

Cylchlythyr | Circular

Revisions to the external quality assurance requirements

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To: Regulated institutions in Wales
Other interested parties
Response by: No response required
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This circular provides an update of the requirements for the external quality assurance review which regulated institutions are required to commission under the Quality Assurance Framework for Wales. These changes will take effect from January 2020. All reviews taking place from that date will be under the revised requirements.

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Introduction

1. This circular provides an update of the requirements for the external quality assurance review which regulated institutions are required to commission under the Quality Assurance Framework for Wales. These changes will take effect from **January 2020**. All reviews taking place from that date will be under the revised requirements.

Background

2. [Circular W17/08HE](#) provided the HEFCW requirements for external quality assurance reviews, which we require institutions to commission at least every six years. The circular had noted that the development year would not include a judgement on enhancement, but HEFCW would consider at the end of that year whether a judgement on this area should be included.
3. [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.
4. HEFCW's Quality Assessment Committee (QAC) has advised on changes to the Quality Assessment Framework. These changes have impacted on the external quality assurance review requirements.

Changes

5. QAC advised that the proposed changes to the external quality assurance review requirements were not substantive. Therefore HEFCW carried out a soft consultation, rather than a full consultation, in order to minimise the burden on institutions.
6. 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.
7. The QAF amendments impacting on the external quality assurance review requirements included 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 (circular W19/22HE refers).

8. Following feedback from reviews carried out under the existing requirements, QAC advised that it would be helpful to make an amendment to the second judgment on the external quality assurance review, to focus on relevant baseline requirements (rather than all the requirements), and incorporating the new Wales-only elements of the baseline. The relevant baseline requirements are defined as follows:
 - That the academic standards of courses meet the requirements of the relevant national qualifications framework, which, in Wales, is both the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (England, Wales and Northern Ireland) and the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales;
 - The Expectations of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, in relation to both English and Welsh medium provision of the institution;
 - The Core and Common Practices of the UK Quality Code¹ for Higher Education, in relation to both English and Welsh medium provision of the institution.
9. QAC advised that there is no additional judgement on enhancement, while recognising that enhancement was part of the common practices within the Quality Code and was embedded as part of the review.
10. The outcomes of the soft consultation, together with HEFCW's responses, were considered by QAC and are provided below:
 - Para 7 - There was a suggestion that there could be scope for student representatives also to request that the review looks at specific areas. *[the text has been amended to be clear that student representatives are part of the governing body and therefore should be able to inform such a request]*
 - Para 12 – There was a suggestion that resources or access to necessary information be included with the support to be provided by institutions, as smaller unions are especially pressured and would struggle to engage with a review without such support. *[amendment made to address this point]*
 - Footnote 6 – the inclusion of Welsh language students in this would support the QAF. It would also be useful to have specific reference to distance learners. *[amendment made to address this point].*
11. The amended requirements for external quality assurance review are provided at **Annex A**.
12. These changes will take effect from January 2020.

¹ Note that the Quality Code enables the appropriate testing of the baseline regulatory requirement as they apply to quality and standards regarding the work of the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (the core practice states: the provider has fair and transparent procedures for handling complaints and appeals which are accessible to all students).

Further information

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

Assessing the impact of our policies

14. 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.