

Better Forums Agenda – May 2026

Better Forums Info:

- Date: Tuesday 12th May
- Time: 5:00 - 8pm
- Location: Nathan Boddington Chambers, University of Leeds Campus

Better Forums Structure:

Each forum will follow this structure:

1. Panellist Training Session
 - a. A 20-minute Session where Panellists are informed of their responsibilities in the space, how voting works and other key context related to Forums
2. Welcome
 - a. The Forum Facilitator will run through Introductions and Ground Rules
3. The discussion of each Idea in turn:
 - a. The student who submitted the Idea (or a nominated spokesperson) to explain what they want and why
 - b. Discussion section
 - i. Clarifications, questions, comments and change proposals from Forum attendees
 - ii. Feedback from Student Leaders, and the Student Exec Officers
 - c. Secret ballot of the Student Panel
 - d. Announcement of Student Panel Verdict
4. Break for refreshments
5. Announcements and reports from two Student Executive Officers detailing progress with regard to implementation of Policy and allowing questions from Forum attendees
6. Continued discussions of Ideas
7. Recap of Announcement of Student Panel Verdict(s).

Idea 1: Childcare Needs

Name: Laura Berro Yoldi

Idea: Should the University of Leeds support childcare needs for students?

What is the current problem, and how does it affect students?

The University of Leeds, like most universities in the UK, is not a charity, and it is understandable to charge fees for its services. However, what is not justified are the enormous fees of its nursery, Bright Beginnings, which currently are £86.40 for a full-time day + a £60 admin fee + a £65 registration fee (but will increase in April), under the current national situation of exclusion of postgraduate students from public funding, the cost-of-living crisis, etc.

The main issue for most UK students who are parents, particularly PGRs, is the commodification of childcare, the lack of universal and accessible childcare provision, and the disproportionate costs of private provision, particularly in the Early Years Education sector. One of the most damaging UK policies in place is the current exclusion of postgraduate students, who are not considered workers, from estate funding for Early Years Education [see this report: <https://news.exeter.ac.uk/staff-news/new-report-calls-on-government-to-fix-the-gap-in-childcare-support-for-postgraduate-students/>]. This policy is only applicable to working parents whose net income is up to £100,000 a year, when the current PGR stipend is slightly higher than £20,000 considering that many PGRs are self-funded.

The University of Leeds needs to tackle this financial issue that impacts all its postgraduate students, meaning that PGRs must choose between expending most of their stipend to cover nursery costs or studying around their children's needs, with the consequence of unnecessary stress and other consequences for them and their families, but also incorporate other measures to realistically promote equality and inclusivity and become a top university for parents.

What is your proposed change? Why would this Idea benefit students?

To tackle these issues, I propose that LUU lobby the University of Leeds to materially/financially support students with their childcare needs. This can be accomplished via the following actions/pathways.

1. Reduce Bright Beginnings Nursery costs for all students who are parents, focusing on PGRs and master's students, at the University of Leeds, to at least half the market average from the 2026-2027 academic year.

2. Create a playgroup on campus (for children older than 5 years old) for students and staff who are parents at a reasonable cost, and with a reduced fee of at least half of the market average for PGRs and master's students, from the 2026-2027 academic year.

3. Include extra funding for PGR parents in their monthly stipend on a regular basis, rather than offering emergency funds. For example, SOAS University (<https://www.soas.ac.uk/childcare-students>) provides a grant of up to £1000 towards the cost of Ofsted-registered childcare.

4. Stop applying the 'core hours' of study to all students who are parents, recognising that this is neither realistic nor fair to them, as they often cannot comply with a 9 am to 4.30 pm schedule due to childcare responsibilities and high childcare costs. For instance, the University of Chester offers Student-Centred Timetabling: <https://heprofessional.co.uk/edition/supporting-parents-through-their-studies-insights-from-the-university-of-chester-and-qaa>

5. Allow all students who are parents to meet with their supervisors online, not as an exception, but on a regular basis, without punishment.

6. Online provision for all extraordinary sessions (except modules), in response to student demand from parents who have difficulty attending face-to-face sessions

7. Creation of Parent-Child Study Rooms. See example: <https://www.sulb.uni-saarland.de/en/courses-and-learning-spaces/learning-spaces/the-parent-child-study-room#:~:text=The%20Parent%20&%20Child%20Study%20Room%20offers,entire%20opening%20hours!%20The%20room%20is%20equipped>

8. As a short-term measure, while the previous adjustments are pursued, the University of Leeds will provide free on-campus childcare for all non-extracurricular activities (except modules and supervision meetings), including Conferences on campus, for students who are parents and cannot afford professional/private childcare, or who do not have a support network.

As an added note, LUU/UoL will ensure that these provisions will not jeopardise VISA Status/requirements for any international students so that they are best able to complete their course whilst meeting their childcare needs.

Have you considered the impact of the proposed change for traditionally underrepresented student groups?

This kit of measures will be particularly positive for International postgraduate students who are parents because they usually lack local network and support to look after their children. Also, for those coming from certain areas and communities more deprived that cannot support them financially, these measures will be beneficial. Finally, in

general, these measures will be directly and indirectly positive for women who are student and parents, as it is them who usually shoulder childcare within the household.

Idea 2: PGR Eye Tests

Name: Weronika Osmólska

Idea: “Should the University of Leeds provide free eye examinations for PhD Students?”

What is the current problem, and how does it affect students?

Currently, free eyesight examination is only provided to staff on the payroll. There are two problems with this.

- The University’s Code of Practice requires Postgraduate Researchers to spend “at least 37 hours [pro-rate] working on their research project” and supports this activity by providing appropriate desk space, computing and IT equipment, yet fall outside of the purview of its DSE policy (aren’t classified as ‘users’) due to not being employed by the University. PGRs are therefore denied the right to University-funded eyesight vouchers, a benefit available to staff at the University who work similar hours with similar work conditions (e.g. Research Fellows). This creates a paradox in which the University both acknowledges the reality of modern research while ignoring health and safety responsibilities. This means that PGRs must pay out of their own pocket for eyesight testing, creating a financial inequity.
- The only way for PGRs currently to access this free eye care voucher is to demonstrate. However, it is increasingly difficult for PGRs to be staff through demonstrating as paid opportunities within faculties are increasingly competitive and limited, often requiring formal applications with CVs and motivation letters. At the same time, paid preparation time for such roles has been reduced, making it difficult for PGRs to apply for these positions, due to the reduced pay and similar amount of work.
- I am aware of other Russell Group universities that extend their staff benefits, including free eye examination, to all PhD students. This creates a disparity between how PGRs are supported when compared to other universities.
- PGR stipends are limited and, with the ongoing cost of living crisis, eye examination tests plus the cost of eyewear can cause financial strain on PGRs. This can lead to many PGRs not attending their regular two-year check-up which is a safety risk and in worst-case scenario can cause permanent eyesight damage.

What is your proposed change? Why would this Idea benefit students?

- The University should change its health and safety practice to categorise PhD students in the same way they do staff, or at the very least recognise PhD students as 'users' for DSE purposes.
- The change would grant PhDs who frequently use DSE the right to a University-funded eyesight test, supporting health and safety and removing financial inequity.
- This would also increase PhD students' general satisfaction rate within the University, as PhD students will feel supported and valued by the University.

The free eye examinations comes with reduced frame rates and also anti-glare coating lenses, which are known to reduce eye strain, preventing eye damage.

Have you considered the impact of the proposed change for traditionally underrepresented student groups?

- It would alleviate a financial burden for PhD students from low-income backgrounds or without external funding.
- It would support students with disabilities that do not meet the threshold for Disabled Students Allowance.

It would provide a subsidised medical care for international students, along with clear guidance, who may be unfamiliar with UK healthcare

Idea 3: Tuition Fees

Name: Katrina Liu

Idea: Should the University of Leeds introduce flexible payment plans for international tuition fees?

What is the current problem, and how does it affect students?

The University currently provides only two options for tuition fee payments:

1. Upfront payment for the whole academic year, to be paid before the start of first semester
2. Two instalments to be paid upfront for each semester.

There are no other options aside from these two payment plans.

This financial inflexibility affects both Home and International Students as it is an active deterrent or causes significant delays to a student's education when financial issues occur.

The tuition fee for Home Students is currently £9,535 for undergraduate years, and may go up in future years, whilst International Student tuition fees vary depending on the course, in some cases exceeding £40,000 per year.

Students also must consider and plan for other financial constraints whilst obtaining their degree – this includes and is not limited to rent, food costs, medical bills, travel costs and much more.

Students who cannot/do not use the Student Loans Company (SLC) for tuition fee payments navigate the payment system themselves and are only given 2 options for payment, which are all upfront.

The key problem this presents is that when financial problems occur, and a student cannot provide all the money upfront, degree certificates and other key documents are withheld until the payment is completed.

Examples of common financial issues for students include problems with transferring money from international banks, students fleeing warzones/natural disasters, other financial crises such as death in the family.

When financial issues such as these occur, there is no grace period so students who would be able to pay the fee by the end of the academic year are instead removed from their course or barred from starting.

When documents like the 'Term-Time Verification Letters' are withheld, students are faced with even more financial pressures as they are unable to obtain part-time work without those documents.

Another problem to consider is that the Flywire (The payment processor used by the University of Leeds) charges a 3% admin fee when students use an international bank card when paying tuition fees. (This ranges from ~£300 to ~£1200 if you consider the tuition fees listed above).

To eliminate this fee, students often set up UK bank accounts, which are only possible to do once you reside in the UK. This is a lengthy process, and if any delays occur in the process of moving to the UK and setting up a bank account (e.g. VISA delays), this would further compound any delays of the tuition fee payment.

One final problem to consider is that international exchange rates often fluctuate, mirroring the payment schedule for the academic year. Often, the exchange rate increases so that international currencies to £GBP end up resulting in students having to pay more of their home currency in order to meet the £GBP figure.

Examples: Here is the conversation rate from Great British Pounds (£) to Chinese Yuan (¥).

Date	GBP to CNY Conversation Rate	How much ¥ a student would need to pay a fee of £15,000
01/08/2024	1 GBP = 9.2250 CNY	138375¥
02/09/2024	1 GBP = 9.3563 CNY	140344.5¥
01/10/2025	1 GBP = 9.3384 CNY	140076¥
01/11/2024	1 GBP = 9.2074 CNY	138111¥
02/12/2024	1 GBP = 9.2021 CNY	138031.5¥
01/01/2025	1 GBP = 9.1329 CNY	136993.5¥
03/02/2025	1 GBP = 8.9552 CNY	134328¥
03/03/2025	1 GBP = 9.2588 CNY	138882¥
01/04/2025	1 GBP = 9.4007 CNY	141010.5¥
01/05/2025	1 GBP = 9.6898 CNY	145347¥
02/06/2025	1 GBP = 9.7523 CNY	146284.5¥
01/07/2025	1 GBP = 9.8474 CNY	147711¥

01/08/2025	1 GBP = 9.5787 CNY	143680.5¥
01/09/2025	1 GBP = 9.6595 CNY	144892.5¥
01/10/2025	1 GBP = 9.5979 CNY	143968.5¥
03/11/2025	1 GBP = 9.3550 CNY	140325¥
01/12/2025	1 GBP = 9.3433 CNY	140149.5¥

What is your proposed change? Why would this Idea benefit students?

I propose that the University of Leeds should introduce additional payment plans, which are structured to allow for some flexibility for students when paying their tuition fees. Some avenues to explore include:

- Quarterly Instalments (Once every 3 months)
- Monthly Instalments during term-time months (September – May, paid at the start of each month)
- Two payments during each semester (1st payment by the start of the semester, and 2nd payment either by specified date, or before end of the semester)

The University must hold consultations with students, with a focus on International Students, to ascertain what options would be beneficial to them.

Students understand that tuition fees should be paid in full before the completion of their degree and so no requests will be made change this. Degree certificates would be understandably withheld until completion on all payments.

Have you considered the impact of the proposed change for traditionally underrepresented student groups?

It would benefit students who comes from financial disadvantage background, it will reduce less financial and mental stress for students, benefit students physical and mental wellbeing.

Event Schedule:

Timing	Item
5:00pm	Panellist Arrive
5:10-5:30pm	Panellist Briefing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ideas and Policy at LUU What are Forums The Role of Panellists in the Space
5:40pm	Idea Holders, Student Leaders and General Audience Arrive
Forums Start	
5:45pm	Forums Starts: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Intro Who is in the room? Ground Rules for engagement Flow for the night
6:00pm – 6:20pm	Idea 1: Childcare Needs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Presentation from Idea Holder Discussion with Panellists and Attendees Panellists Vote Result Announced
6:20pm – 6:45pm	Break <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Refreshments will be served
6:45 – 7:00pm	Accountability Session from Exec Officers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Katrina Liu
7:00pm – 7:20pm	Idea 2: PGR Eye Tests <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Presentation from Idea Holder Discussion with Panellists and Attendees Panellists Vote Result Announced
7:20 – 7:40	Idea 3: Tuition Fees <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Presentation from Idea Holder Discussion with Panellists and Attendees Panellists Vote Result Announced
7:40pm – 8pm	Results Run through results and sign off

