# Belonging: Case Studies

The transition to university can be a an exciting but also nerve-wracking time for new students. From meeting new people to getting to grips with academic literacy, there’s a lot to take on, and supporting students with this can really make a difference.

‘When I was transitioning to university, what helped me was getting to know others on my course, or even just in the same year around the university. Joining societies was crucial to my social life and getting to know others who had the same interests as me made sure I wasn’t isolated.’

It’s easy to feel alone in a new environment, but by supporting students with accessing support, whether it’s via the LUU, their School or through teams such as the Plus Programme, you can really help them feel part of the University community.

'By accessing support from the Union, and through membership of societies, it really helped combat those feelings of being alone. The Plus Programme was also essential in helping me feel welcome.  Them keeping contact with me always made me feel like I was part of a community.’

And it’s not just about meeting new people.  The step up to university standard work can be a challenge for many students.  Academic and Support staff can really support here by offering guidance and advice and reaffirming to the student that they deserve to be here.

‘I really struggled with academic writing in my first year. It felt like I wasn’t progressing.  It was really demotivating, and it felt like it would never get better. But it did. I had a meeting with my Personal Tutor and Student Support Officer which gave me the boost I needed.'

What may sound simple to us, could be a big deal for a student, from planning their route to the university or navigating the campus once here.  Knowing your way around can really help in feeling confident and comfortable in one's surroundings, as can a degree of flexibility from lecturers, especially in the first few weeks.

‘The main support I needed was knowing my way around the campus, it was a completely new place and not easy to navigate.  I used the University of Leeds app which allows you to be able to click into each class you have, and it will give you the location on a map.  Lecturers also allowed extra time to get to classes at first and are all understanding that you are new and are still finding your feet. I also took this as an opportunity to make friends in my class as I would ask if they knew where classes were and walk with them.’

Personal Tutors play a crucial role throughout a student's time at university and beyond, from supporting with academic progress to signposting to careers guidance or co-curricular opportunities.  They are also likely to be one of the key members of academic staff that a student will turn to if they are feeling stressed or anxious.  It shouldn't be underestimated how important a role it plays in a student’s journey.

‘A high of university was being able to secure a volunteer role.  This was through the support of my personal tutor who helped guide me through the application process and gave me the confidence so that I was able to believe in myself.  I found that through university I have been able to come to my tutor with anything and they would do their best to solve it.’

‘I was a bit unsure about how different studying would be at university and what I would say helped me, was speaking to my tutor who offered me advice on how to structure my learning.  It really helped me talking to my personal tutor about my concerns, and he was able to guide me and direct me to the appropriate services in the university.’

‘Most of my support comes from my Personal Tutor.  What’s great about having a personal tutor is that they know exactly the academic issues that I may face and are able to help with their vast experience around the subject matter.’

Supporting students in being sociable and meeting like-minded people are key elements of the Sense of Belonging Toolkit.  Engaging with and developing bonds with others will be a major worry for students, but when this happens successfully, it can have a truly positive effect on their university experience.

‘To expand my social circle I decided to attend taster sessions for things I was interested in but not particularly good at! It’s nice to know that other students are also struggling but are managing to cope.  One thing I wish someone had told me was just to show up to things. If you show up at an event, someone’s going to talk to you.’

‘I had feelings of imposter syndrome – that I didn’t belong - I thought that I was the only person who felt this way, and it is a really lonely way to feel. However, my personal tutor directed me to the Lifelong Learning Centre (LLC) and there I found lots of students like me; Mature, non-traditional students - it was very comforting to know that I wasn’t the only one.’

There’s a wide range of the services and opportunities available at Leeds to support students with settling in, managing challenges and making the most of their time here.  Knowing when and how to access them is one of the most important aspects of being a successful student but can also be a challenge too!  If you can help students understand what’s available and how they can access it, you’ll be playing a big part in making them feel positive about their experience at Leeds.

‘I took advantage of the Student Counselling and Well-being service, and their support has been invaluable. They are extremely friendly, and quick to help, so that you are not left feeling stranded; this is the attitude I have found with everyone I have asked for help from at the university, which boosted my confidence in accessing support!’

‘Getting involved with LEAP (Leeds Excellence in the Arts Programme) has been an incredible experience! It has given me a platform to speak about the things I am passionate about, which has been so important to my confidence; being able to utilise my voice with people who are interested in what I have to say. It has given me an independence of thought, whilst also introducing me to people who are like-minded and exceedingly friendly, which has felt like the best of both worlds.’

‘Getting the most of university through extra-curricular activities really has changed my life. The immediate benefits were about having a good social time, but it’s also helped me get out of my comfort zone.’