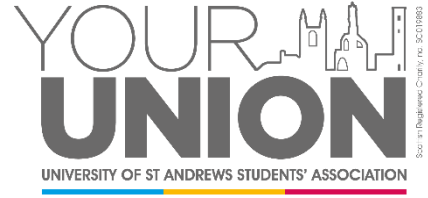


University of St Andrews
Students' Association



‘Equality, Diversity, and Inclusivity: Analysis of the nominations for the Teaching Awards 2023/4’

Hannah Doran
October 2025

Supported by the St Andrews Research Internship
Scheme (StARIS) and the Department of Social
Anthropology of the University of St Andrews



Equality, Diversity, and Inclusivity

The University of St Andrews continues to highlight equality, diversity, and inclusivity as some of its core teaching values. This commitment is matched by a developing category in the Teaching Awards. The nominations for the Outstanding Commitment to Academic Inclusivity analysed in this paper reveal what qualities students believe to be the most important when considering EDI in education. There were 25 nominations for this category in the 2023/4 academic year showing a significant increase from the 2021/2 cycle of only 9 nominations. This increase shows the category growing recognition, and it can be assumed that this will continue to develop in the subsequent years. As social issues continue to arise in the world in general as well as academia, students are becoming more passionate about the EDI commitment of their teachers. This paper analyses the main themes that can be observed in the nominations written by students for the Outstanding Commitment to Academic Inclusivity award and proposes practical steps to educators based on them.

This paper has been researched and presented by Hannah Doran, a fourth-year student at the University of St Andrews. It is part of the wider Teaching Awards Research project run by the University of St Andrews Students' Association. We thank the St Andrews Research Internship Scheme for funding Hannah Doran's internship with the project. The internship was supervised by Dr Evgeniya Pakhomova and Dr Aimée Joyce of the Department of Social Anthropology.

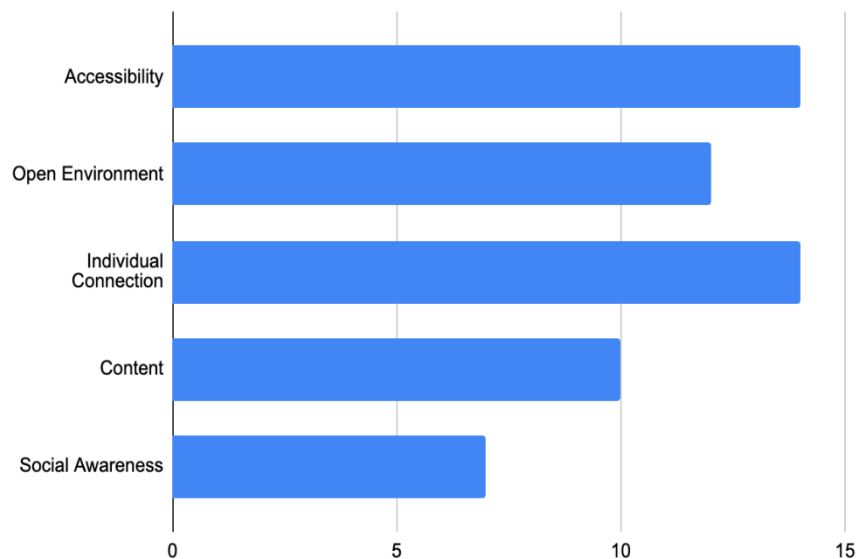
Main findings

Students focused on a wide range of examples regarding different experiences of equality, diversity, and inclusivity. Some focused primarily on the content of the module itself through diverse readings, authors, and types of materials offered within a course while others highlighted how the course functioned overall. Those who looked predominantly at the qualities of educators often highlighted their support, effort, and care that went into their classroom and their students.

These examples highlight the multitude of ways students seek equality, diversity, and inclusivity in their education, from content to classroom environment. Content may be more difficult to incorporate within certain fields, but if educators explain why this is, students may be more understanding of the lack of EDI in teaching. Most of the personal experiences shared regarding care and support from educators to individual students show an effort that exceeds expectations, and it is recognised this level of support would be impossible to achieve with every student. The goal of the suggestions presented in this report is to work for a greater consciousness of equality, diversity, and inclusion within the confines of the University, individual Schools, and teachers' own approaches as well.

Themes which frequently appeared throughout nominations included help with individual circumstances (such as finances and external factors affecting academic work), queer representation, mental health, general social awareness, and neurodivergence and disability awareness. Students show these are the themes they most identify with and look for when nominating educators for the Outstanding Commitment to Academic Inclusivity award. Gender is not discussed as a focused theme outside of mentions of educators asking about preferred names and pronouns, which students appreciated. The theme is interpreted widely, with students discussing a variety of personal experiences. The nominations tend to fall into one of two categories: they either interpret equality, diversity, and inclusivity as something present within the content of teaching or within the classroom. Students acknowledge these manifestations of EDI separately as there are few nominations which include both.

The themes



Throughout the nominations, clear themes emerged in students' descriptions of teachers who were most committed to EDI in education. Primarily, these were to do with interactions with the teacher and in the classroom, but there were cases of content and specific inclusivity as well. Specific inclusivity includes supporting students who may consider themselves as less represented in the academic setting due to their race, culture, sexual or gender identity, and socio-economic class.

Most frequently cited when nominating teachers was individual connection and support that went beyond what was expected. Students discussed individual circumstances which affected their studies ranging from experiences such as personal tragedies, difficulties with accommodation or finances, and living and working as nontraditional students in the University.

The individual support provided is often recognised as going 'above and beyond' the typical expectation from a teacher. These stories show hours devoted to working with the student and often the University itself to make situations easier for the student. The nominations highlight the care and support the students feel from the educators, oftentimes mentioning these as the sole things motivating them to keep studying at the University. This care greatly impacted these students' lives and showed a positive example of academic staff encouraging them to find their place at the University.

The individual support was also typically related to specific instances of recognising the diversity of students. Most students, as previously stated, mentioned special circumstances which occurred to them, but there were other comments which focused on simple acceptance of different sexualities, cultures, and backgrounds. When referring to themselves within these categories, most students discussed their sexualities and financial or social backgrounds as making them feel as outsiders in the University. Through their personal connections with educators, they felt seen and therefore included within academia.

The second most discussed topic was accessibility, for both physical and mental health disabilities as well as various learning styles. Accessibility was described both in ways of teaching and physical access to the content. Some students discussed tutors printing out resources for them if they were having trouble accessing them on their own, others noted the varying styles taught in class to account for all different educational backgrounds. By adapting materials to fit

different learning styles rather than just traditional formats, educators were seen as promoting inclusivity in their classes.

An inclusive classroom environment was also noted throughout nominations as something that students appreciated. An open or welcoming classroom is differentiated from individual support as this affects the entire tutorial group rather than one-on-one relationship with a student. An 'open' classroom ranges in description from encouraging all students to participate at a level they feel they can to an explicit welcome of perspectives from all kinds of different backgrounds, races, cultures, sexual and gender identities, etc. Some students nominated teachers who offered both individual support and openness in their classroom while others separated the two aspects and focused only on one of the two.

The final two main areas of comments made by students are somewhat connected: general social awareness and content of teaching. Social awareness is related to the content of teaching; it refers to acknowledgment of the place of marginalised communities in the field. This may be through discussing the inclusion or lack of sources from these communities as well as acknowledging ethical and moral issues which may arise in the field. Social awareness is typically recognised in nominations that simultaneously mention classroom environments, showing that students believe there to be a connection between the two. Primarily, students see social awareness of their educators as clear signs of their commitment to inclusivity in the classroom through both the content and the classroom environment.

Most of the nominations focus on content of teaching as the primary source of equality, diversity, and inclusivity in the module overall. Typically, a module that is regarded by students as having a strong commitment to academic inclusivity focuses on differing identities which have not been traditionally represented in their respective fields. Some examples of these modules include 'Queer Theory and Roman Literature', 'Feminist Theories in Global Politics', and 'Race, Caste, and the Modern World' as well as other modules that include highlighting queerness in divinity modules. There are other modules which are mentioned that do not focus specifically on marginalised groups and simply foster new points of view. Some of these include 'Creativity in Context' (Management) and a few non-specified courses in International Relations, Astrophysics, and Mathematics.

The nominations praise the modules which discuss groups and issues which may not have previously been focused on in other coursework, making them more familiar to students and allowing students to see themselves represented in ways they have not previously experienced in University. While there are limitations within different disciplines regarding how much EDI specifications can be incorporated within them, students appreciate incorporating these principles wherever possible.

Future nominations

At the end of all the nominations, it became abundantly clear that there were two categories that nominations could fall into – those highlighting educators' characteristics that show a commitment to equality, diversity, and inclusivity, and those highlighting the teaching content that does the same. A suggestion for future awards would be to clarify whether the award is for practical approaches to teaching from educators or for the content of teaching to clarify the criteria for choosing the award winner.

Practical Steps

Connecting with students who may need additional help

While it is not expected to go ‘above and beyond’ for every student, it is vital to **identify and reach out to students who may seem to be struggling**. This act of care and connection deeply affects students and can heavily impact their studies in a positive way. By simply acknowledging and offering some support either through a one-on-one discussion or by connecting them with the proper University contact a teacher is likely to make an impact on a student’s academic journey. As a first point of contact for most students, teachers recognising and assisting with individual struggles help students feel included and supported at the university.

‘He helped me, a person from a more under-represented group at the university, by levelling with me and ensuring that even when things look quite bleak, there is still an up. He would always take time to check up on me, ensure that the room was the right sort of conditions that would not affect my head injury, and take time after lessons to see if there was anything else that he could possibly do to ensure that I was able to continue in my studies at the University. Without his support and guidance, I believe that there was a very real chance that I would have dropped out of university and I am incredibly grateful for his support during what has, thus far, been one of the greatest struggles in my life.’

Nomination 300

Working to ensure accessibility for all students

As the University continues fostering inclusion of students with disabilities in academia, the support should begin in the classrooms. Many students note their preference for educators who include **multiple styles of presenting materials** so there are opportunities to engage for those with different styles of learning. There are also many nominations which highlight teachers offering different ways to access materials. Some specifically highlight printing out sources and other materials for students to interact with during class, and ensuring students unable to attend class can access materials online. Accessibility also seems to be defined as **working with students who have mental and physical disabilities on how to best interact with their education during personal struggles**. One example of this was noted by a student highlighting their professor for helping create a ‘decompression’ space in their school to allow students who are overwhelmed to take a moment before returning to their studies. These real-life examples can be reflected on by teachers who wish to foster an inclusive environment in their classroom.

‘He never fails to make sure everyone is on the exact same page and for those that need a little extra help like myself, he ensures they are never disadvantaged from the rest of the class. He takes extra consideration for those with any form of mental or physical disability to make sure they are not hindered or behind from the rest of the class.’

Nomination 156

‘He understands that each student is unique, and he tailors his approach to accommodate diverse learning styles, ensuring that every individual has the opportunity to thrive academically.’

Nomination 206

Fostering a safe and welcoming environment for all Students also show a desire for educators to actively work for and foster welcoming environments that are clearly open to all types of students and opinions. This can include some content which highlights sources from traditionally marginalised communities, creating a space for these communities in academic settings. Some students write that an explicit statement of welcome on the first or subsequent classes is a favourable sign of commitment to EDI values. By incorporating small things into the classroom such as asking pronouns and preferred names in classes, teachers can make students feel much safer and more comfortable speaking up in class. Students also state that encouragement for all opinions is something which makes a class more engaging and interesting to the students in attendance. With the knowledge they are in a safe environment, they report being more engaged and contribute to growing discussions. These small acts may implement a feeling of safety and encouragement to students, especially those who feel currently underrepresented in the University.	<i>'She is always delighted (and very much able) to explain any aspect of queer theory (as well as Classical literature, of course) that comes up in our seminars, and does so in a way that makes everyone in the class feel comfortable expressing their own thoughts in an environment that can only be described as supportive - both academically and pastorally. >...< Throughout the module, she has struck a great balance between being at the cutting edge queer theory/thought, and making us feel able to speak up in class without worrying about not being so - this can be summed up by a point on the module's first lecture slides, which reads "Clumsy or inadvertently offensive phrasing is inevitable, from me and from students alike, especially since this subject is new to most people here as a form of academic study or scholarly discussion. Do be patient with others' language, and speak up even if you're nervous about getting it wrong!" I am sure I speak for all my classmates in saying that we all experience the atmosphere of support in learning about queer theory which not only enables us to learn a great deal about the field, but enjoy the process of doing so.'</i> Nomination 14
Content geared towards Equality, Diversity, and Inclusivity Students highlighting inclusive content as a sign of commitment to academic inclusivity often referred to the representation of marginalised groups in academia. Some modules explicitly highlighted as excellent focus on race, gender, and sexuality in their fields or demonstrate a sophisticated level of social awareness even if EDI is not their main focus. While such content may be difficult to include in some fields of study for a variety of different reasons, the biggest suggestion would be to acknowledge and reflect upon the gaps in representation. Students consider this to be still furthering EDI even in the absence of solid focus on underrepresented perspectives.	<i>'We are in a school for a field where ethics, inclusivity, and contemporary social issues aren't really discussed, especially not in classrooms - I think most students could get a degree in physics or astronomy and assume that there are no ethical issues we should ever need to think about. I was part of a brand new class this year, focused on cosmology. She did a phenomenal job making room in the class to discuss social issues in astrophysics.'</i> Nomination 108