new for this year and was appreciated by the participants was being given a budget on their Kent One Cards (£20) to spend on lunches as they wished throughout the summer school. Participants were responsible for managing their funds and returning to their timetabled activities on time. Staff also saw this change as positive.

Although some participants wanted more freedom and felt restricted by not being able to visit their friend's accommodation, others appreciated having their own space and privacy. Staff observed that students had "the right amount of independence for their age group and maturity levels".

The focus groups provided some evidence that the participants had time to consider finances and support available to university students, including loans and scholarships. However, only a couple of the participants mentioned the economic benefits that going to university could provide, in terms of their future careers.

"For the jobs that I want to do when I am older, when I have looked at going to university it helps you have more opportunities."

2. *Increase confidence in their capacity to progress onto higher education (short-term) and*
6. *Increased progression to HE (long-term)*

Upon application to the summer school, 30 of the 35 participants in the research sample (86%) either agreed or strongly agreed that they were thinking about going to Higher Education in the future. This figure did not change over the course of the residential and certainly throughout the focus groups participants demonstrated a strong pre-existing desire to go to university in the future, which supports findings from other reports across the sector (TASO, 2022; TASO, 2023; Bowes et al., 2019). Some had even considered what subject they would like to study. A member of staff said that they had had "a number of great conversations with students who asked thoughtful, considered questions and had given their future decision-making thought already (whether they would like to go to university etc.)".

For others, attending the summer school had "strengthened or galvanised or resolved my opinion" on going to university itself, or helped them to see the University of Kent as a desirable option for them.

"I definitely want to go here. I am going to Oxford in a few weeks, I think. I have been to Oxford before but I think here's better for me because I want to focus on computer science."

Where the summer school may make a bigger impression is on participant's confidence in their ability to progress through being better informed and more comfortable in the HE setting. Participants spoke about being better prepared if they do go to university in the future.

"Kind of, yeah, because I was really scared of doing it before because I didn't know what it was like but now that I have the idea of what a campus is like and stuff, I feel like I'd be more comfortable than I was before."

Progression rates for the participants and their matched comparators will be available through HEAT's HESA Track from Spring 2030, at which point we will be able to further explore the impact of summer schools on HE progression.

3. *Increased study skills through educational projects which encourage active learning (short-term)*

Participants were less able to articulate the study skills they had developed, but this was evident through



the work that they did and the projects they created. Interestingly, a number of participants did not believe that they had done much academic work or certainly as much as they were expecting to – it is possible that they did not consider these activities to be work. They were, however, clear that they had developed teamwork skills, and all the participants were able to work together in small groups which helped with socialisation.

One member of staff highlighted that having a wide variety of academic teaching styles and the freedom to design their own project allowed for inclusivity:

“I liked the mix of written work and games or interactive sessions. I also liked that group work was necessary for many sessions, as this allowed students to get to know new people and make new friendships. The group work and the sessions also allowed students with different learning styles to all get a turn at engaging with the topic. For example, some students like writing and presenting their pitches, others like creating models, others like going out and exploring the campus, and others like leading and organising a team. It felt like most students I saw were given the opportunity to explore the idea of breaking barriers in their own way.”

#### *4. Higher KS4 attainment (medium-term)*

KS4 attainment data for the participants and their matched comparators will be available through HEAT's KS4 Track by the end of 2026. However in the short-term, there is some evidence that attending the summer school has motivated the participants to work harder at school in order to reach their goal of attending university.

“If you do well and if you focus, this is what you can have, this can be your life experience.”

Once we receive the KS4 Track for this cohort we will be able to better understand the impact attending the summer school has on their attainment.

#### *5. Learners have an increased interest in participating in further outreach activity (medium-term)*

The University of Kent's Outreach & Widening Participation team run a programme of activities for pre-16 and post-16 learners, the majority of which are organised through close links with local schools and colleges. However, some activities, like the Year 10 Summer School, are self-sign-up, where the student themselves takes the initiative to book. Participants showed an interest in taking part in the University's Ambition to Succeed programme for Level 3 learners, as well as more generally having more information about student finance and studying at university. Others spoke about attending open days and transition events.

A number of participants already had experience of visiting other universities (including Canterbury Christ Church, Oxford and Cambridge), sometimes for similar residential experiences.

## 5. Recommendations

1. The summer school should continue to offer a variety of activities to demonstrate the academic and extra-curricular elements of life at university. Positive changes to the 2023/24 residential that should continue to be provided include the Nerf games and money on Kent One cards.
2. It is believed that the weighted average response to the series of statements around Sense of Belonging may have decreased because they were initially asked upon application to the summer school and therefore applicants may give a more positive response in the (incorrect) belief that it may influence the outcome of their application. Therefore, for the 2024/25 cohort we will ask these questions after they have been offered a place on the summer school. This will help us to determine whether any change was as a result of attending the summer school.
3. We will continue to monitor the intended outcomes of the summer school and review whether they are still appropriate. In particular, once we have received HESA Track data involving matched comparator groups, we will critically reflect on whether 'Increased progression to HE' is a suitable outcome for the summer school considering the majority of participants appeared to already be considering HE as an option. Similarly, although it is undeniable that the summer school provides participants with an insight into university life, it is less clear whether they are better informed of the *benefits* that a degree brings. Consideration should be given on whether the expected outcomes need to be adapted to better reflect the programme, or vice versa. Developing an Enhanced Theory of Change for the summer school will allow us to explore the causal mechanisms at play.

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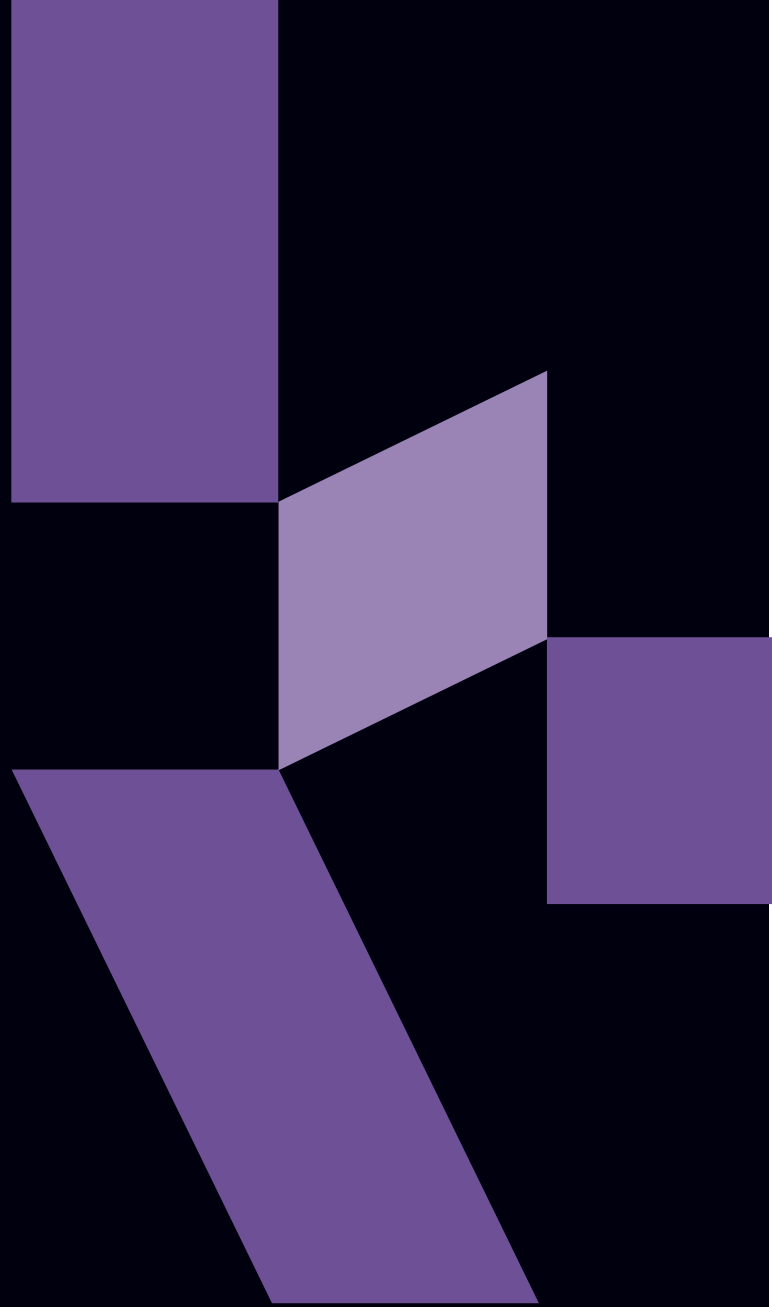
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