

Notes from the NEON Mature Learner Working Group

Wednesday 30th October

1. Welcome and apologies

Naz Dean (University of East London) sent her apologies, but also offered to host the next meeting in February/March 2020.

2. Report on the Virtual Open Days

Last April we ran four virtual open days aimed at providing information to people who might be thinking about going to university. They were – *Why go to university? Student money matters, Researching universities and student life, Settling into university*. They were advertised via social media through the partner universities and NEON. However, they were not really watched by anyone outside of the sector. On reflection we thought the resources might be better for practitioners who are looking at engaging with mature students.

3. The motivations and capacities of mature students in art and design higher education – Dr Sam Broadhead (Leeds Arts University)

The slides for this presentation will be circulated. Points I noted were that mature students are often less satisfied with their experiences on the NSS. Leeds Arts University has an Access to HE course that provides a good foundation for them to proceed onto arts practice based courses at the University. Their mature students are mainly in their 40s & 50s.

The art of 'surviving and thriving': developing a framework for mature students is a good resource for basic provisions on how to support mature students through their university experience.

4. Introduction from Jess Woodsford (OfS)

Jess asked if the OfS were right in linking flexible learning, part-time and mature students together within APPs. She also said that a report on flexible learning, accelerated degrees, transfers and funding would be released in March 2020. There will also be challenge competition funding for innovative projects.

They are creating an A-Z of effective practice and how can they help us with that.

Questions posed were:

What is the role of flexible learning in the mature student market?

What would the ideal APP targets and guidance look like?

What can the OfS provide for practitioners?

There was some discussion around how flexible learning options mean that institutions have to be less flexible, for example put teaching for one course on over one to two days a week.

5. The next project, what should we do for 2020?

Following on from the Virtual Open Days in 2019, we decided on a project for 2020. As a group we will be exploring non-continuation of mature learners to try and expand on the following questions.

Why are mature students dropping out?

Are there common themes within the sector?

Is there anything that can be done?

Each institution will look at a couple of case studies from their own cohort to add to the dataset. We will also explore BAME, commuter and young mature students (21-25) cross overs.

We do need to set some standard questions for this. Since the meeting I have spoken to a Vicki Silver from Shrewsbury University Centre and Morag McIvor from the University of Law (Nottingham) who have expressed an interest in taking part.

6. AOB

There was no additional business.