

# CAMBRIDGE IN THE NORTH WEST AND EAST MIDLANDS CONFERENCES 2025

## EVALUATION REPORT

**Date:** Monday 24<sup>th</sup> March, 2025 (North West) and Tuesday 1<sup>st</sup> April 2025 (East Midlands).

**Participating Colleges:** Christ's College; Downing College; Magdalene College; Pembroke College; Peterhouse; Sidney Sussex College; St John's College.

### Overview:

Applications to Cambridge from the North West and East Midlands are lower than they should be, given students' level of achievement. The reasons for this are myriad but include geographical location. Students from different regions of the UK have different progression rates to university; 18 year olds from the North West and the East Midlands both have lower progression rates than England overall, at 35% and 34% respectively compared to 37% nationally.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, it is known that students' decisions about where to study can be influenced by travel distances from home. This is particularly the case for those from less advantaged backgrounds, who are more likely to choose to study locally.<sup>2</sup> UCAS research suggests that some of this is due to travel costs to engage with the university at events such as Open Days.<sup>3</sup> The Cambridge in the North West and East Midlands Conferences therefore aim to provide prospective applicants from those regions with an opportunity to engage with the University, in a way that is geographically and academically accessible. By taking subject specialists, admissions staff, and current students to the region, the barrier of travelling to Cambridge is removed, and prospective applicants can find out more about whether the University of Cambridge is an institution to which they may wish to apply.

The conferences themselves comprised various elements from which attendees could pick and choose to design a programme that best suited their individual interests. Elements included:

- Advice and guidance sessions, including making a competitive application, student support, finance, and careers.
- A programme of subject specific sessions, delivered by University academics, covering the courses in depth and including mini 'taster' lectures.
- College information stands available throughout the day, providing attendees with the opportunity to speak with admissions staff, academics, and current students (primarily from the region).
- A teacher and advisor strand, built around supporting students in becoming competitive applicants, and ensuring schools have the most recent information regarding application elements and processes.

The inclusion of subject sessions for nearly all subjects offered at Cambridge was an expansion on the previous year's North West event, and the East Midlands event was entirely new. Both these changes were facilitated by an Isaac Newton Trust Widening Participation and Induction Fund Grant.

The North West event attracted over 900 attendees, and the East Midlands event over 450. Both events were primarily attended by state school groups, with individuals also being able to book. This meant that attendance wasn't limited by going to a more engaged school, or a school with the resources available to facilitate a trip.

<sup>1</sup> Bolton, P, 2025, 'Higher Education Student Numbers', Pg 4 <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-7857/CBP-7857.pdf>. Accessed 16/04/2025

<sup>2</sup> Gibbons, S & Vignoles, A, 2012, 'Geography, choice and participation in higher education in England', *Regional Science and Urban Economics*, vol 42, issues 1-2, pp98-113, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0166046211000949>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.ucas.com/connect/blogs/influence-cost-living-student-decision-making>

## Evaluation:

Evaluation comprised a post-event survey to all attendees, observation, and – in time – tracking to enable a better understanding of whether or not attendees went on to apply to, and receive an offer from, Cambridge. Academics and student helpers were also asked for their opinions on the event, and how things could be improved, to be taken in to account for future iterations.

Of the participants who responded to the survey:

- 93% of attendees at the North West event, and 83% of attendees at the East Midlands event, were from state schools (51% and 75% from non-selective schools, respectively);
- This was the first time 71% of attendees from the North West event, and 79% of attendees from the East Midlands event, had any engagement with the university;
- Responses indicated a 20 percentage point increase in likelihood to apply to Cambridge following the North West event, and a 22 percentage point increase in likelihood to apply to Cambridge following the East Midlands event;
- 97% of attendees from both the North West and East Midlands events found the programme of sessions helpful and comprehensive;
- 82% of attendees at the North West event, and 89% of attendees at the East Midlands event found out all the information they were hoping to.

Included below are quotes from teachers who attended the conferences:

- 'No changes – it was fantastic.' *East Midlands event.*
- 'I just wanted to say a huge thank you for the event on Tuesday. I spoke to my students afterwards and they were adamant it was a worthwhile event for them which they got a lot out of. I always ask my students whether we should do an event they've attended next year and [they] unanimously said 'yes'. Also, from a teacher perspective, the sessions that were run were excellent... Thank you so much for making us welcome; we hope you'll be running the event again next year.' – *East Midlands event.*
- 'I have... given you a five-star review! Both [my colleague] and I appreciate the candour of our Cambridge colleagues about the realities of encouraging and preparing our students for such a rigorous selection procedure. It's also good to feel that university and school are working together in our students' best interests. It is a more personal and therefore a more productive engagement with the university than that possible on busy university and college open days. We appreciate all that you do to support us.' – *North West event.*
- 'It was a fantastic conference, thank you to everyone who was involved. We hope attend again next year.' – *North West event.*
- 'Please run this again next year.' – *North West event.*

## Finance:

The Isaac Newton Trust gave a grant of £33,588 to enable the expansion of the event to include subject sessions and an East Midlands conference. Below is a breakdown of the total costs for the 2025 conferences:

Item	North West	East Midlands	Total
Venue hire, including teachers' refreshments, and lunches for Cambridge staff	£18,854.11	£12,371.00	£31,225.11
Accommodation for academics and staff	£3,371.21	£838.53	£4,209.74
Accommodation for student helpers	£633.78	£793.94	£1,427.72
Travel costs: trains and taxis	£2,760.89	£1,602.21	£4,363.10
Travel costs: car hire	£461.49	£232.77	£694.26
Travel costs: fuel and mileage reclaim (for personal cars)	£1,498.61	£494.18	£1,992.79
Parking costs	£12.00	£0.00	£12.00
Other subsistence costs (dinner for overnighters, drinks at event, etc)	£829.14	£425.08	£1,254.22
Student helpers pay	£2,359.01	£2,581.86	£4,940.87
<b>Total</b>	<b>£30,780.24</b>	<b>£19,339.57</b>	<b>£50,119.81</b>

### Elements of the programme that worked particularly well:

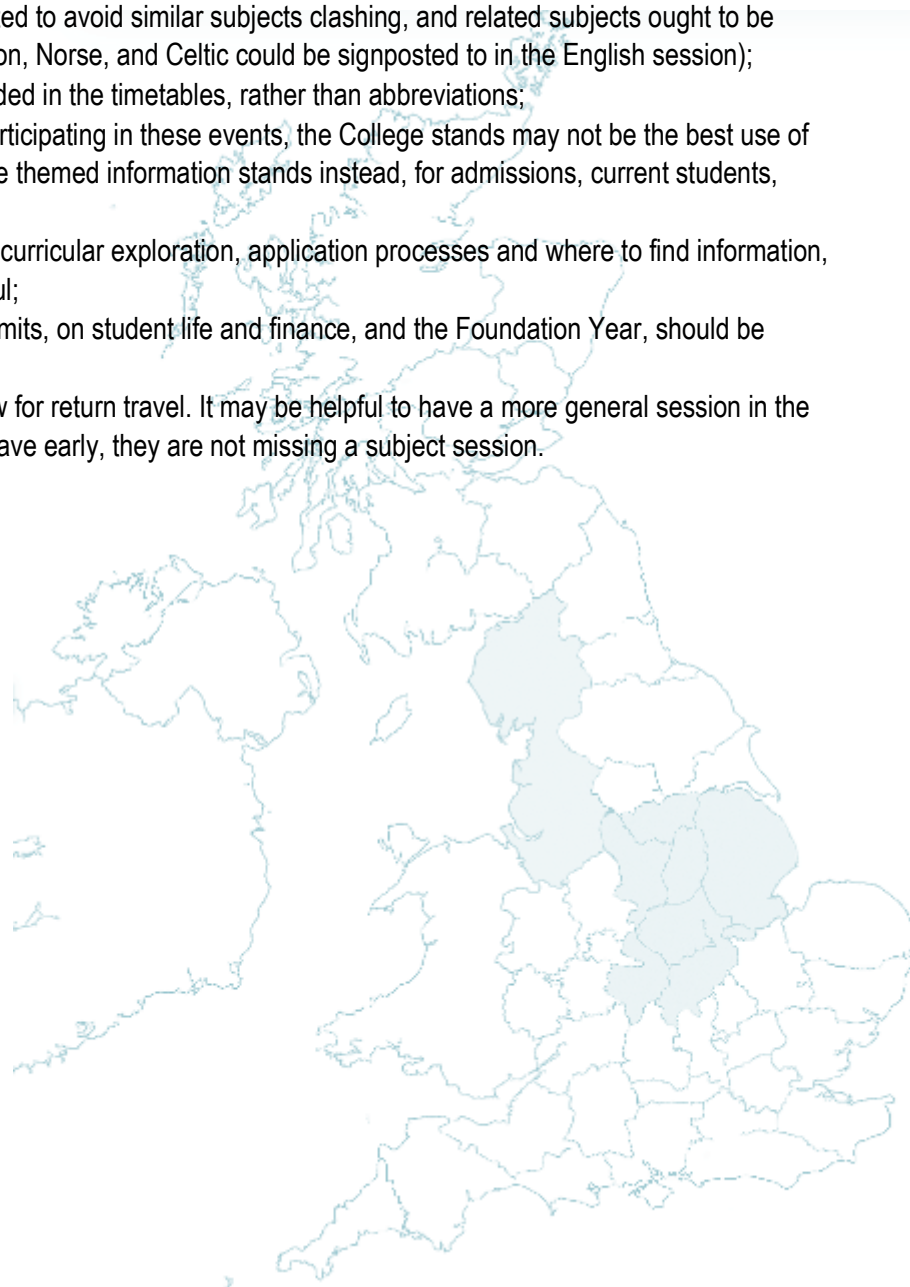
Both conferences generally ran very smoothly, and attendees found them helpful and informative. Below are some areas that were particularly strong:

- Taking current students from the region worked well, and meant that attendees could really see themselves at Cambridge;
- The inclusion of subject sessions improved the usefulness of the event considerably;
- The programme comprising 'pick and choose' elements meant that there were plenty of opportunities for attendees to speak to current students, admissions staff and academics at the information stands. These were well used by those with questions;
- The teachers' strand was particularly well received, and helped build connections and rapport with teachers in the region;
- Feedback was overwhelmingly positive, and the events being held regionally was strongly appreciated.

### Elements of the programme that could be improved upon:



As with all events, there was room for improvement at this conference. The feedback in particular highlighted some of these areas, as did practitioner observation:

- The venues were not easily navigable. The increased use of direction signage compared to last year helped, as did the map for the North West event, but there is still room for improvement in this area;
- The subject timetable meant that some similar subjects were taking place at the same time. This meant that students still deciding between subjects had to choose which session to attend, rather than being able to attend both. If possible, the timetable should be adjusted to avoid similar subjects clashing, and related subjects ought to be highlighted in sessions (e.g. Anglo-Saxon, Norse, and Celtic could be signposted to in the English session);
- Full names for subjects should be included in the timetables, rather than abbreviations;
- With increased numbers of Colleges participating in these events, the College stands may not be the best use of time and space. It may be better to have themed information stands instead, for admissions, current students, subjects, colleges, etc.;
- Additional handouts on subjects, super-curricular exploration, application processes and where to find information, personal statements, etc, may be helpful;
- Additional sessions, if the timetable permits, on student life and finance, and the Foundation Year, should be explored;
- The events should finish earlier, to allow for return travel. It may be helpful to have a more general session in the final slot, so that if attendees need to leave early, they are not missing a subject session.





## Appendix: North West Event Timetable (repeated in the East Midlands, but with the addition of Theology)

<div> <div> UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE NORTH-WEST STUDENT CONFERENCE 2025 </div>   </div>												
Time	Park Suite (500)	Premier Suite (200)	Lancaster Suite (200)	Horseshoe Suite (150)	Whittle Suite (100)	Leverhulme Suite (90)	Box 24 (40)	Jubilee Suite (80)	Davies Suite	Sprint Cup Bar Area	Sports Hall Area	Box 8
10:15-11:15	Introduction to day, about Cambridge and what we're looking for (to include PS's, finance and careers) <i>Park - Libby and Amber; Premier - Rubie and Sarah; Lancaster - Kristy and Natalie</i>							Teachers and HE Advisors: Updates & PS <i>Richard and Sandy</i>				
11:30-12:15	Engineering and Chemical Engineering <i>John Durrell</i>	Geography <i>Phil Howell</i>	English <i>Mark Wormald</i>	Architecture, Design <i>Sofia Nivarti</i>	MML; History and Modern Languages <i>Hugo Azerad</i>	Philosophy <i>Aidan Woodcock</i>		Teachers and HE Advisors: References <i>Caroline and Richard</i>	Teachers' and HE Advisors Lounge	Student Lounge	Information Stands with Cambridge academics, Admissions Tutors, and current undergraduate students.	
12:45-13:30	Interviews (Arts) <i>Sarah Kennedy</i>	Natural Sciences <i>Justin Gerlach, Mark Wyatt</i>	Maths <i>Sergio Bacallado</i>	Computer Science <i>Matt Ireland</i>	Psychological & Behavioural Sciences <i>Andrea Greve</i>			Admissions Tutors and staff available for informal chat	Please feel free to come and use this space at lunch, or in between sessions you wish to attend.	Please feel free to come and use this space at lunch, or in between sessions you wish to attend.	Come and chat to us to ask any questions you may have about the Cambridge courses, applying, or being an undergraduate student with us.	Prayer space
14:00-14:45	Interviews (Maths and Sciences) <i>Justin Gerlach</i>	Law <i>Nick McBride</i>	AMES <i>Nanase Shirota</i>	Linguistics <i>Ksenia Zanon</i>	History; History & Pol; History & ML <i>Caroline Burt and Richard Partington</i>	ASNC <i>Maire Ni Mhaonaigh</i>		Teachers and HE Advisors: Mock interview (Sciences) <i>John Durrell</i>				
15:00-15:45	Human, Social, and Political Sciences <i>Barbara Bodenhorn</i>	Medicine and Veterinary Medicine <i>Justin Gerlach and Dan Tucker</i>	Economics <i>Marta Grzeskiewicz</i>	History of Art <i>Frank Salmon</i>	Classics <i>Torsten Meissner</i>	Archaeology <i>Sheila Kohring</i>	Education <i>Jenny Gibson</i>	Teachers and HE Advisors: Mock interview (Arts) <i>Nick McBride</i>				

