

In their own words, through their own research: secondary school students' experiences of the NextGenLeaders programme

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National Association for Able Children in Education

NEXT GEN LEADERS™

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1: Executive Summary

This report builds on our research with the National Association for Able Children in Education (NACE), investigating the experiences of 'more able', disadvantaged students. In this report, we use participatory methods to present students' experiences of the NextGenLeaders (NGL) programme from two secondary schools with differing socioeconomic contexts.

Overview of the NGL Programme

The NGL programme aims to foster leadership, social responsibility, and active citizenship among young people, particularly amongst those who are disadvantaged, by engaging them in projects that address issues within their communities. The programme is grounded in the principles of Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR), giving students ownership over their learning and development through cognitive and interpersonal challenge.

Methodology

Students in both schools (n=26) designed and conducted their own mixed-method research projects, including surveys, interviews, and creative methods. This participatory process not only provided insights into the impact of the programme but also served as a vehicle for skill development and empowerment for the students.

Key Findings

The students analysed the data they collected and identified a range of key findings, which are presented below.

Personal growth

Students reported significant development in affective skills such as motivation, empathy, and engagement. Many described the experience as transformational, enhancing their sense of agency and self-belief.

Interpersonal competences

Participants consistently highlighted the improvements in teamwork, communication, and social awareness. These skills were especially evident during collaborative project work.

Value of challenge

Students found aspects of the programme demanding – particularly project implementation – but identified these challenges as catalysts for deeper motivation and growth. This was most strongly articulated in School 1, where students often expressed a heightened sense of achievement after overcoming obstacles.

Commonalities across contexts

Despite differences in student backgrounds and school contexts, the students from both schools exhibited similar patterns of development, suggesting the programme's broad applicability and effectiveness, including its use with 'more able', disadvantaged students.

Recommendations

1. Expand YPAR opportunities

- Schools should adopt programmes like NGL for a wide range of students, including those who are 'more able' and variously disadvantaged, to promote personal and interpersonal growth.

2. Curricular integration

- Schools should explore embedding YPAR-based programmes into the formal curriculum where possible (e.g., PSHCE, Personal Development time, tutor time, Citizenship education) or through enrichment and extracurricular activities made available to all students.

3. Policy support

- The Department for Education should consider reforms to the Citizenship curriculum to include YPAR as a structured approach for fostering youth leadership and civic engagement.

2: Introduction to The Project

Removing Barriers For 'More Able' Disadvantaged Students In Secondary School

The first piece of work we undertook on this project was a scoping review (Clare et al., 2025) with the National Association for Able Children in Education (NACE). In the review, we explored research and grey literature relating to the education experiences of 'more able', disadvantaged students in secondary education in England and Wales. In the review, we defined the term 'more able' as referring broadly to students with significant potential for high achievement. In using the term 'more able', we looked to move away from deficit-orientated or static labels like 'gifted and talented' and acknowledge a fluid, growth-orientated understanding of student ability. Our definition of 'more able' aims for inclusivity and emphasises recognising the diverse talents and potentials of students, rather than fixed attainment levels. In the review, the term 'disadvantage' was defined broadly to refer to students who face a range of systemic and contextual barriers that impede their educational progress. These barriers included economic hardship, limited access to educational resources, inaccessibility related to disabilities, a care experienced child, language barriers, and low parental engagement due to factors like work schedules, all of which compound challenges related to accessing educational opportunities, enrichment, and tailored support.

The review highlighted that despite changes in terminology and a greater focus on support, significant socio-economic and cultural barriers continue to hinder recognition and support for disadvantaged students with high potential. This review also highlighted the need to engage directly with students to understand how they define their own abilities, navigate educational challenges, and perceive existing support structures. Centring young people's voices is vital because it enriches understanding by capturing their lived experiences rather than relying solely on adult or institutional perspectives. This approach promises more equitable and inclusive outcomes by empowering students, fostering their self-determination and resilience, and informing improved language, identification practices, and interventions that truly meet their needs. Placing young people's perspectives at the heart of research and policy is essential for evolving education systems that not only boost academic achievement but also nurture learners' agency and support their full potential.

NextGenLeaders Programme and Youth Participatory Action Research

Building on the insights from our scoping review, the follow-on project detailed in this report focussed on the experiences of students from two secondary schools who participated in the NextGenLeaders (NGL) programme. The NGL programme aims to empower secondary school students to become the next generation of socially responsible leaders and is delivered in areas of social disadvantage in England. The NGL programme aligns with the methodology of Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR). In YPAR, young people devise collaborative research projects that matter to them to take action to improve the lives of people in their communities (Anyon et al., 2018). Accordingly, students on the NGL programme are called Changemakers.

Undertaking research that impacts the local community is challenging for all students, including those who are 'more able', as they are required to engage in independent learning involving collaboration and problem-solving. In a systematic review, Dobson (2023) has shown how this challenge helps young people to develop a range of skills and competences, including: cognitive competences, such as critical thinking and problem solving; intrapersonal competences, such as self-regulated learning; interpersonal competences, such as collaborative learning; and affective skills, such as motivation. Crucially, the review also demonstrates how the challenge of YPAR, and the resulting development of these skills and competences, has the potential to remove barriers to learning and to mitigate economic and social disadvantage.

Like our review into 'more able' and disadvantage (Clare et al., 2025), Anyon et al. (2018) and Dobson (2023) demonstrate that research into young people's experiences of YPAR has been conducted by adults, who are likely to see the world very differently to young people. In this project, therefore, we have facilitated a research project with students in two schools to help them research their own YPAR experiences on the NGL programme. Hearing about their experiences of YPAR in their own words, we believe, provides a valuable insight into how students, many of whom are both 'more able' and disadvantaged, really experience the challenge of YPAR in a secondary school context.

3: The Schools and Their Students

The Schools

For this project we worked with students from 2 Yorkshire schools, both of whom were new to the NGL programme in 2024.

School 1

School 1 is a coastal school in East Yorkshire, with around 1000 students. 34% of students are in receipt of free school meals, which is significantly higher than the national average (Department for Education, 2024). The school has experienced recent financial difficulties, which made paying for travel to some of the central NGL events difficult.

School 2

School 2 is in a market town in South Yorkshire and has just under 2,000 students. 12.3% of students are eligible for free school meals, which is half the national average of 24.6% (Department for Education, 2024). The school provides a range of additional support for disadvantaged students and is generally well-resourced.

The Students

School 1

25 students from Year 8 (aged 12 to 13 years) took part in the NGL programme; 12 of these took part in this research project, with the others (and themselves) as participants. 17 of these students were assessed as 'more able', based on their end-of-primary-school results for English and Maths and current teacher assessment. 10 students align with our broad definition of disadvantage. This includes: 6 students who are economically disadvantaged (pupil premium); 6 students who have special education needs; and 2 students who are disadvantaged in different ways.

School 2

14 students from Years 8-10 (aged 12 to 15 years) took part in both the NGL programme and this research. 7 of these students were assessed as 'more able', based on their end-of-primary-school results for English and Maths and current teacher assessment. 5 of these students align with our broad definition of disadvantage. This includes: 3 students who are economically disadvantaged (pupil premium); 3 students who have special educational needs; and 2 students who are disadvantaged in additional ways.



The Students' Projects

The students created their own projects and their own group names, as outlined in the tables below.

School 1

Group Name	Number of Changemakers	Project Aim
Safe Space	6	To provide safe spaces in school and the local community for people experiencing mental health problems
Stop the old from being cold	6	To help the elderly in the community who are unable to afford heating in their homes
Unwrapping Happiness	3	To provide presents on special occasions for underprivileged children
G.I.R.L.S.	4	To help males to understand girls' lived experiences
Sport for all	6	To widen sport participation by providing equipment to underprivileged schools

School 2

Group Name	Number of Changemakers	Project Aim
The Martlets	14	To improve community relations and reduce local instances of hate crime through cultural education



4: The Research Project

Shared Research Aim

In both schools, we agreed the following broad research aim with the students:

To understand students' experiences of the NextGenLeaders programme.

Participatory Approach to Researching with Secondary School Students

We received institutional ethical clearance to run the project, which included gaining the informed consent of senior leaders in each school and then the informed consent of the students. We recruited students by approaching all the Changemakers in both schools to see who wanted to volunteer for our programme. In School 1, 12 out of 25 students volunteered; in School 2, all 14 students volunteered.

For all students, our project started over half-way through the first year of their NGL programme and continued to the end of the first year. This means that for the duration of our project, the Changemakers had designed and started to implement their projects.

Aside from us determining the research aim and writing this report, we took an otherwise participatory approach to the project. This meant we adopted the role of facilitators, running sessions to guide the students through the different stages of the research project to understand the experiences of the NGL programme.

Research Sessions in School

Due to time restrictions in both schools, the sessions took place at different times but followed a similar overall structure as outlined in the tables below.

School 1

Based on their Changemaker groups, the 12 students worked in 4 groups for this project.

Session date and length	Session focus	Session outcomes
07/03/2025 (1 hour)	Introduction to project. Exploration of different research methods.	Increased understanding of different research methods to answer research questions.
14/03/2025 (1 hour)	How to design different tools for data collection and how to ensure research is ethical.	Designed data collection tools.
28/03/2025 (1 hour)	Data collection using 4 data collection tools.	Data collected through: a survey; an interview; a writing activity; a drawing activity.
25/04/2025 (1 hour)	Interpreting and analysing data. Drawing conclusions.	Data analysed.

School 2

Session date and length	Session focus	Session outcomes
12/12/2024 (30 minutes)	Introduction to project. Familiarisation and potential project directions.	Increased understanding of different research methods.
05/02/2025 (1 hour)	Ethics and exploration of different research methods.	Decided to use interviews and surveys to collect data. Created information sheets for interviews and surveys.
11/02/2025 (1 hour)	How to design different tools for data collection and how to ensure research is ethical.	Designed surveys and interview schedules. Finalised information sheets.
25/02/2025 (90 minutes)	Data collection using interviews and survey.	Interviews completed and surveys sent out.
04/03/2025 (1 hour)	Analysis – reading and selecting key parts of transcripts.	Analysis of interview transcripts begun, and format of presentation of data decided.
25/03/2025 (20 minutes)	Analysis – discussion of themes.	Key themes from interviews discussed.
01/04/2025 (1 hour)	Analysis – presentation of data.	Analysis of transcripts finished. Data and analysis written up and presented in PowerPoint format.

Data Collection and Analysis

Some data collection methods proved more popular than others with the students. In School 1, only 3 student participants completed the writing task. Furthermore, the responses to the writing task were brief and, therefore, we made a collective decision not to include this data for analysis. In School 2, a technical fault meant that the survey did not work properly. The survey data for School 2 is, therefore, not included in our analysis.

Overview of Data Collection Tools

School	Methods used	Number of participants	Type of participants
School 1	Interview questions	12	Changemakers at School 1
	Survey questions	20	Changemakers at School 1
	Drawing task	10	Changemakers at School 1
School 2	Interview questions	11	Teachers and Changemakers at School 2

Data Analysis

In keeping with our participatory approach, we worked with the students to enable them to analyse the data in both schools. This involved the students: reading and familiarising themselves with the data; interpreting the data in relation to the research aim; coding and identifying themes in the data (see an example of initial student transcript analysis from School 2 in Appendix 1); discussing key themes and drawing conclusions collaboratively.

The findings from each school are presented on the following pages.



5a: Findings School 1

Survey

20 students responded to the survey (Appendix 2). The data showed that:

- 90% enjoyed being a Changemaker
- 70% enjoyed NextGenLeaders more than their other school lessons
- 100% felt better working in a group
- 90% would recommend NextGenLeaders to their friends
- 100% developed empathy as a result of being a Changemaker
- 55% felt more confident in speaking

Overall, the survey data showed that most students (90%) enjoyed being a Changemaker and would recommend this to their friends, with the majority of students (70%) preferring NGL to their other lessons. The students who analysed this data found it 'surprising that 30% like other lessons [either more than or the same as] NGL'.

The findings also showed how all students enjoyed working in a group, with a slight majority feeling more confident in speaking as a result.

Finally, the data shows how engaging in a project to help their local communities meant they 'gained empathy and confidence'.

Interviews

12 students undertook interviews (Appendix 3). The interview data were recorded through notetaking, and this was then analysed in relation to the research aim. 3 themes emerged, which are presented below.

Theme 1: Rising to the challenge of the Changemaker experience

Most of the students said they had enjoyed their experience so far, feeling the NextGenLeaders programme was 'good' and 'very good'. One student particularly enjoyed the 'event in Leeds', which was 'really good', as they met students from other schools. One student felt they had already achieved 'a few things'.

At the same time, at least half of the students acknowledged the challenge of undertaking their project. For one student, this was to do with collaborating and designing their project: 'It was good but at the start it was hard. Nobody knew what they were doing and you had to work it out. It then became a lot easier and things went smoother.' For another student, the process of designing and implementing their own project

was continually challenging: 'It has been full of twists and turns because we've changed our ideas of who to help and how to help them.' As summed up by another student, the programme has been 'good but difficult' as they 'had to learn new skills'.

Theme 2: Feeling differently about world problems

Most students felt that being Changemakers had made them feel differently about world problems. They had gained a 'new perspective', 'opened up [their] mind to more things' to 'know what's going on in the world'. For one student, this meant a realisation that 'the world is not as nice as it seemed – people are homeless, starving, dying, not being able to drink clean water'. For another, this meant a more specific 'understanding [of] bills, and that there are lots of people who struggle.'

Underpinning these changes was the development of empathy. One student explicitly stated that, 'I have more empathy for people'. Another student said, 'I understand that more people need to be understood. I didn't really understand a lot of people until I started NGL.'

Theme 3: Changemakers changing as people

All the students felt that being on the NextGenLeaders programme had changed them for the better. This change experienced by the students was linked to developing a new perspective on the world. One student said that they now 'know what's going on in the world' and another felt they understood the 'need for a change of role for a new government', which had given them 'a new perspective'.

Gaining a 'new perspective' meant that students were 'trying to help' others, which, in turn, positively impacted upon their own sense of self. One student claimed, 'I think I've changed a lot as before I was sad and now I'm happy because I'm helping people'. Being motivated to help others seemed to impact upon their confidence to participate in discussions within their group and beyond. One student testified they felt 'more mature and more confident'; another said they were 'more responsible'; for another they were able 'to speak out a bit more'; another became a 'better listener'; and another was more 'open to discussion with people I don't know'.

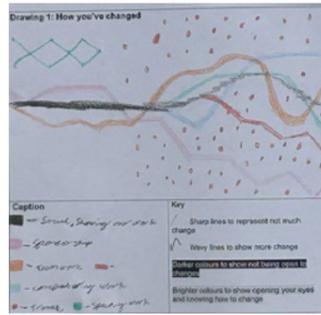
Drawings

10 students undertook 2 drawing activities (Appendix 4). The first activity asked students to think about how they had changed; the second asked them to think about the difference they had made. For both drawings, students were directed by a 'key' in their use of lines and colours and they had the option to write a 'caption' (see Appendix 4). The drawings are grouped into two themes below, with students selecting the drawings they felt best represented each theme.

Theme 1: Personal growth

All students represented some form of change and personal growth through their drawings. Most students did this through interpreting the key they were provided with to create abstract illustrations of their change. These are exemplified in the 3 drawings below.

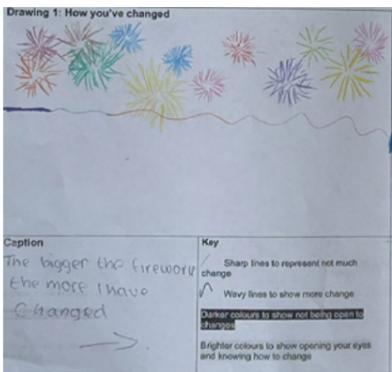
Drawing 1



Drawing 2

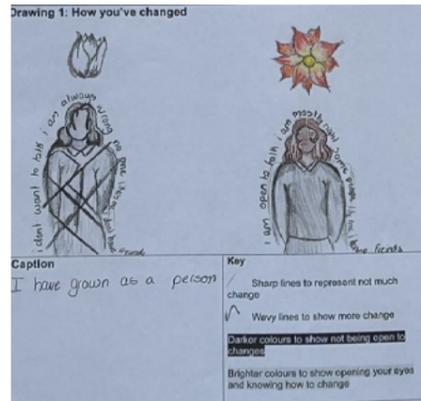


Drawing 3



Drawings 1, 2 and 3 all move from sharp to wavy lines and darker to lighter colours to represent how the students felt they changed, and how they feel they were open to change. Interestingly, Drawing 3 represents this as fireworks, aligning personal growth with celebration. Drawing 1 breaks this change down into 'social' and 'teamwork' skills as well as tasks like gaining 'sponsorship' and 'completing work'. At the same time, Drawing 3 also represents the increasing challenges the student faced as their project progressed through 'trouble'. In Drawing 3, therefore, a clear link is made between challenge and aspects of personal growth.

Drawing 4

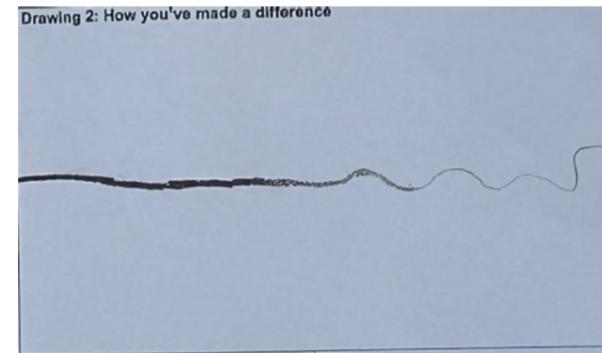


In Drawing 4, the student used her art skills to represent her personal growth through a blossoming, colourful flower and the opening up of a body that shows a face. The use of flower imagery suggests that the personal growth experienced is 'natural' and that this growth involves escaping the incarceration of the sharp lines limiting the body in the first image.

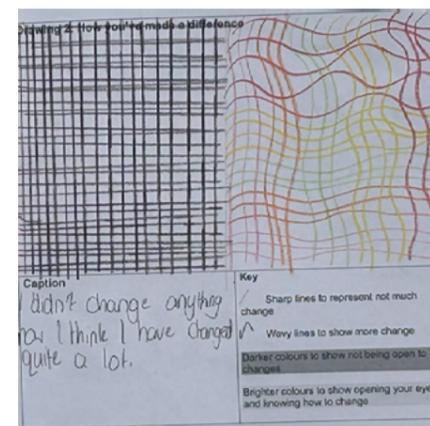
Theme 2: Making a difference

All students represented how they felt their projects were making some kind of difference in their school and local communities. Once again, most students did this through interpreting the key they were provided with to create abstract illustrations of their change. These are exemplified in the 3 drawings below.

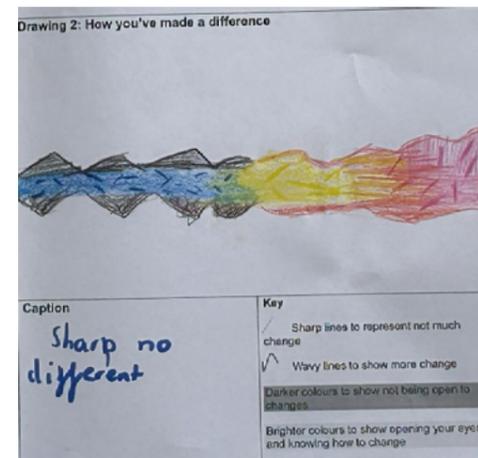
Drawing 5



Drawing 6

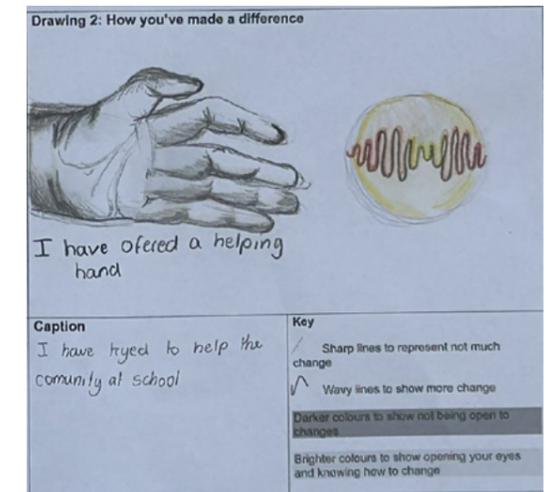


Drawing 7



Drawings 5, 6 and 7 all use a move from sharp to wavy lines to show how the students feel that their projects have made more of a difference over time. Drawings 6 and 7 also use colour to link the difference they have made in their projects to their own personal growth; the implication is that to change things for others, they too must open their eyes and know how to change themselves.

Drawing 8



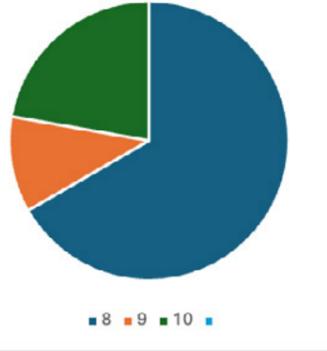
Drawing 8 also makes this link between personal change and making a difference, this time 'to help the community at school'. The abstract yellow shape with the wavy red line resembles the sun and, as in Drawing 4 (by the same student), links change and making a difference to nature and a natural state of being.

5b: Findings School 2

In School 2, the students collectively decided to create a PowerPoint to present the data and their analysis, which included quotes they selected from the transcripts, key themes identified, and images that represented some of the key themes to them. The students chose to analyse the interviews with students on the NextGenLeaders programme at the school and the interviews with the teachers supporting the NextGenLeaders programme separately, and their analysis is presented below in this same format.

Student Interviews

The youth researchers highlighted key themes for each question from the interviews, as well as exploring their overall impressions of the data. The following table shows the information selected by the students to include in their PowerPoint for each interview question for the student interviews.

Question	Student analysis and selected interview quotations
What year are you in?	<p style="text-align: center;">Total students</p>  <p style="text-align: center;">■ 8 ■ 9 ■ 10 ■</p> <p>Most students (six) were in year 8, with one student in year 9, and two students in year 10.</p>
What has been the best part about taking part in the NGL programme so far?	<p>Key themes: Teamwork, social skills, making change, NGL days</p> <p>Selected quotations: “Building up my social skills” “Working together in a team” “seeing everything come together” “I’ve really enjoyed trying to get our impact points up” “everything at the days away”</p>
What have you learned on the NGL programme?	<p>Key themes: Research, teamwork, how to make change, tolerance</p> <p>Selected quotations: “to take time and find ways to understand others’ ideas” “research skills” “how we can help, like, other people who are less privileged” “working with a team”</p>

Question	Student analysis and selected interview quotations
What skills have you gained from taking the NGL programme?	<p>Key themes: Research, teamwork, and confidence</p> <p>Selected quotations: “Research” - in 6/9 responses “I’ve learned more efficient ways of researching” “I’ve gained a lot of confidence”</p>
What would you change about the NGL programme?	<p>Key themes: Wouldn’t change, more time in school, online resources</p> <p>Selected quotations: “I wouldn’t necessarily change anything” “more time” “we might need to be a bit more organised” “more online resources”</p>
Would you recommend the NGL programme to other students? And, why?	<p>Key themes: 100% yes, helpful, learn new skills, building confidence, teamwork</p> <p>Selected quotations: “how to make change happen” “gain new skills” “good experience” “very helpful for building of confidence”</p>

Drawing on this student analysis, three overall key themes were highlighted by the students:

1. Wanting to make change – and feeling able to
2. Increased teamworking, confidence, and social skills
3. Enjoying research and the NGL experience

Theme 1: Wanting to make change – and feeling able to

Across the interviews, students described a strong desire to contribute positively to their community, and they reflected on how the programme had helped them feel more capable of doing so. Several students spoke about how they had learned to “hyper focus in on a problem and brainstorm solutions”, while others highlighted how they had become more aware of the challenges faced by others and wanted to help address these challenges. One student explained they had learned “how we’re tackling [hate crime] in our local community”, noting that “our statistics in our local community are quite shocking.” The sense of purpose came through strongly in reflections on the project, with one student saying they enjoyed “trying to get our impact points up... telling other people about our project... it’s really exciting.” Students also saw the relevance of the programme for their futures, with one noting that “most jobs in the future will most likely include some form of research or talking or communication and those are skills which you just require in day to day life.” Several students expressed appreciation for the real-world and practical applications of what they were learning, particularly in relation to research and problem-solving: “you just learn so many things that would be fantastic for the future.” These reflections suggest that for many students, participating in the NGL programme deepened their understanding of social issues and gave them the tools and confidence to try to address them.

Theme 2: Increased teamworking, confidence, and social skills

Students highlighted how much they had developed their social and communication skills throughout the interviews. One student said they had been “building up my social skills”, while another reflected: “I’ve gained a lot of confidence around talking about these things, and how you can like frame them to get people to understand.” Working with others was also seen as an important learning experience: “working together in a team, and umm, working together with new people”, was emphasised as a key part of the programme by one student. Others described how they had learned “to not always race ahead, and to take time and find ways to understand others’ ideas”, and that the programme helped them “realise you know, your strengths and weaknesses.” Many students described learning how to listen to others’ ideas, contribute to discussions collaboratively, and speak up with their own suggestions. These experiences were not only valuable in helping students navigate their current projects, but also in preparing them for future academic and social environments.

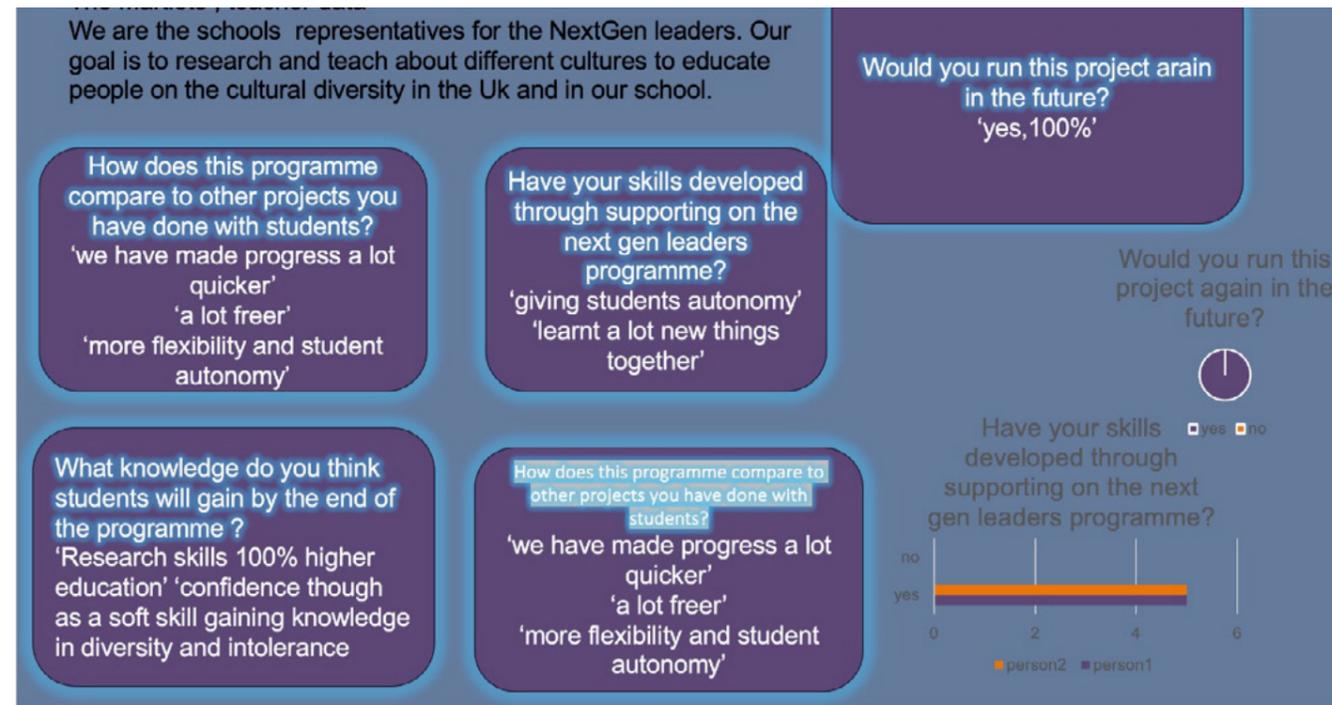
Theme 3: Enjoying research and the NGL experience

The students described research as a key and enjoyable part of their learning, with two thirds of the interviewees explicitly mentioning research skills. These included learning “more efficient ways of researching”, how to “minimise information so more people are interested in actually reading the research”, and how to effectively “find [information] from loads of people and... trusted places”. Many students also emphasised how much they enjoyed “everything at the days away”, including visiting other organisations and hearing from guest speakers. The overall experience was described as “a good experience”, and “really helpful”. Every student interviewed said they would recommend the programme to others. Overall, the students found the process of discovering new information, working collaboratively, and contributing to meaningful change both exciting and empowering.

Teacher Interviews

The students chose to analyse the teacher interviews as whole transcripts, rather than going question by question. The students presented their analysis on one slide (see slide section below), and their work in this is drawn on in the below explorations of these key themes.

Student analysis slide section



The students' analysis highlighted three key themes from these interviews:

- 1) The importance of student autonomy, flexible learning, and capacity building
- 2) The development of students' emotional and social skills
- 3) Constraints of school time and structure

Theme 1: The importance of student autonomy, flexible learning, and capacity building

Both teachers strongly valued the way the NGL programme shifted traditional classroom dynamics, giving students greater independence and control over their learning. One teacher reflected that it had "made me think about how we can use skills which I see at university... giving students autonomy in their actions." The programme was seen as "a lot freer... with a lot more flexibility and student agency than I've ever really worked with." In contrast to more structured curriculum-based learning, NGL offered an open-ended, student-led experience: "Students can direct it and it goes in different directions... so, when I walk in the room, there's like a buzz because students are directing themselves." The emphasis on student-led inquiry was also seen as enhancing their future aspirations: "This will lead some people into thinking about a career around research and... higher education."

Theme 2: The development of students' emotional and social skills

Teachers observed that the NGL programme had supported students in building confidence and social awareness. One teacher described this as "confidence... as a soft skill... I think there's a lot of confidence building happening from doing this." The other teacher pointed to the value of students working with others they might not usually collaborate with, explaining that "You've learned to work with students that you probably wouldn't have otherwise."

Theme 3: Constraints of school time and structure

Both teachers expressed frustration that time constraints limited what could be achieved through the programme in their school. One noted that "it would be good to have more time off timetable", while the other teacher pointed out a broader structural issue in finding time for the NGL programme: "It'd be good if there was more opportunity for schools to have the flexibility to do this. But that's a government initiative." Despite the programme's effectiveness, teachers felt that with more time, students could "do so much more."

6: Conclusion

Whilst School 1 and School 2 present different contexts, particularly in relation to social disadvantage, students' analysis of the data they collected for this project is largely similar and demonstrates how, from a student perspective, engagement in the NGL programme has developed their skills and competences.

First and foremost, most students experienced personal growth because of the NGL programme; a growth that was similarly noted by the teachers in School 2. Their personal growth includes the development of interpersonal competences like social skills and teamworking skills. It also includes a wider understanding of the world, and the problems experienced by others through the development of the affective skill of empathy.

Underpinning personal growth is the affective skill of motivation, with students wanting to make a difference in their schools and communities. Being motivated to devise and implement their projects means that most students claimed to have enjoyed the different phases of their NGL experience.

At the same time, motivation and personal growth seem to be threatened by the challenge that undertaking the NGL programme presents to them. This was captured most in the Drawings and the Interviews in School 1, where students articulated the difficulties they faced in devising and implementing their own community-facing projects. It was also acknowledged by the teachers in School 2, who recognised the autonomy that the NGL programme gave their students. By overcoming these challenges, the students' sense of motivation and personal growth increased.

We chose not to differentiate individual students in this project in terms of ability and social disadvantage for ethical reasons. The consensus amongst participants, which included both 'more able' and disadvantaged students, indicates that YPAR, like the NGL programme, should be considered as a valuable intervention for providing challenge to students, including those who are 'more able' and disadvantaged.

This is in line with existing research (Anyon et al., 2018; Dobson, 2023), which demonstrates how YPAR helps students develop intrapersonal and interpersonal competences as well as affective skills. Hearing directly from the young people, our project adds to this literature by emphasising the importance the young people place on interpersonal over intrapersonal development, and how they see their own personal development in relation to the affective skills of engagement and empathy. Hearing directly from the young people also adds to this literature by emphasising the importance of challenge and its relationship to interpersonal competences, personal growth and motivation.

7: Recommendations

Mindful of the time constraints articulated by the teachers in school 2, we make the following recommendations:

- 1) That YPAR interventions, such as the NGL programme, should be offered to students in all schools, including those who are 'more able'. By adopting such programmes, students will be challenged in such a way that promotes personal growth, interpersonal competences, motivation and empathy.
- 2) That schools should consider ways in which such interventions could be used within the taught curriculum. This could include: Personal Development time; PSHCE or Citizenship education; personal tutor time; enrichment for sixth formers; the student council; cocurricular or extracurricular clubs.
- 3) That the Department for Education should consider promoting YPAR through policy reform to the Citizenship curriculum.

8: References

Anyon, Y., Bender, K., Kennedy, H. and Dechants, J. (2018). 'A systematic review of youth participatory research (YPAR) in the United States: Methodologies, youth outcomes, and future directions, *Health Education and Behaviour*, 45(6), 849-1050.

Clare, I., Swain, S., Wood, M., Dobson, T., Gillett, A., Lightfoot, R., Lowe, H., Haines Lyon, C., McCarthy, A., Walker, E., and Wheatley, R. (2025). *In their own words: removing barriers for 'more able' disadvantaged students in secondary schools*. Available from: <https://www.yorks.ac.uk/research/institute-for-social-justice/events-reports-and-videos/reports/>

Department for Education (2024). *Schools, pupils and their characteristics*. Available at: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/school-pupils-and-their-characteristics/2023-24> (Accessed: 13 May 2025).

Dobson, T. (2023). Competency and affective skill outcomes for 11-19-year olds through progressive and reconstructionist pedagogies: a systematic review, *Educational Review*, 1-22.

9: Useful information

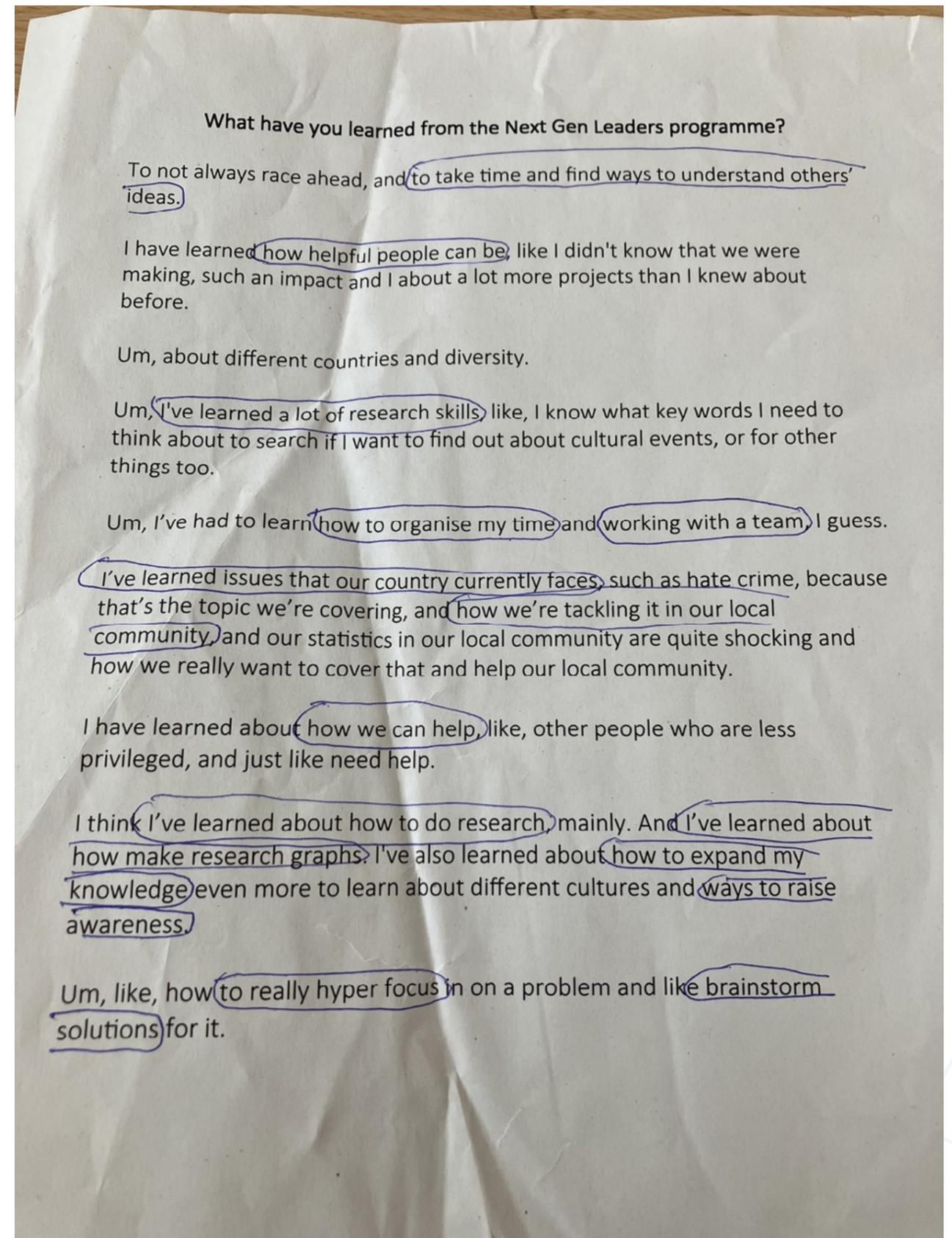
To find out more about NextGenLeaders and NACE, please copy and paste the links below into your browser:

NextGenLeaders: <https://www.nextgenleaders.org.uk>

NACE: <https://www.nace.co.uk/>

10: Appendices

Appendix 1: School 1 Example Student Analysis of Interview Questions



Appendix 2: School 1 Survey Questions

1. How long have you been a Changemaker?
2. Have you enjoyed being a Changemaker? <i>YES or NO</i>
3. Are you more confident in speaking as a result of being a Changemaker? <i>YES or NO or MAYBE</i>
4. Do you enjoy doing NextGenLeaders more than other lessons at school? <i>YES or NO</i>
5. Do you feel better working in a group? <i>YES or NO or SOMETIMES</i>
6. Has being a Changemaker developed your empathy? <i>YES or NO or MAYBE</i>
7. Would you recommend being a Changemaker to your friends? <i>YES or NO</i>

Appendix 3: School 1 Interview Questions

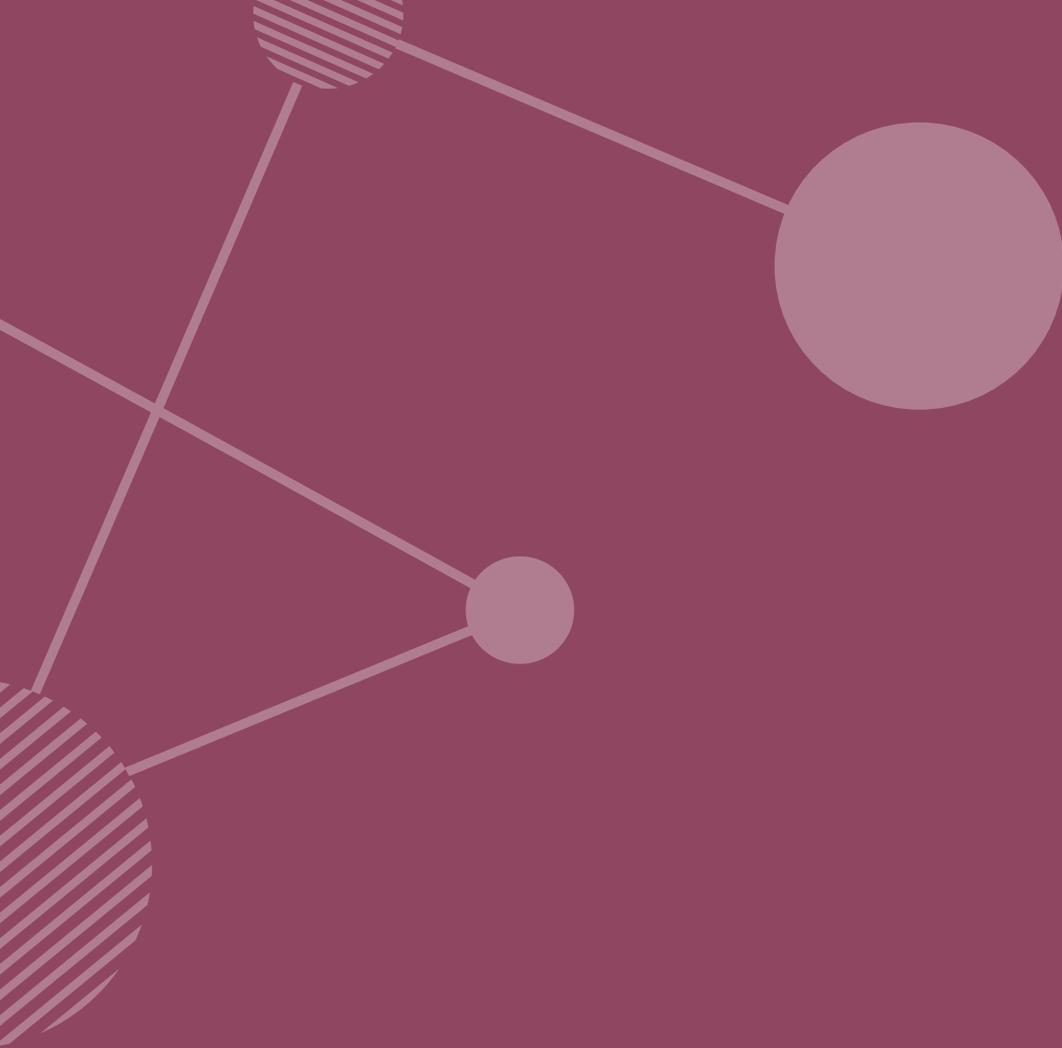
1. How have you found your experience so far?
2. What difference are you trying to achieve?
3. What SDGs are you trying to help?
4. How has your perspective changed on the world problems?
5. How have you changed as a person through your Changemaker journey?
6. What are you planning to achieve in the future?

Appendix 4: School 1 Drawings

Drawing 1: How you've changed		Drawing 2: How you've made a difference	
Caption	Key Sharp lines to represent not much change Wavy lines to show more change Darker colours to show not being open to changes Brighter colours to show opening your eyes and knowing how to change	Caption	Key Sharp lines to represent not much change Wavy lines to show more change Darker colours to show not being open to changes Brighter colours to show opening your eyes and knowing how to change

Appendix 5: School 2 Interview questions

Student questions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What year are you in? 2. What has been the best part about taking part in the Next Gen Leaders programme so far? 3. What have you learned on the Next Gen Leaders programme? 4. What skills have you gained from taking the Next Gen Leaders programme? 5. What would you change about the Next Gen Leaders programme? 6. Would you recommend the Next Gen Leaders programme to other students? And, why?
Teacher questions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Have your skills developed through supporting students on the Next Gen Leaders programme? If so, how? 2. How does this programme compare to other projects you have done with students? 3. What knowledge do you think the students have gained/will gain by the end of the Next Gen Leaders programme? 4. What skills have students learned/will the students have learned by the end of the Next Gen Leaders programme? 5. What would you change about the Next Gen Leaders programme? 6. Would you run this project again in the future? Why/why not?



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