Is the Equality and Diversity Agenda Relevant to Newcastle University?

Introduction

For many years now Newcastle University has been declaring its commitment to equality and diversity (E&D). Equality and diversity are relevant to us all, staff and students alike. Equality is the means by which we benefit from diversity, turning it into a driver of innovation and learning and creating an environment where every individual can flourish. Our former Vice-Chancellor, Prof Chris Brink, is outspoken on the subject and we have invested time and money to build up our expertise and track record in this area. For example, we have launched E&D initiatives and staff networks e.g. the disabled staff network, we have appointed diversity leaders and developed training programmes, we have held think tanks and conducted detailed monitoring and reviews. Our efforts are being recognised, not least through our recent Institutional Athena SWAN Silver award for good practice and progress in gender equality. The E&D agenda encompasses a range of protected characteristics. Whilst much effort has been put into developing initiatives in relation to gender at Newcastle University, we have also been working in other E&D areas e.g. our work with Stonewall. Against this successful backdrop, some might ask whether the E&D agenda is still relevant to Newcastle University.

In the wider societal context, some say the battle is won. Back in 2010 The Economist magazine claimed that, in the world of business certainly, gender equality had been achieved. It described how women had been ‘taking a sledgehammer to remaining glass ceilings’ and how it was now just a matter of time until full parity was achieved with no further need for positive action. In 2017 our laws provide a framework for equal status and explicit protection against discrimination. Women are 47% of the UK workforce and their presence in leadership positions is slowly increasing. Our Parliament is more ethnically diverse than it has ever been before.

So is the job done here in the UK? Can we tick the E&D box and move on?

Or are the reasons we embarked on this journey still as valid for Britain now in 2017 as they were at the outset and is there more work to do?

Despite pleasing progress, Britain is some way from the former Prime Minister’s ‘one nation’ ideal. As Cameron pointed out, a young black man in the UK is still more likely to be in prison than studying at a top university, and just 4% of FTSE 100 CEOs are from ethnic minorities. Two thirds of the British public are uncomfortable talking to disabled people and 86% of secondary school teachers witness homophobic bullying in their school. With respect to gender equality, Sealy and Vinnicombe talk about the ‘glacially slow progress of women through the glass ceiling’ and despite a series of high level reports, such as the Davies report on Women On Boards, women currently hold just 8.6% of executive directorships in FTSE 100 companies. In the Higher Education sector, Louise Morley bemoans the under-utilisation of women’s expertise and skills throughout the HE workforce, and the recent Women Count report finds that men chair 81% of university governing bodies, are 78% of all Vice-Chancellors and Principals and make up 66% of senior management or executive leadership teams.

This paper will go some way in explaining why this is a problem. Embracing E&D is not easy, nor is it time limited. It represents a total shift in perspective and a move to a culture in which
considerations of inclusivity are ‘mainstreamed’, that is they are automatic because they are embedded in all an organisation’s processes, actions and decision-making. This takes many years to achieve. At Newcastle University we have been working hard on this culture shift and we have learned a lot about inclusivity and good practice, but mainstreaming is still a goal for the future.

What are equality and diversity?

Equality is about giving everyone the same rights and protections and access to the same opportunities. It is synonymous with fairness, egalitarianism and justice. In legal terms equality is about eliminating discrimination and addressing historical disadvantage, giving everyone the same chance of reaching their full potential.

Diversity literally means difference. It means taking account of, understanding, respecting and valuing people’s different backgrounds, experiences, perspectives, beliefs and everything that makes them who they are as an individual. When we think about diversity we tend to group people together by, for example, their ethnicity or their sex to help us understand their needs, but this approach presents its own challenges.

In his foreword to our Equality Strategy, the Professor Chris Brink explains: ‘At the University, as in society, our understanding of diversity is rooted in our recognition of groups, but our understanding of education is based on individual talent, potential and attainment. The equality agenda has to do with making sure that no individual is disadvantaged (or, indeed, advantaged) simply by virtue of belonging to any particular group.’

Why are equality and diversity important?

This paper aims to remind us all WHY this journey is so important for our university and why we should all engage with and support this agenda. There are many reasons for us to care about and engage with our E&D agenda. Here are some of the most compelling ones.

1. Social justice

Equality and diversity are closely linked to human rights and are at the heart of the United Nations Charter signed by 193 states. They are enshrined in European and UK law and are guiding principles of the UK public sector. So for many people the strongest argument for E&D is a strong desire for social justice – a simple need to treat people fairly and with respect. Even in the private sector where profit is king, research showed that male and female CEOs are quick to talk about the moral and social case for gender parity, many having personal stories of wanting to see daughters, wives and female employees having access to equality of opportunity. These are the arguments that help to win hearts and minds.

The social justice arguments are key for us in the university sector. We are, primarily, tax-payer funded change agents and thought leaders, serving the whole of society. We exist to unlock the potential of individuals, to ‘decouple circumstance from destiny’ as Prof Brink described it. In some areas we are making huge progress in embedding inclusive measures. For example, across UK universities the number of staff with individual circumstances that resulted in reduced research outputs increased from 12% in RAE 2008 to 29% in REF 2014, with no reduction in research quality meaning a much wider group of staff could be returned, to the benefit of both the individuals
concerned and their universities. This is real progress. And yet in other areas we still see unjustifiable inequalities. For example, UK BME students are less likely to complete their degree programmes than white students and their attainment levels are lower\textsuperscript{ix}, women are less likely to reach senior leadership level than men\textsuperscript{xii}, and disabled students are less satisfied with the student experience than their able bodied peers\textsuperscript{xiv}. We need to ensure that we don’t just talk about equality, we live it because ‘

universities that pay lip service to E&D without embedding structural and cultural change run the risk replicating the inequalities of society (Kimura, op cit.)

2. Our Civic Status

We are proud to be a ‘civic university’ - that is one that exists to benefit the whole of society. In his paper on what it means to be a civic university\textsuperscript{xvi} John Goddard calls for such institutions to be ‘fully engaged’ and have strategies ‘that reflect wider societal needs locally, nationally and globally’. In order to be successful, such strategies require us to create vast networks of diverse stakeholders that have confidence in our ability to understand and collaborate with them. We need a staff body that can draw on a huge array of different experiences and perspectives to connect with students and partners from many sectors, from different backgrounds and with a wide range of interests. Our civic status therefore requires an inclusive ethos and corresponding activities and actions to deliver inclusivity and equality for the benefit of the institution and for the individuals connected to it and served by it.

3. E&D is reflected in our core values

Our vision statement 2021\textsuperscript{xvi} sets ‘valuing diversity’ as a core value, which makes it one of the key principles on which we base everything we do. But what does this really mean?

A university’s core values support its vision, shape its culture and reflect its principles. They are the essence of the university’s identity. Establishing strong core values helps us in a number of ways, for example:

- Our values help us to make decisions by highlighting our priorities and helping us make judgements
- Our values tell our stakeholders what this university is about. They help us to attract staff and students whose values are aligned with ours and so enable us to build a strong and positive organisational culture
- Our core values also inform the people around us in our local community how we function, helping to build confidence in us and encouraging them to engage with us but we must also learn how better to engage with them.

Core values don’t change or stop. They permeate all our activities and inform our approach to our work. They underpin our key strategies such as internationalisation and widening participation.

As well as valuing diversity our other core values include ‘a commitment to excellence’ and ‘responding to societal challenges’. In his foreword to the 2021 Vision statement, Prof. Chris Brink, explains that ‘our equality strategy ties these three values together. We value diversity because we are committed to excellence and we recognise the existence of inequality as a concomitant social challenge, to which we undertake to respond.’
4. E&D success brings kudos

Our reputation is one of our most precious assets. Our drive for excellence is paying off as our achievements become widely recognised and our image is further enhanced. As well as our excellent research power ranking in the REF, we are being recognised and rewarded for our E&D work and are building a strong organisational image in this area:

- Athena SWAN Institutional Silver award (May 2016) for our progress in promoting gender equality; we are one of only nine universities to have achieved this status
- In 2015 we were recognised by the Times Higher Education as one of eight world-leading universities with a 50:50 gender balance
- We won the Outstanding Leadership and Management Team Award (THELMA Awards 2015), which praised our innovative leadership development programmes aimed at increasing diversity in senior teams.

This recognition builds our profile and visibility, and increases our competitive edge. However, we still have work to do. For example, our reputation in terms of our THES world ranking depends at least in part on our ‘international outlook’ that is our domestic-international staff and student ratios and the extent of our international collaborations.

Furthermore, recent press coverage following the UCU report on the gender pay gap\textsuperscript{xxi} pointing out our need to focus on this area and leading us to introduce thorough annual reviews, reminds us how quickly reputation could be marred: the potential damage to our reputation from negative press coverage or, in the worse case, legal cases against us for lack of care in the implementation of E&D policies is unlimited.

5. Attracting talented staff

Another of our core values is ‘investing in excellent staff’ so that we can achieve ‘a significant international, national and regional profile’. We know from recent research funded by HEFCE that high performing research units have high levels of non-UK staff and staff with recent international experience\textsuperscript{xxii}. So if we are to achieve our objectives of being in the top 20 universities in the UK for research and student satisfaction, we need to recruit world class researchers, academics and administrators. This requires us to participate in highly competitive global recruitment markets. We want working and studying at Newcastle University to be an attractive prospect for talented people of all nationalities, ethnicities and beliefs so that we can cast the recruitment net as widely as possible. We do not want any talented individuals to be put off or overlooked because of their protected characteristics – or for any other reason that is not connected to their talent and ability to contribute to the success of this institution.

6. Attracting and inspiring an increasingly diverse student body

The drive to increase participation rates in HE and the success of the widening participation agenda are diversifying the UK student population. Data from Universities UK\textsuperscript{xxiii} show, for example, a substantial increase in participation in HE by students from ethnic minorities and from disadvantaged groups and HESA data show that the number of students in receipt of DSA has doubled over the last 10 years\textsuperscript{xxiv}. This trend is set to continue as we work towards the challenging diversity admissions targets for 2020 set in the recent Higher Education Green Paper, Fulfilling our
Over the last few years we have seen the diversity of our own student body increase; not least we have had particular success in attracting students from low participation neighbourhoods. This is very encouraging, but we recognise that the increased diversity of our students combines with generally rising student expectations to set us a real challenge in continuing to deliver a quality student experience and ensuring the best possible educational outcomes for all.

Students care about equality. The NUS calls us all to ‘promote equality; respect; security; unity and co-operation and thus allow the diversity of people and their opinions to be celebrated rather than merely tolerated’. Research shows that students are sensitive to the mix of staff they meet while at university. They are alert to ‘tokenism’ and see this as a sign of the university lacking true commitment to equality and diversity. They are also very aware of staff having (possibly unconsciously) differential expectations for certain ethnic groups. Black and Asian students are attracted to universities with diverse student bodies.

An inclusive culture where all can flourish and a representative staff profile providing a range of role models are therefore important in helping us to welcome, connect with and inspire our students, ‘ability should be able to access opportunity regardless of circumstance.’

7. Better morale

An inclusive organisation is one that embraces diversity and uses the talents of all its stakeholders, enabling a maximum number to reach their full potential. A well-managed, inclusive organisational culture brings out the various talents, passions and strengths of its staff and is linked to productivity. It gives staff a voice and encourages loyalty and satisfaction. People who feel valued and respected at work are happier and perform better. Although leading and managing an inclusive culture has its challenges and requires contextual understanding and appropriate skills, its potential rewards are manifold. At Newcastle University our staff surveys tell us that we generally treat people fairly, taking into account the protected characteristics of our workforce, and that 92% of our staff think that this is a good place to work. Our overall student satisfaction score is 91% which compares well with our competitors. It seems that our culture is heading in the right direction and we can do more to ensure that all our staff and students are as content and as productive as possible.

8. The benefits of difference

There has been much written and discussed on the benefits of a diverse workforce over the last 20 years, and recent research continues to explore a connection between diversity and organisational performance. McKinsey’s recent research for its Why Diversity Matters project reviewed data from 366 public companies across a range of industries in the United Kingdom, Canada, the United States, and Latin America and found that companies with more diverse workforces perform better financially. There is also a link between diversity and innovation: organisations with measurably diverse leadership outperform others. It has been observed that diverse leaders create inclusive environments that enable much richer and more influential contributions from people from minority groups that help to drive innovation.

However, the connection between diversity and performance is complex and there is more to learn. For example, a meta-analysis by Pletzer et al found no significant correlation between the number of women on a company board and financial performance. There are also problems in quantifying
benefits: The Royal Society commissioned report of 2014 produced by a team at Westminster Business School highlights potential internal and external benefits of increasing diversity but acknowledges that they are highly contextual and therefore difficult to measure\textsuperscript{xxxiii}. So as a society we are still exploring how best to exploit the benefits of diversity, but in academia the momentum is building. Our former Vice-Chancellor pointed out that ‘diversity has an inherent educational value – and sociodiversity is valuable to the intellectual environment in the same way as biodiversity is valuable to the natural environment’ \textsuperscript{xxxiv}. Certainly, logic dictates that a breadth of views, experiences, perspectives and backgrounds should provide a healthy backdrop for an academic environment.

9. Changing Demographics and Societies

The people of the world are changing rapidly. Here are some observations and predictions by PWC and McKinsey\textsuperscript{xxxv};

- World population is expanding rapidly and is predicted to increase by one billion people in the next ten years (50% of this growth will be in Africa)
- Shifting centres of economic power are going to increase the need for global mobility by 50% by 2020
- Women’s participation in the labour force and their economic influence and buying power will continue to increase

The UK is changing too\textsuperscript{xxxvi}. Approximately 30% of births in 2011 in the UK were to parents of non-European ancestry. By 2031, 15% of the UK population will be from a minority ethnic background, up from 12% in 2011. Gay and lesbian households increasingly represent a mainstream and sizable group\textsuperscript{xxxvi}. The underlying theme of these changes is that the world is becoming a more diverse place and this will be reflected in the way that societies develop. The effects are being felt here in the UK; we have a more diverse and mobile workforce from which we can draw staff and for which we must prepare students. Diverse leadership teams will be essential to respond to these developments.

Newcastle University must be aware of, and be able to deal with, potential tensions and conflict between individuals and groups with a specific protected characteristic which may be at odds with the fundamental principles and core values of different individuals and groups who have different protected characteristics. Clear guidelines and action plans are important to ensure Newcastle University complies with its public sector equality duty as required by Equality Act 2010 (see below).

10. The funding imperative

RCUK’s Statement of ‘Expectations for Equality and Diversity’\textsuperscript{xxxviii} sends out clear messages as to the level of engagement in E&D that is expected by those in receipt of Research Council grants. They should be able to evidence that they are training and engaging their staff in promoting and leading cultural change with respect to E&D. If significant improvements are not seen, RCUK says that it reserves the right to ‘introduce more formal accreditation requirements for grant funding’. To show its ongoing interest in this area on 5 May 2016 RCUK launched a new action plan\textsuperscript{xxxix} which aims to promote E&D and ‘challenge bias, work towards fair and inclusive funding processes and lead and
support change in our research community’. The National Institute for Health Research has gone further and now requires applicants intending to apply for Biomedical Research Centre (BRC) funding to have achieved at least a Silver Athena SWAN award to show engagement and progress in promoting gender equality. The Big Lottery Fund encourages applicants to incorporate equality issues into the planning of their projects from the outset and to report annually on the extent to which people with a range of protected characteristics have engaged with the project. In the USA, the National Science Foundation has unequivocal expectations of its grant recipients with respect to their compliance with equalities legislation and has made it clear that it will withdraw its grant funding from any college or university where complaints of discrimination or harassment are upheld. So, increasingly embedding E&D best practice helps universities to be in the best position to meet the expectations and requirements of funding bodies.

11. The legal imperative

The Equality Act 2010 and the attendant Public Sector Equality Duty of 2011 are not ambiguous about the responsibilities of public sector bodies. We are required, by law, to:

- eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation
- advance equality of opportunity between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not
- foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not

This means that we are required to be proactive in our equality and diversity work, rather than reactively waiting for problems to arise. We must develop and publish clear equality objectives and a plan setting out how we will achieve these objectives and we must show that we have actively consulted our stakeholders in the process of setting these objectives.

To ensure that we are compliant with the law, we need the engagement of staff and students and we need to ensure that they understand their responsibilities to each other. The potential costs to our finances and to our reputation of not complying with the law are almost limitless.

It is of paramount importance for all decision makers within Newcastle University, irrespective of whether the decisions being considered relate to the institution’s relationship with its staff or students or business partners or the wider community at a local, national or global level, to have the principles of equality, diversity and inclusion at the forefront of their minds when making any strategic or operational decisions.

Conclusion

There are many reasons why the E&D agenda is still relevant at Newcastle University. We are making progress, but our ambition to ‘to develop a fully inclusive University community which recruits and retains staff and students from all sectors of society’ is not yet realised. The dedication, ideas, and hard work of staff and students at Newcastle University have built a strong foundation for our aspirations to catalyse real change throughout the whole University and across the HE sector. To

---

1RCUK Action Plan for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion
deliver our ambitions E&D agenda, ensuring that all staff and students benefit from improvements in our policies and practice, we must continue to back up our discussions and strategies with real action and commitment.

Prof Judith Rankin, Dean of Diversity
Rachel Tobell, Freelance Diversity Consultant
Prof Candy Rowe, FMS Director of Diversity
References

1 Current attitudes towards disabled people (2015) Scope

2 The Teacher’s Report 2014: Homophobic bullying in Britain’s Schools

https://dspace.lib.cranfield.ac.uk/bitstream/1826/6962/1/Boardroom_Balance.pdf

4 WOMEN ON BOARDS DAVIES REVIEW FIVE YEAR SUMMARY OCTOBER 2015

http://www.som.cranfield.ac.uk/som/dinic-content/research/ftse/FemaleFTSEReportMarch2015.pdf

The Leadership Foundation for Higher Education


10 Winning hearts and minds: how CEOs talk about gender parity (2014) KPMG International

http://www.ref.ac.uk/media/ref/content/equal/EDAP%20final%20report.pdf

12 Stevenson, J., (2012) Black and minority ethnic student degree retention and attainment
https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/sites/default/files/bme_summit_final_report.pdf

13 Morley, L., (2013) op.cit

14 National Student Survey 2016
http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/year/2014/201413/

https://www.nesta.org.uk/sites/default/files/reinventing_the_civic_university.pdf

16 Newcastle University Vision 2021 – Excellence with a purpose (2012)
http://www.ncl.ac.uk/media/wwwnclacuk/abouttheuniversity/files/vision2021.pdf

17 Holding Down Women’s Pay, UCU report for International Women’s Day March 2016
The paper reiterated the prime minister’s previously announced goals on social mobility, which include: a doubling of the number of socially disadvantaged students entering higher education between 2009 and 2020 (from 13.6% to 27.2%); and increasing the number of black and minority ethnic (BME) young people attending university by 20% by 2020 (equivalent to 19,000 extra students).


As above

Promoting good relations on campus: a guide for higher and further education ECU (2013) op.cit.


University of Westminster for the Royal Society’s diversity programme (2014) Diversity in STEMM: establishing a business case


PWC Megatrends
http://www.pwc.co.uk/issues/megatrends.html

Demography in England, the Kings Fund,
http://www.kingsfund.org.uk/time-to-think-differently/trends/demography

MARKETING How to market to gay consumers (2013) Stonewall
http://www.stonewall.org.uk/sites/default/files/marketing.pdf

RCUK Expectations for Equality and Diversity
http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/documents/skills/equalitystatement-pdf/

RCUK Action Plan for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion May 2016
http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/documents/documents/actionplan2016-pdf/