

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

Reference: W06/47HE
Date: 7 November 2006
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INTRODUCTION

- 1 This circular invites heads of Higher Education Institutions to consider whether they wish to see amendments to the Institutional Review: Wales, in line with those made to Institutional Audit in England and Northern Ireland.

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW: WALES

- 2 As described in Circular W06/34HE, the Council's Learning and Teaching Committee has considered amendments made to the institutional audit process in England. These amendments have been incorporated into the new QAA Handbook for Institutional Audit: England and Northern Ireland, published in June 2006, a copy of which can be found at <http://qaa.ac.uk/reviews/institutionalAudit/handbook2006/Handbook2006.pdf>. The QAA Handbook for the Institutional Review: Wales is available from the QAA website at http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews/reviewWales/handbook/Welsh_handbook_english.pdf.
- 3 This is the second stage of the consultation regarding the amendments, following on from the consultation issued in Circular W06/34HE. The outcome of this consultation will determine whether further changes should be incorporated into the ongoing institutional review process in Wales, 2003/04 to 2008/09. If a significant majority of the responses is positive, the intention is that the amendments will be introduced mid cycle, via a supplement to the QAA Handbook for Institutional Review: Wales. The changes that could be made to the process are matters of substance and it would therefore not be possible to apply them retrospectively.
- 4 A table illustrating the differences between the Institutional Review for Wales and the Institutional Audit in England and Northern Ireland is provided in **Annex A**.
- 5 It was agreed by the Learning and Teaching Committee that the Collaborative Provision Review process should be suspended until the next Institutional Review Cycle. However, in cases where the QAA consider that collaborative provision is large and complex, the Institutional Review process may include additional visits to partners.

TQI INFORMATION

- 6 The Institutional Review for Wales requires the provision of qualitative information including 'A summary statement of the institution's learning and teaching strategy' and 'Summaries of HEI's links with relevant employers, how the institution identifies employer needs and opinions, and how these are used to develop the relevance and richness of learning programmes.'
- 7 HEFCW circular W04/05 stated that 'The provision of information by institutions [on the TQI website] will be reviewed in accordance with the arrangements set out in the QAA's Handbook

for Institutional Review: Wales, [November 2003]. As part of the institutional review process, the QAA will make a judgement about the reliance that can be placed on the accuracy, integrity, completeness and frankness of the information that an HEI publishes about the quality of its programmes and the standards of its awards. This judgement will contribute to the main review judgement about the confidence that can be placed on the soundness of an institution's management of quality and standards.'
http://www.hefcw.ac.uk/Miscellaneous_Docs/W0405HE.pdf.

- 8 Circular W04/30HE stipulated that the institutional review process 'seeks to make available to a wide range of stakeholder groups accurate and timely data and reliable information about the quality of the learning opportunities and academic standards across Wales. Most of the information to be made publicly available will be presented on the HERO Teaching Quality Information (TQI) web-site throughout 2004/05' (http://www.hefcw.ac.uk/LearningTeaching_Docs/W0430HE.pdf). This was followed by circular W05/10HE, which highlighted that the TQI website would 'provide an efficient way for institutions to meet their public reporting obligations under the quality assurance framework, and indeed a number of obligations under the Freedom of Information Act' (http://194.81.48.132/LearningTeaching_Docs/W0510HE_circ_letter.pdf).
- 9 The 'Review of the Quality Assurance Framework: Phase two outcomes' recommended the removal of all qualitative data that is provided by the HEIs from the TQI website (http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/2006/06_45/). This has implications for the Institutional Audit: England and Northern Ireland and the Institutional Review: Wales. The QAA Handbook for Institutional Audit: England and Northern Ireland makes extensive reference to the use of TQI data. The QAA has no plans to change the IA handbook in light of the Burslem report, but there is a question hanging over the mid-cycle review process as that was going to draw on TQI information. English HEIs will be asked to find other ways of sharing this information, such as their websites. We invite the sector to express their opinions on whether the Welsh data should remain on the TQI site, although it will be removed for other UK countries, or whether institutions should find other ways of sharing this information.

QUESTIONS

- 10 Referring to the English developments (**Annex A**), you are invited to respond to the following questions by **Thursday, 7 December 2006**.
 - i) Should there be an increase in the emphasis given to enhancement in the Institutional Review process? (Annex A i, ii, vi)
 - ii) Should there be a separation in judgement between the management of the quality of learning opportunities available to students and the soundness of management of academic standards? (Annex A ii)
 - iii) Should there be additional commentary with an explanatory statement regarding the standards and quality of postgraduate research programmes? (Annex A i, ii, v, xiv)
 - iv) Should there be additional commentary with an explanatory statement regarding the enhancement of quality of educational provision, both taught and by research? (Annex A ii, vi)
 - v) Should the judgement on the 'reliance that can reasonably be placed on the accuracy, integrity, completeness and frankness of the information that an institution publishes about the quality of its programmes and the standards of its awards' be replaced with a comment on this matter? (Annex A ii)

- vi) Should the Welsh qualitative TQI information continue to be published on the TQI website, or should institutions find other ways of sharing this information, e.g. by publishing it on their own websites? (Annex A xiii)
- vii) Are there any other changes in line with those made to the Institutional Audit: England and Northern Ireland or other European changes that you would like to see made to the Institutional Review: Wales?
- viii) Given that it would not be possible to apply most of these changes retrospectively, is it desirable to incorporate any changes into the ongoing Institutional Review process?

RESPONSE

- 11 Please address your responses to Dr Cliona O'Neill, Senior Learning and Teaching Manager here at the Council's offices.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Phil Gummett', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Philip Gummett

Annex A.

| INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW: WALES | | | INSTITUTIONAL AUDIT: ENGLAND AND NORTHERN IRELAND | |
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| i | PARA 13 | <p>Institutional Reviews Examine:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The methods by which an institution secures the quality of its programmes and academic standards of its awards Accuracy, completeness and reliability of the information that an institution publishes. | PARA 9 | <p>Institutional audits examine:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The methods by which an institution secures the quality of its programmes and academic standards of its awards - <i>in the light of the UK Academic Infrastructure and the European standards and guidelines for quality assurance in higher education (ESG).</i> Accuracy, completeness and reliability of the information that an institution publishes. <i>Arrangements for maintaining appropriate academic standards and enhancing the quality of postgraduate research programmes.</i> <i>The institution's approach to building systematically upon the outcomes of their internal quality assurance procedures, on the findings of reports of external reviews, and on other information and feedback from students, graduates and employers, in order to develop and implement institutional approaches to enhancing the quality of provision.</i> |
| ii | PARA 20-22 42-51 | <p>Confidence judgements:</p> <p>Broad confidence/Limited confidence /No Confidence*</p> <p>Judgements are made on</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The confidence that can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the quality of its programmes and of the academic standards of its awards. The reliance that can reasonably be placed on the | PARA 16-26 | <p>Confidence judgements:</p> <p><i>Confidence</i>/Limited confidence /No confidence</p> <p>Judgements are made on</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>The confidence that can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards.</i> <i>The confidence that can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the</i> |

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| | | <p>accuracy, integrity, completeness and frankness of the information that an institution publishes about the quality of its programmes and the standards of its awards.</p> <p>Additionally, reports provide a commentary on strengths and limitations of the institution's internal QA methods. The report highlights features of good practice and makes recommendations for further consideration.</p> | | <p><i>institution's present and likely future management of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students.</i></p> <p>Audit teams will also comment specifically on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • academic standards and quality of provision of postgraduate research programmes • institutional strategies for enhancing the quality of its educational provision, both taught and by research, and • the reliance that can reasonably be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information. |
| iii | PARA 41 | <p>Use of Reference Points</p> <p>FEHQ</p> <p>Code of Practice</p> <p>CQFW</p> <p>Subject Benchmark Statements</p> | PARA 28-33 | <p>Use of reference points</p> <p>In addition to the IR requirements, the IA process adds:</p> <p><i>ESG - The way that institutions are responding to the ESG and other developments relating to academic standards in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), particularly in the context of the Bologna Process.</i></p> <p><i>Programme specifications – how institutions make use of other reference points in the Academic Infrastructure in order clearly to define expectations for the teaching, learning and assessment engagement between the institution and its students.</i></p> |
| iv | PARA 37-40 | <p>Thematic Trails</p> <p>Are concerned with testing how well institutional processes work and how effective they are in practice, at local level and across the institution as a whole. In undertaking its trails, the team may gather information at the level of</p> | PARA 34-43 | <p>Audit Trails</p> <p>2 styles –</p> <p><i>(i) Sampling trails</i></p> <p><i>Two trails of this type will normally be sufficient to provide a representative sampling of an institution's</i></p> |

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| | | individual disciplines, programmes, and/or academic departments. | <p><i>internal review procedures and their outcomes.</i></p> <p><i>(ii) Supplementary trails.</i></p> <p><i>Additional to other trails. It will be for an institution to propose a supplementary trail, and for the audit team to accept or reject that proposal in discussion with the institution.</i></p> |
| v | | <p>Postgraduate programmes</p> <p>Not explicit in IR process or review report.</p> | <p>PARA 44-45</p> <p>Postgraduate programmes</p> <p><i>Teams assess and report upon arrangements for securing the academic standards of awards and the quality of provision in postgraduate research degree programmes in alignment with the Code of practice.</i></p> <p><i>An amended version of the documentation that was used for the special review (Annex E) will be used. An audit team's formal comment on postgraduate research programmes will form the conclusion of a section of the institutional audit report, and will contribute to the overall confidence judgements.</i></p> |
| vi | | <p>Enhancement</p> <p>Not explicit in IR process or review report.</p> | <p>PARA 46-50</p> <p>Enhancement</p> <p><i>Audit teams are required to comment specifically on the institution's approach to enhancing the quality of its educational provision, both taught and by research. They are, therefore, interested to learn of the extent to which an institution has moved, and is moving, towards developing an institution-wide policy for systematically enhancing quality of provision.</i></p> <p><i>It is reasonable for institutions to submit, as examples of quality enhancement as a management process, planned approaches which, while they have yet to come to fruition, can nevertheless be demonstrated to have the</i></p> |

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| | | | | <i>potential to do so.</i> |
| vii | PARA 30 & Annex B | <p>SED</p> <p>The detailed contents of the SED is listed in Annex B.</p> | PARA 57-61 Annex D | <p>Briefing paper</p> <p><i>Questions proposed:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>what are we trying to do?</i> • <i>why are we doing it?</i> • <i>how are we doing it?</i> • <i>why is that the best way to do it?</i> • <i>how do we know it works?</i> • <i>how can we improve it?</i> |
| viii | PARA 30 & Annex C | <p>Student Submission</p> <p>Guidance on preparing the SED and the student submission is provided in Annexes B and C.</p> | PARA 62-65 | <p>Student Submission</p> <p><i>Four particular questions proved to be useful stimuli for eliciting students' views in a way that is particularly helpful to an audit team:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>how accurate is the information that the institution publishes?</i> • <i>do students know what is expected of them?</i> • <i>what is the student experience as a learner like?</i> • <i>do students have a voice in the institution, and is it listened to?</i> |
| ix | PARA 34-36 | <p>Review Visit</p> | PARA 73-77 | <p>Audit Visit</p> <p><i>Final day – the AD QAA and some members of the audit team will offer the institutional contact a short courtesy meeting to mark the close of the team's visit, on the understanding that the team will not be in a position to give feedback on the findings of the audit at this time.</i></p> |
| x | PARA 49-51 | <p>Reports</p> <p>Is intended to provide information of use to both lay and professional readers, it includes a summary intended primarily for the public, especially potential students, which is available separately from the rest of the report.</p> | PARA 79-81 | <p>Reports</p> <p><i>The report will comprise an overview of the findings of the audit, aimed at both lay and external professional audiences, and will have a 'technical' annex to carry the detail and explanatory material that is intended to be of practical use to the institution.</i></p> |
| xi | PARA 52-56 | <p>Sign off</p> <p>The review is completed when it is</p> | PARA 82-83 | <p>Sign off</p> <p>Where the audit report offers</p> |

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| | | <p>formally signed off. Where the report makes a statement of broad confidence, the review is signed off on report publication. <i>A brief enquiry is made by the Agency through correspondence with the institution after one year on the way in which the institution has responded to the report.</i></p> <p>Limited & no confidence – process same as IA.</p> <p>Mid Cycle report – three years after publication.</p> | | <p>positive statements of confidence and no recommendations identifying matters of importance requiring urgent attention, the audit will be formally signed off on publication. In an interim review, about three years before the next audit.</p> <p>Limited & no confidence – process same as IR</p> <p><i>Mid Cycle - renamed 'interim review', has been circulated for consultation.</i></p> |
| xii | | | Annex B | <i>Structure of the institutional audit report</i> |
| xiii | Annex D | <p>Stipulates that qualitative information including a summary statement of the institution's learning and teaching strategy and summaries of links with employers and related information be provided.</p> <p>HEFCW circulars later stated that this information would be provided through the TQI website.</p> | PARA 9 14 38 85 | <p>The audit reviews the accuracy and completeness of published teaching quality information (TQI), and will be able to compare it with the complete information from which it was derived, including NSS data, thus enabling the team to examine the accuracy and completeness of published TQI information.</p> <p>It has been agreed that all qualitative information for English institutions will be removed from the TQI site.</p> |
| xiv | | | Annex E | <i>Postgraduate research programmes.</i> |
| xv | | | Annex F | <i>Criteria for confidence judgements, and the relationship between confidence judgements, recommendations and follow-up action.</i> |

*A consultation has already been carried out on this matter.