



Challenge  
inequalities



Empower  
students



Transform  
lives

# Hindsight is a wonderful thing – using the experience of collaborative working to drive improvements in widening participation practice

Dr Julie Vuolo

Deputy Head, Widening Access and Student Success

Centre for Education and Student Success

# In this session...

- Context for change
- The intervention
- The collaboration
- The plan v reality
- Lessons for future practice
- Hindsight is a wonderful thing



# Context for change

Gaps in good degree and continuation outcomes identified in the Access and Participation Plan assessment of performance

Black and Asian students at a higher risk of non-continuation and less likely to be awarded a 'good degree' in comparison to their White student peers

Targets set, intended outcomes agreed, theory of change developed, multi-component intervention designed, evaluation plan drafted

# The intervention

*‘A leadership and empowerment programme for racially minoritised students. Working with third-party providers, this two-day programme will be offered to racially minoritised students as an opportunity for them to develop an understanding of the beliefs and motivations which drive their behaviours and choices, and which can contribute to their success as students. For piloting with up to 50 students in 2024-25 with a view to increasing numbers thereafter.’*

Intended outcomes: Improved self-efficacy, confidence and self-belief. Improved attainment and progression outcomes.





# The collaboration

- Race and Ethnicity Equity Working Group
- Hertfordshire Students' Union
- Widening Access Student Ambassadors
- Student Success / Race Equity Placement Student
- Third party supplier - Grit



# Making decisions together

Duration	Name	Dates	Enablers and barriers to engagement
Providing support for costs	Maximum and minimum numbers	Venue	Catering
Eligibility and Exclusions	Marketing	Development v leadership	Targeted v blanket recruitment
	Evaluation	Stakeholder engagement	

# Making decisions together

Duration	Name	Dates	Enablers and barriers to engagement
Providing support for costs	Maximum and minimum numbers	Venue	Catering
Eligibility and Exclusions	Marketing	Development v leadership	Targeted v blanket recruitment
	Evaluation	Stakeholder engagement	

# Decisions made (eventually!)

Duration -  
two days

Name -  
Catalyst

Dates -  
March

Supporting costs  
- travel,  
accommodation

Numbers - 50  
max / 10 min

Venue - private  
(Herts Sports  
Village)

Catering –  
lunch

Eligibility - Black,  
Asian and Mixed  
heritage  
students

Exclusions –  
Foundation,  
Apprentice

Development  
focus v  
leadership -  
development

Targeted  
programmes v  
blanket –  
blanket

Evaluation – pre  
and post





**Versus**

- Delivered in March
- One student in a hotel
- Delivery team arrived late, disagreed on content
- 10 students, reducing to 6 the day before and 5 on the day
- Found out one was a member of staff and not a student!
- Decided to reduce to one day
- Catering couldn't amend the order / loads of food left over
- Feedback – those that came loved it!

# Lessons for future practice

**Be explicit about the value:** Frame it to be relevant to what students think will be of value to them e.g., take a leadership or careers and employment approach. Be clear on what they will take away. Certificates and digital badging are popular. [Re-frame to leadership focus and career benefits](#)

**Get personal:** Personalise communications. Hand deliver flyers, be visible in high foot fall areas, use word of mouth. Start communications early, adopt a drip-drip approach and embed into other conversations that are already happening. [Recruit student partners to project team](#)

**Have confidence:** Have confidence in what you know about your students i.e., running over two days was expected to be a barrier to engagement due to time, costs and competing demands. It was. [Drop to 1-day](#)

**Target gatekeepers:** Utilise senior leadership staff to open 'gates' for you. Get programme leaders on board. Invest time in increasing staff understanding of race equity and how they can influence student outcomes. [Identify and work with target programmes](#)

**Collaboration rather than transaction:** you have local knowledge and know-how, but external providers have the resource, expertise and time to supply what you need; it only works if you bring it all together. [Debrief honestly and constructively; build on learning going forward](#)

# Hindsight really is a wonderful thing – three take away messages

- Reduce numbers involved in decisions; only consult on what you need to; consult with the right people rather than the most people.
- Trust what you know about your students and local context; you know them best.
- Harness the power of your gatekeepers, whether staff or students.

*If foresight were as good as hindsight, we'd all be rich. Anon*

# Thank you

Julie Vuolo [j.c.vuolo@herts.ac.uk](mailto:j.c.vuolo@herts.ac.uk)