

Cylchlythyr | Circular

Guidance on providing information for prospective taught postgraduate students

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To: Heads of higher education institutions in Wales
Principals of directly-funded further education colleges in Wales
Response by: No response required
Contact: Name: Dr Cliona O'Neill
Telephone: 029 2068 2283
Email: cliona.oneill@hefcw.ac.uk

This circular sets out guidance on the provision of information for prospective taught postgraduate (PGT) students. Using the guidance will help institutions to give prospective PGT students the best possible support as they make decisions about future study. This will both support your recruitment practices and help demonstrate that you meet part C of the UK Quality Code.

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



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Introduction

1. This circular sets out guidance on the provision of information for prospective taught postgraduate (PGT) students. Using the guidance will help institutions to give prospective PGT students the best possible support as they make decisions about future study. This will both support your recruitment practices and help demonstrate that you meet part C of the [UK Quality Code](#).

Background

2. The four UK higher education (HE) funding bodies¹ have been supporting improvements in information provision for prospective PGT students, following earlier work exploring the potential value of a National Student Survey for PGT students in 2010².
3. In 2012 we commissioned iGraduate and Natcen to consider the information needs of potential postgraduate students, and the feasibility of a National Student Survey of PGT students³. The information needs research focused particularly on those students who progressed to PGT study straight from undergraduate study. The Natcen research demonstrated that in the current market a National Student Survey of taught postgraduate students would not be able to provide the information currently sought by potential PGT students.
4. In 2013 the UK HE funding bodies commissioned the Careers Research and Advisory Council (CRAC) and the International Centre for Guidance Studies, University of Derby (iCeGS) to investigate in detail the information needs of prospective taught postgraduate students. Through a survey of 1800 current and prospective PGT students, provider case studies and a literature review this group still feels that, although great efforts are being made by providers to support the information requirements of PGT students, their fundamental needs are not being consistently addressed across the sector as a whole. The work has produced:
 - a. Recommendations for institutions and the sector to improve information for a diverse and complex audience of prospective PGT students (the focus of this circular);
 - b. A toolkit to support students in making their study choices, which will be developed as a website: PG Choices.
 - c. [Research](#) which consists of a literature review and primary research with prospective PGT students.

¹Department for Employment and Learning, Northern Ireland; Higher Education Funding Council for England; Scottish Funding Council; and Higher Education Funding Council for Wales

² Enhancing and Developing the National Student Survey, Institution of Education, available at: <https://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/rereports/year/2010/hpublicinfouserneeds/>

³The feasibility of conducting a national survey of postgraduate taught students, NatCen www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/rereports/year/2013/pginfosurvey/

5. The HE funding bodies have also been undertaking related work through the [Review of the Provision of Information about Higher Education](#), which is considering how we can continue to improve information for a wide range of stakeholders and purposes. Earlier this month HEFCE, on behalf of all the funding bodies, published the [outcomes of the UK review of the provision of information about higher education: Advisory study and literature review](#). This consisted of a synthesis of current research from a range of disciplines around prospective student decision-making behaviour. The Advisory study report details recommendations for further work as well as proposing eight principles to inform the UK funding bodies' approach in the future.
6. In terms of the Welsh context, we are planning to publish our Strategic Approach to Widening Access imminently. This states what we are doing in order to deliver the key theme of Widening Access within our Corporate Strategy 2013-14 to 2015-16, which includes widening access to postgraduate education. Our part-time position paper, which is likewise scheduled for publication soon, also impacts on postgraduate provision. In addition, the Welsh Government Review of Higher Education Funding and Student Finance Arrangements includes within its remit 'strengthening part-time and postgraduate provision in Wales'. The tuition fee support for Welsh domiciled students at undergraduate level means that Welsh domiciled students should find postgraduate study easier to afford than students who are paying up to £9k in fees.

Guidance

7. This guidance is designed to support you in identifying whether or not your current approaches to information provision for prospective PGT students are addressing their needs highlighted by the research: helping students to find the course for them. You may already be applying a number of the principles identified within the guidance as best practice within your own information provision strategies. However, PGT students have identified challenges across the sector, not only in the way information is presented but whether it is up to date or available at all.
8. The funding bodies have used the research to develop guidance to providers of taught postgraduate provision, included as an annex to this circular, focusing on:
 - a. Information to provide: This section highlights themes or types of information that prospective PGT students want, particularly those re-entering higher education after a period away from study;
 - b. Information delivery: This section highlights aspects of design and delivery of information, such as provision of easily accessible information and access to knowledgeable staff. It also highlights

areas of additional information that you may find useful in supporting prospective students through their decision-making journey.

9. The guidance aligns with Part C of the Quality Code '[Information about higher education provision](#)' with reference to Information for prospective students (p 6-8) particularly indicators 2 and 3:
 - *Indicator 2: Higher education providers describe the process for application and admission to the programme of study;*
 - *Indicator 3: Higher education providers make available to prospective students information to help them select their programme with an understanding of the academic environment in which they will be studying and the support that will be made available to them.*
10. **Annex A** contains recommendations, based on research commissioned by the funding bodies, which you can use to review and improve your web presence for PGT students and to consider other methods of interacting with potential students, for example social media and interactions with staff.
11. A toolkit to support prospective PGT students in their decision-making journey is due to go live in spring 2015. We will contact you prior to the launch with more information, and explain how you can link to it, should you wish to.

Implementing the guidance

12. The guidance, and the research on which it is based, are intended to support continued improvement in information provision. We expect you to use this guidance, with reference to the decision-making model developed through the research, to identify and address areas of PGT information provision which may not be being addressed by your current approach.
13. You are asked to review the information you provide across your PGT portfolio, however, we understand that you may need to prioritise in the short term, whilst implementing a rolling programme of improvements over the longer term.
14. We urge you to ensure that the bulk of your PGT focussed web pages are reviewed before the PG Choices website goes live in spring 2015. This will ensure you are providing the information which PG Choices indicates prospective students can expect to find.
15. Information for prospective postgraduate students is one element of the information that we strongly encourage you to make available.

Further information / responses to

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