

About the intervention

Intervention	'University Is For You' event
Date	24/10/2023
Faculty/Service Area	Outreach
School(s)	6 secondary schools from across Cornwall
Academic Year	2023-24
Intervention Lead(s)	Aby Underhill-Carey, Senior Outreach Officer, aby.underhillcarey@falmouth.ac.uk Natalie Bracher, Access & Success Officer, n.bracher@exeter.ac.uk Nadine Johns, Institutional Outreach Officer njohns@marjon.ac.uk Julian True, Access and Participation Specialist, julian.true@plymouth.ac.uk

The "University is for You" event is a unique chance for students to immerse themselves in university life by taking part in a suite of activities on a university campus for a day. Specifically designed to support care-experienced students, the event offers personalized support to ensure a meaningful experience. Participants gain first-hand insight into university life and explore potential courses. The day's objectives include enhancing awareness of Higher Education (HE) through activities like campus tours, HE talks, and workshops. Attendees discover the distinctions between studying at a HE institution and at school/college, fostering a deeper understanding of their academic possibilities. This initiative aims to empower students, providing valuable exposure and guidance as they consider their educational journey beyond secondary education. This support is likely to address key risks from the Office for Students Equality of Opportunity Risk Register (EORR), including Risks 1: Knowledge and skills, 2: Information and guidance and 3: Perception of higher education.

Evaluation

- Paper post-activity surveys were distributed to participants after the event
- A total of nine (9) students took part in the event; and nine (9) participants completed the survey (100% response rate)
- Quantitative data incorporated validated scales from TASO, specifically designed to measure intermediate outcomes, assessing students' university expectations and knowledge. Qualitative insights were derived from students' overall knowledge acquired during the day. This qualitative dimension provided a nuanced understanding of the impact of the visit to Falmouth University on the students' broader knowledge base.
- The main limitations of this study were the very small sample sizes, the self-reported bias, and the use of a single evaluation method.

Summary of findings

Quantitative analysis

The combined percentages below reflect those who ended up agreeing or strongly agreeing with the following statements:

- **66%** feel they know more about the study and course options available in their local area
- **89%** understand more about the support and help available to Care Leavers at university
- **78%** have a better understanding of what student life is like
- **89%** heard real life student experiences that helped them understand more about university

University expectations and knowledge:

- **44%** agreed they are thinking about applying to university in the future
- **78%** said they know what studying at university would be like
- **89%** said they know how studying at university is different from studying in school or at college
- **55%** believe that if they apply to university, they will get in

Qualitative analysis

Respondents were asked to reflect on the key things they will take away from the event. Of the 8 students who provided comments, the 4 themes that emerged from the thematic analysis were:

- Student experiences: One half of respondents (**50%**) highlighted that the opportunity provided them the chance to fully immerse themselves in the experiences typical of HE students, allowing participants to

authentically engage with the day-to-day aspects of university life e.g., *“What higher education is actually like”*

- **Raising aspirations:** A quarter (**25%**) expressed a clear aspiration to pursue HE and achieve academic success, with one student highlighting a readiness to venture beyond their comfort zone, suggesting that the event not only influences academic goals but also contributes to the broader development of students, fostering resilience and a willingness to embrace challenges e.g., *“That you should have no regrets and go for everything”*
- **Student life insight:** **13%** emphasised that their participation provided them with a glimpse into the reality of student life, particularly through the experience of attending a HE-style lecture e.g., *“What a few lecture/seminar feel like. What a day in the life of uni”*
- **HE options:** **13%** gained a better grasp of higher education options through the event, realizing universities differ. This insight could crucially influence students' decisions, guiding them toward institutions aligning with personal preferences and goals e.g., *“All universities are not the same”*.

Conclusions

Overall, analysis of the impact evaluation indicates a positive impact on participants, as it is likely to have provided awareness of HE options, increased their understanding of what it is like to study at a Higher Education level, and, for some, it raised their aspirations to progress to university. Therefore, this programme is likely to address Risks 1, 2 & 3 from the EORR.

Recommendations

Intervention

- Continue with the targeted approach to support students from this underrepresented group.

Evaluation Design

- Continue evaluating this event.
- Consider including both a pre-survey and a post-survey to be able to evaluate the progress made by participants.
- To enhance the validity of findings, consider employing additional evaluation methods such as input from the staff and student ambassadors delivering the intervention, to provide a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of its impact and potential areas for improvement.