



LEAPS Pre UCAS Interviews Evaluation

Host Institution(s)/Partner(s):	LEAPS
Contributing Author(s):	Jenny Edwards
Keyword(s):	Widening participation, widening access, higher education, school, university, college, interview, information, advice, guidance

Introduction

LEAPS is a widening participation programme that supports [LEAPS-eligible](#) students across the Borders, Edinburgh, Forth Valley, and the Lothians who are traditionally underrepresented in higher education to access and prepare for higher education study.

LEAPS is a partnership organisation, funded by its higher education institution and local council partners to increase progression to higher education. LEAPS is also supported by Skills Development Scotland and delivers the Scottish Funding Council's Schools for Higher Education Programme in South East Scotland, in partnership with the National Schools Programme. Find out more about the LEAPS partnership at www.leapsonline.org.

The project we are discussing in this case study is an evaluation of the [LEAPS Pre-UCAS Interviews](#), in the 2022-2023 academic cycle.

LEAPS Pre-UCAS Interviews

The LEAPS Pre-UCAS Interviews aim to help students to consider their college and university options, in light of their S5 results, S6 curriculum, and post-school goals, working towards making strong and strategic higher education applications (HNC/D and degree level study). The Pre-UCAS Interviews also focus on personal statements and back-up plans, encouraging students to undertake their own research and attend open days.

Students receive an individualised action plan following their interview, and can benefit from [pre-application enquiries](#) to many Scottish universities to support their decision making.

A LEAPS Pre-UCAS Interview is offered to all LEAPS-eligible students, across our 73 schools, who are applying to higher education in the current academic year.

Pre-UCAS Interviews take place between August and November each year, and are delivered primarily in school by a member of the LEAPS core team, external staff employed for the purpose of interviewing, or by LEAPS partner university staff.

In 2022-23, LEAPS delivered 2,147 individual Pre-UCAS Interviews to LEAPS-eligible students.

LEAPS Pre-UCAS Interviews Evaluation Project

LEAPS already annually gather and analyse the below to evaluate the LEAPS Pre-UCAS Interviews:

- As a long-standing aspect of the LEAPS programme, anecdotally we know that the Interviews are a highly valued aspect of our programme having received regular positive feedback from schools, pupils, parents/carers and staff over many years. For example, each

year LEAPS carries out an annual planning meeting with each school, with the value and importance of the Interviews often commented upon by teachers.

- Furthermore, staff carrying out the Interviews complete an evaluative questionnaire each year.
- Lastly, in our LEAPS Annual Reports, we report on the destinations of LEAPS-eligible interviewed students (i.e. those who received a Pre-UCAS Interview). This reporting includes a breakdown of the initial destinations of LEAPS-eligible interviewed students by council area (and by destination: 'university', 'college – HNC/HND', 'College – other courses', 'Employment', 'Unemployment', and 'Other destinations'), and by higher education institution. The data used is based on the School Leaver Destination Returns provided by Skills Development Scotland.

This evaluation project aimed to assess the effectiveness of the Interviews specifically from the perspective of participating pupils. The aim being to add greater context and understanding to the feedback and data we already gather and analyse (as detailed above).

Methodology			
What sort of data did your evaluation involve?			
<input type="checkbox"/> Quantitative <input type="checkbox"/> Qualitative <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Mixed methods			
Which methods did you use?			
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Questionnaires <input type="checkbox"/> Validated Scales <input type="checkbox"/> Interviews <input type="checkbox"/> Focus Group(s) <input type="checkbox"/> Analysis of existing data from your intervention e.g. monitoring data routinely collected <input type="checkbox"/> Analysis of externally sourced data, e.g. bespoke, institutional or publicly available <input type="checkbox"/> Other			
Which software package(s) if any did you use to assist with your evaluation?			
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Excel <input type="checkbox"/> SPSS <input type="checkbox"/> NVivo <input type="checkbox"/> Tableau or PowerBI <input type="checkbox"/> Other			
Did your project involve the usage of any statistical methods?			
<input type="checkbox"/> Distribution	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Mean	<input type="checkbox"/> Median	<input type="checkbox"/> Mode
<input type="checkbox"/> Range	<input type="checkbox"/> Standard Deviation	<input type="checkbox"/> Variance	<input type="checkbox"/> Interquartile Range
<input type="checkbox"/> Paired samples	<input type="checkbox"/> None		
<input type="checkbox"/> Other			
Did you use a theoretical framework for your evaluation?			
<input type="checkbox"/> Theory of Change <input type="checkbox"/> Existing framework <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Theory from literature			
Methodology:			
<p>At the outset of our evaluation, we consulted SCAPP's Widening Participation Evaluation Guide. This was hugely influential on our methodology. The Guide highlighted the RUFDATA theoretical framework (Saunders, 2000) which became instrumental in shaping and guiding the approach to this evaluation.</p> <p>We took a mixed methods approach, using both quantitative and qualitative measures, in the hope that quantitative data would demonstrate impact and the qualitative data would give further insights into why these impacts occurred. The aim of a mixed methods approach being to add greater robustness. In the focus stage, it was useful to concentrate on what the intended outcomes were of the Interviews and how these could be reflected in qualitative and quantitative measures.</p> <p>We assessed the effectiveness of the 2022-23 Pre-UCAS Interviews across three questionnaires:</p>			

1. Pre-Interview questionnaire (August – November 2022)
2. Immediately post-Interview questionnaire (August – November 2022)
3. Post-UCAS deadline questionnaire (February 2023)

The uses for the data were shared with participating pupils ahead of them completing the questionnaires.

The questionnaires were delivered digitally, using Online Surveys, and remotely. Pupils accessed the first questionnaire via LEAPS Survey. LEAPS Survey is a database which LEAPS have created specifically for the purpose of delivering and administering the Pre-UCAS Interviews. Prior to their interview, pupils complete an online form via LEAPS Survey providing contact details and information relating to their qualifications and post-school plans. A link to the first evaluation questionnaire was included in the webpage pupils see upon completing their pre-Interview form on LEAPS Survey. The second questionnaire was included in the email pupils receive following their Interview (with their action plan). As pupils would already be accessing LEAPS Survey prior to their interview and likely the action plan email, we hoped this would help drive the response rate. The third questionnaire was sent as a separate email following the UCAS deadline. The impact of the use of a separate email is reflected in the lower response rate for this stage of the evaluation.

Evaluation Questionnaire Response Rate (% rounded to one decimal place)*:	
1. Pre-Interview questionnaire	165 respondents (7.0%)
2. Immediately post-Interview questionnaire	272 respondents (12.2%)
3. Post-UCAS deadline questionnaire	59 respondents (2.7%)

**Please note the number of possible respondents for each questionnaire varies, with the highest number of possible respondents for questionnaire one and the lowest for questionnaire three. This reflects ongoing partnership with schools to ascertain LEAPS-eligible pupils and those applying to higher education within the current cycle.*

The questionnaires included scaling and open text questions.

Data collected and analysed included:

- Pupil expectations of the LEAPS Pre-UCAS Interview
- Pupil intention to apply to HE course(s)
- Pupil confidence regarding likelihood of receiving offers
- Pupil awareness of resources and support services available to discover HE options
- Pupil understanding of how to apply to HE, and what makes a good application
- Levels of pupil preparedness for applying
- Pupil beliefs around impact of LEAPS Pre-UCAS Interviews on aiding progression to HE
- Qualitative feedback from students who had a Pre-UCAS Interview

Once responses were collected, the raw data was exported into Excel for analysis. Basic data analysis skills were used to collate and clean the data and generate column graphs. These methods were used for ease and confidence with prior knowledge and experience. A lack of expertise in data analysis meant that only a very light touch analysis was attempted.

Discussion/ Reflections

We have used the [Gibbs Reflective Cycle](#) to reflect on the evaluation project and provide structure to our overall discussion. See 'Introduction' section for 'Description' aspect of Gibbs Reflective Cycle.

Feelings: As a practitioner, the evaluative process has felt positive - in better understanding our work, and reflecting on what is important within our practice. Carrying out the design, delivery, analysis and reporting stages of the evaluation has given greater confidence and coherency when communicating about this project and its impact. It has also been an opportunity for skills and professional development.

Evaluation: A positive from the evaluation project was the response rate which was higher than may have been expected, particularly for questionnaires one and two. This is especially true when considering the digital/remote delivery model.

It felt very important to introduce this specific evaluation project to ensure we are hearing student voice within our overall evaluation of the Pre-UCAS Interviews, adding greater depth to our understanding of the impact the Interviews have. As a practitioner both organising and delivering the Interviews project in all its scale, my perspective of the project and all it has to offer is vastly different from that of the pupil. Actively providing an opportunity for pupils to share their thoughts on their Interview experience gives us an opportunity to:

- 1) Assess the overall impact of the Interviews
- 2) To analyse whether pupils are in fact experiencing the Interview opportunity as we intend
- 3) To share how it feels in their shoes, bringing the qualitative perspective

We as practitioners are so familiar with, for example, higher education options and UCAS/college application processes so it is crucial that those we are here to serve have the opportunity to let us know if we are pitching our advice, guidance and support correctly for them and meeting their needs.

A challenge in the reporting stage was knowing how much focus to give to each section of the evaluation report, such as the weighting given to sharing your methodology versus your evaluation findings. This challenge was approached by looking to existing internal and external examples and the SCAPP WP Evaluation Guide. Consideration was also given to audience when deciding how much focus to give each section, recognising that different audiences will have different requirements and interests. It is hoped confidence and knowledge of good practice here would increase with further evaluation and reporting experience.

Please see 'Limitations' section for reflections on further obstacles found in this evaluation project.

Analysis: In terms of assessing the overall impact of the LEAPS Pre-UCAS Interviews in aiding progression to higher education, a fourth evaluative stage may be required asking pupils to complete a further questionnaire following Results Day and the confirmation stage of the UCAS process. Alternatively, or in addition, a follow-up questionnaire following matriculation may be beneficial.

See 'Lessons Learned/ Future Work' section for 'Conclusion' and 'Action plan' aspects of Gibbs Reflective Cycle.

Limitations

One limitation of our evaluation was the use of anonymity across the three questionnaires. We chose to make the questionnaires anonymous deliberately to encourage participating pupils to feel more comfortable responding freely, giving more honest responses. However, this meant that no direct comparisons could be made at an individual level between the three stages. Instead, the evaluation findings gave an aggregate reflection of the overall effectiveness of the Interviews. As said, it was a deliberate choice to use anonymity, but we had to be aware of both the benefits and the limitations this approach brought.

As the questionnaires were all completed digitally and remotely, this meant there was very limited opportunity to encourage pupils, in person, to take part in the evaluation and help to bolster our response rate. We recognise that as large as possible a response rate is beneficial overall. However, as discussed above, we were pleased with the response rate we received considering the digital/remote method of delivery. A particular focus needs to be given to how to further drive the response rate for questionnaire three in future years.

A further limitation was the lack of a control group. Given the limitations of staff time and expertise available to this evaluation project, a control group was not possible. Similarly, we did not gather information on other initiatives, relating to widening access or otherwise, pupils were involved with during their experience of the UCAS/college application cycle.

We also recognise that our own knowledge and understanding of our evaluation approach is a limitation. We are very much still learning and developing in this area, and the SCAPP Evaluation Matters Community of Practice has been a great support as we continue to build our own evaluation capacity.

Lessons Learned/ Future Work

A key lesson learned during this process is the importance of dedicated time and prioritisation within workload, not only for the various stages of the evaluative process itself but also for developing the necessary skills required.

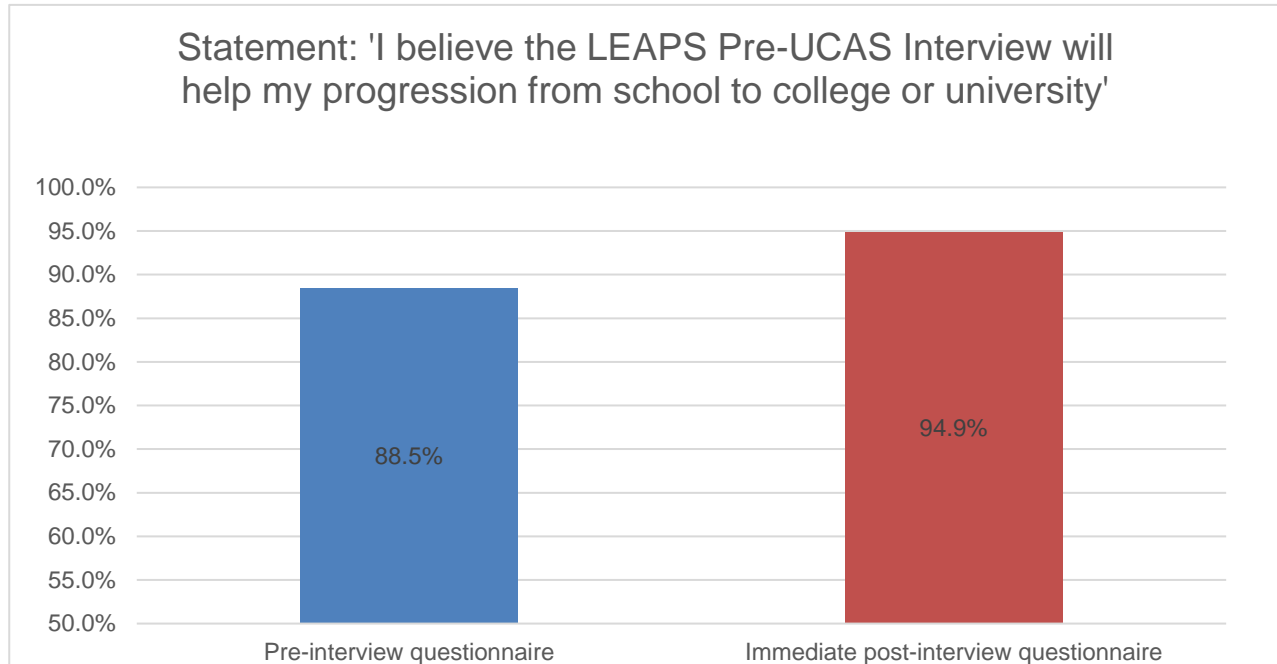
In terms of skills development to aid the evaluative process, we would benefit from further engagement with training in data analysis tools and methods. This was offered as a part of the Evaluation Matters Community of Practice this year but unfortunately part-time working patterns meant we were unable to attend.

It is hoped that the robustness of this evaluation project in assessing the effectiveness of the Pre-UCAS Interviews can be improved by carrying out the evaluation on a year-on-year basis, and showing trends across numerous years, rather than one stand-alone year.

We would also like to bring together our findings from the pupil perspectives with other data sources, such as the School Leaver Destination Returns provided by Skills Development Scotland.

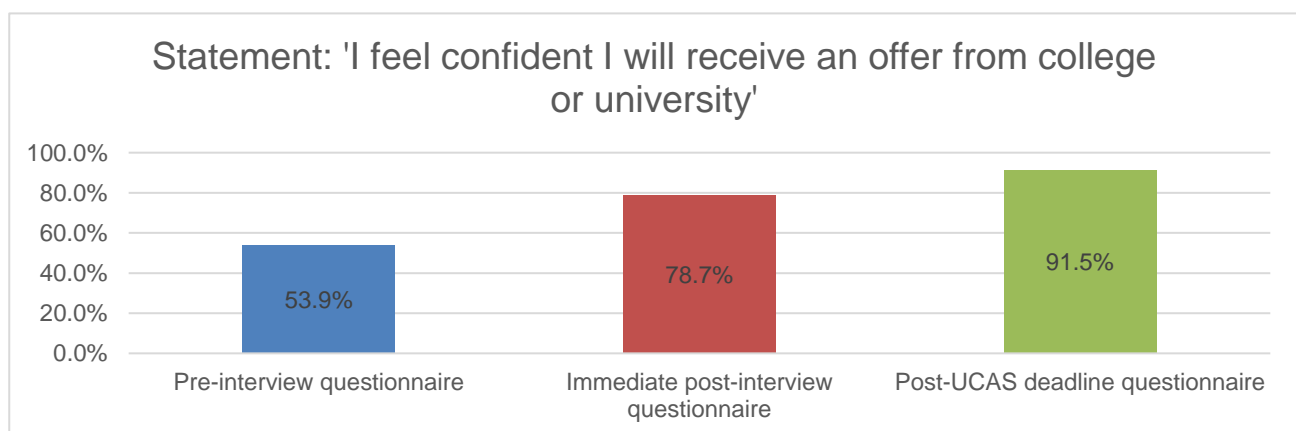
Additional Content

Below are some of the key findings from the three-stage evaluation, comparing responses between the staged questionnaires.



Prior to their LEAPS Pre-UCAS Interview, **88.5%** of respondents selected 'somewhat agree' or 'strongly agree' to the statement 'I believe the LEAPS Pre-UCAS Interview will help my progression from school to college or university'. This is a high figure, especially as gathered before the Pre-UCAS Interview had taken place. It may be reflective of LEAPS' well-established reputation within the schools LEAPS works with for giving high-quality advice and guidance.

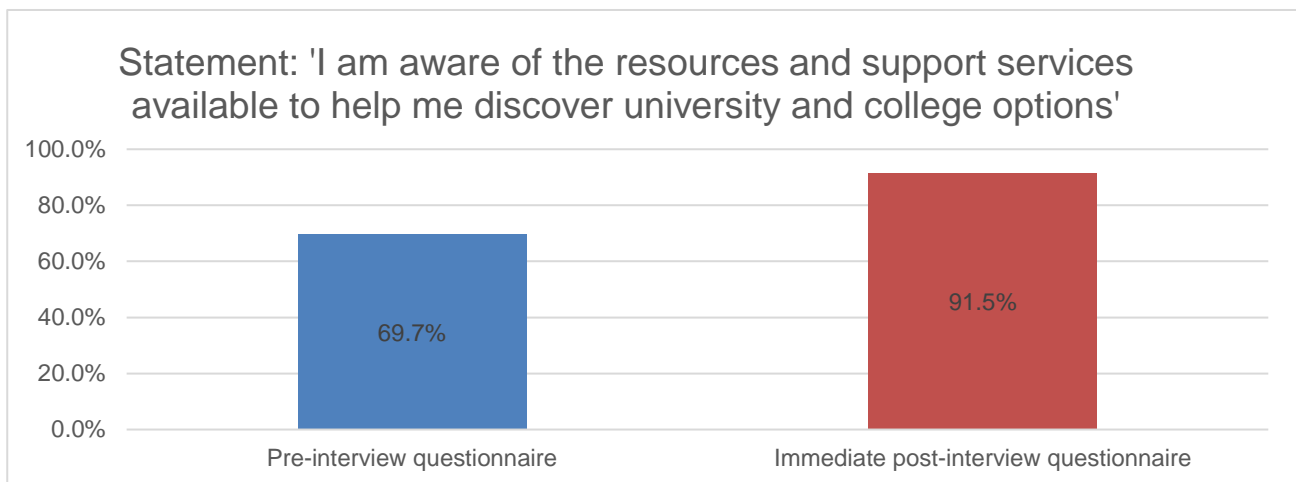
This **increased by a further 6.4 percentage points to 94.9%** when students were asked to respond to the same statement in the questionnaire immediately following the Pre-UCAS Interview.



Prior to their LEAPS Pre-UCAS Interview, **53.9%** of respondents selected 'somewhat agree' or 'strongly agree' to the statement 'I feel confident I will receive an offer from college or university'.

This **increased by 24.8 percentage points to 78.7%** when students were asked to respond to the same statement in the questionnaire immediately following the Pre-UCAS Interview.

By the post UCAS-deadline, this had **increased again by a further 12.8 percentage points to 91.5%**, making a **37.6 percentage point increase overall** (from pre-Interview to post-UCAS deadline).



Prior to their LEAPS Pre-UCAS Interview, **69.7%** of respondents selected 'somewhat agree' or 'strongly agree' to the statement 'I am aware of the resources and support services available to help me discover university and college options'.

This **increased by 21.8% percentage points to 91.5%** when students were asked to respond to the same statement in the questionnaire immediately following the Pre-UCAS Interview.

Further findings include:

- A **15.1% percentage point increase** in the number of respondents answering 'somewhat agree' or 'strongly agree' to the following statement from pre-Interview to immediately post-Interview questionnaire: 'I understand how to apply to college, and what makes a good application'.
- Similarly, results saw a **21.1% percentage point increase** in the number of respondents answering 'somewhat agree' or 'strongly agree' to the following statement from pre-Interview to immediately post-Interview questionnaire: 'I understand how to apply to university, and what makes a good application'.

Lastly, below are some extracts of qualitative feedback gathered across the three questionnaires:

- *"I never actually knew I could go to university with my qualifications I had at the time, the lady that I spoke to was super helpful and made me feel much more positive and motivated, she really helped me open up to the idea of university"*
- *"It was nice to talk to someone who wasn't a parent or teacher as they had an outside perspective"*
- *"I already knew where I wanted to apply, but it was really nice to be recognised for the fact the situation I was in made it slightly harder to apply to uni, and there were resources available to help me. It was really nice to hear someone say they felt good about my chances of getting in and to have people believe in you"*

- *“It’s ok to go to college first”*
- *“I have learned a lot more about how university works, as well as the aspects of university you think about less when applying such as: the social aspect of university, what social life is like at different universities and financial aid”*
- *“I now have a plan B”*
- *“I feel more confident in where I am in my university choices and I feel like the interview made me feel more prepared for what my next steps need to be to make my application the best it can be”*