



Exploring digital Poverty as a barrier to access

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This workshop will engage participants in exploring what universities can do to mitigate the barrier of digital poverty in entry-level learning. Aligning explicitly with Office for Students' aspirations to improve and enhance the learning experience of the most disadvantaged students, this is timely given the impact of COVID-19 amplifying digital barriers to participation. Over the last 18 months media coverage has revealed a concern that the increasing proliferation of digital learning at all universities (amplified by lockdown) has compounded access and participation barriers for students impoverished by socio-economic challenges. This reflects the importance of digital capital as an aspect of learner disadvantage (Park, 2017) and increased understanding of intersectional disadvantage (Nichols & Stahl, 2019) through which digital disadvantage may add to pre-existing inequalities. The QAA (2020) report how institutional action against digital poverty correlates with greater student satisfaction and higher levels of attainment.

The facilitators will draw on and synthesise data from their scholarship into digital barriers facing adult students returning to education. Challenges in relation to disposable income often compound challenges intersecting with other aspects of disadvantage (Butcher & Rose-Adams, 2015) and a lack of confidence and inadequate digital readiness amongst learners from disadvantaged backgrounds seeking an Access entry route has been identified (Curry & Butcher, 2021, Fowle & Butcher, 2019, Butcher & Fowle, 2018).

In the workshop we will share stimulus material identifying key aspects of digital poverty. Participants will share ideas to promote greater inclusion amongst students from poor socio-economic backgrounds and support the progression of a more diverse (and representative) adult learner cohort. Participants will leave with ideas, (adaptable for their own institutional context) to help generate recommendations to mitigate digital poverty by targeted use of funding available in institutional Access and Participation plans.