

QAA Collaborative Enhancement Project

The Inclusive Education Framework: Final Evaluation Report

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Project Overview

Inclusivity is essential for all students to make the most of Higher Education. The QAA 'Enabling Student Achievement' guidance sets the expectation of "From admission through to completion, all students are provided with the support that they need to succeed in and benefit from higher education". However, lack of understanding of the breadth and depth of inclusivity 'on the ground' often lags behind the aspiration to be truly inclusive. Institutions often struggle to define inclusive education, and lack guidance and resources to effectively embed inclusive practice throughout a university.

Our project involved seven QAA member institutions, and aligned to the 'Inclusivity and Accessibility' theme. It generated an inclusive education framework, toolkit and self-directed online learning resource for use across the UK HE sector and beyond.

This project used the [University of Hull \(UoH\) Inclusive Education Framework and Toolkit](#) as a starting point. This framework was developed by the lead institution contacts, through collaboration with academics, professional services staff, students and student union. The framework takes a whole institution approach to inclusive education, informed by scholarly literature. This QAA Collaborative Enhancement Project further developed the UoH work to create an [inclusive higher education framework](#), toolkit and resource bank for use across the sector, generated collaboratively with partner institutions.

Project Partners

The original project proposal was led by the University of Hull, with four institutional partners; University of Derby, Keele University, Staffordshire University and York St John University. In the early stages of the project, we identified a need to diversify the types of institutions represented during data collection, so included King's College London as a Russell Group member, and UA92 Manchester as a newer specialist provider.

Each project partner identified a key contact as a member of the core project steering group who met once a month throughout. These key contacts also coordinated with staff within their institution to arrange institutional visits, identify relevant resources and to develop case studies of inclusive practice.

Full details of the steering group are available from the project website at the link below: [Inclusive Higher Education Framework](#)

Project Objective 1: Evaluate the suitability of the UoH inclusive education framework for cross-institutional use.

The first objective was to establish whether the University of Hull framework was appropriate for use in other institutions, or whether it needed to be modified. In order to achieve this objective, we undertook the following activities:

1. We obtained ethical approval for data collection and analysis for the project via the University of Hull Faculty of Science and Engineering ethics committee (Project number FEC_2022_88).
2. We visited each partner institution and ran a series of structured activities to gather opinions about the Hull framework and how it may need adapting for use elsewhere. At each institution we conducted the following:
 - a. Distributed an online questionnaire prior to each visit to capture initial impressions of the framework and what each institution already had in place.
 - b. A focus group of academics, professional services staff, senior leaders, staff and students. Demographic representation of these focus groups is shown in Table 1, with 48 individuals taking part. Focus groups were given the framework to comment on and suggest improvements, with discussions recorded on flipcharts (Example in Figure 1).
 - c. A workshop open to staff and students focussed on Inclusive Education was held at five out of the six partner institutions, with 182 individuals taking part. The workshop invited participants to reflect on their own practice, but also to evaluate the framework. For example, we asked participants to give examples of inclusive practice, align them against the Hull framework and identify any examples, which did not fit in the original framework design. We received 284 examples of practice, of which 25 could not be aligned to the framework, which informed development of the cross-institutional version.

Focus Group Participant Role	Number
Academic staff	20
Professional services staff	23
Student	5
Focus Group Participant Gender Identity	Number
Male	14
Female	33
Non-binary	1
Prefer not to say	0
Focus Group Participant Ethnicity	Number
Asian	7
Black	4
White	34
Mixed ethnicity	1
Other	1
Prefer not to say	1
Focus Group Participant Disability	Number
No	33
Yes	13
Prefer not to say	2
Focus Group Participant - 1 st Family to go to University	Number
No	21
Yes	27
Prefer not to say	0
Focus Group Participant Institution	Number
Derby	8
Keele	11
King's College London	10
Staffordshire	6
UA92	3
York St John	10

Table 1: Summary of Focus Group 48 Participants' Demographics

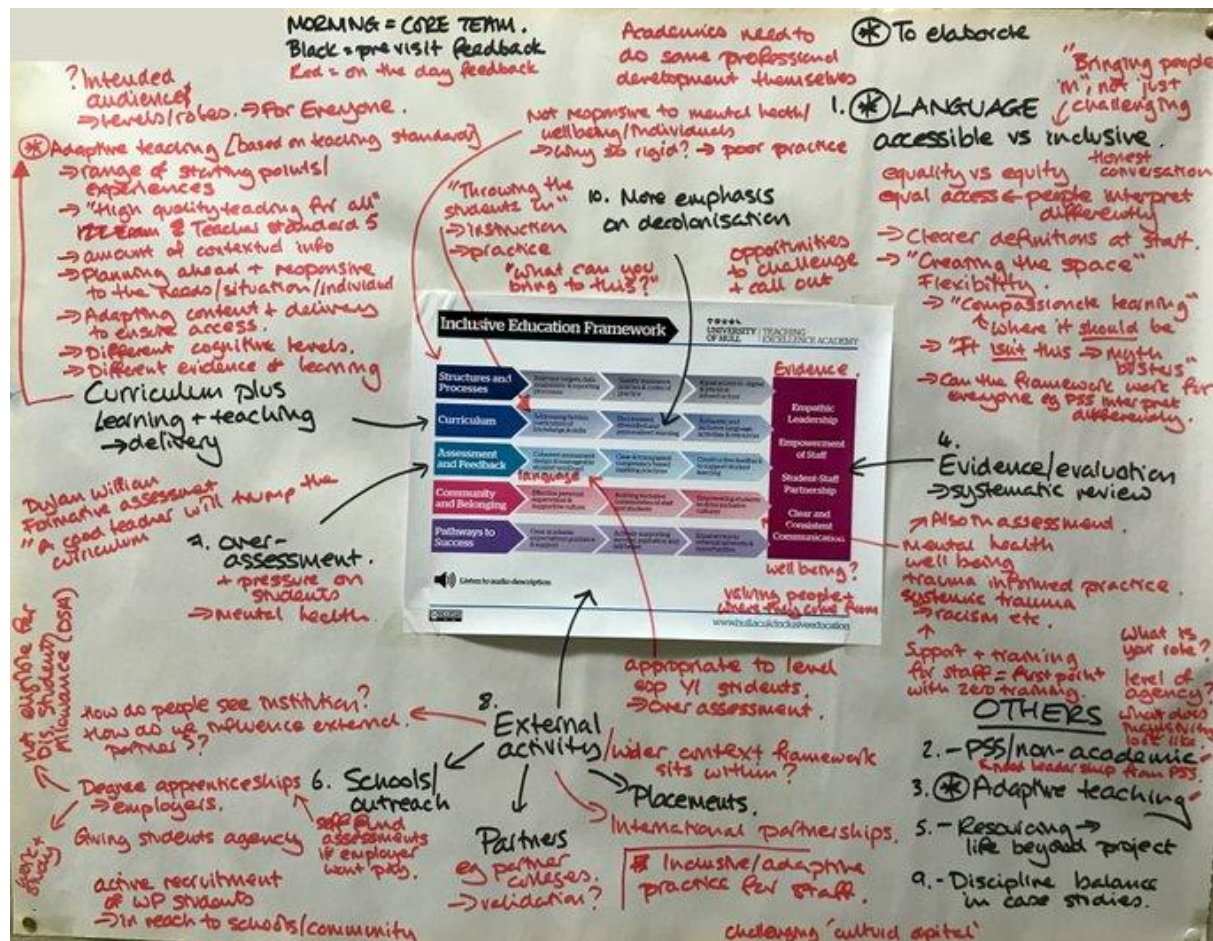


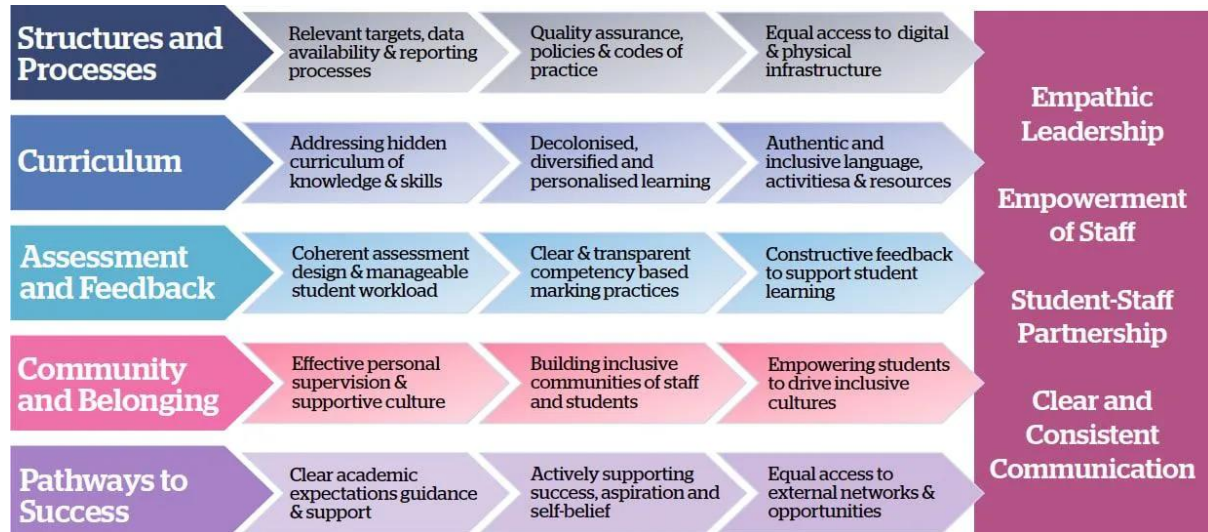
Figure 1: Example of Focus Group Generated Flipchart for one institution

- After all visits were completed, a working group derived from the project steering group conducted a thematic analysis of the responses from all institutions. We used template analysis as a method for iterative development of the framework (King, 1998; King 2012), with six versions of the template produced. The working group met regularly to discuss findings and adapt the framework language. The final version was agreed upon after input from the steering group.

We found that the core structure of the framework (Structures and processes, Curriculum, Assessment and Feedback, Community and Belonging & Pathways to Success) were broadly suitable for cross-institutional use. We adapted the language of 'Curriculum' to become 'Curriculum Design and Delivery' to emphasise that the curriculum is a dynamic entity that is brought to life within the classroom, not a static body of content. The underlying principles of the framework on the right-hand side needed more development, and we went from four principles to six to encapsulate

the major themes identified in the thematic analysis. Minor alterations were made throughout the framework text to incorporate suggestions from all partners.

A comparison of the Hull framework and final QAA framework is shown in Figure 2.



The Inclusive Higher Education Framework

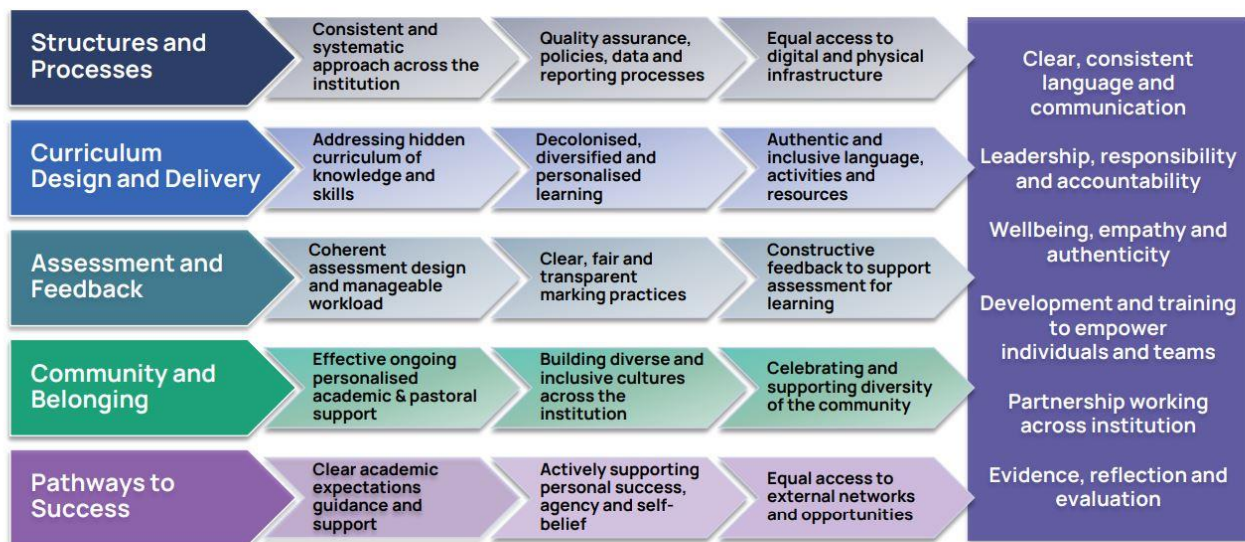


Figure 2: Comparison of the Hull Inclusive Education Framework and the Cross-institutional version of the framework generated through this project

Project Objective 2. Collaboratively generate a cross-institutional inclusive education toolkit and self-directed online learning resource for use by all QAA members, including case studies and resources

The second objective was to build resources to support the revised framework, to be made freely available to QAA members and the wider sector. The resources are available from www.inclusiveeducationframework.info and will be available from that URL for 10 years.

After completion of all institutional visits, the project team met for a planning day at which ideas for resources were proposed and discussed. We decided upon the following outputs:

1. A project website to host the framework and resources
2. A series of case studies drawn from all partners to illustrate effective inclusive practice
3. A series of videos of students and staff reflecting on inclusive practice, including academics, professional services staff and senior university leaders
4. A set of inclusive education checklists to help individuals, programme teams and senior leaders to evaluate their own inclusive practice.
5. A curated set of links to other inclusive education resources
6. A self-directed learning package to help users navigate the resources and make the best use of them.

Workload for development was split between the project partners. York St John took a lead role in the development of the self-directed learning package and videos. Hull took responsibility for the project website, and are the ultimate owners of developed resources.

A student intern was appointed to the project, funded for a total of 200 hours of work (Pei-Chi Ho; York St John). The intern took responsibility for filming and editing videos, as well as supporting the digitisation of the self-directed learning resource.

Generation of project outputs was mostly managed via collaborative Google Docs owned by the project leads, which were then digitised by relevant members of the project team. This was an effective way of managing a cross-institutional team working asynchronously.

Project Challenges

While we feel that the project has been successful, we acknowledge some challenges that were faced.

- **Student representation.** Our original project proposal included significant student involvement both via the steering group and at the institutional visits. We found it more challenging than anticipated to recruit students to the project, even when paying for student time commitments. This was partly due to timing in the academic year; most visits took place in the summer when students were less available, and key recruitment times coincided with student union elections. While student voice has been represented in the final resources, we acknowledge that the project ended up being more staff facing than originally anticipated.
- **Project team availability and workload.** During the second half of the project, one of the project leads took an extended period of sick leave, which had some implications for the timeliness of deliverables. There were also changes in core personnel at two of the partner institutions. For all project team members, the project represented a (significant) time commitment on top of existing workloads, which some found challenging at times. While the project achieved its aims, we acknowledge the additional workload required above and beyond their regular job roles, and are very thankful for all who contributed to the success of the project.
- **Procurement.** We faced significant challenges in purchasing the digital resources required for the website due to complexities of internal procurement. While these were resolved, it did have a significant impact on the ability of the team to complete the project in a timely manner, and led to unexpected additional time pressures on those responsible for digital outputs.
- **Logistical challenges.** The majority of the project was conducted via Teams meeting and asynchronous platforms. This facilitated effective and inclusive cross-institutional working, but had some limitations, particularly for the more creative aspects of project planning.

Project outputs, outcomes and impact

Outputs:

The project has produced two key outputs thus far:

- Cross institutional version of the framework
- Inclusive Education Framework website and resource bank

Outcomes:

The resources described above will support QAA members to evaluate their practice from an inclusivity point of view, and implement practical measures to improve inclusivity within their institutions. In addition to this, we have identified the following positive outcomes directly resulting from the project.

- **Networking between the project partners.** Regular meetings of the project team have enabled relationships to form between the core partner institutions.
- **Impact within partner institutions.** There has already been ongoing impact at several institutions as a result of project involvement. Examples include:
 - Keele University: KH was invited to run a session for the KIITE Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice cohort on Inclusive Education that was attended by over 40 early career academics. KH also gave the Keynote address at the KIITE January learning and teaching conference on Inclusive Education.
 - York St John: The Inclusive Education Framework is being formally integrated into the university's Learning and Teaching Action Plan for the current and coming academic terms.
 - King's College London: The Inclusive Education Framework was presented to a meeting of senior university leaders, with an aim to incorporate it into strategic planning of educational initiatives.
- **Staff Career and Personal Development.** Project team members have been able to use involvement in the project for their own development. At least two project members have directly incorporated involvement with the project into Academic Promotion applications.
- **Peer reviewed publications.** We anticipate at least two publications to come from the project. One will focus on the thematic analysis used to generate the cross-institutional framework, and the other will focus on perceptions and definitions of inclusive education captured during the project.

Impacts:

The long-term impact of the project will be to increase awareness of inclusive practice throughout the HE sector, and to enable institutions and individuals to actively implement more inclusive educational practices. Students will experience more inclusive educational environments, which may ultimately lead to increased sense of belonging, retention, narrowing of awarding gaps or student self-belief.

It is hoped that any impact could ultimately be captured via a number of indicators:

- Engagement with the resources, captured as user statistics. We have set up the website so this data can be tracked and evaluated on a longer-term basis.
- On-going case studies and examples from the project partner institutions of how the framework and resources have been used locally.
- A potential positive impact on sector-wide institutional metrics and strategic aims e.g. student retention data, awarding gaps, student progression statistics.

Conclusions and Reflections

We feel that this was a very successful project that has met its two core objectives, and had considerable impact beyond this. Project team members have repeatedly described the project as being enjoyable, meaningful and important.

“It has been really nice to connect with other institutions and I’ve felt very supported by the project leaders.”

“The experience has been enormously valuable in terms of developing professional networks because of the opportunity to collaborate with colleagues from other institutions and from a range of different disciplinary backgrounds.”

As project leads, we have personally felt the project has allowed us to build confidence and understanding of inclusive educational practice, becoming leaders in this area. Taking our institutional framework out to the wider sector has validated the work we did within our own institution, and strengthened it so we are now confident the framework is a robust tool of value. We have personally grown as a result of the project, taking on leadership responsibility and project management as well as developing our ideas.

We thank QAA for supporting this project both financially and through input into the steering group. We hope that the resulting resources are of value to QAA members, and that the project has a long-term impact in this strategically important area of HE.

We also thank all of those who contributed to the development of the framework, through discussion, participation in workshops or being critical friends to the project. We spoke to some amazing people, many of whom have made a real impact on the way we think about inclusive education. We have interacted with over 200 academics, professional services staff, senior leaders, students and student union representatives as part of this project. We particularly thank those who shared their lived experiences of inclusion and exclusion, and recognise the emotional labour that this represents, particularly for those from currently or historically minoritised backgrounds. We also thank those who challenged us, questioned us, or asked us to think more deeply about this topic. We hope that the final resources reflect and represent your diverse perspectives, and thank you for your contributions.