Equality and diversity in learning and teaching in higher education
Papers from Equality Challenge Unit and Higher Education Academy joint conferences
Acknowledgments

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The individual papers included in this publication can be downloaded separately from ECU’s website: www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/ECU-HEA-compendium

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Introduction

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 compendium provides a snapshot of these days through its short articles, which have been developed from a selection of the papers and workshops delivered. This summary provides a broader overview of the context of the two conferences, an exploration of some of the main themes discussed at the events, which incorporates relevant theoretical considerations, and a summary of the articles within.

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.

Context

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.
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,
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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
Interrogating and disrupting pedagogised norms

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=Dscx4h2l-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.

Belonging and student engagement

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.
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
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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.
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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 as a graduate attribute

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).

Equality and diversity training

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.
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.
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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
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

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.

Section B: Lessons from the coalface: supporting inclusivity

= Confessions of an accidental inclusivist [Sarla Gandhi].
= Learning from non-medical helpers to develop inclusive practice guides [Priska Schoenborn and Wendy Miller].

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
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.
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.
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.
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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

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Abstract

An educational development team, working in the UK’s sole officially bilingual research-intensive HEI, has sought to value, harness and use this unique asset in order to support staff new to teaching at their university. For those unfamiliar with the bilingual nature of higher education in Wales, this paper gives a short introduction before detailing how this team, drawing on the work of critical race theorists such as Ladson-Billings (1995) and Paris (2012), has worked to instigate an appropriate culturally relevant curriculum for their postgraduate certificate in higher education (PgCHE). Examples of how the Welsh language has been incorporated to recognise its value as a medium for academic study are given as well as details on how such work has been used as a springboard for supporting the growth of intercultural competencies of both students and staff.

Introduction

This paper details how one small educational development team of two, working in the UK’s sole officially bilingual research-intensive HEI, has sought to value, harness and use this unique asset within their postgraduate certificate in higher education (PgCHE) qualification undertaken by staff new to teaching. Examples of how the Welsh language is being embedded into a culturally relevant curriculum will be offered. In addition, the change model adopted by the educational development team as a means of reviewing the incremental alterations implemented will be set out. We anticipate that this model could be adopted by curriculum planners wishing to review how diversity and inclusion are being addressed within their provision. Prior to this, for
Section A: Staff development for equality and diversity in learning and teaching

readers unfamiliar with ways in which decisions made by the devolved administration in Wales has impacted on Welsh higher education, a brief overview is given.

Bilingualism in Welsh higher education

Wales, like other constituent nations across the UK, has its own officially recognised language. The 2011 census (Stats Wales 2011) indicated that 26.7 per cent of the population has some proficiency in the language. The use of the language, however, has not historically been uniform with a broadly north/west and south/east divide across the country: English is predominantly the first language nearer the English border.

Since devolution in 1999, the Welsh Government has actively engaged with HEIs to help shape the sector (Welsh Government 2009, 2013, 2015), including its Welsh medium provision. Higher education in Wales has always had Welsh medium provision, but its usage has been limited historically by geography, discipline and also type of institution (Williams 2014). In order to address these limitations, the Welsh Government established the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol (CCC) in 2011 with the intention of building Welsh medium teaching capacity through the funding of staff appointments, research projects and the creation of Welsh medium resources across all institutions (Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol n.d).

Cardiff University, located within the mainly English-speaking south of the country, and the country’s only Russell group institution, predominantly teaches through the medium of English (Garrett et al 2012). With the input of the CCC, however, Welsh medium provision is actively being developed – although the form this takes differs between disciplines and academic schools (Collins et al 2015). Students who wish to use Welsh during their time at Cardiff University are supported through a number of processes: for example, by submitting work for assessment in Welsh regardless of the medium of instruction (Cardiff University 2014).

A time of curriculum change: opportunities for valuing and harnessing the language

Prior to 2011, the PgCHE programme, like the majority of programmes within Cardiff University, was delivered solely through the medium of English. While the distinctiveness of the Welsh higher education system and Welsh-focused policies were part of the initial contextualisation provided for new lecturers in
the programme, there was little formal exploration of the Welsh cultural identity of the institution nor of its bilingual nature – although that is not to say this did not surface informally.

Change occurred in 2011 following the programme’s revalidation. Reflection by the team has identified that this was a pivotal moment enabling the incorporation of socio-cultural considerations. A clearly stated ethos, namely to support individuals’ sense-making as higher education teachers through reflective practice, was embedded within an explicitly spiral curriculum. Innovative activities, such as the use of individual e-journals to build/explore academic identity (Kell and Camps 2014, 2015), encouraged such sense-making. The e-journals, a pedagogic tool to assist staff as they explored their personal and professional value bases, were the first opportunity in which socio-cultural concerns could be raised. Early evaluation of the e-journals noted that students with an interest in such concerns engaged in discussions about language issues. Often these discussions were led by international lecturers reflecting on their personal experiences, although notable exceptions were staff who identified as Welsh.

A review was undertaken shortly after the introduction of the new programme curriculum. The starting place was the extent to which our educational offering supported equal distribution of a range of interrelated rights (Bernstein 2000) namely inclusion, participation and individual enhancement. It was at this point that lacunae in the curriculum were identified. Although the programme formally included processes that enabled students to submit work for assessment in Welsh and offered informal opportunities to explore issues such as the place of the Welsh language in higher education or the supporting of bilingual learners within individual classrooms, it was failing to systematically address other issues. It did not, for example, consider the impact of the university’s bilingual status nor did it link to wider socio-historical concerns such as the impact of internal colonisation and the English project (Hechter 1975) on students’ learning in the university.

Informed by the work of critical race theorists (Ladson-Billings 1995; Gillborn 2006; Paris 2012), we appreciated the value of introducing pedagogic opportunities that were culturally relevant and driven by ideas of regional social justice (Welsh Government 2009).
In particular, we recognised the discursive and reflective potential of modelling such an approach within the programme and were especially excited about the ways in which it could link not only regional and national concerns but also global aspects of higher education teaching. The potential for utilising the plurilingual skills and multicultural experiences of its staff and students was also noted. The team therefore, decided to make further curriculum changes.

Effecting curriculum change can be challenging, especially so when introducing culturally relevant approaches (Young 2010; Sleeter 2012). In order to support the curriculum changes and subsequent evaluation, I proposed the use of a change model (figure 1), which has subsequently been incorporated into the PgCHE’s 2013 Welsh language strategy.

Figure 1: A pictorial representation of the PgCHE Welsh language strategy

The model identifies three critical stages of curriculum development with progression anticipated in a linear and stepped manner and with the first stage regarded as a benchmark position. Termed ‘reaction’, this stage is one of adherence to institutional or legal requirements. The Welsh language marking hub, established by the PgCHE team in order to meet university requirements, can be regarded as an example of reaction planning.
The second stage is one of public ‘recognition’. An example of this would be the inclusion of the Welsh language in the curriculum. Language inclusion as a token or a piece of ‘exotica’ would, however, not be representative of this stage of curriculum development. Rather, this stage demands that the inclusion of the Welsh language also encourages recognition of how the intersections of a range of characteristics, such as gender, class and ethnicity, result in very different lived experiences for individuals.

Such explorations are regarded as a necessary precursor to the final stage where the curriculum is ‘re-envisioned’. For the PgCHE, this re-envisioning extends beyond the programme’s formal curriculum to the team-led events provided for its wider pedagogic community: for example, its series of Brown Bag Seminars and its presence on social media and associated activity such as its regular twitter (#pcutl) hours. The re-envisioned PgCHE curriculum wished to harness the learning that has occurred following the introduction of the Welsh language by:

- using it as a springboard to explore possible intersections between culturally relevant teaching
- further the development of inter/transnational competencies
- contributing to a discourse about academic practices within an officially bilingual institution

It was recognised that, in order to support these changes as they were introduced, there was a need to make corresponding alterations to administrative processes and products, which contribute much to the coherence of any curriculum offer. One early example of such a change was a handbook amendment (figure 2) in which the team articulated its position on the inclusion of the Welsh language within its programme.

**Figure 2: Extract from PgCHE programme handbook**

The PgCHE strategy is framed in the belief that being a bilingual institution is of personal and professional benefit to all members of the university’s community regardless of whether or not an individual is able to use both official languages.

The PgCHE programme, in line with its strategy, seeks to highlight and share the enrichment that the Welsh language and Welsh pedagogic practices offer. Whilst the English language
Section A: Staff development for equality and diversity in learning and teaching

Curriculum changes

As previously noted, the PgCHE curriculum has a spiral structure. The spiralling of the curriculum is woven into workshops as well as directed non-contact time activity that encourages programme participants to reflect and build upon their skills and understanding in a continuous, cyclical manner. Changes to the curriculum needed, therefore, to work with this underlying structure. Hence, they were intentionally introduced in a stepped manner with alterations first made in module one, followed by module two and more latterly in module three (see table 1). Such an approach would, it was hoped, develop a programme expectation that usualised Welsh higher education policy, the Welsh language and pedagogic practices. Once embedded, this would then form the basis for wider curriculum-based discussions about the place of intercultural competencies within the university, and how teacher-led discipline approaches could contribute to the building of these. As the programme workshops are designed to be interactive, discursive places that prompt reflection, it was anticipated that – with facilitation if necessary – discussion about the bilingual nature of the institution would organically occur. The stepped approach also had a more pragmatic driver. As mentioned previously, there is a nationally recognised need for capacity building in order to support and extend Welsh higher education medium provision across all disciplines: educational development is no exception. The educational development team recognised that they would have to identify, support, and, where necessary, mentor colleagues who could then contribute to the newly included workshops.

The first change, to a session delivered early in module one, aimed to provide participants with some contextual understanding of Welsh higher education. This long-standing session has been enhanced and now includes further detail about the diversification of higher education provision across the UK home nations as well as offering an overview of the Welsh higher education landscape and Cardiff
University’s role within it. This enhancement has enabled early discussions between peers about their previous professional experiences, Welsh higher education policy and its impact on Cardiff University as a Welsh research-intensive institution. These discussions are the starting place for the e-journaling academic identity work detailed earlier. It is a matter of concern for the team that currently these can only be conducted through the medium of English. The challenge of being asked to reflect in a preferred language is not lost on the team. The inclusion of Welsh medium sessions in the programme would enable Welsh-speaking staff opportunities to engage, and importantly reflect, without recourse to translation. Such spaces within the curriculum would also support Welsh-speaking staff in their engagement with the UKPSF, which, although available in Welsh, currently requires all applications be in English.

Table 1: Welsh related curriculum provision within the PgCHE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location in programme/module focus</th>
<th>When activity introduced</th>
<th>Curriculum</th>
<th>Welsh language strategy stage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Module 1: Experiencing UK higher education</td>
<td>2013/14</td>
<td>Policy and legislation impacting on Welsh higher education (both Welsh and UK). Overview of Welsh/UK higher education provision.</td>
<td>e-Journals with team member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Module 2: Teaching for learning</td>
<td>2014/15</td>
<td>Welsh medium session in joint workshop (with simultaneous translation). Includes details of Welsh higher education language policy and legislation; Cardiff University Welsh language strategy; exposition of how ethnicity of Welsh-speaking lecturers’ has influenced their academic standing and experiences.</td>
<td>Discussion board threads (including some using the medium of Welsh)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Module 3: Supporting learning through design and assessment</td>
<td>2014/15</td>
<td>Welsh medium workshop on technology-based assessment and feedback. Offered with simultaneous translation followed by session on culturally relevant/responsive curriculum planning. Discipline focused designs for supporting the development of intercultural competencies.</td>
<td>Research projects with potential to explore Welsh medium-related/culturally relevant curriculum intercultural competency issues</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The notion of inclusion and difference raised in module one is revisited in the following module, which explores issues of planning for diversity. Building on workshops that introduce participants to the principles of universal design for learning, an additional workshop has been introduced that seeks to extend discussions about barriers to learning. This workshop sees contributors offering personal examples of marginalisation and challenge as a result of their sexual orientation, nationality or desire to speak the Welsh language at university. This authentic and highly emotive session offers much including: awareness of the language, the risks when failing to challenge commonly circulating stereotypes, and an awareness of how complex the planning demands on lecturers can be. With the Welsh contribution being delivered through the medium of Welsh, simultaneous translation is made available for those who require it. The non-contact activity for this part of the programme encourages the continuation of discussions via a discussion board.

A second Welsh medium session introduced in module three has, unlike the previous session, a non-language focus. The introduction of this workshop is seen to have two outcomes. First, it restates the value of Welsh as a medium for academic use and second, it offers non-Welsh speakers a further opportunity to experience the types of challenges faced by students not working in their first language. This session is a precursor to a workshop in which participants, having been introduced to critical race theory, consider the value of planning culturally relevant curricula. In this latter session, lecturers working in cognate areas are asked to consider how they might design activities that encourage the development of intercultural competencies within their cohorts.

Evaluation of the changed curriculum

The PgCHE evaluation strategy, founded on appreciative inquiry principles, regularly canvasses stakeholders for views which are subsequently utilised to further develop the programme. Although the curriculum changes detailed above are relatively recent (being introduced in the 2013/2014 academic year) and have yet to be fully evaluated, a rich collection of comments and experiences has been collated some of which are shared here.
Feedback has indicated that changes made to the curriculum have had an effect on programme participants’ awareness in the areas of Welsh higher education policy and legislation as well as the Welsh language provision within the university and beyond. There is also, within the programme, an emergent discourse of what working in a bilingual institution means, both for those who teach through the medium of Welsh and for those who teach in English. Workshop discussions now routinely ponder whether/how the language knowledge and experiences of bi/plurilingual staff and students can be used to further learning and contribute to greater intercultural competence.

While the revamping of the contextualised session has met with considerable positivity, especially from international staff and lecturers from outside Wales, the first Welsh medium session has been regarded as particularly valuable. Most students noted that this was the first time they had encountered academic use of the language and one international participant advised that it was the first time he had ever heard the language despite working in the university for some months.

Feedback on the affective impact of the Welsh medium sessions has been revealing. Welsh-speaking participants welcomed the opening up of space for discussion about language, discriminatory practices, and the educational needs of Welsh-speaking students within the classroom. As a result of this change, a gaining of confidence has been observed with some lecturers – post session – volunteering to use their bilingual skills, for example, at university open days. Team members have been encouraged by feedback received from lecturers, including Welsh-speaking participants, that these sessions and subsequent discussions have affirmed their value as bi/plurilingual members of staff.

Contributing to the PgCHE sessions has also been regarded positively with workshop leaders advising that doing so makes a valuable contribution to their academic progression. One colleague, of 12-years standing, who prior to the PgCHE contribution had not undertaken any teaching in Welsh, now has a visible role developing Welsh medium provision within the school.

Informal feedback on the later module three sessions has highlighted that participants deemed the workshops pertinent to their practice within the institution. Future evaluation will
specifically examine the extent to which the workshop on culturally relevant curriculum enables new lecturers to introduce activity supporting the development of intercultural competence. Further intervention, for example through the re-introduction of e-journaling, might assist theory to practice transition.

**Wider considerations**

The team, looking at the operationalisation of the curriculum change, has concluded that the change model set out as part of the PgCHE’s 2013 Welsh language strategy has proven a useful management tool. As well as being a starting place for the annual programme review, it has enabled the team, faced with day-to-day curriculum-based decisions, to maintain a focused approach. Three key resource considerations have been identified as being fundamental for effective curriculum change in this area. These are:

- **capacity**
  - The number of staff willing/able to teach through the medium of Welsh is limited with many citizenship type demands on their time. Development plans need to be cognisant of this limitation, to be willing to contribute to further capacity building, and to adjust timelines accordingly.

- **Welsh medium resources**
  - University library service staff have confirmed a paucity of Welsh medium resources to support such programmes. PgCHE staff, along with the Welsh medium network, could seek non-traditional ways to address this lacuna such as Web 2.0 technology.

- **translation costs**
  - The PgCHE’s use of simultaneous translation in workshops was an innovative use of the university’s well-regarded and active Welsh language service. Negotiations to secure funding to enable translation of routine academic sessions, however, need to be opened well in advance of need.

**Concluding remarks**

While the alterations made to the PgCHE curriculum have only been recently introduced, the observation of the team is that staff undertaking the programme at Cardiff University now have an increased awareness of the Welsh language, and what the university’s bilingual status might mean for their students, their classroom practices and curriculum design. Importantly, the new
Section A: Staff development for equality and diversity in learning and teaching

curriculum has also offered individuals further opportunities for personal reflection on their academic identity as well as enabling them to better contribute to wider university discourses about working in a UK research-intensive bilingual institution.

This work is, however, newly begun. Although some very positive outcomes have already been identified, the long-term impact of including and harnessing the Welsh language in the PgCHE at Cardiff University cannot yet be evaluated. However, the collaborative effort of colleagues across the university, including alumni and current participants, library staff, the Welsh language service and Cardiff University’s CCC branch in assisting this work has of itself furthered the discourse about bilingualism within the institution.

The PgCHE team recognises that the examples of curriculum change detailed here would not be appropriate in many contexts, but anticipates that our experiences could resonate with colleagues working with similar ambitions. This work offers an example of how the curriculum choices made by educational developers can play a pivotal role in the professional and pedagogic development of teaching staff and the wider community within which they work.
References


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


The Sheffield SEED project on inclusive curriculum: an alternative model for staff competency training

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Key words: critical pedagogies; equality; diversity; inclusivity; professional development; staff

Abstract

In 2015, the University of Sheffield hosted the UK’s first Seeking Educational Equity and Diversity (SEED) seminar programme aiming to provide a unique space for sustained reflection on staff knowledge and experience of diversity, equality and inclusivity in higher education. The project draws on a range of critical and experiential pedagogies in order to bring staff together in conversational circles to think differently about equity and diversity by learning from dissonant perspectives, drawing on findings of research, and undertaking self-reflection and peer-led learning. The emerging outcomes of the SEED project illustrate the potential benefits of this approach to shifting thinking about equity and inclusion, and empowering staff to change behaviours and implement local, effective plans for change. In contrast to compliance-focused equality and diversity training, the Sheffield SEED programme suggests the potential of reflective, experiential and social justice pedagogies as effective methods for supporting staff development and the value of ‘challenging your own views, changing yourself’ as key competencies for equality and diversity education.

Introduction

‘I had hoped this would provide an opportunity for professional development, but I hadn’t expected it to offer personal development as well. This has changed the way I think about issues of equality and diversity, not just at work but also in my everyday life, and I have really appreciated the chance to participate in the programme.’

SEED Sheffield participant

In 2015, the University of Sheffield hosted the UK’s first Seeking Educational Equity and Diversity (SEED) seminar programme aiming to provide a unique space for staff to reflect deeply and critically on their knowledge and experience of diversity, equality and inclusivity in higher education. In the words of one of the participants quoted above, the programme sought to fuse
professional with personal development and, crucially, to encourage staff to change the ‘way they think about issues of equality and diversity’ (emphasis mine). The potential of cognitive and affective dimensions to serve as indicators of competency for staff mirrors the value attributed to the outcomes for students associated with deep approaches to learning (such as critical thinking, reflective learning and integrative application skills). In short, the SEED project may represent an alternative model of staff competency training that focuses less on compliance and predetermined outcomes and more on the cultivation of ‘cultural humility’ and cognitive dissonance as necessary attributes for fostering grassroots change.¹

Background

The Sheffield SEED project ran as a pilot, small-scale programme comprising 23 participants from across the university, representing all faculties and range of job roles and responsibilities. Our programme was spread across seven workshops in six months and the sessions ran for two hours each. We retained 21 out of the 23 colleagues at the end of the programme (both of these colleagues withdrew due to clashes in their teaching schedule). Although the SEED programme was a new initiative for the University of Sheffield, SEED projects have been running in schools, universities and local communities in the USA and in other parts of the world (including schools in Asia, Africa and South America) for over 28 years. The national SEED project on inclusive curriculum is America’s largest peer-led diversity programme. It was founded by Professor Peggy McIntosh at Wellesley College (SEED n.d.). McIntosh’s contribution to the development of research in women’s studies, pedagogical theory and critical whiteness studies (coining the term ‘invisible knapsack’ to describe the function of white racial privilege: McIntosh 1989) is widely known by practitioners working in and outside the academy. However, through undertaking my own research into pedagogical techniques to facilitate classroom discussions about racial privilege and oppression (to support an MA class that I teach in the school of English), I discovered the lesser-known work of the national SEED programme. In 2014, I was invited to apply for a place on the ‘New Leaders Training Week’ (a residential, ¹ See Melanie Tervalon and Jann Murray-Garcia’s groundbreaking paper defining the principles of cultural humility in relationship to competency models (Tervalon and Murray-Garcia 1998).
immersive training programme in California), which aims to equip leaders with the skills and practice for using reflective, inclusive pedagogies to facilitate conversations about educational equity and personal experiences of privilege and oppression. The model of serial testimony is central to SEED methodology, along with developing systemic thinking and engaging key concepts and praxis drawn from published pedagogical research by SEED directors like Emily Style and Brenda Flyswithhawks. Similar to the principles underpinning participatory action research and critical pedagogies, the epistemology of personal storying is foregrounded during the SEED sessions and placed in critical conversation with peer-reviewed research. Perhaps contrary to compliance-focused competency training, in SEED, learning is conceived as an ongoing process.

Developing Sheffield SEED

Experiencing first-hand the affective impact of SEED pedagogies, I was interested in seeking ways to integrate this immersive style of learning with the particular dynamics of a research-intensive British university rather suspicious of the ‘American positivist’ and ‘therapeutic’ style depicted by videos on the SEED website. The challenge for me was to adapt the programme while retaining the valuable methodological (and ethical) dimensions that distinguish SEED from existing equality and diversity training opportunities within the university. One of the most important first steps in establishing a mandate for the project was to situate SEED within a recognisable institutional framework so as to demonstrate how potential fruits of the project might bear positively on key strategic areas of university policy. In particular, rather than conceiving SEED as outside the ongoing work in professional development that approaches inclusivity (such as the postgraduate certificate in learning and teaching), I showed that the SEED project would extend and enhance this provision and open up access to colleagues from across the university who may fall outside the certificate’s targeted intake of new teaching staff. In addition, I forged explicit links between the focus of the SEED project and the ambitions of key areas of the university’s learning and teaching framework, commitment to staff

2 McIntosh 2012: 99 describes serial testimony as ‘the autocratic administration of time in the service of democratic distribution of time.’ See the National SEED website (SEED n.d.) for a list of publications by SEED staff including key works by Emily Jane Style and Brenda Flyswithhawks.
development, widening participation and enhanced quality of student experience. In many ways, by casting the net widely, I hoped that the SEED project might have the potential for influencing practice in many different areas of the work of the university.

As an academic member of staff, I recognise the frustration of colleagues who perceive a disconnect between the rhetoric and practice of equality and diversity initiatives and the use of distributive power through committee structures (like the equality and diversity committees) whose ability to influence practice is often hampered by the protocol-driven, upstream channels of the university machine. Therefore, it was important to try to find a way to foster a collaborative model of working that would bring together academic staff with colleagues in professional services and student services and postgraduate students to build a grassroots or guild approach to leadership and institutional change (cf. Kezar and Lester 2009). The face-to-face, peer-led learning offered by the SEED project provides a different model to online and blended equality and diversity training modules and toolkits that can indisputably reach more staff with greater cost efficiency. However, as one participant on the Sheffield SEED project puts it:

‘so often we are in our own ‘bubble’ and day-to-day interactions are very territory based. It was reassuring to find out that a lot of the issues we have are widespread but also to learn about each other’s work and interact...’

SEED Sheffield participant

By bringing people from all faculties together, each bearing unique experiences, skills and positions of influence and power, the SEED project aimed to use the acumen of the group to motivate and sustain ripple-effect change. It is too early to tell exactly the long-term impact of SEED Sheffield. Nevertheless, research into the effectiveness of guild approaches to grassroots leadership in American universities suggests that if institutional environments are receptive to the work of the project (and projects have the endorsement of influential supporters who can use their social capital to mobilise support in overcoming obstacles), then this approach can be highly effective in building critical mass to support change on a wide, inclusive and sustainable platform.
In addition to the requirement to construct a framework for the SEED project that would be legible (and credible) when read through the lens of the institution, I was also mindful of the need to ensure that the content of the programme reflected the experience and interests of staff working in a British university and would be accessible to participants with different forms of prior experience with equality and diversity discourses. The challenge of meeting the diversity of the group can be seen in the different responses of the participants to the content and expectations of the programme: for example, attending ‘opened my eyes and [has] given me the words to articulate injustice within the university’. For others who had already undertaken training in equality and diversity the programme was expected to be a ‘refresher –...[but] I found out there was much I really did not know or understand’. Contrarily, for some participants the use of ‘jargon’ and ‘abstract’ terminology was a hindrance rather than a help in conceptualising the aims of the workshops. One area for improvement next year is to ensure that, as a facilitator, my instructions and descriptions are composed with absolute clarity of expression so that I am not stymying the full participation of all colleagues including those for whom English may not be their primary language.

In order to provide materials that would be stimulating and enriching for the varied interests of the cohort, I designed a private area of the Sheffield SEED website to host critical materials to include peer-reviewed articles, practical reflective exercises as well as a range of online videos and films synthesising a short introduction to the topic. The eclectic range of resources appealed to participants who valued the opportunity to dip in and out of the site depending on time constraints, and it functioned as a mechanism for enabling ongoing learning.

The development of the private area of the website was supported by the Sheffield SEED graduate assistant Alex Mason. Alex sourced research materials, wrote a blog about the project on the public area of the site and provided a crucial student perspective on the content and pedagogy of the programme. Alex also undertook his own research project evaluating the efficacy of social media as a tool for engaging students in conversations about equality and diversity as part of a work placement module offered to MA students in the school of English (Sheffield SEED was the project partner). Alex was instrumental in providing
feedback after each workshop and helping me to evaluate and develop my practice as a group facilitator.

Attendance at the New Leaders SEED training does not result in the bestowing of a SEED programme manual – although many SEED-trained leaders share resources through social media and via the private area of the SEED website. One practical consequence of this is the significant impact on the facilitator’s workload and my work was possible only through support for buy-out of scheduled teaching time. On the other hand, the absence of predetermined session outcomes (although challenging in the context of evidential institutional drivers that require proof of impact) served as a reminder for leaders to allow peer-led reflective learning to structure and determine content and outputs. Similar to Tange and Kastberg’s description of ‘double knowing’ as representative of enriching learning potential of heterogeneous knowledge paradigms in an internationalised classroom (Tange and Kastberg 2013), the SEED sessions aimed to introduce a range of dissonant perspectives in order to encourage participants to view inclusion and equality across different knowledge systems and to identify their own goals and objectives for embedding inclusivity. Although discussion and structured conversation were central to the method of the SEED sessions, participants were also encouraged to identify practical steps to action so that colleagues could envision how their work could and does matter. The introduction of accountability and agency aimed to reduce the sense of inertia and powerlessness experienced by participants when faced with looking at how to influence change from within a hierarchical institution. It also responds to ongoing concerns within anti-racist scholarship about the importance of retaining activism as counter-balance to the confessional pedagogy of white privilege (Lensmire et al 2013).

Just as the lack of programme manual served as a reminder of the requirement to synthesise inclusive pedagogy and content, so too did some participants resist the focus on self-reflection in their expectations that SEED would provide expertise and instruction in the practice of inclusive teaching and curriculum design. Instead, the first five sessions focused mainly on thinking about how our own values, biases and life experiences structure our responses to key topics and in turn influence our approach to our students and our work. The topics in focus during these workshops included exploring ideas about diversity (in the age
of neo-liberalism), gender equity, institutional racism, privilege and power, and intersectional identities (including class and disability). Only in the last two workshops, when we moved to explore knowledge production in the academy and curriculum phase theory, did we build on the shifts in personal development to attend to an explicit concentration on modifying our professional practice. By modelling the balance of academic scholarship with personal experience, and by structuring the programme as an intentional dialogue between professional and personal development, the SEED project also aimed to support, recognise and value student participation in the making of curricula. Many of the participants on the project grasped this implicit link and brought the methodology of the SEED project into their classrooms to, as one participant puts it, ‘incorporate more learning activities that involve students discovering the material for themselves.’ The structure of the workshop content (from exploring narratives of diversity, difference and educational systems to looking at curriculum and pedagogy) aimed to map onto the cognitive and emotional shift within participants as new ways of thinking prompted openness to changing behaviours and workplace practices.

Potential impact and next steps

The impact stories from participants on the project suggest that the SEED model shows potential for the following as outcomes for developing competencies in equality and diversity:

- increased confidence to challenge inequality in the workplace
- renewed motivation to work for greater inclusivity
- establishment of networks of allies across the university
- development of greater mindfulness, self-awareness, cognition and ability to see systems and practices of inequality and privilege in the workplace and beyond
- transferrable skills acquisition, particularly using methods and exercises from the SEED session for training and teaching other colleagues/students
- enhancement of teaching practice, changing approaches to assessment and seminar teaching to make more inclusive and accessible
- establishment of new research collaborations
The Sheffield SEED project on inclusive curriculum has been awarded repeat funding for next year (Spring 2016), and a group of participants from the pilot programme will help oversee the planning and development of its next iteration. Coming through clearly in the feedback from the evaluation is the overriding sense that the value, and potential, of the SEED programme is in its participants’ active realisation that:

‘learning mostly comes through reflection, challenging your own views, changing yourself, and that the programme will not be about... giving tips on how to make your lectures more accessible.’

SEED Sheffield participant

This valuable synthesis of the objectives of SEED illustrates neatly, and redresses, some of the criticisms aimed at existing approaches to the professionalisation of diversity management and staff competency training. Accessing toolkits and professional development programmes that share best practices in inclusive teaching and learning is a valuable mechanism for promoting inclusivity in the university and constitutes a fantastic resource for staff. The Sheffield SEED project aims to complement this excellent work by providing a space within the university to think critically about ourselves, identify inequitable practices within the institution that continue to reproduce inequalities and widen educational attainments, and to work together with others to influence change.
References


Introduction

This paper details the development, implementation and evaluation of an innovative staff learning and development programme in equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) at Nottingham Trent University (NTU).

With the development of NTU’s staff EDI learning and development programme, called ‘equality and dignity at NTU’, the university has moved away from a deficit model of EDI learning and development, which focused mainly on knowledge acquisition around minimal legislative requirements, to a model designed to enable staff to develop core competencies in EDI.

The paper will explore the process by which ‘equality and dignity at NTU’ was developed and implemented, the challenges faced and evidence suggesting that this approach has resulted in the development of a university-wide capability in EDI that is enabling staff at NTU to proactively embed equality considerations into their day-to-day activities.

Equality and dignity at Nottingham Trent University: a core competency approach to staff learning and development in equality, diversity and inclusion

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Key words: core competencies; dignity; diversity; equality; staff development

Abstract

This paper details Nottingham Trent University’s approach to building organisational capability in equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) through the creation of an innovative staff learning and development programme. It explores the rationale behind the programme’s development, explaining why the university moved from a compliance and knowledge acquisition approach to a core competency-based approach. The paper describes the implementation of the programme, the challenges faced and the impact it has had. It illustrates how the approach taken aimed to equip staff to be effective and confident in embedding equality, diversity and inclusion throughout the teaching cycle and how it has resulted in the development of university-wide EDI capability.
Nottingham Trent University

Nottingham Trent University is a vibrant place to study and work enriched by the diversity of perspectives, cultures and backgrounds of its students, staff, visitors and local communities. The university’s 2015–2020 strategic plan embraces this diversity in outlining NTU’s commitment to ‘Creating the University of the Future’.

Core EDI principles and aligned values are evident throughout the key themes, ambitions and actions of the plan, perhaps seen most clearly in the strategy’s ‘empowering people’ theme. Here, the university makes explicit its commitment to inclusion:

‘We will ensure an environment of dignity, inclusivity, and equality of opportunity where colleagues are respected and valued for who they are and the contributions they make.’

NTU strategic plan

A snapshot of NTU’s staff and student equality profile is relevant here. In 2013/2014, NTU had over 25,000 students, of whom over 5000 were postgraduates. Non-UK students made up over 10 per cent of the student body. 55.1 per cent of all NTU’s enrolled students were female and 30.5 per cent of all NTU’s full-time enrolled students were BME.

The university employed over 4000 staff, and women comprised the majority of staff at NTU at 54.9 per cent. 7.4 per cent of UK national staff at NTU, who disclosed their ethnicity, were BME.

Review of EDI organisational capability at NTU

In 2009, an internal review was carried out into the university’s organisational capability in EDI to deliver on its vision to create an inspirational inclusive learning and working environment. The review concluded that while there were identifiable pockets of specialist equality and diversity knowledge and practice – for example, in the EDI team and in student support services – university-wide capability in EDI was needed to enable staff to proactively embed equality considerations into their day-to-day activities whatever their role. So, while the university was meeting its statutory responsibilities, the review assessed that it was not adequately equipped to meet its own internal equality-related

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3 http://www.ntu.ac.uk/strategy/ [last accessed 24.10.2015].
aspirations and goals. The EDI challenges faced by NTU at this time were in many ways those of the higher education sector in general. For example, while the student and staff bodies at NTU are very diverse, there was limited evidence of an awareness of the practical implications, challenges and opportunities of this diversity for all aspects of the student experience life cycle. Also, securing genuine staff engagement with EDI is often very challenging, with preconceptions and experiences about this being a ‘specialist area’, coupled with concerns about limited resource and full workloads.

The sector at the time was identifying and reporting on concerns around dignity at work for higher education staff, with increasing awareness about perceived bullying and harassment in the workplace. This concern was also evident among staff at NTU, and a focus on dignity emerged as a key issue from the review. Overtly acknowledging and addressing the importance of dignity at work was challenging, but emerged as one of the strengths of NTU’s approach.

The review identified ways in which EDI considerations could be embedded throughout the day-to-day life of the university, including equality information reporting, equality objectives, and equality analysis. It also emphasised the importance of having an effective infrastructure in place to support the embedding of EDI throughout the organisation. Finally, the review proposed the development of a staff learning and development programme specifically designed to build organisational capability in EDI.

Following the conclusion of the review, the university took the decision to invest in the development, design and delivery of a bespoke EDI programme. This programme would need to understand and reflect the contextual needs of NTU and be flexible enough to accommodate the internal differences of the university’s nine schools and its range of professional services areas.

The university already had an EDI staff learning and development programme in place delivered by an external law firm and comprising a set of modules relating to the protected characteristics of disability, race and gender. The focus of these modules was on compliance training. To date, this approach has not been effective in supporting or enabling the university to build genuine organisational capability in EDI.
A full-time EDI learning and development officer was appointed. They were given time to analyse the findings of the review, and to understand the future needs of the organisation and the wider sector. This analysis, which included consultation with a wide range of NTU stakeholders including senior management and staff on the ground, was crucial to the subsequent programme design and development. It also coincided with the consultation and preparatory activities around the Equality Act 2010, an important platform with which to align NTU’s EDI work.

From this analysis and consultation, the conclusion was reached that for staff to be adequately equipped to proactively embed equality considerations in their respective day-to-day activities, a competency-based approach to EDI was required. A competency-based learning and development programme in EDI, with a specific focus on dignity, was proposed and developed.

This was about more than developing an EDI knowledge base. It was about developing understanding and competence of EDI at an individual level as well as the confidence to apply this flexibly within the job role. This approach recognised that some legislative understanding was still required. It was proposed that a mix of knowledge acquisition, development of individual core competencies and an opportunity to apply these competencies contextually was best suited to a blended learning approach.

The programme designed initially comprised two core modules:

- Equality and dignity at NTU
- Managing equality and dignity at NTU

Both modules consist of a two-hour online element focusing on key legislation, general principles and examples of application within higher education learning and employment. This is followed by a two-hour face-to-face workshop in which the three core competencies are introduced, explored by the learning group, and applied by them to their role. This opportunity for NTU staff to contextualise their learning within their work function was key to the success of the programme.
The identified core competencies relevant to the sector, and more specifically to NTU, are:

- Knowledge and understanding of key EDI legislation and principles.
- Awareness and respect for difference
- Behaviour based on dignity and respect

The first core competency, knowledge and understanding, recognises that a level of knowledge of the legislative framework, underlying principles and NTU policies is needed to understand equality and diversity in the higher education learning and working environment. The second core competency places a respect for diversity at the heart of all NTU activities both in terms of understanding and meeting individual needs in a context that acknowledges and respects a range of different perspectives and also in terms of how individuals work with colleagues. The third core competency relates to the university’s recognition of the importance of behaviour in determining the organisational culture as well as, ultimately, the inclusivity and effectiveness of the working and learning environments.

The programme was trialled in two areas, an academic school and a professional services area. From this trial, the face-to-face workshop was refined and the programme then rolled out across the university.

The approach taken to rolling out the programme was to train the senior management teams in each area through the ‘Managing equality and dignity at NTU’ module. Then the rest of the staff in that area completed ‘equality and dignity at NTU’. This enabled senior managers to consider the practical contextual applications of the core competencies within their area and to identify what they expected to be the key equality and diversity challenges and opportunities for their wider team.

It also encouraged buy-in from senior managers by giving them the opportunity to shape the contextual emphasis and application of ‘equality and dignity at NTU’ for their teams and provided a safe, facilitated space for each senior team to explore the equality challenges faced. This also helped the EDI learning and development officer to identify expected key issues and potential barriers, and
to determine the pitch – and ultimately effectiveness – of the training for the rest of the staff in each area.

The core competencies were the same in every session, but the contextualisation could vary enormously in terms of what delegates identified as their key equality challenges and opportunities.

The rollout of the ‘equality and dignity at NTU’ programme to all academic and professional services staff across the university began in 2010 and was completed in 2014. 2894 staff were trained in the core module or its equivalent, and of these over 400 have completed the ‘managing equality and dignity at NTU’ module.

As a result of an in-depth understanding of the issues being raised at the face-to-face workshops, a number of key areas of further support were identified and two additional modules were developed as part of the learning and development programme:

- ‘Dignity at work: awareness and good practice’
- ‘Communicating with care’

During the course of rolling out the core programme, specific initiatives emerged requiring bespoke equality and diversity training. Hence, other modules were also developed including:

- ‘Equality and diversity for REF 2014’
- ‘Equality impact assessment training’
- ‘The practical implications of equality and diversity for the PgCHE’

Further bespoke learning and development interventions to help teams work through particular challenges supplemented these.

The core rollout has also led to teams requesting to work with the EDI team on specific equality-related projects, such as equality implications for international placements and supporting trans staff and students.

The monetary cost of delivering this programme is less than 50 per cent of the cost of the previous learning and development programme delivered by an external partner, and the benefits, as evidenced in the next section, have had a substantial impact on NTU.
Evidence of impact

Measuring impact and establishing causality are notoriously difficult in EDI. As such, our approach to evaluating, measuring impact and establishing clear information around return on investment had to be multifaceted and remains open so as to accommodate or apply any developments around measuring impact in EDI in the future.

All delegates evaluate the core equality and diversity module at the end of the session. This provides initial feedback on the relevance and effectiveness of the module as measured against the learning objectives. Further, in a group exercise, included in every session, delegates identify key challenges and opportunities in relation to EDI and dignity for them as individuals and as organisational teams. This information is anonymised and held by the EDI team and has proven a very useful insight into EDI at NTU. It has enabled us to identify key issues and specific challenges, and it has come to influence development of our equality and diversity provision.

While this initial evaluation is useful, it is limited to the reaction of delegates to the specific session. Using Kirkpatrick’s Four-Level Training Evaluation Model, the knowledge and application test at the end of the online element of the module, combined with the evaluation carried out at the end of the face-to-face sessions, can only measure reaction and learning (knowledge). Deeper evaluation of impact is notoriously difficult in EDI learning and development and other types of EDI interventions but it is crucial in determining the impact and return on investment of NTU’s learning and development programme. What was needed beyond evaluating reaction and knowledge was a more in-depth evaluation of impact (in terms of behaviour or the application of what has been learned in delegates’ day-to-day roles) and tangible results in terms of measuring the learning objectives the training was designed to deliver.

So, while recognising the inherent difficulties in designing effective tools for deeper evaluation, in 2014 when the rollout of the core programme across all areas of the university was complete, the programme was evaluated through a university-wide staff survey. The survey return rate was 44 per cent. Of the

respondents, 82.53 per cent had attended at least one of the training modules, despite them, at that point, not being mandatory. The high rate of return in itself can be taken as an indicator of the significant level of engagement of NTU staff with the learning and development programme.

Of those responding to the survey, 91.82 per cent indicated that the programme had been useful in their role, with 36.5 per cent indicating ‘extremely’ or ‘very’ useful. This supported a key design principle of the programme: for it to be contextually relevant to each delegate’s individual role at NTU.

Respondents were asked about positive changes in behaviour and actions since attending the core training. Here, 28.34 per cent indicated positive changes in their own behaviour and 20 per cent indicated positive changes in colleagues’ behaviour and provided examples of this. Qualitative responses indicated increased awareness and discussion around EDI topics and increased levels of consideration, attitudes, language and confidence to challenge negative behaviour. The survey revealed concrete examples of evidence of embedded EDI in the day-to-day life of the university. These included:

- establishing events and activities to promote women in the built environment
- increased sensitivity to inclusivity in designing student materials
- EDI being applied to the style and delivery of field trips

A number of staff indicated that change to attitudes and beliefs takes time, which reflects an underlying premise of the learning and development programme: that to genuinely embed EDI principles is a journey. There is no quick fix. 71 per cent of respondents requested additional EDI related training, suggesting that the core ‘equality and dignity at NTU’ programme had altered people’s perception of EDI training from an ‘I’ve been told to do it’ to an ‘I can see the value of it’.

In addition to the survey, there have been a number of other indicators that have evidenced the embedding of EDI into core university activity and the development of organisational capability in EDI. For example, the use of the university’s dispute resolutions services has increased. In particular, there has been
an increase in the use of the harassment advice service and the mediation service. At the same time, there has been a fall in the number of formal staff grievances around allegations of bullying, harassment or discrimination. While direct causality cannot be assumed, there is much to suggest that staff are moving to earlier informal interventions, that they have an increased understanding of the options available to them, and that they are taking personal responsibility for resolution of workplace conflict. There has also been an increase in proactive EDI queries relating to work activities and services.

Some staff have requested that the online element of the core module be made available to NTU students. This is for a number of reasons, including the relevance of the content of the module to curricula content and general awareness of the value of the module to employability.

**Conclusions**

NTU’s commitment to establishing and maintaining an inclusive and inspirational learning and working environment was evidenced in the decision it made to develop its own in-house equality, diversity and inclusion staff learning and development programme in 2009. The journey since that decision was made has, at times, inevitably been challenging. All staff in attending the core module are given a consistent message about equality, diversity, dignity and respect at NTU. The way in which that message is delivered may differ for relevance and understanding, but the fundamental message is always the same.

The university, in recognising the value and impact of the EDI learning and development programme has now made the core ‘equality and dignity at NTU’ module mandatory for all new starters, to be completed within six months of joining the university. This in itself is a strong indication of the value that the organisation has come to place on the programme in supporting staff to contribute to NTU’s environment of dignity and inclusivity for staff and students.

Also, the requests from NTU staff for more EDI training, alongside increased queries relating to improving inclusive provision, signifies a recognition by NTU staff that EDI considerations are genuinely part of the academic discourse around pedagogy and student success.
Section A: Staff development for equality and diversity in learning and teaching

EDI is now seen as integral to NTU’s success. The university’s 2015–2020 strategic plan is clear on the university’s commitment to ensuring that student provision at NTU is relevant, accessible and inclusive. There is also clear appetite among both academic and professional services staff for further EDI core competence development in specific areas, such as inclusive curricula and managing disability and reasonable adjustments confidently.

There is strong evidence to suggest that the staff programme, with its blended learning approach and focus on the development of EDI core competencies at an individual level, has helped NTU to build EDI capability at an organisational level, which in turn is enabling staff to proactively embed equality considerations in their NTU roles. NTU is more EDI literate and equality-related considerations are present and embedded as part of the day-to-day business of the university. As such, the university is better equipped not just to ensure that it remains compliant with equalities legislation, but also to deliver on its own EDI goals and commitments.
Section B: Lessons from the coalface: supporting inclusivity

Confessions of an accidental inclusivist

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Key words: community of practice; inclusive assessment; patchwork test (PT); reflection; student engagement

Abstract

Patchwork text (PT) is growing in popularity within the higher education sector worldwide and is seen as ‘one of the most influential assessment innovations in higher education in recent years’ (Dalrymple and Smith 2008: 47). While PT is not new in higher education, little has been written about the inclusivist aspects of this type of assessment. This paper hopes to shed light on PT as an inclusive assessment strategy. The paper provides a number of confessions written as patches exploring not only the inclusive aspects of PT, but also how it relates to assessment for learning as well as providing an overview of what PT is. The final reflective patch will discuss the learning journey relating to the implementation of PT into modules and provide recommendations for practice.

Introduction

‘The assessment of students is a serious and often tragic enterprise.’
Ramsden 1992: 181

Much has been written in relation to poor assessment practice in higher education. Traditional forms of theoretical academic assessment within HEIs tend to focus around essays or examinations, for which students can be found to focus on passing the module (learning for assessment) and perhaps ‘playing the system’. Such an approach uses surface learning rather than deep, meaningful and active learning, the latter of which is described rather as assessment for learning (Biggs 1999; Winter 2003). I stumbled across patchwork text (PT) on a colleague’s module and thought it was worth reviewing as an alternative method of assessment, especially as I wanted to encourage assessment for learning. Winter, the early advocate of PT states:
'The essence of a patchwork is that it consists of a variety of small sections, each of which is complete in itself, and that the overall unity of these component sections, although planned in advance, is finalized retrospectively, when they are 'stitched together.'”

Winter 2003: 112

I thought it would be relatively easy to change the assessment strategy; after all, it involved moving from a 3000-word essay to four short pieces of work totalling 3000 words. Little did I know that it would change the way I look at my role as an educator in higher education. While not exactly new in higher education, PT is now an integral part of a number of modules within the University of Central Lancashire’s school of health sciences. This paper discusses one academic’s journey on the implementation of the introduction of PT through a number of confessions written as patches.

My biggest confession is that the introduction of PT had nothing to do with implementing inclusive assessment, but rather stemmed from a desire to improve student engagement with my modules. While, as a ‘professional academic,’ one who is attentive to the scholarship of teaching and learning, I pay attention to teaching, to learning styles, to student support as well as assessment and feedback including formative feedback, I felt something was missing from the student involvement/experience on these modules. These have a diverse range of content, yet when a student would select a specific topic for their essay, the breadth of the student’s application and management of knowledge could not be fully demonstrated. This was because the student focused their 3000-word essay on a very specific topic area while attempting to achieve the module learning outcomes. Depth of knowledge was achievable; however, breadth of knowledge was less evident. Students often appeared to disengage with other equally relevant module content so that they could concentrate on the topic they had selected for the assessment (learning for assessment), which was often something within their familiarity or comfort zone. The assessment strategy was amended to PT since, this way, the students were required to engage with modules in a different manner, and to demonstrate the application of the breadth of their theoretical knowledge as well as critically examine their clinical practice both in and out of their comfort zone.
PT embraces assessment for learning. Its introduction led to an increasing awareness that the way we assess our students makes a difference to how they learn and engage with their modules/programmes of study. Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006) suggest that the more the students see what they are accomplishing through formative feedback, the more they actively engage in their learning; consequently, there is increased self-regulation of their own performance. Trevelyan and Wilson (2012: 488) reiterate the importance of assessment for learning by identifying assessment as ‘becoming more central in the learning process’.

You may be wondering what makes PT an inclusive assessment strategy. When taking an inclusive approach, there should be no distinction between students – disabled or non-disabled (here we use inclusive with regard to disability; we recognise its applicability to all protected characteristics and, indeed, all students). Rather, a flexible method to teaching and learning should be undertaken (Waterfield and West 2006). The work of Dalrymple and Smith (2008) discusses the autonomy and flexibility of PT, which links with taking an inclusive approach. Students can choose how they present their patches, described as different ‘voices’ by Trevelyan and Wilson (2012). This enables students to work with their learning styles. According to Waterfield and West (2006; 2009), an inclusive approach or principles of universal design should consider a flexible range of assessment modes that are made available to all. When comparing PT text with an inclusive approach, we can identify many similarities as outlined in table 1.
Table 1: Inclusive assessment according to Waterfield and West (2009) compared with PT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inclusive assessment definitions</th>
<th>Patchwork text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inclusive assessment makes no arbitrary distinction between types of student: disabled and non-disabled, traditional and non-traditional, etc.</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In inclusive assessment, the issue of disability dissolves into the broader paradigms of student learning styles and experiences and how best to measure individual achievement.</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclusive assessment offers flexibility of assessment choice, including a range of tried and tested methods for assessing competence in a rigorous and reliable way, built into course design and subject to student and staff evaluation</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student preferences for assessment modes, based upon their own perceived strengths and weaknesses, form a key component of making assessment inclusive.</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Using the principles of universal design allows for the assessment of the same learning outcomes in different ways through different types of patches. For example, one student may submit an annotated bibliography to address nursing care implications of a disorder, and another may submit a poster with a rationale for the content addressing the same learning outcome for the same condition. Another aspect of the inclusive nature of PT is identified within its continuous learning perspective. Many students with specific learning difficulties (SpLDs) have difficulties with time management; in PT, the patches are regulated over the course of the module allowing students time to digest their learning (Winter 2003).

PT text also allows for creativity. If a student submits a poster, it is the rationale/evidence base behind the content of the poster that is assessed; the poster would be an appendix to the patch. This academic year, one of the students created a patient information leaflet in graphic novel form for a condition called...
Section B: Lessons from the coalface: supporting inclusivity

I stumbled upon PT on a colleague’s module; I thought it was interesting and perhaps what I needed for teaching. I had some conversations about PT before I took the plunge to change the assessment strategy. I confess I was naive to think that changing the assessment strategy and a little bit of messing with the timetable was all I needed to do. I came a little bit unstuck – especially as my colleague had left their post and I did not have an ‘expert’ or anyone who was remotely familiar with PT with whom to discuss issues arising from planning and implementation.

Table 2: The big five principles of assessment for learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principle</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The provision of effective feedback to students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The active involvement of students in their own learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Adjusting teaching to take account of the results of assessment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Recognition of the profound influence assessment has on the motivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and self-esteem of students, both of which are critical influences on learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. The need for students to be able to assess themselves and understand how to improve.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Orr and Bachmann-Hammig, 2009) view inclusive curricula from a different perspective, where students with disabilities are seen as part of a continuum of learners with various strengths and weaknesses; as such, it is the lecturer that needs ‘fixing’ through pedagogical change. Indeed, the teaching and learning strategy must change for successful implementation of PT. This leads me to confession number two.
It was rather a case of me having a vague vision of what I believed PT to be, and then testing it out on my students. Yes, I had researched PT, and believed it would not be too difficult to implement. After all, it was ‘only’ a change in assessment with some formative feedback and discussion on the patches throughout the module. On reflection, I would have benefited greatly from a definitive ‘how to’ paper on PT. Such a paper has now been published by Trevelyan and Wilson (2012). This paper identifies the objectives of PT (adapted in table 3) in what I would define as one of the seminal papers on the assessment approach.

**Table 3: Objectives of PTs adapted from Trevelyan and Wilson (2012)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objectives</th>
<th>What it means in the classroom/online discussion board activity</th>
<th>What this mean for the student</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Continuous learning</td>
<td>Student engagement and learning – the patches are regulated over the course of the module allowing students time to digest their learning (Winter 2003).</td>
<td>= Reduction in pressure at the end of the module.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>= Allows students to demonstrate the breadth of their knowledge: a comprehensive coverage of the module elements (Trevelyan and Wilson 2012).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deep learning</td>
<td>Students are prepared to debate and challenge issues in the classroom setting as a result of their deep learning of a topic.</td>
<td>The student’s understanding of the topic is increased, particularly through the use of reflection on formative feedback from the lecturer and their peers. They can then reinforce their understanding in their own individual areas of weakness (Boud 2000).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrated understanding of a topic</td>
<td>Students develop a better understanding of the structure and content of the module through linking session outcomes to the module outcomes and their PT.</td>
<td>The final patch, where there is ‘integration of the whole’, also allows for deep learning to take place.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meta-cognitive self-reflection on the learning journey</td>
<td>Self-assessment and self-reflection are vital aspects of formative assessment: discussion of the formative feedback on the patches with peers helps with self-assessment and self-reflection.</td>
<td>As healthcare practitioners, students on the modules are required to be reflective practitioners and the quality of the reflection improves over the course of the module.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I came to realise that changing the assessment strategy was not enough: there needs to be careful deliberation of pedagogical approaches. I became better prepared in the second year of incorporating PT into my modules, at which time I was at a level of conscious incompetence, moving from unconscious incompetence in the first year and to conscious competence a year later.

For me, PT enables students to write small, complete patches of assessment. These, in themselves, are complete and must focus on different aspects of the module. When PT is introduced to the students on the first day of the module, there is apprehension since this is very often an assessment strategy with which they have little or no experience. Examples of types of patches can be found in figure 1.

The patches can be developed from structured learning activities that are lecturer led. The specific topics or focus, however, are student led to ensure a student centredness to the assessment strategy in order to enhance both patient care and personal learning/personal development planning (PDP). This brings in student empowerment and also allows individual students to personally engage in their learning by linking the specific module learning outcomes to the assessment process. This could be seen as ‘learning as making sense or abstracting meaning. Learning involves relating parts of the subject matter to each other and to the real world’ (Säljö 1979, cited in Atherton 2013). Many students select topics that we are yet to cover in the module. This means that when we actually review the topic, they are very much engaged in the classroom with the issues, sharing and contributing to the session. The patches are then stitched together with a retrospective reflection and analysis of the student’s personal learning journey throughout the module (Scoggins and Winter 1999).
Trevelyan and Wilson (2012) identify a number of key issues that academic staff should be aware of in relation to PT. They call them core and optional elements; I would suggest to those who intend to utilise PT in their courses, the need to be fully cognisant of the core and optional elements. A number of different subject specialisms, from dance to Greek tragedy, social work to community nursing have used PT as a method of assessment by employing the objectives of PT; however, the core and optional elements vary within these and this is where confusion arises (Dalrymple and Smith 2008; Trevelyan and Wilson 2012).
## Table 4: Core and optional elements of PTs adapted from Trevelyan and Wilson (2012)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Core elements</th>
<th>Rationale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Multiple assessment tasks</td>
<td>= Permits for continuous assessment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>= Multiple formative feedback.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>= Deep learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>= ‘If assessment is to be integral to learning, feedback must be at the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>heart of the process’ (Brown 2004/5).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacing of tasks</td>
<td>= Permits for continuous assessment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>= Deep learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>= No ‘last minute rush’ as the ‘hard work’ has been done gradually</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>throughout the module (Learning and skills improvement service and Anglia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ruskin University 2010).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>= Reflexivity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integration of work into a comprehensive</td>
<td>= Deep learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>whole</td>
<td>= Integrated understanding of the topic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>= Reflexivity.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Section B: Lessons from the coalface: supporting inclusivity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Optional elements</strong></th>
<th><strong>Rationale</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Flow of patches into each other</td>
<td>= for example, this could be used for project-based modules;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>= alternatively, the patches may be very different, but then ‘stitched together’ by the final integrative reflective patch.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resubmission of prior patches</td>
<td>= feedforward from feedback;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>= allows for self-regulation of performance (Nicol and Mcfarlane-Dick 2006).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provision of summative feedback before the final submission</td>
<td>= allows the students to see where they are with the PT.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extent to which the students collaborate and share learning</td>
<td>= establishes a community of practice within the module;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>= helps with self-assessment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explicitness of self-reflection</td>
<td>= whether a reflexive piece is needed or whether the reflexive piece is implicit in the formation of the final integrative patch.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meta-cognitive self-reflection on the learning journey</td>
<td>= reflexivity;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>= self-regulation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The use of patches of different format or ‘voice’</td>
<td>= an inclusive assessment strategy;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>= variety of patches allows students to develop key transferable and academic writing skills (Learning and skills improvement service and Anglia Ruskin University 2010; Bevitt 2012).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The extent to which students have choice over the patches to complete and in what order</td>
<td>= To empower the student. For me they need to have choice over patches. This allows for student-centred assessment – once they have self-assessed weaknesses in their knowledge base. Some limits may need to be set so that there is variety in the types of PT.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>= This relates to the drive towards empowering the learner in assessment designs (Falchikov and Thompson 2008).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I would also add to the optional elements peer review/support via online discussion board activity. This is a method of collaboration and sharing of learning. This also, in itself, establishes a community of practice for the students as well as the lecturer. As Wenger (2007) states:

‘Communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly.’

Students on my modules have complete control over the type and topic of PT as well as in what order they wish to complete them. Other colleagues are more prescriptive. Although a more prescriptive approach does still fulfil the core elements of PT, the level of student empowerment is limited and one must bear in mind that when student empowerment is limited it will impact on engagement with the module (Young 2015).

This final patch will use Rolfe’s reflection model (Rolfe et al 2001) of ‘what, so what and now what’ to critically reflect on my learning journey of implementing PT assessment.

**What?**

Patch/confession one identified my concerns relating to the feeling that there was something missing with regard to student involvement/engagement with some of my modules. As a reflective practitioner, I sensed I needed to change an aspect of the module to try and enhance learning. PT was the avenue that I explored and identified as one way of improving student engagement with the modules. There was some naivety on my part, as I believed that it would be a simple transaction – changing the assessment strategy and slight modification of the timetable. You cannot change one aspect of the module: all aspects including teaching, learning, support, assessment and feedback have to be reviewed. As there was no definitive how to guide about PT, I did feel as if I was stepping into the unknown on many occasions.
So what?

PT was integrated into a module. After an uneasy first year, where my learning curve was almost vertical, I began to critically examine and evaluate what I was doing and why I was doing it from a pedagogical perspective. I arrived at the awakening that, for me, the learning journey is equally important as the destination or the summative assessment as it should be for students.

I noticed that PT encouraged deep rather than surface learning. This was evidenced by an increase in the grades for the modules and an increased pass rate. The grades have not increased because PT is an easy option; they have increased because the level of engagement and student empowerment within the module has increased.

An area that students initially found problematic was the choice of the type of patch rather than the topic. Students appeared to like the familiarity of the traditional methods of assessment such as the essay, which is traditionally dictated by the lecturer. At first, the choice that PT allows was daunting. For me, it was about a rebalancing of power and authority in the classroom. This also links closely to assessment for learning and the inclusive nature of PT (table 2). Further, while the PT text enhances learning, it should not be seen in isolation: the philosophy behind this assessment strategy also encourages the lecturer to review aspects of their teaching, learning and support. As figure 2 demonstrates, and as my learning journey has recognised, you cannot change the assessment without due consideration to pedagogy.
PT, when fully assimilated into modules, is a ‘thing of beauty’ that enhances learning and therefore the student experience. I would recommend anyone considering implementing PT to do the following.

- Do your homework about PT: read the literature to give you some background/context.
- See it working in practice and take a colleague.
- Ask the students what they think of it.
- Reflect on what you have seen/heard.
- Decide what you want as optional elements of PT and clarify why you have selected those elements.
= Discuss PT with your colleagues.
= Link with someone who has embedded it into their courses.
= Use them as a sounding board and mentor.
= Identify your aims and objectives.
= Plan the changes – remember it is not only the assessment you will change.
= Consider content, scheduling, learning outcomes, learning activities, formative feedback, student support (and how/what you will implement these).
= Implement PT into your module, providing clear guidance to students.
= Evaluate: have you achieved what you set out to achieve?
= Write it up to support the building of a body of evidence.

As a reflective practitioner who is constantly considering what I can do to improve the student experience, there is always capacity for change. For me, the next step is to incorporate patchwork media (Arnold et al) into patch type. I would be keen for students to use media such as podcasts/vidcasts for patches, though I acknowledge that I would need to actively encourage students to believe in their abilities to make this type of submission less daunting. Such incorporation would, however, enhance the inclusivity of PT.


Learning from non-medical helpers to develop inclusive practice guides

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Key words: best practice guidelines; disability; inclusivity; non-medical helpers; student anxiety

Abstract

This paper reports on the findings of a qualitative research project examining untapped knowledge that non-medical helpers (NMHs) have developed for supporting students with declared disabilities. Although student voices are represented in the literature (eg Fuller et al 2004), those of NMHs are rarely heard. Their insight provided authentic information; the assumption being that they are more detached than students, and hence more objective.

The aim was to identify challenges and examples of good practice experienced by NMHs and their students. Simple ‘good practice’ guides were then developed for staff. Making the material palatable and useful rather than too rigorous and demanding was prioritised.

Qualitative data were collected from NMHs via an online survey and two focus groups. Findings highlight the desire for discretion, and anxiety as an over-arching issue irrespective of the condition. Lack of quiet space and difficulties with timetabling, group work and documentation were also revealed.

Introduction

Increasing levels of participation in higher education has been the goal of successive UK governments, and a variety of policies, approaches and practices have been effective in widening access and supporting student success (HEFCE 2010). The term inclusivity is now used to explore ways in which different so-called non-traditional groups can participate in higher education including students whose parents did not attend university, students from lower income households, students identified as BME, mature students, international students and disabled students, including students with SpLDs. Hockings (2010) defines inclusive practice as:
‘Inclusive teaching and learning in higher education refers to the ways in which pedagogy, curricula and assessment are designed and delivered to engage students in learning that is meaningful, relevant and accessible to all. It embraces a view of the individual and individual difference as the source of diversity that can enrich the lives and learning of others.’

Hockings 2010: 1

Widening participation initiatives (Moore et al 2013) and equality and diversity legislation in the UK (SENDA 2004, DDA 2005, Equality Act 2010), supported by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, all mean that inclusive teaching and learning practice is required throughout the higher education sector.

**Disabilities or specific learning differences**

Widening participation has been described as leading to a moral panic among those concerned with higher education (Watson 2006). Including students with disabilities has led to fears – among some staff in some institutions and subject areas – of an erosion of standards (Riddell et al 2007). However, this is a mistaken perception. Research by Jorgensen et al (2007) at a large Quebec college with students with \( n = 653 \) and without \( n = 41,357 \) disabilities found that both groups had virtually identical grades and graduation outcomes, even though students with disabilities (including SpLDs) chose courses with lighter workloads and took around one semester longer to graduate than those without. This conclusion supports earlier findings by Richardson and Roy (2002) on research with students with visual impairments in UK higher education: that there was ‘surprisingly’ little effect on academic attainment.

The UK Equality Act 2010 defines having a disability as ‘if you have a physical or mental impairment that has a ‘substantial’ and ‘long-term’ negative effect on your ability to do normal daily activities.’ The Disabled Students’ Allowance (DSA) is available for all UK higher education students on publicly funded courses who have a long-term health condition, mental health condition or specific learning difficulty. Students with assessed needs can use this funding to, for example, pay for specialist support workers, and/or specialist printing or scanning equipment.
In 2009, it was reported that the proportion of disabled students in the UK had been growing: in 2007, 25,970 students who applied through UCAS declared a disability, 20,452 of whom were accepted – 5.7 per cent and 5.6 per cent of the respective totals of applicants (DIUS 2009). This report also stated that it is difficult to say whether the increasing numbers were due to more students declaring a disability, or to an actual increase in the number of disabled students applying or being accepted to higher education.

The range of conditions included under the term disability is wide, and each has specific identifiable effects with implications for teaching and learning. The challenges for each type of condition and for each individual may have some commonality; however, each individual manifests their resulting special educational needs (SEN) in distinctly unique ways: something that is captured in the frequently used phrase, ‘once you’ve met one person with autism, you’ve met one person with autism’. This individual distinctiveness has implications for the ability to produce generic resources or guidelines for best practice around inclusivity in learning and teaching. According to the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), HEIs need to be mindful that:

‘(1) The educational disadvantage and exclusion faced by many disabled people is not an inevitable result of their impairments or health conditions, but arises from social, attitudinal and environmental barriers. Institutions ensure that in all their policies, procedures and activities, including strategic planning and resource allocation, consideration is given to the removal of such barriers in order to enable disabled students to participate in all aspects of the academic and social life of the institution.

(2) Senior managers, including those at the highest levels, lead their institution’s development of inclusive policy and practice in relation to the enhancement of disabled students’ experience across the institution.’

QAA 2010: 13 and 14

The need for support for all students, and even more so for those with diagnosed or identified conditions, exists at all stages of the
higher education student life cycle: from application and pre-registration, induction, course duration, and on graduation. All domains of the student experience also need to be addressed: in curricula, learning environments and technologies, and the wider campus and extra-curricular activities. Best practice guidelines often consist of detailed handbooks with checklists on issues such as course materials, assignment design, nomination of staff member in each faculty/school etc. (eg Waterfield and West 2002; Cavanagh and Dickinson 2006). We summarise such guidelines in box 1.

For students with assessed needs, several general principles across many conditions can be applied: for example, for inclusive curriculum design as described by Morgan and Houghton (2011), or in providing alternative forms of assessment (see TESTA n.d.). An inclusive curriculum design approach is described as being one that:

‘takes into account students’ educational, cultural and social background and experience as well as the presence of any physical or sensory impairment and their mental well-being. It enables higher education institutions (HEI) to embed quality enhancement processes that ensure an anticipatory response to equality in learning and teaching... [and one] where all students’ entitlement to access and participate in a course is anticipated, acknowledged and taken into account.’

Morgan and Houghton 2011: 5
**Box 1: Key points for SENDA compliance from Waterfield and West 2002**

- Flexible curricula give diversity for disabled students to participate and achieve.

- Disability issues should be a regular focus for staff meetings, faculty/school committees and senior management bodies for resource allocation, cascading good practice, monitoring and review.

- Inclusive practice and anticipatory ‘reasonable adjustments’ should be based on formal procedures rather than on personal interest and experience.

- The nomination of a staff member is vital in each faculty/school to act as a conduit to the disability service and as a point of reference for colleagues and students.

- Familiarisation with guidelines for positive communication and disability language etiquette is important.

- Early information and course materials need to be available in an accessible format, to allow time for modification into alternative formats, familiarisation by students or personal support workers, and early application for the DSA.

- Students should be given as many opportunities to declare disability as possible. Staff should know procedures for confidentiality and dissemination.

- Establish mechanisms for the exchange of information in a confidential and timely way within and between departments to support ‘reasonable adjustments’ for students who have declared disability at any stage.

- The support needs of disabled students should be identified and assessed during information interviews or prior to entry where possible.

- Discuss the impact of the disability on student participation. Many disabilities are invisible, newly acquired, newly diagnosed or progressive. The individual is often an expert on the consequences of their disability.

- Students should not encounter additional processes not applied to their non-disabled peers.
= Provide guidance and support prior to, during and after discrete curricula activities such as fieldwork and placement learning.

= Alternative assessment strategies should accommodate the student’s disability-related functional differences. Without this opportunity, student performance will reflect the impact of the disability rather than student ability.

= Keep adjustments under review and seek student feedback to inform practice.

However, different issues also arise for different subject areas and for different groups of students. Further, widespread perceptions exist among university staff and students that best practice is inconsistent both between and within HEIs (Gibson 2015).

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Current UK practice and the Plymouth University case study

One HEA project (May and Bridger 2010) looked at different strategies in UK HEIs, and found that, although it was impossible to have a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach, some common themes and issues in developing inclusive practice could be discerned. For example:

= concerns about reducing academic standards

= challenges of ‘reasonable adjustments’ given resource restraints

= moving academic culture away from a ‘deficit’ notion of student need to that of entitlement

= engaging senior staff

= daily demands mean that staff do not have time to digest often in-depth literature on the way forward for inclusivity measures

However, the HEIs in the same study (Thomas and May 2010) had adopted strategies that had enhanced their inclusive practice. For example, through:

= establishing the training needs of academic staff

= delivering dedicated training and development
Section B: Lessons from the coalface: supporting inclusivity

- embedding management processes to support staff in developing an inclusive approach to teaching through
  - the provision of appraisal criteria related to meeting students’ diverse learning needs
  - the refinement of module/pathway validation processes to include questions about inclusiveness in module design, delivery and assessment

- creating an inclusive teaching website resource

At Plymouth University, as elsewhere, the numbers of students with a declared disability has been growing in recent years, and in 2011/2012 comprised 12.6 per cent of the undergraduate population, as shown in table 1.

Although these numbers are not directly comparable since ECU data includes postgraduate students, it can be seen that numbers at Plymouth are relatively high compared to the national picture. To summarise the situation:

- in total, 12.6 per cent of students at Plymouth declared a disability in 2011/2012, compared with 12.3 per cent in 2010/2011
- in 2011/2012, the number of disabled students had risen by 91.4 per cent on 2001/2002
- in comparison with south west HEIs and all UK HEIs in 2010/2011, Plymouth University maintained the highest proportion of students in receipt of DSA (9.3 per cent)

As can be seen from table 1, by far the greatest numbers of students classified as having a disability are those with SpLDs, such as dyslexia or dyspraxia. Besides those who formally declare a specific learning difference, many others also experience anxieties ranging from mild anxiety to panic attacks. These affect their ability to study, as evidenced by research elsewhere (NUS Scotland 2010; Andrews and Wilding 2004).
### Table 1: Declared disabilities at Plymouth University (benchmarked against ECU 2013/2014)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disability description</th>
<th>Plymouth University</th>
<th>UK (ECU data)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2013/2014</td>
<td>2013/2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>% of all students</td>
<td>Number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A long standing illness or health condition such as cancer, HIV, diabetes, chronic heart disease, or epilepsy</td>
<td>296</td>
<td>1.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A mental health condition, such as depression, schizophrenia or anxiety disorder</td>
<td>509</td>
<td>1.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A physical impairment or mobility issues, such as difficulty using arms or using a wheelchair or crutches</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>0.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A social/communication impairment such as Asperger’s syndrome/other autistic spectrum disorder</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>0.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A specific learning difficulty such as dyslexia, dyspraxia or AD(H)D</td>
<td>1838</td>
<td>6.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blind or a serious visual impairment uncorrected by glasses</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>0.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deaf or a serious hearing impairment</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>0.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two or more impairments and/or disabling medical conditions</td>
<td>282</td>
<td>1.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A difficulty not listed above (also includes ‘personal care support’)</td>
<td>370</td>
<td>1.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Disabled Students HE</strong></td>
<td><strong>3616</strong></td>
<td><strong>13.43</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| No known disability                                                                  | 23293               | 86.54         | 2,070,140              | 90.03 |
| Not known                                                                             | 8                   | 0.03          | –                      | –     |
| Total students                                                                        | 26917               | 100.00        | 2,299,360              | 100.00 |
Building on previous research findings, a programme of research projects was developed with the aim of improving inclusive practice at Plymouth University more widely. Many of the resources from this programme are now available on a ‘one-stop’ section of the university website (https://www.plymouth.ac.uk/your-university/teaching-and-learning/inclusivity).

Our work was part of this programme. It comprised a qualitative research project examining the untapped knowledge that NMHs have developed in meeting the needs of students. The rationale underlying the project was largely two-fold:

- although student voices are represented in the literature (eg Fuller et al 2004), those of NMHs are rarely heard
- the insights of NMHs could provide authentic information; the assumption being that they are more detached than students, and hence more objective

The project objectives were to identify examples of good practice and remaining challenges experienced by NMHs and their students. As current literature often requires in-depth study, and daily demands may obstruct staff from engagement in identifying inclusivity measures for educational purposes, the intended outcome of the project was to develop brief good practice guides for staff, with the prioritised aim of making the material palatable and useful rather than too rigorous and demanding.

The project team consisted of members from the Pedagogic Research Institute and Observatory (PedRIO), the Disability Assist Service at Plymouth and the manager from the company that provided support workers. The project used a mixed-method approach with data collected from NMHs via an online survey. The responses were then analysed with Excel and NVivo, and two focus groups held with NMHs to explore the identified themes in further depth. The transcripts from these were also analysed with NVivo, and draft ‘Quick inclusivity guides’ were produced on two sample themes. Two content development workshops were then held with NMHs and academics to help develop the content and format of the final guides.
Project findings

Findings from survey and focus groups highlighted key themes:

- the desire for discretion
- anxiety as an over-arching issue irrespective of the condition
- lack of quiet space
- difficulties with timetabling, group work, communication and documentation

There were many examples of good practice identified by the NMHs, ranging from practical behaviour management to provision of course materials. For example:

‘During a period of conflict between one of my students and another member of the cohort, the lecturer heard both sides of the story privately but then brought the issue to the whole group so the two arguing students could see how their behaviour was impacting on the group and to enable the group to plan a way of moving forward together.’

‘One particular tutor handed out yellow workbooks for a series of practicals, which he had thought would benefit those with dyslexia. However, my student can only read white and black. The lecturer was very swift in his response, and we were given a black and white notebook before the end of the same session.’

However, there were also examples in which the following of simple guidelines would have made a big difference:

‘The variation between module outlines from different schools and from different lecturers is huge, some will be 20-, 30-page documents and others will be one A4 sheet and that’s the difference – but sometimes the 30-page one can be worse.’

‘I would like them to say “that’s what you’ve got, that’s the end date. On this date here I want you to have done that and hand that in and on this date here I want you to do that [...]” you’ve got small achievable chunks to the end point. Let’s actually bring it up every couple of weeks and show it to them, how they’re building up and what they’ve done... and actually that’s just sensible project management, preparing them for the workplace.’
‘Not all lecturers enforce “no talking” in lectures and it can be very distracting and make it very difficult to concentrate. This can also be difficult for me when taking notes on the student’s behalf.’

**Issues of communication and of group work were noted to be a major cause of anxiety for some students, with practice varying widely across the university:**

‘Module timetable given in the handbooks differs from the actual timetable. Changes are poorly communicated and cause a lot of anxiety and stress.’

‘You have some tutors who’ll be on top of what they have to do and have separate tutorials, like arrange them on a two-weekly basis... and you get others where you’re sort of nagging to get an email reply back, because it’s been three or four weeks and you’ve not even had a basic answer.’

‘If as part of the module outline it says you will be allocated randomly based on student number, that’s what the student is dealing with, that’s what they do and then we make a plan to overcome that. If that’s not known and on the day it says there’s group work and they’ve put all this prep in and then on the day, “Right, you, you and you; you, you and you.” Panic!’

‘I think one of the most difficult things that all of my students have found with group work is where they’ll do a lot of the work and you get the people who don’t. And they haven’t got the social skills or the confidence to be able to voice that injustice or to process that injustice, so they retreat and then it affects their grades as well.’

**Through their experience of working across different programmes, the NMHs were able to point to good practice that could be applied more widely:**

‘Even if part of the assessment is something that is timed, there are always ways that you can get round it. Some of the faculties will keep the [assignment] document they’ve [students] got to work on with the faculty staff and the student turns up and it’s clocked in and it’s clocked out and then if they’re having an episode [...], they go away and it’s locked. They don’t take it, then they come back and they start again when they’re more comfortable. So they still have the time aspect.’
‘Though students with anxiety issues typically find this difficult to do [contact staff], staff are friendly and approachable. Two lecturers have approached me as an enabler to ask for advice about how to best approach a student with ASD about specific issues to ensure effective communication.’

Drawing both on positive and negative examples of practice and suggestions given by the NMHs and academic staff involved in this research, and from the existing guidelines found in the literature and on websites, a series of six ‘Quick inclusivity guides’ were developed within the rubric of ‘What, How, Why’.

You can access these guides online: www.plymouth.ac.uk/your-university/teaching-and-learning/inclusivity/how-can-i-be-more-inclusive.

The outcomes and deliverables from this project and from the other projects in the research programme included an updated university teaching and learning policy as well as the aforementioned ‘one-stop’ web resource, which also contains video-clips of examples of embedding inclusive practice from staff and students.

Researchers (eg Jacklin et al 2007) suggest that best practice in learning and teaching is by its nature inclusive, as well as accessible to those with otherwise disabling conditions. Increasingly, the trend has been to move away from categorising specific conditions experienced by individuals to talking about ‘diverse learning needs’ which encompasses all students. This research confirmed findings in the literature that the challenges for inclusive higher (and other) education are wide ranging. They include stigmatisation, certain attitudes, a perception among some university staff and students that best practice is inconsistent (May and Bridger 2010), as well as a fear among some staff that inclusivity will lead to an erosion of standards (Riddell et al 2007). It underlined the feelings of intense pressure that academic staff feel when requested to make changes to their already heavy workloads, and highlighted the extent of anxiety among students. However, as the QAA states:

‘While the need for specific adjustments for individual students will continue to exist, institutions should also be capable of anticipating
the range of possible requirements in their strategic planning. Where such anticipation is effective, the pressure on staff that arises from making ad hoc arrangements for individual students should be reduced further... there should be a recognition that responsibility for meeting the entitlements of disabled students applies to all staff in an institution.’

QAA 2013: B4, 17-18

The term disabled is the label which students must adopt to qualify for the DSA. However, it does not always sit easily with many students’ own self-identities (Riddell et al 2007). As Hockings states:

‘The ‘administratively useful’ catch-all term ‘disabled’ can be powerful and empowering in some circumstances, yet negative and stigmatising in others. ...However, in their report on improving experiences of disabled students in higher education, Jacklin et al (2007: 6) found that the category ‘disabled student’ had ‘focused minds of policy makers and brought legislative changes which had opened doors to HE and brought ‘reasonable adjustments’ which could be enabling.’...[Yet] A disability or an impairment may be just one factor contributing to the student’s identity and it may not be the overriding factor.’

Hockings 2010: 3

Thinking has changed significantly over the past few years, whereby it is acknowledged that individuals do not want to be perceived as different, but rather as individuals (Jacklin et al 2007: 27). Earlier approaches that aimed to integrate individuals into an existing context, and thus located the so-called problem with the individual, have been reframed towards addressing barriers, attitudes and other forms of discrimination towards individuals with different characteristics. This research has demonstrated how this is the case. It has also highlighted how both academics and students experience a range of anxieties. The simple guidelines produced outline small modifications that can make a big difference, brought to life through the experienced voices of NMHs, adoption of which can help alleviate anxieties for students and staff as well as help the university move towards more inclusive practice for all groups of learners.
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Abstract

Members of an academic culture are not always aware of the tacit assumptions that they hold about the ‘right’ way to study. Consequently, some important aspects of UK academic culture are not always made explicit to incomers, such as expectations and perceptions related to assessment or methods of accessing information. Moreover, lecturers and students may sometimes be unaware of cultural differences which can impair the ability of international students to participate equally in UK academic life. These include cultural variation in expectations regarding gender roles, classroom participation and power relationships or communication conventions between staff and students. Other aspects of intercultural communication which may result in misunderstanding include linguistic features such as differing turn-taking norms, modes of expressing emotions or modes of managing disagreement. Further, ‘treating all students equally’ may involve inadvertent discrimination, if those in a position of power are unaware of cross-cultural variation in expectations and behavioural norms.

This paper presents a discussion of a workshop that aimed to draw on the knowledge and expertise of participants to identify the key areas in which international students may, at least initially, be disadvantaged for cultural reasons. It reports on a variety of practical recommendations for higher education, raised and discussed during the workshop, which would increase staff and students’ intercultural sensitivity, inclusivity and reduce the sometimes invisible barriers to equal participation.
Introduction

This paper presents a discussion of the results of a workshop exploring the question of how lecturers and students in higher education can improve their intercultural awareness, and in the process create a more inclusive international teaching and learning environment. The workshop was attended by 16 academic staff from various disciplines and universities. The term ‘international students’ (IS) refers here to all students in UK higher education for whom English is a second language. The aims of the workshop were:

- to provide a forum in which the professional experience and expertise of participants could be shared regarding barriers to equality

- to produce practical suggestions regarding ways in which barriers to equal participation in higher education by IS could be reduced

Unsurprisingly, the workshop produced more questions than answers.

IS contribute over £7bn to the UK economy, and constituted 13 per cent of students at UK universities in 2012/2013 (UUK 2014: 1). However, some studies suggest that IS at UK universities achieve lower marks overall than students whose first language is English, referred to here as native speaker (NS) students (Morrison et al 2005; Broecke and Nicholls 2007: 19; De Vita 2002). This may be related to the challenges of studying in a second language or to demotivation due to the difficulty of quickly adapting to teaching and learning approaches very different from those experienced in the students’ previous educational cultures.

It is possible that some lecturers may, by treating all students equally, inadvertently perpetuate unequal participation or discriminatory practices that reduce equal participation in UK higher education, if they are unaware of the diverse needs and expectations of their students. Blasco found that:

‘a major source of confusion [for IS] has to do with the tacit logics and expectations that shape how the formal steps of the learning cycle are understood and enacted locally.’

Blasco 2015: 85
Moreover, the meritocratic system employed in UK higher education to combat inequality may also conceal perpetuation of systemic inequality since it places all responsibility for success or failure on the individual (Johansson and Sliwa 2014: 22).

**Academic conventions and expectations**

**Do IS receive adequate support?**

There was strong agreement among the workshop participants that UK HEIs do not provide IS with adequate linguistic or cultural support. It was felt that IS, and Erasmus students in particular, face a triple challenge: language learning, subject mastery and critical engagement. Overall, it was agreed that IS often need more support than NS students. For example, students may have erroneous expectations about participation, assessment or other UK academic conventions due to the influence of their previous educational cultures. Moreover, it was agreed that dwelling on students’ ‘deficiencies’ is unhelpful: we should be aware that we are privileged.

Participants argued that a two-way dialogue is required: being open and receptive to others. It was also agreed that changes need to be made at an institutional level to provide IS with more support. UK universities appear to be aware of the need for change, in that much time has been devoted to discussion of internationalisation. However, it was agreed that internationalisation is a ‘fuzzy, ideologically laden’ term (Green and Whitsed 2012: 150), not clearly understood by many of the teaching staff who are expected to help their institutions to achieve it.

Leask (2013: 111) considers that in order to achieve internationalisation in the curriculum, the teaching staff in each discipline need to work together to challenge dominant paradigms, investigate emerging paradigms and imagine new possibilities. Leask and Bridge (2013) devised an Internationalisation of Curriculum (IoC) structural framework to this end. Through this, a facilitator, who is an ‘outsider’, can enable the critical reassessment of embedded assumptions to develop further by ‘asking seemingly innocent, yet difficult questions... such as “So what is universal knowledge in the field of science?”’ (Leask and Bridge, 2013: 111).
Participants raised the question of how international staff in higher education could play a more significant role in the internationalisation process. It is possible that recently arrived, non-NS academic staff, who are less steeped in local academic culture and the dominant Western paradigms of their discipline, may be better equipped to bring fresh perspectives to the IoC process.

Following Leask and Bridge (2013), Breit et al (2013) embarked on an IoC programme of ‘critical de-Westernization’ of the curriculum of a journalism degree programme. This did not entail rejection of ‘Western ideas, practices, and values’ but instead aimed to develop ‘awareness of the diversity of approaches and understandings of journalism’ (Breit et al 2013: 131). Students were required to reflect on the assumptions that they brought to their academic discipline, an approach that could also be fruitful in other disciplines.

**Graduate attributes**

Many of the graduate attributes listed by UK universities refer to intercultural competence or communication skills, but a clear policy of how to facilitate development of these skills is often lacking. There may be an underlying assumption that simply being immersed in another culture will automatically result in the development of these skills. It has been argued, however, that ‘monolingual local students rarely mix with international students who are not fully proficient in English’ (Bennett et al 2013: 533).

Leask (2013: 111) argues that all members of an academic team need to work together to agree ‘what students will be expected to be able to do as graduates’ and what part each staff member should play in order to achieve these goals. She further advocates that ‘development of skills such as language capability and intercultural competence may need to be embedded in a number of courses at different levels.’

**Issues with students’ writing**

Issues with students’ writing included informal writing style and use of translation software. One lecturer commented that in her assignment instructions she now includes a ban on text language. All workshop participants agreed that IS need more language support and that some would benefit from access
to support throughout their entire degrees. In particular, it was agreed that students studying in the UK for one semester or less can often need more intensive language support as they have less time to adapt.

Swales (1990) and others (for example, Flowerdew 2015; Johns 2015) have demonstrated the crucial importance of students’ understanding of the concepts of writing genre and discourse community, and the notion of communicative purpose. Helping students to analyse well-written models of writing genres in their discipline can be an effective way to achieve this.

Cross-cultural comparison of academic writing conventions and their underlying values is a key aspect of an intercultural approach. For example, use of hedging or tentative language in Western academic writing increases a writer’s credibility since it displays awareness of other perspectives and of the uncertainty considered in the West to be intrinsic to scientific discovery (Yang 2013). In contrast, Chinese researchers may be more likely to ‘assume a tone of certainty so as to convey authority and credibility’ (Hu and Cao 2011, cited in Yang 2013: 32). If we expect a critical approach from students, we cannot expect them to discard previous learning habits unless they understand the rationale for doing so.

Some students may plagiarise because the stakes are high but their level of English proficiency is low. Participants agreed that students’ understanding of the concepts of criticality and academic integrity are affected by their previous academic cultures (eg Russikoff et al 2003). One issue raised by participants is that lecturers’ understanding of criticality varies and their explanations and instructions to students are often unclear (see, for example, Vandermensbrughe 2004). A key aspect of academic skills courses for Heriot-Watt MSc students is discussions of ways in which students can take a more critical approach. These classes are also open to NS students, although fewer attend.

Participants agreed that students needed stress-free opportunities to practise using Turnitin. One lecturer allowed students who submitted a 1000-word piece of writing to Turnitin to incorporate a revised draft of the work in their upcoming assessed assignment. The lecturer promised students who did this that in assessed
Learning environments

Issues with group work/classroom management

Participants agreed that cultural or linguistic factors may lead to unequal participation or hinder effective communication and result in cultural misunderstandings between students (see for example Qin, 2014; Spencer-Rodgers, 2002). For example, during pairwork or group work, it was reported that students are sometimes reluctant to work with peers whose first language is different from their own. In cases where previous cultural norms regarding student participation differ, students may complain that peers of a different nationality either ‘don’t contribute enough in class’ or conversely ‘talk too much’.

Participants stressed the importance of enabling students to have conversations that can build their confidence and criticality, in an environment where they need not worry about academic conventions. Participants also noted the difficulty of designing group work that enables every student to participate. To accommodate students who have had little prior experience of group work, participants recommended provision of very explicit task criteria and specific roles.

Rientes et al (2014: 78) argue that ‘instructional design can have a substantially strong impact on how students develop cross-cultural learning relations’. They found that students who were allowed to choose their own groups tended to form monocultural
cliques. However, students whose groups were randomly selected were found to be more successful in overcoming cultural barriers and appeared to continue learning activities with group members outside the classroom to a greater extent than self-selecting groups.

**Culturally inclusive teaching**

Participants agreed that lecturers need to be sensitive to students’ previous academic and cultural backgrounds, adding that ‘if our teaching is not culturally inclusive, then the assessment won’t be.’ Some, however, were unsure what ‘culturally inclusive teaching’ might entail. It could be defined as a pedagogical approach that employs a range of teaching methods in an attempt to encompass some of the diverse learning preferences that IS may have and hence reduce the cognitive dissonance or mismatches between teaching approaches and learning preferences that are thought to inhibit learning (Blasco 2015: 86). Clearly, lecture content should also be culturally inclusive: Eurocentric materials or cultural-laden language such as idioms may reduce accessibility for IS. It is worth noting here that nationality may not be the most reliable indication of cultural traits: ‘every person is an amalgam of many “cultures”’, for example the culture of a particular academic discipline (Kealey, 2015:15).

Three distinct approaches emerged regarding the issue of students’ differing cultural expectations about aspects of learning such as classroom participation and the roles of teachers and students. One approach could be summarised as provision of clear guidance and instructions. For example, ‘setting clear ground rules at the beginning’, modelling and scaffolding. Others recommended ‘carrots and bricks [sic]’: attempts to motivate students using rewards and penalties.

A third approach concerned awareness raising and managing students’ and teachers’ expectations, for example, through discussion of the ways in which students’ previous experience and expectations may differ from UK conventions. These expectations may influence academic performance. Hence, UK requirements and the rationale for these should be made very explicit.

Heriot-Watt pre-sessional and foundation English students begin each course with a questionnaire which enables them to compare
assumptions and expectations with classmates and teachers regarding aspects of learning such as assessment, participation in class, and the roles of students and teachers. However, one questionnaire at the beginning of a course may be insufficient as newly arrived students often experience information overload. IS might benefit more from a series of short questionnaires throughout the course which make not only requirements but also underlying assumptions and values more transparent.

Some studies (eg De Vita 2002; Morrison et al 2005; Broeck and Nicholls 2007: 19) suggest that students writing in a second language generally require more time to compose an essay than NS, which seems likely to place IS at a disadvantage in timed examinations. Hence, De Vita (2002) argues that culturally equitable assessment should entail a variety of assessment types rather than only end-of-semester examinations.

It was agreed that, crucially, students do not have ‘space to fail’; in other words, students would benefit from more feedback on work that does not count towards their final course mark. It was also argued, however, that many IS do not take up opportunities to do non-assessed writing tasks. This may be because they are already struggling to keep up with lectures and assessed coursework.

Alternatively, students’ reluctance may stem from the influence of a previous academic culture in which only assessed tasks were considered worth devoting time and effort to. Students may need to be persuaded of the value of expending more time and effort on non-assessed formative writing assignments in order to develop their academic writing skills without the stress of being assessed. It was also noted that overstretched lecturers often do not have time to offer the amount of formative assessment and feedback that IS need (Shaw 2014).

At Blasco’s university, IS are offered an induction course that enables students to compare tacit aspects of learning with their previous academic cultures (Blasco 2015: 100–102). A seminar entitled ‘What nobody tells you about how to write a research paper in the Danish system’ was also well attended. Blasco (2015: 102) suggests it might be even more effective if run by students.
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Interculturality

Participants were concerned that IS may have a sense of inferiority and colonisation, or may find UK higher education 'suffocating'. Marginson (2014: 8), among others, has commented on ‘the sense of cultural superiority that […] is rife in English language education systems’, disputing that IS necessarily wish to ‘become like us’. He calls for a paradigm shift from insisting that IS adjust to the new culture to viewing their transformation as a process of ‘self-formation’ (Marginson 2014: 9).

Conversely, the features that make each institution or host country unique may be part of the attraction to IS, and that making the values underlying local practices explicit to students can enrich their intercultural awareness (Blasco 2015).

Communication

Participants generally agreed that cultural or linguistic factors can hinder effective communication between students and university staff, whether face to face or by email. IS are sometimes unaware of UK politeness conventions or email etiquette when requesting help or feedback from lecturers and may use an inappropriate level of informality or send a draft for feedback without an accompanying message (Scollon et al 2012).

Most participants sometimes felt it necessary to adapt their teaching approach according to the cultural composition of a class; various studies suggest that students’ previous academic cultures can affect learning preferences (Woodrow and Sham 2001; Joy and Kolb 2009; Heffernan et al 2010; Bowden et al 2015; Zhou and Li 2015).

It was agreed that lecturers need to be ‘culturally proactive’ and anticipate cultural issues: for example, the use of Tumblr on the Heriot-Watt Dubai campus was particularly ill- advised in a Muslim context since Tumblr has no ban on pornography. Participants argued that lecturers need to develop knowledge and awareness of cultural variation in student expectations and of UK higher education requirements, and to develop a better understanding of the ‘specific challenges faced by specific groups of international students’.
One method of facilitating the integration of IS could be to initiate a ‘buddy system’ (Campbell 2012), in which new arrivals are paired with a ‘home’ student. It was further suggested that higher education could benefit from following the example of further education regarding cultural inclusivity since equality and diversity training has been mandatory in colleges for some time. In higher education, however, this type of training is often optional.

Some participants argued that unless intercultural competence is embedded in all degree programmes, it is unlikely that lecturers or students will treat it as a priority. Bodycott advocates:

‘the inclusion of intercultural outcomes for all students (Campbell 2010; Leask 2004), and the development of mandatory intercultural mediation and social integration practices (Owens and Loomes 2010) for all students, both domestic and international... [together with cultural] mentoring, intercultural mediation programmes and the sharing of cultural knowledge.’

Bodycott 2012: 361

Bennett et al favour:

‘the provision of formal and informal intercultural learning opportunities for students, who may have limited intercultural experience, and strategically designed intercultural pairs, groups, discussions, and assessments on diverse campuses.’

Bennett et al 2013: 548

They further argue that:

‘there is a role for institutional leadership in providing opportunities for such relationships to be extended [beyond the campus], through, for example, partnered work experience, volunteering, or internship programs.’

Bennett et al 2013: 549

At Heriot-Watt, I am involved in a project in which Chinese students volunteer to teach Mandarin to local primary school children. This has yielded very positive feedback from students, teaching staff and children.
Conclusions

There was strong consensus among workshop participants that IS tend not to receive sufficient support during their transition either at an institutional level or in the classroom. Institutions were perceived as being enthusiastic about the income that IS bring, but vague regarding ways in which staff could contribute to the internationalisation process. Particular issues concerned:

- students’ understanding of culturally laden concepts such as intellectual property and criticality
- lack of language support
- lack of time to provide additional formative assessment and feedback

Advocates of more culturally inclusive pedagogy might argue that employing a more diverse range of teaching approaches is likely to be enriching to students and teachers alike. On the other hand, students may be able and willing to adapt provided the tacit aspects of the new teaching and learning environment are made sufficiently explicit; what Blasco (2015: 103) dubs the ‘making explicit’ approach.

As discussed, student expectations could be managed by:

- instigating a buddy system
- providing clear task and assessment guidelines
- awareness-raising questionnaires and seminars which enable staff and students to compare tacit aspects of learning in UK higher education with conventions and values in other educational contexts

Language and writing issues could be addressed by:

- greater use of guided peer feedback on first drafts of coursework
- use of generic feedback on VLEs
- analysis of the structure and language of discipline-specific writing genres
- use of a variety of assessment methods
Finally, there is much that could be done at an institutional level, such as funding more language support for IS and requiring that intercultural skills development be incorporated into staff training and development, curricula and assessment. It seems clear that until intercultural competence and the principles of equality and diversity are embedded in curricula and assessment, these are unlikely to become a priority for all higher education staff and students.
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Partnership and preparation: a new model of transition from college to university

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Key words: boundary; broker; partnership; preparation; support

Abstract

Widening participation in higher education continues to be a key focus for Scottish government. The 2013 Post-16 Education (Scotland) Act provides for additional funded places, enabling more college students to transfer into higher education with advanced standing. This article provides an overview of the associate student project at Edinburgh Napier University and examines how rethinking partnership between colleges and universities has the potential to better prepare students for transition between the two sectors.

Deploying theoretical conceptions of academic transitions, we outline our findings from a preliminary study which explores a range of support initiatives, discussing the value of student contribution and the importance of the full participation of all partners.

The paper concludes that although associate student status of itself is not sufficient to enable effective transition, targeted support activities are likely to improve confidence and motivation for university study, better enabling articulation students to negotiate the transition to university.

Introduction

Edinburgh Napier is a post-92 university with a funding imperative to expand its provision for college students to progress to university with advanced standing and no loss of time. This article describes research and practice relating to the associate student project, providing an overview of the project to date and examining how rethinking traditional approaches to college–university partnership can alter the transition space for students taking this route to university.
We deploy theoretical conceptions of academic transitions as ‘boundary crossing’ (Akkerman and Bakker 2011), and explore how the effectiveness of a range of practical measures and theoretical conceptions may be understood by reference to their potential as boundary workers and brokers (Wenger 2000).

The paper concludes that close collaborative partnership working between college and university partners, together with a programme of targeted learning opportunities and experiences, is likely to improve confidence and motivation for university study with both of these factors helping to ensure that students are better positioned to negotiate the transition to university programmes in their third year of study.

Context

In 2013, in order to foster growth in articulation activity, the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) introduced funding and set ambitious targets for universities to support additional places for students to progress from college to university with no loss of time, by way of ‘guaranteed articulation’ (SFC 2013). The scheme supports variations in articulation routes. However, in the context of our study at Edinburgh Napier University, students begin their higher national (HN) qualification at a further education college in the knowledge that – subject to them satisfying the requirements of their HN course and reaching a specified level of pass in the graded unit – they have a guaranteed place on a named degree at university. These students enter with advanced standing into third year. This shared model of delivery is known as a 2+2 model (SFC 2013). It enables students to enrol not only on their college programme, but also to enrol as an associate student of the university to which they will eventually progress.

For the academic year 2013/2014, Edinburgh Napier University was awarded funding from the SFC for an additional 107 places for students starting their programmes in college and articulating to university for their third and fourth year. The associate students were dually matriculated in both college and university which meant that they were immediately able to gain access to a range of benefits, resources and facilities offered by the university. These benefits include access to resources such as the library, sports and student association facilities, guest lectures from university staff, as well as access to the student portal and virtual learning environment. Additionally, Edinburgh Napier associate
students are able to access tutorial support across a range of topics including specific subject support, library advice and academic skills guidance. These student-focused, targeted learning opportunities were designed to enhance student progression and attainment by creating opportunities for students to develop their confidence and academic skills in order to prepare them for the higher education environment.

**Partnership and preparation model**

Our model of partnership has been informed by transition studies in the literature (Kift 2009; Pike and Harrison 2011), theoretical perspectives (Wenger 2000; Tuomi-Gröhn and Engeström 2003), focus group findings, partnership meetings with key staff members, and informal communication with staff and students. Our model addresses the practical concerns and preconceptions among staff and students associated with making the transition from college to university. The defining characteristic of our approach to partnership, which is practice-based rather than policy-based, is in its reliance upon relationship building between both staff and students at college and at university levels. The model is not a top-down one, but rather is more democratic and emergent, allowing staff and students to collaborate on best practice in the field of articulation and to influence changes to practice.

**Theoretical concepts**

The challenges faced by students making the transition from college to university can be understood by exploring a number of theoretical concepts inherent in establishing identity and developing competence in a new context. The notion of transition itself is a key concept for our study since in this context it delineates the period of change experienced by students as they progress from college to university. Beach (1999) proposes the concept of consequential transitions which explains how active construction of new knowledge involves the transformation of something that has been learnt elsewhere. This results in the development of identities, new ways of knowing and a repositioning of one’s self in the world (Tuomi-Gröhn and Engeström 2003). Beach’s perspectives on transitions may be helpful in understanding the transformation from college learner into undergraduate student.
As students make the transition from college to university, concepts such as boundary crossing become significant. Boundary is a complex term denoting simultaneously inclusion and exclusion. Akkerman and Bakker (2011: 133) provide a sufficiently pragmatic interpretation of the notion of a boundary as being ‘sociocultural differences leading to a discontinuity of action or interaction’. In our study, the boundaries we refer to are those that are embedded in the divergent educational systems represented by higher and further education. The associate student project explores student transitions through various forms of boundary crossing: for example, from further to higher education, from college to university campus, or from a content-led to research-led curriculum. We conceptualise our work with college students making the transition from college to university as helping them to effectively negotiate these boundaries and to integrate both academically and socially.

Wenger’s (2000) description of social learning systems provides a way of thinking about learning and its social dimensions. Social learning systems draw on the concept of brokering, describing how certain individuals play significant roles in generating cross-boundary connections and generating the infrastructure to enable productive boundary interactions (Wenger 2000). A boundary worker can also be seen as an intermediary, assisting members in one community to gain knowledge from another. In the context of the associate student project, in one of Edinburgh Napier’s schools, a lecturer with a specific remit as an associate student college liaison fulfils this brokering function. Working on the boundary, this university lecturer’s knowledge and experience of working in both social learning systems has enabled active collaboration and the establishment of new connections across the two different social learning systems (ie the college and university).

It is clear that concepts such as transition, boundary and broker are useful when trying to understand the nature of the challenges faced by college students articulating to university, since they are underpinned by a view of learning which is situative, relational and negotiated. This is distinct from an individualistic perspective of learning in which the focus for understanding formal learning transfer from one context to another is on the cognitive skills which reside in the head of the individual student (Bransford and Schwartz 1999).
Initiatives

The range of initiatives implemented in college to support our approach to enabling student articulation can be divided into two distinct, but interrelated, strands: partnership and preparation. Tackling both of these areas of practice simultaneously was essential in order to ensure an optimal, sustainable articulation route.

Partnership development activities are based on embedding regular and ongoing opportunities for open, inclusive communication. We see this as the cornerstone of any long-standing collaborative relationship between the partners. An important aspect of the partnership approach relates to Edinburgh Napier University’s offer of staff development opportunities for college lecturers who wish to gain a more advanced qualification relevant to their teaching area.

Central to our preparation activities is the notion that social engagement and academic performance are not independent issues, but rather inextricably linked. So, although we provide associate students with a range of academic skills workshops, guest lectures and opportunities to attend seminars and labs, as well as shared working between staff teams on material development for delivery in colleges, we also make use of social media, such as Facebook and Twitter (Selwyn 2009). In attempting to engage more informally with associate students, we seek to open up opportunities for social interaction between those studying at college and those at university (Jenkins et al 2012).

To encourage the formation of the associate student identity as a specific group of college students, our partnership model incorporates branded marketing activity. This comprises posters, leaflets and website content to ensure students, staff and, importantly, parents are aware of the importance and significance of the project and of the benefits that await those who make the transition to university (Martin et al 2014).

Methodology

The research and associated practice that we describe in this paper was part of preliminary investigation (now underway) for a longitudinal project which is framed by cultural historical activity theory (Engeström 2000).
Ethical approval for this research and for the more extensive study which will follow has been granted from the Edinburgh Napier faculty research integrity committee. At all times, ethical considerations and the privacy of all participants have been prioritised, obtaining informed consent from individuals and anonymising contributions from all students and staff.

Between the start of the associate student project in September 2013 and April 2014, we adopted a range of qualitative approaches to data collection. Focus groups were used to obtain rich qualitative data from participants in four partner colleges about their experiences of being associate students and to seek their views about the partnership working that was apparent between their college and Edinburgh Napier University. Further focus groups were undertaken with third-year direct entrants to university, who, although not part of the associate student project, had themselves followed the same pathway to university. The focus group interviews were recorded and transcribed. For the purposes of data analysis in this preliminary stage of our research, a priori data codes were applied to meaningful segments of the transcription texts (Bryman 2012).

Staff views on partnership working and the associate student project were also sought through informal discussions with the associate student college liaison. Monthly partnership meetings between college and university representatives of the associate student project constitute the formal channel of communication across all institutions in the partnership. Notes taken during these meetings provided further valuable data which we have analysed thematically for use in the study.

**Findings**

Focus group interviews in college revealed that associate students identify the need to develop their academic skills in order to prepare for university:

‘I didn’t do that great at school in sixth year so thought I’d have to go to college and get the requirements to get into university. And at college I can take time to develop my skills.’

Associate student focus group participant
A bilateral approach to good practice in articulation which is centred on these two interconnected concepts – partnership and preparation – can protect and enhance the integrity of articulation as a route to higher education.

Our focus group data also suggested that students coming to university value the opportunities that social media create to develop contact with their counterparts at university (Selwyn 2009). Students recognise that, as direct entrants, they can find themselves confined to a group of former college students, finding it difficult to blend in with the existing student cohort. Likewise, this focus group determined that access to the online learning environment, with a dedicated page for the associate students had been an invaluable resource.

Our focus groups with third-year direct entrants revealed that they felt strongly about the issue of student identity:

‘Last year if I was saying I was a student it didn’t feel good saying I was a college student. This year it feels good to say I’m at uni. It makes me feel proud.’

Third-year direct entry focus group participant

University student status gives associate students the opportunity to integrate with other university students on campus in libraries, students associations and through other facilities. Focus groups revealed that students value these opportunities, even though they are not always used consistently among the group:

‘I feel privileged – as an associate you get to use the facilities, we had the matriculation event, extra resources, Moodle.’

Associate student focus group participant

As can be seen, Tuomi-Gröhn and Engeström’s (2003) perspectives on consequential transition involving the development of identities are certainly reflected in our focus group discussions.

Feedback from college students who had attended an open day for associate engineering students indicates that students also value the opportunity to explore the university campus:

‘really good to get the feel of the place before we start.’

Associate engineering students open-day attendee
They particularly appreciated opportunities to meet the programme team. In future events, they wanted to attend lectures and spend more informal time meeting other first-year students:

‘I want to take part in something with the first years, rather than just be visitors.’

Associate engineering students open-day attendee

We see evidence here that students perceive the boundaries expressed as differences between college and university, and that they recognise their role as visitors and look forward to belonging as undergraduates at university.

Conclusions

The importance of developing a strong partnership between university and partner colleges has been highlighted in many further to higher education transition studies (Gallacher 2009; Pike and Harrison 2011). Our experience is consistent with this research, and we have identified that strong active partnership is fundamental to the future success of the associate student project. We have sought to move away from a traditional college–university partnership that is primarily expressed in terms of formal documents and historical agreements. Instead, we have worked to ensure that our partnership with colleges is one which is dynamic, responsive and emergent, and which works well in the flatter organisational structures that prevail in colleges. University committee structures impose a degree of formality that we have found to be less well aligned with college culture where business is transacted on a more relational basis.

Through the appointment of a lecturer with specific responsibilities for college liaison, informal engagement with staff has been enabled. This has allowed for a different sort of dialogue to emerge which is open, transparent and collegial. Team teaching with university and college staff has also created opportunities for staff to appreciate each other’s expertise and to ‘open windows onto each other’s practices’ (Wenger 2000: 235).

The uptake by students of the various support initiatives has been variable over the year. Aligning student expressions of interest for certain initiatives with their actual participation at arranged events has sometimes been challenging. We have come to recognise that, although students would like to attend
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university events, guest lectures and other off-campus events, often their part-time work commitments or travel arrangements from their partner college to university make attendance more difficult than we had originally anticipated. This preliminary research has greatly assisted our understanding of the challenges that face students as they move across the boundaries between college and university and has ensured that our support interventions for the future are informed by student perspectives as well as those of experienced practitioners.

Informal meetings and discussions with students and staff have been instrumental in the production of this model of partnership and preparation. Listening to students and involving them in decision-making in relation to future support initiatives will continue to be a priority. Our findings have reminded us that the status of being an associate student is not, in itself, beneficial and may potentially decrease the students' likelihood to make the transition to university if they are deterred by a lack of visible university support. Interventions must be coordinated, academically appropriate, subject specific and be supported by college partners and students. Associate student status is just the starting point for a series of interventions and the beginning for partnership and preparation.

Future research

A longitudinal study is underway which explores the experience of a group of associate students in college, following them as they articulate to university the following year. We expect this study to offer insights into the student experience of boundary crossing, and of the interventions which enable and inhibit successful articulation. Further studies exploring aggregated quantitative data obtained from the student record systems, tracking the progression and attainment of direct entrants in comparison with their first-year entry counterparts, are also underway.
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Embracing diversity – watch your language: understanding student sports teams’ awareness of protected characteristics and the concepts of inclusivity

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Key words: behaviour; diversity; discrimination; equality; language

Abstract

The student experience extends beyond the curriculum. Engagement with student sports teams can enrich aspects of university life while also developing graduate attributes. However, there have also been reports of discriminatory behaviour and poor use of language in university sports teams. Abertay University’s sports team members were surveyed regarding their knowledge of, and attitudes toward, protected characteristics in advance of awareness-raising interventions that included students working with a group with protected characteristics in the community. The survey was then re-administered. The results of the survey revealed that Abertay University sports team members responded significantly differently to their Scottish peers in the general population on questions about whether equal opportunities for women, for BME groups, and for gay men and lesbian women had gone too far. They also had significantly different responses to questions regarding positive action to enable employment for BME groups, for gay men and lesbian women and for those who had experienced depression.

Introduction

Poor behaviour of university sports teams has attracted adverse media attention (Denholm 2013; Ellis-Peterson 2014; Horne 2014; Mohamed 2014). The cohesiveness of sports teams can be integral to their success, but there are also reports of sexist and discriminatory behaviour (Fink et al 2011). Exposure to poor behaviour can be damaging to other students’ university experiences and can lead to impaired wellbeing as well as potential withdrawal from studies (Wilcox et al 2005). Some of
this poor behaviour is manifested in printed texts, including on social media platforms, thereby leaving a lasting footprint for the author which could have a negative impact on the graduated student’s future employment prospects (O’Keefe and Clarke-Pearson 2011).

More than a third of the world’s population now use the internet, and social media is used regularly by 91 per cent of online adults. Further, almost a quarter of adult online time is spent engaging with social media (Internet World Stats 2012). Student populations are considered keen consumers of social networking technology (Barkhuus and Tashiro 2010), and it could be contested that universities have an obligation to educate them toward responsible use.

It is widely acknowledged that universities are expected to produce employable graduates (Knight and Yorke 2003; Schomburg and Teichler 2006), who have the ability to adapt and manage their future careers (Bridgestock 2009). The term graduate attributes refers to qualities, characteristics and skills that universities will develop in their students (Bowden et al 2000). These are now an integral part of many university mission statements and concepts of responsible citizenship can be voiced within them. Therefore, it could be an expectation that employable graduates should be able to apply the principles embedded within equality legislation.

Taking this into account, the aim of this project was to examine the knowledge, attitudes and social media behaviours of Abertay University’s sports teams before and after specific inclusiveness interventions.

**Method**

The project team were granted ethics permission to do an initial scoping of Abertay University’s 18 sports teams’ Facebook pages. Any use of non-inclusive language was noted.

The next phase of the project involved administering a questionnaire designed to test knowledge and attitudes toward protected characteristics. It contained a mixture of case study questions, as well as ones adapted from the Scottish Social Attitudes Survey (SSAS). Team captains were approached at a varsity event and teams were invited to participate in the study.
Consent forms, participant information sheets and questionnaires were left with the teams for voluntary completion, with a member of the project team returning to collect completed forms later in the day.

Students from a variety of teams \( (n=129: \text{56 per cent men; 44 per cent women}) \) completed the pre-intervention questionnaire.

A two-week intervention phase was launched with an evening event to which all sports team members were invited. A video showcasing some sports team members working with a local wheelchair sport group opened the evening, with the Scottish Government Minister for Health, Wellbeing and Sport in attendance. A number of high profile ambassadors from a range of sports also attended and took part in a tabled question and answer session. In the subsequent period, the Abertay Students’ Association signposted the students to materials designed to educate communities toward inclusivity.

Students were given the opportunity to take part in a post-intervention survey prior to a sports team social event. Additional questions were added to gauge student engagement with project materials, and to garner knowledge about levels of interest in undertaking potential equality training. The post-intervention survey was completed by 75 students (45 per cent male; 55 per cent female). The pre-intervention and post-intervention subject groups were not matched.

**Results**

The initial scoping of the sports teams’ Facebook pages during a 12-week period found seven pejorative references to protected characteristics: five were sexist, one referred to religion, and one to sexual orientation.

When surveyed, 60 per cent of the students prior to the intervention knew that there were nine protected characteristics outlined in the Equality Act 2010; this compared with 56 per cent in the post-intervention survey.

Two-thirds (both pre- and post-intervention) gave the correct answer when asked what toilet a gender re-assigned female would be eligible to use.
A number of questions were drawn from SSAS allowing the sports teams’ results to be compared with the general population as well as with a matched age group.

**Figure 1: Comparing sports team responses to SSAS data (2006/2010) on equal opportunities for women**

Attempts to give equal opportunities to women has... (96 per cent response)

![Bar chart showing responses to SSAS data](image)

The students surveyed, both before and after the intervention, differed significantly in their responses when compared with previous SSAS data. As figure 1 illustrates, the sports team students were significantly more likely to say that equal opportunities for women had ‘gone too far/much too far’ ($\chi^2 =11.7, p<0.05$, pre-intervention; $\chi^2 =14.7, p<0.05$, post-intervention). Conversely, sports team students were significantly more likely to say that equal opportunities for women had ‘not gone nearly far enough’ ($\chi^2 =5.03, p<0.05$, pre-intervention; $\chi^2 =7.89, p<0.05$, post-intervention).
Figure 2: Comparing sports team responses to SSAS data (2006/2010) on equal opportunities for gay men and lesbians

Attempts to give equal opportunities to gay men and lesbians in Scotland has... (96 per cent response)

As figure 2 shows, the students prior to the intervention were significantly less likely to say that equal opportunities for gay men and lesbians had ‘gone too far/much too far’ ($\chi^2 = 4.2, p<0.05$, pre-intervention; $\chi^2 = 1.26, p>0.05$, post-intervention) when compared with previous SSAS data. There were no differences between the populations in the post-intervention period. Sports team students were also significantly less likely to say that they would be ‘unhappy/very unhappy if a close relative was in a long-term relationship with someone of the same sex’ ($\chi^2 = 3.98$, $p<0.05$, pre-intervention; $\chi^2 = 5.89$, $p<0.05$, post-intervention).
Figure 3 illustrates how the students prior to the intervention were significantly less likely to say that equal opportunities for BME groups had ‘gone too far/much too far’ ($\chi^2 = 7.18, p<0.05$, pre-intervention; $\chi^2 = 2.58, p>0.05$, post-intervention) when compared with previous SSAS data. There were no differences between the populations in the post-intervention period; however, there were significant differences in the sports teams’ responses to this question between the two surveys: $\chi^2 = 12.4, p<0.05$. Sports team students prior to the intervention were, as shown in figure 4, also significantly less likely to say that positive action to aid employment for BME groups was ‘bad/very bad use of government money’ ($\chi^2 = 4.87, p<0.05$, pre-intervention; $\chi^2 = 2.58, p>0.05$, post-intervention).

**Figure 3: Comparing sports team responses to SSAS data (2006/2010) on equal opportunities for BME groups**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attempts to give equal opportunities to BME groups has... (96 per cent response)</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>Abertay pre-2014</th>
<th>Abertay post-2014</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gone much too far</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gone too far</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>About right</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not gone far enough</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not gone nearly far enough</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 4 further shows how the students were significantly more likely to say that positive action to aid employment for gay men and lesbians was ‘bad/very bad use of government money’ ($\chi^2 =4.2, p<0.05$, pre-intervention; $\chi^2 =5.75, p<0.05$, post-intervention). Post-intervention, they were significantly more likely to say that positive action to aid employment for those who experience depression from time to time was ‘bad/very bad use of government money’ ($\chi^2 =0.98, p>0.05$, pre-intervention; $\chi^2 =5.89, p<0.05$, post-intervention).

Figure 4: Comparing sports team responses to SSAS data (18–24-year olds) on positive action and government spend

Attitudes to positive actions targeting different groups (per cent response)

- Bad/very bad use of money (SSAS aged 18–24-year old respondents)
- Bad/very bad use of money (Abertay pre-2014 respondents)
- Bad/very bad use of money (Abertay post-2014 respondents)

Those that attended the launch event stated that they found it ‘educational’ and ‘beneficial’. However, only about 20 per cent of those surveyed post-intervention attended, others saying that they ‘didn’t know it was on’ or were ‘busy’.

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Approximately half felt that the sports teams should have an equality officer and sign a sports pledge/charter and 60 per cent said they would take part in an equality training event. The comments that accompanied this also revealed a mixture of feelings, with some saying that this would ‘ensure that everyone has an opportunity to join in’ while others felt that there was ‘no need’ or that it was the ‘job of the captain’ to ensure that issues of equality were addressed.

Discussion

It is acknowledged that there are evident limitations in the data owing to the brief period of the intervention and the non-matched nature of the pre- and post-survey groups. Further, the nature of the survey questions meant that respondents had limited opportunity to explain their answers. However, the surveys reveal some particularly interesting differences in the sports teams’ responses when compared with the general population.

Responses were most polarised in respect to the ‘equal opportunities for women’ question. It was also sexist remarks that were of the higher volume on the Facebook postings. Adverse media reports regarding sports team behaviours (Denholm 2013; Ellis-Peterson 2014; Horne 2014; Mohamed 2014) tend to focus on specific misogynistic commentary. Since 92 per cent of employers use social media to recruit (Jobvite 2012), it could be argued that, if universities have a responsibility for producing employable graduates (Knight and Yorke 2003; Schomburg and Teichler 2006), then they need to ensure that students are aware that posting or producing materials with sexist commentary could have adverse consequences for future employment (O’Keefe and Clarke-Pearson 2011).

However, it is of note that only 60 per cent of respondents were interested in equality training, with some stating that there was ‘no need’, and a number commenting that only the team captain should undertake this. The ‘no need’ comment was also accompanied by several other responses where students had stated that they were already ‘inclusive’ – though when part of a social group, there can be a lack of awareness of those who may be being excluded (Sayed, 2003). Unfortunately, there were
no questions within the survey asking respondents to provide
details of their sexual orientation, ethnic origin or religion;
therefore, it is unknown how diverse the sports teams were.

Nevertheless, responses to questions around equal opportunities
for gay men and lesbian women and BME groups appear to suggest
that the sports team members are more inclusive than their
counterparts in the general population. However, the questions
around positive action to enable employment produced less
favourable responses from the students with respect to gay men
and lesbian women as well as with respect to those who suffer
from episodic depression. Positive action exists in employment
law to encourage underrepresented groups to apply for vacancies
and to create a more diverse workforce. Yet, positive action is still
a contentious topic with some viewing it as ‘undue favouritism’
(UKREN 2009), and, as with the sports teams’ responses, reactions
to it being mixed depending on the protected characteristic
concerned and the nature of the actions (Ormston et al 2010).

Many universities have citizenship as a feature of their graduate
attributes (Hounsell 2011) with the intention that these qualities
are encouraged or nurtured during a student’s time at university.
It is of some debate whether the advancement of graduate
attributes extends beyond the curriculum into students’
associations and associated societies (Barrie 2007), and therefore
what influence university executives have over this broader
student experience. However, Jackson (2011) argues that
universities should be acknowledging the co- and extra-curricular
experiences of their students since this life-wide learning could
develop graduates that are more able to handle real world
complexity.

It is known that individuals with certain protected characteristics
can find university more challenging and that they are consequently
more likely to drop out of their studies (ECU 2011). Therefore, the
development of a tolerant, engaged and inclusive community –
in extra-curricular as well as in-curricular activities – that supports
and nurtures students, and encourages them to challenge and
not ignore ‘banter’ (Guasp et al 2014) is to be lauded.
Key findings

The emergence of negative reports regarding sports teams’ non-inclusive behaviour was the original driver for the intervention at Abertay University. Initially, the scoping exercise of Facebook postings identified limited pejorative commentary on the teams’ non-private pages. However, replicating questions from the SSAS revealed some quite significant and less positive differences in student responses to questions around equal opportunities for women and on positive actions to aid employment for gay men and lesbian women as well as those who periodically suffer from depression.

Recommendations and next steps

If it is the responsibility of universities to produce employable graduates who can make a real contribution to society, then those who lead on teaching and learning should consider whether educational and/or experiential interventions to broaden the inclusiveness of our student populations should be embedded in curricula.

At Abertay University, we intend to extend the survey, including to student societies with protected characteristics to ascertain how able they feel to participate in sports team activities. We also intend on continuing to work with the students’ association and its societies to try to create opportunities to embed inclusiveness in their operations. Outwith Abertay, other universities’ and colleges’ sports unions have been approached to ascertain whether they would allow the survey to be conducted with their students with the intention that this broader set of results can be used to inform student association equality action plans.
References


Wilcox, P, Winn, S and Fyvie-Gauld, M (2005) It was nothing to do with the university, it was just the people. \textit{Studies in Higher Education} 30(6), 707–722.
Capturing student perspectives to address the BAME attainment gap in higher education: a case study at Swansea University

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Key words: assessment and feedback; belonging; ethnicity degree attainment gap; student experiences; students as partners

Abstract

Existent literature points toward a considerable attainment gap between black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) students and their white counterparts at a national level. In Swansea University, the latest equal opportunities annual report indicated that while 79.4 per cent of students of white origin received a good honours degree in the 2013/2014 academic year, this is only true of 57.6 per cent of their BAME peers. Across the UK, a number of initiatives have been implemented with the aim to close this gap, some of which have been considerably successful.

This paper presents the results and conclusions drawn from a consultation exercise carried out in partnership between a students’ union and its university, led by the BME officer at Swansea University’s Students’ Union. The officer consulted with BAME students on their experiences of higher education, their insights into and perspectives on the attainment gap at Swansea University, 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.
Introduction

Existent data indicates a considerable attainment gap between black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) students and their white counterparts across the UK and beyond. A report by the ECU revealed that in the 2010/2011 academic year there was a difference of 18.4 per cent between white students who achieved a ‘good degree’, that is a first or upper second-class degree, and their BAME peers (ECU 2012: 82). To further illustrate this gap, Richardson calculated that, based on attainment records for the previous 15 years, the odds of a non-white student obtaining a good degree are about half those of a white student (Richardson 2013: 280). More recently, ECU (2014: 136) reported that, since the 2011/2012 academic year, the ethnicity degree attainment gap has narrowed marginally in England (by 1.7 per cent) and Scotland (by 1.1 per cent), but widened in Northern Ireland (by 4.3 per cent) and Wales (by 2.9 per cent). This means that in 2012/2013, only 54.3 per cent of BAME students in Wales achieved a good degree, which compares poorly with the 67.7 per cent of white students. There are, furthermore, considerable differences between the ethnic groups within the BAME category. The same ECU report (2014: 138) shows that the attainment gap is lower for certain ethnic groups such as Asian Pakistani (13.8 per cent) and larger for others such as Black African (26.8 per cent). These outcomes place BAME students at a significant disadvantage when seeking graduate-level employment, which is reflected in the fact that the Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) survey shows 59.1 per cent of white leavers in full-time work compared with 51.0 per cent of their BAME peers for the 2012/2013 academic year (ECU 2014: 148).

In Swansea University, the 2013/2014 equal opportunities annual report indicated that while 79.4 per cent of students of white origin received a good honours degree, this is true for only 57.6 per cent of BAME students (Swansea University 2015: 15). To an extent, the attainment gap can be linked to differences in attainment prior to higher education (Broecke and Nicholls 2007). However, this is not the only factor: Richardson (2008) statistically controlled for differences in entry-level points in his analysis and found that differences pre-university account for only half of the existing gap. Given the need for more insight in this area, we undertook to explore BAME student perspectives.

7 This data is limited to UK-domiciled students since universities are not required to collect ethnicity data from non-UK domiciled students.
at Swansea University focusing on three main areas:

= BAME students’ experiences of higher education, particularly with respect to how it differs from pre-higher education and to previous assessment and feedback practices

= BAME students’ insights into the nation-wide attainment gap between BAME students and their white counterparts

= BAME students’ ideas as to how this attainment gap can be addressed with a view to reducing and ultimately closing it

This paper presents the results of this exploration and makes a case for increased partnership between universities and students’ unions in order to create opportunities for BAME students to be actively involved in their learning and so to close the attainment gap. The crucial point is, as put by Coleman (2015), we need to urgently address the ‘gap in belonging’. Only then will it be possible to address the gap in attainment.

**Aims and methodology**

This small study aimed to capture Swansea University students’ perspectives on the attainment gap between BAME students and their white counterparts. Namely, why it exists and how it may be closed. As previously mentioned, participants were asked to consider the following:

= their experiences of higher education

= their insights into the nation-wide attainment gap

= their ideas to address the attainment gap

The data was collected in partnership with Swansea University’s equal opportunities team and as part of a black students’ forum held on Thursday 5 March 2015. This forum was attended by 15 home and international students who self-identified as BAME. The students were asked to split into three focus groups which were facilitated by the authors, as well as Misbha Khanum.

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8 Robiu Salisu was, at the time of data collection, the part-time BME officer at Swansea University students’ union. He is now the full-time education officer, representing all students with respect to academic matters. While Salisu’s official title in this former role was BME officer, the authors felt that the term BAME was more appropriate for the purposes of this paper. As such, BAME is used in general and BME when referring to Salisu’s role and the forum at which the data was collected. Sara Correia was then the student experience research coordinator at Swansea University Students’ Union and is now a PhD candidate at the College of Law and Criminology at Swansea University.
(Swansea University’s equal opportunities officer) and Alison Braddock (Swansea University’s strategic project manager for widening access). The notes collected by facilitators were then thematically coded with the aid of NVivo under the three broad themes mentioned above.

The aim of this small research project was to conduct an initial exploration of themes emerging from BAME students’ own perspectives. However, this was limited to a small sample of 15 students and restricted by having to keep focus groups to one hour. A further limitation was that the analysis is based on notes taken by facilitators rather than on transcribed recordings of the focus groups. Nonetheless, a variety of themes emerged from the data which provide an insight into BAME students’ experiences at Swansea University and a starting point for dialogue and action to address the attainment gap at Swansea and beyond.

Findings and discussion

Experiences of higher education

The students taking part in this study had faced a variety of experiences of higher education, which suggests the complex nature of devising strategies to improve the student experience. Nonetheless, a number of overall themes emerged, which are illustrated in figure 1.

Most students taking part in the focus groups described their overall university experience as positive. It was further highlighted that an element of this positive experience was the diversity of the student body. In other words, having the opportunity to pursue independent learning in a diverse and friendly environment contributed towards a positive student experience. One of the participants also mentioned having been well supported throughout their time at university – although this support was perceived as more holistic in their final year. However, as will be discussed below, overall, participants in these focus groups felt that the support they received was not always adequate to their needs and/or did not reach BAME students.
Participants were aware of the existence of an attainment gap between BAME students and their white counterparts either through the work of the BME officer or through attending conferences (e.g., NUS Wales’ black students conference and NUS UK’s black students conference). Others guessed that there might be a gap from their own experiences and anecdotal evidence, especially from international BAME colleagues. The authors note that the response to the BME officer’s open invitation to the BME forum was very positive. This demonstrates that students were interested in this topic and willing to discuss and share their views. This has also highlighted the importance and the role students’ unions and universities can play in providing BAME students with a safe space for open discussion. The authors believe that the more awareness and consciousness there is among BAME students of the existence of the attainment gap, the more these students will contribute with solutions that work for them and/or help themselves. This method stands in contrast to the more traditional top-down, one-size-fits-all institutional approaches to change. Students understand their own situation and, as demonstrated by the suggestions these participants made (explored below), students will contribute with tangible solutions when given the chance. Students’ unions can play an important role, as they are well equipped to enable and support student-led activities and the student voice. Working in partnership with students’ unions, universities can harness the student voice and address complex issues such as the attainment gap between BAME and white students.
Figure 2: The differences identified by participants between higher education and pre-higher education study

Figure 2 summarises the main differences identified by the BAME student participants between their experiences of higher education and those pre-higher education. The main themes that emerged include the impact of larger class sizes at university and the way in which student performance is assessed. As will be further explored below, the participants believed that large class sizes had a negative impact on their learning since there was less opportunity to discuss issues with lecturers face to face and/or on a one-to-one basis. At the same time, higher education requires students to be more focused and was perceived by participants as having a greater importance and a greater bearing on their future than their education up to this point. Nonetheless, some participants indicated that they felt able to adapt to these differences over time. These are, of course, issues that are common to all students transitioning into higher education. Thus, ensuring a smooth entry to university will help all students regardless of ethnicity.

Assessment and feedback

When considering educational attainment, assessment and feedback are essential contributing factors for the measuring and improving of student performance. As has already been mentioned, assessment and feedback were of great importance to the students participating in these focus groups. We found that students had taken part in a number of different types of assessment including coursework, group work and examinations. The themes that emerged on this topic are illustrated in figure 3.
In two out of the three focus groups, participants expressed concern with respect to the weighting of examinations vis-à-vis the weighting of other types of assessment. It was felt that examinations, especially when they were worth the totality of the final mark on a particular subject, led to a lot of pressure and did not facilitate learning – particularly since they usually yield no feedback. It was noted that some participants had not experienced examinations weighted in such a way prior to higher education study and that they felt better able to perform with a variety of assessment methods. Furthermore, participants felt that examination, and exam-type, assessments were often based on memorisation and therefore highlighted only one aspect of learning. Finally, in one focus group, it was mentioned that some perceived the support available to students struggling with examinations as inadequate.

**Figure 3: Participant perspectives on assessment and feedback – the key themes**
Section D: Student engagement with equality and diversity

**Student perspectives on the attainment gap**

As asked to consider why there is an attainment gap between BAME students and their white counterparts, the participants suggested a series of potentially contributing factors. These can be organised into five main themes, which are summarised in Table 1.

**Table 1: Participants’ suggestions regarding factors contributing to the attainment gap**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Summary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Access to support</strong></td>
<td>Coming from traditional backgrounds, some BAME students may be less likely to access formal support vis-à-vis support from family and friends. This may also occur where BAME students feel they cannot relate to staff.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>BAME students are less aware of the support services available to them and therefore do not access them as much.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Access to one-to-one support is seen as scarce since there are few opportunities to speak to staff in large lectures and since some staff can take too long to reply to emails – or fail to reply altogether.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cultural differences</strong></td>
<td>International BAME students have to overcome the cultural shock associated with attempting to integrate into a different culture.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>There is a negative attitude towards BAME students which is manifested when staff speak slowly and/or patronisingly to them. BAME students are not encouraged to succeed but instead expected to fail, which is demotivating.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>There can be a lack of integration between BAME and white students: for example, students clustering along ethnic lines for seating arrangements in lectures and group work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Language barriers</strong></td>
<td>Although some participants did not think language barriers were the main issue, this was seen as a potential contributing factor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Inadequate services</strong></td>
<td>The students’ union was not felt to appeal to BAME students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Western-centric curriculum</strong></td>
<td>Some students felt that BAME students could not relate to what was being taught: for example, the literature used in English literature courses came only from UK and Europe, with no examples from other countries. In humanities subjects, it was felt that there were opportunities to explore authors and subjects that were not Western centric, although not in first year. In subjects like engineering, it was felt that this was not so much of an issue, although the heritage of Arab mathematicians was rarely celebrated.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1 sheds some light on the issues which students taking part in this study perceived to be at the core of the attainment gap between BAME and white students. It is important to note that the term BAME encloses within it a considerable diversity. As such, these factors may weigh more or less for individual students and can have a compounding effect: for example, a combination of large class sizes and being unable to relate to lecturers could combine to have a greater alienating effect on some BAME students. The section below presents a summary of the participants’ suggestions for strategies to reduce this attainment gap.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>One-to-one support</th>
<th>Diversity in the curriculum</th>
<th>Targeted support</th>
<th>Change perceptions of BAME students</th>
<th>Group work</th>
<th>Learning resources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of initiatives and support</td>
<td>Personal tutors</td>
<td>Assessment and feedback</td>
<td>Faith and cultural societies</td>
<td>Lecturers</td>
<td>Role models</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4 illustrates diagrammatically all of the themes which have emerged from our study. The size of the rectangles represents the number of focus groups in which the theme occurred, whereas the gradient colour represents the overall number of individual references to each theme. Each of these is summarised in table 2.
Table 2: Overall suggestions for reducing the BAME/white attainment gap

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Summary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One-to-one support</td>
<td>More office hours, more individual support, and more opportunities for one-to-one contact with lecturers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment and feedback</td>
<td>Make sure assessment criteria are clear and explicit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of initiatives and support</td>
<td>Raise awareness of support services and university-wide initiatives among BAME students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change perceptions of BAME students</td>
<td>Address the negative perceptions of BAME students through campaigns and teacher training.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity in the curriculum</td>
<td>Reflect diversity in the curriculum, celebrate non-Western knowledge and authors, and allow for, and encourage, engagement with non-Western literature.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faith and cultural societies</td>
<td>Increase the visibility of, and support the development of faith and cultural societies within students’ unions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group work</td>
<td>Utilise group work to promote integration between BAME and white students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning resources</td>
<td>Make sure learning spaces are adequate for a positive learning environment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecturers</td>
<td>Ensure lecturers are welcoming and encouraging/expecting more of BAME students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal tutors</td>
<td>Appoint personal tutors from either a BAME background or who can relate to BAME students. Improve the personal tutor role since students generally feel that their personal tutors do not know them well enough and that time spent with them is limited. Make processes less formal and more personal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role models</td>
<td>Increase the visibility of BAME staff and invite BAME speakers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study groups</td>
<td>Encourage mixed informal study groups.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Targeted support</td>
<td>Increase targeted support for BAME students, making sure lecturers are aware of the issues faced by BAME students.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conclusions

In line with previous research, participating students identified a number of reasons which, according to their experiences, may explain why an attainment gap exists between BAME students and their white counterparts. Although entry-level points have been shown to represent 50 per cent of the existing gap (Richardson 2008), no participants in any of the three focus groups identified this as a reason for BAME students’ underperformance. Instead, participants felt that they did not relate to the institution or academic staff in the same way as their white counterparts. As such, we suggest that a cultural shift within institutions is needed in order to make sure they are truly inclusive. This is not only beneficial for black students, but for the whole university community as a home for learning and sharing. We conclude that institutions cannot tackle the attainment gap without first addressing this gap in belonging.

At Swansea University, the results of this project will be presented and disseminated internally with the support of its equal opportunities team, the Swansea Academy for Inclusivity and Learner Support (SAILS), as well as the Swansea Academy for Learning and Teaching (SALT). This small research project has highlighted the benefits of working in partnership with student officers in order to reach BAME students and to be able to draw on their experiences. Students’ unions and their officers are important resources for understanding the experiences of BAME students and for engaging with them as active learners. This requires working with students as partners in identifying the issues and developing solutions, and then acting on student insights and feedback. Finally, more research and monitoring of initiatives is necessary so we can better understand the barriers faced by BAME students as well as what might bring about improvements.
References


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