



University of Worcester

Principles and Practices for Inclusive Learning, Teaching and Assessment



The following set of principles and associated practices have been developed to support inclusive learning, teaching, and assessment. Inclusion in the context of this document means providing an environment and promoting a culture in which everyone, irrespective of background, identity or other social characteristic, feels valued and respected, and has equal opportunity to work hard to be successful. From a learning and teaching perspective, this needs to be planned into the curriculum, facilitated and reflected in teaching practice.

The University has a duty under the Equality Act 2010 to have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act 2010.
- Advance equality of opportunity between people from different groups, which involves considering the need to:
 - Remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by people due to their protected characteristics;
 - Meet the needs of people with protected characteristics;
 - Encourage people with protected characteristics to participate in public life or in other activities where their participation is low.
- Foster good relations between people from different groups, which involves:
 - Tackling prejudice;
 - Promoting understanding between people from different groups.

The protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 are: age; disability; gender reassignment; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; sexual orientation; marriage and civil partnership. There are, however, other groups not included within the remit of the Equality Act 2010 where inequalities of background or experience may result in differential outcomes for progression, attainment and employment. These include groups distinguished on the basis of prior educational qualifications, locality and neighbourhood, and socio-economic background.

The University of Worcester is committed to providing a genuinely inclusive learning community for all, and working towards equalising outcomes for disadvantaged groups. Our understanding of inclusion has been inspired by Universal Design for Learning (<https://www.cast.org/impact/universal-design-for-learning-udl>) which means we wish to embed the principles of inclusion into our professional practice, and help ensure all students have the opportunity to develop, work hard and excel, both academically

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and personally. This means that, where possible, we support approaches to learning that are personalised for individuals taking account of their unique experiences and aspirations.

Inclusive practice enhances the experience of all students – inclusive practices are, therefore, good practices.

The principles set out below, are each supplemented by an explanation as to their importance, together with illustrative examples of how these can be put into practice. These elements address the important

questions of what, why, and how we can approach inclusion in academic practice. The principles are intended to provide a helpful framework for course teams, and for individuals to consider what inclusive practice means for their curricula, teaching practice and provision of support. The aim is to reflect on the learning experience of all students, valuing the contribution of every individual, to enable them to meet appropriately rigorous academic and professional standards in order to succeed in their studies and realise their potential.

What?

1. Anticipate a diverse student group and plan the curriculum to be inclusive for all.

How?

- Check assumptions about prior learning, knowledge and skills. Consider doing a skills audit to find out students' learning needs, and/or consider pre-entry and induction activities that effectively fill any gaps in core skills or knowledge.
- Across a course, especially in the first year, plan the embedding of learning and academic study skills (<https://www2.worc.ac.uk/studyskills/>) development into core modules. Library Services can advise further about auditing and teaching academic skills in the curriculum (<https://library.worc.ac.uk/>).
- Consider whether learning outcomes are achievable by all or whether some students may be excluded from demonstrating success.
- Prepare for meeting the needs of any students who, for example, are direct entrants, have declared a disability and have additional requirements, or have a different prior educational experience. Be sensitive and ask about support needs. Provide ongoing opportunities for students to disclose information, which might require some reasonable adjustment.

Why?

- Planning teaching for a diverse student group (including students from different social, cultural and educational backgrounds, and with different identities), should ensure that all students will feel represented and included.
- Embedding academic skills development into the curriculum supports transition into higher education for all students. It can help reduce barriers for students with Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLDs), international and mature students, and refreshes the knowledge and approaches used by all students.
- If learning outcomes or learning activities are likely to exclude anyone, (e.g. in acquiring a certain skill) you must ensure that the required skill or attribute is genuinely linked to the discipline or professional occupation, and is therefore a competence standard. By anticipating diversity, you will need to make fewer one-off adjustments for students with common disabilities.
- Getting to know students ahead of time will ensure timely preparation for any specific adjustments required. Not all students will declare their disability, and may experience unnecessary obstacles in their progress as a consequence. Providing opportunities to disclose in an open way should help ensure all students can flourish.



What?

2. Ensure the curriculum is globally, socially, and culturally inclusive.

How?

- Include in course aims and objectives the development and promotion of inclusive values and preparing students for working in globally mobile societies.
- Include ideas, concepts, examples and readings that relate to an international world, including perspectives that are presented by different communities, where appropriate. Avoid activities which might exclude students due to presumed knowledge of particular cultures or backgrounds.
- Ensure different viewpoints, voices and identities are represented within the curriculum in terms of gender identity, gender assignment, sexual orientation, ethnicity, age, religion, nationality, socio-economic background, disability, and other relevant social/identity factors. Ensure imagery and examples, visiting speakers (including employer representatives), case studies etc. send clear messages about diversity.

Why?

- By having explicit course aims that relate to inclusion and diversity, and linking these to employability, teams are not only reflecting the mission and values of the University, but also planning a curriculum which will more effectively empower and prepare students for highly skilled employment, and more broadly as global citizens.
 - Incorporating perspectives towards subject matter and reading lists that reflect cultural diversity and are 'internationalised' will ensure that the module reflects a variety of understandings of the world. Being able to identify with the material being presented is likely to enhance learning by making it a more relevant experience for all.
 - Deliberately planning diverse representations can help students with different identities and backgrounds, (e.g. LGBTQ+ students, BAME students, and students with disabilities) feel included and valued. Additionally, students' knowledge and understanding of the world will be enriched, making them more able to accept differing perspectives and improving problem-solving abilities. This also responds to the needs of a diverse, multicultural, and globally mobile student body.
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What?

3. Understand the principles of inclusive assessment design and providing effective feedback.

How?

- Where appropriate, provide a choice of assessment methods for students to demonstrate that learning outcomes have been met; for example, reports can be written or verbal, presentations can be live or pre-recorded.
- Try to ensure that the method of assessment does not necessarily put any students at a disadvantage, and if this were to be the case, consider offering alternative ways for students to demonstrate achievement of the learning outcomes. For example, where appropriate, presentations as an alternative to written reports. See University Policy and Procedures for Inclusive Assessment and Reasonable Adjustments.
- Provide clear criteria for the marking of all types of assessment, including group work (how will marks be allocated?) and for presentations (what skills are assessed?).
- In providing feedback on assessments, be positive, constructive and systematic, following agreed protocols for the course team. If marking student assessments identified as being the work of a student with disabilities, follow the guidance set out in Staff guidance for inclusive assessments and making reasonable adjustments (https://www2.worc.ac.uk/aqu/documents/Staff_Guidance_for_inclusive_assessments_web_version_Jan_2021.pdf).

Why?

- Offering choice will reduce the need to design alternative assessments as a one-off reasonable adjustment. Allowing all students a choice will provide options to suit individual skills strengths and learning styles.
 - The way an assessment is designed may create barriers for some students. The skills required to carry out a certain type of assessment may not be related to the learning outcomes. For example, if the assessment includes group presentations, this may be a barrier for students with SpLDs, or students who experience difficulty with verbal communication. Some forms of assessment involving practical activities, (e.g. sporting activities) require the use of changing rooms, which may require adjustments to be made for transgender students.
 - A good understanding of how and why marks will be allocated will help students prepare and know what to expect, allowing them to play to their strengths. It will also underpin confidence in the fairness of the marking system.
 - Students are more likely to engage with feedback if it builds confidence and identifies clearly how they can make improvements for subsequent assignments. See the Effective Assessment Feedback Guide (<https://rteworchester.files.wordpress.com/2018/09/effective-assessment-feedback-guide-august-2018.pdf>).
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What?

4. Make the aims, expectations and learning activities of modules clear and explicit.

How?

- Clearly set out an overview of the module aims, content and learning, teaching and assessment approaches so that students know what to expect and understand what is coming. Include a week-by-week schedule of learning activities and directed study.
- Signpost specific activities, e.g. field trips, group activities, visits or placements, and provide briefs for students to read ahead of the activity/event. Give students the opportunity to disclose any undeclared disabilities or other information which may require adjustments.
- Be flexible and sensitive to individual student needs and circumstances. Be explicit about policies and procedures for students to follow if they cannot attend sessions and need to catch up on missed work, and make learning materials available on the VLE so that students can easily catch up.
- Schedule initial meetings and follow-up if a student does not attend without notifying a member of staff. Be prepared to spend more time with some students than others where reasonable and necessary. Set out expectations clearly in relation to attendance and engagement, ideally at the start of each semester.

Why?

- Linking knowledge helps students to embed their learning. Some students benefit greatly from having a visual, linear representation of how the content fits together, and how the module is organised and structured. This also helps students organise their learning, study tasks and revision.
 - Giving students prior notice helps them know what to expect. Providing briefs will help all students prepare, and will particularly benefit students with limited time because of care responsibilities, commuting, and balancing work with study. Moreover, this will help students with dyslexia be prepared so that they will not have to read and contribute simultaneously, and students with anxiety may experience less stress through knowing what to expect.
 - Understand that students may on occasion have difficulties in attending because of their home or personal circumstances. This does not negate the responsibility of students to inform staff of any unplanned absence, so they can be supported in catching up or signposted to appropriate help, where appropriate.
 - Students new to HE and/or those most at risk of withdrawing may not know what is expected, and some students due to their personal circumstances, including health, disability or cultural and domestic factors, may require more support.
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What?

5. Ensure teaching materials, such as lecture presentations or handouts, and the VLE are accessible for all.

How?

- Use the built-in organisational features of Blackboard and make sure it is easy for students to locate and find the materials they need. Keep it up to date. Get feedback from students on this and ask them to suggest improvements.
- Make materials available in advance electronically, e.g. via Blackboard, at least 24 hours prior to lectures – sooner if possible. Students should be given notice when material becomes available for them to view. Refer to Disability and Dyslexia Service's guidance on preparing and presenting notes in advance.
- Follow good practice guidance in the production of handouts, presentations and other text-based materials, e.g. with regard to font size and type and layout etc. Refer to the Disability and Dyslexia Service's good practice guidelines when creating written materials.
- As far as possible, use plain English, avoiding the use of jargon or colloquialisms to minimise ambiguity and aid clarity. Check with students whether teaching materials and language in class can be understood by all students, including international students and those from different educational backgrounds.

Why?

- A Blackboard site that is well used, easy to navigate and up to date will help all students, especially those who need to spend longer reviewing materials and revising.
- This helps students to be mentally prepared for new learning. Some students struggle to read quickly, which can exacerbate anxiety. Some students prefer to print materials in advance, rather than reading from a screen. For all students, making materials available will help them stay engaged if they are unable to attend. Research shows advance preparation and contextualisation aids learning.
- There are recommended font and size styles for dyslexic students, helping to reduce elements of visual stress associated with reading and therefore making reading more effective. Ensuring accessibility for screen reading software will enable students with a visual impairment, or hearing difficulty, to access the materials without having to request additional support.
- Ensuring language is accessible to all means that students will be less likely to misunderstand or misinterpret learning and assessment tasks, technical terminology, as well as everyday communication.



What?

6. Embed inclusive values and the development of intercultural competence within learning and learning.

How?

- Try to use, and encourage students to use, gender-neutral and inclusive language, (e.g. partner instead of boyfriend/girlfriend, the use of they/ them pronouns where appropriate, using the preferred pronouns of transgender and non-binary students).
- Encourage cross-cultural interaction through group discussion, and incorporate structured group-based activities that can be used as an occasion for students from different backgrounds and cultures to interact. This may mean that group membership is specified rather than allowing students to choose.
- Wherever possible, draw on the diversity of students to provide meaningful examples. Aim to enhance all students' self-esteem, awareness of cultural diversity and understanding of social relations between different groups.
- Explicitly state that racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, and other types of prejudice, are not tolerated. Include a statement about respecting diversity within course and module guides. If a student makes a statement that could be interpreted as prejudiced, question the choice of language and use as an occasion to explore issues of language and inclusion.

Why?

- Modelling good practice in the use of inclusive language will help foster a positive and inclusive learning environment. By using gender-neutral terms, you will be demonstrating an inclusive approach which all students, and in particular transgender and non-binary students, may appreciate.
 - Intercultural competence is the ability to communicate effectively in cross-cultural situations, and to relate appropriately in different cultural contexts, understanding the multicultural and global communities everyone inhabits. Students may choose to remain in their comfort zone and not engage with classroom diversity. By actively promoting such interaction, (e.g. selecting groups for students to participate in) students can be helped to develop cross-cultural competencies.
 - By recognising and valuing the different and diverse backgrounds of the students (and also what they have in common), their learning experience will be enhanced and ensure diverse identities are respected.
 - Failure to challenge negative and potentially prejudiced comments subtly gives the message to students that this behaviour is accepted. Explicitly stating that such language will not be tolerated begins to address some of the issues of prejudice.
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What?

7. Regularly review student outcomes to ascertain whether there are any significant differences between social groups.

How?

- Establish whether there are differences in withdrawal/retention rates, attainment and satisfaction, and employment and further study outcomes in relation to gender, ethnicity, age, disability or social disadvantage.
- Where significant and persistent gaps exist, consideration should be given to how the outcomes of the disadvantaged groups can be improved. This may involve review of the curriculum, learning and teaching practices, including pre-entry support, assessment modes and academic support, particularly through the personal academic tutor system, or peer mentoring/buddying, as well as more specific and targeted interventions, where appropriate.

Why?

- Achieving significant reductions in any gaps in achievement and progression is a key objective for the HE sector and the University has set targets for this. Reducing gaps in achievement and progression is a key indicator of how successful we are in providing a curriculum, learning environment, and support that is inclusive.
 - Higher Education has the potential to overcome social and historical disadvantages students may face. It is particularly relevant regarding the BAME attainment gap, which continues to be a sector-wide issue. At Worcester, we also have attainment gaps in relation to mature and BTEC students who may experience more dissonance between their prior learning approaches and those at University, and so require personalised support. Refer to the University's Access and Participation Plan (<https://www.worcester.ac.uk/documents/University-of-Worcester-Access-and-Participation-Plan.pdf>) for further information on attainment gaps at Worcester.
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More detailed guidance on inclusive learning and teaching practice is available in the Inclusive Practice Guides that are part of this Toolkit, and also in the annotated resource list.

These baseline principles have been developed by Daniel Harrington, Research Assistant, and Dr Marie Stowell, Director of Quality and Educational Development at the University of Worcester, with the help of colleagues across the University and drawing on the work on inclusion of Plymouth University and the University of Leeds.

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<https://inclusiveteaching.leeds.ac.uk/>; <https://www.plymouth.ac.uk/your-university/teaching-and-learning/inclusivity>.

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