

TQF Bulletin, Autumn 2020



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Welcome to the TQF Bulletin - your quick guide to the activity of [The Quality Forum](#). Please feel free to share this with colleagues who might find it valuable.

Our first meeting of session 2020-21 took place on 20 October. It was our second meeting conducted via Zoom, and our first with Nichola Kett (University of Edinburgh) as Convener and Erica Russell-Hensens (University of Dundee) as Vice-Convener.

We also experimented with a new format. The first half of the meeting, open to senior quality colleagues and representatives of sector agencies, included sector discussions and updates from sector agencies. The second half, open to all colleagues working in central quality teams, included the use of breakout groups to allow colleagues to participate in discussions on the topics of most relevance to them.

Stef Black introduced the new edition of the **Student Learning Experience (SLE) tool** developed by [sparqs](#). The SLE is designed to support course reps in their role and contains questions they might ask the students they represent. The new edition includes specific questions that will help facilitate discussion with students on how their learning experience has been affected by the pandemic. Colleagues were invited to share examples of how they had used the new resource, along with ideas for how it might inform future planning and delivery in learning and teaching practices, curriculum design, and quality processes. Colleagues were supportive of the idea that the resource might support sector-wide research and commented that the questions were useful prompts not just for student reps, but also for staff. Colleagues are encouraged send any further feedback to sparqs.

Nichola updated colleagues on the progress of the subgroup that has been considering the future shape and role of TQF. Some of the subgroup's recommendations had already been actioned, including the establishment of the **Yammer** network, a **two-part meeting** agenda, and the launch of a new **TQF webpage** (link above). The Yammer network had allowed colleagues to engage with each other between meetings, though there was agreement that the demands on colleagues' time and attention across multiple platforms could be overwhelming. It was agreed that TQF should review the use of Yammer at the end of the 2020-21 academic year.

Members were asked for their thoughts on two further proposed changes: **to change the name of the group to The Quality Forum**, and **to invite quality colleagues from Northern Ireland's two Universities - [Queen's University Belfast](#) and [Ulster University](#) - to attend meetings**. Colleagues were enthusiastic about both of these suggestions, commenting that the suggested name better reflected the scope of the expertise within the group, and that it would be valuable to hear perspectives from a neighbouring sector.

We heard further updates from sparqs, [Universities Scotland](#), and [AdvanceHE](#). As part of the new Enhancement Theme, Building Resilient Communities, AdvanceHE will shortly launch a project on **embedding race equality and developing an anti-racist curriculum**. Both sparqs and Universities Scotland expressed interest in participating. This promises to be an exciting and truly collaborative piece of work with the potential to create real change in the sector.

The ELIR method is currently being conducted online, and colleagues who are involved with this online process are encouraged to share any reflections with QAA Scotland.

In the second part of the meeting we were joined by two colleagues from QAA, Ailsa Crum (Director of Membership, Quality Enhancement and Standards) and Andy Smith (Quality and Standards Manager), who led discussion on the topic of [Subject Benchmark Statements](#). These are no longer a formal part of the [UK Quality Code for Higher Education](#), but QAA is committed to reviewing them on a seven-year cycle and is keen to ensure that they are as valuable as possible to member institutions, particularly given the different quality approaches across the UK. Colleagues were invited to share their thoughts on how Subject Benchmark Statements might evolve in content and approach to ensure their utility to the sector. There was general agreement that these are a key reference point, particularly in programme development, and that they need to be clear, accessible and easy for colleagues to use. The relationship between Subject Benchmark Statements and the requirements of Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies was also noted, as both are important reference points for curriculum management teams. Colleagues are invited to continue to feed back to [Ailsa](#) and [Andy](#) directly or via the [Membership email address](#).

For the final item, we split into breakout groups to discuss three topics in more detail before closing with some plenary feedback. On the topic of **student voice**, we heard that there was a lot of work ongoing to gather student views, share best practice, and train student representatives. There was a continuing sense that the online environment had had a positive effect on the student voice, and that this warranted investigation. A common theme was the adaptation of existing student voice mechanisms, rather than the addition of new ones: colleagues are very mindful of the increased demands on staff and students' time.

Themes that emerged around the topic of **institution-led review** included the importance of ensuring that everybody has the required technology and that the programme of meetings includes adequate break time. One suggestion was to split reviews over two half days. The shift to online reviews had created opportunities for good practice, including structuring meetings in more inclusive ways, and thinking afresh about paperwork and information flows. The third group considered the **management of changes to modules, courses and programmes**. The use of technology was offered as an example of good practice in this area, with colleagues making good use of shared online documents to track changes. The ongoing engagement of students and external examiners was proving valuable, and colleagues were conscious of the need to ensure that processes were sufficiently flexible to accommodate rapid change.

TQF is a forum for sharing practice on matters of teaching quality, and colleagues are encouraged to suggest items for discussion. Please [get in touch with QAA Scotland](#) if you would like to share practice from your institution or learn more about practice across the sector. You can also join the [TQF Yammer Network](#).