

Collaboration for Widening Participation: Within and beyond higher education

The move towards increased collaboration and regional organisation for WP initiatives announced by the OfS in June 2025 opens up a range of opportunities for HE. This new approach to partnerships could support a shared national purpose by coordinating the work of providers in tackling local and regional challenges to achieve a greater collective impact. The possibility of more productive links with employers and communities, support for collaborative work with younger age groups and enhanced careers provision would all be facilitated. But at times of change it is also vital that we recognise and learn from the success of existing partnerships. The NERUPI Convention will give you the opportunity to:

- engage with wider perspectives on regional development
- increase your understanding of OfS intentions and requirements
- consider ways to retain existing partnership activities
- explore strategies for developing new collaborative initiatives.

8.45 Coffee & Registration

9.15 Welcome

9.30 Professor Joyce Liddle, Durham University

Professor Liddle will draw on years of experience & engagement as an academic and policy/practitioner in regional development. She will use the session to set WP, knowledge exchange and collaborative partnerships for place transformation in a context of civic and place leadership role for HEIs. In the evolving, highly fragmented devolutionary landscape of regional and local growth, Mayoral Combined Authorities (MCAs) are expected to drive leadership in collaboration with other agencies, including HEIs. Highlighting some recent government reports, and evidence from personal involvement in joined-up and collaborative practice across North-East HEI & other sectors, Professor Liddle will highlight some innovative and proactive regional partnership interventions. She will argue that despite on-going financial pressures, HEIs have an opportunity as effective, transformative Place Leader anchor institutions to fulfil their civic missions, at the same time as becoming a key catalyst for longer term, co-ordinated and joined up activities with partners. Thus, HEIs have the capacity to simultaneously fulfil dual contributions to the Starmer national economic growth agenda with place-based wider social impacts for enhancing levels of access, success and progression of under-represented groups in HEI.

10.10 Professor Jane White from the University of Bath will draw on her experience as a teacher, academic and senior manager involved in outreach, academic support and regional and national partnerships to explore the importance of wider collaboration for widening access and participation in HE. She will do this using examples of collaborative projects and initiatives that she has undertaken during her career. She will highlight some of the opportunities and challenges that she has faced along the way and will share some personal perspectives on the role that HE does or might take to support the educational component of social mobility.

10.50 Coffee

11.20 NERUPI Members' Presentations

12.30 Lunch

1.30

Presentation Panel:

Jo Davies, University of Bath

Geographies of WP: The importance of a fair geographic distribution of WP opportunities

The UK government's Opportunity Areas programme (2017-2022) focussed on improving young people's outcomes in 12 social mobility cold spots across England. The 'From the Centre to the Periphery' project, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council brought together a research team spanning the Universities of Bath, Bristol and Durham, to conduct a three-year quasi-experimental evaluation of the impact of the OA programme from 2024. This presentation will discuss the most important findings to-date, focussing in particular on what we have learned so far about the power of partnership working in the Opportunity Areas to address local challenges to social mobility.

Dr Femi Owolade, Sheffield Hallam University

Aligning Civic Purpose with WP: Building Inclusive Regional Partnerships

This presentation explores how universities can align their widening participation efforts with the civic university mission to create more inclusive and locally responsive regional partnerships. Drawing on practical insights from the National Civic Impact Accelerator (NCIA) programme, it highlights the importance of place-based collaboration, long-term community engagement, and the inclusion of underrepresented voices. The presentation will consider how WP professionals can move beyond access targets to embed civic values into strategic planning and everyday practice - building stronger connections between universities and the communities they serve, especially in areas of persistent inequality.

Scott Atkinson, Royal Academy of Engineering

Networking for Collaboration: The Importance of networking

The Royal Academy of Engineering delivers a range of programmes and activities to support the teaching of STEM across all phases of education in England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales. Programmes support regional networks fostering partnerships between schools, local employers and industry and to support STEM teachers with valuable CPD and resources. This presentation will outline effective approaches to building networks, as well as the benefits and challenges.

Vicky Spink, HeppSY UniConnect Partnership

A regional strategy for building enduring partnerships.

Vicky will share the region's strategy for building enduring partnerships through a changing and complex environment.

2.30

Sam Dunnett & the Sussex Learning Network Regional APP

This session is designed to provide space for participants to explore and consider the potential for developing the regional delivery plans in their areas. The Sussex Learning Network will share their process for developing a Regional Access and Participation Plan starting with mapping existing activity and teacher consultation going on to identify regional risks and development of a Local EORR. Attainment-raising and wider activity plans were shared with key stakeholders before approval was gained through internal university governance structures including regional targets and shared evaluation.

3.45

Next Steps

4.00

Close

NERUPI Members' Presentations

SESSION A: Benjamin Lay Suite – Main Room

- **Dr Marta Almeida-Hill**, University of Kent - **Beyond Sponsorship: Collaboration as a catalyst for educational change**
- **Laura Johnston**, Bath Spa University and **Rachel McCulloch**, Southampton Solent University - **Steps for Success: A Bath Spa University and Southampton Solent University Collaboration**
- **Toby Pallatt**, Anglia Ruskin University - **Learning to look outside the box; the risk and successes of Anglia Ruskin University's outreach programmes**

SESSION B: Benjamin Lay Suite – Breakout Room 1

- **Dr Julie Vuolo**, University of Hertfordshire - **'Hindsight is a wonderful thing' – using the experience of collaborative working to drive improvements in widening participation practice**
- **Dr Chuanyan Zhu**, University of Salford - **Peer-Assisted Learning Salford (PALS) and the Salford Evaluation Framework: A Collaborative Model for Widening Participation Impact**
- **Dr Emily Scott**, **Dr Tamara McNeill**, Oxford Brookes University and **Mauricio Rivera**, University of Sussex - **Fostering collaborative approaches to evaluation: Establishing an Access and Participation Plan Evaluation Community of Practice**

SESSION C: The Benjamin Lay Suite – Breakout Room 2

- **Fleur Middleborough** and **Charlene Wilson**, University of Salford - **Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) Within Assessment**
- **Katarina Blanco**, **Manjula Modhwadia** and **Christine Khalil**, University of East London - **Supporting Young Independent People in Higher Education: Partnerships in Action**
- **Isobel Kane**, **Anna Flatt** and **Alanna Plaats**, University of Suffolk - **Micro-placements: An evaluation of the impact upon neurodivergent students and their employers**

SESSION D: Margaret Fell Room

- **Silje Andersen** and **Dr Ada Mau**, Imperial College, London - **Combatting Maths Anxiety: Working in partnership with Primary Schools in West London**
- **Dr Emily Magrath**, **Dr Chloe Cheetham**, IntoUniversity and **Bilal Hazzouri**, Anglia Ruskin University - **Enhancing Metacognitive Skills in Primary Learners: The Role of University - Third Sector Partnerships in Addressing Regional Educational Disadvantage and Strengthening Educational Interventions**
- **Amy Slater-McGill**, Aston University - **Aspire to Aston: New innovations for existing pre-16 progressive programme**

SESSION E: Abraham Darby Room

- **Jade Wigley** and **Nina Cupric**, University of Staffordshire - **Inclusive Pedagogy Training: Staff-Student Co-Created Programmes for Racial Equity and Neurodiversity**
- **Sarah Dirrane**, Cosmos Ltd - **Understanding the Diversity of FE Learners: A Collaborative Approach to Segmentation**

Participant List:

