FUTURE QUEST RAISING ATTAINMENT REPORT AY24/25

Introduction

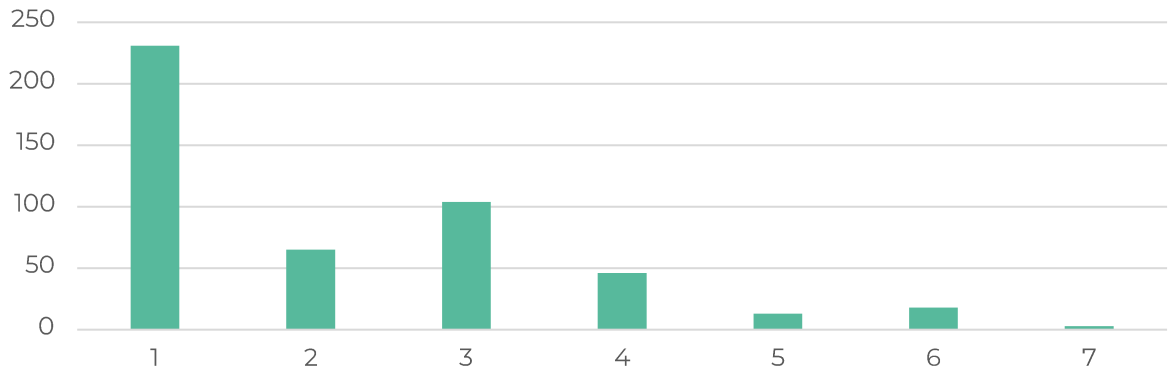
Future Quest is the Uni Connect partnership for Bristol and South Gloucestershire, formed in 2017 and primarily funded by the Office for Students. We are a partnership between the University of the West of England (UWE Bristol), the University of Bristol, City of Bristol College and South Gloucestershire and Stroud (SGS) College, which supports young people to connect with their future selves and make informed decisions about their educational pathways. We want to live in a world where all young people in our region have the same opportunities to progress to higher education, work or study, regardless of their background. Since our inception, we have supported thousands of school students to achieve their full potential through evidence-based, progressive programmes which focus on building resilience, celebrating difference and finding purpose.

Raising Attainment programmes

In 2024/25, Future Quest focused its raising attainment work on three successive programmes. Character Strengths, part of the Future Mindset programme, was also offered to all Year 10 students at a school that did not otherwise receive raising attainment delivery. In 2024/25, Suitably Skilled was not delivered as a raising attainment activity, but it has been added to the Future Mindset programme for 2025/26. Numbers for this activity are not included in the analysis, but student responses are analysed for completeness.

Student selection

Chart 1: number of raising attainment activities attended by number of students 2024/25



n=480: Step Ahead students are not included.

Schools were selected based on their ranked priority in a number of metrics, including percentage of pupils receiving Free School Meals or Pupil Premium, Progress 8 score and persistent absence rates. Link teachers were then asked to choose the pupils they thought would most benefit from the sessions, on the understanding that there are numerous reasons young people may require additional support with their academic self-concept and resilience. As a result, there were certain cohorts, particularly on the Successful Me! and Future Mindset programmes, which had participants of different needs, to the detriment of student engagement. For 2025/26, schools have been given greater guidance around selecting groups of pupils with similar needs as far as possible.

Despite these challenges, Future Quest staff report that, with very few exceptions, all participants were able to engage to some extent. The variety of routes to access the sessions (such as games, physical tasks and speaking exercises) meant that every student had a chance to be a leader on an activity. Games like Jenga, board games and puzzles made the programmes more accessible and engaging for a wider range of students. These activities offered something different from the school routine and allowed those who might not usually feel confident academically to succeed and even lead their peers.

In total, 490 students participated in raising attainment activity including 10 who participated in Step Ahead. Nearly half the students (n=231) attended only one activity. Of these, most were a whole-year cohort at one school which received Character Strengths as a standalone activity.

Table 1: number of students attending only one activity by activity 2024/25

Activity title	Number of students
Character Strengths	156
Campus Visit	13
Memory Magic	11
Unearthing Texts	6
Level Up Your Learning	5
My Mindset Toolkit	4
Meet Somebody New	3
Our Strengths	3
Study Strengths	2
Everybody's Different	1
Growth Mindset	1
Mastering Notes	1

Methodology

For each programme, students were presented with two statements at the beginning and end:

- Before/after this session, I can talk confidently about my skills, achievements and interests.
- Before/after this session, I can talk confidently about what makes me special.

The post-delivery questionnaire also asked students what they most liked about the programme, and what they would improve.

These statements were selected because they use language accessible to students from Year 7 to Year 10. Due to the small cohort sizes, it would be difficult to draw statistically significant conclusions from any survey, so statements focusing on short-term outcomes were deemed preferrable.

Initially, the statements were designed to be presented on ClikaPads, allowing quick, digital completion in the session. Unfortunately, these could not be reliably used in schools so collection moved to paper. As this took more time out of the session, not all groups could be surveyed. Future Quest instead focused on three ‘feedback fortnights’ where all sessions were evaluated. Due to these challenges, sample sizes are reduced.

Alongside these statements, students participating in the Future Fundamentals also received a larger questionnaire and were invited to interview.

Successful Me!

Successful Me! is a three-week programme supporting Year 7 pupils through the transition to secondary school. It is co-designed with education professionals and grounded in transition studies and social and emotional learning theory. The programme uses oracy strategies and dialogic learning techniques to deepen engagement and reflection. The goal of this programme is to ease young people into secondary school and introduce them to some of the skills and ideas which are developed in the Future Mindset and Future Fundamentals programmes.

Sessions

1. **Character Strengths**: participants are introduced to the concept of character strengths. Through playing a game, they learn to identify their own strengths and those of others, from a selection of the VIA Character Strengths. They reflect on which strengths are useful in different situations. Outcome: other
2. **Everybody’s Different**: through games and quizzes, young people learn to talk positively about themselves and others, discussing thoughts and feeling around body image and differences. Outcome: other
3. **Meet Somebody New**: participants practise their conversational skills, considering body language and making a good first impression. UWE Bristol Student Ambassadors come into these sessions to ‘meet’ the participants and give them a chance to put their skills to the test. Outcome: other

Analysis

88 young people at four different schools participated in at least one Successful Me! session in 2024/25. As this was the first year running a programme with Year 7, and the outcomes were primarily dependent on their progression, evaluation of this session was minimal. 13 pupils completed the initial survey, and nine completed the final one.

Chart 2: pupil confidence talking about their skills, achievements and interests before and after the Successful Me! programme 2024/25

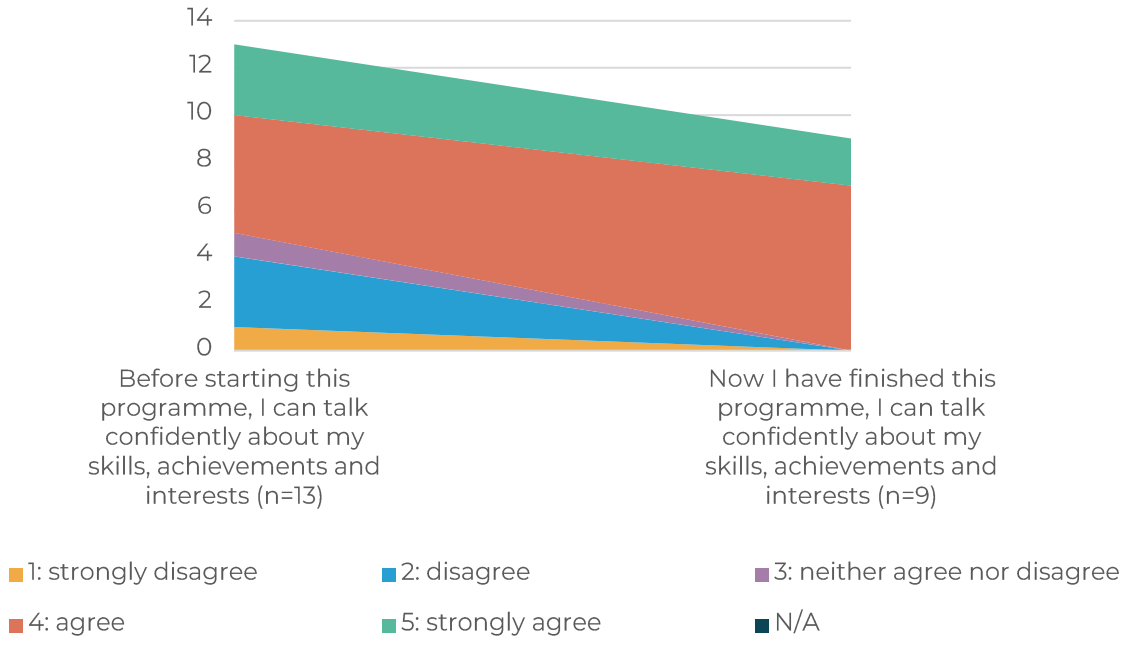
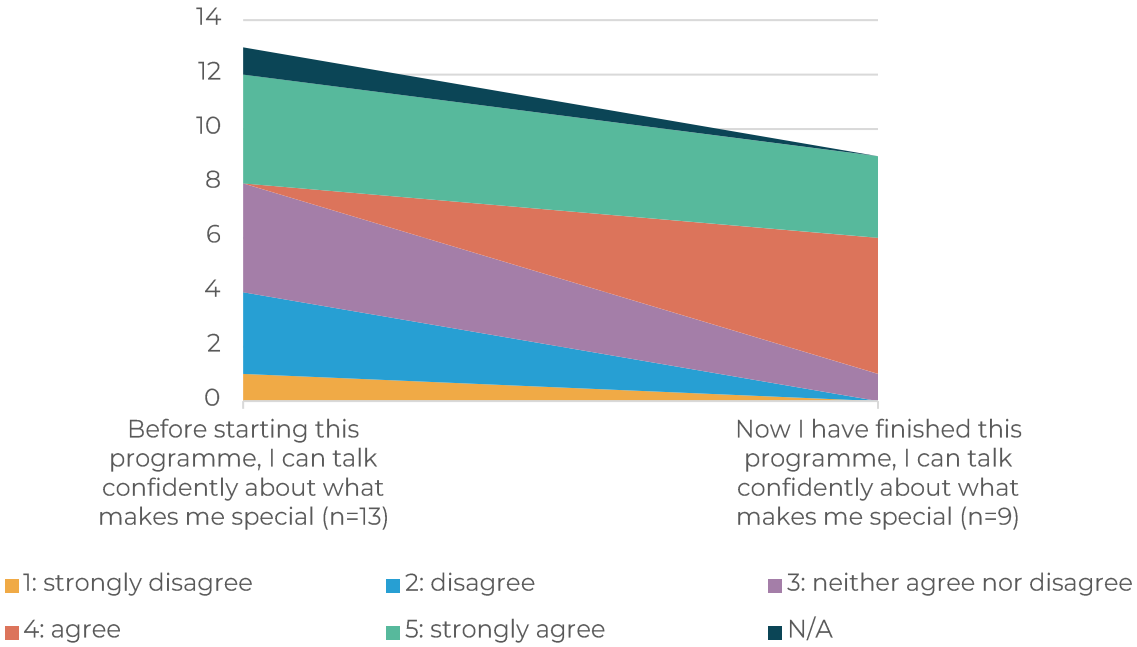


Chart 3: pupil confidence talking about what makes them special before and after the Successful Me! programme 2024/25



The sample size is too small to be considered representative, but it is encouraging that positive responses (4 or 5) increased after the programme for both scales. This could be due to external factors, for example selection bias leading only the most engaged young people

to complete the programme. However, as the programme often took place during other lessons, less-engaged students were motivated to attend and 'skip' their normal lessons.

It appears from these data that the Successful Me! programme was effective at improving participants' self-concept and confidence around communication skills. This is backed up by student comments:

> "[I most liked that] we got to meet lots of new people."
>
> *Successful Me! participant*

> "[I most liked that] I got to talk to people and it can make me talk easier."
>
> *Successful Me! participant*

> "[I most liked] being able to talk to people who aren't my friends."
>
> *Successful Me! participant*

Overall, young people who completed the final session were happy with their experience on the programme. When asked what they would improve, respondents indicated they wished to go into greater depth. Young people either requested more sessions, or more opportunity to practice their skills.

These participants will be tracked as they continue through school, especially where they engage further with Future Quest activity.

Future Mindset

The four-week Future Mindset programme empowers Year 9 students to develop resilience, a growth mindset, and essential soft skills. It draws on a range of research including Carol Dweck's work on mindset, the VIA Character Strengths framework, cognitive load theory, metacognitive study strategies, and employability research.

Sessions

1. **Growth Mindset**: participants explore 'growth mindset' and how it can improve their intelligence, ability and performance and help face challenges and setbacks. Outcome: academic self-efficacy.
2. **Character Strengths**: participants discover the 24 VIA character strengths and learn how to identify their own strengths and the strengths of those around them. They discuss how different strengths can help them in different situations. Outcome: grit/resilience.

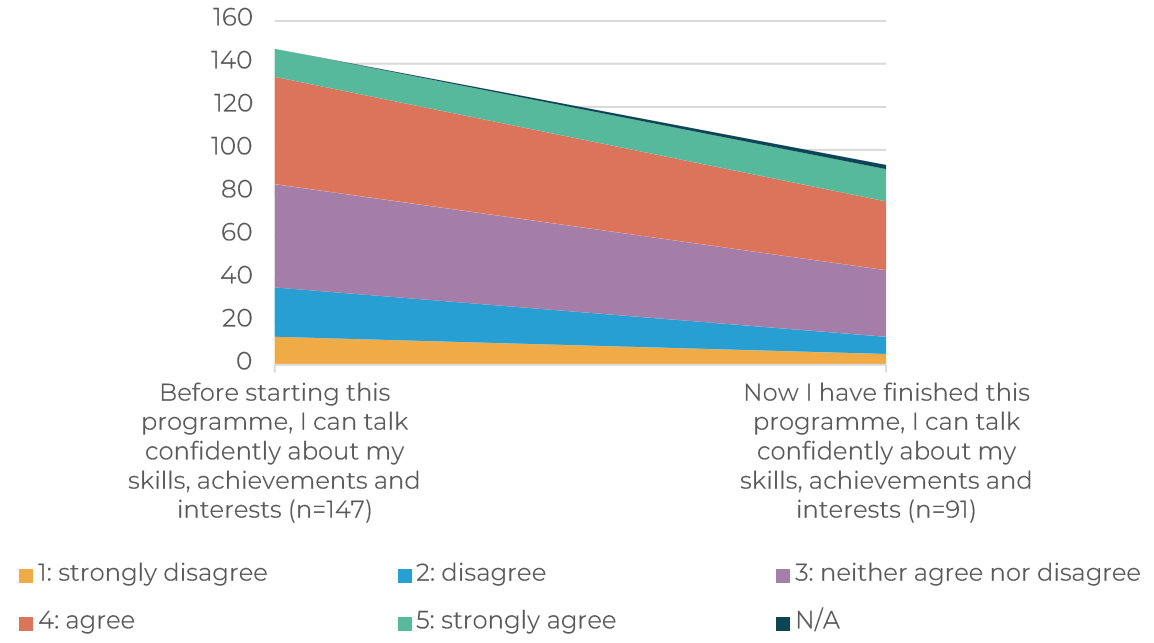
3. **Study Sense**: participants are introduced to the science of memory and sensory learning, exploring how they can engage their senses to boost focus, memory, and retrieval. These skills are used to develop a study plan that works for them. Outcome: study strategies.
4. **My Mindset Toolkit**: participants use the booklets they have completed throughout the sessions to refresh their knowledge of growth mindset, character strengths and study skills.

My Mindset Toolkit is not being delivered as a standalone session in 2025/26, as the content is largely covered by a campus visit at the end of the programme. Instead, Suitably Skilled is delivered as the final session.

Analysis

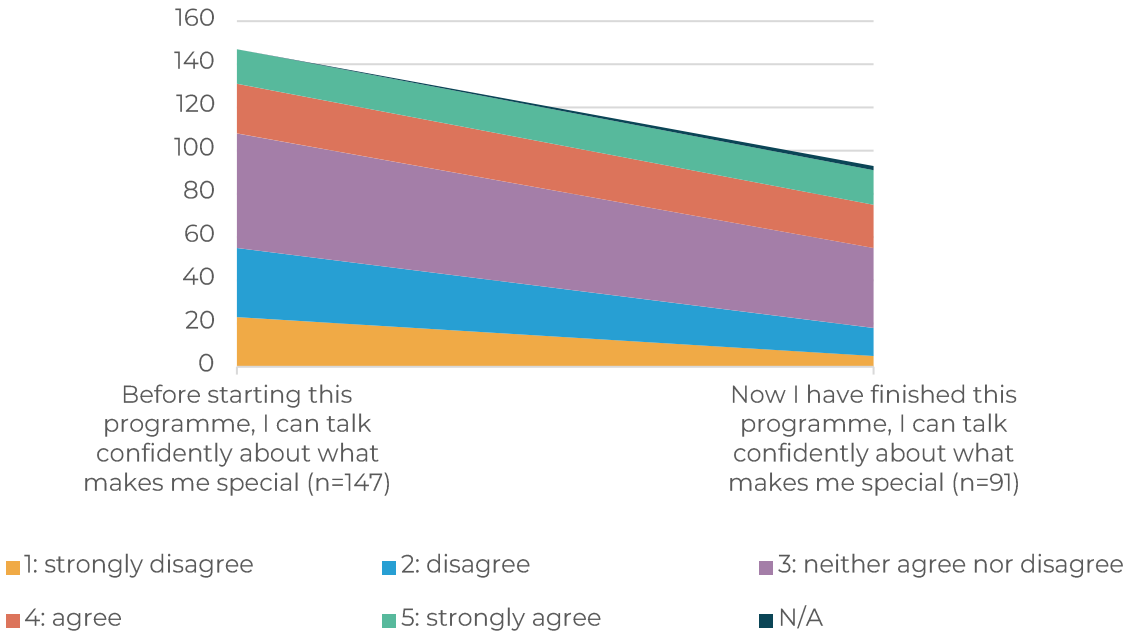
234 young people from four schools participated in at least one Future Mindset session in 2024/25. Of these, 147 students completed an evaluation form at the first session, and 91 at the final session.

Chart 4: pupil confidence talking about what makes them special before and after the Future Mindset programme 2024/25



With the exception of 5: strongly agree (and N/A, indicating no valid response provided), all options received fewer responses in the final survey compared with the initial. However, the proportion of participants responding positively increased from 42.9% to 51.6%, suggesting the programme does contribute to confidence in this area, at least in the short term.

Chart 5: pupil confidence talking about what makes them special before and after the Future Mindset programme 2024/25

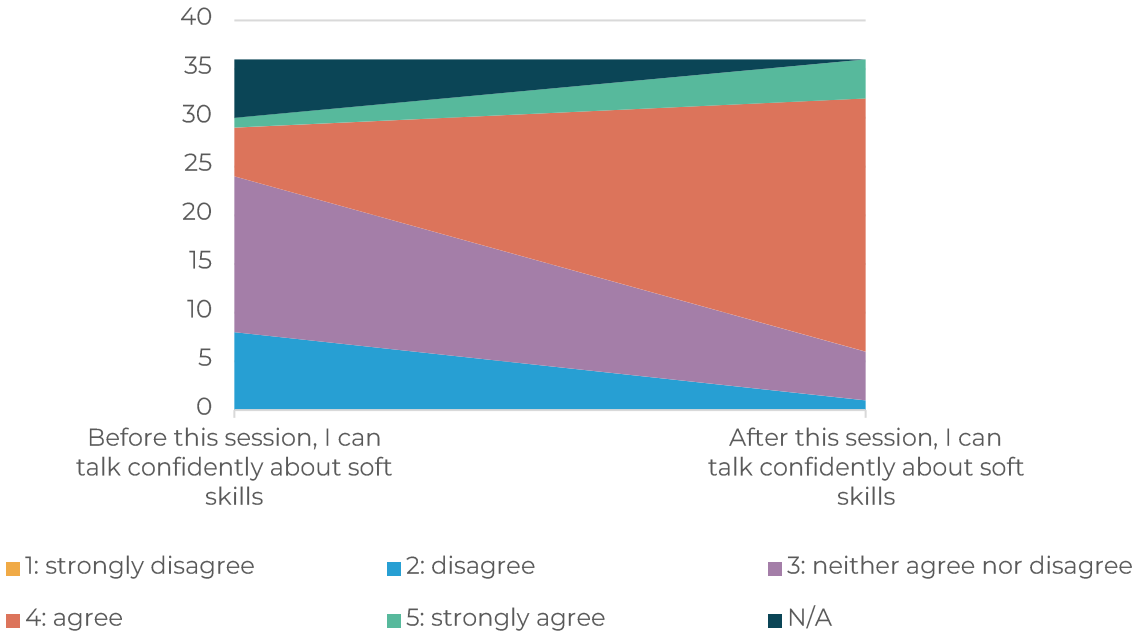


Similarly to the previous chart, responses to this statement show a shift towards agreement, despite the drop in responses. 39.6% of respondents indicated they agreed or strongly agreed with the statement after the session, compared with 26.5% at the beginning.

Suitably Skilled

69 young people participated in Suitably Skilled in 2024/25. Though it was not analysed as part of raising attainment in this period, it has been added to Future Mindset for 2025/26 and is therefore evaluated here as a standalone activity. 37 participants were asked to rate their confidence talking about soft skills before and after delivery.

Chart 6: pupil confidence talking about soft skills before and after participating in Suitably Skilled 2024/25



n=37

The pre-delivery statement received six non-valid answers. Respondents variously left the field blank or wrote that they did not know what soft skills were. It is suggested that these responses could be accurately characterised as 1: strongly disagree. Research suggests children tend to avoid answers they perceive as negative, especially when they have the least understanding.[1]

This scale demonstrates the greatest increase in positive response after the session, moving from 16.7% to 81.1%.

"I liked learning about soft skills and realising how much I use them."

"[I most liked] learning how to express myself with my skills and also how to improve them."

When asked what they enjoyed about the programme as a whole, students overwhelmingly focused on the activities rather than the outcomes. 54 respondents said their favourite thing was making an origami fish during the Growth Mindset session, though 4 indicated they most enjoyed learning about university, talking to someone new or why study skills work.

[1] See e.g. Hall, L., Hume, C. & Tazzyman, S. (2016), Five Degrees of Happiness: Effective Smiley Face Likert Scales for Evaluating with Children, *IDC '16: Proceedings of the The 15th International Conference on Interaction Design and Children*, Pages 311–321, https://doi.org/10.1145/2930674.2930719.

Though this demonstrates a flaw in the wording, which was intended to gather feedback on the structure of the programme, participant responses demonstrate reflective skills, indicating the impact of the programme.

Future Fundamentals

Future Fundamentals lasts five weeks and is aimed at Year 10 students. It is designed to work on its own, or to build on the content of Successful Me! and Future Mindset. Participants learn advanced study strategies and metacognitive techniques essential for GCSE success.

Sessions

1. Level Up Your Learning: participants are introduced to the application of metacognition and how a personalised approach to studying can empower them going forwards. Outcome: academic self-efficacy.
2. Memory Magic: activities give participants the chance to put proven memorisation techniques to the test. Young people are encouraged to reflect on what works for them and how they can build these skills into their own revision. Outcome: study strategies.
3. Unearthing Texts: participants practice skimming and scanning texts for meaning and key information. Outcome: study strategies
4. Mastering Notes: the Cornell note-taking method and mind maps are introduced. Participants learn how to take effective, visually appealing notes to support their revision. Outcome: study strategies.
5. Crafting Your Revision Strategy: participants consider how to plan and manage their time with specific tasks and goals. They bring together everything they have learned to build a revision plan that is productive but not punishing. Outcome: academic self-efficacy.

Future Fundamentals students also had the opportunity to visit UWE Bristol. This included a tour of the campus and opportunities to learn about student life, as well as a recap of the programme.

Analysis

179 young people from three schools participated in at least one Future Fundamentals session in 2024/25. Of these, 28 students completed an evaluation form at the first session, and 19 at the final session.

Chart 7: pupil confidence in talking about skills, achievements and interests before and after participating in Future Fundamentals 2024/25

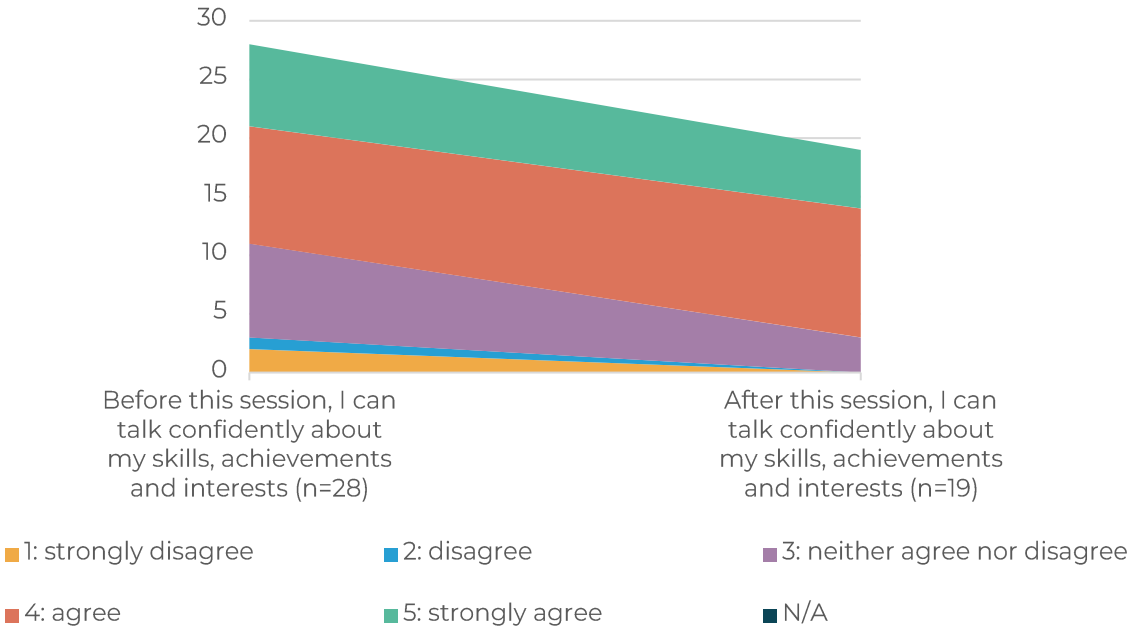
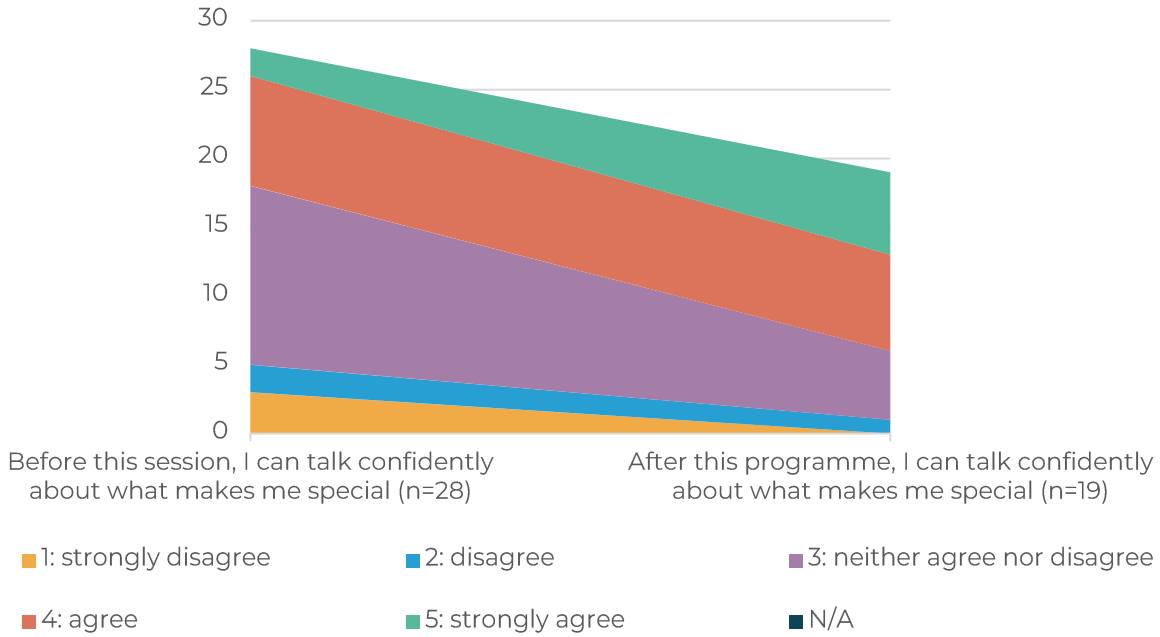


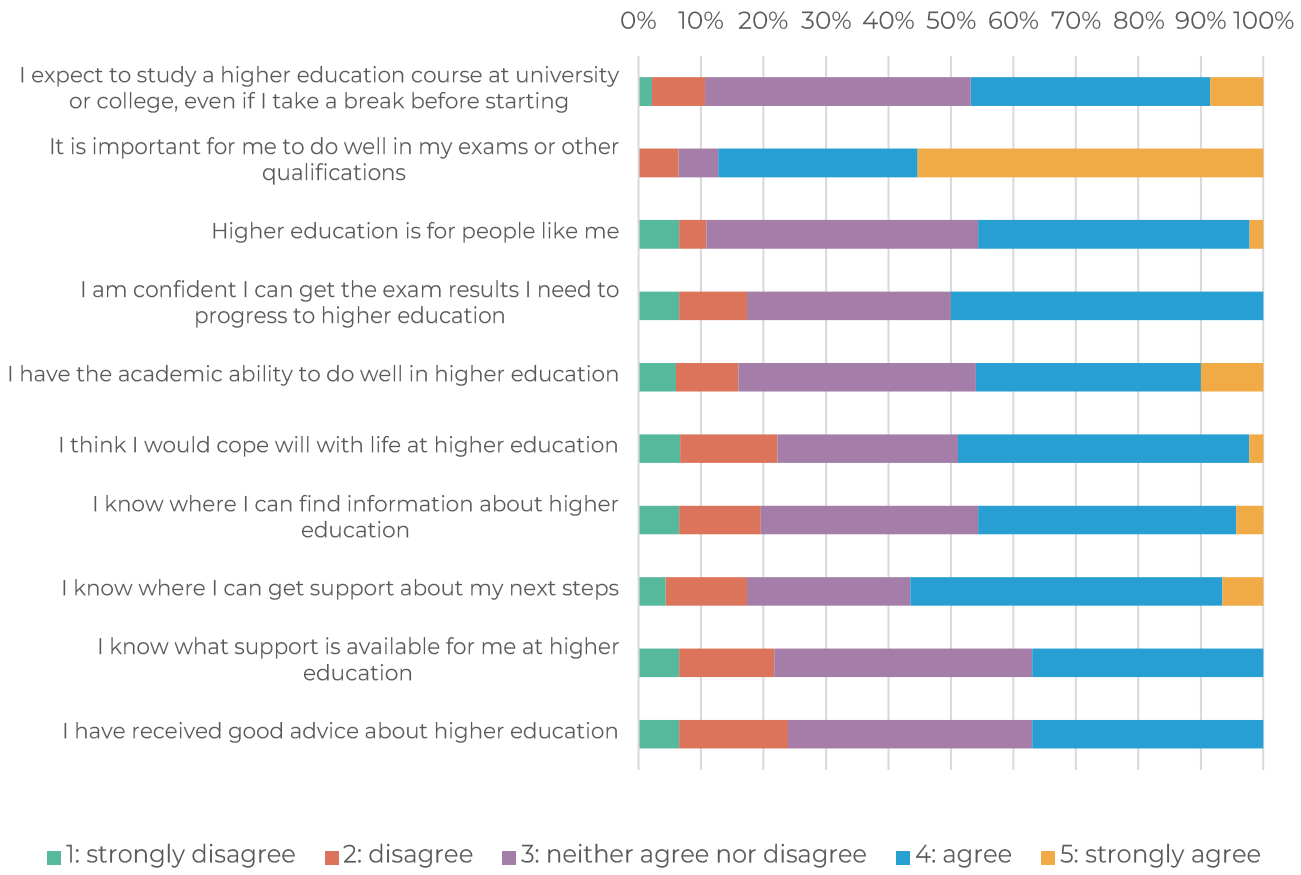
Chart 8: pupil confidence talking about what makes them special before and after the Future Fundamentals programme 2024/25



Future Fundamentals participants were also asked to complete a more detailed survey during their campus visit, after delivery was completed. This group was chosen as, being in

Year 10, they are most likely to have firm ideas of their pathways and be better able to articulate their feelings about higher education. The questions are based on Future Quest's annual student survey with some variations. Analysis of the full survey in ongoing and comparison of responses is not possible at this time.

Chart 9: pupil responses to post-campus visit survey, Likert scales only 2024/25

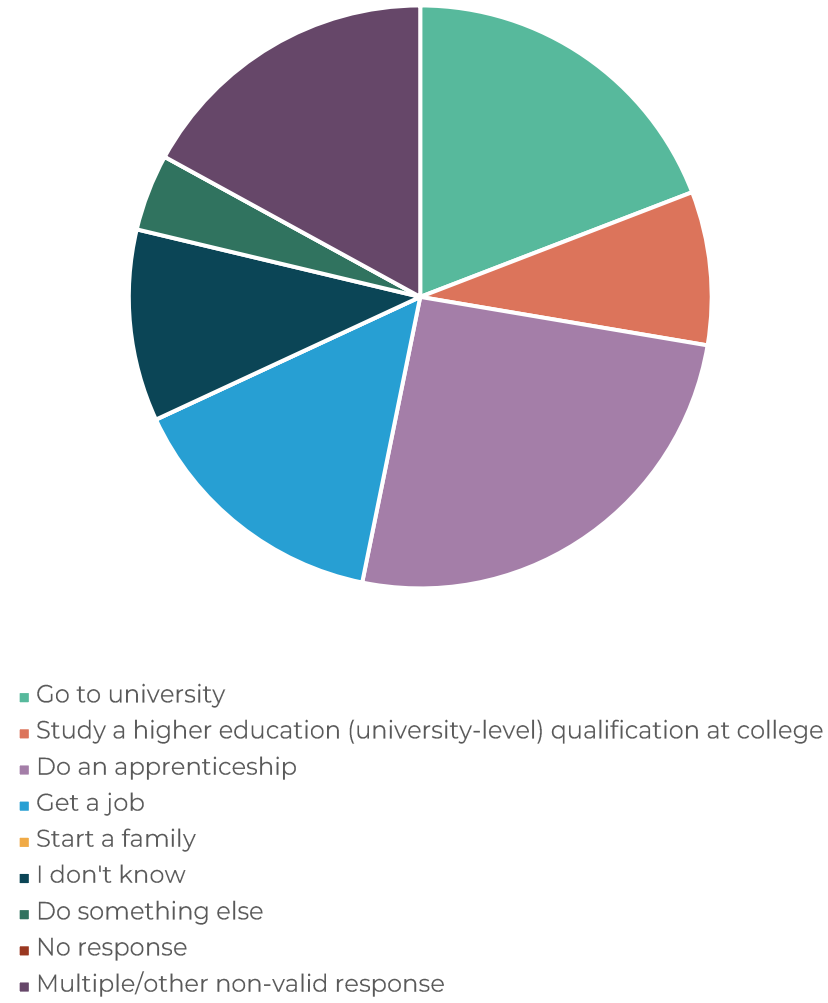


n=47

The scale with the most positive responses was 'It is important for me to do well in my exams or other qualifications', with an average score of 4.36 and 87.2% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement. Pupils also responded positively to the statement 'I know where I can get support about my next steps', with 56.5% responding 'agree' or 'strongly agree'.

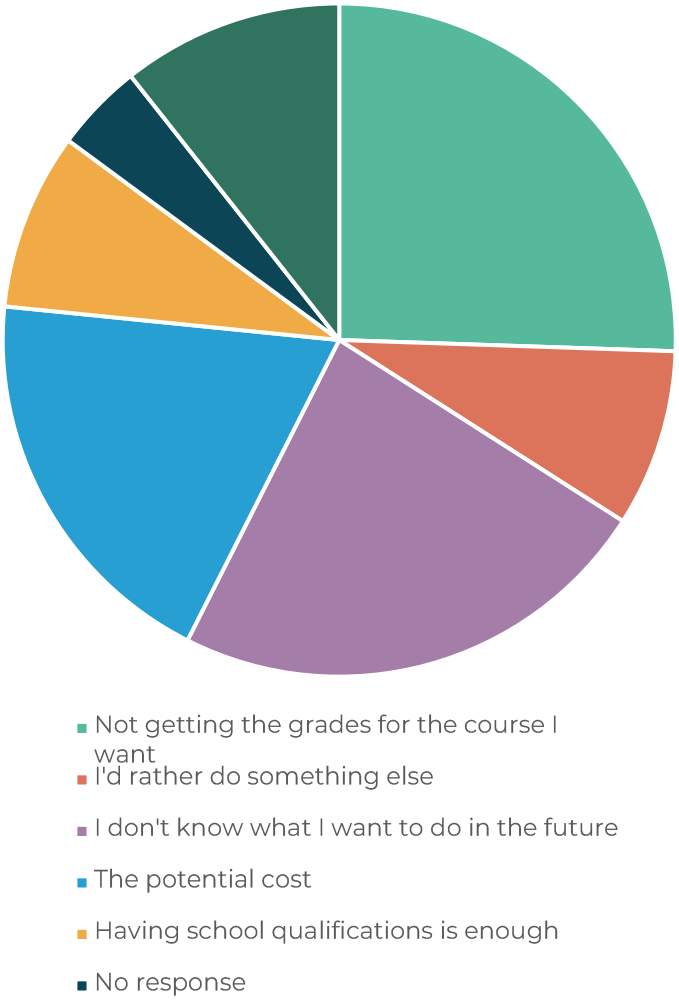
The remaining scales have an average score between 3.07 and 3.43, where 3 is 'neither agree nor disagree'. However, the proportion of positive responses for each scale is 50% or below (down to 37%), as the majority of participant responses are clustered around the neutral option.

Chart 10: pupil responses to 'When I leave school, I most want to...' 2024/25



53.2% of respondents indicated that they most wanted to continue their education after school, whether through an apprenticeship (the largest category with 25.5% of all responses) or other higher-education course.

Chart 11: pupil responses to the question 'What, if anything, would most put you off applying to study a higher education course?



Around a quarter of respondents stated that not getting the grades would be the greatest barrier to progressing to higher education, and another 23.3% stated they did not know what to do in the future. Not getting the grades for the course I want' and 'The potential cost' combined make up 44.7% of all responses. Comparing this with Chart 10, it could be concluded that at least some of the young people who did not state a preference for a higher education course at university or college did so because they did not think they could get in, rather than because they did not want to.

Step Ahead

Created in partnership with Universify Education, Future Quest piloted the Step Ahead programme for Year 10 students with care experience, a social worker, young carer status. An unexpected challenge with data sharing means these students are not currently included in Future Quest's HEAT database.

In 2024/25, 10 students participated in the programme, attending campus visits at each of UWE Bristol's campuses and engaging in mentoring with Universify Education's team. Delivery is still ongoing to this cohort, and it is not yet possible to track their outcomes. However, students engaged in interviews which show the impact of the programme:

> There is a lot of help and support [available at university] with being in care. I thought before I came here... you have to do it all in your own. But you'll be helped and supported through it all during your time in university, which I think is actually really good.
>
> *Step Ahead participant*

> I do [think I'll fit in at university] because I think there's loads of support to help you. And I think I'll fit in really well because there's always something to do if you ever get bored and you can always take breaks from it.
>
> *Step Ahead participant*

> [The Step Ahead programme] has made me really really want to come to university so it has made me knuckle down on studying and like actually getting revision done so I can get my grades up so I can actually come to university because I know what I've got to do to get into university.
>
> *Step Ahead participant*

> [The most helpful part of the Step Ahead programme] was kind of figuring out what options there are. I've always had a fear of thinking that I wouldn't be able to do something else that I was interested in there while doing a course and also making friends. Now I'm able to talk to people easier.
>
> *Step Ahead participant*