



Embedding race equality and internationalising the curriculum

Abertay University case study

Embedding equality and diversity in the curriculum strategic enhancement programme

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1. Introduction

Many universities have the concept of citizenship as a feature of their graduate attributes (Hounsell, 2011). Further, the desire to develop tolerant, engaged, supportive student communities who have the capacity to challenge non-inclusive attitudes and behaviours sits as a core mission of university education. However, diversifying the curriculum may require practitioners to reflect on and confront their own disciplinary context in terms of its cultural history and breadth of perspective (Darlington, 2008). “Colour-blind” education may compound school experiences, limit knowledge and reproduce existing practice (Flintoff, Dowling and Fitzgerald, 2015), and in an environment such as the featured university, which is not very ethnically diverse in its staff or student population, we need to consider how we are preparing students for the multicultural world that may await them after graduation.

Abertay University is a modern Scottish university comprising just over 4,000 students, of whom 80% are Scottish. Only 3% of the student body are from overseas and 11% from Europe. However, 60 nationalities are represented within the student body. Abertay recruits more than 60% of its student body from the local region, which has a low level of ethnic diversity: the BME population for Dundee City is 6% (DCC, 2015) and is much lower in the neighbouring local authorities. The student population mirrors this statistic with 6% of enrolled students identifying as BME; the proportion of academic staff identifying as such is higher at 9.2%. While both figures are above the national average, in terms of actual numbers this is low. A small proportion of the student body participate in exchanges (Table 1), with programme structures and cost (loss of earnings) perceived to be barriers to this form of mobility. Lack of diversity in the university community coupled with limited uptake of exchange opportunities means that student exposure to a range of cultural contexts may be restricted. This has the potential to hamper the development of global citizenship. The embedding of equality and diversity in the curriculum – or, in the case of Abertay, more specifically race and internationalisation – is one way in which this can be addressed.

Further, during the 2015-16 academic session, Abertay University undertook wholesale reformation of its curricula as part of a revised approach to teaching and learning. Objectives included explicit representation of equality and diversity within our programmes of study, increased visibility of internationalism in student learning resources, and increased opportunity for student mobility. This aligned with the university’s strategic aim that exposure to an Abertay education would “expand horizons”. Therefore, participating in the Higher Education Academy Scotland’s embedding equality and diversity in the curriculum strategic enhancement programme (EEDC SEP) was timely.

TABLE 1: NUMBER OF STUDENTS (% STUDENT BODY) PARTICIPATING IN STUDY / WORK ABROAD EXCHANGE OPPORTUNITIES

Academic session	Number of students (%)	Place of origin			Number of BME students
		Scotland	Europe	Other	
2012-13	8 (0.2%)				
2013-14	28 (0.7%)				
2014-15	15 (0.4%)				
2015-16	23 (0.6%)	10	12	1	2
2016-17	24 (0.6%)	14	10	0	1

Abertay had also been one of the first universities in Scotland to produce a statement of graduate attributes and as part of the new teaching and learning strategy these were refreshed (Figure 1).

The requisite reorganisation of learning resources because of curriculum reformation provided staff with an opportunity to reflect on how they would foster the new attributes through their curricula. Evaluation of the current state, pre-reformation, revealed that issues pertaining to race equality were approached in a rather piecemeal fashion and that there were no explicit statements on how to explore understanding in this area.



FIGURE 1: REVISED ABERTAY GRADUATE ATTRIBUTES FOR USE FROM 2015-16 SESSION ONWARDS

Consequently, the initial aims of Abertay's EEDC SEP project were to:

- > develop a strategy for embedding race equality in the curricula of all subject disciplines;
- > identify and disseminate good practice;
- > teach curricula that reflect the cultural diversity that staff and students do, and will, live and work in;
- > use this work to complement strategies to internationalise the curriculum.

2. Implementation

A preliminary scoping exercise by the project team revealed:

- > pockets of good practice dependent on subject discipline;
- > a sense from some staff that "we already do all of this" (investigation revealed this to be unsubstantiated);
- > blind spots, e.g. an unfounded belief that students were being exposed to a multicultural range of theorists within some disciplines;
- > sensitivities, e.g. concerns about causing offence;
- > limited diversity of the current population potentially limiting cultural exposure in the classroom;
- > opportunities for student mobility but some underutilisation.

Reflecting on these outcomes, the project team recognised that there needed to be specific focus on institutional readiness to deliver a diverse curriculum and some re-examination of student mobility prospects.

Consequently, the team revised the original project objectives to:

- > develop continuing professional development (CPD) activity for staff to enable the delivery of an inclusive pedagogy;
- > provide staff development opportunities that will foster the 4Cs: confidence, capability, competence, capacity (Figure 2);
- > examine student mobility and employability pre- and post-graduation;
- > evaluate the student experience.

The key lesson learned from the scoping exercise was the varying ranges of competence, confidence, capacity and capability (the 4Cs) within teaching staff regarding race equality in the curriculum. Accordingly, staff development became a central focus of the project. The university's Teaching and Learning Enhancement (TLE) team run monthly workshops / seminars for staff, as well as hosting the Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education Teaching programme that confers Fellowship of the Higher Education Academy on completion. The TLE team have also developed an online repository of resources (NetTLE).

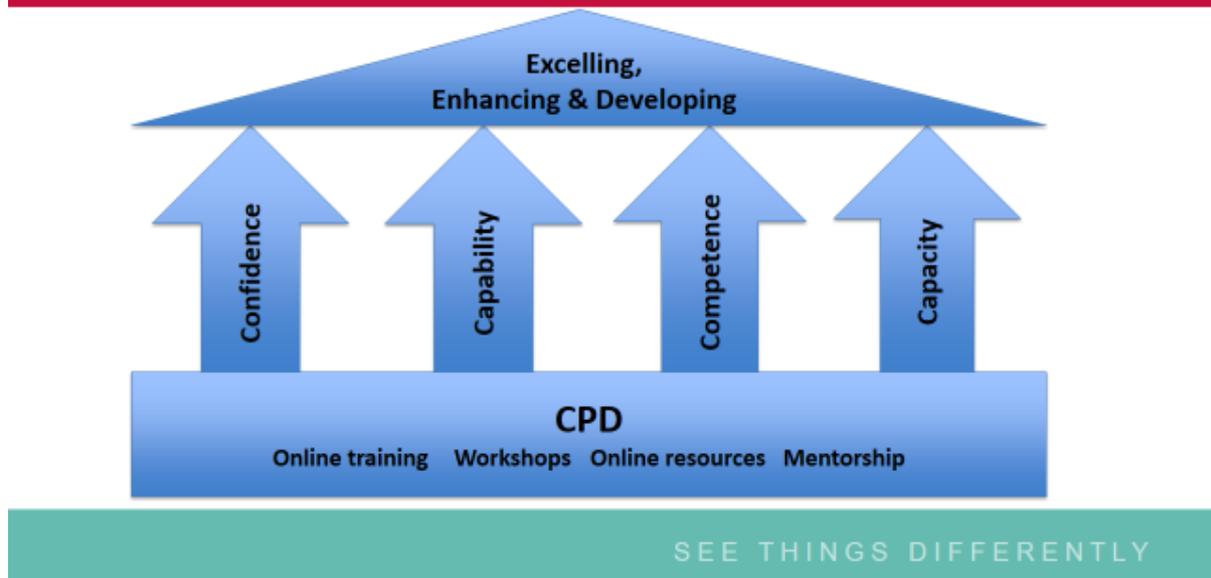


FIGURE 2: THE 4CS – KEY STAFF DEVELOPMENT ASPECTS OF THE ABERTAY EEDC SEP PROJECT

In partnership with our Human Resource Department, a range of CPD activities were identified that could be rolled out in either face-to-face or virtual formats. To date, staff have had the opportunity to engage with unconscious bias training, effective communication workshops, and inclusive teaching and learning seminars. More of these are planned, some of which will be co-produced by staff and students and will specifically focus on race equality and internationalising the curriculum.

The university is currently recruiting staff and student 'Lead Voices' to represent the range of protected characteristics. The project team plans to use this network as well as discipline-based champions, and internal case studies of good practice, to progress the 4Cs. The NetTLE site will be used as a location for internal and external EEDC resources to foster understanding, and develop, enhance and hopefully evidence excellence (the four levels integral to the EEDC Standard that HEA Scotland are developing for programmes of study). The university has also recently implemented a series of mentorship programmes (e.g. early career research mentors, Lead Voice mentors for equality champions, Aurora programme mentors and HEA Fellowship mentors). By incorporating race equality and internationalising the curriculum into these mentorship roles, it is anticipated that this will be another medium through which the 4Cs can be developed.

3. Impact

In November 2016, Abertay University was the first Scottish Higher Education Institution to be awarded the Equality Challenge Unit's (ECU) Race Equality Charter Mark (RECM). Feedback from the ECU revealed that the embedding equality and diversity in the curriculum section had been a real strength of the submission. The scoping exercise conducted for this EEDC SEP project enabled the authors of the RECM document to coherently articulate current good practice as well as to identify what further activity was needed. The accompanying RECM action plan aligned with this EEDC project's development work.

Further evidence of impact will be explored during the 2017-18 academic session when an internal institutional review of the revised curricula will take place. The programme specification template requires academic staff to articulate how equality and diversity is being embedded within their curriculum. This review will facilitate a comparison with statements made during the 2015-16 curriculum reformation and will also provide an opportunity to identify good practice which can be showcased on the NetTLE site. NetTLE is currently an internal resource; however, ongoing website developments mean that in the future this will become externally accessible allowing for broader engagement with concurrent communities of practice.

Finally, focus groups examining experiences relating to race equality took place with students during the 2014-15 session in preparation for our first RECM submission. Focus groups will re-run in the 2017-18 session and output will be compared with the original data to explore whether changes in curricula activities and pedagogies have impacted on student experience.

4. Lessons learned

The project team had not anticipated that they would need to revise their initial objectives and that developing the 4Cs would be an integral means of advancing our EEDC SEP ambitions. It became evident in early phases of the project that some staff felt that they were "walking on eggshells" in trying to broach race equality in the curriculum and consequently one of the employed tactics to deal with this was avoidance. Others when asked about race equality in their curriculum stated: "We already do this"; however, further analysis of what was being done revealed, in some cases, a quite superficial approach.

The project team were also met by resistance from some staff members who oppose advancement of the equality agenda in higher education; and there were some staff who perceived that we were interfering in their disciplinary area: "We know what's best for our discipline." Hence, a key lesson has been that in order to embed race equality within the curriculum there is a requirement to engage staff and ensure that they are

ready and willing to diversify their learning activities. It was this realisation that led the project team to create a suite of development opportunities to increase staff confidence, capability, competence and capacity (the 4Cs).

It also became evident that while there were varying levels of confidence among staff, there were also some very good examples of existing practice and these available resources could be used to guide, develop, support and mentor others. Therefore, harnessing the influence of current champions of race equality has been another useful lesson for the project team.

5. Next steps

Engaging in the EEDC SEP has allowed the project team, as part of a broader reformation of teaching and learning, to begin their journey of diversifying the curriculum. Needs and priorities for both the short- and long term have been identified and accordingly the next steps are to:

- > gather and publish the resources (internal and external) on the NetTLE online site;
- > identify and roll out a programme of training (face-to-face and online);
- > recruit and provide a programme of activity for the champions and mentors;
- > in 2017-18, conduct an internal institutional review of the revised curricula, and host a series of student focus groups capturing experiences of race equality in the curriculum;
- > provide opportunities for programme leaders to work with the university's international office in order to identify and promote in-curricula student mobility opportunities.

The aim would be that by 2021 every member of a programme team can articulate where race equality is being embedded in their curriculum and can express confidence in their capacity to deliver learning activities in this domain. It is hoped that exposure to broader cultural contexts will develop curiosity in both our students and graduates and that we will witness more student and alumni mobility.

6. Key messages

In order that we action the definition of inclusivity provided by Abertay (cited in Wray (2013)):

to move beyond an understanding of inclusion as being an issue for specific groups of students, or a focus for staff with a special interest

we need to use our champions and those already doing good work as mentors and agents of, and for, change. Darlington (2008) and Flintoff, Dowling and Fitzgerald (2015) acknowledge that changing practice can be challenging as it requires individuals to reflect on the diversity of the traditional theorists associated with their discipline and consider whether a monochrome and culturally limiting view is being represented. It is hoped that enhancing the capacity of programme teams to embed matters of race equality in the curriculum will increase student mobility pre- and post-graduation, and enable our students to operate in diverse and multicultural contexts.

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