

Improving access for the most able but least likely: Evaluation of the Realising Opportunities programme





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RO Partners are...

University of Birmingham

University of Exeter

Goldsmiths, University of London

King's College London

University of Leeds

University of Leicester

University of Liverpool

Newcastle University

Queen Mary University of London

University of Manchester

University of Sheffield

University of Sussex

UCL

University of Warwick

University of York

Executive summary

- Realising Opportunities (RO) is a unique collaboration of leading universities who have made a long term commitment to sharing their practice in widening participation, fair access and social mobility. Led by Newcastle University, RO aims to promote progression for able students from under-represented groups to research intensive universities (RIUs) in England. Initially funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) in August 2012 the Partnership became self-funded with each Partner making an equal annual contribution.
- The RO Partnership provides a supportive programme to students in Years 12 and 13 with good academic attainment from disadvantaged backgrounds. The RO programme gives students a wide range of information and support to make informed choices about going to university, and whether they could attend a RIU – those that produce high-quality research, where researchers are experts in their fields, and where teaching is research-led or research-informed. The tenth cohort of students was recruited to the programme in autumn 2018.
- The programme has a robust evaluation framework that involves the collection of student contextual data, student surveys at different stages of the programme and beyond, tracking through UCAS application data, and the Higher Education Applicant Tracker (HEAT) using Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) data.
- Since it began, RO has successfully recruited 'most able, least likely' students – 99% of the 6,000 starters to date have achieved eight or more GCSE passes at A*-C/9-4 grades, and they come from a wide range of disadvantaged backgrounds, with 91% having parents with no experience of higher education, two thirds coming from areas with the lowest HE participation rates based on polar quintiles and nearly one in three having been eligible for free school meals.
- Participation in the programme increases students' understanding of RIUs, and university life, and makes them better prepared for university – of the most recent cohort, 70% knew more about what a RIU is at the end of the programme than at the beginning, 57% knew more about what student life is like, and nearly half were better prepared for living away from home and managing their finances.
- The vast majority (84%) of participants apply to university at the end of Year 13, double the overall proportion of 18 year olds who apply to university. Two thirds (67%) of the latest cohort to become HE ready started university, which compares with the overall rate for all 18 year olds of 33%, and the rate of 59% for a similar comparator group that had participated in different outreach activities.
- Around one in three RO students attend RIUs, compared with one in four in the comparator group.
- Nearly two thirds of RO students said that participation in the programme was very important or quite important in encouraging them to go to university.
- Students who successfully complete the RO programme, and apply to a RO Partner university, can receive an offer up to two grades lower than the standard offer for the course. This 'alternative offer' has helped up to 430 students across the first six cohorts take up a place at a RO university that they otherwise might not have obtained – just over half of all those who have attended RO Partner universities.
- RO students have broadened their study horizons and become more geographically mobile over time. The proportion attending their 'host' university has declined substantially, from one in three students in Cohort 1 to one in ten students in Cohort 6, and successive Cohorts have tended to travel further on average to go to university, up from 35 miles in Cohort 1 to 55 miles in Cohort 6. RO students are more likely to travel away from their home region to go to university than all students from low socio-economic groups.
- Once at university, RO students are more likely than students overall to stay on their course. The average drop-out rate for RO students across Cohorts 1 to 5 was 4%, which compares with the average for all students (including those from the most advantaged backgrounds) of 6%.
- Four fifths (80%) of the most recent graduates obtained a First Class or Upper Second Class degree, slightly above the overall proportion of 76% of all students including those from the most advantaged backgrounds.
- RO graduates are just as likely as graduates overall to enter graduate-level employment or take up further study, with an above average proportion entering further study.

1. Introduction

To understand fully the impact of Realising Opportunities (RO) on participants, there is a robust evaluation framework that involves the collection of student contextual data, student surveys at different stages of the programme, tracking through UCAS application data, and the Higher Education Applicant Tracker (HEAT) using Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) data. The evaluation is implemented and synthesised by the Institute for Employment Studies (IES) as RO's independent evaluator. This approach enables consideration of the impact of the programme in a national context and understanding of students' own perceptions of their involvement.

The first cohort of RO participants completed the programme in 2011 and there have been nine cohorts to date. RO participants are surveyed at four points in time during and after their involvement in the programme:

- The Baseline survey occurs early in Year 12, and asks participants about plans after Year 13, awareness of various university and career factors, and preparedness for university and later careers.
- The Follow-up survey occurs around the Easter holidays in Year 13. This repeats many of the questions asked at the Baseline survey, so that changes in awareness of university and career issues between the start and end of the programme can be measured.
- The Progress survey, introduced for Cohort 3 onwards, occurs in the summer of the year after Year 13, when many participants are approaching the end of their first year at university.
- The Success survey gathers information from former participants four years after Year 13, when they will have graduated if they went straight to university after Year 13 and completed a three-year degree.

RO cohorts and timing of surveys

Cohort	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
1	B	F				S			
2	B		F				S		
3		B	F		P		S		
4			B	F		P		S	
5				B	F		P		
6					B	F	P		
7						B	F	P	
8							B	F	
9								B	

Note: B = Baseline survey, F = Follow-up survey, P = Progress survey, S = Success survey

Blue shading indicates Years 12 and 13 (although Cohort 1 had a shorter timeframe than later Cohorts at about 15 months); orange shading indicates the first three years post-Year 13, and so would cover higher education if a student undertakes a three-year degree straight after Year 13. Source: Realising Opportunities

2. What is Realising Opportunities?

Why Realising Opportunities exists

Participation in higher education in England has increased significantly since 1990 when 19% of young people went to university. This has now risen to half of those aged under 30 in 2016/17¹. This includes more young people from disadvantaged backgrounds than ever before. RO works to address gaps that still remain in the system.

Despite numbers increasing, students from disadvantaged backgrounds are still half as likely to progress to university as those from the most advantaged backgrounds. That difference is even more distinct when considering progression to highly selective universities, to which 22% of the most advantaged students progress compared to 4% of the least advantaged².

The RO programme is designed to give students a wide range of information in a wide range of ways. This ensures students have the space and support they need to make informed choices about going to university, and 'research intensive universities' (RIUs).

Research intensive universities (RIUs) produce high quality research which makes new discoveries possible, and contribute to increased knowledge for the good of society; they seek to address global problems with cutting edge research. Teaching is research-led in a vibrant environment which makes for an exceptional student learning experience. At RIUs:

- New discoveries are being made
- Facilities are cutting edge
- Research is being carried out to help address problems in the wider world
- Researchers are experts in their fields and their enthusiasm and passion is shared with students studying at the university
- Teaching at all levels is research-led or research-informed
- There are strong links with business.

The Partnership started as a three-year pilot scheme funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) with 12 participating universities. The programme became self-financed by the Partnership after the pilot ended, and the Partnership has increased its members since then. The following list shows the universities that have been involved in RO since it began:

- University of Birmingham
- University of Bristol
- University of Essex
- University of Exeter
- Goldsmiths, University of London
- King's College London
- University of Leeds
- University of Leicester
- University of Liverpool
- University of Manchester
- Newcastle University
- Queen Mary University of London
- UCL
- University of Sheffield
- University of Sussex
- University of Warwick
- University of York

Aims of Realising Opportunities

The RO programme is a targeted, national compact scheme for students in Year 12 and 13 across England that aims to:

- Increase the number of applicants and entrants to RIUs from under-represented groups, in support of fair access and social mobility.
- Prepare students for success at RIUs and progression to graduate careers and/or postgraduate study.
- Raise awareness and understanding of RIUs.
- Broaden geographical horizons and help students make an informed academic choice.
- Improve the evidence base among the participating universities for the use of compact schemes and contextual data in admissions.
- Inform and influence government policy in widening participation and fair access.

The Realising Opportunities programme

Participating students start the RO programme in Year 12 and it offers them support throughout Year 12 and 13. Successful completion of the programme can result in an alternative (reduced by up to two A level grades) offer from any of the RO Partner universities. The elements of the programme, and benefits for students, are shown in Table 1.

1. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/744087/Main_text_participation_rates_in_higher_education_2006_to_2017_.pdf

2. Disadvantage measured using POLAR Quintile – UCAS End of Cycle Report 2017: Patterns by Applicant Characteristics

Table 1 Summary of key RO programme elements

Programme elements	Benefits
Academic element	
Students undertake an assessed piece of independent research in an area of their own interest. This can either take the form of the Realising Opportunities Academic Assignment, supported by a university tutor, or the Extended Project Qualification (EPQ) in conjunction with their school/college.	Students are able to demonstrate their potential to be successful at a RIU. They undertake independent research in an area of personal interest to them, and they develop analytical, critical thinking, and academic skills including research and referencing.
skills4uni	
Students work through an online study skills module provided by the University of Birmingham. The skills4uni module has interactive tasks, videos and information designed to build students' awareness of RIUs and increase their skills levels.	skills4uni offers students invaluable insight into the vibrant teaching and learning on offer at RIUs and helps students develop skills to be successful at university.
Events and activities	
Students attend a range of events and activities including the RO Local Launch at their host university and the RO National Student Conference where students meet representatives from all Partner universities. Students are also offered a wide range of events and activities across the Partnership such as subject taster days, residential summer schools, master classes and open days.	The range of events and activities aims to promote the national feel of RO, and encourage geographic mobility. Together they are designed to build students' confidence, foster a sense of belonging to RO, upskill students, encourage informed choices and raise awareness of RIUs. Students can attend as many events as they like. This is a unique opportunity to visit RIUs across England.
Online student support	
Students have access to a wide range of online support during their time on RO including access to RO Ambassadors, regular online chat sessions with representatives from across the Partnership and, in Year 13, the opportunity to be linked with a current undergraduate at one of the RO Partner universities to provide support and subject insight.	The online support provides students with structured support covering key topics at key times - such as student finance, higher education research and UCAS applications. This support offers students access to the RO Central Team, host Partner universities and access to someone with first hand experience of studying at an RIU and who can answer their questions and offer a peer perspective and be a positive role model.

3. Who participates?

RO participants are very able students from backgrounds which make them less likely to progress to higher education (HE), especially to RIUs. In short, they are the ‘most able and least likely’ to attend HE. As individuals, students that the RO programme aims to support can be defined using three key characteristics³:

- They come from schools performing below the national average (at key stages 4 and/or 5) or which have a higher number of students eligible for free school meals than the national average.
- They must have achieved eight A*-C/9-4 GCSE grades (or equivalent qualifications), including English and Maths, and have at least five subjects graded A*-B or 9-6.
- They meet two of the following criteria:
 - Live in a neighbourhood with a low progression rate to higher education, or with a high level of deprivation⁵
 - Come from a home where neither parent attended university
 - Be entitled to discretionary payments / 16 - 19 bursary / Pupil Premium at school / college
- Be entitled to free school meals
- Alternatively, if students are living in, or have lived in, local authority care, or are a young carer, then they are eligible without needing to meet two of the above criteria.

If students do not meet the prior attainment criteria or at least two of the widening participation (WP) criteria, but have experienced difficult family or individual circumstances that may affect their performance in exams or the likelihood of them going to university, their application may still be considered on an individual basis.

To date, over 6,000 students in total have taken part in the RO Programme. Key statistics about students in the most recent annual RO cohort, and the total population to date, are presented in Table 2 below:

Table 2 Key characteristics of latest Cohort, and all RO starters

	Cohort 9	All cohorts
Starters on the programme	1,013	6,059
Gender breakdown	70% female/30% male	66% female/34% male
Ethnicity breakdown	46% white/54% BME	53% white/47% BME
% from POLAR quintiles 1 and 2	60%	66%
% with parents with no experience of HE	92%	91%
% entitled to free school meals	31%	28%
% in receipt of discretionary payments/EMA	60%	54%
% with a disability or special need	9%	7%
% with 8 or more GCSE passes at A*-C grades	98%	99%

3. This shows the criteria for participants up to and including Cohort 9 ie the students discussed in this report. The most recent criteria for recruitment to RO is on the RO website – www.realisingopportunities.ac.uk

4. Based on Participation of Local Areas (POLAR) quintile. POLAR is a measure of education disadvantage. For more information see <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/polar-participation-of-local-areas/>

5. Based on the Index of Multiple Deprivation (<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-indices-of-deprivation-2015>)

4. What did RO participants get out of the programme?

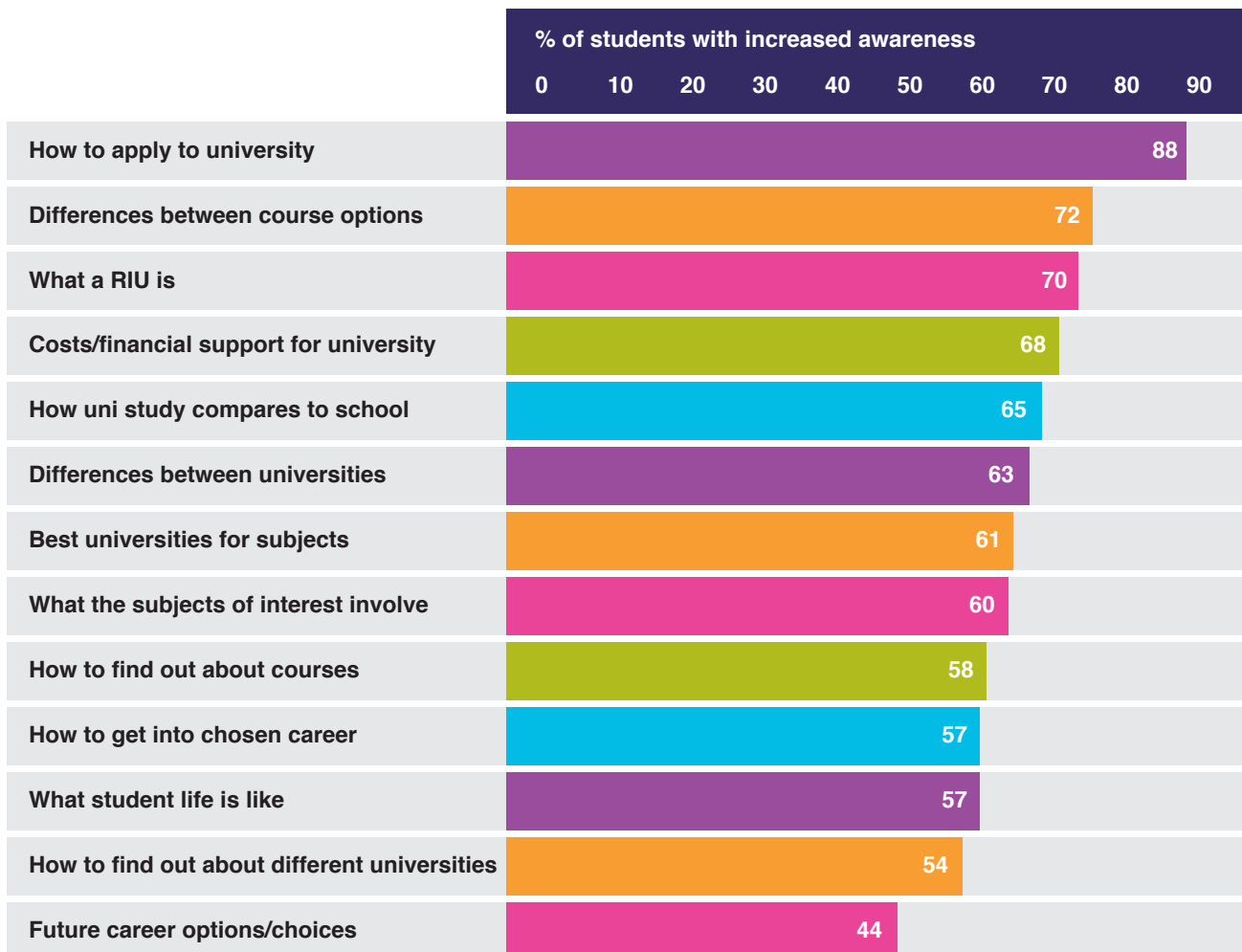
There have now been nine annual cohorts of students participating in the RO programme since its launch in 2009. Some questions in the Baseline survey are repeated in the Follow-up survey so that responses can be compared to measure the impact of the programme on participants, and additional questions in the Follow-up survey ask respondents to consider the impact that participation has had on them.

Preparedness for university

Based on their responses at the Follow-up survey conducted towards the end of Year 13 compared with those at the Baseline survey at the start of the programme, RO participants in Cohort 8 felt significantly more prepared for many aspects of university life as a result of their participation in RO.

- 88% knew more about how to apply to university
- 72% knew more about the differences between course options
- 70% had more understanding of what a RIU is
- 68% had more understanding of the costs and financial support available for university
- 65% knew more about how university study compares with school

Figure 1 Proportion of Cohort 8 students whose awareness of university aspects increased between the start and end of the RO programme

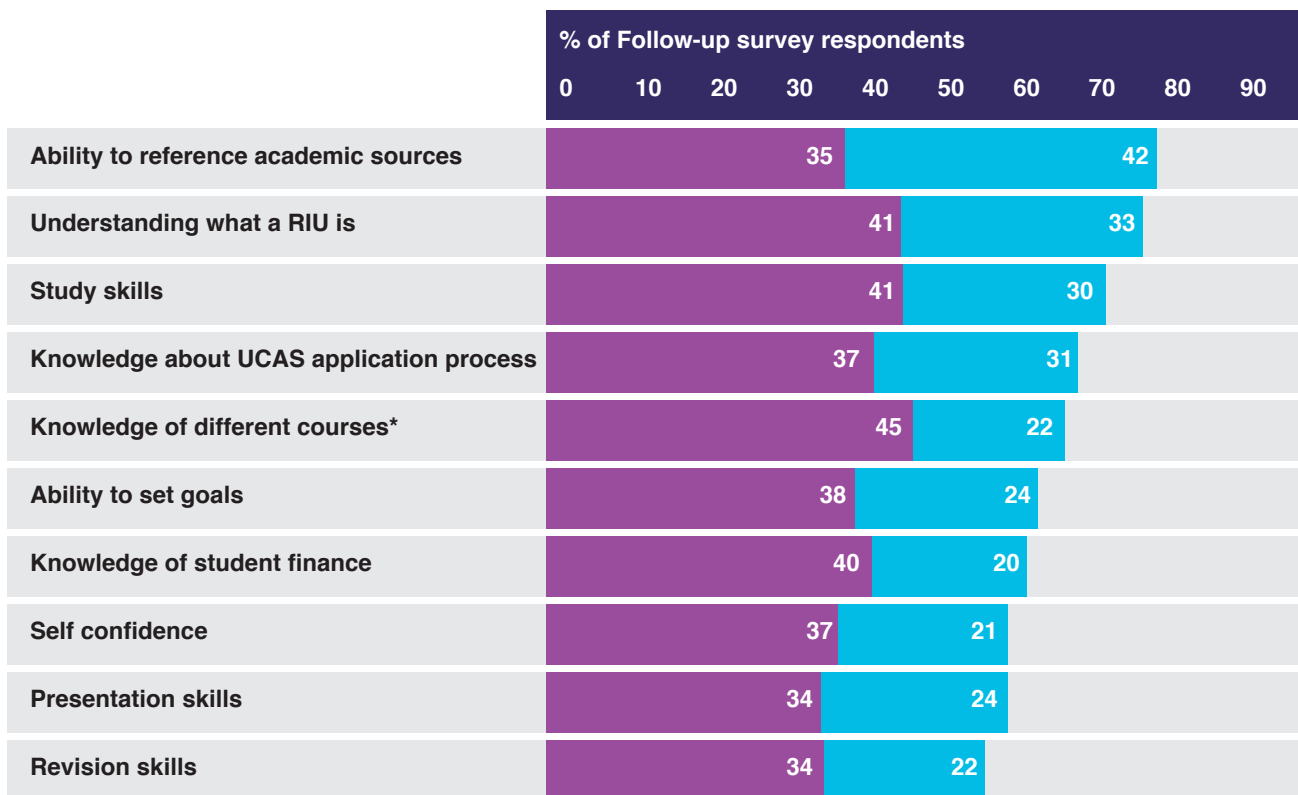


Source: Cohort 8 Follow-up survey linked with Baseline survey

Looking at the entire RO population from Cohort 1 onwards, Figure 2 shows that the greatest impact of RO on knowledge and understanding of university life was on ability to reference academic sources; 42% of students said that RO had improved this a lot and 35% said RO had improved it quite a lot. This was followed by:

- Understanding of what a RIU is (33% said a lot and 41% quite a lot);
- Students' study skills (30% said a lot and 41% quite a lot); and
- Knowledge about the UCAS application process (31% said a lot and 37% said quite a lot).

Figure 2 Extent to which RO had improved knowledge and understanding of university life, Cohorts 1 to 8



Note: * Knowledge of different courses at university only asked in Cohorts 1 to 4

Source: Follow-up surveys Cohorts 1 to 8

Quite a lot A lot

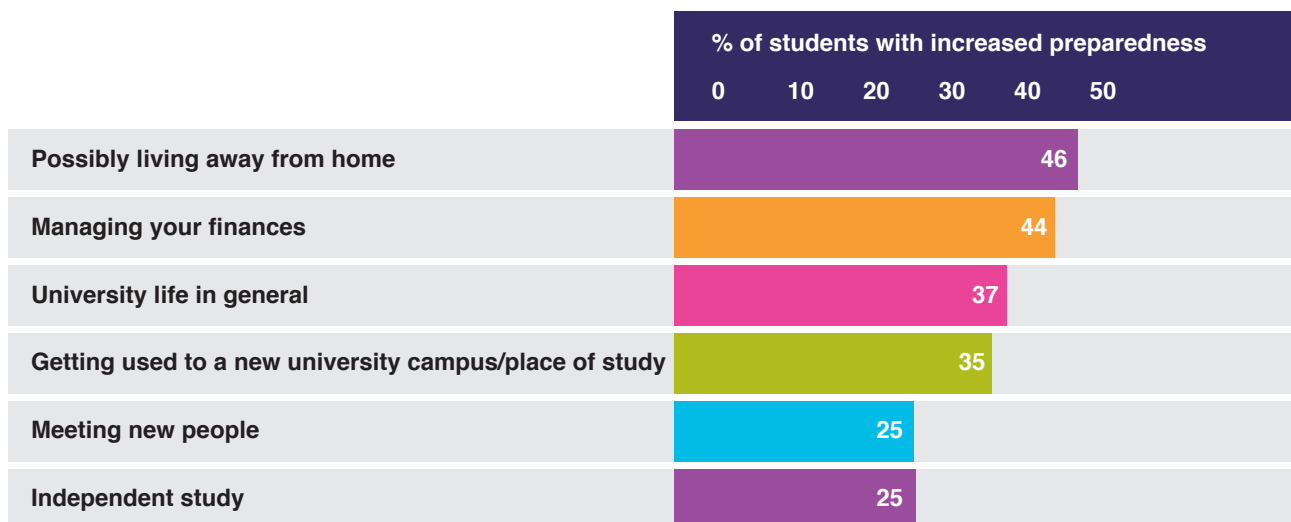


Preparedness for university life

Comparing the responses of Cohort 8 students at the Follow-up survey with their responses at the Baseline survey shows that nearly half (46%) felt more prepared about possibly living away from home as a result of participation in the RO programme, while 44% felt more

prepared for managing their finances, 37% felt more prepared about university life in general, and 35% felt more prepared about getting used to a new university campus or place of study (Figure 3).

Figure 3 Proportion of Cohort 8 students whose preparedness for university life increased between the start and end of the RO programme



Source: Cohort 8 Follow-up survey linked with Baseline survey



5. What do RO participants do next?

Information on RO students applications to university is provided by the UCAS STROBE service, and information on their participation in HE is provided by the HEAT HESA Track.

Access to Higher Education

93% of Cohort 8 participants reported that they had applied for a place at university, of whom nearly nine out of ten had applied to a RO Partner university.

Over three quarters said they had received an offer from their first-choice university, and 92% of RO students reported that they were happy with the offers they received.

Tracking of RO Cohort 7 participants using UCAS application

data confirmed that 84% of those students⁶ had applied to university, of whom 89% had applied to a RIU (85% to an RO Partner university). These were significantly higher proportions than in a matched comparator group⁷. These were also slightly higher than for the RO Cohort 6 tracked participants (78% applying, of whom 86% to a RIU).

Table 3 shows that high proportions of RO participants from the bottom two POLAR3 quintiles, i.e. students from the neighbourhoods least likely to enter HE, applied to RO Partner and/or other RIUs.

Table 3 Applicants to RO Partner universities/RIUs by POLAR3 quintile, Cohort 7, 2017 entry

		POLAR3			
		1	2	3-5	All
Applied to university that year (all)	No.	250	200	285	745
Applied to RO institutions	%	82.0	85.0	91.2	85.2
Applied to RIU (including RO)	%	90.0	87.5	93.0	89.3

Source: This information has been derived from the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service STROBE analytical data service.

Participation in HE

Enrolments at university

The HEAT Tracker enables identification of RO participants who actually enter university amongst national HE student records held by HESA.

This shows that two thirds (67%) of Cohort 6 students tracked by HESA in the HEAT database had entered university in their first HE-ready year. This is higher than

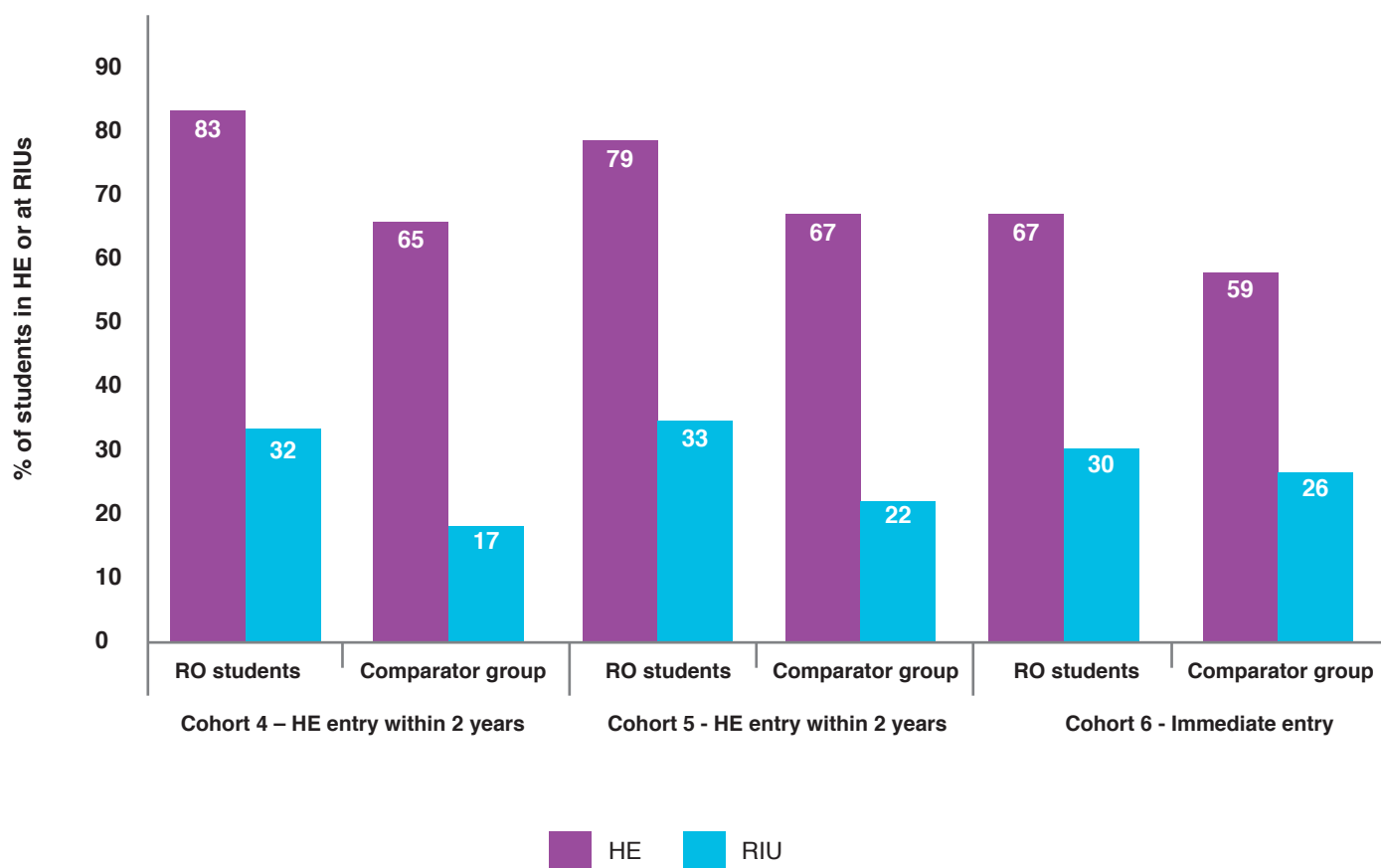
the 59% of a matched comparator group who had not participated in the RO programme. A total of 30% were studying at a RIU (representing 45% of all those in HE), which compares with 26% of the comparator group. This continues the pattern in Cohort 5 (Figure 4).

Looking at the figures for the overall population for England, 28% of all 18 year olds entered HE in 2016/17, and 50% of all people aged 30 and under were in HE. In terms of type of university attended, 31% of all UK-domiciled first year full time first degree students at UK universities were studying at a RIU.

6. Not all RO participants are able to be identified in this tracking

7. The comparator population was selected from the population of all outreach participants (including those in intensive activities) to match RO participants by socio-economic background and attainment at Key Stage 4, and targeting criteria were also applied at the school level this year. The population is further restricted to Key Stage 5 entrants to reflect only those who had progressed to post-16 education.

Figure 4 Proportion of RO students in HE, and at RIUs, compared with HEAT comparator group



Source: HEAT

RO participants in HE who had successfully passed the programme were much more likely to be studying at RIUs than those who did not pass RO – 57% and 26% respectively.

Examination of the A-level performance of RO participants (for Cohorts 3 to 6) demonstrates that those who attended RO Partner universities have lower average grades than their counterparts who attended other RIUs. This reflects the alternative (lower) offers made by RO Partner universities to RO participants.

The alternative offer has an impact on university attendance for a large proportion of students, as 58% of RO participants

who were at RO Partner universities felt they would not have obtained their place without the alternative offer⁸. Typically their achieved UCAS tariffs were two grades lower than those who would have obtained their place without the alternative offer.

These findings suggest that as many as 430 students from Cohorts 1 to 6 who studied or are studying at RO Partner universities, out of a total of 750 who are attending or attended RO Partner universities, might not have obtained their place without the alternative offer, and thus this one element of the programme has helped 430 students from disadvantaged backgrounds to study at a RIU.

8. Based on surveys with RO survey participants across Cohorts 1 to 6 who were attending RO partner institutions (N=139)

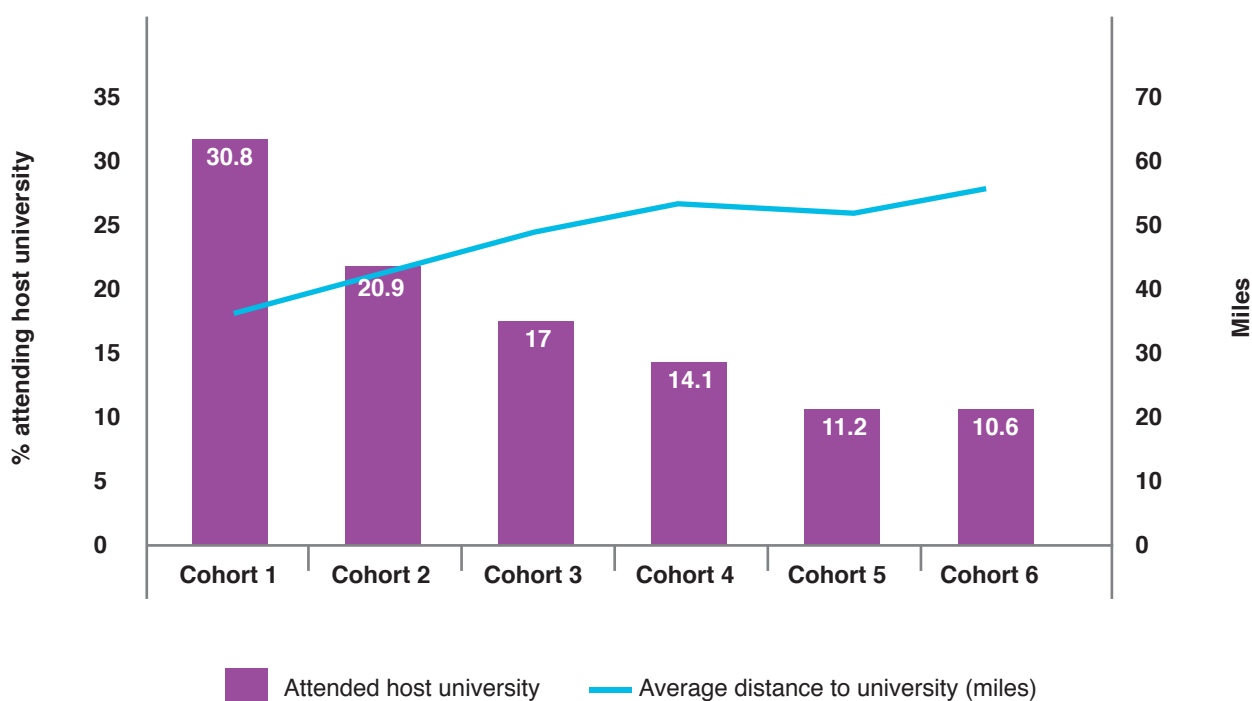
Geographical mobility

One of the aims of the RO programme is to expand the geographic horizons of students and encourage them to consider universities further afield.

The average distance to university (from their home) among RO students has increased since the launch of

the programme, and is highest, at nearly 55 miles, in Cohort 6 (the latest Cohort for which these data are available)⁹. This has been partly caused by a decrease in the proportion attending their local host university, which fell from over 30% in Cohort 1 to 10% in Cohort 6, but the average distance among those attending universities further afield has also increased.

Figure 5 Proportion of RO students attending their host university, and average distance to university



Source: HEAT

These distances are above the averages recorded by HESA for all students (from all backgrounds and attending all types of university)¹⁰. Comparisons with the results presented in a Sutton Trust report into student mobility by social and ethnic

characteristics¹¹ suggests that RO students travel further, on average, than students from the lowest socio-economic groups and further than students from ethnic minority backgrounds.

9. Distances are calculated 'as the crow flies' based on postcodes of participants' home and university attended, for those tracked

10. <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/analysis/maps/archive/student/distance/>

11. Home and Away, Social, ethnic and spatial inequalities in student mobility, February 2018 - https://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Home_and_away_FINAL.pdf

Effect of RO participation on attendance at RIUs

Successful completion of the RO programme can be shown to have a statistically significant influence on the likelihood of a student attending an RO Partner or other RIU, irrespective of their local RO Partner and other factors such as gender, ethnicity, POLAR and IMD background. Amongst the RO students, those of ethnic minority background were more likely than white students to attend their local RO Partner university, despite the increased geographical mobility resulting from the programme overall.

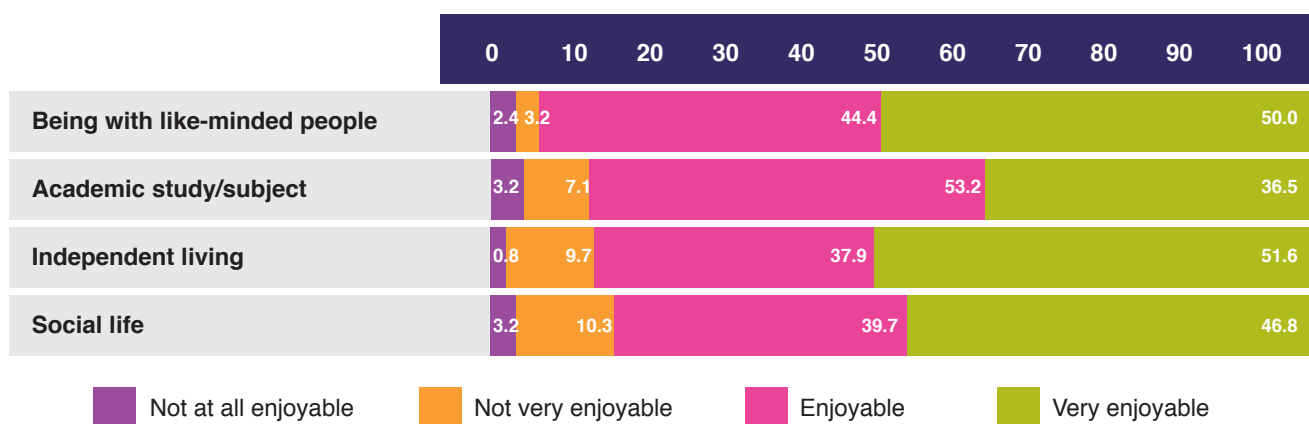
During university

Data from the HEAT HESA Track show that retention rates

for RO students are better than for all students, including those from the most advantaged backgrounds. The national average for all entrants who left HE the year after entry without completing their course is 6.2% (2015/16 data; this national statistic includes students from the most advantaged backgrounds in the country). Across Cohorts 1 to 5 the average for RO students was 3.9%, and ranged from a low of 2.6% in Cohort 1 to 6.1% in Cohort 2.

The RO Success survey undertaken with RO participants in Cohort 4 (most would have graduated at the time of their survey but some would still be studying at university) reveals that 91% had enjoyed or were enjoying their studies, a little higher than seen for the previous cohort. Across Cohorts 1 to 4, more than half found very enjoyable the opportunity for independent living and being with like-minded people (Figure 6).

Figure 6 Extent to which RO participants enjoyed various aspects of university life



Source: Success Surveys Cohorts 1-4

Across Cohorts 1 to 4, half of RO students had moved out of their home region to attend university, with 17% remaining in that region but moving out of their home, and one in three continuing to live at home. Enjoyment levels were highest for those who moved region, or who lived at home; lower enjoyment among those who stay in the same region but move out of home may be influenced by the additional costs of living independently without the new experiences of moving somewhere else in the country.

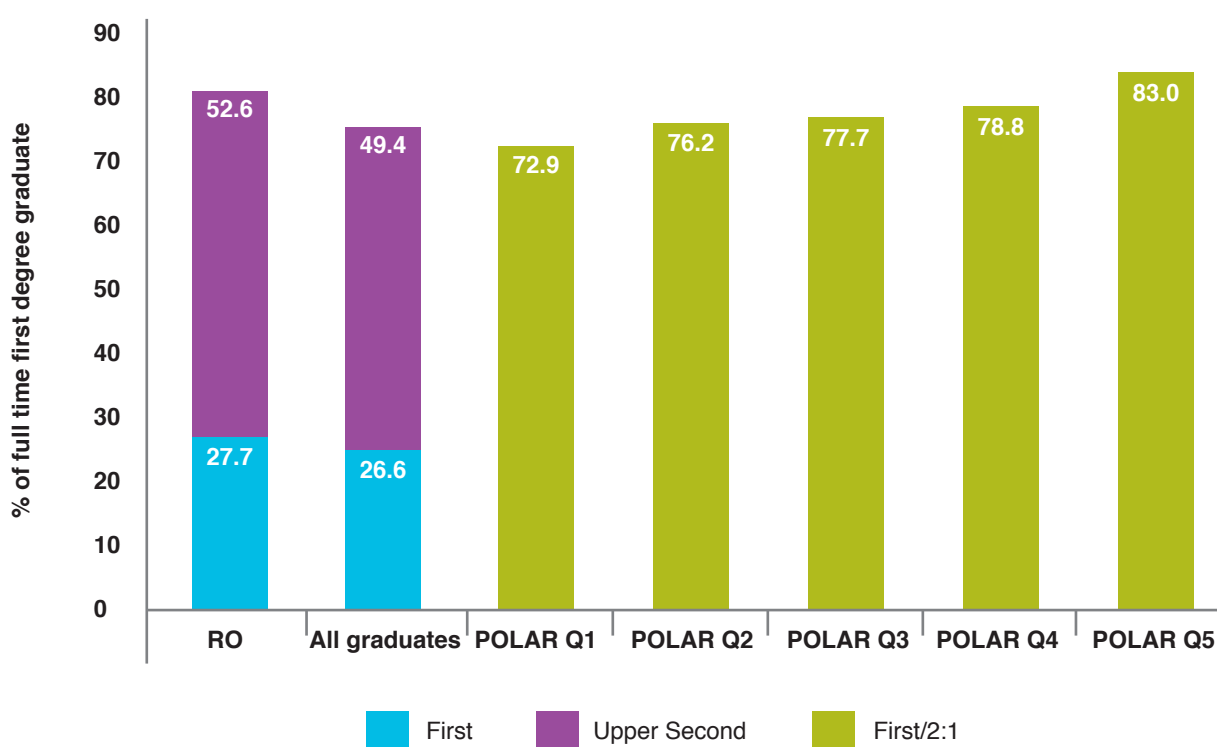
RO participants overwhelmingly (over 95%) felt that their university experience had prepared them well in terms of the skills to find things out for themselves and for independent life, while 85% felt it prepared them well for employment and a similar proportion that it had fostered a love of learning.

Student success

Many of those who participated in the earliest RO programme cohorts have now graduated from university. Data from HEAT on the qualifications of full time first degree graduates shows that 28% of Cohort 4 graduates achieved a First Class degree, and 53% achieved an Upper Second Class degree.

These are higher proportions than seen overall for UK graduates (of whom around 27% gain a First and 49% an Upper Second¹²). The proportion of RO full time first degree graduates achieving a First or Upper Second is above the proportion of all graduates from the bottom four POLAR quintiles, and it should be borne in mind that nearly 60% of RO graduates are from the bottom two POLAR quintiles.

Figure 7 Degree outcomes for full-time first degree RO students in comparison with all students, and by POLAR



Source: HEAT

Just over half of RO participants tracked in HESA's data on recent graduates are reported to be in full-time employment (just below the national average, which was 56% for those graduating in 2015/16) but a significantly higher proportion (26%) were engaged in further study than average (22%).

Of those in employment, 71% of graduates from Cohorts 1 to 3 tracked in the HESA data were in professional occupations, which is close to the average for all graduates including the most advantaged students. However, it is substantially higher than the proportion of graduates in professional occupations who are from less privileged

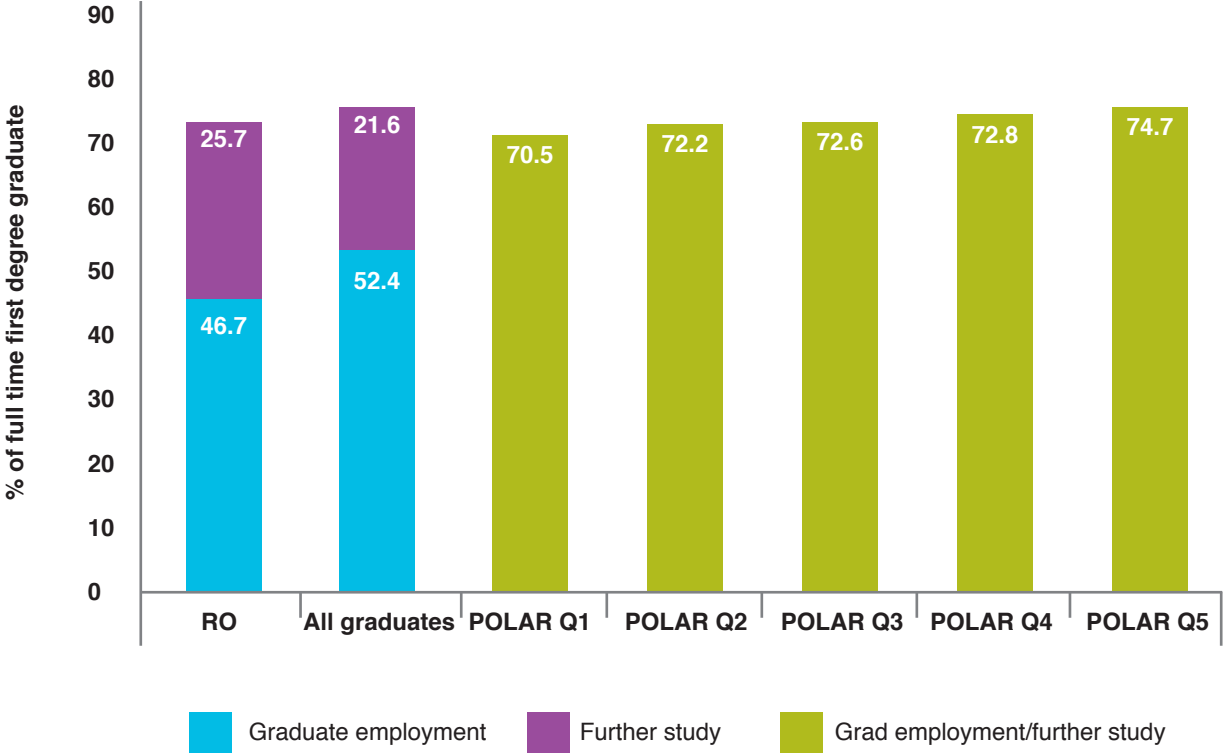
socio-economic backgrounds (which broadly correlates with the backgrounds of most RO participants), which lags by about 20% the proportion from more privileged backgrounds¹³.

Considering graduate employment and further study combined, 72% of the latest cohort of RO graduates were either working in graduate jobs or were undertaking further study, below the proportion across all graduates of 74% but similar to the proportions for graduates from POLAR quintiles 3 and 4 i.e. areas of relatively low employment deprivation.

12. national figures from HESA 2016/17; http://www.hefce.ac.uk/media/HEFCE,2014/Content/Pubs/2018/201805/HEFCE2017_05.pdf

13. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/social-mobility-indicators/social-mobility-indicators#access-to-the-professions>

Figure 8 Graduate outcomes of RO students in comparison with all students, and by POLAR



Source: HEAT



6. What difference does Realising Opportunities make?

Has the programme targeted most able, least likely students?

Since the RO programme started it has successfully targeted the 'most able and least likely' students – 99% of starters have achieved eight or more GCSE passes at A*-C grades, indicating they are 'most able', particularly as they achieved these at schools with below average GCSE pass rates, and they come from a wide range of disadvantaged backgrounds, with 91% having parents with no experience of higher education, two thirds coming from local areas with the lowest HE participation rates, and nearly one in three having been eligible for free school meals.

Are RO students more likely to apply to and attend university in general, and RO Partner universities/RIUs in particular, compared with national rates and an established comparator group?

84% of RO Cohort 7 students tracked by UCAS made an application to university, above the proportion in the previous Cohort of 78%. Nationally, 37% of 18 year olds apply to university (UCAS data).

67% of Cohort 6 RO students tracked by HESA in the HEAT database were in HE (compared with 59% for Cohort 5). This is above the national rate of 33% of 18 year olds entering university (UCAS data) and was also above the HE entry rate of a comparator group of non-RO students who had been in outreach activities, of 59%.

31% of Cohort 6 RO students tracked by HESA in the HEAT database were studying at RIUs which is above the rate for a comparator group of non-RO students who had been involved in outreach activities (26%).

Can this be attributed to involvement in the RO Programme?

31% of Cohort 5 and 6 respondents to the Progress survey said that RO was very important in encouraging them to go to university, and a further 32% said that RO was quite important.

Why do RO students choose to apply to universities that are not research intensive?

Subject considerations were the main reason why RO students did not apply to RIUs, and subjects mentioned included fine art, photography, clinical science, dental nursing, design, architecture and civil engineering. Very few expressed concerns about not getting the grades to attend one, or struggling academically while there.

Do RO students require an alternative offer to progress? Were RO students influenced by receiving an alternative offer?

Around half of RO students who received an alternative offer said that they would have obtained a place on their course without the alternative offer. Among the remainder, their achieved A-level grades were about two grades lower, indicating that the alternative offer is successful at allowing students from disadvantaged backgrounds to take up places at RO Partner universities.

Across Cohorts 1 to 6, there were around 430 students at RO Partner universities who may not have obtained their place without the alternative offer.

One in three students who said that involvement in RO encouraged them to go to university mentioned the alternative offer as the most useful element of the programme in encouraging them.

Are RO students better informed about RIUs, and university life, and better prepared for university?

70% of the most recent RO students had more understanding of what a RIU is at the end of the programme than at the beginning, and 57% knew more about what student life is like.

Nearly half of the most recent students were more prepared for living away from home, and managing their finances, as a result of participating in RO, and one in three were more prepared for getting used to a new campus or place of study.

A substantial minority of RO students in Cohorts 3 and 4 (44%) reported that participation in RO either definitely helped them to achieve a better degree result, or played a small part in helping them achieve a better degree result.

How did RO students feel about taking part in RO? How did students find taking part in RO beneficial?

Nine out of ten students in Cohort 8 said that they felt very positive about being asked to take part in RO.

Around half said that participation in RO had increased their understanding of how university study compares to school, and how to find out about different universities, a lot. Over three quarters said that RO had improved their ability to reference academic sources, and their knowledge about the UCAS process, by quite a lot or a lot.

What degree classifications do RO students achieve at university in general, and RO/RIUs in particular, compared to national rates?

80% of RO Cohort 4 full time first degree students obtained a First or Upper Second class degree, slightly above the proportion across all students of 76%, which includes those from the most advantaged backgrounds.

How many RO students entered graduate level employment or further study after higher education?

The proportion of RO students entering graduate-level employment or further study is very close to the average across all graduates from all backgrounds, although a lower proportion enter graduate-level employment, and a higher proportion enter further study.



