
RE:ACTION FOR EDUCATION LEARNING REPORT

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THE LAIDLAW FOUNDATION AND MAKESENSE

Introduction

The Re:action for Education six-week programme was born out of a collaboration between the NGO, MakeSense and the Laidlaw Foundation in response to the educational challenges triggered by the COVID-19 crisis. The main aim of the programme was to support students, parents and teachers to ensure that students across the world can continue to learn and aspire. The project also aims to reduce the widening attainment gap exacerbated by social inequalities related to the current crisis.

This report will be split into five parts. The first will discuss the research phase, which involved assessing the needs of parents, teachers and students. This was achieved by contacting these groups in our local communities to ask them about the educational challenges they faced as a result of COVID-19. The second part will discuss the intervention / resources design phase of the programme which involved creating our own resources or initiative to meet the needs of parents, students or teachers we identified. The next part will explore my experience mobilising and leading a group of volunteers as part of the one-week reaction for education programme. The fourth will outline the partnerships we developed on the programme and hope to create in the future. The final part will evaluate the overall success of the programme and provide some feedback.

1. The Research Phase

1.1. Who you spoke to?

I decided to speak to a diverse range of people using multiple mediums, to gain a well-rounded view of the current educational landscape. The people I spoke to fall into four broad categories:

- Primary school teachers from underperforming schools in my local area (Merton) and my former primary school
- Parents with children of school age in my neighbourhood and online
- Students in my family and wider network
- Local and national initiatives such as the Tutor Trust, Coronavirus Tutoring Initiative and Merton Voluntary Service Council

1.2. How needs were assessed ?

Firstly, I decided to conduct interviews with parents, students and teachers in my family and local community. I did the same for local initiatives I was able to get contact via telephone. This allowed me to collect information that was rich and detailed as I was able to ask follow-up questions if necessary. I also sent out a general message to teachers and educational initiatives via email and LinkedIn, asking them what they felt were the greatest difficulties they faced in the transition to online teaching and learning.

Finally I decided to utilise social media as much as possible to assess educational needs. I published posts on my personal social media platforms Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn asking parents, teachers and students how they were coping online learning and what they were struggling with the most. I was able to reach just over sixty people during this first week. Finally, in order to access a larger pool of parents outside of my immediate network, I joined Facebook groups for parents in my local area.

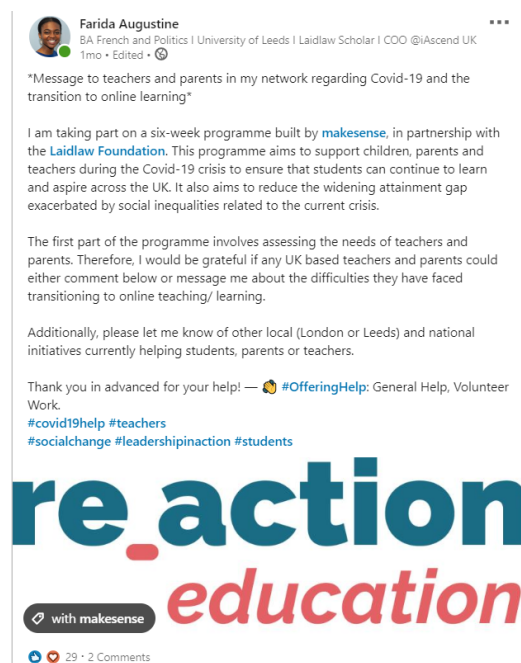


Fig1. Example post on LinkedIn assessing the needs of teachers and parents

If I was to do this research again, I would have used a survey to collect the answers of the people I contacted by email and social media. This would have allowed me to keep track and refer back to the information in a more organised fashion. That said, I kept track of the people I contacted, and the needs assessed in a spreadsheet and a notebook.

1.3. Conclusions drawn

Firstly, parents in particular highlighted the difficulty that their children faced when it came to, engaging with online lessons and a lack of motivation to learn. Students pointed out that this was because most of the lessons were pre-recorded. This was reiterated by some teachers I spoke to who stated that they struggled to ensure that every child attended their classes, particularly at the start of lockdown. Furthermore, because students weren't able to physically interact with other students and see their peers daily, this led to some of them feeling isolated and less motivated to attend their lessons. Therefore, mental health was a significant issue that came up repeatedly. Generally, these stemmed from the difficulties brought on by lockdown such as stress, anxiety, depression, feeling isolated/lonely and lack of physical activity.

Another theme that emerged from speaking to students and parents was that they felt their workload was heavy and unmanageable. This was especially the case for parents who had to juggle working from home, had young children or were in single parent households. In short parents were struggling to juggle teaching at home alongside their other household and work responsibilities. This follows on from my previous point about mental health as the pressure faced by parents to "do it all", could easily lead to burnout and stress.

Thirdly, some parents did not have the knowledge or time to sufficiently support or help their children with home learning. This was especially the case for parents with children in secondary school. Furthermore, some parents mentioned that there was a disparity in the quality / amount of support offered to students and parents depending on the borough their school was located in or the type of school they attended. I got the impression that students who attended large comprehensive schools were not getting as much support as their counterparts in private or grammar schools. Additionally, some students expressed that they weren't getting enough feedback on their work which made it difficult to track their progress.

Another issue I identified after speaking to sixth form students was that they felt unprepared for university applications as it was harder for them to get one to one support from their teachers. Another factor was the inability to attend university open days and speak to university staff and students. This disproportionately affected students from lower

socio-economic backgrounds and those who were amongst the first in their family to attend university.

Finally, one of the biggest educational challenges to families and pupils during this crisis was the lack of technological provision. This includes access to a fast internet connection, laptops and tablets and has disproportionately affected less privileged families especially those with multiple children of school age. For example, some parents and students I spoke to stated that they had to share tablets and computers, which meant that they couldn't always attend lessons at the required time, ultimately disrupted their learning.

2. The intervention/resource design phase

2.1. Vision and Goals

My main vision for the programme was to provide support to students from lower socio-economic backgrounds with their home learning and help them continue to aspire to higher education. I wanted to achieve this vision in three ways (main goals):

- The provision of technology specifically tablets to families I identified as needing it the most
- Use my knowledge and skills to provide tutoring to students.
- Set up a mentoring programme to help sixth form students with the transition into higher education and fill the gaps of support in university application caused by the current crisis.

2.2. Plan

I set out to achieve my main vision through a three-pronged approach (see three goals above). I began by contacting both local and national companies such as BT, Sky and local Rotary clubs asking if they could provide tablets as part of our COVID-19 response programme. I also researched initiatives that were established to help families purchase subsidised tablets, then compiled a list to share with parents and teachers as well as other helpful resources and websites to support learning at home. Secondly, I signed up to be an English and French tutor as part of the organisation Coronavirus Tutoring Initiative (CTI) and sought out students and parents in my neighbourhood looking for some extra support with home learning. Finally in order to effectively achieve my

vision, I worked with other scholars with different skills and a similar to create the biggest impact. Initially, I partnered with Lena who was creating a website of resources. As the week progressed the team of scholars increased.

2.3. Outcomes

- Contacted eight companies to ask about the provision of technology however did not get any positive responses.
- Tutored two students
- Helped Lena edit the website she created to help parents, teachers and students with home learning containing a wide range of resources such as tackling wellbeing, initiative provide technology support and helpful websites.
- Shared the website along with other resources created by the other scholars on the website with parents, teachers and students I contacted and more widely on my social media platforms.
- I created email and social media templates to help future scholars and volunteers in future programme
- Launched iAscend UK website and social enterprise alongside Lena, Moyin and Olivia: <https://i-ascend.wixsite.com/home> (founder of iAscend is Brandon Yu).

iAscend UK is a student-led non-profit initiative established during the reaction education programme to combat inequality in higher education. Although it aims to tackle the issues brought on by COVID-19, we would like this to be a long-term initiative so hope to tackle the deeply entrenched inequalities in the UK education system. It was born out of a partnership with fellow Laidlaw scholar on the programme Brandon Yu (please see section 4 for more information about the partnership). iAscend is a centralised platform to help students thrive in post-secondary school education through 5 main components:

University insights page: centralised platform for students across the UK to who wanted to find honest reviews of their prospective universities or university course written by and for students. This is especially vital during the current crisis as students have been unable to visit their prospective university choices. However, will

be helpful beyond the current pandemic as there is no other platform like this one for students.

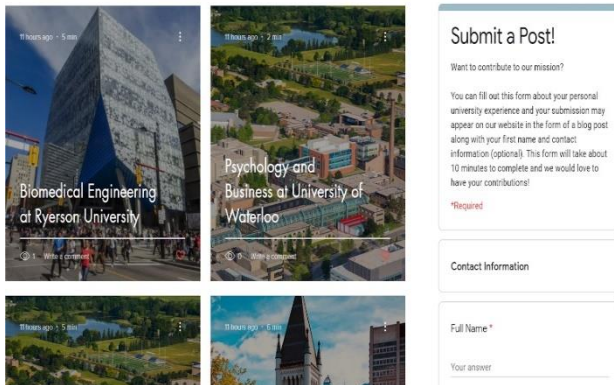


Fig2. Screen shot of university insights page for the iAscend Canada page. Example of an individual review of a university/ university course.

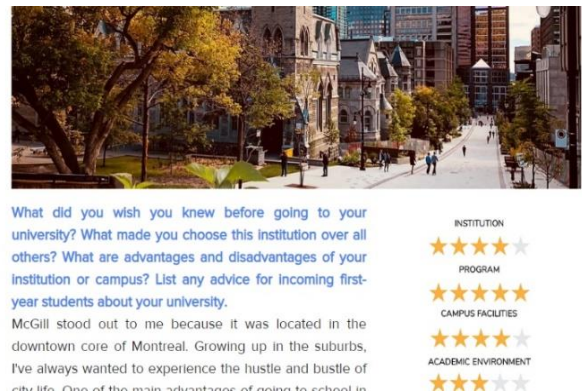
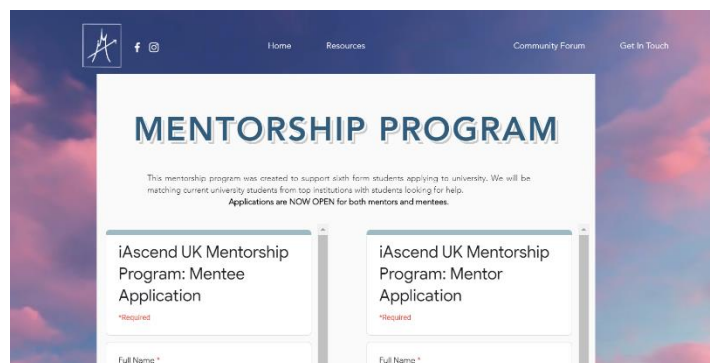


Fig3. Screen shot of university insights page for the iAscend Canada page. Overview of the different blog posts

Mentoring programme: created to support sixth form students applying to university. We will be matching current university students from top institutions with students looking for help with personal statements or who want more information about a specific degree or university. We are currently in the process of putting in place safeguarding measures and creating a safeguarding policy before we can launch. I have written a general outline of our safeguarding proposal inspired by CTI.

Fig4. Screen shot of iAscend UK mentorship page



Workshops: We are planning on running a number of workshops aimed at sixth form students to help them prepare for and get into higher education. Some ideas include personal statement tips and advice, how to make the most out of your first year of university and networking offline and online (including guidance on LinkedIn). Before we launch this part of the programme, we are in the process of conducting surveys to find out what sixth form students want.

Internships: Help broaden skills of sixth form students and get them involved in building iAscend.

Showcase: Involves establishing strong partnerships and links with companies and organisation. This is in order to gain publicity as well as offer opportunities to students such as internships, insight days or careers events etc.

3. Experience as a Mobiliser

3.1. Volunteers recruited

I recruited volunteers for the one-week programme by leveraging and utilising my personal social media accounts, to share information about the reaction for education one-week programme. I also created a Facebook page where we reached 100 followers in less than a week along with a Twitter page. My main target audience were my fellow students and peers. That said, I also advertised the programme to my family members who showed an interest in the programme. I collaborated with other scholars to ensure that we posted regularly on Twitter and Facebook. I also posted on various Facebook groups and pages to advertise the programme such as university groups, Joblink Leeds (for students looking for work opportunities) and various other groups that I felt would be interested in the programme. In total, 101 volunteers were recruited from 9 countries for the Re-action for Education programme and the total was split amongst mobilisers. There were initially eight volunteers in my group, all of whom were students at the University of Leeds except for one participant who was based in France. Before the first call, two people were no longer able to commit to the programme which left us with six participants.

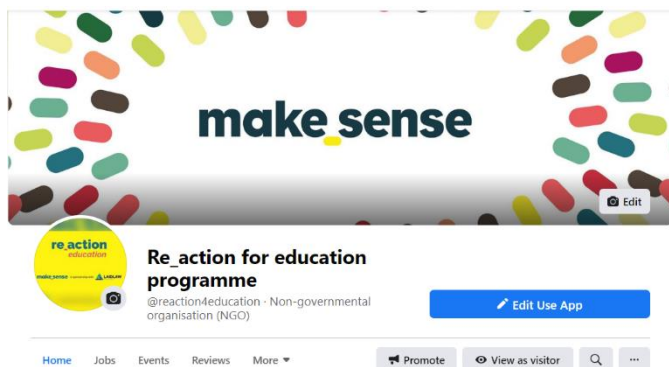


Fig5. Screenshot of Re:action for education Facebook page I launched to advertise the one-week programme

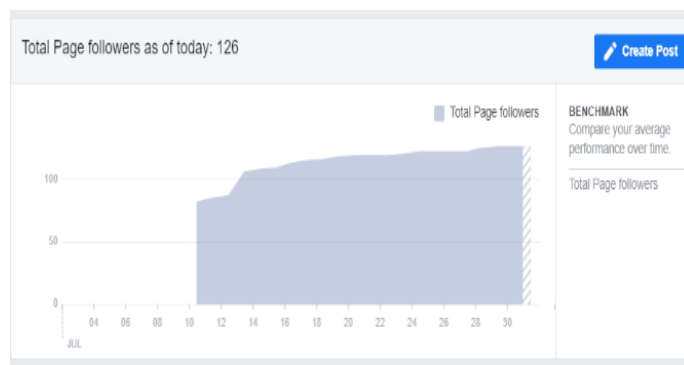


Fig6. Screen shot of total number of followers we gained. In total 126



Fig7. Twitter page created to advertise the re-action for education one-week programme

3.2. Work as a mobiliser

I teamed up with Lena as a co-mobiliser to a group of six volunteers. Before we began mobilising, I along with other scholars spent the week prior preparing and improving upon the content of the daily emails and the resource kits that would be sent out to the volunteers. I created social media and letter templates to help the participants reach out to companies and initiatives. Collectively, we assemble the resources we had created in the previous week for the new set of volunteers to share and use such as the websites and initiatives.

Once the one-week programme had begun, our role as mobilisers was to support and energise volunteers to take action. This was achieved by daily Zoom calls which gave us the opportunity to feedback on the successes and brainstorm ideas and solution

together. We also created a WhatsApp group to create a community amongst our volunteers and to encourage discussions amongst volunteers and provide them with extra resources and advice based on our participation on the programme. Initially, I was quite apprehensive about being mobiliser and was unsure about whether the participants would engage with the programme enthusiastically. However as the days progressed and we got to know the participants a bit more, the apprehension disappeared. That said, one challenge Lena and I faced was ensuring that the volunteers remained motivated and enthusiastic on the programme, even when they were not getting the responses or the feedback they had initially hoped for. We overcame this challenge by using our own experiences on the programme to advise them on alternative actions to take. This was important when there were delays in responses from parents and teachers in their communities. We also emphasized throughout the week, that the main goal of the programme was to help at least one parent, student or teacher in order to manage their expectations. Furthermore, we encouraged them to work together on their daily actions. This was made easier by the fact that most of the participants were students at the University of Leeds. The main issue our group identified were the negative effects of lockdown and home learning on the wellbeing of students.

3.3. Impact created and spread

Collectively our group was able to achieve a significant amount within the space of a couple of days. Lena and I were able to share our tips with the volunteers to ensure that they were more efficient when collecting information through the use of surveys and polls.

On issue of homeschooling/online learning primary > university ages, what type of resource would be most useful to help support you/people you know, in continuing to engage at home?

#yorkshireschools #onlineeducation #lockdownuk #educationincovid #homeschooling #teachersonline

| | |
|----------------------------------|--------------|
| Laptops/tablets | 0% |
| Online worksheets/quizzes | 66.7% |
| More video/group calls | 33.3% |
| Better technology guides | 0% |

3 votes · Final results
2:20 PM · Jul 14, 2020 · Twitter Web App

Farida Augustine
Re-action for education intern @ makesense I BA French and Politics I Universit...
1w · 🌐

Sophie Wheeler · 1st
Recent PPE graduate | Incoming MA Social Research student and Civil Service inter...
1w · 🌐

Good morning to my fellow connections. I promise this is the last survey I will share for a while, but I am currently trying to collate information about challenges faced in education due to the lockdown. I am particularly interested to ...see more

Educational Challenges posed by online learning

As part of my internship with Re-action for Education I am looking at educational challenges faced in the local community in Leeds due to the lockdown and ways in which we can help tackle the problem of inequality of access to education. All data gathered will be anonymous and utilised to help us design resources to help people in the local community. Please give a

* Required

How are you feeling about the transition to online learning? *

Your answer

What aspects are making things easier? *

Your answer

Educational Challenges posed by Lockdown

docs.google.com · 1 min read

🗨️ 5 · 2 Comments

Fig8. Volunteer I Lena and I's group sharing a poll on Twitter to assess the needs of students

Fig9. Survey created and shared by volunteer in my group to assess the education challenges posed by online learning

All the volunteers actively shared the resources that we had created in the previous weeks and also compiled their own list of resources specifically to support the mental and physical well-being of students learning from home. Half of the volunteers in my group registered as tutors either through organisations such as The Coronavirus Tutoring Initiative (CTI) or by reaching out independently to students in their neighbourhood. Another positive impact of the programme was that all participants were keen to continue the work they had begun in the one-week programme, so we have left the WhatsApp group open. Although we were a small group the participants collective our impact was significant. Below is a summary of the impact numbers for my group. As a group we decided not to contact tech companies as Lena, and I found it to be unsuccessful when we tried, and it took longer than a week to get responses if any.

Table 1: The impact numbers from Farida and Lena's group of volunteers

| Number of participants in your group | Number of tech companies contacted? | Number of teachers contacted? | Number of parents contacted? | Number of resources shared? | Number of students contacted |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------|
| 6 | 0 | 11 | 13 | 37 | 5 |

4. Partnership Development and Roll-out:

4.1. Partnership with Brandon Yu and The University of Toronto to launch iAscend UK

As I alluded to before, iAscend UK was born out of a partnership with Brandon Yu and his team in Canada. During the programme Lena, Moyin, Olivia and I decided to collaborate with Brandon as we had similar vision, namely creating a website with resources for students and setting up a mentoring scheme. Furthermore we wanted to create an initiative that would last beyond the six-week programme.

iAscend is a non-profit start-up was founded by Brandon Yu with the aim of creating an online platform to support post-secondary school students (sixth formers) with the transition into higher education. This start-up was first established by team of Canadian students with funding from the university of Toronto. Please see their website: (<https://www.i-ascend.com/>).

The partnership was built by expanding iAscend to the UK. This involved transforming the website that Lena had originally created to fall in line with the iAscend brand. Additionally, we are continuing to expand our team to fellow Laidlaw scholars and university students to get involved with this ambitious project. iAscend hopes to create a support network for underprivileged students across the world to give them the best chance of not only getting into to higher education but thriving once they get there. We aim to do this by giving them insights into specific universities or degree courses; providing mentorship ; delivering workshops and creating opportunities for students through our internship programme and showcase.

4.2. Future partnerships under iAscend UK

Partnerships with UK universities

In order to further expand and reach as many students as possible, we plan to introduce iAscend into campuses in the form of a society. Expanding it to universities we can ensure the longevity of the programme. This is because it will allow us to share the workload and have access to a large pool of students to get involved as mentors. We plan to begin with two universities : The University of Leeds and Durham University. We hope to set up an iAscend society at the union of both universities as way to target incoming university students and recruit mentors for our programme. Furthermore by establishing a university society we hope to get further support from the union especially in regard to safeguarding. Olivia, who was a scholar on the two-week makesense programme will be in charge of setting up the society at Durham whilst Moyin, Lena and I will look into establishing a society at Leeds. In order to do this, we will collect a number of signatures from our peers to demonstrate to the university and the union that there is a demand for this. If successful we hope to partner with and expand to other universities across the UK.

Partnerships with companies and organisation as part of our showcase

As mentioned previously, as part of our showcase, we would like to partner with similar educational organisations and companies to provide opportunities for students on our website. Furthermore, collaborating with other organisation would enable us to advertise iAscend to a more diverse audience. We have started researching and compiling a list of national organisation that we would like to contact and partner up with. However, we made the decision not to rush into contacting them yet as we want to ensure that iAscend UK is more established and has more traffic on our website and social media platforms before we do so. This is to ensure that we appear as attractive partners. Lena and Brandon are currently in the process of drafting a business proposal.

5. Feedback of the Programme**5.1. If this programme were to be run next year, what differences could improve the experience and outputs?****The WhatsApp Group**

As the primary means of communication amongst scholars and the mobilisers, WhatsApp was used throughout the six-week programme. The app allowed us to effectively foster a sense of community amongst the participants and was easy to use. However, for future long-term programmes I would opt for a more effective means of communicating. At times, the WhatsApp group felt quite overwhelming especially as the number of subgroups increased. Furthermore, because WhatsApp is a platform primarily used for socialising with friends and family it was difficult to separate the work and the personal. Also, I found myself easily getting distracted as messages would pop up whilst I was on the WhatsApp makesense group. I would recommend other platforms tailored to work such as Slack, Microsoft Teams or even the Laidlaw Network if subgroups and private messaging were to be introduced.

Focus on weekly goals rather than daily actions

Although I found the overall structure of the 6-week programme to be effective to further improve output, more emphasis should be placed upon the weekly goals

rather than the specific daily actions. During the first week, creativity was restricted as we were told exactly what we needed to do. Instead it would be better if the daily emails had an overarching theme with suggestions and guidance on how to achieve the greater goal. Furthermore, with the daily actions it was easy to feel like you weren't doing enough if you weren't able to achieve the specific task for the day. Additionally some of the tasks required completion of the task from the previous day. This was a challenge, as most tasks took longer than a day to complete. In this way it was easy to feel demotivated and overwhelmed and this was further heightened by the fast-paced nature of the first week especially. I observed this amongst the volunteers I was mobilising.

More support and guidance on safeguarding practices

This may have been an issue that was unique to my team, as we wanted to set up a mentoring programme. That said since this whole programme was centred upon education and helping young people learn, perhaps safeguarding training could have been offered to participants. Alternatively, a member of staff could have been designated as a safeguarding lead to support us with our initiative and ensure that we were taking the all necessary precautions when devising our initiatives. Although, the overall the support given on the programme was of a high standard I felt like that more clarity and support specifically for safeguarding issues would have improved our experience in trying to launch our mentorship programme.

5.2. If this programme were to be run next year, what would you keep the same?

Daily Zoom calls

The daily Zoom calls at the start of the programme were highly effective and really allowed us to feel part of a community and larger movement. The calls created a space where we could share our triumphs and challenges of the day as well as ask questions. The mobilisers brought a lot of energy to the calls which ignited a sense of excitement and always did a great job of celebrating our achievements. The only thing I would suggest to further improve the calls, would be to incorporate smaller break out rooms in some of the calls to encourage the scholars to get to know each other

more. This would have been especially helpful for our cohort as we started out as quite a big team. Whilst I did feel part of a community, I didn't get the chance to speak to a lot of the scholars who didn't have similar projects and who were at different universities.

Mobilising other participants

One of my favourite aspects of the programme was becoming a mobiliser and facilitating a group of volunteers. This aspect of the programme really pushed me outside my comfort zone and allowed me to develop upon a plethora of skills such as leadership, communication and organisation. I also really enjoyed seeing the volunteers use our guidance to help their own local communities. The success of this part of the programme lends itself to the effective overarching framework that MakeSense employs. The cyclical nature of the programme which sets participants up to become mobilisers in their own community and go on to train others to do the same creates a large impact that can easily be measured and observed.

Conclusion

Overall, I feel extremely proud and grateful to have taken part in this programme. It really broadened my understanding of what can be achieved in such a short space of time. I learnt how to inspire those around me to take action and be part of a wider network of active citizens. With the severity and scale of the current crisis, it was easy to feel isolated and powerless. However, the MakeSense framework did a fantastic job of empowering individuals with no formal experience in community facilitation to mobilise their community to work towards improving access to education.

Furthermore, by focusing on the local impact, it fostered a sense of community spirit and made scholars aware of the issues and challenges in their own areas. I am excited to further explore the work that MakeSense does across the world. Additionally, I look forward to seeing how the collaboration between MakeSense and Laidlaw foundation evolves and would be keen to be involved further.

I want to take this opportunity to thank our mobilisers, Lauren and Rachel for supporting us throughout this programme. They brought an enthusiasm and energy to each call and motivated us to take action. I would also like to thank our Laidlaw

coordinators Beccy and Kate and the Laidlaw foundation for providing us with this amazing opportunity for growth to effect positive change at such a crucial time. I feel incredibly inspired to continue working upon the issues we identified during the programme. I will continue the work on iAscend UK, alongside Brandon, Lena, Moyin, Olivia and our growing team of volunteers. I am excited to be part of such a diverse and international team and look forward to creating a positive impact for sixth form students.