

**To: Heads of higher education institutions  
in Wales**

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Response By:

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## **STUDY OF THE EXTENT AND EFFECTIVENESS OF EXISTING STUDENT REPRESENTATION STRUCTURES WITHIN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS ACROSS WALES**

I am writing to advise you that the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) has commissioned York Consulting Ltd (YCL) to undertake a study of the extent and effectiveness of existing student representation structures within higher education across Wales.

### **BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT**

In July 2005, the HEFCW Quality Working Group received the Sparqs (Student Participation in Quality Scotland) annual report and considered whether a similar process might be beneficial for institutions in Wales. It was agreed that a meeting should be held between HEFCW, HEW and NUS Wales and if supported, a proposal for future action would be considered. This meeting was held in September 2005. Officers recommended that HEFCW should consider funding an audit of existing institutional arrangements to provide the evidence base for a decision on whether a Sparqs model would be appropriate for Wales. Following confirmation from Higher Education Wales (HEW) that Vice Chancellors would not object to HEFCW undertaking an exploratory piece of work on enhancing student participation in quality audits, HEFCW initiated the tender process in December 2005. A Steering Group, consisting of HEW, NUS and HEFCW officers, was established to manage the tender process.

### **REMIT AND SCOPE**

In March 2006 YCL were awarded the tender to explore the extent and effectiveness of existing student representation structures across the twelve higher education institutions in Wales examining. The views of institutions and Students' Unions will be sought on the effectiveness of existing structures. YCL will also elicit opinions on whether the establishment of a national support structure, similar to the Sparqs model operating in Scotland (see Annex A attached), would be beneficial. The study will identify and explore the mechanisms utilised across Wales and beyond for encouraging widespread student participation in the quality of the student learning experience, not just focusing upon elected student representatives. The success of a range of

financial as well as academic (credit/accreditation) incentives currently made available to support student engagement with institutional quality processes will also be explored.

The study will consist of desk-based research and structured telephone interviews with Students' Union and institutional representatives from Welsh HEIs. Telephone interviews with HEW, NUS Wales, HEFCW, Quality Assurance Agency and Higher Education Academy officers will also be undertaken. The study should:

- (i) provide an account of existing institutional student feedback arrangements operating across HEIs in Wales
- (ii) provide an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the existing arrangements in Wales
- (iii) identify best practice from across the UK, such as via the Universities Scotland publication 'Student Enhanced Learning through Effective Feedback' which encourages teacher and student dialogue around learning and the Sparqs process in Scotland
- (iv) outline a range of options for consideration by HEFCW for future institutional and national developments to enhance student representation in quality assurance and enhancement procedures across Wales
- (v) provide recommendations on the use of a range of incentives to reward student engagement in quality assurance activities should also be provided

#### FUTURE ACTIONS

YCL will be contacting the offices of Vice Chancellors/Principals, Students Union presidents, and related organisations over the next two weeks to identify a key contact and preferred language (Welsh or English) for future correspondence and participation in the study.

We are sure you will want to contribute fully to the study so that as wide a range of viewpoints as possible can be taken into account. The main contact at YCL for the study will be Senior Consultant Helen Thomas (Tele: 0113 222 3545 Email: [helen.thomas@yorkconsulting.co.uk](mailto:helen.thomas@yorkconsulting.co.uk)).

A report on the outcomes of the Study will be considered by the Council's Learning and Teaching Committee in July 2006.

We will greatly appreciate your active support for this important work.



**PHILIP GUMMETT**