

## SOCIAL POLICY AND SOCIAL WORK

### 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 social policy and social work. 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**

#### Supporting learning for all Social Work and Social Policy students

Removing the minimum age requirement for social work education means that programmes are responding to a new group of 'non-traditional' entrants: younger and/or school-leaving students. These students may experience barriers in the classroom and when undertaking practice learning based on their perceived lack of experience and potentially more limited frames of reference. Similarly assumptions might be made about the presumed knowledge and experiences all students bring.

#### *Younger students in social work education: our new 'non-traditional' students?*

A project undertaken at the University of Sussex sought to allow students of different ages with different life and educational experiences to learn from one another by designing assessment and learning activities in which they collaborated on social work projects. A particular element of this project was the younger students' co-presentation of findings. This was effective in raising students' expectations and providing a tangible challenge to stereotypes and presumptions (Holmström, 2008).

A response to the different knowledge younger students may bring with them that would have wider benefits for all students would be an increase in 'infill' teaching within the curriculum whereby students are introduced to wider historical and contextual information and ideas that may previously have been taken for granted. This might include annotated bibliographies and introductions to other forms of media such as film that provide an opportunity to engage with social and cultural issues and debates.

### *'Universal rather than remedial': a 'holistic' approach to support for learning*

Work undertaken at Manchester Metropolitan University identified a range of strategies that can be embedded in the curriculum to benefit all students. The starting point was that 'students bring diverse resources as well as needs to the classroom'. Strategies developed in response to research conducted with students were integrated into the curriculum at the design stage and this provided opportunities for universal delivery (Kirk, 2002).

### Practice- and work-based learning

Practice- and work-based learning are important components of many Social Work and Social Policy programmes. Although highly valued by students they can trigger anxiety and may raise significant practical issues that can be addressed through induction and planning processes. Other strategies include:

- using networks of stakeholders to help identify barriers to inclusion;
- developing a checklist for assessing and approving the placement and internship accessibility. Sharing this checklist with placement providers will support them to think about inclusion within their organisations;
- engaging students in the production of pre-placement information will help ensure their concerns and priorities are addressed. Guides to different placements and internships produced by students can showcase opportunities that students may initially not see as relevant or appropriate.

An inclusive approach would ensure that the learning outcomes can be achieved in a variety of different placements. For example, students can gain an 'international' experience by being placed in a local placement with access to international colleagues and issues.

Anglia Ruskin University runs a second-year Social Policy Internship module. Students are supported to negotiate a placement with a statutory, voluntary or private sector organisations. They spend ten days with the organisation and have a named mentor with whom they devise a programme of activities.

Students are assessed through a poster presenting a small piece of research or investigating relevant research and by an assignment that analyses the social

policy context of their host organisation. Support is provided through group tutorials and via the virtual learning environment. Students feel the internships enhance their employability and offer an opportunity to explore employment. Employers benefit from having a small project completed. Advice to other institutions includes:

- “effective project planning (time and resource management) effectively counters the students’ tendency to over commit to this module;
- ensuring responsibilities, expectations and resource availability are discussed openly between students, employers and tutors” (Brady, 2009: 4).

See also Built Environment, Dance, Drama and Music, and Law subject guides for further examples and discussion of work placements and internships.

### Engaging service users and those with personal experience

Engaging people with personal experience of curriculum content enhances students’ understanding by providing examples and illustrating the practical reality of social issues. Service users can contribute to curriculum design as well as providing curriculum content through participation in teaching sessions and the development of learning materials.

#### *Collaborative Learning Initiative*

At the Centre of Excellence in Interdisciplinary Mental Health at the University of Birmingham academics, service users, carers and mental health practitioners worked collaboratively to design, deliver and assess an interdisciplinary module for Social Work and Nursing students. The driver was to ensure students were able to learn the skills required to provide effective interdisciplinary mental health services in post-qualification practice.

Central to the design process was a commitment to bringing together a team of equals and to involving all team members in all elements (design, teaching and assessment). The main challenge was the complexity of bringing together a diverse group at a particular time and place. This was addressed by using an enquiry-based blended learning approach to ensure a flexible engagement between the different groups.

Another priority was ensuring the well-being of contributors drawing on personal experiences of mental distress. Support was provided to enable a period of debriefing after intense teaching sessions.

The module used a blended learning approach drawing on video material where service users and carers interviewed proponents of particular approaches creating a dialogue rather than the presentation of a single perspective. These videos are available on the project website.

The benefits included that students had access to experienced mental health practitioners and to mental health service users and carers. Students learnt through dialogue with practitioners, service users and students from other disciplines.

The project website includes a film of staff, students and service users discussing their involvement (The Centre of Excellence in Interdisciplinary Mental Health, undated). [www.ceimh.bham.ac.uk/tv/SWNursIntro.shtml](http://www.ceimh.bham.ac.uk/tv/SWNursIntro.shtml)

See also Business, Management, Accountancy and Finance, and Law subject guides for involving stakeholders and user groups in curriculum design.