

## Written evidence submitted by The Brilliant Club

### Education Select Committee Response

#### The Brilliant Club

The Brilliant Club exists to increase the number of pupils from underrepresented backgrounds progressing to highly-selective universities. We do this by mobilising the PhD community to share its academic expertise with state schools.

In pursuit of our mission, The Brilliant Club runs two core programmes; The Scholars Programme and Researchers in Schools.

The Scholars Programme recruits, trains and places doctoral and postdoctoral researchers in schools to deliver programmes of university-style tutorials, which are supplemented by two university trips.

Researchers in Schools recruits PhD graduates, places them as trainee teachers in schools and supports them to develop as excellent teachers and research leaders committed to closing the gap in attainment and university access.

#### Submission

##### Remote Learning:

- The Brilliant Club has been guided by the evidence provided by The Sutton Trust<sup>1</sup> and Teacher Tapp<sup>2</sup> on the remote learning challenges facing young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. This includes a lack of equipment, poor internet access and a disparity in the level of online engagement being provided in state schools compared to private schools.
- With the indefinite postponement of in-school learning and face-to-face interventions like The Scholars Programme (run by The Brilliant Club), pupils from less advantaged backgrounds risk falling even further behind their more advantaged peers.
- To support pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds during this time and beyond, The Brilliant Club has released a series of [free online resources](#) for pupils, which is updated weekly. These resources are designed to give pupils access to stretching and inspiring university-style academic content, as well as developing their knowledge about university and key skills that are relevant for success in higher education (such as academic referencing and essay writing). Based on The Brilliant Club's Scholars Programme, we are publishing weekly online masterclasses pitched for ages 14-18 across a wide range of subjects, including 'Virology: The How and Why of Poxvirus Research' and 'Psychology: Emotion Induction'. Within the first month of release, our video content on YouTube had received over 5,500 views.
- The Welsh Government are sharing The Brilliant Club's online resources as part of their 'e-Seren' university access distance learning offer on their 'Hwb' platform. The Brilliant Club is also

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/COVID-19-and-Social-Mobility-1.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://teachertapp.co.uk/how-are-teachers-coping-with-lockdown/>

contributing the university access component to Oak National Academy's suite of extracurricular resources.

- In addition to providing online resources, The Brilliant Club recognises that to reach those who are digitally disadvantaged, it is especially important to bridge the gap between the online and the offline. The recently announced plans from Government, and some schools, to provide some disadvantaged pupils with devices, is welcome, but our experience indicates that having lower-tech backup solutions is also important. The Brilliant Club is seeking funding to create home learning packs, which will include learning resources, such as key texts and USB sticks loaded with audio and video content that can be played on television sets, thereby not requiring laptops or an internet connection.
- Whilst there has been a significant push to get school resources online, through initiatives such as Oak National Academy, university outreach support has not been digitalised at the same pace. Due to the lockdown and anticipated long-term restrictions on gatherings, many university summer schools, due to be attended by thousands of underrepresented pupils, are at risk of not taking place.
- In response to this issue, The Brilliant Club is working with partners to develop digital provision to support partners, including universities and education organisations, to deliver high-quality alternative outreach activities for pupils during the summer months. This work will draw upon our unique combination of expertise in programme design and delivery, harnessing the talents and passion of the PhD researcher community, and effective impact evaluation.
- The Brilliant Club's digital outreach work will, subject to accessing sufficient funding, include the development of university-style academic experiences, including online tutorials with audio and video content by PhD researchers, who will be recruited, trained and supported by The Brilliant Club.

### **Recommendations:**

- The Brilliant Club welcomes the Government's decision to provide laptops and internet access to some children and would recommend that this is extended to including all young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. Without increased digital inclusion, university outreach activities will struggle to reach the pupils who need them most. Digital inclusion would create opportunities for pupils to access online outreach resources and engage directly with people who can support their progression, such as a PhD tutor on The Brilliant Club's Scholars Programme.
- The Brilliant Club is pleased that the Office for Students has encouraged Uni Connect hubs to continue their investment in outreach activities. We are already working with several Uni Connect hubs to explore innovative ways of providing outreach while schools are closed and once they reopen. We believe that university access work is more important now than ever before. With face-to-face activity currently not possible, it is important that these bodies engage with charities in the sector to see how this funding could be most effectively invested in digital outreach activities.
- With pupils from underrepresented backgrounds making the transition from school to university in such an unprecedented climate, it is particularly important that they receive appropriate bridging and transition support, either digitally or through support packs.

### **Financial implications:**

- The closure of schools has a significant impact on their supply chain. This includes charities, like The Brilliant Club, who provide pupil-facing programmes directly to schools. With schools closed, our ability to deliver and receive payment for the programmes that schools have signed up to is disrupted.
- Furthermore, opportunities to secure programme participation from schools for the upcoming academic year are reduced, given the range of challenges taking up teachers' and school leaders' time, and the impossibility of visiting potential partner schools to plan their participation. As a result, we – and other charities with a similar business model supporting schools – are likely to feel financial ramifications of the closures well into the next academic year and beyond.
- The guidance issued by the Department for Education instructing schools to pay suppliers as normal was welcome and helpful. However, in following up invoices, it has become clear that many schools use paper-based finance payment systems and their finance teams do not have the ability to process payment outside of the school building.

### **Recommendations:**

- Schools need to be supported to digitalise their financial systems, so that payments can be processed remotely. This would deliver efficiency benefits to schools and support the financial stability of organisations within their supply chain.
- Timely communications to schools on payment of suppliers has supported school suppliers in the short-term, by expediting payment and supporting immediate cashflow challenges. However, it is also important to consider the longer-term financial stability of organisations who work with schools. It is crucial that schools are encouraged to take a long-term view when planning their provision for the coming academic year. Further Government guidance that encourages schools to protect their supply chain in this would be welcome.

### **Disadvantaged groups:**

- The Brilliant Club has been guided by research by Teacher Tapp, which indicates that fee paying schools are continuing to teach Year 11 and Year 13 at a higher rate compared to non-fee paying schools.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, parental confidence in home-schooling differs by class; 47% of middle class parents feel confident compared to just 37% of working class parents.<sup>4</sup> As has been widely reported, the crisis and accompanying school closure is expected to lead to a widening in the attainment gap.
- When schools reopen, they will undoubtedly need to focus their attention on supporting disadvantaged pupils to catch up on the learning that has been lost during the closure period. However, it is well established that – even in normal times – high attaining pupils from less advantaged backgrounds are at most danger of falling behind during their school years.<sup>5</sup> Focusing solely on 'catching up' on learning lost during school closure will not be enough to prevent the attainment gap from widening. Instead, disadvantaged pupils – especially those that have previously been high attainers – need to be stretched and supported through supra-curricular activities, such as The Brilliant Club's Scholars Programme.

### **Recommendations:** \_\_\_\_\_

<sup>3</sup> <https://teachertapp.co.uk/how-are-teachers-coping-with-lockdown/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.suttontrust.com/our-research/school-closures-parent-polling/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/PotentialForSuccess.pdf>

- Increase Pupil Premium funding so that schools can provide additional support to disadvantaged pupils when they return to school.
- With increased Pupil Premium funding, encouragement should be given to schools to think beyond the short-term need to make up for lost learning at Key Stage 4 and Key Stage 5, and to consider investment in interventions that tackle the longer-term educational inequalities that COVID-19 has amplified.

### **Effect of cancelling formal exams**

- With the removal of formal exams, many universities will be considering how to make offers to pupils who have applied to their institutions. Outside of COVID-19, The Brilliant Club supports contextual offers that recognise the different contexts in which pupils have achieved their grades. With the removal of formal exams, this context becomes even more important in supporting pupils from underrepresented backgrounds to progress to the most selective institutions.
- Many universities consider applicants' participation and achievement in academic outreach activities as evidence to support the making of a contextual offer. For example, The University of Bath makes alternative offers (typically one grade below the standard offer) to pupils who graduated from The Scholars Programme in Key Stage 5 and were awarded a 1st or 2:1 in their final assignment.

### **Recommendation:**

- Encourage universities to consider the use of contextual offers when making decisions on university admissions in this academic year, and beyond.

May 2020