

The
Brilliant
Club

Impact Case Study Series

Access Through National Collaboration:

Mobilising the PhD community to support
university readiness with schools in Wales

June 2019



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:



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



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Research
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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 David Jones from The Brilliant Club's Scholars Programme. David is Teaching and Learning Director in The Scholars Programme and oversees the training of the programme's PhD tutors. Prior to joining The Brilliant Club as a Programme Officer, David worked as a primary school class teacher in London after completing his PGCE at the University of Bath.

Contact Details

This is the sixth in a series of impact case studies which can all be found on our website, thebrilliantclub.org. 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 students from underrepresented 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, trains and places doctoral and postdoctoral researchers in schools to deliver programmes of university-style tutorials, which are supplemented by two university trips.



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 sixth in a series of impact case studies about wider thematic issues within university access. It presents the challenges of applying university access interventions that have been successful in one context to meet the specific needs of a different education system. Specifically, this case study describes how The Brilliant Club delivers The Scholars Programme with its partners in Wales.

Welsh students are underrepresented at the UK's most selective universities

- Welsh students are progressing to higher education at lower rates than English and Northern Irish students: 29.6% compared to 33.7% of English and 35.2% of Northern Irish 18-year-olds (UCAS 2018 End of Cycle Report).
- Wales' highest performing students have historically applied to Oxford and Cambridge but not been as successful in getting offers (Murphy Report, 2014).
- "Around a third of 15-year-olds in Wales expect to obtain an undergraduate degree" whereas over 40% of English students expect to complete a degree (PISA, 2015).

The Brilliant Club began working in Wales in 2015-16 and worked with nearly 900 students in Wales by the end of the 2017-18 academic year

- By recruiting, training and placing doctoral and postdoctoral researchers in schools to deliver programmes of university-style tutorials, The Scholars Programme works in partnership with schools and universities to deliver university-style learning in schools across Wales.
- In Autumn 2016, The Scholars Programme ran its first courses in Wales with two schools and two Further Education colleges and 40 students from Key Stage 5.
- By Summer 2018, The Scholars Programme had been delivered to 892 students in Wales across 45 schools and colleges by 31 PhD tutors.

By partnering with local organisations and working with funders to support growth, The Scholars Programme can be delivered effectively to meet the needs and support the priorities of the education system in Wales.

- The Brilliant Club first worked in Wales by partnering with the Welsh Government's flagship widening access programme, the Seren Network. The charity has now worked with all 11 of the Seren regional hubs and delivered the Seren National Conference for the past two years.
- By the end of Summer 2018, 31 PhD researchers from Wales and England had been recruited and trained to deliver 80 placements across south Wales. 846 Scholars Programme students from Wales and England had visited Cardiff University.
- Pupil data is collected and presented differently in different UK nations, so The Scholars Programme's targeting measures are adapted to reflect the education contexts of each nation. The Brilliant Club's team in Wales work closely with each school to understand how the programme can complement and support their priorities and aims.
- The Brilliant Club is seeking to expand its reach in Wales and was kindly granted funding from the Foyle Foundation and the Waterloo Foundation to support this work in 2018-19.

Adapting a programme to meet the specific education needs and priorities of multiple national and regional contexts can be a challenge, and we continue to consider how we can increase our provision across Wales to effectively meet the needs of Welsh students. In this case study, we share what we have learnt so far and how we aim to make the programme available to every non-selective state school in Wales that wants to partner with us.

University Access in Wales

Across the UK, socio-economic background and geography shape students' outcomes and likelihood of progressing to higher education. In the UK, the gap between low participation and high participation neighbourhoods has remained stubbornly high for entry rates to highly-selective universities (UCAS POLAR data, 2018). Meanwhile, students from low-income backgrounds in rural and coastal areas are less likely to progress to university than students from low-income backgrounds in urban areas (State of the Nation, Social Mobility Commission, 2017).

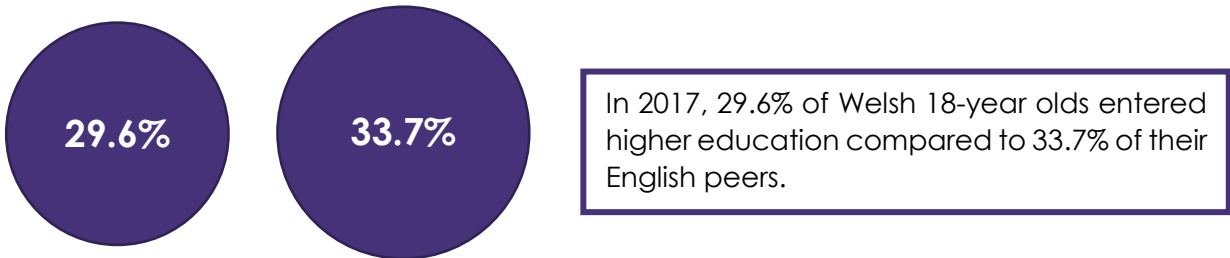
While these statistics are true across the UK, they do not completely reflect the nuances of university access in each of the UK's nations. In Wales, as with the rest of the UK, "there is a 30-percentage point difference between those on free school meals and others" at Key Stage 4 (State of the Nation, Social Mobility Commission, 2017). However, **increasing access to the UK's leading universities for students across Wales has been a major focus in recent years.**

In March 2013, Paul Murphy MP, the former Secretary of State for Wales, was appointed as Oxbridge Ambassador for Wales by the Welsh Government. His final report, published in June 2014, found that Welsh students had lower acceptance rates to Oxford and Cambridge than their peers in England and Northern Ireland.

"In the 2011–12 admissions cycle, only 19.5 per cent of our applications to the UK's top two universities were successful, compared to a success rate of 25 percent for England and Northern Ireland."

Murphy Report, 2014

Murphy's findings reflect a pattern of Welsh students progressing to higher education at lower rates than their UK counterparts. The UCAS 2018 End of Cycle Report showed that **Welsh students are progressing to higher education at lower rates than English and Northern Irish students**; 29.6% of Welsh 18-year olds entered higher education compared to 33.7% of English and 35.2% of Northern Irish 18-year olds.



In part, this difference could be explained through a disparity in attainment. The PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) rankings, which compare the performance of education systems across the world, show Welsh students have been performing below the other UK nations since its inception in 2006.

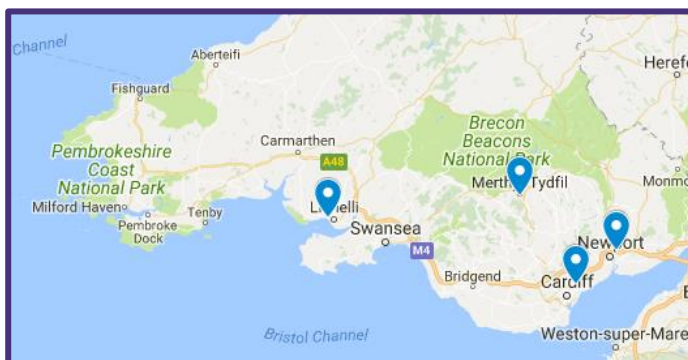
While an attainment gap may be a barrier for Welsh students accessing higher education and progressing to the UK's leading universities, it cannot explain the whole picture. The Murphy Report found that **Wales' highest performing students were applying to Oxford and Cambridge but not getting offers.** It also compared Wales specifically to the North-East of England, a comparable English region, where he found acceptance rates in line with the UK average despite lower levels of average post-16 attainment than in Wales.

Despite this, progression to highly selective universities is beginning to change in Wales (WalesOnline, 2019). Applications from state-educated students in Wales to the University of Oxford rose 13% between 2016 and 2019. In the same application cycle, 31.5% of state-educated applicants from Wales were offered places to study at the University of Cambridge. This represents a record acceptance rates and compares to 24.3% in 2018 and 26.4% in 2017.

Growing in Wales

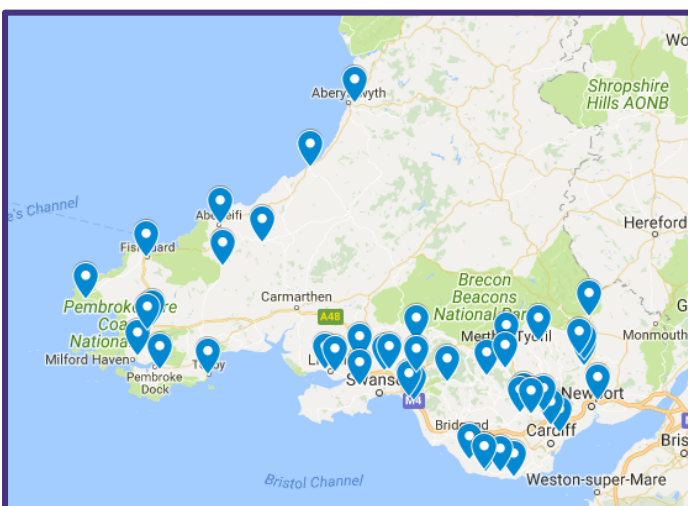
The Brilliant Club began working in London in 2011 with Scholars Programme placements delivered to students at London Academy in Edgware. The charity's aim, however, has always been for its programmes to be available across the whole UK. Since 2011, The Brilliant Club has therefore worked to expand its reach across the UK, and as of 2018-19 has been present across all nations of the UK.

The Brilliant Club's first work in Wales began in the 2015-16 academic year, with members of staff delivering sessions at teacher conferences in Wales run by the Welsh Government's flagship widening participation programme, the **Seren Network**. The first Scholars Programme placements, which see a PhD researcher deliver university-style tutorials in schools, were run in September 2016 and by the end of Summer 2018 the programme has been delivered to **892 students from Year 5 to Year 12 in 45 schools and colleges in Wales**. In



Autumn 2016 (pilot – 4 schools; 5 placements; 40 students from KS5)

that time, we have recruited, trained and placed 31 PhD tutors from Welsh and English universities in schools in Wales. In May 2018 we opened an **office in Cardiff** and have now run provision at all key stages in Wales, including several placements at Further Education colleges. We have also run the programme in two Welsh medium schools and one bilingual school.



Autumn 2016 to Summer 2018 (45 schools; 80 placements; 892 students from KS2, 3, 4 and 5)

The Brilliant Club has continued its partnership with the Welsh Government through the **Seren Network**, which was launched in response to the Murphy Review to specifically address the issue of underrepresentation of Welsh students at Oxford and Cambridge. Delivered through a network of 11 regional hubs across Wales, Seren provision has expanded to **support progression to all the UK's leading universities** and targets Wales' brightest Year 12 students with programmes of information, advice and guidance alongside academic support.

Our work with the Welsh Government has helped us to engage with many schools who have subsequently signed up to The

Scholars Programme independently. A major strand of this partnership has been The Brilliant Club

supporting the design and delivery of **Seren's national conferences** in 2016-17 and 2017-18. These two-day conferences have been attended by over 2,000 students and education staff, with over 70% of the Sutton 30 Universities and 75% of the Russell Group in attendance. We have also supported the Seren hubs to run academic masterclasses and information, advice and guidance sessions through our existing network of PhD tutors, Brilliant Club staff and university admissions staff.

"Working with The Brilliant Club... has provided real opportunities to stretch and challenge some of our most able learners at a university level. All of those who have taken part have benefitted greatly and have developed their research and analytical skills considerably. These experiences have enabled our learners to successfully compete for places in Oxbridge and Russell Group universities.

From a management perspective, working with the Brilliant Club is an enjoyable experience as they are always efficient, reliable and understand how school and college systems work."

Nikki Neale, Faculty and Campus Director, Coleg Sir Gar, Llanelli, Wales

Partnerships with Welsh universities have also been a crucial aspect of The Brilliant Club's growth in Wales. A pilot partnership with Cardiff University allowed The Scholars Programme to recruit PhD tutors and run trips for schools across South Wales in Autumn 2016. This pilot is now a full partnership between The Brilliant Club and Cardiff University to recruit PhD tutors and run trips. As a result, 23 Cardiff University PhD researchers have been recruited and trained to deliver 43 placements and 846 students have visited the university. In addition to those from Cardiff University, amongst the first cohort of PhD tutors in Wales were doctoral researchers from Swansea University and Cardiff Metropolitan University. Both these institutions now have researcher development partnerships with The Brilliant Club, while PhD tutors have been recruited from Bangor University, Wrexham Glyndŵr University and Aberystwyth University.

"The Brilliant Club has been particularly good at relating to students in my [Seren] Hub, whether running sessions on study skills or encouraging GCSE students to aim high in the next stage of their education. They communicate very effectively with secondary school students of all ages."

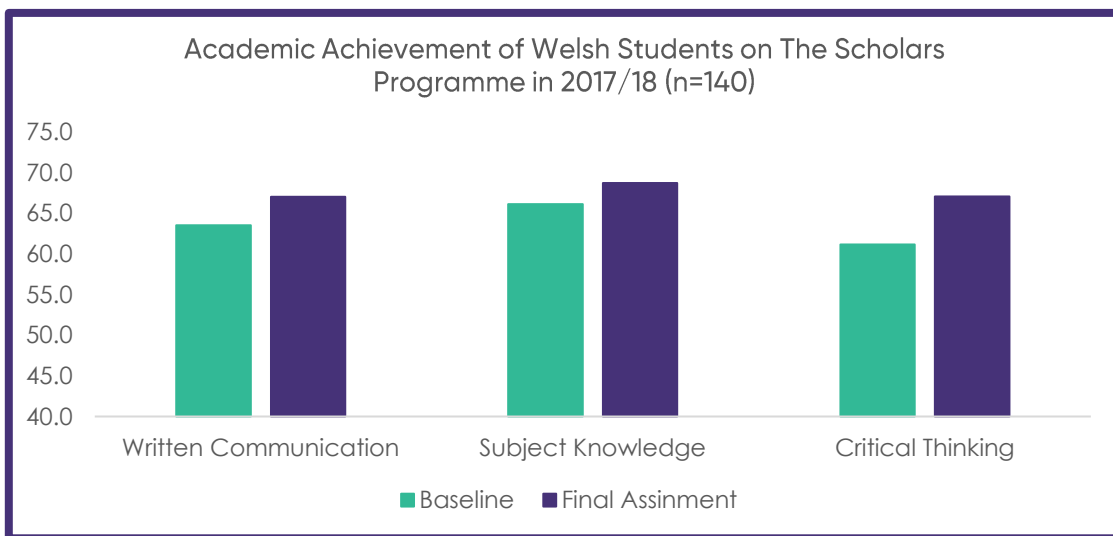
Stephen Parry-Jones, Rhondda Cynon Taf and Merthyr Tydfil hub co-ordinator

Working across both England and Wales has also allowed us to take English students to Cardiff University and Welsh students to English institutions. By the end of Summer 2018, 268 English students have visited Cardiff University, 119 Welsh students visited the University of Exeter for their graduation and 390 Welsh students have visited the University of Bristol.

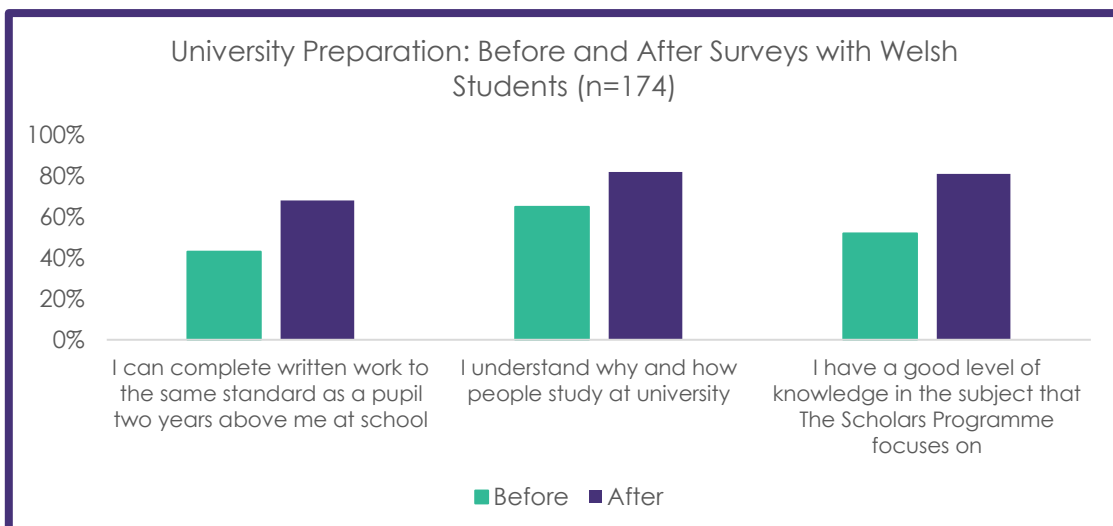
Evidence of Impact

Based on academic evidence, The Brilliant Club has designed an [outcomes framework](#) that details how we will support students to progress to highly-selective universities. Students' in-school tutorials culminate in them completing a challenging university-style assignment, which is marked by PhD tutors at one key stage above their expected level of attainment. By comparing final assignments to students' baseline assignments, we can measure their academic achievement, which is the skills and knowledge that students are explicitly learning in the context of The Scholars Programme. These include written communication, subject knowledge and critical thinking. With the new school curriculum in Wales intended for full roll out by 2022, we believe these competencies will complement the four purposes of the curriculum; particularly to help develop 'ambitious, capable learners' and 'ethical, informed citizens of Wales and the world'.

The following chart summarises the academic achievement of Welsh students on The Scholars Programme in 2017-18.



Welsh students that took part in The Scholars Programme also reported higher levels of self-assessed university preparation after the programme. The below chart gives the percentages of students who agreed or strongly agreed with three statements before and after the programme.



Two Challenges of Growth in Wales

We had to work with our partners to overcome two key challenges in expanding our provision in Wales:

1. The travel challenge: Making university interventions accessible in central and north Wales

As The Scholars Programme has grown in Wales, expansion has been largely concentrated in the urban belt across the south. There are currently nine universities in the country including the Open University, with five primarily or solely based in south Wales. The logistics of reaching rural areas mean that higher costs and time commitments are associated with visiting universities for many schools across mid and north Wales.

For The Scholars Programme, this has represented a challenge as students on the programme attend two university trips, and PhD researchers, who are often based near their institutions, deliver the programme in schools.

Developing partnerships with more Welsh universities will help with tutor recruitment as researchers from Aberystwyth University, Bangor University and Wrexham Glyndŵr University can travel to schools in mid and north Wales more easily. By operating across the UK, The Scholars Programme is also able to call on PhD researchers from institutions in England, such as the universities of Birmingham, Liverpool and Manchester, to serve areas of Wales that are not easily accessible from a Welsh institution.

Working with PhD researchers on a part-time basis also allows the programme greater flexibility to ultimately reach all areas of Wales. Flexible scheduling means that the programme can be run at times mutually convenient to the school and researcher. The Brilliant Club is also committed to covering PhD researchers travel expenses in addition to their pay in order to ensure that travel costs are not a barrier for researchers wanting to work as tutors in the programme.

“Having come from a low HE progression family myself, I have always been passionate about providing opportunities for students from disadvantaged backgrounds to succeed. The Brilliant Club enables me to do just this, and I am excited to be able to work with enthusiastic young people during my placements.”

Cardiff University PhD Tutor

2. Applying a pre-existing model in the specific context of the Welsh education system

One of the challenges for third-sector organisations working across the UK, is being able to ensure their operating models work in the unique contexts of each nation, since aspects of a programme that work with the funding arrangements and educational priorities in one nation may not be applicable to another.

The flexible nature of The Scholars Programme means that we have been able to adapt our operating model to meet Welsh priorities. For example, the programme's pupil targeting criteria used in Wales reflect the fact that the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD) records and presents information differently to England's Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI) or the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD). In addition, our information for schools

explains how they can use the Pupil Development Grant (PDG) to support the programme, and the information itself is available in both [Welsh](#) and [English](#).

"The Brilliant Club does understand the Welsh educational context and how it differs from other UK nations. It empathises with the current Welsh Context and offers ongoing support to educational establishments which is relevant to need."

Sian Farquharson, EAS hub co-ordinator

Working with partners, such as the Welsh Government and universities based in Wales, has also been key to adapting The Scholars Programme to support Welsh educational priorities. The appointment of a National Manager for Wales in January 2017, followed by a Programme Officer for Wales and the opening of a Cardiff office, has also been an important step for developing a presence in Wales. Staff based in Wales full-time are better placed to maintain and understanding of the Welsh national context and can quickly adapt our operating model as necessary.

Conclusions and lessons learned

Next steps: plans for further growth in Wales

While The Brilliant Club's presence in Wales has grown since 2015-16 to working with nearly 900 students by the end of 2017-18, challenges remain if The Scholars Programme is to reach schools across the country.

A key priority of The Brilliant Club is to make its programmes available to all schools who want to participate, including in harder to reach [rural and coastal areas](#). Expanding the programme in north Wales is therefore an important next step for the organisation.

The charity will also continue to work closely with the Seren hubs to share expertise and provide support in their work with Y12s across Wales.

"Having worked as a Humanities teacher in in a large South West Wales Comprehensive school, and in initial teacher education with Teach First Cymru, it is such a pleasure to continue working in collaboration with outstanding teachers to deliver a programme to support and stretch their learners. It is also an incredibly exciting time to be involved in widening access and MAT provision work in Wales with so much great work being delivered through the Seren Network and by universities in Wales, and we have welcomed collaborating with these networks and institutions to develop our work. "

Greg Scannell, National Manager for Wales, The Scholars Programme

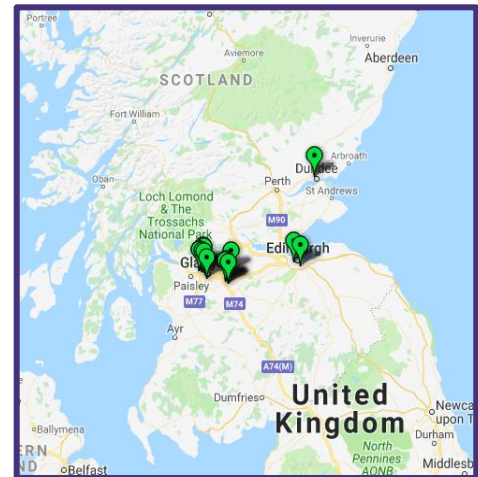
Expanding across the UK

Every young person should have a fair chance to attend a highly-selective university, wherever they live and whatever school they go to. Our staff and tutors come from every part of the UK and beyond, and we are committed to making The Scholars Programme available to any non-selective state school in the UK that wishes to work with us.

Since Spring 2017, The Scholars Programme has been run in Scotland, initially in partnership with Glasgow City Council and the University of Strathclyde. In 2018/19 the programme ran in partnership with the University of Strathclyde and University of Edinburgh in three primary schools in Glasgow, two Edinburgh secondaries and four schools in North Lanarkshire.

In Northern Ireland, The Scholars Programme piloted from January 2019 in partnership with Queen's University Belfast and Trinity College Dublin through The Brilliant Club's sister organisation, [AccessEd](#).

We believe that as long as we work collaboratively with schools, universities and other stakeholders, a model with strong fundamentals can be adapted to multiple contexts.



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