

## **Student Futures Manifesto Theme 1: Support for Students before they reach university**

**Samuel Orman-Chan**  
Student Consultant

### **Overview**

Before Students Reach University, they have many Questions, such as “Where Will I live?” or “What do I need to know before I start my Degree?”. This paper seeks to provide some recommendations to assist in resolving some of these questions.

Since the COVID-19 Pandemic, the issue of Student Preparedness had become especially acute, with many students having suffered from significant disruption to their education. As such, ensuring they feel and know they are prepared as much as possible for university life is essential to ensure a smooth transition to further study. Therefore, this document contains both information & suggested resolutions regarding Support for Students before they reach University.

### **Introduction**

Following the COVID-19 Pandemic in 2020 and 2021, the UPP Foundation commissioned a report with the express function to mitigate and reverse the effects the Pandemic had caused on Higher Education. This became the Student Futures Commission and has resulted in Universities across the UK commissioning Student Futures Manifestos.

The University of Lincoln and the University of Lincoln Students' Union have together commissioned 6 Students working with Staff to create a Manifesto for the University.

This report handles Theme №1 — Support for Students before they reach University.

### **Methods**

To create the report, a number of surveys were issued. This report will focus primarily on data gathered from the second survey which had a significantly higher response rate than the first survey issued.

Following the conclusion of the second survey, a number of focus groups were held. They were held digitally and in the case of the theme 1 & 4 Focus Group, only fielded 3 volunteers. Despite this, the focus group was productive and useful information was able to be gathered.

Throughout the whole process each student was assigned a staff pairing to assist with the gathering of information, the checking of information validity and to provide a staff perspective on the project.

### **Results**

To begin, the survey asked which resources students used when preparing to attend the University of Lincoln. By far the most popular resource (with 88% of Survey Two respondents stating they had used it and found it useful) was the University of Lincoln's Website. This was closely followed by the Students' Union's resources with 79% of students stated they had found useful. By far the least useful, according to the survey's respondents was a service called “Umii” which appears to no longer be in use by the university but at the start of the 2022/23 Academic Year was being promoted as a platform students may use to socialise with fellow students at the University. Umii had been said to have been

useful by 14% of respondents overall. However, this was higher among International Students (at 25%), but they made up only 30% of Survey Respondents. Additionally, students reported that the information available did not always provide an accurate reflection of the teaching methods and expected pre-requisite knowledge for the course. This was especially acute with regard to coding and computing, where it has been suggested (during the Focus Group Session) that “summer micro-credentials” may be beneficial to aid students in transitioning to University Study. Furthermore, a Master’s Student commented that they would like to have information on the connection between their individual modules and employability (again reported in the Focus Group).<sup>1</sup>

International Students further reported that International Agents frequently had sub-par information and the University Website proved to be far more accurate and reliable, however they still felt that the website needed additional information, again based on Survey Two’s data.

Offer-Holder Days were noted to be more valuable and informative compared to Open Days (based on the Survey Two Data). With students citing that Open Days lacked details that was later given during offer-holder days.

For additional detail regarding the survey data, an abridged version of survey two results has been placed at the end of this document. Survey one results whilst highly detailed are unfortunately largely excluded from this report owing to the extremely small sample size of the survey thereof.

## Recommendations

### Micro-Credentials

#### Summer Micro-Credentials

To create a series of ‘micro-credential’ programmes in order to allow prospective and incoming students to build up their understanding of the expected knowledge, identify gaps in said knowledge and potentially allow academic staff to establish a baseline of academic knowledge of a cohort.

Given the complexity in producing academic syllabi, and the additional work in optimising a micro syllabus for online/remote use, this recommendation would likely have to be piloted for a number of programmes over the next 4 years to establish whether or not it is beneficial. A suggestion would be for 2 schools in each of the two new colleges to be selected to run this as a pilot in the next 4 years. With a decision on efficacy taken after 4 years of trials to establish if the micro-credentials had any effect, as to allow for a minimum of two cohorts to graduate and thus assess the impact it [the micro-credential programme] had on academic performance.

#### Orientation & General Micro-Credentials

Given that Micro-Credentials were frequently raised across multiple survey areas, consideration should be given for employability, extra-curricular & orientation micro-credentials. These may consist of courses in effective note taking, shorthand, ICT Skills, interview skills or more abstract areas such as pedagogy and other areas with indirect or no direct relation to a student’s specific study requirements but as to enhance their academic journeys instead. Orientation Micro-Credentials could also be promoted, especially for international students to allow them to improve their English Language Skills, help them understand University Policies or generally adjust to the UK before and during their arrival.

---

<sup>1</sup> A transcript of the Focus Group was computer generated and as such, direct quotes will not be provided owing to the quality of Microsoft Teams Transcription being relatively poor for the purposes of this document.

## Hubs

To provide a pair of centralised ‘hubs’ for preparation for commencing University Study. These hubs would be prominent on the University Website’s Homepage ideally, with links to (not exhaustive):

- Student Life
- Course Pages
- Students’ Union
- Online Prospectus
- Official University Social Media

A hub page for Home Students would likely be relatively easy to implement and as such a 2-year time frame would be suggested with the use of website analytic software to establish the efficacy thereof.

Additionally, human translated articles in foreign languages (an International Hub), like Mandarin Chinese (Putonghua), Spanish or Urdu may be of benefit to international students who speak English as a second language. These articles should explain processes, like international admissions, settling in the UK (Visas etc), the SU’s ISA (International Students’ Association) and information about integrating into UK methods of education. Additionally, articles targeting international students should explain aspects such as UK culture, places of worship in Lincoln and where to go in the event of housing issues, academic offences or financial strife. This international hub will likely be significantly more work owing to the nature of human translation and the need to ensure that it remains accessible to people across the world. As such, an international hub would be expected to include the items as explained above, but with additionally attention paid to make sure it is also culturally and linguistically accessible with extra resources to allow for prospective international students to make an informed choice on their own terms. This would provide them with both the resources and the information to understand what is entailed both by studying at Lincoln and by studying in the UK. Given the additional complexity of translation and international admissions, the International Hub would likely have a timeline of 4 years plus.

## Open/Offer-Holder Day Structure

With regard to Open Days, it may be advised to provide further information, perhaps in the form of a booklet or similar for each course/school containing further information regarding the course structure, nature and assessments etc. These would advisably be a physical document with an online version co-available. A booklet of this form would then be handed out by student ambassadors on open days from their respective course tables. The booklets need not be long but should contain relevant information, that is up to date for the time of the Open Days Cycle, this could also be extended with a 2nd booklet provided on Offer- Holder Days that details extra information, such as an expected cohort size, further detail on teaching styles (based on the new information available at the time of the Offer Holder Days), module content and assessment methods. Additionally, links to a social media Pages for Offer Holders of the specific Course or School, to allow for the offer holder to start to socialise and build rapport with their peers could be added to an Offer-Holder Booklet.

These Booklets should not act in place of flyers or brochures about the course, but should be considered almost akin to a simplified form of the Course Handbooks already issued by some courses. The two booklets, the Open Day & Offer-Holder Day Booklets, should be complementary to each other. Further, student ambassadors should be provided with a copy of the booklets in advanced for comment and to allow them to familiarise themselves with them before open/offer-holder days.

Student Ambassadors when working on Open/Offer-Holder Days should, along with a schedule and basic course information, be provided with materials relating to changes that have been made to the course for the upcoming academic year, as to allow them to provide as accurate information as possible about the course and the entailments thereof.

Owing to the need to prepare extra print documents, this recommendation would be envisaged to be trialled within 3 Years. However, a measure of success of this proposal may be difficult to achieve owing to the nature of print materials & the fact that students attending either Open Days or Offer-Holder Days are not guaranteed to join the University regardless.

Table 1: Which resources did you find useful when preparing for University? (Abridged)

	Overall Percentage of Respondents	International Students	Home Students
Student Life	48%	71%	39%
Umii	14%	25%	9%
WoW (Wellbeing Orientation Welcome)	23%	33%	19%
Students' Union	79%	79%	79%
3rd Party (eg. Unidays)	62%	54%	65%
University Website	88%	79%	91%
UCAS	67%	58%	70%
General Social Media (Facebook, Twitter etc.)	73%	79%	70%
University Specific Social Media (The Student Room etc.)	46%	46%	46%
League Tables	37%	21%	44%
University Prospecti	70%	58%	75%
Open Days	69%	46%	67%
Offer-Holder Days	53%	46%	56%
Informal Visit Days	35%	29%	37%
Other	12%	21%	9%

Note: Wellbeing Orientation Welcome (WoW) was a program targeted at students with additional support needs and as such would be expected to have a significantly lower level of reported use than the rest of the resources listed.