



CamSpire Impact Report

2018/2019



**CamSpire:
The BPA Edition**



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Foreword

CamSpire is a novel and progressive outreach initiative targeting Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Arab (BPA) Students. The programme was founded by CUSU Access and Funding Officer 2018/19, Shadab Ahmed, as there was a distinct gap in admissions rates for these groups, which stemmed from both a low number of applications, as well as a much lower success rate through the admissions process. Nationally, and in Cambridge, there is a severe lack of representation that needed to be addressed, and so CamSpire was born.

CUSU has been running the Shadowing Scheme since 2000 which welcomes hundreds of students each year from the most under-represented and disadvantaged students from the UK to Cambridge and equips them with the knowledge to apply to selective universities. Hundreds of students who attended the scheme have gone on to graduate from the university. The need was apparent for a more targeted in scheme in nature, to address other concerns felt specifically by BPA students.

The scheme will run annually and follow students from Year 11 to their applications in Year 13. The inauguration of the scheme was that of the Year 11 2019 Easter Residential at Queens' College, Cambridge. The event brought 45 UK BPA students from disadvantaged backgrounds to attend the residential event where students experienced a range of academic and informational sessions as well as a chance to socialise with each other. They

will attend a further residential event in Year 12 as well as an interview workshop in Year 13. We hope this will in turn increase the number of applications to the university as well as bring the success rates in line with the average, or exceed it.

The scheme is organised by the CUSU Access and Funding Officer and could not be run without the generosity of university funding, and support from the participating colleges. CUSU would like to give thanks to all those involved in the development of CamSpire and the help in bringing the idea to fruition, and hopes those involved enjoyed being part of one of the first targeted and sustained access initiatives in the UK and will continue to be involved in the future.

This report seeks to evaluate the scheme to provide a data-led basis for the improvement of the scheme and others run across the collegiate university. Next year's report should include data about university applications, and the following year, university destinations.

CUSU hopes the scheme continues to be refined in the future to deliver a scheme that has been shown to have a truly profound impact on the lives of prospective students from this background.

Shadab Ahmed

CUSU Access and Funding Officer 2018/19

Context

Visiting BME students often question the extent of diversity at Cambridge, and so we must ensure that there is some BME presence from current students. A vicious cycle exists, in which the lack of visual physical representation dissuades BME students from applying, thus lessening the number of BME students that future prospective applicants will see.

The low number of BME students is a product of both success rates and initial applications. Despite Bangladeshis and Pakistanis comprising 5.4% of the total London population in 2011, they only accounted for 2% of the student intake in 2017. Arabs accounted for 1.3% of the London population though only made up 0.3% of the student population in 2017. 2% is still below the proportion of Bangladeshis and Pakistanis in the UK which was 2.6% in 2011, however the use of this statistic is misleading due to the regional discrepancies present in the current admissions process.

There are ethnic groups which show the opposite trend, and are more likely to gain acceptance, namely Chinese, Mixed - White and Asian - Indian. This shows that even the term BME encompasses variations in race, religion,

culture and ethnicity. As a result, a broad-stroked initiative is not an effective solution. Instead specific groups must be targeted to truly diversify Cambridge.

When extrapolating from the census data of 2011, the figures show that in fact the proportion of Bangladeshi and Pakistani students should be 1.4% and 3.1% respectively when considering the demographics' age distributions, yet they account for only 0.9% and 1.1% of the student population respectively.

Whilst fluctuations exist the statistics show that these four groups are always significantly below the average acceptance rate for white students, which eludes to the need for increased targeting towards specific demographics to both encourage them to apply and support them through the admissions process. These statistics can be attributed to a variety of factors, however, the university and colleges have a duty to control the narrative wherever possible, and so CamSpire seeks to mitigate these barriers.

Introduction

The programme:

Year	Easter Vacation	Summer Vacation	Autumn
2019	Year 11 Residential*	Year 12 Residential	Year 13 Interview Workshop
2020	Year 12 Residential*	Year 11 Residential**	Year 13 Interview Workshop*
2021	Year 12 Residential**	Year 11 Residential***	Year 13 Interview Workshop**

* Cohort 1 ** Cohort 2 *** Cohort 3

Attendees also have access to a safeguarded online mentoring platform after the first intervention so that they remain connected to the university between the events in the hope to reduce attrition rates.

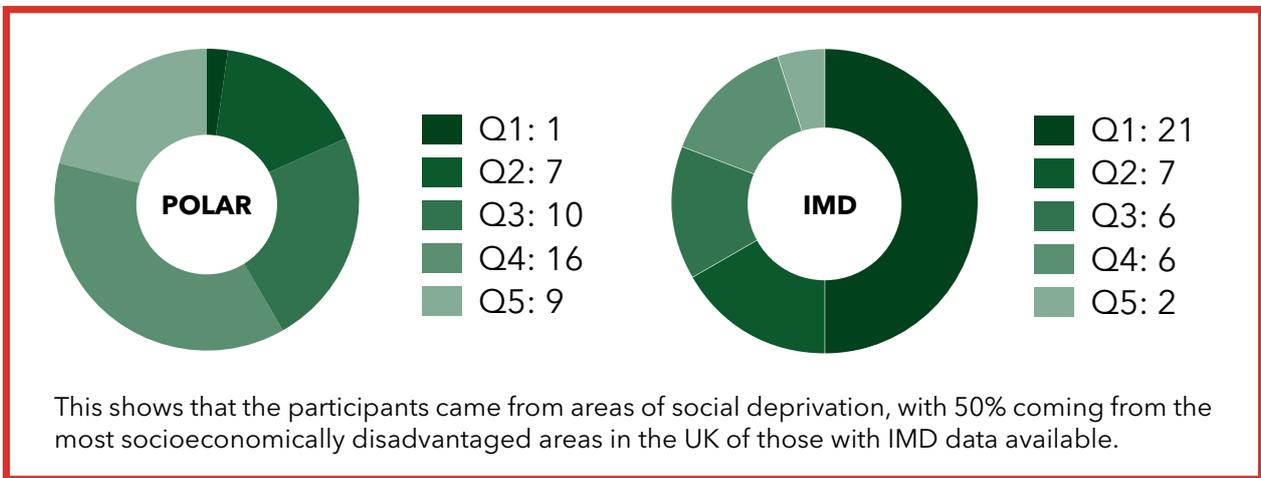
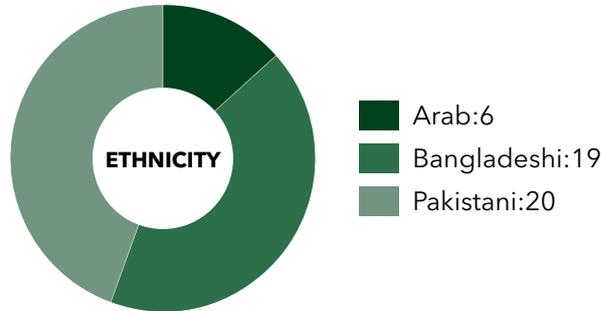
Applications

72 applications were received from Year 11 students and 47 students were invited to attend, with 45 arriving on the day. A larger attrition rate was expected for this group so the attendance was very much welcomed.



Participant Profiles

45
students attended



22% of participants were eligible for free school meals

Further work should be conducted to ensure that there are more applications from areas such as Birmingham and Manchester which have high BPA populations. This will also improve the number of participants coming from areas of under-representation at university, as POLAR is skewed with such a high proportion of students from London, where local access to higher education is high.



2
students in care

12

Local Authorities

Two launch events were run, in Tower Hamlets and Bradford. These were also the authorities which had the two highest number of students attend and so these launch events in different cities seem to prove instrumental in boosting application numbers for both the outreach programme as well as to the university.

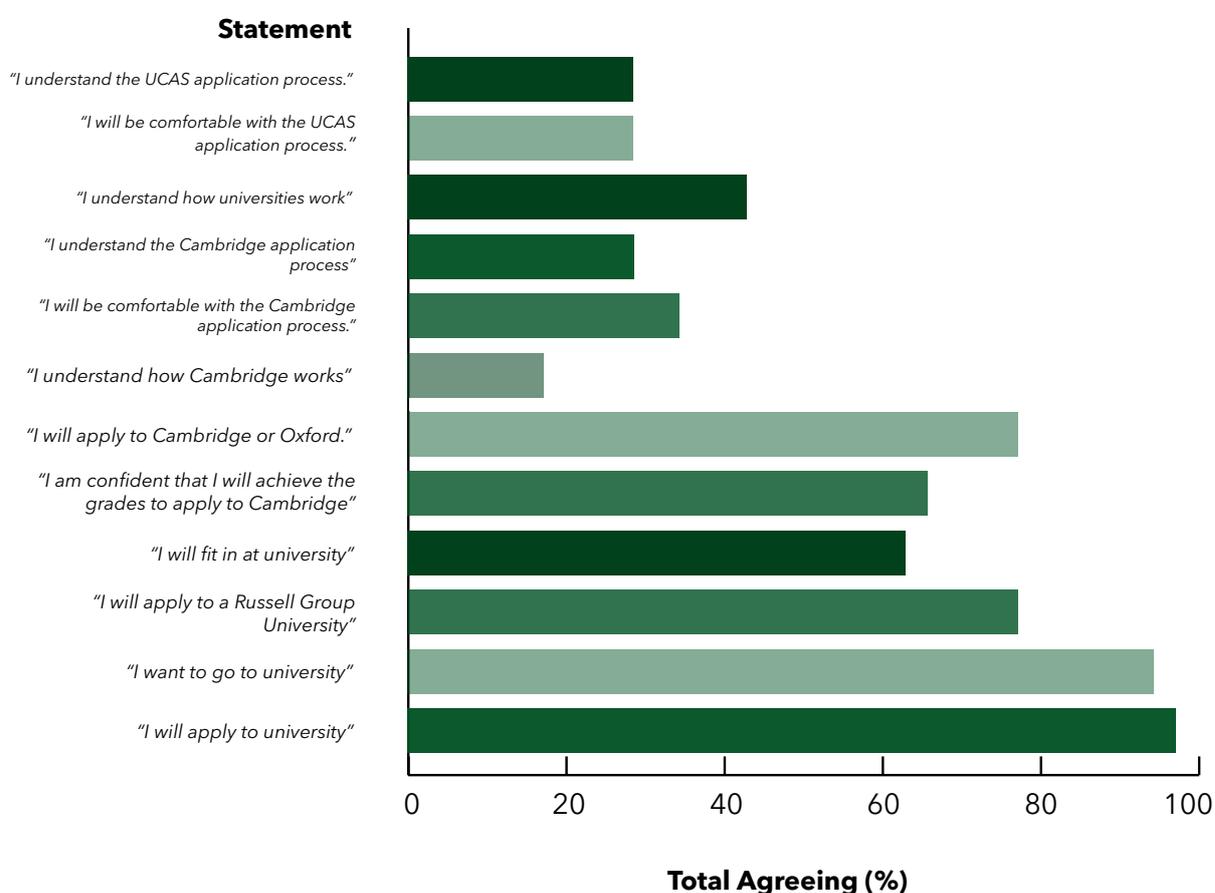
Course Distribution:

Tripas	No. of Applications
Chemical Engineering	5
Computer Science	5
Economics	10
Engineering	7
Geography	5
History	2
HSPS	5
Law	10
Mathematics	7
Medicine	38
Natural Sciences	10
PBS	4
Philosophy	1
Veterinary Medicine	1

This includes all students who applied and it is clear there is a huge proportion of students from this group selecting Medicine as their first preference, with 34.9% selecting it. Only 27 (24.8%) of students selected an Arts/Humanities course (excluding economics) which shows this is an area that can be worked on. These schools should consider doing specific outreach work for BME groups to boost numbers in this field. Even within this field, Law was by far the most popular course, which is indicative of the issue of studying subjects which are thought to lead to specific careers with good financial prospects. Medicine, Engineering, Law and Economics are amongst the most popular subjects amongst applicants, and so work should be done to try to ensure that these subjects that the students wish to study and are not forced into.

Pre-Scheme Survey

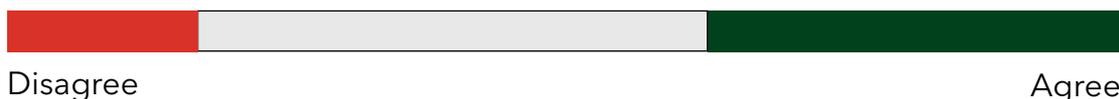
Participants were presented a series of statements and asked to select an option that best matched their perceptions at that point in time. The following data was obtained:



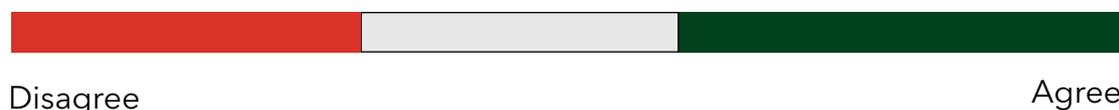
These statistics showed that it was necessary for the interventions to ensure that the students were equipped with information about how Cambridge works, and more generally, universities across the country. It is clear that the cohort wanted to apply to university and Cambridge, but did not feel they understood the application processes or would be unable to navigate them when the time came. As such, the first event should be tailored towards information provision, and after assessing what the cohort then needs, should the Year 12 programme be designed.

Influences and perceptions

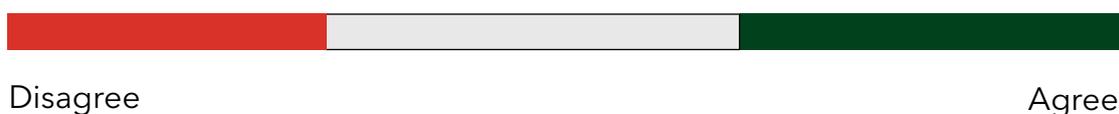
"My family's opinion will influence my decisions about university"



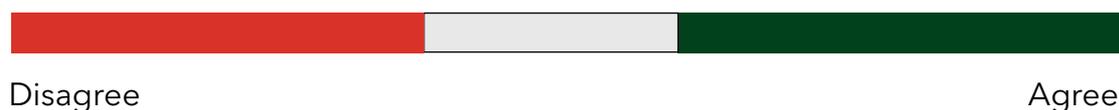
"Living costs will influence my decisions about university"



"My teachers' opinion will influence my decisions about university"



"Tuition fees will influence my decisions about university"



"My friends' opinion will influence my decisions about university"



This shows that families and teachers are a big influence for this group. Data from the shadowing scheme, which is not restricted to these ethnic groups showed that only 20.5% of the cohort agreed that their family's opinion would influence their decisions about university, with 2.9% strongly agreeing. This may be indicative that this group is disproportionately influenced by family opinion. The extent to which teachers have an influence is smaller, but still slightly higher than the cohort of the shadowing scheme, of whom 28.5% agreed, with 2% strongly agreeing.



We then asked the students to describe Cambridge University. The responses show that their feelings towards Cambridge as an institution were largely positive, with some being aware that it would be a challenging process to both gain acceptance and then study whilst here. Having said that, the frequent appearance of the word "white" shows that this is still a concern amongst ethnic minority groups, both the students, and the general public's perceptions.

We also asked about their perceptions of current students. It was interesting to see the disconnect between the perceptions of the institution as a whole and the students themselves. Though "white" appeared once again, words like "snobby" and "private" also appeared without a similar mirroring when describing the university itself.

It will be important to tackle these preconceptions through use of real life students as it seems that the more negative thoughts are associated with people, rather than the university itself.

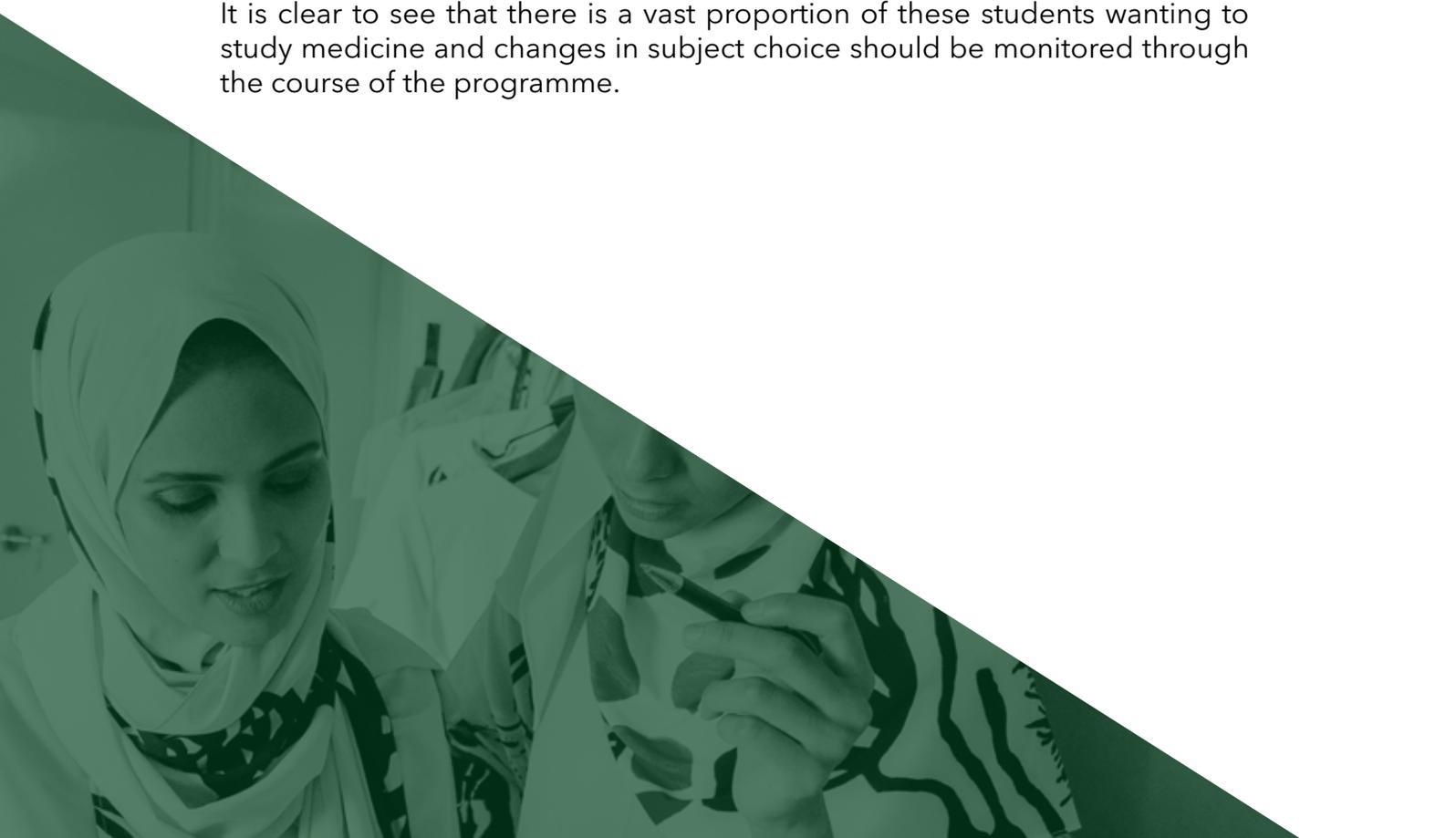
This cohort will be used as a baseline to measure whether there is an advantage in hosting multiple events with online mentoring against single interventions. A Year 12 residential event will be held in isolation to act as a comparator group.

Year 11 Residential - Easter 2019 - Inauguration Cohort

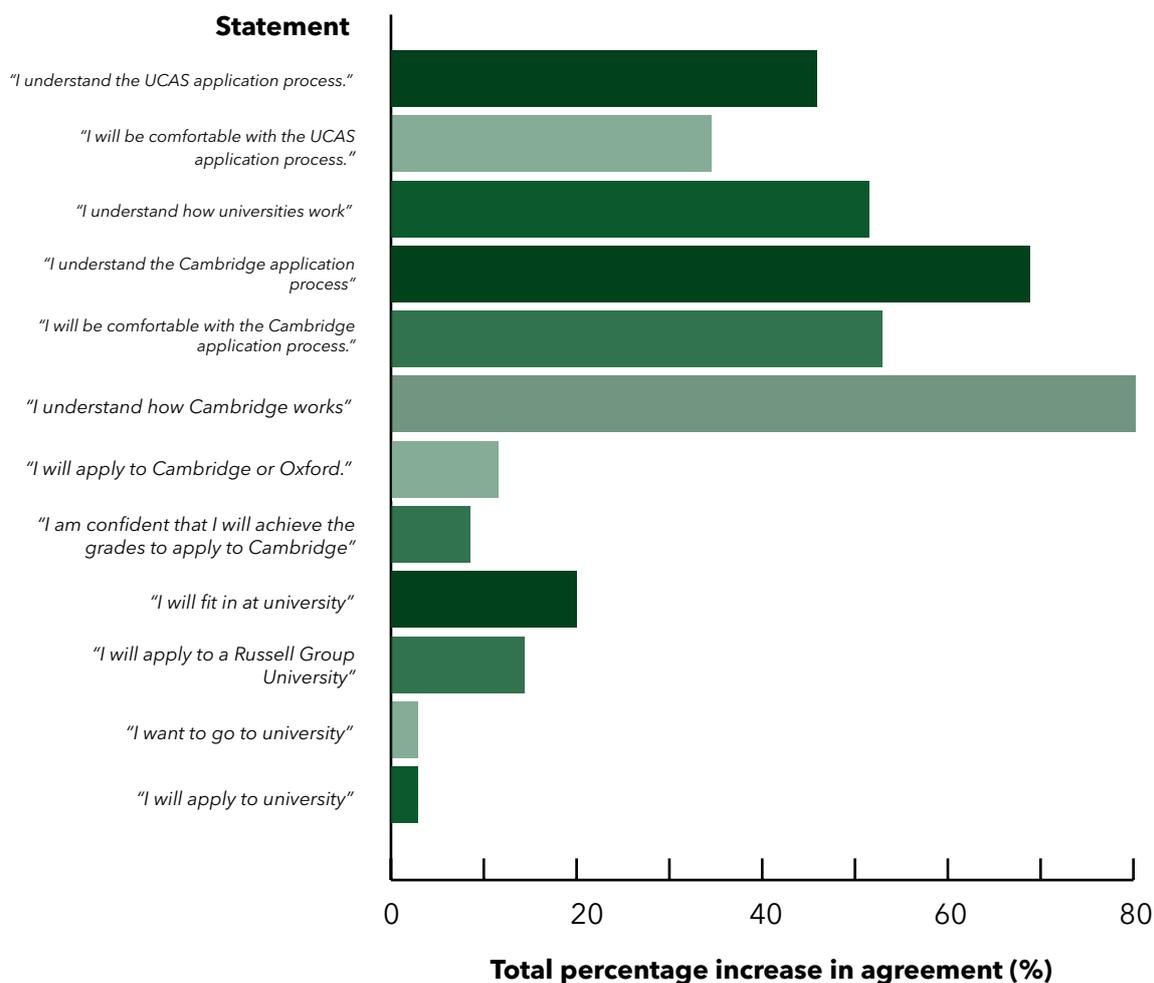
45 students attended this residential, with the following subject breakdown:

Subject	%
Chemical Engineering	4.4
Computer Science	6.7
Economics	6.7
Engineering	8.9
Geography	4.4
History	2.2
HSPS	4.4
Law	6.7
Mathematics	4.4
Medicine	40.0
Natural Sciences	4.4
PBS	6.7

It is clear to see that there is a vast proportion of these students wanting to study medicine and changes in subject choice should be monitored through the course of the programme.



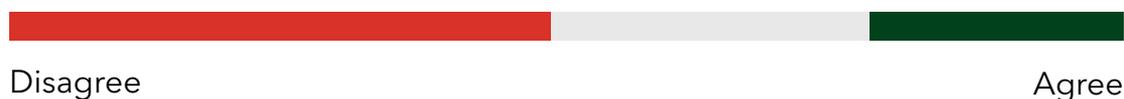
After attending a 4-day residential, filled with academic masterclasses, informational sessions and social events with some current students from a BPA background, the participants were asked to fill in a post scheme survey, with the results as follows:



These statistics showed that the desired outcome of the event was definitely achieved. It is clear that the intervention with this cohort increased aspirations and students were more likely to apply to university and Cambridge, and after the intervention, the vast majority felt they understood the Cambridge process. The next intervention should seek to further explain the UCAS application process and then equip students with tangible resources for them to be able to feel fully comfortable with the various parts of the admissions process, including admissions assessments and writing personal statements properly.

Influences and perceptions

"My family's opinion will influence my decisions about university"



"Living costs will influence my decisions about university"



"My teachers' opinion will influence my decisions about university"



"Tuition fees will influence my decisions about university"



"My friends' opinion will influence my decisions about university"



After one intervention we can see there is already a huge shift in the role of family influence on their decisions, with over twice the number of students now disagreeing with the statement, which was a desired outcome. This also held with teacher opinions and is a welcomed effect as it is a sign that students are feeling more empowered in making their own decisions away from personal views in their surroundings. External and tangible factors such as living costs and tuition fees also diminished in influence which is often a large barrier to those from widening participation backgrounds. These changes in perceptions should continue to be monitored to see if any negative influences can be completely diminished.



Subject Choices

Students were offered online mentoring and had to choose a subject for which they would be mentored. 35 students responded of the 45 and the breakdown was as follows:

Subject	%
Computer Science	5.7
Economics	2.9
Engineering	5.7
English	2.9
Geography	2.9
History	2.9
Law	5.7
Mathematics	2.9
Medicine	34.3
Natural Sciences	20.0
PBS	11.4

It is promising to see an increase in the number of students interested in studying Natural Sciences, perhaps as an alternative to Medicine. Further work may be done in further altering the subject choices and those who continue to pursue a degree in the most competitive courses should receive appropriate support so that they can make strong applications.

It is also interesting to see that a student requested a mentor for English despite there not being any academic sessions for this subject, this might suggest that the event was successful in allowing students to explore subjects in which they are genuinely interested, as opposed to what they feel they should be doing as a result of external influence.

Specific Targeting

Students were asked about their thoughts about the scheme specifically targeting BPA students. The overwhelming majority of students were grateful for this targeting, saying that they felt “comfortable” in being able to share their own experiences with others who would understand. Only one respondent would have preferred an open pool of participants. Another said they were initially concerned about being “singled out” but then were glad when arriving as they felt they could openly discuss specific issues with others on a “personal level” and that it was “definitely a good choice.” Another theme of arriving was the sense of community built and that they were not alone in their journeys. There were also specific references to being Muslim and that this helped alleviate some concerns with some of the volunteers being practising Muslims also.

There was very strong support for this targeting and this allows for us to tackle specific issues that the demographic faces. We have seen similar success with Target Oxbridge and this shows the value of having truly targeted access initiatives.

Respondents were also asked about the volunteers being from a BPA background and every response was favourable, with the most predominant theme being relatability of the volunteers and them being able to understand the issues on a personal level. For outreach activities where there are prolonged periods of interaction between volunteers and participants, role models should be used where possible. Literature shows that perceptions of the youth are more likely to be changed in a tangible manner if presented with information by their peers, that is to say that anyone from a similar background will have a higher chance of influencing the participants’ opinions about higher education and university.

Testimonials

“ It was a great idea. It helped form a good bond and create almost a community. They were easier to relate to and we had much more in common, moreover it helped us find out more about the opportunities to express our culture and embrace our religion in Cambridge and also provide support for situations that may stop us from going to Cambridge, that these minority groups share. Overall it was a great experience and wouldn't have been the same had the volunteers not been of the same background. ”

“ Representation matters!!! The fact that the volunteers were of similar backgrounds to me showed that Cambridge is a realistic dream for students like me to achieve. I thought it was unrealistic for me to even dream of attending Cambridge / Oxford University but they have shown me that it is possible & definitely within reach. ”

“ I thought it was great as it represented the ethnic minorities really well and proved stereotypes for Cambridge wrong. I think it inspired me more - listening to their stories and how they overcame things eg problems like moving out. It really made things look more optimistic and achievable. ”

Future

These students will return next year for a residential event where they will attend more academic masterclasses, as well as sessions on making strong and competitive applications covering admissions assessments and personal statements. Students will also be invited to attend an interview workshop should they wish to submit applications to Oxbridge or for any course or institute that requires an interview as part of the admissions process

A Year 12 event will also take place in August as a standalone event so that we can compare outcomes of students who take part in the entire programme and those who only receive one intervention and variations in between.

We look forward to continue working with colleges and thank the university for the funds to carry out incredibly important work in helping close the gaps in entry to HE for a severely under-represented group of students.





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The BPA Edition**

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