

## Cylchlythyr | Circular

# Consultation on governing body annual assurance statements related to quality

**Date:** 02 November 2016  
**Reference:** W16/38HE  
**To:** Regulated institutions in Wales  
Other interested parties  
**Response by:** **15 December 2016**  
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This circular provides a consultation on additional governing body assurance statements related to quality.

If you require this document in an alternative accessible format, please email [info@hefcw.ac.uk](mailto:info@hefcw.ac.uk).



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## Introduction

1. This circular provides a consultation on additional governing body assurance statements related to quality, which we will request in the assurance return covering 2016/17.
2. Responses to the consultation are requested by 15 December 2016.

## Background

3. Consultation [W16/14HE: Quality Assessment Framework for Wales](#) reported that key features of the framework included placing greater emphasis on the role of governing bodies for providing assurances about quality and standards matters. The consultation proposed to align with the statements that HEFCE were developing, and to collect the information via our existing annual assurance returns.
4. Responses to the consultation, summarised in [circular W16/29HE: Outcomes of the Consultation carried out on the Quality Assessment Framework for Wales](#), agreed with this approach.

## Current position

5. HEFCE has now published the set of [Assurance statements from accountable officers on behalf of governing bodies as part of the new operating model for quality assessment](#). It requires these to be completed in the 2015/16 assurance return from governing bodies.
6. We believe that there are challenges in using some of the statements agreed for England. Therefore we are consulting on the questions, with the aim of introducing them in the assurance return on 2016/17. This return will be developmental, to confirm the appropriateness of the questions, with any additional changes being introduced prior to the 2017/18 assurance return. Our Quality Assessment Committee (QAC) endorsed this approach. This will also give us the opportunity to take account of any lessons learned from the process in England relating to the 2015/16 assurance returns.
7. The assurance statements for Wales will cover all provision of the regulated institution, including franchise and overseas provision. Institutions will want to assure themselves that they also cover the diverse student body<sup>1</sup>, including those with protected characteristics.

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

## Statements in England

8. HEFCW's QAC considered these statements and advised that it was important not to replicate the outcomes of the external quality assessment review in Wales. With that in mind, we have provided the statements required for England, with our commentary below.

### Statement 1

**The governing body has received and discussed a report and accompanying action plan relating to the continuous improvement of the student academic experience and student outcomes. This included evidence from the provider's own periodic review processes, which fully involve students and include embedded external peer or professional review.**

9. In Wales, we will have an external quality assurance review. In response to feedback on the quality assessment framework consultation, this review will include quality enhancement. We are currently consulting on whether this will be a comment or a judgement.

Question 1: Do you think we should include the statement that: The governing body has received and discussed a report and accompanying action plan relating to the continuous improvement of the student academic experience and student outcomes. This included evidence from the provider's own periodic review processes, which fully involve students and include embedded external peer or professional review

### Statement 2

**The methodologies used as a basis to improve the student academic experience and student outcomes are, to the best of our knowledge, robust and appropriate;**

10. We think this is an appropriate question.

Question 2: Do you agree that we should include the statement that: The methodologies used as a basis to improve the student academic experience and student outcomes are, to the best of our knowledge, robust and appropriate

### Statement 3

*For providers with degree awarding powers*

**The standards of awards for which we are responsible have been appropriately set and maintained.**

*For providers without degree awarding powers*

**The standards of awards for which we are responsible have been appropriately maintained.**

11. We think these questions are appropriate.

Question 3: Do you agree that we should include the statement that: The standards of awards for which we are responsible have been appropriately (set and) maintained?
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12. From the 2016/17 assurance return, HEFCE will also include the following statement:

Statement 4

**The governing body has received a report that confirms that the provider continues to meet the standards of Part 1 of the European Standards and Guidelines (2015).**

13. The external quality assessment review provides this assurance in Wales. We do not believe that it is helpful to include this within the assurance statements.

Question 4: Do you think that we should include the statement that: The governing body has received a report that confirms that the provider continues to meet the standards of Part 1 of the European Standards and Guidelines (2015).
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**Additional assurance statements for Wales**

14. We noted in Circular W16/14HE that gathering student views should be the role of the governing body, and that they must demonstrate how they have done this. This included through:
- a report on the annual dialogue between the institution and the student body, eg via the annual quality report (AQR), which would need to be submitted as part of the Fee and Access Plan process.
  - Confirmation that the NSS results have been scrutinised and action plans put in place in partnership with the student body;
15. We therefore propose to include the following statement in the assurance return:

Statement 5

**The governing body has considered a report on the annual dialogue between the institution and the student body, scrutinised student**

**survey outcomes, and put action plans in place in partnership with the student body.**

Question 5: Do you agree that we should include the statement that: The governing body has considered a report on the annual dialogue between the institution and the student body, scrutinised student survey outcomes, and put action plans in place in partnership with the student body.

16. Circular W16/14HE also notes the requirement for every regulated institution to have a student charter. This requirement has been in place since 2012/13, together with the requirement to have a relationship agreement.
17. In order to reduce ad hoc monitoring by officers throughout the year, and therefore reduce the burden on institutions, we therefore propose adding the following statement to the annual assurance return:

Statement 6

**The governing body has received a copy of the relationship agreement between the institution and the student union, and a copy of the student charter, both of which have been reviewed within the past year.**

Question 6: Do you agree that we should include the statement that: The governing body has received a copy of the relationship agreement between the institution and the student union, and a copy of the student charter, both of which have been reviewed within the past year.

**Timetable**

18. A timetable is provided below for ease of reference:

August 2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• HEFCE publishes its assurance statements, to be included in its 2015/16 assurance return</li></ul>
October 2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• HEFCW publishes its assurance statements for consultation</li></ul>
December 2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• New statements included in the HEFCE assurance return.</li><li>• No additional statements included within the return for Wales</li><li>• Consultation responses submitted for Wales</li></ul>

February 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Outcomes of consultation on assurance statements are published, including the final statements</li> </ul>
November 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Institutions contacted to request a response on the 2016/17 assurance statements as part of the development year</li> </ul>
December 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assurance statements submitted by the governing body</li> </ul>
January/February 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• HEFCW evaluates the responses to the assurance statements, and considers any changes necessary</li> </ul>
November 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Institutions contacted to request a response on the 2017/18 assurance statements</li> </ul>

## Responses

19. Please send responses to Dr Cliona O'Neill ([cliona.oneill@hefcw.ac.uk](mailto:cliona.oneill@hefcw.ac.uk); 029 2085 9731) by **15 December 2016**.

## Assessing the impact of our policies

We will be carrying out an impact assessment to help safeguard against discrimination and promote equality, and consider the implications in relation to the Future Generations Act. We will also consider the impact of policies on the Welsh language, and Welsh language provision within the HE sector in Wales. Contact [equality@hefcw.ac.uk](mailto:equality@hefcw.ac.uk) for more information about EIAs.

A similar responsibility rest on higher education institution partners to assess the impact of your proposals to help safeguard against discrimination and promote equality.