MAKE IT COUNT PROGRAMME:

2024/2025 IMPACT EVALUATION REPORT

Attainment Raising Programmes

Network for East Anglian Collaborative Outreach (neaco)

Project description

Make It Count is an 8-week programme designed for Year 7 students. Participants were selected by their schools based on their receipt of Free School Meals (FSM) and/or being from underrepresented groups (UGR). These students were identified as likely to benefit from additional support to build their independent learning, and confidence and self-efficacy in tackling more challenging tasks, helping them reach their full potential. The programme was delivered across 12 schools in East Anglia, with groups of maximum 6 students per session, involving a total of 101 participants. The programme was delivered in partnership with our Higher Education Champions based in schools in the East of England.

The main aim of the programme is to increase students' attainment levels by helping them develop metacognitive strategies they can apply in their learning. The programme also encourages students to reflect on their existing skills, capacities and areas of expertise, while identifying and building those needed to achieve their future aspirations. The development of these strategies is expected to boost students' confidence and resilience when tackling challenges they face in their learning. Moreover, these strategies and skills will equip students to approach new, less familiar activities with greater confidence and a more positive attitude, both in the short and long term.

The programme consists of 8 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 the different tools and skills students will learn about in the rest of the sessions, using climate change as the anchor throughout	• Learning about different learning tools and skills • Understanding of the developing, life-long learning nature of the tools and skills introduced
2	In-school, HEC delivery	To expose students to learning tools that help managing challenging tasks, such as eliminate, categorise and hypothesise	• Learning how to break tasks down into bite-sized chunks

3	In-school, HEC delivery	To expose students to learning tools which help organise and connect ideas	• Learning how to connect new ideas to one already knows
4	In-school, HEC delivery	To expose students to learning tools which help us participate actively and confidently in conversations where different points of views are shared	• Learning how to talk things through confidently
5	In-school, HEC delivery	To expose students to learning tools to organise information	• Learning how to organise information
6	In-school, HEC delivery	To expose students to learning tools that help us understand ideas more effectively through the use of pictures and icons	• Learning how to use pictures and icons
7	In school, HEC delivery	To consolidate the 5 groups of tools and to apply their preferred ones to help create a speech	• Consolidating and applying knowledge and usage of the learning tools • Learning how to and planning a persuasive speech
8	In-school, HEC delivery	To deliver the speech created in the previous session in front of a live audience	• Applying and practising the learning tools acquired throughout the programme • Delivering a speech created using the learning tools acquired • Showcasing improvement in confidence and metacognitive abilities

Table 1: Session outline of Make It Count 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 student cognitive and metacognitive skills (and how these affected the learners' confidence) and academic self-efficacy. Additionally, some open-ended qualitative questions were included to capture the learners' main takeaways from the project, allowing them to reflect on their experiences 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 101 Year 7 and Year 8 students across twelve schools of East Anglia (see Participants section) before and after their participation in the Make It Count programme. Each school had between 4 and 15 participating students, who were organised into groups of maximum six for the programme. 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 101 students, of which 95 were Year 7 learners and 6 were Year 8 learners. Out of these, 85 completed the pre-programme survey (89% response rate) and 73 completed the post-programme survey (77% response rate). In total, 68 students completed both the pre- and post- surveys, accounting for a 72% overall response rate. None of the matched responses were from Year 8 students, so all analysis was performed on Year 7 data only, and no impact analysis per year was undertaken.

Findings and discussion

The figures below, constructed from the 68 matched pre- and post- survey data, reflecting several key findings of the programme:

KEY FINDING 1: Learners reported a significant development in their cognitive skills after participating in the Make It Count programme, although this result is skewed by one of the questions in the block.

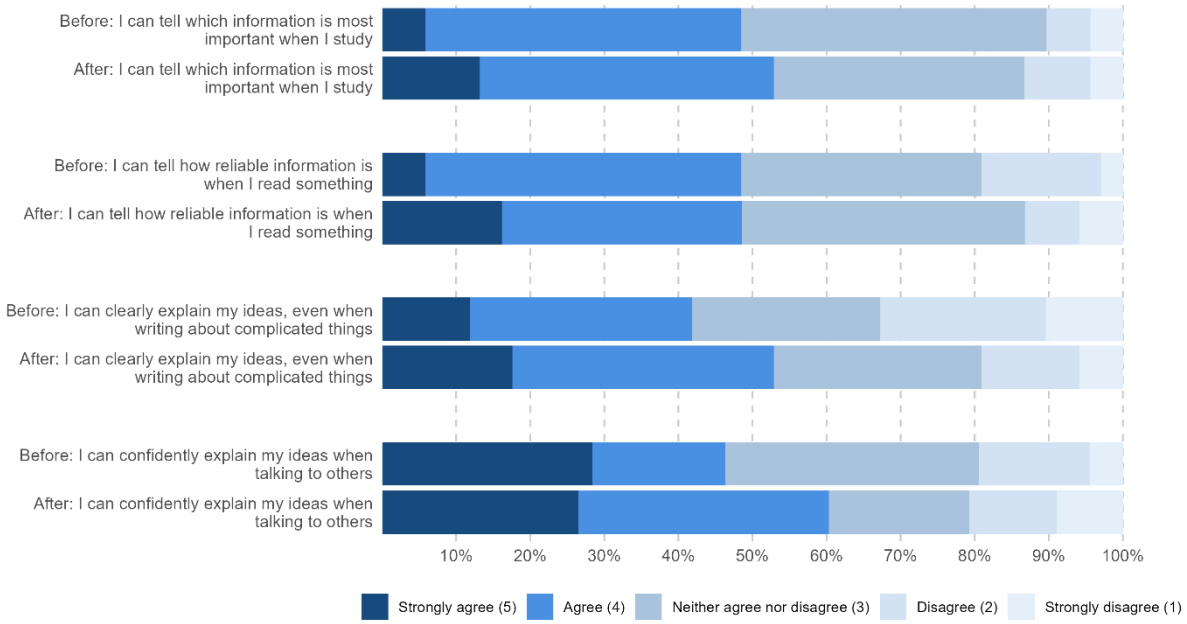

Figure 1: Cognitive skills. Wilcoxon signed-rank tests revealed a significant difference between the pre- and post-survey results of the 'Cognitive skills' block ($p = 0.005$). Regarding question-level analyses, a significant positive difference was found for the third question (p = 0.018), while no significant differences were observed in the rest of the questions in this block ($p = 0.394$, $p = 0.220$ and $p = 0.540$, respectively).

When statistical tests were conducted at the block level, the results indicated a significant positive change in the students' self-reported perspectives on their cognitive skills. However, a more fine-grained, question-level analysis revealed that this effect was primarily driven by the third question (i.e., on explaining their ideas clearly), which was the only item within the block to show a statistically reliable improvement. In other words, the overall block-level result may be overstating the effect, as it largely reflects change in a single question rather than a consistent shift across the block. Therefore, the positive effect observed in the cognitive block should be interpreted with caution, as it may stem from factors such as issues with the survey design (to be discussed later), rather than genuine improvements in students' cognitive skills or awareness.

KEY FINDING 2: Some positive changes were found in the students' self-reported perspectives on their metacognitive skills after participating in the Make It Count programme, although none reached statistical significance.

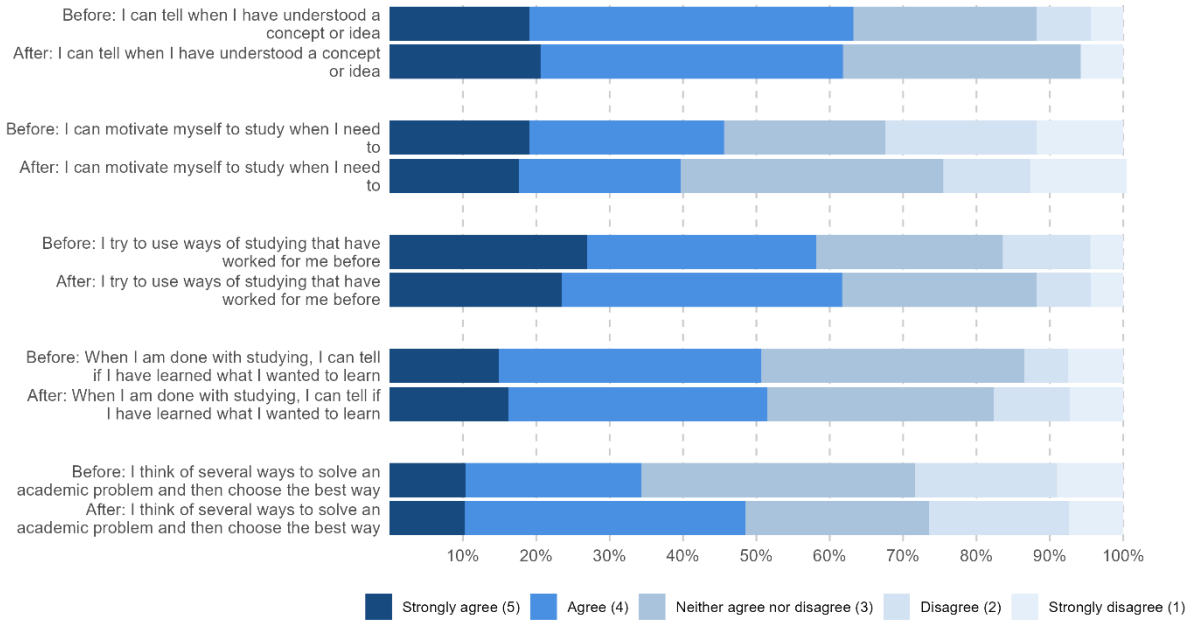

Figure 2: Metacognitive skills. Wilcoxon signed-rank tests revealed no significant differences between the pre- and post-survey results for any of the metacognitive skills questions ($p = 0.575$, $p = 0.964$, $p = 0.822$, $p = 0.980$ and $p = 0.290$, respectively). No significance was found when questions were combined and treated as a separate data point for the overall 'Metacognitive skills' category ($p = 0.371$).

In the case of metacognitive skills, some positive shifts can be observed; however, none reached the threshold for statistical significance. This is particularly noteworthy given that the Make It Count programme is a metacognition programme whose aim is to help students develop metacognitive strategies and their ability to apply them in their learning, as outlined in the 'Project description' section. Based on these results alone, it cannot be concluded that this objective was achieved. The survey questions in this block reflect students' self-reported perceptions of their ability to apply metacognitive strategies to their learning. However, it remains unclear whether the lack of clear positive changes stems from difficulties with students' actual acquisition of the strategies taught during the programme or from limitations in how the survey captured students' application of these strategies in managing their thinking and learning processes.

The qualitative data below offers a different angle: students showed awareness of the strategies they had learned by highlighting them as their biggest takeaway from the

programme (see Table 2), yet the survey responses in Figure 2 suggest that, even if student had internalised these strategies, it is not clear whether they could consistently transfer them while regulating their own learning.

Biggest takeaway of the programme	Percentage of responses[1]
Using different tools to learn things in class, out of which:	60.5%
Chunking ideas	27.9%
Talk tactics	18.6%
Organisation	14%
Understanding better how I learn	16.3%
About climate change	16.3%
Explaining my ideas better	11.6%
Increased confidence	7%
Improved my learning	2.3%

Table 2. Summary of topics raised in the intervention learners' responses to open-ended questions.

These findings are better understood when considered alongside feedback from the programme's delivery staff, who advised on two aspects of the programme which might have influenced the observed survey results: (i) the language and format of the questionnaires, and (ii) the use of climate change as the core topic through which metacognitive strategies were taught.

Regarding the former, concerns were raised with regards to the wording of the questions not being accessible to learners in the targeted year groups, which might have affected their comprehension and, in turn, the reliability of their responses. Rewording and/or reformatting of the questionnaires should therefore be considered in order to enhance their suitability for the intended age groups (see Recommendations section).

Regarding the latter, staff noted that the choice of climate change as the core topic hindered engagement with the metacognitive strategies as students felt they were being tested on climate change knowledge rather than learning about metacognitive techniques. In line with guidance from the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) on metacognition and self-regulated learning, instruction in cognitive and metacognitive strategies should be explicit and taught alongside subjects in which students already have a thorough grounding (Quigley et al., 2018). For future iterations of the programmes, it would therefore be advisable to embed the teaching of metacognitive strategies within familiar content and tasks, rather than through a topic that requires them to concentrate on understanding the content, leaving less space to engage with the strategies (see Recommendations section).

[1] Please note 43 out of 68 students decided to answer the open-ended questions.

KEY FINDING 3: No meaningful changes were observed in the students' self-reported perspectives on their self-efficacy (either post-16 or HE) after participating in the Make It Count programme.

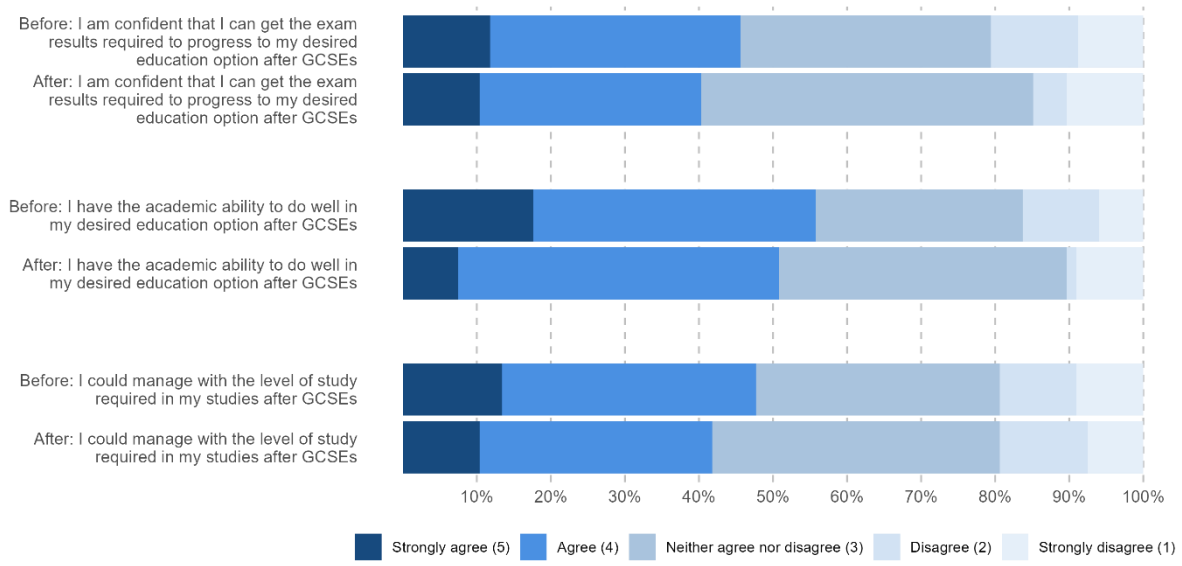

Figure 3: Self-efficacy (post-16). Wilcoxon signed-rank tests revealed no significant differences between the pre- and post-survey results for any of the self-efficacy (post-16) questions ($p = 0.705$, $p = 0.486$ and $p = 0.774$, respectively). No significance was found when questions were combined and treated as a separate data point for the overall 'Self-efficacy (post-16)' category ($p = 0.762$).

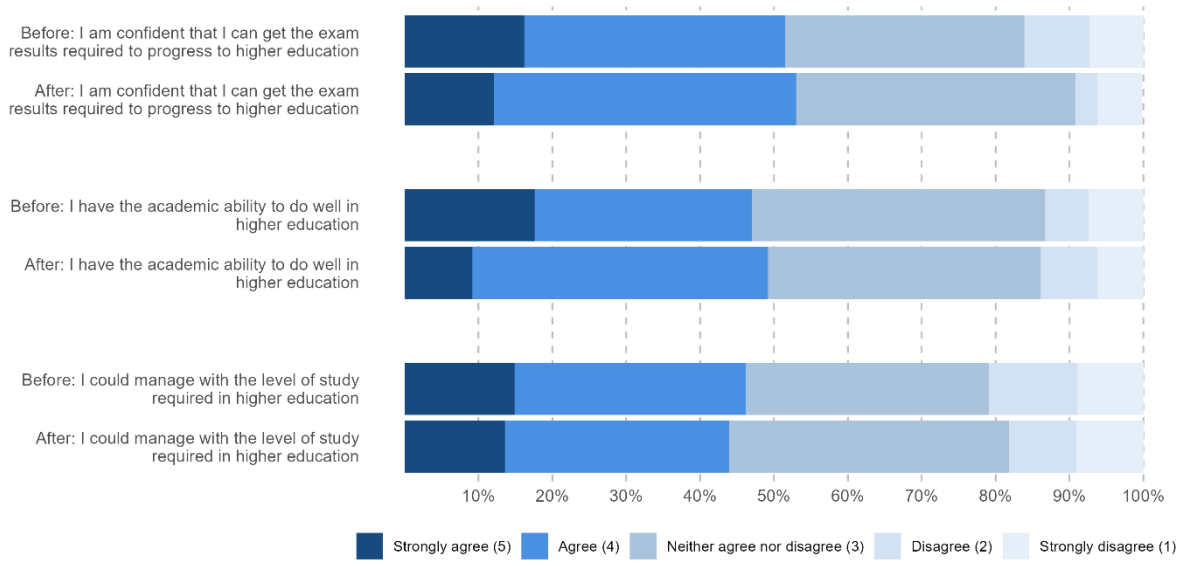

Figure 4: Self-efficacy (HE). Wilcoxon signed-rank tests revealed no significant differences between the pre- and post-survey results for any of the self-efficacy (HE) questions ($p = 0.392$, $p = 0.847$ and $p = 0.944$, respectively). No significance was found when questions were combined and treated as a separate data point for the overall 'Self-efficacy (post-16)' category ($p = 0.529$).

With regards to self-efficacy, no relevant changes were observed in learners' self-reported perspectives, either for post-16 or HE pathways. This might be due to issues with the surveys themselves, as with the previous findings, or to the nature of the questions being asked in these blocks. These items are designed for students considering post-GCSE pathways and are therefore unlikely to be applicable or appropriate for Year 7 learners.

Further insights into the students' perceived impact of the Make It Count programme were collected and are shown in Figure 5. Together with the qualitative data in Table 2, these findings help build a clearer picture of how learners experienced and valued the programme:

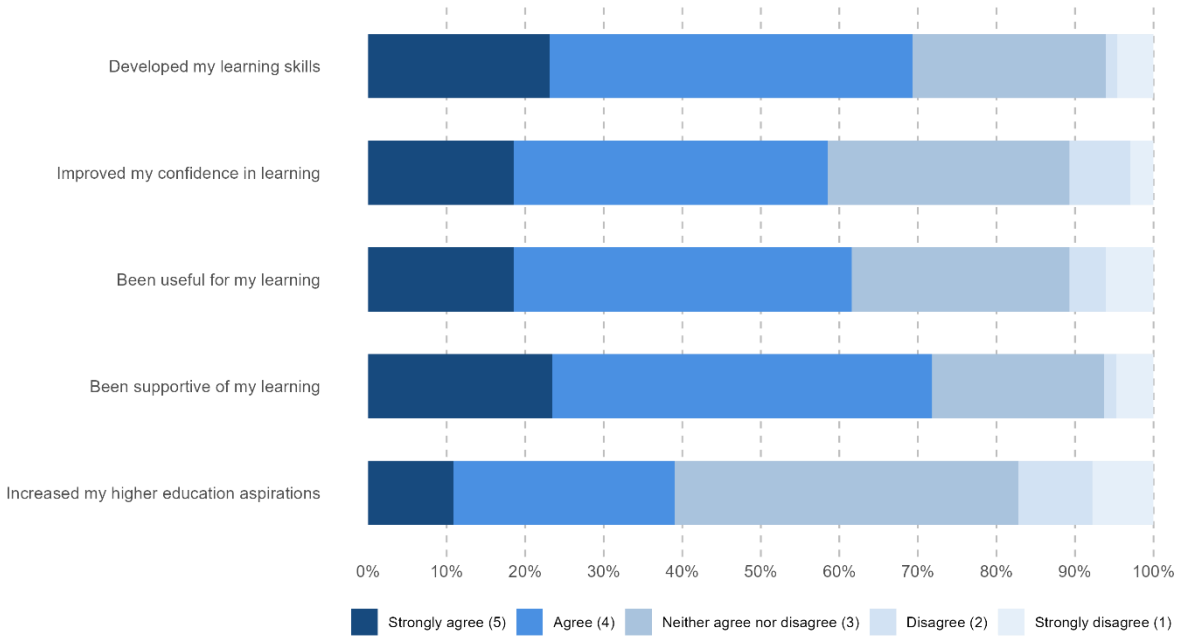

Figure 5: Perceived impact of the Make It Count programme.

When students were directly asked about their perceived impact of the programme on their learning, 69.3% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the programme had developed their learning skills and 58.5% of them reported that it had improved their confidence in learning. This improvement and development in learning confidence and skills likely contributed to the 61.6% of students reporting that the programme had been useful for their learning and to the 71.8% indicating that it was supporting of it too. Lastly, when asked about the impact of the programme on their higher education aspirations, only 39% 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. 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.

Lastly, in addition to the qualitative responses discussed, 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:

> ***"[My biggest takeaway from the session is] I can explain my ideas with confidence and not worrying what other people think."*** – Student at Chantry Academy
>
> ***"[My biggest takeaway from the sessions is] that I can now use different tools to make sure I learn stuff in class."*** – Student at Stanground Academy
>
> ***"I loved the programme, thank you for letting me experience it."*** – Student at Benjamin Britten Academy

Recommendations

1. **Refine and strengthen the evaluation, for example, by adapting the language of the survey questions to Year 7 students and/or by deploying a before-and-after questionnaire for both an intervention group and a control group that could be matched in terms of personal characteristics.** This would still constitute Type 2 evidence, but stronger than the one used in this report. Moreover, the adapted language will ensure that students are reporting their perceptions more accurately than in the current design.

2. **Incorporate qualitative and/or teacher feedback.** Beyond students' self-reports, future evaluations should gather data from teachers on observable changes in classroom participation and performance. In addition, qualitative data 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 interviews and focus groups, to ensure richer insights into students' experiences and true perceptions are captured.

3. **Introduce an objective assessment in addition to a revised version of the before-and-after survey questions.** The current evaluation relies entirely on the

learners' self-perception which might not be the most suitable design for this year group. To enhance the reliability of results and provide an additional, more objective layer of evidence, an objective measure, such as a structured pre-and-post task where students' application of metacognitive skills is tested, could be incorporated.

4. **Embed and teach metacognitive strategies in familiar content.** Students' and HECs' feedback consistently indicated that the focus on climate distracted learners from the core of the programme, i.e., developing metacognitive strategies. To address this, and in line with guidance from the EEF (Quigley et al., 2018), it is recommended that metacognitive strategies be delivered either alongside subjects in which students already have a solid grounding, or embedded within curriculum examples and/or real-life situations with which students are familiar.

5. **Consider and incorporate an IAG component**. While findings show some positive impact on higher education aspirations, this remained the least perceived benefits. Given the programme's design, a clearer and more structured IAG strand could be embedded. For example, through a dedicated IAG component within delivery or continuation of the programme, or by using IAG as a practical example for applying metacognitive strategies (e.g., making informed decisions about future pathways).

6. **Offer opportunities for teachers' and schools' CPD.** Students reported that they often do not have the chance to practise or further develop their metacognitive skills in other classes within school. To tackle this, and also in line with EEF guidance (Quigley et al., 2018), teachers should acquire a professional understanding and skills to develop pupils' metacognitive knowledge. Adding a CPD component for teachers and schools to the programme offer would help equip staff with the tools and awareness to support students in planning, monitoring, and evaluating their learning, thereby reinforcing the programme's impact and legacy.

References

Quigley, A., Muijs, D., and Stringer, E. (2018). *Metacognition and self-regulated learning: Guidance report*. Education Endowment Foundation (online). Metacognition and Self-regulated Learning | EEF