

# 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. In the context of this document inclusion 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 and 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 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. This involves tackling prejudice and 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 by prior educational qualifications, locality and neighbourhood, and socioeconomic 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. We want to ensure all students have the opportunity to develop and the motivation to work hard and excel, both academically and personally. Where possible, we support approaches to learning that are personalised for individuals and take into account their unique experiences and aspirations.

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

Each principle set out below is supplemented by an explanation as to its importance and examples of how it can be put into practice. The core principles are intended to be a helpful framework which provides some structure for course teams and individuals to consider what inclusive practice means for curricula, teaching practice and provision of support.



## 1. Anticipate a diverse student group and plan a curriculum which is inclusive for all

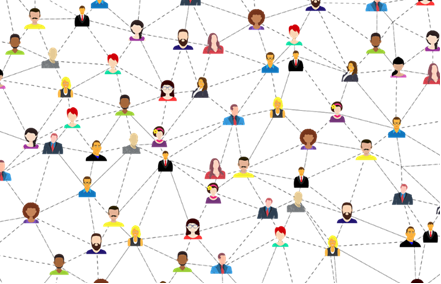
### How?

* 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 which 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://studyskills.wp.worc.ac.uk/) development into core modules. [Library Services](https://library.worc.ac.uk/learner-journeys-toolkit) can advise further on teaching academic skills in the curriculum.
* Consider whether learning outcomes are achievable by all or whether some students may be excluded from demonstrating success.
* Prepare to meet the needs of any student, e.g., those who are direct entrants, who have a disability and have additional requirements, or who have a different prior educational experience. Be sensitive and ask about support needs. Provide ongoing opportunities for students to disclose information which may require some reasonable adjustment.



### Why?

* Planning teaching for a diverse student group (including students from different social, cultural and educational backgrounds) 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 (such as 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 from the start will help ensure you have sufficient time to prepare for any specific adjustments required. Not all students will declare their disability and they may experience unnecessary obstacles as a result. Openly providing opportunities for students to make a disclosure at any point during their course should help ensure all students have the opportunity to flourish.



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

### How?

* Ensure the course aims and objectives include the development and promotion of inclusive values and prepare students for working in globally mobile societies.
* Include ideas, concepts 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 reassignment, sex, sexual orientation, ethnicity, age, religion, nationality, socioeconomic background, disability, and other relevant social or identity factors. Ensure imagery, examples, visiting speakers (including employer representatives), case studies and so on send clear messages about diversity.

### Why?

* By having explicit course aims that relate to inclusion and diversity and linking these to employability, course teams are reflecting the mission and values of the University and developing a curriculum which will empower students and prepare them for highly skilled employment as global citizens.
* Incorporating different perspectives and reading lists which reflect cultural diversity and which are ‘internationalised’ will mean the curriculum reflects diverse understandings of the world. Being able to identify with the material presented is likely to enhance learning by making it more relevant to 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.

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.



## 3. Understand the principles of inclusive assessment design and 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 delivered live or pre-recorded.
* Try to ensure that the method of assessment does not put any students at a disadvantage unnecessarily. If this is the case, consider offering alternative ways for students to demonstrate achievement of the learning outcomes. For example, where appropriate, a presentation could be used as an alternative to a written report. See the University’s [Policy and Procedures for Inclusive Assessment and Reasonable Adjustments](https://www2.worc.ac.uk/aqu/documents/InclusiveAssessmentPolicy.pdf).
* Provide clear criteria for the marking of all types of assessment. For example, how will marks be allocated for group work? In presentations, what skills are being assessed and how do these relate to the learning outcomes?
* When providing feedback on assessments, be positive, constructive, systematic and follow the protocols agreed within your course team. Be particularly aware of policy in relation to the assessment of proficiency in English language (this applies to all students). Some students may need help to develop their proficiency and should be directed to the [Language Centre](https://www.worcester.ac.uk/life/help-and-support/language-centre/) or to the [Disability and Dyslexia Service](https://www2.worc.ac.uk/disabilityanddyslexia/) as appropriate.

### Why?

* Offering a choice of assessment measures 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. Choice should be planned across modules.
* The way an assessment is designed may create barriers for some students and 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 have difficulty with verbal communication. Some forms of assessment involving practical activities (e.g., sporting activities) require the use of changing rooms and this may require adjustments to be made for transgender students.
* A good understanding of how and why marks will be allocated means students know what to expect and helps them to play to their strengths. It also strengthens 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 University’s [Making feedback on assignments effective](https://rteworcester.wp.worc.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/effective-assessment-feedback-guide-august-2018.pdf) for further guidance.





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

### How?

* Clearly set out an overview of the module aims, the module content and learning, and the approaches to teaching and assessment so that students know what to expect. Include a week-by-week schedule of learning activities and directed study.
* Signpost specific activities (such as field trips, group activities, visits or placements) and provide briefs for students to read ahead of the activity or event. Give students opportunities to disclose disabilities or other information which may require adjustments to be made.
* Be flexible and sensitive to individual student needs and circumstances. Be explicit about policies and procedures which students should follow if they cannot attend sessions and need to catch up on missed work. 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 all students to organise their learning, study tasks and revision.
* Giving students prior notice of events or activities helps them know what to expect. Providing briefs will help all students prepare and this will particularly benefit students who have other demands on their time such as care responsibilities, commuting, and work commitments.

This will also help students with dyslexia to prepare if they struggle to read materials and contribute to discussions simultaneously. Knowing what to expect may also reduce stress for students with anxiety.

* Be aware that students may on occasion have difficulties in attending due to home or personal circumstances. However, this does not negate the students’ responsibility to inform staff of any unplanned absence so they can be supported in catching up or signposted to further help (where appropriate).
* Students new to higher education and / or those most at risk of withdrawing may not know what is expected of them. Some students may require additional support due to health, disability or other personal circumstances.



## 5. **Ensure teaching materials and the VLE are accessible for all**

### **How?**

* Use the built-in organisational features of Blackboard for your site and make sure it is easy for students to navigate and find the materials they need. Ask students for feedback and encourage them to suggest improvements.
* Keep the site up to date and make materials available in advance - at least 24 hours prior to lectures or more if possible. Students should be given notice when new material becomes available for them to view.
* Follow good practice guidance in the production of handouts, presentations and other text-based materials. Consider font size and type, layout, use of colour and so on. Further information can be found in the DDS’s [Design and Presentation Ideas](https://www2.worc.ac.uk/disabilityanddyslexia/documents/Disability_and_Dyslexia_Service_-_design_and_presentation_ideas.pdf) guide.
* As far as possible, use plain English and avoid the use of jargon or colloquialisms. This will 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.
* Record your lectures or relevant parts of taught sessions where appropriate.

### Why?

* A Blackboard site that is easy to navigate and up to date will help all students, especially those who need to spend longer reviewing materials and revising.
* Making materials available in advance helps students to be mentally prepared for new learning. Some students struggle to read quickly in the session and this 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 with their learning if they are unable to attend taught sessions. Research shows advance preparation and contextualisation aids learning.
* There are recommended font and size styles for dyslexic students. These help to reduce elements of visual stress associated with reading and improve the reading experience.
* Ensuring accessibility for screen reading software will enable students with visual impairments or SpLDs 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, and everyday communication.
* Making recordings available assists all student to review the materials and revise their understanding.





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

### 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, 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 opportunity 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, 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 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 can give students the message that this behaviour is accepted. Explicitly stating that such language will not be tolerated begins to address some of the issues of prejudice.



## 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 socioeconomic background.
* Where significant and persistent gaps exist, consideration should be given to how the outcomes of the disadvantaged groups can be improved. This may involve a review of the curriculum and learning and teaching practices (including pre-entry support and assessment modes). It may also include a review of academic support, particularly through the personal academic tutor system, and development of peer mentoring / buddying or 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 curricula, learning environments, and support mechanisms which are inclusive and effective.

* Higher Education has the potential to overcome social and historical disadvantages students may face, especially 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.

More detailed guidance on inclusive learning and teaching practice is available in the inclusive practice guides that are part of this Inclusion Toolkit.

# Useful links and resources

[Blackboard Manual: making your courses accessible](https://lttu.uk/support/Blackboard/Manual/accessibility.html), University of Worcester

[Curriculum design](https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/tags/teaching-and-learning/subject-specific-skills/curriculum-design), Advance HE

[Design and presentation ideas](https://www2.worc.ac.uk/disabilityanddyslexia/documents/Disability_and_Dyslexia_Service_-_design_and_presentation_ideas.pdf), Disability and Dyslexia Service, 2017

[Education for Mental Health Toolkit](https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/teaching-and-learning/curricula-development/education-mental-health-toolkit), Advance HE, 2022

[Inclusive curriculum](https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/inclusive-curriculum#overview), Advance HE

[LGBTQ inclusive curricula](https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/lgbtq-inclusive-curricula-university-birmingham), University of Birmingham, Advance HE, 2017

[Making feedback on assignments effective: style guide for tutors](https://rteworcester.wp.worc.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/effective-assessment-feedback-guide-august-2018.pdf), University of Worcester, 2018

[Policy and Procedures for Inclusive Assessment and Reasonable Adjustments,](https://www2.worc.ac.uk/aqu/documents/InclusiveAssessmentPolicy.pdf) University of Worcester, 2021

[SCULPT for Accessibility](https://www.worcestershire.gov.uk/sculpt), Worcestershire County Council

[Universal Design for Learning](https://www.cast.org/impact/universal-design-for-learning-udl)

[Welcoming international students: good practice for assisting integration](https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/news-and-views/welcoming-international-students-good-practice-assisting-integration), Advance HE, 2022

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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