

Open University Widening Participation Conference 2012

Discourses of Inclusion in Higher Education

24-25 April 2012

Whittlebury Hall, Northamptonshire, UK

www.open.ac.uk/discourses-of-inclusion



Call for Papers

Deadline for submissions 3 November 2011

Introduction

At a time when prevailing neo-liberal policy aims to position higher education as an economic venture and students as customers, discourses of inclusion are vital. Terms such as access, widening participation, equality and diversity, and lifelong learning commonly feature in discourses of inclusion related to higher education. The shifting meanings and fluid uses of these terms serve as an indication of the increasing tensions between neo-liberal economic forces and the role of higher education in modern society.

Researchers and theorists, policy-makers and practitioners all have a voice in the diverse range of discourses of inclusion and much is still to be learned and understood from a sharing of their perspectives and experiences. As higher education systems across the world adapt to accommodate the needs of modern neoliberal society this international conference brings together these voices to consider the nature of inclusion.

The conference will examine and debate scholarly issues associated with inclusion and the commodification of higher education. It will map international perspectives on educational inclusion, report on important research findings, and develop new collaboration and joint working for the future.

We are committed to supporting new research and we will facilitate the attendance of post-graduate students to the conference, and we are pleased to be able to offer five full bursaries to support attendance of accepted papers from PhD students.

We are also able to offer two funded places for post-graduate students who are willing to blog the proceedings of the conference during the two days.

Conference themes

Inclusive policy and practice

Governments support higher education in order to produce a skilled workforce and increase economic competitiveness. Can we provide learning for its own sake and still meet policy agendas? In what ways are meanings and understandings associated with “higher education” and “inclusion” shifting and changing? To what extent are the forces causing change sensitive to local contexts and circumstances? Additionally, concerns about standards have led to some resistance within the sector towards the introduction of greater flexibility in delivery modes, new curriculum content, innovative assessment of courses, increased levels of student support and use of new technologies. Is this resistance warranted? What do we mean by standards in higher education and who decides what they are and whether they are achieved?

Student experiences and circumstances

The massification of higher education, changing economic circumstances and an aging population have created a diverse student population that fall within, between and outside different notions of inclusion. Whilst we think of students varying in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, disability, religion and sexual orientation there is also diversity in terms of personal circumstances, geography, career stage, perception of higher education, its purpose, and prior experience.

How do experiences within and beyond the academy shape students’ experiences of higher education? How do notions of success, attainment, personal development and employability feature in the lives of students? How is lifelong learning and the life course integrated into inclusive practice?

Practice beyond the UK

Recent publication of the Higher Education White Paper in the UK has signalled significant changes to the future landscape of higher education. As institutions and organisations adapt and respond to these changes there is much to be learnt from the experiences of overseas institutions and colleagues. This conference is committed to providing a platform for international research/activity and will be dedicating a conference strand to non-UK based work which addresses “inclusive policy and practice” and “students and their experiences”. Recognising the challenges faced with attending a UK conference, special arrangements are being prepared for international colleagues to deliver recorded presentations and not have to attend the UK conference location. These arrangements are only available to authors based outside the UK. For more details please email CIC-Conference@open.ac.uk.

Submit your paper

Submissions for the conference are to be accepted in the following forms:

- Papers to be presented in person at the conference
- Recorded presentations of papers to be broadcast at the conference
- Posters to be presented at the conference

Recorded presentations are especially welcomed from international authors who cannot attend the conference in person to deliver their paper. There is no charge for authors contributing electronic papers for presentation. Full details of how recorded presentations can be submitted are available from the conference organisers. Please email the conference organisers <mailto:CIC-Conference@open.ac.uk> for further details.

Submissions of papers and posters can be made on line through the conference website:

www.open.ac.uk/discourses-of-inclusion