Mainstreaming: equality at the heart of higher education
This report was researched and written by Kath Bridger and Jenny Shaw of BSV Associates Ltd.

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## Equality Challenge Unit

Mainstreaming: equality at the heart of higher education

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Mainstreaming: equality at the heart of higher education
Introduction

Equality Challenge Unit (ECU)'s Mainstreaming: equality at the heart of higher education project aims to support Scottish higher education institutions (HEIs) to find effective methods to meet their public duty across their institution under the Equality Act 2010.

In addition to helping HEIs meet legislative requirements, this project supports the development of an inclusive culture throughout higher education through enhancing the student experience, and promoting institution-wide understanding of equality issues and responsibilities.

The project has been developed in consultation with ECU's Scottish liaison group, which is actively working with HEIs in Scotland to embed equality considerations into their policies and everyday actions through research-based evidence. The mainstreaming strategies and approaches suggested in this publication will be trialled by staff from a range of operational departments in Scottish HEIs in the second stage of the project.
1 Understanding mainstreaming

There are already attempts to embed and progress equality in HEIs, for example through widening participation and increasing support for disabled students, or by including commitments to equality within mission statements. However, many of these initiatives do not always consider the equality and diversity implications of everyday activities. Through mainstreaming, institutions will approach equality and diversity considerations as an ongoing process of quality enhancement across all functions of the institution.

Mainstreaming sets out to effect both cultural and systemic change in an organisation such that an equality perspective is integrated into its day-to-day working across all functions. This is not necessarily a simple or intuitive process, and may be challenging to implement.

The process of mainstreaming will raise awareness of equality considerations throughout an institution. It will also support institutions to meet their public duty required by the Equality Act 2010.

Institutions will need to implement tools and strategies and establish principles to mainstream equality effectively, including:

- taking a holistic approach that considers all aspects of an institution’s functions and delivery and their impacts on staff, students and partners
- promoting the values of participation and consultation
- building a vision of what mainstreamed equality in an institution will look like

The roles of governors and senior management need to be central to the process and may require leaders within an HEI to be responsible for:

- creating a climate within the institution that promotes and supports a diverse community
- preparing staff to work in an increasingly diverse workplace through training in cultural diversity
- introducing policies and practices that are sensitive to the needs of a diverse population
- creating an atmosphere for learning that allows for a discourse on diversity issues
- adopting zero tolerance of discrimination and exclusion

Mainstreaming equality and diversity is concerned with outcomes as well as issues of process, culture change and delivery. It is a long-term, strategic approach to ensuring that equality, diversity and inclusion sit at the heart of an institution’s culture and operational delivery. It is not a quick fix, but requires time, resources, the support of specialist staff and the commitment of senior management. Successful mainstreaming of equality will consolidate the position of HEIs as leaders in the development of a more inclusive and just society, and as educators of a diverse and globally minded workforce.
2 Approaches to mainstreaming

Many institutions will need to undertake significant cultural change in order to achieve mainstreaming of equality and diversity. Although there is no single way of creating change, the following key approaches have been demonstrated to facilitate cultural change across an institution.

= A **holistic approach** is required rather than considering aspects of an institution's delivery in isolation.

= Change will be required at both **institutional and individual levels**. To ensure that there is support for the initiative at all levels, it will be necessary to address policies and processes, and to work with individuals to promote positive attitudes and changes in practice. Changes may have to be made to allow the development of different approaches within the same operational framework.

= A **robust evidence base** is an essential platform for mainstreaming work, drawing on both internal and external research and data. Data can reveal hidden inequalities, including unequal outcomes and areas of segregation. This evidence can be presented in different institutional contexts and apply to different groups of stakeholders to demonstrate the benefits and impacts of change. Evidence can also be used to demonstrate that change (in this instance, mainstreaming of equality) is taking place through monitoring and review processes.

= It is important to bear in mind that no single solution will result in mainstreaming. A **range of tools or strategies** will need to be employed simultaneously.

= There needs to be support from the **highest level** within the institution in order to create the impetus for change and drive its implementation.

= Mainstreaming needs to be tackled at a **strategic level**, promoting the vision of an inclusive institution and addressing policies and functions in order to achieve consistent support at faculty and departmental levels.

The framework below can be used to develop and implement a mainstreaming strategy that encompasses the key cross-cutting approaches described above. It identifies self-evaluation questions to allow these approaches to be tailored to suit the particular circumstances and requirements of an institution. It also categorises the mainstreaming tools to facilitate delivery. The categories are explained and example tools are provided in the following section.
## Mainstreaming framework

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<td>= What evidence (qualitative and quantitative) do you have to demonstrate this?</td>
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<td>= Do the mission, vision and other strategic statements of the institution set out a commitment to equality?</td>
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<td>= What aims will be set at the institutional or departmental/service level in relation to equality?</td>
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<td>= Who do the aims target?</td>
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<td>Cross-cutting approach</td>
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| **Using a multi-pronged/multi-method delivery strategy** | Developing objectives and taking action  
  = What will you achieve, and what does success look like?  
  = What approaches or tools will you use?  
  = How will you ensure all staff have the skills and knowledge to make a success of the initiative?  
  = What tasks need to be completed to achieve the aims and objectives?  
  = Who is responsible for the initiative overall?  
  = Who is responsible for each task?  
  = When will you have achieved each objective? | Analytical Educational Engagement |
| **Review and revise evidence base** | Monitoring and evaluation  
  = What data need to be collected to ensure you have achieved your aims and objectives?  
  = Who is responsible for collecting the data?  
  = Who is responsible for reviewing the data?  
  = What does success look like to the different groups and stakeholders involved?  
  = How will you disseminate and celebrate success? | Analytical Engagement |
3 Tools and strategies for mainstreaming

Most of the tools for mainstreaming equality listed in this section originated from the higher education sector. Others have been used in different organisational contexts, but show promise as appropriate tools to adopt within a higher education context.

Successful mainstreaming rests on change that takes place at both institutional and individual levels. Therefore we suggest using tools:

- as part of an overarching mainstreaming vision
- that are intended to work at different levels
- with an understanding of their theoretical background

Mainstreaming tools are generally divided into three categories.

- Analytical tools consider ways in which information is produced and used to identify equality issues and inform the development of policy and strategy. They result in evidence that may highlight equality issues within an institution, and/or enable the implementation of mainstreaming to be monitored and evaluated.

- Educational tools include methods of raising awareness and delivering training and professional development opportunities for those involved in mainstreaming.

- Engagement tools enable staff and students across an institution to participate in the process of mainstreaming, for example through meaningful consultation. The direct input of minority groups in policy making is a particular priority of a mainstreaming approach.

The sections below set out a range of generic and specific tools in each category, which may be used either singly or in combination. These are examples of tools likely to be of value to HEIs, covering different dimensions of equality and diversity.

Analytical tools

Analytical tools result in quantitative or qualitative data. Generally, both types of data are useful for gaining understanding of the current situation and the reasons behind it.

Use of statistical evidence

Statistics can be derived from the usual management information systems within the institution, but it should be possible to separate them by different equality groups. Where this is not the case, additional data collection or surveys may need to be carried out, or processes for the gathering of management information should be reviewed. Statistical evidence can be used across all core processes.
The **Diversity Scorecard**, developed at the University of Southern California, provides a framework for gathering and analysing statistical information relating to equality within an HEI. It has particular relevance to student services, though it also touches on admissions, and learning and teaching. It is an outcomes-focused holistic tool to address the experience of black and minority ethnic students, which could easily be adapted to other equality groups. [www.uwsa.edu/edi/equity/pdf/diversityscorecardchangemag.pdf](http://www.uwsa.edu/edi/equity/pdf/diversityscorecardchangemag.pdf)

**Appreciative inquiry**

Originally developed at Case Western Reserve University, Ohio, appreciative inquiry involves a wide range of stakeholders in the process of identifying and implementing positive change. It can be used in a wide variety of ways in relation to mainstreaming equality. [http://appreciativeinquiry.case.edu](http://appreciativeinquiry.case.edu)

**Equality surveys and focus groups**

These are used to collect both qualitative evidence and statistical data to identify areas for development and to inform policy and practice. They can be used to supplement data derived from management information systems, or to enquire into areas not covered by these systems, such as attitudes and perceptions.

As part of the Higher Education Academy-sponsored **Developing and embedding inclusive policy and practice** programme, Sheffield Hallam University conducted an institutional survey involving 484 students to look at the experience of disabled and non-disabled students. The survey sought to explore students’ perceptions of themselves as learners and of their student experience. Their responses were later compared with their attainment. The survey was used, alongside an analysis of institutional data, to inform the single equality scheme and identify priority actions.

**Case studies**

Case studies can be used to demonstrate how evidence-based developments have resulted in positive impact. They can be a valuable aspect of evaluating mainstreaming initiatives.

**Strategy review and development**

As a commitment to equality, and powered by drivers such as legislative requirements or reputational benefits, institutions review their strategy and core policy. This process can be undertaken as part of an equality impact assessment, or as an independent process that focuses on quality enhancement and the development of best practice. In both cases, the use of appropriate qualitative and quantitative data is essential in identifying where change may be needed.
Equality impact assessments allow an institution to assess a policy, strategy or initiative for potential negative impact on particular groups. See ECU’s Conducting equality impact assessments in higher education:
www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/equality-impact-assessment-in-he

Review processes

Review processes consider how core processes can be developed in order to drive mainstreaming across particular functions, such as staff development, staff induction, performance management and student support. This can be done informally via meetings or stakeholder panels, but it is becoming more common to use a formal process.

Reflective Review was developed as part of the drive by Action on Access towards mainstreaming widening participation. The tool can be used as part of an institutional self-assessment in terms of any aspect of equality.

A Russell Group university used this process to:
= develop a holistic vision and definition of widening participation and student diversity
= assemble relevant data and use it in performance appraisal and quality assurance processes
= use external data provided by Action on Access to benchmark performance against other similar HEIs
= review or create strategic documents to broaden the university’s widening participation strategy, including the outreach strategy, retention and progression action framework, learning and teaching strategy, equality and diversity frameworks, gender equality, race equality, disability equality, and fairness and diversity policy
= develop an ongoing action plan for which a project group, chaired by the pro vice-chancellor and including the leads from outreach, retention and progression (academic and non-academic) and student equality and diversity, meet regularly to ensure an inclusive approach covering all aspects of the student life cycle
= cascade actions associated with institutional and thematic checklists to a wide range of departments, units and committees across the university
Promoting **culturally inclusive participation in sport**, the University of Newcastle, Australia, has provided staff with an information sheet and checklist to review sports provision for students in order to eliminate indirect discrimination. It takes a broad approach to reviewing provision, including undertaking consultation and considering the venue, how provision is marketed, and broader issues of staff development and student participation and engagement. Both the approach and the resulting checklist provide a useful model that could be adapted for use across the whole range of student services.


**Institutional benchmarking**

Institutions can work with other institutions to identify their current position and monitor their progress against targets and commitments, possibly generating new more relevant data. Data can be used to identify particular trends, for example in respect of the diversity of staff and student populations; barriers to progression; the level of representation of women in governance and senior positions; pockets of good practice or areas for development across core functions or processes.

**Educational tools**

Educational tools are a primary method of bringing about change at the individual level, which is an essential part of the mainstreaming process. They set out either to impart information or to contribute to the development of staff and students’ understanding of equality and diversity. There is evidence from the USA to suggest that diversity-related learning and experience supports positive educational outcomes for students, especially in relation to employability and engaging critical thinking skills.

**Training and development modules or programmes**

Training and development modules can be produced to target specific needs, such as developing an inclusive curriculum and validation approvals.

They can be delivered through staff development workshops, or through longer professional development programmes for academic and non-academic staff, such as a postgraduate certificate in academic practice or higher education management.

**Mentoring and coaching**

Mentoring enables academic, professional and support staff to enhance their professional development.
The University of Bradford’s Cultural understanding in leadership and management project promotes multicultural understanding among senior managers while potentially diversifying the pool of future managers and leaders.

www.lfhe.ac.uk/publications/lffellowship/bradford.html

Staff development or guidance materials

Guidance materials can be used to support a training and development programme or as stand-alone reference documents. Whether generic or specific to certain areas, they can cover inclusive approaches to providing a particular service.

Toolkits and handbooks

Toolkits can take a range of forms and can be used in a variety of contexts, such as when staff carry out mainstreaming activities in their own school, faculty or department.

The Toolkit for developing a business case for widening participation and managing student diversity was developed as the result of a Higher Education Academy research project into the business case for student diversity. It provides staff with development materials for assessing policies and procedures in relation to the whole diversity of the student body, with a particular emphasis on marketing, student recruitment and student services.

www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/detail/ourwork/inclusion/WP_Toolkit

The toolkit Building the anti-racist university was developed in 2002 by the University of Leeds. Although legislation has been updated, the checklists and the background information provided have the potential to be very useful in mainstreaming equality over a wide range of business functions.

www.sociology.leeds.ac.uk/assets/files/research/cers/the-anti-racism-toolkit.pdf

Information and awareness-raising tools

Designed to raise awareness of equality issues, these may take many forms, such as posters, information leaflets and ad hoc events.

Sheffield Hallam University is just one of a growing number of universities that uses an Equality and diversity staff calendar to challenge eurocentric worldviews, communicate a positive message about other cultures and religions and beliefs, and promote diversity-related events. As well as providing a constant reminder to all staff about equality and diversity, this also acts as an effective engagement tool.

www.shu.ac.uk/_assets/pdf/3876-SLS-Staff-Calendar-3.pdf
Privileged identity exploration (PIE) is an educational tool that can be used with students and staff to explore their own privilege in the context of their socialisation, and to understand its implications. It is based on a technique of creating and supporting learners through ‘difficult dialogues’ – challenging cross-cultural (in the widest sense) conversations either in a training setting or arising naturally in day-to-day life.

The facilitator helps those taking part to identify and explore their natural defences to accepting different worldviews and positions. This is particularly useful for those from majority communities to accept and understand a history of oppression or marginalisation among minority communities. The result of this approach is the raising of the ‘critical consciousness’ of those who take part in personal and professional development activity, in order to accept and understand the impact of power inequalities in society.

Student services:
https://wiki.uiowa.edu/download/attachments/39789630/Watt-PIE_Model+%282%29+4.pdf

Religious privilege:
https://wiki.uiowa.edu/download/attachments/39006632/Sherry+Watt+religion+dialogues.pdf

Tools for use with the PIE approach:
https://wiki.uiowa.edu/pages/viewpageattachments.action?pageId=31756792

Engagement tools

Legislation places a requirement on institutions to promote equality of access and opportunity across all functions and areas of delivery. This means that institutions need to reflect on systems, practices and attitudes to ensure there is shared responsibility and shared accountability for equality and inclusion at institutional and individual levels. All staff need to be involved in developing understanding of equality, diversity and inclusion across the institution. Engagement tools are a powerful means of involving staff, and other stakeholders, such as students and governors, in the process of mainstreaming equality.

Advisory or working groups

Some groups will already be constituted as part of other institutional projects or initiatives. As with all constituted groups, working groups need to take account of key stakeholders, including students, practitioners and senior staff, who are able to influence and promote change.

Advocates

Equality champions across the institution's core processes or functions, who are not the equality and diversity practitioner, can act as effective role models.
**Promoting effective practice**

Effective practice results in improved experience or outcomes for students or staff from minority groups. Change can be embedded through promoting methods that have proved effective, especially if the examples of practice are localised within the institution. This can be done either verbally or through written submissions, but requires senior support and links to key strategies.

**Facilitating dialogue**

One-off events, a seminar series, or a place on committee agendas can ensure that equality, diversity and inclusion are discussed freely by students and staff. Promoting the use of inclusive language is an important aspect of facilitating dialogue.

**Appreciative inquiry** is both an analytical and an engagement tool. It values and makes use of the experience of staff and students from minority backgrounds in the context of an investigation or evaluation initiative to provide a richer picture of the current situation and suggest solutions for the future. Appreciative inquiry has been applied in many different contexts within and outside higher education.

The University of Worcester used it as an evaluation tool for developing a more inclusive curriculum:

- [www.worc.ac.uk/adpu/1177.htm](http://www.worc.ac.uk/adpu/1177.htm)
- [www.worc.ac.uk/adpu/documents/VC_WBJ_UW_LT_conference_Jun_08(1).ppt](http://www.worc.ac.uk/adpu/documents/VC_WBJ_UW_LT_conference_Jun_08(1).ppt)

**Holistic examples**

Some strategies integrate tools from all three categories to create an approach to education or service delivery that supports the whole process of mainstreaming.

**Universal instructional design**, an approach to learning development and student services developed by the University of Guelph in Canada, takes into account the requirements of all possible learners.

- [www.tss.uoguelph.ca/uid/index.cfm](http://www.tss.uoguelph.ca/uid/index.cfm)
- [www.tss.uoguelph.ca/uid/uid-implementation-guide-v6.pdf](http://www.tss.uoguelph.ca/uid/uid-implementation-guide-v6.pdf)
Learning reconsidered is a critical approach to student services that embeds diversity and equality and challenges conventionally held wisdom about learning and teaching in higher education. It has the potential to challenge current patterns of privilege and power within an institution by valuing all services and activities accessed by students (both on and off campus) as important aspects of their learning experience.

www.docstoc.com/docs/38475342/18th-EAN-Annual-Conference-York
www.myacpa.org/pub/documents/LearningReconsidered.pdf

Race equality toolkit is a holistic toolkit designed by Universities Scotland to assist academic staff to embed issues of race equality and fostering good relations as part of learning and teaching and curriculum design. It is an adaptable tool that can be used in different ways to suit the particular requirements of the institution, department or individual.

www.universities-scotland.ac.uk/raceequalitytoolkit/index.htm
Like any process of change, mainstreaming equality is a complex undertaking that benefits from ongoing monitoring. A key question here is: What does success look like? The answer should be as specific as possible. Every mainstreaming initiative is different, based on different organisational circumstances, cultures and histories. Success may look quite different to the different stakeholders and equality groups involved, and performance indicators will need to encompass this range of perspectives.

Monitoring and evaluation of an equality mainstreaming initiative should form an integral part of the change process, using engagement tools to gather qualitative data from a range of stakeholders alongside quantitative information from analytical tools such as management information systems and surveys. The way in which data are collected, and the availability of data from management information sources, send out powerful messages about how diversity is valued within an institution.

Like the mainstreaming initiative itself, monitoring and evaluation benefit from central coordination and senior-level championing. Internal or external diversity experts could be valuable in interpreting monitoring data in the light of theoretical perspectives on equality and diversity. This could aid understanding of inconclusive or negative data, the reasons behind it, and what could be done to improve the situation.

Above all, monitoring and evaluation activities should always lead to action – whether refinement of the approach, a refocus on new areas of potential inequality, or measures to maintain the current level of good practice. The job of mainstreaming equality is never truly complete. As society’s understanding of equality issues progresses, so HEIs can continue to demonstrate their commitment to leading good practice in this area, both as large organisations and as influencers of tomorrow’s workforce.
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[www.jennyshaw.org/wp/?page_id=53](http://www.jennyshaw.org/wp/?page_id=53)

ECU works closely with colleges of higher education and universities to seek to ensure that staff and students are not unfairly excluded, marginalised or disadvantaged because of age, disability, gender identity, marital or civil partnership status, pregnancy or maternity status, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, or through any combination of these characteristics or other unfair treatment.

Providing a central source of expertise, research, advice and leadership, we support institutions in building a culture that provides equality of both opportunity and outcome, promotes good relations, values the benefits of diversity and provides a model of equality for the wider UK society.

Equality Challenge Unit (ECU) works to further and support equality and diversity for staff and students in higher education across all four nations of the UK.