

Pegasus Scholars 2022 Programme evaluation



This report draws data from:

- Surveys of the Pegasus Scholar cohort at the start and end of the three-week programme (11)
- Evaluation surveys completed by mentors (6) and supervisors (12)
- The Academic Director's reflections

The 2022 Pegasus Scholars cohort

12 offer-holders from maintained sector schools with WP flags were invited to join the Pegasus Scholars bridging programme in January. Of these, six had an FSM flag ([a strong indicator of general socio-economic disadvantage](#)) and the other six had both OAC and IMD flags indicating that they live in neighbourhoods associated with low Cambridge application rates, in the most deprived 40% of areas within their UK region. Nine attended low-performing schools for GCSE. Two had ECF forms detailing significant periods of interruption to studies due to illness. All 12 of these students accepted their places. Of these, six met the conditions of their offers and two had their offers relaxed. Four more eligible candidates were identified in the August Reconsideration Pool, three of whom were able to join the Pegasus Scholars programme. (The other one was enthusiastic in principle but unavailable for logistical reasons). The final cohort of 11 Pegasus Scholars for 2022 includes five students with FSM flags, the remaining six with OAC and IMD flags. Two are the first individual in their family to attend university and at least a further one is part of the first generation of their family to attend. One attended a school at the foot of Grenfell Tower.

These 11 students represented nine different subjects, as the breakdown below indicates. There was a strong weighting towards Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences subjects. Since the pilot cohort was drawn from offer-holders admitted in the usual way, this reflects the profiles of offer-holders across subjects this year.

<i>Subject</i>	<i>Number of scholars</i>	
Education	1	Taught together for 1/3 of the programme
English	2	
History	1	Taught together throughout, and joined by the HSPS students for 1/3 of the programme
History and Politics	1	
HSPS	2	
Law	1	
MML	1	
Medicine	1	Taught together, but with individual visits to relevant practice contexts.
Veterinary Medicine	1	

This evaluation report begins by presenting a summary of scholar and mentor responses to the end-of-programme evaluation, before reflecting on measures of impact and evaluating the structure of the pilot.

1. In your opinion, should we run the Pegasus Scholars programme again?

A unanimous yes from the scholars, all of whom mentioned at least two out of the following reasons: academic support; social opportunities; confidence building; Cambridge and college orientation; mentoring; enjoyment. These two comments are representative:

Absolutely!! I have gained so much from this experience - firstly, being able to meet people, like other freshers, current students, and fellows, has been extremely reassuring! I've made some really good friends and it is so good to know that there will be familiar faces. In addition, I've been able to get a good idea of the layout of the college and the city, so hopefully will not have to worry about that when I arrive. Also, we've had a really good insight into the way that supervisions work which is so helpful coming from big class groups. The study skills sessions were really useful and the lectures were generally really interesting! Overall, it's taken off a layer of worry about first arriving at uni, and was a really enjoyable experience.

Yes! I am so glad I took part in this programme and would recommend it for anyone who, like me, was feeling nervous about studying at Cambridge for three reasons: Firstly, having practice supervisions before the real thing allowed me to feel okay making mistakes and asking questions because I knew there would be no judgement for getting the wrong answer or not understanding something. I had no idea how a supervision worked before, and hearing or reading about it isn't the same as experiencing it first-hand. It has helped me get over some of my nervousness. Secondly, the study skills sessions were useful in teaching us key transition skills to bridge the gap between A-level and University, where there is more intense reading to do and a different style of learning (lectures and supervisions) to classroom teaching. Thirdly, and very importantly, is the social aspect of the programme. The scholars very quickly overcame the awkwardness of meeting for the first time, got to know the city and other colleges together, and spent some quality time together. Most of all, I learned that there were other people like me going to the University from all different kinds of backgrounds. Everyone on the programme was so helpful, with clear instructions and support, a lot of humour, and honesty about the challenges of Cambridge but encouragement to keep trying.

Mentors were equally enthusiastic, with several commenting that they would have gained a lot from such a programme had it been available to them:

- I cannot express how useful a programme like this would have been
- All the feedback I've had from the freshers and especially my mentees has been that they're feeling a lot less anxious about coming at the start of term
- The scholars were consistently engaged in all of the activities and took them all very seriously, treating it as though it was work set during term time
- Having been involved this year as a mentor, I think the programme everything that I would have benefited from if I had done it last year. The programme gives scholars a taste of Cambridge without all the added pressure of actually being here. This is invaluable because students can fully engage in every aspect of university life without the weight of consequence hanging over them.
- Looking back, I really wish I had had the opportunity to do something similar. This might have eased the considerable anxiety I felt for many of my first weeks at Cambridge.

2. The aims of the Pegasus Scholars programme were: 1) subject enjoyment and enrichment; 2) confidence and orientation, 3) study skills. In your personal view, how far has the programme met those aims? Average score /10

- a. subject enrichment, going beyond what you have done before: 9
- b. subject enjoyment: 8
- c. orientation – knowing your way around Robinson / the University: 9
- d. Confidence about starting at Cambridge: 8
- e. Enhanced study skills: 9

3. In your personal view, how important were each of the following elements of the programme to meeting the overall aims of Pegasus Scholars? Average score /10

- a. Subject supervisions: 9
- b. Group welcome and information sessions: 8
- c. Practical advice sessions (IT, finances, careers): 7
- d. Advice about studying at Cambridge: 8
- e. Extracurricular life at Cambridge sessions (sport, faith, drama and music): 7
- f. Social events: 9
- g. Mentoring: 9

4. Subject supervisions

Scholars were invited to reflect on the level of challenge, workload, and interest of their subject supervisions. All scholars described their subject work as “moderately” (3) or “very” (7) challenging and “very” (3) or “extremely” (7) interesting. Three quarters of scholars described their workload as “slightly too much”, with the rest selecting “neither too much nor too little”. This chimed with supervisors’ views.

Invited to comment on any aspect of their subject experiences, one student wrote: “I was surprised and a bit intimidated by the workload but this is not necessarily a bad thing.” The tone set by supervisors appears to have been ideal: “friendly and relaxed”, “really welcoming”, “supportive, kind and thought-provoking”, “really approachable”, “friendly, helpful and professional”; “really engaging and amazing at teaching”. Scholars particularly enjoyed the various trips they were taken on during the in-person week, including to archives, museums and galleries, and special collections.

Supervisors were guided to avoid pre-teaching first year material, but instead to put together a programme of subject enrichment designed to be enjoyable and challenging, and through which they could begin to address key subject-specific study skills. The scholars are obviously not yet in a position to reflect meaningfully on the choice and ordering of material covered during the Pegasus programme, but it will be useful to hear their thoughts later on in their first year.

MEASURING IMPACT

At the beginning and the end of the programme, scholars were asked to identify how strongly they identified with a series of emotions about studying at Robinson / Cambridge.

<i>Emotion</i>	<i>Pre-Pegasus average / 10</i>	<i>Post-Pegasus average / 10</i>
Excited	8	9
Confident	6	7
Nervous	7	5
Overwhelmed	5	4
Confused	2	2
Proud	8	8

Scholars consistently reported feeling positive emotions more strongly and negative emotions less strongly after the programme. Looking at the individual data, the biggest shifts happen in feelings of confidence – more than half the scholars reported feeling at least two points more confident, and half also reported feeling at least two points less nervous. Open text comments included:

- so much more confident and comfortable in myself as a future Cambridge student.
- I feel so much more reassured!
- I'm so much more confident as a result of the programme and now I can't wait to start
- I am so proud and lucky to be in a college that is so supportive of students.
- I feel so much more confident and prepared than when I started. A lot of questions have been answered, and having a feel for the college has been so valuable.

Scholars were asked to indicate how strongly they agreed with the following statements about their subject before and after the programme.

<i>Statement</i>	<i>Pre-Pegasus average / 10</i>	<i>Post-Pegasus average / 10</i>
I am excited about studying my subject	9	9
I am nervous about studying my subject	6	7
I am good at my subject	6	6
I know what studying my subject will be like	4	8
I have the relevant study skills to do well in my subject	6	8
I am confident that I can improve at my subject	8	9

Surprisingly, given their comments elsewhere, the individual-level data reveals that three students ended the programme less excited about their subject than they were at the start, and four students more nervous! I wonder whether this reflects what happens usually during the first weeks of term, as the reality begins to become clear? One student commented: “It has been intimidating working with such intelligent people, but hopefully everything will turn it ok”.

However, it is gratifying to note that by the end of the programme all students feel equally or more confident that they are good at their subject, particularly given the huge jump in responses to the statement “I know what studying my subject will be like”, where the majority of scholars rated their agreement at least two and as many as five points higher than at the start of the programme. Likewise, all students felt that their study skills had improved significantly, and the

majority expressed more confidence that they can improve at their subject than they had at the start.

- I feel like I've developed skills that I didn't have before
- I am excited for the challenge
- The subject specific sessions I had were amazing and I would definitely recommend doing similar stuff for future [students]
- I didn't exactly know what to expect from it before this programme, but now I'm confident I know what studying my course will be like.

Supervisors' perspectives

Supervisors were warm in their enthusiasm for the programme, not only for its benefits for students but also for the opportunities it provided them as supervisors:

- It was really encouraging to see how, over the course of the three weeks, the student became increasingly confident in expressing their ideas and thought processes.
- Their capacity for producing a good quality piece of work at the end of the three week project was greater than I would have anticipated in marking a supervisee's first piece of work usually submitted a week or two into the new term. The additional supervisions working on planning helped them to side-step a lot of the common general pitfalls new supervisees often fall into in submitting their first piece of work.
- the students said they gained a lot from it in terms of knowledge and confidence ... They were genuinely enthusiastic in sessions, wanting to get the most out of the programme - and it was inspiring and helpful for me as a teacher too!
- As a supervisor, I:
 - gained confidence teaching [a particular subject area]
 - gained confidence marking
 - gained confidence structuring lessons and courses
 - was able to practice empathetic teaching and course structures
 - gained confidence helping students towards an answer, an idea, or a way of approaching work

PROGRAMME STRUCTURE

In designing the programme, I was led by the good practice established in Corpus's Bridging Programme, which takes the form of three in-person weeks, but keen also to capitalise on what we have learned about the affordances of remote teaching and learning over the past years in order to make some savings that would enable us to offer the programme to more students. I also suspected that there might be confidence and academic benefits to establishing the programme before introducing the potential stresses of in-person socialisation.

I settled on a pilot structure of three weeks, alternating online–in person–online. This allowed for a substantial quantity of very small group subject supervision – 18 hours in total per student – plus group and social activities. I was keen to get scholar, mentor and supervisor feedback.

Asked about the length of the programme, two thirds of scholars felt it was “about right” and the other third suggested “too long”. Mentors were likewise split approximately 50:50 between

“about right” and “too long”. In contrast, supervisors unanimously expressed the view that it was about right.

Lots of ideas emerged in scholars’ and mentors’ comments about the ordering of in-person and online weeks.

- Those who suggested the programme was too long expressed concerns about the length of time left after the programme started before coming up for term, wondering whether they had enough time to pack.
- Others felt that they had lost time they might otherwise have spent reading their pre-course reading lists and worried that they might therefore be behind.
- Several suggested that they had enjoyed the in-person week so much they would have put that at the end as something to look forward to – but acknowledged that meaningful social opportunities are harder to offer online.
- One noted: “I think that having a week online, and then a week in person just before we actually began, might have worked better. I found myself comfortable with the environment, and ready for term, only to go back home for 2 weeks and lose some of that motivation and confidence.”
- Some suggested they would have liked to begin earlier in the summer in order to allow more time between finishing Pegasus and coming up for Term. This isn’t practical, unfortunately, because places can’t be confirmed until after results day and the summer pools.

Supervisors tended to express the view that as long as Raven access is in place for the online weeks, “very little is lost”, though several said that all three weeks in person would be more enjoyable. Unlike any scholars or mentors, one or two supervisors suggested that having the *first* week in person might be preferable, in order to establish relationships.

My sense is that a blended three weeks is probably about right, giving students a chance to really get to grips with new and challenging academic material, and allowing supervisors the chance to spread out deadlines – two weeks would limit things considerably. One further consideration, however, is that at least one scholar’s home internet was not strong enough to sustain video-conferencing, which limited their ability to participate fully in supervisions and group activities during online weeks. There are grounds to experiment further, therefore – we might try placing the in-person week last, and/or using the Cambridge Term format of weeks beginning on a Thursday to shift the balance.

Summing up

I invited scholars to suggest how they would describe the programme to a student invited to participate next year. The following comments are representative of a unanimously enthusiastic and grateful response:

- The best and most enjoyable way to truly get to know Cambridge and Robinson beyond its academic reputation and in doing so squash your imposter syndrome whilst meeting some amazing people!
- A really rewarding and reassuring experience! Everyone is so lovely, and behind the Cambridge’s big reputation, intimidatingly beautiful buildings and mass of intelligence, there are some amazingly kind human beings.

- At first, I was slightly apprehensive that my summer holiday was being cut short, but actually it made it better, not only socially as I've met people who I think I'll be friends with for my time at Cambridge and hopefully after I leave, but also because it has massively reduced the pressure of starting.
- It is ... nice to know that I don't have to keep negative feelings to myself, there are always people around to help. It makes Cambridge a university that truly cares for the wellbeing of its students.
- I think the best thing about Pegasus was actually addressing how monumental it is, that individuals from our backgrounds, are in an institution like Cambridge. Rather than having to hide my background to 'fit in' ... Pegasus embraced widening participation and celebrated it. I'm incredibly, incredibly grateful to have been on the course, and know that I would have had a highly self-doubtful month of actually earning my place otherwise. Thank you for making us all feel part of the Robinson jigsaw puzzle, rather than a rogue piece that doesn't belong. I hope next year I can get stuck into helping out at Pegasus, and any other outreach programme that might help students in a similar position to me.

I am satisfied that these evaluations point to an extremely successful pilot of our Robinson College Pegasus Scholars bridging programme. The college should be very proud of what we have achieved this year, and confident that Pegasus provides a solid foundation for students from disadvantaged backgrounds or with disrupted educational journeys.

Some colleagues have expressed anxiety about the potential for the Pegasus programme to contribute to or amplify a sense of stigma surrounding social background. In my view, the final bullet point in the list immediately above answers this point. Incoming freshers are acutely aware of the differences between their own backgrounds and those of other students. Acknowledging and celebrating these differences is part of the way that we will continue to make Robinson an open and inclusive college, appealing to applicants from all backgrounds.

Further data will be gathered later in the year, as the cohort of Pegasus Scholars are better able to reflect on what the programme contributed to their experience of their first year. I will also monitor academic performance data for this cohort.

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October 2022