

Guidance on the collection of diversity monitoring data

Updated guidance on how to collect data about personal characteristics of staff and students in UK higher education

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Advance HE

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1. Introduction

1.1 Context

Monitoring diversity in the current context and legal setting is both complex and contentious. This guidance reflects the current legal position but is guidance only and institutions will want to consider their own context and may want to take their own advice about their equality data monitoring. In capturing data, institutions should take care not to conflate legally protected characteristics and wider diversity monitoring of characteristics which are not currently legally protected.

Example monitoring questions comply with current guidance, including that available from the [Equality and Human Rights Commission](#) (p 294). This guidance will be kept under review.

1.2 Collecting diversity monitoring data

The collection of data about staff and student personal characteristics – via monitoring forms, surveys or other methods – is a rapidly evolving area of work that can provide important insights into the demographic diversity of a population. As the information collected pertains to the diversity of a group, rather than relative levels of equality or inequality, Advance HE refers to this strand of work as diversity monitoring. The design of diversity monitoring questions is often contested and needs to align with reporting requirements while also ensuring that staff and students can, as far as possible, describe themselves in ways that reflect how they identify.

Institutions are required to collect and return diversity data to: (i) sector agencies such as the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA); (ii) regulators such as the Office for Students (OfS); and research funding bodies. When returning data on staff and students to external organisations, such as HESA, data must follow a specific format. However, even with specific reporting requirements, it is possible to tailor questions to match your context. For example, some HESA categories are quite broad, and so institutions might wish to ask more detailed questions for use in internal analysis, that can be then aggregated, before being submitted to HESA. Aside from covering situations in which institutions are required to collect and return data, this guidance is designed to be used for a range of other instances where institutions might want to collect information based on personal characteristics, including internal or external student and staff surveys.

Collecting monitoring data also plays a vital role within institutions in identifying inequalities and implementing initiatives to address problems uncovered. To assess whether the situation is getting better, worse or remains unchanged, institutions need to ensure data is comparable over time. Institutions may also wish to adopt an approach that is comparable across the sector so that such data can be used for benchmarking purposes.

Recommendations presented in this guidance document are based on consultation with equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) organisations, legal experts, other agencies involved in data collection, desk-based research and Advance HE's knowledge of good practice in UK Higher Education (HE). Between December 2020 and February 2021, Advance HE engaged in a series of consultative conversations with EDI organisations and sector bodies, including the Scottish Funding Council, UCAS and HESA. This involved the circulation of a feedback survey on the draft questions and several one-to-one discussions to assess similarities and differences in approach. Where practical, our guidance also aligns with questions asked and response options provided in the census (predominantly the English and Welsh one, although some insights are provided regarding the Northern Irish and Scottish censuses, as well).

With these considerations in mind, Advance HE's guidance differs from that of some organisations in the sector. Our guidance is advisory only; we do not hold a regulatory or monitoring role. We also acknowledge that it may not be practical or most effective to adopt the same approach to diversity monitoring across all activities (for example, diversity monitoring questions used in widening participation activities might differ from the questions used to return student data to HESA).

The guidance document presents recommended question stems, response options and supplementary guidance for the following characteristics:

- + Age
- + Disability
- + Ethnicity, race and nationality
- + Sex and gender identity
- + Trans identity/history
- + Sexual orientation
- + Marriage and other partnerships
- + Pregnancy, maternity and parental leave
- + Caring responsibilities
- + Religion and belief
- + Social background.

Each section identifies a recommended question and alternative questions (depending on the context and reporting requirements). The guidance presented is for diversity monitoring activities conducted in the UK and may not be applicable or appropriate for use in contexts outside of the UK or among international staff or students studying, working or visiting the institution.

Advance HE wishes to recognise the expansive diversity of personal characteristics that exist beyond those explicitly listed in this guidance. We encourage respondents who do not see themselves represented in the response options presented to make use of the 'Other' option and specify in their words how they identify. This will help the sector and HEIs identify areas in which further categories need to be developed in the future.

1.3 Things to consider

When collecting data about the personal characteristics of staff and students, consider the following:

- + Provide respondents with a statement that explains: a) why your institution or department wishes to collect this information, b) how the data will be used and c) what measures have been put in place to ensure data protection compliance.
- + Inform respondents whether data will be anonymised (for example, the information about an individual's name, email address or place of work is removed) and who will have access to this data. If the data collection is not anonymous, this needs to be explicit and participants' explicit consent needs to be secured, before any data is collected. In general, GDPR implications need to be considered before embarking on diversity monitoring data collection exercises.
- + List personal characteristics and response options alphabetically, with the exception of 'Other (specify, if you wish)' and 'Prefer not to say', which should be presented at the end of the response options. "Yes/no" answer options form another exception to our alphabetical order recommendation. This is because it is typical survey practice to list the "yes" option first, as that is what survey respondents would usually expect to see. Consequently, following the 'yes/no' order aids towards avoiding participant confusion. For this reason, we have followed this approach with all our "yes/no" questions.
- + Where possible and relevant, provide respondents with the ability to select multiple options.
- + Ensure that respondents can update or amend their data on an 'as-and-when' basis. If this is not possible, ensure that diversity monitoring surveys are circulated to staff on a regular basis (such as annually) to provide staff with the opportunity to update their details.

- + Ensure that question wording and response options reflect the language of respondents, as far as possible. In some situations, this may require prior consultation with respondents to ensure they are comfortable with the language used.

These considerations recognise that data related to personal characteristics can be sensitive and, in line with [data protection regulations](#), there are specific requirements that institutions must follow when collecting, storing, analysing and using such data.

1.4 Encouraging disclosure and recognising refusal

The design of questions, response options and supporting guidance is only one part of collecting diversity monitoring data. Diversity monitoring exercises are conducted in wider institutional cultures that might encourage or discourage respondents from sharing information about their personal characteristics. When undertaken in a way that acknowledges and meaningfully recognises differences among the staff and student populations, a diversity monitoring exercise can play an important role in strengthening an institution's EDI work.

As part of this process, Advance HE recommends providing a statement explaining why the institution is collecting data and the potential benefits of the activity, such as:

[NAME] are committed to equality of opportunity in our studentship selection processes. By completing this form, you will help us to ensure that our policies and procedures are effective in avoiding discrimination and promoting equality of opportunity or even equity in making those awards.

The information you supply on this form will be kept confidential. The monitoring portion of this form will not be sent to reviewing panel members, and the answers you give will have no bearing on the outcome of your application.

Monitoring can be a sensitive issue and disclosure rates may initially be low. However, over time in a safe and supportive environment, return rates are likely to increase and the quality of data captured likely to improve. Improving levels of staff and student disclosure can:

- + provide more accurate monitoring of the recruitment and retention of staff and students according to different characteristics
 - + indicate the impact of policies and practices on different groups in the institution
 - + provide an in-depth understanding of inequities present, potentially unlawful treatment of staff and students, as well as differences in experiences of diverse populations and relevant areas for action.
-

Several factors can influence an individual's decision to disclose information about their personal characteristics, including:

- + understanding the relevance of the information to the institution and their experiences at work or study
- + the culture of the institution – whether it is open and inclusive or if there are concerns about possible discrimination
- + availability of information on the uses and confidentiality of their details
- + opportunities to disclose information on an ongoing basis
- + whether they relate to the response options available on diversity monitoring forms or not.

Staff are more likely to engage with a diversity monitoring exercise, if they see it as an integrated part of an institution's strategy for promoting inclusivity and increasing accessibility. To foster an inclusive environment, institutions are equally encouraged to recognise and value staff and students that do not wish to disclose data about their personal characteristics, for whatever reason. Respondents should be able to share as much or as little data about their personal characteristics as they wish; a decision not to disclose data should not penalise an individual nor result in a poorer provision of service or experience. To acknowledge staff and students who may not wish to disclose data, all diversity monitoring questions (where reporting requirements permit) should include the response option 'Prefer not to say'.

1.5 Using data for action

The collection of data on its own does nothing to advance staff and student equality. Instead, diversity monitoring, through data collection processes or demographic sections in student or staff surveys is an early and vital step in the process of designing initiatives to tackle issues related to inequality, checking that an initiative is having the desired effects and making changes to an initiative, if required. Diversity monitoring data can help institutions: a) identify inequalities, b) identify existing barriers and information gaps, and c) highlight different experiences and help target support. In other words, it is through collecting and analysing diversity data that we can fully understand the current picture of our institutions and identify what needs to change. After identifying what needs to change, data can then help with evaluating the impact of interventions and monitor equalities progress. This in turn also creates a record of the history of equalities within institutions.

To help build a culture of trust and understanding, it is important to explain clearly why the data is being collected, how it will be used and who will have access to it. It is also important to provide reassurance that the institution will follow guidelines on data collection, storage and use, including complying with data protection legislation. Some people may be concerned that information could disadvantage them, encourage discrimination or harassment, or even worried about being identified. To avoid those issues, and particularly concerns around potential identification of responses, we recommend that institutions provide clear assurances regarding minimum sample sizes for results reporting. Useful relevant guidelines around minimum cases for results reporting can be found on [HESA's webpage](#).

To demonstrate how data collected will be used for action, institutions might wish to share examples of how diversity monitoring information has informed past initiatives in the institution and helped to remove barriers for staff and students. If there are no previous examples from within an institution, examples of how diversity data has led to improvements in similar contexts may be useful to include instead to illustrate the intended purpose.

2. Age

Recommended question:

How old are you?

- + 19 and under
- + 20 – 24
- + 25 – 29
- + 30 – 34
- + 35 – 39
- + 40 – 44
- + 45 – 49
- + 50 – 54
- + 55 – 59
- + 60 – 64
- + 65 and over
- + Prefer not to say.

If looking for more granular information or investigating a specific age group, it might be preferable to ask about an individual's age or date of birth. This is particularly the case when collecting data about students, the majority of whom in many institutions are likely to be between the ages of 18 and 22.

When returning data to HESA, institutions will need to collect information about an individual's date of birth.

3. Disability

Disability monitoring questions should include an explanation of definitions and/or examples (or a web link to [definitions](#)) of what is included and not included under the definition of disability used in the diversity monitoring exercise. For example, the Equality Act 2010 and the [Government Statistical Service harmonised definition](#) defines a person as disabled when they have a long-standing illness, condition or impairment, 'that reduces their ability to carry-out day-to-day activities'. Advance HE recommends including additional explanation for this question, such as:

Under the Equality Act 2010, a person is considered to be disabled 'if they have a physical or mental impairment, and the impairment has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on his or her ability to carry out day-to-day activities'. 'Substantial' is defined by the Act as 'more than minor or trivial'. An impairment is considered to have a long-term effect if:

- + it has lasted for at least 12 months
- + it is likely to last for at least 12 months, or
- + it is likely to last for the rest of the life of the person.

Day-to-day activities are not defined in the Act, but in general they are things people do on a regular or daily basis; for example, eating, washing, walking, reading, writing or having a conversation.

In Northern Ireland, Disability is defined in the Disability Discrimination Act (1995) as 'a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on a person's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities'. Separate legislation deals with disability discrimination in education. Under the Special Educational Needs and Disability (NI) Order, discrimination in education occurs when:

- + a disabled pupil or student or prospective pupil or student is treated less favourably than someone else and the treatment is for a reason relating to the pupil's or student's disability; and this treatment cannot be justified
- + there is a failure to make a reasonable adjustment for a disabled pupil or student
- + victimisation or harassment occurs.

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Only visual impairments that are serious are covered by the Equality Act 2010 and Disability Discrimination Act (1995) in Northern Ireland. For example, a person whose eyesight can be corrected through the use of prescription lenses is not covered by either Act; neither is an inability to distinguish between red and green (ie colour-blindness). However, the same logic does not apply to other impairments or conditions that have a substantial adverse effect on the ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities and which are managed through medication or equipment. For example, if someone has epilepsy which is controlled by medication, they are still considered disabled. Conditions that are progressive, such as HIV/AIDs and cancer are covered from the point of diagnosis and if a person has previously had a condition that met the definition of the protected characteristic of disability under the Equality Act or Disability Discrimination Act, they still have the protected characteristic of disability.

Recommended question:

Do you have an impairment, health condition or learning difference that has a substantial or long-term impact on your ability to carry out day-to-day activities?

- + Yes
- + No
- + Prefer not to say.

(If yes) please select all of the following that apply to you:

- + Blind or have a visual impairment uncorrected by glasses
- + D/deaf or have a hearing impairment
- + Development condition that you have had since childhood which affects motor, cognitive, social and emotional skills, and speech and language
- + Learning difference such as dyslexia, dyspraxia or AD(H)D
- + Long-term illness or health condition such as cancer, HIV, diabetes, chronic heart disease or epilepsy
- + Mental health condition, challenge or disorder, such as depression, schizophrenia or anxiety
- + Physical impairment (a condition that substantially limits one or more basic physical activities such as walking, climbing stairs, lifting or carrying)
- + Social/communication conditions such as a speech and language impairment or an autistic spectrum condition
- + Prefer not to say
- + An impairment, health condition or learning difference not listed above (specify, if you wish).

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In the response options listed above, the use of 'D/deaf' incorporates those who identify as audiotically deaf and those who are deaf and identify as part of a social and cultural community of deaf people (included here in recognition of the protections afforded under the Equality Act).

Advance HE's question differs from the approach in the English and Welsh census, which does not specifically ask about impairment types, but instead is based on self-identification based on the following two questions:

Do you have any physical or mental health conditions or illnesses lasting or expected to last 12 months or more?

- + Yes
- + No.

Do any of your conditions or illnesses reduce your ability to carry out day-to-day activities?

- + Yes, a lot
- + Yes, a little
- + Not at all.

In contrast, the Scottish census asks about the following question, providing a list of options:

Do you have any of the following, which have lasted, or are expected to last, at least 12 months? (Tick all that apply)

- + Deafness or partial hearing loss. Blindness or partial sight loss
 - + Full or partial loss of voice or difficulty speaking (a condition that requires you to use equipment to speak)
 - + Learning disability (a condition that you have had since childhood that affects the way you learn, understand information and communicate)
 - + Learning difficulty (a specific learning condition that affects the way you learn and process information)
 - + Developmental disorder (a condition that you have had since childhood which affects motor, cognitive, social and emotional skills, and speech and language)
 - + Physical disability (a condition that substantially limits one or more basic physical activities such as walking, climbing stairs, lifting or carrying)
 - + Mental health condition (a condition that affects your emotional, physical and mental wellbeing)
-

- + Long-term illness, disease or condition (a condition, not listed above, that you may have for life, which may be managed with treatment or medication)
- + Other condition, please write in
- + No condition.

In Scotland, institutions have a responsibility under the British Sign Language (Scotland) Act 2015 to improve services for BSL users. Advance HE therefore recommends a follow-up question for those who identify as D/deaf or have a hearing impairment:

Are you a BSL user?

- + Yes
- + No
- + Prefer not to say.

Institutions might also wish to use this opportunity to ask an additional question on the provision of reasonable adjustments:

How can we support you?

In the box below, please tell us if there is any support or adjustments we can provide in relation to your impairment, condition or identity.

For example, do you need:

- + Materials in accessible formats?
- + Any additional equipment?
- + People to communicate with you in a certain way, or with a BSL translator?

Not sure? Use the box to ask for further advice.

4. Ethnicity, race and nationality

The protected characteristic of race in the Equality Act refers to a group of people defined by their colour, nationality (including citizenship), and/or ethnic or national origins (which may not be the same as one's current nationality). In the Race Relations (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 "racial grounds" includes colour, race, nationality or ethnic or national origins and the Irish Traveller Community as a specific racial group. Advance HE recommends asking about 'ethnicity or ethnic background', which in the UK is also inclusive of racial (eg Black, white) groups.

As with all other monitoring questions, it is recommended that response options are listed alphabetically, for example 'Asian, Black...' etc. Advance HE also recommends that categories listed are disaggregated to help ensure the experiences of different minority ethnic groups are highlighted in as much detail as possible.

When asking questions about 'mixed' ethnic groups, institutions might wish to use the wording 'Mixed or multiple ethnic groups' in consultation with staff and students, which is inclusive of how some people identify.

Recommended question:

How would you describe your ethnicity or ethnic background?

Arab

- + Arab.

Asian, or Asian British

- + Bangladeshi or Bangladeshi British
- + Chinese or Chinese British
- + Indian or Indian British
- + Pakistani or Pakistani British
- + Any other Asian background.

Black

- + African or African British
- + Caribbean or Caribbean British
- + Any other Black background.

Mixed or multiple ethnic groups

- + White or White British and Asian or Asian British
- + White or White British and Black African or Black African British
- + White or White British and Black Caribbean or Black Caribbean British
- + Any other mixed or multiple ethnic background.

White

- + English, Scottish, Welsh, Northern Irish or British
- + Gypsy or Irish Traveller
- + Irish
- + Roma
- + Any other white background

+ Any other ethnic background**+ Not known****+ Prefer not to say.**

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Response options for ethnicity differ in censuses in England and Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland. In Scotland, white ethnic groups listed include 'Showman/Showwoman'. In Northern Ireland, the list of response options provided are narrower and include 'White', 'Irish Traveller', 'Indian', 'Black African', 'Black Other', 'Chinese', 'Roma', 'Filipino', 'Mixed ethnic group (write in)' and 'Any other ethnic group (write in)'.

When asking questions about ethnicity in Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland, institutions might wish to add additional options such as 'African, African Scottish, African Irish, African Welsh or African British'.

Advance HE's recommended approach to the collection of data on ethnicity is UK-centric and the response options provided may not align with how people from outside of the UK identify. For example, in the USA, the second largest ethnic group is Hispanic; however, this response option is not usually provided in UK data collection exercises. Likewise, in some countries, particularly those with a history of ethnic conflict or genocide, the collection of data on race and ethnicity is uncommon and, in some contexts, illegal. Consequently, international staff and students might be less likely to provide information on their ethnicity.

Collecting data solely on ethnicity might omit different experiences and/or inequalities arising from nationality (eg experiences of British staff and students tend to be quite different than those of international staff and students). So, institutions might wish to ask an additional question on nationality, to be able to report on the national composition of their staff and student populations and explore how their experiences differ based on nationality. Data on nationality might also be beneficial, when trying to explore intersectional perspectives (eg how do religion and belief differ by nationality). We recommend an open-ended question, leaving respondents to self-identify. Responses can subsequently be grouped into groups of interest, with [HESA](#), for example, grouping nationality into 'UK', 'Other – European Union', and 'Non-European Union'.

Institutions are currently required to return both staff and student nationality data to HESA. However, nationality defines the country of one's legal nationality, which is not necessarily one's domicile. For this reason, HESA also collects data on domicile. Thus, institutions might want to consider disaggregating nationality data by domicile and residency status. Domicile is a concept of common law which is specific to the UK. Its primary definition is that of 'the permanent home' with the emphasis being on 'permanent'. Critical to the concept is that an individual may have only one domicile at any given time which is not always the case when residency is considered. Generally, one's domicile can be their residence, but their residence may or may not be their domicile. Any place one lives in or owns is considered their residence. Residency status gives individuals certain legal rights, like the right to live, work, travel, or study in a country. For example, HESA refers to individuals who are UK-domiciled as 'UK', and to international staff and students as 'non-UK'. The differentiation is sometimes unclear, especially where individuals have lived in the UK for a considerable length of time. However, the purpose of the differentiation is to understand the different experiences of different groups.

5. Sex and gender identity

Although sex and gender are terms that are often used interchangeably, they are in fact two different concepts. To clarify, the [definitions used by the UK government](#) describe sex as a set of biological attributes that is generally limited to male or female, and typically attributed to individuals at birth. In contrast, gender identity is a social construction related to behaviours and attributes, and is self-determined based on a person's internal perception, identification and experience. Therefore, a person's gender identity may not be the same as the sex the individual was registered at birth and it may also change over time. Gender identity is increasingly understood as not binary, but on a spectrum, and is thus considered as a more inclusive concept.

Conflating gender identity and sex may cause confusion and could lead to challenges on the basis that the data being collected and the decisions being taken on the back of that data do not give due regard to the specific issues which arise on grounds of sex and/or gender identity. If distinct questions are asked in relation to sex and gender identity, then arguably all experiences are being captured and in the event of challenge, institutions will be better positioned to demonstrate that the approach being taken is a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim as well as allowing more details to be gathered from the data.

Advance HE recommends always including a question on sex in equality data monitoring. Collecting sex data helps institutions to [fulfil their public duty under the Equality Act 2010](#), since 'sex' is the protected characteristic while 'gender identity' is not. Institutions are required to return sex data when collecting staff data to be returned to Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs. Moreover, when returning staff and student data to HESA, institutions are also asked to report data on sex.

The categories used in this question have been designed to match the language used in the [Equality Act 2010](#) and the [Sex Discrimination \(Northern Ireland\) Order 1976](#).

Recommended question:

What is your sex?

- + Female
- + Male
- + Prefer not to say.

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The protected characteristic of sex is defined as a man or a woman, where “*man*” means a *male of any age* and “*woman*” means a *female of any age*. The categories for this binary response option are in line with general survey practice and respondent expectations, as well as with recommendations contained in [Appendix 2 of the EHRC Employment Statutory Code of Practice](#). The Code provides detailed guidance to organisations about what the Equality Act means and Courts and tribunals must take the Code into account in cases involving areas they cover.

Advance HE suggests that institutions should also include a question about gender identity as an option. Such a question ensures that institutions are mindful of the different ways in which gendered norms and marginalisations occur, and is inclusive of a diverse range of gender identities. Advance HE recommends providing explanatory text indicating that the question on sex will be followed by questions on gender identity and trans status.

Collecting gender identity data can help institutions understand their staff and student populations better. For example, institutions can take targeted actions, if they have a clear idea about the proportion of staff from each gender identity group and their representation across different roles. Identifying specific problems and barriers faced by staff and student of certain gender identity can further inform actions (eg gender-based harassment towards non-binary staff and students and the introduction of gender identity training as a mitigating action). Collecting and using gender identity data means that any initiatives undertaken to create inclusive institutions are based on evidence rather than assumptions, thus increasing the likelihood of their success. Moreover, collecting gender identity data can enhance institutional reputation, if able to show that people from across the gender identity spectrum feel included and supported. Last but not least, collecting and, most importantly, acting upon gender identity data conveys a very important message to staff and students from across the gender identity spectrum that their institution recognises them, takes their experiences seriously and cares about addressing their needs.

When collecting data on gender identity, it is important that institutions report all categories covered in the answer options, even if these figures are suppressed following [HESA's rounding methodology](#). Collecting data on “non-binary” but not reporting those could be perceived as effectively reducing the gender identity question to a binary reflection of sex.

Recommended question:

How would you describe your gender identity?

- + Man
- + Woman
- + Non-binary
- + In another way (specify, if you wish)
- + Prefer not to say.

6. Trans identity/history

Trans is a term used to describe people whose gender identity is not the same as the sex they were registered at birth. The term ‘trans history’ can refer to people who no longer identify as trans, but were registered the opposite sex at birth (ie they have transitioned).

Trans status is covered under gender reassignment, which is a protected characteristic in the Equality Act 2010 and the Sex Discrimination (Northern Ireland) Order 1976, meaning that trans people are protected from discrimination and harassment in the workplace and in the provision of education and training. This protected characteristic covers anyone who is proposing to undergo, is undergoing or has undergone a process (or part of a process) for the purpose of reassigning their sex by changing physiological or other attributes of sex.

Collection of trans data is essential, as HE institutions have a legal duty under the 2010 Equality Act and the Sex Discrimination (Northern Ireland) Order 1976 to take active steps to prevent discrimination and harassment on grounds of gender reassignment, whether or not they believe they have staff or students directly affected by gender reassignment. Thus, Advance HE recommends always including a question on trans history and identity. Collection of trans data can assist institutions in evaluating trans inclusion and equality outcomes in relation to access, recruitment, participation, promotion etc., helping them to demonstrate their commitment to trans equality.

Recommended question:

Are you trans or do you have a trans history?

- + Yes
- + No
- + Prefer not to say.

Advance HE’s recommended question does not align with the question recommended by HESA. Therefore, when returning data to HESA, Advance HE recommends the following question:

Is the gender you identify with the same as your sex registered at birth?

- + Yes
- + No
- + Prefer not to say.

HESA's question format mirrors the approach adopted in the new census question on trans/gender identity in the English and Welsh census. However, the question design used in England and Wales differs from the approach in the Scottish census, which will ask:

Do you consider yourself to be trans, or have a trans history?

- + No
- + Yes, please describe your trans status (for example, non-binary, trans man, trans woman).

The census in Northern Ireland does not include question on trans/gender identity.

Monitoring numbers of trans staff and students is a very sensitive area. While there is a need to protect an individual's right to privacy, without gathering some form of evidence, it may be difficult to monitor the impact of policies and procedures on trans people HE access and participation, student outcomes, and employment patterns (such as recruitment, training, promotion or leaving rates).

Because many trans people have had negative experiences related to bullying and harassment, many may be reluctant to disclose or may not trust their institutions fully. In order to obtain more reliable results, some institutions have chosen to conduct monitoring through a neutral organisation under a guarantee of anonymity. If institutions choose to monitor trans staff and students using their own systems, then privacy, confidentiality and anonymity should be paramount. For example, diversity statistics should not be linked to IT-based personnel records that indicate grade or job title, as the small number of trans workers in an organisation may be identified by these or other variables, compromising confidentiality.

7. Sexual orientation

There are multiple dimensions of sexual orientation, including sexual identity, sexual attraction and sexual behaviour. Advance HE's recommended question asks about sexual identity (ie how someone identifies their sexual orientation), which is most relevant for studies of inequality in the HE sector, but might not count staff and students who do not identify with the identity terms listed in the question.

Recommended question:

How would you describe your sexual orientation?

- + Asexual
- + Bisexual
- + Gay or lesbian
- + Heterosexual/straight
- + Queer
- + In another way (specify, if you wish):
- + Prefer not to say.

Advance HE's recommended question matches the wording for the sexual orientation question in all UK censuses. However, in addition to the response options provided in the census, Advance HE recommends including the response options 'Asexual' and 'Queer'.

Familiarity and acceptability of the term 'Queer' has increased within higher and further education through established disciplinary fields such as queer theory, queer studies and queer history. Although this term has now been reclaimed by many LGB+ individuals, particularly young people, who don't identify with traditional categories around sexual orientation, it is still viewed as derogatory by some.

[When returning data to HESA](#), it will now be necessary to provide the following response options:

- + Bisexual
- + Gay or Lesbian
- + Heterosexual/straight
- + Other sexual orientation
- + Prefer not to say.

Institutions might also want to consider asking an additional question to explore how open their staff/students are about their sexual orientation across a variety of settings. A variation of this question is recommended by the EHRC Employment Statutory Code of Practice:

Are you open about your sexual orientation? (Optional answers for each: Yes, No, Prefer not to say)

- + At home
- + With colleagues
- + With your manager
- + At work generally.

The results from the above question may indicate wider organisational issues which need to be addressed.

8. Marriage and other partnerships

Outside of Northern Ireland, there is no legal requirement to collect data on marriage and civil partnerships. However, Advance HE is aware that institutions in England, Wales and Scotland may be collecting data on marriage/civil partnership to identify any impact of these characteristics on employment.

Recommended question:

Are you currently? (Select all that apply)

- + Co-habiting or living with a partner
- + Married or in a civil partnership
- + Separated, divorced or civil partnership dissolved
- + Single
- + Widowed or a surviving partner from a civil partnership
- + Other (specify, if you wish):
- + Prefer not to say.

9. Pregnancy, maternity and parental leave

National data and research have highlighted how pregnancy, maternity and parental leave have an impact on people's careers. In addition, not enough is known about the number of students that start a course of study while pregnant or become pregnant during their studies or about their experiences of pregnancy and maternity. Advance HE therefore recommends optional monitoring of data on pregnancy and maternity. Data will also ensure that the benefits, facilities and services for staff are adequate in meeting the needs of employees who are pregnant or have taken maternity leave.

In terms of maternity, data from university personnel records around legally-defined leave (as compared to asking staff the question) may not capture information for staff who have been working for an institution for under nine months or who were pregnant or recently pregnant at the recruitment stage.

Although there is no legal requirement under the Equality Act 2010 or equivalent Northern Ireland legislation to monitor paternity leave, adoptive leave or individuals taking shared parental leave, institutions may wish to gather this information to better understand the effect that taking this leave has on career progression.

You may wish to ask a combination of these questions and ensure that staff and students are provided with regular opportunities to update this information. Some staff and students may find reference to miscarriages and stillbirths in the following question upsetting. However, it is important for institutions to know how to support pregnant staff and students, regardless of the duration or result of the pregnancy.

Recommended question:

For both staff and students:

Are you currently pregnant or have you been pregnant in the last calendar year?

This includes pregnancies that did not result in the live birth of an infant, including miscarriages and stillbirths.

- + Yes
- + No
- + Prefer not to say.

For staff only:

In the last 12 months, have you taken any of the following types of leave? (Select all that apply)

- + Adoption leave
- + Maternity leave
- + Paternity leave
- + Shared parental leave
- + Parental Bereavement Leave
- + Other (specify, if you wish).

For students only:

In the last 12 months, have you taken time out of your course following any of the below?

- + A pregnancy
- + Your partner's pregnancy
- + The adoption of a child or children.

In the last 12 months, have you taken any of the following types of leave? (Select all that apply)

- + Adoption leave
- + Maternity leave
- + Paternity leave
- + Shared parental leave
- + Parental Bereavement Leave
- + Other (specify, if you wish).

10. Caring responsibilities

Understanding the unpaid caring responsibilities of individuals can inform work to address any barriers to participation in HE that might exist.

Recommended question:

Do you have any caring responsibilities for a child/children and/or another adult/s?

- + Yes
- + No
- + Prefer not to say.

If yes, please select all that apply:

If you share care responsibilities equally then please answer as the primary carer.

- + Primary carer of a child or children (under 18 years)
- + Primary carer of a child or children who is disabled or has a health condition or illness, or temporary care needs (under 18 years)
- + Primary carer or assistant for a disabled adult or adults (18 years and over)
- + Primary carer or assistant for an older person or people (65 years and over)
- + Secondary carer (another person carries out main caring role)
- + Prefer not to say.

It is important that a question collects information about different types of caring responsibilities, reflects on the changing nature of these roles, acknowledges that respondents might have multiple caring responsibilities and that responsibilities might not occur on a regular or daily basis. However, there are some equality monitoring forms that ask how many hours per week the employee devotes to caring responsibilities rather than asking them to identify as primary/secondary carer. The English and Welsh census has been using this question since 2001, asking respondents to tick a box indicating how many hours a week they spend on caring, providing them with 5 options, from '9 hours a week or less' to '50 or more hours a week'. So, institutions might wish to consider this as an option, should they wish to better understand the time devoted to caring responsibilities by their staff or students.

To explain what is meant by 'primary carer', institutions might wish to include more detailed explanatory text:

A primary carer is defined as an individual who plays a substantial role in the care for another person, who may or may not have multiple primary carers. Primary thus describes the level of responsibility to care for another person, rather than being the sole carer for that person.

11. Religion and belief

Advance HE recommends that a question about religion and belief is accompanied by text explaining that its purpose is to ensure that policies and practices do not discriminate against people observing a religion or belief, or those who have no religion or belief. This could be of particular importance for institutions that have a historic or current affiliation with a particular religion or belief or a strong secular identity or history.

Recommended question:

What is your religion or belief? (Select all that apply)

- + No religion (including atheist)
- + Buddhist
- + Christian
- + Hindu
- + Jewish
- + Muslim
- + Sikh
- + Any other religion or belief (specify, if you wish):
- + Prefer not to say.

The focus of the equivalent question in the English and Welsh census is narrower and asks 'What is your religion?'. However, the response options provided in the census match those listed above.

In the Scottish census, the question asks 'What religion, religious denomination or body do you belong to?' and presents disaggregated response options for Christian ('Church of Scotland', 'Roman Catholic' and 'Other Christian, please write in') and the response option 'Pagan'.

The Northern Irish census asks the same question as in Scotland, with the response options 'Roman Catholic', 'Presbyterian Church in Ireland', 'Church of Ireland', 'Methodist Church in Ireland' and 'Other, write in'. The Northern Irish census also asks a question about the religion, religious denomination or body a person was brought up as.

Guidance on the collection of diversity monitoring data

Advance HE

In accordance with the Fair Employment and Treatment (Northern Ireland) Order 1998, the community background question is the prescribed measure for use in employment monitoring.

Recommended question:

Regardless of whether we practice religion, most of us in Northern Ireland are seen as either Catholic or Protestant. We are therefore asking you to indicate your community background by ticking the appropriate box below (Select all that apply)

- + I am a member of the Protestant community
- + I am a member of the Roman Catholic community
- + I am a member of neither the Protestant nor Roman Catholic community.

12. Social background

Capturing a person's social background is not straightforward. Indicators commonly used in widening participation initiatives include students' parental education, measures of rates of participation in HE in their local area (TUNDRA and POLAR4) and school type (state or fee-paying). There are different data quality considerations for each indicator.

Parental education relies on student recall and contains a high proportion of refusals. TUNDRA and POLAR4 have a high level of coverage but TUNDRA is only available for students whose home address on application was in England, and POLAR4 is not available for students whose home address on application was in Northern Ireland.

Given the limitations associated with each, you may wish to ask one, two or all three of these questions.

Recommended question:

The following question is about your parent/s' level of education. This includes natural parents, adoptive parents, step-parents or guardians who have raised you.

Do any of your parents (as defined above) have any higher education qualifications such as a degree, diploma or certification of higher education?

- + Yes
- + No
- + I don't know
- + Prefer not to say.

When you applied for your undergraduate studies, what postcode did you apply from?

- + My postcode was:
- + I can't remember
- + I was not living in the UK when I applied for my undergraduate degree
- + Prefer not to say.

What type of school(s) did you mainly attend between the ages of 11 and 18 years old?

- + State-run or state-funded school in the UK, which was non-selective
- + State-run or state-funded school in the UK, which was selective on academic, faith or other grounds
- + Independent or fee-paying school in the UK
- + Independent or fee-paying school in the UK (assisted or funded place)
- + School outside of the UK
- + Other (such as home schooled)
- + I don't know
- + Prefer not to say.

Institutions might wish to note that state-run or state-funded schools include academy schools, community schools, foundation schools, free schools and faith schools.

Advance HE's recommended questions are most suitable for the collection of data about undergraduate students.

UK censuses do not ask a direct question about social background but might discern this information from questions asked about an individual's postcode, level of qualification, employment status and job title.

The UK Government Cabinet Office has published [guidance on the measurement of workforce socio-economic background](#), which describes approaches based on measuring:

- + Type of school attended between the ages of 11 and 16
- + Highest level of qualifications achieved by either of the respondent's parent(s) or guardian(s)
- + Parental occupation (when the respondent was aged 14)
- + Eligibility for free school meals (for respondents who finished school after 1980)
- + Self-assessment of socio-economic background (comparison to others).

13. Appendix A – Mapping Advance HE’s recommended questions to other data collection approaches

Recommended question	HESA compliant	Response options differ across the UK nations	Aligns with the English and Welsh census	Aligns with the Scottish census	Aligns with the Northern Irish census
Age					
Disability	✓				
Ethnicity, race and nationality	✓	✓	✓		
Sex	X				
Gender Identity	X				
Trans identity/history	X			✓	N/A
Sexual orientation	✓				
Marriage and other partnerships	✓		✓	✓	✓
Pregnancy, maternity and parental leave	✓		N/A	N/A	N/A
Caring responsibilities	✓			N/A	N/A
Religion or belief	✓	✓	✓		
Social background	N/A		N/A	N/A	N/A

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