

# Engaging students to support inclusive cultural change

Case study 8 – Inclusive Practice Partnerships Scheme

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University of Brighton

## 1. About the project

The Collaborative Development Fund supports the development of our members by addressing key sector challenges together, through a series of innovative projects. Topics are co-created with the sector and projects aim to highlight different approaches, in different contexts, to support members to understand how practice might be learned from and applied. Awards are made based on the expertise of teams and the evidence and the relevance to sector-wide practice from an open call for submissions.

Working collaboratively across six University Alliance universities in England, this project, led by Kingston University, explores the key attributes of student engagement programmes which support meaningful, far-reaching, and sustained transformation to a more inclusive higher education,

Research indicates that students who actively engage with their university through not only their academic curricula, but also co-curricular activities are less likely to drop out and more likely to achieve better outcomes (Thomas, 2012). However, not all university students engage with their institutions to the same degree. These groups include mature students and those who are first generation to higher education, students from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds, as well as those from lower socio-economic households.

This case study forms part of a project that aims to surface the work of various student engagement programmes in six higher education institutions in England which have been developed to support inclusivity in their universities.

Advance HE recognises there are different voices with differing views and approaches in the provision of higher education from around the world, this includes how institutions may choose to enhance their curricula.

### 1.1 Summary section

This case study surfaces an initiative that universities may wish to consider. It was designed by University of Brighton to with the intention of helping better understand how to transform and enable inclusive cultures and ways of working in higher education through a programme which partners with students to diversify and decolonise university curricula, while engaging in dialogue and changing mindsets on race equity across all subjects and disciplines.

### 1.2 Name of programme and university

Inclusive Practice Partnerships Scheme, University of Brighton

### 1.3 What is the programme trying to achieve?

The Inclusive Practice Partnerships Scheme was developed in response to focus group feedback where students reported that they felt that the curriculum was Eurocentric. The scheme promotes race equity through partnership working and aims to make positive and impactful changes to the undergraduate curriculum in relation to the representation of racial, ethnic and cultural identities. The work is part of the university's commitment to reduce differential outcomes for Black, Asian and minority ethnic students and supports targets in the Access and Participation Plan (APP) and Race Equality Charter (REC) Action Plan.

The scheme has been developed by academic developers in the Learning and Teaching Hub and has been led locally in each of the eight schools by the Brighton Achieves (Inclusive Practice) Leads and their teams of student Inclusive Practice Partners (IPPs). The Scheme aims to diversify and decolonise the curriculum, start conversations and change mind sets across all subjects and disciplines. The specific aims are as follows:

- + to reduce differential outcomes for students through development of an inclusive curriculum
- + to increase students' sense of belonging and to promote well-being at Brighton
- + to develop effective partnership working methodologies as part of an inclusive curriculum
- + to develop a community of best practice, sharing resources and developing strategies for developing an inclusive curriculum
- + to improve the representation of race equality in the curriculum, through decolonising of curricula and pedagogic practices
- + to improve staff confidence in addressing issues of race inequality in teaching and learning through the decolonising of curricula and pedagogic practices.

IPPs work in partnership with academic staff to review the curriculum to provide more opportunity for racial, ethnic and cultural identities to be represented positively in module content and pedagogic practices. IPP teams conduct a review of their modules and then

make recommendations to module leaders that have the potential to diversify and decolonise the curriculum.

### 1.4 Who is involved?

The IPP Scheme was launched in November 2020, recruiting 53 student partners in the first year and 64 students in the second, across each of the 8 academic Schools. The programme has been led from the Learning and Teaching Hub as part of the Institutional Strategy Brighton 2025 and sits within the area of Education and Student Experience. It is one of the University's flagship programmes and is supported by all senior colleagues, School Deans and Associate Deans, and championed by the Pro-Vice Chancellor for Education and Students. It is part of the University's strategic work and so is reported on via various levels of committee up to senior level.

### 1.5 Impacts and achievements

#### 1.5.1 Participants

The programme has been successful in terms of developing the skills of students who have been involved. For example, one Inclusive Practice Partner who graduated in 2021/22 continued to work with the team as a summer intern developing and assessing our Inclusive Practice Mark (for Diversifying and Decolonising). She has also presented about her experiences at three conference events with the Lead of the IPP Scheme.

#### 1.5.2 Institution

In terms of impact on the experiences of students taking the modules that have been reviewed, we have had preliminary data to suggest a positive impact, but further analysis is required. This is a five-year study so impact on the awarding gap will not be known until 2025/26. Institutional evaluation will include impact on student attainment (particularly the degree awarding gap), continuation and student experience across all five years of the Scheme.

It is clear that schools have become more focused on diversifying and decolonising their curricula through participating in the scheme, and some are taking active steps to develop this disciplinary focused work. For example, the School of Architecture, Technology and Engineering intend to apply for a grant from the Royal Academy of Engineering for their Diversity Impact Programme to extend the work of the Inclusive Partnerships Scheme in their School. This demonstrates an increased level of staff confidence and commitment to this work, which can be seen across other schools in the university. These changes indicate a broader shift in culture, where inclusivity (including diversifying and decolonising work) becomes part of effective L&T practice. This will undoubtedly improve the relationships between staff and IPPs within their schools and assist with the review process.

Having led the work centrally for two years, the Learning and Teaching Hub will be moving responsibility for the IPP Scheme to Schools from September 2022. The Inclusive Practice

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Leads based in each of the eight schools will lead and manage the work locally, using the IPP Scheme Framework. Schools will now report progress directly to the Race Equality Charter Steering Group and the Access and Participation Plan Oversight Group, although the university evaluation will continue to operate centrally, to ensure consistency across the duration of the Scheme.

As a separate but related strand of work, the Learning and Teaching Hub have also developed the Inclusive Practice Mark (for Diversifying and for Decolonising), which uses a set of descriptors to guide applications from module teams who feel that they can demonstrate that they are engaged in this work. Modules don't have to have been part of the IPP Scheme, but it is anticipated that the scheme will support the mark. From September 2022, courses going through periodic review will apply for at least one and up to three modules to be considered for one of the Inclusive Practice Marks, as part of the university's quality assurance and enhancement processes.

### 1.5.3 Examples

There are some excellent examples of partnership working that showcase good practice developed as part of the IPP Scheme. For example, the Inclusive Practice Partners working within the School of Education suggested some significant changes to module specifications (learning outcomes and content description) in the first year of the scheme. These were adopted by the module team and are now part of the new iteration of the module. One of the students involved has since graduated, moved into a teaching job and is now working on decolonising the curriculum within their professional context.

### 1.6 Quotes

"Working with other IPPs has meant that I get to share their energy and enthusiasm and mine with them, to discover each other's motivations and stories which in turn enable us to collaboratively create inclusive changes that make a real impact to student experience at our University." – Tim Danson, IPP for the School of Architecture, Technology and Engineering

"My overriding sentiment is of working with two people who had no ego, no hidden agenda – they just wanted to make a difference for future students. I always had to bring my A-game to meetings! I always wanted to bring my A-game to meetings. I owed them this." – Nicola Tuson, School of Education, University of Brighton

"Sport and exercise psychology is a subject area that has been traditionally white male dominated but there is opportunity to increase diversity with some new readings and references within lectures and challenge the dominance of Western/European perspectives... The IPP was a pleasure to work with. Her passion for improving future student experience and commitment to diversification is outstanding." – Bill Filby, School of Sport and Health Sciences

## 1.7 This case study exemplifies the following toolkit attributes:

### Embedded

This scheme is an excellent example of how a centrally developed programme can be embedded locally, with a central team of academic developers supporting academic leads in each School to develop disciplinary-specific expertise. It embeds partnership working between staff and students into a framework for diversifying and decolonising the curriculum.

The scheme is now moving forward to enable Schools to lead and develop the scheme using the IPP Scheme Framework. This work is now also being embedded in cyclical review through the inclusion of the Inclusive Practice Mark into quality assurance and enhancement processes.

### Evaluated

The IPP Scheme has a robust evaluation, delivered by the University's Evaluation and Policy Department. This uses the TASO theory of change model, measuring the impact on our ethnicity degree awarding gap, the perceptions of our students in terms of the representation of racial, ethnic and cultural identities in their modules, and the IPPs and IP Leads' experiences of partnership working.



## Contact us

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