



NFER Social Mobility Briefing

Can summer schools improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils?

There are many different types of summer school for children and young people. The most common educational summer schools in England are 'transition' summer schools for pupils about to start secondary school and 'access' summer schools to encourage older secondary pupils to apply for university.

The purpose of this piece is to review the recent evidence base on the effectiveness of these interventions in relation to improving outcomes for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds in England.

Are summer schools effective?

The Education Endowment Foundation¹ says that summer schools have a relatively low impact (about two months of progress) on pupils' academic outcomes for moderate cost, based on extensive evidence. Greater impacts can be achieved where summer schools are intensive, well-resourced and involve small group tuition by trained and experienced teachers. Not surprisingly, summer schools without a clear academic focus do not usually show evidence of impact on academic outcomes.

NFER evaluated the first year of the national summer school's programme,² which was funded by the Department for Education (DfE). The main purpose was to help disadvantaged pupils to make a successful transition from primary to secondary school.



The research involved case studies and surveys of 21,065 pupils in 461 schools, 347 of which had taken part in the summer schools programme. The summer schools were organised by secondary schools during the summer holidays and usually lasted one or two weeks.

The overwhelming majority of schools considered their summer schools to be a success. Getting disadvantaged pupils to attend was one of the most common challenges for schools, with half of the group of disadvantaged pupils attending at least once. Most of those who attended the summer schools enjoyed the experience, though boys were less positive than girls about the experience. Interviews with pupils identified the need to directly address pupils' fear of bullying during the summer school. Compared with pupils who did not attend, summer school participants were more confident about starting their new school and had more positive attitudes in relation to school readiness and socialisation.

In order to promote greater engagement, the study identified the importance of mixing academic study with elements of 'fun'. It also recommended liaising more closely with parents and primary schools.

-
- 1 The Teaching and Learning Toolkit is available online here: <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/evidence-summaries/teaching-learning-toolkit>
 - 2 The reports can be found here: <https://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/ESSP01/> and <https://www.nfer.ac.uk/impact-of-the-summer-schools-programme-on-pupils/>

Can summer schools improve access to university?

Summer schools have the potential to improve access to higher education for disadvantaged pupils. These typically focus on older secondary pupils (around Year 12) and are run by higher education institutions (HEIs), sometimes in partnership with other organisations. An analysis of the Aimhigher³ programme of summer schools, which ran from 2001 to 2010, suggested that they were effective in reaching their target population, although they attracted a lower proportion of boys and pupils from white British ethnic backgrounds.

A more recent review⁴ of the research evidence on strategies to improve access to university concluded that there is a lack of robust evidence from the UK indicating which outreach strategies work best, but suggested that there was evidence for the effectiveness of residential programmes along with other interventions including: mentoring, tutoring and helping disadvantaged pupils with their university applications.

One of the few evaluation studies to focus on outcomes investigated the Sutton Trust's summer schools designed to encourage disadvantaged pupils to apply to elite universities. The study of summer schools run by five universities⁵ used a quasi-experimental design to evaluate their success. It found that the summer schools generated proportionately more UCAS applications and registrations from attendees than comparable non-attendees, resulting in a 'modest but real boost' in applications from these disadvantaged young people. Attendees tended to apply to the university that hosted their summer school as well as to other 'elite' universities.



-
- 3 HEFCE, 2009
 - 4 Sutton Trust, 2015
 - 5 Hoare and Mann, 2011

Why summer schools are not enough

The education system is currently not making sufficient progress in addressing the social mobility challenge. By the age of five, there is a 17 percentage point gap in those reaching a 'good level of development' between pupils eligible for free school meals and their peers.⁶

The gap continues to widen, particularly during secondary school, where low-income pupils make less progress each year compared to their more affluent peers.⁷ Even when disadvantaged pupils have performed well at primary school, they often fall off from their high-performing trajectory during secondary education. The implication of this is that initiatives focused on improving access to higher education among older secondary pupils may come too late.

Summer schools are a promising intervention and NFER is currently working with the Sutton Trust to build the evidence base. Our existing knowledge demonstrates the importance of engaging young people by offering an attractive and relevant programme, liaising with schools and families and addressing any barriers to participation.

However, summer schools need to be seen in a wider context of initiatives to encourage social mobility, such as high-quality teaching, tutoring and mentoring and the use of contextual information by HEIs in offering places to pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds.⁸

This is in line with the recommendation of the 2013 Aimhigher review that there should be a framework of 'consistent and sustained interventions' by HEIs and their partner organisations. The recent publication of proposed standards for evaluation of outreach activities by HEIs⁹ will hopefully add to our evidence base in future.

Author

Caroline Sharp, Research Director at the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER).
July 2018.

References

Aimhigher Research and Consultancy Network (2013). *Literature Review of Research into Widening Participation to Higher Education: Report to HEFCE and OFFA by ARC Network* [online]. Available: <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/rereports/year/2013/wplitreview/> [28 February, 2018].

6 <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/early-years-foundation-stage-profile-results-2016-to-2017>

7 Shaw *et al.*, 2017

8 Boliver *et al.*, 2017

9 Crawford *et al.*, 2017

Boliver, V., Crawford, C., Powell, M. and Craige, W. (2017). *Admissions in Context: the Use of Contextualised Information by Leading Universities* [online]. Available: https://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Admissions-in-Context-Final_V2.pdf [28 February, 2018].

Crawford, C., Dytham, S., and Naylor, R. (2017). *Proposed Standards of Evaluation Practice and Associated Guidance* [online]. Available: <https://www.suttontrust.com/research-paper/admissions-in-context-access-gap/> [28 February, 2018].

Department for Education (2017). *Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (EYFSP) Results by Pupil Characteristics: 2017* [online]. Available: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/early-years-foundation-stage-profile-results-2016-to-2017> [28 February, 2018].

Hoare T. and Mann, R. (2011). *The Impact of the Sutton Trust's Summer Schools on Subsequent Higher Education Participation: a Report to the Sutton Trust* [online]. Available: <https://www.suttontrust.com/research-paper/impact-sutton-trusts-summer-schools-subsequent-higher-education-participation-report-sutton-trust/> [28 February, 2018].

Higher Education Funding Council for England (2009). *Aimhigher Summer Schools Analysis of Provision and Participation 2004 to 2008* [online]. Available: http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20120716090500tf_/http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/year/2009/200911/ [28 February, 2018].

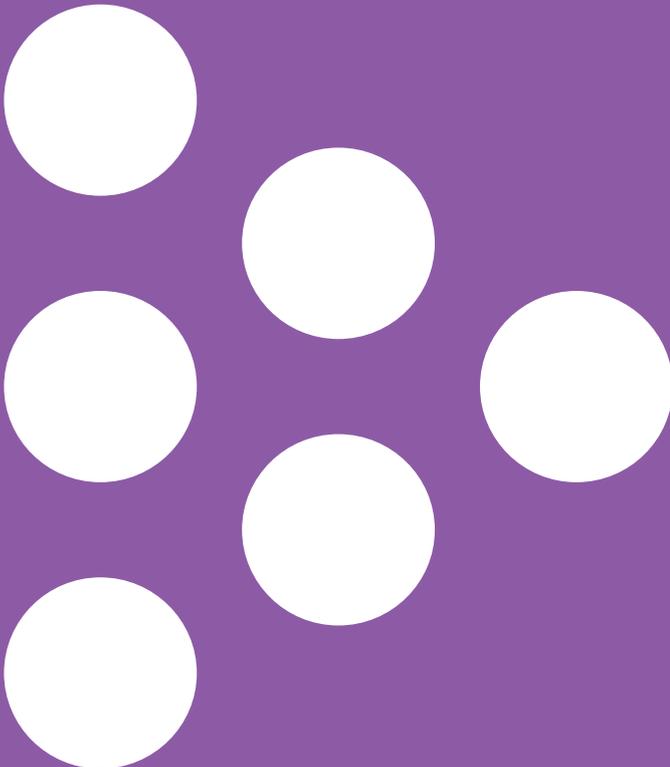
Martin, K., Sharp, C., Day, L., Gardner, R., Mehta, P. and Cook, R. (2013). *Summer Schools Programme for Disadvantaged Pupils: Overview Report*. London: DfE [online]. Available: <https://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/ESSP01> [28 February, 2018].

Martin, K., Sharp, C. and Mehta, P. (2013). *The Impact of the Summer Schools Programme on Pupils: Research Report*. Slough: NFER [online]. Available: <https://www.nfer.ac.uk/impact-of-the-summer-schools-programme-on-pupils/> [28 February, 2018].

Shaw, B., Baars, S., Menzies, L., Parameshwaran, M. and Allen, R. (2017). *Low Income Pupils' Progress at Secondary School*. London: Social Mobility Commission [online]. Available: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/low-income-pupils-progress-at-secondary-school> [28 February, 2018].

Sutton Trust (2015). *Research Brief: Evaluating Access* [online]. Available: <https://www.suttontrust.com/research-paper/admissions-in-context-access-gap/> [28 February, 2018].

Evidence for excellence in education



© National Foundation for Educational Research 2018

All rights reserved. No part of this document may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of NFER.

The Mere, Upton Park, Slough, Berks SL1 2DQ
T: 01753 574123 • F: 01753 691632
enquiries@nfer.ac.uk

www.nfer.ac.uk

