

Student Engagement Conference 2024: Fostering a holistic approach to success

18 April 2024, Leeds Horizon

Session abstracts

Keynote, 10:05 – 10:45, Room: Create

Fostering a holistic approach to student engagement and success in higher education

Tom Lowe, Senior Lecturer in Higher Education, University of Portsmouth

Student enrolments into higher education in the UK continue to sustain high numbers, despite a growing cost of living and public debates about the value of a university education. Society's promise to a prospective student on attending higher education can be summarised as university education offering the 'once in a lifetime experience' and the ticket to a desired graduate outcome. Students give our institutions years of their lives and tuition fees, and it is within this context that the modern university must adapt to continually meet expectations. It is therefore critical that we foster meaningful student engagement at the heart of our universities, yet since the COVID-19 pandemic, engagement approaches in wider society have substantially changed which have led to lower student attendance in classes and lower footfall on campuses. As people, we now have a choice to shop online instead of travel to shopping centres, stream movies instead of visiting the cinema, send voice notes instead of calling friends, respond to text messages with a simple emoji, and there is a growing ability to work from home. The way we engage with one another in society is changing, and when it comes to the university, students no longer have to attend physically to access their learning like previous decades. It is within this context that this talk will focus on how we continue to sustain belonging-rich university communities despite the changing world of engagement, to support student success. Through drawing on published literature, sector practice and discussions, this keynote will focus on how student-staff dialogue and focusing on student voice will lead to the solutions which will help universities to create engaging learning communities of the future.

Workshop 1, 12:00 – 13:00, Room: Create@1

Humans aren't going away: Critical thinking and the QFT!

Adrian O'Connor, University of Roehampton

This interactive workshop will focus on the Question Formulation Technique (QFT). Developed by the Right Question Institute and now being promoted and delivered in collaboration with Harvard University. The QFT is: "a structured method for generating and improving questions. It distils sophisticated forms of divergent, convergent, and metacognitive thinking into a deceptively simple, accessible, and reproducible technique". This is a brilliantly simple but effective approach to engage students in a way which powerfully enhances the development of their critical thinking skills: skills that are lacking and more in demand than ever in the modern industrial, socio-economic post-graduation world.

Workshop 2, 12:00 – 13:00, Room: Create@2

U-Belong: Challenges and opportunities for student engagement and belonging

Dr Michael Priestley, King's College London

Student engagement can benefit the accessibility and inclusivity of provision to promote wellbeing, satisfaction, and belonging. However, common challenges persist around effectively engaging diverse student communities on sensitive topics which, if not adequately addressed, can cause harm. Presented by students, this workshop will share challenges and opportunities for inclusive and effective engagement encountered on the U-Belong project.

Workshop 4, 12:00 – 13:00, Room: Inspire@

Let's talk about - A card game to enhance students' sense of belonging

Dr Shaline Dhayal and Dr Dominic Wiredu Boakye, University of Exeter

The attainment gap between ethnic minority and international students compared to white and home students is a major challenge in UK HE institutes. An important contributing factor is reduced sense of belonging among these students. We propose an innovative and engaging custom-designed card game that fosters interaction and communication among students from diverse backgrounds, tapping on their lived experiences, cultural backgrounds in safe and respectful spaces. We believe this intervention will break down barriers, build connections, and enhance the sense of belonging among students ultimately having a positive impact on closing the attainment gap via improvement in student engagement.

Workshop 5, 14:00 – 15:00, Room: Create@1

Using gamification to engage students in transformative learning approaches

Dr Lorraine Gibson van Mil, University of Strathclyde

Students engage and collaborate in a mini problem-based learning (m-PBL) approach to tackle pressing sustainability challenges. The workshop ensures students understand the interconnectedness of social, environmental, and economic aspects and the need to work together to solve problems. Through interactive activities and group discussions, students analyse a local issue, (in this case, water sewage) and they formulate innovative, sustainable solutions, considering the broader implications of their actions. The workshop fosters critical thinking, interdisciplinary cooperation, and a commitment to driving positive change, empowering students to be catalysts for sustainable solutions in their communities.

Workshop 6, 14:00 – 15:00, Room: Create@2

The Complete Graduate: Designing a VLE-based skills & knowledge framework to support student confidence & awareness

Dr Laura McCaughey, Dr Anna McGregor, Dr Lesley Hamilton, Austin McCombie, University of Glasgow

The Complete Graduate aims to support students in tracking the knowledge, wellbeing, technical and transferable skills completed during their degree programmes to improve awareness, degree satisfaction, belonging and confidence. By collating completion, competency, reflections, and evidence of their work in a single, easily accessible framework within their Virtual Learning Environments, this framework generates a powerful, well-rounded personal portfolio aligned with Graduate Attributes and employability skills. By the end of our workshop, participants will have learned how to scaffold a skills and knowledge framework suited to their needs and gained an understanding of lessons learned from our initial implementation and evaluation.

Workshop 7, 14:00 – 15:00, Room: Inspire@

Empowering students to succeed: Innovation within the Plus Programme at the University of Leeds to ensure student engagement at scale

Jennifer Coates, University of Leeds

The University of Leeds Plus Programme is a proven intervention at scale, building engagement pre-entry and supporting sense of belonging on course through a range of interventions for over 5,000 under-represented Undergraduate and Masters students. Both student voice and integration with the wider institution are key to success, with evaluation showing that engaged Plus Programme students are more likely to be retained on course. However, in the post-COVID era, innovation is vital to maximise student engagement. This session will offer the opportunity to hear about our approach and challenges encountered, foster discussion and will showcase valuable student insight.

Workshop 8, 14:00 – 15:00, Room: Think@

The power of students working in partnership with professional bodies: “I’ve learnt that not everyone in a suit is arrogant!”

Dr Jenni Jones and Dr John Phillips, University of Wolverhampton

This session will share insights into how working with a professional body (the Institute of Directors) can enhance student’s sense of belonging and engagement; in their first year through a targeted group welcome week activity, resulting in students raising over £1500 for a local charity, and through a final year mentoring scheme aimed at enhancing employability skills and prospects for higher level employment. 95% of our final year mentees are from a

global majority background. Our statistics show that mentored students are more likely to receive a good honours degree. We are looking forward to sharing and encouraging you to do the same.