



796

STUDENTS BENEFITTED FROM
A SCHOLARSHIP IN 2018/19

£1,545,000

WAS AWARDED IN SCHOLARSHIPS
IN 2018/19

25

SCHOLARSHIPS ARE AVAILABLE
TO OUR STUDENTS

A place for progress

University has long been viewed as the missing link in the battle for greater social equality. If higher education is available to everyone, regardless of who they are or who their parents are, surely that is half the battle towards a society where everyone can reach their true potential?

You only have to look at Nordic countries like Denmark and Finland, which invest heavily in education, to witness its extraordinary power. Not only are people from poorer backgrounds far more likely to go to university in the first place, but overall social equality in both countries is ranked among the best in the Western world.

The not-so glass ceiling

In Britain, on the other hand, 44 per cent of wealth is owned by just 10 per cent the population. Nearly one in three children live in poverty and more than a fifth of the population live below the poverty line – despite the fact that most of these households are in work. Against this backdrop, it is clear that people

from poorer backgrounds would benefit considerably from higher education. But they are also the least likely to get it, even as university applications continue to rise. Current rates for tuition fees mean modern graduates face unprecedented debt, and, with no ‘bank of mum and dad’ to fall back on, poorer students face far higher stakes.

Long before young people even consider applying to university, our education system is failing many, with standards at schools in deprived areas statistically far below the national average. It is symbolic, perhaps, that the Social Mobility Commission’s 2018 report found just 15 per cent of 18-to-24-year-olds believe their generation has the most opportunity to move up in society. It further reported that 75 per cent of all those surveyed believe

poorer people are less likely to go to top universities, and 64 per cent believe those from a working-class background have less chance of pursuing a professional career.

So, what can universities do to ease social inequality? How can they attract students from disadvantaged backgrounds and empower them to see things through? Funding, understandably, is a huge part of the solution; coming in the form of scholarships, fee waivers and bursaries. Outreach programmes are also hugely effective at reaching and motivating those from poorer backgrounds.

The University of Westminster has continually shown its commitment to attracting and supporting the most diverse student body possible. A crucial part of this is driven by its social mobility initiatives.

The Wates Scholarship

Established by James Wates CBE, former University of Westminster Governor and Chairman of leading construction company, Wates Group, Wates Scholarships offer financial assistance to UK home students embarking on full-time undergraduate study within the School of Architecture and Cities, who are the first in their family to go to university.

With the ongoing costs of materials, equipment and printing portfolios, architecture is an expensive course at the best of times, and the £2,000 annual scholarship can significantly ease financial pressure, leaving students free to focus on their studies.

"I know that I would have struggled a lot," says Wates scholar, Maryam Islam. "The scholarship also helps mentally – it's comforting knowing that I have that support financially."

Both Maryam and her sister started university at the same time, limiting the financial support their family can provide to each. In her second year of a BSc Architectural and Environmental Design – the only course of its kind in the UK – Maryam is currently considering a career in environmental consultancy. The degree "means a lot" to her, she explains.

"In society nowadays, it's like you can't be accepted unless you have a good education," she says. "And to be able to achieve that... I'm so grateful."

For Ewan Smith, a final year of BA Tourism and Events Management student, the importance of the Wates Scholarship goes beyond the financial backing itself.

"It's been an absolute godsend," he says. "With all honesty, I don't know if I would have been able to finish this degree without the help from Wates and the Scholarship. Not just financially, but from the point of view that you know someone believes in you."

During his time at Westminster, Ewan has found the Scholarships Office very

// **WHEN YOU GO TO THE SCHOLARSHIP EVENTS, IT'S INCREDIBLY DIVERSE – THEN AGAIN, IT'S AN INCREDIBLY DIVERSE UNIVERSITY, WHICH IS BRILLIANT** //

supportive and proactive and says he would feel comfortable turning to them for help on any aspect of his course or university life.

"It's a nice feeling," he continues. "It's almost like having central heating, where you know it's there and it just gives you a little warmth I suppose."

As a mature student, originally from a disadvantaged background, Ewan is acutely aware of the 'elitist' reputation of universities and has sometimes felt out of place. In his view, both the University of Westminster and the Wates programme itself do a great deal to challenge this perception.

"When you go to the scholarship events, it's incredibly diverse – then again, it's an incredibly diverse university, which is brilliant, and actually makes me feel a lot more comfortable being there," he says, adding: "You can think of every demographic of person and you can find them in that room and I think that's a testament to Wates, that they understand what the University's about."

Both Ewan and Maryam say they never expected to be chosen for the Scholarship, and it was a huge confidence boost.

"It makes you feel really special to achieve something like that," Maryam says.

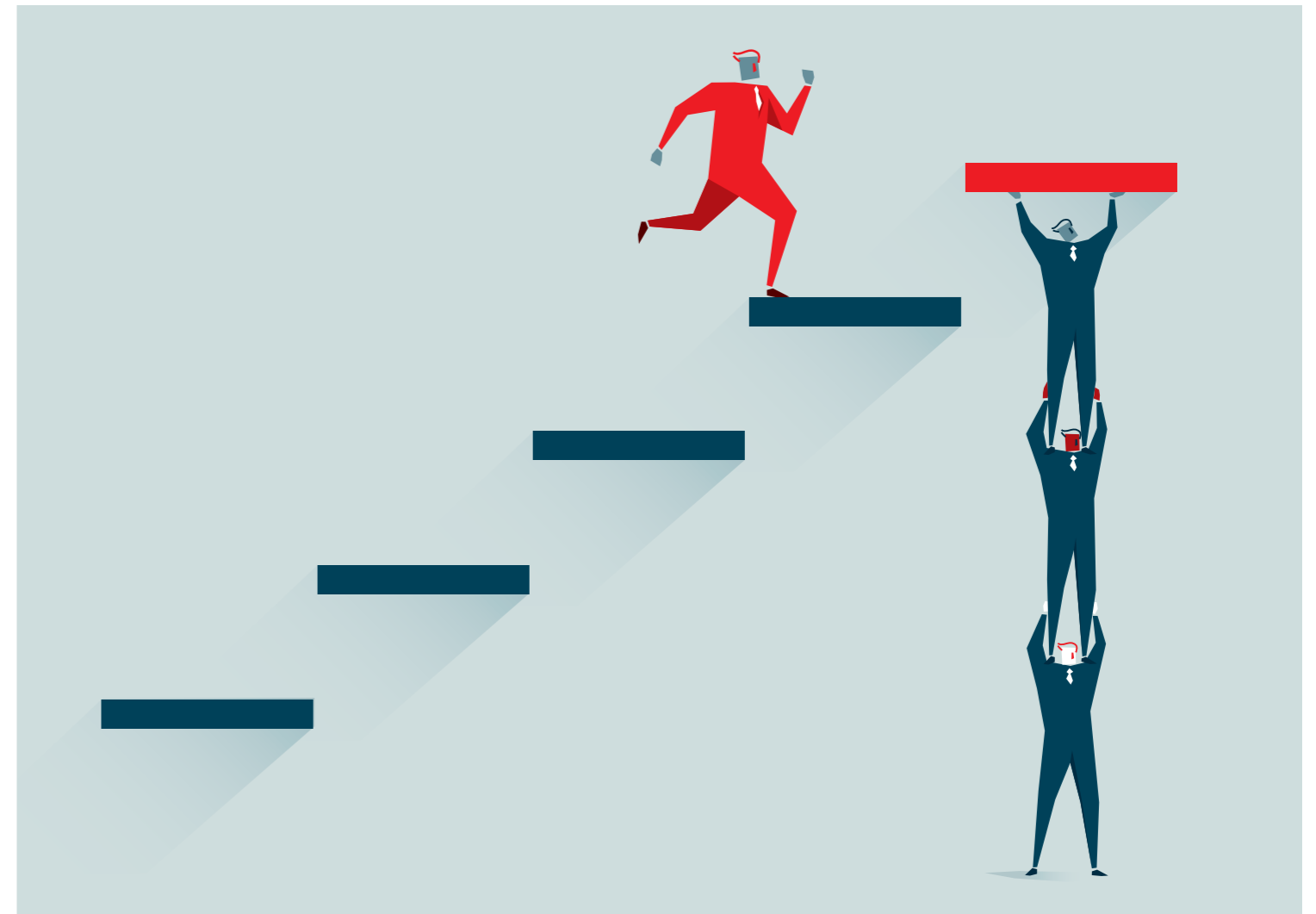
Estranged students

In 2016, the late Professor Geoffrey Petts, Westminster's former Vice-Chancellor, signed a 'Stand Alone'

pledge to support 'estranged students', meaning under-25s, studying without the approval or support of a family network. Many estranged students are victims of physical and emotional abuse, facing issues such as honour-based violence, forced marriage or LBTQI+ rejection. A large proportion of them are not supported by social services and over 30 per cent are, or have been, homeless by the time their course starts. Lacking the financial and emotional support most of their peers would take for granted, these students face far greater challenges when they commence their degrees. On top of this, many feel stigmatised or that people do not understand their situation, and they often report a reluctance to seek out support and resources offered within university.

As well as working to raise awareness of the problem, Westminster offers bursaries, all-year-round accommodation at the University's halls of residence, with a deposit waiver, and accommodation scholarships, in partnership with the Unite Foundation.

In 2018, Westminster won a Stand Alone award in the 'graduation and beyond' section for initiatives such as extended summer employment contracts for final year students. Working with support from the Sir John Cass's Foundation and the Hollick Family Charitable Trust, Westminster has also secured external funding for graduation and transition from university for estranged students.



Care leavers

Care leavers are really a category all of their own, facing a unique set of financial and emotional challenges when they start university. Westminster's wide-reaching available help includes support from University tutors, bursaries, scholarships and tailored financial advice. Westminster also offers completion bursaries through Sir John Cass's Foundation, and support with accommodation costs through Unite.

Quintin Hogg Trust

Set up in memory of the University's founder, the Quintin Hogg Trust (QHT) funds two separate undergraduate scholarships.

In Session offers one-off awards to financially qualifying students, who have been involved in the Student Ambassador Scheme or the Students' Union or have undertaken volunteer work either at university or before.

The English as additional language (EAL) scholarships are awarded to financially qualifying students whose second language is English.

In 2016, to celebrate the University's 125th anniversary, the University of Westminster established The 125 Fund. In conjunction with QHT, the Fund invites University alumni to donate money, which is matched pound for pound, to make awards to enhance the courses and career aspirations of individual students. Past grants have included paying for one student's animation equipment and funding a PhD student's participation in an international conference.

The perks of diversity

The benefits of social mobility go far beyond simple fairness, or even the personal empowerment of individuals. Studies show diversity in the workplace has a hugely positive impact on both productivity and innovation. A team encompassing a broad range of backgrounds and demographics can bring fresh and varied perspectives to a project, and companies embracing diversity statistically outperform non-diverse workplaces.

Britain needs a skilled workforce more than ever before, creating a

further incentive to empower people from all backgrounds to gain further education.

The findings of the Office for Students' (OfS) consultation on improving access to higher education (published in December) has placed a firm onus on universities to facilitate greater equality in every way they can. While there is a limit to what any institution can do in isolation, social mobility initiatives have never been more important.

The University of Westminster has already helped thousands of students from disadvantaged backgrounds achieve academic and professional goals and it remains deeply committed to finding new and innovative ways to improve on its efforts.

Thank you to all our generous donors.

To find out more about supporting scholarship funding, please email development@westminster.ac.uk