



# LEAPS Annual Report

## 2023-2024



# LEAPS

Promoting access to higher education since 1996

## LEAPS is a partnership of the following organisations:



THE UNIVERSITY  
of EDINBURGH



West Lothian  
Council



Scottish Funding Council  
Promoting further and higher education

LEAPS is a successful and unique widening participation programme, funded by its higher education institution and local council partners to increase progression to higher education in South East Scotland.

LEAPS is also supported by Skills Development Scotland and delivers the Scottish Funding Council's Schools for Higher Education Programme (SHEP) in South East Scotland, in partnership with the National Schools Programme.

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# Foreword

Welcome to the 2023-24 LEAPS annual report, which brings together the outputs of LEAPS work from 2023-24 alongside destination outcomes for students LEAPS engaged with during S6 of 2022-23. As always, destinations data for students this past year will be available at a future point due to the time-lag awaiting the information and the time needed to produce datasets reportable for LEAPS.

Alongside the above information, this report includes snapshots of new impact evaluation outputs developed over the course of the last year. This is an area of ongoing development for LEAPS, underpinned by the development of a Theory of Change for LEAPS' work, which will continue to evolve. The current Theory of Change is available on request.

A huge thanks, as always, to everyone who contributed to the development and delivery of our work this year, and especially for the support received to enable the evaluation developments. Throughout the year, LEAPS continued to support – and be supported by – Scotland's Community of Access and Participation Practitioners (SCAPP), and SCAPP's Evaluation Matters Community of Practice played an especially important role this last year.

2023-24 also saw the announcement of – and engagement with – the Scottish Funding Council's (SFC) review of the National Schools Programme (NSP), of which LEAPS is a part. At the time of writing, the recommendations were just about to be published to the partners and shared more widely. The review gave an opportunity to share the breadth of in-kind support LEAPS receives, which makes our delivery possible, alongside an opportunity to share thoughts about future priorities for the NSP and widening access.

The LEAPS programme continued along a similar model to previous years, with increased numbers of engagement in all areas of work and all schools were again involved. Of note, in March 2024 LEAPS opened registration for the LEAPS Transitions Course and saw unprecedented interest. A record number of students were enrolled onto the Course, and, despite additional numbers being made available within the constraints of the existing Course model, for the first time LEAPS was not able to enrol every student that was interested.

It is positive that so many S5 students were interested in the Course, and that is testament to the work done to grow, develop, and publicise the Course. However, it is, of course, a challenge that there is a limited number of places that could be made available and work is ongoing to review how to manage registration when it opens again in early 2025.

Whilst there were other challenges faced in the year, the report speaks to the overwhelmingly positive outputs delivered by LEAPS. This is only ever possible thanks to the support of our partners, including the in-kind support from them, and from others, throughout the sector.

Kirsty Wadsley, Director, LEAPS

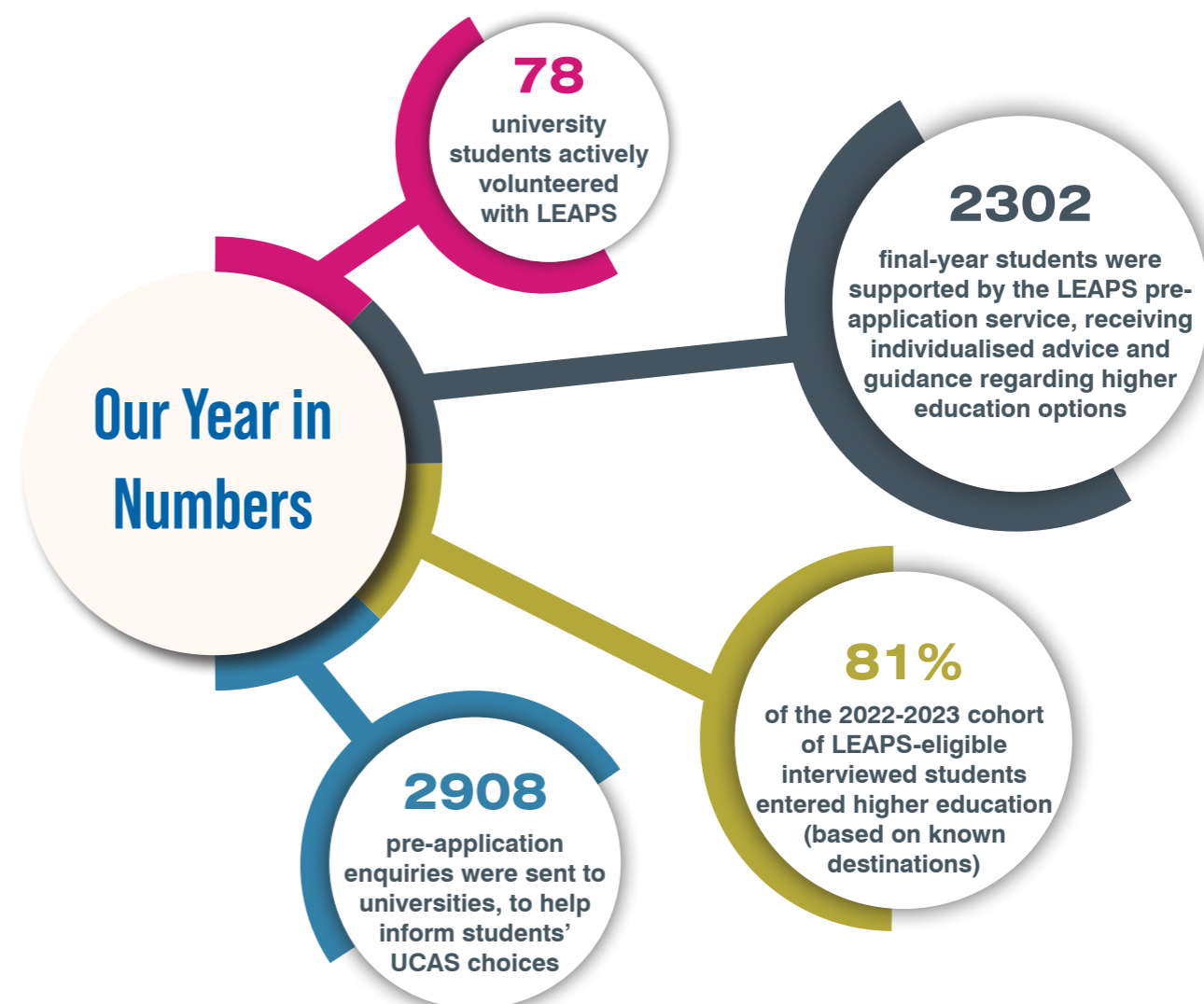
## Aims

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

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

## Objectives

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



# LEAPS Eligibility and Schools

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

The LEAPS programme covers all secondary schools across eight local authorities in South East Scotland and the Forth Valley region (City of Edinburgh, Clackmannanshire, East Lothian, Falkirk, Midlothian, Scottish Borders, Stirling and West Lothian). Across 2023 to 2024, LEAPS worked in 73 secondary schools across this area.

All schools LEAPS works with receive elements of the Schools for Higher Education Programme (SHEP). SHEP is part of the Scottish Funding Council's National Schools Programme, which LEAPS delivers in the area. The focus is on supporting individuals who are underrepresented in higher education.

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

## LEAPS Group 1+ Schools

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

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

## LEAPS Group 1 Schools

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

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



## LEAPS Group 2 Schools

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

1. Alva Academy
2. Armadale Academy
3. Balerno Community High School
4. Balfron High School
5. Bathgate Academy
6. Beeslack Community High School
7. Berwickshire High School
8. Bo'ness Academy
9. Boroughmuir High School
10. Braes High School
11. Broughton High School
12. Broxburn Academy
13. Craigmount High School
14. Currie Community High School
15. Dalkeith High School
16. Deans Community High School
17. Denny High School
18. Dunbar Grammar School
19. Dunblane High School
20. Earlston High School
21. Falkirk High School
22. Firrhill High School
23. Galashiels Academy
24. Graeme High School
25. Grangemouth High School
26. Holy Rood RC High School
27. Inveralmond Community High School
28. James Gillespie's High School
29. James Young High School
30. Jedburgh Grammar Campus
31. Kelso High School
32. Knox Academy
33. Larbert High School
34. Lasswade High School
35. Leith Academy
36. Linlithgow Academy
37. McLaren High School
38. Musselburgh Grammar School
39. North Berwick High School



40. Peebles High School
41. Penicuik High School
42. Portobello High School
43. Queensferry High School
44. Royal High School
45. Selkirk High School
46. St Augustine's RC High School
47. St David's RC High School
48. St Kentigern's Academy
49. St Margaret's Academy
50. St Modan's High School
51. St Mungo's High School
52. St Thomas of Aquin's RC High School
53. Stirling High School
54. Trinity Academy
55. Wallace High School
56. West Calder High School
57. Whitburn Academy

# University Student Volunteers

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

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

In 2023-2024, 78 university students actively volunteered with LEAPS. They supported 51 LEAPS events and made a total of 149 contributions to our 2023-2024 programme of activity and events.

**'One of the most memorable aspects of LEAPS has been the staff; everyone involved with the student volunteers and organising workshops was excellent. They worked hard to ensure all the volunteers were looked after and made to feel welcome and comfortable in their roles. Full briefings and debriefs were given to everyone before and after any activities, and no one was ever asked to do anything outside their comfort zone. The amazing staff are one thing that makes me want to continue volunteering and do as much as I can to help them and the project out to the best of my ability.'**

**Brandon, LEAPS Volunteer**



# LEAPS Programme of Activity: S3

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

The group of schools offered each LEAPS activity is indicated on the following pages using the key:  
**G1+** = Group 1+ Schools **G1** = Group 1 Schools **G2** = Group 2 Schools

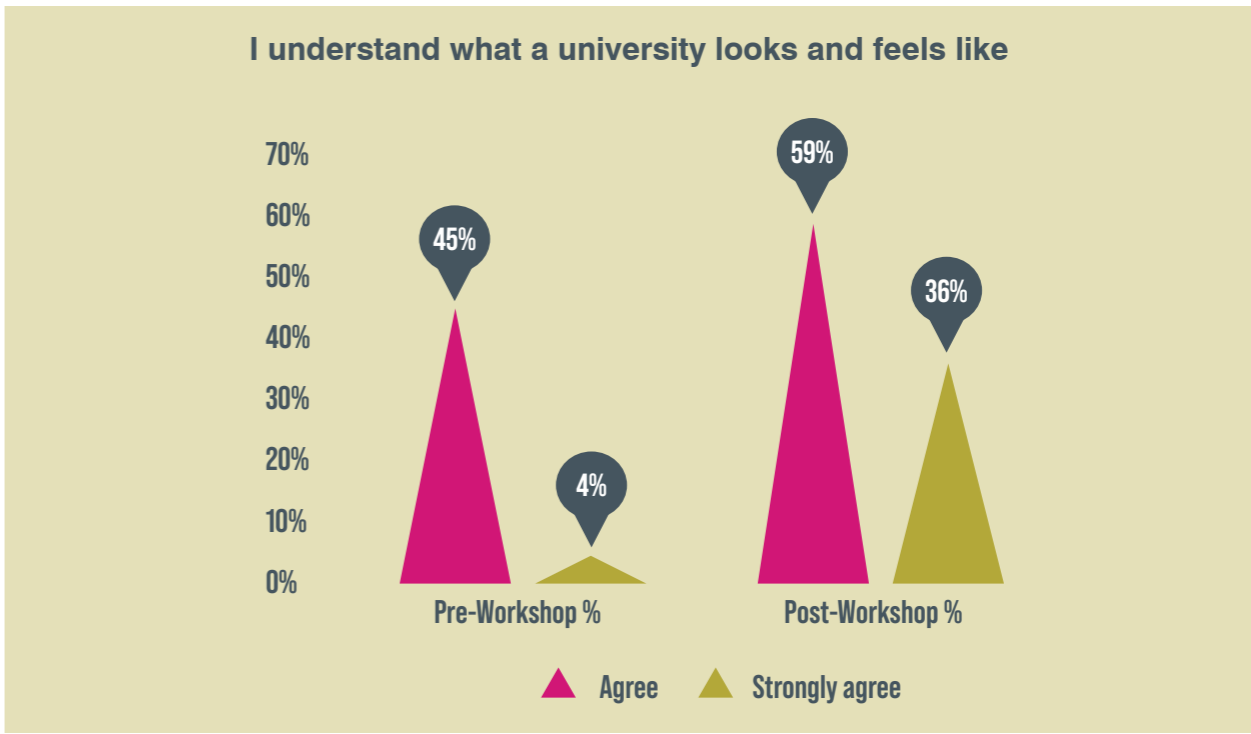
**S3** The activity for S3 students is designed to support aspirations, providing an early introduction to higher education and student life.

**S3 On Campus Workshop G1+ (March - April)**

This campus-based workshop gives S3 students an early introduction to university life. University student volunteers are key to the experience, as they support students to explore a university campus environment and provide a direct insight into university student life. The students split into small groups and tour different areas of the campus, collecting photos and information which they use to create a short presentation about an aspect of university to then share with the wider group. Topics covered through discussion include subjects and courses, independent study, the library, student accommodation, student unions, and sports clubs and societies.

**6 workshops supported 209 students**

**Impact Evaluation Findings\***



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



# LEAPS Programme of Activity: S4

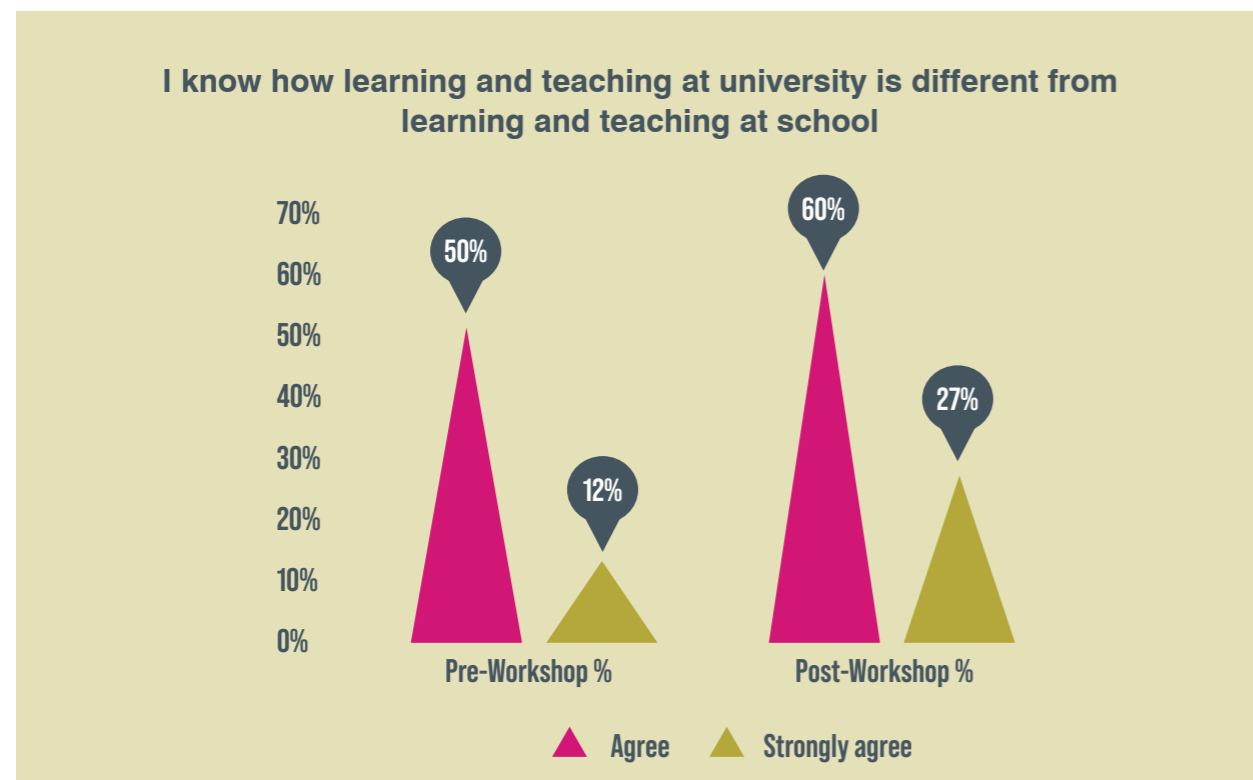
**S4** The activities for S4 students are designed to further support aspirations and to encourage students to consider the range of opportunities at university and college.

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

This school-based workshop takes place over a school period. It aims to highlight differences between higher education and school, with a focus on fun. S4 students are given a choice of conversation topics which they can discuss with current university student volunteers – our ‘uni experts’. Conversation topics are themed and are based around learning, teaching and assessment at university, social experiences at university, and independence and freedom at university. Students are encouraged to reflect on what might be different from school and what they might enjoy about higher education.

31 workshops supported 817 students

## Impact Evaluation Findings\*



\*Full S3 and S4 Impact Evaluation Reports available from LEAPS on request.



# LEAPS Programme of Activity: S5

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

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

This school-based workshop introduces S5 students to key messages regarding routes into higher education, reasons for considering higher education, and the reality of university study. Current university student volunteers play a central role in this workshop, as they are ‘interviewed’ by S5 students about various aspects of their typical week at university. Upcoming LEAPS activity taking place across S5 and S6 is also highlighted so that students know what future support they can expect.

27 workshops supported 665 students

## S5 Presentation G2 (November - March)

This session is for students who may have the potential to go on to higher education study. It provides an overview of what higher education is, including key information relating to entry qualifications, application procedures, exit points, and moving from college to university study. The presentation also explains who the LEAPS team is, what we do, and LEAPS eligibility criteria. Students are introduced to the LEAPS S5Hub, our online resource for S5 students. Upcoming LEAPS activity taking place across S5 and S6 is also highlighted so that students know what future support they can expect.

63 presentations supported 6111 students

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

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

692 interviews undertaken

## S5 Course Checker Form G2 (January - May)

S5 students in our Group 2 schools are invited to complete our optional online S5 Course Checker Form. As with the S5 Interview, the aim is to support students to explore – and make informed decisions around – their higher education study options. S5 students provide information about their school qualifications (achieved in S4, currently sitting in S5, considering for S6) and any higher education study and career plans they are considering. They then receive an email reply from a LEAPS advisor with tailored information, advice and guidance around college and university entry requirements, any key S6 subject choices required to support their future study plans, and other ways in which they can make a strong application to higher education such as work experience. There is a focus on making strategic S6 subject choices.

126 tailored responses sent to students

## S5 Parents' & Carers' Information Session G1+ G1 G2 (March)

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

Session circulated to all LEAPS schools

## LEAPS Transitions Course Promo Presentation G1+ G1 G2 (January - March)

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

17 presentations supported 535 students

# LEAPS Programme of Activity: S6

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

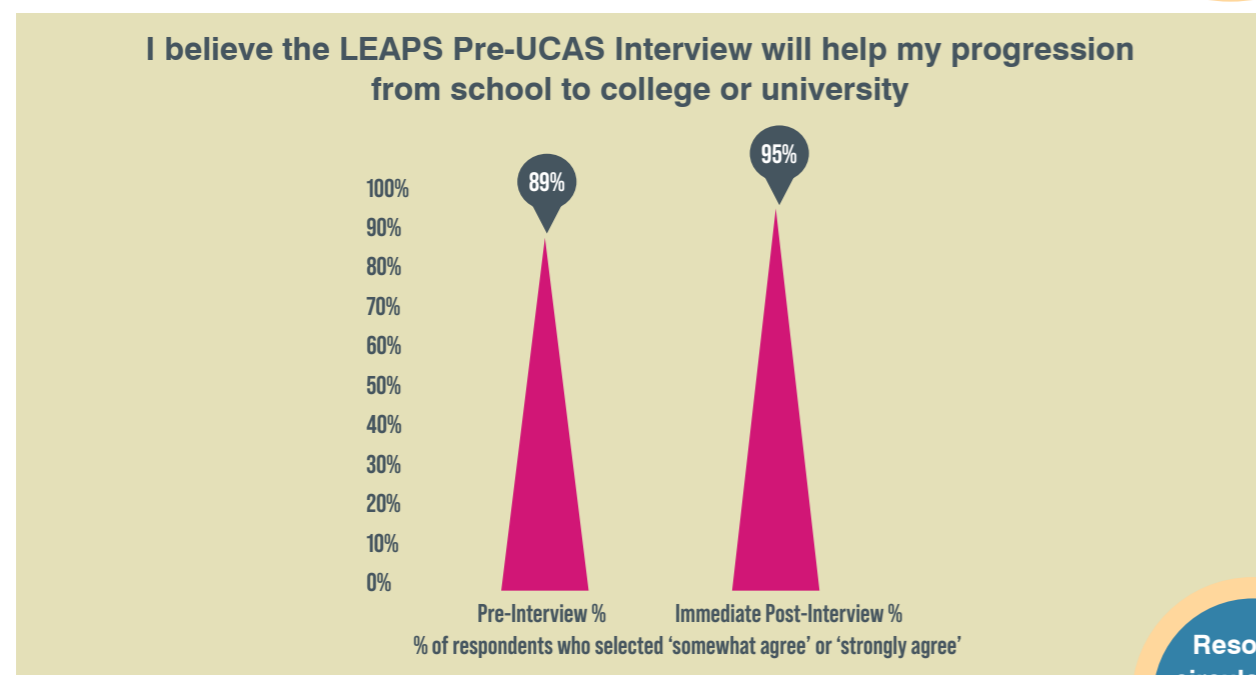
## S6 Presentation G1 + G1 G2 (August)

This presentation reminds S6 students who the LEAPS team is, what we do, and outlines LEAPS eligibility criteria. It highlights the support available to LEAPS-eligible students as they apply to higher education study, with a focus on the importance of the upcoming S6 Pre-application Interview.

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

All final-year LEAPS-eligible students are invited to this one-to-one interview with a LEAPS advisor. The aim is to support students as they apply to higher education. Tailored and impartial information, advice, and guidance is provided around course choices, entry requirements, and experience and achievements to help students make informed and strategic higher education applications. LEAPS eligibility is also checked and confirmed at this point.

## Impact Evaluation Findings\*



## S6 Personal Statement Resource G1 + G1 G2 (August – November)

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

## S6 Workshop G1 + G1 (January – March)

This school-based workshop aims to support S6 students with the transition from school to higher education. Current university student volunteers help prompt informal conversations from a menu of relevant topics including academic study, social life and making new friends, accommodation options and more. The focus is on sharing practical, positive, tips to help alleviate any concerns students may have about making the move to college or university.

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

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

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

Digital presentation circulated to all LEAPS schools

2302 final-year students were supported by the LEAPS pre-application service

Resource circulated to all LEAPS schools

15 workshops supported 462 students

Resource circulated to all LEAPS schools

# LEAPS Additional Activities

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

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

77 students were supported

## School Parents' Evenings G1 + G1 G2

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

14 events supported 642 attendees

## LEAPS Teachers' Conference G1 + G1 G2 (May)

The biennial LEAPS Teachers' Conference is for LEAPS Link Teachers and school guidance colleagues. The focus of the conference is on how we can work together to best support LEAPS students who are considering higher education as a post-school option. Topics covered included an update from the Fair Access Programme Lead at UCAS, LEAPS programme delivery updates, and advice from admissions tutors on UCAS references. Information stands with representatives from partner higher education institutions and other widening participation organisations were also available.

More than 40 schools participated in the conference

## Impact Challenge (April - May)

LEAPS supported this collaborative widening participation project, which comprised the LEAPS partner universities and S3 students from four schools. Through a series of practical workshops and a final showcase event, students were supported to explore the role universities play in tackling challenges globally and close to home.



## LEAPS Transitions Course

The LEAPS Transitions Course is an S6 timetable option for LEAPS-eligible students. The aim of the course is to help students make a positive transition from school to university. It replaces the LEAPS Summer School, which previously ran for seven weeks each summer. The course is supported by academics, academic developers and librarians from our partner and non-partner universities across Scotland, as well as writing Fellows from the Royal Literary Fund, who contribute to the advisory group, lecture series, marking and moderation processes, and students' wider academic development. In 2023-2024, LEAPS-eligible students from all 73 LEAPS schools were offered the chance to engage with the course.

The course comprises a mixture of online and in person sessions which take place on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons from September to March. This programme of activity ensures sustained engagement with the cohort and allows students to experience university learning environments both online and on a university campus.

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

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

'I decided to take the LEAPS Transitions Course in S6, and I loved it. I think it has been the best thing for me to do in order to prepare for university. It has taught me all the key academic skills I need for university such as referencing, academic writing, academic research, note taking and so much more, and allowed me to practice them throughout the year.'

Former LEAPS Transitions Course Student

55 students completed the LEAPS Transitions Course

More than 450 sessions were delivered during the course



## LEAPS Student Case Study

### LEAPS Student from Deans Community High



I first heard about LEAPS during a school assembly. We had a few assemblies where LEAPS was explained to us, and I remember hearing about how LEAPS could support me with my aim to go to university and also learning that I could take the LEAPS Transitions Course as part of my S6 timetable.

When I was in S6 I had my LEAPS Pre-UCAS Interview where I talked with a LEAPS advisor about what I was planning to do after I left school, what I wanted to do at university, the exams I had achieved so far at school, and what I was currently studying. At the time I didn't know exactly what I wanted to study at university, and I think it would have been more helpful if I had, but the LEAPS advisor gave me one of the best pieces of advice which was to write a personal statement for each of the courses I was strongly thinking about studying at university and then to try and narrow down my options based on how easy I found it to write passionately about them when drafting the personal statement.

I decided to take the LEAPS Transitions Course in S6, and I loved it. I think it has been the best thing for me to do in order to prepare for university. It has taught me all the key academic skills I need for university such as referencing, academic writing, academic research, note taking and so much more, and allowed me to practice them throughout the year. Not only has it prepared me academically, but it has also made a massive difference in helping me to feel more confident and independent as I had to travel to and from campus, find all the different campus locations, meet new people, take part in discussions weekly, and complete lots of work, all independently and I had to be self-motivated to do it.

It has shown me that going to university can be a completely different experience from high school, in a good way if you want it to be. On the LEAPS Transitions Course we were taught through lectures and tutorials, we were enrolled as a student at the University of Edinburgh as for the course we were studying there which meant we got to enjoy student discount, we were treated much more like adults. We were given so much support and we were given a true insight into university life from all aspects. I now feel prepared for university and it has shown me that it's not as scary as it looks. Yes, it is a lot of work, but university isn't all about the work – so work hard, go out on the weekends, go to events, study earlier rather than later, have fun and find the balance.

The LEAPS Transition Course has made a massive difference to me and it is the best thing that I did in S6. The LEAPS staff were so supportive, friendly, and without them the course wouldn't have been the same. Of all the LEAPS activities, it was the LEAPS Transitions Course that I found the most helpful and that I think had the biggest impact on me.

'Not only has it prepared me academically, but it has also made a massive difference in helping me to feel more confident and independent as I had to travel to and from campus, find all the different campus locations, meet new people, take part in discussions weekly, and complete lots of work, all independently and I had to be self-motivated to do it.'



# LEAPS Link Teacher Case Study

## Maria Rawluk

### Former LEAPS Link Teacher at Drummond Community High School



As a secondary teacher who started her career in Fife, it was only once I arrived at Drummond Community High School in Edinburgh that I was introduced to LEAPS and then, after a year, became the school's LEAPS Link Teacher for the next 18 years. Working closely with the LEAPS team over the years has been one of the highlights of my career.

LEAPS supports the school's motto of Nurturing Big Ambitions, linking into our promotion, to senior students, of Foundation Apprenticeships courses accessed through Edinburgh College and the opportunity to access online Open University courses through the YASS programme.

Drummond Community High School pupils have taken part in many LEAPS widening participation activities, both in school and on university campuses, having previously been a LEAPS Group 1+ school (receiving S3 to S6 programme of activity) and more recently becoming a LEAPS Group 1 school (receiving S4 to S6 programme of activity). Situated where we are in the centre of the city, all the university campuses are easily accessible by public transport. Over the years memories come to mind. As a school with only one building and one entrance, I remember one of our pupils trying to get his head around the concept of a university campus with more than one building. Others marvelled at the Heriot-Watt University campus at Riccarton, wanting to move there immediately given the facilities that they saw.

Each session we look forward to the S4 workshops with the university undergraduates, which are appreciated by the pupils, as are the S5 and S6 one-to-one guidance meetings where pupils can check that they are on track with their higher education course explorations as well as being able to ask personalised questions and receive advice around their individual plans. With an increasing school roll, this session the number of S5 students meeting with the LEAPS Team increased by almost 100%, with pupils commenting how useful they found the guidance given, and with a 100% attendance at all meetings, such is the standing of LEAPS which is promoted on school bulletins, Microsoft Teams posts, and through emails to pupils and to school staff.

LEAPS has had to respond to a changing world, educationally as well as socially. Coming into school to meet with our S5 and S6 pupils on an individual basis has allowed for further dialogue on how best to support the pupils leaving school. It was thanks to the LEAPS team, with their knowledge of the courses at Heriot-Watt University, that last session two of our Ukrainian refugee students who enrolled at Drummond Community High School in their S6 and final year at high school were supported successfully into the Heriot-Watt Bachelors Degree Accelerator Programme as their stepping stone onto higher education.

Through the encouragement and support of LEAPS, the number of pupils at Drummond Community High School accessing higher education has increased to the point that we are no longer a LEAPS Group 1+ school. While we as a staff miss the S3 programmes, we recognise that the work of the LEAPS team has had a tremendous impact on the positive destinations of the pupils at Drummond Community High School, some who may not have previously considered higher education as their next step on leaving school. Our work with LEAPS is embedded into our school calendar with all staff recognising this support that is an entitlement for our pupils from S4 to S6.

LEAPS is accessible to our students and as a team they are quick to respond and support the students with their career plans. By engaging with LEAPS, I feel that our students at Drummond have a more comprehensive understanding of the various pathways in accessing higher education.



## LEAPS Volunteer Case Study

### Megan

Currently studying at the University of Edinburgh



I first heard about LEAPS through a university email. I thought it sounded really interesting, so I booked in for a volunteer training induction session. After the training, I volunteered to go to Wester Hailes High School to help with a LEAPS workshop. I really enjoyed the experience, and I was eager to volunteer more with LEAPS. I've since volunteered at lots of LEAPS workshops, with various year groups and at various schools.

In one of the sessions I met students taking the LEAPS Transitions Course to help them prepare for the move from school to university, and answered questions they had about university. They asked some really good questions and it was nice to see them so excited at the prospect of starting university soon. I was delighted to be invited and attend their end of year celebration once they had completed the course.

Volunteering with LEAPS has had a positive impact on my university experience. I have always enjoyed volunteering and helping others, and I was keen to see if there was a way to do this while managing my studies. The fact that LEAPS allowed me to choose how often I committed to volunteering meant I was able to help LEAPS students but also maintain a good balance that worked for me, unlike with other volunteering experiences where you have to commit to a certain number of hours. LEAPS also helped me meet more people across the university. It is nice to do other things like societies, clubs, and volunteering, and LEAPS has been a really great one for meeting students at my university I would otherwise never have spoken to.

I hope I have made a positive impact on the students. I would love to have had the opportunity to talk to current university students when I was in their situation. I think the activities we did in the workshop helped emphasise the importance of time management, budgeting, how to make the right choice for you when it comes to a university and/or course, all of which are valuable transferrable skills. I hope I was able to bring these areas to light for the students through sharing my own experiences, as I can imagine that would really help their peace of mind.

I have really enjoyed working with all the LEAPS staff I have interacted with. I think all the work they do is really important. Thank you for the opportunity to be a part of this positive experience for future students! It has been really rewarding.

**'I would have loved to have had the opportunity to talk to current university students when I was in their situation. I think the activities we did in the workshop helped emphasise the importance of time management, budgeting, how to make the right choice for you when it comes to a university and/or course, all of which are valuable transferrable skills. I hope I was able to bring these areas to light for the students through sharing my own experiences...'**

## LEAPS Volunteer Case Study

### Brandon

Currently studying at the University of Edinburgh



My first in-person engagement with LEAPS was at their information session for student volunteers, where they clearly illustrated and highlighted all that they expected from those who took up the role. This session was incredibly valuable and well-planned, and it answered all my questions about the student volunteer role. During this session, I was made aware of the online volunteer noticeboard, where I could sign-up for LEAPS workshops of my choosing as I saw fit.

I signed-up for as many LEAPS sessions as possible across various schools and age ranges. The in-school workshops I took part in were for LEAPS students in their senior years of high school, and provided information and different activities to help prepare them for university life such as planning what a typical day at university might look like. I also took part in a university campus tour where a cohort of S3 students visited a university for a tour of the facilities and a mini scavenger hunt-type activity. They took photos as they explored and made a video presentation. It was obvious that the students enjoyed this very much, as did the LEAPS staff and volunteers. I think these interactive activities really help to engage students. Every workshop and interaction I've had with LEAPS has been extremely positive, both for myself and the schools and students involved.

Working with LEAPS to support students as they approach the end of high school has been great. I personally found the UCAS application process tedious, and felt I needed more support with the transition to university than was available to me at the time. LEAPS works very hard to prevent this from happening to others, and knowing that I have helped in this process gives me a great sense of pride and fulfilment. It has also opened my eyes to just how important providing support is for widening access to higher education. I think I would have really benefited from the kind of support LEAPS offers when I was at school.

From my limited time with LEAPS, I have seen huge benefits to the students involved. During workshops and campus tours many students initially seemed quite quiet, but, after taking part in the activity, they appeared visibly more outgoing and engaged with staff and peers. I have also personally been asked many questions that were either specific to my degree, or specific to student life, that I have been able to help answer as a current university student with current knowledge and experiences I can share.

One of the most memorable aspects of LEAPS has been the staff; everyone involved with the student volunteers and organising workshops was excellent. They worked hard to ensure all the volunteers were looked after and made to feel welcome and comfortable in their roles. Full briefings and debriefs were given to everyone before and after any activities, and no one was ever asked to do anything outside their comfort zone. The amazing staff are one thing that makes me want to continue volunteering and do as much as I can to help them and the project out to the best of my ability.

# Destinations of LEAPS-eligible Interviewed Students

We track the destinations of LEAPS-eligible students who receive a pre-application interview and are supported by LEAPS. The initial destination of the 2022-2023 cohort is shown in the following tables, firstly by council and secondly by higher education institution. Initial destination data for the 2023-2024 cohort will follow in a future report.

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

Destinations of LEAPS Students	City of Edinburgh	Clackmannanshire	East Lothian	Falkirk	Mid-lothian	Scottish Borders	Stirling	West Lothian	Total 2023	Total 2022	Total 2021
University	496 70%	63 68%	149 69%	164 72%	120 69%	129 62%	70 74%	224 64%	1415 69%	1403 70%	1469 74%
College - HNC/HND	75 11%	11 12%	22 10%	32 14%	14 8%	18 9%	17 18%	62 18%	251 12%	242 12%	230 12%
College - other courses	57 8%	9 10%	14 6%	* *	13 8%	17 8%	* *	23 7%	142 7%	125 6%	111 6%
Employment	51 7%	7 8%	23 11%	15 7%	21 12%	31 15%	6 6%	21 6%	175 8%	171 8%	108 5%
Unemployment	8 1%	* *	* *	* *	* *	* *	* *	5 1%	18 1%	11 1%	17 1%
Other destinations	20 3%	* *	* *	8 4%	* *	* *	* *	16 5%	68 3%	61 3%	45 2%
<b>Total Number of Students - Known Destinations</b>	<b>707</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>216</b>	<b>227</b>	<b>173</b>	<b>209</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>351</b>	<b>2069</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>1980</b>

Other destinations shown above from 2023 include voluntary work, training, school pupil and modern apprenticeship.

The percentages in the above table have been rounded and are based on known destination information shown in the table. The destinations of 78 students across the local authorities are unknown (3.6% of the total). This figure was 4.55% in 2022 and 5.04% in 2021. These have been omitted from the table above.

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



**Table 2: University & College Destinations**

Destinations of LEAPS Students	Total 2023	Total 2022	Total 2021
<b>UNIVERSITIES</b>			
Edinburgh Napier University	233	225	250
Univeristy of Edinburgh	218	253	251
Heriot-Watt University	196	162	180
University of Stirling	133	110	105
Queen Margaret University	94	64	72
University of Glasgow	81	98	96
University of Strathclyde	75	81	93
Glasgow Caledonian University	72	74	59
University of Dundee	66	64	65
University of Aberdeen	61	68	78
Abertay University	43	37	28
University of St Andrews	34	48	38
Robert Gordon Univeristy	28	41	34
University of the West of Scotland	9	19	26
SRUC - Higher Education	9	6	15
Other Universities	63	53	79
<b>UNIVERSITY TOTAL</b>	<b>1415</b>	<b>1403</b>	<b>1469</b>
<b>COLLEGES</b>			
Edinburgh College	199	215	185
West Lothian College	61	38	55
Forth Valley College	43	41	30
City of Glasgow College	32	22	23
Borders College	25	15	12
Other Colleges	33	36	36
<b>COLLEGE TOTAL</b>	<b>393</b>	<b>367</b>	<b>341</b>
<b>OVERALL TOTAL</b>	<b>1808</b>	<b>1770</b>	<b>1810</b>

It should be noted that data in both tables for 2023 is based on the Initial School Leaver Destination Returns (SLDR) provided by Skills Development Scotland (SDS) to LEAPS in April 2024.

The total number of LEAPS students for whom we sought a destination was 2147 in 2023 compared with 2109 in 2022 and 2085 in 2021.

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

# Financial Report

## LEAPS Financial Report 2023-2024

LEAPS continues to be financed by a combination of contributions from LEAPS' partners and the Scottish Funding Council (SFC).

In both 2022-23 and 2023-24 the LEAPS Local Council and University partners contributed £289,187 per annum. The SFC contribution was £457,090 in 2022-2023 as it included a one-off sum for the continued development of the LEAPS Transitions Course. The SFC contribution was £393,036 in 2023-2024. The Scottish Funding Council provide funding for delivery of the Schools for Higher Education Programme (SHEP) in the South East Region of Scotland, in partnership with the National Schools Programme. We made a strategic decision in 2023-24 to utilise some of LEAPS' reserves to address the shortfall between income and expenditure with increased operational costs and flat funding. The longer-term options around funding are being explored in discussion with the LEAPS Management Group.

Both the SFC and LEAPS partners contribute towards LEAPS' delivery costs including staffing, alongside hosting costs at the University of Edinburgh. We thank the University for their ongoing support hosting LEAPS and extend grateful thanks to all partners for the valuable many and varied in-kind contributions throughout the year. The combination of the myriad in-kind support to LEAPS, which we estimate is valued in excess of £100,000 per year, alongside the financial contribution is what enables LEAPS to achieve what we do as a partnership each year.

LEAPS reports detailed financial updates to the LEAPS Management Group termly and an annual report for the SFC on the funds spent.

Expenditure	2022-2023	2023-2024
Staffing	£610,958	£702,056
Operational	£49,429	£66,364
<b>Total Expenditure</b>	<b>£660,387</b>	<b>£768,420</b>



# Conclusion and Future Developments

It is always a pleasure to reflect on the work delivered in a year at LEAPS. The higher number of interactions, now coupled with more detailed impact evaluation, evidences the contribution LEAPS makes to higher education access in both the region within which we work and further afield. LEAPS, and our partners, can be proud to share and demonstrate the impact on young people's destinations following engagement with LEAPS. We look forward to continuing to develop our impact evaluation work.

As written previously, LEAPS, like every other project and organisation, is feeling the impact of increasing costs in a continually challenging funding environment. Having had multiple changes to our financial forecast in advance of the last year, it was clear a decision would need to be made to manage a deficit between our in-year income and expenditure in 2023-24. Some of LEAPS' reserves are being used to ensure continuity of delivery and additional funding options are being looked at. The LEAPS Management Group continues to have oversight of the funding situation and provide input to the immediate decisions as well as looking at long-term sustainability.

As a result, throughout this year we have explored additional funding options. We are now submitting proposals to look at opportunities to both shore up our ongoing sustainability across the longer-term, and to explore development work in areas in which we have expertise and in which we have demand from students and schools for the delivery of our work. We are delighted to welcome an additional local authority funding us from 2024-25 onwards, securing them as a full partner with LEAPS.

Awaiting the SFC NSP review outcome necessitated strategic decisions earlier in the year to pause on some developments, such as reviewing our school groupings. We decided to keep the status quo and minimise any potential disruption whilst awaiting the review recommendations.

Whilst writing this, the end of 2024 approaches, which is also time for me to bid LEAPS and everyone involved farewell from my role as Director. It is timely for a new Director to take the helm as LEAPS enters its next phase of work and development. They join with a team now established after myriad personnel changes in the year prior, and a number of options to explore for LEAPS' future and the future of widening access across the partnership.

Thank you again for the ongoing support of LEAPS, and personally for the support during my tenure.

**Kirsty Wadsley, Director, LEAPS**

**LEAPS is a successful and unique widening participation programme, funded by its higher education institution and local council partners to increase progression to higher education in South East Scotland.**



**LEAPS is also supported by Skills Development Scotland. LEAPS delivers the Scottish Funding Council's Schools for Higher Education Programme (SHEP) in South East Scotland, in partnership with the National Schools Programme.**



## **PROMOTING ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION SINCE 1996**

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