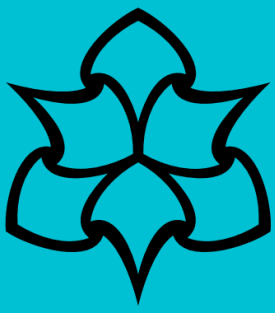# External evaluation of the *Represent* programme

Report for the National Literacy Trust

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on behalf of Manchester Metropolitan University

10th July 2023

Contents

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Executive Summary

NLT's *Represent* programme aimed to address the comparatively lower chances of educational achievement of excluded girls and their greater vulnerability to exploitation, grooming, violence, or engaging in criminal behaviour. Excluded girls often have chaotic lives, live in poverty and are less likely to have access to professionals that might provide the stability and support required for sustained engagement with positive role models[1]. In total, 265 education settings registered their interest in delivering the *Represent* programme with NLT and received the resource pack required for delivering sessions for 368 groups of students. Of these, at least 82[2] schools participated in one or more aspects of the evaluation project.

The evaluation of the *Represent* programme sets out to understand five key questions using a mixed-methods approach to explore the complexities of the girls' experiences, and how the programme has helped to connect the problems around attendance with pathways to future capabilities and wellbeing.

1. **How do participating girls and facilitators experience the *Represent* programme?**
    The resources provided to settings as part of the programme were described as engaging. Both facilitators and students appreciated the opportunity to talk about the issues explored as part of the session activities in safer small group contexts. Students could more readily identify themselves with the authors included in the resources and/or better understand other people's perspectives.

    The social action project that students developed as part of the last two sessions of the 10-week programme was completed with varied success. Notable projects included the creation of posters, co-authored poems, leaflets, and PowerPoint presentations. Some of these were displayed on the walls around the education settings, presented in assembly, and taken to a meeting held at the House of Lords.

2. **How does the *Represent* programme impact on facilitators' practice of supporting their students?**
   The benefits of being part of the programme include both the discussion opportunities that provide spaces for students to communicate their thoughts and the resources provided, especially the books, that resonated with the students' lives'. Students were able to develop better communication with staff and peers, engaging with issues that were relevant to them and developing a social action project that they are passionate about.

    Delivering the programme enabled facilitators to develop their understanding of their students' lives and strengthened their relationships with the students, as well as their ability to support them more effectively.

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[1] Arnauld, M and Gutman, S (2021) Supporting Literacy Participation for Underserved Children: A Set of Guidelines for Occupational Therapy Practice. *Journal of Occupational Therapy, Schools, & Early Intervention* 15(2):111-130 https://doi.org/10.1080/19411243.2021.1934234
[2] Not all respondents to the facilitators' questionnaires provided the name of their school.
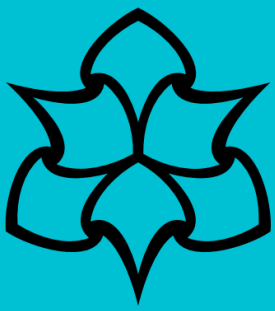
For facilitators working for external organisations delivering various interventions in schools, such as community sports groups, *Represent* provided access to new schools and a platform to broaden their programmes of support for students considered as vulnerable.

3. **What is the impact of the *Represent* programme on the participating girls' communication skills, understanding of forming positive relationships, resilience, and wellbeing?**

Pre- and post-intervention questionnaires measured student wellbeing using the Shortened Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale and a sliding scale adapted from the Outcome Rating Scale; resilience was measured using the student resilience scale; and communication skills and positive relationships measured using questions provided by NLT based on tools developed for previous programme evaluations. The paired samples t-test was used to explore changes in scores for all outcome variables between the pre- and post-intervention measures. There was a statistically significant increase in both wellbeing measures but no statistically significant change in the other measures after the programme.

Qualitative data suggested that the programme had a positive impact on student confidence, particularly in relation to more actively participating in class and reading, which were both evident beyond the programme space. *Represent* developed facilitator/student relationships and improved communication, particularly with staff.

4. **What is the extent to which this impact is sustained six months after participation?**

Aspects of the impact evident six months after participation include the positive impact on students' self-confidence, their confidence in reading, and increased communication skills. There were a minority of facilitators who described limited impact. Finally, long-term impact was most evident where *Represent* was delivered as part of a longer-term support structure, requiring processes of supportive transition post-intervention. It is important for facilitators, and educators in general, to develop trusting and consistent relationships for these students.

5. **What is the potential impact of the programme on other areas in participating girls' lives?**

Participation in the programme impacted upon students' relationships with parents: opening up lines of communication between students and parents, and between facilitators and parents. The programme also helped students to develop a greater sense of belonging to the setting and a wish to share their social action projects with the wider setting community.

Being part of Represent has enabled programme facilitators to build evidence that may influence future work through, for example, presentations of students' action projects at the meeting rooms at the House of Lords or painting a collage about their Represent on a school wall.
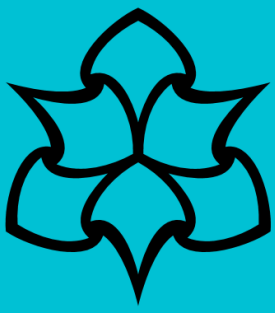
Recommendations

- As the *Represent* programme has demonstrated, small group provision in education settings is important for this cohort of students.

- The positive impact of an oracy focus was a key finding of the evaluation. Given the importance of oracy in terms of confidence and development of voice as a foundational skill for engaging with literacy, we would recommend an ongoing 'oracy first' approach for this demographic of students.

- Facilitators who engaged with the Represent programme were passionate educators who gave their own time to advocate for the programme, and to adapt and develop their own resources and versions. As such, we recommend collaborating with practitioners to co-develop future iterations and/or shared resource repositories.

- Further, an interactive platform showcasing student projects and work from the programme would be an impactful way to value the engagement of the students, and to develop good practice.

- Long-term impact is most evident where *Represent* is delivered as part of a longer-term support structure, requiring processes of supportive transition post intervention. Future programmes should consider the importance of sustained engagement to consolidate or even develop further positive outcomes.

Figure 1: Part of a wall mural about *Represent* painted on the wall of a secondary school

Background

Funded by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, the National Literacy Trust's (NLT) *Represent* programme was designed for girls aged 11 to 14. It offers mainstream secondary schools, alternative provision settings, and community sports clubs the chance to support girls excluded from, or at risk of being excluded from, mainstream education. *Represent* aimed to address the comparatively lower chances of educational achievement of these girls by improving their communication skills, resilience, and wellbeing, and increasing their understanding of how to form positive relationships.

The programme is structured around 10 one-hour sessions, centred on a selection of texts and activities that scaffold oracy and engage students in discussions to strengthen their deep understanding of the key messages and support literacy skills development. The content explores issues that particularly affect girls who have been excluded, or who are at risk of exclusion, but may also be used with mixed groups, as these are important themes for all.

The final two sessions of the programme focused on the development of a social action project. The students were encouraged to choose an issue they were interested in and create a project aimed at sharing their opinions of the issue. The programme sessions were delivered by schoolteachers, teaching assistants, librarians, and sports coaches from football club foundations and other external sports organisations delivering programmes in schools (referred to as facilitators in the rest of this report).

Between April 2022 and May 2023, NLT supported three phases of the programme, each corresponding to a school term. Phase 1 ran from May-July 2022, Phase 2 from September-December 2022, and Phase 3 from January-April 2023.
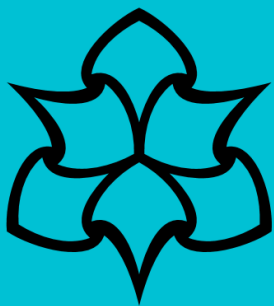
Initial training sessions were provided for facilitators via Zoom at the start of each phase. This training provided important information about programme delivery and continuing professional development focused on oracy skills to support meaningful student discussion; recordings were made available for review purposes and for anyone unable to attend in person.

Each setting registered for the programme received:

- A resource pack for each cohort, including workbooks with the texts and teaching notes.
- A set of books for each cohort of participants.
- Access to bespoke events with authors.
- Premium membership of the National Literacy Trust for one year.

Represent was designed and marketed for girls aged 11-14. However, as there is a high percentage of boys in alternative provision, these settings were able to deliver to a mixed group if this was the only delivery option.

Practice and research with girls at risk of exclusion is important[3], but also difficult for a number of reasons. Developing resources and a context for educational success with engagement in and of itself is important.

The evaluation was conducted alongside programme delivery. It was designed to support evidence-based adaptations in an ongoing way, with research designed to support delivery.

Two interim reports[4] provided feedback from facilitators involved in the first and second phases. This final evaluation report brings together all the data generated between May 2022 and June 2023.

Figure 2: Selection of books provided in the *Represent* resource pack

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[3] Clarke, E. (2023) Understanding girls' experiences of being at risk of permanent exclusion: How do we get there? BERA Blog https://www.bera.ac.uk/blog/understanding-girls-experiences-of-being-at-risk-of-permanent-exclusion-how-do-we-get-there; Seith, E. (2023) Boys more enthused than girls by school for first time. *Times Education Supplement* https://www.tes.com/magazine/news/general/boys-more-enthusiastic-girls-like-school-first-time-scotland#:~:text=The%20report%20states%3A%20%E2%80%9CAround%20one,liking%20school%20less%20than%20boys

[4] Corcoran, S., K. McGahan, J. Wilson-Thomas, and L. Davies (2023) External evaluation of National Literacy Trust's Represent programme: Interim Report 2. Manchester Metropolitan University; Corcoran, S., K. McGahan, J. Wilson-Thomas, and L. Davies (2022) External evaluation of National Literacy Trust's Represent programme: Interim Report 1. Manchester Metropolitan University

Manchester Metropolitan University
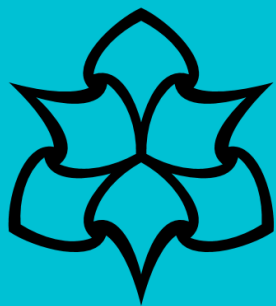
Research Design

The evaluation of the *Represent* programme set out to understand:

1. how participating girls and facilitators experience the *Represent* programme and how this could be improved going forward.
2. how the *Represent* programme impacts on facilitators' practice of supporting their students.
3. the impact of the *Represent* programme on the participating girls' communication skills, understanding of forming positive relationships, resilience, and wellbeing.
4. the extent to which this impact is sustained six months after participation.
5. the potential impact of the programme on other areas in participating girls' lives.

Working in collaboration with the *Represent* team at NLT we developed a mixed-methods approach to explore the girls' complex experiences and how the programme has helped to connect the problems around attendance with pathways to future capabilities and wellbeing. We developed six data generation instruments:

- pre- and post-intervention questionnaires for students
- post-intervention questionnaire for staff delivering the programme
- semi-structured interviews with staff delivering the programme
- creative workshops with students to further understand their experiences
- follow-up interviews in June 2023 with staff interviewed in Phases 1&2 to understand long term impact
- follow-up questionnaire in May 2023 for staff delivering in Phases 1&2

As the *Represent* intervention was designed to be delivered as part of a 10-week programme, the evaluation was planned to coincide with these discrete phases. However, while the start dates for these phases remained the same, many settings delayed their delivery start dates or extended the delivery period because of student absences. The delivery did not therefore fit the timing of the settings. This report therefore focuses on the evaluation of the whole programme.

Data generation with students
Staff delivering *Represent* to students were asked to facilitate the completion of pre- and post-intervention student questionnaires. Each phase had two specific URL links, hosted on Qualtrics, which were distributed to participating settings by NLT.

Both questionnaires included:

- A validated measure for wellbeing (Shortened Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale-SWEMWS)
- Resilience (student resilience scale -SRS).
- a wellbeing sliding scale (adapted from the Outcome Rating Scale [ORS]).
- questions provided by NLT based on tools developed for previous programme evaluations to measure communication skills and positive relationships.

The SWEMWS measures mental wellbeing using seven Likert questions, summed to provide a single 'wellbeing' score. Studies using the SWEMWS demonstrate sensitivity to change following interventions. The ORS was used to explore self-reported levels of wellbeing via the question "how do you feel as a person overall?". We selected four protective factors from the SRS multidimensional resilience tool to measure that correspond to the programme objectives: self-esteem, empathy, problem solving, and goals/ aspirations.

To further include the voices of the students who participated in the programme we carried out creative workshops in six settings. These in-depth qualitative methods worked well for collecting meaningful data with the students. While we provided a detailed overview of what the workshops could look like, we wanted to develop the actual content in collaboration with the facilitators to ensure effective feedback. A member of the evaluation team met the facilitators over Teams to discuss the workshop in more detail, shaping the plan to each group of students taking part.

Two of the workshops were conducted as group interviews at the request of the students (one in person at the school and the other remotely over Microsoft Teams) and four involved collage activities. Using pictures cut out from magazines and arts supplies, the students created collages about their experience of being part of the *Represent* programme.

The collages were made by students working in small groups of two to four. Each small group was observed by a member of the research team, who took on an assistant role – helping to create the collage as directed by the students – while asking questions about the project and the creation of the collage. The conversations were audio recorded.

Data generation with facilitators
To inform the design of the qualitative data generation tools, we initially observed the training provided by NLT at the start of Phase 1. This provided us with an overview of how the programme would work in practice and how the training translated the aims of the programme to the facilitators who would deliver the content.

The qualitative data generation instruments were all designed to be used at the end of programme delivery to provide a retrospective understanding of the facilitators' and students' experiences of being part of the process.

Facilitators delivering the programme were invited to complete an online questionnaire focused on their experiences of delivering the programme, how supported they felt by NLT, the quality of the resources, and the impact of the programme on the students.
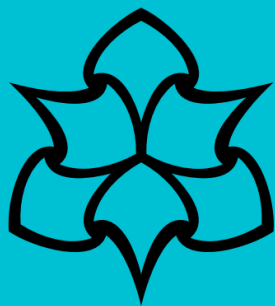
Figure 3: Collage developed by students as part of a creative workshop

They were also invited to take part in a twenty-minute interview. Unless the setting was also involved in a creative workshop, the interviews took place over Microsoft Teams. In person sessions were organised for staff members as part of the visits to settings for the workshops.
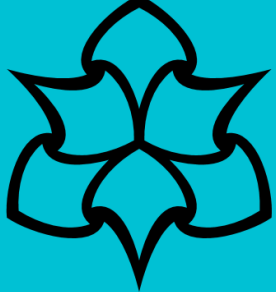
The interview questions focused on their reasons for taking part in the programme, the programme strengths, the extent to which the programme met its aims, and the changes that were observed in the students as a result. We also asked about the specific resources that facilitators engaged with and how they had adapted them to their needs.

In Phase 3 of the project, facilitators who registered for the first two phases were invited to complete a second questionnaire about longer term impact. This questionnaire contained only one question that asked for detail of any longer-term impact observed in the first cohort of students that they had taken through the project.

Facilitators who had previously been involved in interviews during Phases 1&2 were asked if they would like to be interviewed again in Phase 3 to explore additional and long-term impact since the first interview.

Recruiting Participants

All settings who registered an interest in delivering the *Represent* programme were emailed information about the evaluation via NLT's mailing lists. Phase-specific links to the pre-intervention questionnaire were provided at the start of each phase of the programme. A spreadsheet was developed by NLT with start and (predicted) end dates for each setting's programme delivery. Reminders to complete post-

intervention questionnaires were therefore emailed by NLT to schools in the week leading up to the end of the programme.

To address the limited access to laptops in some settings for students to complete the pre- and post-intervention questionnaires, QR codes were developed for each of the questionnaires to enable access using mobile phones. NLT also produced paper versions of the student questionnaires and made them available to schools to facilitate data generation without needing access to an electronic device. Completed paper-based questionnaires were posted back to NLT and the answers to the questions were uploaded to the Qualtrics system ready for the evaluation team to analyse.

Regular emails also asked for volunteers to take part in post-intervention interviews, and to register their interest for their students to take part in creative workshops. In total, 60 facilitators (teachers, teaching assistants, librarians, sports coaches) from 56 schools responded to the questionnaire. Nineteen facilitators from 18 settings were interviewed about the project. Three of these, and an additional facilitator, attended a follow-up interview about longer term impact. A further 15 facilitators responded to the follow-up questionnaire about longer term impact.
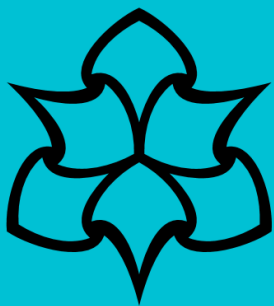
We received 324 responses from students at 70 schools for the pre-intervention questionnaire. We were able to match up responses on the post-intervention questionnaire from 52 students at 17 schools. These students completed at least one measure (for example the SRS) on pre and post intervention questionnaire and provided consent. Reasons provided by facilitators for fewer post-intervention responses related to student attendance and exclusions, settings not completing the programme, and being unable to access the students after the end of the programme or at the end of the term and/or academic year.

Finally, creative workshops were conducted at six settings, located across the country, with a total of 23 girls and two trans students. The number of students in each workshop ranged from 2 to 6.

Ethical Implications
The evaluation of the *Represent* Programme followed the ethical research principles and procedures at MMU and has been approved by the Faculty of Health and Education Research Ethics and Governance Committee (Project 42222). The research was designed utilising a mixed-methods approach to provide various ways in which participants could access and participate in the study. Informed consent is important in all research processes, but particularly so with young people who are often considered to be vulnerable. At all stages of data generation, consent was monitored and opportunities to withdraw were made clear and accessible. Participant information sheets and consent forms were given to all facilitators invited to interview and they were asked to sign and return the forms before taking part. Online questionnaires included participant information about the evaluation and how the research team would use their responses on the landing page and clear questions asking for consent.

The qualitative workshops were designed to utilise a methodological approach which was inclusive and accessible to the students targeted by the *Represent* Programme.

All settings were sent the participant information sheets and consent forms prior to the workshop so that the students understood the nature of the research before the evaluation team arrived. At the beginning of the workshops, the researchers took time to go through the participant information again and explain that even though they were in the room, the students did not have to participate in the workshop and that they could withdraw at any time during the process – even though they had filled in the forms and eaten the biscuits provided.

As research may not have been a familiar subject to the young people participating, they were provided with opportunities to re-affirm their consent at the end of the workshop when they better understood exactly what they had said and how this had contributed to the evaluation process. The researchers confirmed that the students were happy for them to take the consent forms away with them to Manchester Metropolitan University.

There are clear ethical issues around young people's consent in relation to their participation in the research process and their ownership of the artwork produced. The collages produced were left with the schools at the end of the workshops. In one instance, multiple collages were created by a group so that the girls could each take one home with them. The research team took photographs of the collages, some of which are included in this report.

The facilitators delivering the *Represent* programme were present for each of the workshops conducted as they had developed trusting relationships and expertise of working with the students who participated. A range of facilitation methods was offered to each of the schools. In all of the workshops, the researchers were asked to conduct the activities delivered and the facilitators provided additional support for the young people participating.

Data storage and analysis has been carried out in line with GDPR and both MMU's and NLT's data handling policies. Participant data was anonymised at the first opportunity and stored on encrypted, password protected applications. There were no substantial risks anticipated because of participation in the evaluation process.
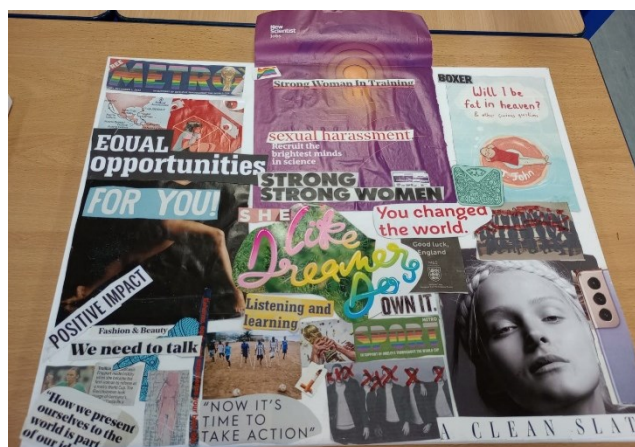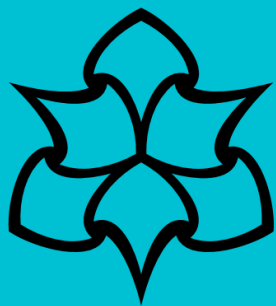

**Figure 4:** Collage developed by students as part of a creative workshop

An overview of programme delivery

In total, 265 education settings registered their interest in delivering the *Represent* programme with NLT and received the resource pack required for delivering sessions for 368 groups of students. Of these, at least 82[5] schools participated in one or more aspects of the evaluation project.

According to the data generated as part of the post intervention facilitators' questionnaire, the staff responsible for programme delivery at each setting adapted the programme to fit the needs of their particular situations. Sessions were delivered to students of ages ranging from year 7 to year 11, in one-to-one sessions (n=2), in small groups of two to ten students (n=57), or with larger groups of over ten students (n=1). These sessions were conducted in person (n=59) and remotely (n=1), once or more each week over the 10-week programme (n=36), or multiple times per week over a shorter space of time (n=3). From the facilitator interview data, these different approaches equated to very similar time for delivery overall and differences related to the approximate length of a single lesson at each setting. Five settings ran the programme for mixed gender groups.

Pre-programme data was provided by students attending 70 schools. In total, 324 students answered part or all of the questions (and provided consent to use their answers) using one of the Qualtrics links to the pre-intervention questionnaire. The following graphs show the demographics of the cohort by year group, gender, and eligibility for free school meals (FSM).
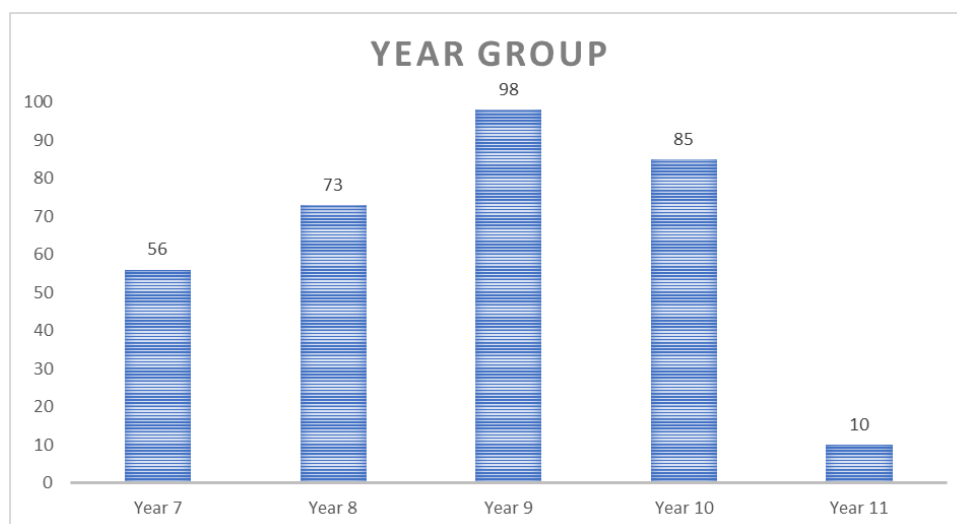
Figure 5: Distribution of pre-questionnaire respondents by year group (n=322), missing data (n=2)

The comparably higher number of female students is unsurprising as the initial aim of the *Represent* programme was to support the development of girls who are often considered vulnerable. Figure 6 (below) confirms that this core aim of the programme was met, with 81.2% of students identifying as female.

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[5] Not all respondents to the facilitator's questionnaires provided the name of their school.
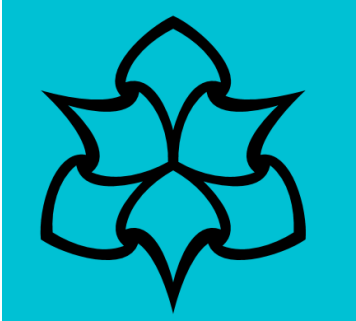
FSM[6] is a proxy measure of deprivation based on parental income. In 2022/23 the national average for students eligible for FSM was 23.8%.[7].
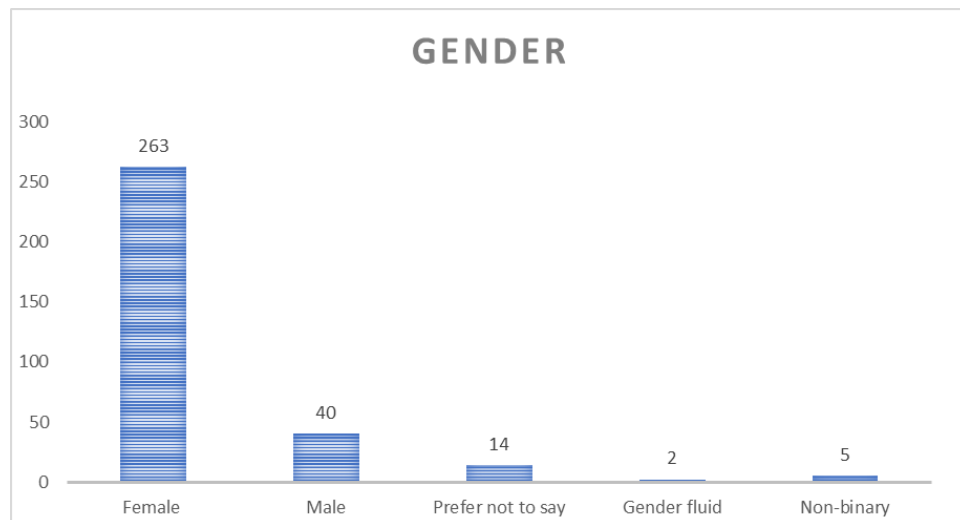
Figure 6: Distribution of pre-questionnaire respondents by gender (n=324)

Based on national figures, the *Represent* programme was accessed by a very high number of students from disadvantaged backgrounds given that 43.5% of students in the programme declared their eligibility for FSM. This addressed an initial aim of the programme which was to target educational settings with higher-than-average levels of free school meals

Figure 7: The number of participants provided with Free School Meals (FSM) (n=324)

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[6] Jessiman et al. (2023) A qualitative process evaluation of universal free school meal provision in two London secondary schools. *BMC Public Health* 23(300) https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-023-15082-3
[7] Department for Education (2023) Academic year 2022/2: Schools, pupils and their characteristics
Schools, pupils and their characteristics, Academic year 2022/23 – Explore education statistics – GOV.UK (explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk)
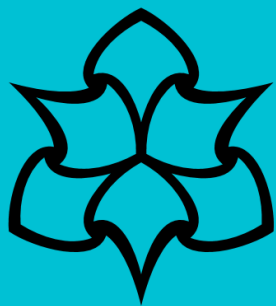
Addressing the research questions

In the following sub-sections, we explore the analysed data in relation to each of the five research questions (RQs) that framed the evaluation process:

1. how participating girls and facilitators experience the *Represent* programme and how this could be improved going forward.
2. how the *Represent* programme impacts on facilitators' practice of supporting their students.
3. the impact of the *Represent* programme on the participating girls' communication skills, understanding of forming positive relationships, resilience, and wellbeing.
4. the extent to which this impact is sustained six months after participation.
5. the potential impact of the programme on other areas in participating girls' lives.

Impact deriving from delivery of *Represent* that does not fall within these specific questions will be discussed in the section focused on the overall impact of the programme.

RQ1 How do participating girls and facilitators experience the Represent programme and how could this be improved going forward?

Evidence for the student and/or facilitator experience of the project was generated using all the research instruments except for the pre-and post- intervention student questionnaires. The data was thematically analysed using NViVO to code for themes within frameworks provided by each of the research questions.

Student experience

> *Could the project last a bit longer than this? Because I enjoyed it.*
> (Student during creative workshop)

Although the programme was delivered to both boys and girls, the students who participated in the workshops were all girls except for two trans students. As the above quote suggests, analysis of comments made during the workshops in relation to the girls' experiences of the programme provided a generally positive overview of *Represent*. One of the main areas of benefit was the development in self-confidence. With help from the teacher facilitating the programme – as the girls were shy in the company of the researcher – the students in one workshop discussed how they felt better able to more actively participate in their other classes because of the way in which they were provided with the space to be honest about not knowing what to do and test out asking for help. One was described by the facilitator as having taken on more of a lead role in the group, which had helped her to "come out of her shell more" in other situations.

> *I am now like honest in my lessons* [about not understanding the work]
> *like I say what I actually think, I don't lie.*

Another girl described the opportunity to develop her literacy skills by spending time learning vocabulary and how this had also given her confidence.

We found out different words…Not just reading the words but to understand the words.

The students' increase in confidence extended to their descriptions of interactions with the *Represent* facilitators and their peers on the programme. For example, they described how they liked having the space to discuss matters and "hearing other people's opinions". At three of the workshops the girls talked about making friendships with the other participants that they would not usually have made.

There was a general agreement that the topics under discussion as part of the programme were "tough subjects", which made the discussions difficult at times.

Erm well, I got a bit emotional on one of them. I think it was about like this girl losing her mum or something. I think it was that weren't it.

One student felt that life was tough enough without having to discuss these topics, but the students at the other five workshops felt that discussing these topics was important.

…because them scenarios we read, some have happened in my life.
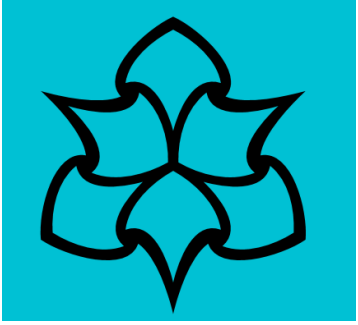
The students appreciated working in small groups that provided safer spaces and structure within which to have these discussions, be honest about their own opinions, and opportunities to think about "what other people would have thought about it". As one teacher added during one of the workshops:

because it is really personal and, so you know, you wouldn't want to have that conversation in a big group.

To which the girls participating all agreed. They especially liked being represented by the characters in the text.

There was someone in the book that had a disability like me. That's the main one that I thought, ah I'm in that book…I've got cerebral palsy. So basically, I felt like I were in that book because like the girl got told she couldn't do something, and I've been told that as well. I started crying but I still did it. Like people would say that I couldn't do football. Like you can't do this, you can't do that, and because like I had my best friends with me, like they cheered me on like come on you can do this. And I think it's helped me more because I've had all my friends by my side the whole way through the programme.

In the post-intervention questionnaire, 29 of the students who responded (n=47) felt that they were represented in the books and other materials used in the programme. Those who 'strongly agreed' went on to clarify "I learnt to love myself" and "because most materials were true". Others who opted for 'somewhat agree' added that "I felt

the characters were real and like me" and "it helped me look at things from many different viewpoints". A further 15 students indicated that they neither agreed or disagreed with the question. Only three students selected either somewhat disagree (n=2) or strongly disagree.

One girl described how the programme has helped her to change her thought patterns, and the message that she felt was really key to the programme – and her social action project – that it is possible to "turn your negative into a positive". For her this related to:

> …ages ago I kept on having negative thoughts all the time and I turned them around.

Finally, the students had mixed opinions about the resources. They liked the texts, but sometimes found the extracts too long to read and that there was "too much information" or "too much writing". They would have appreciated more variety, especially in terms of recordings of the texts using different voices and subtitles for those who are hard of hearing or have sensory processing delays. The teacher in one of the workshops suggested that the PowerPoint slides could have more embedded audio or YouTube clips of the authors for example, and the girls agreed.

It is important to note that only the students in attendance on the day of the workshops were part of the evaluation process and that there were girls absent at three of the settings who did not take part. However, the facilitators from other settings who were interviewed described similar experiences when they discussed their students' experiences:

> They felt a bit more confident, and they were able to share their ideas and to get involved. Because a lot of the kids I have here are worriers. They panic about stuff. They are used to not knowing or not being very comfortable. So, I think that really helped.

> They had an idea of what they were going to be asked to do next and that made them feel, I think a little safer and more confident.

> She normally gets kicked out of lessons because her behaviour. She just shuts down because she's so not getting things right. She was actually really good at linking what these texts were about to real life, things that she's experienced, which was heartbreakingly sad…but so good that she was able to see herself represented in that sort of idea and connect that to her world was awesome.

Facilitator experience

Programme facilitators responding to the post-intervention questionnaire chose to deliver *Represent* in the main because they were concerned about girls and their wellbeing (n=19), wanted to improve student communication skills (n=13), and were concerned about girls and exclusion (n=11). Nearly all of the respondents found the training provided by NLT to be very helpful (33) or helpful (21). Three were neutral, and 1 participant did not find the training helpful. They especially appreciated the

oracy session and the ability to revisit the recordings to recap on the learning. The only negative was the length and timing of the sessions:

An hour and a half twilight is an awfully huge chunk of time, particularly at the start of a term when you have so much stuff to do. But the training itself was excellent and I don't know that there's a way around those problems with the timing of it.

The vast majority of the respondents said that the programme was 'very good' (n=29) or 'good' (n=24) overall, with only five remaining neutral and none choosing the 'neither good nor bad' option. In providing more detail about these choices, the responses could be defined within 4 categories:

1. **The resources were great/engaging (n=18)**. e.g., "Resources were great! Texts were amazing and engaging. Students really enjoyed coming up to the sessions."
2. **It encouraged meaningful discussion (n=14)**. e.g., "It gives the girls an opportunity to discuss their feelings - it gave them a voice plus it gave us some insight into their views on using social media etc."
3. **Consistency in the materials was great (n=4)**. e.g., "The workbooks and resources are really useful for leading discussions and seem to help students analyse what they are feeling."
4. **Worksheets/reading not engaging (n=3)**. e.g., "However, students found the book work tedious as it was the same formula week on week and gave little variety in tasks."

Varied attitudes to the resources are to be expected and very much depend on what individual facilitators wanted the programme to do. For example, one Head of English at a mainstream school wanted structured, prescriptive lesson plans that she could pick up and run with in the same way that she planned her schemes of work for colleagues in the department. She was more interested in the text and the vocabulary lists than the discussions. Facilitators in alternative provision, based in the resource units within mainstream schools, or responsible for pastoral support, preferred to focus less on the text and writing-based activities and more on the discussion and oracy aspects of the programme beyond the text. Two facilitators described being overwhelmed with the amount of material provided.

The resources were developed to give facilitators autonomy in how they used them, providing a one-hour structured session for those wishing to pick them up and go, but giving variety for facilitators who wanted to adapt them to their needs. Some students were described as more confident working within a predictable structure, others responded well to variety.

In terms of the layout of the PowerPoints, I found those really good because there was enough on there, they were uniformed, and the kids could see what was coming. After they done it for a few sessions, they sort of knew they knew the drill.

They really liked the routine of writing in the boxes…"this is how the text represents it. This is how I represent this and how others would think."

Obviously, you need to check them [the texts for their content] *all before you start, but mostly there was very little that I had to do to tweak or adapt for my context. They were flexible enough that it fitted into my context without too much adaptation.*

The main recommendation from the interviews was a request for more variety in resources, such as "more interactive clips or videos or something visual". Some of the facilitators (n=6) felt that the students did a lot of "just listening to me read the extracts and ask more questions".

I think the programme was really well-developed. I think the students really reacted well to it, as it was well structured. It was easier to follow. It's almost a dummies guide to be honest with you. I think you know a lot of people would be able to deliver it.

It was kind of driven by them and that's what they really, really loved and having a space just to talk about their thoughts and feelings about things like body image and social media and all that kind of stuff was. This they really, really engaged with it. And so from that point of view, it was, it was really, really successful.

The other repeated recommendation was for more differentiated texts – especially in terms of the lengths of the extracts provided.

Maybe a few more differentiated texts like I know there were smaller texts, but a lot of the children that I work with have got incredibly low literacy rates, so although they were interested in the excerpts that we were reading, a lot of those were above their reading ability and they really struggled with their vocabulary.

We spent a lot of time talking with me trying to, for want of a better word, dumb down the content because they didn't understand the words.

The books were really, really good on the content, but literacy rates are really low so that was a challenge

Where recommendations were suggested by the respondents to the questionnaire, they could be categorised into three themes: 1) more interactive resources (e.g. "more varied lesson structure and greater variety of tasks to reduce boredom for students"); 2) less text/reading/writing (e.g. "smaller amounts of text to read"); and 3) more gender neutral topics related to boys and trans students.

All the facilitators interviewed appreciated the range of authors and texts available.

…the fact that they are young people generally who are the authors that engage them and that they were from a real variety of backgrounds.

I teach in quite an affluent area…for GCSE we're doing Christmas Carol, Macbeth, and An inspector calls, and it's that old white male all the time

kind of thing. So, it's been great I would say that the text selection is really, really good

They (n=3) mentioned how the situations described by the texts provided topics for discussion that related to the students' own experiences without having to shine a spotlight directly on their personal lives.

Sometimes in our setting, when you have debates, it can become very personalized very quickly. So actually having that as a structure, representing the text…it's been quite a nice thing to see students get a bit more confident with thinking a bit more critically.

I think they got such a lot from it in terms of their confidence to express their opinions, but also what was hugely valuable was getting them to think about other people. So the whole twist about how would the author feel about this was for them a real struggle but really good for them in terms of not just thinking how I think and that space to kind of listen to others and practicing those skills that we take for granted whereby you listen to other people's opinions and you might not agree with them, but that's fine and learning to not shout other people down or convince them to think your way. All of those skills were so, so valuable. So that was amazing.
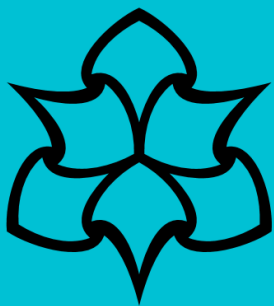
In the facilitators' questionnaire, 12 respondents felt that their students engaged 'extremely well' with the programme, 23 said 'very well' and 13 said 'moderately well'. Given the demographics of the young people targeted by the programme any engagement is extremely positive, so this is a significant finding. Two respondents said the students engaged slightly well, and 3 said not well at all. One of the reasons for the positive responses is the content of the resources. Many of the respondents felt that the students saw themselves represented in the Represent materials (n=36); 13 thought that they only saw themselves a little/somewhat e.g., 'Some definitely and were able to identify behaviour tropes. Some didn't but enjoyed talking about the characters nonetheless.' Only 5, from the perspective of the facilitator, did not think that the students saw themselves represented. For example, 'Not really - they had never heard of the lady footballer.'

For one facilitator however, she felt that the texts both enabled some level of representation as well as an opportunity to learn about others' experiences.

I think when we were discussing all this, particularly the Born Fighter one, that was something that they found quite fascinating. That a girl would be under pressures like she had been, to hide what she wanted to do. It changed their mindset because they weren't exposed to anything like that. It's a white working class, ex-mining community and they have very little interaction with other cultures, so they were interested in that and obviously I tried that with them.

Born Fighter by Ruqsana Begum seemed to be the most popular of the texts, closely followed by *Women don't owe you pretty* by Florence Given – with both the students in the workshops and the facilitators interviewed. Other books, if mentioned, were only referred to once in the data. According to the facilitators, the texts they chose to focus on in their sessions, and the books that were made available for the students

to read, depended on the ages and background of the students they were working with – as well as the faith.[8] All of the texts explored were described as good at engaging the students.

That might be the first time in their lives, especially for our students that they felt that way about text. So that was really lovely.

It was the personal response that I think was the most effective that the girls really did engage with material put in front of them

In terms of the content, the represent myself, represent the text, represent others works really well and I think the children really engaged with it.

So quite often when they come into my room and present them with something that we're going to read or what idea that we're looking at for some of them, there's an immediate reticence. You know that they're just. "Oh, God. Here we go" and I've got to try and come up with all sorts of wacky starters or something to just get them out of their funk before they've even begun. And I don't know what it was about Represent, but I didn't get that from them after the first couple of weeks...By the time they'd actually done a session they were kind of like "ohh yeah. Awesome. Brilliant." So, they were more open to it. Which is a big deal for these kids, a really big deal."

The *Represent* programme was designed and marketed for girls aged 11-14, but settings were able to deliver to mixed groups if this was the only delivery option. The facilitators that delivered to single sex groups felt that the girls only space was key to the success of the programme.

The strength of the project was that it was explicitly for girls. I felt that had a big impact because that was made really clear to the girls when they joined the group. And especially in this kind of setting which is statistically dominated by boys. And I think that they really responded well to that. It was us in a room, a safe space, and we're talking about issues that affect girls and they felt really free.

I'm open to be able to talk about topics that they might not necessarily discuss normally…A lot of the girls are here, are not particularly shy necessarily to talk about things in front of boys, but I think it added that extra sense of "this is our space to discuss things".

Having the space for them to just be listened to and feel like their thoughts are valued is just, you know, and for some of them they don't get that anywhere else.

However, the facilitators who included boys were also positive about the programme.

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[8] Two schools spoke of not studying books with too much sexual content as they were working in Faith-based schools.

I think actually it's important that boys cover that too, especially with some of my boys…they have some quite unrealistic expectations of girls. So, that yet again it was interesting. I showed them the Florence one and they went with their first "She's ugly", and you have to unpick all that.

I mean, there were some bits of it that obviously it wasn't directly relevant to them, but that they were able actually to think about, you know, sisters or girlfriends or friends…And I think the topics are relevant to all of them…and they were able to access it and have opinions on it in quite a mature way. So it still worked for them.

The boys haven't batted an eyelid in terms of the texts or the issues. None of them have said anything like "ohh, why we doing this? This is not for us or at all".

Many facilitators struggled to complete the programme, because of timetabling, students only attending a setting part time, and other logistical reasons, e.g.:

The downside for me is that, annoyingly, the nature of what we do here and how we work, those girls who I wanted it for ended up reintegrating or not, then being part of school on Thursdays and Fridays. So frustratingly the people I thought of when I first signed up to it only took part in a small bit, which was a real shame.

In addition, the unpredictable attendance of the students that *Represent* targets was one of the barriers to their engaging with and completion of the programme as well as individual factors such as situations beyond the classroom, as this teacher describes:

Their levels of engagement and willingness to engage in any activity will depend on what kind of day, what kind of week they're having. As the materials became more familiar, it was really good to see the student who has an ASD [autism spectrum disorder] diagnosis…He enjoyed expressing his opinion more and more, and that led to a lot of engagement from him. That was unusual because ordinarily he won't engage with anything if it looks or smells like reading. Because we were asking for his opinions, and he was getting to express himself, he actually engaged more and more with the texts. So that was really successful. Another student actually, it didn't work for her because of a lot of unsettled things going on in her personal life meant that the texts were touching on themes that were too personal and too raw. And actually her levels of engagement went down during the course rather than up. But that was nothing to do with the course or the materials. That was because of her personal circumstances during the last half term.

This last comment sums up the varied experiences that facilitators had delivering *Represent* to this cohort of young people. They had difficulties getting through the ten-week programme, but even when they only covered some of the sessions there was a general agreement that it had a positive impact.

It's quite good cause they [the sessions] stand alone and that has been good for those attendance problems.

The only thing that I've really struggled with is the school. It's in a very deprived area anyway and engagement with education is sketchy. Attendance is sketchy, so you plan your sessions and then you're going to replan. Then you've got to revisit again, because two more people came in. That has been a little bit frustrating, but I've kept to doing it at least once a week and doing it that way, and at the end of the day, they're doing more reading than they would normally.

It follows then that the social action project, which was designed for the last two sessions of the 10-week programme, was not included by all the facilitators interviewed. When student attendance at the sessions was unpredictable this aspect of the course was left out as it would not be easy to structure the group work around a project that would take more than one session to complete. The social action project involved the students choosing to focus on one of the issues in the programme and creating something that they could use for advocacy. The action projects shared with the research team included: posters, power point presentations, year group assemblies and in one school a leaflet campaign. This last project was a campaign to signpost students to mental health services.

And they're looking at a slightly different approach this time. This group have chosen a more mental health orientated project, they want to do like an outreach poster and leaflets to celebrate mental health and to give support. They want to share links and websites like leaflets and things to give to students in school. So that's their project idea.

At one school a poem about bullying was co-authored by the girls and a video was created showing a slideshow of images that represented the words as the poem was read out loud.

Most of those who did facilitate the action projects found them to be a rewarding part of the programme.

It's been really effective. The outcomes have been really nice and very creative.

Two facilitators mentioned issues about students being overwhelmed and needing some additional frameworks for how to guide them through the project planning. One opted for a more structured approach to completing the programme:

I didn't have much success with that. They weren't confident enough to put their feelings out there for other people to see. But what we did do use a psychology template. It's a head and it's a thought process about things that are important to you, your goals and aspirations, and what you feel. So, we filled that in using doodle pens and craft materials everything. They all laminated theirs and took it home for themselves because it was theirs personally about how they felt.

RQ2 How does the Represent programme impact on facilitators' practice of supporting their students?

When asked to describe the benefits of *Represent* and anything that had worked particularly well during the programme, the responses to the facilitator questionnaire can be categorised into four themes:

1. Discussion opportunities. e.g., "It has allowed the students to interact verbally, think outside the box, communicate their thoughts and feelings in a controlled interesting way."
2. The books. Many respondents wrote about the books, e.g., "Reading a range of texts about issues that affect the girls in real life, rather than an academic sense.'
3. Developing better communication with staff and peers. e.g., "learning to work together with other students and staff."
4. An opportunity to engage with relevant issues. e.g., "The best part for me in my opinion, was them being able to write a speech about something they are passionate about."

Again, the benefits respondents focussed on linked into the aims of the programme. Namely, communication and positive relationships, but they also commented favourably on the selection of books, and the topics focussed on. And it is from this starting point that the facilitators spoke about the value of the programme in providing additional support for the students. All of the facilitators interviewed mentioned the value of working with small groups and having the time to discuss topics that matter in the students' lives – although some facilitators struggled with broaching the more sensitive topics, especially when they resonated with the students' own life experiences. *Represent* provided a structure within which these topics could be discussed, in ways that supported the students as they engaged with the topics within and beyond the programme space.

> *The programme has provided a safe environment for learners to discuss sensitive subjects and allow them to express themselves.*
>
> *I enjoyed exposing them to strong female role models who had faced adversity themselves and this gave us the opportunity to have purposeful conversations.*

Some of the facilitators interviewed explained how the programme developed their understanding of their students' lives, teaching them more about social media use for example, and providing insights into the students' social and home lives. They felt that their relationships with the students were strengthened, as well as their ability to support them more effectively. They described how the programme sessions became spaces in which they were able to get know their students better.

> *The programme has been such an inspiring development opportunity for me as a teacher.*
>
> *It provided an opportunity to develop students' literacy and wellbeing at the same time, which has been a wonderful opportunity. The focus on empathy and understanding other points of view, in a safe and stimulating*

debate, was interesting for me as a teacher and some of the most challenging students in our school responded very well.

In settings where more than one member of staff was involved in delivering the programme, the benefits included opportunities for learning from each other and co-developing their teaching and learning pedagogies. They appreciated being able to share the responsibility and to reflect on the sessions together and adapt the programme accordingly, ready for the next run through with different groups of students.

Delivery of the *Represent* programme, as discussed in the previous section, very much depended on the motivation of the facilitator for taking part. For example:
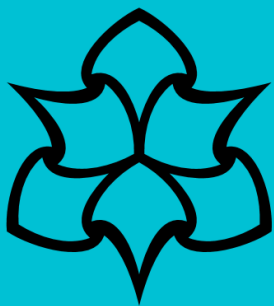
I'm very I'm very passionate about, you know, making the difference with kids who just fall through the cracks and I'm passionate about girls being empowered as well. I've kind of put myself out there and just said right, I want, I want this and I pick the girls and I will commit to this, and it worked.

The facilitators included schoolteachers, teaching assistants, librarians, and sports coaches from community sports organisations. These motivations also had implications for the longer-term impact of the programme on the facilitators practice, and impact on the broader education setting. For example, a sports coach working for an organisation that delivered various programmes in schools within an Educational Authority described how *Represent* provided access to schools that they had not worked in before. As a result of the success of the programme the schools had engaged the organisation to increase their work within the school. Other schools, after hearing about the success of the programme, contacted the organisation about the possibility of delivering programmes to their students. This impact focuses on both the future delivery of the *Represent* programme as well as other initiatives such as NLT's *Game Changers* and other programmes aimed at students considered to be harder to reach.

This organisation ran *Represent* as a five-week intervention, delivering the sessions first thing on a Monday morning and again on a Friday morning. This had a great calming effect on the students who participated as it meant they began the week in a better frame of mind and were able to settle into school more after the weekend. The facilitator was interviewed at the mid-point of the second cohort through the intervention and was already able to see this change in the new group, as well as the cohort that had completed the programme. Such an observation was also shared with a teacher who ran the programme at the start of the academic year. She used the sessions as a way to transition students back into school after the long summer holiday. It worked so well that she was planning to repeat the process in the 2023/24 academic year.

Although the benefits of the programme were clear, the logistics of running it within the settlings' timetables and the perceived 'cost effectiveness' of the time required challenged opportunities for repeat delivery in a number of settings.

They can't really spare more staff for it. I did speak to the head with regards to these projects…and he said if we can, as a school staff are the most expensive resource, and he said if you can spread them as thinly as possible, then we absolutely will.

We've got a lot of support behind the projects, the teachers that we've spoken to that have seen the students during it and following it, love it. But there is a bit of resistance with them coming out of lessons because it's the same time each week. They missed the same lessons and with it being a group thing, we can't pick it what they've all got, like maths. So, they'll miss just one maths subject and that's a little bit harder.

While some settings like the those mentioned on the previous page were able to integrate the programme into the academic year, others required facilitators to give up a planning period to deliver the sessions – which two facilitators had done as they believed in the impact of the programme – or the delivery was assigned to library staff and pastoral leaders who had the time. In these instances, though it was sometimes difficult to integrate the programme into the students' timetables – especially if they were attending the setting on part-time or reduced hours.

We've used elements of the programme and it's been really effective…I think for our setting it would be difficult to run it as the programme is, but we've definitely used a lot of the materials and it's triggered other things in our planning which has been really nice.

There is a timetabling issue in terms of getting the space to do it. But I am planning on starting it again this next half term for those that normally would be doing things like catch up literacy or because there is a bigger oracy focus this term. I'm hoping that I'll be able to get a group of children who aren't necessarily at risk of exclusion but who are hugely behind, have got real literacy issues or cultural capital deficits who I think it would really benefit. I'm definitely hoping to do it again.

Finally, one the most mentioned aspects of impact was the applicability of the resources to the national curriculum. Taking part in *Represent* meant having access to pre-made resources that had been put together with marginalised students "in mind", but they are equally applicable to curriculum content elsewhere.

As an English teacher the texts have been really thoughtfully chosen. It is hard to find new modern texts and then have time to extract from them.

I love the resources. They were great. And I loved the topic, because they're not always ones we'd have time to do or be able to do. I teach PSHE as well, so I feel like it [is] linked. And with citizenship.

Eight of the facilitators interviewed talked about using the resources in their lessons beyond the programme and sharing them with colleagues to do the same.

RQ3 The impact of the Represent programme on the participating girls' communication skills, understanding of forming positive relationships, resilience, and wellbeing.

The programme had four key objectives of improving girls' communication skills, their understanding of how to form positive relationships, their resilience, and their sense of wellbeing. The pre- and post-intervention questionnaires completed by the students were designed to measure each of these attributes.

Overview of the pre-intervention data
The question that explored communication skills was completed by 316 students. The mean score for this measure was 15.9 (s.d. 3.6). The relationships questions were completed by 314 students, their mean score was 16.5 (s.d. 4.0). Both the communication skills and relationship questions are measured using a five-point Likert scale, with a maximum score of 25 and minimum score of 5.

Resilience was measured via four subscales from the Student Resilience Scale (SRS). Complete data for this measure was available for 301 students and focused on self-esteem, empathy, problem solving, and goals/ aspirations. Each subscale utilises a 5-point Likert scale. The scores from the four subscales (10 questions in total) were combined to generate a total resilience score, the minimum score is 10 and maximum score is 50. The SRS mean score for students was 31.1 (s.d. 7.7).

Wellbeing was measured via the Short Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (SWEMWBS). Previously the population mean for SWEMWBS in England has been reported as 23.6. Low and high categories have been created, based on one standard deviation above (high: 28.1-35.0) and below (low: 7-19.3) the mean[9]. In the current study, there was complete SWEMWBS data for 310 students on the pre-intervention questionnaire. The mean score was 19.8 (s.d. 5.3). Students who had a score indicating low levels of mental wellbeing (a score of 19 or below) were found in 49.7% of the cohort. A further 7.4% of students had scores indicating high levels of mental wellbeing and 42.9% of students had a mental wellbeing score in the normal range. These figures suggest that the *Represent* programme was accessed by a high proportion of young people with low levels of wellbeing.

The wellbeing slider was also included as an additional measure of wellbeing, loosely based on the child outcome rating scale (CORS)[10]. This scale asked the students "how do you feel as a person overall?". In total, 274 students responded to this question (50 students did not respond to this question). The mean score was 5.1 (s.d. 2.8) with students utilising the full range of the scale 0-10.

Independent sample t-tests were used to explore differences between male (*n*=40) and female (*n*=263) students on the four main outcome measures. There were 5 students who identified as non-binary and 2 students who identified as gender fluid.

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[9] Ng Fat, L., Scholes, S., Boniface, S., Mindell, J., & Stewart-Brown, S. (2017). Evaluating and establishing national norms for mental wellbeing using the short Warwick–Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (SWEMWBS): findings from the Health Survey for England. *Quality of Life Research*, *26*, 1129-1144 http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s11136-016-1454-8

[10] Duncan et al. (2003). The Session Rating Scale: Preliminary psychometric properties of a "working" alliance measure. *Journal of Brief Therapy* 3:3–12.

Additionally, 14 students chose not to respond to this question. The mean scores for non-binary, gender fluid and students who provided no response are in Table 1. Due to very small numbers in these subgroups, they were not included in the analysis.

There was no statistically significant difference between male and female students' total scores for the communication skills, relationships, or resilience measures. However, there was a statistically significant *(p<.001)* difference in mean wellbeing (SWEMWBS) scores between male (22.5) and female (19.5) students. This finding indicates that male students had significantly higher wellbeing than female students before the *Represent* programme commenced. This result supports the initial justification for developing a programme specifically for female students and is consistent with literature that found females aged 11-14 years had significantly lower wellbeing scores (using the SWEMWBS) than male students[11].

	Communication	Relationships	SWEMWBS	SRS
Male (n=40)	16.1 (3.5)	16.6 (4.1)	22.5 (5.5)	32.9 (7.1)
Female (n=263)	15.8 (3.6)	16.3 (3.8)	19.5 (5.1)	30.8 (7.5)
Non-binary (n=5)	14.4 (3.1)	19.4 (2.4)	20.0 (2.5)	34.8 (11.2)
Gender fluid (n=2)	18.0 (5.7)	19.0 (4.2)	20.0 (4.2)	29.5 (4.9)
No response (n=14)	16.8 (5.3)	18.0 (6.1)	16.4 (7.5)	29.1 (10.9)

Table 1: Questionnaire scores by gender from pre-intervention data (total n =324)

Comparison on pre- and post-intervention data

Students from 17 schools completed both pre- and post-intervention questionnaires (*n*=52). In this cohort, 83% of students were female (*n*=43). The others comprised of male (*n*=6), prefer not to say (*n*=2) and non-binary (*n*=1) accounted for the remaining (17%). Of this cohort, 30.8% students received FSM (*n*=16), 51.9% of students did not have FSM (*n*=27) and 17.3% did not indicate their response (*n*=9). The percentage of students who did have FSM was therefore notably lower in this matched cohort compared to the initial 'pre'-intervention cohort (43.5%).

Interestingly, 16 of the 17 schools with data at the pre- and post-intervention timepoints (*n*=51) were mainstream secondary or middle schools. Indicating, that completion of measures may be more challenging in alternative education settings. This may be explained by 1) the high turnover of students and 2) the lower attendance known to be prevalent in these settings. The average length of a placement in alternative provision has been reported as between one term and one academic year, accounting for 43% of placements.[12] Additionally, available absence rates data during Autumn term 22/23 in England (for comparison purposes) were 39.8% in PRU's compared to 7.5% in mainstream schools.

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[11] Yoon, Y et al. (2022) Gender difference in the change of adolescents' mental health and subjective wellbeing trajectories. *European Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, 4: 1-10. https://doi.org/10.1007/s00787-022-01961-4
[12] Department for Education (DfE), Alternative Provision Market Analysis, October 2018

Additional reasons for the high attrition rate of responses between pre- and post-intervention time points relate to settings not able to complete the full *Represent* programme. Some facilitators reported difficulties completing all the sessions, via the questionnaire (n=11) and interviews (n=6), difficulties completing all the sessions because of students' attendance, other scheduled events towards Christmas and the end of the school year, and not having the time to effectively go through the materials in the sessions planned. These facilitators may not have supported students to complete the post-intervention questionnaire as they had not finished the programme content. One teacher from Phase 1 who was interviewed during Phase 3 after an invitation email explicitly asked for facilitators who had not completed the programme, explained how she had not responded to the post-intervention calls in phase 1 as she had been unable to complete the delivery as planned.

Represent groups were often comprised of students who were not usually in class together as part of national curriculum delivery; a selection of students from different year groups for example were frequently brought together for the programme. It may have been logistically difficult for facilitators to support the completion of the post-intervention measure unless it was completed in the final *Represent* session – and attendance at this last session was not guaranteed. For example, facilitators (n=14) talked about completing the programme but having different combinations of students in each session because of part time timetables and erratic attendance. One school adopted a different approach and delivered the programme to a whole class of 20 students. Although the mode of delivery in this instance was not how NLT had originally designed the programme, it supports the idea that collection of 'post' data is more feasible when the students are in a class together.

Table 2 shows the comparison of data generated by the pre- and post-intervention questionnaires for Phases 1&2. The paired samples t-test was used to explore changes in scores for all outcome variables. There was a statistically significant increase in both wellbeing measures (SWEMWS and wellbeing slider) between pre- and post-intervention data. There was no statistically significant change in the communication skills, relationships, or resilience scores after the programme.

Measure	Pre Mean (standard deviation) n	Post Mean (standard deviation) n
Communication skills (*n*=49)	16.1 (3.5)	16.9 (3.8)
Relationships (*n*=48)	17.0 (3.5)	17.9 (3.4)
Wellbeing (SWEMWS) (*n*=46)	20.0 (5.0)	22.0 (5.6) **
Resilience (Student Resilience Survey) (*n*=46)	33.2 (6.8)	33.5 (7.7)
Wellbeing sliding scale (*n*=36)	5.13 (2.38)	6.14 (2.5) **

Table 2: Comparison of measures from data generated using the pre-intervention and post-intervention questionnaires. Notes: ** significant to 0.05.

Facilitator feedback
In the facilitators' post-intervention questionnaire, 28 respondents 'strongly agreed' that the programme had improved students' communication skills, 22 'agreed', 6 were 'neutral', and 2 strongly disagreed. In relation to students' understanding of how to form positive relationships, 21 respondents 'strongly agreed', 24 'agreed', 11 were 'neutral', and 1 'strongly disagreed'. Therefore, there was a strong positive feeling regarding both students' communication skills and their understanding of relationships.

In the interviews, facilitators had mixed feelings about whether the programme had impacted on the students understanding of how to form positive relationships. About half felt that they had – especially with regards to the friendships that had developed with peers in the groups and their relationships with facilitators. However, a number of the groups were very small and so it was difficult to discuss the effect on relationships beyond the programme. As one teacher explained in relation to understanding other people's perspectives, and the role this has on interacting with others and building relationships:

> *Maybe they're marginally better at understanding someone else's point of view. I think if we ran it again, I'd emphasise that even more, because that's where obviously we as a society fall down, let alone a bunch of, you know teenagers with challenges. So, I think that I would find a way to focus even more on that because I'm hoping that they're a little bit more tolerant of each other's views, but I can't say that necessarily they are.*

One interviewee, who dealt with friendships explicitly, commented on the discussions as follows:

> *I'd say female friendships played a bigger role in our conversations and they all realised, well I realised through talking to them, that their female friendships have really impacted them quite significantly in life so far in terms of good and bad. So, some of them had quite significant stories of how they were impacted by friendship going wrong for example. And we talked about that in depth, about how do you deal with those situations when you fall out with a female friend. Sometimes it seems even more devastating than a boyfriend, for example. So yeah, I think I think we had some really good conversations around that: the idea of friendship and communicating and how to handle those situations, which are probably going to happen again in their lifetime. It was interesting.*

She reveals explicitly the work that this group had done to focus on the importance of positive relationships.

In terms of wellbeing, supporting the results of the quantitative data generated by the students questionnaires, 21 respondents 'strongly agreed' that *Represent* improved students' sense of wellbeing and 26 'agreed'. Once again demonstrating a strong feeling amongst facilitators that the programme had a positive effect on student wellbeing. Nine were 'neutral' regarding this, 1 'disagreed' and 1 'strongly disagreed'. It may be that for this one group the programme just simply did not fit the needs of the pupils.

The large majority of respondents 'strongly agreed' (n=27) or 'agreed' (n=24) that the programme had improved students' oral literacy skills – 8 were 'neutral', 1 'disagreed' and 1 'strongly disagreed'. It may be that some facilitators remained neutral on these questions as these are subjective observations and they did not feel certain enough to give a definite answer. Some of the facilitators interviewed mentioned how it was difficult to 'measure' some of these characteristics (n=4), that it was too early to tell (n=3), or that erratic attendance records meant that they did not have the same combination of participants every week and so it was hard to gauge the changes in relation to the programme alone (n=3).

When describing the additional benefits of the programme for students, four overarching themes were identified in the responses to the questionnaire:
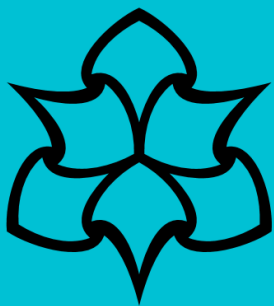
1. Student confidence was developed. e.g., "Students who wouldn't usually participate in class discussion or who would lack confidence in a classroom setting (but perhaps have too much/misplaced confidence that leads them into confrontational situations) were able to have their say."
2. Developed facilitator/student relationships. e.g., "Also helped facilitator/pupil relationships - good to work with a much smaller group for once."
3. Improved communication, particularly with staff. e.g., "Student's communication skills, particularly with members of staff, has improved significantly."
4. Developed student confidence with reading. e.g., "I had one student who wasn't confident to read out load and by the end she was more than confident to. What's more the same student was able to articulate an argument much better as the programme developed."

In expanding on the previous questions, it is clear that confidence (which can be linked to wellbeing) has improved, the students' ability to form positive relationships, communication skills have developed, and for some, engagement with reading has improved. These are all significant for this group of often vulnerable girls who participated in the *Represent* programme. For one teacher, the journaling activity, which was an ongoing reflective writing exercise that was part of the resource pack, added an extra opportunity to understand the girls' home lives as part of the relationship building process:

> *The journaling things they didn't all constantly do that. But when I got some of the students to do the journaling it was so reflective and so mature, especially from some students…so they might only come in for the 50 minutes a week, so we asked for them to do that at home. It meant we got a greater insight into what they're doing at home or how they feel about things. So how they responded to that was really good.*

Resilience was a key part of *Represent* which included a definition of the term for use with the girls. As mentioned previously, one school was using it to frame problems, by encouraging the girls to reflect and "turn a negative into a positive". However, as resilience is a contested phrase in wider research/practice fields –

especially with regards to the context-specific nature of resilience[13] – we asked respondents to the facilitators questionnaire to explain how they understand resilience before asking them if the programme improved their students' experience to ensure that the data generated was interpreted correctly.

Most respondents defined resilience as keeping going in difficult circumstances. For example, "bouncing back, and/or as perseverance"; "Sticking at it, bouncing back from setbacks, continuing in the face of adversity and difficulties." The majority 'strongly agreed' (n=13) or 'agreed' (n=26) that the programme had improved students' resilience. Nine were neutral, which again could be to do with the difficulty in defining and observing changes in this characteristic, while 3 'slightly disagreed' and 1 'strongly disagreed', which again may be due to one cohort not engaging fully with the programme.

Interviews with facilitators gave a similar variety of answers, from resilience being too difficult to measure, to specific references that relate to their particular understanding of the concept and how it was evident within the programme sessions and elsewhere in the school.

> *As the weeks went on, I believe that they become more resilient and were able to challenge themselves more.*

> *I recognise there's a few students that would take the easy option, would wait for someone else to give the answer before they would give an answer and would be very shy. They would almost look over other people's shoulders to see what they're writing down before doing their own work. But as the weeks went on, they become more confident and definitely resilient in terms of not being afraid to make a mistake.*

> *He was a maths teacher, and he had a number of the students he recognised and highlighted a few times how much the programme had an impact on the on them. For example, they were doing algebra and they didn't like algebra. He said he wouldn't see them because as they knew it was algebra they just wouldn't turn up to that period. They just become more resilient, wanting to learn.*

The final question on the questionnaire and in the interviews, asked the facilitators to share anything else about their experience of delivering the programme that we should know. A number of the responses described the impact of the programme on individual students or the group as a whole. Some of these are written up as case studies within the first two interim[14] reports and focus on a range of ways in which

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[13] Luthar S., Cicchetti D., Becker B. (2000) The construct of resilience: a critical evaluation and guidelines for future work. Child Dev. 71:543–62 https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8624.00164; Riley, J., Masten, A. (2005) Resilience in Context. In: Peters, R.D., Leadbeater, B., McMahon, R.J. (eds) Resilience in Children, Families, and Communities. Springer, Boston, MA . https://doi.org/10.1007/0-387-23824-7_2

[14] Corcoran, S., K. McGahan, J. Wilson-Thomas, and L. Davies (2023) External evaluation of National Literacy Trust's Represent programme: Interim Report 2. Manchester Metropolitan University; Corcoran, S., K. McGahan, J. Wilson-Thomas, and L. Davies (2022) External evaluation of National Literacy Trust's Represent programme: Interim Report 1. Manchester Metropolitan University

students had benefitted from the programme. We have selected six examples to share here that provide evidence for the benefits of the programme. For example:

A very disengaged pupil, currently on a massively reduced timetable of only 2 sessions a week. Very negative experience of education so far. Very defensive first session, hood up, grunted answers. Turned up to every single session and engaged, gave articulate thoughtful answers to the questions. It was such a hugely positive experience for him and the idea that controversial opinions that they had were able to be expressed and listened to without judgement on topics that they could identify with was a breath of fresh air for them.

This is very important for a student at risk of exclusion, not only improved attendance but active participation. These students were also significantly impacted by the programme:

Having a year 8 student enable themselves to talk in front of other students and not feel judged - This student was selective mute and for her to answer questions in front of other students was a huge step for her but she felt like she needed to talk to put her ideas across.

There's another student who is a really lovely person. I think she's been pigeonholed for some of her past mistakes, and where she's perhaps been a bit reactive and aggressive with things. She struggles to control her frustrations and her anger. But rather than take out on a person anymore, she removes herself from the situation, so she tends to be one that goes out of lessons. She was particularly upset from something a member of staff had said when he had asked her to be removed from this project as his punishment for something that she'd done. He said "you're not going into it, you're staying in my lesson", so she tried to leave the school. She was upset. She managed to force the doors open and start to leave. I managed to talk it out because I happened to find her. I said "don't do this. You know what the project is about, it's about being heard. We can help you get your opinion voiced. We'll sort this out and we will fight for you and with you". She came back in, and one of the senior leadership team who currently leads the alternative provision, said he was really impressed that she chose to stay rather than leave. He's not seen that reaction before from her. She tends to only get negative comments from teachers, but we have had a few now saying you can see she's really trying.

There is a common theme between the three examples shared above that the young people felt that the *Represent* programme was a space of 'non-judgement', and that this facilitated their participation. This was also demonstrated as a key theme in the student-created collages (discussed in relation to RQ 5 below). The following two students described by facilitators had really engaged with the texts, and this had stimulated their reading practice:

I had one student who embraced the book box, she read them and gave her feedback to the group this then encouraged others to try a books. This student has been allowed back to mainstream now and is doing well and still comes back for support.

One student relished the book box and felt that she really learned a lot from reading them. It opened up a whole new world to her and she frequently returned to borrow another

Again, these two observations on reading are significant for this cohort of students who are at risk of exclusion. Engagement with books and reading is a key factor in educational success, so perceptions that the programme supports this engagement is an important finding. Also shown in this case study:
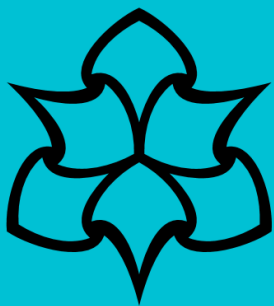
One student has really engaged with the programme, is now reading regularly, has found more confidence and is able to 'Represent' herself in a way she wasn't able to before.

The programme and the reading supported the student above to increase both her engagement and confidence. The example shared here (below), refers to another girl whose confidence – this time in writing – has developed as part of the programme.

There was one particular student who was very caught off guard. She didn't particularly want to do the programme. She wasn't really very interested and thought it was pointless. She was very isolated. She wasn't just generally within school or part of classes really. She was very, very on her own. Over the course of the weeks, she definitely was the one the most that kind of just found her voice a bit. She just grew in confidence in terms of fit, but not only confidence really, but just the ability to think about things. The students I work with, and some of them on the programme, they don't really like thinking about stuff, saying things like "it kind of hurts my head to think about things". So they just go through expecting people to tell them just what do ("Just tell me what I have to write." "But what do I put in this box?" "What do I have to write?").
She definitely had a real shift in thinking. You know, this isn't about what you need to write to get your exam, it is about your own beliefs. And I think just that having that space, thinking that somebody actually wanted to listen to her thoughts, and that the other students were happy to listen to her was a real revelation… it had did really did have a big impact on her and actually in the mainstream classes that she was in. There was a whole school shift as well in terms of her engagement and willingness to participate as well. So, she definitely really did benefit. Thanks.

These examples show significant impacts on students who are often considered as hard to reach, which also means it is hard to engage these students with research, and whilst the examples described by the facilitators are only one perspective of the experience this is informative data and suggests that the programme is a positive intervention in education for girls at risk of exclusion.

It's just been nice to have feedback from teachers, a lot of the teachers have said how much they think the girls have grown in confidence. And they are more in class now. Parents have been really thankful, which has been lovely because I just don't think there's always the space in school to have such open conversations with them about these topics that they're all going through. They don't always know who or when to talk about things. To have a space with a safe teacher who welcomes those difficult conversations…has just been lovely.

Student Perspectives

The girls who took part in the workshops all described how they appreciated the small group dynamic and how it improved their communication skills and the ease with which they were able to ask and answer questions:

In these lessons you are in small groups and have to do a lot of communicating and like I'm not good at communicating in lessons, but when I'm in small groups I can.

This development in communication had an impact on other lessons with girls at four of the settings talking about how they now take more of an active role in their other classes, asking teachers for help when they do not understand. With the exception of one setting, where the particular mix of girls from different year groups had been problematic, there was a general sense of community within the groups and a feeling that the girls had developed friendships. However, even in the group where differences were hard to overcome, they still felt that they had "been able to listen to others and understand different perspectives".

RQ4 What is the extent to which this impact is sustained six months after participation?

In order to understand the longer-term impact of the *Represent* programme on the students who participated, we emailed all staff responsible for delivering the programme in the first two phases. The email included the URL to a short, single question questionnaire and an invitation for anyone who was still interested in being part of the evaluation to be interviewed about their experiences. The email stressed the importance of taking part in the evaluation, even if the school had not completed delivery of the full ten sessions. In addition, facilitators who had been interviewed in the first two phases of the programme were invited to a follow-up interview focused on what had happened since we last spoke. There were 14 respondents to the questionnaire, three facilitators took part in the follow-up interviews, and one facilitator who delivered *Represent* in Phase 1, but was interviewed in Phase 3, talked retrospectively about the impact of the programme in the 10 months since she taught the students.

The questionnaire asked respondents to describe any longer-term impact of the *Represent* project in the months since the students who took part, even if they did not complete the full 10 weeks. We suggested that this could include a case study about an individual student or an overview of the impact on all of the students. Some respondents were unable to give detail of longer-term impact as the students who participated were no longer attending the same school (n=3). The other respondents (n=11) describe positive impact on the students' wellbeing (n=2), communication skills (n=5), oral literacy (n=2), reading levels (n=2), behaviour and risk of exclusion (n=2).

A student, who I now do reading intervention with, still remarks on her experience. There was a book, that directly related to her life. She continued to read it with a learning support assistant and finished the book.

They still talk about the skills they learnt in these sessions and talk about our reflections as a class.
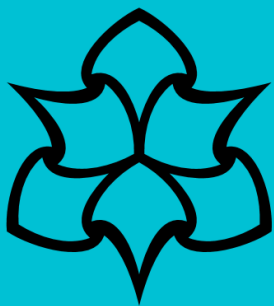
They were able to relate a lot of the content to their own experiences, which meant that they had an opinion to share on several occasions! This sharing, in a positive and thoughtful manner, has continued.

…we focused on the discussion elements. This has had a positive impact on preparations for speaking and listening exams, as they have more confidence and understanding of planning to orally present information/ opinions even when they are struggling with the written and reading elements of the course.

Students have described feeling more confidence with regard to verbal communication.

Students still report feeling a sense of achievement as a result of them taking part in the intervention.

Students have been more comfortable selecting challenging texts to read; more able to articulate ideas in lessons and feel confident in giving their views.

Over time, it was obvious that the student had become more open and willing to listen and understand others. The use of the emotional wheel was also particularly useful as it was a good prompt to help with emotional literacy. This student is now no longer at risk of exclusion.

One of the girls was in a nurture group because she had difficulties in a larger class. She has now been integrated back into a larger group and finds it easier to manage her emotions, e.g. asking for a reset with a member of the senior leadership team rather than becoming angry at the member of staff in the room. She is also displaying less inappropriate behaviour with others e.g. following older students and antagonising them as she has developed meaningful friendships with her own peers.

According to the facilitators who took part in follow up interviews, long-term impact was not guaranteed for all students. Some mentioned students who had been excluded from their setting mid-programme, or who had not attended any of the sessions because they were not interested in the intervention. Others (n=3) felt that long-term impact was dependent to some extent on the follow up support provided for the students post-intervention. As these two facilitators in mainstream settings suggest:

I'd say there's a bit of a mixed bag like to be completely honest, there are some that have really calmed down. There are a couple of girls that did really well and I thought they changed and they're going to be fantastic. They've relaxed a little and got into issues. But I think it's because they've had the 10 weeks and they said they felt listened to, they felt supported. They've had something every week and then it's just cut off. We've moved to a new cohort and there's been nothing in school provided for continuity. I think maybe need touching base sessions or something rolled out to them for the rest of the school because it's not been sustained.

Maybe because they've done the course with us, so they've built that positive relationship with us. They're just maybe struggling to extend that to other people that they haven't done that work with…So I think a lot of it's about the trust side of things.

Another facilitator suggested that even though the programme was interesting and engaging, and the girls felt privileged to be chosen, they were left wondering "what happens next?". There was an understanding that 10 weeks is a short time in the girls' educational experience, and it would be useful to scaffold the months that follow – especially if programme delivery was by a facilitator working for an external organisation or a teacher in a mainstream school who has limited or no contact with the students outside of the programme itself.

In an interview with a teacher working in an alternative provision setting, the following example was shared:

A lot of our students tend to come in and out of education and into the unit where we are, and we've got one girl who didn't work out in alternative provision externally. So, she's come back in, and she asked to come back down because she really enjoyed Represent. I'd finished my Represent cohort, but we're revisiting a couple of the books, and we've been reading the Born fighter one, and she's really enjoying that. For her to come back, considering she's year 10 and she's had a really sketchy engagement with education, shows that it did make an impact. And she came back today and asked first. She wanted to finish the book, so that was a really nice thing. I think she's had a few things happening in life...I think now that the dust has settled and all the trauma that she was going through has kind of stopped, she just wanted to go back to something she was enjoying. So, I just said "yes. We can work that into your timetable." I've had to go to my boss and say, can we just do like half an hour session drop in, doesn't have to be, structured, but we will go through the slides together again on a one-to-one basis and just let her finish the course.

There is therefore a need for support for students transitioning from the programme to whatever comes next and as the above quote above suggests, for students who may not have been able to attend all the sessions for whatever reason to carry on with the programme. It is important to develop trusting and consistent relationships for these students. And this is especially important for those students going into alternative provision or back to mainstream classes or on full timetables. As the teacher above went on to explain about children returning to a mainstream setting:

I called them the Boomerang gang. They took them out and they come back, so attendance has been better when we're in the unit because we have follow-up. If they don't turn up for school, we ring up mom or dad or carer and ask "Why? What's the problem? Anything happened over the weekend?". Whereas in mainstream that is just another number.

Thinking about how the students feel when the programme ends, in three of the workshops, girls spoke about how they wanted the programme to continue. At two of these, some of the girls were unhappy that others were being chosen for the next round of the programme when they had to go back to their usual timetables. There could, therefore, be a sense of loss post-intervention that needs to be considered for those students who had overwhelmingly positive experiences of the programme. Some of the facilitators interviewed included librarians, teachers working in a school's special educational needs support departments and pastoral support leads who were not on full teaching timetables. In these settings, the facilitators delivered the programme as part of long-term relationship building strategies that included thinking about which combinations of students chosen for each programme cohort could provide the foundation for stronger peer support networks.

RQ5 The potential impact of the programme on other areas in participating girls' lives.

The data corresponding to this research question was generated during the facilitator interviews and the workshops with students. At three settings, teachers (and students) described how their participation in the programme impacted upon the students' relationships with parents. The programme opened up lines of communication between the girls and their mothers for example:

One mum was absolutely amazed because her daughter never spoke about school with her. She was amazed that we had managed to get her daughter to approach her to talk to her about school. When we looked at Florence's extract (it was how social media can be damaging if we do not police it enough), this girl went home and asked her mum whether she should be checking her phone more. The girl is a very black and white thinker and doesn't always see the nuances. Her mum appreciated having this way in with her, to be able to talk to her about her phone. And this also helped her mum to understand her more through the questioning process.

Or the topics became something that they could share at home:

I do know that they went home and talked to parents because we asked for parents' feedback.

For two teachers, the programme provided a shift in the nature of their communication with students' parents. For example:

One girl on the programme would never access any interventions and she's on the SEN register. Every phone call home about her was extremely negative and there had never been anything positive. Her parents were over the moon when they received a call to say how well she was engaging with this. And we were unsure at the start as to whether or not she would engage. And she did. And she was great. She was up for each meeting. After that, the English teacher in particular has said that she will now read out loud in that lesson, so it's not just in the lesson with us. She'll also read out loud with a lot more of an audience, which I think was a huge barrier for her to start with.

Two teachers described choosing students to take part in the programme (one boy from a minority background and one girl with a disability) to broaden their experience of interacting with peers about real world issues. In both instances, the teachers felt that they held very narrow viewpoints about other people because of the limited exposure to broader socio-cultural perspectives beyond their immediate family outside of school. Both students were isolated to some extent from peers because of the support they received from teaching assistants and the partial delivery of their lessons in alternative provision within mainstream settings. They were both able to explore different perspectives and learn to understand the experiences of others. For example:
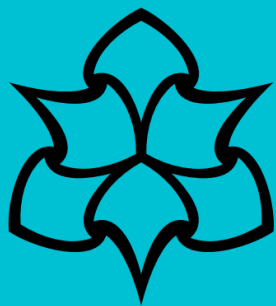
We had one student of Asian ethnicity who is quite traditional in his attitudes towards women. They were little bit sexist at first, I would say. When we got him in this programme really, he didn't want to do it. At first, he did not interact with the girls in the group very politely as he felt that women shouldn't work. And then the girls would start arguing quite strongly. They used a lot of the text that we used, and especially the one about Instagram. That one really helped because…his language use and his attitudes towards women changed, to the point he's even started to debate with his dad about how women should be and has started helping his mum cooking, which is in my opinion amazing progress. And then he's like, "I didn't realise how busy my mum was because you just take it for granted, don't you?"…"she's at home but she does work because well and she doesn't stop and no wonder she gets tired and ratty". It's helped him to recognise inequalities and he was actually quite shocked about things like the pay gap and the impact on women. So, we looked into that, taking the discussion off into a different kind of route. He did a whole PowerPoint on it, so it's really opened his eyes. He also started going on about how men were seen in the media, and how they should look a certain way or be a certain way. So, as he's made amazing progress…If we don't help him to see what the world's actually like, how is he meant to know?

One of the main ways to understand how the programme has impacted other aspects of the students' lives, not directly discussed in the first four research questions, is through a content analysis of the collages created by the students. The seven collages provide useful insight into what they found significant and impactful about the programme. Arts-based methods are an important methodological tool for documenting the experiences and thoughts of 'hard to reach' populations such as girls at risk of exclusion, as they can engage young people with complex psychosocial needs and empower them as partners in research.[15]

The collages provided a way to develop the girls' communication skills while they presented their thoughts about the programme, overcoming the power differential between them and the research team who were relative strangers. Using visual analysis methods,[16] we identified four key themes in the collages – diversity, faces, kindness/non-judgement, and empowerment – that align with the aims of *Represent*.

1. **Diversity** is represented by images of people that include different genders, ages, races, body types etc. Seeing oneself represented is important in terms of wellbeing and confidence. Two of the collages explicitly mention representation of race in the text accompanying the images: e.g. "Black and Muslim is beautiful". Conversations with these two groups explicitly mentioned dissatisfaction at the lack of diversity in representation in media. The diversity shown in the collages, especially one that included images of women at

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[15] Nathan, S et al. (2023) The use of arts-based methodologies and methods with young people with complex psychosocial needs: A systematic narrative review. *Health Expectations*. https://doi.org/10.1111/hex.13705

[16] Bell, P. (2004) Content Analysis of Visual Images in Van Leeuwen and Jewitt *The Handbook of Visual Analysis* London:SAGE https://doi.org/10.4135/9780857020062

different life stages (from toddler to pensioner) highlight recognition that the programme focuses on diversity of representation. Such openness and positivity regarding diversity links to the programme aims that focus on positive relationships, wellbeing, and resilience.

Figure 8: A section of a collage created by students as part of a creative workshop

2. **Faces** feature prominently on all the collages, with a particular focus on reflections/seeing others. One collage is dominated by two striking images placed opposite one another of a human face gazing at a robot/masked face (see Figure 8). The idea of understanding the world from the perspectives of others is a key feature of the *Represent* programme, especially the programme aim of building positive relationships, and this comes through the image choices made by the girls creating the collages. In addition to faces, two of the collages (from different settings) feature heads with either visible brains or images representing the complexities of how brains work, highlighting the ways in which the programme has provided food for thought for the girls who took part, which links to the empowerment theme we discuss below.

3. **Kindness/Non-Judgement** is a key feature of all the collages, both in the expressions on the faces that feature, but also in the accompanying text that some participants have opted to share. For example, "Everyone is perfect." Even more forcefully, one poster states: 'Don't judge someone by the colour of there skin' [sic]. The idea of being judged and of being against this judgement, is clearly a significant feeling that the girls wanted to express at the end of the programme. It may be that through the programme they have felt able to express the ways they feel judged, but it could also be that they now have a voice/way of communicating this feeling. This theme connects with the programme aim of wellbeing and positive relationships.

4. **Empowerment** features in the positive affirmations included in most of the collages. For example, 'You changed the world.' Engaging with and displaying empowering messages could signify the positive self-esteem participants feel.

Positive self-narratives are a key component of resilience, because holding ourselves in positive regard aids the ability to overcome difficult experiences[17]. Thus, the empowering themes in the collage connect with the programme aim of resilience. One collage in particular focuses on the strength of women, drawing from on the how the girls felt more self-confident as a result of the discussions that took place as part of the programme.

Given that the quantitative data found that the students who accessed the *Represent* programme presented with relatively low level of wellbeing pre-intervention (see Table 1), it is noteworthy that the girls' participation experiences shown by the collages are overwhelmingly positive and related to the aims of the programme. This is a significant outcome when considering the often-difficult experiences in education of the young people[18] targeted by *Represent*.

As the girls discussed the content of the collages with the researchers facilitating the workshops, they mentioned the wider impact of being part of the programme. This included the development of stronger relationships with facilitators and developing a sense of belonging to the setting. Girls at two schools in particular were especially keen to show how their work as part of the project had been showcased to the wider student body. The poster shown in Figure 9 was created during an action project on Growth Mindset. It was overlayed with braille as part of the lamination process and was displayed in the corridor for others to see. At another secondary school, the students co-wrote a poem about bullying that was shown to the lower school in assembly.
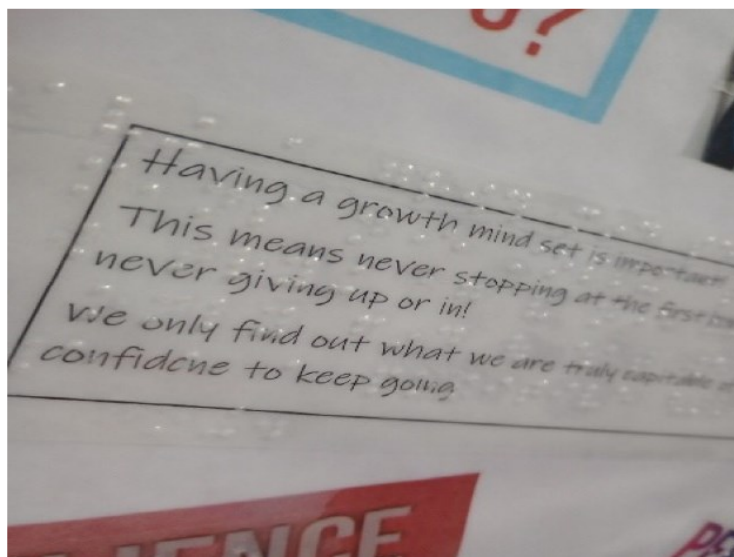
Figure 9: A close up of a section of a poster on growth mind set with transparent braille stickers over the top of the text.

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[17] Simanjuntak, P. and Sulastri, A., 2023, February. Building Children's Resilience in The School Environment: A Literature Review. In *Proceedings of World Conference on Health and Social Science* (Vol. 1, No. 1, pp. 31-37).
[18] Clarke, E. (2023) Understanding girls' experiences of being at risk of permanent exclusion: How do we get there? BERA Blog https://www.bera.ac.uk/blog/understanding-girls-experiences-of-being-at-risk-of-permanent-exclusion-how-do-we-get-there

At other settings, the girls wanted their collages to be on display in the corridor, the library, or in office of a senior leader. They were keen to have head teachers and other staff members see what they had produced and receive the positive reinforcement. A girl at one school wanted to show the collage to peers during assembly

Finally, being part of *Represent* has enabled programme facilitators to build evidence that may influence future work. For example, a sports club delivering the programme in schools in the greater London area took Year 7 students to present their action projects to an audience in one of the meeting rooms at the House of Lords. And a different secondary school painted a collage about their *Represent* work on one of the school walls.

Figure 10: Part of a wall mural about *Represent* painted on the wall of a secondary school
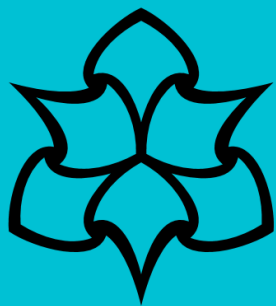
The overall impact of the *Represent* programme

Overall, the impact of the *Represent* programme has been overwhelmingly positive. Providing the materials, resources, and framework for an intervention, but allowing facilitators to deliver it in a way that fit their context, empowers facilitators and trusts in their professional knowledge about their students. As such, this structure may have contributed to how positively the programme was received. This is almost the opposite of how curriculum is dictated and how such oversight contributes to diminish both satisfaction within the teaching profession and positive dispositions to school in children and young people[19].
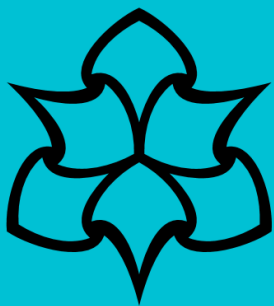
Facilitators have genuinely enjoyed using the resources with their students. They describe the importance of giving girls at risk of exclusion opportunities to discuss important issues in small 'safer' groups. Indeed, one of the selling points of *Represent* is the focus on important issues in the students' lives. Some of the topics that feature in the activities can be considered as difficult to discuss, especially when they resonate with the lives of the students – for example, negative experiences of social media use or difficult relationships. It is this reflection process that the team at NLT felt would be productive in helping the students process difficult topics. There is a similarity between the approach of the *Represent* programme in providing an opportunity for these girls to discuss issues which negatively affect their lives – recognising them as widespread and not individualised – and the consciousness-raising method of second wave feminists which did the same in facilitating a political discussion and action regarding inequalities widely experienced by women.[20] Therefore, facilitators found that the programme enabled them to shape a space in which the students could engage in this reflection process beneficially.

In the main, the *Represent* programme has been targeted effectively: students completing the pre-intervention questionnaire reported a higher than national average eligibility for free school meals, which is used as a proxy measure of deprivation in England, and 49.7% of the students measured low levels of mental wellbeing on the Short Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale. Girls had significantly lower self-reported levels of wellbeing and resilience than boys, agreeing with existing research that suggest girls have more emotional difficulties in puberty, can be vulnerable to negative/dysfunctional coping styles, lower resilience scores, and experience more problems with relationships and peers[21]. Therefore, *Represent* has been appropriately and effectively targeted at excluded girls and those at risk of exclusion, to address their comparatively lower chances of

[19] Ainsworth, S., and Oldfield, J. (2019) Quantifying teacher resilience: Context matters. Teaching and Teacher Education, 82, 117–128. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2019.03.012; O'Leary, M. (2023) Ofsted remains 'out of touch' and views itself as 'beyond criticism and reform' https://www.bcu.ac.uk/education-and-social-work/about-us/news-and-events/ofsted-remains-out-of-touch-and-views-itself-as-beyond-criticism-and-reform

[20] Shrieve, A. (1990) Women Together, Women Alone: The Legacy of the Consciousness-Raising Movement. New York: Fawcett Books

[21] Yoon et al. (2022) Gender difference in the change of adolescents' mental health and subjective wellbeing trajectories European Child & Adolescent Psychiatry; Hänninen, V. and Aro, H (1996) Sex differences in coping and depression among young adults Social Science & Medicine 43(10):1453-1460

educational achievement. Where boys have taken part, because settings could not deliver to girls alone, they have also benefitted from participating in the programme.

The evaluation of the Represent programme set out to understand five key aims. The first relates to how participating girls and facilitators experience the Represent programme. Both students and facilitators were generally positive about their experiences of taking part, mentioning the opportunity to work in small groups on topics that were deemed 'important' and developing relationships between the facilitators and the students and between the students – especially when the groups included girls from different year groups. These relationships contribute towards building peer networks in schools that in turn improve wellbeing and resilience. The students also talked about how their relationships with each other had developed during the programme and how they were more likely to interact with each other outside of the sessions. Facilitators also discussed how the programme impacted on the students' relationships with their parents. Existing research[22] suggests that girls' friendships predict their mental health and wellbeing, indirectly inferring that the relationships formed as part of the programme could be a first step towards building resilience in adolescence and early adulthood. Such improved resilience could, in turn, contribute towards how they develop other relationships beyond the programme and potentially have a positive impact on wellbeing – at least in the short term.

The facilitators reported benefits in terms of access to *Represent* resources, improving their understanding of oracy-focused activities, and getting to know the students better. Although there were programme management issues at a number of settings – including the erratic or part time attendance of the students who took part – facilitators confirmed that there was a positive impact even if they did not complete the whole programme. This impact, described briefly by both students and facilitators as making the students calmer, more confident, and listened to, in turn had a positive impact on students' attendance more generally, their participation in lessons, and their learning – both in terms of improved literacy levels and their engagement in other subjects. As a result of participating in *Represent,* students are perceived to be more likely to ask questions, to put their hands up to answer questions, and generally to be more present.

The programme affected facilitators practice of supporting their students by developing their capacity to facilitate discussions on difficult topics, providing the necessary scaffolding through their use of the resources provided. Facilitators felt supported by the team at NLT and were positive about the training they received – particularly on the use of activities to promote students' oracy skills. The programme helped facilitators develop a better understanding of their students' lives and needs, through discussions about issues that resonated with them on a more personal level.

The pre- and post-intervention questionnaire data found that participation in the *Represent* programme improved girls' wellbeing. This was corroborated by the qualitative data provided by the facilitators and the students themselves. Impact such as improved attendance relate to increasing levels of confidence and wellbeing –

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[22] Chow, W. (2008). The role of friendship on adolescent mental health problems (Doctoral thesis). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database.

especially within their education settings. If students feel better about their education, and more confident about themselves, they are more motivated to attend. In addition, analysis of the qualitative data indicated improvements in the girls' communication skills, their understanding of forming positive relationships, and their resilience. Facilitators and students described positive impacts of the programme on relationships – especially with facilitators and peers, but also with parents. The programme provided opportunities for students to feel heard, find their voice, and make mistakes in a 'safer' context. As such, facilitators have described how they have become more resilient within the context of the sessions delivered as part of the *Represent* programme. Although some suggested that it is difficult to determine impact in either resilience or wellbeing within the context of their interactions with the students (especially over a ten-week period). However, students are described as being better able to listen to other people's opinions, to reflect on conflicting views, and to think about their own opinions, which suggests that they are more resilient to negative interactions with other people at least in the short term.
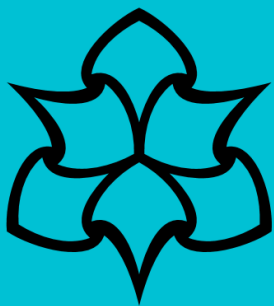
According to 11 facilitators surveyed, some of this impact is evident six months after participation, especially the positive impact on the students' self-confidence, their confidence in reading, and increased communication skills. However, there were also facilitators who described limited impact and it must be noted that long term impact is dependent on the follow up support that is provided post intervention. As some of the facilitators suggested in their interviews, the programme was interesting and engaging, and the girls felt privileged to be chosen, but "what happens next?" There was an understanding that 10 weeks is a short time in the girls' educational experience, and it would be useful to scaffold the months that follow. Recommendations were made for funding, training and/or support for such provision to be put in place, especially with regards to how to improve relationships between the students and schoolteachers not involved in the delivery of the programme. It is important to develop trusting and consistent relationships with these students.

Given the positive impact of the programme in terms of self-confidence and wellbeing, it may have the potential for wider impact with other students. The Covid Pandemic of 2020-2022 affected young people and their education in unprecedented ways in recent history. Their education was drastically changed at short notice to online home-based schooling, and attendance at school was hugely disrupted for at least 2 academic years. The legacy of this on young people's education and mental health is just emerging. A comprehensive review has found that young people's wellbeing and educational participation have been greatly affected, with certain students more negatively impacted than others: '[…] female students with poor academic performance, isolated children, low-income families, indigenous and disabled groups, as well as vulnerable groups'[23]. The *Represent* programme, then, in being targeted at girls at risk of exclusion, and being focused on resilience and well-being, is timely given the inequitable negative impacts of covid on this group who already have struggles in participating and achieving in education. Given the data which demonstrates positive effects of the programme on wellbeing and

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[23] Tang, K.H.D., 2023. Impacts of COVID-19 on primary, secondary and tertiary education: a comprehensive review and recommendations for educational practices. *Educational Research for Policy and Practice*, 22(1), pp.23-61.

engagement, it would be a good evidence-based intervention to apply as part of any covid recovery measures aimed at young people whose education was negatively affected.

Implications and Conclusions

Key Findings and recommendations

The evaluation of the *Represent* programme suggests that the intervention has:

- increased students' self-confidence and confidence in reading.
- increased students' communication skills.
- positively impacted students' wellbeing.
- developed relationships between facilitators, students and, to a lesser extent, parents.

The resources developed as part of the programme have:
- enabled structures through which meaningful discussions can take place on important topics in the students' lives.
- provided diverse representation through which students could more readily identify themselves and/or understand other people's perspectives.

Providing the materials, resources, and framework for an intervention, but allowing facilitators to deliver the programme how they feel fits their context empowers facilitators and trusts in their professional knowledge.
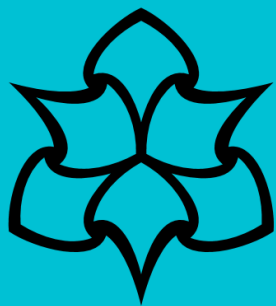
Challenges related to the logistics of delivering the programme within the limitations of timetabling and having staff available to facilitate delivery to small groups of students.

The resources could benefit from more differentiation, namely including:
- text extracts in a range of lengths.
- extracts drawn from more of the books provided in the box.
- more gender-neutral material.

Recommendations

- As the *Represent* programme has demonstrated, small group provision in education settings is important for this cohort of students.

- The positive impact of an oracy focus was a key finding of the evaluation. Given the importance of oracy in terms of confidence and development of voice as a foundational skills for engaging with literacy we would recommend an ongoing 'oracy first' approach for this demographic of students.

- Facilitators who engaged with the Represent programme were passionate educators who gave their own time to advocate for the programme, and to adapt and develop their own resources and versions. As such, we recommend collaborating with practitioners to co-develop future iterations and/or shared resource repositories.

- Further, an interactive platform showcasing student projects and work from the programme would be an impactful way to value the engagement of the students, and to develop good practice.

- Long-term impact is most evident where *Represent* is delivered as part of a longer-term support structure, requiring processes of supportive transition post intervention. Future programmes should consider the importance of sustained engagement to consolidate or even develop further positive outcomes.

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