LSE Pathways to the Professions

Evaluation report
2023-25 and 2024-2026

In partnership with ***The Sutton Trust***

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With thanks to the participants of LSE Pathways 2023-2025 and 2024-26.

Executive Summary

In partnership with The Sutton Trust, LSE delivers two of the Trust's Pathways to the Professions widening participation programmes for students in years 12-13: LSE Pathways to Law and LSE Pathways to Banking and Finance. This report evaluates the most recently completed cohorts which ran from 2023-25 and 2024-26 to explore how the programmes supported participants to understand routes into these professions, make informed higher education choices, and become more familiar with LSE.

What research questions were explored?

1. In what ways, and to what extent, do the LSE Pathways programmes enhance participants' understanding of studying law and banking and finance-related degrees at LSE (including the range of available programmes) and support informed higher education choices?
2. To what extent do the programmes shape participants' sense of belonging at LSE?
3. To what extent do the programmes support participants to make informed decisions about careers in law or banking and finance?

How did we seek to answer these questions?

The evaluation used a longitudinal, mixed-methods design to understand both changes in participant outcomes and the experiences that shaped those changes. It draws on pre, midpoint and post-programme surveys, feedback activities, focus groups, testimonials and LSE admissions data collected before, during and after the programme. Matched pre and post survey responses were used to identify any changes in participants' knowledge, belonging, confidence and intentions, while qualitative data was analysed thematically to understand how participants experienced the programme and how it shaped their decisions about higher education, LSE and career plans.

Key findings

- **Improved understanding of studying at LSE**: participants' understanding of what it's like to study law or banking and finance-related degrees at university increased by 67 percentage points after taking part in the programme. Participants described how Pathways helped them to become more aware of the range of relevant degree options at LSE, including joint honours programmes, and to develop a clearer view of LSE's teaching and learning environment.
- **A mixed picture on sense of belonging at university**: agreement that 'university is for people like me' increased from 73% to 89%, indicating a positive shift in

identity-based belonging. There was also a large increase in knowledge of student life at LSE. However, at the individual level, some participants selected a less positive response at the end of the programme for expectations of academic fit (18%) and social fit (22%).

- **LSE felt more familiar and attainable**: Pathways helped many participants to see LSE as a realistic option, with campus visits, peer connections and Pathways Mentors playing a central role in making the institution feel more accessible and easier to picture themselves within.
- **More informed decision-making about future pathways and next steps**: through the programme, participants were able to clarify subject choices, distinguish between degree routes and career routes, and consider whether LSE, university study or alternative pathways such as degree apprenticeships were the right next step for them. This suggests that the programme supported informed decision-making, rather than simply encouraging more positive views of LSE or university.
- **Stronger careers knowledge and clearer plans**: participants' understanding of what it's like to work in the legal or financial profession increased by 45 percentage points. Work experience placements were especially valued, with 91% of respondents saying their placement helped them clarify their career goals and preferences. For many participants the programme strengthened their motivation to pursue a career in law or banking or finance, while for others it helped them refine their preferred role or focus within the sector, or decide that the profession was not right for them.

Recommendations

1. **Strengthen belonging and inclusion conversations at LSE:** create more opportunities for participants to explore academic fit, social fit, diversity, inclusion and student life in the LSE context.
2. **Preserve access to high-quality work experience:** continue to maximise access to placements, promote consistent placement quality, and share learning from previous cohorts to help participants make the most of the opportunity.
3. **Strengthen opportunities for reflection on skills development:** support participants to recognise and articulate the skills they develop throughout the programme.

Contents

1 Introduction

This report reflects on the longstanding LSE Pathways widening participation programmes for year 12-13 students, utilising evaluation data from the two most recent cohorts (2023-25 and 2024-26). The following section details the background and aims of the programme and outlines the evaluation design and purpose.

1.1 Intervention

In partnership with social mobility charity The Sutton Trust, LSE delivers two of the Trust's Pathways to the Professions programmes for year 12-13 students: LSE Pathways to Law and LSE Pathways to Banking and Finance. The Sutton Trust launched these pathways in 2006 and 2017 respectively, with LSE delivering both programmes since their inception.

The Sutton Trust established these widening participation programmes to improve access to leading professions in the UK, recognising that employees in these fields are disproportionately from higher socioeconomic backgrounds (The Sutton Trust, 2025). The programmes adopt an early intervention approach, supporting students to explore these highly competitive careers and their university pathways while still in sixth form.

At LSE, the 18-month programmes support state school students who live within 90 minutes of campus, from Autumn of year 12 to Spring of year 13. In line with both LSE and Sutton Trust widening participation aims; priority is given to students who are eligible for free school meals, live in areas of high deprivation or low progression to higher education, are first generation students, or are care-experienced.

Students explore a range of LSE degrees relating to law and banking and finance, developing an understanding of what it's like to study these degrees and the routes into the associated professions. LSE is highly respected in these subject areas and combined with its central London location and industry connections, it is well-placed to provide Pathways students with a comprehensive and immersive experience.

The programme is delivered in a hybrid format, combining in-person visits to LSE and partner organisations with online webinars and workshops. Students also have the opportunity to take part in work experience placements with leading firms and attend the National Pathways Conference, a residential event which brings together Pathways students from universities across the UK. Throughout the programme, students are mentored by current LSE undergraduates who are studying degrees related to law and banking and finance. This includes e-mentoring through the Sutton Trust Online platform, which participants can use between programme events to receive individual advice and guidance from Pathways Mentors.

Through its intended outcomes, the programme aims to support students to develop:

- An understanding of what it's like to study law or banking and finance-related degrees at LSE
- a stronger sense of social and academic belonging at LSE
- an understanding and experience of what working in the profession is like
- a stronger sense of belonging within the profession
- an informed view of whether the pathway is right for them
- knowledge of LSE's admissions process, so that they feel confident submitting an undergraduate application to LSE.

Across the 2023-25 and 2024-26 cohorts of the two LSE Pathways programmes, 294 students completed the programmes:

Cohort	Participants
LSE Pathways to Banking and Finance 2023-25	74
LSE Pathways to Law 2023-25	75
LSE Pathways to Banking and Finance 2024-26	75
LSE Pathways to Law 2024-26	70
Total	**294**

Table 1: Number of participants in the 2023-25 and 2024-26 cohorts

Participants in these cohorts had the following profiles:

LSE Widening Participation priority group	Participants
First generation in family to attend university	79%
Eligible for free school meals during their secondary education	69%
Low university participation areas (TUNDRA quintile 1 or 2)	26%
High socioeconomic deprivation areas (IMD quintile 1 or 2)	81%
Care-experienced student	5%

Table 2: Characteristics of LSE Pathways participants for 2023-25 and 2024-26 (n=294)

Participants attended 152 unique schools across 43 local authorities in London, the Southeast of England and the East of England.

Whilst the Pathways to Law cohorts followed gender patterns observed in LSE's other widening participation programmes, the Banking and Finance cohorts had a higher proportion of males. This mirrors gender splits in the field of finance at both higher education and industry level. The gender profile of the Pathways to Law cohorts similarly reflects the female majority typically seen in law degrees.

Cohort	Female	Male	Preferred not to say
LSE Pathways to Banking and Finance 2023-25	38%	62%	0%
LSE Pathways to Law 2023-25	79%	19%	2%
LSE Pathways to Banking and Finance 2024-26	41%	59%	0%
LSE Pathways to Law 2024-26	79%	21%	0%
Average	**59%**	**40%**	**1%**

Table 3: Gender of participants within the 2023-25 and 2024-26 cohorts

1.2 Evidence base and previous work

Research suggests that school students' imagining of what is possible for their future (or their 'possible selves') can be limited by their socioeconomic background and knowledge of university and graduate options (Stevenson and Clegg, 2011). As a result, students from disadvantaged backgrounds may be less likely to view leading professions as a viable or suitable option, irrespective of their academic potential to progress into these fields. Research has also identified that the lower the socioeconomic status of school students, the less likely that their work experience placements are to be in a managerial and professional workplace (Le Gallais and Hatcher, 2014).

The Pathways programmes therefore aim to provide access to professional insight, work experience, networking and subject-specific guidance, so that students from disadvantaged backgrounds can gain a real-world understanding of leading professions and make an informed decision about whether these pathways are right for them.

Previous evaluation of the Pathways programmes at the national level provides positive evidence regarding its influence on participants' university application behaviour. In 2025, the Sutton Trust commissioned an evaluation of the university applications of its Pathways to the Professions and Summer School participants in the 2023/24 UCAS cycle. Conducted by the Institute for Employment Studies and utilising the UCAS Outreach Evaluator tool, the evaluation found that:

- Pathways to Law participants had a higher offer rate than matched UCAS comparator students with similar backgrounds and attainment (50% vs 44%)
- Pathways to Banking and Finance participants had a similar offer rate to the comparator group

- Pathways to Law and Pathways to Banking and Finance participants accepted places at high-tariff universities at 1.7 and 2.2 times the rate of the comparator students respectively

(Institute for Employment Studies, 2025).

Internal LSE analysis of the Higher Education Track dataset provided through the Higher Education Access Tracker (HEAT) database also showed positive progression patterns amongst previous LSE Pathways participants:

- Of the LSE Pathways to Law participants in the 2017-19 up to 2020-22 cohorts who enrolled in UK higher education and could be tracked:
    - 16% progressed to undergraduate study at LSE
    - 58% progressed to another high tariff university
    - 26% progressed to a non-high tariff university
- Of the LSE Pathways to Banking and Finance participants in the 2018-20 up to 2020-22 cohorts who enrolled in UK higher education and could be tracked:
    - 14% progressed to undergraduate study at LSE
    - 57% progressed to another high tariff university
    - 29% progressed to a non-high tariff university

Existing evidence therefore suggests that the Pathways programmes are associated with positive higher education progression outcomes.

1.3 Research Questions

The Pathways programmes are a longstanding feature of LSE's widening participation offer and are widely celebrated as successful initiatives at the national level. LSE is keen to explore the effectiveness of the programmes in the LSE context so that we can understand our local impact and continue to improve the experience for LSE participants.

This evaluation therefore seeks to answer:

1. In what ways, and to what extent, do the LSE Pathways programmes enhance participants' understanding of studying law and banking and finance-related degrees at LSE (including the range of available programmes) and support informed higher education choices?
2. To what extent do the programmes shape participants' sense of belonging at LSE?
3. To what extent do the programmes support participants to make informed decisions about careers in law or banking and finance?

1.4 Methodology and Ethics

Although participants are invited to take part in national Pathways evaluation activities, LSE also uses its own mixed-methods approach to evaluation, in line with its evaluation of other LSE Widening Participation multi-touchpoint programmes. This allows LSE to understand the specific experiences and outcomes of participants on the LSE programmes. Evaluation of the 2023-25 and 2024-26 cohorts was designed to support a more holistic understanding of the complex considerations involved in participants' university and career decision-making, and the role of LSE in shaping these decisions.

Data was collected by LSE before, during and after the programme through the following methods:

- Pre-programme, midpoint and post-programme surveys.
  Of the 294 participants considered in this evaluation:
  - 293 completed the pre survey (99.7% completion rate)
  - 256 completed the midpoint survey (87% completion rate)
  - 223 completed the post survey (76% completion rate)
  - 222 (76%) completed both the pre and post surveys
- A reflection and feedback survey following work experience placements
- Feedback activities during/after specific programme events
- 90-minute virtual participant focus groups. These took place in September 2025 with the 2024-26 cohort, co-facilitated by a member of LSE's WP Team and a student Pathways Mentor who had worked on the programme
  - Pathways to Banking and Finance focus group: 5 participants
  - Pathways to Law focus group: 6 participants
- Testimonials written towards the end of the programme

The evaluation used a longitudinal, mixed methods design to assess changes in participant outcomes and explore the experience of participants. Impact evaluation was conducted largely with respect to the Sutton Trust's Theory of Change for the Pathways programmes, which is used by all UK institutions delivering a Pathways programme. Pre and post surveys included 5-point Likert scales to track self-reported knowledge of university and LSE specifically, academic confidence, sense of belonging and career intentions. Analysis compared aggregate percentage agreement rates and individual-level change between matched pre and post responses to consider evidence of the programme's contribution to participant attitudes, understanding and intentions. Through categorical and open-text questions, the post-programme survey additionally captured programme satisfaction, suggestions for improvement, and reflections on engagement with the Pathways Mentors.

Further qualitative data collected through the work experience survey, focus groups, feedback activities and testimonials provided deeper insight into participants' experiences. This data was analysed thematically with respect to the research questions and intended programme outcomes, while allowing space for new themes to emerge from the data. Qualitative findings were mapped against pre and post survey data to interpret the mechanisms underpinning the observed changes.

The September 2025 focus groups with the 2024-26 participants were the first LSE focus groups in several years for the Pathways programmes. Interest from the cohort to take part in the focus groups was extremely high and the final focus group participants showed a willingness to reflect in depth and honestly on their experiences. The focus groups were therefore a valuable evaluation activity, and repetition in future cohorts should be considered.

Limitations of this evaluation include:

- The 18-month duration of the programme means that observed pre and post changes are likely to have been influenced by wider experiences outside of the programme, such as school support, personal networks and circumstances, other widening participation and extracurricular activities, and participants' personal development as young adults. This evaluation therefore focuses on a contribution to impact rather than causal impact.
- As the Pathways programmes are subject-specific and participants individually applied to take part, participants were likely to be particularly confident and passionate about the exhibited pathway from the start of the programme, meaning that high baseline scores in quantitative survey questions risk masking impact. Qualitative data therefore plays an important role in understanding the nuance of participants' positions and journeys.
- All evaluation activities relied on voluntary participation, meaning that more engaged or positive participants may be over-represented. Communication around evaluation repeatedly emphasised that all honest thoughts and feedback were valued, but this is a naturally challenging limitation to overcome.

An underlying limitation of this evaluation is also the position of LSE and its role in students' futures, whereby LSE will make decisions on LSE Pathways participants' applications should they choose to apply for undergraduate study at LSE. Although participants were informed that their evaluation contributions would not affect any future interactions with LSE, this dynamic may nevertheless have influenced some responses. Some participants may have been overly positive or withheld critical 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 this evaluation and participants were fully informed about the purpose of the evaluation and their rights.

2 Findings

This section presents the findings of the mixed-methods evaluation. Section 2.1 examines participants' understanding of LSE degree options and higher education decision-making. Section 2.2 explores belonging at university and at LSE. Section 2.3 considers career understanding, professional belonging and career decision-making.

2.1 In what ways, and to what extent, do the LSE Pathways programmes enhance participants' understanding of studying law and banking and finance-related degrees at LSE (including the range of available programmes) and support informed higher education choices?

During Pathways, participants were introduced to studying law and banking and finance at LSE through subject introductions, taster lectures from leading academics in the LSE departments of law, anthropology, economics, finance and accounting, and academic skills workshops delivered by LSE LIFE. Pathways Mentors also shared their experiences of studying these subjects at LSE with participants through Q&A panels, e-mentoring, and informal in-person conversations.

These activities aimed to increase participants' understanding of the degree programmes available at LSE, what studying these degrees at LSE is like, and how different degree routes may link to future career goals and options. Collectively, this exposure was intended to support participants to make more informed higher education decisions, including around subject choice and university destination.

The findings in this section draw on repeated pre and post survey items, qualitative survey responses and focus group data to examine how taking part in the programme supported participants' understanding and decision-making around their higher education choices.

Figure 1 shows that by the end of the programme:

- most participants felt positively about their knowledge of university
- knowledge of what studying at university would be like increased by 53 percentage points, with a significant reduction in uncertainty around this
- understanding of what it's like to study law or banking and finance-related degrees at university increased by 67 percentage points
- belief that they would be offered a place at university increased by 8 percentage points, despite a high baseline score and the competitive admissions context for many of the degree programmes participants were considering.

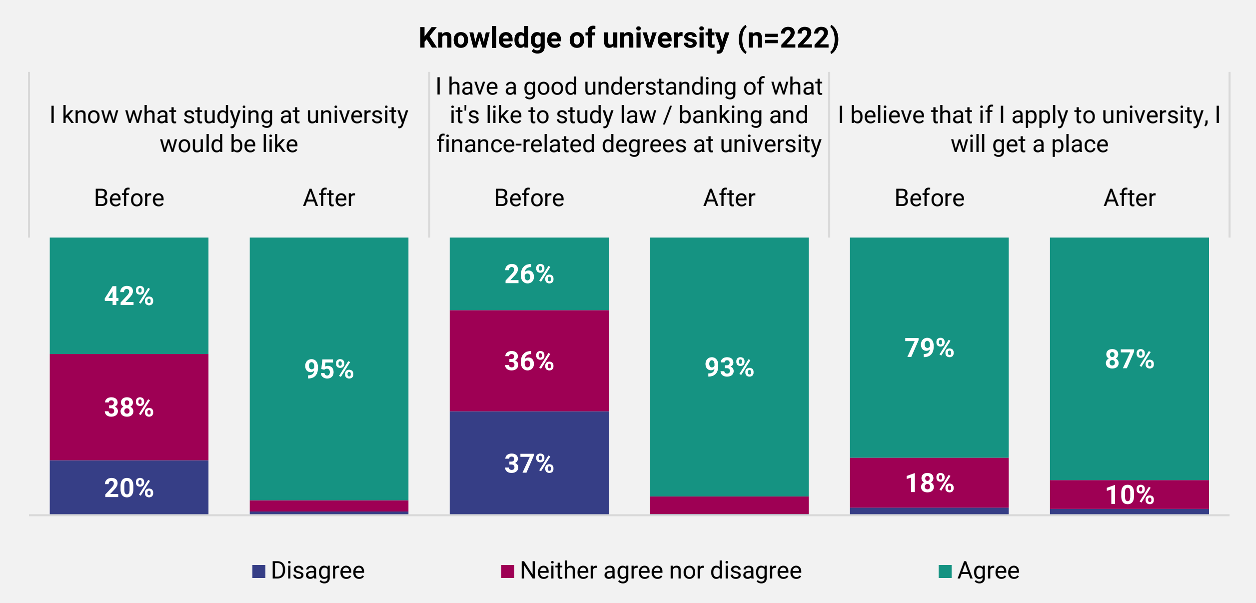

Figure 1: Participants' responses to each statement as self-reported pre-post responses on a five-point Likert scale, aggregating 'agree' and 'disagree' response options. Statements are a combination of bespoke items and items sourced from TASO's validated Access and Success Questionnaire.

Qualitative survey and focus group data suggests that the programme helped participants develop a more concrete understanding of the range of degree options available at LSE. Participants particularly valued exposure to subjects and joint degree programmes that they had not previously considered, including BA Anthropology and Law, and BSc Politics and Economics. Some of this exposure was gained through events which specifically highlighted these alternative programmes, whilst some was gained through discussions with Pathways Mentors. These experiences helped some participants move beyond a narrow understanding of the subject pathway and consider how different academic routes could support their interests and future career plans.

- *'When I saw LSE's law and anthropology course, I knew I had to apply.'*
- *'I also liked the anthropology presentation - prior to the session I didn't really have any knowledge of what anthropology would entail, so I learnt something new'*
- *'Pathways has enabled me to interact with LSE Mentors and staff. This has really allowed me to explore my subject choices.'*

Participants also described gaining a clearer sense of LSE's academic environment. For example, taster lectures helped some participants to understand the level of intellectual challenge involved in studying at LSE. Participants were then able to assess whether this aligned with their own learning preferences.

- *'I gained first-hand experience about what a degree in law meant.'*
- *'The mini university lectures on economics offered a glimpse into the academic rigor of university life.'*
- *'The academic prospects at LSE are great. I like the level of intellectual rigour.'*
- *'I value the institution's emphasis on rigorous academic standards and the international nature of the university, aligning with my goals of eventually pursuing a career in international human rights.'*

This clearer view of LSE's learning and teaching environment is important given that participants reported high academic confidence before starting the programme (Figure 2). The findings therefore suggest that Pathways adds value not by increasing academic confidence generally, but by supporting students to connect with the academic environment at LSE and potentially envisage themselves succeeding here.

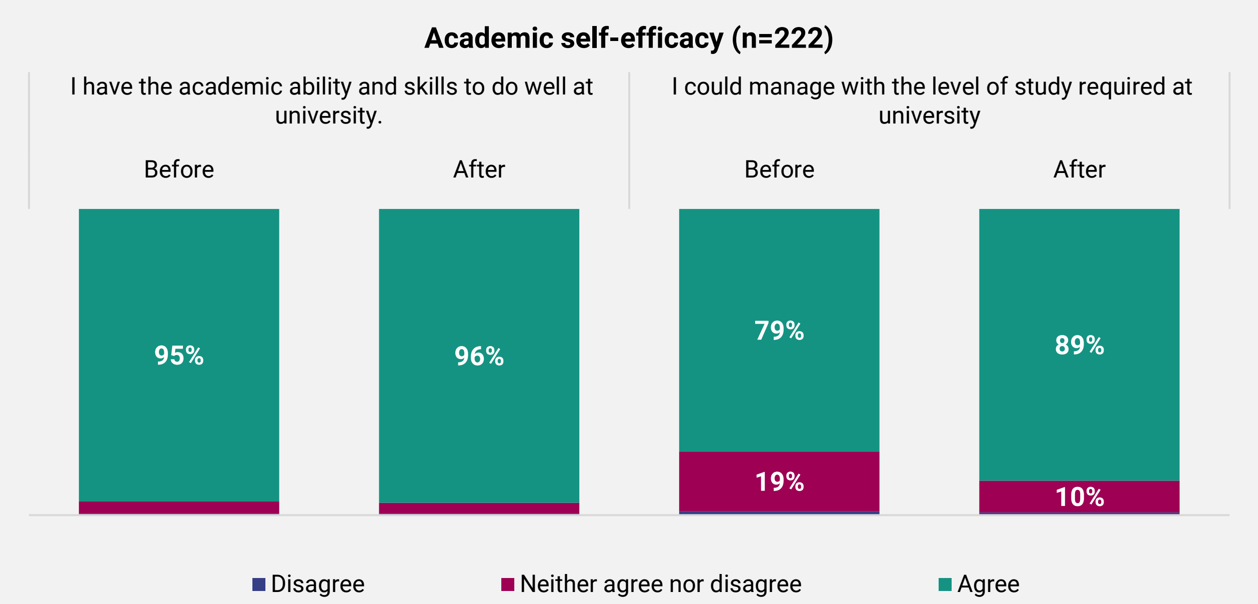

Figure 2: Participants' responses to each statement as self-reported pre-post responses on a five-point Likert scale, aggregating 'agree' and 'disagree' response options. Scale sourced from TASO's validated Access and Success Questionnaire.

Participants' high general baseline confidence could also be linked to the subject-specific nature of Pathways, in which participants may feel more certain about their future direction compared to students on broader widening participation programmes.

This improved understanding of LSE's academic environment and degree options appears to have supported more informed decision-making. Participants described using the programme to:

- Confirm university study or LSE as a preferred destination
- Clarify subject choice and consider joint honours degree programmes
- Distinguish between degree pathways and career pathways (ie, a career in law being possible without studying law at undergraduate level)
- Consider alternative routes, such as degree apprenticeships

> *"It has really sharpened my vision of my steps going forward. Before I only knew law as law and was unable to distinguish between law at university and as a career, let alone the different aspects to law and the routes. I now know exactly what I am aiming for and the clear steps to achieve it."*
>
> **Pathways participant, 2024-26 end of programme survey**

2.2 To what extent do the programmes shape participants' sense of belonging at LSE?

The Pathways programmes aim to develop students' sense of belonging both at university in general and at LSE specifically. The programme design therefore involves visits to the LSE campus, engagement and mentoring with LSE students, and events focused on academic and student life at LSE.

Sense of belonging at university

It is useful to firstly consider participants' sense of belonging at university in general as this provides a foundation for understanding participants' sentiments about LSE specifically. Matched pre and post survey data at the group-level shows that the strongest observed improvement was in the identity-related belief that 'university is for people like me', where agreement rose from 73% to 89%. Meanwhile, expectations of academic and social fit were already high before the programme and remained high afterwards, with negligible observed change in overall agreement.

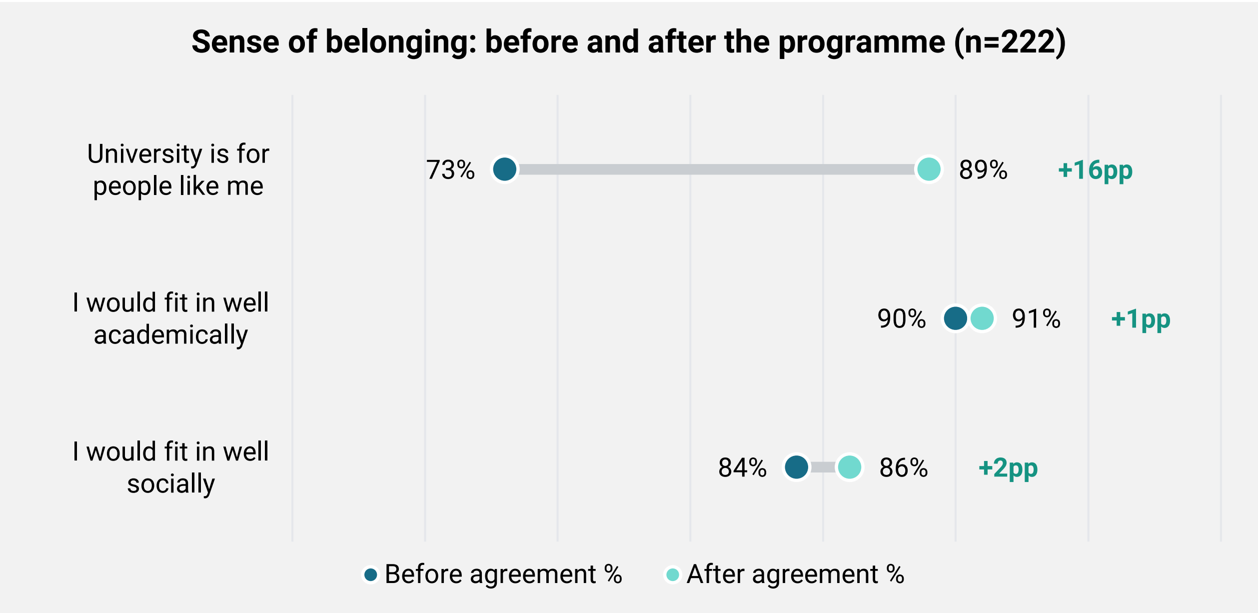

Figure 3: Participants' agreement with each statement as self-reported pre-post responses on a five-point Likert scale, aggregating 'strongly agree' and 'agree' options. Scale sourced from TASO's validated Access and Success Questionnaire.

When asked in the end of programme survey which part of the programme they felt had most helped them to feel like they would fit in at university socially, responses illustrated the key mechanisms of:

- **In-person experience of university life** through campus visits and the National Conference, which one participant described as a 'mini simulation' of student life
- **Peer connections**, including connecting with like-minded peers, group activities and building friendships (*'I was quickly able to form friendships with many of the people there. I assume university is similar in that sense.'*)
- **Reassurance from Mentors and the LSE Pathways team**, with the programme's supportive and non-judgemental environment particularly praised.

Individual-level analysis also demonstrates a similar pattern to the group-level finding. The greatest gains in individuals' trajectories were again seen for 'university is for people like me', with 42% of participants selecting a higher, more positive point on the five-point agreement scale by the end of the programme.

Sense of belonging measures	Improved	No change	Declined	Net movement along scale
University is for people like me	94	102	26	+68
I would fit in well academically	72	109	41	+31
I would fit in well socially	62	111	49	+13

Table 4: Participants' pre-post movement along the sense of belonging scale (n=222).

Although the overall direction of change for academic and social fit is positive, the individual-level analysis shows that some participants selected a less positive response by the end of the programme: 41 participants for academic fit (18%) and 49 for social fit (22%). This does not necessarily mean that participants disagreed with the statements or that the programme had a negative effect; the finding should be interpreted cautiously, as it may reflect participants becoming better informed about university life, particularly as participants had high baseline scores for these measures. Additionally, average decline was one scale point for each measure, and most declines were from strongly agree to agree, or from agree to neutral. This finding therefore does not present an immediate cause for concern, but it would be sensible to continue monitoring these outcomes in future cohorts.

"Just seeing that the people around me were also the people who were aiming to get into these sorts of places opened my eyes and made me a lot more comfortable that I wasn't going into an entirely new world."

Pathways participant, 2024-26 end of programme survey

Sense of belonging at LSE

LSE-specific belonging was explored through pre and post survey items relating to participants' understanding of student life at LSE, and their perception of LSE as a diverse and inclusive environment.

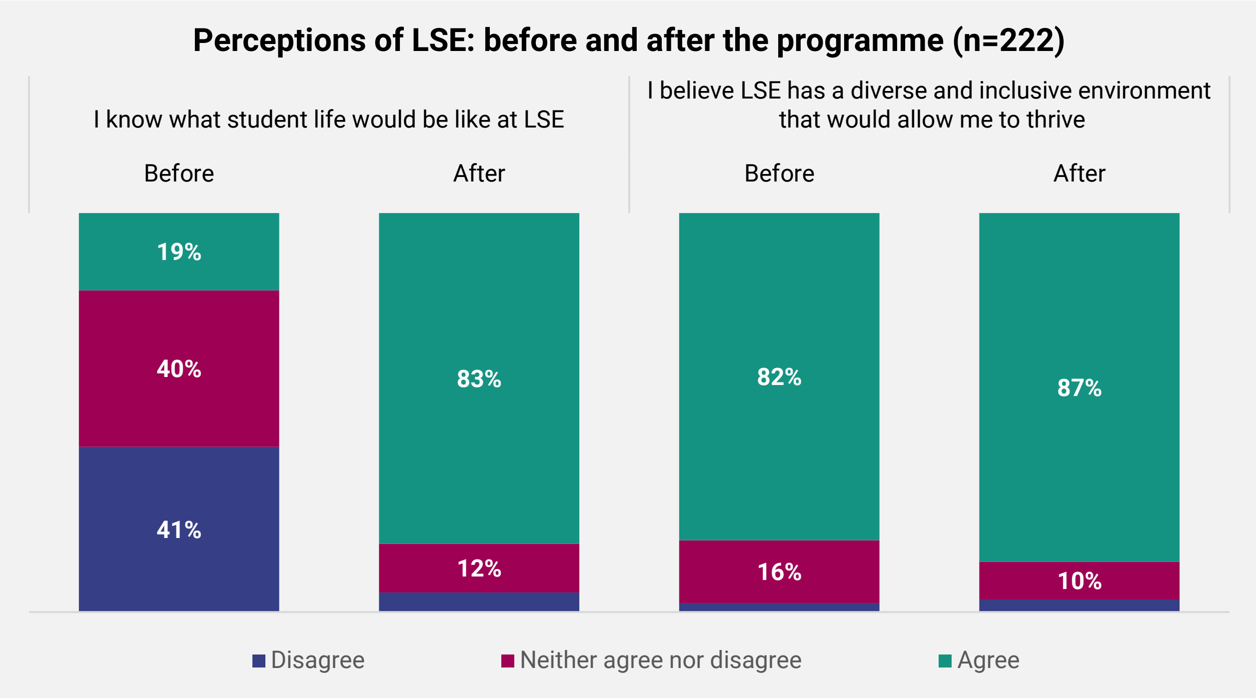

Figure 4: Participants' agreement with each statement as self-reported pre-post responses on a five-point Likert scale, aggregating 'strongly agree' and 'agree' options.

After taking part in the programme, participants' knowledge of student life at LSE increased substantially by 64 percentage points. Their belief that LSE has a diverse and inclusive environment which would allow them to thrive was high at the start of the programme but still saw a small increase of 5 percentage points.

A more detailed look at the interaction between participants' responses to the two statements showed that:

- 72 improved on both statements
- 24 improved on knowledge of student life but declined on inclusive environment
- 4 declined on knowledge of student life but improved on inclusive environment
- 8 declined on both statements

Qualitative survey and focus group data highlighted that for many participants, sense of belonging at LSE was shaped by programme participation, but participants responded to experiences differently. For some, visiting LSE and speaking with current students strengthened their sense that they could belong there. For others, the same exposure helped them decide that LSE, or university more broadly, was not the right route for them. In both cases, participants described the programme as offering them a realistic understanding of student life at LSE, which they then internalised with respect to their own preferences and personal circumstances. This is consistent with the programme's aim of supporting informed decision-making, rather than simply increasing positive perceptions of LSE. Nevertheless, given that some participants reported stronger knowledge of student life but less positive perceptions of LSE's inclusive environment, it would be useful to examine how participants interpret messages and experiences relating to diversity and inclusion at LSE, and whether programme activities provide enough space for exploration and discussion of belonging, inclusion and student life.

Across the spectrum of feelings of belonging at the end of the programme, participants described how Pathways shaped their sense of belonging at LSE:

- seeing LSE as more accessible
- being able to picture themselves studying at LSE and being on campus
- feeling welcome and comfortable on campus
- allowing them to develop a clearer understanding of the academic environment and rigour at LSE
- learning about student societies and communities that aligned with their interests
- helping them to make a more informed judgement about whether LSE, university, or an apprenticeship route was the best pathway for them

Overall, Pathways supports improvements in aspects of participants' belonging that were generally lower at the start of the programme (identity-based belonging at university in general and knowledge of student life at LSE). The programmes also help LSE to feel more familiar and attainable for participants, with campus visits, peer connections and Pathways Mentors playing a central role in this change. These experiences help many participants to develop a clearer perspective on whether they could belong at university or at LSE, which in turn can support more informed decision-making about the next steps in their education journey. However, findings on expectations of academic and social fit at university, and on perceptions of diversity and inclusion at LSE, are more mixed. Future evaluation should continue to monitor individual-level declines in academic and social fit and explore how participants interpret their experiences of student life, belonging, diversity and inclusion at LSE.

> *"When I come to LSE, it genuinely feels like home now. I feel so comfortable going to study there. It's a genuine, realistic option for me and I could definitely see myself studying there for the next three years, hence why it is top choice on my UCAS application."*
>
> **Pathways participant, 2024-26 end of programme survey**

2.3 To what extent do the programmes support participants to make informed decisions about careers in law or banking and finance?

Looking beyond university, Pathways aims to help participants understand what working in the legal or financial profession is like, so that they can make an informed decision about whether the pathway is right for them. Through a variety of workplace experiences and interactions with sector professionals, the programme aims to foster a sense of belonging for participants in these competitive professions and to provide a space for career exploration and reflection.

The career-focused activities which participants undertook included:

- Mock assessment centre
- Work experience placement
- Q&A panels, including sector professionals and Sutton Trust alumni
- CV workshop with LSE Careers
- Advocacy workshop (Pathways to Law)
- Visit to Inner Temple (Pathways to Law)
- PwC coaching webinar (Pathways to Banking and Finance)

Perception and understanding of the legal and financial professions

Pre and post survey items were used to measure participants' understanding of, and sense of belonging in, the legal or financial profession before and after taking part in the programme.

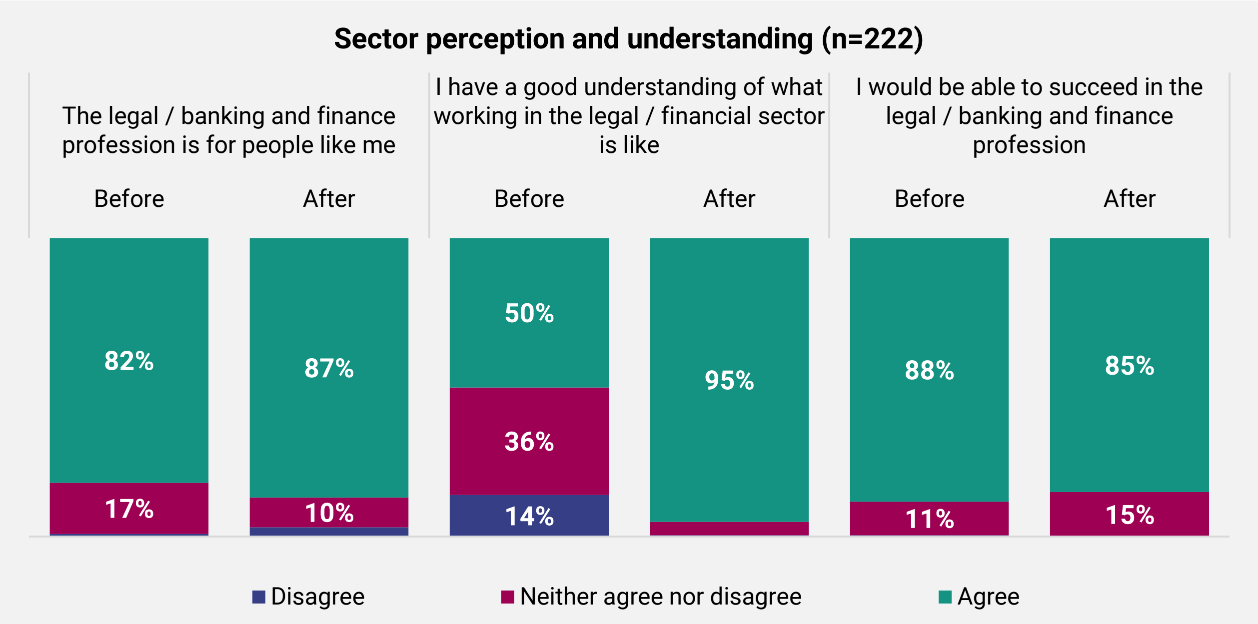

Figure 5: Participants' agreement with each statement as self-reported pre-post responses on a five-point Likert scale, aggregating 'strongly agree' and 'agree' options.

The largest observed change was in sector knowledge, which increased by 45 percentage points by the end of the programme. Sense of belonging in the profession also increased slightly by 5 percentage points, whilst a small number of participants felt more neutral about their likely success in the profession.

End of programme responses showed statistically significant correlations between all three measures:

Statement 1	Statement 2	Spearman correlation coefficient, ρ	Correlation strength	p-value
Profession is for people like me	Understanding of working in the sector	0.54	Moderate positive	$p < 0.001$
Profession is for people like me	I could succeed in the profession	0.61	Strong positive	$p < 0.001$
Understanding of working in the sector	I could succeed in the profession	0.60	Moderate positive	$p < 0.001$

Table 5: Correlation between end of programme sector knowledge, professional belonging and perceived ability to succeed.

The strongest relationship was between feeling that the profession is ‘for people like me’ and believing that they could succeed in the profession. Participants with stronger sector knowledge also tended to report greater belonging and confidence in their ability to succeed.

While this does not show causation, it suggests that sector knowledge, confidence and belonging are closely linked. Participants who completed the programme with a stronger understanding of the profession were more likely to see themselves as belonging within it and as capable of succeeding in that profession.

Work experience placements

The work experience placements are a distinctive feature of the Pathways programmes and are consistently praised by LSE participants as one of the most valuable elements of the programme. Across the two cohorts, placement partners included leading firms such as Hogan Lovells, Santander, Devonshires, 39 Essex Chambers and DLA Piper for Pathways to Law and Deutsche Bank, Orbis Investments, PwC, and Lloyds Bank for Pathways to Banking and Finance.

256 participants (87%) completed at least one work experience placement

After undertaking their placement, participants were invited to complete an optional reflection and feedback survey on the experience, with 122 of the 256 participants (48%) providing a response. Feedback showed that participants overwhelmingly appreciated the immersive experience and the ‘true taste’ of the legal or financial sector, as well as wider experience of a professional workplace.

Participants generally found placements more valuable when they included:

- speaking to a range of professionals in different roles and at different levels of seniority
- conducting practical and interactive tasks that increased their sector knowledge

and/or skills
- insight into what a typical workday might look like.

Reflecting on what they had gained during the placement, closed survey questions indicated that the majority of respondents gained practical understanding, access to relevant experience, and career clarity from the placements.

The work placement has allowed me to …	% agreeing (n=122)
Have a good understanding of professional behaviour and expectations	93%
Have a good understanding of what it's like to work in the sector	91%
Clarify my career goals and preferences	91%
Gain work experience that I would not have been able to access without the Pathways programme	90%
Feel that I would fit in as a professional in the sector	89%
Feel motivated to pursue a career in the sector	87%

Table 6: Participants' reflections on their work experience placements.

In open-text survey responses, participants also highlighted the development of relevant skills (analytical, problem-solving, communication and networking) and the value of the placement in providing them with examples for their UCAS personal statements and networking conversations. With respect to career decision-making, placements helped participants confirm whether a sector suited them, broaden their awareness of available roles or focus broad interests into specific goals.

Participants said:

- *'**Through the work experience I have found myself more immersed in my future** and even more ambitious to reach my goals. It allowed me to gain an honest insight into life in law and the steps I would need to take to achieve what I want.'*
- *'I've realised from this experience [banking and finance] **isn't for me**.'*
- *'Certainly has **focused my attention on the M&A side of things**. Originally, I was more focused on the industry in general.'*
- *'My work experience at 12 Kings Bench Walk Chambers **really confirmed that I would like to become a barrister**.'*
- *'The work experience allowed me to **apply financial concepts in real-world settings**, enhancing my understanding of the industry and **developing key analytical and problem-solving skills**.'*

Career intentions

While work experience was a key mechanism for career exploration, the wider programme also shaped participants' career intentions and their confidence in pursuing these sectors. By the end of the programme, 89% of participants said that they were likely to pursue a career in the legal or financial sector.

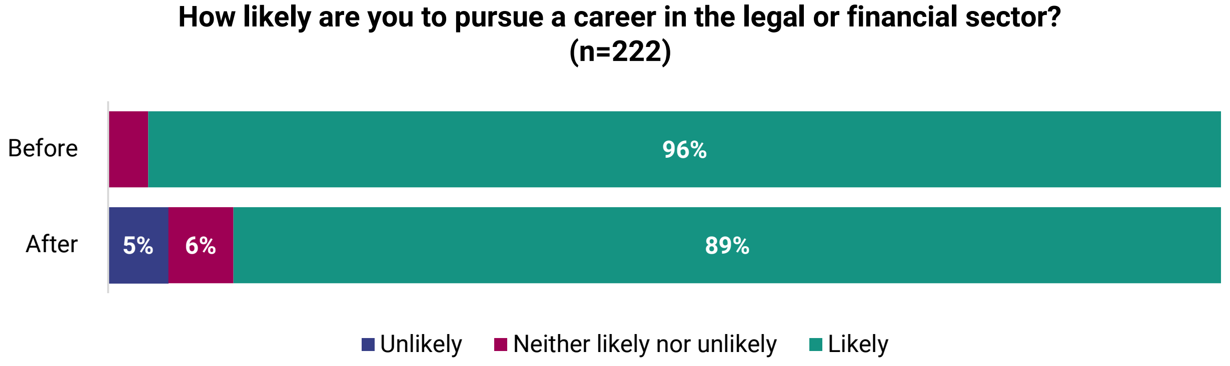

Figure 6: Participants' likelihood of pursuing a career in the sector as self-reported pre-post responses on a five-point Likert scale, aggregating 'highly likely' and 'likely' options.

There was a slight increase in uncertain responses and 5% of participants expressed that they were now unlikely to pursue a career in the respective sector. For some participants, becoming less certain or deciding against a sector reflected more informed judgement following direct exposure to the profession, as shown in the participant quotes below.

Across the cohorts, the importance of belonging was clear for portraying these professions as accessible and attractive options. There was a statistically significant relationship between sense of belonging and the likelihood of pursuing a career in the relevant sector, and between the belief that they would be able to succeed in the profession and the likelihood of pursuing a career in that sector:

- Participants who agreed that the legal/financial profession is for people like them were 1.82 times more likely to pursue a career in that sector compared to participants who did not agree (p-value < 0.001)
- Participants who agreed that they would be able to succeed in the profession were 1.32 times more likely to pursue a career in the legal/financial sector compared to participants who did not agree (p-value < 0.001).

Participants who agreed that 'university is for people like me' were also more likely to pursue a career in both sectors, although the difference was not statistically significant.

"Usually when I tell people I did work experience at a hedge fund, they think I'm a nepo baby"

Pathways participant, 2024-26 focus group

Participants who were **likely** to pursue a career in the sector said:

- *'I found I enjoyed every aspect of working in the legal field, through exploring how the law shapes our world to learning about past cases and how they were handled. This **made me more determined to pursue a career in law**.'*
- *'I feel like [the programme] has been really helpful and **insightful on how to break into banking and finance**.'*
- ***'I want to immerse myself even more** into all the aspects that I have already been exposed to.'*
- *'I've found **a career path that I believe I can thrive more in than any other**.'*
- *'I went **from not knowing** what career to pursue **to being dead set on finance**.'*

Participants who were **unlikely** to pursue a career in the sector said:

- *'Although the placements and the programme helped me learn a lot more about law, **I have decided that it's not the path for me**, however I am still going down a similar route with an Accounting degree instead.' (Pathways to Law participant)*
- ***'It isn't for me**; it seems very time consuming after hours and stressful.'*
- ***'I'll look for a career that has more face-to-face interactions** with clients.'*

End of programme survey responses also illustrated how the programme helped some participants to refine or expand their career plans, even where their intention to pursue a career in the sector remained stable:

- *'The Inner Temple visit really opened my eyes to the role of a barrister and made me question if it was really the role for me, ultimately realising I'd rather be an in-house solicitor.'*
- *'The programme made me realise that whilst I did not want to directly study law at university, I could still pursue a career in law'*
- *'It has shown me there's much more to finance than simply accounting or taxes and that those options and jobs are much more reachable than I had previously thought.'*
- *'Talks with professionals and mentors shaped my decision in terms of the specifics of banking and finance that I want to go into.'*

This demonstrates the value of sector exposure in helping participants to understand different roles within the sector, choose a pathway, or rule out options which aren't suited to them.

Overall, there is clear evidence that Pathways supports participants to explore professional pathways of law and banking and finance by increasing sector knowledge, widening access to professional networks and giving participants direct experience of workplace environments. Participants were able to make more informed plans for their future, which for many participants meant strengthened motivation to pursue law or banking and finance, but for others meant refining their next steps or career goals.

3 Recommendations

Based on the findings, this section outlines recommendations to enhance the impact of LSE Pathways programmes and shape future programme development.

3.1 Strengthen belonging and inclusion conversations at LSE

Create space to discuss academic expectations, social fit, diversity, inclusion and student life in the LSE context honestly. Continue to monitor belonging outcomes in future cohorts, particularly expectations of academic and social fit.

3.2 Preserve access to high-quality work experience

Share participant feedback on what works well during placements with The Sutton Trust, so that they can liaise with industry partners to promote consistent placement quality and ensure participants are exposed to a range of professional roles and practical tasks. Continue to support as many participants as possible to access work experience placements. Where appropriate, share reflections and testimonials from previous cohorts to help participants understand the potential benefits of placements and make the most of the opportunity.

3.3 Strengthen opportunities for reflection on skills development

Create more opportunities for participants to identify and reflect on the skills they develop during the programme, particularly during work experience placements. This could help participants recognise their progress, articulate their strengths in higher education applications and interviews, and make more informed decisions about future study and career pathways.

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