

## **A Collaborative Student Futures Manifesto (Phase two) - Enhancing co-creation and belonging**

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### *Abstract*

This paper presents narratives from student consultants from The Student Futures Manifesto. By outlining core developments and future aspirations this collaborative project, now in Phase two, represents the university's commitment to enhancing student experiences in higher education. By addressing the importance of building belonging, post-pandemic challenges are explored, including issues of belonging, student journeys, community building, and physical spaces. Student consultants present their understanding of what belonging means to them at the University of Lincoln and outlined key elements for consideration for the academic year 2024/25. By working collaboratively with departments across the University the Student Futures Manifesto project has helped to develop a sense of community between students and staff, to ensure belonging.

### *Keywords*

Student futures manifesto; Student Engagement; Student as Producer.

## **Introduction and background**

In 2022, the University of Lincoln (UoL) joined forces with 19 other institutions to champion the UPP Foundation Student Futures Commission's ground-breaking initiative—the Student Futures Manifesto (SFM) Project. At the heart of this endeavour was the creation of the "Lincoln Student Futures Manifesto," a dynamic partnership between the university and the Lincoln Students' Union (SU).

The SFM project emerged through collaborative efforts with students, focusing on six pivotal themes identified within the UPP project:

1. Support for students before they reach university
2. An induction into university life for each year of study
3. Support for mental health and wellbeing

4. A clear outline of the teaching students will receive and the necessary tools to access it
5. Activities inside and outside the curriculum that build skills, networks and communities
6. A clear pathway towards graduate outcomes

The SFM manifesto represents the university's commitment to enhancing student experiences in higher education. As we move into Phase Two, we proactively address post-pandemic challenges, including issues of belonging, student journeys, community building, and physical spaces.

## Discussion

### Phase One: Student Consultants and Data Analysis

During Phase One (December 2023 to June 2023), student consultants played a pivotal role. Paired with staff mentors, they focused on one of the project's core themes. The data collected—through focus groups, surveys and methodology—became the foundation for our report and recommendations. These recommendations were transformed into measurable targets, complete with appropriate timelines.

### Phase two: Student consultants and further analysis

Two student consultants were recruited for Phase two (April 2024 – September 2024) and are supported by staff mentors and through a portfolio of training provided by different departments across UoL, including:

- a) Support to complete Lincoln Award (with hours as student consultants contributing to their Lincoln Award);
- b) Training sessions on leadership or confidence from Careers & Employability;
- c) Support resources, bespoke sessions and work experience provided by the Library;
- d) Support from Student Support and Wellbeing;
- e) Access to workshops, courses, and one-one sessions from International College.

The narratives explored in this paper outline some aspirations from the student consultants for Phase two of the Student Futures Manifesto project. By presenting their understanding of what belonging means to them at the University of Lincoln, key elements are explored with rationales presented. These areas of focus represent future outputs from this partnership project which can be developed in the new academic year 2024/25. By working collaboratively with departments across the

University the Student Futures Manifesto continues to have impact as a bridge, building a sense of community between students and staff, to ensure belonging.

### **Conversations with student consultants**

Allison, a postgraduate taught student in Agri-Food Technology, served as an academic representative. His aspiration as student consultant is to focus on addressing diverse concerns across the international student community. Becoming a student consultant allows him to address these issues collaboratively with the students' union and UoL.

Shukria, a first-year medical student, focuses on improving access to higher education. Her passion lies in enhancing educational experiences and making a lasting impact.

### **Please explain why you wanted to get involved with SFM Phase 2**

*Allison:*

An opportunity to adduce student's concerns was presented and it felt right to go into discussions and negotiations to ensure students voices were heard, but most importantly, valued.

A common issue around international cohorts was that of financial safety/ levels of awareness. This is a problem for students that have only just arrived in the United Kingdom, where standards of safety and security are one of the best globally. They may be unaware of the tell tail signs related to financial safety. This problem can be mitigated through three points.

1. *Utilize already existing resources of the university.* Before arrival, online events are developed by the school to prepare international students for the next chapter of their journey, studying and living in the UK. Multiple online events can be hosted, and the link automatically sent to students registered email addresses with a brief explanation of why this is crucial for their financial safety upon arrival to the UK.
2. *Posters of guidelines for fraud prevention and financial security* should be strategically placed around the University and accommodation buildings. This guidance should be presented to the students during the welcome week per department and displayed on digital screens across the University's environment.
3. *Open day discussions with prospective students* about the importance of digital security and measures to be considered, to reduce the chances of being a victim to mobile fraud.

*Shukria:*

I was excited to get involved with SFM Phase 2 because it presents a unique opportunity to contribute to the enhancement of access to higher education and the overall educational experience. The prospect of making tangible improvements that can benefit both current and future students at the university is incredibly motivating for me.

One of the aspects that appealed to me most is the chance to gain additional training through the students' union. This training will enable me to develop my own skills, which I can then use to positively impact university life for my peers and incoming students. The idea of being able to apply new skills in a way that directly improves the student experience is both personally and professionally rewarding.

Furthermore, I am driven by the desire to make a lasting impact. By participating in SFM Phase 2, I hope to contribute to long-lasting improvements that will continue to benefit students long after my tenure. This role aligns perfectly with my ambition to make meaningful contributions to my community and the university.

Additionally, the ability to work towards the Lincoln Award through this role is highly appealing. The Lincoln Award offers a structured pathway for personal and professional development, which complements my goal of continuous growth.

Overall, SFM Phase 2 offers a multifaceted opportunity to improve educational access, develop my skills, make significant contributions to student life, and achieve personal development milestones. These elements combined make it a perfect fit for my aspirations and values.

With reference to your role as student consultant, we asked them to outline their aspirations – what they would like to develop as key recommendations from Phase 1. Here are their thoughts...

*1. Support for students before they reach university*

*Shukria:*

When I first applied for this role, I expressed a strong aspiration to advance the theme of providing more support for students before they reach university. As a widening participation student who faced challenges in navigating the university application process—especially the demanding process for Medicine—I firmly believe that enhanced support is crucial for prospective students.

The recommendations from Phase One highlighted the importance of additional support during offer holder and open days. Building on this, I propose introducing a mentorship or buddy scheme for incoming students. This initiative would pair new students with current ones who can offer guidance, share their experiences, and provide valuable advice throughout the transition period.

## 2. *An introduction into university life for each year of study*

### *Allison:*

Optional short-term courses could be hosted by the school during longer breaks. It is assumed that most students in their first year will begin to identify critical skills needed for their self-improvements, job prospects and studies. These courses can be pre-recorded and upon a successful completion a certificate is given. These courses could range from data analysis, digital marketing, management roles. A plethora of courses isn't practical, but those to accommodate different backgrounds.

Excursions to explore Lincoln and other cities to integrate students into their new environment and learn the histories of notable landscapes within the UK. This forms a bond, and lets the students explore the richness of English history with the guidance and support of the school. A club can be opened to decide and plan visitation trips.

Invite organisational representatives to conduct a TED talk with the students in attendance. The organisations invited can be prospective employers or community outreach societies that resonate with student career goals. This can be streamlined into a timetabled sessions for students with professional practice as part of their program. The benefit of this being students gain the knowledge and practices of these businesses and what is expected of an individual to be successful across industries.

## 3. *Support for mental health and well being*

### *Allison:*

Services provided by the school should be streamlined to fit the ethnic cultures of these students. The suggestion is to have a representative from every country where students originate from, to give a perceived value of trust and a more impactful communication model with their native languages. This creates a strong link to the students where they can always reach out and be sure that they will be understood.

## 4. A clear outline of the teaching students will receive, and the necessary tools needed

### *Allison:*

For some modules the clarity on teaching methods is well established. However, there may be room for greater development on technical writing. One suggestion would be to create a "Technical Thinking & Writing Club", where students undertake random fun projects and the methodology of critical thinking, researching and academic writing is established albeit in a fun / enjoyable way. This would help the personal and academic growth of participating individuals, building up confidence in classroom activities and assessments.

## 5. Activities inside and outside the curriculum

*Shukria:*

I am passionate about creating activities that develop essential skills, build networks, and create strong communities both inside and outside the curriculum. To address this, I plan to conduct a short research project with Allison using a survey to gather insights from Lincoln students about the specific skills they feel need further development. By understanding these needs, we can make targeted recommendations to enhance opportunities for skill-building during university, ultimately improving our employability. This approach ensures that the programs and activities we implement are directly aligned with student needs and aspirations, making them more effective and impactful.

For Phase Two, I propose the introduction of a mentorship scheme that leverages the experience of existing Lincoln students to support prospective university applicants. This initiative could initially be rolled out in local schools, with plans to expand to other areas based on its success.

*Development of the Mentorship Scheme:*

- Collaborations: We will collaborate with established organisations which already have a strong track record in educational mentorship. This partnership will help in providing effective mentorship and promoting the scheme.
- Recruitment and Training: Current Lincoln students will be recruited and trained to become mentors. The training will focus on essential mentoring skills, providing guidance on the university application process, and sharing personal experiences to inspire mentees.

*Plans for Delivery:*

- Pilot Program: Launch a pilot program in selected local schools to test the effectiveness and feasibility of the mentorship scheme. This will involve pairing mentors with mentees and conducting regular mentoring sessions.
- Expansion: Based on the feedback and outcomes of the pilot, we will refine the program and gradually expand it to more schools and potentially other regions.
- Promotion: Utilise various channels, including social media, school visits, and university open days, to promote the scheme and attract both mentors and mentees.

*Measuring and Reviewing Success:*

- Feedback Forms: Collect feedback from both mentees and mentors through structured feedback forms. These forms will assess various aspects of the program, such as the quality of mentorship, the usefulness of the guidance provided, and overall satisfaction.
- Performance Metrics: Track key performance indicators such as the number of mentees successfully applying to and enrolling in university, improvements in

mentees' academic performance, and mentors' reflections on their skill development.

- Regular Reviews: Conduct regular reviews of the program, using the collected data to make continuous improvements. This will involve adjusting the training for mentors, refining the matching process, and enhancing the support materials provided.

*Aims of the Mentorship Scheme:*

- Boosting CVs of Current Lincoln Students: Providing mentorship opportunities will help current Lincoln students develop leadership, communication, and organisational skills, thereby enhancing their CVs and employability.
- Supporting Prospective Students: The scheme aims to offer crucial support to students before they join university, helping them navigate the application process and adjust to university life more smoothly.
- By implementing this mentorship scheme, we aim to create a supportive community that benefits both current and prospective students, ensuring a positive and impactful experience for all participants.

*Allison:*

Access to more industry events to enable students develop valuable networking connections in their areas of interest. To ensure efficiency Microsoft forms should be filled by students as expression of interest. There should be a deadline / expiry date of the Microsoft forms.

*6. A clear pathway towards graduate outcomes*

*Allison:*

Career and employability services are well established within the school's environment, and are excellent at providing services like CV reviewing tools, skills building sessions, 1-1 talks with a library team member. Developments can be made to assess student's readiness for their prospective career choices. An end of term/end of year evaluation for students with the careers team to talk about their aspirations, targets and confidence levels approaching graduation. Students who have used the career services can provide a progress report and develop a plan for themselves. In turn, the careers team would listen, give advice and encourage the students in pursuing their goals. For this to be successful, lots of exposure such as industry led events, career talks, skills sessions will need to have been established, and most importantly, attended by the students. Alumni are also important in this setting and will be better positioned to relate with the students and give relatable advice.

### **Q. What will you gain from working with staff mentors?**

*Allison:*

It is impressive, the level of support given by the staff mentors. Starting out, I had a lot of anxiety, maybe I still do, but to overcome this feeling I had to engage with the mentors and support services by the students' union.

I met with the Dean of Postgraduate Taught and International students, Claire, at a catch-up meeting with the reps. Some key elements were highlighted, and she advised me to be a part of the post graduate networking club of which at that time I didn't know existed.

An impactful moment was when I was fortunate to be invited to the International Student Experience strategy workshop. Again, I initially felt out of place and anxious but the team I worked with were super nice. During discussions my opinions were resonated with and proved to be a valuable experience for both parties, giving student insights on subject matters but also listening to these professionals elaborate on the work done so far to improve overall student well-being and experiences.

*Shukria:*

I am looking forward to working with staff mentors to enhance my skills and receive tailored guidance on how to best achieve my goals as a student consultant. Collaborating closely with experienced staff will provide invaluable insights and support, enabling me to refine and effectively implement the recommendations from Phase One. With their expertise, Allison and I can further develop and execute these suggestions, ensuring they are impactful and sustainable. The mentorship will also offer me a unique opportunity to learn from their professional experiences, gain practical knowledge, and build a stronger network within the university community, all of which are essential for my growth and success in this role

### **Q. What does belonging at UoL mean to you?**

*Allison:*

What does it mean? It's a surreal experience for me. There's been so much to learn, unlearn and improve on myself. Being a part of this large diverse and inclusive community has instilled in me a sense of awareness and effective communication skills across various groups of people.

I was always inclined to be introverted, upon my arrival at UOL it seemed to be the perfect environment to pull away from my shell. It started with having friendly conversations with my classmates and teachers after rounding up lectures, then scheduling overnight study sessions at the library with classmates working on assessments and me applying to be the academic student representative for the September 2023/2024 cohorts. A huge thank you to those encouraging me to send in my application even though I was terrified at first. Today, I'm glad I took that bold step.



I could tell you I learnt to be a better communicator, solicitor and a good team leader but really, I learnt how not to fail. Being involved with these communities, projects and representing my fellow students meant there was a standard I was held to and in my darkest hours and times where motivation was at a low, I was able to jolt myself back into action and deliver.

Going further I am confident in knowing I have done my part and I openly welcome whatever opportunities that are inclined towards my career and personal interests. While uncertain of what they may be, a huge thank you to the University of Lincoln for guiding me towards this level of preparedness. Agriculture and technology remain of intrinsic value to all nations, and I aim to continuously develop and deploy solutions to current and future setback. This is my pledge!

*Shukria:*

Belonging at the University of Lincoln (UoL) means striving to make a difference and fully embracing the opportunities provided by the university to develop my skillset. It involves being part of a vibrant community of passionate students who bring diverse experiences and skills together to make tangible improvements within the university and beyond. To me, being at UoL means being a passionate changemaker, committed to personal growth and contributing positively to the university environment and the broader community.

**Next stages:**

Work will continue with the SU and the university to support Allison and Shukria with the development of their plans and recommendations for Phase two. The following areas have been proposed for the continuation of the SFM:

1. *Support and guidance on finances*
2. *Support at open days- mentoring/buddy schemes*
3. *Initiatives to build belonging*
4. *Opportunities to explore Lincoln and other cities*
5. *Continuation of work with prospective employers/community outreach societies*
6. *Development of student representation to fit the diversification of cohorts.*
7. *Creation of a Mentorship Scheme*
8. *Continuation of support from Careers*
9. *Industry led events, career talks, skills session and Alumni input.*

## **Conclusion**

The Student Futures Manifesto is more than a document—it's an institutional commitment to support student success and develop co-creation. By listening to student voices, collaborating with staff, and implementing targeted recommendations, the project team aims to create a vibrant, supportive university community, one which places the sense of belonging and feeling valued as core. As Phase Two continues, we look forward to turning aspirations into tangible improvements to enhance the student experience for the future.

## **References**

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