

Cylchlythyr | Circular

Consultation on an additional governing body assurance statement relating to quality

Date: 22 November 2019
Reference: W19/41HE
To: Regulated institutions in Wales
Other interested parties
Response by: 16 January 2020
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This circular provides a consultation on the inclusion of an additional statement relating to quality in the [annual return](#) of governing body assurance statements.

If you require this document in an alternative accessible format, please email info@hefcw.ac.uk.



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Introduction

1. This circular provides a consultation on the inclusion of an additional statement relating to quality in the [annual return](#) of governing body assurance statements.

Background

2. HEFCW consultation [W16/14HE: Quality Assessment Framework for Wales](#) reported that the key features of the Framework included placing greater emphasis on the role of governing bodies for providing assurances about quality and standards matters. Responses to the consultation, summarised in [circular W16/29HE](#), agreed with this approach.
3. [Circular W16/38HE](#) consulted on governing body assurance statements related to quality. The outcomes of this consultation were provided in [circular W17/07HE](#). This confirmed the statements to be as follows:
 - 1) The governing body has received a report taking account of the external quality assurance review, and an action plan has been put in place and implemented as appropriate, in partnership with the student body.
 - 2) The methodologies used as a basis to improve the student academic experience and student outcomes are, to the best of our knowledge, robust and appropriate.
 - 3) a) *For providers with degree awarding powers*: The standards of awards for which we are responsible have been appropriately set and maintained.
b) *For providers without degree awarding powers*: The standards of awards for which we are responsible have been appropriately maintained.
 - 4) The governing body has considered a report on the annual dialogue between the institution and the Students' Union or equivalent, scrutinised student survey outcomes and confirmed that action plans had been put in place and implemented, in partnership with the student body.
 - 5) The governing body has received a copy of the relationship agreement between the institution and the Students' Union or equivalent, and a copy of the student charter, both of which have been reviewed within the past year.
4. The most recent version of the [Quality Assessment Framework for Wales](#) was published in July 2019.

Degree standards and academic integrity

5. Degree standards and academic integrity are issues which attract much press interest. HEFCW's [2019-20 remit letter](#) from Welsh Government included the following:

I recognise that the classification and awarding of degrees is a matter for individual institutions but grade inflation cannot be in the best interests of students if it is not a fair reflection of their achievements. Grade inflation is a UK-wide issue and is best taken forward by a coordinated approach across the four nations. I would expect the Council to look into this further and consider how best to work with the other UK countries.

The issue of contract cheating and the use of essay mills is being explored at a four nations level by the QAA. As this work develops, it may be necessary for me to ask the Council to look at this matter further. In the meantime, the Council should ensure that quality assurance activities take account of these matters to ensure the academic integrity of higher education provision in Wales.

6. In addition, degree standards and comparability are a pillar within the Quality Assessment Framework for Wales. For these reasons, and in line with advice from our Quality Assessment Committee, we propose to include an additional assurance statement for the governing body for the submission to cover **2019/20**.

Q1 Do you agree that it is appropriate to include an additional assurance statement relating to quality for the governing body, to cover degree standards and academic integrity?

Please provide comments.

7. The statement we propose is as follows:
The governing body has effective oversight of degree standards and academic integrity.

Q2 Is the wording of the statement appropriate? If not, how could the wording be amended better to reflect the governing body oversight of these areas?

Please provide comments.

8. In proposing this addition to the governing body assurance statements regarding quality, we ask the following questions:
- i) What **effect** (if any), positive or adverse, will the policy have on:
 - a. **opportunities** for persons to use the Welsh language; and
 - b. **treating** the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language.
 - ii) How could the policy be [formulated / changed] so that the policy decision would have **positive effects**, or increased positive effects, on:

- a. **opportunities** for persons to use the Welsh language; and
 - b. **treating** the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language.
- iii) How could the policy be [formulated / changed] so that the policy decision would **not have adverse effects**, or would have decreased adverse effects, on:
- a. **opportunities** for persons to use the Welsh language; and
 - b. **treating** the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language.

Further information / responses to

9. For further information, contact Nicola Hunt (029 2085 9735; nicola.hunt@hefcw.ac.uk).

Assessing the impact of our policies

10. We have carried out an impact assessment screening to help safeguard against discrimination and promote equality. We also considered the impact of policies on the Welsh language, and Welsh language provision within the HE sector in Wales and potential impacts towards the goals set out in the Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 including our Well-Being Objectives. Contact equality@hefcw.ac.uk for more information about impact assessments.