

## Cylchlythyr | Circular

# Accreditation in the Key Information Set: Consultation on criteria and processes for inclusion of accrediting bodies

**Date:** 2 July 2014  
**Reference:** W14/25HE  
**To:** Heads of higher education institutions in Wales  
Principals of directly-funded further education institutions in Wales  
**Response by:** 31 July 2014  
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This consultation invites comments on the criteria and processes used to determine whether accrediting bodies are eligible for inclusion in the list used for the Key Information Set (KIS), and on the processes for maintaining this list. Responses should be made online by **noon on Thursday 31 July 2014** using the response form at [www.hefce.ac.uk/whatwedo/lt/publicinfo/kis/accredit/](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/whatwedo/lt/publicinfo/kis/accredit/)

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



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## Introduction

1. This consultation invites comments on the criteria and processes used to determine whether accrediting bodies are eligible for inclusion in the list used for the Key Information Set (KIS), and on the processes for maintaining this list.

## Key points

2. One item of information collected about undergraduate courses as part of the Key Information Set is accreditation granted to the course by professional, statutory and regulatory bodies. This helps prospective students understand how completing the programme may contribute to their future employment prospects.
3. HEFCE works with the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) on behalf of the four UK higher education funding bodies to deliver the KIS. To support the collection of this information in a consistent, structured way, HESA maintains a list of accrediting bodies and associated statements, which describe their accreditations. It administers an annual process through which bodies may apply to be added to the list. Applications are considered by a KIS decision-making panel with representation from HEFCE, on behalf of the four funding bodies, and the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education.
4. The funders have recently reviewed and made what we consider to be minor changes to the processes and criteria used in the annual application process. We have also sought to develop and document additional processes for maintaining the list of accrediting bodies.
5. This UK-wide consultation seeks views on the appropriateness of the proposed processes and criteria. It aims to ensure that they are fit for purpose, and thus support the aim of providing high-quality information to prospective students to assist them in making decisions about their undergraduate course.
6. The proposed guidance and application forms are attached as **Annexes A to G**. We invite comments specifically on:
  - the proposed criteria for inclusion in the list of accrediting bodies
  - the appropriateness of the organisations responsible for applying the criteria
  - the proposed processes for maintaining the list
  - the clarity of the guidance.

## Action required

7. Responses to this consultation should be made online by **noon on Thursday 31 July 2014** using the response form, which can be accessed at [www.hefce.ac.uk/whatwedo/it/publicinfo/kis/accredit/](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/whatwedo/it/publicinfo/kis/accredit/).
8. This is an open consultation, and views from anyone with an interest in information about higher education are welcomed.

## Background

9. The developments of the Key Information Set (KIS) and its presentation on the Unistats website have been informed by a substantial programme of research and evidence collection. It contains the items of information that prospective students have identified as most important in making their decisions, and is intended to provide high-quality information in an accessible, comprehensive and comparable way.
10. The KIS was first published in September 2012 and includes data drawn from existing national datasets, such as the National Student Survey and the Destination of Leavers from Higher Education survey, as well as data on learning and teaching activities, assessment methods, accreditation, financial support and accommodation costs, which are collected specifically for this purpose.
11. To allow for the collection of accreditation information, a list of accrediting bodies has been created, with standard text agreed with these bodies to be used in the KIS for each of their accreditations. An annual application process has been put in place for adding bodies to this list.
12. The Higher Education Public Information Steering Group (HEPISG), which is a UK-wide body with higher education (HE) stakeholder and sector group representation, oversees the ongoing development of the KIS. At the time of the inception of the KIS, it requested that a review of the criteria and processes used for the list of accrediting bodies should take place after two years. A small working group with membership from the Higher Education Better Regulation Group, HEFCE, the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) and the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education has recently carried this out. This group has redrafted the guidance concerning accreditation, and has documented a set of processes. These are outlined in the annexes to this consultation.

## Consultation proposals

13. The following are the specific issues on which we are seeking views, and the questions relating to each. Please refer to the annexes for the full

descriptions of processes and responsibilities, the application form and the accompanying guidance.

#### Criteria for including accrediting bodies in the KIS

14. We propose that applications will be assessed against the following criteria.
  - a. **Benefit to the student:** The accreditation should represent a potential benefit to the student, which it is valuable for them to be aware of when choosing their undergraduate course. The body should therefore be able to demonstrate that its accreditation meets at least one of the following criteria.
    - i. Graduates are able to practise as a professional in a specific field (for example, they receive a license to practise that is required by law).
    - ii. Graduates are granted chartered status or the completion of the accredited course forms part of a recognised pathway to professional recognition.
    - iii. Graduates are granted exemption from all or some professional exams.
    - iv. Graduates are eligible for entry to membership of a professional association or learned society.
    - v. The programme has been assessed as meeting externally designated standards and quality thresholds that are recognised by the sector's industry and employers.
  - b. **Accreditation process:** In addition to explaining the benefit of the accreditation to the student, the body will need to demonstrate that its accreditation process is robust and involves the following.
    - i. A definitive yes or no decision at the end of the accreditation process.
    - ii. A time-limited period of accreditation, with further review by the end of the accreditation period.In addition, it will also need to involve one or both of the following:
    - iii. External peer review.
    - iv. Regular monitoring of student performance.
  - c. **Availability of information about accreditation:** The accrediting body should include a clear description of its accreditation process and the value of the accreditation on its website, along with a list of accredited courses. This should include an explanation of the implications for students currently pursuing an accredited programme of study if the accreditation is not renewed. It should provide a link to this information.

### **Consultation question 1**

**Are the proposed eligibility criteria sufficiently broad to include all accreditations or endorsements about which a prospective student might usefully be informed?**

**If not, how should they be amended to ensure this?**

15. We propose that decisions about applying the criteria for inclusion in the accreditation list should continue to be taken jointly by the panel described in para 3. A sub-group of HEPISG would consider any appeals and the application process would be administered by HESA.

### **Consultation question 2**

**Is there an appropriate range of organisations and expertise involved in operating the process?**

**If not, which other organisations would it be appropriate to involve and why?**

#### Maintaining the accreditation table

16. The following sections of the guidance outline how we propose to maintain the accreditation information used in the KIS. You may also wish to comment on the 'Process for assuring accuracy of accreditation listings on Unistats' in the guidance at Annex G.

#### Changes to 'accreditation type' text

17. Accrediting bodies may request amendments to the existing 'accreditation type' text at any point in the year. They should submit these requests to HESA.
18. HESA will update the accreditation type text, and contact any institutions that are using the existing text to inform them of the change. Any queries from institutions about the change should be directed to the accrediting body, rather than to HESA.
19. If there is a substantive change in the nature of the accreditation (for example, if it no longer confers the same exemptions), accrediting bodies should follow the process for a new accreditation type.

#### Applications for additional accreditation types

20. If an institution identifies a new accreditation type for a body that already appears in the accreditation table, it may contact HESA to propose adding this. Accrediting bodies may also request the addition, provided they have written support from an institution.

21. The accrediting body should complete the 'Application for a new KIS accreditation type' form. This form should be returned by 1 December for inclusion in the following year's KIS.
22. Applications will be considered by the KIS decision-making panel for professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs). HESA will inform the PSRB of the panel's decision and the reasons for it. The body will be able to appeal this decision. Such appeals will be considered by correspondence by the sub-group of HEPISG.
23. If an accrediting body identifies a substantive change in an existing accreditation type that may have a bearing on its inclusion in the KIS, **it should make a new request for accreditation** using the 'Application for a new KIS accreditation type' form from HESA. Changes to existing accreditation types will be considered by correspondence on receipt.

Process to remove accrediting bodies or accreditation types from the KIS accreditation table

24. Requests to remove an accrediting body or an accreditation type from the KIS accreditation table should be directed to HESA. These should be made on the grounds that the accreditation is no longer in use or that the body no longer meets the criteria to be included.
  - a. **Requests from accrediting bodies:** If the request is from the accrediting body, HESA will carry out the removal and confirm this to the accrediting body.  
If the accrediting body or accreditation type is currently in use, but the accrediting body has requested its removal, HESA will also contact any institutions using this item to inform them of the removal.
  - b. **Requests from other organisations or parties:** If the request has been made by an organisation other than the accrediting body, which may be an institution, or another party, HESA will contact the relevant accrediting body to seek its agreement to the removal. If the body agrees, HESA will proceed as for a. above.  
If the accrediting body contests the removal, it will be asked to provide a justification for remaining on the list. This, along with any further evidence that officers can provide by, for example, reviewing the body's website and checking for past usage, will be forwarded to the KIS PSRB decision-making panel, which will determine by correspondence whether the body should be removed from the list. HESA will inform the accrediting body of the panel's decision and the reasons for it. It will be able to appeal this decision, and any appeals will be considered by correspondence by the sub-group of HEPISG.
  - c. **Removal of unused accrediting bodies and accreditation types:** The use of accrediting bodies and associated accreditation types will be reviewed annually and the following action taken:
    - i. Any accreditation types that have not been used in the final KIS dataset during the previous two years will be removed.

- ii. Any accrediting bodies whose accreditation types have not been used in the final KIS during the previous two years will be removed.
  - iii. An accrediting body will be informed by HESA in the event of its removal from the table or the removal of any of its accreditation types on these grounds.
25. HESA will produce a report of accrediting body usage each autumn, and will process any removals before publishing the manual for the next year's KIS collection.

### **Consultation question 3**

**Are the proposed processes for maintaining the list, including the removals process, appropriate?  
If not, how should they be modified and why?**

#### Guidance for applicants

26. Please refer to **Annexes B and C**.

### **Consultation question 4**

**Is the guidance for applicants sufficiently clear?  
If not, where would it benefit from clarification?**

### **Next Steps**

27. We will analyse the responses to this consultation and update the guidance to reflect them where appropriate. We will recommend the revisions to HEPISG for approval in August, and the new processes will come into effect from September 2014.
28. We will publish the analysis of responses to the consultation. Additionally, all responses may be disclosed on request, under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act. The act gives a public right of access to any information held by a public authority, in this case HEFCE. This includes information provided in response to a consultation. We have a responsibility to decide whether any responses, including information about your identity, should be made public or treated as confidential. We can refuse to disclose information only in exceptional circumstances. This means that responses to this consultation are unlikely to be treated as confidential except in very particular circumstances. For further information about the act see [www.ico.gov.uk](http://www.ico.gov.uk).

## Further information

29. For further information, contact Dr Cliona O'Neill (tel 029 2068 2283; email [cliona.oneill@hefcw.ac.uk](mailto:cliona.oneill@hefcw.ac.uk)), or the HEFCE contact, Catherine Nixon (tel 0117 931 7476, e-mail [c.nixon@hefce.ac.uk](mailto:c.nixon@hefce.ac.uk)).

## **Annex A: Professional, statutory and regulatory bodies and accreditation statements in the KIS**

1. As part of the development of the Key Information Set (KIS), accreditations granted to courses by professional bodies were identified as an information item that was helpful in enabling students to make informed choices about undergraduate courses.
2. The accreditation table used for the KIS holds lists of accrediting bodies and statements describing the accreditation(s) that they offer. These statements are referred to as 'accreditation types'. Each combination of accrediting body and type has a unique code and institutions may select one or more codes to include against each of their KIS courses where appropriate. There are annual processes for applications to add new bodies or new accreditation types to the table.
3. Accreditations are usually granted by professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs), which are a diverse group of professional and employer bodies, regulators and those with statutory authority over a profession or group of professionals. PSRBs engage with higher education as regulators, accrediting or endorsing courses that meet professional standards, provide a route to the professions or are recognised by employers. There may be multiple bodies fulfilling a variety of roles in some areas, which is why multiple accreditations are permitted for each course. The KIS also includes organisations not usually referred to as PSRBs, for example employers' representatives which may undertake scrutiny of programmes with reference to industrial content or higher skills development.
4. Some accreditation statements included in the KIS therefore indicate that a course results in membership, chartered status or full or partial exemption from exams; others, that it is recognised as meeting a particular set of criteria or a quality threshold that is recognised by employers.
5. The Higher Education Better Regulation Group (HEBRG) in England has examined the nature of the relationship between PSRBs and the higher education sector and published its findings in 2011 in the report 'Professional, statutory and regulatory bodies: An exploration of their engagement with higher education' (available online at [www.hebetterregulation.ac.uk/OurWork/Pages/Professional,StatutoryandregulatoryBodies\(PSRBs\).aspx](http://www.hebetterregulation.ac.uk/OurWork/Pages/Professional,StatutoryandregulatoryBodies(PSRBs).aspx)). Its work has informed the development of the criteria used for the inclusion of bodies in the KIS.
8. It is a requirement that organisations included as accrediting bodies in the KIS provide information about their accreditation or endorsement of higher education courses on their web-site. This information is then linked to from the KIS accreditation statement to enable prospective students to fully understand the nature of the accreditation or

endorsement that has been granted to the course and the potential benefits of this to them.

### **Assurance of accreditation information**

9. Higher education providers submitting KIS data are responsible for assuring their accuracy. The primary relationship in the area of accreditation information is between the institution and the accrediting body, and institutions should seek advice from the relevant accrediting body if they are unsure which accreditation applies to their course. Accrediting bodies are in the best position to understand whether their accreditations are being used accurately in the KIS and it is therefore appropriate for them to carry out periodic checks of the data and liaise directly with any institution where they identify an issue. Accreditation information forms part of the audit programme for the KIS audits that HEFCE conduct annually, and which HEFCW also plans to carry out.

### **Process for applications to be added to the accreditation table**

#### Application process

10. Decisions about the application of the criteria for inclusion in the accreditation list will be taken by a panel with representatives from HEFCE, acting on behalf of all four UK HE funding bodies, and the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education. A sub-group of the Higher Education Public Information Steering Group (HEPISG), which is a UK-wide body with HE stakeholder and sector group representation, will consider any appeals. The application process is administered by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA).
11. The addition of an accrediting body to the list of bodies may be requested by an institution, if it wishes to indicate that a course it intends to return in its KIS dataset is accredited by that body. The institution should request the addition by contacting HESA with an explanation of the benefit of the accreditation to prospective students, and should direct the accrediting body to complete an application form. This should explain its accreditation process in more detail, and demonstrate how it meets the criteria for inclusion of accrediting bodies in the KIS. This form must be returned by 1 December for inclusion in the following year's KIS.
12. This application form, along with the information from the requesting institution, will be considered by the KIS PSRB decision-making panel in January. Decisions will be issued by the end of January.
13. If an accrediting body wishes to be added to the list, it must ensure that an institution contacts HESA to support the addition prior to submitting its application.

## Appeals

14. If an accrediting body is not accepted for inclusion in the list, it will have a right to appeal. Reasons for appealing should be put in writing, within one month of being notified of the initial panel decision. Appeals will be limited to 1,000 words. The case will then be considered by a sub-group of HEPIISG, which will decide whether there are grounds for accepting the appeal. If HEPIISG rejects the appeal, an applicant will not be able to submit a further case for inclusion until there has been a material change to the organisation's accreditation process.

## Assessment criteria

15. Applications will be assessed against the following:
  - a. **Benefit to the student:** The accreditation should represent a potential benefit to the student, of which it is valuable for them to be aware when choosing their undergraduate course. The body should therefore be able to demonstrate that its accreditation meets at least one of the following criteria.
    - i. Graduates are able to practise as a professional in a specific field (for example, they receive a license to practise that is required by law).
    - ii. Graduates are granted chartered status or the completion of the accredited course forms part of a recognised pathway to professional recognition.
    - iii. Graduates are granted exemption from all or some professional exams.
    - iv. Graduates are eligible for entry to membership of a professional association or learned society.
    - v. The programme has been assessed as meeting externally designated standards and quality thresholds that are recognised by the sector's industry and employers.
  - b. **Accreditation process:** In addition to explaining the benefit of the accreditation to the student, the body will need to demonstrate that its accreditation process is robust and involves the following.
    - i. A definitive yes or no decision at the end of the accreditation process.
    - ii. A time-limited period of accreditation, with further review by the end of the accreditation period.In addition, it will also need to involve one or both of the following.
    - iii. External peer review.
    - iv. Regular monitoring of student performance.
  - c. **Availability of information about accreditation:** The accrediting body should include a clear description of its accreditation process and the value of the accreditation on its web-site, along with a list of accredited courses. This should include an explanation of the

implications for students currently pursuing an accredited programme of study if the accreditation is not renewed. It should provide a link to this information.

## **Annex B: Guidance for completing the application for addition to the Key Information Set list of accrediting bodies**

### **Name of accrediting body**

1. Please supply the name of the accrediting body.

### **Location of accreditation information on web-site**

2. Please provide the URL for where information about the accreditation(s) may be found on your web-site.

### **Statement describing each type of accreditation granted**

3. Please provide a brief summary statement (maximum 300 characters) of each accreditation granted to an undergraduate programme by the body. This statement is for publication as part of the course record on Unistats and should therefore explain clearly to a prospective student the benefit of pursuing an accredited course.

### **Higher education courses that are already accredited or that you expect to accredit prior to next year's Key Information Set**

4. Please provide examples of higher education courses that you already accredit or that you expect to accredit prior to next year's Key Information Set.

### **Benefit to the student**

5. Please describe how your accreditation meets at least one of the following criteria:
  - a. Graduates are able to practise as a professional in a specific field, (for example, they receive a license to practise that is required by law).and in some cases receive a license to practise that is required by law.
  - b. Graduates are granted chartered status or completing the accredited course forms part of a recognised pathway to professional recognition.
  - c. Graduates are granted exemption from all or part of professional exams.
  - d. Graduates are eligible for entry to membership of a professional association or learned society.
  - e. The programme has been assessed as meeting externally designated standards and quality thresholds that are recognised by the sector's industry and employers.

### **Accreditation process**

6. Please describe how your accreditation process incorporates the following.
  - external peer review
  - a definitive yes or no decision at the end of the accreditation process
  - a time-limited period of accreditation, with further review by the end of the accreditation period

- regular monitoring of student performance.

**Further information**

7. Please provide any further information that you consider relevant in determining whether your application meets the criteria for inclusion in the Key Information Set list of accrediting bodies.

**Annex C: Application for addition to the Key Information Set list of accrediting bodies**

1. Name of accrediting body

2. Location of accreditation information on web-site

3. Accreditation statement(s)

4. Courses accredited or expected to be accredited

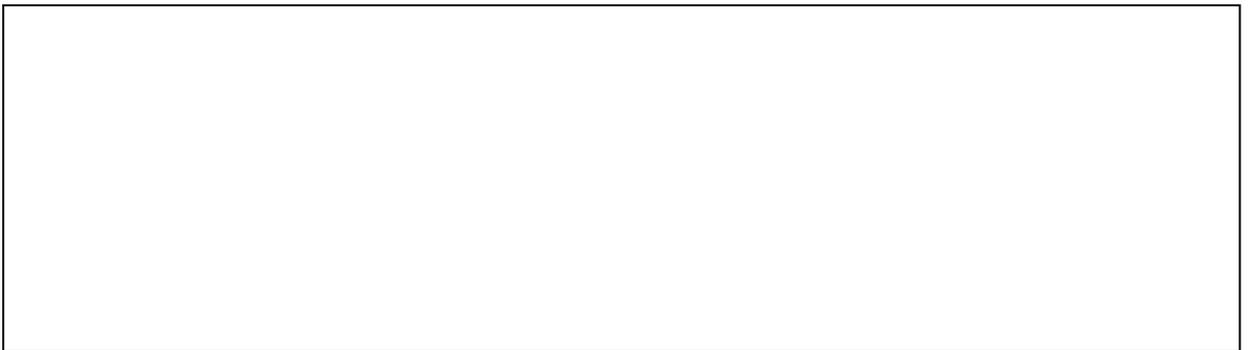
5. Benefit to the student

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for the student to write their response to the question 'Benefit to the student'.

6. Accreditation process

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for providing details about the accreditation process.

7. Further information

An empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for providing further information.

## **Annex D: Maintenance of the accreditation table**

### **Changes to 'accreditation type' text**

1. Accrediting bodies may request amendments to existing 'accreditation type' text at any point in the year. They should submit these requests to the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA).
2. HESA will update the accreditation type text and contact any institutions that are using the existing text to inform them of the change. Any queries from institutions about the change should then be directed to the accrediting body, rather than to HESA.
3. If there is a substantive change in the nature of the accreditation (for example if it no longer confers the same exemptions), accrediting bodies should follow the process for a new accreditation type.

### **Applications for an additional accreditation type**

4. If an institution identifies a new accreditation type for an accrediting body that already exists in the accreditation table it may propose the addition of this to HESA. Accrediting bodies may also request the addition provided they have written support from an institution.
5. The accrediting body should complete the 'Application for a new KIS accreditation type' form.
6. This form must be returned by 1 December for inclusion in the following year's Key Information Set (KIS).
7. Applications will be considered by the KIS professional, statutory and regulatory body decision-making panel. HESA will inform the body of the panel's decision and the reasons for this. It will be able to appeal this decision and any appeals will be considered by correspondence by the sub-group of the Higher Education Public Information Steering Group.
8. If an accrediting body identifies a substantive change in an existing accreditation type that may have bearing on its inclusion in the KIS, it should request the 'Application for a new KIS accreditation type' form directly from HESA. Changes to existing accreditation types will be considered by correspondence on receipt.

## **Annex E: Application for a new Key Information Set accreditation type**

1. Name of accrediting body

2. Location of accreditation information on web-site

3. Accreditation statement (300 characters maximum)

4. Supporting statement

## **Annex F: Process for removal of accrediting bodies or accreditation types from the Key Information Set accreditation table**

1. Requests to remove an accrediting body or an accreditation type from the Key Information Set (KIS) accreditation table should be directed to the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA). These should be made on the grounds that the accreditation is no longer in use or that the body no longer meets the criteria to be included.

a. **Requests from accrediting bodies:** If the request is from the accrediting body, HESA will action the removal and confirm this to the accrediting body.

If the accrediting body or accreditation type is currently in use, but the accrediting body has requested its removal, HESA will also contact any institutions using this item to inform them of the removal.

b. **Requests from other organisations or parties:** If the request has been made by an organisation other than the accrediting body, which may be an institution, or another party HESA will contact the relevant accrediting body to seek its agreement to the removal. If the body agrees, HESA will proceed as for a. above.

If the accrediting body contests the removal, it will be asked to provide a justification for remaining on the list. This, along with any further evidence that officers are able to provide by, for example, reviewing the body's web-site and checking for past usage, will be forwarded to the KIS professional, statutory and regulatory body (PSRB) decision-making panel, which will determine by correspondence whether the body should be removed from the list.

HESA will inform the accrediting body of the panel's decision and the reasons for it. It will be able to appeal this decision, and any appeals will be considered by correspondence by the sub-group of the Higher Education Public Information Steering Group (HEPISG).

c. **Removal of unused accrediting bodies and accreditation types:** The use of accrediting bodies and associated accreditation types will be reviewed annually and the following action taken:

- i. Any accreditation types that have not been used in the final KIS dataset during the previous two years will be removed.
- ii. Any accrediting bodies whose accreditation types have not been used in the final KIS during the previous two years will be removed.
- iii. An accrediting body will be informed by HESA in the event of its removal from the table or the removal of any of its accreditation types on these grounds.

2. HESA will produce a report of accrediting body usage each autumn, and will process any removals before publishing the manual for the next year's KIS collection.

## **Annex G: Process for assuring accuracy of accreditation listings on Unistats**

1. From September 2014, the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) will publish on its web-site a table of all accreditations currently associated with courses that appear on Unistats. This will be updated weekly to coincide with the update of information on Unistats to ensure that it remains current. It is expected that accrediting bodies will check these listings twice yearly at a minimum (with the first check timed to coincide with initial publication of the 2014 Key Information Set (KIS) dataset). Should they find that any of the accreditations claimed do not reflect their records of a course's accreditation status, or if the statement is, for example, inconsistent with the qualification aim of the course, they will need to contact the relevant institution(s) to discuss the issue and request that the institution ensure that its KIS data are updated.
2. If the information is not updated appropriately by the institution in response to their request, the public, statutory or regulatory body should contact HESA ([liaison@hesa.ac.uk](mailto:liaison@hesa.ac.uk)) to request assistance in the case of higher education institutions' data and HEFCE ([kis@hefce.ac.uk](mailto:kis@hefce.ac.uk)) for further education colleges' data.
3. The funding bodies will also write to all higher education providers from which a KIS submission is expected prior to the 2014 deadline, reminding them of the importance of the accuracy of this information and encouraging them to contact the relevant accrediting body to confirm that the accreditation statements they have selected are appropriate if they are at all unsure.