



Prifysgol Cymru  
University of Wales

# University of Wales Cause for Concern Procedure

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## University of Wales Policy for Investigating Causes for Concern

1. A cause for concern is defined as any policy, procedure, action or inaction, which appears likely to jeopardise the institution's capacity to assure the academic standards of UW awards or which may result in damage to the University's reputation.
2. Investigations of a possible cause for concern may arise at the request of professional, statutory and/or regulatory bodies. The University may also exercise its own discretion in respect of information reaching it from other sources, *or anonymously* and may undertake enquiries if it considers there is sufficient reason to do so.
3. Where information received is considered to be insufficient to justify further enquiry, the University will confirm with the information provider that there be no further enquiry. However, if the information provider continues to assert that a possible cause for concern exists, the University will undertake a Preliminary Enquiry (PE) which will only progress to a Full Investigation (FI) if the outcome of the PE confirms that there is a *prima facie* cause for concern.
4. Examples of the types of information which constitute sufficient evidence for triggering Preliminary Enquiry are provided in the following, non exhaustive list:
  - information arising from QAA institutional review reports or similar;
  - information provided by a professional, statutory or regulatory body relating to standards and quality;
  - information relating to standards and quality contained in a review report produced by another body;
  - information derived from the NSS;
  - student/public/other stakeholders (i.e. External Examiners) complaints about serious systemic shortcomings (excluding complaints or appeals relating to individuals).
  - 'whistle blowing' by institutional staff;
  - persistent breach or non compliance with the University's administrative procedures for quality assurance.
5. In receiving such information and complaints, the University would expect these to be accompanied by substantiating documentary evidence.
6. Information which may suggest a cause for concern will relate to serious systemic inadequacy on the part of the institution delivering UW schemes of study, or repeated procedural shortcomings at the same, relating to standards and quality. The information can only be considered further if there are doubts upon the security of the standards of UW awards, or upon the institution capacity to provide a minimum level of learning support for UW students. Information about isolated occurrences of bad practice, unverified anecdotes or hearsay will not normally be sufficient to trigger any action.
7. It is important to note that a cause for concern is not a substitute for the normal range of internal procedures available to individuals to make complaints and appeals to an institution, up to and including reference to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for HE.
8. The investigation procedure will be undertaken in two stages; a Preliminary Enquiry (PE) and a Full Investigation (FI). The PE will be undertaken by the DVC (or delegate) to establish whether there is a *prima facie* case for further investigation. The FI will be undertaken only where the *prima facie* case is established, and will be conducted by a team appointed by the UW, under the supervision of the DVC (or delegate).
9. Normally, the PE will be undertaken within four weeks of UW's agreement to investigate and a report will be made to the institution concerned, the source (if any) of the request for investigation and the VC. The decision to progress matters to a FI will be undertaken by the VC or delegate. If the decision is challenged, by the institution or the source of the information, the matter will be referred to Academic Board, whose decision will be final.

10. The person undertaking the PE may have discretion over the form the enquiry will take but will be required to take into account general procedural guidelines provided by the University. The normal procedure for a PE will be a request to the institution for full information relating to the cause for concern, including its comments and any other supplementary documentation which may be relevant to the Enquiry. Arising from the analysis of submitted documentation, a meeting with representatives from the institution may be arranged as necessary, or the PE may incorporate a visit to the Centre.
11. Where the University considers that there is no cause for concern and that further action would not be necessary, the institution and the source (if any) of information, will be informed. The report from the PE will not normally be published, although it will be available on request. If the matter under enquiry has generated media interest, UW may, with agreement of the institution, issue a press statement. The University may also share information with other agencies e.g. the QAA.
12. Where the University considers there is cause for concern and a Full Investigation is necessary, it will appoint a team of suitable experience and expertise. The team's work will be supported administratively by the University's Academic Division. The DVC (or delegate) may elect to join the team as an observer. The size of the team, its brief and formal remit, will be determined by the University. Naturally, general procedural guidance and the nature of the concern to be investigated will be taken into account. The University may also share information with other agencies e.g. the QAA.
13. The FI team will report to the VC, or delegate, within eight weeks of the start of the investigation and may be brought to the attention of the full Academic Board, as appropriate. The report will cover the nature of the cause of concern, a description and analysis of the facts of the matter and a view on whether the allegations have been substantiated in whole, in part or not at all. In the first two scenarios, the report may also propose what remedial action the institution and/or UW should take. The institution and the source (if any) of information, will be provided with a copy of the report.
14. Where a cause for concern has been substantiated, the DVC, or delegate, will discuss the findings of the FI with the institution concerned and request an action plan, with targets for rectification of the shortcoming. The Chair of the FI team will, in conjunction with the DVC, or delegate, continue to monitor and sign off all action plans. All action taken will be reported to Academic Board, along with any outstanding deadlines, which may decide to take further action, as appropriate.
15. Institutions may appeal directly to the Academic Board against the findings of the FI team and invoke the University's established complaints procedures, as appropriate. The Board's decision shall be final.
16. The University will normally meet its own costs for conducting enquires and investigations into causes for concern, provided it continues to have the capacity and resources to do so. Institutions which are the subject of investigation will be expected to bear their own costs.
17. The quick identification and resolution of any causes for concern is in the interest of all institutions offering programmes leading to UW awards. The University therefore expects full cooperation from the institution and individuals concerned. Institutions which are not willing to cooperate with investigative process will be reported to the Academic Board.