Breaking the link between a young person’s background and access to life-changing higher education
“I always loved learning, but coming from a state comprehensive school, first-generation background, higher education wasn’t on my radar while I was at secondary school. One day in 2014, my teacher called us all to a meeting about a new opportunity called The Scholars Programme. I still remember when our tutor told us that only a few people in the world knew about his speciality. I definitely think the experience was the most important factor in my eventual decision to apply to Keble College, Oxford, where I’ve now spent the happiest two years of my life studying English and Italian. Collaborating with the charity as part of my work with Oxford First-Gen students’ society has been a real highlight for this reason. I can’t thank the programme enough for giving me that all-important first push.”

Shona Galt, The Scholars Programme Alumna, President of Oxford First-Gen Society 2018-19 and Student at Keble College, Oxford

Hello

When I was a teenager and couldn’t stop reading, my food technology teacher asked if I’d like to meet her daughter who was doing a PhD in English Literature. Like most children in our village, to me, a Doctor was who I saw when I was unwell, so to hear news of a ‘doctor of books’ was quite something and I couldn’t wait to meet her. That’s how I ended up discussing renaissance literature with a PhD student in amongst the spatulas and sieves of a food tech room in a struggling school in Doncaster.

Fast forward 20 years or so and I was back at my old school as a visitor. I was there to deliver four assemblies in one morning. After the back to back talks, a teacher asked me to meet ‘just one more’ group of students and took me off to a classroom. In there was a group of six Year 8 pupils who the teacher introduced as ‘our Brilliant Club’. I felt my heart melt as the pupils looked up from their desks. I remember thinking, they know what it is to have someone stretch the boundaries of your knowledge, to know the possibilities of education.

The reality is that the pupils in my old school still face numerous barriers to study at a highly-selective university, as do children from disadvantaged backgrounds across the UK. For example, in England, only 1 in 50 of the most disadvantaged pupils make it to a highly-selective university, compared to 1 in 4 of the most advantaged. Having worked in research intensive universities, I know the power of those institutions and their world-changing research for individuals and society. As CEO of The Brilliant Club, I know the power of our programmes which activate the PhD researcher community, both in the incredible stories of the young people we serve and the impact data which shows that Scholars programme alumni are almost twice as likely to progress to highly-selective universities.

On top of existing inequalities, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting disruption to education, children from disadvantaged backgrounds are even more at risk of falling behind in their academic achievement and university progression.

We need your support to offer life-changing opportunities and unlock the potential of every child in need. Together, we can make a difference for thousands of children and the society we live in.

Thank you for your interest in The Brilliant Club and we would love to continue the conversation.

Yours,
Anne-Marie Canning MBE, CEO
The Need

In the UK today, a young person’s life chances remain linked to their socioeconomic background. Research shows that, whilst there has been an increase in progression to university over time, there are still deep-rooted inequalities in accessing the most selective institutions.

Pupil progression to highly-selective universities in the UK

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>England</th>
<th>Scotland</th>
<th>Wales</th>
<th>Northern Ireland</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Only 1 in 50 of the most disadvantaged pupils progress, compared to 1 in 4 of the most advantaged.</td>
<td>Only 7% of pupils from the most deprived areas progress, compared to 26% of pupils from the least deprived areas.</td>
<td>Only 4% of young people from low participation areas progress, compared to 22% of pupils from high participation areas.</td>
<td>Only 2% of young people from low participation areas progress, compared to 10% of pupils from high participation areas.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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(UCAS Multiple Equality Measure) (Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation) (POLAR4 – Participation of Local Areas) (POLAR4 – Participation of Local Areas)

These progression rates evidence the existence of barriers to fair university access which perpetuate cycles of inequality, underrepresentation and disadvantage within society.

The Brilliant Club supports pupils from underrepresented backgrounds to progress to highly-selective universities. We do this by mobilising PhD researchers to share their knowledge with pupils in state schools.

Making A Difference

The Brilliant Club mobilises PhD researchers across the UK to support young people to:

- Develop the knowledge, skills and confidence to thrive in their studies
- Apply and progress to highly-selective universities

Research shows that this will widen access to long-term benefits which enable young people to realise their potential:

- Learn from leading academics undertaking cutting-edge research
- Progress into competitive and influential career paths
- Achieve higher average earnings
- Build networks which support personal and professional development

By closing this university access gap, we are working towards a fairer society, in which a young person’s life chances are not determined by their background.
How We Make A Difference

In pursuit of our mission, we aim to work with over 15,000 pupils per year across the UK, in towns, cities, rural and coastal areas. We bring together a community of 600 PhD researchers and have partnerships with 800 schools and 40 universities to deliver our two core programmes: The Scholars Programme and Researchers in Schools (RIS).

The Scholars Programme

The programme is designed to
- Support pupils to develop the knowledge, skills and confidence to progress to highly-selective universities
- Work collaboratively to close the gap in university access
- Develop researchers’ teaching skills and public engagement

The Journey

We recruit, train and place doctoral and postdoctoral researchers as PhD tutors in partner state schools

In groups of up to six, pupils take part in seven university-style tutorials delivered by a researcher on courses which are based on academic research and range across STEM, the humanities and social sciences

Pupils complete a challenging final assignment of between 1,000-2,500 words, depending on their age group, which is marked on a university-style grading scheme

We provide school partners with an impact report on their pupils’ progress compared to national averages

We now also offer The Scholars Programme virtually for schools that would prefer or require it due to COVID-19 restrictions or geographical location. The Virtual Scholars Programme offers pupils online tutorials with a PhD researcher and high-quality information, advice and guidance in collaboration with our university partners.

Pupil Targeting

All pupils enrolled on our programmes attend state schools, alumni from which are underrepresented at highly-selective universities. In addition, at least 55% of pupils must meet one or more of our targeting criteria:

- Eligible for free school meals
- No parental history of higher education
- Deprivation according to postcode

“We working with the pupils to teach them about Celtic Mythology (something they had never really encountered before) was both fun and challenging. It really fired in me a passion for teaching. It was truly one of the best experiences of my life thus far.”

PhD Tutor, Northern Ireland

“The experience has enhanced my child’s understanding of higher education. He has started to work out what he needs to achieve his goals in the future.”

Parent, Wales
Researchers in Schools (RIS)

Researchers in Schools (RIS) piloted in 2014, with support from the Department for Education. RIS is a three-year programme for PhD graduates who want to become classroom teachers and is delivered in partnership with Initial Teacher Education (ITE) providers in England. Participants have one day of protected time per week to work towards the Research Leader in Education (RLE) Award, designed to optimise the unique skill set of PhD graduates for the benefit of pupils and schools.

We support RIS participants to become excellent classroom teachers and work towards the RIS aims:

- To champion university access
- To increase subject expertise
- To promote education research

We recruit RIS participants to train with a regional provider and work towards Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) whilst teaching in their school. We support participants to deliver Uni Pathways, a series of tutorials on courses based on their PhD, to six pupils to increase their university readiness.

"The initial attraction was that it is a bespoke programme for PhD graduates – it felt like the programme was designed for me. To be part of the education research community was important to me as well. I want to influence the way maths is taught in schools. When I broke it down, RIS was the only route for me." — RIS Participant

We support RIS participants to complete their Newly-Qualified Teacher (NQT) year. Participants create and pilot an education research project, underpinned by Master’s level training.

"Uni Pathways has really expanded my knowledge and allowed me to be involved in amazing experiences that I would not be able to participate in otherwise, such as visiting a university. Additionally, it allowed me to refine my mathematical skills in physics." — Uni Pathways Pupil

We support RIS participants to build on their expertise and experience to refine their teaching practice. Participants train other teachers to deliver their research project, supported by additional leadership training.

"I have been really impressed with our RIS teacher’s progress this year. Not only does he continue to add impact to the department and to lessons within his subject, but he is also contributing to life beyond his classroom, both pastorally, and by focusing on careers with older pupils." — Headteacher

RIS alumni become part of a community dedicated to making a difference to pupils’ lives as classroom teachers and school leaders.
How We Measure Impact

Key Pupil Outcomes

Long-Term: Increase the number of pupils from underrepresented backgrounds progressing to highly-selective universities

Intermediate: Increase pupils’ university readiness by developing their knowledge, skills and confidence

Long-Term: Impact Evaluations
For the last four years, independent evaluations with UCAS (Universities and Colleges Admissions Service) have found that pupils who complete The Scholars Programme are statistically significantly more likely to apply, receive an offer and progress to a highly-selective university.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Scholars Programme</th>
<th>Pupils in control groups were matched on GCSE attainment and socio-demographics</th>
<th>Control Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>100 pupils</td>
<td></td>
<td>100 pupils</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>62</td>
<td>Applied to a highly-selective university</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>58</td>
<td>Received an offer from a highly-selective university</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>Progressed to a highly-selective university</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
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External Evaluation with the University of Cambridge
In line with our strategy focused on pupil outcomes, we have commissioned the Faculty of Education at the University of Cambridge to carry out an external evaluation between 2018-2020. The evaluation consists of a review of our research and impact work to date and a randomised-controlled trial (RCT) assessing the impact of our programmes on pupils’ intermediate university readiness outcomes.

Intermediate: Monitoring And Evaluation
Our Research and Impact Department brings together a team of social scientists who work to measure, understand and strengthen the impact of our programmes.

During The Scholars Programme and Uni Pathways (delivered through Researchers in Schools), we measure pupils’ progress in competencies that support academic achievement and university readiness, using a combination of assignments and standardised self-report surveys.

We measure pupils’ achievements in written communication, subject knowledge and critical thinking through baseline and final assignments, which are marked on a university-style grading scheme.
Since its beginnings, the charity has made financial sustainability a priority and has consistently maintained a high percentage of income earned through programme delivery (2018/19: 88%). This includes a contract from the Department for Education to deliver Researchers in Schools and contributions towards programme costs from partner universities and schools for The Scholars Programme.

Over the next two years, we need to raise £1.5 million to deliver our programmes for pupils across the UK.
We rely on external funding to deliver high-quality programmes and robust impact evaluation, whilst keeping costs accessible for our education partners, including state schools.
By supporting The Brilliant Club, you will help to deliver impactful, sustainable programmes for young people today and in the years to come.

Friends of The Brilliant Club
We believe in the power of networks and the importance of engaging with all of our supporters to collaborate on our mission.
We would like to invite you to become part of our Friends of The Brilliant Club network, which provides opportunities for everyone interested in the charity to come together, share ideas and support our mission.
You can sign up to the Friends mailing list on our website: thebrilliantclub.org.

We would love to hear from you!
Please email Maddy Maloney (Partnerships and Fundraising Manager) at maddy.maloney@thebrilliantclub.org or call 020 3005 3342.