

Higher Education

Equality issues for Teaching and the promotion of Learning

Guidance on the expectations and standards articulated in the HE sector in relation to equal opportunities in teaching and learning. The section provides a checklist of questions for consideration regarding the following aspects and concludes with questions under the heading 'monitoring, review and change':

1. Curriculum
2. Teaching styles and Pedagogy
3. Assessment
4. Language and imagery
5. Organisation

1) Curriculum

'Institutions should aim to design and deliver programs that are in harmony with students' requirements, the strategic plans of the institution and the institutional awards framework. Programmes should have academic and intellectual currency, requiring the attainment of standards appropriate to the level and nature of the award

Process of design, approval and review should be informed by perceptions of the diversity of requirements which a higher education programme seeks to meet. ¹

- a) How and to what extent has new scholarship on subjects/disciplines across higher education (e.g. about equal opportunities, disability, gender, race/ethnicity) been incorporated into course content?
- b) In what ways do units of study and courses employ an inclusive' curriculum i.e. take into account the varied experiences and needs of ethnic minority students, disabled students and men and women?
- c) Are resources and teaching materials regularly checked for gender, racial, and other forms of bias? If so, how often and by whom?
- d) Are students encouraged to develop areas of expertise and skills associated with the other sex, for instance, in science computing and mathematics (for Women) and Humanities and social sciences (for men)?
- e) Particularly in relation to disabled students, is it clear which aspects of the curriculum are essential to a prescribed learning outcome and which are more flexible? Are staff aware of the need and willing to consider adjusting the curriculum where appropriate?

¹ (HEQC Guidelines on quality assurance)

2) Teaching Styles and Pedagogy

- a) In what ways are tutors and lecturers encouraged to develop a learning environment free from prejudice, discrimination and harassment?
- b) How are tutors and lecturers encouraged to create a supportive atmosphere, where topics of study have been and continue to be, dominated by the opposite sex or by low rates of participation by ethnic minority students?
- c) In what ways are staff made aware of and encouraged to use techniques for involving all students in seminar or group discussions and to value contributions made by all students?
- d) Do all groups of students make use of the support offered by personal tutors and academic staff?
- e) What guidance do staff receive about incorporating a diversity of ethnic and cultural perspectives in their teaching/
- f) Has staff development/training been organised to explore stereotypes about groups of students which might affect the staff-student relationship?
- g) To what extent do course programmes formally address study skills and different learning styles?
- h) Have targets been set for staff training in order to implement and explain the reason for, and the contents of, equal opportunities and other institutional policies
- i) What preparation and support is available for staff dealing with potentially contentious 'equality issues' in the syllabus (for example, in professionally related programmes such as education, law, social work, or other subjects where matters of identity are explicitly encountered, such as history or cultural studies)?
- j) What guidelines or training are there for handling potentially offensive comments regarding disability, race or sex, which arise in learning situations/
- k) What guidelines or training is provided for staff on how to deal with claims of harassment?

3) Language and Imagery

- a) What guidance is provided to staff on the importance of using inclusive language and visual imagery in teaching materials, course booklets and in marking?
- b) What guidance is offered to staff to enable them to distinguish between educational needs arising from the use of English as an additional language, or in a non standard form, and those stemming from specific learning difficulties? What means of student support is available in such cases?

- c) Is there a language policy for your institution? If so what extent does it concur with the existing equal opportunities policy?
- d) Do courses and assessments make use of students 'language diversity'?
- e) Are the specific English Language requirements for your course made explicit to students? Are students given feedback about the oral and written English language skills they need to improve?
- f) How are management information systems used to develop linguistic profiles of students, and to use such profiles to plan language support, including appointment of suitable minority language speakers?

4) Assessment

'Institutions should ensure that assessment rules, regulations and criteria are published in a full and accessible form and made freely available to students, staff and external examiners.

Assessment practices should be fair, valid, reliable and appropriate to the level of award being offered. Assessment should be undertaken only by appropriately qualified staff, who have been adequately trained and briefed, and given regular opportunities to update and enhance their expertise as assessors.

Institutions should make arrangements for students at all levels, including those who study at a distance or in a part-time mode, to be given clear information about the relationship between achievement assessment, academic progress and accumulation of credit.

Programme providers should ensure that detailed and up to date records on student progress are kept. Throughout a programme of study, students should receive prompt and helpful feedback about their performance and progress in relation to learning expectations and assessment criteria so that they can appropriately direct their subsequent learning activities².

- a) Are a range and variety of assessment methods used, in order to do full justice to students' often diverse knowledge, skills and academic backgrounds?
- b) What forums are available for students, especially ethnic minority students, to express concern about the fairness of marking?
- c) Are assessment criteria made explicit?
- d) Are students and assessors prepared to deal with the voicing of cultural and hierarchical differences?

² (HEQC Guidelines on quality assurance)

- e) Are the needs of disabled students taken into account in assessment arrangements?
- f) To what extent is equal opportunities incorporated into systems of marking and assessment e.g. through the use of 'anonymous' marking?
- g) Are the number and outcomes of appeals against assessment results monitored according to disability/ability, age, ethnic group and gender?
- h) Where monitoring indicates significant unjustified disparities between groups of students, what mechanisms are available for reviewing and revising assessment criteria, procedures, marking and moderating schemes and adjusting the role of internal and external assessors and examiners?

5) Organisation

- a) Are course timetables sufficiently flexible to accommodate students who have domestic responsibilities, yet not disadvantage them in their academic performance and final award?
- b) Are the requirements of disabled students in the teaching/learning environment met, for example, by distribution of copies of OHP /use of microphone/access to site, information and communication facilities? Is there sufficient, appropriate, accessible equipment such as modems, keyboards?
- c) Can disabled students gain access to all student provisions including library, student services and extra curricular services?
- d) What forms of support are available to entrants with non standard qualifications and for students with children e.g. study skill provision: child-care such as on-site nursery/holiday play schemes?
- e) In what ways is student diversity enhanced, for example, through links with local access courses and through accrediting prior learning and non-standard educational experience and achievement?

6) Monitoring, Review and Change

'regular appraisals, informed by appropriate external benchmarks, should be used at all levels to monitor the effectiveness of teaching, learning and assessment strategies. Through evaluation of the impact of its policies and practices, an institution should seek to implement continuing improvement of the learning environment, the educational opportunities available to its students, and the quality and academic standards of learning in the education it provides.

programmes should be regularly monitored and reviewed, with any necessary modifications being incorporated.³

³ (HEQC Guidelines on quality assurance)

- a) How are achievement levels monitored by ethnic group and gender, and significant patterns of academic achievement identified and addressed?
- b) How effectively are such analyses fed back into: academic policy, course provision, teaching and learning policies, student support and admissions policy criteria?
- c) How are retention rates monitored by ethnic and gender and significant differences in retention identified and addressed?
- d) What action is taken in respect to teaching and learning from evidence of student dissatisfaction with certain courses or units of study?
- e) Are the institutions commitment to equal opportunities, and the action it is taking included in the information routinely supplied to students?
- f) What mechanism allows students to raise curriculum related equal opportunities issues with responsible academic staff, i.e. regarding design, content, delivery or assessment?