

Christ Church *Horizons*  
2018 Report

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## Christ Church *Horizons* 2018 Report

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## Overview of the Christ Church *Horizons* Programme 2018

In 2018 we launched our first access and outreach sustained contact programme: Christ Church *Horizons*. The programme was offered to 35 year-12 pupils from target state schools and colleges in our London link area, Barnet.

Through the *Horizons* programme we would like to broaden the pupils' academic experience, to enable them to explore beyond the school curriculum, and to support them in developing the skills they will be needing both to make strong university applications, and later, at university. We want to encourage pupils to have the confidence to aim high and hope to dispel myths about higher education and Oxford. As such, the aims of the programme fall into three main categories, which are in line with the goals for access and outreach set out in the Oxford Evaluation Framework:

1. Improving confidence and skills related to university study
2. Developing practical skills to improve confidence and performance in various Oxford admissions stages, if choosing to apply
3. Developing realistic attitudes about Oxford

In order to achieve these aims, six sessions consisting of academic workshops and study skills and information sessions were offered after school, in Barnet, followed by a 'graduation day' in Christ Church.

The academic workshops were given by Christ Church and Oxford tutors, junior research fellows, and graduates, and gave pupils a taste of the teaching and research that takes place at the University of Oxford. Participants were given materials to read in advance and were asked to come to the sessions prepared to discuss them. The workshops covered a wide range of academic subjects: Philosophy (Dr Tae-Yeoun Keum), Oriental Studies (Dr Peter Hill), Engineering (Ms Constance Crozier), History (Mr Samuel Lane), Astrophysics (Mr Mike Walmsley), Law (Ms Sophie Chandler-Millington), Economics (Prof. Petr Sedlacek), English Literature (Dr Katherine Fender), Human Geography (Ms Shona Loong), and Diabetes (Dr Benoit Hastoy). Some of the workshops ran in parallel and pupils were able to choose which one to attend. We did not divide the group into a Science and a Humanities strand, because we wanted to encourage pupils to discover unfamiliar subjects and to consider joint schools as well.

The study skills and information sessions were given by the Schools Liaison Officer, Dr Ana Hastoy. Topics included: an overview of higher education and Oxford, how to explore beyond the school curriculum, finance at university, essay writing, personal statements, and how to give presentations.



At the end of the programme the participants were invited to spend a day in Christ Church, where they attended a taster lecture, a demonstration interview, had interview workshops in subject-specific groups, met current undergraduates and tutors, and had a 'graduation' ceremony.

## Participants

The Christ Church *Horizons* programme was offered to the five 'Target 1' schools and colleges in Barnet. The application process itself aimed to prepare students for university admissions and the selection criteria were: the pupils' prior academic achievement at GCSE, predicted A-level grades, personal statements, and academic references. Applicants on free school meals were prioritised.

The standard of applications was high: we had 71 applicants, with an average of 5.6 A\*s/8/9s at GCSE. We selected 35 pupils, with an average of 7.5 A\*s/8/9s at GCSE. All students would have a 'prior education' widening participation flag if applying to Oxford. 26% would also have a 'residential postcode' (ACORN) flag, and would therefore receive an 'overall widening participation flag' if applying.

## Evaluation

Questionnaires were given to participants at the beginning and at the end of the Christ Church *Horizons* programme. The same questions were included in both questionnaires, in order to assess changes in views. Participants were asked to which extent they agreed or disagreed (5pt scale from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree') with statements linked to the programme's aims as follows:

Aim 1: Improving confidence and skills related to university study

*I feel confident sharing my ideas in lessons.*

*I know how to develop my understanding of subjects outside of school.*

Aim 2: Developing practical skills to improve confidence and performance in various Oxford admissions stages

*I feel confident that I could make a competitive application to Oxford.*

*I feel confident that I could cope with the academic challenges of an Oxford course.*



Aim 3: Developing realistic attitudes about Oxford

*I think that I would fit in at university.*

*I think that people like me go to Oxford University.*

At the end of the post-programme questionnaire participants were asked what their favourite part of *Horizons* was, what improvements they would suggest for the following year, and were given the opportunity to comment on the programme as a whole.

## Summary of results

The results of the pre- and post-programme questionnaires highlight the significant advantages of sustained contact outreach programmes in general, and of Christ Church *Horizons* in particular.

The benefits for the pupils are wide-ranging: from developing skills related to admissions and university study, to having more confidence in their abilities, to believing that they could fit in academically and socially at Oxford.

The answers to the pre-*Horizons* questionnaire showed a marked difference in attitudes to higher education in general on the one hand, and to Oxford on the other: while 69% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they thought they would fit in at university, only 42% felt the same about Oxford. The post-programme questionnaire, however, showed that these views can, and do shift. Having met over 20 members of the University since the beginning of the programme, and having also met Christ Church undergraduates, by the end of *Horizons* over 80% of respondents agreed that people like them went to Oxford (all others remained uncertain, but did not disagree).

Another significant change in views was linked to the pupils' confidence in their ability to make a competitive application to Oxford. Despite the fact that *Horizons* participants were all predicted As and above at A-level and had on average 7.5 A\*s at GCSE, only 38% thought that they could make a competitive application to Oxford; this figure rose to 81% after the programme. The participants' confidence in expressing their ideas and in coping with the academic challenges of an Oxford course also improved by the end of the programme. They agreed without exception that they now knew how to develop their understanding of subjects outside of school, which is a key aim for any academic enrichment programme.



## Aim 1: Improving confidence and skills related to university study

The programme aimed to increase the pupils' confidence by enabling them to develop skills related to university study and to admissions. Through their interactive format, the workshops encouraged critical thinking, problem solving, and clarity of thought and expression. The study skills sessions tackled skills related to admission stages and university study more generally.

Overall, *Horizons* participants felt more confident sharing their ideas in group situations at the end of the programme than they had at the beginning (90% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, compared to 69% before *Horizons*). There was a striking shift from 12% to 67% in those who strongly agreed that they knew how to develop their understanding of subjects outside of school; by the end of the programme *all* respondents agreed with the statement:

'It was a very insightful programme which enabled me to learn about new things that I had not thought of before and build my confidence in contributing ideas in front of peers that I did not know very well.'

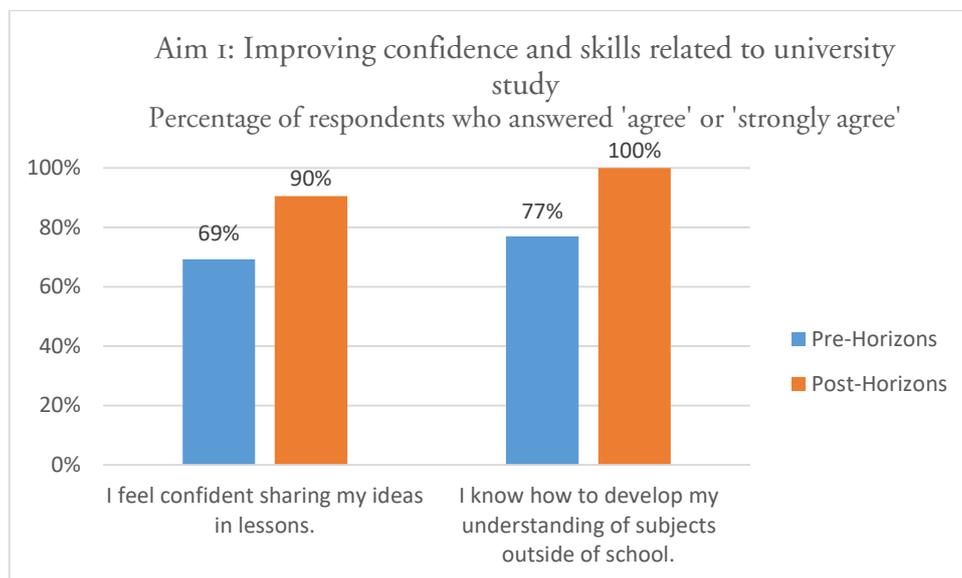


Fig.1

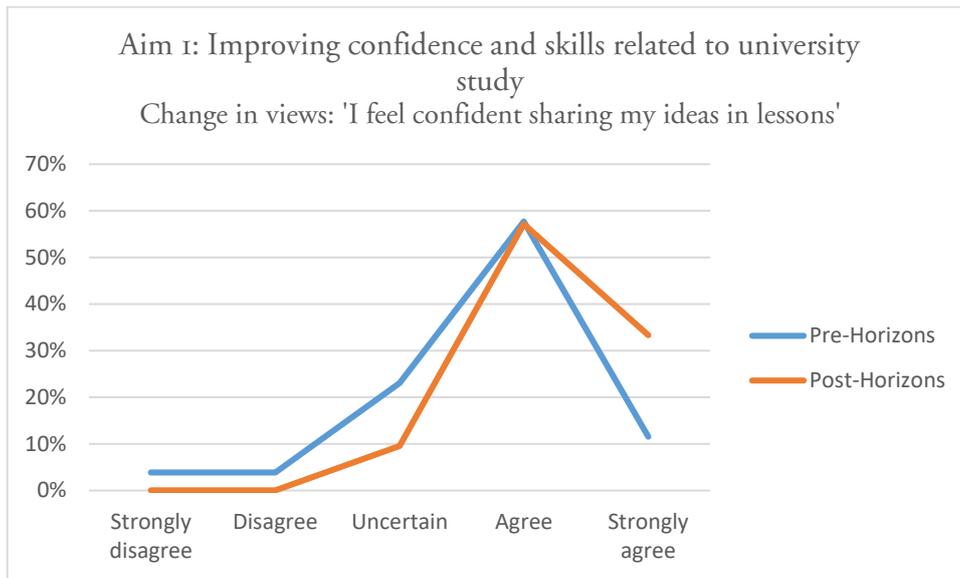


Fig.2

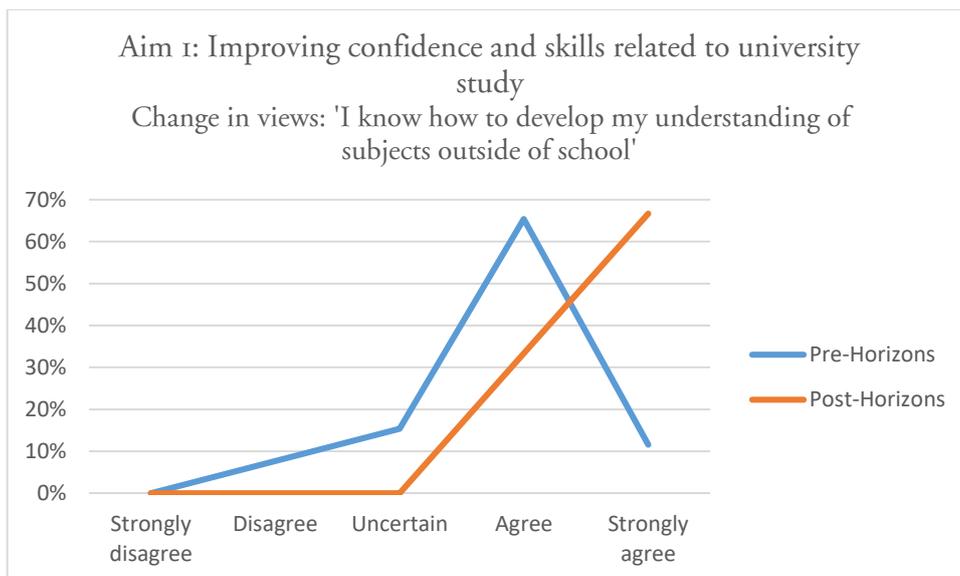


Fig.3



## Aim 2: Developing practical skills to improve confidence and performance in various Oxford admissions stages

As well as being relevant for university study in general, the skills we have been hoping to help participants develop would, of course, be useful to them if they chose to apply to Oxford. However, despite their strong academic background, and despite the fact that they tended to agree that they could cope with the challenges of an Oxford course, only 38% of respondents 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that they felt confident in making a competitive application to Oxford before *Horizons*.

The answers at the end of the programme show a significant boost in confidence in their abilities: more than double the participants 'agree' or 'strongly agree' that they are confident in making a competitive application to Oxford (81%), while also feeling that they could cope with the challenges of Oxford courses (90%):

'Before I came on the programme I thought that Oxford was way out of my reach but the programme made me rethink. Now I am seriously considering to apply to Oxford University.'

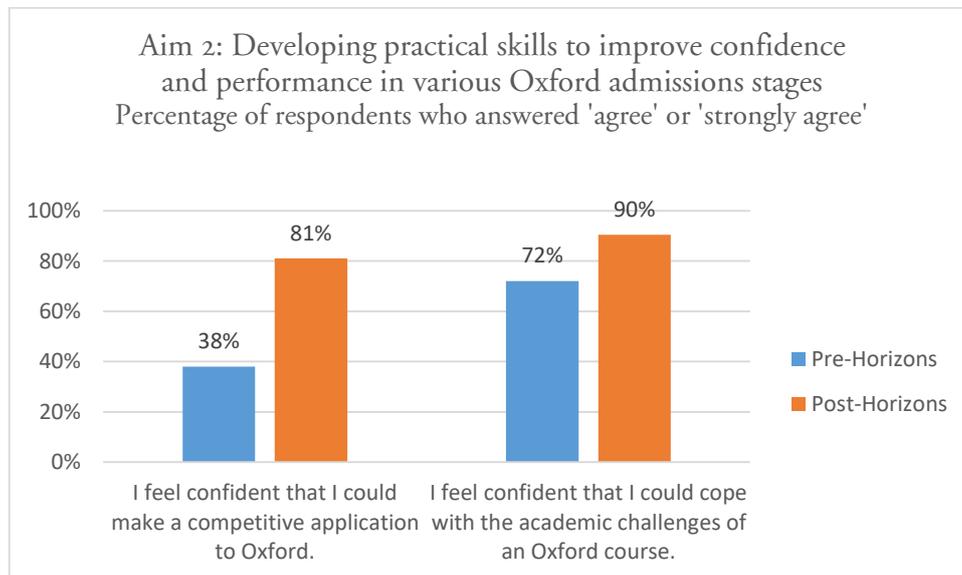


Fig.4

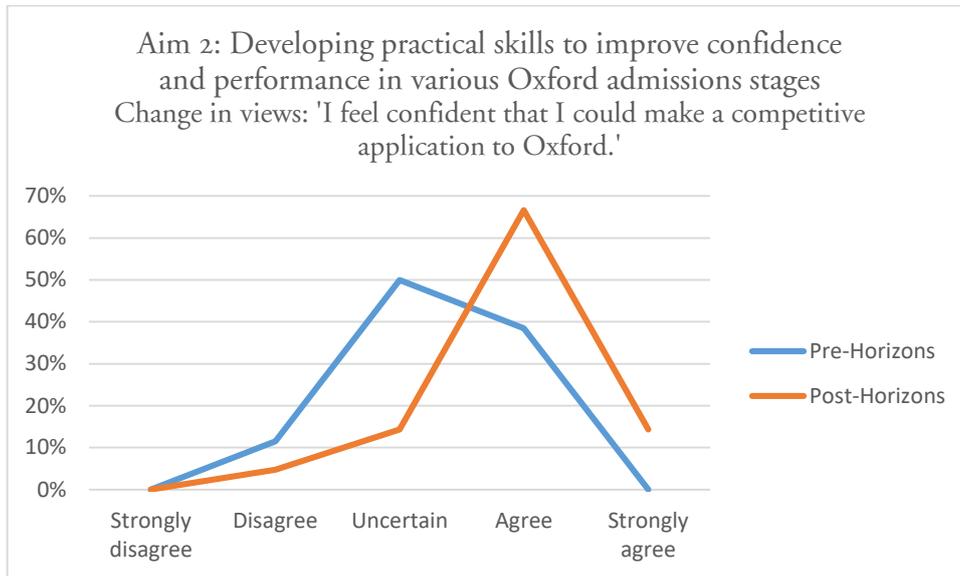


Fig.5

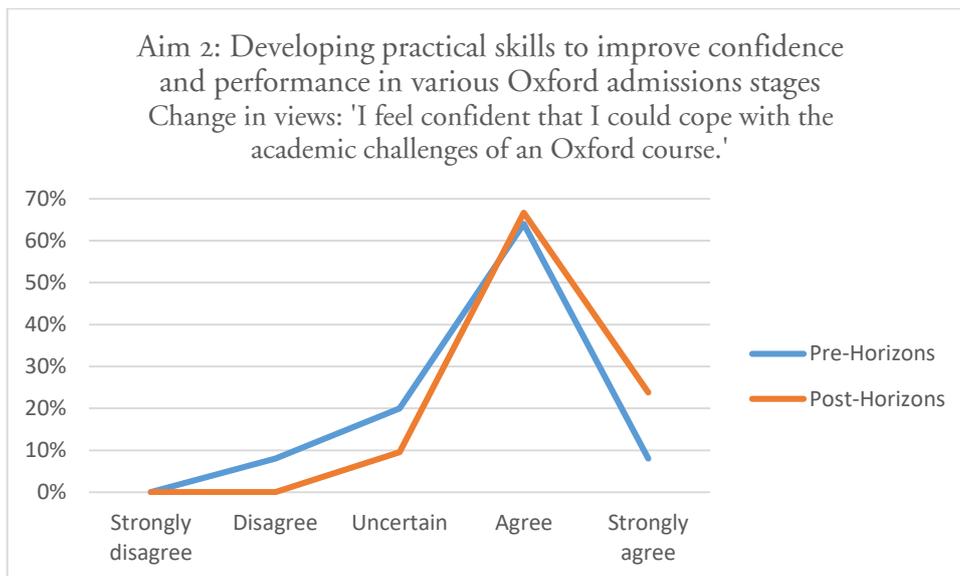


Fig.6



### Aim 3: Developing realistic attitudes about Oxford

We asked participants whether they thought they would fit in at university both to see whether they had any concerns about higher education (since some of them would be the first to go to university in their families) and to find out whether there was a gap in their perceptions about universities in general, and Oxford in particular.

'I believe these sessions are a really good idea as it gives a chance to those who have limited knowledge about universities to really understand the process.'

While there were some initial concerns regarding whether they would fit in at university, these were no longer felt by the end of the programme:

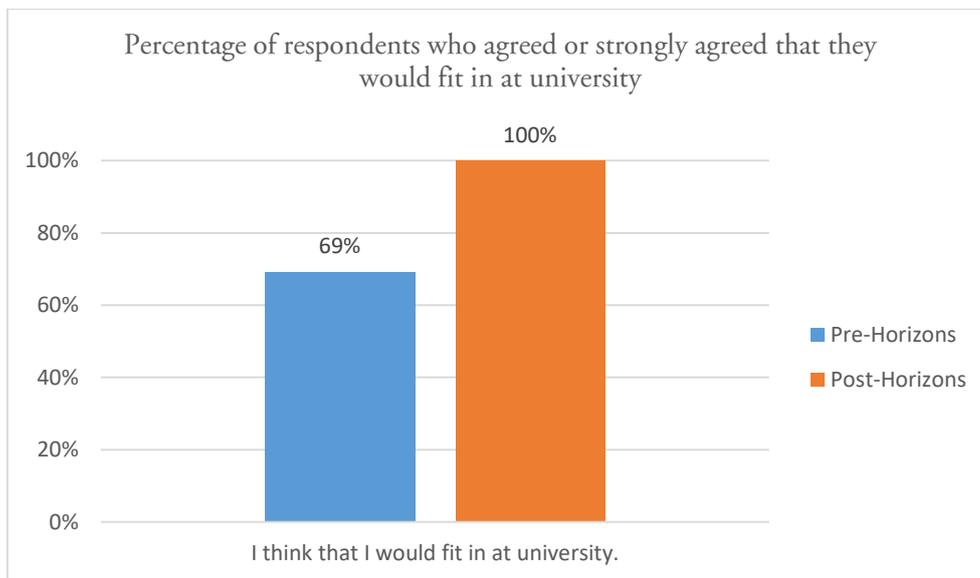


Fig.7

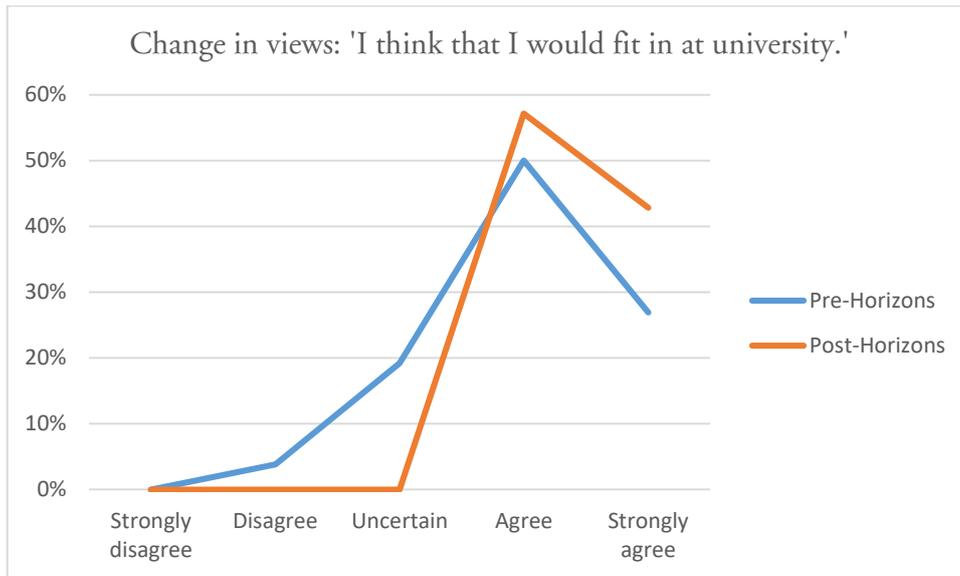


Fig.8

Regarding perceptions about university in general and Oxford in particular, important differences were found at the beginning of the programme. Despite their strong academic record, at the beginning of *Horizons* only 42% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that people like them went to Oxford. This is in stark contrast with their overall positive views about universities generally:

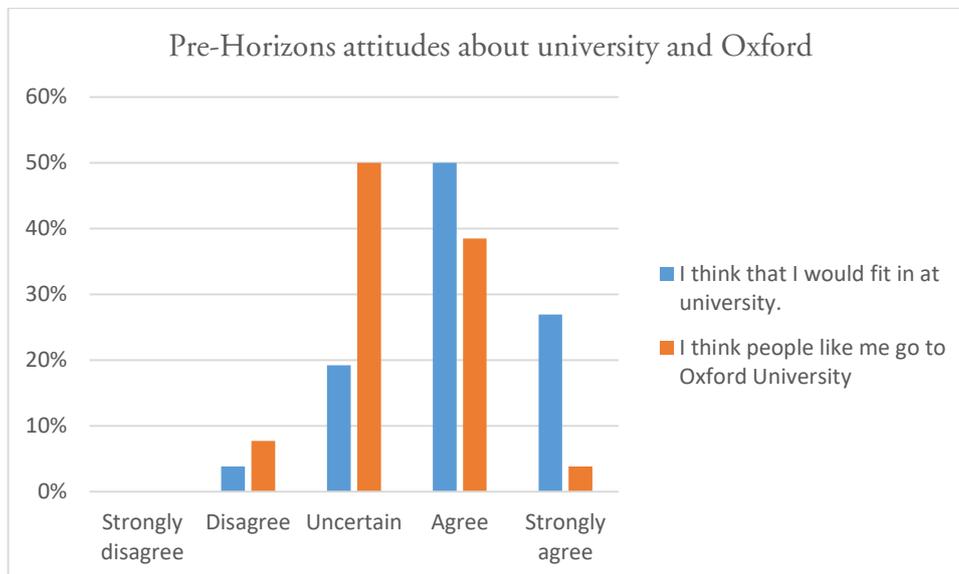


Fig.9



However, a significant shift in perceptions was registered by the end of the programme: 81% of respondents now felt like people like them went to Oxford.

Favourite part of the programme?  
‘Getting to see Christ Church, meet some of the current students, and realising that my perhaps slightly negative expectations of what Oxford University would be like were wholly incorrect.’

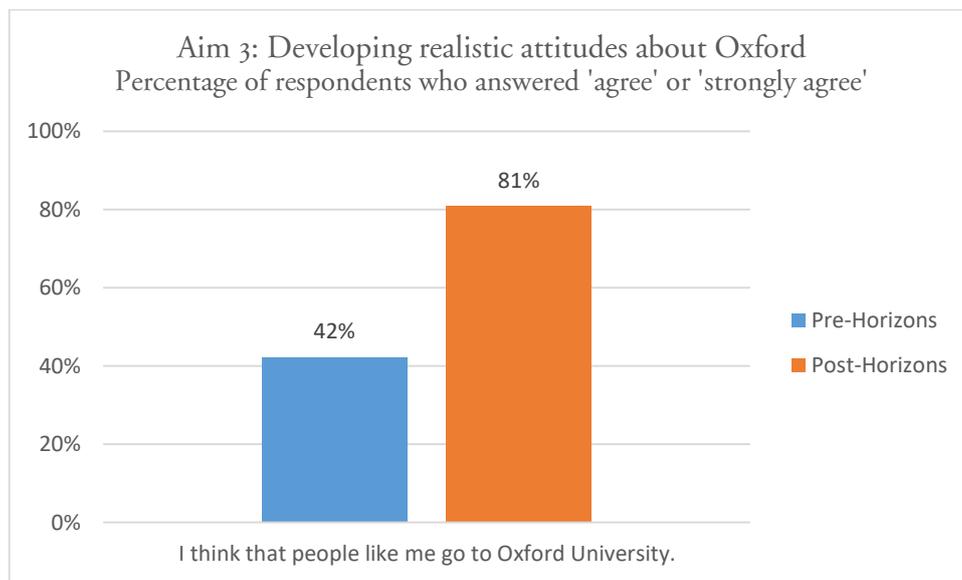


Fig.10

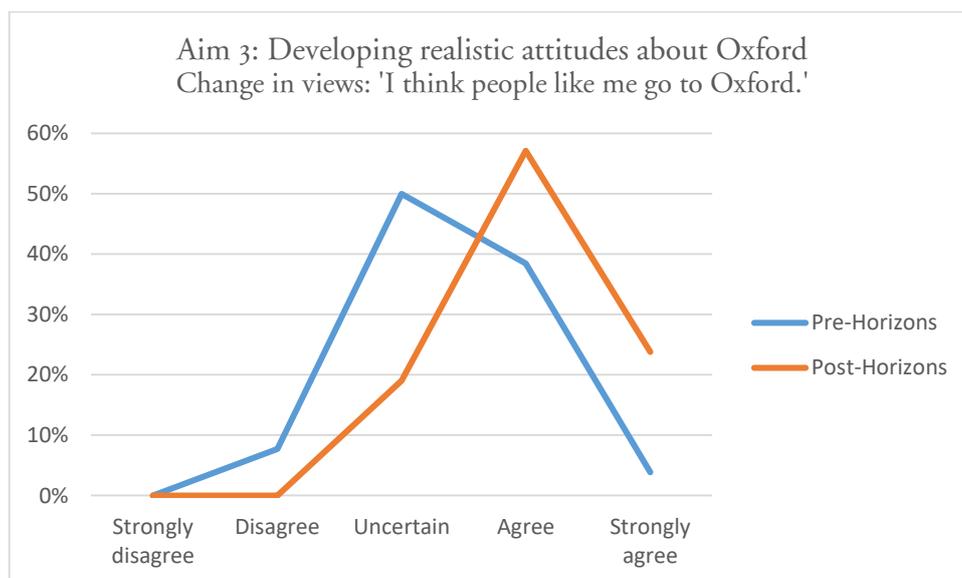


Fig.11



## Conclusion and next steps

Through the Christ Church *Horizons* programme we aim both to help pupils develop their academic skills and to demystify Oxford. The pre- and post-programme evaluation shows significant improvements across all the programme's objectives.

The format of the sessions, which involved doing some reading in advance, provided a good starting point for discussions in workshops. The pupils practised expressing their ideas, developing an argument, and problem solving. By the end of the programme, they felt more confident about their own skills and about their ability to make a competitive application to Oxford. *Horizons* tutors themselves often commented on the positive impression the pupils had left.

'The students engaged closely with the texts, thought flexibly about the fifteenth century (an area of history which is probably quite unfamiliar to almost all of them), and answered at a high level and in a sophisticated manner.' (Sam Lane, Stipendiary Lecturer in History, Christ Church.)

A challenge that we often face when working with state school pupils is that of demystifying Oxford. The pre-programme evaluation confirmed that state school pupils feel like they would fit in at Oxford less than they would at university in general.

However, a key and encouraging finding of the post-programme evaluation is that reputations are not fixed. Pupils are open to changing their minds, and once they do, they can become 'ambassadors' for higher education and Oxford in their schools.

'For next year, I'm willing to advertise this to my school as I found it incredibly valuable.'

The shift in attitudes about Oxford was impressive: by the end of the programme over 80% of respondents agreed that people like them went to Oxford. It will, of course, remain to be seen whether *Horizons* participants apply to university or to Oxford. However, the benefits of the sustained contact programme are more wide-ranging than that and can already be seen in the participants' increased confidence in their abilities, and in the change in their perceptions.

Next year we will be continuing *Horizons* for year-12 pupils, starting earlier in the year to avoid clashes with the pupils' mock exams. We will also look into expanding the programme to include younger age groups, aiming to raise aspirations earlier on. We are grateful for the Christ Church and Oxford University members' support and hope that, as Christ Church *Horizons* expands, so will our graduates', JRFs', and tutors' involvement in the programme and in access and outreach initiatives.



## Appendix: Answers to open-ended questions

### What was your favourite part of the Christ Church *Horizons* Programme?

- Graduation day- learn more about Oxford and made me further want to apply
- Whilst I enjoyed the subject sessions thoroughly, I found the sessions afterwards, on essay writing, personal statements etc. very useful.
- The variety of workshops available to us
- Definitely the day in Oxford. It was really well organised and the watching and practicing an interview in subject specific groups was so useful I can't begin to describe. It really gave me a confidence boost in seeing the reality of what an Oxbridge interview is actually like. I wasn't really considering Oxford before, but after visiting Christ Church it has become a serious option.
- Getting to see Christ Church, meet some of the current students, and realising that my perhaps slightly negative expectations of what Oxford University would be like were wholly incorrect. Dr Ana Hastoy was the best programme leader you could ask for, she communicated well, gave engaging and useful presentations, and made every effort to get to know us on a personal level and form a good relationship with her students. Also receiving the certificate at the end made it feel like a real graduation, so thank you! :)
- The trip to Christ Church, Oxford
- The subject lectures; particularly economics and human geography
- Being able to talk with a second year student in order to get some insight as to how one should prepare for admissions test as well as the key features of university which are not necessarily present at A-Level.
- The subject-specific interview practise we had with admissions tutors at Oxford, and watching the example interview, was great for gaining an idea on what interviews would be like. Also the English workshop on Romantic poets was interesting and the handouts she gave out very useful.
- Visiting Christ Church and completing the mock interviews
- I really enjoyed the various taster sessions, especially the one for English Literature. In addition, the workshops at the end of the sessions were very useful.
- I really enjoyed the Graduation day- I loved meeting students that did my subject and having an in depth of college, especially the amazing library. It was such a great experience that I felt I couldn't have got at a normal open day. I also loved the English talk and felt it gave me a really useful insight into poetry.
- My favourite part of the programme was solving interview problems with Martin Dehnel-Wild on the Graduation Day, as you actually have to think about how to solve these questions instead of the routine A-level maths questions. This had given me first-hand experience on what the interview for Computer Science at Oxford could be like, and helped me understand what to work on during the Summer in order to be successful in the application process. My favourite problem was the bar of chocolate puzzle :)
- The final graduation day at Christ church
- The visit to Oxford university
- Seeing a mock interview - it helped me to understand what they are like better



- The day in Christ Church when we separated into small subject based groups to discuss possible interview questions.
- The variety of taster workshops I have taken part in about subjects which I would normally not study, however due to these they allowed me to gain an appreciation and interest into these novel subjects and gain a wealth of knowledge about them.
- Being able to develop communication skills and research skills
- The sessions and meeting new people
- The day trip to Oxford and the mock interview

### Other comments

- I just wanted to say thank you so much for organising and running the Horizons programme. I really enjoyed it and loved the day in Oxford. Before I came on the programme I thought that Oxford was way out of my reach but the programme made me rethink. Now I am seriously considering to apply to Oxford University and I just want to thank you for that. Horizons programme did not only expand my understanding of different subjects but helped me understand more about university and the application process. It was a pleasure to be part of this course and I hope it would be continued throughout the years.
- Thank you so much for the opportunity to be part of the Horizons programme! It was a very insightful programme which enabled me to learn about new things that I had not thought of before and build my confidence in contributing ideas in front of peers that I did not know very well. The graduation day was a lovely experience and it also further encouraged my decision to apply to Oxford University.
- All the tutors were so friendly and welcoming. It wasn't a pressured environment and I don't think people were judgmental. Each session was genuinely interesting and thought provoking and the day at Christ Church was the perfect insight into life at Oxford Uni. You, Ana, were also so lovely and understanding and really reassuring to the whole group which I appreciated a lot when I felt nervous. Thank you for everything.
- I just wanted to thank you for the Horizons programme, it was extremely helpful and enabled me to improve my confidence and explore subjects I found interesting in greater depth. For next year, I'm willing to advertise this to my school as I found it incredibly valuable.
- Really recommend this experience and I totally enjoyed learning and discovering subjects I never thought of learning and gaining knowledge about subjects I am passionate about due to truly remarkable people from Oxford who intensified my passion for these subjects.
- I really enjoyed the Horizons programme because it allowed me to explore subjects I am not currently studying in school whilst helping me to prepare for my application to study at university.