

Teaching for Inclusive Learning

The following notes are a summary of Professor Christine Hocking's 2010 report on '*Inclusive learning and teaching in higher education: a synthesis of research*'.

Hocking critically synthesizes research reports and research findings from a number of publicly funded studies that address issues of inclusive learning and teaching in Higher Education in the United Kingdom. This report was used with other resources to inform the BEL+T **Teaching for Inclusive Learning** session held in 2019s1.

For more information on the points raised in this reference summary, please refer to the page numbers in the full report ([view report](#)).

Hocking (2010) makes the following propositions about the benefits to educators and students from inclusive approaches to learning and teaching:

- The benefits of widening participation and diversity include more innovative teaching, a source of different knowledge, an enriched social and cultural environment and **improved learning outcomes for all** (Hocking (2010:18) citing Shaw., et al. (2007)).
- Valuing students' differences when designing mainstream curriculum (i.e. design of learning materials, pedagogy and assessment) **can be more cost and time effective** than trying to provide individual accommodation after the fact (Hocking (2010:4) citing Johnson and Fox (2003)).

Hocking (2010:2) refers to 'diversity' as groups of students that are traditionally under-represented in higher education. The groups may include:

- Students of different **ethnic groups**
- Students who identify as having a **disability**
- Students of different **faith backgrounds**
- Students who identify as **LGBTQIA**
- Students who are **First-in-family** (no history of higher education in their families)
- Students of **low socio-economic** backgrounds
- Students who are **mature-age**
- Students with **vocational education training** (making the transition to university)

Hocking (2010) recognizes that students from under-represented groups may be accommodated by educators using the deficit model, but that the inclusion of students across a range of groups can offer benefits to all and to the development of broader and more relevant:

- There is often a **deficit view of students that sit within one or more of these groups**. We require a shift in mindsets to recognize that these students do not belong in a separate 'category' but "fall along a continuum of learning differences that all students face in higher education" (Healey et al. 2006, cited by Hocking, 2010:3).
- This deficit model of 'non-traditional' students is prevalent amongst teachers and leads them to **offer 'compensatory' approaches** that are formulaic and isolating. For example educators separating students from non-traditional backgrounds and providing them with generic instruction to bring their skills up to the perceived "standard of others" (Hocking (2010:21) citing Gorard., et al. 2006).
- Rather than highlight student diversity, the deficit model tries to **assimilate students of diverse backgrounds into the existing academic culture** (Hocking, 2010:29).

Professor Christine Hocking's 2010 report, 'Inclusive learning and teaching in higher education: a synthesis of research' identified the following observations by researchers about the challenges and opportunities for **Subject coordinators** teaching in higher education. For more information on each of the points raised, refer to the page numbers in the full report ([view report](#)).

Some Challenges for Subject Coordinators

- The dominant notion of 'traditional' and 'non-traditional' student can create **overly simplistic understandings** which limit the development of inclusive, engaging teaching (p7).
- When reviewing inclusive approaches, staff may feel overwhelmed by a "**plethora of new initiatives** while trying to sustain/embed old ones" (p17).
- Aligning the curriculum **too closely with the needs of only one group of students** can "prove under-stimulating and demotivating to others" (p30).
- **Student participation** in subjects can be hindered by substantial off-campus activities (p25).
- **E-learning** can hinder students who are already dis-engaged as it reinforcing their feelings of isolation and alienation from the group (p27).
- Large class sizes can **impact on the opportunities that teachers have to get to know their students and understand their differences**. Under these conditions teachers may base their knowledge on their assumptions about students' lives and interests, or on their beliefs about what the average student should know (p31).

Some Opportunities for Subject Coordinators

- Develop pedagogic practices and curricula that take account of the **diverse interests and needs** of all students in your class (p6).
- Designing curricula and pedagogy that reflect **student diversity** may encourage greater student involvement in class discussions (p7).
- Consider how **your framing of expectations about student attendance and classroom participation** can "build confident learner identities and behaviours that lead to success" (p12).
- **Infusion approaches** to curriculum design that considers 'cultural pluralism' encourages staff and students to think critically about their own biases, improves 'linking of assessments' and allows for negotiation of assessment tasks between students and lectures (p22).
- Be mindful that **politics are embedded in all elements of the curriculum**. Your choice of discussion topics and readings, classroom activities and assessment tasks can control the discourse (p25).
- Develop materials, resources, references, and images that **reflect the social and cultural diversity** of the group (p29).
- Keep learning expectations high and use teaching and learning tasks that not just occupy students, but **expand or extend their knowledge** of the topic from a range of perspectives (p30).

Professor Christine Hocking's 2010 report, 'Inclusive learning and teaching in higher education: a synthesis of research' identified the following observations by researchers about the challenges and opportunities for **Tutors** teaching in higher education. For more information on each of the points raised, refer to the page numbers in the full report ([view report](#)).

Some Challenges for Tutors

- Feeling **ill-equipped to deal critically with sociological topics that have the potential to raise conflict** in class discussions. Such topics may be intentionally avoided or discussion suppressed (p32).
- Potential for basing delivery of teaching and expectations on **beliefs and assumptions** about what students do/should know and what they can do/should be able to do (p6).
- Limited awareness of the **diverse qualification backgrounds of students** and being **biased by stereotypes** (p11).
- Difficulty empathizing with **the day-to-day challenges that students encountered** (i.e. such as commuting times, part time work and different studying/learning styles (p15).
- Underestimating the intelligence of students who have **weakness in conventional assessment techniques** (p17).

Some Opportunities for Tutors

- Students value teaching that **recognises their individual academic and social identities** and addresses their particular learning needs and interests (p7).
- Make **time to get to know students** as individuals (p7).
- **Be aware that your classroom practices** (i.e. methods of questioning, facilitating and chairing sessions) may influence "who speaks and who remains silent in class, who is included and who is excluded" (p32).
- Create **safe collaborative spaces by setting ground rules for collaborative learning behaviour** and encourage students to articulate their thinking openly. "In respectful collaborative learning environments all students learn by getting stuck, being uncertain, making mistakes and being different without being ridiculed" (p7).
- Develop strategies for **sharing and generating knowledge**. This involves creating open, flexible activities that allow students to draw on their own knowledge, interests and experiences while encouraging the sharing and application of different knowledge, experiences and perspectives among peers (p7).
- Connect with students' lives, which may involve **selecting or negotiating topics and activities relevant to their** background, ideas about the future or 'imagined' identities (p7).
- Be **culturally aware** by using resources, materials, humour, anecdotes that are relevant to the subject and sensitive to the social and cultural diversity of the group (p7).
- View all students as being **potentially in need of some study support**. This means promoting university services (i.e. academic skills) to all students to avoid singling out individuals (p17). Provide **lecture notes in advance** which benefits all students by giving them time to prepare and interpret the content (p13).

References cited in this summary document. For more information on each of the points raised, refer to the page numbers in the full report ([view report](#)).

[Hocking, C., \(2010\). Inclusive learning and teaching in higher education: a synthesis of research. EvidenceNet. Higher Education Academy: London](#)

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