



# The Brilliant Club

Case for Support





We mobilise the PhD community to support students who are less advantaged to access the most competitive universities and succeed when they get there

# Create a fairer society where no child's education is limited by their background

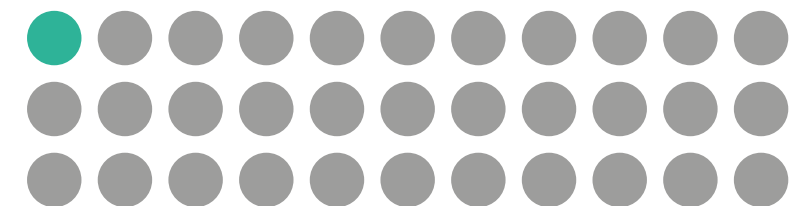
Graduates from the most competitive universities are more likely to access professional careers, have higher rates of life satisfaction and on average they will earn £10,000 more per year than their peers.

But access to the life-changing opportunities that come from attending the most competitive universities is not equal.

In England, **1 in 3** of the most advantaged young people progress to the most competitive universities. In contrast, only **1 in 33** of the most disadvantaged young people progress (Office for Students).



Most Advantaged Students



Most Disadvantaged Students

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

DISADVANTAGED STUDENTS ARE

11x

MORE LIKELY TO MISS OUT ON LIFE-CHANGING HIGHER EDUCATION.

This inequality is getting worse. Schools where a high percentage of students receive free school meals have seen **attainment decrease by twice as much** during the pandemic as those with a low percentage of students eligible for free school meals ([Hodder Education, 2021](#)).

The Education Policy Institute estimate that the gap between the most advantaged and most disadvantaged students will **never close at the current rate of progress** ([Education Policy Institute, 2020](#)).



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“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

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## It’s not just access to the most competitive universities that is unequal.

Disadvantage does not disappear when a young person walks through the doors of their new university. Less advantaged students often find themselves in an unfamiliar environment where many students are from more advantaged backgrounds and better prepared for university-style learning and life as a new student.

DISADVANTAGED  
STUDENTS ARE

3x

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

In 2019/20, 74% of less advantaged students achieved a 1st or 2:1 degree grade, compared to almost 90% of the most advantaged students. ([Office for Students, 2020](#))

Despite having consistently done well at school, they often haven’t been supported to master the study strategies necessary to succeed at university, which can also contribute to them feeling like university isn’t the right place for them. This can impact on their sense of belonging, confidence and how well they adapt to university.

As a result, students from disadvantaged backgrounds are almost **twice** as likely to drop out after their first year and **three times** more likely to miss out on a 1st or 2:1 grade at the end of their degree.

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 now, 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.**

Educational inequality is a complex issue. To tackle it, we must address the problem from a variety of angles. By building on our established network of over 900 state schools, 42 universities and 1,200 PhD researchers, we believe that we can grow our work over the coming years to influence far-reaching change across the higher education sector.

### Access

Between 2021 and 2026, we will support **100,000 students** to access the most competitive universities.

### 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.



# Our Impact

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I grew up in the North of England and went to a school where not many people go to the most selective universities.

**The Brilliant Club was a huge source of inspiration and encouraged me to push myself when I was in school.**

As my parents didn't go to university, **the support I had from my Scholars Programme tutor helped to prepare me for the next step.** Having contact with someone who has first-hand experience of university and being able to ask questions made a big difference for me. If I had not taken part in The Scholars Programme, I can see that I would have had a very different experience and it would have been much more difficult to ease myself in.

Josh, Brilliant Club Ambassador, studying Medicine at Imperial College London

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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 Student

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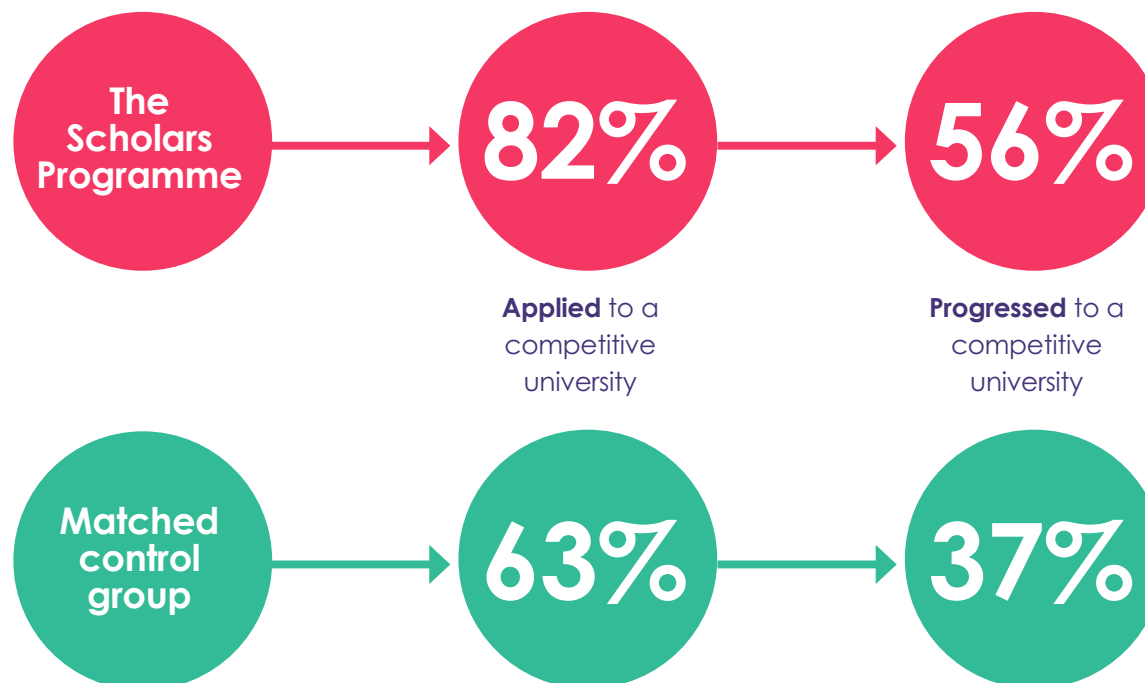
Of Scholars Programme graduates who applied to university, **9 in 10** applied to a competitive university.

**1 in 2** students eligible for Pupil Premium who graduated from The Scholars Programme progressed to a competitive university.

## We know that our flagship programme, The Scholars Programme, works.

For six 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.

Year 12 students who complete The Scholars Programme are **statistically significantly more likely to apply and progress to a competitive university** than students from similar backgrounds.



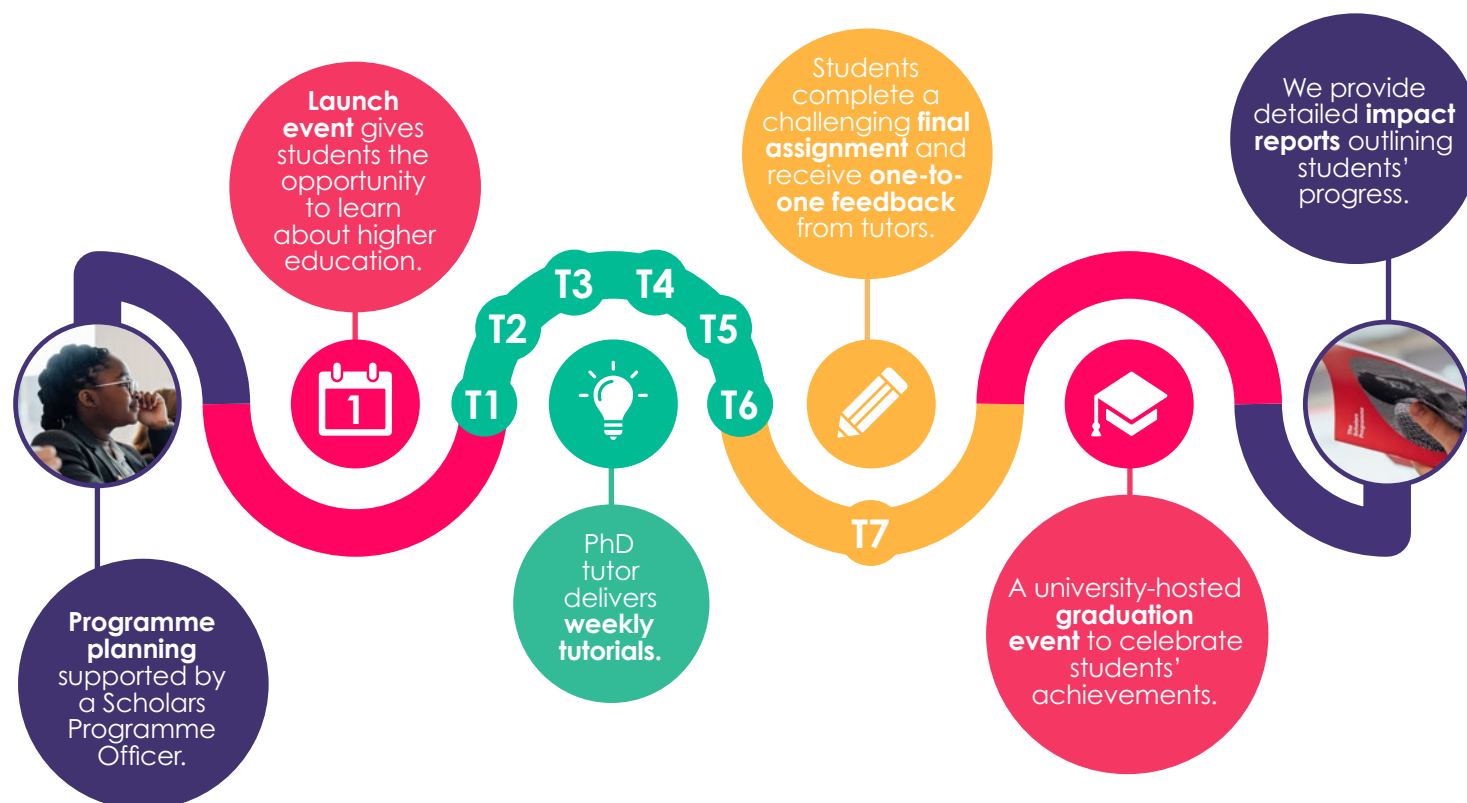
With UCAS, we were able to track the university applications of Scholars Programme graduates to the country's most competitive universities and compare their progression to that of similar students based on previous exam attainment, ethnicity and postcode.

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 students' 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.

Scholars Programme graduates, including those eligible for Pupil Premium, apply to Oxford and Cambridge at **more than double the rate** of their peers from similar backgrounds.



# Our Approach



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 students from across the UK to participate.

## Access: We will work with 100,000 students by 2026

On The Scholars Programme, students 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, students:

- 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, which is marked on a university grade scale
- visit universities and meet with staff and current students, gaining valuable insights into university life and practical knowledge on how to get there.

**We need your support to grow The Scholars Programme to reach 100,000 students by 2026.**

With your support, by the end of the decade, **1 in 10** state school students at the most competitive universities will be a graduate of The Scholars Programme.



Our unique model of sending PhD tutors into schools means that we can reach students regardless of location. We are able to work with students in traditionally underserved areas, such as rural and coastal areas, and in 2021/22 we worked with 135 schools in social mobility coldspots.

We are also able to deliver our programme digitally, so that we can work with any state school who wishes to partner with us.

**With over ten years of proven results, we now plan to work with more students than ever before.**



**100,000**



Success: By 2026, we will support 11,000 students from less advantaged backgrounds to succeed at university



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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 support as others around me did.



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

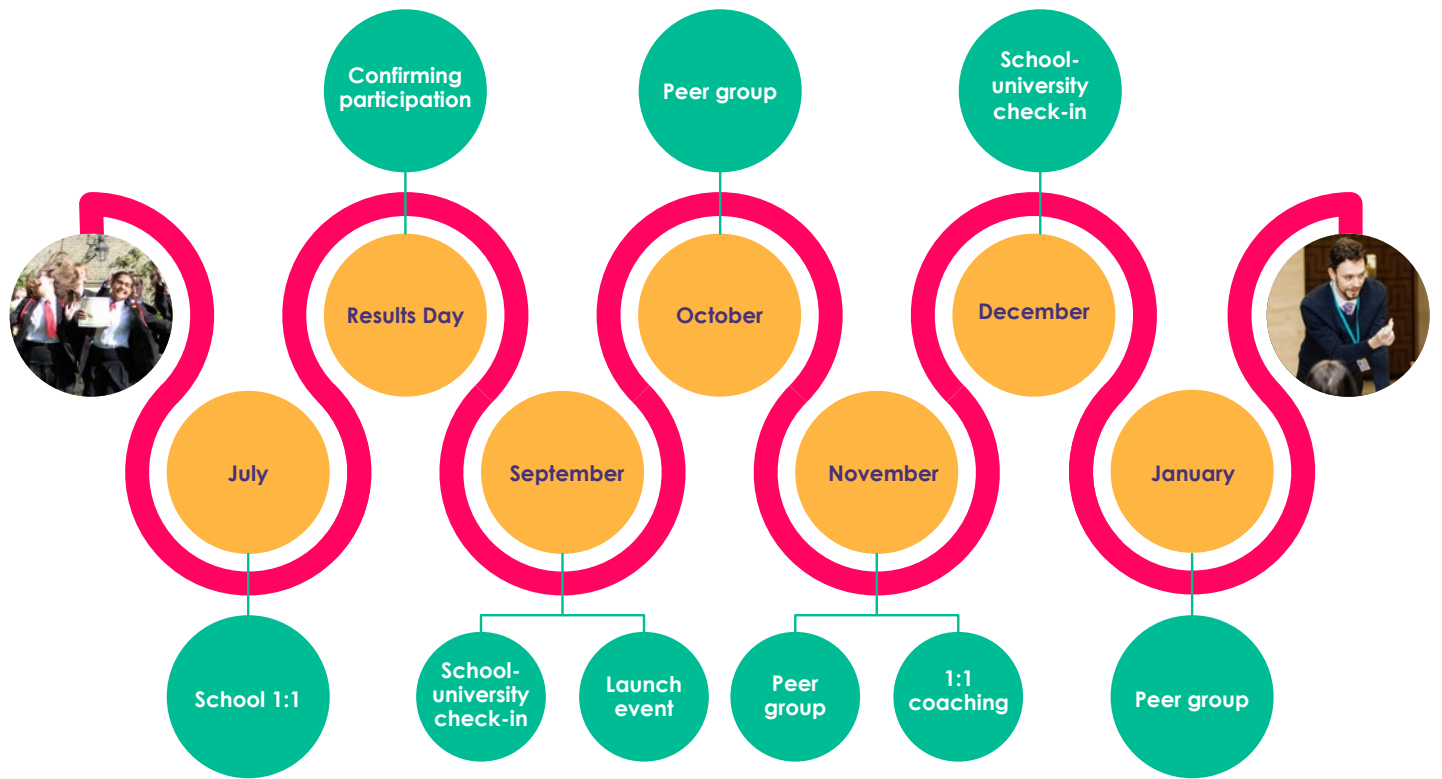
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We have ambitious plans to ensure that all young people feel like they belong at university and can succeed academically, regardless of their background.

Join the Dots is an innovative national programme that brings universities together with schools and colleges to develop a network of support for less advantaged students during their transition to university.

Following results day, students will be matched with a PhD coach who is based at their new university. Each PhD coach will support a group of eight students through a six-month transition programme, fostering a sense of belonging as well as providing academic coaching to help them settle into university-style learning and student life.



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).

We aim to support **11,000 young people** by 2026 by utilising our existing network of over 900 state schools, 42 universities and 1,200 PhD researchers. As the programme grows, we will create a unique support network for students from less advantaged backgrounds at universities across the UK.

11,000

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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, but without The Brilliant Club, I wouldn't have known how to do it.

Deepali Desai, Brilliant Club Ambassador

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# We know that we cannot achieve the scale of impact that we are aiming for alone.

It is key to harness the power of our communities to create broader sector-wide change outside our core programmes.

## Parent Power

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 socioeconomic status and their own educational journey (Sutton Trust, 2013).



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**None of our family have been to university. So basically university's never really entered my head because it doesn't 'exist' in my world. I feel there is a path for us to follow now and we have been included in this 'conversation' now.**  
Parent, Parent Power  
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Since 2021, we have established Parent Power groups of engaged parents and carers throughout England who come together to identify barriers to education in their local communities and at a national level. Through support to develop skills in Community Organising and advice and guidance on accessing higher education, parents are empowered to make change to support their children's future and ensure their children have a fair chance in education and their future careers.

Each group is led by a trained PhD Community Organiser and is designed to empower parents to become advocates for their children's future.

We aim to establish 35 Parent Power groups by 2026 and build a national parent-led community of engaged participants with the ability to amplify parent voices, influence national policy and create real change for university access.

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**As parents, we have a duty to provide the best support to our children that we can. Not all children want to go to university, and that's fine, but for those that do, we need to be able to provide them with the tools and information to make that happen. Parent Power makes this happen.**  
Parent, Parent Power  
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**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  
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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 our supporters to deliver our programmes sustainably and effectively. To keep costs accessible to schools, we seek fundraising income to cover around 20% of the cost of each student'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 around £1,000,000 per year.

If we achieve this goal:

- We will become the UK's largest university access movement, supporting 25,000 students on The Scholars Programme and 5,000 university students per year by 2026
- By the end of the decade, 1 in 10 state school students entering competitive universities will be a Scholars Programme graduate.



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

“ 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



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 would like to thank everyone who helped to make a positive difference for young people, including partner organisations, individuals and those who wish to remain anonymous.

- AKO Foundation
- Allen & Overy
- Astra Foundation
- The David and Elaine Potter Foundation
- DeepMind
- The Dulverton Trust
- Department for Education
- Evolve Care Group
- Prakash and Shila Dewani
- Epic Foundation
- Frank Walding and Dr Rosie Gilbert
- Garfield Weston Foundation
- GMSP Foundation
- Handpicked Society
- The Hugh Fraser Foundation
- Kleinwort Hambros
- Kusuma Trust
- Man Charitable Trust
- The Mohn Westlake Foundation
- Personio Foundation
- The Siôn Mullane Foundation
- Social Business Trust
- The Taylor Family Foundation
- The Waterloo Foundation
- Westminster Foundation
- The Portal Trust
- Thomas Howell's Education Fund for North Wales
- UPP Foundation



We would love to hear from you!

To discuss how you can support The Brilliant Club, please get in touch with Steina (Director of Philanthropy) on [steina.adolfsdottir@thebrilliantclub.org](mailto:steina.adolfsdottir@thebrilliantclub.org) [Thebrilliantclub.org](http://Thebrilliantclub.org) | @brilliantclub



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