

Cylchlythyr | Circular

Good practice guide on publishing information for prospective undergraduate students

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To: Regulated institutions in Wales
Other interested parties
Response by: No response required; all providers should use the guide to review the information that they provide, and make improvements where appropriate by 1 September 2017
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This circular introduces a guide to good practice for UK HE providers on the information they publish for prospective undergraduate students. The guide is available to download on the HEFCE website at www.hefce.ac.uk/lt/provinfo.

All providers should use the guide to review the information that they provide, and make improvements where appropriate by 1 September 2017.

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



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Introduction

1. This circular introduces a guide to good practice for UK Higher Education (HE) providers on the information they publish for prospective undergraduate students. The guide is available to download on the HEFCE website at www.hefce.ac.uk/lt/provinfo.
2. All providers should use the guide to review the information that they provide, and make improvements where appropriate by 1 September 2017

Background

3. In October 2015 the funding bodies published the outcomes of the Review of Unistats (www.hefce.ac.uk/lt/roiconsult/ra/), which considered prospective students' information needs, and how information should be presented. A primary finding was that students wanted more detailed course information than was presented on Unistats. This included how their programme would be taught and assessed, and the modules available. Prospective students were also interested in the characteristics of the broader student experience in different institutions.
4. Following consultation, the funding bodies received broad support for proposals to transfer the publication of some categories of information from Unistats to providers' websites, and to discontinue their central data collection. This included percentages of scheduled learning and teaching and assessment methods (see circular [W16/31HE: Summary of the outcomes of the consultation on detailed changes to the Key Information Set data collection for 2017 and approaches to presenting data on the successor to the Unistats website](#)). The funding bodies noted that this would be supported by guidance to providers on the presentation of information in these areas, to ensure that information remained broadly comparable and was accessible to prospective students. Unistats would continue to link directly to institutions' course information.
5. From 2012/13 Welsh institutions have been required to publish a Student Charter, to include a high level statement on the institution's provision of information on the cost of study, and signposting to full information (eg on course pages). HEFCW is currently consulting on updating the Student Charter Guidance in light of developments including the Competition and Markets Authority guidance to higher education institutions, noting that we believe it is appropriate to replace the reference to costs of study with information on how the institution addresses its responsibilities as described in the CMA guidance.
6. The [Welsh Government's response](#) to the [Independent review of higher education funding and student finance arrangements](#) accepted the recommendation that 'HEFCW should, annually, collect the prices of a basket of goods for each university and publish them.' The response also noted that Welsh Government strongly agreed that students should not

expect there to be major increases in the cost of goods as a result of the review's recommendations. Therefore from 2017/18 HEFCW will start to compile (with a view to publishing) the prices of goods for each institution in Wales. Where possible we will use existing published information, including some of the information covered by the public information guidance.

The guide

7. The guide is available at www.hefce.ac.uk/lt/provinfo. It reflects the research the funding bodies carried out with students on their information needs as part of the review of information about learning and teaching, and the student experience. It has been developed by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) on behalf of the UK higher education funding bodies in partnership with Universities UK, the Association of Colleges, GuildHE and the National Union of Students. While it was developed with the established sector, it is applicable to all providers of higher education. Further information about how the guide was developed, including a summary of consultation responses, is available on the HEFCE website¹ (<http://www.hefce.ac.uk/lt/unikis/consultations/>).
8. The good practice guide has been developed alongside changes to Unistats and the Key Information Set, which arose from the review. Its purpose is to support providers in providing accessible and comparable information for prospective undergraduate students, drawing on advice provided by the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/higher-education-consumer-law-advice-for-providers>) on their obligations under consumer law.
9. The new [Quality Assessment Framework in Wales](#) includes a set of [baseline regulatory requirements](#), the majority of which are in common with England and Northern Ireland. This includes an element to ensure that a provider meets its obligations under consumer law. This guide is intended to help providers meet existing baseline regulatory requirements as they relate to the provision of information to students. The guide does not represent a new baseline regulatory requirement, rather, we expect that providers will use the guidance to help interpret their existing requirements.
10. We recognise that many providers already supply prospective students with comprehensive, high-quality information, but all providers should use this guide to review the information that they provide through their websites and other channels, and to make improvements where appropriate by 1 September 2017.
11. The funders' aim in commissioning this guide is to ensure that prospective students have access to detailed and contextualised information,

¹ On behalf of all the funders

presented in a way that allows them to make appropriate course comparisons to inform their study choices.

Using the guide

12. We suggest that colleagues responsible for developing and communicating student information, and for the governance of accurate and compliant information, should use this guide, with a view to presenting such information in a way that is meaningful, accessible and comparable for the prospective student. The guide is not intended to standardise the way information is presented across providers, but rather to support the provision of rich information appropriate to the distinctive learning and teaching environment within each provider.
13. The guide is not intended to cover all of the information that providers must legally make available. It should not be used in isolation and should be read in conjunction with the CMA's advice. While we have consulted the CMA in developing the guidance, it is not legal advice and providers should secure their own legal advice where necessary.

Feedback and evaluation

14. The funders will evaluate the guide in autumn 2017. We would welcome feedback on its usefulness and suggestions for case studies of good practice by 29 September 2017, for inclusion in future years. As part of our evaluation, we will be researching providers' response to the guidance and may invite their participation.
15. We will seek to understand the effectiveness of our new approach by reviewing the information being made available to prospective students following the changes we have made.

Further information / responses to

16. For further information, contact Dr Cliona O'Neill (tel 029 2085 9731; email cliona.oneill@hefcw.ac.uk).
17. Feedback on the guide should be emailed to iguide@hefce.ac.uk.