

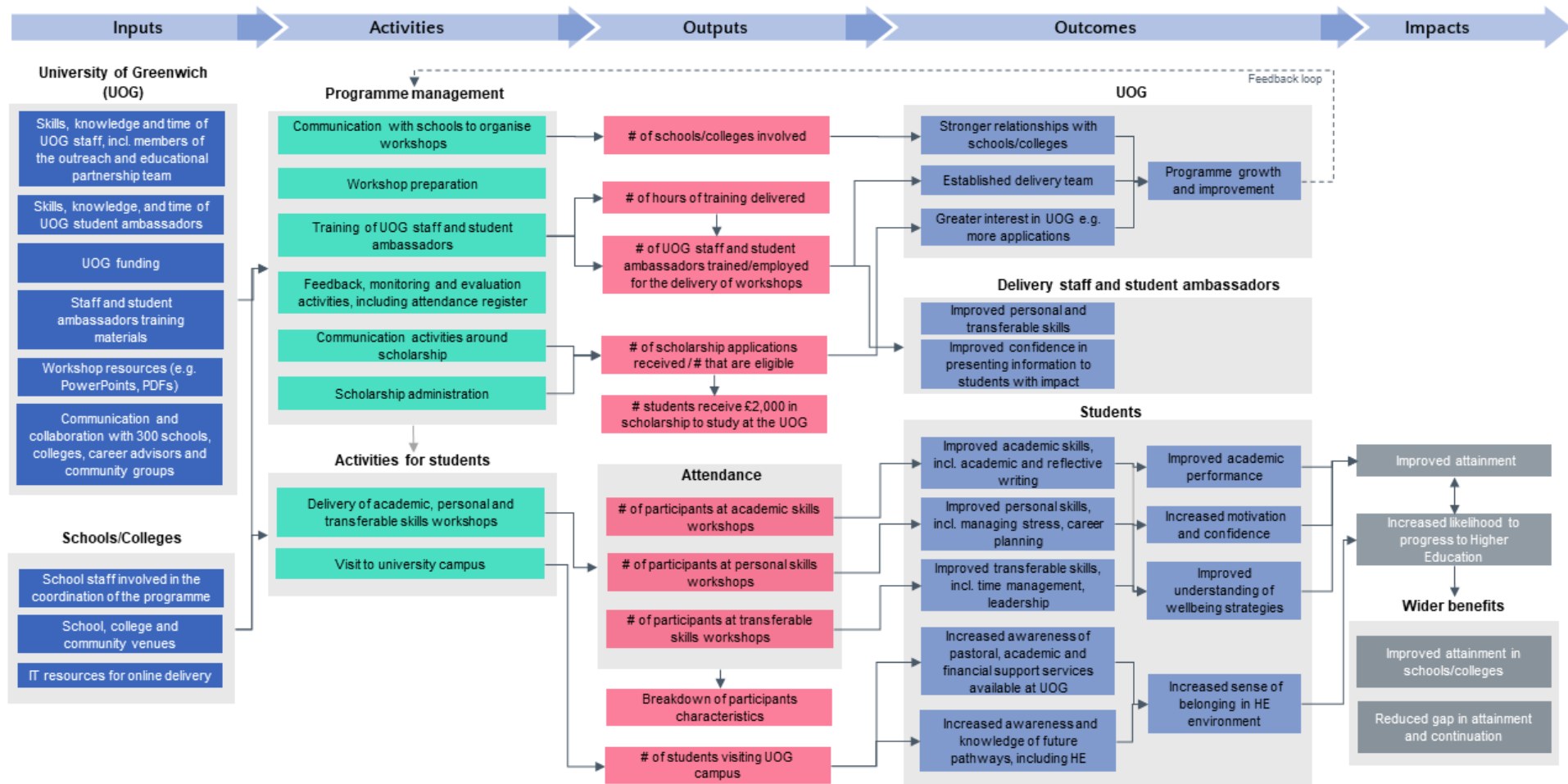
Theory of Change for Attainment Raising Initiatives GREat Skills Programme

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Contents

Why is this intervention being run?	3
Who is the intervention for?	3
What is this intervention?	3
What is this intervention expected to achieve?	4
Who is delivering the intervention?	5
How is this intervention delivered?	5
Where is the intervention delivered?	5
How many times will the intervention be delivered? Over how long?	5
What assumptions underpin the programme?	8
What are the key risks to delivery?	8
What are the causal pathways?	8
Data collection opportunities	10

Theory of Change diagram



Why is this intervention being run?

Universities and other Higher Education Providers can play a role in reducing gaps in continuation and attainment through widening participation activities. University of Greenwich (UOG) is committed to raising awareness about and promoting the benefits of Higher Education (HE) and reducing potential barriers to accessing HE, particularly for underrepresented groups.

The GREAt Skills programme, as part of the UOG strategy, features a series of workshops that aim to develop students' academic, personal, and transferable skills. With a particular focus on groups underrepresented in HE, this intervention seeks to help students succeed in their current programmes of study (i.e. improving attainment), support them with their transition into university, and offer them guidance on their future career plans.

This intervention draws on existing evidence which demonstrates learning strategies focused on developing study skills and softer skills can contribute to attainment raising.

Who is the intervention for?

GREAt Skills workshops are designed for students from UOG targeted schools and colleges. They are suitable for all Level 3 students, such as those who are completing A levels, BTEC, IB, T Levels, access courses or equivalent.

All students from these targeted schools and colleges can participate fully in these workshops. This includes high proportions of IMD Q1 and 2 students and/or POLAR 4 Q1 and 2 students.

What is this intervention?

Working with over 300 schools and colleges, GREAt Skills offers academic, personal and transferable skills workshops delivered by UOG-trained student ambassadors and staff. Initially designed for students taking the EPQ to improve their academic skills and attainment, the intervention has since evolved and now includes workshops that help develop students' soft skills and raise aspirations.

Inputs

In order for this intervention to be delivered successfully, sufficient resources (inputs), including financial and human, are needed from UOG and partner schools/colleges.

First, UOG provides funding for the programme to cover both operational and staffing costs. Equally, human resources, such as skills, knowledge and time of UOG staff (including members of the outreach and education partnership team) and student ambassadors are key. Staff and student ambassadors need to have the appropriate skills and knowledge to develop and deliver the workshops and ensure they are suitable and appropriate. Other resources from UOG include existing training materials to train staff and student ambassadors plus the workshop resources such as handouts, presentations, etc.

The programme also relies on existing communication and collaboration with schools, colleges, career advisors and community groups. The programme often builds on existing relationships, which is valuable in planning workshops to meet the needs and challenges faced by students.

Linked to the above, contributions from partner schools, colleges and communities are also expected. Specifically, schools, colleges and community rooms and venues for in-person delivery are needed, as well as IT resources for online delivery. Additionally, school staff are needed to support the coordination of the programme, which requires effective and timely communication with UOG.

Activities

The activities for this intervention are divided into two strands. These include the management of the programme and activities for students.

Management of the programme includes communication, training, preparation, and evaluation activities. Specifically, UOG works collaboratively with schools/colleges to organise and plan the workshops (see [Assumptions 1 and 2](#)). This, along with workshop preparation and training of UOG staff and student ambassadors (see [Assumption 3](#)), is key to developing and delivering workshops that are appropriate and relevant. As part of the training, student ambassadors attend and observe the delivery of a workshop, and once they have familiarised themselves with the content, they deliver the workshop themselves.

Feedback and evaluation activities provide valuable insights about what works well and less well during workshops (see [Assumption 4](#)). These include monitoring activities and managing the attendance register.

UOG also manages communications about its £2,000 scholarship offer for students participating in multiple UOG outreach activities during A levels/Level 3, for example, comms about the application process.

The second strand of activities includes academic, personal and transferrable skills workshops delivered to students. This includes 7 types of academic skills workshops, 7 types of personal skills workshops, 5 types of transferrable skills workshops, and facilitated visits to the UOG campus (see [Assumption 8](#)). Further detail on the types of workshops is below:

- The **Academic Skills workshops** include the following courses: Choosing your question, Selecting & Evaluating Sources, Referencing & Avoiding Plagiarism, Reflective Writing, Effective Presentations and Academic Writing.
- The **Personal Skills workshops** include the following courses: Managing Stress, Developing Resilience, Independent Learning, Understanding Feedback, Revision Techniques, Critical Thinking, Digital Literacy, and Careers Planning.
- The **Transferrable Skills workshops** include the following courses: Problem Solving, Active Listening & Communication, Attention to detail, Time Management, and Leadership.

What is this intervention expected to achieve?

This intervention is expected to influence a range of outcomes and impacts for UOG, delivery staff and student ambassadors, and participating students.

Outcomes

Outcomes for UOG

It is anticipated that delivering the GREat Skills programme will further **strengthen UOG's relationships** with its targeted schools and colleges. Linked to this, communications about the UOG scholarships are expected to generate **more (scholarship) applications to UOG**, thus generating greater interest in UOG (see [Assumptions 5 and 6](#)).

Together, these are expected to lead to the **programme's growth and improvement**. This is further supported establishing an experienced delivery team by training UOG staff and student ambassadors.

Outcomes for delivery staff and Student Ambassadors

It is expected that staff and student ambassadors receiving training and delivering the workshops will benefit by developing their **professional skills, improving their confidence to present information to students**, and interest in supporting students.

Outcomes for Students

Workshops are expected to **improve students' academic, personal, and transferrable skills**. The skillset acquired by students will depend on the type of workshops they have attended (see [Assumption 7](#)). Together, it is expected that these skills will lead to **improved academic performance** in their current studies, increased **motivation and confidence** and **improved understanding of wellbeing strategies**.

Campus visits are expected to lead to students' **increased knowledge about support services at UOG** – including pastoral, academic and financial support – as well as increased **awareness in future pathways** including progression to HE. In turn, these can contribute to students' having an increased sense of **belonging in a HE environment**.

Impacts

Improvements in academic performance, confidence, and wellbeing are expected to **improve attainment**. Assuming students have an interest in pursuing HE, improved sense of belonging in HE is expected to **increase the likelihood that students progress to HE**. These two longer-term impacts often inform one another as well.

By improving attainment of students from disadvantaged backgrounds, the programme could contribute to **improving overall attainment at school/college level** and **reducing the attainment and continuation gap**. However, it is important to note that many factors influence these potential wider benefits, and the programme would likely only be one small contributing factor.

Who is delivering the intervention?

The intervention is delivered by members of staff from the UOG's Outreach and Educational Partnerships teams as well as student ambassador role models. All staff and student ambassadors are trained by the UOG.

How is this intervention delivered?

Workshops are delivered face-to-face in a group setting, with each group consisting of at least 30 students.

Where is the intervention delivered?

This intervention is delivered both online and in-person. Face-to-face workshops take place in the partner schools and campus visits feature tours around the UOG campus in central London.

How many times will the intervention be delivered? Over how long?

Workshops are delivered throughout the year. Their length can vary depending on schools' requests and availability, but they are typically 1-hour long. The number of workshops delivered to each school is also dependent on factors such as demand and availability of staff.

Will the intervention be tailored?

There are some evaluation activities in place for students to provide feedback on the usefulness of the sessions as well as on what could be improved. The feedback surveys are then assessed regularly and used to design and tailor future workshops. However, the intervention does not provide one-on-one support based on the needs of any particular student. Instead, they are designed with the needs of a particular student group in mind.

How will implementation be optimised?

Several assumptions must be met to ensure that the intervention is optimised, and its effects maximised. First, having fit-for-purpose venues for the workshops can greatly enhance student experience. This is because the workshops are typically held with larger groups and having the appropriate physical space and equipment can both foster engagement and improve delivery.

Additionally, it is also important for students to provide effective feedback after the workshops. Constructive suggestions and feedback means that the workshop materials can then be adapted.

What assumptions underpin the programme?

1. UOG receives sufficient guidance from schools to ensure their workshops' content is relevant to students' needs.
2. Right contacts are in place to support with organising the workshops. This could include receiving the appropriate support for IT, venue booking, etc.
3. There is a sufficient number of staff and student ambassadors (with the appropriate set of skills and training) to deliver the intervention.
4. Students who attend these workshops provide sufficient and meaningful feedback so that the content of workshops can be tailored according to their needs.
5. Workshops allow UOG to raise awareness of the scholarship offered to students attending several outreach activities.
6. Students are able to apply for a scholarship and are eligible.
7. There are enough students attending the workshops and students are fully engaged.
8. Schools have funding and staff resources available to support campus visits.

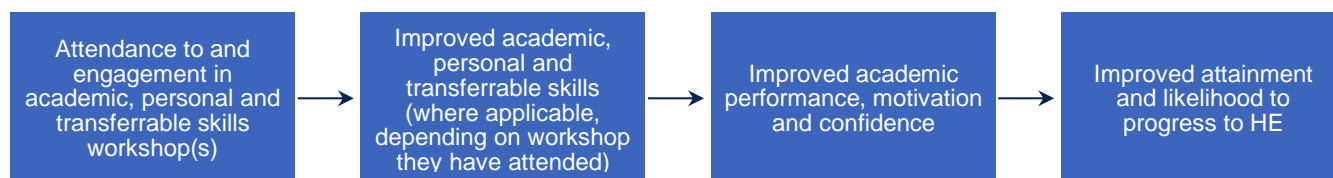
What are the key risks to delivery?

1. Lack of accessibility to and understanding of the scholarship will prevent some students from applying despite being eligible.
2. Since workshops are not tailored to individual needs, they might not be relevant to all students attending/participating.
3. Holding virtual workshops (to larger groups) are at risk of IT failures. Late start coupled with bad connections means that time is often limited.
4. Misunderstanding/lack of communication between stakeholders and partnerships are not conducive to managing expectations and communicating needs.

What are the causal pathways?

Causal pathways explain how the programme activities are expected to lead to the anticipated outcomes and impacts. This section outlines the key causal pathways reflected in the programmes' Theory of Change and presents existing evidence to support them. These causal pathways are based on the assumptions and observations made by the UOG team participating in the design and delivery of the programme, as well as on data collected through their monitoring and evaluation activities, and on the underlying evidence base available. Please note, however, that the evidence presented here is not exhaustive.

Causal Pathway 1

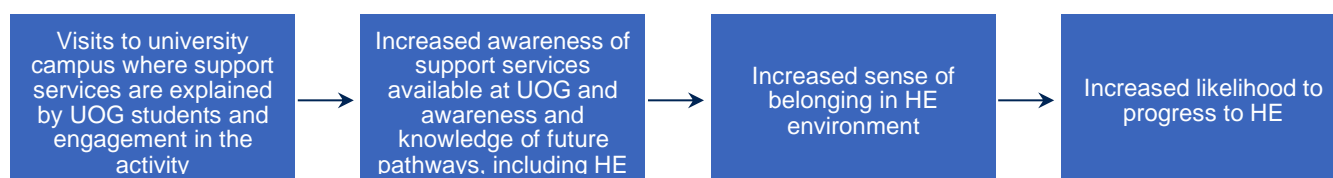


This causal pathway hypothesises that by attending and engaging in the different workshops, students will have improved academic, personal and/or transferrable skills – depending on the workshop(s) they attended. Through the development of these skills, it is anticipated that students will have improved academic performance (e.g., by pupils applying the skills developed in the workshops in their lessons). Simultaneously, improvements in skills are expected to improve their motivation and confidence. Together, this pathway aims to improve pupils’ attainment and increase their likelihood to progress to HE. However, for this to happen in the context of this intervention, workshops have to be tailored to the needs of the student group and different assumptions have to be fulfilled (see [Assumptions 1, 2, 3, 4, and 7](#)).

According to [TASO’s Rapid Evidence Review](#), the strength of evidence for activities to develop soft and study skills is emerging, as there is evidence that general study skills interventions contribute significantly to attainment yet the impact of these types of interventions delivered by HEPs on pupil attainment has not been systematically evaluated. Therefore, further research and data collection is needed to confirm whether this causal pathway holds true and leads to improved attainment.

However, there is good evidence that shows prior academic attainment is associated with access to HE (Office for Students, 2022)¹.

Causal Pathway 2



This causal pathway hypothesises that by visiting the UOG campus and engaging with Student Ambassadors – who explain the different UOG support functions and guide students around the campus – pupils increase their awareness and understanding of services available at UOG and increase their knowledge of future pathways, including HE. This is expected to lead to an increased sense of belonging

¹ Office for Students (2022). Schools, attainment and the role of higher education. Available [here](#).

in a HE environment as students can experience it first-hand. An increased sense of belonging is expected to contribute to an increased likelihood to progress to HE.

This pathway is supported by existing evidence that suggests that employing Student Ambassadors to provide information, guidance, and support to school pupils is effective and positive (see [TASO's Rapid Evidence Review](#)). Several studies have outlined that the reason why ambassadors are credited with much success is their ability to transfer “hot knowledge” (Austin and Hatt, 2005)² that comes from informal and unofficial sources. Some studies on programmes that involved campus visits also showed that these activities were positively associated with pupils’ knowledge of most aspects of HE and student life and progression³. Evidence on the effect of campus visits on learners’ intention towards HE is still mixed, but further evidence of a positive impact is emerging, therefore further research is still needed to assess whether this causal pathway holds true.

Data collection opportunities

This section outlines the different data points that are currently being collected by University of Greenwich and that can be used to assess the programme’s performance against anticipated outputs, outcomes and impacts. It also provides recommendations on future data collection opportunities where gaps have been identified.

Outputs

University of Greenwich currently collects **monitoring information** that can be used to assess the outputs of the programme. This includes the number of schools/colleges involved in the programme, number of UOG staff and student ambassadors trained and employed for the delivery of the workshops, and number of scholarship applications received and awarded. UOG also registers attendance to workshops and campus visits, which allows the University to assess how many students have attended each workshop type. UOG produces **monthly and annual reports**, which include the number of participants with underrepresented characteristics. This information is collected through the Higher Education Access Tracker (HEAT) membership.

Outcomes

As mentioned above, University of Greenwich is currently delivering a **short survey** to collect self-reported information on the impacts of workshops on students’ skills. The survey is currently delivered only at the end of the workshops and is kept to under 10 questions. Despite its short length, the University faces challenges collecting evidence given low response rates. UOG also collects **qualitative feedback** from students and school staff after each workshop.

The below summary box provides some recommendations on data points that could be collected to assess whether the anticipated outcomes have been achieved.

² Austin, M. and Hatt, S. (2005). The Messengers are the Message: A Study of the Effects of Employing Higher Education Student Ambassadors to Work with School Students. Available [here](#)

³ Patel R., Bowes L., (2021) Third independent review of impact evaluation evidence submitted by Uni Connect Partnerships. Available [here](#).

Recommendations for future data collection:

*Conducting short **pre- and post- workshop surveys** to assess whether students' confidence and motivation as well as their academic, personal, and transferrable skills have changed over time (self-reported). For students who attend campus visits, short surveys could also include questions on their awareness and understanding of the services provided by UOG (e.g. pastoral, academic and financial support services), as well as their perceptions of the university environment (e.g. sense of belonging). UOG could explore using TASO's Widening Participation Questionnaire (can be requested [here](#)) which consist of questionnaire scales aimed to measure intermediate outcomes associated with Higher Education access and success.*

*Conducting **topic tests or progress tests** to assess changes in knowledge and skills, which would complement self-reported results. Where possible, it is recommended to conduct a baseline test so that change over time can be captured – though this is likely to depend on the nature of the delivery in each school.*

In order to achieve higher response rates, Greenwich University could request support from participating schools to administer the surveys and ensure students understand the value of completing the surveys and the difference this can make to improve future workshops. Surveys could be delivered through different means, such as online through QR codes or on paper.

*Conducting short **pre- and post- workshop surveys and collecting qualitative feedback** to assess delivery staff and student ambassadors' confidence in their personal, transferrable and presentation skills.*

In order to assess whether participants' academic performance has improved, UOG could use datasets available on HEAT, which provides insights on outreach participants' educational outcomes, such as exam attainment.

Impacts

The assessment of the programme's long-term impacts is often more difficult to incorporate into monitoring and evaluation activities given their long-term nature. As described above, one option would be to set up Data Sharing Arrangements with schools to track participants' academic attainment over time. The assessment of other long-term impacts such as education pathways (e.g., whether they progress to HE) or career development would require longer-term follow-up with participants using primary or secondary data. One option available that UOG already uses is **HEAT**, which allows them to check participants' progression (more described in the box below).

Overall, a future impact evaluation with a counterfactual⁴ is needed to assess the effectiveness of the programme and whether it achieves the intended outcomes and impacts.

Recommendations for future data collection:

*HEAT members have access to data and reporting from the **HEAT Track**, an ongoing longitudinal tracking study whereby outreach participants are tracked through a range of administrative datasets to provide data showing their educational outcomes. HEAT members receive three HEAT Track reports annually which include information on exam attainment at GCSE and A-level or equivalent, as well as Higher Education progression, which can be used to assess the educational pathways participants have chosen after finishing school.*

Future evaluations should assess whether pupil-level attainment and progression data can be accessed for pupils who took part in the programme as well as a comparator group who did not.

⁴ For more information on evaluation methods, please visit TASO's Evaluation Methods guidance, available [here](#)