

Cylchlythyr | Circular

Consultation on revised guidance for student charters

Date: 20 December 2021
Reference: W21/41HE
To: Regulated institutions in Wales and their students' unions
Funded institutions in Wales and their students' unions
Response by: 11 February 2022
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This circular consults on revisions to HEFCW's guidance on student charters. We are proposing to update the guidance to include information on safeguarding as it relates to safe and inclusive higher education and well-being and health, including mental health.

Responses should be submitted by 11 February 2022.

If you require this document in an alternative accessible format, please email info@hefcw.ac.uk.



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Introduction

1. This circular consults on revisions to HEFCW's guidance on student charters. We are proposing to update the guidance to include information on safeguarding as it relates to safe, secure and inclusive higher education and well-being and health, including mental health.
2. Responses should be submitted by 11 February 2022 to quality@hefcw.ac.uk.

Background

3. HEFCW has required all regulated and/or funded institutions to have a student charter in place from 2012/13. This requirement was set out in Circular W11/31HE. The impact of the guidance was monitored in 2013 (circular [W13/27HE](#)), and the guidance updated in response to the monitoring exercise in 2014 (circular [W14/05HE](#)). Further revisions were published in 2017 (circular [W17/19HE](#) refers), and 2019 (circular [W19/15HE](#) refers). The 2019 guidance is the current version.

Current position

4. HEFCW's current guidance requires higher education providers to review their student charter on an annual basis to ensure it is still being used and remains relevant. It should be reviewed jointly by students, student representatives, students' union officers and institutional staff.
5. Working with partners such as NUS Wales¹ and Student Space², we have identified a need to update the existing guidance to include information on safeguarding as it relates to safe, secure and inclusive higher education and updated information on well-being and health, including mental health. In addition, we intend to conduct a general review of the language we use in the guidance to ensure that it remains accessible, particularly for the student body, in discussion with NUS Wales.

Proposed changes

Safeguarding as it relates to safe, secure and inclusive higher education

6. HEFCW's 2021-22 [remit letter](#) from the Welsh Government welcomed *'the work done by the Council and across the sector to strengthen safeguarding approaches to ensure institutions are safe, secure and inclusive learning environments for all staff and students'*.

¹ www.nus-wales.org.uk/

² <https://studentspace.org.uk/>

7. The Welsh Government expects us to *'work with the sector to make rapid and sustained progress to improve the experience of staff and students in higher education regardless of their racial background.'* Secure and inclusive higher education is fundamental to ensuring students' well-being, health and mental health, a positive student experience, retention, attainment, academic and future success.
8. We have identified a need to update HEFCW's existing student charter guidance to include information on safeguarding as it relates to safe, secure and inclusive higher education.
9. Higher education providers should provide links to policies and processes explaining to students how providers aim to ensure safe, secure and inclusive higher education. This might include, but is not limited to, information on:
 - Tackling identity-based violence and harassment in all forms;
 - Tackling sexual violence, domestic abuse and sexual violence, including sexual violence related to alcohol and drugs and female genital mutilation;
 - Hate crimes motivated by hostility or prejudice based on a person's race or perceived race; religion or perceived religion; sexual orientation or perceived sexual orientation; disability or perceived disability and any crime motivated by hostility or prejudice against a person who is transgender or perceived to be transgender; and
 - Supporting low levels of well-being and health, including mental health.
10. Information for students should be clear on the support students can expect from the higher education provider and/or in collaboration with third sector agencies.

Wellbeing and Health

11. In connection with HEFCW's long-term funding to support well-being and health including mental health in higher education, and providers' related strategies (see circular [W19/11HE: Student well-being and health in higher education](#)), we have identified a need to include further information on well-being and health in HEFCW's existing student charter guidance. In addition, all providers will be aware of the increase in student mental ill health before Covid-19 and the impact of the pandemic on mental health.
12. Student charters should include links to higher education providers' processes and procedures on well-being and health, including mental health for students. This may include, but is not limited to:
 - Well-being and health, including mental health, strategies;
 - Well-being and health including mental health, implementation plans and progress reports;
 - A statement on suicide-safer approaches or the suicide-safer strategy.

13. Where providers have achieved the Student Minds [University Mental Health Charter](#) or similar related recognition, links to these awards will be of interest to students.
14. Information for students should be clear on the support students can expect from the higher education provider and/or in collaboration with third sector agencies, including contact information.

Next steps

15. HEFCW has provided grant funding to NUS Wales to support work on the student voice in regulation. The project includes engagement with the student body (via sabbatical/representative officers) at all regulated providers and/or funded providers, including those not affiliated to NUS Wales, on how HEFCW's student charter guidance is currently used. HEFCW will take account of these discussions in finalising the guidance.
16. Following the consultation, HEFCW's Student Opportunity and Achievement Committee (SOAC) will meet with student representatives and will discuss the consultation outcomes.
17. We will take account of advice from SOAC on the outcomes of the consultation when finalising the revised guidance for approval by HEFCW's Council.

Consultation Questions

1. **Do you agree that it is beneficial for the student charter guidance to include information on safeguarding as it relates to safe, secure and inclusive higher education?**
2. **Do you agree that it is beneficial for the student charter guidance to include information on well-being and health, including mental health?**
3. **Are there any unintended consequences of including information on safeguarding as it relates to safe, secure and inclusive higher education or well-being and health, including mental health?**
4. **Are there any other amendments that could be made to the student charter guidance that would make it more useful?**
5. **What effect (if any), positive or adverse, will these proposals have on:**
 - **opportunities for persons to use the Welsh language; and**
 - **treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language.**

6. **How could the policy be changed so that the policy decision would have positive effects, or increased positive effects, on:**
 - **opportunities for persons to use the Welsh language; and**
 - **treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language**

7. **Do the proposed changes have any positive or negative impacts or unintended consequences in terms of equality and diversity and the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act's seven well-being goals, sustainable development principle and five ways of working?**

Timetable

18. The proposed timetable is as follows:

Consultation period	December 2021
Engagement with Students' Union representatives via NUS Wales	January 2022
Consultation closes	Early February 2022
Analysis of responses	February 2022
Student representatives and SOAC advise on consultation outcomes	February 2022
Council consideration of revised guidance	March 2022
HEFCW publication of revised guidance	April 2022
Institutions publish revised charters, in partnership with the student body	By September 2022

Further information / responses to

19. For further information, contact Elin Morris (029 2085 9755; elin.morris@hefcw.ac.uk). Responses to quality@hefcw.ac.uk.

Assessing the impact of our policies

20. 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.