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Undertaking a Diversity Mark application for Kent and Medway Medical School: A reflection on the process.

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Keywords
Diversity Mark | Equality | Diversity | Inclusion

Abbreviations
GMC – General Medical Council
MSC – Medical Schools Council
NHS – National Health Service
UKEC – UK Electives Committee
UK – United Kingdom
UoK – University of Kent
KMMS – Kent and Medway Medical School
EDI – Equality, Diversity and Inclusion
DMO – Diversity Mark Officer
PDPCP1 – Professional Development and Person-Centred Practice1

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What this paper adds:

This reflective piece outlines the process, personally and professionally, of undertaking an application for the University of Kent (UoK) Diversity Mark for a module in Kent and Medway Medical School (KMMS). The aim of writing this reflection is to support and inform others at the University of Kent in undertaking such an application as well as highlighting the benefits of engaging with the award process for individuals, teams and the wider University community.

Abstract:

This reflection describes what is involved in undertaking a University of Kent (UoK) Diversity Mark Award and what the implications are of undertaking such an application for individuals, teams and the wider University. The author will outline the principles and activities involved in the application for Kent and Medway Medical School (KMMS) modules as well as considering the benefits and challenges of applying. The author concludes by discussing future plans for expanding the reach of the award in a KMMS context.

Reflection:

Principles and activities involved in undertaking a UoK Diversity Mark Award: The University of Kent (UoK) Diversity Mark Award is an institution-wide program run by the Student Success Team (University of Kent, 2025a). The Student Success Team aim to support the institution and students to meet their goals and get the most from their degree whilst at the University. The aim of the program is to celebrate modules within academic programmes that offer inclusive learning experiences and diverse learning resources. The program also aims to support staff in representing diverse perspectives on academic subjects and in so doing, develop the inclusive learning experience for students. Success in achieving the award and enacting modular change related to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) has been demonstrated in modules across the University of Kent (Hensby and Adewumi, 2024, University of Kent, 2025b).

Module convenors generally lead on the application process for any one module. The convenors and their teams need to evidence a commitment to EDI in their teaching, learning and resources both now and crucially, in the future. Evidencing this involves a process of review and reflection that must include staff *and* students in order to consider perspectives from divergent backgrounds including race, gender, sexuality, disability, and socioeconomic contexts amongst others. The Culturally Sensitive Curricula Scale (Thomas and Quinlan, 2022) is used to help module convenors assess how inclusive their module is.

Although there are likely to be some changes in the process of application due to ongoing development plans for the award, the process for the modular route generally involves the following elements and these are unlikely to change significantly: Firstly, there is an 'onboarding' process by which the applicant is asked to state their intent and interest in undertaking the application. This is usually in the form of an online form and makes clear to the Student Success Team what your module requirements are and how they can best support you with your application. Following this, you are paired up with a Diversity Mark Officer (DMO) or put on a waiting list for such a pairing or an applicant would be asked to start an 'auto review' application.

A Diversity Mark Officer (University of Kent, 2025b) is a UoK trained individual who is able to independently assess your module against a range of criteria that considers modular commitment to EDI. They are able to highlight areas of excellence as well as areas for development so that the Student Success Team can then work with you to establish what needs to be done to successfully apply for the Diversity Mark Award.

An alternative method of review is an 'auto review' which involves the module lead and team completing the award application independently with less direct support from the Student Success Team. For Kent and Medway Medical School (KMMS) related modules, the author argues this would be a particularly challenging route. The reason for this is that there is constant development of KMMS modules in line with General Medical Council (GMC) requirements (GMC, 2015) as well as programme consolidation development plans being currently implemented and therefore fulfilling all of the award criteria in such an adaptable curricular environment will be difficult. Furthermore, KMMS modules have particularly large teams, huge numbers of sessions associated with

them, and a significant number of contributors all of whom need to be included in some way (or at least invited to do so). Auto-review therefore could be challenging in this situation.

In the author's module (Professional Development and Person-Centred Practice 1), which was the first KMMS module to undertake the Diversity Mark Award application, the module team found that somewhere in the middle of the above two options worked best. The team undertook a 'mini' auto-review by gathering information, opinion and evidence from multiple sources whilst also drawing on the experience and expertise of the Student Success Team. This then formed the basis on which the module team developed the EDI offering and assessed the impact of the offering in the module and, through these developments, were able to successfully apply for the Diversity Mark Award.

Whatever route an applicant takes there is a period of self-reflection about their module, which should include an EDI review of the module resources, reading list, learning sessions, team development opportunities and working practices. This reflective process should be done in tandem with the module team (academic and professional services staff and the school librarian). The Diversity Mark Officer will then review the module, and an applicant will be asked to consider and implement recommendations. The team would then make changes as appropriate, gather their evidence of EDI commitment and submit a Diversity Mark Award application for review by the Student Success Team.

Implications of undertaking the award:

a) Individually

The process of applying for the Diversity Mark Award was a surprisingly introspective one. The author had been involved with institutional award applications previously but not one in which they were able to talk about and change their assumptions, blind spots and biases through the application itself. This meant that at times it was uncomfortable but incredibly powerful in terms of personal development as a scholar. The author was able to better understand how their power and privilege impacted on the quality of the teaching in the module and the breadth of resources used. Vitally, this also meant that change was possible in real time.

The author also had a perception, going into this application process, that it would be used to highlight 'deficiencies' in their module that would be difficult to rectify. However, the opposite was true. Through discussions with students and staff the team discovered how much students valued the module, the choice they got within the module, and that they felt that their voice was heard and valued by staff. The application also gave the author a better understanding of the functionality of the module and how to maximise that functionality. For instance, students fed back that the module reading list was appreciated but significant time constraints in the rest of their course meant they needed much more overt linking between reading list items and specific teaching sessions in order to fully appreciate the significance of the items for their learning.

All of these observations were helpful in developing the design of the module and linking reading list items not only to teaching sessions but also to assessment items. Furthermore, through minimising non-essential pre-reading materials and maximising discussions and group activities, the author was also able to foster better student engagement with the module

(as measured by the amount of time students spent in the online module space) and increase the visibility of the reading list. For the author, the award application has also been a lesson in preparing for other analogous awards in other contexts. External funding awards as well as internal diversity awards (i.e. Athena SWAN) all require the level of introspection that this award required, and this process was therefore useful in developing this skill for the author.

b) For the module team

The module team worked well together and forged an excellent relationship with the Student Success Team. A reflexive feedback session highlighted the good communication that was fostered within and between teams and that this had helped professional development of members of the team. This relationship was particularly important when overcoming a number of practical (getting access to cross-site systems) and pedagogical (finding diverse medical images, tailoring the application form to the needs of the module) challenges during the application process.

Furthermore, this application process enabled the module team to more effectively include global voices in the reading list and module and highlighted to the author the challenges of implementing change in this respect (Schucan Bird and Pitman, 2019). For example, sourcing appropriate diverse medical images for lectures (Louie and Wilkes, 2018) and discovering that some resources that the team originally thought were diverse, did not meet the requirements of the Diversity Mark Award application audit. This was really useful in making clear where changes can and should be made.

Furthermore, the unique elements of the medical degree (the volume of students, the large number of module contributors, the subject matter) made aligning the Diversity Mark Award application to the PDPCP1 module challenging but interesting for the module team. The team worked through a number of challenges including accessing modules using computer systems controlled by two different universities and attempting to get independent student feedback whilst being aware of additional permissions in place in medical schools to filter access of researchers to medical students as they are very widely studied. The team learned a few lessons from overcoming these challenges that can be used to better support other colleagues undertaking the Diversity Mark Application at KMMS in the future.

Related to this, something that the application also enabled was a platform for discussion about frustrations, development opportunities and valuing of everyone's roles in the team. The team were able to discuss how budget constraints affected work at every level, the difficulty of introducing inclusive approaches with many contributors, the limitations of what can be included and what has to be excluded in such a busy module and how this potentially affected students' skills development.

Finally, the team were able to implement scholarly projects based on the information that the team gained from the application process. As an example, a Clinical Teaching Fellow at KMMS undertook a student-focussed research project that not only contributed to the Diversity Mark Award application but is also being written up for publication. Furthermore, this process enabled the author to develop their skills in leading an award application and coordinating multiple teams and

stakeholders in order to capture as wide a range of voices as possible.

c) For the wider KMMS family and beyond

One particular element that emerged from the Diversity Mark Award process was feedback related to the sense of community within our medical school as a whole. The module team, as well as individual team members, were fully encouraged to engage with the application process and supported to do so by KMMS. Furthermore, the team were supported in making the changes that came out of the Diversity Mark Award process by the medical school and its senior leaders.
As an example of this support, wanting to be more inclusive and knowing that the subject and content of the modular essay assessment was likely to be challenging for a Y1 medical student (based on previous years' student feedback and essay marking), the team were enabled to introduce a new, structured essay support programme. This was designed to be as inclusive as possible, and to provide a 'deconstructed' approach to the essay, pulling apart the constituent parts and allowing students to explore each in detail in order to more meaningfully engage with the assessment writing process. Our aim in so doing was to support students, some of whom may have little experience writing essays of this sort, in their general writing development, highlight those who needed more tailored support in this regard, and also impact on their future writing in other years.

As previously mentioned, through this process the team were also able to forge excellent relationships with University of Kent colleagues, particularly in the Student Success Team. Both our team and the Student Success Team had to be flexible in our approach as our module did not 'fit' into the original format of the Diversity Mark Award application. This was due to the aforementioned number of contributors, sessions, student numbers and subject matter. Working closely with the Diversity Mark Award application team, the module team were able to tailor the application so that our module was accurately reflected in the application. This took significant negotiation with multiple teams and enabled a re-consideration of the aims and objectives of the module, which continues to aid in its structure and content development. This was also useful in giving the author a new, in-depth perspective on why the application was so important in developing diversity in our module.

Further to this, it became apparent that the process of undertaking the award, negotiating with the Student Success Team about the best way forward and overcoming challenges as part of a team also had an impact on the Diversity Mark Officers (DMOs) involved. The DMOs were able to interact meaningfully with multiple members of the team, and their expertise was vital to the development of our award offering. Furthermore, through the DMOs new-found knowledge about the structure of the BMBS medical degree course at KMMS, they were able to see areas of development much more clearly than those of us 'on the ground'. This made their contribution to the development of the module even more useful.

In terms of the KMMS student community, this process also enabled us to learn how important peer learning was for the formal and informal curriculum. By engaging with students during the process of the Diversity Mark Award application the team learned how to harness peer learning opportunities to have maximum impact by including more tutorials and seminars in the module and through this, help students to engage with

new learning materials and teaching approaches.

Future plans for expansion of the award's reach:

The Diversity Mark Award has positively changed how the PDPCP1 module is run, assessed, and developed. The author is therefore keen to share this experience with others and encourage them to take the journey also. The team therefore intend to create a 'how to' guide for KMMS staff (of which this reflective piece will form a part) and encourage other module convenors to complete Diversity Mark Award applications in the future. To support this expansion of the Diversity Mark Award across KMMS, the author has been named a 'Diversity Mark Award champion' by the Student Success Team and has been given the opportunity to work with interested KMMS colleagues to support their applications over the course of the next academic year. This was given in recognition of the unique challenges that Diversity Mark Award applicants from the medical school face and the need for specific support as a consequence. The team are also working towards an image library to promote diverse bodily images that can be used by module contributors and convenors.

The team also acknowledge that, with all the changes being implemented with respect to teaching and assessment, our essay markers and exam contributors need to be taken with us in the module's new processes. The author has therefore re-designed and delivered assignment marker training. Feedback so far suggests this approach is more inclusive and scaffolded, more discussion focussed, and as it is delivered earlier in the academic year it better supports the markers in providing consistent, excellent feedback to students.

Furthermore, the team also came to understand the need to encourage wider reading amongst KMMS students during the module Diversity Mark Award application. Students explain that they feel so busy they don't feel they have the 'head space' to be able to read more widely. However, the team also acknowledges that wider reading is vital for promoting diverse perspectives and understanding different world views on a range of subjects (Hubbard, 2021, Adewumi *et al.,* 2022). The team therefore intend to create (for AY 26/27) an online journal and reflection club where students can share experiences, with staff encouragement and oversight, as well as find out more information about a subject, and get peer and expert feedback on writing. The team hopes that this will provide students with a platform to celebrate their voice, explore their thoughts and feelings, and share quality resources on a range of subjects.

Conclusions:

Engaging with this application process has been incredibly valuable personally, as part of the PDPCP1 module team, and as part of a wider community of medical educators at KMMS. It was, at times, challenging and required a significant amount of negotiation, flexibility and teamwork to accomplish. However, this hard work culminated not only in a successful Diversity Mark Award application but more significantly, a more inclusive module that recognizes difference and listens to all stakeholders in order to enact sustainable changes that everyone can appreciate.

The author encourages all module convenors at the University of Kent, especially those from KMMS, to undertake a Diversity Mark Award application. It has changed the author's practice and perspective and enabled them to reconsider the purpose of the module they convene. Although initially hesitant about the impact such an award would have on

both individuals involved in the running of the module as well as the module itself, the author has been surprised about the positive impact of undertaking this challenge for their personal and professional development. Finally, for those wishing to embark on the award application process at KMMS, the author would be happy to support them along that journey in any way that is useful.

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