

An inclusive approach to an inclusive curriculum

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We acknowledge that this project took a truly team approach. The contribution of all team members is noted:

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A case study on how the University of Northampton developed an Inclusive Curriculum Toolkit for use in all University learning, teaching and curriculum processes.

Introduction

Why did the project start?

Higher education students come from diverse backgrounds, bringing with them “a diverse set of learning styles, educational experience and cultural capital, as well as differing levels of confidence and self-esteem” (Office for Students, 2020, n.p.).

An inclusive curriculum enhances the experiences of all students through seeing diversity as a strength and placing the student at the centre of the learning process (OfS, 2020). There is a growing body of knowledge on embedding inclusive curricula, with detailed examples available from a range of UK Higher Education providers (Manchester Metropolitan University, 2024; University of Leeds, 2024; University of Liverpool, n.d.). These examples provide evidence that an inclusive curriculum “improves student retention, progression and attainment, addresses attainment gaps, improves graduate outcomes and employability and reduces the need for additional or retrospective reasonable adjustments” (OfS, 2020, n.p.).

The idea of building an Inclusive Curriculum Toolkit for the University of Northampton (UON) originated from a development day for Faculty of Education, Arts, Science and Technology staff. The day focussed on equality, diversity and inclusivity in learning and teaching. Staff were asked to reflect on what they needed to better embed inclusivity within their pedagogical and curriculum practices. The clear directive was a need for a practical accessible resource and guidelines that would help them to understand key issues and give examples of actions that could be put into practice. That became the Inclusive Curriculum Toolkit.

This project aligns with the University of Northampton's core value of inclusivity and its commitment to widening access and participation and advancing social impact.

What were the project aims or objectives?

This project aimed to develop and implement an Inclusive Curriculum Toolkit that is now embedded across University of Northampton systems and processes for learning and teaching. It was created to support the implementation of the Learning, Teaching and Student Experience strategies.

The toolkit is based on UDL (CAST, 2026), a practical resource that supports inclusive approaches to learning and teaching with the philosophy that inclusion is the foundation for quality learning and teaching. It offers a bank of bespoke, co-created resources, guidelines, case studies, and signposting to external resources that will support embedding inclusivity. It is envisaged that the toolkit will improve student engagement, enhance student outcomes, and support the removal of barriers to learning.

This project had the following aims:

- + To support staff to deliver an inclusive curriculum by embedding inclusive approaches in their practice.
- + To surface and utilise University of Northampton research related to inclusive learning and teaching through creation of best practice case studies.
- + To enhance the learning experience for all students, supporting engagement, belonging, by planning for inclusion by design.
- + To increase Global Ethnic Majority (GEM) student attainment through addressing award gaps and unconscious bias.
- + To monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the Inclusive Curriculum Toolkit.

Approach

Development and implementation of the Inclusive Curriculum Toolkit took a UON-focused approach and ethos to embedding inclusivity in learning and teaching design with representation and involvement from across the university. It is founded on the University's principles of inclusivity and social impact and takes an "inclusive approach to inclusivity" providing a resource that underpins high-quality learning and teaching.

The project had four phases undertaken over a two-year period:

- 1 Gathering of student and staff experience data related to inclusivity through:
 - a. Staff workshops
 - b. Student Listening Rooms (Heron, 2020)
 - c. Student Padlet
- 2 Development of a series of prompt questions to support reflective and critical discussion, forming the basis of the Toolkit, with review and feedback from academic and professional services staff, and external consultants.

- 3 Creation of institution-specific multi-media resources to support the Toolkit.
- 4 Operationalisation of the Toolkit.

Ethical approval for all stages of data collection and user feedback was secured through institutional ethical review processes.

Outcomes

The inclusive Toolkit is designed to support cohesive and consistent approaches to learning and teaching at the University of Northampton. It supports institutional KPIs and compliance with intended outcomes around narrowing awarding gaps, improving sense of student belonging, and enhancing continuation. It has had Institutional impact and is now being used across UON, embedded in systems and processes for:

- 1 Curriculum Development
- 2 Curriculum Review
- 3 Academic Induction
- 4 Staff Development

There is a requirement for reflections on use of the Toolkit to be included in curriculum development, curriculum review and validation activities.

Outputs

The main output is the [Toolkit itself. This is a university-wide web-based resource to support inclusive learning and teaching.](#)

The Toolkit acts as an umbrella bringing together existing resource and guidance as well as creating new digital resource. New resource includes approximately 50 “how and why” multi-media materials that share and model good practice in inclusivity that support the Toolkit.

Other outputs included:

- + Launching the Toolkit at the UON Learning and Teaching conference in June 2026.
- + Staff development workshops based on the Toolkit.
- + Academic article on development of the Toolkit.
- + Presentation at Advance HE Teaching and Learning conference (June 2026).
- + A round table discussion with UON students to share how the Toolkit would impact their learning at university.
- + Ongoing evaluation focusing on implementation and use.

The team were awarded the University’s ‘People’s Award’ in 2025 for Inclusivity Team of the Year.

Next steps

The Toolkit was launched at the University's Learning and Teaching Conference in June 2026. Now it is fully embedded in systems and processes the evaluation phase has started. Going forward the toolkit will continue to be monitored, updated and enhanced

Evaluation and monitoring

The project is being evaluated in two phases. The short-term phase focuses on evaluating user experience during Toolkit implementation. Users will complete an anonymous online survey with responses used to enhance and support usability and effectiveness. The long-term evaluation will include a monitoring plan that the University can use to track impact of the Toolkit, for example through quality and curriculum documentation, views of the Toolkit website, attendance at relevant CPD sessions and student metrics.

Factors that supported this work included:

- + buy-in from senior leadership, facilitating cross-university working
- + cross-university working with input from academic and professional services staff throughout the process, ensuring the Toolkit would meet user needs and align with institutional quality and curriculum processes
- + a review by external EDI experts from different HEs, which provided quality assurance and benchmarking across the sector.

Challenges

This Toolkit was co-constructed over two years through a participatory staff-focused approach. It was shaped by the needs, feedback, and reflections of academic staff. Although initial development was met with some apathy and disinterest, involving staff from across the university created a sense of authenticity that gradually increased engagement and investment. Maintaining momentum, staff interest, resource availability, and project timelines remained ongoing challenges throughout the development process.

Originally an internal action research project, balancing a university-wide initiative alongside teaching responsibilities and limited funding was challenging. These challenges were addressed through effective action planning, the diverse expertise of the project team, and strong commitment from those involved.

Developing the accompanying resources was rewarding but time-consuming, relying heavily on the goodwill and contributions of colleagues across the university. The process highlighted the breadth of expertise and effective inclusive practice present throughout the institution.

The Toolkit is available externally, although its resources are closely aligned with the University of Northampton's values and processes. It serves as a reflection tool and can be

readily adapted by other providers seeking to enhance the inclusivity of their learning, teaching, and curriculum practice.

Role of Advance HE

The Project Lead attended Advance HE's Leadership in EDI course and presented the work at the Advance HE Teaching and Learning conference in 2025.

Web link to the tool kit: <https://mypad.northampton.ac.uk/lte/inclusivity/>

Acknowledgements

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