

Effective equality surveys

Exploring the staff and student experience in higher education institutions



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Equality Challenge Unit

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Foreword

Working with Equality Challenge Unit and Schneider~Ross in 2009, we undertook an equality survey at the University of Essex, aiming to gain a better understanding of the staff and student experience of working and studying at the university. It was something of a journey of discovery.

While responses from colleagues and students surprised us at points, through the survey we learned much about our institution, its practices and processes, as well as about the plurality of experiences, perceptions and requirements of staff and students.

The Equality Act 2010 extends protection to more groups of people, and institutions will need to be increasingly aware of the demographic make-up and requirements of their workforce and student body. The Act will also require institutions to set evidence-based objectives for equality.

Improved understanding of the experiences and perceptions of our staff and students gained through the survey will inform us as we identify real priorities for action to ensure that Essex caters for diversity and provides an inclusive environment.

This publication offers a helpful starting point for undertaking equality surveys, including initial planning and development to ensure the method decided upon, as well as the survey itself, are suited to the aims, resources and individual circumstances of each institution.

It provides step-by-step guidance on how to run an equality survey, and provides many helpful hints. Ultimately, this publication will guide institutions through what will be an enlightening experience.

Professor Colin Riordan

Vice-chancellor

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Introduction

Equality surveys are often an ideal way to enhance understanding of staff and student experiences and perceptions of equality in higher education institutions (HEIs). This guidance explains how surveys can be used within institutions to gather qualitative and quantitative data on staff and student perceptions of equality.

The guidance aims to:

- = help you decide whether your institution would benefit from conducting an equality survey with staff/students
- = share hints and tips from the sector about how to conduct these surveys
- = set out some core questions that ECU encourages HEIs to use to benchmark progress across the sector
- = help you consider and plan complementary activities, such as focus group discussions, which can help with the interpretation of survey results
- = illustrate the sort of analysis and reports that can be used to inform decisions about future priorities and strategies

Aimed at staff working across different functions within HEIs – including equality and diversity practitioners, student services managers, human resources departments and senior managers – this guidance is designed to provoke thinking on the best way for individual HEIs to use surveys to understand local staff and student experiences from an equality perspective.

With the involvement of ECU, Schneider~Ross produced this guidance by working with the University of Essex to develop and implement an equality survey.

The guidance builds on the experience of the University of Essex in developing and running an equality survey. It looks at the different approaches that may be taken depending on available budget and resources. Practical examples are given throughout, along with links to additional resources.

Why carry out a staff or student equality survey?

For the past 40 years, progress on equality and diversity has traditionally been measured by changes in representation of women and minority groups in staff and student numbers.

This remains a vital measure of success. There is increasing recognition, however, that changes in perception and changes to the culture of an institution are necessary in order to embed equality.

Traditionally, equality surveys are of a quantitative nature. However, the use of a quantitative approach with statistical outputs cannot record people's perceptions or experiences. Statistical data are often used to dictate priorities for action – but without the benefit of understanding staff and student perceptions, the real areas that need to be addressed can easily be overlooked.

Carrying out an equality survey of your staff and/or your student population will help you learn more about:

- = how staff/students really feel about the institution of which they are a part
- = the way in which the institution, its policies and practices are perceived to operate
- = how employees and/or students interact
- = the barriers that exist, or are perceived to exist, for specific groups of people
- = where to focus your equality resources and activities in the future
- = the impact of equality initiatives and trends in staff/student experiences over time

Crucially, an equality survey will often deliver significant benefits for an HEI in terms of statutory compliance. Legislation introduced over the past decade has required HEIs to take a much more proactive approach to delivering equality. These responsibilities are enshrined in the race, disability and gender equality duties placed on HEIs by anti-discrimination legislation. The Equality Act 2010 consolidates these duties, replacing them with a single duty covering equality on grounds of **sexual orientation, religion or belief, pregnancy and maternity, gender reassignment** and **age**, in addition to **race, disability** and **gender**. All these legal requirements are designed to ensure improvements in outcomes for all staff and students, and to engender a working and learning environment that is inclusive and in which all individuals can thrive.

Meeting the requirements of these statutory equality duties is a key driver for undertaking an equality survey, providing a positive way to demonstrate you are seeking to promote equality by:

- = highlighting the extent to which different groups of people have different experiences
- = exploring those experiences
- = identifying where people experience barriers or feel disadvantaged

A survey will afford staff/students the opportunity to provide feedback on how well they understand policies and processes, as well as their impact in practice. It will provide insight into unwritten rules that may be fully apparent to some, but completely invisible to others.

Carrying out an equality survey also communicates your institution's values and its commitment to equality, and can be useful in raising the awareness of equality issues among staff and students. For example, by asking staff members about their experiences of discrimination, you will highlight the unacceptable nature of such behaviour and send out a signal that reports of discrimination will be taken seriously.

If your survey is anonymous, respondents will often be very frank – you will receive some honest responses and some extreme views. The result will be a snapshot of how staff/students view the institution's culture, and will illustrate the extent to which they feel valued and give of their best.

The data you collect through the survey will help you to identify your institution's strengths and weaknesses in relation to equality and diversity, which can provide a useful benchmark for future progress. In this way, the survey findings could specify the focus of, for example, equality impact assessments to enable the greatest benefit to be made.

Developing the survey

Scoping the survey

The scope of an equality survey will initially be defined by the rationale for undertaking research in the first instance, and will depend on the time and resources available.

Consider whether you would like to elicit wide-ranging responses from staff or students, or whether a survey that is more focused would be the most useful to your institution. It may be that previous research or analysis of monitoring data has already highlighted specific areas of concern, in which case it may be beneficial to direct your survey around the issues raised.

In many institutions, the best way to scope an equality survey will be to convene an initial meeting involving key people from different parts of the institution. For example, if you are planning a student equality survey, you may wish to arrange a meeting involving representatives from your students' unions, student services, equality and diversity team, as well as some academic or learning and teaching input. The aim of this meeting should be to define the key themes to be explored in the survey, the depth of the research and the terms of reference to be addressed.

It is vital that the aims and objectives of the survey are agreed and understood at the outset – and that the person or team leading the project has a clear understanding of the key issues to be explored. Ask yourselves:

- = Whose experiences do we want to explore through the survey?
- = What potential concerns or barriers do we want to explore in this survey?
- = Do we want feedback on how some new policies or approaches are working and are experienced in practice?

At this initial scoping stage, identify what a successful survey will look like in practice in your institution. Ask yourselves:

- = How might we undertake the research?
- = What sort of deliverables do we want from the research?
- = What are we going to do with what we learn?

You will need to define a methodology that is appropriate to the research, reaches the highest proportion of its target audience as easily as possible, and captures the information required. If a quantitative study is planned, consider supplementary tools, such as focus groups and one-to-one interviews, to augment your findings and provide qualitative context.

Gaining support

Gaining support for your survey is critical for the research to be successful. In order to achieve this:

- = establish a steering or working group to head up the project
- = ensure that a named senior manager – at vice-chancellor or pro vice-chancellor level – makes a public commitment to the project and leads the implementation of actions arising out of the survey
- = involve leaders at all levels and ensure their public commitment to the process
- = ensure consistent messages about the survey are reaching staff and students across your institution
- = include trade union and students' union representatives and other student representatives throughout the process
- = consult and involve key stakeholders to identify themes for the survey, and plan to take actions that need to result from the survey's findings
- = clearly communicate the purpose, process and plans for the research to all those involved, so that they are transparent from the outset
- = make and keep commitments to publish and take action on the findings from the research
- = ensure the research instrument/exercises are accessible and open to all parties targeted and to as wide a group as is practical and relevant

Methodology

Key elements of an equality survey process

You need to decide what your research might include, depending on your budget and resources. At one end of the scale, an equality survey might be a relatively simple quantitative exercise; at the other end, it can be far more in-depth, covering all aspects of equality and diversity as well as involving qualitative input from stakeholders and specific equality groups.

Based on good practice, the key stages of delivering an equality survey would include:

- = meeting with relevant partners to agree overall process
- = scoping and targeting the audience for research
- = designing a survey, with input from colleagues
- = distributing the survey, to a sample or all staff/students
- = collating results and analysing by relevant demographics
- = reviewing and interpreting results in an internal report
- = agreeing necessary actions
- = communicating results and actions

A more in-depth and robust approach might include all of the above, plus some or all of the following:

- = setting up a steering group/survey committee to gain support and to lead the survey
- = carrying out desk research to review policies, formal (and informal) feedback and monitoring data
- = reviewing existing feedback material (specific questions from previous staff/student surveys, exit interviews, monitoring data) in developing the survey
- = delivering a pilot phase to test questions and technology
- = conducting interviews with key stakeholders (including trade unions, senior managers and others)
- = holding qualitative discussions and/or focus groups to confirm findings and explore specific themes in more detail

Choosing a model

The approach to carrying out an equality survey will be shaped in line with your budget, resources in terms of time and personnel, and the skills and tools available.

An HEI's equality survey is likely to be one of three types:

- = Model 1: developing and administering a survey within your department
- = Model 2: working in partnership with an academic research team within your HEI
- = Model 3: using an external agency or resource, such as a specialist consultancy

In practice, an HEI may decide to blend two or more of these models – for example, by managing most of the process in-house (model 1) but using an external consultancy to input and analyse the data (model 3). When choosing a suitable model, it is important to consider the potential advantages and disadvantages of each model in conjunction with what you are seeking to achieve through your survey.

Model 1: developing and administering a survey within your department

Potential advantages:

- = likely to be the cheapest option
- = you will have total control – you will know what you want, and have more control over the end data set
- = you may be able to limit access to the data more easily
- = may be a quicker option – you see the results and trends as they come in (especially if using online survey software)
- = ease of implementation, particularly if you are investigating a single topic with a small group of respondents

Potential disadvantages:

- = respondents may have greater concerns about confidentiality – with consequent lower response rates
- = may be time-consuming and a heavy resource burden (especially if it is large-scale and there is a need for data entry)
- = requires specific skills and tools (eg software)
- = may lack an objective perspective in reviewing policies and processes – the survey design may deliberately or inadvertently favour protecting the status quo or disguise important issues
- = colleagues may not have experience of delivering such surveys, and may be less likely than external consultants to be in touch with best practice and to make informed recommendations about tackling emerging issues

Model 2: working in partnership with an academic research team within your HEI

Potential advantages:

- = more cost-effective than outsourcing, can retain resources and knowledge within your institution

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- = may help to strengthen internal relationships between academic areas and central services
- = greater control over project progress than outsourcing the work
- = may provide access to appropriate research tools/resources (especially for survey development, distribution and collection) that you may not have within your own department or team
- = may allow you to access appropriate research skills that enhance the statistical validity of the approach taken, and provide reassurance if the survey findings are likely to be discussed by an academic audience

Potential disadvantages:

- = you may find it difficult to find a team within your HEI with the right combination of research skills and equality and diversity awareness (eg equality data often require the analysis of small numbers, which might be dismissed from a statistical significance perspective)
- = potential lack of objective perspective in reviewing institutional policies and practices
- = resources may not be available when you need them (other more pressing external research projects could take priority)
- = another department having access to the raw data may raise concerns over the level of confidentiality, which might produce lower response rates
- = colleagues may be less likely than external consultants to be in touch with best practice and to make informed recommendations about tackling emerging issues

Model 3: using an external agency or resource, such as a specialist consultancy

Potential advantages:

- = releases your time to address other issues
- = does not require in-house survey tools/skills
- = may provide greater access to subject-specific expertise, and potential access to external benchmarking data held by the agency
- = more objective approach to research and an independent perspective on policies and practices
- = initial survey responses being sent to someone outside your institution may offer reassurance to respondents about confidentiality
- = the process of working in partnership may reduce costs (eg deciding which aspects of the research can be undertaken in-house and which are best undertaken externally)

Potential disadvantages:

- = budgetary implications – consultancy fees and expenses
- = likely to require a competitive tendering process or seeking different quotations
- = you may not have access to the raw data at the end of the process (if such access is crucial, you need to ensure you reflect this in discussions and in your contract with the consultancy, and agree how confidentiality will be ensured)
- = the survey report may need more editing to fit with your house style and internal terminology
- = potential practical difficulties in enabling external consultants to contact staff (eg to provide a link to an online survey or chase non-respondents), if this is part of the consultants' role
- = may be slightly more complex to manage data protection and freedom of information issues that relate to the data held, and to explain to respondents how such issues will be handled

Defining the sample

The definition of your survey sample is another area that is budget- and resource-dependent. For example, it may not be practical to survey everyone within your institution, particularly if you wish to gather detailed qualitative data.

If a substantial proportion of the research is quantitative, and if you have the option of using web-based tools to deliver the survey, you are more likely to be able to include all staff/students at a relatively low cost. It would be possible to do this as a paper survey, but that would add significantly to the resources required.

If contacting all staff/students is not possible, it will be necessary to draw up a sample that will produce results that closely reflect the views of the population as a whole. Random sampling will give all members of staff/students an equal chance of participating.

As the theme of the survey is equality, you will need to ensure a sufficient number of responses from underrepresented groups (black and minority ethnic (BME) staff/students, disabled staff/students, etc). This may require you to consider weighting the sample to increase the representation of such groups. This is an area in which detailed knowledge of social research and statistical methods becomes important. Circulating information about the survey to specific staff networks (eg your HEI's disabled staff network) or specific student societies (eg your students' union lesbian, gay and bisexual society) can also help to ensure a diverse and representative range of respondents.

It is generally advisable to devise separate questions for staff and students. There may be some general questions that are relevant to both groups, which can provide useful comparative data about the staff and student experience. However, it will be important to ask focused questions about either the staff or student experience, as a survey that is relevant to both groups may result in responses that are too general to be of great use.

Designing the survey

It is important that the questionnaire is designed in a way that provides feedback on particular aspects of the staff or student experience.

It should explore issues with which a significant proportion of staff/students are likely to have high levels of satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Where little is already known about the particular issues affecting staff/students at your own institution, the survey should take into account themes emerging nationally, and be designed to gather baseline data for your own institution. ECU's website (www.ecu.ac.uk) contains reports from national research projects exploring equality and diversity issues in higher education, and is a useful resource for those who are drafting survey questions but are unsure of the issues that might be worth exploring.

Finally, the survey should provide a benchmark against which improvement goals can be set and subsequent progress measured. Consider the need to incorporate questions that will stand the test of time and can be used again in future surveys.

Question types

This section should be read in conjunction with [appendix 2](#), which provides sample questions and themes. When drafting the survey:

- = choose questions that are most appropriate to the research and that will reflect the themes that are central to the project (eg ask about the institution's culture, leadership/management style, bullying/harassment/policies and the personal experiences of the respondent)
- = consider the need to measure future progress against these results
- = ensure the wording will not need to change in future years – and choose a sufficiently wide range of responses so that progress in the future will be measurable
- = supplement quantitative questions with qualitative ones, to get underneath the data and highlight emerging themes with illustrations and personal perspectives (eg if you ask whether the respondent feels they are respected, provide the opportunity to explain why, particularly if they disagree)

- = be aware that asking too many open-ended questions can create a lot of work in coding and analysing the responses
- = use quantitative questions, such as yes/no answers, multiple choice selections and ranked scales, alongside open questions to elicit a wide range of responses
- = focus on the end result and what responses you are likely to receive
- = leave out any questions that you think will not be relevant or generate useful data

Collecting equality monitoring data is vital, and particular care needs to be taken in designing this element of the questionnaire. If it is too detailed, respondents may have concerns about being easily identified; but if it is too superficial, important perspectives may be missed. See [appendix 1](#) for some examples of what might be included in this section.

Question sequence

The sequence of questions can inadvertently affect responses. Try to:

- = group the questions in a way that flows naturally; at the same time, ensure the question sequence does not 'lead' respondents to give certain answers
- = keep themes together to ensure a logical structure
- = avoid the use of double negatives or questions that are difficult to understand
- = ensure a mixture of questions that are positively and negatively phrased

Too many questions written in a similar positive light may evoke a particular response set – this is where respondents automatically agree or disagree without properly considering each item. This usually happens when the positive end of the scale comes first, with the initial questions all based on positive statements. Ideally, questions should be set so that some express positive and some negative statements. Also avoid using the same response scale throughout. Some online survey tools enable randomisation of question responses to avoid question choice bias.

Start the survey with easier and less sensitive questions to allow respondents to gain confidence in the exercise. It is generally better to keep questions on demographics to the end. Challenging questions at the start, or a requirement to provide demographic data, can deter respondents.

Examples

An example of a question that is difficult to understand:

Our institution doesn't have a problem with diversity (agree/disagree)

Terms, such as 'diversity', that may be open to different interpretations should be avoided or explained where no other more explicit word is available.

An example of a leading question:

Our institution is an excellent place to work (agree/disagree)

Questions should be phrased to avoid any element of leading or bias by using numeric scales. It would be better to use the following question:

Please rank our institution as a place to work on a scale of 1–5 (where 1=poor and 5=excellent)

An example of posing a question in either a positive or a negative way:

Positive (you hope that most respondents agree):

In the past 12 months I have not been bullied or harassed at work (agree/disagree)

Negative (you hope that most respondents disagree):

In the past 12 months I have been bullied or harassed at work (agree/disagree)

Survey layout, length and ease of completion

The presentation of a survey affects the way respondents interact with it. It is important to:

- = make instructions for completion as clear as possible
- = ensure paper questionnaires provide plenty of space for people to handwrite each answer
- = highlight the closing date and ensure contact details and/or helpline information are readily accessible
- = offer to provide the survey in an alternative format
- = do not overcrowd the pages; try to make the survey as visually appealing as possible
- = use a font size of at least 12 point and preferably 14 point, as well as a clear, accessible font (such as Arial)

- = if using an online survey tool, ensure the size of the text can be altered within internet browsers by those who require a larger font
- = keep the survey to a manageable length, especially if you wish to maximise responses
- = if an online survey is too long to be quickly completed in one sitting, ensure that it can be saved and make it clear from the start how respondents can retrieve their partially completed survey
- = include the estimated time it will take to complete the survey, and be realistic about how much time you expect respondents to take to complete the survey

Respondents do not want to read an essay before they start, so use a covering letter/ statement or email to convey contextual information. This may include a reassurance about confidentiality and how the information being sought will be used.

Remember – a survey that takes respondents an hour to complete will not be as successful as one that takes 15 minutes

If developing an electronic survey, utilise help features or floating hints where appropriate (see overleaf for an example). Always ensure the information contained in such features is accessible to people using assistive technology, such as a blind staff member or student using screen-reader software. Even if you consider that there is no problem with incompatibility with assistive technology, be sure to offer additional support and/or alternative methods to complete the survey. Due to the variations in assistive technology, it is important to understand that online survey tools or software packages inevitably have some limitations. Therefore a variety of survey response options may need to be explored for assistive technology users. These options should be made clear in any covering letter or email invitation.

At the end of the survey, include a note of thanks and provide contact information in the event that respondents wish to follow it up or have any questions or concerns. In some surveys you may also wish to provide contacts to relevant sources of support for staff and students.

When providing contact details, you may also decide to offer respondents the opportunity to volunteer for involvement in any follow-up work you are planning to deliver (eg focus groups).

Which of the following represents your employment contract?

Permanent contract Fixed-term contract

Secondment from another organisation Temporary/agency staff

External consultant

The following question relates to whether or not you have a disability. It is appreciated this is a sensitive issue for many people. However, in order to ensure that there are no barriers for any single group it is important for us to be aware of those staff who do have a disability or health condition that might require a reasonable adjustment. You should be aware too that employees with a disability or health condition are entitled in law to reasonable adjustments to address their support needs in the workplace (Equality Act 2010). To read the definition of disability move your cursor over the next question.

Do you consider that you have a disability?

Yes No

If yes, please give brief

The Equality Act 2010 makes it unlawful to discriminate against disabled people, or people who have had a disability. Section 6 of the Act defines a person as having a disability if they have a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial or long-term effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities. That effect must have lasted or is likely to last for at least 12 months, or for the rest of the life of the person.

Example of a floating hint

Questionnaire distribution and collection

There is a wealth of information and much academic debate on the advantages and disadvantages of differing methodologies for collecting quantitative and qualitative data. This guide concentrates on the main ways of collecting equality-related survey data from staff and students:

- = web or email survey
- = paper survey
- = a combination of both

You also need to consider whether there are groups of people among your respondents who do not have easy access to a computer. For an equality survey to be truly inclusive, an approach combining paper-based and web-based delivery is likely to be the most appropriate.

It is often important to have discussions with the managers of areas that contain large numbers of staff members without easy access to computers. This may include, for example, frontline staff in cleaning, accommodation or estates services. You may need to negotiate paid time in which staff who work shifts can complete the survey in paper form.

Telephone interviews, or other methods of distributing your questionnaires that involve some face-to-face contact, might also be worth considering if you feel you need to offer support or reassurance to respondents. This would be good practice, for example, if the questionnaire is asking respondents to recall sensitive or distressing experiences. If telephone or face-to-face contact is required at any stage, it will be important to consider how this will be resourced and how issues of confidentiality will be managed.

Some of the potential advantages and disadvantages of using web/email and paper surveys as your main method of distribution are set out below.

Web or email-based surveys

Advantages:

- = cost-effective – there is no need to employ data-entry staff or to scan responses
- = can be completed at a time that suits the respondent
- = often easy to distribute and complete
- = number of responses can be tracked throughout the survey period
- = results can be analysed more easily during the project (eg to check on response rates in different areas), depending on the tools used
- = easier to include question routing (eg a system can take a respondent automatically from question 3 to question 5, if question 4 is not relevant to them)
- = may be easier to separate out some data from other data (eg web-based surveys may enable you to collect people's contact details to enter them in a prize draw, but to encrypt other data so that their contact details are not attached to their other survey responses)
- = environmentally friendly
- = some online survey tools can offer answer choices in a randomised order to preclude bias

Methodology

Disadvantages:

- = requires all respondents to have access to a computer and to be sufficiently IT-literate to respond
- = spam and privacy/ethical concerns – if participation is via an email addressed to individuals, then it might end up in the junk file, be deleted or considered intrusive; some staff/students may opt out of certain group emails
- = technical issues (eg inconsistency of browsers, compatibility of survey software/system with older computers, PC versus Mac compatibility; respondents might only have email, not internet access)
- = you may receive responses to open questions that are too detailed (if you do not impose a word limit on each answer), or people may feel frustrated that they cannot say everything they want to (if you do impose a word limit)
- = potential incompatibility with assistive technology (this is something that needs to be checked and/or tested)
- = generally no means of providing clarification, as can be done if a survey is undertaken using face-to-face interviews or telephone contact
- = possibility of multiple submissions – some types of online survey software use cookies (small files stored on a user's computer that can prevent multiple submission, eg by logging a unique ID for each response and ensuring the same computer does not log another response); however, some institutions set their internet browser software to block cookies, so you may need to test this
- = may pose some complex issues relating to who owns the data (eg if using an online survey tool, you may need to check whether the tool, software or survey provider has any claim over the data set)
- = appropriate encryption and password protection is needed to ensure confidentiality

Paper-based surveys

Advantages:

- = potentially a more inclusive process, as the survey does not require respondents to have access to a computer or computer skills
- = respondents can make additional comments/observations/remarks anywhere on the page to amplify their responses (although this may also be a disadvantage as such remarks may be difficult to analyse)
- = can be more easily converted into/produced in alternative formats (eg audio, braille or large print) for people who are blind or partially sighted

Disadvantages:

- = requires greater commitment from respondents to return the survey
- = expensive – requires significant resources to administer (eg data-entry work)

- = lower and slower response rates
- = requires manual transcription of data from hard copy to an appropriate statistical analysis tool, which may result in data-entry errors
- = may lead to people answering open-text questions briefly, perhaps too briefly to meet your requirements
- = routing people from one question to another (eg 'now go to question 4') can be complex and confusing
- = respondents may not follow instructions and choose more than the requisite number of responses (eg ticking three boxes in response to a question that asks them to tick only one)
- = need to ensure you use appropriate storage facilities for completed questionnaires so that confidentiality is maintained
- = often less easy to access using assistive technology, so there is a need to ensure systems are in place to provide the questionnaire in alternative formats

Accessibility

It is very important to ensure the survey is accessible to disabled people or others who may have difficulty in accessing it, such as respondents for whom English is not their first language. Consider the following issues.

- = Is there a need for documents to be translated? One-to-one support via telephone or direct interviews may be a substitute.
- = Is the online survey compatible with assistive technologies (eg screen-reader software)?
- = Can you engage with your staff and/or student disability network and your assistive technology experts to test the online version?
- = Can you offer one-to-one support for someone completing the survey where it is impractical to provide the survey in alternative formats, or there is a compatibility issue that cannot be resolved?
- = Do you need to consider seeking specialist advice? People experienced in transcription work for blind or partially sighted people will be able to advise on how easy it would be to produce a version of your survey in large print, braille or other formats. A specialist in supporting deaf people could advise on whether the language in your survey would be accessible to deaf people whose first language is British Sign Language.
- = Have you checked for website accessibility? If you are using software that creates online surveys, check with internal or external specialists that your survey will meet relevant accessibility standards. See the resources section for further information.

If you cannot test your survey to check it is accessible using assistive hardware and software, at the very least you must make it clear in all documentation that the survey can be made available in alternative formats (eg braille, electronic text files, etc) and that alternative methods for collecting this information (eg telephone or face-to-face interviews) are available.

Piloting

Before you deliver your survey, it is generally very important to test (or pilot) the survey with a small group of people. Use your pilot to:

- = check that the completion instructions work and make sense
- = explore whether the questions and structure of the survey are unambiguous and easy to understand – you want the survey to deliver the results you need
- = test the technical elements of an online survey – this allows you to work out any problems that would be difficult to fix once the survey is live
- = make sure the survey is accessible on a variety of browsers (do not assume that everyone uses Internet Explorer)
- = check for accessibility issues (see also [Accessibility](#))

You may decide to pilot the survey with people who have already been in the project (eg members of the steering group that designed the survey); however, you should also include some people who have not been involved, to ensure you are getting a fresh perspective on the survey.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality, protecting people's privacy, and ensuring people understand how the information they provide will be used and stored are key considerations when delivering a survey.

It is important to consider the implications of data protection legislation, which requires that all data should be fairly and lawfully processed. To comply with this, it is important to:

- = state the name of the institution conducting the research at the start of the questionnaire (especially important if you are outsourcing the project)
- = provide information on how the resulting data will be handled (eg explain that the data will be handled and stored in a confidential manner)

If you plan to use direct quotes from respondents in your research report:

- = make it very clear to all respondents that their responses may be used in this way (an opt-in/opt-out tick box can be useful to allow individuals to indicate whether they would like their responses to be used in this way)
- = ensure the information published does not reveal the identity of individuals or discrete, identifiable groups of people
- = clarify that all reasonable steps will be taken to ensure none of the information published will be attributable

Confidentiality is important when developing the demographic questions (see [appendix 1](#)), particularly if there are only very small numbers of staff at certain grades or from certain backgrounds. It is better to combine groups to overcome this issue.

This guide does not offer exhaustive advice on data protection legislation. To avoid any difficulties, or if you have specific concerns about data protection issues, you should consult your own institution's data protection specialists or the Information Commissioner's Office (www.ico.gov.uk). However, here are some issues to bear in mind.

- = Addresses and email addresses for staff are classified as personal data.
- = If staff have opted out of general emails, you may find that they cannot receive an email about the survey; one that comes from the vice-chancellor or another senior leader should overcome this.
- = If you are using an external agency to assist with delivering the survey, as they are being employed by you to undertake work on their behalf, it may be permissible to pass on email addresses to the consultancy, but you need to consider this issue carefully. Often you will need to ensure you have documented a guarantee from the consultancy as to how the data will be handled, who will have access to the data, and how and when the data will be destroyed.

The issue of confidentiality plays a crucial role in achieving good response rates. The fewer departments that are involved in collecting/analysing data, the more reassured respondents will be about confidentiality. This is especially important when surveys deal with sensitive issues. This is where using an external agency can have great benefits.

Always be clear about how the information you are collecting will and will not be used, and whether respondents will receive personal feedback to their response. If, for example, some questions ask about experience of harassment, respondents may believe that they are making an official complaint about harassment that they have

Methodology

experienced by answering these questions. Ensure you provide information about appropriate sources of advice and support where relevant, as certain questions may trigger a need for individual support.

It is inevitable that some staff/students will be suspicious about the motives for carrying out an equality survey. Maintaining clear assurances about confidentiality throughout the project should help to alleviate this anxiety.

Maximising response rates

Maximising the response rate for your survey is dependent upon effective communication. Subject to the resources you have available, here are some hints and tips on how to improve your chances of getting good response rates.

Design

- = Keep the survey as simple as possible.
- = Use help tips throughout if necessary.
- = Use routing for more complex questions.
- = Do not make the survey so long that people lose interest and give up half-way through.
- = Tell respondents from the start whether or not they can save their responses and return to complete the form later.
- = Put the equality monitoring questions at the end.
- = Make sure the project is as inclusive as possible.

Engage the audience

- = Publicity on your website, staff intranet, newsletters, student virtual learning environment.
- = Use display screens located around your institution to tell people about the survey.
- = Put up posters.
- = Circulate flyers.
- = Target messages at specific groups (eg student societies or staff networks).

Timing

- = You may wish to avoid times when students or staff members are receiving other surveys (eg course feedback surveys or the national student survey). Some universities may have policies for avoiding surveys at particular times of year.
- = Consider whether the people you are targeting will be available, taking into account holiday periods, bank holidays, religious festivals, etc.

Covering letter

- = Ensure the letter comes from a senior leader, ideally someone at vice-chancellor or senior officer/pro vice-chancellor level.
- = Consider a joint letter with other key stakeholders (eg the students' union president or trade union branch officials).

Maximising response rates

- = You may wish to arrange for template letters to be sent to local managers (eg heads of department and heads of service) so that they can sign these and send them out to their teams.

While the survey is live

- = Keep the profile of the survey high – do not just rely on the initial communications process.
- = Consider highlighting the importance of responding to the survey at relevant staff networks and meetings.
- = Use alerts and rolling banners on your intranet during the fieldwork period to prompt staff and students to respond.
- = Allow enough time for completion, but not so long that respondents defer completion because it lacks urgency.
- = Respond promptly to enquiries about the survey, especially technical issues.

Issuing reminders

Sending out reminders to complete the survey can have both advantages and disadvantages. If a blanket reminder is issued to all potential respondents, this can be helpful in generating further responses. However, some people may object to the cost and resources involved in issuing reminders (especially if they are sent out in printed form), or to feeling pestered.

To send out targeted reminders, you need to have used tracking codes on the initial survey to know who has and has not responded. Again, this has its drawbacks – respondents will often be quick to spot any unique number that might link their email address (or physical address) with their response. If you are using a tracking number or ID, it becomes particularly important to reinforce confidentiality issues. Even if you do offer reassurances about confidentiality, you may still need to be prepared to respond to negative feedback about this issue.

As a compromise, it may be appropriate for you to run regular interim reports on the response rate across your institution, so that you can target communications activities (eg posters, reminders for managers to tell their staff about the survey) in those specific areas with low response rates before the response deadline. This approach avoids the pitfalls associated with blanket reminders, and also avoids giving the impression that individual responses will be tracked or attributed.

Offering incentives

Sometimes it is helpful to offer an incentive to encourage people to complete the survey. For example, giving vouchers or tokens to all respondents, particularly students, can be a useful way to maximise the response rate. A prize draw that respondents can enter may be a useful way to ensure a good response. With a prize draw, you must ensure the prizes are delivered, and it is often useful to publicise the winners (with their permission) at the end. Alternatively, offering a small donation to charity for each return can be a useful incentive.

If you are considering using incentives, you should consider whether or not this might trivialise the survey or skew the responses (ask yourself whether people might answer the survey just to receive the incentive, which could mean that you receive responses that are not genuine). When using any incentives, make sure you keep the process as clear and as transparent as possible. You may also need to consider any tax implications arising out of the use of incentives.

Data analysis

Quantitative data

Start to consider how you will approach an analysis of the data during the survey period.

- = You will need a basic set of tables for all respondents.
- = Your demographic questions will be your initial template for analysis.
- = Depending on the number of demographic questions, there will probably be a lot of data to assimilate.
- = If working with an external provider who is processing the surveys on your behalf, agree the basic cross-tabulations during the fieldwork period.

Review the overall information to see if there are any particular groups where response numbers are on the low side – you may find that it will be necessary to combine groups when detailing results in a report to ensure confidentiality.

Example

Where the number of staff from minority groups is particularly small, additional care must be taken citing statistical data to avoid inadvertently exposing any one person or known group. If there are only three people from a particular background in a department, it would not be acceptable to cite in your report:

'100% of Chinese respondents from the library agreed they felt they were discriminated against.'

It is better to report only on sample cells of more than 25 respondents in reports/documents to be circulated.

The table extract opposite provides an example of the sort of cross-tabulation you might wish to develop from the data collected. The table sets out the results to a question that sat within a section of the survey on overall culture.

In this example, the demographic questions relate to caring responsibilities and sexual orientation. These are represented in the columns across the table.

Table 1

Q1.1 The overall culture within ***** is a fair place to work.

Base: all

	Total	Caring responsibilities					Sexual orientation			
		Child less than 5	Child 5–16	Elderly relative/dependant	Disabled dependant	No caring responsibilities	Heterosexual	Gay/lesbian	Bisexual	Prefer not to say
Total	6071	572	1787	794	209	2928	5454	88	33	369
Strongly agree	(5) 400 7%	50 9%	118 7%	46 6%	12 6%	185 6%	367 7%	6 7%	1 3%	19 5%
Agree	(4) 3395 56%	321 56%	1028 58%	422 53%	107 51%	1644 56%	3090 57%	49 56%	15 45%	169 46%
Neither agree nor disagree	(3) 1244 20%	98 17%	364 20%	166 21%	52 25%	609 21%	1106 20%	22 25%	7 21%	84 23%
Disagree	(2) 824 14%	88 15%	222 12%	135 17%	28 13%	390 13%	720 13%	9 10%	9 27%	74 20%
Strongly disagree	(1) 166 3%	12 2%	44 2%	16 2%	9 4%	83 3%	135 2%	2 2%	1 3%	21 6%
No answer	42 1%	3 1%	11 1%	9 1%	1 *	17 1%	36 1%	- -	- -	2 1%
Total agree	3795 63%	371 65%	1146 64%	468 59%	119 57%	1829 62%	3457 63%	55 63%	16 48%	188 51%
Total disagree	990 16%	100 17%	266 15%	151 19%	37 18%	473 16%	855 16%	11 13%	10 30%	95 26%
Mean	3.50	3.54	3.54	3.44	3.41	3.50	3.52	3.55	3.18	3.25

Example of a data cross-tabulation

Data analysis

The top row details the actual number of respondents to the survey (in this case 6071), then the number of respondents within each demographic category. It can be seen that there were:

- = 572 respondents with children under the age of 5
- = 1787 respondents with children aged 5–16
- = 794 with elderly relatives/dependants
- = 209 with disabled dependants
- = 2928 with no caring responsibilities

The column headed **Total** provides the overall results to the question X is a fair place to work as follows:

- = 7% (400 of 6071) *strongly agreed* with the question
- = 56% (3395) *agreed* with the question
- = 20% (1244) were uncertain and *neither agreed nor disagreed*
- = 14% (824) *disagreed*
- = 3% (166) *strongly disagreed*
- = 1% (42) did not answer the question

The numbers under each demographic heading show how the different groups responded to the same question, therefore their responses can be compared with each other or with the overall figures for variations.

Below the 'No answer' row are the figures that indicate the combined figures for all those who *agreed* to any extent (in this case 3795, representing 63% of respondents) and all those who *disagreed* to any extent (990, 16%).

Again, this figure can be read off for each demographic group, and the data in this instance show that while overall only 16% of respondents generally disagreed with the question, this figure was higher for certain demographic groups – in particular those who identified themselves as bisexual.

While the very small sample for bisexual respondents is unlikely to be statistically significant, it is important to remember that your survey is about perceptions. Therefore results like this should be explored further by looking at other results and qualitative material for the same demographic group to see if this suggests any particular pattern or emerging theme.

In this example, the tabulation takes 'no answers' into account when calculating percentages. If you decide to exclude 'no answers' from your data analysis, you should make it clear that percentages are based on the number of people who *actually answered the question*. Do bear in mind this could create a false impression of the

results for a particular question if the number of 'no answers' is high. This is something to consider early on when compiling the data, and it is important to be consistent, or at the very least to explain how the results for a specific aspect of the survey have been calculated for a report.

At the bottom of the table is the mean score for each demographic group. Scoring is a further way of analysing and comparing results for different groups, and the mean figure is the average score achieved for a question by taking the sum of scores for each response and dividing by the number of people who actually responded.

Qualitative data

For a very detailed analysis of qualitative data, you need to be prepared to spend a lot of time carrying out the analysis work.

A text-analysis tool called a coding assistant can help to speed up this process by identifying recurring words and phrases in lengthy answers to open questions.

Using an external agency for the survey analysis of qualitative material like this can be very expensive. You may need to agree to analyse 50% of direct comments down to a set number of themes. Both an advantage and a disadvantage of online surveys is the wealth of comments, which cannot all reasonably be analysed. However, themes and patterns in responses can usually be identified, and can sometimes be used as baseline data for future benchmarking purposes.

Qualitative questions that enable the respondent to further explain their response to a particular quantitative question allow you to get underneath the data and gain an understanding of the situation for the respondent. Such detailed comments and views, when presented in a report, add significant texture and reflect genuine experience.

Some respondents may have their own agenda, which may be reflected in their responses. Other comments may single out individuals and groups of people as having been responsible for inappropriate or discriminatory behaviour. It is important not to use these comments in isolation for any detailed investigation following the research.

Example

While the use of illustrative quotes adds depth to a report, it is essential to consider whether or not the person is identifiable. For example, citing a powerful quotation from a senior female academic from a particular department with few women in senior academic roles would be unacceptable. In such circumstances, it might be appropriate to provide the quote and state that it is from a 'senior female academic' without mentioning the department.

The nature of the comment also needs to be considered – if it is from an underrepresented group, it could be a remark that is easily associated with a specific individual. If, for example, the tone of voice used within the remark is distinctive, it would almost certainly be better to avoid quoting the remark.

Writing the report

Every institution has its own house style and preference for reports, so this guide does not cover reports in depth. Consideration should be given to the following.

- = Go back to the aims and objectives of the research. Make sure your report sets these out and provides the relevant information identified in the survey.
- = Highlight the themes that have emerged from the research. These can be used as section/chapter headings.
- = Use graphs and tables to highlight information.
- = Think about using colour schemes to emphasise findings (eg traffic lights to illustrate the degree of concern expressed about an issue by participants, the extent to which feedback on a particular issue is positive or negative, or the degree to which progress has been achieved since the previous survey).
- = Reinforce specific statistics with qualitative quotes where available.
- = Include the survey form that was used at the end of the report as an appendix.

It will not be practical to include every cross-referenced data table you have produced. Where possible, include tables showing 'all responses' for the individual questions to give a real sense of the overall picture. Where you have highlighted key relationships between the answers to different questions (eg you might have spotted a trend that people who disclosed a disability were much more likely to answer a specific question in a particular way), then you should also consider providing this full analysis in a table. In essence, select those data tables that will have the greatest impact and offer the most telling story. Generally, these tables will work better in an appendix rather than in the body of the report.

Make sure you report your data consistently, including:

- = the number of decimal points to which the data are analysed
- = making it clear throughout the report whether statistics include 'no answers' values

Some reports will be a simple collection of data, others will contain extensive analysis and narrative using a combination of graphs, tables and other materials gathered during the survey period. Before the report is published, you may also wish to supplement the information you have with some further qualitative work, such as focus groups.

Using focus groups to supplement the survey

Focus groups are particularly suited to gathering qualitative evidence of an institution's culture.

Their value lies in creating a non-threatening environment in which staff/students feel able to express themselves freely. Discussions between participants may shed light on underlying feelings about the institution that may not be immediately apparent when considering the numbers on their own.

One of the main advantages in holding focus groups is to collect personal comments, which can be used later in reports and tailored training to overcome resistance or barriers to change.

Focus groups provide a useful way of cross-checking the conclusions drawn from the survey data. They also provide an opportunity to explore potential recommendations. Participants may want an opportunity to share further ideas for making improvements or changes within the institution. Holding focus groups can also raise awareness of equality and diversity issues and help to prepare the way for change.

Some of the issues to consider when arranging focus groups include the following.

- = At the focus groups, follow up on the themes and issues identified in the survey.
- = Decide whether to run cross-sectional or equality-specific groups (eg focus groups with BME staff members, students with childcare responsibilities, disabled students). Cross-sectional focus groups can help uncover some of the issues, but the voices of underrepresented groups might be lost in the crowd. However, focus groups that include only people from a particular group can sometimes inadvertently engender a sense of dissatisfaction that is not really there. Ideally, it is good to be able to offer both types of discussion session.
- = Explore the possibility of one-to-one discussions with people from specific backgrounds to tease out particular issues.

As with surveys, confidentiality is crucial in getting the best from a focus group. Where you feel that issues of confidentiality are particularly important, it may be beneficial to use someone from an external agency as a facilitator.

There are protocols around designing, arranging and running focus groups and these are activities requiring care and attention. Some of the questions to consider are:

- = How many people do you want to involve?
- = How long do you wish to spend, and will managers/tutors allow participants time out?

- = Do you have the administrative resources to manage invitations, issue directions, provide a venue, flipcharts, refreshments, etc?
- = How many facilitators will you need?
- = What is the best way to encourage participants to open up?
- = Will you need to break into sub-groups?
- = Can you provide reassurance on confidentiality?
- = Can you offer emotional support if, for example, discussions relate to difficult experiences?
- = Would incentives be useful to encourage or thank participants?

Sometimes facilitators record focus groups and produce verbatim transcripts. If you adopt this approach, you will need to be clear with participants that this is what you are doing. More frequently, facilitators write up notes of key points shortly after the conclusion of the focus group. This is sometimes supported by having an official note-taker at the meeting. If you are running more than one focus group, it is important to write up the notes from one group before you run the next – otherwise there is a risk that you will confuse the two.

You may also want to consider handing out a confidential monitoring form at the focus groups (or beforehand if you know who is attending), so that you can establish the demographic composition of these groups.

Potential approaches include using a focus group to provide:

- = illustrative anecdotes, case studies or stories that provide evidence for an underlying theme (carefully anonymised)
- = memorable or powerful quotes (carefully anonymised) about people's experiences, which will bring flavour to a report and illustrate survey results
- = analysis of how different focus groups (eg all-female versus all-male) differed in their feedback and experiences
- = analysis of particular focus group exercises (eg asking participants to select key words to describe the culture of their university)

External agencies with experience of running and analysing focus groups in other institutions may add value.

Conclusion

Undertaking an equality survey is a journey of discovery. A key driver for the development and delivery of equality surveys is the potential for gathering valuable data on the perceptions and experiences of staff and students, which can assist in meeting the statutory equality duties. Undertaking an equality survey positively demonstrates an institution's commitment to promoting equality and diversity, and encourages staff and student engagement.

By engaging staff and students, the real barriers and disadvantages within the institution can be identified. Feedback can also be gathered on the effectiveness of policies and practices and how they are understood by those they directly affect.

The survey data alone can enable institutions to establish areas that need to be addressed. By including supplementary survey questions regarding suggestions for improvements, mutually agreed recommendations that reflect the experiences of the staff and student population can be defined. This collaborative approach has far-reaching benefits for the whole institution, encouraging greater ownership and involvement of all staff and students through the implementation of actions to improve the working and learning environment and underpinning policies and practices.

This guidance discusses the key considerations when developing and delivering equality surveys. For surveys to be successful, they need to be tailored to your institution's needs, resources and population. Issues of accessibility and confidentiality are vital for avoiding additional barriers to participation. The process may be lengthy and challenging at times, but, when delivered effectively, equality surveys are a great way of ensuring your institution can take the right steps to remain – or move towards being – a truly inclusive environment that represents the very best in higher education in the 21st century.

Further resources

Examples of survey tools available for use in-house

- = KeyPoint (www.speedwell.co.uk)
- = Snap (www.snapsurveys.com)
- = SurveyMonkey (www.surveymonkey.com)
- = Cvent (www.cvent.com)
- = KeySurvey (www.keysurvey.co.uk)
- = Some academic institutions also offer their own online survey facilities or market these to other HEIs – for example, Bristol Online Surveys: www.survey.bris.ac.uk

Some of the companies delivering survey tools may also offer a service to manage a survey on your behalf.

Regulation and compliance

- = W3C Compliance: SitePoint article at <http://articles.sitepoint.com/article/w3c-accessibility-guidelines>
- = Data Protection: Information Commissioner's Office (08456 306060 or 01625 545745, helpline open 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday; www.ico.gov.uk)
- = MRS (Market Research Society): the world's largest association serving all those with professional equity in provision or use of market, social and opinion research, and in business intelligence, market analysis, customer insight and consultancy. The association provides a wealth of guidance and information, including codes of practice on conducting surveys and, in particular, conducting surveys with employees as well as information on data protection (www.mrs.org.uk)

Equality monitoring

- = Equality and Human Rights Commission (www.equalityhumanrights.com)
- = Stonewall (www.stonewall.org.uk)
- = Press for Change (www.pfc.org.uk)
- = Higher Education Information Database for Institutions (<https://heidi.hesa.ac.uk>)
- = Office for National Statistics (www.statistics.gov.uk/default.asp)

Appendix 1: Suggested monitoring questions

Monitoring – areas to cover

When designing a monitoring sheet to accompany a survey, give consideration to the following:

- = choose monitoring questions that are most appropriate for your research
- = make use of available guidance, for example that on ECU's website at www.ecu.ac.uk/inclusive-practice/monitoring-and-data-collection and in some of ECU's publications (eg publications relating to staff disclosure of equality data, see www.ecu.ac.uk/our-projects/staff-disclosure-of-equality-data)
- = an equality-focused survey should include monitoring questions under the following themes (examples of potential questions can be found below):
 - **gender**
 - **gender identity/trans status:** this should be a separate question and not considered as part of a question on gender or sexual orientation (detailed guidance on trans staff and students can be found at www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/trans-staff-and-students-in-he)
 - **age**
 - **ethnicity**
 - **disability**
 - **sexual orientation:** guidance can be found in Stonewall's workplace guide *Monitoring: how to monitor sexual orientation in the workplace* (www.stonewall.org.uk/workplace/1473.asp#monitoring)
 - **religion or belief**

Other demographic questions are generally useful, including questions on:

- = childcare/other caring responsibilities
- = nationality (or at least home/EU/international status for students and international/UK status for staff)
- = grade/role (for staff)
- = part-time/fixed-term contract status (for staff)
- = type of role (eg academic, non-academic)
- = year and level of study (for students)

Some practitioners recommend that all monitoring questions have a 'prefer not to answer' option, but this may have a detrimental effect on your data analysis. An alternative is to ensure that, for web-based surveys, these questions are not mandatory (in other words, they do not force an answer before respondents can

move on to the next question). However, this can also pose difficulties as, when it comes to analysis, you might not know whether someone has accidentally missed off the question or deliberately decided not to answer it. Respondents with paper surveys can decide not to answer questions as they feel appropriate.

Stonewall's *Sexual orientation employer handbook* (www.stonewall.org.uk/workplace/1473.asp#sexual_orientation_employer_handbook) includes a section on monitoring. It recommends including a 'prefer not to answer' option for monitoring questions on sexual orientation, and advises that no inference should be made about a person's sexual orientation because they have preferred not to disclose it.

Take into consideration the known profile of your staff/student population:

- = identifiers for specific ethnic groups that are known to be small in your institution might need to be combined
- = this can help to avoid non-responses relating to people's concern that they might be identified in the results (eg rather than splitting out 'mixed – white and black African', 'mixed – white and black Caribbean', 'mixed – white and Asian' and 'any other mixed background', you may wish to simply collapse these categories into one: 'mixed background')
- = this also applies to grades/roles within the institution – if you know you have only a small number at a specific grade, you may decide to group that grade with another

Remember that international staff/students at your institution may respond to your survey. It can be useful for you to be able to differentiate the data you receive from people who are UK-domiciled from data supplied by international students/staff. If you want to compare the survey's response rate from BME students with census data for the local or national UK population, for example, you might find you need to be able to analyse the data from home BME students and international BME students separately.

Additionally, some international staff and students may be unfamiliar with the concept of monitoring, and some may at first find the questions intrusive or even offensive. For this reason, it is wise to provide a succinct explanation of the reasons for gathering the data at the start of this section of the survey and in the overall communication process.

Example

Some monitoring questions can be followed up with further specific questions to test the extent to which people are working or studying in an inclusive environment. For example, it can be useful to follow a question on sexual orientation with questions such as:

If you have said that you are lesbian, gay or bisexual in the previous question, how out are you at work? Although we appreciate that the extent to which you are out at work might vary in different parts of the institution, please select the answers that you feel best reflect your experience (select all that apply):

- I am out to close colleagues
- I am out to most of my colleagues
- I am out to all colleagues
- I am out to my manager(s)
- I am in a student-facing or teaching role, but I am not out to students
- I am in a student-facing or teaching role and I am out to my students (those who I teach or work with)
- I am in a student-facing or teaching role and I am out to all students (including those who I do not teach or work with)

Or a question such as:

If you have said that you are lesbian, gay or bisexual, do you feel that your institution is a comfortable and inclusive environment in which to come out to your colleagues?

Similarly, a question on disability can be more useful if it is followed by questions about the nature of the disability (using broad categories rather than open-ended questions) – but bear in mind that, for some surveys, this might risk inadvertently identifying a respondent. In such cases, you may wish to consider whether or not this level of detail is really necessary for the exercise you are undertaking.

It might also be useful to explore whether or not respondents share information about their disability with colleagues, as this too can test the inclusiveness of the culture in their department and/or the institution overall. You should bear in mind that people may have a range of different reasons for deciding not to disclose information such as their disability status, which may not always be related to how inclusive their working environment is.

Demographic monitoring

A sample demographic monitoring sheet is provided below. This has been produced with a staff survey in mind, but in most cases the questions can be adapted for use in a student survey. All these questions would need to be adapted to suit the needs of your institution and to deliver the specific outcomes you are seeking.

Sample demographic monitoring sheet for a staff survey

To help us interpret the data more fully, please complete the following background questions about you. Please be assured that your responses will be kept confidential at all times and you cannot be identified or linked to your responses in any way. Where verbatim quotes are used in any subsequent reports or documents, they will not be attributed in a way that would breach confidentiality or clearly identify a respondent.

What is your main work location?

- X campus Y campus Z campus

What is your primary role?

- Academic – professor or reader
 Academic – senior lecturer or lecturer
 Academic – researcher
 Professional – administration
 Professional – technical
 Professional – catering/estates/craft

What grade are you?

- Professional 1–5
 Professional 6–10
 Academic 6–8
 Academic 9–10

On what sort of contract are you employed?

- Permanent
 Fixed term
 Fee-paid/hourly-paid

Appendix 1: Suggested monitoring questions

In which faculty/department do you work? (please select one only)

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Arts & humanities | <input type="checkbox"/> Information services |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Science & technology | <input type="checkbox"/> International unit |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Business school | <input type="checkbox"/> Marketing & development [etc] |

Do you have a responsibility for managing other people?

- | | |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|

What is your gender?

- | | |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Male | <input type="checkbox"/> Female |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------------|

Is your gender identity the same as the gender you were assigned at birth?

- | | |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|

Do you live and work full-time in the same gender role that was assigned to you at birth?

- | | |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|

Do you feel able to discuss your gender identity with colleagues at work?

- | | |
|--|-----------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| <input type="checkbox"/> With some people, but not all | |

What is your age?*

- | | |
|--|--------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 25 or below | <input type="checkbox"/> 26–35 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 36–45 | <input type="checkbox"/> 46–55 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 56–65 | <input type="checkbox"/> 66+ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to say | |

*Alternatively, some surveys just ask for the respondent's age (in years). This can provide more sophisticated data, which you can group into age ranges later; however, this approach may also be more complex to administer.

What is your working pattern?

- Full-time Part-time
- Other (might include term-time only, compressed hours, job-share, or any other flexible working arrangement)

Do you have caring responsibilities outside work?

- Yes – I have childcare responsibilities
- Yes – I have carer responsibilities
- Yes – I have both childcare and carer responsibilities
- No

How long have you worked at the your institution?

- Less than one year
- More than one year, fewer than five years
- More than five years, fewer than ten years
- More than ten years

Do you consider yourself to have a disability?[†]

- Yes No Prefer not to say

How would you describe your sexual orientation?

- Bisexual Gay man
- Gay woman/lesbian Heterosexual
- Other Prefer not to say

If you have said, in answer to the previous question, that you are lesbian, gay or bisexual, do you feel that your institution is a comfortable and inclusive environment in which to come out to your colleagues?

- Yes No
- With some people, or in some departments, but not all

[†]Often it is useful to include a definition of disability to ensure people understand the breadth of the term. This can be based on the definition in the Equality Act 2010: a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term effect on day-to-day activities.

Appendix 1: Suggested monitoring questions

Are you UK-domiciled? In other words, is your main home in the UK?

- Yes No

How would you describe your ethnicity? Please select the one box that you feel most closely represents your ethnicity

- White – British
- White – Irish
- White – Scottish
- Irish Traveller
- Other white background
- Black British – black African
- Black British – black Caribbean
- Other black background
- Asian British – Indian
- Asian British – Pakistani
- Asian British – Bangladeshi
- Other Asian background
- Mixed – white and black African
- Mixed – white and black Caribbean
- Mixed – white and Asian
- Any other mixed background
- Chinese
- Other ethnic background
- Prefer not to say

Appendix 2: Suggested themes and questions

Depending on the breadth of the questionnaire, variables should be grouped into themes to provide a good flow through the survey. Use easy-to-answer questions at the start, progressing to more challenging ones towards the end, to give respondents time to gain confidence and develop an appreciation of the topics under consideration.

Themes and sections within a staff survey might include:

- = general observations about the institution and its culture
- = leadership and management style
- = dignity and respect
- = promotion and development
- = work–life balance
- = understanding equality

While this appendix focuses on questions relating to the staff experience, many of these questions can be adapted to suit a student survey. For example, similar questions on dignity and respect and work–life balance would be just as relevant to students. Questions on leadership and management style and promotion and development could be adapted to focus on teaching style and the learning environment, and induction into university life and progression from year to year.

General observations about the institution and its culture

- = From my experience, I believe that the institution is committed to ensuring all staff, students and visitors are treated with equal dignity and respect (*strongly agree, etc*)
 - Then follow this up with qualitative open questions such as:
Please add some comments explaining why you have responded as you have (*open-text response*)
 - = I would recommend the institution to others as a place to work/study (*strongly agree, etc*)
 - = In my experience, the institution is an inclusive place to work/study
- or
- = In my experience, people from different backgrounds are readily accepted and made to feel welcome at the institution (*strongly agree, etc*)
 - Then follow this up with qualitative open questions such as:
Please add comments about any difficulties that might be faced by particular groups of staff/students at the institution (*open-text response*)

Appendix 2: Suggested themes and questions

- = I feel people at all levels within the institution are respected, regardless of their role (*strongly agree, etc*)
- = Please rank your institution as an employer, where 1 = excellent and 7 = poor
- = Please rank how you feel you have been treated as an employee at the institution, where 1 = fairly treated and 7 = unfairly treated

Leadership and management style

- = Members of senior management in this institution are open and accessible (*strongly agree, etc*)
- = How important is it for staff with management responsibilities to have effective people skills? Please rank, where 1 = very important and 7 = not at all important.
- = In my experience, managers at the institution have effective people skills (*strongly agree, etc*)
- = In my experience, managers in my department are good at adapting their management style to get the most out of individuals in their team (*strongly agree, etc*)
- = To what extent do you believe managers in your department take equality and diversity issues seriously (*scale response 1–7, or very seriously/seriously, etc*)

Dignity and respect

- = Do you feel you have been on the receiving end of any bullying or harassment in the past 12 months (*yes/no/unsure*)
It is often important to provide definitions of terms such as 'bullying' and 'harassment' to ensure people are answering the questions consistently – definitions should be consistent with those used in your institution's bullying and harassment, or dignity and respect, policy.
- = If you have been on the receiving end of any bullying or harassment in the past 12 months, have you made a formal complaint? (*yes/no*)
 - *Then follow up with:*
If no, please describe briefly why (*open-text qualitative question*)
- = If I felt I had been bullied or harassed, I would know where to go for assistance (*strongly agree, etc*)
- = I believe I could make a formal complaint without fear of ridicule or reprisal (*yes/no/unsure*)
 - *Then follow this up with:*
If you answered 'no' or 'unsure', why not? (*provide a list of possible options as to why the respondent might have suggested this*)

Promotion and development

- = On the whole, I believe our promotion processes are fair and based on merit (*strongly agree, etc, but include 'don't know'*)
- = Do you feel you have experienced any unfair barriers to your career progression within the institution? (*open-text response*)

Work-life balance

- = I feel my manager supports flexible working (such as part-time working, job-share arrangements, home-working, etc) (*strongly agree, etc*)
- = I feel able to strike the right balance between my work responsibilities and my home life (*strongly agree, etc*)
- = There is a long working hours culture at the institution. Please rank on a scale 1–7 to indicate the extent to which you believe this statement to be true.

Understanding equality

- = There is real commitment at the institution to continuing to improve performance on equality and diversity (*strongly agree, etc*)
- = How important do you feel the following actions or activities would be in terms of delivering progress on equality and diversity? (*provide respondents with a list of possible actions, eg 'introduce new mentoring schemes for particular groups of people', 'provide more training for staff on equality issues', and ask respondents to indicate whether they consider these actions to be very important/quite important/not important; alternatively, rank suggested activities in order of effectiveness; it is also useful to allow respondents to suggest their own ideas*)
- = Please add any suggestions you may have about accommodation, catering, or social activities that you believe would lead to a more inclusive environment (*open-text response*)
- = Please add any further comments – for instance, about further steps that the institution could take to promote equality of opportunity, treat everyone with dignity and increasingly reflect society's diversity? (*open-text response*)

Although every effort is made to ensure the information contained within this publication is accurate and up to date, ECU cannot be held responsible for any errors or omissions. The information is not a substitute for legal advice, and should you require more specific advice you should consult an appropriately qualified professional adviser.



Equality Challenge Unit

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Equality Challenge Unit works to further and support equality and diversity for staff and students in higher education across all four nations of the UK.

ECU works closely with colleges of higher education and universities to seek to ensure that staff and students are not unfairly excluded, marginalised or disadvantaged because of age, disability, gender identity, marital or civil partnership status, pregnancy or maternity status, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, or through any combination of these characteristics or other unfair treatment.



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