

COURSE EVALUATION BURSARY SCHEME 2021-22

INTERIM REPORT

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Introduction

This interim report provides reflections on the first five months of the Course Enhancement Bursary Scheme (CEBS) which was implemented from September 2021 – July 2022. This mid-point evaluation was conducted in January/February 2022. Therefore, these findings are indicative and should be used with some caution. However, early indications are that participants have had a positive experience and participating in CEBS has benefited them in several ways. However, further evaluative work would need to be undertaken to establish if these short-term gains continued for the duration of the CEBS and beyond.

The report outlines the findings from two focus groups with course leaders (CL) and three student researcher (SR) interviews. The findings are presented in five themes.

1. **Motivations for involvement in CEBS:** SRs predominately wanted to improve their employment skills and to improve other students' experiences. CLs wanted to improve their courses, found the funding attractive and wanted to work with SRs.
2. **Benefits and challenges of CEBS:** SRs enjoyed being part of a community beyond their course that meets in-person and online. SRs also felt their confidence had grown, and they had developed knowledge about the research process. SRs found time management challenging but also said CLs were understanding and supportive. CLs found the community and safe development and training spaces beneficial. CLs identified ethics approval as their most significant challenge.
3. **Students as Partners:** SRs felt like a genuine partner in the projects and were involved in various activities. CLs said pre-existing relationships with SRs were beneficial, and they also suggested open and honest communication is essential for partnership working.
4. **CEBS processes:** SRs thought the SR application process could be clearer and wanted the opportunity to work on multiple projects. CL thought CEBS was well promoted and that the application process was straightforward. They also felt CEBS was well supported but wanted more guidance about how to work with SRs.
5. **Evaluative mindset:** CLs thought they had developed an evaluative mindset.

Based on these interim findings, five recommendations have been made.

1. Define evaluative mindset and develop measures that capture how it manifests in participants.
2. Explore the possibility of extending the scheme over 18 months.
3. Develop guidance for project leads and SRs on partnership working.
4. Explore other options for supporting staff through the ethical approval process.
5. Deliver SR training on time management skills and approaches.

Course Enhancement Bursary Scheme (CEBS)

In June 2021, the Student Engagement, Evaluation and Research (STEER) team which is part of the Directorate of Student Experience, Teaching and Learning (SETL) launched the Course Evaluation Bursary Scheme. The overall aim of this Scheme was to support course-based enhancement that had been identified in annual Course Improvement Plans (CIPs). Project support was provided by a member of STEER.

CEBS adopts a partnership approach which draws together College Leadership, the quality processes and the expertise within STEER. The overall aims of the CEBS are:

- enhance the visibility of evaluative thinking in learning and teaching.
- provide support for staff/students within Colleges.

- provide evidence for Access and Participation Plan (APP) returns and the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF).
- secure Evaluation Repository publications for sharing and learning.
- facilitate a funded exploration of 'what works' in a blended/online learning environment for building regulatory confidence, developing quality assurance/enhancement.
- develop an evidence base for future iteration of CEBS.

The CEBS assumed outcomes are:

- an evaluative mindset approach is applied to course improvement.
- perceptions of the value of engagement in the CIP process are increased.
- the quality of action planning in the CIP is improved.
- student experiences are enhanced through evidence-informed decision-making.

Course Leaders could apply for one of nine bursaries of up to £1,000 to be spent by 31 July 2022. The funding was predominantly to pay for Student Researchers (SR). SRs would be paid to work with CLs to design and evaluate interventions linked to the CIPs and disseminate the findings. It was also used to incentivise other student participation in the evaluation. A summary of the 2021-2 funded CEBS projects are in Appendix 1.

Partnership Working

CEBS aimed to embed partnership working between staff and students as it assumed that these relationships are crucial for successful and sustainable enhancement. Working alongside students as partners, producers, and co-creators is a goal shared by many Higher Education Institutions; "it is associated with joint decision-making at a strategic level and co-design of curriculum and services at a local area" (Lowe & El Hakim, 2020, 8). El Hakim et al. (2020, 26) suggests that "students, staff and institutions have a shared responsibility to collaboratively enhance the educational experience... from all three perspectives". Students can play a vital role in transforming "analysis into recommendations that could directly enhance the learning environment for students" (El Hakim et al., 2020, 34).

This approach to staff and student engagement is often framed as a counternarrative to the marketisation of higher education and students as consumers. There is much debate about the terminology and purposes of working alongside students. However, Sum (2020, 157) says that while there might be a variety of terms, "the key message is that students can be so much more than passive learners, taking an engaged, shared and creative role in transforming education in the HE sector". These partnerships can be highly beneficial to all involved. For students, it is potentially empowering, promotes agency and equips "them with skills" relevant to "future careers", which their subject degree alone cannot (Mercer-Mapstone, 2019, 23). For staff, it increases their "connection to students, enhances understanding of students' points of view" and develops project management skill. (Marquis et al., 2020). However, Mercer-Mapstone et al. (2017) point out that research and evaluation on partnerships tend to focus on small-scale initiatives and only document the benefits of the partnership for individuals immediately involved.

STEER provides both professional services and academic support for the student researchers. The professional services staff run the application process and recruitment events for students, organise monthly SR meetings, organise and submit timesheets, manage the SR Microsoft Teams site, promote new work opportunities, and coordinate placement of SRs onto projects. The STEER academic staff provide project leads and SRs with training on undertaking research projects and support sessions throughout the year on project design, methodology and delivery of projects.

Methodology

This evaluation used a Theory of Change to map the relationship between CBES inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes (French et al., 2020). Austen's (2021) ten principles for evaluation, recommends establishing the rationale of an intervention, the underlining assumptions, its potential impact, and the development of the counterfactual. The evaluation was undertaken by the member of STEER staff who also ran CEBS. This means the evaluation was not independent but did benefit from the immersion and connection with project leads.

This mid-point evaluation seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. How is CEBS perceived by CL level in terms of:
 - a. meaningful engagement with CIPs?
 - b. the development of an evaluative mindset more generally?
2. How do SRs perceive the CEBS in relation to developing their skills, confidence, knowledge, and experience?

The evaluation adopted a qualitative approach using semi-structured focus groups/interviews. The focus groups and interviews took place online via Zoom and were recorded and automatically transcribed using the software's built-in features. The data collected was thematically analysed (Braun & Clarke, 2008).

The University granted ethical approval on 18 January 2022 for an evaluation of CESB.

Sample

Three out of a potential 16 one-to-one interviews were undertaken with SRs in January 2022. Two focus groups were conducted with four out of the nine course leaders in February 2022.

Copies of the relevant ethics documentation are annexed to this Report as Appendices.

In January, participants from the SRs were recruited via communication from the SETL administration team, and through encouragement from the Project Leads. Course leaders were recruited via individual email from the CEBS Lead and through general encouragement through the Teams chat.

Findings

The five key themes that emerge from the analysis are: **motivations for involvement in CEBS, benefits and challenges of CEBS, Students as Partners, the Scheme's processes, and an evaluative mindset**. Each of these themes is considered in more detail below.

Motivations for involvement in CEBS

Student Researcher (SR)

SRs said their primary motivations for participating in CESB were to **develop their employability skills** and achieve their study or career aspirations. SR1 explained, *'I thought it would boost my general employability skills, [and] it would be great groundwork for the Masters'*. SR2 thought *'the Scheme could be a way into doing research as part of my career'* and allow them to stand out from other students. However, SR3 believed CEBS would benefit their **current studies** more immediately, as the CEBS project would *'go hand in hand'* with their own research. In addition, the SRs had **altruistic motivations** and a desire to support other students through the intervention, enhance the course, and improve student experiences. As SR2 noted, *'I'm a final year student – if I don't act, nothing changes'*.

Course Leader (CL)

CLs said they were keen to become involved in CEBS to **improve their course provision** and address issues around **employability**. CL1 acknowledged that there had been an institutional and departmental ‘push’ to improve employability, and CL3 wanted ‘*to create lots of industry links*’. CLs were also attracted to CEBS because of the availability of funding to support the improvement of their courses. CL1 said **the funding** allowed them to ‘*get things rolling and tested and evaluated*’. While CL2 said, ‘*I just love these small pots of money, it’s just easier to deal with*’ they also noted that ‘*more would be great*’ too. The opportunity to **work with SR on co-designing** and evaluating interventions was also cited as a motivation by CLs.

Benefits and challenges of CEBS

SR Benefits

Despite the short time the projects had been running, SRs could already identify the benefits of being involved in CEBS. They expressed that their **motivations had already been realised**, with SR1 saying CEBS was ‘*vital for skills development*’ and allowed them to ‘*stand out*’ from others on their course.

SRs expressed that their involvement in CEBS made them **feel part of a wider community beyond their courses**. SR1 noted the recruitment event ‘*was quite a fun session – I already knew some of the researchers, we had quite a chilled time eating gingerbread, laughing, having a good time, it was nice/informal*’. SR3 reported how the informal nature of the event helped them overcome their nervousness and how the people at their ‘*table were lovely*’. They enjoyed this interaction and ‘*have actually stayed in contact with a few of the people*’ (SR3). SR2 said they similarly enjoyed the monthly meetings as ‘*it felt good, I had the chance to discuss with other researchers... It was nice to see how they found it/what they were doing for their project.*’

SR3 said CEBS gives ‘*another opportunity to engage with people across the university*’ and enjoyed the ‘*opportunity to get some in-person communication*’ as their previous year of study had been ‘*completely online*’. However, SR2 explained how they have ‘*enjoyed interacting and communicating with other people online*’, especially with the project team. Finally, SR1 reported how they valued the opportunity to work with other SRs at similar levels of ability because it gave them confidence in delivering the project.

SRs cited the **development of confidence** as a benefit of being involved in CEBS. SR3 would recommend becoming an SR as it is ‘*massively for building your confidence*’. Involvement in CEBS built SR’s confidence in public speaking, taking a professional approach, and by developing specific skills, knowledge, and experience needed to conduct research. SR2 felt their involvement had developed their **understanding of the research process**; planning, ethics, conducting semi-structured interviews, and data analysis. They also suggested that the CEBS was beneficial because it **complemented their studies**. SR2 notes how:

‘I started the project when I was doing a research project module. It’s not the same style of research – more quantitative. The Scheme shows you how to conduct research/reveals hidden gems that you can then draw on for your own project. You learn from researchers about aims and methods. I found the two linked really well together. The module was theorising and the Scheme is more practical.’

SR Challenges

The SRs noted it was a challenge navigating the **transition to becoming a Student Researcher** and learning to communicate with the project lead and other team members. SR3 summaries these experiences,

'I think to begin with, it was like quite a big step to kind of differentiate that... it's more of a job. And I think that was a big thing to stop the feeling that I was speaking to my lecturers and I was being assessed for how I kind of communicate with them and things like that and actually realise that I'm a part of the team.'

The SRs also found **time management challenging**. They found it difficult to balance multiple deadlines and other commitments, such as course requirements, social activities, and planning for the future alongside CEBS. SR1 noted that recently *'things have been completely crazy'*. SR2 thought being involved in CEBS could be an issue for those who were not as organised or did not adopt their particular *'workhorse approach'*. While SR2 would recommend working as an SR to others, they would also advise *'caution with existing study commitments'*. However, the SRs also stated that working as an SR and on a CEBS project **helped them improve their time management skills**. SR2 said they learnt how to manage *'emails, meetings'*, the research process and the *'importance of being flexible [and] managing expectations'*. SR3 noted that their **Project Lead empathised with their time constraints** and worked with them in managing their commitments and was also happy for SR3 *'to take a step back'* at busy times and *'pick up a little bit more in times when I don't have as many deadlines or as much work to do'*.

CL Benefits

Like the SR, the CL also valued the **sense of community** facilitated by CEBS. CL2 said *'it's just very well supported and friendly'* and this is a *'very important part of this funding, it's not just giving money... It's saying we're here along the way if you need us.'* CL2 also said the **'safe' developmental environment** created by CEBS and *'for new people doing research... it's the perfect way'*. However, they did suggest that those at an earlier stage of their career may also feel more pressure to rigidly follow their original research plans and deliver the targets set and have anxiety about the consequences of failing to do so. The CLs appreciated the **training on the ethics process** and the fact that it was recorded.

CL Challenges

CLs identified **issues around securing ethical approval**. CL1 explained that they had already waited around two months and still had not received ethical approval despite chasing via their departmental ethics contact. They also noted how this had impacted the project, and the SR involved was *'frustrated'* with the delay. CL2 also said gaining ethical approval was *'a big hurdle to overcome, and it can really have a massive knock on effect if it doesn't go right'*. However, the CLs believed CEBS could not have done anything more to support this element and had resigned themselves to a perception that delays in being granted ethical approval can be a problem for research in general. CL4 expressed **concerns that the CIP process increased 'twofold if not threefold' burdens** being placed on CLs, which may present a barrier to participation in CEBS for some.

Students as Partners

SR

SRs reported being **involved in various activities**, such as contributing to the ethical application, planning for data collection and providing training for students involved in an intervention. SRs said they **felt like genuine partners** in the projects. SR2 shared that they *'feel as though I have a part to*

play, not just administratively, feel like its valuable for myself and others'. SR3 explained how their project team 'kind of check[s] in with me, so I'm very included in it; they won't have a big meeting without knowing that I could attend'.

CL

CLs noted the **importance of pre-existing relationships with SR** in facilitating effective working partnerships. For example, CL2 said their existing relationship with their SR built their '*confidence*' in the project team's ability to deliver a multi-faceted project. They also said they trusted the SR '*with quite a lot... more leadership work because I know them*' and could '*just leave*' them to it, which was beneficial as the CL was '*chocka*' busy. CL1 noted a pre-existing relationship '*can be really helpful because you know what the [SR] are capable of doing*'. However, they also implied that working with a new SR could cause concerns about project delivery. CL2 also raised concerns that working with a new SR would increase the workload as '*you have to hold their hand a bit more*'.

CLs suggested they **took a Students as Partners approach** and encouraged SR to contribute their ideas and lead on activities where appropriate. CL2 explained how they talked in the plural '*we*' about the project to show it was a joint endeavour. The importance of **open and honest communication** was vital for successful partnership working, especially around SR pressure points in the academic year. CLs were overall very positive about working with SR and felt it brought new insights into the project. CL1 noted that CEBS had provided staff and students with something positive to focus on together.

Processes

SR

The SRs felt that the **application process for becoming an SR needed to be clearer** and that they should receive timely payments. They also recommended that there should be potential for expanding the number of opportunities to participate in projects.

CL

CEBS was promoted through Academic Digest, the Academic Essentials pages, departmental leadership meetings, and drop-in sessions. CLs said they thought **CEBS was promoted** well and had heard about it through various channels. They particularly enjoyed the opportunity to **attend drop-in sessions** with senior leaders as it helped maximise the impact of their proposed interventions. They were also positive about the pre-application support provided. However, they did suggest there could be additional communications and drop-in workshops in the run-up to the application deadline. They also thought there needed to be a clearer distinction between CEBS and the College funded enhancement projects.

CLs were generally **happy with the application process** and the September application deadline, as it was before the new academic year had started. However, they also indicated that there is never an opportune time of year. CL4 explained that the deadline tied in well with the timing of their departmental away day, which allowed them to put their proposal to colleagues and secure their support. CL4 thought the formatting of the application form was '*a bit tricky*' but found the structure helpful.

CL2 suggested **extending CEBS projects to 18 months** to enable project leads to '*achieve more for that money*'. They also felt that extending the projects would allow them to have ethical approval and SRs in place before September, so they would have a full year to deliver the project. CL1 thought this would give them a '*head start*' and deliver a better project. CL4 noted that the timings of the

CEBS do not necessarily tie in with the SR's course timings; one of their SRs finished their course in January just as the main work on the project was starting.

While a sense of community had been identified as beneficial, CL sometimes found there was too much **use of the Teams chat**. CL1 reflected that *'because of the slight struggle I've been having with having ethics approved, I think the frequency of the Team's messages... probably frustrated me'*. However, CL1 one did concede that the chat was *'really, really useful'*, and CL4 said **it was good to have the chat function**, *'to know that somebody is always there on the other side if I have a quick question'* and to see what *'other people are doing'*.

CLs felt that having **more guidance about working with SR** and STEER's expectations would be beneficial. CL2 suggests having more information about organising meetings with SRs as they tend to take up more time than expected *'and it eats up your money'*. CL1 was dissatisfied that the students they recommended, who applied for the SR role, were not appointed even though they said *'they were fine'*. CL4 believed the recruitment and selection process should be developed to require applicants to complete a research-related task to help demonstrate the skills they would need for the project work. Finally, CL2 suggested that the SR training programme should be communicated more effectively with project leads, so they know what training has been offered and when.

Evaluative mindset

Early indications were that CEBS was supporting CLs in **developing an evaluative mindset**. CL1, for example, thought CEBS was introducing them to evaluative terminology like *'pre post measures'*. CL2 noted that *'the more and more you do evaluation work, the better, you know, you become'*. CL1 also commented that CEBS proved *'useful for linking to the [CIPs] to show... actually... evidence you've tried to do to improve your course'*. They also reflected on how their department's iterative CIP meetings provide *'nice opportunit[ies]... to continually refer back to how the course has improved'*.

Conclusion

This evaluation set out to answer whether or not CEBS had supported CLs engagement in the CIP process and if they had developed an evaluative mindset; the interview data showed limited evidence of this, and further evidence should be collected to demonstrate the impact of the programme. Any further data collection should clearly define what an evaluative mindset is and how this is expected to be manifested by participants.

The evaluation was also interested in establishing how CEBS developed the skills, confidence, and knowledge of SRs. Early indications here are perhaps more positive. SRs overwhelmingly reported that being an SR had been beneficial. In particular, they all thought it had contributed to developing their confidence and other skills. They also suggest that being an SR would help them secure further study or employment opportunities.

As an interim report, the conclusions are limited. However, early indications are that CLs and SR have had a positive experience and participating in CEBS has benefited them in several ways. However, further evaluative work would need to be undertaken to establish if these short-term gains continue for the duration CEBS.

Interim Recommendations

1. Define evaluative mindset and develop measures that capture how it manifests in participants.
2. Explore the possibility of extending the scheme over 18 months.
3. Develop guidance for project leads and SRs on partnership working.

4. Explore other options for supporting staff through the ethical approval process.
5. Deliver SR training on time management skills and approaches.

Evaluation Bursaries 2022-2023

The 2022-23 Evaluation Bursary was opened up to all staff (academic and professional services) that are delivering interventions that aim to enhance some element of the student lifecycle (access, retention, attainment, and progression). For more information, please use this [link](#).

Acknowledgement

Thank you to Jill Dickenson who ran CEBS and collected the invaluable data this report is based on.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Summary of projects being funded by the Scheme 2021-2

- Decolonising Physical Education and School Sport courses, particularly from ethnicity and disability angles.
- Driving positive change and widening participation within the chemical sciences through integrating research conducted by chemists from ethnic minorities and the Global South into our students learning.
- Establishing a successful partnership with the BBC's 50:50 Equality Initiative and embedding diversity of sourcing in practical journalism projects and assignments and data collection.
- Exploration of the barriers and enablers to peer mentoring and evaluation of enhanced course activities within BSc Psychology.
- Evaluation of effectiveness of Microsoft Teams for building course communities and establishing a broader multilevel network within Strategic Management, Enterprise and Innovation.
- Student research group working with alumni and final year graduates to understand their experiences re: NSS priorities/make recommendations for the BSc International Tourism Management course.
- A co-design course approach to improving postgraduate students career readiness within MSc Sport and Exercise Psychology.
- Exploration of experiences of first cohort of BSc (Degree Apprenticeship) Physiotherapy to inform future developments of the programme.
- Embedding and enhancing the understanding and application of Big Data across Biosciences and Chemistry.

Appendix 2: Participant Information Sheet for Project Leads

Participant Information Statement: Focus Groups with Project Leads

Research Project: Evaluation of CIPS-aligned Course Evaluation Bursary Scheme

You are invited to participate in the research project identified above which is being conducted by researchers from Sheffield Hallam University's Directorate of Student Experience Teaching and Learning (incorporating the Student Engagement Evaluation and Research Team).

Why is the research being done?

The overarching aim of the research is to support decision-making around the continuation/further development of the Course Evaluation Bursary Scheme that aligns with the development and implementation of Course Improvement Plans.

What choice do you have?

Participation in this research is your choice. Whether or not you decide to participate, your decision will not disadvantage you. If you do decide to participate, you may decide to withdraw from the project up to one month after participation in a focus group without giving a reason.

What will you be asked to do?

You will be invited to participate in a series of up to 3 focus groups to explore your perceptions around the Course Evaluation Bursary Scheme in relation to meaningful engagement with Course Improvement Plans, and the development of an evaluative mindset more general. The focus groups will be held online at a time to best suit the group. With your consent, an audio-visual recording will be made and transcribed. Contemporaneous notes will also be taken at each focus group. Please note that the identity of participants will remain confidential and no one, except the researchers involved in conducting this part of the study, will be informed of who has participated. Following each of the focus groups, a transcript will be provided to you if you wish to see one. You will be able to modify or withdraw your contribution up to one month after the relevant focus group was conducted.

How much time will it take?

Each focus group will run for approximately 60 minutes in duration but may be slightly longer if the discussion extends beyond that.

What are the benefits of participating?

This study offers you the opportunity to share your views and experiences. Whilst we cannot promise any immediate benefits, potential benefits of the study include a contribution to policy and practice and increased knowledge around course improvement and widening participation.

How will the information collected be used?

Findings will be disseminated through the development of a report to SETL/STEER and other research papers, articles, conference papers, and workshops/seminars which aim to communicate the research for professional development or academic purposes.

Individual participants will not be identified in any reports, presentations or publications arising from the project. These publications, along with a summary of key findings, will be made available to participants on request.

How will your privacy be protected?

Any information collected that might identify participants will be stored securely and only accessed by the researchers, except as required by law. Transcripts will be protected on a secure online server and stored on a password-protected computer, accessible only to the researchers.

Written consent will be sought from all focus group participants. The research/evaluation team or external professional agency will transcribe the focus group interviews and store information securely. Participants will be able to review the transcript of the interview to edit or erase their contribution up to one month after data collection on request.

Audio-visual records and interview transcripts will be stored on a password-protected computer, accessible only by the research/evaluation team. All focus group interviews will be given a unique code and all identifying information removed. The key to the code will be retained in an encrypted file on a password-protected computer accessible only to the researcher involved. Research/evaluation team members not involved in interviews will have access only to anonymised transcripts. Consent forms will be stored separately from data in an electronic file on a password protected computer accessible only to those involved in the interview. Data will be stored for at least 10 years following publication of results, after which it will be disposed of by deleting relevant files.

The University undertakes research as part of its function for the community under its legal status. Data protection allows us to use personal data for research with appropriate safeguards in place under the legal basis of public tasks that are in the public interest.

A full statement of your rights can be found at <https://www.shu.ac.uk/about-this-website/privacy-policy/privacy-notices/privacy-notice-for-research>. However, all University research is reviewed to ensure that participants are treated appropriately and their rights respected. This study was approved by UREC with Converis number: ER39394705. Further information at <https://www.shu.ac.uk/research/ethics-integrity-and-practice>

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<p>Postal address: Sheffield Hallam University, Howard Street, Sheffield S1 1WBT Telephone: 0114 225 5555</p>	

What do you need to do to participate?

If there is anything you do not understand, or you have questions about the research please contact Dr Jill Dickinson, Dr Liz Austen or Tom Savage. Please retain a copy of this information sheet for the duration of the research. You will be asked to confirm your consent to participate. Thank you for considering this invitation.

Kind regards

Jill Dickinson (jill.dickinson@shu.ac.uk [mailto:](#)), Liz Austen (l.austen@shu.ac.uk) and Tom Savage (tds045@hallam.shu.ac.uk)

Appendix 3: Participant Information Sheet for Student Researchers

Participant Information Statement: Focus Groups with Student Researchers

Research Project: Evaluation of CIPS-aligned Course Evaluation Bursary Scheme

You are invited to participate in the research project identified above which is being conducted by researchers from Sheffield Hallam University's Directorate of Student Experience Teaching and Learning (incorporating the Student Engagement Evaluation and Research Team).

Why is the research being done?

The overarching aim of the research is to support decision-making around the continuation/further development of the Course Evaluation Bursary Scheme that aligns with the development and implementation of Course Improvement Plans.

What choice do you have?

Participation in this research is your choice. Whether or not you decide to participate, your decision will not disadvantage you. If you do decide to participate, you may decide to withdraw from the project up to one month after participation in a focus group without giving a reason.

What will you be asked to do?

You will be invited to participate in a series of up to 3 focus groups to explore your perceptions around the Course Evaluation Bursary Scheme in relation to the development of your skills, confidence, knowledge and experience. The focus groups will be held online at a time to best suit the group. With your consent, an audio-visual recording will be made and transcribed. Contemporaneous notes will also be taken at each focus group. Please note that the identity of participants will remain confidential and no one, except the researchers involved in conducting this part of the study, will be informed of who has participated. Following each of the focus groups, a transcript will be provided to you if you wish to see one. You will be able to modify or withdraw your contribution up to one month after the relevant focus group was conducted.

How much time will it take?

Each focus group will run for approximately 60 minutes in duration but may be slightly longer if the discussion extends beyond that.

What are the benefits of participating?

This study offers you the opportunity to share your views and experiences. Whilst we cannot promise any immediate benefits, potential benefits of the study include a contribution to policy and practice and increased knowledge around course improvement and widening participation, and you will also be paid for your time as Student Researchers through the SETL/STEER pool.

How will the information collected be used?

Findings will be disseminated through the development of a report to SETL/STEER and other research papers, articles, conference papers, and workshops/seminars which aim to communicate the research for professional development or academic purposes.

Individual participants will not be identified in any reports, presentations or publications arising from the project. These publications, along with a summary of key findings, will be made available to participants on request.

How will your privacy be protected?

Any information collected that might identify participants will be stored securely and only accessed by the researchers, except as required by law. Transcripts will be protected on a secure online server and stored on a password-protected computer, accessible only to the researchers.

Written consent will be sought from all focus group participants. The research/evaluation team or external professional agency will transcribe the focus group interviews and store information securely. Participants will be able to review the transcript of the interview to edit or erase their contribution up to one month after data collection on request.

Audio-visual records and interview transcripts will be stored on a password-protected computer, accessible only by the research/evaluation team. All focus group interviews will be given a unique code and all identifying information removed. The key to the code will be retained in an encrypted file on a password-protected computer accessible only to the researcher involved. Research/evaluation team members not involved in interviews will have access only to anonymised transcripts. Consent forms will be stored separately from data in an electronic file on a password protected computer accessible only to those involved in the interview. Data will be stored for at least 10 years following publication of results, after which it will be disposed of by deleting relevant files.

The University undertakes research as part of its function for the community under its legal status. Data protection allows us to use personal data for research with appropriate safeguards in place under the legal basis of public tasks that are in the public interest.

A full statement of your rights can be found at <https://www.shu.ac.uk/about-this-website/privacy-policy/privacy-notice-for-research>. However, all University research is reviewed to ensure that participants are treated appropriately and their rights respected. This study was approved by UREC with Converis number: ER39394705. Further information at <https://www.shu.ac.uk/research/ethics-integrity-and-practice>

<p>You should contact the Data Protection Officer if:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • you have a query about how your data is used by the University • you would like to report a data security breach (e.g. if you think your personal data has been lost or disclosed inappropriately) • you would like to complain about how the University has used your personal data <p style="text-align: center;">DPO@shu.ac.uk</p>	<p>You should contact the Head of Research Ethics (Dr Mayur Ranchordas) if:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • you have concerns with how the research was undertaken or how you were treated <p style="text-align: center;">ethicssupport@shu.ac.uk</p>
<p>Postal address: Sheffield Hallam University, Howard Street, Sheffield S1 1WBT Telephone: 0114 225 5555</p>	

What do you need to do to participate?

If there is anything you do not understand, or you have questions about the research please contact Dr Jill Dickinson, Dr Liz Austen or Tom Savage. Please retain a copy of this information sheet for the duration of the research. You will be asked to confirm your consent to participate. Thank you for considering this invitation.

Kind regards

Jill Dickinson (jill.dickinson@shu.ac.uk[mailto:](mailto:jill.dickinson@shu.ac.uk)) Liz Austen (lausten@shu.ac.uk) Tom

Savage tds045@hallam.shu.ac.uk

Appendix 4: List of indicative themes/questions for the focus groups/interviews

Student Researchers

- [Why did you apply to become involved as a Student Researcher for this Scheme?]
- To what extent would you say that your involvement in the Scheme [so far] has affected your confidence? Why do you think that is?
- Please could you tell us about any new skills you have developed whilst working as a Student Researcher on this Scheme [so far], and provide some specific examples.
- To what extent do you feel that your involvement as a Student Researcher in this Scheme [so far] has developed your experience, and why?
- What would you say that you have learned from being involved in the Scheme [so far]?
- To what extent do you think your involvement in the Scheme [so far] will benefit you going forwards, and why?
- Reflecting on your experience of the Scheme [so far], would you recommend other students to become involved as Student Researchers for the Scheme, and why?

Project Leads:

- Please tell us a bit about your previous experience as a Course Leader before you became involved in the Scheme.
- Please tell us a bit about your involvement in writing Course Improvement Plans before you became involved in the Scheme.
- How did you hear about the Scheme?
- Why did you apply to the Scheme?
- To what extent would you say that the Scheme has [so far] impacted on the development/implementation of your Project?
- How have you found the organisation and management of the Scheme [so far]?
- How have you engaged with those organising and managing the Scheme [so far] (e.g. Teams, drop-ins, formal meetings etc) and why was this?
- How have you found working with Student Researchers on your project [so far]?
- To what extent would you say the Student Researchers have impacted on the development/implementation of your Project [so far]?
- Reflecting on your experience of being involved in the Scheme [so far], is there anything that you would do differently/the same? Why?
- Based on your experience of the Scheme [so far], would you recommend other Course Leaders to apply for the Scheme? Why?
- To what extent do you feel your involvement in the Scheme [so far] has helped you to develop your skills, knowledge, experience and confidence around:
 - Course Improvement Plans; and
 - evaluation?Why?
- To what extent would you say that your involvement in the Scheme would encourage you to build in evaluation with other projects that you're involved with? Why?

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Knowledge Applied