



a qualitative evaluation of the **IntoUniversity** programme

Executive summary

*Kerensa White
Anna Eames
Caroline Sharp*



Introduction

IntoUniversity is an educational programme aimed at children and young people who are most at risk of failing to meet their potential to go to university owing to economic, social, cultural or linguistic disadvantage. Funded by the Sutton Trust, it began in 2002 and has grown to reach in excess of 1500 children and young people each year in the local area, on site and through school-based work.

One of the distinctive aspects of the **IntoUniversity** programme is that it consists of three strands (FOCUS, Academic Support, Mentoring) that span the age range 8 to 18 (years 3 to 13). Elements in these strands include: primary and secondary Academic Support, half-term FOCUS weeks, primary FOCUS weeks and days, Extending Horizons weekends, school liaison work, school scholarships, mentoring, aspire and achieve days, and a buddy scheme.

The main aim of the study was to evaluate the impact of **IntoUniversity** on individual children and young people. More specifically, the evaluation aimed to take account of whether there had been a generally positive impact on children and young people and whether their participation in the programme had affected their future educational aspirations. It is important to note that part of the context for commissioning this evaluation was that **IntoUniversity** had plans to expand their programme to other sites.

This research project comprised three main strands of data collection: eight case studies, observation of five different elements of the programme and an analysis of 278 evaluation forms collected by **IntoUniversity**.





Key findings

The evidence in this report supports the conclusion that the **IntoUniversity** programme has a positive, transformational impact on children and young people in terms of their academic success, attitudes to learning and social skills; all of which are key elements of helping children and young people to aspire and achieve. It was clear that **IntoUniversity** had played a key role in helping children and young people in clarifying, supporting and strengthening their aspirations and achieving their goals.

Key findings from the case studies and observations

- The data showed evidence of increased motivation, self-esteem and confidence amongst the case study young people.
- Examples of improved learning and academic support were evident in the case study data.
- Examples of independent or self-regulated learning were demonstrated in a number of case studies.
- From both interviews and observations it was evident that a culture of teaching transferable study skills was in place – encouraging independent learning.
- A number of young people demonstrated that they had become self-regulated learners.
- There is evidence that the **IntoUniversity** programme provides a platform in which young people can develop their social skills by interacting with people of different ages, backgrounds and ethnicities (many of whom are current university students).
- Young people value the opportunity to study alongside friends in the Academic Support Scheme and there is evidence that this motivates them and makes learning more enjoyable.
- We observed that **IntoUniversity** encourages children and young people to aspire and progress to university (or another chosen educational ambition).
- In particular we observed that the idea of university is introduced at a young age via explicit and implicit means.
- The programme promotes the acquisition of academic, social and practical skills and knowledge necessary to make university a realistic goal.

Key findings from the analysis of evaluation forms

- Overall, in their completion of evaluation forms, young people were extremely positive about all three strands of the programme.
- The Academic Support Scheme was reported to be an excellent resource for children and young people to complete their homework in a supportive environment.
- The FOCUS weeks provided young people with the opportunity to take part in new and enriching learning experiences and trips (this was also evident in other areas of the evaluation).
- Parents and teachers spoke positively about the primary FOCUS activity week as a useful and inspirational learning experience.
- The FOCUS activities allowed young people to learn about university and trips to universities were enjoyed by the majority of young people.
- Mentors found their training extremely helpful both in its content and delivery. They appreciated the informality, openness and use of role play.
- Mentors felt that the most beneficial aspect of taking part in the programme was the positive influence on a young person's life.



Key findings in relation to IntoUniversity and the wider literature

Many of the good practice features of the **IntoUniversity** programme are consistent with the aspects highlighted in the research literature on study support and mentoring. For example:

- the Academic Support Scheme provides academic *and* pastoral support to young people, both of which are important, especially for young people with limited family experience of academic success
- the Academic Support Scheme makes use of clear target setting as recommended in the literature
- **IntoUniversity** promotes skills for independent and self regulated learning, as recommended in the literature
- the mentoring strand of the **IntoUniversity** programme is successful because it is a part of a broader programme in which young people gain support to inspire them to go to university
- mentoring offers young people different types of support such as affective contacts, direction setting and coaching as recommended in the literature
- the mentoring strand reflects the good practice features set out in the literature such as devoting time to recruitment, screening and matching mentees, as well as providing initial training and on-going support
- there is no comparable literature for the FOCUS strand of the **IntoUniversity** programme. This highlights the uniqueness of the multi-stranded approach **IntoUniversity** has created.

It was knowing I could come and get some support here that was invaluable, even when I started university I came back here for a little while

Recommendations

Given the overall positive impact the programme is having on young people, the research team recommend the further expansion and funding of the programme.

Two sets of more specific recommendations, based on the evidence from this study, are given. The first set relates to the immediate actions that **IntoUniversity** staff may wish to consider at the St Clement and St James Community Project. The second set relates to the potential expansion of the scheme at new sites.

Contact details

Kerensa White
Research Officer
01753 637328
k.white@nfer.ac.uk

Anna Eames
Senior Research Officer
01753 637317
a.eames@nfer.ac.uk

In relation to the programme at St Clement and St James Community Project it is recommended that **IntoUniversity**:

- continues to organise the programme using the multi-stranded model and starting at a young age
- develops evaluation procedures so that they become more consistent in order to gain a clearer perspective on the impact of the programme on young people over time, this could usefully include the collection of data on the post-school destinations of attendees
- ensures that schools and parents are more aware of the entire **IntoUniversity** programme
- considers developing further opportunities for pupil voice and autonomy through, for example, more active participation in the student council and greater choice in learning tasks/conditions, in order to promote self-regulated learning
- develops the mentoring programme still further by: encouraging mentors to be more explicit in acting as role models of successful university entrants, helping mentors to set up visits to their university for their mentees, organising regular opportunities for mentors to meet and support each other post-training, and organising regular opportunities for mentors and mentees to meet with one another and programme staff in order to discuss their progress.

In relation to the potential expansion of the **IntoUniversity** scheme it is recommended that **IntoUniversity**:

- continues to move forward with the plans to roll out the programme to other sites – this may need to begin small, but should have the potential to expand
- uses a similar multi-stranded model, while considering which aspects of the programme are essential and which may be modified in response to local needs
- establishes a similar ethos and learning environment as in the current programme
- employs and trains staff who display a similar positive outlook and enthusiasm for working with young people as is evident in current members of staff
- develops evaluation procedures that have the potential to provide valuable feedback on individual sessions but also provide standardised, ongoing evaluative information across multiple centres.

Further information

For more information and to download the full report, please visit www.nfer.ac.uk.



National Foundation for
Educational Research
The Mere, Upton Park
Slough, Berkshire SL1 2DQ
tel: +44 (0) 1753 574123
fax: +44 (0) 1753 691632
email: enquiries@nfer.ac.uk
web: www.nfer.ac.uk

