

External quality assurance review

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Noddir gan
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Introduction

1. This document provides the details of the external quality assurance review which regulated institutions, or those seeking to apply to be regulated, are required to commission under the Quality Assurance Framework for Wales.
2. The Home Office has confirmed that the proposals for the revised quality assessment framework to be implemented in Wales, and the transition arrangements, meet their requirements for educational oversight for Tier 4.

External quality assurance review

3. The requirement for external quality assurance takes account of HEFCW's statutory responsibilities in relation to education provided by and/or on behalf of regulated institutions, including that which is inadequate, or which is likely to become inadequate. It provides the assurance required under the Higher Education (Wales) Act 2015 with regards to quality, to enable Fee and Access Plans to be approved, and therefore for regulated institutions to access student support.
4. The external quality assurance review must comply with the [European Standards and Guidelines](#) (ESG) requirements for such reviews. The ESG enable higher education providers to demonstrate quality and increase transparency, helping to build mutual trust and better recognition of their qualifications, programmes and other provision. The ESG are used by institutions and quality assurance agencies as a reference document for internal and external quality assurance systems in higher education.

Type of organisation

5. The external quality assurance review must be carried out by a body on the [European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education \(EQAR\)](#). The governing body should ensure that any agency appointed understands the context of Wales within the UK and has appropriate Welsh language capacity.
6. Regulated institutions may collectively decide to appoint a single body to conduct the external reviews.
7. Governing bodies will be free to place additional requirements on the process in light of the institution's mission and strategy.
8. If a body for quality assurance is designated in England, HEFCW will carry out a further consultation with regulated institutions and other interested parties on whether that body should be commissioned to provide external reviews in Wales.

Membership of review team

9. In accordance with the ESG requirements for external quality reviews, the review team must be comprised of peer experts. The team must include a student member(s).

Provision covered

10. The external quality assurance review must cover all HE provision delivered by or on behalf of the institution, including franchise provision, branch campuses and any other overseas provision. However, where partner, delivery or support organisations are also required to undergo external quality assurance review, it would be appropriate to limit the review of the awarding organisation to its management of that arrangement, in order not to duplicate review activity.

Engagement with students

11. The review team must meet the student union and/or representatives of the diverse student body (including taking into consideration the views of students with protected characteristics). Where the student union produces annual quality reports on behalf of the student body, then these must be considered by the team as part of the evidence for the review.
12. The institution must provide training, advice and guidance as appropriate, for the student union and representatives of the student body, to support their participation in the review.

Frequency of reviews

13. Reviews should be carried out at least every six years. Governing bodies may commission them more frequently if they feel this would be helpful.
14. In addition:
 - Where an institution receives any judgement of 'meets requirements with conditions' it should undergo a further review within four years of the previous review, even if the judgement has been revised;
 - Where an institution receives any judgement of 'does not meet' it should be reviewed within two years of the previous review, even if the judgement has been revised;
 - Where an institution has undergone substantial structural change, eg through merger with another one, or becoming part of a group structure, then a new review of the whole institution should be carried out at the earliest date at when any of the constituent partners were due a review.
15. HEFCW will operate a risk-based approach regarding whether any other significant changes to provision should require an earlier full or partial review. This will include consideration of:
 - The outcomes of HEFCW's annual Institutional Risk Review process;
 - Annual assurance statements from the governing body;
 - Fee and Access Plans;

- Concerns raised regarding standards and quality; and
- HEFCW's other engagements with institutions.

These will be considered in the context of the institution's own quality assurance processes.

16. HEFCW will inform the institution whether it needs to undertake a further review in order to meet the quality assurance requirements of fee and access plans. This will also provide the institution with the opportunity to submit evidence where it does not believe it should undergo such a review.
17. Depending on the issue(s) triggering the decision, the earlier review could be a full review, or a review of a specific aspect(s) of the institution's provision. Changes that could trigger a decision include, for example, significant changes to student numbers, types of provision, collaborative provision, complaints about standards and quality, etc.

Judgements

18. In order to facilitate comparison of outcomes, HEFCW proposes that the external review should have a set of common judgements.
19. The following judgement terminology will be used for the external quality assurance review in Wales:
 - a) Meets requirements
 - b) Meets requirements with conditions – the institution will need to implement an action plan to address areas of immediate concern¹
 - c) Does not meet requirements.
20. HEFCW plans to do further work on provision that is likely to become inadequate. We may consult on a 'pending' judgement at a future date, which would take account of such provision.
21. The external quality assurance review will evaluate whether the regulated institution's internal quality assurance approaches comply with European Standards and Guidelines. It will also evaluate whether institutions meet the [baseline](#) requirements for the Quality Assessment Framework for Wales.
22. The judgements will be made regarding whether or not the institution meets the requirements of the:
 - European Standards and Guidelines for internal quality assurance;
 - baseline standards for the Quality Assessment Framework in Wales.
23. Review outcomes of 'meets requirements with conditions' or 'does not meet requirements' will be subject to our [inadequate quality processes prior to intervention](#). Any outcomes which are not satisfactorily dealt with via those processes will be subject to the processes detailed in our [Statement of Intervention](#).

¹ The conditions attached to this judgement will need to clarify the issues involved.

24. Should there be any judgements of 'meets requirements with conditions', or 'does not meet requirements', institutions will need to implement an action plan to enable the judgement to be revised within 12 months of the publication of the review outcome. They will need to liaise with their appointed review agency to obtain verification that actions taken in response to the review outcomes have rectified any deficiencies within that timescale, and therefore enable the judgement outcome to be upgraded.
25. Upgrading the review judgement is essential, as the external review judgement will inform HEFCW's assessment regarding whether institutions meet the quality requirements of the Fee and Access Plan. Any amendment to the judgement following satisfactory action planning will also need to be published.

Enhancement

26. Enhancement is a key focus of the external quality assurance review in Wales. The review will therefore consider enhancement, and the outcomes will include a statement on the institution's strategic approach to enhancement of the student academic experience.

Commendations

27. Aspects of excellent or best practice in relation to all areas of the review are eligible for commendations. These will be statements, rather than judgements.

Publication of reports

28. The report will need to be published, as noted in the ESG. The report should also include recommendations, in line with ESG requirements.

Outcomes of reviews or inspections by other bodies

29. Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs) may accredit specific courses and may also review/ inspect provision at regulated providers. Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales (Estyn) have statutory responsibility for inspecting Initial Teacher Training provision, FE in HE, and further education institutions which may also be offering higher education provision.
30. Regulated institutions will need to keep HEFCW informed of any unfavourable outcomes from PSRB review/ inspection. HEFCW will determine on a case by case basis whether these outcomes should trigger our inadequate quality procedures. This will include HEFCW considering:
 - the findings of these bodies where they judge that the quality of higher education provision is inadequate, or likely to become inadequate²;

² In so doing, HEFCW will use those bodies' definitions of quality (ie what they define as in/adequate quality or the equivalent).

- whether there are implications for the institution as a whole, and also the volume of provision that is impacted by this outcome³.
- whether it is appropriate for HEFCW to take further steps, depending on the scale of the problem, and the impact of this in relation to the mission and sustainability of the institution⁴.

31. If we think there are serious institutional implications, we will consider whether the provision of the institution falls under our statutory responsibilities regarding inadequate quality, and therefore whether we need to follow our inadequate quality procedures prior to intervention, and/or implement the Statement of Intervention.

Summary

32. The key features of the review are summarised below.

Feature	Description
Reviewing organisation	Must be on the EQAR
Review coverage	All HE provision delivered by or on behalf of the institution, including branch campuses and other overseas provision
Membership of review team	Peer experts, including (a) student member (s)
Engagement with students	The review must take account of the views of current students, and meet with them as part of the review. The institution must provide training, advice and guidance as appropriate, for the student union to support them in their participation.
Frequency of reviews	At least every six years. The most recent QAA review will act initially as the external quality assurance review, provided it was undertaken within the past six years.
Judgements	Terminology: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meets requirements; • Meets requirements with conditions; • Does not meet requirements. Judgements regarding whether or not the institution meets the requirements: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • of the European Standards and Guidelines for internal quality assurance • of the baseline standards for the Quality Assessment Framework in Wales

³ In some cases the issues may be relevant at subject level only, but in other cases there could be institution-wide implications.

⁴ It may be appropriate for us to remain engaged with what the reviewing/ inspecting body does next (re-review, re-inspection, etc).

Enhancement	The review will include a statement on the institution's strategic approach to enhancement of the student academic experience.
Commendations	Commendations will highlight examples of excellent or best practice.
Revision of judgement	A judgement other than 'meets requirements' can be amended once the institution has addressed the issue(s) leading to the unsatisfactory judgement within 12 months.
Review report	Must be published, and must include any recommendations
Outcomes of reviews or inspections by other bodies	Regulated institutions must keep HEFCW informed of any unfavourable outcomes from PSRB review/ inspection. In the case of serious institutional implications, HEFCW may initiate the inadequate quality procedures prior to intervention, and/or implement the Statement of Intervention.

Related matters

Triennial assurance review

33. HEFCW's triennial assurance review of regulated institutions will incorporate quality. This will include engagement with the student union, which should incorporate representation of the diverse student body,⁵ including those with protected characteristics. The visit will include any HEFCW follow up necessary resulting from the external quality assurance review, Fee and Access Plans, and other institutional engagements.

Fee and Access Plans

34. Any institution wishing to become/remain regulated must have undertaken an external quality assurance review of their higher education provision (or equivalent Higher Education Review: Wales or other appropriate QAA process) in the past six years. The outcomes of other reviews/ inspections will not suffice. Regulated institutions will need to provide HEFCW with the link to the published report as part of their Fee and Access Plan applications.
35. Institutions that are already regulated will be able to apply for a Fee and Access Plan while addressing the outcomes of any judgement(s) of 'meets requirements with conditions' or 'does not meet requirements'. They will need to include information on how they are addressing any unfavourable outcomes from the review. They will have twelve months to rectify the issue(s) and obtain a revised, published judgement from the organisation that carried out the external quality assurance review. Should they fail to obtain a revised

⁵ part-time, full-time, international, European, UK, postgraduate, undergraduate, mature and non-traditional students, and students of franchise HE in FE

judgement in this timescale, then they will be deemed to have provision which is (likely to become) inadequate, and will therefore will not meet the quality requirements for regulated institutions.

36. Institutions that wish to become regulated will need to have addressed any 'meets requirements with conditions' or 'does not meet requirements' judgements effectively and have had them revised before they can apply for a Fee and Access Plan.

Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF)

37. An outcome of 'meets requirements' in all categories of the external review will form the quality threshold for the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) for Welsh institutions, should institutions wish to participate in the TEF. Institutions which obtained judgements of 'meets requirements with conditions' or 'does not meet requirements' will meet the TEF quality threshold only when the judgements have been updated.