



# Shaping Futures in Cumbria

Nine years of insight,  
partnership and widening  
opportunity



2017 - 2026



“This report reflects not only the scale and breadth of Hello Future’s work over the course of nine years, but also our commitment to understanding the difference that our work makes for young people in Cumbria. Our research and evaluation journey has challenged us to continually ask what works, for whom and in what circumstances, and to use that learning to shape and strengthen our approach. It has also reinforced the importance of understanding our findings within the changing contexts in which young people make decisions about their futures. Most importantly, the evidence demonstrates the value of sustained, targeted and meaningful engagement in supporting young people across Cumbria to understand their options, build confidence and see Higher Education as a realistic pathway for their future.”

**Lisa Jackson** Programme  
Manager, Hello Future

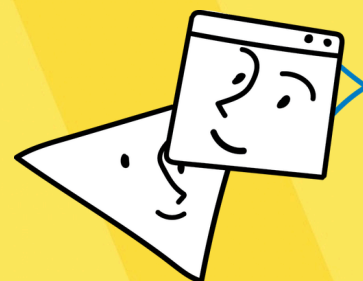


“Hello Future has come a long way in understanding how geography, transport, local work and family ties shape young people’s choices in Cumbria. By listening to learners and testing our assumptions, we have built a clearer picture of which routes feel possible and where support falls short. That learning gives us and our partners a stronger basis for widening opportunity, while remaining honest about what the evidence can tell us.”



**Daniel Dutton**  
Strategic Lead, Hello Future  
Head of Student Recruitment and  
Outreach, University of Cumbria

# Our Impact



Learners supported since launch

**30,000**

**12,000+**

Annual learner exchanges

Annual contact hours delivered

**700+**

**20+**

Schools and colleges intensively engaged

Partner organisations involved

**20+**

**7,000+**

Target learners receiving 3+ interventions since launch

HE Progression rate among intensively engaged learners

**60-66%**

Over this period, our work has taken place against a backdrop of significant change, including the COVID-19 pandemic, evolving strategic priorities within the Office for Students, reductions in funding over time, and a shift in our approach from research towards evaluation of our outreach programmes. Alongside these changes, the wider higher education landscape has continued to evolve, shaped by the rising cost of living, changes in government and their policies and the ongoing impact this has on young people's choices and aspirations. These wider contextual factors are important when interpreting the changes in students' perceptions, attitudes and behaviours that we have observed over time.

# Introduction

**Hello Future is one of 29 Uni Connect Partnerships across England**, bringing together local universities, employers, local authorities and other key organisations to improve young people's access to and progression into Higher Education (HE). Funded by the Office for Students, the partnership provides targeted support to young people, schools and colleges across Cumbria.

Since 2017, Hello Future has supported 30,000 learners through a wide range of HE outreach programmes, including aspiration raising and educational attainment interventions. Working in partnership across Cumbrian schools and colleges, we provide sustained support that builds young people's knowledge, skills and confidence, helping them to make informed decisions about their future and maximise their educational potential.

Through strong local partnerships and a sustained presence, **Hello Future plays a key role in widening access to HE and supporting positive educational outcomes for young people across the region.**

This report represents a reflection on, and celebration of, the body of insight and evaluation work which Hello Future has commissioned over the past nine years, taking the opportunity to recognise what has been learned and achieved whilst working within the Cumbrian education and skills community.

## Our Evidence

The evidence in this report shows the value of Hello Future's sustained presence across Cumbria. It highlights both the opportunities created for young people and the learning that partners can carry into future work. In particular:

- Future Selves, Let's Read and Breaking the Mould have created meaningful outreach opportunities for learners and contributed to wider understanding of effective widening participation practice.
- Sustained, targeted engagement has supported young people over time, showing the value of building relationships beyond a single activity.
- Firsthand experience of HE and professional settings has helped learners explore routes that may otherwise have felt unfamiliar or out of reach.
- The evidence and partnerships built through Hello Future provide a foundation for future outreach in Cumbria, including a clearer understanding of where support is most needed.





# Investment and our own learning journey

Since its inception, Hello Future has commissioned a plethora of insight and evaluation projects, working with professional providers to ensure that the impact of the outreach programmes and activities being delivered is measured, so the partnership can continually learn, increase its effectiveness and demonstrate a return on the investment into its vital activities.

Listening to young people, understanding the distinctive Cumbrian context and using that evidence to shape interventions have remained a constant. However, the way we have approached insight and evaluation has refined and matured substantially since our inception in 2017.

Moving from the early days of researching the local landscape, identifying and evidencing education and skills challenges through to our current, more complex, evaluation approaches, the Hello Future partnership has enjoyed taking a brave and innovative approach, trying out new methods and developing new skills as part of our learning journey.

## Where we plan to go next with our work

Nine years of delivery have given Hello Future strong partnerships, a deeper understanding of young people in Cumbria and a growing body of evidence about what works. Participation gaps remain, including for young people from areas with historically low HE participation and for male learners.

The sections that follow examine what the evidence tells us about those gaps, where our approaches have made a difference and what we still need to understand.



# Our Outreach Programmes – at a glance

This report references a range of Hello Future outreach programmes. The following provides a snapshot of each programme and its key focus.

## Future Selves Workshops

A series of tailored workshops delivered in schools and colleges

## Let's Read

A small group reading intervention

## Breaking the Mould

Targeted activities to challenge male stereotypes

## Campus Visits

Visits to experience university life

## Cultural Trips

Designed to increase social and cultural capital

## Residentials

Small group residentials designed to take learners out of their comfort zone

## Use of Role Models

Graduate Interns and current students showing young people what HE is really like

## Subject Insight and Tutoring Programmes

Designed to support progression and awareness of different subjects

## Mentoring

Led by our Graduate Intern team

## Employer Encounters

Showcasing the range of opportunities in Cumbria and beyond

## Attainment Raising Interventions

Focusing on metacognition and study skills

## Multi Partner Campus Visit Days

Hello Future partners coming together to showcase HE



# Key learnings from Hello Future's early research on provision and opportunity

Hello Future began investing in research into the local landscape of provision and opportunity, for young people in Cumbria, from its earliest days of operation, aiming to gather a robust understanding on which to build its future strategies and outreach programmes.

Between 2018 and 2022, a total of 19 pieces of research were commissioned by Hello Future, encompassing primary research with learners, parents, teachers and outreach practitioners, as well as secondary research consulting grey and academic literature and conducting mapping exercises to understand existing provision across Cumbria.

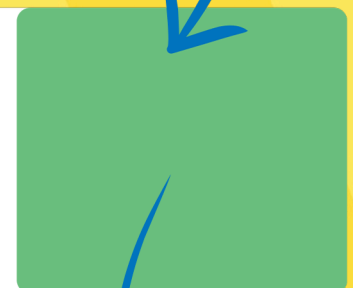
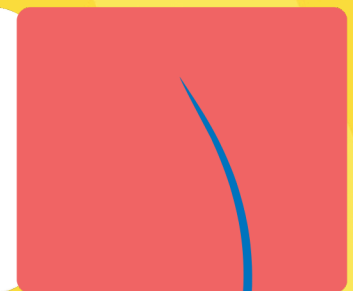
The research during this time provided Hello Future and its partners with invaluable learning across three key themes:

## **Understanding aspirations and barriers to participation in HE:**

Characterising the early research theming, five of the insight pieces cast a wide net and looked to understand learner and parental perceptions of HE, their ambitions and aspirations for themselves and their child, and barriers to considering HE as a pathway. (reports 4, 5, 7, 12, 14)

**Deep dives into specific challenges:** Where specific research questions needed further depth, either due to national priorities or themes arising in the early research, more specific pieces were undertaken to generate depth of understanding, including research into the impact of peers on decision-making, the attitudes and aspirations of young white British males, and the impact of place on decision-making about where to go to university. (reports 8, 11, 16)

**Mapping outreach needs:** Later in this 4 year period, attention moved to research which quantified key gaps in knowledge, motivations, and intention and formed key baselines for future evaluative work. (reports 15, 17, 19, 21, 27)



# Theme One: Understanding aspirations and barriers to participation in HE

Early research indicated that learners across Cumbria had high aspirations when it came to HE. Analysis of CFE data showed that 60% of Y12 and Y13 learners were likely to apply to HE at ages 18 and 19 (report 7), exceeding the population of this age group who ultimately enter HE. High aspirations were observed regardless of levels of disadvantage, with target learners (58%) showing similar levels of motivation as those who were not target learners (62%) based on key attributes of disadvantage (report 7).

Geographic factors go some way to explain the differential aspirations across Cumbria, with learners in Carlisle and Eden (68%) reporting higher levels of desire to apply to HE than those in Furness (58%) and West Cumbria (52%). This difference in aspiration started early: among Y9s – Y11s, learners in Carlisle and Eden were significantly more likely to expect to study at school or a sixth-form college, whereas learners in Furness and West Cumbria were more likely to expect to begin an apprenticeship or go straight into employment (report 7). This aligns with some of the lowest HE participation rates being in the west coast of Cumbria (report 12).

**60%**

Year 12-13 learners were likely to apply to HE at ages 18-19

**58% / 62%**

Target / non-target learners reporting motivation towards HE

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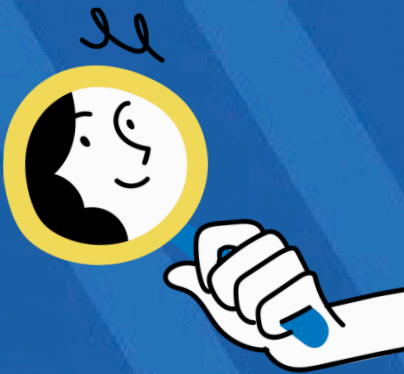
This was a particular challenge among young males, who were more likely to want to go onto an apprenticeship at age 16 than onto further study. When asked why, they explained that it did not appeal to them despite being more likely than females to believe that they had the academic ability to succeed in HE (report 7). The highly gendered local industry was a key explanatory factor in this, and apprenticeships were a good fit with male rural identity and men could see a clear pathway for themselves in the local industries (report 12).

The rurality of the area also further impacted on learners' aspirations. While there were advantages to schooling in the rural context, including a closer relationships with teachers and the school community, the range of subjects could be lacking at local colleges and sixth forms, and transportation links were not sufficient to allow young people to travel further for their desired subject without heavy reliance on their parents for transport (report 12). This distance also made universities particularly obscure, with learners in disadvantaged areas of West Cumbria living more than thirty miles from their nearest university. This meant that learners had few associations with universities, fewer opportunities to visit because the cost could be prohibitive, and it could make moving away to university appear more daunting (report 12).

This resulted in a key number of knowledge gaps for learners. Relatively few learners in the CFE data felt that they knew a lot about applying to HE or the experience of studying there, with the least well understood elements being how to apply, what support was on offer and the financial support on offer (report 7). The latter was particularly pertinent because debt, and stigma around debt, were key barriers noted to accessing HE (report 12).

This is potentially exacerbated by learners' remarks that they often received information about apprenticeships from school much earlier than they received information about HE, which created a reliance on parents to fill in these gaps. However, parents often shared the same perceptions of HE as those reflected in the local area, which could further reinforce negative attitudes towards HE (report 12). Parental experience of HE was highly related to their levels of knowledge and confidence, meaning that young people whose family did not have experience of HE were less exposed to positive narratives about this pathway (report 5). Parents themselves reported their own knowledge of the pathways open to their child in the future (report 4) and understanding of educational terminology (report 14) were key barriers to having conversations with confidence highest when talking to their child about GCSEs and career opportunities but lower around A-levels and degrees (report 4). It was however acknowledged that young people increasingly often see their peers going to university, and this avenue may act as a key way in which young people can get further knowledge about HE (report 12).

## Learners reported desire to apply to HE (%)



# Theme Two: Deep dives into specific challenges

The early research phase into aspirations and barriers warranted further exploration to understand how Hello Future's work could best support learners based on the three highest priorities identified within the insights:

- What are the ambitions and intentions of young males?
- What impact do peer to peer conversations have on young learners' educational choices?
- What impact does being geographically isolated have on decisions to stay at home or move away for university?

## What are the ambitions and intentions of young males? (report 8)

The early research indicated that young males had particular perceptions of HE based on their desires to enter professions valued in the local area and indicated the need to further understand young men's consideration of HE to add nuance and depth to the barriers that existed to their consideration of this pathway. Key findings from further research suggested that young men needed support around attainment, confidence, and aspirations:

- Young men had clear career ambitions but tended to be less certain about HE. This uncertainty was more apparent among Year 10s but was still evident among Year 12s who were closer to the point of making the decision about their next steps after further education.
- Experiences of education may impact this uncertainty, with young men reporting feeling stressed by the change in the intensity of work at key transition points (Y10 and Y12), which may have contributed towards their disengagement with their academic learning. This could lead to lower attainment aspirations, with young men sharing their aim to be 'good enough' and their acceptance that they may not do well.
- Family and friends could influence how young men viewed their future pathways. Connections to trades or local industries could make these routes feel familiar and appealing, while family members' or friends' experience of, or aspirations for, HE could encourage young men to view that pathway more positively.
- The perceived costs associated with HE acted as a significant deterrent amongst our sample of young men. They shared that they did not want to get into debt and could prioritise local employment options which would enable them to earn money faster.





# What impact do peer-to-peer conversations have on young learners' educational choices? (report 11)

While early research showed much about the impact of parents on decision-making, relatively little was understood about the role of peers, though some suggested they could give young people wider exposure to HE as a pathway. Further research to understand peer influence added to this picture to provide direction on how to utilise these networks, including:

- Young people were not necessarily having explicit conversations with their peers about their futures, but it was clear they had some understanding of what their peers wanted to do after school.
- Explicit conversations tended to increase around key decision points, such as GCSE choices and post-18 options. This could make conversations more pressured, however, and those further away from decisions may feel freer to explore without pressure.
- Conversations could be uncomfortable: learners worried that their career aspirations might not be acceptable to others, that HE and moving away were too divisive to discuss, and that it was easier to share positive feelings than their concerns or worries.
- Conversations could be easier when they happened with older students or when learners had a group of friends with a shared interest or hobby.



## What impact does being geographically isolated have on decisions to stay at home or move away for university? (report 16)

Early research consistently showed moving away as a barrier, but more insight was needed into the specific barriers to moving away among those in rural settings, as a distinct question from whether young people intended to go to university. Findings suggested a number of barriers and sensitivities around the topic, including:

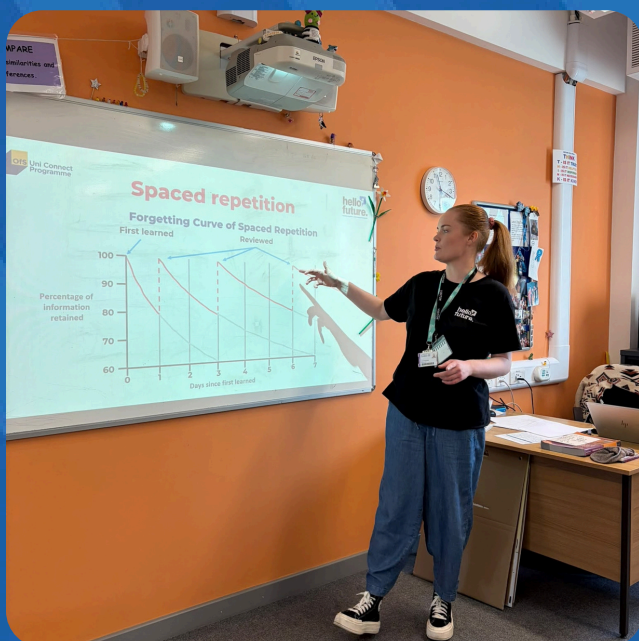
- Learners had concerns about ability to cope in urban, multi-cultural settings and lacked confidence in their adaptability. Some had limited travel experience or limited independent travel experience and the experience of being elsewhere could reinforce the belief they did not belong.
- Family ties and community could discourage some from moving away, when it involves leaving a place where everyone knows each other and relocating. However, views on this were polarised. For some, this created a motivation to stay close to home, for others it encouraged a desire to move away and seek greater independence.
- Some saw the move away to university as permanent because there were no jobs to make it worth coming back; apprenticeships therefore gave an opportunity to get qualifications which were relevant locally.
- Learners appear to be unsure about what moving away actually entails and wanted more guidance about how to move away.



These findings strengthened Hello Future's understanding of the factors influencing learners' decision making and largely validated existing delivery approaches. Evidence highlighted the value of early, tailored, intensive and sustained engagement, low pressure opportunities to explore future options, and interactions with relatable role models who could share lived experiences of education and progression. In response, Hello Future continued to deliver activities such as campus visits, cultural trips, residential experiences, and engagement with current students, helping learners build confidence, broaden horizons, and develop a realistic understanding of the opportunities available to them.

The research also reinforced the importance of supporting learners before key decision points, creating safe spaces to discuss aspirations and concerns, and presenting a range of progression routes, including HE and apprenticeships.

Findings were shared with partners and stakeholders, providing a stronger evidence base for understanding the influence of peer, family and community networks on progression decisions, and directly informed the development of initiatives such as 'Breaking the Mould' for boys, aimed at addressing these influences and barriers, and 'Future Selves' to highly target gaps in skills, understanding and knowledge of HE.





# Theme Three: Mapping outreach needs

Towards the end of the 2018-2022 period of identifying provision and opportunity, research efforts turned from understanding the context and overarching challenges in the local area, to mapping specific outreach needs of learners to inform a clear basis for future baselines for evaluations and key intended outcomes. These demonstrated clear areas for future focus across five intervention themes.

## **Ideation and self-belief**

- 54% of learners knew which future options were best suited to them (report 21)
- 55% of learners felt confident they can achieve their goals in life (report 21)
- Learners wanted more information about the range of opportunities available to them and how to choose the most suitable one for them (report 19)

## **Building skills and strategies**

- 57% knew how they learnt best (report 21)
- 58% believe they will be successful (report 21)
- Gaps identified included literacy, confidence, and study strategies such as revision and exam techniques (report 27)

## **Personal expectations**

- 44% felt ready for their next step (report 21)
- 51% knew their next step (report 21)
- Many learners had a rough idea of their next steps but lacked clarity on what that specifically looked like, which made them feel less ready for the next step (report 27)

## **Practical support and guidance**

- 28% know how to apply for HE (report 21)
- 39% know routes/ways into HE (report 21)
- Learners wanted more information about accessing HE and student finance (report 15. 19)

## **Supporting transitions to HE**

- 28% know how to apply for HE (report 21)
- 39% know routes/ways into HE (report 21)
- Learners wanted more information about accessing HE and student finance (report 15. 19)

Findings relating to learners' ideation, self-belief, readiness for progression, and understanding of HE directly informed the eventual design of the 'Future Selves' programme. Future Selves combined exploration of possibilities with practical skills development and tailored guidance. The programme identified specific need and provided opportunities for learners to explore a wide range of future pathways, reflect on their strengths and interests, and develop greater confidence in making informed decisions about their futures.

Recognising gaps in study skills, confidence and learning strategies, delivery also focused on building learners' resilience, self-awareness, and academic skills.

To support progression, Future Selves offered both practical information and firsthand experiences of HE, including engagement with Graduate Intern role models, campus visits, and guidance on application processes and university life. By combining personal development, skills development and progression support, the programme aimed to increase learners' confidence, understanding and readiness to successfully navigate their next educational or career transition.



# Key learnings from Hello Future impact evaluation

From 2022, Hello Future's focus turned to evaluating the impact of its outreach programmes on learners, driven by OfS guidance for Uni Connect partners to contribute to the evidence base around 'what works': *"We expect partnerships to have strong evaluation plans in place and to deliver robust evaluation of their activity."* (Office for Students guidance 2022). Between 2022 and 2026, Hello Future conducted six evaluation pieces to determine the impact of its work, one of which spanned multiple years presenting a longitudinal picture of impact across a variety of its activities.

## Hello Future had success in:

- Increasing learners' knowledge and understanding of higher education, including helping learners to better understand their next step in their educational journey and the different routes/pathways to get into higher education (reports 22, 23, 24, 25, 29, 31).
- Enhancing learners' intentions to enter higher education (reports 29, 30, 31) and progression to higher education (report 29).
- Increasing the median age of Year 7 learners to support attainment raising, contributing also to young people's literacy skills and comprehension (report 26).
- Increasing metacognitive skills among young men and learners eligible for free school meals (report 29) and enhancing learners' confidence in their abilities and use of appropriate study strategies (report 30).
- Building young men's confidence in the future, through enabling career exploration and providing the space and time for learners to reflect on the future careers (report 31).

Investment in evaluation has been an important part of Hello Future's development. Each stage of evaluative activity has built on previous learning, enabling the team to strengthen the evidence base, develop more robust approaches to measuring impact and refine programme objectives to better reflect the needs of learners.

The development of a robust and sustainable evaluation approach also presented a number of challenges. These challenges provided valuable learning opportunities, helping Hello Future to continually adapt its processes, build the capability of its staff and develop more appropriate ways of understanding and demonstrating impact.



## Engaging schools and colleges

While schools and colleges were consistently supportive of evaluation activity, delivering this effectively within busy educational settings required flexibility and creativity. Strong relationships with schools and colleges enabled the team to adapt approaches to individual settings and integrate evaluation activity wherever possible. However, differences in how and when evaluation could be delivered sometimes affected consistency in data collection and participation, highlighting the importance of developing evaluation approaches that are both robust and practical within school and college environments.

## Continuing professional development

Evaluation increasingly required outreach practitioners to take on new responsibilities, including gathering and interpreting data, engaging learners in evaluation activity and using findings to inform programme development. Significant investment in continuing professional development helped practitioners develop the skills and confidence required to contribute effectively to this process. Working with specialist partners and evaluation experts also provided valuable external expertise, supporting the team to develop appropriate methodologies and strengthen the interpretation and application of evaluation findings.

## Aligning outcomes with delivery

A recurring area of learning was the need to ensure that evaluation outcomes accurately reflected both programme delivery and the intended outcomes for Cumbrian learners. This was particularly important where evaluation findings appeared inconclusive or did not fully reflect the changes practitioners were observing among learners. The limitations of quantitative approaches were also evident when working with smaller groups, where they could provide only a partial picture of impact. In response, Hello Future's evaluation approach continued to evolve, with intended outcomes refined over time and new methodologies explored to better capture the breadth and depth of impact generated through its activities.

**Overall, the evaluation journey has strengthened Hello Future's ability to use evidence as a tool for learning and improvement, ensuring that evaluation is not simply about measuring impact, but about understanding what works, for whom and in what circumstances.**

# Spotlight on Key Evaluation: Future Selves (reports 21-25)

Between 2021 and 2024, Hello Future ran its Future Selves programme with the aim of providing Cumbrian learners with information and skills that would encourage and support them to progress into HE. The programme built on Hello Future's earlier research and drew on Neil Harrison's work on 'possible selves', helping learners explore who they might become and how HE could contribute to that future. The five main themes of the programme were:

- **My transition into HE**
- **My ideas, self-belief and personal expectations**
- **My confidence and attainment expectations**
- **My knowledge of and understanding about HE**
- **Developing awareness of me and how to reach my goals**

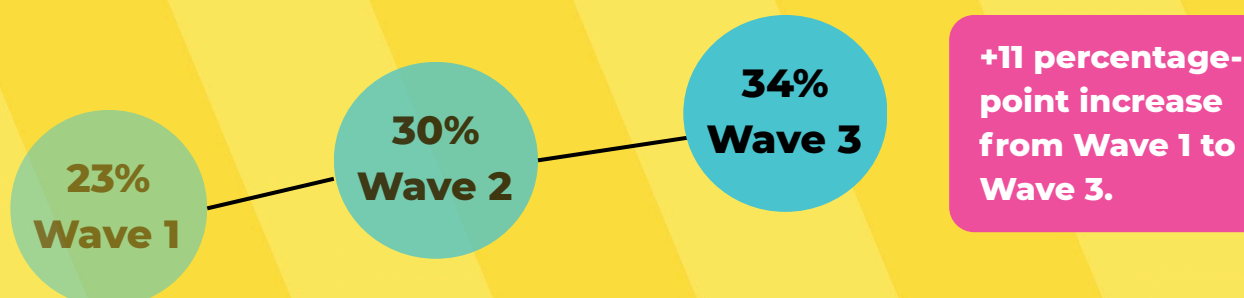
The evaluation of the Future Selves programme, conducted between 2021 and 2024, comprised surveying of learners across three waves, with the first wave acting as a baseline for understanding the key areas of focus, and the latter tracking the impact of Hello Future's activities on learners.

Multiple smaller waves, using a condensed set of 'golden' questions, were also conducted over this period, targeting specific year groups who had received particular interventions.

## The impact of the Future Selves programme

Throughout the programme, learners demonstrated increased knowledge and understanding of HE, including awareness of routes into HE, a practical understanding of how to write their CV and personal statements, and confidence that they had the information they needed for their future plans.

Knowledge of HE had previously been consistently reported as one of the lowest areas of confidence for young people, so the impact and learning gains here were particularly important.



Whilst the programme evaluation did not identify substantive increases across several measures, including intention to study in HE, confidence in transitioning to HE, ideas, self-belief and expectations, and confidence in attainment expectations, separate analysis comparing learners who participated in Future Selves with those who did not identified a positive association. Learners who had participated in at least one Hello Future activity were slightly more likely to report an intention to study in HE than those who had not participated.

## Hello Future participants were 6 percentage points more likely to intend to enter higher education

**37%**

**+6pp**  
higher among  
participants

**At least one Hello Future  
activity**

Intended to study in higher education

**31%**

**No Hello Future  
activities**

Intended to study in higher education

In this evaluation, male learners saw particular advantages from their involvement in the programme and made key gains across several areas relating to their ideas, self-belief, and expectations, including knowing which future options might suit them best and knowing their next step after school/college.

However, males remained less likely to intend to progress to HE than females and there was no change in their intention to progress over the course of the evaluation, indicating that further work with this target group would help.



## Innovative approach of Future Selves

The approach was designed as a longitudinal evaluation model, enabling Hello Future to track changes in short and medium term outcomes across different learner groups and cohorts, against key themes identified through the programme wide Theory of Change. This provided an evidence base to support a tailored, progressive and sustained approach to outreach delivery across schools and colleges.

The model was also designed to provide real time, year group level insights within individual target schools, enabling the team to identify emerging needs and use this evidence to inform and tailor programmes for specific cohorts. This ensured that evaluation findings were not only used to demonstrate impact over time, but also actively informed programme design and delivery.

The innovative nature of this approach was recognised externally. Hello Future received the 2022 Golden Apple Award for Innovation and was also shortlisted for the Educate North Awards in the same year, recognising the strength and innovation of the approach.



# Spotlight on Key Evaluation: Let's Read (report 26)

Hello Future, working in partnership with the University of Cumbria, piloted a new project in 2023 aiming to tackle the issue of learners entering secondary education with a primary school reading age. This was introduced in response to the Office for Students identifying attainment raising as a new priority area.

The attainment raising intervention took place across two schools, working with two groups of six learners over 12 weeks, leading guided reading style small group session using 'Scholastic Connectors' literacy intervention packs.

The evaluation combined insights from interviews with learners, York Assessment for Reading of Comprehension (YARC) reading assessments, and interviews with teachers/teaching assistants to understand the impact of the intervention on learners' reading skills and comprehension.

## Impact

Learners who took part in the programme showed greater improvements in their YARC reading assessments than learners in the control group, indicating positive impact on learners' reading comprehension and ability to recognise single words out of context.

***"My reading improved and learning, like now I want to like put my hand up."***

Evidence around learners' reading rate (how fast and fluently a learner can read a passage aloud) was more mixed, with learners in the control group sometimes improving equally or more.

Qualitative feedback from learners about their involvement in the intervention was highly positive. They rated the sessions as consistently helpful and enjoyable, and described a number of gains from their involvement. These included feeling more confident and fluent, enhanced reading strategies, and wider vocabulary skills.

**Confidence  
& Fluency**

**Pronunciation -**  
More confidence saying words  
**Reading aloud -** Greater comfort reading to others

**Reading  
Strategies**

**Careful reading-**  
Read every line attentively  
**Prediction-**  
Anticipate what happens next

**Vocabulary  
Skills**

**Word range -**  
Use a wider vocabulary  
**Definitions -**  
Check unfamiliar words independently



# Spotlight on Key Evaluation: Breaking the Mould (report 31)

Breaking the Mould is a strategic programme which was launched by Hello Future in the 2023/24 academic year in response to the learnings and evidence generated through previous research identifying **needs around male progression to HE**.

Breaking the Mould focuses on the under-representation of disadvantaged young males in HE, aiming to increase knowledge of opportunities, improve learners' skills and break down gender stereotypes both in education and the workplace.

Hello Future partnered with three secondary schools across Cumbria and 10 young males from Year 8 at each school took part. Year 8s were the focus of the programme as it was felt important to tackle gender stereotypes in jobs and education early, prior to GCSE choices.

The programme includes a series of workshops, self-reflections and partner trips to BAE Systems, the NHS, University of Cumbria and their local colleges (Furness College, Lakes College and Carlisle College).

The Breaking the Mould programme has grown since its launch and the 2025/26 year engaged with 60 Year 8 young males across four schools in Cumbria. During that year a first phase evaluation captured learner stories of impact using the Most Significant Change (MSC) methodology and quantitative measures of impact using Transforming Access and Student Outcomes in HE (TASO's) Access and Success Questionnaire (ASQ).

MSC methodology is a qualitative, participatory form of monitoring and evaluation that collects and systematically reviews personal stories of change from programme participants, and outreach practitioners interviewed learners through their involvement in the programme and stories were assessed in a multi-stage story selection process, bringing together outreach practitioners, senior leadership and sector partners to select the stories which represented the most significant changes.

## Outcomes

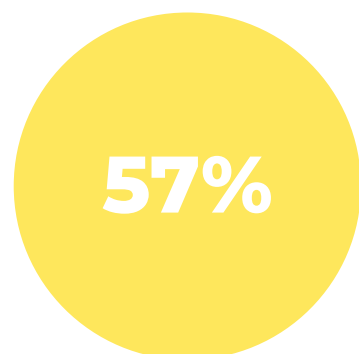
Four overarching themes arose through the story collection, indicating where learners felt the programme had delivered the most impact for them: increased confidence in their future, exploration of careers, time and space for exploration, and changing their aspirations.

In particular, learners demonstrated through the programme that they had:

- Challenged pre-conceived ideas about what their future should look like;
- Considered their future options more flexibly than they had done before;
- Been exposed to new experiences and opportunities; and
- Reflected on what they had learned and how that applied to their futures.

The learner survey showed a small significant increase in learners' academic self-efficacy, driven by learners' increased confidence that they could get the exam results required to progress into HE and that they had the academic ability to do well.

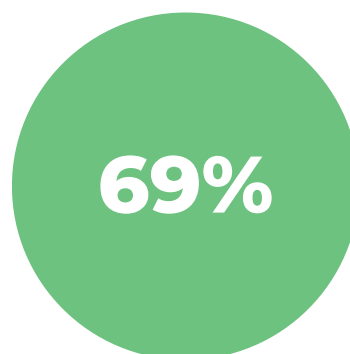
**Breaking the mould participants' belief they could get the results to progress to higher education increased by 12% points**



### Pre-survey

Belief learners could get the exam results to progress to HE

**+12pp**  
after completing  
the programme



### Post-survey

Belief learners could get the exam results to progress to HE

*"I've enjoyed all of the opportunities and seeing all the opportunities and also having more time to speak to my friends more about it. And also going out of school to see more things, more than others normally do. I've spoke to my friends more about our futures and stuff and what we're all going to do in the future. It's just opened my future to more things. Honestly, I didn't actually know [about the University of Cumbria] until I went. I thought it would be further out of Carlisle. I knew Brampton Road was there, I didn't know it was a University."*

Learners' knowledge of HE showed a medium increase, with higher levels of learners reporting that they knew what studying would be like and how it would differ from school or college.

However, learners' intention to enter HE decreased slightly between the pre and post surveys though this change was not significant. When learners were asked which options they were considering in the future instead, there was a significant increase in those who reported they were open to an undergraduate degree. The difference in these two outcomes may be driven by the former being more about concrete intention to enter HE, whereas the latter focused on which options they were considering but that they did not have to have decided on that yet. Notably, the latter measure was more aligned with the valued outcomes from the story selection around flexibility in learners' approach to their future.

# Reflections for the future

As Hello Future continues to evolve, our commitment to widening participation and improving life chances remains at the heart of everything we do. We will continue to build on this learning to strengthen and inform our future practice.

1

One of the clearest findings from Hello Future's evaluation activity is the relationship between sustained engagement and progression outcomes.

## Key Findings

- 60–66% HE progression rate among intensively engaged learners
- Learners who participated in intensive outreach programmes progressed to HE at significantly higher rates than those who engaged in fewer activities.
- This evidence reinforces the importance of providing progressive, long-term support that helps learners build confidence, knowledge, and aspirations over time.

Research also demonstrates that the most impactful activities are those that provide direct exposure to HE and professional environments.

## Activities Associated with the Strongest Outcomes

- ✓ Campus visits
- ✓ Subject-specific insight programmes
- ✓ Mentoring
- ✓ Employer encounters
- ✓ Life skills and communication workshops

These experiences help learners visualise future opportunities and build the confidence required to pursue them.

2



3

These findings have directly informed the 2026/27 programme and future delivery, strengthening Hello Future's commitment to sustained engagement and progressive learner journeys.

Evidence informed initiatives including Breaking the Mould, the Let's Read project and wider attainment raising activity, alongside our embedded school and college workshop programme for high priority schools, will continue to give learners multiple opportunities to engage with activities shown to have the greatest impact. This includes multi partner campus visit days, Higher Education and employer encounters, and subject specific insight opportunities.

Together, these activities provide a sustained programme of engagement, enabling learners to build their confidence, knowledge and skills over time, while supporting informed decision making and successful progression into Higher Education and beyond.

Collaboration with Boys' Impact through the Cumbrian Boys' Impact Hub offers Hello Future an opportunity to build on Breaking the Mould and strengthen sustained support for boys' progression.

Collaboration will be central to how Hello Future builds on this learning in 2026/27 and beyond. Our developing partnership with Boys' Impact, through the Cumbrian Boys' Impact Hub, offers an opportunity to connect the targeted work of Breaking the Mould with a wider, shared commitment to improving boys' educational experiences and progression.

By bringing together schools, colleges, universities, employers, families and community partners, the Hub can help us understand the barriers boys face and coordinate sustained support across key stages of their lives. Hello Future's evaluation and research can inform this work, while the experience of partners (and the voices of young people themselves) can help shape activity that responds to Cumbria's communities.

For Breaking the Mould, this creates an opportunity to extend its reach, strengthen relationships with trusted adults and connect learners with experiences that make future possibilities feel achievable. It also reinforces a wider lesson for Hello Future: lasting change depends on partners working together over time. Our ambition is to build on individual interventions through a more connected approach, helping young people recognise their opportunities and access the support they need to pursue them.

4



# Hello Future Reference List



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30. Hello Future Attainment Raising Research Report (Alterline, 2024)
31. Breaking the Mould Evaluation (Alterline, 2026)

**To Access a complete reference and the reports please visit our website at [www.hellofuture.ac.uk](http://www.hellofuture.ac.uk)**



# Our Partners



## Thank you

to the Hello Future partnership  
and to Alterline for their  
contributions to this report.





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