

Mature Students and Higher Education: Challenges and Opportunities

After many years of decline in the number of mature undergraduates, the value of participation in higher education for individuals, society and the economy has been recognised by policy makers. This event will include an introduction from the Office for Students (OfS) on how it is working for change through improved information, advice and guidance, regulation in the form of access and participation plans and funding initiatives to encourage greater flexibility and choice. The event will also be an opportunity to explore how practice, evaluation and research can support the institutional change required to attract older learners with an expert panel discussion. Additionally, Paula Shaw, Associate Professor of Online Learning at the University of Derby, will reflect on how we can make learning work for mature students.

Programme

- ◆ **9:45** **(Virtual) Coffee & Registration**
- ◆ **10:00** **Welcome & Introduction to the Key Issues**
Annette Hayton, NERUPI Convenor & Senior Research Fellow, University of Bath
- ◆ **10:15** **Office for Students: Improving Opportunity and Choice for Mature Students**
Sandra Binns, Senior Officer, and Kate Page, Access & Participation Manager, Access, Inclusion & Skills, OfS
The opportunity to study as a mature student is essential for equality of opportunity and provides essential skills for future prosperity. While numbers of older learners in higher education have declined, particularly for certain types of study, there are positive signs of increasing demand. The government proposes to nurture this growth and the OfS is working for change through improved information, advice and guidance, regulation and funding initiatives to encourage greater flexibility and choice. Sandra and Kate will give a brief overview of planned changes and respond to your questions in a 15 minute Q&A.
- ◆ **10:45** **Mature Students and Higher Education: Discussion in Breakout groups**
An opportunity to discuss proposed changes and institutional responses to the mature student agenda and to prepare questions for the panel.
- ◆ **11:15** **Panel Presentations and Discussion: Mature Students & HE - Challenges & Opportunities**
Professor John Butcher, Director of Access, Open and Cross-curricular Innovation and Professor of Inclusive Teaching in Higher Education, the Open University
Dr Catherine Bates, Programme Manager: Professional Studies, Lifelong Learning Centre, University of Leeds
Caroline McDonald, Director of Access and Engagement, Birkbeck University London
Navjot Kaur Virk, Head of Discipline: Midwifery & Children and Interim Discipline Lead: Post-Registration Nursing, University of Derby
- ◆ **12:30** **Lunch Break**

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◆ **1:15** **Scaling-up Online Learning whilst Maintaining Satisfaction: Lessons from the Frontline***

Paula Shaw, Associate Professor of Online Teaching & Learning, University of Derby

Through a QAA and Thinglink supported project, the University of Derby undertook a digital ethnography research project, observing six higher education modules; two fully online, two apprenticeship and two practical modules that transitioned to off-campus blended learning, over a twelve-week period in spring 2021. The aim was to learn about the entanglement of the participants' digital studies, work and home life and make recommendations to improve programme management and module design. With the focus on mature learners, we will explore their experiences and lay the foundations of a contextual analysis. Practical recommendations will set the scene for praxis pedagogical discussions.

* Supported by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA)



◆ **1:45** **Evaluating the Mature Student Experience: Discussion in Breakout groups**

An opportunity to talk in small groups about how we evaluate the mature student experience, learning and teaching approaches and initiatives directed at older learners' needs.

◆ **2:30** **Feedback on Discussion**

◆ **3:00** **Close**