

# Guidance on the collection of diversity monitoring data

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

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Advance HE

March 2021

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Collecting diversity data

The collection of data about staff and student identity characteristics 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 broad so institutions might wish to ask more detailed questions, for use in internal analysis, that can be aggregated before being submitted to HESA.

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 to other institutions in the sector so that data can be used for benchmarking purposes.

Recommendations presented in this guidance document are based on consultation with EDI organisations, other agencies involved in data collection, desk-based research and Advance HE's knowledge of good practice in UK higher education. Between December 2020 and February 2021, Advance HE engaged in a series of consultative conversations with equality, diversity and inclusion (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 upcoming UK censuses.

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
- + Caring responsibilities
- + Disability
- + Ethnicity and race
- + Gender
- + Marriage and civil partnership
- + Pregnancy and maternity
- + Race and ethnicity
- + Religion and belief
- + Sexual orientation
- + Social background
- + Trans identity/history.

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 identity 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 write in how they identify in their words. This will help the sector and HEIs identify areas that require individual categories in future.

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### 1.2 Things to consider

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

- + provide respondents with a statement that explains why your institution or department wishes to collect this information, how it will be used and measures taken to ensure practices are in line with data protection requirements
- + 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
- + list identity characteristics and response options alphabetically, with the exclusion of 'Other (specify, if you wish)' and 'Prefer not to say' (presented at the end of the response options)
- + where possible, 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 about an individual's identity characteristics can be sensitive and, in line with [data protection regulations](#), there are requirements that institutions must follow when collecting, storing, analysing and using this data.

### 1.3 Encouraging disclosure and recognising refusal

The design of question, 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 how they identify. 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 equality, diversity and inclusion 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 inequality or potentially unlawful treatment, different experiences and areas for action.

Several factors can influence an individual's decision to disclose information about their identity 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
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- + 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 identity characteristics, for whatever reason. Respondents should be able to share as much or as little data about their identity 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'.

### 1.4 Using data for action

The collection of data, on its own, does nothing to advance staff and student equality. Instead, surveying the diversity of your institution 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.

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 or encourage discrimination or harassment.

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 the current institution, examples of how diversity data has led to improvements in similar contexts may be useful to include instead to illustrate the intended purpose.

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## 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. Caring responsibilities

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

**Recommended question:**

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

- + No
- + Yes
- + 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.

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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.

## 4. 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 defines a disabled person as someone who has a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on 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.

Only visual impairments that are serious are covered by the Equality Act 2010. For example, a person whose eyesight can be corrected through the use of prescription lenses is not covered by the Act; neither is an inability to distinguish between red and green. 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, they still have the protected characteristic of disability.

### Recommended questions:

#### Do you identify as disabled?

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

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

- + 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, mobility or dexterity issues, which might require you to use a wheelchair or crutches

- + Social/communication conditions such as a speech and language impairment or an autistic spectrum condition
- + No known impairment, health condition or learning difference
- + Prefer not to say
- + An impairment, health condition or learning difference not listed above (specify, if you wish).

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:

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

- + Yes
- + No.

In contrast, the Scottish census asks about the following impairment types:

- + 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)
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- + 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.

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.

## 5. Ethnicity and race

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 your current nationality). Advance HE recommends asking about 'ethnicity or ethnic background', which is also inclusive of racial (eg Black, white) and/or national groups (eg African, British, Caribbean, and so on).

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 or Arab British
- + In another way (specify, if you wish):

##### Asian

- + Bangladeshi or Bangladeshi British
- + Chinese or Chinese British
- + Indian or Indian British
- + Pakistani or Pakistani British
- + In another way (specify, if you wish).

### **Black**

- + African or African British
- + Caribbean or Caribbean British
- + In another way (specify, if you wish).

### **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 (specify, if you wish).

### **White**

- + British, English, Scottish, Welsh or Northern Irish
- + Gypsy, Irish Traveller, Traveller or Roma
- + Irish
- + Polish
- + In another way (specify, if you wish).
  
- + Prefer not to say
- + In another way (specify, if you wish).

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 or African British'.

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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.

## 6. Gender

Although gender and sex are often used interchangeably, the term 'sex' is used in the Equality Act and not 'gender'. To clarify, the [definitions used by the UK government](#) describe sex as a set of biological attributes that is generally limited to female or male, and typically attributed to individuals at birth. In contrast, gender is a social construction related to behaviours and attributes, and is an internal perception of oneself. Advance HE recommends [asking a question about gender rather than asking a question about sex](#). This ensures equality efforts are mindful of the different ways gendered norms and marginalisations occur, and is inclusive of a diverse range of gender identities. The inclusion of identities 'man' and 'woman' will also support the small number of instances where binary data about sex is required.

Advance HE advises against asking about a respondent's gender **and** sex on the same monitoring form as this may confuse respondents and, when response options are combined, inadvertently out someone who identifies as trans.

### Recommended question:

#### How would you describe your gender?

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



Advance HE's recommended question differs from the question asked in UK censuses, which ask:

#### What is your sex?

- + Female
- + Male.

When collecting staff data that is returned to Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs, it may be necessary to ask a question that presents a binary response option ('female' or 'male'), in line with the census question. In these situations, Advance HE recommends that institutions ask questions in **two separate surveys at two separate points in time**. This recommendation not only avoids confusing staff with multiple questions on gender and sex within a single survey, but also conforms to requirements under the UK Data Protection Act that stipulate that any surveys collecting sensitive or personal information clearly state the purpose.

Advance HE recommends that institutions provide the following explanation on why further data on sex is being collected through the provision of a binary response option:

The HMRC require employers to gather data on employees' sex. For this reason, we are required to ask the following question and offer two response options only. In some countries more than two sexes are legally recognised and people born in another country may have a different sex stated in their passport to male or female (for example, an 'X' marker).

Advance HE has published additional guidance on [how to ask this question](#).

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## 7. Marriage, partnerships and relationships

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.

## 8. 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 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 questions:

#### 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.*

- + No
- + Yes
- + 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
- + 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

Other (specify, if you wish).

## 9. 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.

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## 10. 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 (how someone identifies their sexual orientation), which is most relevant for studies of inequality in the higher education 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? (Select all that apply)**

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

Advance HE's recommended question stem 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 is currently necessary to disaggregate the response option 'Gay or lesbian' and provide the following response options:

- + Asexual
- + Bisexual
- + Gay man
- + Gay woman/lesbian
- + Heterosexual/straight
- + Queer
- + Other (specify, if you wish):
- + Prefer not to say.

Advance HE recommends one response option for 'Gay or lesbian' rather than 'Gay man' and 'Gay woman/lesbian' as the latter question format asks about both the sexual orientation and sex of the respondent.

## 11. Social background

Capturing a person's social background is not straight forward. Indicators commonly used in widening participation initiatives include students' parental education, measures of rates of participation in higher education 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.

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**Recommended questions:**

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?**

- + No
- + Yes
- + 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 to measurement:

- + Type of school attended between the ages of 11 and 16
- + Highest level of qualifications achieved by either of your 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).

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## 12. Trans identity/history

Trans is a term used to describe people whose gender is not the same as the sex they were registered at birth.

### Recommended question:

Are you trans or do you have a trans history?

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

Institutions might wish to provide further information on what is meant by the terms trans and trans history, such as:

Trans is an umbrella term that describes people whose gender differs in some way from the sex they were assigned at birth. The term 'trans history' can refer to people who no longer identify as trans but were assigned the opposite sex at birth (ie they have transitioned).

Advance HE advises against asking about a respondent's gender **and** sex on the same monitoring form as this may confuse respondents and, when response options are combined, inadvertently out someone who identifies as trans.

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 your gender the same as the sex you were assigned at birth?

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

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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).

Advance HE believes that asking an explicit question about whether someone identifies as trans or has a trans history is easier for respondents to understand, particularly among students, and helps avoid confusion between concepts such as 'gender' and 'gender identity'.

The Northern Irish census does not ask a question about trans/gender identity.

## 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	×				
Caring responsibilities	✓		N/A	N/A	N/A
Disability	✓				
Ethnicity and race	✓	✓	✓		
Gender	✓				
Marriage and civil partnership	✓		✓	✓	✓
Pregnancy, maternity and parental leave	✓		N/A	N/A	N/A
Religion or belief	✓	✓			
Sexual orientation	×		✓	✓	✓
Socioeconomic status	N/A		N/A	N/A	N/A
Trans identity/history	×			✓	N/A

## Contact us

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