

Cylchlythyr | Circular

Revised guidance on the development of student charters

Date: 29 January 2014
Reference: W14/05HE
To: Heads of higher education institutions in Wales
Principals of directly-funded further education colleges in Wales
Response by: No response required; actions to be implemented by 1 August 2014
Contact: Name: Dr Cliona O'Neill
Telephone: 029 2068 2283
Email: cliona.oneill@hefcw.ac.uk

This circular provides revised guidance on developing Student Charters, and replaces circular W11/31HE. It applies to Higher Education Institutions and to Further Education Institutions with directly funded higher education provision. Revisions were made in response to the work described in circular [W14/04HE](#), and information on the changes is available in that circular. You will need to take account of this guidance in your next annual review of the charter.

If you require this document in an alternative accessible format, please telephone us on (029) 2068 2225 or email info@hefcw.ac.uk.



Noddir gan
Lywodraeth Cymru
Sponsored by
Welsh Government

Introduction

1. This circular provides revised guidance on developing Student Charters, and replaces [circular W11/31HE](#). 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. Revisions were made in response to the work described in [circular W14/04HE: The impact of the guidance on student charters, and on good practice in funding of effective, democratic student unions, and student representation](#), and information on the changes is available in that circular.
2. You will need to take account of this guidance in your next annual review of the document.

Background

3. 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.
4. 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.
5. 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.
6. We also consulted our Student Experience, Teaching and Quality Committee, Colleges Wales and the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol in the development of this guidance.
7. 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)
8. Following the publication of [circular W11/18HE Consultation on amendments to the Institutional Review: Wales](#) it was agreed that the Student Charter should be included in the documentation for the Institutional Review: Wales (IRW) process.

Revised guidelines on the development of Student Charters

- 9. We expect all HEIs and all FEIs with directly funded Higher Education provision to have had a Student Charter or equivalent document in place from 1 August 2012, taking into account HEFCW guidelines and the conclusions and recommendations of the SCG. Institutions and their Student Union may choose to call it something else, eg Partnership Agreement, but for ease of reference we will refer to it as the 'Student Charter' throughout this circular.
- 10. 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.
- 11. 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.
- 12. 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 union officers and institutional staff from such partnerships in the

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

development and review of the Charter to ensure that it is relevant to all of their students.

13. 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.
14. 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.
15. 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.
16. 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. Both the incoming and outgoing officers should be involved in reviewing the Charter, with responsibility for sign off resting with the incoming officers. The review should involve student facing staff if substantive changes are being made. Both partners are expected to promote awareness of this document among all their stakeholders (as noted in para 7 (h)).
17. We endorse the recommendations of the SCG, and expect institutions to take account of these in developing their Charter.
18. 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.

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*

- 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).
 - Signposting to where students may find information on opportunities for them to study overseas.
19. 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.
20. We expect institutions and their student unions to continue to monitor the impact of the guidance annually, as part of the process of updating the student charter.
21. The Higher Education Academy is able to provide support to institutions in the revision and/or implementation of Student Charters on request.

Impact assessment

22. We have carried out an equality impact assessment (EIA) screening to help safeguard against discrimination and promote equality. We also considered the impact of policies on the Welsh language, and Welsh language provision within the HE sector in Wales. Contact equality@hefcw.ac.uk for more information about EIAs.

Further information / responses to

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

⁴ HEFCW guidance: [W10/07HE: Provision of information for students on costs of study](#)