

Homerton College website development

Increasing applications by 25% during COVID



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- > Homerton Changemakers
- > What's on in College

contra



Against the norm. Experienced, pragmatic do-ers that will propel you forward using creativity and technical prowess.

Contra makes it happen.

The client.

Homerton College combines the traditions of a Cambridge University college with contemporary values and an inclusive culture. It prides itself on being supportive, forward-thinking, and treating everyone as an individual. It is the largest college in Cambridge and has a diverse student base.

The challenge.

To modernise its dated website and position it as an inclusive and vibrant community, in contrast to a “traditional” Cambridge college. Show it as a modern place to study and differentiate it from other colleges in the university. Increase applications and website engagement.

The solution.

Execute student and other stakeholder interviews. Conduct site user behaviour, keyword and traffic research. Build buyer personas. Launch a new website with a bold, modern, and friendly design. Showcase diversity with powerful imagery and messaging.

and wellbeing at Homerton

Homerton Changemakers

What's on in College

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We found the Contra team experts within web development and marketing in the education sector, always on top of industry trends. The team have been really supportive as a working partner and are highly creative.



***Sarah Hainsworth,
Website & Internal Comms Manager***

Think of a traditional
Cambridge college and
what do you imagine?
‘Diversity’ may not be the
first word that springs to
mind. Homerton College
wanted to change that.





A new beginning.

Homerton College came to us needing a website that reflected its modern values and diverse student base. It aimed to shed the traditional stereotypes of a redbrick and replace them with a bold, friendly and inclusive message. We began by conducting a series of internal stakeholder interviews to get to the core values of the college. The Homerton team understood that while academic excellence is at the heart of everything they do, students need more from a twenty-first-century college. It was time for a digital rebrand.

Research and planning.

Stakeholder interviews, analytics analysis, student personas

Changing needs.

Homerton College wanted to show that they're not academics in ivory towers, but ones that live and care about the world – a world that isn't static. Their website was desperately dated and alarmingly austere. It needed to be agile, responding to the changing needs of students and society rather than relying on tradition or the status quo.



Stakeholder research.

A great website is 'user-centric' rather than organisation centric. We had to speak to the people that matter the most – Homerton's past and prospective students. We conducted interviews, surveys, and further desk research to gain a comprehensive insight into how they felt about the college. We also reviewed analytics for past user behaviour and set behaviour tracking using Hotjar. We discovered that students widely regarded the college as a friendly, diverse and forward-thinking institution.

Agile. Cosmopolitan. **Dynamic.**
Innovative. **Forward-thinking.** **Active.**
Caring. **Friendly.** Vibrant.
Welcoming.
Innovative. **Modern.** Dissenting.
Future focused. **Diverse.**
Egalitarian. New. Pragmatic.
Fresh. **International.**
Dissenting. Outward-facing.
Open-minded.

So what was missing?

In the eyes of current students, the college reflected the brand's core values. However, its digital assets and website severely lagged behind. We needed to use those values to set positioning. We needed to translate the purpose into something that can be used on the website. We needed inspirational and aspirational statements, not just facts and photos. And we needed to put ourselves in our audience's shoes.



The challenge was on.

We built up a series of student personas that, along with our research, informed our strategy. We concluded that student applicants need to feel reassured that this is a place they can fit in and call “home”. We needed to show that Cambridge is right for all backgrounds and Homerton still delivers the traditional Cambridge experience with a modern twist.

Ursula. Undergraduate applicant.

Background & demographics:

Age: 17
Gender: Female
Location: UK
Education: A level.
Extra info: BAME



“I am not even sure if
Cambridge is for me.”

Ursula's story.

Ursula is the first in her family to go to university and is from a state school that rarely sends students on to Oxbridge. Ursula had not considered Cambridge but changed her mind after watching a video on Youtube by a Cambridge student who seemed “normal”. After further research, Ursula decided to apply and is now evaluating colleges.

Goals.

1. I want to find out if Homerton College is the right choice for me

Challenges.

1. Lots of colleges to choose from but hard to separate them
2. I'm not not familiar with Cambridge terminology or traditions

Attitude.

1. Socially minded
2. Cynical

Common objections.

1. Homerton is a bit out of the way compared to the others
2. Will I miss out on the Cambridge experience if I go to modern college?
3. Cambridge is elitist and/or out of touch, do I even want to go?

The background image shows four people walking away from the camera on a sports field. From left to right: a man in a blue and white striped soccer jersey, a man in a grey t-shirt, a woman in a dark jacket, and a woman in a grey sweatshirt. They are walking on a green field with white lines. In the background, there are trees and a fence. The entire image is overlaid with a semi-transparent purple filter. There are also some abstract purple shapes on the left and right sides of the image.

Strategy and implementation.

Positioning and messaging, imagery, information architecture,
user-testing

Out with the old.

Traditional colleges are:

Focused inwards

Reliant on / overly proud of traditions

Stuck in their ways and do things because they have always been done

Old fashioned

Small and/or elitist

In the centre of the city

Content to put people in a mold

Care about academic results above all

In their own / the cambridge “bubble”

Slow to react to social issues

And in with the new.

Homerton is:

Outward focused

Welcomes change

Agile

Modern

Big and diverse

In the centre of new developments

Aware people are individuals

Aware that academic results aren't enough

More “normal”

Cares about social justice, the underdog and seeing positive change

A change of address.

It was also time to change how the website addressed prospective students. We swapped out stuffy statements about prestige and replaced them with warm and welcoming messaging. The copy now reflects the college's ambition to make students feel part of an inclusive community. And it challenges students to change the world for the better.

A home away from home

Homerton is a large college, both in student numbers and physical space. The benefit of large grounds, giving a peaceful and homely atmosphere. With an apple orchard, football pitches, drama theatre, fitness studio and something to do right on your doorstep. Less than 1 mile away we have

Homerton College

Cambridge

A modern Cambridge

College for a

changing world

Our Vision

We believe that changing the world is not just about the 'heroes': it's about everyone, all the time, at every level.

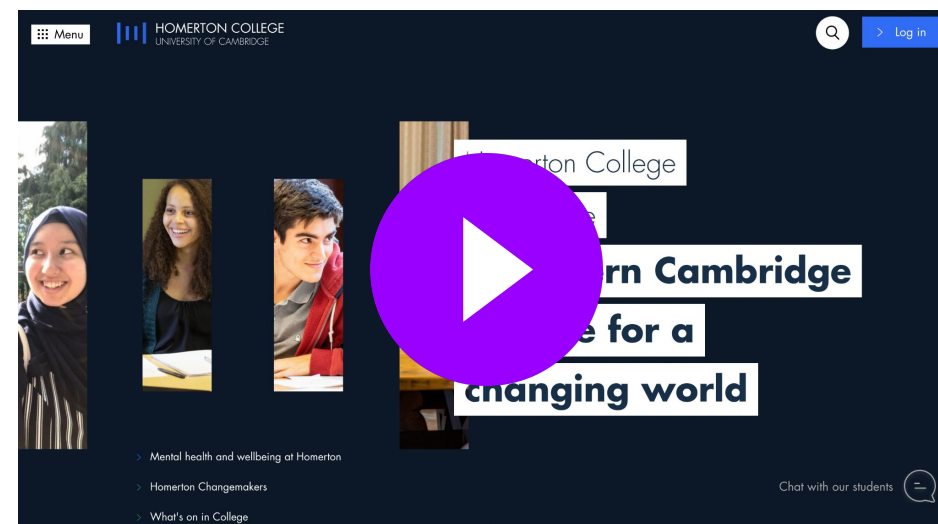
Photo opportunity.

A picture tells a thousand words. We decreased the deluge of images showing grand buildings and elite robes and replaced them with more images that truly reflected the student community. This showcased the diverse student base and friendly and welcoming community.



As easy as ABC.

Good website design makes it easy for users to find what they're looking for. This may be Cambridge, but you shouldn't need a first-class degree in Information Architecture to navigate the site. It had to be as easy as...ABC. The site served a number of different users, including prospective students, current students, alumni, staff and business opportunities. We simplified the navigation to ensure every user was never more than three clicks away to finding the information they needed.





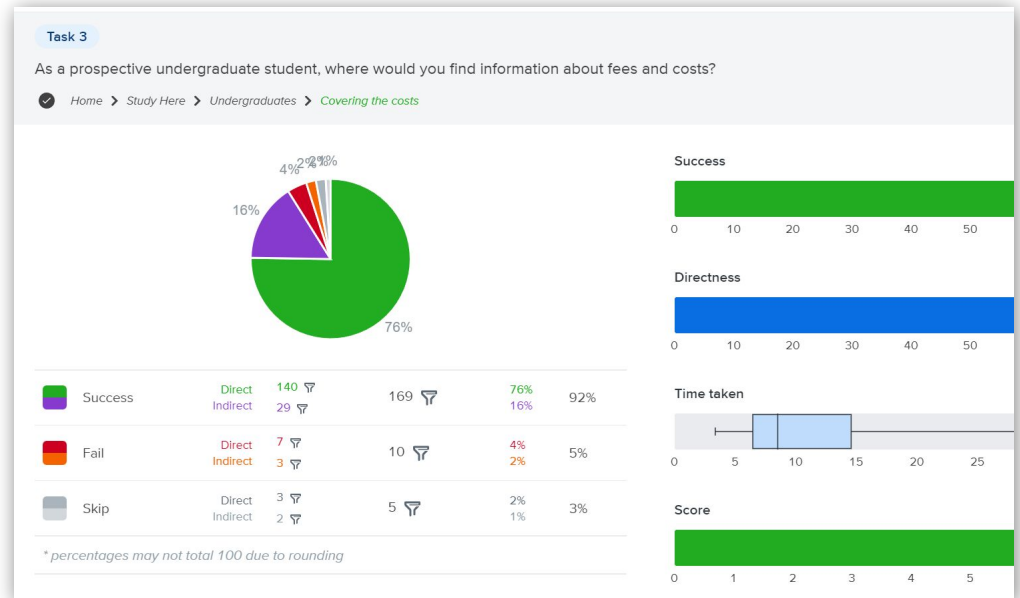
The core landing pages and subject pages are easy to navigate and contain lots of easily accessible info. The key thing is there's a huge amount of information to include from different parts of the college, which have got very different aims. It's really impressive how all those different audiences can land on the home page and easily navigate to find the information you need. Excellent.



Dr Paul Elliott, Director of Studies in Biology and Scientific Admissions Tutor

Tried and tested.

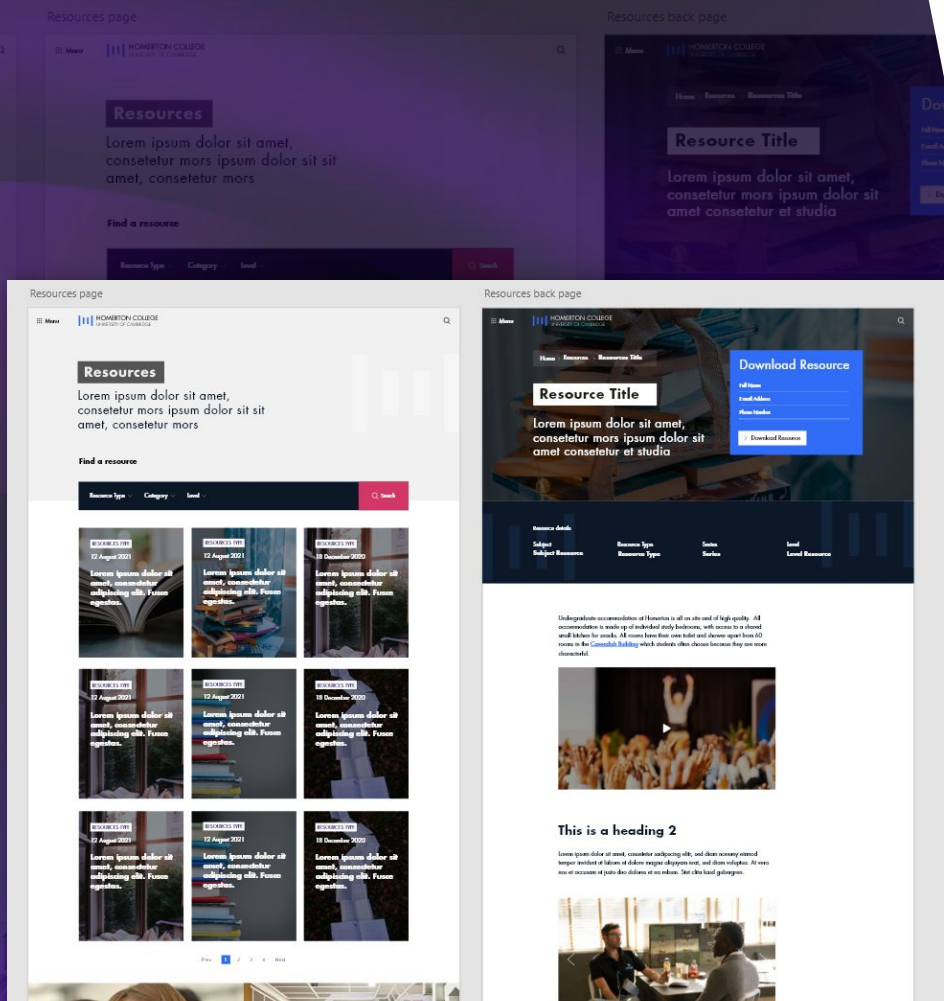
We used a tool called Treejack to test site structure with real users. By asking them to navigate to various pages, we could measure how easily they could find what they were looking for. For any pages that proved difficult to find, we iterated the site structure and re-tested until the site was as easy to navigate as possible.





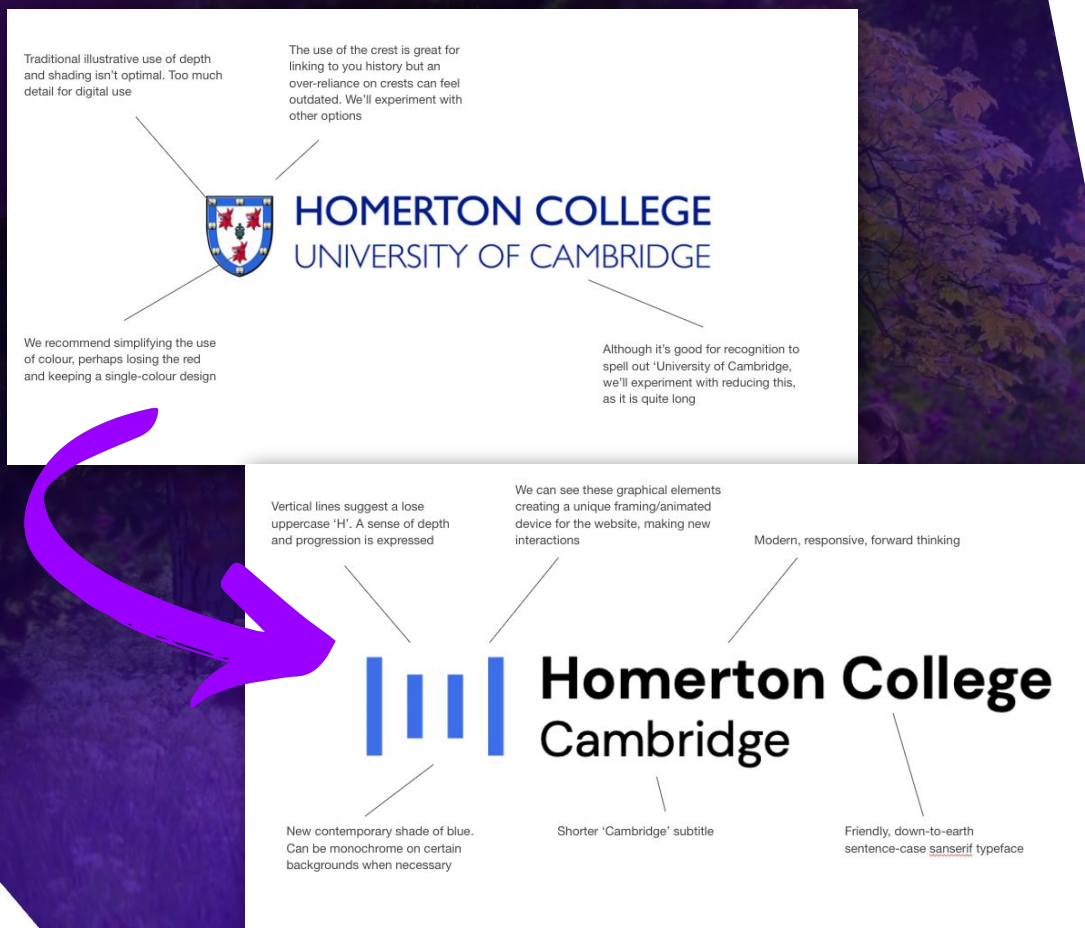
Creativity and innovation.

Visual identity, branding, microinteractions, social proof



Bold, modern design.

The college's egalitarian and inclusive principles would resonate with the target audience if we could demonstrate them in the content and design. Visually, we needed to create a design that reflected the modernity of the college with its progressive ethos.



‘H’ is for Homerton.

Homerton’s current site logo needed modernising. While the use of a crest reflected its heritage, it felt outdated. We began by using a more friendly, down-to-earth sans serif typeface. We also used vertical straight lines to form an uppercase ‘H’, which created a sense of depth and progression. We introduced a contemporary shade of blue which could also be monochrome on certain backgrounds when necessary.

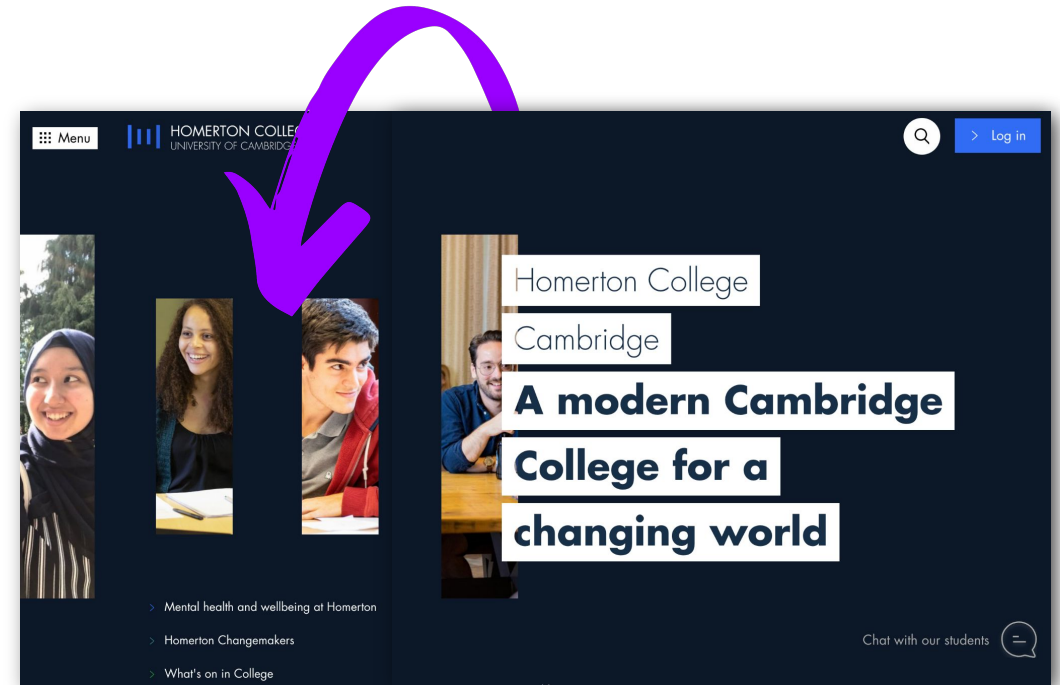
The shape of things to come.

We presented the concept to the Homerton team and it was met with enthusiasm. These bold lines would form the base of the website design. We also used the logo to create unique framing for the website's imagery. The framing creates a sense of looking through a window and gaining a unique insight into something special.



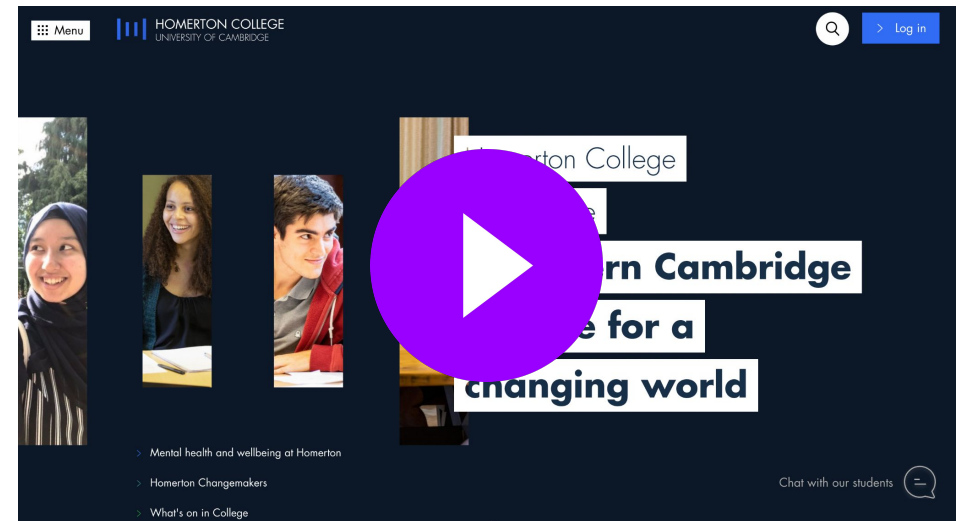
Window of opportunity.

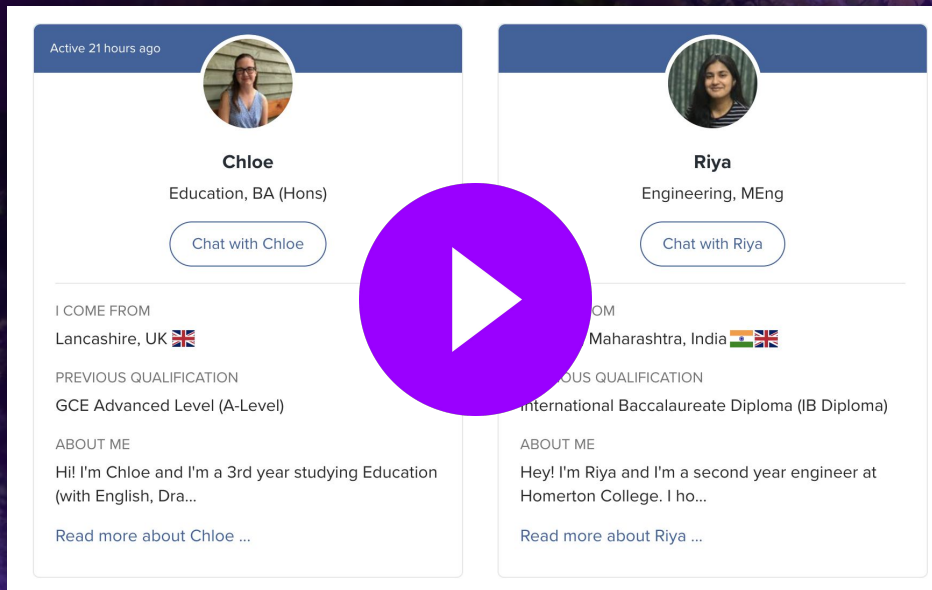
We used this “window frame” creative to make an instant impact on the website. Each frame shows ambitious students from all backgrounds, instantly representing the college’s strong diversity.



Every step you take.

The current website was static and dull. We needed to reflect the vibrancy of the college. We digitally animated the logo and weaved in various micro-interactions to create dynamic movement as the user explored the site.





It's good to talk.

A report by Education.com showed that students are now more likely to consider peer reviews than rankings when deciding on where to study. We put this into practice by implementing the Unibuddy chat function where prospective students can speak with current students and also added student testimonials. Naturally, the students represent the diverse nature of the college.



Results.

Applications, website analytics, testimonials, video walkthrough

Best in class.

The proof is very much in the pudding. At a time when the average number of Cambridge college applications was down due to the pandemic, Homerton bucked the trend with a 25% increase. Google Analytics also showed that users were more engaged, with the average session duration up by a hug 175%. The bounce rate also dropped significantly by 34%.

34%

decrease in
bounce rate

25%

increase in
applications

175%

Increase in average
session duration

Internal feedback.

We interviewed the key stakeholders of the project to gain their insight into the Contra experience and impact of the new site.



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The new website's ease of use has dramatically improved compared to the previous site. The most tangible benefit was an increase in our applications from 800 to 1000 at a time when Cambridge college applications were down. A 25% increase during COVID is fantastic.



Dr Paul Elliott, Director of Studies in Biology and Scientific Admissions Tutor



Take a tour.

Want to take a tour of the new Homerton College website? Watch this three-minute video guiding you through all the essential elements that truly made a “digital impact” on students and staff alike.

Watch now.

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact me at callum@contra.agency

Your sincerely,

Callum, Head of Marketing at Contra Agency



Menu

HOMERTON COLLEGE
UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Homerton College

Cambridge

Thanks...

for reading, let us know if you have any questions :)

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