

Dr Carol Fuller, University of Reading

Email: c.l.fuller@reading.ac.uk Tel: 01183782662

Ufton Research Project

Executive Summary

The Project:

This research explored the role of outdoor residential experiences on the educational attainment and confidence of a group of under achieving students from socially disadvantaged backgrounds. To track the impact that residential visits had on educational attainment and changes in levels of confidence, the research design was a mixed methods, intervention, case study. The project focused on two groups of students and followed these from age 14 to 16 years. The research comprises a group of 12 students as well as a comparison group of 12 students. The two groups are matched for gender, Pupil Premium and, as far as possible, for ethnicity and actual and predicted levels of attainment, in terms of the target for 5 A*-C at GCSE, as well as attainment in the core subjects of English, Maths and Science. The study sought to capture the range of educational impacts of residential outdoor experiences, and so tracked two groups of students over a period of three years: the research group, who took part in twice yearly, three day residential visits and a comparison group that did not. Information relevant to this sample appears in Table 1:

	Research Group	Comparison Group
Gender	9 Male 3 Female	9 Male 3 Female
Pupil Premium	8	5
ESL	3	3

Table 1 – Information on participants

The impact of the Ufton Court visits was explored via school attainment data, survey and one to one interviews. Data collection methods also included participant observations, which focused on behaviour and interactions, and more unstructured interviews, with respect to participation in the activities being undertaken. All University ethical guidelines were complied with in carrying out this research.

Headline findings – in the context of disadvantage, the results for GCSE educational gains in terms of overall attainment (attainment 8) as well as attainment in GCSE English and Maths show that the attainment results were much better for the research group and that the difference in attainment between the two groups is statistically significant. This means that we can say, with some confidence, that the Ufton experiences have contributed in an important way to the overall educational attainment outcomes for the students in the research group.

Key Findings

From the Attainment Data

- A statistical analysisⁱ of the predicted Attainment 8 and Actual Attainmentⁱⁱ 8 scores show that the attainment of the research group is significantly different to that of the comparison group. Whilst neither group achieved the overall expected attainment, the research group still did much better, with attainment just under the expected, with an average “gain” of minus 0.23 (calculated by subtracting each student’s predicted Attainment 8 from their actual Attainment 8 score). This is in contrast to the comparison group which had an average attainment gain score of minus 13.88 meaning that this group were almost 14 points below their expected score compared to the research group who were very nearly meeting expectations. An independent samples t testⁱⁱⁱ shows the difference between the two groups is statistically significant at the 0.01 level suggesting that there has been a significant gain in the overall attainment for the research group: $t, (18), = 2.96, p < .01$
- An independent samples t test also demonstrated a highly statistically significant gain for the research group in English $t, (18), = 3.84, p < .001$ and marginal gains in Maths $t, (18), = 2.02, p < = 0.058$
- In science, the research group still made a greater overall average gain than the comparison group. The research group made a mean gain of -13.20 compared to the comparison group who made a mean gain of -24.20. However, the difference between the research and comparison groups for science was not statistically significant, so should be interpreted cautiously $t, (18), = 1.37, p = 0.18$

From the Interviews

- ‘Repeatedness’ was the fundamental key to the success of these visits. This is because repeated visits enabled students to embed their learning and ensure the longer term impact of their visits
- The ‘Cohort Effect’ was also important to the outcomes of the research. Being part of a fixed cohort enabled students to develop relationships out of school which then had an important impact when transferred back into school
- Unexpected outcomes were the way that students could clearly link their different experiences at Ufton to a change in their own approach to learning within school

- Students self-reported improvement in attainment in year 10 as a result if their own sense of increased confidence in school was mirrored in their actual results
- Improved relationships with family and friends were an additional positive outcome of the Ufton experiences. Improvements in confidence resulted in better behaviour at school and home and this had positive consequences for relationships outside of school.
- Improved confidence in school resulted in greater participation in the life of the school, and in extra-curricular activities.

For further information, please contact Dr Carol Fuller c.l.fuller@reading.ac.uk

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ⁱ Initial data screening identified two students in both the research and comparison groups who had done unexpectedly well and were thus identified as statistical outliers. These were therefore removed from the analysis. However, results suggest statistically significant attainment gains for the research group with and without the outliers.

ⁱⁱ Attainment 8 measures the achievement of a pupil across 8 subjects including mathematics (double weighted) and English (double weighted), 3 further qualifications that count in the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) measure and 3 further qualifications that can be GCSE qualifications (including EBacc subjects) or any other non-GCSE qualifications on the DfE approved list. The Attainment 8 Expected and Actual Grades are calculated (https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/456438/Progress_8_school_performance_measure_2015_updated_August_2015.pdf)