



Gateway Report

GATEWAY TO SUCCESS

November 2020

“We are proud of the support we offer our students to feel confident in getting the best from their studies at Cambridge, regardless of their background. The Gateway Programme is central to this support.”

DAME BARBARA STOCKING, PRESIDENT

The Gateway Programme is an academic and career-based development programme, which is unique to Murray Edwards College and has been running in its current format since 2010.

Gateway was originally devised by Dr Hilarie Bateman and is now run by Dr Kathy Kingstone and Julie Duncan. The Programme's vision centres on ensuring young women from all backgrounds are able to make the most of the opportunities available to them at the University of Cambridge. All our Gateway activities are designed to encourage students to be fearless in their aspirations, and to develop the knowledge and skills to make these achievable.

Academic research shows that young women face issues in terms of their confidence, being bold intellectually, and being ambitious for their future careers. These issues derive from gender-based assumptions and expectations that are deep-seated across societies. These issues are also often compounded when one's social background, ethnicity or sexuality differ from what people perceive to be the Cambridge 'norm'. Research also shows differences in the way men and women learn. The benefits of the Gateway Programme are rooted in being aware of these factors and using this knowledge to good effect to support the talented community of women students at Murray Edwards College.

This report starts by outlining the content of the Gateway Programme and what it is designed to achieve. The report then shares opinions from former students on the benefits of the programme, drawn from a research survey conducted in spring 2020.

**For more information about the
Gateway Programme please visit:
[www.murrayedwards.cam.ac.uk/
college-life/gateway-programme](http://www.murrayedwards.cam.ac.uk/college-life/gateway-programme)**

INTRODUCING THE GATEWAY PROGRAMME

The Programme has three strands – academic skills, personal development and career preparation.

First year undergraduates are offered sessions which focus on academic progress, complemented by personal development and groundwork for career preparation.

Examples of sessions include:

	Activity	Rationale
Academic skills	Making the most of supervisions, what constitutes 'good' work, effective revision, good practice in exams.	To encourage students to work effectively and confidently.
	Discipline specific skills e.g. scientific computing and writing, presenting quantitative solutions, best practice in essay writing.	To strengthen key subject-specific skills with the help of academic Fellows and student peer advisors.
Personal development	Managing competing priorities.	To enable students to take responsibility and manage time effectively.
Career preparation	Accessing College-negotiated internships and support during the application process.	To provide knowledge and experience, and broaden awareness of the range of opportunities available.

Postgraduates, finalists and second year undergraduates focus on personal development skills to support their successful transition into work or further study. Sessions also offer insight into careers and help with the process of getting a job.

Postgraduate students are also offered academic sessions as part of their introduction to Cambridge.

Examples of sessions include:

	Activity	Rationale
Personal development	Networking and presenting yourself.	To build skills useful to every career path and discernment in their application.
	Personal development plan designed to cover academic performance and attributes desired by employers.	To encourage self-awareness and acknowledgement of achievements. Introduces students to the attributes valued in the professional world.
Career preparation	Online networking evening.	To provide a better understanding of a range of fields and how careers unfold. To practice productive networking.
	'Into employment Saturday' - Mock interviews, a group assessment exercise and Q&A with professionals.	To provide practice and feedback on standard assessment processes and better understanding of the 'employer' view.
	One day work-shadowing and College-negotiated internships.	To provide knowledge and experience, and broaden awareness of the range of opportunities available.
Academic skills	Introduction to academic expectations, intellectual property, and the supervision system.	To help negotiate the Cambridge system and expectations quickly and effectively.

Over the last 10 years we have learned from our experience and from the feedback of participants: session content has been honed and expanded, and students are able to select the topics they feel are most relevant to their interests and development.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Of those who graduated since 2017 and have therefore benefitted from the way the Programme has evolved over time:

70% said they would be likely or very likely to mention the Gateway Programme as a reason to study at Murray Edwards College.

75% said their participation greatly helped or helped their study skills and transition to university learning.

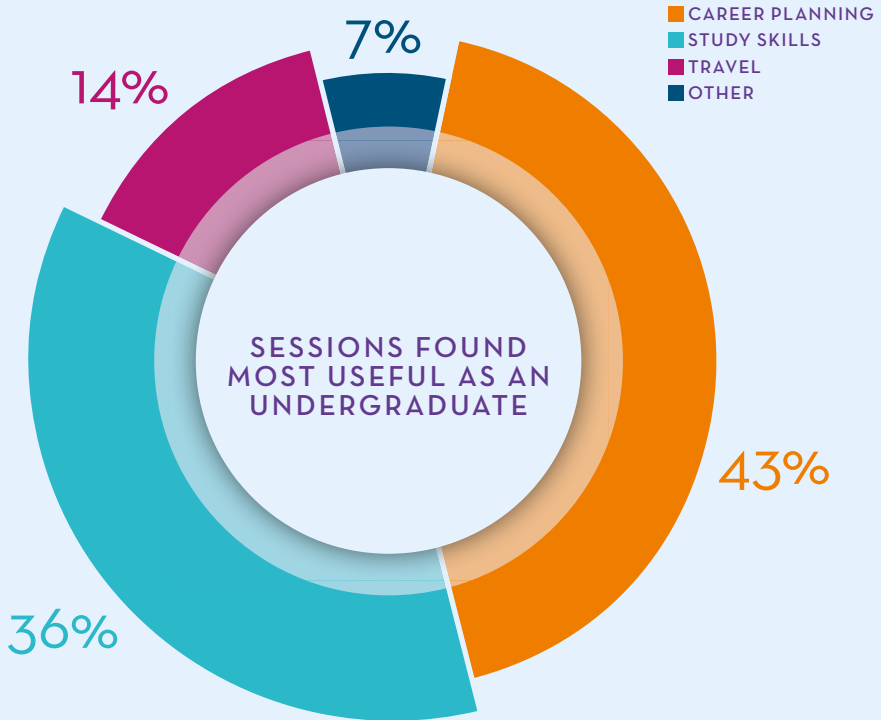
44% said their participation greatly helped or helped in their subsequent careers.

“This programme is extremely useful overall and an asset to Medwards.”

“It’s hard to find the time and space to reflect on what’s going well (both in my studies and search for a career path). The Gateway Programme provided me with that opportunity.”

Sessions found most useful as an undergraduate

Four out of five survey respondents took part in the Gateway Programme. Analysis of open text answers shows that the sessions participants found most useful were study skills and career planning.



Those who did not take part in any sessions almost always felt they would have benefitted from attending the Programme, both as undergraduates and subsequently. Responses to ‘were there any workshops or experiences... that you didn’t take, yet now believe would have been useful to you?’ included:

“All of the skills would have been good to think about.”

“Probably all of them.”

“Yes...100%.”

Transition to effective learning in Cambridge

63% of first years who participated in the Gateway Programme attended the sessions on developing their academic study skills. Looking only at those who graduated since 2017 this figure rises to 87%.

“Amazing first session just chatting with second and third year students who have been there, done that. I got great advice about supervisions, where it was important to focus and how it was OK not to be OK.”

Benefits of the academic aspects of the Programme

Verbatim comments show the perceived value of coaching on study skills such as how to write for science and arts subjects, revision sessions and exam practice. What is perhaps more surprising is how much students valued learning from each other with regards to academic performance. They also appreciated the chance to bond with other first years attending the same sessions. These three things stood out:

1. Learning from students who were just ahead of them

“The student mentors in each subject [gave] tailored advice about what is expected in supervisions, essays and exams. It was invaluable to talk to someone who had recently been through the same process.”

2. Getting advice about how to balance academic and non-academic commitments and thus help safeguard their wellbeing

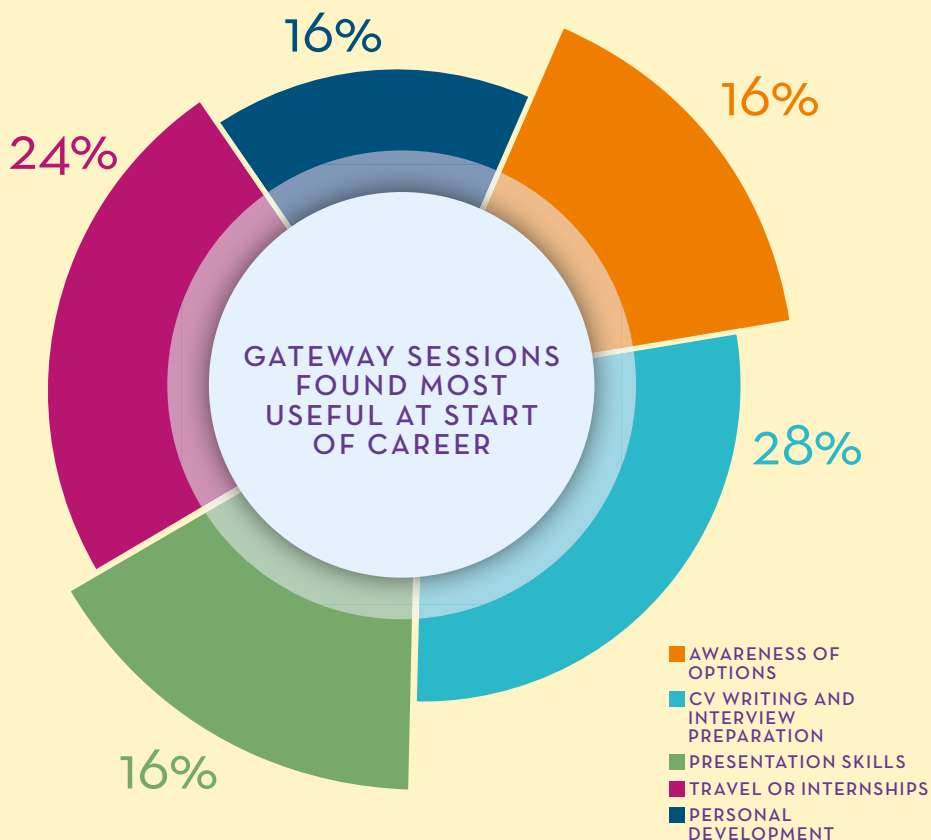
“I liked the opportunity to talk to second and third year students and have group discussion about how to adapt to university life, balancing academic and non-academic commitments.”

3. Meeting their fellow students

“It helped form bonds with fellow College mates.”

CAREER PREPARATION

46% of first years who participated in the Gateway Programme and 72% of second years and finalists, attended the sessions on career preparation. Looking only at those who graduated since 2017, the percentage of second years and finalists attending these sessions rises to 82%.



Benefits of the career-related aspects of the Programme

Verbatim comments show that all the sessions were valued, with most mentioning CV writing, interview preparation, internships and funding for travel.

Digging deeper, alumnae highlighted these three key benefits:

1. Inspiration from alumnae on their career journeys

A key objective of the College and the Gateway Programme is to inspire confidence in our students to make bold choices in order to make the most of their ambition and opportunities. Verbatim comments show that hearing first-hand about the careers of students who had gone before them went a long way to meeting this objective.

“The sessions were run by inspiring women, providing us with role models.”

“I especially remember a talk by an alumna about venturing into the world of work, coupled with a review of her CV.”

2. Skills to help the career application process

“A really good workshop of CV writing skills offered excellent advice... that I’ve been using ever since.”

“There was a full day on CV writing and mock interview practice. I found that excellent.”



“Support finding internships gave me opportunities that would never have been open to me... [they] were invaluable in honing my career interests and gaining employment.”

3. Opportunities to experience careers and workplaces

Appreciation of this element of the Programme came through strongly in terms of honing a career direction and ruling out some options. Work-shadowing and College-facilitated internships were thought to be extremely useful and, in some cases, led to job offers.

“The internship placement really strengthened my CV.”

“I applied for a job at the firm where I currently work after shadowing one of the alumnae for a day!”

“[After an internship] I’m now in full-time employment in that company.”

Although these sessions were focused on preparation for entering the working world, some of those who graduated between 2013 and 2016 reported the skills they learned were still helpful as they negotiated their careers.

“I remember the phrase ‘task not time’. That has stuck with me.”



PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

48% of first years and 56% of second years and finalists who participated in the Gateway Programme attended the personal development sessions.

Benefits of the personal development element

The personal development aspects such as strengthening confidence and ambition, and taking personal responsibility are present throughout the Programme. They are also delivered through specific sessions on skills such as networking, presenting yourself and creating a personal development plan.

“I appreciated the empowerment to speak about my experience and to have a valid voice in group discussion.”

“The summer funding was invaluable at levelling the playing field and enabling me to have opportunities I otherwise couldn’t afford.”

Participants in the Gateway Programme are eligible to apply for funding to undertake a challenge in the summer vacation. Applicants are required to make the case for how they will benefit and how the experience relates to attributes employers are looking for. **55% of survey respondents received funding towards undertaking their Gateway Challenge.** Many talked about how much these experiences opened the door to opportunities they would not otherwise have been able to access.



“Those experiences of travel and exploration were extremely formative and have continued to inform and impact me today.”

“I can confidently say that the summer I spent in China funded by Gateway Challenges changed the whole direction of my career.”

“[Without Gateway funding] I would never have dared to [have] a summer trip abroad when I could be at home working.”

Adding to the skills offered by the Gateway Programme

We asked alumnae what skills they would have found valuable for the Gateway Programme to offer. The vast majority suggested topics that would have helped their career preparation. In particular, because College-facilitated internships were so beneficial, there were calls to widen their reach both through the career options available and the geographical scope. To help select or indeed rule out future career paths, some suggested ‘insight’ sessions that were longer than a work-shadowing day and shorter than a full internship.

Others highlighted ideas that could help in their working lives, particularly presentation skills and networking, and often explained why they felt this was a good idea.

“It is easy as a woman to second-guess ourselves and talk our way out of opportunities that seem risky.”



Our alumnae also made very useful recommendations in terms of which skills training to consider for future Gateway sessions. The following table summarises these recommendations:

Practical skills	Personal skills	Interpersonal skills
Problem solving	Assertiveness	Art of negotiation
Project management	Confidence building	Team leadership
Making effective presentations	Risk taking	Professional dynamics
Public speaking	What to do if you are struggling to find a job	Interpersonal work relationships
Writing in a corporate style		Sexism and workplace challenges faced by women
Time management		Networking
IT literacy		

As we have mentioned, Gateway has evolved over time and it is interesting to note that many of our alumnae's suggestions have already been implemented.

About the survey

99 alumnae who studied a range of subjects and graduated between 2013 and 2019 responded to this survey. It was conducted in May and June 2020. Four out of five responses were from those who had participated in Gateway sessions. All responses were made anonymously. Much of the survey asked for free text responses and this wealth of information provided the valuable insights reported here. We thank all the respondents for sharing their views.

All the quotes are taken verbatim from the survey of alumnae.

