



**Final Report for the  
for the Sutton Trust**

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**Evaluation of the Reach  
for Excellence Programme**

**Second Longitudinal Report for  
Cohorts 1 and 2**

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**November 2012**



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# Executive Summary

The Reach for Excellence programme (RfE) aims to support able young people from disadvantaged backgrounds in Yorkshire to gain a place at a top university. It is run by the University of Leeds and funded by the Lloyds TSB Foundation. This report sets out the findings from longitudinal research, which tracked the first and second Cohort of students to engage in the programme. The first Cohort of RfE students participated in the programme between 2007 and July 2009. The second Cohort of RfE students enrolled in 2008 and left the programme in July 2010. We tracked both Cohorts' progress until September 2012.

The research aimed to explore any long-term impacts of the RfE programme. It is part of a larger evaluation undertaken by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER).

## Key findings

### Most students had progressed to higher education

- Most of the RfE Cohort 1 participants (20 of 33) had now graduated, having studied a broad range of subjects. Eleven students were still at university. Most of these were studying courses typically four or five years in length, for example Medicine.
- All respondents in Cohort 2 were current university students in 2012. Students were studying a variety of subjects, although subject choices tended to be more professionally-orientated, such as business, pharmacy, graphic design, compared with those studied by Cohort 1 students.
- In Cohort 1, one respondent indicated that they had not been to university, while another had left prior to completing their degree.

### Students were attending highly academic institutions

- The majority of respondents in Cohort 1 had been, or were currently, studying at a research-intensive university (21 of 33).
- Around half of students responding in Cohort 2 were studying at a research-intensive university (19 of 41).

### **While at university, students remained close to home**

- Most Cohort 1 students had graduated from universities based in the North of England and more specifically, West Yorkshire. The same pattern was seen in those still at university.
- Students in Cohort 1 (both current and graduates) had most commonly attended the University of Leeds, followed by Bradford University and others in the region, such as the University of York, and the University of Sheffield.
- Similarly, students in Cohort 2 were also mainly attending West Yorkshire universities, with Bradford University being the most popular, followed by the University of Leeds.
- Most students in both Cohorts had remained living at home throughout their university careers (14 students in Cohort 1 and 27 in Cohort 2).

### **Retention rates were high among students**

- Most students in both Cohorts had not changed course or institution since progressing to university, suggesting the importance of the guidance and support they received when making their choices.
- Just four students in Cohort 1 had changed course or institution, while three respondents in Cohort 2 indicated that they had made a change.
- Reasons for change included not wanting to continue with their original course choice, or wanting to pursue a different course. One student cited career prospects as a reason for discontinuing with a particular course.

### **Students continued to achieve highly**

- The majority of RfE participants who had graduated had gained a First or 2:1 degree.
- Those students in both Cohorts who were current students were mainly working towards grades of 2:1 or above.

### **Students who had graduated were either employed or looking for work**

- RfE participants in Cohort 1 have gone on to a variety of destinations after graduating. Eleven of the 20 graduates had secured employment, with four stating this employment was in their chosen field.
- Most of the remaining students were looking for work.
- Six graduates were undertaking voluntary work in their chosen career field.

## Conclusions

The longitudinal findings point to the continued successes of RfE students since they participated in the RfE programme. While we cannot attribute impacts to students' participation in the RfE programme, we have suggested what the findings imply about the programme.

The fact that around half of respondents in both Cohorts 1 and 2 have studied at research-intensive universities during the last three years supports previous years' survey findings about the quality of the advice and guidance they received through the RfE programme. The University of Leeds was the most popular university destination among the Cohort 1 RfE participants, possibly reflecting students' satisfaction with the RfE activities delivered by the institution.

As we noted in previous longitudinal reports, the participants perceived that the RfE programme had helped them to make the right choices. This is borne out by the high numbers of students remaining in their original course and university. The vast majority of RfE students have remained at the institution they originally chose to attend, with a very high retention rate at university throughout the last three years.

Meanwhile, the success enjoyed by students who have already graduated (testified by the proportion who obtained a First or a 2:1) and the predicted degree classes of the others, suggests that the RfE programme has helped to unleash the potential of its students.

## Methodology

The findings are based on two data sources:

- proforma responses from 33 of the RfE Cohort 1 students
- proforma responses from 41 of the RfE Cohort 2 students.

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 About the Reach for Excellence programme and the evaluation

The Reach for Excellence Programme (RfE) aims to support able young people from disadvantaged backgrounds in Yorkshire to gain a place at a top university. It is run by the University of Leeds and funded by the Lloyds TSB Foundation. This report sets out the findings from the longitudinal research that tracks the first and second Cohort of students to engage in the programme. The research aimed to explore any long-term impacts of the RfE programme. It was part of a larger evaluation carried out by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER). The overall evaluation aims to explore the university progression of the RfE students; their awareness of Higher Education (HE) options and of funding available; and to track how many RfE students attend a research-intensive university.

## 1.2 Methodology

This report presents data from the longitudinal follow-up of the first Cohort of RfE students, who completed the programme in 2009, and the second Cohort of RfE students, who completed the programme in 2010. The first Cohort have been pursuing their post-school/college paths for approximately three years and the second Cohort have been pursuing these paths for approximately two years.

The findings are based on the following data sources:

- proforma questionnaire responses from 33 Cohort 1 RfE students
- proforma questionnaire responses from 41 Cohort 2 RfE students.

### **The online questionnaire**

In June 2011, a short proforma was mailed to every RfE student in Cohort 1 (those who had completed the programme in summer 2009). The proforma contained questions on students' destinations after finishing school, including details on their university studies and whether they had changed university or course since starting their study. It also asked about their future plans after graduation. Please see appendix A for further detail.

At the same time, a short proforma was mailed to every RfE student in Cohort 2 (those who had completed the programme in summer 2010). The proforma contained questions on students' destinations after finishing school, including details on their university studies. Please see appendix B for further details.

In total, 33 proforma responses were received out of a possible 91 Cohort 1 RfE students (a response rate of 36 per cent). For Cohort 2, a total of 41 responses were received out of a possible 114 (again, a response rate of 36 per cent).

### **1.3 Report structure**

This report brings together the findings from across the longitudinal study, detailing students' journeys since finishing the RfE programme. It provides:

- an update on Cohort 1 destinations and progress
- post-school/college destinations of Cohort 2 students
- concluding comments.



## 2. The destination and progress of Cohort 1 students

This section provides information about Cohort 1 students three years after they completed the RfE programme. We look at where they were studying in June 2012 (or had studied in the past), the subjects they were reading and the grades they have achieved or are predicted to attain. We also report on their accommodation arrangements and their future plans.

### 2.1 Destinations of Cohort 1 students in 2011

A total of 33 RfE participants completed the survey. Most of the respondents (20) had gained their degrees but 11 were current students at the time of the survey. This is as expected given the timing of the proforma and suggests that the majority of those who went to university proceeded to graduate successfully.

### 2.2 RfE students attending university

#### 2.2.1 Universities attended

Most of the respondents in Cohort 1 had attended university in the North of England, and more specifically Yorkshire. Those students who had already graduated had attended Leeds, Bradford, Manchester, Sheffield, Durham, Wolverhampton, Lancaster, Leeds Metropolitan, and Hull. The University of Leeds, where many of the RfE activities were delivered, was the most popular choice, with eight students having graduated from there. Five of the 11 respondents who were still at university were also at the University of Leeds. Two were at the University of Newcastle and the remaining students were at Birmingham, Bradford, Oxford, York St John, and York University (one student attended each of these institutions). This confirms the tendency of members of this Cohort to study at institutions close to their homes.

Most students in Cohort 1 had graduated from research-intensive universities<sup>1</sup> (13 of 20) while nine of the current students were attending research-intensive universities. This tends to confirm messages contained in previous research about the programme's importance in developing students' confidence and skills to apply to research-intensive universities (Flack *et al.*, 2010). However, the small size of this sample means that considerable care has to be taken when considering this evidence.

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<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this research, research-intensive universities have been classified as universities in the Russell Group or the 1994 group. This includes (Russell Group): Birmingham; Bristol; Cambridge; Cardiff; Durham; Edinburgh; Exeter; Glasgow; Imperial College London; King's College London; Leeds; Liverpool; London School of Economics & Political Science; Manchester; Newcastle; Nottingham; Oxford; Queen Mary, University of London; Queen's University Belfast; Sheffield; Southampton; University College, London; Warwick; York and (the 1994 Group): Bath; Birkbeck; East Anglia; Essex; Goldsmiths; Institute of Education; Royal Holloway; Lancaster; Leicester; Loughborough; Reading; St Andrews; School of Oriental and African Studies; Surrey; Sussex.

Most RfE participants remained at the same institution and pursued the same course throughout their period in university. Only four had changed course. Of these, two had done so because they did not like the course they were originally studying. The overall retention rate suggests that students were well supported in the first instance to make the right university choices for them. It also reflects their continued satisfaction with the RfE scheme, as highlighted in the first year of the longitudinal evaluation (Flack *et al.*, 2010).

### **2.2.2 Subjects studied**

Seven of the 20 RfE participants in Cohort 1 who had already graduated had studied psychology. Other subjects included accounting and finance, computer games design, creative writing, ecology, economics, engineering, English literature, history, Islamic studies, law, quantity surveying, sociology, and sport and exercise science.

Current students were studying a variety of courses. Five of the 11 students were studying medicine, as was the case in the 2011 survey of this Cohort (Kettlewell *et al.*, 2011). The others in the Cohort who were still at university were studying different subjects, namely educational studies, English, French, psychology, theatre, performance and event design, and maths.

Of the four who had changed course, one had changed from science to English because the science course was not one they enjoyed; another had switched from mathematics to educational studies because the course was '*too difficult and wasn't for me*'; while a third had switched from clinical sciences to second year medicine. A fourth student had left a course due to health reasons and then decided to study a different subject after returning to university. The small number of students who changed courses again suggests that students made the right choices initially and confirms the positive outcomes recorded in the previous surveys conducted as part of this longitudinal study.

### **2.2.3 Achievement levels**

We asked RfE participants what grades they had received in 2012. In common with the predicted grades identified in the previous two surveys, most respondents gained a Second class degree or above. Two-thirds of the graduates had obtained a 2:1 degree (13 respondents) and three had gained a First. A further two had obtained a 2:2. Two students had received a Third class grade and none of the students had received a non-passing grade.

Most of the small number of respondents who had not completed their degree (11 respondents) had obtained grades equivalent to a Second class degree or above in the past academic year (8 respondents). This included two who had an average grade equivalent to a First class honours and four who had an average grade equivalent to a 2:1. Only one respondent did not know the grade they had been awarded. It appears that students became increasingly aware of their grades as their university careers progressed, as highlighted in lower levels of awareness in previous

surveys (Flack *et al.*, 2010; Kettlewell *et al.*, 2011). At the same time, a high proportion of graduate respondents who gained a First or 2:1 degree were predicted to do so. This, combined with the number of students who attended research-intensive universities, suggests that the RfE programme has contributed to enabling young people from disadvantaged backgrounds to realise their potential at university.

#### **2.2.4 Accommodation choice**

RfE participants tended to live at home during their time at university. This was true both of current students and graduates who had indicated where they had been living while at university. Almost half of the 31 students who were at, or had been to, university indicated they were living at home while they were at university (14 respondents). Most of the others had stayed in private rented accommodation and far fewer (six respondents) in university accommodation. This tends to confirm the evidence of the 2011 survey that RfE participants generally lived at home, though more were living in private rented accommodation by 2012.

#### **2.2.5 Completion of course and future plans**

As noted earlier, the majority of students in Cohort 1 had already graduated. Of the remaining 11, four stated that they are due to finish in 2013, four in 2014 and another two in 2015. One did not respond. The fact that so few RfE respondents had changed university or changed courses during the past three years reinforces the message about the usefulness of the guidance and support they received when making their choices.

Eleven of the 20 graduates had secured employment, with four stating that this employment was in their chosen field. Six graduates were undertaking voluntary work in their chosen career field. Most of the remaining students were looking for work, either in their chosen career field or in any field. Four students were planning to undertake further study. Very few indicated that they intended to pursue an unpaid internship or go travelling (one student in each case).

### **2.3 Those students not attending university**

The overwhelming majority of students who completed the pro forma were attending, or had graduated from, university. However two respondents were not currently at university. Of these, one student had progressed to university but had left due to personal health issues, not feeling that the institution was supportive with this. The other respondent had not been to university – they had intended to progress to higher education but had wanted to gain work experience in the first instance. Since being in employment their career had progressed and therefore they did not feel it was as important to go to university.

## 3. The destination and progress of Cohort 2 students

A total of 41 RfE participants from Cohort 2 completed the survey, all of whom said that they were university students. Most said they expected to graduate in 2013 with smaller numbers anticipating doing so in 2014 and 2015. One student expected to graduate in 2016.

### 3.1 RfE students attending university

The following section outlines students' university destinations and subjects studied, as well as students' level of academic achievement during their time at university. It also provides details on students' accommodation arrangements.

#### 3.1.1 RfE students attending university

This survey confirmed the evidence of both previous studies for Cohorts 1 and 2: that RfE students are most likely to study at institutions close to home. More than half of the respondents in Cohort 2 were studying at one of two universities: Bradford University (14) and the University of Leeds (10). Bradford and Leeds were also considerably more popular destinations than any other university in the previous survey of Cohort 2. Of the RfE participants who had gone elsewhere, two remained in West Yorkshire (Leeds Metropolitan) while two were at Manchester University. The remainder of the respondents were studying at different institutions. Most were in the north of England (Liverpool, Sheffield, Huddersfield, Lancaster, and Durham) although some were studying in institutions in the West Midlands (Aston and Keele). One student was studying in south-east England (Reading University).

Around half of the respondents in Cohort 2 (19 out of 41) were at research-intensive universities<sup>2</sup>, predominantly at the University of Leeds.

#### 3.1.2 Subjects studied

As in the last survey, the RfE students in Cohort 2 were studying a wide variety of subjects. Indeed only six subjects were being studied by more than one respondent.

These were:

- pharmacy (four students)
- law (two students)
- medicine (two students)
- psychology (two students)

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<sup>2</sup> For the purposes of this research, research-intensive universities have been classified as universities in the Russell Group or the 1994 group. This includes (Russell Group): Birmingham; Bristol; Cambridge; Cardiff; Durham; Edinburgh; Exeter; Glasgow; Imperial College London; King's College London; Leeds; Liverpool; London School of Economics & Political Science; Manchester; Newcastle; Nottingham; Oxford; Queen Mary, University of London; Queen's University Belfast; Sheffield; Southampton; University College, London; Warwick; York and (the 1994 Group): Bath; Birkbeck; East Anglia; Essex; Goldsmiths; Institute of Education; Royal Holloway; Lancaster; Leicester; Loughborough; Reading; St Andrews; School of Oriental and African Studies; Surrey; Sussex.

- medical science (two students)
- clinical science (two students).

In the previous survey, medicine, pharmacy and clinical science were also studied by more than one respondent, though the numbers were too small to be of any significance. Broadly, the types of subjects studied by RfE participants in Cohort 2 were more professionally-orientated than those studied by Cohort 1 students.

Only a small percentage of respondents said they had changed universities or courses, with 37 of the 40 who responded to the question indicating that they had not done so. Of the three who had changed courses, two had decided to pursue a different course or qualification and one had changed university. Course content and career prospects had influenced the three students concerned. Overall, however, retention rates reinforced the positive messages contained in the 2011 survey of this Cohort: that they had made the right choices of course and institution (Kettlewell *et al.*, 2011). This again supports the positive findings from the previous report on Cohort 2 about the quality of the advice and guidance students received through the RfE programme.

### **3.1.3 Achievement levels**

Most of the respondents (32 of 41) had obtained an average grade equivalent to Second class honours or better during the previous twelve months. More than half of these had gained grades equivalent to a 2:1 degree and nine had grades equivalent to a First. One respondent had been graded at the equivalent of a Third. Seven did not know their grades. The average grades achieved by students in Cohort 2 this year were similar to those seen in the previous survey, where more than half the sample obtained a grade equivalent to a 2:1. This provides further evidence that the RfE programme has enabled young people from disadvantaged backgrounds to proceed to university where they are predicted to gain good degrees.

### **3.1.4 Accommodation choice**

More than two thirds (27) of the sample said they lived at home during term time. Nine lived in rented accommodation and only four said they lived in university accommodation. This is similar to the evidence obtained by the previous study (Kettlewell *et al.*, 2011).

## **3.2 RfE students not currently attending university**

None of the students returning a proforma had started university and subsequently abandoned their university studies<sup>3</sup>. As with Cohort 1, retention rates were high among RfE students, providing further evidence of the likelihood of RfE participants to complete their courses at the institutions they had chosen.

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<sup>3</sup> One student, however, has decided to change the course they are studying as they have received an offer to study Medicine at another university.

## 4. Conclusions

The findings of NFER's longitudinal study point to RfE students' continued success as they have progressed through university and, for some, into employment.

The fact that a notable number of students in both Cohorts were studying at research-intensive universities during the last three years confirms the positive messages conveyed in the previous surveys about the quality of the advice and guidance they received through the RfE programme. The RfE respondents in both Cohorts mainly attended universities located in the north of England, particularly in West Yorkshire. The University of Leeds remained the most popular destination among the students and graduates in Cohort 1, possibly reflecting their satisfaction with the RfE programme. The neighbouring Bradford University was the second most popular destination for Cohort 1 students. Most of the Cohort 1 students and just under half of the respondents in Cohort 2 had been, or were, attending a research-intensive university. This implies the programme is succeeding in helping students to progress to research-intensive universities.

The vast majority of students in both Cohorts remained at the institution of original choice with a very high retention rate at university throughout the last three years. As was noted in previous longitudinal reports, the RfE programme was perceived by participants to have helped them to make the right choices and such high retention rates potentially reflect this finding.

Moreover, the previous research also highlighted the importance of work done by the RfE programme in developing students' understanding of student life, the expectations in terms of study, study skills and self-reliance, and what it would mean in terms of living arrangements and the social aspect. This reinforces the previous conclusion that the RfE programme has provided the information and nurtured the skills needed by students to succeed at university, keeping retention rates high.

The success enjoyed by the Cohort that has already graduated (testified by the proportion who obtained a First or a 2:1) and the predicted trajectories of the others suggests strongly that the RfE succeeded in enabling its participants not only to access university, but also to unleash their potential while there.

RfE participants had studied a variety of choices during the last three years. A wider range of courses were chosen by respondents in Cohort 2 than Cohort 1 and they are more professionally orientated. This may be related to the interests of this Cohort or may reflect the impact of external factors (such as the economic situation) on students' choices. At the same time, the nature of the courses studied by RfE participants in Cohort 2 may have influenced the type of institution at which they chose to study.

The proportion of RfE participants in Cohort 1 who lived at home declined over the three year period, from nearly two-thirds in 2010 to less than half in 2012, but more than two-thirds of those in Cohort 2 were living at home. As was noted in the previous reports, this highlights the importance of living at home for this group of young people and may have wider implications for the way in which student support services are delivered in the future, particularly in light of higher student fees and the wider economic situation.

Overall the longitudinal study has shown that students are progressing to top universities, where they are remaining engaged and performing well throughout their university career. This suggests students are moving on from the RfE programme with high aspirations and motivation. The findings also suggest that the support students received has helped them to make the right decisions for them and prepared them adequately for university life.

## References

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Kettlewell, K., Lamont, L. and Aston, H. (2011) *Evaluation of the Reach for Excellence Programme Longitudinal Report for Cohorts 1 and 2*. Slough: NFER. Available: <http://www.nfer.ac.uk/nfer/publications/RFTZ02/RFTZ02.pdf> [31 October 2012]

### **Other reports published through the evaluation of Reach for Excellence**

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# Appendix A: Cohort 1 Proforma Instrument

As you will be aware, the NFER have been carrying out an ongoing evaluation of the Reach for Excellence (RfE) programme, run by The University of Leeds. Now that it has been about three years since you finished school/college and RfE, we're very keen to find out what you have been up to.

We'd really appreciate it if you could fill in the following form. It should only take you about five minutes. When you've finished, please place the form into the pre-paid envelope provided and post it back to us.

Please be assured that all of your details and responses will be kept confidential.

Your name:

**Q1 Are you a university student?**

- Yes (*If 'yes', please go to Q3*)
- No, I have completed my degree (*go to Q3*)
- No, I left before getting my degree (*go to Q2.1 then continue to Q3*)
- No, I have never been to university (*go to Q2.2 then continue to Q10*)

**Q2.1 What were the main reasons you stopped attending university?**

**Q2.2 What were the main reasons you decided not to attend university?**

If you have ever attended university:

**Q3: Which university are you attending/did you attend?**

**Q4: What course are you studying/did you study?**

If you have completed your degree please go to **question 7**, otherwise please continue to **question 5**.

If you left before completing your degree, please go to **question 10**.

**Q5: If you have not yet completed your course, what has been your average grade over the past 12 months?**

- First
- 2:1
- 2:2
- Third
- Non-passing grade
- Other (*please specify*)
- Don't know

**Q6: When do you anticipate you will finish this course? (Please give year)**

Please go to **question 8**.

**Q7: If you have completed your course, what grade were you awarded?**

- First
- 2:1
- 2:2
- Third
- Non-passing grade
- Other (*please specify*)
- Don't know

**Q8: Have you changed universities, or courses, at any stage during your time at university?**

- Yes
- No

**Q8.1: If yes, please briefly describe the changes you made, and the reasons for the changes.**

Change:

Reasons:

**Q9: During term time, do you, or did you, live...**

- At home?
- In university accommodation?
- Privately rented accommodation?
- Other (*please specify*)

**Q10: What will you be doing in September? (please tick all options that apply)**

- A. Continuing with my course
- B. Further study (Masters/PGCE/PhD/second degree)
- C. Employment in my chosen career field
- D. Employment in another career field
- E. looking for employment in my chosen career field
- F. Looking for any employment
- G. Travelling
- H. Voluntary work in my chosen career field
- I. Voluntary work in another career field
- J. Paid or unpaid internship in my chosen career field
- K. Paid or unpaid internship in another career field
- L. Other (*please specify*)

***Thank you very much for your time. We really do appreciate your ongoing involvement with the research.***

## Appendix B: Cohort 2 Proforma Instrument

As you will be aware, the NFER have been carrying out an ongoing evaluation of the Reach for Excellence (RfE) programme, run by The University of Leeds. Now that it has been about one year since you finished school/college and RfE, we're very keen to find out what you have been up to.

We'd really appreciate it if you could fill in the following form. It should only take you about five minutes. When you've finished, please place the form into the pre-paid envelope provided and post it back to us.

Please be assured that all of your details and responses will be kept confidential.

Your name:

### Question 1: University Attendance

Are you a university student?

- Yes (If 'yes', please go to question 2a)
- No (If 'no', please go to question 2b)

### Question 2a: (Attending university)

Which university are you attending?

What course are you studying?

What has been your average grade over the past 12 months?

- First
- 2:1
- 2:2
- Third
- Non-passing grade
- Other (*please specify*)
- Don't know

When do you anticipate you will finish this course?

During term time, do you live...

- At home?  
 In university accommodation?  
 Other (*please specify*)

(Please go to question 3)

**Question 2b: (Not attending university)**

Which of the following best describes your circumstances?

- A. I decided not to attend university  
 B. I have taken a gap year, or have been working, and intend to go to university in the future  
 C. I started university, but have since stopped attending  
 D. I have completed my university course  
 E. Other (*please specify*)

If you responded (A), what were the main reasons you decided not to attend university?

If you responded (C), what were the main reasons you stopped attending university?

**Question 3: Interview**

We are looking to conduct telephone interviews with young people, such as yourself, who were involved in the Reach for Excellence Programme. The interviews will be very brief (10-15 minutes), and will explore areas such as whether Reach for Excellence has led to any benefits for you, or if it has affected your future plans.

Please indicate whether you would be happy to participate in such an interview this summer:

- Yes  
 No

If yes, please indicate the most convenient way for us to contact you. (e.g. mobile number, email address)

Phone number:

Convenient times:

**Question 4: Your Details**

**What is your ethnicity?**

- Black Caribbean
- Black African
- Indian
- Bangladeshi
- White
- Chinese
- Pakistani
- Mixed race (*please specify*)
  
- Other (*please specify*)

Please see below for the contact details we currently have for you. If any of these need changing, please cross it out and provide a more appropriate contact in the space provided

#Name#

#Address#

#Home phone#

#Mobile phone#

#Email address#

***Thank you very much for your time. We really do appreciate your ongoing involvement with the research.***

# Providing independent evidence to improve education and learning.

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