

Policy for addressing unsatisfactory quality in institutions

Summary of responses to HEFCE Circular letter 21/2008

We have published a new policy for addressing unsatisfactory quality in institutions. The policy, which applies to both higher education institutions (HEIs) and further education colleges (FECs), is intended to set out our approach to institutions that are experiencing chronic and continuing problems in quality, as identified by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA). In particular, it sets out what steps could be taken in the cases of institutions receiving two successive 'no confidence' judgements in QAA audit or review, or in the event of an institution being unable to agree or to satisfactorily progress an action plan, following a 'no confidence' judgement.

When formulating the policy, we held discussions with Universities UK, GuildHE, the Association of Colleges, the Learning and Skills Council and the QAA. We then published a draft for consultation in August 2008 (HEFCE Circular letter 21/2008). We received 30 responses from HEIs, 3 from FECs and 2 from other organisations. All but one agreed that the policy was a suitable approach, although a number of comments suggested changes or requested clarification. Where possible, these have been included in the final document.

Two particular concerns were raised by several respondents. The first was a need to clarify the effect of the unsatisfactory quality policy on partners of the affected institution. The final document clarifies this situation. The second concern was that the document was insufficiently specific on the action that would be taken. Any action would however depend on the nature of the initial problem, so it is not possible to set out a definitive, 'one size fits all' policy. While the policy sets out a framework and process for action, and suggests some steps that might be taken, it is not exhaustive.

Any queries about the policy should be addressed to Emma Creasey, HEFCE higher education policy adviser, e-mail e.creasey@hefce.ac.uk, tel 0117 931 7225.