



Institutions in attendance

Bangor University (1)

Edge Hill University (5)

Future U (4)

Lancaster University (1)

Manchester Metropolitan University (7)

University of Manchester (1)

University Academy 92 (1)

University of Chester (3)

University of Lancashire (3)

University of Cumbria (1)

University of Liverpool (7)

University of Greater Manchester (2)

University of Salford (2)

Total attendees: 38

The session notes below were written and compiled by a variety of reporters, therefore some formatting differences may be present.

1. **Championing Mature Learners: What Works and Why.** *Hattie Heath, Outreach and Engagement Office, University of South Wales*
2. **Powerpoint Power up!** *Simon Fairbanks, Uni Taster Days.*

Championing Mature Learners: What Works and Why

Hattie Heath, Outreach and Engagement Officer University of South Wales

Reporter: Amy Robinson

Session Description

This session explored what effective and inclusive outreach for mature learners looks like in practice, focusing on belonging, equity and the barriers adult learners may face, including confidence, finances, caring responsibilities and previous educational experiences.

Delivered by: Hattie Heath, Outreach and Engagement Officer, University of South Wales

Regional role: Hattie works as a regional officer in South Wales.

1. Understanding the Mature Learner Experience

Challenging stereotypes

A key focus was challenging our assumptions about what a prospective university student looks like. Most imagery and messaging around prospective students tends to reflect 17–18-year-olds, rather than working-age adults who may be balancing childcare, family, employment and other responsibilities.

Question to consider: Are our outreach models designed equally well for both groups of students?

The age used to define a mature learner varies between organisations, but is typically around 21–25+.

Mature learners can potentially be affected by 11 of the 12 sector-wide Equality of Opportunity Risks, meaning barriers can exist across multiple areas of the student journey.

Barriers to mature learner entry can appear at every stage:

- Considering HE
- Exploring options
- Engaging with universities
- Applying
- Transitioning into HE

Building trust

Successful engagement with mature learners often comes from consistency of contact and building relationships over time.

This can involve:

- Becoming a familiar face
- Having informal conversations
- Being approachable and authentic
- Creating psychologically safe spaces where people feel comfortable asking questions
- Providing support throughout the learner journey rather than focusing on a single interaction

It is important to avoid a transactional approach or making interactions feel like a sales pitch. Instead, the focus should be on building trust and maintaining contact throughout the decision-making process.

Case study

The case study highlighted the potential impact of sustained, personalised engagement.

Consideration: The level of contact/support demonstrated in the case study represented a very high workload for one college and may not be realistic for all practitioners. The key takeaway may therefore be to consider which elements could be adapted into a more manageable model, rather than attempting to replicate the whole approach.

2. Relationships and Belonging

Relationships and a sense of belonging are particularly important when engaging mature learners.

Mature learners may not necessarily see themselves reflected in traditional university messaging or feel that HE is designed with people like them in mind. Outreach should therefore help learners to see themselves as belonging in a university environment and provide opportunities to speak openly about their concerns and experiences.

3. Flexibility and Design

Many university events and communications are designed around the assumption that a prospective student already understands HE and knows how the university system works.

There can also be an assumption that mature learners can attend the same events as traditional school/college applicants, including evening or weekend events. However, mature learners may have work, childcare, caring or other commitments that make this difficult.

Ways to improve flexibility and accessibility

- Make it clear that attending a recruitment event does not necessarily mean attending for the full duration.

- Consider whether information can be accessed after an event for those unable to attend.
- Where appropriate, encourage mature learners to bring a friend or partner, rather than assuming they will attend with a parent/guardian.
- Use plain, accessible language and avoid unnecessary HE terminology.
- Provide honest and realistic information about university, including potential challenges as well as opportunities.
- Create an environment that actively welcomes mature learners, rather than expecting them to adapt to an existing model.
- Ensure appropriate peer-to-peer representation, including opportunities to hear from mature students.

4. Challenging Our Own Practice

Language

Language was identified as a significant issue for many mature learners.

We should reflect on the assumptions we make about:

- Traditional students
- Mature learners
- Their existing knowledge of HE
- Their confidence and expectations
- The terminology they will understand

Consider whether our communications make sense to someone who has little or no recent experience of HE.

This is also relevant to event titles, promotional materials, email communications and information about the application process.

5. Practical Takeaways

The session highlighted the importance of reviewing current outreach practice through a mature learner lens.

Areas to consider:

- Are our events genuinely accessible to people with work, caring and family commitments?
- Does our language assume prior knowledge of HE?
- Do mature learners see themselves represented in our imagery and communications?
- Are we providing enough flexibility around attendance?
- Do our activities create opportunities to build relationships and trust?
- Are we creating psychologically safe spaces for learners to ask questions?
- Do we provide opportunities for mature learners to hear directly from peers with similar experiences?

- Are we supporting mature learners throughout their journey, rather than focusing solely on recruitment activity?

Overall takeaway

Effective mature learner outreach is not necessarily about creating an entirely separate outreach model. It is about examining existing practice and identifying where greater flexibility, clearer communication, relationship-building and representation could make our provision more inclusive.

End.

Powerpoint Power up! Simon Fairbanks, Uni Taster Days.

Reporter: Natalie Clough

How can we find ways to energise ourselves when presenting? Sometimes presenting in schools is challenging, but presenting is a privilege – we are changing lives and we shouldn't downplay that. We need to put our best foot forward as we might sometimes only meet that audience once.

The Fish Theory – *What does a visit to a public fish market have to do with engaging a classroom of young people?*

In any line of work, ... **1.** ...be fully present. **2.** ...choose your attitude. We descended from negative, anxious people but we can choose positivity. **3.** ...make their day – add value. How can you make them feel good about themselves? **4.** ...find the fun - remember to include visual, aural, reading and kinaesthetic elements and add in activities where possible.

10 ways to power-up your PowerPoint –

10. Prepare your pillars – make sure you have all your personal pillars in line – sleep, food, movement and mind – “We see the world through the state of our nervous system.” – Dr Rangan Chatterjee.

9. Do door duty – greet the students as they enter, shake hands, learn names, break barriers and get a read on them.

8. Lose the lectern – don't be stationery – it makes us look scared, cornered, uninteresting, inaccessible and academic. If we make ourselves visible, we look braver, confident, dynamic, accessible and relatable. It can be a great behaviour management tool when we walk around too.

7. Be relatable - Simon gave us a lovely introduction to himself – he's a writer, he has a family etc. He recommends bringing our whole self to the session – strong connections are made when we bring our whole self.

6. Create memorable, accessible slides. Watch out for – formatting – bullet points etc, spelling/grammar, have you included all the information you need to – times, dates etc? BUT make sure you don't have too many words on a page. We read in an F shape reading pattern, so left-align your writing. Create a call to action if needed – book here etc. It's more readable for people to read times in am/pm. Block capital are poor for readability. Watch out for acronyms.

5. Use your vocal toolbox. Register – *Deep* (sign of authority, good for answering questions) or shallow. *Timbre* – smooth (good for a chaotic classroom) or rough. *Prosody* – flowing (more musical and harmonious. Try not to up at the end of sentences and it makes it sound like a question) or flat. *Pace* – fast (can show passion) or slow (this is helpful for emphasising a point) so vary your pace. *Frequency* – high (positive) or low. *Volume* – loud or quiet (there can be confidence in quiet).

4. Tell them stories. 'Stories are communal currency of humanity' – Tahir Shah in Arabian Nights. Make sentences relevant to YOU – 'As a young carer, YOU and YOUR supporter can reclaim YOUR...'

3. 'Does anybody have any questions?' This rarely work as it's a closed question. Try 'Who would like to ask the first question?' – this is an open question and implies there will be lots of them.

2. Widen the gap – Distance yourself from the feedback and remove the emotion. Think - what is causing you to take offense? Was it their intention to offend you in their feedback? Can you imagine a scenario, which has led to that feedback? Is there a possibility that you might have misinterpreted things? What would happen if you chose not to take offense?

1. Share your superpowers – share your successes through linkedin, voicenotes to your team or in team meeting updates.

END.