

LEAPS Student Volunteers, working with schools and pupils

Since the mid 1990s the **Lothians Equal Access Programme for Schools** has been working with local secondary schools to provide pupils with information about higher education and student life. In particular LEAPS offers encouragement to pupils with academic ability but who might not otherwise considering applying to university.

In our view, the most effective way of making young people aware of the benefits and challenges of higher education is by providing them with the opportunity to meet university students and to visit local universities. As a 'LEAPS student volunteer' you could take part in any or all of the different activities listed below. The majority of these events take place in schools in Edinburgh and the Lothians but there are also some school events in the Scottish Borders and the Forth Valley area.

School Workshops take place in school, last for a single period (approximately one hour) and are delivered between November and May. The age group varies from 14 to 17 year olds (S4-S6) and the different workshops cover themes such as 'myths and realities about student life', 'the typical student week' and 'getting by on a budget'. Transport is provided to and from the school. This year we expect to deliver about 70-80 school workshops. As a volunteer you would work with a small group of pupils, completing a series of short, light-hearted activities.

Our '**Campus Reporter**' events are half-day, campus-based activities where S3 pupils (13-14 year olds) are given the task of creating a short news programme. Working in small groups the pupils are provided with a small hand held video camera and with the help of a student volunteer they explore the campus recording short news items about university topics e.g. university accommodation, student union, sport facilities on campus, etc. We typically deliver about 10 events of this kind, mostly during November, December, March and May.

The **S6 Student Conference** is aimed at S6 pupils (17-18 year olds) who have by this stage decided to submit an application to university. The event will take place on the morning of Friday 16 December 2011 at a university in Edinburgh (TBC) and will provide a range of information to help pupils enjoy a smooth transition into university. As a student volunteer you could help to lead workshop sessions or be a member of the student panel answering questions on student life.

Finally, on Wednesday 15 February 2011 (pm) around 200 S5 pupils (15-16 year olds) will take part in '**Applying 2012**' – a conference based at a university in Edinburgh (TBC). The role of the LEAPS student volunteer is similar to that of the S6 Student Conference and involves acting as a 'role model', talking about life on campus and assisting with student panel and workshop sessions.

Effective LEAPS volunteers should possess the following key **qualities and skills**;

- Be in **year 2 or above at university** (we welcome UG, PG, international & mature students)
- Have a belief that the opportunity to attend uni should be open to all with academic potential
- Have an enthusiasm for the 'student experience' and a willingness to share this with others
- Have the ability to relate to pupils of secondary school age (13-18 years old)
- Have good listening, verbal skills and a sense of humour.

In order to participate in any of our activities a student must attend an **Information and Training Session (see bottom of page for details)**, complete a registration form and provide the contact details for two referees, one of which must be from their place of study. All of our events take place in a staff-supervised environment nevertheless we may request that a volunteer completes a 'PVG' check.

Students choose to become LEAPS volunteers for a number of reasons. Some (but by no means all) are considering a career in teaching and are looking to gain experience that will help them to decide if they are suited for such a path. These students and others normally recognise that the type of experience that volunteering offers will enhance a graduate job application. Another motivation that has been cited by students in the past is the desire 'to put something back' or because they are advocates of the principal that university should be open to all those with the academic ability.

What is common for nearly all LEAPS volunteers is that they expect to find the experience enjoyable (we have received a lot of feedback to prove this is the case!) and they wish to share their positive experience of higher education. As a student volunteer you can opt into as many or as few events as you like, to suit your workload – there is absolutely no arm twisting! This way we feel that every activity will be supported by student volunteers who are keen and enthusiastic.

The next 'Information and Training Sessions' will take place in January 2012:

Edinburgh University: Tues 24 January, 18.30-20.30

If you are interested in attending one of the sessions (you can attend whichever one suits you best), please register your interest by contacting Alice on the email address below. All sessions take place in the evening and venues will be confirmed once you register your interest.

Alice Smith, tel: 0131 650 4676, email: alice.c.smith@ed.ac.uk

For more info visit www.leapsonline.org