



Report

Final report for the Sutton Trust

Evaluation of the Reach for Excellence Programme

Longitudinal Report for
Cohorts 1 and 2

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Executive Summary

The Reach for Excellence programme (RfE) aims to support able young people from disadvantaged backgrounds in Yorkshire to gain a place at a top university. It is run by the University of Leeds, and funded by the Lloyds TSB Foundation. This report sets out the findings from the longitudinal research that tracks the first and second cohort of students to engage in the programme and is part of a larger evaluation being carried out by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER).

The first cohort of RfE students enrolled in 2007 and left the programme in July 2009. Eighty-five per cent of the RfE students went on to gain a place at university in September 2009. Just less than one-half (45 per cent) of the RfE students, for whom destination data is known, entered research intensive universities¹.

The second cohort of RfE students enrolled in 2008 and left the programme in July 2010. Eighty-one per cent of the RfE students in cohort 2 went on to gain a place at university. In total, 44 per cent of the RfE students in cohort 2 progressed onto research intensive universities.

Methodology

The findings are based on three data sources:

- proforma responses from 39 of the RfE cohort 1 students
- proforma responses from 54 of the RfE cohort 2 students
- survey-style telephone interviews conducted with 13 of the cohort 2 RfE students.

Key findings

Cohort 1: [update on destination and progress](#)

From the 39 proforma responses received this year, an overwhelming majority (37) of cohort 1 RfE students are currently at university. Of the two students not attending university at the time of the research, one is in a job with training and one has been re-sitting 'A' Level examinations.

¹ For the purposes of this research, research intensive universities have been classified as universities in the Russell Group or the 1994 group. This includes (Russell Group): Birmingham; Bristol; Cambridge; Cardiff; Edinburgh; Glasgow; Imperial College, London; King's College London; Leeds; Liverpool; London School of Economics & Political Science; Manchester; Newcastle; Nottingham; Oxford; Queen's, Belfast; Sheffield; Southampton; University College, London; Warwick and (the 1994 Group): Bath, Birkbeck, Durham, East Anglia, Essex, Exeter, Goldsmiths, Institute of Education, Royal Holloway, Lancaster, Leicester, Loughborough, Queen Mary, Reading, St Andrews, School of Oriental and African Studies, Surrey, Sussex, York.

Students have not changed their university location or course since 2010; the University of Leeds remains the most commonly attended university while psychology and medicine remain the most popular courses.

None of the students returning a proforma had started university and subsequently abandoned university studies. This suggests that retention rates remain high among RfE students two years after completing the programme.

RfE students continue to achieve high grades in their university course in the second year. The most commonly achieved grades are at 2:1 (21 students). Four students have received marks equivalent to a First Class grade and a further four have achieved a 2:2 level.

Cohort 2: Post school/college destinations of RfE students

From the 54 proforma responses received, the majority (47) of the RfE students are current university students, while seven are planning to attend university in the future. These students are currently taking a gap year or have been re-sitting their A' Level examinations.

Of the 47 RfE students currently attending university, the majority are attending universities in West Yorkshire, in particular, Bradford University and the University of Leeds. Just under one-half are attending research intensive universities, most of which are in close proximity to West Yorkshire, for example, the University of Sheffield, Durham University, Lancaster University or The University of Manchester.

None of the students returning a proforma had started university and subsequently abandoned university studies, although one student has changed course. This suggests that retention rates are also high among cohort 2 RfE students.

Cohort 2 students are generally achieving high grades in their first year. Indeed, the most commonly achieved grade is at 2:1 level, achieved by 18 students. Seven students are achieving First Class grades, while seven are achieving grades at a 2:2 level.

Cohort 2: Perceived impacts of the RfE programme

Young people participating in the interviews identify a wealth of benefits accruing to them as a result of participation in the RfE programme. These include:

- help with applying to university
- developing social skills
- insight into university life
- provision of information on student finance
- confidence
- acquiring study skills
- help with university choices.

This list reflects the impacts that were also reported by cohort 1 students when they were interviewed last year.

A majority of RfE pupils from cohort 2 feel that the programme did indeed help them to effectively plan for their future. The high rating of the overall helpfulness of RfE suggests that students continue to acknowledge the value of participating in the programme.

Just over half of the interviewees feel that they 'probably wouldn't have ended up at university' if they hadn't attended the RfE programme. However, the majority of students disagree that attending the RfE programme *helped* them make the decision to attend university. Indeed, 96 per cent of the cohort 2 students already planned to attend university when they filled in a baseline survey in the autumn of 2008.

Interviewees have identified any aspects of the RfE programme that they have found particularly helpful. The top four most frequently identified aspects of the programme are:

- meeting other people
- summer school
- subject-specific sessions
- financial sessions.

Conclusions

The data gathered from the cohort one students shows that they have remained engaged in their university courses, and demonstrates the longevity of the benefits of the RfE programme.

As with cohort 1, none of the students in cohort 2 who returned a proforma reported that they left university before completing their first year, and they are confident that they had made the right university choices. This may imply that the RfE programme equips the students with the skills and information to make the informed choices regarding university and therefore reduces the likelihood of students dropping out of their studies.

One of the main impacts of the programme for the second cohort of students is that the programme has helped them to succeed in gaining a place at university. The programme appears to have provided students with the motivation and practical skills to achieve a place at university. Without this support some of these students feel that they may not have achieved entry to the university or course of their choice.

Overall, the longitudinal evaluation suggests that the benefits accrued by the students involved in the RfE programme may have helped participants, not only access university in the first instance, but also to retain those students on their course.

1. Introduction

1.1 About the Reach for Excellence programme and the evaluation

The Reach for Excellence Programme (RfE) aims to support able young people from disadvantaged backgrounds in Yorkshire to gain a place at a top university. It is run by the University of Leeds and funded by the Lloyds TSB Foundation. This report sets out the findings from the longitudinal research that tracks the first and second cohort of students to engage in the programme and is part of a larger evaluation being carried out by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER). The overall evaluation aims to explore the university progression of the RfE students; their awareness of Higher Education (HE) options and of funding available; and to track how many RfE students attend a research intensive university.

1.2 Methodology

This report presents data from the longitudinal follow-up of the first cohort of RfE students, who completed the programme in 2009, and the second cohort of RfE students, who completed the programme in 2010. The first cohort have been pursuing their post-school/college paths for approximately two years and the second cohort have been pursuing these paths for approximately one year.

The findings are based on the following data sources:

- proforma responses from 39 cohort 1 RfE students
- proforma responses from 54 cohort 2 RfE students
- survey-style telephone interviews conducted with 13 of the cohort 2 RfE students.

The proforma

In June 2011, a short proforma was mailed to every RfE student in cohort 1 (those who had completed the programme in summer 2009). The proforma contained questions on students' destinations after finishing school, including details on their university studies and whether they had changed university or course since starting their study. Please see appendix A for further detail.

At the same time, a short proforma was mailed to every RfE student in cohort 2 (those who had completed the programme in summer 2010). The proforma contained questions on students' destinations after finishing school, including details on their university studies. Please see appendix B for further details.

For both cohorts, follow-up telephone calls, text messages and emails containing a link to an online version of the proforma were sent to students to maximise the response rate.

In total, 39 proforma responses were received out of a possible 91 cohort 1 RfE students (a response rate of 43 per cent). For cohort 2, a total of 54 responses were received out of a possible 114 (a response rate of 47 per cent).

The telephone interviews

During July and August 2010, a NFER researcher conducted brief telephone interviews with 13 RfE students in cohort 2. These interviews were carried out with young people who had indicated that they were happy to take part in an interview, or in some cases with students with whom telephone contact was made whilst seeking proforma responses. The interviews sought to gain an understanding of how students felt their involvement in RfE had impacted on them, approximately one year after leaving school/college.

1.3 Report structure

The report contains the following:

- an update on cohort 1 destinations and progress
- post-school/college destinations of cohort 2 students
- perceived impacts of the RfE programme on cohort 2 students
- concluding comments.

2. The destination and progress of cohort 1 students

This section provides an update on the Cohort 1 students two years after completing the RfE programme. We look at any changes in the current destinations of these students and subjects being studied. We also consider any changes in the grades they are achieving and their current accommodation arrangements.

2.1 Destinations of cohort 1 students in 2011

From the 39 proformas received in 2011, an overwhelming majority (37) of the RfE students are currently attending university two years after completing the RfE programme. Two are currently not at university. Of these two, one has gone back to college to re-sit A' Levels while another is in a job with training. . These findings are in line with the results seen in 2010 and indicate that for those who have attended university, the retention rate has been 100 per cent. Indeed, for those students who completed proformas in both 2010 and 2011, there is consistency of results across the two time-points with students who were at university in 2010 remaining so in 2011.

2.2 RfE students attending university

Based on the 37 students attending university two years after completing the RfE programme, this section gives a brief update on their current university destination and course.

2.2.1 Universities attended

As was seen in 2010, the 37 RfE students are attending a range of universities across England. These are predominantly in the West Yorkshire region, and as with 2010, **the most common university destination is the University of Leeds** (16 RfE students). The University of Bradford and Leeds Metropolitan University are the next most commonly attended, although far fewer students are attending these universities (four and three, respectively).

Around two thirds of RfE students are attending research intensive universities (25 out of 37)². These tend to be universities within close proximity to West

² For the purposes of this research, research intensive universities have been classified as universities in the Russell Group or the 1994 group. This includes (Russell Group): Birmingham; Bristol; Cambridge; Cardiff; Edinburgh; Glasgow; Imperial College, London; King's College London; Leeds; Liverpool; London School of Economics & Political Science; Manchester; Newcastle; Nottingham; Oxford; Queen's. Belfast; Sheffield; Southampton; University College, London; Warwick and (the 1994 Group): Bath, Birkbeck, Durham, East Anglia, Essex, Exeter, Goldsmiths, Institute of Education, Royal Holloway, Lancaster, Leicester, Loughborough, Queen Mary, Reading, St Andrews, School of Oriental and African Studies, Surrey, Sussex, York.

Yorkshire, such as the University of Leeds (16 students), the University of Manchester (two students), Lancaster University, the University of York and Durham University (one student each).

All students who responded to the proforma in 2010 and 2011 are currently attending the same university as they were in 2010, indicating that none of these students have changed university.

2.2.2 Subjects studied

The RfE students attending university are studying a wide variety of subjects. The returned proformas indicate that students have generally not changed courses since their first year of study, with the most commonly identified areas of study remaining:

- psychology (6 students)
- medicine (5 students)
- engineering (3 students)
- clinical science (2 students).

Of those students who completed proformas in 2010 and 2011, one student had changed courses between these two survey points. A further one student, who did not return a proforma in 2010, had changed their course twice since starting university in 2009.

2.2.3 Achievement levels

RfE students responding to the proforma were asked to indicate the grades they had received in 2011. Generally, students' results in 2011 show consistency with the high grades they achieved in the first year of study. The most commonly achieved grades are at 2:1 (21 students). Four students have received marks equivalent to a First Class grade and a further four have achieved a 2:2 level. Two students have received a Third class grade while none of the students have received a non-passing grade. There has been a reduction in the numbers of students who do not know their grade or have been given other types of grading such as pass/fail. The increase in students' awareness may be because students have moved into their second year of university study and therefore may be more aware of the grading structure. Another reason, indicated by some of the comments from the students, may be that some universities use a different grading system in the first year of a course (for example 'pass/fail') but start to use the traditional university grading system in the second year of a course.

2.2.4 Accommodation choice

Living at home is still the most popular choice among RfE students, two years after completing the programme. This is perhaps not surprising given that the majority of students are attending universities in close proximity to their home. Indeed, 22 of the 37 responding cohort 1 students attending university are living at home.

2.2.5 Completion of course

The majority of students are due to finish their university course in 2012, consistent with a three-year degree programme. Nine students will finish in 2013. This includes students studying 4-year courses such as French and those who have taken a gap year. Six students will finish in 2014. This includes students studying medicine and also two students who have changed their course since starting university. One student studying medicine is due to complete their course in 2015.

2.3 RfE students not currently attending university

Two of the young people who returned proformas are not currently university students. Of these two, one has gone back to college to re-sit A Levels while another, who decided not to go to university, is still in a job with training, as they were in 2010.

3. The destination and progress of cohort 2 students

The following sections relate to the second cohort of RfE students one year after completing the RfE programme. From the 54 proforma responses received, the majority (47) of students are currently studying at university, while the other seven are planning to attend university in the future.

3.1 RfE students attending university

The following section outlines students' university destinations and subjects studied, as well as students' level of academic achievement during the second cohort of RfE students' first year at university. It also includes details on students' accommodation arrangements.

3.1.1 RfE students attending university

The 47 RfE students are attending a range of universities across England. These are predominantly in the West Yorkshire region, but smaller numbers of students report attending universities across a number of northern cities, such as Durham and Lancaster and universities in the south of England, such as Reading and Oxford.

The most common university destination for the RfE students who returned the proforma is the University of Bradford (attended by 20 RfE students). This reflects the destination data for cohort 2, in which the largest proportion of students attend the University of Bradford. The University of Leeds is the second most common university destination for those responding to the proforma (nine students). These two universities are considerably more popular destinations than any of the other universities for the cohort 2 RfE students.

Around two fifths of the RfE students in cohort 2 who have gone on to university study (19 out of 47) are attending research intensive universities³. These tend to be universities within close proximity to West Yorkshire, such as the University of Leeds (nine students), the University of Manchester (two students), Lancaster University (one student), the University of Sheffield (one student) and Durham University (one student). However, a smaller number of RfE students have gone on to attend research intensive universities further afield, such as the University of Oxford and

³ For the purposes of this research, research intensive universities have been classified as universities in the Russell Group or the 1994 group. This includes (Russell Group): Birmingham; Bristol; Cambridge; Cardiff; Edinburgh; Glasgow; Imperial College, London; King's College London; Leeds; Liverpool; London School of Economics & Political Science; Manchester; Newcastle; Nottingham; Oxford; Queen's, Belfast; Sheffield; Southampton; University College, London; Warwick and (the 1994 Group): Bath, Birkbeck, Durham, East Anglia, Essex, Exeter, Goldsmiths, Institute of Education, Royal Holloway, Lancaster, Leicester, Loughborough, Queen Mary, Reading, St Andrews, School of Oriental and African Studies, Surrey, Sussex, York.

Imperial College London, Queen Mary University of London, the University of Reading and Loughborough University.

Of the interviewees who are attending university, nine feel that they have made the right decision about which university to attend, while just one student feels that he has not made the right decision, although no explanation was given for this. One student did not provide a response to this question.

3.1.2 Subjects studied

The RfE students in cohort 2 currently attending university are studying a wide variety of subjects. The most commonly identified areas of study are:

- medicine (four students)
- pharmacy (four students)
- chemistry (three students)
- clinical science (three students)
- biomedical science (three students)
- mathematics (two students).

3.1.3 Achievement levels

RfE students from cohort 2 responding to the proforma were asked to indicate the grades they had received in their first year of university study. Students are generally achieving high grades in their first year. Indeed, the most commonly achieved grade is at 2:1 level, achieved by 18 students. Seven students are achieving First Class grades, while seven are achieving grades at a 2:2 level. Fifteen students indicated that they do not know what their grade equivalent is, or indicated that they have received passing or merit grades (this is particularly the case for students studying courses allied with medicine). None of the students have indicated that they are achieving grades equivalent to a Third or non-passing grade. This indicates that students are continuing to be high achievers at university.

3.1.3 Accommodation choice

The majority of RfE students attending university (33 out of 47) are living at home during the term time, rather than in university accommodation. This is unsurprising given the proportion of students attending universities in West Yorkshire. Indeed all students who are living at home attend universities in Bradford, Leeds (including University of Leeds, Leeds Metropolitan University and Leeds Trinity University) and Huddersfield. It may be that staying at home is an appealing option, especially considering the economic concerns of the past 18-24 months.

All of the students who were interviewed and are currently at university (ten students) feel that they have made the right decision about whether to live independently or at home. Of those who are living at home, two would have liked to have gone into

student accommodation as they had experienced it on the summer school, but for financial reasons have chosen to stay at home. For another student living at home, the summer school made her realise that she could still get involved in university life and join different societies even if she decided to live at home. Two of the three students interviewed who are living in student accommodation feel that the experience of the summer school gave them the confidence to move away from home. One student did not provide a response to this question during the interview.

3.2 RfE students not currently attending university

Seven of the 54 RfE students returning proformas are not currently university students, but they are all planning to attend university in the future: four have taken a gap-year or have deferred entry to university, while three are re-sitting A' Level examinations. This demonstrates the high progression rates of RfE students into higher education.

None of the students returning a proforma had started university and subsequently abandoned university studies⁴. This suggests that, as with cohort 1, retention rates are high among RfE students.

⁴ One student, however, has progressed from a clinical sciences course at Bradford University to Medicine at the University of Leeds.

4. Perceived impacts of the RfE programme

This section explores the extent to which the second cohort of RfE students feel the programme has been helpful to them, and the benefits they identify as arising from their participation in the programme. The data for this section is taken from the interviews with the 13 RfE students in cohort 2.

It covers students' perceptions of:

- the benefits of their participation in the RfE programme
- how helpful RfE has been in supporting them to make decisions about university
- how helpful RfE has been in preparing them for university study.

4.1 Benefits of participating in the RfE programme

The 13 young people interviewed were asked about the benefits of their involvement in the RfE programme. All of the interviewees believe that they have benefited from being involved and are able to identify a wealth of ways in which the programme has supported them, both before attending university and also in their first year of study. The benefits cited by the young people are set out in order of frequency, below.

4.1.1 Help with applying to university

The majority of students interviewed feel that one of the benefits of the RfE programme is that it has supported them in applying to university (mentioned by ten of the 13 students). Information and sessions on the personal statement have been particularly valuable. Other students feel that they have gained a greater understanding of what universities look for in applicants. For example, one student learned that it is important to have work experience to make her stand out from other applicants.

Furthermore, some students feel that the RfE programme has helped to motivate them to achieve their goals and access university. This included students aiming to achieve higher grades after speaking to lecturers about what grades would help them gain entry to university. A few students believe that the motivational speakers encouraged them to apply to university.

The personal statement session really helped drive me in the right direction.

It [the summer school] showed me I could really excel in everything.

[RfE motivated me as it showed me that] you could be the one who is the standard one, the everyday one, or you could be the one excelling ... at that time I was just tagging along and going along with my mates.

4.1.2 Social skills and meeting new people

The majority of students interviewed (ten of 13 students) believe that the RfE programme has helped them to develop social skills that would be important at university and found meeting new people one of the most beneficial parts of the programme. In particular, the students feel that the summer school sessions, in which they were able to work in groups with other students, have been helpful for developing social skills. Some students believe this helped them to be confident in meeting new people once they attended university, and particularly with socialising with people from different backgrounds.

It really helped me, helped me open myself up.

4.1.3 Insight into university life

A high number of students (nine of the 13 students interviewed) feel that the RfE programme has benefited them by enabling them to experience university and learn about university life. In particular, students feel the structure of the summer school, with a timetable similar to what they would see at university was useful. They also benefited from learning about the facilities at university and insight into what university life would be like. These students feel that they were better prepared for university as a result of these experiences.

It prepared me for university.

RfE really showed me how university worked.

It was a bit like a university environment [at the summer school]. That was quite good. Quite unique.

4.1.4 Information on finances

Six of the students interviewed feel that the provision of information on university finance and financial support has been beneficial. Students found the information simplified the process of university funding, including the cost of university, the process of paying back loans and fees, the availability of scholarships and grants and how to apply for these forms of support. Importantly, students feel that this information made them feel more confident regarding financing their time at university.

The financial sessions told me everything about finance so I knew exactly about how to apply through student finance and put me at ease.

4.1.5 Confidence

Five students have placed a lot of value on the confidence they have developed as a result of being on the RfE programme, which they feel helped them during their first few weeks at university. Some of the students feel that they were more confident arriving at university compared to other students because of their familiarity with university campuses and their enhanced social skills.

4.1.6 Enhanced study skills

Five students recognise the value of the study skills sessions, and feel that these have been particularly useful since starting university study. Students particularly refer to their learning around organisation of their work, research skills, and guidance around avoiding plagiarising, referencing and presentation skills.

4.1.7 Help with university choices

Four students feel that the programme provided them with the information and experiences needed to help them make their choices regarding which university to attend or which course to study. Students particularly feel the sessions on different courses at the summer school helped them to make informed decisions about which course to choose. For example one student explained how the sessions helped her to choose which subject to study at university, while another student learnt that he could go on to study the course he wanted, despite not having the required A' Levels, by undertaking a foundation year at university.

4.2 Helpfulness of RfE in making decisions on university attendance

RfE students participating in the interviews were asked to what extent, on a scale of one to five, attending the RfE programme had helped them to effectively plan for their future. Twelve of the 13 interviewees indicated a score of four or five, where five was 'to a great extent'. The remaining interviewee responded with a score of three. **This indicates that a majority of the interviewed RfE students feel that the programme did indeed help them to effectively plan for their future.**

The students were also asked to indicate, on a scale of one to five, whether they agreed or disagreed with a number of statements pertaining to areas where the RfE programme might have been helpful.

The distribution of responses to these questions is displayed in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1: Influence of RfE on students' decision making

	Strongly disagree			Strongly agree	
	1	2	3	4	5
If I hadn't have participated in the RfE programme, I probably wouldn't have ended up attending university	0	2	3	4	2
Participating in the RfE programme helped me make my decision to attend university	4	4	1	1	1
Participating in the RfE programme helped me to decide which university to attend	0	2	2	6	1
Participating in the RfE programme helped me to decide which university course to undertake	2	2	1	4	2

Source: NFER Reach for Excellence Cohort 2 Longitudinal Interviews, 2011, n=11.

Just over half (six) of the interviewees agree to some extent with the statement that they 'probably wouldn't have ended up at university' if they hadn't attended the RfE programme. However, the majority of students disagree that attending the RfE programme *helped* them make the decision to attend university. This reflects the fact that 96 per cent of the cohort 2 students already planned to attend university when they filled in a baseline survey in the autumn of 2008.

The majority of students interviewed believe that the RfE programme helped them to decide which university to attend, while just over half indicate that the programme helped them to decide which course to undertake. This suggests that for the majority of students, while they may have already decided to attend university, the RfE programme helped them to decide which university to attend and what course to take.

4.3 Helpfulness of RfE in preparing students for university study

Interviewees were asked to rate the 'helpfulness' of the RfE programme across a number of areas. Unsurprisingly, the aspects of the programme identified as most helpful mirror the impacts that students identified independently, as presented in Section 4.1.

The responses show that **students' views on the helpfulness of RfE are overwhelmingly positive**, as shown in Table 4.2. Nearly all students (10 of the 11 students) responded with a four or five (which is toward the 'very helpful' end of the scale) when asked how helpful the RfE programme was, overall, in preparing them

for university study. None of the students interviewed feel that RfE has not been helpful to them.

Table 4.2: The helpfulness of RfE

How helpful has RfE been for you in the following areas?	Not at all helpful			Very Helpful	
	1	2	3	4	5
Developing your independent study skills	0	1	3	5	2
Giving you the belief that you were capable of university study	0	0	3	5	3
Giving you the confidence to proceed with your plans for attending university	0	0	2	5	4
Providing guidance on finances associated with university study	0	0	2	3	6
Providing you with information about university life in general	0	0	0	4	7
Developing your social skills	0	0	2	6	3
Preparing you for independent living ⁵	0	1	2	1	1
Overall, how helpful would you say that your participation in the RfE Programme was in preparing you for university study?	0	0	1	7	3

Source: NFER Reach for Excellence Cohort 2 Longitudinal Interviews, 2011, n=11.

The area where RfE is most commonly identified as helpful is for ‘providing information about university life in general’ (all students feel this is helpful). This was followed by ‘providing guidance on finances associated with university study’, ‘confidence’ and ‘developing social skills (for each of these nine of the 11 students have rated this as helpful, with a score of ‘four’ or ‘five’).

Interviewees have also freely identified any aspects of the RfE programme that they found particularly helpful. The five most useful aspects of the programme are:

- meeting other people (all students)
- the summer school (8 students)
- subject-specific sessions (7 students)
- financial sessions (7 students).

Overall, the high rating of the overall helpfulness of RfE suggests that students continue to acknowledge the value of participating in the programme, and the benefits that they enjoy as a result of their participation.

⁵ Asked only of those living away from home for university, n=5.

5. Conclusions

The data gathered from the cohort 1 students continues to demonstrate the longevity of the impact of the RfE programme on students. Those who took part two years ago are still engaged in university courses, indicating a sustained low level of attrition. This might also suggest that the impacts of RfE identified a year after completing the programme (Flack *et al.* 2011⁶) remain in their second year of university studies.

As with cohort 1, none of the students in cohort 2 who returned a proforma have left university before completing their first year, and they are confident that they had made the right university choices. Furthermore all students are either at university or are planning to attend university in the future. This may imply that the RfE programme equips the students with the skills and information to make informed choices regarding university, and therefore reduces the likelihood of students dropping out of their studies.

One of the main impacts of RfE for the second cohort of students is that they feel the programme helped them to succeed in gaining a place at university. Many of the students were already planning to attend university before they engaged with RfE, but the programme appears to have provided them with the motivation and practical skills to actually achieve this outcome. Without this support some of these students feel that they may not have achieved entry to the university or course of their choice.

Overall, the longitudinal evaluation suggests that the benefits accrued by the students involved in the RfE programme may have helped RfE participants, not only to access university in the first instance, but also helped to retain those students on their course. In summer 2012, the cohort 1 and 2 students will once again be contacted to see how they are progressing and to ascertain the final achievement levels of the cohort 1 students who will have completed their three year degree course.

⁶ Flack, J., Lamont, E. and Wilkin, A. (2011) *Evaluation of the Reach for Excellence Programme. Cohort 1 Longitudinal Report*. Slough: NFER.

Appendix A: Proforma Instrument

As you will be aware, the NFER have been carrying out an ongoing evaluation of the Reach for Excellence (RfE) programme, run by University of Leeds. Now that it has been about two years since you finished school/college and RfE, we're very keen to find out what you have been up to.

We'd really appreciate it if you could fill in the following form. It should only take you about five minutes. When you've finished, please place the form into the pre-paid envelope provided and post it back to us.

Please be assured that all of your details and responses will be kept confidential.

Your name:

Question 1: University Attendance

Are you a university student?

- Yes (If 'yes', please go to question 2)
 No (If 'no', please go to question 3)

Question 2: (Attending university)

Which university are you attending?

What course are you studying?

What has been your average grade over the past 12 months?

- First
 2:1
 2:2
 Third
 Non-passing grade
 Other (*please specify*)
 Don't know

When do you anticipate you will finish this course?

Have you changed universities, or courses, at any stage during your time at university?

- Yes
- No

If yes, please briefly describe the changes you made, and the reasons for the changes.

Change:
Reasons:

During term time, do you live...

- At home?
- In university accommodation?
- Other (*please specify*)

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(Please go to question 4)

Question 3: (Not attending university)

Which of the following best describes your circumstances?

- A. I decided not to attend university
- B. I took a gap year, or have been working, and intend to go to university in the future
- C. I started university, but have since stopped attending
- D. I have completed my university course
- E. I stayed at school/college to re-sit A levels, and I plan to go to university
- F. I stayed at school/college to re-sit A levels, and I don't plan to go to university
- G. I took a foundation course/ other qualification, and I plan to go to university
- H. I took a foundation course/ other qualification, and I don't plan to go to university
- I. Other (*please specify*)

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If you responded (A), what were the main reasons you decided not to attend university?

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If you responded (C), what were the main reasons you stopped attending university?

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Question 4: Your Details

What is your ethnicity?

- Black Caribbean
- Black African
- Indian
- Bangladeshi

- White
- Chinese
- Pakistani
- Mixed race (*please specify*)

- Other (*please specify*)

Please see below for the contact details we currently have for you. If any of these need changing, please cross it out and provide a more appropriate contact in the box provided

#Name#
#Address#
#Home phone#
#Mobile phone#
#Email address#

Thank you very much for your time. We really do appreciate your ongoing involvement with the research.

Appendix B: Cohort 2 Proforma Instrument

As you will be aware, the NFER have been carrying out an ongoing evaluation of the Reach for Excellence (RfE) programme, run by University of Leeds. Now that it has been about one year since you finished school/college and RfE, we're very keen to find out what you have been up to.

We'd really appreciate it if you could fill in the following form. It should only take you about five minutes. When you've finished, please place the form into the pre-paid envelope provided and post it back to us.

Please be assured that all of your details and responses will be kept confidential.

Your name:

Question 1: University Attendance

Are you a university student?

- Yes (If 'yes', please go to question 2a)
- No (If 'no', please go to question 2b)

Question 2a: (Attending university)

Which university are you attending?

What course are you studying?

What has been your average grade over the past 12 months?

- First
- 2:1
- 2:2
- Third
- Non-passing grade
- Other (*please specify*)
- Don't know

When do you anticipate you will finish this course?

During term time, do you live...

- At home?
- In university accommodation?
- Other (*please specify*)

(Please go to question 3)

Question 2b: (Not attending university)

Which of the following best describes your circumstances?

- A. I decided not to attend university
- B. I have taken a gap year, or have been working, and intend to go to university in the future
- C. I started university, but have since stopped attending
- D. I have completed my university course
- E. Other (*please specify*)

If you responded (A), what were the main reasons you decided not to attend university?

If you responded (C), what were the main reasons you stopped attending university?

Question 3: Interview

We are looking to conduct telephone interviews with young people, such as yourself, who were involved in the Reach for Excellence Programme. The interviews will be very brief (10-15 minutes), and will explore areas such as whether Reach for Excellence has led to any benefits for you, or if it has affected your future plans.

Please indicate whether you would be happy to participate in such an interview this summer:

- Yes
- No

If yes, please indicate the most convenient way for us to contact you. (e.g. mobile number, email address)

Phone number:

Convenient times:

Question 4: Your Details

What is your ethnicity?

- Black Caribbean
- Black African
- Indian
- Bangladeshi
- White
- Chinese
- Pakistani
- Mixed race (*please specify*)

- Other (*please specify*)

Please see below for the contact details we currently have for you. If any of these need changing, please cross it out and provide a more appropriate contact in the space provided

#Name#

#Address#

#Home phone#

#Mobile phone#

#Email address#

Thank you very much for your time. We really do appreciate your ongoing involvement with the research.

Providing independent evidence to improve education and learning.

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