



**REACH**

**FOR**

**EXCELLENCE**

Progress report: 2016/2017







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### **REACH FOR EXCELLENCE**

The Reach for Excellence (RfE) programme supports young people who demonstrate the potential to study at a top university but who may not have considered entry to research intensive Higher Education. Throughout the two year programme participating students are given a taste of university life and gain the necessary skills and experience for a successful transition into Higher Education.

### **THE UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS: COMMITTED TO WIDENING PARTICIPATION**

The University of Leeds has a long standing commitment to helping the brightest and the best students to progress to higher education, regardless of background. As the University's flagship widening participation scheme, Reach for Excellence is a vital component of the outreach and widening participation work delivered by the Educational Engagement Team, which engages learners from primary school through to sixth form. The Reach for Excellence programme has been able to provide sustained and meaningful support to over 1100 local sixth form students in the last five years. Innovative engagement approaches have allowed the programme to expand its reach and content with the introduction of sector-leading initiatives to adapt and respond to students' changing needs. Reach for Excellence has also inspired the development of a Year 11 scheme, the Thomas Transition Programme (TTP), which is funded by other Alumni donors to work with several partner schools in the area to support progression to further and higher education.



**More than 1,100 6th form students  
participated in Reach for Excellence  
2011/12 to 2015/16**

### **THE THOMAS TRANSITION PROGRAMME**

The Thomas Transition Programme aims to increase self-confidence and reduce some of the pressure felt about the final stages of Year 11 and summer exams. It supports students with decisions about life after Year 11, providing workshops and advice about making the best choices for the future. Participants on the programme meet and work with current students studying at the University of Leeds, who will support sessions and be able to talk to students about what it's really like to go from Year 11, through post-16 education, and on to university study. Programme workshops are delivered in school to increase confidence with revision and exam preparation. These sessions also support students in planning for the future and life after Year 11. There's an opportunity to visit the University of Leeds campus and the possibility of taking part in a residential to experience life as a university student. Students selected to take part in Thomas Transition Programme are currently in Year 11 and have been identified by their school as being on course to achieve highly.

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*Hearing other students' experiences helped me to prepare for university because I received advice on how to approach the different stages. For example, students spoke about accommodation, discovery modules and assessments, all of which were very useful for when I got to university.*

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**Reach for Excellence graduate  
(currently studying BA History)**

## TARGETING THOSE FROM LESS-PRIVILEGED BACKGROUNDS

Social mobility and access to opportunities for students from less privileged backgrounds remains a huge issue within higher education. Evidence from UCAS (the central organisation through which applications are processed for entry to higher education) indicates that despite a general increase in entry of young people to higher education across all backgrounds, participation among students from the most disadvantaged backgrounds still increased at a much slower rate than for those from the most advantaged backgrounds (UCAS, 2015). The Office for Fair Access (OFFA, 2014) analysis of trends published in 2014 showed that the most advantaged 20 per cent of young people were 2.5 times more likely to go to higher education (overall) than the most disadvantaged 40 per cent over the period studied (1998/99 – 2012/13). At the most selective universities this ratio had remained broadly the same over the period: the most advantaged 20 per cent of young people were 6.3 times more likely to enter a selective university than the most disadvantaged 40 per cent.

### TARGETING SELECTION

In order to target the programme, selection of participants draws upon a range of criteria to enable those with limited opportunity to progress to a research-intensive university. To be eligible to join the programme, candidates must provide evidence of satisfying at least two of the following:

- They are the first generation of their immediate family to apply to Higher Education.
- They attend or have attended a school which achieved less than the national average 5 A\*-C passes (including English & Maths) at GCSE.
- Their only option is to attend a local university.
- Studies have been disrupted by circumstances in the applicant's personal, social or domestic life.
- The applicant lives in or grew up in public care.
- The applicant lives in a geographical area with low levels of progression on to Higher Education.
- They are in receipt of Free School Meals during their GCSE studies OR they are from a household with a gross income of £25,000 or below.



## PROGRAMME STRUCTURE

Reach for Excellence is a two-year programme of structured activities and support sessions coordinated and delivered by the Reach for Excellence Student Talent Spotting Team at the University of Leeds. Support is provided in the form of subject specific taster sessions, study skills workshops, impartial pre-entry guidance, finance and budgeting sessions, mentoring and a 5-day residential summer school. Each participant agrees (through a signed learner agreement) to take part in a number of engagement activities and events across the different areas of focus of the programme. To remain eligible students are asked to attend, as a minimum, three events taken from: Academic sessions, Personal development, Study skills, Extra options.



### ACADEMIC SESSIONS

Reach for Excellence offers a wide range of focused academic taster sessions across all university faculties with tailored support for students to get the most from them, to help with attainment in current studies and in making decisions about courses. We also take students along to selected first year undergraduate lectures, with tailored support to ensure they get the most from observing "real" higher education in action!



### PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

Reach for Excellence includes a comprehensive range of practical, advice, and guidance sessions including our famous "Get Set For Uni" sessions which cover aspects of preparing for university, from choosing courses to working out how to manage a student budget. We also offer specialist advice and guidance around finance and scholarships, career planning, and UCAS application support, which includes the opportunity to receive an individual UCAS personal statement consultation.



### STUDY SKILLS

Reach for Excellence includes a tailor made academic study and research skills programme which will help them in their current studies, and to hit the ground running at university. Every session is designed to build skills and confidence for the university study environment.



### EXTRA OPTIONS

Extra options include: the flagship intensive 5 day residential RfE summer school on the University campus, regular themed "web chats", and a range of enrichment activities which combine areas of academic interest, career exploration, and cultural experiences.

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*I was the first person in my family to go to university so it really was all unknown to me at the time of applying. I only became really aware of university when the Reach for Excellence team came into my secondary school. Without RfE I would have never learned about the Clinical Sciences course at Bradford, so I can definitely say that RfE is the reason I am on the path to making my childhood dream a reality.*

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Reach for Excellence graduate



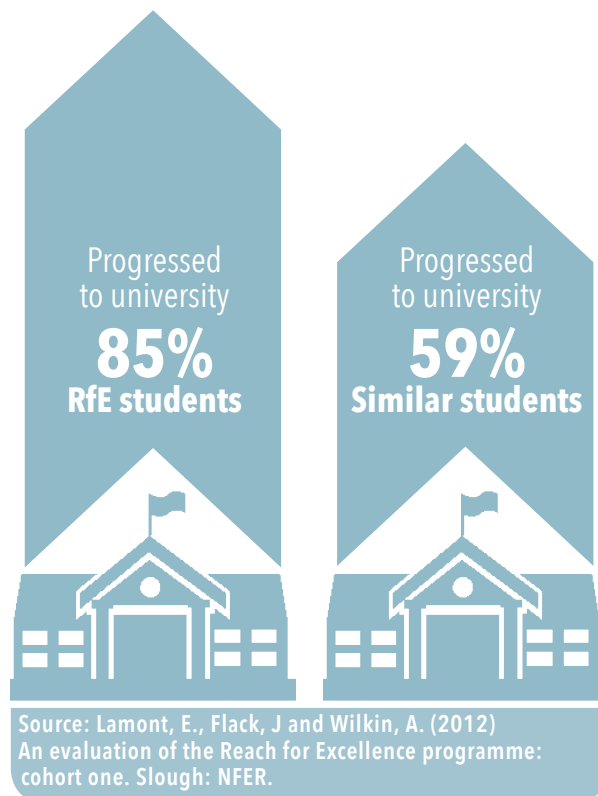
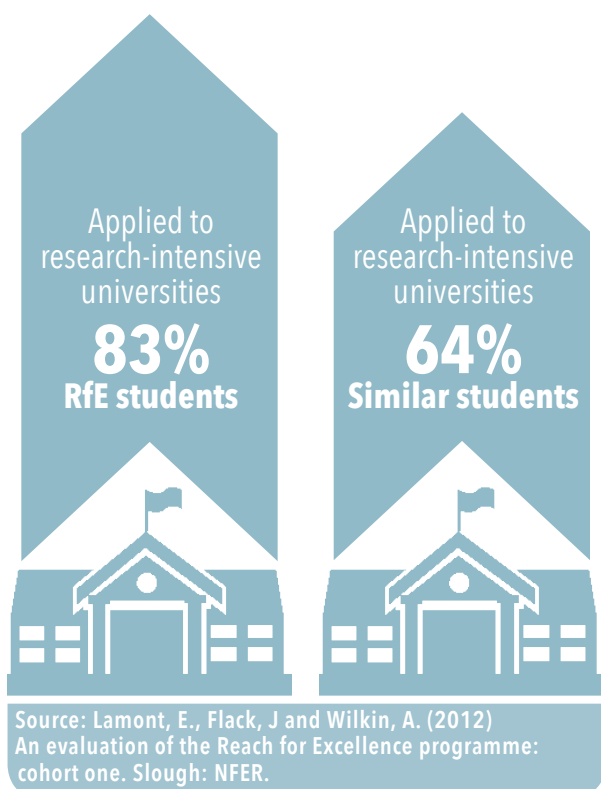




## KEY IMPACTS – PROGRESSION FROM THE PROGRAMME TO UNIVERSITY

A recent independent evaluation carried out by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) (Lamont et al, 2012) found that students on the Reach for Excellence programme were much more likely than similar students (those who had not engaged in the Reach for Excellence programme) to apply to enter a research intensive university.

The NFER research study also found that Reach for Excellence students were more likely to enter higher education generally: 85% of Reach for Excellence students gained a place at university compared with 59% of similar students (those who had not engaged in the Reach for Excellence programme).



### University graduates

Since the Reach for Excellence programme began, some participants have already progressed into university and have successfully graduated. Follow-up data on former students is time-consuming and difficult to harvest. However, nine of the first cohort of students have now successfully completed their degree-level studies at the University of Leeds. Of these 9 students, 8 obtained a First (I) or Upper Second (IIi) class degree. Many more students from this first cohort are on track to complete their degree studies but have not yet done so (some decided to take a gap year following their A-levels, others may also have undertaken degrees with an additional industrial/placement year element).

## KEY IMPACTS – LEARNING GAIN AND DEVELOPMENT WITHIN THE PROGRAMME

The Reach for Excellence programme enables participants to develop a baseline of their skills and abilities in order to monitor and support their own learning gain. To manage this development process the Reach for Excellence team have implemented an online reflective learning log for each participating student to use across the programme to support their learning journey. Participating students are encouraged to access the learning log at key points during the programme in order to assess and monitor various elements of their learning progress. To support this, a suite of statement questions have been devised that focus on crucial elements of the Reach for Excellence programme content. These are:

- My thoughts on university.
- Self and time management.
- Financial literacy.
- Academic skills.
- Commercial awareness.

Snapshot assessments (undertaken by the participants) are sought at the beginning of the programme, at the end of Year 12 (following the Reach for Excellence Summer school) and finally after October half-term (in Year 13).

The statement questions used in the learning logs facilitate a longitudinal look at learning gain across the cohort, and enable individual students to reflectively consider their own progress in a structured way. They also have the opportunity to download their results to use constructively in meetings with school and others - such as mentors or personal tutors (they are particularly useful for UCAS personal statement consultations and progress review sessions).





## LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT GAIN

Our analysis is based on responses received from the Reach for Excellence participants towards the beginning of their programme journey, compared to responses received to the same statement questions approximately 6 months later.

Towards the beginning of the Reach for Excellence programme, the highest average scores were received for statements about understanding what to expect from higher education, knowing how to implement effective examination techniques, understanding the costs of studying for a degree, utilising appropriate problem-solving tools and techniques, and getting the most out of working as part of a team or on their own. Such intelligence data has been useful for the Reach for Excellence programme team as this has enabled resourcing and effort to be targeted in the early stages of the programme.

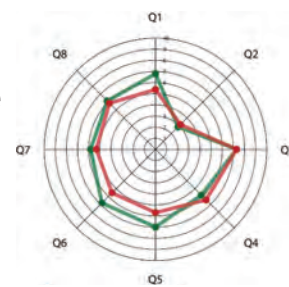
The most positive and considerable gains, from the participants own perspective (collected after having experienced some of the provision on offer as part of the Reach for Excellence programme) were in relation to the application process for university, applying for funding, seeking advice and a greater knowledge and understanding of university marking scheme. Participants also indicated positive learning gains in many other areas; we have selected the most positive gains to report here.

Statement area	Confidence/skill level increase (first 6 months)
I am confident about writing my UCAS personal statement.	57% ▲
I understand the UCAS application process including what I need to do, and when.	47% ▲
I understand how to search for/apply for bursaries and/or scholarships for which I may be eligible.	53% ▲
I understand where I can go to obtain advice and guidance regarding financial matters at university.	45% ▲
I understand how to interpret university marking schemes and to relate them to my work.	45% ▲

## LEARNING GAIN TOOL: HOW IT WORKS

The Learning Gain reflective tool seeks responses to statements from each Reach for Excellence participant. Responses are given on a scale from 1 to 10 (where 1 equals strongly disagree or this very rarely happens/is the case; 10 equals strongly agree or this always happens/is the case).

Responses to statements are then averaged across the entire group to determine scores or ratings at a particular point in the participants Reach for Excellence programme journey. Differences between measurement point averages are calculated and this produces the learning gain/development or distance travelled in that statement area.



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*The Reach for Excellence scheme has helped me in Year 12 to develop my abilities and skills for A-Levels and to improve my academic performance in school ... the University of Leeds has allowed me to research different career pathways so I can choose a career that best suits me. Also, it has boosted my confidence and self-esteem as I've been able to meet and socialise with different people from across Yorkshire.*

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Reach for Excellence student

## REFERENCES

Lamont, E., Flack, J and Wilkin, A. (2012) An evaluation of the Reach for Excellence programme: cohort one. Slough: NFER.

OFFA (2014) Trends in young participation by student background and selectivity of institution. London: Office For Fair Access.

UCAS (2015) End of cycle report 2015. Cheltenham: UCAS analysis and research.









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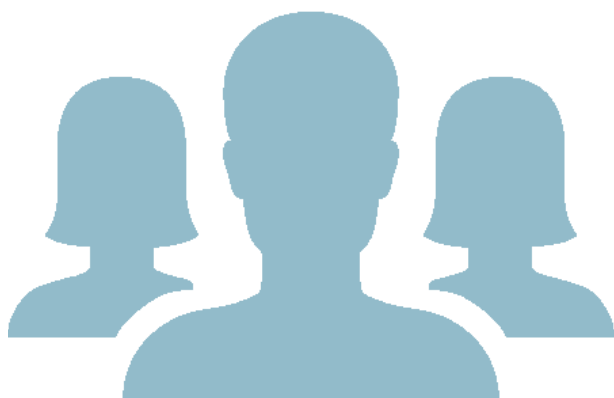
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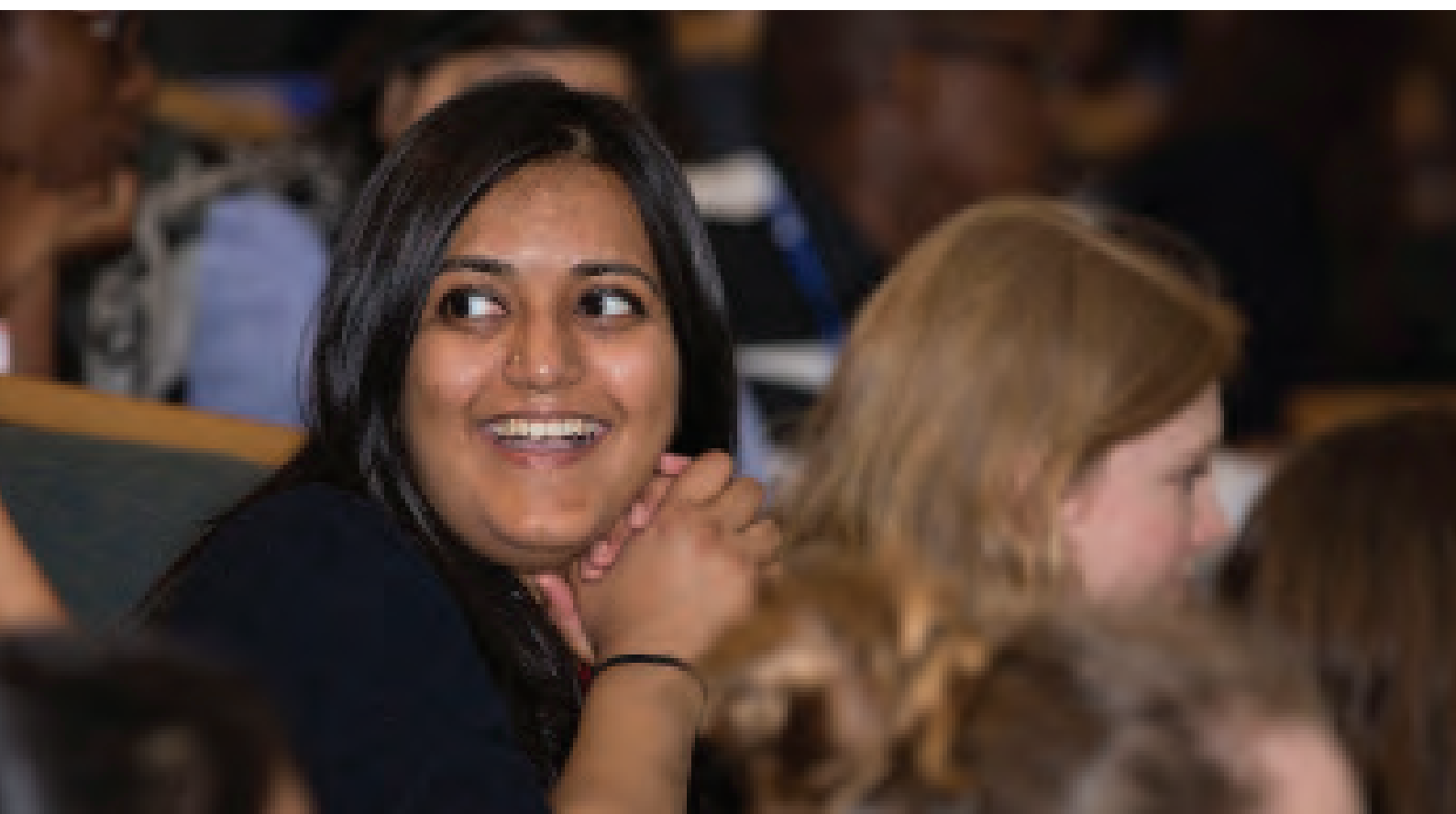
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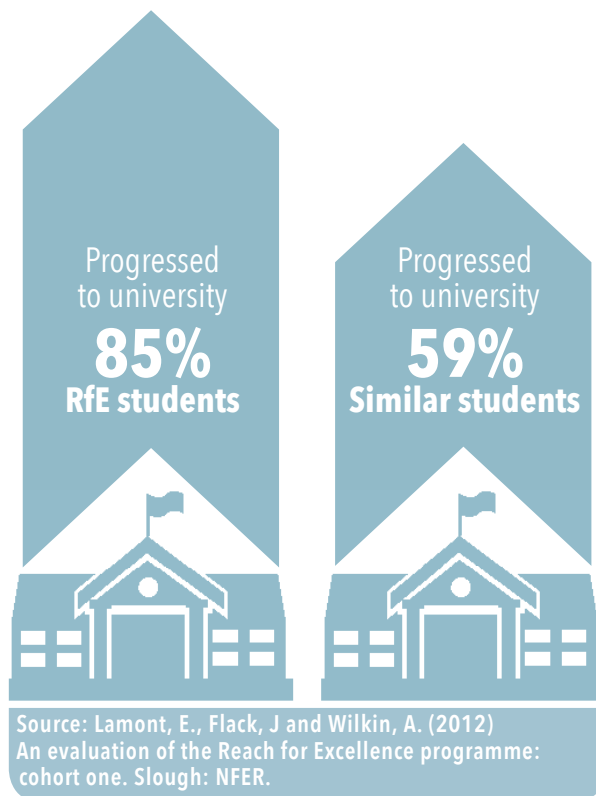
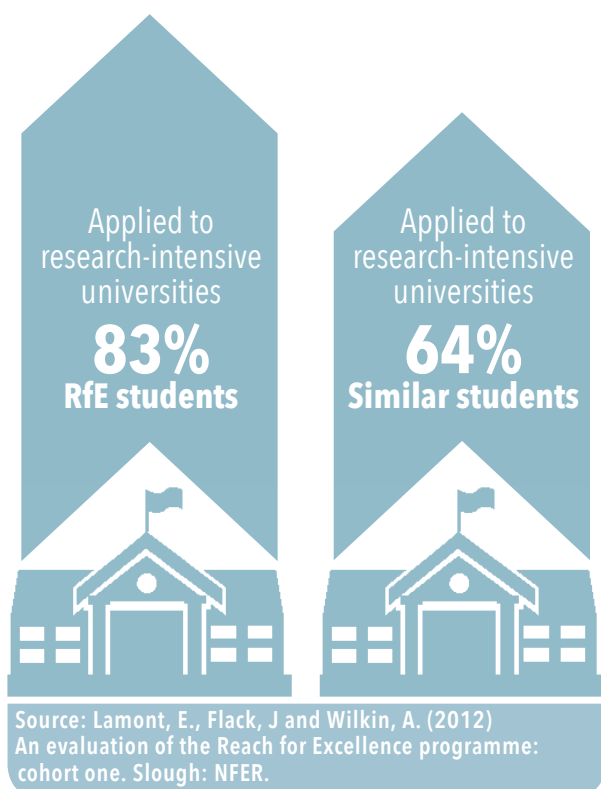




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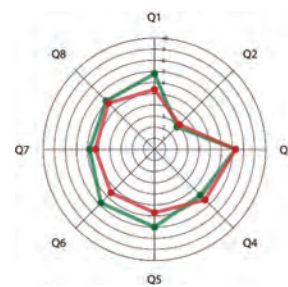
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Reach for Excellence student

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