



InclusiPHE

Inclusive Engagement of Non-Traditional
Students in Professional Higher Education

Stronger Together

**Towards inclusive student engagement of
non-traditional students in Professional
Higher Education**

Strategies and guidelines for Inclusive Students' engagement
in PHE institutions

and Students' Organisations

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1 Abbreviations

NTS	Non-traditional student
HEI	Higher Education Institution
PHE	Professional Higher Education
PHEI	Professional Higher Education Institution
SU	Student Union

2 Summary

This report presents a framework for self-assessment, benchmarking and action planning of inclusive engagement of non-traditional students, on both at the level of the Professional Higher Education (PHE) institution and the level of students' organisations. The self-assessment frameworks will take the form of sets of indicators for inclusive engagement and participatory governance, to be used to conduct a baseline survey, a mechanism to monitor progress at PHEIs and students' organisations, and develop benchmarking exercises. In addition, this Guideline will serve to map ways for turning the self-assessment into concrete action plans, advancing a commitment to inclusive engagement both at campus/PHEI and within student-led organisations. This will result in PHEI's and students-led organizations' better understanding of the impact of more inclusive students' engagement in the governance, internal quality assurance and curriculum development of PHEIs and in the advancement of equality and inclusion.

This guideline, together with the self-assessment tool, aims to serve as a tool for mapping of needs of non-traditional students, whereas the action plan at the end of the guide serves as a guideline for inspiration on how to implement initiative to support better participation and inclusion of non-traditional students.

Filling in the self-assessment tool takes approximately 30-45 minutes to complete, while the action plan is designed to be done in groups or individually. Depending on the length of the discussion and the comparison of results, it can take at least 45 minutes to complete.

3 Introduction

The InclusiPHE consortium has developed a framework for self-assessment of inclusive engagement of non-traditional students to conduct baseline surveys of PHEIs and student led-organizations, develop benchmarking exercises and monitor their progress. Experts from within the consortium have drawn up the criteria on the basis of best-practice in literature, their own experience and the supplementary evidence provided by other research conducted during this project.

Based on this framework, a PHEI Inclusive-Engagement score-card tool and a Student Union (SU) score-card tool have been designed and developed. The SUs score-card assesses to what extent SUs are following inclusive strategies and practices for students' engagement and if so, allows the SUs to evaluate in which way and to what extent these strategies are implemented. The SU score-card tool has been developed with a set of indicators for inclusive engagement which can be used to conduct a baseline survey, a mechanism to monitor progress at students' organisations, and to develop benchmarking exercises. In a similar manner, the PHEI score-card assesses to what extent PHEIs are following inclusive strategies and practices for students' engagement and how these are aligned with their overall institutional strategies. Assessment based on this score-card will also allow PHEIs and HEIs to monitor their progress and compare themselves with other institutions.

The benchmarking data generated with both tools will enable PHEIs and student-led organizations to assess whether they have policies in place for students with particular characteristics, who may be disproportionately represented or underrepresented in key areas of the higher education life cycle. The main focus of benchmarking will be in using the data to drive the institution's aspirations and challenge PHEIs and student organizations to make significant improvements.

Furthermore, the Consortium has produced Guidelines that will map ways for turning the self-assessment into concrete action plans, advancing a commitment to inclusive engagement both at campus/PHEI and within student-led organization. Both PHEIs and student organizations will use the Guidelines for development of inclusive engagement action plans at student-led organisations, to assist them in creating new policies, as well as to measure progress and celebrate successes. The Guidelines will use the following questions to formulate the inclusive engagement practices:

1. What gaps do we need to address?
2. What challenges do we face?
3. What does change look like?
4. What are the goals and measurable outcomes?
5. How will we know if we are successful? What benchmarks will we use, and how will we document our progress and success?
6. What actions will we need to implement to reach our goals and vision?

7. How will we operate and learn as an organization?

4 Description of the score-card tool

4.1 Objective

The purpose of this tool is to provide an instrument to analyze documented information on the institutional strategy for inclusive participation of non-traditional students in PHEIs and to provide educational institutions with a tool to validate and improve the quality of the institutional response in order to strengthen collaboration between stakeholders: students, non-traditional students and educational institutions.

4.2 Tool design process

The instrument presented in this report is the result of a co-creation process involving 10 participants from 10 countries. The tool prototype and method were developed by 7 experts from the consortium, based on a literature review of internationally validated instruments.

Based on the literature review of internationally-validated tools and surveys of student engagement, a set of variables that have been shown to have an impact on student-engagement were identified.

TOOL	AUTHOR	YEAR	MEASURED VARIABLES
National survey of student engagement	NSSE	2013	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Learning with Peers. 2. Campus Environment.
Evaluation of inclusion in higher education through indicators	Márquez, C., Sandoval, M., Sánchez, S., Simón, C., Moriña, A., Morgado, B., Moreno-Medina, I., García, J. A., Díaz-Gandasegui, V. & Elizalde San Miguel, B.	2021	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Institutional culture. 2. Well-being and engagement. 3. Well-being and participation.
National student engagement programme (2020)	Quality & qualifications Ireland, the higher education authority and the union of students in Ireland.	2020	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Governance and management. 2. Teaching and learning. 3. Student representation and organization.

Accessibility and Inclusion Guide	University of Manchester Students' Union	2021	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Public image 2. Professional development 3. Participation 4. Policies and procedures 5. Programme planning and delivery
European working condition survey (in the field about employee involvement)	Eurofound	2013	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Task discretion & organizational participation. 2. Task characteristics. 3. Flexibility (task, rotation, contract duration, working time status). 4. Human resources capacity (supervisory style, career chances, team work,...). 5. Representative voice (consultation procedure, employee representation). 6. Employment regulation (bargaining, trade unions, union density).
European participation index (in the field of employee participation)	ETUI & ETUC	2010	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Board level participation. 2. Establishment level participation. 3. Collective bargaining participation.
European company survey (in the field of employee participation)	Eurofound	2021	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Participation in organizations (Suggestions, possibilities to change, influence in management decisions in several aspects).

The initial design of the tool integrated some of the variables from the different validated instruments as categories, dimensions or sub-dimensions for the analysis. In this phase, as many items associated with the analyzed variables as possible were selected, trying to collect as many precisions as possible. These items were associated to dimensions and sub-dimensions of the initial tool design and an initial consultation with experts in the field of assessment measurement was carried out. Each category is complemented with a best practice example to illustrate it.

In order to obtain further information on the initial framework developed, experts from student-led organisations, university leaders and program leaders were consulted. The inputs received from this consultation were integrated in the tool and validated later by the project consortium members. The consultants were particularly requested to contextualise the items to non-traditional students, since most of the surveys and instruments considered student engagement in general.

4.3 Description of the tool

The tool consists of 3 categories, each of them divided into several dimensions. Each dimension has a series of indicators that attempt to respond to the objective of each of the dimensions.

The SU tool aims in particular to student union leaders, members of student unions as well as student union staff and other students.

The categories, dimensions and items included in the tool are as follows:

CATEGORY 1: GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

Rationale: Recognition of pre-existing structures and decision-making processes are important for ensuring that students can fully participate and influence processes of policy development, implementation, and evaluation that is student-centered. It is from the governance domain that student engagement can be embedded throughout all institutional decision-making, projects, and policy developments.

DIMENSION 1.1. ORGANISATIONAL MEMORY

Description: The set of beliefs, values, general structures and meanings that the institution (in this case student unions) uses to deal with day-to-day life, taking into account the relatively-often changes that occur within the student body due to elections and how it affects the overall institutional culture of an individual student union.

Item
What is the percentage of rules, regulations and plans consistent with the principles of equity and inclusion that exist in your student union?
Are there activities and initiatives as part of inclusion support services?

DIMENSION 1.2. FUNCTIONING OF THE GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

Description: This dimension refers to how student-organised structures such as student unions, associations and student bodies within the PHEI are integrating non-traditional students and liaising with them, how student experience and success is discussed in governance bodies, how national and regional policies regarding non-traditional are debated, how strengths and weaknesses are identified and how a culture for democratic participation of non-traditional students is recognised in student-organised structures mentioned above.

Items
There is a clear link for reporting and action between all levels of governance, from informal liaison groups right up to the student governing body, so that student union staff and/or representatives can see that when issues are raised, they can impact change, while results are transparent and tangible.

The wider student experience and the success of all students (including non-traditional ones) is discussed across student bodies and/or structures as a priority area for collaboration, with roles and responsibilities recognised in achieving shared goals.
The union discusses partnership between student staff/representatives and other students.
The union discusses having sufficient students that are non-traditional members, and regularly discuss issues of importance to non-traditional students.
Members of the student body and/or student staff and non-traditional student representatives at each level of governance can readily identify areas of strength or weakness in non-traditional student partnership.
Members of the student body and student staff as well as students feel supported and recognised for their work to create partnership.
Non-traditional student representatives recognise that a culture of democratic participation across the student structure exists, and that this is being put into practice through agreed actions and areas of co-responsibility.
National priorities and policies are explored, debated, and communicated across relevant governance structures, while subsequent actions are carried out together by the institution and students' union. These priorities and policies take into account non-traditional students.

EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICES IN THE CATEGORY OF GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT	
Organization	Tribez Students' Association (De Haagse Hogeschool, The Netherlands)
Description	Institutionalizing safe spaces or student spaces targeting specific groups of non-traditional students.
Link	https://www.ucll.be/nieuws/2021/05/16/leuven-heeft-nu-ook-een-lgbtqia-studentenvereniging-0

CATEGORY 2: WELL-BEING AND PARTICIPATION

Rationale: When referring to well-being and participation we refer to two main points. Firstly, feeling part of a community and/or feeling well due to a positively settled social and academic life . It also symbolizes being part of a peer group , where students are valued and recognized. Secondly, it involves taking part in the formal and informal bodies and structures of educational participation.

DIMENSION 2.1. CAMPUS ENVIRONMENT

Description: SU environments characterized by positive interpersonal relations promote student learning and success. Students who enjoy supportive relationships with peers, advisors and staff are better able to find assistance when needed, and to learn from and with those around them. SUs should provide efficient student support services that the students can benefit from and which are developed and broadened according to the needs of students.

Items

The student union encourages contact among students from different backgrounds (social, racial/ethnic, religious, etc.) and can give examples of their former initiatives and/or activities through links, reports, articles, etc.

The student union provides opportunities to be involved socially and adapts its content of activities to different groups - eg. religious activities, cultural nights, women's sessions, LGBTQA+ sessions, etc.

DIMENSION 2.2. STUDENT REPRESENTATION AND ORGANIZATION

Description: Student-to-student engagement is an important element of an inclusive and collaborative system of partnership. The ability of all students to participate in democratic processes and elect their own representatives, coupled with the ability of students to self-organise, debate and discuss, to develop student-led opportunities, and to support one another throughout their learning journey, is central to enabling them to become part of the change they want to see in their own student life.

Items
Student staff and/or representatives together with other students discuss and develop policy and rules recommendations that they later on present on a PHEI/local/regional/national level.
Seeing the student body and/or representatives, I feel my needs and interests are represented and taken into account.
Students can face legislative barriers for inclusion. Eg. students on mobility cannot run for the student body, etc.
As part of the student union, there is existence of formal participation bodies for non-traditional groups in form of specific campaigning groups and/or officers within the SU for different non-traditional students/ specific representative bodies for non-traditional students / quotas for non-traditional students within the student body.
Existence of measures to adapt physical and sports/ cultural and creative/ teaching and learning and other activities to the needs of all students.
Existence of measures to adapt religious spaces to the profile of university students, in case it is in line with the country's legislation in regards to religion.
Effective and diverse representation for non-traditional students exists across all levels of governance, and these representatives are valued and integrated by staff into decision-making processes.
Equal access to training is provided, by both the students' union and PHE/SU staff, to non-traditional student representatives in order to support them in carrying out varied and meaningful work across all areas of the student union, depending on their role, responsibilities and interests.
The wider non-traditional student community identifies that their representatives are able to fully reflect their views and opinions, and that their representatives are both supported and respected by the student union.
There are mechanisms and/or opportunities in place for every student representative to take a solutions-based approach and bring fresh ideas without fear of being excluded or dismissed.
Do non-traditional student representatives have the same rights to information and participation in formal meetings? Are they able to take up an active role in forming agendas and can they influence outcomes, while the student union staff and/or representatives are proactive in ensuring equity between all students?

Student union leadership regularly meet and discuss the topic of inclusion of non-traditional students on the agenda, where actions are identified and communicated, while disagreements are discussed through meaningful dialogue.

Does your student union have students from a range of backgrounds involved in the decision-making processes?

Does your student union provide a range of informal ways for students to provide feedback on SU's work (forums, surveys, reviews, evaluations etc.) and is it available in at least two languages and/or in audio transcripts?

EXAMPLE OF GOOD PRACTICE IN THE CATEGORY OF WELL-BEING AND PARTICIPATION

Organization	National Union of Students United Kingdom (NUS UK)
Description	This section looks at one of the key functions of students' unions: democracy and representation. It responds to some of the questions posed in the Inclusive Students' Unions survey (ECU, 2007), and considers some of the issues around diversity, and considers some of the issues around diversity and democratic participation. It also provides examples of best practice in relation to election processes, representation, and ideas for increasing awareness of the roles of students' unions and officers.
Links	http://www.ecu.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/external/inclusive-students-unions.pdf , p.18-25

CATEGORY 3: ACCESSIBILITY AND INCLUSION

Rationale: Accessibility is a necessity for building more inclusive and democratised unions. The possibility of accessing and fostering inclusivity of non-traditional students should be deemed necessary within each student union.

DIMENSION 3.1. PUBLIC IMAGE

Description: Opportunity for your work as a student union is visible to various groups and accessible to all students to become a part of.

Items
The SU's advertising, promotional materials, publications and photos represent the diverse student body.
Simple and easy to read local language is used to describe your programmes and activities, while a version is also provided in a second language depending on the location of the student union.
The student union provides an opportunity for members to provide specific access needs for differently-abled persons in advance of an event as well as doing the event in a hybrid mode.
The SU's various materials such as guides, agendas, events schedules are available in the different relevant languages.

The facilities where you meet are accessible according to your specific needs (i.e. wheelchair elevators, braille documents, audio transcripts etc.)

Your student union is advertised on social media and/or by putting notices in local shops, libraries, community spaces, etc.

The student union displays information and awareness raising material (LGBTQA+ information, pride week, anti-racist posters, BME (Black and Minority Ethnic) history month, etc.)

DIMENSION 3.2: PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Description: The student union applies necessary training on student staff (if existing) and to student body members on the importance of inclusion, equality and diversity.

Items

The student union applies equality and diversity in all the work that you do (e.g. members and volunteers are from diverse backgrounds, and are committed to equality).

Are the members of your student union encouraged to attend training on equality & inclusion issues & working with specific groups of people? (LGBTQA+, minority ethnic, persons with different abilities, etc.)

DIMENSION 3.3: POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Description: The student union applies its own necessary policies and procedures to foster inclusion of different groups of students and/or follows good practices of policies and procedures of its PHEI.

Items

Does your student union put what is written about equality and inclusion into practice? (e.g. use inclusive language; you address bullying/harassment, name calling, racism, sexism, etc.)

DIMENSION 3.4 PROGRAMME PLANNING AND DELIVERY

Description: The student union includes its own programmes /activities/initiatives/campaigns that emphasise the importance of diversity and equality.

Items

Does your student union have up-to-date information about the diversity characteristics of the student body?

Does your student union encourage the use of gender pronouns at meetings and events, and therefore has a general overview of the gender breakdown within the union?

Does your union try to identify underrepresented individuals through different ways? (eg. anonymous feedback, surveys) If so, how are these individuals identified?

Does your union address diverse interests and needs of different groups and members when planning programmes? (Cultural, religious, mobility, literacy, familial, different abilities, educational, etc.) If so, which interests and needs are considered?

Does your student union run programmes or activities on diversity and equality that challenge prejudice and promote inclusion of students with different abilities by offering flexible options?

Does your student union run programmes or activities on diversity and equality that challenge prejudice and promote inclusion of students with mental health issues?

Does your student union run programmes or activities on diversity and equality that challenge prejudice and promote inclusion of students who are members of the LGBTQA+ Community?

Does your student union run programmes or activities on diversity and equality that challenge prejudice and promote inclusion of students from a minority ethnic background?

EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICES IN THE CATEGORY ACCESSIBILITY AND INCLUSION	
Organization	National Student Union UK
Description	The main role is to facilitate and sustain the Liberation Student Campaigners Network for the 5 liberation groups (women, LGBTQ+, black, trans and disabled students) where students and SUs can share with, learn from, and support each other in their work.
Link	https://www.nusconnect.org.uk/liberation/liberation-networks

5 From planning to implementation

Due to the nature of engagement in student unions and in general student-led organisations, this tool is designed to offer flexibility in terms of its implementation. In other words, the tool can be filled in a group, individually or filled in individually as a self-diagnosis and later discussed in a group, that is to be determined by the individual student or student group themselves.

To identify and implement potential positive changes in regards to inclusion of NTS, follow the categories/steps included in the table below, which help student organisations and individuals to put their action plan into a more concrete framework.

The results of the action plan filled in below can help your students' union find inspiration in terms of initiatives to be done for better student participation and inclusion of non-traditional students, while the overall comparison of the results of the self-assessment tool can help your students' union better understand and map the needs of non-traditional students.

Both the self-assessment tool and the action plan are created to be used multiple times, depending on the needs of your students' union.

CHOOSE THE CATEGORY

Choose a category to focus on

- **Governance and Management**
- **Well-being and Participation**
- **Accessibility and Inclusion**

ANALYSIS

Take the results of the student union members, other students and if possible, student staff, and compare them and underline the headlines.

TARGET

Set the target considering SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, timely) objectives

SUPPORT

Who is to be involved?

- Students' staff
- Members of student unions
- Students in general (fill in only category "Accessibility and Inclusion")
- Students association
- Non-traditional students (fill in only category 'Accessibility and Inclusion')
- Non-traditional students' associations

ACTIONS

List the actions to be taken to achieve the objectives

-
-
-
-
-
-

Prioritise them and choose the top four/five.

	Action 1	Action 2	Action 3	Action 4	Action 5
WHAT					
WHERE					
BY WHEN					
HOW					
WHO					
LIST OF RESOURCES					
INDICATORS OF SUCCESS					
What will prevent you from carrying out the improvement? What difficulties?					

Table 2 ...to implementation

6 Bibliography

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