

ACCESS AND STUDENT SUCCESS

ANNUAL REPORT

2020/21



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS



ACCESS AND OUTREACH

CONTINUATION AND STUDENT SUCCESS

Financial Support

ATTAINMENT AND ACHIEVEMENT

Educational Engagement Outreach Fellows

PROGRESSION

Postgraduate Support

Introduction from our Vice-Chancellor

The University of Leeds is home to a vibrant and diverse community of students and staff. Helping students to feel like they belong here at the University is a core part of our mission, and vital to ensuring they go onto future success.

Our [Access and Student Success Strategy](#) outlines how we will make sure that students from all backgrounds can access, benefit from, and thrive at the University. At its core, the strategy articulates our commitment to ensure that we can give our students the best chance to achieve their goals.

This report gives a snapshot of some of the work that has taken place over the past year as we strive to provide our students with the knowledge, skills and experience so valuable in the workplace or further study. The pandemic has highlighted, and in some cases widened, gaps in advantage within the UK and across the world. As a university we have a responsibility to drive down inequalities and help build a fairer future for all.

Our extensive outreach and contextual admissions programmes enable access for more than 1,000 students per year from under-represented groups or low-income backgrounds. During 2020-21, we have continued to:

- Develop our whole-institution approach to success;
- Improve our understanding of different challenges for different student groups and learn more about how we can enhance our support offer;
- Alter and improve our welcome, induction and transition activities to adapt to new ways of working (considering COVID), helping to ensure that our students are well prepared to start their university education;
- Increase the breadth and depth of the work we do in partnership with our students to ensure that Leeds can provide a student experience fit for all.

Helping to direct this activity is our research and evaluation work. Through this, we are constantly evolving and improving what we offer our students – targeting interventions where the need is strongest and understanding the impact of our efforts.

Looking ahead, we will continue to do our utmost to provide new starters and our existing students with the richest and most rewarding experience possible whilst studying at our University.

Professor Simone Buitendijk
Vice-Chancellor, University of Leeds



Our Access and Student Success Strategy 2025

The Access and Student Success Strategy outlines the University's vision and approach to ensuring students from all backgrounds can benefit from an enriching and successful experience at Leeds.

The strategy is set out across four pillars of the student lifecycle: access; continuation; attainment; and progression. The fifth pillar – enablers – outlines where we will focus our efforts to support the successful delivery of the strategy over the next five years.



1

Access

Prospective students from a range of backgrounds can see themselves at Leeds and gain a place

2

Continuation

All students feel they belong and matter to the University

3

Attainment

All students are valued and able to thrive academically

4

Progression

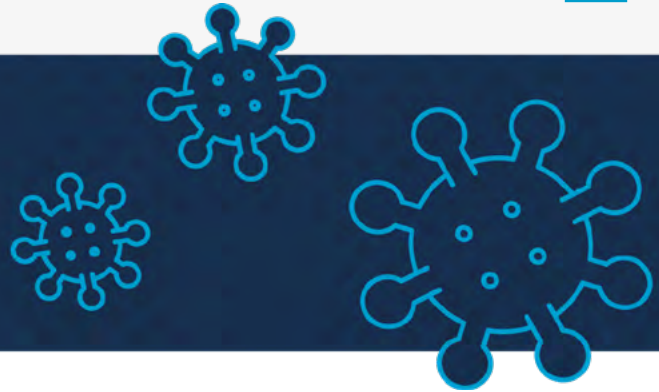
Our students have opportunities to achieve their unique goals and fulfill their potential

5

Enablers

Our culture and systems support an embedded and evidence-based inclusive approach

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



Outreach

As the impact of the pandemic continues to be felt at schools and colleges, our outreach teams have developed innovative methods of engagement, including pre-recorded masterclasses, online summer schools, webinar series and more. These have transformed our outreach offer and enabled us to provide activities that increase aspiration and raise attainment to over 400 schools and colleges nationwide.

ONLINE SUMMER SCHOOLS

Building on the successful switch in 2020 to online summer schools, 2021 saw the University's Educational Engagement teams once again offer a range of subject-focused online events. These included biological sciences; social sciences; food science and nutrition; mathematics; and modern languages.

Responding to feedback from 2020, ambassador-led evening social events were added to the agenda, and these received very positive feedback.

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"The students we had for the Q&A both studied different subjects and so we were able to get an insight into the different courses and a wider range of knowledge."

Student, Online Summer School, 2020/21.
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A HYBRID APPROACH

We had to wait – patiently – over 500 days to welcome Year 12 students back to campus, in-person, as part of the 2021 Reach for Excellence Summer School. The team provided a hybrid experience where students spent some of the week in online sessions and were also invited to attend the 'Summer in Leeds, On Campus Experience Day', which was held outdoors in a purpose-built marquee. This enabled students to meet with undergraduate student ambassadors, explore the University campus and connect with their peers with whom they had been working online.

Feedback showed that all participants appreciated the face-to-face element and that this enhanced the overall experience of the summer school.

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"The staff were lovely and created a safe environment. They all made us feel welcomed and comfortable. It was very informative and eye opening."

Student, Reach for Excellence Summer School, 2020/21.
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FUTURES – REVIEW PHASE 1

A major step forward in embedding our digital outreach offering has been the launch of our Futures Programmes. These subject-specific programmes support individual students from under-represented backgrounds throughout Year 12 and 13. Students take part in regular subject masterclasses, study skills sessions and application-support workshops, and can network with like-minded students from across the country.

A particular focus in the 2021 programme was on supporting students interested in medicine and health, as the ongoing pandemic created barriers for students learning about these paths and undertaking work experience. Through collaboration with academic colleagues, current students, and staff at our local NHS trusts, over 200 students have been supported in applying to these areas this year.

“Thank you so much for taking the time to help us enhance our knowledge about healthcare careers. I honestly cannot thank you enough for your support to apply to the course that suits me best!”

Student, Medicine Futures programme, 2020/21.

LIFELONG LEARNING CENTRE (LLC) SUMMER PROGRAMME

Instead of the well-established adult learner summer school, the LLC delivered an ‘Explore your options’ summer programme in June and July 2021. This series of 15 taster and information events featured post-session recordings available for those who were unable to attend. Overall, 188 people registered for ‘Explore your options’ and a total of 78 adults attended one or more activities.

“I’m really glad [the events] exist. The whole idea of applying to uni as a mature student is quite daunting when nobody else around you is applying. Support offered is excellent and I couldn’t fault it.”

‘Getting into Uni’ session participant, 2020/21.

ONLINE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INDEPENDENT ADVICE AND GUIDANCE

The LLC ran a range of activities to engage with adults studying at levels two and three in local further education settings, raising aspirations and providing information on higher education.

A total of 39 online events were delivered between October 2020 and July 2021, including 20 subject tasters introducing LLC provision and 19 general sessions on topics such as ‘Student Finance’ and ‘Studying as a Mature Student’.

In all, 691 people registered for activities and the total attendance at live events was 345 (only 22 fewer than the previous year, which included face-to-face and online activities).

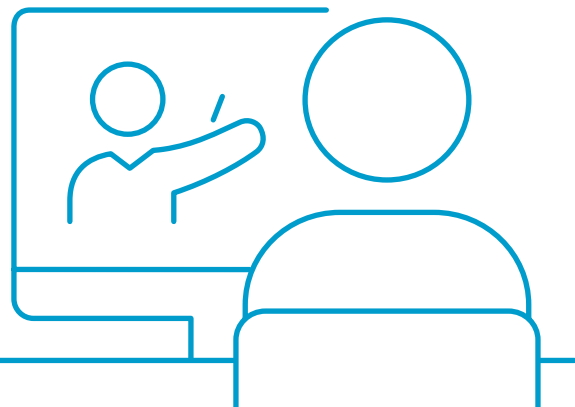
Participants were also offered independent advice and guidance appointments and 563 appointments were held in 2020-21.

“IAG covered everything I needed to know to make an informed decision. My compliments for keeping this service going throughout the covid pandemic.”

Guidance appointment attendee, 2020/21.

PARTNERSHIPS WITH LEVEL THREE PROVISION

The LLC continued to work with local colleges to engage adult learners. Participating further education colleges included: Leeds City College, Wakefield College, Kirklees College, Keighley College, Northern College, Craven College, Selby College and Barnsley College. All 51 sessions in 2020/21 were delivered online using a variety of platforms. This included 35 sessions for Access Higher Education classes (23 of which were in the West Yorkshire region) and 16 sessions for BTEC and CACHE groups. Activities were delivered to over 500 students online.



Access

ALTERNATIVE OFFER SCHEMES

Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2020/21 academic year saw the biggest ever increase in students from Lower Participation Neighborhoods (LPNs) applying to, and securing a place at, the University of Leeds due to our alternative offer schemes – namely, Access to Leeds and Realising Opportunities. There was a 50% increase in LPN applicants to the University and a 45% increase in LPN students accepting offers from the previous academic year.

Due to the move online, both Access to Leeds and Realising Opportunities adapted to include additional peer input, so students could access extra support during this unusual and difficult period.

This was the second year of targeted offer-making for LPN students, with additional grade reductions at confirmation.

“It gave me a lot more confidence as it not only gave me information about the University but useful study tips”

Student, Access to Leeds programme, 2020/21.

The Lifelong Learning Centre (LLC) continued to run the ‘Alternative Entry Scheme’ which enables mature students who have been out of formal education, or do not have certification, to apply to full and part-time courses. This was particularly important for students who were unable to access levels two and three provision because of the pandemic.

To facilitate access to the scheme, matriculation exams were moved online, and support was made available through synchronous individual and group sessions.

In the evaluation, 100% of respondents said they felt positive about doing the Alternative Entry Scheme.

“My one-to-one tutor in maths was incredible and an amazing teacher, not only for having to swap from live classes to online classes very quickly, but also, their wit and energy in making me engage. I was supported with my problems in English and maths [which] gave me more confidence and helped me not panic in both exams. Thank you everyone involved – job well done!”

Applicant via the Alternative Entry Scheme, 2020/21.

Progression

OUR CAREERS SERVICE

During the pandemic, the Careers Service has proactively engaged with students in a range of ways. For example, to maintain support, information, advice and guidance, appointments transitioned to an online model, and the drop-in service converted to bookable same-day appointments.

The Employability and Progression Assistant team provided additional targeted support for under-represented student groups and those most at risk of low graduate prospects through one-to-one support and workshop activities. These students were also regularly made aware of opportunities to build their skills and experience, aiding their development and progression. This support prioritised flexibility to suit individual student needs, and empathy towards the challenges and pressures experienced by studying remotely. The Employability and Progression Assistant in the Lifelong Learning Centre works specifically with our mature, part-time and foundation students and held 276 on-course advice and guidance appointments in 2020-21.



Giving Students a Voice

At Leeds, the student voice underpins all that we do and the longstanding partnership between the University and the Student Union facilitates progressive student representation across programmes and initiatives. As part of this collaboration, we are constantly evaluating our work, with input from students, to drive continuous improvement.



Student Involvement Project

With an ambition to further embed student voices in the work of the Educational Engagement Service, this year we launched our Student Involvement Project.

Supported by extensive research into student voice/ involvement across the sector, we designed an approach that allows us to work with students through partnership and collaboration.

In this new model, recommendations are directed by the experiences of our students. Participants are asked to contribute their 'lived-experience' data and take a leading role in the interpretation and conversion of the data into actionable policy and institutional change.

During the project, students also have the option of participating in a listening room or becoming a student representative. Listening room insights are fed into four 'theme groups' – collaborative working groups with staff and student membership that review the data and make recommendations for improvements or new work.

The student-led, staff-supported model of this project allows us to build a solid evidence base for interventions, and supports a departmental culture where students feel not only that they belong but are also partners directing our future work.

Forty students were recruited for the project's launch, demonstrating clear enthusiasm for testing this new approach. Since then, a training session for student representatives has taken place, and staff across the University are using the project to generate new ideas and insights for their work.

The Plus Programme

The Plus Programme is a support scheme for students who come from backgrounds that are less represented at university, ensuring they have access to all the opportunities at Leeds to help them achieve their goals.

The Plus Programme regularly consults with students about their current and evolving needs as they progress through their university experiences. Student feedback helps to develop the Plus Programme's offer to students through the creation of new activities and development of existing interventions.

STUDENT STEERING GROUP

Now in its fifth year, the Student Steering Group has grown into a core part of the Plus Programme's efforts to involve students in the creation and direction of its work. Since its inception, the group has doubled in size (ten to twelve students from a range of backgrounds attend each meeting) and increased its meeting frequency to convene seven times over the academic year from November to May.

The predominant function of the steering group is to collect feedback on completed/planned activities and provide students' perspectives on issues currently faced by Plus Programme members.

In addition to this, in the third term, the group also delivers two Plus Programme events. In 2020-21, the group planned, developed and delivered an event around supporting Plus Programme students' mental health. This provided students with opportunity to develop skills or techniques to aid wellbeing during the exam period and included an end-of-year social to promote a sense of belonging.

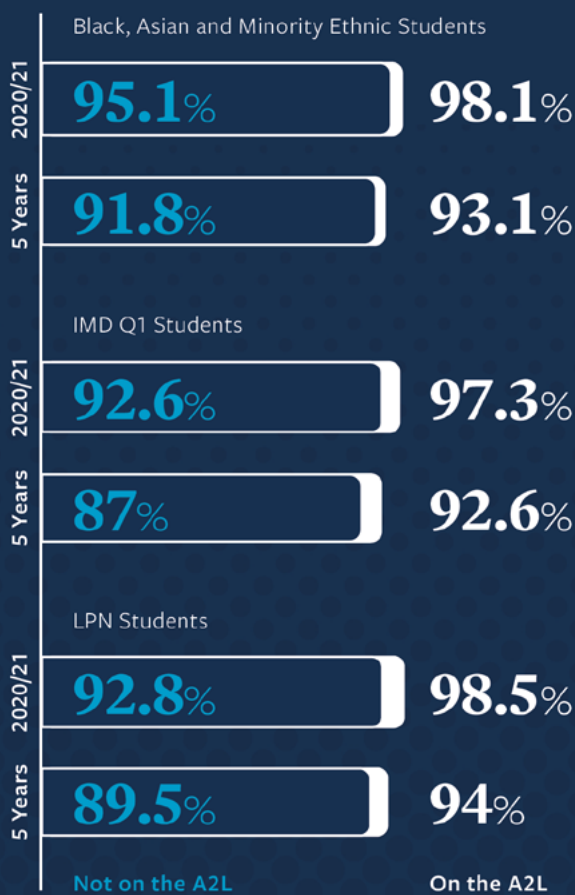
As well as giving steering group members a chance to develop their employability and event management skills, the events also demonstrate to staff delivering the Plus Programme how students prefer events to be run.

"I enjoyed meeting others from different year groups and taking courses which I wouldn't have normally had the opportunity to do. As a first year, it was great to hear about the initiatives the Plus Programme does but also to voice my suggestions. I would recommend being a part of the group as you can develop communication, as well event management skills, during the committee run events."

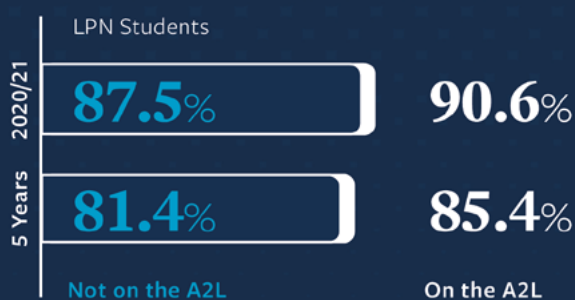
Murtada Dafalla, Student Steering Group Member 2020/21.

At Leeds, we have a wealth of experience attracting students through our outreach approaches, nationally-recognised Access to Leeds scheme, Lifelong Learning Centre and foundation programmes. We continue to develop and improve these, evolving an admissions policy that allows fair opportunity to study at Leeds at all levels of study.

CONTINUATION: First-time UK Entrants



ATTAINMENT: First-time UK Entrants



Contextual Admissions

ACCESS TO LEEDS

The aim of Access to Leeds (A2L) is to ensure that all students, irrespective of background, have fair access to all undergraduate degrees at the University of Leeds and do not face barriers to studying our courses.

The scheme is aimed at those who may not have had the opportunity to demonstrate potential through their grades alone. It includes students:

- With no family history of higher education
- From lower income backgrounds
- From areas with low higher education participation
- Who have spent time in care

The scheme benefits participants by offering lowered entry considerations and access to activities that prepare them for studying at the University of Leeds. A2L applicants receive offers that are two grades below the standard offer and are given the opportunity to participate in the A2L module before they start their undergraduate studies. The module consists of two parts – study skills and a subject assignment. Both parts are designed to help students prepare for university study and are at an equivalent academic level to Year 13 studies.

The A2L module is a crucial opportunity for students to engage with the University in the transitional period from school or college to higher education. It is designed to familiarise the students with the University and to help promote a sense of belonging. The A2L module provides an opportunity to become familiar with some of the University’s academic processes and systems and, more importantly, provides access to university tutors and students. The tutor support is relevant to the subject that the student has applied for so provides familiarity with their intended programme of study.

Recent evaluations have shown the module’s success in aiding the transition of A2L students to the University of Leeds. Over the past five years, 86% of A2L students have achieved a 1st or 2:1 degree – similar to their university peers despite lower entry offers and increased disadvantage.

A2L has also provided a focal point for our outreach and widening access programmes. For example, participants in our Reach for Excellence programme are given automatic progression to A2L if they choose to apply for a University of Leeds course, and we promote A2L in all our outreach delivery. We also have many previous A2L participants among our cohort of student hosts acting as role models and providing crucial continuity in our work.

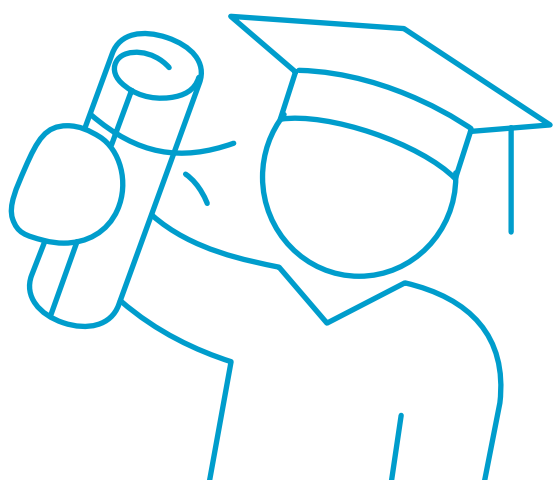
While delivering all the above, A2L has continued to grow in scale. From registering 26 students in its first year in 2003, the scheme registered 1564 students to University of Leeds courses in 2021.



LIFELONG LEARNING CENTRE (LLC)

The LLC recruits students from under-represented backgrounds using several eligibility criteria such as postcode, school attainment levels and household income.

Candidates who have been out of formal compulsory education for three years or more, as well as mature candidates who do not hold traditional qualifications, are eligible for the Alternative Entry Scheme (AES). This runs in conjunction with teaching schools at the University of Leeds, and in 2020/21, 99 students were recruited via this route.



GATEWAY TO MEDICINE

Gateway to Medicine is a six-year course that started in September 2020 for UK students meeting at least two of the University's widening participation criteria. It comprises of a Foundation year running through into the five-year MBChB medical degree.

It is the flagship widening participation initiative within the School of Medicine to help increase diversity within the medical profession. There are young people who would make excellent doctors who have experienced personal or family health and social disadvantage that has impaired their educational attainment. Gateway to Medicine aims to provide an opportunity to build confidence, to attain additional study skills and to fill gaps in their academic knowledge. They can enter the five years of the degree with skills and knowledge to help them progress to become doctors. The life experiences that hindered their progression in school, will prove to be assets when they become doctors because of the empathy that they have for patients experiencing difficult life events.

Despite the challenges of studying on a new course during a pandemic, all 23 of the 2020/21 students successfully completed the foundation year and progressed to year one of the MBChB. There has been a planned increase to 46 students in 2021/22.

Sustained and evidence-based outreach

To continue removing barriers to access and attainment for those from under-represented groups, we are focusing on building sustained and evidence-based outreach interventions with schools, colleges and community organisations.

THE BRILLIANT CLUB SCHOLARS PROGRAMME

The University of Leeds works in partnership with The Brilliant Club on the Scholars Programme which engages young people directly with the University's campus.

The Scholars Programme supports students from under-represented backgrounds to progress to highly selective universities. It targets students who are eligible for Pupil Premium, who have no parental history of higher education and who live in deprived areas according to the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI).

The purpose of this collaboration is to promote fair access to university by mobilising doctoral and postdoctoral researchers to work as tutors in state schools to deliver programmes of university-style teaching to small groups of students aged 10-18. This includes a series of university-style tutorials, two study skills workshops and a final assignment, as well as two university trips and a range of targeted and age-appropriate information, advice and guidance sessions.

The 2020/21 academic year, however, continued to pose exceptional challenges to the Scholars Programme, as the ongoing pandemic prevented the launch and graduation trips from taking place on campus. These events continued to run nationally online, giving students and their parents/carers across the country the opportunity to gain insight into university life.

In total, 480 students from 32 schools were invited to four live online launch events with the University of Leeds, with a further 134 students from 12 schools invited to three graduation events. The University also took part in a national online question and answer event at the start of the academic year where school students had the opportunity to find out more about university life from our University student hosts.

Fifteen researchers from the University of Leeds delivered a total of 27 Scholars Programme placements. The in-school and virtual tutorials culminated in students completing a challenging university-style assignment, which was marked by the researchers. A total of 314 students worked with researchers from the University of Leeds over the academic year.

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 "I really enjoyed learning lots about the Scholars Programme and Leeds University and would definitely consider this University when I am choosing where to study."

"I loved the launch, it made me more confident about looking into universities and made me more comfortable starting the programme."

"I think the launch event was amazing and I'm happy to be filled with some knowledge of which I never knew about. I'm happy to be part of such a great experience!"

Students on the Brilliant Club Scholars Programme Launch, 2020/21.

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Academic Achievement from Students Working with Researchers from The University of Leeds

Academic Area	Baseline*	Final*
Written Communication	52	62
Subject Knowledge	56	64
Critical Thinking	51	62

(Data from The Scholars Programme, Annual Impact Report, University of Leeds, 2020/21)

* Averages based on 187 students who submitted both their baseline and final assignments



Engaging prospective students

To work towards our ambition of ensuring that all prospective students (from a diverse range of backgrounds) can see themselves at Leeds, we provide flexible learning opportunities to support access and raise attainment. By engaging prospective students in both online and face-to-face academic tasters and online courses, we introduce them to life as a student in Leeds and begin to develop a sense of belonging.

LINGUASTARS AND TRANSFORMING ACCESS IN STUDENT OUTCOMES (TASO)

Linguastars introduces Year 12 French, German and Spanish students to studying different languages at university.

Based on prior recommendations and external research, the 2020/21 Linguastars programme was expanded beyond the subject-specific language taster sessions to include more general talks and workshops to increase students' awareness of the entire student lifecycle. The COVID-19 pandemic offered a good opportunity to test out these extra sessions as the online forum removed the need to move to different areas around campus. Additional sessions included:

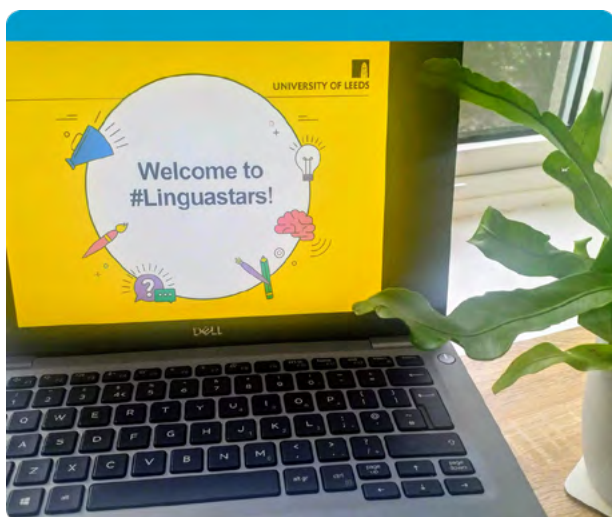
- a UCAS and person statement writing workshop
- an admissions tutor Q&A
- an alumni panel
- a careers workshop
- society sessions

These were valued by students, with one commenting:

“In the UCAS and personal statements session it was great to get a clear idea of the sorts of things to say or not to say”

Linguastars student, 2020/21.

This year, Linguastars also took part in the TASO summer schools research project, which was designed to assess how effective summer schools are in supporting young people in accessing higher education.



LIFELONG LEARNING CENTRE (LLC)

Jumpstart

Jumpstart is a free 'taster course' for adults who are interested in university but may not feel confident about applying. In 2020/21, we had 33 attendees who completed the course, half of whom intended to apply to the University of Leeds.

“I am so glad I have finally managed to complete this course. It has really opened my eyes about University and really made me believe I can actually gain a degree and I might just be good enough.”

“Much more enjoyable than I was expecting despite not really feeling confident with the tech side.. Uni staff have done really well to use this platform in such a way that we feel connected and inspired. Thank you.”

“Learning online worked very well for me. I struggle to go to classes/events in person and I don't know if I would've signed up if it hadn't been online via zoom. I found it easier to speak up and experienced less anxiety. Normally, I would be silent during in person groups.”

Jumpstart participants, 2020/21.

Kickstart

The pre-entry Kickstart programme is a blended learning course to prepare for studying at university that all applicants to the LLC are encouraged to complete.

In 2020/21, 249 students accessed the online element of the course. Workshops included sessions on generic study skill activities and student support, enabling students to meet their peers prior to starting their course.

The feedback from Kickstart online and synchronous live sessions was overwhelmingly positive and most students reported a growth in confidence through engagement with the programme. Based on our evaluation, the live session increased applicants' confidence to tackle the essay by 1.5 points on average.

“The support and encouragement from the tutors was so valuable and appreciated. What felt daunting at the start was managed with support and building on my skills. This increased my confidence and I realised I could do this. It was incredibly enjoyable and I felt part of the LLC community.”

Student completing Kickstart, 2020/21.

At Leeds we are committed to reducing inequalities in higher education at every stage of the student journey. All students should feel they belong, are valued, and are supported to thrive academically so that they can achieve their unique goals and fulfil their potential.

The **Plus Programme & Student Success team** is based within Educational Engagement. Find out more about this support network on the new student success area of the University's website:



Early Engagement with New Entrants and Continuers

Transition to higher education has been a key area of focus for Educational Engagement.

The Transition Working Group and the Plus Programme conducted an audit of all transitional activity to identify gaps in provision, and to create a bespoke offer to students from under-represented groups and their schools. This led to the creation of the Plus Programme Transition Month which, in conjunction with Access to Leeds, provided activity weeks based on themes including independent study, wellbeing and finance.

We provided students with bespoke freshers' activities including bowling, LaserQuest, online quizzes and tours of Leeds city centre. These activities were well attended and included second year students who were unable to access these events the previous year due to COVID-19. Feedback revealed that:

- 92% of respondents felt the transition month resources helped them feel more prepared for starting undergraduate study.
- 68% of respondents found the module resources useful or very useful.

[To view the 'Welcome, Induction and Transition' resources that we provide for students, visit the 'transition' section in the new student success area of the University's website.](#)

Improving Outcomes and Student Experience for Commuter Students

Our Student Success team carried out a qualitative study on students who commute to the University. This highlighted that, although most commuter students feel a sense of belonging within the University as a whole, they do not feel so connected to other students on their course.

They also felt their situation impacted their ability to participate in social activities. To gain a full picture of the demographics of commuter students across the University, the Commuter Student Working Group analysed undergraduate and foundation year student data based on agreed criteria. The Group plans to extend this analysis to cover all students in the future, to develop targeted approaches to support this group.

The Commuter Student Society was awarded funding to create a commuter lounge on campus. This gives commuter students a place to go to prepare food brought from home and provides locker space so that equipment for extracurricular activities does not need to be carried around all day.

[Find out more about how we foster a sense of belonging at Leeds in the new student success area of the University's website.](#)

Estranged and Care Experienced Provision

The Plus Programme offers a comprehensive package of support for estranged and care experienced students. In 2020/21, the University of Leeds was awarded a StandAlone Pledge Award to recognise its outstanding work in this area.

At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, we surveyed care experienced and estranged students to understand their concerns and issues. We found that most students were very concerned about both their ability to earn money during the pandemic and the threat of homelessness.

Through the Plus Programme, we arranged for students who were studying at the University of Leeds without family support to receive additional, non-repayable funding from the University: £500/£700 in summer 2020, £150 in December 2020 and £1,000 in summer 2021.

“Thank you so much for this, it will make the world of the difference to me. I had no income to pay for my deposit for my accommodation in London for my placement year, but now I do. This makes the world of difference and the financial support I have received since joining Leeds has been incredible.”

Recipient of additional payment(s), 2020/21.

We provide assistance with scholarship and student loan applications, and this year, we also offered accommodation support, a dedicated student handbook, and the creation of a ‘Studying Without a Support’ network.

We also introduced a bespoke graduate student offer with the aim of increasing progression within estranged and care experienced graduate students, which is currently much lower than their peers.

In 2020/21, there were

54 estranged students

131 care experienced students

studying at the University of Leeds.

- **Around 18% (1300) of UG and Foundation students are commuters**
- **536 students travel more than 10km to the University**
- **60.1% of mature students are commuters, compared with 13.5% of young age students**
- **68.5% of the 237 students with parental or other caring responsibilities are commuters, in comparison to 16.4% of students with no caring responsibilities**
- **48.1% (353) of Asian students, 24.7% (56) of Black students, and 13.8% (706) of White students are commuters**
- **Social Sciences (33.7% – 362) and Medicine and Health (27.8% – 283) have the highest proportions of commuter students**



Academic Personal Tutors

Building on the work undertaken in 2019/20, we continued to work with Academic Personal Tutors (ATPs) in 2020/21 to help support students through the changes to university life due to COVID-19. For example, tutors met with students to work through problems such as commuting issues, financial issues, difficulty maintaining a study-work balance, and lacking a sense of belonging.

Personal tutors were also invited to attend two seminar sessions to learn more about the Plus Programme and the Student Success Team's work. Tutors reported that the knowledge gained from these sessions was very useful to help them support students from different backgrounds.

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"Discussing the case study with colleagues, [it] was really good to get opinions from colleagues from other schools/faculties with different experiences."

Attendee, scenario seminar session 2020/21.
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Support for Leeds Masters Students

In 2020/21, we significantly increased our support for Taught Postgraduate (TPG) students on the Plus Programme, with the aim of easing transition, building a sense of community, and providing signposting to support students with post-graduation plans.

Historically TPGs have formed a very small proportion of the Plus Programme cohort and, without tailored support, their engagement in the Plus Programme has been relatively low. The new approach enabled taught postgraduates on the Plus Programme to receive full access to all support offered by the team, as well as bespoke and ring-fenced opportunities specific to their needs as masters students.

In total there were 80 students in the TPG cohort. Of these:

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- 60%** (on average) opened the Plus Programme newsletter over the year
 - 34** students accessed the Plus Programme Opportunities Fund
 - 32** students attended a welcome session
 - 28** students had a 'Next Steps Mentor'
 - 21** students attended a social event

There is a clear appetite from TPG students on the Plus Programme to participate in activities and interventions and it is recommended that for 2021/22 the team continues to build on what has been started in 2020/21.

Support for Mature, Part Time and Foundation Students

WELCOME AND INDUCTION

The Lifelong Learning Centre (LLC) welcomed all new mature undergraduate students across the University, presenting them with the guide 'Lifelong Learning: a handbook for mature students', which complemented other school and institutional level welcome communications.

Our bespoke welcome events and peer support activities ensured that students at greatest risk of feeling isolated or having a lower sense of belonging were given the opportunity to make links and connections with each other and key support services.



I enjoyed the contact with others and hearing from students who have been through this already. It was interesting and somewhat comforting to know that other people have worries as well.

Mature student attending welcome event.

ON-CAMPUS SUPPORT

As mature, part-time and foundation year students were more likely to struggle with a move to online learning during the pandemic, the LLC maintained a face-to-face essential service. The Centre remained open for a minimum of two days a week so that students could access general advice, study spaces, and specialist support from the LLC Student Support Officer.



The pandemic was and is still a tough time; between balancing keeping myself safe and the need to see real live faces. The LLC gave me a safe space to escape to, where I could get on with my work and talk to people.

LLC student, 2020/21.

TRANSITION AND PROGRESSION

As mature, part time and foundation year students need particular support throughout the student lifecycle, the LLC delivered a full suite of transition workshops to support students in the move between levels of study, for example, becoming a first/second year student, becoming a final year student and becoming a graduate.



Everything was very informative, reassuring, friendly. There was time for open discussions and also for humour. Great that second year students let us know what the second year would entail.

LLC student progressing from first to second year, 2020/21.

LEARNING CHAMPIONS

Volunteer LLC students support other mature learners to view higher education as a realistic choice by sharing their own experiences. We had 40 active Learning Champions in 2020-21, with 20 new Learning Champions joining up.



We are a group of mature and part-time students who entered higher education through alternative routes. Some of us may have left education early or have not studied for a long time. We are here to help adults in the community realise that they CAN go to university...if we can get there, then so can you.

Founding member of the Learning Champion volunteers, 2020/21.



Learning Champions are inspiring and fantastic advocates. I feel that University is well within my reach now.

Community Group participant, 2020/21.



At Leeds, we are focused on delivering high-level evaluation of the University's activity across the student lifecycle so we can embed an evidence-based, inclusive approach to our work in access and student success.



DATA, MONITORING, EVALUATION AND RESEARCH GROUP (DMERG)

The remit of DMERG is to share best practice, investigate new methods of evaluation and address the more complex issues around evaluation such as ethics and data protection. DMERG continues to widen its reach whilst underpinning our evaluation strategy.

Higher Education Providers (HEPs) are increasingly expected to support schools to raise attainment. To provide practitioners with tools to evaluate their activities in this area, DMERG collaborated with the Brilliant Club to create a bespoke evaluation toolkit. We also ran a training session to enable staff to successfully use the toolkit and work is ongoing via DMERG to embed these methodologies into our overarching evaluation strategy.

COLLABORATION WITH THE CENTRE FOR TRANSFORMING ACCESS AND STUDENT OUTCOMES IN HIGHER EDUCATION (TASO)

Alongside seven other HEPs and the Behavioural Insights Team (BIT), the University joined a pilot project to investigate the impact of summer schools on improving access to higher education for under-represented learners.

Recent analysis conducted by TASO, in collaboration with the Higher Education Access Tracker (HEAT), suggests that participation in summer schools is associated with higher GCSE grades. Existing studies also show that students who attend a summer school express higher confidence and aspiration at the end of the event compared to the beginning. However, there is insufficient evidence to prove a causal link between participation in a summer school and entry to higher education. This project aimed to bridge this evidence gap.

In a randomised controlled trial, BIT allocated eligible applicants for each summer school into a treatment group (where they received a place) or a control group (where they didn't receive a place). Both groups of students were also asked to complete surveys before and after the summer schools to capture differences in attitudes and aspirations towards HE.

Alongside the trial, an implementation and process evaluation was completed. This research will tell us more about whether, why and how summer schools influence students' decisions to progress to higher education.

The interim report is due in spring 2022 and the final report will be published in spring 2024.

LITE FELLOWS

We invest in several fellowships within our Leeds Institute for Teaching Excellence (LITE).

LITE promotes and supports innovation and excellence in teaching and disseminates outcomes to inform student learning in practice. LITE Fellows deliver projects or evaluate university practice to improve the teaching, learning and success of our students.



EVALUATION OF THE WELCOME, INDUCTION AND TRANSITION (WIT) PROJECT

A key part of the University's response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the move to online provision was the Welcome, Induction and Transition (WIT) 2020 project.

This built on previous work, including the LITE ELIXIR project, delivered by Ruth Payne and Andrew Mearman.

We used a mixed methods assessment to evaluate the WIT2020 resources and process, guided by internal expertise on student sense of belonging and theories of implementation and change. The results of the evaluation informed the design of WIT2021, and our evaluation methods will be adopted for WIT21 and beyond.

Our evaluation showed that WIT achieved its aims and that the resources provided were both high quality and robust. It also showed that levels of use were satisfactory for a new resource: 46% of undergraduates and 38% of postgraduates who could have accessed the Getting Started at Leeds (GSAL) online resource did so.

DECOLONISING

The University of Leeds established a fellowship in 2019 to develop a framework for decolonising the University.

Decolonising feeds into the University's Access and Student Success Strategy, supporting ongoing work in reducing disparities in degree attainment linked to race, gender, age and socio-economic background. It also aligns with cross-campus activity to foster a sense of belonging.

The Fellow, working alongside the Decolonising Working Group, has developed a set of key principles to review current practice both within student education and across the wider institution. These have been disseminated to staff through a series of 'How To' guides, podcasts, a resource list and bespoke staff training. Priorities for the next 12 months are developing a student decolonising conference, making further links with regional FE and HE partners, creating a research addendum to the principles and further staff training.

REVIEWING THE INCLUSIVENESS OF LEARNING AND TEACHING PRACTICES

School Academic Leads for Inclusive Practice (SALIPs) worked across 28 schools to raise awareness and embed inclusive approaches to teaching.

During the first semester, SALIPs promoted a range of centrally developed resources to support inclusive digital practices, student experience in online learning and specific interventions for groups of students. SALIPs also worked with key colleagues in relation to student success, disability and language support, and played a key role in school level committees.

During the second semester, SALIPs gathered evidence and wrote up short case studies from a range of pedagogical areas to demonstrate where institutional standards were being met. In total 130 case studies have been written, and a report will be available in early 2022. We also updated the institutional 'Inclusive Marking Policy' to emphasise the need for clarity in assessment criteria.

Through training and development activities, SALIPs deepened their understanding of how to apply inclusive approaches to assessment design, with further work due to be taken forwards throughout 2021-22.

ADDRESSING THE BLACK, ASIAN AND MINORITY ETHNIC AWARDING GAP

This project explores and develops good practice for targeted interventions to support the outcomes of under-represented student groups.

Across higher education, BAME students are less likely to be awarded a 'good' degree (first or 2:1) than white students, even if they enter university with higher grades.

At Leeds, we are committed to closing this gap. Our new 'Access and Participation Plan', approved by the Office for Students, commits the University to closing the gap among all Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic students from 12.7% in 2017/18 to 5.5% in 2024/25. Dr Iwi Ugiagbe-Green is working closely with colleagues Louise Banahene MBE (Head of Educational Engagement), Professor Paul Taylor (Pro-Dean for Student Education) and Dr Nina Wardleworth (LITE Fellow) to achieve these targets.

The 'Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Awarding Gap' project adopts a critical, dialogic and student partnership-based, research-led approach. In 2020/21, we conducted a literature review relating to attainment gaps across disciplines, followed by quantitative and qualitative empirical research. Student researchers also analysed data from the last three years to explore and identify demographic trends in degree awarding classifications.

In addition, student researchers from the Laidlaw Foundation ran listening rooms and focus group sessions focusing on the lived experiences of Black students, employability, and comparison of the experiences of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic students with other student groups. Outputs from these research projects will be disseminated across the University in 2021/22.



The University is now fully engaged in implementing its Access and Student Success strategy, as well as its institutional strategic plans. As always, colleagues have been evolving successful programmes whilst continuing to address existing structural barriers.

Belonging is the golden thread that runs through our strategic approach to access and success, and it underpins all that we do. We recognise how important it is to design approaches with minority communities in mind and maintain an equitable focus on long-term change.

These principles ensure that we work consistently in a collaborative way with all partners, including our students. I'm delighted to see how these partnerships have continued to develop this academic year, particularly in our work with students, such as the Social Mobility and Commuter Societies in the Leeds University Union. Supporting the changes made by these groups, and by the wider student community, reinforces our admiration for their wisdom, empathy and resilience. My colleagues and I continue to be inspired and enthused as we learn alongside them.

Looking ahead, our approach to evaluation, monitoring and research will continue to develop in key areas, such as: fostering a sense of belonging; the physical environment; and in-depth research in areas such as the experiences of our Black students. The qualitative dimension to this is vital and we are excited to be launching our second phase of reverse mentoring and additional listening rooms research to facilitate this. The curriculum, and the extent to which our students feel that it connects with their own experiences, is a core factor in student success, so the launch of an institution-wide Curriculum Redefined programme will enable us to review our portfolio, content, assessment and more. Work on diversity at postgraduate level continues with the expansion of our Leeds Masters Scholarship provision and projects to increase access to postgraduate research. Collaboration and partnership are key to the success of any work in this area, as we know from past experience.

I would like to thank colleagues from across the institution, our students, our alumni community, the charities and organisations we work with for their continuing and invaluable support. I look forward to another exciting, innovative and successful year.

Louise Banahene MBE

Director of Educational Engagement

