



2025-26 IMPACT REPORT

IMPACT SUMMARY

INCREASED UNIVERSITY ACCESS

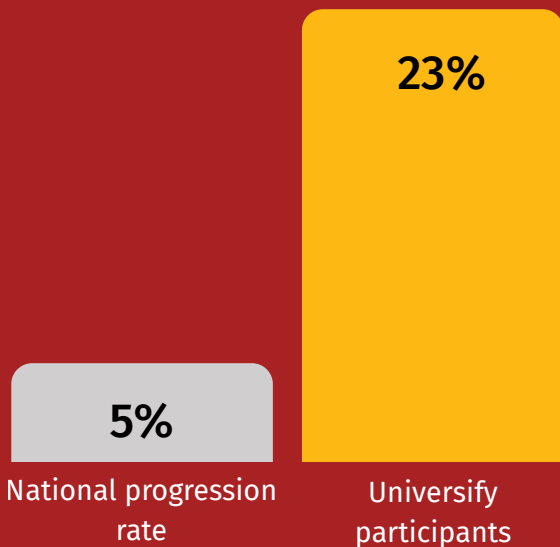
18X

more applications were made to Oxbridge from Universify Cohort 5 (2020-21 programme) participants than expected, and received offers and acceptances at

very significantly high

rates of entry to Oxbridge (17% vs 0%).

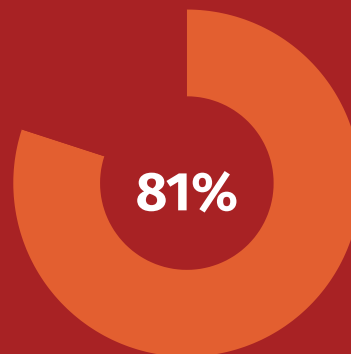
**Participants eligible for FSM
4X as likely to get into top universities**



IMPROVED GCSE ATTAINMENT



of teachers agreed that participation in the Universify programme benefitted their students' GCSE attainment



of teachers agreed that taking part in the Universify programme had increased the likelihood of their students aspiring to university

INCREASED RESILIENCE

71%

increase in participants' ability to overcome challenges after attending 10 or more coaching sessions

FOREWORD

It is a pleasure to present our latest impact report and celebrate our fifth cohort, who have applied to and entered university at rates significantly higher than expected.

After completing the Universify programme online during the Covid-19 pandemic, this cohort continued to have their secondary education disrupted. Despite this, we saw some fantastic results from this cohort: 75% applied to university despite this disruption.

Universify's programme would not be possible without its university college partners. Jesus College, Trinity College and Somerville College have enabled hundreds of underrepresented students to step through their doors, including our most recent participants, Cohorts 8 and 9, helping them realise that Oxford is a place for people like them. The result is a programme which sees underrepresented students get into Oxbridge at a staggering 17x the expected rate.

Alongside our national programme, we have launched our Universify Communities programme in partnership with Future Quest, the University of the West of England and the University of Bristol. Designed to broaden opportunities, particularly for young people with care experience, this programme introduces the support available for them at higher education and provides tailored, consistent support through 1-1 coaching.

When young people have increasingly limited access to real-world opportunities, we must continue to advocate for in-person

programmes where young people can travel outside of the digital world and be challenged by life-changing experiences.

Through these experiences, our programme aims to help young people make more informed decisions about their future, and I invite you to read on to explore the many ways our young people have succeeded.



**BERTINA HO,
CEO,
UNIVERSIFY
EDUCATION**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ADDRESSING EDUCATIONAL INEQUALITY

For the past ten years, Universify Education has worked to reduce educational inequality by supporting young people from underrepresented backgrounds, including those from low-income households, disadvantaged areas, or who would be the first in their family to attend university.

Access to higher education and gaining a degree qualification is a powerful driver of social mobility, as it opens doors to more employment opportunities and the potential for higher lifetime earnings.^[1] Universify helps students in Years 10 and 11 develop the knowledge, skills, and confidence to achieve their GCSE goals and progress to post-16 education and university.

EXCELLENT PROGRESSION TO HIGHER EDUCATION

Our results demonstrate the lasting impact of this early intervention. Among our most recent cohort:

- 75% of participants applied to university, which is well above UCAS' tailored benchmark for comparable peers
- 18% applied to Oxbridge, vs an expected 1%
- 5 received Oxbridge offers (17% vs 0%).

These outcomes reflect the confidence and academic success fostered through our intervention, which impact our participants far beyond the year-long programme.

IMPACT THAT BREAKS DOWN BARRIERS

GCSEs are a pivotal stage in shaping young people's futures and determine access to post-16 education and employment. We are therefore delighted that 90% of teachers feel that participation in Universify positively impacted student attainment.

Our holistic approach, combining university residentials, coaching, and academic support, increases participants' familiarity with higher education, helping to challenge limiting beliefs such as the belief that they don't belong in a university environment. This is especially important for young people who would be the first in their families to attend university, and for those from backgrounds which are underrepresented in higher education.

NEW FRONTIERS

Our new 2-year 'Alumni+' programme, supporting Year 12-13 programme alumni to aim for selective universities, shows increased confidence in key academic skills:

- ability to explain ideas in writing rose from 63% to 100% of the cohort.

In 2025, Universify continued to grow its reach. Alongside the University of the West of England and Future Quest, we delivered our 'Step Ahead' programme, providing community-based support in Bristol to empower more young people to realise their academic potential.

[1] UK Department for Education, 5 June 2025. Graduate Labour Market Statistics: Calendar Year 2024. Available at: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/graduate-labour-markets/2024> [Accessed 19/11/2025]

WHO WE ARE

Universify Education is a charity committed to increasing educational equality in the UK.

We believe that all young people should have access to opportunities to realise their full potential, regardless of their background.

Our work focuses specifically on improving access to university, because higher education is a powerful vehicle for social mobility; a degree qualification can open doors to more employment opportunities and higher life-time earnings, helping young people to escape cycles of disadvantage.

67.9% of working-age graduates were in high-skilled employment in 2024, compared to only 23.7% of non-graduates, and the median real-terms salary for graduates was £7,000 higher than for non-graduates.^[2]

We support young people from ages 14-16, at a crucial point in their educational journey as they prepare for their GCSE exams.



This is important because a young person's early academic attainment at GCSE can determine whether they can progress to further education and access other support programmes. By targeting our intervention at this age group, we aim to extend the pipeline of support and maximise long-term impact.

“Oxford as a university was always something I saw more as an unrealistic dream than a reality, but after being here and talking to the staff, I realised this is not true.”

Ella, Cohort 9 participant, 2024-25, Jesus College

Through offering holistic programmes, we support young people to make informed decisions about their future pathways and develop key skills, including the resilience to achieve their goals.

Our main programme consists of three elements:

- 1) A Year 10 university residential,** designed to increase participants' familiarity with higher education.
- 2) Monthly 1-to-1 online coaching** to help participants identify and make progress towards their goals.
- 3) A Year 11 residential** focussed on GCSE revision to support academic attainment.

[2] UK Department for Education, 5 June 2025. Graduate Labour Market Statistics: Calendar Year 2024. Available at: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/graduate-labour-markets/2024> [Accessed 19/11/2025]

WHY WE EXIST

Young people from low income backgrounds are subject to inequalities and face systemic barriers at every stage of their education and career, demonstrating the importance of programmes like Universify.

Data from the 2023/24 academic year shows a persistent and significant gap in GCSE and A-Level grades between young people who have received free school meals (FSM) and those who have not.^[3] Educational disparities persist when students apply to university, as only 28.9% of students receiving FSM progressed to higher education, and only 4.9% progressed to high-tariff universities.^[4] These numbers are much lower than their peers who are not eligible for FSM — 49% and 14.3%, respectively.^[5]

Additionally, recent research from the Office for Students (OfS) shows that students from underrepresented backgrounds are more likely to drop out of higher education, suggesting that the impact of social, financial and academic barriers continue, even upon entry to university.^[6]

OUR INTERVENTION

At Universify, we are working to change this

problem. We have identified three key barriers which make young people from low socio-economic backgrounds less likely to apply to highly selective universities: limited attainment, limited aspirations, and feeling out of place in a university setting. Our year-long programme directly addresses these challenges through a combination of university residentials, academic teaching, and 1-1 coaching.

WHY UNIVERSITY ACCESS MATTERS

Access to university, particularly to high-tariff institutions, is one of the most effective drivers of social mobility. Higher education opens doors to greater economic security, professional networks, and personal development.

- 75% of senior judges were educated at Oxford or Cambridge.^[7]
- 20% of MPs attended Oxbridge, 35% other Russell Group institutions, and 90% went to university.^[8]
- 85.5% of Oxford undergraduates are not from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds.^[9]

[3] Department for Education, 27 Feb 2025. Key Stage 4 performance: Academic year 2023/24. Available at: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/key-stage-4-performance/2023-24> [Accessed 13/10/25]

[4] Department for Education, 31 July 2025. Widening participation in higher education: 2023. Available: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/widening-participation-in-higher-education/2023-24> [Accessed 13/10/25]

[5] Department for Education, 31 July 2025. Widening participation in higher education: 2023.

[6] Office for Students, 29 March 2023. Students from disadvantaged backgrounds less likely to complete their course. Available: <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/news-blog-and-events/press-and-media/students-from-disadvantaged-backgrounds-less-likely-to-complete-their-course/> [Accessed 13/10/25]

[7] Erica Holt-White, et al. 2025. Elitist Britain 2025: the educational backgrounds of Britain's leading people. The Sutton Trust. Available at: <https://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/Elitist-Britain-2025.pdf> [Accessed 20/04/26]

[8] Erica Holt-White, 2024. 'Parliamentary Privilege 2024: Educational backgrounds of the new House of Commons', Sutton Trust.

[9] University of Oxford. June 2025. Annual Admissions Statistical Report. Available at: <https://assets-oxweb.admin.ox.ac.uk/2026-02/Annual%20Admissions%20Statistical%20Report%202025.pdf> [Accessed 20/04/26]

Research consistently shows that graduates from disadvantaged backgrounds who attend selective universities experience substantial upward mobility, often breaking intergenerational cycles of disadvantage. ^[10]

By nurturing confidence, raising aspirations, and providing practical guidance, Universify helps young people overcome systemic barriers, empowering them not only to reach university but to thrive once there.

WHO WE SUPPORT

We support young people who face obstacles to accessing opportunities as a result of socio-economic disadvantage, and who are typically underrepresented in Higher Education. This includes young people who:

Have grown up in disadvantaged areas of England. This is measured through the Index for Multiple Deprivation, which ranks small areas of the country according to multiple domains of deprivation, including levels of local poverty, employment rates, and access

to essential services like housing, education, and healthcare. Our programme supports young people from the most deprived areas (IMD deciles 1-3).

Are from low income households. This includes young people who are eligible for means-tested benefits such as Free School Meals and Pupil Premium.

Would be the first in their family to attend university. Young people with no family experience of university may have more concerns about applying due to a lack of knowledge of the admissions processes and the financial support available to them.

We also support young people with more specific, individual circumstances which have impacted their education, such as young people with experience of care, young carers, refugees and asylum seekers, young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), and those who have experienced close family bereavement, or other adverse childhood experiences.



[10] Office for National Statistics, 6 Nov 2023. Young people from disadvantaged backgrounds feel less in control of their futures. Available:

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/educationandchildcare/articles/youngpeoplefromdisadvantagedbackgroundsfeelllessincontroloftheirfutures/2023-11-06> [Accessed 17/12/25]

OUR PROGRAMME

We provide extended, multi-intervention programmes, free of cost, to young people from non-selective state schools across England.

OUR NATIONAL PROGRAMME

Since our first cohort in 2016, our year-long, national programme has supported over 1200 young people, aged 14-16, to develop the skills, knowledge, and confidence to realise their potential. Our national programme is composed of three parts: a Year 10 university residential, online coaching, and a Year 11 residential focused on preparation for GCSE exams.

ADDRESSING KEY BARRIERS

Our multi-intervention programme structure has been designed to address the following barriers to university access:

- **Low educational attainment**
- **Low educational aspirations**
- **Lack of self-belief, leading to assumptions that “university is not for people like me” or a fear of “not belonging” in a university environment**

By addressing these three barriers, we aim to put students in a good position to make an informed decision about their future pathway, including whether they apply to university. Their ability to make competitive applications and show resilience through the A-Level and UCAS process is also improved, as is demonstrated by the progression statistics for each of our cohorts.

YEAR 10 RESIDENTIAL

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graph TD; A[YEAR 10 RESIDENTIAL] --> B[COACHING]; B --> C[YEAR 11 RESIDENTIAL];
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COACHING

YEAR 11 RESIDENTIAL

YEAR 10 RESIDENTIAL

Starting in Year 10, participants are introduced to the Universify programme through an immersive week-long residential hosted at one of our partner colleges at the University of Oxford. Participants gain first-hand experience of what it is like to live and study at a highly-selective university, through a packed timetable of university-style subject lectures and seminars, admissions workshops, group work projects, and social activities like punting.

The Year 10 residential is intended to improve familiarity with university, enabling participants to make informed decisions about whether they want to pursue higher education, and helping them explore the different subject paths open to them. For many participants, the residential is their first time staying away from home on their own, and it provides an opportunity to develop their independence.

Participants frequently credit the Year 10 residential with helping them to expand their social skills by enabling them to interact with other young people from across the country, and develop a supportive community of peers.

COACHING

Whilst on the Year 10 residential, participants meet with their coaches and complete their first introductory session to coaching. In this initial session, participants are encouraged to think about their futures, what they would like to achieve over the next year, and to break these larger goals into manageable steps.

Coaching sessions are participant-led and intended to help develop the coachee's resilience and metacognition skills, including their confidence, problem-solving, and attitude towards challenges. These key skills stay with participants beyond the year-long programme.

YEAR 11 RESIDENTIAL

The final component of our year-long programme is a three-day GCSE revision residential which takes place in the spring of Year 11, shortly before participants sit their final GCSE exams.

Participants return to the university colleges that hosted them in the summer and are reunited with their friends from the programme. During this residential, they receive small group GCSE tuition in core subjects (English, Maths, Chemistry, Biology, Physics) to help raise attainment and increase confidence in their academic abilities.

In addition to academic support, the Year 11 residential also supports participants' holistic wellbeing with workshops on managing exam stress, social activities, and presentations which signpost follow-on support like Year 12 and 13 widening participation programmes.



OUR PARTICIPANTS

We support young people from across England who face systemic barriers to education and employment opportunities.

This report primarily presents impact data for Cohort 8, who completed our 2023-24 programme.

The report includes some data for Cohort 9 (2024-2025 programme) and university admissions outcomes for Cohort 5 (2020-2021 programme). Admissions data is available four years after participants complete the programme (aged 16), accounting for post-16 education and the time required for applications and UCAS data to be released.

In Cohort 8, there were 117 participants, of whom:

- 76% were eligible for Free School Meals (FSM), and 86% were Pupil Premium students (means-tested benefits and indicators of low household income)
- 32% lived in postcodes ranked in IMD deciles 1-2 (representing the top 20% most deprived local authority areas nationally)
- 88% would be the first in their family to attend university
- 12% were young carers
- 3% were care-experienced



For Cohort 9, there were 114 participants, of whom:

- 73% were eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) and 81% were Pupil Premium students
- 34% were from postcodes classified in IMD deciles 1-2
- 84% would be the first in their family to attend university
- 6% were young carers
- 7% were care-experienced

PARTICIPANT MAP

117

Participants on Universify's 2023-24 programme

1246

Universify participants since 2016

North East

35

Yorkshire and the Humber

3

94

North West

11

124

22

Wales

1

East Midlands

16

West Midlands

173

11

72

East of England

38

30

8

306

289

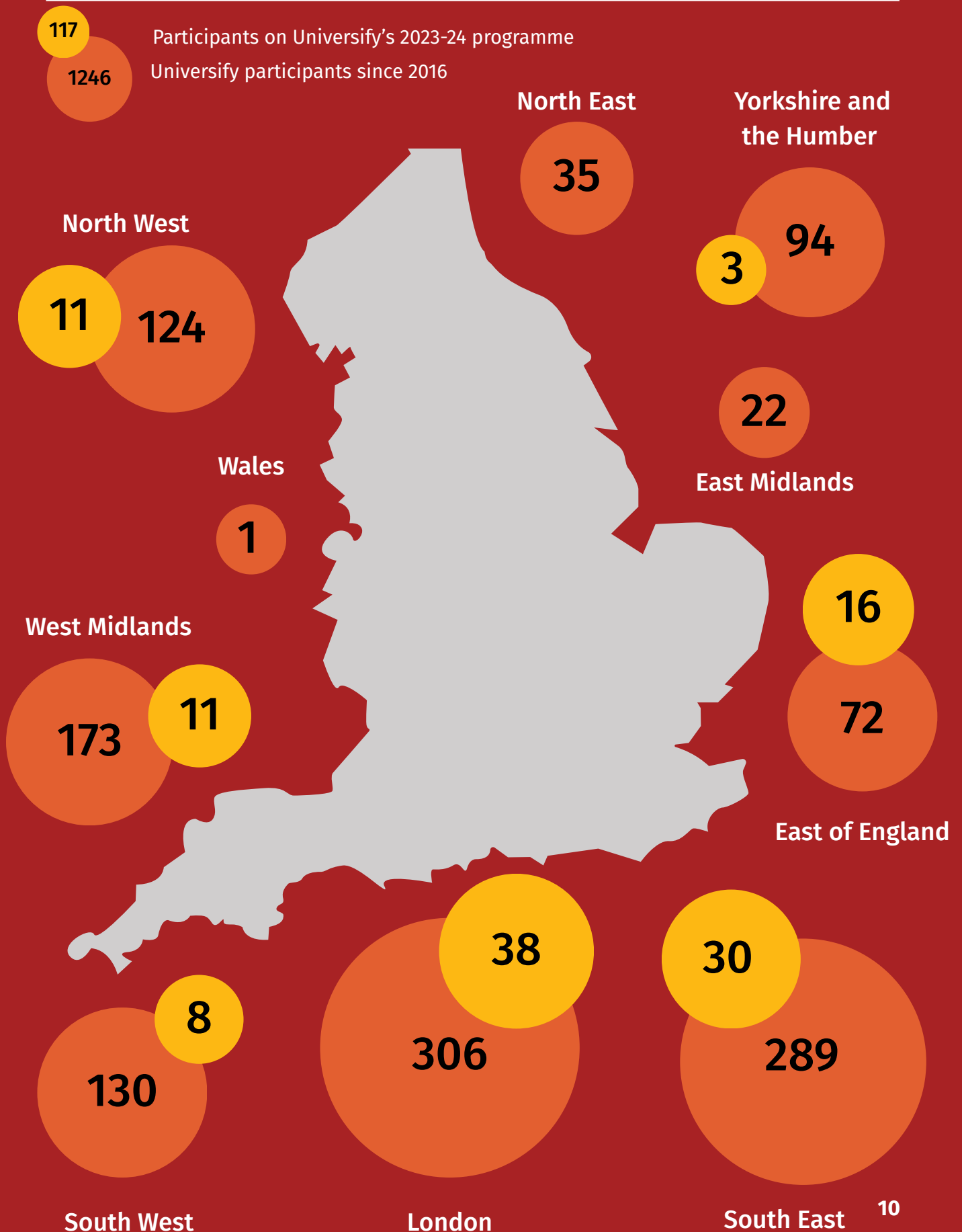
130

South West

London

South East

10



THEORY OF CHANGE

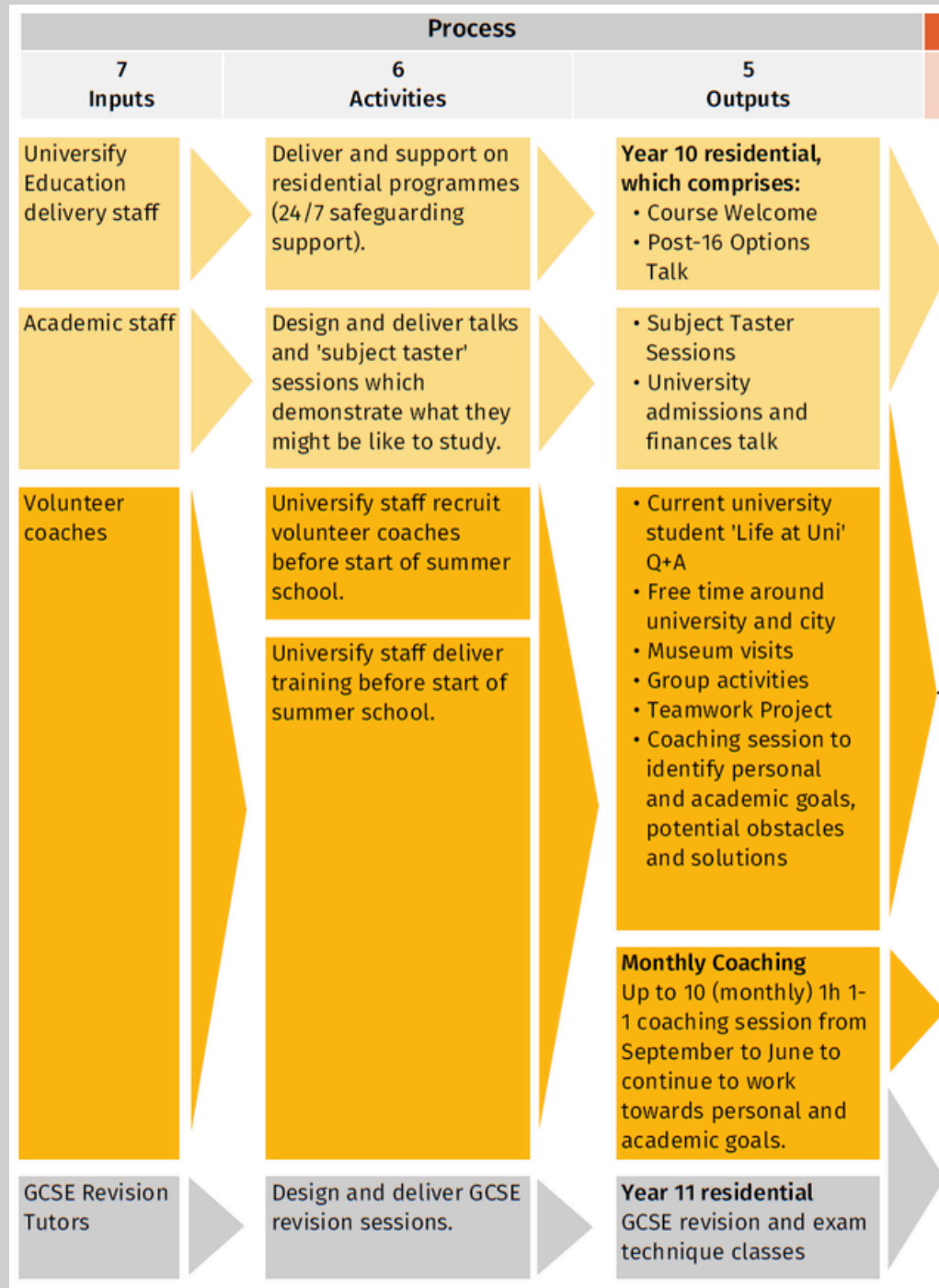
Our programme design is principally guided by our Theory of Change, which explains how we aim to achieve our mission and the outcomes we expect to see as a result of the activities we deliver.

SITUATION

Young people from particular socio-economic backgrounds are underrepresented at highly selective universities in the UK.^[11] Graduates of these universities see far higher wages than graduates from other institutions, so it is concerning that these rewards are not being seen by a population representative of the rest of the UK.^[12]

AIMS

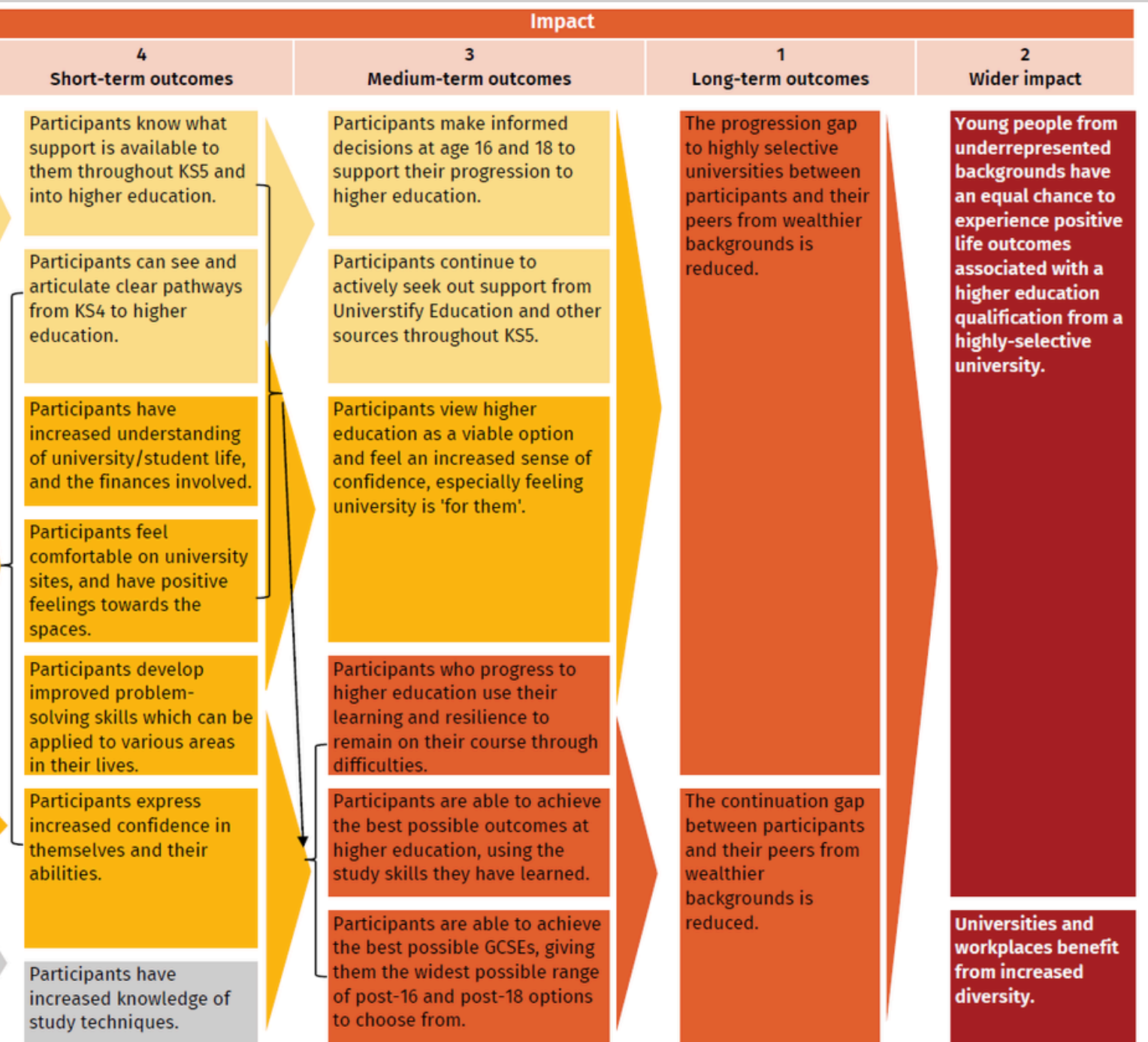
1. Offer a tailored programme of support to participants that allows them to make informed, supported decisions about their future, and achieve the necessary GCSE grades.
2. Build confidence, self-efficacy and problem solving skills which supports participants beyond the Universify programme
3. Eliminate the progression gap between participants and their peers from wealthier backgrounds.



[11] Boliver, V. 19 Nov 2010. Expansion, differentiation, and the persistence of social class inequalities in British higher education. Higher Education 61, 229–242. Available: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10734-010-9374-y#citeas>. [Accessed: 23/10/2025]

Assumptions

1. Participants will engage with coaching, attending at least 2 1-1 coaching sessions and 80% of activities overall. From existing programme data, there is a positive correlation between those attending more coaching sessions and entering higher education.
2. Volunteer coaches can build positive relationships with participants. From existing programme data, participants who respond positively to their coach engage in a greater number of coaching sessions, and provide feedback that their coach has supported their personal development, leading to longer-lasting impact.
3. Participants will be more motivated to pursue higher education in a high-tariff institution over other progression options once they can visualise a reasonable pathway.



[12] Walker, I, and Zhu, Y. August 2018. University selectivity and the relative returns to higher education: Evidence from the UK. Labour Economics 53, 230-249. Available: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0927537118300526#sec0008>. [Accessed: 23/10/2025]

UNIVERSITY ACCESS

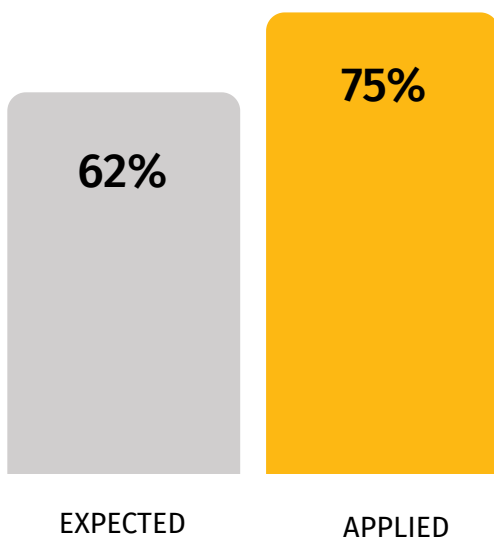
We are pleased to be able to report on the university application and admissions data for our alumni from Cohort 5 (constituting 166 participants), who took part in our 2020-21 programme.

This data, provided by the UCAS Outreach Evaluator, reflects university applications made during the 2023 and 2024 admissions cycles.

INCREASED UNIVERSITY APPLICATIONS

Analysis of Cohort 5 shows that **75%** of Universify participants applied to university, compared with **62% expected** according to UCAS' tailored benchmark.^[13] This difference is **statistically very significant**.

Our participants were also more likely to apply to **medium and high-tariff** universities, those with the strongest track records for increasing social mobility.



Significantly more Universify participants applied to university than were expected based on benchmarks of students from similar backgrounds

OXBRIDGE SUCCESS

Universify alumni have applied to and secured offers from Oxford and Cambridge at levels far beyond expectations for students from similar socioeconomic backgrounds.

- **18%** (30 participants out of 166)^[14] of Cohort 5 applied to Oxbridge, compared with just **1%** expected (2 participants).
- **5 participants** (17%) received Oxbridge offers — a result that UCAS classifies as **'very significantly high'** compared to the expected rate of **0** participants.
- **All 5 accepted their offers**, continuing Universify's record of supporting young people to enter university at the highest level.

These outcomes build upon previous years' success, including Cohort 4, whose participants were **five times more likely to apply to Oxbridge** than comparable peers, and among those eligible for free school meals, **ten times more likely**.

[13] UCAS creates benchmarks of similar students to calculate statistical significance.

[14] UCAS presents all data rounded to the nearest 5. For data where UCAS finds there is a significant result, they also provide percentages, which allow us to calculate exactly how many students achieved each result (e.g. 30/166 applied to Oxbridge, or 18%). Otherwise, we can give an approximation, or a minimum number of students who achieved a result (e.g. minimum of 3 offers from Oxford).

At least 3 Cohort 5 participants accepted places at the following universities:

- Imperial College London
- Swansea University
- UCL (University College London)
- University of Birmingham
- University of Nottingham
- University of Oxford

RUSSELL GROUP SUCCESS

90 participants applied to Russell Group universities, which represent the UK’s 24 research-intensive universities, associated with high entry requirements and include some of the highest-ranked universities worldwide. 54% of participants applied to a Russell Group university vs an expected 26%, which is a **very significantly high rate of applications to the Russell Group.**

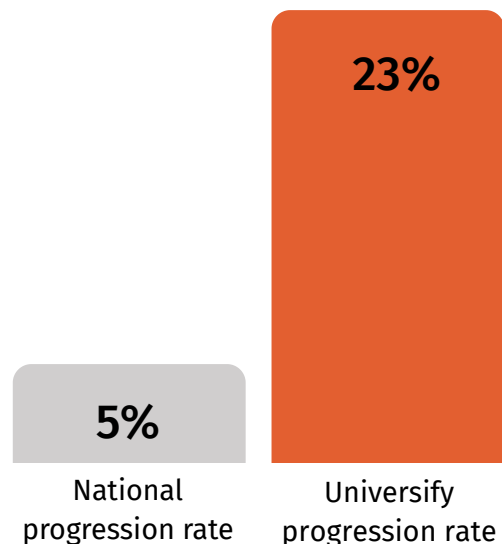
These participants received offers from a range of Russell Group universities (Warwick, York, Manchester, Leeds, Liverpool, Exeter, Bristol, Queen Mary, LSE, King’s College London) and 40/166 entered a high tariff university. These include Imperial College London, UCL, Birmingham, Nottingham, and Oxford.

FREE SCHOOL MEALS

Just over half of Cohort 5 participants were eligible for FSM (88 out of 166). Of those who were eligible for FSM, 55 were accepted to university.

Nationally, less than 5% of pupils eligible for FSM entered a high-tariff university in 2023-24.^[15] For Universify’s participants, 45 received offers from high-tariff universities (51%), of whom 20 accepted their offer (23%). This means that more than **1 in 5 FSM-eligible participants were accepted to a highly selective university.**

Universify’s FSM-eligible participants entered top universities at more than 4X the national progression rate



[15] Widening participation in higher education. 31 July 2025. Available: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/widening-participation-in-higher-education/2023-24> [Accessed 23/10/2025]

GCSE ATTAINMENT

GCSE results are one of the most significant milestones for our participants, shaping the opportunities open to them in sixth form, university, and beyond. Competitive GCSE grades are often a requirement for accessing follow-on support, such as Year 12 university programmes, so a student's early academic attainment has a significant impact on their trajectory.

This year's GCSE impact data, from Cohort 8, once again demonstrates the resilience of Universify participants, who faced the academic pressures of Year 11.

We survey the teachers of Universify participants in the Autumn after they receive their final GCSE grades. For Cohort 8, we surveyed the teachers of 120 participants, and received 77 responses, meaning the data represents 64% of the total cohort.

STRONG ATTAINMENT

71% of teachers reported that their students either achieved or exceeded their predicted GCSE grades.

Notably, **almost a third of students (31%) exceeded their predicted grades**, a higher proportion than in the previous two cohorts. This represents an approximate 20 percentage point increase in the number of students surpassing expectations.^[16]

HIGH ACHIEVEMENT

30% of teachers reported that their students achieved the top GCSE grades (majority 8s or 9s).

While this is slightly lower than some earlier cohorts – particularly during the pandemic years when grade inflation may have played a role – it is consistent with subsequent post-pandemic outcomes.

Importantly, fewer teachers this year disagreed that their students had achieved highly (11% Cohort 8 vs 22% Cohort 7, suggesting a reduction in underperformance across the cohort).



[16] Though it seems intuitive to expect some students to exceed their predicted grades every year, research shows that the probability is very low (given that students who are predicted the highest grade cannot exceed this grade and that predicted grades can be used to motivate students to aim high). Without Universify's intervention, we could reasonably expect just 10% of students to exceed their predicted grades: 'They will do better than their predicted points (+1) only around 10 per cent of the time...Predicted grades are saying: the exam-awarded grades could realistically be this high, but will most likely be a grade or two lower.' Corver, M. 22 April 2021. Predicted grades and university admissions. Higher Education Policy Institute. Available: <https://www.hepi.ac.uk/2021/04/22/mark-corver-predicted-grades-and-university-admissions/>. [Accessed: 23/10/2025]

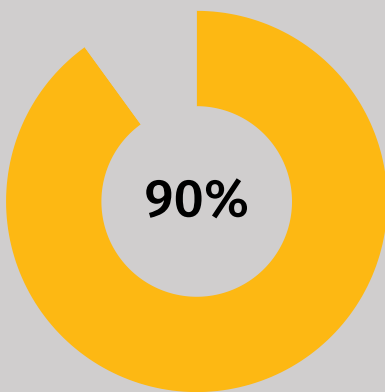
RECOGNISED IMPACT

A remarkable **90% of teachers agreed that Universify benefited their students' GCSE attainment**. For students whose teachers did not feel their grades benefited, teachers still observed positive changes that supported their resilience and preparedness for further study.

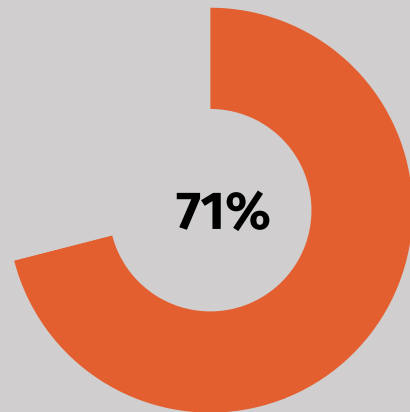
LOOKING AHEAD TO UNIVERSITY PATHWAYS

68% of teachers agreed that their Universify students are now in a good position to apply to a highly selective university, which is a reduction from the previous cohort 7 (in which 76% of teachers agreed), but is consistent with previous cohorts (Cohort 6: 69% agreed).

Moreover, 81% agreed that Universify has increased the likelihood of their students aspiring to such pathways.



of teachers agreed that participation in the Universify programme benefitted their students GCSE attainment



Of teachers reported that their Universify students met or exceeded their predicted GCSE grades

"I found Universify really challenged my shyness and allowed me to make a variety of new connections and helped me to come out of my shell as I am normally very shy. Additionally I am now a lot more knowledgeable on post 16 options and feel a lot less lost about what next!"

Emily, Cohort 9 participant, 2024-25, Somerville College

OUR PROGRAMME IMPACT

University residentials are a core component of our programme and are intended to help participants make more informed decisions about their futures, by providing knowledge and direct experience of what it is like to live and study in a university environment.

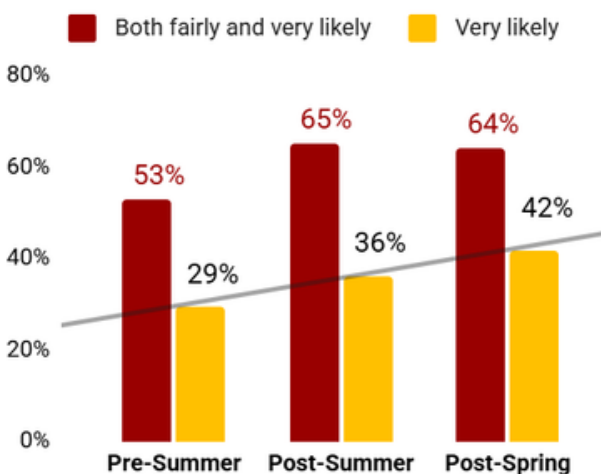
This is particularly important for young people who would be the first in their family to attend university, who may not have anyone to ask for guidance on this topic.

Increasing familiarity with university also helps to combat pre-existing limiting beliefs, such as “people like me don’t belong in that environment”, or fears that they won’t be able to cope with the workload.

MEASURING IMPACT

Before and after attending the University residentials, participants are asked to complete a survey, which helps us to measure the impact of the programme on their attitudes to and aspirations towards higher education, and their self-efficacy.

Cohort 8: How likely are you to apply to a highly-selective university, like the University of Oxford?



[17] Based on 89/110 participants for Cohort 8 who completed the pre-summer, post-summer and spring surveys.

INCREASED ASPIRATIONS TO ATTEND SELECTIVE UNIVERSITIES

Overall, our students reported higher aspirations after taking part in the residentials, expressing a greater interest in applying to highly selective universities such as the University of Oxford. For example:

Cohort 8:

42% of Cohort 8 said they were very likely to apply to a highly selective university after completing both residentials, up from 29% at the start of the programme.^[17]

Overall, 64% of participants said they were either likely or very likely to apply to a highly selective university by the end of the programme.^[17]

Cohort 9:

After completing the Year 10 summer residential, 28% of students in Cohort 9 responded more positively to the question of applying to selective universities.

The majority of students who initially reported that they were ‘not very likely’ to apply to a selective university went on to report that they were ‘fairly likely’ or that it ‘depends’ after the Year 10 residential, with one individual moving from ‘not very likely’ to ‘very likely.’

BUILDING SUPPORTIVE NETWORKS

An important part of the residential experience is the opportunity to socialise and develop in confidence and independence.

Many student testimonials we collected after the residential spoke of being proud and excited to have made friends, alongside the pride they felt in developing academically and gaining the confidence to apply to university.

These new friendships not only boosted students' sense of belonging and self-esteem but also created peer networks where university became a shared, tangible goal, reflected in the increased percentage of participants who reported that more of their friends planned to go to university after the programme.

For example, in response to the question, “Most of my friends are planning to go to university”, Cohort 9 answered more positively after the Year 10 residential:

- 57% of students agreed or strongly agreed with this statement post-programme, compared to 46% pre-programme (46% 57%)
- 14% of students disagree or strongly disagreed with this statement post-programme, compared to 19% pre-programme (19% 14%)

Due to the year-long duration of the Universify programme, students have an opportunity to develop positive relationships with peers, coaches, and volunteers, facilitating the creation and development of social resilience.

“The Universify course inspired me in many ways and has opened up doors for me in the future. I have gained lots of knowledge and experience in lessons I wouldn’t get to pick [at school] and I have made many new friends and I’m tremendously excited to return [in spring].”

**Nora, Cohort 9 participant, 2024-25
Somerville College**



“I learnt more about different courses that I previously had thought differently about and became better at making friends.”

**Henry, Cohort 9 participant, 2024-25,
Jesus College**

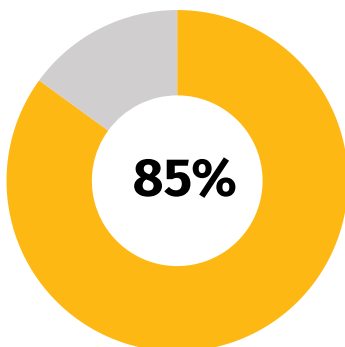
COACHING

UNIVERSIFY HELPS PARTICIPANTS ACHIEVE THEIR ACADEMIC GOALS

At the end of their coaching sessions, participants were asked whether coaching helped them work towards their academic goals.

A majority (62%) of Cohort 8 agreed or strongly agreed, suggesting that coaching helped them plan their studies.^[18]

Participants who completed 5+ sessions were much more likely to agree that coaching had helped them towards their academic goals (85%) - especially those who 'strongly agreed'.



Of participants who completed 5+ sessions, agreed that coaching helped them with their academic goals

Fareh's testimony demonstrates that their coaching sessions provided a "wake-up call" to motivate further work; instead of feeling discouraged about choosing an ambitious career or higher education pathway, participants are supported to feel motivated and empowered through the self-driven environment that coaching provides.

"This course was really thought provoking and pretty much a wake up call as to how hard the profession I would like to go into is. I know I have to really try hard and [my coach] Husnain has helped me realise that."

Fareh, Cohort 8 participant, 2023-2024, Somerville College

WHY IS COACHING IMPORTANT?

Young people from low-income backgrounds face disproportionate barriers to success throughout their education, making resilience a particularly relevant skill for this group. They may receive limited support in improving academic performance or applying to university.

Subtler challenges that can limit performance include increased test anxiety and a lack of self-confidence. Additionally, participants may encounter negative stereotypes, leading them to believe that university is an unrealistic goal, or not somewhere they belong.

Coaching offers participants a supportive, self-led space to build the tools to set and achieve goals which increase confidence and reduce barriers to future employment and education.

[18] Participants who had a high initial score in overcoming challenges were more likely to have fewer sessions and report them as being less helpful. This may explain why some participants strongly disagreed - those who already feel confident have little room to progress.

IMPROVED ATTITUDE AND COMMUNICATION SKILLS

After each session, coaches rate their coachees on their positive attitude, communication skills, and ability to overcome challenges, using a scale that ranged from 0 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree).

Participants in Cohort 8 who underwent **5 or more coaching sessions showed improvements in all of these skills** by an average of 9%.

Skills development was especially pronounced for participants engaging in higher numbers of coaching sessions. **For participants who engaged in 10+ coaching sessions:**

- **Attitude scores increased by 28%**, and **communication scores increased by 33%**, meaning that at the start of the coaching programme, coaches on average ‘agreed’ that participants had a positive attitude and could communicate clearly, shifting to ‘strongly agreed’ after 10 sessions.

OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

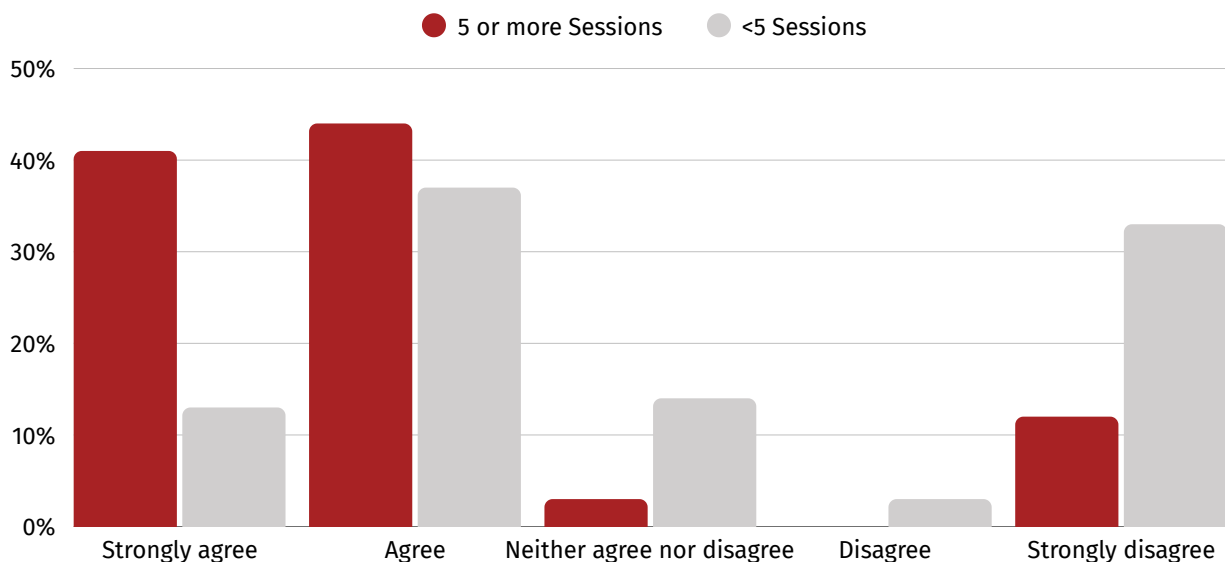
The largest improvements in overcoming challenges during coaching were seen in participants who underwent more sessions, demonstrating the positive impact of sustained coaching.

The ability to overcome challenges of participants who attended 10 or more coaching sessions increased by 71%, from 2.3 to 4.0, whilst the average scores of participants who attended 5 or more sessions increased from 2.8 to 3.2. **By their tenth coaching session, coaches ‘strongly agreed’ that participants could overcome challenges**, compared with ‘neither agreeing nor disagreeing’ at the start of coaching.

Thank you Leyla, the coaching sessions were so helpful and refreshing, it was nice to reflect and break down what I'm actually doing and could do. I look forward to the last couple [of] sessions!

Ma-Hisa, Cohort 9 participant, 2024-25, Jesus College

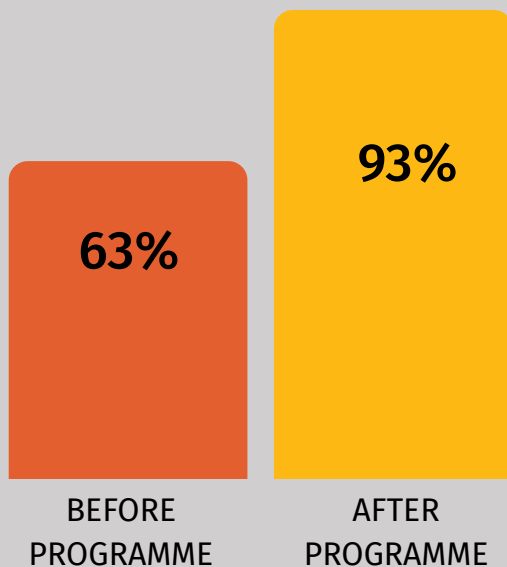
Coaching helped me towards my academic goals



ALUMNI+ IMPACT

2025 saw the completion of Alumni+, a two-year pilot programme designed to build on Universify’s success in supporting participants to highly selective universities, and specifically to Oxford and Cambridge. The programme was developed for young people who had already completed our core year-long programme, had decided they wanted to study at highly selective universities, but recognised they would benefit from additional support to realise this ambition.

The initial pilot involved 30 participants, all of whom had graduated from Universify. The Alumni+ programme aimed to increase access to existing support provided by the University of Cambridge – such as webinars on access, interview preparation, and poster competitions – while supplementing this with group coaching delivered by Universify.



Alumni+ participants gained a stronger understanding of what it is like to study at university

BUILDING CONFIDENCE AND BELONGING

By the end of Year 12, **86% believed they would secure a place at university** if they applied, up from 56% at the start of the programme.

One of Universify’s central aims is to challenge the belief that university is “not for people like me”. Alumni+ helped participants strengthen their sense of belonging: by the end of the programme

- **0 participants believed that university was ‘not for people like me’,** compared with 15% at the start
- **93% of participants reported that they knew what studying at university would be like,** compared with 63% at the start.

This growth in knowledge and confidence demonstrates how the programme supports young people to aim for university and make informed decisions about their futures.



STRENGTHENING ACADEMIC SKILLS

Alumni+ also gave participants the chance to practise and build skills vital for success at university. By the end of the programme, 100% of participants felt confident explaining their ideas clearly in writing, compared with just 63% at the beginning.

As part of the programme, participants engage in online 'subject masterclasses' run by Oxford and Cambridge. Our impact data shows that confidence in **judging the reliability of information rose, with 93% agreeing they could do this by the end of the programme, up from 74%.**

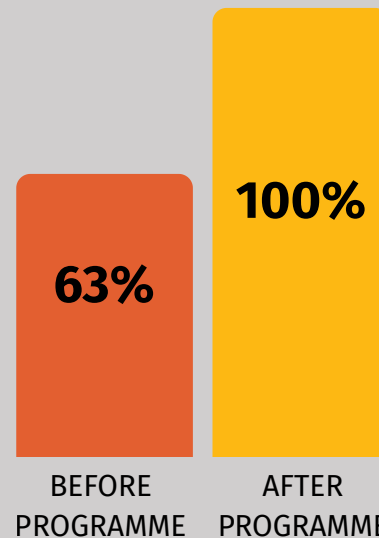
These increases show participants equipping themselves with the tools they need to manage the independence of A-Level study and prepare for the next stage of their education.

RESILIENCE IN THE FACE OF BARRIERS

Cost emerged as the most common reason participants might not go to university, with 7 participants citing it as their main concern.

Other barriers included confidence (4 participants) and alternative career plans (4 participants). For many from low-income backgrounds, financial worries could easily undermine aspirations, yet participants continued to engage with Alumni+ and voice their ambitions.

This ability to confront daunting barriers while maintaining focus on their goals reflects the resilience that Alumni+ is designed to foster.



Alumni+ participants were more confident in their ability to express their ideas clearly in their writing

A FOUNDATION FOR THE FUTURE

Participants left Alumni+ more knowledgeable, more confident, and better prepared to face the challenges of higher education.

By focusing on resilience — whether through managing self-doubt, overcoming financial concerns, or developing independent learning skills — Alumni+ ensures that Universify's impact continues to shape participants' journeys long after GCSEs.



OUR FUTURE PLANS

Universify was founded almost 10 years ago to address the gap in early intervention support to tackle unequal access to university.

As we celebrate the pathways of our alumni, who have grown in confidence, made informed decisions about their futures, and successfully accessed higher education and employment, we continue to assess Universify's programme against our aim of effectively supporting young people today.

While access to university has improved in these 10 years, there is a greater awareness of the range of barriers which students face for reasons beyond low income.

In particular, recent studies have highlighted the challenges for those who are care-experienced, which are compounded by the barriers of being from a low-income background.^[19] The result is that those who are also care-experienced are less than half as likely to access university than those who are eligible for FSM, but are not care-experienced.^[19]

With the sector's growing consideration to cater to intersectional groups, we have piloted a new programme in 2025 to meet this need. The Universify Communities: Bristol Programme ("Step Ahead") runs in partnership with Future Quest and the

University of the West of England to provide opportunities for those who have been supported by social services, including experience of social care. This programme has been designed based on the successes of Universify's existing Year 10-11 programme.^[20]

In 2026, we will continue delivering our established programmes at the University of Oxford to reduce the gap for those underrepresented at the most highly-selective universities. Alongside this, we will establish our programme at UWE with Future Quest in its second cohort, enabling us to expand our local, more tailored support.

In the future, our aim remains to expand our programmes via additional partners who believe in creating opportunities for the most vulnerable students in our society.



[19] Department for Education, 31 July 2025. Widening participation in higher education: 2023. Available: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/widening-participation-in-higher-education> [Accessed 17/10/2024]

[20] Like Universify, Future Quest offer a holistic approach, equipping students with valuable knowledge and experiences related to their educational and career pathways. Since its inception, the partnership has worked with over 40,000 young people from primary to secondary in some of the most educationally disadvantaged areas of the country. Most recent data show participants have an increased sense of purpose regarding their progression, with 86% of participants on sustained programmes indicating higher education as a desired destination. Partner analysis suggests Future Quest students are more than twice as likely to progress to a local university than their peers.

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Sharing Agreements
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Bennet Griffin, Policies

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Hasan Khan	Leah Sternefeld	Pamela Daniel	

LEAD TEACHERS AND TUTORS

Our Lead teachers and schools who help set up the programme at each of our partner schools and support their students throughout the programme, and our tutors who provide university-style taster sessions and GCSE revision classes.

STUDENT COUNCIL 2023-24

Red (student representative), Shea, Carter, Hibah and Irin.

STUDENT COUNCIL 2024-25

Carter and Charlotte (student representatives), Harper, Habiba, Oleg, and Yurii.

UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD MICROINTERNS

Adam Wood	Eryn Ashton	Francesca Clifford	Priya Toberman
Anjali Sivasundaram	Farzana Chowdhury	Kathryn Jackson	Ruth Laing
Bethan Belcher	Chloe Riley	Molly Spurgeon	Tasneem Edo

“FOR THE FIRST TIME, I FELT LIKE OXFORD AND A BRIGHT FUTURE WERE WITHIN REACH”

Zia took part in Universify’s 2023-24 programme and later joined Alumni+. Growing up in care and away from his parents, Zia had lost confidence in himself. After 3 years of support, Zia received a place to study at university, something he hadn’t previously thought possible.

“Before the programme, I wasn’t sure if I’d be able to pass my English GCSE. But during the three days of lessons, they broke things down in a way that made sense and boosted my confidence. They helped me realise that it’s not too late to turn things around. Their support made a big difference, and thanks to my tutor, I was able to pass my English GCSE.”

“It was inspiring to be around others who were motivated and determined. Being part of that environment really pushed me to believe that I could achieve just as much as anyone else. For the first time, I felt like Oxford and a bright future were genuinely within reach. That experience gave me the motivation to change my path and choose to do A-Levels after school, so I could go to university after sixth form.”

“Universify opened my eyes to a different path. It gave me the belief and support I needed to aim higher. Thanks to the programme, I’ll be going to university next year—something I never thought would be possible for me.”

Zia Ahmadi, Cohort 8 participant, Somerville 2023-24



With special thanks to our partners, supports and collaborators.



THE NISBET TRUST

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

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