

# OxFizz Access Programme 2020 Impact Report



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2020 has been challenging for us all!

The Oxbridge application process is complex and competitive at the best of times. We know the young people with whom we work are disadvantaged by the application process and the limited support available to them. They are competing against peers who have significant resources invested in supporting their individual applications. With the additional challenges emerging from COVID-19, there is a real risk the gap in admissions to Oxbridge will grow!

In our report we share how we have supported our young people in 2020 and how we have adapted our provision in response to COVID-19. We share the feedback from our young people on the differences they feel our Access programme has made.

We have expanded our support this year by a further 60% on 2019. We have been able to strengthen the contact time provided to our young people by an average of 67%. Excitingly, 79% of the young people on our core programme have been invited to interview in 2020. The OxFizz team have worked tirelessly to make this happen.

None of this would be possible without the work of two key stakeholders: our volunteer community and our Access partners.

Our 150-strong Oxbridge graduate volunteer community makes everything possible. As we have expanded and adapted our provision, they have risen to the challenge. Our volunteers also fundraise for us to provide the resources for our Access programme. Thank you to our volunteers for the enormous efforts they have made in support of our young people.

This year we have worked with 24 incredible Access organisations and schools. Our partners help us to identify the young people who would most benefit from our programme and support them to achieve the academic outcomes they need and to use the learning from our programme in their applications. Our partnership is a great example of organisations working together around a shared goal! Thank you for your help this year.

Our increasing success makes it even sadder that due to COVID-19 driven funding challenges, we are having to close our Access programme and will be unable to deliver in 2021. Our work this year indicates the gaps that still exist in provision for young people making applications to Oxbridge. The loss of our Access programme makes that gap even larger!

We wish our young people the best of luck as they await their results.

**Chris Gurney, Executive Director**

# HOW WE HELP

## Our Mission

We ensure that young people from the most disadvantaged backgrounds can freely access a programme of support to build the knowledge, confidence and skills to make successful applications to top universities.

### OxFizz Access Programme



#### Young people (YP) have...

Improved knowledge of what is needed for a successful application to Oxford or Cambridge	Improved knowledge of the Oxford or Cambridge application process and key aspects of it	A clear, evidence-informed plan of action to achieve a high-quality Oxford or Cambridge application	Skills and behaviours necessary for a successful application e.g. interviews	Improved knowledge of what studying at Oxford and Cambridge is like	An understanding and connection with studying Oxford or Cambridge
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Schools and Others

More students achieve A-level grades necessary for Oxford or Cambridge

More YP submit a high-quality application

More YP achieve high admissions test courses

More YP perform well at interview



More YP secure post-interview offers to study at Oxford or Cambridge



More YP secure places to study at Oxford or Cambridge



Our programme focuses on 5 main areas, helping young people:

1. Choose their university subject (February)
2. Plan their application (March)
3. Prepare for their admissions tests (July)
4. Prepare for their admissions interviews (September)
5. Practice for their admissions interviews (October-November)

70% of the young people we work with are part of our **core programme** i.e. they sign up to attend our full programme of events. However, we also offer specific event support to some partners e.g. TAP's Medicine Society.

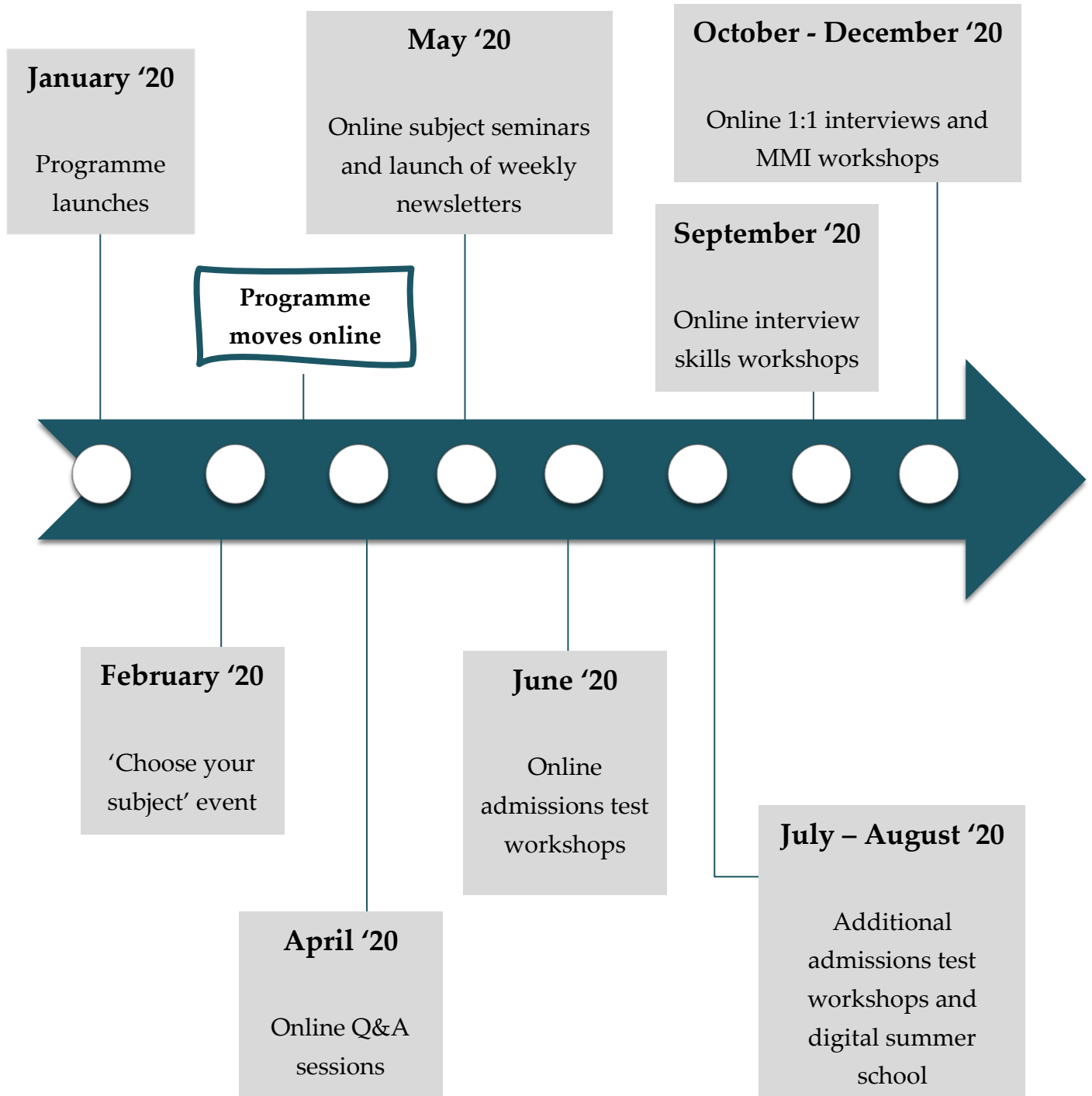


## Changes in 2020

Due to the challenges posed by COVID-19, our programme was moved online in March. We replaced our 'Plan Your Application' event with Q&A sessions and subject-specific skill development sessions (April and May).

Alongside our other touchpoints, we produced weekly newsletters sharing guidance and resources around different stages of the applications process (April – June) and increased the number of bursary places available on our annual Summer School (July and August).

# PROGRAMME TIMELINE



# 2020 IN NUMBERS

# 4630

hours of support delivered

# 454

young people accessed our support

# 24 PARTNERS

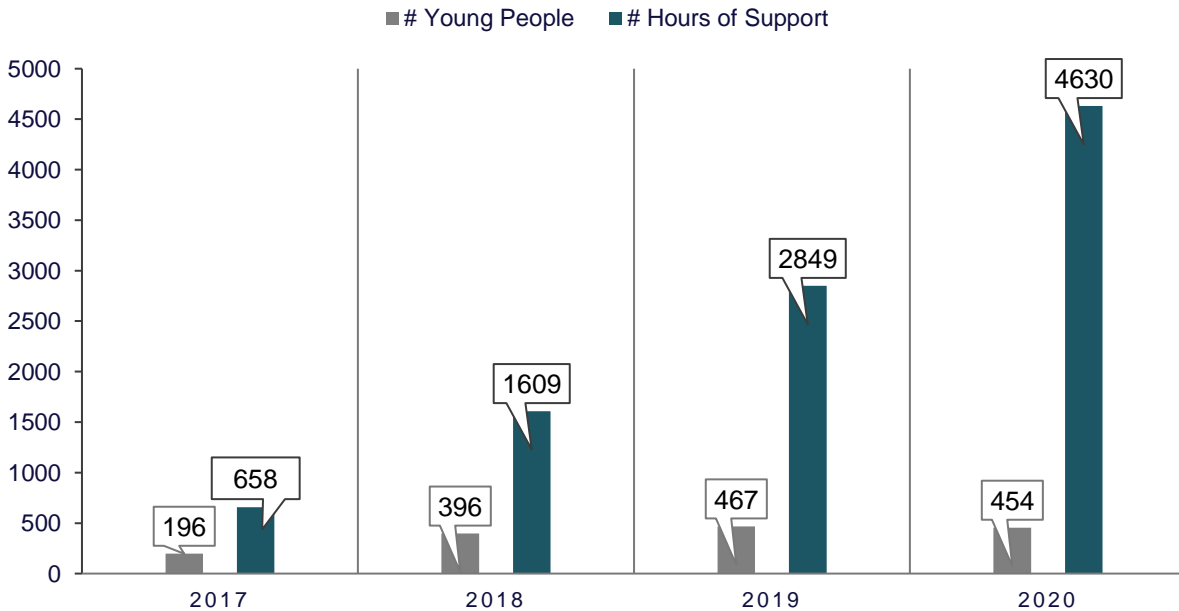
# 79%

invited to interview, from our core programme

# 33

different subjects

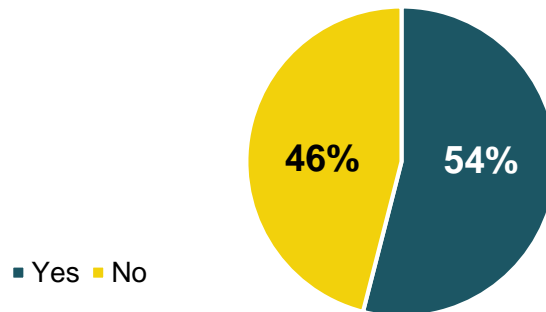
## Access Programme Support 2017 - 2020



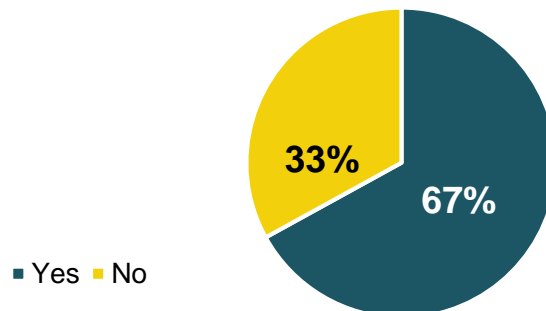
OxFizz is committed to working with young people who are least likely to be represented at top universities in the UK. We aim to support young people on free school meals, those in care or care leavers, those who are the first generation to apply to university, or those in an area of low access to higher education.



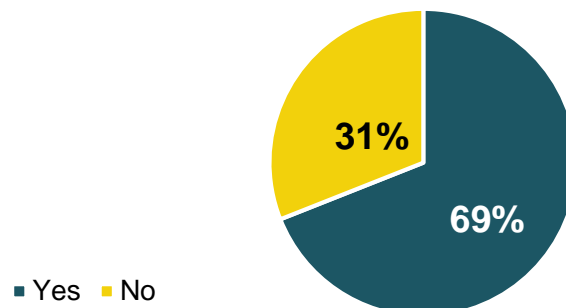
### Young People on FSM



### First Generation



### Young People Living in Most Deprived 30%





OxFizz's 'Choose Your Subject' event is designed to introduce young people to the range of subjects on offer at Oxford and Cambridge, help them decide what course they would like to study, and get them excited about the possibilities top universities have to offer.

Research on subject choice has identified that young BAME people are said to apply disproportionately for the 3 most oversubscribed subjects; Medicine, Law, and Business ([Boliver, 2016](#)). This trend is evident in our 2020 cohort, of which 85% identify as BAME; 36% of the young people on our core programme were applying to study Medicine (20%), Law (8%), or Economics (8%) at Oxbridge.

This is consistent with the idea that ethnic minority students and their families encourage the pursuit of subjects that lead directly to traditional professional occupations or that develop the skills needed to be successfully self-employed. This can result in young people applying for subjects they have little passion or enthusiasm for, whilst also creating more competition for places.

As well as giving a taste of how their A-Level subjects might be developed at university, our volunteers also introduce young people to less well-known subjects they may not have encountered before, some of which are unique to Oxford and Cambridge; such as Land Economy and PPL.

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## 32%

of attendees said they left the event considering applying for a subject they were not considering before the event - suggesting that our volunteers helped young people **better connect with their motivations, goals, and passions**.

## 20%

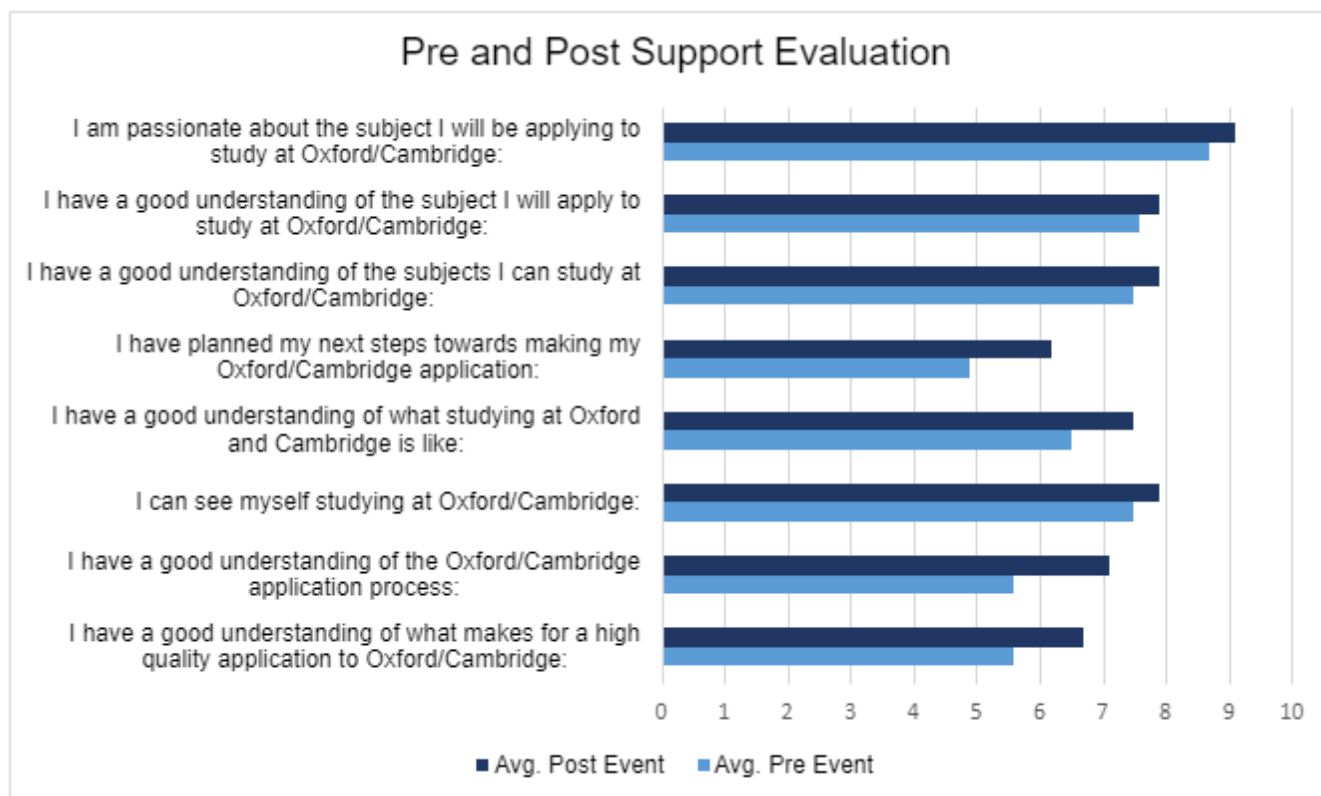
of the young people on our core programme changed their subject choice between March and June e.g. 2 from Law to Land Economy and 2 from Medicine to Natural Sciences.

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We asked young people key questions before and after each of our core events to help better understand the contribution our work is making to supporting them to secure places at Oxford and Cambridge, as well as to help us improve the quality of what we are providing. These questions were developed in partnership with The Access Project (TAP).

5 of these questions were the same from event to event (statements 4-8 below). We also include event-specific statements (statements 1-3 below). Event by event changes in feedback can be found on page 18.

Our data shows that young people felt they had a **better understanding** of studying at, and applying to, Oxford and Cambridge after our first event. There was a particular increase in understanding the application process (**increase of 27%**) and planning next steps towards making an application (**increase of 27%**).



We are seeing an increased reliance on admissions tests across all colleges and faculties at Oxbridge. With the scaling back of AS levels, Oxbridge have increasingly looked to admissions tests results for evidence of a candidate's skills and academic potential.

We also know that many strong applicants are falling at this hurdle, and that young people from disadvantaged backgrounds often lack access to the resources and support of professionals who have expert knowledge of the admissions test process. Our online admissions test workshops are designed to address these areas - building test knowledge and skills and confidence amongst our young people.

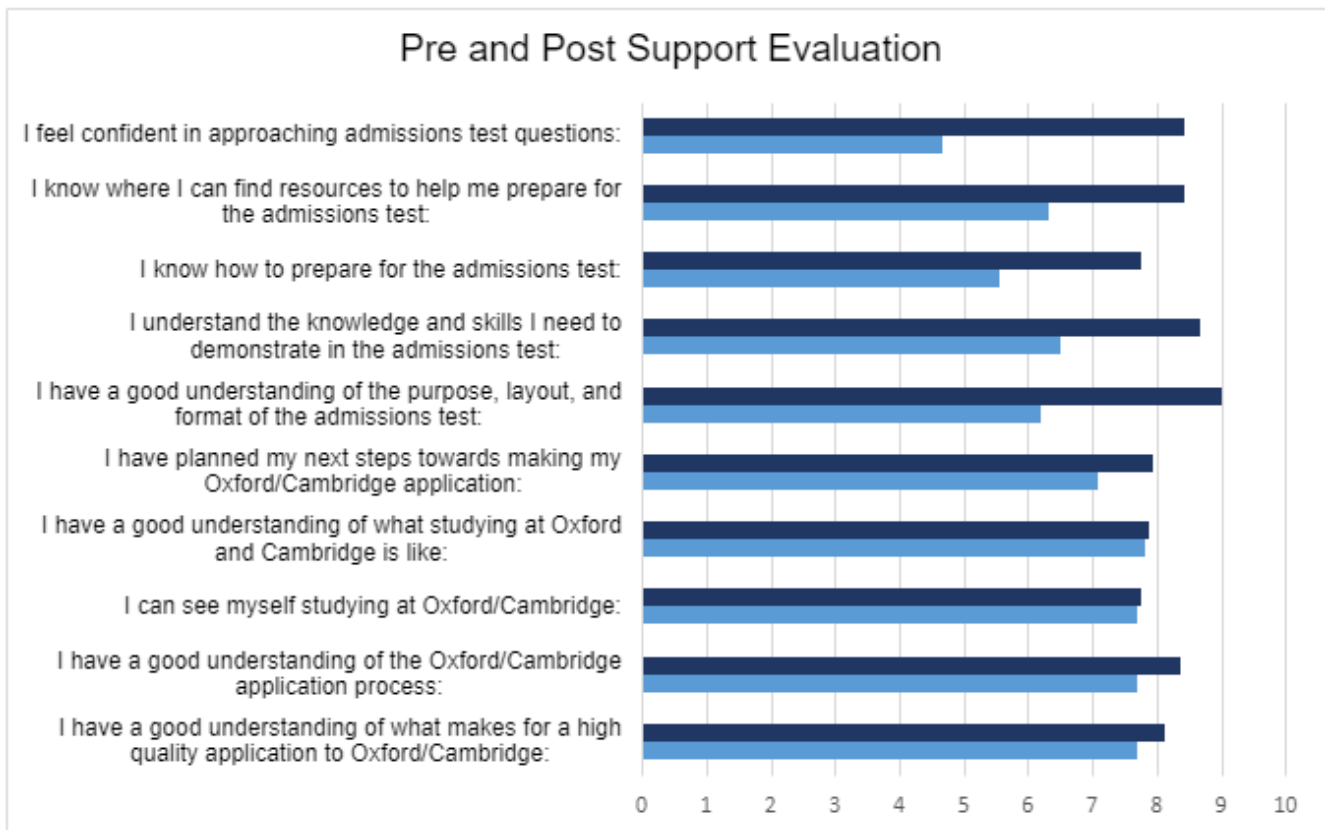
**80%**

increase in young  
people's confidence  
approaching admissions  
test questions



**“I really like how everyone spoke and explained how they were thinking. It felt like a study group and it was really nice to see how people came to the same answer with different mindsets.” – 2020 Young Person**

Our 2020 Admissions Test workshops was our most successful event to date, with **100%** of attendees agreeing that the workshops were **enjoyable** and **helpful**. There were also significant improvements reported around confidence in approaching admissions test questions (**increase of 80%**), understanding of test format and layout (**increase of 45%**), and knowledge of how to prepare for tests (**increase of 39%**).



The Oxbridge International Summer School (OISS) was founded in 2011, providing 2-week academic courses in Oxford for 15-18-year-olds from around the world.

As a result of COVID-19, we moved our programme online. Running our seminars, tutorials, and enrichment sessions via Zoom, and using the social network Goodwall to connect young people with their tutors and their peers.

In recent years we have offered 5 scholarships to exceptional young people on our access programme. However, going digital increased our capacity and we were able to offer **55 scholarships** this year.

- **29** scholarships, across 7 subjects, were taken up by young people on our programme
- **767** hours of access support were delivered by our volunteer tutors and enrichment session leaders
- The average young person engaged with **26 hours** of support, with some engaging in **33 hours** of seminars and sessions!
- Our young people were particularly complimentary of the **academic rigour** of the courses and the opportunity to **engage with their subject** on a deeper level

**I had a great time and found the sessions so informative and enjoyable**

**2020 Young Person**



We know admissions interviews are an important part of applications to Oxford and Cambridge. We have seen how many able young people from disadvantaged backgrounds fall at this hurdle.

In our report, [\*Research in the barriers that disadvantaged young people face when applying to Oxbridge\*](#), we underline young people's concerns and uncertainty around the admissions interviews.

Compared to their more advantaged peers, they have often had less practice discussing their university subject in an academic setting; are less confident and motivated when preparing for their admissions interviews, and have had less access to high-quality resources or feedback to help them prepare for the interview process.

We want to level the playing field - equipping young people with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to achieve their potential in their admissions interviews. Our workshops introduce the format and function of the interview, and provide young people with the opportunity to practice and work through a range of different questions – in pairs and/or as a group.

We know the candidates who do best at interview are the ones who practice regularly; receiving feedback and guidance on how they can continue improving.

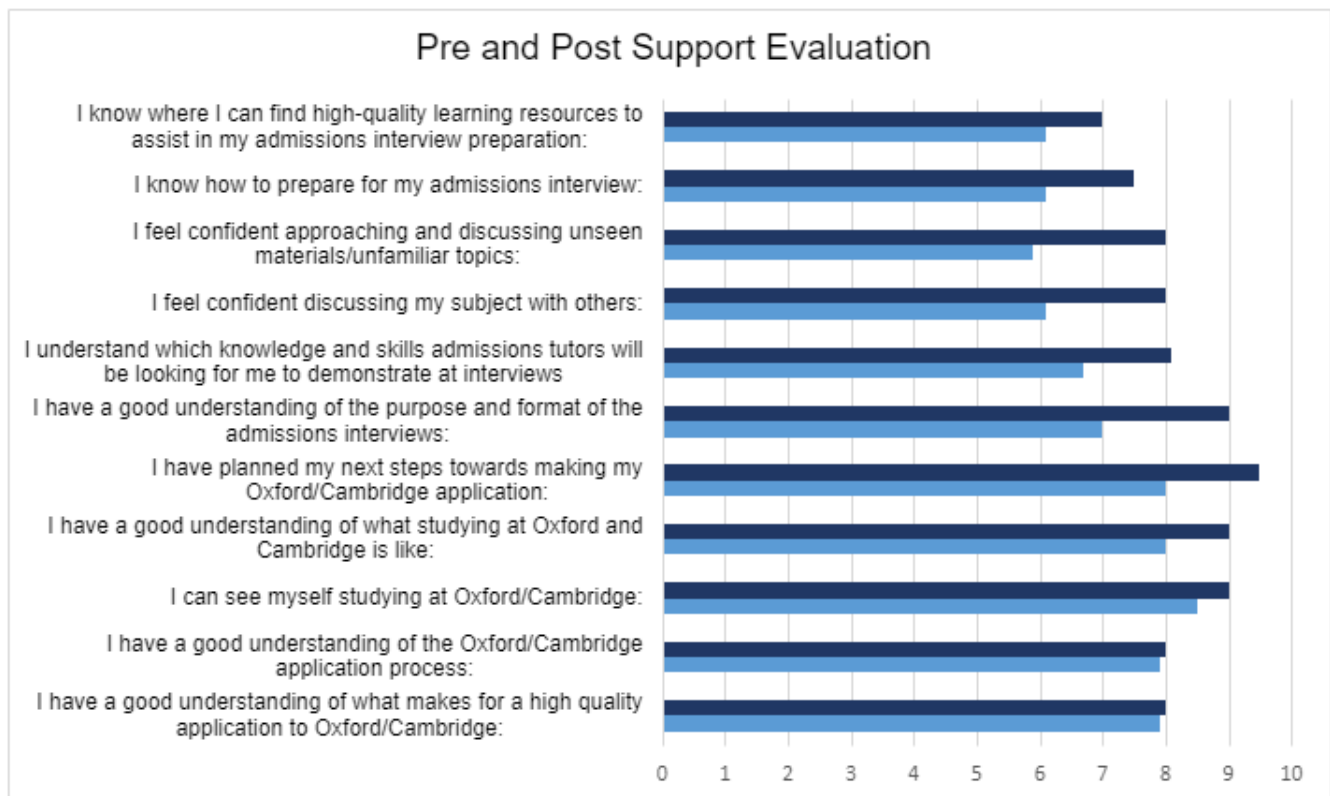
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***“I loved the discussion that we had and the fact that it wasn't on a topic that I have experience talking about, yet I was able to use my own knowledge to form opinions and also listen in on what others had to say. It was also very helpful how it was broken down into each phase of the interview and the different objectives.” – 2020 Young Person***

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# INTERVIEW SKILLS WORKSHOPS

We were delighted to see that young people felt significantly more **knowledgeable**, **confident**, and **prepared** for their university application after our workshops. We saw improvements on all the self-report measures we set, with the most significant increases around confidence in approaching and discussing unseen materials and/or unfamiliar topics (**increase of 36%**) and confidence in discussing one's subject (**increase of 31%**).



Building on what they have learnt in the interview skills workshops, young people are matched with a graduate in their subject for a 1:1 practice interview. Each young person received at least 1 interview from our expert volunteers, with 50% receiving 2 interviews and 16% receiving 3+ interviews.

Most practice interviews held (91%) were subject interviews – based on previously unseen material and/or practical problems. The rest were personal statement interviews or a mixture of personal statement and subject interviews.

**I have grown to be more confident and have picked up a lot of key skills.**

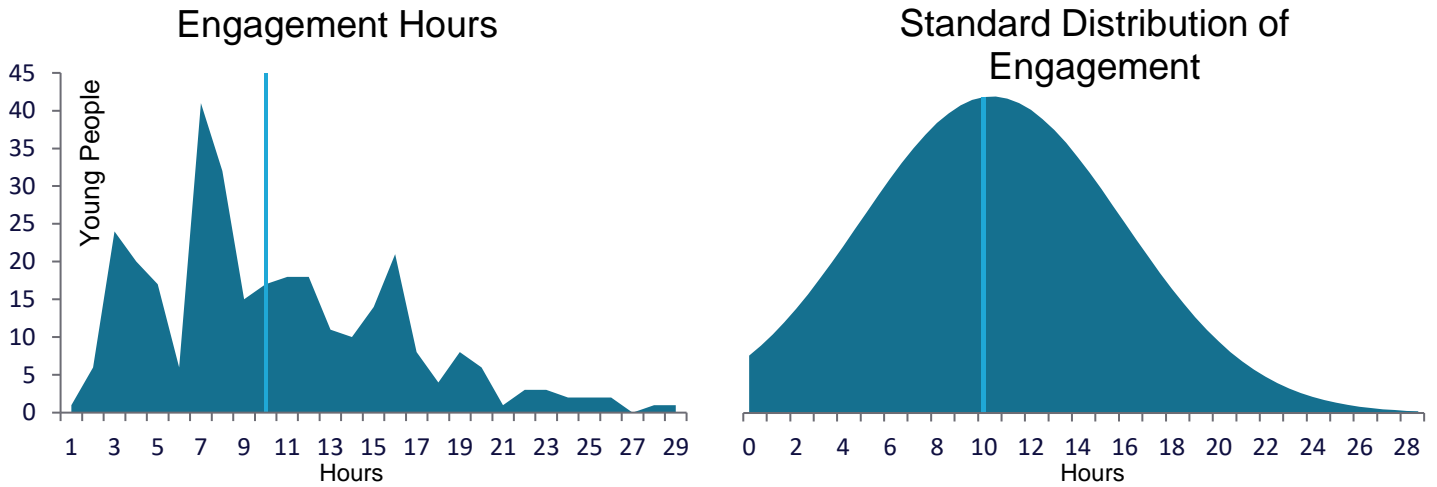
2020 Young Person



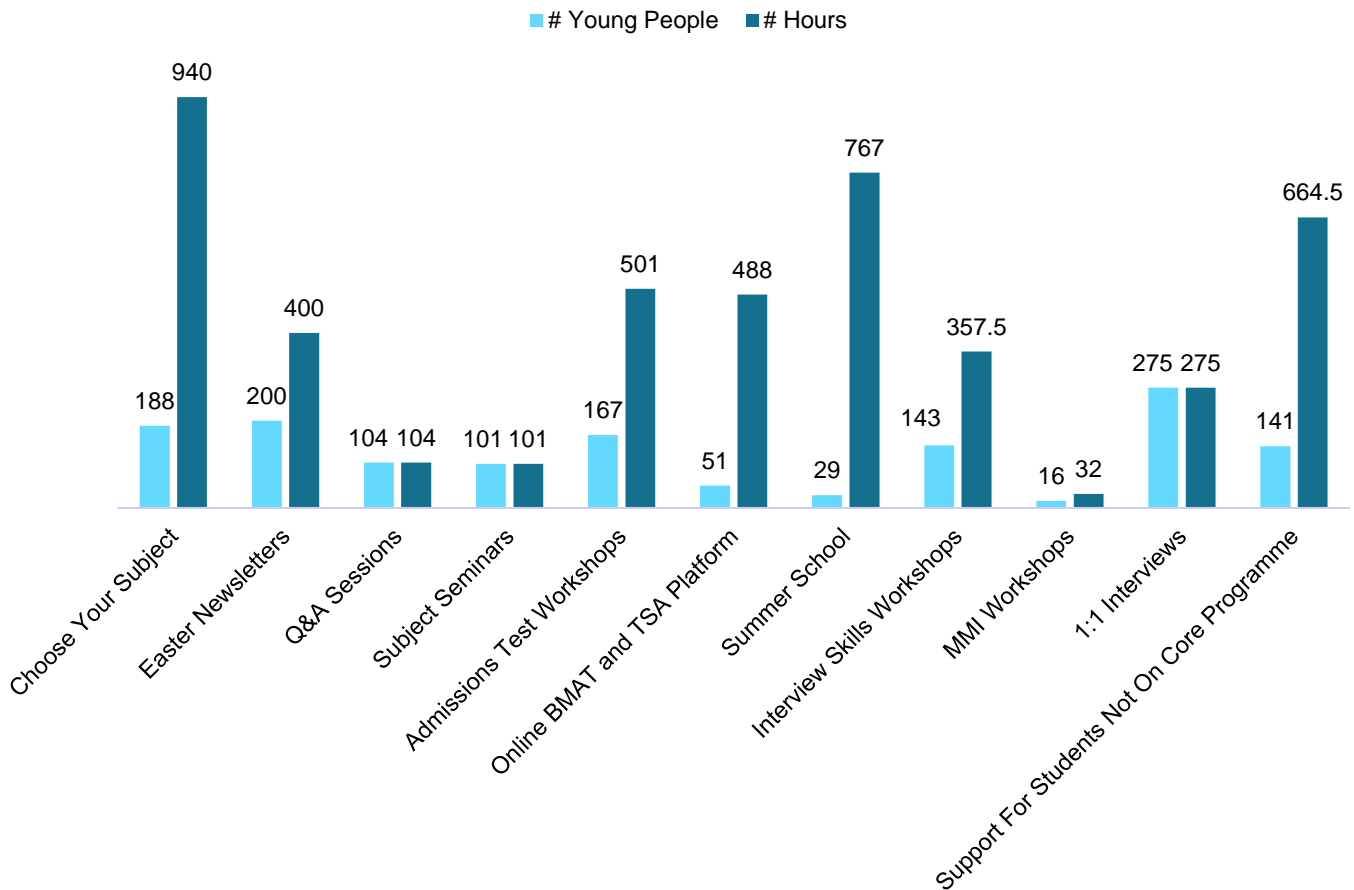
As part of our work with The Access Project's Medicine Society, we ran 6 online Mini Medicine Interview workshops (MMIs) in November for 48 of our young people. These were designed and run by our intern, Benjamin Wood.

The MMIs were the hardest of our touchpoints to convert to digital delivery, requiring a complete rewriting of our resources and double the number of volunteers to run! We would like to thank Benjamin and our volunteers for their assistance and investment in this event.





## Breakdown of Support Delivered in 2020



# PROGRAMME ENGAGEMENT

Engagement was more consistent in 2020 with over 80% of young people on our core programme taking part in at least 6 hours of support - this is not including our digital summer school, which is excluded, as it could not be offered to all young people on our programme.

The **average young person accessed over 10 hours of support**. This is a 4 hour (67%) increase on the average support per young person in 2019.

22% of the young people on our core programme accessed over 15 hours of support, 10% accessed over 20 hours. The most hours of engagement were 29.5!

For those who also attended the summer school the total hours of engagement were higher, ranging from 33 to 55.5 hours!

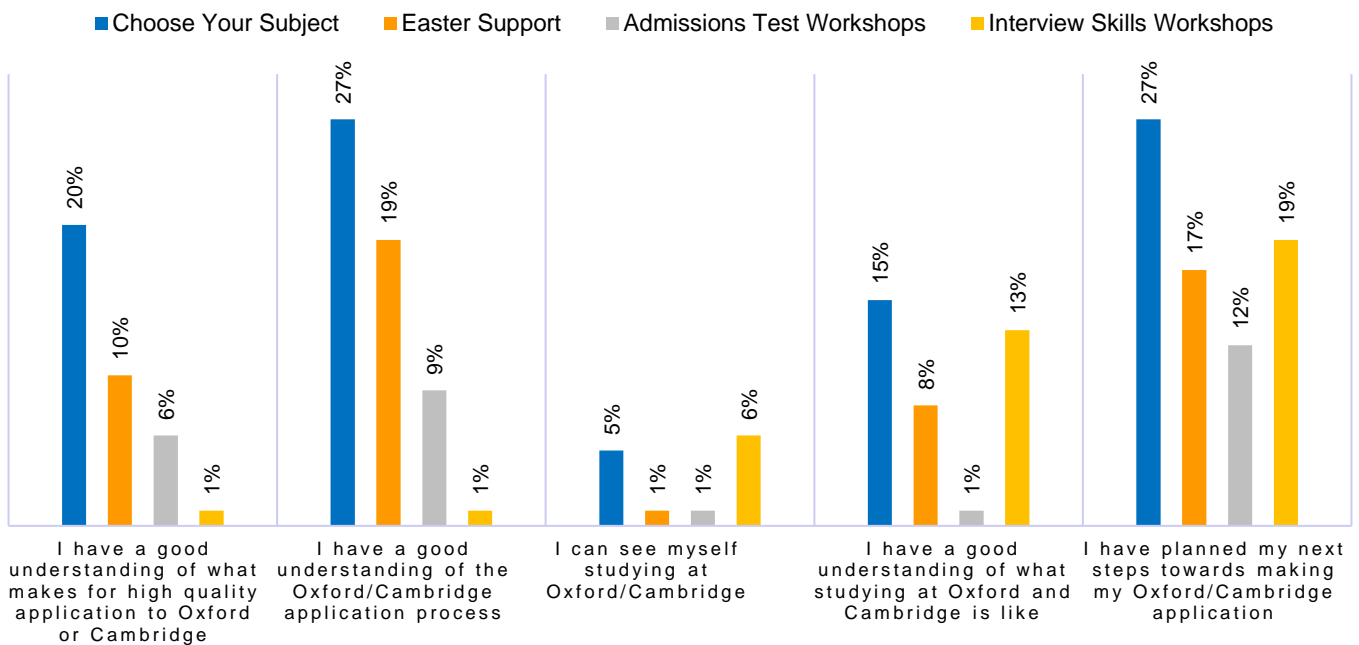
**62%** of the young people who joined our programme in January 2020 remained on our programme and **applied to study at Oxford or Cambridge**.

Despite the ongoing challenges of COVID-19 and digital delivery, we are pleased that with the support of our partners and community of Oxbridge graduate volunteers it has been possible to significantly expand on our programme this year. Both in terms of the hours we have delivered and in terms of the depth of support.

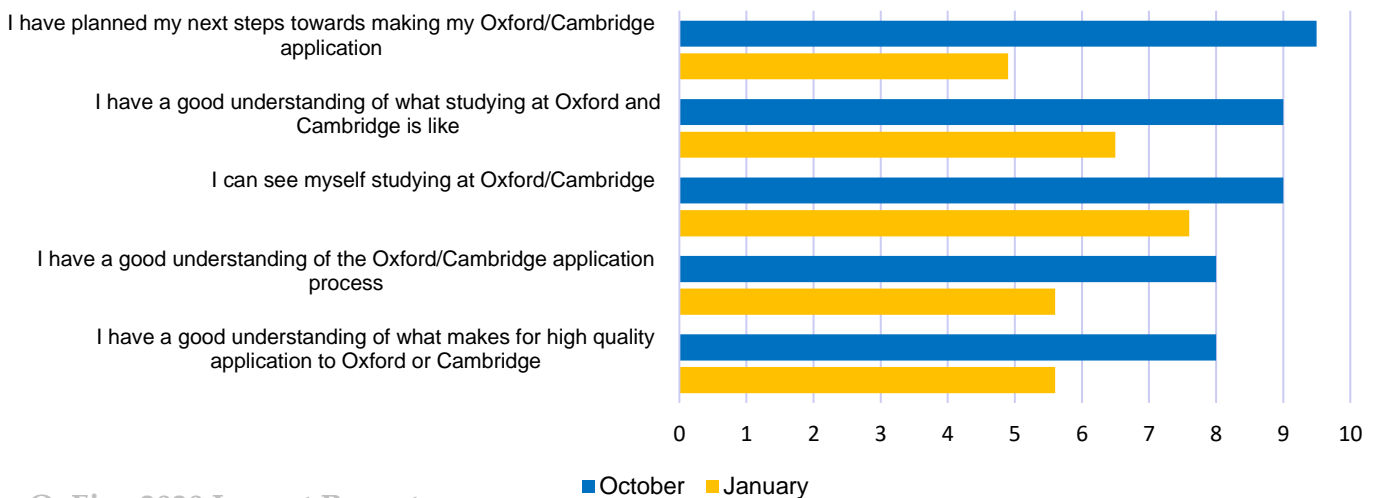


Across our events we saw **improvements in all 5 areas**. Encouragingly, young people’s understanding of the application process and what makes a strong application levelled out by the Summer, while their understanding of what studying at Oxbridge might be like and application planning improved consistently over the course of the programme.

Event By Event Changes in Feedback (%) by Question



Changes in Feedback (out of 10): January v October



We are grateful for the feedback we have received from the young people with whom we have worked and from our volunteers, and the reports produced by our interns this year. Collectively they have provided us with rich insights that we believe will be of use to our partners, and we hope they may inform the design of future programmes of support.

The key insights emerging from our work in 2020 are that:

1. Online delivery has provided us with more flexibility around dates and timings. This has resulted in more consistent engagement as we have been able to offer alternative sessions to young people with part-time employment or care responsibilities;
2. Additional touchpoints and contact between our key events, such as our newsletters and subject seminars, has also had a positive impact on engagement. 45% of the young people who joined our programme in January attended at least 5 of our events, 63% attended at least four, and 88% attended at least three. This suggests that more sustained levels of contact with young people has a positive impact on participation and aspiration;
3. Volunteer feedback on how our young people performed at interview continues to identify a clear gap in access to, and support around, admissions knowledge, resources, and training. In his [report](#), Benjamin Wood highlighted the key areas to be targeted as:
  - a. confidence and ability to think out loud;
  - b. confidence and ability to pause and better structure responses when answering questions/prompts;

# KEY TAKEAWAYS

- c. confidence and ability to apply A-level knowledge to unseen material/problem sets
- d. better access and signposting of super-curricular materials and resources

Volunteer feedback has also highlighted key-skills that young people are expected to demonstrate at interview but struggle to do so due to lack of practice and support, namely graph-sketching, problem solving, and a systematic approach to working through unseen materials (especially in language-based subjects such as English, MML, Oriental Studies etc.);

4. Student feedback identified a clear demand for further opportunities to practice and develop key skills in crucial areas around admissions tests and interviews. The design of future programmes of support should build in more structured opportunities;
5. Admissions Tests remains an area of concern for young people and for our partners who support them. Feedback has highlighted gaps in resources and expertise, especially around the tests required for less popular subjects, such as the OLAT and the Architecture at-interview assessment. This points to the necessity of a better pooling of existing resources and/or adequate resourcing of existing programme of support to support with all areas of testing. Collaboration and communication between organisations working with young people is needed now more than ever.

# THANK YOU

We want to extend a massive thank you to our partner organisations and volunteers who have made this work possible.

Ark

Campus

Jacari

Mossbourne Academy

Mulberry School for Girls

Oxford First-Gen

Paddington Academy

Professional Internships for PHD Students (PIPS)

Reach Academy

Target Oxbridge

The Access Project

The Crankstart Internship Programme

The Elephant Group

The Oxford Islamic Society

Villiers Park

Woodhouse College

Our Interns:

Benjamin Wood (PIPS intern)

Charlie Hailes (Crankstart intern)

Dorcas Shodeinde (Crankstart intern)

Zella Baig (Crankstart intern)