LIFELONG LEARNING: A HANDBOOK FOR MATURE UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS
Welcome to the University of Leeds

Welcome to life as a mature student at the University of Leeds. ‘Mature’ is defined as anyone aged twenty one or over at the start of their course and nearly one in three undergraduates at UK universities are over the age of twenty one when they start their first degree.

There is no such thing as a ‘typical’ mature student, but we recognise that starting at university a bit later in life can be a different experience than that of an eighteen year old. So with the help of mature students we’ve written this guide which we hope will address some common issues and make your personal experience of studying at the University of Leeds a happy, rewarding and successful one.

You’re not alone, but there is a huge diversity in our mature student community. Some people are in their early twenties, just starting university a bit later than usual for personal reasons. Some are in their thirties, forties or fifties, perhaps using university as part of career development or a career change. Others are retired, maybe taking the opportunity to engage with a subject that is a particular passion.
“The course has broadened my view on life, helped me implement new skills within my job, made me more interested in reading and made me more confident as a person.”

Dan – Foundation Degree Child and Family Studies

Specialist support for mature students

Recognising the need for mature students to have a clearly identifiable source of support, the Lifelong Learning Centre (LLC) provides a one-stop shop, open to all mature learners, and provides the following support:

STARTING UNIVERSITY LIFE
Starting University can be a major change and you may feel apprehensive, so the LLC provides a range of welcome events in September specifically aimed at new mature learners. These events are held before the main ‘Freshers’ Week’ to give you a chance to settle in on the campus before it gets busy. Students from all departments are welcome, so it’s a great chance to meet a wide range of other people in the same situation as you.

A PHYSICAL ‘HOME’ FOR MATURE STUDENTS
Located on Level 11 of the Marjorie and Arnold Ziff Building, the LLC has its own resource area which is also open to mature and part-time undergraduates from across the campus as well as other students on LLC programmes. It is a social space in which students can eat lunch, meet friends or work between lectures and offers the following facilities:
- several student-access computers which can be used for checking emails, renewing library books and other quick tasks such as submitting assignments
- reference books including: atlases, dictionaries, directories and books on study skills
- ‘takeaway’ material (leaflets, booklets) on University and Union services
- space for individual or small group working.

Drop in any weekday, 9am – 5pm (5.45pm on a Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday in term time); no need to book or ask, just walk in. It’s a great place to meet other mature students for a chat and a bit of mutual support.

Please note however that the resource area does not offer a printing facility.

There is also a spacious shared common room on Level 12 of the Marjorie and Arnold Ziff Building for use by all students. In addition, the Ziff Building has its own café which is open daily between 8.30am and 4pm. This contemporary café is perfect to take a break or even to do some work in the computer area.

SOCIAL EVENTS
The Lifelong Learning Centre provides regular opportunities for mature students to meet at social events. For example, once a month in term-time we host a mature student café in the Marjorie and Arnold Ziff Building common room. It’s an ideal opportunity to vary your usual routine and meet other mature students from all over the University in an informal setting. Then, throughout the year we organise a range of events both on campus and across Leeds open to all mature students, their friends and families – for example meals, film nights, trips to art galleries and more. All social events are advertised in the LLC resource area, on the LLC website, and also via Minerva, which is the single login portal for your email, timetable, library account and other University information.

www.llc.leeds.ac.uk/about/events

STUDENT NEWSLETTER
Keep up to date with information, events and services for mature students by reading our monthly student newsletter. Students doing a course with the LLC automatically receive this; if you’re studying with another department, email us at lifelonglearning@leeds.ac.uk and we’ll put you in the circulation list.

SKILLS SUPPORT
The LLC offers both group and one-to-one support with academic skills (essay writing, referencing, time management, exam techniques and more) and also basic IT skills. If you feel you need help with any of these, don’t struggle on alone; contact us for support at any time of the year.
ADMINISTRATION SUPPORT
Most University processes and procedures are now online, and however IT-literate you are, you may still have difficulties at some point in dealing with the University’s systems, which encompass the whole range of university life; registration, enrolment, timetabling, exams, using the library and more. The LLC can provide one-to-one support with this – so get in touch and we’ll be happy to help.

GUIDANCE
You may need information, advice and guidance (IAG) at any stage of your academic career; when choosing what subject to study or when on course. You can make an appointment with the LLC’s Guidance Officers for a free and impartial service accredited with Matrix Standard, the industry standard for IAG activity. One to one guidance services available include (but are not limited to) careers and employability skills; one-to-one on-course guidance for individual students; pre-entry guidance and information about fees and financial support.

CAREERS SUPPORT
Mature students study at the University of Leeds for a variety of reasons, but probably most are hoping that in some way the course and the experience of university life will enhance their personal and professional development. This could take a variety of forms from exploring/taking up voluntary roles to starting up a business or developing an existing one. Complementing the work of the University’s Careers Centre (see Other sources of support for mature students on page 8), the LLC also offer one-to-one careers guidance as well as a range of careers support events throughout the year. More information can be found in our Careers Guide for Mature Students available on our website.

www.llc.leeds.ac.uk

BECOME A LEARNING CHAMPION
We encourage our students to inspire other adults to consider university as a realistic option. You can join our ‘Learning Champion’ volunteers, working with other adults from areas where going to university is not the norm. You can get involved in a wide range of activities and events designed to inspire them to think about Higher Education.

“The Lifelong Learning Centre gave me a sense of belonging. No question is too silly when speaking to them and they are very understanding when it comes to personal situations.”

Rekha – Foundation Degree Child and Family Studies.
Take some time to familiarise yourself with some of the other services which may be able to help you while you’re a student at Leeds.

STUDENT EDUCATION SERVICE
The first place to find out about the support available across the University as a whole. This website presents advice to common questions at a particular time of the year and covers everything from advice on house hunting to dealing with exam stress. Visit students.leeds.ac.uk for more information.

LEEDS UNIVERSITY UNION (LUU)
Every student at the University of Leeds is automatically a member of Leeds University Union – one of the biggest and best students’ unions in the country.

www.luu.org.uk
The Union plays a key role in the welfare of all students in the University, providing a wide range of services including:

THE STUDENT ADVICE CENTRE
Get help with a wide range of issues from housing to money from the Union’s equivalent of the Citizens’ Advice Bureau. It’s independent from the University and takes enquiries by phone and email if that’s easier than coming in. All discussions are confidential.

JOBLINK
If you need to work while you’re a student, register with the Union’s own employment agency, Joblink, to find a job with a student-friendly employer.

VOLUNTEERING
The LUU run student-led volunteering societies, so you can volunteer on a local community project or set up your own. To find out more about volunteering visit the Student Activities Office in the Union building.

SHOPS
If you’ve forgotten to buy a birthday card or need a pint of milk you can pop into the Union between lectures and pick up a wide range of essentials. Save time at the weekends by doing things on campus during the week.

SOCITIES
There are over 300 Union societies, ranging from football to chess, wine tasting to skydiving, dance to ‘a cappella’ and mature students are welcome at all of them. Of particular interest might be:

• Mature and Part Time Students’ Society (MatSoc):
  the society for mature and part-time students
Keep an eye out too for over 200 Give it a Go sessions where you can try out some of the activities on offer.

DISABILITY SERVICES
The University has one of the biggest student/staff disability services in the country and can offer a wide range of support to ensure that disability is not a barrier to achievement. Contact them at any stage in your academic career to discuss your needs; ideally before you arrive. Financial support may be available. You may be thinking at this stage that you’ll need any additional support but by contacting Disability Services now you’ll be ensuring that should your situation change, support will be more quickly available.

CAREERS CENTRE
It’s never too early to start thinking about how your studies might change your life. Contact the Careers Centre for help and advice at any stage of your course; they are experienced in working with mature students and can give support not only with starting or changing a career but also with developing your current work situation, applying for promotion, preparing for a review, or thinking laterally about alternative directions.

LEEDS FOR LIFE VOLUNTEERING OPPORTUNITIES
Leeds for Life is a University-wide initiative designed to prepare you for your future. It’s about helping you to get the most out of your student experience and to recognise the value of everything you do. The Leeds for Life website enables you to explore opportunities for volunteering and record and reflect on those experiences.

SKILLS@LIBRARY SERVICE
If you are struggling with writing your first essay since school days or if you need a brush up of your maths or revision techniques, the Skills@Library service provides a range of workshops and online tutorials which can help you to learn new skills or brush up on the old ones. Book early for workshops though, they’re very popular.

STUDENT PARENTS AND CARERS
The University has formal policies on support for pregnant students/students with very young children and for students with other caring responsibilities. Links to these can be found in the Student Parents section of the Lifelong Learning Centre website.

Bright Beginnings offers on-site childcare provision at the University, including a pre-school nursery and a holiday playscheme for older children.

A toy box is available in the Lifelong Learning Centre in the Marjorie and Arnold Ziff Building.

EMERGENCY SUPPLIES
An ‘emergency kit’ with nappies, baby food etc is available on request from the Reception desk at the Lifelong Learning Centre.

The Lifelong Learning Centre and Leeds University Union organise regular social events at which student parents attend, and also organises events specifically for student parents and their families.
Top tips from current mature students and alumni

STUDYING
- Study skills/referencing/plagiarism: understand them.
- Don’t assume semester one will be easy. Get study skills support if you need it.
- Remember to be positive. Study can be fun!
- Contribute to seminars—your knowledge/experience is valuable.
- Utilise your Personal Tutor.

PRACTICAL ISSUES
- Get to know your School: procedures, policies, who to talk to etc.
- Find out early on about mitigating circumstances, results and extensions.
- Make sure you understand the timetable. If not then ask for help.
- Most information that you will need can be found on Minerva as well as the University of Leeds app for smartphone owners.
- There are lockers in the Parkinson Building to hire for the year. Get in early—go to the information desk in the Parkinson Court to find out more.
- As a rule of thumb, parking on campus during weekdays isn’t possible during the day. Evenings (after 5pm) and Saturdays are fine for parking on campus however, but remember to register your car online in order to avoid a fine.
- The University campus is very big. You may need to make extra time to search places out.

MONEY, MONEY, MONEY
Finance: don’t panic if you’re not sure what to do or if you think things have gone wrong. Seek assistance from the Lifelong Learning Centre or the LUU Student Advice Centre.

MONEY SAVING TIPS
Books: try second hand websites such as abebooks.co.uk or sellstudentbooks.com
Software: As a student at University of Leeds, you can get up to five free downloads of Microsoft Office for PC or Mac. University of Leeds IT Shop also has other discounted software available for students.
Food: Cafés can be found in most buildings across campus, though if you’re looking to save money then bring a flask of tea or coffee or soup as the costs can soon mount up. There is a boiling water tap in the student common room in the Ziff Building. Look out for details of the ‘Refresh’ card in all of the cafés on campus—10% off selected food and refreshments.
Stationery: Take a look in your local ‘Pound’ shop for cheap stationery.

SUPPORT
- Don’t be afraid to ask. Staff are friendly and eager to help.
- Get help from Student Counselling for stress-related issues eg exam nerves.
- Disabled students: act early to get support even if you don’t think that you’ll need it. It’s better to have support in place and not need it than to need support and it not be in place.
- Don’t be scared by standard letters. Ask at the LLC if you need help.
- Use social networking sites like Facebook to link up with your programme or join online groups such as the Mature and Part-time Students’ Society.

“...you are made to feel so welcome and all the members of staff and students from other years are so willing to help you with any issue. The support is like nothing I have ever experienced before and I feel part of a big happy family.”
Frequently asked questions

WHAT SHOULD I EXPECT UNIVERSITY TO BE LIKE?
One of the best ways to find out what studying at Leeds will be like is to talk to someone who has already done it. Have a look on the LLC’s website at what some of our current and former students have to say about studying at Leeds and feel free to drop us a line to see when our next events are happening where you can meet current students face to face.

Impartial information, advice and guidance is available to all part-time and mature undergraduates currently studying at Leeds. This can help you to:
• reflect on your long term aspirations and goals and how to reach them.
• be aware of the choices available to you.
• make informed decisions about your educational progression, including changing modules and/or course, if required.
• understand the financial implications of decisions that you make.

adviceandguidance@leeds.ac.uk

WHAT IS MEANT BY ‘CREDITS’, ‘SEMESTERS’ AND OTHER JARGON?
The language used in universities can be quite confusing at first, although you will soon pick it up. The following explanations may be helpful.

Programme
A programme (or programme of study to give the full title) is another word for your course. The terms programme and course are often used interchangeably. At the University, qualifications and courses are usually referred to as programmes of study and are broken down into individual levels. The number of levels you need to complete a programme depends on the qualification you are aiming for. Each level of study is further broken down into a series of individual units known as modules.

Module
Programmes are usually divided into units of study known as modules. Each programme consists of several modules focusing on different aspects of the programme. Each module carries a credit rating of either 10, 20, 30 or 40 credits, although most are 20, and you take a set number of modules each year to build up to a specific qualification.

Discipline Modules
If you are studying for an undergraduate degree programme you will be required to take some modules as an essential requirement of your degree, and you may also have a choice of options. In addition, you can choose some modules, known as Discovery Modules, from a very broad range of subjects that are of more general interest.

Credits
Each module is worth a certain number of credits, which are put towards the total number of credits you would need to study to complete a level. When you successfully pass a module you will be awarded that number of credits.

Level
This refers to the level of difficulty of the module or programme, starting at level 0 for foundation and preparatory programmes and ranging up to level 3 for the highest undergraduate level. For full-time students, each level is roughly the same as one year. For part-time students, each level may take two years.

Terms and Semesters
Although the academic year is broken into terms as at school, most teaching takes place over longer time periods referred to as semesters. These run from September through to January, and February through to June. Some programmes also have summer schools or courses. Do always remember to check well in advance whether your programme of study has a half term break as not all do.

HOW WILL I BE TAUGHT?
Although you will have formal taught sessions in classrooms these form only a small part of the study week. Most programmes tend to have a combination of lectures, where you listen to the tutor and take notes, and seminars where smaller groups discuss the subject in more detail. University study is designed to stretch your mind and teach you to develop your own opinions about the subject. In between classes you are expected to read about your subject, think about it, talk about it if possible, show an interest in it, and work on assignments that will be assessed.

HOW CAN I JUGGLE STUDY WITH OTHER RESPONSIBILITIES, SUCH AS MY FAMILY?
Most students find they need to be very organised and to manage their time well and we have a wide range of specialist support services run by friendly and experienced staff, to help you to do this.

I HAVEN’T WRITTEN AN ESSAY FOR YEARS – HOW WILL I COPE?
Before you start your course you can access the University’s Skills@Library online resources which will provide a range of tools to help you tackle key areas of studying such as essay writing, time management, IT, note-taking skills and how to use the Library. Once you have started your course we run a series of workshops throughout the year and have dedicated members of staff to help and advise you.

IF I MIGHT NOT GREAT WITH COMPUTERS – IS THERE ANY HELP?
Our regular personal and professional development workshops include sessions to help improve your IT skills. If you prefer one-to-one support, personalised for your needs, we can provide that too.

HOW WILL I BE ASSESSED?
Most modules will end in a piece of work, such as a coursework assignment or test. You can also expect to have regular class tests throughout your course. For Discovery Modules you will be awarded a pass or fail grade, although this may depend on the module.

IS THERE ANY HELP?
The University of Leeds website also provides useful information about the financial support you may be entitled to.

students.leeds.ac.uk/leedsfinancialsupport

WILL I MEET OTHER STUDENTS LIKE ME?
The LLC hosts a number of social events each year. These are open to all part-time, mature and foundation level undergraduates across the University, and provide an opportunity for students to meet and socialise with each other.

WILL THERE BE OTHER STUDENTS WHO ARE ALSO PARENTS?
Many of our students on courses across the University are also parents and we have many resources, facilities and groups especially designed to help student parents access the relevant information and the support they need. There are also groups and events set up to help you meet other student parents.

LLC staff will be happy to provide information and one-to-one consultations about fees and the sources of financial support which may be available to you, depending on your programme of study and personal circumstances. Contact us at any time.

0113 343 3212
lifelonglearning@leeds.ac.uk

Although the cost of study is often a concern for mature students in particular, there are no upfront fees to pay. Subject to personal eligibility you should have been able to borrow the cost of your tuition fees through a tuition fee and maintenance loan from the government. Many mature students can also get Leeds Financial Support, a generous bursary linked to your household income.

students.leeds.ac.uk/finance

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Other external sources of information

THE STUDENT ROOM
The largest student community in the world with over 1.2m members and a mature student focused section with support, practical tips and guidance:
www.thestudentroom.co.uk

UCAS GUIDE FOR MATURE STUDENTS
www.ucas.com/how-it-all-works/mature-students

16–25 RAILCARD FOR MATURE STUDENTS
You can apply for a 16–25 Railcard if you’re 26 or over and in full time study.
www.16-25railcard.co.uk/using-your-railcard/are-you-eligible

CARERS LEEDS
Carers Leeds aims to support all unpaid Carers in Leeds by providing information, advice, social and emotional support.
www.carersleeds.org.uk

LIFELONG LEARNING CENTRE
www.llc.leeds.ac.uk
lifelonglearning@leeds.ac.uk
0113 343 3212

LEEDS UNIVERSITY UNION (LUU)
www.luu.org.uk
helpandsupport@luu.leeds.ac.uk
0113 380 1400

LUU STUDENT ADVICE CENTRE
www.luu.org.uk
advice@luu.leeds.ac.uk
0113 380 1420

DISABILITY SERVICES
students.leeds.ac.uk/supportandwellbeing
disability@leeds.ac.uk
0113 343 3927

BRIGHT BEGINNINGS CHILDCARE CENTRE
www.brightheginningschildcare.co.uk
0113 343 1818

STUDENT EDUCATION SERVICE
students.leeds.ac.uk

SKILLS@LIBRARY
library.leeds.ac.uk/skills

Key contacts