The LUU Social Mobility Society Working Class Student Experiences Campaign Report

Introduction

This campaign and subsequent report was created by Samuel Greet, Amber Seddon, and Max Vincent-Brown of the LUU Social Mobility Society (SoMoSoc) committee. The aims of this were to give students who define themselves as working class at the University of Leeds the opportunity to express their experiences within and beyond campus. Students that come from less privileged contexts are often not identifiable across the student body at face value but face numerous and diverse uphill obstacles and untold barriers in their daily lives at university.

With these aims and context in mind, SoMoSoc put out a call for students to submit their voice through a 'Working Class Experiences Campaign'. Here students were asked to optionally submit their account of the experiences that stood out to them and given space for comments. The survey got over 50 responses within the space of around 6 weeks and this qualitative data has been turned into key findings, which are outlined under themes of experiences related to their pre-, during and post- university barriers, anxieties, differences, and frustrations. From this, we have developed recommendations in the final section of this report, and intend to share these to improve this experience based on the student voice.

We would like to thank the students and staff who supported the campaign.

Who are the LUU Social Mobility Society?

"A social mobility society for Leeds students, run by Leeds students. We want to create a supportive community and network for opportunities for students from less advantaged and non-traditional backgrounds at the University of Leeds."

By this we mean students who, due to their background or some other personal context, feel they do not have access to the same opportunities as their peers. To name a few potential factors, these students are from **lower socio-economic backgrounds**; from **less-than-good schools**; have **caring responsibilities**; are **commuters**; are **estranged** from their parents; are **first in their family** to go to university; identify as **working class**; have to do **part-time work** to get by; are **mature-students** or are affected by a range of other circumstances.

Put simply, SoMoSoc is here for anyone who cannot always access the same social, financial, or cultural capital as other students at the University of Leeds.

Contextual Background

This report sits in a wider context of a rising class-consciousness and movement towards representation and recognition of the non-uniformity of the student experience across the country and at the University of Leeds.

The University of Leeds itself has a widening participation action plan (the Access and Participation Plan), which outlines how the university will commit to supporting its widening participation students, including those from working class backgrounds. This plan also outlines outreach measures that are being taken to encourage the uptake of students from underrepresented groups.

Within the widening participation context, the Plus Programme offers opportunities and support students from underrepresented groups. The Plus Programme can offer financial help from the Opportunities Fund to students for attending events such as, but not limited to, open days/internships, and also formal clothing. Of course, most working-class students at the University of Leeds are familiar with the Plus Programme, however not everybody is, and attention needs to be given to this group in order to increase access and participation of students which would ultimately decrease imposter syndrome felt by students.

In addition to this, the Leeds University Union Better University Forum in 2019 - 2020, identified potential areas for additional support and representation for working class students. This culminated in the inaugural LUU Working Class Awareness Week, this year to be delivered under the new name of Working Class Representation Week. Following this week, a report was created which evaluated the success of the week and outlined issues that students were facing alongside proposed support measures. Although this was a positive step towards bettering the student experience, many of these suggestions have had little action to date. Understandably, the Covid-19 pandemic has played its part in making this more challenging, but it is important to highlight this report for future consideration.

The Working Class Experiences Survey

The survey was conducted throughout February and March 2021 to give students the space to share their experiences as part of the institution, anonymised or not. This survey received 50 responses in total, including students from a wide range of courses and varied years of study. Each participant gave consent for their responses and identified demographic information to be shared (preferred name, year, and programme of study). For the purposes of this report, the responses have been grouped into key themes which were most often raised by the student body. They are also presented through quotes and small case studies, in order to demonstrate the non-homogeneity of the non-traditional student experience. These findings are converted into actionable recommendations in the last section of this report, ensuring such a survey is not only an opportunity to share important experiences, but for the SoMoSoc to influence actionable changes which would benefit the working class students in our community.

Findings

University Experiences Surrounding Pre-University Background

This section covers the main themes that emerged surrounding the comparative perspectives between working class students in their experiences prior to university against the experiences had by their more privileged peers.

Pre-arrival and the Costs of University

There were large numbers of respondents that reported they had felt financially constrained before coming to university; they reported that this continued through their time at university and that they struggled to feel equal to their peers. Many respondents referred to the pre-arrival packages containing bedding and kitchen items being overpriced. There are also the additional high costs of attending university open days across the country, especially if parents are working and cannot take children to them, rail fare and otherwise can provide costly barriers to students choosing the university that is right for them. At this current time, the university does not offer financial support for travel or other associated costs of attending these days.

"Moving into university was a struggle due to my parents not owning a car, this made it quite hard each year moving in and out of houses. Also it would have been helpful to possibly get a repayable loan at the very start of uni, as buying bed sheets and utensils etc was expensive, along with the deposit for the accommodation." -
Anonymous student

It is clear that there are disparities between the ease of transitioning to university between working-class students and their peers. We all know that Fresher's week is financially challenging for most students, but this is especially apparent for those who are *working-class*. With no extra financial support from parents/guardians, working-class students may be in debt or enter their overdraft before even commencing lectures. The hidden costs of university are rarely outlined prior to arrival and once here students can feel financially anxious and overwhelmed by the costs that seem to come out of nowhere. It is also important to note that

many working class students are also first generation, with little access to advice or support during this time.

"My parents have had neither the time nor the money to help me in my studies: they are both hard working, yet receive little in the way of disposable income." - *Anonymous student*

Academic Imposter Syndrome:

Throughout the responses given it became clear that many students have encountered problems with feeling confident in their position at university. Working class students feel as though they are constantly against the odds, having not experienced the same level of training or education as their peers before university. Many of them expressed feelings of being less capable or less 'cut out' for academia with no real basis; this is known as Imposter Syndrome.

"I feel there's a barrier for some us who grew up in working class towns to shake the idea that were not supposed to go to uni" - *Anonymous student*

Despite good grades or positive previous academic performance, students from more privileged backgrounds carry themselves with such confidence and authority due to their educational training and background and that can make students feel less than their peers, even if they are at the same level in terms of accomplishments and grading. Students from more privileged backgrounds often already possess familiarity with university style academic writing, with confidently contributing thoughts and ideas in seminar-style environments and other 'unwritten rules' of higher education which students who attended less than good schools have to spend their early years adapting to. This continues to raise questions over sense of belonging and identity at university for these working class students.

Social Imposter Syndrome and Cultural Capital:

As well as academic-related feelings of Imposter Syndrome, similar negative emotions were reported to be regularly experienced within social and peer groups by working class students. A major theme that emerged was regarding the level of cultural capital of their peers and the contrast this was to their pre-university experiences.

For example, large numbers of students from more privileged backgrounds are known to refer to international travelling experiences, ski seasons or other expensive/out of reach life experiences as if they were assumed or a given.

There was **"A complete lack of understanding that living without your privilege of two holidays a year didn't make you poor. A lack of understanding that I'd hardly travelled, had never done a ski season or gone on expensive school/sixth form trips."** - *Amy, Zoology, 2019 Graduate.*

This cultural difference is even applied to understandings and expectations around food, with people being 'snobby' about the types of food that some respondents would eat or supermarkets which they would shop at. This disconnect in experiences isolates working class students at university, and was made worse during the pandemic, with issues surrounding technology and suitable working spaces.

Experiences Whilst Studying at the University of Leeds

Accent:

A repeated theme that emerged from students from Northern working class backgrounds was the commentary around their accent. Despite Leeds being a Northern city, almost 20% of responses noted that their Northern accents faced a spectrum of undesirable responses. This has ranged from internally feeling self-conscious to the extent that a student chooses to 'mask my real accent', others getting comments about their accents peculiarity, to even getting 'mocked' and 'jibed' at over it. This is often noted to occur from early on in their university experience and sets the tone for the rest of the experience of being made to feel out of place, unwelcome or to not fit in, undermining working class students' self-confidence and building on aforementioned imposter syndrome.

Part-time Work and Financial Security:

Most respondents recognised the detriment they felt by their need to have a part time job. Often these students are required to have part time work to pay basic bills and rent or contribute to other expenditures that non-traditional students may not normally have to pay towards i.e., the family car or needing savings as they had no 'fall back' option of the family finances. There was a clear feeling of frustration within these groups.

This is a significant emotional and mental health drain for some working class students, faced with the dual burden of equal university work to peers alongside hours ranging from less than 10 to even up to 30 hours a week, required to make ends meet. Staff and in particular academic teaching staff would benefit from displaying a greater appreciation of the unique circumstances of students under more competing pressures and ensure assessments and expectations are timely and considerate.

"I just want to have enough to have a nest egg in case my car/oven/laptop needs repairing." – Student, Final Year.

Repeatedly in the responses, students noted how students from more privileged backgrounds assumed that because they got more or the full loan, that they had more disposable income or were more financially secure. The respondents felt this misrepresented their position and completely underestimated the stress of their financial situation. This demonstrated their peers' complete lack of understanding about why these students needed this extra income for various contextual reasons and how it was not as available to spend as it seemed. This created conflicts between respondents and their peers i.e., in terms of students choosing on pricing for houses after moving out of halls.

"I've also had many peers who come from wealthy backgrounds not understand my circumstances and this can be incredibly frustrating and lead to many insulting comments. Even looking for a house with friends I had to look for affordability where as they could ask for money for their parents to pay for something better and tried to push for that creating a lot of anxiety and stress." - Emily, 3rd year.

"We're on maximum loan because we receive £0 from anywhere else. We solely rely on our loan. It's so frustrating hearing people complain about money then you find out their parents pay their rent. People on smaller loans don't seem to grasp why we're on maximum loan because they've never had any financial struggles."
Anonymous student

Disposable Income and Extra-Curricular:

Whilst many students struggled with worries surrounding money and a part time workload, some students also reported finding it challenging to maintain a social life where a lot of activities depend on expenditure. This came in direct contrast to peers who seemed to have the luxury of being able to afford much of these things without a second thought, and sometimes displayed a dismissive or 'not understanding' attitude in terms of why cost was important. This hinders the development of a sense of belonging within the student community for the students who have less disposable income, leading to increased social isolation with students 'making up excuses' as to why they cannot take part in the same activities as their peers.

"It can be really hard to have a social life when it always involves spending too." -
Anonymous Student

"I feel aswell there is a pressure to join in with nights out, trips to other cities, and shopping trips, yet it isn't often viable, and can lead to being isolated and called boring due to lack of money." - Anonymous Student

Other students found that they simply could not access some development activities, including societies and clubs, as the cost of this was too high. Many extra-curricular activities involve not just one-off payments for kit or equipment or high membership fees, but also a continued level of outgoings to maintain connection to the society and take part in what they run on a regular basis. The LUU Fund is an important step in the right direction but more needs to be done to encourage societies to make members and potential members aware of its existence and encourage applications more openly and readily, which at present is not something that many committees or societies have taken the time to consider in terms of cost limitations to accessing their extra-curricular activities.

"When it came to societies, I didn't find it accessible at all - wanted to join some, e.g rowing, but the travelling to and from, weekly socials and extras was just too much."

We are aware that the university is now working on funding for Plus Programme students to initially access these types of opportunities. However, this has not yet been widely advertised to the student body and efforts should be made to consider ongoing associated costs.

Lack of Funding Accessibility:

Students were disappointed with the university's current strategy towards supporting their students who come from a low-income background. Feelings towards the hardship fund were consistently negative, with concerns being raised about the nature of the application process.

"It's often embarrassing for students who have to ask for help, as the scrutiny with which university funding sources look at bank statements, does not take into account that people may have money in their bank accounts but it is earmarked for bills, or as self supporting students, may have spent money on clothes or things that may be deemed unessential." - Amy, International Development (Industrial), Third Year.

"Asking for financial help can be a very frustrating process with you having to disclose very personal circumstances year after year and you are almost discouraged throughout." - Amber, Advanced Psychology (Industrial), Third Year.

This neglects the impact of socio-economic differences, particularly within the Covid-19 environment where existing inequalities are only exacerbated. Applications to this fund also require scrutiny of saving and spending for the last three months; this does not necessarily reflect a student's financial situation or upcoming circumstances, for example, affording rent payments. If students are seen to have savings or 'luxury items' such as cars, this can negatively affect the application outcome. This approach fails to consider reasons for 'luxury items' and does not allow students without support to have any sort of financial fallback regarding savings. It is clear that there needs to be more nuance in the process and a better appreciation for the complexity of the student's individual financial situation and the context under which their savings, outgoings or otherwise are interrogated.

Staff and Peer Insensitivity:

Numerous respondents commented on the lack of nuance, sensitivity or flexibility demonstrated by both staff and peers surrounding their relative situation. Staff have notably been unable to recognise that part-time work alongside studies is not a 'choice' for some students, but a necessity for them to be able to afford to attend university at all. The assumption that students can quit their jobs or alter their working patterns at the last minute is at a complete disconnect with the experiences of working class students often having to work, often in frontline hospitality jobs and without the connections or readily availability of more 'flexible work' that might facilitate this. Lack of patience and understanding from privileged staff disenfranchises students from their sense of belonging at the university.

"During my first year of uni, I had a group presentation assessment. We were told the day before the assessment that we would need to be free the following afternoon to present to the class. I was meant to be at work and obviously a days notice is not enough to get a shift covered but my tutor did not understand or care about this."

"Despite this there were several patronising comments made about how I shouldn't have a job whilst at uni as I won't be able to do my best work or dedicate enough time to study, as if that's a choice that most working class students have." - Student, Final Year

Issues also emerged in terms of the sensitivity and thoughtfulness of peers towards working class and less privileged students' circumstances. Largely due to lack of perspective or awareness, students feel unable to share their experiences or concerns with housemates, friends, and casual peers due to the dismissiveness or sometimes even outright exclusionary nature of some students' responses to very real differences in finances, upbringing, and experience. It can be difficult for students to find their voice amongst their peers, when they feel 'alienated' and the minority amongst more advantaged peers, and sometimes leads to students having to hide or avoid speaking up on the distinctiveness of their experiences of being working class both before and at university.

"Biggest thing for me was lack of understanding from peer students. Felt like the university gave enough support but with the students it seemed that often their rhetoric used could be isolating" - Graphic Design, Third Year

"It hit me that so many of my peers came from places I simply couldn't understand, and the lack of understanding was very much mutual. [...] I felt alienated from the get go and it didn't get much easier throughout my time here, I just got more used to it." - Amy Randles, International Development (Industrial). Third year.

Effects of the Covid-19 Pandemic

Many of the already existing trends of experience for students from working class and less advantaged backgrounds have been significantly exacerbated by the Covid-19 crisis. The learning and teaching experience of a student from any number of non-traditional backgrounds such as those with caring responsibilities, low socio-economic background, estranged, mature students with other responsibilities etc. has been significantly more challenging than the experience of some of their more privileged peers.

"I have found particularly during the pandemic, the ability to study at home has been difficult, given I do not have a fancy ' home office' like many of my other peers post about." - Anonymous Student

This is felt in terms of access to technology and digital poverty in particular, as whilst the laptop loaning scheme has helped some students, both its availability as well as wider issues around Wi-Fi connectivity and access to study resources have been hurdles for students to overcome. Better communications around the availability of technology support and loaning would be welcome and ensure that no student is working on less than good equipment, as some students accept just because their laptop 'works' that they would not be entitled to a loan of a laptop which actually functions to a high standard, whereas some students work on heavily outdated and slow equipment that limits their ability to productively study.

Likewise, having to share study spaces or equipment with siblings or not having an appropriate place to work at crowded family homes has been difficult for some. Whilst already an issue longer-term, access to appropriate technology and workspaces was worsened during the pandemic for many students from working class backgrounds. Loss of work, financial hardships, difficult living situations etc. all have greatly impacted on students from working class backgrounds and the lack of recognition and nuance of these students' situations compared to their peers has been detrimental to their relative outcomes and experiences.

"I feel greatly let down and strongly believe the university have failed to support students, particularly in the midst of a global pandemic. Many students did not enter university with the intention of online learning and may not have equal access basic provisions for this ie. internet/technology, thus being at a disadvantage before they've started. It is not a level playing field and is a continual uphill battle." - Anonymous Student

Broadening Horizons

Whilst sometimes overwhelming, complicated, and not without its share of significant challenges, some students did recognise that university had been a revealing experience and had broadened their horizons. For people from a variety of backgrounds, university can provide a place to explore and be true to oneself in ways that can sometimes be difficult to do at home. With lots of people to meet, extra-curricular and co-curricular activities to explore and a lot of general opportunities in the city of Leeds, the university can be a platform for students to explore elements of themselves they had not previously. Inclusivity around sexuality and gender, though not perfect at the university, was a welcome experience for some students. Although, this sometimes comes with the contrast of realising that you, as a working class person, are out of place in a way that was perhaps the standard for where the students have come from.

"Above all, University has been an eye-opening and relieving experience, for which I am grateful." - Law Student, Final Year

"I was really nervous about starting uni, I thought everyone would look down on me. This couldn't be further from the truth though. I've felt really valued and supported throughout." - Emma Wood, 1st Year Social Work

Concerns Around Personal Development and The Future

Accessibility of Opportunities

A repeated concern that emerged was in regard to next steps after university and the stark contrast between working class students compared to their more privileged peers. During university, though the Plus Programme does offer a notably good Opportunities Fund and some paid university internships are offered, students felt that they were less able to take opportunities for work experiences and internships which were often unpaid. Scope to move to another city, especially London, or work for free in Leeds to gain the crucial experiences required to build a CV and candidacy appropriate for graduate-level job roles for many was infeasible due to other working requirements or being unable to work for free.

"Im worried about grad jobs as i feel like i wont have the experience because i had to work and this isn't considered. I love uni but it has been very stressful at times" - Mechanical Engineering Student, 4th Year

This also applies to the extra- and co-curricular activities, which can be key chances for students to build social capital, take on responsibilities and expand their CV, are either financially difficulty to maintain due to direct costs or indirect costs due to the need for part-time work alongside studies overtaking free time availability for such activities.

Connections and networks were noted as essential to guaranteeing internships and work experiences in a lot of different industries, and this made gaining experiences in your field or area a daunting prospect for those who had to apply for open application experiences against 100s of other applicants, whilst other peers had these opportunities through connections or favours in their existing networks. Having more support from the university in setting up links and connections for students who do not have their own personal network to draw upon is really important to close the opportunities gap that working class students are heavily feeling compared to their peers. This would help give more practical access to internships, specialised industry knowledge and work experiences and in turn give students more confidence when it comes to thinking about their graduate outcomes, which for many are very low due to this comparative disadvantage to peers.

Job Prospects

The lack of familial and other professional networks from home many respondents felt put them at a disadvantage to their peers, who they felt often had internships, work experiences or graduate jobs lined up before they left through these connections. The relaxed and open manner with which more privileged students could engage with their students and university experience starkly contrasted with impending fear of unemployment, the debt of university 'not being worth it' in terms of graduate outcomes and seemingly insurmountable challenges around breaking into a challenging graduate market when competing against students who have family and friends who can coach and connect them to job opportunities.

"To some of my friends uni seemed like an experience to put off going to work where as I constantly stress hoping uni will be something to support my chances at working life." – Alex, 4th Year

Some respondents questioned the worthwhileness of their university degrees due to the amount of costs and stress it had burdened them with compared to whether it would be delivering the eventual worth in terms of their job prospects and outcomes post-university.

"I think greater support is needed for first generation students navigating the graduate job market, because of the lack of understanding of family members who never had to go through the process." - Anonymous Student

Not only in terms of connections, but there is a lack of confidence and understanding of the graduate market and the types of jobs available to students after university and what different potential careers would entail. The jargon and assumed knowledge that comes with professional work is often disconnected from those working class students whose own network do not work in any of these industries or professions, limiting not only opportunity but even the basic understanding about what possible line of work these students could go into, unless they try to learn it themselves.

Debt

Students expressed concern over the disconnect in interpretation and understanding of student debt between themselves and their peers. The accumulation of debt was a cause for concern, and dissuaded *students* from feeling comfortable pursuing a year abroad due to fears around being unable to afford it, despite it being a requirement for language courses. These fears continue from expectations to agree to extra payments of up to £5,000 for integrated Master's programme before their degrees began, and right up to the Masters-level students where lack of recipient of funding put students under emotional stress due to fear of going into debt over student loans without having the money yet to pay for it. The lack of financial 'safety net' makes what are everyday decisions and procedures for other peers much more stressful for students who cannot rely on any back up plan if finances go wrong.

Recommendations to be Considered by the University

Future Teaching and Learning Practice

If 'hybrid learning' combining both elements of online and in person teaching is to become the norm for teaching practice at the university, this must not come to the detriment of less privileged students and it is the responsibility of the university to make sure a 'digital divide' does not emerge based on class lines in the coming years. The provision of support for students in terms of their Wi-Fi at home, in terms of having laptops that work well, cameras and microphones so they can contribute etc. is essential to be able to fairly ask students to accept the hybrid teaching model.

Elements of online teaching in terms of pre-recorded lectures can be useful for those from less traditional backgrounds, as they can arrange their time to suit any part time work or other responsibilities they may have, rather than being dictated entirely by teaching hours. However, if elements of recorded lectures or other online delivery are to remain, there must also be a considerable effort to ensure that the in person seminars or other teaching delivery is enriching and supportive for all students and does not come to the detriment of the students who for example might struggle with imposter syndrome. It is essential that in person teaching is inclusive and facilitates contribution and success for everyone and that opportunities to ask questions and for clarification are readily available and assumed knowledge or understanding is not the default for all students.

Changes to the Hardship Fund

The Hardship Fund was raised several times amongst students. The purpose of this fund is to support those who find themselves in financial difficulty, but the application process was seen to be discouraging and complicated. Hardship fund staff may benefit from training on how to appropriately handle complex life circumstances without discouraging vital applications. There should also be special considerations made for savings and how students may use perceived 'luxury items' in certain groups, depending on their individual circumstance. These criteria should not make them less likely to receive support if they are estranged or have caring responsibilities that require a car for example.

For plus programme students, applications should be guided, and efforts made to avoid having to explain difficult circumstances where possible. This could be through the university system,

flagging students who belong to certain groups without the need for further detail, for example, students applying for summer rent support who have little family support.

It must be noted that Leeds University Union has sent a survey asking if the naming of the 'hardship' fund should be changed to the Financial Assistance Fund. This change may make accessing the fund easier for those who deemed the name off putting

Student Involvement in Policy Development

It is clear from the report findings that students feel as though they are not reflected in current policy and feel unheard by the university at a policy development level. In order to combat this, there should be a more open discourse between the university's senior staff and students themselves. This could perhaps be delivered through a co-production implementation method that would enable students to send in ideas for policy change much like the LUU Better Forum where the Vice Chancellor reviews applications that get above a certain number of votes and then implements them accordingly.

There should also be greater transparency on current policies including budgets and spending. These should be shared with students openly in an accessible format and guidance given on how to interpret summaries if necessary. By doing this, the university increases the level of trust from students alongside equipping them to challenge decisions /suggest changes where they see fit. This concept links back to skills development, with understanding of budgets and decision making being an integral part of many future career paths.

These efforts would hopefully boost engagement in terms of BAME Students, LGBTQ+ Students, Estranged Students and others who are more likely to fall into working-class categories and feel as though they are disproportionately represented at university.

A Consistent Commitment to Making the University More Inclusive

It would be more appealing from the working-class perspective if there was an all-year round acknowledgement of the community which falls outside of Working Class Representation Week (WCRW) that are conducive to actionable changes which can honestly be seen to improve the experiences of working-class students (outside of the Plus Programmes remit). The university should also consider the creation of channels to voice concern relating to their academic or wider experiences. An example of this is an anonymous (with the option to provide contact details) online reporting system to report minor and major incidents and receive targeted support in a way that is tailored to the student's needs.

This reporting system is something that could be applied not only for class, but for any student with protected characteristics/from marginalised groups. Currently, there is very little in place to allow students to do this without speaking directly with staff members. This presents a whole host of problems including but not limited to confidence, imposter syndrome and staff relations, which may make a student less likely to seek support. There is much evidence to suggest that this level of anonymity would encourage students to raise issues in a way which they deem as safe to do so, opening channels of communication between staff and students.

It is also clear that there is a lack of understanding and consideration amongst some of the student body. As we know from previous research, working class and underrepresented groups are already predisposed to leaving university and although student behaviour is not necessarily a direct reflection of university policy, the university must remain accountable for the experience of every group. Some thought needs to go into ensuring that just as LGBTQ+ and BAME communities have a visible, active, and proud presence on campus with various months and events within that, that more can be done to create a positive narrative around working class and non-traditional student's successes, resilience, and experiences. Working Class Representation Week is one part of this process but cannot be the only time in which these students find themselves championed and recognised at LUU or the university. Hopefully this can have a direct impact on the attitudes and recognition of difference from other student peers, and maybe including some perspective-building activities during induction would be welcome to help more privileged peers recognise the potential scope for very different experiences and contexts from their more 'non-traditional' student peers.

Staff Training

The university should improve and implement (as mandatory) training on working-class underrepresented issues/increased understanding. We appreciate that this is logistically difficult to provide university wide but should be provided at minimum for tutors who have students flagged as being on the plus programme and came to the university through an access programme as this would improve student-staff relations. There should also be efforts made to develop better signposting to support services who can help students with additional responsibilities they may have, including - pastoral care, counselling, Plus Programme provision etc. This displays the universities commitment to a better awareness and understanding, and also means students will receive support that is tailored to them specifically.

In addition to this, an emphasis should be placed on staff representation. Whether or not this is through a forum that is dedicated to BAME/LGBTQ+/working-class staff networks. These networks could then host events alongside the Plus Programme. This is particularly important in areas of academia that have low levels of staff belonging to underrepresented groups, for example, STEM. This type of action would help boost the feelings that students feel in terms of being out of place and suffering imposter syndrome and dispelling the myth that only privately educated students belong at university and/or can access the academic jobs.

This could also include the LGBTQ+ Network and BAME Coalition at the LUU