



# The Plus Programme Annual Report

2022-2023



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS



# Welcome to the Plus Programme

In a year that's been challenging for almost everyone, the cost-of-living crisis has made things particularly tough for Plus Programme students.

As always, we've let their voices guide us, listening to individuals' stories and working harder than ever to tailor an approach that enhances students' experience of life and study at Leeds. We provide help with both practical and emotional needs. We know that people need a sense of community and belonging if they are to reach their potential.

And with achievement in mind, this year we've done innovative work to close gaps in progression between years, and to improve access to postgraduate study.

Importantly, we evaluate the impact of everything we do. **Read on to see how we're making a difference.**



# The Plus Programme in numbers

This year there were **5,346** students on the Plus Programme (figures correct as of 02/06/2023):



**5,072**

Undergraduates



**274**

Postgraduates



**1,932**

IMD quintile 1



**1,495**

POLAR quintile 1



**150**

Leeds Masters  
Scholars



**456**

Undergraduate  
Means-Tested  
Scholars



**48**

Estranged  
students



**144**

Care-experienced  
students



**10**

Sanctuary  
Scholars

The Plus Programme is located within the Student Success Centre (SSC). The SSC works across the student life cycle to ensure delivery of both the Access and Participation Plan and the Access and Student Success Strategy. Situated within Educational Engagement, it is composed of six interconnected strands of activity.



**Plus Programme**



**PGR diversity**



**Faculty and  
service success**



**Sense of belonging**



**Academic  
success**



**Student contact and  
engagement support callers**



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## Joanna's story

**“Moving from London to Leeds to start University was difficult as I didn't have any family who could drive me with my things, so I needed to hire a van. This was expensive, so I reached out to Lisa at the Plus Programme who helped me access University funds towards my moving costs.**

When I arrived, I went along to a social event for estranged and care-experienced students and I met my now best friend there. We've gone through similar things and we can support each other.

I've been in touch with Lisa quite a lot. She has helped me sort out complications with my student loan and she supported me when I got scammed and lost all my money. I had nothing left when my rent was due, and she helped me contact the Finance Team and the Students' Union for advice. She also gave me evidence of my estrangement so the bank would refund my money”.



Attended Plus Programme social for care experience and estranged students.



Accessed our one to one contact for estranged students.

## Joanna MacInnes

### Undergraduate, History, Second Year

“

**The Plus Programme has helped me feel like I belong at Leeds, knowing there's a dedicated person I can approach and having the opportunity to connect with other students to share advice, like what to do about guarantors. The impact of the Plus Programme on my student experience has been priceless.**



# Quite simply, we encourage students to succeed

## Plus Programme students are more likely to remain on course:



The continuation rate for engaged\* Undergraduate Plus Programme students was **5.5% higher** than the University average for home Undergraduates.



The continuation rate for engaged\* PGT Plus Programme students was **1.66% higher** than the University average for home PGTs.

\* 'Engaged' means participating in three or more Plus Programme interventions in one year.

## Our activity meets genuine needs:



We reached **62.23%** of Undergraduate Plus Programme students with at least one intervention.



We helped **21.95%** of estranged students with at least three interventions.



**82.04%** of PGT Plus Programme students accessed at least one intervention, and **27.55%** accessed three or more.

“

**The Plus Programme has been so supportive, from holding social events to information sessions, which really helped when everything was new and scary.**

Etta Beckreck, History, First Year





“

**Being a member of the Plus Programme I have been supported by such kind staff. From fun socials, to studying sessions, to meetings about graduate support – they have made me feel very looked after over the duration of my degree.**

Janice Asare, Medical Sciences, Final Year

“

**Having specific support such as scholarships and the Plus Programme allows young people from my background to achieve their goals and dreams, empowering us to view ourselves as not only capable but boundless in our ambition.**

Halima Kamran, LLM Criminal Law and Criminal Justice

# Funding for living costs

Unexpected or hidden costs shouldn't hold students back.

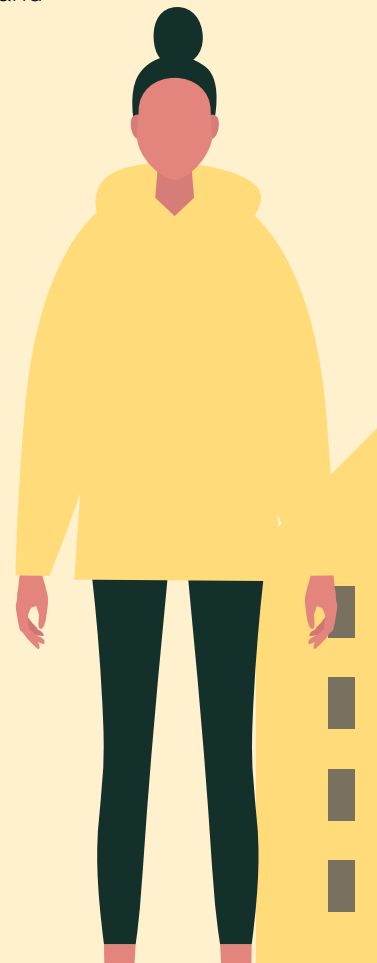
We work to make sure they don't, with various funding pots, such as the **Opportunities Fund**, which helps students engage with extra-curricular professional development opportunities.

Mindful of the cost-of-living crisis, the University allocated £320,000 to enhance existing student interventions, including the Plus Programme. We provided one-off maintenance payments to our care-experienced and estranged students, Leeds Masters Scholarship students and others who had experienced a drop in funding, including Medicine and Dentistry students.

“

**I have accessed the Opportunities Fund to purchase smart clothing for my 10-week placement, as well as travelling to London to go to an Open Day for the Low Carbon Contracts Company's Net Zero Graduate Scheme. This was an amazing opportunity to network, as well as learn more about a graduate scheme I am particularly interested in.**

Meegan Worcester, MSc Sustainability and Consultancy





“

**I have had multiple interviews where the train has been £100+. Having access to the Plus Programme has helped me so much as I haven't had to reject an interview due to the cost.**

Liam Parr, Aeronautical and Aerospace Engineering, Final Year

# Karolina's story

**“After completing my A-Levels I took a year out before starting a Foundation Year, which taught me study skills and improved my confidence.**

I always read the Plus Programme newsletters, which are very helpful, and this year I took part in a project where a lovely Masters student helped me with the application process. I also used the Opportunities Fund to help me participate in more things, like a conference where the Fund covered my travel costs. My Scholarship means I don't have to check my bank account every week to check I have enough money to cover everything. I've been less stressed and able to focus on my academic work and social life”.



Received an Undergraduate Means-Tested Scholarship



Took part in the PGT Student Experience Sharing Project, to get information and advice from a Masters student



Attended four Plus Programme socials, including a Christmas Quiz



Accessed the Opportunities Fund

**Karolina Glasek**  
**Undergraduate,**  
**History(International),**  
**Fourth Year**



“

**The Plus Programme has given me the confidence to know that I do deserve to be at the University, and I belong here. It's shown me there are people similar to me at Leeds, and it's nice to know that there are staff who notice students like me and actually want to help.**



# Listening to students

We evaluate the Plus Programme regularly, including a survey at the end of each term. The feedback helps us adapt ongoing activities if they can be improved to meet students' needs better, and to plan new opportunities.

## Plus Programme events

Our students highlighted that timings and conflicts within their busy schedules could get in the way of attending our events. To address this, we enhanced the flexibility of our scheduling to organise a breadth of online and face-to-face events – from the academic through to the social – beyond the conventional afternoon window to include mornings and evenings.

## Academic skills

Learning how to study can be just as important as studying itself. Our students expressed the need for support with writing academically, thinking critically, and managing their time, and in response we increased our spotlighting of the Skills@Library service in our dedicated Plus Programme newsletters. This directly linked students to more specialised academic skills interventions to supplement their academic studies.

## Wellbeing

Our students asked for our input with managing anxiety, stress, and maintaining a healthy sleeping pattern. We responded by using our spring newsletters to signpost students to the Sleep Well Book Club initiative, as well as our Lifestyle and Wellbeing Project which allows students to access a dedicated wellbeing package. Our newsletters were also used to strengthen links to the Student Counselling and Wellbeing Service by highlighting their range of services, providing crucial signposting to students requiring further support.



# Progression between years

**Student Success Stands:** Student success and satisfaction on course is an important element of all of our work.

We strive to support students throughout their degree and, where possible, to enhance the transition of students between years. We set up a working group to identify students who may be struggling as early as possible, and reach out to them proactively, on an ongoing basis.

The approach builds on existing mechanisms, data or indicators across the university that tell us that students may be looking for our proactive input to improve their experience and outcomes.

In March and May 2023 the Plus Programme coordinated Student Success Stands in halls of residence, LUU, and Library spaces to bring advice on academic-related topics into non-academic spaces. We wanted to uncover the hidden curriculum, encourage students to engage with university information and support and ultimately stay on course. The pilot was successful, and we refined the model for delivery in 2023-24.

“

**The Plus Programme team has been incredibly helpful, providing guidance and support whenever needed. I'm grateful for the opportunity to be a part of this community.**

Amber Singh, Law, Final Year





**Staff on the stands engaged with 33 students on topics like working with an APT, gaining academic skills and using the Library.**

**88%**

**Of students found it a helpful or very helpful resource, and 70% of students opted into, and received, a follow-up email or phone call to check in and advise further on anything new that had come up.**



**A fifth of students engaged were commuter students.**



# Enriching the student experience

**Grit:** We continued to deliver **Grit Personal Development Workshops** for Plus Programme students during 2022/23.

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 enable students to identify and access the university services they need and develop a strong network.

Over the year 102 University of Leeds students took part in one-day, in-person or online Grit workshops. Leeds students described how **“the training was engaging and inspiring... it changed my perspective on life”**.

“

**I felt all over the place. It was difficult just to keep going. It was like my work-life balance was about to tip over. But now I am accountable. I am more focused, more determined, more disciplined, more motivated. And that is just brilliant.**

First year Leeds student, 2022



**83%** increased their sense of belonging and connection



**82%** feel more optimistic about their future



**80%** of students reported having greater self-efficacy



**83%** increased confidence

**Black Student Peer Mentoring Scheme:** We collaborated with **Flourished Minds Ltd** to deliver the scheme, which connected First Year students with students in their second or third year of study.

We aim to create a safe space for students from a Black background starting at the University. The scheme enables students to socialise with their peers in subsequent years and gain advice and support from students who looked like them, and were more likely to understand their experiences, culture, and goals within Higher Education.

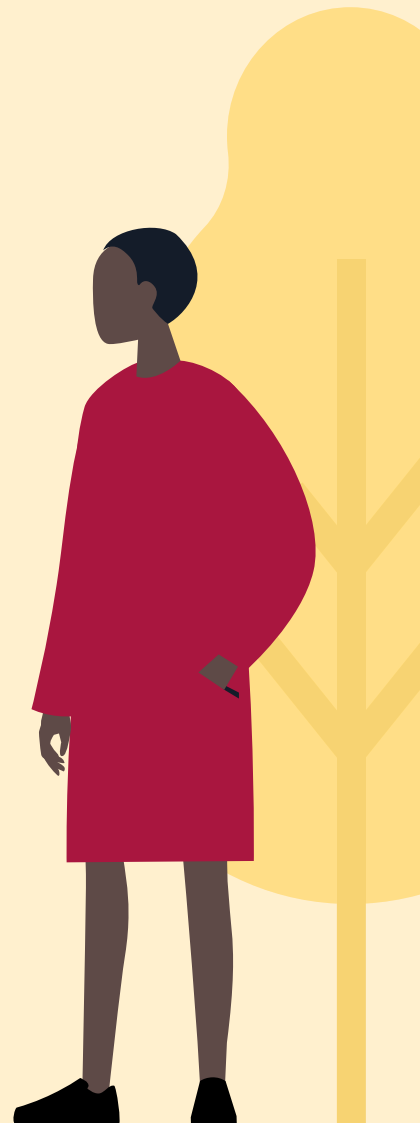
An initial induction session was facilitated by Plus Programme staff, in which participants received information on what was expected of them, what

were useful topics to discuss, and what the respective roles of the mentor and mentee were. Following this, the students were paired up for individual meetings to commence the mentoring programme.

“

**I think it was just really nice to see Black professionals. It sounds so minuscule but I've never spoken to professors or tutors who come from a Black/African background in my time in Leeds and even in my time in secondary school.**

First year Leeds student



# Emma's story

**“I came to Leeds as a mature student, and I've engaged a lot with the Plus Programme.**

I like that there are lots of different opportunities. I've been a member of the Steering Group for two years, where I developed my event management skills and collaborated with other students, some of whom I became friends with. I accessed the Opportunities Fund to buy smart clothes for a virtual internship at the Ministry of Defence, which I wouldn't have been able to afford otherwise as I'm from a low-income background.

I've also received a Scholarship; without it I wouldn't be at the University. Being disabled means I can't work part-time alongside my degree, so I need that funding to support myself. I can buy materials and books to make my studies more accessible and I can plan my finances, giving me peace of mind”.



Received Undergraduate Means-Tested Scholarship.



Member of the Plus Programme Steering Group.



Accessed the Opportunities Fund.

**Emma Rivers**  
**Undergraduate, English**  
**and Comparative**  
**Literature, Fourth Year**

“

**The Plus Programme has had a hugely positive impact on my student experience, primarily because of the variety of opportunities and the fact that I can pick and choose what I want to engage with. The team is also so approachable and friendly.**



# Meeting academic and personal goals

The Plus Programme collaborated with Flourished Minds Ltd to provide professional 1:1 coaching to ethnically minoritised Undergraduate and Postgraduate Taught students at the University. These bespoke sessions catered to each student individually and empowered them to talk about their goals with their coaches, who were industry professionals. The main themes discussed included:



Imposter syndrome and self-doubt



Uncertainty about how to 'sell themselves' during job applications



Procrastination and distraction



Overthinking and self-judgement

“

**I felt that I was truly listened to. One of the most helpful things was that my coach repeated back some of what I said and asked me to think about it. Sometimes it was eye-opening and at others it was deeply rewarding to identify what caused my way of thinking about myself and others.**

Student participant in coaching programme

“

**They organised a meeting with my personal tutor and encouraged me to sign up to the Buddhist Meditation society due to my anxiety, and it has truly made such a difference to both my mental health and academic flourishing.**

“

**The caller was really kind, helpful and proactive. They showed they were fully listening and understanding what I was saying by checking in with me at regular points.**

“

**I was just really taken aback by how relatable and informal it was and we didn't have to follow what we had said we wanted the meeting to be about.**

## **New year, fresh start**

In January 2023 we piloted The Plus Programme New Year Check-in (NYCI) to speak to students about obstacles they are worried about, or to kick-start objectives for the new semester. It's the kind of support we provide year-round, but we felt that proactively reaching out in an often-stressful period (due to exams, assignments, returning after the holidays) could be welcome.

With help from the Student Success Centre, we contacted every Plus Programme student in early January. If they wanted to, they could receive a 1-1 email, video or phone call. The approach was student led with an effort to identify key actions or signposting to any other relevant departments – for example, Academic Personal Tutors, Student Support Teams, Counselling and Wellbeing or the Careers Service.

In all, 89 students opted in. Most wanted to discuss careers, further study, wellbeing, exams, academic support or financial help. Feedback was highly positive and we're considering an expanded scheme in January 2024.

# Spotlight on postgraduate success

For 2022 entry there were 153 Leeds Masters Scholarships available to remove financial barriers to access and success at Masters level for students from low income and under-represented backgrounds.

Scholarships were funded by both alumni donations and institutional funding, showcasing an ongoing commitment to supporting this strategic priority.

Individual Schools and Faculties were also able to fund ring-fenced scholarships for their area, including Leeds University Business School (LUBS) and the School of Performance and Cultural Industries.

And we joined forces with the Mentoring and Widening Participation team in the Careers Service to deliver the Postgraduate Next Steps Mentoring Scheme, matching 29 Plus Programme Masters students with an industry professional in a sector of their choice. The students met their mentor online or in person for advice and practical information about their career plans.

## 97%

Continuation rates for engaged Postgraduate Taught (PGT) Plus Programme students. For engaged black PGT Plus Programme students the rate was **100%**.

## 84%

Continuation rates for non-engaged PGT Plus Programme students.



“

**The Plus Programme welcome event I attended for postgraduates made me feel much more at ease about my course and see how diverse Masters courses are.**

Lucy Wharmby, MA English Literature

“

**The LMS scheme is pivotal for LUBS as it enables UK students to partake in our leading management education who may otherwise not be able to engage with such opportunities, directly supporting our purpose to benefit the society. The value these students bring is immeasurable, as the different experiences and backgrounds enrich the diversity of thought in our classrooms.**

Edgar Meyer, Deputy Dean, LUBS

# Enabling access through positive action

We have taken positive action to develop scholarships ring-fenced for students with protected characteristics.

For example, the Leeds Institute for Data Analytics (LIDA) secured Office for Students funding to create 19 new scholarships for home students from under-represented groups who are undertaking a data science-related MSc. The £10,000 scholarships were launched for 2023 entry, and the Plus Programme is partnering with LIDA to trial a dual award for applicants to receive the OfS scholarship and the Leeds Masters Scholarship in tandem.



**Like to know more  
about positive action  
in scholarships?**

**Contact the team via  
[pscholarships  
@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:pscholarships@leeds.ac.uk)**





**The scholarships can help to remove financial barriers that may prevent students from diverse backgrounds from pursuing graduate education in data science, and increase diversity and inclusion on the programme.**

Dr Luisa Cutillo, Programme Leader for MSc Data Science and Analytics



## Aliyah's story

**“Before I came to Leeds I was at college studying A-Levels and then I applied to Realising Opportunities [a contextual admissions scheme], which reduced my grade offer.**

I've engaged a lot with the Plus Programme this year. I was a member of the Peer Support Sleep Reading Group where I was in a space with students experiencing similar problems to me, and I attended the dissertation writing sessions which were essential as a space I felt comfortable in.

I was also a member of the Steering Group where I was able to talk about my experiences and help students like me who haven't had the easiest route to university. It gave me a greater sense of belonging, and made me feel more comfortable at the University. I was able to influence things that were directly related to me and better understand who I am within the Plus Programme”.

**Aliyah Rose,  
Undergraduate,  
International Relations  
and Spanish, Fourth Year**

“For me, the Plus Programme is the University acknowledging that students like me need something extra and I would have struggled if it wasn't for the programme. I've found being a part of it really beneficial, finding out about amazing opportunities I wouldn't have known about otherwise and building my employability. It's also nice knowing there's something at the University especially for me. It's helped me have a great year and feel like I belong”.



Plus Programme Steering Group member



Received Estranged student support payments



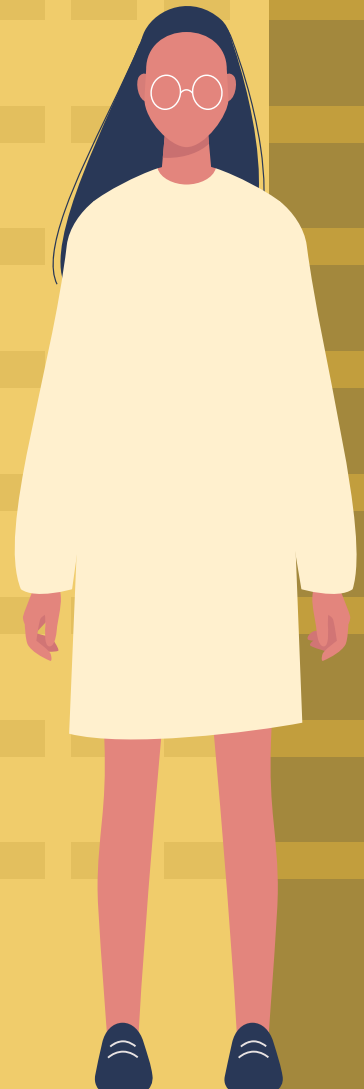
Peer Support Sleep Reading Group member



Attended Shut Up and Write Your Dissertation sessions

“

**As a care leaver I've had access to more specialised things, like social events where it's nice knowing there's a dedicated space for students like me. I've also received funding, like payments over the summer and as I'm graduating, as well as having the costs of my graduation photos being reimbursed. The financial support has been really helpful as I don't have a family to rely on.**



# Fighting fit for the future

## We have programmes for first-year students...

And because there's nothing like starting to think about your options early, for first year estranged and care-experienced students (and those who have completed the Access to Leeds programme) we have continued our work with award-winning charity upReach to offer a personalised programme of career support. It can include:



Expert one-to-one support and personalised coaching



Mock interviews, assessment centres, and online tests



Exclusive work experience opportunities with 30+ competitive graduate employers across the UK

This year, **95 enrolled** onto upReach's various programmes, such as RISE, Investment Springboard, Tech500, and Law Springboard. They could also attend various skills workshops hosted on campus and access the Student Mobility Network, connecting students directly with professionals.

We're proud to say that one of our students has been recognised for her success with **upReach**, winning the Academic Success category at the 2023 Student Social Mobility Awards.



**Without upReach, I'd never have had access to this many opportunities.**

Heathcliff Howard, LLB Law, Second Year

Plus Programme graduates can go out into the world fully prepared and well supported as they take their next steps.

March 2023 saw the launch of a new programme for care experienced and estranged finalists, with exclusive access to a comprehensive graduation package led by colleagues in the Mentoring and Widening Participation team in the Careers Service. They can take benefit from:



**Mentoring  
and coaching**



**One-to-one  
appointments  
with careers  
advisors**



**A dedicated  
point of  
contact  
for support**



**Our regular  
personalised  
newsletter**



**Digital  
resources**



The fortnightly newsletter had an average open rate of 57%



11 students signed-up to the mentoring programme; seven were successfully matched with a mentor

The Careers Service, and the Employability and Progression Assistant (EPA) Team in particular, have helped us deliver another successful year of tailored careers activity for Plus Programme students, including:

- One-to-one support
- Targeted phone calls
- Workshops around topics like imposter syndrome and resilience
- Events with external partners Transform Society, EY Foundation, and more
- Career mentoring schemes matching individuals with industry professionals for Undergraduates and Postgraduates

**This year 147 students were successfully matched with a mentor on a variety of leading mentoring programmes.**

Through mentoring, students have been able to:

- Build a professional network and gain insight into particular industries
- Develop their CV and build career confidence
- Identify skills gaps and find opportunities to develop these skills

“

**I had a very helpful meeting and I left it far more sure of what my next steps should be. I received insightful feedback on my CV and useful tips on how to better focus my search**

Student in receipt of one to one support from an EPA

“

**I found the scheme incredibly personalised and well-structured with plenty of support on a variety of topics.**

Alumni Leadership Mentoring Programme Mentee



## **What about those with an appetite for further study?**

We've been working with the PGR Diversity Team to make sure there's help at hand for our students who want to continue their learning journey.

This has included an Introduction to Doctoral Study webinar to learn more about what to expect at PhD level and the creation of Yorkshire Consortium for Equity in Doctoral Education (YCEDE) research internships with 10 students participating so far in order to support their progression to PGR.

In addition, the YCEDE Advocacy Programme has matched 27 prospective PGR applicants with supervisors for information and advice about PhD level study.

“

**My mentor was very helpful and offered me some very valuable advice. I feel in a much better position now with career ideas and potential applications.**

eMentoring Programme Mentee



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# Looking forward

## **Commitment to positive action**

To date, the Plus Programme has enabled the creation of 40 positive action scholarships, ring-fenced to students from under-represented groups across the University, contributing to Access and Student Success Strategy targets. Next year sees the launch of a positive action community of practice, which will further underpin the work.

## **Enabling success for our mature students**

Did you know that the Plus Programme supports more than 150 students who previously completed a foundation year programme, along with 500+ mature students?

During 2023/24 we will build on existing links with both the Lifelong Learning Centre and Faculties and sharpen our focus on these cohorts, feeding into new Access and Participation Plan targets and contributing to improved retention and awarding rates.



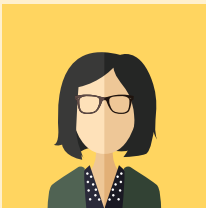


## Next year marks the **10 year anniversary** of the Plus Programme!

We plan to celebrate our successes, hear from Plus Programme alumni and launch new initiatives. We can't wait, and we hope you will join us in the celebrations!

# Your Plus Programme team

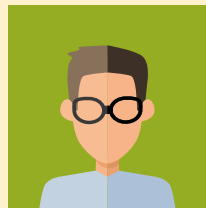
We are a central hub of knowledge and experience in working with students from Widening Participation groups and supporting them to succeed. We'd love to hear from you if you'd like to work with us more closely.



**Jenn Coates**  
**Senior Lead Officer**

Speak to me about: Widening Participation at Masters level, the Student Success Stands, and application of positive action in scholarships.

[J.Coates1@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:J.Coates1@leeds.ac.uk)



**Alex Ferguson**  
**Plus Programme Lead Officer**

Speak to me about: Non-continuation, displaced students, or Engagement Callers.

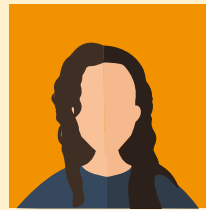
[A.Ferguson1@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:A.Ferguson1@leeds.ac.uk)



**Elen Rose**  
**Senior Lead Officer**

Speak to me about: Plus Programme strategy, transition to Higher Education and through university, and student finance.

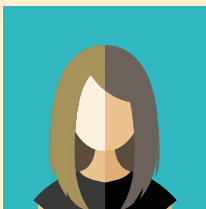
[E.S.Rose@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:E.S.Rose@leeds.ac.uk)



**Ciara Middleton**  
**Plus Programme Lead Officer (maternity cover)**

Speak to me about: Plus Programme strategy, transition to Higher Education and through university, and student finance.

[C.Middleton@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:C.Middleton@leeds.ac.uk)



**Liv Powell**  
**Plus Programme Senior Officer**

Speak to me about: Employability, the Leeds Masters Scholarship, and our activities and support for Masters students.

[O.S.C.Powell@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:O.S.C.Powell@leeds.ac.uk)



**Lisa Firth**  
**Plus Programme Administrator**

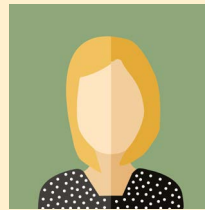
Speak to me about: Estranged and care-experienced students, students with caring responsibilities, and mature students.

[L.Firth@adm.leeds.ac.uk](mailto:L.Firth@adm.leeds.ac.uk)



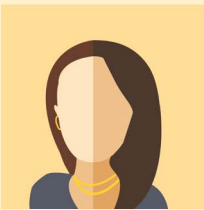
**Steven Forsyth**  
**Plus Programme**  
**Senior Officer**

Speak to me about: Transitional activity for new students, the Opportunities Fund, and Undergraduate scholarships.  
S.Forsyth@leeds.ac.uk



**Sarah Richardson**  
**Educational Engagement**  
**Manager**

Speak to me about: Student Success and evaluation.  
S.H.Richardson@leeds.ac.uk



**Suman Tanveer**  
**Plus Programme**  
**Intern (outgoing)**

Speak to me about: my experiences of the student lifecycle as a recent graduate.



**Libby Johnstone**  
**Student Involvement**  
**Senior Officer**

Speak to me about: Student involvement work, amplifying our student voice, and increasing engagement with students from Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic backgrounds.  
L.Johnstone1@leeds.ac.uk

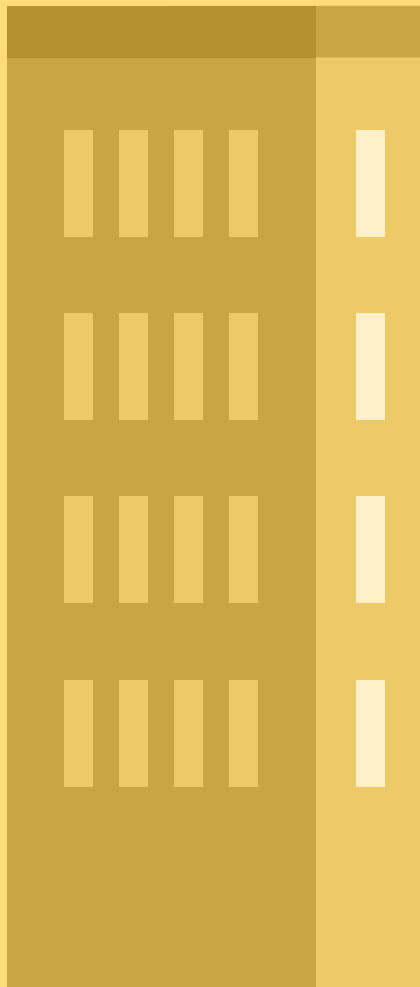
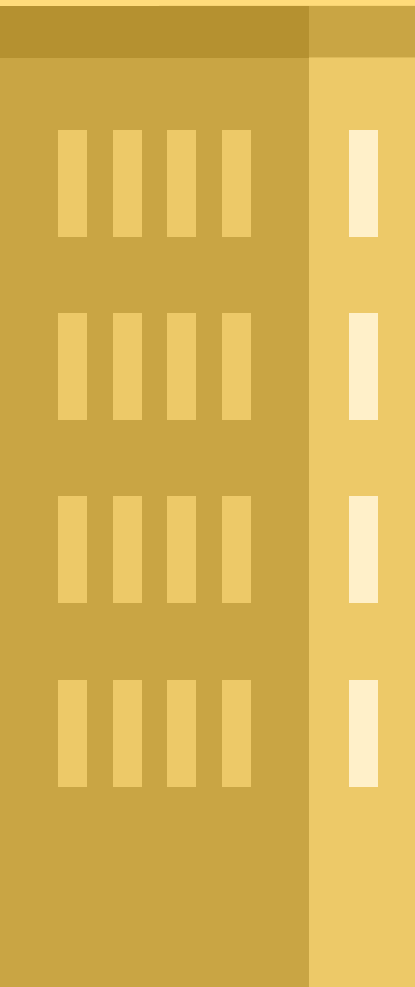


**Kieran**  
**Plus Programme**  
**Administrator**

Speak to me about: Plus Programme communications, activities and support for Masters students, and our work with Sanctuary Scholars.  
K.J.Launder@leeds.ac.uk







## 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](mailto: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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