



Inclusion Officers – Good Practice Examples

How to develop awareness, sensitivity and competence to deal with differences for the “majority” and a sense of belonging and inclusion for the “minority” in the university setting

Thematic Monitoring Meeting - Inclusion in Higher Education

8 December 2021



**UNIVERSITY OF
LIMERICK**
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

Overview

- I. Identifying who needs “including” and whose responsibility it is to include?
 - minority-majority; students-staff
- II. Where does inclusion happen in universities?
 - structures, policies and offices
- III. The Psychological and Culture-Change perspective
- IV. What works well?
- V. Take home message



As I am....

- Romanian
- Lived in The Netherlands and Ireland for 20+ years
- Was an Erasmus student
- Political and social psychology
- Worked in Internationalization for the last 15 years: In UL- Erasmus coordinator and Assistant Dean International

We don't see things
as they are,
we see them
as we are.

- Anaïs Nin

I. Who includes and who is included? The Minority-Majority Perspectives:

Status quo:
**“Universities are
for the people
who made them”**

- Who and why was the institution set up?
- Who are the “**typical students**” and who are the “**typical staff**”?
- Who are the **mainstream/majority students and staff**?
- Who are the **minorities - the under-represented groups** in the university?

“Typically”, universities are for the middle/upper class, majority ethnic/cultural/national group, able-bodied, with typical cognitive development/abilities, heterosexual, healthy people. **Inclusion is about making those who do not fit in these categories feel like they belong to the university.**

Diversity here refers to individual or group-social differences among persons such as **gender and gender identity, age, sexual orientation and identity, ethnic origin, cultural, political or religious affiliation, physical or mental condition and health, socio-economic and prior educational background.** All those can play a role with regard to access and success in obtaining a higher education degree or pursuing an academic or administrative career in a university.

- <https://eua.eu/downloads/publications/universities-39-strategies-and-approaches-towards-diversity-equity-and-inclusion.pdf>

I. Who includes and who is included? The Students-Staff Perspectives

Problem:

“One cannot be inclusive of something and someone they do not understand!”

Do you have a **“diversity and inclusion”** strategy?

Do you have a **“widening participation”** strategy?

Are there **Human Resources policies and trainings** for **diversity management and equal opportunities**?

Are there **spaces where students and staff learn** from each other in informal ways?

Are there **trainings or workshops open to the university community** to learn about **“differences”** and how to work with and beyond **“difference”**?



EUA 2018 <https://eua.eu/downloads/publications/universities-39-strategies-and-approaches-towards-diversity-equity-and-inclusion.pdf>

II. Inclusion of whom? Where does “inclusion” happen?

Usually we focus on including:

- International students
- Students with a particular background or disability
- Staff that has been underrepresented (women!)

But how is the diversity and inclusion agenda framed for us?

- **University strategies and structures:**

- International Offices,
- Access Offices,
- Disability Offices,
- “University of Sanctuary” committees

- **Specially dedicated units**

- Gender Equality Committees (Athena SWAN)
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Office
- Campus Forum on Diversity
- A sub-division of Human Resources Division

What we miss:

- ❖ Focusing on the **mainstream campus community**
- ❖ Setting values that will direct a **culture change towards inclusion**
- ❖ Showcasing **success from the minority perspective**



II. Inclusion of whom? Where does “inclusion” happen? *From “exposure to diversity” to “feeling included”*

- The role of “inclusion officers” is
 - to raise **awareness** to aspects of identity that prevent inclusion
 - To create **sensitivity** to another persons’ point of view, life experience and quality of life
 - To create the **competencies** to “be comfortable with difference”

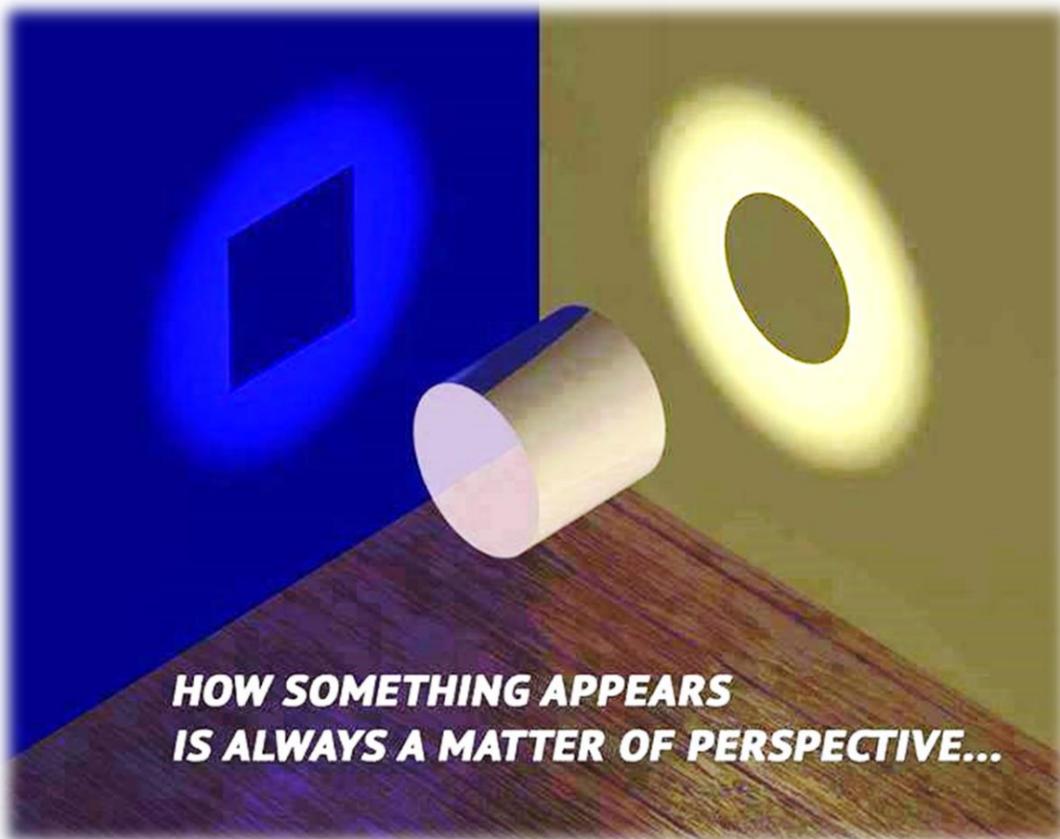


• Dilemma:

- Inclusion should be **everybody’s business** as a personal and professional responsibility
- Before this becomes a reality, inclusion is the **sole business of certain offices** in the university dealing with certain categories of students or staff issues.

III. The Psychological and Culture-Change Perspective

- **Why inclusion is an important value and valuable practice?**
 - Promoting the **benefits of diversity** for productivity, representation, sustainability, learning, innovation.
- **How do we create awareness and sensitivity to difference?**
 - Exposure is not enough, **familiarization takes time and effort**, contact with the Other works best in certain conditions of dialogue.
 - **Danger in exposing and exploiting the Other** (token international student, token disability or access student).
- **How do we train and embed meaningful competencies to act inclusively?**
 - **Perspective taking**, take time to make decisions, listen and be listened to, make it “your personal responsibility”.



III. The Psychological and Culture-Change Perspective

***Group identities* are fundamental to wellbeing.
Who you are and how others see you
matter a lot!**

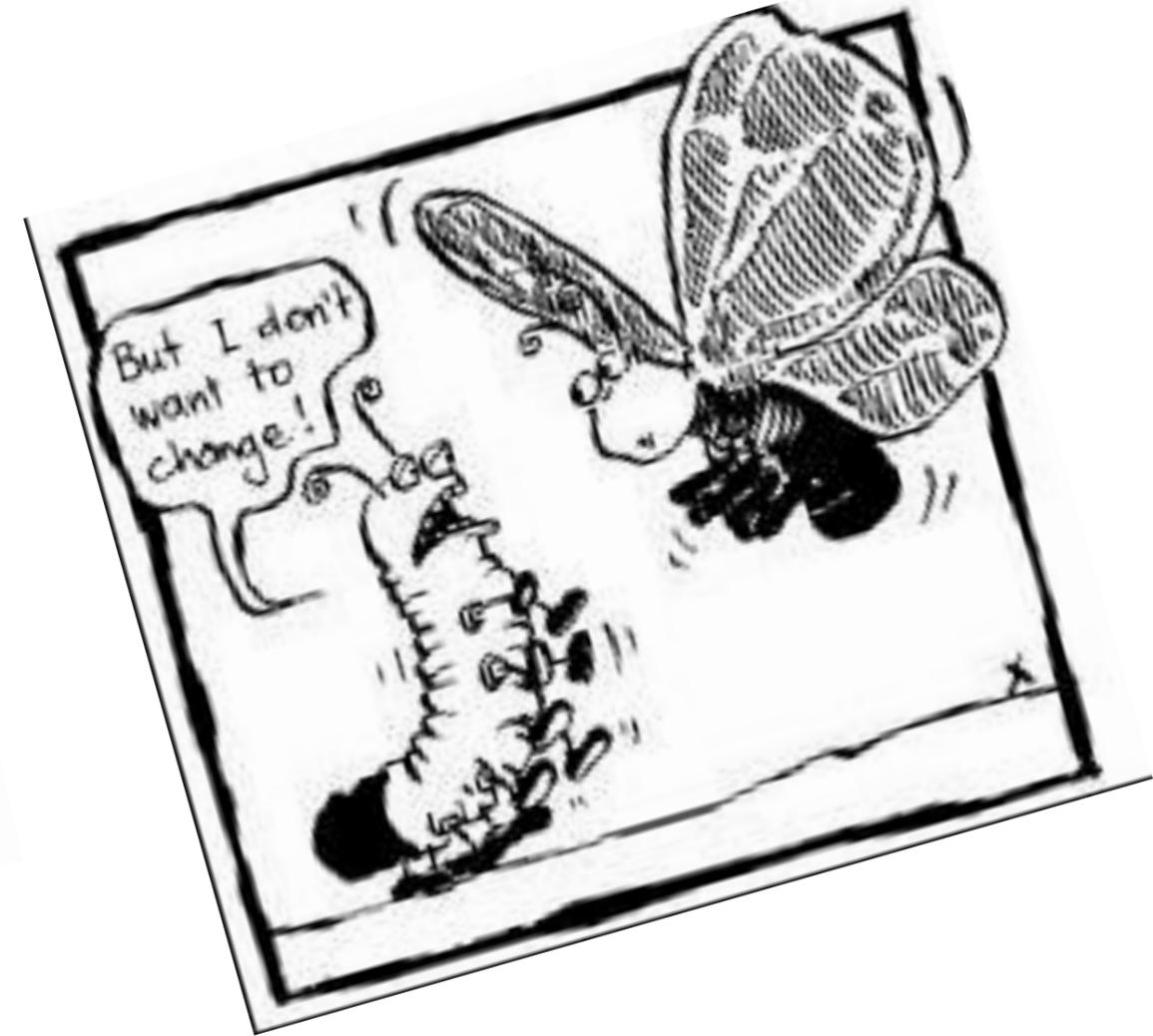
Group identities (nationality/ethnicity, ability, gender) give us “a place in the social world”, by giving us a sense of:

- **Belonging**
- **Distinctiveness**
- **Respect** (recognition, self-esteem, self-respect)
- **Understanding** (meaningful perspective on the world)
- **Agency** (support and solidarity, efficacy as social agents)

If it matters to you, it matters to “Them” too.

Give people a “WHY?” and they will find a “HOW”?

Diversity and Inclusion have benefits, but take time and effort to work well!



Change is hard at first,
messy in the middle,
and gorgeous at the end.

-Robin Sharma

- 3 ingredients
- ❖ Curiosity
- ❖ Patience/time
- ❖ Practice

IV. What works at the University of Limerick?

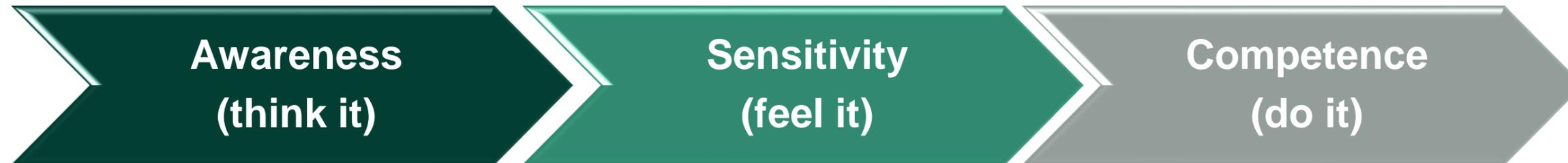
“Inclusion Officers” are pioneers of Diversity and Inclusion across the campus, in different offices, working towards different but convergent agendas

- Well-established **Access and Disability Offices**
- **Student Support officers** – in UL Global, University of Sanctuary Committee, Chaplaincy, Student Counselling and Student Supports
- **HR offices and policies** – Athena SWAN (gender)
- **Student organizations** – Student Union UG and PG
- **Centre for Teaching and Learning**
- **The Internationalization at Home Agenda**
 - Includes curriculum, staff, students, across nationalities and background
- The new **Ethnic Diversity Forum** – under the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Office

Key Principles

- ✓ **Make it mandatory, not voluntary**
- ✓ Work with the “under-represented groups” but target the majority group
- ✓ Engage students and staff in common initiatives
- ✓ **Provide training and spaces, formal and informal to raise awareness and competencies**
- ✓ **Make it visible on campus/buildings/processes**
- ✓ Change the AGENDA: make the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion agenda mainstream

IV. What works at the University of Limerick?



“Inclusion Officers” work across the whole competencies spectrum:

- Formal Education
- Methods Skills
- Application Areas
- *Personal Qualities*
- Work Experience
- Life experience

Building Cultural Competence: Innovative Activities and Models, eds K. Berardo & D.K. Deardorff (Sterling, VA: Stylus, 2012)



Walk the talk: **The value of cultural diversity: rhetoric and reality**, Bennett 2016

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4923010/>

V. Take home message

Identify the differences, work with those different others, engage across the majority-minority and student-staff divides.

Support staff and students to change perspectives and make inclusion their personal and professional responsibility.

https://www.ted.com/talks/verna_myers_how_to_overcome_our_biases_walk_boldly_toward_them

Our biases can be dangerous. **Diversity advocate Vernā Myers** looks closely at some of the subconscious attitudes we hold toward out-groups. She makes a plea to all people: Acknowledge your biases. Then move toward, not away from, the groups that make you uncomfortable. In a funny, impassioned, important talk, she shows us how.

https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story

Our lives, our cultures, are composed of many overlapping stories. Novelist **Chimamanda Adichie** tells the story of how she found her authentic cultural voice -- and warns that if we hear only a single story about another person or country, we risk a critical misunderstanding.





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Thank you for your attention!
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