

# House of Commons: Written Statement (HCWS239)

## Department for Business, Innovation and Skills

Written Statement made by: **Minister of State for Universities and Science (Greg Clark)** on 29 Jan 2015.

### Higher Education

The Government is taking a number of steps to secure improved standards among alternative providers of higher education.

Britain's system of higher education is renowned worldwide for its high quality, a reputation that continues to strengthen as demonstrated by the results of the recent Research Excellence Framework. It is essential that this reputation for quality continues to strengthen in all parts of the sector.

Among alternative providers of higher education some institutions contribute strongly to this reputation through exceptionally high levels of student satisfaction and the employability of graduates.

As the National Audit Office (NAO) has shown, some, however, have raised questions over the consistency of the delivery of quality provision to appropriately qualified candidates by some alternative providers.

The Government has already taken a number of steps to tighten standards among such providers, such as requiring, in 2014, all alternative providers to re-apply to be designated using a more robust designation process.

We will now take the following further steps to provide greater assurance of quality specifically:

- Alternative providers will need to be redesignated every year, rather than remaining designated indefinitely. This will not apply to the seven providers with Degree Awarding Powers that have courses designated for student support.
- As a condition of designation providers will undergo a strengthened quality assurance process, Higher Education Review, which will apply to all higher education providers and be the common review framework of the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education in England.
- From now on alternative providers will be required to have registered any student with the relevant qualification awarding body before a claim for tuition fee support for that student can be made.
- A 'fit and proper person' test will apply to all directors of alternative providers as a specific requirement of the annual designation process, in line with practice in the publicly-funded sector. Changes of directors, or their circumstances, will need to be notified during the year, as well as at the annual designation point.
- Alternative providers will be required to submit information on students' previous qualifications, demographic characteristics and achievements. This information will be published through the Higher Education Statistics Agency.
- Subject to consultation we intend to introduce a minimum English language requirement to ensure that students studying for qualifications at alternative providers have sufficient language skills to succeed at their course.

- We will require alternative providers, subject to consultation, to provide students with good quality information on: student satisfaction ratings, graduate salaries and employment, tuition fees, financial support and the cost of accommodation - through the Key Information Set, which already applies to HEFCE-funded providers.
- We will remove the student number cap from the seven providers with Degree Awarding Powers that have courses designated for student support, and allow providers offering validated degrees the flexibility to increase the number of students they recruit by up to 20% in 2015/16. We will retain the cap on all other alternative providers. From 2016/17 we will allow providers with a strong performance to expand, while reducing student numbers for other providers.
- A rapid response investigatory team has been established, headed by the Government Internal Audit Agency and including the Student Loans Company, HEFCE, the Quality Assurance Agency and BIS. The team will be able quickly to investigate allegations of abuse of the system.
- Pearson, whose qualifications are delivered by some of the alternative providers about whom the NAO have expressed concerns, have strengthened their internal quality assurance process, introducing annual approval and student re-registration and increasing the level of proficiency in English required of student entering Higher National courses.

Taken together these measures will improve the assurance that only quality alternative providers can be designated, that they recruit only students who are suited to their courses, and that student numbers in alternative providers are at appropriate levels in each provider.

The Government is determined to ensure that the strong reputation for quality in UK higher education continues and strengthens.