Reflective questions

The following reflective questions should be read in conjunction with the framework for access, retention, attainment and progression. They can be used alongside other resources such as the Outreach to widen participation toolkits, and our equality and diversity tools.

The questions offer a starting point to develop or enhance strategy within your institution or department around these areas of focus. Student access, retention, attainment and progression are everybody’s responsibility. To be effective in each of these areas, it is important that staff at the institutional and departmental level develop a shared understanding of what these involve and adopt consistent approaches to practice.

The Higher Education Academy believes that all students such should have the opportunity and support to succeed in higher education (HE). Access, retention, attainment and progression in and beyond HE are all components of student success. Students’ sense of belonging, partnership and inclusion are all essential for achieving these and should be fostered within the programme as well as within the wider institution.

Use the following questions as a starting point for individual reflection and for discussions in programme, departmental or institutional teams.

Adapt and revise the questions to meet your own needs and requirements.
It is important that individuals and institutions think through the details of what is required and what conditions need to be in place to build and sustain an accessible and inclusive curriculum, department and institution.

Even seemingly small changes in practice will require a lot of coordination. Creating and implementing flexible assessments involves, for example:

- Collaborating across different teaching units;
- Building the case with staff;
- Discussing and reviewing with students;
- Trialling and collecting evidence of impact;
- Supporting and training staff to deliver it.

How can you engage students to give a sense of belonging that enhances student access, retention, attainment and progression?

A key part of engaging students is understanding...

- what is inclusion?
- why do we need it? and
- how can inclusivity be created and sustained?

Inclusion is essential to student success because students cannot be engaged without full and easy access to the curriculum and the learning environment.

The Equality Act 2010 and Public Sector Equality Duties has given added impetus to HEI inclusionary action but institutions and staff still find themselves having to react to unanticipated situations.
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<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
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<tr>
<td>What does inclusion mean to you as an individual?</td>
<td>(As an academic, a student or senior manager?)</td>
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<td>Do you and your colleagues have a shared understanding of what inclusion means or what is involved in achieving inclusion?</td>
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<td>Do you know if some students (or staff) in your institution feel that they belong more than others?</td>
<td>How do you know?</td>
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<td>How often do you critically review your curriculum to promote inclusion, engagement and belonging?</td>
<td>How are your students involved in this process?</td>
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<td>What support do you offer targeted groups of students or an individual student that could be mainstreamed within the curriculum?</td>
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<td>How do you demonstrate your commitment to, and responsibility for, equality and diversity?</td>
<td>Where and how often do you discuss or appraise your actions or practice within your programme teams or at a department or institution level?</td>
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Do you as a programme team, department or institution understand the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 and Public Sector Equality Duties?

To what extent do you feel confident in dealing with exclusion, prejudice or bias within the curriculum?

How are you enhancing your knowledge and understanding of equality and diversity issues?

How often do you work with or discuss inclusion, engagement and belonging with staff responsible for professional support services (for example the careers and employability service), and staff in other departments or programmes to your own?

What do you expect of your students in your programme, department or institution? What do students expect of themselves?

Do different groups of students have different expectations?

What does student success mean to you as an individual, within your programme team and more widely in your institution?

Is this view co-developed and/or shared with students?

Do you plan for sustainability of inclusion, engagement and belonging?

Who will do this job or offer this support if you are not there?

What does excellent teaching mean to you as an individual, to your students, to your institution?

How do you measure the impact of your practices to enhance access, retention, attainment and progression?

How do you learn from practice that was not successful?
One issue that many institutions face is that data is often held in discrete bundles, with different officers, managers, and units responsible for different aspects of it.

Ensuring that you consider fully the whole student lifecycle demands a different approach, one that can narrate the story of particular student groups, from the moment they enter the institution until they progress to further study, training, employment or self-employment.

Research and the collection of student success data at the national and local institutional level is important.

However, the collection and understanding of data has limited meaning unless you also create opportunities to share and discuss it and to plan strategies that address what is found.

Thinking about how you share and discuss your data is a core part of enhancing learning.

With this in mind, you may find it useful to ask and reflect individually or collectively upon the following questions.
## Reflecting on data

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<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Details</th>
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<tr>
<td>Who is in charge of data in your institution?</td>
<td>Is there a sense of ownership of data at the departmental or programme level?</td>
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<td>How easily can you access your own course or programme data?</td>
<td>Do you all understand your data in the same way?</td>
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<td>Is there a consistent approach to how you explain your data to others internally and externally?</td>
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<td>What data do you routinely use to enhance practice as an individual, programme, department or institution?</td>
<td>Is there further data you could begin to collect?</td>
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<td>How does your data vary across your disciplines?</td>
<td>Why do some disciplines in your institution have high attrition, progression or attainment rates and others do not?</td>
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<td>Can you learn anything from this?</td>
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<td>Do you compare your data with other institutions or departments?</td>
<td>How do you do this?</td>
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<td>Do you compare yourselves over time to establish any trends?</td>
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<td>Do you know what your institution’s or department’s attrition rate is?</td>
<td>Do you know if different groups of students withdraw for different reasons?</td>
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Do you reflect, with others, on the impact of student attrition?
(From the perspective of the student who has left, of the students who remain, of academics, and of the institution?)

Do your students have access to data on retention or attrition rates?
*How do you partner with them in analysing and understanding the data and addressing the implications?*

Do you know whether your institution’s policy on retention and attainment includes the management of attainment gaps?
*Do you publish your data on attainment gaps between different groups of students?*
*Do you know if other departments or institutions publish theirs?*

Do you know whether there is an attainment gap across different groups of students?
*(Within your programme, your department or your institution?)*

Do you, within programme teams, a department or within the wider institution, investigate, understand and discuss the attainment gaps that exist between different student groups?

Does your department’s or institution’s progression rate to employment differ for different student groups?

How satisfied are students at your institution, in your department and on your programme?
*Does student satisfaction vary across different groups of students? If so, why?*