

Cylchlythyr | Circular

Request for submission of case studies on how the student voice contributes to governance

Date: 29 October 2012
Reference: W12/34HE
To: Heads of higher education institutions in Wales
Principals of further education colleges in Wales
Response by: 31 January 2013
Contact: Name: Dr Cliona O'Neill
Telephone: 029 2068 2283
Email: cliona.oneill@hefcw.ac.uk

This Circular aims to address a task in HEFCW's [2012-13 remit letter](#) from the Welsh Government. Institutions are asked to provide multiple case studies to HEFCW on how the student voice contributes to governance in their institutional context by **31 January 2013**.

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Introduction

1. This Circular aims to address the following task in HEFCW's [2012-13 remit letter](#) from the Welsh Government 'I want students to have a say in the governance arrangements of their institutions by ensuring that mechanisms are in place to allow the student voice to be heard and acted upon...I would also like the Council to work with institutions to align student representation with the Welsh Government's response to the McCormick Review.'
2. Institutions are asked to provide multiple case studies to HEFCW on how the student voice contributes to governance in their institutional context by **31 January 2013**.

Background

3. CUC published guidance in 2009 ([Guide for Members of Higher Education Governing Bodies in the UK](#)) which included information on how students can have a say in the governance arrangements of their institutions.
4. An independent review of HE governance in Wales, chaired by John McCormick, was commissioned by the Welsh Government ([Achievement and Accountability](#)), which reported in March 2011. This noted that 'while all chairs are alert to the importance of engagement with the 'student voice' and the majority of boards have student representation, further improvement is still needed. Concerns have also been raised by the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) surrounding the lack of board oversight of the student complaints process.'
5. In March 2011 the Welsh Cabinet received an [oral statement on Higher Education and Further Education Governance](#), following on from the McCormick review. This noted that 'We have also made it clear that we want to see concrete proposals emerging from higher education institutions in the new context in which the voice of students will be more powerful than it has been in the past, and that that should also be reflected within the structures of student representation that we see operating in Wales'. The Welsh Cabinet endorsed the recommendations set out by the Education Minister following the McCormick review of HE governance in Wales, that a new arms-length body with increased planning and regulatory powers be created. We await further consultation in this area.
6. The Leadership Foundation and Committee of University Chairs (CUC) published a guide for governors in 2011, [Getting to grips with academic standards, quality, and the student experience](#). This noted that 'in the 1970s, a concordat was agreed with the National Union of Students over student representation, giving students membership on all governing bodies and senates/academic boards (except for matters about staff or students)'. It stated that it is key for the governing body to understand what students want from their HE experience.

7. The Welsh Government published its [*White Paper: Further and Higher Education \(Wales Bill\)*](#) in July 2012. This noted that students (and staff) should have a stronger voice in the running of HE. It also noted that 'effective student representation within HE will be paramount in ensuring that the learner voice is heard and acted upon.'
8. HEFCW has established a task and finish group to advise on this and other related remit letter tasks. The group includes HEFCW officers, NUS Wales president, a part-time student, the Chair of the Higher Education Wales Pro-Vice Chancellors' Learning and Teaching Advisory Group, the Chair of the Welsh Clerks/Secretaries group, an NUS Wales staff member, Higher Education Academy Wales officer, and a staff member from Colegau Cymru.

Actions taken to date

9. A range of actions have already been undertaken to enhance the student voice and student representation. These are detailed below.
10. HEFCW commissioned a [study on student representation](#) from York Consulting, which was published in 2006. This concluded that there were well developed student representation systems in Wales, and recommended some form of nationally coordinated support. It identified the following strengths:
 - All institutions considered students to be key agents in the quality improvement agenda, and acknowledged the role they could potentially play;
 - Systems in most institutions were well developed at the institutional level, and good formal and informal links appeared to exist between senior management of the institution and the SU president;
 - Some institutions had in place clear structures to support student representatives through networks, forums and on-line support;
 - At the faculty, school or department level, weaknesses with existing structures had been identified by a number of institutions, and independent efforts to address these had been developed;
 - A majority of institutions offered some form of training to student representatives;
 - There were clear and numerous examples of how students had effected change at both institutional and operational level;
 - Institutions had developed processes for ensuring feedback systems were in place for students studying higher education (HE) courses in further education institutions (FEIs), although active engagement in quality enhancement was less evident.
11. As a result, a cross-sector group was formed to enhance, share and build on good practice in student engagement in Wales. The group consisted of Higher Education Wales (HEW), the National Union of Students in Wales (NUS Wales), the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW),

the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) and the Higher Education Academy (HEA). The group developed the Wales Initiative for Student Engagement (WISE), which was launched by the then Minister for Education, Jane Hutt, in October 2009. WISE is an approach which engages students as active participants in the leadership, management, development and delivery of their own educational experience and is a defining feature of further and higher education in Wales. Its aim is to ensure Wales remains at the forefront of student engagement in order continually to empower students to participate in the enhancement of their own learning experiences. It is underpinned by three principles: to work in partnership, value feedback and harness expertise. A WISE action plan report for 2011/12 has been produced, which outlines how student engagement was enhanced in 2011/12. A new action plan has been developed for 2012/13, and includes actions in relation to student engagement and representation.

12. In 2007 HEFCW agreed to support a pilot NUS Wales campaign to enhance student representation in Wales and to support student involvement in the QAA Institutional Review process over the final two years of the six year cycle (ie 2007/08 and 2008/09). The campaign was entitled 'Have your Say'. In 2009 Council agreed to provide funding to NUS Wales to fully implement the campaign, to enhance student representation and support institutions through their first review under the new QAA Institutional Review method. Funding has currently been agreed until the end of 2012/13. This includes developing resources of good practice, enhancing the [Have your Say toolkit](#), encouraging student participation in representation, and providing student representatives with the skills and knowledge effectively to contribute to the learner voice.
13. The Higher Education Academy is leading work to coordinate activity in Wales to enhance specific areas of teaching and learning in Higher Education at the request of HEFCW. This runs under the umbrella of 'Future Directions'. The first theme is Graduates for our future, with three work strands
 - Students as partners;
 - Learning in employment;
 - Learning for employment.
14. All institutions in Wales have at least one student on the governing body (four institutions have two).

The remit letter task

15. The task and finish group advised that, given the range of activities that have been carried out to date on the areas covered by this remit letter task, the focus of the task should be on how the student voice contributes to governance.
16. In order to share the good practice already in operation in the sector, the group agreed that we should ask institutions to submit multiple case

studies to highlight good practice on how the student voice contributes to governance in their institutional context.

17. These submissions will be subject to a selection process carried out by the task and finish group, and those case studies selected will be collated into a good practice document. This will be published electronically and will be published under the WISE and Future Directions umbrellas. The publication will: celebrate diversity; increase awareness of good practice in Welsh institutions, both within and outside Wales; and enable Wales as a whole to enhance the ways in which the student voice contributes to governance through building on the experience of others.
18. The approach will be similar to that which has recently been used successfully by the HE Academy in the Future Directions quality enhancement theme, where case studies from all institutions have been published on each of the three work strands. We will include [case studies from the Students as Partners work strand](#) which focus on how the student voice contributes to governance within this publication. There is therefore no need for institutions to resubmit case studies which have already been published under this work strand.
19. We are asking for one or more case studies under each of the following categories:

Category	Example
ways in which the student voice feeds into the governing body	ways in which governors are expected to engage with the student body; the NSS and other student surveys; annual statement prepared by the student union as evidence for institutional review; ways in which the institution ensures it captures the voice of the diverse student body
how student voice is captured throughout different elements of the student experience	academic, student services, student support) across the diverse student body, including through both English and Welsh, and how this feeds into governance
innovative methods of listening to the student voice	through shaping/informing the agenda of meetings of the governing body, inviting student representatives to chair sections of meetings, or via other institutional committees, and using technology to gather views in innovative ways; good practice in induction, including addressing the specific training needs of student governors
closing the feedback loop	ensuring that the governing body

	provides feedback to the student body
Other	Case studies on any other aspect of how the student voice contributes to governance

20. It would be helpful if institutions could include examples of how they engage the diverse student body, including part-time, full-time, international, European, UK, postgraduate, undergraduate, mature and non-traditional students, Welsh speakers and students of HE in FE.
21. In order to meet the timescales of the remit letter request, good practice case studies need to be submitted to HEFCW by **31 January 2013**.
22. We will aim to feed the case studies into HEFCW training for governors, to be held in April/May 2013, in order to enable the outcomes to become embedded. It will also be featured in a future Higher Education Wales/Chairs of Higher Education Wales strategic dialogue, and in NUS Wales events.

Timetable

23. A timetable is included below for ease of reference.

Date	Action
October 2012	HEFCW circular requesting submission of multiple case studies by institutions
31 January 2013	Institutions to submit multiple case studies
Early-mid February 2013	Task and Finish Group meet to agree which case studies are published
Late February/early March 2013	Case studies are published electronically in a good practice document.

Further information / responses to

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