Diversity matters

Equal opportunities for higher education careers
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Editor: Sarah Coates
Production Editor: Sam Noble
Picture editor: Marissa Keating
Cover photography: Jill Jennings
Contact: shaoleen schöle@theguardian.com

Diversity: get involved
Guardian Jobs is researching diversity in the workplace and gathering positive stories from across the UK. Email diversity.project@theguardian.com and tell us your story.

University challenge
Do universities’ workforces reflect the diversity of their students – and are the top jobs open to everyone? Lucy Jolin finds out

Higher education is a hugely successful sector, contributing about £33bn to the UK’s GDP annually. But as universities are now massive global businesses, how do they ensure they have a diverse workforce to reflect the people they serve?

“Universities are incubators for ideas and knowledge. And it’s right that people from all walks of life should have the opportunity to participate in them,” says David Ruebain, chief executive of the Equality Challenge Unit (ECU). “There is also anecdotal evidence that ideas-based sectors thrive with diverse input. Homogeneity is the enemy of excellence.”

Forward-thinking universities are thinking about diversity in a data-driven way that is worlds apart from the box-ticking of old. “I’ve heard from a surprising 75% of our workforce are from black and minority ethnic backgrounds – we’ve nailed diversity,” says Stuart McKenna, equality and diversity manager at Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU), which recently won Excellence in Diversity’s Diverse Company Award for Education. “But everything we do is information-driven. Yes, you might find that 15% of employees are from black and minority ethnic backgrounds – but what if the majority are working as domestic assistants, or in other entry-level roles?”

Just 29% of vice-chancellors are female, for example, whereas women occupy 77.7% of administrative and secretarial occupations in UK higher education. Ruebain believes that the problem is not one of structure but of organisational segmentation, which exists in all sectors.

“Some occupations within higher education, such as professional and support services, are much more likely to have women than other occupations, such as senior academic positions. But you also find that in schools, where more women than men are teachers but the leadership tends to be disproportionately populated by men. I think it’s more about structural disadvantages – whether that’s around the access to the top jobs that are available.”

In numbers, 2014/15
The number of black academic staff working in UK higher education - compared with 156,440 white academics

4.1% of non-academic staff were disabled.

13.9% of non-academic staff were female.

The number of non-UK staff from EU countries working in academic and non-academic roles; this compares with 319,200 non-EU nationals.

Source: Higher Education Statistics Agency

Deputy Vice-Chancellor

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The closing date for applications is Thursday 1st December 2016. A shortlist of successful candidates will be invited to participate in the interview processes, which will take place on Wednesday 14th December 2016.

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“We’ve committed to advancing the careers of all staff and have established a culture in which there is equality of opportunity, fairness and respect for all,” says John Campbell, HR manager for equality and diversity at the University of Sheffield. “Our mission is to attract, grow and engage staff from all backgrounds and all parts of society to create a truly remarkable place to work. Our mission is to attract, grow and engage staff from all backgrounds and all parts of society to create a truly remarkable place to work. “That would be a disaster. We want diversity in particular we want diversity of thinking.”

Kathryn Mitchell, a chartered psychologist and former deputy vice-chancellor of the University of West London EYWA, believes that ensuring diversity starts at recruitment level, and must extend throughout staff development in order to be effective.

“As a working mother, she has seen first hand how restrictive working practices can hinder diversity. When I arrived at the University of Derby, senior lecturers had to take a management position to progress,” she says. “This structure would have smothered me.

“Now, we have a framework where people can map themselves against certain criteria in order to achieve that level of recognition and promotion. You must have that clarity in an organisation. Everybody who is leading across the university should be able to articulate very clearly how they are developing their staff in an inclusive way.”

Working at Hopwood Hall College
Hopwood Hall College employs approximately 450 staff in both teaching and learning and support services, who are determined to do the very best for our learners by continuing to provide an excellent educational experience, which transforms their lives and prospects.

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www.hopwood.hull.ac.uk/about/jobs

Access all ideas
In higher education in particular we want diversity of thinking

I don’t want everybody who works here to be like me,” says Professor Kathryn Mitchell, who took up the role of Deputy Vice-Chancellor of the University of Derby in September 2015.

“We want diversity as a workforce, as they are our strategic enablers. They allow us to work with a group of people who come here to be educated with very different backgrounds, outlooks and skills. And in higher education in particular we want diversity of thinking.”

Mitchell, a chartered psychologist and former deputy vice-chancellor of the University of Sheffield, the Women Academic Returners Programme provides additional support to female academics and research staff, helping to minimise the impact of extended leave on their research activities and help develop their careers. Women may request up to £10,000 funding to supplement an additional post, or up to £5,000 for research-related activity, such as conference attendance. The Parent to Parent: Funding scheme supports both staff and postgraduate students preparing for, taking, or returning from parental leave by providing an informal ‘buddy’ – staff or postgraduates with personal experience of taking and returning from parental leave.

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Deputy Vice-Chancellor
Disability

Changing infrastructures and attitudes

From training staff to ‘make disability discussable’ to tweaking doors so they open easier, UK unis are taking great strides forward, says Harriet Swain

Small changes can make a big difference to the lives of disabled staff, according to Margaret Stone, principal lecturer at the Leicester School of Pharmacy at De Montfort University. She co-chairs De Montfort’s group for disabled staff, which the university consults when planning new buildings or travel policies.

“Often someone introduces a new idea which is wonderful but they just haven’t thought about one little thing. It’s really rewarding to be able to mend that for other staff,” says Stone, who has repetitive strain injury. For example, the group has been able to suggest putting push pads on heavy doors that disabled staff struggle to open. “The university does actually take account of what we say,” she says. “It isn’t just lip service.”

Under the Equality Act 2010, universities, like other employers, have to make reasonable adjustments as soon as staff disclose a disability, to ensure that they do not face barriers when carrying out their jobs.

Margaret Ayers, director of human resources at Queen Mary University of London and secretary of the representative body Universities Human Resources, says huge strides have been made in promoting gender equality, thanks to the Athena Swan initiative, which recognises work by institutions to address barriers for women. This, in turn, has made universities more attuned to other forms of inequality. Many have been putting effort into supporting disabled students in recent years, she says, and realise that disabled staff need it too.

“There is probably more we need to do to get line managers to realise what their responsibilities are,” she says. “Some don’t always understand what they can do with reasonable adjustments or what support might be available to help people with a disability get back into the workplace. If you are not experienced it can be quite overwhelming.”

As people go on working into old age, so the need for support is likely to increase, she suggests. Universities are also waking up to the needs of staff with mental health issues. Queen Mary is one of a number of universities to consider introducing mental health first-aiders – people trained to act as a point of contact for staff who are having difficulties and want to speak to someone confidentially.

Many UK universities are members of the Two Ticks scheme (recently replaced by the Disability Confident scheme), awarded by the Department for Work and Pensions’ Jobscentre Plus, to help job applicants identify organisations committed to helping disabled workers. Some have also signed up to DisabledGo, which provides information about accessibility in public places. This can be a particular problem for institutions based in buildings more than 100 years old.

Particularly important, says Valerie Russell Emmott, equality and diversity manager at UWE Bristol, is “making disability discussable” because people are often worried about declaring a disability or asking for support.

Her university offers training in awareness of different disabilities, runs a disability awareness month and records separately absences related to disability. It also offers specialist help with applying for government Access to Work grants. “It is about getting the best from everybody we have,” she says.

Mona Patel, equality and diversity specialist at Manchester Metropolitan University and co-founder of the National Association of Disabled Staff Networks, says addressing disability is no longer considered niche. “It’s not just about compliance,” she says. “It makes good business sense.”

In numbers

18,000

The approximate number of disabled staff working in academic and non-academic roles in UK higher education

3.9%

The percentage of disabled staff working in academic roles; just 2.2% of those are at professorial level or above

18%

The percentage of disabled staff with a specific learning disability; this compares with nearly one in four who have a long-standing illness or health condition

Source: Higher Education Statistics Agency

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Librarian Fay Harrison initially struggled to get a job, but she’s since become team manager

When Fay Harrison first applied for jobs after qualifying as a professional librarian she found it impossible to get an interview. When she stopped mentioning her brittle bone condition in the application she would get interviews but no job offer. Then she applied to Nottingham Trent University - then Trent Polytechnic. “The people who interviewed me were fabulous,” she says. “They focused on me and my skills and not my disability.”

She still works there 37 years later and has been promoted incrementally to systems team manager. “While I am a librarian by profession, I have morphed into IT,” she says. “It suits me very well. It is desk based but gives me contact with a lot of people. It has been the perfect fit.”

Over the years her disabilities have worsened - she now needs to use a mobility scooter - but her changing needs have been accommodated. “The university has been very good at supporting me,” she says.

This meant allowing her to work full-time hours but four days a week, giving her Wednesdays off to “recharge her body batteries” and she can also work from home if she is feeling tired, so long as she does not have meetings to attend. She has a dedicated parking space for her car and level access to the building where she works. She also has a special chair and desk and is given enough space around the desk for her to park her scooter and manoeuvre herself into place. Over the years, she and her team have had to move buildings and - and each time university occupational health and health and safety officers have worked with her and her bosses to work out whether the new space is likely to raise any problems.

Also important, she says, has been the work by the equality, diversity and inclusion team at the university in bringing together and supporting a network of disabled staff. The network acts as a point of contact for staff who are disabled or asking for support.

“Not just about being at NTU but about life in general,” she says. She has invested hard work in her job, her role in the department and in the team she works in, and has done so willingly because she has felt supported. “Had I been working with another employer I wouldn’t have progressed in the way I have.”

Independent goals: UK universities are modernising to be more disability-friendly

Getty

This job is the perfect fit’

Embracing change: NTU were happy to accommodate Harrison’s need for a scooter

The Guardian | Tuesday 22 November 2016

The people interviewing me focused on me and my skills

Real lives

‘This job is the perfect fit’

Changing infrastructures and attitudes

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Open universities

Self-expression is the name of the game at university – but LGBT initiatives haven’t always cut the mustard, says Harriet Swain.

Liberal attitudes towards sexual orientation have long been a source of pride for universities. But in the first guide to gay-friendly universities, published in 2010 by Stonewall, the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender rights charity, not one of the 15 UK institutions scored ten out of ten. Four years later, the Gay by Degree 2015 guide listed six with top marks; these institutions could demonstrate that they had LGBT societies and events, non-harassment policies that specifically mentioned sexual orientation, and consulted LGBT students in decision-making.

Lorna Fox O’Maloney, executive dean and senior team LGBT diversity champion at the University of Essex, says her university has put a concerted effort into improving its support for LGBT staff and students over the past five years. “What’s interesting for us is that having heightened awareness and putting a lot of attention and effort into what we are doing as a community has drawn staff and students together,” she says. It has also created an environment in which everyone feels they can be “their whole selves”, she says.

The proportion of staff disclosing their sexual orientation has increased and LGBT issues are now considered in, for example, conversations about how to develop the curriculum. Membership of the Essex LGBT Alliance, which includes 26 organisations across the county, has also helped to deepen the university’s links with its wider community.

Federico Maia, a senior human resources manager and LGBT mentor at the University of Greenwich, says his university is also working hard to develop networks and activities that support LGBT staff and students.

The university set up its LGBT role models programme in January 2014 in the belief that people perform better when they are able to be themselves. Its LGBT staff network also includes “straight allies”, who recognise that it is not just up to gay people to create an inclusive workplace culture and who are prepared to speak out about their commitment to equality.

Through his role in human resources, Maia says he has tried to ensure that the group is not just organising activities but also making changes and coming up with initiatives. The university already offers extensive equality and diversity training for all staff and this will now be an essential part of appraisals. It is also developing a policy for supporting staff and students who are transitioning. The next phase, says Maia, is to celebrate the progress that has been made and the value of diversity.

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