

Your Future **me** Design Thinking Problem Brief

Department:
Sociology

Opening question:

How could MMU support students during the 'cost of living' crisis?

Context:

People experience all types of learning barriers for various reasons, including but not limited to social, financial, and spatial factors. At a time of deepening social inequality amid what has been termed a 'cost of living crisis', our call to action for Sociology and Criminology students is to:

- Think about what barriers you, your peers, or people you do not even know might face
- Choose a theme and begin to consider ways that a university can support its communities and help break down or lower these barriers
- Decide on certain things, or one specific thing, you think MMU can do to support students meet these challenges

Manchester Met is often described as the university for Greater Manchester. We have a large proportion of commuting students, who grew up in Manchester and the surrounding areas. How does this change the way students access the city, and the HE institution itself? Not all students live in halls, not all are 'on the doorstep' and within walking distance for early, late, or otherwise inconveniently timetabled classes. There are issues of travel costs, meaning for some it may be more cost effective to stay at home, and many students have caring responsibilities and/or need to work while studying. How do students balance their student life with other aspects of their life?

Added-Value: apply your *sociological* imagination!

As sociologists or criminologists, we don't just take problems at face value, but think critically about broader contexts, about power structures, social and political processes, about economic and material realities.

Any crisis, whether a recession, pandemic, environmental crisis, or international conflict, tends to highlight and exacerbate existing social problems and inequalities. How does this impact issues many students are dealing with around social anxiety, mental health, and wellbeing? What of students from so-called non-traditional backgrounds, for instance in the social care or criminal justice systems? How might such factors intersect with issues of class, 'race', ethnicity, gender, sexuality, age, disability?

Taking a step back, we might ask a bigger question of why the 'progressive' promise of capitalist modernity, that each new generation would have a better standard of living than the one before, has seemingly stalled or even slipped into reverse? During our own life course, sudden downturns in circumstances can impact us quite abruptly: if you can't live your present in the way you lived in the past, how might this impact your future, your outlook, and aspirations?

- Do we try to tackle the issues and contradictions faced individually, or at a more collective or *structural* level?
- What can an institution like a university do to be part of the solution rather than be part of the problem?
- How can Sociology and Criminology students be equipped to be sent out into the wider world, as Graduates looking to work at the coalface of such social problems?

Starting points/ prompts:

Look at the problem from a student perspective

- First generation (first in family to go to university)
- Socio-economic / class barriers
- Disability or Mental/Physical Health
- Commuting students
- Traditionally 'minoritised' / underrepresented
- International students
- Care leavers
- Criminal records
- Adult learners
- Parents and carers

Look at it from a service perspective

- Student hubs/services/providers/wellbeing
- Finance
- Living arrangements – halls, private accommodation

Look at it from the perspective of how education is 'delivered'

- Relationships between students and staff
- Inclusivity
- The curriculum
- Mode of delivery
- On campus / online delivery
- Classroom culture
- Welcoming/level of engagement
- Participation