



Reading Beyond the University (RBU)



Introduction:

This project, RBU, was vital to address as although we are seeing rising numbers of people attending university, “students from lower social class backgrounds continue to be underrepresented” (Connor, et al., 2001). Many people find the idea of studying in higher education extremely daunting, and some firmly believe they won’t be able to achieve this. The original vision for RBU a short outreach programme which provided a short introduction into the social sciences. We therefore decided to work alongside the YMCA to create classes for service users.

Project Aims/Objectives:

Overall, our project basis hoped to encourage people to consider higher education, and reassess their outlook on the system. We aimed to inspire people, especially ‘hard to reach’ students, to believe in themselves. Additionally, we aimed to create networks and positive relationships with organisations, such as the YMCA, not only to benefit the project but also for the future of RBU and to help Lincoln’s communities thrive.

Research Methodology:

Following our preliminary meeting with the YMCA it became clear to us that this social science course would not spark the interest of the service users. Whether this be down to the intimidation of the word science, or how the service users may feel they were just being utilised for our own benefit. As a collective we decided that it would be best to provide the participants with something they may find more valuable. As such we reached out to a few other academics within the university who graciously volunteered to help in delivering a few short courses in skill development. Such areas agreed upon consisted of ‘mindfulness & resilience’ and ‘employability skills’. While these will be grounded and delivered using participatory and collaborative pedagogies the rationale is that these topics will generate interest, so that we can build a relationship with services users and develop an introduction to social sciences short course with them in the future.

As a pairing, we established the role of networking other agencies, including the Lincolnshire YMCA, to stimulate their potential interest. We did this by initially holding a meeting with Heather Saunders, detailing our project, in order to build ourselves a portfolio of valuable organisations who we could reach out to. A few of these contacts were acquired and we went on to have further contact with Green Synergy and Abbey Access Training. We passed these onto our supervisor, Gary Saunders, who will be able to continue communication with these organisations, and further promote the project.

Literature review:

Whilst developing our project we became aware of the reasoning behind many people’s disinterest in higher education. One theory of this can be seen in C. Wright Mills’s work, *Sociological Imagination*, which presents that individuals become trapped within their troubled lives, and feel they have no ability to escape (1999).

Secondly, throughout our project we bettered our understanding of the defining qualities of UROS. Firstly, student as producer was a crucial instrument in the advancement of our project, as it “emphasises the role of the student as collaborators in the production of knowledge...so that students can recognise themselves in a world of their own design” (University of Lincoln, n.d.) Student as producer allowed us to learn a great deal about the conduction of research, as well as how to create and develop a successful course. Finally, the teaching philosophy of critical pedagogy was vital for our project, due to its encouragement for students to employ “critical analysis and moral judgements” (Giroux, 2011, 3). This support us in the conduction of our own research, and motivated us to read alternative narratives. Finally, the civic university mission is embedded in UROS. The predominant aim of this is to help communities thrive, such as by working in partnerships and volunteering (CUWG, 2019). In light of this our UROS project encouraged us to work alongside the YMCA in order to support their service users, and encourage them to consider higher education.

Findings/Results:

We decided it was best to begin our research on a population who not only fit our targeted audience, but who may also benefit from it the most. From early July we have been working closely with the YMCA in Lincoln, participating in numerous meetings online and in person, including one at the YMCA itself. All these meetings were useful for our team in order to construct an ideal course that would be the most beneficial to the organisations users. One meeting in particular was advantageous as we realised, thanks to one of the YMCA’s leading staff, that we would need to make our research transactional in order for full engagement. As a result we have been in contact with academics at the university who have volunteered to contribute to and help lead a verity of short course in areas that the participants will value. For instance, the first course that will be delivered will specialise in skills surrounding resilience and mindfulness, this has also been approved by the YMCA who also agreed, following continuous dialogue, that this would be the best thing to start our course with. This dialogue will be continued in order to make sure these specialised courses are perfect for our participants.

UK domiciled full-time HE undergraduate student enrolments by participation characteristics Academic years 2016/17 to 2020/21

	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Parental education					
Yes	564,215	576,950	585,045	591,285	617,390
No	497,540	504,305	505,360	510,570	539,050
Don't know	79,580	77,870	77,920	79,245	85,640
Unknown	102,680	103,650	103,770	110,370	123,535
Low participation neighbourhood marker					
Low participation neighbourhood (POLAR4)	132,820	136,275	138,700	143,680	156,870
Other neighbourhood (POLAR4)	979,485	995,665	999,265	1,006,635	1,067,010
Unknown neighbourhood (POLAR4)	4,845	4,940	5,545	5,600	5,465
English Indices of Deprivation (IMD)					
Quintile 1 – most deprived (IMD)	184,560	191,520	197,050	206,245	230,240
Quintile 2 (IMD)	201,555	207,525	209,910	213,995	234,760
Quintile 3 (IMD)	204,095	207,095	207,420	209,055	222,650
Quintile 4 (IMD)	218,950	221,690	220,825	221,080	229,735
Quintile 5 – least deprived (IMD)	261,330	262,275	260,765	258,020	264,590
Unknown quintile (IMD)	1,350	1,395	1,860	1,820	1,435
Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD)					
Quintile 1 – most deprived (SIMD)	12,175	13,150	13,815	14,470	15,985
Quintile 2 (SIMD)	14,800	15,400	15,615	15,705	16,810
Quintile 3 (SIMD)	18,850	18,770	19,000	19,160	20,410
Quintile 4 (SIMD)	23,730	23,265	23,635	23,910	25,240
Quintile 5 – least deprived (SIMD)	29,830	30,335	30,530	30,715	31,725
Unknown quintile (SIMD)	310	390	450	660	780

Figure 6: UK domiciled full-time HE undergraduate student enrolments by participation characteristics, Academic year 2016/17 to 2020/21 (HESA, 2021). This data presents that in 2020/21 230,240 students studying at university come from the most deprived backgrounds, whereas 264,590 students come from the least deprived backgrounds. This shows that there’s still an underrepresentation of disadvantaged students, making our research and project extremely vital.

“Our mission, based on Christian Values, is to develop the mind, body and spirit of individuals, families and communities and improve health and wellbeing for all” (YMCA, n.d.)



Conclusions:

To conclude it is clear that more needs to be done to address the current concern regarding underrepresented students in higher education, as well as considering why this is occurring.

Recommendations- The Future of RBU:

Our work with the YMCA was additionally significant in the sense that we, as a team, also learnt along the way. This will make future work with alternative organisations better structured and organised, in order for the process to run as smoothly as possible.

Our hope is that once our participants have completed the course we have created, they shall in turn not only receive irreplaceable skills, but also a micro credential. As such we could supply a certificate of participation, write references for these people who may later decided to go onto work or higher education. Another idea we have conceptualised is that of a short 12-week course that, dependent on engagement, could be held at the university, allowing access to lectures, seminars and the library, and upon completion they could receive what is considered a credit at university level in the school of social and political sciences. Arguably what we consider most important is that our results can inspire other universities on a national level to also include these sort of work into their civic mission. We want universities across the country to work closely with their communities and contribute to helping causes such as unemployment.



References:

Civic University Working Group (2019). *The University of Lincoln: a strategy for civic engagement*. [online] *The University of Lincoln*. Available at: <https://www.lincoln.ac.uk/media/responsive2017/abouttheuniversity/managementandstrategy/A,Strategy,for,Civic,Engagement,PDF.pdf> [Accessed 29 Sep. 2022].

Connor, H., Dewson, S., Tyers, C., Eccles, J., Regan, J. and Aston, J. (2001). *Social Class and Higher Education: Issues Affecting Decisions on Participation by Lower Social Class Groups*. [online] UCL’s Faculty of Education and Society, pp.1–130. Available at: <https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/4621/1/RR267.pdf> [Accessed 4 Oct. 2022].

Giroux, H. (2021). *Critical Pedagogy. Handbuch Bildungs- und Erziehungssoziologie*, [online] pp.1–16. doi:10.1007/978-3-658-31395-1_19-1.

HESA (2021). *Who’s Studying in HE? | HESA*. [online] Hesa.ac.uk. Available at: <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/students/whos-in-he> [Accessed 4 Oct. 2022].

University of Lincoln (n.d.). *Student as Producer*. [online] Student as Producer. Available at: <https://studentasproducer.lincoln.ac.uk> [Accessed 29 Sep. 2022].

Wright Mills, C. (1999). *The Sociological Imagination*. 14th ed. [online] Oxford University Press. Available at: <https://www.vlebooks.com/Product/Index/91283?page=0> [Accessed 4 Oct. 2022].

YMCA Lincolnshire (n.d.). *YMCA Lincolnshire*. [online] Available at: <https://www.lincsymca.co.uk> [Accessed 29 Sep. 2022].

Acknowledgements:

We would like to thank our supervisor, Dr Gary Saunders for all the help, encouragement and support throughout this project. We are also grateful to UROS for funding this project, the YMCA Lincolnshire, especially for working alongside side us and making this project possible. Finally, we would like to extend this gratitude to Mrs Heather Saunders, who kindly provided us with various contacts and agreed to be interviewed, which helped us in our development.

Student: Grace Jeffery
Jack Smith

Supervisor: Dr Gary Saunders



DISCOVER_LNCN.AC/UROS
@UOL_LALT
#UROS2022