The University of Stirling

An Inclusive Curriculum

Higher Education is beginning to see a welcome shift away from a reactive, piecemeal approach to issues of equality and inclusion, which has formerly been driven by a desire to comply with the law, towards a more pro-active, holistic approach to developing good practice in providing opportunities to improve the educational experience of all students.

The approach is also broader than before. Previously, institutions talked about an ‘accessible curriculum’, which was largely taken to mean accessibility for disabled students. However, increased diversity in the student body, coupled with the coming into force of the Equality Act 2010, means that the development of an inclusive curriculum necessarily includes consideration of the impact of a much wider range of characteristics, such as cultural background, age and sexual orientation.

All initiatives designed to support the development of an inclusive curriculum must pay cognisance to the Equality Act 2010, which requires that HEIs do not discriminate against or harass students or employees on the grounds of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief (including lack of belief), sex, sexual orientation. The legislation also places a duty on HEIs to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited under the Act,
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and people who do not share it, and
- Foster good relations between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and people who do not share it.

What is an inclusive curriculum?

An inclusive curriculum is one in which all staff and students feel valued and have the same opportunities to achieve their academic potential, irrespective of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, or other personal circumstances. It is one in which steps have actively been taken to avoid situations which could lead to discrimination, harassment, unfair treatment or negative stereotyping. An inclusive curriculum includes content which is relevant to the diverse population the makes up the student body, not simply to a particular cohort of that body.

Developing an inclusive curriculum is also about identifying and proactively tackling any barriers that might prevent groups of people from being fully engaged or being able to fulfil their academic potential. This can range from considering the practical issues that have to be addressed for a disabled student on a fieldwork placement, to ensuring that learning materials provided to students are non-biased, or considering the most accessible format and mode of delivery of learning materials, especially for part-time or distance learners. It might involve regularly reviewing the content of courses to ensure that it is relevant to a range of cultural perspectives, or that the language and terminology used is not offensive or inappropriate.

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1Not covered explicitly by anti-harassment provisions, although protection under ‘sex’ is likely
2Not covered explicitly by anti-harassment provision, although some protection under ‘sexual orientation’ is likely
Achieving an inclusive curriculum is not simply about making specific adjustment for individual students who have particular needs, although this is certainly part of it, particularly in relation to the need to make reasonable adjustments for disabled students who might otherwise face substantial disadvantage as a result of the application of a particular policy, practice or requirement. Achieving an inclusive curriculum is about considering the impact of arrangements during their development, to ensure that they are as accessible and inclusive as possible for all students. It is about taking an anticipatory approach to mitigate against issues that one can reasonably expect to materialise.

Example of taking an anticipatory approach to developing inclusive assessment methodologies:

If it is known that a proportion of students might require alternative assessment arrangements rather than a standard 3-hour written examination, it might be appropriate to devise and offer a choice or a range of assessment methods for ALL students. This would reduce the need to respond to individual requests for adjustments, and would benefit all students by recognising that different individuals have different learning styles and can express themselves more effectively through certain exercises, whether this is related to a disability or not. In addition, this approach would meet the institution’s requirements in respect of its anticipatory duty to make reasonable adjustments under the Equality Act 2010.

An inclusive curriculum is one to which all staff and students need to be committed. To achieve a fully inclusive curriculum involves seeking and paying due regard to the views and experiences of the students who take part. Staff are encouraged to involve students in the development and evaluation of their curricula and arrangements for learning, teaching and assessment.

Embedding accessibility and inclusion into the development of programmes and modules

The following checklist is designed to assist staff involved in programme and module development/revision to consider the steps that they need to take to promote accessibility and inclusivity in the curriculum and learning and teaching practices.

Staff responsible for proposing new or revised programmes or modules in Schools should satisfy themselves that the proposal pays due regard to equality and inclusion before finalising the proposal for approval. They should be satisfied that the following issues have been properly considered and any actions required to better promote equality have been identified.
The Student Body

In your discipline, have any groups of students traditionally been under-represented (e.g. male/female, ethnic minorities, disabled students), and, if so, what steps do you propose to take to address this?

Entrance requirements

Are you satisfied that the entrance requirements are appropriate and that they do not directly or indirectly discriminate against or create barriers to the inclusion of students from particular groups e.g. disabled, overseas students, females/males, mature students?

Marketing the programme/module

What information do you provide to potential students about your programme/module to assist them to make an informed decision about whether they could undertake the programme? What information do you provide about the University's approach to equality and diversity, and to student support available?

Core requirements of the programme/module

Are you satisfied that the core requirements are appropriate and that they do not directly or indirectly discriminate against or create barriers to the inclusion of students from particular groups e.g. disabled, overseas students, females/males, mature students? For further guidance on assessing the core requirements from an equality perspective, consider the ‘Teachability’ guidance http://www.teachability.strath.ac.uk/chapter_1/reflectingoncontent1.html

Induction

What measures will be taken to ensure effective induction for new students (regardless of year of entry) to your programme? To what extent does this explicitly cover issues relating to equality, diversity and inclusive practices?

What information do you provide to students taking this programme/module on where they can go to access information and advice about equality matters or additional support? What references do you make to the University’s approach to equality and diversity in programme/module literature?
How could you make information about your programme more easily available to potential students, some of whom have impairments?