Equality and diversity in learning and teaching in higher education

Summary of papers from Equality Challenge Unit and Higher Education Academy joint conferences
Acknowledgments

Introduced, summarised and edited by Pauline Hanesworth, Higher Education Academy Scotland.

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The papers summarised in this publication can be downloaded from ECU's website: www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/ECU-HEA-compendium

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On 11 April 2014 and again on 23 April 2015, over 100 academics, academic developers, equality and diversity advisers, professional and support staff, senior managers and students came together at Equality Challenge Unit’s (ECU) and the Higher Education Academy’s (HEA) joint conferences in Scotland to share practice and learning, to debate issues, and to develop ideas on equality and diversity in learning and teaching practices and processes in higher education.

Nominally grouped under the themes of *Attainment for All* (2014) and *Developing Diversity Competence* (2015), discussions and showcases ranged from developing staff capacity to engaging students as partners in equality in the curriculum, from easing transitions to nurturing belonging, from developing inclusive assessment to ensuring inclusive placements, and from mainstreaming equality to targeting interventions for specific protected characteristics.

This summary provides a broader overview of the context of the two conferences and an exploration of some of the main themes discussed at the events which incorporates relevant theoretical considerations. It also summarises articles developed from a selection of the workshops and papers delivered. These are available to download: [www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/ECU-HEA-compendium](http://www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/ECU-HEA-compendium).

We encourage readers to utilise the research findings, case studies and recommendations within this compendium in their own teaching, departments and institutions for the development of practices, processes and regimes that can support all students in their learning journeys.

*Attainment for All* and *Developing Diversity Competence* were co-organised and co-delivered by ECU and HEA as part of their work in Scotland supporting institutions in tackling equality at the institutional policy and process level (ECU) and within pedagogical and curricula practices and processes (HEA). The conferences aimed to share good practice, stimulate debate, and inspire changes that would enable individual academics, departments, institutions and the sector at large to further develop practices and cultures with regard to equality and diversity. *Attainment for All* concentrated on the learning and teaching pedagogies, environments, experiences and cultures
that work towards ensuring all students have an equal and fair chance to succeed in their learning journeys. *Developing Diversity Competence* focused on the development of that equality and diversity awareness, knowledge and skill within students and staff that can lead to cultural and societal change.
Emerging themes

Both conferences began with two keynotes, providing a staff and student perspective, that teased out some of the key themes that emerged during the rest of the day. In 2014, Lucy Macleod from the Open University in Scotland showcased an institutional approach to creating environments for equitable student success. She highlighted the connections between policy and practice, the importance of developing staff and student capacity and confidence, and the centrality of the nurturing of student engagement for belonging in the creation of learning and teaching cultures that advance equality of opportunity and promote diversity. Moving from organisational culture to personal experience, Anne-Marie Docherty, supported by Yvonne Wayne of Glasgow Caledonian University, then shared her personal experiences of, difficulties in, and suggestions for the improvement of articulation to university from a so-called non-traditional perspective.

‘Walking into my first class was very stressful and I was extremely nervous. One of the main causes for that anxiety was that I had quite literally walked into a very male-dominated subject area and I was for most of the three years that I attended the only female in my class and for someone coming from my particular background this was a really difficult emotional issue to overcome.’

Anne-Marie Docherty, Keynote Speaker at Attainment for All

Key for Docherty was not only the importance of student engagement, but also of partnership working – between students and staff, between colleges and universities, and between university staff – for the development of successful learning environments.

In 2015, Vicky Gunn from Glasgow School of Art explored the tensions generated when attempting to build inclusive campus climates and learning environments, as well as how to overcome them (cf. Gunn et al 2015). Gunn highlighted how disciplinary learning and teaching cultures can impact on student experiences. It is thus, she argued, by addressing the narratives, aesthetics, moral codes and cultural manifestations that play out in our disciplinary learning, teaching and research regimes, by interrogating and adapting our practice, that we can support the success of all students. Gunn was followed by Nathaniel Adam Tobias Coleman, then of University College London, who shared his own and his students’ experiences of the white curriculum,
calling for a re-addressing of the concept of diversity in relation to privilege, dominance and power, and a re-orientating of discussions of racialised gaps in attainment towards that of ‘racialised gaps in belonging’ (Coleman 2015).

‘You will hear colleagues speak of a racialised gap in attainment. [...] The appropriate response, according to the model of racial deficit, is to ‘raise’ their aspirations, through mentoring and ‘out-reach’ work. This model is patronising. By contrast, according to the model of racial domination, students racialised as other than white, and, in particular, students racialised-as-black, have good reason to reject the curriculum in which they are supposed to be attaining success, because that curriculum sustains domination.’

Nathaniel Adam Tobias Coleman, Keynote Speaker at Developing Diversity Competence

Central to Coleman’s argument was also the centrality of learning and teaching practices to both student experiences and the facilitation of student belonging.

These keynotes were, over the two years, followed by four poster presentations, 12 workshops and 17 papers from various Scottish, Welsh, English and Australian higher education staff and students, as well as relevant sector agencies. What follows provides a flavour of the discussions that occurred, and includes relevant theoretical considerations around equality and diversity in learning and teaching in higher education. As prefaced in the keynotes, the central themes around which these discussions orientated, and into which they are categorised below, are:

- interrogating and disrupting pedagogised norms
- belonging and student engagement
- using technology-enhanced learning
- working in partnership
- equality and diversity as a graduate attribute, including equality and diversity training and embedding equality and diversity
- developing staff capacity
To engender change in university culture with regard to equality and diversity, a whole-institutional approach must be taken which brings together, *inter alia*, strong leadership, an enabling infrastructure, relevant and practical policies and processes, supportive quality assurance and enhancement mechanisms, enhanced staff capacity and motivation, effective reward and recognition, and a collaboration with students as both partners and producers. While not losing sight of the bigger picture, we must not disregard the centrality of learning and teaching to this. As the keynotes highlighted, it is through the learning and teaching disciplinary spheres that students primarily interact with and negotiate their university experience (cf. Thomas 2012; Morgan 2013, pp. 43–61; Gunn et al 2015; Hulme and De Wilde 2015).

What is learned, how it is learned and the environment in which it is learned create a dominant culture in which our students’ learning is situated and to which they are forced to relate. Perpetuating assumed disciplinary truths with regard to mode, method and content of learning and teaching, we create pedagogised norms (Atkinson 2002, pp. 121–124; Hatton 2012), ways of learning and teaching that are *per se* normatised through their habitual repetition and reconstruction. Where there is normatisation, there is marginalisation. The normatisation of learning and teaching practices creates what Atkinson calls the pedagogised other: that is the student, students or cohort who find themselves alienated and excluded by the learning and teaching norms of a discipline and/or institution. So it is that Coleman talks of a ‘racialised gap in belonging’ or that University College London students question ‘why is my curriculum white?’ in their campaign video (accessed at www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dscx4h2I-Pk).

To disrupt pedagogised norms and to de-marginalise the pedagogised other, we must interrogate our learning and teaching habits. Such activity was reflected in the conferences in the paper by Anja Finger of the University of Aberdeen who demonstrated how an interrogation of heteronormative curricula led to a student/staff co-created queering of the curriculum that could result in not only a more welcoming pedagogical experience for lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans (LGBT) students, but also a deepening of knowledge for all. Robyn Donnelly of the University of Edinburgh also reflected on how interrogation of pedagogised norms can improve student learning outcomes: her research saw...
how the introduction of new pedagogical types, here interactive engagement techniques, in the teaching of first-year physics courses narrowed (though did not close) gender performance, learning and engagement gaps.

Jane Andrews and Robin Clark of Aston University reported on the interventions of eight institutions which interrogated, challenged and changed learning and teaching practices to improve the attainment of black and minority ethnic (BME) students. Andrews and Clark illustrated the efficacy of approaches that combine critical scenario planning with action research, as well as the need for evidence-based interventions, the involvement of strategic-level support, holistic longitudinal planning, monitoring and evaluation, and the development of staff and student confidence to deal with issues of race and racism for sustained change. Sarla Gandhi’s paper in section B of this compendium and Jane Bell and Nicole Kipar’s paper in section C provide further examples of interrogation of first assessment practices and second pedagogy in relation to international students.

A useful tool for interrogating the curriculum is equality impact assessment: Jill Hammond, Irene Bell and Kath Bridger from Glasgow School of Art illustrated how an impact assessment approach to learning and teaching facilitated self-reflection by individuals and departments on their learning and teaching habits and mechanisms and so could be utilised to facilitate change.

However, this de-marginalising of the pedagogised other, this engendering of belonging, is more complex than it initially might seem. As Kate Thomas of Birkbeck, University of London argued in her paper on rethinking belonging (now published elsewhere: Thomas 2015), the spheres of learning and teaching are contested spaces in which power, identity and place affect modes of belonging. Problematising the concept in relation to the multiple identities of part-time, mature undergraduates (with intersectional explorations relating to age, gender, race and class), Thomas illustrated the importance of the individual student experience in the development of a multivalent understanding of, and subsequent various and flexible approaches to, student belonging (cf. Marshall et al 2012). This was echoed in the paper by Kate Daguerre and Jodi Collett of the University of the West of England.
Emerging themes

whose longitudinal project captured the motivations, expectations and lived experiences of students from so-called non-traditional backgrounds to better understand the challenges faced by these cohorts.

Central to the disruption of pedagogised norms is this listening to, engagement of, and partnership with students: if belonging is multivalent and affected by the unique lived learning experiences of each individual student, then strategies for belonging must begin from precisely this place – the individual student. Indeed, student voice was fundamental to the majority of papers and workshops delivered in the conferences. Here, student associations can be seen to be particularly useful as actors and drivers within pedagogic research, as is reflected in the papers in section D of this compendium as well as in the workshop co-delivered by Megan McHaney from NUS Scotland and Stephanie Millar, then at student participation in quality Scotland (sparqs). This latter workshop further illustrated that student voice is but the baseline: for effective and sustainable change, pedagogic and curriculum practices should be developed with students as partners and co-creators of their learning. By creating learning and teaching environments and activities that support students as partners in their learning, we empower students, create communities of practice, connect learning with students' own lives, knowledge and experiences, and enable the sharing of different perspectives and ways of learning. All of which have been seen to be factors that can lead to enhanced student belonging (Hockings 2010; May and Thomas 2010; Healey et al 2014). Further, by engaging students in the co-creation of their learning and teaching, we invite all students – those catered to by pedagogised norms as well as pedagogised others – to shape their university experience, that is to disrupt normative pedagogic modes and curricula content, and to work towards closing normative/otherised gaps.

One mechanism for teaching that has been utilised in the furthering of student belonging is that of technology-enhanced learning. John Maguire, Margaret McKay and Penny Robertson of Jisc RSC Scotland highlighted in their workshop how the open source content creation tool, Xerte online toolkits (which can be accessed at www.nottingham.ac.uk/xerte/toolkits.aspx), could be utilised to create accessible and interactive online learning
and teaching. Concentrating in particular on the engagement and outcomes of disabled students, Hazel Gant of the University of Portsmouth illustrated how mobile applications could be utilised for the development of active learning approaches that can remove some of the barriers present for this diverse student group. Catherine Lido, then of the University of West London and Lucy Solomon, then of the University of Sussex, further demonstrated in their workshop how certain student groups within their research – here mature and BME – were more reliant on virtual learning environments (VLEs) for engagement and academic support than their so-called traditional peers. Hence, they argued, effective use of VLEs and innovative approaches to blended and e-learning could be utilised to further develop inclusion and to engender belonging among these underrepresented and marginalised student groups.

Key here, though, is the term effective. Technology – including assistive technology as well as the now ubiquitous VLEs, mobile apps and virtual platforms – can undeniably support the creation of interactive, engaging and inclusive learning and teaching environments. However, technology-enhanced learning, especially virtual learning, is not neutral. Developed, shaped and utilised by the same individuals who shape and experience traditional learning and teaching environments, these virtual environments are equally susceptible to normatisation and othering, if not more so if they are perceived as neutral and therefore not subject to the same interrogations as traditional pedagogies. Putting aside the problems underlying the assumption that all students have an equal ability to access technology-enhanced learning, we must not forget that students – and teachers – bring their embodied and cultured identities to the technological and virtual spheres (Lai and Ball 2004). Further, different student groups experience and engage with technology and virtual learning environments in different ways (Dillon et al 2007; Liu et al 2010). Finally, online teaching environments can in fact amplify issues around equality and diversity (Anderson and Simpson 2007) and can perpetuate the power relations and norms of the so-called real world (Vander Valk 2008). Hence – while not denying that technology-enhanced learning and VLEs can be useful tools when teaching with a mind to equality and diversity – they must be subject to the same interrogations regarding normatisation and marginalisation as traditional learning and teaching practices, processes and regimes.
Working in partnership

So far, we have concentrated on learning and teaching in the classroom (lecture theatre/virtual classroom/laboratory etc.). However, learning does not only take place in this sphere. One of the main non-classroom learning environments that has proven a particular concern for some disabled students is that of the work placement. Shirley Hill of the University of Dundee had intended to present on her research comparing disabled and non-disabled students’ experiences on professional practice placements. She had found that disabled students consistently rated their overall placement lower than their non-disabled peers, that they experienced more difficulties, and that nursing and education students in particular were less likely to disclose their disability than those in other disciplines. Similar results were found by Sally Adams and her colleagues at Abertay University who concentrated on nursing placements. Adams further revealed how some of the students with dyslexia in her study also disclosed experiences of bullying and that they were made to feel incompetent. Many recommendations can be, and have been, put forth with regard to placements and disabled students including, *inter alia*, the sharing of coping strategies, the provision of emotional as well as academic support, the development of pre-placement guidance, and the clarifying of student expectations. Especially important, though, is partnership working between universities and placement providers. By working in partnership, we are able to share good practice, manage expectations, provide awareness and development training (on both sides), manage information and guidance, and to interrogate each other’s practices to ensure effective placement experiences.

This partnership ethos can be seen to be effective in all spheres of learning and teaching activity. So it is that Priska Schoenborn and Wendy Miller’s paper in section B of this compendium provides an example of the usefulness of partnership working with non-medical helpers, while Julia Fotheringham and Debbie Meharg’s paper in section C illustrates the importance of partnership working between colleges and universities for articulating students. All of these examples, while overtly focused on different subjects, illustrate how partnership working is central to the development of student engagement and belonging in both the sharing of knowledge and also in the capitalising on different experiences and spheres of excellence to better inform pedagogical practices and curricula content.
Equality and diversity is also, we would argue, a part of graduate attributes. Whether included as a factor in ‘personal effectiveness’ as for example at the University of Edinburgh or in ‘active – or global – citizenship’ as for example at Oxford Brookes University or Glasgow Caledonian University, equality and diversity based knowledge, skills and attitudes are seen to be fundamental to the effective negotiation of, and working within, our global and interconnected world (though cf. Cousin 2012 and Jones and Killick 2013 for more nuanced views on this).

One method of supporting the development of this attribute is through student training. Indeed, the provision of such training within the UK is becoming widespread with some institutions, such as the University of St Andrews, making it mandatory (Gunn et al 2015: 26–27). Such training has a dual function of not only developing the equality and diversity skills and knowledge of students, but also of raising their awareness of their rights within the educational environment. At this point in time, it is unknown the extent to which such training delves into learning and teaching activities, but we hypothesise that this would support the partnership activities outlined above.

There is disagreement, however, about the efficacy of equality and diversity-based courses with some studies indicating statistically significant impact on students’ attitudes and others indicating mixed or non-significant changes (Nelson Laird and Engberg 2011: 119). The paper by Michelle Eady of the University of Wollongong, Australia encapsulated this disagreement. Eady reported findings from her project exploring the impact of an online equality and diversity tutorial around rights, respect and responsibilities on her university’s first-year primary education students. The project’s statistical analysis indicated that the training had had no significant impact, while, conversely, its qualitative analysis reflected the perceived benefits of the training for students. Nevertheless, we should note that the majority of studies do report a positive impact of such training, courses and interventions on students’ awareness and appreciation of equality and diversity issues (Engberg 2004; Nelson Laird and Engberg 2011: 119). Andrea Cameron and Abertay Students’ Association’s paper in section D of the compendium also reports on the impact of equality and diversity-based interventions on the development of graduate attributes, here in relation to student association sports societies.
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Embedding equality and diversity

Equality and diversity focused interventions are not, however, the only way forward. Nelson Laird and Engberg (2011) compared equality and diversity-based training/courses/interventions and what they call 'diversity inclusive' courses. The term 'diversity inclusivity' here derives from Nelson Laird's model of the same name which considers equality and diversity through the elements of purpose/goals, content, foundations/perspectives, learners, instructors, pedagogy, environment, assessment/evaluation and adjustment (Nelson Laird 2011; cf. HEA Scotland’s embedding equality and diversity in the curriculum framework and model (May and Thomas 2010; Hanesworth 2015), which, although different, stem from similar principles). In their comparison, Nelson Laird and Engberg found statistically significant differences between these two methods for bringing equality and diversity into learning and teaching. In short, they found that courses that embed equality and diversity in disciplinary learning and teaching activities had greater diversity grounding, were more inclusive, and rated higher for teaching excellence than diversity-focused interventions. The result being that ‘the effects of the highly inclusive nonrequirements may actually be greater than those of the diversity requirements’ (Nelson Laird and Engberg 2011: 132), effects here meaning the impact on students’ equality and diversity knowledge, skills and attitudes.

It is this embedding that was explored by Brian McGinley and Anne Ryan of the University of Strathclyde in relation to their community education course. McGinley and Ryan discussed how they had embedded equality and diversity, the effect of this on the course – in relation especially to keeping the curriculum relevant – and how this resulted in preparing students for their post-graduation working lives. Sukhwinder Singh of the University of Northampton also investigated the impact of embedded equality and diversity, here in relation to race in social work programmes, on black and white students. Singh illustrated how incorporating anti-racist education into his curriculum increased both groups' confidence in working with BME service users and knowledge of race issues, and increased white students' awareness of race issues to nearly parallel that of their black peers (cf. also Singh 2013; Bartoli et al 2015). Finally, Rob Henthorn and Emily Beever, then of Aberdeen University Students’ Association, delivered a workshop that encouraged its participants to embed equality and diversity in the curriculum to liberate it from its dominant white, heteronormative origins.
and contexts. They illustrated the values such a traditional system can implicitly promote and the effects disrupting it can yield: ie the development of ‘better citizens’. Here, Henthorn and Beever indicated that such disruption is again not only about curriculum content but also about pedagogy: they argued how learning and teaching can foster good relations and a sense of shared values through the facilitating of positive interactions (cf. Hanesworth 2015).

Indeed, while we have superficially separated student belonging and graduate attributes in this introduction and summary, it should not be forgotten that they are inextricably intertwined. The learning and teaching practices suggested above to promote student belonging, to de-marginalise the pedagogised other and to disrupt pedagogised norms are precisely those that can be leveraged to further develop equality and diversity-based graduate attributes.

Developing staff capacity

Of course, all of the above have significant implications on learning and teaching processes with interrogations of, and changes in, practice impacting on quality enhancement and assurance systems, learning and teaching strategies and policies as well as partnership, and other relationship development, mechanisms. Perhaps, though, the biggest implication is that of staff capacity. While such activities do not require that staff are equality and diversity experts – universities already employ individuals with this expertise – they do require staff development in equality and diversity-related learning and teaching as well as sufficient time, recognition and resource for the development of relevant evidence-based pedagogic and curricula approaches. Section A of this compendium explores the staff development question and highlights different approaches to capacity building, including incorporation into existing learning and teaching development, widening of existing equality and diversity development, and creation of bespoke development activity. In addition to these papers, the conferences saw further exploration by Aisha Richards and Terry Finnigan of the University of the Arts, London, and by Anna Mountford-Zimdars of King’s College London. Richards and Finnigan showcased three case studies resulting from their ‘inclusive learning and teaching in higher education’ unit (part of the university’s postgraduate certificate in higher education) and the impact of the Shades of Noir...
Emerging themes

project, both of which are also discussed in Richards and Finnigan 2015. Mountford-Zimdars also showcased case studies from her ‘teaching in the context of diversity’ module (part of the university’s postgraduate certificate in academic practice). Both workshops reflected the efficacy of embedding equality and diversity development within existing academic development activity and the centrality of critical pedagogy (interrogating the pedagogised norm) – in addition to practical changes – to this. Key is that staff development and capacity building, while broad in its remit, allows for the flexibility required to be responsive to the individual academic, cohort group, disciplinary and institutional contexts, needs and drivers that affect learning and teaching.
Summary of papers

The papers summarised here are available to download: www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/ECU-HEA-compendium

We turn now to the compendium papers in more detail. All of the papers within the compendium report on the experiences of, initiatives for, and research into, equality and diversity in learning and teaching practices, processes and regimes. Collectively, they provide a myriad of recommendations, reflections and lessons learned that can be adopted and adapted by others for the development of pedagogies, curricula and cultures that embed equality and diversity so as to create learning and teaching environments in which all students can feel like they belong, all students have an equal and fair chance to succeed in their learning journey, and all students are able to develop competencies that enable them to succeed in our global and interconnected world.

Section A: Staff development for equality and diversity in learning and teaching

= Valuing, harnessing and using the unique asset of working in a bilingual institution: introducing the Welsh language into a postgraduate certificate in higher education [Cath Camps].

= The Sheffield SEED (seeking educational equity and diversity) project on inclusive curriculum: an alternative model for staff competency training [Rachel van Duyvenbode].

= Equality and Dignity at NTU: a core competency approach to staff learning and development in equality, diversity and inclusion at Nottingham Trent University [Angie Pears and Susanna Dermody].

In section A, three papers explore the development and impact of staff development for equality and diversity in learning and teaching. These provide three different, but equally effective, models for those considering developing such initiatives in their own institutions.

Cath Camps from Cardiff University details the development of a culturally relevant, spiralling curriculum within the university’s postgraduate certificate in higher education, one that harnesses the university’s bilingualism by incorporating the Welsh language in a variety of language and non-language-based ways. Camps illustrates how her team were able to utilise this embedded curriculum as a springboard for supporting the growth of intercultural competencies in both students and staff.
Rachel van Duyvenbode of the University of Sheffield describes the introduction of the American-based SEED (seeking educational equity and diversity) seminar programme to her university. van Duyvenbode explores how the programme provided a unique space for sustained reflection and peer-led learning for staff on their knowledge and experience of diversity, equality and inclusivity in higher education. She illustrates how the programme can empower staff to change behaviour and practice, establish a network of ‘allies’, and even result in the incorporation of the methods and exercises from the SEED sessions into staff’s own teaching.

Angie Pears and Susanna Dermody of Nottingham Trent University detail the development, implementation and evaluation of an equality, diversity and inclusion-based staff development programme, a programme that moves away from deficit-based, compliance-led training to a model that supports the development of core competencies. The paper shows how a careful, longitudinal approach to staff development can support institutional change and real mainstreaming of equality and diversity within all university activities.

In section B, two papers describe the experiences of staff in developing and supporting inclusive practice. Both provide practical, innovative ways forward for this development, reflect on lessons learned, and offer/point to recommendations for the adoption and adaptation of inclusive practice as defined and developed from their own experiences.

Sarla Gandhi of the University of Central Lancashire describes her journey to inclusive practice through the adoption of the patchwork text assessment model. Writing in the form of a patchwork text, she provides a number of ‘confessions’ exploring the inclusive aspects of the model, how it relates to assessment for learning, lessons learned, and recommendations for its implementation in others’ learning and teaching practices.
Priska Schoenborn and Wendy Miller of Plymouth University report on the findings of a qualitative research project examining the untapped knowledge of non-medical helpers. They describe the challenges and examples of good practice noted by this group, highlight key findings (e.g., a desire for discretion, that anxiety is an over-arching issue irrespective of condition, lack of quiet space, difficulties with group work, etc.) and report on the production of guides developed as a result of the project.

Section C: Supporting student groups

- How can lecturers and students in higher education improve their intercultural awareness, and in the process create a more inclusive international teaching and learning environment? [Jane Bell and Nicole Kipar].

- Partnership and preparation: a new model of transition from college to university [Julia Fotheringham and Debbie Meharg].

In section C, two papers explore initiatives and pedagogies that can support specific student groups in their learning journeys and education experiences. These papers both illustrate the importance of responding to the learning contexts of specific cohorts while describing practices that could be adapted for wider use.

Jane Bell and Nicole Kipar from Heriot-Watt University present the results of their workshop which aimed to capitalise on the knowledge and expertise of participants to identify the key areas in which international students may be disadvantaged. It offers a variety of practical recommendations for higher education which can increase staff and students’ intercultural sensitivity and inclusivity, and which can reduce the sometimes invisible barriers to equal participation.

Julia Fotheringham and Debbie Meharg of Edinburgh Napier University outline their findings from a pilot project that explored a range of initiatives aiming to support the transition of articulation students. This paper emphasises the importance of theoretical contextualisation and the principles of partnership and preparation in the development of such initiatives. It also highlights the impact of the activities on the articulating students, their efficacy in improving student confidence and motivation, lessons learned, and ways forward, as well as providing a model for those wanting to better enable articulation students to negotiate their transition from college to university.
Section D: Student engagement with equality and diversity

- Embracing diversity – watch your language: understanding student sports teams’ awareness of protected characteristics and the concepts of inclusivity [Andrea Cameron and Abertay Students’ Association].

- Capturing student perspectives to address the BAME attainment gap in higher education – a case study at Swansea University [Sara Correia and Robiu Salisu].

In section D, two papers report on the findings of bespoke projects that focus on student engagement for the development of equality and diversity within institutional settings.

Andrea Cameron and Abertay Students’ Association describe their engagement with student sports teams, emphasising that the student experience, and the development of graduate attributes, extend beyond the curriculum. Reporting on a project that aimed to tackle the non-inclusiveness, especially the lad culture, that has been seen recently to pervade some university societies, this paper analyses the impact of equality and diversity awareness-raising interventions on students’ perceptions of, and attitudes to equality and diversity issues. The paper emphasises the importance of engaging with students in the tackling of, non-inclusive behaviour and attitudes, how inclusiveness should be embedded within student associations’ practices, processes and policies, offers recommendations to others and describes potential ways forward in this area.

Sara Correia and Robiu Salisu, of Swansea University Students’ Union present the results and conclusions of a consultation exercise carried out in partnership between their HEI and its students’ union. The paper describes the qualitative findings from focus groups of BME students, explores the learning experiences of these students, details the groups’ insights into, and perspectives on, the BME/white attainment gap, as well as potential strategies for reducing and ultimately closing it. This paper illustrates the importance of the student voice in identifying causes and solutions for closing the attainment gap and thus makes a case for increased partnership between universities and students’ unions in the creation of learning and teaching experiences that advance equality of opportunity.
Summary of papers

In summary, these nine papers provide a wide range of methods, processes and practices by which equality and diversity can be addressed in a learning and teaching environment, illustrating the diversity of approaches possible. Whether embedding in processes, addressing through curriculum design and assessment, or tackling in staff and student development practices, these papers illustrate how evidence-based practices, made relevant to individual institutional, departmental and disciplinary contexts, can be utilised for real change with regard to equality and diversity in higher education.


Coleman, N A T (2015) Diversity is a dirty word – UK. Available from: https://www.academia.edu/12156321/Diversity_is_a_dirty_word_-_UK [last accessed 07.11.2015].


ECU supports higher education institutions across the UK and in colleges in Scotland to advance equality and diversity for staff and students.

ECU provides research, information and guidance, training, events and Equality Charters that drive forward change and transform organisational culture in teaching, learning, research and knowledge exchange. We have over ten years’ experience of supporting institutions to remove barriers to progression and success for all staff and students.

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