

TQF Bulletin, Autumn 2024

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.

Welcome to session 2024-25, a year of huge change across the Scottish tertiary sector as we start to work to the new [Tertiary Quality Enhancement Framework \(TQEF\)](#), including rolling out the new Tertiary Quality Enhancement Review (TQER) and launching Scotland's Tertiary Enhancement Programme (STEP).

Our first meeting of the year took place on 10 October 2024 on Zoom, our first with Katrina Swanton (Edinburgh Napier University) as Convener and Alen McKinlay (Glasgow Caledonian University) as Vice-Convener. We kicked off with a discussion about the preparation of [Self-Evaluation and Action Plans \(SEAPs\)](#) – with the deadline fast approaching for the first round, members were understandably keen to discuss progress and challenges. Institutions are at different stages with the preparation of their SEAPs and are adopting different approaches which was helpful to share and discuss. There are challenges balancing the relatively low target word count and offering a comprehensive narrative on quality. Karen Gray (Scottish Funding Council) reassured members that the word count is a guide and that the process needs to be useful for institutions, with the sector learning together what is the correct balance of detail for inclusion. There was also some discussion around the use of the [Student Learning Experience \(SLE\) model](#) and engaging students in the process of producing the SEAP. Megan Brown (sparqs) advised a pragmatic approach to the 2024 SEAP and a more planned approach for 2025. sparqs will publish guidance on this and are keen to discuss with institutions in-person.

We then moved on to discuss how institutions are planning to use the [UK Quality Code for Higher Education](#) now that mapping to the Code is not a requirement for the review method. Institutions will still be expected to evidence that their quality processes align with the Code. Some members reported that they had found the mapping process to be valuable in terms of reassuring colleagues across an institutional community, as well as external reviewers, that their processes were in alignment. It was also emphasised that engagement with the Code needs to be something that is ongoing, not just in the run-up to a review.

Kevin McStravock (QAA) offered an update on developments across the UK, including the new Labour government's forthcoming international education strategy for England ([Scotland published its own earlier in the year](#)). Universities UK have produced a [blueprint for the sector](#) to work with the new government. QAA fed into this document, which includes recommendations for greater alignment with the Quality Code and the [European Standards and Guidelines](#). The Office for Students continues to examine trends in [grade inflation](#), and franchising and validation arrangements are coming under increasing scrutiny. In Wales, [MEDR](#) is now operational, and we expect a new tertiary quality framework to be in place as for 2026-27 with separate review methods for universities (QAA) and colleges ([ESTYN](#)). The Northern Ireland Executive has now returned and [has published its priorities](#) – higher and further education are not a top-level priority but there appear to be plans for investment and expansion in some places. This was Kevin's last meeting of TQF, as he is leaving QAA for pastures new in November. Good luck Kevin!

sparqs updated members on their recent work, with emphasis on the launch of [Scotland's Ambition for Student Partnership](#), which was published on 7 October 2024 and that will support student partnership in TQEF. Colleagues from QAA Scotland encouraged TQF members to consider nominating themselves for membership of the STEP Steering Group and provided an update on the TQER schedule, which will be published in the late autumn. SFC have reviewed and amended the membership of the Tertiary Quality Steering Group, which will oversee TQEF and on which Katrina represents TQF. Work is underway to consider how best to evaluate TQEF and to communicate with students about it. Work is also underway on the [Outcome Framework and Assurance Model](#), with meetings being set up to look at data and metrics – these will be flagged up with outcome agreement leads.

After a short break, we went into two breakout groups to discuss topics that had been suggested via the survey we ran during the summer. One group looked at generative AI. The discussion was wide-ranging, touching on assessment design, academic integrity, student disciplinary processes, digital education, and institutional strategy. Institutions appear to be developing guidance, rather than policy (at least at institution-level). The common approach at present is to facilitate discussions with colleagues from across the institution (quality teams, learning and teaching teams, learning technologists etc.) to share guidance and practice. One institution has established an advisory group for this purpose. This also allows for agility, where institutional policy may struggle to keep up with the rapid pace of change. Colleagues noted tensions between excitement about the technology and concerns about academic integrity. Students have voiced concern about the return to in-person exams, as well as unequitable access to higher-end AI tools. Practical action taken in institutions includes a survey of students' use of AI (how are you using it and why?), assessment cover sheets that require students to explain where and how they have used AI, and a beginner's guide for staff. It was noted that the a national working group is developing a Scottish HE framework for Generative AI in the curriculum and assessment on behalf of the [Universities Scotland](#) Learning and Teaching Committee.

The other breakout discussion was on Professional Services Review (PSR). Given the increased emphasis on PSR in TQEF, some institutions may amend their approach to reviewing this area of their work. Some institutions have taken a thematic approach to PSR, which comes with challenges around scheduling and identifying priorities. Securing student engagement in PSR can also prove to be challenging. There is interest in establishing a TQF special interest group to discuss and share practice on PSR in between our main meetings. If you would like to lead on this group, please let us know.

We are exploring more effective ways of working together as a group, including special interest groups, other between-meeting discussions, and a sense check on our online platform (Teams). We'd welcome any thoughts or suggestions members might have. Our next meeting is on Tuesday 4 March 2025. This will be our first in-person meeting since before the pandemic, and we are very grateful to Queen Margaret University for offering to host. Hope to see lots of you there.

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.