

Birmingham Scholar Success Strand Year Two Evaluation Report 2021-22

1. Introduction

The Birmingham Scholar is the University's dedicated programme for improving student access, success and progression, and launched successfully in September 2020. This report summarises progress made in the second year (2021/22) of delivering the Birmingham Scholar success strand activities.

2. Aims of the Programme

The Birmingham Scholar is designed to support students from under-represented backgrounds, identified in the University's Access and Participation Plan (APP), to achieve their full academic potential at the University, and as such to enable the University to meet its APP targets for student success:

- 'Reduce the percentage difference in Good Honours degree attainment between White and Black students from 16% to 5% by 2024/25'
- 'Reduce the percentage difference in Good Honours degree attainment between White and Asian students from 12% to 5% by 2024/25'
- 'Reduce the percentage difference in Good Honours degree attainment between POLAR4 Quintile 5 and Quintile 1 students from 9% to 1% by 2024/25'
- 'Ensure that the attainment gap between disabled students and other students remains non-significant by reducing this from 3% to 1% by 2024/25'

To achieve this, the Birmingham Scholar programme aims to enhance student success through providing a supportive and fully inclusive learning environment. As such, Scholars have access to an extensive range of bespoke support in addition to that which the University offers to all students, including but not limited to:

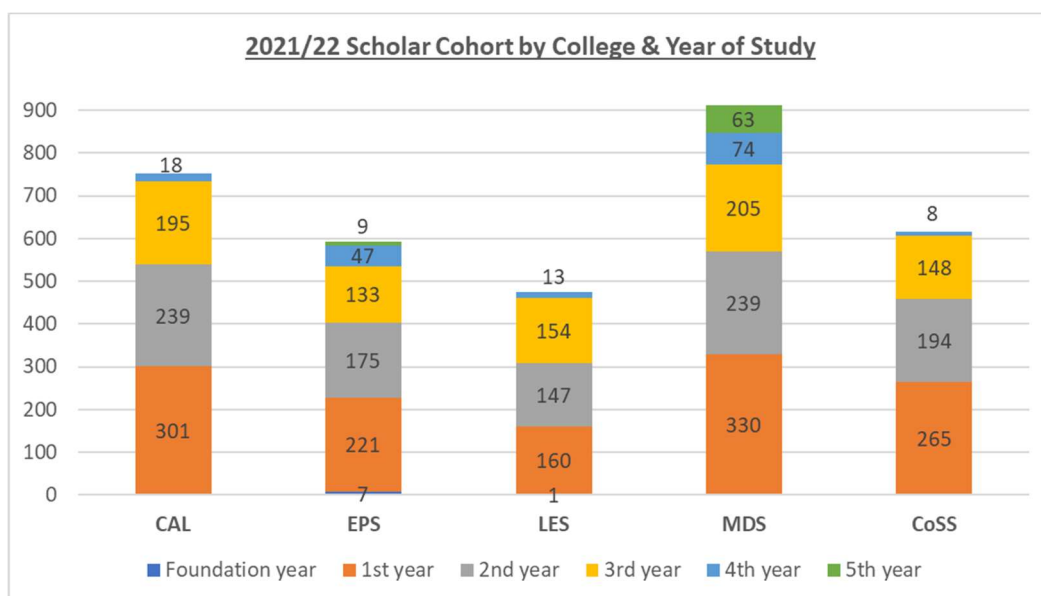
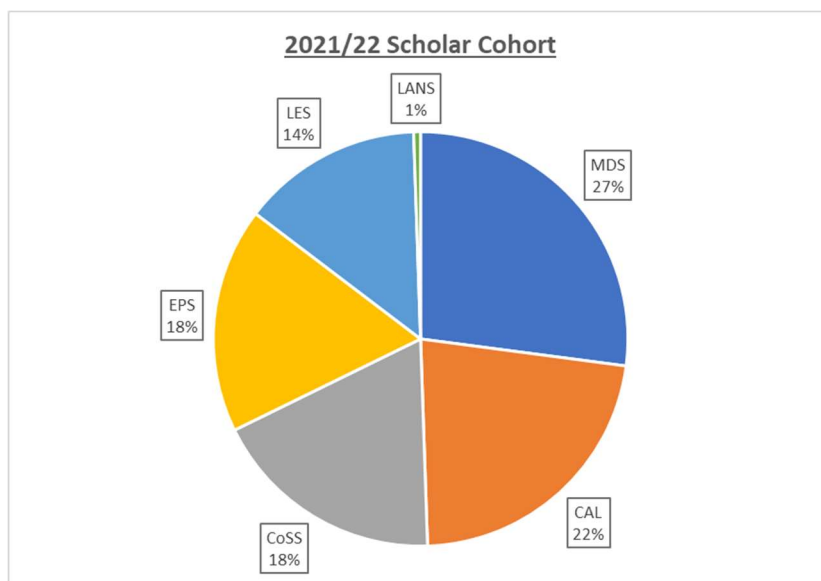
- Exclusive welcome event for new Birmingham Scholars (Scholar Kick Off Week)
- Exclusive access to tailored academic support from the Academic Skills Centre, including the Birmingham Scholar Peer Assisted Study Scheme
- Exclusive access to a range of Pathways to Careers (P2C) activities
- Priority and/or early access to a range of personal and professional development opportunities, such as the Birmingham Project, Personal Skills Award and Impact Challenge
- Priority application for Turing-funded International Mobility programmes
- Dedicated Scholar Canvas course
- Annual Birmingham Scholar Forum community event hosted in collaboration with the Guild
- Dedicated Scholar programme team to provide a range of information, signposting, and personal support

3. Scholar Cohort 2021/22

The target groups for the Birmingham Scholar success strand activity, as stated in our APP, are full-time first degree UK students who are:

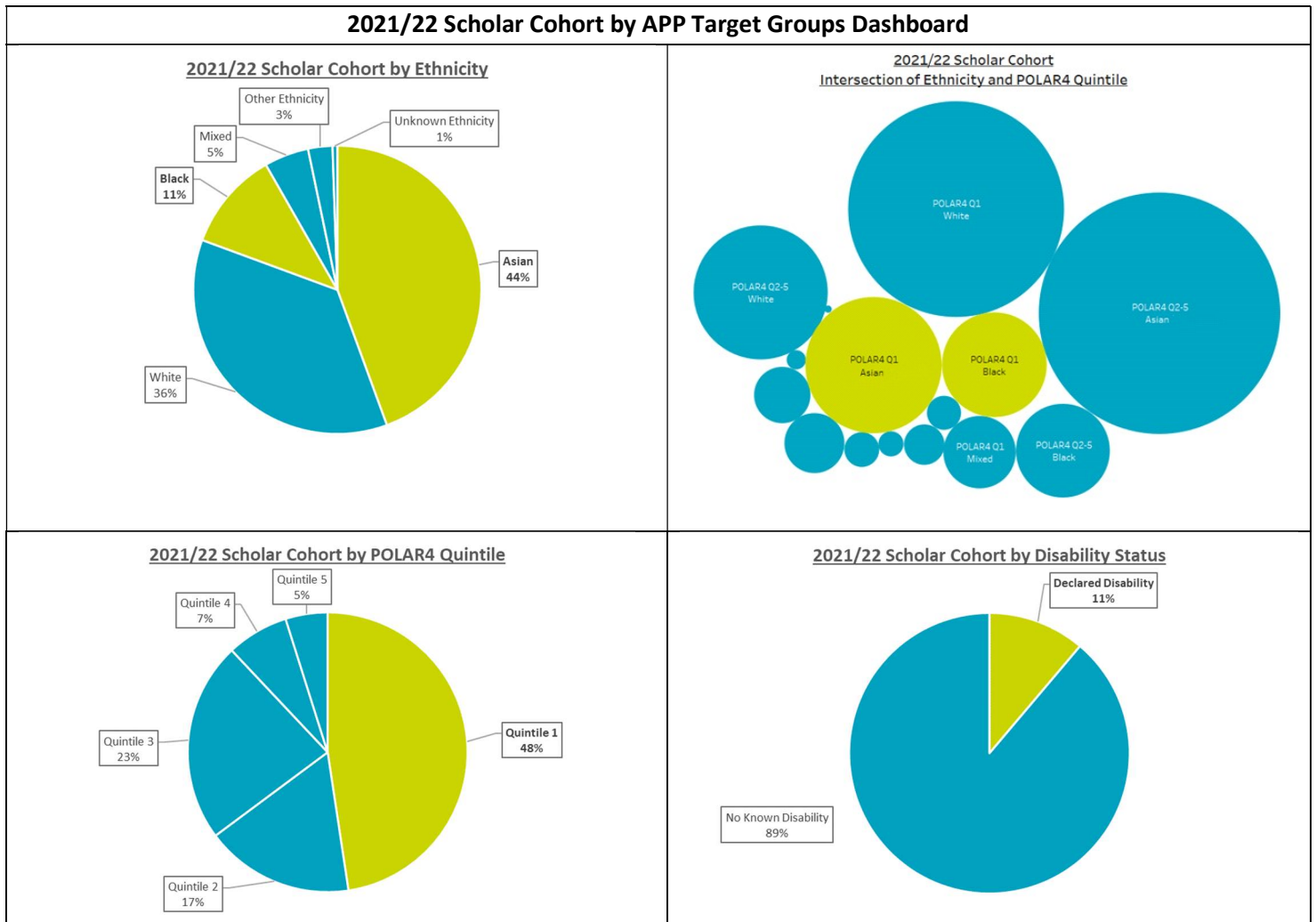
- Asian students¹
- Black students
- Disabled students
- POLAR4 Q1 (P4Q1) students

As part of their Pathways To Birmingham (P2B) offer, all P2B new entrants automatically become Scholars upon enrolment. In addition to this, all care-experienced undergraduates are invited to join the Scholar programme. In 2021/22, the cohort was expanded to also include all undergraduates from P4Q1 areas. This gave a total cohort number of 3,364, almost double the cohort size of 2020/21. The 2021/22 Scholar cohort is broken down by College and year of study below:



¹British Chinese/White Good Honours shows no significant gap and were excluded from APP data analyses in 2020/21. From 2021/22 onwards the British Asian ethnicity group is no longer broken down and APP analyses for this group therefore include British Chinese students

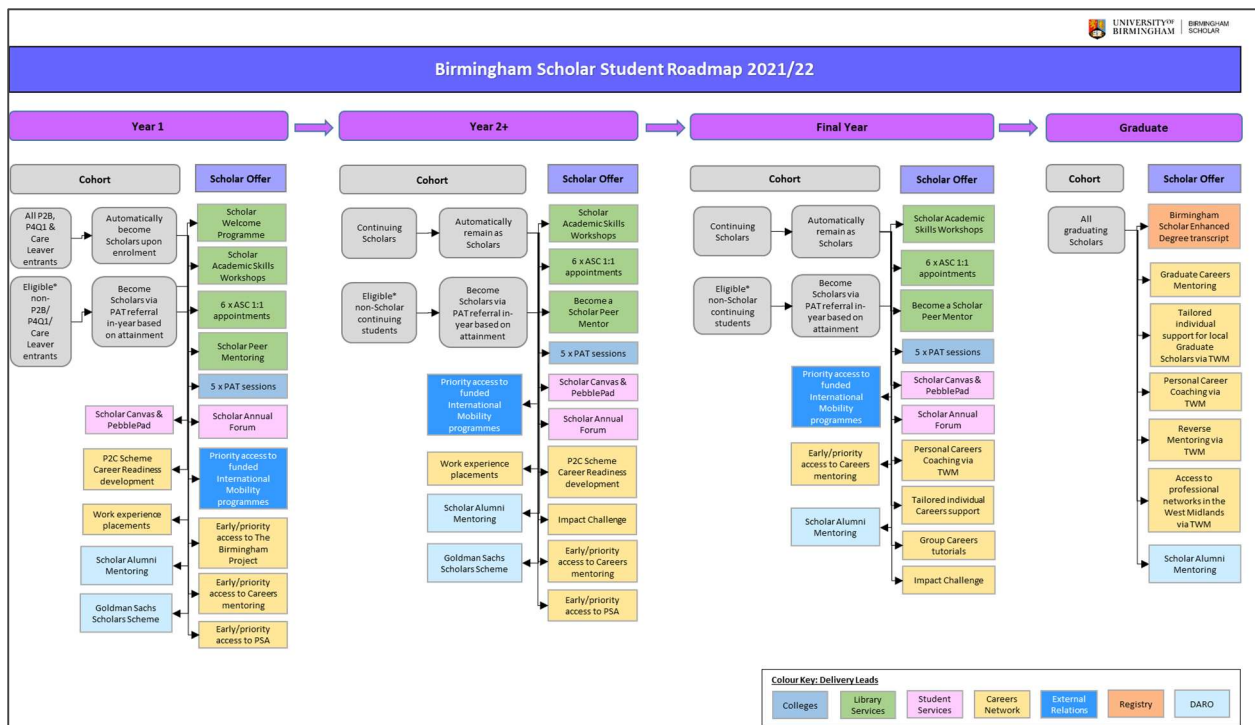
A breakdown of the 2021/22 Scholar cohort by the four APP target groups is shown below. Expanding the cohort to include all P4Q1 undergraduates has increased the P4Q1 proportion from 17% to 48%:



As stated in our APP, student referrals to the Scholar programme by their Personal Academic Tutors are a key element of the success of the programme, by ensuring provision is targeted to the students who will benefit the most. However, PAT referrals are yet to be implemented due to delays in the provision of suitable learning analytics data.

4. Success Strand Activities 2021-22

The Scholar activities that were delivered during 2021/22 are summarised in the diagram below²:



Key additions to the offer to Scholar in 2021/22 were the introduction of fully funded short term international mobility programmes for Birmingham Scholars through the Birmingham Global team using Turing funding, and the new Goldman Sachs Scholars scheme³. The latter is a collaboration between the University of Birmingham and Goldman Sachs to create a new 'corporate scholars' programme for 50 P2B Birmingham Scholars. The scheme, run by DARO, provides Goldman Sachs Scholars with an insight into industry as well as a breadth of personal and professional support including an allocated Goldman Sachs mentor and access to internship opportunities.

4.1. Kick Off Week 2021

Birmingham Scholars' Kick Off 2021 was held the week before Welcome Week, with a general welcome on campus in the Great Hall, and other information sessions delivered online. Attendance at these events was high, with around 350 students attending the in-person event and 263 Scholars taking part in at least one webinar. The feedback received was very positive, with attendees saying the most useful sessions were the on-campus Welcome event and the P2C introduction session. Attendees also reported that Kick Off Week events helped them feel more prepared and more confident about starting university.

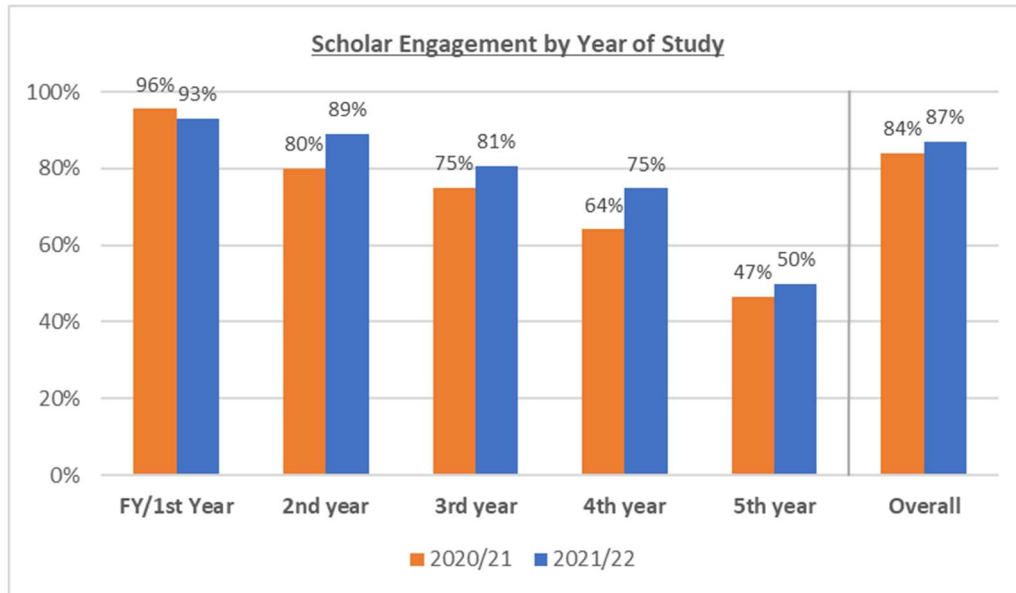
In addition to Kick Off Week, Welcome Week also included the Vice-Chancellor's Welcome Address and in 2021/22 new Birmingham Scholars were invited to be in the audience for the Address and to attend an informal reception with the VC and senior academic staff. 54 Scholars attended, and 96% of attendees stated they were satisfied or very satisfied with the Welcome Address and reception event.

² Pathways to Careers activity (yellow boxes) is reported on in the Progressions Strand by the Careers Network

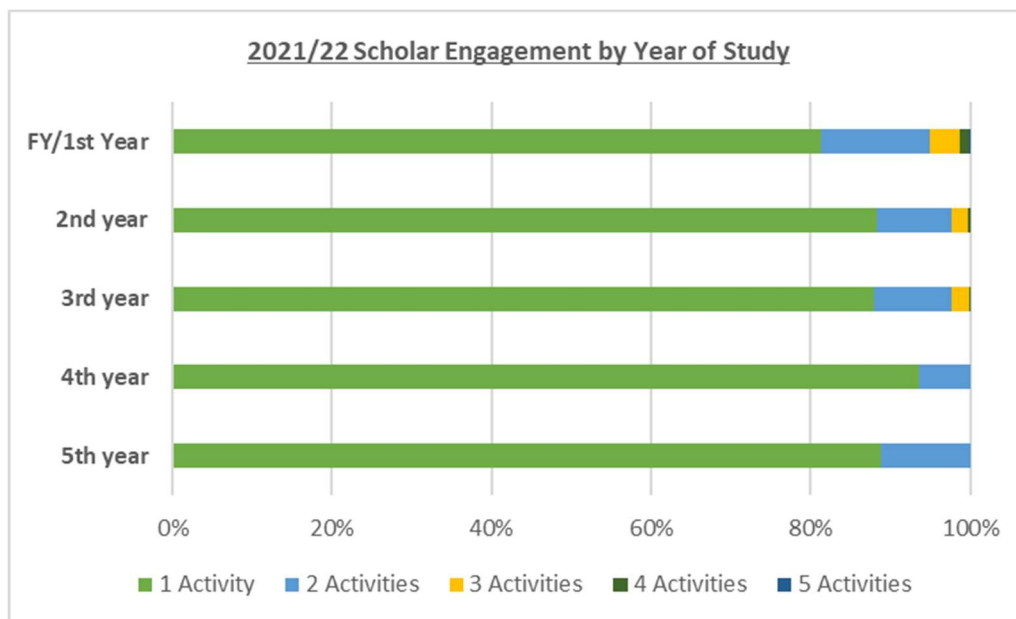
³ More information can be found here <https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/funding/undergraduate/goldman-sachs-scholars-programme.aspx>

4.2. Engagement with the Programme

Engagement with Scholar programme in its second year of delivery has continued to be very high, and overall was 3%pts higher in 2021/22 than in 2020/21. Engagement rates were higher in every year of study except amongst first year Scholars, but this year group still had the highest engagement rate of all years, at 93%.



First year Scholars were also more likely to participate in more than one type of Scholar activity:



4.3. Academic Skills Centre

The Library’s Academic Skills Centre (ASC) delivers the bulk of the Scholar offer and provides expert training in all areas of academic skills support. The ASC also delivers a high level of university transition support for new entrants. Scholars have access to ASC events and workshops that are designed and delivered exclusively for them; these include workshops such as ‘Strategies for Effective Learning Online’, ‘Finding, Using and Referencing Library Resources’, ‘Active Reading and Note Taking’, ‘Improving Your Academic Writing Style’ and ‘Critical Thinking’. Scholars can also benefit from having two additional personal appointments with ASC skills advisors per year.

The ASC's hugely successful new peer-assisted study scheme for Scholars (Scholar PASS) which was implemented in 2020/21 for 1st years was expanded to include all years of study in 2021/22. Throughout Semester 1 four multidisciplinary PASS groups ran weekly, with eleven 2nd, 3rd and final year Scholar PASS leaders mentoring 63 1st year Scholars from different subject areas. PASS Sessions focused on transition to university, general settling in, meeting new people and study skills. Feedback from participants was overwhelmingly positive with 100% of first year respondents saying they would recommend Birmingham Scholar PASS to other first years, and 100% of the PASS leaders saying they would recommend being a PASS leader to others. Qualitative feedback from participants listed the most useful elements of the scheme being its relaxed, informal and interactive atmosphere, the scheme being student-led with topics decided by the 1st years themselves, and the opportunity it provided for new entrants to make friends and benefit from the advice of current students. Feedback from PASS leaders listed a wide range of skills the scheme had helped them to develop, including organisational, presentation, leadership and communication skills.

169 Scholars attended ASC Scholar workshops in 2021/22. Post-workshop feedback surveys from attendees gave a very high average overall satisfaction score of 4.7 out of 5:

Scholar Workshop Feedback Rating	Score/5
Content	4.8
Clarity	4.8
Visual aids and documentation	4.8
Learning Environment	4.7
Length of session	4.8
Overall satisfaction	4.7

Free text survey responses described the Scholar workshops as 'very helpful', 'very interesting', 'very engaging' and as having helped Scholars build their confidence in their academic skills, with the ASC team being 'friendly and approachable'.

4.4. 2021/22 Scholar Forum

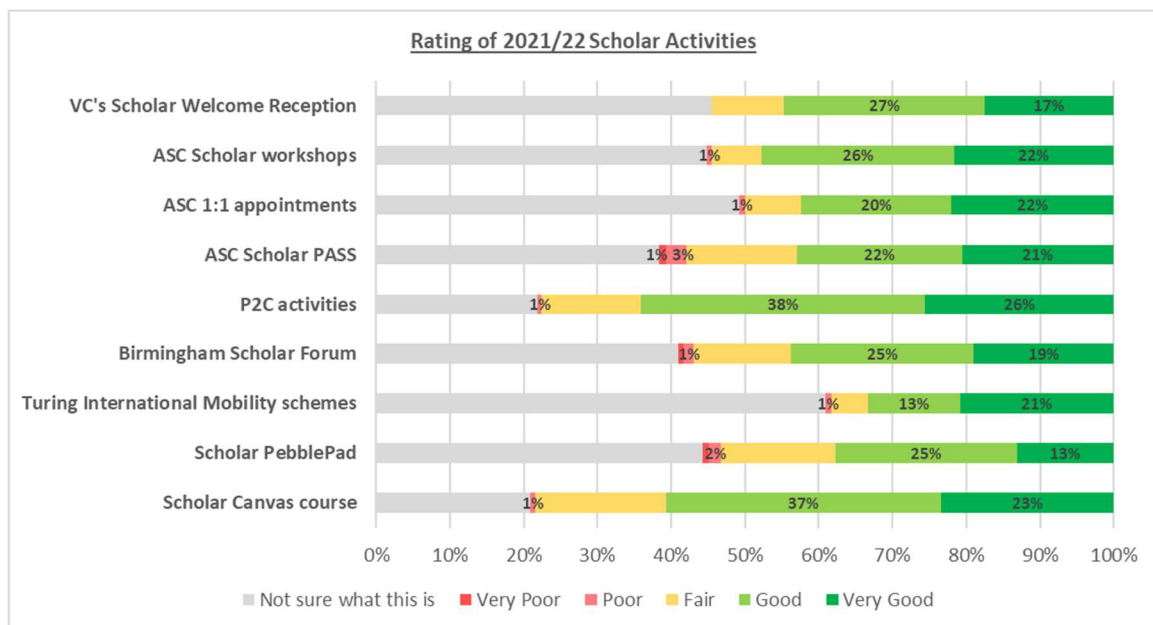
The second Birmingham Scholar Annual Forum took place in March 2022 and was held on campus in the Great Hall. The day included an informal 'Team chat' with Scholar programme team, keynote speeches from a high-profile alumnus and a recent Scholar UoB graduate, an introduction from the Student Equality, Diversity and Inclusion team, an information session from the Global Mobility Team on Turing opportunities for Scholars, and an interactive feedback session with the Guild.

Attendance was extremely low with only 40 Scholars attending for the full day, despite 173 Scholars registering to attend. However, this in line with reported lower in-person attendance at campus events across the University during the 2021/22 academic year, which saw the transition from majority online and hybrid event delivery to more in-person events. Ways in which to improve attendance at the Scholar Forum in future years may be to make the event hybrid with an online attendance option, or to hold several in-person Fora in shorter time slots enabling more students to fit it in with their schedule.

Despite low numbers, the event was very engaging with a positive, upbeat atmosphere. Five Scholars were chosen to receive a free book authored by the opening keynote speaker, who was very popular, with many of the attendees queuing for an informal chat with him during the morning break. The feedback from the interactive session with the Guild, using Slido, was very positive with all the Scholar activities being rated as ‘fair’, ‘good’ or ‘very good’ and none receiving negative ratings. The Scholar workshops and P2C activities were voted the most enjoyable Scholar activities.

4.5. Scholar Feedback Survey 2021/22

The annual Scholar feedback online survey received 320 responses for 2021/22. The results were again very positive, with all Scholar activities⁴ receiving a majority positive rating and any negative rating being extremely low at no more than 4%:

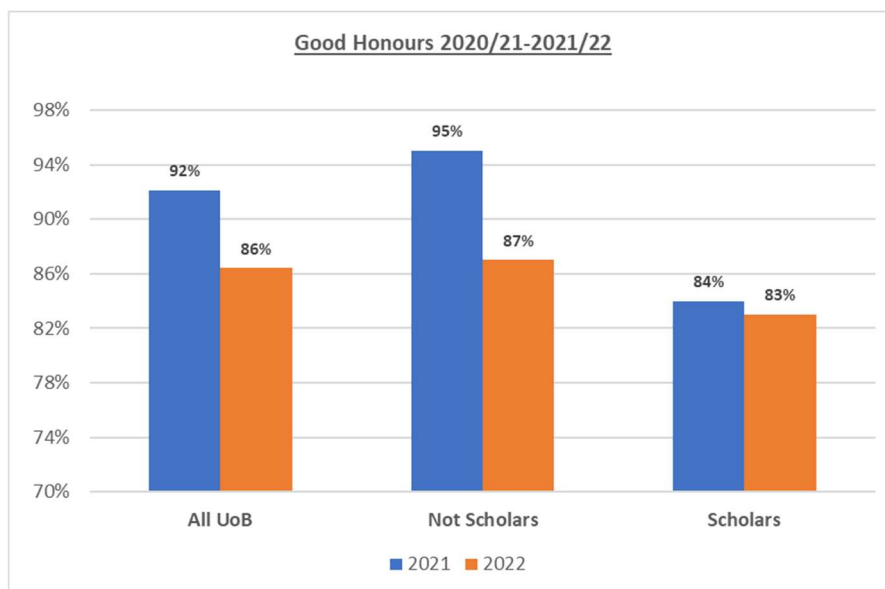


However, survey results again highlight a need to improve the promotion of Scholar activities, given the proportion of respondents who were not sure what some of the activities were. To achieve this, the Scholar team has now drawn up a Birmingham Scholar Communications Plan in collaboration with the Student Communications Team to further promote opportunities and to streamline communications to Scholars.

⁴ Scholar digital badges have been discontinued due to lack of functionality with Canvas

5. Scholar Outcomes 2021/22

The impact of the Birmingham Scholar success strand is measured by the proportion of Scholars who are awarded a Good Honours⁵ degree, as the aim of the programme is to reduce awarding gaps for APP target groups. In 2021/22⁶, Good Honours across the University was 86%, a drop of 6%pts since 2020/21. 2021/22 Good Honours amongst non-Scholars was 87%, a drop of 8%pts from 95% in 2020/21. However, Good Honours for Birmingham Scholars only decreased by 1%pt in 2021/22. This means the awarding gap between Scholars and non-Scholars has reduced from -11%pts to -4%pts:



These results are broken down by APP target group in the sections below.

5.1. Good Honours by POLAR4 Quintile

Good Honours %	All UoB		Scholars	
	2020/21	2021/22	2020/21	2021/22
P4Q1	90%	87%	90%	87%
P4Q5	97%	93%	86%	76%
Awarding Gap	-7%pts	-6%pts	+4%pts	+11%pts

The University awarding gap for P4Q1 vs P4Q5 students has improved by 1%pt to -6%pts. All P4Q1 undergraduates are now Birmingham Scholars; in 2021/22 P4Q1 Scholars continued to outperform their P4Q5 counterparts. P4Q1 Scholar Good Honours is now 11%pts higher than that of P4Q5 Scholars, compared to 4%pts higher in 2020/21.

⁵ Good Honours degree data do not include medical degrees which are Unclassified

⁶ Data taken from UoB Undergraduate Annual Review

5.2. Good Honours by Disability Status

Good Honours %	All UoB		Scholars	
	2020/21	2021/22	2020/21	2021/22
Declared Disability	92%	89%	89%	79%
No Known Disability	92%	86%	83%	84%
Awarding Gap	0%pts	+3%pts	+6%pts	-5%pts

The awarding gap for Disabled vs non-disabled students is now a positive gap with Disabled students achieving 89% Good Honours, 3%pts higher than non-disabled student Good Honours at 86%. This now surpasses our APP target for this group. However, for the Birmingham Scholar cohort the 2021/22 Good Honours rate was 5pts% lower for Disabled Scholars than for non-disabled Scholars. This highlights a need to increase promotion of and engagement with the Scholar programme amongst Disabled students (see section 5.4 below).

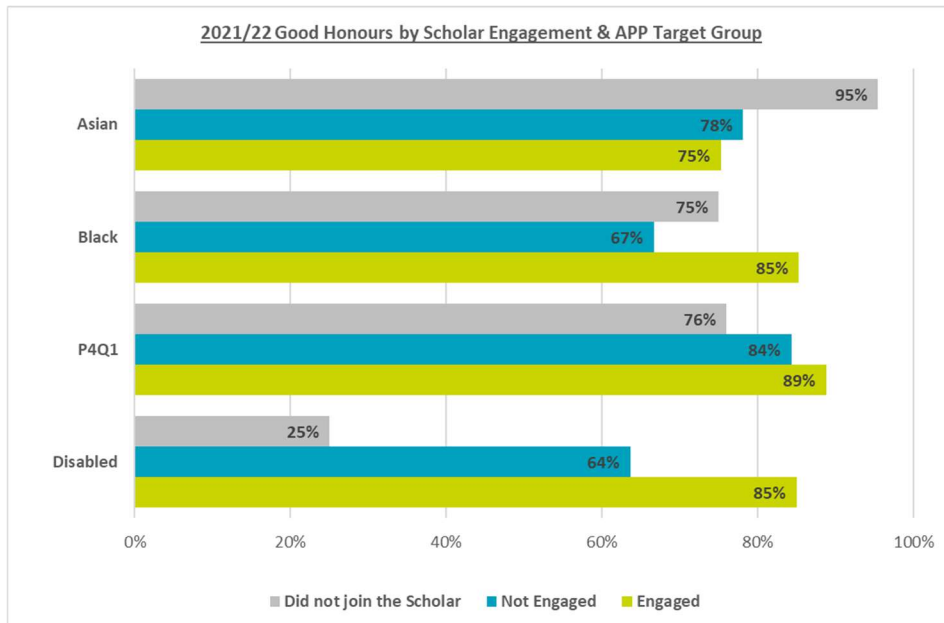
5.3. Good Honours by Ethnicity

Good Honours %	All UoB		Scholars	
	2020/21	2021/22	2020/21	2021/22
British White	97%	94%	94%	89%
British Asian	89%	83%	82%	78%
British Black	79%	77%	71%	81%
Asian/White Awarding Gap	-8%pts	-11%pts	-12% pts	-11%pts
Black/White Awarding Gap	-18%pts	-17%pts	-23% pts	-8%pts

For British Asian students, the awarding gap has widened from -8%pts to -11%pts. Yet for Scholars the Asian/White gap has improved by 1%pt to -11%pts. For British Black students, the awarding gap has closed slightly from -18%pts to 17%pts. However, for Birmingham Scholars the Black/White gap has greatly improved to only -8%pts. These are both encouraging results and demonstrate that the Scholar programme is having the desired impact on reducing ethnicity awarding gaps. More work is required to increase the number of British Asian and British Black Scholars, as currently less than a third of our British Asian and Black undergraduates are Scholars.

5.4. Engagement Impact on Scholar Good Honours

2021/22 degree outcomes were also correlated with whether Scholars had engaged with the programme. Good Honours rates were higher when Scholars engaged with the programme for all APP target groups except the Asian target group:



Engagement with the Scholar programme has had a particularly big impact on the Good Honours rates of Black and Disabled Scholars, where there was around a 20%pts difference in the Good Honours rates of those who did and did not participate in Scholar activities. This again clearly highlights the importance of connecting with all Scholars and driving up their rate of engagement. Conversely, engaging with the programme activities did not appear to have improved the Good Honours rate of the Asian target group. Further investigation into intersectional factors and/or subject cohorts is recommended going forward.

6. Conclusion & Next Steps

The Birmingham Scholar programme of inclusive support for APP target students has built upon its highly successful first year to have further impacted on APP success targets, particular targets for reducing the Black/White and P4Q1/Q5 awarding gaps. Feedback from Scholars show that they are enjoying the wide range of activities and opportunities that the programme offers them, and feel valued and supported, and more confident as a result.

The Scholar cohort in 2022/23 has grown to almost 3,600 students. Priorities for the forthcoming year of delivering the Scholar programme are to:

- implement Personal Academic Tutor referrals, using robust Learning Analytics data;
- improve communications to Scholars via implementation of the new Birmingham Scholar Communications Plan; and
- increase promotion of the Scholar programme, particularly amongst British Asian and Disabled students, to increase engagement rates.

Leanne B.M. Campbell
 Student Success & Inclusion Officer
 November 2022