Inclusive Practice Framework.

1. Introduction

The purpose of this framework is to set out the rationale for embedding inclusivity in the University's learning, teaching and assessment policy and practice; and to rearticulate the University's commitment to inclusion identified in the Refreshed Corporate Plan. Inclusive practice in learning, teaching and assessment is an important developmental element of the University's LTA Strategy. This framework underpins the LTA strategy and supports its implementation. The framework identifies four key aims which will enable the progressive embedding of inclusivity and outlines for each aim a number of objectives.

The monitoring of the framework will be integrated into the annual quality review processes of the University's Academic Quality Framework.

2. Scope

The framework focuses on making staff aware of the standards expected of the institution by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) and best practice in relation to inclusion when designing, developing, reviewing and delivering the University's curricula. This includes Sheffield Hallam and collaborative partner provision, delivered on campus and off campus where it is integral to the University's programmes of study and the student experience, e.g. sandwich placements, work based learning and field trips. It also has a role in raising the awareness of staff involved in the delivery of the University's academic provision of the main requirements of the Equality Act 2010 and staff's legal responsibilities.

3. Definitions of inclusion and inclusive practice in LTA

The HEA advocate\(^1\) that 'inclusion' means enabling full and equitable participation in and progression through higher education for all prospective and existing students. Many institutions are embracing this notion of inclusion and are moving towards more inclusive policies and practices and away from remedial interventions. Inclusive (practice) learning and teaching has been defined\(^2\) as the ways in which pedagogy, curricula and assessment, in higher education, 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

\(^1\) http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/detail/inclusion/Inclusion

\(^2\) "Inclusive learning and teaching in higher education: a synthesis of research" Professor Christine Hockings, April 2010
diversity that can enrich the lives and learning of others. Inclusive practice is not a panacea and the individual needs of students will continue to be met through reasonable adjustments or differentiated teaching, as appropriate and where necessary.

4. Context

4.1 External Context

The Equality Act 2010 has introduced a public sector equality duty, which higher education institutions and the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) have to meet. The duty has a number of aims and these have to be considered by the University when it develops, evaluates and reviews its policies; designs, delivers and evaluates its services, including its education provisions; and when it commissions and procures services from others. This duty commenced on 10 September 2011. Further information is given in Appendix 1.

In addition to the legal requirements, inclusive practice and inclusion have recently been actively promoted nationally by the key HE funding, quality and developmental agencies.

The Higher Education Funding Council for England's (HEFCE) has stated\(^3\) that its aim is "one where everyone has the opportunity to access higher education and fulfil their potential in a culture characterised by inclusiveness and respect'.

The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) Code of Practice, Section 3 is premised on disabled students being an integral part of the academic community but goes further to state that 'institutions should be able to address individual cases effectively and also manage their provision in a way that develops an inclusive culture'.

The Higher Education Academy (HEA) has developed several initiatives aimed at encouraging the development of inclusive practice. For example: Designing an Inclusive Curriculum in Higher Education (DICHE), Developing an Inclusive Culture in Higher Education (2011); and Developing and Embedding Inclusive Policy and Practice (2008).

There has been extensive research undertaken relating to inclusive practice in higher education, an overview of which is available on the HEA website. The research has tended to focus on disadvantaged groups, particularly those defined by the Equality Act 2010 as 'protected characteristics' (e.g. disability, age, race, etc.). However, the consensus in terms of the impacts and benefits to be gained by adopting an inclusive approach are that inclusion relates to and benefits, all students.

\(^3\) 2007/01
4.2 Institutional Context

Sheffield Hallam’s Refreshed Corporate Plan (2011 - 13) identifies inclusion as one of the nine distinctive features of the Institution. The Corporate Plan makes plain a commitment to advancing inclusion as a key feature of the institution’s activities and acknowledges that inclusion contributes to the academic strength of the University. It goes further by stating that part of our approach to improving the quality of the student experience is: 'Focussing on inclusive practice to support high rates of student retention and progression'.

The Student Charter states: "You (students) can expect:"

- an environment that fosters an inclusive, supportive and collaborative University community;

Inclusion and inclusive practice is a prominent feature of the institution’s key learning, teaching and assessment and student experience related strategies. A key aim of the Learning, Teaching and Assessment (LTA) Strategy is that all staff will demonstrate an active commitment to excellence in LTA which includes the advancement of inclusion. In this context it requires that staff acknowledge that adopting inclusive teaching, learning and assessment practices is part of their role as academics.

Alongside the adoption of inclusive approaches to LTA, staff also need to ensure that they are aware of the diverse educational, cultural and social backgrounds of their student cohorts in order to be supportive and responsive to their students' learning needs.

Research has shown that when interviewed, most academic staff at Sheffield Hallam were "keen to make things as inclusive as possible….". Indeed, there are many pockets of good inclusive practice across the institution which can be built upon. However, it is nevertheless true that limited progress has been made in the development of practice in any widespread or co-ordinated fashion. This has been attributed to a lack of understanding amongst the academic community of what inclusive practice actually means and staff not seeing the use of inclusive practices as being part of their responsibility.

Responding to the diversity amongst the the student population and thus being able to develop inclusive practices requires:

- an understanding of the extent of difference amongst a student cohort;
- an understanding of the implications of these differences;
- the ability to adopt a range of teaching practices and learning approaches which enable all students within the cohort to extend their subject knowledge and understanding, and develop their skills and graduate attributes; and
- the use of appropriate and varied methods of assessment to give all students the opportunity to demonstrate their learning.

---

4 Smith, M (2009) "Inclusive Teaching Practice at SHU", Learning & Teaching Institute, SHU
5. **Key Principles**

The guiding principles, which define the focus and the approach which underpin this framework, are that:

- everyone within the University's learning community is responsible for actively promoting and having positive attitudes towards the delivery of the student experience through the continuous enhancement of their academic and professional practice and a commitment to student engagement and participation;
- managing students entitlements and needs in an ad hoc way is unsustainable and the University needs to build the capability to anticipate a range of possible requirements by adopting more inclusive approaches to teaching and assessment;
- the law requires that the University considers how it meets the needs of people with protected characteristics when designing, commissioning, delivering, procuring and evaluating its educational provision.
- inclusive practice is not a panacea and the individual needs of students will continue to be met through reasonable adjustments or differentiated teaching as appropriate and where necessary.

6. **Aims and Objectives**

The following aims and objectives have been identified as the key means by which inclusion will be progressed and enhanced at Sheffield Hallam. Inclusion is already seen as a key feature of the institution's activities, is acknowledged as a contributor to the academic strength of the University and supports the University's high rates of student retention and progression. The following aims and objectives are based on expectations contained with the Quality Assurance Agency's (QAA) codes of practice and acknowledged good practice in the sector. These aims and objectives are not time specific but it is anticipated that they will be progressively implemented across the institution resulting in a curriculum which reflects the University's diverse student population and is delivered and assessed in ways which are inclusive.

6.1 **Aim 1 - All staff understand their specific legal responsibilities and the University's expectations in relation to developing inclusion.**

In accordance with the QAA's codes of practice, it is anticipated that the University will provide opportunities for staff to participate in a range of continuing professional development activities which underpin the development of a fully inclusive institutional learning and teaching culture.

To support this aim the University will provide a range of continuing professional development activities which will help staff to:

a. understand what current diversity legislation means for them in their teaching and support roles, and when they are designing, developing, reviewing and implementing the University's curricula and academic policies;
b. understand what their role is in the development of an inclusive institutional culture; and

c. gain an appreciation of the business benefits of inclusivity.

6.2 Aim 2 - Curricula are designed and developed to be inclusive and facilitate all students to reach their potential.

There is an expectation that the University's courses will be designed to be inclusive. The design and development of inclusive curricula involves the following inputs:

a. course design teams have information and data on the demographic and educational background of existing or potential students;

b. students and central support services; and employers and professional bodies, as appropriate, are included as partners in the design and review processes;

c. course aims, teaching and learning methods, intended learning outcomes, and assessment strategies are evaluated so that potential barriers to student success are identified and addressed; and

d. opportunities are identified to enable students to develop their diversity awareness and global awareness within the curricula.

6.3 Aim 3 - All courses use a range of learning and teaching methods and assessment strategies, which are sufficiently flexible and inclusive, to enable all students to engage with their curriculum on an equal basis and demonstrate they have met their intended learning outcomes.

The use of flexible and inclusive approaches to learning and teaching will ensure that all students have an equal opportunity to meet intended learning outcomes of their course. These approaches enhance students' learning by recognising that students learn in different ways and are at different stages in the development of their academic and digital literacies; English language proficiency; and skills and attributes. These are often dependant on their previous educational experience and cultural background.

The University needs to ensure that the assessment strategies and methods used are sufficiently flexible and wide ranging to give all students an equal opportunity to meet the learning outcomes of their course of study.

The following objectives will support the achievement of this aim:

a. Staff have available and use 'student information' to inform the teaching practice they adopt in the delivery of their modules;

b. Staff adopt inclusive approaches to LTA and integrate them into module delivery,

c. Course teams adopt a managed approach to the use of inclusive practice across modules and levels;

d. Ongoing review, reflection and enhancement of inclusive practices is undertaken to ensure fitness for purpose.
6.4 **Aim 4 - Off-campus learning opportunities are designed and organised to ensure an equitable experience for all students.**

Off-campus learning opportunities are integral parts of the student experience, as such the University has a responsibility to ensure they are accessible and provide an equitable experience. The implementation of the University's employability agenda means that an increasingly large proportion of the student population will have the opportunity to engage in work based learning, professional and sandwich placements. Some students also have the opportunity to undertake field trips and visits related to their areas of study. In order to ensure all off-campus opportunities meet the University's legal obligations, and anticipatory and ethical responsibilities, consideration needs to be given to ensure:

a. Information, advice and guidance on the requirements for data protection, confidentiality, and equality and diversity is provided to placement teams, course/module leaders and employer/placement providers;

b. the organisation of off-campus learning activities is informed by appropriate diversity information;

c. students are fully prepared for the particular issues they may face when studying off-campus; and

d. consultation and negotiation with placement providers is undertaken to make sure appropriate accessibility, adjustments and support are available.

7. **Governance, Monitoring and Reporting**

The Inclusive Practice (IP) Framework is one of a suite of documents which supports the implementation of the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy - 2011 - 13. As such the Pro Vice-Chancellor for Student Experience, Learning and Teaching, who provides the strategic leadership for LTA, has the overall delegate responsibility for co-ordinating the development, implementation and operation of the IP Framework.

The Student Experience, Learning and Teaching Committee, chaired by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, is responsible for coordinating annual reviews, action plans and associated documentation related to the LTA Strategy. As such this cross-institutional group will also monitor the implementation plans for the IP Framework.

Identifying progress against implementation actions will be incorporated into the University's AQF processes and monitoring information will be generated through the collation of information collected during these annual review processes. Other specific responsibilities for ensuring that the IP Framework is implemented successfully will be identified within the implementation plans.

8. **Risks**

There are significant longer term risks for the University in not developing and enhancing its approaches to inclusive practice in teaching, learning and assessment.
The University has set its fee based on delivering an excellent teaching and learning experience for students. National Student Survey results (2011) have shown a decline in teaching and learning satisfaction by students and nationally the University's rankings for teaching and learning are low. It is therefore critically important that Sheffield Hallam focuses on making significant enhancements to its teaching, learning and assessment practice and ensures consistent and inclusive delivery across all provision.

The University's Student Charter includes a statement which sets expectations of inclusivity irrespective of a student's course of study. There are consequently risks in making these clear statements of a universal offer and then not being able to deliver that offer.

In addition, there are possible litigation risks associated with failing to meet the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 as described in Appendix 1 below.
Appendix 1
The Equality Act 2010

The Equality Act 2010 introduced a public sector equality duty. Higher education institutions (HEIs) and the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) have to meet this duty\(^5\). The equality duty consists of a general duty\(^6\), and a series of specific duties\(^7\). The equality duty covers a number of protected characteristics\(^8\).

The general duty has three aims. It requires HEIs to have 'due regard' to the need to:

- eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act 2010
- advance equality of opportunity between people from different groups. This involves considering the need to:
  - remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by people due to their protected characteristics;
  - meet the needs of people with protected characteristics;
  - encourage people with protected characteristics to participate in public life or in other activities where their participation is low.
- foster good relations between people from different groups. This involves tackling prejudice and promoting understanding between people from different groups.

Institutions have to consider these aims in order to demonstrate that they have shown 'due regard' when they:

- develop, evaluate and review policies;
- design, deliver and evaluate services, including education provisions; and
- commission and procure services from others.

Institutions can treat some people more favourably than others in order to comply with the duty providing it falls within UK and European anti-discrimination law. The general duty explicitly recognises that disabled people’s requirements may be different from those of non-disabled people; their impairments must be taken into account; and reasonable adjustments for disabled people must be made.

---


\(^6\) [section 149 of the Equality Act 2010](http://www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/files/psed-specific-duties-for-england-sept11.docx/view)

\(^7\) contained within secondary legislation that accompanies the Equality Act 2010

\(^8\) Protected characteristics: age; disability; gender reassignment; pregnancy and maternity; race – this includes ethnic or national origin, colour or nationality; religion or belief – this includes lack of belief; sex; and sexual orientation.