

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

Guidance on the development of student charters

Date: 21 September 2011
Reference: W11/31HE
To: Heads of higher education institutions in Wales
Principals of directly funded further education colleges in
Wales
Response by: No response required
Contact: Name: Dr Cliona O'Neill
Telephone: 029 2068 2283
Email: cliona.oneill@hefcw.ac.uk

This circular provides guidance on developing Student Charters. It applies to Higher Education Institutions and to Further Education Institutions with directly funded higher education provision. You will need to take account of this guidance by 2012/13 if you do not already have a Student Charter or equivalent document in place. If you have such a document you will need to take account of this guidance in your next annual review of the charter.

This document is available online, in large print, Braille, on CD and on audio CD and cassette. Should you or someone you know require this in an alternative format, please contact us on (029) 2068 2225 or email info@hefcw.ac.uk.



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Introduction

1. This circular provides guidance on developing Student Charters. It applies to Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and to Further Education Institutions (FEIs) with directly funded higher education (HE) provision. Students of franchise HE in further education (FE) provision will be covered by the franchising HEI's Charter.
2. You will need to take account of this guidance by 2012/13 if you do not already have a Student Charter or equivalent document in place.
3. If you have a Student Charter or equivalent document in place you will need to take account of this guidance in your next annual review of the document.

Background

4. HEFCW's remit letter from the Welsh Government for 2011-12 included an expectation that HEFCW ensure that HE institutions agree a Student Charter jointly with their student unions (SUs), clearly laying out the mutual roles and responsibilities of institutions and of their students.
5. We formed a task and finish group to advise us in undertaking this work. This consisted of the Higher Education Wales (HEW) Chair of the Pro Vice Chancellor Learning and Teaching Advisory Group, NUS Wales President, HEW officer, NUS Wales staff member, and HEFCW officers.
6. The task and finish group built on the work of the Student Charter Group (SCG) in England, which produced a [report](#) and recommendations for the development of Student Charters in January 2011.
7. We also consulted our Student Experience, Teaching and Quality Committee, Colleges Wales and the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol in the development of this guidance.
8. The conclusions and recommendations of the SCG (with references) included that:
 - a) Each institution should have a single Student Charter or similar high level statement, covering all students (undergraduate and postgraduate, taught and research) and all staff, to set out the mutual expectations of universities and students; (3a, 3b(a))
 - b) The Charter should be jointly written by the institution and the student union. It should involve student-facing staff, students and student representatives from the outset; senior staff should demonstrate buy-in at strategic committees. (3a, 6.1)
 - c) The Charter should be short and clear, informing students of what they should be able to expect, what is required of them, and what to do if things do not meet expected standards; (3b(b), 3b(d))
 - d) The Charter should focus on current students; (3a)

- e) The Charter should be a summary document, providing signposts and links to more detailed regulations and course information, and should not be a legal contract. It should be as short as possible, preferably no more than two pages; it should be accessible to all students and staff; (3a, 6.5)
 - f) The Charter should emphasise the importance of belonging to a learning community and the importance of partnership working between staff and students; (3a)
 - g) The Charter should be reviewed jointly by students, student union officers and institutional staff on an annual basis to ensure it is still being used and remains relevant. Reviews should incorporate other feedback from students; (3a, 6.4)
 - h) There should be a clear communication and dissemination strategy, which is also reviewed annually, to ensure that the whole student body and all staff are informed and engaged, and that awareness of the Charter is not limited to SU representatives and senior staff; (2.11), 6.5)
 - i) Institutions should monitor student opinion after delivery to ensure that it has maximum impact. (3a, 6.2, 6.4)
9. In June 2011 we published [Circular W11/18HE Consultation on amendments to the Institutional Review: Wales](#). This included whether a Student Charter should be included in the documentation for the Institutional Review: Wales (IRW) process. The outcomes of this consultation were considered by our Quality Assessment and Enhancement Sub-Group (QAESG).

Guidelines on the development of Student Charters

- 10. We expect that all HEIs and all FEIs with directly funded Higher Education provision which do not already have a Student Charter or equivalent document in place will ensure that they do so by 1 August 2012, taking into account these guidelines and the conclusions and recommendations of the SCG.
- 11. The Student Charter should be a high level document which is applicable to the diverse body of students¹, including those with protected characteristics. It should provide signposts and links to more detailed information, such as regulations, student support, and course information.
- 12. Institutions which already have a Charter in place should take account of this guidance, and the conclusions and recommendations of the SCG, within the next annual review of that document.
- 13. HE institutions should have a single Student Charter covering all of their students and staff, including those studying HE in FE through franchise partnerships. They should include a diverse range of students, student

¹ part-time, full-time, international, European, UK, postgraduate, undergraduate, mature and non-traditional students, and students of franchise HE in FE

union officers and institutional staff from such partnerships in the development and review of the Charter to ensure that it is relevant to all of their students.

14. FEIs with more than one franchise partner will need to ensure each set of students is aware of the HEI Charter which applies to them; they may also invite students to be aware of any Charter specific to, and developed by, the FEI².
15. FEIs with directly funded HE provision should develop a Charter regardless of the number of directly funded HE credits they deliver. This could be as part of a document covering all the FEIs' students, if appropriate. These FEIs may also have franchise HE in FE provision, which will be covered by the franchising institution's Charter.
16. Where a HEI has a complex structure resulting in different expectations across the institution, it should still provide a single Charter covering all students of the institution. The Charter should link to additional information as appropriate, to provide the detail of where expectations vary.
17. The Charter should be reviewed jointly by students, student union officers and institutional staff on an annual basis to ensure it is still being used and remains relevant. The review should involve student facing staff if substantive changes are being made.
18. We endorse the recommendations of the SCG, and expect institutions to take account of these in developing their Charter.
19. In addition, we expect Charters for institutions in Wales to include the following:
 - A high level statement on the institution's responsibilities under the Welsh Language Act and as set out in their Welsh Language Schemes. This can include providing opportunities where appropriate for assessing student performance in Welsh, regardless of the language of tuition. The Quality Assurance Agency has produced [guidelines](#) for institutions on this³.
 - Signposting to where students may find information on opportunities to study through the medium of Welsh (eg on course web pages).
 - A high level statement on the institution's engagement with the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol, including a link to the Coleg's website.
 - A high level statement on the institution's provision of information on the cost of study, including signposting to full information (eg on course pages⁴).

² This could be either as part of a document covering all the students of the FE institution, or a specific HE document.

³ *Guidelines for higher education institutions in Wales for effective practice in examining and assessing in a language other than the language of tuition*

⁴ HEFCW Guidance: [Provision of information for students on costs of study](#)

20. The SCG recommended that the Charter be aimed at current students. However, we expect it to be provided in a location where it is readily accessible by prospective students, should they wish to use it in informing their choice of where to study.

Future developments

21. The IRW consultation outcomes included a question on whether the Student Charter should be part of the document for the IRW from 2012/13. The detailed outcomes of the consultation will be published in autumn 2011.
22. We intend that our fee plan guidance for 2013/14 will refer to our expectation that institutions have in place a Student Charter.
23. The Higher Education Academy is able to provide support to institutions in their development of Student Charters on request.

Impact assessment

24. We are committed to contributing to advancing equality and diversity agendas. In addition to meeting our statutory responsibilities, our intention is to drive cultural change and proactive approaches to ensure that equality and diversity issues are fully integrated into our own and the sector's policies and practices and meet Welsh Government priorities. Our Equality Scheme confirms our commitment and statutory responsibilities regarding the 2010 Equality Act. As part of our policy development process, we have undertaken an internal equality impact assessment screening to consider the impact of this document on learners with protected characteristics and groups underrepresented in higher education. The outcomes of this screening are available upon request.
25. We also considered sustainability matters as part of the impact assessment screening of this document. You will need to ensure that sustainability is adequately addressed within the Student Charter and that the document is consistent with and links to the policies, values, and actions set out within your institution's own sustainability policy, and environmental management plan.

Further information / responses to:

26. For further information, contact Dr Cliona O'Neill (tel 029 2068 2283; email cliona.oneill@hefcw.ac.uk).