

Future First's Alumni Programme:

Evaluation report

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Executive summary

Introduction

During the academic year 2013-14, Future First partnered with J.P. Morgan to run an alumni programme for a target group of 25 schools in the areas of greatest need (based on the proportion of students eligible for free school meals). An alumni programme involves bringing former students back to their schools to talk to learners about careers. This particular programme included Future First running six alumni events in each of the schools. These sessions were largely targeted at the students who were currently studying for their GCSEs.

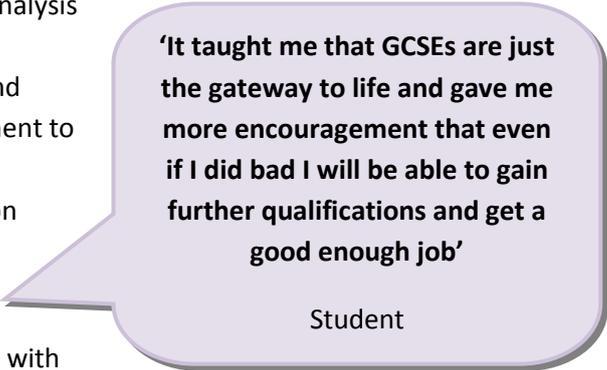
Session foci ranged from reflecting on the importance of getting a C grade in English and maths and discussing revision strategies to post-16 career routes. The programme as a whole aimed to increase students’:

- career confidence;
- motivation to work harder for their exams;
- GCSE attainment;
- employability skills;
- aspirations; and
- access to work experience.

CUREE were commissioned to undertake an evaluation of the programme to establish how far it met these aims, and to put forward recommendations for how Future First could continue to build on the work they are doing with schools.

Evidence for this report

In order to evaluate the impact of the programme, the evaluation team performed an analysis of a range of evidence, including observations of sessions; student and staff perception data gathered through an electronic survey, phone and face-to-face interviews and focus groups carried out during case study visits; and documentary evidence. In order to build on and extend Future First’s own evidence base about the impact of the programme, an analysis of student assessment data was carried out to test the hypothesis of whether students’ improved study skills and learning behaviours, paired with the increased commitment to do well in their studies result in better grades. More information about evidence for this report and evaluation methods can be found in the main report.



‘It taught me that GCSEs are just the gateway to life and gave me more encouragement that even if I did bad I will be able to gain further qualifications and get a good enough job’

Student

Key findings

Overall, the external evaluation findings were consistent with Future First’s own evidence and highlighted that participation in the programme was linked to improvements in confidence and motivation, better understanding of post-16 opportunities, and enhanced aspirations. Participating students were also able to develop important skills, both essential for their studies (time-keeping and revision techniques), and their future life (CV writing and similar). Finally, the evaluation evidence highlighted that many of the participating students made better, and sometimes much better, progress in their maths and particularly English GCSEs

than their non-participating peers. Some headline findings for each of the key areas of impact that the programme aimed to target are outlined below and presented in detail in the main report.

Confidence

- 82% of students felt that attending the Future First sessions had helped them to feel more confident about the future, both in terms of their studies and career
- 85% thought that meeting former students showed them that people like themselves could be successful

Motivation and attitude to learning

- 84% felt that hearing from people in different jobs made them want to work harder in school
- 77% said the sessions had inspired them to get better grades
- 79% agreed that they had been inspired by the sessions to revise more and work harder for their exams

Behaviour

- 74% had been inspired to concentrate more in lessons
- 72% said the sessions had inspired them to get more involved in lessons

Attainment

- Across the five schools for which the analysis of the assessment data was performed, students who attended the Future First sessions made better progress in the core subjects than their non-participating peers
- Progress was better in English, where 65% of the participating students across the five schools achieved or exceeded their predicted grades compared to 59% of their school peers who were not involved in the programme
- In-depth analysis of the data for each of the participating schools revealed that in four out of five schools the participating students' progress was better than that of their peers in one or both core subjects for which the analysis was performed (English and maths). In one school, the progress was as great as 75% of students achieving or exceeding their predicted grades compared to 54% of non-participating students.
- Further analysis for C/D borderline students involved in the programme highlighted that in two schools, the participating C/D borderline students were almost twice as likely to achieve their predicted grades or exceed these, compared to the non-participating ones. In one school, the participating C/D borderline students also performed better than the non-participating C/D borderline students (92% and 84% respectively). In the remaining two schools the difference between the participating and non-participating students' performance was minimal or slightly negative.

'My grades went up in maths as I knew how to revise'

Student

More detail on the analysis of the assessment data is provided in section 3.5

As well as acquiring knowledge, skills and behaviours they could put to use straight away, the participating students were also able to consider and prepare for their future.

Awareness of the possibilities open to them

- 77% agreed that their knowledge of courses and jobs they could do in the future had improved
- 85% said the sessions helped them to find out about different jobs
- 82% felt the sessions had helped them to learn about different routes into jobs such as universities and apprenticeships

Career aspirations

- After they attended the sessions, there was an increase in the number of students who said they were considering options such as going to university

New skills

- 71% thought the sessions had helped them to develop skills that will help them get a job

Accessing more work experience

- 80% said the sessions had inspired them to pursue more opportunities such as work experience and volunteering

‘Students were surprised at how well some of the alumni did. The students don’t see these types of people often so it improved aspirations’

School coordinator

Conclusions and recommendations

Overall, the Future First programme was successful in meeting its aims, with improvements for the participating students spanning a range of areas including their attitudes towards their learning, confidence, aspirations for the future and their awareness of the opportunities available to them. Particularly worth noting is participating students¹ progress and performance in two core subjects (maths and particularly English) was better than their school peers’.

Relevance emerged as a key success factor for the programme. Future First sessions worked better where students could easily relate to the alumni and where the sessions were carefully selected to target areas not already covered by the schools’ curricular and extra-curricular work.

With this in mind, Future First should find ways to:

- involve greater numbers of alumni who have more recently left the school to maximise the extent to which students relate to what they are saying;
- ensure that the alumni are from relevant and varied career paths to ensure the sessions are useful for as many students as possible;

Another important finding was the suitability of the programme for younger students. Schools that offered the programme to younger students as well as their Year 11 cohort found it worked equally well or better for Year 9-10 students. Feedback from the participating school staff and leaders was unanimous: they highlighted the difficulty of scheduling sessions (particularly six of them) for Year 11, noting that there were instances when students quite simply did not have the time to put their learning into practice.

In this respect, Future First should consider:

¹ NB: The assessment data analysis was performed for five schools only.

- primarily aiming the programme at younger (Year 9 and 10) students.

Finally, the evaluation team recommends that the attention to using assessment data alongside other evidence is sustained as the programme is rolled out to new schools.

Future First should consider:

- seeking funding to carry out a larger research and evaluation study, preferably a randomised control trial, to determine whether a finding about the participation in the programme positively affecting student results can be generalised and the effect of the programme better isolated; and/or
- routinely collecting assessment data from all its participating schools to perform in-house analysis or supporting the schools to perform such an assessment and submit their headline findings to Future First for cross-school analysis.

Section 1: Introduction

1.1 Background and context

Future First is an education charity that aims to ensure that every school is supported by a thriving, engaged alumni community. This work is done in order to close the career achievement gap between those born into low-income families and those from high-income ones, and to contribute to improving social mobility.

Last academic year (2013-14), Future First partnered with J.P. Morgan to support a target group of 25 schools, based on those in the areas of greatest need (according to the level of students eligible for free school meals). This programme included Future First running six alumni events in each of the schools, with at least three of these intended to be for those who were currently studying for their GCSEs. This project had a number of aims, including increasing students':

- career confidence;
- motivation to work harder in their exams;
- GCSE attainment;
- employability skills;
- aspirations about their career and education prospects; and
- access to work experience.

CUREE were commissioned to undertake an evaluation of the programme to establish how far it met its aims, as well as to put forward recommendations for how Future First could continue to build on the work they are doing with schools.

1.2 Methodology

The research design for this evaluation aimed to respond to the following principal research question:

'To what extent does students' participation in the programme lead to improvements in their:

- confidence and motivation;
- GCSE attainment;
- employability skills;
- raised aspirations about their career and education prospects; and
- access to work experience?'

The evaluation team deployed a mixed-methods approach comprising quantitative and qualitative methods. These included gathering and analysing a range of perception data from the key stakeholder groups through surveys, depth interviews and focus groups, student attainment data and observations.

An overview of how the data collection methods mapped onto each of the research sub-questions is indicated in the table below:



To what extent does students' participation in the programme lead to improvements in their:	Evidence gathered by the evaluation team				Complementary (documentary) evidence provided by Future First
	Student surveys	Assessment data	Student focus groups/depth interviews	School staff and session facilitator interviews	
- confidence and motivation	V		V	V	V
- GCSE attainment		V		V	V
- employability skills	V		V	V	V
- raised aspirations about their career and education prospects	V		V	V	V
- access to work experience	V		V		V

The areas shaded in green in the table above indicated research work carried out in a sample of schools (case study schools) as opposed to all participating schools. The evaluation team ensured that all data was triangulated through at least 3 different sources.

Whereas the primary focus of the evaluation was to determine the impact of the programme, the team also collected various process-related data in order to both identify any elements of the programme that made it more or less effective, and provide formative feedback to Future First.

1.2.1 Primary evidence

In order to gather evidence about how the students benefitted from engaging with the programme, the evaluation team carried out:

- an electronic student survey (completed by 614 students from 21 schools at the baseline stage and by 60 students from 10 schools at the post-intervention stage²);
- focus groups and individual interviews with 35 students from four schools;
- interviews with seven members of staff at six schools; and
- an interview with a Future First programme manager who facilitated the sessions in one of the case study schools.

In addition, the research team observed two sessions delivered by Future First, one of them being a whole cohort assembly and the other a workshop about the importance of achieving a C in maths.

1.2.2 Documentary evidence

The primary evidence gathered by the evaluation team was complemented by the analysis of the evaluation evidence gathered by Future First (e.g. surveys completed by 226 students) as well as other relevant documentation, such as programme and session descriptions, and written testimonials from teachers who worked with the participating students.

² The level of student participation in the post-intervention survey was negatively affected by the fact many participating schools chose to run the final sessions comprising the programme on the last days Year 11 students were in, meaning that the post-intervention data collection had to happen during the exams period or summer holidays.

1.2.3 Assessment data

In order to gauge the extent to which participation in the programme was associated with better GCSE performance, the evaluation team gathered GCSE data from 10 schools – five participating schools and five non-participating schools. First, the five participating schools were selected to ensure a range of backgrounds, Ofsted and GCSE performance in particular. Next, comparison schools were identified. The two groups of schools were closely matched for the following variables (in the order they were considered):

- Ofsted grading³;
- previous (2013) GCSE performance; and
- proportion of students eligible for free school meals (FSM)⁴.

Variable	Participating schools		Comparison schools	
	Mean	Range	Mean	Range
Ofsted grading	2	1-3	2	1-3
Previous (2013) GCSE performance- 5 A*-C (including English and maths)	60.6%	47-79%	59.2%	48-69%
FSM	57%	44-80%	46%	26-74%

It is important to note that despite the evaluation team's attempts to closely match the two pools of schools it was not possible to ensure a perfect match and eliminate all other potentially confounding variables within this small scale research study. Similarly, it is worth remembering that the total number of participating students was less than 20% of the total number of students in participating schools, and less than 10% of all students in the study. Given these reservations, any evidence of impact of the intervention (not targeting the quality of teaching and learning directly) emerging from the analysis of the whole cohort GCSE results in the participating and comparison schools, needs to be treated with caution.

Given the above mentioned limitations, the evaluation team performed a further, more in-depth piece of analysis for each of the five participating schools to look at the differences between participating and non-participating students. To do so, the predicted and actual GCSE grades of all the Year 11 students were collected and compared, analysing the progress the students had made in English and maths in order to:

- determine the progress they had made; and
- see if the level of the participating students' progress was higher than that of their non-participating peers.

³ The schools in both pools represented a range of Ofsted gradings, from 'Outstanding' to 'requires improvement'.

⁴ The information about the schools' past performance and background characteristics, which was used for matching purposes, was correct and accessed from the Ofsted and Edubase databases in April 2014.

Finally, another participating schools-only piece of analysis was undertaken for students who were predicted to achieve a C or D in English and maths respectively, again comparing the results of participating and non-participating students.

The outcomes of these analyses are presented in section 3.5.

Section 2: How did the programme work?

Initially, Future First approached schools with a description of their programme, inviting them to take part. Schools that chose to join the programme did so for various reasons, including recognising the need and their commitment to:

- help students to learn practical skills such as setting goals, managing their time effectively and developing good study skills;
- raise the students' aspirations and motivation;
- develop a network of alumni;
- raise students' attitudes to learning; and
- help students to gain more career focus and direction.

Each of the schools assigned a member of staff to be the Future First co-ordinator. The co-ordinators were typically involved in deciding on the programme of events to be run in the school by Future First, identifying the students who would be attending all or the majority of the sessions, and organising times and rooms for the sessions.

There were a number of sessions that schools could choose from, and these could be tailored according to the needs of the school. Both the school and Future First facilitators were responsible for putting together the programme of events out of the menu provided by Future First. All sessions use alumni volunteers to meet a variety of objectives and examples include:

- **Introduction to GCSEs:** to help introduce students to their GCSEs and motivate them to work hard from the start
- **Getting a C in maths/English:** to illustrate the importance of achieving a C grade in maths/English, and to support students to do so
- **Revision strategies:** to offer students general support with revision, and to help them make good decisions about revising for their GCSEs
- **Building confidence and aspirations:** to raise confidence and aspirations amongst students so they work harder in order to achieve five A*-C GCSEs
- **Next steps:** to help students identify which pathway is better for them- for example sixth form or college, A levels or BTECs, apprenticeships or further education etc.

The two vignettes below illustrate the approach adopted within two different sessions.

Vignette 1 – Assembly (whole year group)

The session started by students trying to guess the jobs of the four alumni from the props they had brought along. The jobs included: a games animator, a businessman who owned three businesses within sales and software development, a working Mum with a psychology consultancy, and a woman who worked in retail marketing and commercialisation.

The alumni then spoke about the best and worst parts of what they do, what a typical day looks like for them, as well as what someone in their position would generally earn. Students were encouraged to ask the alumni questions about the jobs they did and how they got into that position.

Many young people interested in the idea of running their own business were visibly surprised when alumni spoke about:

- The long hours they worked and the pressure they were under
- Working without a salary at the beginning of starting up their own company

The concluding advice alumni gave students was:

- It doesn't matter if you can't decide what you want to do - take every opportunity you can
- Do what you enjoy as you'll be motivated
- Don't be afraid of failure - try everything, give it a go
- Put 100% effort in - it takes lots of hard work and effort

Vignette 2 - Doing well in maths GCSE session

The session started with the students indicating their confidence levels in maths. Only a few of them felt confident, many were unsure and some admitted a complete lack of confidence.

Four alumni talked to the Year 11 students about the jobs they did, all of which needed a good understanding of maths. Their roles were: broker, accountant, regional manager, and IT consultant. The alumni talked about how they had done in maths, and how they use it in their current jobs. The main points that were highlighted were:

- One of the alumni hadn't got a maths GCSE but regrets it as it took longer for them to get into their job. It meant they had to start at the bottom, work twice as hard and have additional training to get into their chosen career; those who had got maths qualifications had advanced more quickly
- Another of the alumni had struggled with maths as they couldn't see how it applied in real life. They noted the importance of maths as businesses are all about numbers and you need maths in your day to day life for mortgages, bills, budgeting etc: 'maths underpins everything'

Students were then split into four groups and asked to think about possible barriers to getting good results and to write them down on a piece of flipchart paper. Each of the alumni worked with one of the groups to help them think of barriers. The papers were then swapped amongst the groups and students and they were then tasked with identifying solutions to the barriers noted. The alumni also swapped groups so they were able to interact with different students. The facilitator then explained the concept of a SMART target. Students then set themselves such SMART targets to overcome the barriers to success that they had identified for themselves. The facilitator went round each of the groups to ensure the targets set were realistic and encouraged students to think about how they could work towards them.

Alumni finished the session by imparting some final advice to the students. This included:

- Work hard as the next six months are very important
- For those worried about grades - sometimes you don't get them, but just pick yourself up and work hard
- Set yourself goals, revise, learn new things every week, ask for help if you struggle
- Pass it now! If you're struggling and your teacher isn't there use the internet to help you

The first of the series of events for each of the schools was an assembly, which was generally attended by the whole year group. The subsequent sessions were aimed at a smaller group of students identified by the school. The schools differed in how they approached this: for instance, some Future First coordinators liaised with other members of staff in their school to identify students who lacked ambitions or who had no clear ideas about their future plans. Others selected

students who were underachieving at school (typically C/D borderline students, although this varied) in the hope that the sessions would motivate them to work harder for their exams. Others still allowed students to volunteer for the sessions or selected a whole class due to practicalities of timetabling. The majority of the participating schools ran the programme with their Year 11 students, although some decided to involve students from Year 9 and 10 instead, as they felt that they would benefit most.

Some facts and figures at a glance

Number of participating schools	25
Total number of sessions delivered	149
Percentage of sessions targeting students in:	
Year 11	80%
Year 10	15%
Year 9	5%

2.1 Challenges

There were a number of challenges highlighted by school coordinators, both with the logistics and the programme itself.

One of the biggest challenges was trying to arrange six sessions within the packed Year 11 timetable. In one instance, this meant that the school had to run the programme with a whole tutor group as they were unable to take the students out of lessons. Other schools decided to use PSHE time or run sessions after school to accommodate for this. Finding time for students to attend sessions was difficult, as due to exam pressures students were keen to focus on preparing for their GCSEs. As another coordinator noted:

‘I thought all sessions were really good - but the timing was challenging. It was hard to do at the end of Year 11’

Due to the difficulty of scheduling sessions and the extensive number of other events held in this year group, this meant that there were some sessions that students could not attend because they were somewhere else. For instance, one coordinator noted that for one session some students were out on a science trip so were unable to attend the Future First workshop.

At least two of the schools struggled to find a room to accommodate the Future First sessions. In one instance, a school had to run the workshop in a science laboratory which was unsuitable as a workshop venue because of the fixed furniture. However, Future First were able to work around this. Schools noted that they would look more closely at timetabling next year to minimise these issues.

Another challenge in at least two schools was that it was difficult for students to fully engage in the Future First programme, as they felt it was not tailored to their needs. These schools noted that the

students found it hard to relate to all of the alumni speakers as they were not interested in those particular careers. Students themselves noted that they would have found the programme more useful if there had been a greater variety of speakers, particularly in careers they were considering; students in one school said that they would not recommend the programme to others due to the lack of variety in the programme and because they could not relate to the alumni. The majority of students (81%⁵) said they wanted to hear from more alumni. This was exemplified by comments from students about how the programme would have worked better for them:

‘Less professional jobs. Many surgeons came in and business people but not any other type of career’

‘Having someone from my career path’

In one of the case study schools, there were challenges faced with several members of the alumni not turning up for sessions. This then added to the repetitive feel of the programme as it meant that the school was unable to offer students a range of alumni role models.

It was also noted by school coordinators that the students may have related more to alumni that were younger. A student in one of the case study schools explained that although in one of the sessions she liked what the ‘older lady’ was saying, she felt she could relate more to alumni who had more recently left the school. Coordinators noted that when younger alumni had come in to speak to the students - for instance alumni who are currently undertaking an undergraduate degree - the students responded to them well and found it easier to relate to them.

Another element that made it hard for students to remain engaged with the programme was the formulaic approach to the sessions, which some found repetitive. Some students also noted that there were not enough interactive activities which meant they at times lost interest. As one student put it, ‘talking with the alumni dragged a little bit’. Therefore, students suggested that the programme would have been more useful if there had been more practical activities during the sessions. Students in one of the case study schools also indicated that they would have liked more practical support with interview skills, job applications and their CV writing skills. For instance, in one of the case study schools one student highlighted that she did not know what a CV looked like until recently where she had seen one during a careers workshop session run by the coordinator in the school.

In some instances, school coordinators felt that the Future First programme overlapped with other careers work they did within the school, meaning that the programme seemed repetitive. To overcome this, a small number of schools decided to run the sessions for their Year 9 or 10 students instead, as they felt they would benefit more from this intervention.

However, despite these challenges, Future First was consistently praised by school staff for their adaptability and ability to think on their feet to ensure that the programme continued to work for each individual school.

⁵ Future First survey

Section 3: Impact

Overall, the external evaluation findings were consistent with Future First’s own evidence and highlighted that participation in the programme was linked to improvements in: confidence and motivation, better understanding of post-16 opportunities, and enhanced aspirations. Participating students were also able to develop important skills, both essential for their studies (time-keeping and revision techniques), and their future life (CV writing and similar). Finally, the evaluation evidence highlighted that many of the participating students made better, and sometimes much better, progress in their maths and particularly English GCSEs than their non-participating peers.

Each of the main areas of impact on the participating students is considered in detail below.

3.1 Confidence

One key way that the Future First sessions have been seen to impact students was by enhancing their career confidence. The majority of students (82%⁶) felt that attending the Future First sessions had helped them to feel more confident about the future, both in terms of their studies and career. A similar proportion (85%⁷) felt that meeting former students showed them that people like themselves could be successful. This increase in confidence was exemplified by the following quotes from students:

‘It has helped me build my confidence in my future’

‘[The sessions] made me realise different skills and the skills I have’

‘[The sessions] helped me get more confident’

By hearing about a number of alumni’s successes in the world of work, students’ attitudes both to their education and to their future career path were seen to change for the better. They saw that if they tried hard they were more likely to succeed in their careers:

‘Because they spoke about how bad they did at school but they still got a good career out of it, so I feel like if I stick it out I have a good chance of a decent job’ (Student)

Teachers in the case study schools also noted that they had seen improvements in their students’ mindsets towards their future. Coordinators noted that the sessions had helped students to realise that it’s ‘okay’ to make mistakes and that you can still carry on and be successful, allowing students to feel more positive about their future. One coordinator in particular noted that they had begun to



Figure 1: A word cloud showing how students felt the sessions had helped them

‘It shows you can go out and do what you want to do and help other people see what your dreams are’

Student

⁶ Here and below the figures given draw on the CUREE survey data, unless otherwise indicated.

⁷ Future First surveys

‘observe boys who began to see themselves as boys who could be successful’. Another noted that the students who were getting their GCSE results this year were not as nervous as those from last year because they knew there were other opportunities out there.

Hearing about different alumni’s paths from attending school to their current career had helped students to see how people were able to achieve their goals. One of the students stated, and several others agreed, that the best thing to have come out of taking part in the alumni programme was feeling more positive about their future. Additionally, a school coordinator observed that the school’s involvement in the Future First programme had helped to develop a culture amongst students of looking forward to becoming alumni and being able to come back to the school to support others in the future.

3.2 Motivation and attitude to learning

Attitudes towards GCSEs slightly improved during the course of the sessions. For instance, over a quarter of students (26%) at the beginning of the year said that they would like to get good grades but were not doing anything in particular to achieve this. This went down to 17% after all the sessions had been completed. A small number of students also highlighted extra measures they had put in to place in order to do well in their GCSEs:

‘I go to extra sessions to try and achieve good grades in the exam’

‘I try to revise a lot before exams’

The majority of students (84%) felt that hearing from people in different jobs made them want to work harder in school, whilst a similar proportion (77%) said that the sessions had inspired them to get better grades. Around three quarters of students (79%) said the sessions had inspired them to revise more and work harder for their exams. When asked what they had learnt from attending the Future First sessions, students noted:

‘Your GCSEs stay with you forever no matter what kind of job you apply for’

‘That you need good GCSEs in maths and English to be able to pursue your dreams’

By hearing the alumni’s successes, the students realised what was possible for them to aspire to, which consequently gave them more motivation to work harder for their exams. It was noted by coordinators that students had found hearing the alumni talk about both their experiences at school and their current career motivating and they had responded well. For example, one student stated that the sessions had helped her to see how important GCSEs were:

‘Having GCSEs makes you get further quicker’

‘I found lessons on maths and English important because it made me realise how important it was’

Student

Students noted that before the sessions they did not see the real importance of GCSEs - particularly when they knew of people who had done well without them - but that the sessions had made them realise that it was much easier to get into a career if you have good GCSEs. Having realised this, students were more motivated to work harder for their exams. Members of staff also reported that one of the

key impacts of the sessions was that they helped students to value their learning more. This also applied to other year groups who participated in the programme, particularly Year 10. Coordinators noted the increase in their students' motivation as a result of the programme. For instance, following on from one of the sessions a student had commented:

'I really have to stop being lazy and do better'.

3.3 New study skills

Almost three quarters of students (71%) agreed that the Future First sessions had helped them understand how to do well in their exams. Sessions on revision strategies were identified by students and staff alike as one of the most useful sessions they attended. These sessions had enabled them to learn new strategies to use when revising, which made students feel more able and confident in preparing for their exams, Comments included:

'I also enjoyed learning revision methods because it was useful information for my exams'

'Learning how to revise because it gave me an idea about better revision'

'By remembering what I could achieve so I revise more'

Students found the tools used (such as the bubble map or colour chart) particularly helpful in terms of what they needed to know and what they should revise, as well as finding alumni's tips on revision useful. Teachers also noted these sessions as being particularly practical in their provision of useful tips and reminders, and in their emphasis on the importance of revision.

'[The sessions] made me feel better about exam result day'

Student

A more informed and positive attitude towards revision also had the effect of reducing students' stress levels in relation to exams: over half of students (54%) noted towards the beginning of the year that exams made them stressed, which reduced to around a third (34%) by the end of the year.

3.4 Behaviour

There was some evidence that attending Future First sessions had helped to improve students' behaviour inside the classroom. Around three quarters of students (74%) felt that the sessions had inspired them to concentrate in lessons. A similar proportion (72%) said that the sessions had inspired them to get more involved in lessons. Staff at one of the case study sites also noted that behaviour had improved.

3.5 Attainment

Having learnt different revision strategies, students felt they were able to go on and revise better and to consequently achieve better results. This was exemplified in the following quotes from students:

'I learnt how to revise better and pass with higher grades in my exams'

'My grades went up in maths as I knew how to revise'

'I have got better grades in my lessons'

Students noted that key messages from the alumni sessions were ‘to work hard’ and ‘the importance of studying’. In some cases, staff noted that this had transferred into the classroom:

‘We saw improvements more when it came to revision classes and when they started to hand in coursework’

‘In terms of grades, he’s definitely moved up from being on a D grade a year ago to getting Bs in his assessments most recently, so he definitely has progressed over a year and now he’s in a group that’s not a C/D group, but a higher group that does a higher paper’.

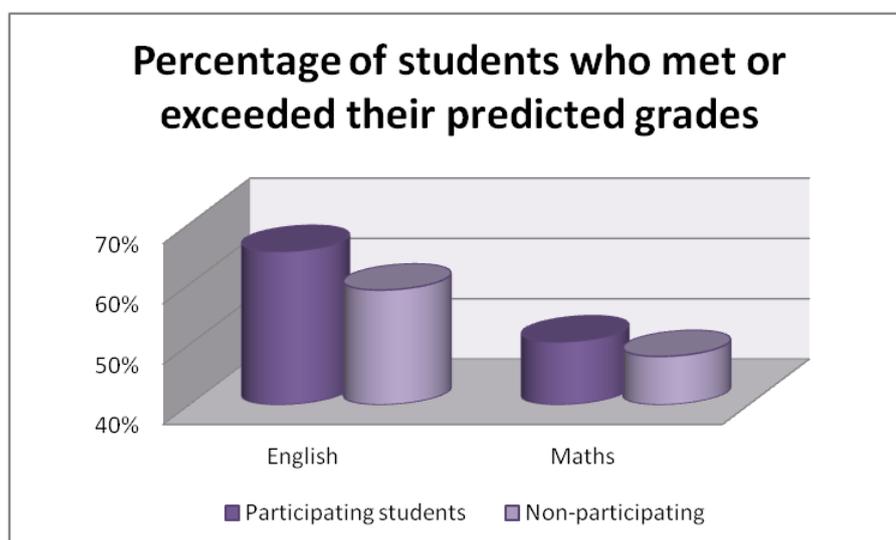
3.5.1 In-depth analysis of student progress and performance (participating schools only)

Pooled data analysis (combined datasets for all participating schools)

As well as gathering the participating student and staff accounts and perceptions, the evaluation team carried out an analysis of the assessment data from five schools where Future First delivered between 4-6 sessions to their Year 11 students. The schools came from a mix of geographical areas, were of different size and type (such as academy and community schools), and reflected a range of levels of school⁸ and student⁹ performance. More information about the schools can be found in Section 6.3 (see ‘participating schools’).

When the datasets with the predicated and actual GCSE scores were pooled across the five schools, it emerged that students who participated in the programme made better progress than their peers who did not take part in Future First sessions: a higher proportion of participating students met or exceeded their predicted grades in both English and maths as the graph below illustrates.

Graph 1¹⁰



Given that many schools selected their ‘C/D borderline students’ to take part in the programme¹¹ and taking into account that these students tend to receive unusually intensive support from their

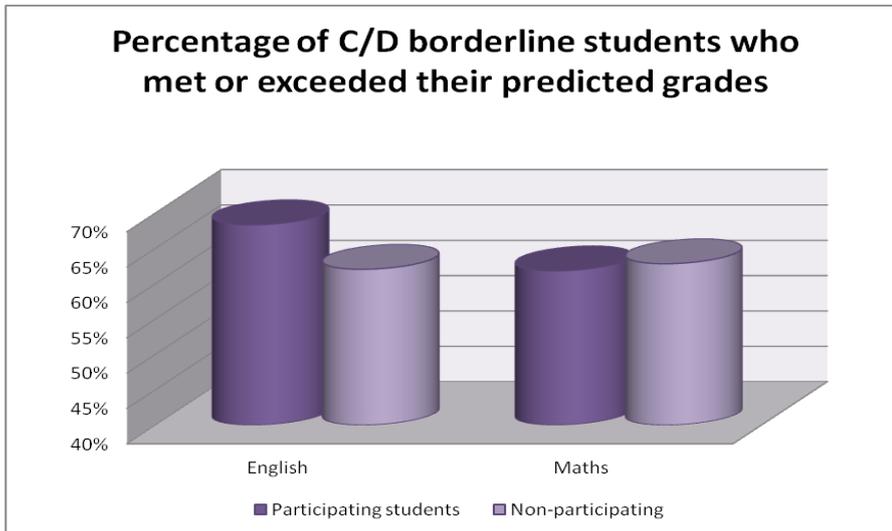
⁸ From Ofsted ‘outstanding’ to ‘inadequate’.

⁹ Five GCSEs including English and maths.

¹⁰ Here and below, please refer to Appendix 2 for the full numbers reported on.

schools in the form of multiple interventions, an additional analysis was carried out to establish if there was a difference between the C/D borderline students who were and were not involved in the programme. Compared to non-participating 'C/D borderline students' from the same schools, a higher proportion of participating C/D borderline students met or exceeded their predicted grades in English. However, this effect was not found for maths, as seen in the graph below.

Graph 2



¹¹ Just under 60% of the students who were involved in Future First's alumni sessions in the five schools were the so called 'C/D borderline students'

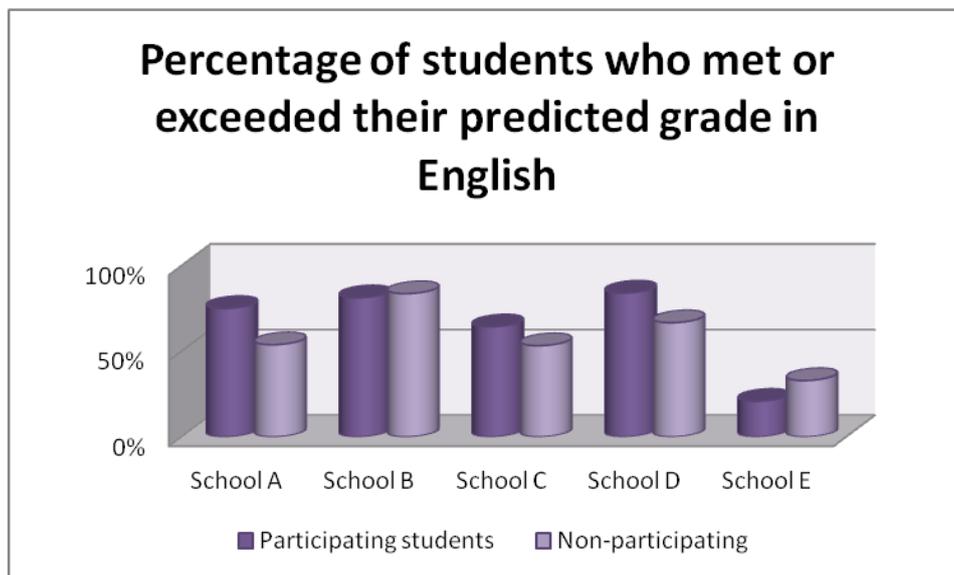
School-specific analysis

Further analysis was then carried out for each of the participating schools, focusing on two core subjects – English and maths.

English

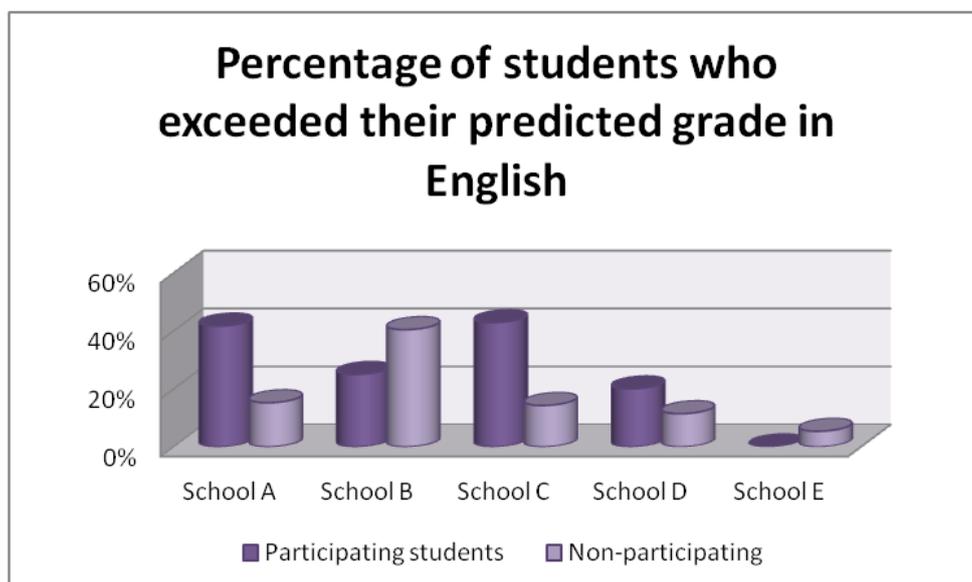
In three out of five schools the students who took part in Future First sessions made better progress **in English** than their peers (from the same school) who did not: they achieved their predicted grades or exceeded these. For the remaining two schools, in one instance the difference between the proportion of the participating and non-participating students was minimal; in the other - the non-participating students made better progress.

Graph 3



In the three schools where the participating students' progress (in terms of meeting their predicted grades) was better than that of their non-participating peers – schools A, C, and D – the proportion of the participating young people who *exceeded* their grades in English was considerably higher than that of the non-participating students.

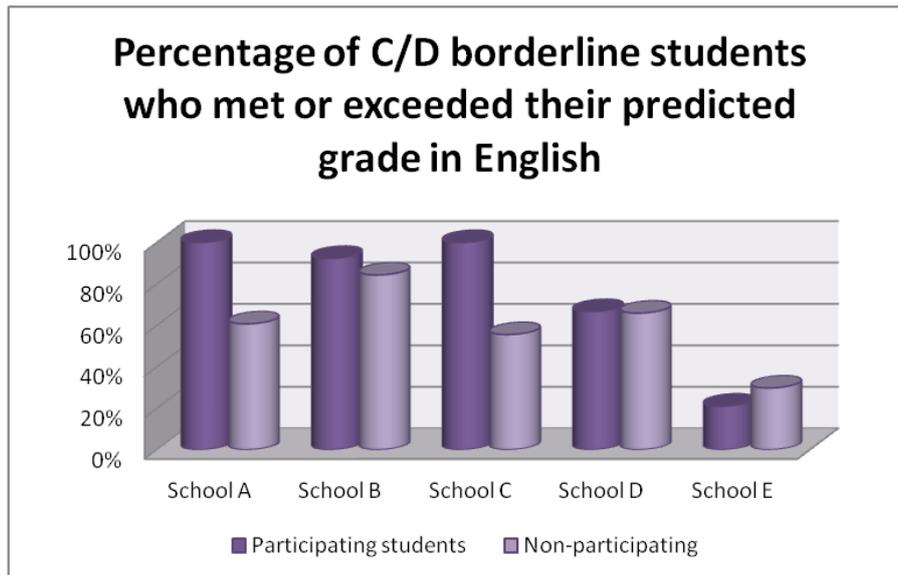
Graph 4



As with the pooled datasets, an additional analysis was carried out to establish if there was a difference between the C/D borderline students who were and were not involved in the programme.

In two schools, the participating C/D borderline students were almost twice as likely to achieve their predicted grades or exceed these, compared to the non-participating ones. In one school (B) the participating C/D borderline students performed slightly better than the non-participating C/D borderline students (92% and 84% respectively). In the remaining two schools the difference was either minimal (School D: 67% and 66%) or slightly negative (school E).

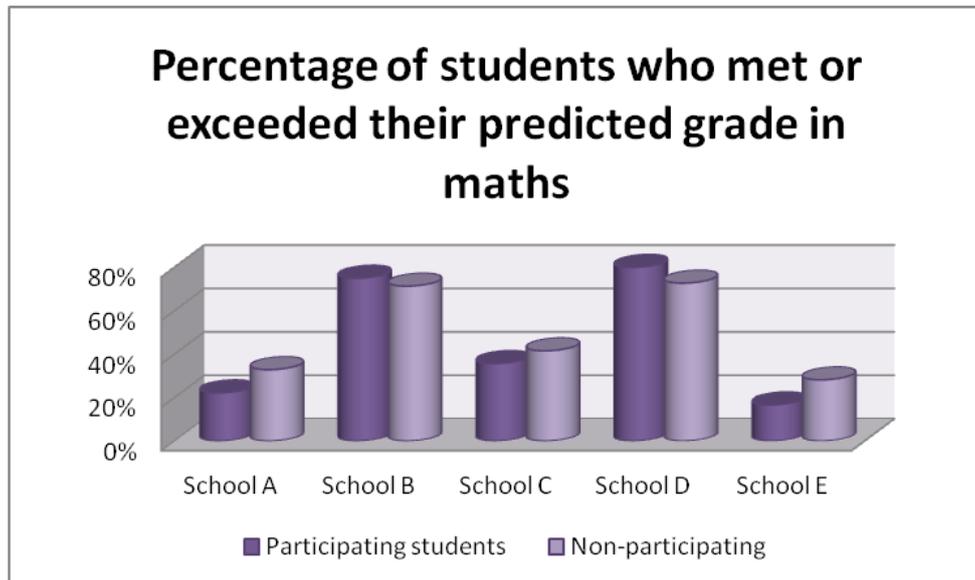
Graph 5



Maths

In **maths**, the participating students made better progress than the rest of the cohort in two out of five schools – schools B and D. Their progress was similar to or slightly lower than that of the rest of the cohort in three remaining schools (A, C, and E).

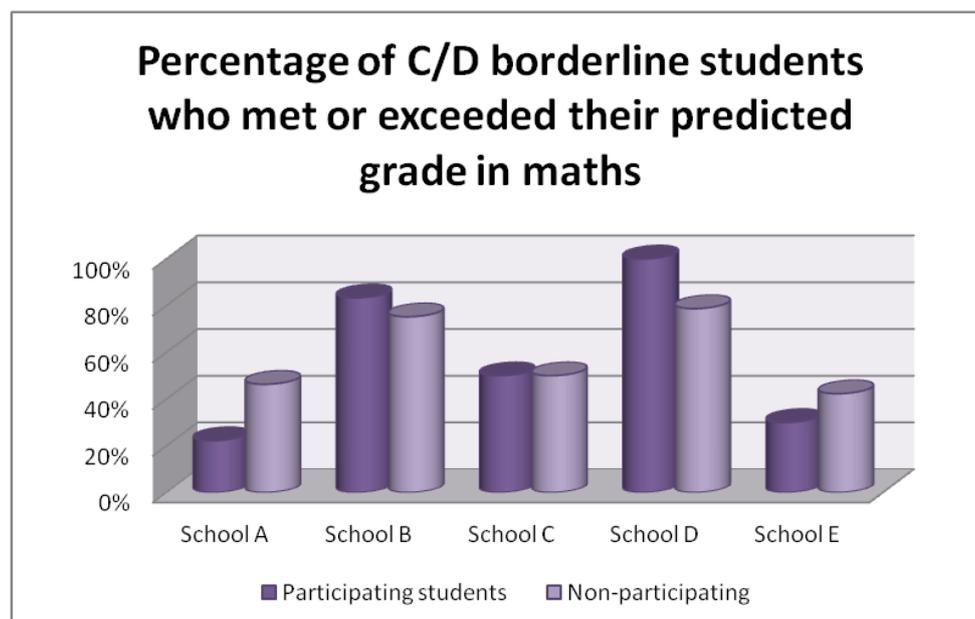
Graph 6



Only in one school (A) the proportion of students who exceeded their predicted grades was higher for the participating than non-participating students.

An additional analysis for C/D borderline students revealed a picture that was virtually identical to that of the entire cohort (see Graph 6).

Graph 7



Overall, the analysis of the assessment data from five schools whose students attended Future First's alumni sessions reveals a positive picture: in four out of five schools the participating students did better than their non-participating peers in either English or maths. In one of these schools, the participating students did better than their peers in both subjects. It is however worth noticing that in one school (E) the participating students performed worse than their peers in both English and maths. The participating students' progress in English was greater than that in maths.

An additional piece of analysis was then carried out to try and reveal why the participating students in some schools performed better than their peers in other schools. In some instances this could be attributed to 'external factors', such as the quality of teaching and learning in schools in question. For example, the school where the participating students displayed a lower rate of progress in both English and maths had been graded as 'inadequate' by Ofsted at the time of data analysis, noting that the quality of teaching and learning requires improvement. In the case of another school, the analysis of students' GCSE performance year on year suggests that one of the departments is considerably stronger than the other: the pattern of progress and performance for students who took part in Future First was consistent with that trend. In this respect, it is important to highlight that Future First's alumni programme is not directly focused on offering interventions in maths and English (and should not be viewed as one) and therefore cannot be expected to improve the quality of teaching and learning in these subjects. Instead, it focuses on preparing students to make the most of the learning opportunities in front of them, increasing their motivation and attitude to learning in particular.

In other cases, where the participating students' progress was good in one core subject but not the other and this could not be explained by visible differences between departments within those schools, or where the participating students' progress was only marginally better, the research team looked for 'internal' (i.e. related to the programme) factors. A retrospective analysis of the qualitative data collected within this project revealed that in these cases there were some (initial) issues to do with making the sessions fully relevant to the participating students. This was mostly due to difficulties associated with bringing in a wide enough mix (in terms of age and choice of career in particular) of alumni or in some instances of session content overlapping with some areas of the school curriculum.

3.5.2 'Headline' comparison of assessment data for participating and non-participating schools

A further analysis was carried out to explore the scope and validity of an "external" comparison with students in non-participating schools. In order to do so, entire cohort results from five participating schools were compared with those from five non-participating schools.

The 2014 aggregate scores (five A*-C GCSE's including English and maths) of both sets of schools were lower than the previous year, as was the average nationally. The dip was slightly more pronounced for the participating group of schools. The variation was more complex when examined at the subject specific level where participating schools' GCSE performance was better in maths whereas non-participating schools' GCSE results were better in English.

These headline findings should be treated with caution and considered inconclusive as despite the evaluation team's attempts to closely match the two pools of schools (see section 6.3 for more detail) it was not possible to ensure a perfect match and eliminate all other potentially confounding

variables within this small scale research study. For example, further investigation highlighted that one of the schools in the comparison pool performed significantly better than the previous year returning to the level of performance that was typical to it before (i.e. it had a 'blip' in its results followed by its Ofsted grading being lowered just before it was identified to be involved in the study). It is also important to remember that the total number of participating students was less than 20% of the total in participating schools, and less than 10% of all students in the study. The impact of the intervention on that small number of students is likely to be undetectable against all the other variables.

In this respect, a larger scale study, preferably under randomised control trial conditions is required in order to test the hypothesis about whether participation in the programme improves student results to an extent that it positively affects whole cohort's performance.

3.6 Awareness of possibilities open to them

As well as acquiring knowledge, skills and behaviours they could put to use straight away, the participating students were also able to consider and prepare for their future.

'[The sessions] helped me think of what I can do after leaving school'

Student

One of the key impacts of the Future First programme was that it raised students' awareness of the possibilities open to them in the future, both in terms of their education and in terms of possible careers.

Over three quarters of students (77%¹²) agreed that the sessions had improved their knowledge of courses and jobs they could do in the future. A similar proportion (82%) said the sessions helped them to learn about different routes into jobs such as universities and apprenticeships. This was mirrored in responses from school coordinators, who found the programme useful as it allowed students to interact with alumni from a number of different backgrounds and careers, and it had exposed students to routes other than college and university. As a result, students developed a more positive attitude towards learning, as they realised there were other routes they could take to get into a career they wanted. For example, one student was struggling to get the grades they needed, but was inspired by a former student who had gone on to do an apprenticeship, before going on to do a degree at the age of 23. This had made the student realise that they were able to take different routes to get where they wanted to be.

The majority of students (85%) felt that the sessions had helped them to find out about different jobs. As a broad range of professions were generally represented at the sessions (including job roles such as politicians, accountants and games designers), this gave students the opportunity to hear about jobs they otherwise may not have thought about or looked into. The majority of students (89%¹³) felt that hearing from people in jobs who used to go to their school was useful. This is exemplified by the following quotes from students about why hearing about different jobs was useful for them:

'You can see the pupils responding and thinking *Oh I could do that*, and it's something they probably haven't thought about before'

Headteacher

'It made me realise that there are more career paths I can take'

¹² Future First survey

¹³ Future First survey

‘Hearing about different jobs so I know what GCSEs I need for the job I want’

‘It [gave] me ideas on future job choices’

Although many of the participating students stated that they already knew what careers they wanted to go in to, the majority of them felt that Future First gave them more knowledge and awareness about their career options. It also allowed students to broaden their horizons and consider a range of other career paths. As one student put it:

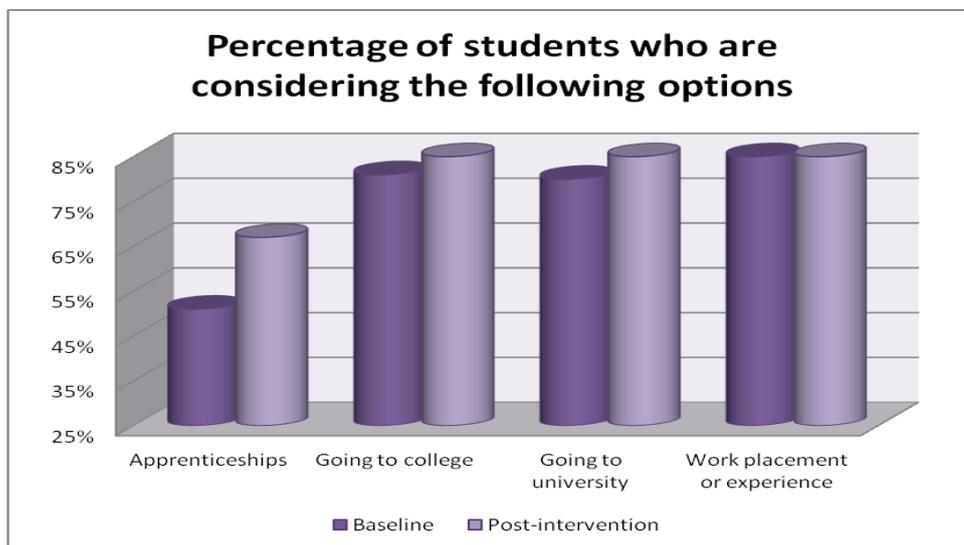
‘I learnt how to decide on more than one option for a job because I was dead set on one career and the sessions helped me understand that you should think of more than one career in case one of them doesn’t succeed’

In some cases, students also changed their previous aspirations to a completely different career path, based on the types of job they heard about within the sessions. For instance, one student had originally wanted to be a nurse but following on from the sessions decided to pursue her love of art and design, as hearing from an alumna about the work she does within games design helped her see a way of sustaining this interest.

3.7 Career aspirations

During the course of the sessions, of the number of students who said that they were considering options such as going to university showed a moderate increase, more so for apprenticeships. This can be seen in the graph below.

Graph 8



Listening to the experiences of former students of the school had been aspirational for many of the students, shown by the following remarks when talking about what they had learnt:

- ‘Aim high. Don’t let anything stop you’
- ‘All you need to do is try your best and you will do well in life’
- ‘There’s no dream too big to be fulfilled’

‘I’d love to do Future First with all year groups... You can change aspirations in one year...’

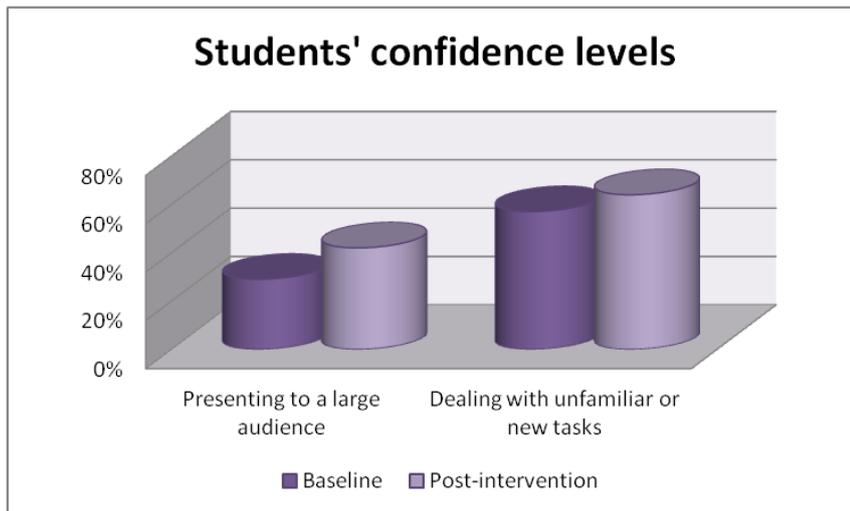
School coordinator

Although many of the students who had discussions with

Although some students noted that they would have liked more practical help in terms of writing a CV or applying for jobs, coordinators felt that the students' employability skills had been boosted by taking part in the programme.

Confidence levels also increased during the course of the Future First programme. This was particularly the case for students' confidence in presenting to a large audience or dealing with unfamiliar or new tasks. This can be seen in the graph below:

Graph 9



Members of staff also noted these changes in confidence. One teacher stated that:

'I think all students have benefitted and have all developed confidence and the ability to work with others - they may not notice this themselves, but I think they've all benefitted'.

3.9 Accessing more work experience

The number of students who were considering undertaking work experience in the future increased slightly during the course of the programme: 85% were thinking about doing some work experience at the beginning of the programme; this rose to 90% at the end of the sessions. The majority of students (80%) felt that the sessions had inspired them to pursue more opportunities such as work experience and volunteering. Although the majority of students already had an idea about their future career and some had already sought work experience, attending the workshops had given them more awareness of the variety of employers and how to contact them. One student commented:

'I'd already got in touch with employers but they gave me more companies I could contact'

In some instances, alumni were also able to offer students work experience or shadowing opportunities. For example, in one of the case study sites, two students were able to shadow a local MP that had spoken at one of the events. One of the students noted that this had made them want to access more work experience in the future, commenting:

'I was apprehensive before starting the work experience, but I'll definitely do this kind of thing again now'

Section 4: Conclusions and recommendations

The analysis of the evidence collected within this evaluation suggests the programme was largely successful in meeting its aims: improvements had been noted in the students' attitudes towards their learning, aspirations for the future and their awareness of the opportunities available to them. The latter is particularly encouraging in the context of an urgent need for clear and high quality, independent career information, advice and guidance, as advocated by various stakeholders including central and local governments, employers, educational organisations, parents and young people themselves.

Whilst not fully conclusive due to the small scale of this research (please see associated limitations described in sections 1.2 and 3.5), the in-depth analysis of the assessment data for the participating students and its comparison with their non-participating peers revealed positive improvements in the levels of progress and attainment for the young people who participated in Future First sessions, particularly in English.

The findings related to the assessment data analysis suggest that Future First should consider:

- seeking funding to carry out a large research and evaluation study, preferably a randomised control trial, to determine whether a finding about the participation in the programme positively affecting student results can be generalised and the effect of the programme isolated. When doing so, we recommend using independent standardised assessments (as well as GCSE scores) in order to precisely establish the level of students' skills in the core subjects immediately before and after the intervention.

Regardless of the degree of success with the above, the evaluation team also recommends that the attention to using assessment data alongside other evidence is sustained as the programme is rolled out to new schools. Future First might for example consider:

- routinely collecting assessment data from all its participating schools to perform in-house analysis or supporting the schools to perform such an assessment and submit their headline findings to Future First for cross-school analysis.

Relevance emerged as a key success factor for the programme. Future First sessions worked better where students could easily relate to the alumni and where the sessions were carefully selected to target areas not already covered by the schools' curricular and extra-curricular work.

With this in mind, Future First should find ways to:

- involve greater numbers of alumni who have more recently left the school as this can help students relate more to what they are saying. By listening to alumni who are currently undertaking, for example, an apprenticeship or degree, students are likely to gain concrete awareness of the next steps they could take after school and what these experiences are like; and
- ensure that the alumni are from relevant and varied career paths to ensure the sessions are useful for as many students as possible.

Although the sessions had benefitted the students in many ways, students noted that they could be more useful if there was more of a focus on their learning and revision, and if sessions were more engaging. In order to do this, Future First should:

- incorporate more group work and interactive activities to ensure that sessions remain engaging for students;
- produce a sheet or workbook for students to keep during the sessions to document their progress. This will help to ensure students track the work they are doing within the workshops and help them to work towards any targets they set;
- ensure there is a clear focus on exams and future courses, as students noted:
 - ‘Give more information on the a-levels and university courses the former students took and how they felt about them’
 - ‘Talk more about the grades and how to do the exams’

Another important finding was the suitability of the programme for younger students. Schools that offered the programme to younger students as well as their Year 11 cohort found it worked equally well or better for Year 9-10 students. Feedback from the participating school staff and leaders was unanimous: they highlighted the difficulty of scheduling sessions (particularly six of them) for Year 11, noting that there were instances when students quite simply did not have the time to put their learning into practice.

In this respect, Future First should consider:

- primarily aiming the programme at younger (Year 9 and 10) students.

Appendix 1: Case studies

Case study 1

Context

School 1 is a smaller than average sized secondary school, which became a sponsored academy in January 2012. Currently, a well above average proportion of pupils are eligible for pupil premium funding. Almost all pupils are from White British communities, with few pupils from minority ethnic groups. A small number of Year 10 and 11 pupils attend the local authority pupil referral provision five days a week, with two pupils attending vocational programmes at the local college once a week. The school was graded 'requires improvement' in its most recent Ofsted inspection in February 2014.

The school was originally approached by Future First to take part. The Future First programme was chosen as it fits well with the school's own aims and the development of a network of alumni is in tune with the schools' practice of working with outside agencies and groups. The school rolled out the programme for the first time in the 2013-14 academic year; they worked with a group of alumni to develop students' confidence, motivation and awareness of future career opportunities.

How did the programme work?

Around 20 Year 11 students took part in the Future First programme in the 2013-14 academic year. The majority of these students were selected in conjunction with careers advisors, tutors and house leaders, who selected mainly those students who had been identified as having not applied for anything for next year, or those who had no ideas about what they might do. Other students selected included those who achieved well and had more direction and whose parents had, for example, arranged work experience for them. The idea was that the higher achieving students could help the lower achieving students and that they could work together to share some of their knowledge and skills. In the process, all students would learn from working together and develop some of the 'soft' skills regarded as essential for employability.

The following Future First sessions were run at the school:

- *Confidence and inspiration* (Year 11 assembly)
- *Building confidence (part 1)* workshop
- *Building confidence (part 2)- goal setting* workshop
- *Revision planning and techniques* workshop
- *Getting a C in English- why and how* workshop
- *Getting a C in Maths- why and how* workshop

The sessions were chosen by the Future First facilitator who planned which sessions would take place next. The school was briefed in detail two weeks before the session. The facilitator identified the alumni who would be attending and explained what she was planning on doing during the session. During sessions themselves, the facilitator established continuity by informing students how they would be following up the activities in the next session.

During the sessions, the facilitator outlined what they would be doing in the session and began by introducing herself and those alumni who were present. Alumni talked to the students about both

their experiences of school and about their working life. Alumni came from a range of occupations, which included a politician, a tour manager, and an author. Group activities were set up, in which the students worked in pairs or small groups, with the alumni working with them to give them encouragement and ideas.

The programme was co-ordinated within the school by one of the House Leaders, who also has responsibility for post-16 transition. As her role involved working closely with the careers advisors and she knew Year 11 well, she was asked by the Head to take responsibility for the Future First programme. The co-ordinator worked closely with the Future First facilitator to organise sessions and ensure they ran smoothly. Her role included selecting the students, organising the practicalities of the sessions (booking rooms etc), and attending each session.

Challenges

There were some challenges encountered during the programme, mostly related to time constraints. For the first two sessions, there was some confusion. The original plan had been to hold the Year 11 assembly, followed by the first workshop for the target students. However, on the day, the year group was unavailable for the assembly. In a departure from the original plan, they held the assembly for the Year 9 group (who appeared to engage with the content), and then ran the Year 11 workshop, with the Year 11 assembly following somewhat later on. Although this meant that the assembly repeated much of what had been done in the workshop, students actually saw this as reinforcing their learning.

Because of the extensive number of other events held in the school, there was some difficulty in finding slots for the six sessions in the calendar. This meant that there were some sessions that students could not attend because they were somewhere else. For instance, for one session some students were out on a science trip so were unable to attend. However, Future First staff were praised for their adaptability and good communication in light of this and the school's relationship with Future First was regarded as being very good.

One other challenge was the fact that there was no allotted time in the curriculum for careers education, so instead the school had to use PSHE time. All of the alumni sessions were booked on the school's 'drop down PSHE' days, so that students were not being taken out of lessons. However, this led to an initial issue with room space. As there were so many other events taking place on this day, all the rooms were booked up quickly. In one instance, the only available space was a science laboratory with fixed benches. This was tricky because of the fixed furniture in the room, but again Future First were able to use their initiative to make it work. The remaining sessions were then organised in classrooms with flexible furniture.

What was the impact?

One of the key ways that participation in the Future First programme had an impact on students was improving 'mindsets' towards GCSEs. Students initially highlighted two key factors in doing well in GCSEs. Firstly, all students realised that it was important to achieve good grades for their future job. The second factor was students' improved attitudes towards working harder. For example, one student said that one of the sessions helped her see how important GCSEs were, "having GCSEs make you get further quicker". This student indicated that before the Future First session she did not see the real importance of GCSEs because she knew people who had done well without them; however she realised in the sessions that it was much easier to get started on your career if you

have good GCSEs. Other students also revealed that although they did not find GCSEs enjoyable, they had now realised that they were “educational”. Another student interviewed said that a key thing they had learnt from the session was to “try your hardest”, whilst one of the survey respondents remarked that “all you need to do is try your best and you will do well in life”. A teacher also felt that Future First had helped students to realise that it’s ‘okay to make mistakes’; you can still carry on and be successful. One student said that Future First helped them to feel more positive about their future: “Because they spoke about how bad they did at school but they still got a good career out of it, so I feel like if I stick it out I have a good chance of a decent job”.

Another key impact of the sessions was that they gave students a greater awareness of career opportunities. A broad variety of occupations were represented in the group of alumni at the sessions, which allowed students to hear about jobs they had not thought about before. They also gained a greater awareness of careers which might be available to them, as well as of the relative complexity of some jobs. For example, it made them realise how important a tour manager’s job was and how much they had to do. By listening to the talks given by alumni, students were able to think of other career paths. For example, one student had originally wanted to be a nurse but had changed to art and design as a result of the programme. She enjoyed the subject and after hearing of the experiences of one of the alumni who designed games for a living, she was able to see a way to sustain this. Although the majority of students had an idea about their future career prior to taking part in the programme, attending the workshop give them a little more awareness of the variety of employers and how to contact them. One student stated, “I’d already got in touch with employers but they gave me more companies I could contact”.

Taking part in Future First has also helped to raise students’ aspirations. A few students commented that the sessions gave them more ideas. One said “I thought about getting my own business”. Although some students already knew what careers they want to go into, the programme raised their expectations through seeing how far people can go. Another student commented, “It shows that you can go out and do what you want to do and help other people see what your dreams are. The former students have come to the school, sat in the same desks and had the same teachers so they know what it’s like to be us”. Students did, however, feel that they would have preferred real life experiences and talks from professionals which were more relevant to the careers to which they themselves aspired.

Some of the teachers interviewed felt that talking part in Future First created a sense of continuity. For example, one alumnus attended all but one of the sessions, which had made students feel more confident about talking to him. Students would often talk to him first and ask him questions during the sessions. Other teachers felt that students had become more confident and forthcoming. One teacher stated that, “I think all students have benefitted and have all developed confidence and the ability to work with others- they may not notice this themselves, but I think they’ve all benefitted”.

One session that had been found to be particularly helpful was the revision session. Some students said that they not only found it useful but also enjoyable. Students found the tools used (such as the bubble map/colour chart) helpful in terms of what they need to know and what to revise. Teachers also viewed the session as useful as it gave students tips and reminders and emphasised the importance of revision. Other activities they thought were particularly enjoyable included interactive discussions about GCSEs.

Analysis of students' assessment data revealed that the students who took part in Future First made better progress in English than those who had not participated. The students who attended the workshops on average scored higher in their exams than predicted, whilst their peers on average performed worse than expected overall. However this pattern was not noticeable in maths where all students performed worse than their minimum acceptable grades (MAG). The participating students made slightly poorer progress than their peers. The average changes in grades from MAG to actual GCSE grades can be seen in the table below (e.g. '-1' represents students achieving on average one grade lower than their MAG):

	Participating students (14)	Non-participating students (77)
English	+0.29 change	-0.44 change
Maths	-1.14 change	-0.86 change

The general feeling from members of the faculty who were involved in Future First was that the sessions were of a good quality and that 'the interaction has benefitted all'. One member of staff also commented that they felt the sessions had been pitched well for the year group.

Where next?

The school is planning on continuing to work with Future First and have signed up to the programme again for next year, viewing it as a long term commitment. As the Head noted, '[Future First] has more status in the school now'. The focus will continue to be on Year 11, as they are seen to be the group that need the most input in the shortest space of time, although there is the view that perhaps the programme would work better for Year 10 to get them to think about their future earlier on. The school also feels there is scope for wider alumni involvement. To this end, when they celebrate the school's 50th birthday, they will be inviting as many alumni as possible to the gala they will be holding.

Evidence for this report

Two CUREE researchers interviewed the Head teacher and the member of staff responsible for co-ordinating the Future First programme within the school. The researchers also interviewed two pairs of students and held two focus groups with six students overall. Assessment data was also analysed, comparing the results of the participating students and their peers in English and maths. We would like to thank everyone who met with the researchers for generously giving their time.

Case study 2

Context

School 2 is a larger than average secondary school, which includes a specialist unit for deaf students. The proportion of students known to be eligible for the pupil premium is well above average. The majority of the pupils are from minority ethnic groups and the proportion speaking English as an additional language is also above average. The school has a specialism in performing arts and has been selected to become a partner in the Music in Secondary Schools Trust. In its most recent Ofsted report the school was graded as 'good'. Inspectors noted that learners were making good progress in English and mathematics, and that most pupils had a positive attitude towards learning.

How did the programme work?

The school wanted to take part in the Future First programme to help raise students' enthusiasm for learning. Year 11 pupils attended two assemblies initially, where they were introduced to the programme. Students were then given the option of volunteering for the programme. However specific students were recommended to take part in Future First based on advice from the heads of house, pastoral managers, tutor, the assistant head and also the school's Future First coordinator. The coordinator reported that, "from the pool of students that we had, we also took head of house recommendations and teacher recommendations as well".

This was the first programme the school had taken part in with Future First, although they had worked with similar sixth form and mentoring programmes. The expectation was that Future First would give students additional motivation and encouragement to help them reach their grades. The school's Future First coordinator explained that "a lot of the students who were allocated positions on the programme have low self-esteem and confidence issues, or need a boost and advice and guidance to push them towards their grades". She went on to say that the programme was "about prepping and helping those students acquire the skills to do that, and that was one of the main attractions about the Future First programme".

The school took part in six of the Future First sessions that included:

- confidence building;
- planning and organising timetables;
- revision techniques; and
- sessions focusing on post-16 career routes.

The sessions were chosen by the school on the basis of what the curriculum already offered students, gaps in this offer and feedback from heads of school and pastoral managers. Students enrolled onto the Future First programme attended all six of the sessions, and the final assembly was attended by the whole year group.

The programme was coordinated in the school by the Community Engagement Officer who is also responsible for careers and who supports one of the assistant heads with responsibility for extended partnerships. She pointed out that "the programme was offered to me to start with so I went to the assistant head and said I think we should take this up".

The coordinator attended and oversaw several of the sessions and observed others. She found them engaging and interactive as pupils were not, "just sitting there and being spoken to."

During one particular session, which dealt with post-16 routes, the coordinator described how students worked on a one to one basis with the alumni. This had worked well because some pupils who would have been too shy to put their hand up in class “got to speak to them on a one to one basis and could ask questions”.

Challenges

The main challenge faced by the coordinator related to finding time for the students to attend sessions, as due to exam pressures students were keen to focus on preparing for their GCSEs. The coordinator found that trying to find a room to accommodate sessions was also challenging even though some sessions took place after school. She highlighted that next year the school will look closely at timetabling for students to help reduce the panic of preparing for exams whilst trying to attend Future First sessions.

What was the impact?

Students said that Future First had helped them to place more value on learning and had raised their awareness of the career choices available to them after school. The Future First coordinator felt that the programme had exposed students to post-16 routes other than college and university and had given them the opportunity to interact with alumni from a range of career backgrounds. She gave an example of a student struggling to get his required grades, who was inspired by an ex-student who had completed an apprenticeship and then later progressed to university aged 23. The student saw that he could do this later on in life if he wanted to. The coordinator said that the programme had opened them up to different routes to learning, which had helped to alter attitudes to learning. Students have been able to see alternatives to the academic university route, such as apprenticeships. Some of the students still recognised former students and seeing what they had achieved and how they had gone about it has raised aspirations and been inspiring.

One student also said that the programme taught them how to consider a range of employment opportunities, rather than just one: “I learnt how to decide on more than one option for a job because I was dead set on one career and the sessions helped me understand that you should think of more than one career in case one of them doesn’t succeed”.

Students felt that the programme helped them to feel more confident about having a successful career and to work harder for their GCSEs. The Future First coordinator reported that the students who were getting their GCSE results this year, in comparison to those last year, were not as nervous because they knew there were other opportunities out there.

The coordinator felt one of the sessions relating to post-16 routes, which was run by two alumni, had particularly helped to inspire students. One of the alumni, who was deaf, spoke about his experiences and the prejudices he had encountered after leaving school. One student said that hearing from people outside of the school talk about their experiences “helped me to understand what I’ll be facing in the outside world after school.” Another said that hearing the ex-students speak about their experiences and how they “move up” was most helpful, “as soon as you leave the gates the world’s out there”.

Students indicated that Future First did not help them to learn new revision techniques or feel more confident about approaching employers. One student also said that he lost interest during the session where there was a long power point and would have preferred to do something a little more

interactive. However both the students and the coordinator felt that overall the programme had been enjoyable and helpful.

Analysis of students' assessment data revealed that the students who took part in Future First made better progress in English than those who had not participated. The students who attended the workshops on average scored higher in their exams than predicted, whilst their peers on average performed worse than expected overall. However this pattern was not noticeable in maths where all students performed worse than their target grades. The participating students made slightly poorer progress than their peers. The average changes in grades from target to actual GCSE grades can be seen in the table below (-1 represents students achieving on average a grade lower than their target grade):

	Participating students (18)	Non-participating students (225)
English Language	+0.33 change	-0.35 change
English Literature	+0.13 change	-0.03 change
Maths	-1.05 change	-0.95 change

Where next?

The coordinator was keen to point out that Future First were accommodating and “sessions were tailored to the school’s needs”. She would like to build on their alumni database to increase the range of participating recent ex-students: “we had the same ex-students for the sessions so it would have been nice for the students to see different faces”. There is much scope for the school to continue working with Future First, including setting up a web page for alumni and incorporating Future First into the schools super-learning days.

Evidence for this report

A CUREE researcher interviewed the member of staff responsible for co-ordinating the Future First programme within the school. The researcher also interviewed two students and carried out one focus group activity with the two working together. Assessment data was also analysed, comparing the results of the participating students and their peers in English and maths. We would like to thank everyone who met with the researchers for generously giving their time.

Case study 3

Context

School 3 is a larger than average secondary school, with a collaborative sixth form arrangement with two other local schools. A large proportion of students are from minority ethnic backgrounds, with at least two thirds of pupils from families of Bangladeshi heritage. The majority of pupils are eligible for pupil premium and the number of students with special needs and disabilities is well above the national average. In its most recent Ofsted report the school was graded as 'outstanding' in all areas, with recognition given to the rapid progress of all students and the clear-sighted leadership of the head teacher.

How did the programme work?

The 2013-14 academic year was the first time the school took part in the programme of alumni sessions delivered by Future First. Students from two pre-GCSE year groups – Year 10 and 11 – were able to benefit from working with former students during the sessions comprising the programme.

A member of staff, who is a trained teacher and a qualified careers advisor become the coordinator for the programme at the school. She worked with Future First and other staff at the school (Heads of Year in particular) to select the students and the sessions that would comprise the programme for each year group and their sequence, attended and observed several sessions and ensured they were timetabled appropriately.

For both year groups the main aim was to raise young people's confidence to help them achieve good grades in their GCSEs by engaging them with positive role models they could relate to. The participating students were mainly those who, according to staff, were 'C/D borderline and had less support at home'. Overall though, staff commented that they felt the programme was relevant to many students as large numbers of them 'don't have people in their families who are working or who have gone on post-18 [post compulsory education]'

During a series of sessions delivered by Future First, students had an opportunity to listen to and work with alumni representing various age groups, levels of education and professions including careers in law, administration, marketing, banking, literature and languages.

The sessions, most of them about 50 minutes long, focused on developing students' confidence and inspiration, provided information about different careers and helped them develop their interview and CV writing skills. The latter was particularly important for the younger cohort as the school wanted to make sure that the young people 'produce something tangible', such as a CV or a personal statement, at the sessions. Other sessions, such as '*The Importance of English and Maths*' and '*Revision skills*' aimed to help students to do well in their present and nearest future.

One of the sessions, which was longer than others and therefore provided a greater number of opportunities for the students and alumni to really get to know each other, was seen as particularly effective by both the school staff and Future First facilitator. Activities focusing on verbal and non-verbal communication (such as introducing themselves, shaking hands, presenting in front of an audience about the people and things that mattered to them) were valued by students and highlighted as really helpful.

Challenges

The biggest challenge for implementing the programme in the school was in recruiting the alumni in the first place. The school wished to proceed with the programme quickly, to make sure the students fully benefited from it before their high stakes exams. However, with there being no prior history of an alumni database, Future First had to find, select and prepare the alumni for the first sessions in a very short space of time. This meant that there was a relatively small range of alumni able to take part in the sessions initially, resulting in some of the students finding it challenging to relate to them, due to their age, career or level of education being very different from those the young people wanted for themselves. Gradually, with the school's alumni network expanding, this challenge was addressed and a greater variety of alumni came to deliver sessions with the current students. Being able to invite alumni who went into employment via apprenticeship routes was highlighted as particularly important in engaging some of the current students with vocational rather than academic aspirations.

Another challenge was 'caused' by the extensive and diverse nature of the school's PSHE curriculum, for Year 11 students in particular. This meant that there were occasional overlaps, when the Future First sessions touched on the same or similar aspects as the school curriculum. When interviewed, the school's coordinator and the facilitator from Future First spoke of their intention to look at the content of sessions more closely in future to ensure there are no overlaps yet plan for reinforcements of learning.

Finally, the coordinator initially found her role slightly challenging as this was the first year the school had taken part in the Future First programme. However, she praised the flexibility and responsiveness of Future First staff. A meeting was arranged with other Future First co-ordinators from different schools which the coordinator found really helpful in clarifying how to address the operational challenges as well as see the bigger picture of how the programme contributes to what the school is doing already.

What was the impact?

The analysis of the evaluation forms completed by the students after each of the sessions shows that they found these to be very helpful. For example:

- all participating students thought that hearing from people in jobs who used to go to the school was useful;
- most of them (14 out of 18) felt more confident about succeeding in the world of work after the session;
- nearly all (17 out of 18) students felt that the session improved their knowledge of education and career paths they could opt for;
- all students highlighted that the sessions made them want to work harder at school; and
- the majority of students (11 out of 18) thought that the sessions ran by Future First were more useful than other career guidance sessions.

The focus group activities with the students, carried out by the research team, highlighted that the programme had a positive impact on students by increasing their career confidence. The majority of students found that Future First helped them 'feel more confident about having a successful career'. The co-ordinator also highlighted that students found the talks from the alumni very encouraging.

She said it was very useful for students to ‘hear the stories’ of how other people were able to achieve their career goals.

The best thing to have come out of taking part in the alumni programme, according to the students themselves, was them feeling more positive about their future. Several of them admitted that prior to the Future First sessions they did not really feel that they would succeed in life.

For some students, there was also immediate impact. According to staff and students themselves, their attitude to learning, effort, organisational and study skills improved after the sessions. Often, it was realising the importance of their current studies and exams for their future career prospects that made all the difference. For example, after finding out from a former student that he needed at least a ‘B’ in English in order to study history at university and pursue a career in law, one student’s attitude transformed as he was determined to work hard to ‘get that B’. His teachers saw him progress during the academic year and make it to ‘a higher group that does a higher paper’.

Analysis of students’ assessment data revealed that, although generally students achieved their predicted grades in English and maths, the students who took part in the Future First sessions performed better overall in both subjects compared to those who had not participated. Students who attended the workshops were more likely to achieve a C or above in English and maths than their peers. The average changes in grades from target to actual GCSE grades and the percentage of students who achieved a C or above can be seen in the table below (-1 change represents students achieving on average a grade lower than their target grade):

	Participating students (33)	Non-participating students (196)
English	+0.09 change 91% C or above	+0.35 change 82% C or above
Maths	-0.09 change 85% C or above	-0.08 change 79% C or above

Where next?

The school is planning on continuing their work with Future First as it is keen to strengthen its connections with alumni: staff could see the positive effects on students from engaging with positive role models in education and employment. The plan is to try delivering the programme just for Year 10 in future as it was particularly relevant and well-timed for the younger students.

Evidence for this report

CUREE ran a focus group with 17 Year 11 students, and interviewed the member of staff responsible for co-ordinating the programme within the school and the facilitator of the programme (Future First staff). In addition, the research team carried out an analysis of relevant documentary evidence (session plans and materials, student evaluation forms) and assessment data. We would like to thank everyone involved in the research for generously giving their time.

Case study 4

Context

School 4 is a smaller than average sized secondary school. The school specialises in media, arts and music and has experienced significant changes (such as loss of its sixth form) since 2009. There is a larger than average number of students entitled to pupil premium at the school, in addition to students with a parent or carer in the armed forces. Since 2012 the school has started to admit boys along with girls into Year 7 and there are plans for the school to become a co-education provider for Year 7 to Year 11 students in the next few years. A large proportion of students at the school are from black African and black Caribbean backgrounds. There is currently a minority of students accessing alternative provision from local providers. The school was graded 'requires improvement' in its most recent Ofsted inspection in May 2013.

Future First is run by the school's Key Stage 4 Coordinator, who has a background in careers management and previously held the role of intervention mentor in the school. She was keen to take part in Future First as she felt students at the school could really gain more career focus and direction from interacting with members of the alumni. Although there is a strong focus on academic success, the coordinator reported that students lack the employability skills they need to succeed in the future.

How did the programme work?

A small group of Year 10 students took part in the Future First programme this year. The participating students were selected by the school's Future First coordinator as they were identified as students whose level was at the C/D borderline. The coordinator also identified a smaller sub-group of higher achieving learners who she felt could benefit from a little more career focus.

The school ran the following sessions:

- *Confidence and inspiration* (Year 10 assembly)
- *Building confidence (part 1)* workshop
- *Building confidence (part 2)- goal setting* workshop
- *Getting a C in English- why and how* workshop
- *Getting a C in Maths- why and how* workshop

The Future First facilitator suggested to the coordinator which sessions should be carried out, which the coordinator then approved. The coordinator felt that all the sessions chosen by the facilitator met the needs of the students she identified for the programme and was pleased with the level of collaboration with Future First, stating that "they made my job easier".

During the sessions, the facilitator outlined what they would be doing in the session and began by introducing herself and the alumni present. The alumni talked to the students about both their experiences of school and their working life. Students participated in group activities alongside the alumni. Alumni helped to encourage students and supported their ideas. The coordinator said that the sessions were consistent and engaging and reported that "the girls didn't feel it was repetitive".

Challenges

The coordinator reported that the programme ran successfully and benefited all students that took part. However, she reported that her students may have been even more receptive to the programme if the alumni were drawn from a younger age range because this would make it easier for students to relate to them. The need for alumni closer in age was highlighted by students during the focus group; one student stated that she liked what an older lady from the alumni was saying but felt she could relate more to alumni who had most recently left the school.

Students also indicated that they would have liked more practical support with interview skills, job applications and their CV writing skills. One student highlighted that she did not know what a CV looked like until recently where she had encountered one during a careers workshop session run by the coordinator in the school. However the coordinator felt that the students' employability skills have been boosted by taking part in the programme and was pleased with the support she received from Future First.

What was the impact?

One of the key ways that Future First had an impact on students was improving students' mindset towards their GCSEs. All students saw needing a GCSE for their future job and working harder as a key reason for doing well in their exams. Several students felt that they need to be clever in order to do well in a subject; however they also felt that you don't necessarily need to be naturally talented at a subject, "you simply have to work harder". One student said that "you don't have to like the subject but you can work harder at it." Students in the focus group generally felt that they had a positive attitude towards their GCSEs and were encouraged by their parents to "study hard". However they did feel that listening to the alumni gave them better insight into what they have to do in order to succeed. A student stated that "one person had a similar interest and she showed me how I can work hard". However students did say that they would have liked the alumni to say more about the struggles they had faced and how they managed to overcome them, as this would have helped to give them a more realistic picture of what they themselves may face.

The coordinator felt that the schools involvement in the Future First programme helped to develop a culture amongst students of looking forward to becoming an alumni and being able to come back to the school to support other students. Students pointed out that Future First has helped them to feel more positive about their own future. Although the majority of students stated that they knew about career choices available to them, some felt that Future First gave them more knowledge and awareness about their career options.

Another key impact of the sessions is that they helped students to value their learning more. Students felt motivated when the alumni talked about how learning helped them to move forward in their career and a student said that she was "inspired" by the fact that one of the alumni was the first lady to graduate from her course. Additionally the same alumna told the students to "pick a job that you would do for free" which seems to have resonated with the students.

The coordinator stated that the programme has helped to further develop her relationship with participating students as they have appreciated the opportunity to think about their future career goals and have been inspired by the alumni who came to speak to them.

Where next?

The school is continuing their work with Future First this year and views the programme as a long term commitment. The work will carry on with Year 10 students; however the coordinator is keen to share the positive impact of the programme with Year 11 students who could also benefit from support with their employability skills. The coordinator feels that there is scope for wider alumni involvement for instance, involving alumni in career workshops.

Evidence for this report

One CUREE researcher interviewed the member of staff responsible for co-ordinating the Future First programme within the school. The researchers also held one focus group with six students. We would like to thank everyone who met with the researcher for generously giving their time.

Case study 5

Context

School 5, situated in the East of England, opened in September 2010 in place of its predecessor school and moved into new, purpose-built academy buildings in February 2014. The academy is smaller than the average-sized secondary school catering for young people aged 11-16. The majority of students are White British, with a small number being from minority ethnic backgrounds. The proportion of students with special educational needs and disabilities is higher than the national average and the proportion of young people eligible for free school meals is significantly higher than average. The academy was graded as 'requiring improvement' in its first Ofsted report (2012); the achievement of students being subsequently (July 2014) judged as 'inadequate'.

The school leaders display 'high levels of aspiration for the achievement of the students in the disadvantaged community the academy serves' (Ofsted). In this context, the aims of Future First's programme of alumni sessions chimed well with the school's ambition to raise students' aspirations.

How did the programme work?

At the academy, the programme was co-ordinated by the Assistant Head, who is in charge of the lower school but also has pastoral responsibilities. The co-ordinator worked closely with the Future First facilitator to organise sessions and ensure they ran smoothly. His role included selecting the students, organising the practicalities of the sessions (booking rooms etc), and attending the sessions.

Around 24 Year 11 students took part in the Future First programme in the 2013-14 academic year. These students were selected by the Head of Year 11, who chose those with low aspirations, who lacked motivation and were underachieving in terms of results. Many of these students also had behavioural problems.

Working in partnership with Future First, the school selected a range of sessions, from those equipping students with skills useful for their immediate studies, through to those providing knowledge about the world of work. The following Future First sessions were run at the school:

- *Confidence and Inspiration* (Year 11 assembly)
- *Building confidence* workshop
- *Setting goals* workshop
- *Work scenarios and setting goals* workshop
- *Time management: organising your own revision time* workshop
- *Inspiration and revision* workshop

Future First then planned the sessions, briefed the school in advance and sent across an itinerary of each session. During the sessions, facilitated by Future First, alumni talked to the students about both their experiences of school and about their working life. Group activities were also set up, in which the students worked in pairs or small groups, with the alumni working with them to give them encouragement and ideas.

What was the impact?

One of the key areas of impact was the students' increased interest in the world of work and business and their enhanced understanding of it. For example, during one of the workshops a couple of the alumni spoke about their experience of starting and running their own business. They shared their experiences with the students, encouraging them to think about how businesses worked. In this session, the students, split into small groups each of them supported by alumni, looked at a scenario and discussed what they would do if it was their business. Motivated by real world, meaningful scenarios, students formally presented their ideas, drawing on the alumni's practical advice and suggestions.

The school had previously struggled to ensure that its students encounter diverse positive role models, so was very positive about Future First introducing young people to 'impressive people who went to the school'. Staff felt that students were able to easily relate to these alumni and take on board their experiences. Some of the students were surprised at how well some of the alumni did, which prompted them to reconsider their own plans and aspirations. As noted by the coordinator, 'the kids don't see these types of people often so it improved aspirations'. Since attending the Future First sessions, students talked more about their career prospects.

As well as raising aspirations, the Future First sessions also improved students' attitudes to learning. The coordinator reported that staff 'saw improvements more when it came to revision classes and when they started to hand in coursework', which – unusually – was all handed in on time. Although the students' better study and organisational skills did not appear to have positively (compared to the rest of the cohort) impacted on their grades this could be attributed to the timing of the sessions. The co-ordinator felt that the programme would have suited younger cohorts better as they would have had more time and opportunities to apply their learning from the sessions. This (offering the programme to younger cohorts) would have also made timetabling, which was a challenge for Year 11, easier.

Where next?

The school is planning on continuing to work with Future First, although this is dependent on securing funding. The school is considering rolling out the programme to their Year 10 students, although it was noted that they would 'love to do Future First with all year groups, you can change aspirations in one year- it's progress'. The school now have connections with a number of alumni who they are able to use for future events.

Evidence for this report

A CUREE researcher interviewed the Assistant Head, who was responsible for co-ordinating the Future First programme within the school. We would like to thank the school's Future First co-ordinator for generously giving his time. The researcher also analysed GCSE assessment data to establish whether there were any differences in results between those who took part in the programme and their peers.

Appendix 2: Numbers reported in the graphs

Graph 1: Percentage of students who met or exceeded their predicted grade in English and maths

	Participating students		Non-participating students	
	n	% reported on graph	n	% reported on graph
English	107	65%	698	59%
Maths	113	50%	729	48%

Graph 2: Percentage of C/D borderline students who met or exceeded their predicted grade in English and maths

	Participating students		Non-participating students	
	n	% reported on graph	n	% reported on graph
English	60	68%	295	62%
Maths	55	62%	269	63%

Graph 3: Percentage of students who met or exceeded their predicted grade in English

	Participating students		Non-participating students	
	n	% reported on graph	n	% reported on graph
School A	12	75%	184	54%
School B	32	81%	183	84%
School C	14	64%	77	53%
School D	25	84%	105	67%
School E	24	21%	149	33%

Graph 4: Percentage of students who exceeded their predicted grade in English

	Participating students		Non-participating students	
	n	% reported on graph	n	% reported on graph
School A	12	42%	184	15%
School B	32	25%	183	40%
School C	14	43%	77	14%
School D	25	20%	105	11%
School E	24	0%	149	5%

Graph 5: Percentage of C/D borderline students who met or exceeded their predicted grade in English

	Participating students		Non-participating students	
	n	% reported on graph	n	% reported on graph
School A	6	100%	28	61%

School B	26	92%	121	84%
School C	3	100%	18	56%
School D	6	67%	44	66%
School E	19	21%	84	30%

Graph 6: Percentage of students who met or exceeded their predicted grade in maths

	Participating students		Non-participating students	
	n	% reported on graph	n	% reported on graph
School A	18	22%	219	33%
School B	32	75%	185	71%
School C	14	36%	77	42%
School D	25	80%	99	73%
School E	24	17%	149	28%

Graph 7: Percentage of C/D borderline students who met or exceeded their predicted grade in maths

	Participating students		Non-participating students	
	n	% reported on graph	n	% reported on graph
School A	9	22%	41	46%
School B	24	83%	105	75%
School C	6	50%	24	50%
School D	6	100%	47	79%
School E	10	30%	52	42%

Graph 8: Percentage of students who are considering the following options in the future

	Pre-intervention survey		Post-intervention survey	
	n	% reported on graph	n	% reported on graph
Apprenticeships	569	51%	49	67%
Going to college	569	81%	49	88%
Going to university	569	80%	49	89%
Work placement or experience	569	85%	49	90%

Graph 9: Students' confidence levels pre and post intervention

	Pre-intervention survey		Post-intervention survey	
	n	% reported on graph	n	% reported on graph
Presenting to an	608	29%	53	42%

audience				
Dealing with unfamiliar or new tasks	608	57%	53	64%