closing
the
gap

BEAT THE ODDS

ANNUAL
REPORT
2019

"I didn't know that this program was going to change me so much: it helped me with my confidence; it trained me to listen actively; and it helped me to get out of my comfort zone. After SPM, as a Malaysian, I want to create my own organisation or work with organisations that are linked to education to help students and my juniors with their future. "

Akif, 2019 Scholar

Content

Foreword

3 years have passed since Brian, Kok Hin, Connie and I started Closing The Gap Malaysia. What started out as a personal endeavour to support one Form 6 graduate to apply for university scholarships has since grown into a 3-year programme that has empowered 104 students in Selangor and Kuala Lumpur.

In the past year, our Scholars secured RM3.4 million worth of scholarships, which is 4.8 times the cost of supporting 3 Cohorts of Scholars for 3 years. 66% of our 2017 Cohort have secured offers to or are already in university. These include offers from selective universities such as Stanford University, University of Malaya and University of York.

Besides that, 2019 was also a year of learning and exploration. Here are our top 3 highlights:

Firstly, we **piloted a Form 6 programme for 11 Scholars, with the goal of addressing the gap in university preparedness within the public Form 6 education stream** - a stream that typically attracts lower-income students who were unable to secure scholarships or alternative pre-university options after Form 5.

Secondly, we also took learnings from the previous years by **emphasizing critical thinking as an integral ingredient for university success in the programme design**. Among other efforts, we collaborated with AccessEd, a UK-based university access programme, to introduce university tutorial-style enrichment in our Residential Camp to raise academic and intellectual aspirations among our students.

Ida Thien
Co-Founder and
Managing Director

Thirdly, we **explored a new partnership with Yayasan Tunku Abdul Rahman, a scholarship-giving foundation set up by an Act of Parliament, to revamp their scholarship programmes.** It was always Closing The Gap's long term goal to influence scholarship-giving to be more contextual based, rather than strictly needs or merits based. Considering that we only expected to have a hand at building scholarships in 5-10 years time, this opportunity has greatly accelerated our strategic plans.

We hope this report will provide you with a clear picture of Closing The Gap's work in the above areas and more. At the same time, we hope that it gives an honest look into aspects of the work Closing The Gap could refine and improve on further.

Personally, it has been a humbling journey to have met so many generous souls who have been instrumental in helping Closing The Gap get to where we are now.

If you are already collaborating with us in our pursuit to push for fairer access to quality university education in Malaysia, we thank you for your unwavering belief and contributions. If you would like to partner with us, do get in touch to chat more about how we could work together!

Partners

Closing The Gap gratefully acknowledges our key partners who were instrumental to our success in 2019:

Steering Committee & Co-Founders

The work would not have been possible without the contribution as well as guidance of **our Steering Committee (SteerCo) members and Co-Founders.** As such, we would like to acknowledge the unrelenting support of:

Datin Mina Cheah-Foong
Managing Director
The Body Shop
Malaysia

Dzameer Dzulkifli
Co-founder &
Managing Director
Teach For Malaysia

David Slade
Vice Principal
Alice Smith School
(*SteerCo since Aug 2019*)

Cheah Kok Hin
Associate
Southern Capital
(*SteerCo & Co-founder*)

Connie Foong
Columbia Graduate
School of Journalism
(*Co-founder and Programme Manager until June 2019*)

Brian Geh
Consultant
McKinsey&Co
(*Co-founder*)

The Challenge

Only 5% of young adults from the bottom 40% income group of Malaysia **have earned a Bachelor's degree** compared to 40% of their peers from the top quintile.[1]

Quality higher education remains an important pathway to lift them out of poverty. B40 students with degree qualifications are/have:

4.6x
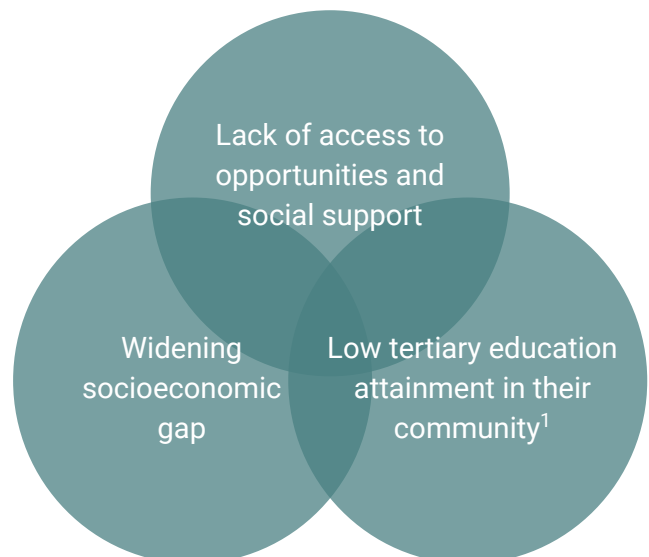
more **likely** to be upwardly mobile[2]

2x

more **earnings** compared to non-degree holders[3]

A 2011 research by the National Bureau of Economic Research in the United States[4] estimating the benefits of attending highly selective colleges also showed that *students who come from less privileged backgrounds benefit greatly from attending selective colleges* due to the social capital offered at such colleges.

However, they face unique challenges that prevent them from aspiring for quality higher education:

Lack of access to opportunities and social support

Widening socioeconomic gap

Low tertiary education attainment in their community[1]

1   Malaysia Economic Monitor: High-Performing Education, December 2013
2   Khazanah Research Institute, Social Mobility Report, October 2016
3   Malaysian Department of Statistics, Salaries & Wages Survey Report 2017
4   Dale & Krueger, Estimating the Return to College Selectivity over the Career Using Administrative Earnings Data, The National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper Series 2011

Our Mission

We help **bright, underrepresented students** enter quality universities by **empowering them** with the knowledge and skills to achieve their fullest potential.

We do this by recruiting high-potential students in Form 5/Upper 6 from lower-income backgrounds to join our 2-3 year intensive programme. Through the programme, students, called Scholars, receive support and guidance to attain entry into local or global universities. Our programme consists of 4 components:

Regular workshops

that provide Scholars with the **knowledge, resources and skills** to set them up for success.

Mentoring

Each Scholar has a mentor who **guides his/her university and scholarship planning for 2 years.**

Additional enrichment

External workshops, exposure trips and internships to **supplement Scholars' growth and broaden their horizons.**

Residential camp

Inspire Scholars through a 5-day **immersive university learning and community-building experience**. Students will also undertake university-level tutorials in different studies to **raise intellectual curiosity and academic aspirations.**

The 2019 Programme Journey:
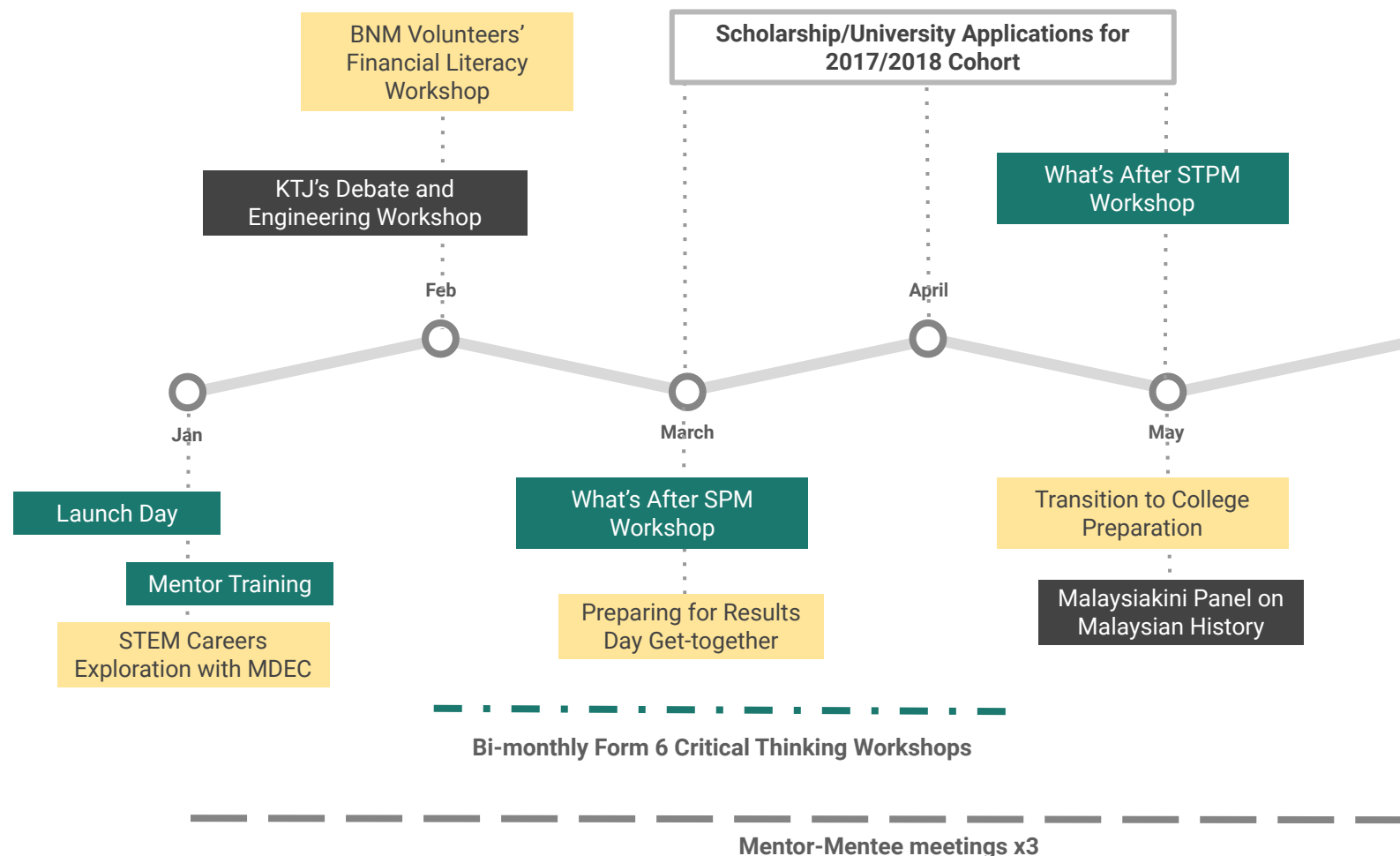## Jan - May

BNM Volunteers' Financial Literacy Workshop

KTJ's Debate and Engineering Workshop

Scholarship/University Applications for 2017/2018 Cohort

What's After STPM Workshop

Feb

April

Jan

March

May

Launch Day

Mentor Training

STEM Careers Exploration with MDEC

What's After SPM Workshop

Preparing for Results Day Get-together

Transition to College Preparation

Malaysiakini Panel on Malaysian History

Bi-monthly Form 6 Critical Thinking Workshops

Mentor-Mentee meetings x3

2019 Cohort

We welcomed 50 new Scholars on Launch Day, consisting of 38 Form 5 and 12 Form 6 students. In January - June, the Cohort explored their post-SPM/STPM options. Form 6 Scholars underwent a separate track of activities from the Form 5 Scholars, which incorporated bi-weekly critical thinking tutorials at SMK Tinggi Klang to supplement the main workshops. *For more details about this, see pg 11.*

2018 Cohort

In the 2nd year of the programme, we focused on preparing the 2018 Scholars for college entry in May/June 2019. This included further explorations of STEM careers, making sense of their SPM results, charting out their options and supporting their scholarship/university applications.

We also partnered with Bank Negara Malaysia's Volunteers to develop our Scholars' financial literacy in preparation for independent living once they enter university.
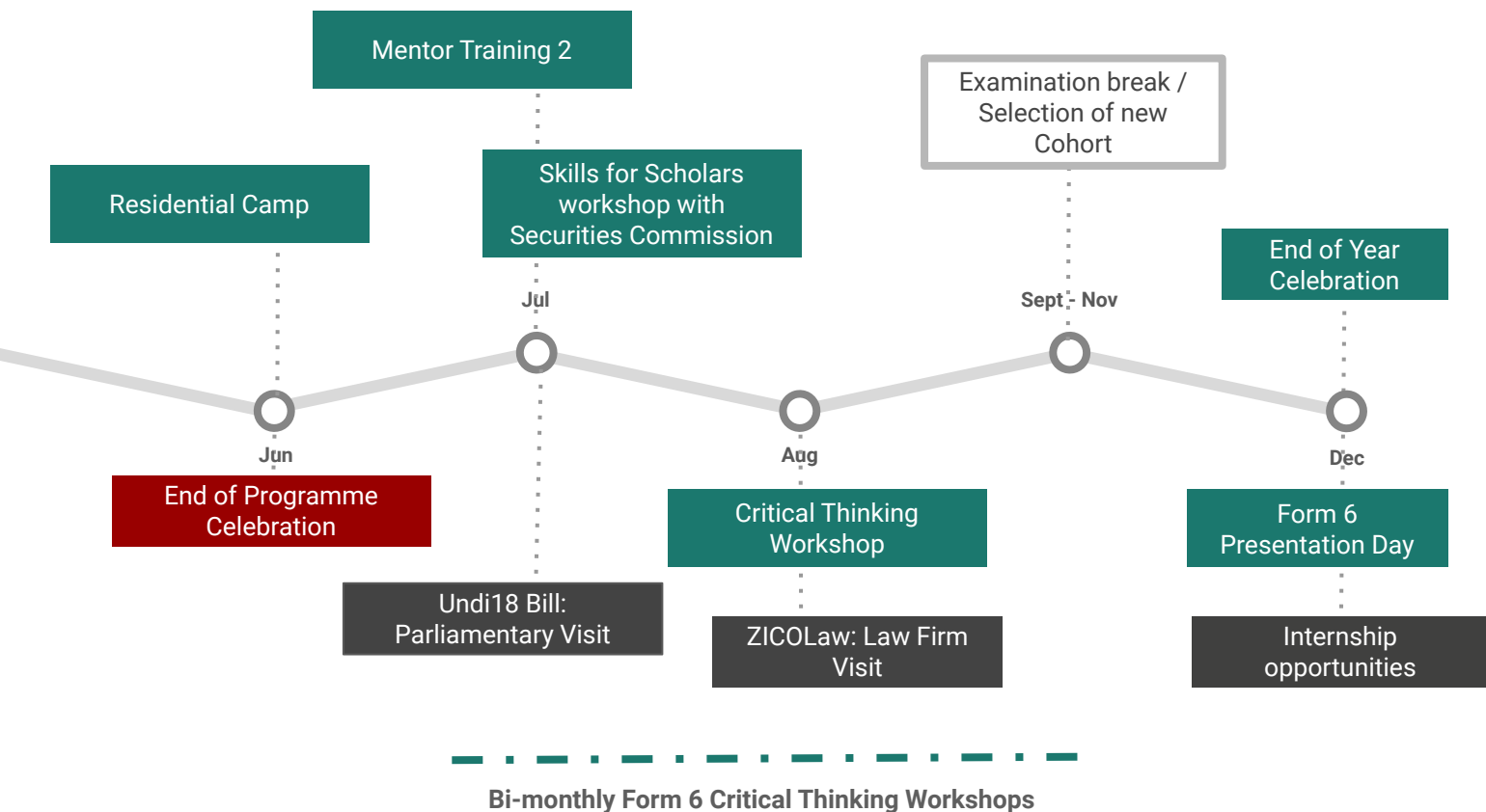
External Enrichment

We also identified several external opportunities for all CTG Scholars to participate in. The aim was to expand their horizons, general knowledge and their soft skill sets. In February, our Scholars delved into debating and engineering with Kolej Tuanku Jaafar's Oxbridge Workshops. Whereas in May, our students attended a history panel organized by Malaysiakini in remembrance of the May 13 Event.

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The 2019 Programme Journey:
Jun - Dec

Mentor Training 2

Examination break / Selection of new Cohort

Residential Camp

Skills for Scholars workshop with Securities Commission

End of Year Celebration

Jun

Jul

Aug

Sept - Nov

Dec

End of Programme Celebration

Undi18 Bill: Parliamentary Visit

Critical Thinking Workshop

Form 6 Presentation Day

ZICOLaw: Law Firm Visit

Internship opportunities

Bi-monthly Form 6 Critical Thinking Workshops

Mentor-Mentee meetings x3

To enhance our Mentors' mentoring skills, we collaborated with HELP University's Counselling students to deliver a training on mental health wellbeing.

2019 Cohort

Scholars continued to hone their interview, speaking and critical thinking skills. Namely, we introduced a Philosophy 101 class conducted by Hazman Baharom, a trainer for the Malaysian International Philosophy Olympiad team. The workshop also welcome DS Nazir Razak who shared with our Scholars about the importance of preparing for the jobs of the future. For Residential Camp details, please refer to *pg 10*.

2017 Cohort

Our Pilot Cohort officially graduated from the programme! 19 have since secured entry into universities, with 7 more completing pre-university *(see pg 14)*. We will continue to engage the Cohort as our inaugural Alumni Scholars.

External Enrichment

In July, we collaborated with Undi18 to bring our Scholars to Parliament. Our Scholars witnessed the debate on lowering of the voting age and met with Members of Parliament. In August, our 2019 Mentor also hosted a visit to his law firm for our Scholars to expose them to careers in the legal field. Lastly, we coordinated internships for 7 Scholars after SPM/STPM. 7 Scholars pursued internships in education organisations (including CTG itself) and University of Malaya under a biochemistry lab immersion programme.

2019 Programme Highlights:
Residential Camp

The Residential Camp is a 5-day-4-night university camp held at Sunway University to give our Form 5 Scholars of the 2019 Cohort an immersive experience of university life. The camp had 3 objectives:

Community
Cultivate a sense of community and camaraderie among students

Capabilities
Improve students' soft skills, application skills and confidence

Choices
Explore different career choices and articulate Scholars' desired choices

Programme Partners:

Architects of Diversity MALAYSIA

AoD is a unique programme designed for secondary school students in Malaysia to tackle the hard questions of living in a multicultural society. It aims to provide the tools to critically engage among groups through empathetic learning and listening.

ACCESS ED

AccessEd exists to increase access to university for young people from under-served backgrounds around the world. We collaborated with AccessEd to design a series of Academic Tutorials consisting of robust curriculum and guidance throughout camp (*see next page*).

Honed soft skills through collaborations with Architects of Diversity to deliver a series of sessions that strengthened **critical skills** and encouraged **stronger intra-group connections.** This included conflict management, self-awareness and writing skills.

Pictured above: Jason of Architect of Diversity facilitating a session on conflicts and negotiation.

Engaged with volunteers from diverse fields to support our camp sessions. Among others, we had a **scholarship panel featuring ex-scholars of Bank Negara Malaysia, Khazanah and Petronas, Adriana** from United World Colleges delivering **a Writing Workshop**, and a MIT graduate who shared about his university experience.

Pictured above: a scholarship panel

Empowered 2017 and 2018 Scholars in the design and facilitating of sessions at camp. Our senior Scholars managed logistics, icebreaker sessions, interview practices and acted as **Mentors to support 2019 Cohort Scholars in their tutorial assignments.**

Pictured above: Parveenn, 2018 Scholar, delivering a session on recognizing differences among students.
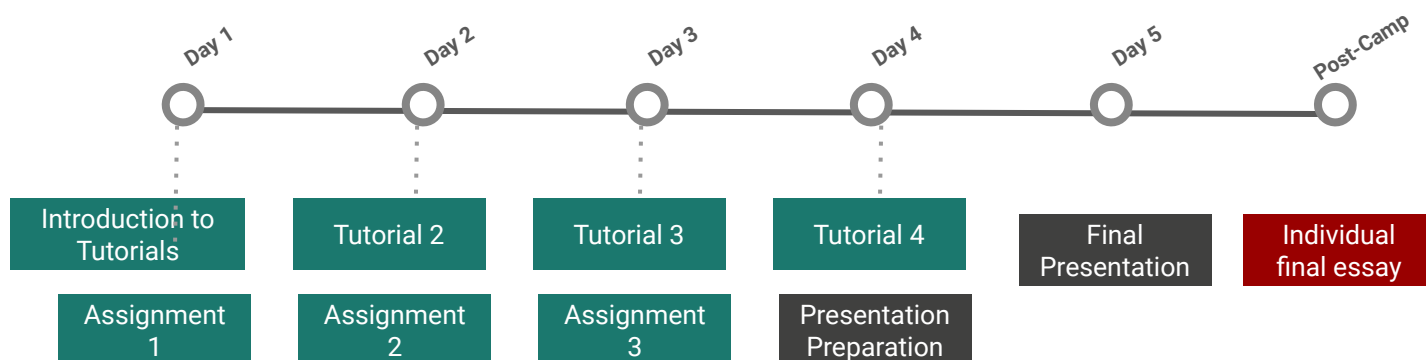
"One of the things I managed to achieve at camp was to stand up and voice out my reflections. I didn't think that I could actually managed to do it so well. While it was quite shocking for me, it made me realize that I'm actually capable at speaking out loud and confidently if I try to."

Gan, 2019 Scholar, when asked What is something that you have accomplished or improved at camp that you are very proud of?"

2019 Programme Highlights:
Academic Tutorials @ Residential Camp

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Post-Camp

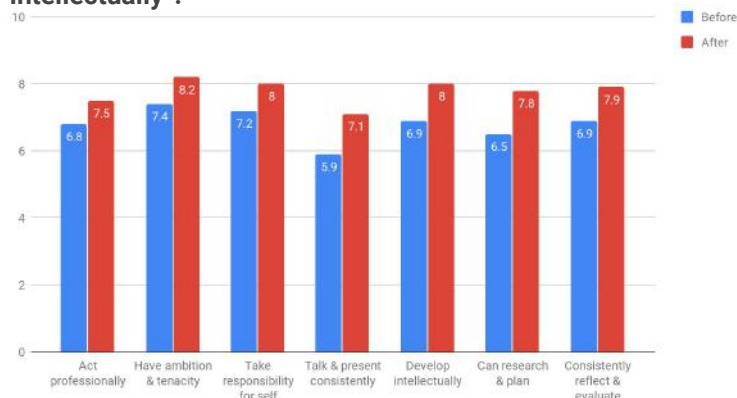| Introduction to Tutorials	Tutorial 2	Tutorial 3	Tutorial 4	Final Presentation	Individual final essay
Assignment 1	Assignment 2	Assignment 3	Presentation Preparation		

We introduced the Academic Tutorials as a new component of Residential Camp in 2019. Scholars formed 1 of 5 tutorial groups (Chemical Engineering, Microbiology, Social Psychology, Gender Studies or History) and were expected to complete assignments which culminate to an assessed presentation on the final day of camp. After camp, Scholars also submitted written essays to their respective tutors to be evaluated - as they would be if they were in university.

This model is loosely adapted from The Brilliant Club's Scholars Programme, which recruits, trains and places researchers in schools to deliver programmes of university-style tutorials in the United Kingdom. Our goal is to develop our Scholars' academic competencies, intellectual curiosity and higher order thinking skills - all crucial for them to be ahead of the curve in university.

Skill	Growth (%)
Meta-cognition	4.8%
Motivation	3.0%
Self-efficacy	1.6%
University readiness	12.4%
Average	**4.8%**

We measured the students' growth throughout camp using a research-based questionnaire adapted by AccessEd (Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire), administered pre- and post-camp. It evaluated students in 4 areas, and found that **students experienced the most growth (12.4%) in university-readiness.**

Further post-camp evaluation also showed an overall increase in the Scholars' reported growth in the Core Competencies below, with the most growth exhibited for **"Can research and plan", "Talk & present consistently" and "develop intellectually".**

Before / After bar chart:
- Act professionally: 6.8 / 7.5
- Have ambition & tenacity: 7.4 / 8.2
- Take responsibility for self: 7.2 / 8
- Talk & present consistently: 5.9 / 7.1
- Develop intellectually: 6.9 / 8
- Can research & plan: 6.5 / 7.8
- Consistently reflect & evaluate: 6.9 / 7.9

"My tutorial session on gender studies) inspired me so much. Eg: Analysing how advertisements leave negative stereotypes towards men and women."

Yan Ni, 2019 Scholar, when asked "What inspired you the most at camp?"

Clockwise from top: Best Presentation Group, Wani (our Microbiology tutor) delivering a session to her group, a sample cover of a tutorial handbook on Race and Political Narratives in Malaysia.

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2019 Programme Highlights:
Form 6 Programme

We recruited 12 Form 6 Scholars from SMK Tinggi Klang to Closing The Gap for the first time in 2019. To this, we piloted a Form 6 Year 1-only programme that comprised of Core Sessions for the 12 Scholars throughout the year and Open Workshops for students from 3 Form 6 Colleges. The Core Sessions were aimed at raising the Scholars' intellectual curiosity, higher-order thinking skills and communication skills.

Open Form 6 Workshops

What's After STPM Pathway Workshop

We invited 5 speakers who graduated from STPM and went on to pursue diverse university pathways to share with **40** students from SMK Tinggi Klang.

Skills For Scholars Workshop in partnership with Securities Commission

39 post-SPM students from SMK Tinggi Klang, Kolej Tingkatan 6 BU, SMK Taman Tasik and Kolej Matrikulasi attended this event co-run with Scholars of Securities Commission - some of whom went on to become our 2020 CTG Mentors.

30%

Increase in self-reported growth for the competency "Talk and Present consistently" by Scholars in 1 year

Core Sessions

Jan — Feb — Mar — Apr — May — Jun — Jul — Aug — Sept — Oct — Nov — Dec

Launch Day

Critical thinking sessions

Ran 11 in-school sessions from February to September on identity, gender, ethics community, culture and current issues that encouraged students to critically engage with complex reading materials and practise speaking.

"I think i grew the most in the critical thinking sessions as they allowed me to stand on different perspectives and taught me to ask deeper questions on those topics."

Vincent, 2019 Scholar, on the most growth he experienced in 2019

Form 6 Capstone Presentation

Scholars underwent 2 weeks of intensive trainings to produce a presentation on current issues to an external audience.

Mentor-Mentee Testimonial
with Zain Putra (2018 Mentor)

Can you describe your journey with CTG?

It has been a very meaningful journey. The first thing that comes to mind when I talk about CTG is of course the relationship that I built with Shamsul [Mentee]. It has been interesting building a relationship with someone from that generation because I left school a while ago. However, we hit it off well and the relationship has grown over the two years. It didn't really hit me how much this journey meant to me until the time when I was leaving to further my studies in the States. I took him out for lunch for our last meeting to say goodbye and he actually gave me a notebook with a really nice message. It reminded me then why I joined the program- to make an impact in someone's life especially at such a crucial time of making transitions.

How has your experience as a Mentor helped in your personal development?

I went into the program wanting to make an impact, this experience has reinforced how meaningful it

"I went into the program wanting to make an impact. This experience has reinforced how meaningful it is to help others by sharing my experiences."

Zain (right) is currently pursuing his MBA at NYU Stern School of Business.

is to help others by sharing my experiences. I also learned a lot about the current education landscape because obviously I had to study and research the various pathway options for my mentee. I wasn't very clear about the options available nowadays, but I understand it better now. The education landscape isn't easy at all even for someone like me, it must be even more complicated for the students.

What are the areas of growth that you see in your Mentee so far?

His eagerness and enthusiasm to throw himself into the relationship and this program; his level of proficiency in English; his maturity and willingness to accept suggestions. By the end of the program, I could see a growing confidence in himself: where he used to be

very shy and would take his time to open up, he is a lot more confident talking to me about his achievements and strengths. Today, I am proud of his decision to test his independence in college, living away from his family and testing himself as a confident young adult.

104 Closing The Gap Mentors

30 local graduates   **74** overseas graduates

Current industries:

59%	17%	15%	9%
Private	Public Sector	NGO	Others

"To my mentor Zain, I would like to thank you for all the guidance during the program especially during my scholarship applications. Your tips and training are one of the reasons I got accepted for it. You are the best ! I also would like to wish him good luck for his studies. Since we are both studying, let's see who gets a higher mark!"

Shamsul, 2018 Scholar, is currently pursuing Diploma in IT at Sunway University, under the Jeffrey Cheah Scholarship.

Our Impact

Scale

| **104**[1] Scholars | **104** Mentors | **18** Schools |

Targeting

96%
Students have parents who do not have a degree qualification

85%
From household income of RM4,000 and below

36%
From household income of RM2,000 and below

Scholarships unlocked

~RM3.4 million
Total scholarships unlocked[2]

4.8x
Cost of supporting 104 Scholars for 3 years

University

16
Scholars in Degree courses

11
In top 200 global universities according to QS 2020 ranking

7
Scholars in Diploma and technical courses

32
Scholars in pre-university or awaiting university offers

Select universities offered:

Stanford University   UNIVERSITI MALAYA   UNIVERSITI SAINS MALAYSIA   The University of Nottingham UNITED KINGDOM · CHINA · MALAYSIA

Select Scholarships awarded:

YAYASAN KHAZANAH   Jeffrey Cheah Foundation Nurturing the Seeds of Wisdom   THE ALICE SMITH SCHOOL KUALA LUMPUR MALAYSIA EST 1946   TUNE LIBRA SCHOLARSHIP

1. *Original Scholars recruited: 110, with 6 dropouts cumulatively (4 in 2017, 1 in 2018 and 1 in 2019) since, putting our retention rate at ~95%.*
2. *Estimated scholarships for both pre-university and university courses unlocked*
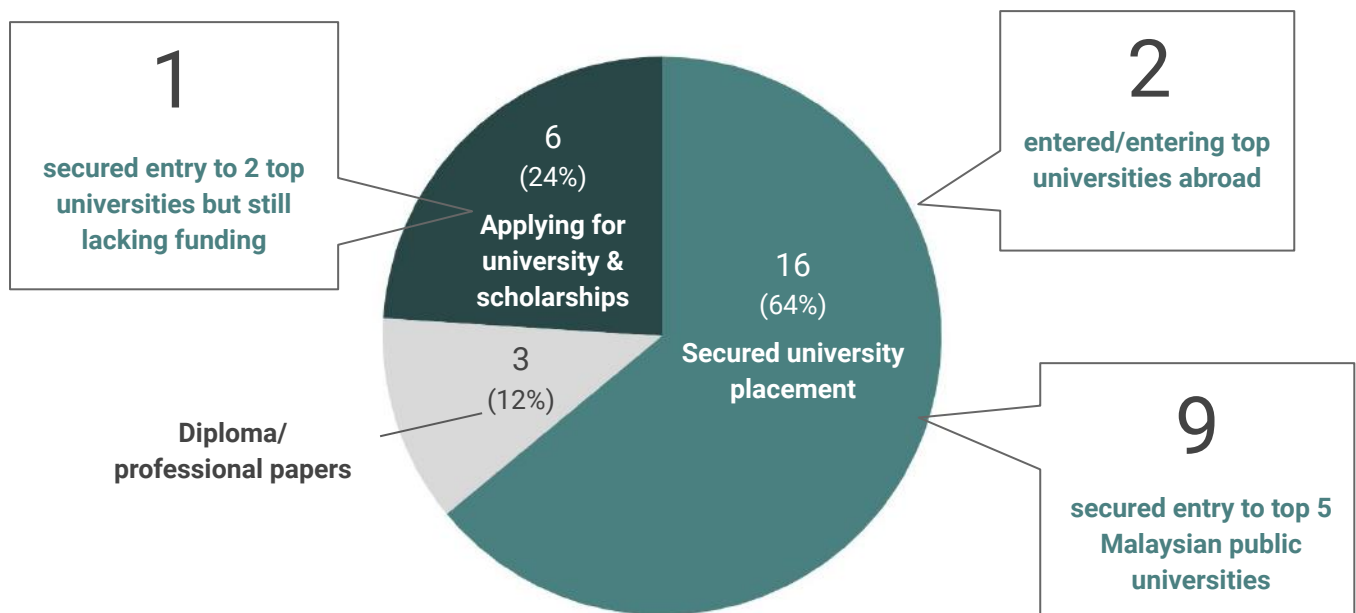
Our Impact

Pilot (2017) Cohort Review

Our pilot cohort, the 2017 Cohort, officially completed the programme in June 2019. Out of 25 graduating Scholars, 64% of them have entered or secured placement in universities, whereas 12% of them pursued diploma-level courses or professional papers. The initial goal was to have 100% of the Cohort pursue degree-level education. However, we recognize that university education is not one size fits all. As such, some Scholars may be better suited pursuing technical or professional courses in lieu of the traditional degree. While Closing The Gap's expertise is primarily in university access, the team will begin to explore non-traditional tertiary pathways for select Scholars where they best fit their potential.

Lastly, due to longer pre-university studies (ie: A-levels, Form 6 and AUSMAT pathways), the remaining 24% of Scholars could only apply for universities from end of 2019 onwards. The Closing The Gap team continues to actively supports these Alumni Scholars with their applications.

1
secured entry to 2 top universities but still lacking funding

2
entered/entering top universities abroad

9
secured entry to top 5 Malaysian public universities

6
(24%)
Applying for university & scholarships

16
(64%)
Secured university placement

3
(12%)
Diploma/ professional papers

Profiles
2017

Yugendran
Entering Stanford University in 2020 on Khazanah Global Scholarship

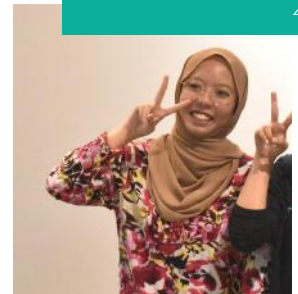Also received offers from UC-Berkeley and King's College London

Iffah
Pursuing Law in International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM)

Jun Loong
Secured entry into University of York, UK and University of Nottingham Malaysian Campus
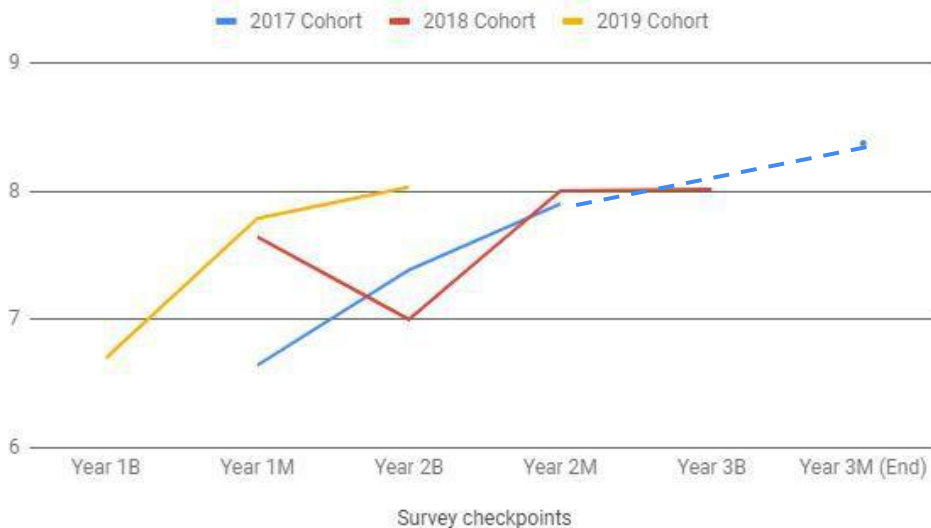
Currently applying for funding

Angelina
Pursuing Certified Accounting Technician (CAT) paper at Kolej Poly-Tech MARA

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Our Impact

Programmatic Growth

Throughout the programme, Scholars were expected to assess their own growth based on 7 key competencies (*table, pg 17*) which were crucial for university readiness. We asked them to rate themselves on a scale of 1-10, with 1 being very weak and 10 being very strong. The following graph compares the average competency scores (*there were no average scores lower than 6, hence the 6-9 scale used for our Y-axis)* and their growth over the span of the programme.

Average Competency Scores across 3 Cohorts over 2.5 years

— 2017 Cohort — 2018 Cohort — 2019 Cohort

Survey checkpoints

B : Beginning of Year   M : Mid-Year   Year 3M (End) : End of programme

Other notes:

1. No baseline (Year 1B) data for 2017 and 2018 Cohort. We began collecting this data for 2019 Cohort onwards.

2. No data for Year 3B collected for 2017 Cohort. Initially, this point marked the official end of the programme. However, our learnings with the pilot showed that it was premature as Scholars only entered pre-university then. As such, we postponed the end of the programme by 6 months and collected final survey responses in Mid-Year 3 (Year 3M) instead. The dotted line connects through the missing datapoint. Moving forward, we will standardize surveys to be conducted every 6 months.

1. There is an overall uphill trend in competency growth across all Cohorts.

All 3 Cohorts reported increase in their competency scorings throughout the programme, with the exception of 2018 Cohort; which witnessed a ~0.6 point drop at the beginning of year 2 (Year 2B). This could be attributed to inflated scorings as Scholars rode on the 'high' of Residential Camp in mid-year 1 (Year 1M), corroborated by reports from Mentors of skewed self-ratings among their mentees. With further meetings and reflections in the later half of the year, 2018 Scholars' self-ratings at Year 2B may be more reflective of their actual progress. Their ratings continued to climb after as CTG activities picked up for the Cohort until mid-year 2 (Year 2M).

Profiles
2018

Pui Shi
Completing A-Levels in Alice Smith School on full KLASS scholarship

Rahman
Pursuing Foundation studies in University of Malaya on Khazanah Watan Scholarship

Josephen
Pursuing Form 6

Parveenn
Pursuing Foundation studies in Sunway University on Teach For Malaysia-Sunway Scholarship

Our Impact
Programmatic Growth

Assessed Competencies
Act professionally
Has ambition and tenacity
Take responsibility for themselves
Talk and present confidently
Develop intellectually
Research and plan
Consistently reflects and evaluates

2. 2019 Cohort reported highest average competency ratings among all 3 cohorts in Year 1. There could be two reasons for this:

One, the team made significant improvements to the programme to **enable a stronger emphasis on critical thinking and intra-Cohort relationship building for the 2019 Cohort.** In particular, 2019 Cohort's Residential Camp was completely rehauled *(see pg 11)*. We also had **more frequent external opportunities organized to give 2019 Scholars further exposure and engagement** to sharpen these sets of competencies.

Two, the 2019 Cohort **reported higher satisfaction (~0.2-0.3 points higher) with their Mentors** at the end of Year 1 compared to the previous 2 Cohorts. In 2019, the team ran a **Mentor upskilling workshop as well as set up tracking systems to ensure Mentors were more equipped and accountable within their roles.** While the difference is not stark, this is a correlation that the team will continue to track as 2019 Cohort enters its second year of the programme. We will also continue to strengthen our support in providing mentor upskilling that will support them in enhancing their trust and relationship with their mentees.

Additional notes: 2019 Cohort's baseline data may be higher than their actual pre-programme abilities as this data was collected right after Launch Day. Moving forward, the team will conduct all baseline surveys either before or during Launch Day. This will also be done with the guidance of Mentors in understanding each competency's definition to ensure self-assessments are as honest and accurate as possible. We also recognize that there may be social desirability bias at play as student responses were not anonymised (to enable us to follow up with non-responsive Scholars), which then may be affected by Scholar's desire to impress or 'give the right answer'. As such, the team assesses competency reporting primarily based on changes in growth over time rather than ratings in their absolute.

3. In general, Scholars from all Cohorts recorded experiencing the most growth in 4 competencies, namely (in order of most to least growth): '*Talk and present confidently*', '*Act professionally*', '*Consistently reflects and evaluates*' and '*Can research and Plan*'.
See Appendix, pg 21, for detailed breakdown of findings

This is consistent with Scholars' qualitative responses which highlighted public speaking, communication in English, confidence and social skills as well as planning their post-SPM/STPM pathways as common areas of improvements. **The 2019 Cohort reported the highest percentage increase in all competencies,** especially '*Talk and present confidently*', '*Develop intellectually*' and '*Can research and plan*'', after Residential Camp. This is echoed by 2019 Scholars' comments which called out camp as the time they experienced the most personal growth.

4. 2017 Cohort's self-ratings continued to increase even after entering pre-university despite minimal programmatic activities beyond the 2-year mark.

In qualitative responses, Scholars attributed the soft skill training, knowledge sharing and mentoring provided in CTG as critical in helping them achieve their tertiary education goals. The team plans to **send a follow-up survey towards the end of 2020 to see if this trend endures well beyond the end of the programme and assess how much of this could be attributed to their involvement with CTG.**

Strategic Partnerships and Outreach

Scholarships

Yayasan Tunku Abdul Rahman (YTAR) is a scholarship foundation set up under the Tunku Abdul Rahman Foundation Act in 1966 and is chaired by the Higher Education Minister. Its objectives are to give financial support to potential graduates to pursue their tertiary education. At the same time, it aims to provide programs that nurture criteria, attitude and personality of credible leaders through self-enrichment in line with the aspirations and traits of YTM Tunku.

In August 2019, **the Closing The Gap team was acqui-hired to redesign an equitable and development-based programme for their scholarship offerings at the university level while continuing to expand Closing The Gap** at the pre-university level. Since then, we have achieved the following:

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Scholarships awarded in 2019 to students from local public and private institutions (Previous year: 0)

Institutionalised Closing The Gap

As a recognized programme supported by Yayasan Tunku Abdul Rahman, **Closing The Gap will gain the credibility to establish relationships with district and state education offices.** We hope this will enable us to gain access to more schools for our 2021 Cohort recruitment.

Launched a fair access scholarship

One of Closing The Gap's long term goals has been to advocate for more equitable access to financial aid and scholarships. With YTAR, we have **successfully introduced competency and needs based assessment into the scholarship selection process to prioritize high-potential students from lower-income backgrounds.**

Modernized and increased visibility of YTAR

Closing The Gap supported in 2 ways: One, **Refreshed YTAR's brand, website and scholarship marketing strategy.** You may view the updated website at *www.yayasantar.org.my*. **Two, Modernized infrastructure, data management and processes**

Other Partnerships & Outreach

150
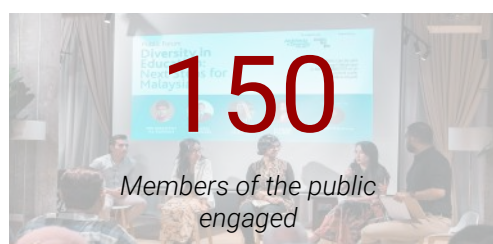
Members of the public engaged

Diversity in Education Forum (Jul, 2019)

Co-organised a public forum with Architects of Diversity on the state of diversity in Malaysian schools and universities as we hope to engage with the public on pertinent issues in higher education. This forum featured speakers such as Dr Ananthi (social psychologist, Dataluminescence Research), Shahril Hamdan (Co-Founder, The Centre), Suet Li (Teach For Malaysia Alumnus).

Communication workshop with MyReaders' Mentors (Sept, 2019)

Closing The Gap ran a communication skills and post-SPM planning workshop to 50 students from MyReaders, a programme that empowers upper secondary school students as mentors to coach younger students to read.

50

Secondary school student mentors from the MyReaders Programme trained

FINCO

20

Mentors currently utilizing the handbook

FINCO-CTG Mentor Handbook

Supported FINCO in adapting our resources for their online mentor handbook as part of their FINCO Mentor initiative, collaborative initiative by Malaysian financial institutions to provide career planning and guidance to students.
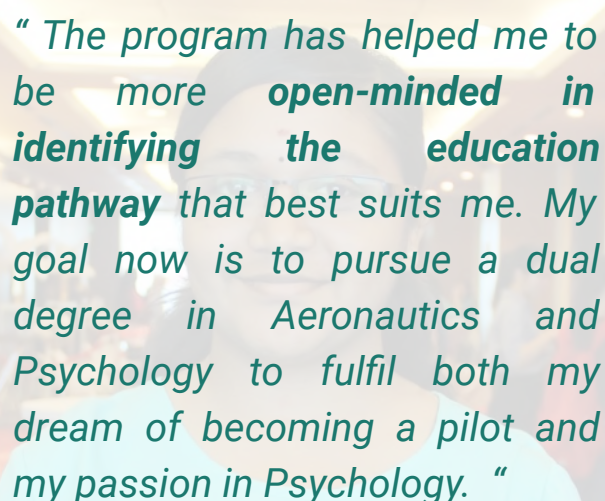
Looking Ahead

1. Launch 2020 Cohort with 71 Scholars

We recruited our largest cohort so far in Closing The Gap, at 71 Scholars and 71 Mentors. This bring the larger Closing The Gap community to be 350-member strong.

3. Launch YTAR's 2020 scholarship application and secure 20 Scholars for the Cohort

We hope to launch the Scholarship with modernized application processes and robust selection criteria. We also hope to increase publicity of our scholarship through targeted marketing and engagement with private and public higher education institutions.

On the programmatic front, we aim to roll out a 2-year development programme framework for the new cohort that focuses on inculcating leadership, employability skills and values which live into the spirits of YM Tunku Abdul Rahman. Finally, we hope to leverage on the YTAR Scholars community to support the Closing The Gap programme via cross-programme interactions and mentoring.

" *The program has helped me to be more **open-minded in identifying the education pathway** that best suits me. My goal now is to pursue a dual degree in Aeronautics and Psychology to fulfil both my dream of becoming a pilot and my passion in Psychology.* "

Susanthine, 2019 Scholar

2. Incorporate further critical thinking & community building components into the programme

Our emphasis on critical thinking skills and community building in the 2019 Cohort reaped positive results - where the 2019 Cohort reported slightly higher increase in core competencies growth between mid to end of year 1 compared to the 2018 Cohort*. Additionally, our Form 5 Scholars who went through Residential Camp also demonstrated higher self-reported improvements compared to the Form 6. As such, we will continue to enhance these two areas in the 2020 programme and extend Residential Camp to Form 6 Scholars as well.

* We were unable to compare with 2018 Cohort's Y1 baseline data as we started collecting baseline data in 2019 Cohort onwards only.

4. Empower Closing The Gap's Alumni community

We hope to put in place our Alumni communication and engagement strategy to maintain our network of 50 2017 Alumni Scholars and Mentors. This would include

- Empowering Alumni Scholars to run student-led newsletters among the Scholars
- Engaging Alumni Scholars and Mentors to lead, volunteer and support Closing The Gap's workshops.
- Mobilizing Alumni Scholars and Mentors as our ambassadors for the recruitment of 2021 Cohort
- Collaborate with Alumni Mentors to identify partnership opportunities with different private organisations (eg: internships, funding and in-kind sponsorship)

Appendix

Breakdown of Average Competencies Ratings by Cohort

Competencies	Checkpoint / Cohort	Y1B Score	Y1M Score	Y1M Change (%)	Y2B Score	Y2B Change (%)	Y2M Score	Y2M Change (%)	Y3B Score	Y3B Change (%)	Y3M (End) Score	Y3M (End) Change (%)	Change (%) in past year	Change (%) since Y1B until latest checkpoint recorded
Act professionally	2017	No data	6	N/A	7	16.7%	7.8	11.4%	No data	N/A	8.4	7.7%	7.7%	40.0%
	2018	No data	7.2	N/A	7.3	1.4%	8	9.6%	8.2	2.5%			12.3%	13.9%
	2019	6.7	7.5	16.7%	8	6.7%							19.4%	19.4%
	Average												13.1%	24.4%
Has ambition and tenacity	2017	No data	7	N/A	7.1	1.4%	8.2	15.5%	No data	N/A	8.7	6.1%	6.1%	24.3%
	2018	No data	7.7	N/A	7.9	2.6%	8.09	2.4%	8.1	0.1%			2.5%	5.2%
	2019	7.3	8.2	15.4%	8.3	1.2%							13.7%	13.7%
	Average												7.4%	14.4%
Can take responsibility for themselves	2017	No data	7	N/A	8.07	15.3%	8.09	0.2%	No data	N/A	8.1	0.1%	0.1%	15.7%
	2018	No data	8.2	N/A	7.7	-6.1%	8.3	7.8%	8.2	-1.2%			6.5%	0.0%
	2019	7	8	16.3%	8.3	3.8%							18.6%	18.6%
	Average												8.4%	11.4%
Talk and present confidently	2017	No data	6	N/A	6.6	10.0%	7	6.1%	No data	N/A	7.7	10.0%	10.0%	28.3%
	2018	No data	7.1	N/A	6.5	-8.5%	7.5	15.4%	7.9	5.3%			21.5%	11.3%
	2019	5.8	7.1	21.1%	7.5	5.6%							29.3%	29.3%
	Average												20.3%	23.0%
Develop intellectually	2017	No data	7	N/A	7.6	8.6%	8.1	6.6%	No data	N/A	8.7	7.4%	7.4%	24.3%
	2018	No data	7.9	N/A	7.6	-3.8%	8.5	11.8%	7.9	-7.1%			3.9%	0.0%
	2019	6.8	8	17.3%	8	0.0%							17.6%	17.6%
	Average												9.7%	14.0%
Can research and plan	2017	No data	7	N/A	8	14.3%	8.1	1.3%	No data		8.3	2.5%	2.5%	18.6%
	2018	No data	7.8	N/A	7.4	-5.1%	8.4	13.5%	8.2	-2.4%			10.8%	5.1%
	2019	6.5	7.8	18.5%	7.9	1.3%							21.5%	21.5%
	Average												11.6%	15.1%
Consistently reflects and evaluates	2017	No data	6.5	N/A	7.3	12.3%	7.9	8.2%	No data	N/A	8.7	10.1%	10.1%	33.8%
	2018	No data	7.6	N/A	7	-7.9%	8	14.3%	7.6	-5.0%			8.6%	0.0%
	2019	6.8	7.9	17.1%	8.2	3.8%							20.6%	20.6%
	Average												13.1%	18.1%

Note: 2017 Cohort's Y2B's survey recorded a significantly higher 6-month increase in percentage for all competencies (except for 'has ambition and tenacity') compared to other Cohorts at the same point. This could be attributed to the fact that this survey recorded only 48% response rate, our lowest response rate out of all surveys conducted. Hence, this set of data may not be the most representative.

" Besides knowledge and skills, I've also experienced great self-development and mental growth throughout the program. My communication and public speaking skills have improved because I am more confident now as compared to before where I get stressed out easily and lacked of self-confidence. I have become more optimistic- I'd find silver-linings in crises and turn them into opportunities. "

Kai Ling (centre), 2019 Scholar

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