



CamSpire Impact Report

2019/2020



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 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.

The scheme contains multiple cohorts, some of which return for further events. This particular cohort was a standalone one. The inauguration of the scheme originally began with a Year 11 2019 Easter Residential at Queens' College. You can find an impact report of that cohort written by the previous CUSU Access and Funding Officer here - [insert link](#).

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. Future reports 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.

Lily-Rose S.

Lily-Rose Sharry

CUSU Access and Funding Officer 2019/20

Context

Visiting BME students often question the extent of diversity at Cambridge, and so we must ensure that people get to see genuine and meaningful representation amongst current students. A vicious cycle exists, in which the lack of visual physical and curricula representation of BME individuals may dissuade others from applying, thus lessening the number of BME students that future prospective applicants will see. Without diverse representation, not only are institutions themselves losing out on a rich wealth of valuable knowledge and experience, but individuals may also miss out on opportunities to pursue their academic interests due to misconceptions surrounding 'prestige' and what kind of Cambridge student truly 'belongs'.

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[1], 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[2], 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, and Indian. This reflects how the term BME encompasses significant variations in race, religion, culture and ethnicity, before accounting for further intersectional identity factors, and thus each creates different cultural capital available to students. As a result, a broadstoked BME 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, and representational issues increase further when accounting for existing intersectional subject gaps i.e. Women and Non-binary representation in certain STEM fields.

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

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

This report is on the Summer Vacation Year 12 Residential 2019.

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.

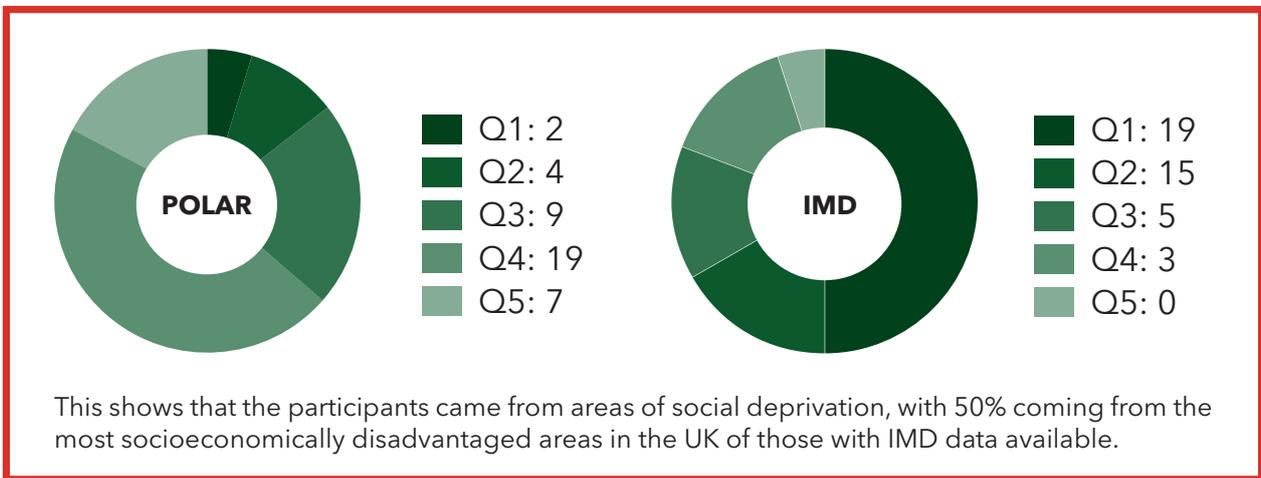
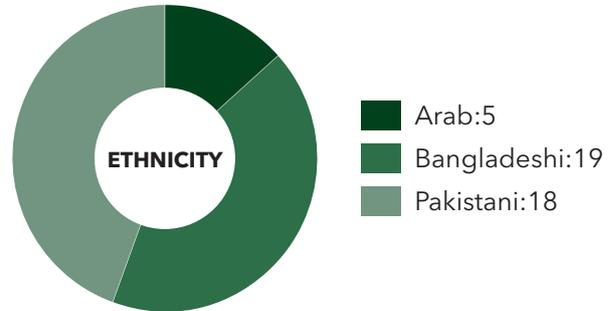
Applications

151 applications were received from Year 12 students and 48 students were invited to attend, with 42 arriving on the day. A larger attrition rate was expected for this group so the attendance was very much welcomed.



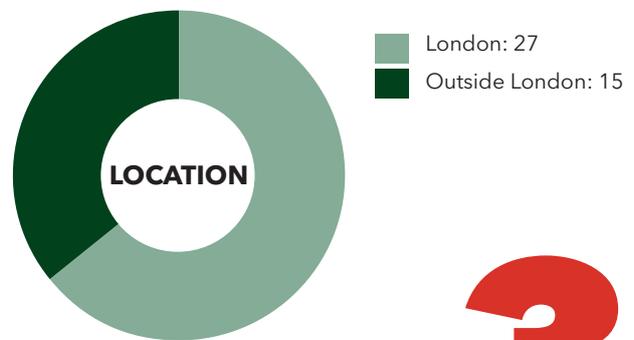
Participant Profiles

42
students attended



20% 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.



3
students in care

Application/course info

The CamSpire scheme had a broad selection of courses on offer. The following is a breakdown of the applications we received by Tripos:

Course Distribution:

Tripos	No. of Applications
Asian and Middle Eastern Studies (AMES)	2
Architecture	2
Chemical Engineering	1
Classics	1
Computer Science	9
Economics	15
Education	2
Engineering	15
Geography	1
History	4
HSPS	6
Land Economy	2
Law	12
Mathematics	6
Medicine	50
Natural Sciences	14
PBS	2
Philosophy	1
Theology	1
Veterinary Medicine	1

Analysis of Course Selection

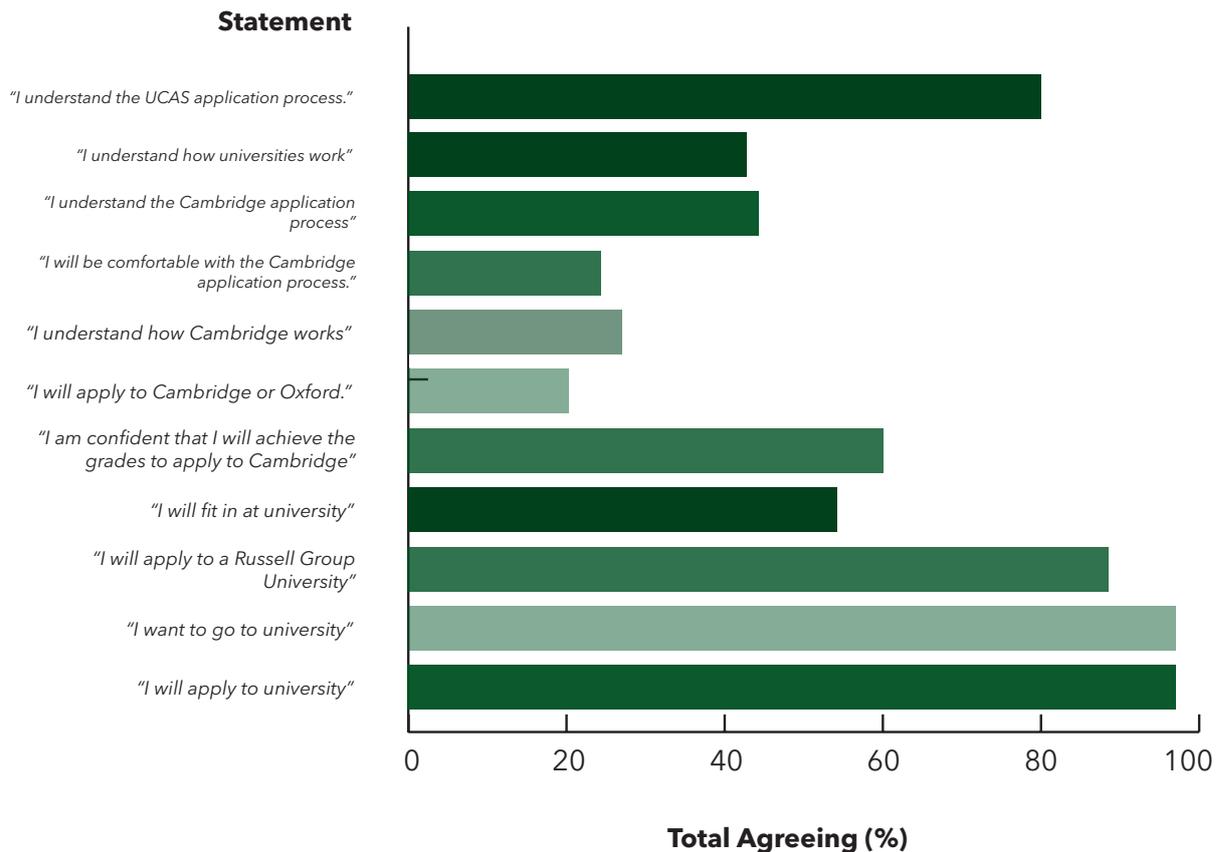
This includes the first choice preference of all students who applied; it is clear that there is a huge proportion of students from this group selecting Medicine (33.1%) as their first preference. Comparatively, only 34 (22.7%) of students in total selected an Arts/Humanities tripos (excluding Economics) as their first preference which shows how this is an area that could be worked on. Like with our Year 11 Cohort, Medicine, Engineering, Law, Natural Science and Economics remained the most popular subjects amongst applicants, which again could indicate a preference for subjects which are thought to lead to specific careers with good financial prospects, or mirrors national ethnicity-based selection trends¹. This could be an area for targeted intervention in our future programmes, with non-STEM specific careers advice at our disposal within Cambridge, and a vast array of subjects which students may not have gained exposure to yet throughout their education.

Interestingly, within STEM selections, unlike our year 11 cohort there were broader gender differences in first choice preference amongst year 12 applicants. Whilst applicants who identified as Female or Non-Binary represented the majority of Medicine applications (68%), Male-identifying applicants represented all (100%) first choice applications made to study to Engineering, Chemical Engineering, and Computer Science, and 94% of applications to study Maths. This is despite our STEM applicants of all and no genders having relatively similar subject combinations at A Level, and is significant due to the likelihood of these subjects being indicative of any potential HE course selection. Therefore, in line with national efforts to close gender gaps in HE, we recognised the importance of doing further specifically targeted intervention and outreach work for these groups to ensure that students were aware of the opportunities available to them, as this could potentially boost applicants in these fields.

¹<https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/students/what-study/characteristics>

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:

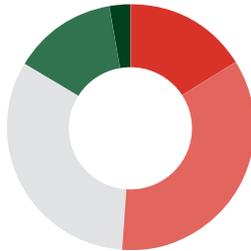
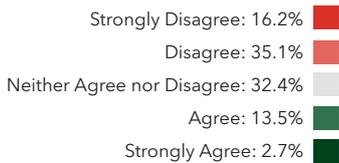


Discussion

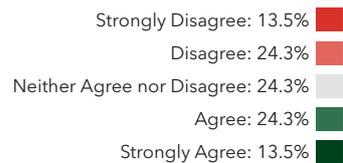
These statistics showed that generally the cohort were very positive about applying to university, with 91% wanting to apply to Russell Group universities, and 97% wanting to attend more generally. However, despite most people (62%) in the cohort confidently agreeing that they would achieve the necessary grades at A-Level, only 18% wanted to apply to Oxbridge specifically. The qualitative commentary that accompanied the survey revealed that this was both due to the application process, but also due to misconceptions that Cambridge was "too prestigious" (See word cloud below X) or that it lacked adequate diversity in the curricula and student population. Whilst 57% agreed that they would fit in at 'University', it was not ascertained through the survey whether this also applied to Cambridge specifically. Therefore, it was important that we provided interventions to ensure that the students were equipped with information about how university applications, specifically Cambridge, work in order to demystify the process. Equally, it was important that we provided the students with an opportunity to challenge the idea that only 'certain students' could attend this 'prestigious' institution.

Influences and perceptions

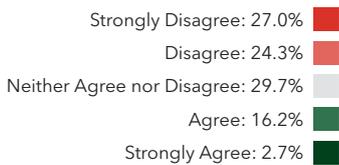
“My family’s opinion will influence my decisions about university”



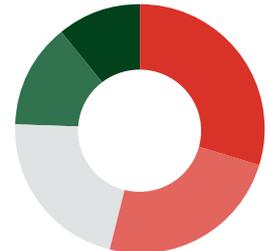
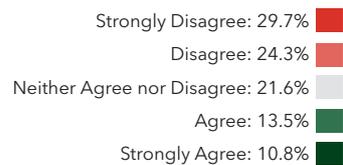
“Living costs will influence my decisions about university”



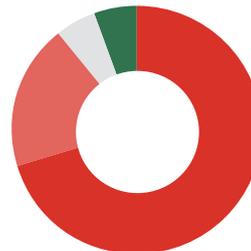
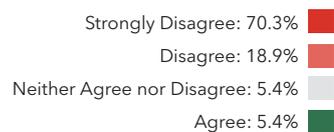
“My teachers’ opinion will influence my decisions about university”



“Tuition fees will influence my decisions about university”



“My friend’s opinion will influence my decisions about university”



Discussion

This data shows that the influence of external players such as family, teachers, friends and fees is far less significant than in our year 11 cohort. The majority of the cohort (51%) explicitly expressed that family opinion does not influence their university decision-making process. Equally, compared to the year 11 cohort, only 51% of this cohort agreed that teachers influenced their decision process. This suggests that there is positive and autonomous intrinsic motivation behind their higher education choices. However, 37% of the cohort in the pre-scheme survey agreed that living costs influenced their decision making, so future sessions should seek to emphasise the financial support options available to students, and to educate and raise awareness surrounding how higher education may be funded.



FLOREAT OOMVS

SUPER DRYFN



adidas

Logo on the patterned backpack, possibly a brand or artist's mark.

Year 12 Inauguration Cohort

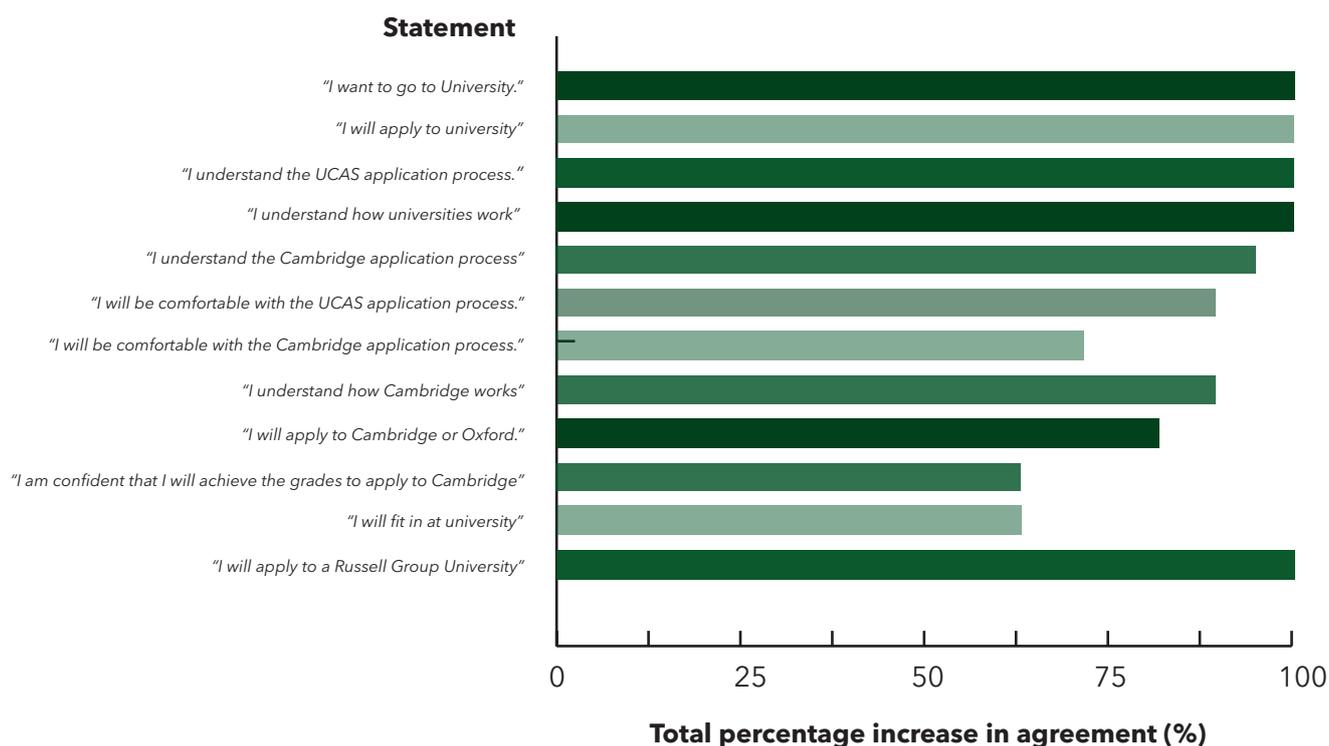
42 students attended this residential, with the following subject breakdown:

Subject	%
Chemical Engineering	2.4
Computer Science	4.8
Economics	7.1
Education	2.4
Engineering	7.1
History	2.4
HSPS	7.1
Land Economy	2.4
Law	11.9
Medicine	42.9
Natural Sciences	7.1
PBS	2.4

It is clear to see that the vast majority of our successful applicants applied to study Medicine. Whilst there is marginally more Arts & Humanities representation in this cohort when compared to our year 11 intake, we would still like to see this increase in the future. Moreover, we would also like to further equal representation within subject choices on additional identity bases i.e. gender identity, to help supplement ongoing widening participation efforts elsewhere in the University of Cambridge, and the higher education field more widely.

Post-Intervention Statements

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



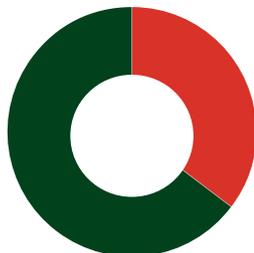
Discussion

These statistics showed that the desired outcome of the programme was achieved. Every participant (100%) in the cohort expressed that they wished to apply to university, understood UCAS and how universities worked, and would be applying to a Russell Group university in particular. Confidence in the UCAS and Cambridge application process rose 54.8% and 53.5% respectively throughout the event. Equally, it is clear that the intervention with this cohort increased aspirations to apply to Oxford and Cambridge specifically, with an outstanding 66.3% increase in participants (now 85.2%) who said they would now consider applying to these institutions when compared to before. 70.4% of responses also said that they now felt that they would fit in at University, which was reflected in their qualitative testimonials and reiterates the importance of students seeing themselves reflected and represented in access initiatives. Whilst the data is difficult to compare to the pre-scheme survey due to a lower response rate (66.6%) than before (88%), it is still clear that improvements have been made in our key areas i.e. admissions and student integration. Participants agreed that 70% of the sessions on offer were useful, with college tours needing improvement in future. Equally, 98% of the cohort found their academic session useful; in feedback, the one student who didn't agree that they enjoyed the session but they simply wished to do a different course. The next intervention should seek to further prepare students to feel comfortable during the application process i.e. personal statements, and also the Cambridge interview process in particular.

Influences and perceptions

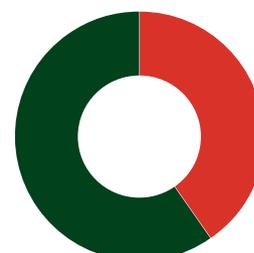
"My family's opinion will influence my decisions about university"

Pre-Scheme: 16.22% 
Post Scheme: 29.6% 



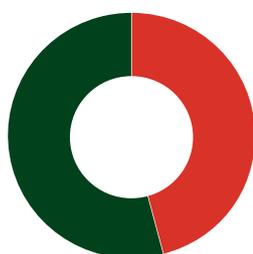
"Living costs will influence my decisions about university"

Pre-Scheme: 37.84% 
Post Scheme: 55.6% 



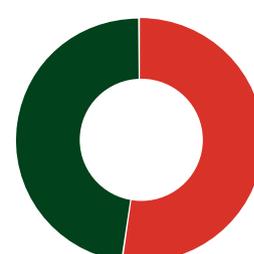
"My teachers' opinion will influence my decisions about university"

Pre-Scheme: 18.92% 
Post Scheme: 22.2% 



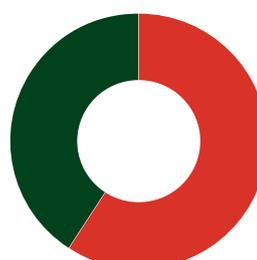
"Tuition fees will influence my decisions about university"

Pre-Scheme: 24.32% 
Post Scheme: 22.2% 



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

Pre-Scheme: 5.41% 
Post Scheme: 3.7% 



Discussion

Compared to the initial pre-scheme survey response turnout (88%), we had less students return our post-scheme survey (64.2%), this means that data is difficult to accurately compare without further identifiers to provide a point of cross reference. In order to create accurate and comparable data, in the future we must improve our data collection methods to ensure a higher turnout of responses. This includes ensuring that we encourage every participant in the cohort to provide responses for both stages, or look towards a comparative qualitative analysis of student testimonials to gauge the nature of their experience.

The average response to family influence unfavourably increased to neither agree nor disagree (29.6% agreement vs 16.2%) in light of the sample size differences. We are unable to speculate why this may be or to assess its real life impact. Similarly, whilst some participants reported that they were more influenced by external forces such as living costs (17.7% increase in agreement) in the post-scheme survey, this could indicate positive or negative influence, or simply reflect increased awareness surrounding the issue when compared to before. This is significant given that the entire cohort (100%) agreed that they still wanted to apply to university regardless, and were significantly more likely to apply to Oxbridge (85.2%) in the post-scheme survey than before. Therefore, more emphasis needs to be placed on negating the external influence of family and finances in future cohorts regardless. Equally, it is important for us to look towards taking a mixed-methods approach or drawing qualitative conclusions from testimonials in order to improve the programme for future cohorts, as this is real life research requiring real life analysis.



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, stating that it made them “feel more at home being somewhere like in Cambridge” as it made it “more comfortable” as they “found it easier to make friends”. Participants also commented on how it positively allowed them “to have some conversations about similar things that [they] believe in but would typically avoid talking about”. Only one respondent would have preferred an open pool of participants.

Respondents were also asked about the volunteers being from a BPA background and every response was favourable, with the most predominant theme being the relatability of the volunteers, who were mostly frequently described as “down to earth” and “honest”, and them being able to understand heritage-specific issues on a personal level. Many students expressed how it was “good to meet people...who also thought they wouldn’t fit in”, and this positively “dismantled many of the myths” surrounding the ‘typical’ Cambridge student. There were also multiple references to being Muslim specifically, particularly regarding concerns relating to the social life of students. Many of the volunteers being practicing Muslims helped to alleviate this; “The volunteers being of a BPA background made it so much easier for me to get a better insight into the ‘life at Cambridge’ as the struggles I have were easy for them to understand and relate to, e.g. drinking, clubbing”. Many responses stressed the importance of positive role-modelling. One participant expressed how “it was reassuring to know that people from my background actually did get into Cambridge, and knowing that they had a place there to enjoy their culture really did make me feel comfortable”, whilst another stated that having BPA volunteers proved that “it is possible for the rest of [individuals] from the same backgrounds to get into Cambridge” which reflects the importance of positive representation throughout the scheme.

Therefore, overall there was very strong support for this targeting and this allows us to explore the specific challenges that the demographic might face, but also provides a space where they can celebrate their heritages as reflected within the Cambridge context. We have seen similar success with Target Oxbridge and this shows the value of having targeted access initiatives; it provides an opportunity for community building, and this in itself is a valuable form of cultural capital.

Testimonials

// I think meeting BAME students that are being represented in Cambridge University dismantled many of the myths I previously had about how a typical Cambridge student must be like.



// It was so inspiring seeing people from my own ethnicity group, who also have a similar background,... it makes you want to join them so badly and be a 'part of the change!' I can't thank them enough, they were absolutely amazing.



// It was good to meet people like myself who also thought they wouldn't fit in.



// the struggles I have were easy for them to understand and relate too, e.g. drinking, clubbing - you could tell their answers were genuine



Future

The next segment of the programme will involve participants being invited back to attend an interview and application preparation session in November 2019. This will be facilitated via our partnership with the Cambridge University Islamic Society, who kindly helped us to run this segment of our scheme. This is to ensure continuity and further BPA representation for our students, and provide another opportunity for them to continue building existing rapport. The programme will seek to supplement existing application knowledge with physical confidence, and academic preparation i.e. further super-curricular exploration, in order to help participants feel ready for interviews. Part of this is also to challenge myths surrounding the Cambridge interview process, and to reassure the cohort that they are valid and welcomed applicants. We will then welcome our next cohorts in 2020, with amendments based on the findings of our current reports being actioned for further success.

In the future, we would also like to expand this targeting further at an intersectional level where possible within our programme, in order to continue challenging further representation gaps in Higher Education i.e. BPA and gender within certain subjects, or doing more to support BPA individuals who also identify as carers or care-experienced, which represented 7% of this cohort. This is to reinforce the reality that individuals, even those with similar ethnic/cultural heritages, have different experiences and subsequently often face unique and sometimes interlocking barriers which can influence their decision-making processes. For example, we would like to run a careers talk celebrating diversity and employment prospects in the UK Arts and Humanities sector, or one looking to reassure people who would like to live at home or near family that there are alternative options. Throughout the scheme, we anecdotally acknowledged that these were barriers which we had not fully explored or accounted for in our data, and we would like to change this in the future. Overall, whilst we feel as though this segment of the scheme has been a success, we would still like to continue doing the best within our means to educate future cohorts on the support systems available to them, as well rounded individuals, should they choose to apply to university, and specifically to the University of Cambridge. We hope that this will help us to continue, and hopefully strengthen, our successes in the future of the CamSpire scheme.

We look forward to working with colleges again in the future, and would like to thank the University for the funding to carry out this incredibly important work. Together, we seek to close representation gaps in higher education applications for this severely under-represented group of students, and CamSpire aims to be an important landmark in this process.





**CamSpire:
The BPA Edition**

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