



The  
Access  
Project

## Impact report 2023/24

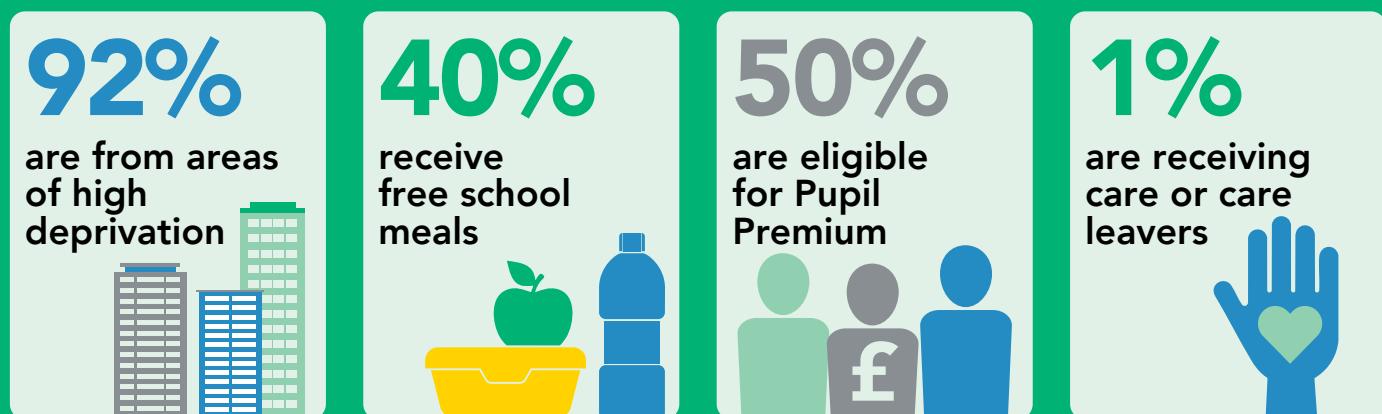
Paving the way for success

# Our mission

**We support** young people from under-resourced backgrounds to raise their aspirations, access top universities, and achieve social mobility.

**Why do we do this?** Our work is vital as access to top universities in the UK is profoundly unequal. Students from the most under-resourced backgrounds are almost three times less likely to attend university.\* We are committed to delivering our highly impactful programmes with our students to tackle this inequality.

**Who do we work with?** We work with those students who need us most. Of the students we worked with in 2023/24:



"I've always aspired to attend a Russell Group university because of the vast opportunities they offer and the advantage they provide in the job market... When I opened my envelope [on A level results day], I was overwhelmed with a rush of relief and joy upon seeing my results."

**Zelal, former student with The Access Project, now studying Psychology at Queen Mary University of London**

\* Source: Widening participation in higher education, Free School Meals – Gap, Department for Education.

# Forewords



## Anna Searle, Chief Executive

"Reflecting on the academic year 2023/24, it is incredibly rewarding to consider the importance of this year as one of transition for The Access Project and the young people on our programmes.

We supported over 2,000 students across the country, welcoming new students and new schools from West Yorkshire, the West Midlands and London. Once again, data shows that students with The Access Project are 50% more likely to attend top universities than demographically and academically similar students, and we can demonstrate that our programme is a critical tool towards achieving social mobility. The university placement gap is increasing nationwide for those on free school meals (FSM), but there is no placement gap for students on our programmes.

We know we are making a difference, but we need to do more. To reach even greater numbers of young people, we developed our new strategy, Accelerating Ambition 2024-2029, building on our data, knowledge and experience in reducing barriers to opportunity for young people from under-resourced backgrounds. Additionally, we developed our new programme, Accelerate, allowing us to reduce fees for schools, and a new learning management system, The Access Hub. Our new strategy and delivery model is designed to be sustainable and scalable, ensuring that the young people and schools we work with remain at the heart of our mission as we continue to drive forward our benchmark-beating provision in close partnership with over 50 corporates, universities, trusts, foundations and major donors. By 2029, we will reach more than 20,000 young people in need of our support.

I would like to thank our hardworking and passionate staff team and our dedicated Board of Trustees for their continued support and challenge throughout the year.

Finally, it is important to recognise the determined and talented young people on our programmes. The Access Project is just the beginning of our students' journeys to brighter futures. In this report, we highlight some of our incredible alumni, who are already making strides in their early professional careers, including Ras.I, below."

## Ras.I, an alumnus of The Access Project and Vice Chair of The Access Project Advisory Council

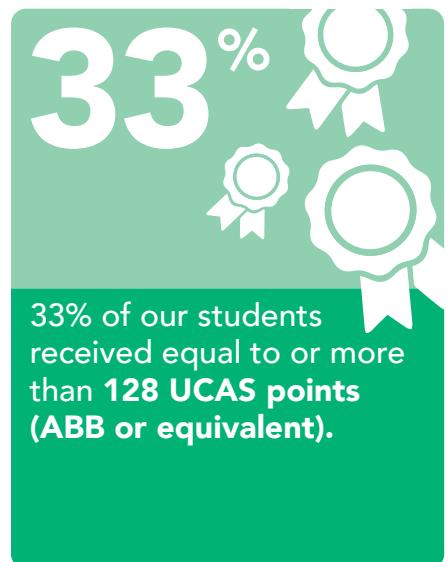
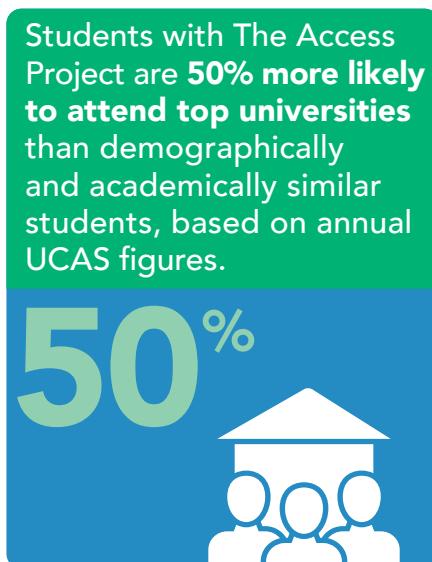


"The last academic year was a transformative one for The Access Project. We took the opportunity to consider the charity's mission and determine the most impactful ways to achieve it. If the goal is to make top third universities more accessible for under-resourced young people, then reaching as many young people as possible is essential. The creation of the Accelerate model positions us to do just that.

As an alumnus of The Access Project, I can personally attest to how life-changing this programme can be. It was my University Access Officer who first encouraged me to dream bigger, urging me to set my sights on the top. That guidance, paired with the programme's unwavering support, gave me the confidence and audacity to break generational cycles of poverty. It helped me become the first in my family to attend university, earning a place at the University of Oxford to study Philosophy, Politics, and Economics.

As The Access Project enters a new era of growth, I am thrilled that even more young people will have the opportunity to experience the programme like I did. Together, we are not just opening doors to education, we are opening doors to brighter futures."

# Our year in numbers



## 2023/24

Total number of students who received support:	<b>2,013</b>
Total number of tuition hours (1:1 and group tuition):	<b>34,600</b>
Total number of student contact hours (including 1:1s, workshops and trips):	<b>13,672</b>
Total number of 1:1 mentoring sessions:	<b>3,570</b>
Total number of university trips:	<b>15</b>
Number of students who attended a university trip:	<b>829</b>



## The Access Project students

- Applied to a top university **► 90%**
- Received an offer from a top university **► 81%**
- Placed at a top university **► 53%**

# Amplifying student voices

Young people are at the heart of everything we do. That is why we are committed to both listening to and amplifying the voices of our students and our alumni.

And why do we do this? Our student voice work improves the quality of our existing provision, informs the design and development of our new programmes, and empowers the young people on our programmes, ensuring they are included and heard.

In February 2024, 77% of the young people on our programmes responded to our student survey, an increase on 4% from the previous year. These responses gave us valuable insights into the support we offer to our students and covered topics such as academic self-efficacy, university readiness, and tuition. The findings led to explorations of all aspects of our programmes, and targeted areas for development.

Alongside this, 30 students from across the country from both Key Stage 4 and 5 took part in targeted focus groups, enabling us to adapt our activities and align our programmes with student and school needs, as well as local contexts.

This student-centric approach is not limited to the design of our programmes. We are passionate about amplifying the voices of our students externally.

## What our students say:

**90% of students**  
told us they feel more motivated  
to attend university.

**94% of students**  
said they feel more positive  
about their future.



Keen to understand the critical role the cost-of-living crisis is having on decision-making for our students and their families, we worked with two student researchers, Riveen (Year 12) and Ismail (Year 13), to co-design and deliver our research publication in this area.

Riveen told us,

"Collaborating and actively contributing to a research project of this scale was a great learning experience. Whilst the initial steps were challenging, it was a satisfying learning curve. It has allowed me to understand the planning, and data recording process, whilst allowing me to practice safe data handling, moderation of focus groups and many more useful skills."

This collaborative approach led to the launch of the 'Cost of Living and University Choices' report in June 2024, in which we put forth five key recommendations.



This report sits alongside our 'Impactful Mentoring' research report, produced in March 2024, which was informed by internal data and external research. In producing these reports and amplifying the voices of our students, we aim to translate our research findings into actionable policies that foster educational equity and make a real difference to the lives of young people.

# Removing barriers to education

We pride ourselves on delivering impactful, individualised mentoring, working in partnership with schools to deliver a programme that builds students' university readiness and removes barriers to equality of opportunity. We believe strongly in the power of expert mentoring to change young peoples' lives: setting them up for success.

Delivered by our team of trained University Access Officers, this mentoring support remains the cornerstone of our programme models. We offer tailored advice on university access, themed workshops, student finance guidance, enrichment opportunities through our corporate partners, additional support for those students wishing to apply for competitive courses or institutions, and university visits to top universities for students in Year 10 and Year 12.

## What our students say:

**89%** of students felt that 1:1 meetings with their University Access Officer had improved their independence to pursue academic interests.

**92%** of students felt that workshops had improved their knowledge about university.



In addition to providing 1:1 mentoring support to over 1,500 young people on our core programmes, we also delivered the following activities:

**1,992**

students attended at least one workshop, on topics such as university choices, revision and study skills, and the transition to university.



**807**

workshops were held, achieving a total of 5,762 student contact hours.



**104**

students were supported through our Oxbridge and Medicine & Dentistry Societies.



**829**

students attended a university trip.

## Tania

**Tania's journey with The Access Project started when she was in Year 10. An eager student, Tania showed an early interest in Geography and public speaking. She knew she wanted to go to university but wasn't sure how.**



Tania worked with her University Access Officer (her mentor from The Access Project) to explore the best route to a top university. Alongside weekly tutorials in Maths, Tania took part in extra-curricular enrichment activities including work experience with Natwest as part of the London School of Economics (LSE) Pathways to Banking scheme, and a four-day residential summer school programme at the University of Oxford.

On results day, Tania received A\*AB in her A levels and is now studying Geography at LSE.

"The Access Project has helped me through the whole journey from A levels to university. My University Access Officer, Rosie, provided extra help with personal statements, which was really helpful when applying to selective universities. The free tuition every week really boosted my confidence."



## Rosie

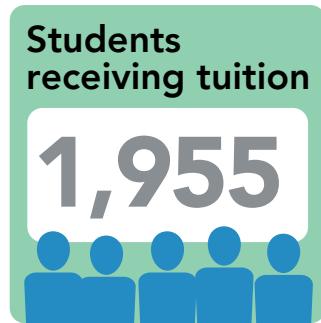
**a University Access Officer with The Access Project at St Thomas More Catholic School.**

"It is incredibly fulfilling to see students' hard work and determination pay off. I love working closely with students, supporting them in achieving their goals, especially when they have such a clear sense of what they are passionate about."



Finding your footing on the pathway to university can often be nerve-wracking for young people, but the eventual outcome is so special. Results day is full of relief and excitement, and it is amazing to see students' efforts come to fruition when they secure a place at their top-choice university."

# Raising educational attainment



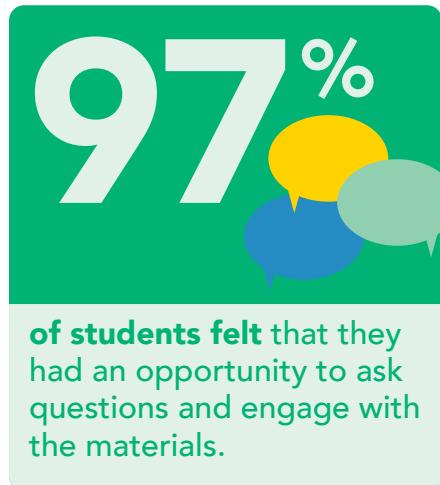
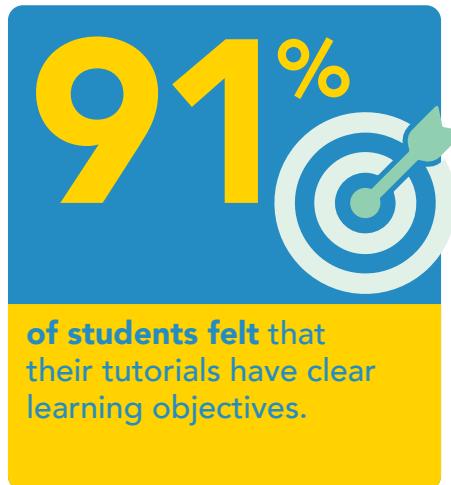
GCSE and A level tuition has been an important component of our intervention since our inception. During 2023/24, our tutors delivered 34,600 hours of tuition to a total of 1,955 students, across both our volunteer-led 1:1 tutoring programme and our professional-led group tutoring programme. This year also saw a volunteer retention rate of 52%, with 679 volunteers who tutored in the 2022/23 academic year staying on as tutors for 2023/24.

Attending weekly tutorials improves student confidence and academic self-efficacy. In our annual student survey, when asked to rate the impact of tutorials on their progress in their tutored subject

on a scale of 1 (low impact) to 5 (high impact), our students gave an average answer of 3.95.

Our digital infrastructure means we make tutorials safe, accessible and exciting for both students and tutors, and we can share online learning content with our students. We provide our young people with hardware such as headsets and webcams, and, by working with our partners at Jangala and Vodafone, we provide internet connectivity solutions so that students can take part in online tutorials. Our tutors have unlimited access to a wide range of educational resources via Kerboodle, keeping students engaged during sessions.

## What our students say:



**Lottie****a volunteer tutor and master's student at Imperial College London.**

"I wanted to join The Access Project as a way to give back a little bit. The good thing about volunteer tutoring is I actually get to use my brain and talk to people and engage. At the end of every year, my students say they have improved their confidence, and they've really enjoyed their subjects. A few of them have decided to take Biology at A level. It feels really special that I've managed to convey my enthusiasm for the subject to someone else."

**Isla****a Year 11 student at The Access Project.**

"One of the most significant ways my tutor has helped is by transforming the way I perceive and approach my studies, particularly in subjects I previously struggled with, like maths. By introducing a fun, friendly competition into our sessions, my tutor made learning engaging and enjoyable. This competitive element motivated me to improve and actually made me look forward to working on maths, a subject I might have otherwise disliked. Their innovative teaching methods, coupled with their constant encouragement, have boosted my confidence and made me realise that I can excel in any subject with the right mindset and effort."



# Essential skills training: our new Accelerate programme

Inequality is at its highest in ten years. Exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis, there are currently tens of thousands of under-resourced young people eligible for The Access Project's support.

Our intervention is consistently shown to have a benchmark-leading impact: students on The Access Project are 50% more likely to attend a top university than statistically similar peers. Ambitious to increase the scale of our programmes and reach even more young people, we have taken the most impactful components of our model and combined them into a bespoke package that focusses on university readiness and personalised mentoring, alongside essential skills development.

With external research indicating that there is an access gap in opportunities to develop transferable skills, we launched a new programme, Accelerate, co-designed with students, universities, alumni, volunteers, schools, and corporate partners. Complementing our mentoring and university readiness support, the essential skills coaching creatively supports students' development of communication, organisation, problem-solving/critical thinking, and collaboration skills.

In 2023/24 we ran our Accelerate coaching model in Oasis Academy Hadley, one of our partner schools in London. Initial feedback from the coaching element of this programme is very positive and our Accelerate programme has now been rolled out to a number of schools in 2024/25.

## Farah **The Access Project student enrolled on the Accelerate programme.**

"One of the best things I learned in coaching was blue sky thinking, which taught me to always look at a situation and think about why it is a good thing rather than why it is a bad thing, and that's something that I have been able to apply to situations which are academic and non-academic."



## Will **a Senior Programme Manager at The Access Project, and Farah's volunteer coach.**

"It was a pleasure to take part in the Skills For Access coaching pilot. I found the experience to be incredibly volunteer friendly. I was well trained and could easily fit the sessions in and around my work and personal life. The resources that the team provides are wonderful! The session slides are well structured but provide the perfect amount of room for the coach to incorporate creativity into their conversations.

I also found the sessions to be a perfect opportunity for self-reflection. I have never really taken the time to step back and look at the skills I have developed throughout my career, and this was the perfect opportunity to do so.



Most importantly, I found that the time spent with my student was incredibly rewarding. They were energetic, curious and open to developing skills they hadn't necessarily had the opportunity to reflect on so meaningfully before. It was wonderful to see them grow in confidence throughout our time together and I learnt so much from them!"

# School partnerships

We partner with schools who are dedicated to removing the barriers under-resourced students face so that they can reach their full potential.

During 2023/24, we worked with 40 schools across England, spanning Greater London, the West Midlands, the East Midlands, Cumbria, Lancashire, and West Yorkshire.

We were delighted to add four new school partners to our portfolio: **King Edward VI Handsworth Wood Girls' Academy in the West Midlands, Moor End in West Yorkshire, La Retraite Roman Catholic Girls' School in London, and Woolwich Polytechnic School for Girls in London.**

## School spotlight

At La Retraite Roman Catholic Girls' School, based in south west London, education is defined by creating opportunities and opening doors. After just one year of partnering with The Access Project,

70% of the Year 13 students on our programme placed at a top university, including one student who gained a place at the University of Cambridge.

Matt Dutton, Assistant Headteacher at La Retraite, told us, "Since working with The Access Project we are seeing real impact, having just celebrated our best ever Key Stage 5 results! Our students speak glowingly of the support they have received from both mentors and tutors and we have a long waiting list of students desperate to get involved. We would recommend The Access Project to all schools looking to secure better outcomes for its most able students!"

Alayah, a Year 11 student from La Retraite added, "In the future I'd like to be a doctor, specifically a gynaecologist, and The Access Project is helping me by giving me advice on how to apply to universities and sixth forms."

## Our 2023/24 partner schools

### North West

Darwen Vale High School  
The Whitehaven Academy  
Workington Academy

### West Yorkshire

Dixons Allerton Academy  
Moor End Academy

### London

Ark Globe Academy  
Bishop Douglass Catholic School  
Carshalton High School for Girls  
Central Foundation Boys' School  
Central Foundation Girls' School  
Chelsea Academy  
City of London Academy, Islington  
The City Academy, Hackney  
George Green's School  
Haggerston School  
City of London Academy  
Highbury Grove  
Hornsey School for Girls  
Kensington Aldridge Academy  
King Solomon Academy  
La Retraite Roman Catholic Girls' School

Lilian Baylis Technology School  
Oasis Academy Hadley  
South Bank University Academy  
St George's Roman Catholic School  
St Thomas More Catholic School  
The Norwood School  
The Urswick School  
Woolwich Polytechnic School  
Woolwich Polytechnic School for Girls

### West Midlands

Colmers School and Sixth Form  
Holte School  
King Edward VI Handsworth Wood Girls' Academy  
Moseley School  
Ormiston Forge Academy  
Waverley School  
Wood Green Academy  
Hamstead Hall Academy

### East Midlands

Ashfield School  
Shirebrook Academy  
West Notts College



# Unlocking future potential: our alumni

**Ali**

**Ali studied with The Access Project from 2021 – 2023, achieving top grades in A level Politics, Sociology, History, and Turkish. Now, he's studying Human, Social and Political Sciences at the University of Cambridge. Taking pride in his Kurdish heritage, Ali is currently working on a research article that explores the impact of local election results on Kurdish communities in Turkey.**



Through tutorials and interventions with The Access Project, Ali learned about subject choices, finance options, and how to give himself an edge in the competitive application process. Alongside The Access Project's provision, Ali engaged with a variety of widening participation programmes, including the LSE Pathways to Law scheme, and a week-long summer school at Cambridge's Pembroke College.

"The close-knit community and immersive experience gave me the confidence to apply to Cambridge. Receiving advice from individuals who had successfully navigated the process not only gave me a boost in confidence, but it helped me understand what I needed to focus on and how to present myself more effectively."

Ali is already thinking about his next steps. Once he finishes his degree, Ali has plans to pursue postgraduate study, exploring the sociology of marginality and exclusion – a field that aligns with both his academic and personal passions.

**Jasper**

**Alongside his studies at our partner university, Queen Mary University of London, Jasper is giving back to The Access Project by sharing his learnings with our current students – and telling his story of how he earned a place at one of the country's top universities.**

Jasper studied with The Access Project from 2018 – 2022. He knew he wanted to pursue a career in the creative arts, so choosing a university course boiled down to four main criteria: course content, contact hours, course satisfaction rate, and graduate employment prospects. Jasper secured his place at QMUL after becoming the first in his sixth form to earn an A\* grade in English Language A level.

Now, he's enhancing his prospects with enrichment activities at university. Jasper contributes to The Print – the student-led newspaper at QMUL students' union – which he says has developed his writing skills and helped him discover a new social circle.



"Making new friends at university can be hard because you won't be familiar with many of the students on campus. Joining societies is a great way to meet other students from different courses across the university, and to build new skills in an area you're interested in."

# Supporting our organisation

## Our people

As part of our journey to become a more diverse and inclusive employer, we achieved the Disability Confident Committed Employer (Level 1 status) in October 2023. This demonstrates a commitment to ensuring our recruitment and working practices are accessible and supportive of people with disabilities.

We worked collaboratively to implement some key activities within our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion strategy. We completed our first Staff Diversity Questionnaire in December 2023 to understand staff diversity across the organisation and identified areas of under-representation, helping us to tailor our training needs and ways of working.

In February 2024 we proudly became a signatory to the Charter for Employers Positive About Mental Health. Our vision is to enable and inspire all staff to achieve, grow, succeed and thrive.

We also continue to be a Living Wage Employer. By paying a fair wage, we're making sure everybody at The Access Project can thrive, not just survive - and stay motivated to deliver our mission and drive positive change.

In this year, our leadership team of executive and senior managers completed an external coaching programme, unlocking potential and improving focus while creating measurable value to the organisation.

### Najibah

**Najibah joined The Access Project in January 2024, helping to deliver and develop our Group Tuition model as Group Tuition Coordinator. Prior to taking up this role, Najibah was a student on The Access Project at George Green's School.**



"As a former student, applying to The Access Project was a huge full-circle moment, especially being interviewed for the role by my former University Access Officer (my mentor in school)! I wanted to learn more about the intersection between education and charity, work to empower young people and contribute to a cause I was confident made a difference – The Access Project ticked all those boxes, plus I was always curious about what my UAOs got up to outside of our 1:1s.

Working at The Access Project has since been the most gratifying experience. I've learnt so much, from navigating Salesforce, facilitating training and managing our wonderful group tutors, to launching a newsletter, solving challenges with tuition groupings and practising resilience through the ups and downs!

To work alongside such brilliant colleagues has been a pleasure, and seeing how much time, effort and resources go into running our programmes has made me all the more appreciative of what The Access Project has helped me to achieve, then and now."

## Our systems and processes

To enhance impact, we continuously assess and develop our systems and processes. Teams take a proactive approach, utilising process reviews and strategic projects across the organisation.

In order to increase the depth and breadth of our impact, we continue to invest in a new learning management system, The Access Hub. The system integrates with Salesforce, our CRM, to ensure seamless safeguarding and secure data handling. The Access Hub will further improve the experience for students and tutors and will also enable our Accelerate students to access online learning content. We are excited about the expansive possibilities that the evolution of this system will allow for our students and the efficiencies that it will enable for our organisation.

Additionally, we have increased automations within Salesforce to save time and resource, as well as increased our data gathering to help us provide the reporting we need to monitor and verify our impact. Salesforce acts as our one source of truth, being fed with live data to allow us real-time insights into our programme and its participants. All of this allows us to act more quickly and respond to the changing landscape.

# Funding our strategy

**Our many partners make generous donations to support our students to achieve their potential, and their kind contributions change lives. By building strong relationships with our partners, funders and donors, we raised over £2.5m in 2023/24.**

Our income grew by 6% year on year and contributed nearly 70% of our total expenditure. This, alongside the programme fee contributions from our partner schools, demonstrates the significant impact our supportive partners and donors have on the lives of the most under-resourced young people we work with. Our multi-year partnerships help us to embed our programmes and develop and deliver new initiatives, including the development of our new programme, Accelerate, and our online learning management system, The Access Hub. Our biggest funders, including ICG and The Queen's College, Oxford, helped to support our expansion into new regions and develop online technology for more effective delivery for our schools and students.

2023/24 was another year of fantastic engagement from our corporate partners. ICG and Northern Trust both held World of Work events at their offices, enabling students to gain invaluable insight into future careers in finance. We are incredibly grateful for the additional support of two corporate partners, Rothschild & Co and Perella Weinberg Partners, who contributed insightful feedback into the design and development of our new Accelerate programme to ensure we deliver impact, as well as generating appealing volunteering initiatives. It's testament to the depth of our long-standing

partnerships that this year we celebrated some of our longest serving volunteers, including one employee from Rothschild & Co who has conducted over 120 hours of tutorials in the past 7 years, making an incredible difference to so many young people's future prospects. Our partners at Monday Charitable Trust made a significant donation in this year, as well as visiting one of our school partners, and we have built a strong partnership across the infrastructure sector through partnerships with Infrastructure Industry Foundation and Global Infrastructure Partners.

Following the launch of our partnership with The Queen's College, Oxford in 2022, this year has seen us embed this partnership through a series of profile-raising events, social media activity, and frequent visits to our three partner schools from the college's Schools Liaison, Outreach and Recruitment Officer. In February 2024, 31 Year 10 students from Darwen Vale High School in Lancashire visited The Queen's College, taking part in a campus tour and academic taster lectures, with 28 of these students now thinking about applying to university, and 19 students saying that the trip made them feel "like they would fit in at the University of Oxford". In March, five Year 12 students from Cumbria visited The Queen's College for a hugely successful residential university trip. The partnership has had a positive impact on students, fostering higher aspirations and motivating them to aim for greater academic success. This is evident in the record number of applications received for Year 9 recruitment at our partner schools supported through this partnership, with all cohorts fully enrolled for September 2024 ahead of the new academic year.

## Rothschild & Co

**Rothschild & Co has partnered with The Access Project since 2015.**

"R&Co4Generations is proud to partner with The Access Project, supporting students from under-resourced backgrounds to access top universities in the UK. Our funding, including support for the Bursary Programme and volunteer tutoring, empowers students to reach their potential and develop essential skills. Meeting these students in person and witnessing the transformative impact of these interventions is truly inspiring."

This partnership is meaningful to the Rothschild & Co foundation, as it aligns with our commitment to fostering talent and creating opportunities for young people to achieve their ambitions."

Laura Haigh, Associate Director, R&Co4Generations, Rothschild & Co

# Thank you

We are deeply grateful to everyone who supported our mission throughout 2023 and 2024. Your generosity and commitment play a vital role in transforming the futures of the young people with whom we work.

We would like to say a heartfelt thank you to our partners, donors, and volunteers, including:

29th May Charitable Trust  
Adobe Employee Community Fund  
AKO Foundation  
Aspect Capital  
Averna Capital Foundation  
Bain Capital  
Bloomberg  
Bolt Digital  
CEPA  
Charterhouse Charitable Trust  
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Magdalen College, University of Oxford

Man Group  
Monday Charitable Trust  
Newcomen Collet  
Next Plc  
Northern Trust  
Pacific Life Re  
Perella Weinberg Partners  
Queen Mary, University of London  
Rothschild & Co  
Seer 365  
Slaughter and May  
Speciality Drinks  
Strand Parishes Trust  
The Considered Ask  
The Queen's College, University of Oxford  
Theodo  
Tuixen Foundation  
University College London  
Wesleyan Foundation Winter Giving Campaign

We're also incredibly grateful to our dedicated trustees for their time, energy, and unwavering support:

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# The Access Project



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