

CAMBRIDGE IN THE NORTH WEST CONFERENCE 2024

EVALUATION REPORT

Date: Monday 18th March, 2024.

Participating Colleges: Downing College; Pembroke College; Peterhouse; Sidney Sussex College, St John's College.

Overview:

Applications to Cambridge from the North West are lower than they should be, given students' level of achievement. The reasons for this are myriad but include geographical location; it is known that students' decisions about where to study can be influenced by how far a university is from home. This is particularly the case for those from less advantaged backgrounds, who are more likely to choose to study locally.¹ UCAS research suggests that some of this is down to cost of travel to engage with the university at events such as Open Days.² The Cambridge in the North West Conference therefore aims to provide prospective applicants from that region with an opportunity to engage with the University, in a way that is geographically, academically, and personally 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 conference itself comprised various elements which attendees could pick and choose from, to design a programme that best suited their individual interests. Elements included:

- Advice and guidance sessions, covering elements of the application process and how to make an application competitive, finance and careers, and the student experience.
- A programme of subject specific sessions, delivered by University academics, which covered the courses in depth and included mini 'taster' lectures.
- Information stands that were available throughout the day, for each of the Colleges participating, and providing attendees with the opportunity to speak with admissions staff, academics, and current students (primarily from the region).
- A teachers and advisors strand, built around supporting students in making competitive applications applicants, and ensuring schools have the most recent information regarding the application elements.

The inclusion of subject sessions was an expansion on the pilot event held previously, and was facilitated by an Isaac Newton trust Widening Participation and Induction Fund Grant. This enabled the event to expand from c. 400 attendees to over 800. The majority of these were from state school groups, though individual students were also able to (and did) attend.

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, though this has not solicited much response.

Of the participants who responded to the survey:

¹ 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>

² <https://www.ucas.com/connect/blogs/influence-cost-living-student-decision-making>

- 96% of attendees were from state schools (65% from non-selective schools)
- This was the first time 77% of attendees had any engagement with the university
- Responses indicated a 26.5% increase in likelihood to apply to Cambridge following the event
- 97% found the programme of sessions helpful and comprehensive
- 90% of attendees found out all the information they were hoping to from attending

Included below are two quotes from teachers, who also attended:

- 'Thank you for coming to the North West, it is very much appreciated and it gives our students (especially Bursary students) an opportunity to speak to academics and students and gives them an insight into what lectures/tutorials/interviews would be like.' – *anonymous*.
- 'The event was brilliant and we hope that you run this again next year in the North West.' – Sharon Jones, Connell Co-op College.

Finance:

The Isaac Newton Trust gave a grant of £8,975 to enable the expansion of the event to include subject sessions. Below is a breakdown of the total costs for the 2024 conference:

Item	All Colleges	Downing	Pembroke	Peterhouse	Sidney Sussex	St John's	Total
Venue hire, including teachers' refreshments	£16,808.60	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	£16,808.60
Lunches for academics, staff and student helpers	£607.24	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	£607.24
Accommodation for academics and staff	N/A	£120.00	£752.99	£240.00	£480.00	£360.00	£1,952.99
Accommodation for student helpers	N/A	£55.00	£211.96	£208.97	£180.00	£56.99	£712.92
Travel costs: trains and taxis	N/A	£120.00	£393.89	£573.21	£300.00	£759.17	£2,146.27
Travel costs: car hire	N/A	N/A	£193.60	N/A	£82.00	N/A	£275.60
Travel costs: fuel and mileage reclaim (for personal cars)	N/A	£81.00	£310.84	N/A	£138.45	£534.30	£1,064.59
Parking costs	N/A	£6.00	£12.00	N/A	£6.00	£12.00	£36.00
Other sustinance costs (dinner for overnighters, drinks at event, etc)	N/A	£50.00	£268.66	£136.56	£142.75	£146.44	£744.41
Student helpers pay	N/A	£93.44	£880.87	£840.53	£300.00	£408.72	£2,523.56
Total	£17,415.84	£525.44	£3,024.81	£1,999.27	£1,629.20	£2,277.62	£26,872.18

Elements of the programme that worked particularly well:

The event generally ran very smoothly, and attendees found the day 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.

Elements of the programme that could be improved upon:

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

- The venue was not easily navigable, and as it was somewhere we were also unfamiliar with, additional signage or maps would have been very helpful, as would a longer travel period between sessions;
- Not all small subjects were covered, which meant that some attendees couldn't attend the most appropriate subject specific session. If possible, all Cambridge subjects should be represented;
- The arrival of school groups at the same time resulted in gridlock at the entrance. Suggestions to improve this include better pre-event communication, and attendees being directed to the first general talk immediately. The information stands can then be available following the first session of the day;
- A number of the attendees were observing Ramadan, and whilst the venue had provided a room to be used as a prayer room, this was not an appropriate space. The venue being a betting establishment was also problematic in this regard. Alternative provision for prayer ought to be investigated, or a different venue used.

Appendix: Event Timetable

UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
NORTH-WEST STUDENT
CONFERENCE 2024



Time	Park Suite (500)	Premier Suite (200)	Lancaster Suite (200)	Horseshoe Suite (150)	Whittle Suite (100)	Leverhulme Suite (90)	Jubilee Suite (80)	Davies Suite	Sprint Cup Bar Area	Sports Hall Area
10:00-11:00	Making a Competitive Application <i>Amber Cuttill and Libby Prodger</i>	Making a Competitive Application <i>Dawn Melody</i>	Making a Competitive Application <i>Sophie Anson</i>				Teachers and HE Advisors: Updates <i>Sandy Mill, Kam Yunus, Richard Partington</i>	Teachers' and HE Advisors Lounge	Student Lounge	Information Stands with Cambridge academics, Admissions Tutors, and current undergraduate students. Come and chat to us to ask any questions you may have about the Cambridge courses, applying, or being an undergraduate student with us.
11:05-12:05	Finance and Careers <i>Elsie Linley</i>	Medicine and Veterinary Medicine <i>Justin Gerlach and Myfanwy Hill</i>	Computer Science <i>Matthew Ireland</i>	Geography <i>Catherine Sumnall</i>	The Student Experience <i>Current students + Maria Kazani</i>	MML, AMES, History and Modern Languages; Linguistics <i>Nicolò Crisafi</i>	Teachers and HE Advisors: References <i>Caroline Burt, Sandy Mill, Libby Prodger</i>			
12:10-13:10	Interviews (Arts) <i>Catherine Sumnall</i> 2 x current students	Natural Sciences <i>Justin Gerlach and Stephanie Smith</i>	Maths <i>Jack Smith and Po-Ling Lo</i>	The Student Experience <i>Current students + Elsie Linley</i>	Psychological & Behavioural Sciences <i>Amy Orben</i>	Teachers and HE Advisors: Assessments <i>Kam Yunus, Richard Partington</i>	Teachers and HE Advisors: Supporting your Students in Admissions <i>Amber Cuttill, Sandy Mill</i>			
13:15-14:15	Interviews (Maths and Sciences) <i>Justin Gerlach, Matthew Ireland, 2 x current students</i>	Human, Social, and Political Sciences <i>Surer Mohamed (and Libby)</i>	Law <i>Nick McBride</i>	English <i>David Clifford</i>	History; History and Politics; History and Modern Languages <i>Caroline Burt and Richard Partington</i>	Architecture; Design <i>Darshil Shah</i>	Teachers and HE Advisors: Mock interview (Sciences) <i>Kam Yunus, Myfanwy Hill, 2 x current students</i>			
14:20-15:20	The Student Experience <i>Current Students + Maria Kazani</i>	Engineering and Chemical Engineering <i>Kam Yunus</i>	Economics and Land Economy <i>Vasileios Kotsidis, Richard Partington</i>	Finance and Careers <i>Elsie Linley</i>	Finance and Careers <i>Dawn Melody and Libby Prodger</i>	Archaeology; ASNC; Classics <i>Sheila Kohring</i>	Teachers and HE Advisors: Mock interview (Arts) <i>Caroline Burt, Nick McBride, Catherine Sumnall, 2 x current students</i>			

