

**UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS**

A place where all students belong

**ACCESS AND  
STUDENT SUCCESS  
STRATEGY**

**2025**



**UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS**

# CONTENTS

Foreword from the Vice-Chancellor

A whole-university approach to access and student success

Higher education is changing and Leeds is changing with it

Working towards a fairer university

The strategy at a glance

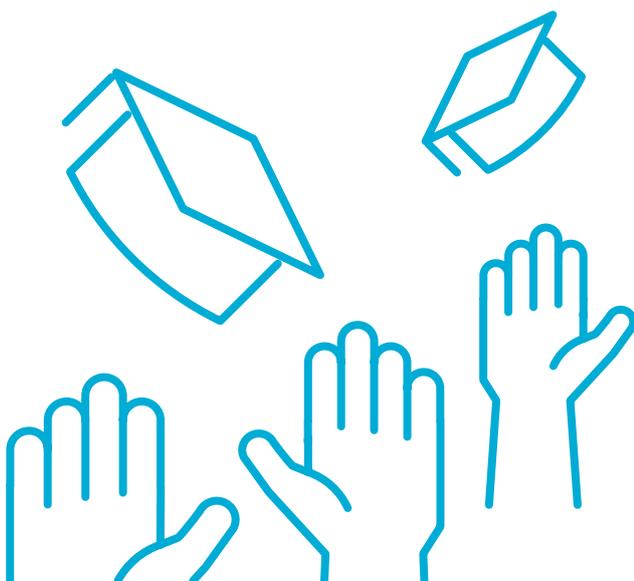
Vision

Strategic pillars

Measures of success

What will life at Leeds look like for our students?

Governance structures will keep us on track



# Foreword from the Vice-Chancellor

Our students and staff are clear that providing students from all backgrounds with fair opportunities to study and thrive at Leeds is a moral obligation and should be core to what we do.

But we want to take this further. Our ambition is to be a place where all students feel they belong and matter to the university; that the unique experience and skills they bring are part of our rich culture and identity.

We are building on strong foundations. Our Access to Leeds scheme and Lifelong Learning Centre are recognised nationally for their scale and maturity. The highly successful partnership between the university and Leeds University Union has led to effective student-led initiatives, including a push to decolonise our curriculum.

But there is more that can be done. Students from under-represented groups still face barriers in gaining a place and succeeding at Leeds and beyond. We know, for example, there are systemic issues which create awarding gaps for mature students and those from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds. This is not just an issue at undergraduate level – barriers persist in access and success for our postgraduate taught and research students.

This strategy focuses our efforts to embed successful initiatives, build on our existing tools and adopt a targeted and tailored approach to supporting students who need it most. It also signals a commitment to tackle issues at postgraduate level. We will be open about the challenges that persist and collaborative in our approach to solving them.

The strategy comes at an important time in history; one where universities the world over are reimagining the way they engage with students. At Leeds, we have accelerated our efforts to deliver online learning and support; removed barriers to continuation to second year; and altered our pre-entry requirements. We don't want to return to normal where this means worse outcomes for students.

It is the responsibility of all of our staff, in academic and professional roles, to have this vision at the forefront of their minds as we embark on the next five years.

*Professor Simone Buitendijk, Vice-Chancellor*

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“It’s a moral and ethical obligation; our students invest in us, we should be investing in them.” *Staff member*

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# A whole-university approach to access and student success

This strategy provides an access and student success lens on the significant amount of work planned and underway across the whole university. Much of the work sits under our Student Education theme as part of our broader university strategy. Educational Engagement, led by Louise Banahene, will play a significant role in driving and delivering the strategy. However, aligning this work with other areas will be crucial. For example, Students' Union priorities; employability activities; work to diversify the workforce, and progress towards UN sustainable development goals will all mutually support the strategy.



# Higher education is changing and Leeds is changing with it



The higher education landscape is undergoing significant change. At Leeds we are alive to the potential threats and opportunities these changes create.

- **The higher education student body is increasingly diverse.** As increasing numbers of students enter higher education, the proportion from under-represented groups is growing despite increasing fees.
- **But access to university is still disproportionately for the advantaged.** The number and proportion of students entering university from low-participation neighbourhoods (LPNs) has increased but the university is still disproportionately a place for students from more advantaged backgrounds at all levels of study.
- **Economic inequalities contribute to increasing scepticism about the value of higher education.** With many households shouldering mounting debt, many students and their parents and carers are questioning the value for money of a degree.
- **Systemic issues limit opportunities for some student groups.** The BAME awarding gap is a huge sector-wide issue. In 2018-19 in England, there was a 22% gap in first and upper second class degrees awarded for Black students compared to White students. Other groups also face barriers - the awarding gap was 10% for mature compared to young learners in the same year.
- **But momentum around access and student success is growing.** A more strategic approach, supported by increased regulation, aims to eliminate the disparities we see in access and outcomes for certain student groups. But with a strong focus on undergraduates, the barriers facing the postgraduate student population are often overlooked and under-explored.
- **Rapid advances in technology provide significant opportunities for progress.** Blended and online provision provides the flexibility for a broader range of students to access higher education than ever before. Now, more than ever, universities are innovating to engage students in teaching and support online. However, as a sector, we must ensure communities who lack access to the necessary technology are not excluded by providing wide-ranging flexible offers.

Throughout the life of this strategy, we will continue to build on the positive sector-wide momentum while addressing the threats head on. Our vision to create a university where students feel they belong, can thrive, and are valued for their unique contribution, will guide us as we navigate this changing landscape.

# Working towards a fairer university

The University takes access and student success seriously and we are starting from a strong base. At Leeds, we undertake sector-leading research in access and participation and our initiatives have a strong grounding in up-to-date evidence about what works, as well as what doesn't. We know how important it is to avoid a deficit model; systemic issues are to blame for inequalities in outcomes and not our students.

We recruit and support large volumes of students from under-represented groups through our significant outreach activity and nationally recognised schemes. There are positive signs that our work in this area is reducing barriers and improving outcomes for many students from under-represented groups. But in order to make significant progress we need to design our teaching and support with all students in mind. Even then, we will continue to take a data-informed approach to target resources and support for students where barriers persist.

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“We were quite fixated on making sure the process was fair – now we have a different idea about what fair is.” *Staff member*

.....

## BARRIERS FACING STUDENTS

Students at Leeds are not homogeneous, they include – but are not limited to – students from BAME backgrounds, international students, mature students, disabled students, students with mental health issues, those with caring responsibilities, estranged students and LGBTQ+ students. Further to this, they enter with a wide range of prior qualifications and experiences.

Understanding the barriers facing these different students, and the impact of intersections between different characteristics, will be crucial to the success of this strategy. We also recognise that the barriers faced by various groups of students are not mutually exclusive. Examples of how barriers play out for some of our students are outlined below.

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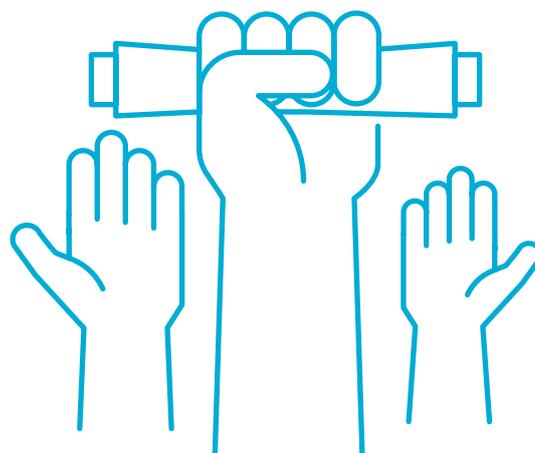
**MATURE STUDENTS** have lower continuation rates and face awarding gaps compared to young students

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**STUDENTS FROM LOW PARTICIPATION NEIGHBOURHOODS** are under-represented at Leeds but access schemes have increased their representation

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**BAME STUDENTS** (black students in particular) are underrepresented at undergraduate and postgraduate level and face awarding gaps when compared to white counterparts



# The strategy at a glance

The strategy is set out across four pillars of the student lifecycle: Access, Continuation, Attainment and Progression. Our fifth pillar 'Enablers' outlines where we will focus our efforts to support the successful delivery of the strategy. The next sections describe our strategy for each pillar in more detail with our select priorities over the next five years.

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The University of Leeds will be a place where students from diverse backgrounds feel they **belong**, can **thrive**, and are **valued** for their unique contribution



## ACCESS

Prospective students from a range of backgrounds can see themselves at Leeds and gain a place



## CONTINUATION

All students feel they belong and matter to the university



## ATTAINMENT

All students are valued and able to thrive academically



## PROGRESSION

Our students have the opportunities to achieve their unique goals



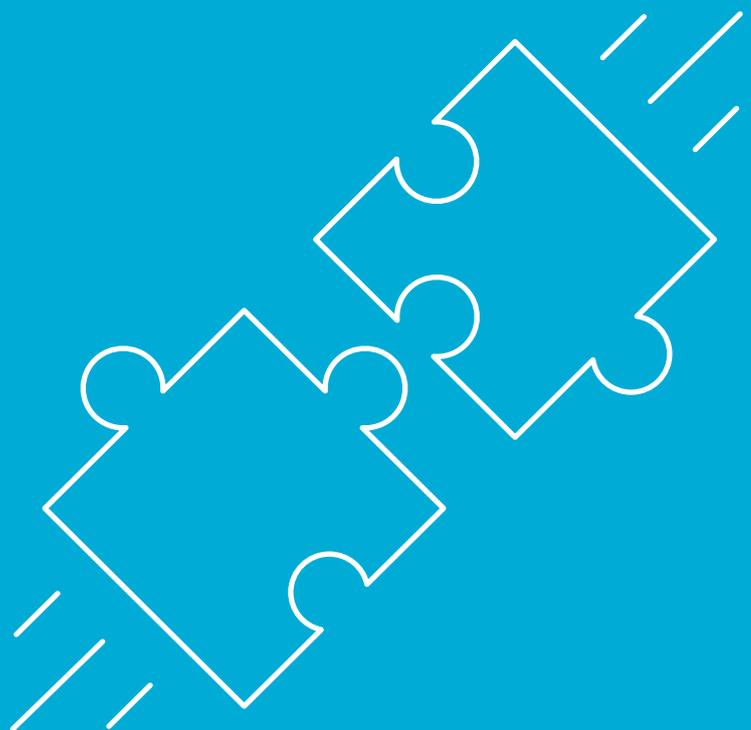
## ENABLERS

Our culture and systems support an embedded and evidence-based inclusive approach

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# Vision

The University of Leeds will be a place where students from diverse backgrounds feel they **belong**, can **thrive**, and are **valued** for their unique contribution.



# Access

## PROSPECTIVE STUDENTS FROM A RANGE OF BACKGROUNDS CAN SEE THEMSELVES AT LEEDS AND GAIN A PLACE

This pillar outlines priorities for supporting fair access for students from a diverse range of backgrounds over the next five years. We have a wealth of experience attracting students through our outreach approaches and nationally recognised Access to Leeds scheme, Lifelong Learning Centre and foundation programmes. However, there is more to do to close gaps in access for those from under-represented groups at all levels of study, as well as those with non-traditional qualifications. To achieve our ambition over the next five years, we must focus on sustained and evidence-based outreach, evolve our admissions policies at all levels and provide flexible learning opportunities.

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“Access to Leeds allows the university to really get the best students.” *Student*

.....

### We will focus on sustained and evidence-based outreach

Build sustained and evidence-based **outreach interventions with schools, colleges and community organisations** drawing on internal and external partnerships, fostering a sense of belonging for prospective students

Build strong and sustained **links with Leeds' communities**, locally, nationally and globally for mutual benefit

Drive teams throughout the university to **innovate and test new initiatives** to stay ahead of prospective students' changing needs

### We will evolve our admissions policies to allow fair opportunities to study at Leeds

Provide **clear and bold messaging** about the opportunities for students from under-represented groups to study at Leeds with a contextual offer

Address unequal access to postgraduate study through **contextual admissions at postgraduate taught and research level**

Convene and collaborate to contribute to a **national understanding** of systemic access issues at postgraduate level

### We will provide flexible learning opportunities to support access for diverse students

Continuously improve our **foundation programmes** and focus on expansion in key areas

Increase **flexibility of delivery** for full-time and part-time learners, including flexible **CPD opportunities** for mature learners

Engage prospective students in **online and face-to-face academic tasters** and online courses to introduce them to life as a student at Leeds and develop a sense of belonging

# Continuation

## We will invest in learning analytics to foster a sense of belonging for all students

Roll-out institution-wide learning analytics so that our academic and support staff can **identify students facing greater barriers to continuation**

Incorporate learning analytics into **institutional decision-making** and integrate with **academic tutoring and supervision** so students are understood and feel they belong

**Empower staff and students** through personalised analytical data

## We will tailor student support to accommodate diverse backgrounds

Expand the Plus Programme to **engage a wider range of students** from under-represented backgrounds

Advance our **personal tutoring and postgraduate research supervisor** model to ensure all students feel they matter, drawing on significant expertise from across the university

Provide proactive and culturally competent **mental health and wellbeing support** through signposting from personal tutors and supervisors to accessible services

## We will support smooth transitions throughout the student journey

Design **transitions and inductions** with the needs of under-represented groups at the forefront so that students from a range of backgrounds and with a range of qualifications are supported

Remove unnecessary barriers to **continuation** for students to progress between years so they know their success matters

**Engage early** with postgraduate taught and research students including through online modules and training

## ALL STUDENTS FEEL THEY BELONG AND MATTER TO THE UNIVERSITY

This pillar details how we will ensure our students are heard, understood and supported to complete their studies. Our successful Plus Programme will remain hugely important to supporting students who need it most, but we know that there is more to do to make sure all our students have access to, and proactively receive, the help that they need. Over the course of the strategy, we will develop an in-depth understanding of our students and their needs through learning analytics, tailor student support at all levels of study to accommodate diverse backgrounds and support smooth transitions throughout the student journey.

.....  
"Being part of the Plus Programme, I've met some amazing people; it feels like a home from home." *Student*  
.....

# Attainment

## ALL STUDENTS ARE VALUED AND ABLE TO THRIVE ACADEMICALLY

This pillar focuses on our efforts to achieve equality in academic success and to draw on our diverse community of staff and students for a richer academic experience. Students at Leeds have access to outstanding research-led teaching but we need to ensure our pedagogical practices provide a rich educational experience for all learners. Work is underway to align our curriculum to a broader range of skills and experience, placing the onus on the university and not students to close awarding gaps. To realise our ambition for attainment, we will build on work to decolonise our curriculum, pushing for a more holistic review at both undergraduate and postgraduate level; continue to embed university-wide inclusive teaching and learning; and focus our efforts on postgraduate attainment.

.....  
“My lived experience is creating a better education and giving people a different perspective.”  
*Student*  
.....

### We will design our curriculum to complement a diverse range of experience

Maintain momentum on our **curriculum review**, building on work to decolonise the curriculum, to ensure it is relevant to a broad range of skills, experience and learning

Work with our diverse student cohort to develop **new approaches to curriculum, learning and teaching, and assessment** which support success and employability

Launch programmes of work to address the **hidden curriculum**

### We will continue to embed university-wide inclusive teaching and learning

Build a **pedagogical delivery model** (for online and on campus) that improves the accessibility of our teaching and assessment at all levels of study

Embed school-level roles designed to drive **consistent inclusive approaches** right across the university

Harness the significant expertise in our **Leeds Institute for Teaching Excellence and Organisational Development and Professional Learning (ODPL)** to inform what we do at undergraduate and postgraduate level

### We will provide fair opportunities for attainment at postgraduate level

**Develop an in-depth understanding of the issues at postgraduate level**

Develop and adapt our **curriculum review to address issues which lead to awarding gaps at postgraduate taught level**

Introduce a **Leeds Doctorate** to provide a standard approach to doctoral study, ensuring supervisors are supported to deliver it

# Progression

## We will tailor activities to support all students to be active decision makers about their future

**Target placement and co-curricular opportunities** to students we know are less likely to take them up

Deliver **targeted work with our graduates** that need the most support to access graduate-level jobs and other ambitious destinations, based on a data-informed approach

Harness the lived experience of our recent **graduates**, employing them to **provide bespoke progression support to our target students**

## We will provide diverse employability opportunities

We will develop a **more flexible and diverse range of placements, internships, volunteering opportunities and collaborative doctoral awards with diverse employers** to enable more students to participate

Develop **graduate placements** at the university, aimed at students from our target groups

Expand our mentoring schemes and peer-to-peer support with an ever-more **diverse pool of alumni, employers and students**

## We will accelerate efforts to progress students from under-represented groups to postgraduate study

**Identify students** from our target groups and understand their needs regarding academic progression

**Build on the findings** from the progression to postgraduate taught project to provide appropriate tasters and advice and guidance

Provide additional support to new postgraduate students from our target groups to facilitate **successful transition into their studies**

## OUR STUDENTS HAVE THE OPPORTUNITIES TO ACHIEVE THEIR UNIQUE GOALS

This pillar outlines our priorities to support fair progression opportunities and links closely to our Employability Strategy. We have a strong track record in supporting students to achieve their goals after they graduate. However, all our students have unique ideas about what success means to them, and not everyone enters with the same tools at their disposal to achieve their ambitions. To deliver this aim, we will deliver consistent and inclusive activities throughout the university lifecycle, and take a data-informed approach, supporting students to be active decision makers about their future. We will provide a diverse range of curricular and extra-curricular opportunities to support students' ambitions and accelerate efforts to progress students from under-represented groups to postgraduate study.

.....  
"I've met lifelong friends; I've spoken at conferences; built confidence; my son and my family think that university is normal." *Student*  
.....

# Enablers

## OUR CULTURE AND SYSTEMS SUPPORT AN EMBEDDED AND EVIDENCE-BASED INCLUSIVE APPROACH

It will be the responsibility of all staff across the university to support our vision to ensure that every student feels that they matter to Leeds. We will focus on culture and governance, data and technology and student voice and evaluation to embed and continuously improve our work in access and student success.

### We will instill a culture that prioritises access and student success and fosters a sense of belonging

**Cultivate and celebrate a diverse community** of staff and students who bring a wealth of perspectives and expertise

**Cascade clear and consistent messages** from our leadership team throughout the whole university to support access and student success at all levels, placing the agenda high amongst competing priorities

**Reward staff for achievements in supporting student success** across the university through recruitment and promotion criteria

Provide **staff training** to support inclusive policy design and practice

Utilise our obligations under the **Vitae research concordat** to cultivate a flexible and supportive environment for our graduate researchers

### We will use data, analytics and technology to understand our students and their diverse needs

Increase our **institutional data maturity** to support data-informed decision-making and improve our capabilities across all our pillars

Address inadequacies in data and **embrace new technology** to support a move to more tailored learning analytics at all levels of study

Address deficiencies in our **customer relationship management system** to improve our evaluation capabilities and provide a more seamless experience for our students

Build on the university-wide momentum to **embrace blended digital learning** for a more inclusive and accessible teaching approach

### We will join-up our governance arrangements to keep the whole university on track

Drive the strategy through the relevant Boards and **strengthen formal flows of communication**

Incorporate school-level targets into the **integrated planning exercise and school annual reviews**

Maintain momentum through clear **lines of accountability and active monitoring** of progress against the measures of success outlined below

**Align service strategies** to mutually support delivery

### We will listen to our students and consistently evaluate our work to drive continuous improvement

Ensure the **student voice underpins all we do** through our strong and successful partnership with Leeds University Union and our representative governance structures at faculty and university level

Further embed our evaluation framework to **consistently evaluate** the impact of initiatives on students from diverse backgrounds across the university and student lifecycle to fully understand their effectiveness, ensuring student feedback is at the heart

Build an **in-depth understanding of the differing impact of our initiatives** at school and graduate school level

# Measures of success

Measures of success across different areas of the strategy will be crucial for keeping us on track over the next five years. Our access and participation plan targets at undergraduate level will be important but we have set ambitious longer term goals. We have also set targets to reduce and eventually eliminate inequalities at postgraduate taught and postgraduate research level. Our Boards with responsibility for the success of the strategy will monitor progress against these targets annually.

## ACCESS



Reduce the gap in access between POLAR Quintile (Q)1 and Q5 undergraduate students from a ratio of **5.5** in 2017/2018 to **3.5** by 2025

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Work with the Dean of the Doctoral College and Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Research and Innovation to **agree targets for access and progression** at postgraduate research level

## STUDENT SUCCESS



Our students **feel they matter** to the University

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Reduce the awarding gap to **5.5%** for undergraduate BAME students by 2025 and eliminate by 2030

# STUDENT SUCCESS



Reduce the awarding gap to **6.8%** for undergraduate mature students by 2025 and eliminate by 2030

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Reduce the gap in non-continuation for undergraduate mature students to **4.4%** in 2025 and eliminate by 2030

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Reduce the gap in non-continuation for undergraduate POLAR Q1 students to **1.5%** in 2025 and eliminate by 2030

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Reduce the awarding gap for postgraduate taught BAME students to **6.5%** in 2025 and eliminate by 2030

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Reduce the gap in non-continuation for postgraduate taught BAME students to **2.5%** in 2025 and eliminate by 2035

# ENABLERS



Professional services staff at all levels will reflect the diversity of the local region with **17% from BAME backgrounds**

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We will increase the proportion of professors from BAME backgrounds in-line with the sector average to **10%**

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We will increase the proportion of female professors from BAME backgrounds in-line with the sector average to **2.3%**

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A **mature data environment** is set-up and running effectively

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The **student voice** is embedded in all our evaluative processes across the University

# What will life at Leeds look like for our students?

**Transition between academic years** is possible without unnecessary barriers which unfairly disadvantage some student groups

**Tailored and proactive communications and support** based on understanding of how and when students are struggling through learning analytics system and personal tutoring processes

**Access to a range support services** (academic and non-academic) which cater to diverse needs

**Able to participate fully in induction events** and activities regardless of background and other commitments

**CONTINUATION**

**Sustained outreach interactions** and engagements with Leeds prior to arrival

**Access to online and face to face academic tasters**, creating that sense of belonging

**ACCESS**

**Easily accessible and clearly communicated advice** on contextual offers and the opportunities these bring

**Flexible course delivery** to suit a range of needs and commitments

**Accessible and inclusive teaching**

**Targeted employability opportunities** to students with fewer tools to progress

**Opportunities for mentoring** with a diverse range of alumni and employer mentors to support unique progression goals

## PROGRESSION

**Access to local employability opportunities and graduate placements** within the university

**Consistent academic experience** through the Leeds Curriculum and Leeds Doctorate

## ATTAINMENT

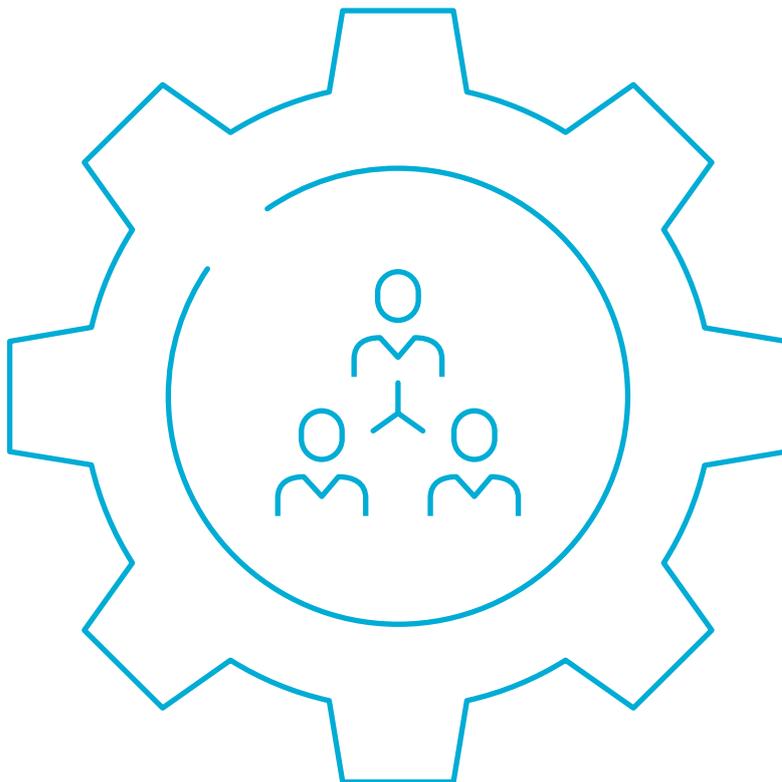
The diverse university community **celebrates different backgrounds** and creates a rich learning experience that all students can identify with

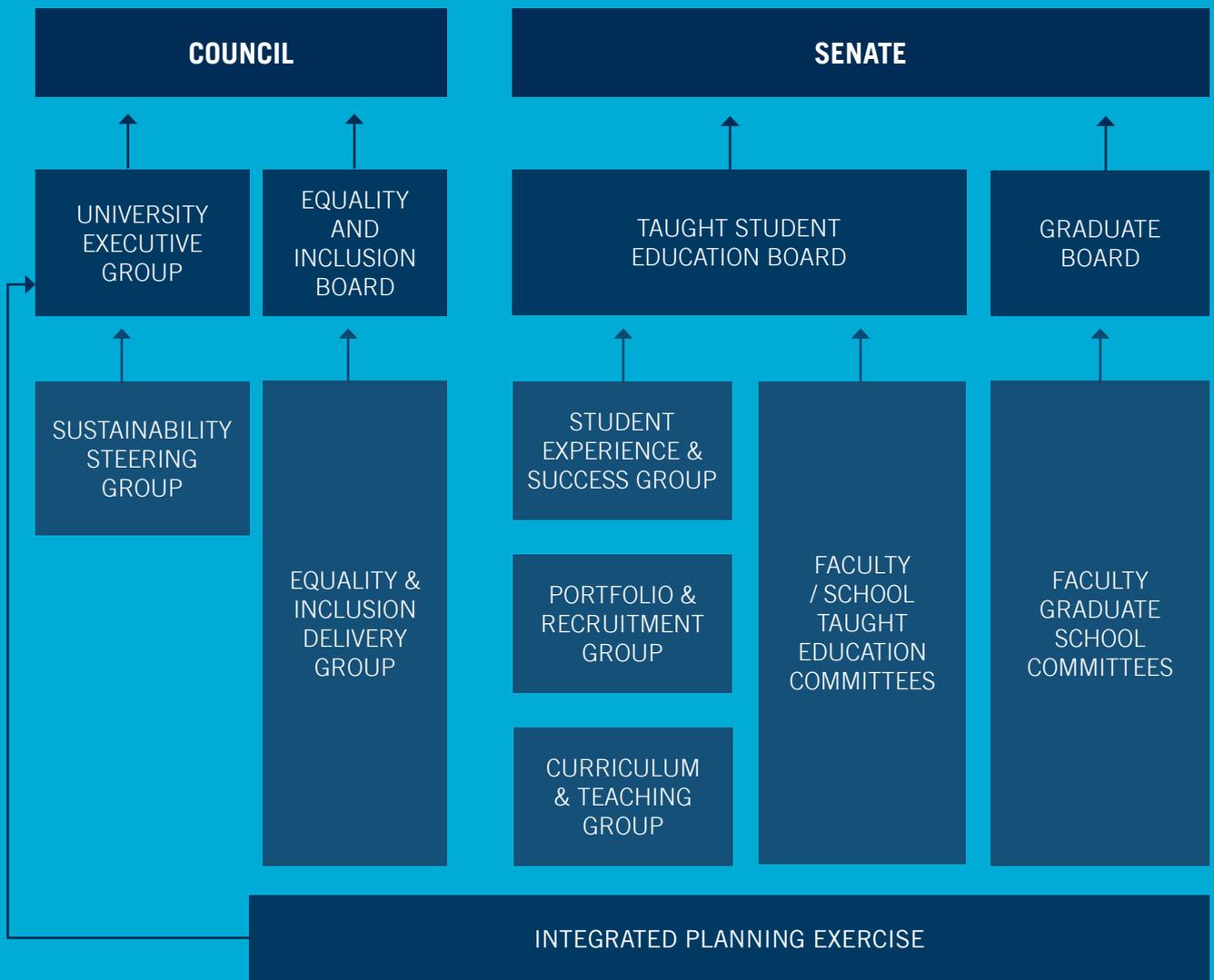
A curriculum which draws on, and develops, **regional and civic engagement** and supports employability



# Governance structures will keep us on track

The diagram illustrates the governance structures supporting the strategy. There are a number of key staff within this accountable for successful delivery. These include the Vice-Chancellor; Deputy Vice-Chancellor; Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Digital Transformation; Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Student Education; Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Research & Innovation; Executive Deans and the Dean of the Doctoral College; Heads of Schools (including Faculty Graduate Schools); Pro-Deans for Student Education; Director of Educational Engagement and Director of the Lifelong Learning Centre.





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