



THE LONDON SCHOOL
OF ECONOMICS AND
POLITICAL SCIENCE ■

LSE Explore 2025

Evaluation report

Opening doors to opportunity

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With thanks to the participants of LSE Explore 2025.

Executive Summary

This evaluation examines LSE Explore 2025, a widening participation initiative for year 12 state school students from across the UK. The series consisted of virtual subject taster events and admissions information sessions designed to increase understanding of the diversity within LSE's academic offering and support informed university choices amongst students from underrepresented backgrounds. The findings of this evaluation will be used to inform future delivery of LSE Explore.

What research questions were explored?

1. To what extent does participation in the virtual subject tasters change students' understanding of studying specific subjects at LSE and university study in general?
 2. How does attending LSE Explore influence students' perceptions of LSE?
 3. How does participation in the series affect students' ability and intention to apply to LSE?
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How did we seek to answer these questions?

Pre-post survey design was used, collecting quantitative and qualitative data from 546 attendees (with 276 completing both surveys). The surveys measured changes in understanding, perceptions, and intentions using Likert scales and open-ended questions. Quantitative responses were analysed using descriptive statistics, while qualitative feedback was examined through thematic analysis to provide deeper insights.

Key findings

- **Improved understanding of university study:** Knowledge of what studying at university would be like increased from 64% to 91%.
- **Broader awareness of social sciences at LSE:** Understanding of the range of social sciences degree programmes at LSE rose from 66% to 96%.
- **Subject-specific knowledge gains:** All six subject tasters improved students' understanding of both studying the subject at university and LSE's approach, with the largest improvements in Philosophy, Government and International Relations.
- **Strengthened perceptions of LSE:** Students gained a deeper understanding of LSE, appreciating its academic rigour, diversity perspectives, and supportive environment. Student Ambassadors played a key role in making LSE seem real and accessible.

- **Improved LSE admissions knowledge:** Understanding of LSE's admissions process increased from 34% to 91% and awareness of contextual offers from 31% to 89%.
 - **Stable undergraduate application intentions:** Students' likelihood of applying to LSE remained high and stable (84% before vs. 86% after), suggesting Explore attracts students already inclined toward LSE.
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Recommendations

1. **Focus on subject-level conversion:** Emphasise promoting applications to the specific Explore subjects rather than LSE generally.
2. **Consider confidence-building strategies:** Explore ways to further boost students' confidence in securing a university place.
3. **Enhance evaluation of subject choice:** Add survey questions to track changes in students' likelihood of applying to specific subjects and perceptions of subject viability.

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3 Recommendations

- 3.1 Focus on conversion to LSE UG applications for Explore subjects
- 3.2 Consider confidence-building strategies
- 3.3 Enhance evaluation around subject choice

1 Introduction

This report shares the findings of the evaluation of LSE Explore 2025, a widening participation intervention for year 12 students. The following section provides the background and context of the series, outlines the evaluation design, and explains why this evaluation was undertaken.

1.1 Intervention

LSE Explore is a series of virtual subject taster events and admissions information sessions for year 12 state school students from across the UK. The series provides a valuable opportunity for students from diverse geographical areas to experience an insight into undergraduate study at LSE, particularly subjects which are less well-known and have an underrepresentation of students from widening participation backgrounds.

The series aims to help students to develop a clearer understanding and awareness of:

- undergraduate study within six lesser-known LSE departments
- the diverse degree programmes available at LSE and the broader benefits of studying social sciences at university
- the wider student experience at LSE and the opportunities available
- the LSE admissions process.

LSE Explore began in 2022, and attendance has more than doubled from 225 students in its first year to 546 students across the series in 2025. This year, students from every region of England attended, with approximately two thirds of students from London and the South East of England.

The 2025 attendees had the following characteristics:

LSE Widening Participation priority group	Attendees
First generation in family to attend university	41%
Eligible for free school meals during their secondary education	25%
Low university participation areas (TUNDRA quintiles 1 or 2)	15%
Care-experienced student	1%

Table 1: Characteristics of LSE Explore 2025 students

In line with patterns observed for LSE’s other widening participation programmes, 70% of attendees were female, 29% were male, and 1% preferred not to say.

Taking place across two weeks in May 2025, the LSE Explore 2025 series consisted of:

- Six 90-minute subject taster events consisting of a department introduction, taster lecture, Q&A time with department staff and peer insights from Student Ambassadors.
- 60-minute admissions events in which an LSE Admissions Specialist provided an overview of the application process, personal statements, and LSE’s contextual admissions policy.

The contributing departments change each year to align with widening participation goals and departmental capacity. In 2025, the Explore subjects were:

2025 Contributing LSE departments

	Geography and Environment		Management
	Government		Psychological and Behavioural Science
	International Relations		Philosophy, Logic and Scientific Method

1.2 Previous Work

Findings from TASO (2022) and Go Higher West Yorkshire (2025) indicate that subject tasters can help students to understand and experience specific degree programmes in an immersive environment. However, in general, there is limited research on subject tasters as a university access activity and limited longitudinal evidence on whether subject tasters increase progression rates to the relevant subjects.

Internal evaluation of LSE Explore has been conducted annually since the pilot series in 2022, with surveys and event content refined each year.

1.3 Research Questions

Although to date LSE Explore has been open to all UK state school students, within [LSE's Access and Participation Plan for 2025/26 – 2028/29](#), LSE Explore is a key activity aimed at improving access for students in LSE's priority widening participation groups (TUNDRA quintiles 1 and 2, eligible for free school meals, and care-experienced). An expansion of LSE Explore is also planned for 2026, introducing an additional in-person opportunity with priority access for students from these groups. It is therefore an ideal time to evaluate the effectiveness of LSE Explore to inform future development and improvement.

The evaluation aims to find out:

- To what extent does participation in the virtual subject tasters change participants' understanding of studying specific subjects at LSE, and of university study in general?
- How does attending LSE Explore influence students' perceptions of LSE?
- How does participation in the activity affect students' ability and intention to applying to LSE?

1.4 Methodology and Ethics

Pre-post survey design was used to evaluate the impact of the series on participating year 12 students. As students could choose to attend any event up until the day of the event, a single pre-activity survey was used for all students with branched questions for the events that they planned to attend. Similarly, a single post-activity survey was used for all students with branched questions based on the events they did attend.

The pre-activity survey was shared with all 1,134 students who had been accepted onto the intervention 12 days before the first event in the series. Accepted students were all UK state school students who met the GCSE entry requirements for LSE if they were to apply in future. The post survey was shared the day after the final event with the 546 students who had attended at least one event in the series.

Of the 546 participants who attended the series:

- 492 participants completed the pre survey (90% completion rate)
- 284 participants completed the post survey (52% completion rate)
- 276 participants (50%) completed both the pre and post surveys.

The pre survey established baseline measures relating to understanding of studying the subject at university/LSE, perception of LSE and intention to apply to LSE. The post survey captured any changes in these measures. Both surveys included a combination of Likert scale items and open-ended questions, allowing for the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data. Open-ended questions invited students to provide more detail on their experiences of LSE Explore and how their perceptions of LSE had changed. Quantitative data was analysed using descriptive statistics and qualitative data was analysed thematically. Participation in the surveys was voluntary, and students' personal data was not linked to survey responses.

The evaluation approach adopts a post-positivist stance in that it assumes students' knowledge and attitudes exist as real phenomena that can be measured through pre-post surveys. This approach reflects the outcome-orientated nature of higher education access research. While objectivity is sought through quantitative analysis, it is also acknowledged that participants' responses are context dependent, meaning that the results provide an approximation of participants' experiences rather than absolute truth. Where relevant, qualitative responses are incorporated pragmatically to offer a more holistic interpretation of participants' responses and to capture the nuanced ways participants engaged with the series within their own unique circumstances.

A limitation of this research is the position of LSE and its role in students' futures, whereby LSE will make decisions on some LSE Explore participants' applications should they choose to apply for undergraduate study at LSE. Although students are informed that there is no link between survey responses and any future interactions with LSE, this dynamic may nevertheless influence some participants' responses, leading them to be overly positive or to withhold negative feedback. Whilst students are encouraged to be honest, this limitation is an inherent risk in all higher education research activity with students who will later be subject to individual-level decision-making by the institution.

Ethics approval was sought and granted for the pre-post surveys within this research.

2 Findings

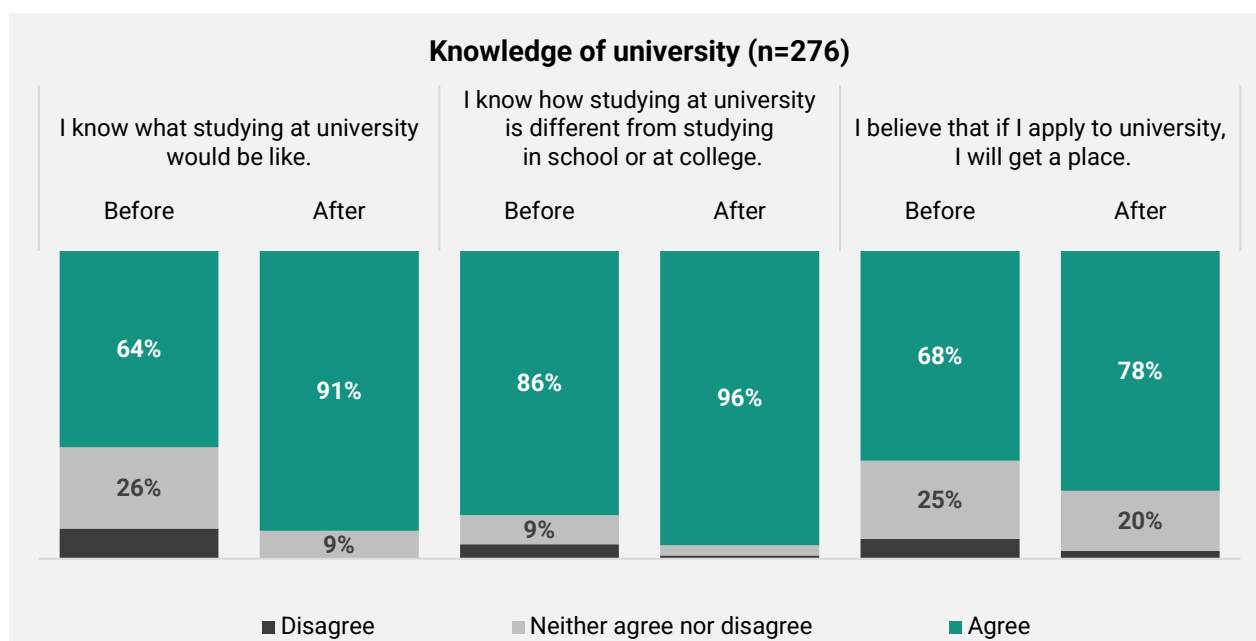
This section presents the key findings from the evaluation, structured around the three research questions: understanding of university study, perceptions of LSE, and application intentions.

2.1 To what extent does participation in the virtual subject tasters change participants' understanding of studying specific subjects at LSE, and of university study in general?

These findings encompass three interconnected aspects of pre-entry understanding relating to university study in general, studying social sciences at LSE, and studying the six specific subject area included within LSE Explore.

University study in general

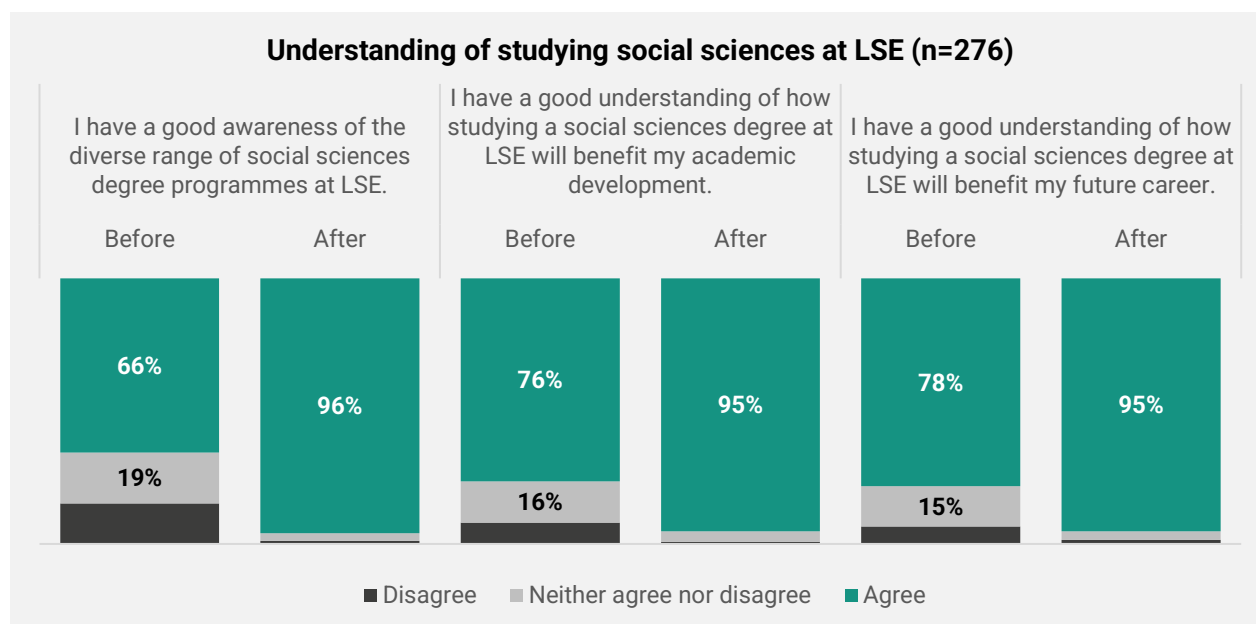
LSE Explore had a positive impact on students' knowledge of university in general and their confidence in receiving an offer for university. The largest improvement was observed in students' knowledge of what studying at university would be like, increasing from 64% before the intervention to 91% after the intervention (+ 27 percentage points).



Whilst confidence in securing a university place improved from 68% to 78%, this was the item with the highest level of uncertainty post-series, as 20% of students still felt neutral about receiving an offer from any university. This uncertainty is reasonable as many factors can influence this confidence, such as academic self-perception, gender, socioeconomic background and first-generation student status. However, it could be useful for the programme team to consider how this confidence could be boosted further in future LSE Explore events.

Studying social sciences at LSE

After attending LSE Explore, there was a significant improvement in students' understanding of studying social sciences at LSE. This indicates that the breadth of LSE's degree programmes and the benefits of studying social sciences at LSE was successfully communicated to students.



This finding is particularly important as LSE sees a concentration of undergraduate applications in well-known degree programmes with perceived vocational links (eg, Economics or Law), a pattern which is also observed amongst applicants from widening participation priority groups.

One possible cause of this is the perception that degrees with vocational links offer safer career prospects, which is vital for students who (need to) prioritise future job security and financial stability. In contrast, less well-known social science degrees may be overlooked by students from widening participation priority groups since these students may not have had access to comprehensive and accurate labour market information and may inadvertently underestimate the transferable skills and career prospects of these subjects. As a result, students from these groups may not have the confidence to pursue a less well-known subject which interests them, especially in uncertain labour markets.

The LSE Explore series touched on this with a brief overview of the career prospects of each subject, and by the end of the series, 95% of students reported a clear understanding of how studying social science degrees at LSE can support their future careers, up 17 percentage points from before the series.

“I didn't realise just how many courses there were and all the combinations possible which is exciting”

Studying the six LSE Explore subjects

Across all subject tasters, there was a positive change in students’ understanding of studying the subject at university and at LSE specifically.

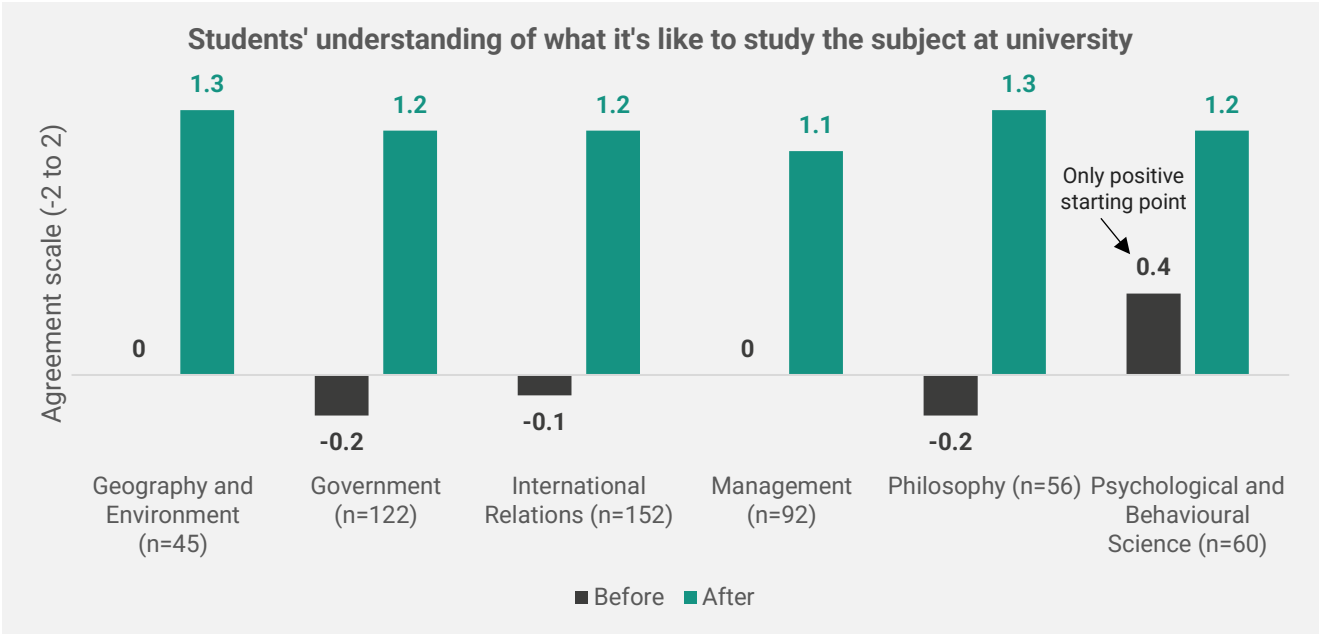
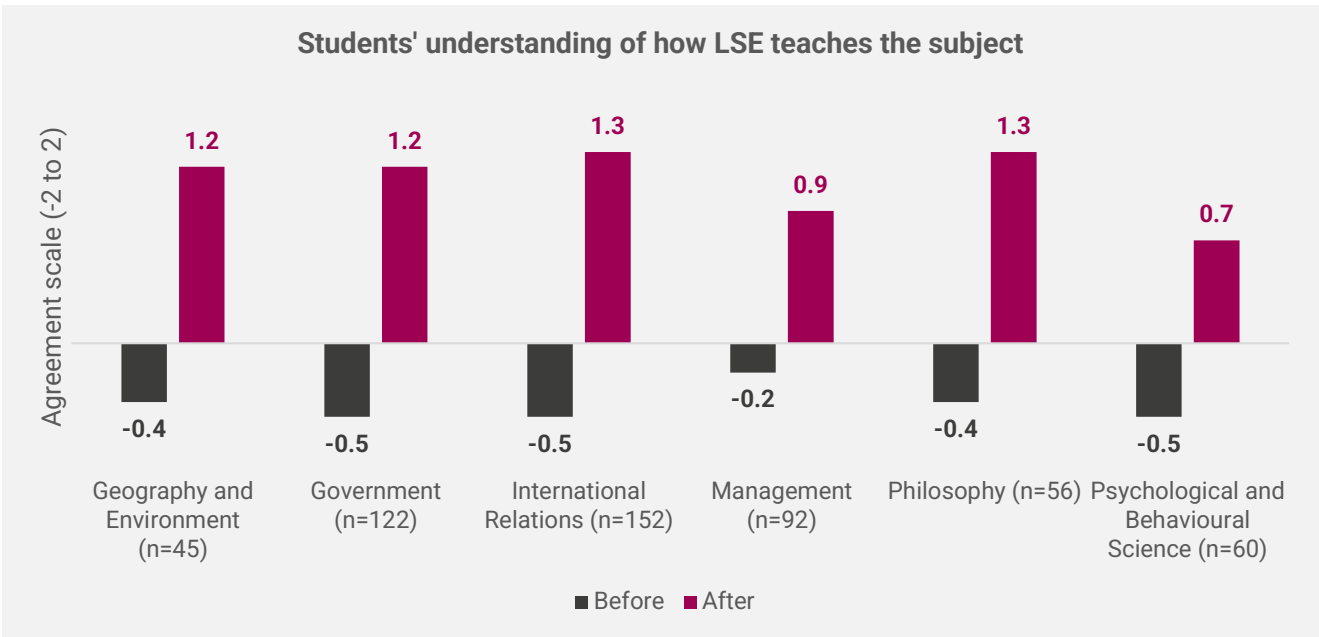


Figure 3: Likert responses options of ‘strongly agree’ to ‘strongly disagree’ coded as 2 to -2



“ A real sense of what lectures and conversations with professors would be like at LSE: rigorous, engaging, and grounded in real-world relevance ”

With the exception of Management, on average, students made greater gains in understanding how LSE teaches the subject compared to the gains in their understanding of studying the subject at university in general. This is expected since the academics and current students focused on LSE’s approach to the subject and their own experiences at LSE.

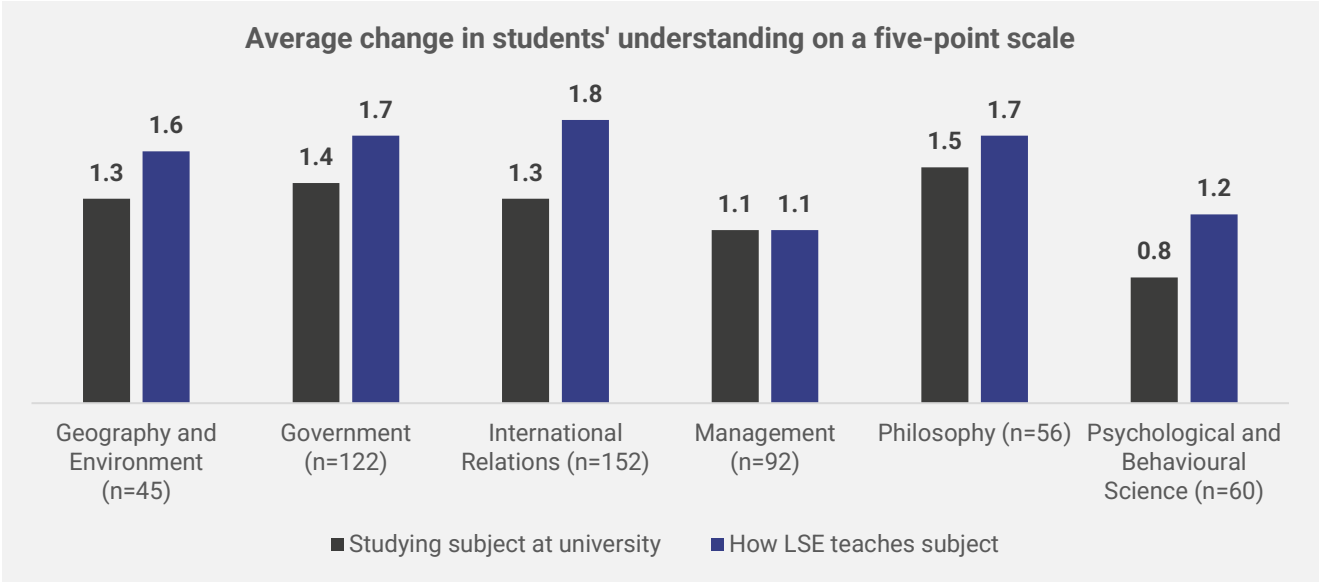


Figure 3: Likert responses options of ‘strongly agree’ to ‘strongly disagree’ coded as 2 to -2

Gains across the two measures were smaller for Management and Psychological and Behavioural Science (PBS), but still positive. It is important to note that PBS started with the highest baseline understanding of studying the subject at university (and was the only subject with a positive starting point), which may have limited the event’s potential for creating impact. This may help explain why PBS also received the lowest event rating across the series, suggesting that its content resonated less strongly with students than other subject tasters, possibly because it offered fewer new or unexpected insights.

"I've made a decision about what I want to do based off these taster lectures."

2.2 How does attending LSE Explore influence students' perceptions of LSE?

Qualitative post-survey feedback indicated that attending LSE Explore either altered or reinforced students' perceptions of LSE in a variety of ways. This was achieved by providing an experiential and realistic understanding of LSE's academic and social environment.

Thematic analysis of qualitative data revealed that students frequently described a shift from viewing LSE largely based on its prestigious reputation, to appreciating the intellectual rigour, diversity of perspectives, and academic support that are at the core of LSE's learning environment. Exposure to the breadth of degree programmes and degree combinations further enhanced students' understanding of the academic opportunities at LSE.

From a social perspective, students felt that LSE Explore fostered a sense of community by improving students' understanding of the vibrant student life and the collegial relationships between staff and students. This latter element was a surprise for some students, likely because of how this differs to the school/sixth form dynamic between teachers and students. Many participants were also reassured and inspired by the first-hand experiences of Student Ambassadors, who were key to conveying what it means to be part of the LSE community. Hearing from Student Ambassadors helped to "humanise" the university and allowed Explore students to visualise themselves as LSE students and see LSE as a place where they could "thrive".

For some, attending Explore strengthened their motivation to apply to LSE, as the prospect of studying at LSE felt more achievable and exciting. For other students, they maintained their pre-existing positive perceptions of LSE based on prior research of LSE as a potential university choice.

Overall, LSE Explore uplifted and upheld students' perceptions of LSE as a dynamic, supportive, and intellectually stimulating university destination.

"I feel I truly understood the unparalleled education you receive at this university, and it encouraged me to do everything I possibly can to get in."

2.3 How does participation in the series affect students' ability and intention to apply to LSE?

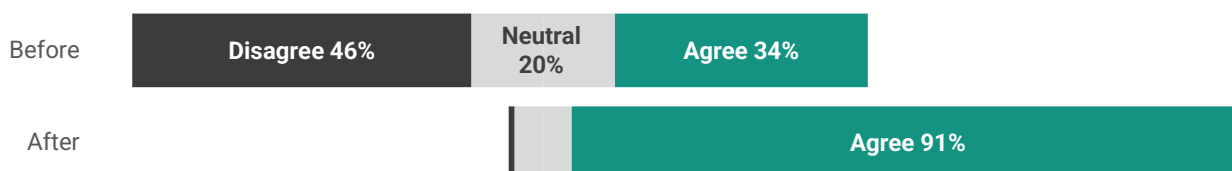
LSE Explore 2025 aimed to provide students with both the knowledge and desire to apply to LSE. The series successfully equipped students with the knowledge to complete an application to LSE, but on average, it did not impact students' intentions to apply to LSE, which remained equally positive before and after the series.

Admissions knowledge

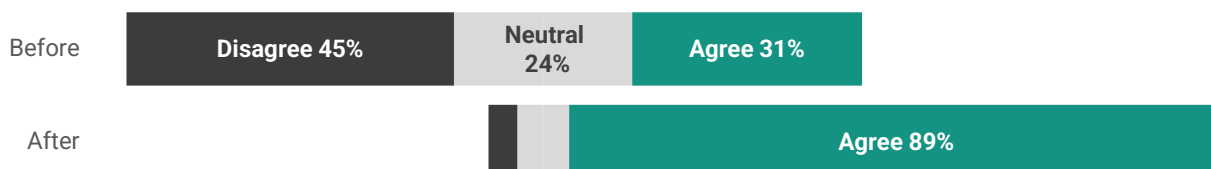
LSE Explore 2025 included optional admissions information sessions, during which an LSE Admissions Specialist provided a 25-minute overview of the LSE admissions process and offered personal statement advice.

Following the events, significantly positive increases in admissions-related knowledge were observed:

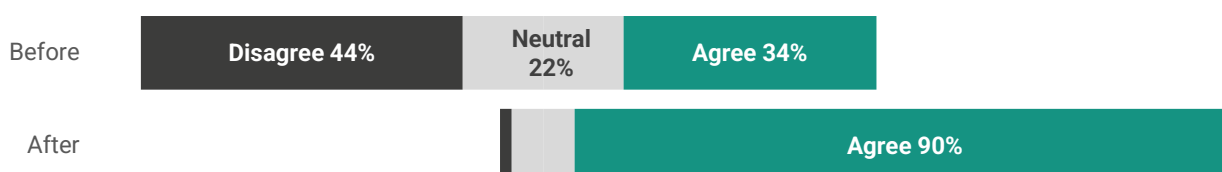
I have a good understanding of LSE's admissions process



I am aware of LSE's Contextual Offer Scheme



I understand how to write a strong personal statement



Intention to apply to LSE

Before and after LSE Explore, students were asked about their intention to apply to LSE and their confidence in receiving an offer from the School.

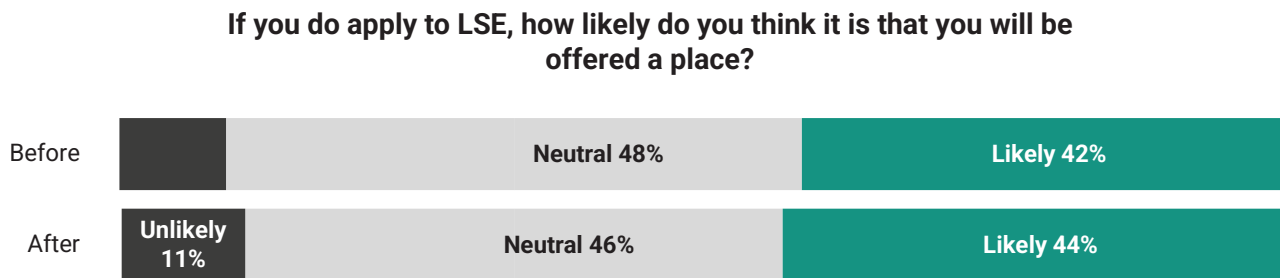


Figure 5: Participants’ responses (n=276) to each statement as self-reported pre/post responses on a five-point Likert scale, aggregating ‘likely’ and ‘unlikely’ options.

Students’ likelihood of applying to LSE and their confidence about receiving an offer from LSE remained positive and stable before and after attending LSE Explore. This suggests that Explore 2025 reached students who had some familiarity with LSE and/or were already certain of LSE as one of their university choices, as opposed to students who were unsure of LSE as a university choice or were totally unfamiliar with the School. The potential for Explore’s impact is therefore likely not on conversion to LSE applications in general, but on conversion to the specific LSE Explore subjects.

Future matching in early 2026 with LSE undergraduate admissions data from the 2025/26 UCAS cycle will allow further exploration of students’ LSE application decisions and subject choices. Additionally, Higher Education Track data (anticipated in November 2027 for 2026 entry) will facilitate further analysis of subject choices for students who enrol at other UK universities.

“Changed my perspective on how I view the process of applying to university; not something daunting but rather something that will expand my horizons and enrich my life.”

3 Recommendations

Based on the findings, this section outlines recommendations to enhance the impact of LSE Explore and shape future programme development. All recommendations are short-term recommendations which can be actioned for LSE Explore 2026.

3.1 Focus content on conversion to Explore subjects, rather than to LSE in general

Since students attending LSE Explore already have a strong intention to apply to LSE prior to participating, more weighting should be given in session content to promoting undergraduate applications to the specific LSE Explore subject areas, rather than to LSE in general.

3.2 Consider confidence-building strategies

Explore ways to further boost students' confidence in securing a university place, as this may impact their subject choice.

3.3 Enhance evaluation around subject choice

Linking with 3.1, it would be useful to build a more in-depth understanding of how Explore impacts subject choice. This could be achieved by adding quantitative and qualitative pre-post survey questions on students' interest in the Explore subject(s), likelihood of applying to the specific Explore subject(s) at LSE and HE in general, and their perception of the subject(s). The likelihood data will provide an earlier proxy measure for university subject choices in year 12 before actual LSE undergraduate application data is available in year 13 and HE destinations data is available 2-3 years following the series.

This help to evaluate if under the surface of the macro-level stability in students' intentions to apply to LSE in general, there are any impacts on students' subject choice (ie, does attending a subject event confirm or change students' subject choice) and how their perception of the subject changes before and after LSE Explore (particularly in terms of the viability of the subject as a next step).

References

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