



EVALUATION OF FACT

Fuelling Ambitions Creatively Together



A student video unit from the Oasis Academy

“Since joining the FACT group my confidence has improved. Before the project I was quite shy, but now I have the confidence to speak out, to share my ideas, and to work with like-minded students. I can honestly say that being part of the FACT project has changed my life. I am now far more confident and it has helped me in other lessons. It has given me the opportunity to meet new businesses and find out how new businesses run. It has shown me new career paths that I might want to work in. More than anything, being part of the FACT project has improved my chances of being successful in the future.”

Video-recording by a student from All Hallows School

1 INTRODUCTION

The University of Salford was invited to act as evaluation partner in this prestigious Salford City Council initiative to raise ambition and broaden horizons for secondary school students in Salford. Students were engaged in a variety of activities at the beginning and at the end of the FACT project, whenever possibly allowing them to gather the data from each other in response to loosely worded questions, in order to establish their perspectives on what they had experienced, what had been learned, and how the project had exerted an impact on their attitudes and thoughts about future careers and employment. A mobile research laboratory was taken to two Hackathon events at Media City UK to enable a variety of means of contributing to the evaluation, and visits were made to schools to follow up at the conclusion of the initiative. Ongoing findings were fed into the project steering committee during the lifetime of the project, to be combined with the thoughts of those staff who were working with the schools to help to address emerging problems.

2 HACKATHON EVENTS

The students from each school were engaged during the two whole-day events at MediaCity UK to offer their thoughts on their expectations, hopes and achievements. They had options to do this by means of a three-item online questionnaire (different for each day) on iPads, responding to the same questions while video-interviewing each other, or audio-recording responses to questions posed by the researcher or their colleagues. All responses were collated from each modes and presented in the word clouds below.



Looking Forward at the First Hackathon

Hackathon Day 1, Question 1

What do you hope to gain from the Hackathon today?



At this point the young people were unclear exactly what they expected to gain from the experience, but they already understood the importance of the opportunity to access business owners, and they were keen to soak up more knowledge generally. Understandably, they showed little sign at this point of taking control or being ready to break the boundaries of their current thought processes. Creativity was mentioned only briefly.

Hackathon Day 1, Question 2

What makes you most excited about the FACT programme?



The Moorside video-recording unit

The most exciting aspect of the initiative at this point was simply the unknown. Even the commonly reported “learning new things” expressed in different ways suggests general excitement about approaching something, anything new, and this supported to a degree by thoughts of adopting novel, creative strategies to achieve an objective.

The vague notion of participating in “something big” - even if its nature and identity was yet to be clarified - was introduced. About half of the responses of “Don’t know” reflected simple willingness to see what would happen and “give it a go”, though there was also an element of “don’t know and don’t care”.

The intrigue of business as a new encounter was widespread, while further elucidation of what “business” meant was not forthcoming at this point.



Hackathon Day 1, Question 3

What do you hope might be different for you personally after completing this project?



With some coaxing and encouragement, and a little time to think, many managed to express tentative expectations of what could be different by the end of the day. Mostly, students were still in the mode of passive receipt of information, expecting to have more detail of potential careers, understanding issues of which they had no prior understanding, but some elements of personal ambition were making themselves known.

Only a single student expected their leadership skills to be developed (and this proved to have been achieved by the end of the second day).

Stimulation of creativity was not a major expectation, and the notion of personal improvement was hardly to be seen. Nevertheless, there was an obvious undercurrent of thinking about a career that would be personally fulfilling, while some personal attributes and the glimmerings of ambition for the project to succeed were introduced.



Video-recording by an Ellesmere Park student

Looking Back after the Second Hackathon

The second Hackathon event was held one week later. The schools visited the mobile research laboratory again in turns to answer revised questions in the same available formats.

Hackathon Day2, Question 1

How have your plans moved on in the last week?

(This might be for you personally or for your team.)

changed project completely presented idea
vision clarified reviewed pros and cons
refined the idea improved product
enhanced confidence
planning moved on
group cohesion improved

There was an obvious progression for some schools and teams. Most obviously, the team's idea had matured and improved, largely in response to the feedback and challenges from entrepreneurs, digital technology specialists and representatives of major local industries. One team had overcome conflict between two competing ideas and settled on a third alternative.

The responses were focused more on the idea or the project, on progress towards a final product, but also on group dynamics. In video recording, students spoke clearly about their respective roles in the project team, and they took pride in having presented their idea. They took to the alternative roles of actor, questioner, director, clapperboard, camera operator more readily in the video-recording sessions. They seemed to have come to recognise the importance of such role diversity in any business or complex endeavour. There was little thought in response to this question about personal growth or progress.



Hackathon day 2, Question 2

What do you plan to achieve at the Hackathon today?



A distinctly competitive element entered the arena in response to this question. The students spoke with relish of “taking on the dragons” and with certainty of winning the prize. The vital importance of offering a sound presentation of their project was emphasised, together with the need to demonstrate effective teamwork and to express their thoughts clearly. While very few students explicitly reported an expectation of having fun, the glee with which the forthcoming encounter was anticipated suggested that almost all expected to enjoy the experience.



Buile Hill video-recorded discussion group

An equally important aspect to the students was the potential (and determination) to make their planned product a reality.

Hackathon day 2, Question 3

What is going to be different for you (personally) after taking part in the FACT project and the Hackathon?



Within the space of one week, the responses to this question had changed remarkably. Students reported strongly that they would be more confident generally, but especially in the presentation of their ideas. They spoke of working more effectively with others in teamwork. Clearly, these are life skills which are transferable widely beyond the bounds of the FACT initiative.



From simply seeking information about possible careers, they had moved on to thinking more carefully and in an informed manner about their options and an expanded horizon of opportunities, including employment, business, and further qualifications. While only from a minority, there were thoughts about being more healthy, with increased enthusiasm and creativity, and the development of leadership skills. Independently, from different teams, came comments about

“following [or pursuing] my dreams”. The identification of both individual and group personal growth was a notable effect of the work in schools in the period between the two events and of the events themselves.

3 FINAL EVALUATION IN SCHOOLS

On completion of the project visits were made to the schools to ensure end-point completion of the hexagon scores and to elicit final perspectives from the students on the outcomes of the initiative. Since not all students had the same experiences and exposure to businesses and challenges (some joining the project later on), it became difficult to gain a meaningful response from some members of the team about the ultimate impact of the initiative.

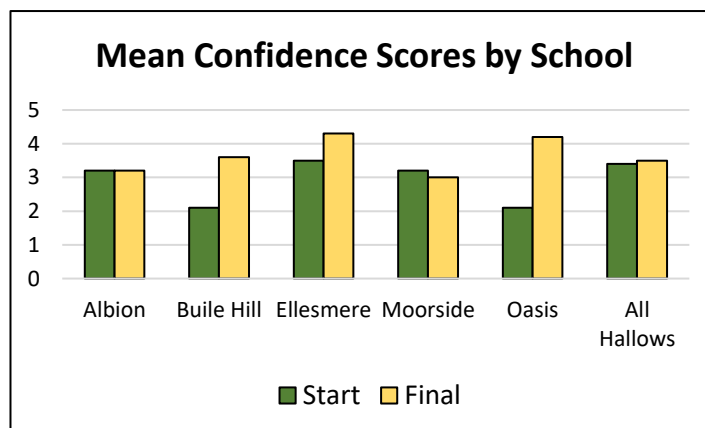
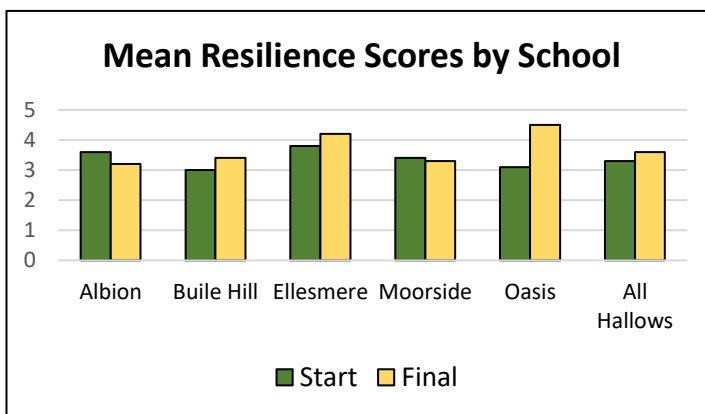
Hexagon Scores

The hexagon tool required student to rate their skillset in six areas: resilience, confidence, challenge, social skills for work, communication, and aspiration/motivation.

The scores were from...

- (1) “This something that I struggle with and don’t feel I have the skill” to...
- (5) “I am completely capable and could support others to develop this skill”.

There was much missing data, either with missing start scores or missing



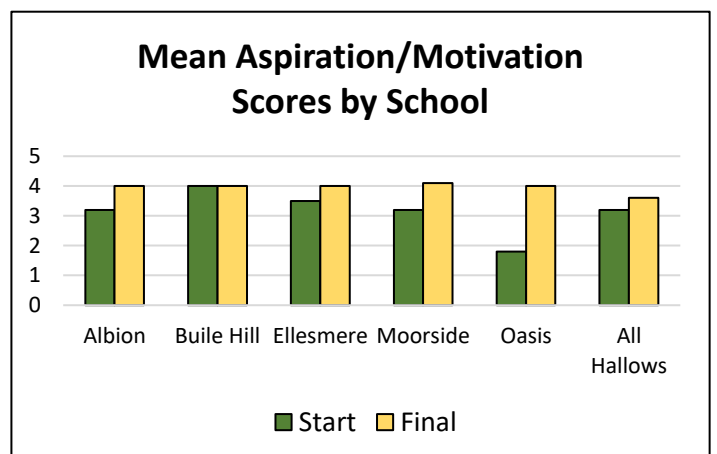
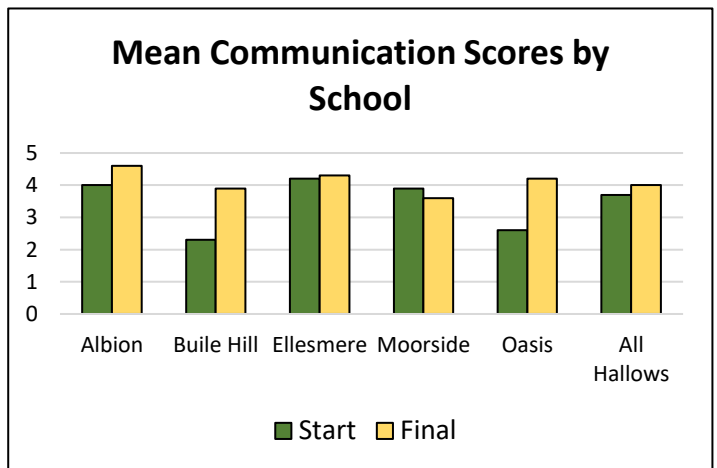
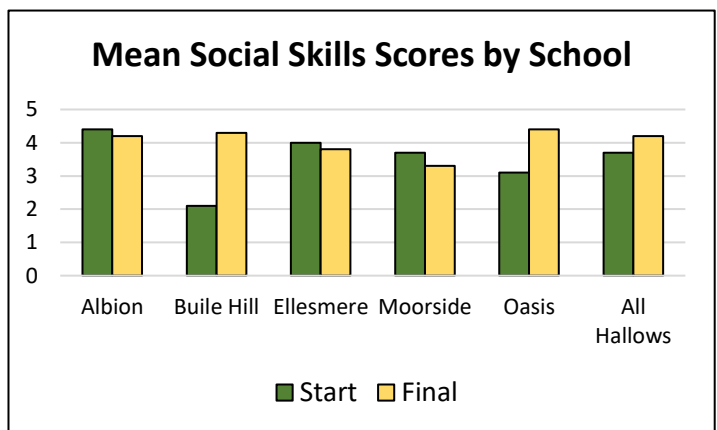
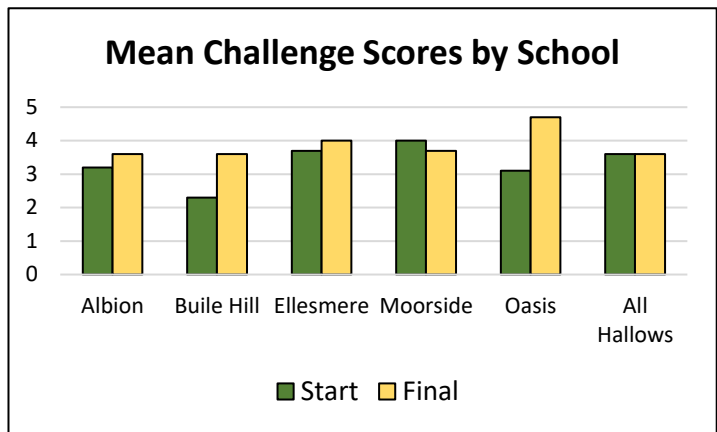
final scores, these reflecting varied membership of the teams over time. Such cases were omitted from the analysis.

Starting with exceptionally high scores meant that improvement could not be shown for some.

Some students were adamant that they had made no improvement, with exceptionally low scores at start and finish.

While the mean scores for schools tend to show only minor change, some individual cases had improved from initial scores of 1 or 2 to scores of 4 or 5 at the final record.

Three schools showed overall improvement in scores across all factors.



Qualitative Review

Three questions were posed to the students - to be answered in whatever way they chose. Some students elected for a group discussion while some preferred to make a final talking head video recording (either alone or as part of a production group). Two decided to interview each other with audio-recorders. A few completed the questions on iPads, and yet others chose to write their responses.



Video recording by a student from Albion Academy

A. *FACT was intended to introduce you to experiences with local businesses and industries that you might not have known about. How well has that gone, and what did you learn from the experiences?*



When we first thought of our app we thought it was a really good idea for our families and friends because lots of people have mental health issues. When we went to the hospital they said it was really important and the NHS would want to fund the app so we realised how much more important it was than we had thought.

We've contacted a company and they responded. It has opened my eyes into the world of business.

It has made me realise that it is hard to make a business and that you have to be the best.

I learned that there's a big market for our idea.

It has helped me to understand about maybe starting my own business and all the things that you have to do.

The visits to The Landing and the businesses there were really helpful, and being able to put our ideas to a panel of experts.

I learned about apprenticeships and how to run a business.

It's improved my social skills and teamwork.

I learned from the experience that a lot of people have jobs with a lot of purpose and they're very important.

I learned how hard it is to make an app and that it isn't simple.

We learned lots of things, developed our idea, and went on to win the competition!

I learned how to code.



After meeting the people from the different businesses, I realised how hard it is to run a business and create ideas that are in a certain price range.

Making something yourself that could become something big.

I learned about loads of things like apprenticeships and how to run a business.

It went very well and I realised a lot of important things.

I think that it went well. I learned a lot from the experience.

B. The intention was that these businesses and industries would help you to develop your ideas. What did you gain from this contact - perhaps about developing your project, but also about your own prospects?

It helped because we were speaking to people who have already succeeded in life and made that idea work. It just gave me confidence.

It gained exposure and showed how easy it can be to gain contact from existing companies.

It helped by giving us ideas to improve our project.

I have found that I need to have a good idea and then start developing.

They helped us a lot by telling us how we could make it better and told us what we need and who we need.

I learnt about how needed our project is but also how hard it is.

I learnt that we can't apply everything we want to our project, but we can develop our ideas into something more interesting that would cost us a little amount of money.

It's hard to wrap around inside the mind of someone with mental illnesses and to put it in an app. There are lots of specific tasks to do - like coding and so on.

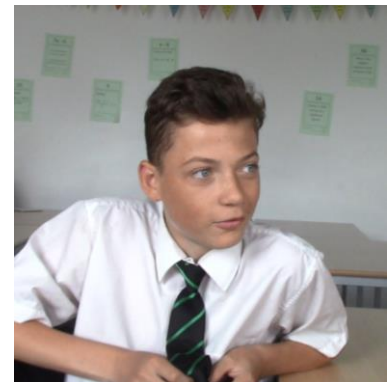
They helped us by giving us ideas on things to help.

It gave us more contacts to help us to develop our project.

I gained thoughts on different jobs.

I had more thoughts on different jobs, etc.

I gained a lot of ideas for my pitch, and businesses got in touch.



C. Think about what the whole experience has been. How has it changed your thoughts about your potential or your possible career paths? What you might be capable of doing when you leave school?

It has definitely made me think about business as a life choice, especially publicity/advertisement wise.

It had opened my mind to different jobs than what I knew was out there.

It's made me more confident to speak up in presentations and things.

It's helped us to think about what we should accomplish in the future. For example, when you go and look at different businesses it inspires us and gives us more ideas about opportunities and what we might achieve in life.



Since joining the FACT group my confidence has improved. Before the project I was quite shy, but now I have the confidence to speak out, to share my ideas, to work with like-minded students. I can honestly say that being part of the FACT project has changed my life. I am now far more confident and it has helped me in other lessons. It has given me the opportunity to meet new businesses and find out how new businesses run. It has shown me new career paths that I might want to work in. More than anything, being part of the FACT project has improved my chances of being successful in the future.

Helping people has always been my number 1 priority so I think this has really helped me to find what I want to do in the future. I have always been interested in health, and I believe that I could make a difference to not only my life but other people's.

It has made me more certain than ever to stick to my career plan. The app has potential but it has made me more secure in what I want to be my career when I'm older. I want to be a therapist with children with mental health issues.

For me it hasn't changed my opinion of my career path.

This experience hasn't changed any of my thoughts about my career path.

For me personally, it hasn't made me change my thought on when I want to be when I'm older.

I want to be a nurse. My plans haven't changed.

This project has not changed my thoughts on what I want to be.

I am still going to be a vet after my experiences at Media City.



A Perspective from Teachers

Some teachers remarked on the changing membership of teams during the project. In some cases there was a thread of continuity, but in others widescale change of membership occurred from start to finish. This was seen in one case as a means of securing inclusion in the movement by as many students as possible, and the teacher retained a personal (and mental) record of which students had taken part at which points. Another teacher could also recall which students had been part from the start and which had joined latterly, but they had found it difficult to maintain any momentum partly because of lack of time resource and partly because of inconsistency in the team membership.

Teachers were also able to prompt students to remember the many visits and experiences that had been part of the project - without suggesting what the outcome had been. Students

often then responded with additional thoughts. It seemed sometimes that students did not see the link between stimuli in the form of visits or engagement with industry and what had changed for them personally.

The complexity of the experience of involvement in the project, with more or less availability of allocated time for teachers, and the maturity required to interpret challenges and responses from entrepreneurs and others who contributed to the programme, were highlighted by teachers. The example was suggested of students concluding that it was essential to be the best to succeed in business: teachers experiencing difficulty in tempering this perspective to a position of meeting a threshold and the ability of many to succeed. This was thrown into perspective by the number of students who expressed precisely this extreme expectation of the success criteria for entering into business and who had dismissed the new alternatives since they were already settled on a career choice.

Whether FACT was the right approach for all students was questioned by two teachers. It was pondered that some young people would be better suited to an individual mentoring approach, and some would be better not “forced” to work in a team. The suggestion was that selection criteria for a further FACT cohort might need to take such issues and alternative approaches into account.

There were questions from the teachers about the hexagon as the right tool to measure personal change. Some thought that it was necessary to dig deeper to establish the personal achievements of individuals rather than of the team. In particular, one teacher would have liked to capture ongoing personal development, and while the hexagon was designed to do this, the student responses had not been helpful in many cases.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Schools had clearly varied in the approach to FACT and the degree of support offered to nominated teachers. This exerted a direct impact on the experiences that were accessed by students, but also on the degree to which students were assisted to interpret the learning that they had gained in order to transform this into the desired widening of horizons. Sufficient dedicated time is essential for teachers to be able to provide active and persistent prompts for students to make the most of their exposure to industry, careers, business and the challenges associated with these.

The selection of students might require further consideration. Teachers spoke of some student perhaps being more likely to benefit from a more individual mentoring approach than from the team approach adopted so far. This was attempted in at least two instances during the project, but it might be possible to factor this in within the ethos of FACT from the beginning of the next round.

The complexity of establishing what had been gained by students was recognised by teachers, with the hexagon perhaps not being sufficiently sensitive to elicit deeper aspects of learning and attitudinal maturation. Together with problems of extreme scores on commencement and many missing scores, this suggests the need to rethink either the choice or the implementation of this element.

Students reported overwhelmingly positive experiences from participation, some of this likely to be the result of novelty and extra-curriculum activity, but the greater part attributed to exposure to individuals and organisations not previously thought to be in the life-world of

most students. They were captivated by business principles, though perhaps at times picking up over-emphasis on competition and exclusivity of success at the expense of the possibilities of creativity and the value of a good idea. Nevertheless, they entered into the activities with gusto, and some had clear aspiration for what might be achieved. Local industry sparked a fire in some, and many remarked on the importance of learning about the breadth of opportunities on offer. They stood in awe of business men and women who had made their own dream a reality.

A remarkable number expressed a sense of learning and wider understanding of these opportunities yet affirmed their continued (and sometimes re-invigorated) passion for their previously chosen career. Engagement in FACT had offered them the chance to at least consider other options, to look more deeply into their existing choice, and to feel more confident that they were making an informed choice of career.

A small number of students expressed lack of interest or lack of engagement with the project, two in particular seeming to be determined not to have gained anything from their participation. It is difficult to know if hidden learning and impact had been involved, and what impact their inclusion had on others in their teams. Possibly, other students took their behaviour and attitude as being nothing new, perhaps contributions were made at times, and certainly one of these students excelled in presenting the group idea. Whether or not these are the students who could benefit more from a more individualised approach might be worth investigation.

The varied means of engagement with the young people, from video-recording units to individual contribution using iPads or through informal discussion seemed to be welcomed by them. While a great deal of footage proved to be unusable and was discarded, other items provided rich data, and the activity of speaking to a small audience while being recorded fitted well with one of the most commonly reported outcomes - an increase in confidence, particularly in presenting a pitch to others.

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September 2018