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Yorkshire youngsters take the first step towards top universities

Thanks to a Halifax-funded initiative*, 120 youngsters from across Yorkshire will be taking their first steps in a scheme designed to help them reach top flight universities. The first set of year 12 students start the 'Reach for Excellence' programme this Saturday (26th January 2008) with an introduction and induction day at the University of Leeds.

Reach for Excellence is aimed at 16-18 year-olds from non-privileged backgrounds and is designed to help them realise their potential by helping them gain a place at a top university. Delivered by the University of Leeds, the scheme includes:

- Study skills sessions
- Lectures
- A residential summer school
- University visits
- Individual mentoring
- Access to a virtual learning environment
- Travel allowance to assist in attending any out of school sessions

Youngsters from across Yorkshire to benefit:

At the start of the current academic year, year 12 students and their parents and guardians were encouraged to apply for the scheme. Over 250 students completed the initial questionnaire, and further information was requested to help select the first 120 youngsters for the scheme.

The successful applicants are from across Yorkshire:

Local Education Authority	Number of Students Selected
Bradford	41
Calderdale	14
Kirklees	16
Leeds	41
Wakefield	8

Candidates were selected based on their academic potential, personal circumstances and their commitment to the scheme. This is the first of three intakes which will benefit 360 youngsters in total.

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Social mobility in the UK remains at low levels

Research** shows that low social mobility in the UK has not improved in 30 years. The UK remains very low on the international rankings of social mobility when compared with other advanced nations. Parental background continues to exert a very powerful influence on the academic progress of children. While 44% of young people from the richest 20% of households acquired a degree in 2002, only 10% from the poorest 20% of households did so.

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 & Humber.

Commenting on the start of the Reach for Excellence programme, Angela Tinker, HBOS foundation Manager, said:

"We're delighted at the response we've had for the first intake. This scheme will make a real difference in Yorkshire youngsters' lives and help them obtain a place at a top university."

Sir Peter Lampl, Chairman of the Sutton Trust said:

"The students who participate in the Reach for Excellence programme are on the first rung of a ladder of opportunity that will hopefully lead to a place at a leading university and a rewarding career. Making full use of the talents of all young people – regardless of background – is the key to improving our shamefully low level of social mobility, so we are delighted to be partners with HBOS in this exciting initiative."

Richard Kemp, Lead Officer for Access at the University of Leeds added:

"We are very excited about this scheme. Reach for Excellence is unique, and we believe the benefits to the students will be huge. Our recruitment was very successful as the scheme was over subscribed, and we believe we have targeted the right students."

Editors' notes

* Reach for excellence is funded with £870,000 from the Halifax and £75,000 from the Sutton Trust

** Study from the London School of Economics and the University of Surrey and funded by the Sutton Trust

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

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 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.

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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