Developing an inclusive culture in higher education: final report

Mike Wray

July 2013

Developing an inclusive culture in higher education: final report

Mike Wray, York St John University

Correspondence address: The Higher Education Academy, Innovation Way, York Science Park, Heslington, York, YO10 5BR, United Kingdom.
Email: retentionandsuccess@heacademy.ac.uk
Tel: +44 (0)1904 717500

Contents

1. Project overview

In 2011 the HEA set up a programme of activity to support 16 higher education institutions (HEIs) across the UK in promoting inclusive teaching and learning. The programme's intention was summarised within the original advertisement for interested teams:

> The programme's vision is to support institutions in the creation of an inclusive learning and teaching culture that enables all students to develop academically, professionally and personally to fulfil their potential.

The programme took place over a period of 12 months and involved three facilitated events including a two-day residential. The events were designed to assist teams with project management skills and to plan, implement and evaluate changes to policy and practice in line with inclusive principles and through institutional cultural change. Additionally, the HEA disseminated a newly developed online module, [Learning to teach inclusively](#).

While the programme's aim was ambitious it was recognised from the outset that many HEIs would have ongoing experience of working towards the principles contained within the programme and that few projects would be starting from afresh in this respect. Rather, the programme was designed to help institutions define inclusion within their own contexts, learn from other participating institutions, identify and overcome barriers to change and provide a focus for more concerted effort across organisations.

This report provides an overview of the reported activities and conclusions contained within these submitted documents. The participating institutions are listed in Appendix 1, alongside a brief summary of each of the projects' aims and objectives, taken from the case study reports that participating teams were asked to complete at the end of the programme. The headings from within the project reporting template were used to identify substantive themes from across the programme. Each report was analysed and common issues identified. This report therefore begins with an overall discussion of the definitions of inclusion given within the reports alongside a broader discussion of the context of these approaches. A summary of the significant aims and objectives together with major project activities is provided. A key element of the programme was the focus on measuring project outcomes, therefore several sections of the reporting template and consequently, this report, concentrate on this aspect of the projects. Evaluative approaches are described as well as a summary of how projects intended to measure the impact of their activities and outcomes.

Previous HEA programmes have supported HEIs in similar undertakings and readers may find it useful to read this report alongside summaries of the previous programmes:

May, H. and Felsinger, A. (2010) *Strategic approaches to disabled student engagement*.

Porter, A. (2012) *Meaningful student engagement*.

Thomas, L. and May, H. (2010) *Inclusive teaching and learning in higher education*.

1.1.   Defining institutional approaches to inclusive learning culture

As part of the first event of the programme, teams were briefed on the HEA's perspective on inclusive teaching and learning as well as findings from previous activity and work within the field. They were then asked to examine the approach taken to inclusion within their own institutions. In order to assist them with these initial examinations they were also asked to complete a self-audit tool[1].

There was significant variation in terms of the key focus offered within the definitions discussed in the project reports. At one end of the spectrum, projects were moving forward with work around disability or began the programme in a context where this was the prevailing direction of the work of the institution and therefore could be said to be defining inclusion in those terms, i.e. inclusion focused on one specific group of students who traditionally would be defined as the key group for this work.

> *inclusivity defined for the purpose of the programme with particular reference to disability*

> *Our work began by revisiting the work the institution had undertaken as part of the Teachability project, which was largely focused on meeting the needs of disabled students and ensuring the curriculum is inclusive of disabled students*

Other projects noted there was a need to move towards including a range of disadvantaged groups within their definition of inclusion. For example, it was noted new legislation, the Equalities Act (2010), covered a range of groups which had either been covered by previous legislation, such as gender and ethnicity, or were newly covered, for example taking into account age and religion. Following on from this extension of the definition to include a range of learners groups, there was also a recognition of a need to think about other groups who may be marginalised or who may not be receiving as equitable an experience of higher education (HE) as the core group of 'traditional' students (i.e. full-time undergraduate, 18- to 21-year-olds who have entered HE directly from undertaking A-levels). Therefore, other groupings of students were mentioned in the reports, such as international students, postgraduate students and distance learning students.

> *As the legislation has evolved and the Equality Act has taken account of other 'protected categories' our understanding has developed in parallel with this*

> *Our understanding of inclusive learning includes also international students and postgraduate and distance learners*

Despite the emphasis on groups of students within some of the projects, most of the projects expressed an understanding around inclusion which was more generic or all-encompassing – so that there was an understanding that in order to be fully inclusive, HE providers must recognise they must ensure that all students are included and experience equitable participation within the HE environment. This end of the spectrum of definitions is indicative of a shift in emphasis seen in recent years within the HE sector towards a more embedded approach to issues such as equality and diversity and inclusion (May and Bridger 2010).

---

[1] May, H. and Thomas, E. (2010) *Embedding equality and diversity in the curriculum: self-evaluation framework*. York: Higher Education Academy.

Below is a cross-section of quotes from some of the inclusive definitions outlined in the reports:

an engaging teaching and learning culture in which all students, supported by staff, can participate and achieve their full potential – University of the West of Scotland

The vision for our University was to move beyond an individualised approach to equality and diversity, producing policies and practice that focus on success for all – University of Salford

The University of Liverpool aims to establish a culture where diversity is considered a distinct strength and viewed as a valuable resource for all

to move beyond an understanding of inclusion as being an issue for specific groups of students, or a focus for staff with a special interest – University of Abertay

Our vision for an inclusive culture is a learning culture in which all students, irrespective of background or situation, are enabled to fulfil their academic potential – University of Exeter

One way of looking at these definitions is to suggest that the focus has moved away from identifying specific sub-groups of students and towards the structure, processes and practices within the institution which create barriers to equitable experiences. This is in a similar vein to the social model of disability (Oliver 1990) which has moved the focus of understandings around disability away from individuals and the experiences of their individual impairments towards the disabling barriers within the social world.

Figure 1 illustrates how the various definitions of inclusion could be seen to be 'nested' within one another. The first two smaller spheres within Figure 1 define groupings which have traditionally been represented within social justice policies and the aims of political interest groups. The outer spheres encompass a more generic understanding of inclusion and are perhaps more challenging from a number of aspects since they ask us to consider the needs of all students regardless of whether they are classified as being at a disadvantage currently. These definitions ask organisations to change their focus to ensure that all learners are included but in doing this they create a tension between the need for institutions to be inclusive and the need to maintain organisational gaze upon particularly marginalised groups. This tension should also be considered alongside the context of institutions in which staff are perhaps struggling to find resources to focus on such issues and who may have only relatively recently orientated efforts towards such groups. If institutions change the emphasis of their approach within these contexts they run the risk of maintaining the inequalities which such sub-groups of students face since their specific needs may be neglected.

Figure 1: Inclusive learner groupings
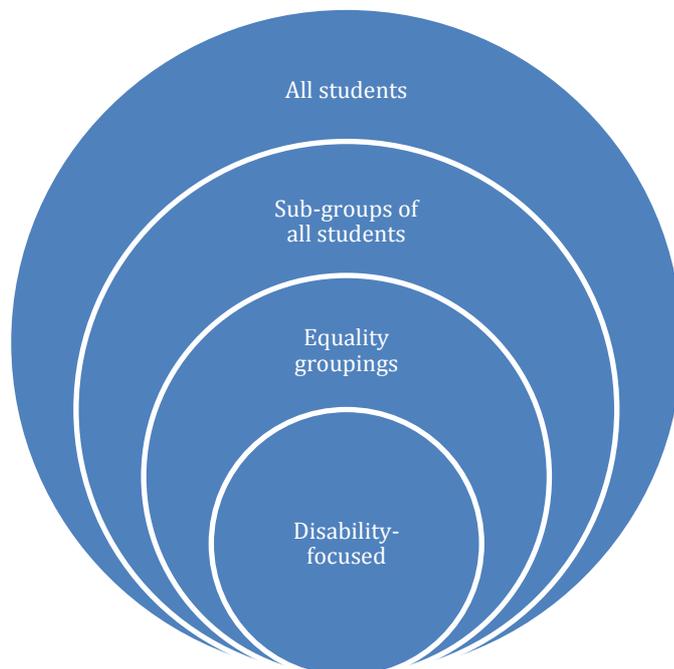
Inclusive current activity

Within the sections of the reports describing the approach of each institution were various discussions of activities taking place within the HEIs at the beginning of the programme, although there were some overlaps in these descriptions with project activities. Current activities quoted by projects also reflected the varying definitions within the institutional contexts. For example, work on assistive technology was mentioned alongside student-led teaching awards, or a second language learning centre for international students was quoted as well as enhanced induction processes for groups of students.

Where broader definitions of inclusion are used alongside definitions which focus on sub-groups, difficulties might arise in terms of focus for institutional efforts. However, activities which cross these definitional boundaries perhaps represent day-to-day concerns of staff within HEIs, such as the need to adhere to policies, rather than any epistemological concerns. It is also worth pointing out that a range of terms was used within the reports about what are broadly the same issues. The terms widening participation, disability, equality groups, diversity and inclusion were all used interchangeably. For example:

> *Glyndŵr University is strategically committed to widening participation in higher education, meeting the needs of a diverse student population with a fully inclusive, accessible and diverse campus*

However, this was not just an issue of using single words or phrases interchangeably. Since the areas overlap one another in many ways, the principles and values which were quoted within the projects expressed the difficulties which are apparent across these shared enterprises. For example, the University of Hertfordshire noted issues around embedding inclusive principles within the equality and diversity agenda.

Local and historical contexts of the institutions

Project definitions were influenced by the local contexts such as that outlined by the University of Salford where they noted the quality of their previous engagement with their local community and a strong tradition of humanity. This was also exemplified by other institutions such as York St John, which has historical roots within the church and is still heavily influenced by the local church community. In many senses, for some of the institutions at least, inclusion is not a new activity but is actually enshrined within their very foundations:

> *St George's understanding of inclusive learning culture is to embrace the diverse community and provide an environment that facilitates inclusivity.*

It might be argued that there is a sense in which the discourse around inclusion has been captured by the times and the political and legislative frameworks which currently exist, although it is still beholden on these institutions to ensure that their values and principles are converted into demonstrable practice and experiences of equity among the student populace.

Change of definition during the life of the programme

A number of the projects noted that their understandings of what was meant by inclusion changed during the process of identifying what they defined within this term and during the course of the programme. One of the best examples of this was provided by the University of Edinburgh, who noted that they had gone from focusing on disability (because of the work they had done on a previous disability-focused project) to recognition of other disadvantaged groups (because of the Equality Act), and that they were now also recognising other groups such as distance learning students. Finally they came to realise that the principles underpinning the whole enterprise are around the understanding that it is fundamentally concerned with good teaching practice. Therefore this project encompassed all four definitional categories outlined in Figure 1.

Another notable example of this principle was given by St George's, University of London, who mentioned how they have realised that inclusion is about moving away from the equality committee to achieving inclusive practice in the classroom. Similarly, York St John University hoped to move the institutional definition further towards encompassing all groups.

Difficulties in defining inclusion

Institutions reported difficulties defining inclusive teaching and learning. Some projects preferred to emphasise the practical problems of implementing their aims and objectives for inclusion rather than an actual definition of inclusion itself:

> *being a daily concern for all; routine teaching and support of all students across the institution* – University of Abertay

> *the challenge of improving the culture and celebrating diversity* – University of Hertfordshire

> *the degree of best fit between the student and their learning environment* – Staffordshire University

Another difficulty was highlighted by the University of the West of Scotland's report in which they commented that there is not an agreed single definition across the University and that different programmes have particular issues which are highlighted in relation to inclusion. For example, on one course direct entry from further education (FE) was the key issue while on another difficulties presented by professional body requirements were key. This variation across different departments was evident in several reports and perhaps reflects the socially constructed nature of concepts such as inclusion.

1.2.   Aims and objectives

The aims and objectives of the work to be undertaken within each of the HEIs ranged in number from two to seven and there was a wide variation in the scope of the initial proposals. Broadly speaking most of the projects set out with quite far-reaching proposals in mind. Many of the projects stated an overall expansive aim such as:

To develop inclusive practice in feedback and assessment across the University – University of Salford

To increase perceptions of the College being a 'Welcoming Place' for both students and staff – Telford College, Edinburgh

Most of the aims and objectives were based around four key themes (Figure 2). These were: strategy; culture or mission; changing policy; processes and practice; engagement with staff and students; and around research aspects such as exploring evidence for inclusion. Other types of objective were mentioned such as those based around how the project would be managed (for example, in a timely way) but those that were only mentioned once or twice are not considered here as a theme.

Figure 2: Key themes from the aims and objectives of the projects

In order to add detail to the four broad categories of project aims and objectives, this section briefly summarises the approaches taken. Some projects made proposals around strategy and overall culture such

as embedding inclusive approaches in teaching and learning strategy or changing culture to celebrate diversity, while others working on wholesale change sought to influence policies and procedures, such as assisting staff to design inclusive curricula, reviewing existing policies and developing new processes for academic validation of programmes. Some aims and objectives were developed around exemplar documents and pro-formas while others were aimed at practice and proposed to develop guides or web resources in this respect. Bringing together both sides of these themes, some of the projects sought to explore gaps between policy, strategy and actual practice while others were hoping to identify and disseminate good practice in order to influence policy and strategy.

A further strand which featured in the planning statements related to staff engagement and this was mirrored by projects which proposed to increase student engagement. Staff engagement involved a range of initiatives such as staff development workshops, setting up networking initiatives or tapping into existing ones and providing a range of resources. Student engagement involved projects seeking to ensure the student voice was heard and investigating students' perceptions of the current state of play. Some took an evidence-based approach by analysing issues such as achievement rates or reviewing existing literature, while others intended to examine the gap between existing practice, policy or culture and a normative definition of inclusion.

1.3.   Project activities

The main activities mentioned in the project reports took the form of staff development activity, staff consultation and networking, student engagement, research activity, reviewing policies and procedures and curriculum and programme design activity. These are listed here with a brief description of some of the activities mentioned:

- Staff development activities included specific workshops around inclusion topics such as particular impairments and generic workshops on issues to do with inclusion more generally. Many projects inputted into existing activity such as institutional teaching and learning days and a number of the project teams were engaged in re-developing and delivering institutional PGCert programmes to include inclusivity.
- Many of the teams used the HEA documentation[2] to review current provision and therefore this afforded considerable consultation exercises and opportunities. Additionally staff and student forums were consulted or set up anew. Staff used existing working groups and committees to disseminate activity and to provide sounding boards for the project activities.
- There was significant student engagement through the activity of the programme as students were required from the outset to be included as a key element of the teams. Also, projects worked with student unions to consult and provided input into inclusivity activities. Other activities included student surveys and focus groups.
- As well as undertaking the initial audit using the HEA's tool for review, many teams undertook research as part of their activity. This took the form of a literature review for some of the projects and these then informed the direction of the project or inputted into the development of other resources. Other projects surveyed the views of staff and students or interviewed individuals about their experiences. Some teams analysed institutional statistics to identify areas of under-representation or potential under-achievement.

---

[2] In particular May, H. and Thomas, L. (2010) *Embedding equality and diversity in the curriculum: self-evaluation framework*. York: Higher Education Academy.

- Most of the teams were involved in some kind of review of existing policies, processes or structures. For example, some teams reviewed assessment processes and others were involved in inputting into institutional teaching and learning strategies.
- Several projects used pilot schemes with programmes and faculty staff which were focused on academic review or validation processes. Some of these developments involved producing guidance documentation or staff development around the issues of inclusive teaching and learning while others were engaged in assisting teaching staff with re-designing courses or aligning teaching methods in more inclusive ways.

Other notable work included working with staff from across the institutions, including library staff, senior leadership teams, virtual-learning-environment (VLE) staff, disability teams and equality staff, on activities similar to those listed above. Many of the projects also reported on activities which will be completed after the project reports were due to be handed in and which were viewed as part of the overall project activities.

1.4.   Evaluative approaches

Evaluation proved challenging for some of the projects, or at least the reporting of these strategies seemed to present some difficulties. For example, many of the projects reported on additional activities due to be undertaken after the programme was complete so could not provide an appraisal of the success of the activities; or they made explicit mention of the challenging time frame of the projects and therefore deliberated over how change was going to be measured in such a short time span. Also, projects reported the difficulties of objectively measuring the outcomes of activities which were aimed at subjective results such as raised awareness or improved understanding of inclusion within academic staff. The need to provide more measurable impact was off-set somewhat by clearly defined activities and outputs in most cases and by the fact that most of the project activities had been based on either perceived need for improvement from the outset and hence engagement in the programme, or through identifying gaps when undertaking the initial review.

Most of the projects did not have a formalised strategy for evaluation and took a more piecemeal approach. Notable exceptions were the projects at the University of Swansea, St George's, University of London, the University of the Creative Arts, and the University of Salford. Each reported on a framework for evaluation or an in-depth mapping of activities against measurable outcomes. Nonetheless, a variety of approaches was mentioned in the reports and these ranged from obvious strategies such as ensuring planned activities were completed and outputs were being utilised, to longer-range, more strategic undertakings, such as monitoring longer-term statistics such as retention and success rates of under-represented groups. Other projects reported on a range of measurements by which impact would be assessed such as internal student surveys or analysis of external measures such as the National Student Survey (NSS). Some projects were seeking to use internal quality processes such as course review documentation or information gleaned from exam boards. Pragmatic measures such as attendance at workshops or numbers of people accessing online resources or IT packages were mentioned.

Many of the institutions (for example, the University of the West of Scotland, the University of Liverpool, St George's) used the HEA's equality and diversity self-evaluation tool (May and Thomas 2010) as a benchmark measurement of where they were at in terms of inclusivity. Two projects used other means of gathering this information, for example the University of Swansea used a sophisticated alternative approach to

benchmarking: a previously developed HEA-funded tool for e-learning, adopting its use around inclusion issues.

1.5.   Project outcomes

As mentioned above, within the time frame of the programme, it is quite difficult to measure outcomes which are described in terms of improvements in efficiency, increased awareness or through student success measures such as improved grades or overall satisfaction measures. Since the projects are in their early stages it would be very difficult to show significant improvements on the measures suggested. There was some confusion around the difference between outputs and outcomes; however, some of this was perhaps around issues of expression, so that outputs, such as developing new staff and student awards around inclusion, could have been reframed as increased awareness through the development of these inputs. Other problematic issues were encountered such as lack of responsibility for this issue within committees or reporting structures. However, due to the number of outputs based around programme design and validation it is likely that many staff will be considering these issues from across the HEIs and making fundamental changes to their programme design as a result.

Despite these problems, there were a number of reported outcomes. For example, the projects appeared to have raised awareness across the institutions around the issues of inclusive teaching and learning in strategic as well as operational terms:

> *An important outcome of this project has therefore been to raise the profile of issues around inclusivity within other university systems and processes and highlight potential areas for development* – University of Staffordshire

> *a key achievement … has been … promoting dialogue around inclusivity, prompting and enabling Colleges to reflect on their approach to and support for learners* – Swansea University

> *there has been some success in striving towards influencing the strategic plans of the university, through embedding this in the University's learning and teaching strategy and within the mission of the new University learning and teaching centre* – Glyndŵr *University*

As a result of increased networking, for instance, some projects pointed to a more coherent approach now being taken as they uncovered people working with these issues, which they were previously unaware of, through new alliances being formed:

> *There have been some successes in terms of engaging with a number of staff from across the institution* – York St John University

> *A key outcome of this programme has been the development of links with other staff and projects across the wider institution … A more coherent community of interest around diversity and inclusivity has been established* – University of Staffordshire

These networking opportunities led to improvements in university systems such as IT provision:

An unintended success of the inclusion project has been the consultation that has occurred between staff to ensure accessibility of the VLE and the content that can potentially be added. This has led to interest in collaborative working to consider the different ways that VLE can be used – University of Abertay

Projects also reported improved systems and procedures around the issues of inclusion and interest in developing practice around inclusive teaching and learning.

Following a review of our internal review practice … reviews are now able to identify areas of good practice in accessible and inclusive learning as well as areas for further development – University of Edinburgh

Inclusivity is now referenced in the pre-event proforma for validation completed by all panel members. Panel members are explicitly asked to raise any issues in this respect prior to an event in order to inform the agenda – University for the Creative Arts

Some projects were able to attain buy-in or actions from senior management teams. Examples include presenting papers to the Vice-Chancellor (Staffordshire University) or achieving new strategic objectives (University of Hertfordshire).

it was agreed that the University would set an Equality Objective associated with reducing the degree differential between white and BME students – University of Hertfordshire

Additionally, many of the projects took baseline measurements of current institutional practice, using the HEA tool (May and Thomas 2011), through statistical examinations or through policy, process and documentation review. One would hope that if similar exercises were undertaken in future years, say five years hence, a marked difference would be evidenced.

1.6.   Measuring impact

Many of the issues described in the previous two sections are relevant to this section. There appeared to be a certain amount of reticence within the reports to document impact and this was in part due to the small window of time during which the projects took place. Similarly, this reluctance was perhaps indicative of teams not wanting to make grand claims for their projects at such a relatively early stage of development of what is essentially a huge undertaking (i.e. changing institutional culture). However, where teams grasped the nettle they were able to evidence some modest impacts (see below). Furthermore, it is probably true to say that some of the activities are likely to make an impact over the longer term and will require continued momentum and continuation of project activity before any meaningful lasting change may be evidenced. For instance, staff development activity and resource development is likely to impact eventually on students when staff take the principles of inclusion on board and implement change in their practice. But this may require further actions such as additional consultation or assistance from student services or quality enhancement staff in order to find solutions to any difficulties with implementation which might be encountered.

Some examples of impact included reports of general satisfaction with staff development work and raised awareness because of the events which projects delivered. A great deal of interest was expressed by attendees of staff development in attending future events:

This was an inspirational event and is one of the few I have attended that is still with me as I work today. It really opened my eyes up to this topic and has enabled me to talk confidently about it to others – University of Edinburgh

Many of the teams reported an improvement in communication mechanisms across the institution and that this has led to improved collaboration or dialogue around the issues of inclusion. As mentioned previously, some teams were able to raise the awareness of inclusion across the HEI including within the senior management team and they felt there was an increased commitment to inclusion:

The agenda has been raised at the highest level within the Institution and has received support from the Board of Governors. – University of Hertfordshire

The Head of the Quality Enhancement Unit and the VP for Learning and Teaching are now both leading on projects which seek to further develop the inclusive culture at UWS – University of the West of Scotland

Ultimately, it is hoped for many projects that the impact will be felt in terms of, for example, student retention and achievement and satisfaction with their experiences of the HE environment. However, there were mentions of the early seeds of this within project activities which have focused on issues such as improving achievement gaps and through programme design and validation. Staff responses were beginning to change and students' experiences were being targeted.

Students taking part in decision making through committees – 'influencing the development of the learning environment' – Staffordshire University

in terms of aligning practice with the principles of inclusivity and key outcome indicators suggest that several programmes are focussed on diversifying assessment practices (particularly in terms of providing opportunity for formative assessment and feedback). – Liverpool University

1.7.   Embedding project outcomes and sustainability

Most of the projects made some commitment to continuing the work of the project beyond the period of the programme. Several of the reports noted that they had not completed everything on their list of planned activities and intended to continue with the work beyond the reporting deadline. Many of the activities completed within the work of the projects were repeatable and most projects stated they would continue to deliver these activities into the future. Examples of these included staff development workshops and student consultation groups. Other activities are sustainable because they produced outputs which would remain within university online resources such as teaching and learning guidance or materials and changes to the delivery of PG Cert courses. These types of embedded activity which produce more intangible impact in the short term are likely to make a sustained difference going forward which is more difficult to measure or claim at this early stage.

Relevant learning gained from the project will be embedded into actions for appropriate schools and units through the new Single Equality Scheme. – University of St Andrews

The training and support for staff is long term investment, it is not a one off piece of training and certainly on-line training alone has been shown to make insufficient impact on staff and student behaviour. – Telford College, Edinburgh

Several projects inputted into course review processes or validation systems. If programme staff are influenced by this guidance and make real efforts to deliver inclusive curricula and changes to practice then the impacts are likely to be significant and the projects will have truly embedded their work within the culture of the institutions.

Other examples of embedding include those which have had indirect effects, or effects on activities which were not immediately apparent as being related to the projects, such as increasing student representation on committees or more representation of staff with an equality and diversity remit on key committees. Staff made use of networking opportunities and improved communication, an approach which will likely result in embedded progression. Research projects were undertaken which will add to the evidence within the institutions and this is likely to feed into quality enhancement mechanisms or in some cases directly into strategic objectives around equality and diversity issues more generally.

Staff were engaged as part of the project or as part of their normal work on various committees or other types of cross-institution consultation processes. Reports noted that the work of the projects had been discussed at these groups or had become part of the considerations these mechanisms were analysing and that this would continue into the future:

Inclusion embedded into their Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy and their new assessment review process – Glyndŵr University

Tying work into a new initiative around the VLE in which the HEI is trying to get consistency around modules online – Swansea University

1.8.   Key moments

Projects were asked to report on key moments during the project or particular challenges they overcame. These fell into four broad categories: improved communication; project management issues; senior management commitment; and institutional management of inclusion issues.

As discussed in earlier sections, several projects noted they had seen improved communications across their HEIs with regard to inclusion issues or equality and diversity activities. The projects afforded the opportunity to network across the institutions. In some cases, as a result of this improved networking, other activity similar to the aims and objectives of the HEA programme was uncovered. Similarly, the initiative provided project staff with the motivation and opportunity to invite other colleagues, from other areas of the institution, to come together to act as focus groups, sounding boards or to share good practice and information. It was noted, by two of the projects, that failure to do this can mean that the project is left vulnerable to staff changes. Therefore, it is important that projects extend their networking and involve a network of other interested parties as early as possible to avoid this difficulty. Any loss of project staff could be alleviated by the continuation of project activities by other engaged staff from across the institution.

Some of the projects were able to gain significant senior management buy-in and in some cases this took the form of the head of the institution's commitment to the agenda and to taking a role in ensuring that objectives were achieved. In one case attendance at one of the programme meetings led to improved buy-in from the senior manager who attended the event. An added benefit of this buy-in, and one which is likely to lead to the embedding of project outcomes, is that projects were able to report to relevant committees where project objectives were given approval.

As might be expected, several projects noted challenges around project management and these included issues of embedding change and sustaining momentum as well as other more pragmatic issues such as staffing levels and short time frames. One project lost a key member of the project team and this had quite a significant impact on project activity, including participation of the student representative on the team. Another noted there are difficulties for unfunded schemes such as these in terms of maintaining commitment during the life of the project. There were also issues around the objective setting at the project planning stage and a few of the projects re-drafted plans and set more realistic targets. Other comments related to the pragmatic reality of sustaining the project beyond the life of the programme. This issue overlapped with the issues raised around institutional responses.

Finally, several projects noted challenges around institutional responses to inclusion and the difficulties in maintaining the 'gaze' of the institution in this direction. Some projects moved more slowly as it became clear a time lag would be required to allow other staff within the institution to take on board key messages from the project and to reframe and find broader significance within their own communities of practice. While several projects made significant gains in respect of institutional buy-in, for example through gaining senior management commitment, there is clearly an issue for all institutions to effect long-term change given the priorities vying for institutional focus.

1.9.   Lessons learned

In a similar vein to the previous section, projects reported issues related to project management in terms of the lessons learned. Issues such as being realistic about project objectives and how achievable these are were reported, alongside staffing issues and problems with being able to obtain time commitment from staff to complete activities. A lack of resources was mentioned in this respect and as no funding mechanisms were linked to the programme, this proved additionally difficult. Similarly, many projects found it difficult to engage with senior management and obtaining commitment from them was problematic.

Equally, projects recognise the need to engage staff earlier on in the project, a difficulty inherent in this programme given the challenging time frame. Projects mentioned they ought to have begun with piloting efforts and that commitment could have been scoped out before the project began. While pilots could prove useful the key is then to work on an embedding strategy and to sustain gains. It seems that some of the projects were just beginning to gain momentum or found it difficult to maintain any momentum due to project management difficulties.

> *The Programme has met with remarkably few challenges. However, as with any culture change programme, it has been difficult to ascertain to what extent our activities have influenced and informed larger initiatives –* University of Liverpool

Projects also found that a useful way to gain commitment is to tag the objectives of the project onto ongoing commitments such as improving student experience. If staff are already working in a particular way or working towards particular ends, it pays to try to find areas in which the new project overlaps. For example, one project was able to secure a commitment within a strategic plan and therefore a more realistic timetable was set within a five-year plan.

> *Making use of the influence and experience of managers and senior academics … increased the sense of 'ownership' of the inclusive agenda at the level of university management and avoided an over-reliance on the growing expertise of the project team* – University of the West of Scotland

Issues around communication were mentioned as being problematic and teams noted the importance of disseminating project activities early and finding an effective means of doing this. Staff outside the project need to see evidence of the need for project activities and that the aims and objectives of projects align with existing ways of working. Similarly, there were issues regarding embedding the project in the work of other staff within the institution and this reinforced the requirement to demonstrate the benefits of the initiative and what can be gained from participating in any suggested activities.

Project staff may also forget that other staff within the organisation may be less knowledgeable and therefore perhaps less understanding of the need for commitment to project aims. Other staff therefore need support, and a range of tools and strategies need to be made available in order that they might usefully work with the principles – in this case relating to inclusive teaching and learning. However, at the same time an understanding was gained in some of the projects that significant good practice was already occurring within institutions and part of the project challenge was identifying this, disseminating it and making it widely understood and used across the institution.

1.10. Continuation

The majority of the projects aim to continue with a substantial amount of activity related to the original aims and objectives set out in their plans, after the programme has ended. Most of the staff teams were hoping to, or had managed to, ring fence some of their time to continue with this work. Many of the projects were continuing to work towards completion of planned activity, owing to various project management issues mentioned in previous sections, such as more realistic time frames or difficulties in engaging with other staff from across the institution. Projects reported activities such as evaluation or rolling out pilots across further departments and courses.

A number of the continuing activities are evidence of the embedded nature of a noticeable amount of the work. For example, projects had begun to be involved in training relating to this area and planned to continue with this work: reference guides were being produced, examples of good practice had been collated and these resources would be used to disseminate the philosophy of inclusion as well as to provide evidence for the value of the approach.

> *It is clear from feedback that all three Schools have found the Toolkit useful and in using it have identified areas of good practice and areas where work needs to carried out.* – University of Stirling

Additionally, students had been engaged and were involved in training initiatives, or will be surveyed and contribute to consultation groups. As mentioned previously, some projects had managed to obtain the

support of senior managers, had used mechanisms of reporting such as committees, or had written the aims of the projects into wider organisational planning documents such as strategic plans. Where this had been obtained, projects reported a good deal of optimism that the work of the programme would be continued in a sustained and embedded way.

Where there had not been significant movement towards completion of all of the aims and objectives of the programme, project teams reported they would continue towards completing these goals. No project reported they would bring a halt to all activity once the programme was over.

2. Discussion

This report has described one of the HEA's change programmes designed to help HEIs to examine their approaches to inclusion.. Sixteen HEIs took part in this programme and were supported by the HEA through attendance at training and networking events which provided project teams with a framework for successful completion of intended aims and objectives and which were designed around good practice gleaned from many of the previous programmes delivered by the HEA.

Alongside the networking events, the HEA provided ongoing consultative support, set up a bespoke email list and provided teams with networking- and resource-sharing opportunities as well as signposting to relevant resources such as the Inclusive Teaching and Learning online module. Many of the teams welcomed the opportunity to make use of resources from other institutions and also provided positive feedback in the reports regarding the connections made within their own institutions. The HEA has been successful, therefore, in providing the HEIs with a range of support mechanisms to help them to achieve their objectives and this success is evidenced through the positive feedback received within the project reports.

In terms of the initial project planning stages there were notable successes. Many of the participating institutions made significant progress in defining their approach to inclusion and by auditing and benchmarking where they were at in terms of completion of that undertaking. Additionally, the teams offered a broad representation of staff from across the HEIs and this was in part due to the HEA's resolve to include senior management involvement in terms of the project bidding process and through representation at the initial event.

Furthermore, project teams included students, and this has played an important part in ensuring that the student voice has been included in the projects' outcomes. This is a good model for the sector to follow when planning change because unless these staffing parameters are stipulated within the early stages of such activity there is a danger that these features might be neglected. Also, without the engagement of a broad range of people on the project teams there is a risk that the project outcomes become less meaningful and are not widely disseminated since they fail to engage with key people within the institutions. Overall, most teams were effective in completing these features of the initial project stage.

There was a difficult balance to achieve within the programme, between ensuring the projects demonstrated sufficient vision and excitement for people to want to take part but also to ensure that project teams were sufficiently realistic in order to deliver meaningful outcomes. It is worth noting that the scope of many of the projects was refined during the first programme event and many of the projects reported that they redefined the scope of their activities after this. Additionally, many of the reports suggested that the projects were far from completion when the programme ended and therefore it is difficult to give a complete

evaluation of the success of the programme. In many respects there was an awareness throughout the programme that it was likely that the activity would seed cultural change rather than complete the enterprise. Despite these issues there is much to be learned from the reality of practice within the institutions and it perhaps through these insights that organisations such as the HEA gain a deeper understanding of what is taking place on the 'shop floor' and thereafter improve the support that it may provide through initiatives such as this.

In spite of the issues mentioned above, a wealth of activity took place across the project schemes of work and a variety of work was undertaken which should be celebrated. At the time of the project reports most institutions had made significant progress towards achieving their aims and objectives. Notable achievements included a range of staff development activities which many of the projects undertook and reported on their usefulness. There were several instances of networking activities described within the projects which were sometimes a result of staff development activities but also in many instances set up as separate entities. Particular successes included projects which were able to achieve senior management engagement to the point of including some of the project's aims within strategic documents and institutional commitments to achieving goals which were directed towards inclusion. There were also many points of overlap with other initiatives such as widening participation and disability services and these were recognised and consolidated though project activities. The range of activity reported would lead us to believe that in general the aims of the programme were achieved and that the projects were a success.

3. References

May, H. and Bridger, K. (2010) *Developing and embedding inclusive policy and practice in higher education*. York: Higher Education Academy. Available from:
http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/detail/inclusion/DevelopingEmbeddingInclusive_SummaryandReport. [Accessed 24 June 2013]

May, H. and Felsinger, A. (2010) *Strategic approaches to disabled student engagement*. York: Higher Education Academy. Available from:
http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/detail/inclusion/Disability/StrategicApproachesFinalReport. [Accessed 24 June 2013]

May, H. and Thomas, L. (2010) *Embedding equality and diversity in the curriculum: self-evaluation framework*. York: Higher Education Academy. Available from:
http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/detail/inclusion/embedding_eandd_self_evaluation_framework. [Accessed 24 June 2013]

Oliver, M. (1990) *The politics of disablement*. London: Macmillan.

Porter, A. (2012) *Meaningful student engagement*. York: Higher Education Academy.
Available from: http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/detail/retention/Meaningful_student_engagement. [Accessed 24 June 2013]

Thomas, L. and May, H. (2010) *Inclusive teaching and learning in higher education*. York: Higher Education Academy. Available from: http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/detail/inclusion/LTsummit_final_report. [Accessed 24 June 2013]

4. Appendix 1: Participating institutions

- University of Abertay
- University for the Creative Arts
- De Montfort University
- University of Edinburgh
- University of Exeter
- Glyndŵr University
- University of Hertfordshire
- University of Liverpool
- University of Salford
- Staffordshire University
- University of St Andrews
- St George's, University of London
- University Campus, Suffolk
- Swansea University
- University of the West of Scotland
- York St John University

Additional projects included from the Scottish Funding Council's Embedding Equality and Diversity in the Curriculum programme:

- Telford College
- University of Stirling

5. Appendix 2: Summary aims and objectives of participating HEIs

University of Abertay
- Developing institutional strategy and policy.
- Inclusive systems and processes.
- Developing staff resources and continuing professional development (CPD).
- Developing practice, e.g. inclusive learning, teaching and assessment (LTA).

University for the Creative Arts
- To support staff with the design of an inclusive curriculum.
- To recognise good practice using Strand 3 guidelines.
- To recommend changes to guidance, templates, other documentation and procedures.
- To develop a range of exemplar documents collected and/or produced using Strand 4 guidelines to exemplify delivery of an inclusive curriculum.
- To establish an online resource for staff developing curriculum in practical art and design studio-based subjects; lens based media subjects; word and theory based subjects across the undergraduate and postgraduate stages.

University of Edinburgh

The aim is the design and delivery of curricula that are inclusive of all students, enabling them to participate fully to achieve their full potential. The objectives are:

- to increase awareness and understanding among staff and students of what inclusive learning means;
- to increase staff engagement;
- to provide a supportive and facilitating inclusive learning environment.

University of Exeter

In this project, we focused on staff and student engagement. We feel that it is only through engagement with an inclusive learning and teaching environment that such a culture can develop. There are two phases to the project: staff engagement and student engagement (although these are not mutually exclusive).

Glyndŵr University

This project has been targeted towards the electronic submission and feedback of student assignment work. There was a danger that the move to electronic assignment submission within university would be steered towards one particular method and the aim of this project was to ensure that a variety of approaches were considered so as to provide an inclusive approach for both academic staff and students.

University of Hertfordshire

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

Objectives:

- 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.

University of Liverpool

- To meet HEA project requirements in a meaningful, measurable and sustainable way.
- To have impact on managerial/strategic decision making processes in relation to curriculum review activities.
- To promote relevant ownership and to make informed recommendations in developing institution-wide inclusive culture.
- To build on existing University of Liverpool developments (primarily resulting from our involvement with the HEA Summit programme – Mulberry Project).
- To stimulate engagement by staff and students at faculty, school and individual levels.
- To deliver change in a timely fashion.
- To review and evaluate change processes.

University of Salford

- To develop inclusive practice in feedback and assessment across the University of Salford objectives.
- To identify student perception of and preferences for inclusive assessment and feedback.

- To identify current practice in inclusive assessment.
- To identify staff perceptions of barriers to inclusive assessment.
- To develop mapping pro formas for inclusive assessment and feedback within a module.
- To develop mapping pro formas for inclusive assessment and feedback within a programme.
- To influence institutional strategy, policy and practice with regard to inclusive assessment and feedback.

Staffordshire University
- To ensure the student voice is heard in the development of inclusive culture.
- To ensure executive and senior management commitment to the development of inclusive culture.
- To establish an inclusive practice forum to oversee the progress in developing inclusive culture and report to the Student Experience Committee, having representation from all faculties and professional support services
- To promote the development of inclusive assessment practice across the institution.

University of St Andrews
Our aim was to conduct self-analysis to measure where we stand as an institution in relation to inclusion through two objectives:
- seek to raise awareness about inclusiveness issues in the curriculum; and
- identify any areas of under-representation among our prospective students' population and our current students' population.

University of Stirling
We promote equality in our learning and teaching activities and as part of ensuring an excellent student experience from recruitment to qualification.
- Our work to recruit students actively encourages diversity and promotes our commitment to equality.
- Our students have and maintain a good awareness of equality issues and are aware of their and the University's rights and responsibilities in respect of the promotion of equality and the prevention of discrimination and harassment.
- The University's curriculum and arrangements for learning, teaching and assessment actively promote equality, diversity and inclusion.
- Our students receive robust and responsive support that meets their diverse needs and provides them with the opportunity to have a successful and enjoyable experience whilst at the University.

St George's, University of London
- To plan our next stages of staff development – to help our colleagues apply diversity principles to curriculum and all pedagogic practices.
- To develop a student culture in which difference is celebrated and not seen as a problem to be resolved for successful professional behaviour in health care practice.

Our **vision** for the project was represented in the following diagram:
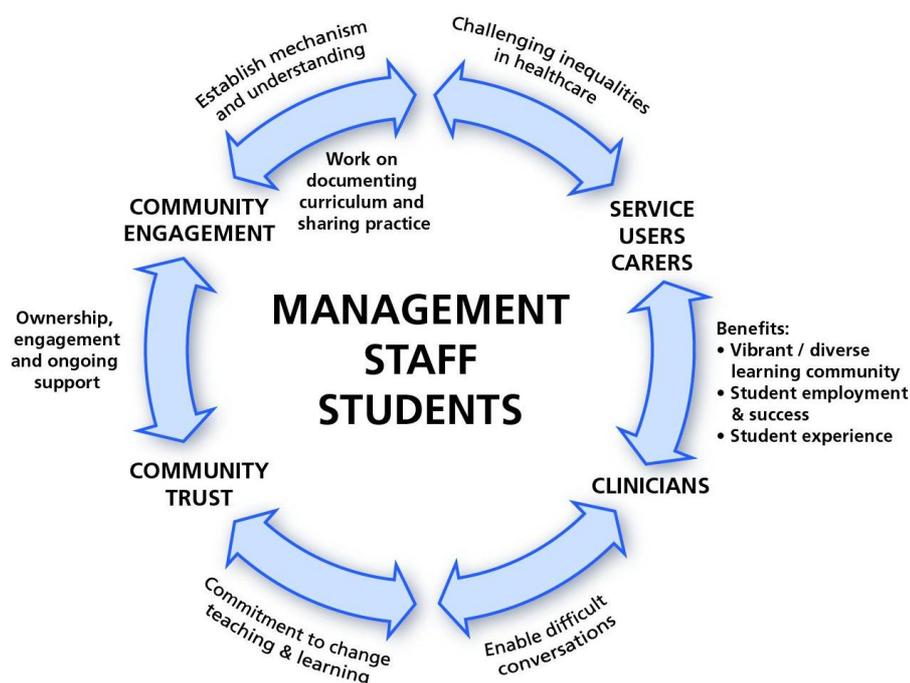
Telford College, Edinburgh
A key aim of the initiative is to increase perceptions of the College being a 'welcoming place' for both students and staff. This is taken to mean not just at the start of a student's programme (induction) but throughout a student's time in the institution and both in and out of the classroom.

The objectives are:
- to raise staff awareness of the Single Equality Act, college policy and expectation;
- to enable staff to have the skills and knowledge to tackle equality and diversity issues in the classroom, and in other areas of the college;
- to enable staff to make their curricula and practices as inclusive as possible;
- to encourage a college-wide sense of dialogue as a means of tackling equality and diversity issues;
- to equip students with the knowledge and skills in the area of equality and diversity so that they understand the issues both within and outside the college.

University Campus, Suffolk
A small project. Ran staff development workshops and ran a pilot project where there was a high level on 'not fully engaging'. The course chosen had a particularly high level of identified disability – 34%. Additional input provided with students on this programme to improve engagement. They increased the numbers of students who were referred to student services in one year from 9 to 13 referrals.

University of the West of Scotland
The project had three broad aims:
- to embed the vision for an inclusive culture into the new University of the West of Scotland (UWS) learning, teaching and assessment strategy;
- to explore the distance or 'gap' between existing UWS policy/strategy in inclusion, and current practices;

- to identify ways to bridge this 'gap'.

York St John University

Aims and objectives:

- establish network of key staff from across the HEI to work on the project;
- review and re-write assessment policy relating to disabled learners;
- review and implement new process of re-validation;
- develop inclusive practice across the institution;
- evaluate the inclusiveness of the student experience at York St John University.