

The
Brilliant
Club

Impact Case Study Series

'Does This Really Work?'

Tracking the Impact of
In-School Interventions with the
Impact Toolkit

October 2017



Research and Impact Series

The **Impact Case Study Series** forms part of our Research and Impact Series, which provides three ways to engage with the work of The Brilliant Club's Research and Impact Department and that of our partners. Please click on the icons below to find out more:



Research Seminar Series

A forum for practitioners to interact with academic research about education and widening participation.



Impact Case Study Series

Accessible case studies addressing key thematic challenges in widening participation and curriculum enrichment.



Research Report Series

Detailed research reports looking at specific ways in which we have tried to improve and evaluate the impact of our programmes.

About the Author

This case study was written by Owen Carter from The Brilliant Club's Research and Impact Department. Owen is the Impact Toolkit Manager and is working on a new platform to effectively evaluate the impact of school-based interventions. Previously, he worked as Content Lead at Optimus Education, connecting a network of over 1000 schools with the expertise of leading researchers and trainers. He has also worked for SAGE and Pearson Publishing, developing apps for primary and secondary school pupils. Owen writes for a number of educational publications, mainly on the application of research evidence to school and classroom practice.

Contact Details

This is the first in a series of impact case studies which can all be found on our [website](#). If you would like to learn more about The Brilliant Club or have specific questions about this case study, please contact:

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About The Brilliant Club

The Brilliant Club exists to increase the number of pupils from under-represented backgrounds that progress to highly-selective universities. We do this by mobilising the PhD community to share its expertise with state schools. In pursuit of this mission, The Brilliant Club delivers two programmes:



The Scholars Programme recruits PhD researchers, trains them as university access professionals and places them as tutors in schools to deliver academically rigorous programmes to small groups of high-potential pupils.



Researchers in Schools recruits PhD graduates, places them as trainee teachers in schools and supports them to develop as excellent teachers and research leaders committed to closing the gap in attainment and university access.

Find out more about our work on our website at www.thebrilliantclub.org.

Executive Summary

This is the first in a series of impact case studies about the work of The Brilliant Club. It is relevant for anyone interested in assessing the impact of education interventions, particularly for school leaders looking to improve their measurement of pupil progress.

School-based monitoring and evaluation needs to improve

- The quality of impact reporting offered by organisations working with pupils and young people can vary across the sector.
- Schools often struggle to evaluate the impact of interventions they run.
- Schools run The Brilliant Club's programmes for a variety of reasons, and want to assess the impact of the programme on a range of outcomes.

We have built an Impact Toolkit to address this problem

- The Brilliant Club's mission is to increase the number of pupils from under-represented backgrounds progressing to highly-selective universities: as this is a long-term outcome that may take a number of years to occur, we need shorter-term outcomes which can help us assess if we are making progress towards this goal.
- Competencies such as meta-cognition and self-efficacy are strongly linked to academic attainment and university access, and validated measures exist to assess them. By observing our impact on these outcomes, we can see in the shorter term the progress pupils are making towards taking up a place at a highly-selective university.
- We have built these measures into the Impact Toolkit, an online platform to make it simple and straightforward for schools to evaluate the impact of The Scholars Programme.
- This Toolkit has now launched and been warmly received by schools. We will be rolling it across the entire Scholars Programme in 2017-18.



We spoke to 31 schools in our initial research for the tool. Only one of these schools was confident in the way they evaluated impact.

30%

According to the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, just 30% of impact evidence provided to them is 'good'; the rest is 'poor' or 'average'.

2%

The work of Project Oracle indicates that most organisations can say why their programme should work, but less than 2% have robust evidence of their impact.

67,430

Number of pupils The Brilliant Club will work with from 2016 to 2021, in 700 schools. To support them to a highly-selective university, we need to effectively measure our impact.

Developing the Impact Toolkit

The evaluation problem

The quality of impact reporting offered by organisations working with pupils and young people is of extremely variable quality. When the Paul Hamlyn Foundation reviewed the quality of impact evidence from organisations they had funded, only 30% of the evidence was rated as 'good': the rest was 'poor' or 'average' (Paul Hamlyn Foundation, 2014, p.10).

Schools can also struggle to evaluate the impact of interventions they run themselves. Of 31 teachers and former teachers we interviewed, only 1 said they were confident in their school's impact evaluation.¹

This evaluation problem raises questions about how charitable organisations can really know what sort of impact they are having. Project Oracle, which assesses the quality of organisations' impact measurement using a 5-tier standard, report that out of 332 projects they've assessed, 236 are at Standard 1 - this equates simply to having a plausible description of the logic of their programme. Only 6 organisations met Standard 3, and none met Standard 4 or 5 (Project Oracle, 2017).

Project Oracle's standards of evidence are themselves much weaker than recognised academic research frameworks such as the [Maryland Scientific Methods Scale](#). If there is a growing expectation in the teaching profession that teachers' decisions are informed by scientific evidence – 51% of all senior leaders have used the [EEF toolkit](#), for instance (Sutton Trust, 2016) – it is crucial that organisations working with schools can be held to the same standard.

Building an evaluation framework for The Brilliant Club

The Brilliant Club's long-term mission is to increase the number of pupils that progress to a highly-selective university. However, as a university access programme working with pupils from age 10, we often have to wait several years to know a pupil's final education destination. We also need to evaluate the shorter-term impact our programmes have in supporting pupils to progress to a highly-selective university, especially during the period of delivery.

To address the evaluation problem and assess our medium and short-term impact, we have designed a competency framework that details how we will support pupils to develop the knowledge, skills and ambition needed to progress to a highly-selective university. This can be used as the basis for much of the charity's impact reporting, and as a way to help schools assess the impact of the programme in their schools.

This competency framework is built upon a series of cognitive and non-cognitive skills that the research literature shows as having a positive impact on academic attainment, as well as life outcomes more widely. Research cautions that there is no single skill that drives pupil outcomes on its own: there is no silver bullet. Rather, a range of inter-related competencies need to be targeted to give pupils the best chance of success (Education Endowment Foundation, 2013).

¹ Brilliant Club user research

Based on this research, The Brilliant Club identified six cognitive and non-cognitive skills that we believe will be effective in developing the knowledge, skills and ambition needed to progress to a highly-selective university. We refer to these as our 'competencies'.

1	Written and Verbal Communication
2	Subject Knowledge
3	University Knowledge
4	Motivation and Self-Efficacy
5	Meta-Cognition
6	Critical Thinking

This competency framework provided a basis for understanding the intermediate impact of the programme, but still left some key questions unanswered:

1. How will we evaluate these outcomes in a way that doesn't make unrealistic and burdensome demands on the time of tutors, teachers or pupils?
2. How do we account for the different reasons that schools run The Brilliant Club? A school may run the programme to improve pupil confidence, for instance, but based on this outcomes framework we would not report on this metric.

It is for these reasons that we developed the Impact Toolkit, a web-based platform for schools to monitor and evaluate the impact of The Scholars Programme.

Making evaluation easy for schools

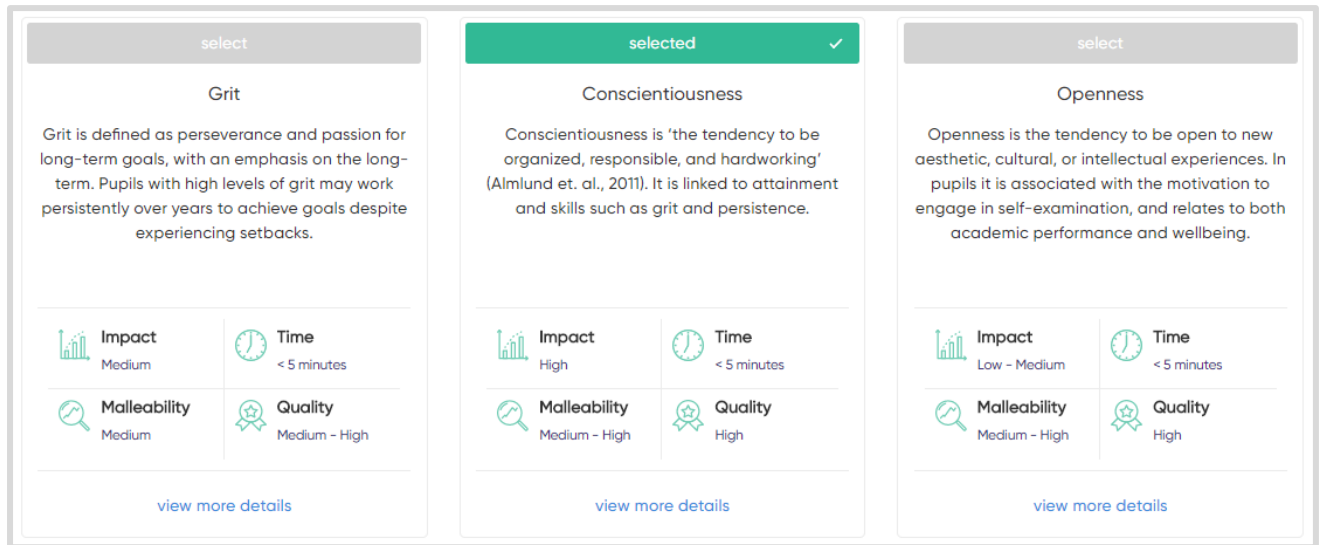
The Impact Toolkit has three main aims:

1. Allow schools running The Brilliant Club to independently evaluate its impact on skills of interest to them, in addition to The Brilliant Club's competencies.
2. Offering an end-to-end platform for teachers to set up and run an evaluation.
3. Make this easy and effective by automating data collection and impact reporting

We have built this into an online tool, which enables:

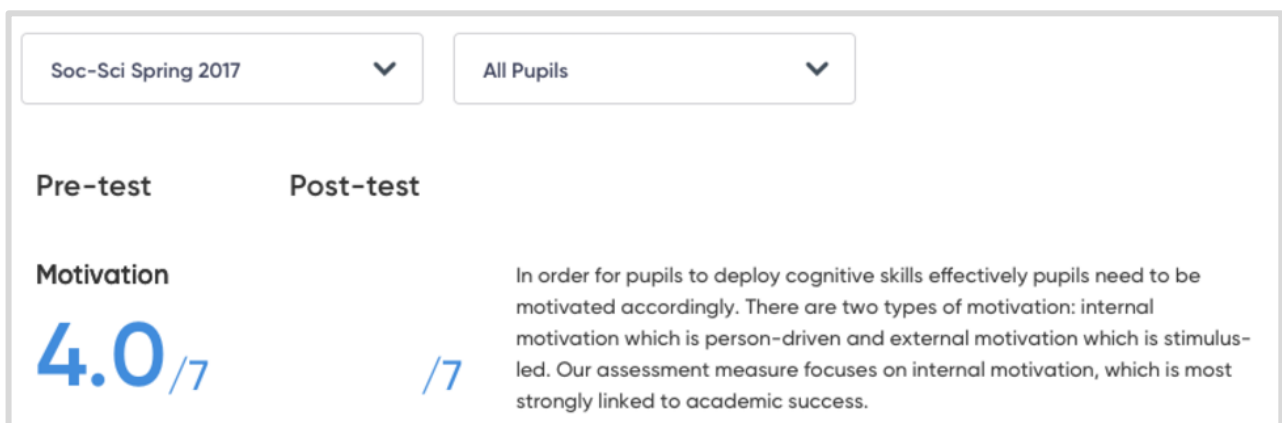
- **Pupil selection:** using attainment predictions to enable teachers to see which pupils may benefit most from the programme.
- **Assessment selection:** teachers can choose from a range of validated self-report assessments to measure the impact of the programme.
- **Impact reporting:** dashboards keep track of key pupil and programme monitoring components, and an impact report is available to report back on the full evaluation once the programme has been completed.

Importantly, as well as assessing progress against The Brilliant Club’s competency framework, schools can choose from a range of optional skills which they may want to assess.



Teachers can choose from pre-selected and optional skills to assess

We aim to make reporting easy and clear for teachers, so that they can see at a glance which competencies have been affected by the programme, and by how much.



Pre- and post-test can be compared, in addition to more detailed reporting

The road ahead

The Impact Toolkit has now been trialed and researched with over 30 schools, and the assessment measures themselves tested with over 400 pupils from different age ranges and contexts. Initial feedback has been positive: Steve Ward, Assistant Headteacher at Glenthorne High School, commented that the platform will **'add a lot of value for us in targeting resources and helping us to evaluate our impact'**; Charlotte Pywell, Head of French at Unity City Academy, called it **'a really impressive and comprehensive approach to evaluation'**.

Over the next 12 months we will be rolling-out the Impact Toolkit with all schools running The Scholars Programme and will look to continue the development process. For instance, over time we may compare results with other metrics including attainment data and parent and tutor self-reports. We also want to continue learning from schools about their priorities in terms of what they want to measure, and ensure we are responsive in supporting their evaluation.

Evaluating school-based interventions is challenging: schools are busy environments and randomised experiments are often not feasible for many initiatives. Our intention, though, is that the measures implemented through the Impact Toolkit should bring us closer to a robust evaluation of The Brilliant Club's impact. For schools, we hope that this will empower them to engage even further with the programme, and to support their focus on the outcomes they want it to affect.

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