

## Introduction

We hope that there are clear parallels between the data we present and the experiences expressed by the students. In the words of our President we are proud to represent these students.

### **Context into student life at Newman University**

At Newman Students' Union we perceive Newman University as an institution which enables not just academic growth, but pivotal personal development. We view Newman as an academic environment driven by inspiring our students to become more confident in skills which benefit them in both their personal and professional lives.

Our student population differs from most Universities in many ways. For example, our data shows that 91% of our students are 'commuter students'<sup>1</sup>, which is significantly higher than the national statistic of 21% of students at universities country-wide being commuters. Research suggests that commuter students are more likely to be first-in-family students, to come from a lower-income household, to be mature students and to have an ethnic minority background<sup>2</sup>. This is reflected in our data which shows that for the last four years 24% of our students are male and 76% are female, while 64% are mature and 36% young. In terms of ethnicity 55% were white, 23% Asian, 13% Black and 8% of other or mixed ethnicity. Furthermore, Newman has been ranked as a top 10 University for social inclusion and second highest in the West Midlands. Newman also has the biggest proportion of students who are the first in their family to experience higher education (72%), first among UK universities (*The Times and The Sunday Times Good University Guide*, 2022)<sup>3</sup>.

In addition, we feel very fortunate to be a Students' Union which operates within a University that places the students at the forefront of all that it does. This makes our role as student representatives significantly easier as our strong and respectful working relationship with the University and all of its departments allows us to work collaboratively to ensure that the student voice is not only heard, but acted on. For example, in the past two academic years we have worked with:

- The Estates Department to open gender neutral toilets on campus.
- The Chaplaincy and Student Support departments to help provide a 'Community Pantry' for students struggling consequent to the 'Cost of Living Crisis'.
- The Estates Department to purchase portable hearing loops for our hearing impaired students for all front facing departments and areas on campus.
- The Estates Department to increase signage and make sure that the rooms with hearing loops have accurate signage.
- The Estates Department who made room signage on doors larger and easier to read to make navigation for our visually impaired students easier around campus.



*Community Pantry (October 2022).*

- The Pro-Vice Chancellor for Students worked with us to open a new Students' Union space in September. This space serves as our office whilst also providing a welcoming social space for students.

It is this respectful and collaborative relationship which is pivotal in allowing both our Students' Union and University to be a driving force in delivering celebrated Student Experience. This is something which has been reflected in our NSS results in which our Students' Union and Learning Community have scored above the benchmark<sup>4</sup>.

### **Student Experience at Newman University**

As you enter Newman University, you are greeted by a quote from our namesake John Henry Newman which reads '**To live is to change, and to be perfect is to have changed often.**' This reflects the reality shared by many of our students who have to regularly challenge mindsets towards education and towards their own academic potential. Unfortunately, it seems that these are mindsets which societal expectations have instilled in them since childhood. By this, we mean that many of our students have not had the most conventional route into higher education which in many cases has had a negative impact on their confidence. Similarly, many of our students have expressed that they simply did not think that University was 'for them' either due to financial reasons or previous experiences and struggles with academia. This is something which is emphasised by the experiences described in our

with 4/6 of the students interviewed Newman has improved their confidence.

stating that they feel that studying at

In 2020-21, 85% of Newman students were from the more deprived quintiles 1-3 compared to a national figure of 62%. Research into working class attitudes towards further education suggests that income can have a strong correlation with academic performance. In 2021, the National Education Union discovered that students accessing Free School Meals are 28% less likely to leave school with 5 A\*-C GCSE grades than their wealthier peers<sup>5</sup>. This is supported further by Goretti Horgan's study which found that older pupils in disadvantaged schools were less likely to describe learning as fun than older children in advantaged schools<sup>6</sup>. From our conversations with students it is clear that Newman University has played a key role in reshaping these mindsets and instilling a love of learning into its student population. This is evident within the student experiences with the fact that 50% of the students used the word 'exciting' to describe their educational experience at Newman.

Here at Newman, we are keen to support our students and their journey through education. Our student support department have a great staff team that are here to support our students whilst at Newman. One of the ways that they do this is by providing SpLD screenings and ADHD screenings. Last year, the department supported 132 students through these screenings, and this academic year they have already screened 115 students (data collected 19/01/2023) meaning that they predict that the number will be even higher at the end of this academic year than last year. Once they have this screening, Newman University is able to support them and tailor their education to their specific needs as best as possible. This can happen through a number of means, some of these including one-to-one mentoring sessions or help with applying for DSA for external

equipment or support. From conversations with students, it is evident the significance that these screenings can have on their approach and relationship to learning. For example, these 247 students who have been screened between September 2021 and January 2023 had been through the entire schooling system without having a diagnosis which may have had a detrimental impact on their confidence in their academic ability as they hadn't been provided with the relevant and appropriate reasonable adjustments. Outside of our academic focus, we also offer social and skills-based opportunities, which again are designed to meet the needs and preferences of our diverse student population. For example, outside of our more conventional events such as Freshers Week, we host regular 'Family Fun Day' events for our student-parents which we feel enables us to help create a network and community for parents studying at Newman.

We also host regular 'Staff versus Students Sports Tournaments' which we feel also reflects our collaborative and egalitarian community. Solidifying a sense of community is the driving motivation for the majority of our social events. In terms of our events which encourage social awareness, these are directly motivated by the student voice we receive, for example we recently hosted a Q&A with author Della Wright to discuss the laws surrounding sex offenders, as more external speakers discussing first-hand experience were requested by our Criminology, Law and Policing students.

### **Student Outcomes:**

Newman University is an institution which shapes the world from the bottom up. Amongst other things, Newman University trains teachers, counsellors, chaplains and youth workers and soon will be adding nurses and physiotherapists to that list. It is these individuals that go on to shape and save lives within our community and beyond.

Despite our entry requirements being lower than many other institutions in the sector, in the last four years 70% of our students have achieved a first class or upper second degree. This further emphasises our belief and understanding that Newman University is a place that reshapes students' perspective of learning from something which may previously be perceived as arduously challenging to something which is wholly achievable.

Our outcomes also further reinforce the argument that Newman University provides students from lower-income backgrounds with a variety of opportunities which may not have been obtainable without a degree qualification. This is reinforced further by the fact that The Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) found Newman University to be one of the ten universities making the most significant contribution to social mobility<sup>7</sup>.



### **Summary:**

In summary, we believe Newman University is different to many other Universities in the sector. We believe this is primarily due to the fact that our student population predominantly consists of individuals who do not adhere to the conventions of a stereotypical student. We hope that it is consequent to this diversity that we have a unique student community, richer as a result of the assortment of ages, cultures, and life experiences. Furthermore, we hope that it is these differences and specific individual journeys through to higher education that reinforce the ideology that education is for **everyone**. We hope that Newman University is an institution which embodies the ideology that education is not something reserved for the elite, and it is not something which must follow prescriptive methods of teaching and assessment - but that it is so much more. Our wonderful learning community is welcoming to everyone, because education is for all.

## References:

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<sup>1</sup> Outcomes of Commuter Students Survey, reported to Learning, Teaching and Academic Quality Committee on 6th March 2019.

<sup>2</sup> *If more students choose home over halls, it's time to celebrate*, Jones, S. (2020).

<https://www.theguardian.com/education/2020/jun/30/if-more-students-choose-home-over-halls-its-time-to-celebrate>

<sup>3</sup> *Newman University ranked Top 10 in the UK for Social Inclusion*, Gray, B. (2022). [Newman University ranked Top 10 in the UK for Social Inclusion - Newman University, Birmingham](#)

<sup>4</sup>[https://tableau.hefce.ac.uk/t/Public/views/NSS2022/Benchmarksforoneprovider?%3Aembed\\_code\\_version=3&%3Aembed=y&%3AloadOrderID=0&%3Adisplay\\_spinner=no&%3AshowAppBanner=false&%3Adisplay\\_count=n&%3AshowVizHome=n&%3Aorigin=viz\\_share\\_link](https://tableau.hefce.ac.uk/t/Public/views/NSS2022/Benchmarksforoneprovider?%3Aembed_code_version=3&%3Aembed=y&%3AloadOrderID=0&%3Adisplay_spinner=no&%3AshowAppBanner=false&%3Adisplay_count=n&%3AshowVizHome=n&%3Aorigin=viz_share_link)

<sup>5</sup> *Child poverty - the facts* (2021). [https://neu.org.uk/child-poverty-facts#:~:text=More%20than%20a%20third%20\(35,on%20low%20incomes%20are%20facing](https://neu.org.uk/child-poverty-facts#:~:text=More%20than%20a%20third%20(35,on%20low%20incomes%20are%20facing).

<sup>6</sup> *The impact of poverty on young children's experience of school*, Horgan, G. (2007). [https://www.basw.co.uk/system/files/resources/basw\\_93245-5\\_0.pdf](https://www.basw.co.uk/system/files/resources/basw_93245-5_0.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> *An English Social Mobility Index: new report proposes a ranking of universities' impact on social mobility* (2021). <https://www.hepi.ac.uk/2021/03/04/an-english-social-mobility-index-new-report-proposes-a-ranking-of-universities-impact-on-social-mobility/>