STUDY SKILLS PROGRAMME:

2024/2025 IMPACT EVALUATION REPORT

Attainment Raising Programmes

Network for East Anglian Collaborative Outreach (neaco)

Project description

Study Skills is a 6-week programme designed for Year 10 and Year 11 students. Participants were selected by their schools based on their receipt of Free School Meals (FSM) and/or being from underrepresented groups (URG), as well as being on the 3/4 boundary for GCSE English and Maths. The programme was delivered across 7 schools in East Anglia, with groups of up to 15 students per session, involving a total of 98 participants. The programme was delivered in partnership with our Higher Education Champions (HECs) based in schools in the East of England.

The main aim of the programme is to increase students' attainment levels by helping them acquire the revision skills required to succeed in their GCSE revision across all subjects. It offers an opportunity for student development by supporting them in building a set of study skills that improve how they learn. These skills are developed through the introduction and practice of proven revision methods and self-care techniques. Moreover, they will help students feel more confident and prepared to begin their GCSE revision by becoming more aware of the most effective ways they learn, enhancing their overall effectiveness.

The programme consists of 6 sessions, with their respective delivery type, content and desired outcomes summarised in Table 1 below:

Session	Delivery type	Focus/Content	Outcomes
1	In-school, HEC delivery	To introduce study skills and outline the most effective study methods	• Gaining understanding of how GCSE study works • Learning and sharing top tips for getting through Year 10 and 11 • Learning about mindfulness and wellbeing
2	In-school, HEC delivery	To set realistic goals for Years 10 and 11 to improve revision outcomes and to identify ways to stay motivated during their studies	• Understanding how to set achievable goals and to stay motivated for revision and study throughout Year 10 and 11

			• Developing a goal setting toolkit using the SMART system • Learning about motivation and practising mindfulness
3	In-school, HEC delivery	To explore how to manage time and create a revision timetable by breaking the process into steps and aligning it with their goals	• Understanding time management • Using the Pomodoro technique to manage time effectively • Creating a revision timetable and progress tracker
4	In-school, HEC delivery	To learn about and practise the most effective study methods based on retrieval (brain dump, flashcards and interleaving) and to reflect on distractions to their study	• Understanding how to make use of effective study methods • Better managing distractions to their study
5	In-school, HEC delivery	To learn about and practise the most effective study methods based on retrieval (mind maps and practice tests), and to reflect on and build resilience to increase academic achievement	• Understanding how to make use of effective study methods • Learning about resilience
6	In-school, HEC delivery	To introduce self-care as an important part of study practice and to implement mindfulness as a coping mechanism for exam stress	• Increasing awareness of self-care in study practice and implementing it within their day-to-day practice • Identifying and managing exam stress

Table 1: Session outline of Study Skills programme.

Evaluation approach

The programme was underpinned by a Theory of Change. All activity was logged on the Higher Education Access Tracker (HEAT) and made use of the HEAT Attainment Raising Typology to code activity. The evaluation focused on a pre-and-post design, looking at students' cognitive and metacognitive skills (and how these affected the learners' confidence) and academic self-efficacy. Additionally, an open-ended qualitative question on comments and thoughts about the project, allowing them to reflect on their experience more freely. The evaluation tracked the changes in these specific skills and outcomes before and after the intervention, and collected information on the learners' perceived impact of the project.

Pre- and post-project surveys were sent to 98 Year 10 and Year 11 students across seven schools of East Anglia (see Participants section) before and after their participation in the Study Skills programme. Each school had between 8 and 15 participating students. Surveys were available in both electronic and paper formats, with a preference for paper, which helped mitigate issues related to technology access in the classroom and supported a higher response rate.

This amounts to an OfS Standards of Evidence Type 2 approach that generates empirical evidence but cannot provide an insight into the specific causal impact of the project. Survey questions used were based on TASO's Access and Success Questionnaire (ASQ).

To analyse impact, a paired Wilcoxon test was conducted to compare pre- and post-survey results. The sample size of matched responses (see section below) is sufficient to detect moderate to large changes, though smaller effects may not reach statistical significance. Therefore, the findings provide useful insights into the students who participated, while generalisations beyond this group should be made carefully.

Results

Participants

The programme was delivered to 98 students, of which 83 were Year 10 learners and 15 were Year 11 learners. Out of these, 82 completed the pre-programme survey (83.7% response rate) and 54 completed the post-programme survey (55.1% response rate). In total, 49 students completed both the pre- and post- surveys, accounting for a 50% overall response rate. The small (matched) year-group sizes prevented separate analyses; therefore, responses were combined for an overall impact analysis.

Findings and discussion

The figures below, constructed from the 49 matched pre- and post- survey data, reflect two key findings of the programme:

KEY FINDING 1: Learners reported a significant development in their cognitive and metacognitive skills after participating in the Study Skills programme.

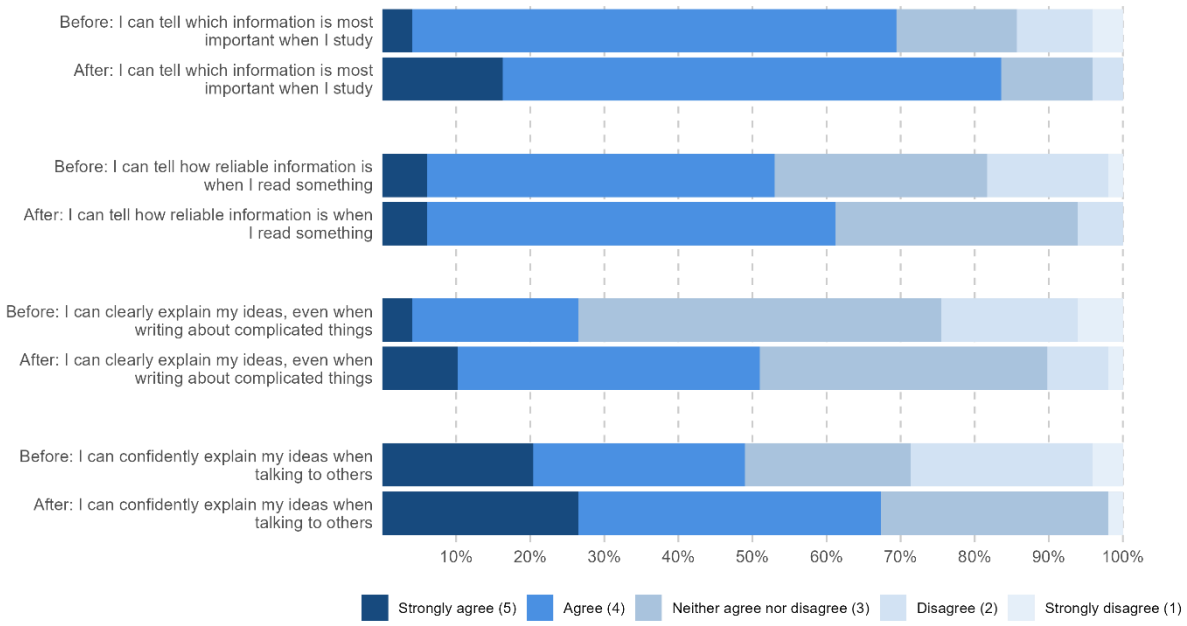

Figure 1: Cognitive skills. Wilcoxon signed-rank tests revealed a significant difference between the pre- and post-survey results of the 'Cognitive skills' block ($p < 0.001$). Regarding question-level analyses, a significant positive difference was found across all the questions in the block, except for the second one ($p = 0.001$, $p = 0.09$, $p = 0.004$ and $p = 0.001$, respectively).

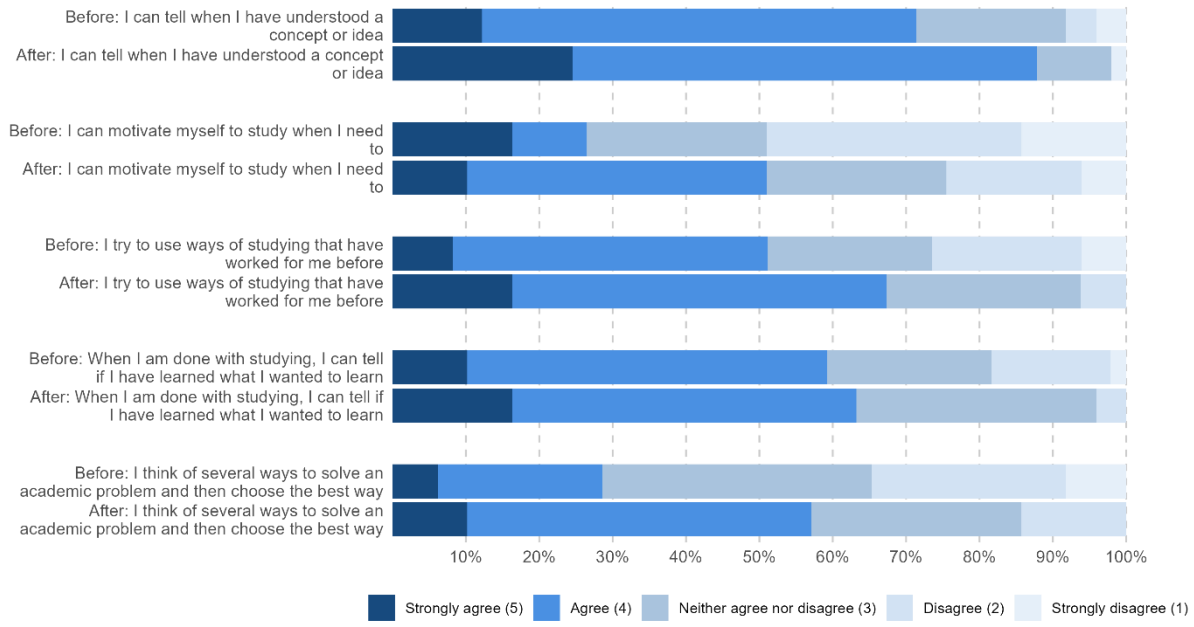

Figure 2: Metacognitive skills. Wilcoxon signed-rank tests revealed a significant difference between the pre- and post-survey results of the 'Metacognitive skills' block ($p < 0.001$). Regarding question-level analyses, a significant positive difference was found across all the questions in the block, except for the fourth one ($p = 0.001$, $p = 0.002$, $p = 0.006$, $p = 0.118$ and $p = 0.001$, respectively).

Analyses conducted at the block level indicated a significant positive change in the students' self-reported perspectives on their cognitive and metacognitive skills. Question-level analyses further revealed that this effect was across all individual questions, except for the second one in the cognitive block and for the fourth one in the metacognitive block.

The three questions driving the positive effect in the cognitive block are concerned with students' ability to discern important information and to explain their ideas. Both of these abilities are directly targeted in the programme, where students are taught and apply techniques that highlight important information (e.g., flashcards, mind maps) as well as methods that involve thinking and talking about their ideas (e.g., thinking of and setting up their goals). This aligns with existing research suggesting that programmes are most effective when their learning objectives when their learning objectives are made explicit (Aubin, 2023), as well as with research on study skills that emphasises explicit strategy instruction as the first step for effective revision support (Kettlewell, 2022). In contrast, question two in the cognitive block – relating to information reliability – might not have been directly targeted, as the programme focuses on revising content that students have already been taught rather than on seeking out or evaluating new sources. As a result, opportunities to practise judging the reliability of information are limited. To address this area more directly, future iterations of the programme could include activities that engage students in evaluating the credibility of their study materials, for instance, by

comparing different explanations of the same concept or identifying features or reliable vs unreliable information.

Regarding the metacognitive questions, interestingly, the four statistically significant items relate to metacognitive monitoring *during* learning (i.e., knowing what and how to study), whereas the question that did not reach statistical significance is more concerned with metacognitive monitoring *after* learning (i.e., knowing whether learning was successful). Despite the lack of significance, the positive shift is still notable. To strengthen this area in future iterations, the programme could build on its existing goal-setting activity by incorporating a complementary reflection phase in which students revisit their initial goals at the end of study sessions and evaluate the extent to which they have achieved them. This would help link the processes of goal setting, practice, and reflection, thereby supporting the development of post-study evaluative skills. Additionally, reframing practice tests as tools for self-evaluation rather than solely as assessment opportunities could further reinforce this aspect. Such an approach aligns with guidance from Kettlewell (2022), who proposes a structured reflection as the final step of effective revision.

KEY FINDING 2: Some positive changes were found in the students' self-reported perspectives on their self-efficacy (post-16 and HE) after participating in the Study Skills programme, although none reached statistical significance.

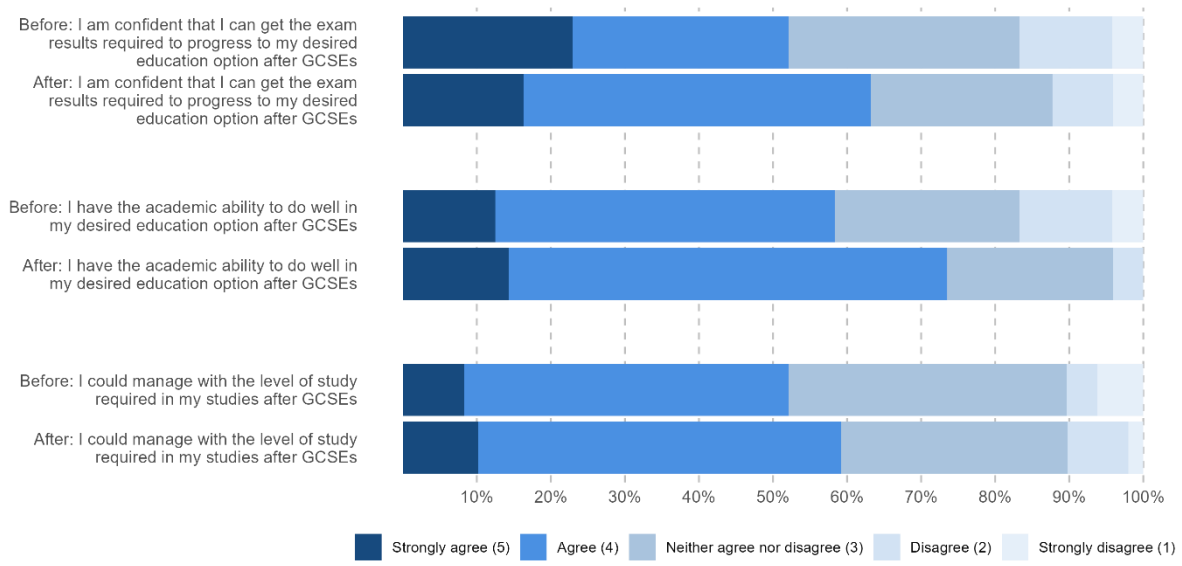

Figure 3: Self-efficacy (post-16). Wilcoxon signed-rank tests revealed no significant differences between the pre- and post-survey results of the 'SE (post-16)' block ($p = 0.139$). Regarding question-level analyses, a significant positive difference was found for the second question ($p = 0.02$), while no significant differences were observed in the rest of the questions in this block ($p = 0.579$ and $p = 0.452$, respectively).

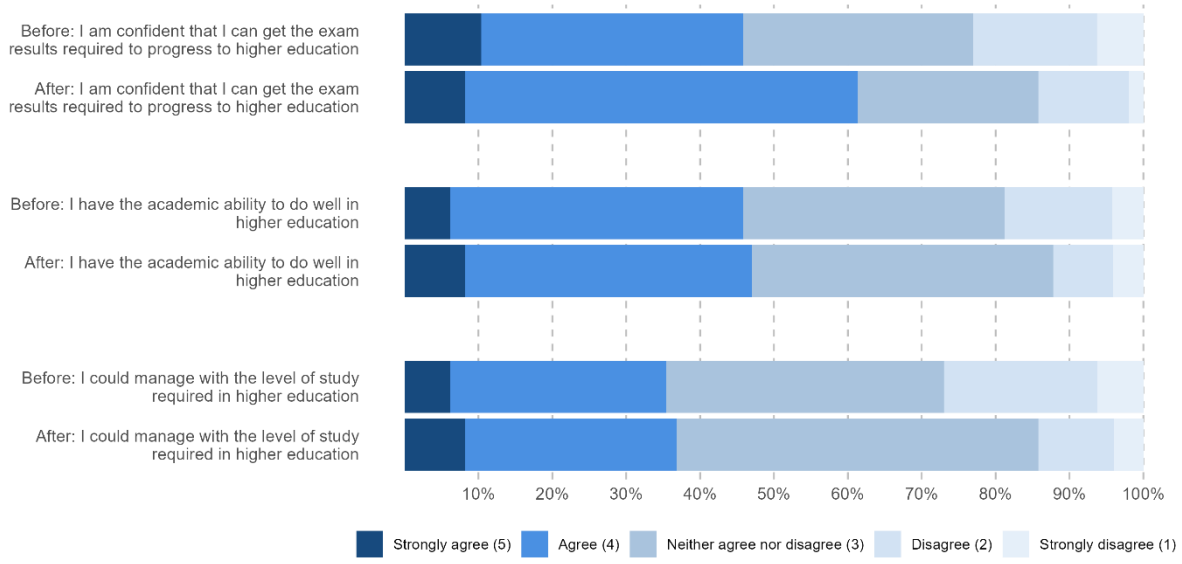

Figure 4: Self-efficacy (HE). Wilcoxon signed-rank tests revealed no significant differences between the pre- and post-survey results for any of the self-efficacy (HE) questions ($p = 0.139$, $p = 0.678$ and $p = 0.256$, respectively). No significance was found when questions were combined and treated as a separate data point for the overall 'Self-efficacy (post-16)' category ($p = 0.204$).

With regards to self-efficacy, some positive shifts can be observed both at post-16 and HE levels, although only question 2 of the SE (post-16) block reached the threshold for statistical significance. Nonetheless, some interesting observations can be drawn from these two blocks. Firstly, the proportion of 'strongly agree' and 'agree' responses was higher in the post-16 block than in the HE block, which aligns with the expected progression in students' academic confidence, that is, greater confidence in coping with nearer academic challenges (post-16) than with those perceived as more distant or demanding (HE). Another notable finding, consistent with the perceived impact data (see Figure 5 below), is that over 70% of students agreed or strongly agreed that they have the academic ability to do well in post-16 education, whereas this proportion drops to over 40% for HE. This pattern mirrors the perceived impact results, where only 43.7% of students agreed or strongly agreed that the programme had increased their higher education aspirations. This disparity may reflect students' lower confidence in their ability to succeed at the HE level, or perhaps a lack of information, advice, and guidance (IAG) regarding HE options, an aspect that future iterations of the programme could explore and address further. Moreover, introducing qualitative questions into the evaluation design could also provide further insights into the students' experiences and needs when it comes to HE aspirations and progression (see Recommendations section).

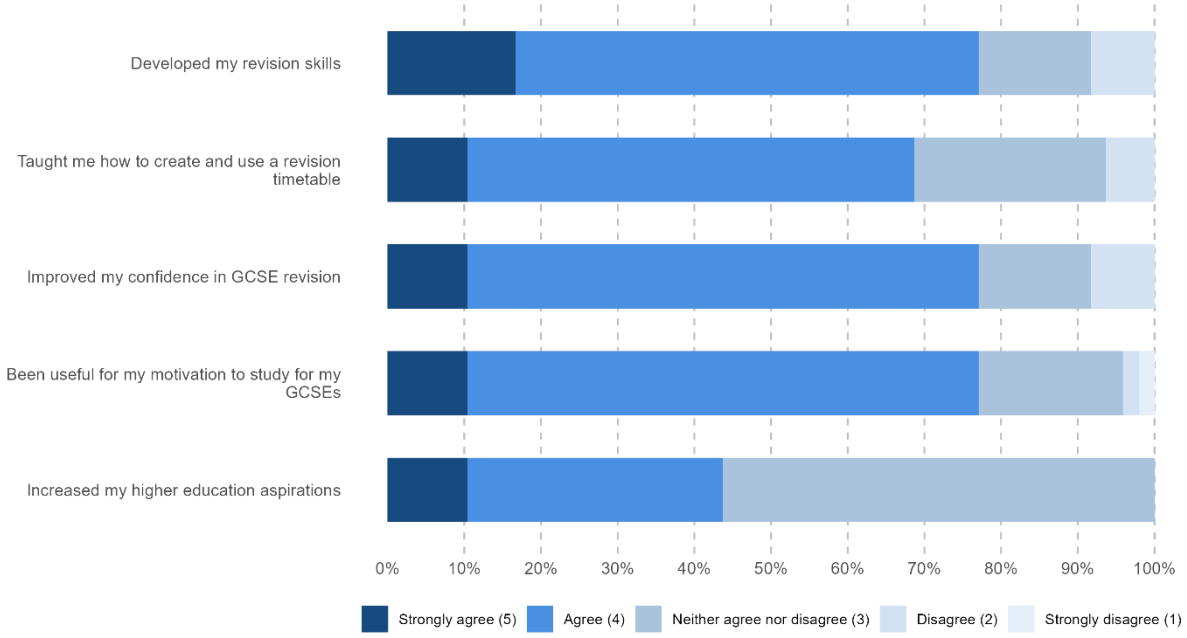

Figure 5: Perceived impact of the Study Skills programme.

When students were directly asked about their perceived impact of the programme on their learning, 77.1% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the programme had developed their revision skills and improved their confidence in GCSE revision. This improvement and development in revision confidence and skills likely contributed to the 77.1% of students reporting that the programme had been useful for their motivation to study for their GCSEs. These results are also in line with aspects highlighted by students in the open-ended feedback question of the survey, in which 68% of students[1] actively underlined the usefulness of the programme's strategies and expressed eagerness to practice and apply them in their exam study. Lastly, when asked about the impact of the programme on their higher education aspirations, only 43.7% of students agreed or strongly agreed – the lowest proportion across the perceived impacts. This result is not surprising, as the programme in its current design does not include any component on HE information, advice and guidance (IAG), which might explain the modest increase in aspirations reported by the students. As mentioned above, future iterations would benefit from embedding an IAG element within the programme outline (see Recommendations section), which would directly address (and potentially raise) students' HE aspirations, if pursued as an intended outcome. Moreover, introducing IAG from the early secondary years would help students develop the knowledge, skills and confidence to make informed choices about their education, as well as helping strengthen and sustain their HE aspirations, particularly if combined with neaco's progressive offer.

[1] Out of 49 total (matched) students, 25 completed the open-ended feedback question. The percentage presented are out of those students (17) who completed such feedback question.

Lastly, several students provided brief testimonials reflecting on their participation in the programme. A selection of these, from students across different participating schools and counties, is presented below:

> ***"This has really helped me to push myself to get the grades I deserve."*** – Student at Ormiston Denes Academy
>
> ***"I have found this useful to actually reflect on how I learn."*** – Student at St Peter's School
>
> ***"It helped us find out the best way of study which works for us."*** – Student at Jane Austen College

Recommendations

1. **Consider and incorporate an IAG component**. While findings show some positive impact on higher education aspirations, this remained the least perceived benefits. An IAG element could be incorporated into the programme to address post-16 and HE expectations; for example, through practical exercises where students apply the study skills while exploring HE options, a follow-up session on pathways after their GCSEs or, where possible, one-to-one support to help students make informed decisions about future study.

2. **Maximise opportunities for students to apply and practice the knowledge acquired during the programme's sessions.** HEC feedback indicated that a higher number of practical activities would be beneficial to fully consolidate the methods taught. To address this, and in line with guidance from Kettlewell (2022), it is recommended that students are more actively encouraged to bring their school work to the programme sessions, and/or to engage with the participating schools to identify relevant aspects of the curriculum content. These can then be used within sessions to apply the taught methods and skills through guided and, progressively, independent practice.

3. **Incorporate qualitative feedback.** Beyond students' quantitative self-reports, future evaluations should gather qualitative data, which can contribute and add more nuance to the discussion of findings, particularly given the limitations of

small-scale quantitative data. Examples of this could be more open-ended questions in the questionnaire or, where possible, interviews and focus groups, to ensure richer insights into students' experiences and true perceptions are captured.

4. **Boost student participation and maximise response rate to ensure stronger data quality**. The current evaluation did find some statistically significant effects in the skills responses of this programme. However, due to the limited sample size, these findings should be interpreted with caution. This was partly due to an attrition rate of almost 50% between pre- and post-surveys, which reduced the likelihood of obtaining stronger evidence for the impact analysis. Future iterations should either maximise the response rate of attending students, e.g., by encouraging survey completion or monitoring attendance, or increase overall student participation to counteract potential attrition.

5. **Explore the impact of repeating the programme across consecutive years.** The current evaluation did not conduct a year-by-year analysis due to the small number of Year 11 participants. However, particularly in light of the recommendation to increase sample size, there is potential to do so in future iterations if the number of Year 11 participants grows. Future evaluations could then incorporate year group analyses to examine patterns across ages more systematically and to explore potential differences in impact between students who participate for a single year and those who experience the programme across multiple years (e.g., both Year 10 and Year 11). Such analyses would help determine whether certain groups benefit more from the programme and repeated exposure leads to cumulative or sustained benefits.

References

Aubin, G. (2023). *What exactly is explicit instruction?* Education Endowment Foundation Blog. EEF blog: What exactly is explicit instruction? | EEF

Kettlewell, J. (2022). *Supporting Revision and the 'Seven-step Model'*. Education Endowment Foundation (online). Supporting Revision and the 'Seven-step Model' | EEF