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**IMPACT**  
**REPORT**

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# Foreword

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In the COVID-19 pandemic, it can feel hard to find positives, particularly for young people in education. Exams were cancelled, schools were closed, and students' futures became more uncertain. Programmes like Universify are now more important than ever in countering educational inequality. It is with great pride that I can reflect on the achievements of our participants and alumni in 2020.

Not only are participants from our second cohort now at university, but our research shows that more of our students are entering top-tier universities than the national average. Despite the disruption to GCSEs our fourth cohort, due to sit the exams in 2020, received results comparable to — and in some cases better than — previous cohorts. These results are testament to their ongoing hard work and the self-directed, empowering process of coaching.

COVID-19 prevented us from hosting residential at Oxford and Cambridge. By adapting our programme to an online format we were able to continue to raise aspirations, connect cohorts of like-minded and ambitious students, and further their understanding of university.

We have a growing evidence base that our programme creates short and long-term impact. What we do works, in-person and online.

It has been a challenging year for all charities, and we are no different. Fundraising is tougher than ever as we look to meet the ever-increasing demand and need for our programme. Our 2020-21 cohort of 167 participants is our largest ever and we are planning for 200+ in 2021-22.

I am proud of our team of staff, volunteers and tutors, whose dedication and passion enabled us to pivot our programme and continue to support our participants. I am also grateful to all our supporters, who have believed in us and enabled us to make a positive impact throughout the pandemic.

The challenges are not over, but the successes so far fill me with belief for the future. As a sector we shall overcome the impacts of the pandemic and continue to make education and society fairer for everyone.

**Mary Nicholson, Chair of Trustees, Universify Education**

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# Impact summary

OVER THE LAST FIVE YEARS WE HAVE WORKED WITH

**558**  
participants

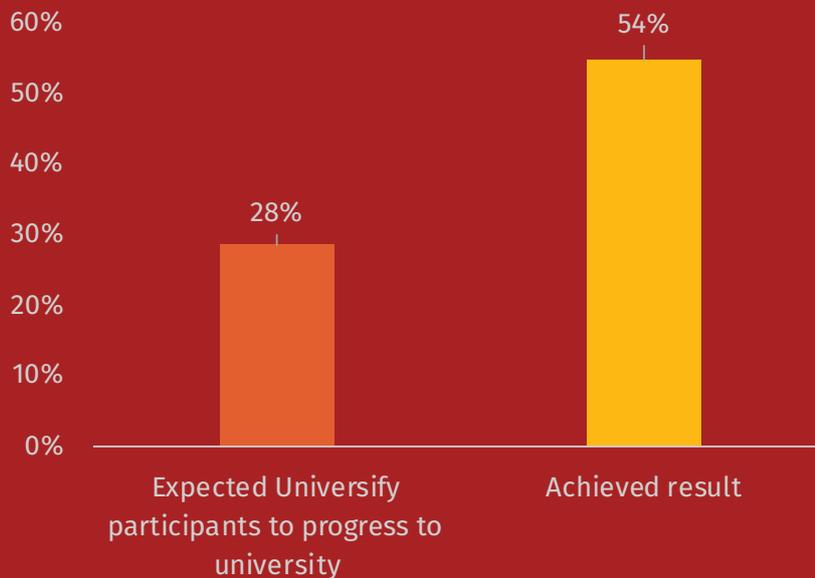
from

**108**  
partner schools

with the  
help of

**207**  
volunteers

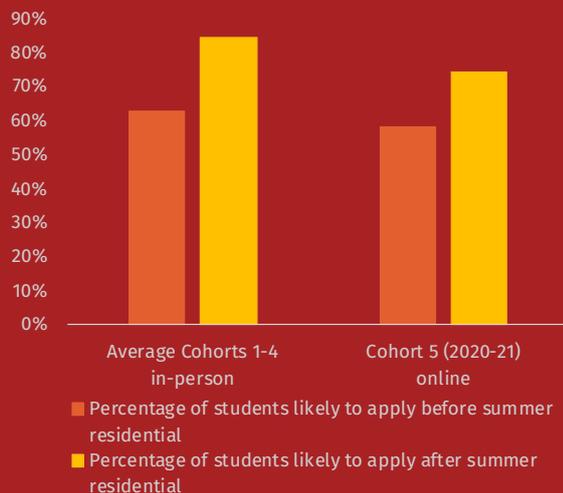
INCREASED SUCCESSFUL APPLICATIONS TO UNIVERSITY COMPARED TO A TAILORED BENCHMARK



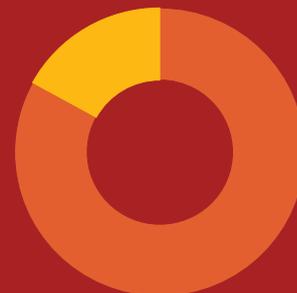
**2.5x**

more Universify  
participants gained places  
at high-tariff universities  
compared to a benchmark  
based on students from  
similar backgrounds

WE INCREASED PARTICIPANT ASPIRATIONS TO APPLY TO HIGHLY-SELECTIVE UNIVERSITIES



WE HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO IMPROVED GCSE ATTAINMENT



**83%**

of teachers agreed that Universify benefitted student attainment at GCSE

# Executive summary

CONTINUING TO IMPROVE ACCESS TO HIGHLY-SELECTIVE UNIVERSITIES FOR STUDENTS FROM DISADVANTAGED BACKGROUNDS AND TACKLING THE EXACERBATION OF EDUCATIONAL INEQUALITY FROM COVID-19

## TACKLING EDUCATIONAL INEQUALITY IN A GLOBAL PANDEMIC

Universify exists to further educational equality and in doing so improve social mobility. We aim to create a fairer, more representative society by making universities open to anyone with academic potential regardless of their background. In particular, we work with highly-selective universities where those experiencing disadvantage face the greatest barriers to entry.

The coronavirus pandemic has been a challenging time for everyone and has had a particularly profound effect on education. School closures, lockdown, and cancelled exams have exacerbated existing educational inequality, which, in turn, worsens societal inequality.

We have all been forced to adapt and we are delighted to see Unviersify participants successfully meet the challenges of the pandemic. Their success is highlighted in the university destinations of our second cohort of participants. We have also been forced to adapt, translating our year-long programme online to ensure those most at risk of not fulfilling their academic potential received support at a time of greater need.

## UNIVERSIFY ALUMNI OVERCOME THE PANDEMIC TO ATTEND TOP UNIVERSITIES

2020 saw the second cohort of Universify participants apply to university and highlighted the long-term impacts of our programme. We found that a greater proportion of Universify participants gained places at high-tariff universities than 18-year-olds nationally. More than half of Cohort 2 participants have entered university in 2020.

Data from the University and College Admissions Service's (UCAS) Strobe tool found that Cohort 2

participants were significantly more likely to apply to the universities of Oxford and Cambridge in 2020. Again, this shows that our impact on increasing aspirations has been sustained long-term.

## MAKING AN IMPACT ONLINE

Despite moving online, we have continued to grow our programme, working with 167 participants from across the country in 2020. Our programme continues to help students overcome the three key barriers – limited aspirations, feeling out of place at university, and limited attainment – that students from underrepresented backgrounds face in applying to highly-selective universities.

- **Increasing successful applications to university** — Universify participants were nearly twice as likely to successfully apply to universities than their peers and 2.5 times more likely to receive offers to high-tariff universities, those with the most demanding entry requirements.
- **Increasing aspirations to university** — there was a 16 percentage point increase in the number of participants who were 'fairly likely' or 'very likely' to apply to a highly-selective university at the end of the online summer programme.
- **Improving GCSE attainment** — 83% of teachers agreed or strongly agreed that engaging in Universify's programme benefited the student's GCSE attainment.
- **Fostering a greater understanding of university** — there was a shift in perception over our summer course with over 2.5 times more positive word associations than negative associations linked to university at the end of the course.

## CREATING LONG-TERM, SUSTAINABLE IMPACT

Like most charities, the pandemic has tested us, stretching our resources as we balance delivering

our expanding and necessary work with maintaining long-term sustainability through fundraising. Demand for our programme is greater than we can meet. In 2020 we received more student applications than ever before, and more partner colleges wanted to host our programme. We wish to meet this demand, growing our impact to further educational equality. To do so we have set three objectives for the coming year.

Firstly, we will expand our programme to 200-250 participants. Secondly, we will focus on building long-term sustainability by diversifying our income streams and building funding relationships with university Widening Participation Offices. Thirdly, we will continue to learn, refine, and adapt our programme to make it as effective, efficient, and impactful as possible.

Our vision is one where universities are open to anyone with academic potential regardless of

their background. This will mean a fairer, more representative, more equal society. This report builds on our track record of success over five cohorts as we continue to learn and adapt to achieve that vision.



# Olivia's Universify story, discovering her passion for Politics

'I AM NOW STUDYING BA POLITICS AND SOCIOLOGY WITH PROFICIENCY IN RUSSIAN AT THE UNIVERSITY OF EXETER AND KNOW THAT IN PART I OWE THIS TO THE INFLUENCE OF THE UNIVERSIFY PROGRAMME AND ITS LASTING IMPACT ON MY GOALS AND ACHIEVEMENTS.'



*I took part in the Universify programme as part of the 2017/18 cohort, the programme consolidating my want to attend university and introducing me directly to the type of study I wished to enter into. The experience not only helped in building my academic confidence but in introducing me to new friends and building a network of peers with similar aspirations to my own, alleviating much of the social anxiety I had previously experienced in relation to meeting new people within academic environments. Most distinctly the subject sessions offered as part of the programme geared me to towards the social sciences as the discipline with which I most connected, influencing not only my A Level choices but my degree subject. After completing the Universify programme I found that what had been a personal interest in Politics was something I wished to place much stronger focus on, taking it upon myself to volunteer in my MP's office for a year as well as entering into Model UN during my time at Sixth Form. I am now studying BA Politics and Sociology with Proficiency in Russian at the University of Exeter and know that in part I owe this to the influence of the Universify programme and its lasting impact on my goals and achievements.*



**Olivia completed the Universify programme in 2017-18. She volunteered for our alumni panel as part of Cohort 5's Universify 2020 summer course online, sharing her advice and guidance from her experience of the programme and applying it to university.**

# Who we are

FOSTERING EDUCATIONAL EQUALITY TO MAKE UNIVERSITIES AND THEIR BENEFITS OPEN TO ANYONE WITH ACADEMIC POTENTIAL, REGARDLESS OF THEIR BACKGROUND.

## THE PROBLEM

Universify Education is an access and outreach charity that works to further educational equality in the UK. We believe that access to education, including Higher Education, is fundamental to creating a fair and inclusive society. Universities should be open to everyone with academic potential regardless of their background - but in the UK today, the reality is that young people from disadvantaged backgrounds are far less likely

to attend university than their more advantaged peers, especially highly-selective universities.<sup>1</sup> Before they have a chance to make decisions about their future, a student's background (family income, ethnicity, where they live and go to school) unfairly influences how likely they are to go to university.<sup>2</sup> For example, only 26.3% of pupils eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) progress to Higher Education, compared with 45.1% of pupils not on FSM.<sup>3</sup>



<sup>1</sup> WonkHE, 'Don't leave disadvantaged students out in the cold', February 2018 <https://wonkhe.com/blogs/dont-leave-disadvantaged-students-out-in-the-cold/>. (Article accessed 28 November 2019).

<sup>2</sup> Teach First, 'Impossible. Social Mobility and the unbreakable glass ceiling', 2017 <https://www.teachfirst.org.uk/sites/default/files/2017-08/Teach-First-Impossible-Policy-Report.pdf> (Article accessed 10th December 2020).

<sup>3</sup> Department for Education 'Widening participation in higher education, Academic year 2018/2019', 2020 <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/widening-participation-in-higher-education#releaseHeadlines-summary> (Page accessed 10th December 2020).

Based on current progress, the educational attainment gap will never close.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, the impact of the pandemic will worsen this gap - the Education Endowment Foundation estimated that the last decade of progress was lost in the 4 months of the first UK lockdown.<sup>5</sup> The pandemic has also had a devastating effect on the UK economy, with the initial lockdown leading to the UK's most severe recession on record.<sup>6</sup> Students from low socio-economic backgrounds are more likely to take the labour market into account when deciding whether to enter Higher Education, and may be less likely to attend university during recessions compared with periods of economic growth.<sup>7</sup>

## OUR INTERVENTION

At Universify, we are working to change this problem. We have identified three key barriers which make students from disadvantaged backgrounds less likely to apply to highly-selective universities - limited attainment, limited aspirations, and feeling out of place in a university setting. Our programme directly addresses all of these challenges through our year-long intervention which combines three elements: a week-long summer residential, monthly 1-to-1 coaching sessions, and a 3-day spring residential.



### The three elements of our year-long programme are

1. a week-long summer course
2. monthly coaching
3. spring GCSE revision residential



*When I saw the Universify volunteer advert, I decided to apply immediately. Unlike most of my snap decisions this one was for good reason. Having been in the first cohort of this initiative 5 years ago, I have a unique appreciation in how useful the programme can be for participants. Although I was academically driven, applying to a university like Oxford seemed unrealistic and attending the summer school was the most effective way of dismantling that idea, something which I am sure resonates with a lot of alumni. Additionally, the coaching aspect meant that this was a more sustained message, the importance of which I have only really appreciated much later. Given all of this, I knew that this would be an incredibly rewarding experience from the perspective of a coach, and so I applied.*

*Being a Volunteer Coach has been immensely fulfilling, despite the challenges of the pandemic. I really enjoyed helping out with the online summer school and engaging with a larger group of students, but the coaching sessions have been the highlight from my role. It has been amazing seeing the confidence of my coachees grow in both themselves and their ambitions, even within a session. Additionally, getting the chance to put the coaching training into action and actually see it working has increased my own confidence in my own abilities and is something I can hopefully carry forward from this volunteering experience.*

**Simrit Sekhon, former Universify participant and current Universify volunteer**

<sup>4</sup> Education Policy Institute, 2020. 'Education in England: Annual Report 2020' [https://epi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/EPI\\_2020\\_Annual\\_Report\\_.pdf](https://epi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/EPI_2020_Annual_Report_.pdf) (Page accessed 10th December 2020).

<sup>5</sup> Education Endowment Foundation, Impact of school closures on the attainment gap: Rapid Evidence Assessment, London: Education Endowment Foundation, 2020.

<sup>6</sup> BBC, 'Coronavirus: What is a recession and how could it affect me?', <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-52986863> (Page accessed 8th January 2021).

<sup>7</sup> Sutton Trust, Social Mobility and Covid, April 2020, <https://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/COVID-19-and-Social-Mobility-1.pdf> (Page accessed 10th December 2020).

# What we do

OUR YEAR-LONG PROGRAMME STARTS EARLIER TO IMPROVE ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION BY EQUIPPING STUDENTS WITH THE GRADES AND ASPIRATIONS TO FULFIL THEIR POTENTIAL

## SUMMER RESIDENTIAL

The week-long summer residential gives participants a snapshot of life as an undergraduate student. They attend academic seminars taught by university lecturers, complete a group work project, and take part in a timetable of social activities. The course challenges participants by taking them outside of their comfort zone, but is also an enjoyable, social experience. They not only have a much better understanding of what university is like, but become part of a cohort of like-minded friends, who are motivated and aspire to attend university.

## SPRING RESIDENTIAL

At the spring residential (previously known as the Easter residential) we focus on boosting academic attainment in core GCSE subjects and preparing participants to think about their future. Participants complete intensive tailored revision classes, attend a careers fair showcasing a wide range of professions, and learn about Year 12 and 13 widening participation programmes to continue supporting participants to reach university.

## COACHING

We provide participants with monthly 1-to-1 coaching with trained Universify volunteers, who are current or recent university students. Coaching gives participants tailored support in setting and achieving their academic goals. This acts to keep participants engaged, continuing to think and talk about university and their aspirations, and helps them to build their individual resilience and problem-solving skills.



*The Universify programme is definitely one of the experiences that have had a profound impact on my life to date. I remember being 15 not having a clue what I wanted to do and honestly, I was pretty lost. It was only after seeing Oxford for the first time and taking part in the programme that I really started to consider higher education as an option. The academic classes on ethics and moral philosophy along with critical thinking were my favourite part of the course and are what really triggered my academic curiosity and ultimately led to my interest in medicine which I am now studying at Imperial.*

**Gulled Bulhan, Cohort 1 Universify participant and first year medical student at Imperial College, London**

**THEORY OF CHANGE**

In designing our programme we developed a Theory of Change to act as a logic model for how we aim to achieve our mission. We mapped out how we aim to reach our long-term goals and outcomes through our programme’s activities. As part of our annual strategy we review our Theory of Change based on findings from our impact evaluation and participant feedback. These findings allow us to refine our programme to ensure we are best supporting participants to fulfil their potential in education.

Our Theory of Change outlines how we aim to equip participants with the skills, knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs to make successful applications to highly-selective universities. By doing so, we hope to combat educational and social inequality in the long-term, countering underrepresentation in society by addressing underrepresentation in Higher Education.

**Background**

Students from certain geographical, ethnic, socio-economic, and class backgrounds are less likely to apply successfully to highly-selective universities and high-demand courses. Barriers include low aspirations, limited attainment, understanding of higher education, lack of support and reliable information, and feeling out of place in a university environment.

**Problem**

Students from disadvantaged backgrounds are under-represented in higher education, particularly at highly-selective universities.

**Activities**

Residential summer course. Admissions support.  
Spring revision residential. Support at university.  
Academic coaching.

**Intermediate outcomes**

Improved understanding of highly-selective university, and how to get there for participants.  
Improved subject knowledge and critical thinking skills.

**Outcomes**

Increased aspiration and attainment. Improved confidence and resilience.  
Increased knowledge of university admissions. Participants are able to make an informed decision about university.  
Increased feeling of being ‘at home’ at university.

**Final goal**

Increase in students from disadvantaged backgrounds making successful applications to universities and highly-selective universities.

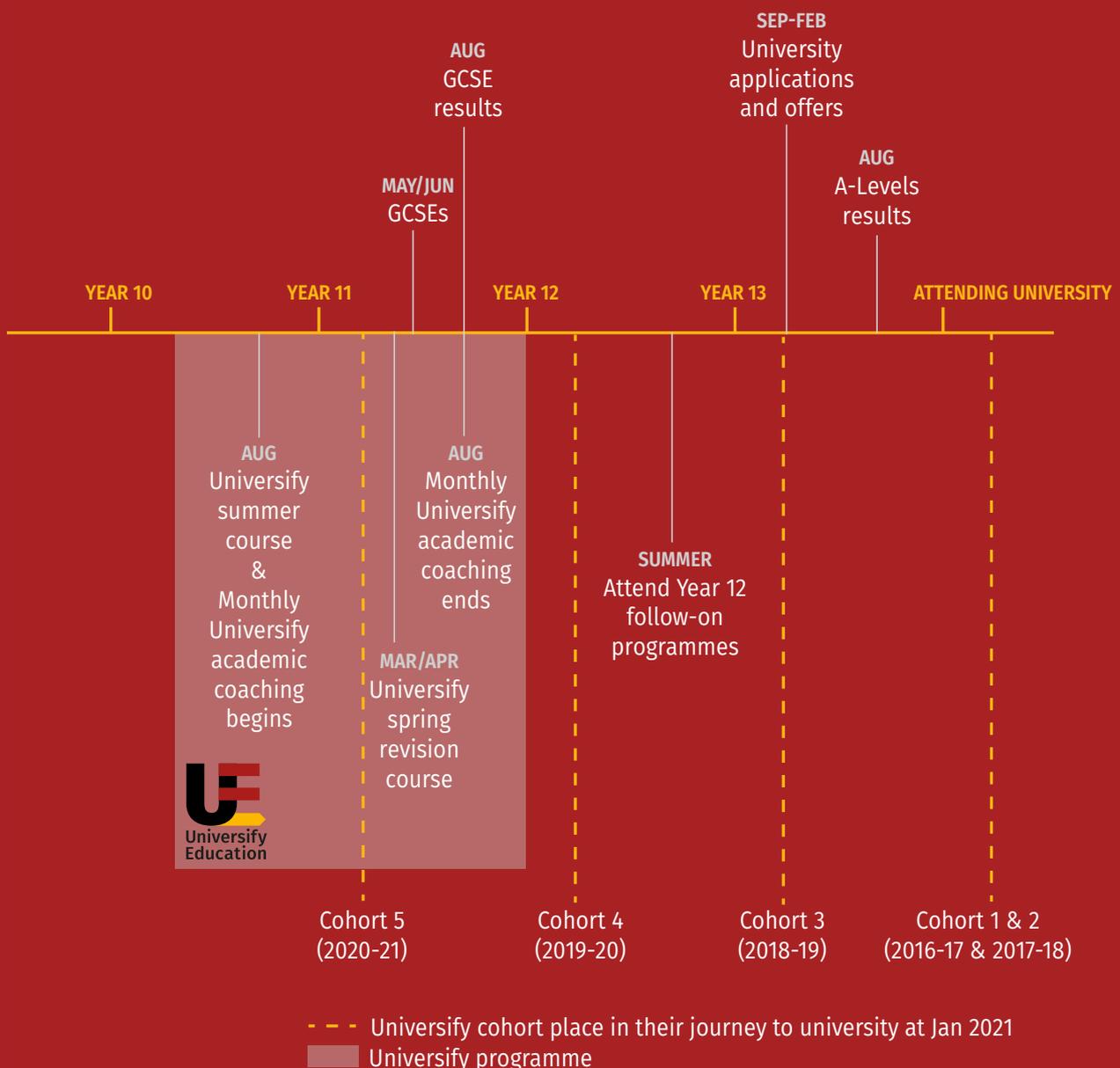
**Further goal**

Higher Education — particularly highly-selective universities — is representative of the UK population.  
People are able to make informed decisions about their future.

**Enabling factors**

Participants form a supportive group and develop cohort expectations of progress.  
Participants respond positively to challenge of being ‘out of their comfort zone’ and in a new environment.  
Schools support participants aspirations and decisions through increased understanding of university.

# Participant journey, from University to university



Our year-long intervention starts in Year 10 to build a pipeline of prospective applicants eligible for existing Year 12 programmes and with the aspirations and attainment to apply to highly-selective universities. We invite Year 12 programmes to the spring course to present follow-on opportunities to participants to encourage them to continue exploring their academic futures.

# Who we support

OUR PARTICIPANTS ARE YEAR 10 STUDENTS FROM NON-SELECTIVE STATE SCHOOLS, WHOSE BACKGROUNDS ARE UNDER-REPRESENTED AT HIGHLY-SELECTIVE UNIVERSITIES

A key part of what makes Universify unique is who we work with. Our participants are GCSE students from disadvantaged backgrounds, starting in Year 10 and continuing throughout Year 11. Most other access and outreach programmes start in Year 12, but by that point many young people have already made decisions about their future, or have under-performed at GCSE, and so would be unable to make a competitive application to a highly-selective university. By starting earlier, we have the chance to raise participants' attainment at GCSE. We are also able to create a pipeline with other widening participation providers so that students get the most support possible to help them to succeed, increasing the sector's effectiveness and maximising our impact.

When selecting participants for our programme, we look for students from disadvantaged backgrounds who have a passion for academia but who are at

risk of not fulfilling their full potential. We work with students who face disadvantage in many different forms, but particularly socio-economic disadvantage, as research shows that this is a key barrier in attending university. Therefore, we prioritise applications from students eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) and Pupil Premium. In 2020-2021, 72% of Universify participants were eligible for FSM at some point in the last six years (Pupil Premium), which is a marked increase on the previous two years and is comparable to the proportion for our first two cohorts, which were much smaller than Cohort 5. The majority of Cohort 5 (53%) were currently eligible for FSM, a significantly higher proportion than we have had since Universify was founded in 2016. This shows that we have been able to expand student numbers each year while working with more students whose backgrounds mean they are at risk of not fulfilling their potential in education.



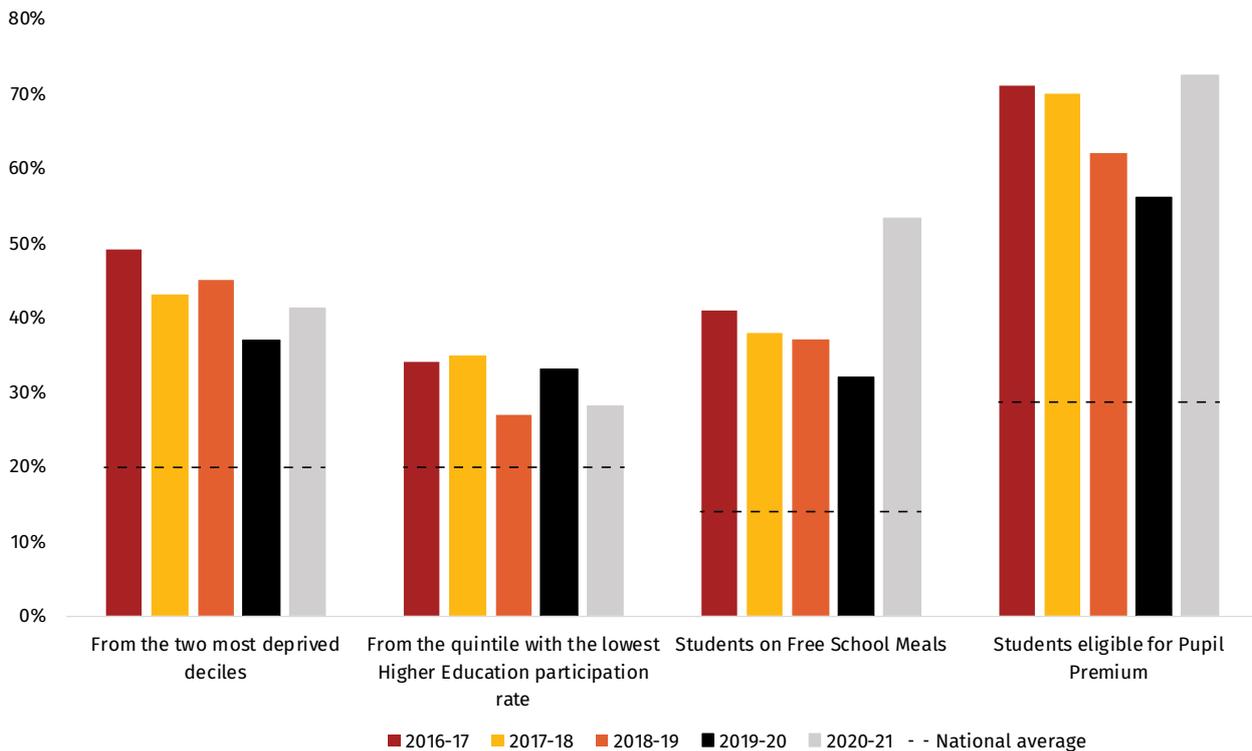
Additionally, we work with students who would be the first generation in their family to attend university, as a lack of family members with experience of university can limit both understanding of and aspirations to university. Almost three-quarters of Cohort 5 (73%) would be the first in their family to go to university. By working with these students, our programme has the potential for greater impact and enhanced social mobility, by improving not just the participant’s understanding of university, but also that of their wider family (for example, younger siblings).

Our selection process is further contextualised using teacher statements. These give us more detail on other reasons why a student may be at risk of not fulfilling their potential, including non-socioeconomic circumstances such as being care-experienced or a Looked After Child (LAC). Teachers also confirm participants’ potential to achieve the GCSE grades required to make a strong application to highly-selective universities.

In August 2020, we worked with four partner colleges at the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge to run five online courses, with a total of 167 participants completing our summer course. While we had hoped to expand the course by 50 in 2020, our growth was limited by a higher-than-normal drop-out rate which we have attributed to moving some of the course online in response to the Covid pandemic.

41% of our fifth cohort came from areas with postcodes in the two most deprived deciles, according to the Index of Multiple Deprivation. In other words, two fifths of our participants came from the poorest 20% of neighbourhoods. When considering geographical participation in Higher Education, 28% of participants came from areas with the lowest participation rates in Higher Education, a slightly lower proportion than we had last year (POLAR4). Although we use POLAR to provide additional insight into participant backgrounds and the barriers they may face, we do not currently select students based on POLAR.

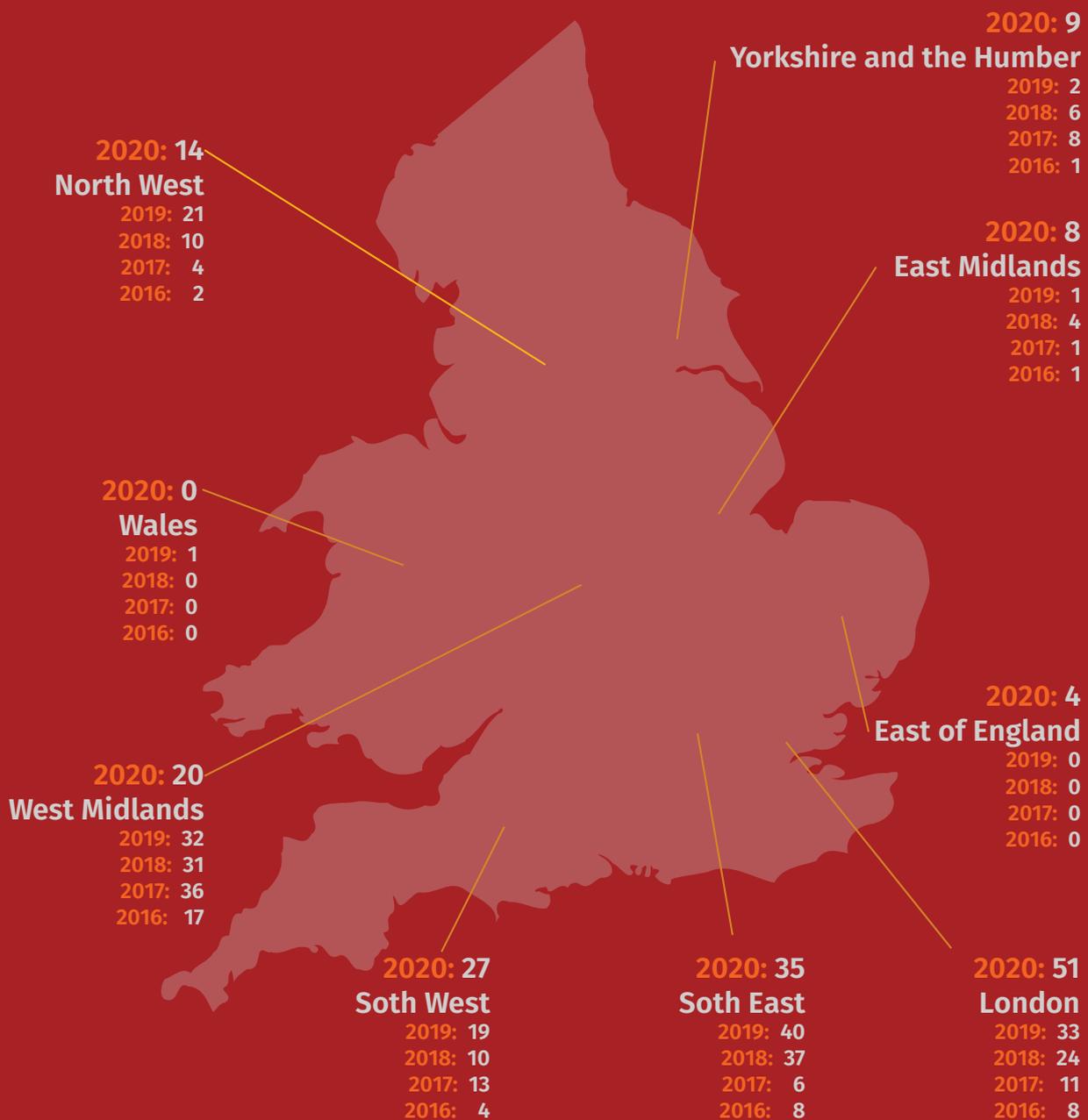
## The background of our participants makes them more disadvantaged than the national average in accessing Higher Education



# Where our participants are from

Initially, schools are selected from the priority areas of our partner colleges. For Somerville College these are Hounslow, Buckinghamshire, the West Midlands, and Staffordshire; for St Hugh's College, it is Kent; for Jesus College, they are Lambeth and Wandsworth; and for St Catharine's College, it is North Yorkshire and Suffolk. In 2020, other schools came through teachers who supported us in programme development, partner organisations, word of mouth from lead

teachers, school registrations of interest, and University outreach. The number of participants from each area is based on these link regions and partnerships. For example participants from the South East in 2020 are from Kent which belongs to St Hugh's link region and Buckingham, which is part of Somerville's link region, as well as partner schools in Oxford, Worthing, and Milton Keynes, which were recruited through other partners and through word of mouth.



# How did we adapt to COVID-19

MOVING ONLINE TO DELIVER A SAFE, ACCESSIBLE, AND IMPACTFUL PROGRAMME TO THOSE WHOSE EDUCATION WAS MOST AFFECTED BY THE PANDEMIC

The disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has been felt on many levels. For our 2019-20 participants, the announcement of the nationwide lockdown in March coincided with the closure of schools and the sudden cancellation of GCSE exams and our in-person residential. Our 2017-18 cohort (Cohort 2) were faced with an abrupt end to their school careers, uncertainty around how their A-level grades would be assessed, and the knock-on impact of meeting their offers for university places.

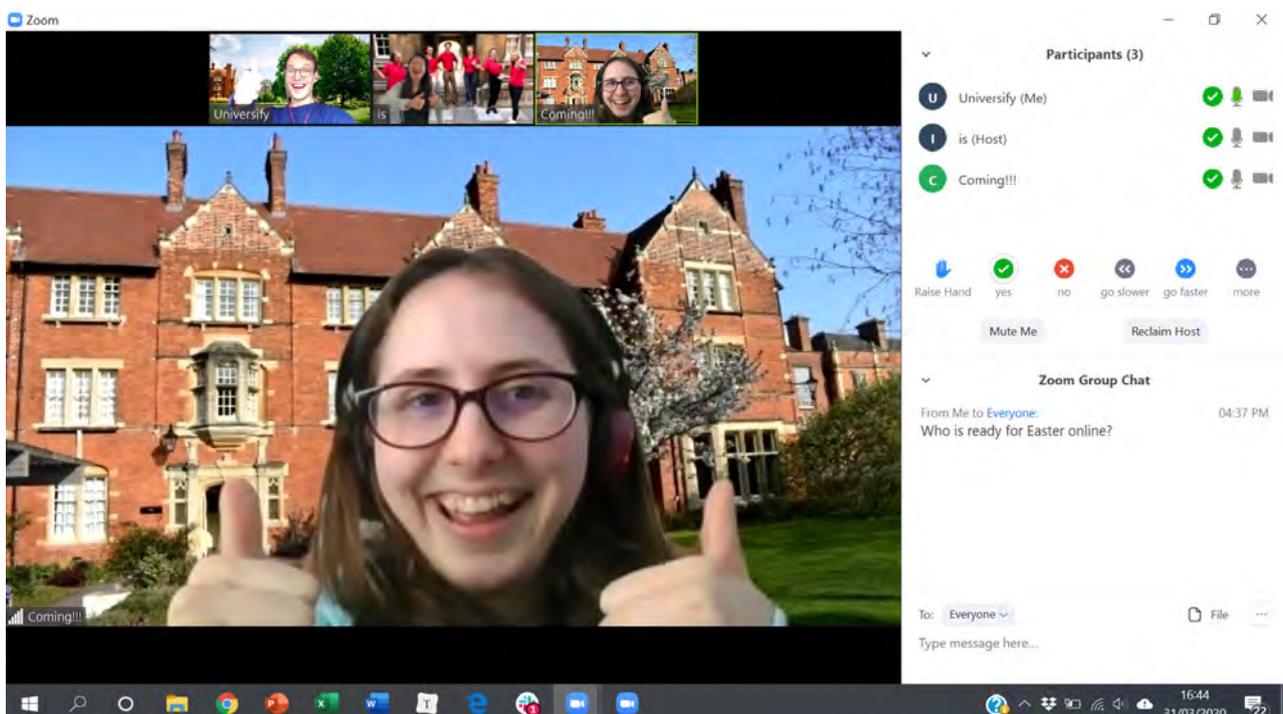
In March 2020, we transformed our spring residential into an online course in two weeks. Our two aims for the online spring course were to provide continuity and structure for our participants in Year 11 during the earliest days of the pandemic and to focus on the future, encouraging students to think beyond the immediate disruption. Our GCSE tutors provided A-Level study skills session as well as covering GCSE content to counter potential learning loss. Students also discussed shared challenges through

an 'adapting to lockdown and managing stress' workshop and took part in our careers fair which showcased a wider range of pathways than ever before thanks to the more easily accessible online format.

## DESIGNING OUR ONLINE SUMMER COURSE

The pandemic forced us to scrutinise what we aimed to achieve through our residential programmes and how to translate this online. We wanted to ensure that the course was safe, impactful, and accessible.

1. **Safe** – how could we ensure participants and volunteers were safe online?
2. **Impactful** – how could we mirror the in-person programme's impact without the residential aspect to achieve the following four objectives: setting aspirations to Higher Education, knowing how to apply for university,



knowing what university is like, and building relationships and confidence?

- 3. Accessible** – how could we support participants who did not have access to stable internet or a device to access the online programme?

To design a programme that would achieve these aims we sought input from former Universify participants, including our student council, volunteers who had run the online spring programme, the wider sector and received pro-bono consultancy support to design, refine and plan our online programme.

### SAFETY ONLINE

The safety and welfare of our students underpins our course design and delivery.<sup>1</sup> We aimed to remove unmonitored online interactions between a young person and an adult. We used recommendations and experiences from the wider sector, notably The Sutton Trust’s guidance from their own online spring programme, and consulted with our Trustee working in schools.<sup>2</sup> These measures were communicated to students and training ensured staff understood and were equipped to manage student welfare online. We also wanted to keep communication channels open so that support could be provided despite operating remotely. Participants were given clear instructions about how to report concerns and received a daily feedback survey as a prompt to report concerns. Universify’s safeguarding officers provided additional drop-in sessions for staff to raise concerns.



*Universify is a key part of our range of university preparation activities at Oxford Spires Academy. Students with potential in Year 10 and 11 have an amazing opportunity to find out more about possible routes through Higher Education, and when those students do their GCSEs they very often have added motivation to do themselves justice. When they reach Year 12 they are better prepared and achieve more. The experience lives with them, and I’m always pleased to see them referencing their time with Universify when they explain their reasons for applying in their personal statements. It’s a great scheme to increase social mobility and access to top universities.*

**Jackie Watson, Vice-Principal, Oxford Spires Academy**

### IMPACTFUL ACTIVITIES WITH TANGIBLE OUTCOMES

We designed every aspect of our online programme with specific participant outcomes in mind. We aimed to keep participant engagement high by creating opportunities for peer-to-peer interactions and for participants to provide feedback and input into the course each day. New activities like peer mentoring and team challenges were used to foster inclusivity, build resilience and provide the chance to try new activities outside of participants’ comfort zone. Participants explored Oxford and Cambridge virtually through our online scavenger hunt which was designed by our alumni. Each day was rounded off with a self-reflection exercise to consolidate what participants might otherwise have shared in informal discussions with their peers during an in-person course. After the 5-day online summer course, we added an additional October Booster

<sup>1</sup> We used Zoom because of its high functionality and ease of monitoring to run all online sessions. Key functions included the ability to lock sessions, remove participants, prevent participants from renaming themselves, prevent private chat messaging, password protect all meetings, use waiting rooms, record to a Cloud-based storage, use of breakout rooms (which at the time was best provided by Zoom compared with other platforms). Participants and staff were made aware that all sessions were recorded and daily spot-checks were carried out. There were at least two members of staff present in all online sessions, except for in breakout rooms where one member of staff acted as a ‘roving’ staff member to monitor rooms. This decision was made to stay in line with sector-wide best practices. The use of breakout rooms was essential for creating an engaging course. We supplemented live sessions with a secure online platform, Schoology, which was monitored by Universify staff throughout the courses.

<sup>2</sup> We also consulted key documents including the UK Council for Child Internet Safety’s Online Safety in Schools checklist.

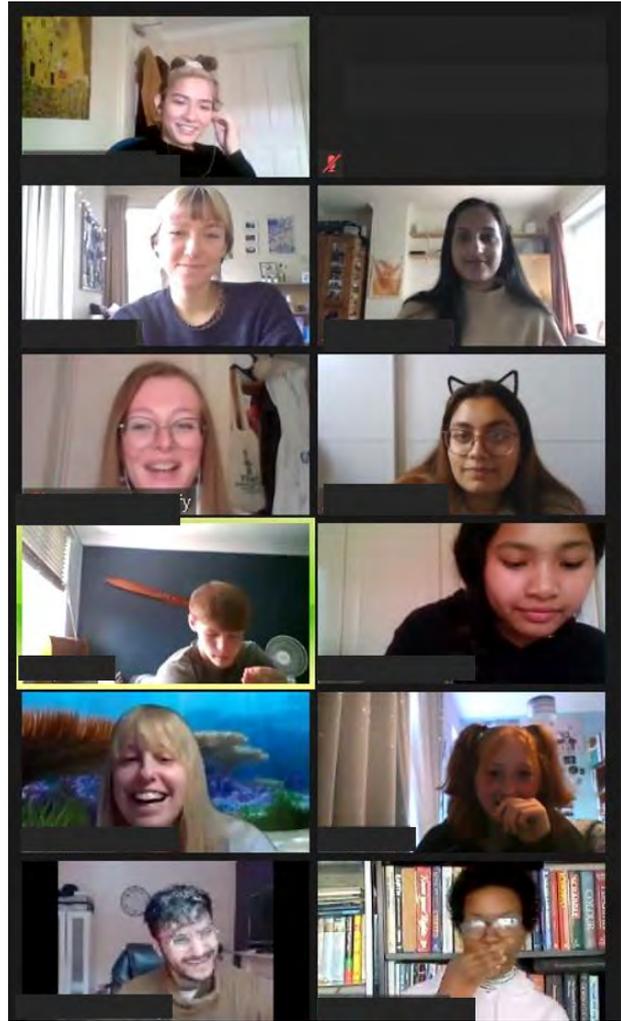
Day to the year-long programme to maintain engagement after summer.

**ENSURING THE COURSE WAS ACCESSIBLE**

We added extra pre-course elements to make it easy for participants to transition to an online programme. We ran a participant and parent Q&A to set expectations and build excitement and provided the opportunity for participants to speak to their coach before the course to familiarise themselves with the technology we would be using.<sup>3</sup> Participants received physical Course Journals guiding them through the course, providing offline activities and supporting self-reflection sessions.

**ACCESS TO THE INTERNET AND DIGITAL DEVICES**

From our pre-course survey, 18% of participants had access to a computer/tablet or a quiet space for less than 3 hours a day, or an unstable internet connection at home. By working with our partner schools, over half of these participants received sufficient access to the internet to take part in our online course. We are grateful to our lead teachers who worked hard to track down devices and Wi-Fi dongles or opened school in the holidays to ensure participants had a quiet space to attend the course.



<sup>3</sup> Ensuring that using technology was not a barrier to the courses was crucial in the way we ran courses. Participants were given step-by-step guides to get set up on the different platforms. Zoom links were posted 15 minutes before each session so that they would be easy to find. Each morning, Universify staff called participants' next of kin if they were missing from sessions and helped to get them online and provided emergency numbers to text or call whenever participants were struggling online. In case internet connections failed, participants had offline work they could complete in their Course Journals while tutors provided web-page based activities in case their internet connection was not strong enough to support video calls.

# What we have achieved so far

WE HAVE CONTINUED TO IMPROVE ACCESS TO HIGHLY-SELECTIVE UNIVERSITIES AS WELL AS RAISING ACADEMIC ATTAINMENT AND ASPIRATION

## ACHIEVING OUR LONG TERM GOAL

### University destinations

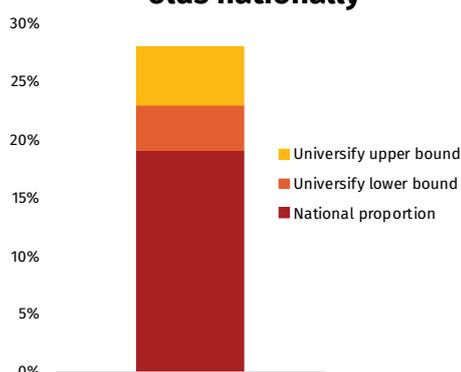
Once again, Universify participants were more likely to apply to university compared to a pool of potential applicants and a greater proportion of our participants entered university than would have been expected based on their background, even in the face of the pandemic.<sup>1</sup>

Independent analysis of our results by UCAS Strobe shows that students in Cohort 2 were **significantly more likely to apply to Oxford and Cambridge Universities** compared to a group of potential applicants. The result underpins our belief that giving students the opportunity to experience studying at highly-selective universities encourages more students to apply, while our academic support ensures that our students have the GCSE grades necessary to apply.

Our analysis of the number of participants who attended high-tariff universities - the top third of universities ranked according to their entry tariff points score - this year supports the finding from UCAS Strobe. **A greater proportion of Universify students gained places at high-tariff universities than 18-year-olds nationally (at least 23% vs 19%).** However, when we also take into account our participants' backgrounds, many more participants than expected have reached high-tariff universities. Those who attend state schools, whether selective or not, are less likely to progress to high-tariff universities (12.3%), and those on FSM are even less likely (3.9%). Our benchmark, which takes both measures into account, suggests

that a much greater proportion of our participants have gained places at high-tariff universities than would otherwise have been expected to: **at least 18 have entered a high-tariff university when just 7 would have been expected without Universify's intervention or in other words 11 additional students.**

**More Universify participants progressed to the top third of high-tariff universities than 18-year-olds nationally**



**More than half of Cohort 2 students have entered university this year** (at least 43 out of 79 students). This represents a minimum of a 16 percentage point uplift and a maximum 24 percentage point uplift compared with the expected number of students progressing to higher education based on students' backgrounds.<sup>2</sup>

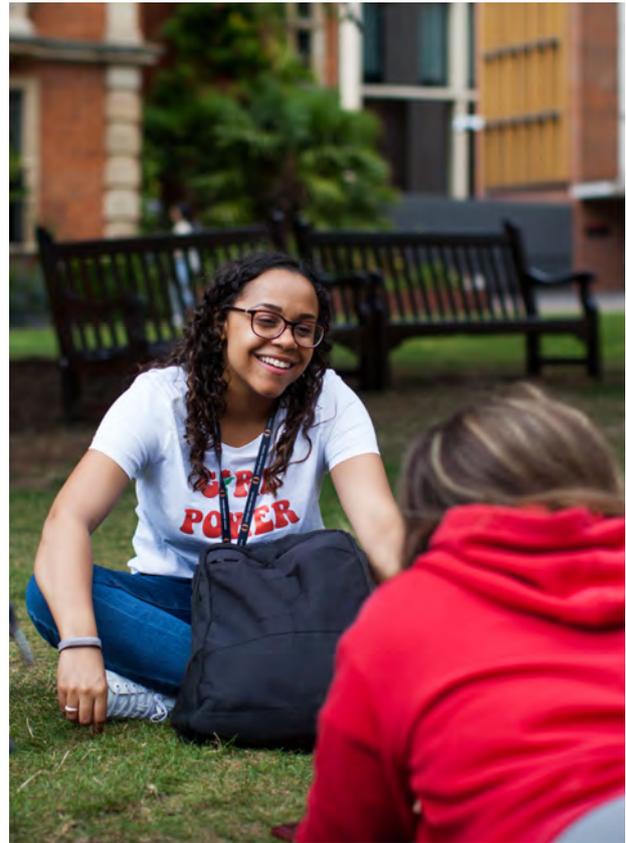
Our analysis suggests that at least 19 additional students from 79 participants in Cohort 2 have reached university who, when taking into account our cohort's aggregated socio-economic background, would not otherwise have been

<sup>1</sup> Participants' 2020 university destinations have been impacted by the pandemic-affected A-Level grading process in August 2020. The process meant some students missed offers because of lower-than-expected Centre Assessed Grades, while others gained places as universities accepted more students than usual (The first of many Oxbridge Colleges accepts all offer holders - 'A-levels row: Oxford college to honour all offers despite results', August 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2020/aug/15/a-levels-row-oxford-college-to-honour-all-offers-despite-results>)  
 Student caps removed for some subjects while additional funding is provided for others - 'English universities to honour admission offers 'where possible'', August 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2020/aug/20/english-universities-to-honour-admission-offers-where-possible>)  
 While the pandemic has impacted the number of students who have accepted offers, it would not have affected the rate of applications which were predominantly made by mid January.

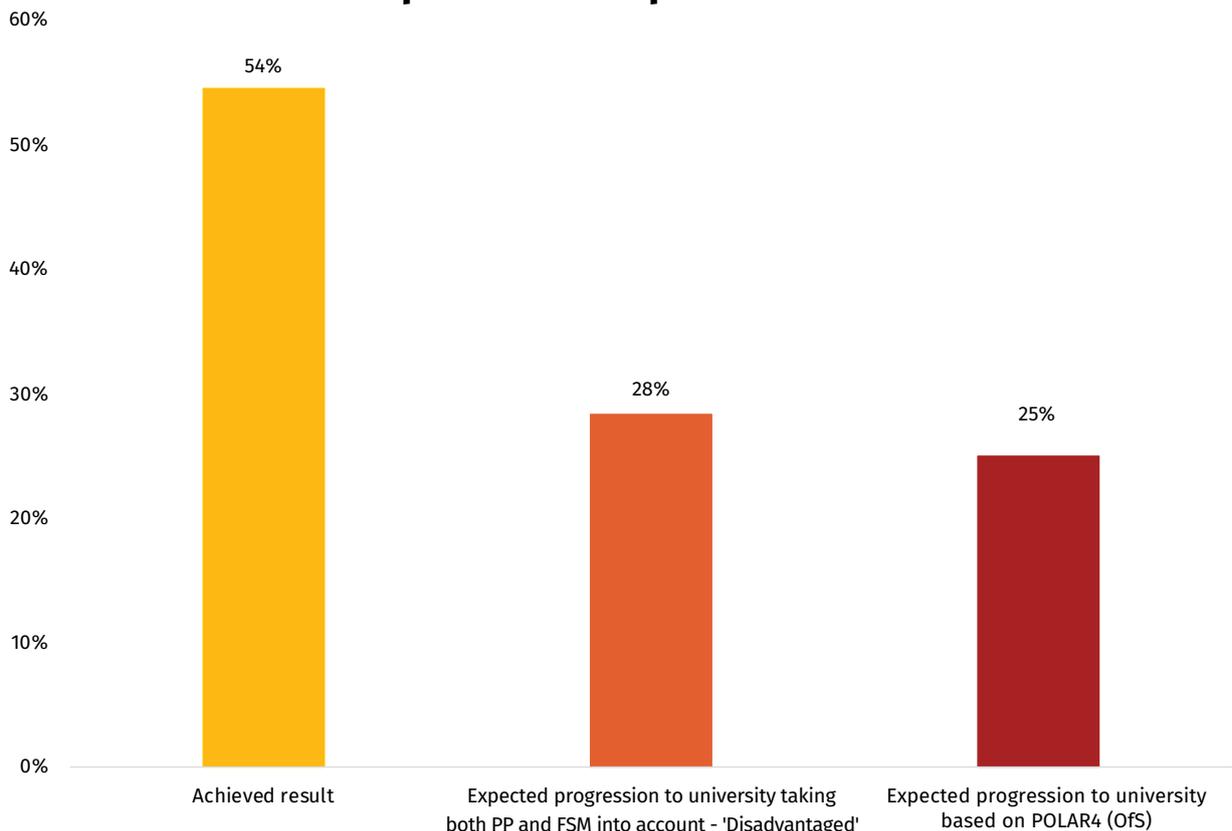
<sup>2</sup> Our benchmark looks at two measures for student backgrounds which are shown to predict how likely an individual is to progress to university: socio-economic background and geographical background. More information about our benchmarking process can be found in our Evidence section.

expected. This year, we also have enough data to show that this uplift corresponds with a greater than expected number of students entering university when considering geographical progression rates for our cohort (POLAR4). This measures the proportion of 18-year-olds from the local area who enter university, allowing comparisons between communities where going to university is more or less common. Looking at our cohort’s aggregate POLAR4 data, 32% of participants would have been expected to go to university. Instead, at least an extra 22% of our cohort — 54% in total — have gone to university this year.

Alongside UCAS data, a supplementary alumni survey has shown that Cohort 2 students are now studying a variety of subjects at top universities including Journalism at Leeds, Engineering at Oxford, Politics and Sociology at Exeter and Psychology at Royal Holloway. As we develop our alumni programme, we expect to gather a greater sample of individual university destinations from our alumni in the future.



### How Cohort 2 participants’ progression to university compares with expected outcomes



**ACHIEVING OUR MEDIUM-TERM GOALS**

**Maintained aspirations to higher education throughout Year 11 despite reductions in feelings of autonomy and control**

We measure the change in participant aspirations to Higher Education at three points — before the summer programme, after the summer programme and after the spring programme — allowing us to identify the effect of our programme on participant aspirations in the short and medium term.

For Cohort 4, overall, aspirations to apply to highly-selective universities, like Oxford, increased from the start of the summer programme in August 2019 to the end of the spring programme in April 2020.

For this cohort, we moved the spring course online within two weeks of the announcement of the first nationwide lockdown, closure of schools, and cancellation of GCSEs. Half of Cohort 4 were able to attend the online spring course. They largely maintained their increased aspirations to Higher Education at spring six months after the summer. It is worth noting that participants attending spring had higher aspirations to Higher Education than their cohort average (74% were likely to apply to a highly-selective university before summer, rising to 92% after summer, versus 60% rising to 81% for the

overall cohort), which may mean that our sample for spring was particularly motivated.

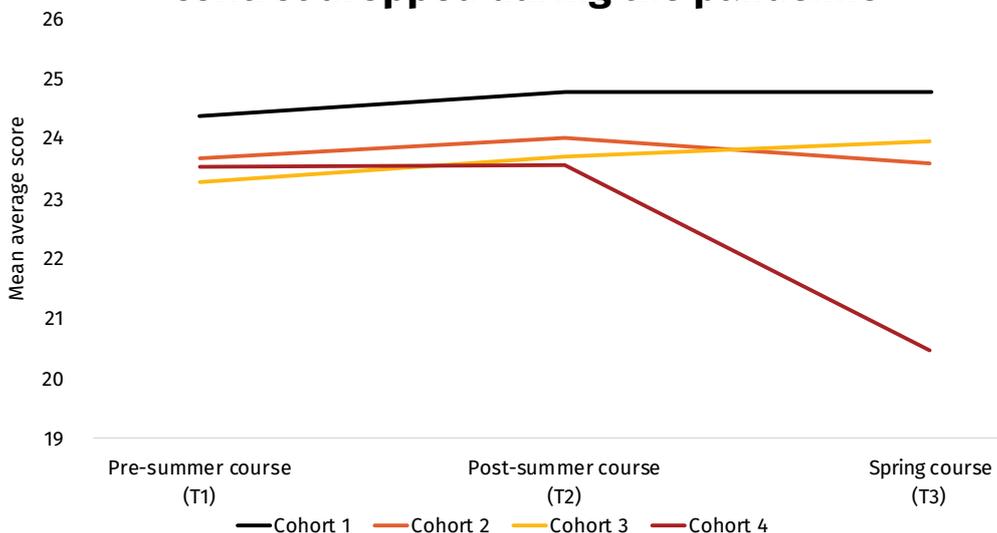
Although there was a slight drop-off of 5 percentage points in aspirations from summer to spring (from 92% to 87%) this is roughly in-line with the trend from previous cohorts and is to be expected. This limited drop-off in aspirations is particularly positive given the disruption of the pandemic. We saw a large and statistically significant reduction in measures of participant feelings of autonomy and control between summer and spring for Cohort 4. This reduction in autonomy and control is the first time we have seen a decrease and appears to be an outlier linked to the pandemic.



*I really enjoyed the course, even though it was online. I liked the group work sessions as well as the academic ones. This week I tried out lessons that I normally wouldn't have gone for and was really pleased that I picked them.*

**Participant, Cohort 5**

**Cohort 4 participant feelings of autonomy and control dropped during the pandemic**

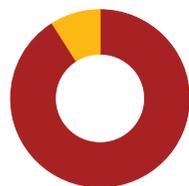


### Attainment at GCSE

Due to the pandemic students were unable to sit public exams in 2020. Instead, they were awarded centre-assessed grades (CAGs) based on teachers’ estimations of what grade students would have received had exams been able to go ahead. Nationwide, CAGs were higher on average than results in 2019. While positive, our impact on participant attainment in 2020 needs to be read with this context in mind.<sup>3</sup>

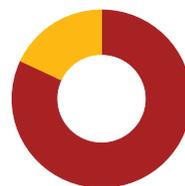
We survey teachers to see how participants performed at GCSE, and specifically how their attainment compared to what they were predicted to achieve. 91% of teachers said that students who went on the Universify course either obtained their predicted grades or did even better than their predicted grades. Particularly positive is that 32% of participants did better than they were predicted to compared to 21% of participants in Cohort 3. Additionally, when asked if students achieved the highest grades at GCSE, 82% of teachers agreed or strongly agreed compared with 68% of teachers in 2019.

It is likely that in part these positive responses reflect the improved results nationally, but also shows our participants were in a strong position to get good CAGs. Given these are based on their work throughout the year, it suggests participation on the programme and ongoing monthly coaching has a positive impact on attainment through improved motivation and quality of work throughout the year, not just improved revision and exam performance. This is supported by the fact that 83% of teachers agreed or strongly agreed that engaging in Universify’s programme benefited the student’s GCSE attainment, a comparable result to previous years despite the change in assessment method this year.



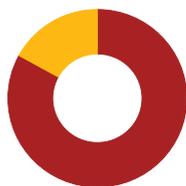
**91%**

of teachers agreed their students attained their predicted grades or did better



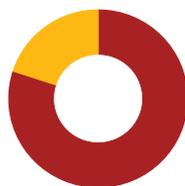
**82%**

of teachers agreed students achieved the highest grades at GCSE



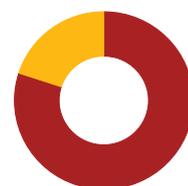
**83%**

of teachers agreed Universify benefitted student attainment at GCSE



**80%**

of teachers agreed students are in a good position to apply to a highly-selective university



**80%**

of teachers agreed students are more likely to apply to a highly-selective university after engaging with Universify

3 In 2020, 76% of students received Grades 4 or above compared with 67% in 2019; 58.2 vs 50.6% achieved grade 5; 25.9 vs 20.6% achieved grade 7; 6.3% of all grades awarded were grade 9 vs 4.5% in 2019. (OFQUAL 2020. 'Results tables for GCSE, AS and A level results in England, 2020' <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/results-tables-for-gcse-as-and-a-level-results-in-england-2020>).

**ACHIEVING OUR SHORT-TERM GOALS**

**Increase in short-term aspirations to higher education and greater self-efficacy**

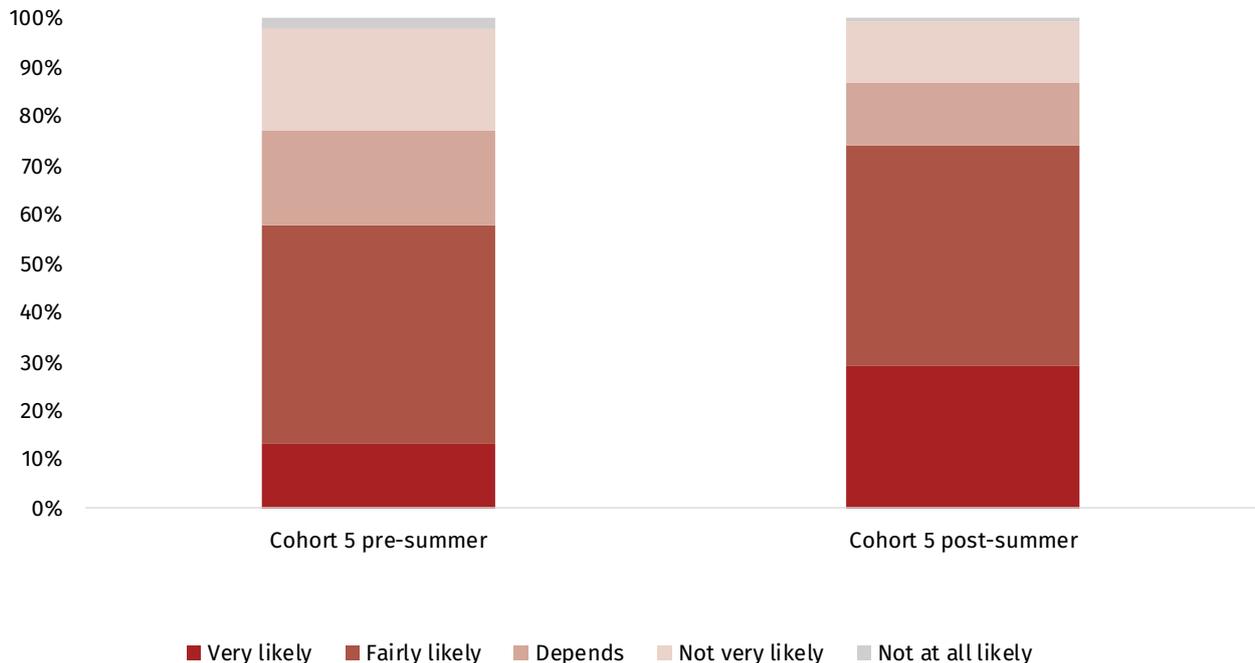
Despite the shift to a shorter, online summer course, aspirations to Higher Education increased in the short term.

We saw a 16 percentage point increase in the number of participants who were ‘fairly likely’ or ‘very likely’ to apply to a highly-selective university between the start and end of the summer programme. This is compared to an average 22 percentage point increase across our previous four cohorts who experienced the summer course in person. The increase in those likely to apply corresponded with a decrease in those ‘not very likely’ or ‘not at all likely’ to apply, reducing by 10 percentage point from 23% before summer to 13% after summer.

In addition, we measured students’ self-esteem, autonomy and control before and after the summer course using a T test to analyse whether activities

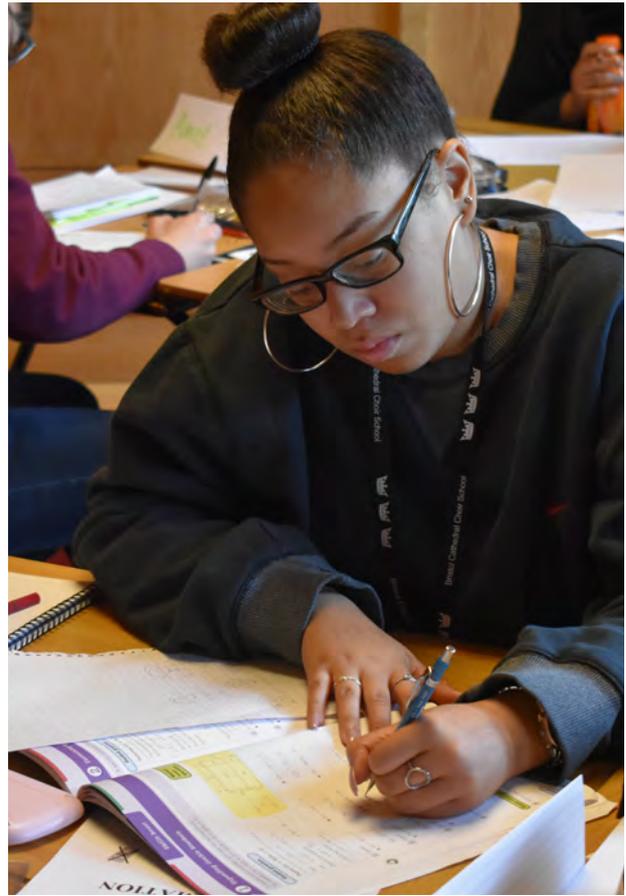


**Cohort 5 - How likely are you to apply to a highly-selective university?**

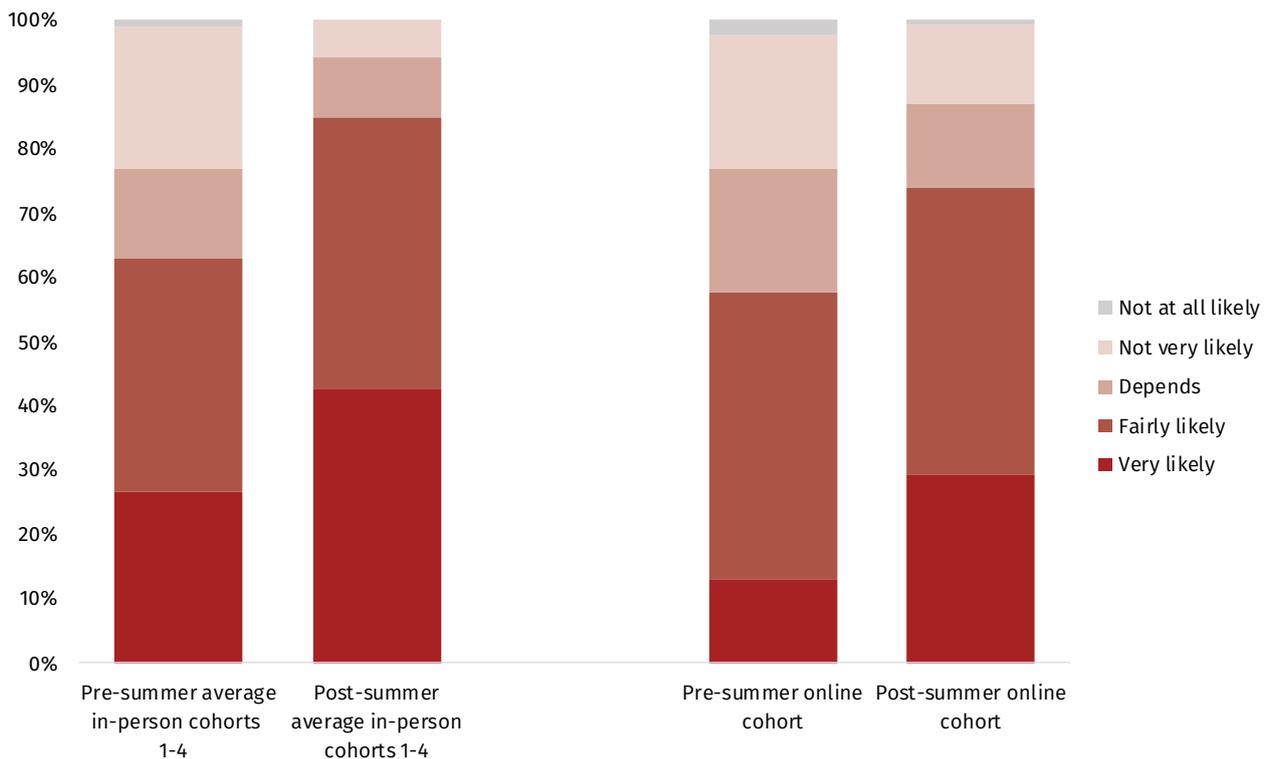


such as peer mentoring, group work and initial coaching sessions had an effect on students’ self-efficacy. This year, we saw a statistically significant increase in both measures of self-esteem and autonomy and control with small effect size. 33% reported that they had high self-esteem before the summer, rising to 43% after the course. The proportion of students who reported that they did not have high self-esteem reduced from 36% to 19% after the summer course.

These short-term results suggest that our online programme was still effective at increasing aspirations to highly-selective universities despite the lack of lived-in university experience for our students, and that it provided the tools and environment for self-growth even in an online setting. We explore the possibility of continuing online delivery beyond the pandemic in the ‘What we learnt’ section.



### How impact on aspirations compares between in-person and online courses



### Perceptions of University

One of the most powerful impacts our course has is changing participants' perceptions of what university is and what kind of person goes to university. We measure this by asking participants for a single word they most associate with 'university' at the beginning and end of our summer course.

Prior to the course, the most common word participants associated with university was 'stressful'. University was 'expensive' and a place of 'work' and 'exams'. Participants thought university would be 'hard', 'difficult', 'intense', and 'demanding'.

After the course, these negative associations were replaced with more positive ones. The number of students who thought university was 'stressful' almost halved, and in contrast, the number who thought it was 'exciting' more than tripled, becoming the most common word for participants to associate with university. Many participants had come to see university as an 'adventure' and that it would be 'fun'; for some it was even a place of 'dreams'.

At the end of the Universify course, participants associated university with 'self-growth' seeing it as an 'opportunity', a chance to be 'independent' and 'explorative'. Students recognised that it was important to be 'hardworking' and 'dedicated' but no longer thought university would be 'tedious'. Through the programme, some students came to see university as 'achievable' and 'worthwhile', whereas before the summer some students had seen university as 'unlikely'.

There was also a change in participants' understanding about what was most important to be a university student, with a focus on being 'curious' and 'passionate' as opposed to simply being 'intelligent', a word which was more common pre-course.

Participants' views can also be seen to have shifted as a whole, not just in respect to specific words. Overall, we saw a 25% increase in positive words and a 48% decrease in negative words between the start and end of the summer course. This shows the cohort's overall perceptions have changed significantly, as well as in respect to specific words.

**25%**

**increase in positive words associated with university after the summer course**

**48%**

**decrease in negative words associated with university after the summer course**

#### TOP THREE WORDS ASSOCIATED WITH UNIVERSITY

Before the summer course

**Stress / stressful (8)**

**Difficult / hard (8)**

**Interesting (7)**

After the summer course

**Exciting (13)**

**Fun (9)**

**Independence (8)**

# Georgia's Universify experience, opening her eyes to the future

'YOU KNOW FOR SURE YOU WILL BE REJECTED IF YOU REJECT YOUR POTENTIAL AND DON'T EVEN APPLY'



*During the Universify programme, I remember sitting amongst my smart classmates with so much potential, feeling like an imposter. Programmes like Universify have been able to show me that I can aspire to more if I don't limit myself with doubt. Following Universify, the Sutton Trust programme has helped me get a guaranteed contextual offer at the University of Bristol, an offer I wouldn't have gotten if Universify hadn't informed me of its existence and showed that was within my reach. Universify still keep me updated about new opportunities via newsletters and event info, I just had to take the leap and apply. You know for sure you will be rejected if you reject your potential and don't even apply.*

*I hope to study physics and maths at university after a gap year to raise money for university and explore my other interests unrelated to science and maths, which will also gift my parents another wonderful year with me. I want to complete a Spanish course to learn Spanish more intensely and with others beyond the 20 minutes I spend on Duolingo occasionally. Hopefully at university, I can complete a year in a European country to master Spanish or even learn a new language.*

*I've also realised how much of the UK I haven't seen so I would like the chance to get to know the place I have grown up in more. Music and theatre have always been an interest of mine so I would like to do more grade exams and performances that I have always been scared to do at school. It will give me a chance to improve my confidence and if I embarrass myself, I have the option to leave the county after a few months anyway.*



**Georgia Hammond completed the programme in 2019 and is now planning to take a gap year before studying Physics and Maths at university**

# How we measure our impact

WE DEVELOPED OUR IMPACT MEASUREMENT METHODOLOGY WITH AN INDEPENDENT EVALUATOR TO GATHER ROBUST IMPACT DATA TO LEARN FROM AND IMPROVE OUR PROGRAMME

We are committed to developing and using robust impact measurement and data collection methods to evaluate and improve our work. For the last four years, our experienced independent impact evaluator, Ellie Harries, has supported us in the design, evaluation, and improvement of our measurement framework and data analysis.

Our data is collected in the following ways.

Short- and medium-term results:

- Three student questionnaires: one administered at the start of summer, one at the end of the summer course, and one at the end of the spring course to enable before and after comparison at three points
- A GCSE questionnaire completed by lead teachers to evaluate GCSE attainment
- Monthly coaching observation forms completed by students and volunteers

Long-term results:

- UCAS Strobe data service for university destinations data from UCAS, the University and College Admissions Service who manage university applications
- A student survey administered following A-Level results day for university destinations data

Wherever possible, we drew on independently validated psychological scales to measure ‘soft’ outcomes, such as an increase in self-esteem or self-efficacy. We drew on Inspiring Impact’s JET Framework, which brings together several key

measures of young people’s skills and personal traits.<sup>1</sup>

All surveys are digital and data is cleaned to ensure we have consistency across our sample. Survey response rates this year were variable and lower compared to previous years. At spring, where only half of participants from Cohort 4 were able to attend, we received 73 survey responses from 149 participants of which we were able to track 61 individuals to measure aspirations to Higher Education. In summer 2020, we received 130 survey responses from 167 participants (78%) which is lower than in previous years (89% in 2019 and 100% in 2018). We attribute this dip to the courses taking place online, creating significant challenges in ensuring surveys were completed. Staff and volunteers made efforts to chase remaining survey responses at the time and post-course with little success.

For our GCSE attainment survey we received 32 out of 66 teacher surveys, 5% more than in 2019. We anticipate that this year was particularly challenging with increased teacher workload but will continue to investigate how to improve survey collection from teachers.

## ASPIRATIONS TO EDUCATION

To measure increased aspirations to education, we asked students the question, ‘How likely do you think you are to apply to a highly-selective university, like the University of Oxford?’. We also used the Department for Education’s Longitudinal Study of Young People in England (LSYPE) survey’s five-question Educational Aspirations module and the one-question University and Higher Education module to measure students’ aspirations

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.thinknpc.org/publications/the-journey-to-employment/> (Article accessed 4 December 2018).

to education.<sup>2</sup> The change was not statistically significant.

### SELF-EFFICACY AND SELF-ESTEEM

To measure students' self-efficacy we used the Individual Protective Factors index, Self-Efficacy sub-scale, which is a seven-item, four-point scale.<sup>3</sup> We also measured students' self-esteem using the Single Item Self-Esteem Scale (a shorter version of the widely-used Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale).<sup>4</sup>

### GCSE ATTAINMENT

Universify is seeking to contribute to and measure two key outcomes linked to attainment:

1. Increased attainment
2. Increased likelihood of making a successful application to a highly-selective university.

To measure these our independent evaluator worked with Universify's former trustee for impact measurement to devise a Likert scale survey to send to lead teachers. The survey presented teachers with the following statements for each student:

1. This student attained their predicted grades.
2. This student achieved the highest grades at GCSE.
3. Engaging in Universify's programme benefitted the student's GCSE attainment.
4. This student is in a good position to apply to a highly-selective university.
5. Engaging in Universify's programme means this student is more likely to apply to a highly-selective university.

We initially chose this method to measure attainment due to ease for teachers, who are not required to access all participant grades which may be harder to procure, and because the data

analysis is more straightforward. For Cohort 5, our current cohort, we have begun collecting data to compare students' target, predicted and real GCSE grades. We hope to report on these results alongside the existing survey in 2021-22.

We have previously explored using the Higher Education Access Tracker (HEAT) with the help of partner colleges and universities to compare our participants' GCSE grades with a control group. Due to current restrictions on data sharing, we are unable to carry out this analysis. We are working with our partner colleges to ensure this is in place for Cohort 6 (2021-22).

### PERCEPTIONS OF UNIVERSITY

To measure participant perceptions of university, we asked the question, 'What one word do you most associate with the idea of studying at university?' in our participant survey before and after summer. We analysed these words to determine whether they were positive, negative, or neutral associations to calculate the overall cohort's shift in perceptions towards university. We also analysed answers to establish common themes, comparing the themes found before and after the summer.

### IMPACT OF COACHING

In 2018-19, we began collecting data on three components crucial for academic success and successful university applications. We wanted to investigate whether participants' attitudes, communication skills and responses to challenges would improve throughout the year through monthly coaching sessions. While the number of students with coaching data varied greatly each month, we were able to analyse overall coaching trends by calculating averages from the data available. We will report on our findings fully in 2021 when we expect to have a more complete set of data.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.education.gov.uk/ilsype/workspaces/public/wiki/Questionnaires> (Article accessed December 2017).

<sup>3</sup> Dahlberg LL, Toal SB, Swahn M, Behrens CB. Measuring Violence-Related Attitudes, Behaviors, and Influences Among Youths: A Compendium of Assessment Tools, 2nd ed., Atlanta, GA: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, 2005.

<sup>4</sup> Robins, R. W., Hendin, H. M., & Trzesniewski, K. H. (2001). 'Measuring Global Self-Esteem: Construct Validation of a Single-Item Measure and the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale'. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 27, 151-161: [http://fetzer.org/sites/default/files/images/stories/pdf/selfmeasures/Self\\_Measures\\_for\\_Self-Esteem\\_SINGLE-ITEM\\_SELF-ESTEEM.pdf](http://fetzer.org/sites/default/files/images/stories/pdf/selfmeasures/Self_Measures_for_Self-Esteem_SINGLE-ITEM_SELF-ESTEEM.pdf) (Article December 2017).

## UNIVERSITY DESTINATIONS

We used UCAS' Strobe service to track our participants' applications, offers, and acceptances. Data are estimates only, as figures are rounded to the nearest 5. UCAS Strobe also matches our participants to a control group with similar characteristics to determine whether there is any statistical significance in our participants' application, offer, and acceptance rates.

To report on whether our programme impacted the likelihood of our participants entering university, we followed the charity IntoUniversity's method of creating tailored benchmarks based on our participants' background.<sup>5</sup> We created two tailored benchmarks: one which looked at socio-economic disadvantage and the other which looked at progression rates to Higher Education in participants' local areas (POLAR4). We chose to use two benchmarks to account for the variety of indicators which impact progression to Higher Education.

For our tailored disadvantage benchmark, we used two national data sets to work out our participants' expected progression rate based on their socio-economic disadvantage criteria in Year 10.<sup>6</sup> We used data from UCAS' End of Cycle report for progression rates for those eligible for FSM.<sup>7</sup> We used data from the Department for Education for progression rates for those who received Pupil Premium.<sup>8</sup> For our second benchmark, we looked at participants' likelihood of reaching university based on the progression rates to university in the area they lived in (POLAR4). We have used data from UCAS' End of Cycle report 2020 to calculate this benchmark.<sup>9</sup>

This year, we piloted a post-A Level alumni survey to supplement UCAS data and better understand individual participant destinations such as which universities they are attending and what participants do if they do not go to university.



*As the lead for Higher ability students in the school and head of the academic pillar I am confident in saying that the Universify programme is the most significant single intervention that improves progress, self-esteem and aspirations.*

*To date we have 9 students who have participated in the activities for the last two years. All the students performed at a very high level- averaging grades of 6 and above. This year one of the students on the programme obtained 4 grade 9s and was the most academically successful student in the year. All nine have gone on to positive destinations with 4 this year joining the local grammar school sixth form.*

*I know that during the pandemic the opportunity for the current year 11s to participate in the virtual residential was crucial in them staying positive and feeling there was a long term goal attached to the distance learning. Interestingly those 4 have already shown great desire this term and performed very well in early entry exams in English and statistics.*

**Tim Fox, lead teacher, Canterbury Academy, Kent**

We received 19 surveys from 79 participants. We expect to receive a greater number of responses for future cohorts as we were able to collect better participant contact information from 2018 onwards.

5 IntoUniversity, 'Impact Report 2019', [https://intouniversity.org/sites/all/files/userfiles/files/IU19009\\_IU\\_IMPACT\\_REPORT\\_2019\\_WEB\\_AW%20\(1\).pdf](https://intouniversity.org/sites/all/files/userfiles/files/IU19009_IU_IMPACT_REPORT_2019_WEB_AW%20(1).pdf)

6 Vikki Boliver et. al., 'Using contextualised admissions to widen access to higher education: a guide to the evidence base' (2017); see also IntoUniversity, 'Impact Report 2019', p12 for discussion. [https://intouniversity.org/sites/all/files/userfiles/files/IU19009\\_IU\\_IMPACT\\_REPORT\\_2019\\_WEB\\_AW%20\(1\).pdf](https://intouniversity.org/sites/all/files/userfiles/files/IU19009_IU_IMPACT_REPORT_2019_WEB_AW%20(1).pdf)

7 UCAS Undergraduate Sector-Level End Of Cycle Data Resources 2020 - <https://www.ucas.com/data-and-analysis/undergraduate-statistics-and-reports/ucas-undergraduate-sector-level-end-cycle-data-resources-2020>.

8 Department for Education, 'Academic Year 2018/19. 16-18 destination measures', Published 19 November 2020 <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/16-18-destination-measures/2018-19#releaseHeadlines-tables>.

9 UCAS Undergraduate Sector-Level End Of Cycle Data Resources 2020, Ibid.

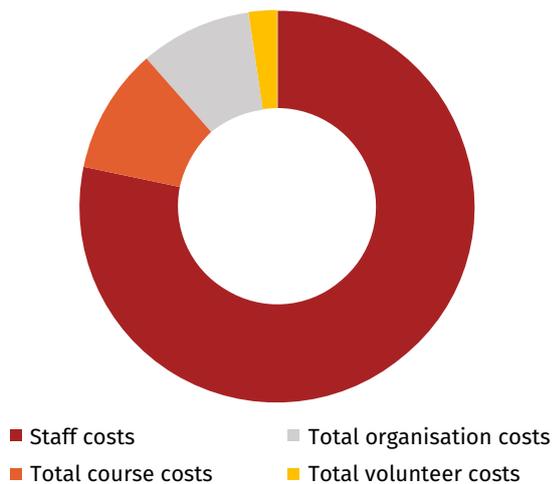
# Assessing Universify’s value for money

TO MAXIMISE OUR IMPACT WE WANT TO ENSURE THAT OUR PROGRAMME IS COST-EFFECTIVE AND THAT OUR LONG-TERM OUTCOMES ARE GOOD VALUE FOR MONEY.

## UNIVERSIFY’S COST PER PARTICIPANT

The Universify programme currently costs £650 per participant. This low cost is achieved through the generosity of our host colleges at the universities of Oxford and Cambridge, who provide accommodation and meals as a benefit in kind. In addition, schools cover the cost of participant transport to the residential courses. Our low cost per participant also highlights the significant volunteer contribution from our coaches who deliver the coaching programme and staff our residential. The above figure of £650, reflects the costs covered by Universify which include course activities, charity overheads, and staff time. Staff time is our greatest cost and is required to prepare and oversee the delivery of the course and for ongoing fundraising and partnership building activities.

### Breakdown of the cost per participant for 2020-21



The £650 cost per participant has been set to account for small year-on-year fluctuations, including participant attendance. As we moved online, we secured an emergency COVID grant to recruit a programme intern to allow us to create our online course while continuing to focus

on fundraising. This additional staff resource means that the cost of our online programme is comparable to our in-person residential. As we grow, we will continue to focus on ensuring our processes are efficient and scalable, so that we benefit fully from economies of scale and continue to provide good value for money.

## UNIVERSIFY’S VALUE FOR MONEY

By using UCAS Strobe we can draw an estimate of our cost-effectiveness, calculating how much it costs to Universify to get each additional participant into university – the participant in question would not otherwise have been expected to progress to university.

We look at two benchmarks to compare our participants’ expected versus real progression to university on aggregate and do not show exact individual outcomes.

$$\text{Cost per outcome} = \frac{\text{total cohort cost}}{\text{number of students who progressed to university}}$$

The first benchmark looks at progression to all universities. From Cohort 2, our benchmark for progression to all universities suggest that at least 19 additional students (22% of the cohort) progressed to Higher Education who would not have been expected to. Our second benchmark for progression to high-tariff universities suggests that at least an additional 11 students (14% of the cohort) progressed to high-tariff universities.

Using our unit cost of £650 per participant, it cost Universify £51,350 to run the programme for Cohort 2.<sup>1</sup>

Our two benchmarks therefore suggest that each additional participant entering Higher Education from Cohort 2 cost Universify £2,703, and that each additional participant progressing to a high-tariff university cost £4,668.<sup>2</sup> This can be compared with other charitable outreach initiatives, costing around £5,600 per participant.<sup>3</sup>

### CALCULATING OUR INDIVIDUAL COST PER OUTCOME

A drawback of using UCAS Strobe is that we can only create an estimated cost per outcome. To be able to compare with other outreach initiatives more accurately we would require individual destination data from our participants. As this data comes through, we will be able to report on an exact cost per outcome.

One the methods we would like to use to determine our cost-effectiveness on an individual outcome basis is to compare our cost to the national cost of helping a young person receiving Free School Meals (FSM) to progress to Higher Education, which is £9,600.<sup>4</sup> To do this we will continue to gather more detailed destination data so we can examine the number of participants eligible for Free School Meals that took part in the Universify programme

who went on to attend university. We look forward to building on our current cost-effectiveness research and how it compares to the national average for pupils receiving FSM in future reports when we have more detailed individual destination data.



**£2,700**

**estimated cost per Universify participant reaching Higher Education**

**£4,700**

**estimated cost per Universify student to reach high-tariff universities**

<sup>1</sup> This figure is an overestimate. The real cost per participant for Cohort 2 was £310. The difference is due to the additional staff costs which replaced volunteer time in Universify's initial start up phase. We have added those costs to arrive to our £650 figure, in order to standardise for future calculations.

<sup>2</sup> Both figures are overestimated costs as our aggregated university progression data itself is based on data rounded to the nearest 5 from UCAS Strobe, from which we have taken the lower bound for each estimate.

<sup>3</sup> Outreach activities range from standalone personal statement writing workshops to full residentials, weekly tutoring and multi-year interventions. We must bear in mind the vast differences in activities, duration and intensity when considering our cost versus the cost of other outreach activities. We have made this comparison to gauge how our initiative sits within the wider outreach work which is done. The figure of £5600 has been taken from IntoUniversity impact report, 2019, [https://intouniversity.org/sites/all/files/userfiles/files/IU19009\\_IU\\_IMPACT\\_REPORT\\_2019\\_WEB\\_AW%20\(1\).pdf](https://intouniversity.org/sites/all/files/userfiles/files/IU19009_IU_IMPACT_REPORT_2019_WEB_AW%20(1).pdf) (Accessed December 2020)

<sup>4</sup> IntoUniversity impact report, 2019, [https://intouniversity.org/sites/all/files/userfiles/files/IU19009\\_IU\\_IMPACT\\_REPORT\\_2019\\_WEB\\_AW%20\(1\).pdf](https://intouniversity.org/sites/all/files/userfiles/files/IU19009_IU_IMPACT_REPORT_2019_WEB_AW%20(1).pdf) (Accessed December 2020).

# What we have learnt

MOVING ONLINE HAS PROVIDED AN OPPORTUNITY TO REFINE OUR PROGRAMME, IDENTIFY NEW POSSIBILITIES, AND IMPROVE FUTURE IN-PERSON PROGRAMMES

## INITIAL ONLINE SUCCESS

Our online courses have been a success. As our impact shows, we have been able to deliver courses which were informative and engaging, where participants were still able to build relationships with their peers and the volunteer coaches who run the programmes.

There have been additional benefits to working online. Participants used their digital skills to produce high-quality group work, and the extra barriers of being in different locations meant participants took the initiative to contact each other to work together via the digital platform we used for the course. The project received a fantastic response, with 99% of participants rating it as either 'engaging', 'useful', 'inspiring' or 'thought-provoking'.

Academic sessions were pitched at the correct level and were more positively received than in the previous two years, perhaps aided by our additional tutor resources and webinar to help tutors determine how in depth their sessions should be. We have been able to include a wider range of perspectives through our inspirational speakers, online careers fairs, and our volunteer representative initiative. A volunteer on each course acted as rep for different backgrounds including BAME, class, disabilities, and LGBTQ+ to share their first-hand university experiences and

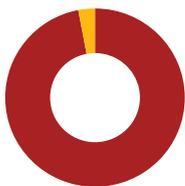


*This was the best online experience , everything was amazingly planned that I now have a better understanding of university life and the course I would like to study. Throughout the whole course the volunteers were so understanding when I had questions and they gave detailed answers back.*

**Participant, Cohort 5**

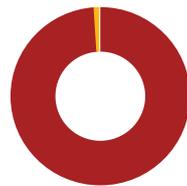
highlight that university is open to people from all backgrounds. We will continue to include and build on these elements when we return to in-person courses.

While participants overcome feelings of being out of place during our in-person residentials, participants who were nervous about working online became more confident online throughout the week. 97% of participants felt comfortable on the course and 99% agreed that staff were friendly and helpful and that they could ask staff for help.



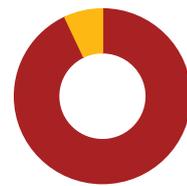
**97%**

of students felt comfortable on the online course



**99%**

of students rated the group work project as either 'engaging' 'useful' 'inspiring' or 'thought-provoking'



**93%**

of participants found coaching useful

## FUTURE POSSIBILITIES ONLINE

Moving online has also provided an opportunity for us to explore new ways of delivering the Universify programme and what that could mean in the future. Undoubtedly, online courses are more scalable than in-person courses. While our short-term outcomes are only slightly below our historical averages, we will continue to evaluate whether the longer-term impacts of our programme are as effective following an online course as an in-person course. We will also explore whether a university residential after the end of the year-long programme has the same outcomes. Questions around whether an online programme deters students most in need of outreach programmes will also be further investigated.

Although online courses bring several opportunities and advantages, they also bring their downsides. Poor access to the internet continues to limit the scope for online courses. For every student who we were able to help access the internet, there was another student who we were not able to provide digital support for. For those who required support and did manage to attend – whether they received help or not – a third had ongoing technical difficulties during the course itself. Of those who did receive devices or Wi-Fi dongles, 25% still did not attend. While the vast majority of our participants chose to and were able to attend the online course, our efforts to ensure everyone could access the programme simply highlight the



*I really enjoyed the course, even though it was online. I liked the group work sessions as well as the academic ones. This week I tried out lessons that I normally wouldn't have gone for and was really pleased that I picked them.*

*Normally, we'd be doing this in person. I actually hesitated accepting because I didn't want to do it online. But, I'm so glad I accepted and I don't regret a thing. This is such a remarkable course, thank you so much.*

**Participants, Cohort 5**

participants miss out when university access work is moved online.

There are still several considerations and opportunities presented by what we have learned from moving online. While we intend to return to in-person courses as soon as it is safe to do so, we will bring aspects of our online course - including additional tutor webinars to ensure classes are engaging, methods to evaluate our programme's purpose and effectiveness, and interactive training for staff - with us.



# Emily's Universify experience, volunteer testimonial

'THE FACT THAT THE PROGRAMME DOESN'T END AFTER THE SUMMER SCHOOL IS SO IMPORTANT, IT OFFERS CONTINUED SUPPORT AS STUDENTS NAVIGATE ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT YEARS OF THEIR EDUCATION.'



*Having experienced social mobility myself, I have always been keen to give back. I know first-hand how much of a difference programmes like this can make. It was a summer school that convinced me that I was good enough, and could afford, to apply to university, despite being the first in my family to do so.*

*So when I heard of Universify in my first year of university, I couldn't wait to get involved. Many social mobility programmes arrive post-GCSEs yet the target age of Universify is crucial as it comes before key decisions are made by students as opposed to afterwards. My first Summer volunteering was amazing, we saw the students grow in front of our eyes, absorbing knowledge, growing in ambition and confidence and asking questions they hadn't been able to ask anyone before. One of my favourite memories of my first year of volunteering was our Q&A session that had to be extended because of all the questions the students had, from revision tips to queries about financial support to sports and societies! If they didn't have this programme, these would be questions they may never have gotten answers to.*

*The fact that the programme doesn't end after the summer school is so important, it offers continued support as students navigate one of the most important years of their education. So I knew I wanted to come back, this time as a group leader, both to support the students but also for myself. As a volunteer you learn so much from those you work with, who all have their own stories and are just as passionate about widening access. Despite the Universify team having to pivot to online delivery*



*this year, I saw just as much growth in each of our students, and I am proud to have contributed to that.*

**Emily Louise, Universify volunteer, 2018-19 and 2019-20. During her time at university, Emily was also Vice President of Oxford First-Generation Students as well as a JCR Access Officer. Since graduating she has gone on to work for The Sutton Trust.**

# Where we are going

WE WILL CONTINUE TO BUILD OUR ORGANISATION SUSTAINABLY, ENSURING THAT WE CAN CONTINUE TO DELIVER OUR PROGRAMME TO MORE PARTICIPANTS AT MORE UNIVERSITIES

While this year has been one of significant adaptation and change, Universify's mission remains the same: continuing to foster educational equality by increasing access to universities, particularly highly-selective universities, making society fairer and more representative in the process. Our strategy aims to ensure Universify is a flexible, scalable, and sustainable organisation, so that we can achieve this mission and grow our impact in the long-term.

In 2021-22 we have three aims:

1. Expansion and ongoing adaptation of our programme to continue achieving impact
2. Build and diversify our fundraising pipeline in the short, medium and long-term to facilitate sustainable impact at scale;
3. Continue to build our compelling business case for impact at scale.

## 1. ADAPTING AND EXPANDING TO GROW OUR IMPACT

The coronavirus pandemic has created an even greater need for programmes such as Universify, as schools and universities have reduced capacity for super-curricular programmes or outreach work. Given this growing need, we are pleased to have delivered impactful courses in 2020 in a safe way. In 2021, we intend to build on this success by expanding our programme, with the aim of supporting 200-250 participants in a time of need. We have three new host partners at the University of Oxford for 2021-22 this year (Balliol College, Trinity College, and St Anne's College) and are excited to work with them to expand into new areas of England, offering Universify to schools in Norfolk

and the North East.

Alongside this expansion, ongoing adaptation of our current programme delivery will be vital as the pandemic continues. We will continue to design and refine our programme, with input from our alumni student council, to ensure participant and volunteer safety without compromising our impact.

## 2. BUILDING LONG-TERM SUSTAINABILITY

In 2020, we have been investing more time into fundraising than ever. This is vital as the fundraising climate in 2020 has been particularly challenging, with the charity sector as a whole expected to lose £10-12 billion of anticipated income over the course of 2020 and some grant-making trusts and foundations reporting their application rate had increased by 100-200%.<sup>1</sup> We will continue to prioritise fundraising efforts in 2021, not only to support the immediate needs of the charity, but also to create a long-term funding pipeline and organisational resilience.

As part of our long-term sustainability plan we intend to build relationships with Widening Participation Offices and partner colleges with a view to them co-funding future Universify programmes. This will be complemented by further work to diversify our income through corporate partnerships, funding from charitable trusts, public fundraising, and programme co-funding. To facilitate this, we have expanded our team this year to four staff members. This additional capacity ensures staff fundraising time is protected, even in programme delivery periods, mitigating the effects of ongoing adaptation. This change has already made a substantial impact on our ability to identify and apply for more grants and increase our public

<sup>1</sup> Jolly, G from Directory of Social Change. "The Fundraising Landscape during COVID-19 and Beyond" Webinar. November, 2020.

fundraising activity.

### REFINING OUR IMPACT MEASUREMENT

We have received qualitative data from individuals to suggest that our programme is having its intended effect on educational aspirations and attainment. To ensure that we are delivering impact consistently to our participants, we will investigate how we can improve the collection of impact data for GCSE attainment and university destinations. This will enable us to track our impact on attainment and longer-term outcomes more effectively and help us to achieve our vision for students to fulfil their potential in education.

### 3. BUILDING OUR COMPELLING BUSINESS CASE FOR IMPACT AT SCALE

We now have a 5-year track record of our programme's impact and data for our first two cohorts' entry to university. While this shows our work is effective, as we mature, we want to further strengthen our business case. We will do this through improved data collection on post-18 destinations, and by systematising organisational processes to create efficiencies, ensuring we maintain our value for money.

Currently, due to the small size of our earlier cohorts, fine detail is lost in impact data gathering methods due to rounding for anonymity. To help us collect more detailed impact data for our participants' post-18 outcomes we will invest time in maintaining and improving links with our alumni to increase engagement with our outcomes survey, starting with monthly newsletters. Alongside this we will review how we collect long-term impact data, seeking input from sector leaders, and consider where we could refine or alter the process to make it more effective.

Overall, our strategic focus for 2021 is to balance addressing the growing need for our work with ensuring we remain effective, scalable, and sustainable, and are able to demonstrate that to others. Our strategic priorities support one another, creating a cohesive vision for Universify that reflects the long-term view of the charity - that despite a challenging year, we are determined not just to survive but to thrive. We will continue to further educational equality throughout future years by supporting even more participants to achieve their academic potential.



# Thank you

WE WOULD LIKE TO THANK THE FOLLOWING PEOPLE AND INSTITUTIONS FOR THEIR SUPPORT, HELP, AND GUIDANCE

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Dave Simpson and Millie Packer, Conference Office

### St Catharine's College, Cambridge

Kathryn Singleton, School Liaisons Officer

### St Hugh's College, Oxford

Elena Sorochina, Outreach Officer

Thea Crapper, Academic Registrar

### Jesus College, Oxford

Matthew Williams, Access Fellow

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Harry Hortyn

Tibor Gold

Nick Lawrence

Steve Rayner

Matt Lacey

Robert Phipps

Kate West

Kath Davies

Nathan Afsar, Student Representative, 2019-20

## UNIVERSIFY STAFF

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Bertina Ho

Heather McDade

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Channy-May

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Webber Kemp

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Eshghi

Simon Gomez Cullen

Amber Seddon

Charlotte Stern

Hannah Farley

Leo Tyrpak

Mercedes Baxter

Simrit Sekhon

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Lydia Joshua

Olivia Tan

Tanvi Sethi

Becca Potton

Ellie Matthews

Izaak Mammadov

Marco Logiudice

Patrick Oliver

Tasmin Sarai

Beckie Smith

Eloise Matthews

Jenn Opare-Kumi

Matt Schaffel

Rahul Radia

Tilly Wring

Ben Gibbons

Elsie Linley

Jenna Ukkonen

Maya Sales-Hyde

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Bertina Ho

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Erica Muneyuki

Juliet Patrick

Meg Polese

Rosie Collier-Gent

Zoe Fell

Boston Wyatt

Trento

Khama Gunde

Megan McGowan

Rosie Lester

Ethan Fraenkel

Kyla Thomas

Saffron Pougher

## STUDENT COUNCIL 2019-20

Alfie	Amira	Georgia	Maman	Sasha
Amber	Daisy	Justina	Nathan	Stella

## UNIVERSIFY TUTORS

Ani Haykuni	Guillermo Tirelli	Lena Sorochina	Nirmala Bigden	Steve Rayner	Yolanda Barton
Chris Baptiste	Jamie Russell	Marcus King	Peter Kirby Harris	Tamara Beretic Vaci	
Christopher Thomas	Jill Campion	Matt Hewson	Robin Loveridge	Tim Fulton	
Domiziana Turcatti	Jon Ward	Matt Williams	Ruth Ketley	Walther Traberg-	
Dorian Minors	Jonah Zankl	Nabila Qureshi	Scarlet Harris	Christensen	

## WORKSHOP AND INSPIRATIONAL SPEAKERS

Niamh Gallagher	Tom Painter and Henry Manning, Apex Mental Skills	Tom Foley and Ollie Palmer, Fortitude IV
Tom Hatton, Holistic Transitioning		Jack Jacobs

## LEAD TEACHERS AND PARTNER SCHOOLS

Gail Ochalek, Abbeyfield School	Megan Slater, Coop Academy Stoke-on-Trent	Jackie Watson, Oxford Spires Academy
Karen Robinson, Ark Bolingbroke Academy	Colin Cavanah, Coop Academy Swinton	Emma Williams, Priory School
Roxana Stylianou, Ark Isaac Newton Academy	Gemma Davies, Coop Academy Swinton	Egle Peleckaite, Reach Academy Feltham
Simon Hands, Ark Kings Academy	Catherine Earley, Coop Academy Walkden	Julie Warren, Redland Green School
Cheryl Vidler-Shemmell, Ark St Albans Academy	Patra Pierce, Cotham School	Alex Cocks, Saint George's Church of England
Prudence Banseka, Ark Walworth Academy	Chris Brooke, Ellis Guilford School	Alex Baxter, Spires Academy
Tony Leigh, Ash Green School	Emily Willis, Excel Academy	Lucy Kirkbright, St Bede's Catholic College
Nicola Santaana, Bennett Memorial School	Kelly-Ann Thomas, Fairfield High School	Eva Botha, St Mary Magdalene C of E All Through School
Caroline Hall, Blatchington Mill School	Lacey Austin, Hadlow Rural Community School	Sophie Alderson, St Mary Magdalene C of E All Through School
Tom Pearson, Bohunt School Worthing	Daniel Bushay, Harris Academy Morden	Tine Elphinstone, St Mary Redcliffe and Temple School
Liz Hackling, Bridge Learning Campus	Misbah Arif, Harris Academy St John's Wood	Rebecca Chapman, St Peter's RC High School
Patrick Callaghan, Bristol Cathedral Choir School	Dami Adeniregun, Harris Academy Tottenham	Sophie Barker, St Thomas More Catholic Academy
Luke Haisell, Brockhill Park Performing Arts College	Megan Greet, Harris Academy Tottenham	Joe Spark, Stationers' Crown Woods Academy
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Jonny Mitchell, Co-op Academy Leeds	Chris Eley, Lammas School and Sixth Form	Billy Bills, The Whitstable School
Emma Moss, Co-op Academy Priesthorpe	Nicky Hunt, Lampton	Magnus Wallace, Weavers Academy
Lisa Antrobus, Co-operative academy of Manchester	Emma Roberts, Lynn Grove Academy	Paula Bull, Westminster Academy
Kate Cooper, Colston's Girls' School	Hannah Shute, Maplesden Noakes	Chloe Meck, Weydon School
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	Ina Goldberg, Oasis Academy Brislington	Laura Raynor, Wrenn School
	Dan Pitt, Orchard School Bristol	
	Becky Maiden, Ormiston Sandwell Community Academy	
	Wayne Trevor, Ormiston Sir Stanley Matthews Academy	

And finally, we would like to thank all the students that have applied and taken part in the Universify programme, who continue to inspire and amaze us with their successes. We are immensely proud of the incredible achievements you have accomplished and will continue to do so.



With special thanks to our partners, supporters, and collaborators



## How to get involved

We believe universities should be open to all students, based on their academic ability and regardless of their background. If you would like to work with us, please get in touch at

[info@universifyeducation.com](mailto:info@universifyeducation.com)

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