



Submission

Realising Opportunities is an outreach project involving 12 leading research-intensive universities committed to increasing the recruitment of bright students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Summer schools, academic tutors, online study skills classes and e-mentoring by undergraduates were used to encourage teenagers classed among the “most able, least likely” to apply to top universities.

Based at Newcastle University, the scheme has targeted more than 500 Year 12 and Year 13 students from educationally and socially disadvantaged backgrounds since it started in September 2009. It creates a bespoke support package for each student to help them when applying to university.

Staff and students from all 12 institutions – Birmingham, Bristol, Essex, Exeter, Leeds, Leicester, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle, Warwick, York and King’s College London – engaged prospective students during the application process for entry in autumn 2011.

The project’s e-monitoring site was visited 12,000 times for an average of 30 minutes per session between May 2010 and May 2011. About 95% of participating Year 13 students applied for entry in 2011 and 58% of those applications were made to research-intensive universities.

The project was funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England and the 12 institutions in the partnership have agreed to continue it beyond the pilot phase.

John Widdowson, principal and chief executive of New College Durham and a member of the judging panel, said: “This is an innovative national partnership showing evidence of real impact and great potential.

“The use of e-mentoring by current students provides a real link with prospective students and has resulted in increased application rates to targeted courses. The obvious success of the project for all concerned indicates that the partnership will be developed in the future.”