Session Title:	3.2 SPONSOR SESSION - Empowering Access: Understanding Disadvantaged Students' Priorities in University Research
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Speaker/Institution Bio/Information:	Ashley Walshe, HE Partnerships Manager Unifrog Emily Kay, HE Partnerships Manager Unifrog
Overview/Aim of session:	Empowering access Unifrog delivered an in-depth exploration of the priorities of students from disadvantaged backgrounds as they navigate their next steps. Revealed trends from the 2025 cohort including their subject preference, regional differences and the key factors important to prospective students. Unifrog teachers shared their perspectives on university access schemes and the most effective strategies for supporting disadvantaged students. The sessions aims to: ● Learn how Unifrog supports widening access goals ● Gain valuable insights from the Unifrog platform ● Develop a "blue sky thinking outreach plan
Workshop Content	**Intro to Unifrog** **Slido questions: How do you feel about WP efforts in HE? Answers given included:** Challenged, inspiring, deflated, more complex, positive, under resourced, passionate, important, everchanging, diversity, stretched, its needed, busy, complex, fuzzy, evolving Unifrog school reach: 2800+ schools, 10k+ active teachers, 1.7million+ active students, How does unifrog support WP: school sponsorship

(universities funding 50% of unifrog subscription), HE workshops

- Talent Pool
- Promote contextual offers and outreach opportunities to relevant audiences
- Engagement with students who are still deciding final UCAS choices
- Get ahead with 2026 applicants

Where does the data come from? Student entries: 294,000 unique users, 1.2 million courses shortlisted, 4,656 survey respondents

What proportion of students are considering university?

No matter what background, students considering uni in equal measures 87% MD 1-3, 88% MD 4-10 likely or very likely to go to university

Understanding the 2025 Cohort: Key trends

Are students from disadvataged backgrounds becoming more or less aspirational? How does this vary by region and subject preference? How are we defining student aspiration?

Deeper data delve: is there a difference between what type of university WP students are considering eg UCAS tariff. Unifrog looked at gap in aspiration levels between students. Lower for IMD1-3 by around 9% in 2025. Illustrates that WP students are less confident about reaching for programmes at aspirational tariff. They are making safer choices, suggests that there is more scope for these students to make a more aspirational choice at clearing

Looked at subject specific data. Largest aspiration gaps are in STEM and social sciences. Smallest gaps in subjects like teaching, media and agriculture. Why? May be more placements, more vocational, less traditional style of teaching, smaller classes that are appealing. Possibly more support in these types of course?

Consider the messages around your subjects, who is representing these subjects in marketing materials, who is teaching these courses and speaking about them.

Discussion: higher tariff universities may not offer the subjects with the smaller gaps in aspiration level. Graduate prospects on vocational degrees may be more vivid and easier to visualise eg teaching. Clear career

path important. STEM: accessibility of courses at A level eg further maths as a requirement at A level may impact. Qualifications eg BTEC may be more accepted for vocational courses eg agriculture. More confidence of what mark you will achieve studying BTEC.

Where do you go to for advice? (survey of 4000 students)
Parents and carers 68%
Staff at school 58%
Friends 39%
Uni reps 30%
Older students at your school college 24%
Social media influencers 11%

For IMD 1-3, 8% less likely to ask parents and care givers for advice (57% vs 65% for IMD4-10) but still number 1 for place to go to for advice

Consider tailored advice and messaging for parents and carers.

Activity: What strategies do you currently use effectively to engage WP students?

List as many of your university's WP priorities as possible, being as specific as possible. Answers included:

Mature learners
Care experienced
Estranged students
White working class boys
State school background
Boys in receipt of free school meals
First gen students
Outreach with local schools
Service children
Girls in STEM
Continuation rates for disabled students
Increase IMD 1-3
SIMD20 (Scotland)
To provide more information to parents and carers
BAME
Free School Meals

Where do you face challenges in this area?

Case Studies/Exampes:	
Scenarios/Roundtable discussions:	**Activity: What strategies do you currently use effectively to engage WP students?** List as many of your university's WP priorities as possible, being as specific as possible. Answers included: Mature learners Care experienced Estranged students White working class boys State school background Boys in receipt of free school meals First gen students Outreach with local schools Service children Girls in STEM Continuation rates for disabled students Increase IMD 1-3 SIMD20 (Scotland) To provide more information to parents and carers BAME Free School Meals **Where do you face challenges in this area?** **Activity 1a** **In an ideal world without budget or resource constraints, what would engagement that helps close the aspiration gap look like?** Attendees approached this question in groups. With this blue-sky thinking approach, design a comprehensive widening access plan? **Activity 1b** **Rank all the activities in your group plan from most to least impactful for your University** Using this list select one activity you believe would add most value to your outreach offering Examples: ● Student ambassadors leading taster sessions to the students ● Start at primary school age, in-school engagement / partnership with schools, deliver workshops in school with on campus day including graduation,

	campus tour ● Parent and carer engagement – guide to hand out to parents at careers fairs, in different languages, 5 most spoken languages in Coventry and translated. Break down barrier of parents unwilling to speak to uni reps due to language barrier ● Interpreters – for parents and carers ● Use of community leaders to provide an alternative contact for 'parent and carer' guide ● Alumni contacts ● Linking to careers earlier
Questions and Answers:	
SummaryKey takeaways:	● Take your idea back to your university ● Pitch this idea to your manager or team ● Engage students early and through multiple approaches ● Ensure you engage with parents and carers ● Tie your content to subject and career education ● Use student ambassadors, academics and partnerships