

Manchester Metropolitan University promotes the major benefits of an inclusive curriculum

Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU) believes that an inclusive curriculum is a good curriculum. It is designed and delivered in a way that is accessible to all students, regardless of the student's educational, dispositional, circumstantial, or cultural background.

An inclusive curriculum aims to serve the diverse groups of students at Manchester Met by promoting accessible learning environments where students can reach their full potential.

In common with many universities, Manchester Met supports its disabled students using Personal Learning Plans (PLPs). A PLP is a document produced by Disability Advisers, in conjunction with the disabled student. The aim of the document is to recommend 'Reasonable Adjustments' to learning and assessment arrangements in order to minimise the impact of the student's disability on their performance.

The Disability Service at Manchester Met became aware that around 60% of students who had disclosed a disability had mild to moderate dyslexia (the biggest group for whom PLPs are produced and circulated). They were also aware that the learning and support recommendations being made for this group were almost identical for each student.

As a result, Manchester Met's Disability Network Group launched a pilot project in 2011, called Embedding Reasonable Adjustments in the Curriculum (ERAC), to streamline the learning support process for students with mild to moderate dyslexia. This was achieved by embedding reasonable adjustments in the curriculum as standard practice, negating the need for a formal PLP. This would have the advantage of bringing learning and support benefits to all students; not just those with dyslexia.

To prepare academic staff for this project, a team comprising both expert academic staff and Disability Advisors provided extensive disability awareness training on implementing reasonable adjustments and

developing inclusive practice. This was achieved through face-to-face training sessions, supported with online resources and guidance.

As part of ERAC, academic staff ensure that key resources and learning materials are available to students electronically, at least 48 hours prior to the session taking place. Additionally, tutors avoid asking students to read extensively during class, and provide written instructions for practical classes in advance. Academic staff are aware of the need to use clear and appropriate terminology and are encouraged to conduct the lecture at a pace that allows all students time to think, as well as to take appropriate notes.

The ERAC project was first piloted in 2011 across the Environmental and Geographical Sciences Programme (around 30 teaching staff). In the following year, it was rolled out across the Faculty of Science and Engineering (around 280 teaching staff). Evaluation of the project showed that embedding reasonable adjustments as standard practice worked to the benefit of all students, not just students with mild to moderate dyslexia, and it also raised awareness of the need for inclusive practice among academic staff. The project also had some benefits in reducing the administrative burden associated with circulating large numbers of very similar PLPs.

As a result of the successful pilot schemes and the overwhelmingly positive feedback from staff and students alike, the project has been steadily rolled out year-on-year to a number of other faculties with a full, university-wide roll out planned from September 2016.

Speaking about the benefits gained through the implementation of an inclusive curriculum, Dr D. Theresa Nicholson, Senior Learning and Teaching Fellow at Manchester Metropolitan University said:

“When students encounter curricula that are truly inclusive, it enhances their sense of belonging, self-confidence, engagement with learning and University life, and ultimately, will give them a much more positive experience of Higher Education.”

The success of Manchester Met’s ERAC Project is testament to the importance of inclusive practice in education. Through strengthening its learning support for disabled students, the university has improved the

learning experience for everyone, which is, ultimately, the very essence of inclusive practice.

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For more information about Manchester Metropolitan University's Inclusive Curriculum, visit:

<http://www.celt.mmu.ac.uk/inclusion/index.php>