



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

Reach for Excellence

**Applying to Reach for Excellence
2026/27**

THE | CONTEXTUAL | OUTREACH | TEAM



Applying to Reach for Excellence – What's it all about?

What is Reach for Excellence?

The Reach for Excellence programme supports young people who demonstrate the potential to access a top university but who may not have considered entry to research intensive Higher Education. Students on the programme receive a wide range of support throughout the completion of their year twelve and thirteen studies.

Support is provided in the form of subject specific taster sessions, study skills workshops, impartial pre-entry guidance, finance and budgeting sessions and a residential summer school. Throughout the two year programme, students will be given a taste of university life and gain the necessary skills and experience for a smooth and successful transition into Higher Education.

A key benefit of the Reach for Excellence programme is that it allows high-achieving students to meet and share ideas with other like-minded students from a range of different schools and colleges situated within the Yorkshire region.

There are around 200 places on the programme this year. The programme is free of charge to students and travel expenses are reimbursed for each event attended. The majority of events and workshops will be held at the University of Leeds.

Aims

The aim of the programme is to raise aspiration, achievement, confidence, and self-esteem. We aim to provide appropriate and impartial guidance in an environment that will stretch bright and capable students who may not have considered entry to research intensive Higher Education.

Most importantly, we aim for students to have fun and enjoy their participation on the Reach for Excellence programme - it is not designed to be any additional pressure on top of the demands of A Level studies.

Programme content

We invite students to a wide variety of events and activities throughout year twelve and year thirteen. The programme is designed to enhance their current studies through subject taster sessions and study skills sessions.

In addition, they have the opportunity to attend workshops and information sessions in careers, finance and the UCAS process amongst others.

These workshops give students invaluable impartial guidance and advice when making the difficult decisions regarding what to study, where to study, how to finance their studies and how to make a good UCAS application.

Can anyone apply?

The programme has a set of key eligibility criteria that you must meet in order for you to be able to apply to our programme.

To be eligible for Reach for Excellence, students must:

- **Be a current Year 12 student.**

The Reach for Excellence programme begins in Year 12 and runs all the way through to the end of Year 13. We have one intake per year – there is no opportunity for Year 13 students to join the programme half way through.

- **Have gained 5 or more GCSEs at grades 9-4, including Mathematics and English Language.**

You must have 5 or more GCSEs at the required level including English Language and Mathematics. In exceptional circumstances, providing a referee can confirm the situation, we may be able to accept students who are undertaking a resit or remark in a subject.

- **Have the potential to achieve at least 3 A Levels at grade B or above (or equivalent qualifications), and to progress to further study at a research-intensive university.**

We appreciate that predicting A Level grades early in Year 12 is complex, particularly if you are new to a school/college. We ask that your referee considers your potential, taking into account GCSE grades and any mitigating circumstances. For example, we have previously accepted students for whom “on paper” a prediction of BBB may have appeared to be borderline, but where their teacher supported their application because participation in Reach for Excellence would make a difference in supporting them to achieve their aspirational grades.

- **Live within a reasonable distance to the University of Leeds and be able to attend regular events on campus during the school holidays.**

Students are invited to a range of events on campus here at the University of Leeds, these primarily take place during school holidays and require a commitment from students to be able to engage with the programme. We therefore cannot accept applications from students who reside outside of Yorkshire and the Humber.

Students must also meet at least two of the following six criteria. If you meet more than two criteria, please make sure you confirm all that apply, so that we can best assess your application.

- **Your parents or carers did not go to university.**

You will be eligible if your parents/carers have not previously completed an undergraduate degree, at a university or polytechnic, either in the UK or overseas.

You are also eligible if your parents/carers have:

- started but not completed an undergraduate degree
- got a higher education certificate (HNC) or higher education diploma (HND) from a university, but not a degree
- got an Open University or similar distance learning degree
- got a work-based degree on a part-time basis
- got an undergraduate degree, but you are estranged from them, with little or no contact.

- **You are from a household with a gross annual income of £25,000 or below, or eligible for free school meals during your secondary education**

You can demonstrate this criterion in one of three ways:

- You receive the 16-19 Bursary Fund or Learner Support because your income is £25,000 or below (a referee from your school or college must confirm this). Please note that bursaries or scholarships for school fees for independent schools are not covered by this criteria.
- You are/were eligible for free school meals at any time during your secondary education (a referee from your school or college must confirm this).
- Your parent / carer can complete our Declaration of Household Income Form, if you are not in receipt of Free School Meals or the 16-19 Bursary Fund. You can download a Declaration of Household Income from our Reach for Excellence Apply Pages. Please contact the Contextual Outreach Team if you are living independently without a parent or guardian.
- You can provide other evidence of your household income such as a wage slip or benefits statement.

When assessing household income, we follow the Student Finance England guidance to assess [taxable](#) income, for the financial year 2025-26. The amount is based on gross taxable income, any non-taxable incomes or benefits are not included in the total amount. If your household income for the current year will be significantly lower than the previous tax year, we may be able to take this into account. You should contact the Contextual Outreach team to discuss.

All information you provide will be stored securely and treated confidentially, in line with our data protection and privacy policy. If your income for the current year will be significantly lower than the previous tax year, we may be able to take this into account.

- **You attended or attend a school that performed below the national average at GCSE.**

We look at the Attainment 8 score for the school at which you took your GCSE exams for the year in which you took them and compare this with the England average (or equivalent for the rest of the UK).

If you changed schools during your GCSEs or have completed examinations over more than one year, we can use the results from any year and school in which you sat a GCSE examination.

School and college performance information for England showing the Attainment 8 data for 2025 may be found on the [Government school performance webpages](#). You should find your school and then click on “Secondary” to navigate to the Attainment 8 score.

Please note that independent fee-paying schools are not eligible under this criterion even if they show a lower than average Attainment 8 score.

- **Your home postcode is in an area with low levels of participation in higher education and/or high levels of socioeconomic deprivation**

We determine which geographical areas meet this definition by using your permanent home postcode (as on your UCAS application) and measuring this against data provided by the government.

To check your eligibility, [look up your postcode](#).

- **You are a care leaver or have experienced time in care**

You will be eligible under this criterion if you:

- are a care leaver; that is you have spent at least 13 weeks in local authority care spanning your 16th birthday (**if this applies to you, you will also be eligible under our personal circumstances criteria**)
- have spent any amount of time in local authority care (such as foster care or residential care), formal kinship care, or have been adopted from care.
- were on a child protection plan at any point after the age of 11.

Find out more about other [support for care experienced students](#) that you might be eligible for.

- **Your personal circumstances have had a disruptive impact on your education**

You will meet this criterion if your studies have been disrupted by circumstances beyond your control. We consider each application on an individual basis, so unfortunately we cannot provide an exhaustive list of situations that meet this criterion. However, they could include:

- caring responsibilities/being a young carer
- experienced a recent close family bereavement
- estranged from your parents/carers
- studies impacted by a mental or physical health condition
- being from a military service family
- refugee or asylum seeker status
- challenging personal, home or school circumstances

By “impact” we mean that the situation has affected, or continues to affect, your attendance, academic performance, ability to do your best, or to participate fully in wider school life. We would not normally consider circumstances for which reasonable adjustments have already been made.

We are willing to consider any circumstances that a teacher or tutor can verify as having a detrimental impact on your studies. Your referee will need to provide a brief description of the nature, timescale and impact of the disruption on your studies.

We would generally consider circumstances that have occurred from GCSE studies onwards and / or during sixth form, unless there has been a significant, ongoing impact from an earlier point. Please note that multiple instances of disruption will be counted as meeting one criterion, you must also meet another in order to be found eligible.

If you select the ‘disruption to studies’ criterion, a free-text box will appear asking for further details. Please complete this as fully as possible. Any information provided will be treated with the strictest confidence. If there is insufficient detail included, we will be unable to process the application until further information has been obtained.

We are unable to consider the general disruption caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, unless your circumstances are extreme. You must be able to demonstrate how the pandemic has impacted your studies in a way that is above and beyond the extent of the disruption experienced by the rest of your cohort.

The Application Process Explained

Applications to our programme must be submitted online. The online application form can be accessed on our website, but you **must** ask a teacher/tutor/careers advisor **in your current school or college** to act as your referee before applying.

Parent or carer?

You do not need to be present whilst the applicant is completing the online form.

If the applicant meets the household income criterion, you may need to fill in a Declaration of Household Income form, which is downloadable from our website and needs to be returned to us via post or email.

Teacher/tutor/careers advisor?

The student must request a reference and confirm you agree to support their application. Please see the Referee Guidelines before completing this stage of our online application process. You are not required to be present whilst a student completes the online application, as your reference is separate to the application.

As part of the application form you will be required to enter your personal details, such as your GCSE results and contact details of your teacher referee, so it’s a good idea to be prepared and have all the information that you might need ready.

You do not have to complete the application in one sitting. There is a ‘Finish later’ button at the bottom of each page of the application form, located below the ‘Next’ button. If you wish to save your responses and return to your application at a later date, then click the ‘Finish later’ button and

either bookmark the URL web address or enter your email address, to receive an email containing the URL, so you can return to your application at a later date. We recommend that you do both.

The application form does not save automatically and we cannot unite you with your unfinished application form if you have lost your 'finish later' link. You would have to complete the whole application form again.

The deadline for applications is 23:59 on Thursday 12th November 2026.

Application Form Walkthrough

Personal Details

Please fill in each section, including phone number and a valid email address. If you do not own your own mobile phone, please list the contact number of an appropriate emergency contact in this field. You may also wish to specify a 'Preferred Name' that we will use in our correspondence with you. For example if your name is "Samantha" but you prefer to be called "Sam" when we write to you, put that in the preferred name box.

Address

House Name/Number *

Street Name *

Town or City *

Postcode *

Top Tips!

Pay close attention when entering your postal address to ensure that you enter the correct information in the corresponding box. It's important we have an accurate record of your address. Do not attempt to type out your full address into any one of the boxes.

The red '**Required**' symbol next to a question means that you **must** answer that question as part of your application. You will not be allowed to navigate to the next part of the application form until you have completed all the required questions on the current page.

It is **very important** to inform the Contextual Outreach Team if you change your email or postal address so that we can keep you updated on the progress of your application.

Please include details of any disability or medical condition you have. This section is not compulsory to disclose, but if you require extra support during the application process, please let us know so we can make the relevant arrangements for you. Students who receive a place on the programme, will be asked for further details to ensure we can support you in the best possible way whilst on campus with us.

About the programme

Please select the appropriate option to let us know how you first heard about the Reach for Excellence scheme. For example, this might have been through a talk at your school or college, via the website, or perhaps through a friend. You are allowed to tick as many options as you like, as we realise more than one option may apply. If you heard about the scheme through an option that is not listed, select the 'Other' option and an additional drop down box will appear, to allow you to provide details, shown below.

Where did you hear about the programme? Please choose all that apply to you. *

- ☐ RfE Recruitment Talk or Fair
- ☐ Teacher or Tutor
- ☐ University Website
- ☐ Social Media
- ☐ Word of Mouth
- ☒ Other

Just because it isn't listed above doesn't mean we don't want to know!

If you have selected "Other", how did you find out about Reach for Excellence? *

Likewise, if you have previously participated in any events at the University of Leeds then let us know. If you haven't taken part in any events at the University of Leeds before you **must** fill in the 'I have not participated in any schemes' box to be able to move to the next part of the application form.

GCSE Qualifications

Use this section to record which GCSE subjects you studied, and the grades you achieved.

There are dropdown boxes for you to select qualification type, subject studied and grade achieved.

1.a. Qualification Type

1.b. Subject

Art and Design

Accounting

Additional Mathematics

Additional Science

Agriculture

Ancient History

Ancient Languages

Applications of Applied Science

Applications of Mathematics

Applied Business

Applied Science

Arabic

Art and Design

Astronomy

Bengali

Please specify here:

When you click on the arrow, the dropdown list will appear and you will be able to select from a range of different subjects, listed in alphabetical order.

Likewise, you can select from a range of different qualification types (GCSE, BTEC) and achieved grades.

We have used information obtained from the previous cohorts of Reach for Excellence students to ensure that we have listed most of the possible GCSE and equivalent options. If a specific option isn't available in the drop-down list, please use your initiative to select the closest relevant category. For instance, if 'Sports Science' is missing, 'Sport' would be appropriate. However, if your subject or qualification type isn't listed at all, simply select 'Other' from the **very bottom of the dropdown list** and use the free-text box to tell us which subject or qualification type you have studied.

There are eleven boxes provided, but don't worry, we don't expect all students to have studied eleven different qualifications, so leave any extra boxes blank if you don't need them.

If you are resitting any of your GCSEs this year, you can tell us at the end of this section. There is a free-text option for you to provide details of the qualification type and subject you are studying. If you know your predicted grade, please list this too, but this isn't compulsory.

If you are re-sitting any of your GCSEs or have requested a re-mark to a paper, please let us know in the space provided below

Applicant's Supporting Statements

This is your opportunity to tell us more about you – we'd like to know why you decided to apply to Reach for Excellence, how you think the programme will benefit you, and any extra-curricular activities you might have taken part in.

Your supporting statements should be unique to you and should be good preparation for writing other applications, including thinking about the things you might like to include on your UCAS form.

Top Tip!

We want to get to know you a bit better in this section, so try and think about your personal motivations for applying to Reach for Excellence, and some specific things you're hoping to gain from taking part in the scheme. Do you want to improve your confidence? Are you looking to learn more about the different courses and career options that are open to you, or build up your employability skills? This is the space to let us know.

Reach for Excellence is a competitive programme so we would suggest that you put some time and thought into answering these questions fully, in order to provide us with any relevant information that supports your application. We recommend that you plan, write and save your answers to these questions in a separate document before pasting them into the boxes on the form, as it can be easier to check spelling and grammar on programmes like Microsoft Word. Try to avoid using AI created statements, we want to hear your own voice telling us why you want to be part of the programme, not Chat GPT telling us why. However, AI can be a good place to brain-storm and start generating some ideas initially.

If you know what subject(s) you would like to study at university, please tell us what motivated you to make that decision. Equally, it's fine if you haven't yet decided on what you'd like to study.

If you have undertaken any work experience, volunteering, additional courses, or roles of responsibility within your school or college, please provide details of these in your second supporting statement. If you haven't yet completed any or are hoping to obtain work experience alongside your current studies – particularly if it's linked to the subject(s) you are interested in studying at university – we'd like to hear about your plans too. Remember, competition for university places is highly competitive, so it's good to start thinking about these things now.

Top Tip!

When you're telling us about your extra-curriculars, try and think of the different skills you've improved on or gained from participating in them, and tell us about those too. This will be really important for your UCAS application, so it's good to start practicing early!

School and College Information

Please select from the first drop down list the institution where you studied your GCSEs. We have tried to capture all schools that offer GCSE provision in the Yorkshire and Humber within this list, however, if you cannot find your place of study, please select the "other" option at the **very bottom of the dropdown list** and use the free-text box that will appear to tell us, as shown below.

School/College where you sat your GCSEs *

Other

If you selected 'Other' please confirm your GCSE School/College name below *

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Next, we need you to select your current school/college you are studying at from the second drop down list. As above, we have tried to capture all schools/colleges that offer Post 16 qualifications in Yorkshire and Humber within this list, however, if you cannot find your place of study, please follow the same steps as above.

Post 16 Qualifications Summary

Please select the subjects you are studying for A Level from the dropdown boxes provided. The format for this section is similar to that of the GCSE section. **We do not require your predicted grades.**

If you are studying for a different kind of qualification, the drop down boxes should accommodate this, for example BTEC, International Baccalaureate, T level etc.

If your subject or qualification type isn't listed, simply select 'Other' from the dropdown list and use the free-text box to tell us which subject or qualification type you have studied.

Please note, if you are studying an EPQ then simply tick the box. We **do not** require an email providing additional details such as the subject or title of your EPQ.

University Subject Interest

The first part of this section allows you to select your top 3 choices of subject that you would like to study at university. These are not fixed, and you are free to change your mind during your time on RfE. If you have not yet decided, you might like to think about which subjects you enjoy and which subjects sound interesting, or that you would like to hear more about. Think about what potential career you might like in the future. Don't worry if you're not entirely sure, we just want to see what ideas you currently have and if you can't think of 3, we have only made the first choice as a mandatory field. As above, if you can't find your subject of interest listed, you can select the 'other' field and provide details in the free text box that will appear.

The second part of this section will ask you to select the subject group you think your interests best align too. Here at the University of Leeds we categorise subjects into 4 main subject areas: Arts and Humanities, STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths), Social Sciences and Medicine and Health. To help you make your choice, we have gathered a list of common courses that fall within each subject group for context.

Eligibility Criteria

93. In addition to the mandatory criteria above, you must also meet at least two of the following criteria to be eligible for the Reach for Excellence Programme. Please tick which criteria you meet below. *

- ☐ Your parents or carers did not go to university
- ☐ Your home postcode is in an area with low levels of participation in higher education and/or high levels of socioeconomic deprivation
- ☐ You attended or attend a school which performed below the national average at GCSE
- ☐ You are from a household with a gross annual income of £25,000 or below or eligible for free school meals during your secondary education
- ☐ Your personal circumstances have had a disruptive impact on your education
- ☐ You are a care leaver or have experienced time in care



This section is designed to confirm that you are eligible for the Reach for Excellence programme. You must meet and select **all** the mandatory fields in the first section to be able to continue with your application. For the next section, please tick the box next to any criteria you believe that you meet. You must meet **a minimum of 2** criterions to be able to move forward with your application. If you are not sure which boxes to tick, please give us a call or email us using the contact details provided on the last page of this booklet.

Referee's Details

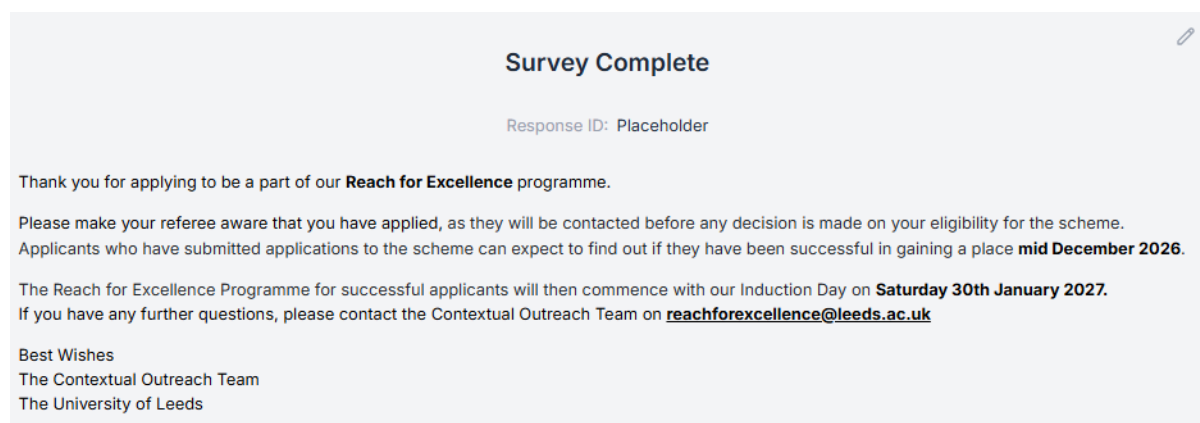
You need to fill in the details of the teacher, tutor or careers advisor who has agreed to act as your referee so that we can check any details of your application with them. You will need to include the following information:

- Name of Referee
- School/College
- Referee's Job Title
- **Referee's email address**
- Telephone number to reach Referee (e.g. this may be the School/College telephone number)

Make sure your Referee is an individual who has knowledge of your academic and personal capabilities so they can give the best and most accurate reflection of you.

Declaration and Submission

To complete your application, you must sign and date to confirm that the information you have provided on the form is true, complete and accurate and no information requested has been omitted. Once you have done this, click 'submit'. You should see a message like the one below. We recommend making a note of the completion response ID and downloading a copy of the PDF for future reference, via 'my responses'.



Once we receive your application, the Contextual Outreach Team will contact your named teacher referee to ask that they complete a referee confirmation form online before the referee deadline of Thursday 19th November at 12 noon. Applications are assessed after the closing date, and decisions about places on the programme can be expected in mid-December.

Contact Us:

The Reach for Excellence team will be happy to help if you have any queries or if more guidance is needed for you to complete your application.

Reach for Excellence email address: reachforexcellence@leeds.ac.uk

You can also telephone us: 0113 343 8471