

# Cylchlythyr | Circular

## Revisions to the Quality Assessment Framework

**Date:** 19 July 2019  
**Reference:** W19/22HE  
**To:** Regulated institutions in Wales  
Other interested parties  
**Response by:** No response required  
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This circular provides an update to the Quality Assessment Framework for Wales. Changes will take effect from 2019/20, and will impact on external quality assurance reviews from January 2020.

If you require this document in an alternative accessible format, please email [info@hefcw.ac.uk](mailto:info@hefcw.ac.uk).



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## Introduction

1. This circular provides an update to the Quality Assessment Framework for Wales. Changes will take effect from 2019/20, and will impact on external quality assurance reviews from January 2020.

## Background

2. [Circular W18/05HE](#) published the Quality Assessment Framework (QAF) for Wales. That circular noted that the Framework needed to be flexible to take account of developments in quality at UK level and in light of proposals to form a post-compulsory education commission, and would be kept under review.
3. HEFCW's Quality Assessment Committee (QAC) has advised on changes to the Quality Assessment Framework.

## Changes

4. QAC advised that the proposed changes to the QAF were not substantive. Therefore HEFCW carried out a soft consultation, rather than a full consultation, in order to minimise the burden on institutions.
5. The soft consultation involved providing a draft amended document to the following groups and organisations for comment:
  - Higher Education in Further Education Network;
  - National Union of Students Wales;
  - Students' Unions;
  - Universities Wales;
  - Universities Wales Pro Vice Chancellors' Learning and Teaching Advisory Group; and
  - Wales Quality Network.
6. The principal changes proposed to the QAF were as follows:
  - The integration of core and common practices within the Quality Code, characteristics statements and subject benchmark statements, where appropriate, into the baseline as Wales-only elements;
  - Amending the second judgement of the external quality assurance review to focus on relevant baseline requirements rather than the full set (circular W19/23HE refers);
  - Inclusion of a statement regarding HEFCW's use of the European Standards and Guidelines as a key reference point;
  - Making reference to HEFCW's Procedures for assessing the risk to the quality of education, and reducing references to quality that is, or is likely to become, inadequate;
  - Updating the text regarding degree standards to reflect the publication of the UK statement of intent, and the subsequent

agreement by Welsh institutions that they would publish statements articulating the outcomes of an internal review of degree standards by 2019/20;

- Updating the section on protection of the international reputation of the UK higher education brand to take account of developments in this area, including amending the text to confirm that HEFCW will work with the QAA and the sector to ensure that appropriate oversight of transnational provision is maintained;
- Updating references to the Higher Education Academy to refer to AdvanceHE.

7. Feedback from the soft consultation, together with HEFCW's responses, was considered by QAC and is provided below:

- Where there is reference to Welsh Universities, it should be clear where this covers FE Colleges delivering HE provision, such as regulated institutions and those with specific programme designation; *[no changes were needed to achieve this]*
- FE institutions would be able to develop an Institutional Statement on Degree Standards where the FEIs award the grades at their own exam boards. Guidance would be required as to what the statement should cover, to gain a feel of what it should look like; *[this work will be led by UUK – no changes to the QAF needed]*
- For FEIs, the institutional statement would need to be able to differentiate between regulations agreed by different HEI partner institutions, for example if a FEI has more than one HE awarding institution that are presented in their own boards. For this purpose, the awarding institution would need to approve the statement to ensure it maintains the standards set by the HEI; *[point for consideration by FEIs]*
- Staff development sessions would be required in FE to ensure that tutors were aware of the European Standards and Guidelines; *[point for consideration by FEIs]*
- Para 15 - If subject benchmark statements/characteristics statements are to be used, HEFCW will need to have the QAA commit to a published schedule of review and consultation as many of them are outdated, and in some cases do not exist at all (particularly at Level 7); *[amended to clarify that subject benchmark statements and characteristics statements should be included where appropriate]*
- Para 15 - the addition of the core and common practices was welcomed but it would be useful to understand whether these will be incorporated into activity due to occur in 2019/20; *[the cover circular to clarify that the changes will be implemented into external quality reviews from January 2020]*
- Para 18 – The footnote should be clarified; *[removed the footnote and amended the text to clarify]*
- Para 41 – use the terms grade improvement/ grade inflation rather than degree improvement/ degree inflation; *[amendment made]*
- Para 42 - The consensus was that the individual institutions have varied missions, value-added activity and degree algorithms. There is

no support to produce a Wales sector-wide statement. Individual institutions were content to produce statements. Further dialogue would be welcomed on what this might entail in order to ensure that existing work is not duplicated or too onerous; *[included statement that regulated institutions will publish statements articulating the outcomes of an internal review of degree standards by 2019/20]*

- Para 50 – suggested confirming that HEFCW would work with the QAA and the sector. *[additional text added]*
8. In addition, we have included a requirement for institutions to treat instances where there is reason to believe that the quality of provision is inadequate or likely to become inadequate, as notifiable events, and inform HEFCW as soon as possible. This includes issues identified through internal processes, eg via student complaints, revalidations, and internal reviews. Our responsibilities relate to the provision of education and the reasonable needs of students, and therefore we need to be notified about systematic issues impacting on a course, or more broadly, rather than issues where the impact is limited to individual students.

#### **Further information / responses to**

9. For further information, contact Dr Cliona O'Neill (tel 029 2085 9731; email [cliona.oneill@hefcw.ac.uk](mailto:cliona.oneill@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](mailto:equality@hefcw.ac.uk) for more information about impact assessments.