Key Initiatives

ACCESS AND OUTREACH
- Brilliant Club
- Access to Leeds
- Schools and Colleges Outreach
- Subject Specific Outreach
- Go Higher West Yorkshire
- Tutor Trust
- IntoUniversity
- Student Talent Spotting
- Foundation Years
- Transforming Horizons
- Higher and Degree Apprenticeships
- Leeds GATE
- Skill Up
- National Art and Design Saturday Club
- Generating Genius
- Row UK
- Sutton Trust

CONTINUATION AND STUDENT SUCCESS
- Plus Programme
- Financial Support
- Student Success Project
- Stand Alone Pledge
- Disability Services

ATTAINMENT AND ACHIEVEMENT
- LITE Fellowships
- Educational Engagement Outreach Fellows
- Professional Studies Degrees

PROGRESSION
- Employability and Progressions Assistants
- Postgraduate Support
- Opportunities Fund
Our Institutional Approach

INTRODUCTION FROM OUR VICE-CHANCELLOR

At the University of Leeds we strive to be a place where all students feel they belong and matter.

Our Access and Student Success Strategy, launched in November 2020, outlines the University’s vision and approach to making sure students from all backgrounds are able to progress to, and benefit from, an enriching and successful experience at Leeds.

It is an integral part of the University’s overarching strategy ‘Universal Values, Global Change’ which sets out a blueprint for Leeds to be a values-drive university, determined to make a difference in the world around us.

This Annual Report provides a snapshot of some of the important work undertaken by colleagues over the past year to ensure we continue to widen access and maximise outreach and success – including accelerating our efforts to deliver online learning and support; removing barriers to continuation to second year; and altering our pre-entry requirements.

Against the backdrop of the Covid-19 pandemic, we remain focused on embedding successful initiatives by adopting a targeted and tailored approach to supporting students who are most in need.

Measuring our success across different areas of our strategy will be crucial for keeping us on track over the next five years. Our Access and Participation Plan (APP) targets remain important and our longer-term approach, as outlined within the Access and Student Success Strategy, will help set the level of ambition in our future APPs at undergraduate level; but the new strategy also includes targets for the elimination of inequalities at postgraduate level.

It is a challenging time for students entering the world of higher education, but the staff and student community at Leeds are absolutely committed to Widening Participation as part of our contribution to social mobility and regional engagement.

As we look to the future, we must build on the work set out in this report and remain a place where students from diverse backgrounds feel they belong, can thrive, and are valued for their unique contribution.

Professor Simone Buitendijk
Vice-Chancellor, University of Leeds
Our Response to Covid-19

The university has worked hard to be as flexible and supportive as possible during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The move to increased online delivery for teaching, outreach and student support has been challenging for both students and staff and we are constantly learning how to improve what we offer our students. Our plans for the future are to retain the innovative and effective elements of digital delivery, making it a larger, permanent part of our outreach offer, without compromising in-person delivery with school and college partners.

OUTREACH

Although our outreach provision has historically emphasised face-to-face interaction, we had been using digital platforms to engage with potential applicants for some time.

This enabled us to rapidly pivot to 100% online delivery of our outreach. During the first lockdown, our online provision ensured that we maintained strong engagement with schools and prospective students in many areas. This resulted in an increase in, or new, engagement in some areas, with higher attendance at our events and more representation from students located further afield (London, Brighton, and even outside the UK).

A major shift in our provision was transforming our summer school residential events to online delivery. These complex events required detailed planning and co-operation; but our prompt adjustment allowed us to go ahead with digital summer schools in modern languages, food science, mathematics, and biosciences.

We also delivered the Reach for Excellence summer school to over 100 Year 12 students, which included evening social activities.

ACCESS

Our work to highlight our alternative access offers during the 2019/20 academic year saw the biggest ever increase in low participation neighbourhood (LPN) intake in one year.

Access to Leeds continued to work with schools and students across the country to provide a two-grade reduction to students progressing through the full scheme and once again we saw an increase in applications and progression to Leeds through the scheme.

This was the second year of targeted offer-making for LPN students with additional grade reductions at confirmation.
As the University responded to lockdowns and restrictions on access to campus, the needs of under-represented groups were considered at every stage of our teaching, assessment and access and student success work.

Direct feedback from students was used to highlight concerns and identify specific areas where we could provide assistance; for example, their feedback led to us providing WiFi dongles or phone data credits, in addition to loaned laptops, where bandwidth was an issue for students’ ability to study.

We worked with the Behavioural Insight Team to investigate ways in which messaging from the University could more effectively encourage engagement with our revised online Welcome, Induction and Transition provision. Using a randomised control trial methodology, we found that messages which emphasised ‘belonging’ were significantly more effective at ensuring prolonged student engagement with these activities.

We targeted groups such as scholarship recipients, estranged and care-experienced students for additional financial support, including providing specific additional funding for estranged and care-experienced students: making awards to continuing students to help offset the lack of work opportunities over the summer (which would be exacerbated by lack of familial support) and to graduating students to support them in their search for graduate work. We also provided estranged and care-experienced students with an additional financial award to help cover the costs of the winter vacation where work was again projected to be scarce for these students.

We awarded additional funding to help cover the cost of accommodation for final year Nursing students whilst they worked in wards during the pandemic.
Giving Students a Voice

At Leeds, the long-running partnership between the University and the Student Union ensures student representation.

During 2019/20 we built upon this, running regular focus groups (which moved online during the Covid-19 pandemic) with a range of underrepresented students from different backgrounds and across the student lifecycle, to better understand their lived experience at Leeds.

We adopted a ‘student-led’ approach, allowing students to shape how this programme of activity would be conducted and developed. Feedback is relayed to relevant services and committees for action and has already generated a number of new areas of work and deep-dive research initiatives which we hope will lead to further progress in student continuation.

Student-led events are another useful way of identifying opportunities to provide appropriate support. A recent student-led event run through our Equality Policy Unit, entitled: Language in Equality and Inclusion: The Perspective of Students, led to changes in the BAME mentoring scheme run through the Plus Programme. The student panel discussion at the event shared that although they felt that the BAME umbrella can afford some solidarity in terms of making institutional changes, students didn’t routinely want to be grouped as BAME, feeling that this flattened their individual identities. They wanted their culture to be thought of more individually. As a result, the Plus Programme is developing a Black student mentoring scheme and has plans to create an Asian student mentoring scheme to commence in 2020/21.
The Plus Programme routinely consults with students about their needs and the support they would like to receive, and a key component of this is the Student Steering group.

Working with our students has obviously become even more important during the pandemic and we consulted with both undergraduate (all years) and postgraduate Plus Programme students to understand how we needed to structure support and signpost existing provision within the University. The responses ranged from academic skills support through to social and wellbeing needs and below are some examples of activity:

**Digital Exclusion**

Students flagged issues of digital exclusion: this had been partly addressed through a University-wide scheme for loaning laptops to students, but in some cases there were also issues of limited bandwidth in shared/family houses, making watching lectures challenging. This resulted in the Plus Programme making phone credits or Wi-Fi dongles available for students unable to attend lectures.

**Academic Skills**

The Plus Programme linked with Skills@Library (which helps students to develop academic skills, within the curriculum) to deliver specific targeted communications on dissertation advice workshops for final year students, as well as sessions on essay structuring, academic writing, time management and staying motivated while learning online.

**Employability**

Employability and Progression Assistants from our Student Careers service provided coordinated support for Plus Programme students across the full student lifecycle. Support ranged from help with application skills and employability confidence to inclusivity-focused employer workshops. Funded activity included three Digital Mock Assessment Centre events delivered by Smart Resourcing Solutions, and two through Transform Society, who also delivered several other skills and sector-based workshops.

Employability and Progression Assistants have established in-depth research areas focusing on the barriers to progression for APP target group students. Recommendations from these initial research reports have influenced employability activity structures, through representation and co-creational methods, and improved ethnicity data reporting processes.

**Wellbeing & Social**

The Plus Programme newsletter carried messaging around the Counselling and Wellbeing Service’s tools (appointments, Togetherall, workshops, etc), on issues including support dealing with stress; help with feeling overwhelmed; and advice on how to avoid dwelling on COVID and how it has affected students’ university experience.

The Plus Programme team hosted more movie and quiz nights, providing opportunities to meet other students and have more human interaction despite COVID. Takeaway vouchers were provided, as well as an online space to enable discussion about the films.

Student feedback has also helped the team to improve their delivery, such as holding events after 5pm, using preferred digital platforms, and limiting activities to an hour where possible.

**FUTURE PLANS**

A new Student Involvement role (to commence in 2021) will be responsible for bringing students into the development, delivery, monitoring and evaluation of our WP activity. The way in which the work will be delivered was directly informed by feedback from underrepresented students contributing to the regular focus groups held by the APP Monitoring Project Group established in 2019.

The Student Involvement Officer will be responsible for creating a formal governance structure feeding into the University’s central governance and services with the aim of increasing staff and underrepresented students’ involvement in our widening participation access and student success work.
REACH FOR EXCELLENCE

Following the most competitive recruitment cycle to date, 265 Year 12 students were selected and registered on our Reach for Excellence scheme in autumn 2019/20. This took the total number of students registered across both years of the programme to 542.

The new Year 12 cohort were offered taster workshops from all faculties to get a flavour of academic life at Leeds. They also had the chance to explore the University campus and benefit from skills and personal development sessions. Our Year 13 students were provided with opportunities to access UCAS and Personal Statement support as well as to attend workshops designed to develop essential practical skills in cooking on a budget, interviews, and financial management.

Following a rapid move to online-only provision, a virtual campus community was created through which 50 hours of live interactive content were delivered. Students also had a dedicated phone line to maintain contact with the team at Leeds, which they could call for reassurance over any worries or uncertainties. The dedicated line was also used to provide 100 of our Year 13 students with direct support over the confirmation and clearing period.

The academic year 2019/20 saw 176 (64%) of our Year 13 Reach for Excellence students apply to the University of Leeds. 96 received at least one offer and 36 of these offer-holders ultimately registered at the University.

INTOUNIVERSITY

The University works in partnership with national educational charity IntoUniversity to run three project centres in Leeds – South, West, and Extension. The projects enable young people to access additional academic support locally and learn more about progression to university. They have also provided important enhanced pastoral support since the beginning of the pandemic.

Despite the challenges of 2019/20 the three projects were able to support a total of 2547 young people across both primary and secondary education, including 193 through mentoring programmes.

When the centres closed in March 2020, support was quickly reformatted to maintain students’ access: a new online learning platform was created; resources were shared via email; and tutorials were held over the telephone. 4709 telephone calls were made to students during the centre closures, meaning that 346 students and their families continued to benefit from being part of IntoUniversity.

The partnership supported 18 students to progress to the University of Leeds in 2020, taking the total number of IntoUniversity Leeds-based students progressing to the University to 76 since the scheme began. The success can perhaps best be seen in the local rates of progression to HE – Leeds East saw a rate of 59% compared to the local average of 23% and Leeds South saw a rate of 72% compared to a local average of 12%.
This year, GHWY students had the chance to visit the University of Manchester as part of a Northern Powerhouse Exchange, while students from a similar partnership, Greater Manchester Higher (GMHigher), were welcomed at the University of Leeds.

Organised by the University of Leeds Uni Connect Officer, the visit had an International Women’s Day theme, with activities including an academic workshop on the suffragettes, a campus tour, and a visit to Leeds City Museum. After the Exchange, 83% of GMHigher students who responded agreed or strongly agreed that they knew ‘more about the benefits of going to university/HE’, and 87% agreed or strongly agreed that they were now more motivated to study and work hard to take advantage of future opportunities.

The University of Leeds also led an Explore English Collaborative Taster Day that gave fifty Year 10s from six GHWY schools the opportunity to experience what it would be like to study an English-based course at the University of Leeds and Leeds Arts University (LAU). Students attended academic workshops on Journalism and ‘Reading Comics as a Literary Form’ at the University of Leeds, and a Creative Writing session at LAU. They also toured both campuses. Analysis of the event showed an 87% increase in the students’ response to the question ‘I understand what it might be like to study English language and literature at university or college’.
THE STUDENT SUCCESS TEAM

The Student Success core team is based in Educational Engagement, with Student Success Officers in each of the eight faculties. The purpose of the SSO role is to maximise student success amongst students from a wide range of backgrounds – particularly amongst students at risk of non-continuation and lower than expected degree attainment, such as mature, BAME and POLAR4 Q1 students.

By working from their faculty vantage point, each officer can focus on faculty-specific priorities and issues. They also work in partnership with colleagues across the University, including the other SSOs, to identify, evaluate, share and embed good practice in relation to retention, attainment and progression. By using data to spot concerns as early as possible, they enable staff to better understand and support students.

This unique role has facilitated the sharing of quality information and good practice. It has led to an increased awareness of the Student Success agenda across the University and has been pivotal in ensuring that data is at the centre of decision-making, as well as in evaluating work done in this area.
STUDENT SUCCESS PROJECTS

Learning Analytics & Minerva* Engagement Monitoring

Due to the significant changes to curriculum delivery in 2020-2021 as a result of the evolving COVID-19 pandemic, a new approach to monitoring student engagement with their studies was rolled out.

Regular monitoring of students' use of online learning is a key mechanism for identifying those at risk of disengaging with their studies. Early identification is a priority to facilitate intervention enabling progress in their studies.

The SSOs played an instrumental role in the development of these reports and the underlying processes, and the lessons learned will play a key part in the launch, in September 2021, of stREAM, the University wide Learning Analytics system.

“The collation and use of data has improved massively since the Officers came into place. The Officer(s) have done a great job making data a lot more user friendly and understandable.”

Faculty of Medicine and Health

“Academic and SES colleagues can now more readily access data that they require, such as demographic data on a student... There is now more confidence with accessing data and confidence in the data itself.”

Faculty of Engineering and Physical Sciences

“Peer Mentoring... would not have happened this year without (the Officer). These initiatives play a key role in developing a students' sense of belonging.”

Faculty of Social Sciences
Student Success Activity

STUDENT SUCCESS PROJECTS CONTINUED

BTEC Student Support

The Student Success team continues to support BTEC students in their transition to the university by encouraging them to feel that they belong at Leeds. The team has worked closely with colleagues across Faculties on existing and new initiatives to support this.

One example includes the SSOs working with the Educational Engagement Outreach Lead Officer in the Faculty of Engineering and Physical Sciences to run the BTEC Masterclass Programme which:

- Delivered a sustained programme of activity
- Targeted Year 12 BTEC students
- Provided support for BTEC students to be better prepared for university life

Evaluation will include pre- and post-Masterclass student and teacher questionnaires, session feedback forms, and analysis of UCAS and Admissions data.

Disability Services

Like the majority of other similar services, much of 2019/20 has been dominated by the need to adapt our service in challenging circumstances to maintain the delivery of high-quality support for disabled students. In previous years the Service has been through a lengthy process of adaptation and change with the introduction of more staffing and increased flexibility in our approach to support.

As a result, Disability Services managed to move all operations online within a week of remote working and was able to offer all support types, both online and in person, which has enabled our students to continue to study and meet their full potential.

Work undertaken over the past two years to improve relationships across this institution has combined with our learning over this challenging time and led to a number of initiative process changes and service offerings that will further improve the way we are able to support students. This includes the streamlining of information sharing, and increased opportunities for students to meaningfully engage with our service without having to visit our physical location. As a result, we have seen a year-on-year growth in the number of students engaging with the Service as well as an increased number seeking support.

Meeting the needs of students is our main focus, and hearing and learning from our students is critical to this. Our Student Panel therefore continues to be a priority area of our more recent development – and we are pleased that this has continued throughout this challenging time. Students advise and guide our development as well as provide insights into how we can better engage with them and break down barriers and remove preconceptions about what we do. Part of this process has been the development of the Student Disability Services newsletter, which is written by and shared with our students, to better inform and provide case studies about the impact and benefits of support. We also continue to work with the wider community to better promote our work supporting positive outcomes for those transitioning into higher education.

“"The BTEC Masterclass Programme has enabled early engagement to understand and address barriers as well as easing transition to the university. Furthermore, it has been an excellent example of collaboration across teams within the university, coming together to support student success.”

STEM team, Educational Engagement
Welcome Induction and Transition

The Student Success Officers supported several elements of Welcome, Induction and Transition in their faculties, including ‘Global Community’ and ‘Being Unconventional’.

Crucially, the SSOs carried out survey and focus groups and produced evaluation reports which have been shared with the central Welcome, Induction and Transition Evaluation Group.

“Running focus groups evaluating induction, (is) something we could not have done without their role due to staff time pressures. This has allowed us to shape our next induction to meet the needs of the students more effectively.”

Faculty of Medicine and Health

“Communication and raising awareness of the Student Success agenda has certainly improved.”

Leeds University Business School

“Students who would have otherwise been on the periphery of their school community (are) much more closely aligned within the schools... The schools within the faculty have been able to devote time and more thinking to their processes on support and success (since having the Officer in place).”

Faculty of Environment

“The SSO is contributing to work on student engagement, peer to peer communication and sense of belonging, as well as supporting evaluation of welcome, induction and transition. All of this work impacts our students, through improvement to our services and better understanding of the student experience.”

The Lifelong Learning Centre

“Cross-faculty conversation and best practice sharing has been a huge area of progress in a large faculty! (We have) benefited from (the Officer) building connections and facilitating links that wouldn’t have been there otherwise.”

Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Cultures
Research and Evaluation

As part of our commitment to ensuring that we use the most robust methods possible to understand and address the challenges faced by many of our students, we continue to evaluate and research practice within Leeds and across the sector.

One strand of our approach is our investment in a number of Fellowships within our Leeds Institute for Teaching Excellence (LITE). LITE promotes and supports innovation and excellence in teaching and disseminates outcomes for impact on student learning. LITE Fellows deliver projects, or evaluate University practice in order to improve the teaching, learning and success of our students.

Some of the LITE Fellows’ projects are relevant to Widening Participation and include:

**THE ELIXIR PROJECT: EXPLORING LINKS BETWEEN INDUCTION, EXIT AND RETENTION**

The ELIXIR project investigated possible links between student retention and induction practices, to identify best practice applicable across the University as well as specialist school and faculty level provision.

By auditing existing good practice at Leeds and elsewhere, the project aimed to gather information about students’ experience of their move to the University, as well as to gather ideas and innovative practice from colleagues. The project worked closely with academic and professional services, and with students themselves, in order to re-energise existing induction materials and showcase new resources that provide clear support to colleagues and students for the crucial transition to university life.

**PEDAGOGICAL WELLBEING & THE LEEDS CURRICULUM PROJECT**

The ‘Pedagogical wellbeing & the Leeds Curriculum’ project aims to investigate how to facilitate and develop wellbeing across the university curricula to deliver improved student mental health outcomes.

The views and experiences of students and staff are central to this project. Annual staff and student surveys designed to elicit views on what makes a student feel a ‘sense of belonging’ at the university enable the project to identify and distribute examples of effective pedagogical wellbeing, and seek opportunities to develop and extend the current provision.

**STUDENT SUCCESS ACADEMIC LEAD**

This two-year project will develop an Inclusive Curriculum design toolkit and implement framework/baseline standards in this area.

The aim is to reduce the gaps in degree attainment linked to students’ race, gender, age and socio-economic background and to improve the student experience. This project will promote opportunities to share knowledge and best practice internally and to work with colleagues at other institutions to develop Inclusive Curriculum best practice nationally.
BELONGING AND ENGAGING FOR SUCCESSFUL TRANSITION TO HE (BEST) PROJECT

This project looks at how students transition into higher education, the factors that affect their sense of belonging and hence engagement, and how these impact on their academic success.

The proposed research takes its lead from the work of Professor Liz Thomas (2012) which concluded ‘It is the human side of higher education that comes first – finding friends, feeling confident and, above all, feeling a part of your course of study and the institution – that is the necessary starting point for academic success’.

Sense of belonging is now at the heart of the University’s Access and Student Success Strategy and an array of new LITE fellowships are being funded through Educational Engagement in 2020/21 including:

- Interactive pedagogy and sense of belonging
- Personal tutoring and sense of belonging
- Sense of belonging and authentic self

NEON – ‘SUPPORTING BTEC STUDENTS’ WORKING GROUP

Colleagues from Educational Engagement play an active role in the National Educational Opportunities Network (NEON) ‘Supporting BTEC students’ Working Group.

The group is responsible for ensuring effective collaboration and discussion between member institutions around work supporting pathways into higher education for BTEC learners and learners following associated alternative qualification programmes – CACHE Diplomas, Cambridge Tech and T levels.

We facilitate genuine collaboration between the research and practice communities via paper submissions to NEON symposium and related conferences and act as a collective voice, feeding findings into the Office for Students on behalf of the member institutions and taking responsibility for sharing best practice at a national level.
Reflections and the future

I am incredibly proud of the progress that the University of Leeds has made in advancing access and student success as reflected in this report.

This is a long-held commitment at the University and intrinsic to our values. Our new institutional strategy with a focus on community, culture and impact embodies this – we want to make a positive difference to the world.

We will continue to advance our work on access and student success, evolving our lifelong learning culture (report coming soon), building on our existing partnerships and collaborations and developing new ones. We will maintain our focus on ensuring our students feel that they belong, matter and are valued.

As outlined in our institutional Access and Student Success strategy, we value the diversity and lived experiences of our student communities. We continue to evolve our approaches to understand intersections in terms of data and through the student voice. The targets and milestones we have set enable us to monitor and measure progress. Listening and co-creating with our students serves as a consistent reminder of the individuals behind the statistics and our culture is one that avoids a deficit model. This ensures that we not only celebrate this diversity but use these contexts to change our systems and approaches to remove barriers.

We know that these barriers and inequalities don’t end at undergraduate level. We are continuing our work to enhance student success for diverse communities studying at taught postgraduate level and we will be developing new approaches to increase access to PhDs. Collaboration and partnership across the institution, with our students and externally, are crucial if we are to address equality of opportunity and outcomes. Our upcoming large-scale change programmes including a new EDI strategy, Curriculum Redefined, introduction of learning analytics and more will accelerate this further.

I am enormously grateful to all those leading and implementing work to date, particularly amidst the challenges of the pandemic. Innovation, creativity and new ways of working have been all the more important and, from digital learning to approaches to engagement, we’ve pivoted and made changes. Many of these are here to stay, leading to long-lasting impactful change.

Louise Banahene MBE
Director of Educational Engagement