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YORK
ST JOHN
UNIVERSITY

Impact Evaluation Report:

FutureHY Exam Preparation Workshop

 futurehy

 ofS Uni Connect
Programme



Background

School-work related anxiety is common among teenagers, particularly in regards to exams. In one large international survey of conducted by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2015), for example, one in two teenagers reported that they are worried and anxious about exams. Interestingly, teenagers in the UK appear particularly susceptible to this type of worry and anxiety and were found to report higher levels than that was typical in other countries.

The consequences of higher levels of anxiety are likely to be poorer academic performance, as well as a less positive educational experience and affinity with learning. With research indicating that perceptions that university would be stressful common and among the barriers for not attending university (e.g., Hutchings & Archer, 2001), experiences of this kind will also likely have an adverse impact on teenagers' attitudes towards further study.

In regards to addressing this issue, research has illustrated that resourcefulness, and having effective problem-solving and planning skills, can ameliorate academic stress, making better performance and attainment more likely (e.g., Akgun & Ciarrochi, 2003). In turn, one can expect a more positive learning experience overall. In keeping with this thinking, academic resourcefulness of this kind has been found to be positively related to reasons for attending university (e.g., Kennett, Reed, & Stuart, 2013).

Aim and scope of evaluation

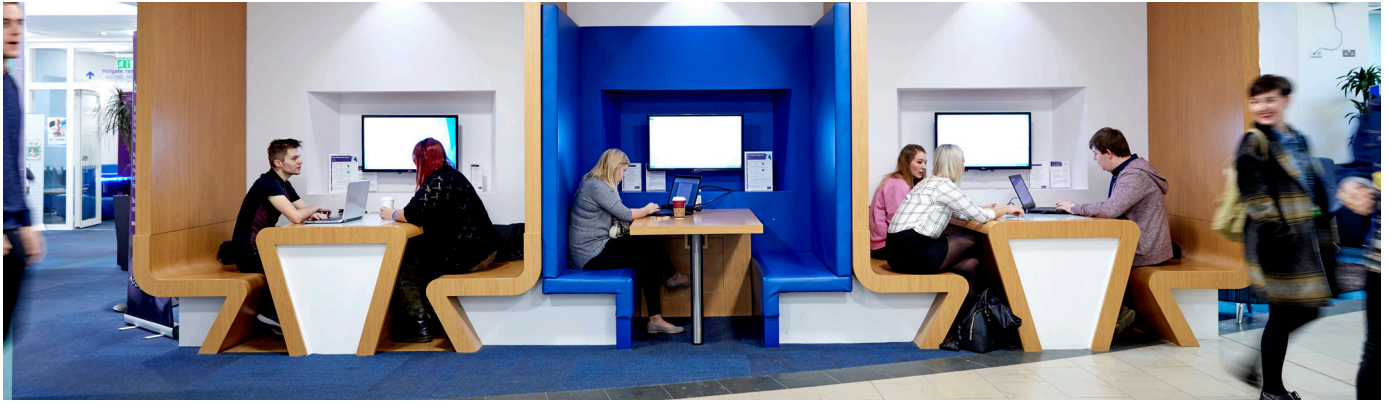
Here we report the evaluation of the impact of part of the outreach intervention programme undertaken by FutureHY. The specific part of the outreach intervention programme is an exam preparation workshop aimed at increasing exam preparedness and likelihood of applying to Higher Education.

Research Questions / hypotheses

Our research question was; can a short exam preparation workshop improve reported preparedness for exams and likelihood to apply to Higher Education?

The content of the workshop was designed to improve understanding of stress and introduce strategies for managing stress, it was therefore expected that it would improve how prepared students reported they felt and, in turn, create more positive intentions towards further study.





Characteristics of outreach

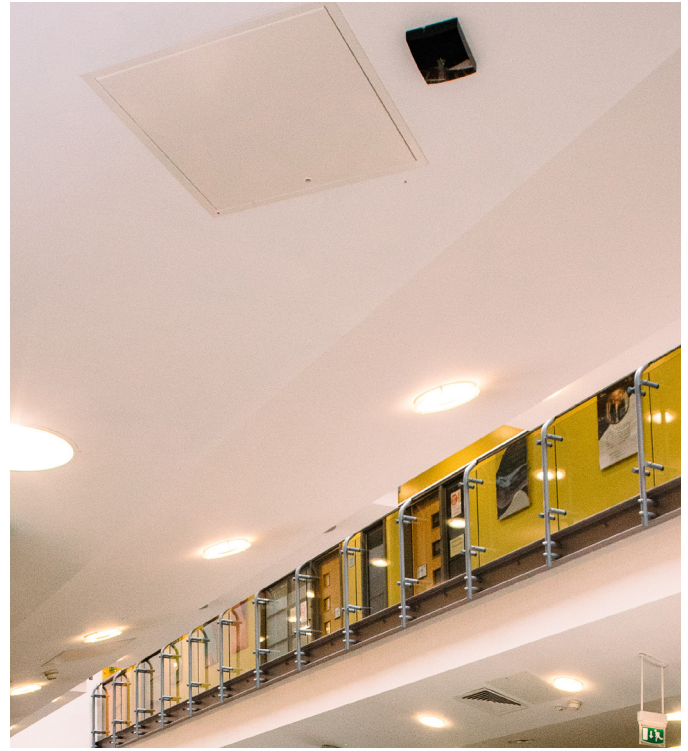
Detailed description	<p>Exam preparation workshop</p> <p>The workshop aimed to provide participants with (i) a better understanding of stress and anxiety, (ii) examples of ways to cope and manage academic work, and (iii) different strategies to prepare and plan for the future.</p> <p>The content covered signs of stress (feelings and behaviours), factors that contribute to more and less stress (demands and resources), realistic goals (versus perfectionism), and preparation strategies (self-management, positive thinking and reflection, positive self-talk, mindfulness and goal setting).</p>
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Characteristics of outreach

Activity type	Skills and Attainment (Workshop)
Timing, duration and frequency of activity	<p>A standalone session.</p> <p>Lasting approximately an hour.</p> <p>Delivered once.</p>
Mode of delivery	<p>Delivered on-site at school/FE colleges.</p> <p>Face-to-face in a classroom setting.</p>
Target group or groups	<p>Target was group-level for students undertaking practice and summative exams that academic year.</p> <p>Year 11 students (age 15-16) undertaking GCSEs</p> <p>Year 13 students (age 17-18) undertaking A-levels or equivalents</p>

Outcomes

Outcomes for NCOP / Uni Connect target learners	<p>Develop confidence in their potential to progress onto and succeed at university / Higher Education.</p> <p>Develop revision techniques and skills.</p> <p>Likelihood of applying to Higher Education.</p>
Outcomes for parents	None.
Outcomes for teachers / school staff	None.



Methods used to evaluate impact of intervention

Type of evaluation	Type 2: Empirical
Type of research approach	Primary quantitative (pre-test/post-test design).
Rationale	The approach was adopted for pragmatic reasons and the difficulty associated with creating a control or comparison group in the setting, as well as meeting expectations and time provided by partner schools.
Data collection methods	Survey (pre/post intervention). Questions and response formats are reported in Table 1.
Sampling and response rate	The current sample represents a subsample of the total students who received the workshop. The survey was distributed to 390 students. Of these, 309 completed all questions on both pre-test and post-test surveys. The sampling strategy was one of convenience (based on availability and additional time to complete the survey) and purposeful (all students who had exams that academic year and completed the workshop). Students were from five colleges and high schools in the North Yorkshire region.
Timeframe for evaluation	Survey was completed immediately before and immediately after the exam preparation workshop. Delivery in November/early December ahead of mock exams (December). Delivery in March in preparation for summer exams (June).
Approach to data analysis	Descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations). Change scores (percentage change). Paired samples t-test. Effect size to quantify the size of change (Cohen's d_z ; Lakens, 2013).

Table 1. Response format of the questions and scoring (1 to 6).

Question	Definitely will apply (1)	Very likely (2)	Fairly likely (3)	Fairly unlikely (4)	Very unlikely (5)	Definitely won't apply (6)	Don't know / unsure
How likely are you to apply to Higher Education?							
I feel confident about my exams	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neither agree or disagree (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)	Don't know / unsure	
I feel prepared for my exams							
I am not anxious about my exams							
I feel motivated to do well in my exams							
I feel that Higher Education is for people like me							
I could get the grades I need for further education							

Table 2. Scores for all respondents.

Question	Respondents	Time 1 Mean	Time 1 SD	Respondents	Time 2 Mean	Time 2 SD
How likely are you to apply to Higher Education	352	2.45	1.49	330	2.47	1.53
I feel confident about my exams	353	3.17	1.01	352	3.41	0.94
I feel prepared for my exams	361	3.08	0.96	347	3.29	0.94
I am not anxious about my exams	365	2.89	1.21	351	3.15	1.14
I feel motivated to do well in my exams	362	3.84	1.00	351	3.91	0.94
Total exam preparedness	343	3.26	0.79	333	3.44	0.80
I feel that Higher Education is for people like me	NA	NA	NA	342	3.44	1.11
I could get the grades I need for further education	NA	NA	NA	345	3.82	0.96

Table 3. Scores for respondents who completed questions on both pre-test and post-test survey.

Question	Respondents	Time 1 Mean	Time 1 SD	Time 2 Mean	Time 2 SD	% change	t	Effect size change
How likely are you to apply to Higher Education	315	2.38	1.45	2.42	1.50	2%	1.35	0.08
I feel confident about my exams	327	3.19	1.02	3.41	0.95	7%	5.23*	0.29
I feel prepared for my exams	330	3.10	0.96	3.28	0.94	6%	4.89*	0.27
I am not anxious about my exams	336	2.90	1.21	3.14	1.15	8%	5.52*	0.30
I feel motivated to do well in my exams	333	3.84	1.00	3.90	0.95	2%	1.28	0.07
Total exam preparedness	309	3.27	0.80	3.44	0.80	6%	5.57*	0.32

Note. * denotes a statistically significant difference between time 1 and time 2 scores ($p < .001$, two-tailed). Effect size change denotes the magnitude of change in units of standard deviation (Cohen's d ; Lakens, 2013).



Results and conclusions

Results	<p>Descriptive statistics for all respondents are reported in Table 2.</p> <p>Descriptive statistics for those who completed time 1 and time two questions are reported in Table 3, along with change scores (percentage change), results of pair-samples t-test, and effect size. Effect size is reported in units of standard deviation.</p> <p>Key findings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Total preparedness for exams significantly increased pre-test to post-test. • The increase was evident for self-reported confidence, preparedness, and anxiety. • There was no statistically significant change for self-reported likelihood of applying to Higher Education.
Impact achieved	<p>Our evaluation indicates a positive impact of the exam preparation workshop on self-reported exam preparedness.</p> <p>The impact of the exam preparation workshop on self-reported likelihood of applying for Higher Education is inconclusive.</p>
Contribution or attribution	<p>We consider the evaluation to provide evidence of a contribution (not attribution of causality) to the observed changes due to the type of design (pre-test/post-test design).</p>

Closing remarks

Our evaluation of the exam preparation workshop indicates that this part of our outreach intervention programme has a positive impact and contributes to better exam preparedness.

Students reported that they felt significantly less anxious, and more confident and prepared, following the workshop than before the workshop

Recommendations

Exam preparation sessions are a valuable addition to the support provided to students undertaking exams and who are considering applying to Higher Education.

The focus of the workshops should include normalising the experience of stress and anxiety, and giving students the skills and strategies to cope with and manage academic stress.

Some strategies that may be most effective are self-management, positive thinking and reflection, positive self-talk, mindfulness and goal setting.

Understanding the role of these types of workshop as part of a wider sustained and progressive programme of support is an important area of future work



References

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This report was prepared by Professor Andrew Hill, Dr Tracy Donachie, and Rebecca Harland, and Helen Smith.

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