Student Futures Manifesto- Summary of Student Consultants Reports

Context

The University of Lincoln (UoL) was one of 20 institutions to sign up to the UPP Foundation Student Futures Commission new Student Futures Manifesto (SFM) Project (2022), with the creation of the Lincoln Manifesto being a partnership between the University and Lincoln Students' Union (SU), and student led from start to finish. Based upon six key themes the manifesto represents a commitment to enhance and facilitate a series of support mechanisms for students, to make positive contributions to student experiences in Higher Education.

The Student Futures Commission (2022) represents a collective Higher Education approach to proactively respond to some of the barriers and challenges students may face in their student experience following the Pandemic. These were shifts impacted by the Pandemic, such as sense of belonging, student journey, community, and changes to physical spaces, among others. With a set focus on three main themes (teaching and learning; student experience and wellbeing and employability) the Commission announced their approach as "*a call to action for universities and students to co-produce a Student Futures Manifesto*" (2022: 4).

As a response to observations and lessons learnt from the Pandemic, in particular the consequences for learning in Higher Education, the Commission succinctly identified the importance for universities to support students, to provide greater guidance through pathways aligned to future outcomes. The focus on rebuilding a sense of 'belonging' was developed from their research data indicating the negative impact on mental health, knowledge learnt and student expectations. The aim of the project was to create tangible actions that would help to reverse the impact that the pandemic had on the Higher Education experience, over the coming five years.

As outlined by the UPP Foundation report, the manifesto centers around six key themes:

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

Method

Students were recruited to this new opportunity through an application process. Overall, 13 students applied, and following interviews in December 2022 with The Vice President Education, The Dean of Lincoln Academy of Learning & Teaching (LALT), a Student Recruiter

and The Academic Representation Manager, students were assigned to one of the core themes, based on their areas of interest and experience. The six student consultants began their research in January 2023 and submitted their final reports in June 2023. This timeline for SFM project was purposely developed to work in accordance with the university calendar and took into consideration assessment periods and holidays.

To assist student consultants in their role, the SU established a suite of support and training to guide them at all stages, for example with research methods and guidance on facilitating focus groups. Key training for the role included:

- Manifesto documentation training
- Role requirements training
- The role of the partnership between the University, SU and consultants training
- Written skills training

Each Student Consultant was also paired with a Senior University Staff Member from an appropriate field to guide and support their section of the project. Student consultants were provided with a handbook for the project. This document outlined the key information on training, dates and timelines and information about staff mentors. Student consultants received a stipend of £600. This was a split payment across the two academic terms, with one payment of £300 made in April 2023 and another of £300 in July 2023.

Each Student Consultant conducted a Focus Group and Survey of their peers which was the foundation of the report and recommendations. These ideas were further developed and laid out as measurable and specific targets, with appropriate timescales, with guidance from staff members that were paired with consultants.

An oversight group was set up to guide and oversee the student consultants, with The Dean of LALT, The Vice President Education, SU Staff, student consultants and staff mentors all present. Monthly meetings were held to ensure accountability and progress for the duration of the project.

Recommendations - Summary

Theme	Recommendations
Support for students before they reach university	- Summer Micro-Credentials - Hubs - Open/Offer-Holder Day Structure
An induction into university life for each year of study	- Creating Opportunities for Inter-Year Conversations - Providing a Wider Range of Signposting during Welcome Week - Offering an Extra-Curricular Opportunity to Explore Campus
Support for mental health and wellbeing	- Mental Health self-certification for extensions - Communication channels - Information on Wellbeing support in Welcome Week - Create an app that University staff will create
A clear outline of the teaching students will receive and the necessary tools to access it	- Clarity of teaching methods "How" and "when" student find information about teaching methods - Level of Preparedness for Teaching methods and how it aids their learning experience

Activities inside and outside the curriculum that build skills, networks and communities	• Increasing student participation via use of incentives • Student curriculum groups • More exposure of opportunities within the curriculum that help build skills, networks, and communities
A clear pathway towards graduate outcomes	• Micro-Credentials • Integrations • Engagement

Recommendations – in detail

1. Support for students before they reach university

- **Summer Micro-Credentials**

To create a series of 'micro-credential' programmes- to allow prospective & 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. To pilot in two schools from the two colleges over the next four years. With a decision on efficacy taken after four years of trials, to allow for two cohorts to graduate and assess impact on academic performance. Suggestion for Micro-Credentials on:
  a) Employability, extra-curricular & orientation micro-credentials. These may consist of courses in effective note taking, shorthand, ICT Skills, interview skills.
  b) Orientation Micro-Credentials 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.

- **Hubs**

To provide a pair of centralised 'hubs' to prepare 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 to use website analytic software to establish the efficacy thereof.
An International Hub: Mandarin Chinese (Putonghua), Spanish or Urdu may be of benefit to international students who have 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. Articles for international students should cover topics such as UK culture, places of worship in Lincoln and where to go in the event of housing issues, academic offences or financial support. An international hub needs to be culturally and linguistically accessible, with extra resources to allow for prospective international students to make an informed choice on their own terms. Via providing them with both the resources and the information to understand what is entailed both by studying at Lincoln and by studying in the UK.

- **Open/Offer-Holder Day Structure**

To provide further information, in the form of a booklet for each course/school containing further information regarding course structure, nature and assessments etc. These would ideally be a physical document with an online version available. A booklet of this form would then be handed out by student ambassadors on open days. Booklets 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 information available at the time of the Offer Holder Days), module content and assessment methods. Links to a social media Pages for Offer Holders of the specific Course or School, to allow offer holders to start socialising and build rapport with their peers could be included. Booklets should not act in place of Flyers or Brochures about the course but would be 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.

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

- **Creating Opportunities for Inter-Year Conversations**

To provide an opportunity within welcome week for students to meet and informally chat with students about their own experiences and build potential relationships wherein students have another way to ask questions. This could be through a coffee morning with tutor groups - accessible for the larger courses, as well as for the smaller courses.

- **Providing a Wider Range of Signposting during Welcome Week**

Ensure that resources provided over welcome week are accessible all year round, such that a student is able to appropriately access the resource they need easily, which should help to reduce some stress. This would work alongside recommendation 1 by continuously providing different avenues for the students to receive help, to improve the independence, without decreasing the confidence or increasing the stress of the student.
The recommendation is for schools to use other forms of communication for this Signposting. Whilst students do use their emails, the amount received mean it can get easily missed and PowerPoint's are not the most engaging form, particularly in welcome week when they may see a lot of them. Suggestion of a campus/department tour within tutor groups, which would not only provide a more personalised approach, it would also allow for students to ask more questions, by creating social media posts detailing the signposting needed, as this is far more engaging and accessible than slides.

- **Offering Extra-Curricular Opportunities to Explore Campus**

Students to complete a project within their first welcome week of a scavenger hunt, which would help them orientate themselves around the university and provide them with necessary knowledge about what is available. This would help new students orientate themselves whilst meeting new people as it is a group project. This concept could be built upon in order to include all year groups, such that the groups need to be comprised of a range of years. This would still provide the same opportunities for first years, while also creating another path to meeting students in different year groups, as well as given students in later years a 'refresh' on what services are available.

3. **Support for mental health and wellbeing**

- **Mental Health self-certification for extensions**

To reinstate self-certification for extensions in the 2023/24 academic year, similar to the pilot scheme that ran previously. This would support students in need of additional time due to mental health conditions and concerns, creating accommodations when necessary.

- **Communication channels**

Channels of communication need to be developed when advertising services or supporting students who have reached out for help. Registered disabled students and students with pre-existing mental health and wellbeing issues need to be made aware of the services available to them as they start their university experience in their first year of study.
Create digital documents to send out to students before or during welcome week in first year to let students know. After this we will also send this information to students a few times a term as a reminder of services.

- **Information on Wellbeing support in Welcome Week**

All new students in Welcome Week need to be educated in the support offered by the Wellbeing Centre and how to contact them. This information needs to be emailed out to students two or three times a term and to be included in sessions at the start in each year's welcome weeks. This ensures that all students have multiple opportunities to hear about the services and how to go about contacting.
Embed within personal tutoring to have sessions with students about these services and provide the point of contact for students to talk to and help get referred to wellbeing services. This will also include tutors having sensitivity and mental health and wellbeing training. The students are still able to ask for more help with how to access the services and contact them but if we have this information in welcome weeks and reminders a few times a term then more students will feel like they know how to get the help they need. This is instead of not knowing how to contact the Wellbeing Centre and struggling on yourself.
Provide a booklet with information such as services available, how to contact them, new services being worked on, promotional material and other stuff that can affect mental health like academic study support services. These booklets will be placed in student accommodation as well as in The Student Wellbeing Centre and in designated areas around the university, so all students always have access to the document.

Create digital resources to be emailed out to students at the start of next year. We will have weekly check-in meetings so that we can place all of the information needed into these documents. A weekly meeting would also help us to be able to keep on track to meeting our deadline for the start of the next academic year. The booklet can be distributed around campus at the start of next academic year as we will already have the information needed we just need to put it all into a booklet format.

d) Create an app that University staff will create

The App can invite students to work alongside staff. This app is going to be made uniquely for our university instead of buying an app and trying to make the format work out for what our university needs. This app is going to be a pin board for everything that a student is going to need while studying at university. It will include services such as:

-Timetable
-Library Search
-Emails
-Announcements
-Mental Health and Wellbeing Information -Drop-In Session Appointments -Counselling
-On Site Doctors Information
-Modules/ Module Information -Assessments
-Grades
-Library Support
-SU and much more

This app will be the only place that a student will ever need to look to find what they are searching for. This will be a less overwhelming way for students to get information and find what they are all looking for in one place. As stated in the focus group "When the university releases an App, the idea for Wellbeing services to be included into this was well met as emails are often ignored" showing that students would find it very useful to have all this information in one location.

This recommendation might take the longest to implement as we need to create the app before we can start to add all the information needed on it and roll it out. There should be monthly check-in points for this recommendation to see how the process is coming along to get a reasonable achievable deadline. This is so we can work closely to make sure that everything is achievable and added to the app alongside having all the university's input to create something everyone is happy with.

4. **A clear outline of the teaching students will receive and the necessary tools to access it**

- **Clarity of teaching methods**

The flipped classroom is an instructional approach that typically involves students engaging with pre-recorded lectures or materials before the class session, allowing for more interactive and collaborative activities during in-person class time. It encourages active learning, student engagement, and peer-to-peer interaction.

Increase Integration of Flipped Classroom Approach: Given the positive reception of the flipped classroom approach by students in the College of Arts and the Business School, it is

recommended to explore its integration into relevant modules across departments. This can be measured through the following actions:
Develop a pilot program in selected modules to implement the flipped classroom approach.

- Monitor student engagement and participation levels in these modules.
- Gather feedback from students regarding their experience and perception of the flipped classroom approach compared to traditional teaching methods.
- Assess the impact on student learning outcomes through comparative evaluations of student performance and achievements

Enhance Awareness and Utilization of Teaching Methods: To ensure students are well-informed about the available teaching methods and their benefits, it is recommended to improve communication and resources regarding teaching approaches. This can be measured through the following approaches:

• Develop comprehensive handbooks or online guides for students that provide detailed information about each teaching method employed in their respective departments.

- **"How" and "when" student find information about teaching methods**

Enhance Information Provision to improve the clarity and depth of information provided to prospective students during the decision-making process, particularly regarding teaching methods, expectations and make learning curve a bit easier. This is particularly important for international students, registered disabled students, and students in their earlier academic years. To measure this:

Track the conversion rates of prospective students who have access to comprehensive information during the decision-making process compared to those who do not, to evaluate the impact on enrolment.

Orientation and Induction Programs: Incorporate comprehensive induction programs that familiarize students and during the induction period, dedicate specific sessions to familiarize students with the learning and teaching methods include the use of virtual learning environment and provide comprehensive explanations and demonstrations, addressing any concerns or questions they may have. To measure this:

Utilize learning analytics tools available in the virtual learning environment to track students' engagement and progress in the modules or courses. Monitor the usage of virtual learning resources introduced during the induction period to assess students' adoption and utilization. There should be close collaboration with lecturers and module coordinator to ensure accurate and up-to-date information is available to students and provide professional development opportunities for faculty members to enhance their teaching skills and approaches. Recognise the unique needs of international students, registered disabled students, and students in different academic years. Offer targeted support and resources to help these students feel more prepared and confident in engaging with the style of teaching. This could involve additional orientation sessions, mentorship programs, or accessibility accommodations.

- **Level of preparedness for Teaching methods and how it aids learning experience**

Develop Practical Application Opportunities: To address the desire for more practical sessions, The university of Lincoln should focus on integrating hands- on experiences and real-world applications into learning experience. This can include incorporating case studies, simulations, or collaborative projects. To measure this:

- Monitor student performance in assessments or projects that require the application of theoretical knowledge to evaluate the impact of practical sessions on their learning outcomes.
- Track the attendance and engagement levels in practical sessions compared to other teaching methods to determine student interest and participation
- Enhance Pre-course communication to provide students with a clearer understanding of the style of teaching they will encounter. To measure this:
- Conduct a pre-course survey to assess students' awareness and understanding of the teaching methods and expectations prior to the start of the course.
- Track the number of inquiries and feedback received from students regarding the clarity and comprehensiveness of pre-course communication.

These recommendations can be measured through quantitative data as well as qualitative data including feedback and engagement levels. Regular assessment and monitoring of these measurements will provide insights into the effectiveness of the implemented improvements and allow for ongoing adjustments to further enhance the students' preparedness and learning experience.

By implementing these recommendations, the university of Lincoln would enhance the overall student experience, empower students to actively engage in their learning, and improve the alignment between student expectations and the teaching methods employed.

5. **Activities inside and outside the curriculum that build skills, networks and communities**

- **Increasing student participation via use of incentives**

This has been a key area that was highlighted in the focus group, and evident with the low number of responses to the survey. There is uncertainty as to why student engagement and participation is low when opportunities are given. For example, staff leads for the theme also mentioned that engagement and participation was low when the Careers and Employability Hub offered industry experts to host events at the University. A suggestion from one of the participants in the focus group was to offer certificates or micro-credentials as an incentive as this would contribute to their employability. If this is offered, there may potentially be a rise in engagement that could be measured once this is implemented.

It appears to be essential to investigate why student participation is low, and this could be assessed by asking students as to why they do or do not attend opportunities that can help build skills, networks, and communities.

- **Student curriculum groups**

Having student-led groups within the curriculum may also enhance this theme, as it will enable collaboration between staff and students and truly make learning have a student-focused approach so that they are able to achieve the best outcomes. This would also improve engagement as students will feel as though they have more involvement and contribution in what they are being taught, rather than having a rigid curriculum that may not meet all their needs to help build skills, networks, and communities. Furthermore, this may also allow students to network more with staff and other students on their course, leading to a more community-like atmosphere.

- **More exposure of opportunities within the curriculum that help build skills, networks, and communities**

Based on the survey results and comments made in the focus group, it seems as though students are either not aware of opportunities or feel as though they are unable to participate. However, these reasons are not very clear and requires further investigation. Students were aware of many Students' Union related opportunities, however, within the curriculum it is not always evident. A recommendation to provide more exposure of these within the curriculum is to have College specific announcements released monthly, so that students are aware of what is available. Furthermore, encouragement from staff members on a student's course may also provide more exposure. As the Students' Union appears to be the strongest community for most individuals and has aided in connecting students, another suggestion is that the Students' Union could work in collaboration with societies to propose more activities that focus on building skills, networks, and communities.

6. **A clear pathway towards graduate outcomes**

- **Micro-Credentials**

We need at Lincoln more skills and opportunities offered to students training them alongside their degree for their future careers. We need academic skill support such as offering business students AWS training, Excel and Word certificates and more that relate to their course which can help them stand out if they choose to participate. Alongside no academic skills like First Aid training, BSL, formative writing, or team working and confidence courses. With all these courses being offered for free or at a fair price for any and all students here at Lincoln. The University should start by looking at the course and find any skills or certifications available. Then establish what they can run or host here at Lincoln and whether or not they can run it for free, if not look at providing students with the best price possible. They should look at emailing course specific skills that are on offer and inform students about it (we recommend course specific skill recommendations as to not flood the student's inbox). However, that's not to say students can't access others. We need to look at the site there offered on modernise and expand both the academic offering and the non-academic offering on there for all students to expand their career employability.

- **Integrations**

We want to integrate careers and employability further into lesson time. We want courses and modules to take career readiness more seriously and better prepare their students for the future. Offering days where students take part in workshop style lessons or have days out to explore their industry with real life examples and more careers fairs. Most importantly we want lecturers to tell you about these events during your lesson time when they are relevant to do so. To achieve this level of integration we will have to make the University re-evaluate its approach to teaching students and allowing more time and effort focused to this approach. We also have set up a system to inform lecturers about events and opportunities to inform students. We also want to look at making teacher re-evaluate their own teaching approach and incorporate a career-focused outcome to teaching offering at least one more instance of advance careers opportunity such as workshops or explore real-life industries.

- **Engagement**

We want to make sure that the students know what is offered and how they can get access to it. To do this we came up with the idea of adding key events to students' timetables such as career fairs or opportunities out. On top of making sure that the emails we send to you which is the most popular choice by far has quality over quantity looking at a more tailored experience for students. Lastly, having lecturers tell students about the opportunities that are happening in Lincoln in lesson time that are relevant to their course and that you might find helpful. To make this happen we want an improved system in place from the University to be able to better tailor information to students making quality over quantity emails to improve awareness. On top of informing teachers and letting them inform the students themselves. Whilst having a team to make sure that important events are timetabled onto students' timetables with the possibility of having a switch to toggle these events on and off to not overcrowd students' timetables.

Conclusion and next steps

Following receipt of the individual reports from the student consultant's, the SFM will to be officially launched through the creation of a webpage located on the University Corporate website. This site will showcase the recommendations as an institutional commitment to fostering and developing the sense of belonging at UoL. The webpage will further reflect upon shared experiences from both a student and staff perspective. With a planned in-person launch to celebrate this partnership project between staff and students, and UoL and the SU, the next steps are for task and finish groups to be created to progress with actions and operationalize findings.   Co-creation will continue for the future from this project with co-authored articles and outputs.