



The Plus Programme Annual Report

2021-2022



Hello again.

It's been another busy year for the Plus Programme.

We have continued to develop our innovative approach to supporting the University of Leeds' students from under-represented groups, building their sense of belonging and helping the university meet its Access and Student Success Strategy targets.



6,262 students

Eligible for the Plus Programme

“

In the first few weeks of university I felt more comfortable knowing that I always had the Plus Programme to fall back on. The Plus Programme has helped me feel part of the university and part of a community, and it's given me the confidence to know that I do belong.

Emma, Undergraduate student

We have worked collaboratively with Academic Schools, professional services teams and with students. Together, we have:

- Fed into Annual School Reviews and strategic objectives
- Developed activities and scholarships
- Shared expertise, and;
- Put the student voice front and centre

As always, evaluation and research have been essential, and they've helped us develop into new areas this year – notably, supporting access and success for Postgraduate students. We've grown existing programmes and initiatives and developed our expertise. And it has been a privilege to get to know and understand the richly diverse backgrounds and experiences of the students we support.

What is the Plus Programme?

Over the past year **6,262** students have had access to the Plus Programme, and our support and activities have made sure students have been able to participate fully in university life.

The Plus Programme works with students to offer a range of support and activity that aims to:



Improve sense of belonging



Boost confidence



Provide information and advice



Support wellbeing



Encourage financial security



Enhance employability and facilitate successful next steps

All with an overarching aim of supporting under-represented student groups to remain on course and be successful.

“

In my first few weeks at Leeds the Plus Programme made me feel more included and like there was a community there for me. A community that understood what I'd gone through and that wants me to succeed. It showed me that the university did care.

Undergraduate Plus Programme student



5,898
Undergraduate
students



3,799 / 61%
IMD quintile
1 or 2



3,376 / 54%
POLAR quintile
1 or 2



364
Masters
students



155
Leeds Masters
Scholars



527
Undergraduate
Means-Tested
Scholars



73
Estranged
students



155
Care-experienced
students



9
Sanctuary
Scholars

Broadening the Plus Programme



We have expanded the Plus Programme to automatically include:

- Students from postcodes within IMD quintile ¹
- A wider group of eligible Leeds Masters Scholar applicants

And we now offer a self-referral option for both Undergraduates and Taught Postgraduates if we have not enrolled them automatically

and they are eligible. This includes students who may be estranged, care-experienced or refugees/asylum seekers. The self-referral form is easy to find on the Plus Programme website².

In the Taught Postgraduate space, the inclusion of a further 60 Leeds Masters Scholarships per year, funded by the university, means more Masters students than ever can now access the Plus Programme.

¹ English indices of deprivation 2019 - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

² https://students.leeds.ac.uk/info/1000014/plus_programme/1066/about_the_plus_programme

Our impact

- Of the **1,561 Plus Programme students** who commenced undergraduate study in 2020-21, **96.2% continued at the university for a second year of study**, compared to 96.1% of the whole cohort.
- The continuation rate for Plus Programme students from minoritised ethnicities was **95.5%** (compared to 92.8% for the whole cohort).
- For students who are care-experienced, **85.7% continued with their studies to 2021-22**, up from 65.5% in 2020-21.



The Plus Programme has had a really significant and noticeable impact, just having that support there. When I first joined I was really nervous to start university, so knowing that there were people like me was really helpful. If I needed anything, whether it was financial, career advice, or events to socialise at, knowing that it was a specific group set up for people like me was really helpful.

Lizzie, Postgraduate student

Transition support

Our new Transition Month helped 1,245 A-level students prepare for university life.

In 2021, we wanted to see if we could do more to support the new student intake. We created a bespoke offer to students and schools and the result was the Plus Programme Transition Month. In partnership with Access to Leeds, themed weeks of online activity were provided focusing on topics including independent study, wellbeing and finance skills. Taking place before A-Level results, the activities encouraged students to get ready for university life and introduced them to our support services. By the end of the 2021 Transition Month **we had engaged with 1,245 students.**

We offered the Differ app to help incoming students get to know each other.

We worked with EdTech organisation Differ to provide an app to help incoming students form connections with their peers and ease anxieties about starting university. With COVID still making in-person transition events impossible, all incoming Widening Participation students were invited to join online communities on Differ between A-Level results and the start of their first term. The app is a unique and safe platform for students to communicate with their peers and start forming networks before they arrive.

Students reacted enthusiastically – 333 unique users sent at least one message, and 1,025 group and one-to-one chats were created between students. A total of **13,686 messages** were sent during the first 30 days. **86% of our users would recommend Differ to new students** and **83% found it helpful or very helpful.**

³ <https://www.differ.chat/>

86%

Of students would recommend Differ to new students.

“

I think the Commuters' Community [on Differ] was really helpful. They literally gave you every detail on how to commute. They give you all the top tips, like which bus you're supposed to take and which route is the fastest. I thought going to uni would be the scariest thing ever but talking to people from the app...made me less worried.

Commuter student, Plus Programme



Wellbeing package

Mindful of the negative impact COVID has had on many students' mental health, we have expanded the Plus Programme's wellbeing package.

We now provide:

- One-to-one appointments for our most vulnerable students
- Referrals to the Counselling and Wellbeing Service
- Dedicated wellbeing sessions
- Regular information on wellbeing within our student newsletters

And we're working with The Edge to give Plus Programme students who are struggling with low energy or lack of motivation access to a personal trainer and a 12 week exercise programme. 25 students have enrolled to date, and all have shown improvements in their wellbeing evaluations.

Our new workshop programme helps participants shape their own student experience.

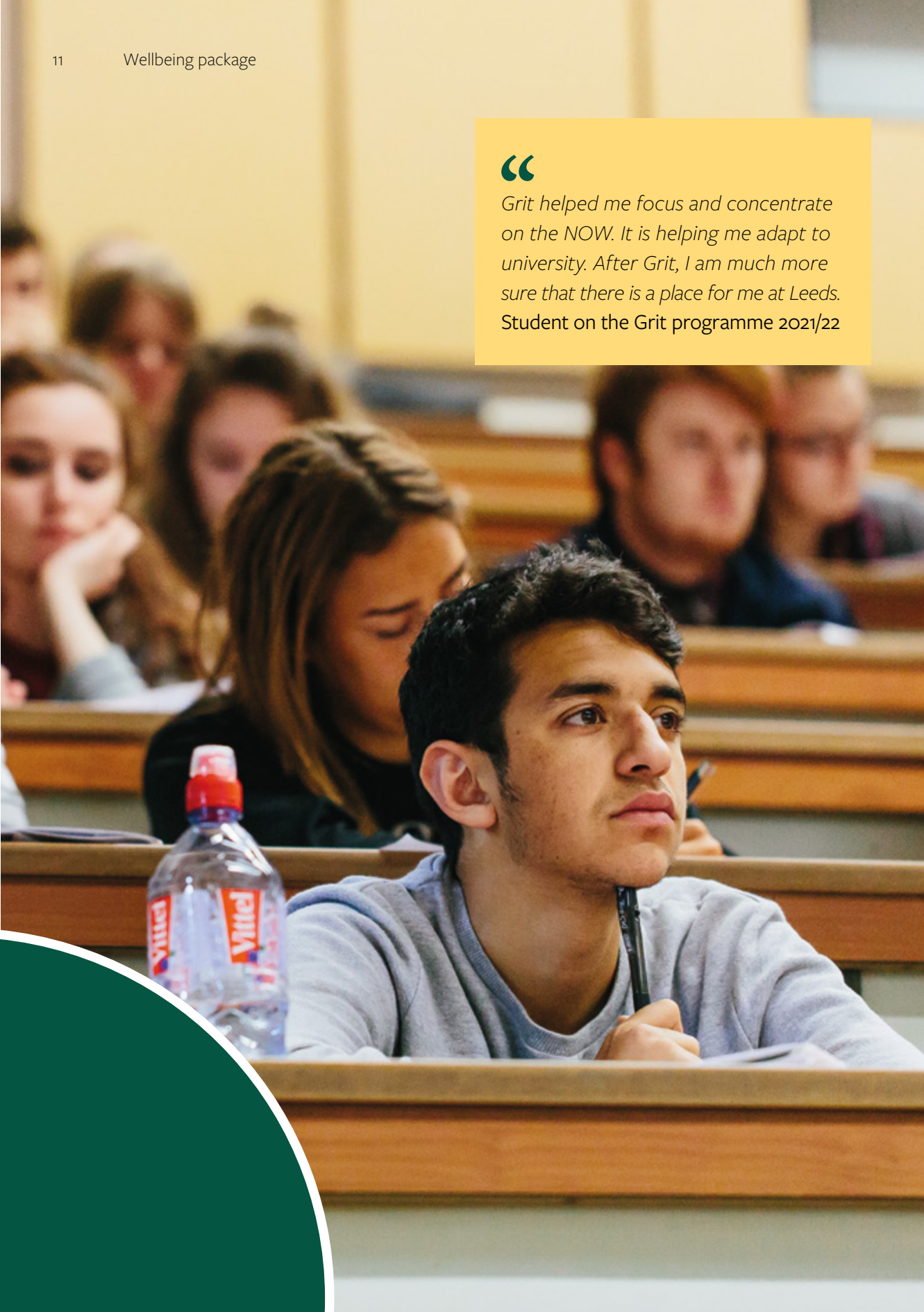
We have introduced Grit Personal Development Workshops for Plus Programme students. Designed to give participants confidence to

change their experience of university life for the better and empower them to succeed in achieving their goals, the workshops help students identify and access the university support services they need and develop a strong support network.

“

Grit helped me focus and concentrate on the NOW. It is helping me adapt to university. After Grit, I am much more sure that there is a place for me at Leeds.

Student on the Grit programme 2021/22



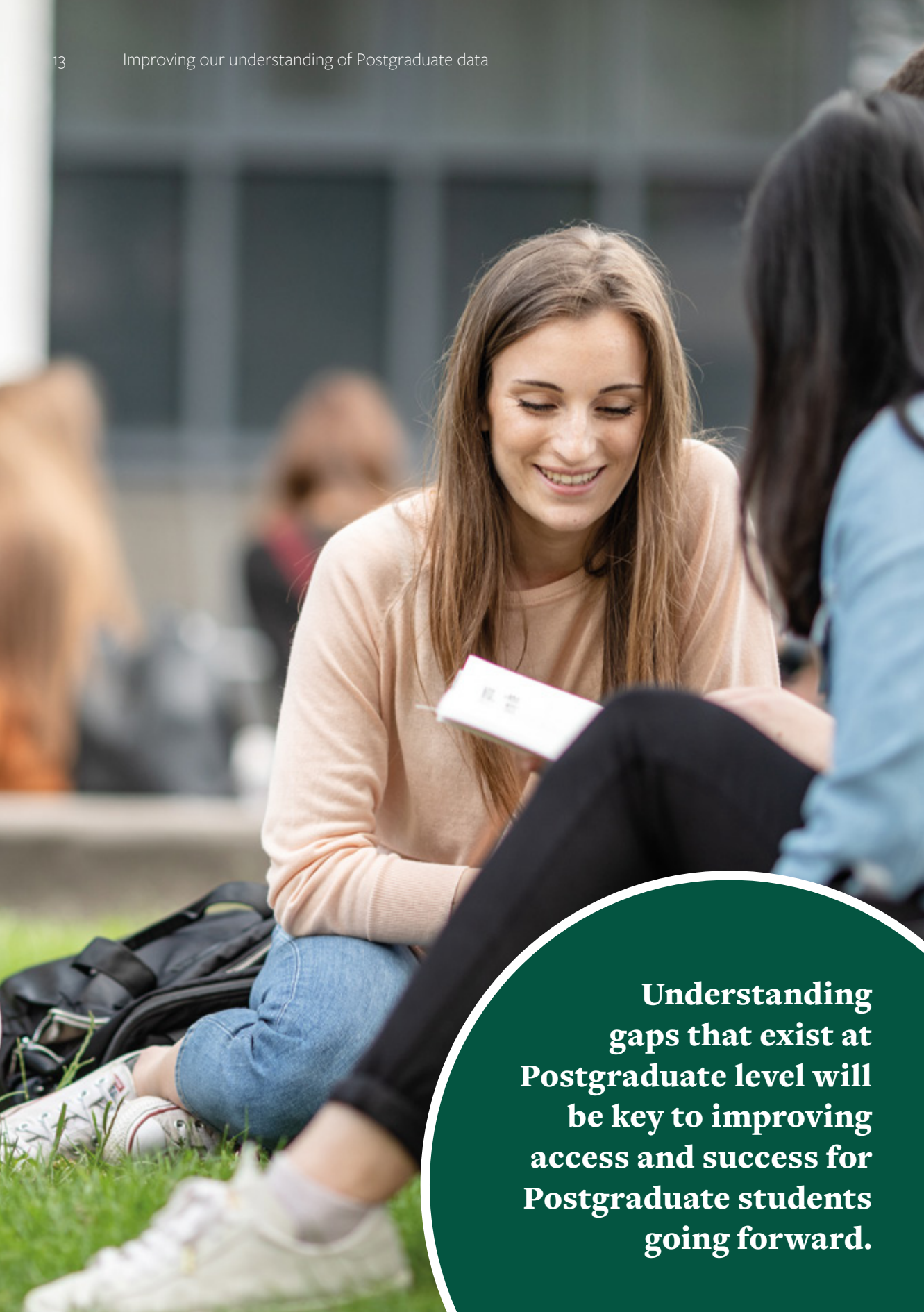
Improving our understanding of Postgraduate data

We are partnering with seven other institutions on a project to improve access and success for future Postgraduate students.

The NEON Postgraduate Admissions Data project aims to better understand Postgraduate Admissions Data, specifically looking at the application and admissions pipeline. Working with seven peer institutions, a series of questions is being added to Postgraduate application forms so the universities can understand access rates in the Postgraduate environment.

During the next academic year, we will capture and monitor application and enrolment data and in 2023/24 each participating institution's data will be analysed. Understanding gaps that exist at Postgraduate level will be key to improving access and success for Postgraduate students going forward.





**Understanding
gaps that exist at
Postgraduate level will
be key to improving
access and success for
Postgraduate students
going forward.**

Collaborations with schools and faculties

Supporting our medical students in their next steps

Professional registration fees shouldn't slow students' progress. All new doctors and dentists must pay registration fees to the General Medical Council or General Dental Council to practice. Fees are due at the end of the degree and differing financial circumstances can act as a barrier into the professional world. This year we have worked with the University's Funding team to address the problem. For June 2022, the new Plus Programme Medicine and Dentistry Registration Fund has supported students with their registration fees.

Earth and Environment fund

Access to the right clothing and equipment supports effective fieldwork.

This year we collaborated with the School of Earth and Environment to obtain Footsteps Funding and establish a Fieldwork Fund, available to the School's Plus Programme students. 44 students were supported with access to this funding, and it enabled students to get the clothing and equipment they needed for their fieldwork.



It really has helped me enjoy fieldwork more. Having a high-quality waterproof coat and boots (more than I could ever afford without the fund) ensured I didn't get wet or cold and spend a week soggy and miserable”

Earth and Environment student

Championing the Plus Programme student voice within the wider university

It's essential that we raise the profile of Widening Participation across the university and this year it has been great to work collaboratively with

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colleagues to achieve this objective. We have met with colleagues including those in the Faculty of Arts Humanities and Cultures to provide further insight into how to best support Widening Participation students in faculty.

Our work with Academic Personal Tutors: a case study

Rachael O'Connor, Director of Student Support for the School of Law, is undertaking a LITE research fellowship, working with a student research team who self-identify as under-represented, including 11 Plus Programme students. These students are co-designing a reverse mentoring scheme that will commence in 2022-23, with the aim to improve academic personal tutor insight and practice. The School of Law has also used Plus Programme data to identify students for targeted additional support in the form of mentoring, academic skills development and wellbeing. Students involved in the work have been compensated for their time.



In AHC, we are keen to ensure we are working with, learning from, and supporting, the Plus Programme. It was really helpful to have Plus Programme colleagues meet with our DSEs, both to update DSEs on the programme but also to get advice and insight for all of our student success work. There is a lot of expertise, experience and insight in the Plus Programme team!

Mel Prideaux, Pro Dean for Student Education, AHC

Supporting students to find a sense of belonging at the university

You're in!

This year we expanded our clubs and societies membership fund, helping 240 Plus students with membership fees. Alongside this, we launched our LUU Clubs and Societies Associated Costs Fund, with 460 successful applications. This fund offered students up to £200 towards travel, sports equipment or other expenses involved with taking part in club or society activities.

“

When I saw the fund, it was a relief. I had to pay the membership costs in the first few weeks, so it did impact my financial situation, as I had to use my own money in savings because my student loan and scholarship wouldn't come in until later. It's been really good being part of a society...It's helped me feel like I belong at Leeds.

Anna, Undergraduate student

£27,388

The total offered to students as part of these two funds.



Scholarships

Supporting our students financially to enhance their university experience and enable them to take advantage of all the opportunities available.

Our Undergraduate Means-Tested Scholarship

We received a record number of applications to the Undergraduate Means-Tested Scholarships this year and supported 120 incoming students in 2021. Many scholarship recipients have reported being able to take part in extra-curricular activities, such as volunteering at a local not-for-profit organisation and taking a society committee role, because of this additional financial support.



120 Undergraduate scholarships



Means-tested and Widening Participation criteria



£3,000 per year



Being granted this scholarship and opportunity made me realise I set my own bar for achievement. And every day that bar becomes higher. I never thought university was for people like me, but perhaps people from less advantaged backgrounds are exactly what the education system needs. Self-made, hardworking individuals who have had to overcome very real obstacles. All I can say is thank you [...] for believing in people like me when society works against us.

Undergraduate Means-Tested Scholar 2021-22



Leeds Masters Scholarship

We were able to award 151 Leeds Masters Scholarships for 2021 entry. Many scholars comment on how essential the funding has been in order for them to have the time and energy to focus on their course, with some saying study would be impossible without it.



151 Leeds Masters Scholarships



Means-tested and Widening Participation criteria



£5,000 per student



I was very much in the position where I was initially looking at doing a Masters part-time and working alongside it, but that would have been a different course at a different university. So getting the Leeds Masters Scholarship has been huge because it's bridged that gap with finance and I've been able to go onto my Masters without necessarily having to worry as much as I would have been about funding. Getting it in monthly payments is also very good because I know at the end of the month I've got that safety net.

Leeds Masters Scholar 2021-22

Sanctuary Scholarships

We were also able to support four new Sanctuary Scholars bringing us to a record total of nine simultaneous scholars who are a refugee or asylum seeker.



The Scholarship has been like a dream for me ... It's been so important for me but also for my family. It's helped with things like transport to the University of Leeds, and I could easily go and buy a laptop and a desk for studying for university. The Sanctuary Scholarship has had a positive impact in every aspect...it's been life changing, especially with my mental health which it has boosted.

Sanctuary Scholar



4 Sanctuary Scholarships awarded



Available for refugee and asylum seeker students



Undergraduate, Masters or PhD study



Covers tuition fees plus £10,000 per year towards living costs

Innovation to help improve diversity at Postgraduate level

This year, we have been proud to support our University in creating positive action scholarships to improve access and success at Postgraduate level for under-represented groups and improve the diversity of our Postgraduate community.

This innovative approach will enable the university to be able to take action where needed to start to address the imbalance in access to Postgraduate level study.

19 scholarships created so far

Examples include:

- Masters scholarships for UK Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic students applying to the School of Performance and Cultural Industries
- PhD studentships for Black British applicants entering the Faculty of Social Sciences



Our work with estranged and care-experienced students

The Plus Programme has supported 176 Undergraduate students and 21 Masters students from care-experienced and estranged backgrounds during 2021/22. This year, our ever-evolving support for estranged and care-experienced students has included regular coffee and catch ups, drop-in sessions (in person and online) and one-to-one advice and signposting. In December 2021 students in this target group each received a £50 gift voucher as a festive gift, and in June 2022 returning students received a payment of £550 to support their summer costs.

We have also developed our links with the accommodation team, ensuring that incoming students from these backgrounds can access advice on choosing where to live, and have somewhere to store their belongings during accommodation changeover periods.

Working with our Careers Service, we have enhanced our support for graduating students to help them to move smoothly out of university life. During June and July newsletters were sent offering information on graduate jobs and other practical advice. To help graduating students, we also offered a £600 graduation payment to cover the cost of their gown and photos, as well as to support them during their first few weeks out of university.

**Up to £1,200
offered to
students to
support their
costs throughout
the year.**



Working closely with the Careers Service

Our ongoing collaboration with the Careers Service saw 196 Plus Programme students contacted by the Employability and Progression Assistant (EPA) team between January and March this year. The EPA team, all recent Leeds graduates, delivered a mix of online and in-person tailored career information and signposting, looking at topics such as application skills and confidence building.

The PwC Female, e-mentoring and Alumni Leadership Mentoring programmes were opened to Plus Programme applicants, with 70 students matched with mentors. The Postgraduate Next Steps mentoring

team also saw another successful year, with 39 Plus Programme Masters students matched with a mentor in academia or in industry, who they were able to meet to discuss their career development opportunities.

The work of the EPA team to support graduates included offering daily drop-in appointments on MyCareer, along with making direct contact with graduates deemed the most likely to be in need of support based on their graduate readiness answers. All of our estranged and care-experienced graduates have received a call.



I received the email yesterday and I'm truly grateful for your support! It was crucial in helping me smash the interviews and helping me to stay calm and focused. Thank you for your support!

Plus Programme student working with the EPAs



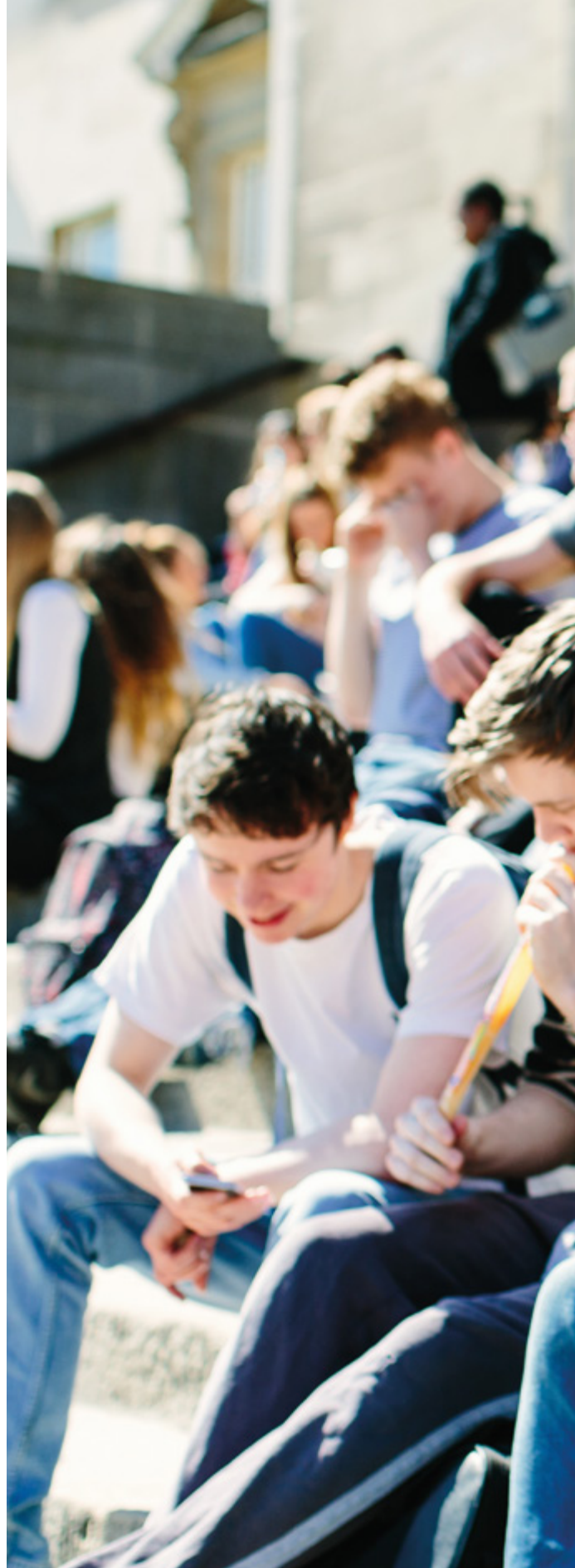
Looking ahead

Enhancing Diversity within Postgraduate Research

We're excited about the plans we have for 2022-23 to support Diversity in Postgraduate Research. Two new colleagues have joined us to support our work in this area, with projects focused on building better student networks and enhancing the mentoring offer in the pipeline.

Learning from the lived experiences of our estranged and care-experienced students

Given the challenges faced by our estranged and care-experienced students we realised we need more input from relevant external agencies and students about our existing and future support. So we are setting up a regular advisory group of those with lived experience or professional expertise in care experience/estrangement to share their perspectives and advice. We will use their insight to shape future support and improve access, retention, attainment and progression.





Your Plus Programme team

We are a central hub of knowledge and experience in working with students from Widening Participation groups and supporting them to succeed. We'd love to hear from you if you'd like to work with us more closely

**Jenn**

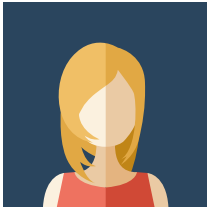
Speak to me about:

Plus Programme strategy, graduate outcomes, and our work on widening participation into Masters level study.

**Alex**

Speak to me about:

Employability, forced migrant students and evaluation.

**Elen**

Speak to me about:

Plus Programme strategy, transition to Higher Education and through university and student finance.

**Naomi**

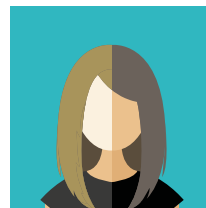
Speak to me about:

Student voice, student involvement and engagement of students from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds.

**Lisa**

Speak to me about:

Estranged and care-experienced students, students with caring responsibilities and mature students.

**Liv**

Speak to me about:

Plus Programme communications to students and our activities and support for Postgraduate students.

**Sherry**

Speak to me about:

Diversity in the Postgraduate Research space, support for under-represented groups, and how you can get involved in shaping your PGR journey.

**Sally**

Speak to me about:

Cross-institutional PGR diversity work, PGR engagement programmes and mentoring for PGRs from under-represented groups.

**Sarah**

Speak to me about:

Access and Student Success, collaboration and learning analytics.

**Matt**

Speak to me about:

Access and Participation Plans, the Access and Student Success Strategy and evaluation and monitoring.





Get in touch

For more information about the Plus Programme and how we support the success of students from Widening Participation groups, please contact us:

Email: theplusprogramme@leeds.ac.uk

LinkedIn: [University of Leeds Plus Programme](#)

Instagram: [plus_programme](#)

Further information for University of Leeds colleagues is available on our [webpages](#)



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