

Cambridge University roadshow reaching out to county's schoolchildren

By [Cambridge News](#) | Posted: March 05, 2015



Students take part in an archaeological dig in Sawtry, as part of Cambridge University's Higher Education Field Academy programme, run through the McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research

The idea of a divide between Cambridge University and the region's schools is one which refuses to die, but a new university project has been trying to break down these stereotypes.

In the last academic year, the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Schools Outreach Group (Capsog) was formed in order to better engage with the region's schoolchildren, and promote the university as a potential future destination.

The university is in no short supply of outreach and engagement programmes, but with various different university departments and colleges all having their own links with schools, coordinating them has been no easy task.

That job fell to Matt Diston, Capsog's widening partnership project coordinator, who has just published a report of the group's first-year activities.

He told the News: "The university has had various groups in the past, but it was the scale and diversity of the university which made it pretty much impossible.

"The Capsog group isn't responsible for delivering anything, it's about pulling together various projects and programmes. This was our first report, and the goal is to highlight and raise awareness of what group members are doing."

All the Cambridge's 31 colleges currently have links to a different region of the UK, so schools the length and breadth of the country have a direct association with Cambridge.

The Cambridgeshire and Peterborough regions are covered by Pembroke and St Catharine's College, which held a range of events to engage with schools.

The Cambridge Colleges' Teachers' Roadshow took place in Peterborough and saw teachers from 20 schools meeting with university staff, while the Easter Residential Sciences Masterclass saw schoolchildren spending three days living in Pembroke for a taste of university life.

Mr Diston said: "We're connected to every secondary school across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough in one way or another. Some had half a dozen contacts, but to a lesser or greater degree every school in the county was engaged with us through one of these initiatives."

Among other groups affiliated with Capsog are the Cavendish Laboratory, Department of Engineering and the university's museums.

Last year the museums ran a week of activities with the North Cambridge Academy, which saw 300 students visit all eight museums, and the botanic gardens.

Kate Noble, education officer at the Fitzwilliam Museum, said: "Activities Week marks the end of a fantastic first year in this partnership between the museums and North Cambridge Academy.

"The museum ambassadors have provided unique and exciting perspectives on our collections and have made films, led tours, written trails for other young people and worked towards an arts award.

"Their understanding and confidence has really grown over the course of the year and they are now passionate museum advocates, and we are looking forward to welcoming other students from the school to the University of Cambridge Museums."

Schoolchildren also get a hands-on experience with Cambridge University's Higher Education Field Academies (Hefa), which runs two-day archaeological digs for children.

Carenza Lewis, from the McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research, said: "Hefa is extremely popular with the teenagers who take part – the unexpected and unusual challenge of completing a rigorous two-day dig searching for new research data against the clock is something they clearly find inspiring.

"Many of them also say they feel more positive about the idea of going to university after they've completed their Hefa."

The group uses a student survey to provide feedback to Capsog, with one Cambridgeshire student digging in Sawtry saying: "I have gained a greater knowledge of history which is around us in the world we live in and a greater knowledge of the university."

Ms Lewis added: "School staff are equally impressed, with Cambridgeshire schools commenting 'It has given the students a fantastic idea of what university is like' and 'We all had a brilliant time, thank you for giving our students this experience'."