

Session Title:	4.6: The rise of the commuter student
Speaker(s):	Dr Susan Kenyon
Chair:	Alex Whitham
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Speaker/Institution Bio/Information:	<p>Dr Susan Kenyon, Principal Lecturer in Politics / Institutional Lead for Commuter Students, Canterbury Christ Church University</p> <p>susan.kenyon@canterbury.ac.uk</p>
Overview/Aim of session:	<p>This workshop presented the case for reshaping HE for commuter students, presenting practical examples of changes that HELOA delegates can make to embed support for commuters in their activities. Taking the example of a major project at Canterbury Christ Church University, delegates were encouraged to consider the changes they can make, to encourage a positive experience for commuter students at their institutions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase awareness and understanding of commuter students and their significance in the sector. • Reflect on how inclusive our policies, practices and decision-making processes are for commuter students. • Empower you to identify practical changes that you could make, to (further) support inclusive approach in our approach.
Workshop Content	<p>Definition: "Students who continue to live at home whilst studying, rather than moving into student accommodation." (Kenyon, 2024).</p> <p>In 2024, the Office for Students (OfS) added commuter students to the Equality of Opportunity Risk Register. This policy change reflected an increasing body of evidence from across the UK showing that commuter students are a) increasing in number and b) experiencing inequality of opportunity in Higher Education.</p> <p>All the data you need is their postcode and your postcode; not having the data is not an excuse! We all have this</p>

	<p>data.</p> <p>Mention of 'failure narrative' by staying at home - some research has taken place in this area. Eg. Teachers and careers advisers encouraging pupils to 'fly the nest' and move away.</p> <p>Some institutions have a 5-mile rule. Must live in halls in first year to build community.</p> <p>Lots of commuter students feel they don't get the right information, advice and guidance. Reference to HELOA aim (slide 'Commuter students and HELOA'). Eg. 'don't have parking, assume you'll use public transport, here are the halls where you live.' Shaping attendance around current activity patterns is important.</p> <p>One student said 'you promised things but didn't give me correct information about being a commuter student here.'</p> <p>Commuter students are much more engaged than others - but that drops off by end of first year if they have difficulties (eg. no parking).</p> <p>Stats:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 47% of students are commuter students - but that will change over time (this is at the start of the course) • Varies from 12% to 85% of students across institutions • 2/3rds at Canterbury • Likely to be 1/3 of 18 year olds in future <p>Who? Not living with other students can be a disadvantage - and places importance on communities.</p> <p>Where? Big difference between undergrad and postgrad - more postgrads commute.</p> <p>Why? Cost of living and lack of accommodation are big reasons, and it won't stop.</p> <p>Financially: There's money in retention and recruitment of commuter students - but it is an increasing market. There will likely be CMA (Competition and Markets Agency), regulatory action and reputational risk for sector.</p> <p>The residential student bias in UK HE:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whole institution (pedagogy, policy, processes,
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	<p>places)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Entire student journey (pre-pre-application to postgraduation)
Case Studies/Examples:	<p>Being a student is part of their life: "I am a parent, an employee, a community activist, a volunteer, a band member... and I study."</p> <p>Timetabling and attendance don't fit in their lives - we need to reshape to fit their lives</p>
Scenarios/Roundtable discussions:	<p>Activity: Is there a residential bias student bias in recruitment, outreach, marketing and admissions? Reflections on your policy and practice.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leicester put on 'commuter/local student talk' and student panel (of commuter students) What can I do between classes? Is there any area to go? Perhaps provision for lunch (eg. microwaves, kettle) Timetabling - compressed timetables with later start over 3 longer days (rather than 3 days with only a few hours each day) Knowing your student biases - eg. Hertfordshire put more buses on at certain times as commuter students were late for lectures. Could be doing more in welcome week? Leeds Trinity - 67% commuter so recently switched recruitment mini guide to have commuter ahead of halls of residence.
Summary Key takeaways:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nationally, around half of home students in UK HE are commuter students (Kenyon, 2025). The proportion of commuter students has been increasing year on year, in response to the widening participation agenda in UK HE. It is likely to continue to increase, in response to demographic and structural changes following the Covid pandemic and on-going cost-of-living crises. Commuter students can have a poorer student experience and outcomes than their residential counterparts. One reason for this is that university pedagogies, policies and processes are designed for the traditional, residential student, who lives on campus or close to their learning and for whom Higher Education is an immersive experience. They do not meet the needs of commuters, who must travel to access learning and for whom studying is just a part of their busy lives.

	It's down to all institutions to do more to cater for commuter students, from enquiry to enrolment and during their time at university.
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