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Bridging the Gap

Evaluation Report

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Executive summary

Bridging the Gap was a student-led, collaborative project that was undertaken by the Education Outreach and Academic Skills teams at Newcastle University Library. The aim of the project was to create high quality, online study skills resources for A-Level and Stage 1 Undergraduate students that build student knowledge, skills, confidence and independence, all directed by user input.

The project

The project was run successfully, bringing together a collaborative cross-departmental project team who were supported by an advisory group made up of stakeholders from the University and schools. Resources were developed through a thorough iterative process, and the project workload was split between two years, allowing the team to reflect and adapt their processes at the halfway mark.

Working with students

Working in partnership with students resulted in the production of resources that are high quality and relatable for users. Students working on the project felt themselves and their views were valued, and benefitted from the experience they gained through their internship. Student input was embedded into every stage of Bridging the Gap, and working with students was felt to be the highlight of the project for many of the staff involved.

Ways of working

Effective collaboration allowed the project team to benefit from one another's expertise. The project co-ordinator was essential in enabling this collaboration, and in ensuring workload remained manageable alongside team members' other commitments. Positive relationships were developed between the project team staff, the student interns and the advisory group, and this resulted in more positive outcomes for the project, increasing the quality of the resources.

The resources

The resources that have been created are of a high quality and the project team are proud of them. Wide-ranging expertise and student experiences have informed their creation, resulting in resources that are useful and engaging for the target audience. The inclusion of students within the resources is a key factor contributing to this. The resources have been circulated and used in a variety of contexts, and have received positive feedback from students and staff who work with them.

The future

The project team will continue to promote the resources and monitor their usage. Staff involved in the project have plans to collaborate on other projects, and to use the Bridging the Gap resources to enhance the University's other study skills provision.

Background: Why Bridging the Gap?

Bridging the Gap was a student-led, collaborative project that was undertaken by the Education Outreach (EO) and Academic Skills (AS) teams at Newcastle University Library, alongside the Digital Library Service (DLS) and Learning and Teaching Development Service (LTDS) teams. The aim of the project was to create high quality, online study skills resources for A-Level and Stage 1 Undergraduate (UG) students that build student knowledge, skills, confidence and independence, all directed by user input.

A need for these resources was established initially by the Education Outreach team. With over 2,000 A-Level students attending their Sixth Form Study Skills workshops throughout the academic year and 117,506 views on their Sixth Form Study Skills website (2022-2023), the team were very familiar with the issues faced by A-Level students. In their encounters with A-Level teachers and school librarians, the EO team also became increasingly aware of the crucial skills A-Level students need – and often lack – to complete their A-Levels and transition into university studies. The Academic Skills team had also been experiencing a high volume of Stage 1 UG students booking for 1:1 support from their team, and see a similarly high level of usage on their Academic Skills Kit website annually.

Conversations between the two teams highlighted some of these key similarities between the students they were encountering, and the '*combined skill set*' the two teams shared. This, and the raised expectations of the availability and quality of online resources since the pandemic, prompted the initial plans to develop learning resources to support A-Level and Stage 1 UG students as a collaborative team, as it '*would lead to better resources than what [they] could do individually*'.

A pilot project was funded by the University's Education Enhancement fund, where the teams trialled working collaboratively to create six resources. Crucially, the pilot project team included two UG students who were employed to support in the development of the resources, and A-Level and UG focus groups also provided input and feedback on the resources. The success of this short pilot led to further funding for a two-year project with an attached project co-ordinator post to oversee the development of an entire suite of study skills resources to support A-Level and Stage 1 students.

Background: Evaluation - A Theory of Change approach (ToC)

A Theory of Change approach to evaluation is recognised as being particularly suited to complex, multi-strand projects (Dyson and Todd, 2010) where there are many stakeholders involved; a variety of activities take place and a range of outcomes for the beneficiaries is anticipated. It is 'a systematic and cumulative study of the links between the activities, outcomes and the context of the initiative' (Fullbright Anderson et al., 1998, p. 16).

Initial interviews with the key stakeholders results in a steps of change document that identifies the strands of action and the steps that need to be taken in order to achieve the intended outcomes. Data is then collected that will evidence the progress that is being made towards these outcomes. This document is designed to be a participatory tool that is revised and reflected upon throughout the evaluation process. As such it is a formative tool that can impact the project in action, rather than purely a summative tool that only influences the next iteration of the initiative. Crucial to the process is an exploration of where a project has taken a different direction for, as Davidson (2000) argues, the 'unintended consequences are just as important to track down as goal-related outcomes' (p. 20).

Although it is typically the evaluator who produces the Steps of Change document, the project stakeholders are free, and indeed encouraged, to make amendments so that it reflects their own thoughts and interpretations. Once the Theory of Change has been agreed, data is collected to evidence changes taking place towards the outcomes. This typically adopts a mixed-methods approach and is made up of evaluator-collected and stakeholder-collected data. In terms of the latter, this is data that is routinely collected as part of the project (e.g. meeting notes, survey results, website data etc). This is then combined with the data collected via the methods adopted by the evaluator (e.g. interviews, observations etc). This enables triangulation and therefore rigorous conclusions to be drawn.

The Bridging the Gap Theory of Change

Interviews with key members of the project team took place at the start of the evaluation. Analysis of the interviews, in combination with an examination of project planning documentation, resulted in a draft Theory of Change model that identified the key long-term outcomes for the various beneficiaries and the steps required to achieve these. This draft was discussed with the project co-ordinator, the project leads from Education Outreach and Academic Skills and the Director of Academic Services and University Librarian, and a final version approved (see Appendix 1, p. 34). In the model, the following long-term outcomes were identified for the various beneficiaries.

Beneficiaries	Outcome
UG student interns	The students feel their views are valued and have resulted in high quality, user-led resources.
A-Level and UG students	The A-Level and UG students who use the resources have developed their academic skills and knowledge. The A-Level and UG students who use the resources are more confident and independent when undertaking academic work.
Library staff	Effective collaborative ways of working have been trialled and shared with the wider library.
University staff involved with Stage 1 Undergraduates and A-Level teachers	The workload of University staff and teachers, when advising/providing academic feedback, is reduced.

With respect to the evaluation timeframe, the aim was that two of these outcomes could potentially be fully evidenced (green) by completion of the project, and that the remaining three (orange) were longer-term outcomes requiring evidence of the resources being used and workloads reduced. This would require at least one additional year after the launch. The evaluation would therefore hope to evidence significant progress being made towards these outcomes, if not fully evidencing their completion.

The evidence: data collection

The data required to evidence the steps of change was determined by the evaluator and the project co-ordinator, and was collected by both during the 18-month evaluation period. Meetings between the two, plus the project leads, took place on a regular (typically monthly) basis to discuss the progress being made towards the project outcomes and to ensure that the relevant data was being collected in order to evidence this.

Evaluator collected evidence	Number
ToC initial interviews with the project leads and the project co-ordinator	n=3
End of Y1 student interview	n=1
Start of Y2 survey: UG interns and PGR student intern/seminar tutor	n=5
End of Y2 student interviews: UG interns and PGR student intern/seminar tutor	n=5
Launch event participant short interviews	n=5
End of Y2 project team interviews: Academic Skills team, Education Outreach team, Digital Library Service (DLS) Learning and Teaching Development Service (LTDS)	n=6
Update meetings with the project co-ordinator and team	n= 11
Observations of meetings, sessions, events	n=4

Project co-ordinator collected evidence
• Advisory Group meeting agendas and notes • A-Level and UG focus group/user-testing feedback • Actions documents • Resource Brainstorming templates and examples • Job Adverts – User-testers, focus group participants, project team interns, project co-ordinator post • Guidance on project management tool – documentation and video • Presentation slides • Resource examples – links and screenshots • Photographs • Awards information • Podcast • Conference recording

As demonstrated, the data was wide-ranging in scope. Appendix 9 on page 41 identifies which data was collected to evidence each step within the model.

1 The project

The project team

As outlined, the BTG project team was made up staff from across the Library and Academic Services and UG student interns. Education Outreach (EO) and Academic Skills (AS) contributed their expertise in relation to the content of the resources, based on their knowledge and experience of working with A-Level and Stage 1 UG students. The Digital Library Services (DLS) team provided their expertise in web development, creating and implementing the resources and developing the websites they would be hosted on. The Learning and Teaching Development Services (LTDS) team used their expertise in digital media, videography and graphic design to design and create any audiovisual resources. The UG student interns contributed their expertise from their perspective as the target audience, sharing their lived experiences and featuring in audiovisual resources and photos.

One of the key learnings from the pilot was a recognition that developing the resources was a large undertaking, and that there were implications regarding workload for the existing project team who would have to do this over and above their core work. As one of the project leads highlighted, *'resource development does take a lot longer if you are involving two departments, and students, and checking it, and focus groups'*.

It was also considered important to have one person involved with an overview of the entire project who *'wasn't being pulled in different directions'*, particularly because of the cross-department, collaborative nature of the project.

As a consequence, a funded project co-ordinator role was also part of the project team, whose primary remit was to:

- Develop the 2-year project plan
- Support project leads by monitoring project outputs to ensure objectives and timescales are met
- Supervise students working on the project
- Organise and run student focus groups
- Work with colleagues and stakeholders to disseminate and market the BTG resources

The advisory group

At the start of the project, an advisory group was created to support the project and was made up of (but not limited to): Student Wellbeing, Student Recruitment, the Library's Academic Liaison team, academic staff from all University faculties, the Inclusive Newcastle Knowledge Centre, alongside teachers and school librarians. This was considered a crucial part of the project. Their remit was to provide input on key

aspects of the project and to act as advocates for both the project itself and the resources created. Members who agreed to take part did so because they saw the benefits of the resources for the students they work with:

- *'Many of the stage 1 students I support within [Student Health and Wellbeing Services] will benefit from the wealth of advice, guidance and tools this project brings together in one platform.'* – Student Wellbeing Advisor Team Manager
- *'I am delighted to be involved in the Bridging the Gap Advisory Group and contribute to such an essential part of our offer. Supporting students to understand how higher education works is crucial to enabling them to succeed.'* – Dean of Education, Faculty of Science, Agriculture and Engineering (SAGE)
- *'I am confident that Bridging the Gap will help young people make a much more seamless transition into the world of post-eighteen learning.'* – Former School Librarian

Advisory group meetings were held quarterly and were a combination of updates plus *'a theme or a question so that [the project leads/coordinator] could have a conversation and get inspiration and ideas'*. An interim newsletter between the meetings continued to provide the group with updates on progress.

The make-up and structure of the meetings worked very effectively. It was considered vital to help the project team keep sight of *'the bigger picture'* and to enable the project team to provide a clear rationale for the resources being created and the choices made:

- *'We've kind of had to think about justifying why we were doing things and I think that's important to do that. [...] I think that was a really useful exercise.'* – Project team member
- *'The advisory group was extremely helpful. It meant that we were held accountable for the things we were saying we were going to do outside of our project team.'* – Project team member

The advocacy role of the advisory group also proved to be extremely important. The members advertised the resources themselves, but also brokered connections that ensured that the resources would be marketed more widely. The advisory group brought together people who do not typically work together, and this has created an important legacy, resulting in *'a network for future work.'*

Initial research and user input

In order to understand the current landscape at the start of the project, the project co-ordinator undertook an audit of the current Newcastle University provision (the Sixth Form Study Skills site and the Academic Skills Kit), and that of 14 competitor universities (see Appendix 3, p. 35). The audit focused on the skills these universities cover (e.g. referencing, writing etc.), as well as the resource format (e.g. quiz, video etc.).

Alongside this, the project co-ordinator and project leads ran a focus group activity with UG students, and surveyed A-Level students visiting the University for a Sixth Form Study Skills workshop with the EO team (see Appendix 2, p. 35). Interviews with a sample of A-Level teachers and academics were also undertaken in order to understand the issues that they experience when supporting their students and to establish the information they thought students may benefit from having access to. Their responses fed into the decision-making process (see Appendix 4, p. 36).

Group	Number	Activity
A-Level students	n=25	Completed a survey during their visit to the University for a study skills workshop.
Stage 1 UG students	n=2	Topic areas on a whiteboard in columns. Two different coloured post-it notes were provided and participants asked to suggest what content they would have liked to be covered and in what format when they started university. Participants were also provided with a short series of questions to answer on paper. Post-it note activity was photographed.
Stage 2 UG students	n=3	
Stage 3 UG students	n=1	
Academics from all faculties	n=5	Interviewed by a member of the Education Outreach team.
Teachers	n=3	Interviewed by a member of the Education Outreach team.

A thematic analysis of all of the data was undertaken by the project co-ordinator, with the results colour-coded according to the project's remit, and then ordered from most frequently mentioned to least. This analysis resulted in the following eight categories in order of prioritisation:

- Writing skills
- Healthy study habits
- Reading skills
- Referencing and plagiarism
- Research skills
- Communication skills
- Revision skills
- Digital skills

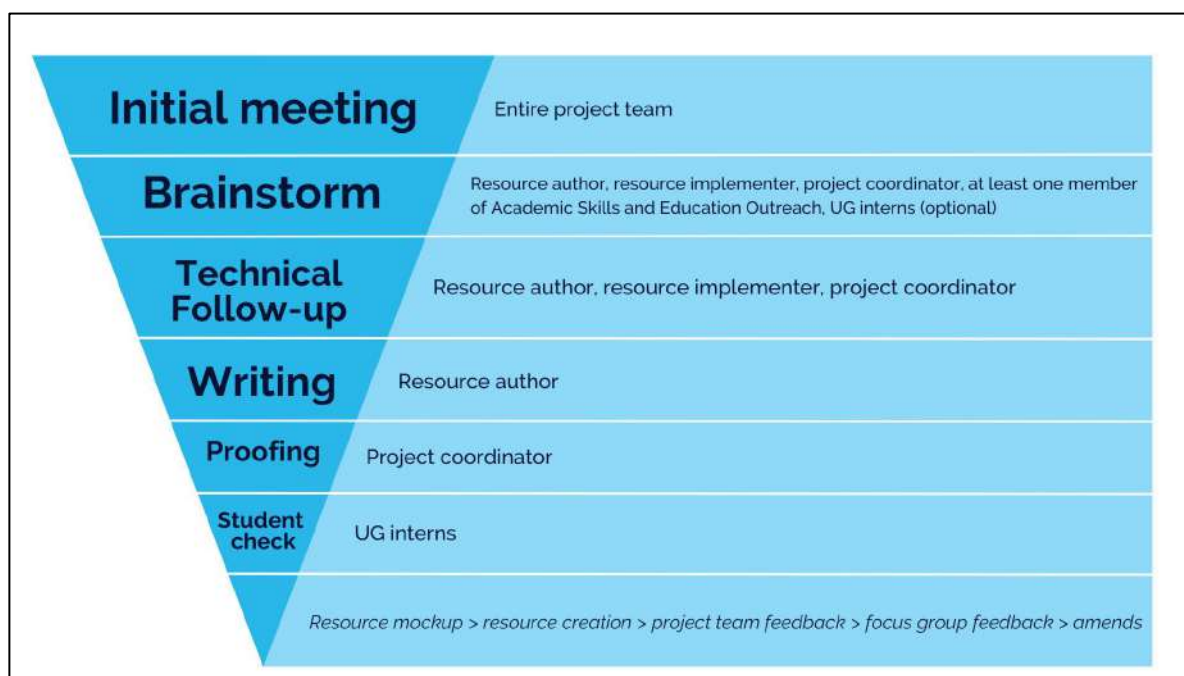
The analysis also highlighted the need for a general glossary of terms alongside these categories. The final stage in the process resulted in the identification of individual resources to be developed over the two-year project, using this input to match the content requested with preferred delivery styles.

The resource-development process

From its conception following the success of the pilot, BTG was planned to be split into two years so that the team could reflect on their progress at the halfway point.

Therefore, a third of the resource development took place during Year 1, allowing for processes and collaborative ways of working to be trialled and refined ready for the final year push. The final resources would sit on the Library's [Sixth Form Study Skills website](#) and the [Academic Skills Kit](#), with the same content duplicated across both sites and the language differentiated between the two educational contexts (eg. 'coursework' and 'assignments', or 'lesson' and 'seminar').

In Year 1, the model for writing the resource content was to allocate members of Education Outreach and Academic Skills to lead on these, supported by the student interns and the wider project team. Once a resource had been written, it would be proofed by the project co-ordinator to ensure a consistent style and tone, then checked by the two UG interns on the project team, before being sent out to student focus groups for feedback.

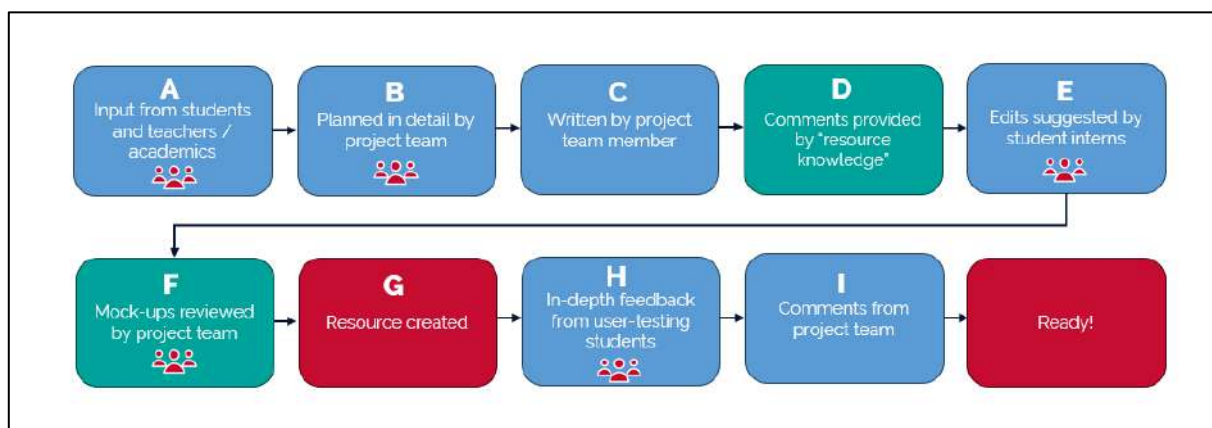


Workflow model for Year 1 of BTG

With the majority of staff members having to do this over and above their normal work, having them write the resources was creating capacity issues and impacting on the resource development deadlines: *'It's just inevitable that your main focus is going to be the session that you're teaching this afternoon or [...] the resources that you have to publish next week rather than the thing that you know has to be completed in six month's time.'*

UG participation in focus groups, which had already proved to be challenging during the pilot (despite offering payment), became *'an ongoing problem'* during Year 1 of the project. Different strategies had been adopted to try and improve the numbers, but the traditional face-to-face focus group approach did not seem to attract many participants.

With all of these challenges and changes identified, the Project co-ordinator created a new workflow that mapped out exactly where student and staff input would take place, resulting in the following model for the resource creation process for Year 2.



Workflow model for Year 2 of BTG

This new model involved hiring additional UG interns and employing a postgraduate demonstrator, who delivers seminars to Stage 1 students and marks their work, to support the project co-ordinator to write the remaining resources, with input from the relevant EO and AS team members during the brainstorming and editing stages. Some resources required external knowledge, for example, Student Wellbeing staff from the Advisory Group provided this input for all of the Healthy Study Habits resources. This new way of working ensured that the expertise and knowledge of the relevant teams was drawn upon (including student involvement at stages A, B, E, F and H), but that the EO and AS teams' workload was not exceeded. It was considered extremely fortunate that the project co-ordinator's background as a Learning Content Creator in EdTech meant she had experience of writing and creating learning resources to make this possible, and that the postgraduate demonstrator had a career in writing and other experience working in education.

In Year 2, meetings no longer required the whole project team to attend, just relevant team members plus at least two of the four UG students that had been hired. This reduced the challenge of having to co-ordinate multiple diaries. Using a meeting space that enabled meetings to be offered on a hybrid basis also facilitated attendance. Comments and feedback from those not attending meetings were still requested and fed back at the start of the meetings to ensure everyone had the opportunity to contribute.

Following a brainstorm for a resource, a follow-up technical meeting would then take place between the resource authors, two of the UG students and either the web developer (DLS) or videographer (LTDS) before the writing started, so that the authors would understand any technical requirements (i.e. the maximum length of a script, the limitations of an animation, the capabilities of a tool). For the project co-ordinator, it was important for DLS and LTDS to be involved from the very first brainstorming meeting to ensure the authors were confident in what they were setting out to write: *'having DLS and LTDS in the room for those meetings to say "we can't do that" but "we can do this" was really important.'*

In reducing meetings to essential resource brainstorming and planning technical requirements, and continuing to manage the workflow via Microsoft Teams and project management tool Teamwork (discussed on pp. 23-24), it meant the entire project team could have input where relevant and feel part of a core team, but their workload was not impacted and they were able to work on the content most relevant to them and their knowledge. The standardised template documents that had been created to support the brainstorming stage of the process (see Appendix 6, p. 39) were also streamlined and amended to include all details identified as being necessary from the first year of the project.

In order to address the limited participation in focus groups, the project co-ordinator had already tried a more informal approach in Year 1 by booking a computer suite, where students could work individually at their own pace without having to share their views with their peers. Having identified that the students' physical presence in the building was not necessary to obtain their feedback, the role was then changed to be entirely remote user-testing, where students were paid to access the resources on their own devices and submit their feedback back to her via email. This resulted in more in-depth, thorough feedback than previous in-person focus group input.

With changes made and the new ways of working implemented, the final two-thirds of the resources were created during Year 2 of the project, resulting in over 40 resources in total.

2 Working with students

As outlined in the introduction, the overarching aim of the project was 'the creation of high quality, online study skills resources for A-Level and Stage 1 Undergraduate students that build student knowledge, skills, confidence and independence'. Key to achieving this aim was the involvement of students at all stages in the process, both to understand what their needs are, but also the ways in which they access information.

The pilot and subsequent 2-year project built in student involvement from the start. Involving students throughout the project in different ways ensured a '*formalising*' of the student voice, rather than basing decisions about resources purely on the experience of the academics, library staff and teachers involved in working with this cohort of students. Students were considered partners in the project, with their expertise valued. As outlined in the previous section, this involved:

- Obtaining baseline information via surveys and focus groups with A-Level and UG students to understand their needs. This shaped the decision-making regarding which resources to produce and in which formats.
- The employment of several undergraduate students who were seen as full partners in the project team.
- Obtaining feedback on draft versions of the resources via focus groups and user-testing with A-Level and UG students.

Students as partners: the undergraduate interns

The undergraduate interns who worked within the project team were integral to BTG. Two UG interns were initially recruited by the project leads prior to the start of Year 1 to work on the project between December 2022 and May 2023. Their key duties outlined in the job advert involved:

- Attending meetings to contribute to the development of teaching and learning resources which will help A-Level and first year undergraduate students with their research and academic skills.
- Attending focus groups to capture comments of the group, present findings in a report and disseminate to wider project team.
- Assessing online teaching resources providing feedback and comments upon their appeal, relevancy and accessibility for target audience of A-Level and first year undergraduate students.

One student was in Stage 1 of their degree, and the other in their final stage. The two students attended some of the project meetings (typically online), provided ideas during the initial brainstorming sessions and then ongoing feedback as the drafts of the resources were developed. Notwithstanding the very positive outcomes of involving student interns in the project, some issues did arise in Year 1. One of the main problems

was the ability to organise meetings that the two interns could attend. This was often due to clashing timetables and the time of year (i.e. assessment periods), and meant they did not get to work together in the way it had been hoped. Students were also not always able to provide feedback on the resource content within agreed deadlines.

With a better understanding of the skills required to create the resources, as well as a clearer understanding of the issues facing students taking on internships (including timetabling), the project co-ordinator sought funding from the Careers Service to hire four UG interns using a new job specification, re-employing one of the students from the first year of the project. This new specification provided more accurate details about the role learned from the way the first year of the project ran, including:

- the ability to work collaboratively
- the ability to think creatively and provide ideas for resources
- the ability to reflect on their own experiences of A-Levels and Stage 1
- the opportunity to take part in filming
- the ability to write blog posts
- digital capabilities

Students in Stage 2 of their studies were recruited (rather than Stage 1), as it had also been recognised that a level of understanding and maturity was required in order for the students to reflect back on what their needs were in the first year of university. It was hoped that having four interns would make it easier to ensure that at least two of the interns could be present at every meeting and that the workload would be distributed more widely. This greater number of students also increased representation across different subject disciplines, reflecting the varied academic experiences students might have. For example, one UG intern stated it was *'good to have different people with different opinions because I don't do exams'*, whereas other students working on the project did.

To ensure the interns were prepared for their workload, comfortable working with each other and the project team staff, and understood the project, the project co-ordinator held an induction morning for the students before their work commenced. They had the chance to meet each other and the project co-ordinator, familiarise themselves with the meeting rooms they would be spending time in, and were provided with training on using the project management tool, Teamwork. The project co-ordinator used this induction to introduce herself as their manager and outline her expectations, answer any questions and ensure the students were welcomed into the project as equals.

In an initial survey, when asked 'Did your induction to the project prepare you for your internship? If not, what information or support do you feel you need?', the students' responses were positive:

- *'Yes! Everything was very informative and easy to understand. I knew exactly what to expect from the internship.'*
- *'I felt like the induction was detailed and made me feel very welcome. It was very settling to have met the team before any work had started.'*

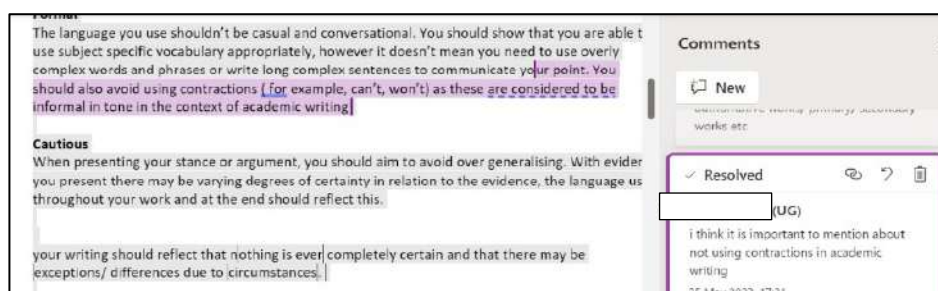
For the UG interns, what proved to be critical to the success of the partnership working was, firstly, that they were treated as equals with their views valued, and secondly that their priorities and needs were understood. During the end of project interviews, they spoke in detail about the impact of partnership working on their overall experience of the project.

Students as partners: valuing the undergraduate interns

In the Theory of Change model, one of the key outcomes identified at the start of the evaluation was that the students involved would feel that 'their views were valued' and that their voices would influence the resources to the extent that they could genuinely be described as 'user-led'. This was considered extremely important by the project leads and the project co-ordinator. When analysing the student intern interview data, it was possible to identify 'value' as being articulated in different ways, and this has been used to shape the following discussion, drawing also on the wider data to evidence this.

Value as: the students' views are acted upon during the resource creation process and this is recognised by them

The student interns provided many examples of how their views were acted upon at different stages in the process. This included at the brainstorming stage, when creating the resources (e.g. when filming, recording voiceovers etc.) and at the editing and feedback stages. During an interview, one student stated their '*opinions have been listened to*' and that if changes they suggested couldn't be made, the reasons for this '*were always explained*' (for example, if something was not technically possible). Evidence of this was also captured within the project team's working documents.



Screenshot of draft text for the Features of Academic Writing resource featuring student comments

In this example of the resource drafting process, we see a comment made by an intern and the highlighted text evidencing the change made by the resource author as a result of their feedback.

The students expressed feeling ownership of the resources because of the input they had, with one student stating *'you sort of look at the resources and feel like they're your resources [...]. Especially for the filming, the scripts are exactly based off what each of us had said.'*

'Value' as: the wider project team are interested in the students' views and respect the expertise they bring

All of the students interviewed expressed that the project team were all interested in what they had to say and appreciated the insight that they provided into the '*struggles*' that students often have during their A-Levels and first year of university. They also described how the environment was such that they were never made to feel that there was a hierarchy that placed them lower than others in the team, for example:

'the rest of the team are genuinely interested in what we've got to say. [...] I've never felt that [the team think] "they're are only undergrads, they don't really know anything". So all of our opinions have always been validated and encouraged from the get go.'

Value as: the students are provided with opportunities to develop their knowledge and skills in order to benefit their future

Every student identified ways in which participation in the project had enabled them to develop skills, attributes and knowledge that they could draw upon during their studies and also when applying for jobs/working on their current jobs. During the interviews, the following were identified:

- **Improved public speaking** through having to state their opinions during meetings, having to take part in presentations (including conferences and the project's launch event), having to meet and work with a range of different people from all levels of the University and through taking part in filming.
- **Improved general communication skills** through having to communicate verbally and in writing, and performing in front of a camera.
- **Improved time management and organisational skills** through having to work to deadlines and balance their studies, other work and internships.
- **The ability to work as part of a team** through having to work on a large scale collaborative project.
- **The development of specific skills** related to the project work through: writing blogs, having to use new software, web design, learning about the different aspects of film-making and project management.
- **Improved confidence** through the experiences and activities they have taken part in.

There was evidence in the interviews that the skills, knowledge and attributes the students had developed through participation in the project had positively impacted on: their studies, job applications and their current roles. For example:

- *'Without Bridging the Gap, I would not have known half the things about university than what I do now, even just the different resources that the library page and Academic Skills page have.'*
- *'I got an e-mail [from Sky] because the election was called yesterday. So I'm filming the election for one of the constituencies in West London, which will be good. I said I had experience using cameras and working in a filming environment, which I think was beneficial to that application.'*
- *'I applied for an internship in a science lab and I could include different aspects like communication.'*

Value as: Recognition from external sources



Contribution to the Workplace Award ceremony, Newcastle University Students' Union

The four UG students that worked on Year 2 of the project were nominated by the project co-ordinator (and were subsequently shortlisted) for Interns of the Year at the Newcastle University Workplace Awards. In the nomination application, the project co-ordinator described the important role that the students had played in the project, the professionalism they had displayed and how well that had represented the student body. This was appreciated by the students, with one claiming it was a *'great thing'* to *'add to your LinkedIn'*.

Students as partners: how the undergraduate interns impacted on the project

The Theory of Change evaluation interviews highlighted the positive impact of the student interns being significantly involved in the project team, and how much their views were valued by the wider project team. Despite the fact that many of the project team staff work within student-facing services and are producing resources and information for students, none had experienced partnership working and co-production in this way before. Involving the students was considered to have been the *'most important'* feature of the project, enabling the staff to *'deepen their understanding of how students see their own development over the course of their studies'*. Other impacts included:

- The creation of resources that the team felt were *'authentic'* and *'relatable'* and written in language that was clear.
- The creation of resources that were more likely to be accessed and used by young people: *'My day-to-day job is mainly stuff for learning and it's mainly stuff for academics. So it is to be used by students, but it comes from an academic's perspective of what they decide might be best for the students. Whereas in Bridging the Gap it was really helpful to hear from students about how they would like to learn.'*
- The creation of *'stronger resources'* because *'you're consulting with students at every stage'*.
- The ability to directly ask students questions about their studies, for instance: *'how do you feel about it? What do you feel you and your acquaintances, your friends need help with and how? How could we communicate that more effectively to people of your background, your age?'*

Students as partners: focus groups and user-testers

As already discussed, the project benefitted from initial input and feedback on resources from A-Level and UG students through focus groups, and later, user-testing. Though not as consistently involved in the project as the UG interns, these students were crucial to the success of BTG's student-led methodology, guiding the team in the creation of resources and ensuring the content that was produced was of a high quality.

Positive feedback for the resources obtained through focus groups and user-testing served to reinforce to the project team that the work they were doing was valuable, and that the resources they were producing were relevant. Critical feedback informed changes made to the resources, and allowed the team to improve the end product.

For example, a resource originally named 'Conventions of Academic Writing' was renamed to 'Features of Academic Writing' following user feedback. When asked 'Is the title of this resource clear, and if so/not, why?', some students expressed an issue with the word 'conventions':

- *'Unless people don't understand what "conventions" means'*
- *'Could be more clear – "conventions of academic writing" is not very explanatory'*
- *'Never heard of the word convention'*
- *'Perhaps the word "conventions" is too fancy'*
- *'The title isn't clear for me as I don't know what "conventions" means'*
- *'I personally find the title a little confusing with the word "conventions", maybe use basics of academic writing'*

It was discussed anecdotally by the project team that this was not only helpful feedback for this resource, but is something they would remember if they were to consider using the term 'conventions' in a learning resource for students in future. The

same was said of positive feedback (see p. 26 for examples), with staff members commenting on how they might approach other work in future based on the resources students appeared to engage with most through the BTG user-testing.

3 Ways of working

The project team was made up of members representing different services from within the Library and the University alongside students, all of whom had been brought together because of their relevant skills and knowledge. Many of the team members had not worked together before and collaboration on such a scale '*with different departments and areas of expertise*' was a new way of working. There was an acknowledgement (identified during interviews) that some of the team members had previously worked in silos and not been as consistently involved in project working like this before.

Collaborative brainstorming

One of the key impacts of this collaboration was the value placed on having different voices in the room, with each person providing their expertise and with all having the opportunity to learn from one another: '*You understand the craft [of the others in the team], i.e. what can be done digitally, the length of videos etc. We all learnt as we went along.*'

Working together collaboratively was considered to have had a significant impact on the type and quality of the final resources. What was considered particularly effective was the fact that the meetings took place during the early stages of the resource creation process. With everyone present, a range of ideas would be discussed and built upon. The students' presence in meetings was appreciated by the technical project team staff, '*because it was really beneficial to be very close to the source [...]. It was really fast to get instant feedback [...] and gather the requirements*'. These early meetings also ensured that possibilities/impossibilities were discussed right at the start of the process, and this meant that time was not wasted later on in the project.

The project coordinator

In order to ensure that collaboration occurred and that it ran smoothly, a variety of processes were put in place by the project co-ordinator. Employing a project co-ordinator to run the 2-year project had been identified as crucial during the pilot phase when it became clear that the workload associated with creating resources was not something that could be accommodated over and above the normal workload of the pilot project team. As one of the project leads explained:

'Online resources do just take longer than you think to create. And then obviously the process by which we would do it whereby you're involving students, you're consulting with people at every stage [...]. I didn't have the capacity to carry on doing it. I just couldn't have done it.'

However, the project co-ordinator had not been expecting to play such a significant role in the project when she applied for the position. This included contributing ideas during meetings, authoring lots of the resource content and building the webpages alongside the web developer. In an end of project interview, she described the layers of the role that only *'became apparent due to how scaled up the project was'* and derived from her personal interests and previous experience in EdTech. The project benefitted from her experience and this enabled her to take on this more complex role, and there was an appreciation from the project leads that what she was doing was *'not traditionally what a project co-ordinator should do'*.

It was ultimately concluded that having a more involved project co-ordinator was a strength of the project. With one person as *'the go to person for Bridging the Gap'*, it guaranteed that *'the momentum and the progress was ensured'* and also that the resources and website had *'the same language'* and *'the same feel'* while being contributed to by a large collaborative team, thereby ensuring it didn't appear *'disjointed'*. Following the success of BTG, the project co-ordinator was offered a permanent position at the University based in the Library's Education Outreach team.

Collaboration between the project team

One of the most significant aspects of the role of the project co-ordinator was to ensure that the collaboration between the large team was effective. This was complicated and time-consuming and required the development of both relationships and processes. As the project co-ordinator explained, *'a lot of the solutions to problems that I was trying to come up with were around "we really need to save time", but people still want to feel involved, and how can we do that?'*

Key to the relationship-building was ensuring that all those involved felt that they and their views were valued, and that trust was established. This was achieved by the project-coordinator in four key ways. Firstly, she created a non-hierarchical structure where each person's expertise was acknowledged to facilitate meaningful collaboration between all of the departments and students involved. The project co-ordinator's aim was always to ensure that people were confident to express their views and that they felt that *'they deserve to be in the space and that they are valued'*. Interviews with the project team indicated that this was successful, where they described BTG team meetings as a *'comfortable space to be in'* and that *'it was very much a project that was ours and not hers'*.

Secondly, during the project meetings, the project co-ordinator ensured that everyone was given the chance to participate. This is how she describes that process:

'If the students were quite quiet and they weren't saying anything, I would name them and go "What do you think?". In the same way I would go to a member of staff if they had not contributed and I would make sure I'd heard from Academic Skills, Education Outreach, students, any other experts in the room. I would be constantly scribbling and making sure that we're not being led either just by the students or just by the staff. So I tried to make it so every individual in the room was representing a kind of an equal part.'

That this process was effective and appreciated was evidenced during the end of project interviews, and was also observed during the evaluation when the evaluator attended one of the brainstorming meetings for a video resource on contributing to seminar/classroom discussions. The observation evidenced how the project co-ordinator ensured that all of those present contributed to the discussion, drawing on their expertise. For example, the students present talked about their own experiences of being in seminars (e.g. the fear of being put on the spot, the fear of getting things wrong), and one of the representatives from Student Health and Wellbeing stated that she felt that the video needed to show the internal dialogue that students have with some practical advice and ideas on how to respond. All of the ideas proposed were summarised by the project co-ordinator at the end of the meeting, with this then informing the script for the final [resource](#).



Stills of 'Preparing for Seminar Discussions' video

Thirdly, the project coordinator ensured digital collaboration through Microsoft Teams and introduced a new project management software called Teamwork (see Appendix 5, p. 38) that was trialled as part of the project with a view to using it more widely across the Library if successful. Teamwork is a visual tool and is particularly suited to complex projects with different deadlines and many participants. It was introduced at the start of the project to enable the project co-ordinator to manage the project effectively, while also allowing any member of the project team to track individual resource progress. She provided every team member with 1:1 training on how to use it and produced a

video tutorial and written guidance (see Appendix 7, p. 40) that could be accessed at any point so that *'if you forgot it, you could kind of get a refresher'* according to one project team member. This ensured that everyone had a basic understanding of how to use the tool, as well as ongoing support.

During the interviews, the majority of the project team stated that they found it very useful and intuitive to use. They identified a range of positive aspects:

- *'The visual clarity you know. You've got these vertical columns and stuff kind of moves from left to right step by step [...]. It was very clear. Rather than having to trace back through multiple emails and cross reference all these different documents.'* – Project team staff
- *'It was also really easy for me to track the different stages of the project as well, and basically to ring fence some capacity for a specific month because I would know that there are three different resources that are waiting or are getting the final review. [...] for me it was very beneficial.'* – Project team staff
- *'[...] it does keep everything in one place. All of those resources, rather than them being in a million emails every hour, it displays it all out and you can see at which stage all of the resources are and who with.'* – Project team student

However, other members of the team described how the services they worked for already asked them to use other systems, and therefore using Teamwork was just one more thing to learn how to use. Some team members also mentioned that the tool might not lend itself to the other forms of work that occur within the Library, despite it working well for BTG. From the perspective of the project co-ordinator, Teamwork was being used more effectively by Year 2 of the project. She explained that it was used to varying degrees by different team members, but for her having a tool that was *'visual and that can capture the whole workload moving along'* was *'instrumental'* to her role. The project co-ordinator and the head of Digital Library Services are reviewing the use of Teamwork within BTG and considering potential options for further use.

Alongside Teamwork, Microsoft Teams is where all of the project documentation, resources and files were kept so that every team member could access these files when they wished. The chat was reserved for key announcements for the attention of the entire team to avoid creating too many notifications. It was hoped that this organised way of working would not only make all of the project content more easily accessible, but that it created a level of transparency that would empower all team members to feel it was their space to work and browse (see Appendix 8, p. 40).

Finally, through developing an excellent understanding of the individual needs of the project team (i.e. their workloads, teaching commitments, timetables etc), the project co-ordinator was able to ensure that project meetings and deadlines would fit around each member. This not only benefited the participants, but also ensured that work was more likely to be completed on time. Again, the interviews with other members of the team highlight that this was recognised and appreciated.

Relationship-building

The relationships that developed throughout the project can be considered as having had a significant impact on the success of the project and the quality of the resources. The evidence from the evaluation interviews with the project team members demonstrated that the relationships that did develop were strong and positive and that everyone significantly enjoyed being a part of the team. Of particular significance were the relationships that developed between the four UG interns, which proved to be extremely close. They became good friends outside of the project, even creating their own group chat to use outside of working hours. These relationships had a very positive impact on their overall experience of the project as they were able to support each other as they undertook the work. As one student explained, *'There were four of us and we all could all relate. We'd all feel a bit nervous about this, but we all had each other's backs. That actually made it really lovely.'*

Testament to the strength of the relationships that existed throughout the team were expressions of enjoyment and the sadness described when the project came to an end:

- *'I would literally sit and do this for free. If I had to volunteer for it I would because I've enjoyed it that much.'* – Project team student
- *'it's definitely been the best job I've had. It's so different and because you're doing different things each time it's never boring.'* – Project team student
- *'It was a very harmonious kind of experience. I would do it again. If it was starting again tomorrow, I would come back.'* – Project team staff
- *'I feel quite sad the whole project's finished, because I've really enjoyed it. Just working with the students and I think we've all got to know each other quite well towards the end of it.'* – Project team staff

Several participants described how rare it was to be working on a project where the model of collaboration involved bringing all of the expertise together from the start, and where the process of planning and creation was done together between those with the knowledge of the subject and those who would ultimately produce the final resource. This was considered to be of huge importance, particularly in terms of creating successful outcomes where everyone has a good understanding of what is needed and what their role is.

4 The resources

It was clear during the end of project interviews with the project team that they were very proud of the resources that had been created, both in terms of the content and their quality. Having been able to draw upon the wide-ranging expertise of the team,

and very specifically the views and ideas of the student interns and the A-Level and UG students consulted throughout the project, the conclusion was that this had enabled them to create resources that would be extremely useful for the target audience, supporting them with a range of study skills in a variety of user-friendly, relatable formats:

- *'they can be taken the whole way through a process from researching [for a piece of work] right through to the actual act of writing and through to editing it.'* – Project team staff
- *'I'm really happy. I think they look really, really good. I think they have the right kind of tone as well and that's why having the students' input was really invaluable.'* – Project team staff
- *'They're interesting to watch. [...] There's always things moving, there's graphics so that the resource that comes out of the end is hopefully, fingers crossed, something that students will sit through.'* – Project team staff

For the students in particular, there was pride in the fact that they had created resources that have the potential to support students for years to come. One student shared: *'I have my little cousin and people that I know who are going to come to Newcastle Uni and it's going to be resources that I've had a big part to play in that are going to help them. It's actually a really nice feeling'*. Another student commented: *'I never had the opportunity to utilise these resources myself and I know that when moving from A-Level to university they would've been extremely helpful, so I wanted to be able to support other students'*.

The feedback that was obtained during focus groups and user-testing with A-Level and UG students when reviewing the final resources highlighted how useful they considered them to be, plus how much it was appreciated that students had been part of the creation process:

- *'Done by students, makes it more relatable.'*
- *'A variety of students speaking, showing a sense of community'*
- *'Relevant. I think it's something a lot of student's struggle with. More help with this in the first year would be good.'*
- *'Getting insights from current students definitely makes the video more relatable'*
- *'I liked the fact that it broke down the topic detail for each and every individual student, and their way of learning.'*
- *'Opinions are expressed from a range of students on different courses, showing it is applicable to all students'*

This provides a sample of the kind of feedback the resources received.

Validation that the resources are of high-quality and will be useful has also been evidenced via sources external to the project team. Both the A-Level and UG versions of the resources have been shared in a variety of contexts:

- The PARTNERS programme team shared early examples of the Bridging the Gap resources with the A-Level students attending the Academic Summer School in 2024 and stated that *'they had the best feedback they've ever had on their learning resources'* in conversation with the project co-ordinator.
- The resources and overall project have been shared widely at conferences and events, resulting in conversations within the University and with other HE institutions. Conferences include the Academic Libraries North Conference (June 2023), the Newcastle University Learning and Teaching Conference (March 2023 and April 2024), the Three Rivers Conference (June 2023 and November 2024), and the ALDinHE Conference (June 2023).
- One of the project leads and the project co-ordinator held a webinar for ALDinHE (an organisation that represents professionals employed in the field of Learning Development in Higher Education), where they showcased the project. 50 representatives from different universities attended and extremely positive comments were made, plus follow-up emails were received from several participants.
- The resources are included in the University's Access and Participation Plan.
- The resources are included in the University's new Education Strategy as part of the Student Launchpad project.
- The Academic Skills and Academic Liaison teams have signposted Stage 1 students to the resources during sessions delivered at the start of the academic year 2024-2025.
- The project co-ordinator was invited to speak to 200 Stage 1 Agriculture and Farming students after an academic attended the launch event and was impressed with the quality of the resources.
- The Get Ready to Study resources have been added to Canvas, enabling academics to embed the link into their programme. It is also available as part of the induction information provided to students on Canvas.
- Get Ready to Study was advertised on merchandise and by staff as part of the Library's welcome week, and led to a spike of over 2,000 views across five working days.
- The Project Co-ordinator was invited to speak about the project and resources on Elizabeth Hutchinson's 'Engaging and Empowering School Libraries podcast' and received positive feedback.

The launch of the new resources was celebrated at the end of the project with an event at The Boiler House at Newcastle University, with over 50 school and University staff members in attendance. At the BTG launch event, the evaluator spoke to five members of staff representing both state and private schools in Newcastle and North Tyneside (4 teachers and 1 school librarian), who explained how and why they would be using the resources. All considered them to be very useful and that they would be signposting them to both their sixth form students and the teachers who work with them. The librarian described how she had been looking for accessible resources like this to

signpost her sixth form students to for a long time. She said the students were often scared at the prospect of going to university and that the resources could mitigate some of their fears. One of the teachers stated that the students in her school lacked independence and relied heavily on their teachers to complete their work. She believed these resources would enable the students to work more independently.

Emails shared after the launch event from two sixth form librarians who attended the launch event provide additional evidence of the value and quality of the resources:

- *'I've added a slide to our forthcoming Y12 Library Inductions so I can promote it to our students. It's a fabulous resource.'*
- *'Last night's event was wonderful - such an inspiring, useful, and positive project that will doubtless help many, many young people [...]. I'm looking forward to sharing it with our students and staff.'*

From its launch on 25th July to the end of November 2024, the new Sixth Form Study Skills site had reached 31,574 views and Get Ready to Study had reached 9,880 views in the same period. This already compares extremely favourably with the statistics for the whole of the previous academic year (1st September 2023 to end of June 2024), where the total number of views for Get Ready to Study was 1,853.

5 Recognition for BTG

In 2023, the project was shortlisted by the Times Higher Education Awards for the Outstanding Library Team category. The team is also exploring submitting for a Collaborative Award for Teaching Excellence (CATE) and the project co-ordinator is working with mentors who are previous winners to develop their application. At the time of writing this report, only initial conversations have taken place but are positive. It is hoped that the sites will continue to receive recognition as their usage increases.

6 The Bridging the Gap Theory of Change revisited

A Theory of Change model is reflected upon and revised by project participants as an evaluation progresses. One of the key features of the approach, is that it clearly highlights any positive progress that is being made along the steps towards the long term outcomes, even if not all have been fully evidenced by the end of an evaluation period.

The Bridging the Gap Theory of Change model was reflected upon by the evaluator, the project leads and the project co-ordinator throughout the 18-month evaluation. This was undertaken to ensure that the steps remained accurate, that evidence was being collected to demonstrate if they had been completed, and that if any changes were occurring, to establish why this might be and whether the model needed to be similarly changed. A final update of the Theory of Change model occurred in December 2024.

The discussion and findings presented in this report chart and evidence the successful progress made towards the project outcomes and this has been represented on the updated model (see Appendix 9, p. 41). Here, we can see that, at the time of writing, two of the outcomes ('The students feel their views are valued and have resulted in high quality, user-led resources' and 'Effective collaborative ways of working have been trialled and shared with the Library staff') have been fully evidenced. We can also see that for the remaining three evidenced ('The A-Level and UG students have developed their academic skills and knowledge', 'The A-Level and UG students are more confident and independent when undertaking academic work' and 'The workload of University staff and teachers when advising/providing academic feedback to their students, is reduced'), the final steps have been partially evidenced.

These latter three are longer-term outcomes that are beyond the timeframe of the evaluation. They will require the resources to be used and reflected upon by A-Level and UG students, as well as their teachers, school librarians and university academics. The project team are monitoring ongoing feedback and data provided by Google Analytics and Hotjar on the websites, and will continue to seek feedback from schools accessing Sixth Form Study Skills workshops at the Library. Within the evaluation report, early evidence has been presented to show that the final steps are well underway, but data collection will need to take place for at least one academic year in order to evidence their successful completion. This has been discussed with the project co-ordinator and possible data collection approaches to evidence these final steps have been added to the ToC model (see Appendix 9, p. 41).

7 Learning for the future

As a result of the Theory of Change evaluation and the learning that has taken place over the two years, it has been possible to identify key factors that led to the successful completion of the Bridging the Gap project, and lessons learned by the project team that could be applied to other projects in the future.

Project structure

Having a clear project structure centred around iterative resource development was a strength of the project. BTG evidenced that:

- Trialling new ways of working through a pilot project will allow for a larger follow-up project to run more effectively, where teams can apply any lessons learned.
- Dividing a project into two parts, where a smaller fraction of work is initially taken on in the first part, will allow projects to iron out any initial issues and work more productively in the second part. For BTG, this meant roughly a third of the resources were created in the first year of the project, and the rest in the second.
- Projects would benefit from building in additional time for relationship-building at the front end of a project before the workload begins to ensure the best possible start.
- Marking the end of a project formally by sharing successes and celebrating with those involved is valuable, both to gain a wider audience for the work and to validate the efforts of project team members. For BTG, this was done through an in-person launch event to showcase the project's outcomes.

Project co-ordinator role

The role of the project co-ordinator was considered critical in the BTG project. While not all projects may be able to fund a specific post, it was clear from the evaluation evidence that:

- Dedicated time needs to be allocated for a person to co-ordinate projects with a large team and tight deadlines. Ensuring that all voices are heard and developing the necessary processes to do so takes time.
- A project co-ordinator requires excellent people skills in order to ensure the development of positive relationships and trust.
- The job specification for the project co-ordinator role may evolve over time on longer projects. The initial specification therefore should include some flexibility in terms of the person requirements, or the potential need for further funding/time has to be considered at the project planning stage. In the case of BTG, the project benefited from skills that the project co-ordinator had from previous employment, and that there was also funding available for additional support.

Advisory group

The role of the advisory group was considered to be a vital feature of BTG, ensuring accountability. The evidence from the evaluation suggests that the following is important when setting one up:

- People with the relevant skills and knowledge must be approached to participate, who believe in the project aims, but also who are in positions where they can advocate for the project and broker connections.
- Advisory group meetings must have a structure that includes updates on the progress being made, but that also draws on their expertise as the project progresses.
- Advisory group members should be kept involved throughout the length of a project, not just initially. In BTG, this was done through a quarterly newsletter.

Collaboration

Collaboration was a key feature of the BTG project that resulted in the creation of high-quality resources. Evidence of this collaboration demonstrates that:

- Having a project team made up of people with the necessary expertise to create the final product is important. This includes representation from the target audience as full partners (i.e. in the case of Bridging the Gap, UG student interns).
- The building of relationships and trust between team members requires time but is an important pre-requisite for success.
- Hierarchy should be avoided within a project team. The views and creativity of all team members should be valued, ensuring that all feel ownership of the work the team is doing. This was carefully managed by the project co-ordinator within BTG.
- The full team (or at the very least one representative from each service involved), including members of the target audience, should meet early in the resource development process to brainstorm ideas. In BTG, this ensured that everyone contributed to the content, that technical possibilities and impossibilities were understood, and that only those members needed for the next stage continued with the resource creation process.
- Understanding the workloads/needs of team members over and above their involvement in a project is crucial in order to ensure that project deadlines are met.
- Processes must be put into place to ensure that collaboration happens effectively. In BTG, this included having a workflow model, standardised documentation, clear lines of communication via Microsoft Teams and Teamwork, and the project co-ordinator attending all meetings to act as chair.

Working with students as partners

Working with students as partners when developing learning resources was a significant strength of BTG, but also presented some challenges. The project showed that:

- Acting on student input and feedback when creating resources for students will ultimately result in more relatable, engaging learning resources.
- Thorough feedback from students during the creation of learning resources not only serves the resources being created at that time, but can help staff address general misconceptions about learning content for students and inform wider work they are doing.
- Working with students within a project team can increase staff enjoyment of a project. This factor was seen as a highlight of BTG for many staff members.
- Employing university students for remote user-testing is a more effective way of attaining feedback on digital resources than in-person workshops or focus groups.
- Seeking feedback from schools and colleges externally is challenging, especially at certain times of the year. In BTG, it was seen as fortunate that the EO team had upcoming school visits they could rely on.

8 What is next for the Bridging the Gap resources and team members?

Following the completion of the project, the team are continuing to monitor usage of the resources to understand how they are being used and hope to be able to report on this data in future. The EO and AS teams are also continuing to explore a range of promotional opportunities, including (but not limited to):

- Sharing promotional merchandise for Sixth Form Study Skills with the wider University to be distributed on open days
- Promoting Get Ready to Study via academic contacts
- Promoting Get Ready to Study at the entrance of the Library at peak times as identified by the AS team
- Continue to distribute promotional merchandise at any planned events where potential users may be in attendance (e.g. school workshops in the Library, Freshers' Week activities in September)
- Trialling CPD workshops for A-Level teachers

As a result of the new relationships and ways of working established through the project, team members are continuing to collaborate on other work:

- The EO and AS teams are working with Student Recruitment on developing new study skills workshops to be delivered to A-Level students on topics not previously covered by EO's offering, using the new BTG resources to facilitate this
- EO, LTDS and DLS are collaborating on an archives-based web project, where EO are creating learning resources for GCSE students studying the history of medicine, project managed by the BTG project co-ordinator
- The project co-ordinator is working with Student Recruitment staff on redesigning the Canvas module they use for their PARTNERS summer school, using the BTG resources
- LTDS have since provided EO with additional videography support for other project-based learning with secondary schools

Project team members have expressed a general interest in using the ideas, principals and ways of working established through BTG in other work, and continue to use it as a reference point when taking part in other projects.

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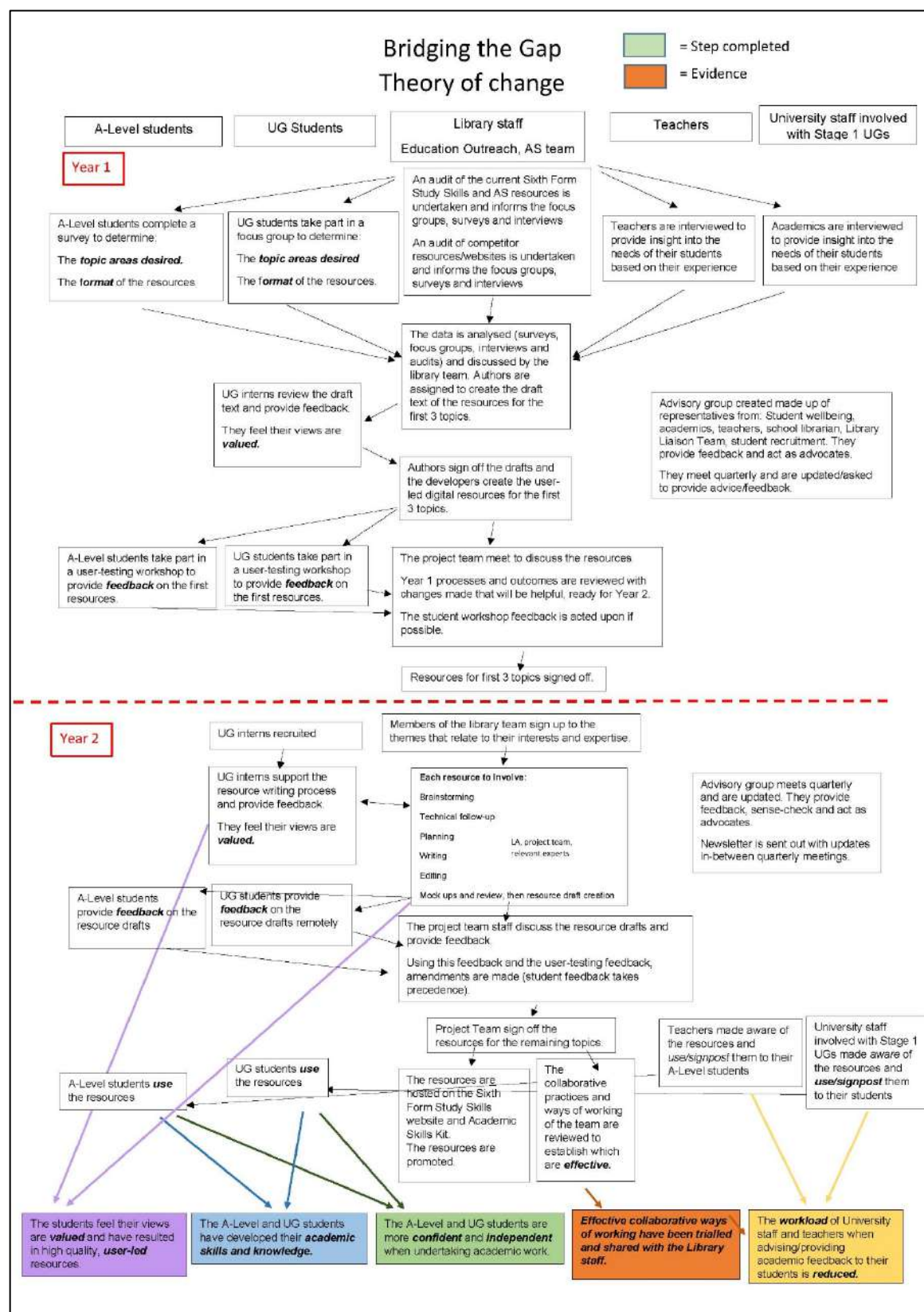
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Appendix

Appendix 1 – Bridging the Gap Theory of Change



Appendix 2 – Example of A-Level student input

Are you completing an Extended Project Qualification (EPQ)? (Circle)

Yes / No

What A-Level subjects are you currently studying?

Psychology, Biology, English Language

You're about to start working on a piece of coursework or your EPQ essay. What aspect of writing it are you most worried or unsure about?

Referencing, managing time, making relevant

Are you considering going to university when you finish your A-Levels? (Circle)

Yes / No / Unsure

If there was one thing you'd like to know about studying at university, what would it be?

Content management, managing time

Rank these skill areas from 1-10, with 1 being the area you're most confident with and 10 being the area you're least confident with.

Revision Skills	How much you know and what you can do	1
Research Skills	How much you know and what you can do	7
Reading Skills	How much you know and what you can do	3
Writing Skills	How much you know and what you can do	5
Communication Skills	How much you know and what you can do	4
Presentation Skills	How much you know and what you can do	8
Referencing & Plagiarism	How much you know and what you can do	9
Glossary/Definitions	How much you know and what you can do	2
Healthy study habits	How much you know and what you can do	6

If you were looking to improve your study skills, what kind of resources would you be likely to use?

Resource type	How likely are you to use it? (Circle)	Can you explain why or give any examples?
Textbook (the one you use in school)	Very likely / Quite likely / Unsure / Quite unlikely / Very unlikely	
Reference books (e.g. dictionaries, encyclopedias)	Very likely / Quite likely / Unsure / Quite unlikely / Very unlikely	
Online resources (websites, videos, podcasts)	Very likely / Quite likely / Unsure / Quite unlikely / Very unlikely	
YouTube channel with videos	Very likely / Quite likely / Unsure / Quite unlikely / Very unlikely	
Podcasts	Very likely / Quite likely / Unsure / Quite unlikely / Very unlikely	
Games	Very likely / Quite likely / Unsure / Quite unlikely / Very unlikely	
Quizzes	Very likely / Quite likely / Unsure / Quite unlikely / Very unlikely	

Any other ideas or comments?

Appendix 3 – Example of initial competitor analysis activities

	Newcastle University	University of Birmingham	Nottingham University	Warwick University	Durham University	Edinburgh University	Southampton University	Manchester Metropolitan University	UWE Bristol	Portsmouth University	Liverpool Hope	Solent University	Oxford Brookes University	University of York
Resource Types														
Webpage (text, graphics, images)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Quizzes	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Videos	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
PDF/printable content	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Courses	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Content														
Exams and revision	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Dissertation and theses	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Assignment types	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Presentations	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Academic writing	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Grammar	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Independent learning	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Reading and note-taking	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Critical thinking	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Time management	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Plagiarism	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Referencing	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Other relevant info		Also includes resources on using feedback, also a section on digital skills, and within academic writing they specifically cover academic writing.	Resources are divided by school, also includes content on group work and work-life balance, within writing they specifically cover developing as a writer and your writing.	Also includes resources on mindfulness and some subject-specific resources, mainly accessible via Moodle or university login so not able to view in full.	All resources appear to be via Durham Uni multi-factor authentication, not able to access.	Also includes resources on group work and has an accompanying blog.	Also includes a section on group work.	Accompanying podcast, some resources are only accessible via Moodle.	Also includes resources on working with others.	Also includes a section on working in groups and a specific page on mindmaps.	Also includes a section on listening skills and a specific page on mindmaps.	Also includes a section on group work and a section on feedback and reflection.	It seems to cover the greatest range of topics or all of the universities but a lot of the resources are actually links out to other university websites or	Includes a section on digital wellbeing with guidance on work/life balance and seeing digital boundaries.

Appendix 4 – Quotes gathered from student and academic/teacher input categorised by skills area

Skills Area	Comments	
	Students	Teachers/Academics
Healthy Study Habits	• “healthy work/life balance” • “different study spaces available” • “timing” • “time management” • “in case I feel overwhelmed with all the content and can’t keep up” • “managing time” • “how much the workload will be weekly” • “how much of my time should it take up” • “what the study environment is like”	• “working independently” • “time management” • “setting specific dates and deadlines” • “what do I do next?” x2 • Making decisions around their learning • “time management” • “procrastination and worry” • “confidence building is needed” • “confidence is an issue”
Writing Skills	• “analysis” • “having full of understanding of what/how I’m going to do my essay” • “writing clearly” • “formatting with relevant content” • “how to critically analyse in essays” • “how to synthesise and form an argument off of someone else’s work” • “how to lay out an essay or different assignments”	• “general lack of a specific argument/thesis statement” • “difficulties with typos/grammar/lack of proofreading” • “unideal use of secondary sources (just dropping quotations into the essay and doing nothing with them, for example)” • “what do I think are the main points I need to get across” • “proofing” • “assimilating research and putting it into an academic essay” • “being formal enough” • “how do I build a coherent argument rather than just taking a source and saying “so and so said this”” • “concerns with standard of writing – some students have issues with clarity of writing and using punctuation and grammar correctly”
Reading Skills	• “how to get the most out of a secondary source” • “how to summarise an article” • “note taking” • “note taking (not waffling and concise”	• “never seen a peer-reviewed journal article” • “big step from reading selected extracts to entire piece” • “reading comprehension” • “note taking from books” • “confidence to know what material is relevant” • “how to pick it apart or understand how to critically analyse what they’re being show” • “not using abstracts to understand whether a source is relevant” • “speed reading and target reading” • “knowing not read literally everything”
Research Skills	• “finding trustworthy information” • “research” • “finding theory” • “where to find wider info” • “gathering data that’s relevant” • “finding academic research to support my question” • “finding enough data” • “how to research best”	• “primary research – they have no idea what they’re doing isn’t valid and why” • “where to look for generic resources” • “is this a “good enough” source/critic?” • “have you heard of this?” • “don’t have the concept of why a peer-reviewed journal is good” • “good amount of “Google isn’t the best search” conversations”

	• “how to pick the best content to use: articles, YouTube (reliable and informative creators)” • “What are the most useful pieces of information to use?”	• “bias of sources” • “finding useful resources” • “where to find material in library” • “how many sources should I use?” • “not thinking to use the bibliography of a source to find other sources” • “using and finding resources” • “targeted searches”
Revision Skills	• “how to do efficient note-taking” • “making a revision timetable” • “note taking” • “academic exams”	• “they think studying is just copying down notes or information” • “note-taking from lectures” • “how do they migrate from a structured curriculum where they have to know one point out of twenty to one where they need to know one aspect which might cover twenty different things” • “they’re passively writing notes and not doing anything with that”
Communication Skills	• “preparation and communication in seminars” • “communicating in an interview” • “what to include in a presentation” • “how a university presentation differs from say an EPQ one” • “how to be engaging in a presentation”	• “lack of confidence in social skills” • “very reluctant to engage” • “being able to talk to other students and express what they think the answer is without a sense of fear and judgement” • “group work” • “how do you work together with someone else to get something” • “nervous about oral presentation” • “confidence with oral communication” • “oration” • “seminars, discussing, talking” • “confidence to contribute” • “struggle with responding to each others’ spoken contributions”
Digital Skills	• “how to optimally use software like Microsoft Word, Excel?” • “list of free resources available” • “how to use software” • “Google Scholar” • “Cite them right”	• “digital study skills” • “using reference tools in Word” • “variation of experience of using Excel” • “general digital literacy skills”
Referencing & Plagiarism	• “how to reword and synthesise a scholar’s work without plagiarising them” • “referencing examples” • “guidance on referencing” • “how to not plagiarise/the different forms of plagiarism” • “Cite them right” • “my implantation of references that are accurate” • “referencing” x6 • “appropriate references and citations” • “incorrect referencing”	• “using referencing tools in Word” • “referencing – can you double check this? Looking for reassurance” • “great concern and worry about referencing and citation, being accountable from where the information came from” • “footnotes” • “issues with referencing (I have never seen a Stage 1 student do this perfectly)” • “students are uniformly troubled by referencing” • “tend to ask about referencing” • “plagiarism” • “writing a paragraph with sources properly referenced”

Appendix 5 – Teamwork

The screenshot shows a Trello board titled "Bridging the Gap" with a navigation bar at the top including "List", "Board", "Table", "Dashboard", "Files", "Time", "Milestones", "Forms", and "More...". The board is organized into six columns, each with a title and a count of cards:

- To do** (+3): Contains three cards: "Decision Trees" (List: Healthy Study Habits, assignees: Emily, Lauren, Tom), "Making the Most of Office and Google Apps" (List: Digital Skills, assignees: Emily, Kirsty, Lauren), and "Revision Strategies video" (List: Revision Skills, assignees: Charlotte, Gemma, Kirsty).
- Writing** (+5): Contains five cards: "Reading with a Purpose Video" (List: Reading Skills, assignees: Charlotte, Gemma), "Referencing Resource Video" (List: Referencing & Plagiarism, assignees: Emily, Tom), "Digital Tools" (List: Digital Skills, assignees: Charlotte, Lauren, Tom), "Presentation Template" (List: Communication Skills, assignees: Charlotte, Emily), and "Revision Strategies interactive" (List: Revision Skills, assignees: Emily, Stephanie, Tom).
- Proofing** (+5): Contains five cards: "Presentation Tips" (List: Communication Skills, assignees: Charlotte, Emily, Lauren), "Contributing to Discussions Video" (List: Communication Skills, assignees: Charlotte, Lauren, LTDS), "Delivering Presentations Video" (List: Communication Skills, assignees: Emily, Kirsty, Lauren), "Advice Posters" (List: Healthy Study Habits, assignees: Emily, Kirsty, Lauren), and "Using Evidence in your Work Interactive" (List: Writing Skills, assignees: Charlotte, Emily, Gemma).
- JobsOC Student Review** (+1): Contains one card: "Making the Most of Your Feedback Video" (List: Writing Skills, assignees: Emily, Kirsty, Lauren, LTDS).
- Knowledge Sign-off** (+1): Contains one card: "Work-life Balance Scale" (List: Healthy Study Habits, assignees: Charlotte, DLS, Lauren, Stephanie, Tom).
- Mock-up** (+2): Contains two cards: "Glossary of Terms" (List: Glossary of Terms, assignees: DLS, Lauren) and "Making the Most of Your Feedback Interactive" (List: Writing Skills, assignees: Charlotte, DLS, Stephanie, Tom).

Each column has an "Add a card" button at the bottom.

The screenshot shows a Trello board titled "Bridging the Gap" with a navigation bar at the top including "List", "Board", "Table", "Dashboard", "Files", "Time", "Milestones", "Forms", and "More...". The board is organized into six columns, each with a title and a count of cards:

- Mock-up** (+2): Contains two cards: "Glossary of Terms" (List: Glossary of Terms, assignees: DLS, Lauren) and "Making the Most of Your Feedback Interactive" (List: Writing Skills, assignees: Charlotte, DLS, Stephanie, Tom).
- Producing** (+6): Contains six cards: "Writing to a Word Count Animation" (List: Writing Skills, assignees: Charlotte, Emily, LTDS, Stephanie), "Making the Most of Your Notes animation" (List: Revision Skills, assignees: Emily, Lauren, Tom), "Argument Video 3: Making your contribution" (List: Writing Skills, assignees: Charlotte, UK, LTDS), "Presentation Video Quiz" (List: Communication Skills, assignees: Charlotte, DLS, Kirsty, LTDS, Stephanie), "New Beginnings videos" (no list), and "Types of Source Interactive" (List: Research Skills, assignees: Charlotte, DLS, Jackie, Kirsty).
- Project Team Review** (+4): Contains four cards: "Contributing to Discussions Interactive" (List: Communication Skills, assignees: DLS, Emily, Stephanie, Tom), "Referencing Basics Video" (List: Referencing & Plagiarism, assignees: Kirsty, LTDS, Tom), "Revision timetable" (List: Revision Skills, assignees: DLS, Lauren), and "Healthy Study Habits - webpage" (List: Healthy Study Habits, assignees: Lauren, Sara).
- Focus Group Review** (+0): No cards in this list yet.
- Project Team Amends** (+3): Contains three cards: "Study spaces - video" (List: Healthy Study Habits, assignees: Jackie, LTDS, Sara), "Argument - video" (List: Writing Skills, assignees: LTDS, Kirsty), and "Proofreading - video" (List: Writing Skills, assignees: UK, LTDS).
- Complete** (+6): Contains six cards: "Punctuation - interactive" (List: Writing Skills, assignees: DLS, Gemma), "Anatomy of a text - interactive" (List: Reading Skills, assignees: DLS, Jackie), "Being an active reader - Interactive" (List: Reading Skills, assignees: DLS, Gemma, Kirsty), "Notetaking - interactive" (List: Reading Skills, assignees: DLS, Lauren), and "Healthy Study Habits - webpage" (List: Healthy Study Habits, assignees: Lauren, Sara).

Each column has an "Add a card" button at the bottom.

Appendix 6 – Brainstorming documentation template

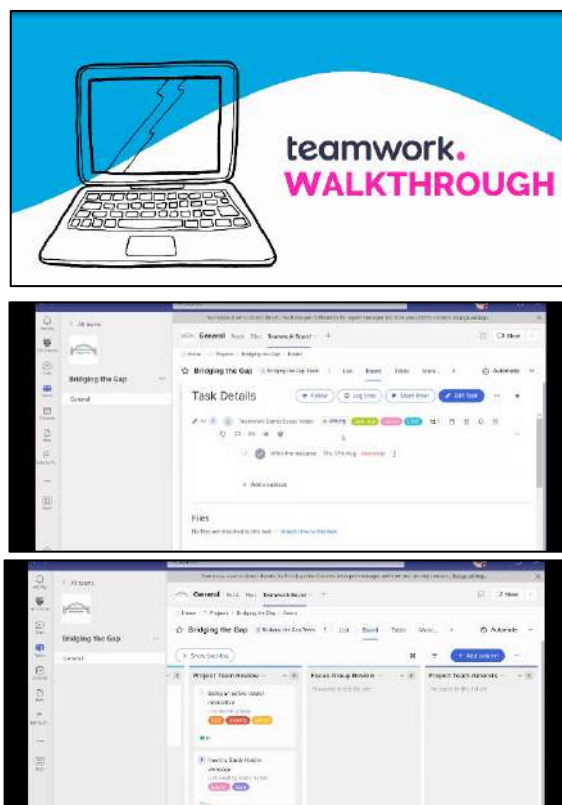
Resource Brainstorm

Skills area:	Resource Name:	Resource Type:
Author(s):	Knowledge:	Implementer:
Present at Brainstorm:		
Objective/purpose of resource: •		
Overview of resource: •		
Style notes: •		
Actions: •		
Deadlines: Technical follow-up meeting date: Resource to be written by: Any other deadlines to be added.		

Appendix 7 – Training on using Teamwork provided by the project co-ordinator

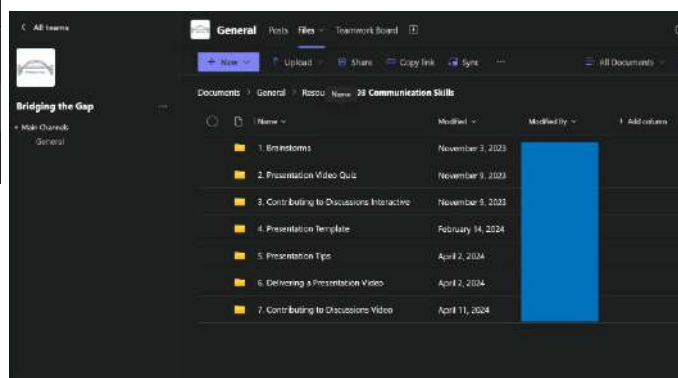
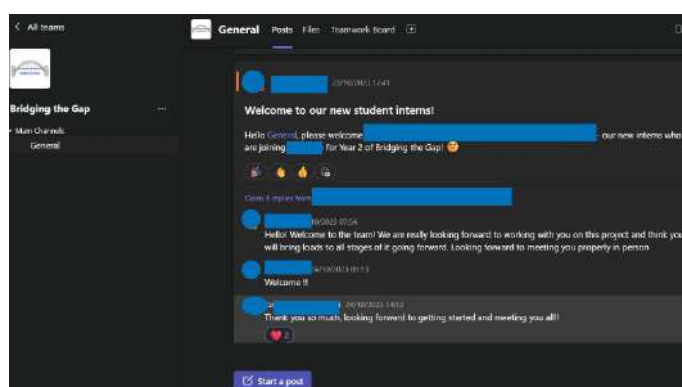


Screenshot of written Teamwork instructions



Stills of Teamwork walkthrough video

Appendix 8 – Bridging the Gap Microsoft Teams channel



Appendix 9 – Bridging the Gap Theory of Change with evidence annotated

