

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

Reference: W03/35HE

Date: 30 May 2003

Response By: 30 September 2003

Further Information:

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## **IMPROVING STANDARDS IN POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH DEGREE PROGRAMMES: FORMAL CONSULTATION**

I am writing to invite you to contribute to a formal consultation on the development of threshold standards and an underlying framework of good practice for postgraduate research degree programmes.

As you will be aware from earlier correspondence, the four UK higher education funding bodies are collaborating on a joint project to develop threshold standards for postgraduate research degree programmes (RDPs). In January 2003, we circulated, for informal comment, the report of a study undertaken by consultants on the development of a quality framework, together with a set of proposed threshold standards which we had identified from the report (Circular W03/01HE).

Responses to the preliminary consultation indicated that institutions were generally supportive of the concept of threshold standards for RDPs and found the standards proposed broadly acceptable. They did, however, raise a number of concerns about specific aspects of those standards, particularly in relation to quantitative measures, for example those for critical mass.

The proposed threshold standards have been revised in the light of the responses to the informal consultation. At the same time, we have drawn on other elements of the consultants' report to produce an underlying framework of good practice. These two elements have the following purposes:

- *the threshold standards* are regarded as representing the essential minimum for the provision of high quality research degree programmes. They are intended to establish a baseline for the quality of provision across the sector; all institutions in receipt of funding for PGR provision from the UK higher education funding bodies will be expected to comply with them.
- *the underlying framework of good practice* is intended to encourage ongoing improvement in the quality of provision, beyond the minimum level represented by the threshold standards. Compliance with the good practice framework will not be mandatory, but the intention is that institutions should use the framework as a guide to quality enhancement.

The proposed threshold standards and underlying framework of good practice are set out in Table 1 of the enclosed consultation paper. Comments are invited on these, and on the specific issues raised in paragraph 36 of the document.

Responses should be submitted by email and should be sent directly to Will Naylor ([w.naylor@hefce.ac.uk](mailto:w.naylor@hefce.ac.uk)) at the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) by **Tuesday, 30 September 2003**. You are also asked to copy your response to Linda Tiller at HEFCW ([Linda.Tiller@hefcw.ac.uk](mailto:Linda.Tiller@hefcw.ac.uk)).

Yours sincerely

**PHILIP GUMMETT**  
**DIRECTOR OF HIGHER EDUCATION**

*Consultation paper sent to HEIs only.*