



Challenging our assumptions. Surprising outcomes from responsive pre-entry work with diverse groups

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The Lifelong Learning Centre's (LLC) Communities and Partnerships (C&P) team at the University of Leeds provides pathways into higher education for people who have not had these opportunities. The team co-ordinates a range of pre-entry initiatives which provide a continuum of activities connecting higher education opportunities with local communities and adult learners. We aim to raise aspirations and awareness of HE, support preparation and build a sense of belonging to enable a successful transition to university study.

In common with many practitioners, the pandemic required us to rapidly change the way we engage with our target communities, whilst remaining true to our aims of engaging inclusively with communities of low participation in HE. The context of increasing inequality and the digital divide necessitated that we had to find creative and innovative ways of working with communities and groups.

This workshop will explore how the C&P team have responded to events through the use of different technologies, pedagogical approaches and learning environments. We will discuss the initial move from face to face to online activity, followed by the development of hybrid engagement, which mixed digital and in-person methods. We will share our initial assumptions about the use of technology in community engagement and how they have been challenged and we will discuss our reflections and learning from this period of change and innovation.

We will engage workshop participants through activities and discussion, sharing some of the practical methods we have used with groups of adults. The session will highlight the extent to which we've been successful in achieving our aims of transformative learning in pre-entry outreach work during the last two years and consider the challenges posed by the altered landscape of adult learning and what this means for adult educators.