

# The Student Education Bulletin: Spring 2020

(Plain text version)

## Our regular look at teaching excellence at Leeds

Welcome to our spring issue of the Student Education Bulletin where we take a look at the activity going on around campus to promote teaching excellence and to enhance student education for Leeds' students.

## Comment from the DVC

### **The Deputy Vice Chancellor (Student Education), Tom Ward, reflects on the academic year to date.**

The academic year 2019-20 has thrown up quite extraordinary challenges for everyone dedicated to Student Education. As ever, I want to start by thanking everyone involved for the effort and thought that goes into enabling our students to learn effectively in such difficult times.

The impact of, and calibration of response to, the Covid-19 pandemic is so fast moving that anything I say will be of little relevance when this goes to press. Nonetheless, we should all be hugely appreciative of the work that has been done by the [Digital Education Service](#) and others to help prepare for more online working. I am particularly grateful to Prof. Neil Morris for leading this work so effectively. It is clear how important it is for our students that we have widespread confidence in using modern digital education capabilities. I hope that some of the rapid increase in use of the technology we have invested in contributes to a permanent improvement in our ability to think about education in new ways long after the Covid-19 event is behind us.

Other developments in online education include:

- A pilot this year of [LinkedIn Learning](#), which gives students and staff access to a wide range of short CPD courses through the LinkedIn platform;
- A pilot of the [“Top Hat” mobile voting system](#), a device-independent mobile voting system that allows for quick responses to questions live in the classroom;
- [Coursera](#) has made a large array of their courses available free of charge to support institutions responding to the virus.

Before recent events, I was delighted to see the enthusiastic engagement in February with our consultation on the emerging strategic plan for Student Education. More than 80

colleagues in leadership roles participated in workshop sessions to feed into an early draft of the plan; and Abiha Khan, LUU Education Officer, hosted a session with school reps at the Education Assembly, ensuring that the student voice has been embedded in our thinking right from the start. We will pick this topic up again in the coming weeks.

We have been piloting a Student Education Initiatives Handbook, which aims to capture the many different initiatives underway. Responding to Covid-19 means some of these will be slowed or delayed but it is nonetheless a daunting list of initiatives. A new Enhancement Network is about to be launched, with a first objective being to look at how we might phase or prioritise the items in this list, which range from further development of inclusive educational practices, to new approaches to induction and transition, decolonising the curriculum, to using technology to support better decision-making as in the culmination of the Evidencing and Sustaining the Leeds Educational Offer project so ably led by James Pickering. The Pro-Deans for Student Education are thinking carefully about how best to embed these initiatives at Faculty and School level and [keep them joined up with the five framing themes](#). The pace of change can be challenging, and we will be doing our very best to support colleagues to respond through Annual School Reviews, action planning, and by creating networks and forums for people in particular leadership roles.

In news from LITE, Tina Overton has had an enormous impact in her relatively short period here as Director of LITE. We wish her well for retirement, as well as looking forward to the arrival of a new Director. Among many innovations it has been good to see more student-led activity and the way in which LITE is contributing directly to education across the campus.

A striking example is the Leeds and Law Transformation Project (LLTP) involving Leeds University Business School (LUBS) and the School of Law, who have joined forces to radically transform the way they teach a wide range of modules at both undergraduate and postgraduate level. Planning for these flagship modules is well underway, and the module leads have been appointed LITE Transformation Fellows. As part of this role, the Transformation Fellows will contribute fully to the LITE community and act as ambassadors at internal and external events. This team of over 30 academics and digital enhancement and innovation experts will have a lasting impact on education beyond those two faculties. Cathy Myles, Pro Dean for Student Education at LUBS said: 'We have a really driven team involved with these flagship modules and I am very excited to see how this develops over the coming year and how we can share what we learn, not only within our own University but also with our wider academic community.' This project is part of a much wider expansion of the Western Campus at Leeds, which will see new facilities that will truly enhance the staff and student experience in learning and teaching at Leeds.'

Thanks again to everyone who is working so hard to protect students at Leeds from the many external events that have made life so difficult this year.

## Feature: Criticality Symposium

**Kashmir Kaur is a lecturer in English for Academic Purposes within the School of Languages, Cultures and Societies. Building on a PRiA (Pedagogic Research in the Arts) funded project exploring criticality in academic writing Kashmir used LITE's Supporting PedR Fund to deliver a Criticality Symposium. Here, she reflects on some of the findings and observations along the way.**

Criticality? What does 'criticality' in higher education conjure? How is it defined and taught? How do students learn 'criticality'? What is their understanding of it? Why is it they have difficulty expressing 'criticality' in their studies?

These are the questions that I've been wrestling with in my teaching and have kindled my interest into looking into this concept further.

Although criticality is conspicuous in educational debate, experience shows that within education discourse it is more often than not viewed in a fairly narrow way in higher education. It's often synonymous with critical thinking. Yet, criticality is so much more.

Criticality is a complex, opaque concept as there are various understandings and interpretations. Different audiences such as epistemic communities and disciplines have their own forms of criticality. For example, a historian's way of viewing criticality will be different from a biologist's and even in the same school differences may occur.

My take on teaching criticality has been to embed it in each lesson by teaching it implicitly through the Socratic way of questioning students and not accepting their short initial responses. I press them to provide a deeper response by requiring them to develop their reply by continuously asking questions such as why, how, justify and what about the other perspectives. Initially, this approach confused the individual but simultaneously engaged the class. When the student was unable to respond, another would chip in to expand and this usually resulted in further students taking part.

This outcome suggests students were demonstrating 'criticality'. However, students need to engage with all aspects of criticality and demonstrate it in their writing too. So, it begs the question what is 'criticality'?

Conversations with colleagues have resulted in interesting and differing understandings from questioning information to “sharp thinking” linked to generating SMART aims and objectives, and finding a gap in existing literature with emphasis on how sources are utilised. They also revealed that the general understanding and interpretation of criticality appeared to be solely aligned to critical thinking, although no precise definition was forthcoming.

Criticality comprises critical thinking, analytical reasoning, critical self-reflection and critical action and is connected to the domains of knowledge, self and world. So it is not just critical thinking but a way of being, acting and engaging.

Higher education is not just a space for students to inhabit a different universe but also a space to be transformed as individuals. It then follows that the classroom or a lecture or a seminar are not neutral spaces but places for transformative learning where students are emancipated and not constrained.

It's curious that criticality is not interrogated in the classroom more as it is a primary requirement for success in academic disciplines. It is a quality that is a key competence in the world of work. Moreover, it's one of the main challenges students from diverse educational, cultural and linguistic backgrounds and traditions experience during their studies. Research has shown that international students' approach to and understanding of criticality can adversely impact their academic performance. So, are students being serviced adequately in developing their criticality skills?

Critical thought in economic, political, social and cultural arenas is radical and emancipatory and there needs to be space and opportunities in higher education for disposition for criticality to develop.

In today's polarised world of misinformation and mistrust, it is more necessary than ever before for students to have the skills to navigate through the tsunami of information which they are deluged with, and challenge 'fake' news and 'post truth' dogma. They need these skills to view the world beyond their immediate lens of their 'bubble' to be conversant and engage with the opposing views in order to make the world an equitable place for all.

So, higher education needs to do more than just tick the 'critical thinking' box. It needs to interrogate and review how criticality is taught and simultaneously draw attention to other aspects of criticality where graduates are emancipated to critique in a wider context. Criticality in higher education needs to be more than a benign form of critical thinking. It needs to enable critical individuals engage with the world, themselves and knowledge.

To view a bibliography and to see the presentations from the symposium visit [Kashmir's Criticality page](#) on the LITE Sharepoint site.

## Opinion: The Future of Induction

**Could we be seeing an end to Freshers' Week? LITE Fellows Andrew Mearman and Ruth Payne suggest that students need more than a brief introduction to academia and a pub crawl. LITE's [ELIXIR](#) project is looking closely at what 21st century students want and need in their first year at university, and is offering guidance on how universities can best provide it.**

Imagine being a first-year student. Perhaps you've just left home and you're independent for the first time. Perhaps you've moved away from family and friends. You might be in a new country, or leaving the world of work to undertake study again, years after you last thought about formal education. Perhaps you're moving into a halls of residence with people you've never met before. Or perhaps you're living alone in private sector accommodation. Perhaps you're free to do whatever you want for the first time and perhaps you suddenly have to think about how to budget for that. On top of all that, you might also be undertaking domestic chores you've never really thought about before.

The week before teaching typically involves everything from a series of talks on programme structure, introductory lectures and information about regulations on assessment, to events about personal safety, setting up a bank account and information about how frequently the local buses run. This is in addition to a parade of social events.

Some current approaches to induction really do run the risk of leaving students feeling overwhelmed and a little shell-shocked. Might there be another way?

The ELIXIR team is developing a set of principles that will help colleagues involved in welcoming new students to prioritise the right things and focus on what students need to know.

By drawing a distinction between a university-wide welcome and programme-level induction, we can ease the sheer weight of information students are often expected to absorb. There's a lot of content that can be easily be moved to later in semester one, or even into semester two and this will make a huge difference to our students. And by using the first week or two to really focus on helping students to settle in and make friends, the university is likely to quickly see an upturn in student satisfaction.

Our discussions with students from different faculties clearly show that a major shared concern for new students is that they will not get to know people on their programme

In response to this, the ELIXIR project is developing a timeline that shows how some of the content from the traditional induction week can be accommodated across the whole period from pre-arrival to the end of year one. By developing this through discussion with key people in the University, the project is also gathering induction resources that can be made easily available to everyone and take the pressure of staff, too.

We have received a fantastic response to our ideas for change, with a clear appetite across the university to tailor induction activities to students' individual needs. **Might we be witnessing the end of Freshers' Week as we know it?**

**A Welcome and Induction event will be delivered online on Tuesday 12th May – details to follow. If you are interested and want to know more details please sign up [here](#).**

In the SPOTLITE: Jen Dyer

**Jen Dyer is a lecturer in sustainability in the School of Earth and Environment. In this SpotLITE, Jen discusses her role as the School Academic Lead for Inclusive Practice and her interests in Mixed Ability sports.**

**Tell us about your career before you took on your current role? (Or before you came to Leeds?)**

I've been in the School of Earth and Environment (SEE) since 2007 in a variety of roles. Those include my PhD, looking at the impact of growing a biofuel crop called Jatropha on livelihoods in Malawi, and a variety of short term research and teaching contracts before I secured a permanent Lectureship in Sustainability in 2016. My role has constantly evolved and my research has changed in focus completely during that time from natural resource management in southern Africa to social inclusion and Mixed Ability sport in Yorkshire! My teaching role has also evolved and I've had the pleasure of leading a variety of modules on our Sustainability-related degrees. Our students never fail to inspire and impress me so I have often looked for innovative ways to enhance their experience and have incorporated pedagogic research as a way of doing this.

**What is your current role?**

Currently, I feel like my role is a big sustainability-related jigsaw with teaching, research, management, practical contributions to the Uni community and pastoral aspects all jostling for space and time! As well as teaching on our Sustainability degrees, I lead the Creating Sustainable Futures Discovery Theme and am embracing the new School Academic Lead for Inclusive Practice (SALIP) role which I share with Jacqui Houghton in SEE. I also work closely with the Sustainability Service on a variety of projects and am the SEE Staff Sustainability Architect. I've recently led a team in developing a really exciting Living Lab project looking at pollinators on campus. This was showcased at the recent Student Sustainability conference so look out for opportunities to be involved in that if you're interested in all things that buzz, hum and flap! I'm also involved in a lovely LITE Catalyst project looking to raise awareness of the Community and Voluntary sector as a career option amongst students and staff in Environment. This sector is so crucial in addressing the challenges we are facing as a society and our students can make a huge contribution given their skills and passion.

### **You lead on sustainability within the Discovery programme. Why do you think it is so important for students at Leeds to study sustainability?**

We live in a changing and massively complex world with some huge challenges facing us. If we're going to address them, everyone needs to be on board! Studying sustainability allows students to engage with and explore this complexity and understand their role in a more sustainable future, as well as the role of others. It allows them to think about how much they can do individually and how to influence those around them. Studying sustainability also provides students with essential skills like critical thinking and systems thinking, as well as understanding and empathy for the global community. We are looking to develop all sorts of innovative ways to embed sustainability in the curriculum, alongside Discovery, through the Leeds Sustainable Curriculum working group. I'm looking forward to working with lots of staff and students across the Uni on this.

### **Tell us about your interest in social sustainability?**

Often the environment is the first thing that comes to mind when we talk about sustainability and I'm keen that this isn't the only aspect people focus on, even though it's often easier to engage with! My research around Mixed Ability sports has really opened my eyes to how different groups can be excluded from society through not having their voices heard. This has to be addressed if we are going to get a sustainable future that works for everyone with innovative, just and

effective solutions. I'd love to see a world where we seek to understand and embrace social difference rather than be fearful of it.

### **How does your work with Mixed Ability sports fit in with the rest of your academic role/interests?**

I've been involved with Mixed Ability sports and IMAS, the social enterprise behind it, since 2014. It has taught me so much about society and how we view social difference. I've been able to bring this into all aspects of my role at Leeds. It has really inspired me to learn more about inclusive teaching and engage with initiatives such as decolonising the curriculum. It's made me more compassionate and better able to support student and staff mental health and wellbeing and I've recently written a paper with colleagues in SEE looking at what we can learn from mixed ability sports in making sustainability initiatives more inclusive. Now I need to tackle academia ... !

I've also developed a huge interest in the role of the Community and Voluntary sector in addressing sustainability challenges, and the role research can play in supporting it, through my work with IMAS. This has inspired me to establish my own community interest company, Nifty Sustainability, with a former Leeds colleague, which I'm really excited about!

### Feature: Reverse Mentoring

**Rachael O'Connor is a lecturer in the school of law. In this article, Rachael talks about her ongoing project to introduce a reverse mentoring scheme, which is commonly adopted in the legal sector. Here she reflects on the pilot study which focuses on supporting the international student experience.**

Partly supported by the [LITE Catalyst Fund](#), this pilot project explores the impact of 'reverse mentoring' between international students and members of staff in the School of Law.

#### **Reverse mentoring – what is it?**

Reverse mentoring is all about finding ways to empower millennials and Gen Z in the workplace, centred on 'role reversal' and flipping traditional power dynamics on their head. For example, it has been used in the legal sector as an attempt to improve diversity in more senior roles by pairing senior male board members with junior female solicitors.



This is the first study to explore reverse mentoring between students (mentors) and staff (mentees) from a diversity and inclusion perspective. In this study, students are encouraged to take the lead, sharing their experiences of being an international student here at Leeds and providing their mentees with information and tools that could positively influence the way their mentees teach and interact with students in the future.

### **What am I trying to achieve?**

As our campus becomes more and more 'internationalised', it is important that we put our minds to the question of whether we are doing enough to adapt to our diverse student body. To an extent, what the project achieves is dependent on the participants and what they want to get out of it. This is about the creation of impactful, personal relationships between mentors and mentees, above all else.

However, some of the issues I am particularly interested in exploring responses to and change in are: community, hierarchy, stereotypes/bias and diversity/inclusion. I ran some initial focus groups with international students and staff prior to starting the reverse mentoring pilot and these are all issues which we discussed and which there was a range of views on within the School.

### **The pilot project**

Student participants in the pilot study represent four different nationalities. They are all undergraduate students in either their second or final year of a Law degree. Staff participants are predominantly in teaching roles (representing a mixture of scholarship, research and teaching fellowship colleagues) with one participant from student support services. Staff participants also represent a range of experience and seniority levels. I felt this was important as, although relying on student and staff volunteers at this stage, I want to get as wide a range of views on the impact of reverse mentoring as possible. Mentors and mentees were paired randomly, although I excluded any pairings of students/staff who already knew each other well e.g. personal tutors, seminar leaders etc. as I felt pre-existing relationships might make the power role reversal more challenging.

Participants meet at a location of their choice (away from the mentees office) on four occasions throughout the semester. Themes/discussion topics are provided to stimulate discussion around equality and diversity issues. Participants are interviewed at the start and end of the study and asked to complete a reflective log following each meeting to help me recognise and measure impact, learning and change.

## Why international students?

There are many studies exploring the international student experience in higher education and there is no denying that it is a complex issue, given the diversity amongst an extremely large body of students.

Internationalisation shows no signs of slowing and is a key focus of many university strategies. Reverse mentoring is a tool which may have a positive impact on the international student experience (and that of many other students), as well as providing additional support to staff working within a diverse and growing campus. We have also set up a new network focused on [Internationalising Student Education](#) through which myself and colleagues from across campus hope to provide support to staff in navigating the challenges and opportunities of internationalisation. Please join us if you are interested!

The findings of the reverse mentoring project will be relevant to a number of important debates around the international student experience, student well-being, diversity and inclusion and staff/student relationships (i.e. [Bee Bond](#) and [Lydia Bleasdale](#) etc.). I look forward to sharing these findings with you in the next SEB!

If you would like to find out more about the reverse mentoring pilot project or reverse mentoring more generally, please contact Rachael O'Connor: [r.e.oconnor@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:r.e.oconnor@leeds.ac.uk)

(Note: this project is also partly funded by the [Association of Law Teachers](#))

## Comment from the LITE Director

### **Tina Overton applauds the work of the Digital Education Service in responding to the current pandemic before saying her goodbyes as Director of LITE.**

The world has changed so rapidly in the past few weeks and is changing so quickly that our situation will be different again by the time that you read this article.

During my time here in LITE we have worked tirelessly, along with colleagues in OD&PL and the Digital Education Service, to encourage colleagues to innovate in their teaching practice and to embrace new technologies. Now, almost overnight, that has come to pass. Plato said that 'necessity is the mother of invention' and we have all certainly seen that this is true over the past few weeks.

I have been immensely impressed how colleagues have supported each other to move teaching and learning online and to thoughtfully rethink upcoming assessment, all supported by a very responsive and committed Student Education Service.

I know that things are not happening as quickly or as smoothly in some other institutions and it is a credit to our university that student education is such a high priority and that colleagues are well prepared to meet the challenges that face us at this time.

I hope that when the current crisis is over and we return to an on campus experience for our students and staff that we do not automatically go back to our old practices, that we maintain and enhance the best of what we achieved in the online environment and are able to build in variety and flexibility in all that we deliver for the benefit of our students.

You may notice that this edition of the Bulletin does not include the regular column from Neil Morris, Director of the Digital Education Service. Neil has shown outstanding leadership during this current crisis and has guided the institution through the move to the online environment. He is simply too busy to provide his regular update for this edition but I am sure he will have lots to share with us in the next edition.

This is my last contribution to the Student Education Bulletin as the Director of LITE. Discussing other issues just now feels a little trivial but I would like to reflect briefly on my experiences at the University of Leeds. It was immediately apparent when I arrived that the institution takes education very seriously. So, everything was in place for LITE to make an increased impact on the Leeds community. I think we have achieved that through new funding streams, flexible Fellowships, an extensive series of events, new networks and capacity building in pedagogic research.

The level of engagement in the community was clear to see at this year's Student Education conference, which was a 'sell out' in record time.

I leave LITE in the hands of a capable team who have been a delight to work with and I look forward to watching how it develops further under a new Director.

## Focus: Educational Engagement

**[Louise Banahene](#), Head of Educational Engagement, provides insights into the current focus of her team's activities and the value of the student success forums. Louise reflects particularly on initiatives that aim to equalise the degree classifications of BAME and white students.**

Students from BAME backgrounds are less likely to achieve a first or upper second class degree than white students. We aren't alone across the sector and, like other institutions, this can't be explained by grades or type of qualification before university.

Whilst there are sector-wide strategic initiatives underway across the institution, change will only come if it is accompanied by individual adjustments amongst us all alongside a culture in which both staff and students work together in partnership. We'll need to work at pace to achieve a rate of change that ensures students starting now will see gaps close and we have stretching targets that reflect this.

Our regular student success forum has been formed to support this and is relevant to academic or professional colleagues at all levels. Taking place every six weeks, on campus, it's a supportive environment bringing around 70 staff and students together to share data and qualitative research, hear good practice. Importantly, it's also an opportunity to discuss, network, reflect and identify areas for change. Speakers are staff with expertise in their field covering the research that underpins their approach. In addition to the BAME awarding gap, the forum has already discussed academic literacy, support for BTEC students and ways to maximise continuation rates.

Content covered in previous forums and relevant sector or institutional research are on a [Minerva organisation](#). If you use twitter, please also follow @Success\_Leeds.

The next forum, due to take place on 7th April, has had to be postponed. If you'd like to attend in the future or hear more please contact Louise Banahene or [Nina Wardleworth](#) to find out more.

## Regular Feature: PedR Focus

**This issue's article for the PedR Focus has been selected by Katie Livesey, Teaching Excellence Manager in LITE.**

This article is timely given the huge challenges facing universities, and the wider education sector as a whole, which have had to rapidly adapt in response to the ongoing worldwide crisis. With lecture theatres standing empty and campuses shutting down, lecturers will have to deliver their teaching remotely for the foreseeable future. This paper has been selected for its contribution to what will no doubt be a growing and vibrant discourse around online pedagogy in the coming months.

This recent paper has been written within the context of the increasing emphasis on online teaching being seen within HE institutions. Universities have seen delivering programmes, modules or parts of modules online as a way of responding to the changing landscape of higher education. Rising student numbers, the need for inclusive practice, changing student populations and the increasing competitiveness of the student market can all be addressed through the adoption of new technologies. Through an exploration of current literature the article explores pedagogic theories in the context of face-to-face and online group facilitation, drawing out comparisons and themes before providing a useful checklist for educators who are developing their own online teaching practice.

The authors suggest that the rapid speed of availability and the subsequent adoption of new techniques in delivering learning in an online setting is moving faster than the understanding of the new pedagogies required to deliver effective teaching. Tried and tested methods for imparting knowledge, based upon experience and reflection, are coming into question within the world of online delivery. A reluctance to shift from face-to-face teaching to online delivery is understandable. For many, one of the key barriers preventing them from making the leap to becoming a virtual practitioner is the perceived removal of the opportunity for interaction. How can that same rapport between students and teacher, and between student and student, be achieved if teaching is being delivered virtually and asynchronously?

Creating the desired environment which encourages peer discourse is important and the role that the teacher plays in creating 'social' interaction has been the subject of many studies. Online teachers ponder over the length of posts in online discussions, the nature of the content and the optimum point to interject within the discussion. Reflecting on the value of 'presence' is inevitable given the conundrum of trying to recreate in-class relationships in an online setting. The physical presence of the teacher in a face-to-face setting often goes hand-in-hand with facilitating group discussion. In a seminar/lecture setting the teacher can gauge the atmosphere, identify the key players within the group and work to create a safe environment which will give students the confidence to contribute and participate. The tangibility of a lecture theatre provides the safety net to 'directing' the students that a virtual classroom doesn't, offering a reliance on tried and tested pedagogies.

Relinquishing that ability to direct activity within a visible space requires confidence by the practitioner that the same 'direction' can be maintained in the virtual space. Practical suggestions for successful group discussions online include having a clear set of objectives for what needs to be achieved and for the roles of student and facilitator to be made clear from the outset. Online, it is often peer to peer support that encourages and

generates greater dialogue around the task, with the teacher only interjecting to steer the group towards the desired outcome.

This shift in how a teacher contributes to the direction of the lesson may not be an easy one for the practitioner to make and as the article suggests understanding how to achieve 'presence' and facilitate discussion will take 'time, effort, strategies and commitment'.

Right now there is an unprecedented urgency for all practitioners to be able to deliver their teaching virtually. No doubt the experiences will vary in terms of success. However, practitioners can now start to build their knowledge and experience bank to give them the foundations to practice and reflect and to develop their online pedagogy.

[The full article can be read here](#) .

You may also be interested in the [University's Online Educators Network](#) .

Comment: LUU View

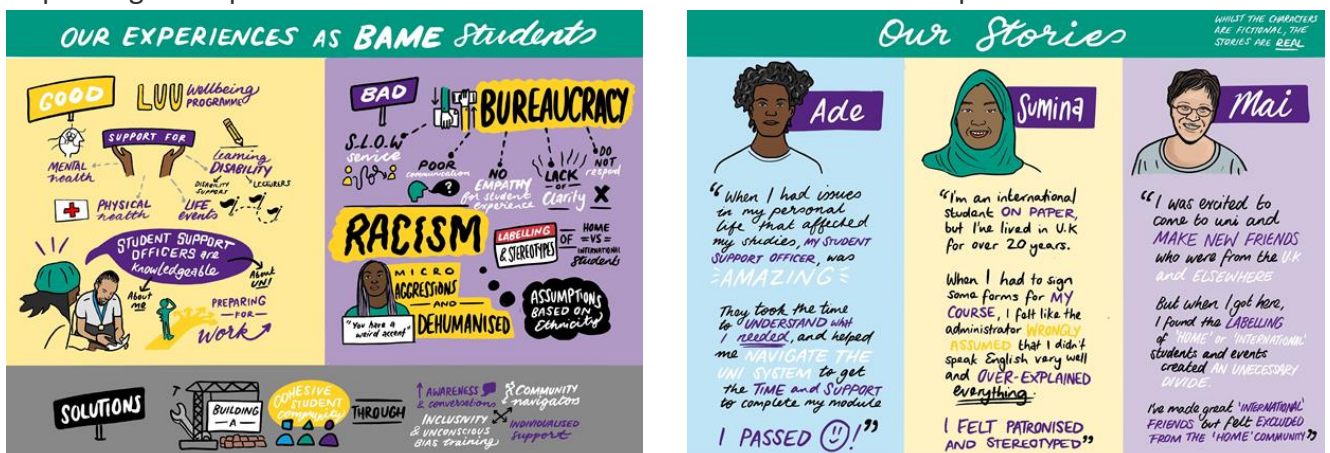
**As Education Officer [Abiha Khan](#)'s term draws to a close she provides an update on education developments across the University from the student perspective.**

We're already three months into 2020 and what a year it's been so far!

We kicked off this year with the iconic LITE Student Education Conference with a focus on Student Success. My personal highlight was getting to learn from so many inspiring colleagues who really showcased just how much our University cares about its students. Another highlight was [Dr Meera Sabaratnum's](#) keynote speech on Decolonising the Curriculum. Back in October, I ran two decolonising workshops - for Black History Month - inspired by Meera's project so it was an honour to meet her and to discuss how to extend the decolonising project at Leeds. It was a privilege to sit on a student panel alongside three inspiring students. I spoke about the individuality of success for students and how success is multifaceted as no one student views success in the same way. As a panel, we all stressed the importance of community and building a sense of belonging, with societies and other co-curricular activities playing a huge part in our success at University. Ultimately, student success is about how university prepares you for life and it has been great to collaborate with colleagues since then to innovate our approach to student success.

As a university community, we are responding to a rapidly changing and unpredictable set of challenges presented to us by the coronavirus crisis. I am confident that we can work together in partnership to meet these challenges and learn as we develop the solutions.

Digital resourcing and upskilling are part of the range of solutions we need to develop and implement. These provisions are vital for improving student accessibility but also help us to provide continuity when faced with a range of challenges, such as those being presented by Novel Corona Virus Covid-19. It's really important that we implement these technologies ethically and inclusively. We already knew that we needed digital enhancements on campus, not least because of the pedagogical advantages they deliver. But it's not a tool to be used 'instead of' but alongside other educational delivery. Since my election I've been pushing for improvements in this area and I will continue to do so. Despite an increased



demand for online delivery stemming from a crisis, I am confident we will all benefit from an increase in capacity of skills and resources.

In February I chaired an important and powerful panel discussing the BAME Awarding Gaps and how Universities must act to close them. We invited only staff members of the University – those people who are most responsible for creating and enacting change – and our panel was made up of inspiring higher education experts.

My goal was to ensure that our University community understood the complex issues which cause these awarding gaps, acknowledge their role in creating them, and feel empowered to create institutional change and break down the structural barriers that our students face.

We also worked with Nifty Fox Creative to design unique visual storyboards which articulated real student experiences – I wanted to ensure we had the student voice prominent in the discussion.

It is easy to get so fixated on data that we forget that there are real students with real experiences whose lives are affected by the decisions our institutions take. Laura Evans and

I helped BAME students to articulate their positive and negative experiences at the University of Leeds with a yearning for a cohesive community. The University has pledged to close the gap among all BAME students from 12.7% in 2017/18 to 5.5% in 2024/25. We can only reach this target through a thorough understanding of the challenges and an open approach to future dialogue.

Part of our discussion included rejecting the deficit model and how we can help students to navigate a system that is structurally designed to disadvantage them - moving them from the periphery to the centre of knowledge. The panel encouraged universities to take a much more proactive role in hearing the student voice continuously, especially through co-creation. We must not rely on the efforts of staff or students of colour as the panel discussed how they are already overburdened with the added emotional labour. Universities must dismantle our own structures and policies rather than interventions for students. LUU has been working in partnership with senior leaders in the University to help close the gaps. However, I want us to be truly sector leading in this and we simply cannot do this alone. We must have partnership at all levels to truly make an impact. I would highly recommend listening back to the event to play your part in this institutional pledge to close our awarding gaps.

#### **My other manifesto work:**

Alongside other activity, I am working with a team who are committed to improving the Joint Honours student experience in Arts, Humanities and Culture. Most recently we have successfully implemented deliverables to improve induction, frontline support, community building and timetable clashes. I have also been working with the University to create dedicated study spaces for our postgraduate researcher community. The provision of available study spaces for postgraduate researchers is not distributed evenly across the University. It is really important that we do more to make PGR students feel part of our campus - research has shown that researchers who can work alongside their peers form stronger social and professional communities and so are less likely to experience feelings of isolation commonly associated with research degrees.

#### **Lead LUU results:**

I've also thoroughly enjoyed supporting candidates for this year's Lead LUU. It was fantastic to see students from both undergrad and postgrad, home, EU and international backgrounds joining in the campaign. I was particularly proud to see so many of our brilliant School Reps taking the next step in student leadership. That was my journey and I cannot recommend my experience enough. Congratulations to the incoming Student Executive team!



[Find the results here](#)

### **Closing:**

The big news recently was the announcement of the new Vice-Chancellor! It was a real privilege to represent students as part of the recruitment process for this important appointment. I am really excited for the incredible Professor Simone Buitendijk to join us – she brings a wealth of experience in student education, inclusion and has an innovative approach to HE.

### Do you have a story for our next Student Education Bulletin?

If you have a project or teaching intervention that you would like to share, either through an article in SEB or through a LITE workshop, please do get in touch with the LITE team to discuss how we can help you disseminate your research.

### LITE forthcoming events – important update

Due to the ongoing campus closure caused by the Coronavirus crisis we are reviewing our events programme on a regular basis.

All LITE events throughout April and to the end of term have been postponed with the aim of rescheduling at a later date – or running in an alternative format.

Look out for further announcements regarding events.

Thank you for your patience and we hope to see you all again on campus very soon.

### Contact details:

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