



GO HIGHER
West Yorkshire

Collaborative subject taster experiences: 2022/23 Impact Evaluation

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A Go Higher West Yorkshire evidence report

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This report is the first in a series on collaborative taster events delivered by Go Higher West Yorkshire. Future reports in the series will be published on the GHWY website at www.gohigherwestyorks.ac.uk/impact.

Abstract:

In the summer term of 2023, a programme of 4 Collaborative Taster Days took place, bringing together staff from multiple higher education providers across West Yorkshire with industry professionals to deliver events aimed at giving learners more information about careers and higher education (HE) opportunities in specific industries. Almost 150 learners with backgrounds underrepresented in higher education took part, and survey results show that they have an increased knowledge of HE options and career options. In addition, after attending the event at a HE campus, some learners felt an increased sense of belonging in a HE environment.

Acknowledgements

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Events were planned and supported by staff in the Go Higher West Yorkshire (GHWY) central team. The events were planned and delivered by Outreach Officers based across GHWYs member HEPs and facilitated by GHWY staff based in partner schools.

We are particularly grateful for the time and input of staff at the member institutions who contributed to these events. We also thank the student ambassadors who supported these events.

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Introduction to Go Higher West Yorkshire and Uni Connect

Go Higher West Yorkshire (GHWY) is a partnership of 13 higher education (HE) providers across West Yorkshire which seeks to reduce inequalities in HE access and success. This is facilitated by a dedicated central team of staff who enable collaboration in relation to county-wide widening participation initiatives and members' access and participation plan (APP) activity. Each HE provider subscribes to Go Higher West Yorkshire as a member institution.

Our 13 HE members are:

- Bradford College
- University of Bradford
- University Centre Calderdale College
- University of Huddersfield
- Kirklees College
- Leeds Conservatoire
- University of Leeds
- Leeds Arts University
- Leeds Beckett University
- Leeds College of Building
- University Centre Leeds
- Leeds Trinity University
- University Centre Wakefield College (Heart of Yorkshire)

GHWY delivers the Uni Connect programme in West Yorkshire. Uni Connect is the national programme through which higher education providers work together, and with partners, to improve equality of opportunity in access to higher education. Funded by the Office for Students (OfS) since 2019, Uni Connect is the latest in a series of nationally funded 'collaborative outreach' programmes that have operated in England since the early 2000s (1).

As an organisation we work closely with schools, local authorities, employers and the West Yorkshire Combined Authority to enable true collaboration.

To find out more about our collaborative initiatives, current projects and strands of work, including the Uni Connect Programme, please visit our website: www.gohigherwestyorks.ac.uk.

You can also follow us on [LinkedIn](#) and on X @GoHigherWY.

Executive Summary

The Collaborative Taster Days (CTD) programme is a series of subject specific events, each based on a different HE campus, aiming to increase learners' knowledge of specific industries and the careers and routes into these industries, both in and out of Higher Education. At each event, Higher Education Providers (HEPs), local employers, and wider industry partners collaborate to introduce learners to a range of subject specialisms and the different HE options in the area.

Key findings

Learners had improved knowledge of Higher Education after taking part in a Collaborative Taster Day

Some learners had an improved sense of belonging in an HE environment after taking part in a Collaborative Taster Day

Learners had a better understanding of whether HE will be part of their future after taking part in a Collaborative Taster Day

Learners had improved knowledge of specific industries after taking part in a Collaborative Taster Day.

Recommendations

Increase learners' knowledge of HE and specific industries by delivering experiential subject taster events

Investigate why some learners feel less comfortable in a HE environment after taking part in GHWY collaborative taster days

Tailor experiential subject taster events to increase learners' sense of belonging

Introduction to GHWY

Collaborative Taster Days

The Collaborative Taster Days (CTD) programme is a series of subject specific events, each based on a different HE campus, aiming to increase learners' knowledge of specific industries and the careers and routes into these industries, both in and out of higher education. In doing so, it also aims to broaden learners' horizons for their future and give them a better idea of their options.

CTDs started life as an online resource in the academic year 2020/21 (2), at a time when the possibilities for delivering in-person activities were limited. An in-person event was successfully delivered in 2021/22, and finally in the summer of 2023 a full programme of four CTDs was delivered in relation to the following vocational sectors:

- Health and Social Care
- Science, Technology, Engineering, and Maths (STEM)
- Policing
- TV and Media.

At each event, higher education providers (HEPs), local employers, and wider industry partners collaborated to introduce learners to a range of subject specialisms and the different HE options in the area.

The events were designed in collaboration with our HEP members together with local businesses and industry partners. Events prioritise Leeds City Region skills growth areas (3) and the needs of our participating schools and FE colleges. As well as increasing knowledge of specific industry sectors, it is also expected that in taking place on a HE campus, it will lead to an increased sense of belonging for learners in a HE environment.

Topic	Location	Date	Year Group	Collaborators
Health and Social Care	Leeds Beckett University	May 2023	10	Bradford College, Leeds Beckett University, University of Huddersfield
Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths	University of Bradford	May 2023	10	University of Bradford, Kirklees College, University of Huddersfield, University of Leeds
Policing	Leeds Trinity University	June 2023	12	Leeds Trinity University, West Yorkshire Police
TV & Media	Leeds City College	July 2023	9	Leeds City College, Leeds Arts University, Leeds Conservatoire

Over the four events, a total of 149 students took part, 133 of which we have demographic data for. Of these, 20.3% of participants were eligible for free school meals, 17.3% were from a Black, Asian, minority ethnicity or mixed ethnic background, and 78.9% had a UC target postcode.

Intended programme outcomes

The programme of Collaborative Taster Days was designed to achieve the following outcomes for participating learners:

- Increased understanding of possible careers in the specific focus industry.
- Increased knowledge of higher education options and courses which relate to the specific industry
- Increased familiarity with an HE environment and as such will have an increased sense of belonging.

Findings

Knowledge of Higher Education

KEY FINDING: Learners had improved knowledge of Higher Education after taking part in a Collaborative Taster Day

Learners were asked before and after taking part in the CTDs whether they would agree with the statement 'I am aware of the Higher Education options that are available to me' (Figure 1). Before the events, a total of just over 60% of learners felt that they agreed or strongly agreed¹. After the event, this had increased to 86.41%². For both the TV & Media and the Policing events, no learners at all disagreed with the statement after the event.

This shows that taking part in the event had a clear positive impact on learners' knowledge of higher education options, and that this impact was particularly clear at the TV & Media CTD. One possible reason for this could be that TV & Media as a topic is less closely associated with HE compared to, for example, STEM subjects, so learners may have been less aware to start with of HE options in this field – the TV & Media day is also the one with the highest percentage of learners saying that they 'disagreed' or 'strongly disagreed' with this statement in the pre-event survey³.

However, there could be other factors involved that are not clear from this survey result, and the particular success of this event at improving knowledge of HE, as well as any differences in the delivery of the event compared to the others, should be considered when planning future CTDs.

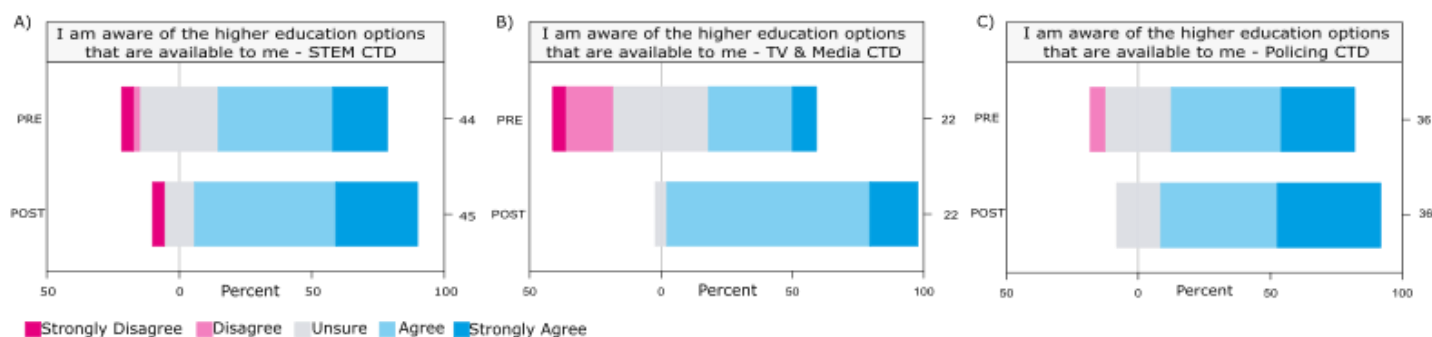


Figure 1 Participant responses from pre and post surveys at different events to the statement 'I am aware of the higher education options that are available to me.' A) Survey results from the STEM CTD. B) Survey results from the TV & Media CTD. C) Survey results from the Policing CTD.

¹ 63.63% at the STEM event, 40.91% for the TV & Media event, and 69.45% at the Policing event.

² 84.44% for the STEM event, 95.45% for TV & Media, and 83.33% for Policing

³ 22.7%

KEY FINDING: Some learners had an improved sense of belonging in an HE environment after taking part in a Collaborative Taster Day

Several of the questions in the survey were aimed at measuring the learners' sense of belonging within an HE environment – learners were asked whether they agreed with the statements '*Higher Education is for me*' and '*I feel like I would be comfortable studying in Higher Education*' before and after the events. In addition, learners at the STEM and TV & Media CTDs were asked an additional question in the post-event survey only – '*I feel I would enjoy being a university student*'.

For the two questions that were asked both before and after the event, in almost all cases there was a small rise in the proportion of learners who agreed or strongly agreed with the statements, of less than 10%.

There are two exceptions to this. The first was the response of learners to the statement '*Higher Education is for Me*' at the TV & Media CTD, where there was a rise in agreement of more than 30% (Figure 2a). The other exception was the statement '*I feel I would be comfortable studying at Higher Education*' at the STEM event, where there was a small fall in the proportion of learners agreeing with the statement – however, looking at the raw data (Appendix B), this is due to a small increase in the number of learners taking the post activity survey, and doesn't actually represent a fall in the number of learners agreeing with the statement. It also occurs with the background of already high agreement with the statement – 77.5% of learners at the STEM event agreed or strongly agreed that they would feel comfortable studying in Higher Education even before taking part in the event (Figure 2b). In addition, there is a reasonable shift from 'Agree' to 'Strongly Agree' – 4.5% of the learners strongly agreed before taking part, compared to 13.6% after taking part.

We can conclude that whilst the event may have allowed some learners to feel a greater sense of belonging in a HE environment, the impact was not particularly large in this area. As before, the most effective event in this area was the TV & Media day.

One question was only asked as part of the post-activity survey- '*I feel I would enjoy being a university student*'. This question showed high levels of enthusiasm about the university experience, particularly amongst the learners at the STEM CTD, where more than 80% of learners either agreed or strongly agreed.

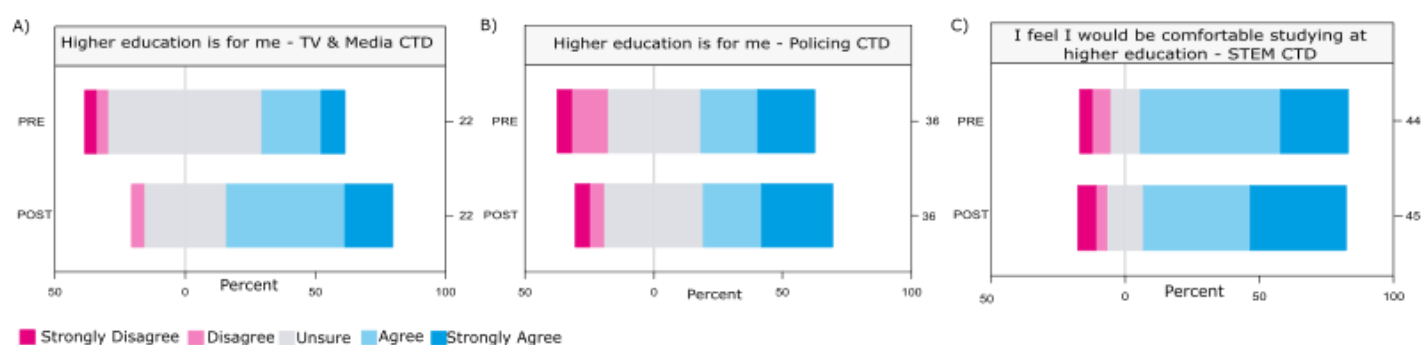


Figure 2 Participant responses from pre and post surveys at different events to statements about sense of belonging. A) Survey responses to the statement 'Higher education is for me' from the TV & Media CTD. B) Survey responses to the statement 'Higher education is for me' from the Policing CTD. C) Survey responses to the statement 'I feel I would be comfortable studying at higher education' from the STEM CTD.

KEY FINDING: Learners had a better understanding of whether HE will be part of their future after taking part in a Collaborative Taster Day

In many of the questions asking about sense of belonging in a HE environment, alongside the small increase in learners answering 'agree' or 'strongly agree' after taking part in the event, there was also an increase in learners answering 'disagree' or 'strongly disagree' – for example, the percentage of learners saying they strongly disagreed with the statement *'I feel I would be comfortable studying at higher education'* went from 2.8% to 5.6% after taking part in the Policing CTD (Figure 3b), and the percentage that disagreed with the same statement went from 4.5% to 9.1% after taking part in the TV & Media CTD (Figure 3c). Similarly, the percentage of learners who strongly disagreed or disagreed with the statement *'Higher education is for me'* went from 4.5% to 11.4% after taking part in the STEM CTD (Figure 3a).

This could be understood to show a negative impact on the sense of belonging in an HE environment for some learners. However, in all of these cases, we also see a corresponding decrease in the percentage of learners responding to these statements with 'unsure'. Therefore the result could also be understood to represent learners feeling more able to make an informed decision about whether HE is the right path for them now that they have more knowledge of what a HE environment is like. Evaluation of future iterations of the CTD programme should investigate why some learners feel less comfortable in an HE environment after taking part in the programme, and should attempt to establish whether there are any common characteristics between learners who have experienced a positive impact on sense of belonging, and likewise between those that have experienced a negative impact. The programme can then be designed to better cater for both groups

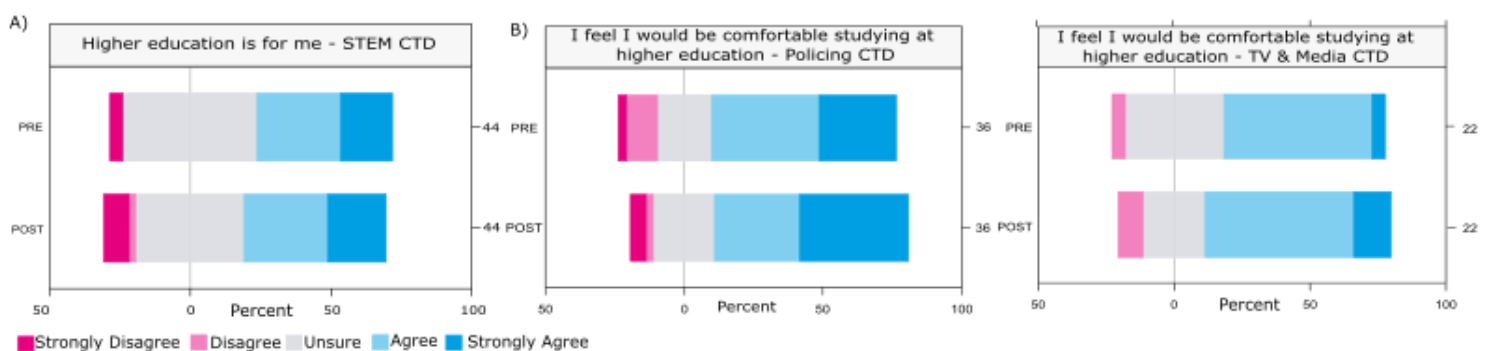


Figure 3 Participant responses from pre and post surveys at different events to statements about sense of belonging.' A) Survey responses to the statement 'Higher education is for me' from the STEM CTD. B) Survey responses to the statement "I feel I would be comfortable studying at higher education' from the Policing CTD. C) Survey responses to the statement 'I feel I would be comfortable studying at higher education' from the TV & Media CTD.

KEY FINDING: Learners had improved knowledge of specific industries after taking part in a Collaborative Taster Day.

Each of the CTDs was based around a particular industry: Health and Social Care; Science, Technology, Engineering and Medicine; TV and Media; and Policing. In each case, learners were asked before and after the event if they agreed with statements about these industries specifically. When asked whether they agreed with the statement *'I understand how industries collaborate across a project'* the number of learners who agreed or strongly agreed went from 63.3% to 100% after taking part in the TV & Media CTD, and from 59.1% to 95.6% after taking part in the STEM CTD (Figure 4a & b). When asked about the statement *'I feel comfortable working to a brief, presenting my design and justifying my decisions'* the percentage agreeing or strongly agreeing went from 63.3% to 86.6% after taking part in the TV & Media CTD (Figure 4b) and from 45.4% to 64.4% for the STEM event.

At the Policing CTD, learners were asked to what extent they agreed with the statement *'I am aware of the route to work within Policing or jobs linked with the Police'*. The proportion of learners who agreed with this statement went from 63.9% before taking part in the event to 88.8% afterwards (Figure 4d).

It is clear that taking part in any of the CTDs led to learners having increased knowledge of the industries involved.

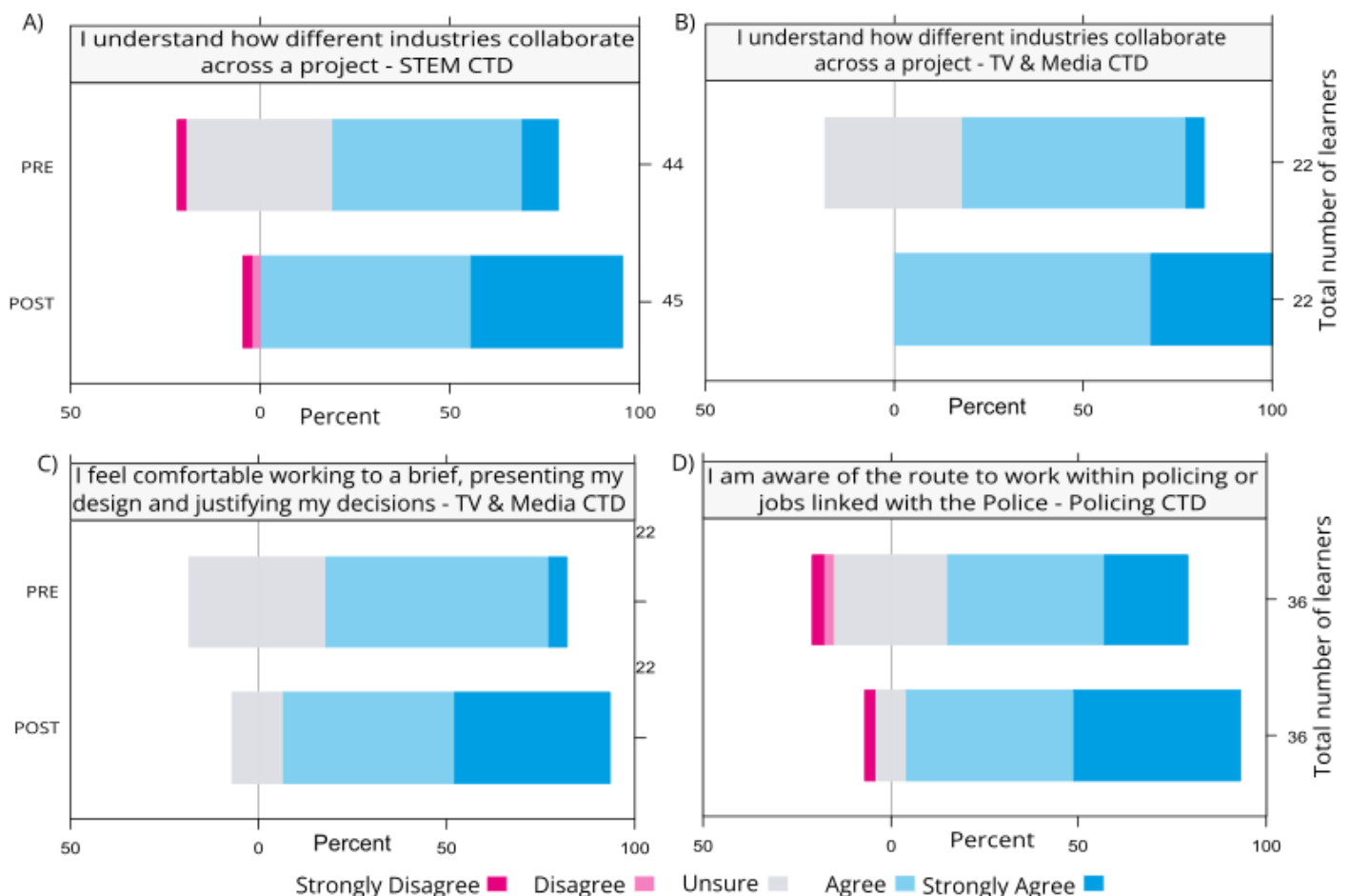


Figure 4 Participant responses from pre and post surveys at different events to statements about industry knowledge A) Survey responses to the statement 'I understand how different industries collaborate across a project' from the STEM CTD. B) Survey responses to the statement 'I understand how different industries collaborate across a project' from the TV & Media CTD. C) Survey responses to the statement 'I feel comfortable working to a brief, presenting my design and justifying my decisions' from the TV & Media CTD. D) Survey responses to the statement 'I am aware of the route to work within Policing or jobs linked with the police' from the Policing CTD.

Recommendations

Increase learners' knowledge of HE and specific industries by delivering experiential subject taster events

Our findings show clear success in building learners' knowledge, both of higher education and of specific careers and industries, during collaborative taster day experiences. This supports learners' ability to make informed decisions about their future in an engaging, experiential way. Future iterations of GHWY's CTD programme (and any other programmes/organisations with similar intended outcomes) should build on this success.

Investigate why some learners feel less comfortable in a HE environment after taking part in GHWY collaborative taster days

Evaluation of future iterations of the CTD programme should investigate why some learners feel less comfortable in an HE environment after taking part in the programme, and should attempt to establish whether there are any common characteristics between learners who have experienced a positive impact on sense of belonging, and likewise between those that have experienced a negative impact, to establish how the programme can be designed to better cater to both groups.

Tailor experiential subject taster events to increase learners' sense of belonging

Although some improvements in sense of belonging could be seen after taking part in the programme, these improvements were small, particularly for the STEM event. Development of future iterations of GHWY's CTD programme (and any other programmes/organisations with similar intended outcomes) should focus on how learners' sense of belonging could be improved as part of its approach to learner engagement.

References

1. Dryden M. Developing a theory of change for a future national collaborative outreach programme.
2. Collaborative taster days - Go Higher West Yorkshire [Internet]. [cited 2024 Jan 24]. Available from: <https://gohigherwestyorks.ac.uk/what-we-do/teachers-advisors-carers/collaborative-taster-days/>
3. West Yorkshire Combined Authority. Local Skills Report: Leeds City Region [Internet]. 2022 Jan [cited 2025 Feb 19]. Available from: <https://www.westyorks-ca.gov.uk/media/7885/local-skills-report-2022-final-pdf.pdf>

Appendix A: Methods

Surveys

Pre and post surveys were completed at the STEM, Policing and TV and Media CTDs. Each student was given a survey to complete before and after taking part in the event. The surveys were designed by the evaluation team at GHWY, and consisted of 6 statements which learners were asked to rate on a five point scale of 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree'. The questions were designed to measure three things: the learners' knowledge of HE options and therefore their ability to make informed decisions; how learners feel about higher education, and their sense of belonging in an HE environment, and specific knowledge about the subject and career trajectory covered by the Collaborative Taster Day.

Analysis and Visualisation

Data was analysed using RStudio and visualised using RStudio (2021.09.0+351) and Inkscape (1.2.2). Raw data can be found in appendix B, raw data in excel or CSV formats and code is available upon request.

Appendix B: Survey Questions & Raw Data

Table 1 STEM Collaborative Taster Day

STEM													
question		Pre-event Survey						Post-event Survey					
		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
I understand how different industries collaborate across a project	Count	1	0	17	22	4	44	1	1	0	25	18	45
	%	2.3	0.0	38.6	50.0	9.1	100.0	2.2	2.2	0.0	55.6	40.0	100.0
I feel comfortable working to a brief, presenting my design and justifying my decisions	Count	9	6	9	18	2	44	4	6	6	19	10	45
	%	20.5	13.6	20.5	40.9	4.5	100.0	8.9	13.3	13.3	42.2	22.2	100.0
I feel I would be comfortable studying at Higher Education	Count	2	3	5	23	11	44	3	2	6	18	16	45
	%	4.5	6.8	11.4	52.3	25.0	100.0	6.7	4.4	13.3	40.0	35.6	100.0
I am aware of the Higher Education options that are available to me	Count	2	1	13	19	9	44	2	0	5	24	14	45
	%	4.5	2.3	29.5	43.2	20.5	100.0	4.4	0.0	11.1	53.3	31.1	100.0
Higher Education is for me	Count	2	0	21	13	8	44	4	1	17	13	9	44
	%	4.5	0.0	47.7	29.5	18.2	100.0	9.1	2.3	38.6	29.5	20.5	100.0
I feel I would enjoy being a university student	Count							3	1	7	18	16	45
	%							6.7	2.2	15.6	40.0	35.6	100.0

Table 2 TV & Media Collaborative Taster Day

TV & Media													
		Pre-event Survey						Post-event Survey					
question		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
I understand how different industries collaborate across a project	Count	0.0	0.0	8.0	13.0	1.0	22.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	15.0	7.0	22.0
	%	0.0	0.0	36.4	59.1	4.5	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	68.2	31.8	100.0
I feel comfortable working to a brief, presenting my design and justifying my decisions	Count	0.0	0.0	8.0	13.0	1.0	22.0	0.0	0.0	3.0	10.0	9.0	22.0
	%	0.0	0.0	36.4	59.1	4.5	100.0	0.0	0.0	13.6	45.5	40.9	100.0
I feel I would be comfortable studying at Higher Education	Count	0.0	1.0	8.0	12.0	1.0	22.0	0.0	2.0	5.0	12.0	3.0	22.0
	%	0.0	4.5	36.4	54.5	4.5	100.0	0.0	9.1	22.7	54.5	13.6	100.0
I am aware of the Higher Education options that are available to me	Count	1.0	4.0	8.0	7.0	2.0	22.0	0.0	0.0	1.0	17.0	4.0	22.0
	%	4.5	18.2	36.4	31.8	9.1	100.0	0.0	0.0	4.5	77.3	18.2	100.0
Higher Education is for me	Count	1.0	1.0	13.0	5.0	2.0	22.0	0.0	1.0	7.0	10.0	4.0	22.0
	%	4.5	4.5	59.1	22.7	9.1	100.0	0.0	4.5	31.8	45.5	18.2	100.0
I feel I would enjoy being a university student	Count							0.0	1.0	12.0	7.0	2.0	22.0
	%							0.0	4.5	54.5	31.8	9.1	100.0

Table 3 Policing Collaborative Taster Day

Policing													
question		Pre-event Survey						Post-event Survey					
		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
I feel my future lies within Policing or jobs linked with the Police	Count	2.0	2.0	7.0	10.0	15.0	36.0	1.0	2.0	6.0	11.0	16.0	36.0
	%	5.6	5.6	19.4	27.8	41.7	100.0	2.8	5.6	16.7	30.6	44.4	100.0
I am aware of the route to work within Policing or jobs linked with the Police	Count	1.0	1.0	11.0	15.0	8.0	36.0	1.0	0.0	3.0	16.0	16.0	36.0
	%	2.8	2.8	30.6	41.7	22.2	100.0	2.8	0.0	8.3	44.4	44.4	100.0
I feel I would be comfortable studying at Higher Education	Count	1.0	4.0	7.0	14.0	10.0	36.0	2.0	1.0	8.0	11.0	14.0	36.0
	%	2.8	11.1	19.4	38.9	27.8	100.0	5.6	2.8	22.2	30.6	38.9	100.0
I am aware of the Higher Education options that are available to me	Count	0.0	2.0	9.0	15.0	10.0	36.0	0.0	0.0	6.0	16.0	14.0	36.0
	%	0.0	5.6	25.0	41.7	27.8	100.0	0.0	0.0	16.7	44.4	38.9	100.0
Higher Education is for me	Count	2.0	5.0	13.0	8.0	8.0	36.0	2.0	2.0	14.0	8.0	10.0	36.0
	%	5.6	13.9	36.1	22.2	22.2	100.0	5.6	5.6	38.9	22.2	27.8	100.0



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