BCUSU

BIRMINGHAM CITY University

Belonging at the heart of BCU

BCU's Strategy for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion
Student Version

2026 - 2030



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Introduction

Empowering people, fostering inclusion, and shaping a fairer future together for over 180 years.

BCU's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy, Belonging at the Heart of BCU, sets out our commitment to creating a university where belonging, inclusion and community define our culture and success. It supports BCU's Strategy 2030 and its three strategic pillars:

- Develop Talent for Tomorrow
- Create Knowledge for Good
- Power Prosperity

This student-facing version explains what the strategy means for you as a BCU student. It focuses on the commitments that will shape your learning, access to support, experience of university life and opportunities to succeed and progress.

We know that students do not all experience university in the same way. Your identity, background and circumstances can affect the barriers you encounter and the support you need. We are committed to understanding these differences and taking action to make students' experiences and outcomes more equitable.

This means creating inclusive and accessible learning environments, addressing disparities in student outcomes, strengthening support, improving representation and ensuring that students can influence the decisions that affect them. It also means being transparent about our progress and accountable when change is needed.

Students helped shape the University's EDI Strategy through workshops, focus groups, surveys and feedback. We will continue to work with students and Birmingham City University Students' Union to turn its commitments into practical action.

By 2030, we want every student to feel heard, valued and part of the BCU community, and to have an equitable opportunity to participate, succeed and achieve their ambitions.

Belonging at the heart of BCU



Our Strategy will mainstream equality, diversity and inclusion across BCU.

"At BCU, we are committed to creating an educational ecosystem where every individual - staff, student, and partner - is actively heard, valued for their individuality and strengths, and empowered. Our unique approach centres on recognising each person's individual identity and potential, and the diversity of our community."



Imogeen Denton,
Director of Inclusion



Adam Race,
Chief People and Infrastructure Officer

Vision

To be a university where belonging, inclusion and community define our culture and success.

Mission

We will embed equity, belonging, inclusion and community across BCU so that every student feels they belong, is heard and valued, and has the opportunity to thrive.

What it means to you

- Your identity, background and circumstances should not limit your ability to participate or succeed.
- Teaching, assessments, services, systems and spaces should be designed with different students in mind.
- You should be able to find and access support without unnecessary complexity or stigma.
- You should see diverse people, experiences and perspectives reflected across university life.
- You should have meaningful opportunities to influence decisions that affect your experience.
- You should be able to see what BCU has committed to, what progress has been made and where more action is needed.

> Your identity, background and circumstances should not limit your ability to participate or succeed.



The equality priorities most relevant to students

The full University strategy covers both students and staff. This version focuses on the priorities that most directly affect students.



Eliminate disparities in degree outcomes

We will address differences in degree outcomes between students from different ethnic communities and examine how ethnicity intersects with disability, deprivation, age and other characteristics.

Ensure equitable access and support for disabled students

We will remove barriers and improve access, opportunity and support so disabled and neurodivergent students can participate fully and succeed.

Build confidence and belonging

We will strengthen students' trust in BCU's commitment to equality of opportunity and create a community in which students feel respected, represented and included.

These equality priorities are supported by five connected building blocks that describe how BCU will deliver change.





Our key equality priorities

Priority 1

Eliminate disparities in degree outcomes between students from all ethnic communities.

Building blocks of delivery
To enhance equity-focused and intersectional practice.

Priority 2

Develop a diverse workforce that helps every student feel that they belong.

Building blocks of delivery
To promote shared responsibility and active allyship.

Priority 3

Ensure disabled students have equitable access, opportunity and support to participate and succeed.

Building blocks of delivery
To enhance the development of more accessible and supportive environments.

Priority 4

Build confidence and belonging, so all students and staff trust our commitment to equality of opportunity.

Building blocks of delivery
To build on existing belonging, pride and inclusive representation.

Priority 5

Ensure fair reward and equal opportunity for everyone.

Building blocks of delivery
"Embedded by design" - To move from good intentions to tangible practical actions.



Priority 1

To enhance equity-focused and intersectional practice

Not every student begins university from the same position or experiences it in the same way. An equitable approach recognises different circumstances and provides the opportunities and support students need to achieve fair outcomes. An intersectional approach also considers how different parts of a student's identity and experience overlap.

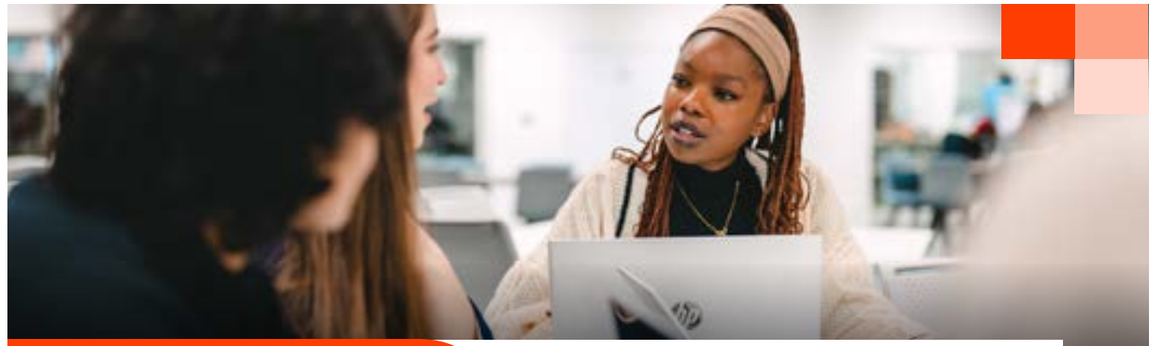
> We will use student data, lived experience and qualitative feedback together to identify barriers and disparities

What it means to students

- We will use student data, lived experience and qualitative feedback together to identify barriers and disparities.
- We will examine access, continuation, attainment and graduate outcomes across different and intersecting student groups.
- With the launch of the Office for Institutional Equity, we will take targeted action where evidence shows that particular groups face greater disadvantage.
- We will apply an equity and intersectional lens when reviewing policies, curricula, assessment and student services.
- Schools and services will use evidence to understand their own students rather than relying only on University-level averages.

What progress should look like

- Sustained reductions in identified awarding and progression gaps.
- Accessible student EDI data and accompanying explanations are used in decision-making.
- Students can identify changes made in response to evidence and lived experience.
- New and revised policies, services and learning practices demonstrate how equality impacts have been considered.



Priority 2

Shared responsibility and active allyship

Inclusion is not the responsibility of students who experience inequality or of a small number of EDI specialists. Everyone at BCU has a role in creating a respectful, fair and supportive community. Active allyship means noticing exclusion, responding constructively, supporting others and helping to remove barriers.

> Students and staff will be supported to recognise and challenge discrimination

What it means to students

- The Office for Institutional Equity will set clear expectations for inclusive behaviour across learning, teaching and university life.
- Students and staff will be supported to recognise and challenge discrimination, harassment and microaggressions.
- Student induction and development opportunities will explain what inclusive behaviour and active allyship look like at BCU.
- Students will have different ways to contribute, including through BCUSU, student groups, course representation and the Office for Institutional Equity.
- Leaders and staff will be expected to listen, act and follow through when concerns are raised.

What progress should look like

- Students report greater confidence in recognising and challenging inequity.
- Students know how to raise concerns and have greater confidence that appropriate action will follow.
- There is visible participation in student networks, groups and inclusion activity.
- Student feedback shows a reduction in experiences of exclusion and microaggressions.



Priority 3

Accessible and supportive environments

Students should be able to enter, navigate, participate and succeed without unnecessary barriers. Accessibility applies to buildings, digital platforms, teaching, assessment, communications, placements, services and wellbeing support.

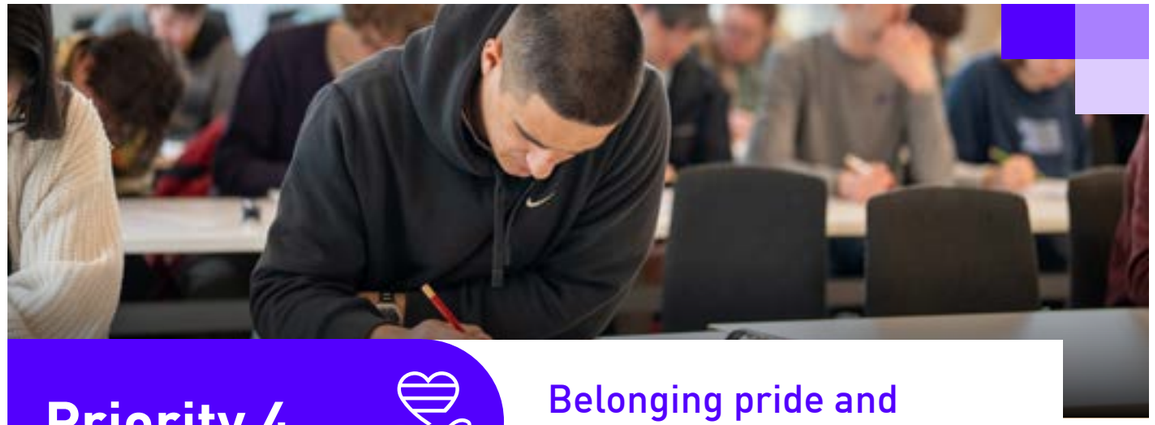
> We will improve the content, tone and timing of information so students know what support is available and how to access it

What it means to students

- We will move from relying on reactive adjustments towards anticipating and removing barriers wherever possible.
- We will review the accessibility of key buildings, services, digital platforms, curricula and assessment processes.
- We will make routes into adjustments and specialist support clearer and simpler.
- We will improve the content, tone and timing of information so students know what support is available and how to access it.
- The Office for Institutional Equity will help staff recognise support needs and respond or signpost with confidence and empathy.
- We will work to make support more accessible so students do not have to repeatedly explain or justify their needs.

What progress should look like

- Improved student feedback on accessibility and the responsiveness of support.
- More timely implementation of reasonable adjustments and fewer avoidable delays.
- Published action and accountability following physical and digital accessibility reviews.
- Positive feedback from disabled and neurodivergent students about their learning and support experiences.
- Clear evidence of delivery against the Disabled Student Commitment.



Priority 4

Belonging pride and inclusive representation

Belonging should be a lived, everyday experience shaped by relationships, culture, representation and participation. Students are more able to learn, contribute and take intellectual risks when they feel valued, respected and part of their university community.

> We will strengthen culturally informed wellbeing and community support

What it means to students

- The Office for Institutional Equity will increase the visibility of diverse identities and experiences in curricula, communications, events and decision-making.
- We will work with students to create teaching, learning and assessment approaches that reflect diverse perspectives.
- We will strengthen culturally informed wellbeing and community support.
- We will strengthen connections across our diverse student communities.
- We will work with students so that their voices lead to visible change.
- We will support identity-based and liberation-focused student groups in partnership with BCUSU.
- We will create a culture of respectful open dialogue through lawful free speech.

What progress should look like

- Improved student survey results for belonging, inclusion and student voice.
- Students report seeing their identities and experiences reflected in curricula and university communications.
- Growth in participation and leadership within student groups and networks.
- Student feedback identifies meaningful changes resulting from partnership and co-creation.
- Inclusive imagery, language and storytelling are visible across University platforms.



Priority 5

Embedded by design

Lasting change requires more than individual initiatives. EDI must be built into how BCU plans, makes decisions, allocates resources, designs services and reviews performance. Leaders and teams must be clear about what they are responsible for delivering.

> We will share clear updates on what students told us, what we did and what changed as a result

What it means to students

- We will connect the University EDI Strategy to School and service planning, governance, risk and performance processes.
- EDI will be considered when policies, courses, assessments, services, systems and spaces are designed or reviewed.
- We will publish progress using data alongside student experience and feedback through the Office for Institutional Equity.
- Students and BCUSU will have opportunities to scrutinise progress and contribute to priorities for action.
- We will share clear updates on what students tell us, our response and what changed as a result.

What progress should look like

- Regular reporting to the University EDI Committee and University Executive Team.
- Visible follow-through against commitments and action plans.
- Year-on-year improvement in student EDI indicators and explanations where progress is off track.
- Students can identify who is accountable for action and how their feedback has influenced decisions.

How this supports Strategy 2030

Develop Talent for Tomorrow

- Inclusive learning environments that remove barriers to participation and achievement.
- Curricula and teaching that reflect diverse perspectives.
- Improved continuation, attainment, progression and graduate outcomes.
- Accessible and anticipatory support before difficulties escalate.

Create Knowledge for Good

- An inclusive research culture in which different voices and perspectives can contribute.
- Recognition of lived experience as a valuable source of knowledge and insight.
- Community-centred research partnerships that benefit the people and places BCU serves.

Power Prosperity

- Removing barriers to opportunity and progression for local people.
- Developing socially aware, culturally competent and community-minded graduates.
- Working with Birmingham's communities to support social mobility and inclusive prosperity.





How progress will be measured

The full University EDI Strategy includes measures relating to both students and staff. The measures below are those most relevant to students. BCU will use these figures alongside student feedback and lived experience, because data alone cannot explain why a disparity exists or whether students experience change in practice.

We will also monitor

- Student feedback about accessibility, belonging, inclusion and support.
- The timeliness and effectiveness of reasonable adjustments.
- Participation in student voice, networks and co-creation activity.
- Evidence that accessibility reviews and equality actions have been completed and have improved students' experiences.
- Delivery of relevant commitments within the Race Equality Charter, Athena Swan and Disabled Student Commitment action plans.



Our commitment to students



Belonging at BCU should be visible in how you are taught, supported, represented and involved. We will use evidence and student experience to understand where barriers remain, act on what we find and report openly on progress.

> Our goal is that every student can say: 'I am part of BCU and BCU is part of me'

Continuing student partnership

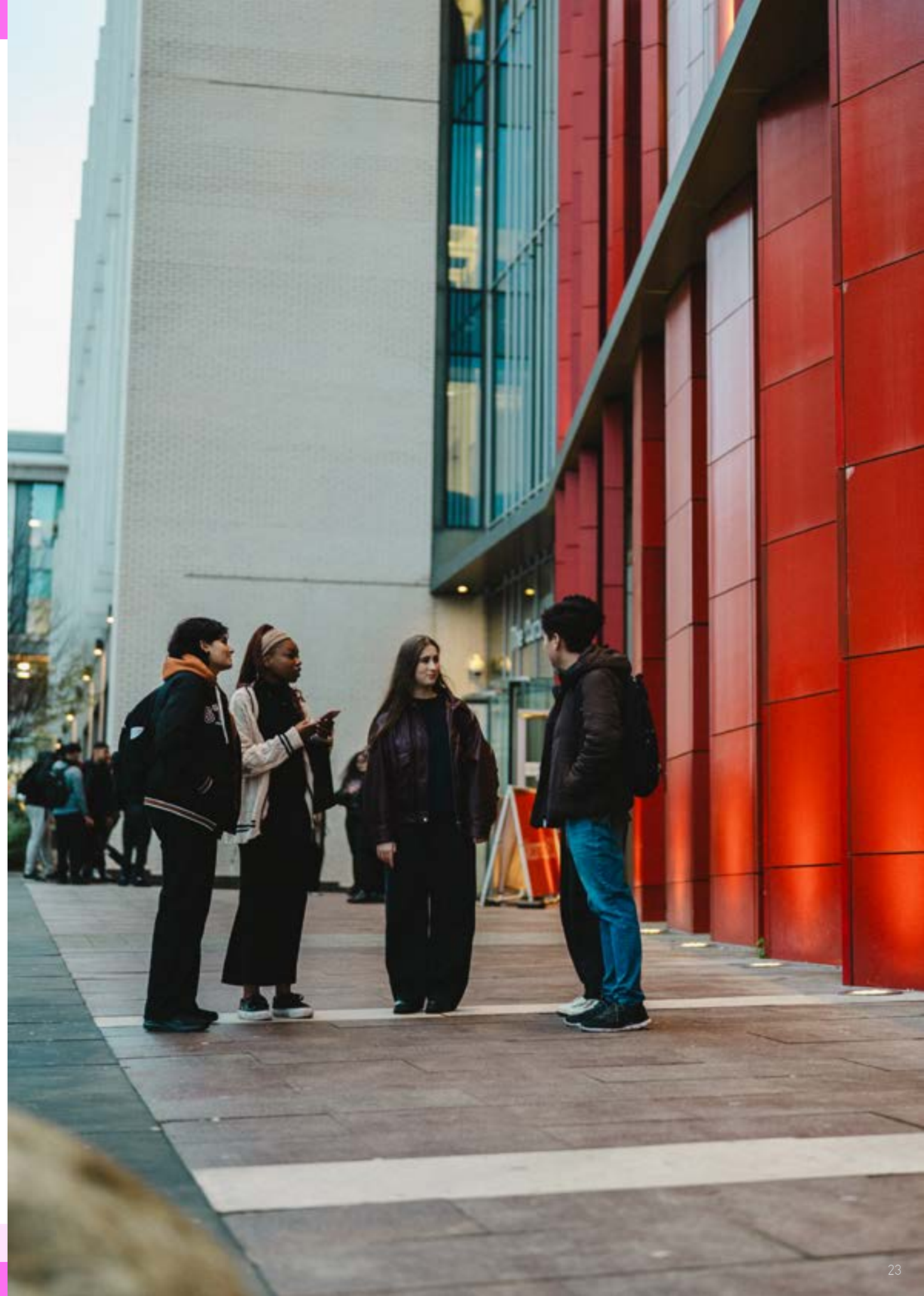
Related strategies and policies

Publishing the strategy is not the end of this process. BCU will continue to listen to students, work with BCUSU and use student feedback to shape delivery. Progress will be shared transparently, including where further action is needed.

Strategy name	Dependencies
Education Strategy	There is a need to ensure that teaching methods, curriculum design, and assessment practices are inclusive and accessible to all students, including those with disabilities, neurodivergent learners, and those from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds.
People and Culture Strategy	There is a requirement to ensure that recruitment, career progression, and workplace policies promote EDI. This includes inclusive hiring practices, reasonable adjustments for staff with disabilities, and fostering a culture of belonging through staff networks and leadership development programmes.
Digital Masterplan	Digital tools must be designed with universal accessibility in mind, ensuring that students and staff with disabilities can fully engage with online platforms, virtual learning environments, and digital resources.
Health and Wellbeing Plan	There is a requirement to ensure that staff health and wellbeing approaches are inclusive, equitable, and responsive to different needs and lived experiences. This includes creating supportive working environments, providing accessible wellbeing support and reasonable adjustments, and fostering a culture of care and belonging through inclusive policies, leadership behaviours, and staff networks.
Estates Masterplan	Physical accessibility is critical for an inclusive university environment. The built environment should ensure equal access to buildings, learning spaces, and social areas for all students and staff. This includes step-free access, adequate signage, assistive listening devices, and accessible accommodation.
Research Strategy	Embedding EDI into research ensures that studies consider diverse participant groups, avoid biases in methodology, and promote inclusive knowledge creation. Research funding should support under-represented groups and ensure that research outputs are accessible.
Sustainability Strategy and related plans	Our EDI strategy supports the delivery of the UN SDGs, in particular Quality Education, Gender Equality, and Reduced Inequalities. BCU is committed to supporting the delivery of the UN SDGs through Strategy 2030 and Our Sustainable Future.
Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech	Our commitment to EDI means creating a culture where everyone belongs and where open dialogue is part of how we learn and grow together. Freedom of speech (within the law) and academic freedom enable students and staff to share lawful views, challenge ideas and explore different perspectives within a supportive, inclusive environment.

Glossary of terms

Term	Definition
Accessibility	Designing and improving environments, systems, services and information so people can participate fully, independently and with confidence.
Active allyship	Using your voice, influence and actions to support people from marginalised or under-represented groups, challenge exclusion and help remove barriers.
Awarding gap	A difference in degree outcomes between groups of students. The term focuses attention on institutional barriers and outcomes rather than implying that students themselves are deficient.
Diversity	Recognising and valuing differences between people and groups.
Equality	Ensuring people are not treated less favourably or discriminated against because of who they are.
Equity	Recognising that people have different circumstances and providing the opportunities or resources needed to achieve fair outcomes.
Inclusion	Actively creating an environment where different people are welcomed, able to participate and supported to thrive.
Intersectionality	Understanding how different parts of a person's identity and circumstances overlap and can create distinct experiences of advantage or disadvantage.
Lived experience	Knowledge and insight gained through a person's direct experience of an issue, identity or system.
Minority ethnic	A collective term used in the strategy for ethnic groups that are minoritised within UK society. Wherever possible, BCU will use specific group-level data and language rather than treating different communities as one group.
Reasonable adjustment	A change made to remove or reduce a substantial disadvantage experienced by a disabled person.



Rooted in

Birmingham

Reaching Beyond