

PATHWAYS

Ready Day case study



The Ready Day was held on 7th March 2022. All year 10 students attending a target school visited one of five campuses across four higher education providers in Leicestershire. The Ready Day helped the school to meet its Gatsby Benchmark 7 (encounters with further and higher education) and allowed all students in the year group to experience a campus without undue pressure on higher education providers to find space whilst working under COVID restrictions.



Libby Hewson
Pathways Outreach Assistant

Although there were various issues arising prior to and during the day, many students enjoyed a positive experience of higher education and learnt about their future educational options: nearly half of students at one campus felt they learnt *a lot* and the vast majority felt they learnt at least a *moderate amount*. However, some students at some campuses disengaged due to a lack of alignment with their interests. Much has been learnt for future iterations of the Ready Day or similar events, with recommendations for improving planning, logistics, content, delivery style and format, and evaluation.



Emma Angell
Pathways Evaluation & Operations Manager

Aims of the day

- To provide students with an insight into university that enables students to critically assess the options that are available to them locally;
- To introduce and develop decision making skills including getting students to identify what is important to them and drawing comparisons;
- To test an inclusive approach to campus visits enriching the experience for students with English as an additional language, in particular through self-directed exploring and small group sizes; and
- To develop students' presentation and communication skills.

Content of the day

Students experienced three key areas of higher education:

- Living (experiencing campus life);
- Learning (tasters for higher education subjects); and
- Personal Development (developing skills and learning outside of the classroom setting)

through campus tours, subject taster sessions, hands-on workshops, lectures, and debates.

Context

Mid-size multi-cultural school in Leicester City

High numbers of ESOL and SEND students

School struggling with behaviour more since pandemic

Reputation as a difficult school

No visits made to higher education campuses during the pandemic

74 of 237 students in year 10 were Uni Connect target students (approx. a third)

Planning challenges

Communication – working across five campuses, all which were dealing with their own challenges and a pandemic, difficult to gather people together for conversations

Ambassadors – not enough Pathways ambassadors, relying on institutions, minimal sign up

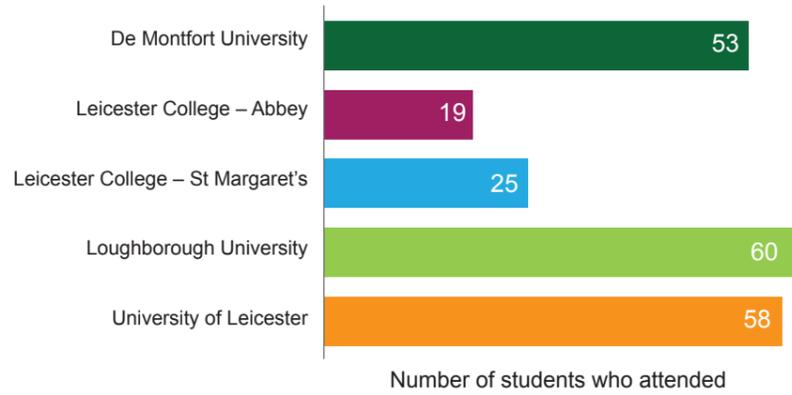
FE College – first time delivering this kind of event and with no specific team to support this

Staff changes – Outreach Assistant was new in post, and the senior staff member initially responsible left during the early planning stages

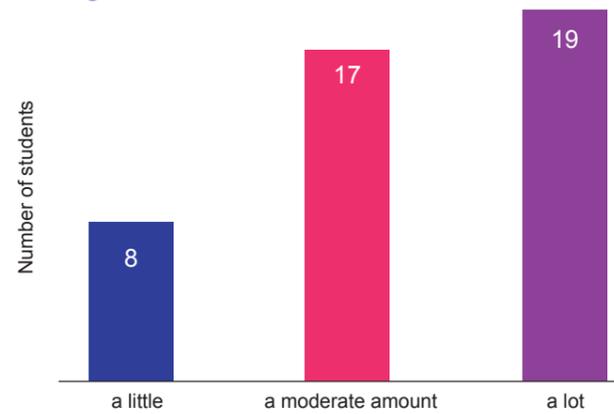
Pandemic – the day was postponed due to the January 2022 lockdown.

Evaluation methods and challenges

- A **mixed methods** approach with pre- and post-student surveys, written observations from Pathways staff and ambassadors, feedback forms from institutional delivery staff and school staff, and a recorded conversation with Pathways staff
- Evaluation Manager **under-resourced** to plan a high-quality in-depth evaluation whilst acting as Interim Project Manager
- **Technical issues** with software and **logistical issues** on the day prevented meaningful collection of quantitative impact data via the student surveys
 - o No or not enough time allocated to evaluation at some campuses
 - o Logistical and/or technical issues meant that evaluation took longer than expected or was not possible
 - o One campus experienced a fire alarm in the afternoon
- **Rich qualitative data** was collected from staff and ambassadors



Distribution of responses for the question “How much have you learnt about higher education today?” at one campus



Twice as many students preferred small groups to large groups

Nearly half of students at one campus enjoyed the day a lot, 80% enjoyed the day at least a moderate amount



You could definitely tell from the start that some people were like ‘well why am I here, what’s the point?’ And later on they were like ‘actually **university doesn’t seem that bad**’. A lot of them said what they imagined what a university was like and what it looked like was **very different to what they actually experienced**.

Pathways staff



Student **tours**, they **loved** that. [...] And then the last session was run by the law society, and it was a **real case**, and they had to do the prosecution and the defence. And that was amazing, they loved that, **they liked to argue**.

Pathways staff

Issues on and after the day

Logistics of a multi-site visit

- Buses arriving late or in the wrong place
- Different start/end times
- Groupings
 - FE college removing some sessions
 - School was last minute in allocating students to groups, and allocated by non-agreed criteria

Pandemic

School staff engagement

- Some staff didn’t want to be there
- Safeguarding issues
- Some staff negativity about the delivered content

Lack of opportunity to brief ambassadors

School cancelled the follow-up day of student presentations so impact cannot be measured

Lessons learnt

Running a campus visit during a pandemic is **difficult**

Clarity is paramount

- Being sure of what is needed
- Not letting schools or colleges dictate content or logistics
- Communication, communication, communication
 - In-person meetings vs online
 - Relationships are key
 - Have a named contact at each site, especially the FE college



Have a **written agreement** with the school to cover aims, content, and follow-up delivery

- Getting school staff on board in advance
- Making opportunities for Pathways staff to brief both staff and students in advance
- Ensuring follow-up day goes ahead

Ensure ambassadors are **fully briefed** on their roles

Thorough testing of **data collection** software