



Developed in partnership with



Join the Dots

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Programme Summary

In the UK today, graduates from the most competitive universities are more likely to access professional careers and have higher rates of life satisfaction¹. On average, they will earn £10,000 more per year than their peers². However, disadvantage does not disappear when students walk through the door of university. Data shows that students from disadvantaged backgrounds are three times more likely to miss out on a 1st or a 2:1 degree at university compared to their more advantaged peers³.

DISADVANTAGED STUDENTS ARE

3x

MORE LIKELY TO MISS OUT ON A 1ST OR 2:1 GRADE AT UNIVERSITY

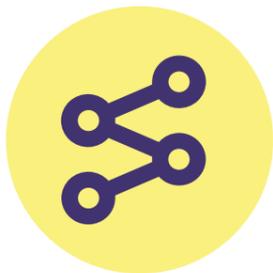
Graduates from the most competitive universities are more likely to **access professional careers** and have higher rates of life **satisfaction**. On average, they will earn **£10,000** more than their peers.



Furthermore, they are more at risk of withdrawing from university, with 8.9% of students from POLAR 4 neighbourhoods dropping out of university after their first year, compared to 6.3% of students from other areas⁴.

The Brilliant Club was approached by a group of schools who wanted to do more to support their students to make the transition to university, particularly those at risk of facing these additional barriers. Working closely with schools, universities and students, The Brilliant Club is leading a collaborative programme to join the dots between schools and universities, to support students to succeed in their next stage of their education journey.

Join the Dots will be a national programme built on the principles of community, connections and coaching, it will bring together universities and schools to develop a network of support for students during the transition to university. It will be targeted at students who are most likely to face barriers in making a successful transition to university, and who are at risk of missing out on the life-changing opportunities that come from successfully earning a degree from a competitive university.



Connections



Communities

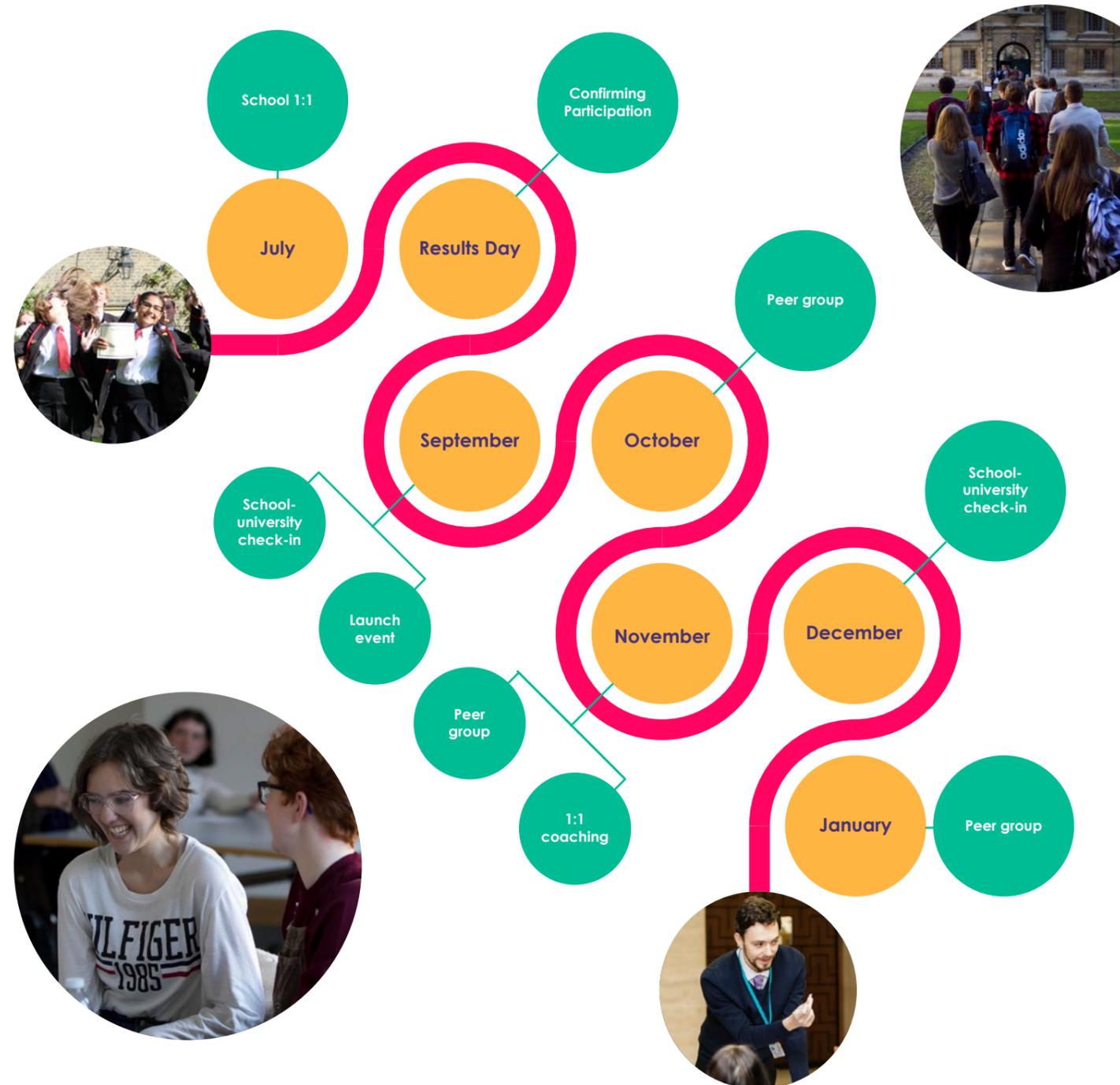


Coaching

Join the Dots will **connect** schools, universities and students to share knowledge and set goals for a successful transition. It will build **communities** of students to identify, discuss and address shared challenges. Through 1:1 and peer group **coaching**, it will help students to develop key university study strategies and be a link for students to access university support as needed. By joining these dots, we will build networks that support students to thrive in higher education study.

Join the Dots approach

Join the Dots will bring together schools and universities to support students to make the transition to university. Participating schools and colleges will identify Year 13 students who meet the Join the Dots targeting criteria and have selected one of the programme's partner universities as a firm choice. Students' participation will be confirmed on results day, when they will be matched with a PhD Coach from the university they are going to. Each PhD Coach will support a group of eight students through a six-month transition programme. This includes school-university check ins, where the student, their teacher and their PhD Coach meet. These meetings are designed to create a space where students are supported by a teacher, who knows them well, to share concerns and set goals for the transition to university. Students will have 1:1 support from their PhD Coach, meet in small peer groups to share challenges and be part of a national network of students who are also making the transition to university.

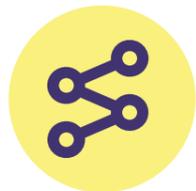


Programme elements

Principle

How this will work

Connections



The PhD Coach will be the link point between the student's time at school and university. They will meet with the student and their teacher at a **school-university check in** at the beginning of the programme. This will act as a bridge between school and university to ensure that knowledge and support for students is not lost between Year 13 and first year. Prior to the meeting, the teacher will work with the student during the summer term to prepare them for starting university, guided by a Join the Dots resource pack.

At this first school-university check in, the teacher and the student will share what their experience of school has been like so far, and the student can share what their hopes and concerns are about making the transition to university. A recent study showed that supporting students to think about how their previous life experiences may affect their transition to university and to set intentions for their university experience before commencing their studies enabled students to engage more with peers and faculty when at university⁵.

At the end of the programme, the student, PhD Coach and teacher come together again to reflect on the first term of university. This gives students the chance to look back on their original intentions, and subsequent progress. Showing students that they have successfully overcome difficult tasks and providing them with encouragement can increase their **self-efficacy**⁴.

Throughout the programme, the PhD Coach will connect the student to the institution they are joining, making sure they know the different support services available and how to navigate the university.

Communities



The programme will foster peer-led communities, which is important for building a **sense of belonging**. The students will be part of a national network of students who come together at a Join the Dots **launch event**, giving them the opportunity to form networks, which first-generation students can struggle with⁶. Students will then come together in **peer groups** of eight, facilitated by the PhD Coach, to reflect on their experiences of making the transition to university.

The importance of fostering a sense of belonging in the university community, especially for students from disadvantaged backgrounds, is well evidenced. It leads to higher levels of persistence and ultimately results in better degree outcomes for individuals³. Research shows that hearing from students from similar backgrounds and going through a similar transition can improve sense of belonging, because it normalises challenges and presents them as temporary.⁷

Coaching



Through 1:1 **coaching** and the **peer group sessions**, PhD Coaches will support groups of eight students to develop their **study strategies** and **academic self-efficacy**. Session content will be guided by student need to ensure students are developing strategies related to their academic discipline.

Using effective study strategies has been found to be the strongest predictors of university retention and are linked with improved achievement. Furthermore, providing encouragement, guidance, and positive feedback to students can help to develop their academic self-efficacy, especially when faced with difficult tasks⁹.

Evaluating Join the Dots

Gathering evidence to understand the impact of Join the Dots is a fundamental part of the programme. The Brilliant Club has an established Research and Impact team, with over five years' experience of evaluating its own national access programmes as well as working with higher education institutions to evaluate their local outreach activities.

The programme's impact will be assessed by measuring intermediate and long-term outcomes:

Intermediate outcomes

sense of belonging
academic self-efficacy
study strategy use

Long-term outcomes

second year continuation
degree completion
degree outcomes

The findings from the Join the Dots programme will be published in a report in early 2023. It is hoped that the publication of our findings, along with formative insights and reflections, will support schools and universities to better understand what works when it comes to supporting students as they transition to university. We will also report back to university partners about how the programme has impacted their students.

The Brilliant Club's new strategy, Join the Club, is about working collectively to support students from less advantaged backgrounds to access and succeed at university. We would welcome discussions with partners interested in supporting our most collaborative programme yet, as we bring together schools and universities to support students on one of the most important educational transitions they will make. To find out more, please contact david.jones@thebrilliantclub.org.

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- The University of Manchester
- West London Zone

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References

- ¹ <https://www.suttontrust.com/our-research/elitist-britain-2019/>
- ² <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/graduates-continue-to-benefit-with-higher-earnings>
- ³ <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/access-and-participation-data-dashboard/>
- ⁴ Robbins, S. B., Lauver, K., Le, H., Davis, D., Langley, R., & Carlstrom, A. (2004). Do psychosocial and study skill factors predict college outcomes? A meta-analysis. *Psychological bulletin*, 130(2), 261; Krumrei-Mancuso, E. J., Newton, F. B., Kim, E., & Wilcox, D. (2013). Psychosocial factors predicting first-year college student success. *Journal of College Student Development*, 54(3), 247-266.
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- ⁶ Pasero, H. (2016). Talkin' 'Bout First Generation: An investigation into the needs of, and challenges faced by first generation University students at the University of Southampton. Pp.1-40.
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**We mobilise the PhD
community to support students
who are less advantaged to
access the most competitive
universities and succeed when
they get there**



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