



Call for papers and guide to submissions

EDI Conference 2027: Inclusion that works

Leading transformation for stronger, more equitable higher education

Bringing together global perspectives, practical experience and collective leadership to examine what works, confront what does not, and build more effective and publicly credible approaches to inclusion that improve outcomes and strengthen higher education's mission.

14-15 April 2027

Deadline for submissions: Midnight, 30 October 2026.

Submissions should be made online via the following link:

https://advancehe.smapply.org/prog/edi_conference_2027

Overview

Higher education institutions are navigating significant political, financial, technological and societal change. HEIs face difficult choices about institutional priorities, resources, academic culture and the experiences and outcomes of students and staff. At the same time, equality and inclusion work is subject to increased legal, political and public scrutiny.

In this context, EDI practice cannot stand still. It must demonstrate how it supports the fundamental mission and public purpose of higher education, including excellent education, student success, research and open inquiry, social and economic opportunity, community cohesion and responsible institutional leadership.

This conference will explore how leaders, practitioners, researchers and students can lead transformation, foster belonging and shape more inclusive futures while responding to an increasingly complex and uncertain environment. It will ask what works, what does not, where practice needs to change, and what capabilities leaders and inclusion professionals will need for the future.

The Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Conference is Advance HE's flagship annual event, bringing together practitioners, academics, researchers, policymakers and sector leaders from across the UK and around the world to share learning, challenge thinking and advance equity, inclusion and belonging in higher education. Through keynote sessions, panel discussions, presentations, deep-dive sessions and facilitated dialogue, the conference provides a space for critical reflection, practical insights and collaborative action.

Whether your focus is leadership, governance, teaching and learning, research, student experience, organisational development or culture change, the conference offers

opportunities to engage with emerging ideas, evidence-informed practice and innovative approaches that support more equitable and inclusive institutions.

Conference outcomes for delegates

- **Critical reflection and renewal:** Examine what is working, where progress remains limited, what has produced unintended consequences, and how EDI practice needs to evolve in response to changing institutional and societal contexts.
- **Evidence, impact and practice sharing:** Learn from research, evaluation and practical experience, including success, challenge and failure, to distinguish activity from impact and identify proportionate, sustainable and transferable approaches.
- **Professional capability and skills building:** Strengthen the knowledge, judgement and practical skills required to lead inclusion, navigate complex legal and contested issues, influence institutional decision-making and embed EDI across leadership, governance, education, research and services.
- **Future readiness and public purpose:** Explore how inclusion can strengthen higher education's mission, outcomes and public value, and prepare for future political, legal, financial, technological and societal change.
- **Networking, dialogue and collaboration:** Engage constructively with different experiences and perspectives, build relationships for mutual learning and challenge, and develop collaborations that support sustained change.

Conference themes

The conference will have the following sub-themes and contributors will be asked to identify which sub-theme their submission supports.

Across all four themes, contributors should address the following cross-cutting questions where relevant:

1. **Purpose:** What institutional or societal problem is the work seeking to address, and how does this connect to the mission of higher education?
2. **Evidence:** What evidence informed the approach, and what evidence is available about its impact?
3. **Learning:** What worked, what did not, and what would be done differently?
4. **Resources:** What did the approach require, and is it proportionate, sustainable and transferable?
5. **Accountability:** Who owns the outcome, and how is progress scrutinised?
6. **Relevance:** How could the rationale and outcomes be explained clearly to students, staff, governors and the wider public?

Theme 1: Embedding inclusion in transformation and change

Inclusion is most consequential when it shapes core institutional decisions rather than operating in a silo. This theme explores how EDI activity enables leaders, governors, professional services and academic teams to embed inclusion within strategy, transformation and in the development of everyday institutional practice.

We welcome contributions that demonstrate both current practice and future approaches to leading transformation.

We welcome contributions on a range of issues related to this theme, including

- Inclusive leadership through institutional change, financial pressure and restructuring
- Influencing strategy, governance and culture
- Building support for inclusion in changing, contested or challenging contexts
- Future leadership models and capabilities
- Global perspectives on inclusive and transformational leadership
- Staffing structures and leadership models where EDI responsibility and portfolios are changing
- Shared leadership and responsibility for inclusion without diluted accountability
- Effective collaboration between EDI specialists and mainstream institutional functions

Theme 2: Developing and professionalising EDI practice

Higher education is increasingly shaped by policy and regulatory developments, political, societal, media and financial pressures, demographic shifts and technological change.

Institutions and EDI practitioners must improve priority outcomes while upholding equality and freedom of speech for all staff and students. This theme explores the professional, legal, ethical and leadership capabilities required to navigate these complex pressures, take difficult, often contested decisions, and sustain environments in which everyone can learn, work, disagree and participate.

We welcome contributions on a range of issues related to this theme, including

- The changing role and skill requirements of inclusion professionals
- Evidence-informed decision-making in complex and contested contexts
- Understanding and responding to criticism, challenge, disagreement, resistance and backlash
- Legal, policy and regulatory literacy
- Influencing senior leaders, governors and institutional services;
- Professional ethics and standards
- Freedom of speech and academic freedom
- Equality law and the Public Sector Equality Duty
- Recent legal and regulatory developments relating to sex and gender
- Lawful and evidence-based policy and service design
- Community cohesion, belonging and constructive disagreement

- Institutional neutrality, impartiality and the appropriate expression of institutional values
- Managing conflicting rights, expectations and perspectives
- Governance, assurance and accountability in contested areas

Theme 3: Belonging, dignity and cohesion by design

Recent global events, cultural and political disputes, discrimination and intense public and media scrutiny have affected the experiences of many staff and students. Specific groups and communities encounter distinct barriers, hostility, exclusion or pressures within and beyond higher education.

Institutions also have responsibilities when staff or students become the focus of intense public, political, media or online scrutiny. We welcome contributions examining effective institutional responses in these circumstances; how institutions can uphold academic freedom, freedom of expression, academic standards and due process while recognising and addressing risks to wellbeing; and how leaders, specialist services and wider communities can share responsibility rather than leaving affected individuals or groups to carry the burden alone. This includes honest examination of gaps between institutional commitments and the support experienced in practice.

This theme focuses on purposeful and evidence-informed approaches to belonging and community cohesion. We welcome contributions that examine how institutional environments, systems, services and relationships can support fair opportunity, academic success and constructive engagement across difference. Contributions should demonstrate impact and learning, including where interventions have encountered limitations, tensions or unintended consequences.

We welcome contributions on issues including:

- Antisemitism, Islamophobia, anti-Black racism and sector leading responses to discrimination, harassment or hostility
- Disability inclusion and belonging
- Socioeconomic disadvantage, class, place and educational opportunity
- Sex, trans inclusion, gender reassignment, gender-critical beliefs and institutional responses to the UK Supreme Court judgment in *For Women Scotland* and the EHRC Code of Practice for service providers
- Religion or belief, including protected philosophical beliefs
- The alignment and interaction of inclusion with freedom of speech, academic freedom and constructive disagreement
- The effects of global conflicts and societal divisions within university communities and fostering community cohesion during periods of conflict, protest or polarisation
- The effects of media, political and online scrutiny on staff, students and institutions;
- Cultures that support dignity, participation, respectful challenge and open inquiry
- Community partnerships, civic engagement and dialogue across difference

- Evidence, evaluation and measures of belonging, participation and institutional trust
- Global approaches to belonging and cohesion

Theme 4: The purpose and public value of inclusion in higher education

What is EDI work for, and how should it evolve? This theme examines how inclusion supports the mission and public purpose of higher education, including education, research, open inquiry, opportunity, civic contribution and public confidence. It invites honest reflection on the strengths, limitations and future direction of EDI practice and encourages innovative, future-focused and thought-provoking contributions that explore emerging opportunities, challenges and possibilities for the sector.

We welcome contributions on a range of issues related to this theme, including

- Student voice and intergenerational leadership of EDI
- Emerging inequalities and opportunities
- Imagining the inclusive institution of 2035 and beyond
- The relationship between inclusion and the academic mission
- EDI, institutional legitimacy and public confidence
- Socioeconomic inequality, class, place and educational opportunity
- Understanding public attitudes and communicating beyond the sector
- What has worked, what has not and what should change
- Lessons from conflict, 'culture wars' and unintended consequences
- Global perspectives on the changing purpose and practice of EDI

Statement of commitment

We are committed to showcasing and amplifying the voices of the full diversity of staff and students contributing to equity, diversity and inclusion within higher education. This includes colleagues from student unions, academic departments, professional services, widening participation teams, governance and HR functions, senior leaders, and early-career staff. The conference recognises that embedding EDI requires the insights and collaboration of people across all roles and career stages.

We also acknowledge that higher education operates in a climate of contested viewpoints and heightened scrutiny on issues such as sex and gender, antisemitism, anti-Muslim hate, racism, decolonisation, and global conflicts. In showcasing work across the sector, the conference will explicitly uphold the principles of academic freedom, respectful dialogue and intellectual integrity, creating a space where complex and divergent perspectives can be explored constructively and with care.

Conference structure

The conference will run across two days with an optional evening dinner and activities on the evening of the 14 April. Delegates can attend the full conference or choose the one day that resonates most with their work, experiences or requirements.

Please note that there will also be an early evening reception for Athena Swan and Race Equality Charter award winners from recent application rounds. These winners will also be offered the opportunity to showcase their work during specific sessions in the conference programme.

Proposals/session type options:

Proposals are sought against any of the four themes above, which will span both days of the conference.

The conference aims to showcase a wide and diverse range of work, activities, and positive changes both within and outside the HE sector. Proposals are welcomed from individuals, teams and students, whether they belong to a single institution or multiple institutions. Student unions and other student bodies or groups are also warmly encouraged to submit their proposals. Submissions from networks or partnerships within HE or with bodies outside the HE sector are also welcomed to offer the opportunity for delegates to learn from the widest and most diverse range of work, building on the conference theme. Submissions are especially welcomed from presenters with lived experience of protected characteristics or from minoritised groups.

Submissions can be for any of the following session formats. Individuals may also submit to more than one session type. After review we will schedule submissions into 60-minute session slots arranged by theme.

1. Interactive Workshop session (60 minutes)

Hands-on sessions where attendees can develop new skills, collaborate with peers, and apply their learning in a practical setting. Workshops are interactive and often focus on specific tools, techniques, or best practices. This is an opportunity to be inventive in your mode of delivery to achieve optimum engagement and learning. Any presentation elements in this session should not exceed 20 minutes, allowing 40 minutes for discussion or practical activity. Delegates should leave the sessions with practical skills or ideas which help to improve their practice.

2. Oral presentation (30 minutes)

Oral presentations should aim to give a brief summary of a piece of research or a project, either completed or still in progress. Each presentation should last for no more than **20 minutes**, leaving 10 minutes for questions/discussion. Two oral presentations, with a central theme, will be grouped into hour-long sessions.

3. Ten-minute thesis (10 minutes)

Building on the idea of the “Three-minute thesis”, the goal of this session is to present your research in an engaging way that attendees can understand. However, presenters only have **three minutes** to deliver the content and **seven minutes** for questions. You can think of this exercise as an academic version of an elevator pitch. Five individual sessions will be scheduled into an hour-long session.

4. Poster presentation

Posters give an alternative approach for the presentation of current research or new work. Posters should be an eye-catching visual representation of a topic, potentially including graphics, tables, charts, text, and images. Posters will be displayed throughout the conference for informal browsing, with contributors indicating when they will be available in person to discuss their poster.

Posters should be **professionally printed** and brought with you to the conference for display. Only the following orientation and sizes can be accepted:

- Landscape – A1
- Portrait – either A1 or A0
- Neither orientation should be smaller than A1 in size

In addition to the printed poster, presenters are asked to produce both an **electronic version of the poster** along with a **three-minute recorded presentation** explaining the key points of the poster and the project behind it. Electronic posters and recorded presentations will need to be submitted in advance to the conference team, and QR codes linking directly to the recording will be displayed alongside physical posters in the exhibition area.

Submission guidelines

Submissions should be made online via the following link:

https://advancehe.smapply.org/prog/edi_conference_2027

On accessing this link, you will be asked to **set up a simple account** requiring your name, e-mail address and a password of your choosing.

Deadline for submission: Midnight, 30 October 2026

The following provides an outline of the information required in your submission.

1. Accept Conditions of Conference

Privacy Statement

You will be asked to read and agree to Advance HE's privacy statement, explaining how we will use and store any data you submit.

Conditions

Before submitting a proposal for the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Conference 2027, please be aware that the following terms and conditions apply. Presenters are required to:

- attend the in-person conference for a minimum of one day to present their session should it be accepted into the conference programme. Please note, presenter places are not free of charge, but are offered at a discounted rate
- agree to information about themselves, their co-presenters, their institution and their session details being promoted externally on the web-based conference programme

- permit their slide decks and resources from the session being shared with conference attendees
- allow their session to be photographed or videoed during the conference at Advance HE's discretion
- allow their and their co-presenters' details (name, email address, institution, biography and Twitter name) to be shared with delegates during the conference on the Advance HE's events app.

You will have to agree to these conditions and storage of data before progressing with your submission.

2. Lead Presenter Details

Contact details

Please include your details as the lead presenter. As lead presenter, all correspondence regarding the session will be sent to you, but not to any co-presenters. It is the lead presenter's responsibility to share information and correspondence with all their co-presenters.

Your title (for example Dr, Professor, Ms, Mr.), first and last name, institution, job title, e-mail address, mobile phone number, X-Twitter handle (if you have one) and a short biography should be provided which will be added to the conference app and made available for all conference delegates to view.

Biographies should be no longer than 100 words and should be written in the **third person singular**. Mobile phone numbers will not be shared outside of the conference administrative team and will be used to contact you only if we have been unable to get in touch via e-mail.

Before completing this section, you will be asked whether your proposed session includes any additional presenters. Please select the appropriate answer. If you have additional presenters, you will be asked to include contact information (as above) for each additional presenter.

You should only list colleagues who will be attending the conference to co-present your session in person.

3. Session Details

Title of session

Please give your session a name that describes your session **concisely** and **attractively** to audiences. On request, the title of your session can be changed ahead of the publishing of the programme, but as standard, this will be the title used for the programme and all publicity for your session online or on the conference app.

Session Theme Selection

From the drop-down list of four themes, please select the theme that most closely aligns with the content of your session. Details of each theme can be viewed when that option is selected.

Session type

Please select the session types that you would prefer to deliver at the conference (you may choose more than one session type).

Please be aware of the differing lengths of the sessions available:

- Interactive workshop session – 60 minutes
- Oral presentation – 20 minutes, plus 10 minutes Q&A
- Ten-minute thesis – 3 minutes, plus 7 minutes Q&A
- Poster presentation.

Further details about session types can be found by clicking on the 'Show more' button under each session type.

Overview of session (up to 100 words)

This overview should be a concise summary which highlights the key features, benefits to the audience and unique selling points. It should capture the reader's attention quickly and provide information to generate interest and encourage engagement.

This information will be used by our reviewers to select sessions for inclusion in the programme.

Engagement and Interactivity (up to 100-150 words)

Please provide details on how the session will run, including how you will engage participants.

This information will be used by our reviewers to select sessions for inclusion in the programme.

Key takeaways (up to 100 words)

Please provide a short summary of the **planned outcomes** of the session. Please also include the anticipated impact your session will have on that audience; how will delegates be able to implement the findings in their own practice; and how your session demonstrates originality/innovation?

This information will be used by our reviewers to select sessions for inclusion in the programme.

Link to theme (up to 50 words)

Please provide details of how the proposal links to the overall theme of the conference and the chosen thematic area. Why will delegates be interested in this session?

This information will be used by our reviewers to select sessions for inclusion in the programme.

Abstract

This section will be used for **publicity purposes only** to promote your session via the Advance HE website, the conference app and social media. This should set out the aims and objectives of the session and be written in a way that will attract delegates to your session. Abstracts should be no longer than 100 words. This information will **not be reviewed** or form part of the submission that reviewers will assess when deciding on suitability for inclusion in the conference.

4. Presenter Requirements

Room layout

Where possible, session rooms will be arranged in either theatre style for oral presentations or in cabaret style for interactive sessions. If your session has layout requirements outside of these styles, please select 'other' and explain your requirements.

Please note that while we will attempt to accommodate each presenter's preference, it may not always be possible to arrange the rooms in your preferred style due to limitations placed on us by the venue.

Additional equipment

As standard, breakout rooms will be supplied with a Windows laptop, a projector and screen. Interactive breakout sessions will also contain flip charts, pens, post-it notes and a variety of other stationery.

For presenters who wish to bring their own laptops, VGA and HDMI adaptors will be available. Where possible, presenters wishing to use Mac laptops or Macbooks should bring an appropriate adapter with them to connect to the projector cables.

If you require equipment in addition to the above list, please state it in this section.

Please be conscious of the limitations of space within venues and try to adapt your sessions accordingly. We will not be able to accommodate sessions that require multiple delegate access to computer terminals/laptops or other specific technical equipment.

Additional requirements

If you anticipate having any additional requirements when attending the conference, please make us aware of these here. These may include accessibility, access, or other additional requirements that will enable you to attend and present your session.

Support dogs, carers and assistance staff are welcome at the conference and will not be charged an attendance fee, but please let us know about this by including the details here. A quiet room, prayer room and baby feeding room will be provided throughout the conference available to all delegates.

Review criteria

Each proposal is subject to review by a panel of peer reviewers against the following criteria:

- relevance to the conference theme and selected sub-theme
- clarity of the proposal and the institutional or societal challenge being addressed
- contribution to the development of EDI practice, institutional leadership or public understanding
- quality and appropriate use of evidence, evaluation or professional experience;
- evidence of impact, critical reflection and learning
- anticipated interest from delegates
- potential for delegates to be actively engaged.

Additional information

Important dates

Date	Milestone
1 September 2026	Call opens
30 October 2026	Deadline for submissions (00:00 GMT)
w/c 7 December 2026	Lead presenters informed of submission outcome
w/c 7 December 2026	10% presenter discount opens
11 January 2027	Lead presenter acceptance of session place
29 January 2027	Presenter discount offer closes
1 February 2027	Deadline for presenters to have booked onto the conference
15 March 2027	Presentations, electronic posters and recordings to be submitted
7 April 2027	Conference bookings close

Presenter Information

Presenter availability

Presenters will be informed of the review decision, and their scheduled time in the conference programme by **week commencing 7 December 2026**. We are unable to take into account presenter availability when timetabling the sessions, so it is essential that you are available to present your session on either day of the conference, until the specific time and date of your session is confirmed.

Pre-conference

Following a successful review of their submission, lead presenters will be informed of the decision and will be asked to confirm acceptance of the offer to present at the conference.

Presenters are required to attend the conference for a minimum of **one full day** to present their session and to participate in other sessions throughout the day.

All presenters (including poster presenters) will need to register for the conference by **1 February 2027** and **book by 29 January 2027** to take advantage of the **10% discounted rate** for presenters.

It is our intention for the conference to be delivered as a full in-person experience and all presenters should prepare to deliver their sessions on site, however, requests to present remotely because of health or accessibility concerns will be taken into consideration.

Contributors will be required to send presentation slides, electronic posters and any recordings to the conference team by **15 March 2027**. This is so that slides and resources can be shared with conference delegates in advance for accessibility purposes and allow us to pre-load presentations onto laptops in the session rooms.

Details of your session, drawing on information supplied on the submission form, will be published on the Advance HE website.

You may also be invited to blog about your session before the conference to assist with promotion of the event.

Post-conference

Presentations, electronic posters, recordings and abstracts will be shared with conference attendees after the conference has been delivered. Please ensure that permission has been sought for the use of any copyrighted images.

You may also be invited to blog about your session or conference experience after the conference.

Co-presenters and responsibilities

All presenters and co-presenters named on the submission form should register and attend the conference should the session is accepted.

Please note:

- All presenters, including co-presenters, need to have booked onto the conference by **1 February 2027**
- It is **the responsibility of the lead presenter** to pass on all relevant details to any co-presenters, as correspondence in the first instance will be sent only to the lead presenter
- It is **the responsibility of the lead presenter** to inform Advance HE at the earliest opportunity of any changes to the session title or content, or of any circumstances that prevent presenters attending the conference that could lead to the session being withdrawn

Materials and handouts

Presenters are encouraged to provide handouts during sessions to support their presentations or workshops, but please note that Advance HE will not be able to print materials on the presenter's behalf and if required these should be prepared in advance and brought with you to the conference.

Attendee numbers

We are unable to guarantee exact audience numbers at any single session, and this may result in delegates' attendance being uneven between sessions that are running in parallel.

Accessibility

We will provide presenters with guidance on accessibility, and **it is expected that presenters adhere to this guidance** and ensure that any presentations and handouts meet Advance HE's accessibility requirements.

Privacy policy

All the information supplied on the submission forms will be stored by Advance HE in electronic format for the purposes of administration of the conference. Additionally, except where stated otherwise, information supplied in submission forms may be published in the conference app, on the conference website and Advance HE blogs pages. All presenters will be required to sign acceptance of the Advance HE events terms and conditions when completing their conference booking form.

Contact us

If you have any queries about submissions for the conference, please contact events@advance-he.ac.uk