

Press Release

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HALIFAX LAUNCHES £1 MILLION UNIVERSITY ACCESS SCHEME FOR YORKSHIRE YOUNGSTERS

Announced today, Halifax is launching a £1 million initiative to nurture the talents of bright Yorkshire youngsters from disadvantaged backgrounds. This is the only programme of its kind in the UK.

The Halifax led 'Reach for Excellence' programme is being delivered and administered by the Sutton Trust and University of Leeds. It will benefit 360 sixteen to eighteen year-olds over a three year period across Halifax's Yorkshire heartland. The scheme is aimed at youngsters from non-privileged backgrounds and is designed to help them realise their potential and gain a place at a top university.

The programme has now opened and is accepting applications through schools and colleges across Yorkshire.

The only programme of its kind

The Reach for Excellence programme is the only programme of its kind in the UK. As part of the programme, youngsters will receive weekly advice sessions and lectures, a residential summer school, university visits, individual mentoring over a two year period as well as parent/carer sessions. This is the first time that all these elements will have been put together in one programme.

Funding

Funded with £870,000 from the Halifax and £75,000 from the Sutton Trust, the 'Reach for Excellence' programme will benefit Yorkshire students offering a menu of subjects. Year 12 & 13 students will benefit from the scheme and will receive a travel allowance to assist in attending any out of school sessions.

Access to higher education

Across Yorkshire there is a wide disparity between youngsters gaining access to higher education. In some areas (Leeds Central) just 10% of students manage the step, compared to 62% in others (Sheffield Hallam). The national average is 32%* compared to 26% for Yorkshire And Humber. The 'Reach for Excellence' programme will help youngsters from areas with low access rates attend top level universities by providing them with the practical knowledge and confidence to apply.

Data from the Office of National Statistics show that the expansion of higher education over the last decade has disproportionately benefited those from the higher social classes. In 1991/92 35% of those in the top three social classes went to university, compared to 11% from the bottom three – a gap of 24 percentage points. Ten years later, although the proportions of both higher and lower social class students had increased because of the expansion of university places, the 'gap' between the social classes had increased to 31 percentage points.

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Eligibility

State School and colleges across Yorkshire have been given detailed information about the programme and the eligibility criteria and will be encouraged to invite suitable students to submit application forms. The primary focus of the programme is to help children from schools serving areas of need.

In addition to targeting areas of need other criteria will be used:

- Students identified by their teachers as having the potential to succeed – typically, they must have the potential to study for 3 A Levels and attain grades B or above
- Students from families with a non-professional background or with little or no tradition of higher education
- Attendance at a maintained (state) school or college with a low rate of progression to higher education – typically, a school with less than 45% of pupils achieving five or more A*-Cs at GCSE
- In receipt of an Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA) – the EMA is a reasonable proxy for household income; students aged 16, 17 or 18 in full time education are eligible for the EMA on a sliding scale according to household income
- An allowance will also be made for applicants who have had their studies disrupted or adversely affected by circumstances in their personal or social lives (e.g. family break up) or are living in public care

The selection will not be purely on proof of academic achievement, but also on potential. Students will be recruited for the initiative from September this year with the scheme due to begin in January 2008.

HBOS in the community

The total community investment by HBOS in 2006 was £44.2m.

HBOS is the biggest financial service employer in Yorkshire with 14,200 people in the region. This represents 21% of the company's UK workforce – up 3,100 (+28.5%) since 2001.

Colleagues are encouraged to get involved in volunteering. In 2006 over 7,300 colleagues across the UK registered their volunteering activities. These community based activities range from ongoing regular work by individuals, through to single day 'team challenges' by groups and departments. A number of volunteering initiatives have been launched during 2007, particularly focusing on improving education standards and providing young people and disadvantaged adults with the skills to support them into employment.

Shane O'Riordain, General Manager, Halifax Group Communications, said:

"The Halifax is delighted to be supporting young people in its Yorkshire heartland. We hope to make a real difference in areas of need by helping youngsters obtain a place at a top university."

Peter Lampl, Chairman of the Sutton Trust, said:

"It is becoming more and more important that we make full use of the talents of bright young people, particularly those from non-privileged backgrounds. Too often these students feel that they are not good enough to get into a top university or that they won't fit in once they are there. Thanks to the generous support of the Halifax and the work of Leeds University, we can dispel these myths through this innovative programme. 'Reach for Excellence' really will offer life-changing opportunities to hundreds of young people."

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Professor Michael Arthur, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Leeds supported these comments adding:

“We are really excited about this programme. There are many areas in our region with high levels of deprivation and low progression rates to higher education. This project should improve the life-chances of many able young people living in these areas and ensure they achieve their full potential.”

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Notes to editors:

The scheme will target young people who are plausible candidates for university; who are from non-professional backgrounds with little family history of higher education; are in receipt of the Educational Maintenance Allowance; or are in schools with low rates of progression to higher education. Selection will also take account of any individual circumstances that may have affected a student's studies. An application pack is attached.

Halifax obtained the donation from the HBOS Foundation which assists good causes across the UK under two main themes; money advice and financial literacy and developing and improving communities. The HBOS Foundation is a registered charity No.SCO32942.

The Sutton Trust is a charity founded in 1997 by Sir Peter Lampl with the aim of providing educational opportunities for young people from non-privileged backgrounds and improving social mobility. The activities of the Trust are aimed at helping children who are educationally disadvantaged, by raising both their aspirations and academic achievement. It funds a wide range of research and projects covering parenting and early years, schools, universities and access to the professions. For further information see www.suttontrust.com.

The University of Leeds is acclaimed for the quality of its teaching and research. One of the largest universities in the UK, Leeds is also the most popular among students applying for undergraduate courses. An emphasis on innovative research and investment in high-quality facilities and first-rate infrastructure means that no fewer than 35 departments are rated internationally or nationally 'excellent'. Last year the University worked with over 30,000 young people to raise their aspirations and achievement towards higher education

*Source: Young participation in higher education, HEFCE 2005; DfES; Scottish Funding Council