



Simon Thomas AM
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1NA

5 November 2014

Dear Simon,

Response to question received in Plenary on 14 October 2014 concerning the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA)

I am writing in response to your question about the action being taken by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) in respect of its contract with the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA).

Under the terms of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992 HEFCE has statutory responsibility for securing that provision is made for assessing the quality education in the institutions which it funds or intends to fund. In Wales an equivalent statutory responsibility lies with the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW). It is a matter for each Council to determine how to discharge its duty whether that be through the QAA or otherwise. The QAA does not have a statutory responsibility for quality assurance. This will remain the case if the Higher Education (Wales) Bill is enacted following its passage through the National Assembly for Wales.

On 7 October 2014, HEFCE announced a review of quality assurance in the UK. My officials were informed by HEFCW about this development on 25 September and subsequently updated me about the proposal. The higher education (HE) funding bodies in England, Wales and Northern Ireland are to seek views on future approaches to the assessment of quality in higher education. Based on the feedback received, they may then invite tenders under a joint procurement exercise. This will ensure transparency and demonstrate value for money.

The review of quality assurance arrangements recognises that UK higher education is undergoing rapid change. Future quality assessment arrangements must continue to be internationally respected, to have the confidence of students, and to support a world-class HE sector. I understand that HEFCE's aim is to develop innovative approaches that are risk-based, proportionate, affordable, and low burden.

HEFCE will establish a Steering Group to oversee the process, including the tender specification. The Steering Group will include representatives from the sector, the NUS and the funding bodies including HEFCW. The existing quality assurance arrangements will continue in 2015-16. Any new arrangements will operate from September 2017.

The Scottish Funding Council in partnership with Universities Scotland and NUS Scotland will be separately reviewing the approach to assessment of quality for Scottish universities in a parallel process on a similar timescale. The four HE funding bodies in England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland will keep in close touch throughout these processes to ensure that we learn from each other and develop the best possible arrangements for each of our countries. HEFCW has kept my officials updated on these developments and has written to universities in Wales about the review and tendering process. Welsh institutions will therefore have an opportunity to express views through the consultation exercise before the tendering commences.

The review has no implications for the HE (Wales) Bill since under our proposals the statutory responsibility for making provision for quality assessment arrangements for HE in Wales will continue to rest with HEFCW. Under the Bill, as now, it will be for HEFCW to determine how to discharge its statutory role and if necessary to determine with whom to contract with for that purpose.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Huw Lewis', written in black ink.

Huw Lewis AC / AM

Y Gweinidog Addysg a Sgiliau
Minister for Education and Skills