

For information

Annual Reports 2016-17: complaints against HEFCW and allegations concerning institutions funded by HEFCW

Agenda: 25
HEFCW/17/62

Disclosable

13/07/2017

1 Issue

- 1.1 This paper provides for information an annual report of complaints received against HEFCW, and allegations received regarding the higher education providers funded by HEFCW, during the financial year (FY) 2016-17.

2 Corporate Planning Implications / Rationale for paper

- 2.1 The Audit and Risk Assurance Committee (ARAC) and the Council receive an annual report on the number of complaints against HEFCW, and allegations about institutions funded by HEFCW, received in the previous financial year.

3 Recommendations

- 3.1 To note that:
- i. There were no complaints against HEFCW received in FY 2016-17.
 - ii. There were no allegations concerning an institution which appeared to fall within the boundaries of HEFCW's responsibilities.
 - iii. ARAC approved during the year a revised procedure for handling complaints/allegations against institutions, which was issued for consultation in June 2017.

4 Timing for decisions

- 4.1 No decisions required. This report is received annually for information by the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee and by the Council.

5 Further information

- 5.1 Contact: Dale Hall (029 2085 9665; dale.hall@hefcw.ac.uk) or Ewen Brierley (029 2085 9713; ewen.brierley@hefcw.ac.uk).

6 Complaints about HEFCW in 2016-17

- 6.1 The *HEFCW Complaints Policy* sets out how we will deal with any concerns or complaints about our services. The Policy is based on the model Concerns and Complaint Policy produced by the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales in 2011 (and which remains extant), and was approved by Council at its meeting on 11 May 2012. It is available on HEFCW's website. (www.hefcw.ac.uk/about_us/our_responsibilities/complaints_about_hefcw.aspx).
- 6.2 There were no complaints about HEFCW received during FY 2016-17.

The Council is invited to note that no complaints about HEFCW were received during FY 2016-17.

7 Allegations against institutions in 2016-17

- 7.1 HEFCW's assurance service occasionally receives allegations of financial irregularity or impropriety, mismanagement, waste and fraud in higher education institutions. We have a procedure to manage our response to such allegations, *Allegations concerning institutions funded by HEFCW*, available on our website (www.hefcw.ac.uk/working_with_he_providers/institutional_assurance/allegations_concerning_institutions.aspx). Complaints by staff or students concerning a particular institution are to be addressed through the institution's own internal complaints and appeal procedures.
- 7.2 The Memorandum of Assurance and Accountability between HEFCW and higher education institutions (HEIs) sets out requirements for the governance and management of institutions. Where allegations are received that these requirements are not being met, HEFCW must satisfy itself that the matter has been investigated, appropriate action taken, and relevant people informed.
- 7.3 HEFCW has received a number of communications from individuals relating to complaints against HEIs. However, upon consideration there were no allegations against any HEIs funded by HEFCW received during FY 2016-17 that appeared to fall within the boundaries of HEFCW's responsibilities and procedure on handling allegations.
- 7.4 Officers have revised HEFCW's Allegations Procedure to take account of HEFCW's duties under the Higher Education (Wales) Act 2015. The revised complaints against institutions procedure was approved by ARAC at its March 2017 meeting, subject to the procedure being expanded to include complaints regarding institutions' fulfilment of the 'Prevent Duty' under the Counter Terrorism and Security Act 2015. The revised procedure was issued for consultation on 9 June 2017 via circular W17/12HE.

The Council is invited to note that:

- i. ***There were no allegations in 2016-17 concerning an institution which appeared to fall within the boundaries of HEFCW's responsibilities; and***
- ii. ***ARAC approved during the year a revised procedure for handling complaints/allegations against institutions, which is currently out for consultation.***

8 Financial implications

There were no financial costs incurred during the year in relation to complaints and allegations.

9 Communications implications

There are no specific communication implications arising from this paper. The HEFCW Complaints Policy is available on the HEFCW website in English and Welsh. The consultation on the revised complaints against institutions process was issued via circular W17/12HE on 9 June 2017.

10 Diversity and Equal Opportunities implications

There are no specific diversity and equality implications arising from this paper. HEFCW Complaints Policy was subject to an Equality Impact Assessment screening in April 2012 prior to its approval by Council in May 2012.

11 Risk Assessment

Risk	Action to address risk
Complaint or allegation against HEIs not managed in accordance with the procedures, or incorrect decision made.	Complaints against HEFCW that cannot be dealt with informally are co-ordinated by the Council Secretary. Allegations against HEIs co-ordinated by the Head of Sustainability and Assurance. Periodic reminders to staff about complaints and allegations procedures.
Complaints against HEFCW not in line with public body guidance and Complaint Chair recommendations	Audit and Risk Committee and Panel Chair recommendations addressed. Public Services Ombudsman for Wales guidance used as the basis for HEFCW's revised Complaints Policy in 2012. Revised Complaints Policy was Equality Impact Assessed.