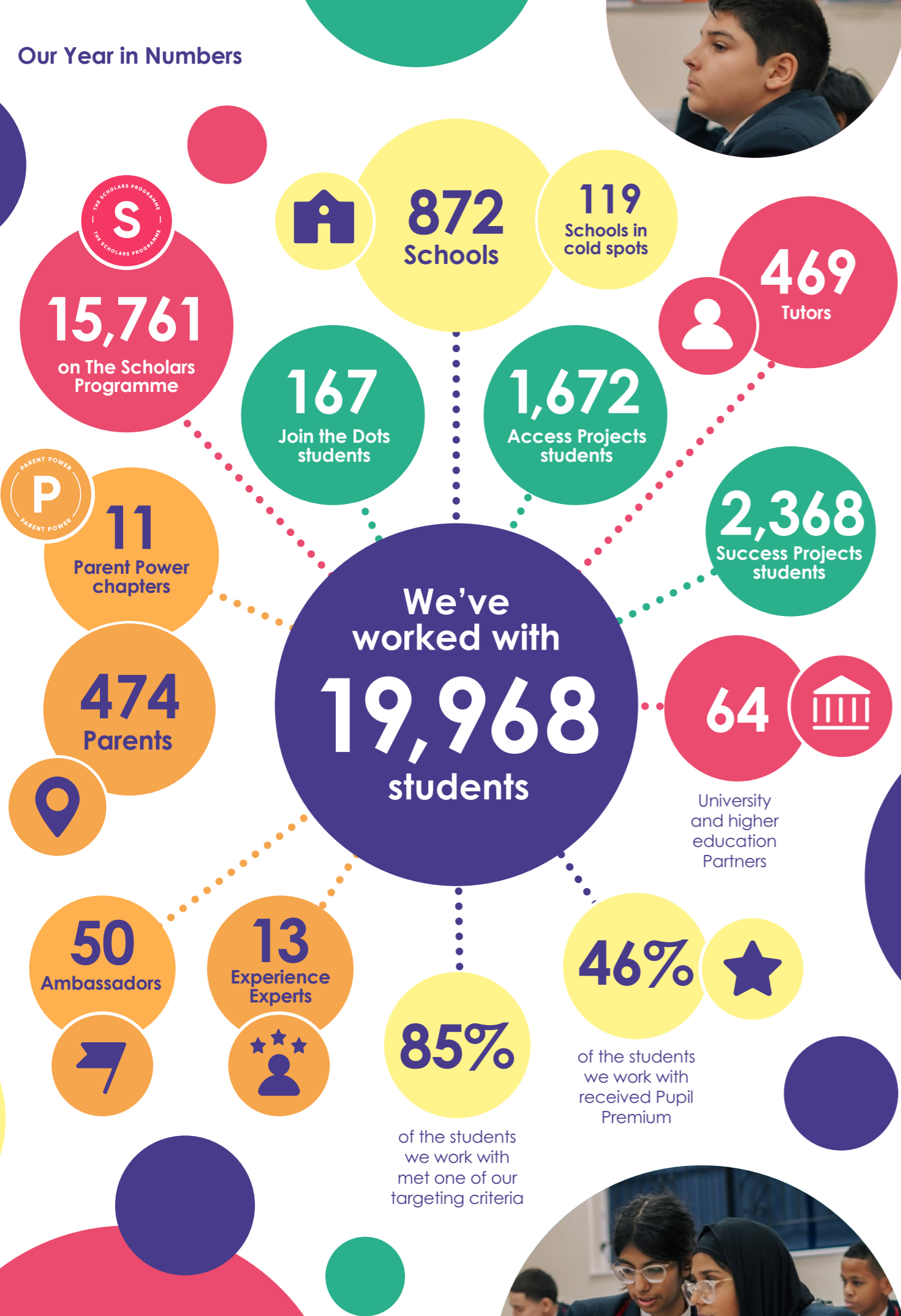


Our Year in Stories



The
Brilliant
Club
2023/24

Our Year in Numbers



Introduction

I am pleased to welcome you to our Year in Stories for the 2023/24 academic year.

This has been an exciting year for The Brilliant Club. Students across the country have contemplated the role that plankton might play in solving climate change and debated whether a novel can save the world. They have written assignments on the link between oral health and memory and tried their hand at cryptography. In 2023/24, parent leaders attended the Labour Party Conference to advocate for the parent and carer voice, and, at our first ever national [Parent Power conference](#), built their shared vision for the future of education policy. Our ambassadors continue to share their own stories of overcoming barriers to educational opportunity, with our ambassador Hoa's story featuring on a BBC Radio 4 appeal back in September.

We have mobilised 469 researchers to support 19,968 students in 872 schools across the UK, working alongside our 64 partner universities and higher education institutions. We've also worked with over 470 parents through our Parent Power programme, 50 student ambassadors from our alumni community, and 13 young people on our Experience Experts panel. This year's Annual Impact Report is dedicated to sharing the voices and experiences of this community through stories. These stories showcase the impact of our programmes, and the achievements of the people we work with, who have all worked tirelessly this year to improve educational opportunity for less advantaged students.

This has also been a year of political change in education: with a new government in Number 10 and the first budget behind us, we are starting to see the first indications of what the next five years will look like. As the government launch a child poverty taskforce and a curriculum review, we will continue to do all we can to advocate for programmes that tackle the barriers to educational opportunity. This has never felt more important: we know that university graduates [are more likely to access elite professions and earn more](#) than those who do not access university, with graduates from top third universities earning £21,100 a year more, 16 years after Key Stage 4, than those with no post-Key Stage 4 qualifications.

The barriers to educational opportunity feel more challenging than ever. We continue to see a concerning rise in child poverty, [with recent findings showing that 1 in 3 children are now below the poverty line](#). This means that a record 36%, or 5.2 million children, are experiencing some form of deprivation. The rise in poverty also means that schools are increasingly taking on pastoral duties to ensure that the immediate needs of their students are met – that they remain warm, fed, and dry.

Activities that take students beyond the curriculum, like [The Scholars Programme](#), can play an important role in building skills, including academic self-efficacy, critical thinking, subject knowledge, and written communication. Sadly, we are seeing schools having to make difficult decisions on where to spend their Pupil Premium budget, with [47% of school leaders](#) now using the funding to plug gaps in their budget, and 50% of schools cutting enrichment activities like trips and outings. In the face of these new challenges, The Brilliant Club continues its efforts to improve access routes to higher education and support for students when they get there. The Scholars Programme inspires a love of learning and raises attainment in students aged 8-18, providing them with the skills, self-confidence, and knowledge necessary to progress to university study.

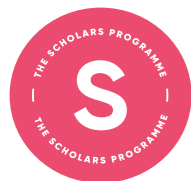
At The Brilliant Club, we know that support for less advantaged students must continue after they enter university. This year, [we published research](#) that showed that students from less advantaged backgrounds are facing significant roadblocks to participating fully in university life. For less advantaged students on campus, academic studies, sense of belonging, and finances are all interconnected: students often miss out on experiences that build belonging because they simply cannot afford them, students who work are less likely to feel they are keeping up with their academic studies, and academic performance has an impact on whether students feel university is for them. Our student transition programme, [Join the Dots](#), aims to support students during the first six months of university study, so that they are set up to succeed in their degree and beyond.

This year, we have grown our external engagement, including holding two events at the Labour Party conference in 2023, and releasing policy recommendations during the general election that spotlighted what our communities want to see in education. In September 2024, we worked with BBC Radio 4 and the comedian John Robins to launch an appeal for The Scholars Programme and ran a full-page advertisement for Join the Dots in the Financial Times, with the support of the Social Business Trust.

This impact report celebrates the Brilliant Club community - our tutors, schools and universities, our parents, Brilliant Club Ambassadors and supporters. Your incredible work, commitment and support this year means that 19,968 more young people have developed their academic skills, increased their confidence and attainment, considered new opportunities and, perhaps most importantly, developed a new thirst for learning. From all of us here at the Brilliant Club, thank you.

Anne-Marie Canning, MBE
CEO of The Brilliant Club





The Scholars Programme

We train our PhD tutors to deliver The Scholars Programme in our partner schools across the UK; sharing their subject knowledge and passion for learning with small groups of students aged 8-18.



Access and Success Projects

Alongside our core programmes, our Access and Success Projects team collaborates with other organisations to provide bespoke small- and large-scale projects.



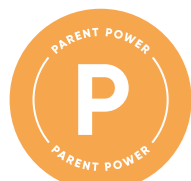
Join the Dots

A national programme which brings schools and colleges together with universities to develop a network of support for students during the transition to university.



Brilliant Consulting

The Brilliant Consulting unit works with other organisations who want to ensure better outcomes for future generations, and specialises in research and evaluation, strategy development and digital transformation.



Parent Power

Parent Power is driven by parents and carers tackling barriers to education and leading change in their communities, with each chapter supported by an anchor institution and connected by a national network.



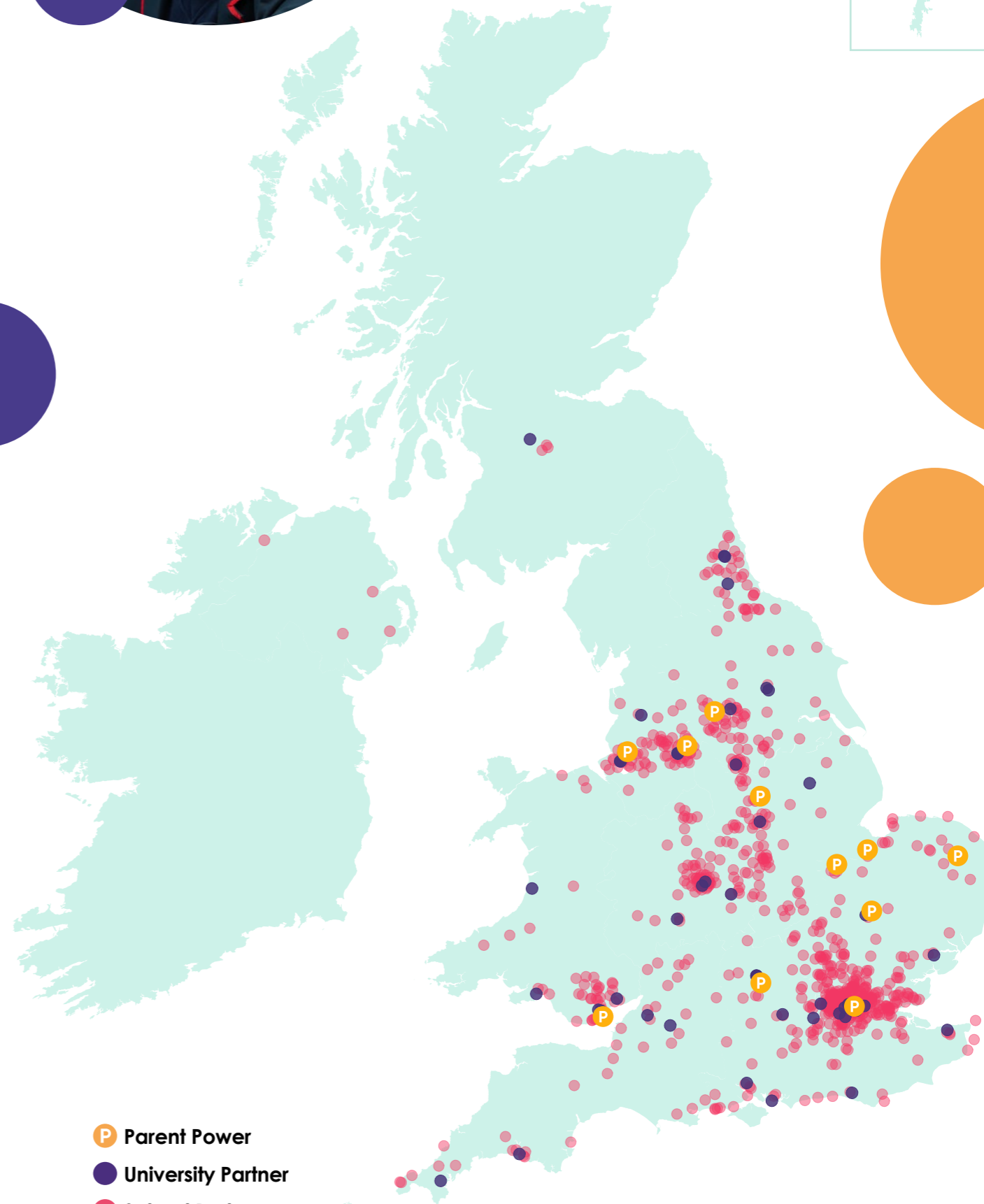
I quickly found myself hooked by the course content and enjoyed being taught in a new way. I was quite surprised by how much I was enjoying learning about biology. From that point, I knew that I wanted to pursue science and biology, and I wanted to be a geneticist.

Asa Fletcher-Snow, Ambassador for The Brilliant Club, now studying Natural Sciences at the University of Cambridge



A child's future should never be determined by where they grow up, the type of school they go to or how much money their parents earn. I'm supporting The Brilliant Club and their work to improve social mobility and university access in state schools across the UK.

*John Robins
Comedian, podcaster,
proud state schooler*



- P Parent Power
- University Partner
- School Partner

Getting in...

Through our 'getting in' programmes, we work with less advantaged students and their families to improve access to the most competitive universities. Our goal is to reach 100,000 students through our access programmes by 2026.



The Scholars Programme

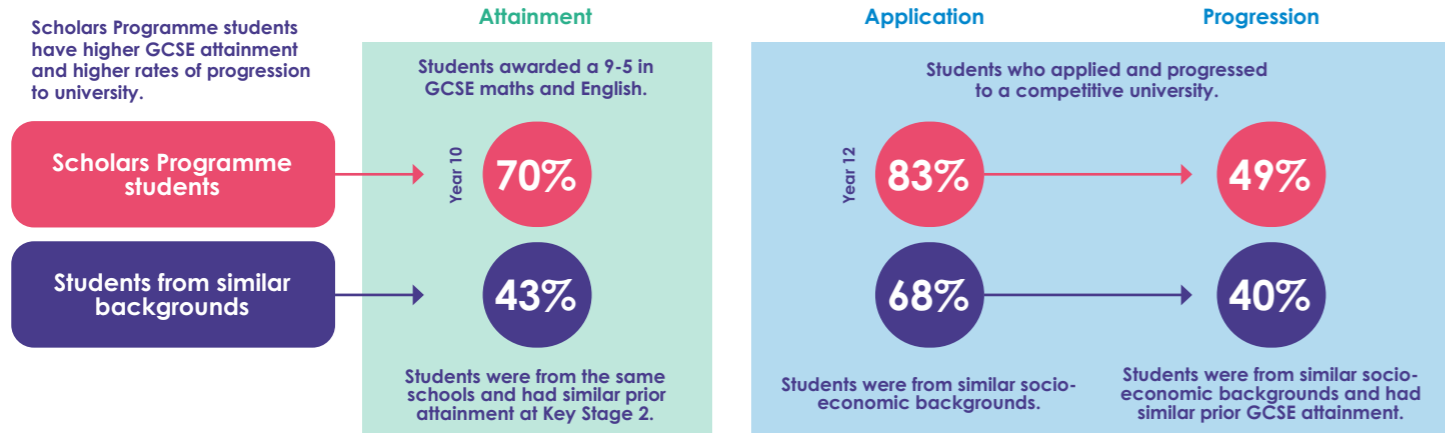
The Scholars Programme gives students aged 8-18 from non-selective state schools and colleges the opportunity to work with a PhD researcher to experience university-style learning. It helps students to develop the university knowledge, academic skills, and attainment to secure a place at a competitive university.

We train our PhD tutors to deliver The Scholars Programme in our partner schools across the UK and share their subject knowledge and passion for learning with small groups of students. The programme is structured around seven tutorials and ends with students attending a graduation event at a partner university to speak with current undergraduates and learn about university life.

Students who participate in The Scholars Programme achieve higher grades at GCSE than other students from their schools with similar prior attainment. Our latest evaluation has found that students who participated in The Scholars Programme in Year 7, 8, 9 or 10 were also more likely to achieve a 9-5 in maths and English at GCSE than students within their schools who scored similarly at Key Stage 2.

For eight consecutive years, independent evaluation with UCAS has shown that Scholars Programme graduates progress to competitive universities at a higher rate than other students from similar backgrounds.

Our recent economic evaluation of The Scholars Programme shows that increased progression to more competitive universities is estimated to generate over £30 million in additional lifetime pre-tax earnings for a cohort of 1,200 Year 12 students.



Case study: The Scholars Programme

I started teaching on The Scholars Programme in the second year of my PhD, excited to get involved with The Brilliant Club's work. Growing up on a council estate in South London and being the first in my family to go to university, I've always felt strongly that anyone with the desire to pursue higher education should have that opportunity.

I enjoy how, over the course of the seven tutorials, I get to know my students well. They learn a bit about me too, and together we discuss my course on cancer biology, talk about university, explore where to find resources, decipher degree titles, and envision what a degree in science could lead to. As much as the students are learning new things, so am I!

What's been particularly inspiring for me is watching students develop their writing skills. It's rare for pre-university science students to write extended essays, yet this skill is essential in academic and professional settings, whether for writing papers, grants, or reports. Seeing my students' weekly progress build up to their final 2,500-word essay is always rewarding. One of my students even performed so well that her essay was awarded a First and is set to be published in *The Scholar*, The Brilliant Club's student journal—showcasing both her exceptional promise and the impact of the programme. This opportunity to have her work recognised publicly not only celebrates her dedication but also highlights how The Scholars Programme sharpens students' skills and builds their confidence as they prepare for university and beyond.

Callum Oddy, Tutor for The Scholars Programme, PhD student at University College London



...Getting on:

We know that disadvantage does not disappear when a student arrives at university. Students from less advantaged backgrounds are more likely to drop out of university in their first year, have lower degree outcomes, and are less likely to be in employment or further study 15 months after graduation than their more advantaged peers.



Join the Dots

It is crucial that less advantaged students feel equipped to navigate their new life at university. Evidence shows that students with high self-efficacy, metacognition and sense of belonging are more likely to succeed at university. This forms the foundation of our university transition programme, Join the Dots.

Join the Dots brings schools and colleges together with universities to support during the transition to university. It is targeted at students who are most likely to face barriers in making a successful transition to university, supporting them from their Year 13 or equivalent, all the way to their first six months of university. Alongside our ten university partners, in 2023/24 we supported 167 students to navigate the opportunities and challenges of making the transition to university.

Join the Dots runs in two parts:



UniPrep supports Year 13 and equivalent students with university application and preparation, through a series of live webinars.



Students who attend one of our partner universities then receive academic coaching in 1:1 and peer group sessions led by a PhD Coach.

This year, we have seen that Join the Dots shows strong results in key areas of student development, including a statistically significant improvement in academic self-efficacy and metacognitive strategies, along with a rise in students' sense of belonging.



Case study: Join the Dots

Join the Dots has been a transformative experience, equipping me with the tools and confidence to adapt and thrive in my university studies. Through this programme, I have gained critical skills such as independent research, time management, and critical thinking, all of which are fundamental to academic success. A particularly impactful moment was working with my coach to review my first piece of coursework. Their guidance not only helped me improve but also reassured me that I was capable of excelling at university. I was able to embrace this task that seemed daunting at the time with ease because I had the support of my coach who believed in my potential. They shared that I could get started with the assignment by first articulating my thoughts with a plan, and offered some advice on how to reference.

Growing up in a low-income household and being care-experienced, I often faced stigma and low expectations from my peers and, at times, teachers. These experiences planted doubts about my ability to pursue higher education. However, Join the Dots challenged these perceptions, providing me with the support I needed to believe in my potential. The programme taught me to embrace feedback and approach challenges with resilience, which has been instrumental in my journey. This newfound confidence enabled me to take on opportunities I once thought were beyond my reach, including securing a lab internship in America as part of my degree programme.

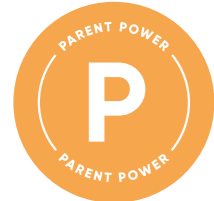
As an ambassador for The Brilliant Club, I have embraced the chance to inspire and inform students from underrepresented backgrounds about everything they want to know about higher education and, more specifically, about university life. One of the most exciting experiences in this role was participating in a TikTok Q&A session with prospective university students from Year 11, Year 12 and Year 13. Sharing my journey and seeing their enthusiasm and curiosity grow through the live chat was incredibly rewarding.

Being part of the Brilliant Club has not only deepened my passion for education but also reinforced my belief that, with the right support and determination, anyone can overcome barriers and achieve their aspirations."

Sarah Zulkernain, Second-year student at the University of Manchester and Brilliant Club Ambassador



Parents



Parent Power

Parents and carers are the most influential people in a young person's life, and yet are underrepresented in discussions about and strategies for improving access to higher education.

Parent Power creates networks of parent communities across the UK, each one facilitated by The Brilliant Club and an anchor institution. Parent Power is targeted at parents and carers who are unfamiliar with the university admissions system, including those who have not been to university themselves. Parents receive community organising training and attend advice and guidance sessions on accessing higher education, so they are empowered to make change in their children's future and ensure they have a fair chance at success in education and beyond. We recently launched our UKRI-funded evaluation in collaboration with King's College London. We look forward to finding out more about the impact of Parent Power in 24-25.

In 2023/24 we ran Parent Power chapters in 11 local communities: Abbey, Bradford, Cardiff, East London, East Oxford, Fenland, Knowsley, Mansfield, Norwich, Oldham, and Peterborough. Chapters in Newport, Birmingham and Swindon were launched in Autumn 2024.

Recent Parent Power campaigns have addressed the localised barriers to education in communities across the UK:



Fenland parents have been successful in their campaign for a safe cycling, walking and mobility route to connect Guyhirn to March, to make it easier for young people to engage in extracurricular activities at the University of Cambridge.



Cardiff parents made five recommendations to Cardiff University to improve the transparency of contextual offers in their prospectuses, which have all been accepted.



Knowsley parents are campaigning to bring A-level provision back to the area. Knowsley is the only borough in the UK where you can't study A-Levels.



Case study: Parent Power

The 2023-2024 academic year has been a time of discovery, trailblazing and learning about what it means to be a campaigner for Fenland Parent Power. While we haven't achieved our goals just yet, we have made our presence known to officials and to the public and we secured £60,000 in funding towards our proposed active travel route.

It was through the support of Fenland Parent Power that a kind of chain reaction started among us. With our community organiser's continued involvement, over time we began to feel more confident in taking action. Confidence led to creativity, which led to media coverage of our 'Letter to Santa' campaign at the end of last year, and more recently of our 'Letter to the King' campaign.

Our collective work and countless visits to many of the country's top universities have also had an impact on my personal life – these visits fuelled my ambition to change career. I went from being a HGV mechanic to a Community Infrastructure Levy Officer and I am grateful to my community organiser, Vicki, and Harry at The Brilliant Club who both supported me through this transition.

If we continue our adventure at this rate, I believe that next year, not only will our children benefit from the support offered by The Brilliant Club, so will parents and the wider community. Who knows, maybe a parent will pursue university study. Anything is possible!

Maciej Stachurski, Parent Leader,
Fenland Parent Power



Bespoke Access and Success Projects

Alongside our core programmes, we collaborate with institutions to deliver additional access and student success projects to support their priorities. Each project is specific to the needs of the partner.



Sanctuary Scholars

In 2023, we piloted a bespoke access project aimed at students from refugee, asylum seeking and forced migrant backgrounds. In 2024, we adapted the programme based on data from the pilot to enhance the sense of belonging for these students at higher education institutions.



The Turing Summer Experience

In collaboration with the Alan Turing Institute and its funding partners, The Brilliant Club ran four Turing Summer Experience Weeks for young people in Year 12 with an interest in careers in AI, Data Science, Computer Science and Defence and Security.

Ambassador Programme

We continue to work with programme alumni as part of our ambassador programme. This year, we have worked with 50 student ambassadors. These ambassadors are now at university or recent graduates and support the charity by sharing their own stories and help us to improve our programmes for the next generation of participants.



Case study: School Tasking

I'm the creator of School Tasking, a university led primary outreach project, in which Year 5 pupils are introduced to law through fun and interactive tasks. It uses the format of the hit Channel 4 television show, *Taskmaster*, to teach Year 5s a little bit about law, to build positive connections with university more broadly, and to encourage pupils to be enthusiastic about their learning.

The project is now running at 34 universities across the UK and Ireland, with standardised data collection across all university providers of the competition. In 2023-24, we employed The Brilliant Club to analyse and write-up the pre- and post-project evaluation data from the participating pupils. The Research and Evaluation team wrote individual impact reports for the universities involved and an overall national impact report for the project.

At all stages of the process, the team were professional in their approach to the data collection and engaged well with all of the participating institutions. They made the process as easy as possible for the teams working on School Tasking, which I think was much appreciated by those fitting the project into already over-stretched workloads.

The Brilliant Club have a wealth of experience in widening access initiatives and helped us to shape the School Tasking evaluation so that we were able to get the most helpful data from the project for demonstrating impact and real change. It has been an absolute pleasure working with team members from such a brilliant and experienced organisation.

Dr. Ali Struthers, Creator, School Tasking





Case study: University of Durham

At Durham, one of the reasons we continue to collaborate with The Brilliant Club is that our missions are closely aligned, particularly when it comes to supporting underrepresented student groups. Throughout our work with them, we have found that The Brilliant Club are professional, credible and collaborative, and it has been especially useful to work with an organisation that have a good oversight of the priorities of the university sector, to give us an external, impartial perspective.

The Scholars Programme has been a standout area of our collaboration. We have consistently had positive experiences with the Scholars Programme team, especially due to their strong communication and a proactive attitude. Together, we've worked through logistical challenges and established shared goals, ensuring that our projects run smoothly. Going forward, we will be working with The Brilliant Club to design a bespoke Access project which will be a multi-intervention intervention for students in Year 7 – 11.

We've also found value in The Brilliant Club's expertise in evaluation and research. A recent example is their support with the development of our new Access and Participation Plan (APP). Their involvement enhanced our self-assessment processes and improved how we identify at-risk student groups. While we are growing our internal capabilities for evaluation, Brilliant Consulting helped by providing impartial, expert opinion that was based on experience of others in the sector. This undoubtedly led to a stronger submission.

As a university committed to widening participation, we have benefited from partnering with The Brilliant Club. This collaboration isn't just about working on projects together—it's about shaping a step change in how we address access, evidence, and impact. The Brilliant Club's experience with research and evaluation, as well as the delivery of widening participation interventions, has made a meaningful difference, and we look forward to continuing this partnership.

Richard Coldwell, Senior Manager of Access & Engagement at Durham University



Evaluation and Consultancy

The charity's research and impact team conduct evaluations to enhance outcomes for underrepresented groups. Specifically, we evaluate the charity's university access and success programmes and conduct external evaluations for mission-aligned organisations via [Brilliant Consulting](#).



Brilliant Consulting is an evaluation and strategy unit, and we specialise in qualitative and quantitative research and strategy development. In 2023/24, we supported a wide range of organisations through our consultancy work. Some examples include: the Centre for Transforming Access and Student Outcomes in Higher Education (TASO), Durham University, EdPlace, King's College London and The Sutton Trust. We also led the evaluation of School Tasking, a UK-wide outreach programme run by the University of Warwick that uses fun and interactive tasks to teach primary school students about the law, set in the style of the TV show Taskmaster.

We look forward to building on the success of the 2023/24 academic year, as we continue to mobilise the PhD community and work with parents, carers, and partners to tackle barriers to education.



With thanks to our supporters and partners, including those who wish to remain anonymous

- AKO Foundation
- Alan Edward Higgs Charity
- Aldgate and Allhallows Foundation
- The Alice Ellen Cooper Dean Charitable Foundation
- A&O Shearman
- Ardian Foundation
- Astra Foundation
- Donors to the BBC Radio 4 Appeal
- Bolton Learning Partnership
- Bristol Masons Charity
- Cambridge Ahead
- Cambridge City Council
- The Connolly Foundation
- The Dalgleish Trust
- Dataiku
- The David and Elaine Potter Foundation
- Dixons Academies Trust
- The Dulverton Trust
- Dr Jacqueline Stedall
- Epic Foundation
- Evolve Care Group
- Frank Walding and Dr Rosie Gilbert
- Frays Dental Centre
- Jean and Hélène Peters Fund, managed by the King Baudouin Foundation
- Garfield Weston Foundation
- GMSP Foundation
- The Gosling Foundation
- SG Kleinwort Hambros
- Knowsley Council
- Kusuma Trust
- Man Charitable Trust
- M&G Community Fund
- The Minekte Foundation
- NCR Foundation
- Niral Patel, Vishal Patel, Viresh Patel, Kunal Patel and Rajvinder Minhas
- Northeastern University
- The Mohn Westlake Foundation
- Personio Foundation
- The Portal Trust
- Prakash and Shila Dewani
- Reckitt Foundation
- Redborne Teaching Partnership
- Royal Society of Chemistry – Chemists' Community Fund
- The Siôn Mullane Foundation
- Social Business Trust
- The Steel Charitable Trust
- The Taylor Family Foundation
- Thomas Howell's Education Fund for North Wales
- Trinity College, Cambridge
- UPP Foundation
- Wadham College, Oxford
- The Waterloo Foundation
- Wesleyan Foundation
- Westminster Foundation
- Wildfire
- The Worshipful Company of Ironmongers
- Queens' College, Cambridge
- The 29th May Charitable Trust
- Aberystwyth University
- Anglia Ruskin University
- Arden University
- Birmingham City University
- Brunel University London
- Cardiff Metropolitan University
- Cardiff University
- City, University of London
- Courtauld Institute of Art
- Durham University
- Falmouth University
- Goldsmiths College
- Imperial College London
- King's College London
- Leeds Trinity University
- Liverpool John Moores University
- London School of Economics
- Loughborough University
- Manchester Metropolitan University
- Newcastle University
- Northumbria University
- Oxford Brookes University
- Queen Mary University of London
- Roehampton University
- Royal Holloway and Bedford New College
- SOAS University of London
- St George's, University of London
- Swansea University
- University College London
- University of Bath
- University of Birmingham
- University of Brighton
- University of Bristol
- University of Cambridge
- University of Central Lancashire
- University of East Anglia
- University of East London
- University of Essex
- University of Kent
- University of Leeds
- University of Lincoln
- University of Liverpool
- University of Manchester
- University of Nottingham
- University of Oxford
- University of Plymouth
- University of Portsmouth
- University of Reading
- University of Sheffield
- University of South Wales
- University of Southampton
- University of Strathclyde
- University of Sussex
- University of Warwick
- University of Worcester
- University of York
- York St John University



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

Join
the
Club



CONNECT WITH US

🖱️ thebrilliantclub.org
✂️ @brilliantclub
📷 @thebrilliantclub
✉️ hello@thebrilliantclub.org

Registered charity no: 1147771 (England and Wales) SC048774 (Scotland)

The Brilliant Club is a registered company limited by
guarantee in England and Wales (no. 07986971)

