

Presentations AM

SESSION A: Benjamin Lay Suite: Main Room

From Primary School to Teacher Development: A Lifecycle Approach to Widening Participation

Ciaran Shantz, Anglia Ruskin University

Anglia Ruskin University's UK Recruitment and Widening Access Team has developed evidence-informed outreach programmes that address inequalities in access to higher education across the learner journey. From raising aspirations and improving literacy attainment among primary pupils through Reach for the Stars, to providing stretch and challenge opportunities for secondary students from widening participation backgrounds through Thinking Beyond Horizons, and equipping teachers with strategies to better engage under-represented groups through Beyond the Label, these initiatives demonstrate how collaborative, stakeholder-led outreach can create more equitable pathways into higher education and enhance educational outcomes.

Teaching for the future: Thinking, Metacognition and learner agency for young people

Dr Emily Magrath and Dr Chloe Cheetham, IntoUniversity

This session shares learning from the first year of a two-year OfS-funded partnership between IntoUniversity and Anglia Ruskin University, exploring how metacognition can be explicitly taught to primary-aged learners in widening access contexts. Addressing a gap in access and participation practice, the project examines whether developing metacognitive skills through early intervention can strengthen learner agency, critical thinking, informed decision making and future educational progression. Attendees will hear emerging findings from a mixed-methods, quasi-experimental evaluation, gain insight into sustained outreach delivery and cross-sector collaboration and explore how The Big Thinking Project is being refined and scaled for its second year.

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SESSION B: Benjamin Lay Suite: Breakout Room I

Ditching the Deficit Model: Reframing Vocational Learners Through Strengths and Equity

Dr Lindsey J. Munro, Manchester Metropolitan University

Vocational qualifications provide an important pathway into higher education, particularly for students from underrepresented and working-class backgrounds. This session explores how institutions can move beyond deficit narratives by designing inclusive courses that recognise and build on students' existing strengths. Drawing on practical initiatives, including lived experience workshops, prior learning skills maps, strengths-based coaching, and resources that make the hidden curriculum visible, the framework supports equitable student success, more inclusive learning environments, and the reduction of awarding gaps.

Pedagogical Innovation to Improve Student Engagement and Retention with Non-Traditional Learners

Dr Md. Anwar Hossain and Dr Nadia Liaquat, Bath Spa University

This paper explores pedagogical innovations that improve engagement, confidence, and retention among non-traditional learners, including student carers, international, working, and first-generation students. Grounded in Universal Design for Learning, Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory, and Tinto's Student Integration Model, the study examines UDL, audio-visual feedback, AI-supported dashboards, and structured deadline extensions among 200 students. Findings demonstrate strong effects on engagement and retention, with confidence and engagement mediating retention. The paper recommends scalable, inclusive, technology-supported approaches that respond to students' lived experiences.

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SESSION C: Benjamin Lay Suite: Breakout Room 2

Why deep targeted engagement is worth the investment

Alexandra Lyons, Imperial College, London

In-person engagement is expensive, particularly programmes working with the same young people through multiple touch points. Why choose to run targeted, intensive programmes when you could reach more with a webinar? Our recent external evaluation engaged Cosmos to review STEM Potential and STEM Futures, two flagship multi touchpoint programmes. We'll share key findings from our newly developed practitioner toolkit, showcasing the impactful elements that build to make these programmes worth the investment.

Equity with equality? Can contextualising everyone widen participation for medical admissions?

Dr Philip Chan, Kent and Medway Medical School

At Kent and Medway Medical School contextual information is used to widen participation by defining a "contextual group" of applicants which is treated differently to a standard group

In a competitive admissions environment, we used academic attainment relative to the average of the applicant's school (in contrast to absolute grade attainment) as the main metric for selection. This achieved equitable widening participation metrics without the need to define a separate contextual group.

This might be more resilient to political influence than current practice.

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SESSION A: Benjamin Lay Suite: Main Room

Sustained Outreach in Practice: Evaluating Leeds to Success Across the Secondary Lifecycle

Ayesha Akram and Emily Sharp, University of Leeds

Amid growing uncertainty about the value of higher education, targeted outreach remains vital in addressing educational inequalities. This presentation examines *Leeds to Success*, a widening participation programme supporting Years 7–11 students underrepresented in higher education. Through attainment support, skills development, higher education awareness and campus experiences, the programme has engaged many disadvantaged learners, with over half from the most deprived IMD quintile. Evaluation findings show improved confidence, academic self-efficacy and progression awareness, while highlighting challenges around impact tracking, consent, belonging and continuous programme improvement.

Practice and Evaluation Learnings – A Creative Summer School for Underrepresented Young People

Simone Hesselberg and Grace May, Bath Spa University

This session reflects on the delivery and evaluation of a targeted creative arts summer school for underrepresented 13–16-year-olds at Bath Spa University's creative design campus. The programme forms part of our Access and Participation plan, and in this session, we will share our project aims, ambitions, outcomes, learnings, and failures.

Learnings include how engagement varies year to year, the need for flexibility in meeting diverse young people's needs, and the required adaptivity of creative evaluation methods. We will then present last year's findings and share initial insights from our most recent iteration of the programme.

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SESSION B: Benjamin Lay Suite: Breakout Room 1

Enhancing Student Support through Proactive Engagement at the University of Leeds

Iona Gillies, University of Leeds

Engagement Calling identifies students who may benefit from additional support. Through personalised conversations, this holistic approach brings together services across the University to support students' academic success, financial wellbeing, sense of belonging and personal wellbeing.

This presentation explores how Engagement Calling contributes to student success through early intervention and proactive support. The data and systems used to identify students, common themes emerging from student conversations, referral and intervention processes and the benefits and challenges of implementing a university-wide proactive engagement model will be discussed. Delegates will gain insights into how data-informed approaches can help institutions identify and respond to student needs, supporting continuation and reducing inequalities in outcomes.

From Diagnosis to Design: Using the Working Diagnosis Model to Close Disability-Related Awarding Gaps

Charlotte Stewart, Buckinghamshire New University

This session presents the Working Diagnosis Model; a practical, legally grounded framework developed at Buckinghamshire New University to tackle structural inequity in disability support. The model reframes support around barrier identification, impairment effect, and reasonability, enabling timely and anticipatory adjustments without requiring formal diagnosis. It integrates validated screening tools, multi-source evidence, and ethical communication of uncertainty to ensure students receive support at the point of need.

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SESSION C: Benjamin Lay Suite: Breakout Room 2

Conscious Practice: Reframing Widening Participation through Equitable Institutional Practice

Dr Lesley Raven, Manchester Metropolitan University

Conscious Practice is an institutional innovation project exploring how educator development can contribute to widening participation by creating more equitable learning environments. Drawing on the experiences of racially diverse academic staff who have completed StellarHE's leadership programme, it examines how leadership learning informs authentic, flexible and racially inclusive assessment. The presentation shares emerging insights, reframing widening participation as equitable institutional practice and inviting discussion about how universities can respond to educational inequalities through educator development, leadership and assessment.

How can poetry inform curriculum decolonisation?

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Scholars have emphasised that higher education remains deeply embedded in Eurocentric epistemologies. These are presented as universal, while non-Eurocentric knowledge systems are often delegitimised. In response, this ongoing project explores how beyond-discipline learning can challenge existing knowledge hierarchies and support the development of socially just curricula. As a method, poetry workshops are being conducted across two universities in Brazil and the UK. By inviting participants to engage in poetic co-creation, the project opens space for the embodied and artistic dimensions of alternative forms of knowledge.