



Putting pupils in control

an action research project
exploring progression
opportunities

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National Collaborative
Outreach Programme

search project



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Background: Go Higher West Yorkshire

Go Higher West Yorkshire is a partnership of 12 Higher Education Providers, and we operate the HEFCE-funded National Collaborative Outreach Programme (NCOP) in our region. Across our partners, provision includes a diverse offer of progression opportunities for people of all ages to access Higher Education - including apprenticeships, diplomas and flexible degree programmes alongside more traditional ones. Part of our innovative programme of delivery is to work with cohorts of pupils to encourage them to think positively about their progression options and opportunities.

Anecdotal evidence indicates that progression options are traditionally limited for learners from disadvantaged postcode areas. Limiting factors are believed to be: a lack of information and awareness of opportunities available beyond immediate family or social circles, and restricted evidence-based reference points (parents or siblings') positive personal experiences of progression. We would like to test out these beliefs by working with young people growing up in these communities.

Over to you!

Researching parents/com
views on what you can d
learn school.





Action research with pupils

Our pilot project, with one of our partner schools (Castleford Academy), worked with a school-selected mixed gender group of twelve Year 9 learners to support their development as 'action researchers' charged with exploring options and opportunities available to them when they eventually leave school and progress to the next stage in their lives.

Action research can be described as a 'living inquiry' owing to the way real-life experiences underpin the research; this creates a rich and reality-based foundation upon which to examine progression. The notion of progression has been deliberately broadly presented to our action-researcher group in order that they can explore and examine its focus and meaning within their own families and community groups. In this way, the group could determine and develop appropriate and meaningful definitions of progression.

The format of our project has been to work with an experienced external evaluator and teacher of research methods. Our evaluator developed a suite of materials designed to engage with the pupils in an active way to help them develop their data gathering, collation and analysis skills. Three workshop sessions took place in May and June 2017 which:

- Introduced the project idea of pupils investigating and negotiating their own progression options and opportunities with representatives from their own family and community groups
- Reviewed (at a mid-point) the data collected and made suggestions for further collection and analysis, and
- Combined all data gathered to identify key themes and topics impacting on or affecting progression options.







Working with Castleford Academy

Our action researcher group devised their own survey and data collection tools to help guide and shape the information they collected as part of the project. Their core research question sought views on progression options and opportunities from parents/carers and other family/community members. Questions developed included:

- What do you think I should do after leaving school?
- What are your thoughts on my career choice I'd like to be taking?
- What job do you see me doing?
- How can I achieve the skills I need for my future job?
- Would you prefer I go to college or get an apprenticeship?
- How did your past choices influence how your life is now?
- Do you see me carrying on education after I'm eighteen?
- How could I achieve my goals to get the job that I want?
- What are/What were your aspirations when you were younger?
- Did your GCSE/BTEC Grades factor in to the career choices that you chose/have chosen?
- What type of job do you think would best suit my strengths that I have in current education?

In total our action researcher group collected the views of 50 parents/carers and other family/community members.



”

I found that women are more detailed in the answers they give than men. They have more suggestions to make and link what they say to their own experiences.

Action Researcher

”

My sister told me that University qualifications are useful because they can ensure that you have the best chance of getting a job.

Action Researcher

”

I was told that another member of my family wanted to go to university but they couldn't afford to pay the fees, so he had to get student loans out and stuff to help pay for it, and this were a couple of years ago. So that sort of put me off a bit.

Action Researcher

”

My parents don't want me to make the same mistakes as they did and drop out as early as they did and not be able to get the jobs or like do the things that they want to do.

Action Researcher

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My parents want me to consider an apprenticeship when I leave school because I would be learning while being employed.

Action Researcher



Findings

Comments received as part of the data collection

We analysed the answers and comments we received and put them into ordered themes of importance. We clustered responses into the following areas:

- Discussions about progression are being considered by families and communities at an earlier stage in secondary education than used to be the case. Our action-research group generally felt that this was before Year 9.
- There is some considerable influence from parents/family on choice beyond school – rather than allowing pupils to have a greater say in their own futures.
- There are differing views on benefits of progressing to Higher Education from older and younger generations of family members – older generations (generally) favour working, younger tend to view educational progression as being more important.
- Advice on progression options and opportunities tended to be more detailed and specific from the particular female family/community members interviewed as part of our project than from the male family/community members.
- There was a generally strongly held view that progression to Higher Education was seen as a positive option by family/community members, but few had direct experience of Higher Education themselves.

Views on Castleford

For many of our 'action researcher' group of Year 9 pupils, their research found that parents and/or guardians had a positive view of the local area, but they also recognised the limited career, job or other progression opportunities it could provide. This honest recognition was not viewed (by our researcher group, or the parent or guardians they interviewed) as a restriction device on progression.

Progression to College/University

Almost every parent or guardian consulted by our action research group suggested that progression to college or university would be a positive move forward. For some parents and guardians, their advice about progression was based on their own positive experiences of moving from school to college and then to work. This provided a strong positive influence on our action researcher group, as evidenced by this analysis: "people said either go to college, go to university or both. The people I asked also went to college or university themselves".

Subject choice and interest

Subject choice for progression to college and university was directed by personal interest (and influenced by parental or guardian views on suitability). Enjoyment and interest in the subject area were far more important than other factors such as salary. Ultimately, careers were considered as a factor by some of the group but, for most, structuring decisions on progression in this way was not important.

College and University visits

Visits to colleges and universities organised by the school in collaboration with other providers have helped to shape and crystallise intentions to continue educational journeys, beyond school, for our group. Whilst they demonstrated a knowledge and understanding of the broad difference in academic and vocational programmes on offer at institutions, this became more limited when evaluating the differences between Russell Group and Post-1992 Universities. In addition, for some, distinctions between universities became blurred and unclear – with the institutional name 'University of Leeds' often being used to describe sites and provision offered by Leeds Beckett University and Leeds Trinity University.

Financial considerations

Financial or maintenance considerations that are present when progressing to college or university formed part of the discussions for our action researcher group. They indicated that they were aware of costs being involved in progression, but these were not instrumental in current attitudes towards progression. In relation to this, the majority of the group requested that more provision and guidance material could be produced (on costs and financial support available) for those wishing to progress to college or university.

MEN

women

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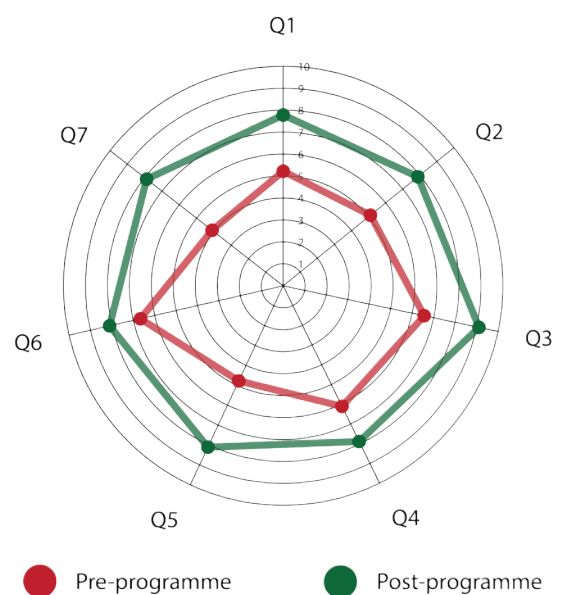
Impact on our researchers

Data analysis using the Research Toolkit Learning Gain tool presents developments or gains made during this action research programme.


The Learning Gain tool uses pre- and post-activity data to explore impact from the perspective of our action researcher group. In our analysis we devised a number of statements related to the programme – linked to progression options and opportunities and subject-specific content covered on the programme.

The largest gains made during the programme (in terms of percentage change) relate to the ability to frame and develop research-related questions, using research evidence to support arguments, confidence in presenting thoughts and ideas, and being more knowledgeable about options available when leaving school.

Statement area	Pre-Prog.	Post-Prog.	Change	% Change
(1) I know about the options available to me when I leave school	5.22	7.78	2.56	49% ▲
(2) I am able to clearly present my thoughts and ideas to others in a group, and I feel confident about doing this.	5.11	7.89	2.78	54% ▲
(3) I know what my parents / guardians think about me going to University or College after I leave school.	6.56	9.11	2.56	39% ▲
(4) I can see where research skills might be useful for my school work.	6.11	7.89	1.78	29% ▲
(5) I know how to use research evidence (or data) to support what I want to say.	4.78	8.11	3.33	70% ▲
(6) I am interested in carrying on studying after I leave school.	6.67	8.11	1.44	22% ▲
(7) I know how to develop a clear research question and collect data relating to it.	4.11	7.89	3.78	92% ▲





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