



The impact of the Sutton Trust's Summer Schools

**A summary of research by Dr Tony Hoare and Rosanna Mann
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Summary of findings

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Key findings

- The summer school programme reaches its target group: over 90% of attendees met the programme's academic criterion and at least one of the socio-economic criteria. Just under half of all attendees met *all* four of the socio-economic and academic criteria.
- Summer school attendees were more likely to engage with the university application process overall: 93% ended up applying to - and 84% registering at - university, compared to 88% and 68% respectively of unsuccessful applicants to the programme.
- Summer school attendees were also considerably more likely to apply to - and end up at - leading universities than students in one of five control groups. Over three quarters (76%) of summer school attendees matched in the UCAS database went on to a leading university¹, compared to 55% or less of students in the control groups who did not apply to the scheme but who had similar academic and socio-economic profiles.
- Summer schools particularly increase the likelihood of students attending a summer school university, and especially their host university: of those who applied, 23% went to a summer school university², compared with 13% of unsuccessful applicants to the scheme and 7% in the control group.
- Summer schools make the biggest difference to the poorest students. Attending a summer school substantially narrows the gap in application and registration rates for those meeting all the Sutton Trust eligibility criteria, in receipt of Education Maintenance Allowance, from low participation neighbourhoods and with non-graduate parents. In some cases, the summer schools reduce completely the gap between the success of the more affluent students and those from non-privileged homes.

¹ Defined as being a member of the Russell Group or 1994 Group of universities

² In this case either Bristol, Cambridge, Nottingham or Oxford. St Andrews is part of the programme but for reasons of the availability of data was excluded from this part of the analysis

Introduction

The Sutton Trust has been running its summer schools programme, aimed at those at the end of Year 12 and about to be confronted with the option of applying to university, since 1997. In that time some 10,000 young people have passed through the programme, which now runs at four universities – St Andrews, Bristol, Cambridge and Nottingham. For over ten years Oxford was also part of the scheme, and is also included in this evaluation report, which looks at the experiences of Summer School students in the summers of 2008 and 2009.

The Sutton Trust promotes its Summer Schools widely among UK schools, inviting applications from students who meet its criterion of academic attainment (five or more GCSEs at A and A* grades) and some or all of other indicators of a non-traditional HE background, namely:

- attendance at a 'low performing school' (both in terms of attainment and progression to HE)
- being in receipt of Educational Maintenance Allowance
- having no parental experience of higher education

Students can apply to one of the Sutton Trust summer schools in a specific year. All are oversubscribed, often heavily, with the final selection decisions devolved to outreach staff at the relevant host university.

Exploring the impact of the Sutton Trust summer school programme is important and timely from both a policy and research methodology perspective. On the former, the programme now represents arguably *the* leading cross-campus outreach initiative in Britain. It benefits from the funding, managerial and promotional experience the Trust is able to bring to bear, but it still needs to show it provides a good return on that investment. It also represents a considerable commitment on the part of the host universities (who provide the on-site person-power, facilities and a significant proportion of the funding). They, more than ever before, also need to establish the impact of the programme as clearly as possible.

The Sutton Trust has measured the effectiveness of its summer schools in a variety of ways, including through the tracking of students in the UCAS system, pre and post questionnaires and through a statistical evaluation by the National Foundation for Education Research in 2001. This found strong evidence that attending a summer school was associated with an increased probability of subsequently applying to at least one of the participating universities and leading universities more generally. An analysis by the Boston Consulting Group also showed a positive financial return of 14:1 for to the individuals who take part.³

³ A summary of previous work can be found at: <http://www.suttontrust.com/research/ten-year-review-of-sutton-trust-summer-schools/TenYearReview-SuttonTrustSummerSchools.pdf>

However, previous analyses had their limitations, and the Trust was keen to commission an updated, robust source of evidence to inform the development of the programme as it approaches its 15th year of operation.

This paper is a brief summary of the full report undertaken by Dr Tony Hoare and Rosanna Mann of the University of Bristol's Widening Participation Research Cluster. The full report is available at www.suttontrust.com.

Methodology

Outreach activities, including summer schools, are an important part of widening access, but it is particularly problematic for researchers to demonstrate convincingly what effects these outreach activities have had. Too few programmes have been well evaluated using robust statistical methodologies and control groups.

The Sutton Trust's programme of Summer Schools at leading campuses is not only now the largest remaining cross-university national outreach programme, but is well-suited by its distinctiveness, timing and management to mitigate these research problems. In particular, it is possible to establish a set of control groups - some (inner controls) of students who applied for a Summer School place unsuccessfully, some (outer controls) with similar characteristics to the Trust's eligibility criteria, but who never applied. We can compare their subsequent experience over applications and registrations to UK universities with those who attended the 2008 and 2009 Summer Schools.

The six groups used in the evaluation were:

- i) 'attendees' - successful applicants to the programme
- ii) 'reserves' - those on a reserve list, but not eventually offered a Summer School place
- iii) 'applicants' - who were unsuccessful and not placed on any reserve list either
- iv) OC1 - UCAS applicants in the relevant years (2008/9 and 2009/10) who met all the Sutton Trust's criteria, insofar as these can be matched
- v) OC2 - UCAS applicants in the same relevant years who met the Sutton Trust's GCSE criterion and at least one, but not all, of the others
- vi) OC3 - All other state school UCAS applicants in the same relevant years.

(Note: ii and iii constitute the inner control group and iv, v and vi the outer control groups)

The evaluation looked at a number of important research *questions*:

1. Has the programme reached the right target group of students – i.e. those from non-privileged and under-represented homes, as defined by the criteria mentioned above?
2. Has attendance at a summer school been associated with specific outcomes in terms of their *rates* of application to HE, the university *destinations* involved, and the *success rates* of these applications?
3. How far do these experiences also vary with the personal characteristics of the students concerned?
4. Finally, does the impact of the summer schools vary across the five universities delivering them?

This summary document concentrates on the first three of these questions in the sections that follow.

The targeting of the programme

The analysis finds that summer schools have been successful at selecting students from the applicant pool who best fit the programme's academic and widening access criteria. As shown in Table 1, below, almost all (99.2%) of attendees meet the GCSE criterion of 5 or more A* and A grades, while 91% both met this and were from non-graduate backgrounds. 45.3% *also* met these and the other two criteria of being from a low performing school and eligible for Education Maintenance Allowance.

The programme has not specifically targeted those students from postcode areas which have historically low rates of progression to higher education (the Polar2 Groups 1 and 2), but the scheme seems to have been successful at picking up these students, with 31% of attendees coming from these neighbourhoods compared to 24% of applicants.

Table 1: the social and academic profile of summer school attendees and applicants

				Attendees	Reserves	Applicants
ST Criteria						
5A*-A GCSEs				99.2%	95.1%	79.2%
Non Grad Parents				91.8%	88.0%	62.4%
EMA				68.9%	63.3%	42.8%
Low Sch Perf				75.9%	55.5%	51.7%
Non Grad Parents + 5A*-A GCSEs				91.0%	83.3%	46.3%
EMA + 5A*-A GCSEs				68.1%	59.0%	29.9%
Low Sch Perf + 5A*-A GCSEs				75.2%	51.4%	38.9%
EMA + Non Grad Parents + 5A*-A GCSEs				62.9%	51.8%	20.9%
Low Sch Perf + EMA + 5A*-A GCSEs				49.5%	26.5%	13.3%
Low Sch Perf + EMA + Non Grad Parents + 5A*-A GCSEs				45.3%	21.4%	9.2%
Other WP criteria						
Polar2 Groups 1-2				31.0%	28.6%	23.7%

University outcomes

The tables below compare the proportions of attendees, applicants and control group students who made applications to, and ended up registering at, different types of universities. Table 2 looks at all students in the summer schools database, including those that could not be matched with UCAS records either because they did not apply to university or because of problems tracing their data. Table 3 removes the unmatched records and looks only at those summer school students who we can see did apply through UCAS and compares them to other students with certain characteristics in the UCAS database.

So, for example, Table 2 shows that just over half (50.3%) of those attending a summer school subsequently applied to their host university, over a third (36.1%) applied to one of the other four summer school universities, over 80% applied to at least one Russell Group university, just under 60% to a university in the 1994 Group, 43.5% to any other university outside these elite groups, and less than 7% did not make any traceable UCAS application. The row columns add to more than 100% since summer school students almost always made more than one UCAS application (up to a maximum of five), and so will often have applied to more than one of the destination groups. The lower half of Table 2 shows the same profiles by university destination groups but for final registrations. Since each student produces just one such registration (or none) these rows do sum to 100%.

Table 3 show similar sets of data, though now for numbers of *applications* (not applicants) and registrations, and incorporates the profiles for the three outer control groups defined earlier. These can only be identified once they have made a UCAS application, so there is no longer any 'None' column, equivalent to Table 2. Equally, there is no 'Host' column since the outer control groups have never made any application to the Sutton Trust programme. However, it is still possible to identify their applications to, and registrations at, the five summer school universities. Table 3 is now read such that, for example, 21.3% of all the UCAS applications from those attending a summer school were to one of the five hosts, and 22.8% of all their final registrations, while the equivalents for the less-privileged of the outer control groups (OC1) were respectively 7.1% and 4.6%. All rows now sum to 100%.

Table 2: All Summer School students compared to inner control groups

Applicants

	Host SS uni	Other SS uni	Russell Group	1994 Group	All others	None
Attendees	50.3%	36.1%	81.3%	58.2%	43.5%	6.9%
Reserves	25.3%	34.1%	74.9%	59.8%	51.8%	9.8%
Applicants	21.3%	31.1%	71.6%	51.3%	50.3%	12.2%

Registrations

	Host SS uni	Other SS uni	Russell Group	1994 group	All others	None
Attendees	12.0%	7.1%	29.4%	15.3%	19.9%	16.4%
Reserves	5.3%	6.5%	23.1%	15.3%	25.7%	24.1%
Applicants	4.5%	5.3%	24.4%	14.6%	27.5%	23.7%

Table 3: Matched Summer School students compared to all control groups

Applications

	SS uni	Russell Group	1994 Group	All others
Attendees	21.3%	38.2%	20.3%	20.1%
Reserves	15.7%	36.2%	21.3%	26.8%
Applicants	14.2%	37.4%	19.5%	28.8%
OC1	7.1%	28.4%	18.0%	46.2%
OC2	8.9%	30.8%	19.9%	40.1%
OC3	3.9%	15.8%	12.3%	67.7%

Registrations

	SS univ	Russell Group	1994 Group	All others
Attendees	22.8%	35.1%	18.4%	23.7%
Reserves	15.6%	30.4%	20.2%	33.9%
Applicants	12.9%	32.0%	19.1%	36.1%
OC1	4.6%	24.0%	17.4%	53.9%
OC2	6.9%	27.8%	20.2%	44.9%
OC3	3.2%	12.1%	10.4%	74.3%

In summary, then, the tables show that:

- Summer School attendance gives a real boost to engagement with the UCAS applications process. 93% of attendees ended up applying to - and 84% registering at - university, compared to 88% and 68% respectively of unsuccessful applicants to the programme (control group iii define on page 4).
- Importantly, Summer School attendees are also more likely to apply to and register at leading universities. Looking at those summer school students positively matched in the UCAS database (Table 3), 76% of summer school attendees went on to a leading university, compared to 64% of unsuccessful applicants and 55% of students in control group OC2, who had similar academic and socio-economic profiles.
- Those who applied to summer schools but did not get in were also more likely to apply to and be accepted at a leading university than outer control group students. This may be because of an existing predisposition to leading universities and/or because the programme acted to raise students' aspirations and awareness through the publicity and application process.
- The research also shows a particularly positive impact for those universities who take part in the programme. 23% of summer school attendees ended up at a summer school university⁴, compared with 13% of unsuccessful applicants to the scheme, and 7% or less in the outer control groups.
- Although 'trade' takes place across the five host universities, there is a *very* clear preference from the attendees for their summer school host for applications and registrations, over any other option. Summer school attendees are over 2.5 times more likely to register their host university than unsuccessful applicants to the scheme.

The characteristics of those who benefit

The research finds, unsurprisingly, that students with fewer widening participation characteristics have a general and clear tendency to favour the more elite universities, including the summer school host institutions. This is entirely consistent with other evidence on the social structuring of the UK's higher education hierarchy.

However, the research found that the summer schools mitigate these inequalities and are particularly beneficial to the poorest students. Compared to their more affluent peers, attending a summer school narrows the gap in application and registration rates for those meeting all

⁴ In this case either Bristol, Cambridge, Nottingham or Oxford.

Sutton Trust eligibility criteria, from non graduate backgrounds, in receipt of EMA, and from low participation neighbourhoods (defined as POLAR2 1-2⁵).

Conclusions

This study provides strong empirical evidence that summer schools do work, from the UK's now highest profile cross-university outreach programme, incorporating not just one control group but five. The research concludes that the Sutton Trust Summer Schools work from the perspective of their hosts, inevitably centred on their own individual downstream benefits, the perspective of the Trust itself and its mission to widen access to the elites, and society as a whole, which benefits from identifying at least something that widens not just HE *participation* but also *access*, and kick-starts social mobility.

As well as an overall positive impact on application and registration rates to higher education, the study shows a positive impact on leading university destinations – the crucial barometer of success for the scheme. The research concludes that both impact and predisposition are at work, with i) higher rates of application and registration for summer school attendees than reserves and unsuccessful applicants, and ii) reserves and applicants in turn having higher rates than the outer control groups of similar students who have not engaged with the summer school application process at all.

However, the researchers conclude that the impact of the programme might be even higher than the figures in the report suggest. Not all of the differences between the various pairings of inner and outer control groups can necessarily be ascribed to 'predisposition' – a greater probability that those in the inner control groups would seek a place at a specific university or type of university (from among the elites) *before* the prospect of the summer school programme appeared over their personal horizons. It is likely that some of their so-labelled predisposition is the result of becoming aware through the summer school programme of the possibility and appeal of a place at a competitive, selective university. If this is the case, then the findings would downplay the real impact of the Summer Schools and generate *conservative, minimum estimates* of the true effect of the programme.

The summer school programme achieves its success thus by raising two of the three 'As' of the widening access canon – student *awareness* and student *aspirations*. The out-going Director of OFFA, Sir Martin Harris, urges universities to diversify their access spend away from student financial support and direct proportionately more of it towards outreach. He promises that in the new, highly-challenging funding regime, OFFA will be on the lookout for good practice and '*any early evidence of impact on student behaviour or recruitment patterns*'. There seems no room to doubt that Sutton Trust's Summer Schools programme provides both.

⁵ See <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/widen/polar/polar2/>