

Cylchlythyr | Circular

Outcomes of the consultation on an additional governing body assurance statement relating to quality

Date: 30 April 2020
Reference: W20/10HE
To: Regulated and funded institutions in Wales
Specifically designated institutions in Wales
Other interested parties
Response by: No response required
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This circular provides the outcomes of the consultation provided in [W19/41HE: Consultation on an additional governing body assurance statement relating to quality](#). It also provides the additional statement which we intend to implement in the assurance returns for 2020/21.

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Introduction

1. This circular provides the outcomes of the consultation provided in [W19/41HE: Consultation on an additional governing body assurance statement relating to quality](#). It also provides the additional statement which we intend to implement in the assurance returns for 2020/21.

Background

2. The [Quality Assessment Framework for Wales](#) (QAF) includes the requirement that the governing bodies of regulated institutions should provide assurance on a set of statements relating to the quality of their provision as part of the [annual return](#) to HEFCW. The list of statements was confirmed in circular [W17/07HE: Outcomes of the consultation on governing body annual assurance statements related to quality](#).
3. The statements are also included in HEFCW's [terms and conditions of funding](#) and [processes for specific designation](#).
4. HEFCW's [2019-20 remit letter](#) from Welsh Government included a request that we should ensure that quality assurance activities in Wales take account of grade inflation and academic integrity. These are two areas which continue to attract scrutiny and press interest both on a UK-wide basis and at an international level.
5. Following advice from our statutory Quality Assessment Committee HEFCW published circular W19/41HE in November 2019 on the addition of a governing body assurance statement relating to quality. The proposed addition was as follows:

The governing body has effective oversight of degree standards and academic integrity.

6. The consultation closed in January 2020. HEFCW's Quality Assessment Committee provided advice to Council on the outcomes of the consultation. Council has considered this advice, and approved the outcomes for publication.

Consultation outcomes

7. We received 11 responses to the consultation. A brief summary of the response to each question, together with the outcomes, is provided below. **Annex A** provides a more detailed breakdown of responses received, together with respondents. The complete set of statements is provided at **Annex B**.

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?

8. The majority of responses confirmed that it would be appropriate to include an additional assurance statement to cover the issues highlighted in the consultation. However, a number of respondents raised issues with the terminology used.
9. Conclusion: An additional statement should be included but the terminology should be amended (see question 2).

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?

10. There was a mixed response to this question. The majority of respondents disagreed that the wording was appropriate and provided suggestions for alternative statements. These are listed in **Annex A**. A number of respondents felt that 'degree standards' were already implicitly included in existing assurance statement 3a.
11. Conclusion: The additional statement should be included but 'degree standards' should be amended to 'degree outcomes' in order to better reflect that this statement relates to student degree outcomes. The final statement which will be included in the list of assurance statements is as follows:

The governing body has effective oversight of degree outcomes and academic integrity

Other considerations

12. No positive or negative impacts were highlighted in terms of equality and diversity and the Well-being of Future Generation (Wales) Act's seven wellbeing goals, Sustainable Development Principle and five ways of working as part of our impact assessment.
13. No positive or negative impacts on the Welsh language were identified in the consultation responses. One response noted that work needed to be done to explore the issue of contract cheating through the medium of Welsh as the focus tended to be on contract cheating through the medium of English and this could represent a gap in arrangements.
14. We intend to address this through a proposed event relating to academic integrity to be delivered by the QAA in partnership with HEFCW and Universities Wales.

Assurance statements and next steps

15. We anticipate that the governing bodies of regulated institutions will be asked to provide their annual returns as normal in December 2020. These statements will relate to the 2019/20 academic year and the return should be made against the previous list of statements (i.e. those which were [confirmed in April 2017](#)).
16. The revised set of statements, provided at **Annex B**, will be implemented for the 2020/21 annual return, to be provided in December 2021.
17. The QAF has been revised to include the additional statement (**Annex C**).

Further information / responses to

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