

Engaging students to support inclusive cultural change

Case study 4 – Inclusive Curriculum Consultants Programme

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Kingston University

1. About the project

The Collaborative Development Fund supports the development of our members by addressing key sector challenges together, through a series of innovative projects. Topics are co-created with the sector and projects aim to highlight different approaches, in different contexts, to support members to understand how practice might be learned from and applied. Awards are made based on the expertise of teams and the evidence and the relevance to sector-wide practice from an open call for submissions.

Working collaboratively across six University Alliance Universities in England, this project, led by Kingston University, explores the key attributes of student engagement programmes which support meaningful, far-reaching, and sustained transformation to a more inclusive higher education,

Research indicates that students who actively engage with their university through not only their academic curricula, but also co-curricular activities are less likely to drop out and more likely to achieve better outcomes (Thomas, 2012). However, not all university students engage with their institutions to the same degree. These groups include mature students and those who are first generation to higher education, students from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds, as well as those from lower socio-economic households.

This case study forms part of a project that aims to surface the work of various student engagement programmes in six higher education institutions in England which have been developed to support inclusivity in their universities.

1.1 Summary section

This case study surfaces an initiative that universities may wish to consider. It was designed by Kingston University with the intention of helping to better understand how to transform and enable inclusive cultures and ways of working in higher education through a programme which facilitates students to work with academic staff to develop university curricula and curriculum-related activities that are accessible, reflect students' cultural backgrounds and prepare them to work in a culturally diverse world.

1.2 Name of programme and university

Inclusive Curriculum Consultants Programme, Kingston University

1.3 What is the programme trying to achieve?

Originally launched in 2016 as a part of the Inclusive Curriculum Framework (ICF) Project, and substantially refreshed in 2020, the Inclusive Curriculum Consultants (ICC) Programme was developed to involve students in institutional change, creating a more inclusive learning experience for all students, and to reduce the Black, Asian and minority ethnic degree awarding gap.

The main goals remain unchanged. These were to support students to use the ICF to develop curricula or curriculum-related activities to ensure their inclusivity and share their diverse voices and perspectives whilst gaining invaluable professional experience by working with academic staff on curriculum development. The principles align with our Inclusive Curriculum Framework which are:

- + to create an accessible curriculum
- + to enable students to see themselves and their backgrounds reflected in the curriculum
- + to equip students with the skills to contribute positively to, and work in, a diverse, global environment

The Inclusive Curriculum Consultants support staff via four areas of key activity:

- + Reviewing course materials including on Canvas (Virtual Learning Environment or VLE)
- + Running/supporting student engagement activities
- + Supporting/reviewing course enhancement activities or plans
- + Supporting relevant staff development activities at Course, School, and Faculty levels

The focus on reducing the Black, Asian and minority ethnic degree awarding gap has broadened to support the University to achieve our Access, Participation and Inclusion targets, namely “reducing the attainment gaps for Black, Mature, and IMD 1 students”.

Most importantly, the programme acts as a mechanism through which the institution not only legitimates our students' knowledge and experiences but also actively endorses and encourages co-creation as a strategy to create more inclusive curricula. Furthermore, the programme encourages co-creation as strategy to be used by the wider university.

1.4 Who is involved?

The programme is located in the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Centre (LTEC), sponsored by the Head of LTEC as well as the Head of Student Services. Its activities are reported to the Education Committee through the Access and Participation Plan reports, as well as through LTEC reports. The programme is also embedded in our Quality, Assurance and Enhancement processes and the consultants sit as panel members on every (re)validation panel and Substantive Review. The ICC programme is also aligned with the mandatory curriculum design process to help support our staff with student voice, curriculum review, and course design. The programme hires 16–18 student consultants each year. The role of Senior Curriculum Consultants was created to further support the new Curriculum Consultants.

1.5 Impacts and Achievements

Key achievements – from refresh in 2020:

1.5.1 Participants

- + Over the programme, the Consultants experienced greater confidence in their abilities to discuss EDI issues and provide feedback to senior staff. This was not only evidenced in the surveys but also their performance reviews. Students also highlighted and improved sense of belonging as they got to meet other like-minded students. We are increasingly seeing students going back and taking part in student voice activities as part of their course and having impact there.
- + From the last cohort of consultants we have had 1) a small but significant cohort go on to work in higher education around the agendas of inclusion and student outcomes and 2) a number who have continued into postgraduate studies centred around education.

1.5.2 Institution

- + Embedding of the Programme in all mandatory Quality Assurance and Enhancement Processes including Pre-Validation workshops, Validation panels and the risk-based Kingston Course Enhancement Process
 - + Successful in attracting students who traditionally have been more marginalised in and disenfranchised from the University – e.g. allowing for better representation of Black, Asian and minority ethnic, First Generation, Female, IMD 1&2, and Disabled students in comparison to other student engagement programmes
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- + Worked with 600 students over the last year to hear their voices through our student engagement work for a variety of projects (including our academic framework review, focus groups, and surveys)
- + The largest proportion of the work being carried out was programme/module/material reviews and advisory work which this year had the potential reach to and impact on 3000 students. 60 staff have also been worked with.
- + Increase in staff collaborating with their own students as result of working with the programme. This has included staff co-creating modules and reading list with their students. We are also seeing repeat engagement with the programme. Highlighting the changing attitudes and increased support for these programmes.
- + The ICC programme has been a massive contributor to the expansion of similar type of student-staff partnership programme across the UK HE Sector. However this year our programme has expanded both internationally and into the compulsory education. We are currently partnering with Boston University School of Public Health (USA) and Nonsuch Grammar School to create sister programmes. We are therefore doing a lot of work championing student-staff partnership not only in our institution but beyond it.

1.5.3 Examples

Architecture Programme

Architecture has engaged with various Inclusive Curriculum resources since they were identified as having a significant degree awarding gap in 2016/7. Architecture have worked with the ICC programme from 2018 until 2021. They have collaborated with the ICCs on a variety of projects, including a review of all the modules on the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) and a series of student engagement activities (i.e. focus groups, surveys, and whole year activities) to feed into their Revalidation. The course team has taken all the feedback and recommendations from the projects seriously and has integrated it into practice or into the development of their new course. This strong engagement with the ICCs and their subsequent actions has allowed them to improve the value-added score for Black, Asian and minority ethnic students (a measure of attainment) and begin to close the degree awarding gap. The extensive work that they completed to develop their new course will continue to reflect the work that the ICCs have done in collaboration with them.

Good Degrees – % CGP

Year	Black	Asian	White
2020/21	86.8	86.8	90.0
2019/20	75.6	75.6	86.2
2018/19	61.2	61.2	78.3
2017/18	38.5	38.5	72.3
2016/17	61.9	61.9	82.9

BA Fine Art

ICCs were asked to review 3 modules (one across each level) of the BA Fine Art to explore how accessible the modules were to students and how the materials might engage or represent a diverse student body. For each module, a summary of the findings and recommendations was produced. These were implemented immediately for the 21/22 year. On the three modules we reviewed the MEQ results for the learning resources:

- + FA5006 – Satisfaction at 100%
- + FA4005 – Satisfaction had reduced from 71% to 57%
- + FA6007 – Satisfaction at 86.7%

1.6 Quotes

“I just wanted to say thank you very much for this amazingly helpful piece of work. As [X] has methodically integrated almost all the feedback into this year’s Canvas content. It was an absolute pleasure to work with you and your consultants.” – Jo Addison, Fine Art

“I just wanted to say a massive thank you for this amazing opportunity that I have been a part of. Thank you for all your wisdom and knowledge and mostly for believing in me. Never in my life did I ever see myself working on a programme like this, but I am so grateful that it was part of my life's purpose. I have learnt and grown so much from this programme, and I hope that it continues to grow and impact so many teachers, students and the whole education system.” – Immaculate Lubega, Final Year BSc Dance

“I think the process is great as it is – best constructive feedback I have received in over 20 years of my working life... The written feedback of the review was the most detailed and comprehensive I've had in my career to date...” – Declan Hamblin, Senior Lecturer, The Centre for Physical Education, Sport and Activity, Department of Education

1.7 This case study exemplifies the following toolkit attributes:

Authentic

Students are recruited via a video application which comprises of the students answering four questions to understand what they know about inclusion, experience of team working, beneficial skills, and ability to problem solve. We found this to be inclusive rather the traditional CV process or interview.

Empowering

The consultants undergo an extensive two months of training to help them explore everything from technology enhanced learning, Learning and teaching principles, student engagement, LGBT student experience, inclusive curriculum and research methods, to interpreting data. We have a partnership agreement, which includes our project plan, code of conduct and values which we follow strictly. We have a zero-tolerance approach on the programme, and we will and have asked course teams to pause their projects if the programme's values are not being adhered to. Students must feel safe to raise issues, so we have our own internal complaints process and students are supported to deal with trauma through one-to-ones with the programme lead. Next year we will be introducing Healey and France's (2021) culturally responsive partnership support model, which includes peer support, mentoring and reflective writing.



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