University of St Andrews

TEACHING, LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT COMMITTEE

Race Equality and the Curriculum

The following document has been drawn up to meet the University's statutory requirements in relation to racial equality legislation and is part of a series of documents relating to all aspects of the University's activity.

We are sensitive to the fact that there are core principles of academic freedom which mean that the subject matter of curricula should not be dictated by inappropriate considerations, and we are also confident that we are working in an environment of responsible colleagues, for whom any act of racism would be intolerable and unthinkable.

In creating this document therefore, we have sought to build on the guidance provided in relation to disabilities legislation last academic session, and to provide some ideas which colleagues may care to have in mind as they develop their curricula or devise ways of constructing students' learning environments.

We hope the document will be seen as a positive statement of the University's commitment to providing an accessible curriculum to all students and welcome comments or recommendations.

C J SMITH (Professor)
Dean of Arts

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Reflecting on
Racial Equality in the Curriculum

Introduction

The University of St Andrews has a cosmopolitan and varied student population, with many nationalities, cultures and beliefs represented. We pride ourselves on providing a very high standard of education to all our students, and on making our curriculum accessible to all students, whatever their background and whoever they are.

For some subjects, the nature of their content means talking about the world in all its complexity and variety. It is right that as we do so, we reflect upon the way that we deliver our teaching, and on the various sensitivities that we touch upon, both in terms of those we choose to study, and of those we meet in our students.

In this document we have not sought to be prescriptive; we appreciate that much here will come as second nature, and much will be irrelevant to some kinds of teaching and subject matter. Nevertheless, we are all challenged by the recent Race Relations legislation to think about these issues, and we hope that the questions presented here are a helpful spur to your reflection.

Purpose & Design (rationale, aims and learning outcomes)

Consider whether your course content naturally lends itself to identifying / exploring racial equality issues (eg module on the African slave trade). If it does not, there might be ways in which racial equality issues could nevertheless be addressed, to the students' benefit.

1. Does the range of options available to students within the curriculum appropriately reflect the diversity of the cultural heritage of the student body?

2. Are different perspectives on or interpretations of the subject acknowledged, even if the nature of the course does not allow for equal time to be devoted to all perspectives?

   > For example, provide a supplementary reading list for students who wish to explore other perspectives in more depth.

3. Does the curriculum reflect the needs and issues of a wide range of student groups?

   > For example, monitor the composition of one's own classes year on year to identify any changes in ethnic / racial makeup, to ensure the course remains relevant to all.

Could you highlight within your School examples of good practice in this area?

Teaching Methods & Delivery

1. In what ways might racial equality issues affect your teaching and students' learning?

> Be familiar with the University's Equal Opportunity and Race Equality policies, and be able to direct students to the relevant policies and support materials.
>
> Emphasise that students have a responsibility under the University's policies and could face disciplinary action for violations.
>
> Consider assigning students to teams / groups rather than allowing self-selection, in order to ensure that all students in each group are exposed to a broad ethnic view.
>
> Emphasise that students doing team / group work should take into account all members of the group when selecting times / venues for getting together (eg a pub is unlikely to suit orthodox Muslims or some Christians, and these students may not attend the meetings; Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays can all be sensitive times).
>
> Point out alternatives that the students might not otherwise consider, such as virtual meetings using WebCT discussion boards and chat rooms.
>
> Consider whether certain approaches (eg small group activities) might be more difficult for some students (eg ethnic minority female in a predominantly male class). Consider alternatives in such situations (eg use of virtual tutorial groups in WebCT).

2. Are appropriate alternatives provided when lectures clash with culturally sensitive days or religious festivals?

> Provide online access to lecture materials and/or arrange for note-sharing.

3. Where courses include placements, field trips or a period abroad, are all students who wish to take up this opportunity able to do so?

> Investigate to make sure a non-discriminatory experience will be had during placement.
>
> There should be a 'standards contract' with the placement provider which sets out what is expected in terms of equal opportunities as well as the standard of support that all students should get throughout the placement.
>
> Make sure there are procedures to deal with placement providers who breach the 'standards contract' or the University's race equality policy.
>
> If particular students are unable to participate, provide alternative arrangements.

Could you highlight within your School examples of good practice in this area?

Learning Resources

1. Are you confident that all of your curriculum materials (eg lectures, handouts, overheads/slides, videos) are free from racial, gender and other forms of bias? (Unless the bias is being explicitly dealt with as part of the course.)

   > Carefully review all materials that are not self-generated, eg videos, CDs and DVDs, external websites, CAL software.

2. Curriculum materials can allow us to reflect on the fact that Britain is a multi-cultural society. Have you thought about the messages (both explicit and implicit) that your materials are sending?

   > If using photographs, slides or other images of people, try to show a mix of ethnicity and gender (unless the point being illustrated requires otherwise).
   >
   > Use names reflecting ethnic diversity (and/or gender-neutral) for case studies and other course materials.
   >
   > Where appropriate, use source materials and examples that contain a range of social, political, economic and religious perspectives, events, theories and achievements.

Could you highlight within your School examples of good practice in this area?

Assessment Processes (including methods)

All students have a basic right to:

- Assessment procedures, criteria and regulations published in a full and accessible form and made freely available to students in advance.

- Assessment via a range of methods within the programme as a whole, in order to do full justice to students' often diverse knowledge, skills and academic backgrounds.

- Feedback on students' work given in a sensitive manner.

- Equal opportunities incorporated into systems of fair and impartial marking and assessment.

In light of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, other issues should be considered when developing and implementing assessment.

1. Are you confident that assessment procedures are balanced and that they do not unfairly discriminate against any individual or group of students?

   > Be sensitive to cultural and religious differences with regards to food and drink when setting assignments (eg orthodox Muslim students might find it offensive to be asked to write a business plan for a brewery).

2. Try to ensure that exams and class tests do not clash with culturally significant days and religious festivals. It is the responsibility of students to notify staff of potential clashes.

> If in doubt, contact the examinations officer Katie Allan (ka22, x2142)

3. Are appropriate alternatives provided if a clash is unavoidable?

> Be prepared to provide a separate exam on a different day.

Could you highlight within your School examples of good practice in this area?

Course Evaluation & Review Procedures

There should be some mechanism (eg Staff / Student consultative committee) by which **all** students can raise curriculum issues, and provide input on the fairness of course design, presentation, learning resources and assessment. If there is evidence of student dissatisfaction, what is the response? Racial equality issues should be considered as part of this general process.

If you have a diverse student body, you might also consider:

1. How would you review teaching materials, syllabi and exams to ensure equal opportunity for all social groups?

2. Are achievement levels monitored by ethnic group and gender, and significant patterns of academic achievement identified and addressed?

3. Are retention rates monitored by ethnicity and gender and significant differences in retention identified and addressed?

Could you highlight within your School examples of good practice in this area?

References

Some of the points above are drawn from the following sources:

University of Sussex, Equalities Unit, Equal Opportunities Checklist
http://www.sussex.ac.uk/equalities/documents/equal_opportunities_checklist.pdf

Equality and Diversity and the student experience – Guidance notes for academics
Based upon HEFCE Quality Assessment Division – Working with QAD's Equal Opportunities policy: Briefing paper

Equality Issues for Teaching and the Promotion of Learning
Based on 'Higher Education and Equality', pub EOC, CRE, CVCP 1997

Institutional Racism in Higher Education Toolkit Project:
Building the Anti-Racist HEI
http://www.leeds.ac.uk/cers/toolkit/toolkit.htm
Laura Turney, Ian Law & Debbie Phillips
Centre for Ethnicity and Racism Studies – University of Leeds, Published 2002

Oxford Brookes University, teachingnews: Teaching Tips
http://www.brookes.ac.uk/services/ocsd/teachingnews/tips.html

University of Durham, Diversity and Equality Unit, Promoting Race Equality
http://www.dur.ac.uk/diversity.equality/Race_Equality_booklet.pdf

Teaching for Inclusion: Diversity in the College Classroom
http://ctl.unc.edu/tfitoc.html
Center for Teaching and Learning - University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; Published 1998

Commission for Racial Equality
http://www.cre.gov.uk/

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