

# Connect More: How can services, sectors & communities find a shared vision?

## National Multiple Disadvantage Summit 2025

University Challenge: Working closely with academics to improve outcomes for people facing multiple disadvantage

### Speakers:

- Norman Richards – Management Information Systems & Evaluation Officer, Humber Learning Consortium
- Nadia Bashir – Senior Research Fellow, Sheffield Hallam University
- Dr. Lyndsey Harris – Director of the Health and Wellbeing Evaluation Unit, Associate Professor, University of Lincoln
- **Chair:** Hana Bloedel, Membership Manager, MEAM

### Aims of the session:

- To leave with broad ideas of how to collaborate and build an academic partnership.
- To understand both sides of the university partnership, from the academic perspective as well as the public/third sector.
- To share examples of the positives as well as the challenges.
- To consider what sort of partnership a local area would most benefit from.

### Opening

We opened the session with an introduction from each of the three panelists; their background, how they got to where they are and the work they have done in the multiple disadvantage sphere. Nadia and Lyndsey have had long careers in academia while Norman has had a dedicated career in the third sector. They have each worked in the multiple disadvantage sector: Lyndsey's work centers on women and domestic violence, leading initiatives including working alongside the Lincolnshire Police; Nadia's work focuses on coproduction and designing and delivering Peer/Community Researcher training,

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especially for people of colour and those experiencing multiple disadvantage; Norman's work has been as an evaluation officer coproducing evaluations for the Humber Learning Consortium. It was important that we had both academics and someone from the third sector. Norman and Nadia are an excellent example of that as they have worked together over the years and developed a very strong working relationship.

### **Why collaboration is important**

It is currently an underutilized opportunity in which the positives far outweigh the negatives. It only enriches the perspective on either side of the partnership and is beneficial for research as a whole, as it widens and deepens the work.

There are a wide variety of ways to collaborate; data collection and analysis, furthering multiple disadvantage research, and training peer researchers are just a few examples. Nadia has trained peer researchers while Norman has done the evaluations, and Lyndsey has led initiatives within Lincolnshire that address women and domestic violence. Because of their different lived experience and backgrounds they each bring unique perspectives and knowledge to the work, and the communities they have access to are also different.

### **Benefits and impact of partnership**

Nadia brought up the access that partnership gives to communities that might be distrusting or simply so far removed from academia there would be no opportunity to connect. A strong partnership helps to bring in those who have otherwise been excluded from research and helps to get their voices heard.

Coproduction is another profoundly important aspect to partnerships. It brings in those with lived, living or other learned experience to come together when they otherwise wouldn't have had the opportunity to. It amplifies the voices of those who are most often

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left out of the conversation even when the conversation is about them, their community, their experiences, etc.

It offers the opportunity for the university to become more involved in the community. There is the stereotype of the “ivory tower”, that universities are places of exclusivity for the invited few. This helps to dispel this and to have university resources reinvested to those who need it the most, especially as budgets are tight. There is also the possibility of better buy-in from local government, as the research comes from an accredited body and is officially published. It also provides a way to demonstrate that the work that is being done is both necessary and beneficial within the wider community.

### **Challenges of collaboration**

Lyndsey brought up the important point of whether an academic is there to self-serve or whether they are there for the work and the community which will oftentimes be obvious in the way they work. It’s important to identify the people that are there for the change they want to be part of, not just in furthering their own work and research.

Finances are another area that can be a challenge. It can be difficult to get the necessary money, but easier when you have already formed a partnership and can go in together on a bid. On the other side, once a partnership has been built, it is important to continue the relationship and keep in touch with people you’ve previously worked/collaborated with.

### **Takeaways**

Throughout the session, much of the conversation was focused on the development and importance of connections and relationships, as that is what sustains multiple disadvantage work. There will always be opportunities for networking and building these relationships, attending events such as the Summit, community events and even online. While people often focus on building new relationships, do not overlook the relationships you already have. An attendee asked what happens to a relationship when the project

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finishes. Nadia used the example of her and Norman; their official funded period of working together ended but since then they have kept each other in mind as relevant opportunities arise.

### Contacts

If you would like to speak more about working with academics, Nadia and Lyndsey are happy to be contacted for further discussion.

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