Because of factors entirely out of their control – their family income, parental history of higher education and their postcode...

This inequality is getting worse, and has been further exacerbated by Covid-19. Schools where a high percentage of pupils receive free school meals have seen attainment decrease by twice as much during the pandemic as those with a low percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals. (Hodder Education, 2021) The Education Policy Institute estimate that the gap between the most advantaged and most disadvantaged pupils will never close at the current rate of progress. (Education Policy Institute, 2020)
It’s not just access to the most competitive universities that is unequal.

Disadvantage does not disappear when students walk through the doors of their university.

For the 1 in 50 disadvantaged young people who do progress to one of the most competitive universities, new barriers appear. They find themselves in an environment where the majority of students are from more advantaged backgrounds. This can impact on their sense of belonging, confidence and how well they adapt to university-style learning.

Supporting young people to access and thrive in higher education doesn’t just impact on the individuals; it impacts us all.

Unequal societies have lower levels of mental health, lower life expectancy and higher crime rates. For the UK, this inequality has been estimated to cost £39 billion per year. [The Equality Trust, 2012]

Young people from disadvantaged backgrounds are not only less likely to attend a competitive university, they are also less likely to get high degree grades than more advantaged students. Getting a 1st or 2:1 grade can make a significant difference in accessing leading roles in business and government, and benefiting from the increased life chances that come from working in such professions.

If we do not level the playing field, young people will continue to be limited by their backgrounds and we will all miss out on the benefits of a representative and fair society. That is why we are scaling up our programmes to work with more pupils than ever before to support them to access the most competitive universities and succeed when they get there.

“Widening access into highly-selective universities is not just about transforming individual lives but improving society as a whole. It’s important that graduates who will go on to be leaders across a range of professions come from all sections of society. Greater diversity among professional elites is beneficial for all of us. It would help to address Britain’s low levels of social mobility.”

– Lee Elliot-Major, Professor of Social Mobility, University of Exeter

Access

In the next five years, we will support 100,000 pupils to access the most competitive universities. We estimate that this will result in 30,000 of these young people progressing to a competitive university.

Success

We will also support 11,000 students from disadvantaged backgrounds to succeed once they enter university.

Through increased participation in our programmes and by developing strong communities of support, we can create a fairer system for our young people, benefiting all of society.
After never really talking about universities, my son came back from his initial trip to Cambridge truly inspired and announced that he would like to go there. He has worked incredibly hard, received great GCSE grades and is now in his first year of A-levels, where he is learning how to apply for Cambridge.

I don’t mind where he goes and for him to have worked so hard to even be able to consider applying is amazing and all testament to his hard work, but I really believe that the trip that you took him on made him believe it all possible.

Parent of a Scholars Programme Pupil

We know that our flagship programme, The Scholars Programme, has a significant impact on increasing the rate of progression to the most competitive universities. For five consecutive years, an independent evaluation led by the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) has shown that graduates from The Scholars Programme are significantly more likely to progress to the most competitive universities than their peers from similar backgrounds.

In 2020, 44% of Scholars Programme graduates progressed to a highly-selective university, compared to 28% of pupils from similar backgrounds.

We have a strong culture of evaluating our impact and using the findings to inform programme development. We recently collaborated with the University of Cambridge to complete a randomised-controlled trial (RCT) to evaluate The Scholars Programme. The results show that the programme has a significant impact on pupils’ confidence in their ability to study and succeed at university. This self-efficacy plays a key role in making less advantaged students feel like they belong and can thrive at the most competitive universities, an important factor in driving progression to and success at university.

UCAS track applications of Scholars Programme graduates to ‘Department for Education Top Third’ highly-selective universities, and compare their progression to that of similar pupils based on their attainment at GCSE, ethnicity and postcode.
On The Scholars Programme, pupils develop the knowledge, skills and confidence that empower them to access the most competitive universities. They participate in an engaging academic course with a PhD tutor and receive personalised support that helps them achieve their goals.

On The Scholars Programme, pupils:
• experience university-style learning and push the boundaries of their academic ability
• learn beyond the curriculum through studying a unique subject based on their PhD tutor’s area of expertise
• write a challenging final assignment of between 1,000 and 2,500 words, which is marked on a university grade scale
• visit two universities and meet with staff and current students, gaining valuable insights into university life and practical knowledge on how to get there.

The Brilliant Club has a unique ability to support less advantaged young people to access life-changing opportunities associated with higher education. Now we need additional support to enable 100,000 pupils from across the UK to participate.

Access: We will work with 100,000 pupils over the next five years

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Success: By 2026, we aim to support 11,000 students at university through our student success partnerships

For the first time ever, we are expanding the scope of our work to support young people once they are at university. We will build on our existing approach and partner with universities to connect students from disadvantaged backgrounds with PhD tutors. Our tutors will support them with key learning skills that students need to thrive, such as referencing and constructing an argument, as well as helping to generate a sense of belonging – which has been associated with lower drop-out rates and increased student success (Brady et al., 2020; Murphy et al., 2020; Thomas, 2012). Our approach will be tailored to each partner university's needs and complement existing interventions.

We know that we cannot achieve the scale of impact we are aiming for alone. We will actively build and empower communities to support and champion university access and success. We will strengthen our communities of pupils, parents and PhD tutors to deepen connections across communities and create champions for young people's education up and down the UK. We are particularly excited about empowering parents as champions and advocates for their children's education. Parents play an important role in influencing their children's attainment, aspirations, and expectations. However, the support parents can provide often varies by socio-economic status and their own educational journey. (Sutton Trust, 2013).

We will establish local Parent Power networks, where groups of parents will come together to identify barriers to education in their local communities and at a national level. Working collectively, parents will campaign to enact the change needed to ensure their children have a fair chance in education and their future careers.

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Laura Ryan,
Scholars Programme Tutor

Working with The Brilliant Club has made me a more confident teacher and a more thoughtful researcher.

The Brilliant Club

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Case for Support

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By supporting The Brilliant Club, you will join us in tackling educational inequality and creating a fairer society for our young people.

We work in partnership with universities, schools and funders to deliver our programmes sustainably and effectively.

To keep costs accessible to schools, we seek fundraising income to cover 20% of the cost of each pupil’s place on The Scholars Programme.

In order to meet our five-year goal of supporting over 100,000 young people, we need to raise over £800,000 per year.

If we achieve this goal:
• 30,000 pupils who graduate from The Scholars Programme between 2021 and 2026 will enter one of the UK’s most competitive universities based on our track record
• We will become the UK’s largest university access movement, supporting 25,000 pupils on The Scholars Programme and 5,000 university students per year by 2026
• By the end of the decade, 1 in 10 state school pupils entering competitive universities will be a Scholars Programme graduate.

We would love to hear from you
To discuss how you can support The Brilliant Club, please get in touch with Steina (Head of Philanthropy) on steina.adolfsdottir@thebrilliantclub.org
Thebrilliantclub.org | @brilliantclub

Supporting The Brilliant Club means
• championing social mobility
• supporting young people to achieve their potential in education, regardless of their socioeconomic background
• creating a fairer, better society for us all

Through supporting The Brilliant Club, you will
• Have access to exclusive events and talks, gaining insights from leading academics and education professionals
• Be invited to see our programme in action by joining university trips
• Have opportunities to meet our programme ambassadors and alumni
• Receive bespoke updates on your impact
• Network with other supporters through our Friends of The Brilliant Club community.

I am so glad that others in my school will be doing this too because I have gained so much, picked up lots of skills and advice but more importantly have experienced a new way of learning.

Scholars Programme graduate from Gloucestershire

Epic Foundation has been supporting The Brilliant Club since 2016. They have been continually outstanding in all areas, including operational excellence, performance and impact.

Louise Byrne, Programmes Director Europe & Asia, Epic Foundation

The Brilliant Club is a registered charity in England and Wales (no. 1147771) and in Scotland (no. SC048774).
The Brilliant Club is a registered company limited by guarantee in England and Wales (no. 07986971).
The Brilliant Club, 17th Floor, Millbank Tower, 21-24 Millbank, SW1P 4QP

We are registered with the Fundraising Regulator.