Our students and staff are clear that providing students from all backgrounds with fair opportunities to study and thrive at Leeds is a moral obligation and should be core to what we do.

But we want to take this further. Our ambition is to be a place where all students feel they belong and matter to the university; that the unique experience and skills they bring are part of our rich culture and identity.

We are building on strong foundations. Our Access to Leeds scheme and Lifelong Learning Centre are recognised nationally for their scale and maturity. The highly successful partnership between the university and Leeds University Union has led to effective student-led initiatives, including a push to decolonise our curriculum.

But there is more that can be done. Students from under-represented groups still face barriers in gaining a place and succeeding at Leeds and beyond. We know, for example, there are systemic issues which create awarding gaps for mature students and those from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds. This is not just an issue at undergraduate level – barriers persist in access and success for our postgraduate taught and research students.

This strategy focuses our efforts to embed successful initiatives, build on our existing tools and adopt a targeted and tailored approach to supporting students who need it most. It also signals a commitment to tackle issues at postgraduate level. We will be open about the challenges that persist and collaborative in our approach to solving them.

The strategy comes at an important time in history; one where universities the world over are reimagining the way they engage with students. At Leeds, we have accelerated our efforts to deliver online learning and support; removed barriers to continuation to second year; and altered our pre-entry requirements. We don’t want to return to normal where this means worse outcomes for students.

It is the responsibility of all of our staff, in academic and professional roles, to have this vision at the forefront of their minds as we embark on the next five years.

Professor Simone Buitendijk, Vice-Chancellor

“It’s a moral and ethical obligation; our students invest in us, we should be investing in them.” Staff member
A whole-university approach to access and student success

This strategy provides an access and student success lens on the significant amount of work planned and underway across the whole university. Much of the work sits under our Student Education theme as part of our broader university strategy. Educational Engagement, led by Louise Banahene, will play a significant role in driving and delivering the strategy. However, aligning this work with other areas will be crucial. For example, Students’ Union priorities, employability activities, work to diversify the workforce, and progress towards UN sustainable development goals will all mutually support the strategy.

Higher education is changing and Leeds is changing with it

The higher education landscape is undergoing significant change. At Leeds we are alive to the potential threats and opportunities these changes create.

- The higher education student body is increasingly diverse. As increasing numbers of students enter higher education, the proportion from under-represented groups is growing despite increasing fees.
- But access to university is still disproportionately for the advantaged. The number and proportion of students entering university from low-participation neighbourhoods (LPNs) has increased but the university is still disproportionately a place for students from more advantaged backgrounds at all levels of study.
- Economic inequalities contribute to increasing scepticism about the value of higher education. With many households shouldering mounting debt, many students and their parents and carers are questioning the value for money of a degree.
- Systemic issues limit opportunities for some student groups. The Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic awarding gap is a huge sector-wide issue. In 2018-19 in England, there was a 22% gap in first and upper second class degrees awarded for Black students compared to White students. Other groups also face barriers - the awarding gap was 10% for mature compared to young learners in the same year.
- But momentum around access and student success is growing. A more strategic approach, supported by increased regulation, aims to eliminate the disparities we see in access and outcomes for certain student groups. But with a strong focus on undergraduates, the barriers facing the postgraduate student population are often overlooked and under-explored.
- Rapid advances in technology provide significant opportunities for progress. Blended and online provision provides the flexibility for a broader range of students to access higher education than ever before. Now, more than ever, universities are innovating to engage students in teaching and support online. However, as a sector, we must ensure communities who lack access to the necessary technology are not excluded by providing wide-ranging flexible offers.

Throughout the life of this strategy, we will continue to build on the positive sector-wide momentum while addressing the threats head on. Our vision to create a university where students feel they belong, can thrive, and are valued for their unique contribution, will guide us as we navigate this changing landscape.
Working towards a fairer university

The University takes access and student success seriously and we are starting from a strong base. At Leeds, we undertake sector-leading research in access and participation and our initiatives have a strong grounding in up-to-date evidence about what works, as well as what doesn’t. We know how important it is to avoid a deficit model; systemic issues are to blame for inequalities in outcomes and not our students.

We recruit and support large volumes of students from under-represented groups through our significant outreach activity and nationally recognised schemes. There are positive signs that our work in this area is reducing barriers and improving outcomes for many students from under-represented groups. But in order to make significant progress we need to design our teaching and support with all students in mind. Even then, we will continue to take a data-informed approach to target resources and support for students where barriers persist.

"We were quite fixated on making sure the process was fair – now we have a different idea about what fair is." Staff member

The University of Leeds will be a place where students from diverse backgrounds feel they belong, can thrive, and are valued for their unique contribution.

The strategy at a glance

The strategy is set out across four pillars of the student lifecycle: Access, Continuation, Attainment and Progression. Our fifth pillar ‘Enablers’ outlines where we will focus our efforts to support the successful delivery of the strategy. The next sections describe our strategy for each pillar in more detail with our select priorities over the next five years.

BARRIERS FACING STUDENTS

Students at Leeds are not homogeneous; they include – but are not limited to - students from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds, international students, mature students, disabled students, students with mental health issues, those with caring responsibilities, estranged students and LGBTQ+ students. Further to this, they enter with a wide range of prior qualifications and experiences.

Understanding the barriers facing these different students, and the impact of interactions between different characteristics, will be crucial to the success of this strategy. We also recognise that the barriers faced by various groups of students are not mutually exclusive. Examples of how barriers play out for some of our students are outlined below.

MATURE STUDENTS have lower continuation rates and face awarding gaps compared to young students

STUDENTS FROM LOW PARTICIPATION NEIGHBOURHOODS are under-represented at Leeds but access schemes have increased their representation

BLACK, ASIAN AND MINORITY ETHNIC STUDENTS face awarding gaps when compared to white counterparts

The strategy at a glance

The University of Leeds will be a place where students from diverse backgrounds feel they belong, can thrive, and are valued for their unique contribution.
Vision

The University of Leeds will be a place where students from diverse backgrounds feel they belong, can thrive, and are valued for their unique contribution.

Access

PROSPECTIVE STUDENTS FROM A RANGE OF BACKGROUNDS CAN SEE THEMSELVES AT LEEDS AND GAIN A PLACE

This pillar outlines priorities for supporting fair access for students from a diverse range of backgrounds over the next five years. We have a wealth of experience attracting students through our outreach approaches and nationally recognised Access to Leeds scheme, Lifelong Learning Centre and foundation programmes. However, there is more to do to close gaps in access for those from under-represented groups at all levels of study, as well as those with non-traditional qualifications. To achieve our ambition over the next five years, we must focus on sustained and evidence-based outreach, evolve our admissions policies at all levels and provide flexible learning opportunities.

“Access to Leeds allows the university to really get the best students.” Student

We will focus on sustained and evidence-based outreach

Build sustained and evidence-based outreach interventions with schools, colleges and community organisations drawing on internal and external partnerships, fostering a sense of belonging for prospective students

Build strong and sustained links with Leeds’ communities, locally, nationally and globally for mutual benefit

Drive teams throughout the university to innovate and test new initiatives to stay ahead of prospective students’ changing needs

We will evolve our admissions policies to allow fair opportunities to study at Leeds

Provide clear and bold messaging about the opportunities for students from under-represented groups to study at Leeds with a contextual offer

Address unequal access to postgraduate study through contextual admissions at postgraduate taught and research level

Convene and collaborate to contribute to a national understanding of systemic access issues at postgraduate level

We will provide flexible learning opportunities to support access for diverse students

Continuously improve our foundation programmes and focus on expansion in key areas

Increase flexibility of delivery for full-time and part-time learners, including flexible CPD opportunities for mature learners

Engage prospective students in online and face-to-face academic tasters and online courses to introduce them to life as a student at Leeds and develop a sense of belonging
ALL STUDENTS FEEL THEY BELONG AND MATTER TO THE UNIVERSITY

This pillar details how we will ensure our students are heard, understood and supported to complete their studies. Our successful Plus Programme will remain hugely important to supporting students who need it most, but we know that there is more to do to make sure all our students have access to, and proactively receive, the help that they need. Over the course of the strategy, we will develop an in-depth understanding of our students and their needs through learning analytics, tailor student support at all levels of study to accommodate diverse backgrounds and support smooth transitions throughout the student journey.

“Being part of the Plus Programme, I’ve met some amazing people; it feels like a home from home.” Student

“My lived experience is creating a better education and giving people a different perspective.” Student

ALL STUDENTS ARE VALUED AND ABLE TO THRIVE ACADEMICALLY

This pillar focuses on our efforts to achieve equity in academic success and to draw on our diverse community of staff and students for a richer academic experience. Students at Leeds have access to outstanding research-led teaching but we need to ensure our pedagogical practices provide a rich educational experience for all learners. Work is underway to align our curriculum to a broader range of skills and experience, placing the onus on the university and not students to close awarding gaps. To realise our ambition for attainment, we will build on work to decolonise our curriculum, pushing for a more holistic review at both undergraduate and postgraduate level; continue to embed university-wide inclusive teaching and learning; and focus our efforts on postgraduate attainment.

“Being part of the Plus Programme, I’ve met some amazing people; it feels like a home from home.” Student

“We will invest in learning analytics to foster a sense of belonging for all students
Roll-out institution-wide learning analytics so that our academic and support staff can identify students facing greater barriers to continuation
Incorporate learning analytics into institutional decision-making and integrate with academic tutoring and supervision so students are understood and feel they belong
Empower staff and students through personalised analytical data
We will tailor student support to accommodate diverse backgrounds
Expand the Plus Programme to engage a wider range of students from under-represented backgrounds
Advance our personal tutoring and postgraduate research supervisor model to ensure all students feel they matter, drawing on significant expertise from across the university
Provide proactive and culturally competent mental health and wellbeing support through signposting from personal tutors and supervisors to accessible services
We will support smooth transitions throughout the student journey
Design transitions and inductions with the needs of under-represented groups at the forefront so that students from a range of backgrounds and with a range of qualifications are supported
Remove unnecessary barriers to continuation for students to progress between years so they know their success matters
Engage early with postgraduate taught and research students including through online modules and training
We will design our curriculum to complement a diverse range of experience
Maintain momentum on our curriculum review, building on work to decolonise the curriculum, to ensure it is relevant to a broad range of skills, experience and learning
Work with our diverse student cohort to develop new approaches to curriculum, learning and teaching, and assessment which support success and employability
Launch programmes of work to address the hidden curriculum
We will continue to embed university-wide inclusive teaching and learning
Build a pedagogical delivery model (for online and on campus) that improves the accessibility of our teaching and assessment at all levels of study
Embed school-level roles designed to drive consistent inclusive approaches right across the university
Harness the significant expertise in our Leeds Institute for Teaching Excellence and Organisational Development and Professional Learning (ODPL) to inform what we do at undergraduate and postgraduate level
We will provide fair opportunities for attainment at postgraduate level
Develop an in-depth understanding of the issues at postgraduate level
Develop and adapt our curriculum review to address issues which lead to awarding gaps at postgraduate taught level
Introduce a Leeds Doctorate to provide a standard approach to doctoral study, ensuring supervisors are supported to deliver it
We will tailor activities to support all students to be active decision makers about their future.

Target placement and co-curricular opportunities to students we know are less likely to take them up.

Deliver targeted work with our graduates that need the most support to access graduate-level jobs and other ambitious destinations, based on a data-informed approach.

Harness the lived experience of our recent graduates, employing them to provide bespoke progression support to our target students.

We will provide diverse employability opportunities.

We will develop a more flexible and diverse range of placements, internships, volunteering opportunities and collaborative doctoral awards with diverse employers to enable more students to participate.

Develop graduate placements at the university, aimed at students from our target groups.

Expand our mentoring schemes and peer-to-peer support with an ever-more diverse pool of alumni, employers and students.

We will accelerate efforts to progress students from under-represented groups to postgraduate study.

Identify students from our target groups and understand their needs regarding academic progression.

Build on the findings from the progression to postgraduate taught project to provide appropriate tasters and advice and guidance.

Provide additional support to new postgraduate students from our target groups to facilitate successful transition into their studies.

**Progression**

**OUR STUDENTS HAVE THE OPPORTUNITIES TO ACHIEVE THEIR UNIQUE GOALS**

This pillar outlines our priorities to support fair progression opportunities and links closely to our Employability Strategy. We have a strong track record in supporting students to achieve their goals after they graduate. However, all our students have unique ideas about what success means to them, and not everyone enters with the same tools at their disposal to achieve their ambitions. To deliver this aim, we will deliver consistent and inclusive activities throughout the university lifecycle, and take a data-informed approach, supporting students to be active decision makers about their future. We will provide a diverse range of curricular and extra-curricular opportunities to support students’ ambitions and accelerate efforts to progress students from under-represented groups to postgraduate study.

“We’ve met lifelong friends; I’ve spoken at conferences; built confidence; my son and my family think that university is normal.” Student

**Enablers**

**OUR CULTURE AND SYSTEMS SUPPORT AN EMBEDDED AND EVIDENCE-BASED INCLUSIVE APPROACH**

It will be the responsibility of all staff across the university to support our vision to ensure that every student feels that they matter to Leeds. We will focus on culture and governance, data and technology and student voice and evaluation to embed and continuously improve our work in access and student success.

We will instill a culture that prioritises access and student success and fosters a sense of belonging.

Cultivate and celebrate a diverse community of staff and students who bring a wealth of perspectives and expertise.

Cascade clear and consistent messages from our leadership team throughout the whole university to support access and student success at all levels, placing the agenda high amongst competing priorities.

Reward staff for achievements in supporting student success across the university through recruitment and promotion criteria.

Provide staff training to support inclusive policy design and practice.

Utilise our obligations under the Vitae research concordat to cultivate a flexible and supportive environment for our graduate researchers.

We will join-up our governance arrangements to keep the whole university on track.

Drive the strategy through the relevant Boards and strengthen formal flows of communication.

Incorporate school-level targets into the integrated planning exercise and school annual reviews.

Maintain momentum through clear lines of accountability and active monitoring of progress against the measures of success outlined below.

Align service strategies to mutually support delivery.

We will use data, analytics and technology to understand our students and their diverse needs.

Increase our institutional data maturity to support data-informed decision-making and improve our capabilities across all our pillars.

Address inadequacies in data and embrace new technology to support a move to more tailored learning analytics at all levels of study.

Address deficiencies in our customer relationship management system to improve our evaluation capabilities and provide a more seamless experience for our students.

Build on the university-wide momentum to embrace blended digital learning for a more inclusive and accessible teaching approach.

We will listen to our students and consistently evaluate our work to drive continuous improvement.

Ensure the student voice underpins all we do through our strong and successful partnership with Leeds University Union and our representative governance structures at faculty and university level.

Further embed our evaluation framework to consistently evaluate the impact of initiatives on students from diverse backgrounds across the university and student lifecycle to fully understand their effectiveness, ensuring student feedback is at the heart.

Build an in-depth understanding of the differing impact of our initiatives at school and graduate school level.
Measures of success

Measures of success across different areas of the strategy will be crucial for keeping us on track over the next five years. Our access and participation plan targets at undergraduate level will be important but we have set ambitious longer term goals. We have also set targets to reduce and eventually eliminate inequalities at postgraduate taught and postgraduate research level. Our Boards with responsibility for the success of the strategy will monitor progress against these targets annually.

### ACCESS

- Reduce the gap in access between POLAR Quintile (Q)1 and Q5 undergraduate students from a ratio of 5.5 in 2017/2018 to 3.5 by 2025

- Reduce the gap in access between IMD Quintile 5 and Quintile 1 students from a ratio of 2.3 in 2019/20 to 2.0 by 2025

- We will increase the number of postgraduate researchers from a Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic background from 14% in 19/20 to 21.8% by 2025

### STUDENT SUCCESS

- Our students feel they matter to the University

- Reduce the awarding gap to 5.5% for undergraduate Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic students by 2025 and eliminate by 2030

- Reduce the awarding gap to 6.8% for undergraduate mature students by 2025 and eliminate by 2030

- Reduce the gap in non-continuation for undergraduate mature students to 4.4% in 2025 and eliminate by 2030

- Reduce the gap in non-continuation for undergraduate POLAR Q1 students to 1.5% in 2025 and eliminate by 2030

- Reduce the gap in non-continuation for postgraduate taught Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic students to 6.5% in 2025 and eliminate by 2030

- Reduce the gap in non-continuation for postgraduate taught Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic students to 2.5% in 2025 and eliminate by 2035

### ENABLERS

- Professional services staff at all levels will reflect the diversity of the local region with 17% from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds

- We will increase the proportion of professors from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds in-line with the sector average to 10%

- We will increase the proportion of female professors from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds in-line with the sector average to 2.3%

- A mature data environment is set-up and running effectively

- The student voice is embedded in all our evaluative processes across the University

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What will life at Leeds look like for our students?

**ACCESS**
- Sustained outreach interactions and engagements with Leeds prior to arrival
- Access to online and face-to-face academic tasters, creating that sense of belonging
- Easily accessible and clearly communicated advice on contextual offers and the opportunities these bring

**CONTINUATION**
- Transition between academic years is possible without unnecessary barriers which unfairly disadvantage some student groups
- Able to participate fully in induction events and activities regardless of background and other commitments
- Access to a range support services (academic and non-academic) which cater to diverse needs

**PROGRESSION**
- Tailored and proactive communications and support based on understanding of how and when students are struggling through learning analytics system and personal tutoring processes
- Targeted employability opportunities to students with fewer tools to progress
- Access to local employability opportunities and graduate placements within the university
- Opportunities for mentoring with a diverse range of alumni and employer mentors to support unique progression goals

**ATTAINMENT**
- The diverse university community celebrates different backgrounds and creates a rich learning experience that all students can identify with
- Accessible and inclusive teaching
- A curriculum which draws on, and develops, regional and civic engagement and supports employability

**CONCLUSION**
- Consistent academic experience through the Leeds Curriculum and Leeds Doctorate
- Opportunities for mentoring with a diverse range of alumni and employer mentors to support unique progression goals
- Access to local employability opportunities and graduate placements within the university
Governance structures will keep us on track

The diagram illustrates the governance structures supporting the strategy. There are a number of key staff within this accountable for successful delivery. These include the Vice-Chancellor; Deputy Vice-Chancellor; Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Digital Transformation; Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Student Education; Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Research & Innovation; Executive Deans and the Dean of the Doctoral College; Heads of Schools (including Faculty Graduate Schools); Pro-Deans for Student Education; Director of Educational Engagement and Director of the Lifelong Learning Centre.
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