

Attainment Raising Activity

Crafting Accurate Sentences Tutoring (CAST) 2025/26

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Contents

Summary	2
Introduction	4
What is CAST?	4
Reasons for the Selection of the CAST Programme	4
Evolving Sector Expectations	5
Method	5
The School and its Staff	5
The Tutees	6
CAST Tutors	6
Research Questions	7
Details of Data Collection and Evaluation Methods	7
Implementing CAST	8
Ethics	8
Results	9
Attendance and Retention	9
Pupil Assessment.....	9
Pupil survey	11
Participant Satisfaction with the Tutoring Programme	12
Student Tutor Survey	13
School Staff Survey	13
WIN Staff Feedback.....	13
Discussion.....	14
Research Question 1: To what extent does participation in the CAST programme improve pupils’ sentence-level writing accuracy?	14
Research Question 2: How does participation influence pupils’ non-cognitive outcomes, including motivation and self-efficacy in writing?	15
Research Question 3: To what extent was the CAST programme successfully implemented within the WIN delivery model, and what lessons can be drawn for its scalability?	16
Recommendations	18
Conclusion	18
References	19
Appendix A: Access and Participation Plan and Risks to Equality of Opportunity	20
Appendix B: Theory of Changes.....	21

Summary

The Wessex Inspiration Network (WIN) piloted the University of Exeter's Crafting Accurate Sentences Tutoring (CAST) programme during the summer term of 2026. CAST is a structured small-group tutoring intervention designed to improve pupils' sentence-level writing accuracy, confidence and engagement through a curriculum delivered by university students.

Piloting CAST was part of a strategic decision to deliver a collaborative and measurable programme addressing risks to equality of opportunity for under-represented groups of students. The intervention was targeted at pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds with low levels of literacy. Through improving their literacy skills and confidence the aim is to reduce the attainment gap for underrepresented students and to increase the likelihood of sustained engagement with education and progression to higher education. Being tutored by university students is a key element of the intervention as it provides role models and is a tangible involvement with higher education.

The programme was delivered in a secondary school in Bath and North East Somerset (BANES) by seven student tutors recruited from the University of Bath and Bath Spa University. Fourteen Year 9 pupils (13-14 year-olds) initially joined the programme, with ten completing the intervention (71.4% retention). Most participants were from under-represented backgrounds, including 90% eligible for Free School Meals (FSM).

Key Findings

Writing Attainment

Nine pupils completed matched pre- and post- intervention assessments. Overall scores remained broadly stable, decreasing slightly from 6.67 to 6.44, although results varied across the four assessed writing domains.

Table 1: *Writing Domains*

Assessment Area	Pre-Assessment Mean	Post-Assessment Mean	Change
Sentence Structures	2.33	2.67	+0.34
Grammatical Structures	0.89	0.89	0.00
Sentence Demarcation	2.22	2.11	-0.11
Punctuation for Clarity and Meaning	1.22	0.78	-0.44

Analysis of individual pupil outcomes showed a mixed pattern of results. Three learners (33%) increased their overall score, two learners (22%) maintained the same score, and four learners (44%) recorded a lower score at post-assessment than at baseline.

Pupils with a lower baseline score of 5 generally demonstrated the greatest improvement.

Non-Cognitive Outcomes

Participants reported increased confidence in achieving personal goals (+0.22), improving their underlying level of ability (+0.44), and focusing on progress when facing challenges (+0.56). However, some measures declined, including confidence in learning what is taught in class (-0.22) and figuring things out through effort (-0.22). The largest reductions were observed in agreement that hard work pays off (-0.89) and that anyone can change their level of talent (-0.68). Despite these mixed survey findings, teacher and tutor feedback suggested improved confidence and engagement with literacy.

Attendance, Engagement and Participant Satisfaction

Attendance and engagement were strong throughout the programme. Amongst the ten pupils who completed the course, seven attended every session, two missed only one session, and one missed two sessions, with all participants attending at least five of the seven sessions. Tutor engagement was similarly high. All seven tutors completed the required training, overall tutor attendance reached 89%, and six of the seven tutors attended at least eight of the nine scheduled sessions.

Participant feedback was highly positive. Three-quarters of respondents (75%) agreed or strongly agreed that they enjoyed the tutoring sessions, giving an average enjoyment score of 4.1 out of 5. Satisfaction was even higher when pupils were asked whether they would recommend the programme to others, with 100% agreeing or strongly agreeing and an average recommendation score of 4.5 out of 5, indicating strong levels of participant satisfaction and endorsement of the programme.

There were high levels of commitment, engagement and satisfaction from pupils, tutors, the teacher and WIN staff throughout programme delivery.

School Feedback

"Confidence is definitely improved – they have benefitted from 1:1 or small group support. They are also more confident in using literacy language e.g. verbs, clause etc."

Teacher feedback was positive, referencing improvements in pupils' confidence and writing abilities. The teacher highlighted the value of personalised support and praised the engagement within the sessions. They recommended a shorter programme that could be delivered within a single term. Tutees and tutors also shared with WIN staff that the CAST sessions were a highlight of their week.

Collaboration, Implementation and Scalability

Despite implementation challenges the pilot demonstrated that CAST can be delivered successfully through a collaborative Uni Connect model, with the school requesting it returns and other schools expressing interest in future delivery.

Recommendations and Conclusion

This pilot presents a mixed but encouraging picture of impact. While attainment gains were limited, there is evidence that CAST supported improvements in sentence structure, confidence, resilience and engagement with writing, alongside high levels of attendance, retention and participant satisfaction. Given the implementation challenges, the findings should be viewed primarily as implementation learning rather than definitive evidence of effectiveness. Nevertheless, both this evaluation and the wider CAST evidence base provide a strong rationale for continued delivery and further evaluation of the programme.

- **Review participant targeting and programme design** by considering the suitability of the intervention for pupils with different baseline attainment levels, sharing findings and updated content with teachers, and discussing content priorities with CAST coordinators.
- **Protect the key features of the delivery model**, including small-group support, through appropriate tutor recruitment, workforce planning and project budgeting.
- **Strengthen tutor recruitment** by promoting opportunities early across the university ambassador pool and monitoring recruitment levels throughout planning and delivery.

- **Enhance future evaluation activity** by maintaining the existing evaluation design while seeking opportunities to increase cohort sizes and incorporate a comparator group where feasible.
- **Continue to review the project's strategic fit and sustainability**, including its alignment with regional attainment priorities.
- **Ensure full programme delivery** by incorporating contingency weeks into programme planning and aligning assessment measures with the six-session plus campus-day model.

Introduction

This report presents the activities and outcomes of WIN's delivery of the Crafting Accurate Sentences Tutoring (CAST) programme from 7 May to 10 July 2026 in a school within Bath and North East Somerset (BANES).

What is CAST?

CAST is an evidence-informed raising attainment programme that seeks to improve pupils' writing skills and confidence through structured literacy tutoring delivered in small groups by trained university student tutors in partnership with schools. It was developed by Lindsay Skinner (Director of Education for the Ted Wragg Trust and a former headteacher) as part of the University of Exeter's South-West Mobility Commission. The programme is inherently collaborative, drawing on the combined expertise of university staff, student tutors, schools and external partners to strengthen both delivery quality and evaluative rigour.

The programme targets pupils, identified by teachers, against the specific criteria of those who:

- Do not consistently demonstrate accurate sentence construction.
- Are able to regularly attend tutoring sessions.
- Are from under-represented or disadvantaged backgrounds, including those eligible for Pupil Premium (PP) or Free School Meals (FSM), as well as other vulnerable groups. Pupils with significant additional needs are typically excluded to ensure suitability for the intervention.

The evaluation examines programme impact across the following domains:

- Pupil attainment outcomes.
- Cognitive outcomes, particularly sentence construction skills.
- Non-cognitive outcomes, such as motivation and self-efficacy.
- Student tutor perspectives.
- Teacher feedback.

Reasons for the Selection of the CAST Programme

CAST was selected by WIN, following a review of higher education access initiatives, due to its strong theoretical foundations, alignment with effective tutoring practices, its potential to generate learning about scalable and collaborative attainment raising approaches and successful evaluations from previous programmes.

It has been delivered by multiple Uni Connect partnerships including the North-East Uni Connect Programme, Next Steps South-West and GROWS and their evaluations have produced encouraging results. A 2023/24 multi-partner evaluation involving 329 pupils across 23 schools found a 33%

improvement in literacy assessment scores, alongside improvements in self-efficacy and educational aspirations. Statistically significant gains were identified in areas including sentence construction, participle phrases and punctuation (True and Hart, 2025).

GROWS, a Gloucestershire-based Uni Connect organisation, has provided consistent evidence to WIN of CAST's effectiveness. In 2023/24, 87% of participants improved their assessment scores, achieving an average increase of 57%. In 2024/25, participants achieved a 25% increase in assessment scores, with statistically significant improvements in overall writing outcomes. Across both years, 93% of participants reported that the tutoring improved their writing skills, and comparison-group findings suggest that the gains observed were attributable to participation in the programme.

Additionally, Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) (2025) reports that small-group tuition can deliver the equivalent of four months' additional progress over an academic year, while university-led tutoring has been shown to improve literacy outcomes, confidence and engagement. Elliot Major and Sim (2023) argue that tutoring is most effective when delivered in small groups and closely linked to classroom learning. They also note that effective implementation depends on tutor training and support, and requires a high degree of coordination between teachers, tutors and providers.

Evolving Sector Expectations

This report also provides an applied example of how WIN, in collaboration with its lead partner (the University of Bath), is responding to evolving sector expectations around the production of high-quality, publishable evaluations. Specifically, it demonstrates how WIN has piloted a collaborative, regionally aligned model of outreach delivery, designed to generate robust, transferable evidence and contribute to the national evidence base through the Higher Education Evaluation Library (HEEL), (TASO, 2025).

The project also reflects the sector's increasing focus on regional collaboration and working in partnership with other universities, colleges and schools. This aligns with the Regional Access Partnerships' goals of improving the equality of opportunity to higher education and pathways into employment by bringing together different organisations. Seventeen Regional Access Partnerships are proposed. They will replace the Uni Connect programme from the 2027-2028 academic year.

Method

The School and its Staff

The CAST project required extensive coordination with the participating school to ensure effective delivery. This included arranging risk assessments, letters of assurance, venue bookings, consent processes and other permissions. Successful implementation depended on the support and collaboration of key staff members across multiple school functions.

WIN's primary contact was an English teacher who coordinated communication and student involvement. The school librarian provided a dedicated space for sessions and allowed resources to be stored on site. The IT team enabled tutors to access the school Wi-Fi network, ensuring that laptops and digital resources could be used effectively during sessions. The HR department approved the regular presence of CAST tutors, while reception staff facilitated weekly sign-in and sign-out procedures. This cross-departmental collaboration was a critical factor in the smooth delivery and ongoing sustainability of the project.

WIN and the pilot school agreed that tutoring sessions would be delivered in the school's library during the school day. Thursdays from 12:20 to 13:20 were identified as the most suitable timeslot, taking into account the availability of pupils, school staff, teaching space and WIN staff.

The Tutees

Year 9 (13-14 year-old) participants were identified by teaching staff using the CAST selection criteria of pupils who:

- Did not consistently demonstrate accurate sentence construction.
- Were able to regularly attend tutoring sessions.

Teachers were encouraged to prioritise pupils from OfS (Office for Students) under-represented backgrounds, including those eligible for Pupil Premium (PP) or Free School Meals (FSM).

The programme began with 14 participants. Four participants withdrew, citing not wanting to miss timetabled classes. The ten remaining tutees were predominantly made up of learners eligible for Free School Meals (FSM), with nine participants (90%) meeting this criterion. In terms of gender, the cohort consisted of six female participants (60%) and four male participants (40%). The cohort was largely White, accounting for eight participants (80%). The remaining participants were from Black (10%) and Mixed ethnicity (10%) backgrounds.

Analysis of postcode-based targeting measures shows that the cohort included learners identified with under-representation in higher education. Based on postcode classifications, 3 participants (30%) met the criteria for IMD (Index of Multiple Deprivation), 2 participants (20%) through IDACI (Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index), and 3 participants (30%) through POLAR classifications.

Overall, the participant profile demonstrates that the intervention successfully engaged a cohort with a high proportion of learners from groups that are traditionally under-represented in higher education, particularly those eligible for FSM and those identified through postcode-based widening participation measures.

CAST Tutors

Selection and Profile of the Tutors

Seven university students were recruited as tutors to the project: two were studying at Bath Spa University and five studying at the University of Bath. Applicants were recruited through an open application process and selected via an online interview designed to assess their suitability for the CAST programme.

The CAST tutors were studying a range of disciplines, with three enrolled at postgraduate level and four at undergraduate level. Four tutors were from Asian/Asian British backgrounds and three White British tutors. Three of the tutors were male, three female tutors and one who identified as genderfluid.

Selection criteria for tutors included strong communication skills, patience, commitment to the role, reliability and the ability to engage positively with learners. Applicants were also expected to demonstrate an understanding of the importance of fostering confidence and supporting the tutees' academic development.

The survey suggests that the seven tutors were less diverse in terms of socioeconomic and educational background. Four respondents reported that at least one parent had attended university, one

respondent was unsure, and one reported that neither parent had attended university. Two tutors reported eligibility for Free School Meals. While the majority of respondents still came from families with experience of higher education, the inclusion of a first-generation university student and additional respondents from less advantaged educational backgrounds broadened the representation within the cohort.

Overall, the tutors brought a range of demographic characteristics, academic experiences and educational backgrounds.

Preparation and Support of the Tutors

Successful candidates completed a comprehensive training programme before beginning delivery. This consisted of both in-person and online elements. The face-to-face training was developed and delivered by WIN, drawing on best practice and resources from the GROWS programme. In addition, tutors completed online training modules designed by the University of Exeter, providing a consistent foundation of knowledge and skills to support programme delivery. The tutors were paid on an hourly basis for their training.

The tutors taught in small groups (typically a 1:3 ratio) in weekly sessions at the school. Sessions focused on explicit teaching of sentence construction, including grammar, punctuation and sentence structure, alongside opportunities for guided practice and feedback. Resources used included printed workbooks for each tutee, power points shown on tutor laptops and mini whiteboards, all of which were supplied by WIN (unless the tutors opted to use their personal laptops).

Tutors' journeys to the school, which was on the edge of the town and not easy to access via public transport, were facilitated by WIN who arranged and paid for their transport. The initial use of taxis proved unreliable so using Ubers became the preferred option. The student ambassadors arranged their own Ubers and were reimbursed by WIN on production of a receipt.

The WIN coordinator hosted weekly online drop-in sessions throughout the programme, enabling tutors to reflect on previous sessions, discuss challenges, share good practice and prepare for the next session. The meetings were in alignment with the CAST model and provided support to the tutors.

Research Questions

Guided by the programme's Theory of Change (ToC), this evaluation focuses on both outcomes and implementation. The evaluation is structured around three research questions:

1. To what extent does participation in the CAST programme improve pupils' sentence-level writing accuracy?
2. How does participation influence pupils' non-cognitive outcomes, including motivation and self-efficacy in writing?
3. To what extent was the CAST programme successfully implemented within the WIN delivery model and what lessons can be drawn for its scalability?

Details of Data Collection and Evaluation Methods

A mixed-methods evaluation design was employed to capture both outcome and process data, aligning with sector expectations for robust and publishable evidence.

Quantitative data collection included:

- Measured changes in pupils' sentence construction skills through pre- and post-intervention assessments marked externally by an English GCSE examiner arranged through the University of Exeter.
- Non-cognitive outcomes were assessed using pupil self-report measures designed to capture changes in confidence, motivation and attitudes towards writing. Surveys were administered during the first session (14 responses) and the final session (ten responses).

Qualitative data collection included:

- Student tutor reflections, gathered through structured feedback and/or surveys, explored delivery experience, perceived pupil progress and implementation challenges.
- Teacher feedback, focusing on pupil selection, observed outcomes and perceptions of programme fit and effectiveness.
- Pupil feedback included free-text responses and was administered in the final session.

Process evaluation elements were incorporated to assess the fidelity and quality of implementation of the collaborative CAST–WIN delivery model. This included monitoring session delivery, tutor training, partnership working, weekly drop-in sessions for the tutors, and adherence to the core components of the CAST programme. Observations, implementation records and feedback mechanisms were used to identify any deviations from the intended programme design, assess how the programme operated within the WIN delivery model, and capture contextual factors that may influence future scalability.

Data was analysed using a combination of descriptive statistics for quantitative outcomes and thematic analysis for qualitative data. Given the pilot nature of the intervention and the small sample size, the analysis focuses on learning from the method of implementation and emerging patterns rather than definitive evidence of effectiveness.

Analysis was conducted only on surveys and assessments that could be matched across the baseline and final data collection points. Of the ten pupils who completed both assessments, one pupil was excluded due to an unmatched survey, resulting in a final matched sample of nine participants.

"I am thinking about going to university or higher education in the future", Survey item 4d, was excluded from the analysis because of a low response rate, which limited the reliability and interpretability of the findings for this measure.

Implementing CAST

WIN chose the paid student ambassador model of delivering the CAST tutoring programme. A campus visit and 'graduation' ceremony was planned to complete the programme. Delivery started in May 2026, a later start than originally planned due to organisational issues such as a change in the pilot school. The core components of the intervention were maintained up to week 7 of the full 9 weeks after which outside events, such as extreme weather, curtailed the full delivery of the programme.

Ethics

A favourable ethics decision for this evaluation was received in March 2026 from the University of Bath's Social Science Research Ethics Committee.

Results

The following section presents the evaluation findings against the three research questions underpinning this study (see p. 7). Specifically, it investigates whether participation in CAST is associated with improvements in tutees' writing accuracy, examines its influence on non-cognitive factors that support writing development, and explores the extent to which the programme was implemented as intended within the WIN delivery model.

The results presented below should be considered within the context of several adaptations to the original delivery plan, notably:

- The intended campus visit did not take place.
- The second assessment and survey were delivered during a period of exceptionally warm weather and consequent collapsed school timetable meaning tutees were withdrawn from off-curriculum classes which may have influenced their engagement with the evaluation activities.

Attendance and Retention

The programme began with 14 tutees. Four participants withdrew before completion, resulting in a retention rate of 71.4%. Attendance analysis below is based on the ten participants who remained in the programme and did not withdraw consent.

Seven participants attended every session, demonstrating a strong commitment to the programme. Of the remaining participants, two missed a single session and one missed two sessions. All members of the final cohort attended at least five of the seven sessions. Engagement was consistently strong across all seven sessions. Full attendance (100%) was achieved in Sessions 2, 4 and 6, while attendance in Sessions 1, 3, 5 and 7 remained high at 90%.

All seven student tutors successfully completed the required training, comprising five hours of online learning and three hours of in-person training. Tutor engagement and availability remained consistently high throughout the intervention. Overall tutor attendance was 89%, with six of the seven tutors attending at least eight of the nine sessions delivered. Every session was supported by a minimum of five tutors and most sessions had six or seven tutors present. Although one tutor was unable to participate in the final four sessions due to a work placement commitment, sufficient tutor capacity was maintained to ensure uninterrupted delivery.

Pupil Assessment

Students were scored in four areas:

1. Sentence structures (e.g. simple, compound, complex).
2. Grammatical structures (e.g. listing of clauses, range of clauses to start sentences).
3. Sentence demarcation (full stops and, where appropriate, question marks).
4. Punctuation for clarity and meaning (commas, ellipsis, exclamation marks, apostrophes, semicolons and colons).

All assessments were marked by the same independent marker to ensure consistency of judgement across tests. Nine learners completed both the pre- and post- assessments.

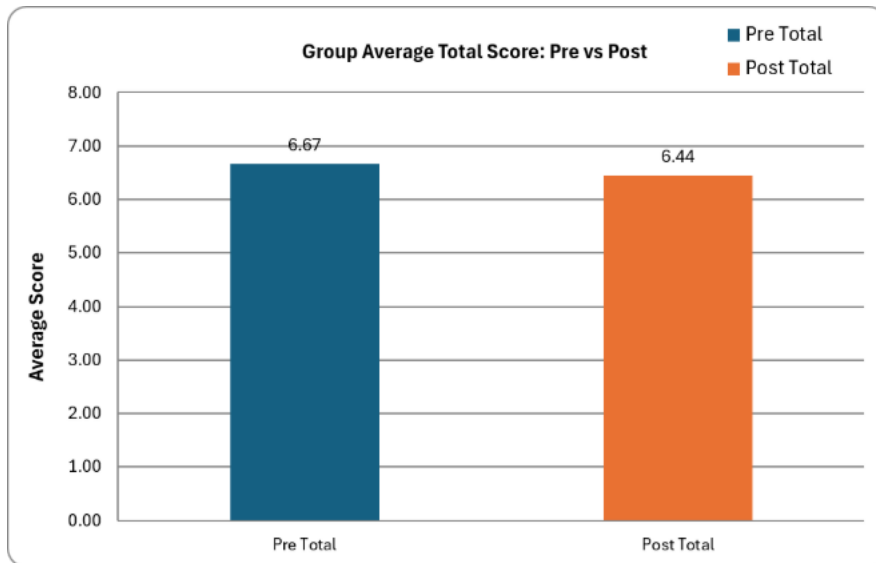


Figure 1: Group Mean Assessment Scores Before and After CAST

The average total score is broadly stable, decreasing slightly from 6.67 at pre-assessment to 6.44 at post-assessment, representing an average change of -0.23 points.

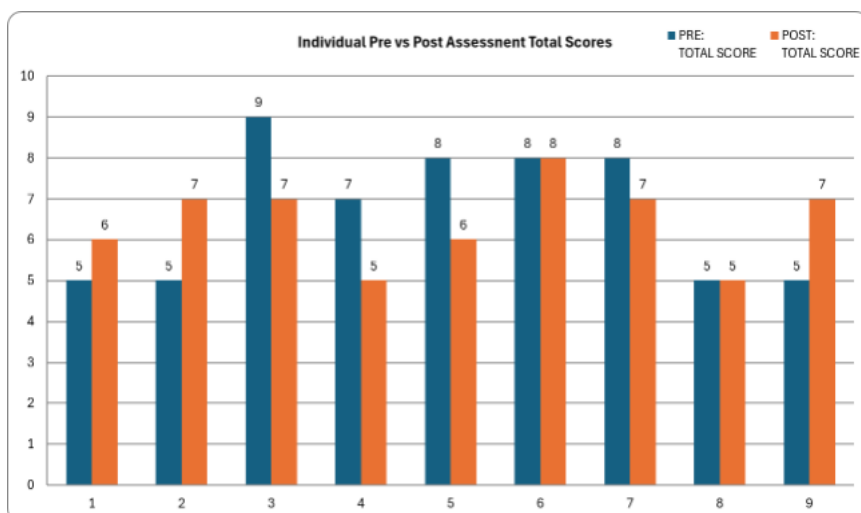


Figure 2: Individual Participant Pre- and Post- CAST Assessment Scores

Individual outcomes show a mixed pattern of results. Three learners (33%) increased their overall score, two learners (22%) maintained the same score, and four learners (44%) recorded a lower score at post-assessment than at baseline.

A notable pattern was that learners with lower baseline scores (of 5) generally showed positive movement, while several learners who began with comparatively higher scores recorded lower post-assessment results.

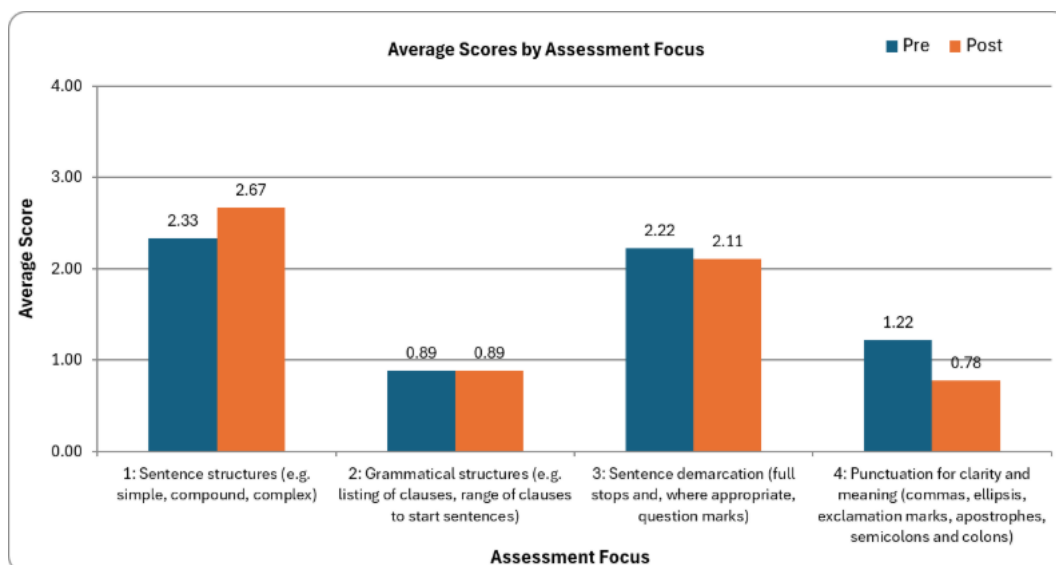


Figure 3: Group Mean Pre- and Post- Assessment Scores by Assessment Area

The strongest area of improvement was sentence structures, with average scores increasing from 2.33 to 2.67 (+0.34).

There was no change in the average score for grammatical structures (0.89) indicating that the intervention did not appear to influence learners' use of such grammatical features as varied clause structures or sentence openings.

Small declines were observed in the remaining assessment areas. Average scores for sentence demarcation reduced from 2.22 to 2.11 (-0.11), while scores for punctuation for clarity and meaning decreased from 1.22 to 0.78 (-0.44). The latter represented the largest change observed across the four assessed skill areas.

Overall, findings provide mixed evidence of impact. While learners demonstrated improvement in sentence structure, this gain was offset by declines in punctuation-related skills and slight reductions in sentence demarcation performance. Consequently, average total scores remained largely unchanged across the cohort. The pattern of results suggests that the intervention may have been more beneficial for learners with lower initial attainment, supporting progress among those starting from a weaker baseline while producing less consistent outcomes for higher-attaining learners.

Pupil survey

A pre- and post- intervention survey was undertaken by the tutees. The survey was provided to gain the perspectives of the learners on a range of self-reflection statements. Pupils were asked to read 13 statements and choose the response that best described them on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 represented "Not very like me" and 5 represented "Very like me."

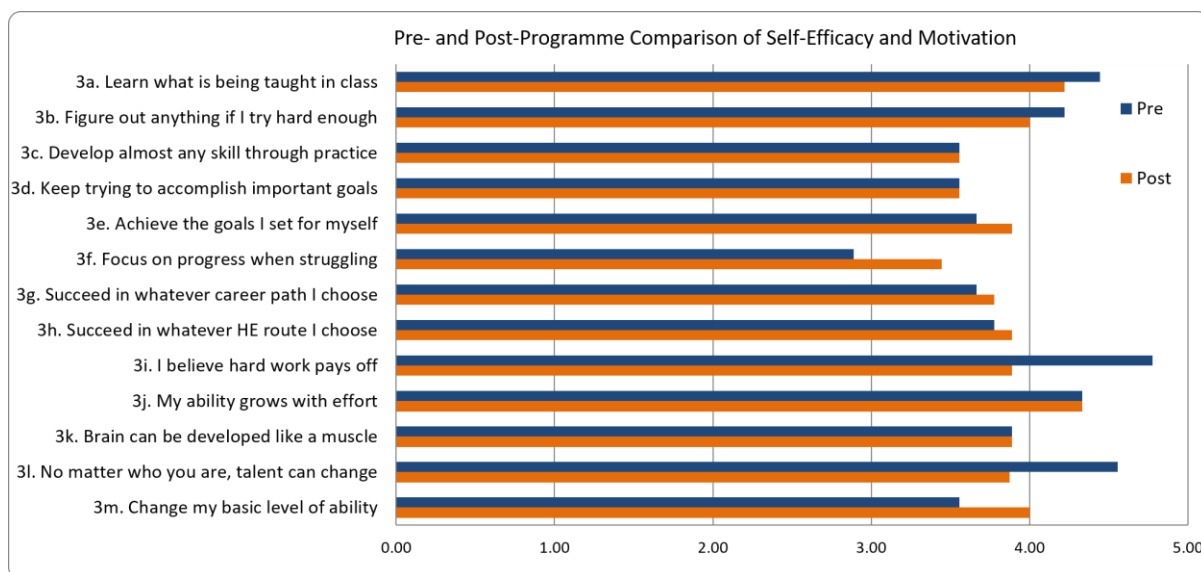


Figure 4: Group Mean Self-Efficacy and Motivation Scores at Pre- and Post-Assessment.

The results show a mixed pattern of change. Positive shifts were observed in participants' confidence in achieving personal goals (+0.22), focusing on progress when facing challenges (+0.56), belief in success through chosen career and higher education pathways (both +0.11), and confidence in improving their underlying level of ability (+0.44). The largest improvement was seen in participants' ability to focus on progress rather than becoming discouraged when tackling difficult tasks.

Several statements showed no change, including beliefs about developing skills through practice, persistence in achieving important goals, growth through effort, beliefs about developing the brain, and the potential for talent to change. Small decreases were recorded for confidence in learning what is taught in class (-0.22) and in figuring things out through effort (-0.22). The largest reductions were seen in agreement that hard work pays off (-0.89) and that anyone can change their level of talent (-0.68).

Overall, the findings suggest some improvement in self-confidence and resilience-related measures, while beliefs relating to effort, hard work and talent development appear to have weakened over the period measured.

Participant Satisfaction with the Tutoring Programme

Nine participants completed the post-intervention survey. One response was missing for each of the two satisfaction questions. One participant did not respond to the statement 4.e "I enjoyed the tutoring sessions", while another participant did not respond to the statement 4.f "I would recommend the tutoring to other students". As a result, each analysis is based on eight valid responses.

Table 2: Participant Satisfaction with the Tutoring Programme

Statement	Mean Score (1–5)	Agree/Strongly Agree
I enjoyed the tutoring sessions	4.1	75%
I would recommend the tutoring to other students	4.5	100%

Overall, participants reported positive experiences of the tutoring programme. The statement "I enjoyed the tutoring sessions" received a mean score of 4.1 out of 5 (n = 8), with 75% of respondents selecting either Agree or Strongly Agree. No respondents selected Disagree or Strongly Disagree.

Participants were particularly positive when asked whether they would recommend the tutoring to others. The statement "I would recommend the tutoring to other students" received a mean score of 4.5 out of 5 (n = 8), with all respondents (100%) selecting either Agree or Strongly Agree.

Student Tutor Survey

All seven student tutors completed the end-point survey. Tutors reported developing a range of skills, particularly communication, interpersonal, organisational and problem-solving skills. Satisfaction with programme delivery was high, with all respondents agreeing that the training, materials and support effectively prepared them for tutoring. Most also felt the workload was manageable, observed improvements in tutees' writing skills, and said they would recommend the programme.

Tutors most enjoyed working directly with young people, building positive relationships, and seeing improvements in tutees' confidence and writing. The main challenges related to tutees' understanding of grammar and sentence structure, alongside practical issues such as session length, pupil engagement, and group size.

Suggested improvements included additional interactive resources, more opportunities for one-to-one support, longer sessions where appropriate, and clearer communication throughout the programme delivery.

School Staff Survey

Feedback from the one participating teacher suggests that the CAST programme positively impacted pupils' literacy skills, confidence and future attainment.

The teacher also stated pupils showed improvements in writing, particularly sentence accuracy, while some demonstrated increased classroom confidence and more positive attitudes. The teacher also expected the programme to support improved attainment for all participants.

The teacher highlighted the value of personalised, small-group support and immediate feedback, noting that pupils became more confident using literacy terms such as verbs and clauses, indicating stronger understanding and engagement.

The only suggested improvement was to shorten the programme and deliver it within a single school term, making it easier to fit into the school timetable while maintaining impact.

WIN Staff Feedback

Overall, the three WIN staff who implemented the project viewed CAST as a successful initiative that generated positive feedback and engagement. The programme benefited from strong core materials, committed school support, effective tutors, and well-targeted student recruitment, all of which contributed to positive outcomes. Staff highlighted the value of sustained small group and one-to-one support, noting that the relationships built between tutors and students created a highly positive experience. Both students and tutors reportedly saw the CAST sessions as a highlight of their week, reflecting the strong engagement and sense of belonging fostered through the programme.

Feedback also identified several areas for future improvement, including building additional contingency time into the schedule, continuing to over-recruit tutors, streamlining administrative processes, and maintaining consistent staffing and communication to support effective delivery.

Discussion

WIN would like to highlight several implementation factors to be considered when interpreting these findings. Only seven of the nine planned sessions were delivered, reducing instruction time and disrupting the intended sequence of learning. As a result, the programme was not implemented with sufficient fidelity for its full impact to be realised.

Assessment and survey outcomes may also have been influenced by contextual factors, including exceptionally warm weather during delivery, disappointment as the campus day was cancelled, pupils having reduced time to complete the end of course assessment and survey and having to do so on a curriculum collapse day when their peers were not having curriculum-based lessons. These factors may have affected engagement, motivation, and pupils' ability to fully demonstrate the skills they had developed.

Research Question 1: To what extent does participation in the CAST programme improve pupils' sentence-level writing accuracy?

The findings suggest that participation in the CAST programme resulted in limited improvement in sentence variety and mixed results in writing accuracy at the cohort level. A closer examination of the data reveals a nuanced picture.

The strongest positive outcome was observed in the tutees use of sentence structures, where average scores increased from 2.33 to 2.67. This suggests that pupils were more likely to use a wider range of sentence forms, including simple, compound and complex sentences, indicating that CAST successfully encouraged pupils to experiment with more sophisticated sentence construction.

In contrast, no improvement was observed in grammatical structures, while small declines were recorded in sentence demarcation and punctuation for clarity and meaning. The largest decline was seen in punctuation. This pattern suggests that although pupils were beginning to write more varied sentences, they were not consistently applying the technical conventions needed to support these increasingly complex structures.

Individual-level findings show that pupils with lower starting scores generally demonstrated the greatest gains. Three pupils improved their overall score, two maintained their baseline performance, while four recorded lower post-assessment scores (see Figure 2). This may suggest that CAST was particularly beneficial for pupils with lower prior attainment. However, the reduction in programme delivery may have affected pupils differently depending on their starting point. Pupils with lower baseline skill levels still received much of the core content designed to support foundational skill development and may therefore have had greater opportunities for progression. In contrast, pupils who began the programme with stronger existing skills did not receive the later sessions, which were intended to provide additional stretch and challenge. As a result, the shortened programme may have limited the extent to which higher-attaining pupils could demonstrate further gains. Delivery of the full programme is recommended by incorporating contingency weeks into the programme planning and aligning assessment measures with the six-session plus campus-day model.

Student tutors reported that the intervention had a positive impact on learners, particularly in supporting their confidence and engagement with sentence construction. However, tutors noted that the technical terminology and range of rules introduced later in the programme could be difficult for

some pupils to grasp. Tutors further highlighted the limited length of sessions, with several suggesting that additional time would have provided greater opportunities for pupils to practise and consolidate new learning. This may help explain the lack of improvement in grammatical structures and technical accuracy observed in the assessment data. Despite these challenges, the generally positive feedback from tutors suggests that the programme was viewed as beneficial and that stronger outcomes could be achieved if pupils received additional instruction time.

Reviewing the breadth of the content covered with CAST coordinators and discussing which pupils to target with teachers is recommended, especially if programme hours are reduced in future delivery. Fewer sessions may limit opportunities for pupils to develop and consolidate learning across the four assessed components (see Figure 3), particularly given the challenges identified by tutors in the pupils' understanding of grammatical concepts and technical terminology. A shorter course also has implications when selecting tutees e.g. those with lower baseline assessments should be prioritised perhaps as they experienced the greatest gains in the pilot project.

Additionally, consideration should be given to the academic year group selected for participation. WIN selected Year 9 pupils to remain within the scope of the favourable ethics approval for this evaluation; however, as CAST was originally designed for Year 8 learners, the additional year of schooling may have reduced the scope for measurable improvement among some participants, particularly those with higher prior attainment.

Overall, the findings indicate that CAST shows promise in developing pupils' use of sentence structures, particularly among lower-attaining learners. However, these gains were not accompanied by improvements in other aspects of sentence-level accuracy, resulting in little overall change in assessment scores. Given the missed sessions and challenging delivery conditions, the findings should be interpreted cautiously, and it is possible that stronger outcomes may have been achieved had the full programme been delivered as intended.

Research Question 2: How does participation influence pupils' non-cognitive outcomes, including motivation and self-efficacy in writing?

The findings provide some evidence that participation in the programme positively influenced aspects of pupils' self-efficacy and motivation, although the pattern of change was mixed across the measures assessed. Improvements were observed in pupils' confidence in achieving personal goals, their belief in their ability to improve, and their capacity to focus on progress when faced with challenges. In particular, the largest increase was seen in pupils' ability to concentrate on their progress rather than becoming discouraged by difficult tasks (see Figure 4). These findings suggest that participation may have supported greater resilience and confidence in learning, outcomes that are closely linked to successful engagement with literacy development.

The improvement in confidence-related measures is consistent with wider findings from the CAST project. Teacher feedback highlighted increased confidence amongst participating pupils, particularly their willingness to engage with literacy concepts and use subject-specific terminology. The teacher attributed these changes, in part, to the individualised nature of the support and the opportunities provided through one-to-one and small-group tutoring. Taken together, the survey and teacher findings suggest that the programme may have contributed to creating a supportive learning environment in which pupils felt more confident to engage with writing-related tasks.

However, the findings were not universally positive. While confidence and resilience measures generally improved, some reductions were recorded in statements relating to hard work, effort and beliefs about the malleability of talent. Interpreting these findings is challenging given the small sample size, when individual responses have a substantial influence on the overall results, and the absence of statistically significant testing. It is possible that pupils developed a more realistic understanding of the effort required to improve their writing skills as a result of participation in the programme so giving rise to a dip in confidence. Equally, these changes may simply reflect normal variation within a small cohort rather than meaningful changes in attitude. Furthermore, self-efficacy and motivation data are based on self-reported survey responses, which may have been influenced by pupils' perceptions and interpretation of the questions. The absence of a comparison group means changes cannot be attributed solely to participation in CAST.

Future delivery may benefit from incorporating opportunities for reflection, goal setting and celebrating progress, while considering how confidence gains can be reinforced beyond the programme through continued writing opportunities within the curriculum. A further recommendation is to ensure one-to-one or small group tutoring as this was identified as a key feature in improving confidence in the teacher and student tutors' feedback.

Overall, the evidence suggests that the programme shows promise in supporting some non-cognitive outcomes, particularly those associated with confidence, self-efficacy and resilience. While the results do not indicate consistent improvements across all motivation-related measures, the positive changes observed suggest the intervention contributes to pupils' confidence as learners and writers. Further delivery with larger cohorts and more stable implementation conditions would help to determine the extent to which these outcomes can be replicated and sustained.

Research Question 3: To what extent was the CAST programme successfully implemented within the WIN delivery model, and what lessons can be drawn for its scalability?

Throughout the project, WIN staff, recruited tutors and the partner school demonstrated a strong commitment to implementing the intervention as designed. Where adaptations were required, stakeholders worked collaboratively to preserve the core elements of the CAST model. WIN's reflection is that the principal barriers to delivery were largely contextual and operational in nature, rather than arising from the intervention design. As such, these challenges are considered reflective of the practical realities of project implementation and are likely to have affected internally developed programmes in a similar way. The one exception relates to the overall length of the intervention. CAST was originally designed as a nine-session programme; however, the teacher's feedback is the programme would be better if shortened to fit into a term and would like this abbreviated version delivered next year. The same feedback has been given by schools across the project and CAST have created a six-week version which WIN will deliver in future.

Student satisfaction findings also provide evidence for the successful implementation and the potential scalability of the programme. Participants reported positive experiences overall, with three-quarters (75%) agreeing that they enjoyed the tutoring sessions and all respondents (100%) indicating that they would recommend the programme to other students (see Table 2). Attendance data further supports the feasibility of the programme within a Uni Connect delivery model. Although four tutees withdrew before completion, retention among the remaining cohort was strong, with 71.4% of the original participants completing the programme.

While WIN is in its pilot year for the project, encouragement can be taken from the successful delivery of CAST over multiple years and across different regions which provides encouragement regarding its potential for expansion. The programme's effectiveness across varied contexts suggests it can be successfully adapted and delivered at a wider scale, provided its core delivery principles are maintained. Demand from schools also suggests strong potential for scalability within the WIN region. Following WIN's delivery of the project, several local schools have expressed interest in participating in future iterations, indicating that the model addresses a recognised need and has the potential for wider implementation.

Student tutors are a core part of the delivery model and WIN was able to recruit a strong pool of tutors. Engagement and retention levels among the tutors remained strong throughout the intervention with six of seven tutors completing the full project. An important consideration for future delivery is the composition of the tutor cohort. At the University of Bath, recruited tutors comprised a higher proportion of postgraduate students than undergraduate students (approximately 3:2). In contrast, Bath Spa recruited two students: one undergraduate and one postgraduate. Although the sample is too small to draw firm conclusions, this raises questions about whether the time commitments, skills and responsibilities associated with programmes such as CAST are more compatible with postgraduate study. This is particularly relevant given that postgraduate populations are typically smaller than undergraduate populations, which may limit the pool of potential tutors available within some institutions. A recommendation to strengthen tutor recruitment is the early promotion of the CAST tutoring opportunity across the university ambassador pool and monitoring recruitment levels throughout the planning and delivery cycle.

Given that many universities already operate established student ambassador programmes, there is potential for other institutions across the West of England to deliver similar interventions using their existing student populations. This would enable further testing of the model across different contexts, strengthening the evidence base and contributing to a greater understanding of its impact and scalability. However, institutional capacity should be considered. Smaller providers may face challenges recruiting sufficient tutors, highlighting the potential value of regional approaches that enable institutions to share ambassador capacity and recruitment resources. Such collaboration could reduce barriers to participation and support wider adoption of the model across the sector.

Furthermore, cross-institutional delivery may offer benefits not only for recruitment capacity but also for diversity and representation. Although the cohort reflected a range of demographic characteristics, there was more limited representation of tutors from lower socioeconomic and non-graduate family backgrounds. Expanding recruitment across multiple higher education providers could help address this by drawing upon a broader student population and increasing the likelihood of engaging tutors with a wider range of educational and life experiences. In WIN's context this could involve inviting stakeholders like the FE colleges with HE provisions to provide a small number of students to future versions of the project. The tutees may benefit from encountering role models accessing higher education in multiple different forms. Continued review and refinement of the tutor recruitment across future implementation could help answer the questions above.

The programme's future growth may be influenced by wider funding and policy changes. Collaborative working could be particularly valuable in supporting scalability, enabling smaller institutions to

contribute to delivery while drawing on the larger student ambassador pools available at other universities.

CAST has a relatively high cost per pupil compared with some outreach interventions. Student tutors are paid for their training, programme delivery, and travel to and from participating schools. In addition, successful delivery requires significant coordination and oversight from WIN staff, including tutor recruitment, training, scheduling, school liaison, quality assurance and programme management.

Any future expansion of the programme should therefore carefully consider both the financial and staffing resources required to maintain delivery quality. While the model has demonstrated positive outcomes and strong participant engagement, scalability will depend on ensuring sufficient investment in both tutor capacity and programme coordination. Expanding delivery without adequate resources could risk compromising key features of the intervention, particularly the small-group support and consistency of delivery, that underpin the programme's effectiveness. Therefore, the scale and sustainability of future delivery will depend on the level of investment and strategic focus afforded to this type of activity within future regional collaborations.

Recommendations

Based on the ideas explored in the discussion, it would be recommended that future delivery of the programmed should:

- **Review participant targeting** by considering the suitability of the intervention for pupils with different baseline attainment levels, sharing findings and updated content with teachers, and discussing content priorities with CAST coordinators.
- **Protect the key features of the delivery model**, including small-group support, through appropriate tutor recruitment, workforce planning and project budgeting.
- **Strengthen tutor recruitment** by promoting opportunities early across the university ambassador pool and monitoring recruitment levels throughout planning and delivery.
- **Enhance future evaluation activity** by maintaining the existing evaluation design while seeking opportunities to increase cohort sizes and incorporate a comparator group where feasible.
- **Continue to review the project's strategic fit and sustainability**, including its alignment with regional attainment priorities.
- **Ensure full programme delivery** by incorporating contingency weeks into programme planning and aligning assessment measures with the six-session plus campus-day model.

Conclusion

This evaluation examined the implementation and outcomes of WIN's delivery of the CAST programme during the summer term of 2026. Overall, the findings present a mixed but encouraging picture. While overall writing assessment scores remained broadly unchanged, there is evidence that the programme supported improvements in sentence structure, particularly amongst pupils with lower pre-assessment scores.

More positive findings emerged in relation to non-cognitive outcomes. Survey data, alongside teacher and tutor feedback, suggests that participation contributed to increased confidence, resilience, and

self-efficacy. Pupils appeared more willing to engage with literacy concepts and challenge themselves as writers.

The evaluation also demonstrates that CAST can be delivered successfully through a collaborative Uni Connect partnership model. Despite many challenges (such as recruitment issues, project delays, timetable constraints and the loss of two planned sessions), attendance, tutor retention and participant satisfaction remained high. Feedback from pupils, tutors and school staff indicates that the small-group tutoring model was both feasible and valued.

The CAST evaluations conducted by the University of Exeter, Next Steps South West, and GROWS, identified stronger positive impacts on literacy attainment, writing skills, confidence and self-efficacy. These studies drew on larger datasets, often spanning multiple schools, and some incorporated comparator groups that found greater improvements amongst participants than non-participants. As a result, the wider evidence base for CAST is more positive than the findings reported here.

The evaluation of these findings should be interpreted in light of the study's limitations, including the small sample size, reduced delivery period, challenging implementation conditions, and absence of a robust comparator group. As such, this evaluation represents an important contribution to implementation learning rather than definitive evidence of effectiveness. Future evaluation activity could be enhanced by maintaining the existing evaluation design while seeking opportunities to increase cohort sizes and incorporate a comparator group where feasible.

CAST shows promise as a collaborative, university-supported literacy intervention. While evidence of attainment gains was mixed in this pilot, positive findings relating to sentence structure, confidence, engagement, programme feasibility, and stakeholder satisfaction, alongside the wider evidence base, provide a strong rationale for continued delivery, refinement and evaluation at a larger scale.

WIN is pleased to have transitioned from an internally developed attainment-raising project to the CAST model. The quality of evidence generated through this pilot, together with the potential to produce even stronger evidence through future implementation and evaluation, reinforces the decision to adopt the programme. Overall, WIN views the pilot as a success and is optimistic that CAST will continue to grow, supporting both pupil attainment and the wider sector evidence base through dissemination via the Higher Education Evaluation Library (HEEL).

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Appendices

Appendix A: Access and Participation Plan and Risks to Equality of Opportunity

The University of Bath’s *Access and Participation Plan*¹ identifies nine risks to equality of opportunity (Figure 1). Equality of opportunity means “individuals are not hampered in accessing and succeeding in higher education as a result of their background or circumstances they cannot fairly influence” (The Office for Students, 2025).

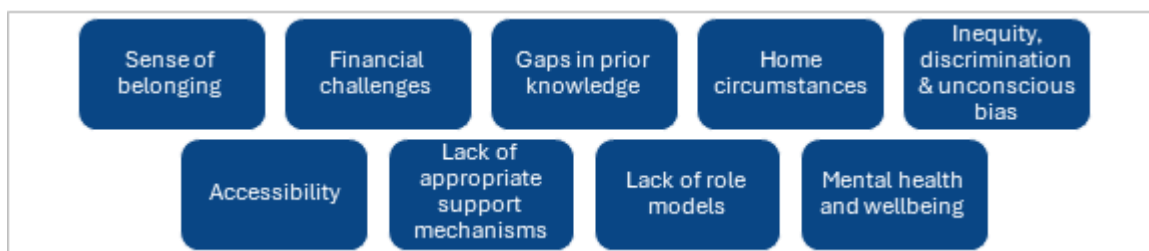


Figure 1: University of Bath’s nine key risks to equality of opportunity across the student lifecycle.

The associated risks that the evaluation/programme are designed to address are:

- Gaps in prior knowledge
- Lack of role models
- Sense of belonging

WIN - Crafting Accurate Sentences Collaboration Process 25.26

Problem statement

Uni Connect partnerships are increasingly being asked to collaborate to address regional risks to equality of opportunity, while also strengthening the sector-wide evidence base. The Office for Students (OfS) is directing partnerships to contribute to this evidence base through the Higher Education Evaluation Library (HEEL), requiring more coordinated, robust, and evaluable approaches to programme delivery.

WIN has previously focused on projects designed by WIN staff or University of Bath-led projects (e.g. Careerplot). This is therefore the broadest project in terms of geographical reach and number of partners that WIN has been part of.

Inputs

- Partnership staff time & expertise (evaluation leads, practitioners, data teams)
- Funding for collaboration and evaluation activity
- OfS guidance, HEEL framework, and evaluation standards
- Training and evaluation capacity - building
- Data systems and infrastructure (collection, storage, sharing)
- Established partnership networks and relationships
- Governance structures and leadership support
- Programme delivery frameworks and shared tools
- Time for coordination and cross-partnership working
- Access to participants, institutions, and programme sites
- Monitoring and evaluation tools (surveys, datasets, tracking systems)
- Technical support (data analysis, reporting, HEEL submission processes)
- Stakeholder buy-in (partners, schools, HE providers)

Activities

- Engagement with the WP Impact Team at University HEEL submission process: Peer review, masterclasses
- Navigating implementation of externally designed projects in the University of Bath's research Ethics framework
- Collaborative agreements - partnership, legal etc.
- Collaboration with Bath Spa to recruit, train and pay their university ambassadors

Outcomes

- Improved evaluation capability across partnerships (skills, confidence, shared understanding)
- More robust, consistent and evaluable programme design
- Increased successful HEEL submissions (quality + volume)
- Improved understanding and application of research ethics processes
- Stronger partnership working and formalised collaboration structures
- More efficient delivery through clear agreements and governance
- Increased capacity to recruit, train and manage delivery staff (ambassadors) from across the south west
- Improved quality and consistency of programme delivery

Impact

- Stronger sector-wide evidence base on 'what works' (HEEL contribution)
- More scalable, replicable and evidence-informed programmes across Uni Connect
- Improved targeting and effectiveness of outreach interventions
- Enhanced collaboration across partnerships at a regional and national level
- Better informed policy and practice decisions (OfS and sector)
- Improved equality of opportunity and progression to HE

Causal pathways

- **Pathway 1: Collaboration to Evidence Quality** - Partnership collaboration → shared programme design → consistent delivery approaches → improved data quality & comparability → robust evaluation → contribution to HEEL evidence base
- **Pathway 2: Evaluation Capacity Pathway** - Training & guidance on evaluation → increased staff capability → improved evaluation design (ToC, methods) → more rigorous impact evidence → Stronger HEEL contributions
- **Pathway 3: Coordination to Scalable Practice** - Cross-partnership coordination → aligned priorities & methods → reduced duplication → scalable, replicable programmes → stronger sector-wide evidence → informed policy & practice
- **Pathway 4: Evidence Use to Improved Outcomes** - Robust HEEL evidence → improved understanding of 'what works' → better programme design → more effective interventions → improved equality of opportunity outcomes

Moderating factors

- **Partnership engagement & buy-in** - collaboration is required for alignment and shared delivery
- **Variation in evaluation capacity** - differing skills affect quality and consistency of evidence
- **Clarity of OfS/HEEL requirements** - influences direction and standardisation of approaches
- **Data quality & comparability** - impacts ability to compare and aggregate findings
- **Resource constraints (time, funding, staff)** - may limit depth of evaluation activity
- **Leadership & governance support** - drives prioritisation of collaboration and evidence-building
- **Existing partnership relationships** - trust affects willingness to share practice and data
- **Programme diversity across regions** - reduces comparability and scalability of findings
- **External policy and sector pressures** - may shift priorities or disrupt delivery
- **Technical infrastructure & systems** - affects data collection, sharing, and reporting

WIN - Crafting Accurate Sentences Tutoring 25.26

Problem statement

There is a persistent attainment gap in educational outcomes between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged pupils, even when controlling for high prior attainment. At the individual level, prior attainment is the biggest indicator for progression to university. Raising attainment among disadvantaged groups is therefore a key priority in closing the HE progression gap.

Inputs

- Skills, knowledge and time of staff
- Skills, knowledge and time of students
- Staff and delivery team training materials
- Workshop resources
- Funding
- Communication and collaboration with external partners
- Venue
- Data collection systems
- IT resources
- Curriculum materials
- Student voice and co-creation structures

Activities

- Literacy sessions
- Non subject-specific tutoring
- Campus visit

Outcomes

- Improved Writing Skills
- Increased Academic Motivation
- Increased academic self-efficacy
- Increased sense of belonging

Impact

- Increased key stage 4 attainment
- Increased key stage 5 attainment
- Increased post 16 progression options
- Increased post 18 progression options
- Increased enrolment in HE

Causal pathways

- **Pathway 1: Literacy Skills** - Literacy sessions → improved writing skills → better assessed work → increased KS4 attainment → increased KS5 attainment → increased progression options including HE
- **Pathway 2: Academic Motivation and Engagement** - Tutor support → increased academic motivation → improved attitudes to learning → greater engagement and effort in school → improved attainment → improved KS4/KS5 outcomes → increased progression options including HE
- **Pathway 3: Academic Self Efficacy** - Literacy sessions → improved writing skills → increased confidence → improved attitudes to learning → improved attainment → improved KS4/KS5 outcomes → increased progression options including HE
- **Pathway 4: HE Awareness Pathway** - Campus visit → increased awareness of HE → increased aspiration and perceived accessibility → increased enrolment in HE

Moderating factors

- **Pupil engagement & attendance** - consistent participation is required for any impact
- **Tutor quality & consistency** - effectiveness depends on training, delivery, and relationships
- **Baseline attainment & confidence** - influences how quickly pupils benefit
- **School support & teacher buy-in** - reinforces learning beyond sessions
- **Home environment & competing pressures** - affects engagement and study time
- **Aspirational context** - shapes impact of campus visits and HE progression
- **Programme dosage (frequency/duration)** - sufficient intensity needed for change
- **Group size / delivery model** - affects personalisation and impact
- **Pupil selection accuracy** - targeting the right pupils affects outcomes
- **External pressures (wellbeing, workload)** - may limit capacity to benefit
- **Institutional constraints** - timetabling, space, school priorities
- **Data use & monitoring** - ability to adapt delivery based on progress