The University of Hertfordshire's Higher Education Academy (HEA) 'Developing an Inclusive Culture in Higher Education' Report.

Developing an Inclusive Teaching strand within the UH Curriculum Design Toolkit

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Title of the initiative:

Developing an Inclusive Teaching strand within the UH Curriculum Design Toolkit

Key words:

Inclusive teaching; Curriculum design toolkit

Description of our institutional understanding of inclusive learning culture:

Involvement with the HEA 'Developing an Inclusive culture in HE' project has helped to raise the profile of inclusivity within our Institution and to promote inclusive teaching. The University has embraced the challenge of improving the culture and celebrating diversity and the project has been timely, as we have been able to help inform the University's equality objectives. The Head of Equality is a member of our project group and the project has thus enabled us to work more closely with the Equality office and to consider not only inclusive teaching for the benefit of students but also to consider the needs of staff of protected characteristics. The Pro Vice-Chancellor (Student Experience) has been extremely supportive of the project and through invitations to the Institutional Student Educational Experience Committee, has enabled the project group to share its outcomes and inform an Institutional wide equality objective.

Aim:

The aim of our project was to design an inclusive teaching strand of the University of Hertfordshire's (UH) curriculum design toolkit.

Objectives:

Through the project, we hoped to:

- Research relevant literature on inclusive teaching practice;
- Identify Principles for Good Practice in Inclusive Teaching;
- Design a diagnostic for staff to reflect on current practice and identify areas for improvement;
- Develop case studies of good practice ;
- Publish the Inclusive Teaching strand of the curriculum design toolkit.

A description of the strategies and practices we used during the course of the programme relating to the 'embedding equality and diversity in the curriculum self-evaluation framework':

Our project related specifically to the development of resources to support curriculum design and delivery, however, as the year progressed, the project expanded to include activities associated with staff engagement and Institutional management.

Curriculum Design and Delivery:

The University of Hertfordshire's Blended Learning Unit (BLU) initiated the development of a Curriculum Design Toolkit to help staff take a considered look at their current curricula in terms of their learning, teaching, assessment and the learning environments that they provide. Staff within the BLU, and within the successor unit, the Learning and Teaching Institute (LTI), developed strands of the toolkit which represent relevant challenges within Higher Education teaching. Each strand contains a number of interrelating documents and components. These components are:

- Research informed Principles for Good Practice;

- Accessing statements;

- Self-diagnostic tool;

- Consideration of features and consequences of practice;

- Hints and tips to help improve practice.

The Inclusive culture project therefore offered us the ideal opportunity to develop an Inclusive Teaching strand of our toolkit.

To develop the inclusive teaching of the toolkit, the team reviewed relevant literature associated with inclusive practice and identified overarching principles for Good Practice for Inclusive Teaching (figure 1). The literature review included policy documents, good practice guidance as well as books, websites and articles associated with inclusive teaching. A list of the references and resources that we considered is included at the end of this document which may be of use to others.

Good Practice in Inclusive Teaching…

- Ensures the understanding of individual learning needs
- Takes a coherent approach which is anticipatory and proactive
- Provides environments for effective learning for all
- Ensures materials are accessible and representative
- Uses assessment which enables all students to demonstrate their learning
- Makes use of feedback and performance data
- Is informed by professional development

Figure 1. Principles for Good Practice in Inclusive Teaching

Having defined our overarching principles, we then wrote accessing statements. Each principle has five underpinning statements to enable consideration of the principle and its application in academic practice. At this stage we reviewed the principles and the statements with other staff and students in the University, including representatives from the University of Hertfordshire's Student Union (UHSU) (Figure 2).

Ensures the understanding of individual learning needs

It is important that all students feel supported and know that they can speak to their tutor/lecturer about any concerns they may have. Getting to know students not only helps them to feel a part of the Institution but will also enhance their motivation for their studies.

Principle 1
Good Practice in Inclusive Teaching…
Ensures the understanding of individual learning needs

- Q1.1 I spend time getting to know my students
- Q1.2 I am explicit about how and when all my students can contact me
- Q1.3 I talk to students about my role in supporting their learning, including how I want to be addressed
- Q1.4 I create safe environments which enable students to share concerns
- Q1.5 I know where to find study needs agreements for my students with a disability and feel confident in making the identified adjustments
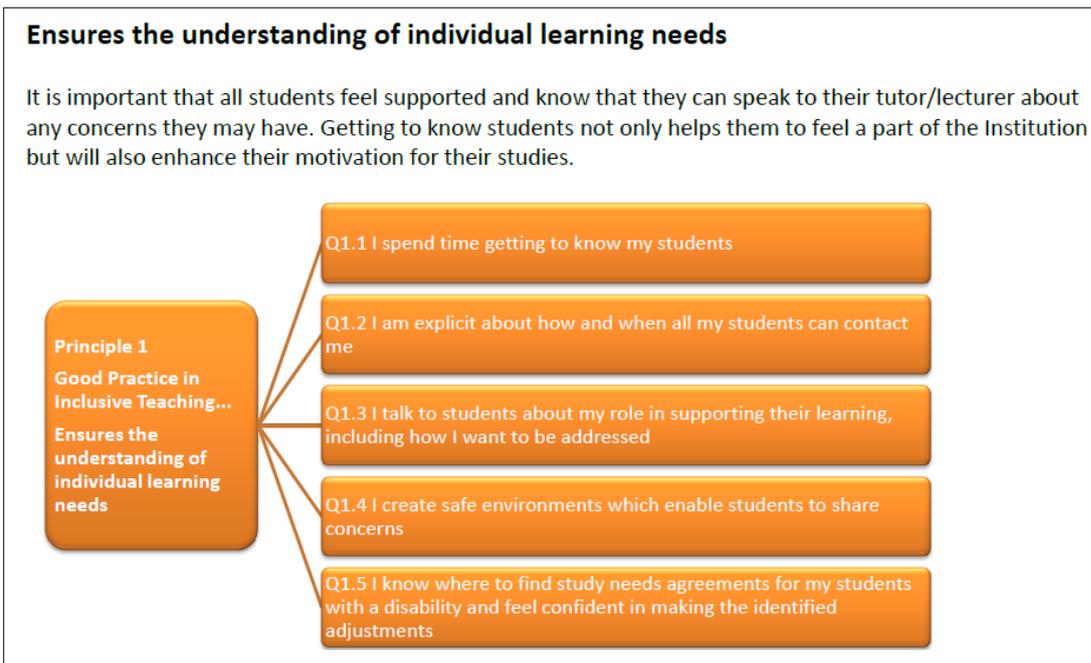
Figure 2. Principle 1 plus accessing statements

Following refinement, the principles and statements were made into a self-diagnostic tool which can be accessed via an excel spreadsheet. The self-diagnostic enables staff to indicate whether they believe they meet each of the statements 'Very often, Often, Occasionally, Rarely or Never'. Using a traffic light system, the spreadsheet provides an indication of how well one's practice meets the principles and helps identify areas most in need of development. The toolkit also provides hints, tips and case studies to help staff identify what they could do to improve their own practice. The toolkit is accessible via the presentation software Prezi (http://prezi.com/cibiptp5pa3d/curriculum-design-toolkit/). The materials are all also available via the University of Hertfordshire's Learning and Teaching Institute's web site in Word and Excel documents).

There is no right or wrong way to use the toolkit but we hope that for the Inclusive Teaching strand of the toolkit, staff members will review their own practice and consider how they are interacting with their students and how they manage their teaching and assessment activities.

Staff Engagement through case study development:

Through the project we have collated case studies to demonstrate how practices relate to the Principles for Good Practice in Inclusive Teaching and for staff to consider how to implement similar initiatives within their own discipline. The case study development has also enabled a project team member to work with staff members who have identified specific challenges and supported them as they implement inclusive teaching activities. An example of this has been the support of a visiting lecturer who was concerned about the lack of involvement and integration of international students within seminar sessions. Our project team member provided the lecturer with some relevant literature and resources associated with enabling intercultural group work and then attended the seminar classes to help the lecturer put the students into mixed groups and facilitate the discussions to enable all students to contribute effectively. The project team member attended a number of sessions to provide continued support and guidance. As a result of the project, the students have learned to work with people outside their previous friendship groups and the level of interactivity and engagement within   seminar sessions has noticeably increased. The lecturer is now more confident about facilitating group work and she has reported improvement in student performance: within this group, there was an increase of 5% for the coursework assignment, compared with the average mark for the whole cohort. Along with the project team member she has presented her work at a local visiting lecturer conference and at the University's annual learning and teaching conference.

Institutional management and co-ordination:

In 2009 The University of Hertfordshire took part in the HEA Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) Summit project. Through the inclusive culture project we wanted to further the work from the summit programme and consider mechanisms to reduce the degree performance differential between white and BME students. As well as developing case studies specifically relating to supporting BME students, we have presented the inclusive culture project to the Student Educational Experience Committee and asked the committee to consider the challenge of reducing the BME degree differential. Through the support of the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Student Experience), members of the project team were asked to present a paper to the Chief Executives Group where it was agreed that the University would set an Equality Objective associated with reducing the degree differential between white and BME students. Considering ways to meet the target will form part of staff development activities for members of the Student Educational Experience Committee and will be a key priority for the work of the Learning and Teaching Institute and the Head of Equality in 2012-2013.

Overview of the evaluation approach:

The project is being evaluated through a number of mechanisms. Regarding the toolkit, we have presented the inclusive teaching strand at internal events such as our Learning and teaching Forum (which includes representatives from each Academic School with responsibility for learning and teaching) and the International Blended Learning Conference. Feedback from participants at both events enabled refinement of the principles and accessing statements plus the inclusion of more hints and tips. The toolkit is also being evaluated by staff members studying for their post graduate certificate in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education. As part of an assessment on curriculum design, participants are using the toolkit to evaluate their own practice. They will identify good practice within their own teaching and identify areas for improvement plus actions on how to improve. The outcome indicators will be the identification of specific targets for application within their own context.

Evaluation of the case studies will take place during 2012-2013. We will work with staff members or module teams who wish to tackle a specific issue and using the case studies will help them implement relevant initiatives/activities to address their challenge. We will monitor the implementation of the initiative and record any changes at module level in terms of student feedback and performance.

At Institutional level we reviewed all qualitative comments from the 2010 and 2011 National Student Surveys (NSS) and identified positive and negative comments associated with inclusivity. In both years there were more negative than positive comments and when considering the comments according to specific themes, there are a higher number of comments associated with teaching activities and the support of staff. The quantitative data from the 2011 NSS also demonstrated differences between the ethnicities. We will continue to analyse NSS data (both quantitative and qualitative) to determine if the University becomes more inclusive in its practice and thus demonstrates a reduction in difference in quantitative scores between different ethnic student groups and sees a reduction in negative qualitative comments.

The University has set an equality objective to reduce the degree differential between White and BME students. Degree performance according to ethnicity is considered at University level through the Student Performance and Monitoring group so the University target will be monitored through this group. However, it is hoped that Academic Schools will identify their own measureable targets to reduce the degree differential which will support the achievement of the University's overall target.

Outcomes of actions so far; key successes and achievements:

The curriculum design toolkit is accessible to anyone within and beyond the Institution. It is being used by staff members on the Post Graduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education and will be promoted through a HEA workshop being held at the University in May 2012 on 'Internationalisation and Inclusivity'. The toolkit should result in improved teaching and assessment practices which will benefit both students and staff.

An intended outcome of the project was to define an Equality Objective associated with inclusivity and through the identification of the target associated with reduction in the BME differential, we have achieved this.

An unintended outcome of the project has been the discovering of initiatives and examples of practice that we weren't aware of. For example, for World Mental Health Day on 10 October 2011 there was a flash mob organised by staff and students of Nursing, Midwifery and Social Work to promote the awareness of mental health issues. Staff in the School of Creative Arts have developed

their curriculum to include the discussion of the importance of Black films in the history of film and TV development.

The project has also enabled us to make connections with other local groups through activities for Black History Month 2011 such as the Inspire events. The Inspire events were held in collaboration with the Hertfordshire Partnership NHS Foundation Trust and the Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council and have stimulated us to think about the importance of staff networks such as a BME staff network and a Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans staff network. The Head of Equality is now facilitating the development of LBGT network and we are looking to develop a BME staff network in the next academic year. We believe that such initiatives, which enable staff from currently under-represented or less visible groups, to share their experiences and empower them to inform and influence the university, will enhance the experiences of students.

Outputs:

The curriculum design toolkit is available to anyone via the following link http://prezi.com/cibiptp5pa3d/curriculum-design-toolkit

Impact:

It is often difficult to measure impact, particularly when considering curriculum design. As more staff become aware of the toolkit and use to it to reflect on and then enhance, their practice, we expect to see more positive feedback from students and enhanced student performance. Staff who have worked through the toolkit or who have engaged in a case study have already reported benefits in terms of enhanced student engagement, more confidence in their own teaching and classroom management and improved student performance.

Through the project we have been able to raise the profile of a very significant challenge for our Institution. We have capitalised on an Institutional readiness to address the differential in white and BME student performance and have clearly identified a challenging target for the Institution. The agenda has been raised at the highest level within the Institution and has received support from the Board of Governors.

Examples of where work has been embedded within the institution:

The curriculum design toolkit is now included within the Programme Review and Validation handbook as published by Academic Services. The handbook suggests that programme and module teams use the toolkit to design, develop and enhance their curriculum. The Institution also plans on having a member of the Learning and Teaching Institute on review and validation panels who can explore and investigate the extent to which the curriculum, including teaching and assessment practice, is inclusive.

The University has set an equality objective to reduce the BME differential by a certain amount by 2014-2015. This time limit will ensure that the Institution works towards this target with Academic Schools identifying ways in which they can address the differential within their own disciplines.

Important moments in the initiative, including challenges that have been overcome:

The project's success has been partly dependent on the support at Institutional level. Having the Head of Equality on the project team has been a huge benefit and has enabled the Learning and Teaching Institute to work much more closely with the Equality Office. This has been beneficial for both parties; the Learning and Teaching Institute has gained further understanding and guidance regarding equality legislation and policy and through the Learning and Teaching Institute the Head of Equality has been able to bring equality challenges, particularly associated with teaching, to the attention of the Student Educational Experience Committee, thus ensuring Institutional support.

Through the profile of the project we have been able to broach issues beyond teaching such as employment opportunities for staff of protected characteristics. Discussions with the Director of Human Resources has raised the profile of the equality challenges for staff and has stimulated the University to identify an equality objective associated with identifying and addressing any barriers to the recruitment and career progression of staff.

Lessons learned:

The project has highlighted how important it is to gain support from senior management within the Institution yet also to recognise that seemingly small initiatives 'on the ground' can have significant beneficial consequences for the students and staff involved. Providing support for members of staff to try something new within their own teaching has been very important and has enabled those staff members to then support other colleagues and share their newly developed expertise.

Within the project we planned to speak more with the Students' Union and particularly to engage with some of the student societies associated with belief, culture and sexuality. We haven't done this and plan to engage with these groups during the next academic year. We are keen to ensure the support of our students when disseminating and discussing the University target associated with reducing the BME differential.

Overview of continuing work:

The toolkit is complete and is readily accessible, but we do plan to continue to collect case studies and publish these on our LTI site. Reducing the BME differential is an equality objective so the LTI will be working with Academic Schools to investigate and implement ways to improve inclusivity within the classroom and ensure fair assessment within the different disciplines.

Throughout the project we were aware of the challenges of changing a 'culture' and trying to think about ways in which we could achieve this. One of the ways is having an institutional target associated with a specific challenge (in our case the BME degree differential) however we also wanted to consider other ways that weren't necessarily target driven. We want to share and celebrate the cultural diversity within our Institution and we have decided to develop a calendar within our Managed Learning Environment (studynet) and staff intranet (staffnet). The initial conception is that the date will be displayed on the studynet and staffnet homepages and on dates which have a cultural significance a hover box will appear when the cursor moves over the date and brief details about the day will be provided. The list of dates plus the information for the boxes will be supplied by LTI with guidance from the Equality Office, UHSU, Pro Vice-Chancellor (Student Experience) and the University Chaplaincy prior to the start of a new academic year. If the calendar is deemed beneficial we will welcome suggestions for other dates to be included via UHSU and the Equality Office. We hope that the calendar will provide:

- An increased awareness and understanding of the cultural diversity at UH;
- An opportunity for students and staff to celebrate significant cultural events;
- Increased understanding of cultural events which may impact on work or study activities.

Key messages for others:

Developing an inclusive culture initially seems like a grand challenge and one that may be overwhelming. It may be helpful to identify the key challenges for your institution or the few key initiatives that you can instigate that will make a difference.

Other information about the work:

Although the Inclusive culture project ends with the publication of the case study, we are keen to maintain links with the other Institutions involved in the project and are planning on continuing with activities initiated through the project.

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