Equality, Diversity and
Accessibility in the Curriculum

Guidance for faculty management, programme committees and course teams

Photograph by Angela Schröer
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This guidance has been developed in collaboration and consultation with colleagues in a number of faculties, in Student Services and in IET. It is published in hard copy and on the Equality and Diversity Office intranet. The electronic version contains embedded links to further guidance. Comments or suggestions for improving this guidance are welcomed and should be sent for the attention of the Senior Manager, Equality and Diversity.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Why we need to consider issues of diversity in our curriculum

We are committed to providing high-quality university education to all who wish to realise their ambitions and fulfil their potential and to widening participation and meeting the needs of diverse groups of students. Creating an inclusive, relevant and accessible curriculum will contribute to attracting and retaining our target groups, equipping students to respond to increasingly diverse environments and will assist us in our strategic objective to expand our global reach.

1.2 Responsibilities

Responsibilities of Faculty, including Programme Directors and Managers, Heads of Awards, Course Team Chairs and Managers are outlined in the Equality and Diversity stakeholder responsibility matrix, as follows:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Faculty</th>
<th>Programme committees</th>
<th>Course teams</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Environmental scanning</td>
<td>Create programmes and courses that attract a diverse student body</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Pre-production</td>
<td>Consider issues of equal opportunities and accessibility at an early stage of programme and course development and document decisions clearly</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Production</td>
<td>Ensure the language, content and imagery used reflects the diversity of culture, identities, and experiences in the UK and internationally</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Post-launch</td>
<td>Monitor student registration, completion and attainment of different groups on programmes and courses and respond to results of monitoring</td>
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1.3 Dimensions of diversity

Diversity encompasses a wide range of identity characteristics, including but not limited to; age, disability, ethnicity, gender, language, religion and belief, sexual orientation, socio-economic and educational background. The responsibilities outlined above apply to all of these dimensions, with the exception of the fourth responsibility, post-launch monitoring. Monitoring of outcomes is currently possible for all dimensions of equality, except language, religion and belief and sexual orientation, as this data is currently not collected from students.

1.4 Integrating equality, diversity and accessibility into faculty processes

Diversity and accessibility issues can sometimes be seen as something additional to core work. Integrating equality considerations throughout existing processes at faculty, programme and course levels will reduce the perceived additional burden and will add real value to those processes by improving the quality of decision making. The guidance that follows directly addresses these key curriculum management processes at faculty, programme and course levels.
2. Faculty level guidance

2.1 Assessing the market

Assessing the market involves gathering data including market research, evaluating the data and identifying new opportunities and forecasting student numbers.

In forecasting student numbers, a prediction of the likely participation by age band, disability, ethnicity and gender should be made, based on participation in previous presentations, or participation on similar programmes.

The most up to date participation data for new undergraduates is presented to faculties by IET in spring each year and then published on the Knowledge Network under ‘Faculty Profile presentations’.

Detailed demographic trend data on participation, completion and attainment at faculty level for new and continuing students (by age, disability, ethnicity and gender) is available in the ‘monitoring’ section of the Equality and Diversity intranet.

Sector benchmarking data from HESA showing subject choices by different groups is available in the ‘faculty guidance’ section of the Equality and Diversity intranet.

Where you have identified the need for new market data, this should be discussed with the Market, Competitor and Customer Insight team in Marketing.

2.2 Planning the curriculum

The faculty curriculum plan is generated by the information entered into the PLANET system and this, along with the Strategy Statement, forms a record of the faculty intentions and direction for the coming years.

The faculty should use market data to form an understanding of the impact of its plans on the diversity of the student body.

Planning should also include an assessment of the level of accessibility of the programmes and courses offered by the faculty and should demonstrate continuous improvement in this area. This is partly because we have an anticipatory legal duty to make reasonable adjustments but most importantly because we want to enable our existing and prospective disabled students to access the widest possible choice of courses.

2.3 Establishing new programmes

The decision to form a new programme of study must be based on an assessment of the market, and this assessment should include the impact of the programme on the University’s ability to meet its diversity, widening participation and accessibility objectives. A new programme will either result in a greater amount of diversity, a lesser amount of diversity or no change to the overall diversity profile of the student population. Not all programmes will be attractive to all groups and so a lesser amount of diversity could be justified if it can be demonstrated that other programmes within the faculty are compensating for this.
3. Programme and Award level guidance

3.1 Specifying awards and programme components

The programme committee is typically concerned with defining the programme and its components, which may involve establishing new courses or awards. Members of the programme committee will normally carry out the early stages of course approval for new courses in the programme and subsequently appoint a course team. Consideration will need to be given to equality and diversity in any new or re-versioned components that require approval (either through the stage gate process for courses or the awards process).

In addition, the programme committee should perform a specific analysis to ensure there are or will be sufficient pathways for students with disabilities to complete a programme of study.

3.2 Course business appraisal

A discussion should take place to identify any challenges that might be encountered for students with disabilities in meeting the essential learning outcomes. Where challenges are identified, early consultation should take place with media staff in LTS and for non-standard solutions, the Accessible Educational Media team in IET.

The course business appraisal stage also requires the following question to be answered:

“How will this course attract minority group students to study with the University? You should use planning and marketing data to identify whether there is currently under-representation for programmes of study that are similar to the course being proposed. Where you have identified low participation for particular groups (ethnic minorities, age, gender, disabled students), you should consider how the course can help to increase participation from these groups.”

This means that you should look at OU data for courses in similar subject areas as well as external sector data to determine what the profile of students might be for a particular course. If you identify the potential for low participation by any group, you should take steps to address this. The section ‘recruiting students to your course’ in the course level guidance provides ideas of ways to attract under-represented groups.

3.3 Forming the course team

Course teams generally consist of a course team chair, a course manager or coordinator, members of central and regional academic staff, a course secretary, external assessor and sometimes other external contributors but the make up varies across CAUs. It may be possible to create a course team that represents a diversity of identities and experience. In such cases, course teams will be able to draw on such diversity in developing course content and critiquing the content for bias and omission. Where this is not feasible, the course team can draw on the diversity expertise of others; other academic or non-academic staff within the faculty, experienced staff in other faculties, Associate Lecturers, the Accessible Educational Media team, media staff in LTS and staff in the Equality and Diversity Office.

3.4 Market planning

A marketing plan can be devised for a programme as a whole, rather than for individual courses. Marketing plans should take into account the current demographic profile of students studying in the faculty. Under-representation can be addressed by ensuring that campaigns proactively address the issue of diversity by targeting both the content and location of communications.
3.5 The programme committee

The programme committee has responsibility for assuring quality and standards in the development and delivery of the programme. The committee should therefore consider at least annually the success or otherwise of the programme in integrating equality and diversity and ensuring accessibility. A range of data on participation and progression of students is available from the faculty guidance section of the Equality and Diversity intranet.

3.6 Annual review of awards

In the annual report to the Awards Committee, the programme committee is required to have reviewed demographic data. This review should make use of participation, completion and attainment data and student feedback and the report should include information on;

- any changes that might be required to the programme
- recommendations on long term changes to the curriculum
- areas of good practice that should be shared with others
4. Course level guidance

4.1 Responsibilities

All members of the course team have responsibilities in this area, however the course team chair should appoint one or more members of the course team to keep an overview and ensure these responsibilities are met.

A checklist (see appendix A) has been created to support individuals who are assigned this role.

Either the course team chair or the person assigned responsibility for keeping an overview should assess and respond to any development needs of the team in relation to understanding of equality, diversity and accessibility.

4.2 Course specification plan

The course specification plan (REP03) contains the information required by the University during the stage gate approval process in order for a course to proceed to production. The Equality, Diversity and Accessibility Course Team Report Template (see appendix B) on the PLANET system must be completed fully as this provides evidence that the course team has and will continue to take equality and diversity into consideration during the development, delivery and review of the course.

A copy of the completed template should be sent to the Associate Dean or Director with lead responsibility for Equality and Diversity issues within the faculty for scrutiny. The Associate Dean or Director may seek guidance from the Equality and Diversity Office or others and may request that the course team take action to address areas of concern.

4.3 Course accessibility

Once a course specification plan has been approved, the more detailed course specification design is developed. This process takes place over a period of time and also involves staff in LTS and Student Services. A key concern in the specification design is to ensure the course is accessible to disabled students, particularly in relation to the following elements:

- Teaching, learning and assessment strategy
- Materials
- Tutorials, day and residential schools

The course team and in particular the person assigned coordinating responsibility for accessibility issues should be familiar with the following guidance which is contained in the Curriculum Management Guide (CMG), the OU Knowledge Network (OUKN) and LTS intranet:

- Introduction to accessibility – a short guide that provides an introduction to consideration of disabled students in relation to learning outcomes, study media, reasonable adjustments and student support strategies (OUKN)
- Guide to alternative media for disabled students (CMG)
- Guide to describing visual teaching materials (OUKN)
- Guide to producing accessible computer-based materials (CMG)
- List of OU disability service providers – who can help (CMG)
- LTS production process – standard and optional accessibility provision (LTS intranet)
4.4 External assessment

Once a course has been approved for production by the University, the external assessor is appointed. If the profile of the course team is not particularly diverse, the appointment of the external assessor may provide an opportunity to redress this. Additionally, the assessor should receive as part of their brief the need to provide feedback to the course team on issues of diversity and accessibility.

4.5 Writing the course

The University has produced practical resources which all course team members should be familiar with, particularly staff writing course content, including external contributors:

- **OU Language and Image Guide**: This is a booklet which is available to download. It contains guidance on representing different forms of diversity including; age, disability, ethnicity, gender, religion, sexual orientation and socio-economic difference. It also includes guidance on writing plain English.

- **Diversity in the Curriculum OU Case Studies**: this resource is currently being developed. It will be a web-based resource that provides case studies on different approaches to including issues of diversity in your course.

4.6 Critical readers

Efforts should be made to ensure that the critical readers selected to review and provide feedback to the course team are drawn from as diverse a pool as possible and are able to comment in relation to the inclusiveness and accessibility of both form and content. The University has a significant number of groups and networks where critical readers might be recruited from:

- Black and minority ethnic staff network, and Lesbian and Gay staff network – contact the **Equality and Diversity Office**
- Staff Disability Advisory Team – contact **Human Resources**
- International and other research students based in Milton Keynes – contact **Research School – Research Career Development Support**
- OU Student Association online student forums – contact the **OU Student Association administration office**
- OU Alumni from diverse backgrounds – contact **Alumni Relations**
- Associate Lecturers from diverse backgrounds – submit an article to TutorHome News or to target tutors with a particular interest in diversity issues, contact **AL Services**.
- Links with community organisations through widening participation and regional outreach work – contact secretary or regional members of the **Widening Participation Network**.

The briefing provided to critical readers should explicitly request that the reader provides feedback and suggestions in relation to issues of language, bias, omission, and representation of diversity in the course materials.

Advice might also be sought from an expert in English as an Additional Language to identify potential difficulties and to identify ways to improve clarity, especially for level 1 courses.
4.7 Recruiting students

The information that you provide to describe a programme or course can have an impact on the choices made by students. You should therefore check for use of plain English, and for bias and omission, the content produced for prospectus contents and information provided to the Student Services Communications Team for updating the Courses and Qualifications (C&Q) website. Bias is often unintentional, and arises when individuals do not consider the perspective of people with different identity characteristics to their own.

It is also vitally important that the information provided to students on the C&Q website describes in detail the accessibility adjustments, including challenges and solutions, to the form (eg. materials, alternative formats), content (eg. assignments) and teaching (eg. additional support) of the course. This should be written in a positive way so that potential students who would have little difficulty are not put off. Transparency and clarity will enable prospective and current students with disabilities, advisors and disability assessors to make informed course choices and will reduce the amount of reactive and costly retrofitting of courses.

Where particular programmes or courses may not attract some groups, for example where the programme is strongly gender oriented or not attracting particular ethnic groups, it may be useful to draw out elements of the programme or course that challenge students assumptions about who the course is for. In addition, the Student Services Communications Team can support you in developing specific campaigns and/or course choice mailings. Your faculty Marketing plan should also address specific issues of equality and diversity in your faculty and therefore should support you in attracting students from diverse backgrounds.

4.8 Course team meetings

When the course is in delivery, meetings of the course team provide an opportunity to explore the experience of different groups of students, based on feedback from Associate Lecturers and students themselves. Challenges may be presented which have not been considered by the course team and which might need to be rectified earlier than the post-launch review.

4.9 Post-launch review

The post-launch review normally takes place during the second presentation of the course, when information from the first full year of presentation is available, including AL and student feedback, and data on participation and completions.

During the review, the course team should ensure that adequate consideration is given to the experience and outcomes for students from the perspective of age, disability, ethnicity, gender, socio-economic circumstances and previous educational background. This analysis will ensure that overarching generalisations about students are not made. For example, data may show that completions are higher on a particular course when compared to completions within the faculty overall. An analysis by gender may show that this is due to exceptionally high rates of completion by women, whereas completion for men is below the faculty or university average. This would highlight the need to consider what action is required to improve completions for men. Similarly, where data shows a worrying trend, such as low levels of retention, it is important to identify in greater detail which groups are not being retained as well. This will ensure an appropriate use of resource in any targeted work that is undertaken.

The review should also include feedback from Associate Lecturers about adjustments they have made to meet student needs. This feedback can be used to inform all stakeholders; academic, production and presentation staff, so that improvements can be made in both the short and long term.
4.10 Lifecycle review

The lifecycle review normally takes place no later than 4 years after the post-launch review. As with the post-launch review, it is important to ensure adequate information is available in order to assess the experience and outcomes of different groups. The main difference at this stage is that trend data over a number of years should be used. For example, action that might have been taken to improve completion rates for men can be assessed over a number of years to see if completion rates have improved in that time and to determine if the gap between men and women has narrowed in that time. A widening gap would indicate that the improvement strategy has not worked. The outcomes of this review should inform future course design.
Appendix A: Ten steps to making your course inclusive

This checklist is based on detailed guidance for course teams contained in the Curriculum Management Guide. It is available to download from the Equality and Diversity intranet.

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<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Complete</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Assess the level of diversity within the course team and the diversity knowledge of course team members and agree steps to address any imbalances.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Assess the accessibility of your course for students with disabilities and plan adjustments as early as possible.</td>
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<td>3. Provide the course team and any external contributors with a copy of or links to the OU Language and Image Guide.</td>
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<td>4. Discuss and document opportunities for integrating diversity into the course to ensure it is relevant to diverse and international markets.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Ensure the guidance for the external assessor includes a requirement to comment on diversity and accessibility in their report.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Recruit critical readers with diverse backgrounds and experiences.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Ensure the guidance for critical readers asks them to comment on diversity and accessibility of the course.</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Write the descriptions of the course for web, prospectus and campaigns so that it is free from bias, omission and complex or culturally exclusive language and ensure that information about course accessibility is accurate and comprehensive.</td>
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<td>9. If your course is in a subject area where there is segregation or under-representation, decide how you will challenge student assumptions about who the course is for (eg. through course descriptions or through targeted campaigns).</td>
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<tr>
<td>10. Schedule demographic data analysis (participation, completions, attainment) to coincide with key post-launch review points for the course.</td>
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This checklist completed by:
Appendix B: Equality, Diversity and Accessibility – Course Team Report Template

(Part of REP03 course specification plan)

About this report
This part of the report demonstrates the ways the course team will take equality, diversity and accessibility issues into consideration during the development, delivery and review of the course. Many course teams already do this effectively and this report provides both a necessary audit trail and a way of identifying good practice that can be shared more widely.

Please ensure that you have read the course level guidance in the document ‘Equality, Diversity and Accessibility in the Curriculum’ in the Curriculum Management Guide before completing this template. A copy of this report should be sent to the Associate Dean or Director with lead responsibility for equality and diversity issues in your faculty. If you require additional guidance, contact the Equality and Diversity Office.

Responsibilities
The course team chair should appoint one or more members of the course team to keep an overview of equality, diversity and accessibility issues and ensure the course team and its production and presentation partners meet their responsibilities. A checklist has been created to support individuals assigned this role.

1. Name of course, course code, level and name of course team chair

2. Name and job title of person with lead on equality and diversity issues

3. Name and job title of person with lead on accessibility issues

4. Have any development needs been identified within the course team?
   - No
   - Yes
   If yes, how have or will these be addressed?

Reasonable adjustments
It is vitally important that the course team considers and documents decisions in relation to adjustments for disabled students as failure to make adjustments may be challenged by students or third parties acting on their behalf under the provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act. Detailed guidance on making courses accessible and providing reasonable adjustments can be found on the OU Knowledge Network and many types of adjustment are now provided as standard by LTS. Where you have concerns about accessibility on a specific course, early guidance should be sought, initially from media staff in LTS and for non-standard solutions, the Accessible Educational Media team.

5. Are there any difficulties likely to be experienced by students with different kinds of disabilities?
   - fatigue and/or pain;
   - mobility or physical impairment;
   - mental health disability;
   - manual dexterity impairment;
   - dyslexia;
   - visual impairment;
   - hearing impairment;
   - requiring personal care;
   - speech impairment;
   - health condition

6. Are there any essential course learning outcomes that students with different kinds of disabilities are unlikely to achieve without the provision of adjustments?
7. What proposed adjustments can be made? (please state adjustments for each type of disability)

8. Are there any adjustments that are considered unreasonable?
(you must consult with LTS and AEM staff if you consider that adjustments can not be made to make the course accessible for students with one or more types of disability)

### Course content

Diversity encompasses a wide range of identity characteristics, including but not limited to; age, disability, ethnicity, gender, language, religion and belief, sexual orientation and socio-economic background. The course team should be aware of the diverse audience their course is being produced for and of how their own knowledge and understanding is limited by their own experience. The course team should make particular efforts to avoid omission, bias, stereotypes and culturally exclusive assumptions or language in the course content.

9. Have all members of the course team, including any external contributors, been provided with links to the *language and image guide*?

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<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
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<tr>
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<td>No</td>
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If no, please explain how the course team will be made aware or reminded of the above issues.

10. Please state the ways that it will be possible to integrate issues of diversity within the content of the course (Tick all that apply).

|   | The course will use some literature, case studies or artefacts to highlight diversity
|---|------------------------------------------------|
|   | The course will directly discuss issues of diversity relevant to the study topic
|   | The course will discuss stereotypical or prejudicial perspectives
|   | The course will have some discrete modules on one or more diversity issues
|   | The course will draw on different perspectives from different authors
|   | The course will draw on perspectives from non-Western authors and/or will have an international dimension
|   | The course will create opportunities for students to engage in critical analysis of different perspectives/norms
|   | Other, please state: |

### External assessment

11. Please confirm that guidance on diversity and accessibility has been or will be explicitly included in the briefing for the external assessor and that the assessor has been asked to comment on this aspect of the course in their report?

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### Critical readers

12. What plans are in place or what efforts will be made to ensure that the course will be critically assessed by people with diverse backgrounds and experiences?

13. Please confirm that guidance on diversity and accessibility has been or will be explicitly included in the briefing for critical readers and that readers have been asked to comment or respond to specific questions in relation to this.

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Recruiting students
For some subject areas, there is significant segregation or under-representation for some groups. The information that you provide to describe your course can have an impact on the choices made by students.

14. Is your course within a subject area where there is under-representation for particular groups, eg. women, men, Black students, younger students?
   □ No
   □ Yes
   If yes, please say which groups may not be attracted and what action you propose to take to challenge student assumptions about who the course is for.

15. Please confirm that course descriptions for prospectuses, course websites and specific marketing and communication campaigns will be checked to ensure they are inclusive and that information about course accessibility will be comprehensive.
   □ Yes
   Who will be responsible for this?
   When will this happen?

Monitoring participation and outcomes
Course teams should consider an analysis of participation and outcomes from the perspectives of age, disability, ethnicity, gender and socio-economic circumstances.

16. Please confirm that key review points for the course, including the post-launch and lifecycle reviews, will include the above analysis.
   □ Yes

Additional comments
17. Are there any other issues that have been identified or any comments that the course team want to add?

Date of meeting(s) where issues were considered by course team:
Date this template completed or last updated:
Date of authorisation by course chair:
Date sent to Associate Dean or Director with lead responsibility for E&D in faculty: