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Inclusive Curriculum Design and Delivery: A University-wide Task and Finish Group

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Introduction

As we have seen from earlier articles, the ability to provide learning that delivers on equality, accessibility and diversity, is of crucial importance in a Higher Education environment that is increasingly competitive, and where quality and value for money are increasingly scrutinised by prospective students and their parents. We can be confident that MMU meets, and in many cases, exceeds, the expectations and requirements of the QAA (Quality Assurance Agency) guidelines and the Equality Act (2010). But can we do better?

Background

The notion of inclusive practice has previously been associated with disability but more recently has come to include people with any background or characteristics. This changing emphasis is crystallised in the Equality Act

2010 and is reflected in the MMU Single Equality Scheme (SES). The concept embraces those that may be marginalised or face barriers for other reasons, including physical, social, cultural, financial, experiential and circumstantial. Even different learning preferences (i.e. the notion that students learn in different ways; that is to say that students are not one homogenous group who learn in the same style and at the same speed) should be reflected in the design and delivery of our curricula. The aim is to embed inclusive practice in our programmes and move away from existing 'dispersed' pockets of support for protected groups across the University.

A scoping exercise already undertaken has established that there is much good practice in evidence across the University with respect to the design and delivery of an inclusive curriculum at MMU. The article by Nicholson *et al.* in this issue describes one such example relating to disabled students, but there is a need to broaden some aspects of our practice across the student population. There are other aspects of our provision that could be improved. For example, there are low levels of academic staff engagement in mandatory diversity and equality training. Although we have a wide variety of online resources and training materials to support teaching in a diverse student body, these often suffer from not being as 'joined up' or as visible as they might be. There is also a need to raise diversity awareness and provide guidance and strategies for academic staff to ensure their delivery is as inclusive as possible. We could also benefit from greater collaborative working. Adding some urgency to this work is the expectation that a forthcoming QAA code of practice will place much greater emphasis on Equality and Diversity than it currently does.

About the project

The Diversity and Equal Opportunities Committee (DEOC) have established the Inclusive Curriculum Task and Finish Group to review and strengthen current practice at MMU. The purpose of the Task and Finish Group (TFG) is to review current inclusive practice at MMU and to develop an institutional framework for inclusive practice. The Project seeks to:

1. Review current practice, identifying good practice and areas for improvement.
2. Check compliance with legislation and policy.

3. Review supporting resources, guidance, policy documents and training, identifying good practice and creating or improving provision where necessary.
4. Promote and disseminate good practice, particularly inclusivity in the context of professional standards in academic practice and in the context of the MMU Commitment (Student Charter).
5. Recommend ways in which monitoring and evaluation of inclusive practice can be embedded within existing quality enhancement processes (e.g. PDR, CMI, periodic review).

In addition to a Final Project Report, there will be three main Project deliverables:

1. Good practice resources for supporting inclusive practice in the curriculum and for supporting the professional development of academic staff.
2. Recommendations and processes for embedding evaluation and monitoring of inclusive curriculum design and delivery evaluation within quality enhancement processes at MMU (ensuring compliance with Equality Act 2010 and relevant QAA codes of practice).
3. An institutional framework which will provide guidance to academic staff on inclusive practice in curriculum design and delivery.

Getting involved

The TFG will explore the experiences of other institutions who have embraced inclusive curricula and also make use of the Higher Education Academy self evaluation framework. To date the Project has been discussed across a variety of MMU services (e.g. DEOC, CASQE and CeLT) and with individuals and the Project is sponsored by the Deputy Vice Chancellor. However, in order to further the Project there is the need for wider input, especially from academic staff and students. If you are interested in the project or think you might be able to contribute please contact the Project Assistant, Matthew Gawne (m.gawne@mmu.ac.uk) or the Project Lead Dawn Nicholson (d.nicholson@mmu.ac.uk).