



# Ditch the Doubt: Evaluating Bespoke Widening Participation Activity

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## Background

HeppSY works with cohorts of students who face additional barriers to progression to higher education (HE), beyond those of other students of the same age. We work with certain students from a UCP postcode, to equip them with the knowledge required to make an informed choice about HE. It became apparent that there are certain groups within those UCP postcodes that face even more barriers despite already being at a disadvantage.

Often these groups face increased barriers or imagined barriers, due to a lack of knowledge of pathways, negative perceptions of HE in terms of 'perceived fit' and sense of belonging and parental influence. This can lead to a lack of confidence and the emergence of imposter syndrome and/or myths surrounding the process.

Ditch the Doubt was developed for UCP students who face additional barriers beyond those of their peers, and ran across 7 centres between March 2022 and June 2022 to 93 students. With a more intensive and bespoke intervention between March and June 2022, the UCP students who participated in this project were expected not to have the confidence to overcome the barriers, and not to access and make the best use of other resources and opportunities open to them.

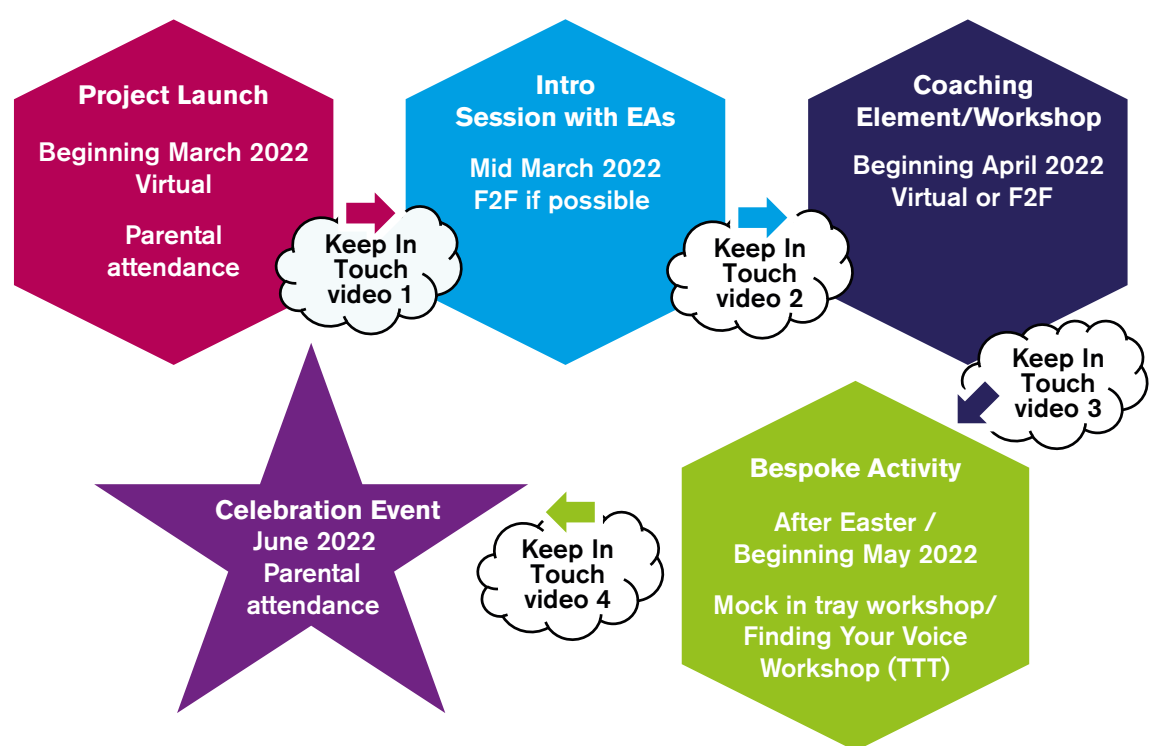


Figure 1: Ditch the Doubt project cycle

The topics covered in the Ditch the Doubt strands were:

- Is it for me?
- How do I get there (pathways)?
- Support available at HE?
- Is it worth it? (Where might it lead)?

The bespoke programmes selected by the 7 centres included **SHE Can**, aimed at high achieving working class girls who need to 'find their voice' and **Just the Job**, aimed at those interested in routes into HE through Higher and Degree Apprenticeships.

## Methodology

To ensure a successful evaluation, the Ditch the Doubt team adopted a mixed approach, incorporating a triangulation design with both qualitative and quantitative elements. Such an approach allowed the evaluators to identify the individual's cognitive change before and after the project and to effectively locate the association between the cognitive change and the specific interventions of the project.

A pre-survey consisting of Likert scales and aligned with the CFE Learner Survey were issued with the programme welcome packs to determine students' HE knowledge, career knowledge, perception of their future selves, academic confidence level, and their likelihood of applying for HE at age 18/19. Qualitative questions were attached to the pre-survey, which was reissued following completion of all Ditch the Doubt sessions.

Rating scales were embedded into the coaching session, which students completed before and after taking part to underpin the survey findings and evaluate impact. These rating scales were later explored further in a series of focus groups.

Three focus groups were completed prior to the end of the 2021/2022 academic year to contextualise quantitative findings.

## Results

31 pre-16 students across 6 centres completed the pre-survey. A further 8 post-16 students completed the survey in 1 centre. The post-survey was also completed by 31 pre-16 students in 6 centres and 1 post-16 student in 1 centre. 13 of these students can be matched across both surveys. 54 students completed the pre- and post-rating scales across 6 centres during their coaching sessions. 24 students from 3 centres attended focus groups.

### Higher Education Knowledge

Prior to engaging with Ditch the Doubt, more than 50% of survey respondents indicated that they knew "nothing" about the financial support available or how much HE would cost. After Ditch the Doubt, 58% of respondents stated they knew 'a little bit' or 'a lot' about the cost of HE and what support they could access.

Although confident in their knowledge of subjects available to study at HE, 48% of students stated they knew 'nothing' of the types of qualifications available to them (such as foundation degrees, or degree apprenticeships). Following the programme, 94% percent of students indicated they knew 'a little' or 'a lot' about the variety of options available to them.

Overall, there was an increase in knowledge across all statements presented in Q2: **'How much do you know about higher education?'** (figure 2).

Q2: How much do you know about HE?	Change from pre- to post- (%)		
	Nothing	A little bit	A lot
The subjects that you could study	-12.90	-3.23	+16.13
The types of course you could take e.g. degree apprenticeship, foundation degree	-41.94	+19.35	+22.58
What student life might be like	-22.58	+6.45	+12.90
How much HE costs	-29.03	+29.03	-3.23
Where to find information about HE	-12.09	+3.23	+9.68
The financial support available	-12.09	+9.68	+3.23

Figure 2: Changes in response to Question 2 of the pre- and post-survey

### Career Knowledge

Following Ditch the Doubt, students had a much greater understanding of how going to HE could impact their future earnings and lead to more opportunities (figure 3).

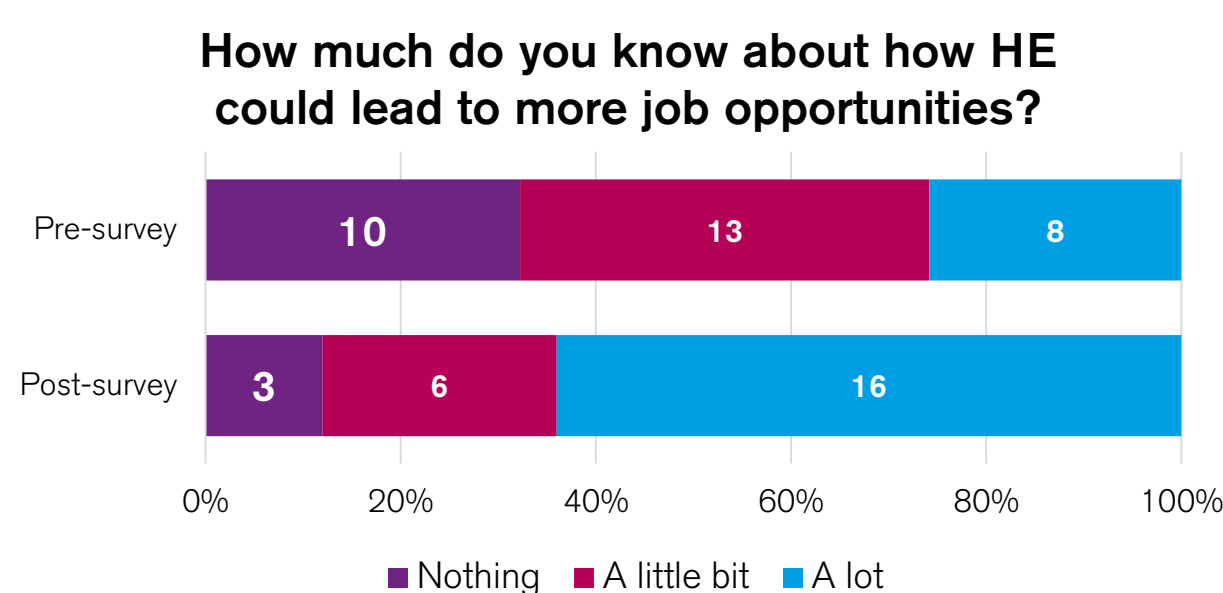


Figure 3: Response to Question 3 Statement 2 of the pre- and post-survey

Focus group participants would have liked more information on managing finances and more practical tasks related to securing employment, such as practice interviews.



### Seeing Your Future Self

The coaching element of the programme was found to have a significant impact on students' perception of their futures. The pre- and post-rating scales indicated a 21% increase in feeling they could trust their own judgement and a 25% increase in positive feelings about their futures. Students had a clearer idea of what student life might be like.



### Academic Confidence

The coaching element of the programme was found to have a significant impact on student confidence. The pre- and post-rating scales indicated an average increase of 24% in their confidence in communicating their strengths and abilities to others and a 26% increase in their feelings of confidence in their ability to achieve things they set their mind to. This was further reflected in their responses to a statement given in question 4 of the survey about HE, "I am confident I could succeed." (figure 4)

A student chose to highlight their confidence in their post-survey response, stating "[Ditch the Doubt] has made me more confident in what I can do to get into higher education."

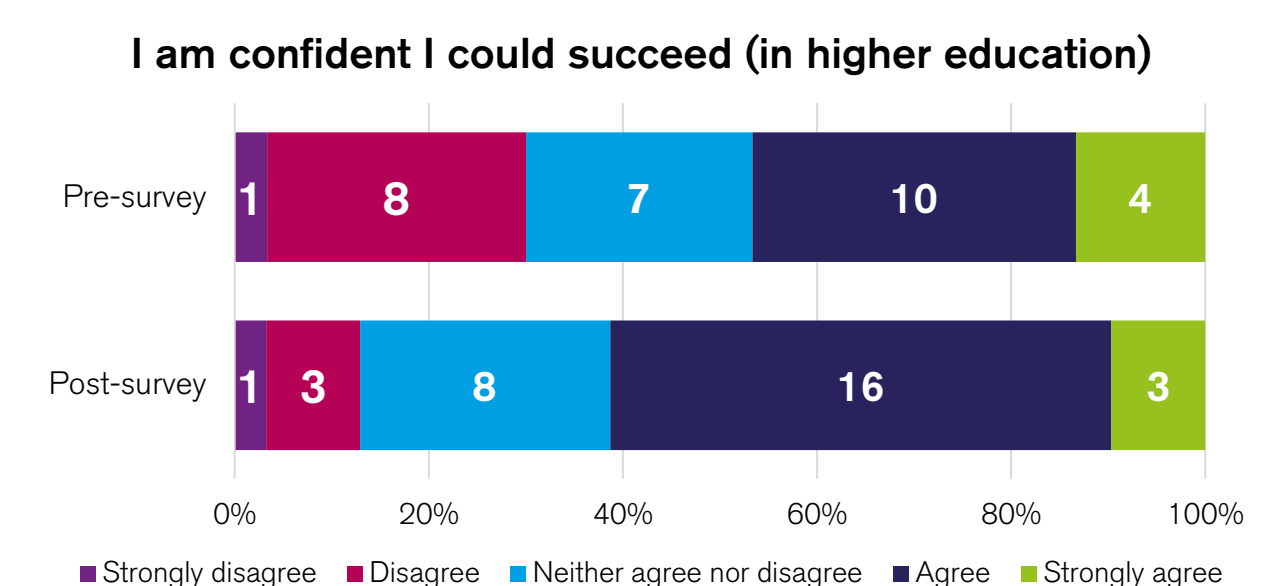


Figure 4: Changes in response to Question 4 Statement 4 of the pre- and post-survey

### Likelihood to Apply for Higher Education at Age 18/19

Students indicated that they felt they would belong in HE and could handle the responsibility at a higher frequency after completing the Ditch the Doubt programme. This was reflected in the qualitative section of the post-survey, where students explicitly stated that the programme changed their plans regarding HE when asked **"Has taking part in Ditch the Doubt changed how you feel about yourself? If so, how?"**

"Maybe as it has inspired me to possibly go to higher education."

"Just made me want to go to higher education."

## Student Feedback

"I think that the most valuable bit was that I have more opportunities when I leave school"

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"I feel more confident in going into higher education"

## Teacher Feedback

"The content was very carefully graded in steps. The approach was very sensitive and encouraging. The workbook provided a useful structure. A very worthwhile session and each individual improvement in confidence was evident as the day progressed."

"I thought the training the students received regarding confidence and communication was of great benefit to them and would be beneficial to all students of a similar age."