

aspire

IntoUniversity 
250,000
FUTURES

IN THIS ISSUE

Meet our 250,000th student

When Finley took part in a workshop at school with our Great Yarmouth centre, he had no idea he was making IntoUniversity history.

Building Futures in the North East

From Newcastle to Hartlepool, IntoUniversity is creating new pathways for young people across the North East, tackling inequality and empowering communities to unlock their potential.

250,000 Students Reached



Join us in the next chapter

This year, IntoUniversity is celebrating an extraordinary milestone as we've now supported 250,000 students across the UK. It is a moment to reflect with pride on what two decades of dedication, collaboration and belief in young people can achieve.

From our very first centre to the 46 we now operate across England and Scotland, this milestone represents more than just numbers. It is the stories of individual students: the Primary student who found the confidence to present in front of their peers at a graduation ceremony, the young person who took part in an internship programme that shaped their career ambitions or the student that achieved their place at university which they had previously thought was out of reach.

These journeys have been made possible by the thousands of staff, volunteers, university partners and funders who have supported us on our journey. To everyone who has been part of the IntoUniversity community, thank you. Your commitment has created real and lasting change.

As we celebrate, we're also asking ourselves an important question: how can we deepen our impact, reach young people in new ways, and ensure our work continues to evolve for the next generation of learners?

What's Next for IntoUniversity?

Reaching 250,000 students isn't the end of our journey, it's a milestone that marks how far we've come and where we're headed next. Having also reached our target of supporting 60,000 young people per year ahead of schedule, we're now looking beyond our current business plan, which concludes in 2027, to plan the next stage of our growth and impact.

The years ahead will focus on strengthening the foundations that got us here.

We'll keep exploring new ways to support learning and development, building on projects like our Adult and Family Learning pilot with parents and carers, and our metacognition research with Anglia Ruskin University, *The Big Thinking Project*, funded by the Office for Students, to better understand what helps students thrive.

We are committed to reaching more communities across the UK, with a continued focus on areas where our support can make the greatest difference. Every new partnership and centre will strengthen our relationships with students, families and local networks, helping us to grow in a way that is both meaningful and sustainable.

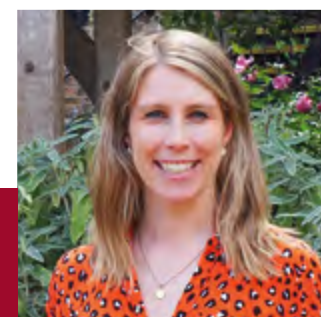
Through collaboration, an evidence-led approach and a shared belief in the potential of every young person, we will continue to open doors to opportunity and create lasting change for students and families nationwide.

As we look to the future, our focus is on deepening the connections with students, families and communities. We are building a future where every student, and every family, has the resources, relationships, and support to achieve their aspirations.

Reaching 250,000 students is a moment to celebrate how far we've come and to look ahead with optimism to the next 250,000 journeys.

A huge thank you to everyone who has been part of our story so far. We could not have achieved this milestone without the commitment and encouragement we have received since 2002. We hope you will continue to support us as we learn and reimagine what's possible for young people across the UK.

Hannah Purkiss,
Chief Operating
Officer



Meet Finley: IntoUniversity's 250,000th student!

When he took part in a workshop at school, he had no idea he was making **IntoUniversity** history.



After months of anticipation (and a lot of careful counting), Finley, a Year 3 student from Great Yarmouth, joined an **IntoUniversity** workshop at his school, completely unaware he was making history as our 250,000th student. It's a milestone moment for the charity and for the communities we support across the UK.

"Finley's brother, Riley, was actually the first ever student to sign up when we opened," explains Amy Rust, Centre Leader at **IntoUniversity** Great Yarmouth.

"So to now welcome Finley as our 250,000th student really feels like a full-circle moment. We've always said that our work is about long-term relationships and seeing families grow with us. We're so lucky to have families like Finley and Riley's who are supportive, engaged, and passionate about helping their children succeed."



Finley's Story

Eight-year-old Finley, a Year 3 student in Great Yarmouth, is bright, curious and creative. When asked about his favourite subject, he doesn't hesitate:

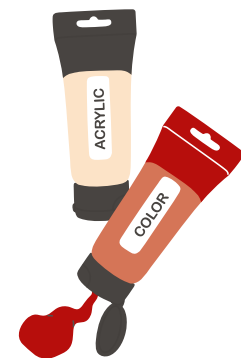
"Art. I like drawing – everywhere!"

His most recent masterpiece, he tells us, was "mountains in Geography".

Finley dreams of being "a famous artist" one day and already takes pride in his creativity. "I like drawing landscapes," he says. "We did one at school with buildings, and we could make our own instead of copying the teacher."

Recently, Finley took part in his very first **IntoUniversity** workshop, where students explored different careers. "We learned about Architects and Marine Biologists," he recalls. "Architects design buildings – that was really interesting." The concept of the "future" was also introduced, and Finley was quick to say that in his own future, he wants to be "an artist, definitely."

When asked how he feels to be **IntoUniversity's** 250,000th student, Finley beams: "Really, really, really happy!"



Finley and his Dad, Alex, at the Great Yarmouth centre. Finley is holding a photo of his role model, his older brother, Riley.



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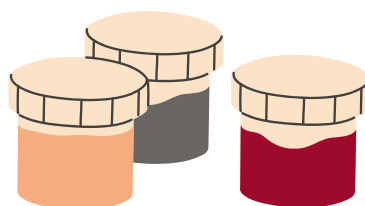
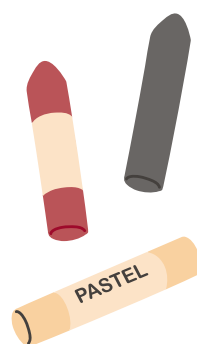
A Family Journey with **Into**University

The family's connection with **Into**University began with Finley's older brother Riley, who joined the centre in 2022. Riley had been withdrawn from school, and his parents were seeking a safe, supportive space for him to rebuild his confidence.

"We were really pleased when **Into**University opened," Finley's mum explains. "It came at just the right time. Riley was being home-schooled, and this place gave him structure again. He came twice a week, did [Secondary] Academic Support, mentoring, trips – all sorts. It helped his confidence massively. He learned social skills, he tried new things, and it gave him something to look forward to."

One standout moment for Riley was visiting Cambridge on a university trip which was his first time away from home for a full day. "He was nervous, but he loved it," his dad says. "He got stuck in and he really enjoyed himself."

Now, Riley is studying foundation cooking at college and volunteers locally with young people and adults with additional needs. His parents say he's even thinking about becoming a teacher one day, inspired by his own experiences and a desire to help others who have struggled in education. "**Into**University gave him those tools," they say. "It showed him that there are doors everywhere, not just walls."



"The possibilities are endless"



Riley attending the Secondary Academic Support at the Great Yarmouth centre. His former mentor, Laura, is now a member of staff at the centre.

Opportunities and Aspiration in Great Yarmouth

For the family, having an **Into**University centre in Great Yarmouth has been transformative, not just for them, but for the wider community.

"It's such a good opportunity for the kids around here," says Finley's mum. "There isn't much like this in the town, especially for children with special educational needs. Without **Into**University, I don't know what would have happened for Riley. It was a chance to try new things and be inspired."

The family is also hopeful about Finley's future, including the possibility of university. "The possibilities are endless," his dad adds. "If he wanted to go to university one day, that would be brilliant. It's not just about academic stuff, it's about giving them confidence and showing them what's out there."

Looking Ahead

250,000
FUTURES

For Amy and the Great Yarmouth team, Finley's story captures the heart of **Into**University's mission. "We've seen how consistent, community-based support can change lives," she reflects. "Finley and Riley's family remind us why we do what we do. It's about giving young people hope, confidence, and belief in their future."

As Finley looks ahead to more **Into**University workshops and the adventures of Year 4, he's feeling optimistic. "I'm really happy and excited," he says, eager to keep discovering what's possible.

Finley is just one of the many remarkable young people we've had the privilege to work with. From the very first student to our 250,000th, every story has mattered and every moment has contributed to who we are today. As we celebrate this milestone, we're looking forward to continuing to help even more young people discover their potential in the years ahead.

Building Futures in the North East



Rose Farley,
Operations Manager

Since 2021, **Into**University has grown its presence in the North East of England from zero to four local learning centres, aiming to tackle educational

inequality. Starting with **Into**University Newcastle East in 2021, we have since opened in Middlesbrough in 2024 and most recently in Gateshead and Hartlepool in 2025.

But why the North East?

The North East faces some of the deepest-rooted challenges in the country when it comes to social mobility. Research from the End Child Poverty Coalition and the University of Loughborough (2024) revealed that 89% of constituencies in the region have at least one in four children growing up in poverty. Participation in Higher Education also remains among the lowest in England, with many areas seeing fewer than 20% of 18- and 19-year-olds progressing to university.

The English Indices of Deprivation show the scale of this challenge starkly. Middlesbrough ranks as the most deprived local authority in England, with 49% of its neighbourhoods in the top 10% most deprived nationally. It is closely followed by Hartlepool (9th most deprived), Newcastle (19th), and Gateshead (39th). Additionally, when we look at the number of children looked after in these communities, Hartlepool has the highest rate of children in care (164 per 10,000) out of all local authorities in the North East (GOV.UK, 2024). These figures illustrate why targeted support for young people across the North East is so essential.

Young people and staff cutting the ribbon at the launch of IntoUniversity Middlesbrough



Understanding Local Challenges

Through community consultation, our teams are continuing to build a deeper understanding of the barriers that young people in the North East face.

Education can sometimes become intertwined with financial welfare systems, making it difficult for young people to prioritise learning. A local research report, developed in collaboration with Northumbria University, Hartlepool Borough Council, HartlePower, CLIP and Thrive Teesside, provides further insight. Residents of Hartlepool expressed concerns around the lack of training and employment opportunities for young people in Hartlepool, high unemployment rates, and a need for young people to leave the town to access better jobs (2024). Therefore, in the face of limited local job prospects and post-16 options, some young people may feel pressure to take job opportunities early to support their families, rather than continuing in education.

Eve, our new Centre Leader in Hartlepool, describes the importance of our work in Hartlepool and the North East:

*"The North East has a long history of being overlooked when it comes to opportunities, yet it is home to so many young people with the potential to achieve great things. Having an **Into**University centre in Hartlepool means young people will now have quality support in exploring their next steps, whether that's gaining the knowledge to make informed choices about their future or developing the confidence to believe in themselves and their aspirations, and be recognised for the talent they always had in the place they call home."*

In Gateshead, unemployment levels are high, and this has worsened in the last decade. In 2021, just over one in two people (52.8%) were employed (excluding full-time students), compared with 54.1% in 2011 (Census, 2021). Challenges such as school refusal, rising exclusions, homelessness and housing insecurity all have a knock-on effect on young people's confidence and engagement in education.

Laura, Centre Leader of **Into**University Gateshead, speaks about the work we are doing in the community to remove these barriers:

Young people taking part in IntoUniversity Gateshead's first FOCUS Week



"The Primary FOCUS weeks, run with Year 6 students, have been particularly effective at raising aspirations and knowledge of future options, including university. Students have the time and opportunity to discuss their hopes for the future and also find out about ways they can make this happen! Additionally, in Gateshead, lots of youth initiatives have closed or have a cost barrier to them. Our after-school provision 'Academic Support' is completely free which has been noted as a benefit by lots of young people and their adults at home."

Looking Ahead

Despite these challenges, there is huge potential and resilience within the communities we serve. Each new **Into**University centre in the North East represents a long-term commitment to supporting local students, families and schools to achieve their aspirations.

Recent research from the Sutton Trust's Opportunity Index (2025) and the UPP Foundation's Widening Participation Inquiry (2025) underscores why this regional focus matters. Both reports identify the North East as one of the most disadvantaged areas in England for social mobility and Higher Education access, calling for early, sustained, place-based investment, early intervention, and stronger partnerships between schools, universities, and communities.

IntoUniversity's model directly addresses these priorities and helps bridge the regional Higher Education participation gap highlighted by national research. We provide academic support, mentoring, and aspiration-raising from Primary school to university, supporting young people to reach their goals.

This growth has been made possible through the support of all our valued partners, including Newcastle University, Northumbria University, King's College, Cambridge, and the John Armitage Charitable Trust. Together, we are reaching more young people in communities where educational disadvantage remains one of the most significant barriers to opportunity.

As we continue to build our presence in the region, our goal is to inspire thousands more young people to imagine new futures for themselves. With the dedication of our staff, the energy of our students and the strength of our partnerships, we are helping to ensure that every young person in the North East has the chance to realise their potential.



We would love to hear your feedback about *aspire*.

To get in touch or to find out more about **Into**University please visit our website www.intouniversity.org, drop Vicky an email at aspire@intouniversity.org or call us on **020 7243 0242**.

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