

Mature and Commuter Students

The traditional university model catered for a student body that largely consisted of young full-time live-in students, and its curriculum, delivery and support systems tended to reflect this. However, higher education institutions are increasingly aware that mature and commuting students have different needs. In this event we are going to:

- consider the challenges facing mature and commuting students
- learn how evaluators are analysing institutional data to understand their learning journey
- hear strategies from colleagues to support mature and commuter student access and success in higher education
- explore strategies for the future.

♦ 13.00 Introductions

♦ 13.05 Research Insights on the Experience of Mature and Commuter Students *Keynote Speaker: Professor Liz Thomas, University of York*

Liz will use her research in schools and higher education to draw attention to the issues facing mature and commuter students in seeking to access and engage with higher education. Her research in secondary schools and universities showed how social class inequalities are reproduced including at the point of higher education choice and on the student experience. Her recent work with the Technological Higher Education Association Ireland focussed on commuter students provided valuable insights, whole provider and whole sector approaches and strategies to support and enable commuter students. This session will include time for audience participation and discussion, especially around strategies to respond.

♦ 13.45 Short Break

♦ **13.50 Panel Presentations: University of East Anglia, University of East London and Loughborough University**

Exploring the Impact of the UEA Mature Students Network on Student Awareness, Belonging, and Engagement

Gemma Standen, Callum Perry, Zoe Jones, and Becca Westrup, University of East Anglia

Gemma and Callum will be discussing their fellowship-funded research on Exploring the Impact of the UEA Mature Students Network on Student Awareness, Belonging, and Engagement. By centring student voice and lived experience, the project aims to inform inclusive practice and policy development.

Supporting Commuter Students

Debbie Lindsay, University of East London

Debbie will be sharing the support package that is available to commuting students at the University of East London, in particular the University's Engagement Bursary, including how it is promoted, the assessment process, and the ways in which students are supported through it. She will also share and analyse data from the 2024/25 academic year to highlight the bursary's impact on retention and progression among low-income commuter students.

Evaluating the Learning Journey of Commuter and Mature Students: the Commuter and Mature Student Experience at Loughborough University

Professor Hilary McDermott, Dr David Maidment, Jared Patel and Marta Ulanicka, Loughborough University

Hilary will present the findings from Loughborough's recent research which explored the factors that can influence mature and commuter students' decision making in relation to their continuation and completion of higher education. This initial phase of work utilised a qualitative approach involving interviews and focus groups to gain information from current and past students. Hilary will then discuss some key recommendations on how institutions can address these challenges and outline the further work that Loughborough are planning to build upon these initial findings.

♦ **14.35 Questions to the Panel and discussion**

♦ **14.45 Group Activity**

Participants will have the opportunity to discuss what they can do to support these student groups and consider how they might research and evaluate their interventions.

♦ **15.15 Round Up and Close**