



SHAPE

SOCIAL SCIENCES
HUMANITIES &
THE ARTS
FOR PEOPLE
& THE ECONOMY

Evaluation: Executive Summary

SHAPE in Schools

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Written by:

Lucy Jenkins & Tallulah Machin



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Context

The SHAPE in Schools pilot project was established to complement and support the work being undertaken by the British Academy and London School of Economics to promote social sciences, humanities and arts subjects through the establishment of the SHAPE acronym. SHAPE stands for 'Social Sciences, Humanities and Arts for People and the Economy/Environment' and lobbies for better visibility, understanding and connectivity associated with the subjects, disciplines and skills which can be broadly categorised within those subject areas. In this way, SHAPE sits as complementary to STEM.

The SHAPE in Schools pilot project has now undertaken two phases between November 2020 and June 2022, led by a core research team of Lucy Jenkins and Tallulah Machin.

Both phases shared the following core aims:

1. To increase the visibility of SHAPE subjects in secondary school settings through the creation of SHAPE materials and the training of SHAPE teacher ambassadors.
2. To demonstrate the relevance of SHAPE subjects to people by taking a cross-curricular approach which embeds real-world relevance.
3. To challenge teachers and learners to understand their personal connection with SHAPE.

The summary that follows intends to provide highlights from the full evaluation of the second phase of the SHAPE in Schools pilot project. Further information can be found in the full evaluation report.

Phase 1

The first phase of the SHAPE in Schools pilot project took place from November 2020 to July 2021. It aimed to explore and establish messages relating to SHAPE which would inspire and enthuse a secondary school audience across the four UK nations about the subjects under its umbrella. Phase 1 engaged with eight schools from across the UK. The target learner cohorts were years 8 and 9 in England and Wales, S2 and S3 in Scotland and years 9 and 10 in Northern Ireland.

Learners participated in three SHAPE workshops. Sixteen teachers from across the partner schools took part in a series of training sessions focusing on the SHAPE mindset and were introduced to the methodology underlying the SHAPE materials which included object-based learning as a way to construct and deliver inspirational SHAPE learning experiences. Key findings from the first phase are available in the Phase 1 evaluation report and a summary of them in the Phase 2 evaluation.



Phase 2

Phase 2 of the SHAPE in Schools pilot project built on the methodologies and approaches of the first phase but offered a more flexible and devolved approach to working with schools. This was partly in response to the recommendations made in Phase 1. Phase 2 engaged six schools from across the four UK nations, three of whom had completed Phase 1 while the other three were new to the programme.

Recruitment of schools began in November 2021 and the project completed in June 2022. Teacher training took place in January 2022, and teachers were able to deliver between one and four workshops any time between February and May 2022. Schools were asked to work with a minimum number of 120 learners in years 8 and 9 in England and Wales, S2 and S3 in Scotland, and years 9 and 10 in Northern Ireland. Due to ongoing disruption caused by COVID-19, not all schools were able to work with 120 learners and 75% of respondents only participated in a single workshop.

Key Changes Between Phases

A number of key changes were implemented between Phase 1 and Phase 2, largely based on the evaluation findings and recommendations from Phase 1. These changes were:

- The creation of an additional workshop based on the object *Sugar* to accompany existing workshops on *Masks*, *Trains* and *Shoes*.
- The translation of all four workshops to a PowerPoint format; amendments made based on findings from the accessibility audit in Phase 1 and overall revisions made to improve the quality of the content based on learner and teacher feedback from Phase 1.
- A lighter touch approach to training to reduce the time commitment for teachers.
- A less directive approach to learner engagement, giving schools flexibility to choose how many workshops learners undertook.



Key Findings from Baseline Attitudes and Understanding

This section summarises the key findings in relation to the data collated before the workshops were undertaken by learners in Phase 2. The data therefore provides an insight into their baseline understanding of and attitudes towards SHAPE and STEM before engaging in the workshops. Full findings relating to this data can be found in the full evaluation report.

1. Learners struggled to categorise effectively a group of 22 common subjects across the broad categories of social sciences, arts, humanities and STEM indicating broad uncertainty about which subjects fall into which category.

- Respondents were most adept at placing arts subjects in the correct category. 97% of learners correctly identified 'art and design'. This was followed by 73% correctly identifying music and 68% correctly identifying drama.
- Respondents struggled to categorise correctly the social science subjects. Only 43% of respondents correctly identified business as a social science, with 36% considering it humanities. This rose to 47% and 38% respectively for politics. Over a third of respondents also placed physics, chemistry, biology and physical education into the social science category.
- Respondents were particularly challenged by categorising certain humanities subjects. English and modern languages were widely mis-categorised. English caused the greatest confusion with 41% of respondents placing it in humanities and 31% placing it in STEM. 24% of respondents placed modern languages into the social science category and 12% placed it in STEM. Respondents were most able to correctly identify history (80%) as a humanities subject, followed by religious studies (77%) and geography (76%).
- Respondents were confident categorising maths as STEM, but struggled with ICT, PE, Health and Food Technology. Over half of respondents were able to identify the three 'hard' science subjects of physics (57%), chemistry (56%) and biology (55%) as STEM, despite over a third placing them in social sciences as discussed above.



- 2. Learners demonstrated some confusion about what subjects were included under the acronym STEM.** 31% of respondents placed English in STEM, suggesting more research is required to understand how learners understand STEM subjects and the value placed on the acronym within classroom settings. This would support efforts to introduce SHAPE on equal and complimentary terms.
- 3. Learners indicated slightly greater enjoyment of STEM subjects than SHAPE subjects, despite there being more SHAPE subjects taught on the curriculum.** The four STEM subjects ranked slightly higher than the eight SHAPE subjects overall when learners were asked to rank twelve subjects based on enjoyment. The gap increases for male respondents but is slightly reversed for female respondents.
- 4. Male respondents display a definitive preference between subject groupings with STEM ranking highest.** For female respondents the distinction between subject groupings is less marked though there is a preference for arts subjects. This finding corresponds to a variety of the findings based on gender throughout the report.
- 5. Learners ranked art and design, physical education and English highest for enjoyment in a list of twelve subjects.** Meanwhile, modern languages and religious studies ranked lowest. The findings are largely consistent with an analysis conducted in 2021 by [Tallulah Machin for MFL Mentoring](#), based on 5,755 survey responses from learners in years 8 and 9 in Wales.
- 6. 41% of learners agreed or strongly agreed that they find SHAPE subjects fun before the workshops. This rose to 50% when asked if they find SHAPE subjects interesting.** However, a large proportion of respondents answered 'neither agree nor disagree'. Corresponding open answers suggest this is because they enjoy some SHAPE subjects but not others and find it difficult to group them as one or other because they felt the acronym included subjects they didn't like, as well as the ones they liked.
- 7. Learners ranked STEM subjects are more important than SHAPE subjects for their future careers. The difference was more stark than for enjoyment.** The mean placement of each subject based on importance for careers highlights a clear privileging of English and maths followed by science. Music and religious studies were placed lowest followed by drama and modern languages.



- 8. When presented with a list of 24 possible skills and asked to select which skills they think are developed in SHAPE subjects, respondents chose an average of ten skills.** Teamwork (64%) and creativity (62%) were the most frequently selected skills, followed by problem solving (54%), independence (53%), people skills and communication (both 50%). This suggests an understanding of the interpersonal nature of SHAPE subjects ('P' for people) and the value of creativity, both of which are highlighted elsewhere in the responses.

These findings suggest that learners are confused about the relationship between STEM and SHAPE, and struggle to identify which subjects fit where. The inclusion of English as a STEM subject, by almost a third of learners, suggests learners do not understand STEM as signifying the core subjects, like science and maths.

The findings show that even before engaging with the workshops some learners had positive attitudes towards SHAPE subjects and could see the relevance of them to their future careers. Importantly, the findings show that STEM fares better in all areas, both in terms of enjoyment and aspiration for the future, which makes a robust argument for the need of SHAPE in order to ensure that all subjects are equally recognised, visible and valued.

Key Findings from Experiences of the Programme

This section summarises the key findings in relation to the three aims of the SHAPE in Schools pilot project in Phase 2. The evidence leading to these findings is discussed in the main body of the Phase 2 evaluation report and also considers the key findings from Phase 1. Full findings from Phase 2 can be found in the Phase 2 evaluation report.

Aim 1: Visibility

Increase the visibility of SHAPE subjects in secondary school settings through the creation of SHAPE materials and the training of SHAPE teacher ambassadors.

- Teachers who responded to the surveys were very positive about the training experience and the supporting materials provided to them, such as the guidance notes. The guidance notes were particularly appreciated with all six respondents to the teacher exit survey stating that they were 'very useful.'
- Teachers were very positive about the resources themselves with comments relating to their variety, adaptability, creativity, interest and enjoyment being used across a variety of open-text responses. Unlike Phase 1, teachers didn't comment on the format of the resources suggesting that the adaptation to the PowerPoint format was well-received.
- Three of the schools involved in Phase 2 were newly recruited while three more had previously engaged in Phase 1. All six teachers who responded to the exit survey were able to articulate an understanding of the methods and mindsets underpinning the SHAPE workshops, with many making explicit reference to SHAPE as a project which aims to make and show connections between a range of subject areas.
- Teachers from four of the six schools trained others to support the delivery of the SHAPE workshops. This suggests that teachers were sufficiently confident in their understanding of SHAPE that they could cascade their learnings to others.



- Many teachers explicitly commented on how the resources encouraged them to deliver the workshops in a style that was different from their normal teaching style. One teacher commented: 'The activities were very active and some of the teachers enjoyed using this method of delivery as they would not typically use this style.' A minority of teachers commented on the similarities between their teaching style and the delivery methods of SHAPE, for example: 'In many ways it was very similar to the way I deliver Drama lessons - using and exploring different stimuli to create work from although I would include more drama based activities from the outset.'
- Teachers also commented that they had learned new things through the workshops. Many found the workshops and guidance notes 'interesting' and 'enjoyable', although some commented that this had a time implications which impacted on their overall experience. One teacher commented: 'I had to do a bit of research or read notes carefully which is quite time consuming.'
- Encouraging teachers to attend training in Phase 2 was more challenging than in Phase 1. It is clear from the challenging engagement with schools throughout this phase that the impacts of COVID-19 continued to play a significant role in teachers' daily experiences in school. Only six out of the eleven who agreed to participate in the programme completed the project and four out of five schools who dropped out during the project explained that this was due to extreme workload pressures caused by staff absences as a result of COVID-19. The continued pressures on teachers will need to be revisited for any subsequent phase.

Aim 2: Relevance

Demonstrate the relevance of SHAPE subjects to people by taking a cross-curricular approach which embeds real-world relevance.

- When learners were asked to indicate if the workshops had helped them understand how SHAPE subjects are connected to each other, the data shows that 48% of all respondents strongly agreed or agreed they could already see these connections before they took part in the workshops. Following the workshops, 44% of learners strongly agreed or agreed that the workshops had helped them to further understand the connections between SHAPE subjects.



- Learners were positive about how the workshops had allowed them to see connections between subjects. A learner commented that their most enjoyable aspect of the workshops was *'discovering different subjects and how they are connected.'* However, the interdisciplinary approach of SHAPE did generate some confusion with some learners still confused by what SHAPE meant at the end of the workshops: *'I'm not sure how the SHAPE subjects are linked; I can understand how some of the SHAPE subjects are linked because they release inner creativity but I don't really understand how they link to my daily life.'*
- Following the workshops, there was an overall 3.6% decrease in the correct placement of the twelve SHAPE subjects but also a 4.4% decrease in the correct placement of the nine STEM subjects. Learners were therefore more aware of SHAPE subjects in general, as is confirmed elsewhere in the data, but were not more able to identify exactly which subjects were social sciences, arts and humanities. This is unsurprising since the workshops' intention was to draw connections between and highlight the relevance of all SHAPE subjects, even including reference to STEM subjects, rather than teach learners to correctly identify which subjects go where. That specific aim would require a more explicit approach.
- 29% of respondents indicated that they strongly agreed or agreed that the workshops had made them more likely to take SHAPE subjects for Nationals/GCSE. This is half the impact that was seen in Phase 1 where 58% of learners indicated they were 'much more' or 'a little more' likely to take SHAPE subjects. This is likely due to the fact that 75% of learners engaged in only one workshop in Phase 2, compared to all learners completing three workshops in Phase 1, suggesting that sustained intervention derives stronger impact in this area.
- All four workshops (*Masks, Shoes, Sugar and Trains*) yielded similar outcomes and the object-based learning approach was mentioned in open-text comments made by learners and teachers. The large proportion of these comments were very positive, expressing an enjoyment in particular of looking at one object from multiple angles. For example: *'I most enjoyed learning about how one thing to us can be many different things too'; 'I like how we explored the different ways an object is viewed'; 'Getting to be creative and learn a lot about one thing.'*



Aim 3: Personal Connection

Challenge teachers and learners to understand their personal connection with SHAPE.

- Learners' experiences of the workshops were overall very positive. 49% of learners strongly agreed or agreed that they found the workshops interesting. Findings from the teacher exit survey reflect very positive attitudes from learners towards the workshops, with all six teachers strongly agreeing or agreeing that learners found the content of the workshops interesting.
- When asked whether 'the workshop was fun', 60% of learners strongly agreed or agreed. Teachers' comments reflected these positive findings with all six teachers strongly agreeing or agreeing that learners enjoyed the workshops.
- In total, 42% of learners strongly agreed or agreed that the workshops had increased their enjoyment of SHAPE subjects at school. The responses to the workshops are a particularly positive outcome given that 75% of learners only engaged with one workshop. This is in comparison to Phase 1 where all respondents had to engage with three workshops. Unsurprisingly, the results from Phase 1 showed a greater impact of the workshops with 67% saying they were 'much more' or 'a little more' interested in learning about SHAPE subjects after taking part. This indicates the importance of sustained intervention in order to maximise outcomes from the learning resources but also suggests that positive impact can be had after just one SHAPE experience.
- Learners were asked to indicate if the workshops had helped them understand how SHAPE subjects are connected to everyday life. 40% of learners strongly agreed or agreed. Learner responses were very comparable between female and male learners for positive statements, with 39% and 41% selecting strongly agree and agree respectively, suggesting comparable outcomes for female and male learners. This is mirrored throughout the data suggesting that the workshops were appropriate and interesting to both male and female learners.
- Learners offered a variety of comments about the things they enjoyed most about the workshops, these included the opportunity to work as a team and an enjoyment of using creativity and design skills, as well as to use their imagination. These comments suggest that learners were able to reflect on what they personally enjoyed about the SHAPE experience.



These findings suggest that the SHAPE approach and workshops continue to be enjoyable and interesting to learners, and support learners' understanding of SHAPE and in particular, the range of skills that one uses. This is despite 75% of learners undertaking only one workshop in Phase 2 compared to three workshops in Phase 1. The findings also suggest that learners are confused about the STEM acronym which in turn provokes confusion about SHAPE.

Overall, there is clear evidence that both teachers and learners benefit from engaging with the SHAPE approach and that more sustained engagement, as was the case in Phase 1, generates even more significant short-term impact.

Recommendations

The following set of recommendations are based on the evaluation findings and are made with a view to further funding being made available to support the work of SHAPE in Schools.

- 1. SHAPE needs to review its relationship to STEM, as well as investigate learner understanding of both.** SHAPE was developed on the basis that STEM was a well-understood acronym amongst learners. Evidence from this evaluation suggests that there is confusion amongst the student body about what subjects STEM includes. English was often mistaken as STEM while physics, chemistry and biology were frequently considered social sciences. Better understanding learners' interpretations of SHAPE and STEM will support efforts to profile SHAPE's relationship with and to STEM. The drawing together of the two will continue to be important.
- 2. SHAPE needs to clearly define its messages to determine whether it wishes to profile clearly the individual subjects it encompasses or whether it is comfortable with an emphasis on skills and interdisciplinarity.** These two phases have shown that despite the efforts made by SHAPE, there is a lack of clarity about which subjects come under its umbrella. This is affected by wider contextual factors such as the fact that schools don't use social science as a category for subjects. SHAPE needs to have a clear initiative to continually profile individual subjects or to continue with its interdisciplinary approach.
- 3. SHAPE needs to consider the role of the teacher in order to ensure consistent support and minimise pressures.** Throughout the two phases of SHAPE in Schools the pressures on teachers have been clear. SHAPE needs to review how it works with teachers in the longer-term in order to minimise the additional pressures it puts on teachers, regardless of any improvement in the wider public health context. Whilst teachers welcome additional support for their subjects, it is increasingly evident that their capacity to deliver workshops that fall outside core curriculum content is minimal at secondary school level.



- 4. SHAPE ought to review its aims for any continued work.** Current aims are aspiration and attitude focused with a lesser focus on the longitudinal impact on learners. It is worth reviewing current aims to ensure they meet the ongoing needs of SHAPE and consider again the value of longitudinal evaluation of learners that engage. This does have significant resource and cost implications but would further develop understanding of the impact of the approach. Current evidence is focused on short term impacts. Mid- and long-term impacts could offer further important insights.
- 5. SHAPE needs to consider the wider marketing and communications relating to the SHAPE in Schools work and to develop a model that promises longer-term commitment from the project.** Schools would benefit from being able to leverage wider campaigns relating to SHAPE in order to maximise buy-in from the wider school community. This would also support recruitment of schools which has proved particularly challenging and resource intensive in this phase. Schools need to feel that SHAPE is committed to them, which in turn means providing a vision for the project that extends beyond one year. With a more wraparound approach to communications and a secure future for the project, schools are more likely to participate.
- 6. The SHAPE training has continued to be effective and beneficial and could be redeveloped for other audiences/purposes.** The SHAPE training continues to be well-liked and purposefully implemented. SHAPE could consider other areas where the SHAPE training might be mobilised to further develop the aims of the SHAPE initiative. Creative practice and discussion-based practices stimulated by the workshops and training were most identified by teachers as key features that they had enjoyed and implemented.
- 7. SHAPE ought to consider the sustained nature of any intervention it delivers going forward given that Phase 1 generated stronger impacts.** SHAPE will need to strike a balance between flexibility in approach and maximising impact. Phase 1 insisted learners undertake three workshops, and impact was stronger. Phase 2 was more flexible and 75% of learners only engaged with one workshop and although impact was positive, it was less marked than in Phase 1. Balancing impact against flexible approaches will require careful consideration for any future phase.

Authors

Lucy Jenkins

**Email:**

L.Jenkins1@lse.ac.uk
JenkinsL27@cardiff.ac.uk

Twitter: @2210Lucy

LinkedIn: [Lucy Jenkins](#)

Lucy Jenkins is the Programme Manager for MFL Mentoring, a project funded by Welsh Government to increase the number of young people opting to study international languages across schools in Wales. Lucy has led the development of the project since 2017, expanding the project to support the introduction of the Curriculum for Wales and most recently designing a communications strategy for international languages in Wales. Lucy has contributed to the body of research associated with the project investigating language learning, learner motivations, multilingualism, digital practices and mentoring. Lucy also designed and developed a sister project called Language Horizons, a Department for Education funded digital mentoring project which ran between 2018-2020, to support languages uptake in schools across England. Lucy acted as Project Director for the duration of this project. Most recently, Lucy has been employed as an independent Education Consultant to develop a schools programme to support the British Academy SHAPE initiative, which aims to increase the visibility of social sciences, humanities and arts subjects across society.

Tallulah Machin

**Email:**

T.Machin@lse.ac.uk
ciao@tallulahmachin.com

Twitter: @TallulahMachin

www.tallulahmachin.com

Tallulah Machin is a freelance educator and researcher based in South Wales. She has been part of the design, implementation and evaluation of the SHAPE in Schools programme since its inception in November 2020, leading on interdisciplinary resource design and conducting research into the SHAPE landscape for schools across the UK. Her previous roles include working as Operations Manager for Language Horizons and MFL Mentoring, two projects aimed at improving learner attitudes in order to increase uptake of international languages at GCSE and A-level. Tallulah's expertise includes the creation of learning resources, the design of learning experiences based on mentoring methodologies and research into attitudinal and uptake challenges within education. Two recent pieces include a joint publication on preparations for the Curriculum for Wales and a report based on findings from learner surveys conducted by schools who participated in MFL Mentoring in 2021-22.



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For more information about SHAPE, contact
SHAPE@thebritishacademy.ac.uk