
A toolkit to enhance integration between home and international students - BA Fashion Marketing

Area of Focus

An intervention to enhance integration between home and international students by promoting the benefits of working in diverse groups instead of homogenous groups. The aim is to improve student experience, empathy, bonding, retention and attainment.

Context

The student body of Fashion Management includes over 20% international students from different cultures and faiths. In the first term of the first year, academic staff felt that the integration between home and international students could be improved to encourage a more vibrant student environment and sharing of learning.

An intervention was developed—aligned to the University's Connecting Globally and Success for All ambitions—which sought to promote inclusion; build skills for interaction; and promote rapport and belonging. The intervention was designed to take place during Global Week 2018.

One of the fundamental aims of the intervention was to 'broaden the lenses' of the students to overcome the limited exposure that some students may have had prior to university, by helping them to build their confidence to integrate with others different to themselves. The intervention also highlighted the diversity of the workplace and how the skills gained working in diverse groups would enhance employability.

Approach

A collaboration between fashion management lecturers, Faith, EDI, Hate Crime and Global Lounge was facilitated by Faith at NTU. The team's expertise in bias, hate crime awareness and equality and diversity allowed a bespoke intervention to be created.

Global Week was agreed upon to deliver the intervention as this was in line with celebrating diversity on a larger scale. During the event, Faith Ambassadors and CERT student mentors were present in case students felt more comfortable sharing experiences and feedback to their peers.

Interventions

The intervention comprised 3 short presentations and facilitated discussions in smaller groups covering the following key areas:

- exploring and celebrating cultural identities in a safe way
- links between the world and fashion and employment
- impacts of harmful and exclusionary behaviours.

This was followed by an interactive activity which involved students working in mixed cultural groups. Students were asked to bring with them an item or picture from a part of the world they identify with e.g. Nottingham lace, Chinese silk etc. The item was not necessarily linked to fashion but was something that students felt a strong connection with and represented them and the area in which they lived. The items could be "stereotypical" or more personal: for example, one of the facilitators brought in shoes from Northampton, an area famous for its welted shoe industry, while another facilitator brought in pickled onions and an onion fork. Students were able to see that although we may live in different parts of the world we often hold dear similar objects, irrespective of faith, background, culture or nationality.

Students then added their item to a large map of the world on the floor and were given opportunity to review and consider structured questions to encourage reflection on the value of diverse cultures and contributions. The intervention ran over a 2-hour lunchtime slot and was supported by Faith Ambassadors.

Initial Outcomes

Some students shared their opinion about the importance of the event, stating,

'It's good to know other cultures... [and] to really know what is happening around the world... Especially in Fashion, there is so much influence from other cultures... I'm not really affected by like any religious [hate] crime or anything like this but I am understanding of people and I think that people need to be understood. It's good that we are making progress [by] knowing the other cultures, how they're living and their traditions and stuff' – Student 1

'Fashion's just such a global industry and it's so important not only like to know where different fabrics are from but where everyone is from... It's just so global that if you don't know about world history and [everyone's] culture, you're really behind' – Student 2

Initial feedback indicated that most of the students were engaged, wanted to share their experiences and felt they had benefited from participating in the event. There were some students who were less engaged and seemed uncomfortable to discuss issues around hate crime, racism or biases. Further in-depth training on hate crime was delivered as a follow up to increase understanding.

Lecturers from the Fashion Management team (Anita Love and Nicola Francis) shared learning at a National Conference (RAISE Conference) and explored the replicability of such an initiative for other universities, nationally.

Outcome

Following the workshop and evaluation, the EDI and Faith team led the development of a 'Respect Toolkit'. The Respect Toolkit can be found in the [Success for All case study resources](#).

The Fashion Team will use the Respect Toolkit with their first-year students early in the course before social groups are fully established. The overall aim is to create an understanding around diversity, faith, harmful behaviours and unconscious biases at the outset of a student's journey at NTU with an option of engaging the students further by allowing them to create 'pledges' displayed in their learning environment.

An additional outcome from the intervention was the creation of new, positive inter-departmental relationships which can become a support network for any future initiatives across the University.

Challenges and next steps

A follow-up set of questions is being devised to explore the longer-term effect of this impact on students who have experienced the intervention in the first year of their course.

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