

7 Steps to: Inclusive Teaching and Learning

Overview

Good teaching and learning is inclusive (Hockings, 2010; Thomas et al, 2005) and should be everyday practice (May and Bridger, 2010). The QAA Quality Code: B3 Learning and Teaching (2012) requires HEIs to provide inclusive learning through promoting equality, diversity and equal opportunity. Inclusivity is a fundamental principle of Plymouth University's Strategy 2020 and the TLSE strategy 2013-20 (p6) states the need 'to develop inclusive learning and assessment opportunities that meet the needs of our diverse learners'.

Plymouth recognises the value of our diverse student body and our support for inclusivity is not new. Waterfield and West (2006) advocated a pro-active approach to inclusive assessment. This contrasts with reactive assessment approaches where alternative or contingent provisions are made for individual students, a process which is both problematic and time consuming (Healey, 2006).

The reduction in funding to the Disability Students Allowance (DSA) in September 2016 will result in limited non-medical help to support individual students in lectures, practical sessions, field trips, seminars and with study skills. Academics therefore need to develop a more inclusive approach through using a range of methods, diverse resources, technology, and offer different routes to learning as well as an open and responsive attitude to students' needs. Positive relationships with all students are essential. Staff need to encourage students to discuss any additional needs so staff will be able to anticipate any reasonable adjustments and ensure support is available throughout the student journey.

1. Get to know your students

An essential aspect to facilitating effective learning is to develop positive relationships with all learners. Students report the importance of staff being welcoming, approachable and available, whilst taking care not to segregate or stigmatise difference (Burgstahler, 2015). Educate students early into the roles and responsibilities of both the Personal Tutor and Tutee. Through personal tutoring and in taught sessions, create an environment of trust and mutual respect. This will enable students to be confident in seeking support outside the classroom and encourage them to come forward and talk to Personal Tutors and module leaders about their needs. Ask: What is the profile of your student cohort? What is the gender ratio? Are there large numbers of mature or international students? How many have a declared disability and what are their needs? Individual needs are identified within the Student Support Document (SSD) which it is important to locate (e.g. through Unit E) . Encourage students to declare any disability to enable support to be organised. A comprehensive picture of the cohort will assist in anticipating needs, reasonable adjustments and delivering appropriate approaches.

2. Curriculum design and the planning of sessions

When designing programmes, modules and sessions, anticipate potential barriers (such as a 2 hour long lecture) that can be avoided by using a balance of different teaching and learning methods. Jones and Cop (2004) cite the value of students participating in curriculum design to make it responsive to their needs. Ensure curriculum content is relevant and related to real-world issues for the diverse student group (Hockings, 2010). All learning materials and resources should be visually accessible with images and references that reflect the diversity of the student group. Consider the accessibility issues for field trips and practical sessions. Students also need to plan their time and prepare, therefore the programme/module handbook and DLE must specify the dates, times and content of all taught sessions. Assessment and feedback deadlines, assessment instructions, feedback information, marking and grading criteria should likewise be clearly communicated.

3. Pre, during, and post session support

Introduce students in the first year to the importance of completing pre-session work such as reading, viewing podcasts, or completing an activity/quiz prior to sessions. Students can be resistant (Schell, 2012) to engage with pre-work until they understand that flipped classroom approaches free up face-to-face time for more student focused interactive sessions (Educause, 2012). Students value the use of a range of teaching methods, and the use of clear and concise verbal explanation, supplemented with diagrams and graphics. Lecture slides and handouts should be put up on the DLE at least 48 hours prior to a session (TLQC, 2014) and the recording of sessions facilitates the need of students to return to and reflect on the content of the session. In particular, international and students with additional needs find this invaluable. You can do this using Content Capture and/or encourage students to record the session themselves using notetaking software/apps or a digital recorder. Request volunteers to take notes using OneNote so these can be uploaded to the DLE. Be careful not to talk to the screen/whiteboard as some students may have a hearing impairment. Take time to reflect on your delivery in the classroom: How do your social and cultural assumptions affect your interactions with students? How might students' backgrounds and experiences influence their motivation and engagement? Consider how you will support students after the session? Facilitate a forum, blog or Q&A session on the DLE or timetable a regular 'open door /surgery time' for students with post session queries.

References

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4. Active learning

Some students find active learning including groupwork, field trips and practical work challenging for differing reasons. Meet with disabled students to discuss their requirements - they are experts in their disabilities. Consider how you will introduce students into active learning methods and anticipate any reasonable adjustments you may need to organise (e.g. height of equipment, access to buildings). If you need to introduce students to group working, consider a resource such as the LearnHigher groupwork webpages <http://archive.learnhigher.ac.uk/groupwork/>. Field trips can be a source of anxiety for many students. This can be allayed through information, a timetable of activities, photos, videos and podcasts from a previous trip showing the accommodation and facilities. Students can be supported in laboratory work through pre-sessional videos illustrating how to use equipment. LabPlus on the Plymouth campus provides facilities and support for students to practice laboratory and field work skills.

5. Inclusive assessment and feedback

Students need to engage in, and learn from assessment to improve their performance (Brown, 2013). The feed-in, feed-forward and feedback model of assessment provides an inclusive approach (Brown, 2007). Feed-in ensures students are prepared to tackle assessments (e.g. Whalley, 2008). These include students engaged in practice papers, marking previous assignments and discussing past feedback comments. Is the assessment task, required standards and marking criteria accessible on the DLE? Research shows feed-forward using peer review of a partly completed assignment can raise student grades (Bennett and Stevens, 2015). How do you educate students to utilise feed-forward and feedback to improve their learning? How will your students receive feedback after a summative assessment or exams? Carless (2014) suggests the use of same day post-exam workshops where students can receive immediate feedback. The Seven Steps to Inclusive Assessment and Peer and Self-Assessment provides further information <https://www.plymouth.ac.uk/your-university/teaching-and-learning/guidance-and-resources/7-step-series> as do the inclusive teaching, learning and assessment webpages <https://www.plymouth.ac.uk/your-university/teaching-and-learning/inclusivity>

6. Technology to assist inclusive practice

Technology can assist good quality teaching and learning. Both MS Word and MS Power Point contain built in accessibility checks. Consider adding audio links to slides on the DLE. Upload videos, podcasts (with subtitles if required) and interactive quizzes and use these in sessions to vary teaching methods. Facilitate online forums, blogs or message boards after sessions to reply to student queries and engage deeper learning. Students report the value of using Twitter to communicate about journals, papers and other resources (UPSU 2016). There are numerous free and purchasable software and apps to support all students. Their functions include converting text to speech, speech to text, grammar apps, referencing programmes and mind mapping (see <https://www.dnamatters.co.uk/resources/>). Advise students to meet with a Disability Assist advisor to discuss and identify appropriate technologies. There are a number of guides to technology resources (e.g. http://www.callscotland.org.uk/Common-Assets/ckfinder/userfiles/files/Wheel_Of_Apps_V1_0.pdf)

7. Supporting students development and well-being

Supporting students development and well-being should not be a distinct collection of services with deficit connotations but part of the curriculum content (May and Bridger, 2010). Encourage students early in the first year to complete the Student Guide to Learning Support and Well-Being online self-assessment tool on the DLE <https://dle.plymouth.ac.uk/course/view.php?id=19395> to identify any support needs they require. It is also important that staff are familiar with the student support services available. Support services include: Learning Development who support a range of study skills, including the Writing Café and the WRASse website which both support academic writing; SUM-UP assists with numeracy skills and statistics; the English Language Centre offers English language support. For students with mental health and well-being challenges, there is a range of support provided through Health and Well-being services. These include the Listening Post, Counselling and SHINE, which offers e-support through on line. Access to these and other services can be obtained through <https://www.plymouth.ac.uk/your-university/teaching-and-learning/guidance-and-resources/student-support-services>

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