



Equality Impact Assessment – Virtual Classroom Policy

Before carrying out EqIA, you should familiarise yourself with the University’s EqIA Policy Statement and Guidance and Checklist Notes, and undertake our online training on Equality and Diversity and EqIA. These, along with further information and resources, are available at www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/equality-diversity/impact-assessment

EqIA covers policies, provisions, criteria, functions, practices and activities, including decisions and the delivery of services, but will be referred to as ‘policy/practice’ hereinafter.

A. Policy/Practice (name or brief description):

Virtual Classroom Policy

This Policy clarifies rights and responsibilities when delivering and recording teaching and learning using the Virtual Classroom service and other online communication and collaboration technologies.

Equality impact assessments already exist from the introduction or update of the following applications covered by the Policy:

- [Equality impact assessment for Blackboard Collaborate](#)
- [Equality impact assessment for Microsoft Teams](#)

B. Reason for Equality Impact Assessment (Mark **yes against the applicable reason):**

- Proposed new policy/practice **YES**
- Proposed change to an existing policy/practice
- Undertaking a review of an existing policy/practice
- Other (please state):

C. Person responsible for the policy area or practice:

Name: **Melissa Highton**

Job title: **Director of Learning, Teaching and Web Services**

School/service/unit: **Learning, Teaching and Web Services, Information Services**

D. An Impact Assessment should be carried out if any of the following apply to the policy/practice, if it:

- affects primary or high level functions of the University **Yes**
- is relevant to the promotion of equality (in terms of the Public Sector Equality Duty ‘needs’ as set out in the Policy and Guidance)? **Yes**
- It is one which interested parties could reasonably expect the University to have carried out an EqIA? **Yes**

E. Equality Groups

To which equality groups is the policy/practice relevant and why? (add notes against the following applicable equality group/s)

- Age
- Disability
- race (including ethnicity and nationality)
- religion or belief
- sex
- sexual orientation
- gender reassignment
- pregnancy and maternity
- marriage or civil partnership¹

The Policy and the applications it covers have the potential to impact on all 9 protected characteristics as all teaching-related staff and all students throughout the University will be authorised to use the applications. We feel however, the characteristics of disability, race, religion and belief, and pregnancy and maternity may be the most likely to be affected.

The Policy may be of particular relevance to the protected characteristic of disability, in that the applications for remote online learning will need to be accessible in terms of meeting current guidelines as stated by the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines Version 2.1 AA standard including compatibility with assistive technology. The University has a web accessibility policy, which is based on the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines Version 2.1 AA standard.

<https://www.ed.ac.uk/about/website/accessibility/accessibility-policy>).

In addition, some disabled students may need to record the online content and this reasonable adjustment has been supported through the University's Accessible and Inclusive Learning Policy. This need is further recognised and supported within this Virtual Classroom Policy.

Some disabled students with conditions such as social anxiety may prefer not to have their camera on and the Virtual Classroom Policy reflects that having the camera on is not compulsory.

Students who require individual reasonable adjustment for remote learning will have this identified by the Student Disability Service and the relevant School will be made aware of this.

It may be of relevance to the protected characteristic of race as the applications will automatically be in English, as at present are subtitles generated by MS Teams automatically in real time. This is mitigated by the fact that the main teaching language of the university of English. There is also the ability to change the language preference in the settings tab of each application quickly and easily. This could therefore have a positive impact on the protected characteristic of race as it may prove of use to students whose first language is not English.

The University is aware of the possibility that some students may encounter problems accessing content because of changing internet restrictions within their country, and will react and adapt to any such restrictions where possible.

¹ Note: only the duty to eliminate discrimination applies to marriage and civil partnership. There is no need to have regard to advancing equality or opportunity or fostering good relations in this respect.

The availability of University content delivered asynchronously may have a benefit for users who require flexible working. It may therefore have a positive impact of some disabled users, those with caring and parental responsibilities and those who adhere to times of religious observance as it means users do not have to attend campus.

The uploading of a photo to accompany a user's name within each application is optional and the turning on of a user's camera is not compulsory and so there should be no discrimination for users who do not wish a photograph to be used for religious reasons. If a person was undergoing gender transformation the application would pull the information from Euclid or the HR system so as soon as the user's name was updated in those systems it should also change in the application. The user is able to upload whichever photo they wish to each application and change it over time.

All content added to the applications must not discriminate against any of the protected characteristics. Any content that was found to discriminate against any of the protected characteristics would result in severe disciplinary action. The University vision is a continuing commitment to equality and diversity for both students and staff. The University has a single equality strategy to ensure that equality and diversity are guiding principles in our pursuit of academic excellence. Within the applications, the Policy specifies that a user would normally be identifiable to other users and therefore caution will be needed ensure other users are not making judgments based on a user's name particularly in regard to gender or race. However this issue is mitigated in that the Policy also allows for a student to be anonymous or use a pseudonym if required, and clarifies that it is not required for a user to turn on their video feed to the application at any point.

Add notes against the following applicable statements:

- On any available information about the needs of relevant equality groups:
The Policy has been reviewed by the Student Disability Service, Edinburgh University Students Association and trades unions. The Disability Information Team have conducted independent accessibility testing of Collaborate for Accessibility and will continue to do so. They have been consulted on the accessibility of Microsoft Teams.

All users are encouraged to give feedback regarding any issues with the system and any potential feedback related to any of the 9 protected characteristics is addressed and acted on as appropriate.

- Any gaps in evidence/insufficient information to properly assess the policy, and how this be will be addressed:

No, we feel we have sufficient information to proceed at this stage.

- If application of this policy/practice leads to discrimination (direct or indirect), harassment, victimisation, less favourable treatment for particular equality groups:
Recent feedback has been received that some students have internet connections or hardware that are not reliable enough to stream media, and we believe this issue may disproportionately affect students of certain nationalities. Section 13c) of the Policy should be amended to ensure the range of cases where a student may be permitted to download a recording is comprehensive.

Otherwise we do not believe the new Policy will result in any form of prohibited conduct -for the reasons detailed above and below. Any reasonable adjustments required will be put in place.

- If the policy/practice contributes to advancing equality of opportunity²

The Policy may help advance equality of opportunity as the policy supports remote learning. This can have benefits for users who may find it difficult to attend campus such as some disabled students, those who have caring/parental responsibilities and those who adhere to times of specific religious observance.

The Policy may also help equality of opportunity across all nine protected characteristics by encouraging a secure digital teaching space and underlining the University's Dignity and Respect Policy.

- If there is an opportunity in applying this policy/practice to foster good relations:
It is hoped that by considering potential impacts of this policy across all nine protected characteristics and ensuring the policy will not create disadvantage this demonstrates the commitment of Information Services and the University to Equality and Diversity. It is also hoped that this commitment will also be demonstrated through the Policy's data protection stipulations, particularly in relation to sensitive personal data.

- If the policy/practice create any barriers for any other groups?
Some students have internet connections or hardware that are not reliable enough to stream media, and this issue may disproportionately affect students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. As noted above, Section 13c) of the Policy should be amended to ensure the range of cases where a student may be permitted to download a recording is comprehensive to reflect this. The University has many study spaces allowing free access for students and staff to IT facilities and this includes several enclosed rooms that an individual may book.

- How the communication of the policy/practice is made accessible to all groups, if relevant?

This information about the Policy and the Policy itself will be provided on our webpages that have been tested for accessibility in line with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines Version 2 AA standard and which are governed by the University Web Accessibility Policy. Alternative formats will be provided to disabled users free of charge upon request, for example large print, or Braille.

- How equality groups or communities are involved in the development, review and/or monitoring of the policy or practice?

We will continue to monitor all feedback for any positive or negative impacts on any of the 9 protected characteristics. We will continue to engage with stakeholders as the Policy is implemented and as it develops, including but not limited to the Student Disability Service, Edinburgh University Students Association and trades unions.

- Any potential or actual impact of applying the policy or practice, with regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality and promote good relations:

None at this stage.

F. Equality Impact Assessment Outcome

Select one of the four options below to indicate how the development/review of the policy/practice will be progressed and state the rationale for the decision

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² This question does not apply to the protected characteristic of marriage or civil partnership

Option 2: Adjust the policy or practice – this involves taking steps to remove any barriers, to better advance equality and/or to foster good relations.

Section 13c) of the Policy will be amended to ensure the range of cases where a student may be permitted to download a recording is comprehensive.

G. Action and Monitoring

1. Specify the actions required for implementing findings of this EqIA and how the policy or practice will be monitored in relation to its equality impact (or note where this is specified above).

Amend Section 13c) as noted in section F above. Ensure all communications about the policy are available in alternative formats for disabled users free of charge upon request. We will continue to monitor all feedback for any comments (either positive or negative) related to any of the 9 protected characteristics. We will remind staff of the need to make reasonable adjustments as required.

2. When will the policy/practice next be reviewed?

Academic year 2021/2022 or when we receive any comments positive or negative related to any of the nine protected characteristics.

H. Publication of EqIA

Can this EqIA be published in full, now? **Yes**

I. Sign-off

EqIA undertaken by (name(s) and job title(s)):

Neil McCormick, Educational Technology Policy Officer, Information Services

Accepted by (name):

Melissa Highton, Director of Learning, Teaching and Web Services, Learning, Teaching and Web, Information Services

Date: 25th November 2020

Retain a copy of this form for your own records and send a copy to equalitydiversity@ed.ac.uk