

A very short guide to first steps in WP/Outreach

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What follows is two pages based on the principles that a) we ought to support outreach because we want as many as possible to benefit from the transformative thinking and opportunities HE can bring; b) we have knowledge and skills to share c) we have WP targets to meet; d) many colleagues want to help out, but don't have the time and/or don't know how. The intention is to provide a pragmatic basis for activities that adapt what colleagues do in lectures, workshops or seminars, so that they can use it to provide activities for schools and colleges. Once developed, these same activities could then be used for open days/recruitment in other contexts and feed back into teaching and learning, or provide a context for more enriched outreach activity or project. Tasters are obviously only part of the menu, but they can sharpen our skills and develop appetites for more.

Taster session aims and objectives

- Taster sessions aim to provide, as the name implies, those attending with both a taste of what higher education might be like and a flavour of subject knowledge that either generates new interest or supports existing learning. They are a 'starter', rather than the main course.
- The objective is to encourage those attending to 'demystify' the university – to help students think they could be here/they want to be here AND provide an event adding to their existing knowledge in an engaging way.
- Academics often do these events because either they see it as a means of sharing knowledge and skills, raising aspiration, a recruitment device or because they see it as a means of supporting pre-18 education: it can do all all of these *and* make us reflect on our own approach to teaching *and* support our current students with their communication skills when they help out (plus we can pay them).
- For these activities to support our outreach agenda the actual delivery of the above aims and objectives need to be tested. These means building in a simple evaluative process into the activity: knowing what you want the event to do, asking those who took part – guest students, teachers, and (ideally also) ambassadors, WP staff and academics to reflect on its impact and effect afterwards.

Planning events

- As schools and colleges are invariably busy, with an overcrowded academic year, and it can take time to organise parental consent, we increase our chances of recruiting for on-campus events by planning schedules at least 3 months ahead or, preferably, at the start of the academic year. The Central WP team can help plan your calendar.
- It can also benefit recruitment for events to consider where what we do overlaps with what schools and colleges do. While we don't simply want to support the curriculum, non-curriculum specific support can be greeted with scepticism, unless you can show how your activity supports key skills, concepts or approaches.
- We can discover what's relevant – via GCSE and A Level specs or by asking teachers.
- WP administrators can recruit the events, book rooms, recruit student ambassadors.
- It can be far quicker to arrange a visit a school or college; this might lead to future on site visits. Many academics do these in a personal capacity already – if that's you – ask for an evaluation form to use at these events so that you and the university can give the fullest possible picture of our work and its impact.

Utilising colleagues' best practice

- In many cases what puts colleagues off outreach and tasters is the time commitment: planning a bespoke activity takes time that colleagues don't have for planning and delivery. The

University recognises that challenge in its WP funding process – Academic Schools are reimbursed from the WP budget for the time academics devote to WP work; P/T or fractional academic staff can be reimbursed for WP work provided it is within their allocated hours. Even then, many colleagues are still ‘time poor’.

- The quick solution to this is to utilise our current lectures/classes/workshops. If we have classes with content and/or activities that have engaged level 4 or level 5 students, these can work just as well with 12-18 year olds, turning them into a standalone showcase of a concept or the subject.
- We might need to provide some context: “I’m x, I lecture/research in this area. One of the things we do when we study this subject here is y. If you came here, you’d be studying something like this in your first year. We do this because as you might know, y matters to the way we think about z.” But what can follow is essentially the same material. NB it depends on the age group, but much longer than 30 minutes of ‘traditional lecturing’ is pushing it; with more interactive talks, seminars or workshops often engage more effectively. Different modes of delivery need to be considered – a workshop, with student ambassadors taking a facilitating role can often ‘break down barriers’/reduce alienation as opposed to the academic working alone.
- End any event with a Plenary and a Q & A. Expect subject-based questions but, for many attendees – especially those at secondary school and college - tasters raise contextual questions. We should be able to answer if we want to make our work relevant, engaging and appealing: what do academics do all day? Why do you do this? What careers are there in this? Being able to address these questions can help those attending make sense of the event and of university. *These basic principles work just as well for an open day as for a WP taster.*
- An event like this can then be repeated, developed, provide a summer school activity, or form a point of departure for a more bespoke outreach activity.

Student Ambassadors

- The WP team recruit and train a large pool of student ambassadors for outreach work. This work can provide valuable experience in working with young people – leading to possible career paths – but it can also strengthen students’ communication skills.
- If you have student ambassadors from your course, either introduce them, ask them how they take notes, or study – if it’s a lecture – or maybe get them to run break-out groups if it’s a workshop. WP work can empower our ambassadors, build their confidence, develop their critical and communication skills.

Informal chats, coffee and lunch – building partnerships & gaining understanding

- Teachers attending events really appreciate it if you ask them how the event worked, what they are doing. This can lead to further events or insights into education that can help with planning for future events. Asking students/schoolchildren if they liked the event can provoke the occasional “it was ok”, but will often open up a conversation about their studies or our degrees that can often be more memorable/valuable to them than the event itself.

Evaluation and Reflection

- The WP team will construct, administer and provide evaluation forms and subsequent feedback on WP activities for you. Academics can calibrate questionnaires to address particular questions if they wish. Running these events can also help academics reflect on the delivery of teaching or a particular exercise. This might not be captured on an evaluation form but it can inform or approach to teaching and learning. *For example, if I have a more engaged conversational short lecture for 12-13 year olds that gets them talking and debating, would that approach work at Level 4? These approaches that many of us use: mixing up lectures, with group work, with discussion, with source analysis are forms of blended learning.*