

Equality and Diversity in Learning and Teaching Special Issue Editorial

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Welcome back to *Learning and Teaching in Action*! After a period of re-organisation and staff changes, *LTiA* is finally back, and in an online format. This first re-launch issue focuses on equality and diversity in learning and teaching, bringing together practice and action research papers, workshop outcomes, and 'show and tell' shorties based on contributions at the summer 2011 cross-Faculty conference; "*Equal? Diverse? Accessible? Learning and Teaching in the £9K Era*".

Increasing diversity in the student population and a strengthening of legislation (Equality Act 2010) and regulation (e.g. QAA Quality Assurance Framework) are two aspects of the many changes occurring in Higher Education (HE). These two changes are pushing forward a renewed emphasis on embedding equality and diversity in the curriculum. Increased competition in the HE marketplace, a desire to maximise the quality of the student experience, and recent government policy on widening participation, further drive the desire to eliminate discrimination, and promote equality of access and opportunity.

At MMU, we aspire to provide accessible and affordable education that will enable students to develop to their full potential, academically, professionally, and personally, going on to develop rewarding careers. This needs careful consideration of the management, design and delivery of learning, teaching and assessment, throughout the student life cycle. A model for this is provided by the Equality Challenge Unit (2012): “building a culture that provides equality of both opportunity and outcome, promotes good relations, values the benefits of diversity and provides a model of equality for the wider UK society”.

The summer 2011 learning and teaching conference brought together almost 200 academic and non-academic colleagues from across the institution. Central services representation included the Centre for Academic Standards and Quality Enhancement, MMU Executive, the Centre for Learning and Teaching, Human Resources, Learning and Research Technologies, the Library, Facilities, the Learner Development Service, and Student and Academic Services. Academic participants also straddled seven of our eight Faculties – and so the event was truly an example of inclusive dissemination and participation in action! What follows is an attempt to capture the essence of that meeting. Our Vice Chancellor, John Brooks, who gave the conference opening address, begins by setting out the wider Higher Education context, and the potential threats to equality and diversity from increased competition and full fees. Huge capital investment and transformation in information technology serve to enhance the student experience, but it is at the chalk face – in the classroom – where perhaps the greatest opportunities lie to provide a fully inclusive experience.

Mona Patel and Dawn Nicholson then provide an overview of our legal obligations under the Equality Act 2010. They show how the MMU Single Equality Scheme captures the actions that are in place to improve the student experience in the context of equality and diversity throughout all stages in the student life cycle. Paul Norman reports on a workshop in which the potential impact of national social policy reforms on access to MMU, student support, and student success are considered. Mark Langan and Emma Taylor consider sources of information about our students, from both formal metrics such as the National Student Survey and Uniview, and from informal dialogue with Student Support Officers and Staff-Student Liaison Groups. This workshop report also explores potential avenues for more effective approaches to student support. Alicia Prowse reports on a workshop that explored attitudes to international students, and considers strategies for inclusive curriculum design. Dawn Nicholson, Rita Lewin, Nahida Shabbir and

Kath Botham describe a pilot project that aimed to bring about inclusive curricula by removing the need for Personal Learning Plans for students with mild to moderate dyslexia. The successful pilot phase has now been adopted as standard policy across the Faculty of Science and Engineering. Julie Haslam describes a project in Art and Design aimed at providing pre-entry support for student transition into Higher Education.

A series of Show and Tell presentations is then opened by Peter McKenna, who shows how the use of simple technology can assist students with impairments relating to reading and language. Jane MacFadyen and Alan Homes tell us about the intriguingly named 'Unit X', which attempts to enhance graduate employment prospects for all students through inter-disciplinary collaborative work with external agencies. Alan Holmes shows how the use of online digital portfolios is helping reduce access barriers to Art and Design programmes. And finally, Mike Hayes shows how actually teaching students about disability and neurological disorders as part of Healthcare Science programmes can help raise awareness of equality and diversity issues.

The practice paper by Rod Cullen and Mark Roche highlights key issues around provision of accessible learning, teaching and assessment resources in a VLE such as Moodle. They also provide step-by-step guidance and a rationale for creating accessible online learning resources. This special issue ends with two information pieces. The first, by Nahida Shabbir, provides an overview of support provided for disabled students by the Learner Development Service, and highlights some new developments in progress. Then, Matthew Gawne and Dawn Nicholson invite you to contribute to the University-wide Inclusive Curriculum Project, which aims to develop and implement an institutional framework for inclusive curriculum practice.

I hope that you enjoy this issue of *LTiA*, which highlights some of the excellent practice across our institution to enhance the student experience, both through promoting equality of opportunity and by embedding inclusive practice in the curriculum.

Dawn