CHUCL
Changing University Cultures

Summary of research design

Our methodology to study institutional culture and equality & diversity issues involves multiple methods, so that we can explore complex lived realities along various dimensions (Mason, 2006; Greene et al 1989). Influenced by institutional ethnographies (see for example Smith, 2005), we start from the issues and experiences of our participants and link these to the social relations of the institution.[1] Our approach is qualitative, stressing the importance of collecting in-depth data which are rich and detailed and seeing value in each case and person in our research.

Our methods capture aspects of institutional culture and intersecting inequalities in different ways. The first phase of our research involves documentary analysis, in-depth and more informal interviews, focus groups, an open-text survey, participant and non-participant observation, and an anonymous WordPress blog. In the second phase we implement an Action Inquiry process which we ground in our data and use to generate additional material.

Table 1: research methods and focus

Method	Focus
Documentary analysis	Language and ideas in external promotional/internal policy materials Descriptive information in staff and student statistics/staff survey
Drop-in sessions	Informal discussions around culture and intersecting equality issues
In-depth interviews	Work and study practices External and internal facing values Perceptions and/or experiences of intersecting equality issues Suggestions for cultural change
Open-text survey	5 words to describe institution's culture Strengths and weaknesses of culture How institution promotes equality & diversity
Observation	Behaviour, clothes, conversations, body language, interactions in varied social and spatial contexts (e.g. sports events, fresher's week, public lectures, cafes, meetings)
WordPress	Personal experiences of intersecting equality issues e.g. class, race, gender, sexuality
Action Inquiry	Discussion groups using personal, group and wider system observations to explore themes generated from research data

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[1] This is also not dissimilar to the 'organisational diagnosis' approach which might be adopted by organisational change consultants: however, our study involves a great deal more data and a deeper level of analysis.

Action Inquiry is a cyclical process of reflection and action to strengthen individual and organisational practice and operates at three interrelated levels. First person AI is self-inquiry, a process of bringing awareness to our thoughts, feelings and actions in a personal and professional context. Second-person AI involves joint inquiry with others into issues of mutual concern. Third-person AI seeks to bring a wider community, such as an organisation, into inquiry. The AI process supports the development of increased insight, shared vision and practice. It uses collaborative ways of communicating and applying learning to enable change and understand its impact on institutional culture as a whole. In Grounded Action Inquiry, this process is 'grounded' in data on institutional culture to enable deep thinking for cultural change.

Our research strategy is flexible, adaptable and developmental, to suit the context of the institution, the logistics of the process and the emerging findings. Our research participants are primarily self-selecting, although we approach some individuals specifically and actively encourage participants who identify as being from under represented/minority/marginalised groups. This includes, but is not restricted to, (self-identified) women and non-binary people, BAME people, people from different cultural backgrounds, people with disabilities, people who identify as LGBTQIA+, people who consider themselves to be working class, people on short term contracts, part-time staff, international staff, and those who feel their age (younger or older) or religious background make a difference to their experience of studying or working at an institution.

We use an inductive process to develop theory from our data, understanding the institution through analysing people's interpretations of it and accepting that social life is constructed in interactions and experiences rather than existing in a separate reality (Bryman, 2012). In qualitative research, data are not quantified but themes are allowed to emerge which give deeper insights into the phenomenon being studied: this is perfect for the analysis of institutional culture, which is a multidimensional process rather than a 'thing' to be measured. We use the software programme NVivo to facilitate a systematic and rigorous technique through which the data are analysed in detail, and 'constant comparison' and identification of 'deviant' or 'contrary' cases are employed to check the validity of our themes (Burnard et al 2008).

References
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