

Cyngor Cyllido Addysg
Uwch Cymru
Higher Education Funding
Council for Wales

Cwrt Linden
Clos Ilex Llanisien
Caerdydd CF14 5DZ
Ffôn 029 2076 1861
Ffacs 029 2076 3163
www.hefcw.ac.uk

Linden Court
Ilex Close Llanishen
Cardiff CF14 5DZ
Tel 029 2076 1861
Fax 029 2076 3163
www.hefcw.ac.uk

hefcw

Cylchlythyr

Circular

Consultation on amendments to the Institutional Review: Wales

Date: 20 May 2011
Reference: W11/18HE
To: Heads of higher education institutions in Wales
Principals of directly-funded further education colleges in
Wales
Response by: 30 June 2011
Contact: Name: Dr Cliona O'Neill
Telephone: 029 2068 2283
Email: cliona.oneill@hefcw.ac.uk

This item provides a consultation on amendments to the Institutional Review: Wales. It also notifies institutions of other changes to the process that are not subject to consultation.

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Introduction

1. This circular provides a consultation on amendments to the Institutional Review: Wales (IRW). It requests responses by **30 June 2011**.
2. It also notifies institutions of other changes which we will ask the QAA to make to the IRW that are not subject to consultation.

Background

3. The QAA published the second edition of the handbook for the IRW in 2009¹, covering reviews carried out from 2009/10.
4. From 2009/10 the process became a rolling programme of review, rather than a fixed cycle. This enabled changes to be made to the review process without having to wait until the end of a cycle. The handbook identified that 'any major changes introduced during the programme of reviews would normally be subject to consultation with all interested parties.' It identified that institutions would normally have 12 months' notice of changes.
5. Since the publication of IRW, a revised method for Institutional Review: England and Northern Ireland (IRENI) has been published². Principal differences between IRENI and the IRW are detailed at **Annex A**.
6. IRENI includes some aspects of the IRW, such as the role of institutional facilitator, shorter format of reports with provision of a separate evidence base to institutions, and use of a self-evaluation document.
7. The Quality Assessment and Enhancement Sub-Group (QAESG) of HEFCW's Student Experience, Teaching and Quality Committee (SETQC) considered the new IRENI method and recommended that HEFCW consult institutions on a range of potential amendments to the IRW. QAESG includes representation from Higher Education Wales, NUS Wales and institutions.

Terminology of changes

8. QAESG advised that the terminology used in IRENI of substantive and minor changes, where substantive changes affect the underlying principles of the process, and minor changes affect the operation of the process, should be adopted in Wales.
9. These definitions have been used to determine which changes to the IRW are subject to consultation, and those which could be adopted without consultation.

¹ <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews/reviewWales/default.asp>

² <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews/institutionalreview/>

10. We will notify the QAA of the minor changes to be adopted without consultation (para 13) and ask them to take account of these changes in the next edition of the IRW handbook.

Consultation on changes

11. QAESG has advised on the changes which should be subject to consultation. QAESG recommended that we should not consult on the introduction of a thematic section to IRW, which would be subject to a commentary, as there would not be sufficient reviews in any academic year to provide meaningful outcomes.
12. The proposed changes to the IRW are identified below. Institutions are invited to identify whether or not they agree these changes should be made.
 - i) Change to the number and categories of judgements
Moving to the same number and wording of judgements as IRENI will facilitate comparability with other countries of the UK. This includes a judgement on public information from 2012/13.
 - ii) Changes to outcome terminology
Using the same outcome terminology as IRENI will enable comparability with other countries of the UK.
 - iii) Removing grading of recommendations
Removing the grading of recommendations will mean that Welsh HEIs are not disadvantaged by a perception that the grading in Wales means institutions are weaker in these areas.
 - iv) Inclusion of affirmation of actions in progress within the IRW
This will benefit institutions which are in the process of implementing change.
 - v) Replacement of the 3 day briefing visit by a one and a half day meeting
This will reduce the cost of reviews and provide an increased focus to the visits.
 - vi) Publication of action plans
This will make information on actions more accessible to a wider audience. It will also enable institutions to demonstrate that they are addressing the review recommendations.

- vii) Revision of judgement
This will enable institutions to demonstrate that they have addressed the outcomes of their review, and therefore unfavourable review outcomes will not impact on public perception of the institution once they have been addressed.
- viii) Inclusion of student charter within the documentation for IRW
HEFCW's remit letter 2011-12 from the Welsh Assembly Government identifies an expectation that HEFCW ensure HE institutions and their student unions jointly agree a student charter which clearly lays out the mutual roles and responsibilities of institutions and of their students. Inclusion of a student charter, or equivalent document, as an expectation within IRW will address this issue.
- ix) Change in the timetable for amendments to IRW
Moving to the same timetable as IRENI for the introduction of changes, with substantive changes being agreed at least 6 months before the start of the academic year in which a tranche of reviews are to be carried out, would allow the process to be more responsive to change than is possible with a 12 month notice period. It would also mean that all institutions to be reviewed in any academic year would be reviewed under the same method, rather than having different methods used within the same academic year.

Other changes

13. Changes which will be made to the IRW which affect the operation of the process, rather than the underlying principles, and are therefore not subject to consultation, are detailed below.
 - i) Increased use of videoconferencing and teleconferencing
This has environmental benefits and also reduces time required for travel.
 - ii) Involving a larger number of students
This recognises the importance of the student voice
 - iii) Use of a lead student representative
This role would enhance the student voice within IRW
 - iv) Electronic document submission
This has environmental benefits and reduces staff time
 - v) Using four reviewers instead of five
This will result in cost savings.

- vi) Producing the report a shorter interval after completion of the review
This will result in the report being published in English and Welsh 14 weeks after completion of the review, rather than 22 weeks as at present.

- 14. In addition, following the advice of QAESG, we will ask the QAA to include clarification in the revised IRW handbook that the Academic Infrastructure details more stringent requirements regarding the provision of information.

Timetable

- 15. Responses are requested by 30 June 2011. We will inform the QAA of the outcomes of the consultation, and ask them to take account of changes in a revised version of the IRW handbook.
- 16. Institutions undergoing IRW in 2011/12 will be reviewed under the current IRW method, as described in the second edition of the handbook, as institutions would be disadvantaged by opting to undergo the new IRW without an appropriate notice period for preparation, and permitting institutions to adopt some aspects of the new method (eg judgements) but not all, would result in a range of hybrid processes, for which there is no clear handbook/description. The revised method will apply to institutions undergoing review from 2012/13.
- 17. If the IRW adopts the same timetable for substantive changes as IRENI, then future changes to IRW will be agreed at least 6 months before the start of the academic year in which a tranche of reviews are to be carried out.

Responses

- 18. Institutions are invited to identify whether or not they agree the changes detailed in para 12 should be made. Please send responses to Dr Cliona O'Neill (tel 029 2068 2283; email cliona.oneill@hefcw.ac.uk).

Annex A. Principal differences between the Institutional Review: England and Northern Ireland (IRENI) and the Institutional Review: Wales (IRW).

| Item | Para* | IRENI | Para | IRW |
|-------------------------|--------------|---|-------------|--|
| Review components | 10, 15 | Reviews will have two components: a core section leading to judgments, and a thematic element which will not lead to a judgment. | 14, 21 | Two components: judgements and comments |
| Academic infrastructure | OD (b) | There will be an enhanced focus on the engagement of the institution with the Academic Infrastructure and other agreed independent reference points. | 12 | Judgement on academic standards covers the use made of external examiners, internal and external reviews, assessment policies, the Academic Infrastructure and other reference points, management information and other relevant topics. |
| Number of judgements | 11 | Four judgments: on <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the threshold standards of awards, • the quality of students' learning opportunities, • the enhancement of students' learning opportunities, and • from 2012-13, on the quality of public information, including that produced for students and applicants. | 14 | Two judgements: on <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 academic standards of its awards • the confidence that can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students |
| Judgement outcomes | Annex 2 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Threshold standards – meet/do not meet UK expectations • Other judgements – commended/ | 16-19 | The same for both judgements: Confidence/ limited confidence/ no confidence |

| | | meets UK expectations/ requires improvement to meet UK expectations/ does not meet UK expectations | | |
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| Comments | 15 | Commentary on the thematic element, which will not form part of the formal judgements | 21 | Comments on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the institution's arrangements for maintaining appropriate academic standards and quality of provision of postgraduate research programmes the institution's approach to the enhancement of the quality of its educational provision, both taught or research the accuracy and completeness of the public information that the institution publishes about the quality of its educational provision and the standards of its awards |
| | OD (d) | The review team will meet or receive information from a larger number of students. | 57, 63 | Preliminary meeting and briefing meeting include meetings with student representatives, review visit includes meetings with groups of students |
| Recommendations | 14 | Recommendations will not be graded. | 24 | Recommendations graded as essential, advisable or desirable. |
| Actions in progress | 14 | Affirmations of action in progress will be included. | | No specific acknowledgement of actions in progress |
| Briefing visit | 34 | There will be no three-day briefing visit by the review team – replaced by a one and a half day meeting of the review team which will be held 6 weeks before the review visit. | 61 | 3 day briefing visit held 5-6 weeks before the review. |
| Review trails | Annex 3a | There will be no specifically-defined, predetermined review trails. However, | 32 | Use trailing as a technique for gathering evidence in an organised way. |

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| | Section 3 | review teams will wish to see some of the evidence that institutions use to assure themselves that central policies and processes for quality and standards operate at local level. | | |
| Self-evaluation document | Annex 3a | A self-evaluation document (SED) will be required – to replace briefing paper | 52-53 | Self-evaluation document already required in Wales |
| Video- and teleconferencing | 83, OD (j) | More use will be made of videoconferencing and teleconferencing for meetings. | | No specific acknowledgement of how use can be made of video- and teleconferencing. |
| Document submission | Annex 4a | All documentation will be submitted electronically and team members will work with electronic documents. | 53, 62 | The SED made available both in hard copy and in electronic format. Other documentation can be provided electronically or hard copy, or a mixture of both |
| Institutional Facilitator | Annex 5 | The role of the institutional contact will be enhanced to that of institutional facilitator | 50-51 | Institutional facilitator in place in Wales |
| Reports | 49-51 | Reports will be shorter; there will be a summary written specifically for public readership. Draft provided to institutions 6 weeks after review visit. Normally published within 12 weeks of the review visit. Unpublished evidence base will be provided to the institution. | 69-72 | Reports comprise the findings of the review and will be as concise as possible while covering enough detail for it to make sense to an institutional audience. Draft normally provided to institution within 8 weeks. Normally published in Welsh and English within 22 weeks of the review visit. |
| Action plans | 53-54 | A published action plan will be prepared as a result of all reviews, whatever the judgment; institutions will be expected to involve the student body in preparing the action plan. Action plans to be updated annually until completed, and published on institutions' websites. | 75, 77 | Unpublished action plans required for limited and no confidence outcome judgements only. |

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| Revision of judgement | 61, 64 | A judgment indicating that an area of the review fails to reach the required standard will lead to a follow-up process which may lead to a revised judgment. | 76, 78 | Follow-up process does not lead to a revised judgement. Institutions with limited confidence outcomes undergo review four years, and with no confidence outcomes, two years, after the previous review. |
| Student charter | Annex 2 (14) | Expectation that a student charter, or equivalent document, setting out the mutual expectations of the institution and its students, is available. | | No expectation regarding a student charter |
| Reviewers | OD 28 | Four reviewers (including one student reviewer) and a review secretary. Potential to increase or decrease number of reviewers depending on the complexity of the provision. | 43 | Five (including one student reviewer) and a review secretary/coordinator. Potential to include additional reviewers if provision is extensive or complex. |
| Student submission | 26 | Student representative body invited to prepare a written submission. | 54-55 | Student representative body invited to prepare a submission – not specified to be a written document. |
| Lead student representative | Annex 6 | New role to allow student representatives to play a more central part in the organisation of the review. LSR to encourage engagement of students with the review process and keep them informed of its progress, oversee the production of the student written submission (SWS). | | No comparable role. |
| Follow-up procedures | 55-65 | Three years after the review visit report back on the review action plan, noting only areas where objectives of the action plan have not been met. Requires improvement – action plans to address risks relevant to this judgement to | 74-78 | Confidence – report 3 years after review, QAA visit to institution. Next review after 6 years. Limited confidence – action plan from the institution within three months of publication of the report, signed off when |

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| | | <p>be addressed within one year of publication of the review report. Peer visit to establish whether judgement can be changed.</p> <p>Does not meet –undergo another institutional review if progress has been made. Institutions may be charged for this. If this results in any judgement of less than meets, or if insufficient progress has been made to warrant holding a second review, HEFCE’s policy for unsatisfactory quality is invoked.</p> | | <p>institution indicates the action plan has been completed and implemented successfully with maximum time limit of 18 months. Next review after 4 years.</p> <p>No confidence – detailed action plan within three months, follow-up visit within 12 months, review signed off when QAA satisfied that action plan has been implemented successfully, within maximum time limit of 12 months. Next review after 2 years. Can result in invoking of HEFCW’s unsatisfactory quality procedure.</p> |
| | Annex 2, OD 26 | <p>Review teams may enquire into the ways in which an institution has considered the expectations of the <i>Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education in the European Higher Education Area</i> (EHEA) and any other guidance relating to European or other international practices, such as the European Credit Transfer System and the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area.</p> | 30-31 | <p>Comment on 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. Comment on how institutions have engaged with the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales.</p> |

*Paragraphs refer to the handbook, with the exception of those marked OD – operational description.

Timeline

| | Time | IRENI | IRW |
|---|--------------------|--|---|
| 1 | - Eighteen months* | <p>(except first year, when notice will be one year)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institution provides information about academic year • Institution completes collaborative provision proforma • QAA sets dates for all reviews in a particular year | |
| 2 | - 12 months* | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institution submits key information (student numbers, number of programmes, and so on) • Institution reports major changes to collaborative provision arrangements • Institution nominates IF and LSR | Preparatory briefing |
| 3 | - 9 months* | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Size of review team confirmed • Mode of collaborative provision review agreed • QAA identifies coordinating officer | |
| 4 | - ≥ 6 months* | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic for the thematic element is confirmed by QAA • Any agreed changes to review process are confirmed by QAA | preliminary meeting. Assistant Director (AD) visits institution to meet institutional representatives and students. AD provides briefing on the process of review and provides guidance on the institution's self-evaluation document (SED) and the student submission |
| 5 | - 4-5 months* | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Briefing event for IFs and LSRs • QAA gives institutions the names of team members | |
| 6 | - 16 weeks | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparatory meeting between the | |

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| | | institution and QAA officer at the institution | |
| 7 | - 11 weeks | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Document upload: institution uploads to QAA secure folder information including SED and SWS | |
| 8 | - 10 weeks | | QAA receives the institutional SED QAA receives the students' submission (if any) |
| 9 | - 7 weeks | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Team considers documentation remotely; QAA analyses public information set | |
| 10 | - 6 weeks | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review team makes first visit to the institution | |
| 11 | - 5 weeks | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> QAA informs institution of any further documentation required and confirms review visit details QAA confirms length of review visit | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> briefing visit . Review team and AD undertake the briefing visit to the institution Review team holds a meeting with the head of the institution, appropriate senior staff and student representatives Review team identifies broad lines of enquiry for the review visit Review team meets institutional representatives to agree the programme for the review visit and review trails Any additional information required before or during the review visit is identified |
| 12 | 0 | | Review visit. Review team visits the institution for up to five working days; AD joins the team for the final day of the review visit. Review team meets staff and students for discussion of lines of enquiry, including the |

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| | | | review trails |
| 13 | + 2 weeks | QAA informs institution and HEFCE/DEL of key findings | Letter outlining the review findings is agreed by the review team and sent to the head of the institution by the AD |
| 14 | + 6 weeks | QAA sends draft report and evidence base to institution | |
| 15 | + 8 weeks | | QAA sends the draft report to institution |
| 16 | + 9 weeks | Institution provides factual corrections; QAA finalises report | |
| 17 | + 12 weeks | QAA publishes report | Institution responds to the draft report |
| 18 | + 22 weeks | Institution publishes its action plan on its website | Report is published on the web |

* In the case of IRENI, timings refer to the start of the review year, whereas with IRW timings refer to the review event