



Activity name	Level 3 Options
Date	Tranche 5 (Sept 2020 – Aug 2021)
Total number of students	~830
Total number of target students	~200
Institutions involved <i>* Institutions that completed surveys</i>	Brannel School*, Haygrove School*, King Edward VI Community College, Notre Dame School*, Pool Academy*, Plympton Academy, St Ives School*, Torpoint Community College*, The Park School, West Somerset College*, Whitstone School*

Introduction

The results presented in this report summarise the survey data collected for the ‘Level 3 Options’ outreach workshop from Next Steps South West (NSSW). NSSW is the regional provision for the Office for Students’ Uni Connect programme. The Level 3 Options activity was delivered to year 9, 10 and 11 students at target schools in Cornwall, Devon and Somerset during the academic year 2020-2021, which corresponds to the NSSW Tranche 5 period.

‘Level 3 Options’ is a 20-minute talk/assembly or 60-75 minute workshop designed to develop knowledge and understanding of different level 3 pathways and their linked opportunities. The intervention helps students to understand what is meant by ‘level 3’ and to understand the different progression pathways into higher education, focusing on how post-16 choices can shape future study and career options. The workshop also assists students in making decisions about which level 3 pathway might be right for them based upon their future plans, and on their learning styles and aspirations. Students are introduced to key terms via a presentation and carry out research into pathways. In extra time, or as an action to complete at home, students also complete a handout designed to help them personally plan their next steps. Session activities aim to increase student confidence and expertise in researching, to prepare participants for planning their post-16 options. The intended outcome of the workshop is to reduce the impact that a lack of knowledge and a lack of confidence may have as barriers to attending HE. It thus addresses the ‘*Knowledge of HE*’ and ‘*Soft Skills*’ barriers to higher education as described in the NSSW Theory of Change.

Sessions were delivered by NSSW Institutional Outreach Officers (IOs) and County Outreach Officers (COOs), occasionally supported by Student Ambassadors (SAs) from NSSW partner institutions. Due to Covid-19, and associated disruptions to in-person visits to schools, sessions were mainly hosted live online. Eleven schools hosted a Level 3 Options workshop, which enabled approximately 830 students to participate.

Aims

By the end of the workshop, students should be able to understand what a level 3 qualification is and the various level 3 pathways that can be chosen. They should also know which level 3 options suit different learning styles and study/career paths, and be able to confidently assess the pro and cons of each post-16 choice. Correspondingly, the session seeks to provide students with increased knowledge and self-reliance in being able to map their own post-GCSE pathways.

Table 1 shows the expected short-term outcomes and shows how the impact of the Level 3 Options intervention is measured and evaluated.

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

Barrier to HE	Short-term outcomes	Indicators
<i>Knowledge of HE</i>	Increased knowledge of HE-related level 3 options and pathways	Increased knowledge of HE-related level 3 options and pathways for <u>≥ 80% students</u> <i>Students should be able to:</i> - Identify different HE routes/options - Describe differences in level 3 and HE routes
<i>Soft Skills</i>	Increased confidence and expertise in researching and planning for future options	Increased confidence and expertise in researching and planning future options for <u>≥ 50% students</u> <i>Students will report increased confidence in making level 3 choices</i>

Evaluation Design and Data Collection

The evaluation of the Level 3 Options activity consisted of a post-session survey designed to assess the success in achieving the short term anticipated outcomes above, and to gauge if there has been an '*Increased Awareness of HE Options*' and '*Increased Confidence and Self-Belief*' as a result of partaking in the workshop.

The survey was structured around five main quantitative and qualitative questions, which most students answered via an online form. Questions used were varied and included Likert scales, single choice, and free text options. Responses were dealt with anonymously and could not be traced back to individual students. Out of the ~830 students who participated, 369 successfully completed an evaluation survey submission. The following presents the results of the 369 returned surveys.



Results

On the post-session survey, attendees were asked to indicate how much they agreed or disagreed with four statements relating to the session. The results are shown below in figure 1.

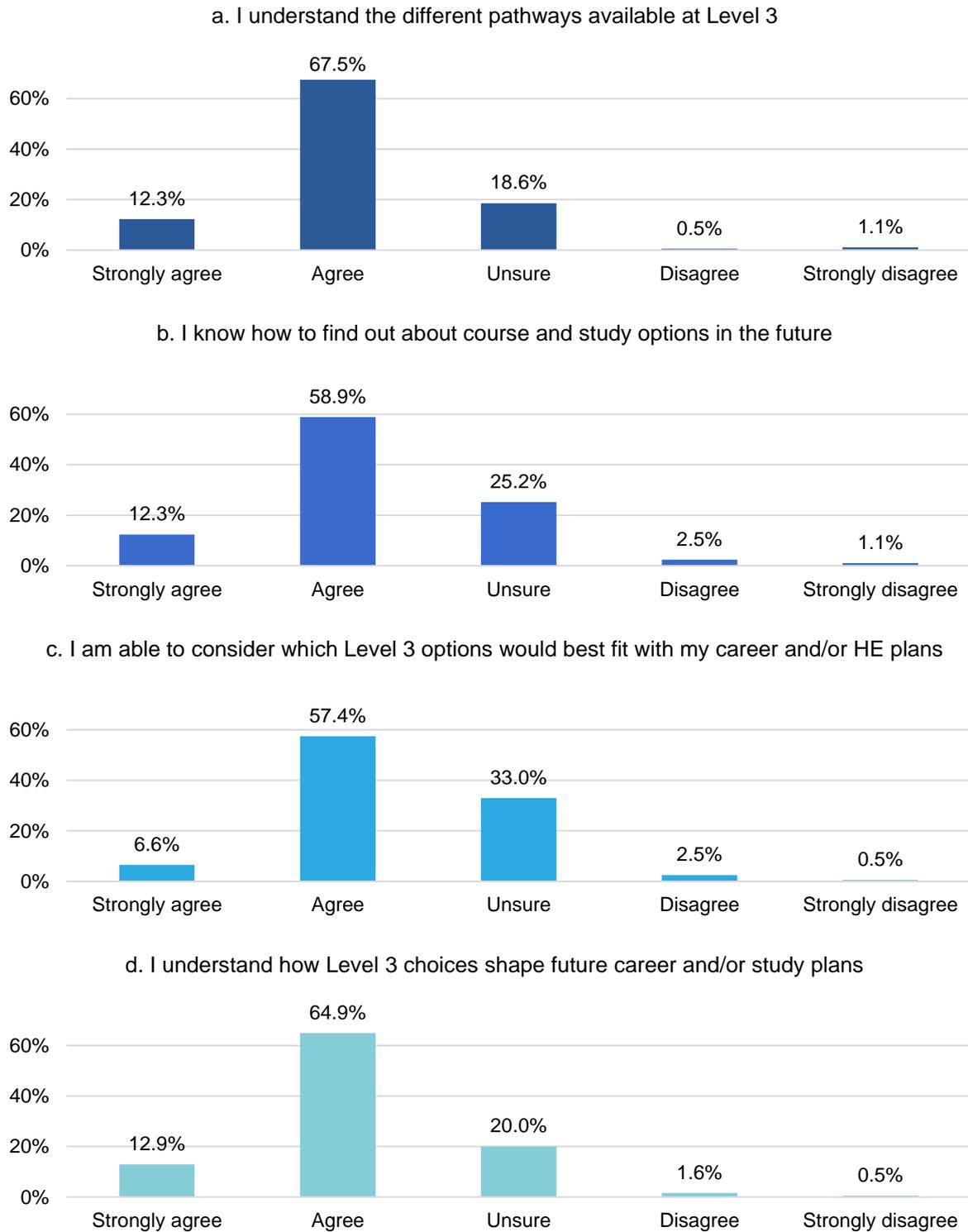


Figure 1. Responses to statements relating to the session.



For all four statements, the majority of survey respondents indicated that they strongly agreed or agreed, suggesting that the information disseminated to the students is likely to have increased their overall knowledge of level 3 qualifications. A combined total of 79.8% stated that they ‘Strongly agree’ (12.3%) and ‘Agree’ (67.5%) that, as a result of attending a session, they now understood the different pathways available at level 3. Similarly, a combined 71.2% indicated that they now knew how to find out about course and study options for the future. Positive responses were also received for ‘I am able to consider which Level 3 options would best fit with my career and/or HE plans’ and ‘I understand how Level 3 choices shape future career and/or study plans’. Respectively, 64.0% and 77.8% stated that they either ‘Strongly agree’ or ‘Agree’ to these statements. The low percentages for those who ‘Disagree’ (0.5%, 2.5%, 2.5%, 1.6% in turn) and ‘Strongly disagree’ (1.1%, 1.1%, 0.5%, 0.5% in turn) to the four statements is further testament to the positive outcome on the students’ overall learning and the barrier of insufficient HE knowledge.

Conversely, for statement c, a third of participants (33.0%) were ‘Unsure’ in their ability to consider Level 3 in relation to their career and HE plans. It is not possible here to disaggregate reasons for this response, but these students may benefit from additional NSSW workshops available as part of the core offer and Progression Framework.

This question may also be difficult to answer for participants who do not have a specific career/HE plan and who may have felt inclined to neither agree nor disagree with the statement. A recommendation would be to review this question to ensure that no incorrect assumptions are being made when asking students about their future plans.

As a check of understanding, and to verify the self-reported results in the first survey question, students were asked to look at five level 3 pathway options and determine which one could not lead on to a paramedic science course at HE-level (see figure 2).

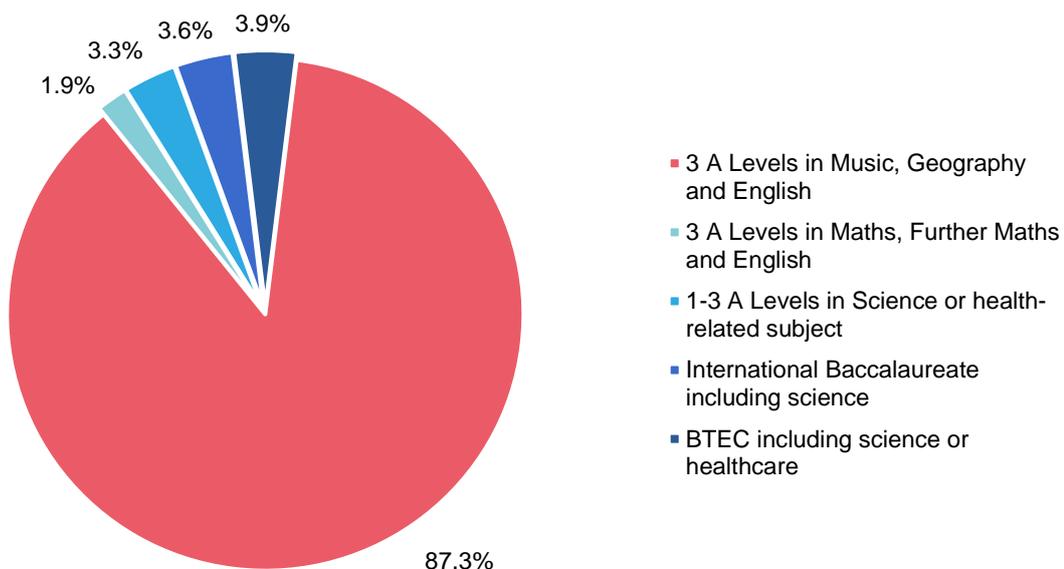


Figure 2. Answers highlighting knowledge of level 3 options that do not lead towards a paramedic science HE course.



As figure 2 highlights, 87.3% of respondents were able to identify ‘3 A Levels in Music, Geography and English’ as the correct answer. As the majority of students could provide a correct response, this data indicates that typically students understood and could recall key session information, and it provides further evidence that the session had a positive impact on students’ knowledge of HE (i.e., courses and pathways).

Qualitative answers provided in the third survey question illustrate further the knowledge that participants gained from having attended a Level 3 Options workshop. Students were asked to provide two examples of what they had learnt about level 3 routes and qualifications. Out of the 369 survey responses, 244 participants gave 2 examples of something learnt and 95 participants gave 1 example, with the rest not providing an answer or entering an extraneous response. The free text answers were analysed by looking at common subjects within the responses given and were categorised into thematic groups. Fourteen categorises in total were found to fit the data best. The results can be seen in table 2.

Table 2. Students’ feedback providing two examples of what they learnt from the Level 3 Options session. The three most popular response categories are shaded in light blue.

Thematic category	Number of responses (example 1st)	Number of responses (example 2nd)	Feedback examples
The different pathway options	86	36	<i>“There are lots of different pathways.”</i> <i>“More options than I thought.”</i> <i>“There are lots of options you can take, not just A-Levels.”</i> <i>“You can do practical or academic.”</i>
The importance of future opportunities	14	9	<i>“A lot of doors are open for opportunity.”</i> <i>“Loads of opportunities.”</i> <i>“I know how level 3 choices can help my future.”</i> <i>“It helps us get better jobs.”</i>
The importance of good GCSE grades / studying	18	17	<i>“Have at least 5 GCSEs.”</i> <i>“To enter at Level 3 you will need 4 GCSE grades (9-4).”</i> <i>“You have to get a high score in English, Maths, and knowing another language will give you a better chance of getting a job.”</i> <i>“I also learned that qualifications are a lot more important than people think.”</i>
The importance of personal choice	7	12	<i>“I can choose from many paths and can change them to suit my style of learning.”</i> <i>“That you can choose whatever you want to do.”</i> <i>“I learned that you can choose the appropriate subject and what you can do.”</i> <i>“It’s your choice and no one elses.”</i>
A Levels	17	14	<i>“What A-levels are.”</i> <i>“You can go back and do you’re A-levels after you are 18.”</i> <i>“A levels have 6 options – you need to choose 3.”</i> <i>“A Levels take 2 years to complete.”</i>



T Levels	38	38	<p><i>"I know what T-levels are."</i></p> <p><i>"T-levels are a brand new type of qualification."</i></p> <p><i>"T-levels equivalent to 3 A-Levels."</i></p> <p><i>"T-levels is something instead of BTEC."</i></p>
Apprenticeships	34	23	<p><i>"You can do an apprenticeship and still get a higher level."</i></p> <p><i>"Apprenticeships you learn and get paid for 30 hours."</i></p> <p><i>"That you have to find your own apprenticeship and if you can't the college can help."</i></p> <p><i>"English and Maths is still needed for apprenticeships."</i></p>
Other vocational choices e.g. BTECs	20	21	<p><i>"If you're more of a practical person you do a BTEC."</i></p> <p><i>"BTEC don't do exams they do written work."</i></p> <p><i>"That you can take BTEC along with A-levels."</i></p> <p><i>"NVQs."</i></p>
International Baccalaureates	23	21	<p><i>"I learned what IB was and how it could help me."</i></p> <p><i>"A baccalaureate is an international qualification."</i></p> <p><i>"In an IB you have to choose 6 subjects."</i></p> <p><i>"That most people don't do IBs."</i></p>
The costs of level 3 study	8	3	<p><i>"16-19 get it free."</i></p> <p><i>"Age 16-19 is free."</i></p> <p><i>"You get three years of college free."</i></p>
The benefits of HE study	4	6	<p><i>"Higher education give access to better jobs."</i></p> <p><i>"If you get a good degree you're more likely to get the job you want."</i></p> <p><i>"Higher education."</i></p>
Option choices can be confusing	4	1	<p><i>"There are more options and I'm not sure what to pick."</i></p> <p><i>"Realised I actually don't know what to be."</i></p> <p><i>"It's hella confusing."</i></p>
Other	6	18	<p><i>"You have to have knowledge about what you are doing."</i></p> <p><i>"You have to get UCAS points."</i></p> <p><i>"Retake something if you want a different career."</i></p> <p><i>"You can continue your level 3 at any age."</i></p> <p><i>"You can do a level 2 before."</i></p> <p><i>"Be prepared to take on challenges."</i></p>
Irrelevant / blank	90	150	

Table 2 shows that the most common information learnt related to the different study options post-16. Students could also commonly recall information relating to T-levels and Apprenticeships. Overall, the students could recall many different facts and tips about what they had learnt which indicates that the intervention was successful in informing on post-16 choices. Whilst the percentages for blank and irrelevant responses of 24.4% (n=90) and 40.7% (n=150) are relatively high, it is likely that the non-mandatory / free text nature of the survey question meant that some students may not have felt compelled to answer.



The evaluation survey also asked session participants whether they felt more confident planning their next steps (after year 11) having attended a workshop. Figure 3 shows how students rated their level of confidence.

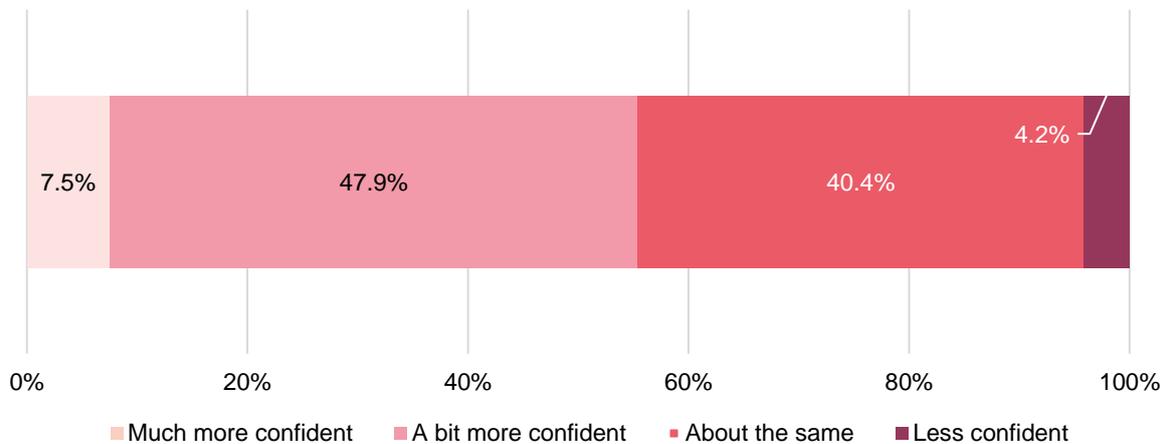


Figure 3. Self-confidence with planning post-16 options.

The data in figure 3 indicates that their participation in a session likely had some impact on increasing confidence levels, with the majority of respondents (47.9%) choosing the 'A bit more confident' survey option. For some, they were 'Much more confident' (7.5%) with planning their next steps after their GCSEs. Just under half the participants, however, selected the 'About the same' and 'Less confident' survey options (44.6% combined). Whilst the survey doesn't enable further segmentation of the data to explore the reasons for the results, it is pertinent to note that for some participants their confidence levels did not improve or dropped. It is recommended that the survey question be reviewed if further comprehension is needed as to why confidence levels may or may not have changed from having attended this session. NSSW can also continue to support these students through sustained interventions to maximise the impact of this session, and to promote improved confidence in future decision-making.

In the final part of the survey, students shared their next steps in terms of how they will progress with their selection of level 3 options. Open-ended answers were again categorised based upon themes that best represented the data. Since some comments fell under more than one thematic category, the total number of thematic responses (n=386, 293 minus blanks) is different from the number of individual responses (n=369, 276 minus blanks). The categorised data is presented in table 3.

The results in table 3 show that many students completed the session having identified at least one activity/task that they will complete to support their progression onto level 3 and beyond. Specifically, two-thirds (62.1%, n=229) of survey participants were able to take away from the workshop some practical knowledge which would support them in their next steps. The data shows that the workshop was successful in helping students understand their different options, and that it encouraged them to formulate their own personal progression plans.



Table 3. Students' next steps for choosing their level 3 options. The three most popular response categories are shaded in light blue.

Thematic category	Number of responses	Percentage of responses	Response examples
Work hard / continue studying / improve attainment	16	4.1%	<p><i>"Work hard and try to achieve my goals for a future job/career."</i></p> <p><i>"More effort into learning."</i></p> <p><i>"I'm going to do a bit more revision."</i></p> <p><i>"Study harder."</i></p> <p><i>"Complete my GCSEs...."</i></p>
Research education options and next steps	67	17.4%	<p><i>"Research different options and pathways."</i></p> <p><i>"Look into what I can do and requirements for HE."</i></p> <p><i>"Research the correct subjects to take to get to what I want to be."</i></p> <p><i>"Look into apprenticeships I'd like to do / what company to learn/work with."</i></p> <p><i>"Look at colleges."</i></p>
Research career options and next steps	20	5.2%	<p><i>"I will research the job I want and what I need for it."</i></p> <p><i>"I will research jobs and have an open mind."</i></p> <p><i>"Think about which career suits my interests."</i></p>
Consider personally relevant options (courses, careers)	29	7.5%	<p><i>"I will do some research to find out how I learn and what path will best suit me."</i></p> <p><i>"Have a think about what subjects I like/am good at...."</i></p> <p><i>"Think really hard about what I want to do."</i></p> <p><i>"Research more about what I am interested in."</i></p>
Research on the web	35	9.1%	<p><i>"Look at websites."</i></p> <p><i>"Google stuff."</i></p> <p><i>"Look into using the suggested websites to help me out with level 3 options."</i></p> <p><i>"Search online to see what are the positives of and negatives of picking different ones."</i></p>
Explore Careerpilot website	22	5.7%	<p><i>"Careerpilot."</i></p> <p><i>"I can research and use careerpilot to help me pick from different things to do in the future."</i></p> <p><i>"Diving more into websites like careerpilot, etc."</i></p>
Talk to family / friends	31	8.0%	<p><i>"Talk to my parents."</i></p> <p><i>"Ask family members about it."</i></p> <p><i>"Talk to my sister (she did an apprenticeship)."</i></p>
Talk to teachers / advisors	10	2.6%	<p><i>"Talk to teachers."</i></p> <p><i>"Talk to teachers for their opinions or parents/colleagues."</i></p> <p><i>"Talk to career lady."</i></p>
I don't know	47	12.2%	<p><i>"I don't know."</i></p> <p><i>"I'm not quite sure at this moment in time."</i></p> <p><i>"I don't really know cause it won't benefit me much."</i></p>



Other	16	4.1%	<p><i>“Contact the college I want to attend.”</i></p> <p><i>“Visit Duchy College.”</i></p> <p><i>“Look at helping at my football group to see if I can do my NVQ with them to become an assistant.”</i></p> <p><i>“Speak to people that have pursued a similar career that I want to.”</i></p> <p><i>“Get advice from people who have already done that.”</i></p>
Irrelevant / blank	93	24.1%	

Table 3 further highlights that, in the main, students plan to continue with their research, specifically focusing on exploring further the level 3 options introduced to them and thinking in more depth about future study options (n=67, 17.4%). Similarly, conducting research into future career pathways was also planned (n=20, 5.2%). Several respondents stated that they would be using the internet to further explore their next steps (n=35, 9.1%). Student comments also highlight plans to talk with influencers (parents and teachers combined, n=41, 10.6%) and to understand more about how their personality might link with future course and career options (n=29, 7.5%). Two thematic categories which highlight the impact of the workshop beyond its main aims, are those encompassing comments about improving GCSE grades (n=16, 4.1%) and utilising tools such as Careerpilot (n=22, 5.7%). More uniquely, some students will be assessing their possible options by contacting potential college providers or speaking with others who have pursued similar routes (‘Other’, n=16, 4.1%).

Conversely, it is important to recognise that some respondents said they that didn’t know what they would do next (n=47, 12.2%), and others didn’t respond at all or with an invalid response (n=93, 24.1%). With just over a third of participants not fully responding to this survey question, there is likely a need to strengthen the impact that the session has on helping students recognise suitable ‘takeaways’ and actionable plans relevant to them. Although, as with survey question 3, it is difficult to know the extent to which the voluntary nature of the survey question had on students not responding.

Conclusion

Overall, the survey data analysed in this report demonstrates that the Level 3 Options workshops had a positive impact on the majority of participants, from both a knowledge and soft skills perspective. The workshop has been successful in increasing student knowledge of the different pathways available to them following GCSE level, and how level 3 options can influence progression into higher education and towards a successful career. Figure 2 in particular highlights how students have greatly increased their knowledge of how level 3 choices can shape future study plans, such as those relating to HE. There has been an increase in ‘Knowledge of HE’, thus addressing this NSSW barrier. Furthermore, there has been significant improvement in attendees’ confidence and in their ability to research and compare their options,



thus addressing the key NSSW barrier of lack of ‘Soft Skills’. With findings also revealing students’ plans to reach out to influencers and pursue better grades and/or career pathways, the workshops also address barriers such as engagement from ‘Influencers’ and ‘Socioeconomic’ disadvantage. The success of the workshop in meeting its intended targets can be seen in table 4 below.

Table 4. Level 3 Options outcomes achieved in T5.

Barrier to HE	Short-term outcomes	Indicators	Evidence	Outcome achieved
Knowledge of HE	Increased knowledge of HE-related level 3 options and pathways	<p>Increased knowledge of HE-related level 3 options and pathways for ≥ 80% students</p> <p><i>Students should be able to:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Identify different HE routes/options - Describe differences in level 3 and HE routes 	<p>79.8% of participants reported that they understood the different pathways available at L3</p> <p>77.8% of participants reported that they understood how L3 choices shape future plans</p> <p style="color: red;">Target 80%: T5 result 77+%</p>	Nearly achieved
			<p>87.3% of participants identified the correct option when asked to select the one which did not lead onto a specific course at HE</p> <p style="color: red;">Target 80%: T5 result 87.3%</p>	
			<p>75.6% of participants could recall at least one piece of information that they learnt about a L3 qualification/route</p> <p style="color: red;">Target 80%: T5 result 75.6%</p>	
Soft Skills	Increased confidence and expertise in researching and planning for future options	<p>Increased confidence and expertise in researching and planning future options for ≥ 50% students</p> <p><i>Students will report increased confidence in making level 3 choices</i></p>	<p>71.2% of participants reported that they knew how to find out about course and study options</p> <p>64.0% of participants reported that they were able to consider which L3 options would best fit with their plans</p> <p style="color: red;">Target 50%: T5 result 64%+</p>	Achieved
			<p>55.4% of participants felt more confident with planning their post-16 options</p> <p style="color: red;">Target 50%: T5 result 55.4%</p>	
			<p>62.1% of participants knew what they would do next to pick their L3 options</p> <p style="color: red;">Target 50%: T5 result 62.1%</p>	

Table 4 illustrates that the soft skills expected outcome has been achieved, with the session making an impact on students’ researching expertise (also see figure 1) and



their confidence in planning their future options (also see figure 3). Being able to specify a next step (see table 4) is a good indicator that there has been an increase in confidence in making level 3 choices for over 50% of the participants. Table 4 further illustrates that the workshop has been impactful in introducing students to the main level 3 qualifications (also see figure 1), in enabling students to recognise the differences between routes into HE (also see figure 2), and in providing pertinent information that could be remembered (also see table 2). The expected outcome for increased knowledge of HE was only partially met as the data didn't reflect an 80% increase in all key areas; however, the data fell only marginally short of the desired target.

Recommendations

Whilst the survey responses on the whole were positive, the data presented here shows that there is some scope for improving the impact of the Level 3 Options session. A third of workshop participants reported being doubtful ('Unsure') of their ability to judge which level 3 options would best fit with their career and study plans (figure 1) and just under half of the students reported no increase in their confidence with planning their next steps. Similarly, 37.9% of respondents left no definite response when asked what they might do next. This apparent hesitancy among students might be alleviated through the addition of supplementary session resources and/or increased emphasis on signposting to further research, contacts and material. A review of this session is recommended to ensure that sufficient examples and learning techniques are covered.

With 40.7% of survey respondents not providing a second example of something learnt, there may also be room for improvement in how students are able to identify and describe level 3 options. As above, it is recommended that the workshop be reviewed to ensure that the materials, resources and structure contain sufficient examples, variation in memory recall techniques and chances for discussion etc. to support learners in their knowledge of HE, specifically in relation to their information literacy.

Additionally, some further consideration should be made to the length of time students are given to answer the survey questions, as ones which ask for information recall are likely to take longer and students may not have had enough time to be able to answer with two responses.