FOCUS ON: TEACHING AND LEARNING

EMBEDDING, FACILITATING AND SUPPORTING INCLUSIVE LEARNING

WHAT IS INCLUSIVE LEARNING?

Inclusivity in the context of teaching and learning (T&L) in higher education can be described as the practices used to promote equal opportunities to every student and reduce or remove barriers to effective learning and participation. It is core to the University of Reading's strategy to close awarding gaps, which is the difference in outcomes and continuation experienced by underrepresented student groups and their peers.

Inclusion means that every student is valued irrespective of their background, life experiences, personal and protected characteristics. Celebrating differences stands in contrast to the persistence of the deficit model, which attributes student characteristics as the key factor in explaining differences in academic performance and continuation rates of particular student demographic groups. An inclusive approach prompts us to critically examine our practices in higher education in the interests of making holistic changes that benefit *all* students.

WHY INCLUSIVE LEARNING?

It is crucial to acknowledge that individual experiences in higher education vary widely, and experiences of advantage and disadvantage will change depending on the situation. However, reflecting on privilege, inequality, and exclusion provides an opportunity for critical self-reflection on our practices, and to create a more socially just and inclusive university.

Here are some advantages of fostering a more inclusive higher education environment:

1. Inclusive T&L is grounded in the belief that the diversity in our students' backgrounds and experiences **enriches** the learning experience for everyone.
2. Inclusive practice has the potential to boost student **engagement** and **wellbeing** by encouraging full participation in learning activities. It enables students to showcase their knowledge, skills, and strengths through assessments.
3. An inclusive curriculum aims to acknowledge the inherent value of knowledge, voices, and experiences that have been systematically silenced or marginalised in higher education.
4. Inclusivity is associated with an array of practices that de-centre the educator and enable students to help themselves and each other. Therefore, anticipatory inclusive practices contribute to the long-term **reduction** of staff **workload** by ensuring that learning is maximally effective and engaging. It also reduces the need for time consuming individual adjustments and their associated administrative tasks.

Beyond these instrumental benefits, inclusive practice acknowledges the humanity of our students and the societal barriers many of them must navigate. As critical education theorist bell hooks (1994) wrote, "[t]o teach in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students is essential if we are to provide the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin."

How do I use this guide?

Inclusive T&L incorporates a wide range of approaches, pedagogical theories and considerations. This guide will help you to find, select and adapt solutions to your discipline and context through a self-evaluative approach. These solutions can range from small changes to larger reforms.

In this guide, you will find prompts to help you self-evaluate your existing T&L practice. There will also be links to UoR resources to help you get started embedding equity, diversity and inclusion into your classroom e.g. making learning materials accessible.

It is hoped that through engaging in this guide, you will discover that a lot of what you are already doing is inclusive practice; you just didn't know it yet!

Inclusive T&L are "the ways in which pedagogy, curricula and assessment are designed and delivered to engage students in learning that is meaningful, relevant and accessible to all. It embraces a view of the individual and individual difference as the source of diversity that can enrich the lives and learning of others."
– Hockings (2010)

HOW DO I FOSTER AN INCLUSIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT? A SELF-EVALUATION APPROACH

The following checklist will help you to reflect and evaluate your programme, module and/or teaching and learning practice. The self-evaluation scale – ranging from 1 (not yet started) through to 5 (sustaining) – will help you to prioritise areas for enhancement.

Note: the self-evaluation framework and checklist is adapted from Advance HE (2018), the Cambridge Centre for Teaching and Learning self-evaluation tools, and UoR's Curriculum Framework. The checklist links to relevant guidance to assist you and your colleagues to develop a plan for further action.

OVERALL JUDGEMENT	RATING	FURTHER DETAILS
Not yet started	1	Not yet started to think about this or discussions have been limited.
Aspiring	2	Recognise the value of inclusive practices and note the importance of addressing awarding gaps but not yet sure where to start.
Developing	3	Identifying and prioritising areas for enhancement and beginning to address these but it is not widespread.
Enhancing	4	Addressing areas for enhancement; working in progress to extend this across the programme/department/school.
Sustaining	5	Areas for enhancement have been addressed; there is a systematic action and evaluation plan and evidence of positive impact on the student experience.

Teaching and learning in practice

1. You and your teaching team have a clear, shared understanding of the diversity of the student cohort and take this into account when teaching and designing learning activities (**shared understanding**).

2. Teaching is student-centred. Students are provided with an appropriate range and balance of T&L approaches and opportunities to actively engage in their learning, both in and out of class (**active learning**).

3. Teaching and learning activities are carefully sequenced to help students master the learning outcomes (**constructive alignment**).

4. Teaching and learning activities have clear and well-defined learning outcomes and the rationale for these is explicit. Clear connections exist between scheduled and self-scheduled study (**transparency – learning outcomes**).

5. Independent learning is scaffolded, from directed activities at early stages to guided and more autonomous learning later in a module or programme (**scaffolding independent learning** and **skills development**).

6. There are opportunities for students to work collaboratively in diverse and mixed groups within and beyond their cohort (**collaborative learning**).

7. Digitally enabled approaches are combined with in-person and non-digital approaches to create an active, varied, flexible and inclusive learning environment (**digitally enabled learning**).

8. Students are provided with an accessible mix of modes, media and formats of T&L materials in clearly signposted advance of in-person teaching and can access recordings afterwards (**digital accessibility**).

9. Students work in partnership with staff to shape the teaching and learning on the programme/module (**students as partners**).

10. There is consistency of layout and style of Blackboard courses across the programme (**consistent use of VLE**).

WHAT IS NEXT?

Here is some advice about next steps following the self-evaluation of your practice:

- **Choose an area of focus**: while it is important to ensure all areas of practice are inclusive, focus first on one of your lower scoring items, as work here is likely to have a large impact. To get started, read the guidance or resource linked against this item. Then, reflect or research how to adapt strategies and approaches within your discipline and context.
- **Start small**: developing inclusive practice is a process that takes time. Identify strategies that are readily adaptable to your context. Aim to make sustainable, incremental adjustments. Are there any quick wins you can implement right now?
- **Identify resources**: take a moment to map out the colleagues needed to make the changes happen coherently across a programme, or the resources you will need. Can professional services outside your department or school help you?
- **Work in partnership**: co-creating learning and centring students in the design of learning and assessment is important for ensuring students are represented in curricula and that their needs are met.
- **Evaluate impact**: consider how you will evaluate the impact of the changes you make to your classroom and T&L practice. Can you ask students for their views iteratively throughout the module?

Further advice on areas of practice related to inclusive teaching and learning can be found in the following sections of this guide and on UoR's Inclusive T&L website.

DECOLONISING THE CURRICULUM

A diversity and inclusion priority area for UoR is ensuring that all teaching, learning and assessment and student support engage students of all races and ethnicities, and helps them to excel. Decolonising the curriculum (DtC) is an important component of this work. It is about ensuring the higher education curriculum is socially just. As an ongoing journey, to decolonise universities is to question the dominant narratives within academic disciplines and to interrogate accepted teaching and learning practices.

What can this look like in practice? Decolonising your classroom might involve ensuring module content is diverse and representative of non-Western and racialised minority perspectives, issues and scholarship; enhancing student choice in assessment; and including more opportunities for students to share their thoughts and critique hierarchies and established discourses. UoR has produced a series of Decolonising the Curriculum Resources – containing student voice, case studies and helpful tips to help you decolonise your practice.

Tips for inclusive teaching, learning and assessment
Below is a selection of practical tips adapted from University College London. Additional guidance and explanation can be found on the UCL website.

- Reflect on your assumptions about students – to what extent do the materials and methods reflect the students in your classroom?
- Set explicit expectations for your students – see CQSD-ADE's guide on assessment criteria and rubrics.
- Avoid ignoring or singling out students to speak for an entire group – instead, scaffold discussion skills and consider designing and facilitating effective groups. See CQSD-ADE's group work guide for more information.
- Build staff-student and student-student rapport e.g. engage in meaningful icebreaking activities and be transparent about the learning process.
- Offer a diverse range of assessment methods – see the A-Z of assessment methods and Using a Variety of Assessments to Support Inclusive Learning.
- Diversify your reading lists – is there opportunity for students to collaborate on creating reading lists? Are there case studies outside of the UK? See CQSD-ADE's reading lists guide.

"[Inclusive teaching and learning] is important to me as having an inclusive learning environment allows all students to succeed no matter their background and paves the way for a bright and successful future." – UoR Inclusion Consultant, 2023

MAKING LEARNING MATERIALS ACCESSIBLE

Blackboard course sites

Blackboard ALLY is a tool integrated into Blackboard, and has three main functions:

- Provides students with automatic [alternative formats of materials on Blackboard](#).
- Checks the materials on Blackboard courses against accessibility standards and provides an [accessibility report.](#)
- Provides [guidance](#) to improve the accessibility of files

Lecture recordings and video

Learning video affords flexibility and accessibility. UoR's lecture recording system and video editing suite is [YuJa](#). A variety of accessibility features are applied to your video automatically on upload. See the [YuJa accessibility guide](#) for more information on how to improve accessibility depending on student need.

Designing accessible documents and slide decks

While at least one in five students declare a disability and may need accessible content, creating accessible documents and content benefits *all* students. At UoR, we recommend you follow [SCULPT](#):

- Structure – use heading styles in documents
- Colour & contrast – ensure there is sufficient contrast
- Use of images – use alt text on your images
- Links – describe your link, never use click here
- Plain English – use clear uncomplicated language
- Table structure – use simple tables

You can learn more about accessible content creation guides at [Digital Accessibility Resources](#).

STUDENT PARTNERSHIP

Working in partnership with students is essential for inclusivity. These schemes will help you integrate student voice into your T&L practice:

- [Inclusion Consultants](#) advise on making courses and services accessible and inclusive for our diverse student community.
- [CQSD-ADE's Student Partners](#) can co-design and co-create learning and assessment on your module or course.
- Consider [PLanT](#) funding to support staff and students working in partnership to enhance T&L at UoR.

SUMMARY

Inclusive practice is an ongoing, reflective process that is always evolving to meet learners' diverse needs. Through consistently and meaningfully incorporating inclusive practice, we cultivate richer, more supportive learning environments and reduce the need for co-curricular and resource-intensive support mechanisms. By embracing and promoting inclusive learning methods, we actively contribute to addressing disparities in attainment and making our university better for students and staff.

Need specific advice on supporting disability?
The [Disability Advisory Service](#) (DAS) can advise teaching staff on reasonable adjustments and how to support students with a disability, specific learning difference, long-term medical or mental health condition.

To contact CQSD-ADE to discuss how inclusive T&L can work for your programme or module and explore other guides in our Focus On: series, please visit https://www.reading.ac.uk/cqsd/teaching-resources

References and further reading

Advance HE. (2018). Embedding equality, diversity and inclusion in the curriculum: a programme standard. https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/embedding-equality-diversity-and-inclusion-curriculum-programme-standard

Cambridge Centre for Teaching and Learning. (nd.) Self-evaluation tools. https://www.cctl.cam.ac.uk/mind-gap-toolkit/self-evaluation-tools

Hockings, C. (2010). Inclusive learning and teaching in higher education: a synthesis of research. Advance HE. https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/inclusive-learning-and-teaching-higher-education-synthesis-research

hooks, b. (1994). *Teaching to transgress: education as the practice of freedom*. Routledge.