GENERIC CONSIDERATIONS OF INCLUSIVE CURRICULUM DESIGN

Principles of inclusive curriculum design

Anticipatory
Flexible
Accountable
Collaborative
Transparent
Equitable

Generic considerations

— cost and financial considerations;
— embedding student and staff well-being;
— promoting student engagement;
— use of technology to enhance learning;
— responding to different approaches to learning;
— avoiding stereotypes and celebrating diversity;
— making reasonable adjustments.

The following inclusive curriculum design considerations will apply in most if not all subjects albeit to different degrees. These need to be taken into account along with the subject-specific considerations, which in some instances will also apply to more than one subject.

Considering cost and financial implications

Financial considerations may be an incentive as well as an obstacle to changing the design processes that influences learning, teaching and assessment practices and institutional learning support services. Inclusive curriculum design processes may have no costs associated with them, or may involve greater initial costs, for example to enable student engagement or to access specialist resources. However, over time inclusive curriculum design should reduce the need to make individual adjustments or changes. Many examples of effective practice in the subject briefings were generated using targeted funding intended to produce inclusive resources or develop inclusive methods. When reviewing curriculum design it is important to think about ways of adopting some of the ideas mentions in the subject briefings, as well as embedding and maintaining provision developed within your own institution, this is particularly important when time-limited funding ceases or when competing bids for the funding or resources exist. The curriculum design and quality assurance processes are another opportunity to make the business case to change for budget holders or other sections of the university; for instance, inclusive curriculum design can change the use of space or the type of technology that is required. Involving staff from estates or ICT services can draw on their expertise and help ensure best value in purchases and building projects.

Embedding student and staff well-being

Promoting student (and staff) well-being is high on the agenda across the sector (see Healthy Universities: www. healthyuniversities.ac.uk). The Universities UK/GuildHE Committee for the Promotion of Mental Well-being in Higher Education has produced *Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion in Higher Education* (Crouch *et al.,* 2007). The guidelines are clear that promoting well-being involves "not only attending to the needs of those with mental health difficulties, but also promoting the general mental wellbeing of all staff and students" (Crouch *et al.,* 2007: 2). Considering which curriculum elements may cause stress or undue difficulties for particular students at the design stage enables course designers to structure modules and programmes in ways that will minimise the need for individual reasonable adjustments (see reasonable adjustments p 36). Working in partnership with student support services can help put support processes and resources in place to support the well-being of all students. Those designing the curriculum should also be mindful of the well-being of those delivering and supporting it.

Promoting student engagement

The engagement of students at all stages of their higher education journey has long been encouraged by the sector and its myriad benefits noted (Centre for Higher Education Research and Information, 2009). A HEFCE-commissioned report noted that at an institutional level the emphasis appeared to be on engaging with students as consumers rather as "partners in a learning community" (Centre for Higher Education Research and Information, 2009: 4). This is relevant to discussions about curriculum design because engaging students as partners in curriculum design at programme and subject level rather than as consumers should result in students having a greater ownership and understanding about the nature and purpose of their learning experience. As May and Felsinger (2010) acknowledge the greater the degree of participation sought the higher the level of involvement and commitment required from students particularly as illustrated on the pyramid diagram below.
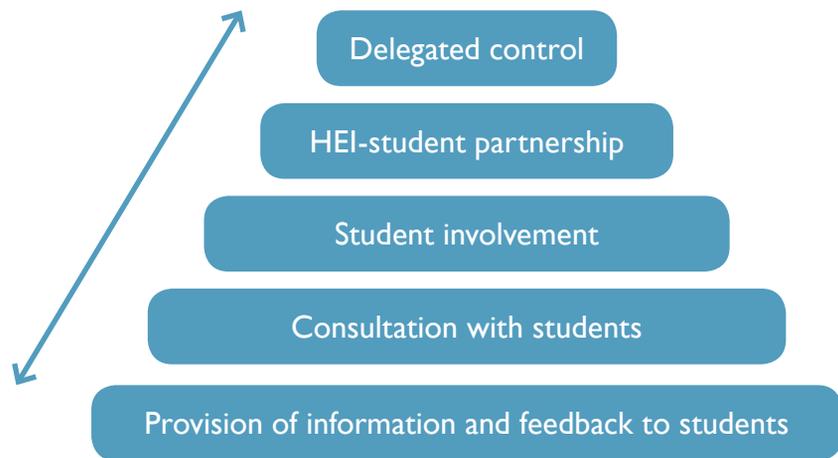
Figure 3: Pyramid of involvement, adapted from The Forestry Commission (2008)

(Source: May and Felsinger, 2010: 31)

Increased expectations about student involvement have the potential to limit the engagement of students with limited capacity regarding time and flexibility as a result, for example, of health needs or caring responsibilities. Therefore particular attention should be given to developing strategies and processes for engaging all students (see May and Felsinger, 2010).

Use of technology to enhance learning

Technology is not a solution in itself, but can be used to facilitate a more inclusive curriculum and should be an integral part of every design decision. Course designers should review the technological possibilities for delivery (of both teaching and assessment) at the outset to make them more readily achievable, which saves time and avoids each staff member or course team investigating the possibilities for themselves. For example:

> The 'What's it worth?' project from the JISC Techdis HEAT Scheme (McInnes *et al.,* 2009) investigated the possibilities for offering a more inclusive range of assessment methods at Roehampton University, and validated the different approaches with the relevant University committees. This resulted in staff being able to utilise a wide range of technologies in assessment without having to seek validation in each case.

The JISC briefing *12 steps towards embedding inclusive practice with technology as a whole institution culture* (Ball, 2009) identified five areas of institutional focus where consideration of technology can enhance inclusion. All five areas potentially impact upon curriculum design:

— senior management enable course designers to more easily adopt new techniques and technologies into their curriculum when they play an active role by leading change and promoting inclusion and enhanced use of technology;

— learning, teaching and assessment may be more closely aligned through the use of technology that allows synchronous and asynchronous communication between staff and students and increases the range of collaborative learning activities, e.g. creation of a wiki;

— web (and intranet) provision, in addition to the field of online learning, can be utilised within course design requirements to ensure flexible format materials are made available to learners;

— equality and diversity are supported by using technology to extend access to materials or resources for inclusion in the curriculum syllabus;

— information flow about technological ideas needs to move from the course designer to the staff responsible for ensuring technology is used effectively. There also needs to be a feedback mechanism to encourage staff and students to revise the design of a course in response to future technologies.

Responding to different approaches to learning

All students have different learning approaches. Inclusive curriculum design should involve reflection on the opportunities for different approaches to learning to be embedded and/or offered as alternatives within the curriculum. For instance, teaching and learning activities as well as assessment policy and practice can benefit from considering visual, audio and kinaesthetic learning preferences, as well as considering individual or group learning and face-to-face or virtual methods of delivery. Similarly it can be useful to consider at the design stage how to incorporate the different 'conceptions of learning' (Perry, 1970) that students may bring with them, for example what they expect from assessment or their perceptions of the tutor as expert or facilitator, which can influence how content is taught. Whether or not a student is included within curriculum delivery will depend upon the decisions being made in the design process.

Avoiding stereotypes and celebrating diversity

Curriculum content can, often unwittingly, present and perpetuate stereotypes. Attention should be given to identifying where this occurs and removing discriminatory material from the syllabus. Stereotypes can be challenged by using a range of examples, images and illustrations, or considering the references and reading materials included in

a bibliography. This does not mean providing an example or image for each equality grouping, protected characteristic, past educational experience or current context, but does involve ensuring that a range of examples are provided when preparing lectures, reading lists or problem-based scenarios and that any materials present equality in a positive light and a non-stereotypical way. Although feedback from students can help future design and delivery of modules, remember that individual students categorised by any one equality group are heterogeneous. Avoid assumptions about the way that prospective students are categorised; there is no guarantee that students sharing a specific equality label will respond to content, group work or types of assessment on the basis of how others similarly categorised have reacted. Inclusive design and delivery needs to avoid stigmatising and make provision accessible and relevant to all students.

Making reasonable adjustments

Inclusive curriculum design should pre-empt and reduce the need for reasonable adjustments for individual students. Where reasonable adjustments remain necessary they should be planned and implemented in partnership with the students concerned. The way in which adjustments are planned and delivered can substantially impact on their effectiveness. Adjustments have the potential to be stigmatising and divisive particularly where other students perceive advantage or 'special treatment'. A key element in providing a welcoming and comfortable environment for all is to ensure that the student body are aware of and understand the values and principles underpinning inclusive practice. Engaging students throughout the design process can help to anticipate potential adjustments and allow institutions to consider whether such adjustments could be mainstreamed.