

APP Interim Report

Leeds Futures

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Introduction

Leeds Futures is a sustained engagement programme with a subject-specific focus and nationwide reach, which aims to inspire and support Year 12 and 13 learners and give them an insight into university life. In the academic year 2023/24, 619 Year 12 students were enrolled on the programme, across 13 subjects/subject areas.

The project began in Arts & Humanities, Health Sciences and Social Sciences subjects in 2021/22 before expanding to include STEM subjects in 2022/23. Before Leeds Futures, subject-specific outreach activity at the University of Leeds was largely delivered to schools and colleges in the Yorkshire and Humber region due to the travel time and cost involved in bringing students to campus. However, during the Covid 19 Pandemic, outreach teams at the University moved quickly to a model of online and then subsequently hybrid delivery, meaning that the geographical location of schools and students was less of a barrier to participation.

In the academic years 2022/23 and 2023/24 the programme engaged approximately 1200 individual learners across 12 subjects/subject areas. Participants were from over 240 schools/colleges in 9 different regions across England.



Futures Participants by Region

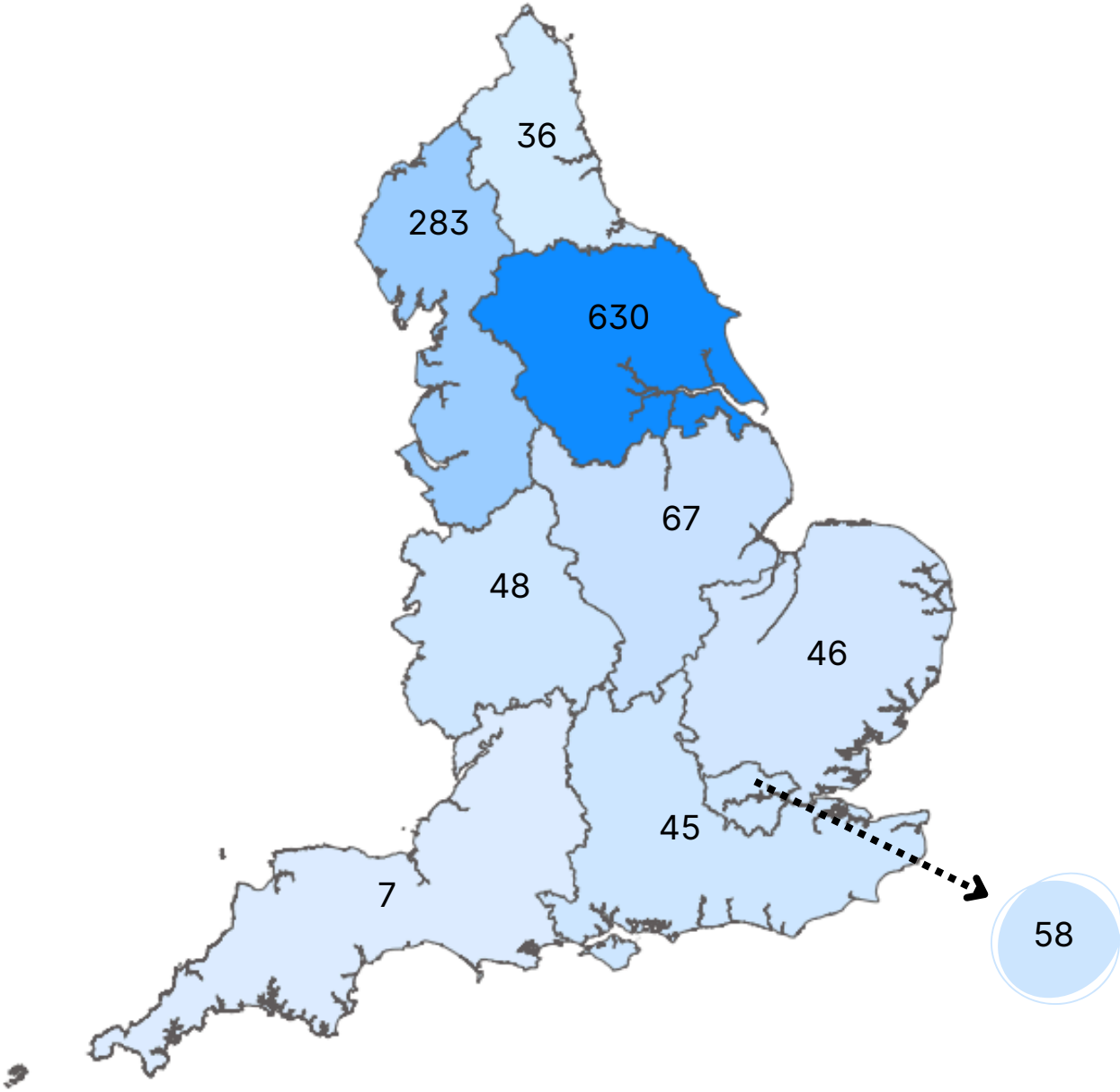


Figure 1. Futures Participants by Region 2022/23 and 2023/24

The primary objective of Leeds Futures is to widen participation and foster inclusivity for underrepresented groups at the University of Leeds, including those from low participation neighborhoods (POLAR4 Quintiles 1 and 2), socioeconomically disadvantaged neighbourhoods (IMD Quintiles 1 and 2), and those who meet other Access to Leeds (A2L) widening participation criteria. Leeds Futures directly supports the University's Access and Participation Plan objective 'Leeds will increase the percentage of students from Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) Quintile 1 attending the University to 16.1% by 2027/28 through targeted outreach activity and associated admissions strategy.'

Leeds Futures forms part of a wider outreach and student success offer. It acts as a pipeline to our Access to Leeds contextual admissions scheme, which, in turn, leads into our Plus Programme. This programme is dedicated to ensuring the success of students underrepresented at the University once on-course.

Students applying to the Leeds Futures programme choose to specialise in a subject or subject area – we call these 'strands'. The following strands are currently offered:

- Allied Health and Healthcare Science
- Creative Arts
- Dentistry
- English/History
- Environment
- Medicine
- Midwifery
- Nursing
- Music
- Politics
- Social Work
- STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics)
- Theatre and Performance

The programme consists of a series of subject-specific online talks, lectures and seminars, as well as at least one campus day. The online sessions are delivered on Zoom, after school, by staff from Educational Engagement as well as trained undergraduate ambassadors, postgraduates, and academic staff. Campus days provide students with the opportunity to gain a real insight into student life at the University of Leeds. Students take part in subject-focused lectures, hands-on practical workshops and interactive seminars. They also have a guided tour of campus which includes seeing the libraries, lectures theatres, Students' Union, and sports centre.

In addition, students on all strands are offered a suite of online sessions called 'Progression to University'. These sessions were added to the Futures programme in 2023/24, to provide support and guidance on practical matters and support students as they make decisions about higher education and apply to university courses. The 'Progression to University' sessions currently on offer are:

- Student finance
- Choosing a course and university
- Applying through UCAS and personal statements
- Exam study skills and managing anxiety
- Transition to University and the Plus Programme.

Leeds Futures sessions are delivered from January in Year 12 until the point of UCAS application in Year 13.

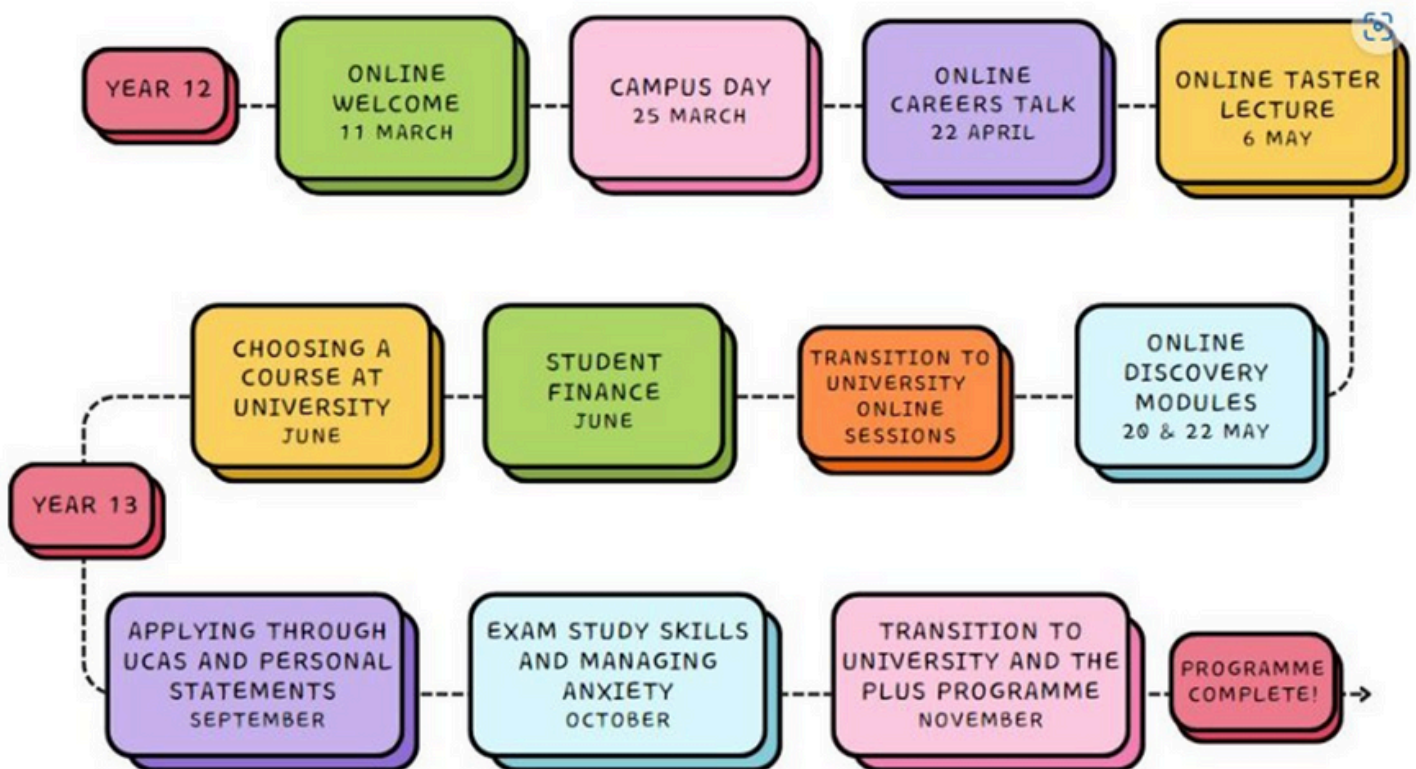


Figure 2. Example Programme 'Roadmap' from Leeds Futures English/History 2024/25

Sample Programme - Arts & Humanities Strand

Over the past two academic years the student offering has been significantly enhanced. Programmes have been developed to increase the number of taster sessions, providing students with more choices and a broader range of subject options.

In addition, certain subject strands now include 'Discovery Module' taster sessions, allowing students to explore topics outside their primary area of study. For example, students enrolled on the English/History strand can try out new subjects such as Linguistics, Philosophy, or a language. This mirrors the undergraduate offering at the University of Leeds, where students take 'discovery modules' alongside their main area of study. Consequently, Leeds Futures students are becoming more familiar with undergraduate terminology, which is crucial in supporting them with transition and helping to address the 'hidden curriculum'.

To remove financial barriers and support students attending the campus day, travel bursaries have also been introduced. These bursaries aim to cover the cost of travel, ensuring that all students can participate fully in the event without financial constraints limiting their involvement.

As strands were set up by separate teams, it's been important to work collaboratively in recent years to streamline the delivery of Leeds Futures. This includes the introduction of a single, centralised landing [webpage](#) and a more coordinated approach to marketing and promotion. Internal processes have also been improved, with all teams now using standardised application forms, pre- and post-evaluation forms, and a unified privacy notice.

Guaranteed Offers/Interviews

In 2023-24, four strands piloted a new approach to give special consideration to applications from students who had completed the compulsory elements of the associated outreach programme. These contextual admissions strategies were introduced to directly support the Access and Participation Plan target of increasing the percentage of students from IMD Quintile 1 attending the University. The special consideration recognises the dedication shown, and the knowledge and skills gained, from the Futures programmes and aims to increase applications, interviews, offers, and registrations from students who meet our contextual eligibility criteria. The introduction of these strategies was a significant achievement, resulting from extensive collaboration with academic colleagues and admissions teams.

Students on the Leeds Futures – Politics programme are eligible for a guaranteed contextual offer (two grades below the standard offer) when applying to specific courses within the School of Politics and International Studies (POLIS). For 2025 entry, 18 more Leeds Futures – Politics participants applied to (and received offers from) courses in POLIS compared to 2024, bringing the total to 20, and marking a significant increase from just 2 applications the previous year.

Similarly, students on our Medicine and Dentistry programmes receive additional consideration for an interview if they apply for specific courses within our Medical and Dental Schools. This means that students who would not typically meet the shortlisting criteria due to their academic or UCAT scores being too low, are now being offered an interview. For 2025 entry, 9 more Leeds Futures participants were shortlisted for an interview in Medicine than for 2024, bringing the total to 30, while shortlisting for Dentistry is still in progress.

In addition, students on our Leeds Futures – Healthcare programme receive a guaranteed interview for our Nursing, Midwifery and Social Work courses. As well as to reward students for their commitment, this was put in place to remove a perceived barrier that Leeds was hard to get into for these courses. The number of students who have applied to Leeds and received a guaranteed interview will be known after this year's UCAS deadline.

Targeting

Leeds Futures is designed for, and targeted at, individual students rather than entire classes or groups, meaning students sign up independently of their school. While any Year 12 student can apply for a place on Leeds Futures, we prioritise students in alignment with the Access and Participation Plan objective 'Leeds will increase the percentage of students from Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) Quintile 1 attending the University to 16.1% by 2027/28 through targeted outreach activity and associated admissions strategy.' At the point of application, we collect demographic data from the students and then prioritise those who meet at least one or more Access to Leeds criteria and also those from IMD Quintiles 1 and 2 and POLAR4 Quintiles 1 and 2.

Some oversubscribed subject strands, such as Health Sciences and Social Sciences, require students to meet two A2L criteria.

Others, like Creative Arts and Music, accept



students who meet just one criterion, balancing the need to fill places with both subject recruitment goals and widening participation objectives.

In addition to the Access to Leeds criteria, additional demographic data, such as ethnicity and gender, is collected for certain subject strands. This data is used to identify and prioritise specific student groups, aligning with the needs of particular academic Schools within the University. For example, Dentistry and Medicine Futures programmes prioritise male students, as well as White and Black students who have been in receipt of Free School Meals.



Subject Strand	Academic Year	Number of applications	Number of students enrolled	2+ Access to Leeds criteria*	Polar 4 Q1/Q2*	IMD Q1/Q2*
Creative Arts	2022 23	No data	20	No data	52%	52%
	2023 24	36	23	50%	48%	57%
Dentistry	2022 23	114	94	93%	56%	80%
	2023 24	199	109	95%	51%	89%
English	2022 23	No data	39	No data	64%	57%
	2023 24	79	40	50%	48%	48%
Environment	2022 23	73	57	No data	29%	28%
	2023 24	48	34	62%	44%	53%
History	2022 23	No data	38	No data	30%	32%
	2023 24	54	44	50%	44%	48%

Subject Strand	Academic Year	Number of applications	Number of students enrolled	2+ Access to Leeds criteria*	Polar 4 Q1/Q2*	IMD Q1/Q2*
Medicine	2022 23	231	143	95%	56%	85%
	2023 24	305	183	90%	60%	87%
Music	2022 23	No data	9	No data	33%	42%
	2023 24	19	19	16%	27%	27%
Politics	2022 23	55	29	No data	59%	55%
	2023 24	112	50	No data	74%	96%
STEM	2022 23	140	71	30%	27%	41%
	2023 24	135	81	41%	50%	46%
Theatre and Performance	2022 23	No data	No data	No data	No data	No data
	2023 24	45	45	20%	38%	36%

Table 1: Leeds Futures Demographics for 2022/23 and 2023/24

*The percentages in the final three columns refer to those students enrolled on the programme

Leeds Futures Demographics

Table 1 above shows the number of applications to each programme, as well as the number of students enrolled, for 2022/23 and 2023/24. It also shows the percentage of participants meeting various target criteria.

Fluctuations in the percentages of participants meeting the various widening participation criteria is dependent on the context of the specific subject area, including the popularity of the subject area and the specific criteria that each strand uses to select their participants.

For some programmes with a higher volume of applications, such as Medicine and Dentistry, we are able to more effectively shortlist candidates who meet our target demographics. For instance, the percentage of participants eligible for Access to Leeds (meeting two or more criteria) has exceeded 90% in Medicine and Dentistry in both years. In contrast, for Music, where application numbers are lower, the eligibility percentage in 2023/24 was only 19%. Although STEM has a higher number of applications, students who don't fulfil certain academic criteria, or who are studying the wrong combination of subjects are discounted before students are shortlisted by the widening participation criteria. This may account for the lower percentages (30% and 41%) of students who are eligible for Access to Leeds here.

The Politics strand saw a huge increase in applications in 2023/24 following the introduction of the guaranteed contextual offer. Prioritisation criteria also changed to more directly include students from IMD Q1/Q2 postcodes, explaining the increase of participants meeting this criteria to 96% from 55% the previous year.

In the aim of increasing applications across all programmes, a coordinated marketing campaign including a joint website, re-branding, and consistent communication strategies has been implemented in recent years. Analysis of application numbers over the next few years will help to evaluate the impact of this campaign.

Table 1 also highlights some gaps in the data that has been collected and reported, due to different outreach teams running their programmes independently, each making their own decisions about evaluation plans and selection criteria.

Short/Medium/Long-term Outcomes

Leeds Futures has clear short, medium, and long-term outcomes, which are outlined in the Theory of Change. We collect quantitative and qualitative data from students to measure these – they fill out a pre and post questionnaire which is made up of Likert scale questions as well as more open-ended questions, to gain a deeper understanding of participants opinions and thoughts.

Short-term Outcomes

Qualitative feedback collected from these questionnaires illustrates how short-term aims are being met through participation in the programme, and is outlined in Table 2 below.

Short-term aim	How is this aim being met?	Student feedback quotes to support
<p>Exposing students to what it's like to study at the University of Leeds</p>	<p>Students participate in taster lectures, seminars, and practical workshops, both online and in-person. Campus days include guided tours where students can explore subject-specific facilities. During these visits, undergraduate students are available to answer questions and share their experiences.</p>	<p><i>"The campus day was a highlight as I made many new friends that I could relate to, and had a comprehensive experience of typical lectures and training for medicine at the University of Leeds."</i></p> <p><i>"I felt I got an excellent sense of what it would be like to study Politics at university"</i></p> <p><i>"I thought that the taster day at the university was extremely helpful in not only showing the kind of environment I will study in in the future but also the practicals that would take place as part of the course."</i></p>
<p>Raising awareness of career options</p>	<p>Students are offered careers talks as part of the programme. Undergraduate students may also speak with participants about their work experience, including sharing information on their 'year in industry'.</p>	<p><i>"Leeds Futures has helped me explore careers that relate to environment."</i></p> <p><i>"Understanding the NHS and the allied health care professions. The world does not end if I do not get into medicine because I have learnt different alternative ways to get there or different careers paths."</i></p> <p><i>"I really enjoyed the programme as it helped me realise that I wanted to study Biology at university and the pathways that doing so could lead to."</i></p>

Short-term aim	How is this aim being met?	Student feedback quotes to support
<p>Creating a sense of belonging at the University of Leeds</p>	<p>Trained Student Ambassadors act as positive role models, answering questions and providing support. Campus Days enable the participants to meet each other and understand that they are “all in the same boat” and all share the same concerns.</p> <p>The diverse curriculum on offer mirrors the undergraduate offering and gives students choice.</p>	<p><i>"It provided an opportunity to meet like-minded people who are passionate about the same issues/topics as I am."</i></p> <p><i>"I really loved the campus days. It was great to build a circle of people going through the same difficult process as me and we've all kept in touch"</i></p> <p><i>"During the Latin America taster session, I felt very much acknowledged as I am a Latino person, so knowing that someone is learning about its history, and teaches people about it, is really good".</i></p>
<p>Giving students confidence in a range of skills: team work; communication; problem solving; study skills.</p>	<p>Through taking part in interactive seminars and hands-on practical sessions, students gain a range of transferrable skills</p>	<p><i>"In many many different ways, it helped to shape me into a more confident individual as well as providing me with knowledge about medicine as a course and career. I feel that compared to maybe 12 months ago I am a much much more informed person and that really does give me reassurance. I have come to love medicine even more now, even with the many challenges in the journey and the imposter syndrome."</i></p> <p><i>"[Writing the opinion piece] really helped me develop confidence to clearly articulate my thoughts, showing me the importance of academic writing."</i></p> <p><i>"Taking part in a seminar was an incredible opportunity and well-thought our experience. I learned a good number of new skills and techniques to help me in my studies."</i></p>

Short-term aim	How is this aim being met?	Student feedback quotes to support
Supporting students with the application process	The 'Progression to University sessions are designed to give students additional support and guidance on a range of topics, including the UCAS application process and the Access to Leeds scheme.	<p><i>"[Leeds Futures] helped me understand how university life and the application process works, as well as helped me decide on the course to apply for."</i></p> <p><i>"It gave me perfect guidance on how to apply to medicine. It also helped me to understand more about different careers in medicine, UCAT exams, work experience and how to reflect on them including different skills needed for medicine."</i></p>

Table 2 - Short term outcomes

Short-term Outcomes

Although the qualitative data indicates that the short-term goals of the programme are being met, the extent of this success is unclear due to gaps in the data collection, particularly with the Likert scale questions.

Despite these gaps, initial analysis of the available data shows an increase in students' perceived understanding of university life. For instance, students on the STEM strand in 2023 reported an increase in their understanding of what it's like to be a university student, with scores rising from 2.62 to 3.95 out of 5 (+1.33) from the pre-programme questionnaire to the post-programme questionnaire. Similarly, students in the Politics strand in 2024 reported a better understanding of the differences between Politics, International Relations, and International Development courses, with scores increasing from 3.12 to 4.28 out of 5 (+1.08) from the pre-programme questionnaire to the mid-point questionnaire.

Medium and Long-term Outcomes

The primary medium to long-term aim is for students to apply to study, and then register as a student, at the University of Leeds. This aligns with the University's Access and Participation plan to 'increase the percentage of students from the most deprived areas (IMD Q1), to 16.1% by the academic year 2027/28'. This objective is measured by tracking participants through the University's undergraduate admissions process. This tracking allows us to monitor which students apply to the University (and to which course), how many receive offers, whether they accept or decline their offers, and ultimately, which students enroll in courses at the University.

Figures 3 and 4 show the number of applications and registrations that have been received from Futures participants who took part in the programme in 2021/22 and 2022/23.



Leeds Futures 2021/22 Participant Tracking

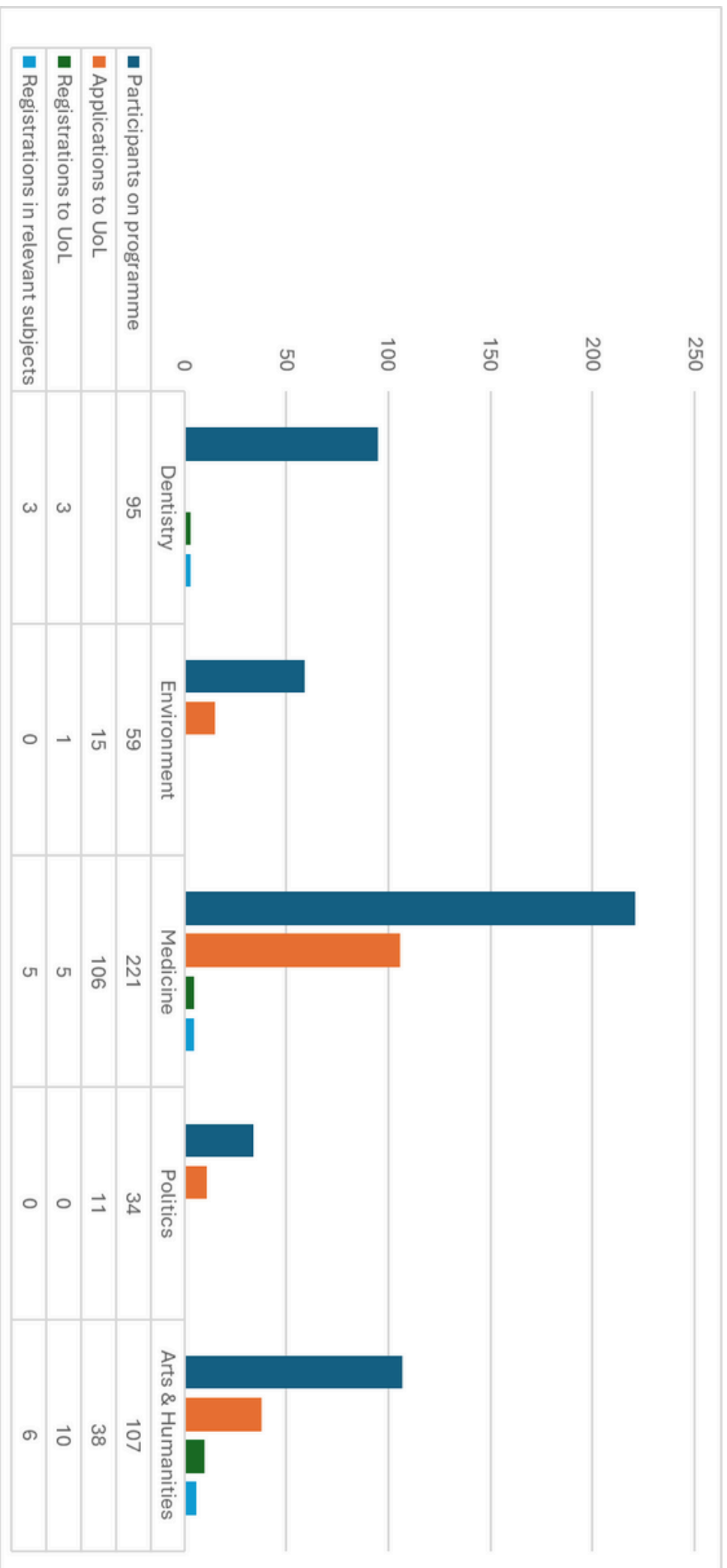


Figure 3. Leeds Futures participant tracking data 2021/22
 *Dentistry application data not available for 2021/22 participants

Leeds Futures 2022/23 Participant Tracking

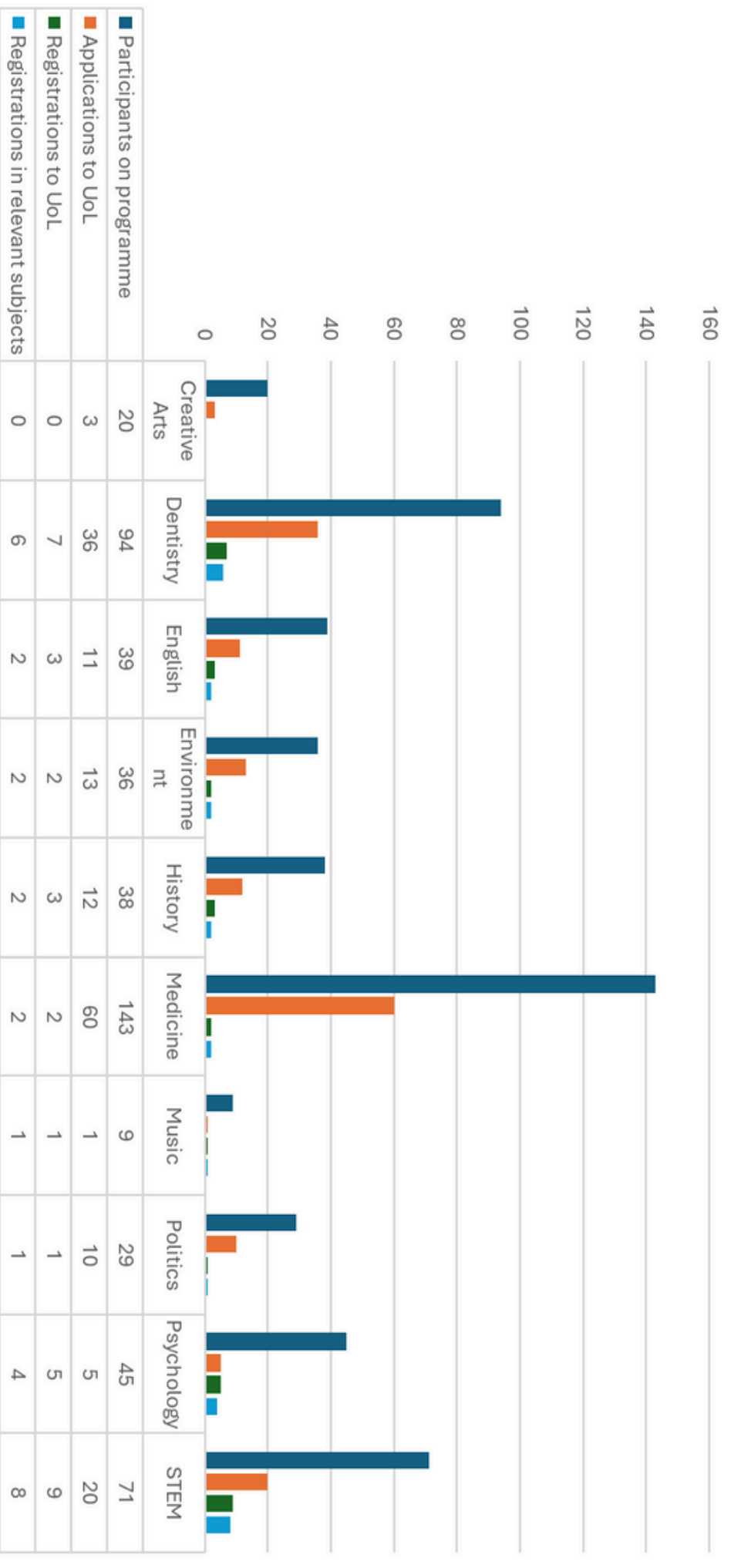


Figure 4. Leeds Futures participant tracking data 2022/23

There have been 171 applications (32.8% of participants) and 52 registrations (5% of participants) to the University of Leeds across the two programme years. The number of applications, offers, and registrations varies by programme. The numbers show that a proportion of students are applying to Leeds, but that there is a gap in converting these applications to registrations. Dependent on the subject strand, this could be due to applicants not receiving offers for the more competitive courses, that students are not choosing the University of Leeds as their firm or insurance choice, or that students are not meeting the required grades. A more detailed analysis is needed to fully understand this data and to plan the next steps to improve the conversion of these students.

Wider long-term aims include participants enrolling at university in general and enrolling onto university courses relevant to their subject strand. In the future, these aims will be measured by analysing the data returns provided by HESA, as we input students' data into the Higher Education Access Tracker (HEAT).

Lessons Learned and Future Directions

Since its launch in 2021/22, the Leeds Futures programme has expanded significantly. Key developments include the expansion to new subject areas, the introduction of travel support bursaries, and pilot schemes offering guaranteed interviews and offers for specific strands. Feedback has played an essential role in shaping and adapting the programme's content to better support participants. However, the programme continues to face significant challenges. Table 3 outlines these challenges alongside proposed solutions and next steps.



Challenges and Proposed Solutions

Challenge	More info/Description	Proposed Solution
<p>Receiving enough applications for certain subject strands</p>	<p>Despite considerable marketing/promotion to schools and colleges and teacher networks nationwide, some subject strands do not generate enough applications, e.g. Music</p>	<p>Analyse Futures applications, attendance and tracking and monitoring data over the next few years, to help make an informed decision on the continuation of the programme strand.</p>
<p>Online engagement and 'drop-off'</p>	<p>Retaining students is an issue for many of the subject strands. Engagement at the beginning of the programme is high, but drops-off as the online sessions continue. This could be due to 'online fatigue' post-Covid - students feeling tired of online learning and/or students finding it hard to feel fully engaged whilst attending online.</p>	<p>Online attendance is much higher for subject strands where there is a clear incentive, for example in Medicine and Dentistry where there are guaranteed interviews for high attendance and in Politics, where there are guaranteed offers for high attendance. We can explore the option of expanding guaranteed offers to other subjects. Offering an additional campus day may improve retention. The Environment strand saw a significant improvement in retention after offering an additional campus day in autumn Year 13.</p>

Challenge	More info/Description	Proposed Solution
<p>More consistent collection of demographic data</p>	<p>The Futures programme hasn't previously been evaluated as a whole, as different demographic data was collected by subject teams at the point of application, and then used to prioritise students.</p>	<p>There is now a more consistent approach to collecting demographic data, with Access to Leeds criteria being used to prioritise students for most strands (the exception is Politics as it's using its own contextual admissions route). This will allow us to carry out more thorough evaluation.</p>
<p>More consistent collection of pre and post-programme Likert scale questions to ensure more detailed analysis of measurement of short term aims.</p>	<p>It has been difficult to collect enough post-programme evaluation data to measure short term aims accurately. Drop-off in attendance means we have many more pre-programme surveys than post.</p>	<p>We have tried 'incentives' such as Amazon vouchers for completing post-evaluation forms. We will also introduce a more consistent use of a mid-point evaluation forms at campus days, as we know attendance here is better.</p>
<p>Conversion of participant applications to registered students</p>	<p>The tracking and monitoring data shows that a proportion of participants are applying to the University of Leeds, but a significant percentage of these don't end up registering as students.</p>	<p>A more thorough analysis of the tracking and monitoring data will be the first step to understanding and exploring how to approach improving conversion.</p> <p>The Politics strand is trialing additional campus days for offer holders, with the aim of increasing conversion. If successful, this can be rolled-out to other subject areas.</p>

Table 3: Challenges for Leeds Futures, description and possible solutions

Conclusion

Leeds Futures aligns with key institutional and national goals to improve access to higher education for underrepresented groups. It aims to directly support the University's Access and Participation Plan objective to increase the percentage of students from Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) Quintile 1 to 16.1% by 2027/28.

The programme has demonstrated significant growth and impact since its launch. In the past two academic years, Leeds Futures has engaged approximately 1200 learners from over 240 schools and colleges across 9 different regions in England, offering them the opportunity to deeply explore a specific subject area through this comprehensive [SG1] sustained outreach programme.

Key achievements include the introduction of 'Progression to University' online sessions; the introduction of guaranteed interviews for Medicine and Dentistry; the introduction of guaranteed contextual offers for Politics and streamlining of internal processes within Educational Engagement.

Qualitative feedback highlights how participants have benefited, with many reporting increased confidence, a better understanding of career outcomes, and an improved understanding of university life. The introduction of travel bursaries has ensured that students from widening participation backgrounds can access the campus days.

There are challenges with the Leeds Futures programme and clear areas for improvement, such as attendance drop-offs in online sessions, inconsistent data collection and conversion of participants onto UG courses at the University of Leeds and these areas will be explored further in future reports and evaluation.

Leeds Futures has become a key pathway into the Access to Leeds contextual admissions scheme and the University's Plus Programme, aiming to support students throughout the university lifecycle. The introduction of guaranteed contextual offers and interviews has strengthened its impact, creating even clearer routes into higher education for participants of some of the strands. The guaranteed interviews for Medicine and Dentistry have already shown encouraging results and we hope to build on these successes in future years.

Leeds Futures is not only a critical mechanism for fostering equity and inclusivity but also a testament to the University's dedication to creating meaningful, long-term change in access to higher education. By building on the successes achieved so far and addressing areas for growth, the Leeds Futures programme is well-positioned to further its impact, enabling more underrepresented students to realise their potential and contribute to a more diverse and equitable academic community.



Educational Engagement at the University of Leeds is committed to widening participation and empowering students from all backgrounds to succeed.

We work across the whole student lifecycle—from delivering sector-leading widening access schemes and outreach activities, through to supporting students' transition to higher education and their success once on course. At the heart of our work is a deep commitment to inclusivity and equity of opportunity—ensuring that every student feels valued, empowered, and equipped to thrive both during their time at Leeds and in their future endeavours.



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