

Bristol Scholars Programme – raising attainment pre- and post-entry

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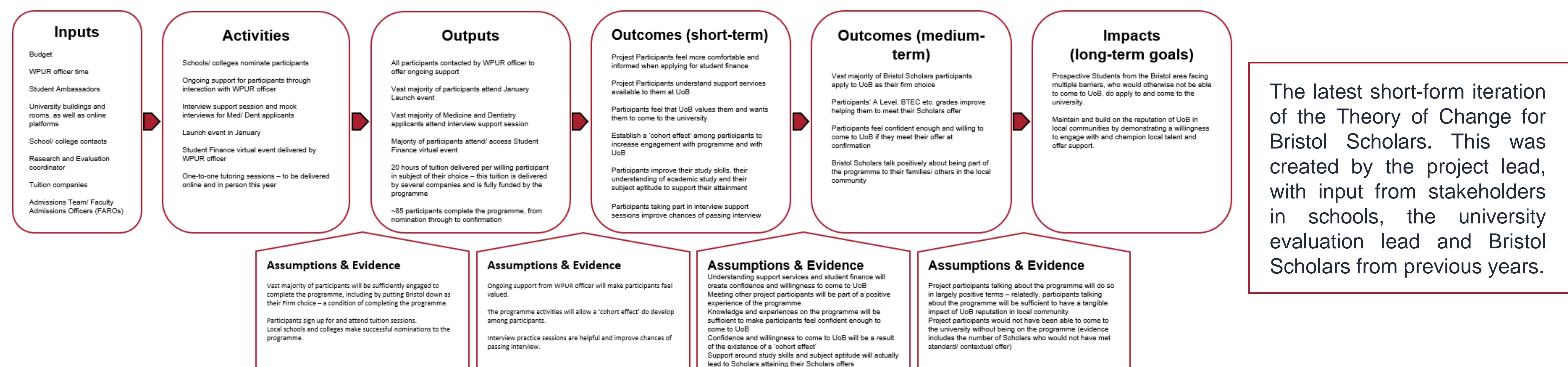
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Programme overview

Bristol Scholars is a programme run by the University of Bristol's Widening Participation and Student Inclusion teams. Running since 2016, the programme provides individualised support to students from the City of Bristol region to progress to the university. Students are selected by headteachers and heads of post-16 to allow students to be selected that might not otherwise be eligible for our programmes due to their prior attainment. Once on the programme, these students are given a tailored offer as low as four letter grades below the usual offer for the course they apply for. This is intended to reflect that a students' predicted results, or performance in year 12, might not be a true reflection of their academic ability.

Students take part in year 12 and 13, where they attend a launch event, receive 20 hours of academic tuition, interview support where necessary, advice on student finance, and ongoing support from the project lead. Upon enrolment at Bristol, they move on to the second stage of the programme, which starts with a online transition-focused course to improve academic readiness. Further events include one-to-one coaching, residential conferences and social events to improve the students' sense of belonging, keep a high retention rate and ensure that they are able to achieve results at degree level similar to those who are not on the scheme.

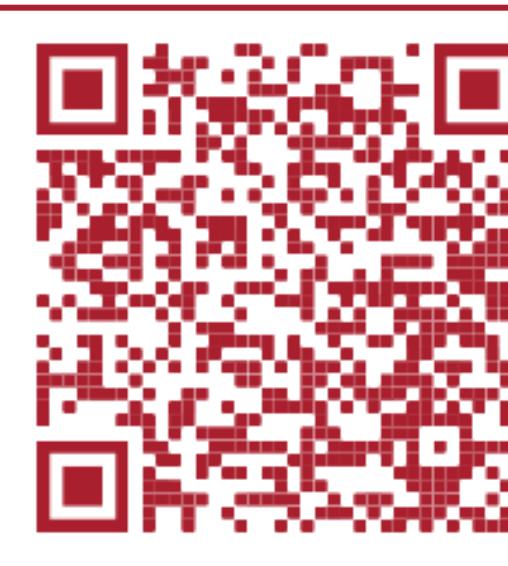


Evaluation design – pre-entry

Pre-entry evaluation for Bristol Scholars is well-established. We defined research questions by drawing upon the theory of change (above) created for the programme. The primary mode of data collection is in the form of a full-cohort survey, sent out at the beginning, midpoint and the end of the programme. The midpoint survey was included to focus specifically on questions around attainment and the endpoint survey also includes some process evaluation of the project. Example copies of the surveys can be accessed below.



Initial Survey



Midpoint Survey



Endpoint Survey

The research questions most pertinent to directly raising attainment were:

- 1) How effective is the tuition provided to project participants as part of the programme?
- 2) Does being part of Bristol Scholars make project participants more likely to come to the University of Bristol?

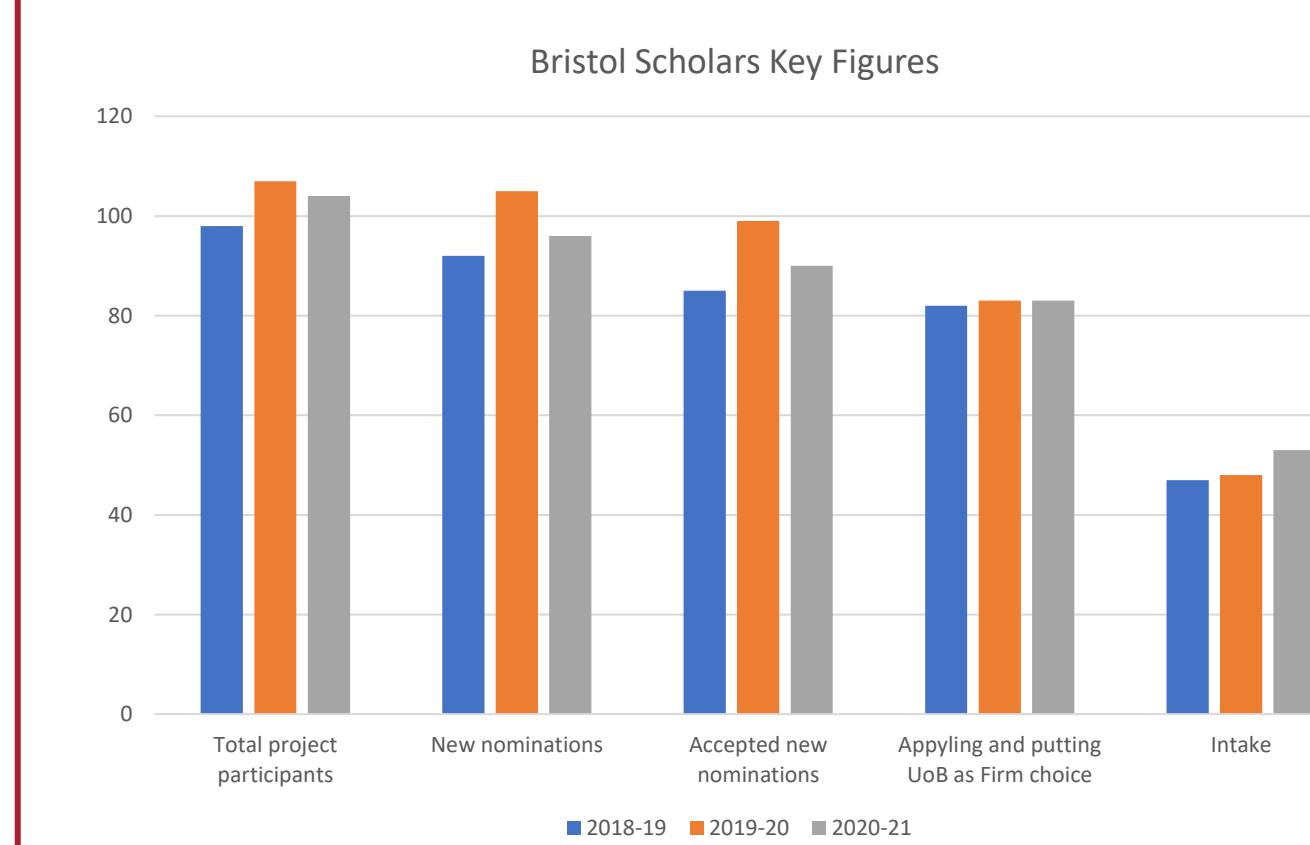
We used the surveys above to answer these questions, alongside attendance and enrolment data to monitor progression through the programme and into HE.

Evaluation results – 2020/21 pre-entry

Attainment focused evaluation mostly used academic confidence as a proxy for attainment. Given the endpoint of the pre-entry program, enrolment at the university was also used to measure academic success. In the midpoint survey, which was distributed immediately after the end of academic tutoring, we asked follow-ups on our set of initial survey questions. We received the following results (n=14, right).

Please rate how confident you are in the following areas at the present time, where 10 is extremely confident, and 1 is not at all confident.	Initial Survey	Midpoint Survey
How confident do you feel learning new things in your subject?	7.57	7.92
How confident do feel overcoming challenges in your learning?	7.32	8.24
How confident do you feel answering exam style questions in this subject?	6.64	7.8
How confident are you that you can perform to the best of your ability in exam conditions?	6.04	7.52
How confident are you contributing to class discussions in this subject (asking and answering questions)?	6.93	8.16
How confident do you currently feel in achieving your target grade in this subject?	6.82	7.52

We were pleased that in each of the measures, confidence increased among students who had taken both surveys. However, despite incentives, only around 15% of students on the programme took the survey – meaning extra measures will be required to be sure this is having an impact.

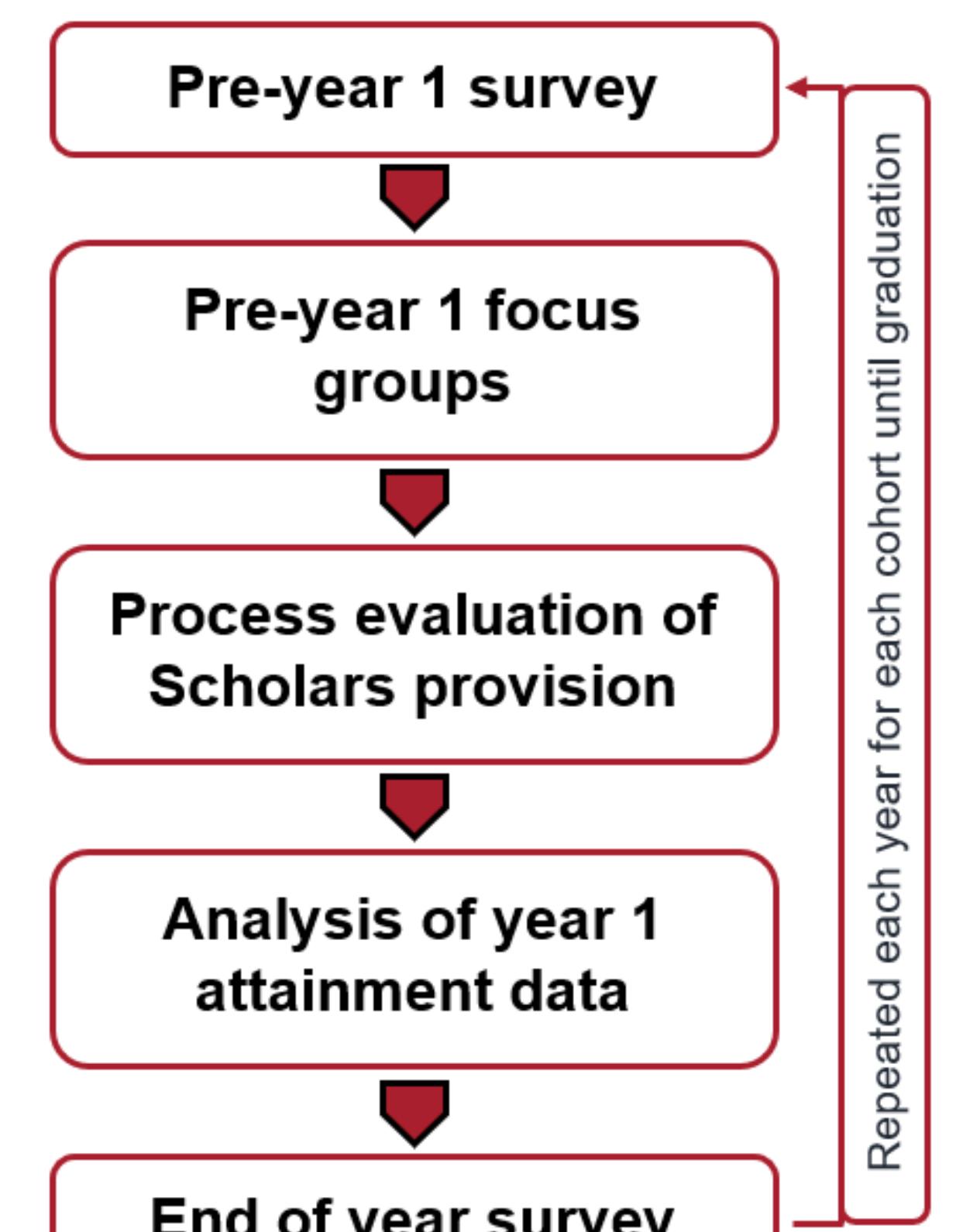


We also examined the intake as compared to previous years – due to the pandemic, this was the first year that the programme and the tutoring were both delivered online. Given that participation, completion and enrolment rates all stayed consistent, and academic confidence improved, we considered that part of the programme to be successful.

Proposed evaluation design for post-entry

Currently, there is very little evaluation in place for the post-entry side of the scheme. We have in the past looked at student continuation and achievement data to understand exactly how well the students fare at university, and with the first cohorts of Bristol Scholars now having graduated, we can benchmark their success against other students in their subjects to assess whether the tailored offer-making policy is sound.

Alongside this, we are looking to add a programme of evaluation to add more depth to these findings, as seen to the right. This will require the creation of a new theory of change and the development of updated research questions.



Working questions

What measures can we add to our pre-entry part of the project evaluation to more robustly measure our impact on attainment?

Do our research questions serve to properly investigate student attainment? If not, what should the new ones be?

How do we properly measure the impact of individual interventions in the post-entry part of the project? Is it destined to be a black-box intervention?

Are other evaluation designs more suitable to measure the impact of the project on student attainment for the post-entry part of the project?