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Inclusive Education Framework

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Inclusive Education

Forward

Inclusivity is at the heart of the University of Hull's vision of a 'Brighter, Fairer, Carbon Neutral Future'.

Our Education Strategy 2020-2025 sets out our commitment to embedding a fully inclusive approach that celebrates diversity and embraces differences throughout all areas of university life. Inclusivity at the University of Hull not only places students at the heart of this transformational change, but actively empowers students as partners. The Inclusive Education Framework is a powerful tool for helping all members of the university community to understand what inclusive practice means.

It also provides practical suggestions to ensure that all students have an equal opportunity to succeed, therefore empowering staff to actively embrace inclusive practice. I am delighted that this rigorous framework has been developed to support our vision of a truly inclusive university and I am excited about its potential for driving sector leading change.

**- Professor Becky Huxley-Binns, Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education),
University of Hull**

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What is Inclusive Education?

Our students all benefit from living in a diverse and inclusive society, and from receiving a diversified, decolonised and inclusive education. Our students are also the leaders of tomorrow, so the values we demonstrate and embed through our approach to education will be those that they will take into society.

Being inclusive means that all students are given an equal opportunity to succeed, independent of their background or demographic characteristics. This framework has been developed to help staff and students understand the breadth and depth of what inclusive practice means within Higher Education.

This framework adopts a broad definition of inclusivity. It moves away from a culture of reasonable adjustments for individual students, but instead considers the needs of a diverse student body. Inclusive universities consider the needs of commuter students, working class students, international students, students with caring responsibilities, and other aspects of student life that might impact on student success. Throughout the framework we have included specific examples of inclusive practice and how these can have a positive impact on all our students.

Being inclusive does not mean compromising on academic standards or quality processes. Inclusion does not require grade inflation or 'dumbing down' - inclusive programmes can and should be academically rigorous and give authentic training in knowledge, skills and behaviours appropriate to the discipline. Adopting an inclusive approach recognises that some students are systematically disadvantaged by exclusive practices, and to proactively ensure that all students have equal opportunities to succeed.

Legally, the Equality Act (2010) establishes that individuals with protected characteristics are protected from discrimination (protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation). As such, inclusive educational practices are essential for ensuring that students from different backgrounds have equivalent outcomes for retention, degree classifications awarded and progression to future study and employment.

We adopt an intersectional approach to inclusion, recognising that individual students might belong to multiple historically disadvantaged groups. Inclusive education also recognises that students are individuals, not just members of a demographic 'group'. Two students from the same 'group' might have very different experiences, so we must take care not to fall back on stereotypes or generalisations about what a particular group of student needs.

What is Inclusive Education?

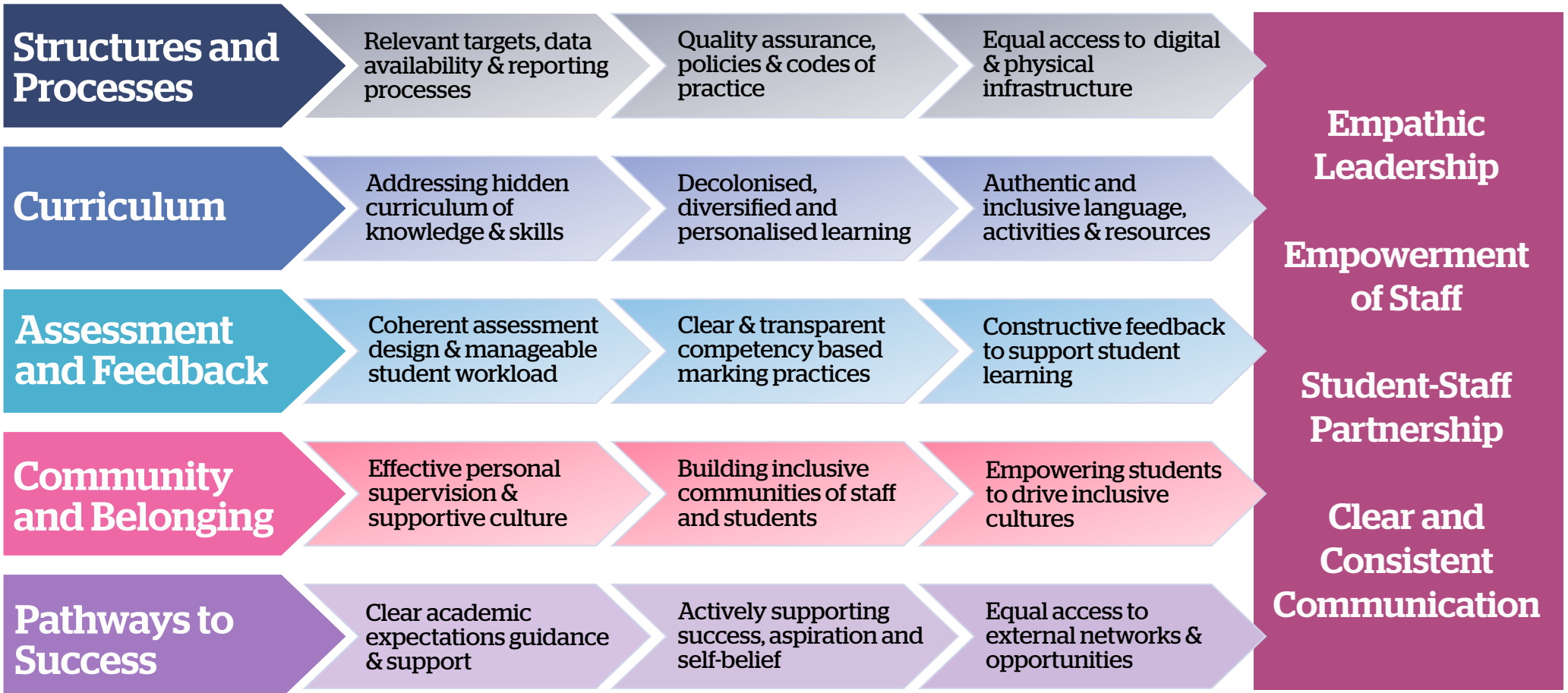
We also note the difference between ‘accessibility’ and ‘inclusion’. For example, ‘accessible’ might mean a wheelchair user can physically get into a space, whereas ‘inclusive’ would have furniture and other students arranged so that the wheelchair user can interact with their peers on an equal basis.

The framework demonstrates that there is no ‘single solution’ to inclusivity, and that it is everyone’s responsibility. It requires students, academic and professional services staff to work together to build the most inclusive environment possible. Being inclusive is also a journey – our understanding of inclusive practice and the needs of students is constantly evolving, and we will sometimes get it wrong. We hope that the framework helps all members of the university community to think more broadly about inclusive practice, and to take appropriate action to ensure equality of opportunity for all students.

The framework has been developed for use within the University of Hull. However, we hope that the framework has value beyond our institution and is a useful tool for creating inclusive cultures across the sector.



The Framework



 Listen to audio description

The Framework

The framework details five areas of activity which contribute to inclusive practice across an institution: Structures and Processes, Curriculum, Assessment and Feedback, Community and Belonging, and Pathways to Success. In addition to the five areas of activity, the framework is underpinned by the principles of empathic leadership, staff empowerment, student partnership, and clear communication.

To implement these at institutional level requires all members of the university community to examine their own practices, and to take positive action where inequality is identified. This can and should be discipline or context relevant; the approach to inclusive education may look very different in healthcare compared to the arts, sciences or humanities.

The framework is designed to be practice-focussed, providing staff and students a clear understanding of the depth and breadth of inclusive practice. It is academically rooted in the work of Mountford-Zimdars et al. (2015) and other relevant literature (see end of the document for references). The framework has been developed in consultation with students and staff, so that it represents the needs, structures, strategic priorities and culture of our university community.



Structures and Processes

An inclusive university will have processes and structures that actively consider equality and diversity, so that inclusive practice becomes routine throughout the institution. Senior university leaders have key roles in driving inclusive cultures and processes at all levels of the university (UUK and NUS, 2019).

Academic and professional services staff are also essential for the implementation of inclusive practice on the ground. In an inclusive university, everyone will be aware of and engage with relevant policies and apply them to their local contexts. Inclusive policies and documentation are written in clear transparent language, and processes are straightforward for staff and students to engage with.



Structures and Processes

Examples of how to do this might include:

Establishment of Key Performance Indicators that relate to widening participation (e.g., retention, awarding gaps).

For the University of Hull, these are defined in the Education Strategy 2020 - 2025 and the Institutional Access and Participation Plan 2020/21 - 2024/25.

Accessible and transparent programme data, integrated into routine quality processes. To enable evidence-driven interventions, the use of dynamic data dashboards gives programme teams local accountability. This allows for early intervention to address any identified awarding gap or student retention issues.

Developing and reviewing policies that emphasise inclusive practice. Effective policies embed good practice across the institution, and are best developed in partnership with students, academic and professional services staff. At Hull, an example of this is the Inclusive Marking, Assessment and Feedback Policy.

Building staff and student awareness and understanding of institutional policies. Engaging students and staff in the development of institutional policies builds inclusive cultures. Inclusive communication is clear and transparent and understandable by all, particularly those unfamiliar with university terminology or communicating in a second language.

Ensure learning environments are accessible. Teaching environments, both physical and digital, must reflect current legal accessibility standards. Inclusive programmes will design out the need for individual adjustments where possible, by adopting a more inclusive approach for the whole cohort. Where possible, students with reasonable adjustments are active partners in ensuring accessibility and given autonomy and dignity in decisions about their own learning environments.

Ensure activities are inclusive. All students should feel included and respected in the activities they undertake. Genuine inclusion will consider multiple lenses, including disability, ethnicity, gender identity and sexual orientation. For example, it is inappropriate to plan field work to countries where homosexuality is illegal.

Ensure equal student access to resources, factoring in digital inequality. Many students cannot afford specialist materials, software or costs associated with field work or placements. Students may also lack quality study space at home, or not have access to an appropriate computer to work on. Inclusive programmes will consider financial implications of activities and offer targeted support or alternatives where appropriate.

Curriculum

The curriculum is at the heart of the student experience and is the most obvious place to demonstrate inclusivity to students. Students who feel that their curriculum is relevant to them are more likely to be motivated and to succeed.

The curriculum includes what we teach and how we teach it, including the timetable and infrastructure required. It also includes the Hidden Curriculum, which is the 'untaught' component of the educational experience, including the implicit knowledge, norms and behaviours that are required for success at university (Margolis, 2002; Hubbard et al. 2020).



An inclusive curriculum will:

Be transparent about the assumed knowledge and skills required for success. Inclusive programmes consider students with different entry qualifications (e.g., A level vs BTEC), and proactively ensure that all students start the programme with the skills and knowledge required. This could be done by an intensive start to the programme designed to 'level the playing field' before new content is introduced.

Adopt a diverse and decolonised range of perspectives. Decolonisation requires that historical power imbalances are confronted within the curriculum, including the dominance of White European mindsets on the discipline. This is an issue for all disciplines, not just the arts and humanities. For example, an inclusive economics programme would examine the relationship between the historical slave trade and modern global economic disparities. Inclusive healthcare programmes would consider health inequalities and diagnosis in Black and Asian populations, as well as ableist attitudes within health care.

Allow students to personalise their curriculum where possible. Inclusive programmes will give students flexibility and autonomy in how they demonstrate their learning. For example, students could be given choice of essay topic within a module so that they can focus on something they are particularly interested in, which will increase motivation.

Demonstrate inclusion where possible. Inclusive language and practice really matter, particularly for students from historically minoritised groups. For example, an inclusive healthcare programme would actively consider language used when engaging with LGBTQIA+ or ethnic minority patients, or with non-English speaking patients.

Proactively manage and remove barriers to engagement. Many students build their studies around other aspects of their lives, including caring responsibilities, commuting to campus and paid employment (Leese, 2010). Students with disabilities or long-term health conditions may find it more difficult to come to campus or engage with particular resources. Inclusive teaching activities are designed so that students can engage regardless of their personal circumstances.

Give students authentic opportunities to practise their knowledge and skills. Learning should be active where possible, giving students regular opportunities to discuss, use and test their knowledge and skills. Pedagogy should be authentic and active, using strategies such as problem-based learning, collaborative project-based activities and reflection on learning. Active pedagogies have been shown to reduce educational inequalities such as awarding gaps.

Assessment and Feedback

Assessment is a major driver of student learning but is also a source of considerable anxiety for many students. Poorly designed assessment strategies can act as a barrier to learning, and potentially reinforce educational inequalities. Inclusive assessment goes beyond the provision of reasonable adjustments for individual students with disabilities, towards a model where flexibility of assessment is available for all (Waterfield and West, 2006).

Inclusive pedagogy also requires effective use of feedback and feedforward. All students benefit from having a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of their work and be able to identify how to improve their performance in future assignments. Inclusive assessment and feedback processes are also mindful of student anxieties and provide constructive support for students in demonstrating their learning (Winstone and Nash, 2016).



Have coherent programme level design. All students benefit from seeing connections between assessments in different modules. Earlier years of the programme will prepare students effectively for their final assessments, ideally with no novel assessment types introduced in the final year.

Be mindful of student workload and anxieties around assessment. Inclusive programme teams will coordinate assessments so that students are not over-assessed or face unmanageable workloads.

Design out the need for individual reasonable adjustments wherever possible. There can often be flexibility in how students demonstrate programme competencies and standards defined by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) or Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs). That flexibility can be used to design out individual reasonable adjustments. For example, students meeting a competency of effective communication could have a choice of format (e.g. podcast, infographic, blog), enabling students to identify the most appropriate medium for their individual capabilities and needs.

Give students authentic opportunities to demonstrate their skills, knowledge and self-awareness. When assessments are embedded in 'real world' scenarios, students are more motivated by seeing the connections between their learning and the wider context and their future career.

Give students a diversity of assessment modes. An inclusive assessment portfolio will include a balanced variety of formats relevant to the discipline, so all students have opportunities to play to their strengths.

Be marked using clear, fair and transparent criteria that align to module competencies. Inclusive marking criteria will not disproportionately penalise students for mistakes in written English or referencing, except where this is required by e.g., professional, statutory and regulatory bodies. Weighted rubrics that clearly specify requirements may be more inclusive than holistic marking criteria.

Community and Belonging

For all students, feeling part of a community invokes feelings of security, positive emotions, and increased self-worth. A sense of belonging has also been demonstrated to be positively associated with student motivation, and academic success (Freeman et al, 2007; Bliuc et al, 2011). Students are less likely to withdraw from programmes or leave university if they are engaged both on an academic and a social level (Tinto, 1993; Krause & Armitage, 2014). Inclusive universities will build cultures which positively foster a strong sense of community and belonging.



Community and Belonging

Examples of how to do this might include:

Facilitating effective and supportive Personal Supervision. Enabling students to feel comfortable discussing their concerns or anxieties with academic tutors/supervisors will allow for effective signposting to additional support as indicated. Interventions such as bi-weekly drop-in sessions or a scheduled one to one monthly meeting could be used to help to facilitate effective rapport and relationship building.

Proactive monitoring of student engagement. Routine monitoring of engagement can identify students at risk of withdrawal at an early stage. At Hull, using the dynamic student engagement dashboard will allow for targeted supportive intervention via the personal supervision framework.

Relevant and inclusive induction activities. Effective induction is embedded within programmes and includes both social and academic focussed activities. Structure, timing and format of events will be considered, being mindful of commuter students, those with caring responsibilities etc. For example, the provision of alcohol might exclude students who choose not to drink for cultural, health or religious reasons. Inclusive induction will also provide tailored support for international students and those transferring from other universities part way through their programme.

Supporting students to build friendships and peer support throughout their programmes. Many students are more socially isolated than we might assume, so welcome opportunities to form connections with their peers within the programme. At Hull, embedding interventions such as the Peer Assisted Study Sessions (PASS) scheme into module delivery will positively affect self-confidence whilst creating additional peer support. Further examples might include working in smaller teaching groups, and encouraging involvement with related academic societies.

Effective and ongoing partnership with students. Examples of this might include initiatives such as Student Staff Partnership projects, or involving students in programme design and decision making. Encouraging students to regularly evaluate modules and programmes, and responding constructively and transparently to feedback given.

Empower students to embrace inclusivity within their own learning environments. This could include open discourse around student personal experience, and sharing of ideas amongst peer groups in relation to supporting diversity.

Pathways to Success

Inclusive universities offer all students, regardless of their background or entry level, the opportunity to succeed. Inclusive education is not just about academic grades. It involves gaining additional personal attributes and competencies such as social and practical skills, lifelong friendships, and a fulfilling sustainable future career (York et al, 2015; Cachia et al, 2018). Encouraging students to reach their potential by adopting a fair and inclusive approach will ensure that success is achievable to all.

Importantly, success is dependent on a student's understanding of the norms, cultures and behaviours of higher education, sometimes referred to as their cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Students who are from historically disadvantaged backgrounds or are the first in their family to go to university are less likely to have accumulated cultural capital relating to higher education. To be inclusive the university will make its norms and expectations as transparent as possible.



Adopt a competency-based approach within programmes to make expectations clear. Competency requires knowledge, experience and self-awareness within a disciplinary context. Encouraging a reflective approach to a student's own learning and development will enable them to appreciate existing strengths, and work on developing areas for improvement.

Demystify and avoid the use of academic jargon. Using clear and understandable student language in all programme materials will ensure that outcomes and opportunities are explicit. For example, providing a clear explanation detailing how UK degree classifications work will help students to understand academic expectations, and the link between academic grades and future career or study plans.

Constructive ongoing reviews of academic progress. Regular reviews of academic achievement will enable students and personal supervisors to focus on academic issues, future targets, and address potential support needs. Early identification of future career aspirations also allows for action planning and bespoke support and signposting.

Embedding institutional support services into programme delivery. Inclusive programmes will embed introductions to services such as central academic skills teams, or student wellbeing teams. Doing this early in the programme encourages engagement with relevant services and reduces student anxieties about seeking support.

Use programme and marketing materials that demonstrate inclusivity. This could involve student facing marketing materials making use of 'real' student narratives. For example, highlighting students who have achieved success despite needing to suspend their studies or due to ill health could make for powerful role models.

Effective use of mentoring & role models. This can support inclusivity by demonstrating to students available possibilities and potential career opportunities. Examples might include involving alumni in career events, collaboration with prospective employers and feeder colleges, and internship opportunities. Role models within the curriculum will represent the diversity of the student body.

Use additional supportive mechanisms to enhance student self-belief and confidence. Inclusive programmes will embed activities that build student autonomy, responsibility and self-confidence. For example, at Hull the reflective tools within the TeamGB Student Support Tool could be used within taught content.

Ensuring that placement or work experience opportunities are equitable to all. Some students may potentially be disadvantaged if a placement opportunity is likely to incur additional travel or time commitments. Students with paid jobs may be unable to commit to a lengthy placement, and students with disabilities may face additional challenges in accessing placements. Placements and work experience opportunities should be carefully managed to ensure maximal inclusivity.

How does the framework help students?

All students benefit from an inclusive education. Inclusive practice embeds the most effective pedagogies into programmes so that all students have equal opportunities to succeed. Adopting this approach reduces the need for reasonable adjustments on a case-by-case basis, as more students are able to reach their potential within the inclusive structure.

However, there are examples where some students have disproportionate impact of inclusive practice. Some students belong to educationally disadvantaged groups as defined by the Office for Students (e.g., students from educationally disadvantaged areas, Black, Asian and Ethnic Minority students, disabled students). Other students might not belong to these demographic groups (e.g., commuter students, students with anxiety, students transferring between universities), but will still be supported by inclusive education practices.

We have included four examples of students from a variety of backgrounds, and how the activities in the inclusive education framework help them fulfil their potential. We use these case studies to illustrate a range of advantages to inclusive practice, and to help build empathy between staff and students (Smith 2015; Hubbard 2020). These case studies cannot possibly represent the full breadth of inclusive practice; they are intended as 'snap shots' to help understand the potential of the framework. The case studies do not represent all students within a given demographic 'group'; inclusive practice recognises that students are individuals, and the needs and experiences of two students within the same 'group' might be very different.

We recommend that staff work in partnership with students to understand the breadth of student experience in their local context, and use the insights gained to underpin implementation of the framework for all students.

Examples of The Framework in Action: Mark

Mark has come to university aged 18 after doing a BTEC National Diploma. He excels in practicals but has always struggled more with written work. Mark is living away from home for the first time and works 20 hours a week at a part time job to subsidise his rent. His parents are in professional roles, and most of his friends went to university.

Mark will be supported by the activities in the framework in several ways:



Processes and Structures: The departmental team are aware that many of their students find combining work and study challenging. The timetable has therefore been planned to give least one free day a week. This allows Mark to work predictable shifts, therefore organising his time more effectively and reducing financial anxiety.

Curriculum: The programme team know that they have A level, BTEC and foundation year students in their department. They have therefore carefully considered what prior knowledge and skills are required, and clearly articulated these for all students. The first two teaching weeks give all students opportunities to practise and consolidate relevant background knowledge before introducing new content. This helps Mark address gaps in his knowledge, levelling the playing field for students with different entry qualifications.

Curriculum: Mark's programme considers decolonisation and racism within the discipline within compulsory modules. As a white student he was previously unaware of some of these issues. With this new understanding he can adopt a more inclusive attitude, becoming a more effective ally on campus and in future employment.

Assessment: Having authentic assessments that link to career aspirations help all students. For Mark, the inclusion of relevant authentic practical assessments allows him to play to his strengths, and lets him effectively demonstrate his competency in the discipline.

The Framework in Action: Lydia

Lydia is a 1st year student who came to Hull through clearing, having missed her A level grades for her first-choice university. Lydia has considerable levels of anxiety, so finds large groups of people, and social situations very difficult to deal with. Most of her school friends didn't go to university, and she is struggling to make new friends either on her course or in her halls of residence. Lydia also has a long-term health condition that requires her to attend regular hospital appointments, which is impacting on her attendance. As a result, Lydia is feeling very homesick and has considered leaving university to go back home.

Adopting an inclusive approach enables Lydia to succeed in the following ways:

Assessment: Lydia's programme has a coherent and streamlined assessment design, which means that she is less likely to be overwhelmed by over-assessment. The opportunity to practise assessment formats within the programme helps her manage anxiety, particularly when she gets constructive feedback on how to improve her work.

Relationships and Belonging: Lydia's programme includes a group assignment early on, which is carefully designed so that all students are given an equal opportunity to contribute via personalised tasks. Lydia may find this structured group work format easier to engage with and can start to develop friendships with her group that she will keep for the rest of her programme.

Pathways to Success: A clear articulation of the programme structure and expectations at the start of the year for all students means that Lydia doesn't feel that she missed out on important information via clearing. The programme team also meet with all students individually during induction. This means that Lydia can be reassured that her A level grades will not define her future academic success, and any on-going support can be put in place.

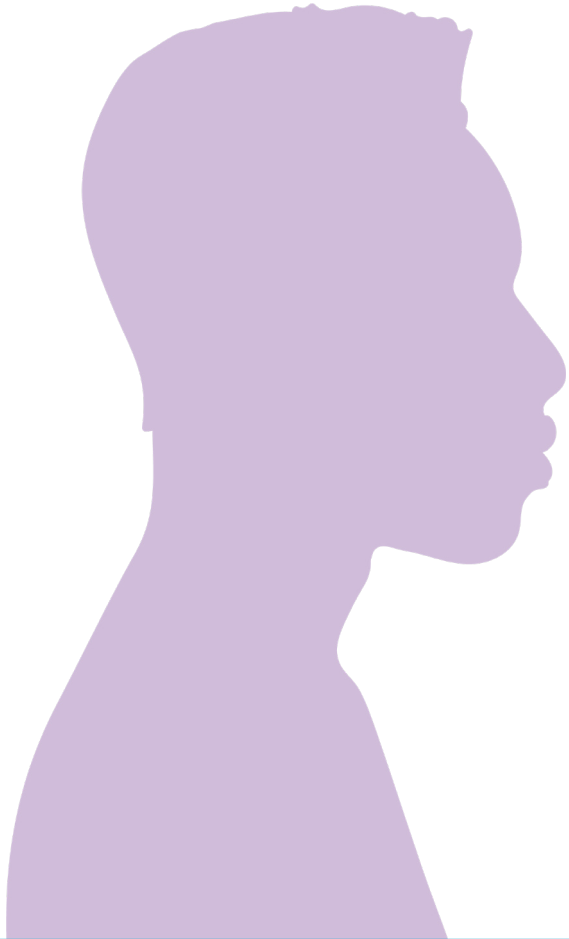
Pathways to Success: Lydia's department have a strong culture of personal supervision, with structured regular 1:1 meetings within the context of taught modules. This gives Lydia the opportunity to build a relationship of trust with her personal supervisor, who will be able to reassure her about her academic progress and provide constructive support where needed. Her personal supervisor can also support her in managing the impact of her health condition on her studies, including signposting to relevant support services on campus.



The Framework in Action: Kwame

Kwame is British-Nigerian, and comes from London, where his parents are independent small business owners. Kwame lives in university accommodation in term time and is an active member of the university martial arts society. In non-teaching weeks Kwame lives at home with a large extended family, and his parents expect him to take on lots of domestic responsibilities such as taking younger siblings to school, shopping and running errands. He was a high achiever at 6th form, but he is disappointed that his university grades are constantly on the 2i/2ii border, despite him spending long hours in the library studying.

Kwame will be supported by an inclusive education approach in multiple ways, including:



Processes and Structures: The institutional awarding gap strategy requires programme teams to take responsibility for their awarding gap data, and to identify appropriate interventions. After several Black and Asian students including Kwame highlight the difficulties in studying at the family home, the programme team move any assignment deadlines that fall immediately after a vacation for all students.

Assessment: As part of the department's inclusion strategy, assessment instructions and mark schemes are reviewed in partnership with students to ensure clarity of language for all. The programme also embeds activities that help students to understand marking criteria and the requirements of assessments at the new higher level of study. Kwame finds this approach particularly helpful, as he came into university with misconceptions about how to get good grades.

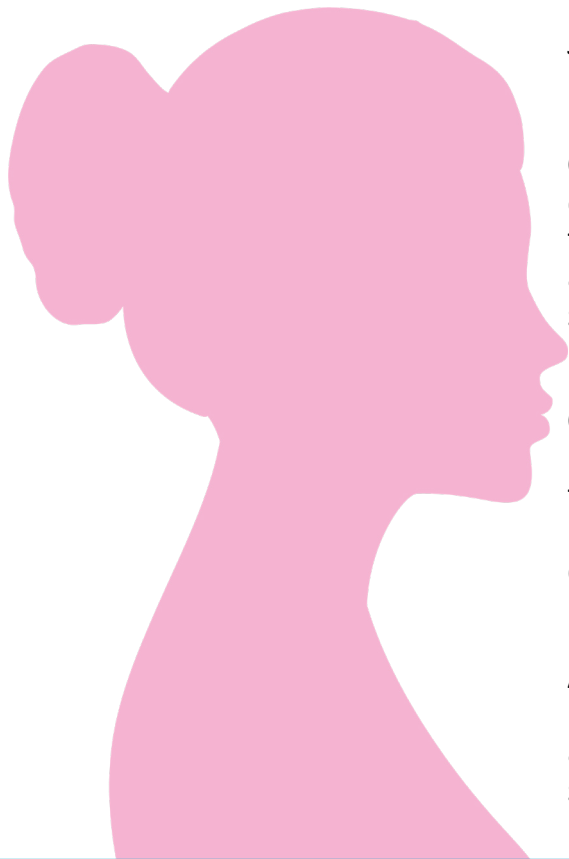
Relationships and Belonging: Kwame appreciates that teaching staff are pro-active in leading an inclusive culture in the department, including having a clear anti-racist stance. This means he doesn't feel isolated and has culturally appropriate support. His personal supervisor is also aware of awarding gaps, so actively supports Kwame to reflect on his grades and develop a strategy to improve his marks going forward.

Pathways to Success: Recognising that ethnic minority students face particular challenges within higher education and the job market, the university has established a formal Black student mentoring scheme. Having a mentor from a similar cultural background has helped Kwame regain confidence, and has shown him a greater range of potential future careers.

The Framework in Action: Joanna

Joanna is a mature student who has returned to university to complete a postgraduate taught programme now that her children are at school full time. Having completed her undergraduate degree over 10 years ago, she is struggling with the transition back to study, and is quite intimidated by the prospect of her dissertation. The decision to do a postgraduate programme means that Joanna's family are financially stretched. They only have one car, so Joanna has to drop-off and collect her children and wife from school/work on days that she is required on campus. Joanna's house has a poor internet connection, and she shares her outdated computer with her children who also use it for school work.

Adopting an inclusive approach enables Joanna to succeed in the following ways:



Processes and Structures: Routine recording of lectures and use of captions in video content help Joanna engage with academic content in her noisy home environment. Asynchronous content allows her to engage with the course at times compatible with her busy family life.

Curriculum: Joanna's programme leaders recognise that students come from a variety of different educational and professional backgrounds. To level the playing field at the start of the programme, they develop group-based activities to help students identify their existing skills and knowledge, and any gaps that need addressing. Through this, Joanna realises she is better qualified for postgraduate study than she thought, and starts to make friendships.

Curriculum: Joanna's computer is outdated, so she struggles to install specialist software. However, her programme team have pro-actively reviewed all computer-based teaching activities, and made free, open source or browser-based alternatives available to all students. This means that Joanna is better able to engage with course content without having to disclose her financial and personal circumstances to teaching staff.

Assessment: The regular writing tasks and constructive approach to feedback taken within her postgraduate programme help Joanna prepare for her dissertation. The programme also embeds activities led by a central writing skills team, which encourages Joanna to book some follow up 1:1 support sessions to help her find her academic writing style.

Simple steps for being more inclusive

- **Meet with your students regularly** and get to know them as people – find out what their aspirations are, and any barriers to success they are experiencing.
- **Work in partnership with students** where possible so that you are co-creating the learning environment, or getting meaningful feedback about student needs and views.
- **Signpost to relevant support services.** The skills team, student wellbeing teams, Specific Learning Differences (SpLD) support provide excellent support, but students may not be aware of them or might be reluctant to engage with them without active encouragement.
- **Review the language** you use in student communications – are you being as clear as you could be? This is especially important for students who might not be familiar with university terminology, or those studying in a second language.
- **Add your pronouns** (e.g., she/her, they/them) to your email signature, module documentation, your Virtual Learning Environment profile and any introduction slides in your module. This tells everyone that you don't make assumptions about gender, which is more inclusive for trans and non-binary students.
- **Use the microphone in teaching spaces**, whether you think you need to or not. Students with hearing impairments might be relying on the audio provided via the microphone.
- **Use the accessibility tools** in your Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) to check your sites are inclusive.
- **Include alt-text on images** in online content wherever possible. This means that visually impaired students can use the resource.
- **Record lecture delivery**- students unable to attend due to carer commitments or illness for example, can catch up at a more convenient time for them.
- **Add captions to video content** so that hearing impaired students can engage with them – this also helps students viewing content in noisy locations or when commuting.



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Refworks Reading List



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