



Partnership in Action at the University of Leeds Lifelong Learning Centre

middle ground

The Lifelong Learning Centre provides a tailored service offer to all mature Undergraduate students at the University of Leeds (any student aged 21+ when they commenced their programme).

This poster will focus primarily on our flagship Middle Ground Network Project but there is also a spotlight on our Mature Student Advisory Board.

Mature Student Advisory Board (MSAB)

- Formed October 2021
- 15 paid student members
- 4 meetings per academic year (online)
- Facilitated by the University of Leeds Lifelong Learning Centre
- Created to elevate and formalise Mature Student Voice at the University
- Representation from across faculties & diversity of mature students at Leeds
- 3 staff chairs (acting as facilitators)
- Partnership Award Winners 2022

Middle Ground Network

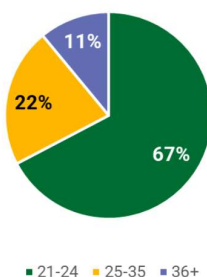
- Born out of feedback from MSAB & Mature Student Mystery Match-Ups Buddy Scheme
- Launched December 2022
- Funded by alumni donations through the Footsteps Fund
- Collaboration between Lifelong Learning Centre, Student Success Unit and Leeds University Union
- Events & activities to increase Sense of Belonging for younger mature students
- Co-Created with students, for students - Employed 5 Engagement Coordinators
- Overall Partnership Award winners 2023



Why?

- Younger mature students make up the largest proportion of mature Undergraduate students at the University of Leeds however, have not traditionally engaged with activity tailored towards supporting mature students. Given this, we felt that a project of this nature would be greatly beneficial
- Feedback from students such as "I'm finding it a little difficult to find friends around my own age at the minute. I'm 28 and find most people either seem to be 18 or c. 40+"
- Our objectives focused on increasing opportunities for social interaction between this group of students both in person and virtually, and through this developing a richer understanding of the needs and preferences of younger mature students

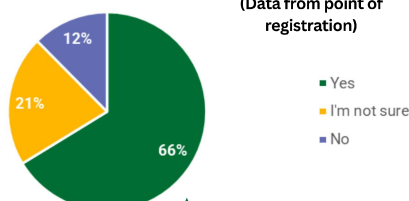
Mature Student Age Breakdown University of Leeds (22/23)



Data extracted August 2023 - Undergraduate, FT & PT, Home & international

Only 1 in 3 agreed with the statement (agree, or strongly agree) "I feel a sense of belonging at the University of Leeds". The majority fell in the middle with a neutral response.

Do you feel that your age has impacted your sense of belonging at the University of Leeds?



(Data from point of registration)

Only 22% of students agreed with the statement "I have peers at the University of Leeds who share the same life experiences as me".

How?

- Partnership and student voice at the core: recruited paid students from the target demographic to lead the project, involved different teams at the University including the Students' Union for activity delivery and created institutional buy-in through collaboration on the proposal
- We embedded pre-evaluation questions into the network registration form to gather baseline data and to draw out student preferences for the types of events and activities we should be offering
- Student ownership throughout - name, branding and activities
- Ongoing partnership with students, consistently allowing for feedback and adapting things as we go

Impact

- Now have 169 registered students - 40% attended at least one event over the academic year, and 18% had some form of sustained engagement
- We ran a real variety of events through the year, in different spaces and at different times of day and days of the week to cater for everyone's timetables and commitments
- After each event we shared a post-event survey, 96% said that they felt the event had strengthened their sense of belonging at the University of Leeds
- 83% said they'd keep in touch with students they met at the events



Evaluation

- There was a 21% increase in those who agreed with the statement "I feel a sense of belonging at the University of Leeds" compared to pre-engagement survey responses
- There was also a 21% increase in those who agreed with the statement "I feel part of the student community at the University of Leeds"
- When asked if being a part of the Middle Ground Network had impacted measures of belonging, 76% agreed evidencing the positive impact of the network

"I am very glad it exists as I feel like it fulfils an area of support and community that is truly lacking at the university."

Conclusion

Partnership has been key to the success of this project!

All of the student Engagement Coordinators agreed that being involved in the project had increased their sense of belonging at the University, and that the co-creation aspect was an important part of the project. Everyone agreed that staff and students shared the same vision and values. Students credited the authenticity of the project, "This wasn't a box-ticking exercise, there was real determination to help and support mature students."

Has this event strengthened your sense of belonging at the University of Leeds?



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What Next?

- Putting together a detailed report to share across the sector
- Embedding the successes from the project into our work going forward at the centre
- Booked events in for next year
- Hoping to hire a student again to ensure that student voice remains at the core of this project
- Created a welcome guide for younger mature students, Written by our engagement coordinators
- Aiming to increase engagement with regular programme of events and activity



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