



# LEAPS

Promoting access to higher education  
since 1996



## LEAPS Annual Report 2024-2025

# Our Partners

LEAPS is a partnership of the following organisations:



LEAPS is a successful and unique widening participation programme, funded by its higher education institution and local council partners to increase progression to higher education. We work across South East Scotland and the Forth Valley region.

LEAPS delivers the Scottish Funding Council's Schools for Higher Education Programme (SHEP) in South East Scotland and the Forth Valley region, in partnership with the National Schools Programme, to support Senior Phase pupils in Scotland from backgrounds of socioeconomic disadvantage and underrepresented groups to access higher education at university. LEAPS is also supported by Skills Development Scotland.

LEAPS is thankful for the support we receive from many organisations through our wider partnership work.

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# Foreword

In my first year as Director, I welcome you to the 2024-25 LEAPS annual report, highlighting our team's achievements and the successes of the young people we've supported across South East Scotland and the Forth Valley region. The report includes information on activities undertaken in 2024-25 and young people's positive destinations from our 2023-24 S6 cohort. We will report on the destinations of this year's cohort in a future report, when we receive the full data set.

There was increased engagement with the young people we support across the different year groups, and an increase in those progressing on to higher education study (based on known destinations).

Alongside the traditional in-school delivery and campus visits, the LEAPS Transitions Course in 2024-25 was the most successful year to date, with 91 young people completing the course from 32 schools.

We are delighted to include a selection of insights from young people taken from our evaluation work, which has been developed across all delivery streams this year. This has built on the Theory of Change from last year and gives greater insight into impact and learning for continuous improvement.

The Scottish Funding Council released the National Schools Programme Review Final Report in December 2024, which set out 15 recommendations. These covered a range of areas, from a single student identifier to creating a monitoring and evaluation framework to promoting the outcomes and impact of the National Schools Programme (NSP) widely through an annual report or similar. Work has commenced on implementing the 15 recommendations and LEAPS, along with NSP partners, have a key role to play in the implementation to ensure the best outcomes for young people.

It has been another year of change, with an additional East Lothian school becoming part of the LEAPS cohort. We also saw Kirsty Wadsley, former Director, leave LEAPS in January 2025. The LEAPS team would like to thank Kirsty for all her support and everything she achieved during her time at LEAPS. We also gained a new Vice Chair, who will move into the position of Chair during the 2025-26 academic year.

I hope you enjoy reading our annual report as much as we have enjoyed writing it, recalling the year with its challenges and successes and young people's achievements. We want to thank all our partners for their support over the year. We know that we would not be able to widen access for as many young people across South East Scotland and the Forth Valley without their support, and we truly appreciate the in-kind and financial support we receive. The LEAPS Management Group and I would also like to thank the LEAPS team for their hard work and dedication. Their passion shines through in their work and is evidenced throughout this report.

**Allison Calder, Director, LEAPS**

## Aims

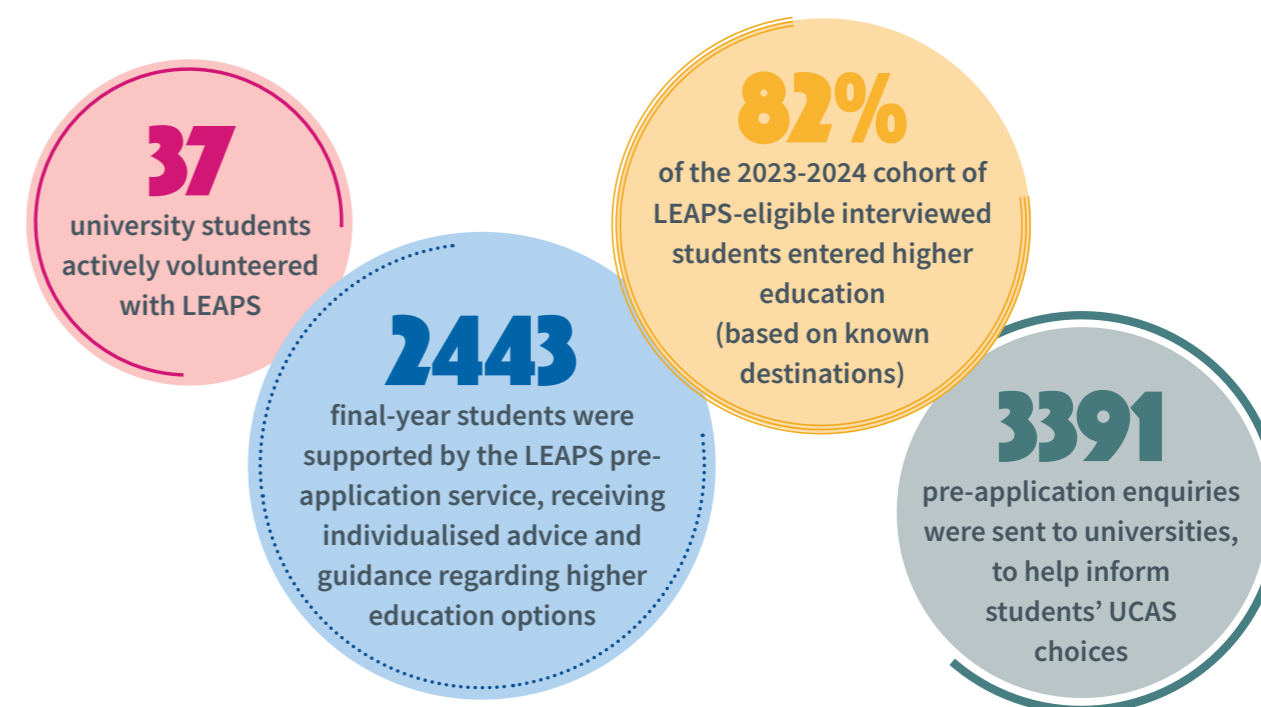
LEAPS is a unique partnership committed to widening access to higher education. We are dedicated to supporting the young people we work with.

Our aims are to raise the expectation of attainment in academic study, to encourage the view that access to higher education is realistic and achievable, and to support transitions into higher education.

## Objectives

- To provide young people, and their parents, carers and guardians, with current, impartial and realistic information, advice and guidance relating to higher education in universities and colleges.
- To work in partnership with schools to identify LEAPS-eligible students and ensure they take part in LEAPS activities, helping to create a strong culture of progression to higher education within the schools in which we work.
- To support secondary school teaching staff by providing impartial information, advice and guidance relating to higher education admissions and widening access policy.
- To liaise with admissions and recruitment staff within higher education institutions to deliver LEAPS activities and to discuss opportunities and admissions on behalf of the young people we work with.
- To enhance the expectation of success in academic study and prepare students for higher education by promoting a positive attitude to learning via LEAPS activities.
- To provide LEAPS higher education institution partners with data relating to students who enter their institutions to enable monitoring of progression.

## Our Year in Numbers



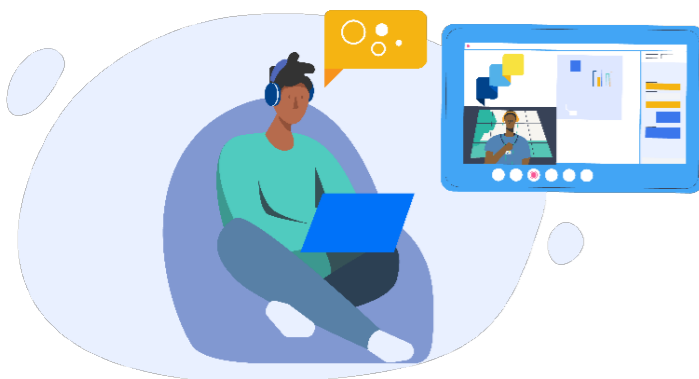
# LEAPS Eligibility and Schools

LEAPS was created with the aim of encouraging and advising students who are traditionally underrepresented in higher education.

The LEAPS programme covers all secondary schools across eight local authorities in South East Scotland and the Forth Valley region (City of Edinburgh, Clackmannanshire, East Lothian, Falkirk, Midlothian, Scottish Borders, Stirling and West Lothian). Across 2024 to 2025, LEAPS worked in 74 secondary schools across this area with one new school onboarded.

All schools LEAPS works with receive elements of the Schools for Higher Education Programme (SHEP). SHEP is part of the Scottish Funding Council's National Schools Programme (NSP), which LEAPS delivers in the area. The NSP aims to support Senior Phase pupils in Scotland from backgrounds of socioeconomic disadvantage and from underrepresented groups to access higher education in university.

For this reporting period LEAPS schools were divided into Group 1+ schools, Group 1 schools, and Group 2 schools. The level of support which LEAPS provides to each school is typically determined by the school's rates of progression to higher education. The inclusion of schools in each group is reviewed on a regular basis.



## LEAPS Group 1+ Schools

Schools in Group 1+ have rates of progression to higher education that are some way below the national average. For this reason, students in these schools are normally entitled to participate in all aspects of the LEAPS programme, from S3 to S6.

1. Castlebrae Community Campus
2. Craigroyston Community High School
3. Forrester High School
4. Gracemount High School
5. Newbattle High School
6. Tynecastle High School
7. Wester Hailes High School

## LEAPS Group 1 Schools

Schools in Group 1 have rates of progression to higher education that are below the national average. For this reason, students in these schools are normally entitled to participate in all aspects of the LEAPS programme, from S4 to S6.

1. Alloa Academy
2. Bannockburn High School
3. Drummond Community High School
4. Eyemouth High School
5. Hawick High School
6. Liberton High School
7. Lornshill Academy
8. Preston Lodge High School
9. Ross High School

## LEAPS Group 2 Schools

Schools in Group 2 typically have a more established tradition of students progressing to higher education. Students in these schools who match any of the LEAPS eligibility criteria (see [www.leapsonline.org](http://www.leapsonline.org) for details) are entitled to individualised support during S5 and S6, recognising that although the school might have an established rate of progression to higher education there are still students within the school who are underrepresented in higher education.

1. Alva Academy
2. Armadale Academy
3. Balerno Community High School
4. Balfron High School
5. Bathgate Academy
6. Beeslack Community High School
7. Berwickshire High School
8. Bo'ness Academy
9. Boroughmuir High School
10. Braes High School
11. Broughton High School
12. Broxburn Academy
13. Craigmount High School
14. Currie Community High School
15. Dalkeith High School
16. Deans Community High School
17. Denny High School
18. Dunbar Grammar School
19. Dunblane High School
20. Earlston High School
21. Falkirk High School
22. Firrhill High School
23. Galashiels Academy
24. Graeme High School
25. Grangemouth High School
26. Holy Rood RC High School
27. Inveralmond Community High School
28. James Gillespie's High School
29. James Young High School
30. Jedburgh Grammar Campus
31. Kelso High School
32. Knox Academy
33. Larbert High School
34. Lasswade High School
35. Leith Academy
36. Linlithgow Academy
37. McLaren High School
38. Musselburgh Grammar School
39. North Berwick High School
40. Peebles High School
41. Penicuik High School
42. Portobello High School
43. Queensferry High School
44. Rosehill High School\*
45. Royal High School
46. Selkirk High School
47. St Augustine's RC High School
48. St David's RC High School
49. St Kentigern's Academy
50. St Margaret's Academy
51. St Modan's High School
52. St Mungo's High School
53. St Thomas of Aquin's RC High School
54. Stirling High School
55. Trinity Academy
56. Wallace High School
57. West Calder High School
58. Whitburn Academy

\* LEAPS began working with Rosehill High School in 2024-2025.



# University Student Volunteers

Many of the events we deliver are designed around the input of current university students who choose to volunteer with LEAPS. This includes school-based workshops, campus visits, and events held at universities in and around Edinburgh.

Our university student volunteers play a vital role in our programme. They come from across our partner higher education institutions and study a variety of academic disciplines, offering a range of student experiences to draw upon. They share direct, recent higher education experience including navigating applications, making choices, and – crucially – making that transition from school to university or college.

In 2024-2025, 37 university students actively volunteered with LEAPS. They supported 39 LEAPS events and made a total of 110 contributions to our 2024-2025 programme of activity and events.



**'My school did not have LEAPS during my S3 to S6 years and, looking back, not only I but other classmates would have benefited from simply being able to access information the programme provides or having someone share their journey and story. Thanks to the [LEAPS] programme, students are able to understand the higher education system and expectations, as well as receiving motivation and reassurance that if they want to step into higher education, they can.'**

LEAPS Volunteer

# LEAPS 2024-2025 Programme of Activity: S3

**LEAPS delivers a range of activities from S3 through to S6.**

The group of schools offered each LEAPS activity is indicated on the following pages using the key:

**G1+** = Group 1+ Schools **G1** = Group 1 Schools

**G2** = Group 2 Schools

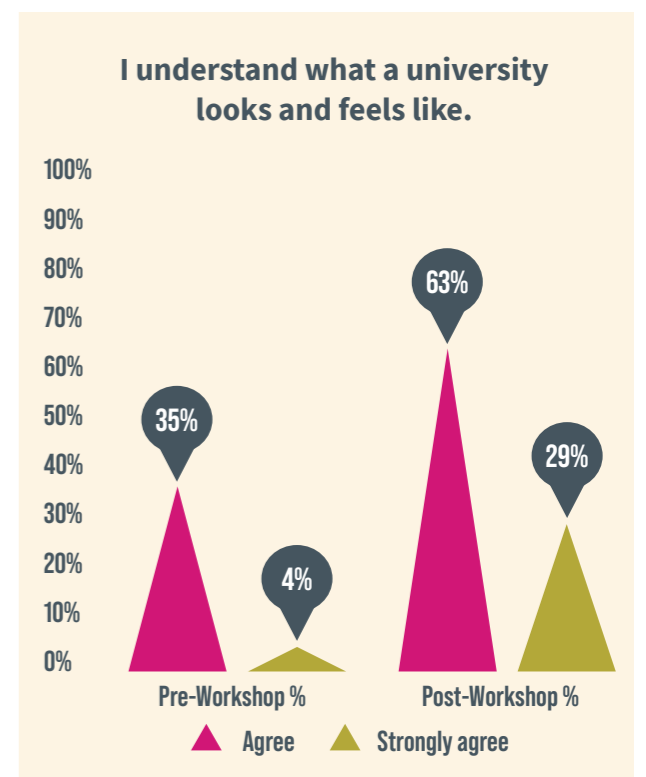
**The activity for S3 students is designed to support aspirations, providing an early introduction to higher education and student life.**

## S3 On Campus Workshop G1+ (March)

This workshop gives S3 students an early introduction to university life by providing an opportunity to visit a LEAPS partner university campus. Students work in small groups alongside a university student volunteer, touring the campus, hearing more about their experiences of university life, and gathering photos and information they can use to create a short video presentation to show to the wider group. A range of topics are covered as part of the workshop, including subjects and courses, student accommodation, sports clubs and societies, student unions, the library and independent study. S3 workshops are delivered to school students, by LEAPS and partner university staff and student volunteers, across one morning.

**7 workshops supported 221 students**

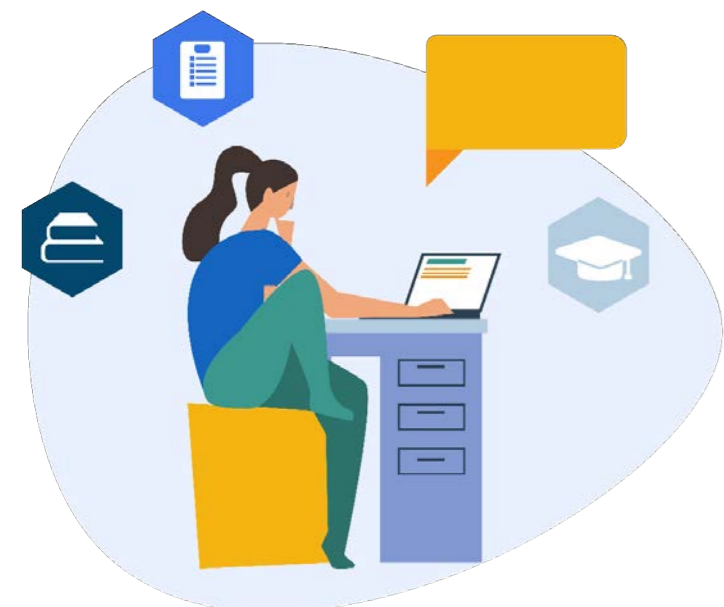
## Impact Evaluation Findings\*



What was one thing you learnt from today's visit to the university?



\* S3 Impact Evaluation Report available on request.



# LEAPS 2024-2025 Programme of Activity: S4

## S4 Workshop G1+ G1 (November - February)

This school-based workshop is delivered as a quiz with three rounds, each with a different theme and question format. S4 students are encouraged to work with others to reflect on and discuss answers to questions about their higher education knowledge, the range of available courses and where these can lead in future, and the differences between learning and teaching at school and at university. LEAPS-branded pencils are awarded to the winning group in each session. S4 workshops are delivered to school students, by LEAPS staff, in a single school period.

**28 workshops supported 695 students**

## S4 Workshop in a Box G2 (August - April)

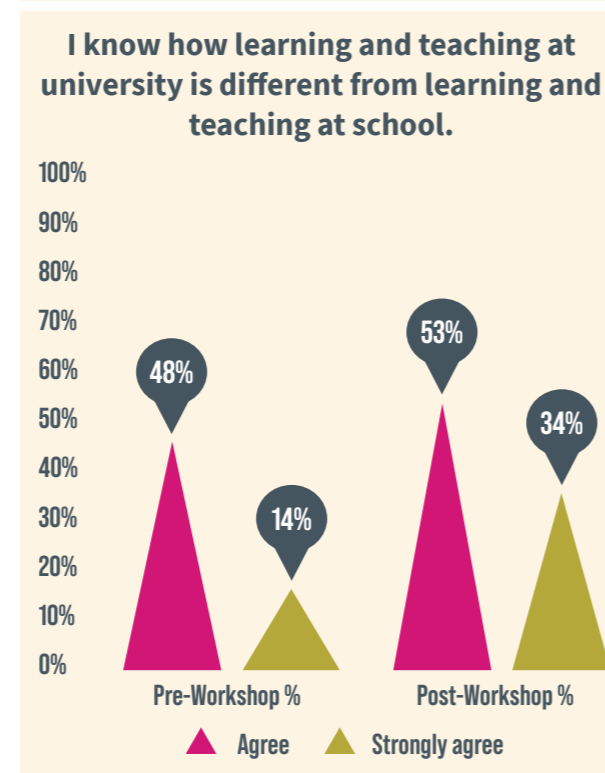
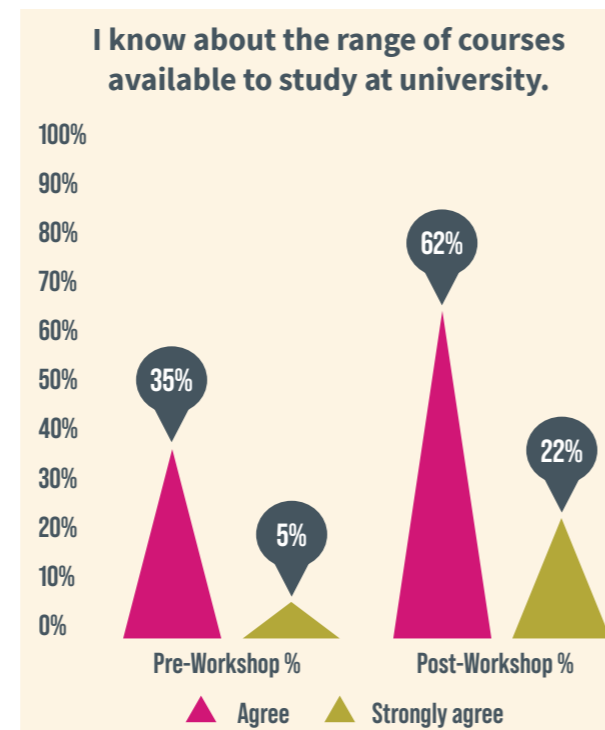
The LEAPS S4 Workshop in a Box was piloted as an optional activity for Group 2 schools in this school year. As with the school-based S4 workshop, it follows an interactive quiz-based format and is designed to encourage S4 students to reflect on their higher education knowledge, the range of available courses and where these can lead in future, and the differences between learning and teaching at school and at university. The workshop is teacher-led. LEAPS produces and shares materials with schools including answer sheets, workshop leader resources to support delivery, and prizes for students.

**13 schools delivered this teacher-led activity**

We estimate more than 1500 students were supported through the workshop-in-a-box activity.

The activities for S4 students are designed to further support aspirations and to encourage students to consider the range of opportunities at university and college.

### Impact Evaluation Findings\*



\* S4 Impact Evaluation Reports available on request.

# LEAPS 2024-2025 Programme of Activity: S5

## S5 Workshop G1+ G1 (November - December)

This workshop aims to increase S5 students' understanding of everyday student life and of the different learning environments they might expect when moving on to higher education. Students work through a timetabling activity with a university student volunteer, who shares their own experiences and encourages their group to consider what both the opportunities and responsibilities of university life might look like for them. Students are also given further information about their S5 Guidance Interview and advice on how best to prepare for this. S5 workshops are delivered to school students, by LEAPS staff and student volunteers, in a single school period.

**29 workshops supported 708 students**

## S5 Presentation G2 (November - March)

The S5 'Planning for Your Next Steps' presentation is designed to introduce LEAPS to S5 students in our Group 2 schools, to increase their awareness of different post-school routes, and to underline the importance of research and making informed and proactive choices throughout S5 and S6. Students also learn more about the LEAPS Transitions Course and the opportunities that this S6 timetable option can offer them. The session signposts students to the LEAPS online blog, to the S5 Course Checker resource and to their own guidance teachers in school, should they believe themselves to be LEAPS eligible. S5 presentations are delivered to full S5 cohorts, by LEAPS staff, in a single school period.

**64 presentations supported 6662 students**

The S5 activities are designed to encourage students to recognise how valuable S5 is in terms of entry to college and university, with a particular focus on providing guidance around course choices and entry requirements. Advice is also provided via the LEAPS online blog.

## S5 Guidance Interviews G1+ G1 (January - March)

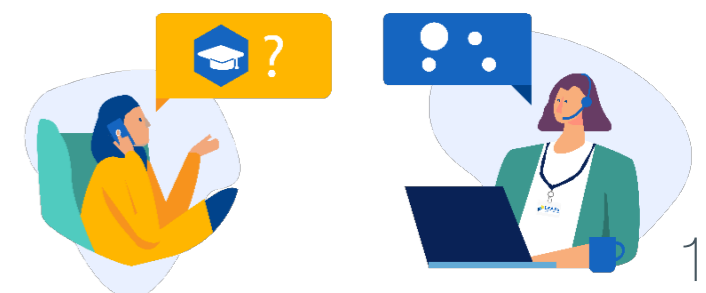
S5 Students in our Group 1+ and Group 1 schools are invited to this one-to-one interview with a LEAPS advisor. The aim is to support students to explore – and make informed decisions around – their higher education options. Students are offered tailored information, advice, and guidance around college and university entry requirements, any key S6 subject choices required to support their future study plans, and other ways in which they can make a strong application to higher education such as work experience.

**691 interviews undertaken**

## S5 Course Checker G2 (January - March)

S5 Students in our Group 2 schools are invited to complete our optional online S5 Course Checker resource. As with the S5 Guidance Interview, the aim is to support students to explore – and make informed decisions around – their higher education study options. Students provide information about their school qualifications (achieved and anticipated) and any higher education study and career plans they are considering. They then receive a tailored reply from a LEAPS advisor with information, advice and guidance around college and university entry requirements, any key S6 subject choices required to support their future study plans, and other ways in which they can make a strong application to higher education such as work experience.

**85 tailored responses sent to students**



**S5 Parents' & Carers' Information Resource G1+ G1 G2 (March)**

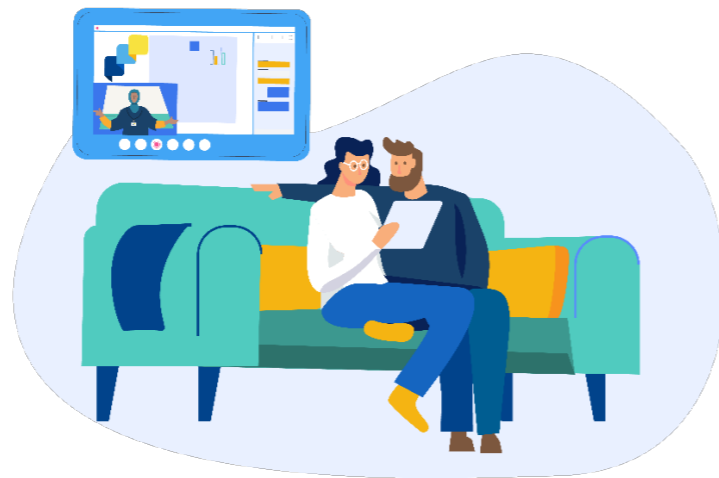
This information session is for parents and carers of S5 students. It is available online and can be accessed at any time. The aim is to support parents and carers as their young person navigates future study options. Topics covered include LEAPS eligibility criteria, LEAPS support, advice on researching higher education course options, the higher education application process, student funding, and how to contact colleges and universities with application queries.

**Resource circulated to all LEAPS schools**

**LEAPS Transitions Course Promo Presentation G1+ G1 (January - March)**

This short presentation is offered to schools that are interested in highlighting the LEAPS Transitions Course as a possible S6 timetable option to their LEAPS-eligible students. It outlines what the Course is, who can take it, the academic skills students will learn, how it is taught and assessed, and how universities consider it for admissions purposes.

**10 presentations supported 464 students**



**'I just feel that I have to say that the LEAPS advisor was so incredibly helpful and that, without them, I would have struggled. Thank you!'**

**LEAPS Student following S6 Pre-application interview**



# LEAPS 2024-2025 Programme of Activity: S6

The S6 activities are designed to provide further support to students as they apply to higher education, to ensure an effective transition to – and success in – their future studies. Advice is also provided via the LEAPS online blog.

**S6 Presentation G1+ G1 G2 (August)**

This digital presentation reminds S6 students who the LEAPS team is, outlines LEAPS eligibility criteria, and highlights the support available to LEAPS-eligible students as they apply to higher education study.

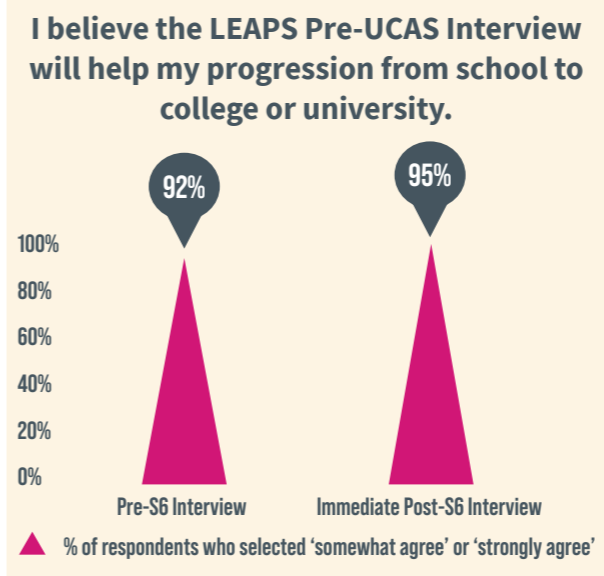
**Digital presentation circulated to all LEAPS schools**

**S6 Pre-application Interview G1+ G1 G2 (August - November)**

All final-year LEAPS-eligible students are invited to this one-to-one interview with a LEAPS advisor. The aim is to support students as they apply to higher education. Tailored and impartial information, advice, and guidance is provided around course choices, entry requirements, and experience and achievements to help students make informed and strategic higher education applications. LEAPS eligibility is also checked and confirmed at this stage so that it can be highlighted to universities at the point of applying to higher education and considered for contextual admissions.

**2443 final-year students were supported by the LEAPS pre-application service**

**Impact Evaluation Findings\***



**S6 Personal Statement Resource G1+ G1 G2 (August - November)**

This online resource supports students with their UCAS personal statement. It provides guidance on how to start writing a personal statement, as well as how to edit and refine it. It includes plenty of practical tips, including advice from Fellows of the Royal Literary Fund.

**Digital resource circulated to all LEAPS schools**

**S6 Workshop G1+ G1 (January - March)**

The LEAPS S6 workshop aims to support S6 students with the transition from school into higher education. It covers UCAS responses, the decision-making process, back-up planning and next steps. Students are encouraged to think about their own journey and are given a checklist of actionable tasks to work through in the following months. S6 workshops are delivered to school students, by LEAPS staff and student volunteers, in a single school period.

**17 workshops supported 382 students**

**S6 Post-application Resource G1+ G1 G2 (January)**

This online resource guides students through the key steps – and considerations – required in the UCAS cycle after they have submitted an application. It covers how to make choices, how to reply to offers, the importance of post-application events, college pathways and more.

**Digital resource circulated to all LEAPS schools**

\*Full S6 Pre-application Interview Impact Evaluation Report available from LEAPS on request.

# LEAPS Additional Activities

## LEAPS Results Day Helpline G1+ G1 G2 (August)

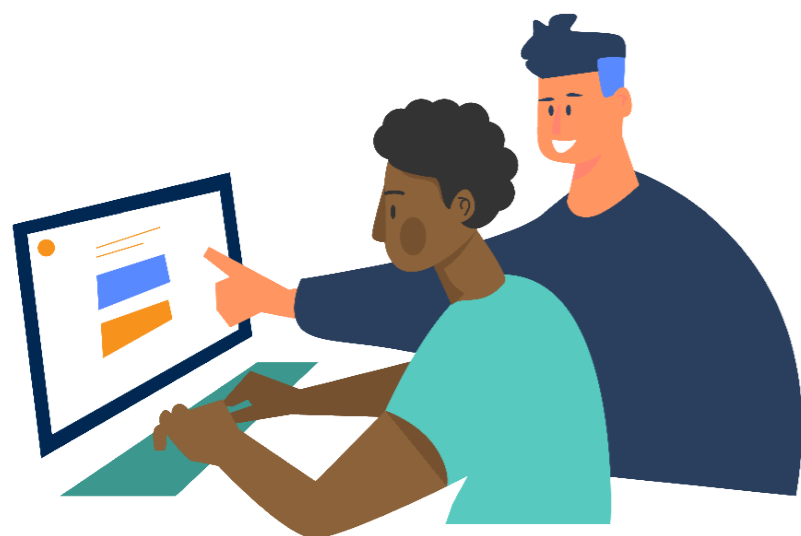
The LEAPS Results Day Helpline supports students as they receive their exam results on SQA Results Day. Advice is tailored to each individual student's circumstances, but typically includes looking at courses available in clearing, college options, and (for those staying on at school) any key subjects to be studied in S6.

**26 students were supported**

## School Parents' Evenings G1+ G1 G2

The LEAPS team attend parents' evenings in schools throughout the year, raising awareness of the impartial support offered to LEAPS-eligible students via the LEAPS programme.

**15 events supported 610 attendees**



**'I wanted to take a moment to express my huge appreciation for the hard work, dedication, and commitment you have shown in supporting our pupils throughout their journey at Falkirk High School and beyond. Your invaluable contributions have played a key role in helping our young people transition into positive post-school destinations.'**

**LEAPS Link Teacher**

# LEAPS Transitions Course



The LEAPS Transitions Course is a credit-rated S6 timetable option for LEAPS-eligible students with the aim of supporting students to make a positive transition from school to university. The Course comprises a mixture of online and in-person sessions which take place on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons from August to March. This programme of activity ensures sustained engagement with the cohort and allows students to experience university learning environments both online and on a university campus.

The focus of the Course is on developing successful academic practice – in other words, how to be successful at university – and students have the chance to work with other students and academics and lecturers from a broad range of subject areas. Semester one focuses on developing university-level academic skills and a writing assessment. Topics covered include academic writing, critical thinking, referencing and plagiarism, discussion skills, feedback and generative AI and university study. Semester two has a lecture series, a group poster assessment and a reflective zine.

The Course is led and taught by the LEAPS teaching team, and supported by academics, academic developers and librarians from our partner and non-partner universities across Scotland, as well as writing Fellows from the Royal Literary Fund, who contribute to the advisory group, lecture series, marking and moderation processes, and students' wider academic development. Our current External Examiner is based at the University of Glasgow. In 2024-2025, LEAPS-eligible students from all LEAPS schools were offered the chance to engage with the Course.

The Course has been credit-rated by the Centre for Open Learning at the University of Edinburgh and is offered as a 20 credit SCQF Level 7 course. It is also available on Insight, the online benchmarking tool used by secondary schools and local authorities in Scotland. Many universities in Scotland consider the LEAPS Transitions Course for university admissions purposes, and the Course provides students with an opportunity to demonstrate to university admissions staff that they are prepared for degree-level work.

**91 students completed the LEAPS Transitions Course**

**More than 500 sessions were delivered during the Course**

**'I took part in regular lectures and tutorials, which were split between being online and in person at a university campus in Edinburgh, and which I found very insightful and exciting ... I was also able to feel like a real student by getting to grips with a university setting, which makes the idea of starting university for real feel a little less daunting ... The course gave me the opportunity to meet new people from across the country, learn new skills, and develop more faith in my own abilities going into university.'**

**Former LEAPS Transitions Course Student**

## LEAPS Student Case Study

**Caley, LEAPS student from Hawick High School, currently studying at the University of Edinburgh**



I first heard about LEAPS and the work they do to support students into higher education when I was in S5. In S6, my whole year group were given the opportunity to attend a one-to-one pre-UCAS interview with a LEAPS advisor. During my meeting the advisor helped me talk through some initial ideas around my higher education options, relating courses to my own school subjects and grades. The support and information I received during my meeting definitely guided me towards making my final decision and choosing my university course.

Towards the end of S5, we received an assembly which introduced us to the LEAPS Transitions Course. Interested by the short film and presentation, I decided to take the course as part of my S6 timetable.

I took part in regular lectures and tutorials, which were split between being online and in person at a university campus in Edinburgh, and which I found very insightful and exciting. LEAPS booked and paid for all of the train tickets, which made the trips so much easier. When I first started the course, I had not decided where I was going to go to university and I ended up choosing the University of Edinburgh. I believe that this was partly because I was able to have the opportunity to explore the campus, as well as parts of the city I had never seen, on a regular basis through the LEAPS course and I really liked it. I was also able to feel like a real student by getting to grips with a university setting, which made the idea of starting university for real feel a little less daunting.

Throughout the course, we were taught about a range of academic skills ranging from academic writing to data skills. We were introduced to the types of assessment we might come across, such as group work and academic posters. I believe that learning so many of the academic skills required and being exposed to the way that learning is structured at university has given me the ability to go into my course feeling confident with an idea of what to expect as well as what is expected of me.

As well as learning about the academic side of university, LEAPS provided student life sessions and resources for support and wellbeing during university. They even supported us through writing our personal statements which was very useful. All of the LEAPS staff members were really kind and supportive throughout the course and no question or concern was too silly or small. I feel more comfortable going into university knowing that the LEAPS staff are only an email away if I ever need their guidance.

I would urge anybody going into S6 and thinking about going to university to take the LEAPS Transitions Course. The course gave me the opportunity to meet new people from across the country, learn new skills, and develop more faith in my own abilities going into university.

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## LEAPS Link Teacher Case Study

**Martin, LEAPS Link Teacher at Firrhill High School**



I have been actively involved with LEAPS since taking over the remit for our Senior Pupils at Firrhill High School in 2018 – quite a while now! At Firrhill we have a significant number of young people who apply for university each year and due to having such a diverse catchment area, around a third of these pupils each year are eligible for LEAPS support.

Every year I am impressed with the co-ordination, support and guidance that the LEAPS team gives our young people, starting with that preliminary conversation and presentation in S5, through to support on SQA Results Day after S6 is finished. The team give up a significant amount of time every September to one-to-one conversations, always liaise with myself if there is a potential issue or further conversation to have, and are always available on the phone or via e-mail when I have one of my (numerous) questions.

LEAPS have also supported our growing number of early UCAS deadline applicants, and the priority advice they give them at the start of the academic year is invaluable. This year, two of our cohort are going into Gateway to Medicine courses, and this is due to the advice that the LEAPS team gave them.

This year we also piloted a new 'S4 Workshop in a Box' lesson developed by LEAPS, which was targeted at our S4 pupils in terms of getting them to start to think earlier about plans and what they might like to do after school. Feedback from both teaching staff and pupils was overwhelmingly positive and we have now added the LEAPS lesson plan into our S4 curriculum going forward. Pupils also loved the basil seed pencils provided by LEAPS as prizes!

Finally, as the lead for the UCAS process at Firrhill, the biennial LEAPS conference is one of the most invaluable sessions of the year for myself. Not only are the sessions always informative, filled with useful information and updates, but it provides an excellent opportunity to meet other professionals with a similar remit and to share good practice. LEAPS remains an integral part of our Senior Phase support and it is safe to say that it has enabled a number of our pupils over the year to progress to their desired next stage of education. I look forward to working with them for a number of years to come.

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## Former LEAPS Student Case Study

Patryk, Former LEAPS student at Galashiels Academy, currently studying at Borders College



I found out about LEAPS during the end of S5, going into S6, as I had been speaking to my pastoral teacher at Galashiels Academy about subjects that interested me but also the uncertainty of going to university and having the skills needed to attend.

When I was in S6 I took the LEAPS Transitions Course as part of my S6 timetable. The earliest memory I have of LEAPS was the train ride going up to Edinburgh for the Course with my fellow classmates, who I probably wouldn't have spoken to otherwise. I remember the confusion of struggling to actually find the building we were heading to, which at the time was quite funny. Once at the location I remember being put in a classroom full of people I'd never met before, which obviously was a little bit anxiety inducing. However, as the class went on, I started to feel more welcome and more included. I particularly remember having to choose a card that had a certain value and re-enter the class based on the value of the card. Being involved in this made me feel even more comfortable speaking to the people in my class as I started to realise that they were in the same situation as me. All of the staff and tutors on the Course were fantastic in their help and support for students attending, whether that was an issue with the Course, struggling with deadlines, or even applications for university.

The LEAPS Transitions Course helped me transition from school to higher education in a number of ways. The two that come to mind are definitely Harvard style referencing and getting used to group projects. With the Harvard style referencing, I wasn't sure what the importance of it was at first, and it was definitely confusing, but the more I learnt about it the more comfortable I was using it. It didn't quite hit me until near the end of my college course how important Harvard style referencing is and how much it is used. It's quite an important skill, because it shows that you can do research and do it in a way that anyone reading what you've created can verify the sources you've used.

With the group project, I didn't realise until much later how applicable these skills are to everyday life and education. Especially when you have to get used to working with people you've never met and work together productively.

Being allowed the choice to select what workshops I wanted to go to at certain points in the LEAPS Transitions Course helped boost my confidence, as I was being allowed to take control of my own learning. I selected the note-taking workshop, where we were taught different methods of how to note take. The one that stuck the most with me was the Cornell method. I've used it ever since, and it has improved my memory and note-taking skills. I believed that the class was presented very well, especially with students being given the freedom to select their own method to focus on. I enjoyed learning academic skills and feeling more independent by taking the LEAPS Transitions Course.

After school I decided to go to college, and then apply to university from there. LEAPS introduced me to UCAS and how the applications work, which gave me a lot of things to think about as I realised I could potentially make my way to university via college. LEAPS has awakened a large sense of confidence within me which has helped me with my day-to-day life, and helped me to understand that there's always a path to whatever goals I may have. Whether it's a university course or a particular job, LEAPS has helped me discover that I have a lot of different paths to choose from.



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## Former LEAPS Student Case Study

**Debbie, Former LEAPS student at Wester Hailes Education Centre, currently studying at the University of Edinburgh**



I was looking up the LEAPS programme for a presentation I was working on for one of my university courses when I was inspired to get in touch with LEAPS to say thank you.

I went to (what was then called) Wester Hailes Education Centre between 2011 and 2014, where I took part in the LEAPS programme and another programme called Fast Forward. Though I had to leave high school when I was 16, I never lost sight of my goal to further my education. Now that I am studying at university, I wanted to say how grateful I am for programmes such as LEAPS which really helped to motivate me, kept me going, and supported my progress.

I left school early in fifth year so a lot of the support I received took place leading up to fifth year, including a university residential programme. I remember people from LEAPS talking with us about where we wanted to go to study and showing us all the potential courses and careers that were available. I was able to identify those that most interested me, and I was given an idea of the paths I could take. This made the idea of furthering my education less about being 'good enough', and more about doing something I enjoyed. This was one of the key experiences that emphasised the belief that this was attainable for me.

This belief was an important part of my journey. The encouragement, support, and resources I received allowed me to decide to see how far I could go. Even if I initially had low expectations, I learned that by taking each progressive year at a time I would move further than I believed possible. This decision to aim high, and to see how far it takes me, continues to drive me forward.

The things that stopped me from staying on at school and prevented me from achieving my Highers there had nothing to do with the school, however, it was the school and programmes such as LEAPS which provided me with a plan that I was able to return to. This, along with widening participation policy and contextual admissions, enabled me to reach the point I am at today.

If I was to summarise my experience, I would say that the LEAPS programme and others like it, as well as the school staff, helped me to focus on aiming high and believing in my potential rather than lowering my expectations because of where I come from. It helped me tailor my education to what I want to do, not what was expected of me, so that I was learning about things that were enjoyable and interesting to me and which made me curious and passionate. So, even when I was out of education, when I was in a position that I could return it was the most natural thing for me to do so. It gave me the support, resources, and motivation to overcome the challenges that came my way.

I hope that more programmes like LEAPS continue in the future, and more students like me receive the resources, support, and motivation to keep aiming high and seeing how far they can go.

Now that I am studying at university, I wanted to say how grateful I am for programmes such as LEAPS which really helped to motivate me, kept me going, and supported my progress.

## Former LEAPS Student Case Study

**Niall, Former LEAPS student at St Kentigern's Academy, Postdoctoral Researcher at the University of Edinburgh**



I first became aware of LEAPS towards the end of secondary school where I had an interview with someone from the LEAPS team about my university options and attended the LEAPS Summer School as it was organised then. This was very useful experience, as my parents had not been to university so it was a good first step to get an idea of what university would be like and helped me to have an idea of what to expect before my first day.

At the time, I was not very sure what I wanted to study at university, or do afterwards. I had always liked science and maths, so chose to study Theoretical Physics at university as it seemed like a good blend of the subjects. This experience of undergraduate study opened up a whole range of experiences and opportunities which would not have been possible if I had not gone to university. I also had a part-time job throughout my whole degree, which was completely doable, though I had to make sure to manage my time well and balance it alongside engaging with my studies.

During my degree, I realised that I really enjoyed science and wanted to keep working in research. How to go about doing this was not something I properly understood before going to university, or really until midway through my degree. I decided to apply for PhD places and got advice from my tutors at university on how to do this before then moving to England to do my PhD. Luckily, PhD programmes in the sciences are generally funded through grants so I had an income while doing it, almost as if I had a graduate job.

After my PhD I was still interested in doing scientific research so I moved back to Edinburgh for a job as postdoctoral researcher. Now that I am on the other side of the equation and have knowledge of teaching at a university, I would encourage LEAPS pupils to not be afraid to ask for help and to speak up in classes as your lecturers will really appreciate you getting involved. Also, to use your time at university to engage with and seek out different experiences such as societies or internships. I received a grant by my university department to do a summer research project, for example.

My career has taken routes I could not have anticipated when I was a LEAPS pupil. I switched topic from Theoretical Physics, to a PhD in Applied Maths, to my current research which is in Astrobiology. I'm from a small town in West Lothian and my parents did not go to university, but I am now a published author and have spoken at international conferences. Having gone from LEAPS school pupil, with limited understanding of university, to staff member at the university doing research, I would say university can afford you great opportunities and things may go in directions that you did not even know existed.

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# Destinations of LEAPS-eligible Interviewed Students

We track the destinations of LEAPS-eligible students who receive a pre-application interview and are supported by LEAPS. The initial destination of the 2023-2024 cohort is shown in the following tables, firstly by council and secondly by higher education institution. Initial destination data for the 2024-2025 cohort will follow in a future report.

**Table 1: Total destinations by local authority**

Destinations of LEAPS Students	City of Edinburgh	Clackmannanshire	East Lothian	Falkirk	Mid-lothian	Scottish Borders	Stirling	West Lothian	Total 2024	Total 2023	Total 2022
University	627 74%	88 75%	179 80%	162 81%	123 67%	127 61%	93 71%	262 72%	1661 73%	1415 69%	1403 70%
College - HNC/HND	65 8%	11 9%	16 7%	14 7%	19 10%	19 9%	19 15%	35 10%	198 9%	251 12%	242 12%
College - other courses	53 6%	* *	* *	7 3%	10 5%	23 11%	* *	28 8%	130 6%	142 7%	125 6%
Employment	66 8%	10 9%	20 9%	16 8%	28 15%	31 15%	13 10%	30 8%	214 9%	175 8%	171 8%
Unemployment	5 1%	* *	* *	* *	* *	0 0%	* *	* *	12 1%	18 1%	11 1%
Other destinations	28 3%	5 4%	* *	* *	* *	7 3%	* *	* *	57 3%	68 3%	61 3%
<b>Total Number of Students - known destinations</b>	<b>844</b>	<b>117</b>	<b>224</b>	<b>201</b>	<b>184</b>	<b>207</b>	<b>131</b>	<b>364</b>	<b>2272</b>	<b>2069</b>	<b>2013</b>

Other destinations shown above from 2024 include voluntary work, training, school pupil and modern apprenticeship.

The percentages in the above table are rounded to the nearest whole number (therefore totals may not equal 100%) and are based on known destination information shown in the table. The destinations of 30 students across the local authorities are unknown (1.3% of the total). This figure was 3.6% in 2023 and 4.55% in 2022. These have been omitted from the table above.

\*Value could provide information on a cohort of less than five or has been suppressed to prevent calculation of data for a small cohort.

**Table 2: University & College Destinations**

Destinations of LEAPS Students	Total 2024	Total 2023	Total 2022
<b>UNIVERSITIES</b>			
University of Edinburgh	260	218	253
Edinburgh Napier University	245	233	225
Heriot-Watt University	226	196	162
University of Stirling	149	133	110
University of Glasgow	148	81	98
University of Strathclyde	103	75	81
Glasgow Caledonian University	103	72	74
Queen Margaret University	100	94	64
University of Aberdeen	80	61	68
University of Dundee	72	66	64
University of St Andrews	36	34	48
Robert Gordon University	26	28	41
Abertay University	26	43	37
SRUC - Higher Education	12	9	6
University of the West of Scotland	10	9	19
Other Universities	65	63	53
<b>UNIVERSITY TOTAL</b>	<b>1661</b>	<b>1415</b>	<b>1403</b>
<b>COLLEGES</b>			
Edinburgh College	175	199	215
West Lothian College	41	61	38
Forth Valley College	32	43	41
City of Glasgow College	31	32	22
Borders College	20	25	15
Other Colleges	29	33	36
<b>COLLEGE TOTAL</b>	<b>328</b>	<b>393</b>	<b>367</b>
<b>OVERALL TOTAL</b>	<b>1989</b>	<b>1808</b>	<b>1770</b>

It should be noted that data in both tables for 2024 is based on the Initial School Leaver Destination Returns (SLDR) provided by Skills Development Scotland (SDS) to LEAPS in July 2025.

The total number of LEAPS students for whom we sought a destination was 2302 in 2024 compared with 2147 in 2023 and 2109 in 2022.

Universities intake returns to the Higher Education Statistics Agency are available from partner universities.



## Conclusion and Future Developments

As another year has ended, and we look to the future, it is important to take time to reflect on the work delivered and the difference it has made. Increasing engagement and positive destinations year on year is becoming more difficult with rising costs, and the team go above and beyond to ensure that young people receive the information, advice, and teaching that they require to transition to higher education.

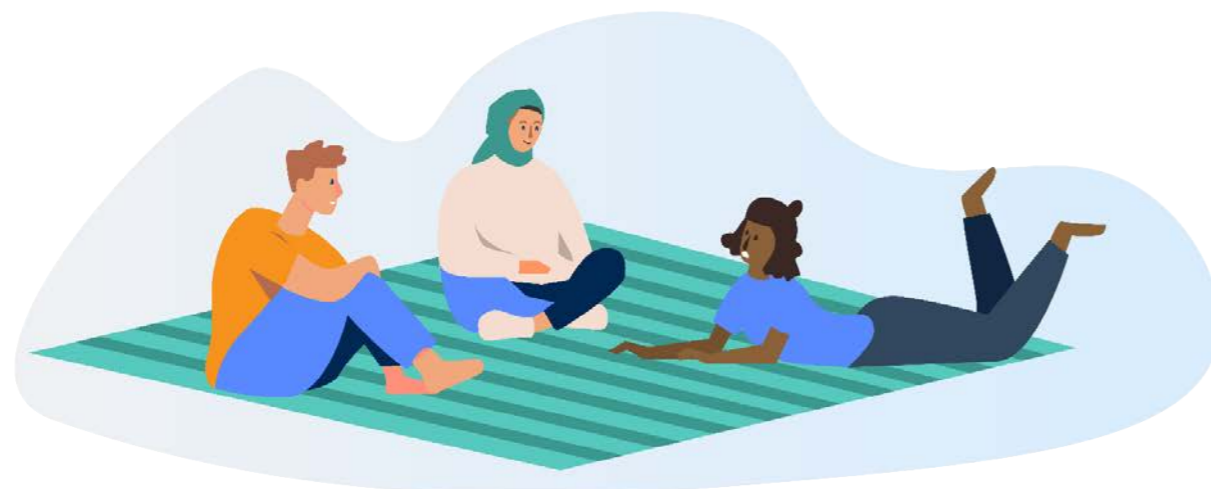
Capturing the achievements that young people make along the way is necessary to demonstrate the impact of what we do, and the team have invested in developing programme evaluations that provide evidence and insight to help us to constantly improve. This enhanced level of evaluation will feed into the implementation of the NSP Review and inform decisions about LEAPS' core delivery over the coming years.

As highlighted in previous years' reports, funding remains a challenge. With flat funding and rising costs our management group has, again, this year decided to use reserves to fund our shortfall in funding. This is not sustainable in the long term, and we are exploring different funding sources as well as changes to delivery models to ensure that LEAPS is sustainable for future generations of young people.

As we move towards the end of 2025, the team are developing our strategy for the next four years, bringing together the voices of young people with those of the team, our evaluation data, the NSP Review recommendations and funding considerations, to set out a plan that will take us through to 2030. We look forward to sharing this with you in the new year.

Thank you for taking the time to read our report and for supporting the work of LEAPS.

**Allison Calder, Director, LEAPS**



LEAPS is a successful and unique widening participation programme, funded by its higher education institution and local council partners to increase progression to higher education. We work across South East Scotland and the Forth Valley region. LEAPS delivers the Scottish Funding Council's Schools for Higher Education Programme (SHEP) in South East Scotland and the Forth Valley region, in partnership with the National Schools Programme, to support Senior Phase pupils in Scotland from backgrounds of socioeconomic disadvantage and underrepresented groups to access higher education at university. LEAPS is also supported by Skills Development Scotland. LEAPS is thankful for the support we receive from many organisations through our wider partnership work.



## PROMOTING ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION SINCE 1996

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