

For discussion at the HEA Conference on Student Progression and Continuation

Consultation Version

Good Practice Guidelines on Student Progression and
Continuation: Proposed Structure and Content

Policy Forum on Student Progression in Higher Education

Overview

The Policy Forum was tasked with establishing the need for such Guidelines as part of its remit and, following discussion, it was agreed that such Guidelines would be of benefit. The agreed structure presented below relates to awards at National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) Levels 6–8, and full-time in-person provision.

A desktop review of international policies and practices re the availability of standalone national-level guidelines/policies and practices was undertaken, and the report informed the discussion at Policy Forum meetings.

Following consideration of the diversity of practices internationally, and discussion of the Irish context, members of the Policy Forum agreed that Guidelines presenting high-level good practice principles on student progression would act as a useful reference point for institutions planning a further exploration of student progression and continuation and facilitate knowledge exchange and generation, and dissemination of practices. It is envisaged that the Guidelines may complement and potentially form part of a suite of resources offered to institutions on Student Success. It is expected that the Guidelines will address the following areas:

1. institution and course literature — presenting information in an accessible format for second-level/further education students to facilitate their understanding of course content, academic demands, time commitment, and career/progression pathways and opportunities, and ultimately their decision-making on course choice and institution choice (examples of good practice include <https://www.mtu.ie/courses/>),
2. institution course portfolio, and entry pathways and requirements — consideration of common-entry pathways with the view to specialisation at a later date e.g. year 2,
3. institution facilities and policies to cater for the diversity of the student population — inclusive design of teaching and break-out spaces to facilitate collaborative learning, and of social spaces to facilitate social engagement;

- consideration of the timing of social events, and of timetabling arrangements (the [ALTITUDE National Charter for Universal Design](#) could be used by institutions as a resource to identify good practice and areas for further development),
4. pre-arrival (following acceptance of an offer/registration) and ongoing engagement with students to facilitate academic and social preparedness and to highlight support services where these may be needed (e.g. [MTU Ready](#), [TUS Connect & Engage Programme](#), [TUS Learner Success Toolkit](#)),
 5. evidence-informed policies and practices on early identification and intervention enabling institutions to identify students at greater risk of non-progression/non-continuation at an early stage (e.g. [UCD LEAP](#), [TU Dublin Computing Learning Centre and Faculty Retention Strategy](#)),
 6. institution-wide ethical and responsible data management and reporting across the student lifecycle to inform early identification and ongoing intervention measures (e.g. [DCU Data Analytics](#), [ATU REAL Analytics](#)),
 7. administrative, academic, and social supports to support student progression and continuation (reference to existing literature and guidelines such as [HEA Teaching & Learning](#), [HEA Student Success](#), [TCD Tutorial Service](#), [TCD S2S](#), [NCAD First Year Experience](#), [MIC Workload Balance App](#), [UL Student Engagement and Support Officers](#)),
 8. quality standards on programme and curriculum design and review enabling timely interventions to address progression and continuation rates (reference to existing literature and guidelines such as [HEA Teaching & Learning](#), [QQI Standards](#), [ENQA European Standards and Guidelines](#)),
 9. flexible pathways offering breadth of choice to promote progression and continuation and enabling students to change course/subjects or institution where required,
 10. resources/support services (including academic supports) for students considering transfer to another course/institution, course continuation,

repeating exams/the year or taking a leave of absence (e.g. [UCC Response to Early Withdrawal](#), [MTU Academic Learning Centre \(ALC\) Summer Programme](#)).

There was a consensus that such Guidelines will include definitions of key terms, reference good practice where available, and provide guidance on common metrics for the measurement of non-progression, including post withdrawal and related outcome tracking, to support student success more consistently across the Sector.

This document presents the key areas identified by the Policy Forum for inclusion in the Guidelines as good practice principles. As the Policy Forum was not tasked with developing the Guidelines, some examples of good practice principles are provided to facilitate an understanding of the proposed approach, and these are by no means definitive or exhaustive.

Good Practice Principles – Areas for Inclusion

The good practice principles will address the thematic areas below. Each thematic area will present a definition of terms where this exists, be considered at national/sectoral-level, and institutional-level where appropriate, and will reference good practice where available (exemplars on the [HEA Teaching & Learning National Resource Hub](#)).

1. Institution and course literature
2. Course portfolios, entry pathways and requirements
3. Institutional facilities and policies
4. Pre-arrival (following acceptance of an offer/registration) and ongoing engagement with students and orientation
5. Early identification and intervention
6. Ethical data management and reporting
7. Administrative, academic and social supports
8. Quality standards on programme and curriculum design and review
9. Flexible pathways
10. Resources/support services to facilitate transfer options/transitions

Examples of Good Practice Principles

The Policy Forum has provided examples of good practice principles for pre-entry (acceptance of a place/registration) contact, early identification and intervention, and resources/support services to facilitate transfer/transitions. The examples are by no means definitive or exhaustive and reference exemplars where these have been published or will be available in due course.

What is good practice

Institutions that offer:

- i. Pre-arrival and ongoing engagement
 - o Proactive engagement with students pre-arrival (following acceptance of an offer/registration) and on an ongoing basis to establish and support academic preparedness and to highlight support services/resources (including academic supports) where these may be of benefit.
 - o Inclusive and accessible up to date information and resources on the institution, its values and structure (faculties/colleges, schools, departments, and disciplines), its learning environment and support services, and the learning opportunities available to students.
 - o Orientation programmes and post orientation supports/resources that present the suite of resources and support services (academic and personal/social) available to students, foster a sense of belonging, and normalise asking for help.
 - o Specific supports and resources for students who may lack the social capital to successfully navigate institutional administrative, academic, and social services.
- ii. Early identification and intervention
 - o Ethical engagement with students early in the academic year to identify students who may be less likely to progress/continue with their studies using predictive analytics and to reach out to these students with supports tailored to their needs.

- Access to reports/dashboards on student progression at faculty, school, and department levels to enable academic and teaching and professional staff to identify and support students at greater risk of non-progression, and specific programmes/subjects/modules where progression and continuation rates require consideration.
 - Consideration of student progression and continuation data (at the course/subject level) across the student lifecycle by a central authority (at institutional level) each academic year to identify students who may be less likely to progress/continue, and to inform early identification and intervention practices at the discipline, course, and subject levels.
- iii. Resources/support services to facilitate transfer/transitions
- Proactive engagement with students following assessment to offer academic supports where needed to increase the likelihood of progression/continuation.
 - Proactive engagement with students considering their options regarding their course and academic preparedness to communicate resources and supports, support their transfer/transition where appropriate, and to identify reasons for non-progression/continuation, and withdrawal.

Conclusion

The Policy Forum recommended the development of guidelines on student progression in the form of good practices principles to facilitate knowledge generation, and the sharing and dissemination of good practices across the Sector. These guidelines are intended to act as a resource, rather than being prescriptive, and may form part of, and complement, a suite of resources on student success.

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The Higher Education Authority