

## LANGUAGES, LINGUISTICS AND AREA STUDIES

### 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.

### Introduction

It is the responsibility of the every member of staff within HE to respond to the requirements of equality legislation. The basic principle that can and should be universally responded to is that **it is attitudes, barriers and other forms of discrimination within the system rather than individual characteristics or deficits that are the cause of disadvantage**. Employing an inclusive approach is underpinned by the adoption of other principles of inclusive curriculum design, summarised in the adjacent text box and discussed in the introduction section of this guide available at [www.heacademy.ac.uk/assets/documents/inclusion/disability/ICD\\_introduction.pdf](http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/assets/documents/inclusion/disability/ICD_introduction.pdf)

May and Bridger assert, in respect of developing an inclusive culture, “making a shift of such magnitude requires cultural and systemic change at both policy and practice levels” (2010: 2). In essence this change is represented by a shift in focus from responding to the ‘needs’ of individuals or specific groups of students to an approach that anticipates and plans for the *entitlements* of the evolving student population. Thus the onus is on institutions and subject communities to change and adapt their policies and practice rather than expect this of individual or specific groups of students.

There are many generic considerations of inclusive curriculum design, summarised in the adjacent text box, which are discussed in the introduction section. The focus of this section is on subject-specific considerations for those in those subjects aligned to languages, linguistics and area studies. Here examples of innovation and effective practice are provided to demonstrate that effective practice for one group can and should be effective practice for all. The examples, resources and ideas included in this and other subject guides have come from the sector. They were obtained directly in response to a general request made to the sector during 2010, from a review of the HEA Subject Centres or from recommendations made by colleagues teaching in the specific subject.

Where there are examples in other subject guides that may be particularly relevant or worth reviewing for further adaptation these are flagged. However, notably inspiration and ideas for curriculum design can come from many sources, therefore reading strategies employed and ideas in other subject areas can be a useful source of new ideas.

### **Inclusive curriculum design: subject-specific considerations**

#### Developing an inclusive approach to work and study abroad

'Residence abroad' is often seen as integral to the experience of modern language degrees. Consideration needs to be given to ensuring that any barriers that may prevent language students from studying or working abroad are anticipated at an early stage and where possible pre-empted.

The report *Disability and residence abroad* stresses the importance of good partnerships between the home and host institutions and the students to ensure that good preparation and the correct support can be put in place (Canning, 2004). This would be effective practice with all students and could include:

- engaging all students in planning for their residence abroad at an early stage so that specific barriers and support entitlements can be addressed;
- collecting and sharing information about potential locations that acknowledges the student cohort diversity, for example about the availability locally of halal or kosher food or of places of worship;
- working with students after their residence to identify how to improve and tailor the preparation and support provided.

There will be some students unable or unwilling to travel abroad. This may include students with specific health or support requirements, students with caring or employment responsibilities, or it may relate to differing cultural attitudes and expectations in the host country. In these circumstances consideration should be given to providing language students with opportunities that would enable them to meet the same learning outcomes as those students who undertake a residence abroad. An example here would be a work placement where students have a similar opportunity to be immersed in a different language and culture.

## Supporting transition to higher education: balancing language and content

Recent research undertaken in response to concerns about language students' transition to higher education identified a specific issue for language programmes (Gallagher-Brett and Canning, 2011). Pre-entry qualifications tend to emphasise the acquisition of language skills compared to the focus on 'content' at higher education level.

In England, A-level teaching increasingly uses shorter more 'functional' texts in place of literature. Alongside this, A-level students applying for language courses in HE are studying a greater variety of subjects at A-level with less opting for the more traditional combinations of humanities subjects, such as English and History, which foster the essay-writing skills expected at undergraduate level (Gallagher-Brett and Canning, 2011).

An inclusive approach would consider the extent to which a modern languages programme provides opportunities for all students to acquire the skills and knowledge required to complete the course. Strategies can include:

- working in partnerships with schools to emphasise the importance of 'content' teaching within language courses at advanced level;
- providing admissions and pre-entry material that promotes the interdisciplinary nature of modern language programmes and prepares students for the different expectations and content;
- engaging with students to better understand their prior education experience and their expectations of higher education;
- devising 'in-fill' teaching that supports all students to build their knowledge of the language's political, cultural and social context.

A project at Queen Mary, University of London explored the views and experiences of students from a local 16-19 college and their first-year language students about transition to higher education. The report made a series of recommendations for the college and their own School of Modern Languages to consider:

'Induction' was an unhelpful term rarely understood by students. A more inclusive approach would involve embedding strategies to facilitate transition throughout the programme.

Students identified the importance of good relationships with staff in the school and developing a sense of belonging as important elements in

transition. This could be supported through ongoing informal social events and departmental support for language societies.

The report also highlighted the sharing of workload expectations and the production of learning diaries as an effective strategy employed elsewhere in the university that could be easily adopted by the School of Modern Languages (Claussen, 2004).

See also the English, Engineering, Mathematics, and Medicine, Dentistry and Veterinary Medicine (MEDEV) subject guides for other projects involving collaboration with secondary schools.

### Responding to student interests and learning approaches

A central tenet of inclusive curriculum design is to anticipate the diverse interests, experiences and priorities of students. When they enter higher education students will already have approaches to learning that they are familiar with and comfortable about using. The onus is usually on the module convenor to identify and prepare a variety of materials and sources for students with different levels of skill, knowledge and learning approaches that respond to previous experience and prepare students for future learning.

The Open University's SOLO learning module for language students allows students to select their materials and construct their learning sessions. The module is supported by an exercise bank organised by skill (grammar, writing, reading, listening, speaking and literature) and by level of difficulty. Students are encouraged to view the bank as an 'a la carte' menu from which they can select items.

Example: A student with an interest in walking selected a description of a holiday walk. The tasks included:

- summarising the directions;
- listing items to take on the walk;
- describing the walk to a friend on the phone;
- writing or recording a journal entry based on the walk (Bishop, 2004).

Technology-mediated learning (which includes a range of approaches such as computer-aided learning and computer-mediated communication often within the context of a managed learning environment) is being routinely incorporated into languages and linguistic teaching (Shield, undated, also includes links to a range of graphical virtual worlds. [www.llas.ac.uk/resources/gpg/416](http://www.llas.ac.uk/resources/gpg/416)).

While attention needs to be given to ensuring the use of technology does not exclude some students, for example because of accessibility or because of timing (when material is streamed live or participation in group activities is synchronous), technology-mediated learning provides many opportunities to support inclusion. The benefits of this approach are that it includes:

- support for the development of strong learning communities, particularly when students are studying at a distance;
- large amounts of content that can be easily uploaded and updated making it available in a flexible and open manner;
- “contact with authentic resources, texts and target language speakers in a way that was previously impossible without living in the target culture” (Shield, undated).

A resource from University of Central Lancashire provides visual storyboards for use with British Sign Language that can open up discussion about this form of communication and might be used as a joint stimulus for students learning several languages (Phillips, undated).

### Teaching presentation skills

Many students have anxieties about presenting their ideas, the University of Portsmouth have identified that some international students are also unclear about the expectations of an academic presentation. The following example shows how materials developed for one group of students, in this case international students, then become a resource for making expectations transparent for all students, which is one of the principles of an inclusive curriculum design.

A video produced by the University of Portsmouth for international students in Area Studies has been used in the classroom or as an independent study resource to support all students to better understand the requirements of academic presentations. It acknowledges the anxiety presentations can provide for many students and provides guidelines students can employ in their work. The video includes guidance on:

- structure and signposting;
- useful words and phrases;
- use of notes and scripts;
- the importance of key content words (Jane, undated).