



Embedding equality and diversity into our undergraduate curriculum

Royal Conservatoire of Scotland case study

Embedding equality and diversity in the
curriculum strategic enhancement programme

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1. Introduction

The Royal Conservatoire of Scotland (RCS) has a dynamic equality and diversity culture and our Equality and Diversity Forum, which consists of students and staff, offers small amounts of funding to staff and students to make outstanding equality and diversity initiatives happen. This is extremely effective, but sits outside of our core curriculum.

The RCS undertook a major curriculum reform exercise, which began in 2008, with the new undergraduate degrees being launched in 2012/13. This was successful and contemporised all of our degrees to the point where our curriculum is viewed as world leading in the conservatoire sector. Core to this is that, from first year of study onwards, the theme of human rights sits at the heart of the curriculum.

It would be fair to say, though, that regardless of our positive work across the Conservatoire in equality and diversity, and despite our best ambitions, we have stopped short of fully embedding equality and diversity across and through the curriculum. As a result, our 2015-2020 strategic plan, "Delivering a defining performance" (RCS, 2015), put equality and diversity as one of its central pillars. In line with this, since 2015 (to be completed in 2018), the Conservatoire has been reviewing its undergraduate curriculum. This includes all undergraduate programmes offered in both of our Schools, the composition of which is outlined in Table 1.

TABLE 1: ROYAL CONSERVATOIRE OF SCOTLAND UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAMMES

| School of Music | School of Drama, Dance Production and Screen (DDPS) |
|--|---|
| Bachelor of Music (Honours) | BA Acting |
| Bachelor of Education with Music (Honours) | BA (Honours) Contemporary Performance Practice |
| | BA Musical Theatre |
| | BA Filmmaking |
| | BA Modern Ballet |
| | BA Production Arts and Design |
| | BA Production Technology and Management |
| | BA Performance in British Sign Language and English |

In accordance with the strategic plan, the embedding of equality and diversity has been one of four main priorities for the review, and has provided the opportunity for

undergraduate programme teams to review current equality and diversity practice and to identify actions that aim to truly embed equality and diversity across the undergraduate curriculum.

Our participation in the embedding equality and diversity in the curriculum strategic enhancement programme (EEDC SEP) has allowed us, with the assistance of expertise from the Higher Education Academy (HEA), to revisit and focus on key developments required within the areas of i) curriculum content, ii) learning and teaching methods, and iii) inclusion in the curriculum.

Our aim has been to maximise opportunities to diversify art forms and disciplines and to contribute to sectoral change and further learning.

The objectives of our EEDC SEP project were to:

1. Provide staff with professional updating workshops to raise awareness of equality and diversity research models and self-evaluation frameworks developed to assist design teams to further embed equality and diversity into their programmes.
2. Engage programme development teams in activities to review existing practice, identify areas for enhancement, and develop ideas as part of programme redesign to further embed equality and diversity in our undergraduate curriculum.
3. Present initial programme redesigns for consideration by a scrutiny panel comprising internal and external experts (including the HEA Equality and Diversity Academic Lead) and receive feedback to inform further action.
4. Pilot initiatives at programme level to further inform programme redesigns.
5. Prepare new documentation and guidance in support of programme review.

2. Implementation

The project was implemented at two levels: institutional and programme. At the institutional level, activities were undertaken with all undergraduate programmes to:

1. Provide professional update workshops for staff and programme development teams that raised awareness of models to assist in embedding equality and diversity into the curriculum.

2. Review existing equality and diversity practice using the HEA EEDC model (Hanesworth, 2015) and self-evaluation framework (May and Thomas, 2010) and identify areas for further enhancement and embedding.
3. Present ideas for further embedding equality and diversity into programmes for scrutiny by internal / external equality and diversity experts.
4. Provide feedback to programme teams on their ideas to inform further refinement and presentation in final programme documentation.
5. Use the HEA EEDC model to inform the update of our undergraduate academic framework and associated programme documentation templates to provide programme teams with further guidance.
6. Evaluate the work undertaken during the life of the project to assess the impact it has had on further embedding equality and diversity in our undergraduate curriculum.

At the programme level, pilot activity was undertaken to test ideas identified that would further embed equality and diversity in our curriculum in three programme areas. We outline these institutional and programme activities further below.

Professional updates

A number of professional update workshops were offered to staff either as part of our annual learning and teaching conference or as dedicated workshops targeted at different staff groups and students. These included:

EEDC workshop for programme design team (PDT) convenors

This workshop marked our institutional launch of the HEA EEDC SEP project, in that all undergraduate PDT convenors were invited to attend the session, led by Dr Pauline Hanesworth, the HEA's Equality and Diversity Academic Lead. The workshop focused on the EEDC SEP project plan, the equality and diversity section of the undergraduate academic framework, and HEA's EEDC self-evaluation framework and model for learning and teaching practitioners. It aimed to equip all PDT convenors with an overarching knowledge and awareness of how to embed equality and diversity into their modules, in terms of content and delivery.

Four equality and diversity focused workshops

These workshops took place during our annual staff learning and teaching conference in September 2016. They covered topics such as unconscious bias, equality and diversity in assessment and feedback, our equality and diversity creative fund and widening access to performing and production arts education.

Awareness-raising sessions with guest speakers during Black History Month and LGBT History Month

The Black History Month interactive presentation, “The Black Minstrelsy in Scotland” by Dr Eric Graham, described the arrival of American “black-faced” acts in Scotland before the American Civil War, and their social and political positioning.

The LGBT History Month workshop, “Maggie Kinloch in conversation with Horse McDonald”, provided an opportunity for staff and students to hear a conversation with our ex Vice-Principal Professor Maggie Kinloch and iconic singer and writer Horse McDonald. The session explored the impact of identity and sexuality on development and acceptance as an artist, in an honest and moving session.

Review of equality and diversity in the undergraduate curriculum

Having been introduced to the HEA’s model for embedding equality and diversity in the curriculum and tools for undertaking self-evaluation, programme development teams were asked to use it to review current practice and identify areas where actions were needed to further embed equality and diversity in their programmes.

Programme teams were then invited to document the changes they planned to make to their programme designs and present these for scrutiny. The scrutiny included consideration of proposals by a scrutiny team, including input from our HEA consultant, Dr Pauline Hanesworth. Following scrutiny, each programme team received feedback, which they were encouraged to use when finalising their programme designs and preparing their programme documentation.

Programme pilots

The three undergraduate programmes identified below then piloted initiatives, which took place over the last academic year.

Bachelor of Music (BMUS)

This comprised the introduction of a new “Healthy Musician” module to promote inclusiveness. There is a vast body of evidence showing that singing together promotes affiliation, releases hormones associated with health and wellbeing, and promotes a sense of togetherness in societal contexts. In addition, the programme team planned to provide lectures on healthy practice and mental health and wellbeing, addressing real issues such as stress and performance anxiety.

BA Digital Film and Television (DFTV; now BA Filmmaking)

Linking up with diverse and dynamic local arts practitioners on specifically focused project days, the pilot project initially partnered with an artist from SQIFF (Scottish Queer International Film Festival) during September and October 2016. The pilot

intended to broaden the awareness of the student cohort in relation to individuals and groups with different legally protected characteristics, in this case sexual orientation and gender identity. The aim was for the pilot to impact upon the range and depth of student projects in terms of equality and diversity understanding compared to earlier cohorts.

BA Production Arts & Design / Production Technology & Management (PAD/PTM)

This consisted of a four-week pilot where small cross-programme groups selected a protected characteristic and researched how it had been impacted on or represented by the development of theatre. Their research was expected to explore the political and social climate and its impact on the chosen subject, the nature of the related performance and how audiences responded, and other key developments of theatre at this time and how their work has influenced their chosen subject. The groups presented their findings in the final week to their peers, the Head of Production, and the Equality and Diversity Officer.

Evaluation workshop

An evaluation workshop, involving undergraduate teaching staff and students, was held to evaluate what we had achieved to date, to consider the impact of our work, and to identify further actions needed to fully embed equality and diversity as we start to finalise our undergraduate programme designs and prepare for their implementation in 2018/19. The workshop provided an opportunity for discussion to review work done to date on embedding equality and diversity into all undergraduate programmes, share ideas, approaches and practices, and make recommendations to the Undergraduate Curriculum Review Planning Group to inform further actions needed by the Conservatoire and individual programmes.

3. Impact

Programme review

Scrutiny of draft programme documentation by a scrutiny panel comprising both internal and external experts proved invaluable. It evidenced that staff had benefitted from the professional updating activities we had delivered and had equipped them with knowledge and a model / tools to undertake a systematic self-evaluation of their current activity.

All undergraduate programmes engaged in self-evaluation activity and, as a result, each programme was able to demonstrate – and have confirmed – that they already had many instances of good practice in embedding equality and diversity. In addition, each programme received feedback on areas where changes could be made to further

embed equality and diversity into their programme designs, especially in relation to content, teaching and assessment methods, cross-cultural clashes and inclusion in the curriculum.

The scrutiny also identified institution-wide areas that needed to be addressed. These included:

1. ***Support for students with mental health issues.*** This has informed the scoping and implementation of further work RCS has undertaken since on mental health, which we have progressed through our QAA Scotland enhancement theme.
2. ***Further exploration of gender issues.*** This has informed the production of our recently published "Gender Action Plan" (RCS, 2017) and other work that we are engaged in currently with the Equality Challenge Unit.

Programme pilots

The impact of the programme level pilots has been variable but overall has established a positive level of engagement and has provided valuable indicators of where more activity or emphasis is required to enhance greater success.

For example, the Healthy Musician module, which was piloted for all first year music students, was very well received by some students who found it extremely useful, claiming that it aided with stress reduction and performance anxiety. However, others found the approach too theoretical and would have benefitted from a more practical methodology.

Conversely, the pilot undertaken within the DFTV programme was positively received by all students and specifically identified as good practice within the most recent external examiner's report for the QAA.

The evaluation of the pilot within the PAD / PTM programmes identified that, overall, the groups evidenced a reasonable understanding of the complexities of representing various protected characteristics in and through theatre. They all discovered information they were not aware of within their own groups and were also able to hear new information from their peers in the other groups during the presentations. Admittedly, there were varying levels of participation in this pilot, as is often the case with collaborative group work. However, most students appeared to gain some benefit from the project. Unfortunately, the feedback sessions were not well facilitated due to time restrictions. Overall, it was found to be a useful pilot exercise but one that needs to be developed.

Awareness-raising sessions

Feedback from individual staff members and students attending one of the two awareness-raising sessions, which took place during Black History Month and LGBT History Month, was far more likely to speak of the impact that being present had on both a personal and professional level. For example:

I was raised with a certain anxiety about racial prejudice and the importance of not seeming to draw attention to people's differences. One of the significant issues raised in this session is the importance about our history of prejudice and its place in education, and I think I may find myself in future with a greater willingness to engage rather than avoid the issue. [Anonymous delegate]

I think I'm now more intrigued to think of creating productions centred on Scotland's history. I'm also particularly intrigued by the notion of a country smothering its own history, an idea I'd like to explore further. [Anonymous delegate]

It was enlightening to experience a world of very personal art from a non-classically trained musician. It has made me want to explore a connection between the two worlds and explore the scope for an artist's personal expression in prewritten works, be it opera or song. [Anonymous delegate]

Evaluation workshop

The evaluation workshop provided an opportunity to take stock on where we were and to identify further work needed over the next few months as we prepare our final programme documents for review and start to plan the implementation of our revised undergraduate programmes from September 2018. Details of future actions can be found in the next steps section of this case study.

Further impact

Finally, our work has led to the production of further guidance for programme teams, which has now been added to our programme document template. This guidance is informed by and aligned to the HEA's EEDC model for learning and teaching practitioners (Hanesworth, 2015).

This EEDC SEP project finished before our undergraduate programme teams completed and submitted their final programme documents for review. This will now happen between December 2017 and March 2018. It has not been possible, therefore, to assess the full impact of this project on the final programme designs. However, as part of the review process, we will continue to identify and document further evidence of impact.

4. Lessons learned

The opportunity to reflect on the work undertaken to further embed equality and diversity into our undergraduate curriculum has highlighted that there is a need to:

- > consider the range of repertoire / canon, including their histories, and how it can facilitate discussion on socio-cultural / political issues. We should take a “curiosity” over “caution” approach institution wide;
- > create space in the curriculum for debate on critical repertoire;
- > provide appropriate opportunities for the creation of new work, allowing students to explore their individual experiences through this work;
- > create opportunities to explore issues around professional environments, such as racism and sexism in the workplace;
- > address variations in audition practices;
- > consider ways of using any developments in student partnership agreements with our student union to ensure they take account of equality and diversity;
- > acknowledge unconscious bias and take account of this when identifying role models for students through recruitment of staff and our use of external specialists, visiting lecturers, directors etc.;
- > balance course work, personal time and issues of otherness in our timetabling.

5. Next steps

Engaging in the EEDC SEP project has enabled RCS to take a focused approach to embedding equality and diversity into our undergraduate curriculum, and to benefit from expert input to our review from the HEA and other institutions participating in the project.

We are particularly indebted to the support and input we have received from the HEA Equality and Diversity Academic Lead; her expertise, guidance and patience has proved invaluable, and we plan to continue to engage in further work that the HEA is planning.

Our evaluation workshop identified a number of actions that are still needed. These are outlined in Table 2.

TABLE 2: PROPOSED ACTIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT OF EEDC

| Action | Who |
|--|-------------------------|
| 1. Feedback from BAME students School Management Teams to determine how to gather views of BAME students on UG programmes to inform actions needed in the programme review | School Management Teams |

| Action | Who |
|--|---|
| to further embed equality and diversity. | |
| <p>2. Introduction to Collaborative Practice Module (ICP) The Choice / Collaboration Working Group should consider the feedback relating to the ICP module when considering redesign options for ICP, including developing opportunities for race awareness training as part of the module.</p> | Choice / Collaboration Working Group |
| <p>3. Employ more artists of colour. Programme heads should consider ways to incorporate a more diverse range of professionals in programme delivery that reflects an increasingly diverse student cohort.</p> | UG Programme Heads |
| <p>4. Support structures for BAME / LGBTIQ students. SU should review current support network arrangements with input from BAME / LGBTIQ students, and consider ways to evolve these as part of SU activities and support groups for 2017/18.</p> <p>WAP (Widening Access and Participation) Team should consider ways to extend the “Transitions” mentoring scheme to support widening access, care experienced and BAME students post-transition to UG Study.</p> | <p>Students Union</p> <p>Fair Access Manager</p> |
| <p>5. Staff awareness-raising relating to BAME and trans students Build a facilitated “creative conversation” into the annual staff learning and teaching conference to raise awareness of the needs of BAME and trans students.</p> | Conference Planning Group |
| <p>6. BAME feeder to undergraduate study Fair Access Team should continue to evolve plans for greater engagement with BAME communities in Glasgow and other parts of Scotland, and monitor / report on the impact of this work through the Fair Access Committee and Student Recruitment Strategy Group.</p> | Director of Academic Innovation / Fair Access Manager |

6. Key messages

We are a small specialist institution; as such, our staff constantly juggle competing pressures on their time, especially as many staff work for us part-time and have

additional employment in their professional field. As a result, convincing staff to find time to participate and engage with professional updating is an ongoing struggle. Consequentially, some of our professional update workshops and sessions were not as well attended as we had hoped.

Our key messages from participating in this project are:

1. We would recommend that those institutions wishing to evaluate equality and diversity in the curriculum do so as part of existing institutional curriculum / programme review processes. Identifying equality and diversity as a theme for our undergraduate review has proved beneficial in that it has enabled us to have an institutional focus.
2. We found the HEA's equality and diversity resources useful (HEA, n.d.). The EEDC model and self-evaluation framework have been particularly helpful and have proved useful tools for programme teams engaging in a systematic evaluation of equality and diversity.
3. It has been helpful to us to have objective external input from an expert "critical friend" when reviewing equality and diversity in the curriculum.
4. Equality and diversity in the curriculum is a huge theme. Everything takes longer than you expect it to. We would recommend that you take time at the start of the project to carefully scope and resource your work, and ensure that key staff and influencers are available to take part for the duration of the review.
5. Use institutional events such as professional update events, staff conferences etc. to make the whole institution aware of what you are doing and why it is so important.
6. Having equality and diversity as a strategic priority has proved beneficial and has ensured that it is supported by senior colleagues.

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