



Magdalene College Outreach Events 2024-5: Travel Grant Evaluation Report for Isaac Newton Trust, April 2025

Project Overview

The project sought to change the pattern of in-person events in Cambridge being de facto restricted to students residing within a short or inexpensive travel distance from the city, or schools which can afford expensive coach costs. UCAS data consistently shows that students from Merseyside and Wales are more likely to apply to universities close to home, such as Liverpool, Edge Hill, Cardiff, and Bangor¹. Researchers and practitioners have expressed concerns about a potential two-tier system of those who can afford to move away from home for university, and those compelled to stay local due to financial restraints.² Some pupils make a conscious choice to remain in their home region³, but such agency requires them to have weighed up the decision against alternative options which they may or may not be aware of. Visits to universities can help to develop pupils' knowledge and expectations of Higher Education beyond their immediate vicinity. Declining school budgets, however, has meant fewer opportunities are available for students to meaningfully engage with universities beyond their local area.

Between December 2024 and March 2025, Magdalene College welcomed ten schools from Merseyside over the course of five visit days. None of the ten schools had visited Cambridge for at least five years. We were able to develop relationships with two Multi-Academy Trusts, The Great Schools Trust and The Northern Schools Trust, to host two multi-school visits days for the first time. The visits were facilitated due to a generous grant from the Isaac Newton Trust to pay for schools' travel to and from Cambridge.

The grant also funded travel expenses for pupils attending the Magdalene Residential in April 2025. Travel from Merseyside and the Isle of Man is complex and expensive, and the grant enabled us to pre-purchase train tickets for many students to simplify the journey and minimise upfront costs.

The project enabled a total of 290 pupils from 30 schools to visit Cambridge.

¹ Wilgoss, C., 'Unpacking Welsh Regional Migration', UCAS (2023). Available at: <https://www.ucas.com/connect/blogs/unpacking-welsh-regional-migration-deep-dive-higher-education-progression-across-welsh-parliamentary>

² Holdsworth, C., 'Going away to uni': mobility, modernity, and independence of English higher education students.' *Environment and Planning A* 41 (2009).

³ Keating, A., Benckekroun, R., Cameron, C., and Whewall, S., 'Movers, returners and stayers: the role of place in shaping the (im)mobility aspirations of young people in coastal towns.' *Journal of Youth Studies* 27(9) (2024).



Targeting

For the day visits, schools were targeted based on information gathered from the CAO Targeting Dataset, as well as HEAT records of school engagement with Cambridge. The target schools all had high proportions of pupils eligible for Free School Meals, and low historic progression to Oxford or Cambridge. When arranging visits, we requested that trip leaders gave priority for places to those pupils who meet one or more of the University's Widening Participation criteria, including care experience, Free School Meals eligibility, and under-represented ethnic groups. We also requested that selected pupils have the potential to achieve 5 or more grades 9-7 (A*-A) at GCSE or >A*AA at A Level.

The schools who visited were:

- The Sutton Academy, St Helens
- King's Leadership Academy, Liverpool
- King's Leadership Academy, Hawthornes
- King's Leadership Academy, Warrington
- King's Leadership Academy, Bolton
- Bellerive FCJ, Liverpool
- St Edmund Arrowsmith Catholic Academy, Prescot
- North Liverpool Academy, Liverpool
- Liverpool Life Sciences, Liverpool
- The Studio, Liverpool

For the residential, pupils were selected based on the University's Widening Participation criteria, including care experience, Free School Meals eligibility, and under-represented ethnic groups. We also assessed GCSE performance, A Level predictions, and alignment between A Level subjects studied and the pupil's desired undergraduate course.

Evaluation

Type 2 evaluations were conducted for both programmes. Attendees completed pre- and post-event surveys using questions adapted from the TASO Access and Success Questionnaire (ASQ). For the residential, individual-pupil-level data was collected and uploaded to HEAT for future tracking.

Responses to the TASO ASQ questions show that the programmes have a positive impact on:

- Higher Education expectations (the extent to which individuals expect to go to competitive HE).
- Knowledge of Higher Education (knowledge and understanding about applying to and studying at a university like Cambridge).
- Sense of belonging (ideas around fitting in academically and socially at a university like Cambridge).



Day Visits

Statement	'Strongly agree' or 'agree' – pre-visit	'Strongly agree' or 'agree' – post-visit
I understand the benefits of going to university.	78%	90%
I know what studying at university would be like.	24%	75%
I know how studying at university is different from studying in school.	49%	83%
I understand the range of courses on offer at universities.	46%	74%
University is for people like me.	59%	70%
I would fit in well academically with others at university.	53%	67%
I would fit in well socially with others at university.	44%	59%
I understand how the UCAS application process works (Y12 only).	10%	70%
I am clear on the qualifications and grades I would need to go to a university like Cambridge (Y12 only).	81%	91%

Feedback quotes:

"I really enjoyed visiting the different Colleges and their libraries – this shows how much the Colleges care about their students."

"I enjoyed the opportunity to meet the Student Ambassadors and ask questions."

"It was amazing to see the university in person!"

Residential

Statement	'Strongly agree' or 'agree' - pre-residential	'Strongly agree' or 'agree' – post-residential
I am confident that I can get the exam results required to progress to a university like Cambridge.	71%	82%
I have the academic ability to do well at a university like Cambridge.	78%	87%
I could manage with the level of study required at university.	85%	93%
I know what studying at a university like Cambridge would be like.	29%	98%
I know how studying at university is different from studying in school or college.	61%	98%
I plan to apply to a competitive university like Cambridge.	82%	88%
I understand how the UCAS application process works.	37%	89%
I am clear on which university course or subject I want to apply for.	80%	98%
I know the qualifications and grades I will need to progress to my chosen university course.	90%	98%



Feedback quotes:

"I felt immersed in the Cambridge culture and student life. I loved touring the College and getting a taste of lectures, whilst also learning study skills I can use in my current revision."

"Having travel buddies really helped make the journey to Cambridge less stressful."

"Thank you so much for accepting my application to this residential! I've learnt so much and really enjoyed myself. I'm seriously considering applying for this university and I'm extremely grateful for the insight you've given me, I will definitely recommend it at my school for students in the younger years as I've really enjoyed every minute. Thank you so much for organising this!"

Finances

The Isaac Newton Trust awarded Magdalene College a generous grant of £18,000 to support travel costs associated with our Widening Participation events between 28 May 2024 and 30 April 2025.

The majority of the funding was spent on the two major projects: school group day visits to Cambridge; and the Magdalene Residential. A small amount of funding was allocated to facilitating target schools to attend regional outreach events, namely the Magdalene College Liverpool Event⁴ and the Cambridge North West Conference⁵. While schools are typically asked to fund their own transport to these events, two of our Link Schools contacted us to explain that, due to financial pressures, their students would be unable to attend without a contribution to travel costs.

The project costs amounted to £15,228.35 leaving £2,771.65 unspent and to be returned to the Trust.

Event Travel	Item	Cost
School group day visits to Cambridge	Coach hire	£7,269.50
Magdalene Residential	Pre-purchased train tickets (Merseyside)	£3,503.94
	Mileage reimbursements (Merseyside)	£2,211.48
	Flights and airport transfers (Isle of Man)	£1,723.43
Magdalene Liverpool Event – Link Area school	Minibus hire	£300.00
Cambridge North West Conference – Link Area school	Minibus hire	£220.00
	TOTAL	£15,228.35

⁴ <https://www.magd.cam.ac.uk/news/hundreds-attend-liverpool-outreach-event>

⁵ https://www.pem.cam.ac.uk/sites/default/files/draft_2025_university_of_cambridge_north-west_student_conference_timetable_0_0.pdf



Successes

Day Visits

The programme enabled nine schools to visit Cambridge for the first time in over five years. By offering to fund coach travel, Magdalene College developed stronger relationships with Link Area schools which have historically engaged infrequently with our outreach programmes.

Two visit days were attended by pupils from multiple schools with a Multi-Academy Trust. Working with MATs allows us to maximise the number of schools engaged on a single visit, and ensure pupils are selected based on attainment and Widening Participation criteria. We were able to engage with King's Leadership Academy, Liverpool, for the first time – a school in which 86% of pupils reside in POLAR Q1/2, and 68% have been eligible for Free School Meals during secondary school. The visit was also able to support their affiliated academies in Hawthornes, Warrington, and Bolton. With more schools currently joining various MATs across Merseyside, we hope to continue to host multi-school visits in the future.

Pre- and post- evaluation surveys were conducted immediately upon arrival and before departure, meaning response rates were high.

Residential

We made the decision to pre-purchase train tickets for attendees from Merseyside, to avoid pupils having to pay the £100+ upfront cost. We found that engaging pupils in communications about travel plans prior to the residential provided an opportunity for any questions or concerns to be addressed ahead of time and reduced the likelihood of late dropouts. We also offered attendees the opportunity to be assigned a 'travel buddy' based on their intended departure station. The initiative seemed immediately popular and contributed to easing pupils and parents' anxieties about the journeys to and from Cambridge.

For pupils attending from the Isle of Man, travel is additionally complicated. Many parents are understandably unwilling to allow their children to fly to London unaccompanied. We were grateful to the Sixth Form team at Ballakermeen High School, who generously gave up part of their Easter holidays to accompany the Manx cohort to Cambridge. We would highly recommend this arrangement to any other Colleges aiming to engage with distant Link Areas.



Improvements

Day Visits

Whilst the feedback from pupils and teachers was overwhelmingly positive, we are aware of the long travel time and limited opportunity to explore Cambridge within just one day. In future, we hope to offer two-day visits with overnight accommodation in Cambridge and will apply to the Isaac Newton Trust WPIF to fund this development of the existing project.

To further maximise the opportunity for attendees to explore Cambridge during their visit, we will explore the possibility of the Schools Liaison Officer visiting the school prior to the visit to deliver Information, Advice, and Guidance (IAG) and help pupils to prepare for the visit.

In future, we will initiate conversations with target schools as early as possible to increase the likelihood of organising a trip. Similarly, whilst multi-school visits are helpful to maximise the number of schools engaged, we would be more open to arranging single-school visits for target schools to reduce potential complications in planning.

Residential

We will continue to make minor amendments to the residential programme based on attendee feedback. The travel aspect appeared very successful.



Appendix 1: Sample Day Visit Timetable

Bellerive FCJ, 5th February 2025

07:00	Coach departs Bellerive FCJ	
11:30	Arrive at Magdalene College Cripps Court 1-3 Chesterton Road, Cambridge, CB4 3AD	
11:30-12:00	Welcome talk: Introduction to Higher Education and the University of Cambridge <i>Cripps Room 3</i>	
12:00-12:30	Lunch <i>East Room</i>	
12:30-13:30	Years 10: Study Skills, Critical Thinking, and Metacognition <i>Cripps Room 3</i>	Year 12: Thinking Ahead to University <i>Cripps Room 4</i>
13:30-14:15	Tour of Magdalene College <i>With Student Ambassadors</i>	
14:15-14:30	Student Life Q&A <i>With Student Ambassadors</i>	
14:30-14:45	Break	
14:45-15:45	Academic Taster Session Archaeology and African History with Kiah Johnson (PhD student) <i>Cripps Room 3</i>	
15:45-16:00	Feedback and Final Questions	
16:00	Coach departs Magdalene College	



Appendix 2: Magdalene Residential timetable

Monday 7th April 2025

13:30-15:00	Arrivals Check into accommodation
15:00-15:30	Welcome Talk [Benson Hall]
15:30-16:15	Tour of Magdalene College <i>With Student Ambassadors</i>
16:15-17:15	Tour of Cambridge <i>With Student Ambassadors</i>
17:15-17:45	Free time in accommodation
17:45-18:45	Dinner [Ramsay Hall]
18:45-19:45	Punting Scudamore's
19:45-22:00	Evening activities [Cripps Gallery]



MAGDALENE COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE
Academic Office

INT Grant Ref:
24.4 xiv M39 WPIF MAY 2024

Tuesday 8th April 2025

	Arts and Humanities	Biological Sciences	Physical Sciences
08:00-08:45	Breakfast [Ramsay Hall]		
08:45-12:00	English: Introduction to Practical Criticism and Careers in the Humanities [Faculty of English] 09:30-11:30	Visit to Department of Genetics [Department of Genetics] 09:30-11:30	Engineering: Dr Rich Roebuck [Department of Engineering] 09:30-11:30
12:00-13:00	Lunch [Ramsay Hall]		
13:00-15:00	Fitzwilliam Museum 13:30-15:00	Sedgwick Museum of Earth Sciences 14:00-15:30	Physics: Dr Steve Martin [Benson Hall] 13:30-15:30
15:00-18:00	Tour of Department of Architecture 15:15-16:15	Pembroke College Tour 15:45-16:30	Chemical Engineering: Dr Zach Bond [West Cambridge Site] 15:45-17:30
	Personal Statements [Cripps 5] 16:45-17:45	Medicine: Jacob Walsh [Cripps 4] 16:45-18:00	
18:00-19:00	Dinner [Ramsay Hall]		
21:00-22:00	Evening Activities [Cripps Gallery]		



Wednesday 9th April 2025

	Arts and Humanities	Biological Sciences	Physical Sciences
08:00-08:45	Breakfast and Morning Briefing [Ramsay Hall]		
08:45-12:00	University Library: Study Skills/Critical Reading workshop 09:00-11:00	Chemistry Siobhan Johnson [Cripps 4] 09:00-10:00	Computer Science: Dr John Fawcett [Cripps 5] 09:00-10:30
	College Tour: Robinson College 11:15-11:45	Biological Sciences Spatika Jayaram [Cripps 4] 10:15-11:45	Maths: Dr Sergio Bacallado 10:30-12:00 [Cripps 5]
12:00-13:00	Lunch [Ramsay Hall]		
13:00-19:30	Philosophy of Religion: Dr Simon Ravenscroft [Cripps 4] 13:00-14:00	Murray Edwards College Tour 13:00-14:00	Lucy Cavendish College Tour 13:15-14:00
	HSPS: Prof Brendan Burchell [Cripps 4] 14:15-15:15	Personal Statements [Cripps 5] 14:15-15:15	
	Free time in Cambridge 15:30-18:30		
	Free time in College – getting ready for dinner 18:30-19:30		
19:30-20:30	‘Informal Formal’ Dinner [Dining Hall]		
21:00-22:00	Evening Activities [Cripps Gallery]		



Thursday 10th April 2025

	Arts and Humanities	Biological Sciences	Physical Sciences
08:00-08:45	Breakfast [Ramsay Hall]		
08:45-11:00	Mock Interview workshop: 09:00-10:00 [Benson Hall]	UCAT for Medicine applicants Jacob Walsh 09:00-10:00 [Cripps 4]	Admissions Assessments 09:00-10:00 Dr Sergio Bacallado [Cripps 5]
	Admissions Assessments 10:00-11:00 [Benson Hall]	Mock interview workshop Jacob Walsh 10:00-11:00 [Cripps 4]	Mock interview workshop Dr Sergio Bacallado 10:00-11:00 [Cripps 5]
11:00-11:30	Closing Remarks and Feedback [Benson Hall]		
11:30	Departures		