Edge Hill University

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy

2021-2025

OUR COMMITMENT

Our plan for delivering Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) in the University aims to be ambitious and a beacon of example to the sector. This requires commitment from all staff and students. From those who lead teams, support students and manage staff, everyone has a responsibility to embrace EDI in their own leadership, collegiality and management.

The goal of this EDI Strategy is that all people, teams and departments in the university can clearly identify how they can make a change to consider EDI in the way that they work and study to embed principles of fairness, respect and inclusion in all areas of work.

INTRODUCTION

VICE-CHANCELLOR, DR JOHN CATER

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Our principles of inclusivity run as threads throughout everything we do, fostering a sense of belonging and creating an environment where all people are valued for who they are.

These principles are crucial in supporting our culture as a University; they are also integral to delivering successful research, innovation and teaching.

This Strategic Action Plan brings together a great deal of work by many colleagues across the institution. Under the leadership of Dr Jane Moore, Pro-Vice Chancellor for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, we will continue our commitment to raising awareness of inequalities and to tackling them, ensuring our principles of inclusion are evident to everyone.

Through active listening to our students, staff and alumni, we will take positive action to continue to make our community one to which we all proudly belong.

The ideas and actions articulated in this document will underpin our 2021-2025 Strategic Plan so we can be certain that equality, diversity and inclusion are embedded in everything that we do.

To make progress, we must tackle issues across the University community in a holistic manner, as well as addressing the specific needs of different groups of staff and students. I am pleased therefore that this plan will also bring renewed focus to our work in promoting wellbeing and good mental health in our staff and student communities and tackling bullying and harassment.

At the heart of this plan is an ambition to influence culture across the University. This will require a commitment from all staff and students to take responsibility in embracing the principles of equality, diversity and inclusion and bringing them to life in all we do, each day, as one community.

Dr John Cater
Vice Chancellor

THE VALUE

OF EQUALITY, DIVERSITY & INCLUSION AT EDGE HILL

We are proud of our commitment to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI). By continuing to increase the focus and widespread consideration of EDI in all that we do, we will:

- Work together to strengthen our sense of community at Edge Hill.

- Ensure all students and staff feel as safe and supported as possible.

- Make informed decisions based on a factual evidence base and meaningful consultation, collaboration and co-production – ensuring that a wider range of student and staff voices contribute to discussions throughout the University.

- Enhance the experience that our students and staff gain, through an increasingly diverse population and inclusive curriculum.

- Value each individual and respect the dignity of all – tolerating others' right to hold views and beliefs which may be opposed to our own.

- Enable those with protected and underrepresented characteristics within higher education to have equal opportunities to excel in their studies and careers.

- Empower all staff and students to achieve their very best, irrespective of their personal characteristics and heritage.

- Support early and informal resolution of issues and concerns.

- Hold ourselves open to honest dialogue, where we share experiences and expect to be challenged constructively.

- Nurture the growth of the University, through the diversity and inclusivity of our academic and professional services, support and student communities and governance.

- Meet our legal obligations in line with the Equality Act '10 and Public Sector Equality Duty.

- Align our EDI work with our Office for Students regulated Access and Participation Plan to support the access, continuation and progression of students from protected and underrepresented groups.

- Evaluate the impact of our support initiatives and use this learning to continually enhance our support and associated action plans.

CONTEXT & DRIVERS

Edge Hill is a warm and welcoming University with a strong track record of success and rapid growth. We're proud of its establishment as the first non-denominational teacher training college for women outside of London and of the pioneering work Principal Ken Millins, who in the late 1960s and 70s undertook mainstreaming the study into race relations and laying the foundations for our International Centre on Racism.

Edge Hill has historically attracted a diverse student body, with over 70% of its students having one or more Widening Participation characteristics.   As we continue to evolve in a changing, more complex and uncertain external environment, we strive to make improvements to the staff and student experience wherever we can. To do this we use independently assessed frameworks to demonstrate our continued commitment to foster an inclusive culture throughout the institution.

Some of our externally recognised successes include our:

- Institutional and departmental Athena Swan Bronze Awards
- HR Excellence in Research Award
- Exemplary outcomes of both student and staff wellbeing audits
- Disability Confident status
- Mindful Employer status
- University Mental Health Charter

As a sector however, universities continue to face significant EDI-related issues. Some of those that have been highlighted nationally and internationally include those of race, harassment, and misogyny and matters related to mental and physical health. The historic impact of education or work environments, as well as background and privilege, mean that the experience of – and opportunities for – staff and students are not equal for all.

Commonly, equality, diversity and inclusion are not currently understood as 'core business' by all those responsible for implementing policies, values and behaviours.

Since 2019 there has been a regulatory requirement for universities to have an Office for Students approved and annually reviewed five year Access and Participation Plan that sets out how they will improve equality of opportunity for underrepresented groups to access, succeed and progress in higher education.

Without this Plan, an institution cannot charge students more than the basic fee rate. This demonstrates the importance of student related EDI matters and the need for a co-ordinated approach to tackling inequalities in Higher Education.

Valuable consultations with our staff and students and an external review by Advance HE, has helped us to develop the EDI Strategic Action Plan.

It proposes a set of high-level objectives that will enable our staff and student communities to work together to transform and embed our approach to EDI over the next 5-year period 2021-2025.

WHAT OUR COMMUNITY SAID

Against a backdrop of social and global activism committed to raising issues of equality, diversity and inclusion, a range of consultations which commenced with an independent review by Advance HE in 2019, and included focus groups and surveys with our staff and students took place during 2020, both with a general remit and also with specific themes: for example, the People Plan, Black Lives Matter and our Access and Participation Plan work to support Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic student experiences.

While some focus group participants were positive about current EDI initiatives in place at Edge Hill, they signalled the importance of transparency, of supporting appropriate staff networks and having policies that are clear and specific. 58% of respondents to a staff survey conducted on our behalf by Advance HE wanted to know more about EDI.

To ensure greater transparency across the institution, Edge Hill will consider ways to communicate its commitment to EDI, celebrate successes achieved and recognise where further work is required. This will take the form of an action plan reviewed by the newly formed EDI steering group (EDIS) and shared more widely amongst staff.

Some key areas for action following staff consultation are:

- **The EDI Steering Group should emphasise that responsibility for the implementation of EDI work lies across all faculties, academic and support departments, committees, religious and cultural facilities.**

- **New and refreshed EDI-facing policies, such as the Bullying, Harassment and Hate Crime policy, should include monitoring processes that clearly outline the consequences of non-compliance. Where appropriate these policies should also include a framework to assist with the reporting process, including how any issues will be addressed.**

- **A commitment to, and engagement with, EDI matters should be visible from the top of the organisation and throughout. We should ensure that all staff receive EDI training appropriate to their roles and responsibilities, and that all newly appointed staff have knowledge of the University's EDI Strategy, Action Plan and related policies during their induction and their associated obligations.**

- **Empower staff to set up staff networks, while supporting their sustainability by ensuring this does not solely rely on the efforts of individual staff members. Edge Hill should help ensure this type of work is recognised and valued.**

Key areas of action following student consultation are:

- Improving the marketing and imagery used by the university to ensure it celebrates and promotes diversity to current and prospective students.

- Improving our cultural competence.

- Enhancing and further promoting our racism and hate crime reporting mechanisms.

- Ensuring the facilities, we offer are inclusive (catering, student accommodation, Chaplaincy and student social events).

- Ensuring that Learning, Teaching and Assessment strategies have inclusivity at their core, by design, intent and delivery.

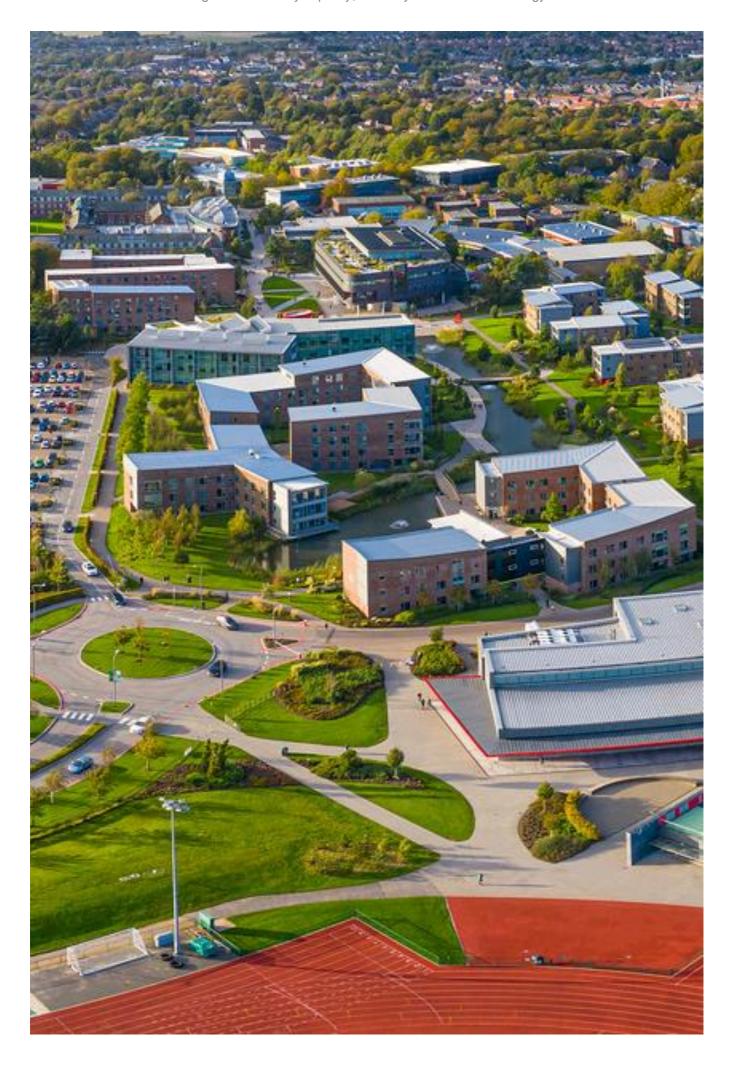- Having formal and informal ways for students to discuss EDI issues.

Our consultations showed that there is strong support for considering characteristics beyond the nine protected characteristics identified within the Equality Act, and so we have expanded our coverage of staff and student diversity in this plan.

We will take cognisance of the interconnected nature of social categorisations such as race, class, and gender as they apply to a given individual or group, and how they create overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage.

The insights gathered from each consultation have proved invaluable, and as we implement our new EDI Strategic Action Plan, we will continue to talk with and listen to our community.

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OUR GOALS

Our EDI Strategic Action Plan will ensure that all students and staff feel, safe, included and supported to be their very best in all that they do; that the University is the best it can be, with a high performing and diverse staff and student community; that all steps are taken to eliminate prejudice and discrimination and that all students and staff visibly contribute to the values of the University and its wider impact.

We will achieve this by adopting four clear principles:

Create a fair, safe, and inclusive environment for all, in which diversity is celebrated.

Diversify staff, student and independent Governor communities through focused, evidence-informed and proactive approaches to recruitment, success and progression.

Embed responsibility and accountability for inclusive practices in all we do, through policy, systems, processes, staff development, PDR, inclusively designed curriculum, relevant accredited frameworks and our Access and Participation Plan.

Raise awareness, confidence, understanding, familiarity and visibility of EDI, both within and beyond EHU, through focused and evaluated projects and activities.

EMPOWERED & 'EDI' FOCUSSED

OUR PEOPLE PLAN

Dealing with personal matters relating to equality, diversity and inclusion can be sensitive. A core principle of a strong approach to EDI is that equality of experience is not the same as equality of solution. For example, a person's unique requirements may mean that it is best for them to be treated differently to others and a 'one size fits all' approach is rarely appropriate.

We will develop our people management policies with a 'person-centred' lens to allow the flexibility to take account of unique personal circumstances where appropriate.

Our aim is to develop a culture of sharing, support, and honest communication.

This means expressing and discussing any challenges we may face and seeking support. Through two-way conversation channels (such as regular anonymous surveys), we aim to ensure that the appropriate tools and training are in place to support individuals in decision making, in understanding how to raise an issue of concern or responding to a request for an adjustment to be made to the workplace.

Our staff and student networks are key to this work, creating spaces for co-leadership that bring about real change; making sure that those who are under-represented or experiencing disadvantage are able to voice their concerns, take ownership of the issues that are affecting them, so that we can work in partnership to deliver change.

We also need to ensure that every one of us undertakes the collective responsibility to change our environment and culture.

We will deliver this support through a combination of locally embedded EDI & Wellbeing Ambassadors, including students as leaders of change, who will work alongside Human Resources, and other professional services, to support managers in responding to student and staff needs appropriately. Work will continue developing resources, toolkits, FAQs and training materials that can be accessed via a dedicated EDI Hub.

We will also create a staff facing EDI data dashboard, which will increase transparency in our workforce data, compliment the AAP dashboard, and help leaders of courses and teams understand where there might be bias within their own parts of the organisation.

We will embed responsibility for EDI into all job roles through appropriate PDR objectives.

STAFF & STUDENT DIVERSITY

Staff Diversity:

EDI strategies are usually centred around those with 'protected characteristics'. The Equality Act 2010 defines these as: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation.

Our Strategic Action Plan for EDI goes beyond just delivering targeted interventions to support specific groups of staff. We will consider other characteristics in addition to the ones identified in the Equalities Act:

Caring responsibilities:
acknowledges individuals who act as carers for older relatives, those with disabilities and children.

Socio-economic background:
recognises the impact that coming from a less affluent background can have on being a staff member or student at the University.

Temporary impairment:
allows us to consider the support we can give those with shorter-term illness and mental health issues that may not be covered by the definition of disability.

Neurodiversity:
acknowledges the different ways the brain can work and interpret information. We will take steps to make our neurodivergent staff feel valued, part of the team and supported to contribute fully towards achieving the University's goals.

Linguistic Diversity:
is a strength of our institution and its diversity. We should remain mindful of the way we communicate, especially if students or staff do not speak English as their first language and encourage staff, through the Language Centre, to share the joys of learning a new language.

Student Access and Participation Plan:

Our Access and Participation Plan requires us to support student groups, and students who are considered to be underrepresented within higher education, this includes students who are:

- **From areas of lower higher education participation.**
- **Lower household income and/or lower socioeconomic status groups.**
- **Care leavers or care experienced.**
- **Estranged (studying without a family network/family support).**
- **From Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities.**
- **Refugees.**
- **Children of military families.**
- **Students with particular entry qualifications for example, BTEC's.**

We will continually assess our data and support any other student groups who may be facing barriers to accessing, succeeding or progressing in higher education.

Inclusive Community:

We will ensure our EDI processes and practices are fully inclusive of trans people, including use of preferred names and pronouns and support for those who are transitioning. Equally, we will ensure we are inclusive of non-binary individuals, who identify as genderqueer, gender fluid or in other ways that are free from binary gender.
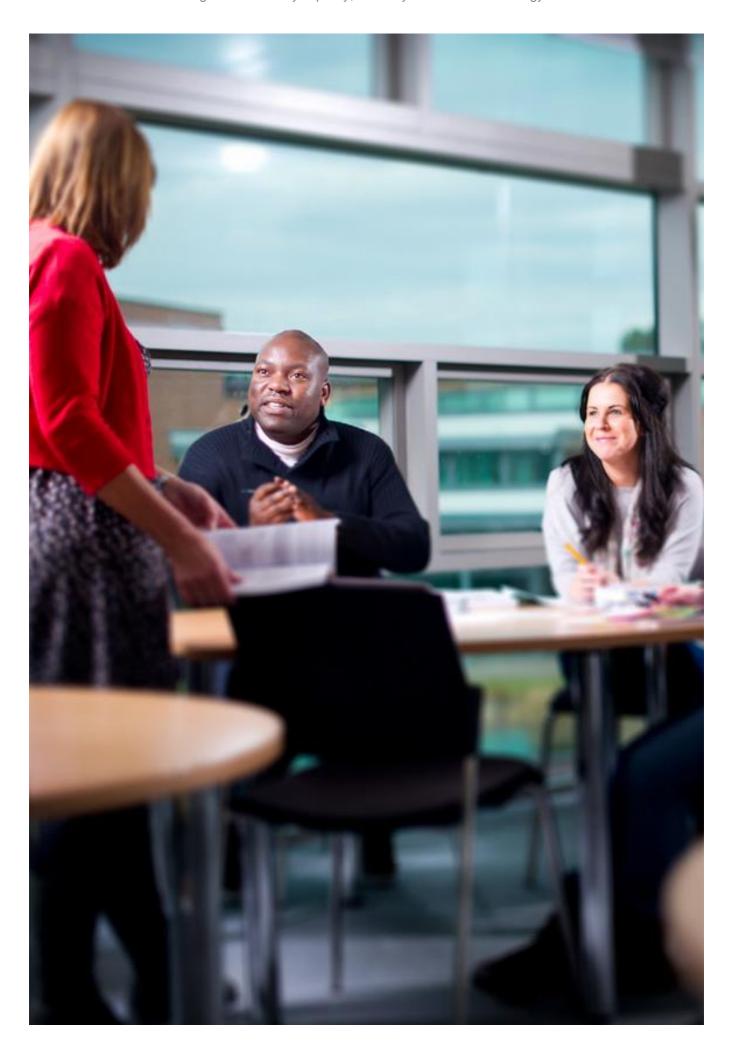
We will ensure that our EDI plans align with the wider university support for mental health and wellbeing, and work with experts from our own university community to guide our support for the mental health of our students and staff. This will be distinct from, but complementary to, our more general, proactive, ongoing, support of physical health and wellbeing.

As well as recognising additional characteristics and how we need to approach these in a successful and inclusive way, we will also specifically consider the impact of intersectionality - recognising that multiple social and demographic identities and therefore levels of discrimination can overlap.

Wherever possible, the activities delivered through our EDI Strategic Action Plan will support all our staff and students, whether they hold a specific characteristic or not.

However, in some cases there are clear imperatives to deliver activities that are targeted to address the lived experiences of staff and student groups. These normally involve working directly with and consulting members of staff and/or student networks and, in some cases, the activities may be initiated by the networks themselves.

In other cases, these may arise from local, national or international focus on EDI issues. We will always take an open and transparent approach when doing any targeted work, explaining clearly to staff and students why this approach is being adopted.

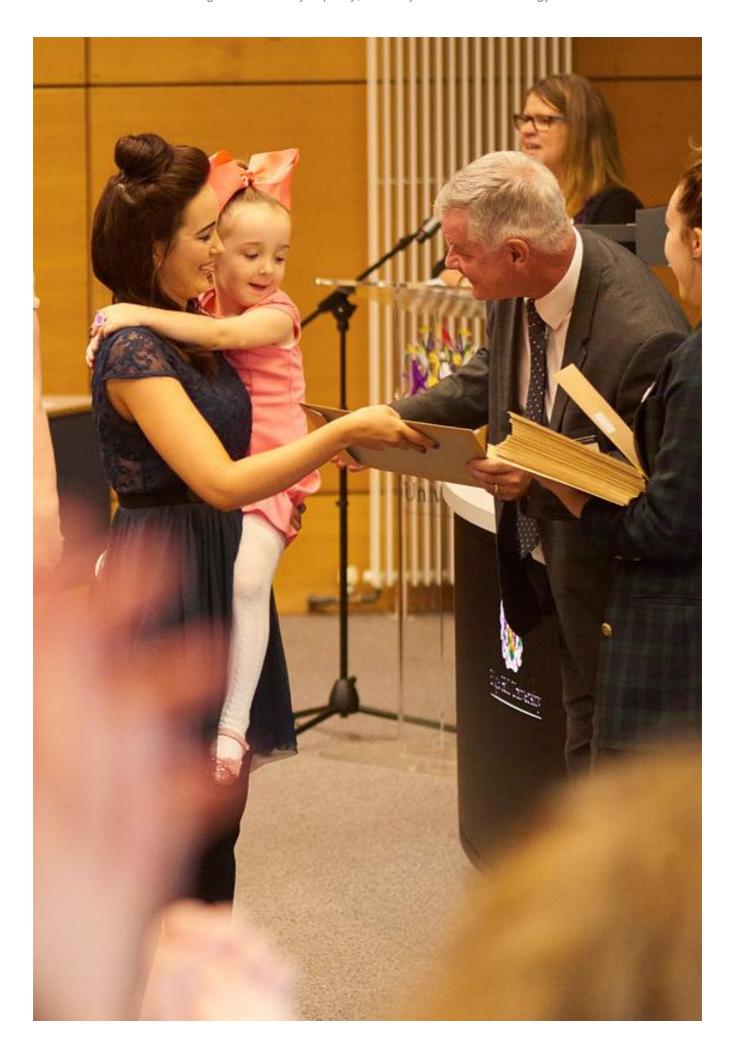# A PROACTIVE APPROACH

TO DELIVER CHANGE

Positive action is not positive discrimination. Positive discrimination is unlawful in the UK and refers to the specific selection of an individual for a place in a study programme, or a job, on the basis of their protected characteristics. However, positive action recognises the systemic bias that places certain groups at a disadvantage, and takes steps to address this inequality, and ensure that all have an equal opportunity of achieving their very best.

An example of positive action is through the way that we write and target our advertising for courses or job roles. If evidence shows that a particular course or job role is biased towards one gender, we may choose to target groups from an under-represented gender to encourage a more equal balance of applications. All applications are considered according to the same criteria, but we may look at the information that we request in an application to ensure that we do not introduce or exacerbate systemic bias. We will continue to reflect a range of diversity in representations we include on our website, intranet and in public facing materials.

Building EDI into our curriculum is also an example of how we will proactively deliver change, through validation and quality processes into curriculum design and delivery.

We will encourage the adoption of positive action where possible, basing decisions on a clear evidence base to ensure that appropriate actions are being taken to address a real problem, and evaluate the impact of our actions through assessment of our progress against our EDI Strategic Action Plan. We will explore the development of resources to build confidence in taking positive action.

GOVERNANCE

As our University has grown and our focus on EDI has increased, it means we have to reconsider how we coordinate our work in a coherent way.

In 2020, we formed the EDI Steering Group (EDISG) as a new strategic committee to ensure we are performing against the actions we have committed to It. The EDISG will meet once per term and its membership will consist of the senior leads of the key strategic and operational areas, with responsibility for commissioning and directing operational groups with specific remits.

The EDISG is responsible for owning and approving the Strategic Action Plan and progress indicators, which will be maintained and communicated through our online EDI Hub and will take oversight of the activities that fulfil our legal responsibilities, as well as those on which we report through external charters.

To ensure the EDISG is focused on strategic level work, we will introduce more fluid working groups throughout the year to deal with arising / ongoing operational priorities and deadlines ensuring the right core processes and teams are in place to enable everyone to deliver against the agenda locally. The EDISG (or its working groups) will report into other institutional committees across the university governance structure, on matters of relevance to each of their remits.

RELATED STRATEGIES

The objectives in the EDI Action Plan are supported by related work-streams, including:

EHU Strategic Plan			
Research Strategy	Curriculum Strategy	Access & Participation Plan	Learning & Teaching Strategy
HR Annual Report		**EHU People Plan**	

They are also underpinned by the business plans for faculty and service areas which support the objectives at a local level and reflect the Institution's commitment to EDI in everything we do.

MEASURES OF SUCCESS

The overall mission of the EDI Strategic Action Plan is for Edge Hill University to be a place where:

- all students and staff feel safe and supported.
- students and staff can achieve their very best in their work and study realising their full potential.
- diversity is both celebrated and used to support the University's growth.

This mission will be supported by a detailed action plan that will be publicly available, continually reviewed and refreshed as required.

By working together, in partnership with the groups that we are aiming to support, we can deliver the inclusive culture required for us to ensure that we are all happy, safe and supported.

This will result in:

Visible role models, allies, EDI and Wellbeing Ambassadors, reflecting the diversity of our staff and students, in all roles and contexts.

All those who implement policies and behaviours are aware of where expertise sits within the organisation, understand their own responsibilities, and know when and how they can get help.

Progress against our Access and Participation Plan targets and aims - the annual reduction of gaps in access, **continuation, attainment and progression of students with protected and underrepresented characteristics.**

This will include working towards our five APP targets to:

1. Increasing the number of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic students accessing our institution.

2. Reducing the gap in continuation rates between students from areas of low participation in higher education and those from areas with higher rates of participation.

3. Reducing the attainment gap between our Black students and White students

4. Reducing the attainment gap between female students from areas of higher deprivation, and female students who are from lower areas of deprivation (using indices of multiple deprivation as the measure)

5. Reduce the gap in progression into graduate careers between students from areas of low participation in higher education and those from areas with higher rates of participation.

Continuous improvement of our support for under-represented students through research informed practice and impact evaluation of our initiatives.

Reduction of gaps in pay and progression for staff with protected characteristics.

Increased retention of specific groups.

Increased diversity in our staff and student population, where particular groups are currently under-represented by considering representations in public facing materials such as website, job adverts, staff and students at open days etc.

A culture, where people can understand each other's perspectives and experiences, and where we have clear expectations around behaviour, respect, empathy and kindness whilst recognising that these might sometimes be opposing.
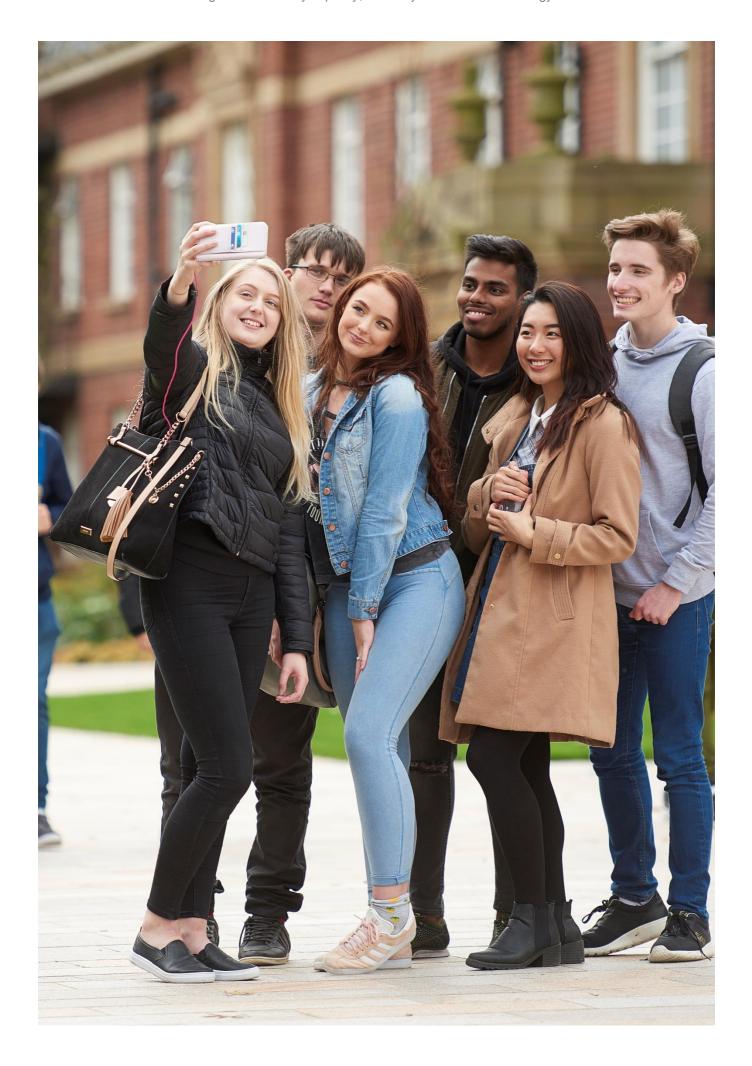
The achievement of EDI goals, including external benchmarking and charters (e.g. Athena Swan and HR Excellence in Research, Race Equality Charter).

Shared EDI objectives in all staff performance reviews.

An inclusive curriculum that is accessible and inspiring to all.

A respected and successful organisation, in which staff and students are proud to work and study.

Our ambitious plan builds on the passion and commitment from a large number of staff and students. We may also discover new challenges along the way which require us to revise our approach; we are committed to making sure that this focus does not over-burden anyone, particularly if they are already in a minority or have to work to overcome disadvantage because of their personal circumstances or characteristics.

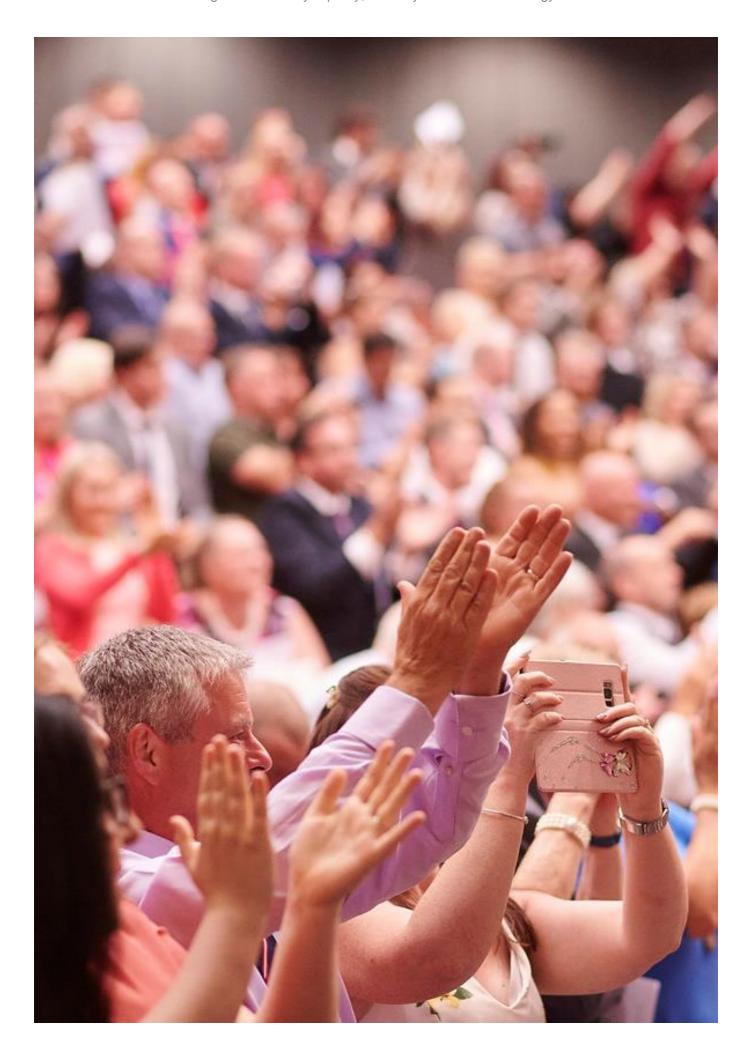# CLOSING STATEMENT

DR JANE MOORE

PRO VICE-CHANCELLOR FOR
EDI AND DEAN OF EDUCATION

Healthy organisations listen and learn. Our consultation exercises have given us a clear steer and mandate for building on our commitment to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion through a comprehensive and ambitious strategy and associated actions. (as articulated in the aligned action plan).

Edge Hill's history is rooted in the struggle for equality, and we strive to do justice to that history in our continued commitment to challenge, support and champion. EDI goes to the heart of who people are and what matters to them. It is the nature of issues of equality, diversity and inclusion that these are sometimes difficult and uncomfortable, and we must be both sensitive and brave in our responses. We aim to nurture an environment and community in which every person feels safe, supported and that they belong; we won't be satisfied until we can say that is the case.

Ambitions and ideals have their place, but hard work, reflection and resilience are needed to really embed meaningful change. We are committed to a culture of openness, both about the successes we achieve and about the remaining and emerging difficulties we will sometimes face. We need to be watchful and kind. However, we believe we can make real, sustained and significant progress through the months and years ahead, and make Edge Hill University a genuinely inclusive, safe and happy place for everyone.

ENDMATTER

DOCUMENT MANAGEMENT

Title	Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy
Owner	Director of Human Resources
Approved by	Board of Governors
Date of Publication	2021
Date for Review	2025

Edge Hill University