Supporting students from diverse backgrounds

Awareness guide for personal tutors
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Introduction

from our project leads

We are delighted to welcome you to the first Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) guide for Personal Tutors.

The University of Nottingham recognises that its staff and students are central to its success. We are fully committed to:

■ providing equality of opportunity for our staff and students
■ freedom from unlawful discrimination on the grounds of race, nationality, ethnic origin, colour, gender identity and/or expression, marital or civil partnership status, disability, sexual orientation, religious, spiritual or political beliefs, age, caring responsibilities, or socio-economic background

In order to achieve our goals and maintain our values we aim to attract, recruit and retain staff and students of the highest standard. Only by ensuring equality of opportunity can the University be confident that it is recruiting from the widest available pool of talented individuals.

Given the ever-growing diversity of our student community, Personal Tutors need to be aware of a range of issues that might impact on students’ learning experiences. By being more aware of these matters tutors should be better placed to support their students and more able to make appropriate adjustments when needed.

This guide is intended as some helpful pointers of things to consider when you are supporting students. It is not a definitive set of answers to every conceivable issue that will arise. We hope that this will act as a starting point for colleagues to learn more about the kinds of difficulties students from diverse backgrounds can face whilst at University, and would encourage everyone to use training and development opportunities available both within and outside of the University to grow their knowledge further.

We hope you find this document useful when working with your students and we’d love to hear your feedback as to what we can do to support you further in this area.

Many thanks,

Professor Sarah Sharples
Pro-Vice-Chancellor
Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

Zoe Mackenzie
Students’ Union Equal Opportunities and Welfare Officer
What are protected characteristics?
There are nine characteristics protected from discrimination under the Equality Act 2010.

These are:
- age
- disability
- gender reassignment
- marriage and civil partnership
- pregnancy and maternity
- race
- religion or belief
- sex
- sexual orientation

More information about protected characteristics can be found at nottingham.ac.uk/studentservices/equalityanddiversity

In the context of the University, there are a number of networks under the Students’ Union through which students come together to support each other, and campaign to improve their experience and extend their rights.

These networks are:
- black and minority ethnic (BME) students
- disabled students
- international students
- LGBT+ students
- mature students
- women’s network

More information on the networks can be found online at: su.nottingham.ac.uk/student-groups

This guide will give an overview of each of these networks and the kinds of things to be mindful of when meeting with and supporting students as tutees. But first...

Some words about intersectionality

Intersectionality is a term that was coined by American professor Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989. It refers to the interconnected nature of social categorisations such as race, class, and gender, and how they apply to a given individual or group in creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage. This concept, that certain people face multiple threats of discrimination because their identities overlap with a number of protected characteristics or minority classes, had been understood for some time but Crenshaw was the first to put a name to it.

Tutors should be aware that their students may face multiple difficulties because of their identities and should be open in attempting to understand how their students are managing these sometimes interrelated but also sometimes distinct considerations.
Black and minority ethnic students

Around 20% of undergraduate students identify themselves as BME. This population has grown from around 16% five years ago. In the postgraduate community, this number is around 15%. With approximately 1 in 5 students of the University identifying as BME, it’s important that personal tutors understand the issues that these students face and are likely to raise in support conversations.

Microaggressions

Microaggressions are everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults that can be intentional or unintentional. Microaggressions work to perpetuate the marginalisation of groups using hostile, derogatory, or negative messages. Microaggressions marginalise, other and exclude by perpetuating existing racist tropes. They could be things like:

- a British Asian student, born and raised in the UK, being complimented for speaking “good English”
- assuming that a Muslim woman wears the hijab because she was forced to
- a black British student, born and raised in the UK, being asked “But where are you really from?”
- calling a black woman angry or aggressive in class discussions

Microaggressions can be experienced by any student who has any protected characteristic as part of their identity – they are not solely racial. They can often be perpetuated by allies in the response to racism or complaints from BME students – sometimes unintentionally undermining or playing down the concern. As a tutor, it is important that you understand this if you are dealing with complaints.

How you can help

- Listen to and validate your tutee’s feelings – don’t attempt to diminish, minimise or dismiss their concern
- Direct them to the BME Officer and student network where they can connect with peers who can support them
- Find out more about microaggressions and how they are experienced by researching the subject online
Racism

Universities are stereotypically seen as being liberal places, where tolerance and diversity is championed and celebrated. Whilst we have a diverse community of students at Nottingham, there are still significant concerns and issues related to racism that need to be addressed.

Racism is a societal system which centres around whiteness through financial, academic, media and criminal justice systems. It is important to understand the broad context here because hate crimes do not happen in a vacuum. By growing our understanding we can help to prevent hate crimes, and fully support and safeguard students that are at risk of experiencing hate incidents. Both on and off campus, students could be subject to racism and tutors should be ready to support their tutees as necessary should they be affected.

How you can help

■ Commit to growing your knowledge and having an active understanding of what racism is and how it operates in Universities
■ Support your tutee to report the incident to the University via methods outlined on the Harassment and Hate Crime webpage nottingham.ac.uk/go/harassment-and-hate-crime
■ Direct them to the BME Officer and student network where they can connect with peers who can support them
■ Follow up with them to track the progress of their incident report. This is particularly vital where cases are taken through formal structures
■ Don’t be a bystander. Call out racism when you see it. Ensure your tutees know that it is not just students’ responsibility to safeguard themselves from racism
■ Learn more about criticisms of counter-terrorism and anti-radicalisation laws, and how, whilst it is a safeguarding measure, the Prevent duty can be seen to affect Muslim students
■ Be aware of the potential welfare issues that racism can cause for BME students – referring onwards to other support within the University as necessary
■ Understand why students might be hesitant to report incidents and the institutional barriers to reporting incidents. If someone does not want to report an issue, try to find other ways to support them

Degree awarding gap

According to Equality Challenge Unit, in England in 2015-16 the gap between the proportion of white students and BME students obtaining firsts and 2:1s is 15.6%. The University has an institutional EDI objective that by 2020, action plans will be in place and will be being implemented at School/Faculty level in regard to improving the educational attainment of BME students, and there is a centralised plan of activity that colleagues from across the institution are working on to address this.

Further reading and learning resources

If you’d like to know more about BME experiences, the following resources are a good starting point:

▫ 6 Action Items for White People in the Workplace and Beyond – Medium website. Available at: https://medium.com/@age lender/6-action-items-for-white-people-in-the-workplace-beyond-ecf8727fe89a
▫ DiAngelo, R. (2018) White Fragility: Why it’s so hard for white people to talk about racism
Supporting students from diverse backgrounds

Disabled students

The University of Nottingham supports all students who self-define as having a disability which could include long-term medical conditions, hidden illnesses, mental health conditions, autistic spectrum disorders, specific learning differences, and sensory impairments. The University of Nottingham requires students to provide appropriate evidence of their disability in order to access specialist support services.

Physical accessibility

Each learning location poses different challenges for students who have limited mobility. It is important to understand that some students may have difficulties getting to and from meetings or teaching sessions for a wide variety of reasons, for example, building works and lifts out of order, which may cause additional stress and concern for disabled students.

How you can help

- The University provides guidance on Disabled Access to facilities via its website. Make sure that your tutee is aware of this. Find out more: nottingham.ac.uk/go/disabledaccess

- If the access problem relates directly to buildings used for school or faculty activities, raise the issue with the chair of your Faculty Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion group or Disability Liaison Officer. Ask them to keep you informed of any progress and to let you know what you can do to help progress the concern.

- As Personal Tutor you should have access to your students’ Support Plan – check this for recommendations relating to physical accessibility. If this needs to be reviewed, refer the student to Academic or Disability Support nottingham.ac.uk/go/contactaccessibility

- Keep up to date with campus developments so that you can have proactive conversations with your tutees to identify problems ahead of time and together come up with adjustments and solutions to these issues. nottingham.ac.uk/go/currentdevelopments
Supporting students from diverse backgrounds

Accessible teaching materials and resources
Some students may have difficulties in accessing hard copy, printed materials. Providing electronic or online resources, which the student can access in advance and adapt to suit their specific needs, can enable them to study more effectively.

Accessible electronic resources can:
- enable students to use assistive technology to interact with the materials
- enable students to change the font, font size and colour
- give students the opportunity to revisit materials covered in class

Focussing upon the learning outcomes for a session and ensuring that information is given in an accessible way, means that disabled students have the opportunity to engage with the material. Lecture capture, for example, can be a very effective tool for students who need to revisit specific topics and discussions more than once.

The University has an Alternative Format Service (AFS) that produces accessible materials for students who cannot access standard resources. The service also provides advice and guidance to staff who wish to make their own work more accessible.

Students can access the AFS via referral from the Accessibility Team (Academic and Disability Support). To find out more visit: nottingham.ac.uk/go/afs

The University also has a Library Scanning Service which can create high quality, searchable scans for teaching purposes. To find out more about this service and how to access it, visit: nottingham.ac.uk/go/scanning

How you can help
- Encourage the student to share what works for them
- Ensure that lecture materials are available on Moodle in an editable format. If students report difficulties to you, follow this up with the Disability Liaison Officer or the staff member, to advocate for the student
- Encourage your tutee to use the accessibility tools already built into Microsoft products such as using headings in the navigation pane
- Be aware of the assistive technology which we have available at the University (Text Help Read and Write Gold and MindView are networked: nottingham.ac.uk/go/assistive-software
- Be aware that the library offers a wide range of support for all students. To find out more visit: nottingham.ac.uk/go/accessibility

Accessibility (academic and disability support) and disability liaison officers
The University has well-established support in place for students with disabilities, and there are specific staff members who you can speak with. Each school appoints a Disability Liaison Officer (DLO) to provide a source of reference, advice and guidance for members of staff and students in the school about disability issues and support. Students who are concerned about a disability may approach the DLO directly or may be referred by another member of staff. A full list of DLOs can be found at nottingham.ac.uk/go/disability-liaison-officers

The Accessibility Team (Academic and Disability Support) provide support and advice for students who consider themselves to be disabled, including those who have long-term medical conditions. Find out more: nottingham.ac.uk/go/disability-support

Further reading and learning resources
If you’d like to know more about the experiences of disabled people, the following resources are a good starting point:
- Open Source resource ‘Birkbeck for All’ Joined up thinking on Accessibility – built in tutorials and advice. Available at: http://app1.lts.bbk.ac.uk/xerte2/play.php?template_id=468
- Autism Best Practice Guides. Available at: http://www.autism-uni.org/bestpractice/
- ADHD – information about ADHD and possible strategies. Available at: www.howtoadhd.com
- Using IT. Available at: https://education.microsoft.com/GetTrained/accessibility
- Explains the different software, including the built in features in, for example like MS Word, and apps. Available at: https://diversityandability.com/resources/ and https://www.abilitynet.org.uk/we-are-abilitynet-adapting-technology-changing-lives
- Keep things together using Clipper. Available at: https://www.onenote.com/clipper
- Mind mapping alternative to MindView7, web-based so can be used on students’ own devices. Available at: https://www.xmind.net/xmind8/
- Alternative read aloud software (Text Help ReadandWrite is available on networked computers), web-based so can be used on students’ own devices. Available at: https://www.weavatools.com/
Over 27% of the student population at University of Nottingham are international students. These students come from over 150 different countries and are essential in creating the vibrant community that we have on campus. However, they can also have specific concerns that they need support with to ensure they have a great experience here.

**Culture shock**
Culture shock is described as a state of psychological and physical disorientation when one finds themselves in a new environment, culture and situation. Things like loss of social support, independence, potential limited ability to communicate – all contribute to the feeling of culture shock. Every student is different and can experience those challenges in a variety of ways, but amongst the main symptoms of culture shock are: depression, fatigue and insomnia, loss of self-confidence, anxiety, fear, isolation, loneliness and confusion.

**How you can help**
- Listen and provide space for reflection (especially during the first few weeks)
- Help students to understand that it is normal – most people in the same situation feel it and it’s important to talk about it, share experiences and give yourself time to adapt
- Help in finding a support system – by joining a club, society or volunteering project and finding others with similar interests. The International Student Network is student-led network run by and for international students [su.nottingham.ac.uk/organisation/isn](http://su.nottingham.ac.uk/organisation/isn). You could also put them in touch with the Students’ Union’s International Officer who provides democratic representation for international students on issues faced on campus
- Check whether they are aware of the Global Buddies programme. This is a Students’ Union initiative that pairs incoming international students with current students for peer-to-peer support and social activity. Find out more at: [bit.ly/globalbuddies](http://bit.ly/globalbuddies)
Academic expectations

It can be helpful to remain aware that there can be a mismatch between students’ expectations and an organisation’s way of working, dependent on their prior experience and context. For example, expectations around staff support, academic requirements, plagiarism, etc can vary considerably depending upon the student’s country of origin and the education system within that country. This can be especially pronounced at the postgraduate level where students arrive with previous experiences of higher education that they have as a point of comparison. Anything you can do to support greater understanding by explaining the way these processes work at the organisation and relating it to students’ pre-existing knowledge is very helpful.

In addition, language differences add a further level of difficulty. Even though every student of University of Nottingham must meet a required level of English, some technical or specialist level of English might still be unfamiliar.

How you can help

- Avoiding assumptions by asking questions which ascertain prior level of knowledge. Take opportunities to clarify exactly what the expectations are or how students can access services.
- Ensure that lectures are recorded and all materials are available online. Students who have English as a second language find it incredibly helpful to revisit their learning experiences to ensure that they have properly understood the material covered.
- Where possible, being clear and using plain English with all students, and where needed trying different ways of explaining unfamiliar concepts.
- If students need more support with their English skills you can signpost them to CELE who offer various courses and sessions to support with this [nottingham.ac.uk/cele](http://nottingham.ac.uk/cele).

International staff role models

The importance of role models has been identified against a range of protected characteristics as they provide living examples that achievement in a certain area is possible and that any barriers currently perceived are not insurmountable. International students may benefit from talking with staff or fellow students who have been through similar experience. This can be particularly useful if your tutee has expressed an interest in progressing a specific career path or has aspirations for an academic career.

It is important to bear in mind, that everyone is different, and everyone’s experience might differ regardless to where they come from.

How you can help

- The University is a culturally diverse place and there are colleagues or fellow students who might have experienced similar feelings in adjusting into the life within UK academia. Speak with colleagues within your school or faculty that have an international background to see if there is value in creating connections between them and your tutee.
- Similarly, find out who the lead staff member for international students is in your school and discover what they are doing currently to support these students so that you can share this information with your tutee.
- Offer to connect students with specific colleagues so that they can share their experiences and help people to understand how they can progress their career aspirations or simply answer questions about their journey to date.

Signposting to other international-specific support

Other areas of support specifically focused on international students across the University and Union include:

- Visa and Immigration team based in Cherry Tree Lodge on University Park.
- International Chaplaincy – a multi-faith team that are specialised in dealing with faith-related queries and pastoral support for all faiths or none, and provide various social activities.
- Family Link – a scheme run by Student Services and CARO which links students to a local Nottingham host family.
- International Reps are present on many hall committees to support international students experiencing any issues in halls.

Further reading and learning resources

If you’d like to know more about the experiences of international students coming to the UK, the UK Council for International Student Affairs (UKCISA) provides a good starting point with a lot of information and training on their website: [www.ukcisa.org.uk](http://www.ukcisa.org.uk).
LGBT+ students

There’s no way to spot an LGBT+ student. There are no superficial features that are necessary nor sufficient to indicate that a student is LGBT+. You may never know whether the student you’re talking to could be LGBT+, unless they tell you.

As of January 2017, roughly 1 in 5 University of Nottingham students identify as not-heterosexual in some sense or another – and this is merely the population that feel comfortable answering as such. For these reasons it is best not to assume anything about anybody’s identity, including whether or not they are LGBT+.

What is LGBT+?

We should not assume that everyone understands what the term “LGBT+” means. For clarity, the LGBT+ Student Network at Nottingham takes the term to mean the following:

‘those [...] who do not self-identify as all of the following: non-intersex, heteroromantic, heterosexual, non- bisexual, cisgender, and not questioning their sexual orientation, romantic orientation, or gender identity.’

UoSUN LGBT+ Network Constitution 15/12/18

This is to ensure that everyone who ought to be part of the Network can be included. Many people use the term ‘Queer’ as an umbrella term for the LGBT+ movement. The acceptability of this term varies between communities, with many supporting its use and others not.

Gender and sexuality

LGBT+ students sexuality and/or gender is often not well understood or represented in classrooms and universities. Some students will have experienced bullying and hate crime directed against those with an LGBT+ status and may not feel safe.

Sex and gender are not interchangeable words. The distinction between sex and gender differentiates someone’s biological sex (that is, their reproductive system and secondary sex characteristics) from their gender (that is, the personal, societal, and cultural identity ascribed via their gender expression).

UK culture often assumes and treats as default that its members are heterosexual (straight). The LGBT+ community includes those who identify as lesbian or gay/homosexual (those attracted to people of the same sex/gender), bisexual (those attracted to people of both the same and different sexes/genders), asexual or aromantic (those who do not experience sexual or romantic attraction), and many more nuanced variants of sexuality, such as demisexual and pansexual.

UK culture also incorrectly assumes that all its members are cisgender, i.e. that they identify with the gender they were assigned at birth. People are usually assigned a ‘sex’ at from their primary sex characteristics at birth, for example, male/female/intersex. ‘Gender’ describes an individual’s personal, societal, and/or cultural identity, which may change and develop over time. Gender and sex are therefore not interchangeable terms. Trans is generally used as an umbrella term for those who do not identify with the gender they were assigned at birth, but not all those who count themselves as gender non-conforming would call themselves trans.

A common misunderstanding is that trans individuals have, will, or wish to undergo gender-reassignment surgery. Some transgender people do have surgery, others can’t, or have no desire to. If someone is transgender this does not tell you about their sexuality. It is important not to assume anything about trans tutees’ preferences. Instead let them express them or choose to withhold them. The term transsexual is no longer a commonly used term and should not be used to describe trans people generally.

Another prominent part of the trans community are non-binary people. These are individuals who do not identify with either side of the gender binary – i.e. the man/woman binary. Some non-binary people identify
with a third gender. Some identify with a specific nuanced expression of gender. Some reject any gender categorisation altogether.

**Pronouns**

Pronouns such as ‘him/her/they’ are constantly used to inform people about the gender of the person being talked about. This is why it’s important to use the correct pronouns. The correct pronouns are those that someone asks you to use. Using the wrong pronouns is impolite and can be distressing for the other person.

**How you can help**

- Include pronouns in name introductions at the beginning of the year, seminar introductions, and email/document signatures
- Use the pronouns the tutee asks for including when you are talking about the student when they aren't there
- If in doubt, use ‘they/them’

**Students understanding their identity**

University is a unique environment. It’s often the first place we can explore ourselves and the world we fit into. It can provide an important space to forge our adult identity, independent of previous agents of socialisation, such as school and family. This environment gives some the confidence to come out about aspects of themselves they’ve kept secret for some time. Other students will enter University unsure about themselves and will be just beginning to explore and unpack their feelings about this. It’s therefore vitally important that we continue to provide a safe and supportive environment for all our tutees.

**How you can help**

- Make no assumptions regarding any of your tutees
- Use any opportunity to create and enhance a supportive environment for students to be open about their feelings about their identity. This could be in simple visible cues or by making a positive statement of support as part of introductory meetings
- Listen carefully to what your tutees are saying about their identity and how they think this is affecting their experience
- Signpost students to the LGBT+ Officer, their official elected representative in the Students’ Union, and LGBT+ Students’ Network who can provide more information and peer support. There are also a range of online resources available from charities like Stonewall that can help

**Mental health**

Numerous studies over the past 20 years have shown that LGBT+ students are statistically more likely to suffer with mental health difficulties whilst studying at University. A 2016 survey by YouGov found that 45 per cent of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) students reported challenges with their mental health, compared to just 22 per cent of non-LGBT students.

**How you can help**

- Listen to what they are actually saying. Sometimes when someone is talking about their mental health, they are simply looking for a listening ear. Sometimes they are opening themselves outwardly because they need to be directed to more specialist services
- Use the Identifying and Responding to Students in Difficulty guide for staff to find out which services and staff members you can refer the student to. Be aware that depending on their capacity level you may need to advocate on their behalf
- Don’t try to solve their problem. Refer them to a mental health professional with the appropriate skills, experience, and qualification to deliver a package of treatment. Know the limits of your role and where the tutee would benefit more from more specialist counsellor

**Further reading and learning resources**

If you’d like to know more about LGBT+ experiences, the following resources are a good starting point:

- Smithies, D. and Byrom, N. (2018) LGBTQ+ Student Mental Health: The challenges and needs of gender, sexual and romantic minorities in Higher Education. [online] Kings College London and Student Minds. Available at: www.studentminds.org.uk/lgbtqresearch
- Support and advice on coming out – Stonewall. Available at: https://www.stonewall.org.uk/help-advice/coming-out-0
- LGBT in Britain: University Report – Stonewall. Available at: https://www.stonewall.org.uk/lgbt-britain-university-report
Supporting students from diverse backgrounds

Mature students

The University has an institutional EDI objective to reduce the non-continuation rate for mature students to 10.5% or less by 2020/21 (from a baseline of 12.9% in 2014-15). The relatively small number of mature students across the University hides a more complex picture at the school level, where some courses have comparatively high numbers of mature students compared to others that only have 1 or 2 within their total cohort.

Balancing study with other commitments

It might sound like an obvious point but mature students can be very different to the standard 18-21 year old stereotypical undergraduate.

We know from experience that mature students tend to have many more demands on their time. This could be caring commitments – either looking after children and all of the connected responsibilities that brings, or having to support adult dependants – that compress the time they have available to study. On top of this, they may have part-time jobs that they need to maintain to ensure they can afford to study. The timetable for a mature student can feel like an overlapping jigsaw – one where, try as they might, they sometimes cannot make the pieces fit together.

How you can help

- Listen and be empathetic. Demonstrate that you understand their situation and that you don’t assume they are the same as younger students
- If you can’t meet them face to face because of their commitments, offer Skype meetings or telephone tutoring
- Be prepared to be flexible with their learning requirements (and to advocate for them with module leaders or others within the school or faculty). If you have to get your children to school, arriving for a 9am lecture can be incredibly difficult. If a timetable cannot be changed, what can be put in place to ensure that student doesn’t miss any material? Your Senior Tutor can help to provide support here

Financial difficulties

Finance is a real issue for many mature students. Many think they can manage only to later find that the reality is that a student loan is not enough in its own right. Often they will have given up a full time job before returning to study so will be actively adjusting to that change in financial status. They could still need to work part-time to make ends meet. Mature students also tend to have more of a negative emotional response to taking on student loans with an associated sense of stigma in relation to debt. They are also likely to have a greater sensitivity to any “hidden” costs related to placements.
How you can help

■ Ensure that tutees are aware of the financial support that is available within the institution. Do not offer advice in financial matters, but where appropriate, offer to make the first connection to specialists within Student Services or the Students’ Union.

■ Consider what opportunities for employment there are within your department, school, or faculty that might be suitable to the students need. Working within the University can also help to build sense of belonging as well as helping to address financial concerns. Direct them to Unitemps so that they can find out more about available employment opportunities.

Isolation and feelings of being different

As older people, mature students often feel that they should be more confident. They’ve been through life experiences and faced challenges before in a way that 18 year olds have not. This unhelpful thinking is present in a lot of mature students and acts to reinforce Imposter syndrome.

In reality mature students can lack confidence in general, something that is amplified when the reality of being in a classroom and a cohort with so many younger students hits home. They quickly don’t feel like ‘one of the group’, can be ignored by younger students, and can become isolated. Instead of raising these issues they try to hide or cover up their worries, thinking that they should know what to do and where to go.

How you can help

■ Don’t wait for them to come to you – make an active approach to them. Often Mature Students will report that they don’t think they can ask for help; that they don’t want to take up people’s time. If you’re not seeing them, it may not be because they are fine but because they are scared to come forward.

■ Make time for them. Make sure your tutee understands that this discussion with them is a good, important use of your time.

■ Work with others to help identify the networks that are available to them. The Mature Students’ Network is a good place to start, as is the Widening Participation team who work on projects to support mature students.

■ Help them build belonging with others. Because of age similarity, mature students can find themselves feeling a greater sense of connection with staff members or postgraduate students. Look at how this can be supported whilst ensuring that appropriate professional boundaries are maintained.

Previous academic experiences

Mature Students will have had different experiences of education prior to University than other students. This could be due to a gap in their education meaning they need to start again in relation to academic skills. It could be that they entered via an access course and therefore have learnt in a different environment with a different length of course to A levels, and therefore don’t have the same knowledge or understanding that recent A level students have. The study that got them to University might have been via distanced learning or through other less standard qualifications.

Because of this variation many mature students can spend much of their first year back tracking on A level subjects to fill the gaps in their knowledge, whilst at the same time coping with the first year of undergraduate study.

How you can help

■ Don’t assume that everyone took A-levels and don’t use that as a shortcut in lectures and seminars. Even just saying “You’ll remember this from A levels…” can be demoralising for mature students.

■ Ensure consistent delivery of lecturer recording and early provision of lecture slides to assist learning. Mature Students are more likely to return to review material multiple times to ensure that they have understood the content.

■ Give time to talk through how to approach assessments, and how they can find other support resources such as those around using libraries and learning resources, time management, organisation skills, and so forth.

Further reading and learning resources

If you’d like to know more about Mature Students’ experiences, the following resources are a good starting point:


▫ University of Nottingham resources for mature students. Available at: https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/studywithus/student-experience/mature-students.aspx
Over 55% of the student population at University of Nottingham are women. Whilst women’s access to and achievement within higher education is seen as good, there are still many different barriers that women face whilst at University and deep concerns about the effect that sexism has both within academia and within wider society.

**Sexual discrimination**

It’s easy to believe that sexism and sexual discrimination is just overt and obvious misogyny. But very often sexism is quite subtle and is experienced as a result of people not giving consideration to the more indirect factors that can impact a women’s ability to fully participate in studies. It’s therefore important that everyone thinks about what might need to be provided to ensure equity of experience. This can range from the timing and scheduling of sessions through to the provision of equipment for learning to simply feeling able to speak up in lectures. All of these small things can pile up and make it difficult for women to feel part of the community.

**How you can help**

- Ensure that you are making space for women’s voices to be heard. This is particularly important in courses that have a smaller percentage of women students
- When preparing activities, ask women on your course to input their thoughts and feedback to highlight any considerations that you may have overlooked
- Consider what you can do to create a positive environment for contributions – helping students to feel confident to speak up

**Sexual harassment and assault**

As a result of allegations against individuals and the #metoo movement, the international profile of concerns with regards to the sexual harassment and assault people experience has never been higher. Unfortunately, this is not a new issue as numerous research projects over the past ten years have demonstrated the kinds of episodes of harassment and sexual violence students experience.

The University has taken a number of steps to further address this area and to encourage students to feel confident in coming forward to report their experiences.
### How you can help

- Listen and validate your tutee’s feelings – don’t attempt to diminish, minimise or dismiss their concern.
- Support your tutee to report the incident to the University via methods outlined on the Harassment and Hate Crime webpage nottingham.ac.uk/go/harassment-and-hate-crime
- Show them the University’s Sexual Misconduct policy so that they can understand how cases reported will be handled nottingham.ac.uk/currentstudents/documents/identifying-and-handling-cases-of-sexual-misconduct.pdf
- Liaise with other colleagues with specific support roles such as School Welfare Officers and Student Welfare in Campus Life. If you are unsure of who would be most appropriate, please refer to the Identifying and Responding to Students in Difficulty guide or speak with your Senior Tutor.
- Direct them to the Women’s* Officer and student network where they can connect with peers who can support them.
- Follow up with them to track the progress of their incident report. This is particularly vital where cases are taken through formal structures.

### Pregnancy and maternity

Some students each year will either arrive at Nottingham pregnant or with child care responsibilities or become pregnant or gain child care responsibilities during their course of study. A survey carried out by the Students’ Union’s Women’s* Network in 2018 found that:

- 75% of respondents were very unhappy or unhappy with the way their pregnancy and/or childcare needs were understood and dealt with by staff and the University.
- 79% found it very difficult or difficult to arrange childcare around their studies and 86% said that difficulties around childcare affected their decision to return to their studies.
- 65% felt that the University and staff did not take a flexible approach to facilitate continued learning.
- 57% felt that staff did not demonstrate a sensitive and non-judgmental approach when discussing issues related to pregnancy and childcare.
- 71% did not feel they were given appropriate advice and support to make informed choices about their studies during pregnancy and/or when looking after young children.

From a policy perspective, the University is clear that being or becoming pregnant, terminating a pregnancy, or becoming a parent should not be a barrier to successfully studying at Nottingham and is committed to being as flexible as possible. Special arrangements can and should be made locally dependent upon circumstances but there is a general approach outlined in appropriate policies.

In addition to the above, the University also supports the Equality and Human Rights Commission’s Working Forward Pledge Campaign to create workplaces which are the best they can be for pregnant women and new parents - working to construct a supportive and flexible environment for breastfeeding staff and students by providing a range of private, hygienic, safe and secure spaces for breastfeeding/expressing across all campuses. This includes all UoN cafés and shared spaces that are clearly signed to show that they are “Breastfeeding Friendly”.

### How you can help

- Read and share the University’s Policy on support for pregnant students and students with very young children.
- Ask how you can support study flexibility in relation to both the pregnancy phase and maternity. Parents will need time for medical appointments, whilst breastfeeding parents will need time to feed or express.
- Identify where your local parenting rooms and breastfeeding friendly spaces are, so that you can signpost others to these as required.

### Trans, non-binary and gender fluid

The Women’s Network at UoNSU is inclusive of trans women, non-binary and gender fluid individuals, and anyone else who considers womanhood a part of their identity. Considerations for Trans students are covered in more detail in the LGBT+ section of this guide.

### Further reading and learning resources

If you’d like to know more about the experiences of Women both within the HE sector and more broadly within society, the following resources are a good starting point:

- How to Be a Workplace Ally - Lean In website. Available at: https://leanin.org/tips/workplace-ally
- The Guilty Feminist [podcast]
Supporting students from diverse backgrounds

Other sources of information and support

There are various additional ways to access support, knowledge and to develop your learning across the range of issues and topics you may come across when supporting diverse groups of people. These include:

Stronger Together campaign
You can find more links and information about student networks at: nottingham.ac.uk/go/strongertogether

The People and Culture events programme
The University recognises many days and months throughout the year which are intended to raise awareness of different aspects of diversity, examples of these include LGBTQ history month, BME history month, Disability December, Month of the Mind and International Women’s Day. Look out for promotions advertising events which aim to help broaden understanding and promote conversation about issues surrounding the EDI agenda. Information can be found via the People and Culture blog: blogs.nottingham.ac.uk/peopleandculture/

The People and Culture webpage can be accessed at: nottingham.ac.uk/go/people-and-culture

Personal development and leadership training
A wide range of personal development resources can be accessed through the Leadership and Management Academy Hub which can be accessed here: nottingham.ac.uk/ima

e-learning and short courses
The University offers a range of training courses and e-learning options through the Professional Development Short-Course Programme. nottingham.ac.uk/go/edi

Did you know...
The University of Nottingham is also a:

Disability Confident Committed employer
Increasing diversity is important to us and we are committed to the aims of Disability Confident. In particular, as a registered organisation, we will:

■ ensure that our recruitment processes are inclusive and accessible
■ communicate our vacancies through a range of different channels
■ offer an interview to applicants with a disability who meet the minimum essential requirements of the role (as detailed within the role profile)
■ anticipate and provide reasonable adjustments as and when required
■ provide support to any existing employee who acquires a disability or a long-term health condition

Find out more at: nottingham.ac.uk/go/equalityanddiversitypolicies

Institutional Athena SWAN Silver award holder
The Athena SWAN Charter recognises commitment to gender equality in the advancement and promotion of staff and students in higher education and research. The University of Nottingham have held an Athena SWAN Bronze Award since 2006. In 2012 we achieved an Institutional Silver award and were successful in our Institutional Silver Renewal in 2017/2018.

All our science, technology, engineering, mathematics and medicine Schools hold individual Silver or Bronze awards. Since the expansion of the Athena SWAN Charter to include the arts, humanities, social sciences, business and law, we are also all working towards at least Bronze Award status by the end of 2020 in these school categories. Find out more at: nottingham.ac.uk/athena-swan
A Race Equality Charter member
The University of Nottingham are working towards a Race Equality Charter Bronze award, with the aim of submitting our application in 2020. The Equality Challenge Unit (ECU), now Advance-HE, fully launched this charter for excellence in advancing racial equality in higher education in 2016.

Find out more at: www.ecu.ac.uk/about-race-equality-charter

A Stonewall Diversity Champion
Stonewall campaigns for equality for lesbian, bi, gay and trans people across Britain. The University of Nottingham is proud to be a Stonewall Diversity Champion as part of our commitment to supporting lesbian, gay, bi and trans staff in the workplace.

The Diversity Champions programme provides access to a wide range of support to aid the University in becoming an ever more inclusive place to work, study and visit. Resources include best practice guides and research, events, and access to the Proud Employers job site.

Find out more at: www.stonewall.org.uk/diversity-champions-programme

Signed-up to the Working Forward Pledge
The University of Nottingham signed up to commit to the Working Forward Pledge in September 2018. The Pledge is a national campaign run by the Equality and Human Rights Commission which focuses on improving practice to support pregnant women and new parents, from expecting a baby through to settling back in at work. We have a set of actions to fulfil the pledge as part of our Athena SWAN Action Plan, which is driving further developments in this area.

Find out more at: www.equalityhumanrights.com/working-forward