The Scholars Programme is a comprehensive four-year pathway, from age 14 to 18, to help able students from lower income backgrounds reach their full academic potential, gain access to leading universities or other centres of excellence, and thrive once there. Able students with no family tradition of higher education are often at a great disadvantage when applying to leading universities. They often have low expectations and do not have the self-confidence to apply, they can make poor choices when selecting A-levels and frequently do not get the grades they are capable of. They may need additional support to ensure they succeed. The Scholars Programme provides this support. Using one-to-one sessions with Learning Mentors, undergraduate e-mentors, workshops, masterclasses and residential courses, the programme sets out to develop the personal and academic skills essential to enable students to fulfil their potential. Scholar alumni are offered ongoing support through career mentoring to help them access graduate jobs.

We asked participants what impact the Scholars Programme had on their thinking, aspirations, attainment and career paths

Name: Tom
Age: 23
From: Swindon
Degree: University of Bristol, First Class Degree in Computer Science
Currently: Technical Consultant for BAE Systems Applied Intelligence

"The Scholars Programme was extremely beneficial to me during my application to university. My mentor helped me come to a decision about what I wanted to study and where. My regular meetings with her encouraged me to think about my application and progress it in a timely manner giving me the best opportunity to write a really strong personal statement. Her guidance through this process was invaluable as I would not have received anywhere near this amount of support otherwise. I received offers from all five universities I applied to and I feel the support offered by Villiers Park had a direct impact on this."

Name: Ashleigh
Age: 19
From: Swindon
Degree: University of Oxford, Biomedical Sciences

"I wasn't sure what would happen after Year 11, and had never even thought about university subjects I may want to study. I never really aimed high because I didn't feel I could achieve high. Villiers Park gave me the opportunity to excel in my subjects and has influenced my grades hugely. The programme doesn't just support you academically, but it supports you in all aspects of life. You develop skills such as confidence; the confidence to believe in your academic abilities, the confidence to aim high, and the confidence to become the best student you can be. This programme helps to make the doctors, teachers, scientists, writers of tomorrow.”
Name: Bethany  
Age: 19  
From: Swindon  
Degree: Southampton University, Medicine

"I had never received much mentoring at school beforehand as I was always considered capable and a ‘high achiever’, so I was very happy to be selected as it meant I had someone to help me reach my full potential.

“Applying to study Medicine is insanely competitive, and the Villiers Park staff have been able to give me the extra edge I needed. I was lucky to join the Medicine Society which enabled me to begin studying for my entrance exam, the UKCAT, earlier than I would have, and enabled me to gain valuable work experience in a GP surgery that I would not have otherwise got. My mentor was extremely helpful at preparing me for the application, by helping me book university open days and with my personal statement.

“Villiers Park is such a unique programme that helps students like me reach their goals. It offers help to students who are lucky enough to be a Scholar and without it I would not be who I am today. This programme makes a massive difference to every Scholar in different ways. This programme is rare as it focuses on children who are not struggling in class as such, but have high aspirations and are often forgotten about.”

Name: Laura  
Age: 19  
From: Swindon  
Degree: University of Warwick, English Literature

"I had always been classed as ‘Gifted and Talented’, but other than being given the label, nothing else was done to try and stretch my abilities or anything like that. I think I was a lot less confident before joining Villiers Park, not just in myself and my interactions with others, but also about where I’d go after school.

“Villiers Park has definitely left me aspiring higher than I would have without them. I think more than anything just because my mentor and the five-day residential helped me realise that my true passion really is English, and that I absolutely need to get to the best possible place for me to study it. Villiers Park has helped me be certain about what I want to do and helped me choose my dream course.

"Villiers Park really do manage to change lives. Without them, there’s no way I would have considered Warwick and it’s possible I might’ve given up hoping to get to university considering all I went through in Year 13. Thank you Villiers Park!“
Name: Russell  
Age: 18  
From: Hastings & Bexhill  
Degree: University of Oxford, Physics  

“Growing up in Hastings (an area of socio-economic deprivation) I, and many of my fellow Scholars, have witnessed the negative effects of alcohol and drug abuse. Villiers Park raises the aspirations of Scholars, encourages them to attend university and praises high academic achievement, because of this it alters the mind set not only of the Scholars but of their friends and this ripple effect affects the entire school as a result. Although this may seem like an irrelevant and insignificant effect, I can assure you it is very real in the area where I live and in areas that other Scholars Programmes work. Villiers Park significantly improves the life prospects and future happiness of all Scholars and students in the community. I am truly honoured to be a part of the programme and I am extremely thankful for the opportunities it has given me and my friends.”

As part of the Scholars Programme students attend a Villiers Park five-day Inspiring Excellence Programme residential course which develops their passion for a particular subject and provides an insight into the knowledge and skills needed to become an expert in a particular field.

We asked Inspiring Excellence Programme participants what impact the course had on their thinking, aspirations, attainment and career paths

Name: Louie  
Age: 23  
Background: College, first generation accessing higher education  
From: Leyton  
Degree: Queen Mary University, First in Bsc Genetics  
Currently: undertaking a Masters of Research at Imperial College London  

“I felt I was a more rounded and outwards looking person due to the path this course sent me down. It motivated me to work harder, I applied myself with new vigour, and as a result I’ve probably done better overall. It was a great experience and one that changed my life path for the better!”
**Name:** Amy and Charlotte  
**Ages:** 19  
**Backgrounds:** both from state schools, Amy is first generation accessing higher education  
**From:** Wirral and Bournemouth  
**Degree:** University of Cambridge, Law

Amy: "Villiers Park is hands down the reason I’m at Cambridge now studying Law. Villiers Park made Law a subject that I realised for the first time that I have a passion for. It is the reason I applied to Cambridge because it made it realistic. Villiers Park was the first time I’d really been surrounded by a group of people passionate about academia and everyone was there to learn and because they loved learning. After a one week residential I had this seed of ambition planted – I wanted to do Law, I wanted to go to Cambridge and it came to fruition because of that."

Charlotte: "Villiers Park gave me the confidence to apply and it gave me the confidence I needed in the application stage to then get in and it’s provided so many opportunities afterwards. Villiers Park goes beyond just teaching you a bit to see if you like the subject it immersed you in it as a complete whole. We’ve had a phenomenal success rate for such a small group – three people from our Villiers Park course got into Cambridge, two or three got into Oxford, and one girl is at Brown University in America."

**Name:** Edward  
**Age:** 18  
**Background:** College, first generation considering higher education  
**From:** Horsham, West Sussex  
**Currently:** in final year at college

"It was so refreshing to be treated as an adult, in a non-competitive environment in which I could relax, without the thought of A-levels! Whereas in college the focus seems to intensely be on exam technique, never learning anything outside the syllabus, here I learnt so many interesting facts and theories and feel that I am now able to think in much more varied, interesting and critical ways.

“Admittedly, I was always under the impression that lectures would be dull, boring and tedious periods of note-taking and being spoken at, but the passion presented by the tutors made every session so engaging, exciting and enthralling.

"Since returning from the course I have reflected and am now seriously considering going to university - I was never considering this before!"