Staff perceptions of belonging and inclusion at university

June 2022
Inclusion
In our original survey of students, we defined “inclusion” as: “the ways the constituent parts of a course (e.g. content, teaching style) create a space in which you (i.e. students) feel comfortable and confident to be yourself”

Overall 93% of respondents agreed with our definition of inclusion. Of those respondents, 51% only partly agreed.
Inclusion

Is your university, HE provider or college actively working on improving academic inclusion?

- Yes: 59%
- To some extent: 33%
- Not sure: 6%
- No: 2%
“I know that an approach which has been successful at my institution, in considering how we can support inclusive initiatives to widen participation, has been to be led by student governance, decision making and production and delivery of content” – Survey respondent
Inclusion

What do you think is most important to focus on when developing inclusive academic courses?

- Course content
- Course structure and pedagogy (1st priority)
- The approach and style of the academics teaching the course
- Managing & enabling the behaviours & interactions of the students towards each other
- Ensuring the broad accessibility of learning resources
- Signposting students who are struggling academically towards effective support

1st priority, 2nd priority, 3rd priority
“There is a real lack of understanding of who needs to be included - i.e. everyone! In a recent meeting of professional services staff on inclusion, there emerged a real misconception that inclusion was about disabilities and ethnic minorities only”
– Survey respondent
Academic confidence
Academic confidence

What in your view, makes the most significant difference to whether a student feels confident about their academic skills on arrival at university?

- The student's demographic background & personal socio-economic circumstances (eg first in family) - 25%
- The type of qualifications the student has achieved (eg A levels, BTECs) & the assessment process - 15%
- Whether the student has had encouragement & support (or lacked these) in prior educational experiences - 10%
- The quality of induction support that HE providers offer to support transition to HE - 10%
- Whether the student's family or personal network is supportive - 5%
- The student's personal self-efficacy eg ability to manage time or ask for help - 5%
- The student's prior development of cognitive & academic skills eg numeracy, writing - 5%
- Don't know - 5%
- No answer - 5%

1st priority - Green
2nd priority - Purple
3rd priority - Orange
“Interventions around academic confidence are often located within WP or Success departments, which reinforces a deficit model. Academic confidence should be nurtured and supported as standard, rather than re-actively when a student is considered to be struggling with course content.”

– Survey respondent
“On our larger intake courses there are many students slipping through the net, particularly in the first term, we are not realising they are falling behind until the first tranche of results”

- Survey respondent

“Students come from a system of school education where the goal is grades. My experience over the last 20 years is that for many at risk students, the acquisition of grades seems to be at the expense of academic confidence”

- Survey respondent

Academic confidence

What makes the most significant difference to a student’s ability to develop their academic confidence during their course of study? 1st priority

- The academic culture of the discipline that the student is studying
- The quality of student’s relationship with academics teaching on the course
- The quality of student’s relationship with personal academic tutor
- The quality of student’s relationship with peers studying on the course
- Whether student has access to/joins student-led academic society
- Whether student has access to/engages with additional academic support
- The degree of choice and autonomy the student is able to exercise in engaging with course content
- The pedagogies adopted on the course eg provision of formative feedback
- The academic culture of the university at which the student is studying (eg whether it is highly selective)
- Don’t know

Total
- Staff supporting students’ academic learning
- Students’ Union staff or student representative
- Academic engaged in teaching and learning
- Staff supporting students’ wider experience and development
- Other - please specify
Peer connections and networks
Peer connections and networks

If you think about the degree of importance that is afforded to students developing peer connections as part of their university learning experience, how would you characterise your general view of the issue?

- Forging new connections & building peer relationships is an essential part of the university learning experience for all students: 76%
- Lots of students gain added value from the opportunity to make friendships & peer connections while at university, but it’s not something that every student needs or values: 21%
- If students make new friends and connections while studying that’s an added bonus but it’s not material to the learning experience: 1%
- Other - please specify: 1%
Peer connections and networks

“The course is the one central place we know all students will interact and the one place we can definitely influence in a way which is a core part of the learning experience as instead of a bolt-on” - Survey respondent

What degree of responsibility do you believe your institution has for enabling students to build peer connections?

Score out of 10, with 1 being “Student peer relationships should be allowed to happen totally organically” and 10 being “Student peer relationships are something that the institution should actively try to make happen”
Peer connections and networks

“...for students with caring responsibilities, living at a distance, etc, extra curricular activities can be completely inaccessible” – Survey respondent

“...we need to create the environments in which relationships can be built, but we can’t make the friendships and connections happen” – Survey respondent

Assuming that for the generality of students making friends is a positive thing, whether or not it’s seen as essential to the learning experience, who should have lead responsibility for facilitating peer connections and friendships among students?

“...It would muddy the waters (let alone break teaching staff) to also have the responsibility to facilitate the building of social connections” – Survey respondent