

ACCESS AND OUTREACH IMPACT REPORT 2023/24



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INTRODUCTION

THE YEAR IN REVIEW

Rebecca Clark

Head of Access and Outreach



At the beginning of this academic year the media reported that the proportion of less advantaged teenagers accessing university had fallen for the first time on record. This came as a stark reminder that widening access programmes like those detailed in this report, alongside strong partnerships with schools, colleges and communities, are more important than ever.

This year has been an exciting year. Our partnership with IntoUniversity and the University of Hull saw two new centres officially launched in Bridlington and Grimsby and our own community learning centre, The Place, now entering its second year. All this alongside the focus of our Access and Outreach team who have worked harder than ever to bring the voice of children, young people and students into their programmes. This, and our robust evaluation frameworks, will ensure our programmes go from strength to strength.

Our commitment to widening access sits alongside an equally strong commitment to supporting the success of our students on course and beyond. Our new Access and Participation Plan, approved by the Office for Students, sets out our continued investment in widening participation work that benefits people at any point in their journey with us.

I am incredibly grateful and proud to lead widening access at York and to work alongside a committed team of widening access specialists. This report goes only part of the way in demonstrating how important widening access to higher education is to us all.



THE TEAM HAS
WORKED HARDER
THAN EVER TO BRING
THE VOICE OF
CHILDREN, YOUNG
PEOPLE AND
STUDENTS INTO THEIR
PROGRAMMES.



Visit our schools and colleges webpages to find out more about our widening access initiatives.



Worked with

347
schools
across the UK

Engaged with over

8500

young people through widening access initiatives



Online and in-person programme

events

55Events in schools



Supported by

198
current
university
students

OUR APPROACH TO WIDENING ACCESS AT YORK

At York, our commitment to widening access is rooted in the belief that long-term, sustained engagement empowers individuals to explore their higher education options and reach their full potential.

We design and deliver targeted programmes specifically for students from less advantaged backgrounds and those underrepresented in higher education. These initiatives are grounded in evidence-based practices and led by passionate and dedicated outreach professionals who are committed to helping talented individuals pursue their aspirations.

Collaboration is at the heart of our work. We build strong relationships with schools, colleges, education providers and community groups to engage students and their support networks. These partnerships are vital to the success of our programmes, offering valuable insight, expertise, and feedback that help us refine and improve our approach.

Student voice plays a central role in everything we do. We involve current York students across our initiatives to share their authentic experiences of higher education. Their stories provide relatable and meaningful perspectives that help prospective students make informed choices about their futures.

By incorporating student perspectives, we ensure our programmes remain relevant, purposeful, and aligned with the needs of our audiences, ultimately keeping them connected to the real experiences of students at York.





OUR REACH

To engage with and support students across the country, we work with a widespread network of partners and collaborate with a variety of schools, colleges, and organisations. By focusing on students and their communities, we are able to enhance both our reach and impact. We also remain committed to our civic responsibilities through a variety of initiatives across York and the Yorkshire and Humber region.

PRE-16

Following ten years of impactful delivery, Shine continues to be one of our leading outreach initiatives, supporting students throughout Yorkshire, the Humber and the North East of England.

Designed as a five-year journey, the programme engages pupils from Year 7 to Year 11. Shine aims to raise awareness and knowledge of higher education, while also inspiring, motivating and encouraging participants to realise their aspirations and achieve academic success.

Through visits to 25 partner schools, the programme engaged with close to 4000 students in Year 7 and Year 8. Working with whole year groups, we introduce pupils to the concept of higher education and explore the skills needed to navigate the upcoming years ahead in their education. From Year 9 onwards, selected students are identified to take part in more focused and in-depth activities.

The Shine programme engaged 518 pupils across Year 9 to Year 11 through a variety of events, such as campus visits and residential events. During these sessions, we place a strong emphasis on increasing knowledge, confidence building, developing a sense of belonging with, and excitement for, higher education.

Students who complete the programme are encouraged to progress onto one of our post-16 programmes such as Black Access, Next Step York or Realising Opportunities.



81%

of students in Year 11 agreed they had good knowledge and understanding of HE. This increased from 49% of students in Year 9 from the same cohort.

89%

of students in year 10 agreed they had a better understanding of how students learn at university after attending the residential.



Henna's story

To former participants like Henna, Shine provided the stepping stones to make informed decisions that changed their lives.

Growing up, Henna always had a vague interest in attending university but it seemed a distant reality. It was almost like she needed a stepping stone to the other side of the river, and Shine would be that for her.

She decided to look for more information about participating in the Shine programme, but with no idea what to expect, it was slightly intimidating. However, from the beginning, the Shine team's genuine "infectious" passion for supporting students made her feel welcome and reassured her that it would only benefit her.

To Henna, "Shine was a real opportunity to see that university was an option for someone like me", particularly when she visited campus.

Taking part in academic taster sessions, building social networks, and being listened to helped her believe that she could achieve. She also appreciated how her Shine journey was hers and that the programme was a safe space to ask questions and explore her interests.

Graduating from the Shine programme provided a route onto the Next Step York programme. This was invaluable to her university application journey. She was initially indecisive and only submitted her application a day before the deadline. Still, with the support from the Next Step York team, she persevered and eventually started at York studying an undergraduate degree in politics.

Since then, her time on Shine has continued to support her in many other ways. Her experience on the programme made her start at university seem "less daunting," both socially and academically. Having graduated in 2020, and now happily working in the police force, Henna is unsure if she would be where she is now without Shine. She sees its "massive impact" on her educational journey, providing the stepping stones to getting where she is now.



REGARDLESS OF THE PATH YOU CHOOSE, **SHINE GIVES YOU SKILLS, CONFIDENCE** AND A BOOST TO MAKE **INFORMED CHOICES.**

Angel's story



WHEN I JOINED SHINE, I DON'T THINK I WAS AWARE OF HOW **MUCH OF AN IMPACT THE** PROGRAMME WOULD HAVE ON MY FUTURE DECISIONS.



Angel always enjoyed school but looking back, she "wasn't sure how or whether I could even attend university", as she came from a low socioeconomic background in the North East where the opportunities and skills needed to apply seemed out of reach. Not until her school selected her to participate in Shine in Year 9 did Angel begin to see that this could be a reality for her.

She says, initially, "Shine sounded like an enjoyable chance to meet new people and foster connections whilst learning interesting topics". Students and staff always provided an engaging and friendly environment, but she felt nervous moving onto the residential stage. It was during that two-day visit to York that she realised university was a place for someone like her, and she could envision life on campus for the first time. She was also given the confidence to follow her passion for law after participating in a subject taster session, which helped her meet like-minded people and build upon her public speaking skills.

Shine "solidified" that university was the right avenue for Angel but left her wanting to learn more, which motivated her to apply to Next Step York. This opportunity proved that York was right for her, and she was "elated" when she received an offer to study at the University. Once on campus, she felt like she had a head start due to the connections and knowledge she had accumulated over both programmes. The Access and Outreach team also provided opportunities when she was a student, as she worked in the team for three years, spanning four different roles.

This work directed her focus on a career that she's passionate about, leading her to a role in the Social Mobility Foundation as an Engagement Coordinator for the North East - the area where she grew up. The charity focuses on providing young people from low income households with the opportunity to access top universities and careers. Looking forward, Angel hopes "to inspire people who might be from a low-income background that university is a fantastic opportunity" and that it is a place for them.



THE POWER IN PARTNERSHIP Tim's story

Those are the words of Tim, a Shine coordinator who works at a school in an area where progression to higher education is substantially lower than the national average.

There is not a local university to which students can feel connected to, which can make the idea of taking that next step feel distant to its students. This has the unfortunate impact of sometimes limiting students' aspirations. Tim sees himself in this context as providing the 'link', connecting students to opportunities and empowering them to follow their dreams.

Now the Shine coordinator for his school, Tim has been involved in the programme for over ten years. Throughout this time, he notes that his school has had a lot of external visitors, and one of the things that has been consistently said is "how well-prepared students are for progression". He believes that Shine is one of the reasons for this.

To Tim, Shine breaks down barriers by "giving students something to target towards" and it plays a big part in informing students of the options available after 16. It is not just about university. Shine gives students the confidence to explore their interests and passions, whether based in a university or not, and helps students make choices that are not affected by outside influences but by what is important to them.

However, a significant element of the programme is ensuring that students know they "can achieve towards Russell Group universities like York." It can also bring students closer to York, both physically on campus and by providing the voice of students, which he believes young people appreciate the most.

Tim shared, "I just really enjoy it. I think it's good for the students. It's positive, and there are no negatives about it from my end. The students enjoy it, and it also happens to help them make informed decisions along the way."

POST-16

Designed to inspire and engage, our post-16 programmes give students in college and sixth-form the opportunity to learn about university life and explore their options after further education study, allowing them to make informed choices.

Our activities are aimed at talented students who have the potential to progress to university, but may have faced barriers that prevent them from accessing higher education. Students are selected based on a number of criteria, ensuring our activities are reaching those that will benefit from them the most.

Each initiative has its own unique offering but all work towards demystifying higher education, fostering a sense of belonging and building skills for students to thrive in their education journey. Students who successfully complete these programmes can access an alternative offer to study which is up to three grades below our standard offer.

Next Step York

A personalised two year initiative that accepted 311 students onto the programme and delivered a range of in-person and online events, including an Academic Conference.

Black Access

A student-led programme, co-designed with current Black university students at York. A team of 22 student staff successfully delivered a calendar of events for 137 young people across Year 12 and Year 13.

Realising Opportunities

A collaborative programme between research-intensive universities. York worked with 217 students across Year 12 and Year 13, co-delivering a range of events including a Virtual National Conference and Academic Skills Module.

In year two of the programme, completers of Next Step York and Black Access are invited to take part in **YorJourney**, a module designed to provide support during the transition to university study. We look forward to celebrating the success of our programme participants and welcoming those who go on to study at York each September.









96%

of students felt more confident about studying at university as a result of attending the Academic Conference

Next Step York student survey

98%

of students felt prepared for life at university after taking part in Realising Opportunities

Realising Opportunities Impact Report 2024

92%

of surveyed YorJourney students felt confident to seek academic support after completing the programme

YorJourney student survey





BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS

Ayo was a student in the first Black
Access cohort to come through the
programme. Now studying Law at the
University of York, Ayo has been
working on the Black Access
programme as a Student Supporter for
the past two years. It feels like a fullcircle moment.

Ayo had a "relatively positive" experience during college but was unsure about carrying on with higher education. He expected that he would apply to university due to the nature of the career path he wanted to pursue, but even with a clear understanding of a course, there was still a lot of uncertainty.

When Ayo first started the Black Access programme, he was "quite surprised" to see that there were "actual faces" behind it and that it was much more personable than expected. Particularly, seeing how interactive it was and that it was a programme with sessions run by current Black students provided him with comfort. This helped Black Access become something to Ayo that was more than just a programme of activities to complete for a grade discount.



It became a way to make a network in the university application process and the transition to studying at York.

The Black Access programme has given Ayo practical skills that will benefit him even after his studies. Sessions on CV building and personal statement writing helped during the university application process. The programme also supported Ayo in developing many transferable skills he has utilised when applying for internships and work experience, which, in pursuing a law career, has been invaluable in his professional development. It also brought a renewed confidence in meeting and getting to know new people.

Ultimately, for Ayo, Black Access has a "massive impact" on young Black students. It breaks down barriers, addresses concerns they may have about the University, and provides valuable networks and advice about life at York as a Black student.

Kymrun's story

Kymrun's story is one that exemplifies the power that programmes like Realising Opportunities give students in setting them up for success not just at university but for life.

Kymrun enjoyed working hard at school and college, enjoying many subjects. Mathematics was a subject she wanted to pursue further, but she had doubts and was unsure if it was a subject for someone like her.



Partly motivated by these concerns, she applied to take part in Realising Opportunities, and looking back, she remembers, "It sounded like a great opportunity, but I had no idea what to expect from it".

Her experience changed her journey to applying to university in many ways. Firstly, it allowed her to overcome her doubts about studying mathematics by giving her in-depth experience of the subject, which she says "helped me gain the confidence and belief to go study it". The programme also helped Kymrun to reconsider what universities she thought she could apply to. Despite initially thinking she should apply to universities closer to home, a visit to campus stood out as she quickly realised that York was for her.

Once at university, it soon became apparent that the programme had unlocked a passion for helping others overcome inequalities which led to working as a student ambassador within Access and Outreach. She says that "being a student ambassador really helped to fuel my passion and commitment to widening participation."

After studying undergraduate and postgraduate degrees at York, she now works as a Programme Manager for The Hg Foundation, supporting programmes in the UK, Europe and North America to help diversify the technology workforce. She credits her time on Realising Opportunities as setting her up for success by giving her self-belief and confidence that she still relies upon to this day in following her passion. Looking to the future, Kymrun just wants to keep doing what she's doing, helping and supporting more people and fighting the inequalities they face.



I'M ALWAYS SO GRATEFUL FOR THE OPPORTUNITIES I HAD AT THE UNIVERSITY OF YORK AND THE WAY IT OPENED UP SO MANY DOORS FOR ME - REALISING OPPORTUNITIES WAS THE FIRST STEP IN THIS **ME - REALISING OPPORTUNITIES WAS THE FIRST STEP IN THIS.**

Kunza's story

I WASN'T SURE WHAT TO EXPECT, BUT I'M SO **GLAD I GAVE IT A SHOT. NEXT STEP YORK WAS ONE OF THE BEST DECISIONS I'VE EVER MADE.**

When Kunza first started the Next Step York programme as a student, she was unaware of the journey she was beginning. It was not just a journey to university but one that is still ongoing in helping others.

Kunza chose to participate in the Next Step York programme to step out of her comfort zone. Practically, it made sense as she wanted to see York, but the experience went beyond this. The programme gave her important insights into being a student while building her skills and confidence. This was especially invaluable to Kunza as she was the first in her family to go to university.

She then joined the University of York as a student and wanted to give back, so she applied to work as a student ambassador while studying. The versatile role allowed her to work on various programmes that she had once taken part in. Her experiences helped her apply to her current role as a Student Support Officer. "If it wasn't for Next Step York pushing me to continue saying yes, then I would not have taken on my current role".

Looking forward, Kunza wants to continue to make a difference. Barriers still need to be broken down, and her insights and unwavering commitment to a positive student experience will only drive her to make this difference. Her job in student support is rewarding as roles like hers "really make students feel like they're not alone on their journey and that someone is with them every step of the way, just like the Next Step York team were for me."



STUDENT VOICE

OUR WORK WITH CURRENT UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

Using student voice and experiences in outreach work is essential to widening access to university because it brings authenticity, relatability and representation to the forefront of our engagement.

When prospective students, particularly those from underrepresented or less advantaged backgrounds, hear directly from current university students who share similar life experiences, it helps break down the perception that higher education is inaccessible or "not for people like me." Lived experiences offer a powerful counter-narrative to traditional assumptions about who belongs at university and what success looks like. We need higher education environments to reflect society and have the brightest minds.

Student voice can also illuminate barriers that universities' might overlook or fully understand. Their insights provide valuable context on how outreach efforts are received and where there be missed opportunities. Whether it's navigating the application process, understanding student finance, or adjusting to academic life, current students are uniquely positioned to share practical advice and emotional reassurance. This peer-to-peer approach often resonates more deeply than information presented solely by educational outreach practitioners.

Moreover, involving students in outreach design and delivery fosters a culture of inclusion and empowerment within the university itself. It shows that their contributions are valued beyond their classrooms, and it encourages a cycle of advocacy and mentorship. When students are invited to co-create outreach programmes, universities benefit from more responsive, impactful, and student-centered initiatives that truly speak to the needs of their current and future cohorts. In short, student voice is not just a tool we use; we consider it a vital bridge. By centering student experiences, we can more effectively connect with students and build lasting relationships based on trust, representation, and the exploration of their potential.

We are incredibly proud of our students and grateful to them for their valued contributions. We hope by employing talented students and supporting them through their degree with employment opportunities that it might support the future graduate talent pool achieve fantastic outcomes and make contributions to society.



CONFIDENCE AND COLLABORATION Amari's story

To Amari, Black Access shows students that "race should not be a determining factor that stops you from going to university or the university you want to attend".

Amari worked on the Black Access programme as a Student Intern, a role they held close to their heart being the first person in their family to go to university. Seeing that Black Access breaks down this barrier for other students made the role "so rewarding" to them as they were able to use their own experiences and voice to help other students overcome the same obstacles they faced.

Amari recounts one particularly rewarding example of the positive impacts of their work. A student participant was initially quite anxious and quiet at the start of their trip to the University of York for Black Access' biggest on-campus event.

However, when seeing the community of Black students working on the programme, they became more confident and excited about attending university and decided they would like to apply to York. They also showed interest in wanting to work as a student staff member, similar to Amari, on a programme like Black Access.

Now a Social Media Freelancer, Amari's time at Black Access helped to pave the way for their career.



Working on Black Access as an intern gave Amari skills and experiences that have equipped them to succeed in their new role. They were empowered to run a social media page, creating professional content to empower fellow Black students. This not only boosted their professional and personal confidence but also gave them industry-specific knowledge using apps such as Instagram and TikTok. It taught them how to follow trends that target a particular audience, which helped them pursue a similar career, specifically with social media.

This confidence has also changed how Amari works with others. This was encouraged when working on the Black Access programme, as they had to work with students, other members of Access and Outreach, and even senior staff at the University. Amari's role in the programme has empowered them to seek support and collaboration from others more confidently when needed.

Mitch's story

MY ROLE HAS POSITIVELY **IMPACTED MY CAREER AS IT WAS A DIRECT REASON FOR ME LANDING A JOB SHORTLY** AFTER GRADUATING

To former Student Intern, Mitch, Next Step York teaches students that "you can very much aspire to do something that you think is unattainable." His own story certainly proves this.

Mitch was a Student Intern for Next Step York, bringing an invaluable student voice. His role was an active one as he found that his ideas were "valued enough" to be "a strong point within the structure of the residential event". He then got to see first-hand the impact his work made as he saw young people engaging and learning from the resources he had made.

The role was a perfect fit for Mitch. He said, "I feel quite passionate about the ability to progress to higher education regardless of background because it should be an opportunity for everyone. I had an amazing experience at York, and I think everyone should have it as an option."

Not only did his role support those participating in the programme, but it also had a "direct impact" on his own professional development. The role equipped him with practical skills, such as a greater understanding of how internal communications work, as well as idea development, task delegation, and professional relationship building.

The role also aided his professional progression by giving him practical experience in interview panels and 1-to-1 sessions with his manager, developing his CV. However, the most important skill Next Step York has given Mitch is confidence in himself.

"Next Step York threw me into all areas and taught me how to approach situations that I'm nervous about, from speaking to a room full of over 70 people to speaking to venue managers or teaching 16-year-olds how to crochet!" This confidence translated into muchdeserved professional success for Mitch as he felt more confident applying to various roles after graduation, which led him to his current position.

"Not only could I draw upon my experiences in interviews, but my current manager told me that she saw the transferable skills within Access and Outreach in my current marketing role because she used to work within a university department."



DEDICATED SUPPORT

In 2023/24, York remained deeply committed to supporting young people with experience of local authority care and those who are estranged from their families, helping them take confident steps toward higher education.

Our VIP campus visits are designed to offer independent students and their guests a warm, personalised introduction to university life. Delivered by the AchieveHE programme team, these visits included free return travel, overnight accommodation, a shared lunch, a guided campus tour, and a chance to meet academic staff in a chosen department. For many, these visits were transformational - of the eight students who took part in a VIP visit during 2023/24, five subsequently enrolled at the University of York in September 2024.

Throughout the year, we continued our close collaboration with Inspiring Choices, helping to deliver the On Track programme - an outreach initiative for care-experienced young people aged 10 to 25. Across five events, we welcomed 30 young people into safe spaces where they could explore their next steps.

In October 2023, York hosted the sixth annual Care Leavers Can Celebration in partnership with North Yorkshire Council's Leaving Care team. The event brought together 140 people, including 52 care leavers, to celebrate their achievements, share stories, and build a strong sense of community.



Five students enrolled at York after a VIP Visit



Five events delivered in collaboration with Inspiring Choices



140 people welcomed at the Care Leavers Can Celebration



A spotlight on



Designed and launched this year, Foster their Future works with foster carers across the UK to equip them with the tools needed to support young people in making informed choices about their future.

Foster carers have a big impact on young people's lives, perhaps more so than professionals in a school, due to the often disruptive nature of a care-experienced young person's educational journey. Working with foster carers, who often support multiple young people over a long period of time, can have a long-lasting positive impact.

Delivered as a six-part series to 38 attendees, the online sessions centered around raising knowledge of higher education and the support that is available for students with care experience. Themes included student finance, the UCAS application process and transitioning to university, with pre and post-programme surveys showing 144% increase in knowledge of support available to care experienced people at university.

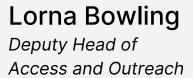


I thought it would be much more formal and stuffy, but it wasn't. It was very informal and there were lots of breakout sessions, discussions, guest speakers, videos, something there to cater for all learning styles. But I think the way each session was broken down made it all very easy to understand. Vanessa and everybody delivering gave us plenty of opportunities to ask questions, and it was a very safe space. I think we learned quite a lot from the other people who attended, the other delegates, as well the facilitators.

I can only talk really positively about the course because it far exceeded my expectations. We thoroughly enjoyed it and it was really engaging. We loved the fact that there were guest speakers, some of whom were previously looked after children who have gone through university, and at times it was really inspirational to hear them and quite emotional at times. I honestly cannot think of one thing that I would change.

- A cohort 1 participant

LOOKING AHEAD





Looking back on our year of impact is a wonderfully proud moment. Over this year, our partnerships with schools and colleges have continued to thrive even when those providers face increasing pressure. These partnerships allow us to see the impact of our work for students at the University and for pupils at school or college. Together, we share a commitment to supporting young people to explore their educational options and experience what higher education has to offer. And, it would not be possible for the University of York to deliver our widening access programmes without the support of teachers, advisors and school leadership teams. Your work and support matters to us enormously. Thank you.

As this impact report is published annually, we are already in the full swing of delivery for the 2024/25 academic year. This report provides us an opportunity to reflect and implement our learnings from successes and challenges alike. Our programmes have always included student feedback. However, it is through our longitudinal data and insight that we can see which of our interventions and programmes have the strongest impact. It is by looking at data over time that we can focus our efforts and resources on the activities that matter and affect learners in a lasting way.

Our work is delivered by a talented team of professionals who are enthusiastic and committed to supporting talented young people to explore their potential and to build their confidence. It is these young people who inspire us to do more each year.

Thank you for allowing us to support you. Our commitment to widening access to university is our core mission and is widely reflected in the university ethos of public good. We are very proud of our impact and cannot wait to see what the next year brings.



Contributors

Amari Faria
Student staff case study and pevious Black Access Intern

Angel Tarran

Shine case study and York graduate, currently working at The Social Mobility Foundation

Ayo Popoola

Black Access case study and current student team member, studying Law at York

George Hall

Case study writer and current University of York student studying History and Politics

Henna Javid

Shine case study and York graduate, currently a Police Officer

Kunza Amin

Next Step York case study and York graduate, currently a Student Support Officer

Kymrun Dhami

Realising Opportunities case study and York graduate, currently working at The HG Foundation

THANK YOU

Mitch McClean

Student staff case study and previous Next Step York Intern

Tim Dowey

Shine Coordinator at a Shine partner school

Thank you to all of our partner schools and students who have taken part in our programmes.

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

