Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Annual Report 2023-24

Contents

1. Introduction

The University of Worcester is committed to creating an environment free from discrimination, bullying, harassment or victimisation, where all members of our community are treated with respect and dignity. We aim to create a culture of dignity and inclusivity within our community, providing a working and learning environment, where all members are valued for their contribution and individuality.

We recognise that equality, diversity and inclusion require a strong commitment and concerted action. We aim to build an inclusive environment where opportunities are open to all, diversity is valued, and where everyone can reach their full potential without fear of harassment, prejudice or discrimination. Every person in our University community has a responsibility for making the University an inclusive environment where all members of our University community feel welcome and are able to be themselves.

Our commitment to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) has flowed through successive University Strategic Plans. It is reiterated in the most recent plan which states "*our approach...is bult on the principle of inclusion*". Our EDI Framework 2022-2027 restates and extends our commitment to EDI.

2. Legislative Context

The Equality Act 2010 provides a legal framework to strengthen and advance equality, diversity and inclusion. The Act protects all individuals from unlawful discrimination on the grounds of nine protected characteristics:


Public Sector Equality Duty

The University has additional duties under Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 to promote equality. The general equality duty requires the University, in the exercise of any of its functions, to have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited;
- Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it, and
- Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

3.   EDI Governance at the University of Worcester

The University's Board of Governors has ultimate responsibility for ensuring the University complies with the above legal duties.

The overarching governance of EDI falls to the University's Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Oversight Group (EDIOG), whose membership comprises primarily members of the University's senior management team (UEB) and the President of the Students' Union. This approach ensures that EDI matters have a high profile at the University and EDI is embedded into University wide projects from the outset. EDIOG's relationship with other committees and the wider University is set out in Table 1 below. EDIOG reports directly to the University Executive Board and has a reporting line to the Board of Governors, via its People and Culture Committee.
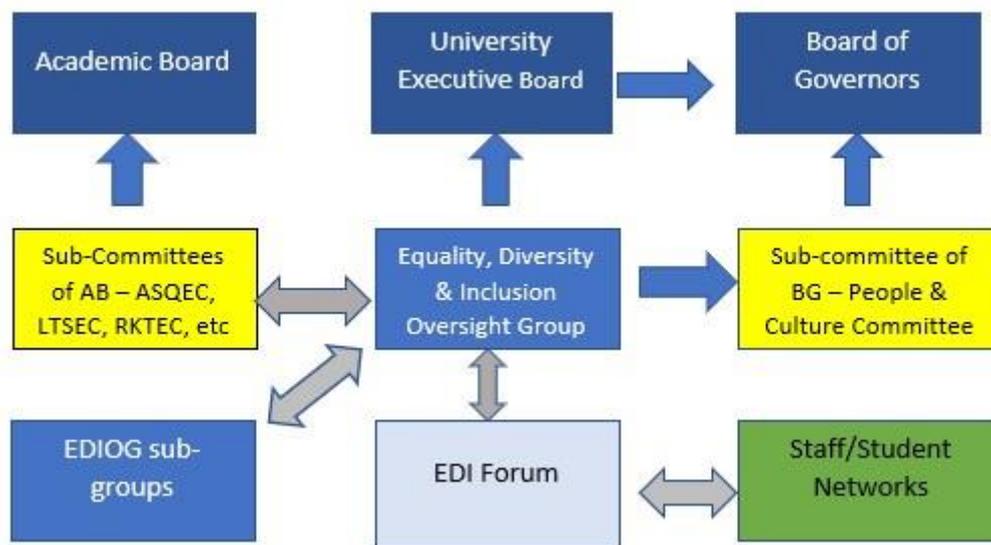
The EDIOG works closely with the sub-Committees of Academic Board and other University Working Groups and Student's Union officers and groups, whose area of focus closely aligns with one or more of the EDI themes.

The EDI Forum has student and staff membership from across the University including from various student and staff networks. The EDI Forum provides a sounding board for EDIOG as well as providing a mechanism for both staff and students to raise relevant EDI matters.

During 2023-24 members of the EDI Forum were asked to express an interest in one or more of the EDI themes in the EDI Framework and small theme specific working groups were established, led by a senior member of the University, supported by an EDIOG member as

sponsor.   These working groups will develop ideas and initiatives relating to their assigned theme for consideration by EDIOG.

4.   EDI Framework

The University's Board of Governors approved the current EDI Policy Statement and EDI Framework 2022-2027 in November 2022. In these documents the University identifies six high level commitments which will enable us to achieve our vision:

1. We commit to embedding EDI in the design and delivery of all our core activities: in our educational offer, both in terms of our learning and teaching practice and our curriculum; in our research, both in how we support research but also in carrying out our research; in our public and community engagement and our wider Knowledge Exchange.

2. We commit to assuring that all our strategies, policies and practices are inclusive to students and staff from all backgrounds.

3. We commit to ensuring that all members of our community and visitors to the University are treated with respect and dignity and receive fair and equitable treatment in all aspects of their engagement with the University.

4. We commit to ensuring that all members of our community are aware of their individual and collective responsibilities and legal duties in relation to equality and diversity through providing up to date training, development and guidance.

5. We commit to providing a clear framework which enables any unwanted conduct, behaviour or practice to be reported and which assures our students and staff of a robust process of investigating and appropriate action.

6. We commit to demonstrating visibility and accountability for EDI among our senior leadership.

The framework further identifies six themes around which we will focus our work:

1. **Shaping the culture:** promoting an inclusive University-wide culture in which students, staff and other members of the University from all backgrounds have a strong sense of belonging and can work creatively and innovatively to achieve their own and the University's ambitions.

2. **Student success**: attracting, supporting, developing and retaining students from across all communities, providing an inclusive curriculum and enabling all our students to achieve their future study and career aspirations.

3. **Supporting our staff:** attracting, developing and retaining a talented workforce with increased diversity at all levels of the organisation.

4. **Influencing the wider community**: recognising the University is an integral part of the City of Worcester and the region and seeking to influence policy, practice and behaviours across this wider area.

5. **Developing an inclusive approach to Research and Knowledge Exchange:** ensuring EDI is embedded in the design and delivery of our Research and Knowledge Exchange and in the systems we develop to support our researchers.

6. **Enhancing our infrastructure**: developing further the physical and digital accessibility of our campus to increase opportunities and improve experiences for all.

And four main areas of focus we wish to particularly focus on during the lifetime of the Framework:

- Race
- Gender
- Disability
- LGBTQ+

This report sets out in Section 8 activity during 2023-24 in each of the six themes identified in the EDI Framework.

5. Student EDI Profile

5.1 Overall student profile

The latest trends in the University's total student population relating to gender, age, disability, ethnicity/race, sexual orientation and religion/belief are shown below. The data in this report is from the HESA Core File as at the year-end for each academic year.

National comparator data throughout this section is taken HESA Higher Education Student Data for 2022-23 or from Advance HE Equality in Higher Education: Students ,which provides further analysis and commentary on 2022/23 student data. National data for the 2023/24 student population was not available at the time of writing.

The first table shows the University of Worcester's total student population, including postgraduate, over the last five years.

|	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Total student number	9801	10110	9901	9733	9184

5.2 Gender

The student gender profile has remained fairly constant over recent years with a split 70-75% female and 25-30% male, with a small percentage identifying as 'Other' or refusing to identify. Across the sector, the latest data available from 2022-23, shows the female:male:unknown split as broadly 57:42:1. This national split has been fairly consistent since 2016/17.

	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/25
Female	71.02%	72.24%	73.16%	72.38%	70.84%
Male	28.98%	27.75%	26.79%	27.16%	28.72%
Other	0%	0.01%	0.05%	0.14%	0.14%
Refused	0%	0%	0%	0.32%	0.29%

The University's gender split, with a significantly higher percentage of female students, is reflective of the University's academic portfolio with a high percentage of female students studying in the Schools of Nursing & Midwifery, Allied Health & Community, and Education, all of which tend to lead to jobs which are more attractive to females. The greatest percentage of females in 2023/24 was in the School of Nursing & Midwifery (88.34%), followed by the Institute of Education (83.79%), and the School of Allied Health & Community (81.59%). The highest percentage of male students in 2023/24 were in the School of Sport and Exercise Science (67.80%) and the Worcester Business School (57.50%). The School with the most balanced gender split in 2023/24, and closest to the national picture, was the School of Science and the Environment (female 58.19%, male 41.18%, unknown 0.63%). In broad terms there has been little movement in these gender splits over the past five years.

5.3   Disability
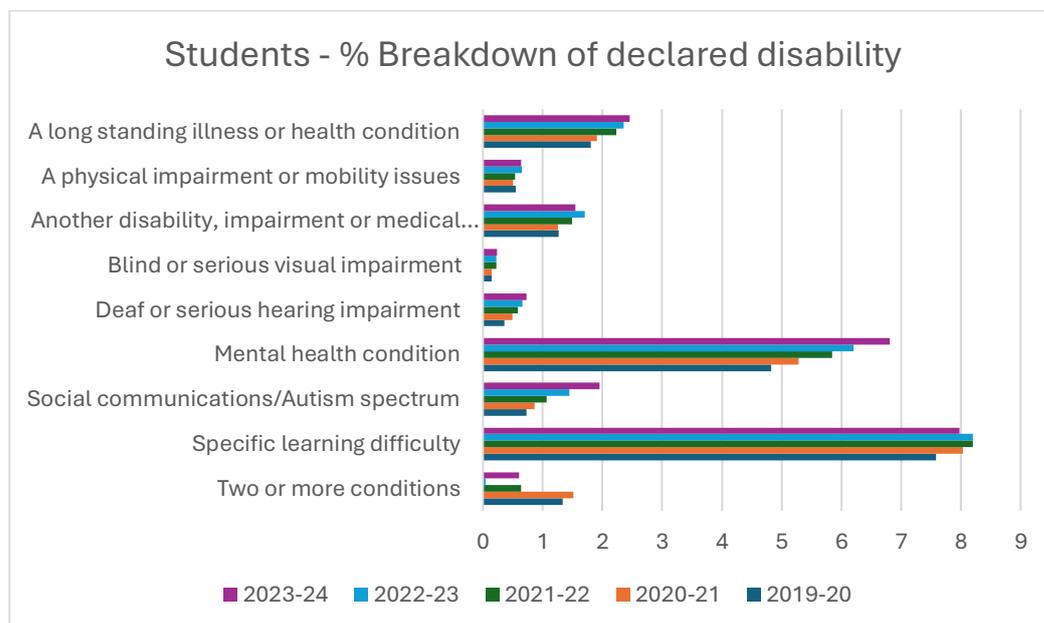
The number of students declaring a disability at the University during the period 2019/20 to 2023/24 has increased year on year from 18.58% in 2019/20 to 22.95% in 2023/24. Across the UK HE Sector disability disclosure rates since 2003/04 have nearly tripled rising from 5.4% to 16.48% in 2022/23.

Specific learning difficulties is the highest declared disability with 7.98% (733) students disclosing a disability. Specific learning difficulties is the most commonly student disability disclosure nationally, with 31.9% disclosing this disability in 2022-23 (8.23% at the University in 2022/23).

The second most disclosed disability amongst the University's students is mental health, which has risen year on year from 4.82% (472 students) in 2019/20 to 6.81% (625 students) in 2023/24. Nationally, mental health is also the second highest disclosed disability at c29% of the national student population since 2020/21.

5.4   Ethnicity

The University's student population has gradually become more diverse with the percentage of students identifying as White decreasing from 83.59% in 2019/20 to 70.50% in 2023-24. Nationally in 2022/23, the HESA data shows 51% of students, who are UK domiciled, as identifying as White; this is not 100% comparable with the University's data which includes all students.

The percentage of the University's students not disclosing their ethnicity was relatively low from 2019/20 (3.57%) but has risen steeply in 2023/24 to 16.05% (1474 students). This data is provided on a voluntary basis.
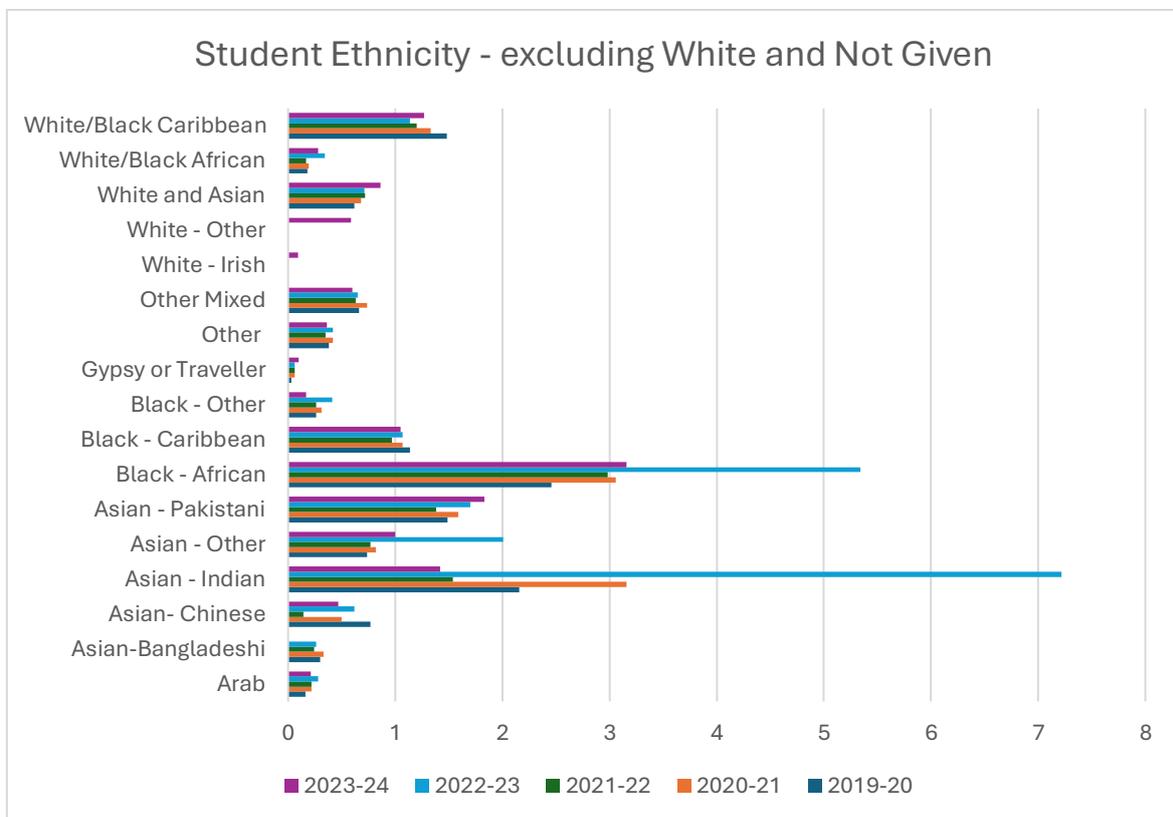
Note: in 2023/24 HESA changed some of the ethnicity fields, introducing 'White-Irish' and removing 'Asian-Bangladeshi'

The ethnic split of the University's student population shows that the spikes in Asian-Indian and Black-African ethnicity in 2022-23 have reduced in 2023-24. It is anticipated that this is not a true reflection of the ethnicity of the student population given, in particular, the increase in Asian students studying Nursing in 2023-24 and may be more reflective of students choosing not to declare their ethnicity on registration.

5.5 Sexual Orientation

Disclosing sexual orientation is a voluntary for students and the data has changed little during the five year reporting period, with 81.21% disclosing as Heterosexual, 10.9% as LGBTQ+ and 7.89% as 'Unknown'.
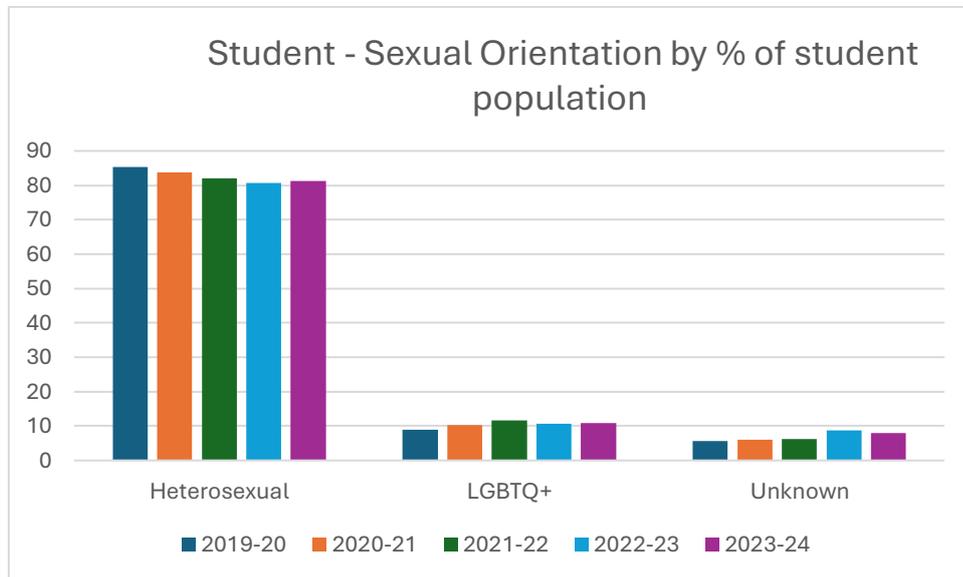
There is no national reporting on those identifying as LGTBQ+ although the University's data reflects a picture which is above the 3.2% returned in the 2021 census.

5.6 Student Religion/Belief

The University's data shows a generally consistent picture over the 5 year reporting period with c31% identifying as Christian and 51– 55% identifying as having 'no religion' and 3-4% 'preferring not to say'. Nationally, in 2022-23 27% identified as Christian, 39% as having 'No Religion' and 12% as 'preferring not to say'.
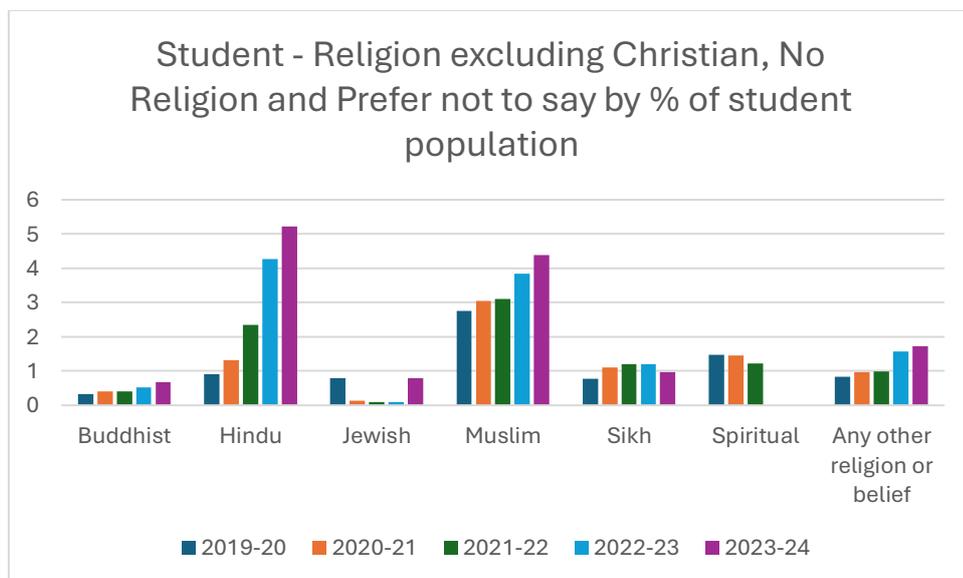
The data shows a steady increase year on year in students identifying as Hindu (5.23% in 2023-24) or Muslim (4.38% in 2023-24) which is likely to be reflective of the growing diversification of the ethnicity of the University's population.

In 2022-23 HESA removed Spiritual as a religion/belief which students could choose to identify with which may have informed the slight increase in the percentage identifying as 'Any other religion or belief'.

Nationally, in 2022/23 HESA data shows 11% of the student population identified as Muslim and 4.83% as Hindu.

6.   Access and Participation Plan (APP)

As a condition of our registration with the Office for Students, we must have an Access and Participation Plan (APP). The successful delivery of the APP benefits all students at the university; however, its remit is UK/Home students, and the focus is on reducing gaps in outcomes between different groups of students.

The new APP for 2024/25 to 2027/28 identifies gaps in outcomes between students with different characteristics using the Office for Students Equality of Opportunity Risk register, from this we have developed a range of intervention strategies intended to eliminate the gaps.

At the University we are focusing our work on:

- Eliminating gaps in access to UW courses for students from low participation neighbourhoods, sstudents from a Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic community and Students that have been in receipt of free school meals.
- Eliminating the gaps in continuation for students who are mature (over 21) on entry, students with entry qualifications other than A-Levels and students from Black, Asian and Mixed Heritage backgrounds and
- Eliminating the gaps in degree completion and degree award levels for students with entry qualifications other than A-Levels and Students from Black, Asian and Mixed Heritage backgrounds.

Examples of activity include;

- Targeted outreach activities in communities that are currently underrepresented at the University.
- Transition support including extended induction and return to return to study support, a suite of microlearning courses that build confidence and skill in academic study, a range of financial support for students, as well as a range of structural developments in curriculum and course design and student support.

The APP has a complimentary evaluation strategy that will inform the University of progress against the targets in the plan.

The APP Steering Group oversees the delivery of the plan. Reporting on progress against its APP targets can be accessed via this webpage.

7. Staff EDI Profile

7.1 Staff Data Collection

The data on which the report is based is taken from the HR system records for October 2024. It includes the core* staff of the University, total headcount 1,174. The total in 2023 was 1183. All colleagues were invited to update their personal information and protected characteristics by 31 July 2024, this was undertaken using the previous HR system. The new HR system, i-Trent, was implemented in August 2024 and this will be used for future reports.

The benchmarking data for the HE sector available from HESA (Higher Education Statistics Agency) is still affected by the gaps in reporting for professional services staff. As mentioned in previous reports, from 1 August 2019 it has not been mandatory to report data relating this group of staff. At this university we continued to report 'non-academic'/professional services staff, however some HEIs have not reported. This makes comparison with the national situation less robust.

*Associate Lecturers and Students working part time within the University while they study are not included. The contractual situation for these two groups fluctuates during the year. Some who currently appear in the HR record might not undertake any work in the current year for a variety of reasons. Some Associate Lecturers might not be offered a contract and/or may decide to decline a contract for a period and return the following semester or year. Similarly, students may well work in their first and third years' and decline a contract in their second year.

7.2 Age
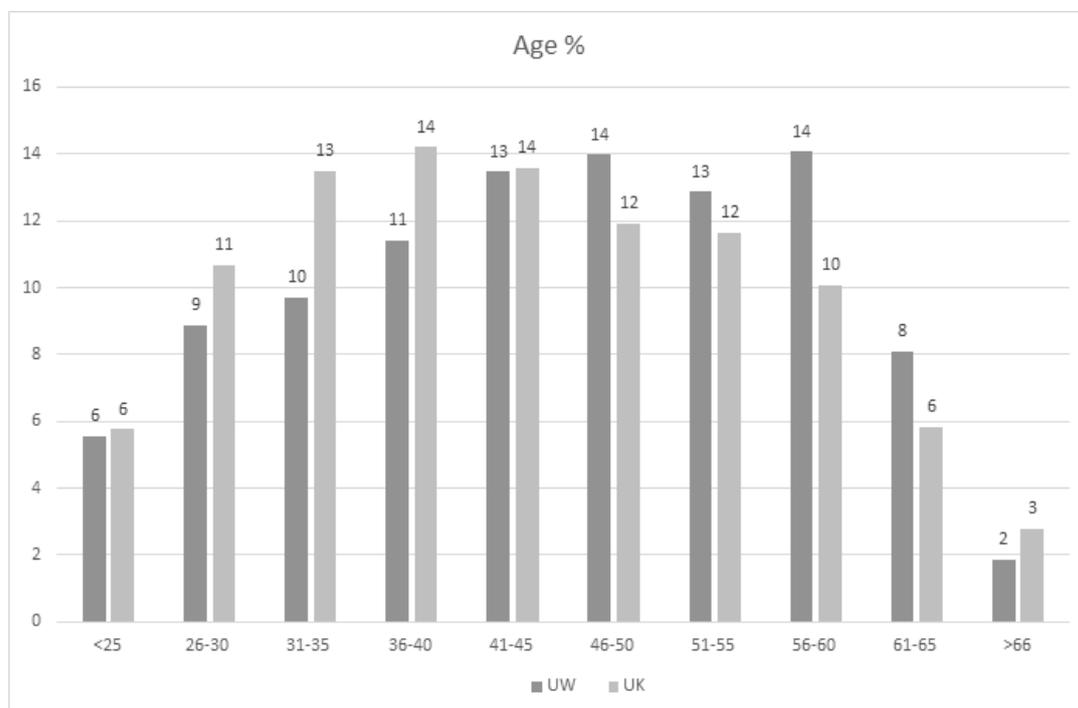
The age profile for the University and for the UK HE sector is shown above as % in each age group. There has been a slight decrease in the % of those over age 66 in UW, to be expected because of the voluntary severance schemes during 2023/24.   The age profile in this university is different when compared with data from UK HE. This likely to be the impact of

academic staff joining the University of Worcester having already had a career within the sector in which they teach. The increase in the teaching of health-related subjects requires that staff have a professional qualification and experience before being appointed. Academic careers in other HEIs may well have a more 'traditional' pattern of undergraduate then progressing to postgraduate study and seeking a first academic post in younger age bands. Appointing mature and experienced professionally qualified staff into their first HE post has implications for the type of support needed during induction and probation.

7.3 Disability

The disclosure of disabilities in the University of Worcester has increased to 14%, an increase of 2% from 2023. In UK HE the current disclosure rate is 7.2%, an increase of 0.4%. This higher % of disability disclosure by staff at the University of Worcester may well be due to the high level of support provided for students who are disabled.

There have been changes to the definitions of disability types by HESA since last year. One example is 'learning difficulty' has been rephrased as 'learning difference'. This shift in language reflects a view that individuals learn differently and might not experience this as difficult or disabling. This may well have an impact on disclosure rates in future.
The % across each type of disability is similar for University of Worcester and UK HE. The main changes from 2023 are an increase in learning differences of 0.4%, also 0.4% in disclosures relating to long standing health conditions and 0.3% in hearing impairment rates. Mental health disclosure rates in UW have decreased slightly, by 0.1% and increased slightly in UK HE by 0.1%. This is likely to be a condition where there is under-disclosure in most organisations.

% of Disability disclosures
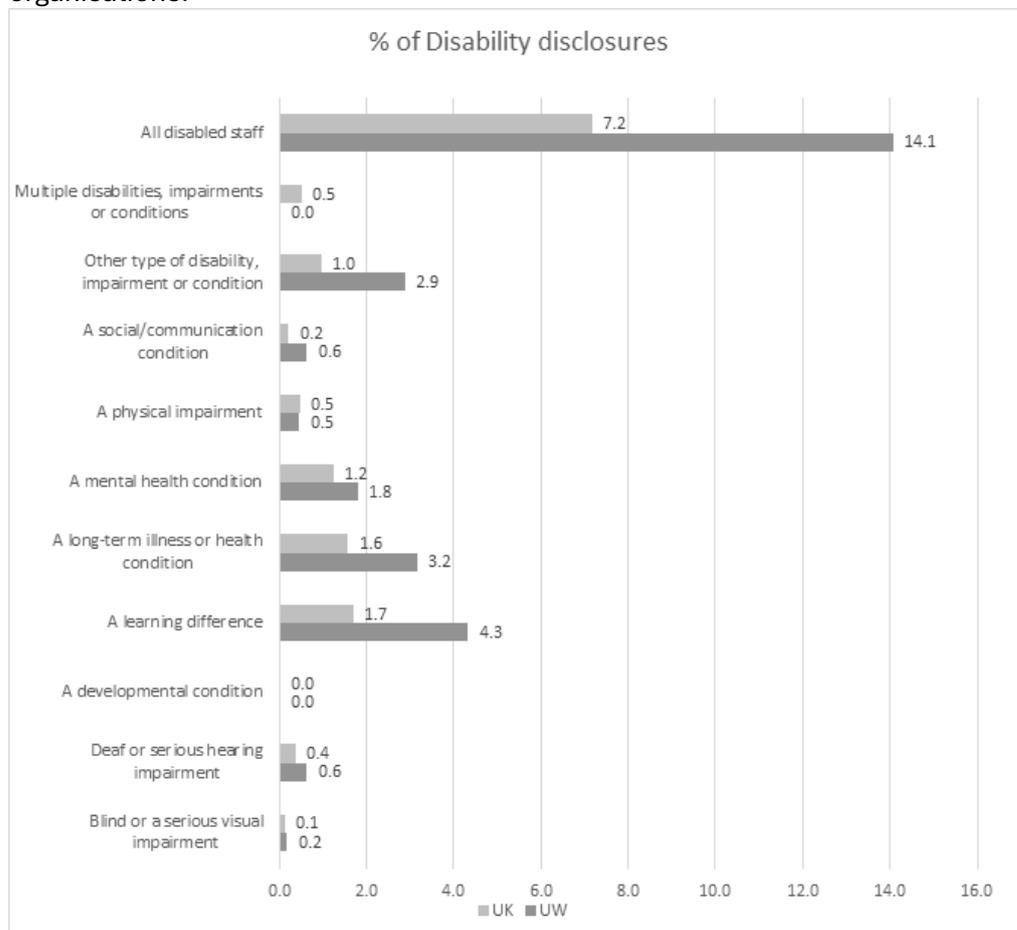
77.4   Ethnic origin

At the University of Worcester, the data set relating to ethnic background is robust with only 1% of   colleagues who 'refuse to disclose' or 'not known'. The UK HE national data shows 9% of staff do not disclose.

The % of colleagues who identify as being from a Minority Ethnic background in the University of Worcester has increased to 7.1% in 2024 from 6.4% in 2023. The national data for UK HE shows that in 2024 19.1% of individuals disclose their ethnic origin as being from a minority group, an increase of 1.5% from 2023. The wider UK ethnic minority population of working age is estimated to be 17%, and the total ethnic minority population to be 26%.

Within the University of Worcester, 67% of staff who disclose ethnic minority membership are in academic posts, and more than half of these are in health-related subjects.

There are fewer professional services staff disclosing ethnic minority membership, at 33% of the group. The recruitment pool for professional services staff is from within the region, and for academic staff the pool is national and international. Professional services roles are more likely to have a salary level in the lower pay bands which means re-location from other regions with more diverse populations is less likely or affordable. Some roles in lower pay bands are outside the scope for visas under the current UK Government visa regulations.

Regional demographic factors are significant, and the counties of Herefordshire and Worcestershire have low yet increasing % of ethnic minority groups in the population. The chart below shows the % of staff from different ethnic groups in the University of Worcester and UK HE.
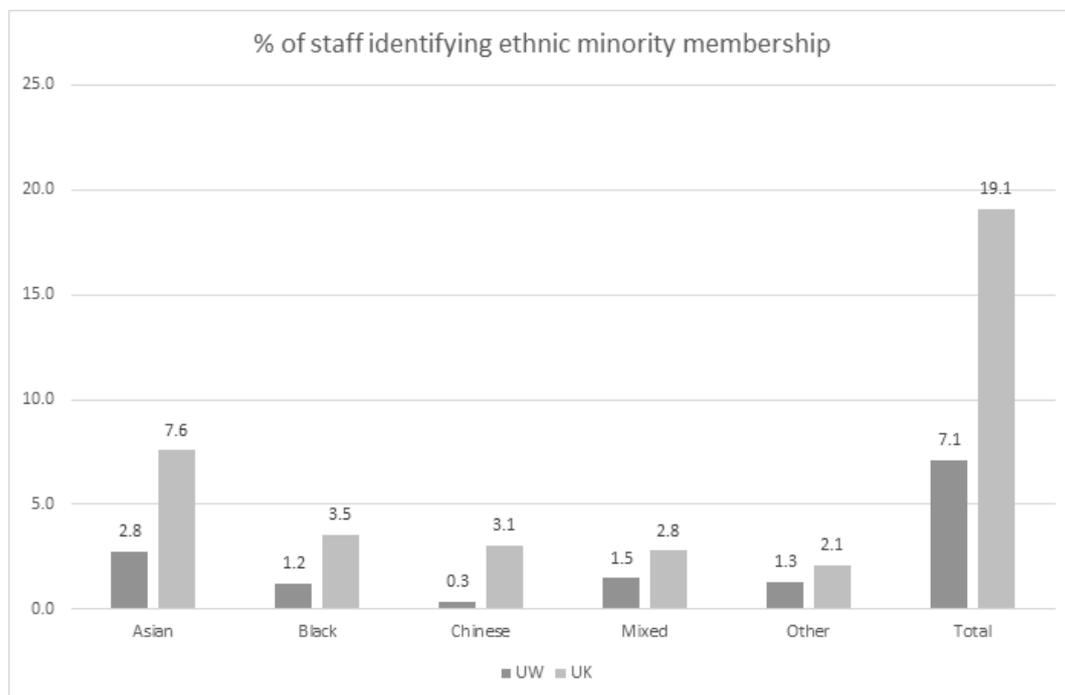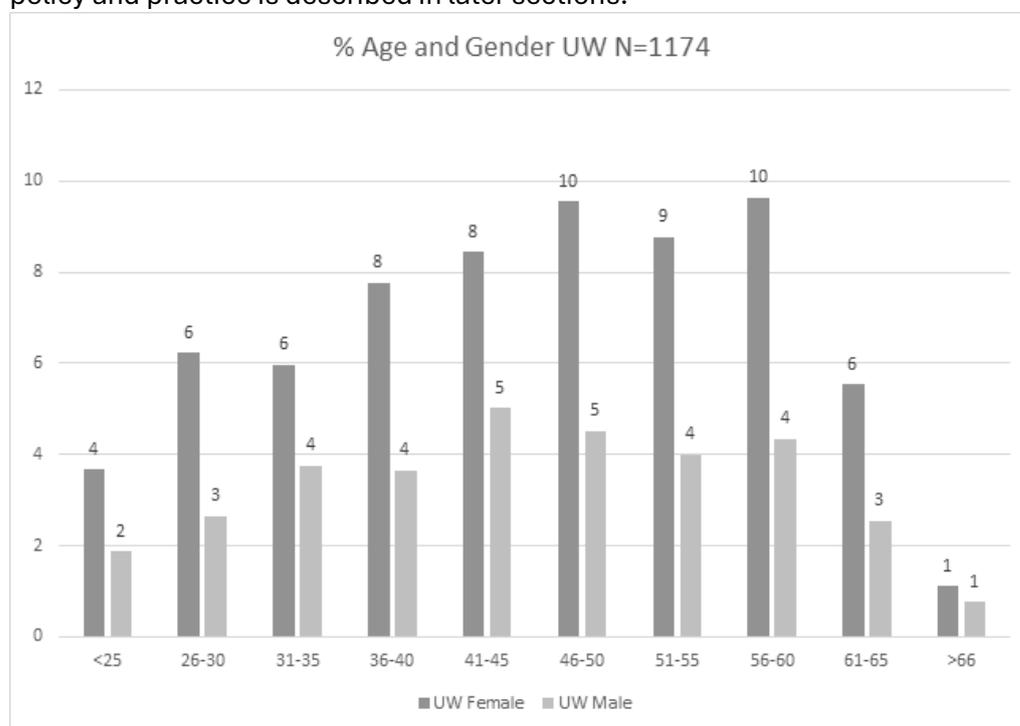
7.5   Gender

The gender balance has shifted in 2024 to 67% female, it was 65% in 2023. In UK HE the gender balance is 55% women and 45% men.

The high % of women in academic areas at the University of Worcester reflects the curriculum strengths in subjects allied to health and education, with these occupations historically attracting a higher % of women, despite many efforts to increase the % of men. This is 'horizonal' occupational segregation where gender still is a factor in career choice.

As demonstrated in our Gender Pay Gap reporting, the vertical occupational segregation in the University's workforce is less pronounced than in many other organisations. The data shows that the representation of women is high in all the salary quartiles including at the most senior levels.

The intersectionality of age with gender is considered below and the implications of this for policy and practice is described in later sections.

7.6   Gender identity, reassignment, or Transgender status

Transgender status	2022		2023		2024	
	% Worcester	% UK HE	% Worcester	% UK HE	% Worcester	% UK HE
Refused to say	2.6	2.1	1.94	2.11	2.0	5.8
Blank field	5.1	63.5	6.16	62.28	1.6	51.0
Gender changed since birth	0.2	0.4	0.25	0.49	0.25	0.3
Gender same as birth gender	92.2	34.0	91.65	35.11	96.0	42.9

It is encouraging to see from the table above that the % of blank fields is declining both at Worcester and within the UK

7.7 Religion and belief, including no belief.

The chart below shows data for this University and UK HE. The main changes between 2023 and 2024 are the reduction in blank fields in both data sets, and an increase in the % disclosing 'no religion' in both sets.

Religion and belief	UW	UK
No religion	47.1	33.4
Buddhist	0.8	0.7
Christian	37.1	22.3
Hindu	0.3	1.5
Jewish	0.1	0.4
Muslim	1.8	3.1
Pagan	0.0	0.0
Sikh	0.4	0.4
Any other religion or belief	2.2	3.0
Information refused	9.9	10.3
Blank	0	24.9

7.8 Sexual orientation

	2022		2023		2024	
	% UW	% UK HE	% UW	% UK HE	% UW	% UK HE
Bisexual person	1.8	1.3	2.4	1.6	3.4	2.4
Blank field	0	43.0	2.2	40.9	0	24.5
Gay	3.6	2.0	3.2	2.1	2.9	2.8
Heterosexual	83.8	45.7	78.0	47.0	79.6	58.6
Other	0.3	0.4	0.4	0.5	0.3	0.7
Refuse to say	10.4	7.5	13.8	7.8	13.7	11.0

The table above provides data for the University and from HE (from the HESA return). The national data shows a reduction in the % of 'blank' responses. At Worcester there has been an increase in the disclosure of bisexuality and heterosexuality, and a reduction in disclosures of gay identity.

8. EDI Activities and Achievements in 2023-24 by EDI Framework Theme

In January 2024 the University won a Purpose Coalition's Breaking Down Barriers award in the category of 'Achieve Equality Through Diversity and Inclusion', recognising its practical and effectiveness in providing opportunities to earn a very high quality higher education.

8.1   Shaping the culture

- In June 2024, Worcester was ranked 1st in the UK for Quality Education in the globally respected Times Higher Education University Impact Rankings. The Sustainable Development Goal for Quality Education is a measure of how well and institution is ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all.
- The University was also top in the UK for Gender Equality in the 2024 rankings.
- In January 2024, won an award for Achieving Equality Through Diversity and Inclusion at the Purpose Coalition's Breaking Down Barriers Awards 2023. The award recognised the University's practical and effectiveness in providing opportunities to earn a very high-quality higher education. https://www.worcester.ac.uk/about/news/2024-university-of-worcester-wins-award-for-achieving-equality-through-diversity-and-inclusion
- In July 2024, Worcester was shortlisted for University of the Year in the UK Social Mobility Awards for the third time. The Awards recognise best practice and innovation and celebrate excellence and achievement among organisations across the UK working to improve social mobility. https://www.worcester.ac.uk/about/news/2024-worcester-shortlisted-for-university-of-the-year-title
- The University has formed a new partnership with Dudley, Walsall and Halesowen Colleges to provide higher education courses in the Black Country, identified as one of the most deprived areas of the Country, according to the Government's Index of Multiple Deprivation. The Black Country, with a population of about 1.19m, has historically been poorly served by higher education. This new partnership will provide opportunities for people to study for a health profession, including Nursing, on their doorstep.
- In March 2024, the Worcester Business School, ran an event open to all to celebrate International Women's Day. The event showcased female student, graduate and staff success stories as well as giving charities in the region, which support women, opportunities to promote their causes.
- To mark the start of Ramadan, the University hosted a community Iftar which was open to students and staff of all faiths. In addition advice and guidance from the Muslim Council of Britain on how to support those fasting during Ramadan was shared with all staff. Members of staff shared their experiences of observing Ramadan and answered questions during a workshop session. Eid, at the end of Ramadan was celebrated through events held at both the St John's and City Campuses.
- The Students' Union, supported by the University, ran a very successful Race Equality Week 2024 in February. This included micro-behaviours training, a Culture and Race Workshop, and a Community Dialogue attended by external organisations and University senior staff.

8.2   Student Success

- The University welcomes students from a wide variety of educational backgrounds – over 40% of students enter the University with non-traditional qualifications such as Btec, Foundation Year or Access to Higher Education qualifications, over 32% of home students come from addresses within the bottom two quantiles of the Government's Index of Multiple Deprivation and 52% are first-generation entrants.
- The University's Access and Participation Plan (APP) provides detailed information on our commitment to all students, regardless of background or financial considerations (See Section 6). More than 40% of our students joined the University with non-traditional

qualifications such as Btec, Foundation year or Access to Higher Education qualifications, over 32% of home students come from addresses within the bottom two quantiles of the Government's Index of Multiple Deprivation and 52% are first generation entrants.

- The University launched its Student Futures Manifesto in October 2023. The manifesto makes key pledges in all areas of students' lives and learning before, during, and after their time studying at the University.
- Every year, the University holds special transition event to help students with a neurodiversity to overcome their anxiety around starting university. The two-day event is an opportunity for those students due to start their studies in September and who may have difficulty with the transition to independent living, to take part in a mix of activities and meet new friends. https://www.worcester.ac.uk/about/news/2023-event-helps-students-with-transition-to-university
- In November 2023, three students represented Great Britain at an international wheelchair basketball tournament in Japan. https://www.worcester.ac.uk/about/news/2023-students-compete-for-great-britain-in-wheelchair-basketball-tournament
- In April 2024, a graduate of the University was featured in a national campaign highlighting successful people who were the first in their family to go to university. Kiran Sahota is an award-winning social historian and founder of the community interest company, Believe in Me, which empowers young people and women from marginalised communities through education. Just yesterday (Sunday), Kiran and Believe in Me received the King's Award for Voluntary Service, the highest award given to volunteer groups across the UK. https://www.worcester.ac.uk/about/news/2024-worcester-graduate-features-in-national-campaign
- In May 2024, Worcester student Ash Bainbridge was named Student Midwife of the Year in the 2024 Student Nursing Times Awards. Ash won the award for demonstrating outstanding work in improving inclusivity and making maternity a safer space for those from the LGBTQ+ community. https://www.worcester.ac.uk/about/news/2024-worcester-student-wins-prestigious-midwifery-award
- In June 2024 the University hosted a special transition day for visually impaired students from local colleges. Students from New College Worcester and the Royal National College for the Blind in Hereford attended the day, which was organised by the University's Disability and Dyslexia Service. https://www.worcester.ac.uk/about/news/2024-visually-impaired-students-visit-to-learn-about-transition-to-university
- The University celebrated the achievements of one of its graduates who received a King's Voluntary Award in November 2023, in recognition of her charity and education work exploring South Asian history through a female perspective
- The University celebrated the success of one of its students in being selected to represent England at the IBSA (International Blind Sports Federation) World Games in August 2023.

8.3   Supporting our staff

EDI matters continue to be embedded into every stage of the employee experience:

- Recruitment and selection; in -person training has been provided for all who engage in the process and topics such as unconscious bias, discrimination and the current legal framework are included.
- This training has also been designed and delivered to members of the IMPACT group, those service users who might have a role in staff and student recruitment. The group members

have lived experience of a range of disabilities and health conditions, they learn from and contribute to the session content.

- We have attracted a more diverse profile of applicants for work experience and bespoke HR work experience has again been provided to individuals from different cultural backgrounds.
- Induction is provided to all new staff, and this includes EDI policies, procedures and practices.
- There is on-line, self- paced training about EDI matters within the staff learning management system and all new staff are required to undertake this and repeat every two years.
- The schemes for probation, mentoring and appraisal schemes have EDI topics included.
- We improved data collection and significantly reduced the number of blank fields for gender identity, religion and belief and sexual orientation.
- The staff network groups continue to develop:
    - LGBTQ+ Network now has over 400 allies, the network leads design and deliver awareness raising sessions for staff on the 'lived experience' of being LGBTQ+.
    - Disability Matters Network is taking a similar approach and the leads have delivered workshops to staff about their experiences.
    - A cultural diversity group has been formed GRACE= generating racial awareness and cultural equity and is open to all with an interest in the topic
- We conducted a staff survey in February 2024 and the overall feedback on EDI matters was strongly positive. For the two questions directly related to EDI over 70% of respondents were in agreement:

    I am treated with fairness and respect.

    I think my organisation respects individual differences (eg. culture, working styles, backgrounds, ideas)

    Further analysis of the survey outcomes is underway to explore the experiences of those with different protected characteristics.

- 'Active bystander' workshops have been held with the aim of encouraging staff to challenge any inappropriate behaviour that they might witness, in a safe and effective way.
- Specialist training was provided for a group of senior staff who might be asked to investigate potential instances of sexual harassment/violence.
- We have continued to address the topic of mental health and wellbeing that some members of minority groups might experience. We have provided open mental health first aid programmes and suicide prevention and awareness in partnership with expert external advisers.
- 'Neurodiversity' and different learning and working styles has been addressed in several ways. E-learning courses are available for all staff and managers. Other courses are in development to support staff with teaching and assessing neurodiverse learners. Colleagues with lived experience of neurodiversity have shared their experiences with others in their teams. The shift in the language to 'learning differences,' referred to in the staff profile section, may assist with normalising neurodiversity and how accommodations can be made. The NHS ICS Neurodiversity network is developing a Neurodiversity toolkit that we can access.

- The age and gender balance shows that a significant proportion of colleagues will experience perimenopause and menopause. We have continued to offer support and guidance in the form of workshops and informal 'drop in' sessions for colleagues to share experiences. There is also an e-learning course available for all staff to view.
- The staff age profile means that many staff are likely to become carers. We continue to be a member of the Worcestershire Association of Carers. This provides access to legal and financial advice for carers, and we have offered workshops on these topics. There have been open meetings with support from colleagues from the Association for Dementia Studies to share experiences and information.
- Support for staff who are planning for retirement has also been provided in the form of workshops open to all with expert financial and wellbeing advisers.
- Equality Impact Assessments (EIA) have been undertaken on several key activities. These include the voluntary severance schemes, re-organisation and change programmes and several research bids.
- Professor Nicoleta Cinpoeş was awarded an Honorary Doctorate from a university in Romania in recognition of her work to advance a major arts festival in the country. https://www.worcester.ac.uk/about/news/worcester-lecturer-awarded-prestigious-honour-by-romanian-university
- In July 2024, Jo Smith OBE, Emeritus Professor at the University of Worcester and a prominent campaigner for the prevention of suicide in students, was awarded an honorary doctorate from a fellow university. Professor Smith was given the honour by Middlesex University during its Graduation Week. https://www.worcester.ac.uk/about/news/2024-honorary-doctorate-for-worcester-professor

8.4   Influencing the wider community

- In January 2024, the University donated more than 100 pieces of sports kit to disadvantaged young people all over the world. The kit was handed over to the charity SOS Kit Aid, which recycles sports kit for use by people in developing countries. https://www.worcester.ac.uk/about/news/2024-university-donates-sports-kit-for-use-in-developing-countries
- In January 2024, the University was awarded £493,000 to boost its degree apprenticeships offering. Working alongside employers, including the NHS, the University has embraced nursing and allied health apprenticeships. Worcester's apprenticeship courses are enabling individuals to overcome economic and social barriers to secure entry into health care professions, while meeting local, regional, and national employer needs. https://www.worcester.ac.uk/about/news/2024-funding-will-expand-health-based-degree-apprenticeships
- The University's Sport, Exercise and Recreation service welcomes up to 250 seniors clients a week attending adapted sport sessions and gym based classes; over 130 community fitness centre members, and over 40 community sport clubs booking the indoor/outdoor sport facilities throughout the year. This year we ran a specialist falls prevention programme, which was featured by the BBC. Read the article
- We recognise that our role in supporting those from disadvantaged backgrounds to have an equal chance of success starts well before students join the University at 18. That is why we manage the local branch of the nationwide scheme, Children's University, which aims to provide opportunities for children of all backgrounds to take part in learning activities outside of school. 332 children graduated from Worcestershire Children's University in 2023.

- Lakeside Campus secured Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) funding for 1,620 free places on its 2024 summer holiday clubs. HAF is a Department for Education (DfE) funded programme aimed at enabling children and young people in receipt of benefits-related free school meals (FSM), vulnerable or in need of this provision to attend school holiday activities and experiences during Easter, summer and Christmas.
- The University has signed up to the Gypsies, Travellers, Roma, Showmen and Boaters (GTRSB) in Higher Education Pledge committing a welcoming environment in which GTRSB students feel welcome and supported and can thrive academically and personally. Our academics have worked closely with members of these communities, carrying out research and developing best practice guides for professionals. Two members of our IMPACT group, made up of people who use health and social care services, are Romany Gypsies who regularly input into a range of health and social care classes.
- A new exhibition opened at the Infirmary Museum, based at the University's City Campus, exploring how children's literature approaches and represents dementia.
- During May 2024 experts from the University hosted free talks open to the public at The Hive looking at taboo subjects: 'fat activism', sex and 'cancel culture'
- The Staff LGBTQ+ Network was supported to attend the Worcester City Pride event and acted as advocates and ambassadors for the University's support for inclusion
- Time to Talk Day in February 2024 was hosted at The Arena and attended by over 100 individuals from a range of community groups
- The University has been part of the launch of the NHS Oliver McGowan mandatory training in Learning disability and Autism awareness and over 50 colleagues have completed training.
- We are sharing good practice on EDI matters within the region by active partnerships with Integrated Care System Diversity Groups and recently with the West Mercia Police EDI lead

8.5 Developing an inclusive approach to Research and Knowledge Exchange

Research and Knowledge Exchange at the University of Worcester is always informed by an inclusive approach. Further, the University is also engaged in research focused on specific protected characteristics as set out in the Equality Act. Within this, there is also a strong focus on understanding the experience of our own students from diverse backgrounds. Below, we highlight some of the research that was undertaken in 2023/24.

Inclusion in research

Crossing the line: providing personal care in the context of family carers is a study completed in 2024, funded by the National Institute of Health Research (NIHR), and undertaken by researchers in the Association for Dementia Studies. The study aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the personal care giving experiences of family carers supporting someone with dementia. These include their strategies for overcoming challenges. It was designed to identify core content for the development of general training resources on personal care for use by family carers to someone with dementia.

Given the focus of the study, it was apparent that the findings might be particularly relevant for women, who are often main carers, but also to communities where care for older adults more frequently falls to the family. However, it was also important to consider the experience of other diverse groups.

Within the study, the team worked with [Merri Yaadain](#), a Community Interest Group based in Bradford, set up to reduce barriers for BAME groups is accessing services and information. This was to ensure that a wide demographic could be included in the research, and to positively and appropriately engage with people from ethnic minority backgrounds. Further, to ensure the study outcomes reached a wide audience, the team listed it on Join Dementia Research, hosted by NIHR, tailoring search criteria to reach areas in the UK with high levels of ethnic diversity. The team also worked with an LGBTQ+ advisor, who has ensured that the study was accessible and inclusive to the LGBTQ+ community.

The study has included a strong, valuable PPI group, from the design to the delivery, consisting of people with lived experience, including someone with dementia. Teaching and educational outputs from the study around providing personal care for someone with dementia have been reviewed by a number of professionals from England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales, as well as by our LGBTQ+ and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion advisor. Many of the reviewers also have dual lived and professional experience of dementia.

Gender

Two projects began, respectively in 2023 and 2024, funded through UK Research and Innovation (UKRI)'s flagship Future Leader Fellowship Scheme, each with a strong focus on gender. The first led by Dr Jessica Mee seeks to understand and improve female health and performance by mitigating heat strain in the context of global warming. The study starts from the position that much of the research focused on heat mitigation, that is on strategies for athletes and for the general public to cope better with high temperatures, has been focused on males and that Jessica's research to date shows that females require more daily exposures to hot ambient conditions to establish hallmark heat acclimation adaptations, compared with males.

The second study led by Dr Anna Muggeridge is focused on maternal activism across the 20th and 21st centuries, that is on the ways in which women have been politicised by their experiences of fertility, pregnancy, birth and caring for children through infancy and early childhood

Race

Staff in our School of Nursing and Midwifery have engaged in research to understand Practice Assessor and Practice Supervisor experiences of facilitating learning for pre-registration international nursing students with the objectives:

- to identify areas of good practice in facilitating learning for international nursing students;
- to explore any challenges encountered and viable solutions considered;
- to identify examples of effective collaborative working.

Encouraging international students to study nursing in the UK can implement meaningful benefits, generating diverse and culturally rich knowledge, to inform the profession in an increasingly globalised society. However, it is recognised that international students studying a professional nursing programme require effective preparation, in addition to successful collaboration between universities and NHS Trust/placement providers. This involves preparing students for socialisation into not only a new country and culture, but also navigating the sub-culture of an NHS or other placement organisation and the required standards/professional

values of the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC). Within the University and associated NHS Trusts, various initiatives were implemented to accommodate an increased international student population whose first language was not English, within Year 1 of a pre-registration nursing cohort. These included additional English language sessions, advice sheets for practice partners developed by the university language centre, involvement of NHS Trust international teams, and intentional scheduling of focused discussions as part of 'preparation for practice' sessions. The university also recruited a lecturer with a specific remit for international student co-ordination.

This study employed a qualitative interpretive approach drawing on social phenomenology. 10 (out of 64) Practice Assessor/Practice Supervisor (PA/PS) agreed to participate in the study. Data collection for this study was gathered from single face-to-face, semi-structured interviews, lasting between 30-40 minutes. Thematic analysis resulted in generating three super-ordinate themes: Communication, Supporting students, Collaborative working.

It is clear from the analysis that PA/PS within this study have faced challenges in facilitating learning for pre-registration international nursing students but have also identified gaps in their own knowledge and understanding of how culture and language can influence the learning relationship. Language and time constraints were identified as barriers to facilitating effective learning relationships but sharing learning with colleagues and drawing on organisational support networks as suggested by participants, will improve understanding, and help to embed interventions that have proved successful. This study suggests the importance of organisational teams working together for improvement, including consideration of 'specialist' team members or an international lead for pre-qualifying health care students being introduced as a source of guidance and information. Findings also suggest that additional specialist resources and awareness of how to access these, within the NHS Trust and university would be extremely beneficial in terms of both signposting students and informing PA/PS queries. The buddying approach suggested by participants of this study is a useful first step in drawing on staff with relevant experience to help students in their socialisation to an NHS culture. This study identified that understanding student background and culture could help to facilitate a more meaningful and enjoyable learning experience, for both students and PA/PS. However, this will only be possible when students own cultural values are not compromised.

Dr Peter Unwin and Professor Gyozo Molnar are engaging in a programme of research and knowledge exchange focused on the lived experience of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) communities of health and social services. Most recently they have received funding from *Understanding Patient Data* to explore the attitudes and perspectives of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities on the collection of ethnicity data in health services, and develop recommendations to ensure these groups are better represented in healthcare data.

Tapuwa Mwedzi, a doctoral student funded by the University of Worcester, under the lead supervision of Dr Laila Kasem, is investigating precarity amongst forced migrant entrepreneurs in the UK. His study will look at the challenges experienced by forced migrant entrepreneurs in the United Kingdom at different stages of the entrepreneurship journey, how they manage these challenges and elucidate the support that they need to succeed as entrepreneurs.

Disability

Researchers in our Social Pedagogy Research Group, led by Dr Carla Solvason and Dr Alison Prowle, are working with Blaenau Gwent Disability Services on a longitudinal project that seeks to better understand the support provided by Blaenau Gwent for children and young people with a range of disabilities, at various phases during their lives. Data will be collected at regular

intervals across a five-year period, with four groups of children aged 14, 17, 20 and 23 at the start of the research. The aim of the project is to create a picture of the child's support experience across their transition from teenager to adult and to provide recommendations for the future development of the service. The project also has the potential to feed into disability services elsewhere in the UK.

Dr Allie Sewell, Institute of Education, is engaged in a project entitled, *the Impact of Synaesthesia on Children's School Experiences: Mapping the field for use in Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programmes*. The project explores synaesthesia's positive and negative impacts on education to inform further research, which will develop instruction for use in ITE programmes. Synaesthesia is a condition that causes an unusual 'merging of the senses' due to cortical cross-communication. For example, those with synaesthesia ('synaestheses') may find that sounds cause a taste sensation, while others might experience letters or numbers as colours. It affects 4% of the population, emerges in childhood, and is gender non-specific. Childhood experiences range from positive to indifferent.

As an outstanding ITE provider, teacher training in our Institute of Education thoroughly explores neurodivergence (e.g., ADHD, ASD, Dyslexia) and its impact on social and learning processes. There is rationale to develop a complementary understanding of synaesthesia in the ITE curriculum as the nascent literature hypothesises associated learning strengths, such as improved memory and processing speed, and barriers to learning, such as processing overload. As such, the project centres on a systematic synthesis of the literature on synaesthesia in school-aged children and the potential impact on learning and well-being.

The synthesis has scoped and assessed quantitative and qualitative research evidence and policy reports over the last decade to identify key knowledge and understanding in the UK and internationally. Searches were undertaken using available databases, assessing evidence to inform the three research foci outlined above. Grey literature, including user-led projects, policy documents, and third-sector reports, were sought from government, think tanks, and charity websites. It is hoped that this synthesis will provide an important knowledge base in this area which currently does not exist in the public domain.

LGBTQ+

Engaging transgender and non-binary individuals in healthcare beyond transition-related care is necessary for improving health outcomes. Despite legal protections, transgender and non-binary people in the UK face substantial barriers to accessing healthcare, characterised by negative experiences and discrimination. The study, *Exploring Access and Engagement to Healthcare for Transgender and Non-Binary Individuals in England*, aims to explore the healthcare experiences of transgender and non-binary individuals in England, focusing on access and engagement within primary and secondary care services.

Adopting a participatory research approach, this study involved transgender and non-binary individuals in England through online focus groups and semi-structured interviews, conducted in three phases. Participants were recruited via snowball sampling from LGBTQIA+ networks. Thematic analysis was used to interpret the data, with a focus on healthcare engagement and barriers to access.

Participants highlighted the necessity of equitable healthcare access as a fundamental human right. Many participants found their experience of accessing healthcare was hindered by discrimination, restricted access to gender-affirming care, and a lack of provider knowledge. Systemic exclusions and identity erasure were identified as barriers, with participants experiencing misgendering, incorrect use of gender markers, and diagnostic overshadowing impacting access to and engagement with healthcare services. Positive healthcare experiences were noted when gender identity was respected and integrated into care.

This study underscores the significant healthcare barriers faced by transgender and non-binary individuals in England, highlighting the need for systemic changes to ensure accessible, respectful, and inclusive care. Recommendations focus on education, policy changes, and further research to address these challenges and improve healthcare outcomes for the transgender and non-binary community.

Non-Binary Identity in Performance - this project seeks to enquire of non-binary performers how they articulate their non-binary identity in performance. It will take the form of a survey of performance/s and performers; interviews with performers and the curation of an event specifically addressing the issue of non-binary identity and the challenges of accessing healthcare. This event will be specifically targeted at an audience of health professionals or those training to be a health professionals. It will highlight issues of non-binary patients and offer education in the form of showcasing the lived experience, complexity and nuance of non-binary identity.

8.6   Enhancing our Infrastructure

- Wellbeing and Multi Faith Spaces have been confirmed at St John's Campus, City Campus and Severn Campus. Location of the spaces will be added to the Campus map.
- An audit has been undertaken of toilet facilities and accessible toilet signage stimulated by feedback from the Disabled Students Network. This has resulted in an agreed programme of toilet signage, to include braille signage, being rolled out across the campus. The campus maps will also be updated.
- A Sustainability Hub has been established in the Thomas Telford Building on the St John's Campus.
- Student Hub established at City Campus to ensure visibility of the Students' Union to students who spend their time predominantly at the campus.
- The University has introduced an enhanced student name change process meaning students only need to notify us once if they wish to change their names. The new backend software then cascades this throughout all our online systems. This ensures old names are not inadvertently displayed to the student or to their peers. This reduces concern and ensures students feel welcomed and respected.
- We have continued to combat any form of harassment and misconduct through the delivery and enhancement of our digital Report a Concern systems enabling students and staff to report concerns and seek help. This integrated platform – part of a broad programme addressing harassment – provides new tools allowing students to receive support and foster a safer, more inclusive environment on campus and on placements.

- We have commenced a pilot allowing students with additional needs to take their exams using their own devices. Previously, those students who required dictation software often struggled to configure this on borrowed equipment. This new approach lets students leverage their own setup and their own assistive software, enhancing their confidence and ensuring a fairer, more inclusive examination experience.
- We have continued to invest in making all of our developed systems WCAG compliant and we have retired older apps such as the legacy Intranet pages in favour of the modern user-friendly MyDay pages. These improvements ensure that digital content not only meets current regulations such as the Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) Accessibility Regulations 2018 but actually enhances the services we offer to our students in a tangible way, making navigation and user-experience seamless, benefiting the entire community, including those with visual and additional needs.
- The work conducted over the summer substantially upgraded our Wi-Fi infrastructure meaning that more students can access essential online resources and support services quickly and efficiently. This robust network underpins our commitment to access to digital learning for our entire community.
- In 2024 we started actively promoting the use of AI tools through a new modern learning portal for students to enrich learning and teaching, enabling students to explore new ways to study and create their own innovative learning materials. By introducing AI tools and encouraging their responsible use, we aim to enhance student engagement and provide fresh opportunities for inclusive academic support.
- From September 2024, prospective students benefitted from an enhanced Applicant Portal through MyDay, offering tailored information and guidance. This was particularly helpful for those students with additional needs or students coming from overseas where English might not be their first language. This platform allows them to learn about the University in their own way, ahead of arriving, reducing uncertainty and anxiety by providing a clear, accessible way to access support.
- We are now developing a modern student life and case management system. We intend to involve the students in the design of this system ensuring co-creation through open dialogue ensuring the system best reflects the needs of our community.
- Finally, the Dukes Building has been designed to offer enhanced technology for hybrid teaching and modern in-person lectures, with a particular focus on supporting students with additional needs. This investment helps ensure that learning environments are accessible and adaptable, reflecting our ongoing dedication to embracing diversity and promoting inclusion.

9.   Next Steps

During 2024/25 the EDI Oversight Group will work with the specific EDI Forum Working Groups looking at each of the six themes of the Framework to further develop and embed the University's work in this area.

The new University Inclusion Calendar will be launched. The new calendar identifies key religious and non-religious celebrations i.e. Black History month which are celebrated nationally and which the University has decided to particular focus on in 2025. The

University's response may take the form of an event, a talk, an exhibition or general awareness raising.