

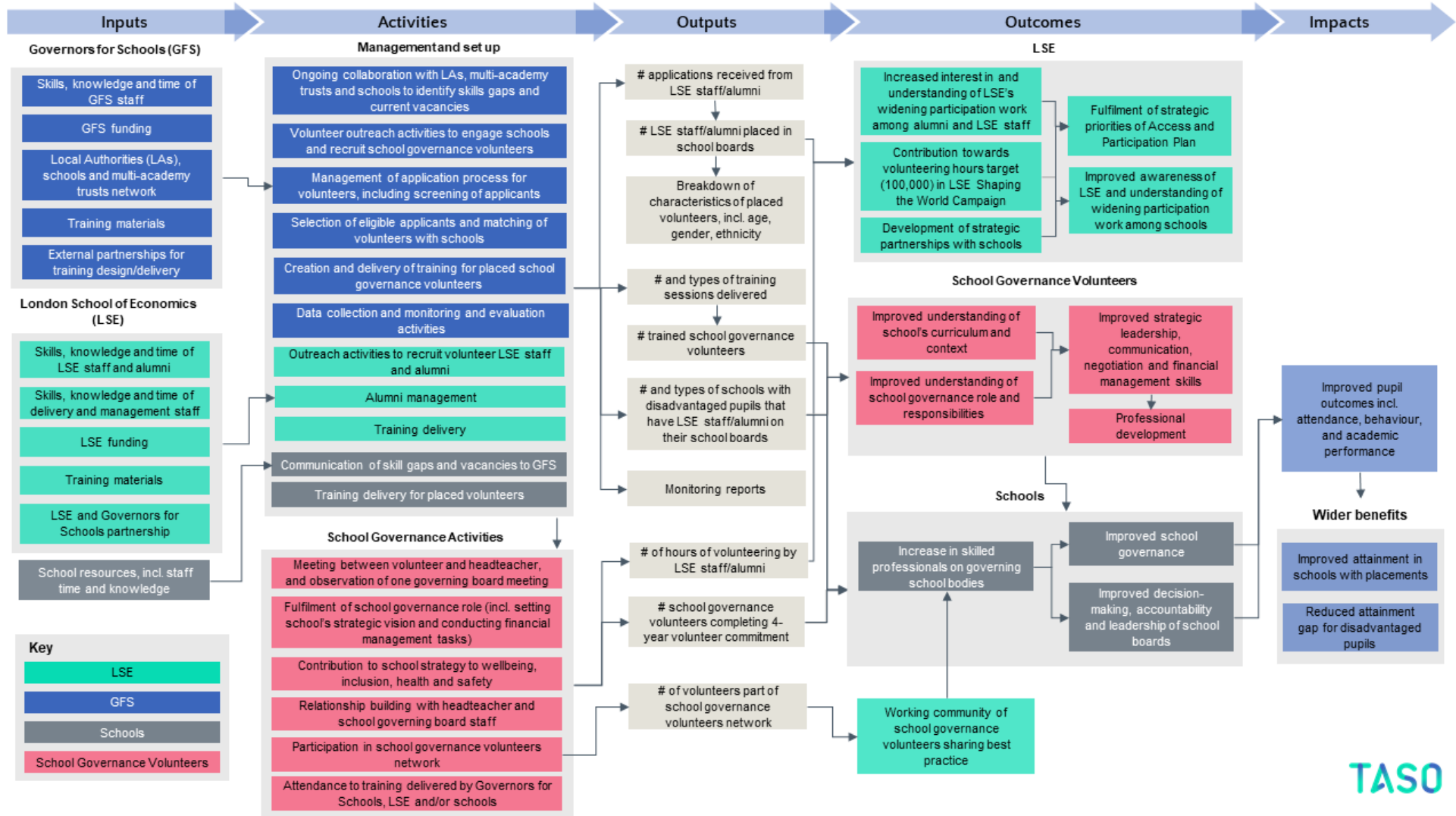
Theory of Change for Attainment Raising Initiatives School Governors Scheme

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Theory of Change diagram



Why is this intervention being run?

This intervention is based on existing evidence that effective school governance and leadership are critical to driving school improvement. However, many schools, particularly those in disadvantaged areas and underperforming schools, struggle to recruit volunteers with the necessary skills and expertise for taking on a school governance role.

This intervention aims to recruit and place London School of Economics (LSE) staff and alumni into school governance roles in England and Wales in partnership with Governors for Schools (GfS). The initiative seeks to reduce governance skills gaps mainly in disadvantaged areas, support underperforming schools, and contribute to improved school outcomes, including pupil attainment.

Who is the intervention for?

The School Governors Scheme supports schools across England and Wales, from maintained schools to Multi-Academy Trusts, and mainly targets schools in disadvantaged areas and underperforming schools.

What is this intervention?

Drawing on the linkage between good governance and good pupil outcomes/performance, this intervention involves recruiting and placing LSE staff and alumni into school governance roles in schools across England and Wales. These placements are expected to reduce governance skills gaps mainly in disadvantaged areas and contribute to improved school and pupil outcomes.

Inputs

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

Specifically, inputs required from GfS include skills, knowledge, and time of GfS staff to manage and coordinate the programme as well as funding. It also requires coordination and support from Local Authorities, schools, and Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs) networks to identify skill gaps and vacancies, and external partnerships for the design and delivery of training for placed school governance volunteers. Other inputs include existing training materials to support volunteers.

LSE is expected to provide skills, knowledge, and time of LSE staff to coordinate the programme and support the recruitment of volunteers, as well as time and skills of LSE staff and alumni that apply for school governance roles. Other inputs include funding and training materials. A key input needed to ensure the successful delivery of the intervention is the working partnership between LSE and GfS (see [Assumption 1](#)) and sufficient capacity from both.

Lastly, school resources are often needed to communicate school board vacancies and needs to GfS, as well as to onboard volunteers.

Activities

Activities for this intervention are categorised into those delivered by LSE, GfS, school governance volunteers, and schools. Specifically, GfS are responsible for liaising and managing the ongoing collaboration with Local Authorities (LAs), MATs, and schools to identify skills gaps and current vacancies in school boards. Schools, MATs and LAs are expected to communicate their vacancies and needs by completing a form on the GfS website (see [Assumption 2](#)), who then lead the recruitment of volunteers based on schools' needs.

In order to engage schools and recruit school governance volunteers, GfS delivers a range of volunteer outreach activities targeted to either schools or volunteers, including presentations, social media campaigns, and headhunting activities. These outreach activities are complemented with further outreach campaigns delivered by LSE to engage, recruit and encourage their staff and alumni to become school governance volunteers (see [Assumption 3](#)). LSE also leads on promoting the opportunity and tracking its uptake through its alumni management processes.

GfS manages the application process for volunteers, which includes reviewing applications, selecting those that meet the eligibility criteria, and matching them with schools, based on the schools' needs and volunteers' skills (see [Assumption 9](#)). Once the matching has been done, schools' headteachers and school governance volunteers are expected to meet to confirm they are happy with the allocation, and the school governance volunteer is provided with the opportunity to attend and observe one governing board meeting.

GfS also deliver training for volunteers, who are able to access e-Learning and online training resources through the GfS website. Schools and LSE may also deliver specific training for placed volunteers.

Once volunteers have been placed in school boards, they are expected to fulfil their role (see [Assumption 4](#)) which involves working with other board members to plan the school's strategic direction, oversee the school's financial performance, and hold the headteacher and school leadership to account. School governance roles also involve challenging existing processes to drive school improvement in different areas such as wellbeing, inclusion, health and safety. School governance volunteers are also expected to join and contribute to a school governance volunteers' network to share best practice and experiences with other volunteers (see [Assumption 5](#)).

Finally, GfS are responsible for the monitoring of the programme, which involves collecting data on the number of volunteers placed and the schools that have filled their vacancies (see [Assumption 6](#)). Anonymised information on the number of LSE volunteers placed in schools is then shared with LSE so that the university can monitor its staff and alumni engagement in school boards, which contributes to their volunteer hour commitments. LSE also captures information on engagement with the alumni network, which will be used to assess the performance of the initiative.

What is this intervention expected to achieve?

This intervention is expected to achieve a range of outcomes and impacts for LSE, school governance volunteers, and schools involved in it.

Outcomes

Outcomes for LSE

By having LSE staff and alumni fulfilling their roles as school governance volunteers and sharing experiences (see [Assumption 5](#)) about it with colleagues and other staff, other LSE alumni may show **interest in participating or contributing to LSE's widening participation work**. Staff and alumni taking part in the initiative will contribute to the target of 100,000 volunteering hours as part of LSE's Shaping the World Campaign. At the same time, LSE school governance volunteers establishing and strengthening relationships with schools as part of their role can contribute to LSE's **development of strategic partnerships** with schools and ultimately **improve awareness of the university and widening participation work**.

By having LSE staff involved in volunteering activities and receiving monitoring information from GfS (e.g., number of LSE staff/alumni placed in school boards), LSE is expected to **fulfil the strategic priorities** of its Access and Participation Plan.

Outcomes for School Governance Volunteers

Placed volunteers attending the training sessions and accessing training material offered by GfS are expected to have an **increased understanding of what a school governance role** entails and the associated responsibilities. The training and first-hand experience as school governance volunteers is expected to increase volunteers' **strategic leadership, communication, negotiation and financial management skills** (see [Assumption 7](#)), which can in turn increase their and support their **professional development**.

Volunteers, who are anticipated to work together with schools' leadership teams, are expected to **improve their understanding of the schools' context** (e.g., resource challenges faced, pupil's characteristics) and curriculum, and be able to better **support school governance and the schools' strategic direction**.

Outcomes for schools

The intervention is expected to contribute to **more skilled and diverse professionals in governing school bodies**. By understanding the schools' needs and context, contributing to the planning of the school's strategic direction and overseeing the school's financial performance, volunteers can support schools **improve their overall governance, decision-making, accountability, and leadership** (see [Assumption 8](#)).

Impacts

Assuming volunteers placed in school boards have effectively fulfilled their role as school governance volunteers (i.e. engaged and committed school governance volunteers that participate in the schools' decision-making and understand the school and pupil needs), the intervention is expected to lead to **improved pupil outcomes**, including **attainment**. This is expected to happen as school governing bodies will be able to manage resources efficiently to support pupils' needs, helping them progress in education.

By improving attainment of pupils mainly from disadvantaged backgrounds, the programme could **contribute to 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 managed and coordinated by members of staff from LSE in collaboration with GfS. GfS lead on recruiting and training LSE staff and alumni to fulfil school governance volunteer roles.

How is this intervention delivered?

The recruitment and engagement of schools and volunteers, as well as the application process, matching of volunteers with schools, and training of volunteers is conducted virtually online.

School governance volunteers are typically expected to attend the school board meetings in person, though a small number of roles are remote.

Where is the intervention delivered?

The programme coordination, promotion and recruitment of the programme is delivered on campus and virtually via LSE networks. GfS training for volunteers is typically online/virtual. Staff and alumni recruited for school governance roles as well as the schools involved are based across England and Wales.

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

Once the programme starts, the recruitment of volunteers and matching of volunteers with schools is anticipated to take place throughout the academic year. LSE staff and alumni would be able to apply to school governance volunteer roles at any time.

Once volunteers have been placed, they are expected to fulfil their role for 4 years.

Will the intervention be tailored?

This intervention is generally not tailored to participants though the governance volunteer role can vary depending on the school context. GfS volunteers should take responsibility for their engagement with the training materials available online, and they should collaboratively agree with school boards on their role and responsibilities.

How will implementation be optimised?

There are several strategies that could be followed to ensure the intervention is optimised and effective. First, it would be desirable that LSE governance volunteers remain in their role and fulfil their 4-year volunteer commitment. This would allow volunteers to develop a dynamic understanding of the school's context and needs, which should support their ability to more effectively support school decision-making and governance. By staying in their role, they also offer stability to schools and encourage relationship building. Secondly, having flexible LSE staff who are supported by line managers can also strengthen the impact of this programme, as they would have more time and interest to accommodate to their new role.

What assumptions underpin the programme?

1. LSE and GfS have adequate resources to deliver the programme and they have an effective and working partnership.
2. Local Authorities, schools, and academies collaborate with GfS to communicate school needs and vacancies.
3. Communication and recruitment activities reach the right audience and lead to a sufficient number of applications being submitted to fill school vacancies.
4. School governance volunteers are committed to their role and are able to travel to schools to attend board meetings.
5. School governance volunteers share their experiences with other colleagues, LSE's staff or alumni and contribute to the network.
6. School governance volunteers and corresponding schools are willing and able to contribute to monitoring and evaluation activities by providing feedback.
7. Training offered to placed school governance volunteers is effective in improving skills relevant for their role (e.g., strategic leadership, financial management, negotiation skills) and volunteers access the training.
8. School governance volunteers are able to make effective contributions to school boards and their involvement in the board leads to better governance and leadership, which translate into better-run schools.
9. School governance volunteers placed in school boards through the programme fill the skills gaps present in the school board.

What are the key risks to delivery?

1. LSE's strategic priorities changing can lead to LSE shifting the focus of its programmes.
2. Lack of capacity from LSE's staff and alumni to engage in the programme can lead to a reduced interest in volunteering or committing to a 4-years role.
3. Long recruitment processes can lead to some volunteers withdrawing from the programme. Equally, those who are interested may not apply due to the uncertainty revolving around onboarding dates and time commitment.
4. Some of the geographically disadvantaged areas might be remote and difficult to travel to. Inaccessibility coupled with the time it takes to travel may deter volunteers from signing up to this programme.
5. Lack of resources in schools (e.g., staff or budget) can complicate the improvement of the schools' governance, impact the retention and development of skilled governance volunteers, and hinder

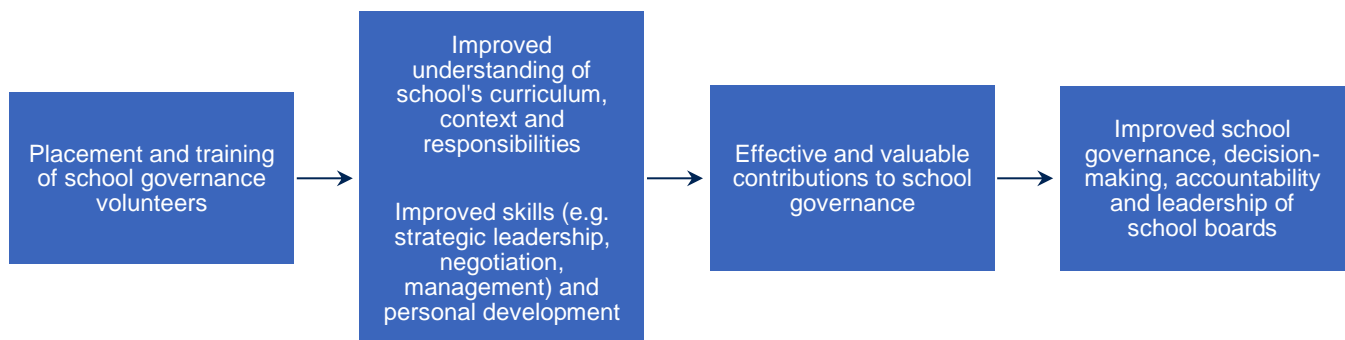
positive changes in the schools' curriculum and direction that can affect the achievement of improved pupil outcomes.

6. Difficult school contexts can challenge the fulfilment of anticipated impacts.

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 LSE 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



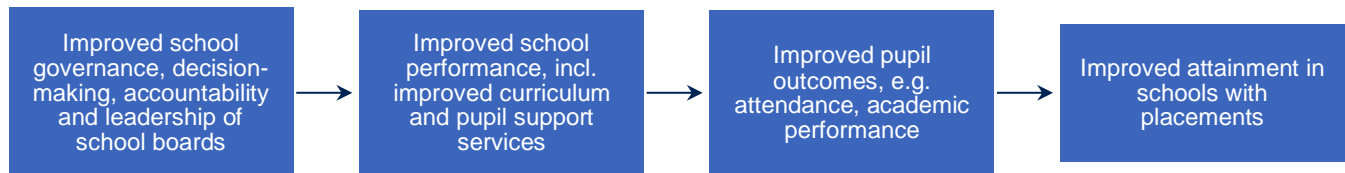
This pathway hypothesises that, by training and placing volunteers in school governance roles, they will improve their understanding of the school's context, needs, and curriculum, and also develop a clearer understanding of their responsibilities within the school. In turn, school governors are expected to be equipped with the necessary skills to contribute to school governance effectively, including relevant and valuable inputs. Assuming there are not wider barriers affecting school governance, it is anticipated that this contribution will improve school governance, decision-making, accountability, and leadership in schools.

In a study consisting of surveys and focus groups conducted by GfS and partners in 2019, participating governance volunteers reported the development of transferrable skills such as leadership and negotiation but also reported a growth in agility, analysing performance data and KPIs, and financial skills. Findings from the GfS survey with schools and volunteers also found that school governance volunteers have had significant professional progression, such as becoming a committee member (incl. a committee chair or Vice Chair) or a link governor.

The survey conducted by GfS also found that school governance volunteers are highly effective in making positive impacts on the schools they are placed in. Findings show that governors can impact schools through a range of actions, including advising on financial and strategic matters, reviewing and amending policy, providing leadership, and having advanced IT skills.

While these findings show promising evidence supporting this causal pathway, it is largely based on self-reported data without a comparison group. As such, more robust evidence is needed to confirm that the GfS programme leads to improved school governance.

Causal Pathway 2



The second pathway follows on from the first, largely looking at the hypothesis that improved governance, decision-making, accountability and leadership in schools will lead to improved school performance, pupil outcomes, and attainment. This is expected to take place as more effective school boards are expected to have better strategic planning and better financial resource management than school boards with skills gaps. In turn, this is anticipated to result in improved outcomes both financially (e.g., financial resources better allocated) and for pupils' education (e.g. resources allocated to meet pupils' needs and provide adequate support). By ensuring pupils receive the support and education they need – including adequate resources, material, facilities, and support services – they are expected to have better outcomes such as improved attendance and academic performance, leading to overall improved attainment.

There is some evidence to support the link between improved governance in schools and improved pupil outcomes, and it is a key area reviewed by Ofsted. The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) states that school governors and trustees play a crucial role in improving school performance by providing support and challenge to the headteacher and their leadership team, and they produced a report on becoming an evidence-informed governor¹.

However, according to [TASO's Rapid Evidence Review](#), the strength of evidence for school governance interventions – which include university members becoming governors of schools – is weak, as existing research does not demonstrate a causal link between these interventions and attainment. Therefore, as noted above, more robust evidence is needed to assess whether the GfS programme leads to improved school governance and if in turn, this leads to improved pupil outcomes including attainment. Attributing the impact to the programme may be challenging due to the many other factors affecting pupil performance.

Data collection opportunities

This section outlines the different data points that are currently being collected by LSE and/or GfS and which can be used to assess the programme's performance against anticipated outputs, outcomes and

¹ https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/public/files/Publications/EEF_Guide_for_School_Governors_and_Trustees_2019.pdf

impacts. It also provides recommendations on future data collection opportunities where gaps have been identified.

Outputs

GfS currently collect **monitoring information** that can be used to check progress against the anticipated outputs. Data points include the number of applications received from LSE staff/alumni, number of applicants from LSE placed in school boards (including a breakdown of characteristics² of placed volunteers), number and type of training sessions delivered, number of attendees in training sessions, and the number and type of schools with disadvantaged pupils that have LSE staff/alumni on their school boards. This information can only be used to generate monitoring reports at GfS level (report findings are not disaggregated by university type). Other information planned for collection includes the number of hours volunteered by LSE staff/alumni.

LSE will also collect **data on network participation** that can be used to check the number of volunteers that are in school governance roles through the programme, as well as data on training sessions delivered to volunteers.

Recommendations for future data collection:

*In order to assess the percentage of school governance volunteers that complete the 4-year volunteer commitment, GfS or LSE could contact LSE staff/alumni who took on a school governance role on an annual basis to check whether they are still part of school boards. This could be done through short **surveys, via email or via the alumni Network** and could provide an opportunity to explore the key reasons for which volunteers decide to leave their roles.*

Outcomes

GfS conducts **quantitative and qualitative research** – including surveys and focus groups – with schools and GfS school governance volunteers to assess the outcomes of the programme. Surveys are used to explore volunteers' views of their role, satisfaction levels, skills developed, and professional development. Surveys with schools explore satisfaction levels with volunteers, experience with the recruitment process, views of volunteers' skills, and impact of GfS governance volunteers on schools (e.g., level of impact). Research findings are then used to produce reports that can be shared with schools and universities.

At present, data collection does not include outcomes anticipated for LSE relating to their widening participation work. However, as noted above, it is expected that LSE will collect data on the number of hours volunteered by LSE staff/alumni in these roles.

² This will only be provided at LSE-level when a certain threshold of applications and placed volunteers is met to ensure anonymity and confidentiality

Recommendations for future data collection:

GfS surveys could also explore volunteers' views of the training provided, confidence in their understanding of schools' context and curriculum, as well as understanding of their role to incorporate these other outcomes. However, additional content should be balanced with burden on respondents.

Impacts

The assessment of a programme's long-term impacts is often more difficult to incorporate into monitoring and evaluation activities given their long-term nature. Several recommendations for considering the impact on schools and pupils are included in the box below, which should be considered for future evaluation. Overall, a future impact evaluation with a counterfactual³ is needed to assess the effectiveness of the programme and whether it achieves the intended outcomes and impacts.

Recommendations for future data collection:

*In order to assess whether academic performance has improved, GfS and/or LSE could work with schools that have GfS volunteers in their boards to access data and track whether **attainment** has improved since volunteers were put in place. This could include examining aggregated data or pupil-level data, though the latter would require Data Sharing Agreements with participating schools.*

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 HE progression, which can be used to assess the educational pathways participants have chosen after finishing school. HEAT could be used to track outcomes for pupils from schools with LSE governance volunteers.*

Future evaluations should assess whether attainment data can be accessed for schools/pupils who took part in the programme as well as a comparator group who did not.

**LSE is already a HEAT member*

³ For more information on evaluation methods, please visit TASO's Evaluation Methods guidance, available [here](#)