

ACCESS AND OUTREACH  
*Annual Impact Report*  
2020 - 21



UNIVERSITY  
*of York*



# Contents

- 04 Reflections on 2020/21
- 05 Our Vision
- 06 Opportunity beyond number
- 08 Our Approach
- 10 Access and Outreach in Numbers
- 11 Access and Outreach in People
- 14 Our Reach
- 15 Our Programmes
- 16 Spotlight on Shine
- 20 Spotlight on Next Step York
- 24 Spotlight on The York Experience Summer School
- 30 With Thanks
- 31 How to get involved

## Reflections on 2020/21

**Looking back over the academic year, our mission in Access and Outreach has been relentlessly focused on supporting students in schools and colleges across the country during what has been the most challenging and turbulent time they have faced.**

Despite the lockdowns and restrictions imposed during the pandemic, by ramping up our online engagement, we were able to support over 5000 learners across the country, reaching out to more than 350 schools and colleges locally, regionally and nationally.

The access and outreach team worked tirelessly to ensure that the least advantaged and most underrepresented students were given sustained support, enabling them to continue their education and work towards their goals of entering higher education, despite the impact of Covid.

In rising to this challenge, our team demonstrated great agility, tenacity and imagination in their stubborn refusal to let the pandemic become yet another hurdle preventing talented young people from reaching and succeeding in higher education.

Despite not being together, the team has worked closely together. This annual report celebrates how our access and outreach team is not only changing individual lives for the better, but also creating a community of change-makers across the country determined to champion opportunity wherever talent is denied access.

## Our Vision

**Welcome to the University of York's annual access and outreach report. It celebrates our deep commitment to helping talented and ambitious young people in less advantaged and neglected communities gain access to the very best in higher education. We believe that where you come from must not determine where you can get to.**

Inevitably, this report reflects on a year constrained by restrictions and lockdowns. But it shows how a university that has cared about widening access 'more than almost anything else' since its inception, can remove restrictions and unlock doors to opportunity in even the most straitened and challenging of times.

This enduring commitment to access and outreach aligns perfectly with our newly defined mission to be a university for public good: a goal that emerged from academics and students reflecting on the founding ethos of their university and its roots in a city with strong tradition of social justice and social mobility.

This was also a year where we became the first Russell Group University to partner with the Purpose Coalition - led by the former Education Secretary Justine Greening. The coalition is network of people and organisations - from the public, private and charitable sectors - who are committed radically improving social mobility through access to higher education.

The Coalition's combined voice can help us shape the national levelling up agenda in this vital important arena and clearly identifies the University of York as civic-minded, international in the broadest sense and passionate about equality, diversity and community.

This report contains many statistics - the raw data by which we measure our success and help us to identify and rectify our shortcomings.

But it is the personal stories in this report that will resonate the most. These stories, often of a triumph over hardship and adversity, show how we all gain by widening access and opportunity and how our society is strengthened and enriched by their engagement in higher education. It is something that our founders would have recognised and celebrated.



**Charlie Jeffery**  
Vice Chancellor

# Opportunity beyond number

**In her introduction to our Social Mobility Pledge report, the former Secretary of State for Education, Rt Hon Justine Greening, identified the defining challenge facing the country today: where you start in life remains a determining factor in where you finish.**

While talent is spread evenly across the country, opportunity to realise that talent is not. All too often those who could benefit the most from access to higher education have the least opportunity and that is a tragedy for potential students and the wider society.

Recent research by the Sutton Trust highlights the importance of a university education to improving social mobility and yet, according to the Office for Students, disadvantaged students are half as likely to enter higher education.

Everyone, regardless of background, deserves equal access to higher education, to realising their full potential and unlocking a happy, prosperous and successful future.

Education and universities are in a powerful position to help tackle this challenge head on, redefining the social contract schools, further education colleges and higher education must have with their local and regional communities.



*Everything we do is a partnership and a collaboration: it is only by working with schools, colleges, local government, social services and voluntary organisations, that we can connect with those for whom the opportunity to access higher education feels out of reach.*

**Rebecca Clark**

But that requires leadership and collaboration. This report shows how the University of York is providing that leadership and collaborating with others to accelerate social mobility.

Established in 1963 – the beginning of an optimistic and progressive decade – the University of York’s founders endowed it with a strong public purpose, drawing on a rich tradition of championing social justice and combating inequality that is distinctive to the City of York. Our ethos in Access and Outreach is inextricably linked to that culture.

Everything we do is a partnership and a collaboration: it is only by working with schools, colleges, local government, social services and voluntary organisations, that we can connect with those for whom the opportunity to access higher education feels out of reach.

This report illustrates the scale and range of our programmes and the communities we reach, from isolated coastal communities stretched out on the very edge of Yorkshire, to the diverse and densely populated inner city suburbs of London, where poverty and privilege can be a matter of crossing a road to a different borough, as the profile of Vanessa Sefa provides powerful testimony.

We may set ourselves targets and measure the impact of our programmes in facts and figures; but it is the personal, human stories that lie hidden behind those numbers that inspire us to try harder and do better. As the personal stories in this report testify, opening the door to university transforms lives and society for the better.

No matter the challenges, this work is its own reward. The people we support to realise their potential are not only among the most determined of undergraduates who excel at their studies, they also go on to become advocates of the widening opportunity ethos that is at the heart of the University of York’s access and outreach. It is this multiplier effect that adds so much value to our programmes and is almost impossible to accurately capture in a number.



**Rebecca Clark**  
Head of Access and Outreach

# Our Approach

**Our approach to widening access at York is founded on the principle that long term sustained programmes provide participants with opportunities to consider their higher education ambitions in an informed way based on their personal informed experiences.**

We provide programmes that are aimed and curated for students from less advantaged backgrounds and those who are currently underrepresented in higher education. These programmes are crafted using an evidenced based approach and using educational outreach practitioners who are enthusiastic, passionate and committed to supporting talented individuals to reach their full potential and realise their aspirations.

We work closely with Schools, Colleges, Educational Providers and Professionals to engage with their pupils, students and supporters. These relationships are crucial to our team and the effectiveness of our work. We value the expertise, knowledge and support we gain from working with our colleagues who work in the community. The insights and guidance we gain from our partners shapes our interventions and allows our work to be critiqued, shaped and continuously improved.

Student voice is a key component of all our programmes, using role models from the York student body to share their honest experiences of higher education. We employ students across all our interventions with some general and specific roles. The understanding and personal voices of our students can act as a relatable journey to higher education providing prospective students with information to make their own informed decisions. Student voice allows us to ensure our programmes are fit for purpose, for the intended audiences and connected to the real students at York.



**Lorna Bowling**  
Deputy Head of Access and Outreach



# Access and Outreach in Numbers

**5000**  
young people across the UK have accessed and engaged with an online programme

We have worked with **350** schools and colleges across the UK

We provided **30+** academic subject tasters from our departments at the University of York to our participants

We have used **310** student voices in our programmes to act as role models for higher education

## CASE STUDY

### Widening access numbers add up



**Kymrun Dhami is in her element. “There’s so much that I enjoy about this role,” says the 27-year-old lead of Imperial College London’s A Level Maths and Further Maths Online Programmes, who has a lifelong fascination with mathematics and a passion for widening access to higher education.**

A decade earlier, the then Coventry schoolgirl was on track to be in the first generation in her family to go to university. But the budding mathematician found herself at a disadvantage: further maths, which was key to a good university place was not taught at her school but could be studied on consortium at another school.

Undeterred, a combination of determination and talent earned her a place on the national Realising Opportunities programme; a nationwide support network of research intensive universities including Birmingham, Warwick and York.

It was a programme that changed her life. It not only equipped her with the tools, skills and confidence to succeed in higher education; it also provided a paid-for visit to York, following a summer school in Birmingham, that opened her eyes to moving from the Midlands to the North.

“I had never considered moving far from home,” says Kymrun, whose new role spans working with students all over the country. “I thought Birmingham was a possibility but not somewhere as far as York: I was unsure about whether I would fit in.”

That train ticket north decided her otherwise. Although the campus was largely white – “they were working hard to help change this over the four-and-a-half years I was there” – it was so immediately and warmly welcoming that she fell in love with the place.

During her time as a Maths undergraduate and then Masters’ student, Kymrun spent much of her spare hours in ambassadorial outreach roles. “It was wonderful to give something back, but also incredibly rewarding as I learnt new skills that laid the foundations for my future career.”

Having secured a Masters’ degree, the university engaged her to review the Social Sciences’ Departments approach to outreach and access. “It was very different to look in detail at how individual departments were working, rather than university wide.” she said.

But it was also the springboard to her Imperial College London role. “Outreach had such a profound impact on me, but I am also still fascinated by mathematics. To be able work with a leading STEM university that enables me to combine both these things – my love of maths with my passion for improving access – really means a lot to me.”



CASE STUDY

## Student Voice is essential for impact

**“My name is Hannah Pope and I am a third-year Interactive Media student and a Black Access Intern at the University of York. With only 8% of students at higher-tariff institutions coming from a Black background, I felt encouraged to get involved in the creation of Black Access, as it would allow me to encourage prospective students within my community to progress to high tariff universities and make a positive difference to the lives of young people. And as one of two Black students on my course, as well as moving away from a community as diverse as London to York, this was something I could relate to.**

Through this role, I have had the opportunity to create various social media content on platforms including Instagram, Tik Tok, YouTube as well as producing video content on Black History Month for primary school children. I have particularly enjoyed these opportunities, in supporting prospective students' decision making by providing an introspective look at what being a Black student in York is like. Furthermore, the Black Access Intern team have had heavy involvement in the creation of the programme ensuring Black students are visible and not tokens, due to going through the application process before and developing the programme events.

This academic year, I am looking forward to further opportunities in the near future, where myself and the student teams are able to support prospective students during the application process, run in-person events, and much more due to the alleviation of the pandemic.”



*I felt encouraged to get involved in the creation of Black Access, as it would allow me to encourage prospective students within my community to progress to high tariff universities and make a positive difference to the lives of young people.*

**Hannah Pope**





# Our Programmes

Over the last two decades we have designed – and continue to refine and renew – a range of tailored access and outreach programmes that connect higher education opportunities to pupils in primary schools, secondary schools and colleges in less advantaged and neglected communities across the country.

We are also engaged with students in further education and more mature learners who are looking to re-enter education.

Our programmes have a local, regional and national reach: we are as passionately committed to supporting our community here in York as we are to those across Yorkshire and the Humber and further afield.

These multi-intervention outreach programmes have specific aims and objectives and are selective in participation. The length of programme varies from intensive weeks/months to five years in length. The purpose of each programme is different to suit the age/life stage, educational level and background of the participants.

Our programmes take place in person and online and include a range of workshops, events and activities. We engage our Student Ambassadors to support and facilitate events and provide their insights and experiences.

We also participate in a range of collaborative programmes with local, regional and national partners. These enduring partnerships allow us to work together with fellow higher education providers, community partners and charities in a way that drives forward change and ensures the success of these programmes is far-reaching in geography and scale.



SPOTLIGHT ON

## Shine

**With a decade of success behind it, Shine remains one of our flagship access programmes supporting pupils across Yorkshire, the Humber and the North East of England. Built around a five-year sustained programme Shine provides support for pupils in Year 7 to Year 11.**

To mark its tenth anniversary, Shine will be expanded from 21 partner schools to over 35 signalling our continued commitment to, and investment in, widening access and opportunity across the region and the north.

Partner schools are provided with whole cohort support for all learners to ensure higher education and informed choices are explored and supported. Targeted cohorts are created from Year 8 onwards to provide intensive and immersive experiences of higher education to talented students who meet a range of measures of less advantage and underrepresentation.

Our partner schools are integral to the success of Shine in their engagement, support and steering of the programme. Schools are invited to join the programme and are selected based upon a range of education and socioeconomic factors.

Shine has a culture of inclusion, encouragement and curiosity and provides learners with opportunities to inspire their futures and ultimately support their success. The programme has a range of interventions and activities from campus visits, online events, mentoring, a residential and much more. Students who complete the programme are encouraged to progress onto one of our post 16 programmes such as Next Step York or Realising Opportunities.

CASE STUDY

## Coming home to York

**With a few family photographs pinned to the wall of her student flat, Chloe Hutson is settling in to her first week and first lectures as an undergraduate in criminology: but, unlike the majority of freshers, Chloe is already feeling at home.**

"I started the Shine programme when I was in Year 7 so it really feels like I am coming home when I arrive back to York," says Chloe. As an 11-year-old at Grimsby Havelock Academy, however, the idea of studying at university – let alone a Russell Group institution – had never crossed her mind. Shine changed that.

"At the time it seemed very early to be thinking of university but, looking back, it was essential for someone like me; the first in my family to go into higher education," she said. Her father was a well-paid lorry driver who worried about his daughter getting into debt. But the knowledge she gained from Shine enabled her to show him there was no need to worry.

"The support over the last five years from the Shine team has been incredible," Chloe says. "It's a programme for the most promising students but you have to keep your grades up and stay motivated." For Chloe, the Year 10 residential visit was the highlight of the programme and where she began to focus her interest in criminology.

"Every year at school the Shine team push you out of your comfort zone, give you tasks to complete and challenges to overcome. It has helped give me the confidence to debate issues in public and explore issues I am passionate about.

"I have amazed myself that I have got here and my parents are so proud. But I know I would not be here without the support of Shine over five years. It would be a dream come true if I could become part of it, helping young people from a similar backgrounds achieve their own dreams."



*I have amazed myself that I have got here and my parents are so proud. But I know I would not be here without the support of Shine over five years.*

**Chloe Hutson**

CASE STUDY

## A shining example of partnership



*It's great that they promote the value of higher education in general rather than just York. This really widens opportunity.*

**Catherine Hodgson**



**As Amir Kadir preps for his admissions interview with Oxford University, the Assistant Principal for Teaching and Learning at the Macmillan Academy in Middlesbrough, Catherine Hodgson, sings the praises of the Shine programme.**

"We were one of the very first schools to engage with Shine," says Catherine. "It's a partnership that has grown through time. It's helping raise aspirations among our students by showing them they are worthy; they are good enough and ambitious enough to apply to the top universities."

Amir is a case in point. Along with Oxford, the would-be actuarial scientist, has his name down for UCL, Durham and Manchester. With Newcastle as an option if he needs to live nearer home. "Shine gave me a very early insight into what university is like. It helped clear away all the assumptions I had about university: like the amount of money it would cost and that only posh people go to university."

Catherine looks across at the ambitious Amir and agrees. "Shine's young ambassadors do a great job of dispelling many of the myths about university. What they say resonates with our students and, as they move up through school, our students realise they are no different from the ambassadors and this gives them the confidence to follow in their footsteps."

The partnership with York, she says, has been hugely beneficial, with the school incorporating many of Shine's activities into the curriculum and more than 200 pupils experiencing it since the relationship began. "It's great that they promote the value of higher education in general rather than just York. This really widens opportunity."

A former student at the University of York herself, Catherine says one of the big barriers to access is a fear of debt. "Shine has given our students – and through them, their families – a better understanding of debt and how to budget. These financial sessions show our students that they can afford to go to university; that there are measures in place to help; and that cost does not put higher education beyond them. This is a powerful message."

For students like Amir, Shine has helps them worry less about the cost of going to university and more about the cost of not going.



CASE STUDY

## Ticket to a medical career

**First year medical student, Somoya Hajyousef, had never been on a train by herself before she was sent a ticket to attend a residential outreach event organised by the University of York's Shine programme.**

"I had wanted to be a doctor from the age of five, but I was so lacking in confidence that I couldn't take the step to university. Even when the invite from Shine came through, I decided to reject it," says the Somoya, the daughter of Palestinian and Polish parents.

When her mother saw the invite she managed to talk her anxious daughter round. "It was my mum who gave me the push out of the door," says a thankful Somoya who imagined she would be staying in a hostel with bunk beds among a group of strangers with whom she had little in common.

It wasn't like that at all. "I was in from the very start. I knew this was for me. I went to the medical school taster and knew immediately it was for me. I was on top of the world," she said. Though the Shine team talked to her about pathways to medicine, by the time she got back to school she forgot.

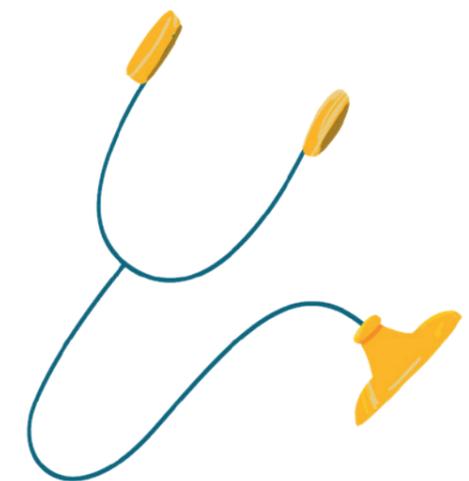
She found the move from GCSEs to A' levels to be "massive and very stressful" but remembered her pathways to medicine application just in time. It was through this that she met student ambassadors, people just like herself who had been through very similar journeys.

"I had always thought I had only one chance of getting in to medical school. If I fell at the first hurdle that was the end of my beautiful dream; there were no second chances. But so many of the students we met had not made the grade the first time round, and there they were studying to be doctors.....it made me realise that if I failed first time it would not be in vain. That was so motivating," she said.

"I don't work hard for nothing; I need a goal and path and this gave me both. It solidified my determination to get the grades and nobody could tell me that I wouldn't make it or should do something different. I had no Plan B."

The residential also dispelled a big myth. "I thought it would be all affluent white people, but there were people from every class, culture and background. I was amazed at what it was like, it really was an OMG moment with people from backgrounds similar to my own. I knew I would fit in."

"Shine (and my mum) got me out of the house, enabled me to work out life for myself. I had never had sleep overs and never been on a train by myself before I went to the Shine residential. I can honestly say I would not be where I am today were it not for Shine."



SPOTLIGHT ON

## Next Step York

**Next Step York was also established in 2012 with the focused aim of supporting sixth form students in the North of England to explore their options after further education. Since the programme started over 1000 students have benefited from Next Step York.**

The two year intensive programme provides interventions and events to allow participants to explore university from courses through to campus life. With the support of role models and mentors, students engage with modules which allow them to gain in personal confidence and widen their experience to enable them to make better informed decisions about their future.

We target schools and colleges in the Yorkshire and Humber region that have a cohort of students who are underrepresented in higher education, maybe less advantaged and have the propensity to consider higher education. The partnerships in our programme have ultimately led to the longevity and success of the programme.

The personalised nature of Next Step York allows students to focus on what they want to explore and learn. Through curating their own programme students navigate all the aspects of the higher education experience in a supportive format which enables students to gain experience in a supportive environment.

Allowing students to thrive through their own exploration we hope students will progress through practical support such as applying to university, student finance and transitioning.

We hold a range of in-person and online activities throughout the two years which allows students to engage in a community and foster a sense of belonging.

## CASE STUDY

## On the right track

**Working in a high pressured, safety critical environment like Network Rail requires Nathan O'Neill to draw on the many non-technical skills he developed at university.**

With a score of signallers under his leadership, the 25 year-old History graduate could have travelled down a very different track had his eyes not been opened to higher education by Next Step York.

"No-one in my family had been to university," says Nathan, whose father works at Yorkshire Water and envisioned his son taking an apprenticeship with the firm. "It was what was expected, what people did," said Nathan who attended an academy school in Doncaster.

Eight years later, he still remembers the day NSY came to the school. "It changed my life. Until then university was rarely mentioned at school; and then only as a place to study and get a degree. Here was a chance to spend a week on campus to see what it was all about."

It was "a huge eye opener" and a chance to meet students and relate to them in a way that made me think I could be in their shoes in two years' time. It's fair to say I wouldn't be where I am today but for NSY."

Suddenly, he had a new focus at school. His friendship group changed. His ambition grew and, with the support of York's access and outreach team, he learnt the fundamental skills of being a student and gaining access to higher education.

Looking back to that first residential visit through to his graduation, Nathan believes the biggest benefit was not the formal qualification, but an experience that enabled him to become a well-rounded person. "It took me out of my comfort zone and supporting me to grow.

"In my role today we talk a lot about the importance of non-technical skills. Next Step York showed me that university is about much more than an academic education: it's about meeting and working with people from every walk of life; about attention to detail; meeting deadlines; working under pressure; and developing the confidence to communicate with others," he says.



*It was "a huge eye opener" and a chance to meet students and relate to them in a way that made me think I could be in their shoes in two years' time. It's fair to say I wouldn't be where I am today but for Next Steps York.*

**Nathan O'Neill**

CASE STUDY

## Next step university

**Growing up in Salford and being taught in a school that had just come out of special measures never made Beth Critchley feel disadvantaged: it was just how things were. Today, the 25-year-old lawyer with Farrer and Co in Lincoln's Inn Fields, sees things differently.**

She praises the 300-year old legal practice, whose clients include the reigning monarch, for its approach to inclusivity and diversity, but is all too aware of how much needs to be done to stop a person's place of birth being a deciding factor in their life chances.

Had it not been for a poster in the library of her sixth form college, Beth knows her path would have been very different. It was an invitation to attend a free residential programme run by the Next Step York outreach and access team at the University of York.

"I felt a bit of a fraud. I didn't see myself as someone who needed help from a widening participation scheme. It was a cop out. I was fine, just fine," she said.

But that week changed things utterly. She understood for the first time what life at university would be like and wanted to experience it for herself. "It made it all very real and tangible. It made me realise I want to do this. I want these experiences. I want this opportunity."

As she embarked on her law degree she also began to understand what she had missed at school. "Other people knew there was a game to be played and a game to win. I was just turning up to classes and didn't know what was at stake," Beth said.

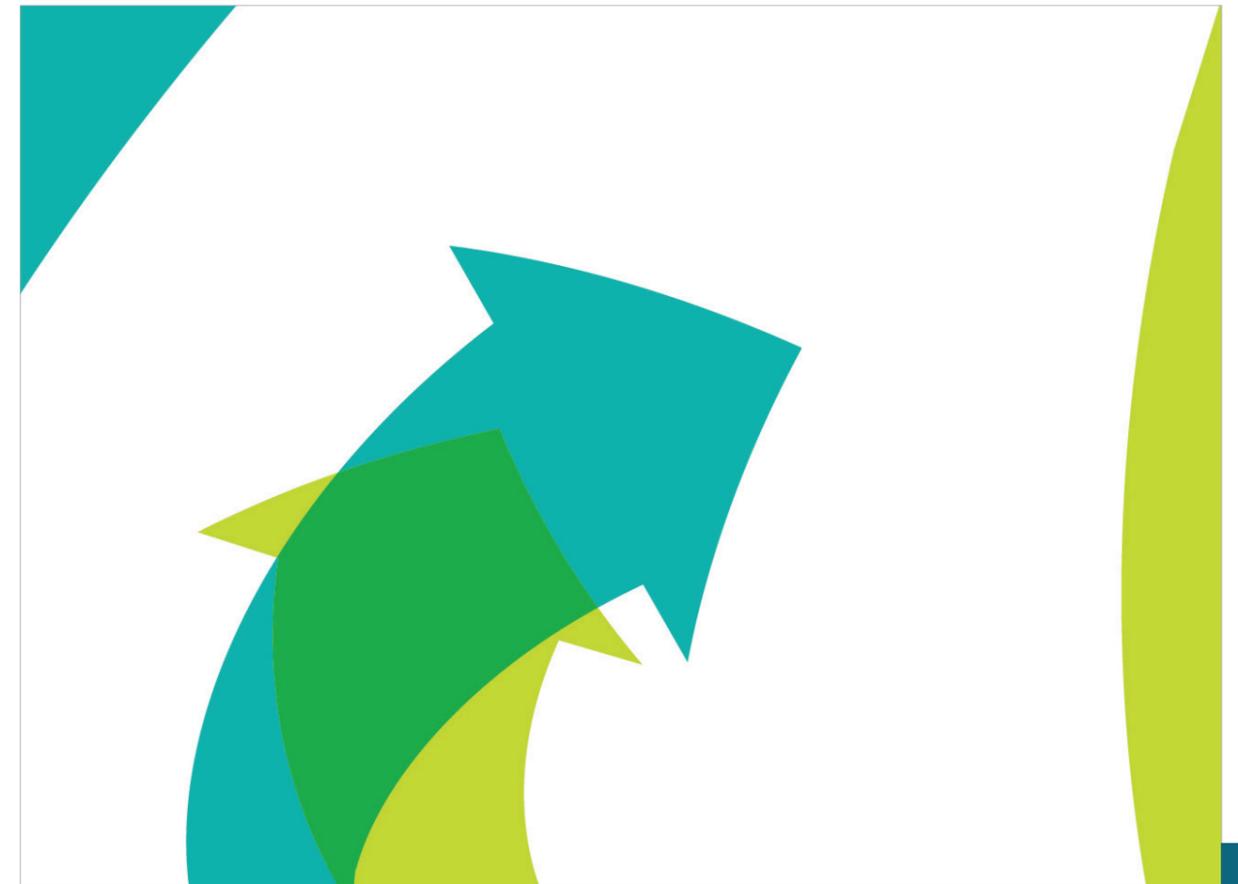
Like so many who have benefited from Next Step York, Beth became an evangelist for widening access while at university, reaching out to schools and young people like herself. Even today in her day job she is a volunteer with the Social Mobility Foundation and a regular at the free legal advice centre close to her workplace, where she helps those less advantaged access the law.

"My perspective on life has changed. I no longer think it's just the way it is. Things that aren't fair can be changed," she said. And all because she saw a poster in the school library and decided to take the Next Step York. "That's the bottom line."



*It made me realise  
I want to do this.  
I want these experiences.  
I want this opportunity.*

**Beth Critchley**



SPOTLIGHT ON

# YESS

York Experience  
Summer School

**York Experience Summer Schools are often the eureka moment when prospective students decide that higher education really is for them. The carefully crafted, week-long residential is an immersive and hands-on experience that enables students to gain a comprehensive understanding of almost every facet of student life and to build their skills and confidence.**

Accompanied by an extensive pre- and post-support programme, YESS reaches out to year 12 students from all across the UK at a critical stage in their further education journey. The participants are full of potential and meet a range of underrepresented and less advantaged measures and are engaged with one of our existing programmes at York or with one of our partners.

The summer school programme was established in 2012 and expanded in 2014. More than 1,800 young people have benefited from the YESS programme since its inception. In 2020 we delivered this online for the first time reaching triple the number of participants we usually could. The success of YESS hinges on the participation of current students at York, acting as role models, mentors and sharing their first-hand experiences.

The programme is widely supported by York's academics, student services and careers departments. This holistic approach to the student life cycle equips participants with the knowledge, experience and confidence to navigate their higher education journey. The structure of the programme allows students to excel and thrive whilst gaining the support and encouragement of the York community.

CASE STUDY

## Single minded effort

**Brought up in a single parent household, where his mother worked full time to keep the family together, Ben Fudge faced some hard choices as a teenager in a working class district of Worksop.**

While his sister Lauren had blazed the trail by securing a place at university and gaining a First Class Honours degree, her experience of higher education was mixed and left Ben questioning whether it was the right path for him.

Today, in the fourth year of a sociology degree at the University of York – with the last year spent at the University of Denver, Colorado – Ben has much to thank his sister for. “Mum was so busy working that it was Lauren who supported and encouraged me during GCSEs and A Levels,” says Ben.

Back then, he was working for Tesco in his spare time to help the family finances. The firm offered him a step up the career ladder with training, but Ben didn't feel that retail was for him and was yet undecided about university.

At school, mention of the Sutton Trust's support for social mobility and routes in to higher education, provided an insight into the possibilities and more research led him to discover the York Experience Summer School.

“This was the game-changer for me,” Ben said. “It may sound cheesy but that week enabled me to see myself thriving at university. I realised then that university is for everyone, even a white working class boy like me raised by a single parent.”

At school, it had been impressed on him that going to university came with a hefty price tag: and that worried him. “My sister had explained that it was nothing like as bad as I had been told, but I didn't really listen to her,” Ben says. The YESS programme spelled it out very clearly and this “took the pressure off”.

Today, Ben is working hard on his studies but, over the last three years he has also dedicated a lot his time to his role as a student ambassador, reaching out to young people like himself through open days, schools' engagement and campus tours.

“It would be fantastic if at the end of my degree I could join the University of York access and outreach team as a graduate recruit. What a brilliant first job,” he said.

“

*I realised then that university is for everyone, even a white working class boy like me raised by a single parent.*

**Ben Fudge**

CASE STUDY

## Doors opened: Opportunities realised

“

*It had a huge impact on me. It opened a door to a world I had never imagined let alone experienced.*

**Maisie Smith**



**With the aspiration to be appointed head of music at her school, primary teacher Maisie Smith feels a dream is coming true for the young girl from Northampton who grew up on a housing estate where few escaped and life was often a choice between manual work and the dole.**

“Where I grew up the door to opportunity was invariably closed. Very few people ever left the estate,” says the 26-year-old sociology graduate who today teaches a class of 30 at Duston Eldean Primary school.

For her, the door to a different future opened when York Experience Summer School (YESS) offered her a taste of university life and she said yes. “My dad was keen for me to go to university but we knew so little about it. I was the first in my family to even think of it,” said Maisie who was studying sociology at A Level at the time. “I got chance to talk to sociology students at the summer school and realised that this was the right course for me. But the experience was much bigger than that.

“It had a huge impact on me. It opened a door to a world I had never imagined let alone experienced. Coming from an estate where nothing happens to seeing this beautiful campus with students walking around I fell in love with the place. I thought ‘wow’ this could be me.”

And so it was. With the support of the Realising Opportunities programme, she qualified for York. During her time at university, she not only studied hard but also threw herself into access and outreach work, including working with year three and four pupils in a local primary school.

“Through my role as an ambassador I was able to see the children engage and be passionate with their teachers and this made me realise I wanted to help young people achieve their potential. And that’s what I am doing today,” she said, adding: “The wonderful thing about outreach at York is that it doesn’t stop at the residential, it continues all through your degree and beyond. I am still in touch and working with the team seven years later.”





## Time for a change

**'There are teachers and there are change-makers. Vanessa Sefa falls into both categories.' So said Good Morning America late last year after she posted a heart-warming story on Twitter about braiding a distressed young pupil's hair ruined by the rain.**

"Black y8 girl came to me during break, crying, with her natural hair shrunk by the rain," Vanessa wrote in her tweet. She continued: "In under 15m & with the wrong tools I got the girl out with 2 rushed cornrows. Being black & that age, hair can mean so much. This is one of the many reasons we need more #Blackteachers #BHM."

To press home the point, she cites government statistics that show just 3% of teachers in the UK are black. Now in her third year teaching English at the Archbishop Lanfranc Academy in Croydon, Vanessa is determined to level up that statistic.

Ten years earlier, as a student in a Croydon school herself, she was told by her teachers that if she was to achieve her ambition of going to university, her best option was to find a better school. Ever resolute, she followed her teachers' advice.

"As much as they had trained me to the best of their ability they knew I would have a better chance of realising my dream at a different school. They had the best of intentions," says Vanessa, who succeeded in transferring to the single-sex Sixth Form at Wallington Grammar School in the leafy suburbs of neighbouring Sutton.

"In all honesty, I didn't enjoy the experience," she says, reflecting on the move from an ethnically diverse, lower working class school where the majority of learners were on pupil premium, to one of middle class affluence and privilege. "It was a massive awakening and a necessary step for me. If I hadn't gone to Wallington I would not have been able to handle the experience of an elite Russell Group university like York," she added.

But getting to York would not have happened had Vanessa not been so singularly focused at her new school. "It was a form presentation that for a few seconds highlighted the work of the Social

Mobility Foundation (SMF) and its support for getting into university," she said. Having made a quick note of its website, she spent that evening looking at the qualification criteria – single parent family, deprived London Borough, free school meals, ethnic minority. "I ticked all the boxes; let's go."

Through the SMF she narrowed down her options. "I was aiming high and the University of York ticked all my own boxes – a Russell Group university with an English department ranked among the best in the world," she said. That summer she was on a YESS residential programme that confirmed York was the place to be. "The student ambassadors were the really nice thing. A couple were from London and that made me feel at home."

But her first year as a student at York was not entirely easy. While the widening participation programme had been brilliant in opening access to higher education, she felt almost abandoned when she arrived.

"I was sold the dream that I would come to York and find my own tribe, but that didn't really happen," she said. When she told the access and outreach team this, they embraced Vanessa's message and the Black Access programme was born. It's a programme designed and built by black students and is now central to York's mission to engage with black students both at school and when they come to the university.

Today, at her own school in Croydon, 57% of students have English as an additional language. As a result, this can make learning an even bigger challenge. To overcome this Vanessa has designed a programme that accelerates the reading ability of pupils across the school. It's been a massive success.

As Good Morning America said: Vanessa is both a teacher and a change maker.

CONTRIBUTORS

**Amir Kadir**  
Shine case study and current student at Macmillian Academy

**Ben Fudge**  
YESS case study and current student ambassador. Currently, studying Sociology and Criminology at York

**Beth Critchley**  
Next Step York case study, attending in 2014. Currently a solicitor in Manchester

**Catherine Hodgson**  
Shine Case study and former York student. Currently a teacher at Macmillian Academy

**Chloe Hutson**  
Shine case study and contextual offer holder. Currently studying Criminology at York

**Hannah Pope**  
People case study and Black Access Intern. Currently studying Interactive Media at York

**Kymrun Dhani**  
People case study and Realising Opportunities student. Currently working at Imperial College London

**Maisie Smith**  
YESS case study, attending in 2014 and also attending Realising Opportunities. Currently a teacher in a primary school

**Nathan O'Neil**  
NSY case study, attending in 2012 on our first cohort. Currently working for Network Rail

**Somaya Hajyousef**  
Shine case study. Currently studying at Hull York Medical School

**Vanessa Sefa**  
YESS case study, attending in 2015. Currently a teacher in London

# Thank you

CREATION TEAM

**Designer - Hannah Yates**  
Hannah@madebytwo.co.uk  
@\_madebytwo

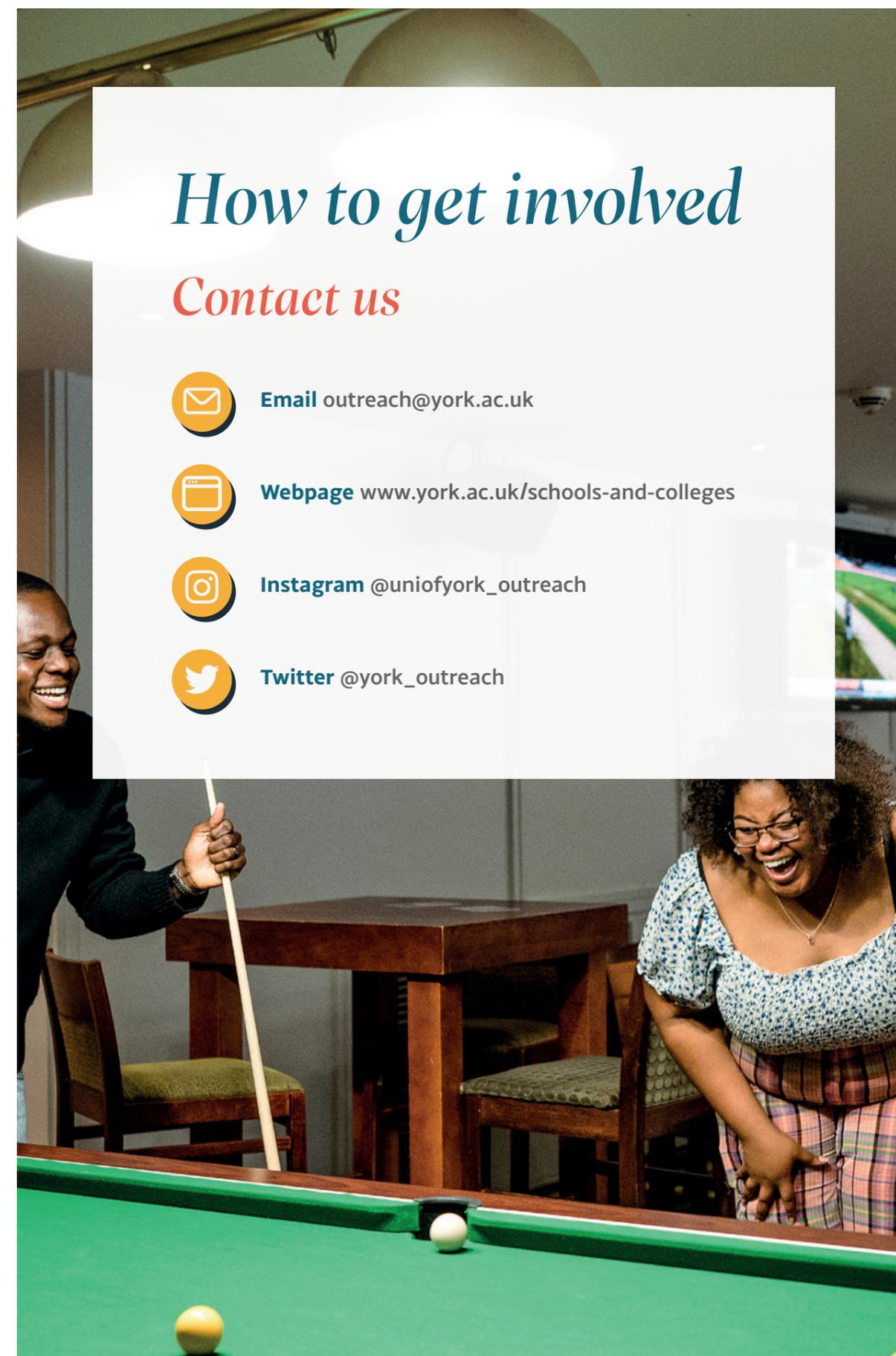
**Writer - John Yates**  
john@madebytwo.co.uk

CONTENT AND COORDINATION

**Lorna Bowling**  
Deputy Head of Access & Outreach

*Thank you to all our partner and students who have supported and participated in our programmes.*

*A special thank you to staff at the University of York and members of the Access & Outreach Team.*



## How to get involved

### Contact us



**Email** outreach@york.ac.uk



**Webpage** www.york.ac.uk/schools-and-colleges



**Instagram** @uniofyork\_outreach



**Twitter** @york\_outreach

FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT  
[york.ac.uk/schools-and-colleges](https://york.ac.uk/schools-and-colleges)

