

CULTURE, TOURISM, EUROPE AND EXTERNAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

CENSUS (AMENDMENT) (SCOTLAND) BILL

SUBMISSION FROM ADVANCE HE

Advance HE welcomes this opportunity to comment on the Census (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill. We recognise the importance of including sexual orientation and gender identity within the Scottish Census.

Colleges and universities routinely ask questions of sexual orientation and gender identity on both staff and student equality monitoring forms, many using Advance HE guidance on definitions and form of question, see <https://www.ecu.ac.uk/guidance-resources/using-data-and-evidence/monitoring-questions/>

For college students, sexual orientation is a mandatory field, with a “prefer not to say” option while gender identity is currently voluntary, but also with a “prefer not to say” option. For college staff both questions are mandatory with “prefer not to say” options. For university staff and students, both questions are voluntary but with “prefer not to say” options.

Response rates for these questions can return high “prefer not to say”, but both staff and students are familiar with the questions being asked.

Our [statistics reports of staff and student data](#) highlight that the colleges and university sectors currently do not have access to a national demographic for gender identity and sexual orientation due to the voluntary nature of the question providing low returns, but also partly due to many institutions only recently beginning to ask these questions.

There is a need to have a national and regional data set for these protected characteristics for benchmarking. In the sector, benchmarking across institutions can be difficult due to the voluntary nature of some of the questions. Having a national data set would provide a means of comparison for institutions keen to be able to demonstrate a need for positive action for these particular groups.

Our [research into college HR systems](#) shows that where colleges are asking equality monitoring questions, gender identity in particular, there is no consistently used question which limits the possibility of benchmarking. The proposed changes to the Census provide an opportunity to create questions that encompasses the broadest range of definition to gather best response possible, but also to define the questions that can be used by other sectors.

We support the inclusion of questions relating to sexual orientation and gender identity in the Scottish Census.

About Advance HE

Advance HE formed in March 2018, following the merger of the Equality Challenge Unit, the Higher Education Academy and the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education.

Our purpose is to advance the professional practice of higher education across the UK, and with colleges in Scotland to improve outcomes for the benefit of students, staff and society.

Advance HE is funded to work with colleges and HEIs on equality and diversity in Scotland by the Scottish Funding Council.

We aim to create an inclusive culture that champions the continuous development of teaching, leadership and research. We use an evidence-based approach to identify what works, and develop practice-based solutions. We work in partnership with colleges and HEIs to create positive change.

Part of our work involves us working with the Scottish Funding Council and the Higher Education Statistics Agency on equality monitoring questions and we produce guidance for colleges and universities on best practice in equality monitoring. We produce statistical reports on staff and students in universities across the UK using HESA data and students in colleges in Scotland using data from the Scottish Funding Council. See [Equality in higher education: statistical reports 2018](#) and [Equality in colleges in Scotland: statistical report 2018](#).