



The Brilliant Club

# Student Success

Case for Support



In the UK today those from the most advantaged backgrounds are 60% more likely to access a professional career<sup>1</sup> than those from less advantaged backgrounds (Social Mobility Commission, 2021). As a result, our society often misses out on the talent and insights of those who, because of where they grew up or their parents' income, face barriers that prevent them from fulfilling their potential in education and work.

In England, only 3 in 100 of the most disadvantaged students progress to the most competitive universities, compared to 1 in 3 of the most advantaged (UCAS 2021).

**For disadvantaged students who do access the most competitive universities, their disadvantage does not disappear when they walk through the doors of their 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 peers.

Degree outcomes are often a key entry requirement into professional careers, such as in business and government, and missing out on these grades reduces opportunities from students to benefit from the increased life chances that come from working in such professions.



Students from less advantaged backgrounds, who come from areas where few or no other students have progressed to the most competitive universities often struggle with feelings of not fitting in at university. Despite having consistently done well at school, they often haven't been supported to master the specific study strategies necessary to succeed at university, which can also contribute to them feeling like university isn't the right place for them.

**Students from disadvantaged backgrounds are almost twice as likely to drop out of their undergraduate course in the first year than their more advantaged peers.** (House of Commons Library, 2021)

**The Brilliant Club has big plans to change this, and we need your support to ensure that students can succeed at university, regardless of their background.**

In the next five years we want to create a network of support for 11,000 undergraduate students from less advantaged backgrounds so they can succeed at university.



Through our partnerships with over 900 state schools, 42 universities and 1,200 PhD researchers, we are well placed to create impactful interventions:

- We are launching a national student success programme, in collaboration with schools and universities across the UK. Our Join the Dots programme will support students to make the transition from school to university.
- We will collaborate with university partners, delivering bespoke student success programmes that meet the specific needs of students at each university.

<sup>1</sup>By 'professional career' we mean 'professional and managerial jobs' as defined by the Office for National Statistics in The National Statistics Socio-economic classification (NS-SEC), 2021.

**If we want to create a fairer society, where people from all backgrounds have an equal chance of contributing, we must work in partnership to overcome the challenges around student success.**

**“** I went to a school where they definitely tried their best to prepare us, but the resources and knowledge to prepare students for the most competitive universities just weren't there.

When you get to university, they sort of expect that everyone knows how to write an essay and reference it properly, but this isn't always something you learn in state school. Other students had years of preparation leading up to university.

*Deepali Desai, Brilliant Club Ambassador, student at UCL*



**” “**

Before starting at Cambridge, I didn't know anybody who was going there. I was nervous that I would be isolated and alone.

Unfortunately, for the first few weeks, this concern became a reality. I noticed that other students had informal connections with each other from their schools, their local area, and extended family. These networks were often a form of support for these students, allowing them to socialise more easily and share their anxieties about university life. I wish in my first term I had the same level of informal support as others around me did.

*Phoebe Butler, Brilliant Club Ambassador, student at Emmanuel College, The University of Cambridge*



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## Join the Dots

The Brilliant Club is launching Join the Dots, a national programme that will bring together universities and schools to develop a network of support for less advantaged students during the transition to university.

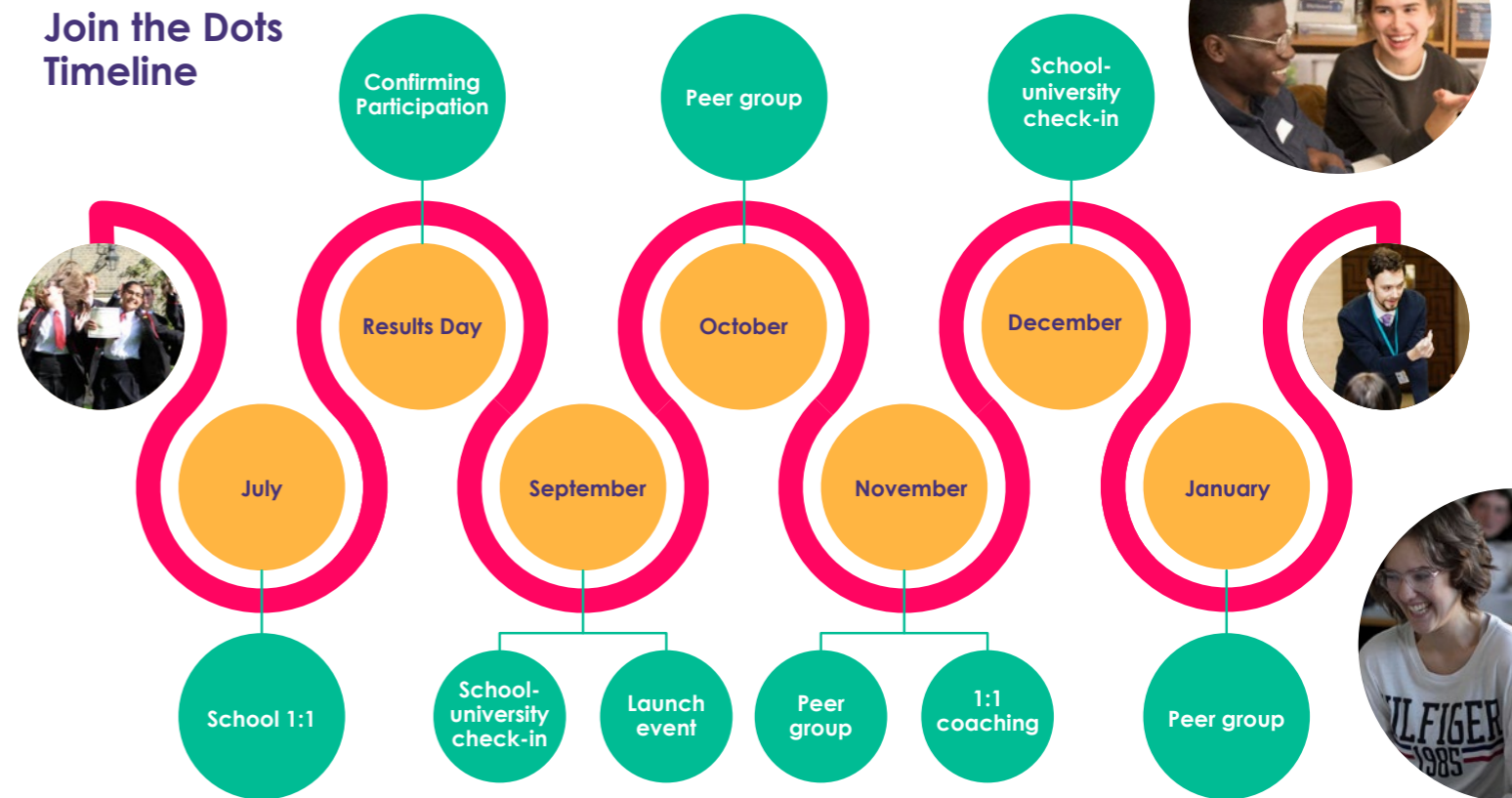
We have developed the programme in partnership with a group of schools, who identified a need to provide additional support to their students as they transition to university.

The programme is designed around the principles of **Connections**, **Communities** and **Coaching** and will help students develop skills and build networks that enable them to thrive in higher education study.

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. On results day, we will confirm their participation and 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.

We will pilot this approach in the 2022-23 academic year, supporting 250 students, working with a selection of our partner universities. We are already in conversation with a number of schools and universities to participate in the pilot.

## Join the Dots Timeline



### Connections

The programme will create a bridge between school and university, with a dedicated PhD coach linking the two to provide a seamless transition for each student and making sure they know the different support services available and how to navigate the university. School-university check-ins will 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 that are grounded in their previous experience at school.



### Communities

Students will get the opportunity to connect with fellow students from similar backgrounds, building supportive networks and fostering their sense of belonging. Students will become part of a national network of Join the Dots participants, who will come together at a national launch event. The PhD coach will then facilitate peer groups of eight to reflect on their experiences and support each other through the transition.



### Coaching

Through 1:1 coaching and peer group sessions, PhD Coaches will support groups of eight students to develop their study strategies and academic self-efficacy and offer them feedback as they submit their first assignments. Using effective study strategies has been found to be one of the strongest predictors of university retention and is linked with improved achievement. Positive feedback will also develop students' self-efficacy and their self-belief that they can succeed.

## Bespoke support for universities

We understand that the needs of students vary at both individual and institutional levels. We partner with universities to design student success interventions that are specific to their needs.

### Case study: Trinity College, Cambridge

We have partnered with Trinity College, Cambridge to offer a bespoke 20-month long programme to equip underrepresented groups of young people with the knowledge, skills and confidence to be able to access the universities of Oxford and Cambridge and support them to succeed in their studies. Starting in Year 12, students take part in university-style Scholars Programme tutorials, followed by an in-person Summer School at Trinity College, mentoring around university applications and university preparation sessions focusing on study skills to give them the best start in their new chapter as university students.

We have to-date supported 46 students, who have reported increased confidence in academic skills, such as referencing and academic research, and feeling like they know more about what it is like to be a student at university.



This was a wonderful programme that really gave me an insight into what university life would be like. The assignment producing task was extremely effective to show me what I can do at an early undergrad level

*Participant, Trinity Transition Project*



### Case study: University of Sussex

The University of Sussex have identified that more academic support is needed for undergraduates who have been asked to retake exams or are returning to study after a period away.

We are creating additional support for 40 students, recruiting and training PhD researchers who will provide a short course of academic mentoring to these students. They will deliver one-to-one and small group sessions that focus both on specific support topics and on developing general academic skills.

## Impact and Evaluation

Our student success work will build on the learnings we have drawn from delivering impactful university access work over the past ten years and understanding the existing evidence around the most impactful approaches to student success.

### We will focus our efforts on supporting students to:

- **Engage with effective study strategies**
- **Foster a sense of belonging**
- **Build academic self-efficacy**

For our Join the Dots programme, these intermediate outcomes will be measured through both quantitative and qualitative data in the form of surveys and focus groups.

### As a result of this, the long-term outcomes we expect to see for students are that they:

- **Continue into second year of university**
- **Complete their degree course**
- **Achieve a strong degree outcome**

For our bespoke work with universities, we will set evaluation criteria linked to the students participating.

The Brilliant Club has a strong track-record of evaluation, and we are basing our approach to student success on the learnings from our existing programmes.

- Through evaluation with UCAS, our access intervention, The Scholars Programme, has been found to make a significant impact on increasing progression to the most competitive universities. In 2020, **44%** of Scholars Programme graduates progressed to one of the most competitive universities, compared to just **28%** of students from similar backgrounds.
- Internal evaluations of intermediate outcomes on The Scholars Programme show that students increase the key skills and knowledge needed for university study, such as written communication and critical thinking by an average of 20% while on the programme.
- A recent randomised controlled trial we did with the University of Cambridge showed that our existing approach has a significant impact on growing academic self-efficacy and young people's confidence in their ability to study at university.

We are constantly learning from our evaluation findings and building our evidence base for what works in university access and success.

The investment we have made in evaluation and our rigorous approach to impact monitoring have set us up well to implement a robust approach to measuring our student success work from the outset. We are committed to sharing our findings more widely to help improve practice across the higher education sector and aim to publish initial findings from Join the Dots in an evaluation paper in early 2023.

## Help us create a fairer society where young people can achieve their academic potential regardless of their background.

We are seeking philanthropic support to kickstart our student success work. Your support will:

- Support 800 disadvantaged students in 2022-23 to succeed at university
- Enable us to establish our student success work and pioneer new approaches
- Allow us to demonstrate the impact of Join the Dots and build our evidence base for what works
- Help us to use this evidence to seek sustainable funding to expand Join the Dots and our bespoke work with universities
- Build the foundations for us to scale our work to support 11,000 students over five years

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.



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](mailto:steina.adolfsdottir@thebrilliantclub.org)

### We are delighted to be working with the following schools and universities who are partnering with us to develop and pilot our student success work:



**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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