

STEP AHEAD IMPACT EVALUATION 2025

STUDENT ADVICE AND COMMUNITIES TEAM, MARCH 2026

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Data reporting Notice

Student numbers used throughout this document are being reported under [HESA rounding](#) guidelines to protect the anonymity and confidentiality of participants. Any category numbers reported as 0 do represent some participants, categories with no students are not reported on.

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Executive Summary

This report evaluates the impact of the 2025 [Step Ahead](#) transition programme in supporting students from priority [Student Communities](#) to begin university with greater confidence, a stronger sense of belonging and increased social connectedness. These interlinked factors play a key role in achieving the University's Student Success targets, outlined in the [University's Access and Participation Plan 2025 - 2029](#), of improved student continuation and completion for target student groups.

The evaluation uses survey data from participants before, immediately after, and in the December of students' first semester at The University of York after Step Ahead. The findings show there was:

- A statistically significant increase in attendees' social connectedness before and after Step Ahead, and still in the December of their first semester.
- A statistically significant increase in attendees' sense of belonging before and after Step Ahead.

These results show the positive impact Step Ahead has in helping students transition more smoothly into university life.

At a cohort level, increases in confidence were not found to be statistically significant, but there was a significant increase in confidence for students who participated in a widening participation (WP) programme and/or those in receipt of a Contextual Offer. Additionally, Student Community-level analysis found that Step Ahead is having a positive impact on social connectedness and belonging for multiple Student Communities.

Further analysis of the format of the programme (1-day vs 2-day) found that outcome scores were not statistically significantly different between the two cohorts, and therefore we can assume both are valuable to the attendees.

Background

Since its inception in 2020, Step Ahead has supported 1,500 students, considerably strengthening the University's transition support for new students from priority Student Communities.

Through Step Ahead students build peer networks, campus familiarity, awareness of opportunities and an understanding of academic expectations. These factors, which all relate to the 'human side of higher education', directly influence students' sense of belonging and confidence which Thomas et.al (2017) identify as the essential starting point for academic success. 'There is a broad emerging consensus that issues of engagement and developing a sense of belonging lie at the heart of both retention and success' (BIS, 2014). Underpinning the programme and evaluation design is the Step Ahead Theory of Change ([Figure 1](#)), an accessible version is available in [Appendix A](#).

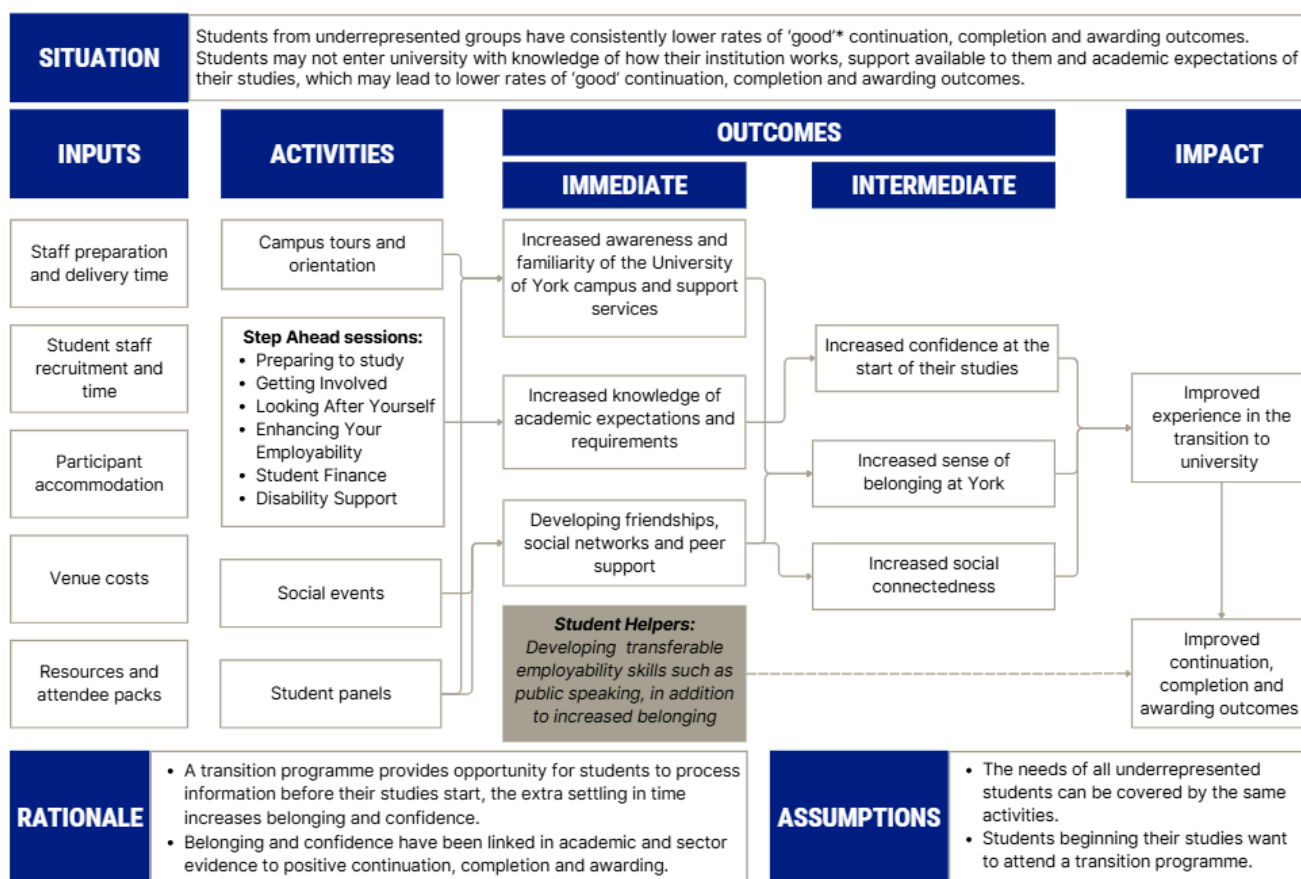
The Theory of Change proposes that through Step Ahead, students:

- Gain a deeper awareness of university support and opportunities
- Build friendships before the academic year begins
- Familiarise themselves with the University of York campus
- Develop a better understanding of academic expectations at university level

These opportunities, in turn, positively influence students' confidence, sense of belonging and preparedness for university. These intermediate outcomes that are all interlinked and are essential to the long-term outcomes of improving student success outcomes, including continuation and completion.

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Figure 1: Step Ahead Theory of Change



*Good continuation, completion and awarding as defined by a positive outcome in the Office for students Access and Participation data set.

Confidence refers to a students' self assurance in their abilities to succeed at university and includes both academic confidence e.g feeling capable of completing coursework and social confidence e.g. feeling comfortable interacting with peers. Often the term self-efficacy is used in a similar sense to confidence (Thomson et al., 2022). Crucially, self-efficacy is strongly correlated with positive attainment outcomes (Schneider & Preckel, 2017). Specifically in terms of Step Ahead, we are working with the rationale that confidence can be boosted by feeling prepared for university life and that improving confidence has been linked as an effective way to reduce student outcome gaps (Mountford-Zimdars et al., 2015).

A sense of belonging is conceptualised as how connected and included a student feels with the university community (Ahn & Davis, 2020). A supportive social circle at the start of university helps students foster a sense of social connectedness, belonging and identity. Step Ahead has been thoughtfully designed "to pump-prime the kinds of friendships, networks, and social activity that sustain students through their studies and reinforce their confidence to achieve" (Dickinson, 2021). Increased sense of belonging improves success outcomes and increases the likelihood students will continue and complete their studies and be awarded a good degree (Allen et al., 2024) and decreases the likelihood of negative outcomes (Menkor et al., 2021). Sense of belonging has been found to be dynamic and responsive to several factors while at university. Importantly, significant decreases have been found in the first year of study (Gilani et al., 2026) which demonstrates the importance of measuring the impact of interventions that can support sense of belonging and associated success outcomes throughout the first year.

When recognised with the University's 'Pioneering Inclusivity Award', Step Ahead was praised for its innovative inclusivity and for recognising the vital link between a sense of belonging and student success. It was also acknowledged that Step Ahead aligns with the University's strategic ambition to

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create a 'community without limits', effectively removing barriers for diverse learners through providing an increased sense of social connectedness from the start of their studies. Ultimately, Step Ahead equips students with the tools they need to thrive from day one.

Programme Overview

In September 2025, we hosted three in-person Step Ahead events: two 2-day events (with free overnight accommodation) and a 1-day event for students living more locally. All Step Ahead attendees participated in the following key sessions designed to support their transition into university life:

- Preparing to Study - led by staff from the [Inclusive Education Team](#)
- Getting Involved in University Life - led by staff from the [University of York Students' Union](#)
- Student Panel - led by current students
- Campus Tour - led by current students

Additionally, students attending the 2-day events could choose two of the following three workshops:

- Budgeting Your Way Through University - led by the Student Advice and Communities Team
- Enhancing Your Employability (Opportunities in the UK and Around the Globe) - led by the Global Opportunities Team and Careers and Placements
- Moving Through University with Confidence - led by Learning Enhancement and Inclusive Education

Participant Overview

Students who have a confirmed place on an undergraduate course at the University of York and who belong to one or more of the [eligible groups](#) can apply for a place on Step Ahead. The eligible groups include but are not limited to the University of York's APP target groups and demographic groups included in the Office for Students [APP student characteristics](#). Within the Student Advice team who run Step Ahead, these groups of students are called 'Student Communities'

All student numbers in this report are rounded to the nearest 5 to protect students' identities. Step Ahead saw record participation in 2025, with 320 students attending - up 16% from the previous year. For the first time since Step Ahead's inception all events were fully booked with waiting lists. Student data highlights the program's intersectional reach: 71% of the cohort identified with two or more Student Communities, while 21% belonged to four or more Student Communities.

[Figure 2](#) provides a breakdown of attendees by student community and compares participation in the 1-day and 2-day events. A key for Student Communities is included in [Appendix B](#) and a tabulated data summary. Since many students identified with multiple Student Communities, the total count in the chart exceeds the actual number of participants, as students appear under each community they identify with.

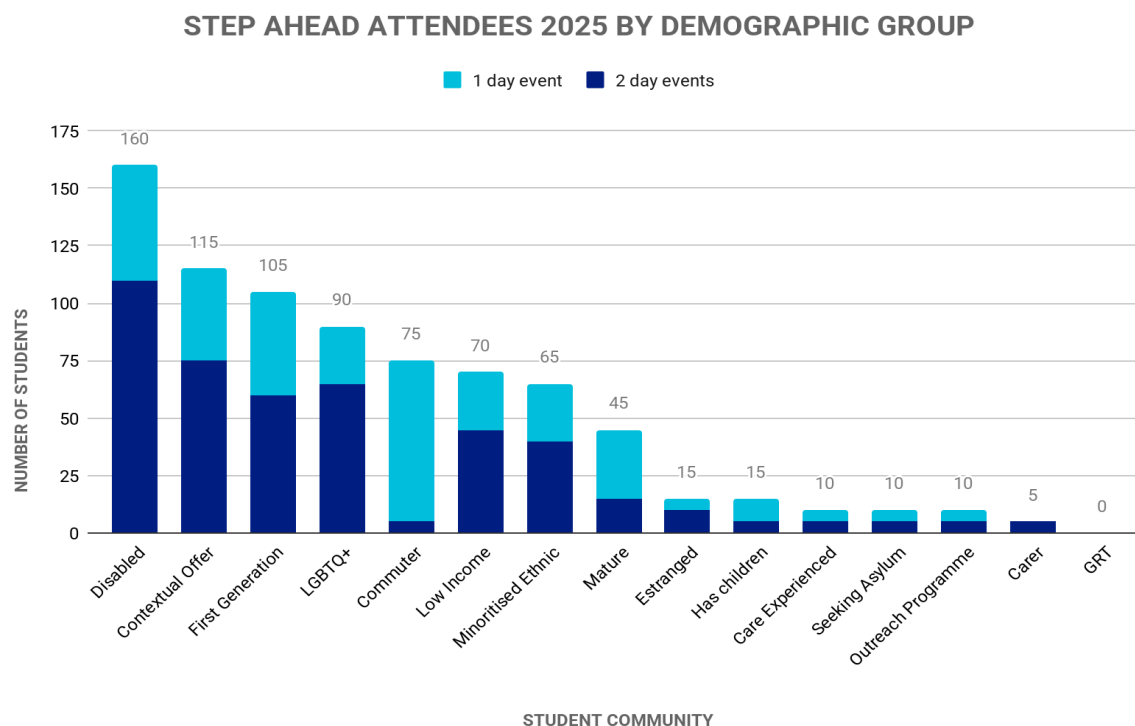
The largest student communities of Step Ahead participants continue to be disabled students and students who have received a Contextual Offer or Alternative Widening Participation Offer from the University. Of note, the number of commuting students attending Step Ahead increased by 181% from 2024, from 27 to 76 attendees. This suggests the number of commuter students at York is increasing and that Step Ahead appeals to commuters who are keen to build networks, campus familiarity and awareness of opportunities prior to starting university.

There was also a further increase in the number of students from minoritised ethnic groups (students belonging to Black, Asian, mixed and other ethnicity heritage groups) attending Step Ahead in 2025. The number of students from minoritised ethnic groups participating in Step Ahead has more than doubled since 2023, reaching 62 attendees this year (a 148% increase from two years ago).

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Figure 2: Step Ahead Attendee Demographic Group Data, split by 1-day and 2-day events.

[Figure 2](#) highlights demographic differences between the 1-day and 2-day Step Ahead events. The 1-day



event had a higher proportion of commuting students, mature students and students with children. Interestingly, the proportion of students from four or more Student Communities was significantly higher at the 1-day event (34%) than at the 2-day events (14%).

Data Collection and Methods

The impact evaluation aims to understand Step Ahead's influence on student confidence, social connectedness and sense of belonging, as discussed above. To assess the effectiveness of Step Ahead, students were given the option to participate in a Step Ahead Impact Evaluation. This research, approved by the University of York's Professional Services Ethics Committee, used a longitudinal repeated-measures design, administering the survey to participants three times: prior to Step Ahead, immediately after Step Ahead and finally three months after the programme at the end of the participants' first term at York.

The Step Ahead team used existing validated scales for both confidence and sense of belonging (see [Appendix C](#)). These scales were created and tested externally to ensure they effectively measure student confidence and sense of belonging, and have been selected for this impact evaluation to increase the reliability and validity of our investigation and to strengthen the claims that could be made from the results. The validated scales included four questions per outcome. The belonging scale is validated so that each question is weighted, and as such the belonging score at each stage is calculated using this weighting (more information about the belonging scale can be found on the [TASO ASQ webpage](#)). For the confidence scale, the questions are not weighted and therefore responses to the four confidence statements were averaged to give a score at each stage. Additionally, a two-point non-validated scale was used to capture 'social connectedness' for the first time this year. The average of these two questions was used as the social connectedness score. Additionally, students were also asked additional questions relating to their views on Step Ahead and feelings towards university at the

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same three intervals. These responses are used to compare and triangulate the students' experiences of Step Ahead with the impact seen in the belonging, confidence and social connectedness scales.

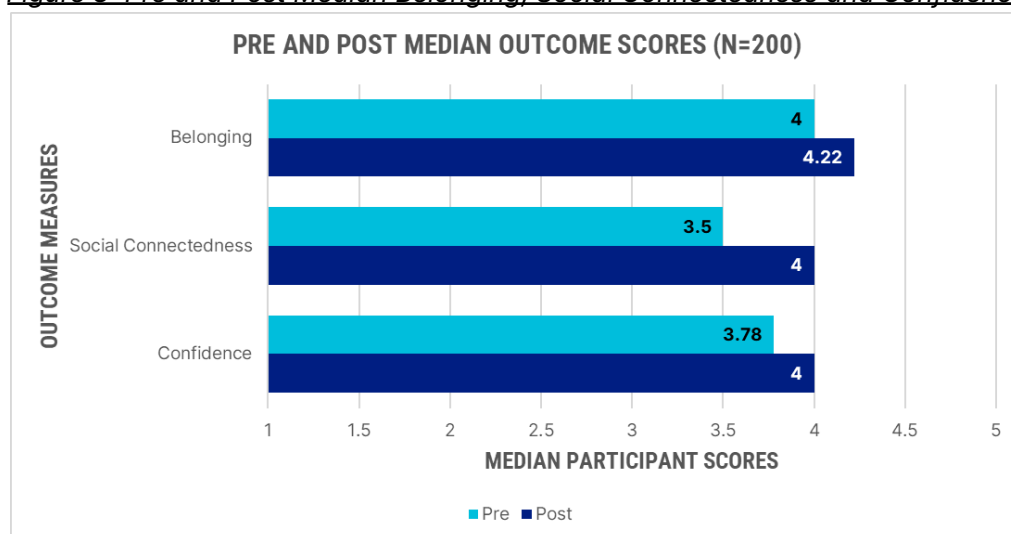
Students were asked to provide their student username so that responses could be matched over time, allowing for a more detailed analysis of Student Communities trends and individual progress. 200 students completed both the pre and post questionnaires and 70 completed all three questionnaires, a substantial increase on the numbers of students completing the surveys last year (70 completed the pre and post and 40 completed all three in 2024).

Findings and Analysis

In the 2024 Step Ahead Impact evaluation we found a statistically significant increase in both belonging and confidence from before the programme to after, and to the December survey point; no social connectedness questions were included in 2024. This year we are testing each outcome measure to see whether there were improvements in scores for the new cohort and the slight changes in programme delivery. The outcome measure scores were tested and found not to be normally distributed, therefore we again ran Wilcoxon signed-rank tests to compare pre and post scores, and Friedman tests to compare pre, post and December Scores.

200 Step Ahead participants completed the pre and post survey. The responses to the validated confidence and belonging scales, and the social connectedness questions by cohort are summarised in [Figure 3](#). Each outcome measure was tested to see whether the increase we see is statistically significant by testing the changes for each student.

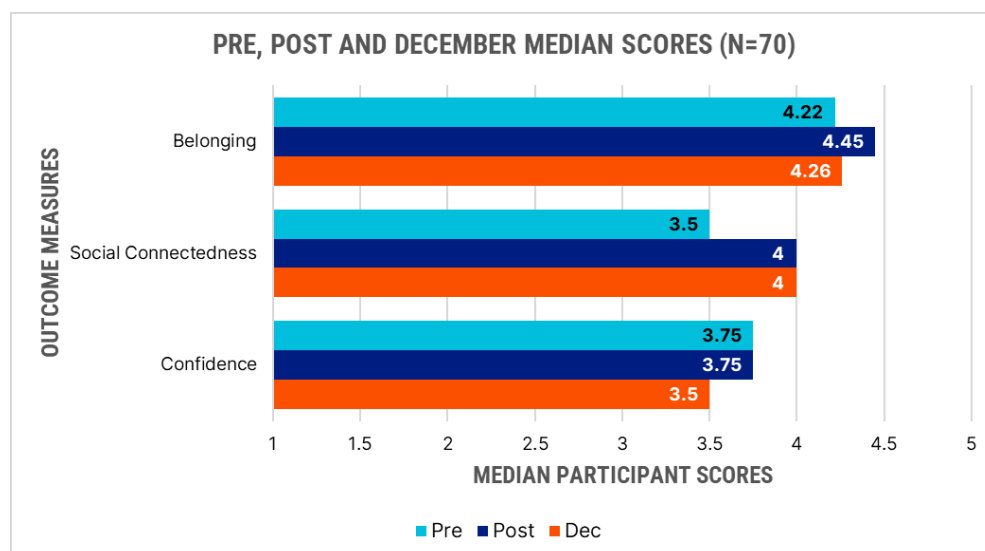
Figure 3: Pre and Post Median Belonging, Social Connectedness and Confidence Scores



70 Step Ahead participants completed the pre, post and December survey. The responses are summarised in [Figure 4](#). Unlike for the pre and post surveys, the median scores do not increase at each survey point, although some increases are seen within time stages. Again, we tested for statistical significance.

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Figure 4 Pre, Post and December Median Belonging, Social Connectedness and Confidence Scores



i) The Impact of Step Ahead on Students' Sense of Belonging

There were general increases in students' sense of belonging across the three measurement points which were statistically tested. **The Wilcoxon signed-rank test conducted on the pre and post sense of belonging scores (n=200) found a statistically significant increase at the 0.1% level ($Z = -3.441, p < 0.001$).**

A Friedman test on the matched pre, post and December scores (n=70) determined that there was a **statistically significant** difference in **belonging** scores, $\chi^2(2) = 7.018, p = 0.030$. Additional tests are required in this instance to understand the nature of the change. The additional tests measure the significance of changes from pre to post, pre to December and post to December with an adjusted significance level of 1.7%.

There were no significant differences between the pre and December survey ($Z = -1.825, p = 0.068$) or between the post and December surveys ($Z = -1.358, p = 0.175$), despite an overall increase in the belonging reporting across the surveys. **There was a statistically significant increase in belonging between the pre and post surveys ($Z = -3.441, p < 0.001$).**

Additionally, we collected comments from students which related to their belonging:

"I found a really kind and welcoming community."

"Getting a head start to meeting people you know are in a similar situation to you was a great part of Step Ahead."

"It was important to me to make connections as a mature learner and the Step Ahead event supported this."

ii) The Impact of Step Ahead on Students' Social Connectedness

We are pleased to report a statistically significant increase for social connectedness scores. **The Wilcoxon signed-rank test found a statistically significant increase between the pre and post scores (n=200) at the 0.1% level ($Z = -6.501, p < 0.001$).**

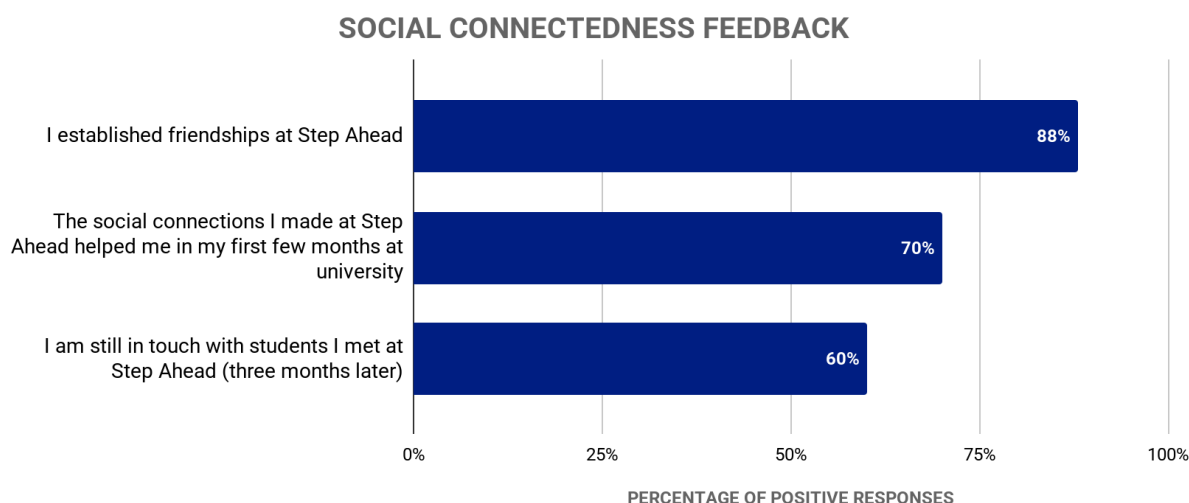
A Friedman test determined there were statistically significant differences in social connectedness between the survey times, $\chi^2(2) = 24.228, p < 0.001$. Wilcoxon signed-rank tests were conducted with a Bonferroni correction applied, resulting in a significance level set of 1.7%. There were no significant

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differences between the post and December surveys ($Z = -1.748, p = 0.081$). **There was a statistically significant increase in social connectedness between the pre and post surveys ($Z = -6.501, p < 0.001$) and between the pre and December surveys ($Z = -2.575, p = 0.010$).**

In addition to the findings from the validated scales, the feedback questions in the December follow-up survey showed the positive impact of Step Ahead on students' social connectedness (see [Figure 5](#)). Here, 'responded positively' refers to responses of 'yes' to a 'yes/ 'no' question or 'agree/ 'strongly agree' to a scaled question.

Figure 5: Positive response rates for social connectedness feedback questions



In their own words attendees spoke about their social connections as below:

"The social aspect of Step Ahead enabled me to speak to multiple people on my course, two of whom are now my lab partners and close friends."

"Step Ahead was great for boosting confidence in university as a whole, as it facilitated meeting other freshers removing the unease of heading straight to freshers blind."

"The social side of Step Ahead is really pushed from the get-go with Student Helpers facilitating communication between peers and this is amazing for those who are commuting since they commonly feel as though they are left out of on campus student life."

iii) The Impact of Step Ahead on Students' Confidence

The confidence survey responses for this cohort were somewhat different from last year's scores, which is reflected in the statistical tests. The difference in students' confidence scores at the pre and post surveys was found to be non-significant ($Z = -1.745, p = 0.081$) using a Wilcoxon signed-rank test ($n=200$). Furthermore, a Friedman test ($n=70$) found no statistically significant differences between the confidence scores at the three survey times, $\chi^2(2) = 5.025, p = 0.081$.

However, when students were asked in the post-Step Ahead survey to state if they agreed/ disagreed with the statement "I feel more confident about starting university after attending Step Ahead", 82% of students responded with 'agree' or 'strongly agree'. Finally, students shared comments linked with confidence in the feedback survey:

"Now I feel more confident about starting Uni and knowing which support services are available."

"Feeling more confident in who I am before starting uni!"

"While the people I met at Step Ahead I'm not really in contact with anymore, it gave me the confidence to make other friends during Freshers' and it served as a 'proof of concept'... that making new friends in a strange place is actually pretty easy."

iv) Student Communities analysis

We also conducted a Student Communities analysis to identify whether the significant changes seen were reflected when considering demographic characteristics. Further Wilcoxon signed-rank tests were conducted, the results are shown in [table 1](#).

Table 1 - Wilcoxon signed-rank testing results between pre and post scores for Student Communities

Student Communities	n	Belonging	Social Connectedness	Confidence
Disabled	110	Significant ***	Significant ***	Not sig
No known disability	90	Not sig	Significant ***	Not sig
Students from Minoritised Ethnicity backgrounds ♦	45	Significant *	Significant **	Not sig
White Students	155	Significant **	Significant ***	Not sig
Mature	25	Not sig	Not sig	Not sig
Young	175	Significant ***	Significant ***	Not sig
IMD Q1	40	Not sig	Significant *	Not sig
IMD Q5	50	Not sig	Significant **	Not sig
No parental history of HE	75	Significant **	Significant ***	Not sig
Other	125	Significant *	Significant ***	Not sig
WP Scheme and contextual offer	110	Significant **	Significant ***	Significant *
Not WP/Contextual	90	Not sig	Significant ***	Not sig

* 5% confidence level - lightest green, ** 1% confidence level - medium green, *** 0.1% confidence level - darkest green

♦ Minoritised ethnicity groups have been aggregated for statistical purposes, the disaggregated groups were too small for this analysis but are available for descriptive review.

The significant differences we saw at the cohort level are seen in some Student Communities for some outcomes but not all. This could be due to many reasons, which will be explored further in the [discussion section](#). Interestingly, although no cohort level significant differences were found for confidence, there was a statistically significant increase in confidence scores for students who participated in a WP scheme or who received a contextual offer.

v) One/Two Day analysis

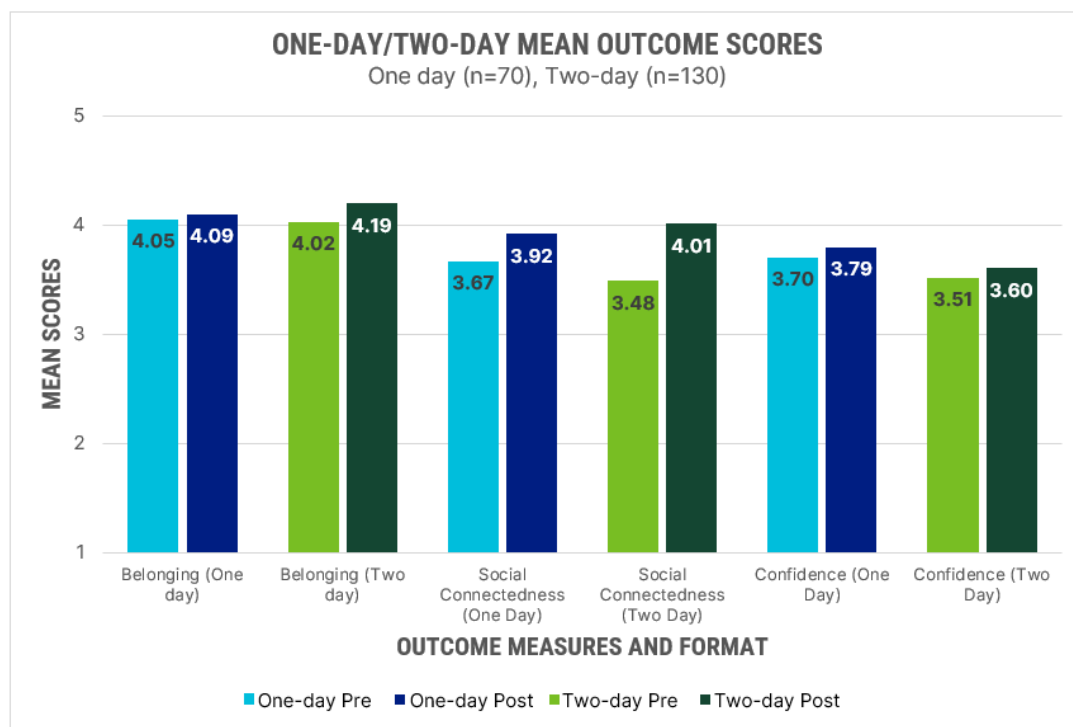
Step Ahead runs in two formats: as a one-day programme and a two-day programme with an overnight stay. To understand whether the format has an impact on the outcomes, we investigated this. Of the 200

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students who completed the pre and post surveys, 70 attended a one-day event and 130 attended one of the two-day events, the cohort outcome data is shown in [Figure 6](#).

There is an increase for each outcome measure for both formats. Consistently, mean outcome scores are higher for one-day attendees than the two-day attendees. Perhaps due to the lower pre survey scores, the two-day attendees have a larger increase for belonging and social connectedness (the increase for confidence mean scores is the same for one/two-day). Interestingly, the two-day attendee belonging and social connectedness average scores are higher than for one-day attendees, despite a lower mean pre score. We tested the scores for statistical significance.

Figure 6: Pre and Post Mean Outcome Scores by Step Ahead Format



To compare the one-day and two-day scores, a Mann-Whitney test was conducted and assumptions were met. The test **did not** find a statistically significant difference between the mean scores for one-day compared to two-day participants for any outcome measure:

- Belonging; ($U = 4256.0$, $p = 0.405$)
- Social connectedness; ($U = 4076.0$, $p = 0.196$)
- Confidence; ($U = 4296.5$, $p = 0.450$)

This suggests that there were no differences in the outcome scores for the attendees of the one-day and two-day events, and that participants have similar experience on one-day and two-day events.

We did further Wilcoxon signed-rank tests on the pre and post scores for the one-day and two-day cohorts. A **statistically significant** increase in **social connectedness** was found in the **one-day** cohort between pre and post surveys; ($Z = -2.4131$, $p = 0.015$). The differences for belonging and confidence were found to be non significant, ($Z = -1.240$, $p = 0.215$) and ($Z = -0.978$, $p = 0.328$) respectively.

For the **two-day** cohort, **statistically significant** increases were observed for both **belonging** and **social connectedness**, ($Z = -3.413$, $p < 0.001$) and ($Z = -6.318$, $p < 0.001$) respectively. The difference between confidence scores was not significant, ($Z = -1.467$, $p = 0.142$). These results are consistent with the cohort findings.

Discussion

Improvements in Belonging, Social Connectedness and Confidence

As in previous years, there has been a statistically significant increase in belonging after attending Step Ahead. For the first time we have included social connectedness as an outcome, and have also found a statistically significant improvement. These results provide further evidence supporting our Theory of Change, that Step Ahead has a positive impact, particularly in intermediate outcomes linked to student success at university.

When we consider the impact of Step Ahead after several months we saw that there were significant increases in social connectedness from before and after Step Ahead, as well as before and in December. The belonging scores were again found to significantly increase immediately after Step Ahead when we considered the sample of students who responded to all three surveys, but the long-term results were not statistically significant. We see in the literature that sense of belonging tends to be higher at the start of university and significantly decreases across the year (Gilani et al., 2026), so while we didn't find a statistically significant increase from the start to December, it is encouraging to see a small non-significant increase from before Step Ahead to December.

Descriptively the median confidence score reduced in December, however, the statistical testing found no statistically significant difference (positive or negative) between the confidence levels at pre, post, and December surveys. Therefore with this evidence, this is not cause for concern at this stage, but will be something we continue to monitor in the future. From this data and these tests we cannot say why no statistically significant differences were found for confidence scores this year. Last year a significant difference was found in a smaller cohort, but interestingly the confidence scores were lower ([Appendix D](#)). While we would hope to see significant increases in our outcomes, it is encouraging to see higher levels of confidence in our cohort. This is something to consider for future evaluations.

Additionally, the non-significant drop seen in confidence scores in December could be explained by a number of confounding factors. Firstly, this may be a larger trend in the student population that we are seeing in the Step Ahead cohort; perhaps after their first semester at York students become more aware of university life and how much there is to know and learn that an increase in awareness may negatively affect their confidence. This is something that we could test in future years using a control group. Additionally, it is also important to note that the number of students who completed all three surveys (70) was less than half of those who completed the first two (200). As a result, this is a much reduced sample and this does mean there is a higher chance that this subgroup doesn't effectively capture the full cohort's experience at the December survey point.

Student Communities

For the first time this year, the sample size was large enough to analyse results by Student Communities. We found a statistically significant increase in social connectedness for all groups, with the exception of mature students, which may be due to their smaller sample size. These results are encouraging and suggest that Step Ahead is helping students build social connections at the start of their time at York.

Although not every group had a statistically significant increase for sense of belonging, importantly we did see statistically significant increases for multiple target groups; disabled students, students from minoritised ethnic backgrounds, students with no parental history of higher education and students who attended a Widening Participation programme or received a Contextual Offer. This provides strong evidence that Step Ahead is having a positive impact for the students it is designed to help.

Overall, confidence scores did not increase significantly at cohort level. However, a significant increase was found for students who attended a Widening Participation programme or received a Contextual Offer. This valuable insight shows the effectiveness of Step Ahead for such a large proportion of the Step Ahead cohort, and demonstrates that the overall non-significant result is still a valuable finding.

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Although we didn't find many statistically significant increases for different Student Communities, this doesn't mean that these increases weren't important. While there is not enough evidence at this time to say changes to confidence were statistically significant for the majority of Student Communities, it's still important to note the increases in confidence for nearly all student groups. This is something we can continue to monitor in future years.

Differences in Impact Between the 1-Day and 2-Day Events

In terms of comparing the 1-day and 2-day events, due to the high response rates this year it was possible to compare the experiences of participants at both events. There was no statistically significant difference between the two formats of the events when compared with each other. This key finding indicates that despite the differences in the scores and significance levels for the two cohorts we can be confident that the Step Ahead one-day and two-day experience is not significantly different for participants.

Statistical tests found some significant increases for outcome scores for both one-day and two-day participants, but not for all outcomes. A significant difference in social connectedness was observed for both one-day and two-day participants, whereas for belonging a statistically significant result was only found for two-day participants. This is something we will continue to monitor and investigate in future evaluations. The differences in confidence were not significant for either group. These null results may be explained by the sizes of the cohorts, as there are almost twice as many participants who attended the two-day event, it is not surprising we found more significant differences for this group.

Strengths, limitations and future evaluation plans

The strengths of this evaluation design come from the repeated measures design and the use of validated scales. Additionally, the high response rate this year allowed for more analysis than has been possible previously. While significant increases in belonging and social connectedness were found across the different data collection points, there are limits to this impact evaluation. Firstly, only the students attending Step Ahead were surveyed, so we cannot say that Step Ahead is the cause of these increases, but we have shown there is a correlation between attending Step Ahead and increases in key outcome measures.

Building on the strengths in this evaluation and addressing the limitations, we plan in future evaluations to continue to monitor the key outcomes identified in the Theory of Change. Following this year's results, we will closely monitor and continue to investigate changes in the participants' confidence scores; we will compare the 2025 confidence pre score to new cohorts to understand whether confidence scores continue to be higher in general at entry and why, or whether the high scores in 2025 were an outlier. Similarly, in future evaluations we will continue to compare the experiences of the 1-day and 2-day participants with a particular focus on sense of belonging differences between the two groups. Furthermore, we will continue to investigate trends at a cohort and student communities level. Additionally if possible, we will incorporate a control group of comparable students into the evaluation design to identify trends happening in the first term for incoming students generally to compare with those who participated in Step Ahead.

In recent years we have demonstrated the positive impact of Step Ahead through increases in intermediate outcomes which are known to contribute to student continuation and completion. In future evaluations we plan to track the continuation and completion of Step Ahead students directly. As the data becomes available, we will measure impact by comparing continuation and completion rates of Step Ahead students with other students from similar Student Communities but did not attend Step Ahead.

While our focus has primarily been on the positive impact of Step Ahead on participants, we also wish to acknowledge the positive impact that Step Ahead has on the students who are selected to support its development and delivery. All of our paid Step Ahead Student Helpers had previously attended Step

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Ahead as new students and were part of at least one Student Community. While currently, Student Helpers' feedback is included in the operational review of Step Ahead, our intention is to include student helpers experiences in future impact evaluations.

Acknowledgements and Contact Information

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Appendix A: Step Ahead Narrative Theory of Change

Situation:

Students from underrepresented groups have consistently lower rates of 'good' continuation, completion and awarding outcomes. Students may not enter university with knowledge of how their institution works, support available to them and academic expectations for their studies, which may lead to lower rates of 'good' continuation, completion and awarding outcomes.

Inputs:

- Staff preparation and delivery time
- Student staff recruitment and time
- Participant accommodation
- Venue costs
- Resources and attendee packs

Activities

- Campus tours and orientation (leads to Immediate Outcome 1)
- Step Ahead sessions: Preparing to study, Getting Involved, Looking After Yourself, Enhancing your Employability, Student Finance, Disability Support (Leads to Immediate Outcome 2)
- Social Events (leads to Immediate Outcome 3)
- Student panels (leads to Immediate Outcome 1, 3 and 4)

Outcomes (Immediate)

1. Increased awareness and familiarity of the University of York campus and support services (Leads to Immediate Outcome 2)
2. Increased knowledge of academic expectations and requirements (Leads to Immediate Outcome 1)
3. Developing friendships, social networks and peer support (Leads to Immediate Outcome 2 and 3)
4. *Student helper outcome*: Developing transferable employability skills such as public speaking in addition to increased sense of belonging (Leads to Impact 2)

Outcomes (Intermediate)

1. Increased confidence at the start of their studies (Leads to Impact 1)
2. Increased sense of belonging at York (Leads to Impact 1)
3. Increased social connectedness (Leads to Impact 1)

Impact

1. Improved experience in the transition to university (Leads to Impact 2)
2. Improved continuation, completion and awarding outcomes.

Rationale

- A transition programme provides opportunity for students to process information before their studies start, the extra settling in time increases belonging and confidence.
- Belonging and confidence have been linked in academic and sector evidence to positive continuation, completion and awarding.

Assumptions

- The needs of all underrepresented students can be covered by the same activities
- Students beginning their studies want to attend a transition programme.

Appendix B: Student Communities

Attendance numbers are rounded to the nearest 5, in line with HESA guidance. Any values with a zero indicate there were students in this group, any with a '-' indicate no students from this group attended.

Student Group	Definition	1 day	2 day
Disabled	Students who report a disability, this includes students with long-term health conditions, specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia, dyspraxia and ADHD, autistic spectrum conditions and mental health conditions	50	110
Contextual Offer Holders (COH), Alternative or Widening Participation Offer (WPO) Holders	Student who have received a Contextual Offer from the University	40	75
First Generation	Students who are the first generation in their family to go to university.	45	60
LGBTQ+	Students who identify with one or more of the LGBTQ+ communities	25	65
Commuter students	Students who plan to commute to university at the time of applying to Step Ahead.	70	5
Low-Income	Students who have self-identified as 'from a low-income household' on the application form	25	45
Minoritised Ethnic Groups	Students from a Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic (sometimes referred to as BAME ¹) background	25	40
Mature	Students who will be 21 or over on my first day at university	30	15
Estranged student	Students who are estranged from both of their biological or adoptive parents	5	10
Has children	Students who are parents	10	5
Care Experienced	Students who have care experience	5	5
Seeking Asylum	A student who is a refugee or a student seeking asylum in the UK	5	5
Outreach Programme	Student who participated in a University of York outreach programme (Black Access, Realising Opportunities or Next Step York)	5	5
Carer	Students with unpaid caring responsibilities for a family member	0	5
Gypsy, Roma or Traveller heritage (GRT)	Students from a Gypsy, Roma, Traveller, Showmen or Boater background	0	0

¹As set out in our [APP](#) (page 7), wherever possible we are explicit about which students we are referring to when we discuss minoritised ethnic groups, to best support the differing needs of each group. For the anonymity of students in this report and for statistical testing, sometimes it is necessary to group minoritised groups while still using the most appropriate and least harmful language possible.

Appendix C: Impact Evaluation Questions**Step Ahead Impact Evaluation 2025 - Evaluation Questions**

These questions ask you to think about your university experience and expectations².					
Throughout your course, how confident are you that you will be able to:	Not at all confident	Only slightly confident	Fairly Confident	Predominantly confident	Very confident
Study effectively on your own in independent/ private study	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Manage your workload to meet coursework deadlines	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Plan appropriate revision schedules	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Remain adequately motivated throughout	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The following statements relate to how you feel about being a higher-education student³.					
Please think about each statement and indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree:	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither agree/disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I feel I belong in higher education	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I made the right decision in choosing to study at this higher education institution	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I feel supported by this higher education institution	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I see myself as part of the community at this higher education institution	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Social Connectedness statements					
I feel confident about meeting people and making new friends	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I am confident other students would support me to succeed at university	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

² [Academic Behavioural Confidence Scale \(Sander & Sanders, 2009\)](#), ABC Studying Factor, p.27

³ [Access and Success Questionnaire \(ASQ\), TASO](#), Scale 7a

STEP AHEAD IMPACT EVALUATION 2025

Appendix D: Confidence median scores in 2024 and 2025

	2024		2025	
	Pre/Post cohort (n=70)	Pre, Post and Dec cohort (n=40)	Pre/Post cohort (n=200)	Pre, Post and Dec cohort (n =70)
Confidence Pre	3	3	3.78	3.75
Confidence Post	3.125	3.25	4.0	3.75
Confidence December	n/a	3.5	n/a	3.5