



Lucy Cavendish College
Final Evaluation Report on the Academic Attainment Programme 2021-22

Context

In June 2022 Lucy Cavendish College (LCC) was delighted to receive a generous grant of £25,000 from the Isaac Newton Trust Widening Participation and Induction Fund (INT WPIF) to support our flagship outreach Programme: the Academic Attainment Programme (AAP). This Programme aims to raise participants’ academic attainment over the two years before they start higher education: this is the period of post-16 study usually coterminous with A-levels, IB Higher Levels or Scottish Highers/Advanced Highers. The Programme has three successive elements: the Summer Preparation Programme (SPP), which takes place in the summer following the completion of GCSEs; the Academic Enrichment Programme (AEP), which covers the period October to May of the first year of post-16 study; and the Summer Application Bootcamp (SAB), which is held during the summer before applicants apply to university. It is conducted entirely online and has a truly national reach, with participants enrolled from every corner of the UK. LCC has now been running the AAP for two consecutive academic years (2021-22 and 2022-23), the latter of which was kindly part-funded by the INT WPIF.

Evaluating the Programme’s impact is challenging because LCC cannot obtain data on the attainment of students enrolled on the AAP unless they apply to Cambridge, which is a limited and potentially unrepresentative sample of participants. It is also not possible to obtain attainment data for a control group of non-participants from similar backgrounds in order to be able to draw conclusions about the specific impact of the Programme on students’ ability to achieve these grades, vs, for example, interventions by their school/college or other third parties. However, qualitative data concerning the impact participants feel the Programme has had on their academic attainment, their development of key skills and their overall preparedness for higher education is collected and is analysed below. The principal focus of our evaluation has therefore been participants’ success rates when applying to highly-selective universities, including Oxbridge. This data is more easily accessible, can be more easily compared to that from other outreach programmes run by the University and to our own internal norms, and, through UCAS STROBE, can also be compared to a control group of non-participants in order for conclusions about the Programme’s effectiveness to be drawn. A connection to academic attainment can also be assumed, since all such universities require high grades to have been achieved through conditional offers. However, the drawback to this method is that comprehensive data is only available at the end of any UCAS apply cycle, which is over one year after the relevant round of the Programme was completed. As a result, this report will focus primarily on data pertaining to the 2021-22 round of the Programme. This is not the year that was funded by the INT WPIF, and it took place before the INT WPIF funding allowed LCC to expand and develop the Programme to its current model. However, as will be seen below, its results are nevertheless a significant indicator of the potential of the Programme, which we can only anticipate will be further demonstrated when data from the 2023-24 admissions round is eventually available.

Qualitative Evaluation

From August 2021 until August 2022, the first year of the AAP supported 550 state school students. An extensive evaluation in September 2022 found that the Programme had more than achieved its aims as the following figures demonstrate:

Aim	Findings
To support students to develop their key academic skills and subject-specific knowledge.	79% of respondents agreed that the AAP strengthened their subject-specific knowledge and skills; 86% now feel confident in their current studies.
To give students an insight into university-level study, allow them to explore the subjects available and help them to determine the subject/s to which they are best suited.	Over 90% of respondents reported that the AAP gave them an insight into university-level study. The percentage of respondents who have a good understanding of the range of courses available at university increased from 71% to 92%; the percentage who have a good understanding of the contents of the courses in which they are interested increased from 56% to 93%. 82% of respondents said that the subject-specific sessions helped them to decide which subject they might like to study at university.



To support students to explore their subject interests independently.	88% of respondents now feel confident exploring their subject independently; this was an increase of twelve percentage points over the course of the Programme.
To support participants to make competitive applications to high-tariff universities. (SAB specific)	Over 90% of respondents now feel well-informed both about applying to top universities generally and about applying to Cambridge specifically, which rose from 52% and 39% respectively at the start of the Programme; 97% know where to go for further information or if they have any questions. 98% feel confident that they know how to make a competitive application to Cambridge and other top universities.

Quantitative Evaluation

Following applications to the University of Cambridge and offer-making in January 2023, LCC identified 216 AAP students who had applied to the University. Of these, 91 students received offers. This equates to an offer rate of 42%, which was double the University-wide average offer rate (21% in 2022-23) and significantly higher than the University-wide Home Maintained offer rate (25%).

Further statistics from this application round reinforce the conclusion that participation in the AAP made a significant difference to students' chances of receiving an offer from the University of Cambridge. These include:

- 31% AAP offer rate for STEMM courses (University-wide average of 20%; University-wide Home Maintained rate of 24%)
- 54% AAP offer rate for Humanities courses (University-wide average of 23%; University-wide Home Maintained rate of 30%)
- 39% AAP offer rate for FSM students (University-wide rate of 19%)
- 34% AAP offer rate for IMD flagged students (University-wide offer rate of 20%)
- 34% AAP offer rate for POLAR4 Q1/Q2 flagged students (University-wide offer rate of 22%)

LCC was the College to receive the most applications by AAP students with 29 applications and 11 offers, but many other Colleges also benefited, including Selwyn (16 applicants; 6 offers), Caius (13 and 7), Clare (12 and 3), Trinity (12 and 5). Corpus Christi made offers to both its AAP applicants, Girton to 5 from 6, Fitzwilliam to 3 from 4, Murray Edwards to 7 from 10, Magdalene to 2 from 3 and Downing to 5 from 8.

Of the thirty undergraduate courses offered by Cambridge, only Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic, Education, History of Art, Music and Theology did not receive any AAP applicants. The course to receive the most applications was Medicine with 34, followed by Natural Sciences (21), Economics (16), Computer Science, Law and Mathematics (each 15). Offer rates were highest in various small arts subjects (Archaeology, AMES, Classics and MML – all 100%), but there were also significant success rates in Chemical Engineering and Biotechnology (67%), History (67%) and Natural Sciences (57%). Apart from the subjects to receive no offers (Philosophy and Veterinary Medicine), only in Engineering (8%) and Computer Science (7%) did AAP applicants fall below the University-wide offer rates for their subjects (17% and 8% respectively in these cases); in all other subjects they significantly exceeded them.

In addition to the above, LCC obtained data from UCAS STROBE, which demonstrated the following:

- 95% of AAP students applied to UCAS, which is very significantly higher than 24% of the benchmarked cohort. 93% applied to higher tariff universities*, which is very significantly higher than 17% of the benchmarked cohort.

*UCAS have not specified exactly which universities are included in this group, but we understand this to include the top third of universities, based on a combined measure of entrance requirements and acceptance rates.

- 90% of AAP students received offers through UCAS, which is not significantly different to the benchmarked cohort. 83% received offers from higher tariff universities, which is not significantly different to the benchmarked cohort.

The STROBE analysis therefore suggests that participation in the AAP does have a significant impact upon application rates to high tariff universities, but not on offer rates from these institutions. However, this data was collected at the end of January 2023, before many students had received outcomes from all universities to which they applied, so it



is not yet complete. LCC will therefore re-obtain data at a later point in the cycle and compare it to data obtained from the Higher Education Access Tracker (HEAT), which, together, will allow further and more substantiated conclusions to be drawn about application and offer rates for AAP students and their relationship to control data.

Conclusions

Once again, it must be emphasised that this report evaluates the 2021-22 round of the AAP, not the 2022-23 round which the INT WPIF generously supported. This is because the 2022-23 round is not yet complete, so qualitative evaluation cannot yet take place, and application outcomes from the Programme will not be known until 2024 at the earliest. Nevertheless, it is hoped that the full evaluation of the previous year of the Programme that can now be completed will demonstrate the tremendous potential of the AAP, both in terms of the effect it has on participants' confidence and skill development, and particularly in terms of the application outcomes secured by participants on the Programme. Remembering that the 2021-22 round was simply a pilot, and that INT WPIF funding allowed LCC to expand, develop and further professionalise the subsequent 2022-23 round, there is every reason to believe that the outcomes secured by that year of the Programme will be even more impressive than those detailed in this report.

One area in which the 2021-22 Programme could clearly improve is in the success rates of applicants to certain STEM courses at Cambridge, specifically Engineering and Computer Science. To this end, LCC is pleased to report that one of the most significant changes we made to the 2022-23 Programme was to recruit more experienced subject tutors in Physics and related subjects, and to further develop the curricula for these subjects. We anticipate that this will already have had an impact on students' preparedness in popular disciplines such as Engineering and we eagerly await next year's application results to see the fruits of our investment.

We would like to close by extending once again our sincere thanks to the INT for its exceptionally generous support. It is hoped that the above more than demonstrates the potential of this Programme, which in its first year has already achieved higher applicant success rates than I have ever encountered on any outreach programme with which I have been engaged during my career. We hope that the INT will look favourably on any future funding bids the College may submit for this Programme.

Dr Mark J. King,
Assistant Senior Tutor: Academic,
Lucy Cavendish College
May 2023



AAP costs incurred in financial year July 2022-July 2023

Category	Description	Cost
Personnel expenses	Upgrade of the post of Outreach Officer (covering increased salary and additional oncosts)	£5,084
Personnel expenses	25% of the salary of the new Admissions and Outreach Officer post and pro-rata oncosts	£11,827
SAB (AAP 2021-22) Session Leaders	Paying Subject Leaders for the SAB (£75/session, 6 sessions)	£450
SPP Subject Leaders	Paying Subject Leaders for the SPP (£150/session, 5 sessions)	£750
AEP Subject Enrichment Curriculum Leaders	Paying Subject Leaders for the AEP (£150/session, 94 sessions)	£14,100
AEP Taster Session Leaders	Paying Session Leaders for Taster Sessions (£75/session, 17 sessions)	£1,275
Equipment	2 Zoom licenses	£320
Equipment	Laptop, microphone, and high-quality webcam for new Admissions and Outreach Officer	£800
OVERALL COST		£34,606