

Evaluation of Advancing Access

Summary report

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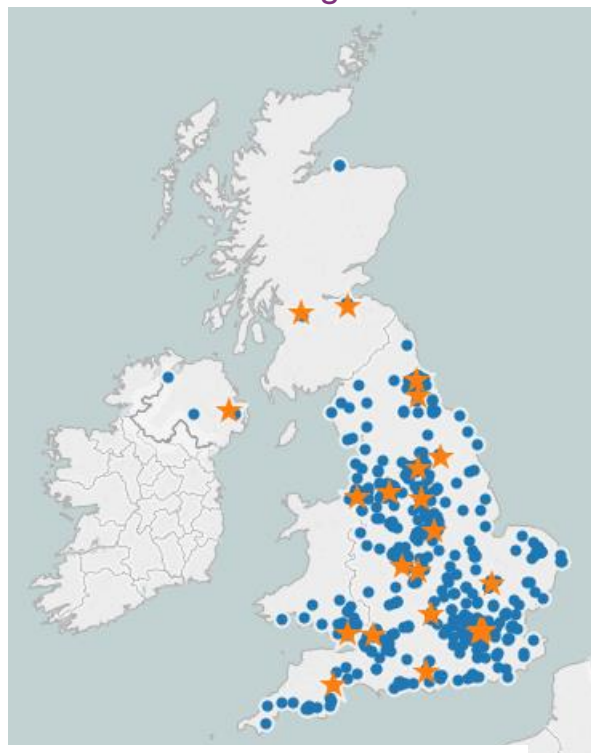
February 2018



Evaluation of Advancing Access: Executive Summary

Researchers at the School of Education conducted an independent evaluation of Advancing Access: a web-based CPD intervention for teachers and advisers with the aim of facilitating progression to leading universities. The project involved a pilot phase between September 2016 and April 2017 and a full launch in May 2017. Data was collected between September and November 2016 for the first phase and between May and September 2017 for the second phase. 299 more schools have been recruited since the pilot phase. There were no other significant qualitative changes as this is still early in the university application cycle and the development of advancing access. The evaluation looked at the reach of Advancing Access' web-based resources and virtual conference. Surveys and interviews collected feedback on the early stages of Advancing Access and its potential future impact.

Who has Advancing Access reached?



- ★ Russell Group institution
- Advancing Access users

859

account
holders

448

schools and
colleges

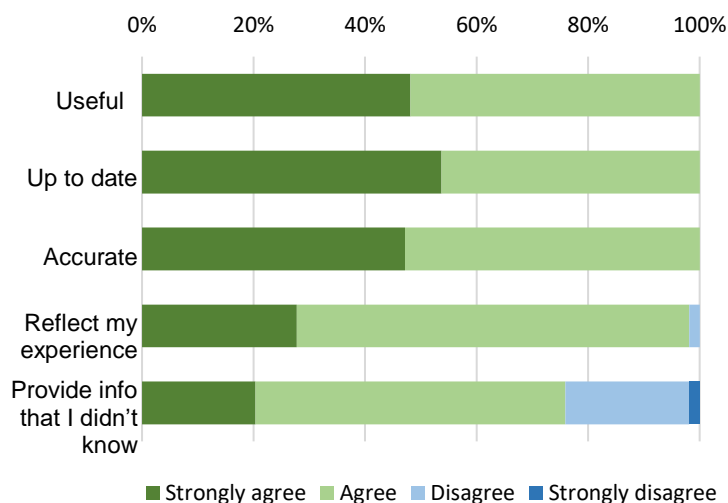
Schools and colleges with an Advancing Access account in England and Wales are:

- 92% state schools or colleges
- 44% of schools and 31% of colleges have lower than average progression to HE
- 59% of schools and 60% of colleges have lower than average progression to Russell Group universities
- 35% of schools have a higher than average proportion of pupils from areas of low participation in HE (POLAR 3)
- Schools in opportunity areas are twice as likely to be engaged with Advancing Access than other schools

Advancing Access users were most frequently careers advisers, based in schools and working independently. Other school users were often head of year 12 or 13, and subject leads. Advancing Access accounts were also held by people working in third-sector organisations with a focus on careers advice and widening participation in higher education.

What was the response¹?

In our survey of Advancing Access account holders, 100% of respondents agreed that the information and resources were useful, up to date and accurate. 98% agreed that resources reflected their experience of preparing students to apply to leading universities and 76% agreed that resources provided information they didn't know before.



¹ All website users registered by 30 August 2017 were invited to complete the survey; 76 responses were received.

Virtual Conference

Advancing Access delivered two virtual conferences, in November 2016 and May 2017. They offered many of the features of a face-to-face conference, but were delivered online.



English schools and colleges with an attendee at the virtual conference in 2017:

- were state schools or colleges (94%)
- have lower than average progression to Russell Group universities (60% and 56% respectively)

Survey responses² from attendees were generally positive. **100%** of respondents agreed that the information and resources provided were useful, up to date, accurate and reflect their own experience; **70%** agreed that the event provided information that they didn't know before. Attendees valued the opportunity to hear from multiple universities without the time and expense of travelling to multiple conferences. **83%** said they were very likely to attend another virtual conference.

Findings

There is good evidence from survey and interview responses that Advancing Access has improved its users' knowledge about progression to leading higher education institutions.

There are two main types of users: experienced advisers who have made small (but potentially significant) gains in knowledge and used Advancing Access resources alongside information from a range of other sources; and less experienced teachers who offer advice and guidance alongside their regular role. These teachers can potentially make bigger gains in knowledge.

We looked at a range of information about schools: progression to higher education, attainment levels, free school meal eligibility and living in low progression neighbourhoods. On all measures, information about schools with an Advancing Access account had a similar pattern to other schools: Advancing Access is used by schools that are representative of schools nationally. This means that some schools using Advancing Access are already doing very well with progression to leading universities, but Advancing Access is also reaching many of those that need support. This is a very good achievement, especially in the short time that Advancing Access has been available.

Advancing Access could now review and update the criteria they use to target their promotional activity. This will allow Advancing Access to continue to monitor their progress and learn which activities are most effective.

It is too early to say what the full impact of Advancing Access might be. Schools and colleges will need time to embed the resources into their practice. It will then take more time for quantitative data on student choices to become available. In the meantime, Advancing Access can continue to listen to user feedback to tailor what they offer.

² All 259 virtual conference attendees were invited to complete the survey; 39 responses were received.

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Introduction

Advancing Access is a collaborative programme led by twenty-four UK universities to deliver an open-access online continuing professional development (CPD) resource for teachers and advisers with the aim of facilitating progression to leading universities. The resources and information presented on the website are designed to increase teachers' and advisers' knowledge and confidence in relation to progression to leading universities and challenge any misconceptions they may hold. Resources and online events are open access but the programme targets schools and colleges with low levels of progression to leading universities.

Advancing Access, hosted by the University of Nottingham, was established using funding from the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) National Networks for Collaborative Outreach scheme. HEFCE funding ended in December 2017 and it has since been funded by its partner universities, the twenty-four universities in the Russell Group. This evaluation is independently conducted by the School of Education at Durham University.

This evaluation report covers the period from Advancing Access' website launch in September 2016 to September 2017. There were two main phases of data collection, as illustrated in the timeline below (Figure 1). The first covered Advancing Access' pilot phase running September 2016 to April 2017. Strand 1 was launched at the start of this period and an online virtual conference was held in November 2016. A report on this phase was produced in 2016. The second phase of data collection covered the period following the full launch in May 2017 to late September 2017. Three further strands of resources were launched and a second virtual conference took place.

As shown in Figure 1, September – December represents a key period each year for Advancing Access users, when schools and advisers support students with university applications. The timing of this evaluation report means that very little data on this key period in the main phase could be included.

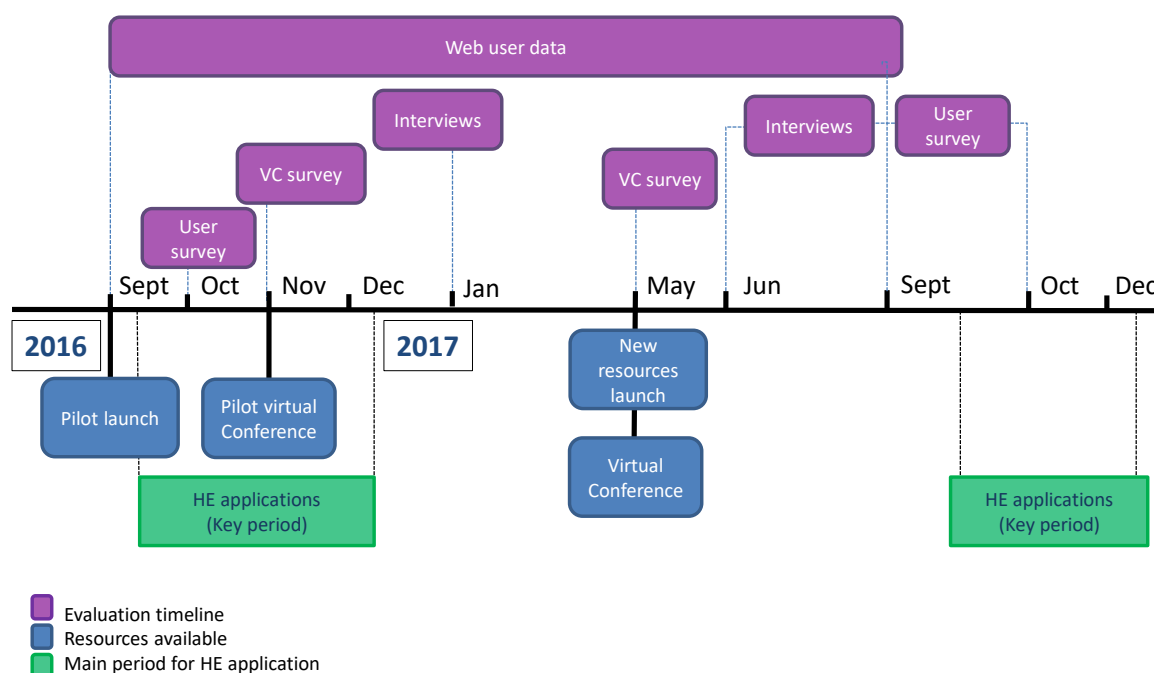


Figure 1 Timeline of Advancing Access development and evaluation data collection

Evaluation questions

The key research questions at the outset of the evaluation included:

1. Does the intervention increase knowledge of enabling factors for progression to leading universities for teachers and advisers?
2. Does the intervention support attitudinal change regarding leading universities for teachers and advisers?
3. Has the intervention reached the intended audience?
4. How is the intervention used by the schools and colleges at which it is targeted?

Question 3 is addressed using Advancing Access user data, linked with contextual information about users' schools and colleges. Questions 1 and 2, and to an extent question 4, are answered by surveys and interviews of website users and virtual conference attendees.

Advancing Access website and resources

The main method of delivery for Advancing Access is the website www.advancingaccess.ac.uk. The website contains four strands of CPD resources aimed at teachers and advisers. Strand 1: *How do I help my students choose a university and course?* was launched as part of the pilot phase in September 2016, with three further strands of resources launched as part of the full release in May 2017. The three further strands are as follows; Strand 2: How do I help my students apply to university?, Strand 3: How do admissions processes work?, Strand 4: How do I help my students make the right choices for post-16 study?

The cut-off date for data included in this report was 8 September 2017, meaning that we are only able to report on early indications of engagement with Advancing Access, particularly with strands 2 to 4. (see Figure 2).

How many users does Advancing Access have and how are they using the website?

Advancing Access has over 850 registered users. Users are mostly located in England and Wales and around three-quarters are working for a state secondary school or college. Peaks in user engagement coincide with promotional activity, particularly for the relaunch in May 2017. However, many users have signed in to the website only once at this stage.

The Advancing Access website had 859 user accounts as of 8 September 2017. The accounts were categorised as part of the analysis and Table 1 below shows the number of accounts in each category. A full explanation of categories is given in section 2.1 (p7) of the Report in Detail.

Table 1 Number and category of website user accounts

Category	Number of accounts	Percentage
Secondary school or college	634	74%
Organisation	90	10%
University	36	4%
Independent school	54	6%
Unknown	16	2%
International	13	2%
Anonymous	13	2%
Primary school	2	0%
Independent primary school	1	0%
Total	859	

The majority of users were located in England and Wales, with three users in Northern Ireland (one grammar school, one primary school and one unknown user) and seven users in Scotland (five from independent schools, one from a university and one working for an organisation). Figure 2 shows the location of Advancing Access users in the UK, along with Russell Group institutions.

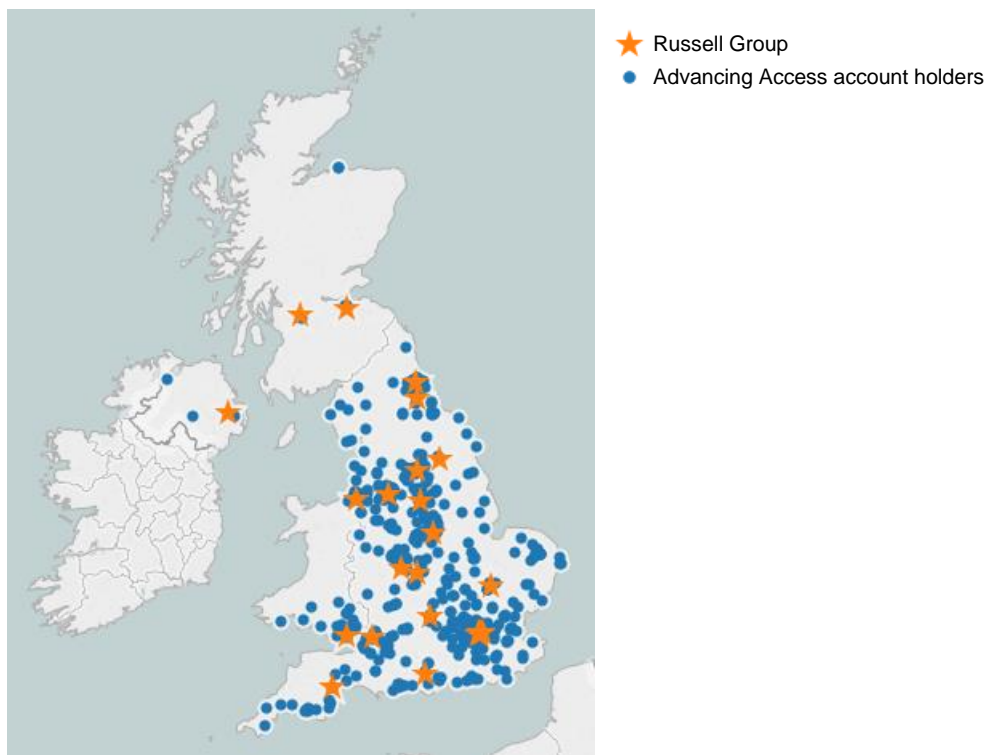


Figure 2 Map of UK-based Advancing Access account holders and Russell Group institutions

Table 2 below shows how users working in state secondary schools and colleges categorised their roles. These accounts are associated with 414 unique state schools and colleges.

Table 2 Role of website users associated with secondary schools or colleges

Role	Number of accounts	Percentage
Other	146	23%
Careers adviser	143	23%
[Null]	107	17%
Student	49	8%
Head of year 13	44	7%
Subject lead	42	7%
Head of year 12	40	6%
Most able coordinator	33	5%
Deputy head	23	4%
Enrichment officer	5	1%
Head teacher	1	0%
Head of year 8	1	0%
Total	634	

Usage of the Advancing Access website appears to be heavily influenced by promotional activity related to the release of new content. In Figure 3 below we see three spikes in account creation. The first, with 116 accounts created in the w/c (week commencing) 19th September 2016, coincides with the pilot launch of Advancing Access. The second spike of 87 accounts created w/c 31st October 2016 follows the first virtual conference and coincides with the return from October half term. The third, more gradual spike, with 54 accounts created w/c 8th May, 82 created w/c 15th May and a further 98 created w/c 22nd May 2017, reflects the full launch of Advancing Access in May 2017 and the promotional activity undertaken around the three new strands of resources which were launched at this time.

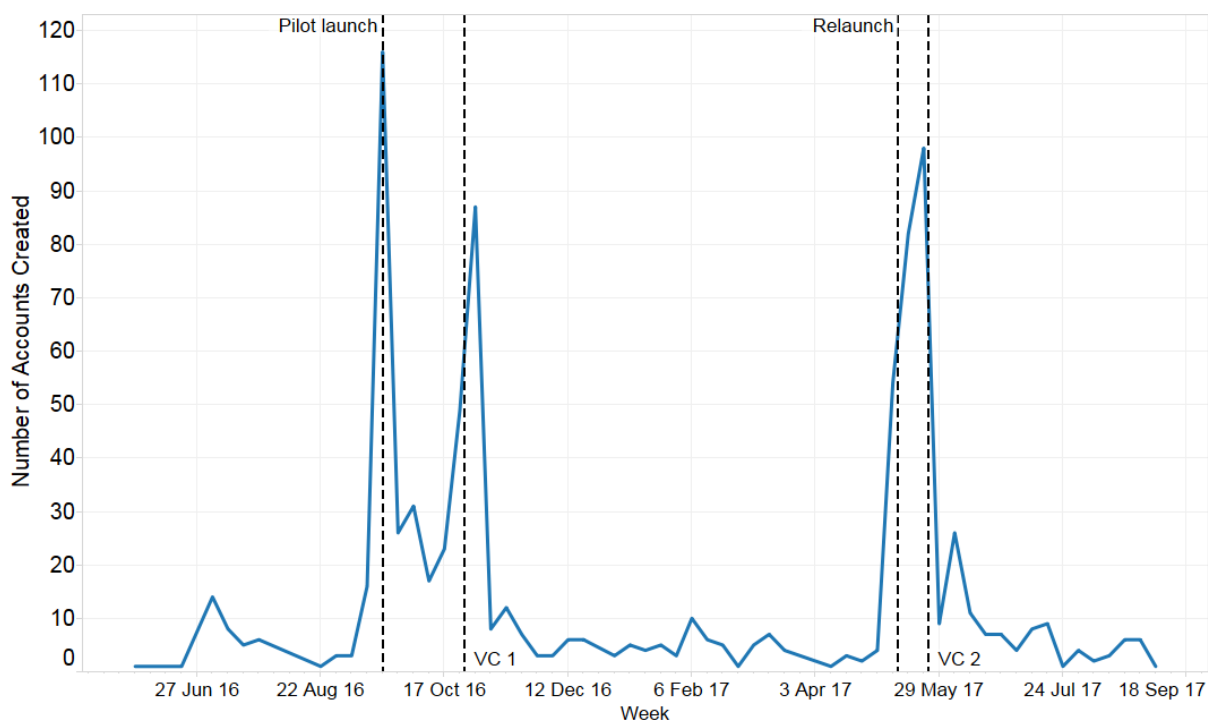


Figure 3 Number of accounts created each week, from Registered Accounts dataset

Advancing Access also provided details of which resource pages users visited. Figure 4 shows the number of resource views each week. The pattern reflects the creation of user accounts seen in Figure 4, although the May 2017 spike includes a much larger number of resource views (322 w/c 15th May and 524 w/c 22nd May 2017) due to the increased number of resources available on the website. Figure 5 shows how often each resource in Strand 1 has been viewed. The Report in Detail shows the figures for strands 2 – 4 (p12).

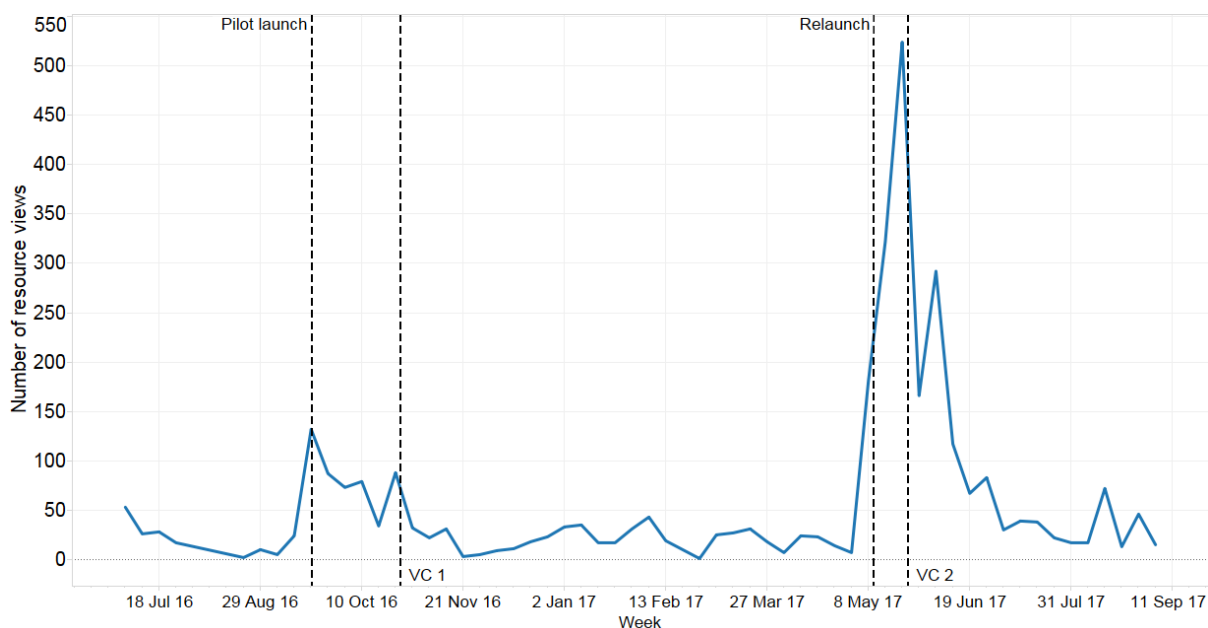


Figure 4 Number of resource views each week

Resource Views for Strand 1

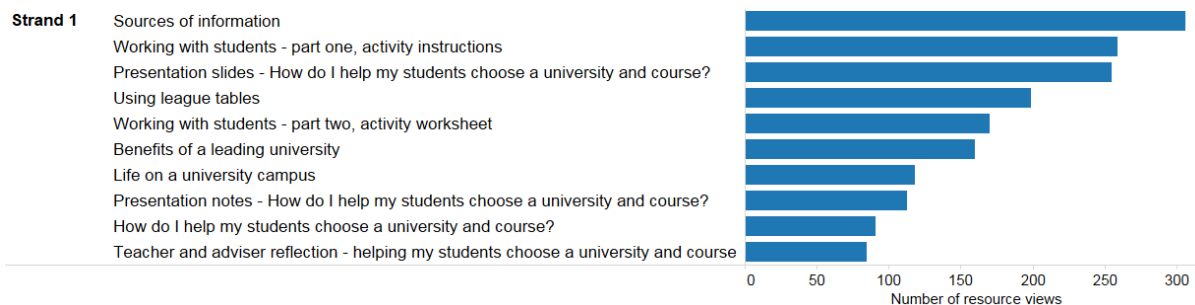


Figure 5 Number of resource views: Strand 1. More details are given in the Report in Detail Section 2.3 (p10)

We also looked at the number of times each account-holder had signed in to the Advancing Access website. Figure 6 shows how many users have signed in once, twice, three times etc. We see that 436 users – 51% of the total number of users – sign in only once. 175 users (20%) sign in twice.

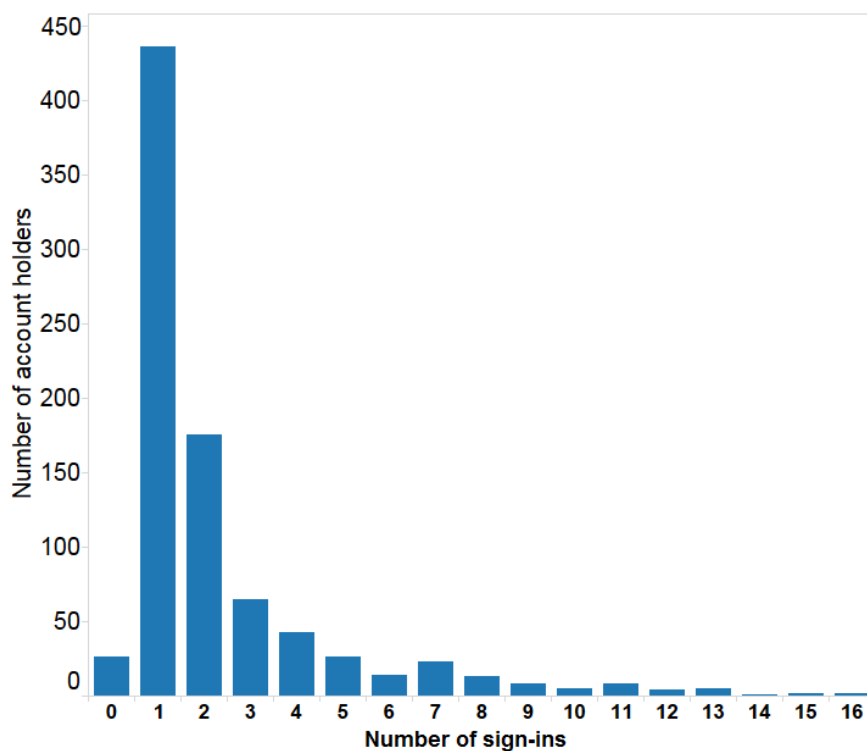


Figure 6 Frequency of number of sign-ins

What we have learned:

- Advancing Access have many users in England.
- School staff in a range of roles are using the site.
- Advancing Access publicity and marketing activity is having a clear impact on user engagement.

What should happen next:

- Advancing Access should continue with promotional activity, and consider some specific content for Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales if they would like to increase uptake in these nations.

Which schools are using Advancing Access?

Most Advancing Access users are from state schools and colleges in England. In general, the characteristics of schools using Advancing Access have a similar pattern to schools in England overall. This is a positive achievement; we might have expected usage to be dominated by schools that already send many pupils to leading universities, but this has not been the case. Around 60% of schools and colleges with an Advancing Access account have lower than average rates of progression to Russell Group universities.

Engaging schools in opportunity areas has been a particular success: schools in these areas are twice as likely to be engaged as other schools. Two-thirds of schools with an Advancing Access account have lower than average free school meals eligibility, but this reflects the national picture. For evaluation and future planning, it is important to consider the distribution of each indicator as well as looking at whether schools are above or below the national average.

In this section we look at whether Advancing Access is reaching its intended audience. We describe the characteristics of the schools accessing Advancing Access resources, and compare them with other schools in England to check whether Advancing Access have reached the type of schools they want. We also look briefly at schools in Wales (p 20). No state schools in Scotland have used Advancing Access yet so we don't look at data for Scotland. More details are given in the Report in Detail Section 2.5 (p14).

Schools in England

For England, we started with the Department for Education's (DfE) list of schools and colleges. We removed irrelevant school types and matched in information about the schools from a range of sources. We then matched in Advancing Access' list of registered accounts to show how many accounts were associated with each school.

In total, Advancing Access accounts were associated with 414 state schools and colleges in England and Wales, and 34 independent schools. Table 3 gives an overview of school type.

Table 3 Establishment type of schools associated with at least one Advancing Access account

Type of Establishment	Number and percentage in category
State school	308 (69%)
College	89 (20%)
Independent school	34 (8%)
Welsh establishment	17 (4%)
Total	448

Opportunity areas

Twelve 'opportunity areas' were selected by the Department for Education to receive support to improve social mobility. In total there are 197 state secondary schools and colleges in opportunity areas. At the time of reporting, 25 of these (13%) had at least one Advancing Access account. This compares well with schools not in opportunity areas, where only 7% have an account. In other words,

schools in the opportunity areas are around twice as likely to have an Advancing Access account than other schools. A breakdown of each opportunity area is given in the Report in Detail Section 2.7 (p14).

Progression to Higher Education

Reaching schools and colleges with low rates of progression to leading universities is a key priority for Advancing Access. The Department for Education publish information about percentage of students progressing to higher education from each school or college, the percentage progressing to a 'top third' institution³ and the percentage progressing to a Russell Group institution. The rates of progression are different for schools and colleges, which is why we have presented them separately.

Table 4 shows how schools and colleges with an Advancing Access account compare with the national average for progression to higher education. An explanation of the method used is given in Section 2.8 of the Report in Detail (p15). It shows that 61% of schools with an Advancing Access account have lower than average progression to top third universities, and 59% have lower than average progression to Russell Group universities. 60% of colleges with an Advancing Access account have lower than average progression to Russell Group universities.

Table 4 Number and percentage of schools with at least one Advancing Access account that are above, and below, the national average progression to higher education rate in various categories

Category: Progression to...	Number of Advancing Access schools with data available	Number and percentage of AA schools above national average	Number and percentage of AA schools below national average	Average for Advancing Access schools or colleges	National average progression rate
Any HEI (schools)	264	149 (56%)	115 (44%)	61%	60%
Top third (schools)	252	98 (39%)	154 (61%)	25%	26%
Russell Group (schools)	244	100 (41%)	144 (59%)	18%	17%
Any HEI (colleges)	77	53 (69%)	24 (31%)	47%	41%
Top third (colleges)	76	40 (53%)	36 (47%)	14%	10%
Russell Group (colleges)	78	31 (40%)	47 (60%)	10%	7%

As progression to higher education is a particularly important measure for Advancing Access, we have also looked at how the spread of progression rates for schools and colleges with an Advancing Access account compares with progression rates for other schools and colleges in England. Figure 7 shows that for schools that have an Advancing Access account, their rates of progression to higher education follow a similar distribution to other schools in England: in other words, Advancing Access have reached a group of schools that are representative of schools in England in terms of progression.

For colleges (Figure 8) we see that the distribution of progression to higher education for colleges with an Advancing Access account (orange bars) follows the pattern of the distribution of all colleges in England (blue bars), but less closely than for schools. Figure 8 gives interesting information about progression to higher education from colleges. The graph has two peaks, which indicates that progression rates are different in different types of colleges. The first peak shows colleges with a vocational focus, and the second peak shows colleges that mainly teach A level courses. We see that a higher proportion of colleges around this second peak have an Advancing Access account; colleges around the first peak are less likely to have an account.

³ Based on the mean UCAS tariff score from the top three A level grades of entrants; list as published by the DfE.

How to read a histogram

The histogram gives us more information about the spread of the data than just knowing the average. Each bar in the histogram represents the *frequency* of data (in this case number of schools or colleges) in each boundary. Different colours represent the data from different population. The orange part of the bar shows schools that have an Advancing Access account and the blue part shows schools that don't. Stacked together, they show the distribution of rates of progression to HE for all schools in England.

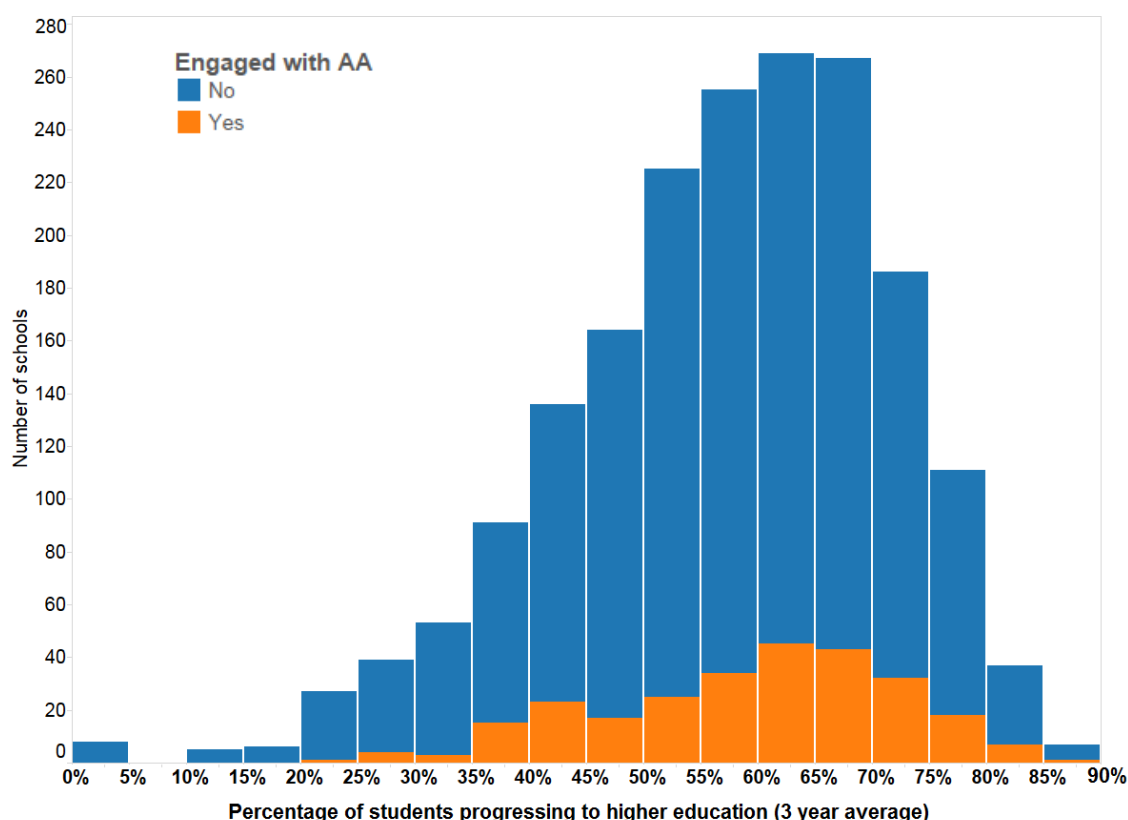


Figure 7 Histogram showing distribution of % of students progressing to any HEI, 3 year average; schools without an AA account (blue) compared to schools with an account (orange).

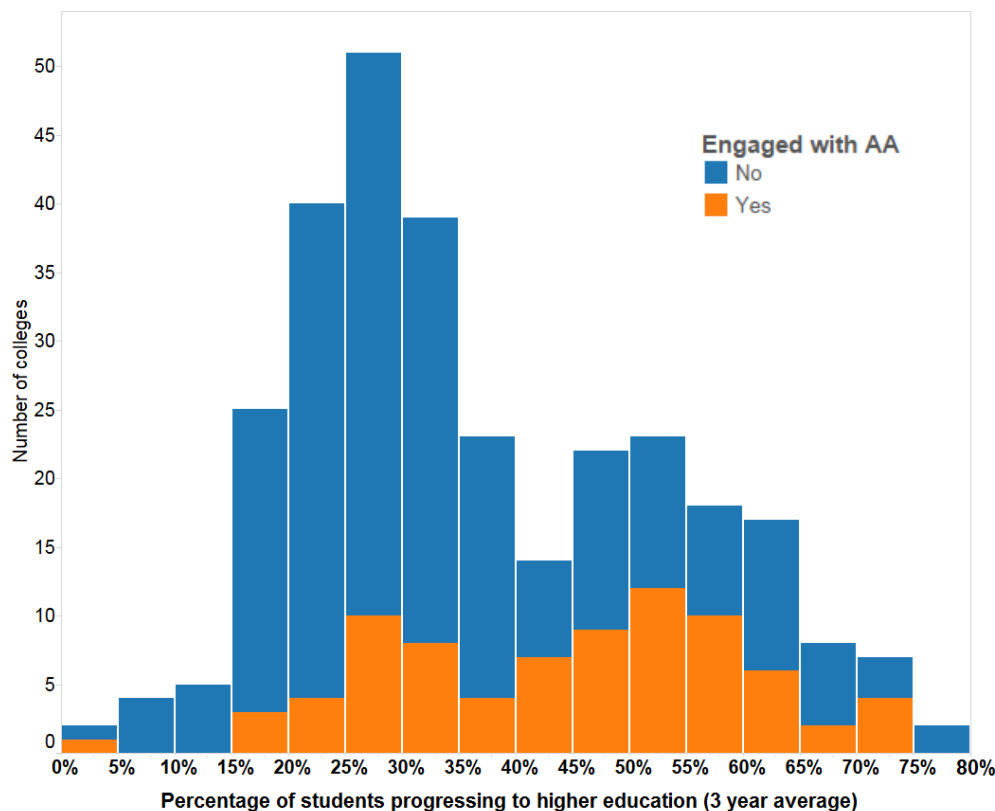


Figure 8 Histogram showing distribution of % of students progressing to any HEI, 3 year average; colleges without an AA account (blue) compared to colleges with an account (orange).

Attainment (KS5)

To assess attainment at KS5 we looked at three categories: percentage of A level students achieving at least three levels at grades AAB or better, at least two of which are in facilitating subjects; average point score in best 3 A level entries; and average point score per academic entry. Table 5 shows that over 60% of schools and colleges with an Advancing Access account have below average attainment at KS5 on every measure. More details are given in the Report in Detail Section 2.9 (p20).

Table 5 Number and percentage of schools with at least one Advancing Access account that are above, and below, the national average for KS5 attainment in various categories

Category	Number of Advancing Access schools with data available	Number and percentage of AA schools above national average	Number and percentage of AA schools below national average	Average for Advancing Access schools or colleges	National average percentage / score
% 3 A levels at AAB incl. 2 facilitating	325	114 (35%)	211 (65%)	12.0%	13.9%
Average point score in best 3 A levels	325	130 (40%)	195 (60%)	32.19	33.8
Average point score per entry	343	132 (38%)	211 (62%)	28.69	30.6

However, looking at the number of schools below the national average does not show the full picture. The box plot in Figure 9 (showing the % of students achieving AAB at A level) gives further context. We see that for the majority of schools (whether or not they have an Advancing Access account), their attainment is below the national average. The mean average is high because a relatively small number of schools score very highly – so any school picked at random would be more likely to be below the national average than above it. The ‘box’ in the box plot for schools with an Advancing Access account is higher than the box for schools that do not have an account. This means that Advancing Access have engaged schools with slightly higher levels of KS5 attainment than for the general population of schools. However, we also see that very few schools at the top of the attainment distribution (those who are doing very well without intervention) are engaged with Advancing Access. Advancing Access have engaged many schools with lower levels of attainment and this is a good achievement.

How to read a box and whisker plot

Each dot on the box and whisker plot represents a school or college. The box shows where most of the data is clustered. The line in the middle of the box shows the median – the middle score in all the data – and the ends of the box show the *lower and upper quartiles*. If you ordered all the data and split it into four quarters, the first quarter would be below the lower quartile and the last quarter would be above the upper quartile. So 50% of all schools are in the box.

Similarly to the histogram, box and whisker plots show the shape of the data distribution. In this example, we see that most scores are grouped towards the lower end, with a long tail of points to the right as a small number of schools score much higher than most of the others.

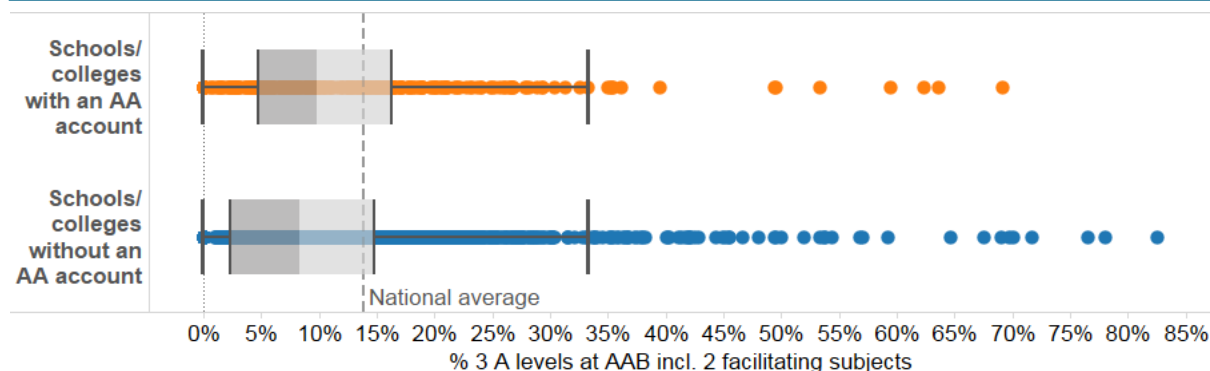


Figure 9 Box and whisker plot showing % of pupils achieving AAB or higher in at least two facilitating subjects at A level; schools without an AA account compared to schools with an AA account. Reference line shows national average as published by DfE. For schools with no account, lower quartile = 2%, median = 8%, upper quartile = 15%. For schools with an AA account, lower quartile = 5%, median = 10%, upper quartile = 16%.

Attainment (KS4)

More details are given in the Report in Detail Section 2.10 (p22). To measure attainment at KS4 we used the percentage of pupils achieving 5 or more A*-C or equivalents including A*-C in both English and mathematics at GCSE, and the Progress 8 score for each school. We see that for both ways of measuring attainment, 40% of the schools with an Advancing Access account have attainment below national average at KS4.

Table 6 Number and percentage of schools with at least one Advancing Access account that are above, and below, the national average for KS4 attainment in various categories

Category	Number of Advancing Access schools with data available	Number and percentage of AA schools above national average	Number and percentage of AA schools below national average	Average for Advancing Access schools or colleges	National average percentage / score
% pupils achieving 5+ A*-C or equivalents including A*-C in both English and mathematics GCSE	293	175 (60%)	118 (40%)	61.0%	57.4%
Progress 8 score	291	176 (60%)	115 (40%)	0.025	-0.03

Free School Meals eligibility

Information on the percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals in each school, and the percentage eligible at any time during the past 6 years (known as 'Ever6') gives an indicator of disadvantage for schools engaging with Advancing Access. When we look at progression to higher education or attainment levels, Advancing Access would hope to engage with schools that are below the national average and in need of support; whereas with an indicator of disadvantage they hope to reach more schools above the national average.

We see in Table 7 that only 34% of schools with an Advancing Access account had a rate of free school meals eligibility equal to or above the national average. However, as with KS5 attainment, looking at the distribution illuminates the picture further. We see in Figure 10 that, as with attainment, a small number of schools with very high eligibility drive up the national average – so there are actually more schools below the average than above. Comparing the distributions, we see that free school meals eligibility for schools with an Advancing Access account is slightly lower in general than for other schools in England, but not substantially so. Advancing Access account holders include many schools with high levels of free school meals eligibility. More details are given in the Report in Detail Section 2.11 (p23).

Table 7 Number and percentage of schools with at least one Advancing Access account that are above, and below, the national average for free school meals eligibility

Category	Number of Advancing Access schools with data available	Number and percentage of AA schools above national average	Number and percentage of AA schools below national average	Average for Advancing Access schools or colleges	National average percentage
Percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals	302	102 (34%)	200 (66%)	13.7%	14.6%
Percentage of pupils eligible for FSM at any time during the past 6 years	300	110 (37%)	190 (63%)	27.7%	29.3%

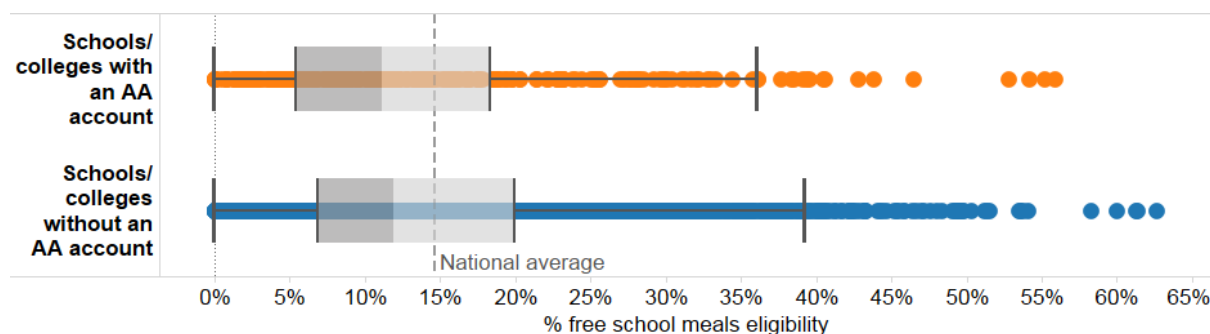


Figure 10 Box and whisker plot showing % of pupils eligible for free school meals; schools without an AA account compared to schools with an AA account. For schools with no account, lower quartile = 7%, median = 12%, upper quartile = 20%. For schools with an AA account, lower quartile = 5%, median = 11%, upper quartile = 18%.

Participation in higher education by local area (POLAR3)

More details are given in the Report in Detail Section 2.12 (p24). POLAR3 measures the rate of participation in higher education in local areas. Each area is ranked by the proportion of young people progressing to HE and the ranked list is split into five *quintiles*. Quintile 1 represents the lowest levels of participation, with quintile 5 representing the highest. There is also a ‘gaps in young participation’ version which takes account of KS4 attainment and the ethnicity of pupils in each area. The gaps classification illustrates whether participation is lower or higher than expected given these factors, whereas POLAR3 simply illustrates whether participation is low or high in relation to other areas.

As Advancing Access is targeted at schools, we wanted to look at the POLAR3 quintiles for pupils attending each school. Using data published by HEFCE, we calculated the percentage of pupils from each school in the dataset living in each POLAR3 and gaps quintile and matched this into our schools database. We look at the percentage of pupils in each school living in quintile 1 and 2 as a single outcome for both measures.

Table 8 shows that on both POLAR3 measures, just over 40% of schools with an Advancing Access account have a proportion of pupils living in low progression neighbourhoods that is equal to or above the national average. However, as with other measures, a broad range of schools have engaged with Advancing Access, including 55 schools with over 70% of their pupils living in low progression neighbourhoods.

Table 8 Number and percentage of schools with at least one Advancing Access account that are above, and below, the national average for percentage of pupils living in POLAR3 quintile 1 or 2

Category	Number of Advancing Access schools with data available	Number and percentage of AA schools above national average	Number and percentage of AA schools below national average	Average for Advancing Access schools or colleges	National average percentage
% pupils living in a POLAR3 young progression quintile 1 or 2 ward	298	121 (41%)	177 (59%)	35%	41.0%
% pupils living in a POLAR3 'gaps' quintile 1 or 2 ward	298	126 (42%)	172 (58%)	37%	40.6%

Schools and colleges in Wales

A small number of schools in Wales had Advancing Access accounts. 36% (five schools) had above average rates of free school meals eligibility. Most schools using Advancing Access had above average attainment: 86% at KS4 and 79% at KS5.

See Report in Detail Section 2.13 (p26) for more details. Seventeen schools and colleges in Wales were identified as Advancing Access account holders. Given this small number, we gathered contextual data on these schools but have not used data on all schools and colleges in Wales.

Fourteen of the 17 Welsh establishments were matched in the My Local School service. The three establishments that could not be matched appear to be colleges.

Free school meals

The national average for free school meals eligibility in secondary schools Wales is 17.3%. Five schools were above this average and nine schools had below national average eligibility for free school meals.

Attainment

We looked at attainment in KS4 and KS5. At KS4 we looked at the percentage of pupils achieving the 'Level 2 threshold' (equivalent to 5 GCSEs at Grade A*-C including English/Welsh and Maths); and the average capped wider points score which counts each pupil's best 8 results. Twelve of the 14 schools (86%) were above average on both of these measures.

At KS5 we looked at the 'Level 3 threshold' (equivalent to 2 A levels grades A-E) and the average wider points score for KS5. The picture was similar, with 11 of the 14 schools performing above the Welsh average on both measures.

Advancing Access could do more to engage with schools with lower than average attainment in Wales. However, as the number of schools currently engaged is small, engaging with only a few extra schools could have a big impact on the proportion with above-average free school meals eligibility or below-average attainment.

What we have learned about which schools are using Advancing Access:

- Schools in opportunity areas are twice as likely as other schools to have an Advancing Access account. 13% of schools and colleges in opportunity areas are engaged so there is still scope to improve this.
- 59% of schools and 60% of colleges with an Advancing Access account have below average rates of progression to Russell Group universities. 61% of schools with an Advancing Access account have lower than average progression to top third universities.
- Around two-thirds of schools with an Advancing Access account have below average rates of free school meals eligibility and around 60% have below the average number of pupils living in low progression neighbourhoods. However, there is a broad spread on both these measures: Advancing Access are engaging with many schools with high deprivation on these measures.
- In general, the distribution of the criteria we have looked at is very similar for schools with an Advancing Access account and those without. This means that schools using Advancing Access are representative of the general population of schools. This is a positive achievement as we might have expected Advancing Access to appeal to schools that are already 'doing well'.

What should happen next:

- Advancing Access should consider working with local authority districts if they want to reach more schools in opportunity areas.
- If Advancing Access continue as they have been, we would expect them to continue to reach a broad range of schools.
- A targeting plan should be developed that identifies groups of schools and colleges meeting Advancing Access' priority criteria. This will help measure whether new promotional and outreach activity is successful.
- Contextual data about schools and colleges should be reviewed annually, as most data sources are updated annually.

Survey and interviews of website users

Advancing Access users perceive the resources as a professional development resource, and to use with their students. 100% of survey respondents agreed that resources were useful, up to date, and accurate. 98% agreed that they reflect their experience and 76% agreed that they provided new information. This is a very good achievement as many survey respondents were specialists in careers advice.

The audience for Advancing Access can be seen as two groups: experienced advisers for whom the resources add to a large pool of knowledge; and non-specialist users who have low, or patchy previous knowledge. For this latter group, Advancing Access can potentially correct misconceptions and lead to improvements in their advice and practice. Experienced advisers are facilitating this by using Advancing Access materials in training.

Perceptions about entry requirements for leading universities vary and Advancing Access can play a role in correcting misconceptions here.

A survey was conducted of all users who had registered an account on the Advancing Access website since the initial launch, up to 30 August 2017.

Four interviews with Advancing Access users were conducted between June and October 2017, and these are analysed alongside two interviews that were conducted in January 2017.

Full details of survey and interviews are given in Section 3 of the Report in Detail (p28).

Background of respondents

There were 76 valid responses to the survey. Not all respondents answered every question, so totals will vary throughout the analysis.

74 respondents identified a particular school that they were associated with. The two respondents who did not do this were both independent careers advisers. The most frequent role for respondents was 'careers adviser', and most respondents had roles in schools with around a quarter of respondents involved in sixth form leadership.

Advancing Access resources

When asked how the Advancing Access resources are best characterised, respondents were most likely to perceive them as 'information and resources to develop my own knowledge', with 98% of respondents either strongly agreeing or agreeing with this. 'Information and resources to use in sessions with my students' was agreed with in almost the same frequency (96% agreement) and respondents were more likely to strongly agree with this statement.

Figure 11 shows responses to questions about the quality of Advancing Access resources. 100% of respondents either strongly agreed or agreed that the resources were useful, up to date and accurate. Respondents were less likely to agree that the information and resources provided information that they didn't know before; 76% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with this statement.

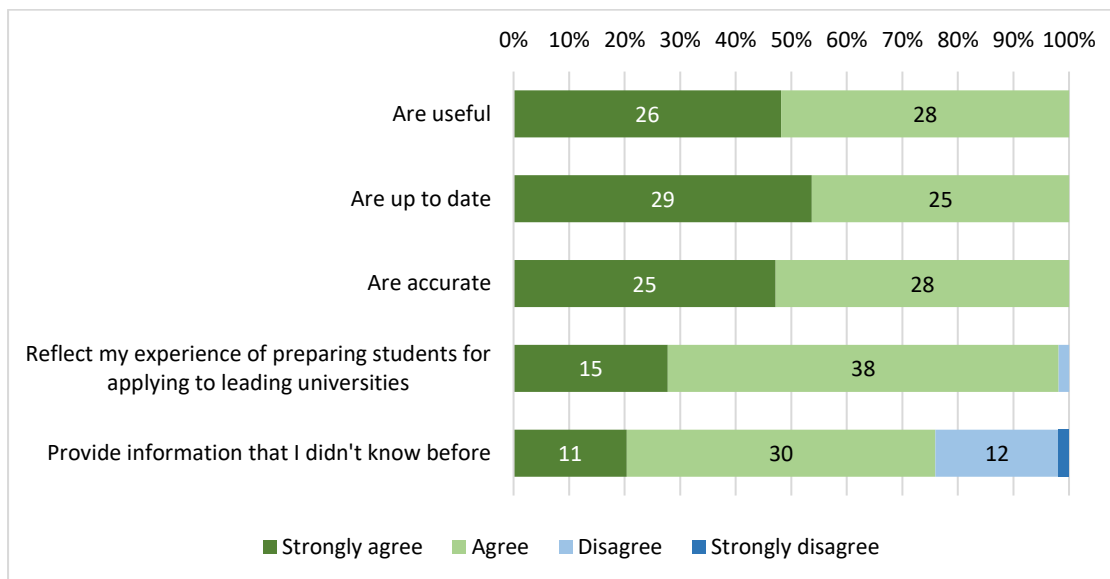


Figure 11 Responses to 'Please show how much you agree with the following statements about the Advancing Access website: The information and resources...'

Participants were asked how far they agreed that Advancing Access had improved their ability to support students in a range of areas. Respondents were most likely to agree that Advancing Access had helped them support students with the admissions processes at each university and how the application is dealt with (87%) and how to access the most competitive universities or courses (87%).

When asked about the likelihood of changing the advice they give to students as a result of engaging with the Advancing Access website 30% of respondents said that they were more likely to advise their students to apply to leading universities such as those in the Russell Group and 22% said that they were more likely to encourage more of their students to consider university.

Barriers to use

Participants were asked to choose from a range of factors which was most likely to prevent them from using Advancing Access resources, and which factors were likely to limit the impact of the resources. The most frequent response on both preventing use and limiting impact was 'not enough time', with 42% (N=19) and 43% (N=20) respondents selecting this, respectively.

Perceptions and audience of Advancing Access

There are two main types of users for Advancing Access: experienced advisers for whom Advancing Access is one of many sources of advice, and non-specialist teachers for whom the materials may form a key part of their training and knowledge about progression to university. Interviewees and most survey respondents tended to exemplify the first type of user: supporting students career and/or HE decisions forms a large part of their role, and as such Advancing Access is one of many sources of information informing their expertise. Interviewees all had substantial responsibility for progression to HE in their setting – roles included school career advisers, a head of sixth form and 'university officer'. They used Advancing Access resources to inform the sessions they themselves were delivering to students – both one-to-one and workshop-style sessions. They tended to perceive the resources as an additional source of information to weave into their knowledge and resources from other sources to ensure that their knowledge was current.

The university application process that interviewees described tended to involve input from a range of staff, and interviewees had an appreciation that all teachers had the potential to influence students' HE decision-making. One interviewee was intending to use Advancing Access resources in training sessions on UCAS references and personal statements. Another interviewee felt that the most important feature of Advancing Access for 'occasional advisers' was the opportunity it gave to

challenge their misconceptions and update their understanding. They had directed teachers to the resources:

"Sometimes they can make off the cuff remarks to students and that stays with them for a long, long time. "I don't think they will take you at [RG institution]!" ... with no justification for it. I am trying to push that with the staff [so they can] see now what they are, what they are looking for, entry requirements those universities are looking for - they don't look at where that student is coming from. It's whether they meet the requirements for the university [that influences] whether they will be considered."

Interview respondent, careers adviser in a single state school

The interviewee felt that the Advancing Access resources represented Russell Group universities as they understood them to be now, compared with "20 years" ago when they felt that their language and approach was more "elitist". The resources allowed them to more easily convey this change to colleagues.

One interviewee raised the issue of school budgets and the impact that this was having on advice and guidance provision. The interviewee felt that although she had a high level of expertise and did not need to learn much from the materials, they were a useful aid for teachers who, because of budget cuts, were now expected to deliver advice and guidance as part of their normal role (for example, in tutorial sessions) and were unlikely to have been well-trained to do so.

Most interviewees did see Advancing Access as distinct from other content – all interviewees were aware that it was delivered by the Russell Group without being prompted. One interviewee said that although they recognised it as representing the Russell Group, they would not describe it like this to their colleagues; rather, the interviewee would describe it as a general university advice website in the hope that it would then challenge colleagues' expectations about whether their students were suitable for leading universities. When asked how they felt it was different from other resources, one interviewee felt that it was more targeted at advisers (rather than teachers) and had more detail than most other sites they used.

However, one interviewee and some survey respondents saw the Advancing Access content as more 'generic', pertaining to university access in general rather than specifically leading universities. In some cases, this was because students didn't perceive most Russell Group universities as different from other universities – the idea of simply going to any university was perceived in the same way. In this case, the interviewee was intending to use the resources, for example to support all teachers involved with writing references, but expected that few students in the school would actually attend Russell Group institutions:

"To be honest, yes it would be great if they went to Russell Group universities, but a lot of our students don't even aspire to university, and I've got to work on those students as well to let them see that yes, there is life outside of [their town] and you can go."

Interview respondent, school sixth form

A potential limitation to gains in knowledge for experienced advisers is their assumption that Advancing Access gives information that they already know. If materials contain information that is new, or specific to leading/Russell Group institutions, Advancing Access should consider highlighting this to reduce the risk of users assuming that the information agrees with their current knowledge and assumptions and hence not engaging as fully as they otherwise might.

In both the survey and the interviews there were occasions where Advancing Access was compared with the UCAS website. In general, both websites were seen as accessible sources of reliable information and resources.

"I have only used your website to access the "how to write a reference" because we have several new personal tutors and it seemed silly to re-invent the wheel when the information was there. However, I could just as easily have used the UCAS information."

Advancing Access user survey respondent

At the time of data collection (June to October 2017) interviewees had not had the opportunity to use many of the resources in practice – rather, they were intending to review their set of materials and look for gaps where the resources could be incorporated. This quote from a survey respondent characterises this position:

“It really is a matter of looking at them more thoroughly and building them into our support. We have a lot of materials already developed to suit our own requirements as exactly as possible, so these tend to be the first recourse.”

Advancing Access user survey respondent

Perceptions of the Russell Group and current application behaviour

Survey participants were asked in what circumstances they would advise students at their school to apply to leading universities, such as those in the Russell Group, as well as being asked whether there are any circumstances in which they would not advise highly academically able students to apply to these universities.

When asked about the circumstances in which they would advise students to apply to leading universities, over 80% of those who responded mentioned predicted grades or academic attainment. Eleven respondents (around a fifth) mentioned a particular set of grades that they would see as a threshold and these ranged from A*A*A* to BBB (one response each). The most frequent responses were AAA and AAB.

Several respondents also mentioned students' temperament – would they thrive in a “more academic environment” and were they “ambitious”. Around a third of respondents mentioned students' personal circumstances or personal preferences – occasionally whether the location would be suitable, but also whether the course was appropriate to their interests and longer-term plans. Four respondents had a ‘no harm in trying’ approach:

“I would even encourage them to do so if their grades were one or two below. No harm in trying provided they don't mind the rejection and have some other more realistic choices amongst their options.”

Advancing Access user survey respondent

Five respondents said that most of their students apply to many Russell Group universities anyway, with one saying that the challenge in their setting was to encourage students to pick an appropriate “back-up” choice in case their exams don't go as well as expected.

Only one respondent mentioned that whether a student met access/widening participation criteria would factor into their advice about whether to apply (although thoughts of this may also have been at play for those suggesting students should apply with lower predicted grades). Given the increasing importance of contextual admissions in leading universities, it may be beneficial for Advancing Access to devote some resource to promoting knowledge and understanding of this area.

When asked whether there were any circumstances in which they would not advise students to apply to leading universities, around half of respondents said no, there were no circumstances when they wouldn't advise a highly academically able students to apply. For those who did give a positive response, around half of these (n=13) described situations where there was a more appropriate course elsewhere, for example if the student wanted to study a more vocational course or something artistic such as dance. One respondent mentioned higher apprenticeships such as those offered by leading accountancy firms.

Six survey respondents mentioned mental health issues as a reason they might not advise students to apply to a leading university:

"If they struggled with mental health issues under the pressure of exams, I would encourage them to look at less demanding institutions so they could still get a degree but with less of the anxiety-inducing pressure."

Advancing Access user survey respondent

However, another respondent mentioned that this would be "very rare". Allusions to 'personal circumstances' were equally frequent, with some respondents also mentioning that students may choose to stay at home for university due to personal and health-related circumstances. A small number of respondents were keen to emphasise that while they might not suggest particular institutions to a student, they would not actively discourage them from a choice that the student felt was right for him or herself. Only one respondent mentioned contacting the university about additional support for a potential student:

"I hope there would not be any circumstances where this would occur where I could not contact admissions to support the student."

Advancing Access user survey respondent

It may be beneficial for Advancing Access to provide more advice and reassurance for users on the ways that leading universities can support vulnerable students, and provide more signposting to where users can access information from particular institutions.

What we have learned about opinions of Advancing Access and experiences of users:

- Advancing Access has a very high level of credibility: 100% of users agree that the resources and information provided are useful, up to date and accurate.
- Advancing Access is used by specialist advisers as part of a range of resources. These advisers already have a high level of knowledge and experience and Advancing Access can fill some gaps.
- It is also used by a range of teachers and others in schools who do not have university admissions as the main part of their role. These users have potentially larger gains to be made. Sometimes, experienced advisers are using the materials to train other staff.
- Users found Advancing Access valuable as a single point of information that applied to many universities.
- Many survey respondents were planning to use the materials, but had not been able to do so yet.

What should happen next:

- Users were not able to say much about how they had used the materials in practice, as many had only had access to them for a very short time. Advancing Access should continue to gather feedback from users to understand how resources become embedded in practice over time.
- Perceptions about admissions criteria and support available for applicants vary. Advancing Access should consider a particular focus on contextual admissions and support structures for disadvantaged applicants to address this.

Virtual Conferences

Virtual conferences were well-attended and generally well-received. The schools that took part have similar characteristics to schools using the Advancing Access website.

Attendees strongly valued the opportunity to hear credible advice from several universities, particularly as it was free and convenient to attend.

Attendees were more likely to have a role focussed on careers advice than general website users, and as such were less likely to say that lack of time would prevent them putting the advice into practice. Over 80% of survey respondents said that they were 'very likely' to attend another virtual conference in future.

Advancing Access delivered two virtual conferences (VC); the first was delivered during the pilot phase on 1 November 2016 (referred to in this report as VC1). The second VC (VC2) was delivered after the relaunch on 24 May 2017. The current report focuses on VC2 but where applicable details from VC1 are included. VC1 was covered in detail in our 2016 evaluation report. A more detailed description is given in Section 4 (p37) or the Report in Detail.

This online event is intended to replicate a 'real life' conference (similar to existing Russell Group or UCAS conferences). The online event included interactive webinar presentations, a virtual staff room, and an exhibition hall.

There were five webinar presentations in VC2 covering the following topics:

- Writing personal statements
- Writing academic references
- Applying to study medicine
- Applying to Oxford and Cambridge
- Preparing for university interviews

VC1 covered the first three of these, along with a presentation on admissions tests. All webinars included a text-based chat forum where delegates could ask questions of presenters. The virtual staff room gave delegates the opportunity to take part in discussion with other attendees and university representatives. The exhibition hall featured stands for each of the 24 partner universities, with the opportunity to conduct live text-based chat with university representatives and download university-specific materials on outreach schemes and activities and scholarships as well as more general information about each university. Attendees were able to sign in and out of the website at any point during the three-hour conference.

VC attendees' roles

The 2017 VC had 259 attendees in total, compared with 143 in 2016. Table 9 shows the role that attendees selected. For those selecting 'Other', their free response answers included roles such as teachers of various subjects, roles related to HE progression (e.g. 'Higher Education officer') and pastoral support roles.

Table 9 Role of second virtual conference attendees

Role	Number
Other	90
Careers adviser	57
[Null]	29
Student	23
Subject lead	17
Head of year 12	14
Most able coordinator	11
Head of year 13	8
Deputy head	7
Enrichment officer	3
Total	259

Which schools attended the Virtual Conferences?

Note that the measures in this section are the same as those used to give contextual data on schools and colleges with Advancing Access accounts. Fuller description about the information is given in that section.

Schools in England

VC1 attendees were associated with 112 state schools and colleges in England and Wales (108 in England) and one international school VC2 attendees were associated with 130 state schools and colleges in England and Wales (127 in England), and 9 independent schools.

Table 10 Establishment type (from Edubase) of schools attending each virtual conference

Type of Establishment	Number VC1	Number VC2
Academy converter	59	52
Academy sponsor led		23
Further education	18	23
Community school	6	15
Other independent school	7	9
Academy 16-19 converter	0	5
Voluntary aided school	3	4
Foundation school	6	3
Welsh establishment	0	3
Free schools	0	1
Free schools 16 to 19	0	1
Other	9	0
Total	108	139

As in the analysis of Advancing Access account holders, the total number of schools referred to in each section will differ, and the number of schools referred to on each occasion will be specified.

Opportunity areas

Seven schools in opportunity areas had an attendee at VC2. While this represents only 4% of the total number of schools in opportunity areas, it compares favourably to the rate of attendance from schools outside of opportunity areas. 2% of these schools had a VC attendee, meaning that schools in opportunity areas were around twice as likely to have a VC attendee.

Progression to Higher Education

The percentage of students progressing to higher education from each school or college is investigated in three categories: progression to any higher education institution (HEI); progression to a 'top third' HEI and progression to a Russell Group HEI.

As in the analysis of account holders, we have grouped VC2-attending schools and colleges into separate categories and presented two tables to allow comparison against accurate progression averages. Table 11 shows the number of schools and colleges that were above and below the national average on all three progression categories for 2016/17.

Table 11 Number and percentage of schools with at least VC attendee that are above, and below, the national average progression to higher education rate in various categories

Category: Progression to...	Number of VC schools with data available	Number and percentage of VC schools above national average	Number and percentage of VC schools below national average	Average progression for VC schools or colleges	National average progression rate
Any HEI (schools)	82	39 (48%)	43 (52%)	61%	60%
Top third (schools)	76	35 (46%)	41 (54%)	26%	26%
Russell Group (schools)	77	31 (40%)	46 (60%)	19%	17%
Any HEI (colleges)	25	19 (76%)	6 (24%)	51%	41%
Top third (colleges)	25	16 (64%)	9 (36%)	15%	10%
Russell Group (colleges)	27	12 (44%)	15 (56%)	9%	7%

For progression to any HEI and progression to top third institutions, we see that the average for schools with a VC2 attendee is roughly similar to the national average each year. For progression to Russell Group institutions the average for schools with a VC2 attendee is slightly higher than the national average.

As with Advancing Access account holders, we see that the average progression across all categories for colleges with a VC2 attendee is higher than the national average. Figure 12 shows the distribution of progression to any HEI (3 year average) for colleges with a VC2 attendee compared to colleges without. Similar to the pattern for Advancing Access accounts, we see that colleges with progression around 50% are more likely to have attended the VC2.

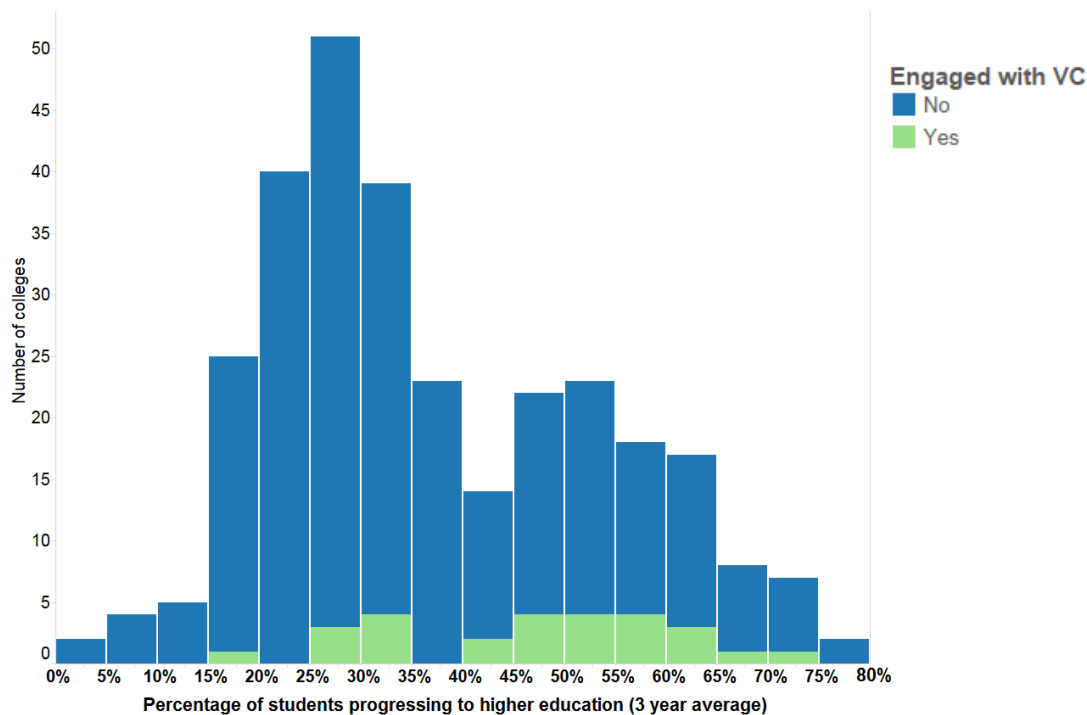


Figure 12 Histogram showing distribution of % of pupils progressing to any HEI, 3 year average; colleges without a VC2 attendee compared to colleges with a VC2 attendee.

Attainment (KS5)

To assess attainment at KS5 we looked at three categories: percentage of A level students achieving at least three levels at grades AAB or better, at least two of which are in facilitating subjects; average point score in best 3 A level entries; and average point score per academic entry.

On average, schools and colleges with a VC attendee have slightly lower levels of KS5 attainment than the national average (Table 12). As with Advancing Access users, looking at the distribution of the percentage rates for all schools in a box and whisker plot gives a fuller picture. We see in Figure 13 that while in general the KS5 attainment for schools attending the VC is slightly higher than other schools, there are many attendees at the lower end of the attainment distribution, and that the highest-attaining schools tend not to have attendees.

Table 12 Number and percentage of schools with at least one VC2 attendee that are above, and below, the national average for KS5 attainment in various categories

Category	Number of VC schools with data available	Number and percentage of VC schools above national average	Number and percentage of VC schools below national average	Average for VC schools or colleges	National average percentage / score
% 3 A levels at AAB incl. 2 facilitating	107	42 (39%)	65 (61%)	12.9%	13.9%
Average point score in best 3 A levels	107	44 (41%)	63 (59%)	32.3	33.8
Average point score per entry	111	49 (44%)	62 (56%)	29.2	30.6

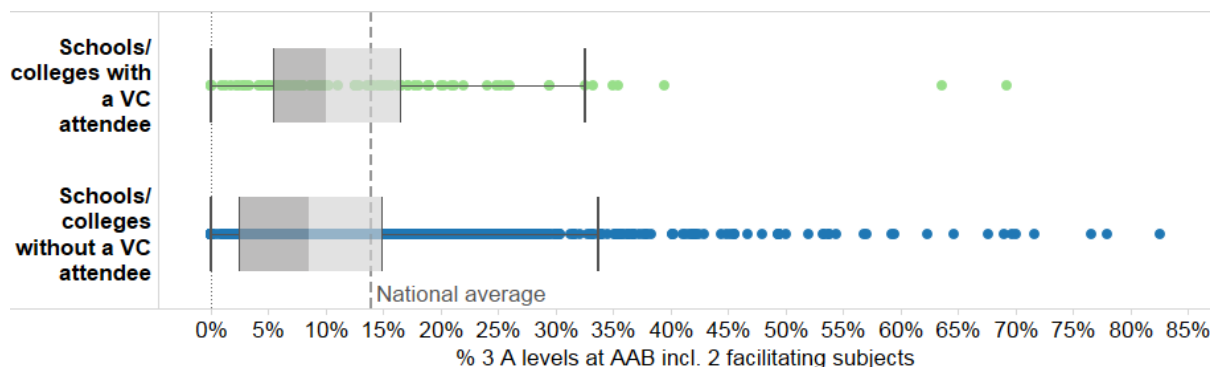


Figure 13 Box and whisker plot showing % of pupils achieving AAB or higher in at least two facilitating subjects at A level; schools without a VC attendee compared to schools with a VC attendee. Reference line shows national average as published by DfE. For schools with no account, lower quartile = 3%, median = 9%, upper quartile = 15%. For schools with an AA account, lower quartile = 6%, median = 10%, upper quartile = 17%.

Attainment (KS4)

To measure attainment at KS4 we used the percentage of pupils achieving 5 or more A*-C or equivalents including A*-C in both English and mathematics at GCSE. We see in Table 13 below that on average, schools and colleges with an Advancing Access account have slightly higher GCSE attainment than the national average.

Table 13 Number and percentage of schools with at least one VC2 attendee that are above, and below, the national average for KS4 attainment in various categories

Category	Number of VC schools with data available	Number and percentage of VC schools above national average	Number and percentage of VC schools below national average	Average for VC schools or colleges	National average percentage / score
% pupils achieving 5+ A*-C or equivalents including A*-C in both English and mathematics GCSE	92	57 (62%)	35 (38%)	63%	57.4%
Progress 8 score	91	58 (64%)	33 (36%)	0.03	-0.03

Free School Meals eligibility

Table 14 shows the descriptive statistics on the percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals in each school, and the percentage eligible at any time during the past 6 years (known as 'Ever6') for schools with at least one VC attendee. We see that on free school meals eligibility the average for these schools is the same as the national average, while for Ever6 is it a little below the national average.

Table 14 Number and percentage of schools with at least one VC2 attendee that are above, and below, the national average for free school meals eligibility

Category	Number of VC schools with data available	Number and percentage of VC schools above national average	Number and percentage of VC schools below national average	Average for VC schools or colleges	National average percentage
Percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals	96	35 (36%)	61 (64%)	14.7%	14.6%
Percentage of pupils eligible for FSM at any time during the past 6 years	95	36 (38%)	59 (62%)	28.6%	29.3%

POLAR3 and gaps in young participation

As in the previous section, we use a dataset derived from HEFCE's secondary schools data to calculate the percentage of pupils in each school living in quintile 1 and 2 on young participation and participation gaps measures.

Table 15 below shows the descriptive statistics for each category – note that due to rounding of the original data for each ward, totals for some schools come to over 100%. We see that the average on both categories for schools with at least one VC attendee is below the national average.

Table 15 Number and percentage of schools with at least one VC2 attendee that are above, and below, the national average for percentage of pupils living in POLAR3 quintile 1 or 2

Category	Number of VC schools with data available	Number and percentage of VC schools above national average	Number and percentage of VC schools below national average	Average for VC schools or colleges	National average percentage
% pupils living in a POLAR3 young progression quintile 1 or 2 ward	92	38 (41%)	54 (59%)	34%	41.0%
% pupils living in a POLAR3 'gaps' quintile 1 or 2 ward	92	36 (39%)	56 (61%)	33%	40.6%

Survey and interview responses on the virtual conference

Further details will be found in the Report I Detail Section 4.4 (p45).

Background of survey respondents

There were 39 valid responses to the survey. Not all respondents answered every question, so totals will vary throughout the analysis.

38 respondents identified a particular school that they were associated with – most were schools in England, but two respondents were associated with a school in Kenya and one with an international school in Bangkok. The respondent who was not associated with a school was an independent careers adviser.

Respondents were asked to select their role and responses are shown in Table 16 below. Those who selected 'Other' gave details of roles related to careers and academic support (e.g. 'Director of Student Development'; 'Head of Access to Higher Education'). Some respondents had roles related to 'able and talented' students and one was Oxbridge coordinator alongside a general careers advice role.

Table 16 Number and percentage of responses to 'What is your role in school/college?' (VC)

Role	Number	Percentage
Careers Adviser	14	36%
Other	12	31%
Head of Sixth Form	4	10%
Head of Subject (or equivalent)	4	10%
Teacher	3	8%
Assistant Head of Sixth Form	2	5%
Total	39	

Respondents were also asked how long they had been working in schools, and the responses ranged from 1-31 years, with an average of 14 years. When asked how long they had been working in their current school or college, the average was 7.5 years and responses ranged from 0-29 years. Out of those who responded regarding whether they had been a student ambassador or student mentor while at university, 11% (N=4) had done so.

Background of schools

The majority of respondents selected the post-16 (including 11-18) stage of education as best characterising the school/college they worked in, with 13% (N=5) of those who responded to this question saying they worked with the 11-16 range. When those working in 11-16 schools were asked about the post-16 destinations of their students, 2 selected A-levels and 2 selected career-focused qualifications such as BTEC or NVQ.

For those who selected post-16 (including 11-18) as best characterising their school/college, the majority of those who responded regarding the post-18 destinations of their students selected 'University' (97%, N=32).

Post-16 respondents were also asked, 'If students from your school / college progress to university, which universities do they most often progress to?', and could select the main three universities from three drop down lists. There were 92 selections in total, of which 46 (50%) were Russell Group institutions.

Engagement with the virtual conference

Respondents were asked how long they had spent engaged with the VC. The most frequent response was 1-2 hours at 66% (N=23). 26% of respondents (N=9) had stayed less than an hour, and 9% of respondents (N=3) had stayed for the full three hours.

Participants were asked which VC presentations they had attended (Figure 14). The most frequent response was 'What makes a successful personal statement?', with 28 respondents having attended this session.

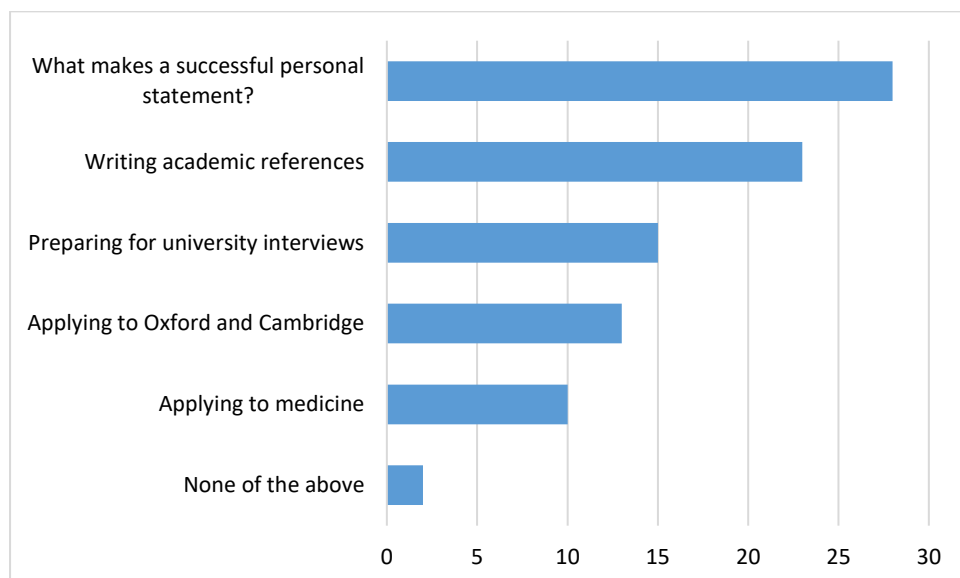


Figure 14 Responses to 'Please select which, if any, of the online presentations you attended'

Participants were asked how they had used the other areas of the VC (Figure 15). The online presentations were most frequently attended, and all sections were attended by over 40% of respondents. Eight respondents had attended all three areas and a further 12 had attended two areas.

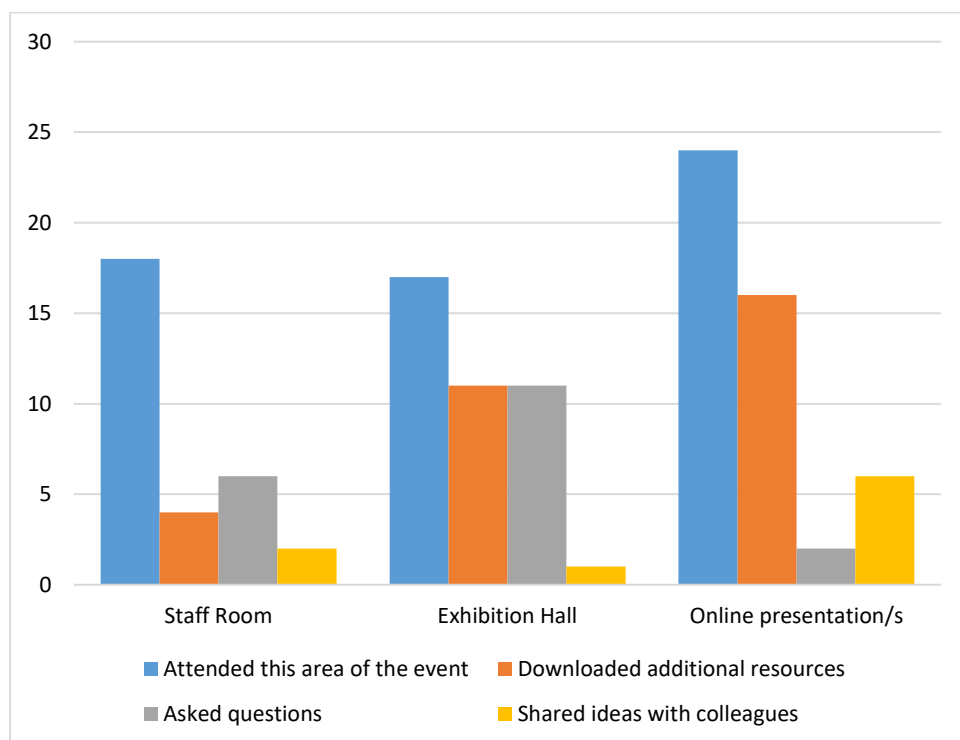


Figure 15 Responses to 'In what ways did you engage with the following virtual conference areas?'

Participants were asked how they intended to use the information and resources that they gathered from each area of the virtual conference (Figure 16). Respondents primarily intended to use the

information and resources to develop their own knowledge. Directing students and colleagues to the information and resources were also frequent responses.

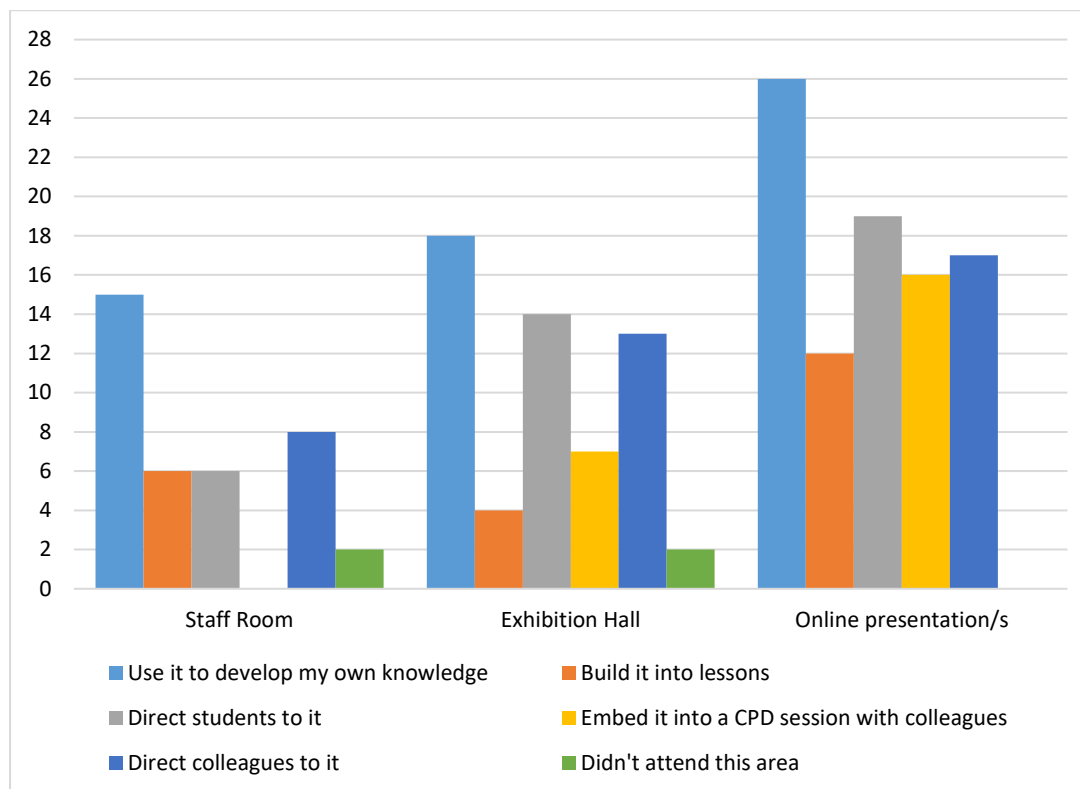


Figure 16 Responses to 'How do you intend to use the information and resources you picked up at each of the virtual conference areas?'

Opinions and potential outcomes

The majority of free response feedback in the survey was positive. While one respondent felt that the VC was “no substitute for physical presence”, many felt that it was just as useful as attending a physical conference and many appreciated the flexibility and ease of attending.

“I really loved the concept and in the past I have had to attend separate events run by individual universities. This was more convenient.”

Virtual conference survey respondent

This comment was fairly typical of the responses in the survey. Generally, respondents found the format and content useful and engaging. Respondents found it useful to see content from a range of universities and intended to apply this when supporting students:

“PowerPoint material on personal statements [was] especially useful - contrasting university approaches. Getting across to students how the statement needs to fulfil the differing needs of very differing universities is difficult at best.”

Virtual conference survey respondent

One respondent mentioned that they intended to include some of the resources in their school's “university guidance workbook”.

Respondents were asked to show their level of agreement with a range of statements about the quality of the information and resources available in the VC (Figure 17). 100% of respondents either strongly agreed or agreed that the resources were useful, up to date, accurate and reflect their own experience. Respondents were less likely to agree that the information and resources provided information that they didn't know before, with 30% of respondents disagreeing with this.

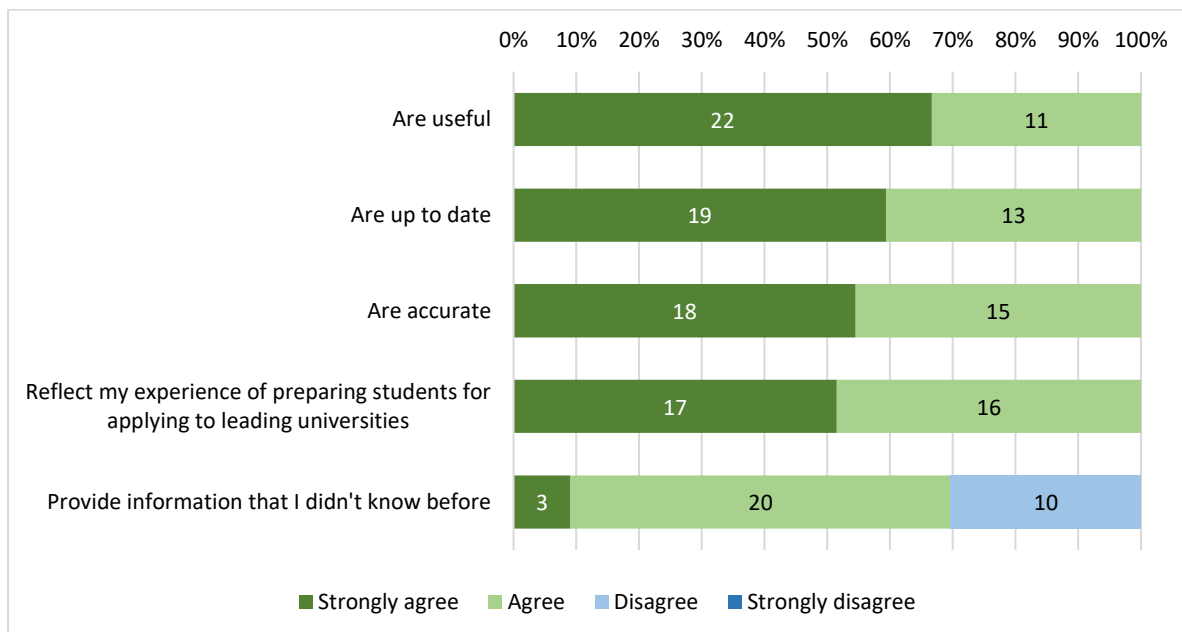


Figure 17 Responses to 'Please show how much you agree with the following statements about the Advancing Access virtual conference: The information and resources that I picked up...'

Participants were asked how far they agreed that Advancing Access had improved their ability to support students in a range of areas. Respondents were most likely to agree that Advancing Access had helped them support students with how to write a good personal statement (94%), which reflects the content of the presentations that respondents attended. The admissions processes at each university and how the application is dealt with and writing references to support university applications also scored particularly highly, with both having 93% agreement.

When participants were asked about the likelihood of changing the advice they give to students as a result of engaging with the Advancing Access website, 21% of respondents said that they were more likely to advise their students to apply to leading universities such as those in the Russell Group and 15% said that they were more likely to encourage more of their students to consider university.

When asked how likely they were to attend another VC in the future, 83% of respondents (N=29) said that this was very likely, with a further 11% (N=4) saying it was fairly likely (Figure 18). This key finding demonstrates that attendees found the VC to be a valuable use of their time.

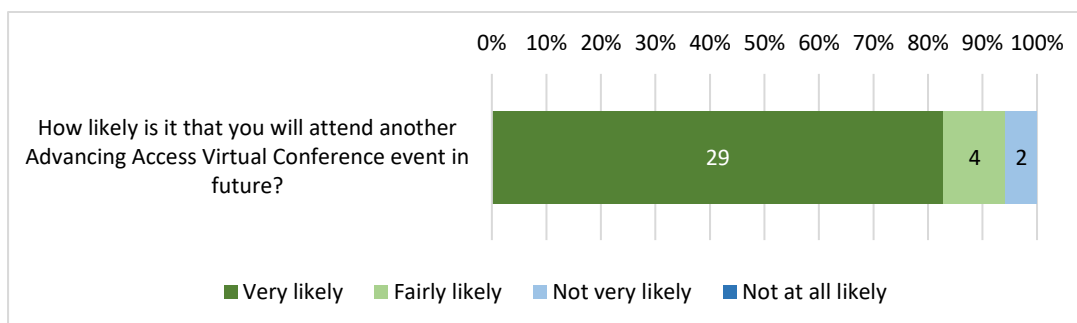


Figure 18 Responses to 'How likely is it that you will attend another Advancing Access virtual conference event in future?'

Barriers to use

Participants were asked to choose from a range of factors which was most likely to prevent them from using Advancing Access resources, and which factors were likely to limit the impact of the resources. The majority of respondents said that no factors were likely to prevent their use (56%, N=19) or limit the impact (53%, N=17). Of those who did pick a limiting factor, 'not enough time' was the most

frequent for both questions (29% and 25% respectively). 16% of respondents thought that students' own perceptions/aspirations were most likely to limit the impact of the resources.

Practical and technical feedback

Respondents were asked how they heard about the VC. Some open responses were categorised in the analysis; responses are shown in Figure 19. Respondents mentioned various advisers' conferences, including those run by the University of Birmingham, the University of Nottingham and the University of Liverpool.

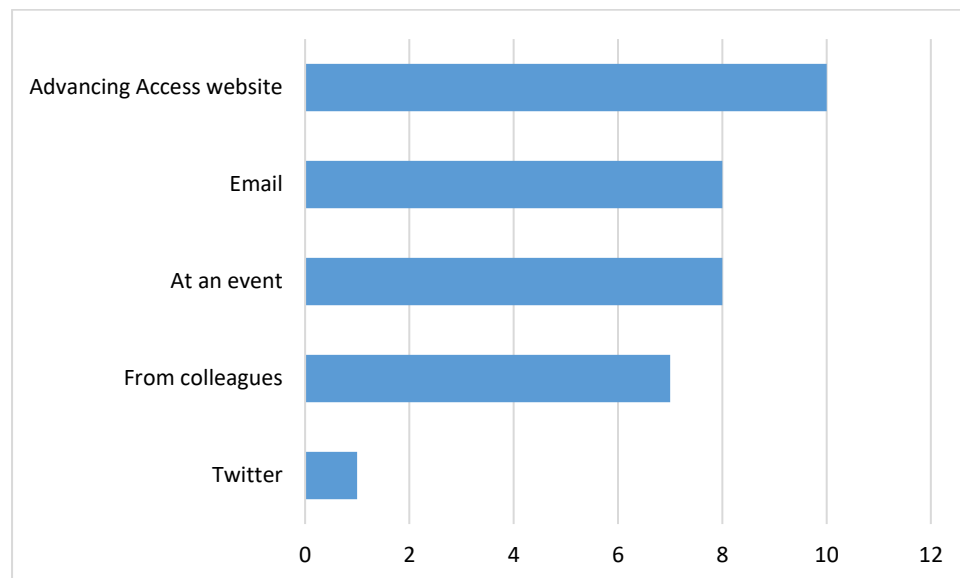


Figure 19 Responses to 'How did you hear about the Advancing Access virtual conference?'

Participants were asked what factors influenced their decision to attend the VC and responses are shown in Figure 20.

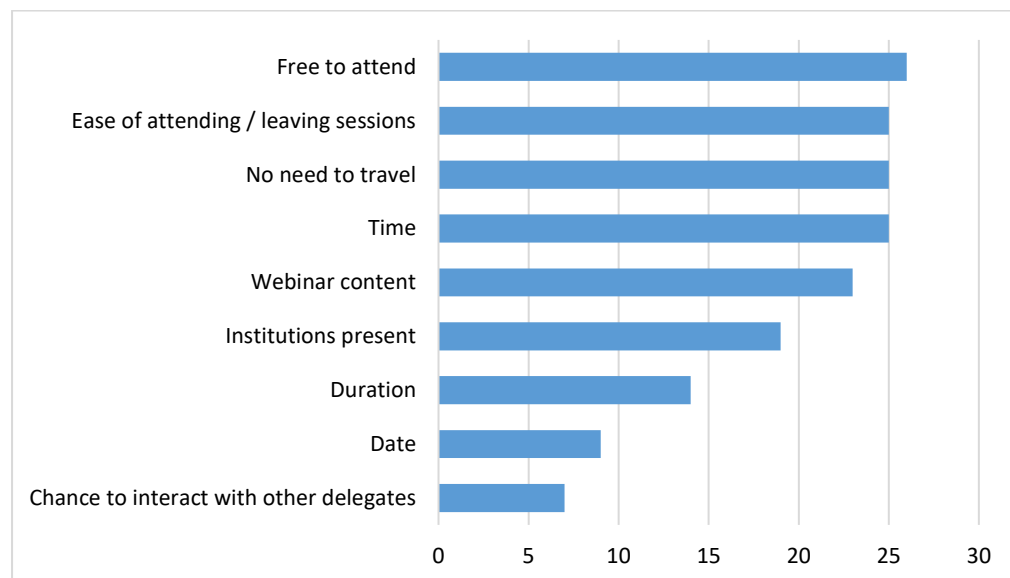


Figure 20 Responses to 'What factors influenced your attendance at this conference?'

What we have learned about virtual conference attendees and their opinions of the virtual conference:

- Virtual conference attendees came from similar schools to Advancing Access users in general.
- The response was typically enthusiastic. Survey respondents “loved the concept” and many (although not all) thought it was just as good as travelling to a conference in person, with the added benefits of being less costly and time-consuming.
- Attendees particularly appreciated getting reliable information from multiple universities in the same event.
- While a small number of respondents had problems with the timing of the event, generally it was felt to be convenient.
- As with the Advancing Access website, attendees had gathered information and materials, but had not yet been able to put this into practice.

What should happen next:

- Advancing Access should continue to offer virtual conferences. They should continue to offer the current core content, and consider some more specialised subject-based sessions to engage subject teachers.
- Getting the right audience is key, so any new activity should be promoted in advance across multiple channels to ensure the right users are reached.
- Some respondents intended to return to the website to view presentations that they missed in the live session. Advancing Access should check whether this is happening. They could also consider conducting follow-up research (a survey or interviews) with attendees to find out how information has been used in the longer term.

Summary of findings

In this section we look back at the research questions and summarise the answers we have found so far. Advancing Access is still a very new programme. The data collection for this evaluation finished before many users had been able to fully put their new knowledge into practice, so it is difficult to know what the full impact will be at this stage.

Does the intervention increase knowledge of enabling factors for progression to leading universities for teachers and advisers?

Yes, there is some good evidence that Advancing Access increases knowledge of enabling factors for progression to leading universities. Interview findings indicated that for experienced advisers, gains in knowledge would often be small but could potentially have a big impact for individual students. Examples included answers to individual questions about entry requirements for specific courses and institutions posed in the virtual conference, and information about contextual admissions. This information might change the advice that they give to just a single student, but the impact on that student could be substantial, leading to them applying to a course that they might otherwise not have done.

There is also some good evidence that Advancing Access materials can increase knowledge for non-specialist teachers. Survey and interview respondents talked about using Advancing Access materials to deliver training to staff, or building them into their school's guidance packs. Given the timing of data collection, most respondents were planning to do this but hadn't yet – it would be useful to conduct further research to find out more about training and embedding materials.

Survey responses also gave positive evidence that Advancing Access increases users' knowledge. 76% of respondents in the website user survey and 70% in the virtual conference survey agreed that Advancing Access had given them information that they did not know before. There were also high levels of agreement in both surveys when respondents were asked whether Advancing Access had improved their ability to support students in a range of areas (ranging from 69% to 87% agreement across categories in the website user survey and 37% - 94% in the virtual conference survey).

Does the intervention support attitudinal change regarding leading universities for teachers and advisers?

There is some evidence that Advancing Access resources support attitudinal change regarding leading universities. In surveys, 30% of respondents to the website user survey and 21% of respondents to the VC survey said that they were more likely to advise their students to apply to leading universities such as those in the Russell Group.

Interview findings indicated that interaction with Advancing Access was part of a bigger picture of changing perceptions about the Russell Group. Interviewees tended to be well-informed about the requirements and admissions procedures of leading universities (the general principles rather than the detail) and they felt that Advancing Access would be valuable as a way to quickly remedy misconceptions and fill gaps in knowledge for staff with less expertise.

This question could be answered more fully by continuing to survey and interview users over time, as the effects of attitudinal change will become more apparent as users go through more university admissions cycles.

Has the intervention reached the intended audience?

Yes, Advancing Access have had some good successes in reaching their target audience. School with an Advancing Access account or attending the virtual conference are, in general, similar to the population of schools in England. The information categories we have looked at tend to have a broad spread of data points, with many schools on either side of the national average.

An important risk for Advancing Access was that the resources and information would mainly be taken up by schools that are already 'doing well' with progression to higher education and leading universities. The materials are publicly available online and many schools of this type have engaged. However, the spread of data shows that many schools and colleges with lower rates of progression (on school-level destination measures and POLAR3 progression data); high rates of free school meals eligibility and lower average attainment have also engaged with the resources and the virtual conference. Engaging with schools in opportunity areas has been a particular success – these schools are twice as likely to be engaged with Advancing Access than schools in other areas.

How is the intervention used by the schools and colleges at which it is targeted?

It is too early to fully answer this question. Most survey respondents having not yet used the resources in practice.

Interviews gave some indication of how Advancing Access is used and perceived differently by schools in more disadvantaged areas. One interview was conducted with a school that had high rates of progression to Russell Group universities. This interview indicated that for advisers that already have detailed knowledge, Advancing Access does not offer new information and therefore has limited appeal. As the learners in this school already aspired to attend leading institutions and were well-informed by their parents, the interviewee felt that the resources were not sufficiently detailed for them.

In contrast, a careers adviser working in a range of schools felt that the student resources would provide good preparation for students, particularly if used by a school in advance of a one-to-one guidance interview. This interviewee felt that the resources could play an important role in prompting students to consider their future pathways in a way that they would not have done previously. Another interviewee working in a low progression school talked enthusiastically about the inspirational impact of the video case studies on her students. The interviewee felt that the students were able to identify with the video content and that this affected their perception of their own ability and opportunities more than would have been possible with second-hand information.

One interviewee hypothesised that schools with lower budgets for careers advice would find the materials most useful for training staff to fill this gap and it would be useful to explore this further in future evaluation

Future research questions

At the start of the evaluation, we set out a series of research questions. The questions below are those that it is still too early to answer. We have described the kind of research that would need to take place to answer them.

If changes in knowledge and attitudes take place for teachers and advisers, how does this affect learners?

At this stage of Advancing Access' development there is limited information about how changes for teachers and advisers might impact on learners. Advancing Access should continue to work closely with schools (or continue to work with an independent evaluator who can work with schools on their behalf) to understand how the materials are being used and what impact this might have on learners. We would have liked to complete case studies as part of this evaluation, but it was too early for schools to take part. This plan should be reviewed and activity in schools could potentially be observed at the end of 2017/18 and start of 2018/19 academic years.

Does the intervention increase the likelihood of higher-achieving learners at KS4 progressing to study facilitating subjects at KS5 / learners at KS5 making high-quality applications to leading universities?

It is difficult to answer both of these questions with any certainty using the data available at this stage. Ideally, this topic would be investigated further using the administrative data on school pupils and university students, as this would give an accurate measure of learners' subject choice and HE destinations. However, there is a substantial time lag on the availability of this data: for example, for learners making KS5 choices in 2017/18 – starting study in 2018/19 – the first data on the subjects they have chosen would be available when their results are published after October 2020. Similarly for HE applications, learners applying in 2017/18 would attend university in September 2018, and data on this would first be published in 2019. The earliest that any analysis and findings could be published on this kind of data is around 2021. Advancing Access should continue to monitor proxy indicators of impact such as user feedback in the meantime.