

Cylchlythyr | Circular

Outcomes of consultation on Unconditional Offers in 2020/21 and 2021/22

Date: 13 September 2021
Reference: W21/29HE
To: Heads of higher education institutions in Wales
Principals of directly-funded further education colleges in Wales
Response by: No response required
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This circular provides the outcomes of our consultation on unconditional offer making at institutions, via circular W21/10HE, which asked for information from institutions regarding the basis on which they make unconditional offers, and on how the progress and continuation of students is monitored.

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Introduction

1. This circular provides the outcomes of our consultation on unconditional offer making at institutions, via circular W21/10HE, which asked for information from institutions regarding the basis on which they make unconditional offers, and on how the progress and continuation of students is monitored.

Background

2. In March 2021 we published [circular W21/10HE](#) which provided a letter from the Minister for Education requesting that institutions refrain, until 30 September 2021, from making unconditional offers to students which are not in line with standard offers for those who have not already gained appropriate qualifications.
3. Subsequently, in March 2021, HEFCW requested information from institutions regarding:
 - the basis on which the institution provides unconditional offers to applicants; and
 - the means by which the institution monitors the progression and continuation of students given unconditional offers.
4. We received ten responses to the consultation. Respondents are listed at **Annex A**.

Summary of responses

The basis on which the institution provides unconditional offers to applicants.

5. The majority of institutions reported that unconditional offers were made to applicants on the basis of qualifications already obtained. The following points were also made:
 - some institutions considered whether a student's UCAS application, academic performance and predicted results showed that they had the ability to succeed on their chosen course;
 - in one case, unconditional offers could also be given as a result of an applicant obtaining the required standard of the institution's entrance or scholarship exam;
 - a very small number of applicants were given unconditional offers if they had not yet attained their qualifications; this was for very specific reasons, which were often unique to each individual (eg audition, portfolio, and/or interview, and those who have gained the appropriate skills via work experience).
6. Not all institutions confirmed in their responses that, in line with the HEFCW guidance in circular W21/10HE, they did not provide 'Conditional Unconditional' offers to applicants, ie offers which are conditional at the

point of offer and adjusted by the provider from conditional to unconditional if that provider is selected as an applicant's firm choice. However, we are not aware of any instances where the HEFCW guidance is not being followed.

The means by which the institution monitors the progression and continuation of students given unconditional offers.

7. Institutions reported using a variety of different processes to monitor the progression and continuation of students given unconditional offers, including entry tariffs, withdrawal rates, ongoing assessment and personal tutor sessions. These included:
 - monitoring entry tariffs achieved by applicants to understand the effect on applicant achievement prior to entry;
 - comparing the withdrawal rates of students given conditional and unconditional offers in order to determine whether there was differential impact on progression and continuation;
 - using ongoing assessment to identify any potential risks to successful progression throughout the year;
 - setting up specific groups to monitor various aspects of the student cycle, which then reported to bodies with oversight of quality and student portfolios;
 - using the personal tutor system to monitor student progression and continuation;
 - intentions to track the progression and continuation of students in future, through the Student Record System. This work could also be supported via learning analytics.

8. Some respondents considered that, given the low numbers of students receiving unconditional offers, it would be statistically meaningless to monitor their progression and continuation in comparison to other cohorts of students.

HEFCW position

9. Through this circular we re-affirm our position that institutions should ensure that prospective students, applicants and current students are provided with the information they need in order to make decisions about their studies, in line with guidance from the [Competition and Markets Authority](#).

10. In circular W21/10HE we made reference to a number of resources which institutions should take account of in relation to a fair admissions system.

11. We recognise the autonomy of institutions in this area and, therefore, our engagement is in relation to the ongoing stability of the Welsh sector, and the interests of students, including widening access to and through higher education.

12. In analysing UCAS data and responses from institutions, we have identified a small number of instances where the proportion of unconditional offers made by an institution out of their total offers, and the approach to allocating these offers, are not in line with the rest of the sector. Where we have identified specific issues, we will follow up with institutions directly to seek clarification on the rationale in these cases.
13. As noted in circular W21/10HE, we will continue to monitor practice on unconditional offer making across the sector, including trends over time and how institutions respond to their own monitoring of student progression, through analysis of data and our ongoing institutional engagements.

Further information

14. For further information, contact Dr Cliona O'Neill (tel 029 2085 9731; email cliona.oneill@hefcw.ac.uk).

Annex A

Consultation responses were received from the following institutions:

Aberystwyth University

Bangor University

Cardiff Metropolitan University

Cardiff University

Grŵp Llandrillo Menai

Neath Port Talbot College

Swansea University

University of South Wales

University of Wales Trinity Saint David

Wrexham Glyndŵr University