

Spotlight on Best Practice Podcast. CCCbeU Episode 1 transcript

Chloe: Welcome to the Spotlight on Best Practice podcast. We have the first in a new series today, which is called CCCbeU. The series will be amplifying the voices of the diverse and underrepresented in our CCCU community. So I'm the host today, Chloe Courtenay, and I'm joined by Jon Opay-Tetteh, Head of Equity and Inclusion. So welcome, Jon.

Jon: Pleasure to be here, thank you. So can you tell us a bit about your role and your team? Yes, certainly. So yeah, my name's Jon Opay-Tetteh. I am the Head of Equity and Inclusion, here at Canterbury Christchurch University. My team and I, simply, we lead on everything to do with equity and inclusion throughout the university and the different business arms of the organisation, our collaborative partners, our students, our staff, ensuring success, their wellbeing, and improving that cultural awareness and growing the culture with a key emphasis on proactively removing systemic barriers to progression.

Chloe: And is yours a new role?

Jon: Not completely new, but we're growing our function and we're rapidly getting out of there, hence the podcast. And we've got a new strategy as well. So it's an exciting time and it's something that's very integral to Vision 2030.

Chloe: So as part of this, there's a new equity and inclusion strategy, isn't there? For 2024 to 27, I believe, and that's for the whole university? Can you tell me more about that?

Jon: Yes, so this is, you know, hinting on what I said in terms of, this is such a huge opportunity, exciting time for the organisation where we've got the new strategy for the next three years, which has really built on, you know, a lot of the ongoing work that's happened prior to my joining last year, but to give us a focus over the next few years and, you know, ensure that our resources and capabilities are aligned with Vision 2030 and it's a, you know, community-driven approach. So, you know, what we've done is we've engaged with over 430 staff and students to understand what they believe the vision should be, the priorities, what the challenges are. And through that work, you know, we've come up with, you know, really inspirational, ambitious, but I believe achievable vision. So, by 2030, our university will be recognised as a centre for excellence in delivering equitable opportunities and outcomes for all our people and communities. That, for me, I think that we're in a unique position as an organisation. I believe we're compliant in our work and we're under equality law, but we really want to take that next stage in terms of being equity inclusion, being embedded in everything that we do and that the work is sustainable. And I think we can do that. Also, through that engagement work, you know, our people helped us with the strategic priorities which really underpin the work that's going to be going forward. So, our three priorities are our people, our

culture and our university. So, you know, our people wanted their voices to be heard, but importantly acted upon. You know, there's no point in, you know, information being passed to our teams and our advocates and our allies if there isn't meaningful change that goes forward and goes back to providing those hidden voices in those communities. So, we really want our people to be the centre of the journey to help evolve the strategy. Our culture, again, is linking into, you know, what does a thriving learning environment look like where people can belong and feel like they contribute to Vision 2030? So, you know, our people, again, asked us to, you know, increase opportunities for staff and students to co-create, come together, and also, you know, ensure that we're having, you know, respectful and brave debates. And then finally, our university is all around ensuring that our work is, you know, sustainable, it's aligned with other institutional priorities, and it's consistent. So, if you're asking people to help us evolve the strategy in the work, there are tools, there are procedures, there are frameworks that they can get involved in.

Chloe: So, obviously, you're saying it's about equity and inclusion. So, will there be real opportunities for part-time staff and session and stuff to be involved? Because I know sometimes there can be so many strategies and policies, but it's hard to implement them or see how you can have your part to play.

Jon: 100%. So, one of the exciting projects and part of the new strategy is what we call the growth framework, so that no matter your role, what you do, you know, you don't need to go directly, you don't need to write a policy. There's an opportunity for everyone to get involved in this work from, you know, being interested in your colleague, where they come from, to, you know, joining the staff network to, you know, contributed to one of the equity action plan groups. This equity and inclusion needs everybody, every role. We need to live our values, we need to be compassionate, but it needs to be the community, engaging with the management groups and the governance structures of the organisation, so that alongside the data, we're hitting the mark and it's unique to university. So, it's not a top-down approach, it is our allies, our students, our staff to really grow that.

Chloe: So, what other Equity and Inclusion priorities do you think there are for the institution and indeed the sector?

Jon: I think it's access to data and the quality of that data is very important. We probably don't have the best disclosure rates in certain areas, but where we increase those, which is a key priority for us, is what are we doing with that data and how are we communicating with organisation that your data is trusted and that is informing the action plans that go forward and what's the narrative that sits behind that, that's extremely important.

Chloe: So, where's this data coming from?

So, you know, our staff surveys, you know, our HESA returns, you know, student returns as well, the surveys as well, but it's collating that into, you know, action plans, for example, we're gonna apply for the race equality charter and that's very data driven, which will result in the five year action plan, similar to Athena Swan, which ensures that the work that we do will have meaningful change because it's directly related to the data of this institution and the people that make it up.

Chloe: Okay, so that's some interesting ideas that you've got there. What other sort of exciting projects do you have lined up or that you've already been involved in?

Jon: One of the biggest enablers for change for this strategy is the Institutional Equality Impact Assessment Project that we've partnered with Advantage. That starts in January. We've had, we started our engagement phase. I'm absolutely convinced and excited by the value of that project. Its equality impact assessments simply are a tool, a way for, you know, if you're starting a project, you're writing a policy or you're reviewing a policy or a procedure. It's to proactively identify if an underrepresented group is being indirectly or directly affected, discriminated against by that change in practice, for example, but also are we, we can use that to identify good practice as well. So that is gonna be a huge change, game changer, because that involves data, that involves collaboration with the key communities. And again, it puts us in the realm of actually being more proactive rather than waiting for discrimination to happen or inequitable outcomes. Let's get on the front foot. So that's really exciting. And that will be launched later in the year. We're now in the co-creation phase and we'll be piloting that over the next couple of months. And another really exciting project is the Conversation Toolkit that we should be piloting fairly soon. So these are gonna be conversations on race, disability, mental health, wellbeing, where we get our staff together to have conversations, where we can make the uncomfortable a little bit more comfortable. So those are just some of the few things that will start coming out.

Chloe: That's good, because I can see practical things for people to be engaged in.

Jon: Exactly. And talking of engagement, you've got the very first equity and inclusion conference taking place on April the 24th. We do indeed. So that is a huge opportunity for our staff, our students to come together for a really dynamic, engaging day, where simply we celebrate who we are. It's entitled CCCBU, obviously. But we all come from different backgrounds, identity, we all have different stories. And it's about us coming together, listening to some engaging speakers and discussion panels and the opportunity to interact with different teams, whereas through stalls around the hall, from staff and students around network societies to support available, showcasing some of the strategy and the equity inclusions staff led hub, so people can find out more. We've got some exciting speakers, Gamal Chawara, who's affectionately known as Gee. He's won a BAFTA before, and he will be talking about his journey and the complexity of identity. We have got some faculty staff talking about how CCCU is

querying the curriculum. And we've also got a really interesting panel where diverse students are gonna be telling their experiences, their lived experiences of being at the university. So it's an opportunity for us to come together. So I really encourage you to book your tickets where we can come together, have some cookies, and live our values and help elevate for example our respect, respect campaigns, and hopefully come away with an understanding of where we're going in the next few years. So is it easy to book onto this conference? It is. You can go on online or on the events page. I'm sure that we can put a link on this podcast as well, or simply email us at equity.inclusion@canterbury.ac.uk, okay? and we'll get a ticket over to you as well. So yeah, I wouldn't miss it is what I would say.

Chloe: Great, that's fantastic. So finally, what does equity and inclusion actually mean to you, Jon?

Jon: Personally, for me, it's about being brave. We talk about, we're committed to be an anti-racist organisation and what does that actually mean? What does anti-racism mean? Or anti-discrimination? For myself personally, I've probably sat in the shadows, my younger days, a little bit too much and being a bit comfortable. And now I put all my energy into going back to amplifying the voices of those that are underrepresented or hidden. And I see, I get the biggest joy. It's not even worked to me, seeing people achieve their potential by removing barriers. That's what equity and inclusion means to me.

Chloe: And what do you want people to think of when they think of equity and inclusion going forward?

Jon: Bravery, compassion, well-being, interest. And just that kind of celebration of, we're at an institution where we are an international global organisation. We've got a great international make-up. We've got great, great diverse campuses. And if we want, we're very committed to being a widening participation, participating organisation. And it's about living and breathing that for me. And I think we can go to the next level of that.

Chloe: Okay, so it sounds like there's a lot for people to be involved with. There's strategies underpinning, there's conferences to engage with. So really good introduction for people who may not quite know what equity and inclusion means.

Jon: Yes, and what I always say, when we talk about this work is not to be daunted. It's not, if you want to get involved, doesn't mean that you need to suddenly write a brand new policy for your area. It's, you might go to a conference, you might show some interest in your colleague, you might join a staff network. You might just take a few five minutes to just read the updates on the internet and just to understand and read a book, it's simply ensuring that this is a thriving, brave, learning environment where we can all be ourselves and achieve and realise Vision 2030.

Chloe: Well, that sounds amazing. Thank you so much, Jon.

Jon: It's a pleasure.

Chloe: Thank you for listening to episode one of CCCBU, which is part of the Spotlight on Best Practice podcast. And if you enjoyed this, please join us again.