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Abstracts - Papers

Session One: Targeting Protected Characteristic Groups

*Change and challenges: learning from the Higher Education Academy’s BME Strategic development grants*

**Jane Andrews and Robin Clark**

In 2012-13, the Higher Education Academy funded eight institutions to implement interventions to improve the attainment of BME students, and to contribute to our knowledge about effective approaches to improving retention and success. The BME-SDG interventions included projects aimed at challenging and changing assessment practices, teacher expectations, peer-mentoring and curriculum design. All projects adhered to a set of guiding principles laid down by the Academy around the need for evidence-based interventions; the involvement of PVC 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. Each of the projects have completed their implementation and the purpose of this paper is to report on early outcomes, barrier and enablers, lessons learned and key messages for others. As we expect impact to increase over time, evaluation will continue for an additional three years to enable the effect on degree attainment to be examined.

*Narrowing the ethnic attainment gap- students as ambassadors and working in the academic Schools and Departments*

**Jane Tope**

This paper considers how, in practical terms, the University’s Schools can make changes in order to address the ethnic attainment gap. It explores the development of trained student ambassadors working alongside academics, undergraduate tutors and School Heads to make changes to the curriculum, the representation of BME students on committees, the creation of BME student ‘space’ and student role models. The notion of student ambassadors developed from the University’s BME peer mentoring scheme (which has been developed and evaluated as part of a HEA funded project: final report due in March 2014). As BME students became more familiar with the issues of concern, from their own experiences and the research, it became clear that work needed to be done at School level and in a more proactive, positive way; one that recognised and celebrated BME students’ contribution to the University’s teaching, learning and social environment.

In 2013, in a number of Schools, BME student ambassadors were trained and started working with academics and fellow students to highlight and address the ethnic attainment gap, poorer retention and experiences. For example, in the School of English, Drama, American and Canadian Studies, a group of ambassadors working with the UG tutor established a book/arts club that considered BME literature and film. It’s open to all but targets BME students in that School. They have regular meetings, have visited Freshers’ events in the School, have created a space to post adverts etc. and now have a rep. on the Schools committee.

2014 sees the development of a BME students/School ambassadors’ toolkit. This will enable Schools to access resources and make it easier for them to address the ethnic attainment gap locally.
The experience of disabled and non-disabled students on professional practice placements: similarities, differences and implications for practice

Shirley Hill

This session will present the results of a research study that investigated the experience of disabled students on practice placements compared to their non-disabled peers, across six professional disciplines: medicine, dentistry, nursing and midwifery, education, social work and community education. The research utilised an online survey and semi-structured interview techniques to gather quantitative and qualitative data from both disabled and non-disabled students. Such a comparison had not previously been made in the placement context and the research was therefore unique in this respect. The results of the research study were subsequently compared with the student placement feedback obtained independently by the individual disciplines during the period of the research, providing further insight into the students’ experience.

The session will consider in particular, the similarities and differences in students’ reported placement experience, issues related to disability disclosure and identity as a disabled person in such contexts, and the evidence for different attitudes to disability in different professions. The session will conclude by identifying recommendations for practice that aim to improve the experience of all students on practice placements and to ensure the needs of disabled students in such contexts are appropriately met. Delegates will be encouraged to consider the extent to which the results reflect their experience of supporting students on placement or delivering the practice placement component of professional programmes; in particular, whether the identified recommendations are relevant to their institutional context.

Session Two: Enhancing Attainment Across the Disciplines

Exploring Gender Differences in Undergraduate Physics Courses

Robyn Donnelly

The under-representation of women in science, in particular physics, at university level is of growing concern. In this talk we will discuss results collected from the exploration of the existence and degree of gender disparity in student participation and performance in physics courses at the University of Edinburgh. In addition to gender disparities in performance, differences between ‘major’ and ‘non-major’ students will also be explored.

Pre- and post-instruction testing, using standard diagnostic tests of conceptual understanding (e.g. the Force Concept Inventory in Mechanics), has been used to identify significant differences between how males and females perform at undergraduate level as well as specific misconceptions held by students which could be targeted for intervention. The use of interactive engagement techniques in first year courses has resulted in a consistent improvement in student understanding over the course of a semester. The observed gender gap found at the point of entry to university, despite students holding similar school qualifications, narrows after one semester of teaching but remains statistically significant.

In addition to this, analysis was carried out of students’ performance on continuous assessment and end-of-course examinations throughout the undergraduate programme to explore the possibility of gender dependence on the type of assessment. Results suggest female students outperform males on coursework elements whilst the pattern is less clear for examination results. This study will highlight important similarities and differences between cohorts and suggest possible teaching methodologies capable of closing performance gaps.
'We Have Books in the Library on the Subject': Why Queering the HE Classroom Is Even Better

Anja Finger

This paper is based on a learning-and-teaching project carried out at the University of Aberdeen in 2011-2: ‘Queering Religion and Its Study: The Experience of LGBTIQ Students’. Homophobia, heteronormativity and ways of tackling them in the university context were explored through a focus group and a series of individual interviews.

Students identified areas of good practice as well as those where they felt that improvements are necessary or desirable and offered concrete suggestions for a more welcoming university experience. This does not have to happen at the expense of academic standards. In fact, student participants did not advocate what could be construed as ‘dumbing down’ but rather a more challenging as well as rewarding academic journey for all. More specifically, the idea of ‘queering’ the curriculum does not only broaden and deepen existing knowledge; it also generates new forms of knowledge. These contribute to political awareness and cultivation of self – in both students and those teaching them.

Identified problems and envisaged solutions are made relevant beyond the immediate context of this research, beyond the scope of Religious-Studies students or those who self-identify as queer. Hence the paper should be of interest to the wider learning-and-teaching community.

Participants in this project also spoke about what equality and diversity mean to them, including the limitations of these concepts as they understand them. In a related vein, I want to address the question how we can translate the legal and managerial terminology of ‘protected characteristics’ into emancipatory educational practices co-created by students.

How is Reasonable Adjustment implemented in clinical placements for student nurses with disability?

Robin Ion, Andrea Cameron, Sally Hain

Aim: To understand what forms of Reasonable Adjustment are made in clinical practice for nursing students on placement with a declared disability.

Context: All Scottish HEIs have outcome agreements requiring them to demonstrate diversity in the characteristics of their student population. This includes having more students enrolled with declared disabilities. A learning support plan is often constructed for these students in conjunction with the Student Disability Officer. However, this plan will generally concentrate on the student’s academic experiences within the university, but with the emphasis on employability, more students are now engaging with external placement activities; something which is essential for nurse preparation programmes. Analysis of performance data for students’ enrolled in the School of Social and Health Sciences revealed significant differences in both progression rates and grade profiles by subject area and stage of study for students with disability. These differences were quite marked when the profile of grades for student nurses were considered, and further analysis revealed a significantly lower grade profile in clinical practice modules for those student nurses with disabilities.

Method: A series of focus groups and interviews is planned with student nurses with disabilities, as well as a survey of clinical practitioners, to explore experiences of placement and any forms of reasonable adjustment that are made.

Data analysis: Examination of the output will be used to generate a series of recommendations, in conjunction with the Student Disability Officer, regarding forms of Reasonable Adjustment for clinical placements. Initial findings will be presented within this paper.
Session Three: Supporting Students Throughout their Learning Journeys

Partnership and preparation: A new model of transition from college to university

Debbie Meharg, Julia Fotheringham

Widening participation in higher education continues to be a key focus for Scottish government and the 2013 Post-16 Education (Scotland) Act places obligations upon Universities to achieve progress in this regard. The Act also makes provision for Additional Funded Places enabling more college students to transfer into higher education with advance standing (Scottish Funding Council, 2013). This paper provides an overview of the Associate Student project to date and examines how rethinking traditional articulation can increase attainment for all. This model of articulation has created opportunities for partnership working between colleges and universities which are designed to enhance student progression and attainment and to better prepare students as they negotiate the transition between college HN study and university. The paper describes ‘building bridges’ (Fisher and Atkinson-Grosjean, 2002) through partnership working between college and university and the interventions put in place to better prepare students intending to progress to University.

The paper deploys theoretical conceptions of academic transitions as ‘boundary crossing’ (Akkerman and Bakker, 2011) and explores how the effectiveness a range of practical measures and theoretical conceptions may be understood in terms of their potential as boundary objects (Star, 2010).

The paper concludes that Associate Student status of itself is not sufficient to enable effective transitions, but that a programme of targeted learning opportunities and experiences is likely to improve confidence and motivation for university study, ensuring that students are well positioned to negotiate the transition to undergraduate programmes in their third year of study.

Rethinking Belonging

Kate Thomas

This paper emerges from doctoral research into the impact of retention strategies on part-time, mature undergraduates in English higher education (HE). It considers the discourse of ‘belonging’, prominent in student retention literature. A ‘sense of belonging is considered critical to both retention and success’ (Thomas 2012:1) an approach influenced by Tinto’s interactionalist theory of student departure (1975) which highlights integration and congruency as conditions of student persistence. But the idea of belonging as universal or uniform is problematised by ‘practices of boundary making and inhabitation which signal that a particular collection of people, practices, performances, ideas are meant to be in a place’ (Mee and Wright, 2009:772).

The paper problematises ‘belonging’ in relation to the multiple identities of part-time, mature undergraduates, cross-cut by age, gender, race and class and highlights ways in which these characteristics position them on the periphery of HE and potentially restrict their access to means of belonging validated in dominant institutional discourses. It applies a borderland analysis (Abes, 2012) to show how Bourdieus’s theoretical framework of habitus, capital and field (1977, 1990); Brah’s conceptualising of ‘diaspora’ (1996) and Massey’s progressive sense of place (1994, 2005) allow ‘belonging’ to be interrogated through ideas of power, identity and space/place and to convey the complexity of belonging in contested space. Delegates will be invited to draw on their own experiences in a discussion of alternative versions of belonging beyond the institutional gaze and the paper will report on early findings from the project’s four case studies.
Unique Student Trajectories: Exploring non-Traditional Routes and Journeys through Higher Education

Kate Daguerre, Jodi Collett

This paper will present the key findings arising out of a longitudinal project aimed at capturing the motivations, expectations and lived experiences and journeys of students from non-traditional backgrounds studying Sociology and Criminology at the University of the West of England, Bristol (UWE).

The project aimed to respond to the recent significant changes to the Higher Education landscape, specifically the increase of student numbers and the rising awareness and commitment to widening participation. It aimed to investigate student experience in order to illuminate factors that explained student attainment and engagement, in the context of the growing diversity of the student body.

This submission arises out of our work as Graduate Interns at UWE. A case study was produced to consolidate the data collected from various forms of student interaction including observations made in study skills sessions offered in a graduate advisor capacity, semi-structured interviews with a 10% sample of level I Sociology and Criminology students and, finally, our heuristic reflections as recent UWE graduates of the chosen programmes. Building on this work carried out in academic year 12/13 a longitudinal study was developed in order to track the original participants’ journeys through Higher Education. Further interviews have been carried out this academic year 13/14 drawing on themes from last year’s findings.

This paper will discuss the key findings around challenges faced by non-traditional students, such as the significance of age difference, diverging learning expectations and variety of entry routes. We will also highlight findings around the particular empowering characteristics of non-traditional students, such as their greater commitment to study, a better understanding of independent learning and higher motivational levels.
Abstracts - Workshops

Session One:

Workshop One: Confessions of an Accidental Inclusivist  
Sarla Gandhi

Over the past few years, patchwork text assessment has been introduced into a number of modules. Whilst not exactly new in higher education, the patchwork text assessment strategy has an implicitly inclusive focus. This workshop will,

- Discuss what it is (and isn't) and why formative assessment/feedback is integral to this type of assessment strategy;
- Review the inclusivity aspects of this type of assessment strategy;
- Highlight the benefits/potential pitfalls of patchwork text assessment;
- Provide some practical hints and tips for colleagues who may wish to use this form of assessment.

Patchwork text assessment enables students write small, complete ‘patches’ of assessment, which in themselves are complete and focus of different aspects of modules. The ‘patches’ are structured learning activities that are lecturer led, but specific topics are student led to ensure the student-centredness of the assessment strategy in order to enhance both patient care and personal learning/personal development planning (PDP). This allows individual students to personally engage in their learning (deep) by linking the specific module learning outcomes to the assessment process. Formative feedback via lecturer and peers is utilized during the writing of the patches. The patches are ‘stitched together’ with a retrospective reflection of the student’s personal learning journey throughout the module.

Student engagement with the module is enhanced, feedback has been positive since the change in the assessment strategy and average module grade has increased.

Workshop Two: Embracing Diversity – Watch Your Language  
Andrea Cameron, Stewart Squire

Aim: To develop a set of resources to be used in a UADSA campaign centred on embracing diversity and promoting tolerance. These resources will be piloted with Abertay sports team members.

Context: Graduate attributes refer to qualities, characteristics and skills that can transfer to being responsible citizens (Bowden et al, 2000); this could include being able to apply the principles embedded within the Equality Act 2010. Poor behaviour of university sport teams has recently attracted media attention (Denholm, 2013), and these are not isolated events. The cohesiveness of sport teams can be integral to their success but there have also been reports of sexist and discriminatory behaviour (Fink, Borland, Fields, 2011)

Method: Initially, a scoping exercise of Abertay sports teams’ shared open Facebook postings was undertaken to gain a sense of the scale/volume and breadth of issues which demonstrated non-compliance with the Equality Act 2010. This exercise was used to inform the development of a questionnaire distributed to consenting members of Abertay sports teams, examining knowledge and attitudes in respect of the protected characteristics embedded within the Equality Act 2010.
Data generated: Responses were used to develop a set of resources to support a UADSA campaign with evaluation of impact via redistribution of the questionnaires, and re-scoping of the sports teams’ Facebook postings.

Workshop Three: Creating Inclusive Content using Xerte Online Toolkits (XOTs)

John Maguire, Margaret McKay, Penny Robertson

Xerte online Toolkits (XOT) is an open source content creation tool developed by Nottingham University with the support of Jisc Techdis. It enables the creation of accessible, interactive online content using a series of templates. This toolkit provides the opportunity to create rich online content. XOT can be used:

- To support interactive learning;
- To create engaging and accessible information;
- To support collaborative creation and sharing of subject content;
- To support active classroom/lecture contexts;
- To support learners in being active content creators.

Aims: To become more familiar with XOT and to understand the varying contexts for its use,

- To understand the interactivity and inclusivity benefits of this content creation tool;
- To provide examples of effective techniques from other users;
- To learn about the sources of support and opportunities for further professional development from the XOT communities across the UK and internationally;
- To inspire effective and innovative practice by exploring features and techniques.

Nature of the Session: The workshop will offer an introduction to XOT, an opportunity for delegates to become familiar with the toolkit structure and to learn about integrating Xerte with learning platforms (in particular Moodle). In addition the session will provide the opportunity for delegates to work with peers to evaluate ways that content created using XOT could be used to create inclusive and accessible learning.

Session Two:

Workshop One: Embedding equality consideration into academic programme development and delivery – a mainstreaming approach

Jill Hammond, Irene Bell, Kath Bridger

Developing an inclusive environment and delivering inclusive learning and teaching practice which benefits an increasingly diverse student body whilst maintaining academic standards are still often regarded as competing agendas. This does not have to be the case as demonstrated by a recent GSA action learning project involving cross discipline teams of academic staff considering equality in a range of key learning and teaching areas.

Referring to embedding inclusive policy and practice in higher education May & Bridger (Higher Education Academy, 2010) state:

‘Moving (the equality agenda) “from the margins to the mainstream” (Thomas et al, 2005) remains a significant challenge. It necessitates a shift away from supporting specific student groups through a discrete set of policies or time-bound interventions, towards equity consideration being embedded within all functions of the institution and treated as an ongoing process of quality enhancement’
Working from this principle and using the legislative requirements to mainstream equality and impact assess equality impact together with QAA’s Quality Code as impetus for action, GSA have developed an approach to embedding equality consideration at the heart of learning and teaching which has been developed by academic practitioners for academic practitioners.

The focus of the workshop will be the approaches to learning and teaching enhancement by mainstreaming equality through impact assessment that have emerged from this institution-wide project. Participating academic staff will share their experience and learning and delegates will be invited to engage with, discuss and consider the relevance of these approaches to their own pedagogic practices.

**Workshop Two: The role of virtual learning environments and peer support in under-represented student groups’ experiences of higher education**

Catherine Lido, Lucy Solomon

This workshop will present and build upon a body of research conducted primarily in collaboration with Professor Mary Stuart (VC, University of Lincoln) as Primary Investigator. Dr Catherine Lido and Dr Lucy Solomon will present their existing published research which highlights factors negatively impacting Widening Participation (WP) student populations, in terms of experiences, progression and academic outcomes. The message from their triangulated, mixed-methods findings reveals ‘sense of fit/belonging’ and ‘connection/identification’ with the university are key predictors of students’ well-being, academic self-esteem and academic achievement and retention. It will then workshop some unexpected findings regarding certain demographic student groups who may be less engaged with their university peers within and outside the classroom environment, but more reliant on (and engaged with) virtual learning environments for social and academic support than their more ‘traditional’ counterparts. These findings highlight the importance of widening access to peer networks and consistent VLE provision for minority student groups and practitioners will be invited to brainstorm innovative approaches to blended and e-learning delivery specifically targeted to promote inclusion, fit and belonging for under-represented and marginalized student groups.

**Session Three:**

**Workshop One: Liberation, Equality, and Diversity in the Curriculum: the student perspective**

Stephanie Millar, Philip Whyte

NUS UK recently produced a briefing for student officers in higher education entitled “Liberation, Equality, and Diversity in the Curriculum” providing guidance about inclusivity in the higher education curriculum and highlighting some of the work that is already happening in universities. This workshop uses this briefing as the basis for considering the students’ views of equality and diversity in the curriculum and exploring the value and methods to involve students in the discussion.

Within academic development practice student involvement in curriculum design is becoming a relevant issue for academics and curriculum developers, with students being recognised as partners in curriculum design and, increasingly, as co-developers. With higher education institutions being encouraged to support people from protected groups to participate in activities, where their participation is disproportionately low under the he Equality Act, there is an opportunity for HEIs to bring together the student engagement and equality in the curriculum strands of their work together.

The workshop will consider how connections can be made between these two areas of work, asking participants to focus on the student perspective of equality and diversity in the
curriculum. It will consider the importance of involving students in curriculum development work and how a Students' Association can support this process. It will identify ways that sparqs and NUS Scotland can further support HEIs by developing student capacity.
Abstracts - Posters

Session Three: Removing Barriers in HE and Understanding Diversity of Student Perspectives

The Discursive Construction of Dyslexia in Higher Education

Harriet Cameron

Under UK law dyslexia is a disability and the label entitles students within higher education to certain supports. However, students with the label I have come across during my work as a specialist tutor conceptualise dyslexia in different ways. Some say they feel they are just 'stupid', some consider dyslexia a medical condition, some feel that dyslexia is a positive, and others feel they are simply different, part of a neuro-diverse population. My position is that the ways dyslexia is constructed in any particular interaction, or in any wider text, have implications for how students with the label construct their identities (and others’ identities) as academic learners. In turn, I believe certain ways of being and doing are opened up or closed down by the ‘subject positions’ (Davies & Harre, 2001) these constructions offer. My current research is a discourse analysis of two focus group conversations between dyslexic university students and myself. In this session I will talk about the different subject positions participants took up or offered, the wider discourses they drew upon, and the implications of these for ‘being’ and identity and equality within the higher education context.

Part Time, Mature Students in HE: Developing 21st Century Teaching and Learning Initiatives

Barbara Fielden-Cash

The aim of this study is to investigate the reasons underlying the fall in enrolments of part time mature, undergraduate students onto Business degrees at a University Campus in the NW of England post 2012.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that although increasing part time fees and student funding are a barrier to entry into HE, other factors also have an impact. Curriculum developers can do very little to influence funding of courses but, by identifying and addressing other barriers to entry HE providers within a University Campus setting could encourage mature, part time students to attain HE qualifications.

The objectives of the paper will be to critically analyse the current situation regarding enrolments of mature, part time students at a University Campus in the NW of England. A review of the current academic literature surrounding the area will be developed. Primary research will be undertaken via a questionnaire and semi structured interviews with 40 mature, part time students, who were accepted onto Business courses at the University Campus in June - September 2013 but subsequently rejected their offers, to ascertain the reasons behind this decision. A case study will also be developed.

The areas investigated will include the cost of the course but will mainly focus on any other additional barriers to entry. Results will then be analysed, conclusions drawn and recommendations made as to teaching and learning initiatives that could be put in place at the University Campus to address any barriers to entry for mature, part time students to develop their participation in HE.

How Influence from Employer Mentors Helps Motivate Students to Succeed

Jackie Gallagher, Kirsty Summers

The Employer Mentoring Programme aims to help non-traditional students to reach their maximum academic and employability potential. The Programme has been running for 4 years, during which a
A correlation between student participation and increased attainment has been identified. Previous years’ evaluation of the Programme has demonstrated improved academic performance and greater levels of graduate-level employment for the participating cohorts.

Recent funding from the Scottish Funding Council has supported an increase in the number of participants, including students with disabilities and those studying specific subjects. As part of this new phase, the impact of the programme on the self-efficacy of the participating cohort is being measured using an existing self-efficacy scale (Schwarzer and Jerusalem) provided by the Scottish Mentoring Network. The relationship between the self-efficacy scores of individuals and their educational and employment outcomes will be explored, along with programme evaluation and progress tracking (baseline, follow-up and conclusion).

At the time of the conference, there will not yet be conclusive results from this year’s cohort but the hope is that the students’ journeys of self-discovery will provide useful and relevant insight into the impact of an alternative learning environment on attainment and success. The research will explore student progress from their initial assessment of how they perform in certain situations to the reality of dealing with these situations and students’ self-awareness and ability to plan and map out the “road ahead”.

The poster will demonstrate:
- Background to the Employer Mentoring Programme;
- The self-efficacy questionnaire used;
- Examples of the narrative provided by participating students along their journey;
- Any appropriate data and projected conclusions.

2%? ......... Could Do Better!

In Scotland, only 2% of children brought up in care get to university, compared to 36% of general school leavers.

- The Guardian, Wednesday 24 April 2013
  “Department for Business, Innovation and Skills statistics indicate that 49.3% of young people in England entered higher education in academic year 2011/12”.
- Skills Development Scotland, School Leaver Destinations Initial Follow up 2012/13
  “36.5% of school leavers entered HE, a decrease of 0.8pp in comparison to last year”.
- Quality Mark in Higher Education, Buttle UK March 2013:
  In England in 2011 6%, and in Scotland 2%, of care leavers were in HE.

Despite increasing awareness of the needs of care leavers, a focus on increasing the numbers entering Higher Education, and the high profile work of groups including Buttle UK and CELCIS (Centre for Excellence for Looked After Children in Scotland), nothing much has changed in terms of the 2% of care leavers that are known to access Higher Education.

This poster demonstrates a pilot resource to allow users to investigate the current situation with regard to young people, care, and education. This resource is aimed at raising awareness amongst anyone currently working in Further and Higher Education and those who have contact with care leavers, and enables the user to propose their own solutions to increasing the number of care leavers accessing university.