

IncludeAll - Core Concepts:

Introduction

What does '*IncludeAll*' really mean and why does it matter?

IncludeAll, as you might guess, is about including **all** students, and it is the University's approach to inclusive practice within teaching. It involves "issues relating to all students and to types of teaching and learning that fully and equitably include everyone in the classroom or in the programme cohort" (Grace and Gravestock, 2009, p.1).

Inclusive practice involves minimising any potential barriers to learning experienced by the way the curriculum is designed and delivered. Contrary to popular belief, it is not just about making adjustments to 'level the playing field' for individual disabled students, although where appropriate, this is extremely important and part of our legislative duty. Instead, it is about acknowledging that we have students of different abilities, nationalities and ethnicities, genders, ages, sexual orientations and religions. The QAA (Quality Assurance Agency) refer to this as the 'diversity of protected characteristics' (UK Quality Code for HE, Part B:B1, p4).

It moves away too, from the idea that we have 'traditional' – full-time undergraduates aged 18 to 21 with 3 or 4 A levels - and 'non-traditional' – mature, PT, distance, FE to HE, international, qualifications other than A levels, first in family, Access – to just students, individuals who happen to come from different educational, dispositional, circumstantial and cultural backgrounds (Thomas and May, 2010). This has nothing to do with academic standards or quality but about tackling inequality (Brink, 2008).

It also recognises that students do not have equal access to prevailing educational power structures (Allen, 1998). Some students may not feel secure in their sense of belonging and feel they do not fit in with the 'norm'. This inhibits full engagement and therefore educational experience, retention and attainment (Mann, 2005 and NUS, 2012). It also recognises that dominance and privilege give some students an advantage (Mills et al, 2011).

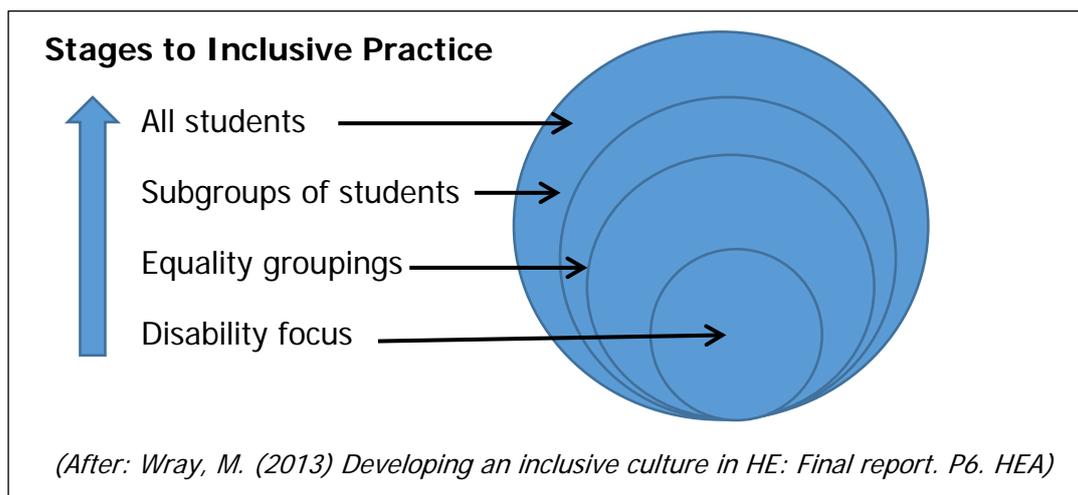
An inclusive practice approach enables individual students to feel they belong and thus develop academically professionally and personally to fulfil their potential. For the QAA an inclusive environment "anticipates the varied requirements of learners and aims to ensure that all students have equal access to education opportunities" (UK Quality Code for HE, 2013, Part B:B1, p5). However, the UK Quality Code also reiterates that while we might be "responsible for providing inclusive learning opportunities and support for learning, the effectiveness with which the learning

opportunities are used, is a matter for students themselves” (UK Quality Code for HE, 2012, Part B:B3, p4).

As a consequence, our *IncludeAll* approach to inclusive practice is about anticipating the breadth of need from a diverse student population, and understanding that **all** students can benefit from changes made to learning materials, teaching approaches and assessment methods. Inclusive teaching is likely to be good teaching, relevant and accessible.

Underpinning our approach is the belief that inclusive practice is, by definition the degree of best fit between an individual learner and their learning environment.

This moves us away from purely reacting to individual ‘extra’ requirements, through proactively adapting what we are doing to redesigning and transforming our practice, incorporating a universal design approach and changing the systems rather than the individuals. This means the need for specific support is substantially reduced in line with the UK Quality Code for HE. This is summarised in the diagram below:



A broad diversity of staff and students brings with it different ideas, knowledge and experiences that contribute to an enriched learning environment. Promoting equality involves treating everyone with equal dignity and worth, irrespective of the group or groups to which they belong, whilst also raising aspirations and supporting people with diverse requirements, entitlements and backgrounds. The NUS (National Union of Students, 2012, p2) talks of liberation as well as equality and diversity in the curriculum:

- **Liberation** – challenging the effects of structural oppression in society
- **Equality** – the curriculum should not disadvantage any students or group of students because of their background or characteristics

- **Diversity** – the curriculum should represent the diversity of contemporary society, facilitating an environment in which all students feel welcome.

For the NUS this has two strands:

1. Ensuring all students, regardless of profile, have access to the same resources and facilities, feel safe and welcome and have equal chance of success
2. Raising issues and ensuring curriculum content reflects our diverse population, encouraging social inclusion and mutual understanding.

For Margolis (2003), the content of the curriculum sends messages about who is valued in higher education and hence in the professions and workplace.

When the diversity of all students is recognised and valued, their contribution not only adds to, but further enhances, the learning experience of others. We can draw on our students own experiences, backgrounds and beliefs. By adopting this approach, it enables all students to not only access course content but also to fully participate in the required learning and assessment activities. As a consequence, the diversity of students is appreciated, and they are enabled to demonstrate their knowledge, skills and experience, both in teaching sessions and through related assessments.

In essence, we want **all** our students to gain a positive learning experience and thereby reach their full potential. None of our learning materials, teaching approaches or assessment methods should disadvantage any student, so the remainder of this Toolkit is to provide staff who teach with information about good practice on how this can be achieved. None of us are expected to be experts but we can gradually build up experience, sharing what works.

It is anticipated that some of this is already strongly in place in areas of the University, and so the Toolkit might merely be a prompt for reflection, encouraging staff to consider how they can make their existing good practice even better.

For reflection:

Do I know the diverse backgrounds of my students and their implications for learning?	
How do I use curricular, teaching and assessment practices that promote learning for all?	
Do I draw upon the diversity of my students to enhance and enrich the learning of all?	
How do I identify and address inequalities that exist in my teaching environments and promote an inclusive and respectful climate for learning?	

(From CIRTL: Learning through Diversity)

References and background reading

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This document is part of an inclusive practice 'toolkit' - *IncludeAll*. The whole Toolkit, as one complete document or as separate documents, can be found on the University website at www.staffs.ac.uk/inclusivepractice .

It is split into four sections: Core Concepts; Inclusive by Design; Enhancing Practice; Checklists for Self-reflection.

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