

# Equality, Diversity and Inclusion:

A card resource for facilitating  
conversations and learning

Revised edition



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## Credits

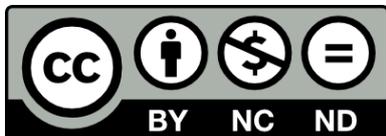
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Colour illustrations: Joel Cooper (2022) [www.joelcooper.co.uk](http://www.joelcooper.co.uk)

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This booklet, published in 2024, is an updated and revised version of the 2021 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion guidance and activities booklet.

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## Introduction

Equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) are important and complex issues that need to be addressed in higher education. They are relevant to both students and staff and many universities have introduced EDI strategies and policies and provided EDI-related training and activities (Claeys-Kulik & Jørgensen, 2018). Such activities and the setting in which they take place need careful consideration. Each participant 'arrives with their own unique background and experiences' (Mahmood et al., 2022:269) and as EDI issues are often sensitive and deeply personal many people are concerned about raising them, and using appropriate language, which can prevent them being explored.

This revised version of an EDI card resource comprises this booklet and a set of 27 cards. The resource is based on the concept of using 'serious play', as 'Play that is serious and focused within a learning environment can help learners construct a more personalized and reflective understanding' (Rieber et al., 1998:29, 35). Cards can be used to stimulate dialogue and provide visual prompts for exploring complex issues.

The original card resource was developed to support conversations and learning about EDI at the University of Hertfordshire (UH). The set of 18 EDI cards was created by members of the UH School of Education Student Success and Engagement Team (SSET). They used a staff-student partnership approach for learning development (Bovill, 2020) to identify and agree the terms used in the pack and worked with an illustrator, Joel Cooper, to design the set. Finally, a member of the team prepared guidance on setting an ethical, inclusive learning context for using the cards (Clark et al., 2022). This new version of the resource has been informed by findings from a research project carried out by the Universities of Hertfordshire and East Anglia to explore the different ways that the resource could be used with staff and students (Sillence et al., 2023a, 2023b). Ethical approval was obtained at each institution before the project was carried out.

In this document, we note that inclusion and inclusivity are often used interchangeably by many organisations and individuals. We have attempted to use these consistently in the UK context to reflect a distinction based on current entries in the *Oxford English Dictionary*. Inclusion is defined as 'The action or an act of including something or someone (in various senses of include v.); the fact or condition of being included, an instance of this' and inclusivity as 'The fact or quality of being inclusive; (now) esp. the practice or policy of not excluding any person on the grounds of race, gender, religion, age, disability, etc.; inclusiveness.' One way of thinking about this is that inclusion is the destination and inclusivity is the journey.

## What are the EDI cards?

The updated EDI card set features 27 cards, 26 with words and illustrations, plus one blank card (the 'wildcard') for users to create their own images and topics for discussion. The 26 words in the current set are:



Figure 1. The new set of EDI cards, including the blank wildcard.

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*Belonging, Bias, Boundaries, Class, Culture, Disability, Discrimination, Equity, Ethnicity, Freedom, Gender, Identity, Inclusion, Justice, Language, Mental Health, Neurodiversity, Ownership, Power, Prejudice, Privilege, Religion, Respect, Spirituality, Stereotype, Trust*

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In the first section, this booklet provides several steps for you to consider when preparing to use the EDI cards and advice on setting up an inclusive learning environment. Secondly, it offers a set of **preparation prompts**. These are designed to explore why you are using the EDI cards. Thirdly, it encourages you to reflect on where you will use the cards; for example, the curriculum context and the discipline, a particular stage in the learner's journey, or the physical space. Fourthly, and finally, it asks you to consider how you will use the cards. It suggests different ways of using them and describes the different card set formats. The EDI cards are available as digital artefacts as well as a physical set, and they can be enlarged or reduced to suit your context. You might decide to use all the cards, to focus on a group of related cards, or to just use one. The final section explores how educators might build on these activities to both deepen and extend engagement with EDI over time.

# Preparing to use the EDI cards

## 1. Developing learning

Before using the EDI cards in an educational setting, it is vital to ensure that staff and student facilitators have completed relevant organisational training in equality, diversity, inclusion, and unconscious bias. This is important to allow individuals time to confront and reflect on their own beliefs and assumptions about themselves and others (Harven & Soodjinda, 2016). Although unconscious bias may be difficult to eliminate from everyday interactions, facilitators should be aware of its influence on our behaviour and be prepared to challenge it.

## 2. Creating 'brave spaces'

Creating a context which facilitates open, respectful, nonjudgmental discussions will enable students to explore sensitive and controversial issues of equality and diversity, which may be provoked by these EDI cards. As a facilitator, it is important to consider the type of space that the participants will interact in. Holley and Steiner (2005:50) suggest creating a 'safe space', a setting 'that allows students to feel secure enough to take risks, honestly express their views, and share and explore their knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors' and highlight that 'Being safe is not the same as being comfortable'. However, engaging in activities with these cards may surface participants' own biases and challenge their personal values and beliefs, which can feel unsettling and requires courage to confront.

Instead of a safe space, the facilitator may wish to frame the interactions as a 'brave space' (Arao & Clemens, 2013:142) or a 'classroom of disagreements' (Flensner & Von der Lippe, 2019:284), to emphasise the challenging and transformational nature of discourse about equality and diversity. Mutually agreed ground rules, with specific facilitator and participant dispositions and behaviours, are recognised as promoting meaningful equality and diversity discourse (Holley & Steiner, 2005; Jackson, 2014; Harven & Soodjinda, 2016; Williams et al., 2016).

## 3. Identifying and agreeing ground rules

The facilitator and participants can discuss, create, and agree ground rules within the group, to reinforce shared responsibility for creating a more respectful space for discussion (Holley & Steiner, 2005; Jackson, 2014; Garibay, 2015). Jackson (2014) suggests several ground rules, which have been developed by students and teachers working together. These rules cover: the type of language to be used and the limits that apply (see <https://www.nohatespeech.uk/>); taking turns to speak and not interrupting others; showing respect 'for the right of others to express views and beliefs different from one's own'; challenging ideas not individuals; encouraging participants to explain why they hold particular views; and making sure everyone can take part (Jackson, 2014:57).

## 4. Preparing participants

At the start, facilitators may wish to remind participants of the boundaries of the session. This might include informing the group of how and where they can access support if they are distressed by issues raised in the session; for example, a tutor, self-service app, staff or student wellbeing team or counselling service. It may be helpful to remind participants that learning happens outside our comfort zones, and sometimes that requires tolerating personal discomfort, challenging ourselves, and taking risks (Holley & Steiner, 2005; Arao & Clemens, 2013; Flensner & Von der Lippe, 2019).

## 5. Encouraging listening

In order for both facilitators and participants to exercise tolerance and respect for other peoples' experiences and viewpoints, even when they do not agree with them, it is important that everyone is invited to participate, and to try not to judge other people or make assumptions (Samaritans, No date; Gilbert, 2017). Everyone in the group can practise active listening skills (see <https://www.mindtools.com/a85f8yd/listening-skills-infographic>) to deepen understanding of what others are saying, demonstrate respect, and communicate authenticity and empathy to others (Kisfalvi & Oliver, 2015). The facilitator might include an infographic on the five key behaviours as part of the preparatory materials, or in the physical space at the time of the activity.

## Why use the EDI cards?

As a facilitator, you will need to consider why the cards will be used in your practice rather than another resource or approach in learning and teaching. We have found that the card resource is particularly helpful for staff and students for three reasons: developing participants' understanding of language around equality, diversity and inclusion; exploring issues related to this theme within a specific subject area or field of work; and developing individual voices when discussing EDI with others. We summarise some of the activity aims that relate to each of these reasons below.

Increasing understanding of EDI language:

- Reflecting on the definitions of certain words or terms.
- Stimulating word associations and widening existing vocabulary, or developing a starting / common vocabulary / glossary. For example, that produced by the University of Washington (<https://environment.uw.edu/about/diversity-equity-inclusion/tools-and-additional-resources/glossary-dei-concepts/>) or the University of York (<https://www.york.ac.uk/about/equality/edi-glossary-terminology/>).
- Exploring the influence of autobiography and cultural context on language choice and use.
- Understanding different perspectives over time and in different locations.

Exploring EDI issues within a specific subject area or field of work:

- Confronting unconscious bias.
- Surfacing organisational or group inequalities, discrimination, or stereotyping.
- Challenging views appropriately.
- Experiencing and responding to challenge appropriately.
- Thinking critically about current news or social media stories.

Empowering participants to develop their voice and engage in safe spaces:

- Building a sense of belonging and/or trust within a group.
- Hearing and telling different stories.
- Providing opportunities for individuals to raise personal experiences of injustice, discrimination, or oppression.
- Articulating thinking using appropriate language.



## Preparation prompts

**What is/are the reason(s) for using the card resource in your own practice?**

**What are the aims for your activities?**

## Where can you use the EDI cards?

One of the aims of the research project carried out on the use of the card resource was to identify different contexts or situations in which it was used. Your reasons for using the cards might determine both an event setting and a location in a course or programme. Examples from our research include groups of student representatives exploring EDI topics together for the first time and teams of learning developers who have worked as colleagues for a long time.

### **Physical space (face-to-face session):**

- A group activity to encourage discussion and reflection on diversity and inclusivity in a safe and comfortable environment.
- To prompt conversations during team-building activities or training sessions to promote diversity awareness and inclusion in the workplace.

### **Online or hybrid session:**

- A presentation platform: PowerPoint, Keynote, Google Slides.
- An icebreaker or conversation starter in online or hybrid sessions to promote engagement and participation.
- Incorporated into online learning modules as a self-directed learning activity.
- On an interactive platform such as Padlet, Miro or Lucidspark.

### **At the start of a module or one-off session:**

- An introduction to the module or session to establish expectations and create a welcoming and inclusive environment.
- A tool to set the tone for the session, emphasising the importance of diversity and inclusion.

### **An induction for getting to know peers:**

- To facilitate introductions and to encourage participants to share their backgrounds and experiences.
- A tool to encourage participants to find common ground and build relationships based on mutual respect and understanding.

With a group who know (and trust) each other:

- To deepen the understanding and awareness of diversity and inclusivity among a group that already has a baseline level of trust and familiarity.
- To facilitate deeper conversations and explore more complex issues related to diversity and inclusivity.

**An independent reflection tool for self-directed activities:**

- A personal reflection tool to encourage individuals to reflect on their own biases and assumptions.
- A self-directed activity to encourage individuals to learn more about diversity and inclusivity in their own time and at their own pace.

**In a remote setting, such as a placement:**

- A tool to create a sense of community and connection among remote learners or workers.
- To promote diversity and inclusivity awareness in settings where participants may be geographically dispersed.
- A reflection tool / lens through which students can be encouraged to identify any EDI issues relating to their experience or practice.

**In mentoring, advising, personal tutoring:**

- To explore issues of power, difference, identity, boundaries, trust, and ownership within the relationship (between mentor / mentee, tutor / student). For example, when setting up the relationship, or before moving to deeper or more challenging issues.
- To create explicit opportunities for students / clients / mentees to raise sensitive or difficult issues.
- A lens for the tutor / mentor to use during observations.

**In seminars or tutorials:**

- A group activity to encourage participation and engagement in seminars and tutorials.
- To prompt discussions on topics related to diversity and inclusivity in the context of the course material.

**With different groups of participants: staff, students, student-staff, or group representatives:**

- To promote diversity and inclusivity awareness and understanding across the organisation.
- Tailored to the specific needs and interests of each group.

**At different points in a course or programme:**

- To reinforce key messages related to diversity and inclusivity.
- Incorporated into a broader scheme of work or programme design to ensure that diversity and inclusivity are integrated throughout the learning experience.

**In different disciplinary contexts:**

- Adapted to different disciplinary contexts to make them more relevant and meaningful for learners or workers in those fields.

- To encourage interdisciplinary conversations and collaborations around issues related to diversity and inclusivity.
- To examine the meaning of terms in different disciplines, or introduce new terms to discussions.



### Preparation prompt

**Where will you use the card resource in your practice?**

**Try to think about...**

- ✓ location: physical or online
- ✓ event: one-to-one meetings, seminars, break-out groups
- ✓ stage in a module / course: introduction, mid-point, plenary
- ✓ participants: level of study, mixed groups of staff or students

## How can you use the EDI cards?

The format adopted for using the EDI cards is likely to depend on why you want to use the cards and where you intend to use them. The entire set of cards can be used for comprehensive exploration of equality, diversity and inclusion, or selected cards can be used to focus on specific topics or issues. It is important to remember that the set also includes a blank card, or 'wildcard', which allows individuals to determine their own topics, or provide different interpretations of the existing topic set. You will also need to decide if you intend to provide a full set of cards for each participant or a limited number of sets that will be shared.

The methods for using the cards fall into two categories. The first is in independent learning. For example, participants can choose a significant card and explore it using a spider diagram or build a reflective log each week with developing insights. The second is in social learning. This can be achieved with pairs or groups of participants who order cards in some way, such as using diamond nine or prioritising, or show connections through a mind map and engage in conversation.

### Individual sets for each participant:

If a participant is using their own set of cards, they may decide how best to arrange them at the beginning of the activity. We authors have noticed how this can happen instinctively and will differ from person to person.

For example, some participants may choose to arrange the card set in rows in no particular order – placing each card in the order it appeared in the pack (Fig. 2).

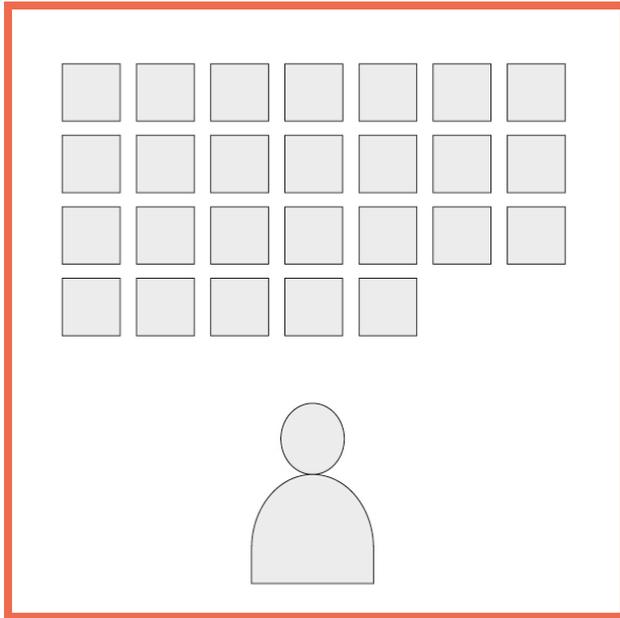


Figure 2. Diagram showing the layout of 26 EDI cards in front of a participant.

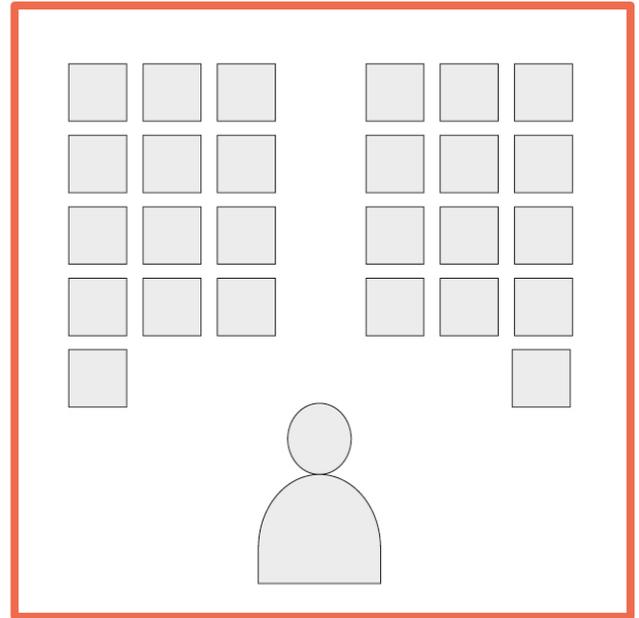


Figure 3. Diagram showing the layout of 26 EDI cards in front of a participant separated into two groups (left and right).

Participants might notice that there are some relationships between the card topics and set some to their left and right, indicating a division following human bilateral symmetry (Fig. 3).

As well as using the horizontal axis, participants might use a vertical axis indicating a hierarchy. For instance, this could be degrees of importance from low to high (Fig. 4) or high to low (Fig. 5) indicated by distance from the participant.

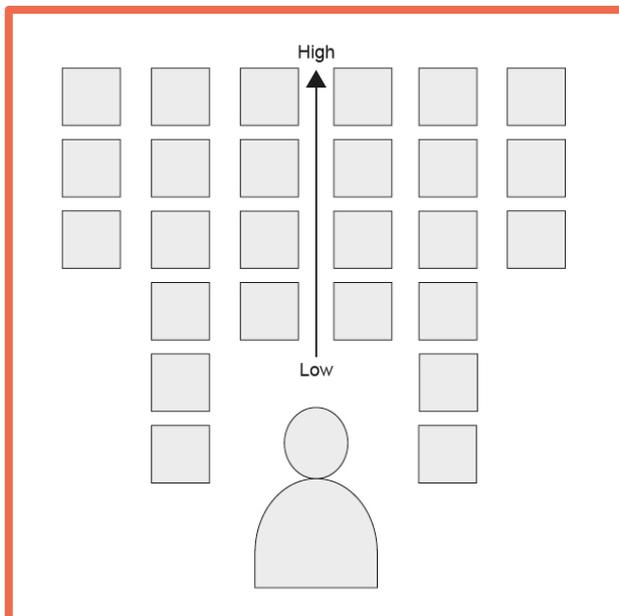


Figure 4. Diagram showing the layout of 26 EDI cards in front of a participant with cards arranged in degrees of importance for an individual, with high importance furthest away

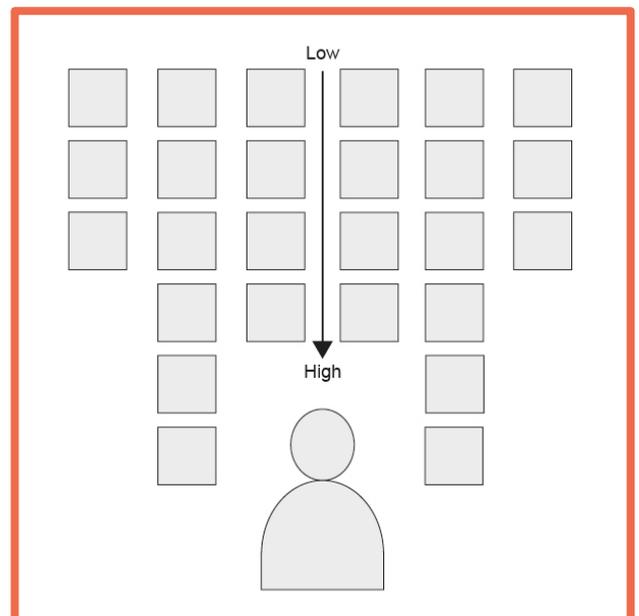


Figure 5. Diagram showing the layout of 26 EDI cards in front of a participant with cards arranged in degrees of importance for an individual, with low importance furthest away.

Categorisation is an important aspect of using the EDI cards. Although we can explore topics independently of others, participants might have in mind organisational categories in which to arrange the cards in columns (Fig. 6).

Horizontal arrangements are useful for indicating the relationships between card sets. In the following example (Fig. 7), the participant has set aside some of the cards and might create two or more subsets, drawing attention to connections between those in set 1 and those in set 2.

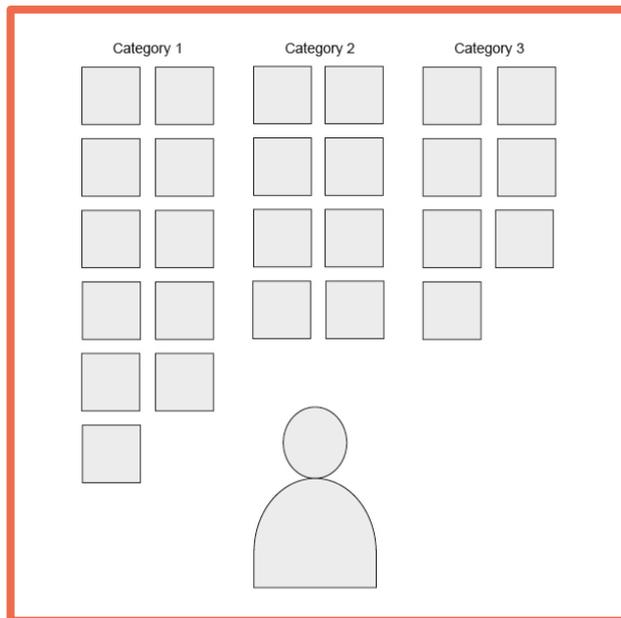


Figure 6. Diagram showing the layout of 26 EDI cards in front of a participant with cards arranged in three category columns.

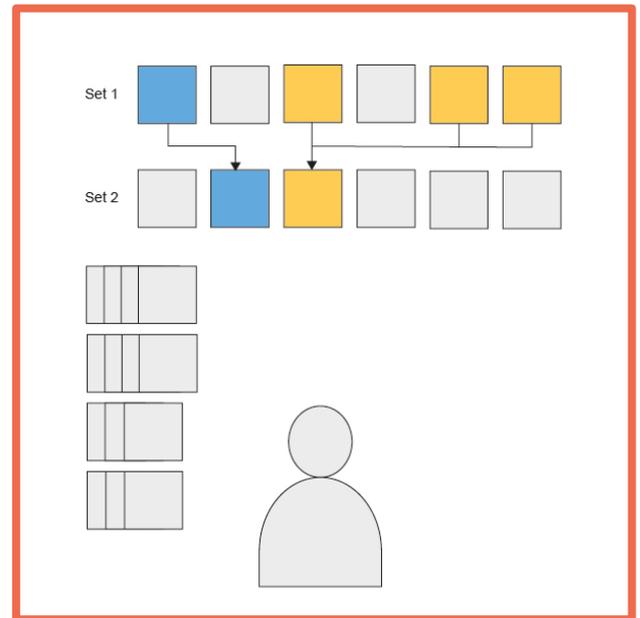


Figure 7. Diagram showing the layout of 26 EDI cards in front of a participant with cards arranged in two horizontal sets. Arrows indicate relationships between particular card topics.

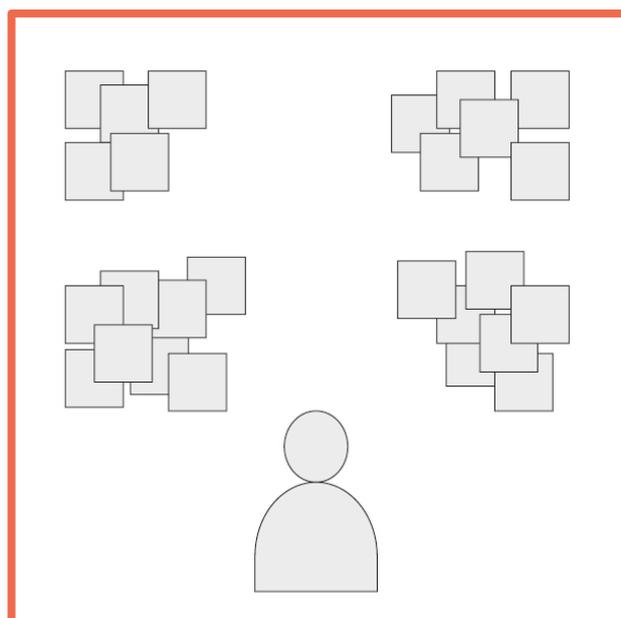


Figure 8. Diagram showing the layout of 26 EDI cards in front of a participant with cards arranged in four topic clusters.

Although we aim to make the cards visible, some participants might group and stack their cards into clusters or piles, which conform to some form of categorisation (Fig. 8).

## Group sets

Group sets of EDI cards can be distributed for use in small group discussions or team-building activities. In selecting specific topic cards, participants might hold or even wear (using a sticky tab or safety pin) the card they have chosen, and try to personify, or embody, this concept (Fig. 9).

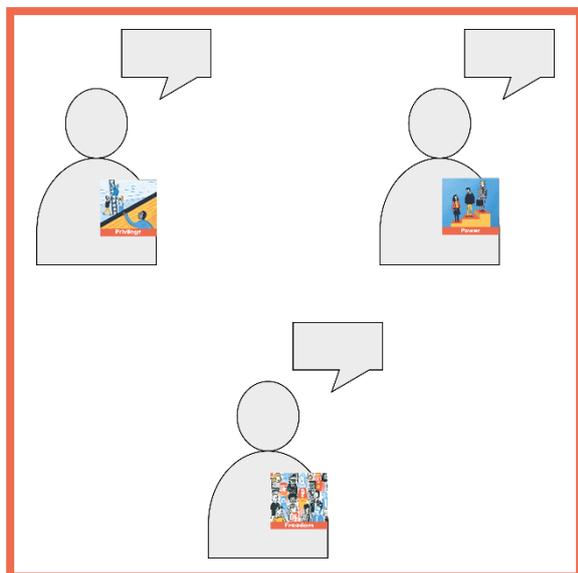


Figure 9. Diagram showing the selected EDI cards worn as badges by three participants who personify or role-play that topic.

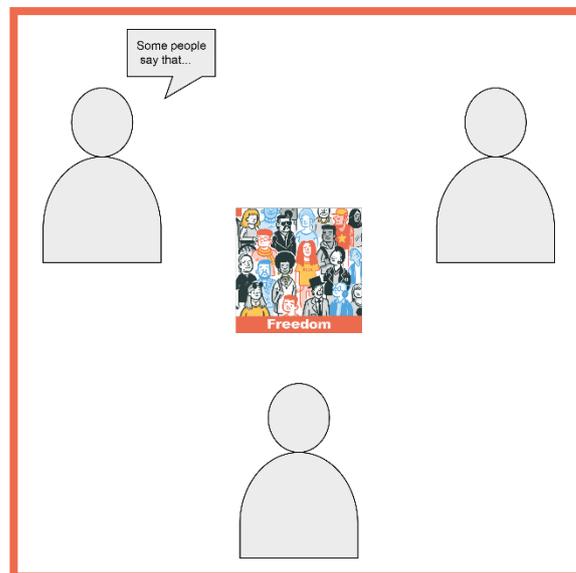


Figure 10. Diagram showing a selected EDI card considered as a topic of enquiry, or research, by three participants.

Selected cards can also be used as a prompt for enquiry, or research (Fig. 10). Several participants might set a single card on a table and use a portable device to access information online that provides the views or definitions of the term created by others.

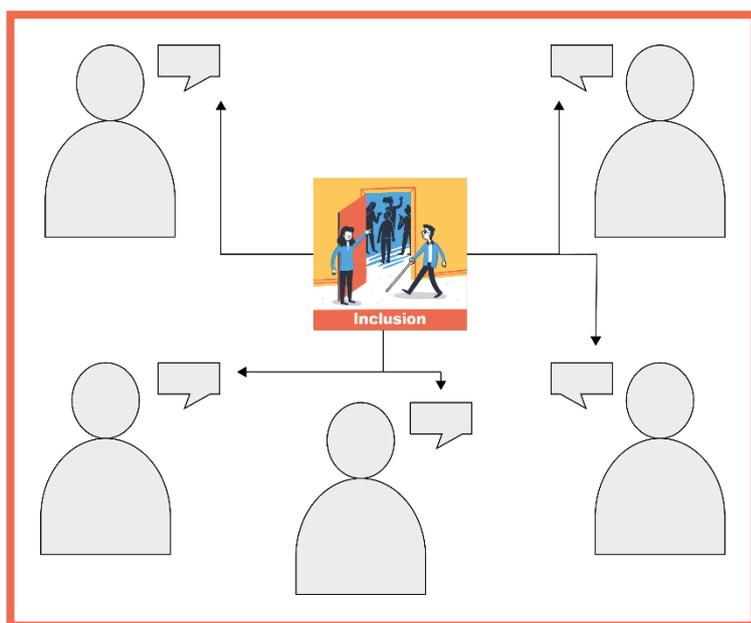


Figure 11. Diagram showing a selected EDI card considered as sharing prompt by five participants, who each suggest associations or definitions.

A single card can also be used in sharing activities, with multiple participants reflecting on what they understand by the topic in front of them (Fig. 11). Participants might share associations, definitions, or even synonyms, with their peers.

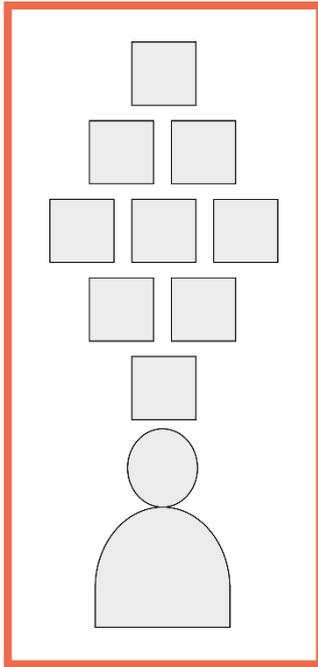


Figure 12. Diagram showing the layout of nine EDI cards in a diamond nine pattern.

Participants can be given, or select, 9 cards and can organise them in relation to an identified priority. This could represent what has been particularly important to them in their lives, or most challenging issues in their contexts, for example. They organise the cards by laying them on the table in the shape of a diamond (Fig. 12) – 1 card (seen as the most important in relation to the task) in the first row, 2 in the second, 3 in the third, 2 in the fourth and 1 in the final row. This enables reflection and discussion around topics such as personal impact of some EDI issues, or ideas about which aspects need to be addressed in a particular context.

Participants can identify cards that relate to particular topics or, themes in course material or, other texts, such as EDI policy documentation, and use them as a basis for discussion or reflection (Fig. 13).



Figure 13. Diagram showing a selected EDI card (disability) and search path through a local policy document to find examples of how the term is used and defined by other authorities, such as government legislation (<https://www.gov.uk/definition-of-disability-under-equality-act-2010>).

## Formats

### Digital copies

Digital copies of the EDI cards can be shared with participants via a shared drive or online platform. A collaborative whiteboard (Miro, Lucidspark, Padlet, etc) or PowerPoint presentation can be used to display the cards and facilitate group discussions (Fig. 14). Digital images of the cards can also be enhanced with alt text descriptions for individuals who use screen reading software.

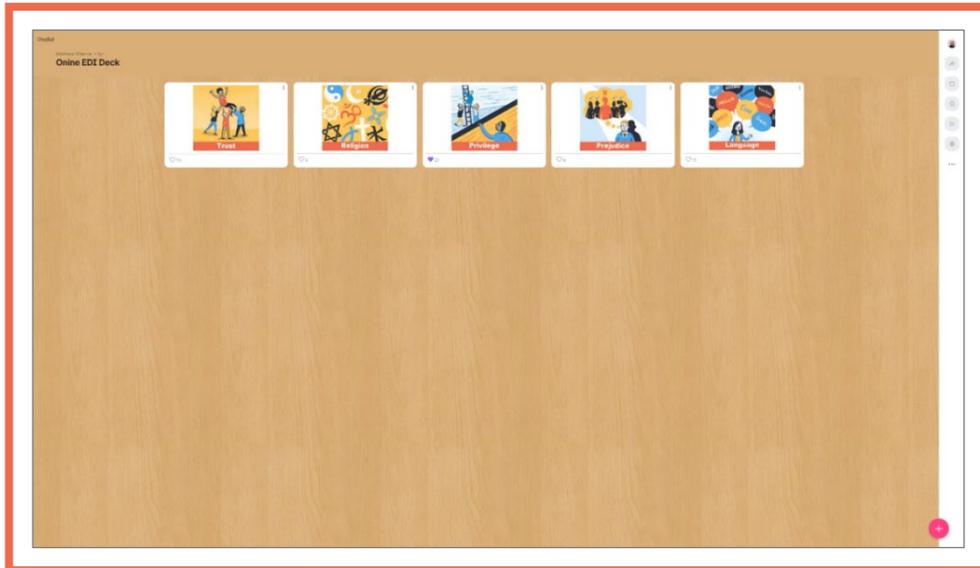
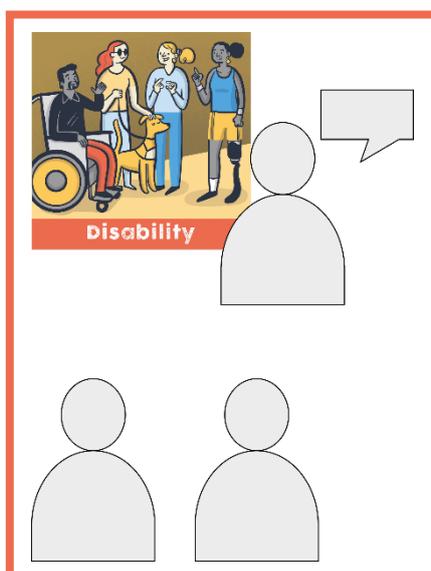


Figure 14. A screenshot showing a selection of EDI cards displayed on the Padlet platform.

### All cards printed onto 1 page

All the topic cards can be printed onto one page for easy distribution and use in group activities (Fig. 1). This may be appropriate for staff or students who would prefer a preview of the cards, to consider before the session, or an overview if they are sharing one set in a group.



### Posters around the room

Facilitators can play with the scale of the EDI cards to make full use of the physical environment. Posters with selected topic cards can be displayed around the room to promote awareness and encourage discussion (Fig. 15). Groups of participants can gather around each poster and move on to the next in the form of a 'gallery walk' (Francek, 2006).

Figure 15. Diagram showing a selected EDI card expanded to poster size for a presentation or 'gallery walk'.



## Preparation prompts

How many sets of EDI cards will you use?

Which format will you choose for the cards?

Which of the EDI cards will you use?

## Building forward

In this section, we consider the ways in which the EDI card activities can be extended over time to deepen learning. Although the card set can be used in one-off events, changes in assumptions and attitudes towards equality, diversity and inclusion are more likely to occur over time. Instead of focusing on informational learning, EDI session facilitators should be aiming for transformational learning, which emphasises a deeper experiential and emotional engagement with the ideas that arise (Rodgers & Kangas, 2022). Curriculum developers and training coordinators can use the cards to explore extended activities and learning outcomes through adult learning theory, thinking of EDI topics as threshold concepts, and relating these to curriculum aims, objectives and intended learning outcomes. Building forward may involve developing new topic cards. The EDI topic wildcard was created for this purpose.

## Adult learning theory

Higher education is an environment for adult learners, comprising individuals ranging from 18 years of age to those returning to formal education after many years. Andragogy, or adult learning (literally 'leading') differs from pedagogy in that it places a greater emphasis on the following:

- An individual's need to know.
- Their self-concept as responsible for decisions.
- Their previous life experiences.
- A readiness to learn, e.g., timing and relevance.
- An orientation to learning. For example, task- or problem-centred.
- Their motivation, extrinsic, but very often intrinsic.

(Knowles et al., 2005:64-69)

Although the quantity of life experience will vary from person to person (in years), the qualities of those experiences can be explored and harnessed in relation to their identity as a learner. This approach to learning is consistent with the findings of our recent research on the use of the cards across two universities. The idea of storytelling emerged as an important theme for several participants:

---

*I think it's an interesting exercise in self-reflection ... It's effective in bringing EDI issues to life with stories and examples, instead of treating it as an abstract thing and could show individuals that they could have personal motives that are already EDI related. (P9, Q2)*

---

Stories, ‘*constructions* that give a meaning to events and convey a particular sense of experience’ (Carter, 1993:8, original emphasis), have been used when teaching inclusion to show ‘that there are different ways of viewing and experiencing the world’ (Jarvis & Iantaffi, 2006:80). They continue to be used for EDI learning and practice development (for example, Saleh et al., 2014; Chrysostomou & Symeonidou, 2017; Harrison-Train et al., 2021).

## Threshold concepts

As the EDI card topics are essentially a set of concepts, they lend themselves to the lens of threshold concepts. These differ from key concepts of a body of knowledge in having certain characteristics as defined originally by Meyer and Land (2003, 2005):

- transformative – they can change understanding of a body of knowledge
- irreversible – they cannot be ‘unlearnt’
- integrative – they permit linkages with other bodies of knowledge that were previously hidden
- troublesome – they can be difficult to grasp, and may seem counterintuitive; they can leave the learner in an uncomfortable ‘liminal’ state
- bounded – they have limits, so that they may border with other thresholds

When considering activities for building forward, curriculum developers and training coordinators might map these characteristics to the EDI cards (Fig. 16) to anticipate some of the ways that each topic could contribute to more profound changes in attitudes and behaviours. This includes foreseeing possible resistance to the definitions or use of certain terms.

| <b>EDI Threshold Concepts</b> |                       |                     |                    |                    |                |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|--------------------|--------------------|----------------|
| <b>Card</b>                   | <b>Transformative</b> | <b>Irreversible</b> | <b>Integrative</b> | <b>Troublesome</b> | <b>Bounded</b> |
| <b>Class</b>                  | ◆                     | ◆                   | ◆                  |                    | ◆              |
| <b>Culture</b>                |                       |                     | ◆                  |                    |                |
| <b>Discrimination</b>         | ◆                     |                     | ◆                  |                    |                |
| <b>Ethnicity</b>              | ◆                     | ◆                   | ◆                  | ◆                  | ◆              |
| <b>Freedom</b>                | ◆                     | ◆                   | ◆                  | ◆                  |                |
| <b>Identity</b>               |                       | ◆                   |                    | ◆                  |                |
| <b>Ownership</b>              | ◆                     | ◆                   | ◆                  | ◆                  |                |
| <b>Power</b>                  | ◆                     | ◆                   | ◆                  |                    | ◆              |
| <b>Prejudice</b>              |                       | ◆                   |                    |                    |                |
| <b>Privilege</b>              | ◆                     | ◆                   | ◆                  | ◆                  | ◆              |

Figure 16. A table mapping a selection of EDI cards against the characteristics of threshold concepts.

## Curriculum development

In terms of curriculum development, an educator might select a card and share ideas and words from a group of participants (cf. Fig 10). This might be one way of building curriculum topics. Decolonisation of the curriculum in higher education is one example. One of the challenges for educators in higher education in the UK has been the scope of the A-Level History curriculum, which may not provide a substantial exploration of the British imperial project (Gebrial, 2018:25), and therefore limit previous awareness and discussion of social phenomena, such as 'Class', 'Culture', 'Discrimination', 'Ethnicity', 'Freedom', 'Identity', 'Ownership', 'Power', 'Prejudice', 'Privilege', 'Religion', and 'Stereotype'. The EDI cards provide a resource to establish foundational knowledge when students transition into a university course.

The EDI topic cards might supplement disciplinary thinking in degree programmes, providing a conceptual foundation connected to historical information, such as key events, actors, and agendas. A conceptual lens permits a foundational approach to the critical language that undergraduates are likely to encounter in academic writing, thus supporting key academic literacies. These concepts can be revisited within different disciplinary domains or reconsidered over the course of the academic year in terms of shifting meanings, which prompt students and staff to reformulate their earlier positions and attitudes as they encounter new knowledge.

## Final points

We hope you have found some of the ideas in this booklet useful and that the resource will be helpful as you explore EDI topics in practice. We found it particularly helpful to meet as a project team for a day, in a reflective space to try a range of activities together, noticing challenges and what helped our discussion and learning. You may wish to start this way and build on our ideas to create your own approach.

Learning together can be expanded beyond your own institution. We would be interested to hear from you and to share ideas, so do get in touch at our details below. You can also promote your use of the cards, and share new ideas of topics, by presenting and publishing through the higher education sector. AdvanceHE currently runs a conference on EDI; the Association for Learning Development in Higher Education (ALDinHE) provides opportunities to publish a range of articles on supporting student learning. If you work to promote EDI among colleagues, the Staff and Educational Development Association (SEDA) also offers opportunities to write about your practice.

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**AdvanceHE: <https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/>**

**ALDinHE: <https://aldinhe.ac.uk/>**

**SEDA: <https://www.seda.ac.uk/>**

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