

[FINAL DRAFT] The Benefits of Attending a Summer School – for Teachers

Summer Schools come in all shapes and sizes. Some are subject-specific, whilst others allow a first-hand glimpse into life as a Higher Education (HE) student. Some are residential, whilst others happen only during the day; some take place at Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), whilst others take place elsewhere. So, why attend one? Research shows that participation in summer schools is associated with higher attainment and higher HE progression (TASO, 2021), but the specific benefits largely depend on the purpose of the summer school.

Subject-Specific Summer Schools

Many HEIs run summer schools centred around a specific subject. These events aim to spark participants' interests and provide an insight into what studying that subject in HE could look like.

A pharmacy or medicine summer school, for example, may allow participants to spend time in GP surgeries or other working medical settings, gaining experience of environments similar to those they may encounter during their degree. A creative writing summer school might support participants to develop their portfolios, guided by experienced writers and alongside like-minded peers. An engineering summer school might allow participants to explore disciplines beyond their current curriculum, use industry-standard equipment, and work collaboratively to develop practical solutions to real-world problems.

Perhaps the greatest benefit is that students often leave with greater confidence and excitement about their future educational journey. They may also develop a deeper understanding of how the learning on their current course applies beyond the classroom, supporting motivation and raising attainment.

Non-Subject-Specific Summer Schools

Several HEIs run summer schools which are non-subject-specific. Generally, these serve two purposes: to allow participants to develop a sense of place and belonging, making higher education feel more familiar, accessible, and achievable; and to support them in developing the skills to succeed in HE.

This could involve sessions exploring different aspects of student life, including Students' Union activities, representation, clubs and societies, wellbeing, course choices, study abroad opportunities, and placements. These summer schools often include a project or theme for students to work on throughout the event, allowing them to reflect on what they have learnt, collaborate with others, and develop skills such as communication, teamwork, and problem-solving.

Students may leave these experiences with a stronger sense that HE is for "someone like me", alongside a greater awareness of the skills and behaviours which will support their transition into HE.

There are hundreds of summer schools offered by institutions across the UK (and beyond) for students of all ages. While many are aimed at Year 12 (Level 3 Year 1) students, there are also many opportunities for those in Key Stages 3 and 4, where early interventions can have a lasting impact.

Every summer school is unique, with its own aims and outcomes. However, as with many university outreach programmes, the greatest benefits are often not in the information shared or the activities delivered, but rather in the feelings which they evoke. The confidence gained from trying something new; the friendships formed with other participants; the honest, first-hand insight shared by student ambassadors; and the opportunity to spend time in a university environment all contribute to helping students see it as somewhere they could belong. Ultimately, a successful summer school does more than inform students about university; it helps them begin to imagine themselves there. It is that shift in confidence, aspiration, and self-belief that often proves to be the most enduring benefit of all.

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TASO (2021). *An investigation into the relationship between outreach participation and KS4 attainment / HE progression.*

https://cdn.taso.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021-03-31_Investigation-relationship-outreach-and-KS4-attainment-HE-progression_TASO.pdf.