

Fitzwilliam College Year 11 BME Scheme – Isaac Newton Trust WPIF report

Thanks to funding from the Isaac Newton Trust Widening Participation & Induction Fund, Fitzwilliam College was able to expand our Year 11 BME online programme and in-person day, to include a full 3-day residential for students on the programme in the summer after year 11.

In total, the fund was used to host 36 year 11 students, 5 BME student ambassadors, and 2 Fitzwilliam College outreach staff members, for a programme running from 1pm on Sunday 2nd July to 1pm on Tuesday 4th July. Activities included information and guidance sessions on applying to Oxbridge/university; a debating workshop to help build soft skills; tours of Fitzwilliam, St John's, and Magdalene Colleges; taster lectures delivered by BME academic staff at Fitzwilliam College; and entertainment such as a punting trip, icebreakers, and a quiz night.

At the end of the programme, students were asked to complete an anonymous feedback form sharing their thoughts on the stay. The key findings from the 32 responses were as follows:

- Asked how likely they were to consider going to university, students rated themselves an average of 7.4/10 before the programme, and 8.9/10 after, suggesting the programme had a very positive impact for raising aspirations. 1 student decreased in likelihood, 6 stayed the same, and 25 reported an increase in their likelihood of going to university after their stay.
- Students rated our student ambassadors 9.2/10 for helpfulness, highlighting the value of a well-trained team of ambassadors assisting on outreach events. The positive reception of our ambassadors, all of whom were from black/minority ethnic backgrounds, also highlights the importance of proper representation in outreach events, creating a space for current BME students to honestly share their experiences and connect with prospective BME applicants and the unique challenges and concerns these communities might face.
- They rated accommodation as 7.4 out of 10 and rated the catering 6.8/10, suggesting generally positive reception toward the practicalities of their stay, but that improvements could be made in some areas. Numerous students requested more choice in the buttry, and some reported issues with the showers and quality of bedrooms. This will be noted for future events and attempts will be made to book with the conferencing/events team further in advance to secure refurbished accommodation in tree court for residential programmes.
- Students rated the evening entertainment 8.5/10, with many commenting that the icebreakers and quiz night were very enjoyable, highlighting the importance of a well-planned programme of social activities as part of overnight stays to allow students to bond, feel more comfortable in their environment, and get a taster of the friendships made in a university freshers week.
- Students rated the visit 8.8/10 overall, suggesting students generally had very positive experiences during their stay. In the free text section where students could add additional comments about their stay, some responses included 'it was a nice stay and a great opportunity to see the university of Cambridge' and 'thank you Louis and Lauren, as well as the student helpers for your commitment and passion in taking care of us!'.

Students were asked to rate the different sessions on the programme for both usefulness and enjoyableness, on a scale from 1 to 5 (1 being not at all useful/enjoyable; and 5 being very useful/enjoyable). Sessions were generally rated very highly as noted in table 1, which includes the average ratings of each session. The ‘moving to university’ Q&A was rated the least enjoyable with an average of 3.75/5, suggesting a more interactive Q&A format could perhaps be used in the future. However, this session was rated second most useful with a score of 4.4/5, suggesting it still provided valuable insight into university study for the students which helped them consider this option further. Conversely, punting was rated the least useful activity with a score of 3.25/5, perhaps due to the lack of academic content involved, however this activity was the most highly rated for enjoyableness with an average rating of 4.6/5 for enjoyableness, demonstrating that it was still valuable to organize as it provided a fun and memorable way to explore the city. The highest rated session for usefulness was the final talk of the programme on the application process, which scored an average of 4.7/5 for usefulness, and 4.0/5 for enjoyableness. Across the board, we believe the programme was planned effectively to provide a useful and enjoyable experience, based on the generally positive ratings of all sessions which were all scored on average between 3-5/5 for both measures.

When asked what else they would have liked to see or do, some requested more tours of certain colleges, suggesting that more supervised free time in town could be incorporated into the programme so students have time to explore colleges as they wish. Others requested more choice in subject taster sessions, and we would be keen to liaise with BME academics at other colleges to facilitate this. Finally, some requested a visit to a department/lecture theatre, which we have since aimed to incorporate in other residentials, with the law faculty being especially amenable to visits. If the BME scheme residential runs again, we will include a faculty visit as part of a tour of the city and other colleges.

Table 1

Activity	Average rating for usefulness	Average rating for enjoyableness
Tour of Fitzwilliam College	4.2/5	4.0/5
Punting	3.25/5	4.6/5
Academic Taster Lecture	4.3/5	4.2/5
Debating Workshop	4.0/5	4.0/5
Moving to University Q&A	4.4/5	3.75/5
Tour of St John’s College	4.3/5	4.5/5
Tour of Magdalene College	3.9/5	3.9/5
Applying to Cambridge talk	4.7/5	4.0/5