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# 7th Biennial International Conference on Access, Participation and Success “Through the looking glass: How Higher Education is using the lens of access, participation, and success to create equity for all students”: accessible version of the conference programme

Welcome to our 7th Biennial International Conference on Access, Participation and Success. We are delighted to provide delegates with a full agenda including a selection of workshops and seminars each aligned to one or more of our conference themes:

* Theme 1: Student engagement including co-creation, representation, and student voice
* Theme 2: Inclusion including curriculum, assessment, tuition, and communication
* Theme 3: Accessibility including student support, digital inclusion, and service delivery
* Theme 4: Student outcomes including motivation, equity and employability

## Day one

09:00 - 09:30: Login (posters on display)

### 09:30 - 09:35: Welcome Address

Professor John Butcher, Professor of Inclusive Teaching in Higher Education (WELS), The Open University

### 09:35 – 10:05: Opening Keynote Presentation

Dr Liz Marr, Former Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Students), The Open University

### 10:05 - 10:10: Move to workshops (posters on display)

### 10:10 - 11:10: Workshops

Four parallel sessions will take place during this hour, the details are listed below.

#### 10:10 - 11:10 parallel session 1: Exploring level 5 student’s lived experiences of the barriers to their progression and attainment

This is the first of four presentations within this one-hour session.

**Presenters:** Dr Emma Whewell and Lee Waters, University of Northampton, UK

**Themes:** Student Engagement

**Abstract:** This workshop will provide an interactive workshop designed to allow participants to reflect on how they might support student success at their institution, although conducted at a UK university the methodology and subsequent findings have relevance to all students embarking on higher education. This workshop builds upon the outcomes of a mixed methods investigation into the perceived barriers to attainment and progression in level five sport students at the University of Northampton.

We will present the findings of our study which used two data sets- initially entry level data was analysed to identify some of the key characteristics of the student cohort- for example entry route, age, and ethnic background. Secondly, a phenomenological case study of the lived experiences of 15 level 5 sport and exercise students was conducted. It aimed to understand the complexities of success in higher education, far beyond entry qualifications, indices of deprivation and POLAR characteristics, to offer a first-hand account of student perceptions and interpretations of the barriers they face in progression, retention, and completion on their programme.

Using focus groups and interviews with students from a range of indices we have constructed a set of vignettes written in the first person that explore interpretations of our students’ lived experiences and challenges. Findings demonstrate a complex set of circumstances that centre on managing workload, use of support services and aspirations of students that conflict with university priorities. They represent students individual and collective journeys and have relevance across all levels and subjects.

Conclusions centre on the role of academic and pastoral support, assumptions about priorities of students and practical interventions to support achievement. This workshop will use the vignettes as a discussion prompt to raise considerations for colleagues’ own institutions. Using break out rooms and audience participation including the chat function and Padlet, we will look to consider solutions for the case study vignettes and how these could be applicable to other institutions.

The outcomes of this workshop are to raise awareness of the complex set of circumstances students in higher education may face and to offer our colleagues means by which they may be able to support their students and represent their voice in their teaching, learning and assessment practices.

#### 10:10 - 11:10 parallel session 2: IDEAS for developing an inclusive curriculum

This is the second of four presentations within this one-hour session.

**Presenters: Dr Wendy Fowle and Nicola Beer, Oxford Brookes University**

**Themes:** Inclusion

**Abstract:** In January 2023 our University will be launching its IDEAS model. The model is one of the fundamental strategic initiatives being delivered under the umbrella of its Access and Participation Plan. It aligns with the University’s guiding principle of inclusivity within its Strategy (May and Bridger, 2010) and addresses the structural and pedagogical change needed across the teaching and learning landscape to create an environment where all students whatever their background:

* Enjoy a sense of belonging (Goodenow, 1993; Yorke, 2016)
* Have digital barriers removed from their learning experiences (Jisc, 2020)
* Develop skills to equip them to participate fully in the employment market, including resilience and confidence in their long-term career paths (Advance HE, 2019)
* Are enabled to take ownership of their own learning through meaningful and effective feedback (Sambell and Brown, 2021)
* Are supported to develop the knowledge, skills and competencies to enable successful contribution to a more sustainable future (Advance HE and QAA, 2021)

Inclusive learning design is pivotal to meeting our ambitions, ensuring that the needs of all students are being met and designed in from the very beginning of their study experience. It is informed by the breadth of literature regarding inclusive learning design and the experience of educational developers within the University. Our approach focuses on the following key elements:

* Inclusive learning
* Digital inclusivity
* Employability learning
* Assessment for learning
* Sustainability mindset

As part of the process, a set of questions in the student voice are presented to programme teams within each of these themes during the curriculum design process. This supports our human-centred, Design Thinking approach which places students and their experiences at the centre of the model.

Our workshop will provide an overview of the development of the model within the context of the relevant literature that has informed the design approach. Our new Student Curriculum Consultants will provide further insight into the role that they play in relation to embedding the student voice within the curriculum design process and the experiences they have had in this role to date.

Following the initial overview of the development and implementation of the model, delegates will be introduced to the specific tools associated with the themes and invited to engage more fully with them within breakout rooms. The breakout rooms will be facilitated by the presenters. Delegates will receive hands-on experience of using the tools and work with the facilitators within the interactive workshop.

With delegates back together in the final plenary session, we will present our approach to evaluating the impact of the IDEAS model, through a developed Theory of Change framework. The learning gained from this session will support colleagues in their approach to developing inclusive curriculum within their own institution in addition to developing a Theory of Change and associated Evaluation Plan.

**References**

AdvanceHE (2019) [*Embedding Employability in Higher Education Framework*](https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/teaching-and-learning/employability-enterprise-and-entrepreneurship-higher-education) (online). Accessed 25 November 2022.

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May, H. and Bridger, K. (2010) [Developing and embedding inclusive policy and practice in higher education](https://s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/assets.creode.advancehe-document-manager/documents/hea/private/developingembeddinginclusivepp_report_1568036692.pdf) (online). Accessed 25 November 2022.

Sambell, K. and Brown, S. (2021) Changing assessment for good: building on the emergency switch to promote future-oriented assessment and feedback designs. Assessment and Feedback in a Post-Pandemic Era: A Time for Learning and Inclusion, 11-21.

#### 10:10 - 11:10 parallel session 3: Let us work together: Working with students and staff to contribute to a whole-institutional approach to positive change for underrepresented students

This is the third of four presentations within this one-hour session.

**Presenters:** Janet Lindley, Mary-Jayne Wilton, Helen Williams and Sally Storr, The Open University

**Themes:** Inclusion

**Abstract:** “If you have come here to help me you are wasting your time, but if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.”
― Lilla Watson

This interactive workshop will be based on learning from our experience of delivering a service designed to support Black students and close an institutional awarding gap as part of an Access, Participation and Success (APS) Strategy. The Personal Learning Advice (PLA) Service is a specialist coaching and mentoring service set up to deliver support to students from priority cohorts in the Access and Participation Plan. In 2021 and 2022, we worked predominantly with Black students across all levels of study at the Open University (OU) as part of an institutional commitment to ensuring greater equity for Black students’ experiences and outcomes. The service has also delivered support to students in areas of increased socio-economic deprivation.

In the first part of the workshop, we will briefly outline the approach we have taken to reflection on our own practice and introduce the “equity lens” through which we have critically evaluated existing coaching and mentoring professional frameworks (Clay et al, 2023).

In the second part of the workshop, we will invite delegates to participate in a discussion led by some of the coaches and mentors in the PLA Service. We will focus on the following 3 challenges, in particular:

The language of ‘help’ and ‘support’ and how we can normalize help-seeking

Allyship and inclusive practice and how this translates practically in our practice

‘Success’ and what that means to the students we support

In the third and final part of the workshop, we will lead some interactive coaching exercises to encourage individual reflection on our shared commitment to supporting underrepresented students. It is anticipated that this workshop will be of interest to delegates interested in looking for a safe space to explore the ways they can embed anti-oppressive practice into their own roles – whether working in the UK or another context.

**References**

Enya-Marie Clay, Jo Blissett, Lynne O’Neil, Janet Lindley, Helen Williams, ‘Developing an equity lens: the experience of creating a professional framework for coaches and mentors,’ *Journal of Learning Development in Higher Education*, Special Issue: Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (Forthcoming February 2023).

Lilla Watson, “If you have come here to help me you are wasting your time, but if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.” – attributed to the Aboriginal activists group, Queensland, 1970s

#### 10:10 - 11:10 parallel session 4: Come to Test & Learn from the new Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Learning Analytics Dashboard

This is the fourth of four presentations within this one-hour session.

**Presenters:** Miriam Fernandez, Paul Mulholland, Vaclav Bayer, Martin Hlosta and Christothea Herodotou, The Open University, UK

**Themes:** Inclusion, Student outcomes

**Abstract:** The current degree-awarding gap for a ‘good module pass’ at The Open University (OU) is 19.3% for BAME students and 31.1% for Black students compared to White students. The factors behind these awarding gaps are, however, not fully understood. Research conducted in 2019 over The Open University modules showed that this is not a matter of effort spent, since BAME students spent 4-12% more study time to achieve the same academic performance as White students.

In this workshop, we present our developed Equality Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Learning Analytics (LA) Dashboard. This dashboard was developed following a previous analysis of existing dashboards currently used at the Open University and an interview-led requirements-gathering process from 13 different university stakeholders.

We will first present our conducted analysis of the five different analysed dashboards  (APS Dashboard; Qualification & Progression student profile dashboard; Module Performance Self Service; ASSIST; and Curriculum Analytics Tool) as well as the results of our requirements gathering from the selected stakeholders.

We will then present the designed and developed EDI dashboard and showcase how it can support the automatic identification of modules and materials where problems emerge. We will describe how the dashboard can help university stakeholders, particularly module chairs, by highlighting the specific parts of the module where awarding gaps are increasing and by providing key evidence from existing scholarship investigations conducted by the OU that may help to understand and address those gaps.

A hands-on session will follow up on this presentation. We will allow time for participants to conduct an awarding gap investigation of different OU modules using the EDI dashboard followed by a focus group discussion. During the focus group, we will ask participants to describe their findings about the various modules they engaged with and to reflect on how such a dashboard could be integrated into existing stakeholder practices.

At the beginning of the workshop, participants will also be asked to complete a brief online questionnaire. With this form, we aim to collect information about: (i) their role (AL, Module Chair, etc.), (ii) the tools that they currently use (if any) to investigate existing awarding gaps, (iii) the problems they encounter when using such tools (if any), (iv) their perceptions of the EDI dashboard, and (v) possible developments (requirements) that they may want to see in future versions of the dashboard.

An analysis of both the questionnaire and the focus group will then be feedback to participants (if they wish to be contacted by the research team).

Data Protection and ethical approval will be requested before this workshop in collaboration with the Research Ethics team at The Open University to ensure that both, the questionnaire and the focus group are carefully designed and that participants are aware of the purpose of the study, how the collected data will be collected, stored and analysed, and how they can give or withdraw consent.

**References**

*Open.Ac.Uk*, 2023, [Access and Participation Plan 2020-2025.pdf](https://www.open.ac.uk/about/wideningparticipation/sites/www.open.ac.uk.about.wideningparticipation/files/files/OU%20Access%20and%20Participation%20Plan%202020-2025.pdf)

Nguyen, Q., Rienties, B., Richardson, J.T.: Learning analytics to uncover inequality in behavioural engagement and academic attainment in a distance learning setting. Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education 45(4), 594–606 (2020)

### 11:10 – 11:20: Break (posters on display)

### 11:20 - 12:20: Seminars

This hour will comprise four different sessions, each made up of two 30-minutes seminar. The details are listed below.

#### 11:20 - 12:20 parallel session 1**:** “The bridge between school and uni, that’s the bit that’s missing”: Improving Access to Higher Education for Care-Experienced Students / Building a student panel to improve support for independent students

This is the first of four 2 x 30-minute presentations within this one-hour session.

**Session A title:** “The bridge between school and uni, that’s the bit that’s missing”: Improving Access to Higher Education for Care-Experienced Students

**Presenters:** Hannah Bayfield and Lena Smith, Cardiff University

**Themes:** Accessibility

**Abstract:** International research has demonstrated that care-experienced young people (CEYP) achieve poorer educational and lifecourse outcomes than their peers (Berger et al, 2015; Jackson, 1994; 2010; Mannay et al, 2017; O’Higgins et al, 2015; Sebba et al, 2015; Vinnerljung and Hjern, 2011). This inequality has been attributed in part to multiple placement moves and a potential lack of focus upon educational experience (Evans et al, 2016). Based on statistics from 2012, the Office for Fair Access (OFFA, 2017) reported that whilst 60% of the general population of school leavers in the UK entered higher education (HE), only 6% of care leavers went to university (Allnatt, 2018) (although this is likely to be an underestimate (Harrison, 2020; Harrison and Waller, 2018)).

With rates of children taken into care increasing in Wales (Welsh Government, 2021; Elliott, 2020), there is value in understanding how best to support this group with their educational transitions. Based on pan-Wales research into access to, and success in, HE for CEYP (Bayfield, 2023 [forthcoming]), this paper presents the experiences of 13 young people in Wales regarding educational transitions and the support they have – or have not – had when it comes to HE. Based on these experiences, recommendations are made for improving transition support and better signposting existing support. CLASS Cymru (Care Leavers’ Activities and Student Support Wales) is used as an example of how to action the recommendations from care experienced people and those who support them.

The paper is drawn from a wider research project examining the support Welsh Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) provide to care-experienced young people prior to and during their time in Higher Education (HE) with the aim of closing the access gap faced by this group. Findings suggest the importance of information sharing in order to share best practice as well as identify common areas for improvement. As such, this shared presentation brings together academic and practitioner colleagues to discuss the ways in which such collaboration can improve support.

**References**

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Bayfield, H. (2023, forthcoming) Exploring support for care experienced young people in Higher Education in Wales. Cardiff University: CASCADE

Berger, L.M., Cancian, M., Han, E., Noyes, J. and Rios-Salas, V. (2015) ‘Children’s academic achievement and foster care’ Pediatrics 135(1) pp. 109

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Jackson, S. (2010) ‘Reconnecting care and education: from the Children Act 1989 to Care Matters’ Journal of Children’s Services 5(3) pp. 48-60

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Welsh Government (2021) Experimental Statistics: Children looked after by local authorities, 2020-21. Wales: Statistics for Wales

**Session B title:** Building a student panel to improve support for independent students

**Presenters:** Kirstyn Kedaitis, Jon Datta and Kerrie Portman, University of Cambridge

**Themes:** Student Engagement, Inclusion

**Abstract:** There is an increasing call for higher education institutions to collect and reflect on feedback from care-experienced and estranged students with a view to improving provisions for these groups. However, it can be challenging to collect a volume of meaningful feedback from independent students for a variety of reasons. A small pool of participants, students’ fear of stigma, and a lack of widespread awareness of institutional supports are just some of the factors that can pose a challenge when collecting feedback, thereby impacting on an institution’s ability to meaningfully evaluate and improve upon their existing provisions.

As a signatory of both the [Care Leaver Covenant](https://mycovenant.org.uk/) and the [Stand Alone Pledge](http://www.thestandalonepledge.org.uk/), the University of Cambridge has been working to support care-experienced and estranged students according to the [UCAS HE Provider Good Practice Briefing for Care Experienced Students.](https://www.ucas.com/providers/good-practice/emerging-cohorts/care-experienced-students) We have created an advisory panel comprised of students with lived experience of care and/or estrangement. The panel meets regularly to offer their opinions and ideas to help the University better support students pre-entry and once they have enrolled. By sharing their lived experiences, the students can help inform policy and practice, and provide staff with a steer on how new initiatives might impact them.

This seminar will consider how to collect and utilise student feedback in a valuable way by means of a student panel. Examples will be provided of how to build an independent student panel, how to meet with and collect feedback from the panel, and how to use this feedback to guide student support work within a higher education institution. Student representatives will also share their experiences of being part of the panel.

#### 11:20 - 12:20 parallel session 2: Shaping the OU Websites and systems of the future with student research / Inclusive Curricula and Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies

This is the second of four 2 x 30-minute presentations within this one-hour session.

**Session A title:** Shaping the OU Websites and systems of the future with student research

**Presenters:** Jade Matos Carew, Kirsty Baker and Paul Hambidge, The Open University

**Themes:** Student Engagement, Accessibility

**Abstract:** The Accessibility and Usability Evaluation team (AUE) is part of Learning Experience and Technology at the OU. User-centered design and the student voice is at the heart of everything we do. The AUE team is responsible for looking after the digital accessibility and usability of our centralised, student-facing websites and systems and acts as a centre of expertise and education, promoting best practice to all staff.

We recently set up a student research panel so we can test new features, components, and designs, in order to feed this research into an iterative design process and evidence the decisions we make. Through the panel, we conduct qualitative observational usability studies, (1:1/group moderated sessions and unmoderated activities) as well as engaging students in shorter rapid feedback activities such as polls, surveys, and questions in a dedicated forum space. Our findings, even the seemingly small ones, have enabled us to make real changes and improvements and open up discussions with design and product teams about innovation and future considerations, making the digital space more inclusive.

The panel allows for easier facilitation of student participation in projects. The high proportion of disabled students on our panel ensures their inclusion in our research activities and gives voice to a distinctly underrepresented group in higher education. It also enables us to conduct targeted research into aspects of accessibility and the use of assistive technology.

Most importantly, the research panel offers us the privilege and enjoyment of direct contact with students, who in turn, enjoy working and communicating with us, seeing and getting to know ‘the people behind the websites’, and really feel like they’re having an impact on shaping their present and future learning spaces at the OU.

We’d love the opportunity to take you on a tour of our research to date. We’ll look at lessons and examples of how we’ve used simple UX and usability methodology in the design and delivery of our panel activities and sessions which you can perhaps apply to your own contexts. We’ll then talk you though some examples of how the student voice from our research has had a positive impact on how we design and create our digital space for students as well as how we’re raising awareness around the OU of the importance of usability and inclusive design.

**Session B title:** Inclusive Curricula and Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies

**Presenters:** Morag Duffin, The University of Law

**Themes:** Inclusion

**Abstract:** This seminar will review the challenges of developing and monitoring the provision of an inclusive curriculum for professional programmes that are regulated by professional, statutory and regulatory bodies. These bodies engage with higher education providers as regulators on courses that provide a route through to their relevant profession or that are recognised by employers. This creates an additional element to the development of curricula for higher education providers as they have less autonomy over the content and assessment methodology, the quantity of content, and even in some cases the knowledge of the final results of their students. This seminar explores this in the context of Law. It also considers the challenges of developing a curriculum for a subject that is based on historical precedent and thereby replicates historical inequalities. This has a particularly large impact on professional Law courses, where the remit is to prepare students for the workplace, as opposed to academic Law courses which provide the student with the opportunity to look at Law in a more theoretical context. Finally, the seminar explores the practical barriers faced by higher education providers who deliver professional courses, when they are preparing students for a profession that is itself struggling with inequalities in terms of representation and practices. It will discuss structures and processes that can be put in place to ensure curricula are as inclusive as possible despite these challenges, covering the journey from design of materials, to delivery of teaching and monitoring of provision. The session will also consider any opportunities that may arise from inclusive curricular work, in particular from working with PSRBs, co-creating with students and working collaboratively with other higher education providers.

#### 11:20 - 12:20 parallel session 3: Introducing ‘Learn, grow, connect’: a group intervention to support students with mental health needs / Developing a toolkit for teaching sensitive topics at a distance learning university

This is the third of four 2 x 30-minute presentations within this one-hour session.

**Session A title:** Introducing ‘Learn, grow, connect’: a group intervention to support students with mental health needs

**Presenters:** Chrissie Farley and Harminder Kaur, The Open University

**Themes:** Inclusion

**Abstract:** This seminar will feature a short presentation on a 2022-23 group workshop programme with the Personal Learning Advisor (PLA) Service at the Open University (OU). The PLA Service is a specialist coaching and mentoring service set up to deliver individual and group support to students from priority cohorts in the Access and Participation Plan.

In October 2022, the service launched a group workshop programme entitled ‘Learn, Grow, Connect,’ which was written specifically for c.1500 UK-domiciled distance-learning students studying in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences with declared mental health needs. The programme was designed using principles from a ‘coaching for learning’ pedagogy (Wang, 2012) and learning from the wider literature on belonging and shared identities (Advance HE, 2022).

In this presentation, practitioners from the PLA Service will aim to share learning on building inclusion for students with mental health needs in a live session and invite attendees to reflect on their own good practice in this area. The presentation will start by providing an overview of Learn, Grow, Connect,’ the rationale for offering virtual, group interventions and explore how ‘co-creation’ with students was embedded in the programme. Personal Learning Advisors delivering the sessions will share some of the good practice learned from facilitating sessions for students with (some very complex) mental health needs. There will also be an analysis of student feedback to-date and how this has been used to inform ongoing improvements in the programme and the incorporation of a student ‘voice.’ Finally, it will also share some of the challenges with encouraging student participation in a live session and how we addressed these.

The session will be of interest to those involved in teaching and learning, as well as practitioners in student support roles.

**Session B title:** Developing a toolkit for teaching sensitive topics at a distance learning university

**Presenters:** David Morrison, The Open University

**Themes:** Student engagement, Inclusion, Accessibility

**Abstract:** Topics can become sensitive when they have the capacity to evoke an emotional response. This may be because we have difficult experiences relating to the topic or because there are strongly held and competing views on it.

In the School of Psychology and Counselling at The Open University, a UK-based distance learning university, a growing number of modules include sensitive topics such as self-harm and suicide. Understandably, these topics can be particularly challenging for students with personal experience of them. As a result, some students struggle to engage with the teaching, learning and assessment. This has been a twofold challenge for lecturers, some of whom had limited experience of teaching sensitive topics in a distance learning environment: 1) how to deliver effective tuition on these topics and 2) how to support students for whom these topics are sensitive.

In response to these challenges, the presenter developed a toolkit for teaching sensitive topics. This toolkit was based on the existing academic literature and a workshop with psychology and counselling lecturers at the university in 2019. The toolkit was launched in 2020 as an online, internal resource for lecturers. Since its launch, over 1,000 lecturers have accessed the resource.

This seminar will begin by outlining the development of this toolkit, its rationale, aims and objectives. In the second part, the seminar will provide an overview of the toolkit’s contents, including when and how students respond to sensitive topics, how to teach sensitive topics, and how to provide feedback on assignments based on sensitive topics. Third, the seminar will critically review the toolkit’s development and present feedback from users. Finally, the presenter will discuss plans for the expansion of the toolkit into a large-scale, publicly available resource for educators at other Further and Higher Education institutions.

#### 11:20 - 12:20 parallel session 4: The careless academy? Making space for carers and parents in higher education / What do we know about the impact of an Access programme?

This is the fourth of four 2 x 30-minute presentations within this one-hour session.

**Session A title:** The careless academy? Making space for carers and parents in higher education.

**Presenters:** Dr Rachel Spacey, Rebecca Sanderson and Amy Zile, University of Lincoln

**Themes:** Inclusion

**Abstract:** Higher education has been described as a ‘care-less’ environment, a world characterised by competitive individualism within which students are assumed to be unencumbered by the responsibilities of care (Lynch, 2010; Moreau, 2016). Within higher education research there is increasing interest in the links between student identity, experience and wellbeing, particularly in relation to minority student groups. One such group is students with caring responsibilities who are sometimes described as a “hidden” minority, a group whose experiences and needs are not well understood. Funded by the student mental health network SMARTEN our mixed methods study explored the challenges faced by these students with a particular focus on their study-work-life balance, sense of belonging and access to university support services.

Our research indicates that these students experience conflicts of identity and stresses resulting from the tension between their educational and caring commitments. These tensions can lead to students feeling excluded from the life of their institution. As one participant told us:

 “My job is being a student. That's what I am. That's what I should be doing. So it's really, really frustrating. And university isn't just about studying. There's so many other things that go along with it that I would love to do, but I can't. And I'm always that one…You have to say you can't”.

Reporting on the findings from 18 semi-structured research interviews with student parents and carers and our national survey this presentation will explore the nature of these challenges in more detail. Resisting a deficit model approach our research, which was shaped by principals of co-design and action research, also highlights the strengths which these students bring to their studies and their university. For universities to become truly inclusive to these students we argue that we must recognise these strengths and find ways to empower student carers and parents to reshape the university into a care-ful, not care-less, institution.

**References**

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**Session B title:** What do we know about the impact of an Access programme?

**Presenters:** John Butcher, The Open University

**Themes:** Inclusion, Student outcomes

**Abstract:** This seminar presents key findings synthesised from three scholarship projects conducted at the Open University (OU) exploring the impact of a part-time Access module. The OU has offered a suite of three 30 credit level 0 preparatory Access modules since 2013, attracting around 4K students from disadvantaged backgrounds per year.

Scholarship on the impact of the STEM Access module was undertaken first, with student surveys, tutor interviews and analysis of outcome data demonstrating important effects during the module: increased learner confidence; a reduced fear of maths; and an engagement with ‘doing and reading about’ science. An ‘Access effect’ was subsequently identified, sustained into Year 1 undergraduate study, by which students who began with Access were more likely to complete and pass their first undergraduate science module - enhanced assessment literacy prompting more strategic learners to submit every task and engage with tutor feedback (Butcher et al, 2018; Butcher et al 2020).

Second, the impact of the ‘Arts and languages’ Access module was explored through interviews with 37 students. Conclusions included: the impact of embedded generic skills enhancing learner confidence and time management; and the effect of literacy skills relevant to the arts and humanities enhancing cultural capital, enabling disadvantaged learners to access challenging disciplines. Impact extended into the lives of individual students, suggesting a counter-narrative to the prevailing, ‘economic value’ paradigms of higher education policymakers. (Butcher & Clarke, 2022; Butcher & Clarke, 2021) This year, a third scholarship project began, exploring the impact of the social science Access module ‘People, work and society’, which attracts the most disadvantaged students. Interim findings will be presented on the impact on perceptions of employability and student identity.

Recommendations for sector colleagues include the imperative that all universities embed a flexible, student-centred, confidence-building preparatory taster experience aimed at students returning to education.

**References**

Butcher, J. & Clarke, A. (2021) ‘[Widening HE participation in the arts: impacts of an Access module on learner preparedness](https://doi.org/10.1177/14740222211004884)’, Arts and Humanities in Higher Education

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Butcher, J., Wood, C., McPherson, E., & Clarke, A (2020) ‘How might mature students with low entry qualifications succeed in undergraduate Science?’ Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning, 22, (3), 137-165

### 12:20 – 13:05: Lunch (posters on display)

### 13:05 – 14:05: Seminars

This hour will comprise four different sessions, each made up of two 30-minutes seminar. The details are listed below.

#### 13:05 – 14:05 parallel session 1: Supporting Disabled Students Journeys: Transition into Higher Education (HE) / Moving into a new socially just and equal ‘normal’- the lessons Higher Education must learn from its disabled students

This is the first of four 2 x 30-minute presentations within this one-hour session.

**Session A title:** Supporting Disabled Students Journeys: Transition into Higher Education (HE)

**Presenters:** Tahera Mayat and John Haque, Go Higher West Yorkshire

**Themes:** Student engagement, Accessibility

**Abstract:** Collaborative working and supporting under-represented groups is at the heart of Go Higher West Yorkshire (GHWY). GHWY became aware disabled students can fall off a cliff between Further Education (FE) and Higher Education (HE) and responded with a collaborative output.

There exists a vast amount of generic advice to help students transition to HE. However, this often overlooks the unique experience of disabled students. The move to HE is a huge journey. However, for disabled students the transition to HE can be especially complex and a challenge to navigate. This is due to increased independence; different expectations in FE and HE; and how the language and terminology used for disability and support varies in HE. Therefore, disabled learners may not access the support they need and/or know what questions to ask.

Working collaboratively across a group of FE and HE providers, GHWY recently launched a Transition Pack for Disabled Learners. This is designed to raise awareness of how disabled students can access appropriate guidance when progressing from FE into HE. Our transition pack receives praise for humanising this transition by bringing in lived experience through embedding the student quotes/voice of those who have already made the transition to HE.

The pack aims to encourage practitioners, students and parent/carers to understand how a diagnosis (or awaiting of a diagnosis) translates in HE; informs of the Disabled Students Allowance (government grant in United Kingdom (UK)); and provides a roadmap of the HE application process from start to finish. Alongside the transition pack, we commissioned a literature review conducted by Advance HE for an overview of Disabled Learners research to support our work in this area.

Participants can expect a virtual tour of the transition pack including the key recommendations to support Disabled Learners. This session will also highlight the strategic objectives of the pack including a focus on GHWY’s approach towards dissemination. Audience members will be able to share their thoughts on developing the HE Disabled Students Transition Pack via an interactive online platform.

Our transition pack content is UK centred and based on the UK educational system. However, there are generic learnings on supporting disabled students: open lines of communications; listening to daily realities of students; and understanding the impact of systems and policies on those who trying to navigate them.

**Session B title:** Moving into a new socially just and equal ‘normal’- the lessons Higher Education must learn from its disabled students

**Presenters:** Dr Suanne Gibson, University of Plymouth, and Dr Zeta Williams-Brown, University of Wolverhampton

**Themes:** Student engagement, Inclusion

**Abstract:** The past three years have witnessed seminal change occurring in and to education. The pandemic brought much pain, but with it also hope. Where many students experienced segregation and inequality, others experienced empowerment, being heard and finding success. The authors are referring to the lived academic and life experiences of many UK UG and PG disabled students. This paper draws on findings from and related outputs of a study that took place during the second year of the pandemic, entitled ‘**Building back better: Working with disabled students to address unequal outcomes in UK HE’.**

Throughout the study, the project leads and co-investigators, worked closely with the national body [Disabled Students UK](https://disabledstudents.co.uk/) resulting in contribution to DSUK’s (2022), national report on the pandemic for disabled students and panel dissemination, [Going Back is Not a Choice](https://disabledstudents.co.uk/not-a-choice/), the publication of a special edition journal paper, an invitation to submit a BERA blog series, contribution to a House of Lords report on the Disabled Students Allowance, conference paper invites and media coverage.

This presentation draws out seminal findings and themes from the study and related work for HEIs to consider, in terms of their new ‘normal’. We argue this is a new ‘normal’ that sustains and builds upon wider access and successful inclusive provision. The benefits when genuine collaboration and partnership between students and educators happen in education is well evidenced (Gibson and Cook-Sather 2020), our work has uncovered a clear need for co-created inclusive pedagogy and provision, one where disabled students are front and centre of the discussion, decisions, roll out and evaluation.

**References**

Gibson, S. and Cook-Sather, A. (2020) ‘Politicised compassion and pedagogical partnership: A discourse and practice for social justice in the inclusive academy’. International Journal for Students as Partners 4 (1), 16-33

Disabled Students UK (2022), [Going Back is Not a Choice](https://disabledstudents.co.uk/not-a-choice/), DSUK, March 2022

#### 13:05 – 14:05 parallel session 2: Making online synchronous collaborative learning more accessible for students with sensory impairments / Embedding accessibility into the curriculum: an Accessibility Tool as a checklist

This is the second of four 2 x 30-minute presentations within this one-hour session.

**Session A title:** Making online synchronous collaborative learning more accessible for students with sensory impairments

**Presenters:** Jo Buxton, The Open University

**Themes:** Student engagement, Accessibility

**Abstract:** This seminar reports on the findings of research conducted at the Open University into the accessibility of collaborative learning events and the barriers to engagement experienced by blind/visually impaired (BVI) students and deaf/hard of hearing (DHH) students.

Taking a Design-Based Research (DBR) approach, five studies were undertaken to identify these barriers and determine potential interventions.  These identified online synchronous learning events as providing the most significant barriers.  The product of the research, a result of collaborative design by the participants in the study, is a framework for accessible collaborative engagement represented in the form of a software model, the Model for Accessible Collaborative Engagement (MACE).

The studies involved representatives of all stakeholders in the collaborative learning process at the institution: students, tutors, modules teams, academics, support staff, and the student union Disabled Students Group.  These studies took the form of an online survey, interviews with staff and students, staff workshops and a collaborative design focus group.  With significant representation of the target groups (BVI and DHH) in all studies, and taking an iterative approach to the design, evaluation and construction of the framework model, the studies established that barriers existed in four main categories covering different themes:

1. Communications: aural, visual, screen reading and navigation, text/captioning, lip reading and non-verbal, interpretation and third-party, mode control, and synchronisation.
2. Emotional and Social Factors: familiarisation, support networks, self-advocacy, opting out, cognitive load, and stress and anxiety.
3. Provisioning and Technical Factors: dissemination, speed and pacing, staff training, participation control, group size, technical], and recordings.
4. Activity and Session Design: materials (volume of, in-advance, accessible), accessible activities, and session formats.

MACE is designed to be utilised by both students and staff to provide guidance and suggestions on how to identify and acknowledge these barriers and implement interventions to reduce them.

**Session B title:** Embedding accessibility into the curriculum: an Accessibility Tool as a checklist

**Presenters:** Rhiannon Edwards, University of Bath and Vanessa Moore, The Open University

**Themes:** Accessibility

**Abstract:** A more inclusive learning environment for all students begins with an accessible learning environment. In the academic year 2020/21, 18% of all students (full-time and part-time) registered to a HEI in the UK disclosed a disability (HESA, 2021). With the number of students declaring disabilities rising each year, HEIs are having to rethink curriculum design to ensure materials are both inclusive and accessible; accessibility by curriculum design can be considered proactively as opposed to reactively (Bunbury, 2020). A 10-prompt Accessibility Tool was designed to encourage academics delivering an online module to consider accessibility by design, especially in the context of students who may need to receive materials in hard-copy. The aim of the study was to establish the usability of the Tool, and whether it facilitated engagement of accessibility. We asked academics to participate in a survey (n = 22), and followed-up with semi-structured interviews (n = 16). Over 50% of participants felt the Accessibility Tool contained appropriate content, was user-friendly, and fit for purpose. The thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) of the interviews revealed core themes focusing on training for the Tool, facilitating conversations around accessibility in curriculum design, and highlighting the specificity of the Tool for printed materials only. Results suggest the Tool does facilitate accessibility in curriculum design, enables academics to think about how interactive activities translate to print, and would be further complimented by a training brief. Once revised, the dissemination of the Tool across the HEI will enable curriculum design to include accessibility, facilitating a proactive initiative to accessible module materials as opposed to a reactive response. The Accessibility Tool can be used by all academics of varying disciplines, but it’s noted some prompts may need to be edited to accommodate for discipline specificities such as software.

**References**

Bunbury, S. (2020). Disability in higher education–do reasonable adjustments contribute to an inclusive curriculum?. International Journal of Inclusive Education, 24(9), 964-979.

Braun, V. and Clarke, V., (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. Qualitative research in psychology, 3(2), pp.77-101.

HESA (2021) [HE student enrolments by personal characteristics](https://eur01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.hesa.ac.uk%2Fdata-and-analysis%2Fstudents%2Fwhos-in-he&data=05%7C01%7Csatwant.knight%40open.ac.uk%7C15181595ccf24f91820908db0f416753%7C0e2ed45596af4100bed3a8e5fd981685%7C0%7C0%7C638120545795815556%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=9X28%2FfbIIJCDULRkBkc4ah%2Bu5hsPDL08L4N0xndgUsg%3D&reserved=0) (Accessed: 26 January 2023).

#### 13:05 – 14:05 parallel session 3: A view through the looking glass: co-creation and innovation - a recipe for success / The ‘Learning pathways for carers’ programme

This is the third of four 2 x 30-minute presentations within this one-hour session.

**Session A title:** A view through the looking glass: co-creation and innovation - a recipe for success

**Presenters:** Sarah Mander, Amber Fensham-Smith, Nichola Connolly and Yasmin Reeve, The Open University

**Themes:** Student engagement

**Abstract:** This session showcases innovative co-creation activities and research practice undertaken by the Student Voice and Wellbeing group from the School of Education, Childhood, Youth and Sport at the Open University (OU). The group works in partnership to strengthen student voice and facilitate opportunities for empowering students which ensure the student voice is heard, listened to and acted upon.

Creating such opportunities amplifies students’ voices, offering potential to address awarding gaps for any student group. This work communicates the message that students’ voices and wellbeing are inextricably connected and are everyone’s responsibility (Mander in Brown and Mander, 2021). The student-led session recounts the inception of the group, sharing the whys and hows of its strategic approach and leadership, and the depth and breadth of the students’ participation. It reports on research activities which evaluate the impact on under-represented students of participation in staff recruitment processes. The presentation is a platform to challenge, stimulate and diversify traditional student voice practice and is relevant for an international audience.

A focus upon promoting positive mental health and wellbeing is a core value of the group. The presentation proudly introduces a newly published bi-lingual, digital student wellbeing handbook, co-created by Student Ambassadors and staff members. Resources include thought-provoking contributions of artwork, poetry, stories and activities based upon the five ways of wellbeing connect, give, take notice, keep learning and be active promoted by MIND, a UK based mental health charity. The main strength of this resource is that it draws directly on student experience, and what students feel best supports their wellbeing while studying.

These activities share insight and expertise, helping facilitate deeper learning of barriers to student experience. They identify creative, pioneering approaches to improvement in the equality of student experiences and outcomes. The presentation will be of interest to other HEIs seeking innovative models for promoting marginalised voices through mental health and wellbeing projects, and brings potential for policy makers to re-evaluate existing student voice and wellbeing strategies and practice.

**References**

Mander, S. (2021) ‘Well-being, Mental Health and the Student population’ in Williams-Brown, Z. and Mander, S. (eds) Childhood Well-being and Resilience: An educational perspective, Abingdon: Routledge.

**Session B title:** The ‘Learning pathways for carers’ programme

**Presenters:** Dr Nichola Kentzer, Dr Chris Kubiak and Prof Mary Larkin, The Open University

**Themes:** Student engagement, Accessibility

**Abstract:** Although widening access policies have led to greater prioritisation of students who are carers, they continue to experience considerable disadvantage in higher education (HE) (Carers Trust, 2018; National Union of Students, 2013).  Strategies to address their needs remain underdeveloped (Larkin & Kubiak, 2021). In addition, there is a need to better understand possible reasons for the under-representation of this population in HE (Runacres et al. 2021).

A body of work developed by The Open University’s (OU) Carer Research Group has led to significant insights into the experiences of the ever-increasing number of students in the OU who are carers. This research has sought to not only understand the experiences of carers as they study, but also to reduce the barriers faced by carers to enable their access to, and success in, HE.

This seminar will consider the key findings from this work and discuss how these wider insights have underpinned an innovative project using OpenLearn, a free, unlimited resource that offers flexibility, choice, and carer specific learning opportunities. The project, carried out in partnership with a leading carers organisation in the UK - Carers Trust, aims to support wellbeing and an opportunity to upskill for employment and/or further study, including entry to OU courses. The way that this project.

This project started by creating learning journeys for carers in Tower Hamlets – one of the UK’s most diverse area. It has led to a unique ‘Learning pathways for carers’ programme which includes a ‘Learning Guide for carers’ and a ‘Facilitator Guide’ for carer centre staff to support carers to access and study through OpenLearn.  The programme will be demonstrated and the plans for the national roll out (supported by Carers Trust) and international roll out (starting with Carers New South Wales, Australia) outlined.

**References**

Carers Trust, (2018) Supporting Students with Caring Responsibilities: Ideas and Practice for Universities to Help Student Carers Access and Succeed in Higher Education, London: Carers Trust.

Larkin, M. & Kubiak, C. (2021). Carers and Higher Education: Where next? Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning, 23**,** 130–151.

National Union of Students. (2013). Learning with care: [Experiences of student carers in the UK](https://www.nusconnect.org.uk/resources/learning-with-care) [Online]. [Accessed 17 September 2020].

Runacres, J., Herron, D., Buckless, K. & Worrall, S. (2021). [Student carer experiences of higher education and support: a scoping review](https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2021.1983880). International Journal of Inclusive Education**,** DOI.

#### 13:05 – 14:05 parallel session 4: Digital inclusion beyond the pandemic: call to action for a sector-wide strategy / Joining the Dots: Learnings from a university transition programme

This is the fourth of four 2 x 30-minute presentations within this one-hour session.

**Session A title:** Digital inclusion beyond the pandemic: call to action for a sector-wide strategy

**Presenters:** Freddie Quek, Times Higher Education and Laila Burton, The Open University

**Themes:** Accessibility

**Abstract:** The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the HE sector has been profound, and the rapid move to online delivery created both challenges and opportunities for improving access, participation, and success. One significant challenge has been digital exclusion and The Open University's research into students' lived experiences provides insights into the impact of digital exclusion on the learning experience, particularly for students from underrepresented and disadvantaged backgrounds.

This seminar will highlight key findings from research into digital exclusion at the OU and beyond. It will also give participants the opportunity to learn about a collaborative initiative led by Freddie Quek to develop a digital inclusion strategy for the higher education sector. Most universities have a digital inclusion strategy and through collaboration we can take a more joined up approach to removing the barriers to learning posed by digital exclusion.

**Session B title:** Joining the Dots: Learnings from a university transition programme

**Presenters:** Hannah Thomson and Sarah Zukernain, The Brilliant Club

**Themes:** Student outcomes

**Abstract:** Disadvantage does not disappear when students walk through the doors of their university. A growing body of research has highlighted the inequalities that exist in undergraduate outcomes in the UK. Some students are less likely to get good grades in their first year, more likely to drop out before their second year and less likely to graduate with a 1st or 2:1 in their final degree. The attainment gaps we see between less and more advantaged students are significant, even at the most competitive universities.

Join the Dots is a new programme piloting in 2022/23, co-created through collaboration between schools, universities, students, and The Brilliant Club. The programme brings schools and universities together to support students at university who are most likely to face barriers during the transition from their final of year of school to their first year of university. Our seminar will have three areas of focus:

1. How we developed the programme based on research evidence relating to the most important outcomes for student success
2. Learnings from the first year of Join the Dots, including insights from our evaluation
3. The student experience of starting university and taking part in Join the Dots

Join the Dots builds communities of students to identify, discuss and address shared challenges and foster a sense of belonging at university. Through one-to-one and peer group coaching, it aims to address three key student outcomes: academic self-efficacy, sense of belonging in higher education, and study strategy use. Our evaluation of the programme focuses on measuring changes in these outcomes and on students’ experience of transitioning from school to university. This session will provide an in-depth overview of the pilot, highlighting our evaluation results and lessons learnt so far. Further, a student taking part in the programme will share her experience of Join the Dots.

### 14:05 - 14:15: Break (posters on display)

### 14:15 - 15:15: Seminars

This hour will comprise four different sessions, each made up of two 30-minutes seminar. The details are listed below.

#### 14:15 - 15:15 parallel session 1: The non-negotiable: how student-led academic spaces foster adaptable, accessible and inclusive learning within the shifting landscape of HE / Value, visibility and belonging: exploring the impact of staff/student reverse mentoring within higher education

This is the first of four 2 x 30-minute presentations within this one-hour session.

**Session A title:** The non-negotiable: how student-led academic spaces foster adaptable, accessible and inclusive learning within the shifting landscape of HE

**Presenters:** Joshua Manning, Cara Baer, Liz Staples and writing mentors (names TBC), University of Plymouth

**Themes:** Accessibility

**Abstract:** For the last 10 years, the Writing Café has been a welcoming space for students to talk about academic writing across disciplines and to support them to become better writers, outside of formal academic confines, underpinned by the philosophy of inclusion and inquiry (Boud et al., 2013; Goodley, 2014). Whilst originally located within a physical café space, the Writing Café has been offering a simultaneous in-person and online service since the beginning of the 2021/22 academic year. This hybrid approach has actively incorporated the best practices learned from providing the Digital Writing Café throughout the Covid-19 pandemic. This was highlighted by the Gravity Assist report (Barber et al., 2021) as one of the most innovative examples of online peer support, which continues to inform our return to campus strategy to create a more flexible and accessible service.

Though the Writing Café was always a non-hierarchical space that helped to bridge the gap in supporting social mobility through demystifying academic writing practices to make them more accessible (Pritchard, 2015; Baer et al., 2023), this new flexible approach has seen a drastic increase in engagement with the service. This has been evident when comparing student attendance at the Writing Café between the hybrid and in-person only models, with 56% more students using the service last year, and an increased number of these students belonging to Access and Participation Plan (APP) categories.

This seminar will explore the value of offering a non-negotiable online and in-person service, and the accessibility benefits of continuing to deliver hybrid services, with over 60% of Writing Café engagement being digital in 2021/22, despite experiencing an institutional movement away from remote learning options. Our student Writing Mentors will share their experiences of offering hybrid academic-writing support and the benefits of this accessibility-driven approach, as well as discussing the impact on our student engagement. Participants will be encouraged to join the discussion about the benefits and challenges of running accessible, hybrid peer-to-peer academic support services, and share their reflections on the value of students as Writing Mentors to encourage a culture where students are valued as creators and distributors of knowledge.

**References**

Baer, C., Kearney, N. & Boote, J. (2023) ‘[Creating the conditions for inclusion: How the Writing Café is facilitating accessibility for disability through mutuality and empowerment](https://www.bera.ac.uk/blog/creating-the-conditions-for-inclusion-how-the-writing-cafe-is-facilitating-accessibility-for-disability-through-mutuality-and-empowerment)’, British Education Research Association Blog, 13 January. (Accessed: 30/01/2023).

Barber, M., Bird, L., Fleming, J., Titterington-Giles, E., Edwards, E. and Leyland, C. (2021) ‘[Gravity assist: propelling higher education towards a brighter future – Digital teaching and learning review](https://ofslivefs.blob.core.windows.net/files/Gravity%20assist/Gravity-assist-DTL-finalforweb.pdf)', The Office for Students. (Accessed: 30 November 2022).

 Boud, D., Cohen, R. and Sampson, J. (2013) Peer learning in higher education: Learning from and with each other. Abingdon: Routledge.

Goodley, D. (2014) Dis/ability studies: Theorising disablism and ableism. Abingdon: Routledge.

Pritchard, C. (2015) 'Mentoring in the Writing Cafe: Identity, belonging and ownership, Journal of Learning Development in Higher Education, Special Edition: Peer Learning, 9th November.

**Session B title:** Value, visibility and belonging: exploring the impact of staff/student reverse mentoring within higher education

**Presenters:** Steve Gleadall and Rachael O’Connor, University of Leeds

**Themes:** Student engagement

**Abstract:** Our presentation will consider findings from an institutional reverse mentoring study between students who self-identify as under-represented at University and senior leaders. We worked with students from underrepresented groups including mature, international, UK ethnically minoritised, and widening participation background. Reverse mentoring in higher education flips ‘traditional’ roles, positioning students as ‘mentors’ and staff as ‘mentees’, with a view to educating and empowering both sides and catalysing cultural change through sharing and discussion of unique lived experiences.

The project was piloted in 2021 by Steve Gleadall from Educational Engagement, the department with responsibility for leading the University’s access and student success work, in collaboration with the Students’ Union. Following the pilot’s success and positive feedback, it was developed into a research study, supported by Rachael O’Connor as academic lead, and expanded across the University in 2022. The key aims of the study were to assess the impact of staff/student reverse mentoring relationships on: (i) students’ feelings of value, visibility and belonging; (ii) staff understanding and appreciation of challenges and barriers faced by under-represented students and (iii) the daily practice and influence of institutional leaders within their areas of responsibility.

Our presentation will share and explore data gathered from project participants in light of these aims and reflect on the future direction of reverse mentoring within our University and the wider higher education sector. Participant reflections on being mentors (students) and mentees (staff) in the project were gathered both quantitatively (pre- and post-intervention surveys) and qualitatively (one-to-one reflective conversations) during the project period and further longitudinal data is to be collected six months following the scheme. The project relates closely to the ‘student engagement’ sub-theme of the conference given its focus on students from under-represented backgrounds and close connections with representation and student voice. We ultimately argue that reverse mentoring is a positive and potentially revolutionary intervention, which supports us to rise to the grand challenge of creating an institutional culture and experience that supports all students to feel they are valued, visible and belong.

#### 14:15 - 15:15 parallel session 2: ‘Value, Motivate, Support, Inspire’- Enhancing Undergraduate Student Success at the University of Birmingham / Employability and Student Success: Virtual Internships for Underrepresented Students

This is the second of four 2 x 30-minute presentations within this one-hour session.

**Session A title:** ‘Value, Motivate, Support, Inspire’- Enhancing Undergraduate Student Success at the University of Birmingham

**Presenters:** Leanne Campbell, Pete Collins, Polly Harper and Jenny Mullins-White, University of Birmingham

**Themes:** Student outcomes

**Abstract:** The 2020/21 academic year saw the successful launch of the University of Birmingham’s ‘Birmingham Scholar’ programme. The Birmingham Scholar is designed to support undergraduate students from under‐represented backgrounds, identified in the University’s current Access and Participation Plan, to achieve their full academic potential.  The programme aims to improve student success by increasing academic and social capital, building confidence, and fostering a sense of belonging for its participants, using an inclusive, whole-institution approach to student support (Thomas et al.,2017).

This presentation gives an overview of the Birmingham Scholar programme in its first two years, detailing its implementation, delivery and evaluation. The wide range of exclusive activities and opportunities offered to Scholars, both centrally and at Faculty level, are presented along with evaluation of their impact as set out in our Student Success Theory of Change.   The programme offers participants tailored academic and digital skills training, a dedicated Peer-Assisted Study Scheme to aid transition from school/college to university, graduate employability mentoring and coaching, fully funded international work and study placements, and priority access to a range of personal development opportunities.  Scholars also have a team of dedicated staff across the University to support them throughout their entire undergraduate student journey.  Student feedback is central to the year-on-year development of the programme, and key feedback themes are also discussed in this session.

We also present preliminary evidence that the Scholar programme may contribute to reducing awarding gaps by improving degree outcomes for Scholars who engage with the programme.  Our analysis of degree outcomes for the 2021/22 academic year show that for Scholars who participated in the programme’s activities, Good Honours rates for some under-represented groups were as much as 20 percentage points higher than for those who had not participated.  We conclude with recommendations for improving student success programmes of support by better targeting student cohorts, providing a holistic support package in which student wellbeing is central, and by recognising the importance of avoiding a deficit narrative in offers of academic support for under-represented groups.

**References**

Thomas, L., Hill, M., O’Mahony, J. and Yorke, M., (2017) Supporting Student Success: Strategies for Institutional Change. Final report from the What Works 2 Student Retention & Success Programme, London: Paul Hamlyn Foundation.

**Session B title:** Employability and Student Success: Virtual Internships for Underrepresented Students

**Presenters:** Catherine Comfort, Andrew Potter, Diane Butler, Flavia Ranzolin Navas, Kristen Reid and Trinny Western, The Open University

**Themes:** Student outcomes

**Abstract:** Virtual internships offer an innovative approach for supporting employability and improving graduate outcomes for underrepresented students. Recent research has indicated that many students who would benefit from an internship are often unable to take part due to work and family commitments (Hora et al., 2020) and that this often disproportionately affects students from underrepresented groups. In virtual internships, interns work remotely and are supported by their supervisors through email, phone and conferencing software. This type of internship can provide greater flexibility for the intern and also can offer opportunities to gain work experience to students who may have difficulty working on site, such as students with disabilities (Kraft et al., 2019). Successful virtual internships, however, require interns to develop skills in working independently (Pretti et al., 2020) and interns also benefit support from a strong mentoring approach by their supervisor (Jeske & Lineham, 2020).

In this seminar, the project team, including student interns, will discuss the findings from an empirical study of a pilot virtual internship scheme at a large UK university. The pilot scheme is part of a suite of initiatives intended to address the university’s Access and Participation Plan (Office for Students, 2018) that supports university-based virtual internships for underrepresented students. Data were collected in 2022 through focus groups with the first cohort of virtual interns under the scheme and via semi-structured interviews with their supervisors.

We focus specifically on the role of the supervisor in supporting the virtual intern and what makes for a supportive and successful virtual internship experience. Additionally, as many of the internships supported the university’s aims in improving equality, diversity and inclusion, the seminar will identify how this innovative type of student-staff partnership can help to achieve these aims.

**References**

Hora, M., Chen, Z., Parrott, E., and Her, P. (2020). Problematizing college internships: Exploring issues with access, program design and developmental outcomes. International Journal of Work-Integrated Learning, 21(3), 235–252.

Jeske, D., & Linehan, C. (2020). [Mentoring and skill development in e-internships. Journal of Work-Applied Management](https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/JWAM-09-2019-0028/full/html). Advance online publication.

Kraft, C., Jeske, D. & Bayerlein, L. (2019). Seeking diversity? Consider virtual internships. Strategic HR Review, 18(3), 133-137.

Office for Students. (2018). [Regulatory Notice 1: Access and Participation Plan guidance for 2019–2020](https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/1093/ofs2018_03.pdf) (Report No. OfS 2018.03).

Pretti, T.J., Etmanski, B., and Durston, A. (2020). Remote work-integrated learning experiences: Student perceptions [Special issue]. International Journal of Work-Integrated Learning, 21(4), 401–414.

#### 14:15 - 15:15 parallel session 3: The Extended Project Qualification and Widening Participation Students: Creating Equity, Improving Awarding Gaps, and Developing Research Skills / Attracting under-represented groups to train to teach in Wales

This is the third of four 2 x 30-minute presentations within this one-hour session.

**Session A title:** The Extended Project Qualification and Widening Participation Students: Creating Equity, Improving Awarding Gaps, and Developing Research Skills

**Presenters:** Dr Victoria Yuskaitis, University of Southampton

**Themes:** Accessibility, Student outcomes

**Abstract:** The University of Southampton's Learn with US Transition Programme provides free interactive workshops and guidance to sixth-form students in UK state schools undertaking the EPQ (Extended Project Qualification). The EPQ is a Level 3 qualification worth half of an A-Level, which allows students to develop their own independent research project on a topic outside of their A-Level studies. This culminates in a 5000-word dissertation or investigative report or, alternatively a design, performance or artefact that is reflective of their research, supported by a shorter, written report.  This programme focuses particularly on students who meet Widening Participation (WP) criteria, therefore playing a key role in creating equity during the transition to university. Dr Victoria Yuskaitis, an Academic Skills Officer in the Learn with US team, demonstrates that research from the University of Southampton observes that higher proportions of students with an EPQ achieve first class and 2:1 degree awards compared to the proportion of students that do not have an EPQ. In addition, exploratory analysis of Southampton’s most recent research indicates that the EPQ may also contribute to reduced awarding gaps for students from underrepresented backgrounds in Higher Education. This shows that enabling students to develop key research skills and confidence in viewing themselves as potential members of a university community through an EPQ qualification improves accessibility, especially since our programme targets WP students benefitting most from these interventions.

**Session B title:** Attracting under-represented groups to train to teach in Wales

**Presenters:** Sarah Stewart and Catherine Bleasdale, The Open University

**Themes:** Inclusion, Student outcomes

**Abstract:** Recruiting and retaining high-quality teachers is of significant importance to all and is fast-becoming an urgent policy issue in many countries, including the United Kingdom. Wales has seen a recent shift from university-based teacher education to school/university partnership programmes. Wide educational reform in Wales emphasises the recruitment of ethnic minority teachers, bilingual teachers and attracting candidates to fill rural school vacancies. However, options for part-time and employment-based routes into the teaching profession have until recently been limited in Wales. These routes can offer a more flexible teacher education for those who wish to change careers and/or have existing commitments they wish to continue with while they study.

This seminar will present the progress of two unique teacher education routes that have been delivered by the Open University since 2020 in Wales. It is informed by programme data and student teacher survey responses along with data from student teacher interviews. The part-time and employment based routes, studied over two years, has to date graduated more than 100 new teachers. The profile of these new graduates and those currently enrolled on the programme will be examined. Comparisons will be made to the gender, ethnicity, age and previous work experience profile of others training to teach in Wales. The proportion of student teachers enrolled on the new routes who declare their ethnicity has been higher each year for those enrolled with the Open University than those following other routes into teaching in Wales. There is strong evidence that for many, without the new routes into teaching they would have been unable to train to teach. Many of those on the programme are more mature than the traditional student teacher and consequently bring with them many beneficial skills from their previous careers/roles; all of which prove impactful during their training and for the schools they work in.

#### 14:15 - 15:15 parallel session 4: Building communities and helping students to succeed: Early interventions for student success / Collaborating to Increase Inclusion in Graduate Recruitment and Success

This is the fourth of four 2 x 30-minute presentations within this one-hour session.

**Session A title:** Building communities and helping students to succeed: Early interventions for student success

**Presenters:** Dr Scott McKenzie, Alayla Castle-Herbert, Anne Verries-Wade and Hanna Silk, The Open University in Wales

**Themes:** Student engagement, Student outcomes

**Abstract:** Bringing together practitioner, academic, and student perspectives, this session will share the initial findings of a Student Success Project that aims to give part-time learners in Wales the best start in Higher Education. The Project sets out to improve students’ chances of succeeding through an evidence-based, multi-intervention programme delivered to new students who are most at risk of disengaging. Specifically, this includes students who:

* are from the bottom two quintiles of the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation;
* have lower previous educational qualification levels;
* are studying on modules with below-average completion rates.

 There are four strands to the Project, including pre-entry contact, induction, post-entry proactive interventions, and financial wellbeing support.  We are undertaking scholarship work to evaluate our student success activities, predominantly focussing on student induction and proactive interventions.

In this session, we’ll discuss the role of one-to-many (group) interventions in developing student communities for part-time distance learners, and how this links to student success. We’ll briefly cover how we have used learning analytics data, combined with practitioner insights and student voices, to shape and evaluate the programme. Finally, we’ll share initial findings and discuss techniques and tips for helping students tackle their first term.

**Session B title:** Collaborating to Increase Inclusion in Graduate Recruitment and Success

**Presenters:** Angela Scanlon, Ursula McTaggart and Shauna McCloy, Ulster University

**Themes:** Student outcomes

**Abstract:** In Northern Ireland graduates with disabilities are 10% less likely to attain highly skilled employment compared to their non-disabled peers. To increase equity in this area and break down barriers to highly skilled employment, those with disabilities require supportive and positive action that enables them to build their professional identity through work-based learning, develop confidence and gain access to graduate labour market opportunities.

The graduate internship offer at Ulster University as a partnership with local NI employers has been demonstrating high levels of success both for the local economy and the onboarding of graduates in to appropriate level jobs since 2012. More recently the profile of graduate students has become increasingly diverse calling for a change in the learning experience including the onboarding and engagement within the work-based context.

A new internship pathway is now being explored with the support of competitively secured local government funding. The Graduate Boost programme gives employers the opportunity to have a subject relevant graduate to contribute directly into their business. To fill current skills gaps in the context of falling numbers within the working population in Northern Ireland, it is now critical that employers seek to increase inclusive recruitment practice. The programme has brought together partners including Ulster University, Harkin Institute, USA, Disability Action NI, Specialisterne NI, Employers for Disability and NI employers. This intervention is aimed at supporting the development of inclusive and confident practice in NI through action-based research and practice.

The presentation will allow those attending to hear of the progress to date including the lived experiences of graduates. Participants will be encouraged to contribute their own experiences to lessons learned acknowledging that practice can be richly enhanced if we collaborate openly to inform the way forward.

### 15:15 – 15:25: Break (posters on display)

### 15:25 – 16:25: Panel Discussion

**Host:** Dr Liz Marr, Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Students), The Open University

**Panel members:**

* Rehana Awan, Staff Tutor - STEM,Computing & Communication, The Open University
* Natalie Baker, Vice President, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, The Open University Student’s Association
* Prof Eva Cendon, Professor of Adult and Continuing Education: FernUniversität in Hagen, Germany
* Prof John McKendrick, Commissioner for Fair Access to Higher Education for Scotland, Glasgow Caledonian University
* Adaora Nwaka, BAME Advocate, University of Hertfordshire

### 16:25 – 16:30: Day 1 close

Chair: Shona Littlejohn, Deputy Director (Student Experience & Widening Access), The OU in Scotland

## Day two

### 09:00 - 09:30: Login (posters on display)

### 09:30 - 09:35: Welcome Address

Mychelle Pride, Associate Dean, Teaching Excellence (WELS), The Open University

### 09:35 – 10:05: Opening Keynote Presentation

Professor Ross Renton, Principal, Anglia Ruskin University, Peterborough

### 10:05 - 10:10: Move to seminars (posters on display)

### 10:10 – 11:10: Seminars

This hour will comprise four different sessions, each made up of two 30-minutes seminar. The details are listed below.

#### 10:10 – 11:10 parallel session 1: Towards Accessibility in Digital Electronics for the Visually Impaired. A b-learning experience / ONCE Foundation Channel at UNED - an Open Training Resource in Design for All

This is the first of four 2 x 30-minute presentations within this one-hour session.

**Session A title:** Towards Accessibility in Digital Electronics for the Visually Impaired. A b-learning experience

**Presenters:** Jorge Pérez-Martín, Alejandro Rodriguez-Ascaso and Félix De la Paz, Computer Science Faculty, Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia (UNED), Spain

**Themes:** Accessibility

**Abstract:** Esther is a user of a screen reader and braille. She is a student of Fundamentals of Digital Systems at UNED, the Spanish National Distance Learning University. Her study is hindered by the characteristics of the materials, the learning activities and the assessment processes, including mathematical expressions (Archambault, 2007), complex images, an inaccessible circuit simulator, and pre-recorded and live videos (Rodriguez-Ascaso, 2018). To face this challenge, the module’s lecturers are being assisted by the UNED disabled student unit (UNIDIS) and the Spanish National Organisation for the Blind (ONCE).

The contents of the virtual course are being adapted following the accessibility recommendations (WCAG 2.1) (W3C, 2018). Furthermore, Esther has a version of the course textbook in ASCII Braille by ONCE. However, the production of tactile diagrams of the massive number of images (circuits, state diagrams, etc.) is taking time. For her practice, we choose representative assignments and produce them in accessible MSWord files with math equations (MSUDenver, 2021). When there are any images involved, we re-design them to omit non-essential information, so that tactile perception is optimized. The images are then reviewed by ONCE experts, who produce the tactile diagrams and send them through post mail to the student. Then, she works on the assignment individually, explores the tactile materials, and annotates her intermediate and final results in a digital document through tables and mathematical expressions. When needed, online meetings are scheduled with the student to clarify issues or to describe orally the functions of the circuit simulator. Regarding the final exam, we have worked on a new type of accommodation that is new at the university, consisting of an exam in accessible MS Word format accompanied by a set of tactile materials.

However, many open challenges remain, including: pending contents of the textbook; accessibility of the pre-recorded and live videos; and accessibility of the simulator (Pender, 2022).

**Session B title:** ONCE Foundation Channel at UNED - an Open Training Resource in Design for All

**Presenters:** Cecile Finat, Antonio Juano, Elisa Molanes-López, Jorge Pérez-Martín, Miguel Ángel Artaso, Emilio Letón, and Alejandro Rodriguez-Ascaso, Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia (UNED), Spain

**Themes:** Accessibility

**Abstract:** The objective of the ONCE Foundation Channel at UNED is to provide training on Design for All and Universal Accessibility (Barnes, 2011). The Channel is an initiative of the Royal Board on Disability, with Fundación ONCE and UNED. It educates on the needs of people with disabilities, their rights, as well as the strategies and techniques to remove existing accessibility barriers… in fields such as information technology, education, communication, architecture and commerce.

Training is provided through the UNED MOOC Open edX platform (Gil-Jaurena, 2015), and through electronic books. Learning materials are developed working alongside other organizations with relevant expertise, including professionals with disabilities: faculty experts, computer scientists, architects, lawyers, occupational therapists, standardization experts, human rights activists, etc. The Channel guides authors so that materials (videos, text, quizzes and peer assessment activities) comply with instructional and accessibility standards (Letón & Rodriguez-Ascaso, 2021). Teaching, tutorial and technical support is provided online.

Since 2016, more than 20,000 students have enrolled in its courses, mostly from Spain and Latin America. 22% of them have completed a course, 12% have requested a certificate. The Channel develops a Quality plan, including research activities to understand the barriers students with disabilities face in open education and how to overcome them, as well as the accessibility competences our students acquire.

The courses have a significant impact on groups of people who think this training is relevant for their professional progress (64%), and four of the courses were selected by the State Foundation for Employment Training (FUNDAE) to form part of its program of free training in digital skills. There is also an impact on groups that have traditionally found themselves with limitations in learning, according to UN Sustainable Development Goal 4, e.g., students with accessibility preferences or needs, and students who come from areas where the UNDP report identifies deficiencies in education (United Nations, 2015).

**References**

Barnes, C. (2011). [Understanding disability and the importance of Design for All. Journal of Accessibility and Design for All](http://riberdis.cedid.es/xmlui/bitstream/handle/11181/3552/understanding_disability_and_the_importance_of_design_for_all.pdf?sequence=1), 2011-1(1):55-80.

Gil-Jaurena, I. (2015). [MOOCs in Spain: Preliminary lessons from UNED MOOCs experience. MOOCs and educational challenges around Asia and Europe. KNOU Press 191-204](https://www.academia.edu/download/47702693/MOOCs_and_Educational_Challenges_around_Asia_and_Europe_FINAL.pdf#page=198).

Letón Molina, E., & Rodríguez Ascaso, A. (2021). [Guía para crear los contenidos de tu curso digital. Editorial Fundación ONCE](http://e-spacio.uned.es/fez/eserv/bibliuned%3A92-Libros-Arodriguez/Guia_Practica_Crear_tu_Curso_Digital_vf.pdf).

United Nations. (2015). [Sustainable development goals. UN](https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/).

#### 10:10 – 11:10 parallel session 2: Exploring the experiences of students of minoritised ethnicities through a longitudinal community of enquiry / Students Supporting Students – improving student outcomes through peer mentoring

This is the second of four 2 x 30-minute presentations within this one-hour session.

**Session A title:** Exploring the experiences of students of minoritised ethnicities through a longitudinal community of enquiry

**Presenters:** Prof Samantha Broadhead and Dr Laura da Costa, Leeds Art University

**Themes:** Student engagement, Inclusion

**Abstract:** This presentation reports on the findings from the first year of a three-year research project with successive cohorts of minoritised ethnicities in order to explore their experiences at a creative arts institution in the north of England. The method comprises a longitudinal community of inquiry (CoI) methodology and findings from the research will be used iteratively to identify and hone appropriate support measures. Whereas previous research (Bale et al. 2020) created a CoI as a single event that considered student experience at one point in time, this project seeks to consult the same community over the three years of their undergraduate degree.

Two paid research facilitators were recruited from postgraduate students of minoritised ethnicities and trained in facilitation of CoI. An external service was used to transcribe the recorded discussion, before revision by the research facilitators. The facilitators received further staff support in analysing the transcripts, to discuss emerging findings and themes. The analysis was written up into a final report including recommendations for appropriate support measures.

Initial findings corroborate some issues reflected in the original iteration of the project, indicating that these were still encountered in current student experience, but also new insights. Findings concerned students’ expectations pre-enrolment, the sociocultural context of choosing to pursue the creative arts, the dynamics between different groups of students, interactions with tutors and forms of pedagogy associated with creative arts education, and finding belonging.

**Session B title:** Students Supporting Students – improving student outcomes through peer mentoring

**Presenters:** Catherine Comfort, The Open University

**Themes:** Student engagement, Student outcomes

**Abstract:** Learning from experienced student peer mentors increases new students’ sense of belonging, supports transition to university, positivity impacts student retention and is accepted as an effective intervention in face-to-face universities (Skaniakos et al., 2014). Benefits to students from underrepresented groups include those studying with disabilities who learn ‘how things work at university’, how to access support (Hillier et al, 2019 p. 487), and experience improved emotional wellbeing and self-esteem (Haft et al., 2019).

This seminar outlines the positive impact on student outcomes of an online peer mentoring pilot established to support student success in a UK distance-learning Business School between 2021 and 2022. Volunteer student mentors approaching the end of a Business qualification offered practical and emotional support to Level 1 students on the qualification’s introductory module. Support offered was shaped by mentors’ experience of succeeding in supported online learning. All Level 1 students in selected areas could access mentor support via asynchronous, many-to-many online forums.

This seminar discusses the implications of this model for retaining and progressing students, especially those from underrepresented groups. Forum usage analytics and module results data show positive correlations between engaging with the mentoring process and improved student outcomes. Despite mentors’ discouragement from limited direct student forum engagement, analytics reveal widespread forum usage with and without direct interaction. Qualitative study findings from participant and non-participant surveys and semi-structured interviews are shared. This pilot extends the findings of Fayram et al. (2018) that online mentoring lets students use advice to suit their needs, increases confidence and improves outcomes, by additionally identifying benefits for underrepresented students.

Gains identified by mentors will be discussed, including practical application and further development of skills learned in study, such as pitching communication at an appropriate level.

Practical considerations identified include helping students navigate to forums and employing a delivery format suitable for large student populations that is not operationally onerous.

This seminar is relevant to institutions considering offering online peer mentoring. Indications of positive impacts on progression and completion for students undertaking group peer mentoring, particularly those from underrepresented groups, suggest this format of mentoring can help reduce awarding gaps.

**References**

Fayram, J., Boswood, N., Kan, Q., Motzo, A., Proudfoot, A., (2018) ‘Investigating the benefits of online peer mentoring for student confidence and motivation’ International Journal of Mentoring and Coaching in Education 7: 4, pp. 312-328

Haft, S. L., Chen, T., LeBlanc, C., Tenczas, F., Hoeft, F. (2019) ‘Impact of mentoring on socio-emotional and mental health outcomes of youth with learning disabilities and attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder’ Child and Adolescent Mental Health 24: 4, pp. 318–328

Hillier, A,, Goldstein, J., Tornatore, L., Byrne, E. and Johnson, H. M., (2019) ‘Outcomes of a peer mentoring program for university students with disabilities’, Mentoring & Tutoring: Partnership in Learning, 27:5, pp. 487-508, DOI: 10.1080/13611267.2019.1675850

Skaniakos, T., Penttinen, L. and Lairio, M. (2014) ‘Mentoring Programmes in Finnish Higher Education -Mentors’ Perspectives’, Mentoring & Tutoring: Partnership in Learning, 22:1, pp. 74-86, DOI: 10.1080/13611267.2014.882609

#### 10:10 – 11:10 parallel session 3: Empowering minoritised students through scholarship: A staff-student collaborative approach to understanding the experience of Black distance learning students / Conversations of Creating Change: Widening Participation to Higher Education through working-class voices

This is the third of four 2 x 30-minute presentations within this one-hour session.

**Session A title:** Empowering minoritised students through scholarship: A staff-student collaborative approach to understanding the experience of Black distance learning students

**Presenters:** Jim Lusted, Shannon Martin and Ola Fadoju (with additional input from OU students Denise Hamilton-Mace and Ola Omotosho), The Open University

**Themes:** Student engagement, Inclusion

**Abstract:** This presentation will discuss an ongoing body of scholarship that has sought to empower and centralise racially minoritised students through an investigation into the experiences of black distance learning students.

A staff-student collaborative approach has been adopted across three separate projects - two completed and one currently in progress - whereby several student-researchers have been recruited and paid a consultancy fee to join staff colleagues in forming the project team. All student-researchers involved to date have black heritage and bring current lived experience of the issues facing black students in higher education settings.

The presentation will present a summary of the key findings from phase one of the scholarship that undertook peer-to-peer focus groups (student only spaces) with black students to explore their distance learning experiences specifically in relation to three key areas; their relationships with tutors, relationships with other students and their perceptions of the module materials they have encountered. Phase 2 of the project is then summarised, focusing particularly on the process followed to produce a student-led design of a targeted peer support network for black students, which is being piloted this academic year.

Finally, the presentation offers some critical reflections on staff-student scholarship collaborations, particularly those that are framed by traditional white-black racialised hierarchies. Through these reflections, we explore the potential for such collaborations to offer opportunities to empower minoritised students while at the same time being inadvertently susceptible to student exploitation and the re-enforcement of such hierarchies.

**Session B title:** Conversations of Creating Change: Widening Participation to Higher Education through working-class voices

**Presenters:** Dr Abigail O’Brien, University of Plymouth

**Themes:** Inclusion, Accessibility

**Abstract:** This seminar will involve a presentation of my findings from my recently completed PhD thesis. The thesis was centred on student voice of prospective university students, and widening participation to higher education with a focus on working-class voices. The findings involved future inclusion and accessibility considerations to enable working-class voices to be present in the shaping of access and participation to university. This UK study had a focus on access to ‘elite’ universities, although the findings provide useful considerations for widening participation at all university institutions.

The main aim of the thesis was ‘to create change by finding new ways to improve the Higher Education system and promote a more socially inclusive environment’ (O’Brien, 2022:2). Exploring prospective university student voices was key to this study. Findings for the study were collected through a range of narrative elicitation tasks and interviews, over the course of 10months at what were considered critical time points in decision-making.

The main findings from this study were around the importance of access to open days and the effect of attending open days. As well as the importance gaining further information made to the final decision of secondary school students considering their post-18 university choices. Interesting findings on aspiration and family influence on working-class decision-making also provided useful insight into young people’s decision making for post-18 options. In particular, some of these findings have questioned previous readings and research on working-class aspirations.

‘Widening Participation is not only about increasing the numbers of entrants to higher education, it also involves engaging learners from currently under-represented groups’ (Gordon, et al. 2010:169).

**References**

O'Brien, A (2022) [Widening Participation in Higher Education: Exploring factors that prevent secondary school students, from disadvantaged/non-traditional backgrounds, from engaging in Higher Education with ‘elite’ universities](https://ore.exeter.ac.uk/repository/handle/10871/129045). PhD thesis. University of Exeter, United Kingdom [Online]. (accessed: 31 January 2023)

Gordon, J., Dumbleton, S., Miller., C (2010) ‘['We thought we would be the dunces' - From a vocational qualification to a social work degree: an example of widening participation in social work education](https://doi.org/10.5456/WPLL.12.S.169)’, in Widening Participation and Lifelong learning. 12, pp.169-184.

#### 10:10 – 11:10 parallel session 4: Understanding the BAME awarding gap at The Open University by means of quantitative and qualitative data analytics / Language Technology in the workplace: an A.I. student co-creation project

This is the fourth of four 2 x 30-minute presentations within this one-hour session.

**Session A title:** Understanding the BAME awarding gap at The Open University by means of quantitative and qualitative data analytics

**Presenters:** Miriam Fernandez, Martin Hlosta, Tracie Farrell, Vaclav Bayer and Fidèle Mutwarasibo, The Open University

**Themes:** Inclusion, Student outcomes

**Abstract:** Data-driven, student-centered approaches can reduce attainment gaps in higher education. In this seminar, we present the results of a project that has investigated the attainment gap for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) students at the Open University (OU) by means of a combination of qualitative and quantitative data analytics. We used a set of predictive algorithms (called OUAnalyse) developed at the OU to understand more about how students learn and analysed this data to investigate which patterns might be specific to different groups of students (including ethnicity, gender and combinations of these protected attributes). These include, for example, patterns of different ethnicities passing through the module milestones at different levels, or when BAME students withdraw as opposed to White students. We then presented the patterns we observed to 6 Black students, as well as six educators from diverse backgrounds. In a series of focus groups, we asked them how we should interpret these patterns.

Key findings include: (i) the university does not prepare enough for different cultural experiences and values lead to different expectations of the university experience, (ii) family responsibilities and expectations may be more significant for students from different cultural backgrounds or who start their university journey later, increasing financial burden and limiting time, (iii) immigration experiences (first generation, as well as immigration background in the family) impact many aspects of the educational experience, (iv) Black students and educators of diverse backgrounds experience racism, which is an added trauma that is typically not addressed by the university, (v) some Black students and educators worry that an OU degree, particularly if it is not a highly marked degree, may not be as advantageous for Black students, who may be held to higher standards than their white counterparts in the job market.

For studying the long-term effects of the awarding gap, an analysis of alumni might be fruitful.

**References**

​​Hlosta, Martin, et al. "Impact of predictive learning analytics on course awarding gap of disadvantaged students in stem." International Conference on Artificial Intelligence in Education. Springer, Cham, 2021.

Bayer, Vaclav, Martin Hlosta, and Miriam Fernandez. "Learning Analytics and Fairness: Do Existing Algorithms Serve Everyone Equally?." International Conference on Artificial Intelligence in Education. Springer, Cham, 2021.

**Session B title:** Language Technology in the workplace: an A.I. student co-creation project

**Presenters:** Dr Andrew Gargett, Dr Mirjam Hauck, Joseph Kwarteng and Mychelle Pride, The Open University

**Themes:** Inclusion

**Abstract:** We report on a Test and Learn project rooted in the Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion strategy of our institution. We are collaborating with students from an access and widening participation background to co-create a course in Artificial Intelligence, more specifically on “Language Technology in the Workplace”.  We are working towards faculty targets for Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic students, students with a declared disability, and students who reside in IMD (Index of Multiple Deprivation) Q1. We want to enhance completion and module good pass results for IMDQ1 students in particular, but also for both Black and Asian students, and for students who declare a disability including mental health difficulties, i.e., across all three APS characteristics. In parallel, the A.I. (Artificial Intelligence) sector worldwide has historically low participation rates for women, as well as for people from a range of minority groups, including Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic groups and members of LGBTQ+ communities, due to entrenched attitudes and practices within IT.

Our work integrates established design principles into co-creating the curriculum, ensuring more effective collaboration within a complex team (from student stakeholders to faculty and curriculum specialists). Through a series of workshops, participants journey through a typical design cycle: from

* pre-workshop preparation, to
* participating in conceptualising and developing curriculum material, then
* post-workshop critical reflection, and
* iterating through (1) to (3) several times.

We aim to:

* Create a methodology for developing technology courses that account for interests and study preferences of as wide a range of learners as possible.
* For staff to better understand motivations and interests of students from a variety of backgrounds.

An important outcome is that students feel their views and contributions are valued and that their identities and backgrounds are reflected in course content.

### 11:10 – 11:20: Break (posters on display)

### 11:20 – 12:20: Workshops

Four parallel sessions will take place during this hour, the details are listed below.

#### 11:20 – 12:20 parallel session 1: Not all Inclusive Curriculum Reviews are Equal: Findings from the OU’s Inclusive Curriculum Student Consultant Pilot Project

This is the first of four presentations within this one-hour session.

**Presenters:** Dr Caroline Derry, Steph Dunne and Dr Sukaina Haider, The Open University

**Themes:** Inclusion

**Abstract:** The Wonkhe and Pearson research on belonging (Blake et al, 2022) found that inclusion relates to both the accessibility of the teaching and learning environment and the diversity of the course content. The Open University’s (OU) Inclusive Curriculum Tool, based on Kingston’s Inclusive Curriculum Framework, is a list of prompts that supports the user’s evaluation of module content. The reviewer considers, for example, whether the language used is respectful, whether the content is representative and diverse, and whether students are encouraged to consider how their own perspectives are shaped. At the OU, the staff who design and produce the curriculum, as well as those who have been applying the Inclusive Curriculum Tool are often white, able-bodied, cis-gender, heteronormative and middle-class.

In July 2022, the OU’s Centre for Access, Participation and Success, building on good practice in the sector, employed 6 student consultants with diverse lived experience to review its curricula using the Tool. The aim of this pilot project is to increase staff awareness of the importance of inclusive pedagogical approaches as an initiative to close the racialised minority ethnic awarding gaps and disability awarding gaps. The Student Consultants were provided with full training.

This presentation and interactive workshop, relevant to colleagues working throughout HE, will draw on the findings from the Student Consultant project to make the case that curriculum reviews are not of equal value.  It will be argued that it is not enough for universities to review their curricula for inclusivity, there needs to be awareness about the lived experience of reviewers when considering the feedback.

In the session presenters, with different roles in the Student Consultant project, will advocate that student reviewers, with lived experience of the barriers that limit inclusion, are best placed to help universities understand how to make the learning environment more inclusive. The co-presenters will highlight the importance of empathy to robust curriculum review. Steph Dunne, a profoundly deaf Student Consultant will provide powerful examples of the ways she has increased the awareness of staff of the barriers faced by disabled students. Dr Caroline Derry, a Queer autistic senior lecturer in law and EDI specialist, will provide examples of how partnerships with students with diverse lived experience benefits the academics who produce module materials. Dr Suki Haider, the racialised minority manager of the OU Student Consultant project, will argue that the richest inclusive curriculum reviews are provided when a team of students, with a range of protected characteristics, review module content in collaboration.

In breakout rooms, the workshop participants will be invited to share their experience of reviewing the inclusivity of curriculum.

The workshop will raise the awareness of participants of the value of diverse lived experience and collaborative reviews. Secondly, it will support participants to facilitate real progress on inclusive curricula at their institution.

**References**

Blake S., Capper, G. and Jackson, A.,(2022), [Building Belonging in Higher Education: Recommendations for developing and integrated institutional approach](https://wonkhe.com/wp-content/wonkhe-uploads/2022/10/Building-Belonging-October-2022.pdf) [Accessed 28.2.2023]

[Kingston University’s Inclusive Curriculum Framework (n.d)](https://www.kingston.ac.uk/aboutkingstonuniversity/equality-diversity-and-inclusion/our-inclusive-curriculum/inclusive-curriculum-framework/), [Accessed 28.2.2023]

#### 11:20 – 12:20 parallel session 2: Sharing insights from reverse mentoring in HE: the power of listening and learning for developing authentic staff/student relationships

This is the second of four presentations within this one-hour session.

**Presenters:** Associate Prof Rachael O’Conner, University of Leeds, and Prof John E. Goldring, Liz Cain, Adam Westall and Dr Helen Smith, Manchester Metropolitan University

**Themes:** Student engagement

**Abstract:** This workshop brings together Reverse Mentoring (“RM”) practices from two different institutions in the UK (Rachael O’Connor - University of Leeds and Helen Smith, Liz Cain, John Goldring and Adam Westall - Manchester Metropolitan University). By establishing a community of practice, colleagues from these universities have developed a framework that other institutions can use to develop their own RM projects. Key to the approach is to develop a deeper understanding of the staff/student relationship. RM has been shown capable of this in our previous research (O’Connor, 2022; Cain, et al, 2022. See also Morris 2017; Zauchner-Studnicka 2017: Raymond et al, 2021).

By using a RM approach, we have developed innovative pedagogies to listen, learn and improve our practice as educators and those of our colleagues. Consequently, this workshop will engage delegates to explore RM pedagogies. Specifically, RM promotes inclusive practice in building authentic relationships between staff and students from different backgrounds. RM has the ability to empower and amplify voices of students from historically underrepresented backgrounds. While students are not taking part in the workshop, it is their voices and interactions with academics that form the backbone of this workshop making it useful for academics, practitioners, professional services colleagues and anyone working in HE. As this is about gaining a better understanding of students’ lived experiences, anyone working within the sector could benefit from developing this approach within their practice.

This interactive workshop will provide delegates with the opportunity to develop their own approach to RM within their institution. By developing their own action plan supported by the workshop facilitators, delegates will be able to build on their initial institutional planning after the workshop. We will also invite delegates to join our existing network of practitioners who are actively engaged in RM in order to further develop RM across the sector as a tool to enhance student experience. Following an introduction to the principles of RM and sharing examples of our best practice, delegates will be put into breakout groups within which they will begin to develop their own RM project outlines. Key activities will include small and larger group discussions on the following issues: (i) what they want the outcomes of their RM project to be; (ii) who they want it to target; and (iii) institutional barriers and challenges to implementing RM in their contexts.

Throughout the workshop, there will be small breakout group discussions leading to larger group debate with opportunities for constructive feedback from facilitators who have expertise in delivering RM initiatives in HEIs. The workshop will provide thinking space for those working in HE to develop this innovative approach to student engagement which purposefully disrupts traditional power structures in HEIs. Rather than discussing student experiences in an abstract way, the workshop will give delegates critical time for planning a practical intervention tailored to their own institutional needs.

We suggest an upper limit of 50 attendees for the workshop (e.g. 10 break out groups of 5 delegates per group) to allow for meaningful discussion.

**References**

R O’Connor ‘‘It makes me feel empowered and that we can make a difference’: Reverse mentoring between international students and staff in legal education’ (2022) European Journal of Legal Education 3(1), 95-126

Liz Cain, John Goldring & Adam Westall (2022) Seeing behind the curtain: Reverse Mentoring within the Higher Education landscape, Teaching in Higher Education, DOI: 10.1080/13562517.2022.2129963

Morris, L. (2017). “Reverse Mentoring: Untapped Resource in the Academy?”, Innovative Higher Education, 42(4), pp: 285-287.

Zauchner-Studnicka SA (2017) A model for reverse-mentoring in education. Int Scholarly Sci Res Innovation;11(3):551–558

Raymond, M., Siemens, J. and Thyroff, A. (2021). “Students, please teach us! Implementing student-employee reverse mentoring to increase career readiness”. Marketing Education Review, pp.1-6.

#### 11:20 – 12:20 parallel session 3: Going beyond Consultation: Co-Production with Widening Participation students across the student lifecycle

This is the third of four presentations within this one-hour session.

**Presenters:** Emma Hall and Abigail Cattlin – Edge Hill University (student presenters to be confirmed)

**Themes:** Student engagement

**Abstract:** Edge Hill University’s Widening Access and Participation Team will be presenting within the theme of Student Engagement, including co-creation, representation, and student voice using our Student Advisory Panel project as a successful example of our innovative approach to supporting students from underrepresented, disadvantaged or discriminated-against groups within Higher Education. This workshop will provide an interactive experience with delegates and the opportunity to leave with some practical outcomes.

Collaboration, co-creation, and co-production are vital for understanding students lived experiences and developing initiatives and/or services that will effectively address inequalities across the whole Student-Life cycle. The Widening Access and Participation Team at Edge Hill University first convened a Student Advisory Panel for Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic students in 2020/21 to inform the design and delivery of a wide range of university initiatives and services. The panel was so successful that an additional four panels have been convened for 2021/2022, covering Care Leaver, Care Experienced and Estranged Students, Disabled Students, First Generation Students and Mature Students.

The Student Advisory Panels meet once per term, with the panel members able to contribute to agenda items in addition to colleagues from across the university being able to attend for student feedback on a particular service or new initiative. They work around panel members availability and are paid for their time. A news article about the original advisory panel can be found here – Working in partnership with our Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Students – News (edgehill.ac.uk).

During this workshop, Emma and Abi, alongside existing Student Advisory Panel members, will reflect on setting up a collaborative project with students and the challenges of working in this way, in addition to celebrating the successes and positive work which has resulted from our Student Advisory Panels thus far. Working with our students has provided invaluable insights into their life at university, allowing for genuine coproduction with our students across various services. An unintended outcome of the Advisory Panels has been the positive impact on the panel members themselves, it has been very powerful to get a group of students in a room who all share at least one underrepresented characteristic. Working with our students and being able to show them demonstrable changes they have made to better the experience of all students has bolstered their sense of belonging.

We will then move into breakout sessions, providing colleagues with the opportunity to come together to discuss the project and how they could incorporate and develop the strategies provided at their institutions. In their discussions, we will be asking colleagues to consider the following topics:

* How do you gain feedback from your current students and how do you respond to this feedback?
* How do you ensure feedback from students is acted upon, what are the mechanisms for accountability?
* Do you have opportunities for current students to collaborate on Widening Participation initiatives?
* How do you manage the blurred lines of success work, when much of the ‘doing’ sits outside of the central team?

#### 11:20 – 12:20 parallel session 4: How can we maximise equity and diversity in student partnerships?

This is the fourth of four presentations within this one-hour session.

**Presenters:** Lorna Sibbett and Dr Renu Bhandari, The Open University

**Themes:** Student engagement, Inclusion

**Abstract:** There is growing recognition of the value of ‘Students as Partners’ in shaping Higher Education. Student-staff collaboration enriches development of curriculum, learning activities, resources and services that are learner-relevant and accessible. Student partners are motivated and bring valuable perspectives, but have we unintentionally limited the pool of potential partners? How do we minimise barriers to engagement and empower diverse students to find their voice as our partners?

In this workshop, we shall outline our approach to equity in student partnerships, using as an example the BUD (Belonging United Diverse) project. Then participants will be invited to share their ideas, experiences, reflections and successes, posting these to create a virtual wall of potential collaborators / consultants. Expect a few polls too.

The BUD project at the Open University sought to make more inclusive the online learning environment in Access modules. Student participation in online discussion forums was noticeably limited to a small proportion of white students; and autistic students were absent despite forming a significant proportion of one of the modules. The BUD project appointed paid student interns who could provide lived experience and / or expertise on Black and autistic student inclusion. Student interns were full partners in scholarship and acted as ‘buddies’ within the online discussion forum, modelling inclusive language. The proposal and implementation phases of the project required collaboration across the University: academic units; Careers and Employability Service; negotiation with potential intra-institutional funding streams; and Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) advisers. Completion of the project is due in June 2023; here we present interim reflections and outcomes.

We invite participants to share their experiences in setting up an EDI students-as-partners (SAP) project: how did you reach / advertise to your potential student partners? Was it a challenge to reach the particular student identities you needed to be represented? How did you manage this challenge? How does your institution support SAP initiatives? We shall also invite participants to share their successes. For participants, who may be contemplating their first SAP project, you will have opportunities to share your ideas, concerns and challenges. Together we might maximise equity and diversity in student partnerships.

### 12:20: - 12:25: Return to main session

### 12:25 – 12:30: Keynote introduction

Diane Butler, Associate Dean (Academic Excellence) (STEM), The Open University

### 12.30 - 13:00: Keynote

Mette Anwar-Westander, Founder and CEO of Disabled Students UK

### 13:00 – 13:05: Conference close

Diane Butler, Associate Dean (Academic Excellence) (STEM), The Open University

### 13:05 – 13:30: Break (posters on display)

### 13:30 – 14:15: Discussion rooms open

Stay in the main conference room to be placed in a breakout room for an informal discussion on matters raised in the conference

### 14:15 – 15:00: Poster discussion rooms open: click to join a meeting below with poster authors

#### 14:15 – 15:00 Discussion room 1: Closing the awarding gap - listening to our Black students

**Presenters:** Louise MacBrayne and Jennie Bellamy, The Open University

**Abstract:** Data for the Open University level one science module S112, Science Concepts and Practice indicated that pass rates for Black students are much lower in comparison to white students and students from other ethnicities, despite completion rates closer to the rest of the cohort, leading to an awarding gap.

The poster will disseminate thematic outputs from focus group discussions involving S112 Black students. The poster will present findings from an intersectionality study performed to consider any relationships between ethnicity and other HEA descriptors such as gender, socio-economic status (Index of Multiple Deprivation, IMD), and being first in family to Higher Education with respect to module pass rate.

Recommendations will include changes to module content and assessment to increase Black student success and engagement. Examples will include increased representation of Black scientists in module content and more inclusive tuition practice, including an awareness of financial challenges associated with additional module costs.

#### 14:15 – 15:00 Discussion room 2 – Creating flexible accessibility for distance-learning students while developing a remote coaching and mentoring service

**Presenters**: Enya-Marie Clay and Richard Peat, The Open University

**Abstract**: This poster will outline a series of recommendations for delivering accessible, remote student support where students require reasonable adjustments to standard forms of delivery and is relevant to student-centred support practitioners. The PLA Service is a specialist coaching and mentoring service set up to deliver support to students from priority cohorts in the Access and Participation Plan.

Through the delivery of the PLA service, it was identified that telephone call appointments were not suitable for some students due to their circumstances or conditions. Therefore, coaching via email was explored and developed as a reasonable adjustment. Through two years’ experience on the project, two effective models of email coaching were identified and practitioner guidance was created. These recommendations draw from practitioner experience, student feedback, and from models and recommendations used in online counselling and mentoring. This poster presents these findings, as well as recommendations for practitioners and key considerations.

#### 14:15 – 15:00 Discussion room 3 – Working Towards a More Inclusive Learning Journey

**Presenters**: Tracey Inverary, The Open University

**Abstract**: **Project Understanding:**When the Open University took a deeper look at the data of its students it became apparent that there were significant gaps in awarding for different cohorts of students from a variety of ethnicities and backgrounds (Gray, 2020). The University wanted to bring balance in attainment outcomes and introduced initiatives to support this effort.  To ensure a more permanent approach to change that supported equality and inclusive education, the inclusive curriculum tool (ICT) was introduced and subsequently a team of six inclusive curriculum student consultants (ICSC) to drive the usage of the ICT.

**Project Context:**The ICT was created after looking at Access Modules, taking data and feedback to inform how to apply the tool (Gray, 2020), and eventually ICSCs were involved when looking at how learning is designed, the developmental processes of module creation and production as well as redefining aspects of the tool to ensure continuity in it being fit for purpose.

The ICSCs are a part of the Access Participation and Success (APS) Team and have National and International lived-experiences that allow for curriculum of different modules to be scrutinised, and to be done so from all angles to highlight design incompatibilities with reflecting the students that study the module material or content that is not compatible with equitable approaches to assessment.

**Project Findings:**With well over half of the student population registered with disabilities, well over a third registered as being from BAME backgrounds, care-experienced and living in deprived areas (OU, 2022), representation within the materials and useful support and accessibility, was discovered as essential to thorough engagement with module material and access to learning that afforded better attainment outcomes. Module teams, Learning Designers, development and production teams were able to partner with ICSCs regularly, gain better awareness and reach clear understandings and objectives to ensuring EDI took a prominent place in module creation.

**Source of information:**

Gray, D. (2020) Inclusive Curriculum Executive Summary, March 2020, Open University, Milton Keynes.

OU (2022) Facts and Figures, About The Open University. [Online]. <https://www.open.sc.uk/about/strategy-and-policies/facts-and-figures>  . (Accessed December 2022.)

#### 14:15 – 15:00 Discussion room 4 – ‘Towards Inclusivity’ – A practical, community-based approach to enhancing inclusive design, using data and learning design’

**Presenters**: Jannah Aljafri and Rafael Hidalgo, The Open University

**Abstract**: Module teams are often keen to design and deliver the most inclusive learning experience for all students. However they face some practical constraints such as high workloads, low resources and low confidence in sharing EDI-related challenges (Gregory & Lodge 2015; Claeys-Kulik et al. 2019).

The Open University's Learning Design team have developed 'Towards Inclusivity module evaluation project' (TIMEP) which aims to meet those needs. It is a practical framework and resource for evaluating the module and taking evidence-based actions to enhance students' experience and outcomes, including those with marginalised characteristics.

A VLE-based website guides the module team in their project, step-by-step, focusing on the most strategic areas and using data (including student voice) and learning design to help with this. The module team can access a cross-faculty community forum and live support where needed. On project completion, the module team would have developed a deeper understanding of their students' needs, more confidence in identifying key inclusivity issues and solutions, and a practical 'living' action plan.

We aim to launch 'Towards Inclusivity' in July 2023, and the poster will give a visual introduction.

**References**

Gregory, M.S. and Lodge, J.M. (2015) [“Academic workload: The Silent Barrier to the implementation of technology-enhanced learning strategies in higher education,”](https://eur01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fdoi.org%2F10.1080%2F01587919.2015.1055056&data=05%7C01%7Cjannah.aljafri%40open.ac.uk%7C823bf065e4274e022b6808daf548343a%7C0e2ed45596af4100bed3a8e5fd981685%7C0%7C0%7C638091987698762068%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=dGQksjSBU%2BCwPAFAsu5QuUWKnHMMU8q288tpnJd0Cjs%3D&reserved=0) Distance Education, 36(2), pp. 210–230.

Claeys-Kulik, A., Jørgensen, T.E. and Stöber, H. (2019) [Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in European Higher Education Institutions: Results from the INVITED Project. rep. Brussels](https://eur01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Feric.ed.gov%2F%3Fid%3DED603495&data=05%7C01%7Cjannah.aljafri%40open.ac.uk%7C823bf065e4274e022b6808daf548343a%7C0e2ed45596af4100bed3a8e5fd981685%7C0%7C0%7C638091987698762068%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=OUyIdORdTy%2Bvvr1eTPU1jRdvKeIZ6escgnxnI4m0jQY%3D&reserved=0): European University Association, p. 37.

### 15:00: Conference end