

Student Engagement Conference 2021



Leading student engagement in times of crisis and transformation 26 May 2021, Virtual

The simple truth is that student engagement has never been more important or more challenging. During these historically difficult and tragic months, this pandemic age, it has been impossible to deliver anything close to a 'normal' student experience. New students have not enjoyed the normal excitement of freshers' week, thriving clubs and societies, carefully structured academic inductions, the nerves and the thrill of new social groups, the multi-layered learning in lectures, seminars, practicals and tutorials, and the discovery of campus communities. Returning students have had to radically adjust their expectations, as one year that was hastily curtailed in extraordinary circumstances transitioned into a new academic year of 'unknown unknowns'. And yet institutional life has had to continue. Education has remained a top priority for both policy makers and society more widely, and the challenge of engaging students amidst socially distanced teaching, rapidly constructed online modules, periods of self-isolation, tiered restrictions and COVID-lockdowns has been the lot of academic and professional colleagues alike.

Focusing on student engagement, this conference will be an important and very timely opportunity for the sector to come together to review where we've been and consider where next. Through the lens of leadership, we will discuss not only the challenges but also the opportunities presented by the COVID experience. What does leading engagement mean and how can we reboot our vision of student engagement as we build towards the 2021/22 academic year?

In many ways student engagement has become more critical than ever. The effect of COVID-19 has been to magnify and to amplify: to magnify existing inequalities and injustices, and to amplify the impact of both good and poor educational practices. One message from this is that good practices matter more than ever, and we must find ways to take those good practices into new and sometimes challenging teaching and student engagement scenarios.

Feelings of loneliness, alienation and disconnection are the opposite of what we would wish for our students at any time, but throughout most of 2020 we have been working with students who have been under enormous psychological pressure resulting from social restrictions, changes to education, having to stay in lockdown for prolonged periods of time, and the ever-present fear of contracting or passing on the COVID virus. The known elements of wellbeing have been under considerable strain. And even as society hopefully begins to emerge from this crisis, the scars to wellbeing may for some be long-lasting. This is the backdrop to student engagement as the sector moves forward.

This, then, is an important moment of leadership transformation as regards student engagement. We will hear from experienced leaders, look at what recent student surveys tell us, explore through interaction the nature of engagement and how it is evolving, and listen to panels of staff and students regarding new and emerging practices and priorities. We will ask the question, how can a crisis of engagement be transformed into a future of hope where students can grow, thrive and flourish?

Programme

- 09:30 Platform opens & informal networking**
- 10:00 Welcome**
Doug Parkin, Principal Adviser, Advance HE
- 10:15 Keynote – Leading engagement – who are you engaging? How? And why is it more critical than ever?**
Professor Anthony Smith, Vice Provost, Education & Student Affairs, University College London and Jim Onyemenam, Postgraduate Students' Officer, Students' Union UCL
- 10:45 Student Voices and delegate response**
Self-filmed first and second-year students talk about higher education: what they like and what they would change (a 5-minute video)
- 11:00 What our surveys tell us? Plus Q&A**
Dr Diana Pritchard, Principal Curriculum Developer, University of Bedfordshire - UKES
- 11:30 Break**
- 11:45 What is engagement and how is it evolving?**
This interactive session, led by Doug Parkin, Principal Adviser, Advance HE, will be a collaborative opportunity to consider where we are now as a sector in terms of student engagement, how it is evolving, and most importantly what we need to do next. Playing with some definitions of student engagement, the discussions will explore how we can reboot our vision of student engagement as we build towards the 2021/22 academic year?
- 12:45 Lunch**
- 13:45 The Big Conversation – Getting student engagement right**
Chair: Joan O' Mahony, Senior Adviser, Advance HE;
Sunday Blake, President, University of Exeter Students' Union;
Augustine Nwosu, President, Coventry University Students' Union;
Maisha Islam, Student Engagement Research and Projects Officer, Centre for Student Engagement, University of Winchester;
Professor Osama Khan, Vice Provost (Education), University of Surrey
- 14:45 Break**
- 15:00 Parallel Workshops**

Engagement in the classroom	Engagement in institutional leadership and governance	Engagement in co-curricular and personal development opportunities
Teaching and Learning Online: Engaging with Student Voice Dr Sue Taylor, Northumbria University	Student staff partnership research group Dr Harriet Dunbar-Morris, University of Portsmouth	Improving employability and leadership through student engagement Dr Joanne Tyssen and Sophie Clayton, University Centre Leeds (Leeds City College)

- 16:00 Closing keynote: Learning through digital engagement – lessons learned from the COVID-19 pivot**
Professor Chie Adachi, Director, Digital Learning, Deakin University, Australia
- 16:30 Close**