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Evaluation of the ThinkHigher NCOP programme, Warwickshire; February – July, 2018.

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21 September, 2018.

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Executive Summary

Key findings

This initial evaluation report of the ThinkHigher programme has begun the process of tracking, and assessing, the implementation of the Office for Students' National Collaborative Outreach Programme (NCOP) in Coventry and Warwickshire. The key findings of the evaluation of six months (February – July, 2018) of the implementation of ThinkHigher were:

- Self-confidence is an issue for some of the young people, and ThinkHigher has begun to address the issue through the one-to-one work carried out by the ThinkHigher coordinators, and the introduction of the Aspirations and Confidence in Education (ACE) scheme. In addition, the programme of activities carried out at Warwick and Coventry campuses under the title Discovery Days, along with targeted activities like the *Dol y moch* residential, also help address confidence issues.
- Evidence from the young people suggests that ThinkHigher's focus on improving young people's knowledge of higher education has been successful. There were high levels of satisfaction in relation to campus-based events, and the provision of information about university. The young people involved enjoyed, appreciated, and were aware of the benefits of seeing and experiencing the two university campuses, as well as finding out about information, such as degree options, concerned with university.
- One of ThinkHigher's key aims is to enhance aspirations in relation to university and possible future careers. Interestingly, the data suggest that, taken as a group, the young people already have high aspirations in terms of university and careers. Some 66% of the survey respondents indicated that they intend to go to university, while 73% believed that they would be able to attend. The interviews also provided

examples of long-held aspirations to attend university and enter professional careers.

- In terms of the ThinkHigher aim of ‘promoting positive attitudes to education’, the larger part of the evaluation cohort appears to already have positive attitudes to education which ThinkHigher work is in a position to strengthen.
- The evaluation cohort identified a number of perceived barriers to engaging in higher education, including: financial fears; concerns related to student life; worries about living away from home and family; and concerns about gaining the necessary examination grades. There was some evidence that ThinkHigher work had been successful in reducing concerns about finances at university, and demystifying the processes surrounding fees, living expenses and loans.
- ThinkHigher aims to strengthen the enabling factors in relation to attendance at university. These factors include the support and influence of family, friends and school. The data suggest that the evaluation cohort typically has good levels of support from parents/carers and family, and that peer support is positive.

Recommendations

The evaluation has two recommendations, one in relation to the overall focus of ThinkHigher, the second concerns the evaluation plan for the 2018/19 school year.

Focus of ThinkHigher

It may be that ThinkHigher should consider the overall focus of its work. There was evidence that the evaluation cohort had high aspirations in terms of university and careers, that, in some cases at least, these were long-standing, informed, aspirations. Further, there was also evidence of high levels of parental, and family support for those aspirations, with some

of the evaluation cohort having parents in professional careers, elder siblings or relatives who attended university and acted as role models for the young people. ThinkHigher may consider a further sifting of its members through the coordinators' one-to-one work, with a varying intensity of work with different ThinkHigher members.

Evaluation planning for the school year 2018/19

The evaluation carried out from February – July 2018 showed that differing data gathering methods faced differing barriers. Issues related to data gathering that depended on the cooperation of schools and responsible school staff in particular fed into a revised approach to the next stage of the ThinkHigher evaluation. The evaluation planning for 2018/19 is detailed below (1.2.3) and is fully supported by the CEDAR evaluation.

1. Introduction

1.1 The ThinkHigher National Collaborative Outreach Programme (NCOP)

The National Collaborative Outreach Programme (NCOP) was an initiative launched in January, 2017, by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (Hefce). Following the closure of Hefce in March, 2018, the NCOP was inherited and continued by the Hefce successor organisation, the Office for Students (OfS). Funds, to the amount of £50 million per year have been provided for 2017/2018 and 2018/2019, with provision for a further two years' funding following successful mid-term review. NCOP's remit is described as:

'The National Collaborative Outreach Programme (NCOP) brings together 29 partnerships of universities, colleges and other local partners to deliver outreach programmes to young people aged 13-18.

Their work is focused on local areas where higher education participation is lower than might be expected given the GCSE results of the young people who live there.

The programme [...] aims to support the government's goals to:

- double the proportion of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds in higher education by 2020
- increase by 20 per cent the number of students in higher education from ethnic minority groups
- address the under-representation of young men from disadvantaged backgrounds in higher education.¹

¹ <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/national-collaborative-outreach-programme-ncop/> accessed 17 September, 2018

NCOP's remit has led to a focus on 997 local wards in England where there are:

'low levels of young participation (POLAR3 Q1) and lower than expected levels of young participation, considering Key Stage 4 attainment and ethnicity (QQ1 or Q2),
or

Low levels of young participation (POLAR3 Q1) and lower than expected levels of young participation, considering Key Stage 4 attainment only (Q1 or Q2).'²

The target wards are covered by 29 local consortia, consisting of universities, colleges and local partners working collaboratively to establish locally appropriate interventions to address participation in the target wards.

1.1.1 The Warwickshire local partnership

The delivery of NCOP in Coventry and Warwickshire is badged as 'ThinkHigher' and represents collaboration between partners including the University of Warwick, Coventry University, Warwickshire College Group and North Warwickshire and Hinckley College, as well as the Local Enterprise Partnership and both Coventry and Warwickshire Councils. The ThinkHigher team is located in the University of Warwick, with four ThinkHigher coordinators embedded in schools in the ThinkHigher area.

Seven Warwickshire wards meet the NCOP criteria for support, and ThinkHigher, working with the Business Intelligence unit at Warwickshire County Council, used school census data

² <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/national-collaborative-outreach-programme-ncop/how-ncop-works/> accessed 17 September, 2018.

to identify schools with the largest numbers of pupils from NCOP postcodes. That analysis produced 15 secondary schools, serving 1,519 NCOP pupils. The schools have from 25 to 328 NCOP pupils on role, with the median number of NCOP pupils being 68. ThinkHigher is organised on a hub and spoke system, with the six schools with the highest number of NCOP pupils (numbering from 83 to 328) forming hub schools, and the remainder being spoke schools. The ThinkHigher coordinators are located in hub schools, and each support hub and spoke schools.

In order to address the NCOP's three programme targets (see 1.1 above) ThinkHigher aims to deliver outreach activities designed to promote:

- Increased aspirations for the future.
- Improved/more positive attitudes towards education.
- Improved self-esteem and self-confidence.
- Increased knowledge of Higher Education.

ThinkHigher outreach reflects evidence that suggests that the most effective strategies to impact on outcomes for young people are sustained, long-term programmes. Further, 'existing evidence also tells us that the most effective interventions are those which focus on mentoring, resilience [and] metacognition'³. The overall approach of ThinkHigher is to develop and maintain targeted, sustained and intensive contact with the cohort of young people. The minimum package that ThinkHigher intends to put in place for 11 of the schools categorized as encompassing the high intensity cohort is given in Table 1.

³ Internal ThinkHigher document, 'ThinkHigher NCOP Evaluation – 2018/19 Academic Year', p.2.

Table 1: minimum ThinkHigher package for high intensity cohort

Core package:
1 x general 'on campus' day (for all Year 9s)
3 x 1:2:1 or small group sessions (all Year 9 and Year 10, Year 11 dependent on school policy)
Minimum of 3 x in-school workshop sessions (all Year all Year 9 and Year 10, Year 11 dependent on school policy)
1 x Speakers Trust 'Speak Out Challenge' workshop (all year 10, other ages by arrangement)
Additional activities to be delivered based on needs identified in the core sessions, and including:
Maximum of 2 x campus visit ['Discovery Days']
Confidence/aspiration raising activities both I school and on-campus (i.e. Aspirations & Confidence in Education, ACE)
Exam preparation workshops (school holidays)
One of more cultural capital visits (weekends and holidays).

1.2 This evaluation

1.2.1 The aims of the qualitative evaluation

ThinkHigher asked the Centre for Educational Development, Appraisal and Research (CEDAR), the University of Warwick, to conduct a qualitative evaluation (to complement the existing local quantitative evaluation) starting at the end of January 2018. The evaluation was to collect rich, in-depth qualitative data relating to the impact of ThinkHigher on the young people enrolled in the programme. In addition, data would be collected relating to the barriers and enabling factors bearing on the intended benefits to the young people of participation in ThinkHigher.

The evaluation has the following research aims:

- To generate data on the impact of ThinkHigher interventions, for example, the 'Discovery Days'.
- To generate data on barriers to the young people participating in higher education; in relation to:
 - Schools and school experience.
 - Peers.
 - Families.
 - The young people's attitudes towards education and higher education.
- To generate data on enabling factors underpinning young people's decisions to participate in higher education, in relation to:
 - Schools and school experience.
 - Peers.
 - Families.
 - The young people's attitudes towards education and higher education.

1.2.2 Evaluation plan, 2018

CEDAR's evaluation began at the end of January, 2018 (a year after the ThinkHigher launch). The evaluation plan for the remaining six months of the 2017/18 school year was to sample from the potentially large data pool using one to one interviews, telephone interviews, focus groups and surveys, aimed primarily at capturing pupil voice. The plan and the data actually collected is summarised in Table 2.

Table 2: February-July 2018 evaluation data capture plan and data collected

Data collection source	Data collection method	Planned numbers involved	Data collected
Young People (YP) at 'Discovery Days'	Survey Focus groups	Unknown at outset.	Surveys: 315 surveys completed in total at 21 Discovery Days. No focus groups.
YP at GCSE 'Boot Camp'	Survey	Unknown at outset	23 surveys
YP: outdoor education residential (July 2018)	Initial planning was to use survey & telephone interview. This was changed to data collection via YP's reflective, learning journals	c.30	Journals were issued to all YPs at the residential, but none were returned (data collection administered by ThinkHigher staff)
YP: Y11 disengaged boys programme (November 2017-March 2018)	Sampling – telephone interviews	Unknown at outset	Programme did not run
Sampling of total ThinkHigher YP membership	Telephone interviews and face to face interviews	c.32	6 YPs interviewed by telephone. 8 YPs interviewed face to face.

The ThinkHigher Discovery Day events, held largely at the University of Warwick and the University of Coventry, but also at other locations, including Coventry's Belgrade Theatre, proved to be a useful source, with 315 surveys completed by the young people. The Discovery Days survey is presented in Appendix 1, it was designed by the evaluation and

administered by ThinkHigher staff. Similarly, the survey for the GCSE 'Boot Camp' (run as part of the University of Warwick's Widening Participation and Outreach school revision scheme) yielded 23 completed surveys (the Discovery Day survey was used).

In terms of interview data, face to face, group interviews, and by telephone, only 14 young people took part compared to the planned sample of 32 young people. The principle difficulty in this data collection related to working with schools which had strict policies on limiting pupils' time out of class, or appeared to be unable, or unwilling, to facilitate telephone, or face to face interviews. This proved to be a notable obstacle to the collection of data relating to pupil voice, and some consideration, involving both CEDAR and ThinkHigher, has been given to circumventing this obstacle during the school year 2018/2019.

ThinkHigher offered a residential event at the outdoor education centre at *Dol y moch*, Snowdonia⁴. This was attended by a group of young people accompanied by ThinkHigher staff. At an evaluation meeting prior to the residential event, it was agreed that the event would be used as a pilot for assessing the usefulness of reflective journals as a method of capturing pupil voice⁵. The young people were each given a journal at the start of the residential, and briefed on how to use the journal. The result was that, 'the diaries worked well in that all students participated and some used them really well. However, we only had one student willing to hand his in and isn't usable, I think, for evaluation purposes' (ThinkHigher staff member). Nonetheless, the journal idea has been incorporated into the evaluation plan for 2018/19 (see 1.2.3).

⁴ <http://www.plasdolymoch.co.uk/>, accessed 18 September, 2018

⁵ The evidence base that underpinned the decision was: Clayton, Diana (2016) "Volunteers' knowledge activities at UK music festivals: a hermeneutic-phenomenological exploration of individuals' experiences", *Journal of Knowledge Management*, Vol. 20 Issue: 1, pp.162-180.

1.2.3 Evaluation planning for 2018/19

The 2018 evaluation fed into planning for the 2018/19 school year evaluation. That plan envisages three data collection methods: a questionnaire; journals and reflective feedback; and semi-structured interviews and focus groups. Further details are presented below:

'Questionnaire:

The change in aspirations of the intensive cohort will be assessed through a questionnaire, to be administered at the beginning and end of the academic year.

Drawing on the work of Strand and Winston⁶ 'designed to assess factors that may impact upon aspirations, such as: the extent of home support; pupils' experience of school, teachers and the classroom; pupil's attitudes to school and to the future; self-esteem and academic self-concept; and peer influences. Thirty-four items were developed which students rated on a four point scale of Educational aspirations.' This has been combined with direct questions on pupils' intentions for their post-16 and post-18 options, and a questionnaire on their levels of concern about various aspects of progression to Higher Education. The questionnaire will produce a score based on Educational Aspirations. Change in this score will be used as a measure of progress after each year of intervention. This can be continued beyond 2018/19 if funding is renewed.

This questionnaire will be administered at the beginning and end of the academic year. All pupils in the ThinkHigher NCOP High Intensity cohort will complete the questionnaire (c.250).

⁶ Strand, Steve and Winston, Joe (2008) *Educational aspirations in inner city schools*. Educational Studies, Vol.34 (No.4). pp. 249-267

Journals and Reflective Feedback

Alongside the questionnaire study, we will do extensive qualitative research, to examine the meaning attached to the survey responses. A key part of this research will be to encourage and support pupils in reflecting more effectively and thoughtfully on their experiences. Reflective writing will be covered in a workshop for all participants, and 'tick box' feedback forms for interventions will be replaced with forms which encourage participants to reflect on what they have learned and whether it addressed key concerns.

This work, which will be reinforced in 1:1 and small group sessions, serves two linked purposes: to provide better, richer evidence of the impact our work has on young people and to support development of meta-cognition and reflective, self-regulated learning.

In addition, c.60 participants will be given a learning journal, in which they will be encouraged to reflect on their experiences, both within the ThinkHigher programme and more widely, in more detail, to build a richer picture of their learning and changes in their attitudes. The aim is to get 15-20 completed journals back for analysis. This method "provides the subjects of research substantial scope for reflection and self-determined knowledge presentation, it provides the researcher with extensive amounts of intensive material and it reinforces analyses of data gleaned from other methodological sources"⁷

⁷ Meth, Paula (2003) Entries and omissions: using solicited diaries in geographical research, *Area*, Volume 35, Issue 2, June 2003, pp.195-205

This part of the research seeks to explore potential disconnects between responses to survey and interview questions, recognising a sense that respondents in such surveys may be prone to giving the researcher what they perceive to be the “correct” answer (e.g. a stated intent to go to university which is not matched by actual intentions or expectations on closer examination), as well as to enrich and corroborate findings through other methodologies.

Semi-structured interviews and focus groups

The aims of the qualitative evaluation are to generate data on the following key areas related to achieving the intended benefits:

- Barriers:
 - Related to schools and school experience.
 - Related to peers.
 - Related to families.
 - Related to young people’s attitudes towards education and higher education.
- Enabling factors:
 - Related to schools and school experience.
 - Related to peers.

- Related to families.
- Related to young people's attitudes towards education and higher education.
- The overall impact of NCOP interventions on both the barriers and enabling factors listed above.
- The impact of specific NCOP interventions, for example 1:2:1 work with the Raising Aspirations Coordinators; Discovery Days etc.' ⁸

1.3 This report

This report presents data and findings from the evaluation carried out between 7 February and 22 July, 2018. It draws upon data generated by the Discovery Days and Boot Camp surveys and the interviews with participating young people. The findings are presented by theme, combining survey and interview data. The themes addressed are related to the impact of Think Higher on:

- Improving self-esteem and self-confidence.
- Improving knowledge of higher education.
- Enhancing aspirations.
- Promoting positive attitudes to education.

In addition, barriers and enabling factors to engaging in higher education are also addressed.

⁸ From ThinkHigher internal document, 'ThinkHigher NCOP Evaluation – 2018/19 Academic Year, received 9 September, 2018

2. Survey and interview data findings

2.1 Survey demographics

The Discovery Days and Boot Camp surveys were completed by 338 young people. There was a 50-50 split in terms of respondents (n=337) describing themselves as male or female. Of 335 respondents to the question about school year group, 172 were in Year 9 (51%⁹); 124 in Year 10 (37%); 25 in Year 11 (8%); 3 in year 12 (1%); and 11 in Year 13 (3%). The self-described ethnicity question was completed by 316 young people; who gave 38 different ethnicities. Two categories were the most often used – ‘White British’ (n=152. 48%), and ‘White’ (n=54. 17%). ‘British’ (9%), ‘Asian’ (4%), ‘British Asian’ (3%), and ‘Indian’ (3%) were the next most common, and the only classifications that had more than 2% response. The other self-descriptions covered a very wide range, including, ‘Black Irish’, ‘Black Caribbean’, ‘German English’, British/Brazilian’, ‘Polish/White’, ‘White Hungarian’, and ‘White Russian’.

2.2 Confidence and building self-confidence

The survey contained an open question which invited respondents to complete an open question – ‘using the space below, write down what, if anything, worries you about visiting university, and attending university after you have finished school’. There were 91 responses to this question. The responses covered a limited range of issues, with some respondents mentioning more than one concern. The second most frequent response (n=30) related to concerns that can be classified as being connected to confidence issues. These included worries about being independent at university, being able enough to study at university, concerns about being able to manage workloads, fears about being away from families, and worries about making friends at university. Examples included:

⁹ All percentages are rounded to nearest whole number

‘I’m worried that I would fail my course and not get enough support whilst at University.’

‘Adjusting to being independent -Coping with work.’

‘Getting lost -work load -making friends.’

‘Confidence -you might not know most of the people.’

‘The thing I’m most worried about is speaking in front of people.’

‘Being away from family and friends.’

These issues were also mentioned in the interviews, as was the impact of Think Higher in terms of improving self-confidence. An example was provided by one interviewee, who explained that they did not feel comfortable or confident when they were talking face to face with people, although phone conversations were not a problem. This young person had talked about the issue to the ThinkHigher coordinator, and, as a result, was part of the ThinkHigher Aspirations and Confidence in Education (ACE) programme. The young person explained that in the ACE session, ‘we sat down with a couple of students and did some games and stuff like that, and started talking about what we were interested in and things we like to do, and why our confidence level is not that high – it was enjoyable. [...] I was able to [talk] about school and answering questions and stuff like that,’ (YP1). It may have been that having the space to talk about confidence issues in school was particularly useful for this young person, as they went on, later in the interview, to say that ‘experiences of some students with their teachers at their secondary school’ might put those students off attending university.

ThinkHigher's approach to enhancing self-confidence among the cohort starts with the one-to-one sessions that the ThinkHigher coordinators run with individual young people, which leads to the ACE sessions. In addition, the various other ThinkHigher events, such as the Discovery Days and the residential, also have clear confidence-building elements. The one-to-one sessions were explained by one of the coordinators as being a way:

'to get the information from young people in what they were interested in, what they were finding difficult that was getting in the way of either doing well or in school and so that we could plan a programme around it. So it came out from a lot of those one-to-ones about friendship groups and being able to say to friends "I don't want to come and hang around the streets in the evening actually. I want to get home from school and relax and I want to get on with my homework", but it's difficult to say that to my friends, so looking at being assertive and boundaries and confidence so that's why ACE came out, there were quite a few people saying quite similar things and things like what subjects they're interested in and planning Discovery Days so it was more to inform what we did going forward.' (ThinkHigher coordinator)

Confidence-building was not just in relation to peer groups, or school-life, but extended to all aspects of the ThinkHigher approach, which is characterised by the provision of information and opportunities.

Other confidence-related issues concern fears about being able to manage the academic demands of university, being away from home, and, particularly, moving away from families and friends. Thirty of the open responses in the survey related to fears about not being able to cope with academic demands, failing courses, not being able to make friends, and moving away from family. The interviews also produced data relating to these issues. Comments

included: 'I'm not sure [I want to go far for university] because I want to, like, move away, but then I will also get homesick', (YP2); and, 'The Coventry one [university] seems quite nice. I would want to stay quite close to home. I know that area quite well. I'm not really a big fan of travelling far away from the family', (YP1).

2.3 Improving knowledge of higher education

Acquiring knowledge and experience of universities and university life was seen, by the majority of survey respondents and the young people who were interviewed, as important for their motivation, aspirations and future choices. The open question in the survey had 18 comments made about concerns relating to university life; for example:

'Student apartments -making/finding my way round the campus.'

'Knowing the environment (the university).'

'I have worries about not knowing what subjects I want to study and what unis are best for each subject.'

'I'm worried about what I need to do, and what subjects to take if I go to Uni.'

'Going to university I am worried about meeting new people. I am also worried about finding my way around the campus.'

Part of ThinkHigher's strategy is to familiarise the young people with the two university campuses, and enable the pupils to engage in activities, learning and discovery about university at Warwick and Coventry universities. The ThinkHigher launch event was held at Warwick, and most of the Discovery Days events are held at Warwick or Coventry. The

Discovery Days and Boot Camp survey showed that the majority of respondents had previously visited a university, 74% (n=328), while 69% (n=329) had visited Warwick or Coventry university before. The survey asked four questions about visiting Warwick and Coventry universities for the Discovery Days and Boot Camp:

- I think it is important to see what university is like.
- Visiting a university for events like the Discovery Days gives you a good idea of what it would be like to be a university student.
- I enjoy visiting universities.
- Visiting university while still at school makes it more likely that I will go to university after I finish school.

The responses to these questions, on a four point Likert scale, were all strongly positive. In response to the question about the importance of seeing what university is like, 94% of respondents (n=260) 'agreed' or 'totally agreed'. Similarly, 88% of respondents (n=259) 'agreed' or 'totally agreed' that visiting university for ThinkHigher events gave a good idea of what it would be like to be a university student. The same percentage, 88% of respondents (n= 258) 'agreed' or 'totally agreed' that they enjoyed such visits. Responses to the question 'visiting university while still at school makes it more likely that I will go to university after I finish school', showed that 81% of respondents (n=256) 'agreed' or 'totally agreed'; while 17% 'neither agreed nor disagreed'. This latter might suggest that despite the very high positive responses to the earlier questions about visiting universities, there were other factors that might have greater weight when deciding to attend university.

The interviews provided some detail in terms of the value that young people put on seeing university, and attending events at university, like those provided by ThinkHigher. Three of the interviewees said that the main reason that they had agreed to join ThinkHigher was

that it would, as one put it, 'be an insight into my university and what life would be like', (YP1). This student went on to say that she had learned, through ThinkHigher visits, that university life was 'quite busy, you have to study a lot, and you go to lectures during the day, and you only really have around three hours to yourself, excluding sleep,' (YP1). Another interviewee gave an account of the value of visiting universities: 'I think the best thing to do is like show them [young people] what it [university] is. I think it's hard to tell someone about it without them going to see because it's completely different to anything I've experienced before, so I think going just really helps,' (YP3). The ThinkHigher launch day, held at Warwick University, was also seen to be important, as the focus of the day was broader than the Discovery Day experience. One of the interviewees explained that not only had they been surprised by the size of the campus and facilities such as the library, they had also been able to 'talk about loads of things to do with it [the university], like all the university, and the accommodation and all that,' (YP6).

In addition to the benefits gained from visiting and seeing the two campuses, the young people also explained that they found the content of the Discovery Days important, not only in terms of the days themselves, but also when it came to thinking about possible degree choices in the future. The survey responses showed that 74% of respondents (n=330) 'agreed' or 'totally agreed' that they were 'really interested in the subject of this Discovery Day'; while 77% (n=333) 'wanted to find out what the subject of this Discovery Day was all about'. There was some indication that attendance at specific Discovery Days might have enhanced, or strengthened intentions to take particular subjects at university, with 56% (n=333) of respondents indicating that they 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that 'I might like to study the subject of this Discovery Day when I leave school', while 31% 'neither agreed nor disagreed', and 15% gave a negative response. The interviews also showed positive responses to Discovery Days, and an appreciation that the subjects covered, for example, law, business, economics, politics, theatre, sociology, could help in respect of future choices. One interviewee, for example, said that they would like to see more subjects and more Discovery Days: 'I would like to have maybe more discovery days, they would help me decide with all the subjects that I'm taking, like health and social, and photography, and

stuff like that, if I had a better insight of what they do there [university] I could go,' (YP5). However, about half the interviewees had already made decisions about university degree courses, and three of the interviewees had already applied for university admittance.

2.4 Enhancing aspirations

From the data gathered, it was not clear that the cohort represent a group that has little aspiration to attend university. Two questions in the survey addressed the desire to go to university after school, and the expectation of going to school; the responses are reproduced in tables 3 and 4.

Table 3: survey responses to statement, 'I want to go to university after I finish school.'

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid:				
Totally Disagree	6	1.8	1.9	1.9
Disagree	8	2.4	2.5	4.4
Neither agree nor disagree	92	27.2	29.2	33.7
Agree	89	26.3	28.3	61.9
Totally agree	120	35.5	38.1	100.0
Total	315	93.2	100.0	
Missing	23	6.8		
Total	338	100.0		

Table 4: survey responses to statement, 'I think that I will be able to go to university after I finish at school.'

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid:				
Totally Disagree	4	1.2	1.3	1.3
Disagree	12	3.6	3.8	5.1
Neither agree nor disagree	71	21.0	22.5	27.5
Agree	126	37.3	39.9	67.4
Totally agree	103	30.5	32.6	100.0
Total	316	93.5	100.0	
Missing	22	6.5		
Total	338	100.0		

Table 3 shows that two-thirds of the respondents (n=315) were positive in relation to wanting to go to university, with only 4% saying that they 'totally disagreed' or 'disagreed' with the statement 'I want to go to university after I finish at school', and 30% 'neither agreed nor disagreed' with the statement. This suggests that the ThinkHigher cohort already has high aspirations in relation to attending university. Table 4, which presented a different question in relation to future university intentions, attempted to assess how many of the

ThinkHigher cohort attending the Discovery Days and Bootcamp believed that they would be able to attend university. In this case, 73% of respondents (n=316) 'agreed' or 'totally agreed' that they would be able to attend university. There is a mismatch between those who wanted to go to university at 66%, and those who thought they would be able to, at 73%. This might suggest that although university aspirations are high (and much higher than the percentage of post-school 18 year olds who went to university in 2017 – some 32.6%¹⁰), there is a gap between those who believe they will have the necessary requirements to attend, and those who expect to attend.

The figures from the survey raise some questions about the nature of the cohort that may need further investigation. The percentages of respondents intending to attend university were high, and the small number of interviews carried out suggest that the older interviewees had long-held intentions to attend university. Three of the interviewees, YP3, YP4 and YP5, had already accepted offers at university at the time of interview (12 February, 2017) for academic subjects in the sciences. In addition, YP2, and YP6, had long-held intentions to study at university, and knew what degrees and careers they were aiming for. In both cases, they had the full support of their families, in one case, the young person's elder sibling was at university, and in the other, a friend was at university; further in another case, the mother of the young person was a professionally qualified person working in the same field that the young person intended to enter, and their elder sibling was at university. This evidence of existing high levels of aspiration among the cohort was less noticeable among the younger ThinkHigher pupils interviewed, perhaps unsurprisingly, although even the group of Year 9 pupils interviewed had a reasonable idea about their futures – 'I want to be an engineer' (YP7), 'I want to be a primary school teacher' (YP8), 'A nurse' (YP9), 'A vet' (YP10).

¹⁰ <https://www.ucas.com/corporate/news-and-key-documents/news/largest-ever-proportion-uks-18-year-olds-entered-higher-education-2017-ucas-data-reveals> accessed 20 September, 2018

2.5 Promoting positive attitudes to education

Two questions in the survey sought to generate data about the link between being part of ThinkHigher, attending Discovery Days and Bootcamp, and attitudes to school work. The first question asked for responses to the statement, 'I thought that it [Discovery Day] would help with my school work'. 61% of the respondents (n=335) 'agreed' or 'totally agreed', and 33% 'neither agreed nor disagreed'. This suggests that although a large majority did see value in attendance, in part, in relation to their school work, a notable minority were neutral, and only a small minority, 7%, were negative. Interestingly, the next question, where the young people had to respond to the statement, 'A teacher said that I should go [to the event]', showed that only a minority agreed with the statement, some 30% (n=329). When these responses are taken in conjunction with responses to the questions about interest in the Discovery Day and Bootcamp subjects (see above, 2.3, pp.19/20), it appears that the respondents saw value in the ThinkHigher events not only in terms of school work, and less so in terms of school obligations, but also in terms of interest in the subjects on offer through the ThinkHigher Discovery Days and Bootcamp. The source of those positive attitudes may be a combination of self-motivation, the support of parents and family, the impact of school, and the opportunities offered by ThinkHigher.

2.6 Barriers and enabling factors in relation to participation in higher education

2.6.1 Barriers

The open question in the survey showed the largest number of response were related to concerns about financial barriers to attending university. In all, this barrier was mentioned 34 times, and was the most common response. Examples included:

'The payment/how affordable it is. Student debt. Required grades.'

‘Too expensive to attend university.’

‘I am little worried that my parents won't be able to afford to send me to University. And even if they can, I don't want to leave them without any money.’

‘What worries me about attending university is the financial bit.’

‘I'm worried about attending university due to tuition fees and student loans.’

These concerns were echoed by a minority of the interviewees, with one giving a strong statement about the general concern among their peers about financial barriers: ‘I'd probably say the biggest barrier is the money. I don't think people even think about the work too much, it's just the money, and how much it is a year, especially with living away,’ (YP3). However, there was recognition that ThinkHigher work had helped reassure interviewees about access to funding and paying for fees and living expenses while at university. For example:

Interviewer: ‘Before you got involved with the ThinkHigher project had you thought at all about whether you wanted to go on to university after school?’

YP1: ‘I thought not really because I thought it was quite expensive, which it is, but I talked to my family about it and they would be quite happy with me to go to university, and they would be able to support me going with the money. [...] And with ThinkHigher we're talking about budgets at the moment in one of the session and it gives you a little taster into university life and how much you would have to pay out, and how much you have to study, and the grades you have to get to get into university.’

Concerns about not getting the right school-level qualifications, or the right grades, also featured in the data. Five of the open question answers in the survey concerned not getting the right grades to get into university. There was evidence that ThinkHigher had an impact on such concerns with, for example, one young person saying that what they had learned from ThinkHigher was ‘that you can all do it [...] people with qualifications, even though some people might not have the higher marks, but they can go to different universities, and, then, everyone can get a loan, even if it’s a different amount, and they can always branch out from that,’ (YP2).

2.6.2 Enabling factors

In addition to ThinkHigher’s work in terms of allowing its young people to visit and study on a university campus, providing one-to-one guidance and advice, explaining about finance, qualifications and university life, along with building confidence and expectations (all covered above), parents/carers, families, and friends, along with schools, play a part in enhancing aspirations to attend university. The survey showed that 78% of respondents (n=318) ‘agreed’ or ‘totally agreed’ with the statement that ‘my parents/carers were really pleased when I told them I was coming to university for this Discovery Day’. In terms of friends, only 8% (n=316) of respondents ‘totally disagreed’ or ‘disagreed’ with the statement that ‘my friends thought it was good that I was coming to this Discovery Day’, while 48% gave a positive response, and 43% a neutral response. The interviews also produced examples of the importance of parental and family support and modelling for the young people. For example, one interviewee stressed the importance of an elder sibling’s university experience: ‘I’d probably say [had wanted to go to university] since I started GCSEs, it was always my aim. My sister is a few years older than me, and she’d done the same, and then once I saw her going away it was something I wanted to do,’ (YP3). Another interviewee (YP5) attributed that role to their cousins’ experiences of university, while a third commented that ‘my family all want me to do it and get the qualifications,’ (YP2).

3. Conclusions

This initial evaluation report of the ThinkHigher programme has begun the process of tracking, and assessing, the implementation of the Office for Students' National Collaborative Outreach Programme (NCOP) in Coventry and Warwickshire. This outreach programme aims to support young people from areas where higher education participation is lower than might be expected, to aspire to, apply for and attend university. The NCOP is a four year programme, 2017-2020, and this report covers six months of the operation of ThinkHigher during the school year 2017/2018. The data presented, from a variety of sources, enables some tentative conclusions regarding the impact of ThinkHigher on the young people involved, and helps shape the continuing evaluation.

The evaluation generated data from young people by using surveys which were completed by 338 respondents attending 21 ThinkHigher Discovery Days, and a Warwick University GCSE Bootcamp. In addition, a small number of interviews, 14, were carried out with young people. Taken together the data suggest that:

- Self-confidence is an issue for some of the young people, and ThinkHigher has begun to address the issue through the one-to-one work carried out by the ThinkHigher coordinators, and the introduction of the Aspirations and Confidence in Education (ACE) scheme. In addition, the programme of activities carried out at Warwick and Coventry campuses under the title Discovery Days, along with targeted activities like the *Dol y moch* residential, also help address confidence issues.
- Evidence from the young people suggests that ThinkHigher's focus on improving young people's knowledge of higher education has been successful. There were high levels of satisfaction in relation to campus-based events, and the provision of information about university. The young people involved enjoyed, appreciated, and were aware of the benefits of seeing and experiencing the two university campuses,

as well as finding out about information, such as degree options, concerned with university.

- One of ThinkHigher's key aims is to enhance aspirations in relation to university and possible future careers. Interestingly, the data suggest that, taken as a group, the young people already have high aspirations in terms of university and careers. Some 66% of the survey respondents indicated that they intend to go to university, while 73% believed that they would be able to attend. The interviews also provided examples of long-held aspirations to attend university and enter professional careers.
- In terms of the ThinkHigher aim of 'promoting positive attitudes to education', the larger part of the evaluation cohort appears to already have positive attitudes to education which ThinkHigher work is in a position to strengthen.
- The evaluation cohort identified a number of perceived barriers to engaging in higher education, including: financial fears; concerns related to student life; worries about living away from home and family; and concerns about gaining the necessary examination grades. There was some evidence that ThinkHigher work had been successful in reducing concerns about finances at university, and demystifying the processes surrounding fees, living expenses and loans.
- ThinkHigher aims to strengthen the enabling factors in relation to attendance at university. These factors include the support and influence of family, friends and school. The data suggest that the evaluation cohort typically has good levels of support from parents/carers and family, and that peer support is positive.

This initial evaluation was a formative evaluation in respect of testing what data collection methods were best suited to the ThinkHigher programme. The evaluation planned to gather survey data, conduct a range of interviews, primarily with the young people involved, but also with responsible teaching staff, and to trial a reflective ThinkHigher learning journal. The experience of the evaluation has shown that there are substantial challenges in respect of gathering data that depends upon the cooperation of schools and school staff; this issue impacted on the evaluation plans involving school pupil and school staff interviews. Working

in collaboration with the ThinkHigher director, a revised evaluation plan has been established for 2018/19 (see 1.2.3 above), which will make use of a pre and post school year questionnaire; school year-long learning journals, reflective feedback following all ThinkHigher events; and a repeated attempt to gather interview data.

Appendix 1: Discovery Days young people's survey

National Collaborative Outreach Programme, NCOP (Warwickshire)

Discovery Days survey

About NCOP

The National Collaborative Outreach Programme (NCOP) is designed to raise participation in Higher Education. In order to assess the effectiveness of the scheme, the Warwickshire NCOP is being evaluated by researchers from the Centre for Educational Development, Appraisal and Research (CEDAR), the University of Warwick.

What are you being asked to do?

The evaluation team from CEDAR are collecting the views of the young people involved in NCOP in order to understand what they think are the strong, and less strong, points of the scheme. We would like you to complete this short survey at the start of the Discovery Day. Your answers will be confidential, and kept by CEDAR on a password protected data base on secure University of Warwick servers. When the material is used to write evaluation reports it will be anonymised. If you have any questions about the survey or the evaluation, contact Dr Stephen Cullen, CEDAR, University of Warwick, CV4 7AL, S.M.Cullen@warwick.ac.uk.

Consent:

Please tick the boxes.

- ☐ I confirm that I have read and understood the above information concerning this survey, and know who to contact to ask any questions.
- ☐ I understand that participation in the survey is voluntary and that I can stop whenever I want to.
- ☐ I agree to participate in the survey.

Q1. Name

Surname: _____

Given name: _____

Q2. How would you describe your ethnicity:

Q3. Gender:

Q4. Year Group:

Q5. What is the title of the Discovery Day you are attending:

Q6. This Discovery Day and you:

I chose to do this Discovery Day because:

(Please tick one response in each row)

	Totally Disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Totally Agree
a) I thought that it would help with my school work.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b) A teacher said that I should go.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c) I am really interested in the subject of this Discovery Day.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d) I wanted to find out what the subject of this Discovery Day was all about.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

e) I think that I might like to study the subject of this Discovery Day when I leave school.

Q7. Visiting universities:

a) This Discovery Day is the first time I have been at a university.

☐ Yes

☐ No

b) I have been at Warwick or Coventry University before.

☐ Yes

☐ No

If 'yes' go to the next question, if 'no' go to Q8

	Totally Disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Totally Agree
c) I think it is important to see what university is like.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d) Visiting a university for events like the Discovery Days gives you a good idea of what it would be like to be a university student.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e) I enjoy visiting universities.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

f) Visiting university while still at school makes it more likely that I will go to university after I finish school.

☐
☐
☐
☐
☐

Q8. University and you:

(Please tick one response in each row)

**Totally
Disagree**

Disagree

**Neither
agree nor
disagree**

Agree

**Totally
Agree**

a) My parents/carers were really pleased when I told them I was coming to university for this Discovery Day.

☐
☐
☐
☐
☐

b) My friends thought that it was good that I was coming to this Discovery Day.

☐
☐
☐
☐
☐

c) I want to go to university after I finish at school.

☐
☐
☐
☐
☐

d) I think that I will be able to go to university after I finish at school.

☐
☐
☐
☐
☐

Q9. Using the space below, write down what, if anything, worries you about visiting university, and attending university after you have finished school.

Thank you for completing this survey.