

SESSION A: Benjamin Lay Suite – Main Room

Beyond Sponsorship: Collaboration as a catalyst for educational change

Dr Marta Almeida-Hill, University of Kent

As lead sponsor of the University of Kent Academies Trust (UKAT), the University works collaboratively with local schools, families and educators to drive meaningful change. From mentoring and outreach to adult education and community art projects, the initiative represents a sustained, grassroots partnership. In 2023/24 alone, over 1,400 students engaged with Kent-led programmes, reflecting rising aspirations and improved outcomes. This model showcases how universities can act as catalysts for long-term educational and social renewal. In this presentation Marta explores the University of Kent's role as a transformative community partner in Medway - a region marked by educational inequality and deprivation.

Steps for Success: A Bath Spa University and Southampton Solent University collaboration

Laura Johnston, Bath Spa University

Rachel McCulloch, Southampton Solent University

Supporting transition from college into university in the southwest of England, this project focused on academic research, time management, collaborative working and student life. Academics from both universities were also involved and provided sessions which went gave an in-depth insight into research methods and plagiarism. College staff CPD sessions were delivered in addition to the student workshops. All sessions were highly interactive in nature and were positively received across the board. In this presentation Laura and Rachel will provide a practical guide to how the project was started, developed and delivered. As well as celebrating its successes, they will also examine challenges and lessons learned.

Learning to look outside the box; the risk and successes of Anglia Ruskin University's outreach programmes

Toby Pallatt, Anglia Ruskin University

In 2024/2025 the Anglia Ruskin University's Outreach team went through a lot of change, particularly in the delivery of its activities with the help of external speakers and collaborators from the charity sector. In this presentation Toby will discuss the impact and learnings from the delivery of their programmes and reflect and share findings on how the Outreach team looked outside the box, the risks associated with external collaboration and the successes that have come from them.

Suggested Pre-reading links and materials

[The Boy Question | How To Teach Boys To Succeed In School | Mark Roberts](#)

[TASO – Core Theory of Change Guidance](#)

SESSION B: Benjamin Lay Suite – Breakout Room I

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

Dr Julie Vuolo, University of Hertfordshire

An assessment of performance for the University of Hertfordshire’s Access and Participation Plan identified Black and Asian students as being both at a higher risk of non-continuation and less likely to be awarded a ‘good degree’ in comparison to their White student peers. In this presentation Julie will share the University’s experience of collaborating with students and a third-party organisation to co-create a two-day self-development programme for students of Black, Asian and Mixed heritage backgrounds. Suggestions for how the University’s experience of working collaboratively could be used to drive future improvements in practice will be discussed and the key learning points from the experience highlighted.

Suggested Pre-reading links and materials

The UH approach to student staff partnership. <https://www.herts.ac.uk/ltaq/learning,-teaching-and-academic-quality/home/pedagogic-research/student-staff-partnership>

Abegglen, S., Burns, T. and Sinfield, S. (eds) (2023) Collaboration in Higher Education. London: Bloomsbury Open Access. Available: <https://www.bloomsburycollections.com/monograph?docid=b-9781350334083>

Peer-Assisted Learning Salford (PALS) and the Salford Evaluation Framework: A Collaborative Model for Widening Participation Impact

Dr Chuanyan Zhu, University of Salford

The University of Salford's Peer-Assisted Learning Salford (PALS) program is enhancing first-year student success. As a key intervention in its Access and Participation Plan, PALS fosters a robust learning community, significantly boosting students' sense of belonging, retention and academic achievement. In this presentation Chuanyan will share the University’s collaborative approach to embedding comprehensive impact and implementation evaluations directly into the programme, showcasing a practical model for evidence-based practice aligned with the Salford Evaluation Framework.

Fostering collaborative approaches to evaluation: Establishing an Access and Participation Plan Evaluation Community of Practice

Dr Emily Scott and Dr Tamara McNeill, Oxford Brookes University

Mauricio Rivera, University of Sussex

The Access and Participation Plan (APP) Evaluation Community of Practice (ECoP) is being set up within the FACE APP Special Interest Group (APPSIG) and is undergoing collaborative design with a community of practitioners who are involved in the evaluation of APP intervention strategies and activities. The ECoP is due to launch in September 2025. This presentation will outline the purpose and process of setting up the ECoP, as well as how the group can collaboratively address evaluation challenges, create opportunities for evaluation collaboration, and maximise evaluation knowledge and praxis.

Suggested Pre-reading links and materials

Community of Practice Design Guide: <https://library.educause.edu/-/media/files/library/2005/1/nli0531-pdf.pdf>

SESSION C: The Benjamin Lay Suite – Breakout Room 2

Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) Within Assessment

Fleur Middleborough, University of Salford

This pilot scheme explores the implementation of a Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) initiative involving two universities, the University of Salford and the British University of Bahrain, facilitated through the Edumundo simulation platform. The project aims to foster intercultural collaboration, enhance the student learning experience and evaluate personal development outcomes. In this presentation Fleur will discuss the implementation, delivery and lessons learned from the project, and how this will inform future initiatives.

Suggested Pre-reading links and materials

[COIL VE Home Page](#)

[Business Simulations - Edumundo](#)

Inclusive Pedagogy Training: Staff-Student Co-Created Programmes for Racial Equity and Neurodiversity

Jade Wigley and Nina Cupric, University of Staffordshire

The University of Staffordshire's Inclusive Pedagogy Programme is designed to address awarding and continuation gaps for neurodiverse students and students from Black and Asian backgrounds. Through structured partnerships with students and academic colleagues, two co-created staff training programmes have been developed, underpinned by Universal Design for Learning principles (2024) and the Quality Assurance Agency Inclusive Education Framework (2023). Drawing on a robust mixed-methods evaluation strategy and informed by student-staff focus group analysis and co-creation workshops, Jade and Nina will explore and share the complexities, impacts and lessons learned from embedding this inclusive practice at an institutional level.

Suggested Pre-reading links and materials

[University of Staffordshire's Access and Participation Plan 2024-2028](#)

[The UDL Guidelines](#) [QAA Inclusive Education Framework](#)

Understanding the Diversity of Further Education Learners: A Collaborative Approach to Segmentation

Sarah Dirrane, Cosmos Ltd

In this presentation Sarah will introduce a large-scale collaborative research project involving nine partners across education settings, including colleges and Uni Connect partnerships. The project aimed to better understand the diverse motivations, barriers, and aspirations of learners in further education. The resulting development of a segmentation model grounded in the responses of over 35,000 students will support more equitable and responsive access and participation strategies. Sarah will then explore the outcomes and learnings from the project and reflect on the approach, the process of collaboration and the application of insights to regional practice, offering insight into how cross-institutional work can generate meaningful, student-centred approaches to widening participation.

Suggested Pre-reading links and materials

<https://cosmosltd.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/Cosmos-FE-National-Student-Segmentation-Executive-Summary-Report.pdf>

SESSION D: Margaret Fell Room

Combatting Maths Anxiety: Working in partnership with Primary Schools in West London

Silje Andersen and **Dr Ada Mau**, Imperial College, London

The Imperial College Primary Maths Transitions programme aims to reduce the impact of transition to secondary school for disadvantaged pupils, particularly around Maths attainment. It works with young people from year 5 to year 7, their teachers and their parents to reduce “maths anxiety” and increase interest in maths. In this presentation, Silje and Ada will share some of the challenges and impacts observed over the first two years of this pilot programme and invite discussion around the challenges and benefits of working with this age group.

Suggested Pre-reading links and materials

<https://www.imperial.ac.uk/news/251837/imperial-launches-programme-support-successful-foundations/>

Enhancing Metacognitive Skills in Primary Learners: The Role of University - Third Sector Partnerships in Addressing Regional Educational Disadvantage and Strengthening Educational Interventions

Dr Emily Magrath and **Dr Chloe Cheetham**, IntoUniversity

Bilal Hazzouri, Anglia Ruskin University

IntoUniversity and Anglia Ruskin University work in partnership on an OfS-funded Metacognition Project that supports the development of metacognitive skills in primary-age learners from disadvantaged backgrounds through community-based educational programmes. In this presentation Emily, Chloe and Bilal will offer practical insights into project design, evaluation, university–third sector partnership dynamics and the regional application of this work. They will also critically reflect on key lessons from the first phase of the project (January and August 2025), including both successes and challenges and how these will inform future practice.

Aspire to Aston: New innovations for existing pre-16 progressive programmes

Amy Slater-McGill, Aston University

The Aspire to Aston Programme aims to support pre-16 academic attainment and aspiration towards higher education as part of Aston Universities Access and Participation Plan (APP) targets. In this presentation Amy will share the background to the Programme, the planning and collaborative partner recruitment, programme, delivery and the evaluation methodology used to measure APP objectives. Amy will also consider what’s worked, what hasn’t worked and what’s still a work in progress, and invites peer discussion to share good practice with Outreach and WP colleagues.

Suggested Pre-reading links and materials

<https://www.aston.ac.uk/sro/aspire-aston-progressive-programme>

SESSION E: Abraham Darby Room

Fake or Real News? Engaging prospective adult learners in community settings with critical thinking workshops

Laura Bradnam, Birkbeck University, London

Birkbeck's Fake or Real News programme is now in its fourth year of delivery with excellent longitudinal results. It is designed to meet local community needs around digital skills whilst upskilling participants in critical thinking, classroom confidence and beginning a pathway to return to education. Birkbeck has partnered with a number of different community groups and organisations in Newnham and Camden to enable this tailored, accessible and inclusive offer. In this presentation, Laura will give an overview of the programme's project with Working Men's College and community partners, sharing its underpinning theoretical approach and how this innovative method can be applied to your own work.

Supporting Young Independent People in Higher Education: Partnerships in Action

Katarina Blanco, Manjula Modhwadia and Christine Khalil, University of East London

The Young Independent Students (YIS) project at the University of East London is a sector-leading example of how collaborative, cross-sector work enhances the university experience and outcomes for vulnerable students, specifically care leavers, estranged students, refugees, and young carers. In this presentation Katarina, Manjula and Christine will explore the YIS model, its measurable impact on retention, completion and progression for students and its potential for wider replication across institutions to address national Equality of Opportunity Risk Register priorities through meaningful collaborations.

Suggested Pre-reading links and materials

<https://www.uel.ac.uk/study/fees-funding/scholarships-bursaries/undergraduate-scholarships-bursaries/young-independent-student-bursary>

Micro-placements: An evaluation of the impact upon neurodivergent students and their employers

Isobel Kane, Anna Flatt and Alanna Plaats, University of Suffolk

The University of Suffolk's Careers, Enterprise and Employability team provide STEP+ micro-placements: ring-fenced, 30-hour paid opportunities that are co-designed with external employers and are specifically aimed at neurodivergent students. These targeted interventions aim to address inequity in work-based learning, are delivered in collaboration with local employers across Suffolk and Norfolk and are structured flexibly around student timetables, providing a supportive bridge into professional environments. They also build on regional partnerships with employer networks, specialist charities, and university departments. In this presentation Isobel, Anna and Alanna will discuss building connections with neurodivergent students and understanding their needs, give an overview of the scheme's context and delivery with local employers and present its evaluation methods and findings.