



Activity name	KS5 Choosing an HE Course
Date	Tranche 5 (Sept 2020 – Aug 2021)
Total number of students	1115
Total number of target students	192
Institutions involved <i>* Institutions that completed surveys</i>	Bridgwater & Taunton College*, City College Plymouth, Exeter College*, Holyrood Academy*, Marine Academy Plymouth*, Notre Dame Plymouth*, Petroc, Plymouth College of Art*, South Devon College, Teignmouth Community School, The Cornwall College Group*, The Spires College, Truro & Penwith College*, Yeovil College*

Introduction

This report summarises the evaluation survey results of the ‘Choosing an HE Course’ outreach workshop offered by Next Steps South West (NSSW). This workshop was delivered to year 12 (Level 3, Yr1) and year 13 (Level 3, Yr2) students across the South West region (Cornwall, Devon, Somerset) throughout the 2020-2021 academic year, which is the NSSW Tranche 5 period.

The Choosing an HE Course intervention is a one-hour workshop or twenty-minute assembly, consisting of a mixture of activities including a quiz, tutor instruction, discussions, SMART action planning, and signposting. It is designed to provide KS5/Level 3 students with information about the various factors that can be considered when selecting HE study options. In exploring these elements, and through learning how to conduct appropriate research, students grow to understand how to identify HE routes that are right for them and why. Throughout the session there is a strong emphasis on the decision-making process and supporting students to make well-informed choices; choices which will contribute positively to their own future goals and plans. Consequently, the workshop seeks to improve access to higher education and addresses the key barriers to higher education as identified in the NSSW Theory of Change model.

Next Steps South West staff delivered the workshop as part of the ‘Core’ offer, available to target and non-target students in NSSW target schools and colleges. Delivery was led by Institutional Officers (IOs) and County Outreach Officers (COOs), with some sessions further supported by Student Ambassadors (SAs) who facilitated activities and provided extra information to students about their own experiences of HE study. As an integral part of the NSSW core programme of activities, the workshop was offered to all target schools and colleges with KS5 students. This enabled 14 institutions to engage and 1115 students to take part.

Aims

By the end of a session, students should be able to investigate the various factors to consider when selecting their HE course and be able to identify the different routes into higher education. They should be able to understand how to research options and justify decisions they make regarding options which are right for them. Thirdly, students should be able to apply this new knowledge and their choices concerning course and university to their own future goals and plans. The use of templates for SMART planning further helps students to be able to construct their action plans and apply personally relevant decision-making criteria to HE study.

Thus the intervention seeks to support students' progress in their knowledge of HE study. This correspondingly aligns with the NSSW key barrier relating to a lack of *Knowledge of HE* and touches on Gatsby Benchmark 3. It explicitly helps to '*Develop students' knowledge and awareness of different subject course options at HE and the pathways required to reach them*'. Success of the intervention is measured and evaluated against the target for the expected short-term outcome as detailed in Table 1.

Table 1. How success of the T5 workshops is measured.

Barrier to HE	Short-term outcome	Indicator
<i>Knowledge of HE</i>	Increased understanding of HE pathways and personally relevant options	Increased understanding of HE pathways and personally relevant options for ≥ 80% students

Evaluation Design and Data Collection

The evaluation of the Choosing an HE Course activity consisted of a post-session survey designed to evaluate the success in achieving the short-term anticipated outcome *Increased Understanding of HE Pathways and Personally Relevant Options* and to gauge if there is now an *Increased Awareness of HE Options* as a result of partaking in the workshop.

Students were asked to complete the survey which was structured around five qualitative and quantitative questions relating to the anticipated outcome. Students who attended a session had the option of completing either a paper form or an online form. Answers were anonymous and could not be tracked back to individual students.

The following results section presents the data gathered from the returned surveys, of which 307 were received.

Results

Attendees taking part in the Choosing an HE Course workshop were asked in the post-activity survey to indicate how much they felt they knew as a result of their participation in the intervention (see *Figure 1*).

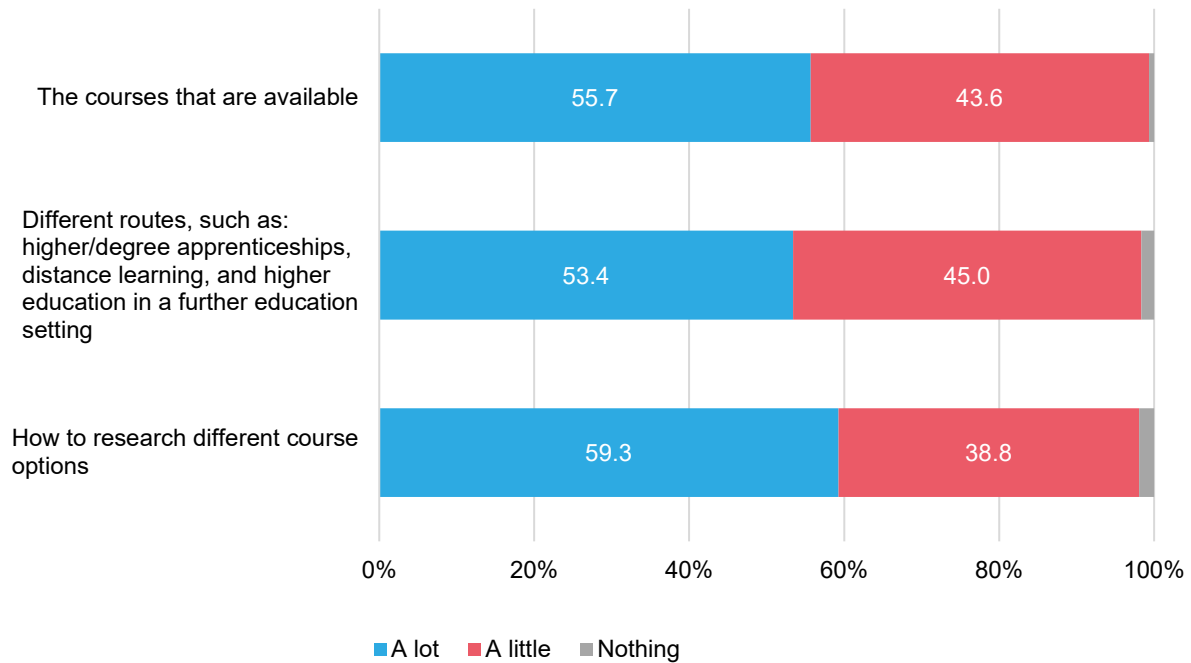


Figure 1. Level of higher education knowledge following a workshop.

Figure 1 shows that the level of knowledge following the workshops was high, with just over 50% of students reporting that they knew ‘A lot’ about the courses available, about different routes into HE and how to research course options. Specifically, 99.3% of respondents knew ‘A little’ or ‘A Lot’ about the courses that were available to them; 98.4% knew about the different routes available; and 98.1% knew how to research the different options. Less than 2% of students reported knowing ‘Nothing’ of these aspects of HE, which highlights the successful impact of this workshop on students’ understanding of HE courses.

To analyse if there was any differentiation, the data was tabulated by institution and year group (see *Appendix Table 3*). This additional analysis highlighted that comparatively, Year 13s across the institutions typically report ‘A lot’ more than ‘A little’, whereas for the Year 12s there were higher counts for ‘A little’. ‘How to research different course options’ returned more responses of ‘A lot’ than ‘A little’ for both year groups. This indicates that the intervention in T5 was particularly helpful in this area for both year groups.

As well as overall knowledge of HE courses and routes, the Choosing an HE Course workshop focused on the different factors that could be considered when choosing a course or place to study. Correspondingly, the survey sought to find out what factors students found important, and specifically important in regards to their own individual situations. Respondents could select three top factors from a list of six. Figure 2 shows the options that the workshop participants found to be the most important.

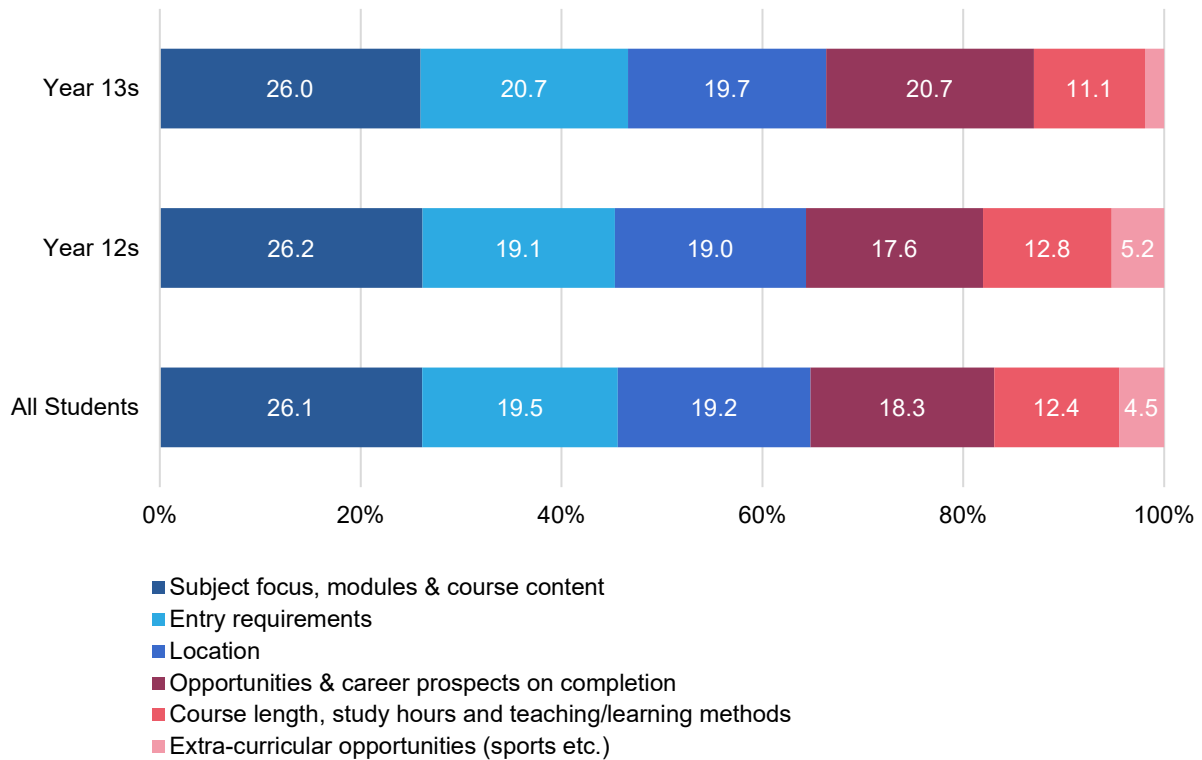


Figure 2. Most important factors when choosing a higher education course.

The majority of students stated that ‘Subject focus, modules and course content’ (26.1%) were the most important elements for them. Closely followed by ‘Entry requirements’ (19.5%), ‘Location’ (19.2%), and ‘Opportunities and career prospects on completion’ (18.3%). Separated by year group, the data suggests that this is true for both year 12 and year 13 students. ‘Course length, study hours and teaching/learning modules’ (12.4%) are less important factors to consider but are still central to some students; more so for Year 12s than Year 13s. Few students stated that ‘Extra-curricular opportunities’ (4.5%) were important to them, and this figure is even less for Year 13s alone (1.9%). For Year 13s, it appears that it is more important to consider opportunities on completion (20.7%) compared with Year 12s (17.6%).

During the workshops, students were also taught about different HE qualification types, ranging from Level 4 courses such as higher apprenticeships, to Level 8 courses such as a doctorate. As a test of student knowledge, and to check whether this information was well understood, students were asked to identify which of four courses/qualification levels was not at HE level (see Figure 3). The majority of students provided the correct answer, as shown in Figure 3. 231/305 (75.7%) of survey respondents chose ‘General Certificate of Secondary Education’ as not being an HE course/qualification, demonstrating their ability to distinguish between HE and non-HE qualifications.

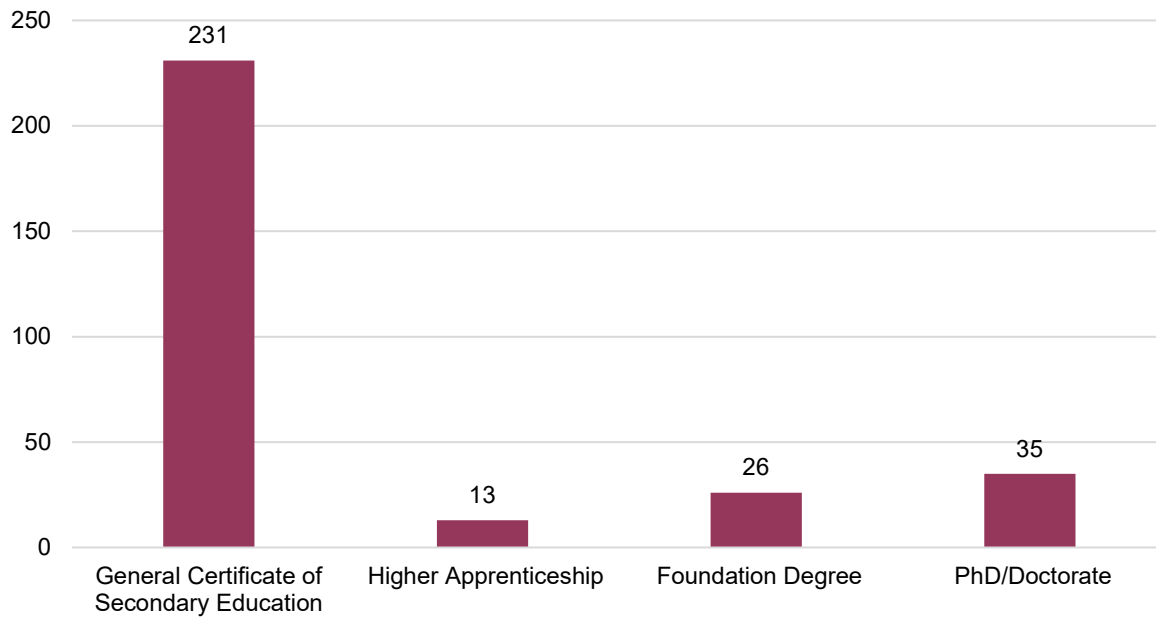


Figure 3. Level of knowledge of HE course types following the workshop.

However, it should also be noted that 35/305 (11.5%) of survey respondents thought 'Doctorate/PhD' to be the correct answer. This indicates that these students have not fully understood that the term 'higher education' extends to incorporate post-degree qualifications. However, at this point it is more important that students understand the difference between Level 3 and 4, and it may be unnecessarily confusing to test knowledge of Level 8. Considering this point, it is prudent that the survey question is reviewed to check that the most relevant learning has taken place.

Data shown in Figure 4 shows students' level of agreement to statements relating to the HE knowledge that they have acquired and their ability to apply this to decisions relating to their future. From the responses, it can be stated that overall, students had a positive perception of their HE knowledge and could apply this knowledge to their future plans, as over 15% 'Strongly agree' and over 59% 'Agree' to the statements. Therefore, for all three survey questions, over three quarters of participants stated that they knew about university, and HE courses linked to their career plans (76.5%), participants knew how to find out about course and study options for their future (91.5%) and could make a more informed decision about whether HE was right for them (86%).

A noteworthy number of students though were more 'Unsure' about their knowledge of HE courses linked to career plans (20.8%) and making informed decisions right for them (13%) than in their stated knowledge of how to find out about course and study options (7.5%). These students may benefit from additional NSSW workshops available as part of the core offer and Progression Framework.

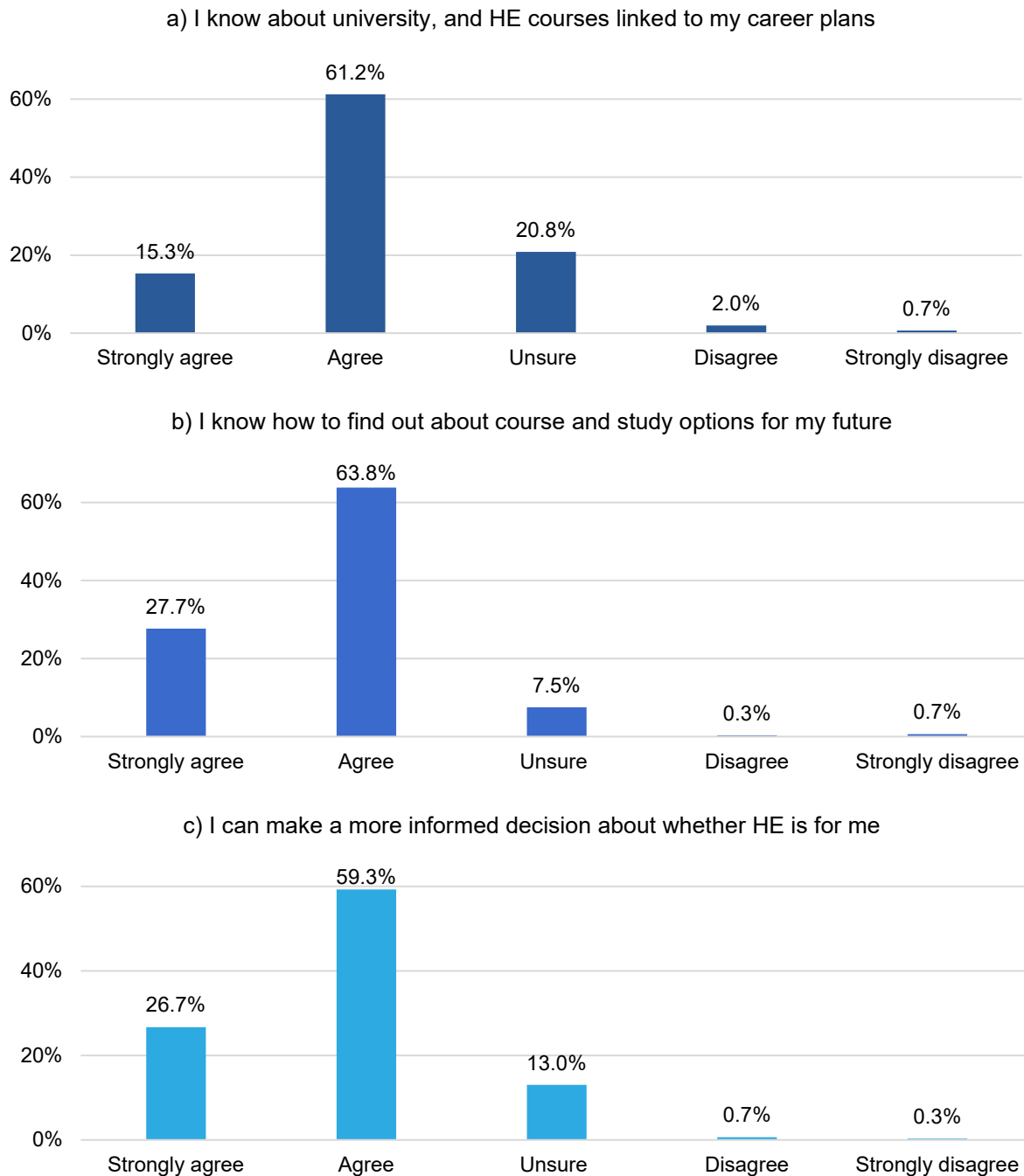


Figure 4. Student perceptions of their level of HE knowledge and applying it to future plans.

Alongside, it could also be reflected that the survey question itself may not be pertinent to all students as not all career plans will have obvious HE links. The statement 'I know about university, and HE courses linked to my career plans' assumes that the student's career choice has an HE pathway, which may not be the case for vocational career pathways. Consequently, a revision to the survey question is recommended, to ensure improved clarity when checking students' future plans and understanding whether there are HE pathways related to their future goals.

The responses for question 4 of the survey were also tabulated by year group and by partaking institution to assess if there was any differentiation in the data by the age of

the students or the locality of the events. Whilst there were subtle differences in the tallies, none stood out as being visually outlying or distinctive, indicating that age and location did not influence whether the students were sure or unsure of their understanding and capability.

The survey concludes by asking participants to provide at least one example of how they might source information to help choose an HE course. The answers, by nature of the question, were wide ranging. To manage the differences in responses, answers were coded to one of eleven categories, chosen to best represent the data. Figure 5 shows the count for each category.

This survey question provided 273 responses of which 167 were chiefly related to UCAS information sources. Other frequently mentioned sources include other websites such as WhatUni, CompleteUniGuide and Workaaway (23 mentions), and the Discover Uni website / Gov pages (19 mentions). Unique answers which are tallied by 'Other' included the lesson itself, open days, league tables, Unibuddy, and current undergraduate students. Teachers (1 mention) and family/friends (2 mentions) were also low-cited sources, as shown in Figure 5.

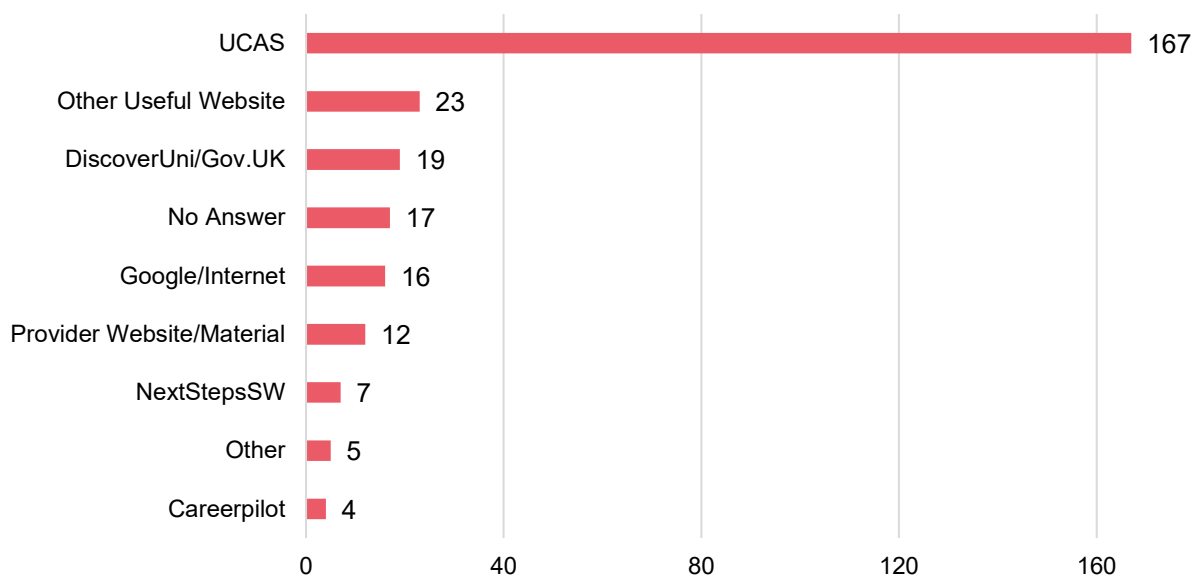


Figure 5. Cited sources of information for finding out about HE courses.

Most students mentioned one information source on their survey response but 17 put two, 2 put three, and 1 put four. In this analysis, only the main response was coded. It may be that the question being phrased as 'at least one example' was influential in respondents only listing one source but it could also suggest that some students were not able to provide more than one information source. Only 2% of respondents mentioned more than two sources, but this may not be a true reflection of their knowledge. A change in the wording of this question may allow students to answer it more fully in the future.

Conclusions

From the data analysed and presented above, it can be concluded that the Choosing an HE Course workshop has had a positive impact on the majority of students who took part. Analysis shows a high level of increased knowledge of HE options and pathways, and how to research them (*Figure 1*). The findings demonstrate an increased awareness of factors that relate to HE study options (*Figure 2*) and the qualification levels available at higher education (*Figure 3*). The workshop was also successful in increasing students' knowledge of sources that can be used to locate course information (*Figure 5*). The majority of students agreed that they had a greater understanding of how higher education linked to career pathways, the course and study options available, and how to make an informed decision (*Figure 4*).

It can be stated that the workshop has reinforced students' overall knowledge and understanding of HE pathways, and jointly their ability to make personally relevant and well-informed decisions; thus, it was effective in meeting its principal aim. However, with 75.7% of students correctly identifying the non-HE course, one indicator fell marginally short in meeting the target that $\geq 80\%$ of students would have an increased understanding of HE pathways and personally relevant options. However, with 99.3% of students being able to recognise courses available to them, 91.5% of students being able to find out about course and study options for their future, and 86% of students being able to make a more informed decision about whether HE was right for them, it can be stated that the overall short-term outcome has been achieved, as summarised in Table 2.

Table 2. Choosing an HE Course outcomes achieved in T5.

Barrier to HE	Short-term outcome	Indicator	Evidence	Target outcome
<i>Knowledge of HE</i>	Increased understanding of HE pathways and personally relevant options	Increased understanding of HE pathways and personally relevant options for $\geq 80\%$ students	99.3% of students reported knowing about courses that were available; 98.4% of students reported knowing about the different routes; 98.1% of students reported knowing how to research course options Target 80%: T5 result 98+%	Achieved
			91.5% of students strongly agree or agree that they know how to find out about course and study options for their future Target 80%: T5 result 91.5%	
			86% of students strongly agree or agree that they can make a more informed decision about whether HE is right for them Target 80%: T5 result 86%	

Recommendations

1) Consideration needs to be given to the fact that post-degree level qualifications at Level 8 may be less recognisable and meaningful to KS5 students and that it is more important that students understand the difference between Level 3 and Level 4. A re-assessment of the survey question should be made to consider if the option of 'Doctorate/PhD' is a suitable choice or whether an alternative option would be a more suitable replacement.

2) In order to build on the knowledge gained, students would benefit from attending other additional NSSW workshops, for example to further increase the number of 'Strongly Agree' responses in Figure 4.

It is suggested that schools and colleges are encouraged to book complementary NSSW workshops to further develop students' awareness of career options and the support available to them regarding any future decision-making. An example would be the post-16 Pay Index workshop.

3) Question 4a) would benefit from being re-phrased in order to better understand if all students can make appropriate links between, HE courses and their career plans. It is suggested that the question is altered to 'I have had the opportunity to find out if there are HE courses for careers I am interested in'.

4) To test if students can list more than two HE course information sources, question 5 could also be re-worded from asking for 'a least one' source to 'list as many sources as possible' as this would test how many, and which sources are known.

These recommendations will support activity and survey development moving into Tranche 6 and beyond.

Appendix

Table 3. Table showing the tally of survey responses for question 1 by institution and year group.

	Courses available						Different routes						Research options					
	Year 12			Year 13			Year 12			Year 13			Year 12			Year 13		
	A lot	A little	Nothing	A lot	A little	Nothing	A lot	A little	Nothing	A lot	A little	Nothing	A lot	A little	Nothing	A lot	A little	Nothing
Bridgwater and Taunton College	11	10	0	9	0	0	12	9	0	6	2	1	11	9	1	9	0	0
Cornwall College	4	6	0	11	5	0	3	7	0	11	5	0	6	4	0	13	3	0
Exeter College	93	60	1	15	14	0	93	61	0	13	16	0	94	57	3	15	14	0
Holyrood Academy	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Marine Academy Plymouth (MAP)	4	10	0	3	6	0	3	11	0	6	3	0	7	7	0	4	5	0
Notre Dame Plymouth	5	7	0	0	0	0	4	7	1	0	0	0	3	8	1	0	0	0
PCA Pre-Degree Campus	0	0	0	3	3	0	0	0	0	3	3	0	0	0	0	4	2	0
Truro and Penwith College	3	7	0	0	0	0	2	6	2	0	0	0	6	4	0	0	0	0
Yeovil College	10	5	1	0	0	0	7	8	1	0	0	0	9	6	1	0	0	0