

Widening Participation in Post-Graduate Teaching and Research

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UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

Executive Summary

We conducted an international review of the current barriers facing widening participation in postgraduate education and evaluated the global solutions.

A forward-thinking guide to widening access at postgraduate level

- ✓ **UK institutions have much more to give to widening participation (WP) at postgraduate level**
- ✓ **Sector-wide collaboration is needed to establish a gold-standard for WP student admissions, retention, and professional development**
- ✓ **Strategies such as Access to Leeds and the ongoing support of the Plus Programme should be widely adopted and evaluated**
- ✓ **Lessons can be learnt internationally from remote learning and the Covid-19 pandemic**
- ✓ **Universities should establish a WP student task force group who are consulted in any new policy decisions**

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- ✓ **Students should be involved in any decisions which affect a particular protected group and be sufficiently compensated (e.g WP students paid for their time assisting WP schemes)**
 - ✓ **Research into WP postgraduate education should be prioritised**
 - ✓ **Institutions should be aware of their postgraduate diversity where prospective staff and students can access this**
 - ✓ **Use of the term BAME could be replaced by PWER (people who experience racism) with consultation of the universities BAME population**
 - ✓ **Further research of disability disclosure and how neurodiversity affects students accessing support at PG level is needed**
 - ✓ **WP students may benefit from remote learning and increased flexibility of university courses (i.e part-time learning)**
 - ✓ **Postgraduate study may be more attractive to WP students if the university can establish meaningful links with industry (such as Black British businesses appealing to Black students)**
 - ✓ **Further research into WP at postgraduate level should be cautious to include all affected groups and avoid simply dividing into BAME v.s White or disabled vs. non-disabled**

Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| INTRODUCTION | 5 |
| DEFINING WIDENING PARTICIPATION..... | 6 |
| CURRENT LANDSCAPE | 7 |
| BULLYING AND BELONGING AT UNIVERSITY | 9 |
| DEFINING BLACK ASIAN AND MINORITY ETHNIC BACKGROUNDS | 11 |
| INTERSECTIONALITY | 11 |
| THE UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS POSTGRADUATE TAUGHT DATA..... | 12 |
| THE UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS POSTGRADUATE RESEACHER DATA | 15 |
| ACCESS TO LEEDS..... | 23 |
| THE PLUS PROGRAMME | 24 |
| UK SOLUTIONS..... | 29 |
| INTERNATIONAL SOLUTIONS..... | 32 |
| REMOTE LEARNING AT POSTGRADUATE LEVEL..... | 37 |
| NEXT STEPS FOR THE UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS..... | 39 |
| CONCLUSION..... | 41 |
| RECOMMENDATIONS | 42 |
| SEARCH STRATEGY | 44 |
| REFLEXIVITY, REFERENCES AND RESOURCES | 45 |

Introduction

Progress to widening participation at postgraduate (PG) level has stagnated in England. Much work covers widening access to undergraduate (UG) admissions, but challenges to PG transition, applications, offers, acceptance, and registrations have not been extensively researched. Private (independent) students were seven times more likely to be accepted into the University of Oxford/Cambridge for undergraduate study, and twice as likely into Russell group universities, such as the University of Leeds **(1)**. Although, detailed sector-wide statistics for postgraduate admissions are not as easily as available and are less fully-segmented. What is known, is that there are stark gaps in access to postgraduate taught (PGT) and research programmes (PGR). Future sector-wide data may expose further inequalities at PGT/PGR level.

In 2018, higher education England indicated that there were only 85 Black UK professors, making up 0.6% of professoriate **(2)**. In fact, white professors were three times as likely to be promoted to professorship than colleagues from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds **(2)**. If academia is to progress towards greater equity, institutions will not only have to ensure that PG admissions better reflect the diversity of the wider population, but that those from diverse backgrounds are able to thrive and belong within a university setting following their first degrees.

The Sutton trust has been campaigning for access to higher education for 24 years. However, resources have been focused on widening access to undergraduate admissions. In June 2021, they released a report acknowledging a need to extend help to postgraduate admissions as the competition for high paying jobs increases, un-helped by unpaid internships **(3)**.

This report aims to review the international literature on widening participation to postgraduate level (WPPG) and evaluate some of the international solutions to inequality that have been developed and evaluated across the world. Data on taught and research postgraduate involvement at the University of Leeds will be presented alongside the University of Leeds's intervention: Access to Leeds and the Plus Programme

Defining Widening Participation

Widening participation (WP) became of political interest in the UK in the 2000's when high-flyer Laura Spence failed to secure a place for medicine at the University of Oxford, after achieving 10 A*'s at GCSE at a comprehensive school **(4)**. This was further complicated by the 2003 University of Bristol admissions controversy, where admissions were biased *towards* state school students, which led to a brief boycott of the university by a number of independent schools **(5)**. The subject of WP is still controversial, and care should be taken to ensure that admissions policies are not unfairly disadvantaging other groups (e.g White working-class boys).

An absolute definition of WP is yet to be established among UK institutions. Perhaps it is an evolving concept which should be addressed on an individual basis. However, traditional WP has been 'working-class' students, first-generation (parents who did not attend university) and/or from a minority ethnic background **(6)**. WP can also mean increasing the number of students attending higher education. The University of Leeds Access to Leeds scheme, provides lower offers to those who meet pre-defined criteria and helps prepare students for undergraduate study even before they attend university **(6)**. Successful students must meet at least two of the criteria below.

Access to Leeds Criteria

- You're from a household with an annual income of £25,000 or below OR in receipt of 16-19 Bursary Fund or Discretionary Learner Support with an income threshold of £25,000 OR in receipt of free school meals during your GCSE studies
- Your parents did not go to university
- You attend a school achieving below the national average at GCSE
- Your studies have been disrupted by circumstances in your personal, social, or domestic life
- You live in an area with low progression to higher education
- You live or grew up in public care

Current Landscape

In 2015, six universities joined together to quantify the problem with WP PG (The Universities of: Leeds, Manchester, Sheffield, Warwick, York and Newcastle) **(7)**. The report, *Widening Access to Postgraduate Study and the Professions*, summarises the best estimate of PG demographics across the six northern and midland universities.

Widening Access to Postgraduate Study and the Professions 2015 Summary

- Those *without* PG degrees had higher salaries on average
- 80% of PG alumni were employed
- There were more Female PG applications, who were less likely to be offered a place
- Graduates with graduate parents were more likely to pursue PG study
- Over half of UGs were dissuaded from PG study due to cost
- Repeating surveys and inclusion of more universities is crucial

Four background measures were associated with disadvantage in transition to postgraduate study for consortium alumni: parental socio-economic class, parental higher education, school type and financial means. The task force subsequently recommended four areas for improvement; extending and improving information, advice and guidance; investigating postgraduate admissions policies and practices; and targeting support affordability (e.g. through scholarships).

Further progression of WPPG research is limited by the infrequent data collection in these groups and GDPR regulations, where a centralised system, such as UCAS for undergraduates, does not exist. In the academic year 2010/2011, students from the most privileged background were 2.3 times as likely to go onto PGR and PGT study than their WP counterparts (3). WP students are underrepresented at PG level, but students studying at a selective university were more likely to progress to PG (7). Parental socio-economic class, parental higher education, school type and financial means were all variables associated with PG progression. We know from previous literature that

particular groups within PWER are less likely to progress to PGR/PGT, such as Black Caribbean and Bangladeshi (8). Black students were also found to be more concerned about University debt than their White peers (9). Nonetheless, the inequalities in access to PG education do not appear to be due to differential aspirations (10).

Academia has made recent strides to tackle gender discrimination, most notably in STEMM, through the Athena Swan initiative. You can see which awards the University of Leeds holds [here](#) (11). Men were more likely to progress to PG level, but this varied by subject with men favoured in STEMM and women in education (7).

Barriers to PG included funding, and academic disinterest, and seeking employment; in fact, an estimated 50% of UG students were dissuaded from further PG study due to lack of funding. Students with higher academic marks and participation in university life were more likely to stay onto PG educations. Previous literature also warns of an attainment gap in PWER students and lower socioeconomic background (10,12,13). Future solutions could focus more on belonging at university alongside the financial support of scholarships. Scholarships specifically targeted at WP PG students in the six institutions were highly successful, where there was not enough funding to offer all applicants a place (10). Schemes aimed at WP students should be as clear and simple as possible, making it easy for UG students (and those mature graduates returning to PG study) to know that they are eligible.

The most up-to-date analysis of the barriers facing WP PG and the progress being made in the UK is aptly summarised by Dr Paul Wakeling et al., (June 2021) (3). The report details the issues behind tuition and maintenance loans for postgraduate students and leads the way for social mobility.

The Sutton Report June 2021 Summary

- Universities should extend their WP outreach (More summer schools)
- Financial barriers to PG should be addressed through centralised funding
- WP PG data should be published annually by all institutions
- A PG student was more *employable* (but not necessarily at a higher income) in the labour market
- Master's loans were successful in increasing WP PG
- Increasing PG tuition fees without financial help for WP students may damage the progress made
- Many students are dissuaded from further PG study due to rising tuition fees and living costs
- Universities and funders can do more to promote WP PG

Bullying and Belonging at University

Is it enough for WP students to be granted a place at university?

Student characteristics: mental health, disability, socioeconomic status, gender and sexuality and ethnicity, all placed them at risk of non-completion. Higher degree students were also at risk of attrition **(14)**. Unfortunately in 2006, it was found that the universities with the highest WP rates, also subsequently had the highest drop-out rates **(15)**. A sense of 'belonging' within the university is the key to retention and progression, where universities should aim to foster a caring, supportive and welcoming environment for a diverse student body **(14)**.

In case studies of 27 working-class UK students in 2013, working-class students tended to 'play down' the amount of work they had to do in conversation with their middle-class peers **(15)**. A WP master's student stated that she will "fit in fine academically, but won't fit in at all socially". The students also commented on how working alongside their

studies impacted their grades and academic career, stating “I just wasn’t going to reach my potential” (15). A common theme emerged, where WP students had to pick between fitting-in or standing-out. Universities must understand the unique challenges that WP students face not only academically, but how their previous identity can merge with the university community.

In 2009 it was reported that LGBTQ+ discrimination or bullying resulted in one fifth of these students taking time out of their course (16). 29% of transgender students specifically also had to take time out due to transphobic bullying or harassment (17). A feeling of “not fitting in” was the predominate reason for over half of LGBTQ+ students wanting to drop-out (18). Despite this, these students did find higher education to be a more welcoming place than the rest of the society. Nonetheless, the University of Leeds should strive to make LGBTQ+ students feel part of the community and provide specific support during postgraduate study. There is a major gap in the literature on *postgraduate* belonging among LGBTQ+ students. No data is currently available (from the University of Leeds or other institutions) to see the progression of this group into academia and professorships.

A recent report by University and College London in 2019 highlighted the barriers specific to Black female professorship (2). Accounts of Black women in higher education pointed towards a culture of bullying and racial microaggressions, with many feeling that they had to ‘prove’ their competence against their White counterparts (2). Shockingly, they also reported being ‘overtaken’ by White female colleagues who were less qualified for academic roles.

In summary, belonging at university should become a key part of student support programmes. Students who feel more acceptance and feel that they can engage with university life and their peers, are more likely to stay into PG study and beyond!

Defining Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Backgrounds

Use of the term BAME or BME has come under recent controversy for ‘othering’ people of non-white origin (19). Black communities face entirely different issues to those from Asian backgrounds. In fact, the UK Race Disparity Unit (RDU) do not use the terms BAME or BME for these reasons (19). Institutions remain largely behind on this movement. Therefore, caution should be observed when designing interventions to address gaps in ‘BAME’ post-graduate (PG) participation. Postgraduate outreach to these communities may be negatively affected by use of the term ‘BAME’ if they do not identify with this term (or even find it distasteful). For instance, a movement to recruit Black British researchers may be better served by allocating specific funding (‘ring-fencing’) for that group rather than aiming to recruit ‘BAME’ in general. How to market this in a way that appeals to different communities should be researched sensitively. Researchers have recently called BAME to be scrapped and potentially replaced with “People Who Experience Racism” (PWER), although an official agreement is yet to be reached.

“PWER” = People Who Experience Racism

Intersectionality

Intersectionality is the result of numerous disadvantages merging to create complex barriers (20). It is important for universities to keep the individual in mind, where WP students may face multiple challenges to pursuing postgraduate education such as (but not limited to); caring responsibilities, socioeconomic status, disability, neurodiversity, LGBTQ+ discrimination or minority ethnic group. Nonetheless data on how these disadvantages interact and result in student admission and engagement at PG level should be evaluated. Barriers that PG students face may be of stark contrast to those at UG level. For example, PG students may have further complexity with funding at PGR/PGT level. There is a gap in addressing this issue at PG level, where studies are scattergun among unrelated sectors, such as STEM and the arts (21–24).

Postgraduate Taught Data at the University of Leeds

- Data from 2018/2019 and 2019/2020 academic years on taught postgraduate progression at the University of Leeds
- Has not been previously synthesised by the University, unlike the postgraduate research data in the next section
- The general continuation rate for all Home/EU students was 92.4% in 2018/2019 and 91.9% in 2019/2020 for comparison

Effect of BAME at taught postgraduate level

- 89.5% of BAME PGT students did complete their course in 2018/2019. Of those who did not the largest reason for non-continuation was resitting, followed by personal circumstances. This was also echoed in the next academic year
- The number of BAME PGT students continuing dropped from 2018/2019 from 248 to 221 in 2019/2020 (although this appeared to increase the continuation rate as less BAME students were accepted)

Effect of a low-economic background (LEB) (20% most deprived neighbourhoods)

- 90.8% of LEB students did complete their course. Having similar non-continuation reasons to BAME students (resitting or personal circumstances). Concerningly, this rate dropped to 80.2% in 2019/2020 due to a variety of reasons, which could be related to the Covid-19 pandemic with lower-socioeconomic groups most affected
- Engineering and physical sciences was the highest area for LEB student drop-out with a 76.2% continuation rate

Effect of a declared disability

- 90.9% of disabled students did complete their course in 2018/2019 and 87.6% in 2019/2020. The main reasons for non-continuation were resitting, health-reasons and exclusion. A high exclusion rate in this category may indicate some misunderstanding surrounding neurodiversity among university staff, however, the reasons for exclusion are unlisted for confidentiality
- When separated into specific disabilities over the past decade, those with social communication difficulties (autism) had the lowest continuation rate of 80.8% (mostly due to having to resit). This suggests that neurodiversity support could be improved. The data also will not include those with neurodiversity who do not consider themselves to have a disability.
- For all categories of disability, the continuation rate was below the non-disabled student group except for those with a chronic illness or blindness.

Independent recommendations

- i) The BAME resitting rate at PGT level should be addressed, as this suggests that the attainment gap between BAME and White students exists at the University of Leeds and is the largest cause of BAME PGT non-continuation. The Plus Programme could develop specialised support for BAME students, who often have complicated personal lives (intersectionality)
- ii) University staff should receive regular training on intersectionality and the attainment gap in BAME students. Students should know who to go to for support if they feel they have been discriminated against.
- iii) Departments with a low LEB rate should investigate the reasons why these students may be struggling more than their peers and intervene early

- iv) The LEB data is somewhat unreliable, where only students from the bottom 20% deprived areas are classed as LEB- This should be expanded to include all students eligible for the plus programme- ensuring young carers and estranged students are included. The university acknowledges this
- v) The University should aim to understand why students may not disclose a disability, but also screen for neurodiversity in a non-offensive way. Specific support should be given to students who have communication difficulties.

Figure one provides an insight into the continuation rates for all subjects across all students attending the University of Leeds. Further breakdown of these subjects into LEB, BAME or disability is not yet available.

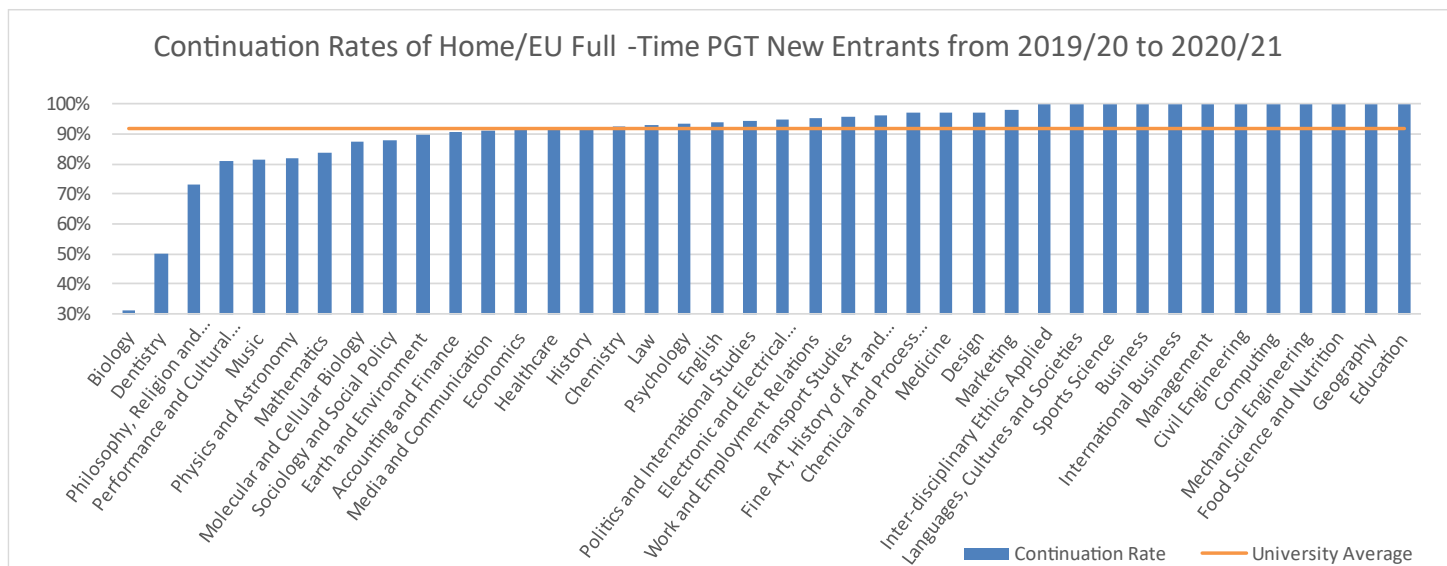


Figure one. Continuation rates of home/EU students from 2019 to 2020/2021. Reproduced from Leeds Student Success and Management Group (unpublished).

Postgraduate Researcher Data at the University of Leeds

- Data from the last five years 2017 to 2021 on postgraduate research applications, offers acceptances, and registrations was synthesised by the University of Leeds.
- Overall, the University of Leeds PG profile was similar to the Russell group average, although, acknowledged that internal targets should be set higher.

“The data show that where differentials exist in the PGR pipeline, the biggest leak in that pipeline is at the offer stage. For male applicants, and, especially, for applicants from minority ethnic groups, the proportions of applicants receiving offers were notably lower than for the female or white comparison groups, although remaining broadly at the offer level at later stages in the process” (internal University of Leeds data 2017-2021)

Barriers to collecting PGR Data within the University of Leeds

Collecting data at PGR level has many setbacks, and relies on the students being comfortable disclosing sensitive information. The following are reasons that the data may be biased and may not reflect the true student PGR body, which have already been acknowledged by the university. Further independent discussion on the limitations of this data is on page 18.

- 1. Information on ethnicity is not mandatory**
- 2. The categories do not match with UKRI**
- 3. There are currently only two gender options available**
- 4. Disability information is optional**

Admissions process proportions by gender

When dividing admissions data into gender, more males applied for postgraduate places than females. Registrations of females only overtook males in 2020/2021. It appears that the university is becoming fairer in terms of the final demographics of the PGR cohort, but, has further work to do in appealing to female students at the application stage, which was consistently poorer across the five years for women. Note how data on 'prefer not to say', non-binary, intersex, transgender students has not been collected.

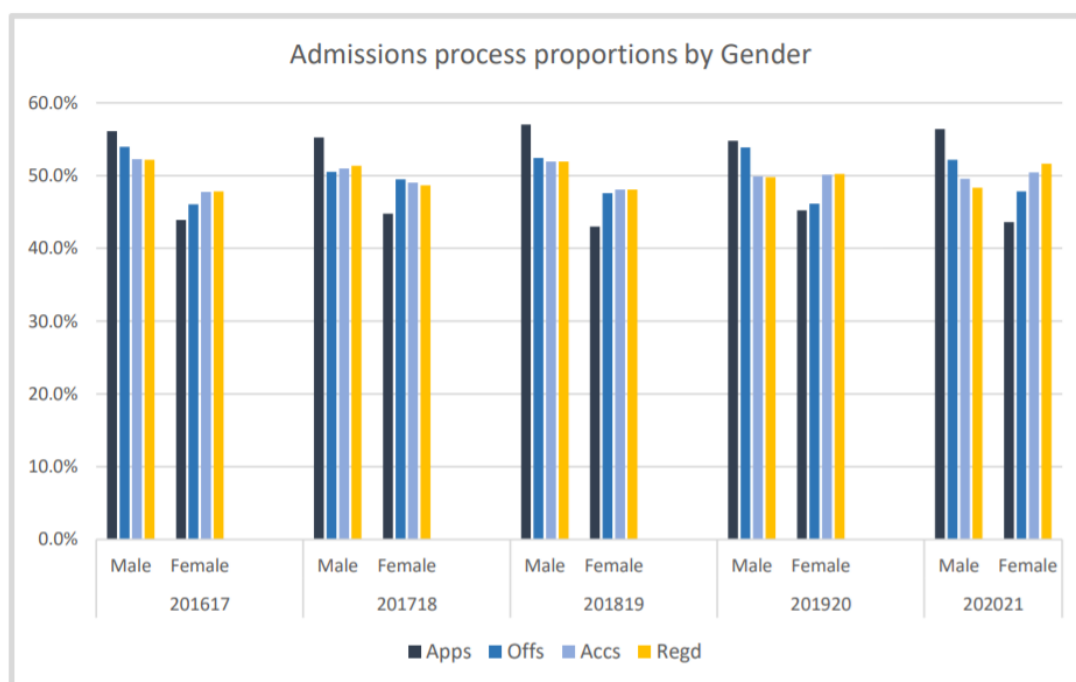


Figure A. Admissions process proportions by Gender. Reproduced from internal University of Leeds PGR data. Apps= Applications. Offs= Offers. Accs= Acceptances. Redg= Registrations.

Admissions process proportions by ethnicity

Ethnicity was summarised as White versus BME (Black and Minority Ethnic). The growth of BME students applying appears to be gradually increasing. However, the number of official registrations appears to have stalled. This is concerning as it may suggest bias against BME students within the application process. Urgent action by the university to address this discrepancy is needed.

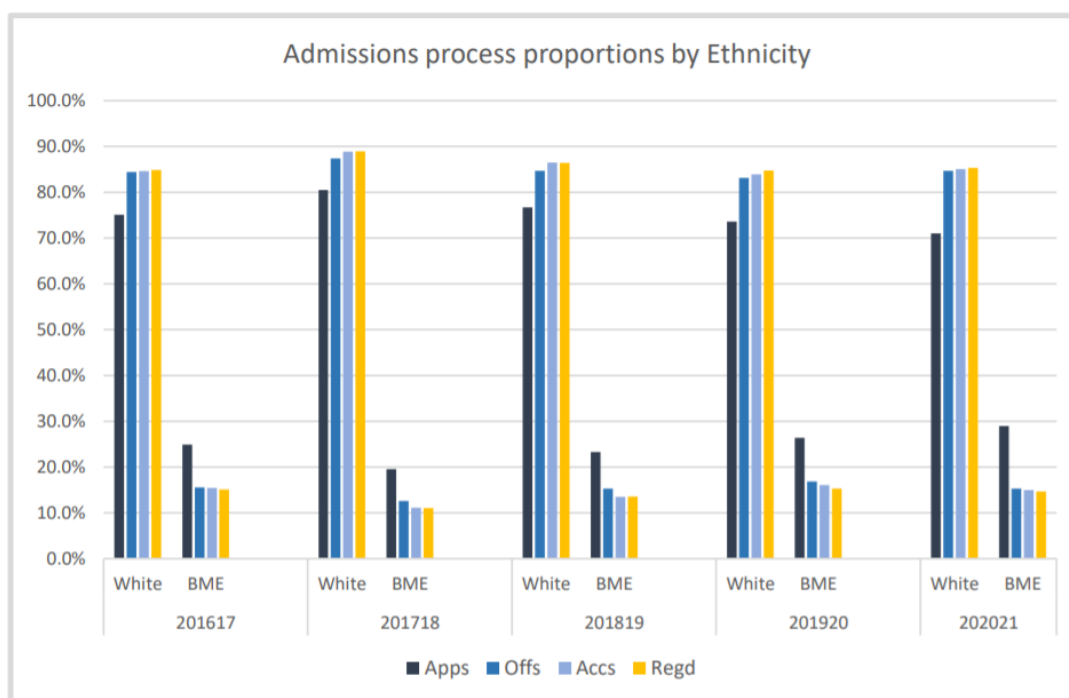


Figure B. Admissions process proportions by Ethnicity. Reproduced from internal University of Leeds PGR data. Apps= Applications. Offs= Offers. Accs= Acceptances. Redg= Registrations.

Admissions process proportions by age

Mature students (over the age of 25) made up 50% of PGR applications but were offered less places. There may be multiple factors affecting this including time of out education. More information is needed on why mature students were not offered a place, as this may be able to be accommodated by the university (Such as flexible working or child-care) to obtain a more diverse student body. WP students often have convoluted paths into further academia.

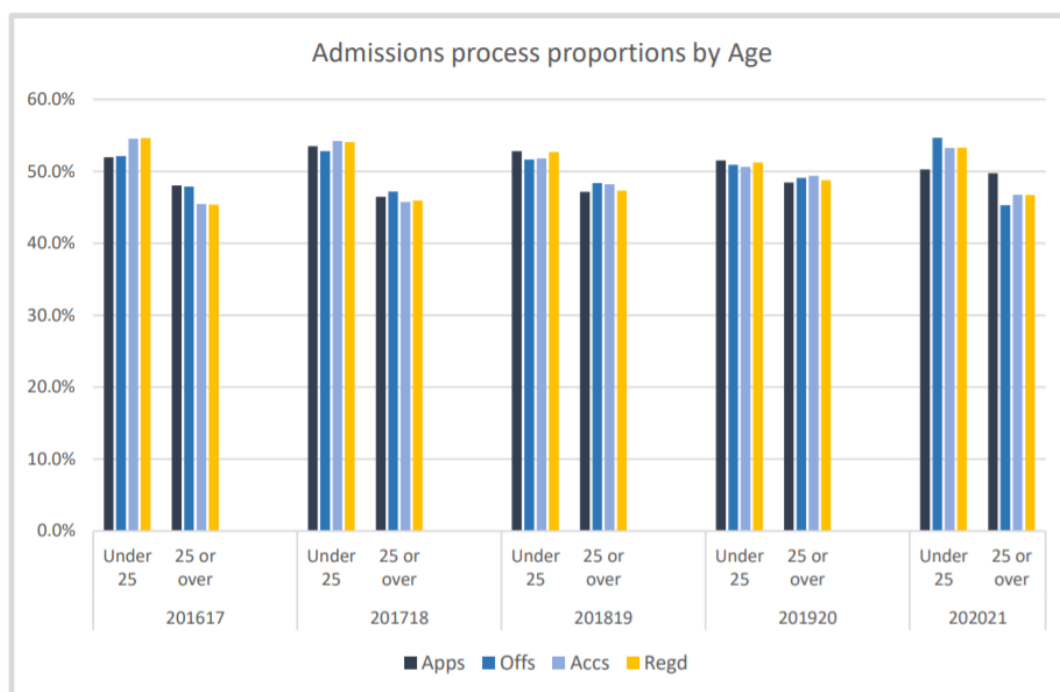


Figure C. Admissions process proportions by Age. Reproduced from internal University of Leeds PGR data. Apps= Applications. Offs= Offers. Accs= Acceptances. Regd= Registrations.

Admissions process proportions by disability

The vast majority of applying and acceptances were to non-disabled students. However, not all students may feel able to disclose their disability, or indeed identify as neurodiverse (not a disability, i.e ADHD or Autism). Disabled students who did apply did seem to be offered more places over non-disabled students, suggesting that disability is not discriminated against in admissions to PGR. Nonetheless, progression and feelings of belonging at the University have not been studied, which may impact this group.

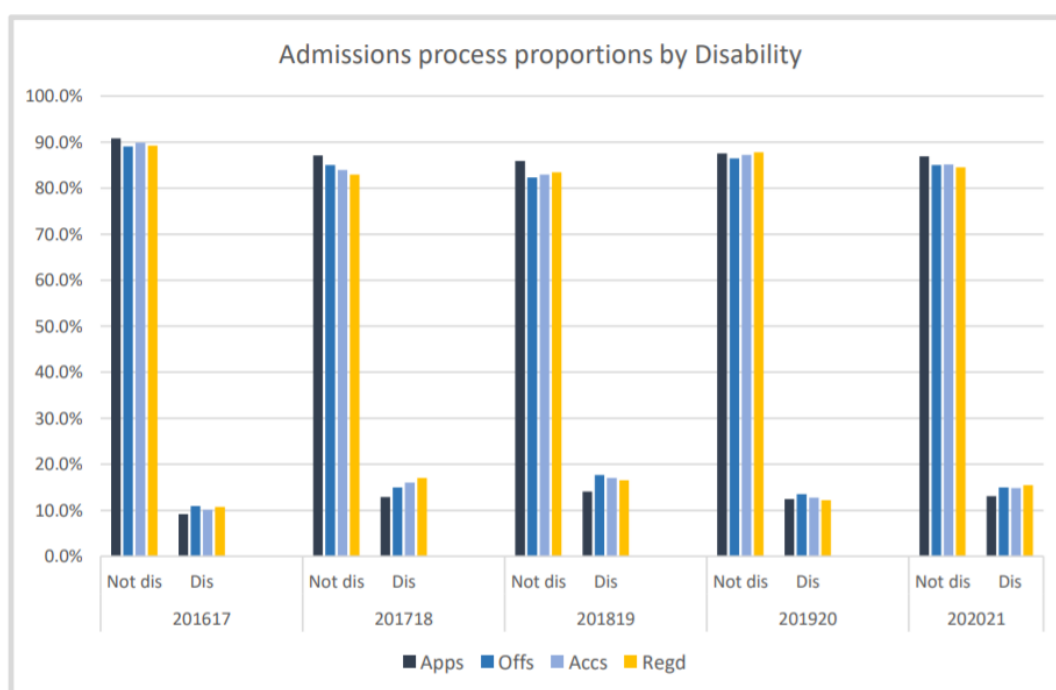


Figure D. Admissions process proportions by Disability. Reproduced from internal University of Leeds PGR data. Apps= Applications. Offs= Offers. Accs= Acceptances. Redg= Registrations.

Recommendations of the Task and Finish Group

These findings were presented to the Leeds graduate board in December 2020. The main finding of concern was that while BAME applications had been increasing, the number of offers had not in this group. The task force made specific recommendations for the University of Leeds to action.

- 1) Target setting to enable collective understanding of the milestones and aspirations for diversity in PGR study**
- 2) Development of approaches to contextual admissions and/or ring fence interview slots and/or scholarships**
- 3) Review and refinement of existing scholarship model to increase diversity and minimise barriers**
- 4) Evaluation of impact of changes made and embedded from the outset**

Further recommendations of the Task and Finish group (Non-independent)

I. There is a gap when looking at BAME applications and the making of offers for research degrees. The Group suggests that consideration of potential as well as academic achievement be included in our admissions criteria in the form of contextual admissions. This would require further work to devise what the criteria for contextual admissions look like in this PGR space.

II. Greater need to raising awareness of PhD opportunities to the BAME community through wider advertising such as via BBSTEM

<https://bbstem.co.uk/> and signing up to the Stuart Hall Foundation

<http://stuarthallfoundation.org/>

III. Recognising the importance of funded scholarships in accessing research opportunities, explore the potential for more routes for scholarship funding from both the university and externally sources (such Alumni, ESRC WR DTP and the Stuart Hall Foundation) via ring fencing.

IV. Revisiting and refining our PGR Web pages so that it reduces instances of assumed knowledge about the application process and presents clearer information, with enhanced step-by-step signposting, on: the research degree opportunities, how to apply, how to write a good application (including personal statement and proposal), what to expect at interview, what a PhD involves and the career opportunities available to those with a PhD.

V. Additional guidance and support in the application process through the introduction of a mentor role for applicants who may not have prior knowledge of PGR study.

VI. Engagement with target groups to co-create opportunities which prospective PGR students from BAME communities find beneficial.

VII. Offering summer placement opportunities to BAME students so they can experience research opportunities at the University.

VIII. When presenting the Equal Opportunities statistics to Graduate Board on an annual basis we suggest that additional columns are included in the spreadsheet that highlight the 'application to offers' conversion rate and the 'offers to acceptance' conversion rate so progress can be tracked.

Limitations of the University of Leeds PGR data (Independent)

There are significant barriers to obtaining PG data. Undergraduate data has the benefit of being collected centrally through UCAS, whereas institutions have their separate procedures and priorities for PG level. The University of Leeds has an opportunity to highlight these issues, and lead the sector to promote inclusion at PG level.

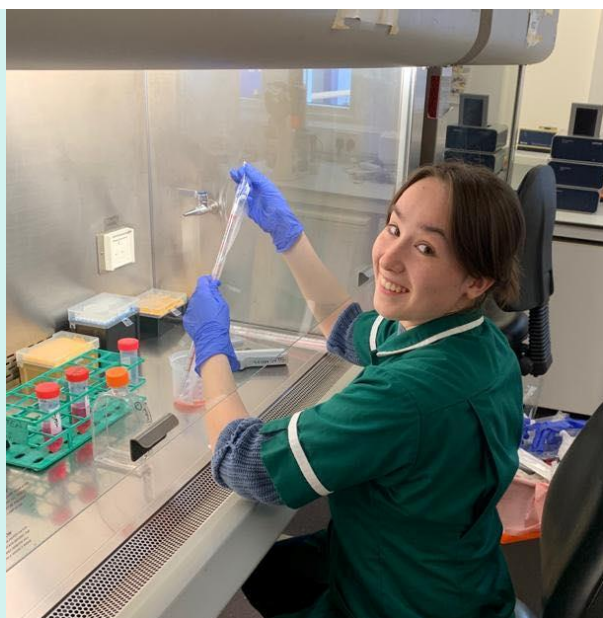
The data only included UK fee-paying students. Excluding international students may result in less diversity reflected in the analysis than is realistic on campus within university. Further investigation of international student applications, offers, acceptances and registrations is needed. The experiences of international students may also provide valuable information to the university, which may result in a more attractive environment for WP and BAME students in the UK. Little is understood about international progression from UG to PGR/T, and onwards to academia. Understanding barriers to international settling within the University of Leeds may promote more BAME participation beyond undergraduate and in professorship.

Disability requires further breakdown into its protected groups. Despite these students appearing to be more likely to receive an offer, we do not understand the specific barriers to different groups within disabled students. For example, those with autism face stark differences to those with dyslexia and ADHD. There is also the issue of disclosure, where students may feel that their disability/neurodiversity will be used against them. Prospective data on neurodiversity would help the university understand the differences at admission and also the support needed during post-graduate study, which could be followed-up through the Plus Programme (next chapter).

Furthermore, the statistics only included, gender, age, ethnicity (white or BAME) and disability. Offering only two genders may 'other' those from the LGBTQ+ community, where those who are non-binary may feel overlooked by the university and thus less likely to disclose their demographic information. There are more protected characteristics which would benefit from inclusion such as LGBTQ+, care leavers, estranged, mature, neurodiverse students. 'BAME' has also come under recent scrutiny, as the issues of the Black British community are vastly different from those from Gypsy/Traveller community for example.

Access to Leeds

Access to Leeds supports students through their transition into higher education. It provides an offer two grades lower than expected, for example, Medicine AAA to ABB. Student must meet two WP criteria which must be validated by a trustworthy source (usually a teacher) (25). To graduate from Access to Leeds, students must complete several modules on university skills, such as academic referencing and submit a short essay to a mentor in their subject of interest. This can be completed from home over a few months, giving flexibility to the student. A2L students often outperform their lower offers, showing the benefits that removing the pressure of offers can do for WP students. After satisfactory completion of the A2L pre-university course, students gain access to the Plus Programme support network. Disadvantaged students are caught early, and thus this allows the university to signpost resources to these students and prepare them for study at PG over the course of their undergraduate degree. It is important to note that students must be aware of the Access to Leeds application deadlines, which is some time before the start of the academic year, in order to benefit from the extra support and scholarship consideration. Continued widening access work is needed to ensure surrounding schools and those from deprived communities are aware of Access to Leeds and the availability of postgraduate support.



“I came through Access to Leeds and was welcomed to Leeds by the Plus Programme. They have supported me with their opportunity fund which gives up to £500 a year for any career opportunities I would not have been able to afford myself” – Penny, Medical Student

The Plus Programme

A UK solution to supporting WP PG students at the University of Leeds

The Plus Programme is a support network for WP students which provides resources, and career opportunities during UG and PG education at the University of Leeds. It is a long-term solution, that is in place for students throughout their time at the University. To gain access to the Plus Programme, WP students have usually (but not always) applied to the University of Leeds's access course, Access to Leeds. Students can also 'self-refer' to the plus programme if they feel they are disadvantaged, or their circumstances change. The Plus Programme has a weekly bulletin that provides students with different sections to engage in, such as career advice, career opportunities, counselling, activities, and events. This helps students to pick and choose what they engage with, as some opportunities will be more relevant than others. Scheduling social activities which a small incentive (such as a takeaway voucher) can bring students together for a guilt-free evening and allow students from WP backgrounds to socialise with others they may not have had a chance to meet. Plus Programme students can also claim for expensive membership costs for university societies, which previously may have been a barrier to starting something new. This aids integration within the university community, providing a 'home away from home'.

Student, Penny,
discussing how much the
Plus Programme and her
master's scholarship
benefitted her during her
Masters of Research year
as a WP student. As part
of a recent outreach
interview.



Penny Sucharitkul

Penny Sucharitkul
Medicine 2023

We asked the Plus Programme team a series of questions to reflect on their successes and how they could improve the service for the benefit of PG students.

How was the Plus Programme created?

The Plus Programme was created in 2014 as a result of the ever-growing number of WP students entering the University, and in response to non-continuation and attainment gaps between the general student population and WP students. This also, came on the back of the high numbers being recruited through Access to Leeds.

Educational Engagement supported means-tested scholars entering the University through the scholar support scheme. This was a programme of support throughout the student lifecycle, which included one on one support, group meetings, bespoke academic and social activities. The scholars involved in this programme, displayed lower non-continuation and higher attainment rates, compared to other WP students who were not in receipt of a scholarship or receiving the bespoke support from Educational Engagement. Therefore, it was decided to create the Plus Programme to provide on course for all WP students, with the aim of improving continuation, attainment, completion and progression rates of WP students.

How has the Plus Programme grown?

The Plus Programme has grown significantly since 2014. Since its inception there were 1,000 students, who came through Access to Leeds and/or UG scholars. By 2020/21 there are just under 5,000 students on the programme. Student may also self-refer to the programme

How does the Programme support students that go onto postgraduate study?

Students who are on the Plus Programme at Undergraduate level (i.e. all Access to Leeds students) are automatically enrolled onto the Plus Programme if they return to undertake a Masters programme at Leeds. This is both those who continue straight on and those who take time out between their studies. Students in receipt of the Leeds Masters Scholarship also benefit from the Plus Programme.

From 2021/22 we are also encouraging other groups of Masters students to self enrol onto Plus Programme via our self enrolment link on our website. These groups are estranged students, care experienced students, former young carers and refugee/asylum seeker students. Students who meet certain criteria for the Leeds Masters Scholarship but who are unsuccessful in their application for the scholarship (due to volume of applicants) will also be invited to join the Plus Programme if they proceed with a Masters programme at Leeds.

There is currently no equivalent of Access to Leeds at Masters level, but work is ongoing to identify students who meet WP criteria in the Masters space, and for the Plus Programme to be opened up to them.

Plus Programme run various sessions for Undergraduate students to demystify postgraduate study (taught and research) and for students to better understand the potential impact and benefits.

For the Masters cohort, a targeted programme of activity is delivered throughout the year for students including sessions on employability, social activity and a next steps mentoring scheme.

Do you support PhD students?

PhD students are currently not eligible for the Plus Programme, however, Plus Programme work with researchers when running sessions on PG study and as part of the next step mentoring, to support taught students with decision making about PGR.

How are you planning on improving the plus programme?

Key areas of focus for the Plus Programme in 2021/22 include: a project looking at student involvement and student voice; further work around access to postgraduate study and success for students who do progress to PG. Including work to better understand social class and its impact on students at Leeds and reviewing and implementing initiatives to support students from Asian backgrounds, to complement the existing offer for Black students on the Plus Programme.

How do you support specific student groups? (i.e disabled, neurodiverse, LGBTQ+, estranged, carers, care-leavers, minority ethnic groups...)

We are the dedicated point of contact at the university for care experienced students and estranged students. We signed the Stand-Alone Pledge in 2018 which shows our commitment to supporting estranged students and have since developed our work with this group. These groups of students are prioritised for our means tested scholarships and they are offered free kitchen and bedding packs on arrival (if living in university accommodation). Their up-front deposit is also waived, and we contact these students pre-entry with information and the offer of support during move in week. We are also developing an online 'guide' for these students with lots of info about university life and support. We have run social events for estranged and care experienced students including pub lunches and 'cuppa and chat' events and plan to create more of a formal network for these students in the 2021/22 academic year. During the pandemic, we

...offered these students one off payments at summer and Christmas to support them with essential costs, as many of them rely on part time work.

We don't provide specific support as such for carers, LGBTQ+, disabled and neurodiverse students, but we do signpost to support for these groups as well as sharing information about events and societies which might be relevant to these groups. We are also working closely with Leeds Union on their Liberation Project work which supports these groups.

As noted in the university's Access and Participation plan (APP), there is a significant disparity in the proportion of BAME (the term used in the plan) students attaining a 2:1 or above when compared with White students. One of the targets in the APP is to close the unexplained gap between proportion of BAME students attaining a 2:1 compared with proportion of White students attaining 2:1 or above from 12.7% in 2017/2018 to 5.5% in 2024/2025. In the Plus Programme we have run a Black Student Peer Mentoring programme in 2020/21 with around 40 students. First year students were matched with second year and above students from the same faculty and attended workshops and training with an external professional coach. We also ran a panel event with professionals all from a black or minority ethnic background which was well-received by students. In 2021/22 we will be running this again, alongside a series of workshops with external partners aimed at supporting students from an Asian background.

How successful has the programme been?

In 2020/21, 691 individual students attended an event run by the Plus Programme, which is an increase on the previous year. The non-continuation rate for Low Participation Neighborhood students at Leeds is 6.7%. The non-continuation rate for the Plus Programme cohort is 3.5%. We have received individual feedback from students who have commented that the Plus Programme has helped them feel a part of a community, helped them feel they belong at Leeds and helped them to stay on course despite difficult personal circumstance (for example, being estranged from their family)

How has the programme helped WP postgraduate students in their career prospects?

The Plus Programme has recently introduced a 'next step mentoring scheme' which pairs PGT students with a mentor in industry or academia. This scheme aims to help students to better understand the potential options for them after their Master's and be able to discuss this with an expert in that area. Various employability sessions are run for PGT students with the Careers Service, and more focus has been made this year on tailoring these for a PGT audience, rather than expecting PGT students to attend session primarily aimed at UGs.

Research has been undertaken to better understand the impact of PGT study on student outcomes, looking at things like their career and salary outcomes, perspective of employers and testimonials from PG alumni about the impact of study on their next steps.

UK Solutions to postgraduate widening access

UNITED KINGDOM



In June 2021 the Sutton Trust released a comprehensive report about the failings of UK widening access to postgraduate education (3). So, what are the potential solutions? The term "Solutions" in this report is defined as interventions which can be implemented prior, during or after PG study at university. A WP solution can focus on students or staff at an institution. The solutions to WP PG include both admissions, retention and progression into industry or academia.

Many universities provide essential means-tested support for master's study. Sheffield provided £10,000 for 570 WP students (2016 to 2021) to pursue PG study, which when combined with a student finance tuition loan, is a generous amount which should not just allow students financial security, but to also integrate into university life. A sense of belonging and participation at university has already been demonstrated to increase PG engagement and may convince students to stay onto doctoral study and pursue professorship in that institution (14). However, a key point of improvement is that these awards are only open to those who achieve a 1st class degree. We know that the attainment gap exists for Black students and those from lower-socioeconomic backgrounds (26). Leeds master's scholarship provide £5,000, which can make the difference between undertaking a masters and not; but, doesn't allow for complete financial security. Those who do not secure a Leeds Master's Scholarship may also be eligible for Leeds Financial Support, but this is approximately half of what a student would receive from a full scholarship. Manchester provides even less at £4,000 for PG study. Cambridge, Nottingham and LSE also provide scholarships of varying amounts.

Paid internships allow students to save money over the summer for potential PG study and build skills ready to compete for highly skilled jobs. Industry involvement can also allow students to experience the company environment and network with mentors. At the University of Oxford, WP students were invited to do an internship paid at £2,500 for six weeks, they have also started collecting detailed demographic data on PG admissions to help them make more informed interventions (27). The University of Leeds also offers many paid internships across all subjects, including internships aimed at WP students which contribute to the University's Access and Student Success Strategy 2025 (28,29). These internships were signposted to WP students through the Plus Programme, highlighting the importance of communication with the WP student body. One of the crucial factors in UG decision making to undertake PG study is how it will increase job prospects including higher salaries .

The University of Glasgow is leading on new WP initiatives where they trialled a unique approach to WP PG through assisting refugees (30). Refugees who had a professional or academic background in their country of origin were encouraged to progress their skills at the University. This allowed integration of the refugees into PG education and higher

academic professions rather than starting from scratch (30). The Glasgow Caledonian Summer transition programme has also been established for the sole purpose of helping autistic students transition into university life from school or other institutions (31). The programme accepts students who have disclosed a diagnosis of autism, but also students who identify with autism. This is a massive steps towards inclusivity as many disabled/neurodiverse students may feel that their diagnosis may be viewed in a negative way by university staff (32).

More radical strategies have been trialled by Nottingham anecdotally, where applicants applying to PG study had their initial undergraduate degree institution anonymised. But this was quickly met with controversy from academics. Perhaps implicit bias training towards previous institution could be introduced for academic recruiters. Nonetheless, more research is needed to be done to ensure that new interventions (such as anonymisation, recruiter blinding) do not bring about unforeseen discrimination.

NEON is an organisation which supports those involved in widening access to higher education and aims to best practice for widening participation at PG level. Their core message is that higher education should be open to all who are able and willing, not limited by their social background (33). They hold training and workshops for student support staff (or outreach staff) for specific disadvantaged groups including; mature students, WP students, disabled students, BTEC students, and how to set up mentoring (34). Of course, universities must first make the funding available to employ a team of dedicated WP support staff who can progress the admission, retention and graduate prospects agenda for WP students.

Overall, there is scope for UK interventions to take inspiration from each other through NEON or similar working groups. New interventions inspired from international WP PG solutions are discussed in the next section, which may be able to inform new ideas. Institutions should urgently fund and action research and their recommendations into WP PG education, as the rate of change for WP PG students has stagnated. Most importantly, these actions and recommendations should have insight from the affected stakeholders (including but not limited to: Black, Asian, Minority, Neurodiverse, LGBTQ+, Disabled, Carer, Care Leavers, Mature, Lower-income students).

International WP PG Solutions

What lessons can we learn outside of the UK?

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA



Historically, the African-American community of the USA were not allowed to attend higher-education and were segregated from White Americans prior to the civil rights act in 1964 **(35)**. Many universities put limits on the numbers of African-American students allowed to enrol **(36)**. This led to the formation of historically black colleges and universities- of which there are 101 today- making up just three percent of all USA universities **(37)**.

Today, race remains a polarising issue. Affirmative action in the American literature predominately focuses on race and ethnicity rather than UK WP (e.g lower income, disability) **(38)**. In 2010, only 7.4% of doctoral degrees were awarded to African-Americans, 5.8% for Hispanics and 7% to Indians/Alaskans compared to 74% of White students. In 2016, students identifying as White had fallen to 60%, but African-Americans still only took up 7.5% of all awarded doctoral degrees **(38)**. This may have been partly due to the introduction of the 'mixed' race category. Although diversity is increasing for some groups (Asian and Hispanics), the data suggests that a move towards banning affirmative action may hinder future progress **(39)**. The impact of banning affirmative action was shown to have reduced the numbers of under-represented students in Texas, California, Washington and Florida by 12.5% **(40)**.

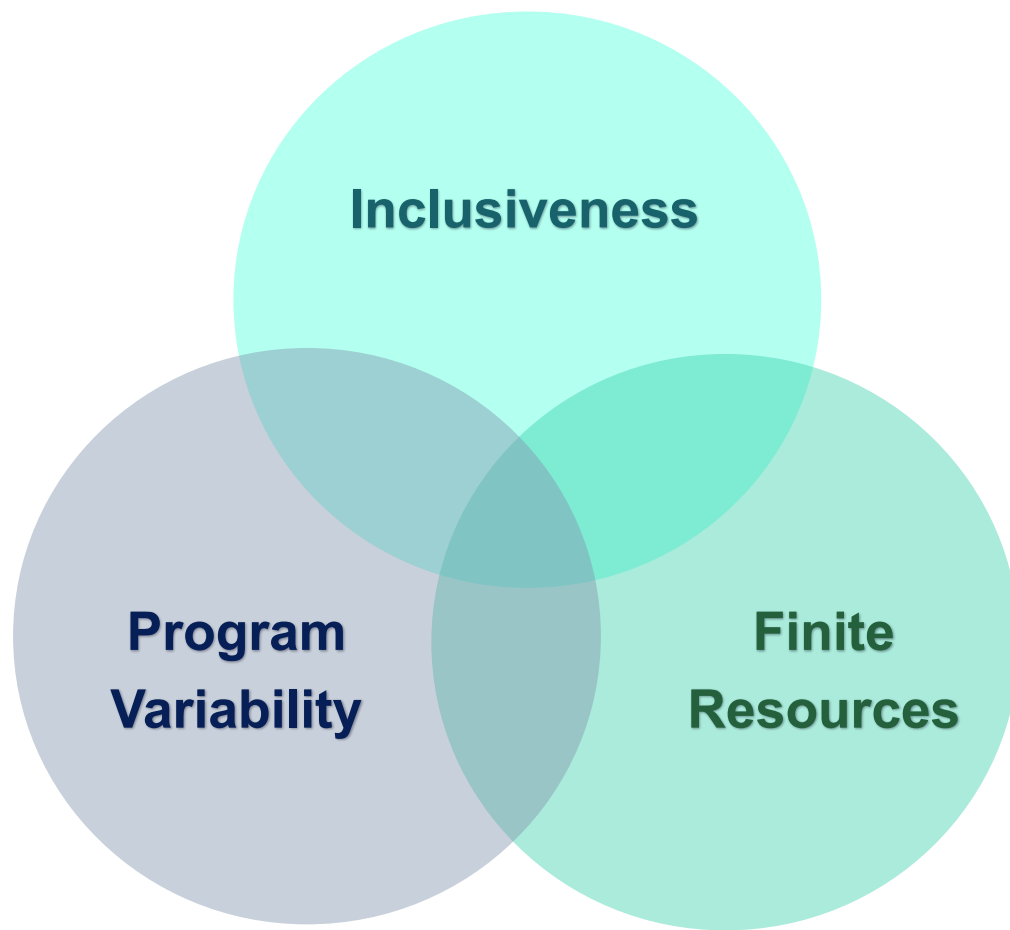


Figure one. Tripartite model for improving graduate school inclusivity. Adapted from Windchief 2019 (38)

Montana State University, USA, released a paper in 2019 focusing on institutional change within universities to improve the inclusivity of graduate schooling (38). Windchief 2019, presents a tripartite approach, see figure one. Inclusiveness relates to the growing body of evidence surrounding the benefits to WP at PG level. Program variability is the understanding that academic departments face different diversity issues and must be individual in their approaches. Finally, the realisation that there are finite resources in order to tackle WP access to PG education, for example this could be a limited number of funded scholarship places or a lack of WP academic support staff (38).

Lessons that Universities can learn from the diversification of the American Military

The USA military has a long-entrenched history of misogyny and racism. The army was traditionally used to dominate and suppress other cultures. In contrast, today they have the highest proportion of Black-Americans than historically White universities and large executive companies (41). The army has proven it is possible to do more to tackle historical discrimination through positive affirmative action.

Rather than focusing on lowering standards for the sake of diversity and inclusion, the army provide extra training resources and mentorship to those who otherwise who have not met the rigorous standards. This means that diversity can be prioritised without diluting the recruitment process, where WP recruits are brought up to the same (or higher) standard than their more affluent peers (41). Thus, they have demonstrated the benefits of positive affirmative race-conscious action can have. This contrasts with some university admissions programmes (Access to Leeds) which provide lower academic offers. A question remains how early universities would need to intervene to close the gap between their peers, but also in what way this would be done fairly. However, A2L students do not often need their lower grade offers and exceed these expectations; where lower offers are more about welcoming and fostering a sense of belonging early on in the WP student's university life.

Another significant aspect is understanding each department's diversity statistics and for this to implemented from the 'top-down'. Different sections of the military will have different diversity statistics, which is comparable to different subject areas in academia. We know that STEM has a historic issue with women in science and that nursing is predominately a female profession. This is not to state that the USA military has a perfect model of diversification, but that it recognises areas for future improvement. The military accepts that it still has more to improvement with regards to minorities and women in its higher ranks. Ledesma 2017, argues that a diverse university leadership is needed to begin to address student demands for a cohesive and inclusive learning environment (41).

EUROPE



Access to postgraduate education across Europe varies greatly, although, there are some strategies which appear to be having a positive influence. A European university in Greece trialled a post-graduate learning course with 40 female mature PG students, which allowed them to work flexibly from home **(42)**. The study highlighted the many responsibilities these women balance, include marriage and childcare. Mentorship was found to be key and allowed more of the women into the higher professions, who otherwise would not have had access. This alludes to universities changing their courses to fit their students, and being flexible with face to face activities.

In Ireland, students who did not meet the eligibility grades were offered an access-course before UG study **(43)**. The pre-university course was successful, citing 72% of WP students going onto pursue PG study when compared to usual UGs. This approach is similar to the Access to Leeds course in the UK, building on the evidence for universities to expand their pre-university access courses. Such courses lessen the impact of transition to university through extending access to support, allowing students more time to adjust to a faster academic environment and teaching students integral skills such as academic referencing. Perhaps more importantly, access courses can alert students to the financial support of scholarships, which often have deadlines before the start of the academic term. Fostering this transition and a sense of belonging compounds to increase the likelihood of WP PG study **(14)**. However, the contents of these access courses varies by university, where institutions should aim to share their access-course data to improve such courses. Students will vary in their pre-university needs, some may require help with academic referencing and others may require help with integration into university life; providing some choice for access students may help universities better understand their needs.

AFRICA (ZAMBIA)



Kwame Nkrumah University in Ghana, Zambia has been running long distance PG programmes since 2005, long before the chaos of covid-19 (44). They believe that online learning is the way forward for WP student engagement. They took a qualitative approach and synthesised the view of five of the staff members running the long-distance programme. Essel et al, recommended that qualified students should be taken on any time during the year and allowed to graduate any time of the year. That remote learning students should have access to university resources within their own community, and if possible a librarian to facilitate learning. Scholarships for the poorest students were also recommended to reduce their financial burden.

Meanwhile, at the University of Cape town in South Africa, managed to reduce the drop-out rate of Black students by over half through post-graduate support (45). The academic development programme offers both academic and psychosocial support and access to mentorship. It has many similarities with the Plus Programme at the University of Leeds. Within the academic development programme, is the winter school of the National Astrophysics and Space Science Programme, which recruits third year physical science students who are from historically Black universities or disadvantaged backgrounds into an honours bridging programme. Allowing them access to a career in astronomy or space sciences. Another programme also helps PG students to improve on their research writing capabilities and develop their competence as an academic tutor.

Remote Learning at Postgraduate Level

Covid-19

This year (2020/2021), remote learning has encapsulated many universities and students for better or for worse. Universities had to mitigate the shut-down of campuses and facilities, and still find a way to deliver first class education. Many features of online learning remain for the next academic year, with some universities opting to stick to online lectures; to some student's disdain **(46)**. Many postgraduates were affected by not being able to access laboratory facilities or physical library resources. Socialising and integration into university life took its toll and will inevitably have future repercussions for WP PG. A survey of 208 WP students at a single institution found that feelings of belonging had dwindled during the UK lockdown, and surprisingly half were opposed to continued online learning **(47)**. Student's views on how to enhance a sense of belonging in an online environment were unclear, where more research is needed **(47)**.

On the contrary, disabled students praised universities for finally providing extensive remote access to all their teaching resources and recorded lectures **(48)**. Many disabilities activists fear that this progression will be rapidly reserved after the pandemic **(49)**. Thus, universities must be cautious to retain lessons learnt from covid-19, but also to satisfy students who wish to return to in-person teaching in the face of rising tuition fee costs **(50)**.

Covid hardship funds were a response by some universities to help students suffering from the social affects of covid- which did provide some financial relief, but the sector-wide affects of the pandemic are sure to be far reaching. For instance, the Sutton Trust recently spoke out about the inequity of A-level grades between the state and private secondary schooling sectors, presenting their findings from over 3,200 teachers that "Parents of pupils in private schools or living in affluent areas of England were the most likely to put pressure on teachers over exam grades" **(51,52)**.

The Open University

The Open University (OU) has long been an advocate for flexible long distance learning, including at PG level (53). They have over half a century of experience running remote flexible undergraduate and postgraduate degree programmes. Their 'supported open learning' model encourages students to fit their studies around jobs, families and other commitments, while providing them with all the materials they need from home. Students still receive access to personal tutors as they would do at a campus university and can socialise with other students through course forums and conferencing. What sets the OU apart from other institutions is that they are a global provider of distance learning and heavily promote equal access to education and social justice. In fact, 26% of the Open University's undergraduates live in the 25% most deprived areas (54). 72% are working alongside their studies. They are also the largest provider of university education for students with disabilities, citing 30,791 students in 2019/2020. Barriers which may have prevented students from studying at a Russell group institution are also mitigated by the OU, with a third of students having previously achieved one A-level or below (54). Potentially, there is scope for the University of Leeds to collaborate with the OU to improve disability monitoring and student's feelings about disclosure of disability/neurodiversity



The Open
University

- Established in 1969
- Experts in flexible education
- Excellent WP track record
- 2.7 billion impact on UK economy
- Produces most UK law graduates
- Produces more CEO's than any other UK University!

Next Steps for the University of Leeds

The University of Leeds has taken steps in the right direction towards improving equity for WP PG students. The university should continue to fund and develop Access to Leeds and the Plus Programme, with increased links to diverse industries. A task force of diverse student WP representatives should be recruited (ideally from students on the Plus Programme) and paid for their time assisting with the University's Access Strategy goals. Any new developments should be consulted through the university's WP task force with dedicated WP staff members. A specialised disabled/neurodiverse student committee should also be founded and funded to address the university's issue with disability disclosure and access to disability services at both UG and PG level and be appropriately reimbursed for their time. If possible, the student body should be consulted about the use of the term BAME against PWER in official university documents and statistics through the Leeds Student Union.

Leeds University have proposed three bids for the Office for Students and Research England fund worth eight million pounds, to improve postgraduate research participation and access.

1) Generation Z

Led by Professor Iyiola Soyanka. "Gen-Z will deliver a series of interventions to improve the outcomes for Black female students through 3 phases of the PGR lifecycle (based on the Aurora Advance HE model". The main aim is to address institutional and individual barriers at different stages of the PGR life cycle through the delivery of a programmes of training and strategic advice that recognises the impact of intersecting inequalities on issues of access, success and academic careers. We hope to generate a long-term increase in the number of Black female professors in higher education institutions in England."

2) Yorkshire Consortium for Equity in Doctoral Education (YCEDE)

Led by Professor Pippa Chapman. “This ambitious project will deliver profound structural and cultural change in HE practices across a diverse set of Yorkshire Universities, thereby developing a beacon of best practice that can be shared more widely to enhance opportunities for postgraduate researchers of colour nationwide. We will bring together five Universities to establish a Yorkshire Consortium for Equity in Doctoral Education (YCEDE) that will provide new opportunities for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities to enter postgraduate research. We will adopt and adapt existing best practices at scale whilst developing systems-change innovations that re-shape institutional policies and procedures. We intend to fix the system and structural biases within rather than ‘fix’ the student. Evidence shows that shifts in representation are short-lived in institutions that focus on changing recruitment and admissions alone. Instead, our consortium will take a whole pipeline approach that will enhance the experience of postgraduate researchers (PGRs) during their programme. Based on the data from our institutions, we will develop bespoke interventions prioritising the different needs of under-represented groups. YCEDE will nurture and empower a strong community of researchers with the knowledge, confidence and leadership skills to impact the needs of a sustainable and fairer global society.”

3) EQUATOR: Building solid ground for racial diversity in Geography, Earth & Environmental Sciences postgraduate research

Led by Dr Jacqui Houghton. “EQUATOR aims to enact a step-change in access, participation and experience for BAME students across the student lifecycle in GEES (Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences; the three worst Physical Science subjects for BAME UGR student representation with very poor retention to PGR), leading to more BAME students in postgraduate research (PGR) and a more diverse workforce for the green transition. Specifically it aims to: remove barriers to and improve experience in GEES PGR for BAME students with interventions to increase PGR applications and application success, increase opportunity for work experience and for networking; increase participation of BAME students in PGR by increasing

representation, sense of belonging and retention, elevating research skills and careers awareness, and by promoting positive outdoor experiences; and, evaluate and promote anti-racist practice across GEES HE sector to deliver transferable insights for HE STEM/industry/policy.”

Conclusion

The UK wide approach WP PG remains disjointed to the detriment of students. Urgent action is needed particularly after the widening disparities in A-level achievements following the covid-19 pandemic. Institutions should include student stakeholders in any discussions and forward planning. The University of Leeds has already made significant advancements in this area, with help from the Plus Programme, but has yet to reach its full potential in supporting disadvantaged students. Support and further research should aim to include more protected groups, such as LGBTQ+, Neurodiversity, care leavers/carers, and division into ethnic groups as opposed to ‘BAME’ v.s White.

Recommendations

The recommendations made in this report should be further refined and discussed with a larger WP student body. The recommendations are not fully inclusive of all changes that are possible to improve WP PG at the University, but act as a starting point. The report had a time limit of six weeks to be completed. This report was written by an independent WP Plus Programme student who was exclusively funded by the University of Leeds, further reflexivity is mentioned below.

- I) The University of Leeds should aspire to collect further WP admissions and acceptance data on PGT/R students including but not limited to:
 - Intersectionality
 - Parental occupation
 - Sibling participation at university
 - PWER and all relevant groups
 - Socio-economic background (postcode, deprivation, household income)
 - Disability & Neurodiversity: Autism, Dyslexia, ADHD etc
 - PG Financial situations before, during and after study
 - Barriers to PG study
- II) The university should also encourage other higher institutions to share this data widely and the student body updated on this progress.
- III) An increase in PGT and PGR bursary funding places and continuation of the Plus Programme

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- IV) Students should be involved in any decisions which affect a particular protected group and be sufficiently compensated (e.g., WP students paid for their time assisting WP schemes)
 - V) Creating links between Black British businesses and Black students (and other ethnic groups), to improve employability and relevance of PG study
 - VI) The university should have an internal discussion with staff and students on the use of the 'BAME' term, evidencing appetite for a move towards 'PWER' People who experience racism.
 - VII) University interventions should also focus on WP undergraduate involvement in university activities as this is evidenced to help PG progression. (Ref brazil study)
 - VIII) University departments should demonstrate an understanding of their diversity and publish these figures to prospective students and staff
 - IX) Lessons should be learnt from Covid-19, with flexible working having many benefits for mature and non-traditional WP students.
 - X) Encourage other Universities to found their own Access to Leeds and Plus Programmes and learn from the reflections of the Plus Programme team.

Search Strategy

| Topic | Search Terms | No. Results, Database |
|----------------------------|--|-----------------------|
| Overall | (Postgrad* OR Post-grad* OR Master* OR Doctoral OR Graduate school OR PhD Student* OR Taught postgrad* OR postgradaute research) AND (Widening Participation OR Widening Access) AND (Outreach OR Low income OR Minority OR widen* access OR BAME OR Diversity OR Disability OR LGBT OR low socio-economic OR Carer) NOT (undergrad* OR Under-grad*) | 142 Google scholar |
| Overall | (Postgrad* or Post-grad*) AND (Widening Participation OR Widening Access) AND (Outreach OR Low income OR Minority OR widen* access OR BAME OR Diversity OR Disability OR LGBT OR low socio-economic OR Carer) | 299 Google Scholar |
| Working Class | (Postgrad* or Post-grad*) AND (Widening participation OR Widening access) AND (Low income OR low-socioeconomic OR Low socioeconomic OR Poverty OR depriv* OR Working class OR free school meals OR lower class) | 495 Google Scholar |
| Disability/ Neurodiversity | (Postgrad* or Post-grad*) AND (Widening participation OR Widening access) AND (Disability OR Carer OR Autism OR Dyslexia OR Neurodivers* OR learning difficult*) | 419 Google Scholar |
| LGBTQ+ | (Postgrad* or Post-grad*) AND (Widening participation OR Widening access) AND (LGBTQ*) | 133 Google Scholar |
| BAME | (Postgrad* or Post-grad*) AND (Widening participation OR Widening access) AND (BAME OR Black African OR Asian OR Mixed Race OR Minority OR Traveller* OR Gypsy OR International) | 357 Google Scholar |
| Estranged/ Care leavers | (Postgrad* or Post-grad*) AND (Widening participation OR Widening access) AND (Estranged OR Independent Student OR Care leaver*) | 55 Google Scholar |

Databases

Google scholar was the predominate data base used for this rapid review. Articles that were selected were international in scope and were relevant to WP at PG level or had lessons from UG which could be applied at PG level. PPJS was the primary investigator. To further widen the search for relevant literature which could not be identified by advance searching was found using 'Connected papers' visual software (55).

Reflexivity and Acknowledgements

Penelope PJ Sucharitkul is a fourth-year medical student at the University of Leeds. She comes from a mixed White and Asian (Thai) background and is from a single-parent working-class family. She was a young carer for her dyslexic father and grandmother during her schooling. She has interests in widening participation at university having come through Access to Leeds and been a Plus Programme student for four years. She was recruited and mentored by her supervisor, Professor Luke Windsor, Dean of the Doctoral College at the University of Leeds.

Professor Luke Windsor is Dean of the Leeds Doctoral College and is responsible for leading on Access and Student Success as it relates to Postgraduate Research at the University of Leeds. He has previously been a Deputy Dean (Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Cultures) and a Pro-Dean for Student Education. His active involvement in equality work began through engagement with Access to Leeds, where he presented talks on positive action in Higher Education to incoming taught students, and since then he has been active at Faculty and University work in relation to gender and race equity in particular.

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