



**An evaluation of the
Reach for Excellence Programme**

Interim report

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Executive summary

Introduction

The Reach for Excellence Programme (RfE) aims to help able young people from disadvantaged backgrounds in Yorkshire gain a place at one of the country's leading research universities, as well as ensuring they enter higher education in general. It is run by the University of Leeds, and funded by the HBOS Foundation, with support from the Sutton Trust.

This report sets out the interim findings of an evaluation of the programme, carried out by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER). The evaluation will investigate the programme's impact on the university progression of the first cohort of RfE students, their awareness of Higher Education (HE) options and of funding available. It will track how many RfE students attend a leading research university, and higher education in general.

This interim report documents the composition of the students recruited for the programme, and explores some of the initial impacts the early stages of RfE has had so far. It will be followed by a final report in December 2009 which will document the university destinations of RfE students, comparing these with the outcomes of similar students who have not been on the programme.

Methodology

The interim findings are based on the following data sources:

- A baseline survey (focusing on data from 114 of the 120¹ students on the RfE programme at its inception)
- Telephone interviews with 30 sixth forms heads (or their college-based equivalents) after initial introduction to the programme
- Fourteen interviews with students and three focus groups (with a total of 15 different students) across three event visits
- A student proforma
- A parent proforma
- Interviews with programme managers.

¹ Six students enrolled on RfE did not complete the baseline survey. However, letters and additional copies of the survey were sent to students who did not complete a survey on two separate occasions in order to maximise response rates.

Key messages

- The findings highlighted in this interim report suggest that RfE is resulting in tangible benefits for the young people involved, despite the early stages of the programme at which data has been gathered.
- Students enrolled in RfE are predominantly from schools with below average academic achievements, are from relatively deprived households, are high academic achievers, and in most cases are first generation university applicants.
- After just seven months of RfE involvement, the students were considering a wider range of university destinations, with a higher propensity to identify leading research universities. Although external influences could have impacted on this finding, RfE students felt that the programme was helping them to decide where to apply and to identify the ‘top’ universities.
- Early indications suggest that RfE is also providing advice and experiences to equip students to apply to and subsequently participate in Higher Education. Information concerning financial support has been particularly valued.

Key findings from the baseline survey

- Sixty-one per cent of the students on the programme are female². They are largely from White British or Pakistani backgrounds (54 per cent and 31 per cent respectively).
- Eighty-eight per cent of the students on the programme are from families with low household incomes (as indicated by entitlement to the government’s Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA)); 86 per cent are first generation university applicants³.
- All but one of the students on the programme met at least two of the criteria used to select them for the programme. Seventeen per cent met three criteria or more. As well as being high achievers and capable of studying at a research-led university, students needed to meet at least two additional criteria from a list of four (to be receipt of an EMA; to be in public care; to be a first generation university applicant; or to have had their studies adversely affected).
- The young people enrolled are high academic achievers: 85 per cent have between ten and 18 GCSEs at A* to C. However, 58 per cent of students are from schools that achieve below the national average for GCSE scores⁴.

² This is slightly lower than other summer schools supported by the Sutton Trust and is largely a reflection of girls’ better GCSE attainment.

³ First generation university applicants are those who parents did not attend university.

⁴ In 2007, 46.7 per cent of pupils nationally achieved GCSEs at grades A* to C (including English and mathematics) Source: National Statistics: First Release. Available at: <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000768/sfr01-2008.pdf> [20August 2008]

- Ninety-five per cent of the young people on RfE were already planning to go to university at the time of the baseline survey⁵. However, only 47 per cent knew where they wanted to apply.
- The RfE students appear confident that university attendance will lead on to good jobs and better qualifications, and that it will be an enjoyable experience. However, they expressed apprehension about accruing debt and 28 per cent did not know what university would involve. Given that RfE aims to provide young people with financial information and an insight into university life, it is likely that these apprehensions will be reduced as a result of participation in the programme.
- Factors that would encourage/further encourage the young people to go to university were primarily whether they found a course that interested them and whether they knew they would get a good job and be better paid as a result. RfE aims to help students to find a course that interests them and to recognise the beneficial employment prospects open to graduates, so it is likely that more students may go on to university as a result of their RfE experience.
- The most useful sources of advice accessed by the students were ‘other’ family members (e.g. siblings or cousins), university staff and parents. Programmes such as RfE that provide young people with a high level of contact with university staff could therefore be extremely beneficial.
- At the time of the baseline survey, there was a considerable hunger for information on what going to university would involve. Largely, students were seeking information regarding the best universities for the subjects they were considering and on what subjects involved at university. They were also interested in information on financial support and how much attending university costs. Again, RfE aims to provide this information so it is possible that this will have positive impacts on progression to university.

Views of sixth form heads

- On first hearing about RfE, sixth-form heads felt that it would have a positive role in encouraging students to enter into HE. It was hoped this would be achieved through the provision of information to help students to make choices, practical assistance with applications, experience of university life, and by raising aspirations and confidence to apply to HE.

⁵ It should be noted that intentions to attend university may not necessarily equate to levels of subsequent attendance. Recent research carried out by MORI for the Sutton Trust reported that there is a high level of aspiration towards higher education among 11-16 year olds in state schools. Seventy per cent report that they are fairly or very likely to go on to university-led study. However, this contrasts with actual participation rates: 32 per cent of 17 – 20 year olds go on to university.
<http://www.suttontrust.com/reports/MORI2008.pdf>

- As well as RfE, it was felt that students could also be encouraged to progress to university through input from school staff, other school-based programmes and from support from parents.
- Factors felt to be discouraging students from applying to HE included: financial concerns; pressures to stay at home; negative perceptions of post-graduate employability; and low academic aspirations.
- Head of sixth forms identified some potential limitations of RfE: the requirement for students to give up free time; the 'strict' entry criteria; the distance from some students' homes to Leeds; small numbers of students attending from individual schools/colleges; and a lack of understanding of what RfE was about.
- Overall, the anticipated effects of RfE included: increased educational aspirations; a widening of choice for university destinations; increased academic attainment; and improved confidence.

Student perceptions of RfE

- Students applied to RfE in the hope that it would provide them with opportunities and information to enhance their progression into HE. They were seeking practical advice regarding applications and funding, and an insight into university life. Even at early stages of the programme, students reported that RfE had exceeded their initial (high) expectations.
- It is evident, despite the early stages at which data has been gathered, that RfE is having a considerable influence on the students. For example, the analysis suggests that since their involvement in the programme, students are considering a wider choice of university destinations, and feel that RfE has helped them to decide where to apply.
- RfE students are considering a wider range of Russell Group universities⁶ than prior to RfE, and more students are considering applying to them. Students indicated that RfE has been helpful in identifying the top universities to apply for.
- When choosing universities, RfE students are primarily basing their decisions on whether it is the best university for their chosen subject, the reputation of the university, course entry requirements and the quality of student life. This could be a result of RfE to date. Given that the programme aims to support the students in accessing this information, it is possible that students will make better informed decisions about university as a result of participation.
- RfE students have valued financial information regarding university attendance, advice on applications and details of different university courses. They also feel that RfE has raised their awareness about

⁶ The Russell Group of large research-led universities consists of: Birmingham, Bristol, Cambridge, Cardiff, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Imperial College, Kings College London, Leeds, Liverpool, London School of Economics, Manchester, Newcastle, Nottingham, Oxford, Queens University Belfast, Sheffield, Southampton, University College London, and Warwick.

university progression by providing insights into university life and a greater awareness of choice. Other early impacts include the development of social and study skills, improved confidence and raised aspirations.

- It was reported that the varied menu of activities offered by RfE and the campus/university-based experiences have been key factors contributing to the early impacts.

Parental perceptions of RfE

- At the launch event (in January 2008), parents filled in a short proforma to ascertain their hopes for the programme and their early perceptions.
- Two-thirds of the parents felt that gaining a place on RfE had an immediate effect on their son/daughter. Primarily, the young people were reported to be more motivated, more optimistic about their future and more focused on their achievements and progression to university.
- All parents felt that RfE would be beneficial for their son/daughter. It was hoped that it would enhance their confidence, widen their awareness of choices about university, provide an insight into university life and act as an incentive to fulfil their potential.
- Three-quarters of the parents reported that they felt differently about their child's future now that they were on the RfE programme. Largely, they were more positive about their son/daughter's future due to less concern about financing a university education. They were also more positive that their own non-attendance at university would not hinder their child's progression into HE.

1 Introduction

1.1 About the research

In 2007, the University of Leeds was awarded funding from the HBOS Foundation and the Sutton Trust to help able young people from disadvantaged backgrounds in Yorkshire to gain a place at a leading research university, and ensure they entered Higher Education in general. The Reach for Excellence programme (RfE) was subsequently established as the only university access programme of its kind in England. Over the duration of the programme, 360 16-18 year olds from Yorkshire schools are intended to benefit from regular advice sessions and lectures, a summer school, university visits and individual mentoring, with the overall aim of raising the aspirations, achievement, confidence and self-esteem of the young people involved. It also seeks to provide appropriate and impartial guidance in an environment that will stretch bright and capable students who may not have considered entry to prestigious research-led universities.

To ensure that the programme was targeted accurately, eligibility criteria were set for inclusion. Students were invited to apply for the programme from schools that had a low rate of progression to HE, but to take part in RfE candidates must also:

- live in Yorkshire
- have the potential to achieve 3 or more A-levels at grade B or above and to be a candidate for study at a leading research-led university
- have gained 5 or more GCSEs (including English Language and Mathematics) at grade C or above.

Candidates were also required to meet at least two of the following criteria:

- to be in receipt of an Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA)
- to be in public care
- to have had their studies disrupted or adversely affected by circumstances in their personal, social or domestic life
- be the first member of their family to apply to HE (excluding older brothers or sisters).

The Sutton Trust commissioned the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) to carry out an evaluation of the RfE programme. This involved tracking the first cohort of 120 students as they progressed from year 12 to year 13, supported by RfE. This report sets out the interim findings of the evaluation, by which time RfE students had been provided with the following sessions:

- a launch event, in January 2008
- four study skills and personal development events: time management, revision skills, researching and referencing, and ‘who wants to be an enterprise millionaire?’
- four subject specific events, including ‘contemporary China’, a medicine conference, a law session and an English Masterclass.
- the summer school, in July/August 2008.

1.2 Aims

The primary aim of the NFER evaluation is to ascertain how many pupils went on to a research led university (as well as entering HE as a whole) because of the scheme who would otherwise not have done so. In order to meet this aim, the study is also exploring the following research questions:

- Do pupils completing the RfE programme have a greater awareness of the options available to them, of the HE sector and of the funding available?
- How many pupils who complete the RfE programme enter higher education?
- How many pupils who complete the RfE programme secure a place and attend a research-led university?

These questions will largely be answered in the final report, due in December 2009. However, the findings in this interim report go some way to identify early findings of the impact of participation in RfE.

1.3 Methodology

These interim findings are based on the first three phases of data collection:

- the baseline survey
- telephone interviews with sixth form heads
- event visits

The baseline survey

In December 2007 and January 2008, before the students were informed of the RfE programme, 295 baseline surveys were completed and returned to NFER (see Appendix 1). Of these, 114 were from students who subsequently gained a place on the programme; 27 were from students who applied but did not gain a place; and the remaining 154 were from students who were eligible to apply, but chose not to. These latter groups will form the control group for the follow-up survey in spring 2009. The survey gathered information on the following:

- GCSE grades and A-levels being studied
- careers advice received to date
- parental attitudes towards university attendance
- intentions post-year 13
- reasons for/for not wanting to go to university
- information required about university
- family attendance at university.

The findings in this report are based on the responses of the 114 students on the RfE programme who filled in a baseline survey.

Telephone interviews with sixth form heads

Telephone interviews were carried out with 30 heads of sixth form (or their college-based equivalents) where students were invited to apply for the programme. Students from 26 of these schools/colleges subsequently gained places on the programme.

Event visits

NFER researchers have conducted three RfE event visits and gathered the following data:

- **Launch event** (February 2008). During this event, initial views on RfE were gathered from 37 parents via a proforma (see Appendix 3). Eight interviews were also carried out with students on the programme as well as two interviews with event organisers.

- **‘Who wants to be an enterprise millionaire?’** (May, 2008). Six interviews were carried out with students after this event, alongside an interview with programme organisers.
- **Summer School** (July/August, 2008). During this visit, 47 of the 48 young people in attendance at the summer school completed a proforma. This ascertained their current university intentions, the factors influencing their decisions, and the usefulness of RfE to date (see Appendix 2). Three focus groups, with 15 young people in total, were also conducted.

The methodology will be built upon during the academic year 2008-09 by the following:

- three more event visits, including interviews with the young people on the programme and with programme organisers and deliverers
- a follow-up survey of all pupils who filled in the baseline survey (March 2009)
- collating follow-up data from the sample of 30 schools regarding outcomes for all eligible pupils (September 2009).

Final findings from the evaluation will be provided to the Sutton Trust in December 2009.

1.4 Report structure

Findings are presented under the following chapter headings:

- Findings from the baseline survey
- Head of sixth form perspectives
- Student perceptions of the programme
- Parental perceptions of the programme
- Conclusions.

2 Findings from the baseline survey

Key findings

- The baseline survey was administered in December 2007 and January 2008 before the students were aware of the RfE programme. In total, 295 surveys were returned to NFER: 114 were from students who gained a place on the programme. In order to provide a description of the current RfE cohort, this section focuses purely on this baseline data.
- Sixty-one per cent of the students on the programme are female⁷. They are largely from White British or Pakistani backgrounds (54 per cent and 31 per cent respectively).
- Eighty-eight per cent of the students on the programme are from families with low household incomes (as indicated by entitlement to the government's Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA)); 86 per cent are first generation university applicants.
- All but one of the students on the programme met at least two of the criteria used to select them for the programme. Seventeen per cent met three criteria or more. As well as being high achievers and capable of studying at a research-led university, students needed to meet at least two additional criteria from a list of four (to be receipt of an EMA; to be in public care; to be a first generation university applicant; or to have had their studies adversely affected). The young people enrolled are high academic achievers: 85 per cent have between ten and 18 GCSEs at A* to C. However, 58 per cent of students are from schools that achieve below the national average for GCSE scores⁸.
- Ninety-five per cent of the young people on RfE were already planning to go to university at the time of the baseline survey. However, only 47 per cent knew where they wanted to apply.
- The RfE students appear confident that university attendance will lead on to good jobs and better qualifications, and that it will be an enjoyable experience. However, they expressed apprehension about accruing debt and 28 per cent did not know what university would involve. Given that RfE aims to provide young people with financial information and an insight into university life, it is likely that these apprehensions will be reduced as a result of participation in the programme.
- Factors that would encourage/further encourage the young people to go to university were primarily whether they found a course that interested them and whether they knew they would get a good job and be better paid as a result. RfE aims to help students to find a course that interests them and to recognise the beneficial employment prospects open to graduates, so it is

⁷ This is slightly lower than other summer school programmes supported by the Sutton Trust and is largely a reflection of girls' better GCSE attainment.

⁸ In 2007, 46.7 per cent of pupils nationally achieved GCSEs at grades A* to C (including English and mathematics) Source: National Statistics: First Release. Available at: <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000768/sfr01-2008.pdf> [20August 2008]

likely that more students may go on to university as a result of their RfE experience.

- The most useful sources of advice accessed by the students were ‘other’ family members (e.g. siblings or cousins), university staff and parents. Programmes such as RfE that provide young people with a high level of contact from university staff could therefore usefully be promoted.
- At the time of the baseline survey, there was a considerable hunger for information on what going to university would involve. Largely, students were seeking information regarding the best universities for the subjects they were considering and on what subjects involved at university. They were also interested in information on financial support and how much university costs. Again, RfE aims to provide this information so it is possible that this will have positive impacts on progression to university.

2.1 Introduction

This section of the report sets out the findings from the baseline survey, and provides an overview of the RfE cohort. It focuses specifically on the 114 young people who gained a place on the programme and who also completed a baseline survey (six students who enrolled on the programme did not return a survey). It also contains additional background information gathered by the programme organisers. Data on those who applied to RfE and did not gain a place, as well as on those who were eligible for RfE but did not apply, will be used as comparison groups in the final report.

The section covers:

- background characteristics of the students
- parent’s attitudes towards university
- intentions on leaving school
- reasons behind university intentions
- factors that would encourage university attendance
- sources of advice about university
- additional information required by students.

2.2 Background characteristics

Background characteristics of the current RfE cohort are given below. These are drawn from the baseline survey and also from data provided by the programme organisers.

Gender

Sixty-one per cent of students on the programme are female.⁹

Ethnicity

The ethnicity of 110 of the young people enrolled on RfE was gathered by the programme organisers and is provided in Table 2.1¹⁰.

Table 2.1: Ethnicity of 110 students on RfE

Ethnic background	Number of students (n=110)	Percentage
White British	59	54
Asian/Asian British (Pakistani)	34	31
Asian/Asian British (Indian)	8	7
Black/Black British (Caribbean)	3	3
Mixed (White and Black Caribbean)	2	2
Chinese	1	1
Black/Black British (African)	1	1
Mixed (White and Asian)	1	1
Other Asian	1	1

Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100

Source: University of Leeds, Access Academy.

As shown, 54 per cent of students on RfE are of White British origin, and 31 per cent are of Asian/Asian British (Pakistani) origin.

Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA)

Eight-eight per cent of the students are in receipt of an Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA) from the government. Recipients of an EMA must come from families with a household income of no more than £30,810 per year. Seventy-one per cent received the maximum amount of £30 per week, allocated only to families where household income is no more than

⁹ Source: University of Leeds, Access Academy.

¹⁰ Source: University of Leeds, Access Academy.

£20,817 per year. This indicates that the young people enrolled on RfE are from families with low household incomes.

Family attendance at university

Eighty-six per cent of students on RfE reported that neither their mother nor father¹¹ attended university. Ten per cent of students were from families where either their mother or father had attended university, and four per cent reported that both parents had attended.

Sixty-two per cent of students whose parents had not attended university also reported that none of their siblings had attended. In this sense, they were the first person in their immediate family to attend university. Thirty-eight per cent of students whose parents had not attended reported that their brother or sister (or both) had gone to university.

In 56 per cent of families where at least one parent had attended university, the students were the first of their brothers or sisters to attend.

These results suggest that, in line with entry criteria, the majority of students on RfE are first generation university applicants.

School details

Students on the programme are drawn from 37 schools across West Yorkshire. Fifty-eight per cent of the students are attending schools where the average percentage of GCSEs achieved at grade A* to C in 2007 (including English and mathematics) is below the national average¹². Eighteen percent of the students are from schools that achieved less than half the national average GCSE scores in 2007. Twenty-eight per cent of pupils are from schools that achieved above the national average, and 14 per cent are currently at sixth form colleges (where GCSE data is not applicable). This demonstrates that a considerable proportion of students on RfE are from low academically achieving schools.

¹¹ 'Mother' and 'father' include step-mothers or step-fathers

¹² In 2007, 46.7 per cent of pupils nationally achieved GCSEs at grades A* to C (including English and mathematics) Source: National Statistics: First Release. Available at: <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000768/sfr01-2008.pdf> [20August 2008]

GCSE achievements

Despite the fact that 54 per cent of the students attended a school with below average GCSE results, 71 per cent of the students have between ten and 12 GCSEs at grade A* to C (25 per cent have ten, 31 per cent have 11, and 16 per cent have 12). A further 14 per cent of students have between 13 and 18 GCSEs at A* to C. This indicates that, in line with the RfE entry requirements, the students on the programme are high achieving (85 per cent have between ten and 18 GCSE's at A* to C).

A-level subjects

The A-level subjects most commonly studied by students on RfE are listed in Table 2.2.

Table 2.2: Most commonly studied A-levels

A-level studied	Number of students studying (n=112)	Percentage
Biology	46	40
Chemistry	45	40
Psychology	45	40
Maths	38	33
Sociology	37	33
English Literature	25	22
English Language	24	21
History	21	18
Physics	17	15
Law	14	12

More than one answer could be given so percentages do not sum to 100

A total of 112 respondents gave at least one response to this question

Source: NFER Reach for Excellence Baseline Survey, 2007

The A-level subjects being studied are closely related to the university subject choices and career aspirations of the RfE cohort, set out in Section 2.4.

Students in public care

None of the RfE students have been, or are currently, in public care¹³.

¹³ Source: University of Leeds, Access Academy.

Disruption to studies

Thirty-seven of the young people on RfE have had their studies disrupted or adversely affected by circumstances in their personal, social or domestic life¹⁴.

Meeting the RfE criteria

As laid out in Section 1.1, entry criteria were set to ensure that the programme was targeted at those most in need of support. As well as being high achievers and capable of studying at a research-led university, students needed to meet at least two additional criteria from a list of four (to be in receipt of an EMA; to be in public care; to be a first generation university applicant; or to have had their studies adversely affected). Seventeen per cent of the students met three of the additional criteria, and 82 per cent met two¹⁵. One student on the programme met only one of the criteria, but he/she was admitted to the programme due to additional educational and social needs.

2.3 Parents'/carers' attitudes towards university attendance

Given that RfE is targeted at first generation university applicants, parental attitudes towards a university education are of interest. Therefore, the baseline survey sought to ascertain students' perceptions of their parents' attitudes.

Seventy-seven per cent of students were confident that they knew their parents' views on their attendance at university. Ninety-one per cent of the students stated that their parents would like them to go (69 per cent of which indicated that they 'strongly agreed' with the statement 'my parents would like me to go to university'), revealing that the students largely have parental support.

Thirty-one per cent of the students felt that their parents could not advise them on their decision to attend university, possibly reflecting the high proportion (86 per cent) of young people whose parents had not attended university. Seventy-eight per cent of the students stated that their parents were leaving them to decide whether they wanted to attend university or not.

¹⁴ Source: University of Leeds, Access Academy.

¹⁵ Source: University of Leeds, Access Academy.

Very low numbers of students reported that their parents wanted them to gain employment, take time out or undertake work-based training (one per cent in the first two cases, and four per cent in the latter). These findings show that the parents of students on RfE have high aspirations for their son or daughter and are keen for them to attend university, despite, in the majority of cases, not having attended university themselves.

2.4 Intentions on leaving school

Ninety-five per cent of students on the RfE programme claimed at the time of the baseline survey that they planned to go to university. The remaining five per cent did not plan to go. This suggests that the overwhelming majority of young people on RfE are already setting their sights high and are planning to progress onto university.¹⁶

However, although they knew that they wanted to go to university, RfE students were less sure about where they would apply. Only 47 per cent stated that they knew where they would apply, the majority of which (75 per cent) planned to apply to Leeds University. Table 2.3 sets out the top 11 university destinations of those 47 per cent who knew where they were planning to apply.

Seven of these universities are from the ‘Russell Group’¹⁷ suggesting that the students are already aiming for top universities (in total, 12 of the Russell Group universities featured in the university destinations). However, there appears to be a geographical bias (with the exception of Cambridge and Oxford) to universities in Yorkshire or those within easy reach of the West Yorkshire region. It is worth noting that 53 per cent of the students did not know where to apply to.

¹⁶ As mentioned earlier (see footnote 5), it should be noted that previous national surveys suggest that aspirations to study at university are not always translated into actual participation.

¹⁷ The ‘Russell Group’ universities include: Birmingham, Bristol, Cambridge, Cardiff, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Imperial College, Kings College London, Leeds, Liverpool, London School of Economics, Manchester, Newcastle, Nottingham, Oxford, Queens University Belfast, Sheffield, Southampton, University College London, and Warwick.

Table 2.3: University destinations

University destination	Number of students intending to apply (n=50)	Percentage
University of Leeds	38	75
University of Manchester	16	31
University of Bradford	13	26
University of Cambridge	8	16
Leeds Metropolitan University	6	12
University of Oxford	5	10
University of Huddersfield	5	10
University of Sheffield	4	8
University of Nottingham	4	8
University of York	3	6
Newcastle University	3	6

A filter question: all those who said they knew where they intended to apply

More than one answer could be given so percentages do not sum to 100

Source: NFER Reach for Excellence Baseline Survey, 2007

During the third event visit, a proforma was used to gather data from 47 students in attendance at the summer school. This provides more recent views on university destinations and can be compared with the data presented above. This can be found in Section 4.4.1.

The students on RfE had a better idea of what they might study at university than about where they would like to study. Sixty-eight per cent of the students who intended to go to university stated that they knew what they would like to study. These choices are set out in Table 2.4.

These subject choices are in line with the career aspirations of the RfE students, sixty-three per cent of which stated that they knew what career they would like to follow. The largest proportion of students (21 per cent) reported that they wanted to follow a career in medicine. Fifteen per cent planned to follow a career in law, seven per cent in teaching or engineering and six per cent in dentistry. Beyond these groups, a wide variety of career choices were reported, for all but ten of which a university degree would be a prerequisite. Amongst these ten, although a degree would not strictly speaking be compulsory, it would be useful.

Table 2.4: Subject choices

Subject choice	Number of students intending to study (n=72)	Percentage
Medicine	13	18
Law	13	18
Psychology	11	15
Science (general)	5	7
Biology	5	7
Accountancy/finance	5	7
English language	5	7

A filter question: all those who said they knew what they intended to study

More than one answer could be given so percentages do not sum to 100

Source: NFER Reach for Excellence Baseline Survey, 2007

2.5 Reasons behind university intentions

Students were asked to indicate the extent of their agreement with a number of statements about university. Some of the statements related to concerns or reasons that would militate against university attendance, and others related to positive reasons for attending university.

The statements agreed with most strongly were as follows (figures in brackets relate to the percentage of students agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement):

- I want to continue studying (95)
- Going to university will enable me to get a good job (95)
- I want to get a higher qualification (94)
- I want to go to university (94)
- I think I would enjoy the studying (87)
- I know people who have been to university (85)
- I have heard good things about university from my friends (76)
- I think I will get the grades needed for university (75).

These statements all referred to positive reasons for attending university. It is perhaps unsurprising that positive statements emerged most strongly, given that ninety-five per cent of the students already planned to attend university (see Section 2.4). Largely, the students appear confident that university

attendance will lead on to good jobs and better qualifications, and that it will be an enjoyable experience.

Of statements related to factors that could militate against university attendance, the following emerged most strongly:

- I'm concerned I will end up in debt (62)
- I am not sure what university will involve (28)
- I want to start earning as soon as possible (25)
- I don't want to leave home (23).

The statement 'I'm concerned I will end up in debt' was agreed with by more than twice as many young people as those who agreed with the other three statements listed above. This suggests that concerns over debt are a significant mitigating factor against university attendance. Given that RfE aims to provide young people with financial information and advice, it is possible that concerns over debt would be reduced and that students would be more likely to choose a university education. It is also worth noting that RfE aims to provide information about what university will involve and to raise the confidence of attendees, which will hopefully reduce students' concerns about university life, or not wanting to leave home.

2.6 Factors that would encourage, or further encourage, respondents to go to university

Table 2.5 sets out the numbers of students who felt that the following factors would encourage, or further encourage, them to attend university.

Three factors emerged most strongly as factors that would encourage/further encourage the young people on the programme to attend university. These were: if going to university would enable them to get a well paid job; if going to university would enable them to get a good job; and if they found a course that interested them. These were identified by 83 per cent of the students in each case. It is possible that RfE will help the young people enrolled to find a course to interest them and to recognise the beneficial employment prospects open to graduates. Hence, more students may go on to university (or feel more sure about applying) as a result.

Table 2.5: Factors that would encourage, or further encourage, the RfE students to attend university.

Factor	Number of students who felt this would encourage them (n=114)	Percentage
If I knew it would enable me to get a good job	94	83
If I knew I would be better paid in the end	94	83
Finding a course which really interested me	94	83
Not have to worry about being in debt	89	78
If I had more information and support to research the options	79	69
If my friends were going	30	26
If my parents were more encouraging	20	18

Figures refer to individual questions in each row so percentages do not sum up to 100

Source: NFER Reach for Excellence Baseline Survey, 2007

Interestingly, only 18 per cent felt that if their parents were more encouraging they, in turn, would feel more encouraged to attend university. This finding could indicate that parental attitudes are not influential over students' decisions to attend university, but is more likely due to the high levels of support that 91 per cent of the students on the programme already feel they have from their parents (see Section 2.3). In this sense, their parents are already encouraging them enough and therefore the need for greater encouragement is not an important factor.

A considerable number of students reported that not having to worry about being in debt would encourage them to attend university, as would more information and support about university options. Given that RfE aims to provide information and advice about university choices and finances, this would suggest that the students might be keener to attend university after involvement in the programme.

2.7 Sources of advice about university

For the young people on RfE, the majority of advice about university had been provided by parents/carers or by teachers (103 of the students reported that they had accessed parental advice, and 102 had accessed advice from teachers). This was followed, in order of frequency, by advice from other

family members, schools careers coordinators, the Connexions service, university staff and finally, employers (accessed by 87, 75, 62, 41, 28 young people respectively). The usefulness of the advice received is set out in Table 2.6.

Table 2.6: Useful sources of advice

Source of advice	Percentage of those accessing support who rated it as 'very useful' (n=114)
'Other' family members	41
University staff	32
Parents	32
Teachers	20
Employers	14
Connexions	11
School careers coordinators	9

Figures refer to individual questions in each row so percentages do not sum up to 100

Source: NFER Reach for Excellence Baseline Survey, 2007

Overall, the most useful source of advice was 'other' family members (e.g. siblings or cousins). Young people also rated the advice from university staff as particularly useful. Given this high rating, it is unfortunate that only a relatively small number of students (41) had accessed advice from university staff. If this type of information is to be more easily accessed by young people, then programmes such as RfE that provide young people with a high level of contact from university staff should be promoted.

Although 86 per cent of students' parents had not attended university (see Section 2.2), parental advice was still considered particularly useful. However, 24 per cent of the students on RfE rated the advice given by their parents as 'not very useful' or 'not at all useful'. This suggests that although 32 per cent of young people rated their parents' advice very highly, one quarter of the students on the programme were not benefiting from useful parental advice about university. This is in line with the earlier finding that 31 per cent of the students felt their parents could not advise them about university (see Section 2.3).

Overall, advice deemed least useful was that provided by employers, the Connexions service and schools careers coordinators.

2.8 Additional information required

Ninety-five per cent of students on RfE indicated that they would benefit from more information about what going to university would involve. The types of information that they required are set out in Table 2.7.

Table 2.7: Additional information required by RfE students.

Information required	Number of students requiring it (n=106)	Percentage
The best universities for the subject(s) I am considering	97	90
Financial support	92	85
What the subject(s) I am considering would involve	91	84
How much it would cost	88	82
The grades you need	87	81
What different universities are like	83	77
Student loans	83	77
How to apply	80	74
How to find out about courses	76	70
What you need for the top universities	68	63
How the study compares to school	67	62
What student life is like	64	59

More than one answer could be given so percentages do not sum to 100

Source: NFER Reach for Excellence Baseline Survey, 2007

Overall, these results suggest that there is considerable hunger for information about what going to university would involve. Even the information required by the lowest proportion of students would still be useful to over half (59 per cent) of the students on RfE.

Ninety per cent of students required information about the best universities for the subjects they are considering. This suggests that the students may already be aiming high. However, 85 per cent also require information about financial support, suggesting that how they would finance their time at university is a concern to the RfE cohort (a recurring theme identified in the baseline survey). This, along with a relatively high proportion of students seeking information on costs and student loans (82 and 77 per cent respectively) may reflect the relatively financially deprived backgrounds of the students (see Section 2.2).

Given that RfE aims to provide the students with all of the information listed in Table 2.7, it is likely that students will be more likely to progress to universities (and the best universities for their chosen subject), armed with information and advice gleaned from participation in RfE.

3 Head of sixth form perspectives

Key findings

- On first hearing about RfE, sixth-form heads felt that it would have a positive role in encouraging students to enter into HE. It was hoped this would be achieved through the provision of information to help students to make choices, practical assistance with applications, experience of university life, and by raising aspirations and confidence to apply to HE.
- As well as RfE, it was felt that students could also be encouraged to progress to university through input from school staff, other school-based programmes and from support from parents.
- Factors felt to be discouraging students from applying to HE included: financial concerns; pressures to stay at home; negative perceptions of post-graduate employability; and low academic aspirations.
- Heads of sixth form identified some potential limitations of RfE. These were: the requirement for students to give up free time; the 'strict' entry criteria; the distance from some students' homes to Leeds; small numbers of students attending from individual schools/colleges; and a lack of understanding of what RfE was about.
- Overall, the anticipated effects of RfE included: increased educational aspirations; a widening of choice for university destinations; increased academic attainment; and improved confidence.

3.1 Introduction

Telephone interviews were conducted with 30 heads of sixth form (or college-based equivalents) at the time they first received information about RfE. Interviews sought to gather thoughts and perspectives on a range of issues, including: the characteristics of participating and non-participating students; the factors encouraging and discouraging students from entering Higher Education (HE); RfE's potential to encourage students to attend HE; factors that may influence the efficiency of RfE; and thoughts on anticipated effects of the programme. This section summarises these early views. It will be complemented in the final report by a further round of interviews in light of students completing the programme.

3.2 The characteristics of students likely to take part in RfE

Two-thirds of interviewees highlighted the criteria for RfE participation in relation to characteristics of students likely to take part (e.g. first generation university attendees; from households with lower incomes/in receipt of EMA;

capable of high academic achievements). A range of other personal characteristics and parental attitudes were also noted.

The personal characteristics of students likely to take part focused on the ambition, motivation and commitment demonstrated by students, as well as levels of self confidence and educational/career-orientated aspirations. Characteristics included:

- ambition, motivation, and willingness to accept help and support
- positive attitudes, enthusiasm and a proactive approach to their futures
- high levels of commitment and reliability
- an organised and structured approach to study
- low interpretations of academic ability and low educational and university aspirations
- a naivety and lack of understanding about university life and opportunities
- a lack of self confidence.

Characteristics of students likely to take part in RfE

Students who are focused and go-getting, who know what they want to be and to do, but who are just unfortunate that they are not in the same position as other students with the same abilities.

Aspiration and self confidence is such an issue. Going to uni is like going to the moon.

Students identified as being likely to participate in the programme were also characterised as those influenced by low levels of parental knowledge, involvement, support and encouragement:

They have lower expectations of themselves in [the local] area. Parents don't think that their kids are the ones that go to uni, because only snobs from the posh areas and posh schools go to uni.

We have one girl who is Oxford material without a doubt. She has a sister who is a medic and I've had the most awful conversation with her mother at the latest parents evening, saying that she is not sure whether she's going to allow her to go to university, because it's going to cost too much...she said, "well I didn't go, and it did me no harm".'

There are hidden coded messages about attending university that are lost on these students. If you want to be a lawyer and work for a very good practice in London, it is hard to get them to see that it matters

which uni they go to. “I’ll go to the uni down the road because that’s where my dad says I should go, and I only need two ‘C’s to get in, so I won’t have to do as much work”.

However, in one case, it was felt that there were high levels of parental support for university application but that the parents lacked the appropriate information to provide it effectively. ‘Parents are keen for their children to achieve, but they lack the knowledge to guide them properly’.

3.3 The characteristics of students not likely to take part in RfE

Roughly one-fifth of interviewees identified the pupils not likely to take part in the programme as being those who failed to meet the entry criteria. In addition the following characteristics were identified:

- a lack of aspiration and interest, despite eligibility for the programme
- a lack of commitment to a long-term project
- a lack of understanding about RfE
- financial constraints, including part-time employment and the responsibility to support the household/family economy
- lack of support from parents and low parental aspirations for students
- parental perceptions of university education being of low value – instead, employment is a priority after leaving school.

Characteristics of students not likely to take part in RfE

The ones that didn’t apply were the ones that knew they were going to their home university – our students don’t move.

One set of parents was really worried about their child going to a ‘fancy’ university, but were quite happy for them to go to a local one.

Those less likely to participate in RfE are young people who get very little encouragement from home, where the expectation has always been that they will get a job when they are 18.

3.4 RfE's potential to encourage more students to enter HE

Two-thirds of interviewees felt that the RfE programme would have a positive role in encouraging more students to enter HE. It was felt that RfE would do this by:

- providing information to help students make more knowledgeable choices
- providing practical assistance in terms of application processes
- providing academic assistance through study support sessions
- providing experience of university life
- raising awareness amongst students in terms of broadening their university destinations and academic horizons
- raising aspirations and providing confidence to make more challenging applications
- providing schools with future 'pathfinders' to promote and cascade the experience of RfE throughout the rest of the school.

RfE's potential to encourage more students to enter HE

I'm looking for it to encourage them to apply for more prestigious universities.

It will give him a lot more confidence and it will make him realise that he can apply to higher-end universities rather than just hedging his bets and maybe going for the lower grades.

I am hoping to use the girls who attend the programme to open a wider pathway for [other pupils] and to create a culture change.

Importantly, although the heads of sixth form recognised RfE's potential to encourage students to enter HE, roughly one-third of interviewees contended that the students concerned would probably have applied to university without this programme.

3.5 Factors that encourage students to attend HE

In addition to RfE, heads of sixth form were asked to comment on other factors that could support and encourage students to attend HE. These included:

- input from school staff in the form of practical advice and guidance and the promotion of university progression

- other school-based programmes, especially those involving links and relationships with HE institutions. These include mentoring schemes, visits from university staff and students, and the provision of subject-related courses in schools: 'Practical experience of getting them out into [HE] institutions, getting them talking to undergraduates'.
- raising the profile of HE lower down in the school
- support from parents in encouraging HE attendance
- schools working alongside parents to develop their support for and understanding of HE progression.

3.6 Factors that discourage students from attending HE

Factors that could discourage students from entering HE included contextual factors (e.g. family/cultural attitudes), low aspirations and financial considerations. In some cases, they did not so much discourage attendance, but limit university aspirations. Discouraging factors included:

- the affordability of HE, particularly where students contribute to the household economy
- a desire/pressure to stay close to home as a result of limited geographical horizons
- financial issues (i.e. concerns over potential debts) and cultural reasons exacerbated the pressures to attend a university close to home:
- negative perceptions of post-graduate employability
- perceptions and beliefs within families which may act to limit students' awareness of, and their ability to attend, HE or particular institutions
- low aspirations and an attitude that attending 'top' universities is beyond their reach, requiring too much work and commitment to secure a place
- a lack of motivation so that that prioritise the courses that they think they have the strongest chance of being accepted for (RfE was seen to have the potential to counter this parochial outlook of students and parents).

3.7 Barriers and limitations of RfE

Around one-quarter of interviewees felt that there were no barriers or limitations to the RfE programme. However, where barriers were identified they included the following:

- giving up free time (e.g. Saturday mornings or Wednesday afternoons). This was particularly difficult where students had part-time jobs and contributed significantly to the household economy
- the entry criteria. These were described as being too strict and as excluding some particularly well-suited students from the programme. The requirement to be in receipt of EMA was said to mean that those students with slightly higher household incomes would miss out: 'I can understand why EMA is used as a measure, but I don't agree that it necessarily always shows the need'
- the distance from some students' homes to Leeds. It was felt that this might prevent or deter some students from attending. The difficulties in making the journey (generally via public transport), as well as the motivation and confidence to travel, were highlighted as potential difficulties despite the assistance provided via the programme. Furthermore, parents' social and cultural values could limit students' mobility and inhibit their attendance at RfE sessions
- potential overlap with other HE access initiatives
- the small number of students gaining a place on RfE. In some schools/colleges this meant that there was 'no critical mass' of participating students, making it harder for the students to remain motivated and committed
- the economic disadvantage and poverty of opportunity of some students could limit their willingness to see the benefits of participating in RfE
- students' need to earn money could limit their ability to participate in, and their commitment to, the programme
- missing lessons in school/college for the RfE programme
- a lack of communication between the programme organisers and the school (e.g. short notice about the programme, lack of feedback as to how the programme is progressing)¹⁸
- a lack of communication between the programme organisers and the students (largely, not being able to present the programme to the students)¹⁹.

3.8 The anticipated effects of RfE

Four-fifths of interviewees identified possible effects and impacts of RfE (the remainder felt unable to comment at this early stage of interviews). Anticipated effects included:

¹⁸ The programme organisers are aware of this early barrier and have put steps in place to reduce any negative consequences (see Section 6)

¹⁹ As stated in ¹⁸ above.

- increasing educational aspirations of the students involved. RfE was seen to have the potential to encourage students to aim higher in terms of their academic abilities
- increasing the range and nature of future university destinations. Participation in the programme could mean that students become more aware of a greater range of universities (not just those in their local areas), especially research-led institutions:

It will encourage students to apply to more prestigious universities and to access wider opportunities. We hope it will encourage people to spread their wings and have the self confidence to live a bit more widely and to experience new and different places.

- increasing the academic attainment of the students involved. Students could benefit from the tangible advice and skill development opportunities available. Time management and study skills were specifically noted
- increasing students' confidence. As well as educational development, social and personal development could result from participation in the programme, especially for those students lacking in parental or family support
- dissemination within schools. It was envisaged that students participating in the programme could act as pathfinders within schools, disseminating and cascading some of the information and skills they had acquired. In this way, RfE could have wider impacts throughout the school rather than being limited to the individual directly involved
- raising awareness of the 'realities' of university life within schools. Several interviewees suggested that RfE could contribute to raising the status of HE and encourage others in the school to actively pursue it as an option
- if disseminated well, it was also claimed that the programme and associated opportunities could help to encourage students to remain in the sixth form rather than transferring to college, so enhancing the numbers studying academic rather than vocational subjects in the school.

4 Student perceptions of RfE

Key emerging findings

- Students applied to RfE in the hope that it would provide them with opportunities and information to enhance their progression into HE. They were seeking practical advice regarding applications and funding, and an insight into university life. Even at early stages of the programme, students reported that RfE had exceeded their initial (high) expectations.
- It is evident, despite the early stages at which data has been gathered, that RfE is having a considerable influence on the students. For example, analysis suggests that since their involvement in the programme, students are considering a wider choice of university destinations, and feel that RfE has helped them to decide where to apply.
- RfE students are considering a wider range of Russell Group universities than prior to RfE, and more students are considering applying to them. Students indicated that RfE has been helpful in identifying the top universities to apply for.
- When choosing universities, RfE students are primarily basing their decisions on whether it is the best university for their chosen subject, the reputation of the university, course entry requirements and the quality of student life. This could be a result of RfE to date. Given that the programme aims to support the students in accessing this information, it is possible that students will make better informed decisions about university as a result of participation.
- RfE students have valued financial information regarding university attendance, advice on applications and details of different university courses. They also feel that RfE has raised their awareness about university progression by providing insights into university life and a greater awareness of choice. Other early impacts include the development of social and study skills, improved confidence and raised aspirations.
- It was reported that the varied menu of activities offered by RfE and the campus/university-based experiences have been key factors contributing to the early impacts.

4.1 Introduction

Student perspectives were gathered at three stages during the first year of RfE; firstly from the launch event (January 2008), then at an event in May 2008 and finally at the summer school in July 2008. In total, 14 interviews have been conducted – eight at the launch event and six in May. At the summer school, three focus groups were conducted with a total of 15 young people, and 47 of the 48 young people in attendance completed a proforma (see Appendix 2). This section compiles this data, exploring reasons for applying to RfE and

early student expectations. It then moves on to address students' perceptions of the impact of RfE to date. This includes impacts on course and university choice.

4.2 Reasons for applying to RfE

At the launch event, interviewees were asked why they had originally applied to RfE. Six explained that having been introduced to the programme, they made the decision to apply on the basis of the opportunities that RfE could bring them, their interest in the programme, and the information/knowledge it could furnish them with. This was seen as especially important in the case of those who were first generation university applicants. Two of the interviewees reported that the school encouraged them to apply.

Reasons for applying to RfE

I thought it would help me to get into a really good university.

When they [the University of Leeds team] came into college it sounded really interesting, so I thought it would be worth a try.

I didn't think it would make it easier for me to get into university, but I thought it would give me a little bit of information. No one in my family has ever been before, so I just wanted a bit more information on it. I had no idea at all about what uni is like.

4.3 Expectations and hopes for RfE

The students expected that their participation in RfE would provide them with information on the nature of courses and the choices available to them. They also hoped that RfE would assist them with practical assistance and advice regarding the application process, funding and the realities of student life. Sessions on revision skills and time management were also seen as potentially useful elements of the programme, especially for those who were also in part-time employment.

Students had high hopes of RfE. They were enthusiastic about it and hoped it would help to inform their progression into HE. Most of the participating students already had clear thoughts about attending university (as Section 2.4 sets out, 95 per cent of students already planned on attending university prior

to RfE), but interviewees saw RfE as having the potential to help them refine and develop their choice of course and destination.

Young people's expectations and hopes of RfE

It will help me to make sure that medicine is definitely what I want to do.

It will give me information about the different types of course you can do and information on my law course – like the types of things the course will cover.

I hope it will give me help on filling in application forms and my interview technique.

I want to find out exactly what's going to happen on courses once I get to uni, then it's not a surprise when I get there.

I will have an idea about what uni is like and will know if it's right for me or not.

I wasn't too sure about what I wanted to do, but I thought [RfE] would push me in the right direction.

I just want to get the most out of it – I don't want to go to uni and study something when I haven't considered other things – that is the main reason I want to be on it so I can see what else is open to me. I don't want any regrets.

In May 2008, students were asked to assess how their experiences of RfE had matched their initial expectations and hopes. Students spoke very highly of their experiences and were enthusiastic about their involvement to date. Largely, students felt that RfE had exceeded their initial (high) expectations.

How RfE has met student expectations

It's better than I thought it would be. There are the enrichment courses as well as getting the knowledge of how to get into uni. It's informative. The different events are interesting; it's more than just about how to get into university.

It's exceeding my expectations – I didn't think it would be as enjoyable as it is.

4.4 Early impacts of RfE

Throughout the interviews and focus groups and in the student proforma, students were asked about the impact of their involvement in RfE to date. It is evident that, despite the early stage at which this data has been gathered, RfE is having, at the very least, a considerable influence on the students. The proforma asked students to rate how helpful RfE had been in 11 key areas (see Appendix 2, question 7). Results suggest that RfE was considered to be helpful in all areas, but specifically in providing application advice, information on financial arrangements and an insight into university life (rated as ‘helpful’ or ‘very helpful’ by 40, 39 and 38 of the 47 students respectively).

4.4.1 The impact of RfE on students’ university aspirations and destinations

As previously stated (see Section 2.4), the majority of students participating in RfE were already planning to go to university (95 per cent). In this sense, there is little scope for this evaluation to explore whether RfE results in more of the students attending university *per se*²⁰. However, the proforma data suggests that one of the two people who were initially unsure about applying to university in the sample is now planning to attend university. Interview data also suggests that other students had become more certain that HE was the appropriate progression route to follow. However, for many, attending university had been a long-held aspiration and gaining a degree was considered a career pre-requisite.

Students’ attitudes towards attending university

Going to university to study English has been my plan for a long time as it is a subject I am very passionate about. Also it is required since I wish to become an English teacher.

It’s been a lifetime ambition, a goal of mine to succeed at university.

I have always been led to believe that uni will give me a better quality of life and this has not changed.

I have always wanted to go to university to make me more employable and independent.

²⁰ However, as mentioned previously, research by MORI for the Sutton Trust suggests that university aspirations do not always translate into university participation.

While other studies have shown that aspirations to attend university are not always translated into actual participation, for many RfE students it appears that the programme is likely to have little impact on plans to attend university itself but whether these highly able pupils are considering particularly prestigious institutions. From the proforma data gathered at the summer school, all of the 47 students listed at least three universities to which they were considering applying. However, at the time of the baseline survey, only 15 of these students knew where they wanted to apply²¹. This suggests that those who were at first unsure, have now made decisions about where to apply. Furthermore, at the time of the baseline survey, 22 different universities featured in the choice of the 15 who knew where they wanted to apply. This had increased to a range of 33 universities for this sample of students at the time of the proforma. This suggests that the students' choices of university have widened by 50 per cent. Indeed, one-third of all of the students who completed the proforma (15 out of 47) reported that they were now considering applying to additional or different universities than they had prior to RfE. Furthermore, almost two-thirds (29 out of 47) of the students felt that RfE had helped them to decide which universities they would like to go to. This suggests that participation in RfE might have influenced this widening of university destinations, as well as helping those who were initially unsure about where to apply to make some choices.

RfE's influence over university choices

I had no idea where I wanted to go before this but then they mentioned other stuff like looking at which ones are good for research. It [RfE] gives you more criteria on which ones you might decide to go to.

It [RfE] has helped me to think about it more logically. I used to have no idea where to go. I always knew what I wanted to do but I didn't know where to start looking to go. It's helped to talk to some people who have done what I want to do. It helps me think about it sensibly and not get stressed out.

In the baseline survey, the 15 pupils who knew where they wanted to apply to university identified 11 of the Russell Group universities. This had increased to 16 by the time of the proforma. As well as the broadening of range of Russell group universities, more students were considering applying to them

²¹ It is possible that one additional student knew where they wanted to apply, but this student did not fill in a baseline survey.

by the time of the proforma in July 2008 compared to numbers at the time of the baseline (January 2008). These findings suggest that more of the RfE students are considering applying to ‘top’ universities after seven months of intervention. How far this is a result of RfE experience or of other external factors can not be identified. However, when asked how helpful RfE had been in helping to identify the ‘top’ universities to apply for, almost two-thirds (30) of the young people felt that it had been ‘helpful’ or ‘very helpful’.

RfE’s encouragement to consider ‘top’ universities

RfE has shown me the importance of going to a top university which is good for my subject.

They told us about league tables and I’ve not really looked at league tables before. They are really useful to be able to use now.

When you go on UCAS sites and you look at the league tables, I didn’t realise that you could change it so you could look at which is best for your subject area and that has been really helpful – finding out which is best. I’ve now realised how valuable that aspect is as opposed to the lifestyle. I was so certain I wanted to go to [University of X], but after looking, the department isn’t as strong as I thought it was. I’ve realised [University of Y] is a lot stronger.

In order to provide an overall comparison, some tentative findings can be gleaned by comparing the university choices of all of the students who knew where they wanted to apply at the baseline (beyond the 15 for whom there is direct comparative data), with all those who filled in a proforma. Although this data is not directly comparable, it provides an overall picture of the university choices of a sample of the RfE students at baseline, and also at the time of the proforma (30 of the students in the proforma sample did not know where they wanted to apply at the time of the baseline. This analysis reveals the universities they are now subsequently considering). Table 4.1 details the most frequently identified university choices of the 47 students who filled in a proforma (July 2008), as well as the percentages of students identifying this university as one of their choices in the baseline survey (January 2008).

Table 4.1: University destinations of RfE students

University destination	Percentage choosing in July 2008 (n=47)	Percentage choosing in January 2008 (n=51)
University of Leeds	79	75
University of Manchester	51	31
University of Bradford	38	26
University of York	36	6
University of Huddersfield	32	10
Newcastle University	30	6
University of Sheffield	30	8

More than one answer could be given so percentages do not sum to 100

Source: NFER Student Proforma, 2008 (see Appendix 2)

July 2008 data, n=47, January 2008 data, n=51

Table 4.1 demonstrates that the students are still considering universities close to home and that the universities of York, Huddersfield, Newcastle and Sheffield are particularly popular amongst the students who completed a proforma. The University of Leeds remains a popular destination and is currently the first choice of 22 of the 47 students (just under half of the proforma sample) on RfE. The universities of Newcastle, Sheffield and Manchester showed the largest gains in popularity (as also shown in Table 4.1). It is perhaps worth noting that besides the University of Leeds, these are the closest Russell Group universities to the RfE students' homes.

4.4.2 Factors influencing university choice

In the proforma, students were given a list of factors that might be influencing their university choices (see Appendix 2, question 6), and asked to rank how important each of these factors were. Students suggested that the following considerations (in rank order) had influenced their choice of university destination:

- whether it is the best university for their chosen subject
- the reputation of the university
- the course entry requirements
- the quality of student life
- the proximity of university to home
- if friends attended or were planning to attend the university.

These findings suggest that the ‘quality’ of the university is influencing students’ choices of where to apply, which may go some way to explain why the Russell Group universities are emerging as more popular (as set out previously in Section 4.4.1). It is worth noting that financial concerns exacerbated the desire for some young people to stay close to home: ‘I’m scared of getting into a load of debt if I moved away’. These priorities could be a result of RfE to date. Given that RfE aims to raise students’ awareness of the importance of the top four of the factors listed above, it is likely that the information gleaned through RfE participation will enable the students to make well informed decisions about their HE future.

4.4.3 Information provision

Besides providing information on university choices and research skills to refine their decision making, RfE aims to furnish students with information on all aspects of university life. Students particularly valued the information on the financial considerations surrounding university attendance, especially given their concerns over the affordability of university and fears about accumulating debt. Given that the RfE students are from households with lower than average incomes, RfE aims to remove the potential of financial issues limiting university aspirations. Thirty-nine of the 47 students who filled in a proforma rated the information on financial arrangements and support for university as ‘helpful’ or ‘very helpful’ (around four-fifths). In addition, students valued the advice and information they received to support them in their application to university. This emerged as the most helpful aspect of RfE to date in the student proforma data (40 of the 47 students rated this as a ‘helpful’ or ‘very helpful’ aspect of RfE). Students also found that information on choosing courses had been helpful, although less so than other areas of RfE (only 18 pupils rated this as ‘helpful’ or ‘very helpful’). This might be because students already had an idea of what they might study at university.

The information provided by RfE

Financial information

It [RfE] has explained many offers I did not know existed e.g. access scheme and scholarships, finance etc. It has sparked my interest into looking at what other universities have to offer.

The thing I found most helpful was stuff about funding and bursaries. I didn’t know much about it but it really helped me.

One of the most helpful things has been information about finances and the availability of bursaries and grants. I was worrying about finances but I'm a bit happier now.

I've learnt about the bursaries I could possibly get and the bursaries I could get could cover most of my loans as I'd be living at home, so the only real thing would be travel, but I think the bursaries could cover that.

University application advice

I found the personal statements really helpful as they told us what not to do, and what to say, as our school hasn't done them yet.

Information on different courses

It has helped me quite a lot [in terms of applying for university] as I am really reconsidering taking medicine now. I'd thought of it before but I wasn't sure if I wanted to study for that long. Because [the medicine event] was so enjoyable and I liked how they had laid out the learning programme, I think I will go for medicine. Law was kind of new to me as I'd not considered it before but I really enjoyed it and they are my top two choices now.

4.4.5 Awareness raising

Participation in RfE has also increased students' awareness of issues surrounding university. For example, students felt that RfE had been helpful in providing an insight into university life (38 of the 47 students filling in the proforma felt that RfE had been 'helpful' or 'very helpful' in this respect). Over one-third of students (33) reported that RfE had been helpful or very helpful in raising awareness of choices open to them (including the benefits of applying to 'top' universities, as covered in Section 4.4.1).

Raised awareness as a result of RfE

Insights into university life

I like that RfE shows you what uni life is like, and how it is so different from college. It's an entry into university that makes it an easy transfer.

One of the most useful things has been that we get a taste of what university life is like. We come to activities during the year but we don't get a feel for uni life that way.

It [RfE] helps if you are thinking about going away from home to a different university as you get a taste of how it is to get away from home.

Awareness of choice

RfE has opened my eyes to many choices around me.

It's opened up more aspects to my choice. When you first look at universities you think it's just grades, but there really are different types of learning and different types of courses and Reach for Excellence has just really opened that up for us. At school, many of my friends won't get this.

It's helped us to look at lot of universities, and not just one. It's helped us to look at different places and to consider more options.

4.4.6 Enhancing skills and personal development

Students reported that RfE had impacted positively on their development and skill acquisition in a range of areas. Firstly, RfE had been instrumental in developing the students' social skills, something they considered useful for university preparation. Of those responding to the proforma, 38 of the 47 students, felt that RfE had been 'helpful' or 'very helpful' in developing their social skills. Similarly, students felt that RfE had been influential in increasing their self-confidence and aspirations (40 and 41 students rated RfE as 'helpful' or 'very helpful' in these areas respectively). Finally, as a result of study-skills sessions, 28 of the young people felt that RfE had been helpful (or very helpful) in developing practical study skills to help in raising their attainment, such as revision skills and study techniques.

The influence of RfE on skills and personal development**Developing social skills**

The social aspect is really good. You get to mix with other people and if you are going to stay in student halls then that is what it would be like. It's been really useful.

When you go to university it's unlikely you'll go with friends so to build that confidence that I can talk to people is important.

Increasing confidence

My confidence has been built up for meeting new people which I need to do in university.

RfE has made me more aware of the things involved with university and so it has strengthened my knowledge, making me more confident about going to university.

Raising aspirations

I didn't think I had a chance to get into Leeds uni but this has made me really want to try.

It's pushing you, showing you can do this and showing you your actual potential. Some people like to point out the negative rather than the positive, but Reach for Excellence is all about your good points. I feel privileged that I got on the programme.

4.5 Factors contributing to impacts

A number of factors were identified as contributing to the impacts on students, but two key elements underpinned them: the programme content and activities and the campus/university experience.

4.5.1 Programme content and activities

As RfE has progressed, interviews with students have highlighted that the individual courses and events, and the programme as a whole, are largely considered relevant and interesting, and that the variety of provision on offer is particularly appealing. Students have also valued opportunities for social interaction (both at RfE events and through the Virtual Learning Environment). In terms of impacting on decision-making, this holistic approach was seen to provide a more rounded experience than some of the other skills or subject-based provision available to students through other local HE establishments. Taster courses and subject-specific events were also considered enjoyable, relevant to their current studies and influential over their decisions about what to study at university. Study skills and revision-orientated sessions were seen as valuable, although several young people suggested that they were already sufficiently confident in these areas.

4.5.2 Campus/university experience

Students valued the experience of attending sessions on campus and interacting with university staff and students. They considered this an effective means of generating first-hand information and knowledge from which they could make informed decisions around their university progression. For example, interacting with current students (most notably through interacting

with summer school student hosts) was reported to be particularly effective in engaging students and for providing them with ‘instant and honest’, and perhaps what is considered to be more credible, advice. The campus/university experience was noted as being particularly valuable for increasing levels of confidence, developing social skills, providing insights into university life and for reaffirming decisions to enter HE.

Usefulness of campus experience and contact with current university students

I find it useful to interact with the hosts. I got to ask questions that were on my mind about Law – that was very helpful. The Law session was really helpful and I enjoyed it

The hosts [were really useful] – particularly talking to medics as I want to study that. They have given me so much information that is realistic, not just off the internet. First-hand experience can’t be compared with anything and RfE has provided me with that.

There are people always willing to answer your questions or to talk to – hosts and leaders. When you search on websites it could take an hour to answer your questions but here, it is just ‘there’.

5 Parental perceptions of the Reach for Excellence Programme

Key findings

- At the launch event, parents filled in a short proforma to ascertain their hopes for the programme and their early perceptions.
- Two-thirds of the parents felt that gaining a place on RfE had an immediate effect on their son/daughter. Primarily, the young people were reported to be more motivated, more optimistic about their future and more focused on their achievements and progression to university.
- All parents felt that RfE would be beneficial for their son/daughter. It was hoped that it would enhance their confidence, widen their awareness of choices about university, provide an insight into university life and act as an incentive to fulfil their potential.
- Three-quarters of the parents reported feeling differently about their child's future now that they were on the RfE programme. Largely, they were more positive about their son/daughter's future due to less concern about financing a university education. They were also more positive that their own non-attendance at university would not hinder their child's progression into HE.

5.1 Introduction

During the RfE launch event, parents were asked to fill in a short proforma to ascertain their hopes for the programme and their views of it to date (see Appendix 3). Thirty-seven proformas were returned from parents. It is evident from the responses set out below that, at the start of the programme, parents were extremely positive about RfE, stating that they felt that it would have significant impacts on their child's future and was already beginning to alter their aspirations.

5.2 Immediate effects of gaining a place

Twenty-two of the 37 parents (almost two-thirds) thought that gaining a place on RfE had had an immediate effect on their son/daughter. Primarily, parents felt that their child was pleased to have gained a place on the programme, and was looking forward to, and enthusiastic about, participating. Parents also noted that their child's confidence had increased.

Other effects on the young people that were identified included:

- concern about doing ‘new scary things’
- optimism about their future
- heightened interest in Leeds University
- a greater focus on their achievements and progression to university.

Effects of gaining a place on RfE

My daughter feels more confident about higher education and also believes it [RfE] will help with her grades.

It has heightened his interest in university.

She is very pleased about being selected and is hoping to gain a good insight into university life and opportunities available to her.

5.3 Benefits of the programme

All of the parents who returned a proforma felt that the RfE programme would be beneficial for their son/daughter. Benefits cited are set out below in order of frequency:

- enhanced confidence and self-esteem
- greater ability to make informed decisions and an opening up of choices
- improved knowledge, information and guidance about accessing higher education
- insights into university life
- an incentive to do well and fulfil their potential
- improved communication skills through socialisation with other students.

Benefits of RfE

He will receive advice and information about going to university that I can't give him.

It will give her the chance to meet other children from different backgrounds and schools who want to go to university.

He will gain confidence and insight into applying and researching the best university.

5.4 Views on their child's future

Twenty-seven of the parents (almost three-quarters) reported that they felt differently about their child's future now they were on the RfE programme. Largely, they felt more positive about their son/daughter's future. In some cases this was because parents were no longer concerned or confused about funding arrangements, and in other cases, it was because they felt that the possible inhibiting effects of them not attending university would be significantly reduced by participation in the programme. Other parents felt more positive about their child's future because RfE could provide the necessary help and support for their son/daughter to realise their potential and to go on to university. They also felt that their child would be introduced to a wider range of options than they might otherwise have been. Those who felt no differently about their child's future explained that this was primarily because their son/daughter had always planned on a university education.

Changed perceptions of their child's future

I can see opportunities and a future I was unaware of. I know that we will now get assistance with choosing which university and how to get there financially.

We feel it [university attendance] is a lot more possible.

5.5 Views on the launch event

All but three parents felt that the session provided for them at the launch event was 'useful' or 'very useful' (two-thirds felt that it was 'very useful'). Parents reported that information on what RfE would involve and was about was the most useful aspect of the event (cited by 14 parents), closely followed by the financial information that was provided (cited by 12 parents). Six parents felt that everything was equally useful. Smaller numbers of parents also found it valuable to meet the staff who will run the events, to have people there to answer their questions, and to be provided with handouts to take away.

6 Conclusion

Despite the early stages of the programme at which data has been gathered, the findings highlighted in this interim report suggest that RfE is resulting in tangible benefits for the young people involved. Students, their parents and heads of sixth form have all expressed high hopes for the programme, and student expectations have been exceeded.

The students enrolled in RfE are predominantly from schools with below average academic achievements, are from relatively deprived households, are high academic achievers and in most cases, are first generation university applicants. In this sense, the programme has been accurately targeted.

Initial findings suggest that after seven months of RfE involvement, the students were considering a wider range of university destinations, including more of the Russell Group universities. Although influences external to RfE (such as school-based influences) may have impacted on this broadening of destinations, around two-thirds of participants in the summer school felt that RfE was helping them to decide where to apply and was helping them to identify the ‘top’ universities for which to apply.

Early indications suggest that RfE is not only equipping the enrolled students with valuable information to support their decisions around university, but also advice to ease the application process as well as experiences to equip them with an insight into university life and studying. Given the concern around funding a university education (exacerbated by the relatively disadvantaged backgrounds from which the RfE pupils are drawn), the information concerning financial support and arrangements has been particularly valued by students and their parents. Students have reported higher levels of motivation and confidence in their decisions to attend university and a growing awareness of their potential to apply to a range of highly regarded universities. Indeed, a high number of students felt that RfE had been helpful in raising their university aspirations. They also feel better prepared for life in a university environment.

Information gleaned through the baseline survey and student proforma identifies the need for programmes such as RfE. For example, issues and needs identified by the students involved are highly aligned with the

programme's aims. Furthermore, interviews with programme organisers have revealed the extent to which they are responding to student and school feedback in developing the programme for the current and future RfE cohorts. Indeed, initial concerns highlighted in the head of sixth form interviews have been acted upon and potential limitations of or barriers within the RfE programme have been addressed.

The survey reveals that 95 per cent of the young people enrolled on RfE already aspired to go to university before participating in the programme. Although at this interim stage we are unable to ascertain progression onto university, it will be interesting to see whether 95 per cent of the RfE students go on to attend university – a topic to be explored in the final report. It will be particularly interesting to compare the progression rates between students on RfE, students who did not apply, and students who applied but did not gain a place.

The evaluation will therefore provide a indication of how the programme may help translate intentions for HE into reality of participation. It will also show the extent to which RfE results in students applying to research-led universities and how the programme prepares students for both application to, and subsequent participation in, HE. However, at this stage, these initial findings go some way to identify the value of the programme and the positive influence that RfE is beginning to have on its participants.

Appendix 1: Reach for Excellence baseline survey, 2008

The survey follows on pages 44 to 49.



Career Awareness and Intentions Questionnaire

NFER is an educational research organisation. We have been asked by the Sutton Trust, a charitable foundation, to conduct a study concerning young people's choices about university. This survey is the first part of that study. We are asking you to answer the questions below, most of which will only require ticking the appropriate box.

Your identity and your answers will not be made known to anyone other than the members of the NFER research team. These will not be shared with your school or the Sutton Trust. The questionnaire will ask you about:

- your personal details
- your attitudes towards university
- your understanding of your parents'/carers' or guardians' attitudes to university
- your aspirations and intentions
- matters that may affect your decisions concerning future education

We would also be grateful if you would provide contact details in case we should want to follow up this questionnaire with another to see if your career plans have changed.

A ABOUT YOURSELF

1a. Name

1b. Gender (Please tick)

Male

☐

Female

☐

2. School

3a. How many GCSEs have you achieved at grades A*-C?

(Please write the number in the box)

3b. Do you have English and Maths at GCSE grades A*-C? (Please tick Yes or No)

Yes

No

Yes

No

English GCSE A*-C

☐☐

Maths GCSE A*-C

☐☐

4. What A-levels/GCSEs/other courses are you studying this year?

(Please list the subjects in the boxes below)

A-Levels

GCSEs

(additional/re-takes)

Other courses

(Please provide details)

B CAREERS ADVICE RECEIVED TO DATE

5. Below is a list of people you might have spoken to about university.

(Please ÷ to indicate how useful their advice has been)

	Very useful	Useful	Not very useful	Not at all useful	No advice given
	1	2	3	4	5
Teacher	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
School Careers Coordinator	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Connexions Adviser	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Parent/Carer	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
University Staff	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Employer	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sister/Brother/Other Family	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please specify below)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

6. What are your parents'/carers' attitudes towards you going to university?

(For each statement, please ÷ the box that most applies to you)

	Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree
	1	2	3	4	5
I don't know what my parents/carers think	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My parents/carers would like me to go to university	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My parents/carers cannot advise me as they don't know what university is like	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My parents/carers want me to get a job rather than go to university	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My parents/carers want me to do some work-based training (e.g. apprenticeship)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My parents/carers want me to take some time out	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My parents/carers are leaving the decision to me	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other- What else do your parents/carers think?	<input type="text"/>				

C YOUR CURRENT INTENTIONS POST YEAR 13

7. Do you know what career you would eventually like to follow?

(Please ü Yes or No)

Yes ☐

No ☐

(If yes, please write what career you would like to follow in the box)

8. What do you intend to do when you leave school?

(Please ü the option below which most applies to you)

Go to college ☐ 1

Get a job ☐ 2

Go to university ☐ 3

Go on a training programme/
apprenticeship ☐ 4

Take a year out then get a job ☐ 5

Take a year out then go to university ☐ 6

Do voluntary work ☐ 7

Don't know ☐ 8

Other - (please specify below) ☐ 9

(If you intend to go to university, please go to Qu.9. Otherwise, please go to Qu.11)

9. Do you know which universities you want to apply for? (Please ü Yes or No)

Yes ☐

No ☐

(If yes, please list the universities you are considering in the box)

10. Do you know which subject(s) you would like to study at university?

(Please ü Yes or No)

Yes ☐

No ☐

(If yes, please list the subject(s) you are considering in the box)

11. Below are a number of statements about why you might want to or not want to go to university or be undecided.

(Please tick the response to the following statements that most applies to you)

	Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree
	1	2	3	4	5
I'm not sure what university would involve	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I want to continue studying	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I think I would enjoy the studying	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I think I will get the grades needed for university	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I want to get a higher qualification	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I know what course I would do	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I want to go to university	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I don't need to go to university to do the job I want to do	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Going to university will enable me to get a good job	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Going to university will enable me to get a well paid job	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I think university study would be too hard for me	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I don't know what else to do at this stage	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I would fit into student life well	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I don't want to leave home	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I want to start earning as soon as possible	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I want to get a job soon	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
None of my friends are going to university	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I can afford to go to university	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I'm concerned I'll end up in debt	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I have heard good things about university from my friends	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I would find it easy to make new friends	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I know people who have been to university	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other - (Please write any other reasons in the boxes below as to why you want to go to university or why you don't want to go to university.)					

Why you want to go to university

Why you don't want to go to university

12. What would encourage/further encourage you to go to university?

(Please ü the response that most applies to you)

	True for me	Not true for me	Don't know
Not to have to worry about being in debt	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
If my parents were more encouraging	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
If I had more information and support to research the options	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Finding a course which really interested me	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
If I knew it would enable me to get a good job	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
If I knew I would be better paid in the end	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
If my friends were going	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Nothing would encourage me to go to university	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other	<input type="text"/>		

13. Would you benefit from more information about what going to university would involve? (Please ü Yes or No)

Yes ☐ No ☐

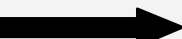
*If you answered Yes, please go to Qu.14.
Otherwise, please go to Qu.15*

14. What information do you require about university?

(Please ü as many options which apply to you)

How to find out about courses	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	How much it would cost	<input type="checkbox"/> 10
What different universities are like	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	Student loans	<input type="checkbox"/> 11
How the study compares to school	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	Financial support	<input type="checkbox"/> 12
The grades you need	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	Other- Please specify below	<input type="checkbox"/> 13
How to apply	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="text"/>	
What student life is like	<input type="checkbox"/> 6		
What the subject(s) I am considering would involve	<input type="checkbox"/> 7		
The best universities for the subject(s) I am considering	<input type="checkbox"/> 8		
What you need for the top universities	<input type="checkbox"/> 9		

OTHER INFORMATION

Please can you provide us with some additional information about yourself and your family on the next page. 

15. Have any of the following members of your family been to university?

(Please ü the answers which apply to you)

Mother	<input type="checkbox"/>	1	Cousin(s)	<input type="checkbox"/>	5	None of my family have been to university	<input type="checkbox"/>	9
Father	<input type="checkbox"/>	2	Carer	<input type="checkbox"/>	6		Other adult family members - please specify below	<input type="checkbox"/>
Step-mother	<input type="checkbox"/>	3	Brother(s)	<input type="checkbox"/>	7			
Step-father	<input type="checkbox"/>	4	Sister (s)	<input type="checkbox"/>	8			

16. Are you receiving an Educational Maintenance Allowance? If yes, please say how much you are receiving a week.

(Please ü the response below which applies to you)

YES £10 a week	<input type="checkbox"/>	1
YES £20 a week	<input type="checkbox"/>	2
YES £30 a week	<input type="checkbox"/>	3
I am not receiving an Educational Maintenance Allowance	<input type="checkbox"/>	4

17. Please can you give us your email address, mobile number and address so that we can keep in touch regarding your career progress.

Email address:

Mobile number:

Address:

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR TIME

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Genesis 4, Innovation Way, Heslington, York.
YO10 5DQ

Appendix 2: Student proforma

Evaluation for the Reach for Excellence Programme

The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) is carrying out an evaluation of the Reach for Excellence programme. We are hoping to find out if being involved in the programme has had any impact on your choices about higher education.

We are really interested to hear your views and would appreciate it if you were willing to fill in this short questionnaire. All of your responses will be kept strictly confidential.

1. When you started RfE, how did you feel about applying to university?
Please tick one response.

I wanted to go to university ☐

I wasn't sure if I wanted to go or not ☐

I didn't want to go to university ☐

Other ☐

2. Now you are on RfE, what are your plans? Please tick one response.

I want to go to university ☐

I am not sure if I want to go or not ☐

I don't want to go to university ☐

Other ☐

Please explain below why your plans have/have not changed

3. If you are planning to go to university, where are you currently thinking of applying to? Please list:

1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____

4. _____ 5. _____ 6. _____

4. Are these university choices different to those you had at the start of RfE?

Yes

☐

No

☐

Don't know

☐

Not applicable

☐

If yes, what are the reasons behind the change(s)?

5. Has RfE helped you to decide which universities you might like to go to?

Yes

☐

No

☐Don't know/
can't say☐

Please explain your reasons for this answer:

6. Please rank (from 1 to 6) how important each of the following factors are to you in deciding on your university choices. 1 would be the most important factor, and 6 the least important factor. Please put one number (1, 2, 3, 4, 5 or 6) into each box below to show how important each factor is.

Its closeness to home

It is the best university for my subject

My friends are applying/ I have friends there

There is a good student life there

The university has a good reputation

The grades required to get in

7. Some of the things that RfE might have helped you with are listed below. Please circle one number on each line to indicate how helpful RfE has been for each of the areas.

	Not at all helpful			Very helpful	
	1	2	3	4	5
Providing insight into what university life is like					
Providing information on financial arrangements/support for university					
Raising awareness of university choices available					
Helping you choose universities to apply to					
Helping you choose subjects to apply for					
Helping to identify the top universities to apply for					
Teaching you study skills					
Building your confidence					
Raising your aspirations for your future career					
Developing your social skills					
Giving your parents information about university					
Practical advice/information about applying to university					

Please could you fill in your name and contact details. This is for NFER's use only and your answers will not be shown to anyone on the RfE programme or your schools.

Name:

E-mail:

Phone:

Thank you very much for your time

Appendix 3: Parent proforma

Evaluation for the Reach for Excellence Programme

The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) is carrying out an evaluation of the Reach for Excellence programme. We are hoping to find out what impact taking part in the programme has on the young people involved.

We are really interested to hear what parents/carers think about the programme, and what impact they feel it might have on their child.

We would really appreciate it if you were able to fill in the following short questionnaire. All of your responses will be kept strictly confidential.

Thank you very much for your time.

a) Your son/daughter has gained a place on the Reach for Excellence programme. Has this had any immediate effect on them?

Yes

☐

No

☐

Don't know

☐

Please give details:

b) Do you feel the Reach for Excellence programme will be beneficial to your son/daughter?

Yes

☐

No

☐

Don't know

☐

Please give details:

c) Now they are on the Reach for Excellence programme do you think any differently about your son/daughter's future?

Yes

☐

No

☐

Don't know

☐

Please tell us why:

d) How useful have you found today's session? Please rate on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is not at all useful, and 5 is very useful, please **circle a number** below.

Not at all useful	1	2	3	4	5	Very useful
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e) What have you found most useful about today?

f) Is there anything that you have found less useful today?

g) Is there anything else that you would have liked to have heard about today?

h) Are there any other comments you would like to make?

Thank you very much for your time