

Equality and Diversity and the student experience

Guidance notes for academics

1) Curriculum Design, Content and Organisation

a) In this aspect of provision, the first check should be for equal opportunities aims and objectives relating to the curriculum content and its scope and intention. Where relevant, subsequent questions will then need to address the organisation and design of the curriculum and ask whether all students have access to the curriculum. In relation to professional courses, in particular, it may be appropriate to ask whether equal opportunities awareness is embedded into the programme.

Questions which may help to probe this area of the provision include:

b) What evidence is there of staff concern to make the curriculum and its delivery accessible to a diverse range of students? Are the examples used in course materials appropriate and accessible to all students? Are there appropriate bridging courses to enable students to reach an equal platform?

c) Does the range of options available to students within the curriculum reflect appropriately the diversity of the cultural heritage of the student body?

d) Are Equal opportunities issues (e.g. gender, race, etc.) identified as themes or topics within the curriculum?

e) Is the language used in the presentation of course materials appropriate in not discriminating against or undermining the confidence of any student groups?

f) Does the timing of classes (for parents/carers and part-time students, for example) and assessments (including exams –for example Saturday exams may not be culturally compatible for Jewish students) fit broadly with students needs?

g) Where courses include placements, field trips, and or a period abroad, are all students who wish to take up this opportunity able to do so, and is a non-discriminatory experience assured during the placement? Where particular students are unable to participate, are appropriate alternative arrangements made?

2) Teaching, Learning and Assessment

- a) The questions asked here relate to the teaching session observed, to the opportunities and support provided for learning, and to the approach and practices associated with assessment. Questions which will help assessors address the extent to which equal opportunities aims and objectives are realised include:
- b) Is there evidence of staff concern to take into account the needs of students with impairments or learning difficulties in their use of teaching methods? Are alternative means of receiving material available for students with visual impairments or dyslexia?
- c) Is care taken to avoid the use of discriminatory terms in lectures, seminars, and other teaching contexts? Is there evidence in the classes which have been observed of the use of non stereotyped examples and non discriminatory language?
- d) Is there evidence that, if it occurs, discriminatory behaviour and/or attitudes are challenged by staff, whether the source is students, other staff, books or other learning materials?
- e) Is the organisation of group work sensitive to the needs of all groups within the student body and does it recognise different gender and cultural styles of working?
- f) Is there evidence that the experiences and values of all students are appropriately legitimated?
- g) Are assessment procedures balanced and are they scrutinised to ensure that they do not unfairly discriminate against any individual or group of students?
- h) Are there opportunities for disabled students to request special arrangements and is there guidance for examiners and administrators on 'generally accepted practice'?
- i) Is the manner in which feedback is given on students work sensitive to the need to maintain the dignity of the individual? Is critical feedback to students within a group context (such as might be found in Fine art, for example) handled sensitively to sustain the student's self respect and confidence?

3) Student Progression and achievement

a) Many institutions have explicit aims related to the recruitment of a diverse student intake, and many are committed to increasing access. In considering the effectiveness of a provider's access policy, assessors need to consider not only the success with which the targeted groups are appropriately recruited, but also their successful progression through the programme. In considering student progression and achievement, assessors will wish to explore also the extent to which any other aims and learning outcomes related to equal opportunities are achieved by students. Questions which may relate to this aspect include:

b) Does the admissions policy ensure equality of access to the provision for all appropriately qualified applicants?

c) Does the profile of the student population actually recruited match which is sought?

d) Are there differential rates of progression, failure, withdrawal and or transfer, and how are these understood and explained?

e) Do the patterns suggest inequality of opportunity for any groups of students? What steps are being taken to address these issues and how effective are they?

f) Does the review of students work suggest that all groups are achieving the intended learning outcomes?

g) Is value-added claimed and/or achieved? How is it measured and does it apply to all students?

h) If the quantitative data indicate different rates of student attainment, how are these explained?

4) Student Support and Guidance

a) There are likely to be many different parts of the institution providing support for students, and assessors will need to appraise the existence and use of such resources by the diverse groups of students associated with the provision being assessed. Assessors may find it helpful to ask:

b) Is there a diagnostic and referral system which allows disabled students, those with learning difficulties, language support or cultural needs to obtain information and access to appropriate facilities, including at pre-entry/pre-offer stages?

c) Are students supported in the acquisition of key skills (often numeracy, Language and information technology) and the study skills needed to successfully complete their study programme?

d) Does the structure (for example, the staff profile) and culture (as exhibited in display materials, signs, etc.) of the institution match the student profile and is it organised to meet diverse student needs?

e) Do support systems demonstrate concern for all students, including part time, mature, disabled etc?

f) Where there are peer support systems, are they appropriate and effective? What has been the role of staff in initiating and supporting such groups?

g) Are there complaints/Harassment procedures? How are they advertised, and what support is available to staff/student wishing to make a complaint?

5) Learning Resources

a) If there is a learning resource strategy, assessors will want to ask whether equal opportunities aims and objectives are embedded within it. Assessors will also need to make close reference to the nature of the student body and remember that a diverse body will have diverse needs which are not always compatible. The access needs of the full-time and part-time students are different, and premises which are appropriate to the non- impaired students are not necessarily suitable for disabled students **Questions that assessors may want to ask are:**

b) Are the accommodation (lecture theatres and class rooms, specialist and staff accommodation, independent study spaces), the library and IT facilities accessible to all students who wish to use them and are they appropriately equipped to meet the needs of students with physical and sensory impairments?

c) Are the opening hours of the library, IT and other learning support resources, and lending rights, appropriate to the circumstances of diverse groups of students, including part time students? What action is taken to redress problems of accessibility, and how effective is it?

d) Is the stock of resources (books, journals, videos material, etc. sufficient to support any equal opportunities issues embedded in the curriculum and the content of courses? Are additional resources such as visiting lecturers, community resources) used appropriately to ensure coverage of equal opportunities issues in the provision?

6) Quality Assurance and Enhancement

a) This aspect is concerned with the quality assurance and control processes which the institution has in place to support and enhance the quality of the provision in the subject being assessed. **Typical questions to ask are:**

b) Are there processes for checking that policies are working?
How do the evaluation processes capture and progress the views of all categories of staff and students?

c) Who are the student representatives? What evidence is provided (in minutes etc) that the full range of diverse student groups contribute actively to setting the agenda, raising issues and debating issues at meetings where course delivery is evaluated?

d) Does the process of monitoring and evaluation enhance equal opportunities? In particular, is there effective monitoring of:

- The progression, achievement and employment of students on all programmes;
- The match between the student body and the aims of the programme in terms, for example, of gender, race, disability, nationality;
- The use of learning resources and student support facilities;
- The use of learning resources and student support facilities
- The use of staff development

e) Who receives this monitoring information and what are the mechanisms for action arising from it?

f) What action is taken to ensure that staff are aware of and demonstrate commitment to the institutions equal opportunities policies and practices as they relate to students and their programmes of study?

g) Are staff provided with training in equal opportunities (for example in teaching to visually impaired students; in harassment etc.) in order to enable them to deliver an effective curriculum and student support?

h) Is there staff development to promote a greater understanding of ways in which staff can support the needs of all students?

i) Is there equality of opportunity for all staff to obtain continuing professional development?

7) Summary

a) In evaluating the student learning experience and student achievement in a way which is sensitive to equal opportunities, assessors needs to start with the aims and objectives, and understand clearly the extent to which there is diversity in the student body across the programmes and levels with the provision.