

More

Providing insight into major gift fundraising during the pandemic: **a survey** of UK universities' activity levels and funds raised.

More Partnership

This report was prepared by
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“Fundraisers were initially reluctant to be proactive, assuming people wouldn't be interested in giving. But this changed over time as it became clear that donors wanted to operate as they would have done before wherever possible.”

UK University

More's Survey into major gift fundraising activity during the pandemic

In 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic disrupted life as we knew it. However, philanthropy did not stop and neither did fundraising activity. More Partnership undertook a survey of UK universities and Oxbridge Colleges to understand the impact of the pandemic on major gift activity.

10 universities and four Oxbridge colleges submitted data with two more colleges submitting qualitative feedback. For the purposes of our analysis and reporting we divided these participants into three groups. Group A; Group B and Group C.

- **Group A (Golden Triangle universities)**
University of Cambridge (Central University Team only), Imperial College, LSE and UCL.
- **Group B (Other UK universities)**
Universities of Birmingham, Bristol, Cardiff, Exeter, Glasgow and Sussex.
- **Group C (Oxbridge Colleges)**
Emmanuel, Pembroke and St Catharine's, Cambridge and Trinity, Oxford with qualitative responses from Queens' College Cambridge and St Anne's College Oxford.

Executive Summary

1. There was an initial slowdown or “shock” at the outset of the pandemic in March 2020. This was most obviously seen in the falls in major gift meetings requested and held. The extent of this decline varied significantly, with virtually no decline for some institutions (for example only an 8% fall in requests with a corresponding 2% fall in meetings) while others saw meeting numbers decline by up to 92% and 85% respectively.
2. Overall, comparing the 12 months pre-pandemic with the seven months post-pandemic, there was an average fall in major gift meeting activity of 40% (from 6.0 to 3.4 monthly meetings per FTE major gift fundraiser). The number of discovery meetings held fell by an even greater amount as the focus of attention shifted almost entirely to existing relationships and donors – which is understandable.
3. Major gift ask levels and ask success rates were much more robust, however, with increasing numbers of asks in the largest institutions outweighing a slowdown among Oxbridge colleges. In fact, there were more successful asks during Apr-Sept 2020 than Apr-Sept 2019. Bizarrely, during both periods there were more successful asks than asks, possibly due to the lag effect of timing of response vs. ask.
4. The sporadic nature of principal gifts make comparison on income levels more difficult, but there seems to have been a 22% fall in major gift commitments post-pandemic with ‘Group B’ universities hardest hit (down 45% compared to 13% and 19% for Oxbridge colleges and Group A respectively).

Executive Summary

5. Qualitative feedback has reinforced data showing that all institutions adapted to, even embraced, the virtual world. Major gift programmes adapted and innovated - whether developing new digital communications, shifting existing content online or developing bespoke ways to engage with donors and use senior leaders in the cultivation process.
6. Fundraisers put a renewed and welcome focus on stewarding and resoliciting donors. These existing donors and supporters were more receptive although, over time, institutions' reach and ambition has increased not just to a more global audience but thematically, with an increased variety of format and channel.
7. However, key challenges remain in how best to engage newer prospective donors and how to deepen relationships more generally in the virtual world when face-to-face interaction, campus visits and the ability to see projects first-hand continues to be restricted.

Data sought and analysed in this survey

- This survey, prepared and analysed by More's Insight team was designed to provide insight into month-by-month major gift activity and performance over an 18-month period, allowing comparison of 2020 against figures for 2019.
- Data in this report is shown in three-monthly quarters from Q1 (Apr-Jun 2019) to Q6 (July-Sept 2020).
- The survey sought data relating to major gift activity including meetings requested and held, asks made and successful, and funds raised.
- We sought comments on the impact of the pandemic and lockdown to provide some context and qualitative information to back up the data.
- Although intended to be as simple as possible, as with any survey, we acknowledge that there may be differences in how different institutions record data.

Key Findings

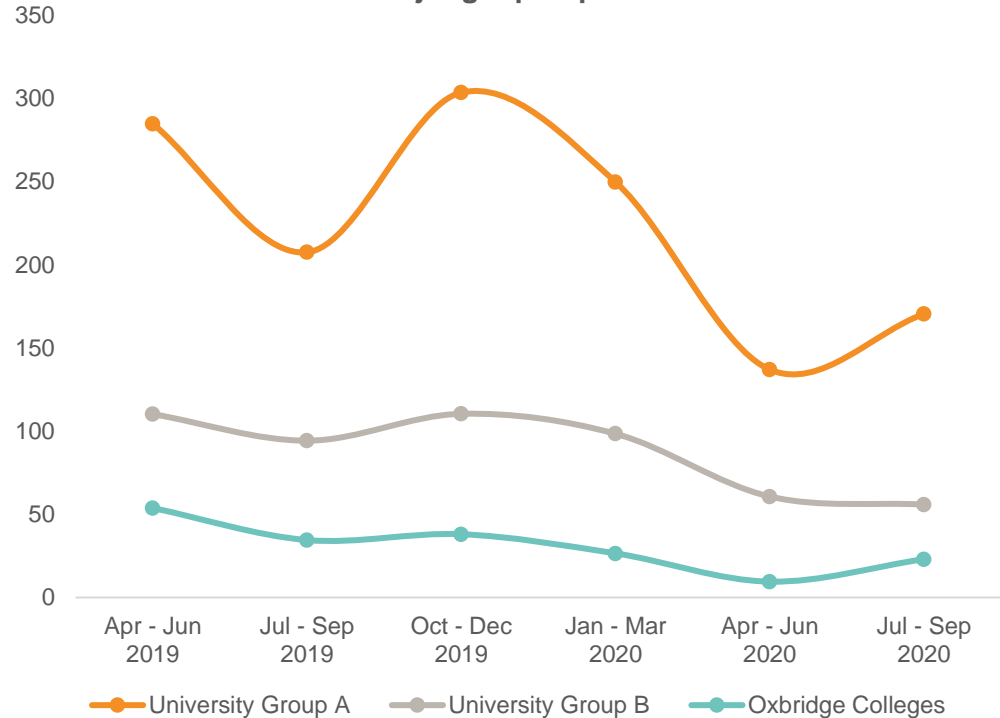
1. Major gift meeting activity
2. Discovery meeting activity
3. Asking for major gifts
4. Major gift ask success rate
5. Value of major gifts raised

1. Major gifts meeting activity

Meeting activity fell significantly post-pandemic but had started to rebound by Q6.

- Meeting activity reduced in the three months April to June 2020, down 54% on previous year.
- Signs of recovery from July onwards for the largest programmes. Overall activity in Q6 was 26% lower than in Q2.

Graph 1: Average no. meetings/institution with major gift prospects

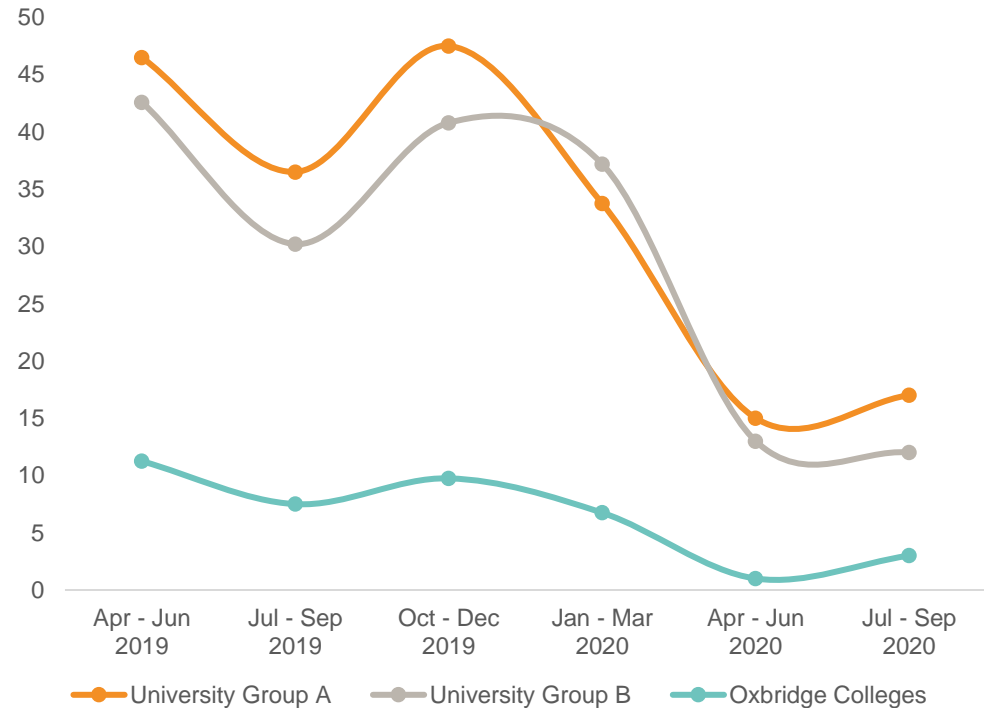


2. Discovery meetings

There was a sharp decline across all institutions in the number of discovery meetings.

- Discovery activity was even more significantly down in the three months April to June 2020 - down 71% on previous year.
- Although there were signs of recovery from July this was much more limited.

Graph 2: Average no. discovery meetings (per quarter)

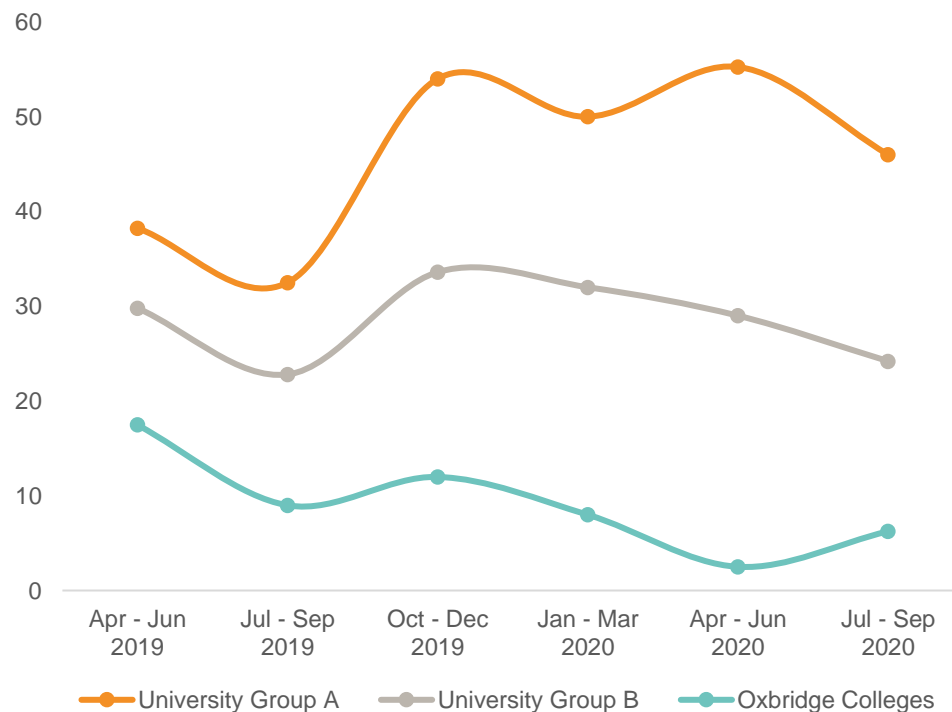


3. Asking for major gifts

Asking continued during lockdown and increased in larger programmes.

- Asking was seemingly unaffected by the pandemic and lockdown, except in Oxbridge colleges where there was a significant fall.
- Group A saw a 70% increase in Apr-Sept 2020 compared to Apr-Sept 2019 whereas Group B was static.

Graph 3: Asks made and proposals submitted (per quarter)

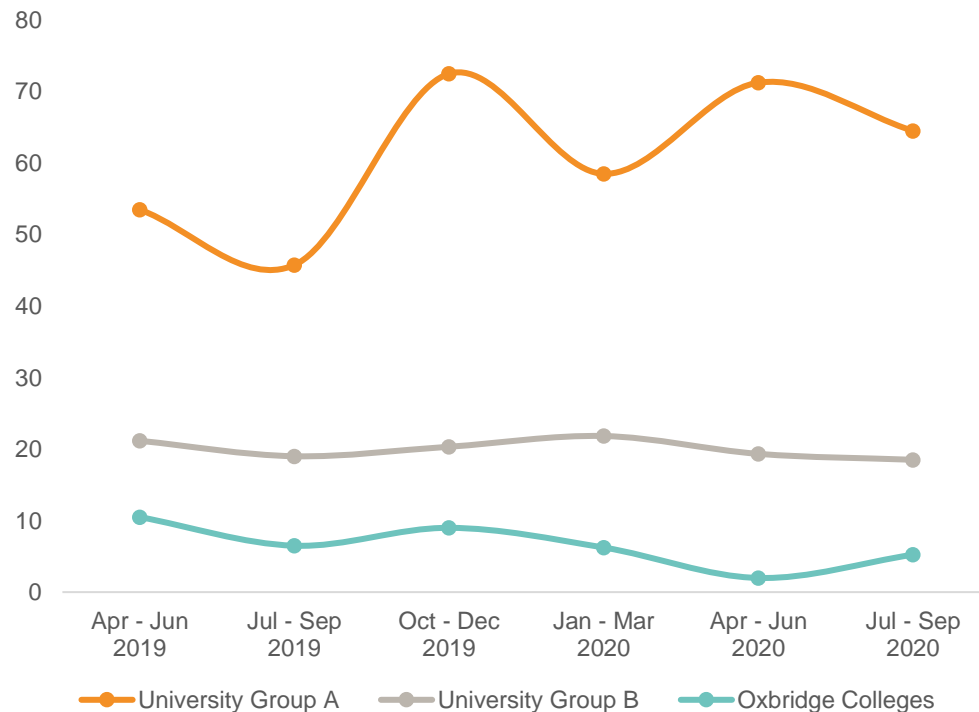


4. Major gift ask success rate

Ask success rate again increased in larger programmes.

- When it comes to both ask volume and success rate, the gap between the largest institutions and the rest has grown over the 18-month period shown.
- Oxbridge Colleges' activity was hit much more by the pandemic's arrival.

**Graph 4: Successful asks/gifts closed
(mean average for each group)**

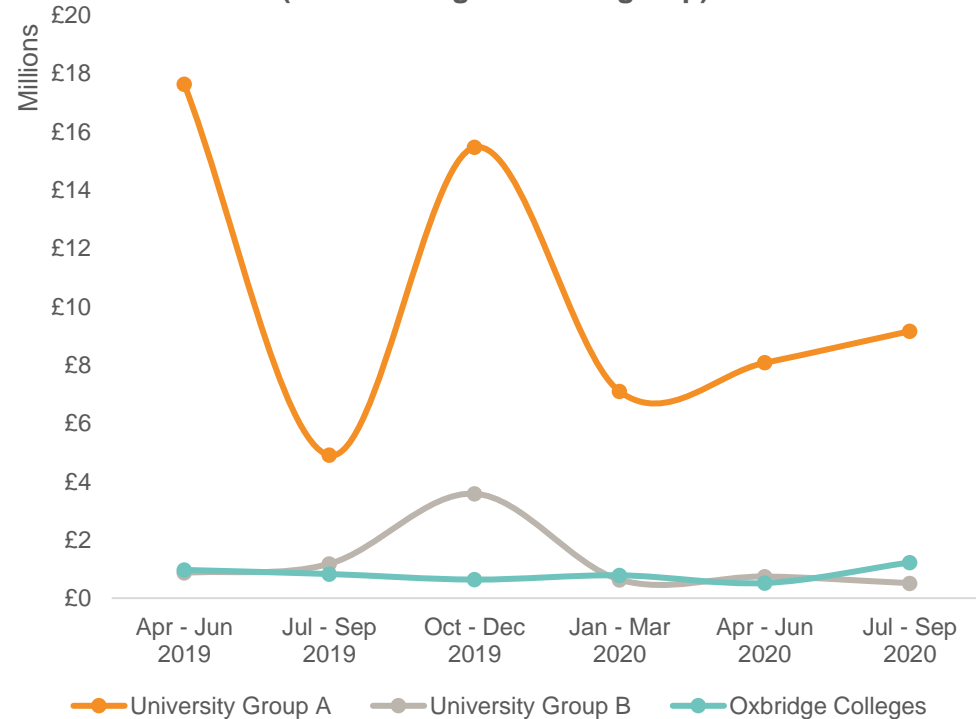


5. Value of major gifts raised

A typically volatile pattern of gift value with no obvious lockdown effect.

- The very largest gifts tend to have significant impact on these numbers.
- Overall gift value reduced across each group between 2019 and 2020 when comparing the six-month period (April-September) in both years.

**Graph 5: The value of gifts closed
(mean average for each group)**



In closing – what we heard from participants...

“The initial impact of the pandemic and the move to working remotely had a detrimental impact on engagement.”

“There’s been a distinct lack of development of and engagement with new prospects.”

“Existing major donors are sympathetic to our position and are responding well to extra-close stewardship at present.”

“Overall I would say it has made contact easier but deep engagement harder.”

In closing

Thank you to all those institutions that participated in this survey – we couldn't have done it without you!

We hope that you find the insights gained both interesting and helpful in understanding how the sector was affected by the pandemic.

If you would like to go further to explore the data and what it may mean for your institution or to seek recommendations about how you could adjust your fundraising programmes do let us know.

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