



Evaluating & Researching University  
Participation Interventions

## NERUPI Student Ambassador and Mentor Working Group

# **The Student Ambassador Experience: Enhancing Professional & Personal Development**

Final Report  
January 2024

# NERUPI Student Ambassador and Mentor Working Group

## The Student Ambassador Experience: Enhancing Professional & Personal Development

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## Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank students and staff in the universities that trialled the Student Ambassador Reflection Tool, without whom the research would not have been possible. The report is based on collaborative research arising from discussions at the NERUPI Student Ambassador and Mentor Working Group and the following Working Group members were actively engaged in co-ordinating focus groups and the completion of the Student Ambassador Reflective Tool and Student Consents forms:

- Amy Burt, Impact & Evaluation Officer, University of Kent
- Amanda Cudby, Post 16 Manager, University of Sussex
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- Claire Sims, Outreach Officer, University of Essex
- Teresa Storey, Educational Engagement Lead Officer, University of Leeds.

Annette Hayton, Senior Research Fellow, University of Bath and NERUPI Convenor, Amy Burt, Impact & Evaluation Officer, University of Kent and Co-Lead of the Student Ambassador and Mentor Working Group and Dr Clare Gartland, Associate Professor of Education, University of Suffolk and Contributing Academic for the NERUPI Student Ambassador and Mentor Working Group and were the project leads.

Thanks are also due to Marta Almeida-Hill, Deputy Head of Outreach and WP: Impact and Evaluation, University of Kent who worked on early stages of the Reflection Tool and Dr Violeta Negrea, Research Fellow, University of Suffolk who undertook the qualitative inductive-deductive data analysis for this report.

The coordination of the student ambassador responses from participating institutions, a preliminary data analysis and the iterative production of this report was undertaken by Dr Sally Griffin, NERUPI Research and Development Officer, University of Bath.

## **The Network for Evaluating and Researching University Participation Interventions (NERUPI)**

The NERUPI is a community of practice for those seeking to reduce inequalities in higher education access, participation and progression. With over 70 member organisations we are able to share our expertise and explore new approaches to evaluating the impact of interventions in this complex and evolving area.

Our NERUPI members work with the NERUPI Evaluation Framework to plan, develop and evaluate their programmes and activities. With clear aims and objectives based on both theory and practice - a *praxis* approach - it provides a sound basis for improving practice in teams across the student lifecycle from outreach to student success to graduate progression.

### **The NERUPI Student Ambassador and Mentor Working Group**

The NERUPI Working Group was set up in the autumn of 2020 for practitioners, evaluators and researchers with an interest in student ambassadors and mentors and their work.

The interests of the Working Group include the:

- Recruitment of student ambassadors and mentors, particularly recruiting a diverse, balanced and representative cohort
- Training, development, deployment and support of student ambassadors and mentors
- Pedagogy for outreach / ambassador-led activities
- Impact of student ambassador and mentoring schemes on the ambassadors and mentors themselves, including any impact on retention, attainment and progression into further study or employment
- The impact of working with student ambassadors and mentors on widening participation activity participants
- Continuing contact and engagement of student ambassadors and mentors after graduation
- joining up of the work of student ambassadors and mentors in schools, colleges and at university, employer outreach and the schools' agenda
- Student voice.

## **I. Introduction**

Universities in the United Kingdom employ their students as 'student ambassadors' in a variety of roles, including recruitment and outreach with disadvantaged and underrepresented groups. Each university develops its own approach to recruitment, training, employment and evaluation strategies, although there are many common elements. We use the general term 'student ambassadors' in this paper to describe those focussed on university outreach rather than those providing peer support for fellow students, for example. The job title varies considerably depending on their roles and their higher education institution and may include: Student Tutor, Student Mentor, Teaching Ambassador or Student Advocate. In these roles students are often deployed on a wide variety of recruitment and outreach programmes and events such as open days, subject specific events, summer schools and mentoring or tutoring programmes.

Through these activities they often develop a complex range of knowledge, skills and experience. However, student ambassadors are not always able to articulate these in ways that will support their future career progression.

Research in this area is limited but over the past two decades the existing studies have concluded that working as a student ambassador can be beneficial in a number of ways including: development of a sense of belonging in higher education; access to relatively well-paid, well-supported and flexible employment opportunities; the acquisition of knowledge, skills and experience and improved retention, success, uptake of postgraduate study and career progression (Baker and Sela 2018; Gannon *et al.*, 2018; Green, 2018; Gartland, 2014; Ylonen, 2012; Austin and Hatt, 2005). A recent analysis of widening participation ambassador recruitment, training, working practices also explored the NERUPI aims student ambassadors supported most in the students with whom they worked (Zivitins, 2020). The survey of 32 English and two Welsh higher education providers and four Uni Connect partnerships found that student ambassadors are perceived to have the most impact in developing students' knowledge and awareness of higher education: the aim 'Know' in the [NERUPI Framework](#).

## 1.1 Background

A collaborative project was undertaken by the NERUPI Student Ambassador and Mentor Working Group, where experienced student ambassador and mentor coordinators and evaluators worked with Dr Clare Gartland, who has a research interest in this field, and the NERUPI Team. This collaborative approach facilitated through a Working Group has proven successful in a number of other NERUPI projects.

The aim of this project was to provide further insights into the specific skills and capacities student ambassadors develop through their roles. It was decided to take an exploratory approach and a Student Ambassador Reflection Tool was developed to support ambassadors' reflections on their experiences and learning to provide a firm basis for further research and evaluation, including the development of a NERUPI online survey to support future internal and collaborative evaluation.

## 1.2 This report

This report presents an inductive-deductive analysis of 21 reflection tools completed by student ambassadors from four English universities. It provides an analysis of student reflection to a series of questions arranged in seven themes:

1. Higher education experience and learning
2. Interacting with other people
3. Digital knowledge and skills
4. Taking charge of your learning
5. Initiative and leadership skills
6. Your career plans
7. Contribution to your university.

The report is relevant to all those interested or involved in the planning of future engagement, training, employment and support of students in student ambassador roles. It will also be of interest to a wider group of NERUPI stakeholders and practitioners who engage students to support their recruitment, outreach and wider access and participation programme delivery.

The report is structured as follows:

**Section 1** introduces the background to the pilot project including examples of previous research, the NERUPI Student Ambassador and Mentor Working Group and the structure of the report.

**Section 2** describes the methodologies used in the pilot project, discusses ethical considerations and the use of focus groups.

**Section 3** sets out the key findings from the focus group research grouped into seven reflection themes: higher education experience and learning; interacting with other people; digital knowledge and skills; taking charge of your learning; initiative and leadership skills; your career plans; contribution to your university.

**Section 4** provides a range of reflections arising from the analysis of the findings and discusses the conclusions and recommendations which have emerged from this pilot study.

**Section 5** provides a list of references for the research resources cited in the introduction to the report.

## 2. Development of research methodology and project delivery

The Student Ambassador Reflection Tool Pilot Project was developed and delivered over the academic years 2021-22 and 2022-23.

### 2.1 The Student Ambassador Reflection Tool

The Student Ambassador Reflection Tool was developed by Dr Clare Gartland, with input from the Student Ambassador and Mentor Working Group and the NERUPI Team. It was informed by previous research into ambassador skills development, practitioner knowledge and the Key Competences for Lifelong Learning included in the [EU Youthpass tool](#). This was developed by experts from across Europe to identify and define the key competences necessary for personal fulfilment, social cohesion and employability in a knowledge society. It was adapted to reflect the current practical experiences of university staff and students involved in ambassador work (Table 1). The final version of the Student Ambassador Reflection Tool for use in this pilot project was agreed by the Student Ambassador and Mentor Working Group (Appendix A).

It was intended that the Student Ambassador Reflection Tool would be completed by a small number of student ambassadors in 10 universities from four broad subject areas (STEM, Health, Humanities and Social Sciences). It was agreed that student ambassadors would be paid for completing the form and that the responses would be used to inform the development of a national survey to assess the benefits of working as a student ambassador as well as to support local evaluations within organisations. Using the pre-determined and agreed format of the Student Ambassador Reflection Tool, completion of the Reflection Tool and student consent forms was administered locally by members of the Student Ambassador and Mentor Working Group in five English universities over the period 2021 to 2023. The completed documents were then sent to the NERUPI project coordinator for collation and analysis.

**Table I.** Key competences framework for student ambassador NERUPI research and evaluation.

<p><b>Higher education learning and experience</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• your area of study</li> <li>• wider opportunities at the university</li> </ul>	<p><b>Taking charge of your learning</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ability to organise own learning including effective management of time and information for ourselves and in groups</li> <li>• gaining, processing and assimilating new knowledge and skills</li> <li>• seeking and making use of guidance</li> <li>• building on prior learning and life experience</li> </ul>
<p><b>Interacting and engaging with a range of other people</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• express ideas, thoughts, feelings and facts orally and in writing</li> <li>• interact with other people in appropriate ways in different settings</li> <li>• knowledge of the challenges that different people have (other students, school students, lecturers, teachers, outreach staff)</li> <li>• understandings about yourself arising from these interactions</li> </ul>	<p><b>Initiative and leadership skills</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ability to turn ideas into action</li> <li>• creativity, innovation and risk taking and problem solving</li> <li>• ability to plan and manage projects in order to achieve objectives</li> </ul>
<p><b>Digital knowledge and skills</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• confident and critical use of IT for work and communication</li> <li>• use of computers to retrieve, assess, store, produce, present and exchange information</li> <li>• use of computers to communicate with different groups of people</li> </ul>	<p><b>Contribution to the university</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• supporting incoming students through recruitment and transition events</li> <li>• involvement in development and evaluation of activities</li> <li>• contribution to the student voice</li> </ul>

## 2.2 Ethical considerations

At the beginning of this project in the academic year 2021-22 it was initially considered that seeking the student voice through the Student Ambassador Reflection Tool would not require ethics approval since the findings would be used only for professional development purposes. However, the aims of the project were later extended to include informing the development of the Europe-wide Erasmus+ Project. At that point further advice was sought from the University of Bath Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee.

The University of Bath Research Ethics Committee advised the NERUPI Team that as the findings would now be used as part of larger research project ethics approval was required. Approval was subsequently sought and gained. As part of this process a student consent form was approved by the Committee (Appendix B) and measures were taken by the Working Group to ensure that the Student Ambassador Reflection Tool was completed anonymously. As a result of this revision, although completed Reflection Tools were received from 30 respondents from five universities during the 2021 to 2023 period, completed consent forms were received from only 21 respondents from four of the five universities in the academic year 2022-23. These 21 responses were analysed for this report. The smaller than expected sample size

was disappointing but the uniformity and quality of responses indicates that the questions were largely appropriate and relevant.

## 2.3 Analysis, reporting and dissemination

This report presents an inductive-deductive analysis of 21 reflection tools completed by student ambassadors from four English universities: University A (n=5), University B (n=12), University C (n=2), and University D (n=2). An inductive open coding was applied for each of the following seven themes:

1. Higher education experience and learning
2. Interacting with other people
3. Digital knowledge and skills
4. Taking charge of your learning
5. Initiative and leadership skills
6. Your career plans
7. Contribution to your university.

Within each theme, the codes across the participants were grouped in sub-themes. The sub-themes show the type of activities student ambassadors were engaged with, and the benefits for their learning, excepting the last theme where the benefits are mostly related to university. Although the reflection tools were anonymous, each reflection tool response was assigned a code using a letter representing the university and a number representing the ambassador respondent to identify common patterns across universities and ambassadors and to identify the frequency of codes (Appendix C).

The findings of the Student Ambassador Reflection Tool Pilot Project will be disseminated to NERUPI members and used by the NERUPI Student Ambassador and Mentor Working Group to inform the development of a NERUPI survey to assess the benefits of working as a student ambassador. They will also be used to inform and support the collaborative Erasmus+ Project with interim findings already being shared. The NERUPI Team and the Working Group collaborated with Dr Clare Gartland and her team at the University of Suffolk on their Erasmus+<sup>1</sup> project to develop a package of training modules for student ambassadors to use across the European Union. The Reflection Tool and interim findings proved useful to the Erasmus+ Project and representatives from the Student Ambassador and Mentor Working Group gave presentations at the online Erasmus+ Conference in March 2023. The Working Group continues to support the work of the Erasmus+ Project, including its compilation of a student ambassador training handbook and planned final conference in July 2024.

## 3. Key Findings: seven reflection themes

The key findings from student responses in the Student Ambassador Reflective Tool were summarised in seven reflection themes, with some grouped into sub-themes.

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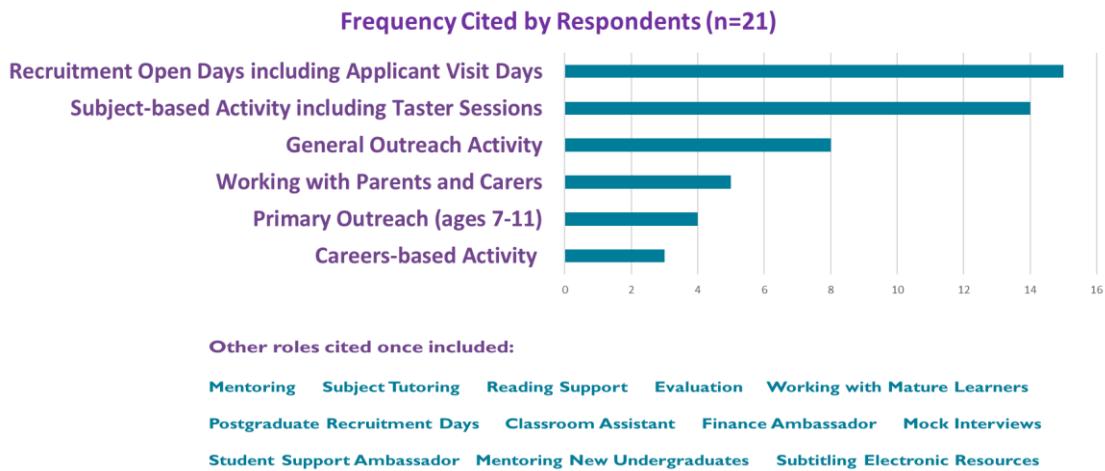
<sup>1</sup> The Erasmus+ Project is a collaboration between the Universities of Suffolk, Bucharest in Romania, Amasya in Turkey and Université Catholique de l'Ouest in France and NERUPI. Its aims are to develop models of cross-sector working with student ambassadors and to 'engage, connect and empower young people by developing transnational networks'.

### 3.1 Higher education experience and learning

During their time at university, the student ambassador respondents in this pilot project reported that they were involved in a mixed range of activities, with most gaining experience of working in roles that supported recruitment to their university and/or to their particular courses (Figure 1). The activities within this theme were grouped into seven sub-themes: inspirational talks, campus tours and visits, open days and events, taster sessions, online events, finance and other activities.

**Inspirational talks.** These mainly consisted of: (a) delivering presentations on course specific themes (psychology, life sciences, languages), on career opportunities, university life, entry requirements and support; and (b) listening to talks delivered by experts. Student ambassador respondents felt that there were many benefits to be gained from delivering and listening to talks. Commonly identified benefits included building confidence in public speaking, valuable knowledge and understanding of how students learn and how students can be better supported and knowledge about university courses and career opportunities. Some considered that engagement with talks and presentations had a positive impact on their own motivation and feelings of belonging.

**Figure 1.** Summary of activities that respondents supported when working as student ambassadors.



**Campus tours and visits.** Student ambassadors frequently mentioned that they were involved in campus tours for school students and their families. Their role was in guiding, designing, leading and assisting with campus tours and answering questions related to university life and courses offered at university. Personal benefits that 14 of the 21 respondents identified in undertaking this type of work were expanding their knowledge about the university and the existing services which they had not been aware of including:

- Their own course, academic discipline and research fields, but also of others
- The support available to them (academic, pastoral and financial)
- Paid work, placements and volunteering opportunities
- Forming wider social networks such as student societies.

Through meeting students and their parents and/or carers, leading them around the campus and answering their questions, eight out of the 21 student ambassador respondents felt that they improved their communication skills, while 10 discussed the development of their organisation skills.

**Open days and events.** During open days and different events, student ambassadors participated in assisting with the preparation, setting up, facilitating interactions between students, leading and assisting with

activities and answering questions from students. While working as part of a larger team, student ambassadors felt that they had developed teamworking, organisation and communication skills and cultural and social awareness and had gained career insights.

**Taster sessions.** These involved student ambassadors delivering practical sessions in their department or assisting in delivery of taster sessions by experts. Student ambassadors reported gains in leadership skills, communication skills, teaching skills, improved confidence in public speaking and building positive relationships with academics and students.

**Online events.** Student ambassadors engaged with diverse activities online such as being part of the interview panel, supporting online sessions, contributing to discussions, answering students' questions and giving online presentations. The online activities helped student ambassadors to develop interview skills, communication and online presentation skills whilst becoming more familiar with the use of technology.

**Finance support.** Sometimes when activities had a greater focus on supporting students with financial queries, student ambassadors took the role of answering questions from students and parents about financial schemes, loans, bursaries and scholarships. This led to student ambassadors gaining financial knowledge, budgeting skills and greater understanding about participants' backgrounds and their different needs.

**Other activities.** There were other activities in which student ambassadors were engaged and from which they felt they benefited such as attending career fairs, learning about different student societies, developing creative skills and extending experiences by working in different departments and buildings.

## 3.2 Interacting with other people

During the activities, student ambassadors interacted with a diverse audience. Seven groups of people were identified from their statements: peer student ambassadors, school students, school staff, parents and carers, outreach and recruitment teams, university lecturers and others.

**Peer student ambassadors.** Engagement as student ambassadors involved working with their peers, both from the same discipline or subject and from different disciplines and subjects. The activities included idea storming, supporting each other with the organisation of events, group discussions, co-delivery of sessions and assisting with answering questions from students. The benefits of interacting with other student ambassadors were mentioned frequently and those reported varied from gaining valuable knowledge about courses, career pathways, course progressions, students' socio-economic backgrounds and their learning to developing confidence in their public speaking and useful and transferable skills such as teamworking, communication, leadership and social skills.

**School students.** Student ambassadors interacted with a range of students from primary schools to sixth form, college students and adult learners. From interaction with all or some of these groups they felt they had gained valuable experiences and benefits. They reported becoming more aware of the backgrounds of others including their needs, cultures and ways of learning. This had helped them gain confidence when talking to diverse students, to become more empathetic, to develop their interpersonal skills and acquire more understanding of pedagogy, which for some was 'eye-opening' and 'rewarding'.

**School staff.** The most common reported interactions with school staff were those with schoolteachers, who assisted them during tours and visits and from whom student ambassadors received feedback on their

presentations and learned from free conversations with them. Through these types of interactions student ambassadors reported that they developed confidence in talking to professionals.

**Parents and carers.** Student ambassadors interacted with parents, carers and other family members of prospective students when guiding them around the campus, answering their questions and sharing personal experiences with them. The benefit of talking to parents and carers was seen in developing anticipation skills by being aware of potential questions to be considered in their talks, communication skills and confidence in public speaking.

**Outreach team and recruitment teams.** During the activities, student ambassadors were supported by the different members of the outreach and/or recruitment teams that they worked with at events and from whom they received useful information and reflected together on events. Student ambassadors learned from the outreach and recruitment teams about potential questions, how to organise events, about relationships and about communication with students. Collaboration with these university teams gave them more confidence to raise potential concerns about students and in establishing points of contact for any other queries. Through their work with these teams some respondents gained an understanding of the differences between recruitment and outreach staff in their priorities and approaches.

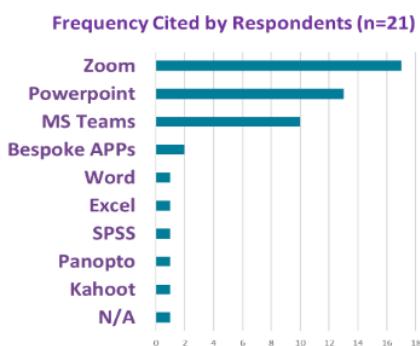
**University lecturers.** The conversations and interactions that student ambassadors had with university lecturers during the activities gave them confidence in talking to academics. They felt inspired by them, found out about career prospects and felt that they had developed an academic network.

**Others.** Some student ambassadors had the opportunity to interact with business leaders, members of the public or third-party companies. This made them feel that they had expanded their views on higher education and careers and had developed their business skills and communication awareness.

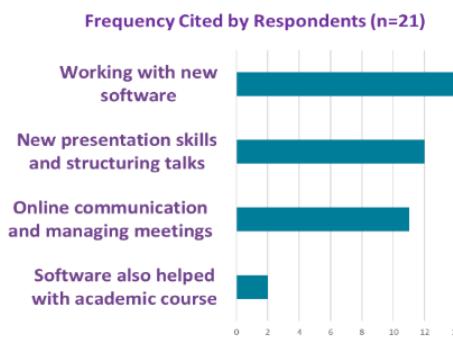
### 3.3 Digital knowledge and skills

During the activities that were undertaken as student ambassadors most respondents reported that they had used technology and software programmes, including PowerPoint, Zoom, WhatsApp, Teams, Panopto, Kahoot and other software programmes to support their presentations and communications (Figure 2). Over half of the 21 respondents reported that they had developed confidence in using technology, digital knowledge and skills, online presentation skills and online meeting management and communication skills, although only two respondents considered this to have helped with their academic course (Figure 3).

**Figure 2.** Software used.



**Figure 3.** Reported learning gain.

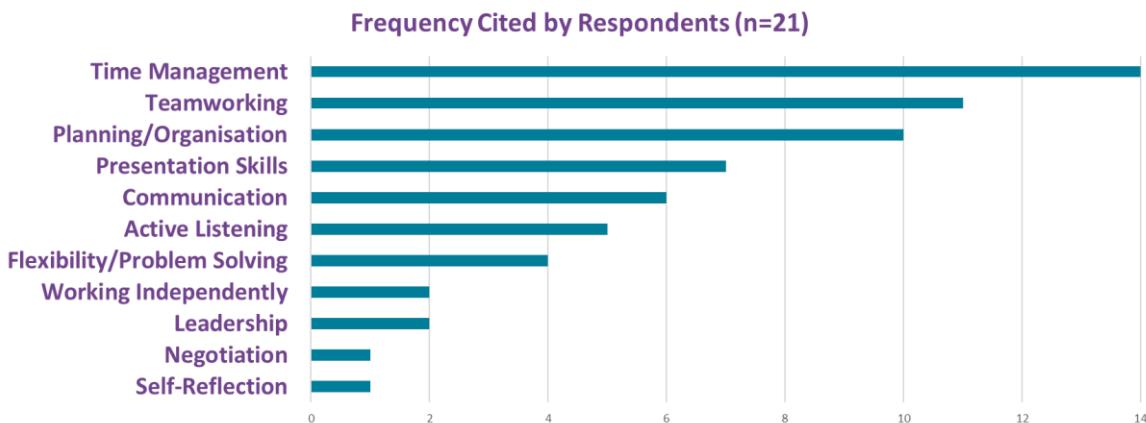


### 3.4 Taking charge of your learning

There were a range of activities that student ambassadors mentioned as contributing to their learning autonomy and leadership skills (Figure 4). The activities that student ambassadors took a lead on were grouped into six sub-themes: outreach activities consisting of open days, tours, taster sessions and school visits; delivering presentations to students; interviewing; career fairs; designing resources and other roles.

**Outreach activities.** During open days activities, tours and taster sessions, student ambassadors took the lead in the design, organisation and leading of tours for single students and those in pairs or groups. They also planned, prepared, presented and supported a diverse range of sessions for students. The benefits that they felt they had gained were related to teamworking skills, leadership skills, communication skills, critical thinking skills (having to take spontaneous and on-site decisions), time management and organisation skills (having to manage time effectively and to deal with time constraints).

**Figure 4.** Skills developed that were considered important to learning autonomy and leadership.



**Delivering presentations.** Student ambassadors described taking charge of preparing and delivering presentations, question and answer sessions, diverse talks on their courses and experiences at university, both face to face and online, as well as taking decisions about content to be included in presentations and talks and managing their time and activities. They felt they had developed autonomy skills, teamworking skills, leadership, organisation, communication and pedagogical skills.

**Interviewing.** Some student ambassadors were directly involved in mock interviews, in giving feedback, answering questions and in mentoring students.

**Career fairs.** Several student ambassadors represented their university at career fairs working independently and answering questions from students and their parents or carers.

**Designing resources.** Some student ambassadors were involved in designing learning templates, slides and interactive activities and described how they learned to effectively organise and manage their time, developed creativity skills and engaging strategies.

**Other roles.** One student ambassador undertook the role of a social carer, by looking after a flat on a residential programme, learning about responsibility, trusting relationships, time management and effective communication.

### 3.5 Initiative and leadership skills

Student ambassadors described many instances where they had used their initiative, took a lead and made decisions independently.

**Leading presentations.** Student ambassadors led and presented activities on their own having to keep the attention of large group of students, dealing with disruptions and unexpected questions, organising and preparing materials in advance and trying to make fair decisions for everyone. Student ambassadors felt that they benefited from these activities in terms of developing critical thinking, initiative, decision making skills, and public speaking skills.

**Leading tours.** Student ambassadors led tours for a diverse range of students including those who required additional assistance, and independently supported and assisted parents and carers with diverse queries. They reported that they learnt to think quickly to adapt the tour to diverse needs (e.g., a parent in a wheelchair and student with learning difficulties), how to remain calm in unexpected situations and think positively when plans did not work out as expected. They also had to deal with distractions on a busy campus, making sure that students stuck to the schedule and so learnt to be flexible, adaptable, patient and supportive. Student ambassadors identified the campus tour as the activity where they most often needed to demonstrate their initiative and leadership skills.

**Emergency situations.** Student ambassadors sometimes had to deal with a wide range of emergency situations including fire alarms ringing in the building where the tour was heading, a student with hearing impairment difficulties, students becoming unwell and fainting, visitors getting lost on transport, online connection issues and more. They learnt to not panic, to keep calm, to calm others, to be organised and to have an additional plan in place to deal with a range of possible unplanned situations. They became aware of the need to pay attention to detail and the importance of empathy, adaptability and flexibility, safeguarding, problem solving and teamworking skills.

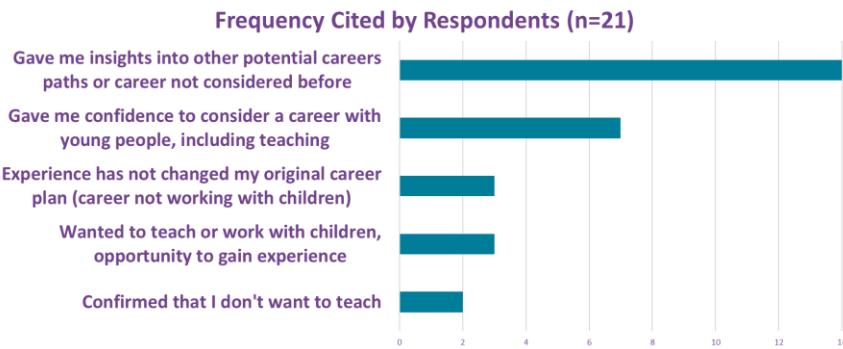
**Support and assistance.** Student ambassadors showed initiative and leadership skills when dealing with critical incidents such as unhappy parents, computer learning, working with their peer student ambassadors or when organising and leading their own stalls at events. They quickly mastered new skills and learnt to keep their calm and reason in critical situations, adjust activities to the needs of their audience and to 'communicate effectively and calmly to other people' and asked for support when needed,

**Other events.** Sometimes, some student ambassadors took charge of the groups assigned to their peer student ambassadors who felt less confident in busy environments, by offering advice and organising groups. Other initiatives involved replanning, giving instructions and explaining them to students, and helping them in expanding ideas.

### 3.6 Your career plans

Involvement in activities gave student ambassador respondents insights that helped them to reflect on and clarify ideas about their future career plans. Of the 21 respondents, 14 discussed how involvement in activities had given them insights into other potential career paths or careers that they had not considered previously (Figure 5). Five sub-themes were used to summarise their experiences with career plans: working with school students, university open days and tours, learning from their own and the teaching of others, career opportunities and other roles.

**Figure 5.** Identified impacts of working as a student ambassador on future career plans.



**Working with school students.** By working with school students in a variety of activities, including presentations, talks, supporting events and projects, student ambassadors discovered their love and passion for teaching or lecturing students or for other professions such as medicine, architecture or widening participation outreach work. Many spoke about their desire to make a difference to the lives of students and being able to help others.

**University open days and tours.** Student ambassadors developed greater confidence and compassion by having opportunities to guide and give advice to school students during campus tours and open days at university. Such opportunities had an impact on their 'mind set' developing confidence and motivation for an educational career or medicine. For some, the activities were 'eye opening', gave them 'food for thought', were 'inspired', were 'rewarding' and made them aware of new possibilities.

**Learning from own teaching and the teaching of others.** Many student ambassadors felt they had learned from their own teaching and from that of others. During their time as student ambassadors, some discovered that they enjoy interacting with different people and their passion for teaching. Others strengthened their passion for their subject and made them reflect more deeply on their degree, further study or other fields. A valuable benefit was seen in opportunities to develop relationships and networking.

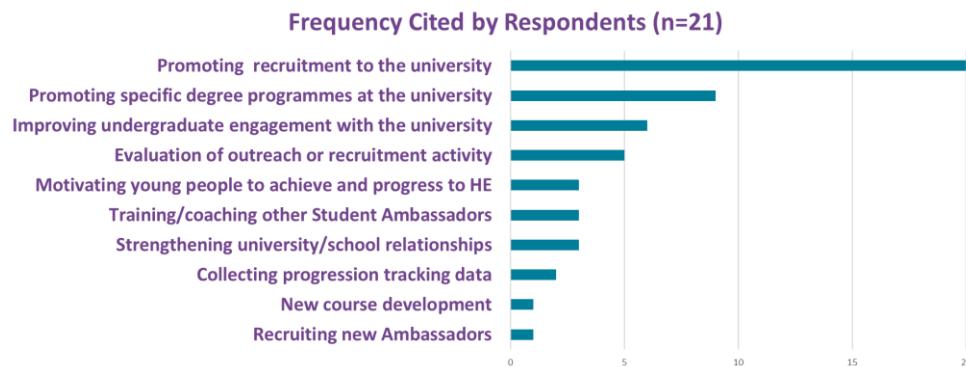
**Career opportunities.** In their role as student ambassadors running stalls at career fairs, talking to students about their interests, talking with academics on career opportunities, or observing sessions, student ambassadors developed awareness about a range of roles and placement opportunities, widened their career prospects, and helped to make more career-informed decisions.

**Other roles.** Leading large groups of students helped student ambassadors discover their leadership potential, to develop communication and networking skills and, for some, a passion for marketing through opportunities to make promotional material.

### 3.7 Contribution to your university

Student ambassador respondents identified a range of ways that their work benefited their universities, with 20 of the 21 respondents considering themselves to have supported recruitment to their institution (Figure 6). The benefits to their university that student ambassador respondents identified were summarised in five sub-themes: open days and tours, delivering sessions/taster sessions, career fairs, reflection and evaluation and other experiences.

**Figure 6.** Contribution that student ambassadors consider they make to their institution.



**Open days and tours.** Because of their closeness in age to school students, student ambassadors reported that they felt school students talked to them more freely about their concerns and worries and asked them questions about university offers, university life and financial support. Therefore, student ambassadors can be argued to be better positioned to promote the benefits of education, progression to higher education, a university and its courses and campus and encourage students to make an application. Student ambassadors described themselves as a 'friendly face', 'mentor or coach' or 'older student'. Through their interactions, talks and sharing their own university experiences with school students, student ambassadors contributed to the university by increasing student aspirations and motivation for enrolling in higher education, making them aware of opportunities and options, increasing their academic outcomes through mentoring, advertising the university offer on the website and providing them with useful university experiences.

**Higher education information and taster sessions.** By delivering sessions to school students, student ambassadors helped in promoting degree courses, in establishing relationships between schools and university, in improving students' learning experiences, in increasing the quality of education outreach, and in making students aware of opportunities that could be available to them.

**Career fairs.** Through their participation at career fairs, student ambassadors contributed to the promotion of their university, by talking to students and in offering advice and guidance. They also contributed to the university through increased motivation regarding their own course progression, retention and completion of studies.

**Reflection and evaluation.** Student ambassadors contributed to the university by helping to increase the quality of the events and learning experiences to make them more attractive and engaging to students. Such contributions included the adaptation of presentations to suit a diverse audience, strengthening relationships between schools and universities and between students and teachers, giving feedback on courses and modules to make them more effective, increasing the amount of student data to support the evaluation of activity, tracking the progress of students and supporting widening participation and access programmes.

**Other experiences.** Some student ambassadors contributed to university through other activities such as coaching peers and so contributed to the increase in quality of student ambassadors, promotion of courses and their university at conferences, the recruitment of new ambassadors and the promotion of positive relationships. They also contributed to the university's values through their own attitude and behaviour.

## 4. Reflections and recommendations

As well as evaluating the quality of the student experience and learning of respondents who had been deployed as student ambassadors, it is intended that the findings of this pilot project will be used to inform the development of a NERUPI survey to assess the benefits of working as a student ambassador.

### 4.1 Student ambassador reflections

The reflections of the participants in this project suggested that working as a student ambassador had many benefits for them. These included positive impacts on their self-esteem and self-confidence, an increase in knowledge about their universities and their sense of belonging and the acquisition of a wide range of skills and experience that they considered important to their learning autonomy, development of leadership qualities and their future career plans. This broadly supported the conclusions drawn from some of the earlier studies cited in the introduction to this report (Baker and Sela 2018; Gannon *et al.*, 2018; Ylonen, 2012; Austin and Hatt, 2005).

Twenty of the twenty-one participants in this project were involved in student ambassador activity that supported and promoted recruitment to their university. One of the interesting points that emerged from their reflections for those involved in the recruitment, training and deployment of student ambassadors was that the range of skills, knowledge and confidence that students can acquire from being involved in campus tours and open day activity should not be underestimated. Often students new to ambassador work are employed on open days and campus tour activity, but the experience that they gain from these roles should be viewed as a foundation that could be further developed into the higher skills that are required for future employment in specialised widening participation, widening access and attainment-raising activity.

### 4.2 Student Ambassador Reflection Tool

Feedback from analysis of the Student Ambassador Reflection Tool responses concluded that each of the seven categories in the Student Ambassador Reflection Tool seemed to be very clear as they are accompanied by many useful prompts which give respondents clear ideas about what experiences they can describe (Appendix A), however, it was suggested that respondents might at times find section 4, 'Taking charge of your learning' and section 5, 'Initiative and leadership skills' confusing because of the closeness of the relationship between these two categories. It was recommended that if the prompts from the two categories were to be turned into questions it would make it easier for respondents to differentiate between them.

After the analysis of responses, it also became apparent that the same type of activity was mentioned in almost every theme, which meant that different benefits were repeatedly found under the same type of activity. For example, during open days, student ambassadors gained different types of knowledge, skills and confidence as well as initiative and leadership skills, awareness of career opportunities and contributing to their university. However, it should also be recognised that the repetitiveness observed in this analysis could be because of the small sample population and the limited range of activities that some respondents engaged with and so had to reflect upon.

## 5. References

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