QAA SCOTLAND

This review method is ESG compliant

Handbook for Scottish Quality Enhancement Arrangements (Phase 1: 2022-24)

Quality Enhancement and Standards Review (QESR) Institutional Liaison Meetings (ILM)

September 2022

Contents

Compliance with the ESG

The Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) provide the framework for internal and external quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area. QAA's review methods are compliant with these standards, as are the reports we publish. More information is available on our website.

Introduction

This is the Handbook for Phase 1 of QAA Scotland's quality enhancement arrangements - specifically covering the delivery of the Quality Enhancement and Standards Review (QESR) and Institutional Liaison Meetings (ILM) approach that applies to Scottish higher education institutions (HEIs) in the period 2022-24.[1] It follows the previous cyclical method known as Enhancement-Led Institutional Review (ELIR).

The ELIR method, which was the process used to review and report on all Scottish higher education institutions, was based on a 4+1 year cycle, with four cycles delivered since the establishment of ELIR in 2003 (ELIR being one of five elements of Scotland's Quality Enhancement Framework). The fourth cycle of ELIR concluded in the academic session 2021-22, having been extended by six months due to the impact of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and UK national lockdowns.

This new external institutional review method is a two-phase approach and is being developed within the context of a major Scottish Funding Council (SFC) review - Coherent Provision and Sustainability: A Review of Tertiary Education and Research. A key outcome of the review is the developing tertiary quality arrangements. Arrangements will be agreed in 2023-24 for implementation in 2024-25.

Within the external institutional review method under development here, the cyclical review phase will take place in Phase 2 which will commence in 2024-25, coinciding with the anticipated implementation of the developing tertiary quality arrangements. While the tertiary quality arrangements are being developed, Phase 1 (QESR and ILM as outlined below) will enable QAA to support the SFC in fulfilling its statutory obligations under section 13 of the *Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 2005* with regard to quality assurance and enhancement.

The development of the new Scottish quality enhancement arrangements is being taken forward in consultation with the sector and, as part of this, QAA Scotland (QAAS) has established an external Institutional Review Advisory Group to support this work. The Advisory Group comprises members drawn from the higher education sector who have direct experience of the ELIR method from being members of an HEI that was reviewed through ELIR and/or as reviewers, including student reviewers. In developing the Phase 1 component of the arrangements, QAAS developed proposals which were discussed at key sector groups such as the Scottish Higher Education Enhancement Committee (SHEEC) and The Quality Forum. The student voice has been represented both by the engagement of sparqs (Student Partnerships in Quality Scotland*)* and by student members of sector groups and the Advisory Group. QAAS is grateful to all of these colleagues and groups for their time and constructive engagement so far and look forward to their continued engagement as Phase 2 arrangements are finalised and implemented.

The new method is also informed by a comprehensive evaluation of the ELIR 4 cycle.

Within Phase 1 of the developing quality enhancement arrangements, QESR focuses on an institution's management of its academic quality and standards. The primary aim is to enable assurance to be established which will inform an enhancement-led full review in Phase 2. QESR will consider the institution's outcome for ELIR 4 and the subsequent activity that has taken place to address the findings of that review. In particular, there will be an interest in how an HEI's processes embed an enhancement-led approach to improving the learning,

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[1] The Open University is not included as part of Scotland's review approach and is covered by the Quality Enhancement Review method: www.qaa.ac.uk/reviewing-higher-education/types-of-review/quality-enhancement-review

teaching and wider student experience. Establishing this approach and how the institution evaluates its effectiveness, anticipates Phase 2 supporting a more pronounced focus on enhancement at that stage.

The aims and scope of Phase 1 are outlined in paragraphs 15-19. This Handbook relates to Phase 1 only; a Handbook for Phase 2, beginning in 2024, will be produced in due course.

Phase 2 will be primarily enhancement-focused and build on the foundations for the management of academic quality and standards which will have been explored by the Phase 1 review team.

In addition to drawing on its predecessor, ELIR, the approach has some key features in common with review methods operating in other parts of the UK and beyond. QAA's work, approach and review methods are designed to meet the standards and reflect the guidelines set out in the [European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area](#) (ESG). QAA seeks to encourage engagement with other Bologna expectations, including the means to enable student mobility. Phases 1 and 2 will collectively address these requirements.

Key developments of the new method: continuity and change

The SFC has confirmed its intention to maintain an enhancement-led approach to the review of quality management and, throughout the development of ELIR's successor, universal support from the sector has been expressed for the external institutional review method in Scotland to continue being enhancement-led. Consideration of the way in which HEIs use quality and standards processes to drive enhancement is integral to the approach of this two-phase external institutional review method and evidence-based self-evaluation is at its core.

The review method is informed by other key premises or features of the Scottish higher education sector:

- [Quality Enhancement Framework](#) (QEF), which included external institutional review activity,[2] enhancement themes, institution-led review, student engagement and public information

- acknowledgement that higher education institutions in Scotland involved in this process have mature quality arrangements

- a 'no surprises' approach to managing potential risk to quality and standards, owing to the informal protocol that the Scottish higher education sector adopted with the introduction of the enhancement-led approach in 2003, meaning that institutions can seek advice from, and provide information to, Quality Assurance Agency Scotland (QAAS) officers.[3]

Phase 1 of the Scottish quality enhancement arrangements continues to enable a range of outcomes to be achieved by:

- promoting evidence-based evaluation by institutions and the opportunity to engage in discussion on the outcome of that evaluation with a team of peers

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[2] This encompasses successive approaches to the ELIR method and refers to both the formal title of the ELIR method and the continuing enhancement-led ethos of institutional review in Scotland
[3] See paragraph 66 of the [Scottish Funding Council Guidance to Higher Education Institutions on Quality from August 2017-2022](#)

- delivering an informed view on progress in managing and enhancing academic quality and standards, contextualised by identified good practice and recommendations

- enabling whole-sector enhancement and developmental activity to be conducted, drawing on thematic information regarding good practice identified in and recommendations made to the institutions reviewed.

The method continues to:

- comprise interrelated elements of an annual discussion between a QAAS officer and a small group of staff and student representatives from the institution (ILM) and an engagement with a peer review team (QESR)

- involve peer and student reviewers on at least one occasion and include a review visit (QESR)

- champion student engagement in all aspects relating to the quality of their learning and teaching and broader student experience, including through both the QESR and the ILM

- require submission of an evidence base including a mapping of the institution's policy and practice against the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code)

- make use of key sector reference points, including the [Quality Code](), the [ESG](), the [Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework]() (SCQF) and the [SFC's guidance to HEIs]() on the management of quality arrangements

- emphasise the institution's approach to using data and evidence (quantitative and qualitative information) to inform its decision-making

- align follow-up activity with QAA Scotland [Focus On]() projects with the intention of facilitating cross-institutional learning.

The main change will be the two-phase approach to external institutional review arrangements which will commence from session 2022-23. Within this, Phase 1 will focus on the foundations on which each higher education institution's enhancement-driven approach to management of quality assurance and academic standards are built, and, in addition, include consideration of sector-wide enhancement-related activity. Phase 2 has a clear focus on enhancement of learning, teaching and the broader student experience with any specific assurance and standards aspects examined, as required. Sector-wide enhancement topics will be explored through both QESR and ILM.

Handbook

This Handbook contextualises the enhancement-led approach in Scotland, outlines the nature and scope of QESR, details the method (including findings, reporting and follow up, and the peer review team), details the role and method of ILM, and the monitoring and evaluation approach.

Section 1: The enhancement-led approach in Scotland

Defining enhancement

1   Enhancement, as defined within the Scottish higher education sector, is 'taking deliberate steps to bring about improvement in the effectiveness of the learning experiences of students.' This definition of enhancement is at the heart of Scotland's enhancement-led approach and is, therefore, a foundation of both Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the external institutional review method being developed by QAA Scotland.

2   Across both phases there will be a focus on the institution's strategic approach to enhancement, which is implemented at multiple levels within the institution. The resulting enhancement may involve continuous improvement and/or more significant step-changes in policy and practice.

Enhancement, innovation and risk

3   Fundamental to enhancement is the management of change. Enhancement involves doing new things or doing established things in different ways. Both of these involve the need to manage a process of change from current to future activity. To be confident in the effectiveness of their approach, institutions need the ability to identify and manage the risks associated with the change process. The enhancement-led approach in Scotland supports institutions in adopting an ambitious approach to their enhancement activity and promotes managed risk taking.

Enhancement includes assurance through self-evaluation

4   In order to take deliberate steps, it is expected that the institution will have a clear strategic vision of the enhancement it is seeking to bring about. It is also expected that the institution will evaluate its current strengths and areas for development. In doing so, the institution may make use of a framework of questions:

- Where are we now?
- Where do we want to be in the future?
- How are we going to get there?
- How will we know when we get there?

5   The approach the institution takes to self-evaluation forms a key part of Phase 1. Considerable confidence can be derived from an institution that has systematic arrangements in place for evaluating its strengths and identifying and addressing potential risks to quality and academic standards. In an enhancement-led approach, institutions identify ways in which the student learning experience could be improved, even when threshold quality is secure. The enhancement culture in Scotland places emphasis on engaging well beyond the threshold, inspiring excellence.

6   HEIs undertake evaluative activity on an ongoing basis, and careful attention will be paid to the range and overall effectiveness of those ongoing evaluative activities within the overall external institutional review approach. In addition, in Phase 1 the institution is encouraged to submit evaluative coversheets for documents in the evidence base. This is covered in more detail in Section 3, under 'Self-evaluation'.

External reference points

7   As part of identifying its strategic approach to enhancement and evaluating its current policy and practice, the institution is expected to make use of a variety of external reference points. Some of these reference points will be common to all Scottish institutions, such as the SFC guidance to institutions on quality and the SCQF. Some reference points will be UK-wide, such as the Quality Code, and others will be international, such as those developed through the Bologna Process.

8   While institutions have flexibility to identify the full suite of reference points that are relevant to their strategic vision, context and student population, there are a number of specific references that Scottish higher education institutions are expected to address. These include the Quality Code, incorporating Subject Benchmark Statements, and the higher education qualifications framework that, in Scotland, is established within the SCQF. Institutions will also have regard to Part 1 of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) and to the UK Professional Standards Framework for Teaching and Supporting Learning. The SFC publishes guidance on its expectations for the Scottish higher education institutions. For some provision, HEIs will also need to make reference to requirements and/or guidance of relevant professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs).

9   One of the elements of the Quality Enhancement Framework is the programme of Enhancement Themes and related activities coordinated under the auspices of the Scottish Higher Education Enhancement Committee (SHEEC). Scottish HEIs are expected to engage with the Enhancement Themes. Institutions are empowered to determine the way that they engage with each Theme. The Enhancement Themes have produced outputs that are valuable reference points and that have impacted on policy and practice across the sector. While there is no expectation that an institution should align with specific outputs, certain practices have become common across the sector.

10   It is recognised that HEIs operate in a dynamic environment in which the possible suite of reference points is evolving. The review team will be interested in the extent to which the institution has systematic arrangements for: identifying the reference points that are most relevant to the institution's strategic direction and student population; identifying changes in the Quality Code, SFC guidance and related key reference points; and updating institutional policy and practice accordingly using these reference points in setting, managing and evaluating institutional strategy, policy and practice. While this will be considered in detail in Phase 2, the review team may identify through Phase 1, any aspects on which to focus attention in the Phase 2 review.

11   The review team will also recognise appropriate lead times for the institution to undertake this activity. Information on current expectations in the sector is available from QAAS officers.

Student engagement

12   Student engagement is one of the five elements of the Quality Enhancement Framework, and the effectiveness of student engagement is a significant focus of external institutional review. Since the inception of the enhancement-led approach in Scotland, it has become established practice that students should be partners in the formulation, operation and evaluation of the institution's approach to enhancement. The review team will explore the extent and effectiveness of that partnership. The review team will also be interested in the approach institutions take to engaging students in their own learning.

Internationalisation

13   Scottish higher education institutions continue to have a strong focus on internationalisation. The Enhancement Themes and related activity draw extensively on international practice. Institutions increasingly make use of international reference points and networks in formulating and evaluating their strategies, policies and practices.

14   In external institutional review, the institution's approach to internationalisation is explored through a number of areas. Across Phase 1 and Phase 2, this will include: student recruitment; the student experience (for example, student and staff mobility); the curriculum; and international partnerships (for example, collaborative provision). In addition, in Phase 2 of the method, the institutional review team can include an international reviewer. Within Phase 1, the context of a particular higher education institution will determine how internationalisation is explored.

Section 2: External institutional review

15   Complemented by ILM, QESR seeks to:

- be open and transparent, forward-looking, and conducted in a collaborative spirit
- support the sector in securing academic standards and enhancing the student learning experience
- reflect the principles of self-evaluation and the role of evidence
- relate to the wider enhancement-led approach in Scotland.

Furthermore, in conjunction with Phase 2, the Phase 1 arrangements of QESR and ILM are intended to enable the Scottish higher education sector's commitment to the ESG to be met.

16   The aim of Phase 1 is to review the foundations on which each higher education institution's enhancement-led approach to the management of academic quality and standards are built, and to consider progress made by each institution from its ELIR 4. The outcomes from QESR and ILM will be used to provide context for Phase 2, which will also be rooted in the enhancement-led ethos of the Scottish higher education sector. In particular, Phase 1 will enable a team comprising peer and student reviewers to consider an institution's approach to managing academic quality and standards, including the use made of sector reference points, institution-led review and key evidence sets for both assurance and enhancement purposes. It will reflect back on an institution's ELIR 4 outcome (including commendations and recommendations) and subsequent response, and look forward towards a full enhancement-focused review of an institution's approach to learning, teaching and the wider student experience in Phase 2. While Phase 1 will have a greater emphasis on assurance, this should be seen through an enhancement-led lens. Accordingly, the Phase 1 activity will be more limited in scope than the proposed activity in Phase 2, and will comprise a smaller evidence base focused around learning and teaching strategies, data and quality processes (the evidence base for QESR and ILM is set out in Annex 2).

17   As with ELIR, the scope includes all of the institution's higher education credit-bearing provision, including collaborative provision and irrespective of level, mode or location of study. This will include undergraduate and postgraduate students; taught and research students; full-time and part-time students; and campus-based, work-based and distance-learning students. It will also include students entering the institution through the full range of routes and pathways, and home, European and international students, irrespective of funding. The evidence set is intended to enable a peer review team to consider the institution's oversight and activities in relation to its student population as outlined here. In

Phase 1, the peer review team will make observations and indicate any areas of particular interest for Phase 2.
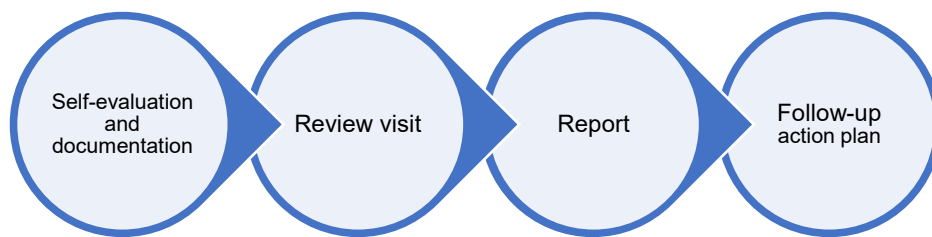
18   QESR will also include consideration of a tertiary enhancement topic which will additionally be supported by QAA Scotland Focus On activity. The topic that will be considered across the Phase 1 activity is 'The future of learning and teaching: defining and delivering an effective and inclusive digital/blended offering'.

19   The scope of the review is further outlined in the indicative report headings in Annex 3 and will focus on institutional approaches to quality enhancement and academic standards and quality processes. The role of students as partners in shaping their learning is an important component, which will also be explored in Phase 1.

Section 3: Quality Enhancement and Standards Review (QESR)

20   QESR is an enhancement-led method with outcomes based on the evidence considered by the review team. This evidence comprises documentation submitted by the HEI in advance of the review visit and discussion that takes place by way of meetings with staff and students within the review visit itself. These are described in more detail below.

Figure 1: QESR process

21   The standard timeline for the QESR process is outlined in Table 1.

Table 1: QESR standard timeline

Time +/- visit	Actions	Responsibility
-8 weeks	Higher education institution (HEI) uploads submission to review site; team begins work on documentation	HEI
-5 weeks	Review team requests any additional documentation/evidence and proposes a schedule for the visit, including who they would like to meet	Review team
-3 weeks	HEI uploads response to additional documentation/ evidence request	HEI
-2 weeks	Review team holds virtual pre-visit meeting and submits interim text; this meeting is chaired by the QAAS officer, also includes confirmation of the schedule and participants	Review team/ QAAS officer
0 weeks	One-day review visit (normally virtual)	HEI/Review team/QAAS officer
+ 1 week	Review team completes draft findings report	Review team
+2 weeks	Report for moderation within QAA Scotland	Review team/ QAAS officer
+3 weeks	Draft findings report shared with HEI for factual accuracy	QAAS officer
+5 weeks	HEI responds on any points of factual accuracy	HEI
+8 weeks	Findings report published	QAA
+28 weeks	HEI shares draft action plan with QAAS officer for feedback prior to publication	HEI/ QAAS officer
+32 weeks	Action plan published on HEI website; link provided for QAA website	HEI

Key participants

22   This section summarises the roles of the QAAS officer, students and the institution's staff facilitator. Details of the peer review team, which comprises an academic reviewer, a student reviewer and a coordinating reviewer, are set out in detail below in Section 5: QESR team.

The QAAS officer

23   Each QESR is managed by a senior QAAS officer who provides advice to the institution on its preparations for the review and supports the QESR team in its initial analysis of the evidence set. The QAAS officer will attend the review team's pre-visit meeting

and will also join them for the final private review team meeting on the review visit, chairing both these meetings and providing advice as appropriate.

24   The QAAS officer, supported by the coordinating reviewer (see Section 5 below), is responsible for testing that the QESR team's findings are based on the information available to them and are reasonable within that context.

25   The QAAS officer is also responsible for editing the report.

The role of students

26   Students are among the main beneficiaries of QESR and the student experience is at the heart of the review process. Student reviewers are full and equal members of review teams.

27   To inform its considerations of the extent and effectiveness of the institution's partnership with its students, the review team will expect to meet with students as part of the review visit.

The role of the institutional contact

28   HEIs are invited to confirm a single member of staff to facilitate the review by liaising closely with the QAAS officer and coordinating reviewer to ensure the organisation and smooth running of the review process. This is likely to be (but does not have to be) the institution's Head of Quality or equivalent.

29   During the QESR process, the institutional contact is expected to:

•   provide a single point of contact on arrangements for the review visit and any queries relating to the institution, to help make the process as efficient as possible
•   meet with the review team as one of the HEI key contacts to provide clarifications and contextual information.

30   The institutional contact helps to provide a constructive interaction between all participants in the review process and supports effective working relationships.

Documentation

31   Documentation for QESR is submitted by the institution to QAA Scotland eight weeks in advance of the visit. Submission is by way of an upload to a secure review site and the documentation required is set out in Table 2.

Table 2: Documentation for QESR

Documentation/evidence
Annual Report to Scottish Funding Council (most recent submission)
Annual Outcome Agreement Self-Evaluation Report (most recent submission)
Update to ELIR 4 follow-up report (including response to QESR where this has taken place)
Enhancement topic-related evidence

A copy of the HEI's current Learning & Teaching Strategy (or equivalent), supported (where appropriate) by: • any action plan (or equivalent) supporting the delivery of this Strategy for the current academic session • evaluation of previous session's action plan (or equivalent)
Data used by the HEI internally for oversight of: • retention and progression • degree outcomes • complaints and appeals • student disciplinary cases These should include analysis of any trends and attainment gaps for the last five years
The HEI's current mapping to the UK Quality Code and information on when this was last updated
A copy of the HEI's approach and process for undertaking institution-led review, including arrangements for considering Professional Services review
Institution-led review (ILR) reports since submission for ILM in 2021-22
Follow-up from any previous ILR reports discussed at the 2021-22 ILM
A copy of the HEI's approach to annual monitoring
Sample to illustrate annual monitoring in operation through different levels of scrutiny from the most recent cycle
Institution-level analysis of: • annual monitoring • institution-led review • external examiner feedback • student feedback
Minutes from meetings of key institutional committee(s) responsible for the oversight of quality and standards from the last academic session
A copy of the current Student Partnership Agreement (or equivalent) with the students' association

32   In addition, if there is any annual report or paper reflecting on the student partnership arrangements and/or student engagement in the quality assurance and enhancement of their experience, produced by either the Students' Association (or equivalent) or the HEI, this would be welcomed as an optional addition to the document set listed above. There is no compulsion to include such a document and one should not be produced solely for the purposes of this process. The absence of such a document will not be considered negatively with regard to the HEI. As it could be met in a number of ways, HEIs are encouraged to have an informal conversation with their QAAS officer if they would like to explore whether anything that is produced annually on this subject might usefully be included.

33   The institution is not expected to prepare bespoke material for review. Rather, QESR will be supported by a set of existing material, or information already prepared for other purposes. The documentation provides the QESR team with direct access to information about the institution's key processes for securing academic standards and quality, and enables the team to see how the key processes function in practice. Having this information at an early stage allows more time during the review visit for discussions relating to the use of these processes to support quality enhancement.

34   It is important to note that an institution's context or particular circumstances may require some additional evidence to be submitted. Where this can be anticipated in advance - for example, if an institution has an action plan in place following a Scottish Quality Concerns Scheme investigation - then this will be confirmed at the same time as dates for QESR activity and ILMs are confirmed wherever possible. When the review team carrying out their preliminary review of the documentation require additional material to inform evaluations, timeframes will be agreed with institutions. Evidence will not be able to be submitted after the review visit.

Self-evaluation

35   Self-evaluation against external reference points is intrinsic to the enhancement-led approach to quality management that is embedded within the Scottish higher education sector and which is founded on the understanding that HEIs have mature arrangements for quality. Through their quality processes, institutions adopt a range of approaches to self-evaluation that are used internally to provide assurance that quality and standards are robust and, externally, to support public confidence in academic standards and the quality of the student experience. The approach being adopted during Phase 1 of external institutional review arrangements recognises that institutions continue to focus resources on delivering high-quality learning and teaching in a hybrid and changing environment. Following consultation with the sector and SFC, it has been agreed that existing institutional and sector-wide self-evaluation processes and procedures will be used rather than HEIs having to produce a separate self-evaluation report.

36   In addition to the documentation that HEIs produce for internal scrutiny as part of their normal approach to oversight of quality and standards, self-evaluation takes place through the institution's annual reports to SFC on the Outcome Agreement and the Institution-Led Review (ILR). Guidance is provided on the requirements of the ILR report and includes findings, actions and impacts as a reflective overview. These reports provide opportunities for institutional self-evaluation against the broader context of the higher education sector and which are further contextualised by the internal documents produced by an HEI as part of its arrangements for managing quality and standards. They are, therefore, included in the list of evidence requested in the Phase 1 arrangements.

37   Recognising that, as part of Phase 1 of external institutional review, institutions are not required to produce a separate self-evaluation document that contextualises evidence, HEIs are additionally provided with the option of including self-evaluation coversheets which can be added to contextualise the existing HEI documentation/reporting submitted and outline achievements and further areas for development determined through self-reflection. Coversheets are optional and institutions may prepare them for all, some or none of the documents submitted. It is suggested that they will be most pertinent where there is additional context, action or areas for development not already identified in the document concerned. Coversheets may be particularly useful for:

•   the Outcome Agreement report
•   the enhancement topic-related evidence

- data used by the institution internally for oversight of retention and progression, degree outcomes, complaints and appeals and student disciplinary cases
- Quality Code mapping
- institutional-level analysis of annual monitoring, ILR, external examiner feedback and student feedback
- Student Partnership Agreement.

38   A coversheet template will be provided by QAA Scotland to HEIs undergoing QESR.

39   The final selection of themes to be explored in the visit is determined by the review team on the basis of the material submitted by the institution and will additionally be contextualised by any coversheets submitted.

40   The tertiary enhancement topic throughout Phase 1 is **The future of learning and teaching: defining and delivering an effective and inclusive digital/blended offering**. To enable enhancement discussions in respect of this topic, the institution is asked to submit relevant documentation that outlines enhancement activity or the institution's strategic approach in that area. QAA will develop Operational Guidance to support a shared understanding of the enhancement topic in QESR. This will be published on the QAA Scotland website and institutions informed.

Review visit

41   The review visit will take place over one day. During the visit, the review team will continue their considerations of the institution's documentation and hold meetings with staff and students. The review team will share in advance of the visit a list of topics/themes to be explored during the visit based on the documentation submitted. This means the team will pursue matters relating to both the assurance and management of academic standards, and also the enhancement-led work being undertaken by the institution to enhance the student experience. The visit will include opportunities for the review team to clarify matters relating to the progress of the review.

42   Reviewers are expected to produce structured notes using a QAA template to inform the areas that the review visit will explore and the subsequent report on findings. These notes will be shared with the QAAS officer in the final private team meeting of the day to underpin discussions.

43   An indicative structure for the review visit is provided in Annex 4 and the QAAS officer will liaise with the institutional contact in respect of who to invite to each meeting. The review visit will normally take place online as a virtual visit and will use QAA online review protocols.

44   As noted in Section 1, student engagement is a fundamental part of the process, both in preparation for and during the review. Meetings with student representatives and students are a core component of the review visit.

Section 4: QESR findings, reporting and institution response

45   As detailed earlier in the Introduction to this Handbook, the external institutional review method under development here will be delivered over two phases. Phase 1 will take place over a period of two years (academic sessions 2022-23 and 2023-24), with the Phase 2 arrangements being agreed in 2023-24 for implementation in 2024-25 to support the

implementation of the developing tertiary quality arrangements in Scotland. The findings of Phase 1 and ELIR 4 outcomes will be reflected upon when establishing the Phase 2 schedule of reviews. Judgements will form part of Phase 2 of the method and will be informed by Phase 1 findings.

46   The Phase 2 activity will complete an in-depth peer-evaluation of each institution, which is an holistic evaluation of strategy, policy and practice related to quality assurance and enhancement. Although the Phase 1 component is more focused in scope, the combined elements of QESR and ILM in 2022-24 will be subject to thematic analysis undertaken by QAA, that will inform future development and enhancement activity of the Scottish higher education sector overall, as well as for individual institutions.

Findings

47   Phase 1 findings will consider how, from the information available to the review team, the institution is continuing to maintain an effective and enhancement-led approach towards the management of academic quality and standards. This will be expressed by one of the following statements:

- From the evidence presented, the review team is **confident** that the institution is making effective progress in continuing to monitor, review and enhance its higher education provision to enable effective arrangements to be in place for managing academic standards and the quality of the student learning experience.

OR

- From the evidence presented, the review team is **not confident** that the institution is making effective progress in continuing to monitor, review and enhance its higher education provision to enable effective arrangements to be in place for managing academic standards and the quality of the student learning experience.

48   Where a review team is not confident that an institution is making effective progress, a member of the review team (normally the academic reviewer) will join the QAAS officer at the ILM the following year. If the concerns persist, the full review in Phase 2 may be brought forward as a priority in the cycle. It should be noted, however, that the cycle for external institutional review in the developing method has yet to be defined. While it may draw on the historical cycle from ELIR, adjustments may be required owing to the two-phase approach.

49   A table setting out the outcome criteria that review teams use to reach their conclusions is in Annex 5.

50   A report is produced for each QESR setting out the findings and the underpinning evidence. The report will note concisely the basis on which the review team established its findings. It will include recommendations for action and any instances of good practice to inform Phase 2 activity. The institution will be provided with the opportunity to comment on factual accuracy of the draft report as per the timescales provided in section 3.

51   Reports, which will be published on the QAA website, are written primarily for the institution that was reviewed, and may be of interest to quality contacts at other institutions and key agencies within the sector. In addition, they provide an evidence base to inform the production of a suite of Thematic reports and developmental activity with the sector. The reports are structured around the main areas of enquiry within QESR, highlight good practice and areas in which the institution is recommended to take action. The headings covered in the report are in Annex 5.

Follow-up action plan

52   Each institution is required to publish a follow-up action plan 24 weeks after publication of the report (that is, 32 weeks after the review visit). Four weeks prior to publication, institutions are advised to share the draft action plan with the QAAS officer to the review for feedback. As the quality arrangements for 2022-24 are intended to enable development from ELIR 4, HEIs are strongly encouraged to incorporate the progression of any QESR actions into the processes they have already used to drive forward their ELIR 4 recommendations. The action plan responding to the QESR findings should be published on the HEI's website and a link provided to the QAAS officer for inclusion on the QAA website. The action plan will form part of the information base for Phase 2. The action plan may be in a format determined by the institution but must contain clear actions linked to the recommendations with deadlines and, where appropriate, process stages.

53   In addition, all institutions will be expected to continue to engage in follow-up activity delivered through Focus On projects. The precise nature of the events and activities associated with Focus On is agreed during the cycle with SHEEC and the institutions. Events are generally topic-based, to focus on matters that arise in several QESR reports. This provides greater flexibility for institutions to discuss their QESR outcomes and actions with institutions who are addressing similar topics. Follow-up activity continues to be an important element of QESR, as is the engagement of students in institutional follow-up action plans and activities. Follow-up is intended to promote the enhancement-led nature of QESR by contributing to the dissemination of information about the QESR outcomes and sharing institutional practice.

Thematic reports

54   From analysis of the findings of external institutional review, QAA produces a suite of thematic reports with the aim of promoting the sharing of information, including providing institutions with information that they can use to compare their policy and practice with that across the sector. Thematic reports also provide information that supports development and enhancement activity, such as Focus On projects and the Enhancement Themes. Thematic reporting will continue throughout both phases of the Scottish Quality Enhancement Arrangements (Phase 1 in 2022-24 and Phase 2 commencing in 2024) and QAA Scotland will continue to draw on the content of individual QESR reports to inform thematic or sector-wide reports.

Appeals and complaints

55   QAA has formal processes for receiving complaints and appeals. More information on these processes can be found in Annex 6 and on the QAA website.

Section 5: QESR team

Allocating reviewers to teams

56   QAA Scotland allocates reviewers to QESR teams. Owing to the focused nature of QESR, the composition of the review team will be standard for all HEIs and comprise: one academic reviewer, one student reviewer and a coordinating reviewer. In Phase 2, the precise composition of the review team will be flexible to address the context of the institution, the nature and scope of the review. Phase 2 will also extend the review team

to include the potential addition of an international reviewer and the use of an additional student reviewer.

57   While in Phase 2, there will be an expectation that at least one UK member of the review team will be drawn from outside of the Scottish higher education sector; review teams for QESR may be drawn entirely from the Scottish higher education sector.

58   In QAA's experience, there are benefits from some continuity of members of review teams for both the review process and the institution under review. Therefore, where possible and practicable, one member of the Phase 1 QESR review team will be drawn from an institution's ELIR 4 review team. QAA will also work with its reviewer pool and the institution to support a degree of continuity between the teams used in Phases 1 and 2 of this method. However, there may be circumstances in which this is not possible, including for reasons of reviewer availability or changes to conflict of interest. In such cases, QAA Scotland will work to mitigate any impact and it will not affect the validity of the review process.

59   Members of a review team are not allocated to the team for the QESR at their own institution or any with which they have a conflict of interest. Further information regarding conflicts of interest in reviews is set out in paragraphs 72-74 below. Proposed teams are shared with the institution prior to confirmation.

Reviewer roles

60   The scope and evidence base of QESR is focused around a particular and specific set of documentation. It is necessarily limited in scope as Phase 1 is intended to confirm whether the HEI is making progress following ELIR 4 and to inform the context for Phase 2 - it forms the initial part of the overall external institutional review method which will succeed ELIR 4 and is not intended to address all aspects of quality management comprehensively and in isolation. While some reviewers have specific responsibilities within the review process, the findings articulated in the report are evidence-based and represent the collective review of the QESR team.

61   All reviewers have responsibility for:

*   reading and analysing the evidence set submitted by the institution
*   participating in the review visit
*   agreeing findings on the basis of the evidence set and any further information gathered during the review visit
*   drafting and commenting on the review report.

62   The student reviewer brings a learner perspective to the review. Therefore, their responsibilities during the review are likely to focus on evidence relating to student engagement and partnership working and how the institution is managing the student learning experience for a range of different learners.

63   The coordinating reviewer has responsibility for maintaining an overview of the review process and its findings. They have particular responsibility for managing the review and the QESR team. This will involve:

*   liaising with QAA Scotland throughout the review and with the institution during the review visit
*   facilitating the QESR team's identification and evaluation of the key points to be explored during the review
*   ensuring alignment between findings and the report headings (see Annex 3 and 5)

- maintaining a record of the QESR team's considerations, and its discussions with staff and students
- supporting the QESR team in identifying the evidence on which its findings are based.

64   The coordinating reviewer maintains a record of the QESR team's findings and supporting evidence. At the end of the review visit, this record is used to support the review team in preparing a draft of the report. The QAAS officer may also make recourse to these notes during the report editing process.

65   Reviewers have responsibility for preparing draft text for the report. They will also be required to support the QAAS officer in editing the review report, providing additional information and evidence as necessary.

Selection criteria for reviewers

66   All members of the review team are selected by QAA Scotland according to the criteria in Annex 7 and having regard to the schedule for reviews in Scotland.

67   QAA Scotland seeks student reviewer nominations from students' associations and Scottish HEIs. Student reviewers are eligible to undertake reviews for as long as they continue to meet the selection criteria, in particular provided it is not more than three years since they undertook study in a Scottish higher education institution.

68   QAA Scotland considers nominations from all UK higher education institutions for academic reviewers and coordinating reviewers. Every Scottish higher education institution is encouraged to nominate at least one candidate for each role.

QESR reviewer training, continuing development and events

69   All QESR reviewers, including those trained in Enhancement-Led Institutional Review (ELIR) and other QAA review methods, are required to undertake QESR training. Reviewers are also expected to participate in continuing development and reviewer events as appropriate. Training and continuing development may be targeted to specific groups of reviewers, such as students or coordinating reviewers. This may take place in-person or online.

70   Where necessary, student reviewers may be required to attend additional briefing activities to support them in contextualising QESR in the wider Scottish Quality Enhancement Framework and to support the development of key reviewing skills.

71   In order to share experience of the QESR method and to maintain the knowledge of experienced reviewers, continuing professional development events may be held. All reviewers who have participated in a QESR team during the previous academic session, together with those allocated to teams for the following academic session, will be invited to attend.

Conflicts of interest in reviews

72   QAA works to maintain the highest possible standard of integrity in the conduct of its work. Alongside the ways in which QAA ensures that there is no conflict in the handling of appeals and complaints, QAA seeks to ensure that there are no conflicts of interest in the conduct of reviews and has a policy on Conflict of Interest. The policy recognises the range of potential conflicts (including direct and indirect, actual and perceived). QAA staff and reviewers are responsible for declaring conflicts of interest as soon as they are aware of

them. Given the size, complexity and dynamic nature of the higher education sector, new conflicts may emerge and guarding against any perception of conflict or bias is an active responsibility. Conflicts may arise during a review - for instance, a job opportunity may emerge.

73   Before review teams are finalised, names will be checked with an institution to ensure that they do not know of any conflict. Individual reviewers will not always be aware of institutional-level conflicts - for example, discussions with a collaborative partner.

74   QAA has a statement on Conflict of Interest on its public website.

Section 6: Institutional Liaison Meetings (ILM)

75   As outlined in the Introduction to this Handbook, since the introduction in 2003 of the enhancement-led approach to external institutional review in Scotland, the Scottish higher education sector has adopted an informal protocol for sharing information, often referred to as 'no surprises'. As well as enabling HEIs to seek advice from, and provide information to, QAA Scotland officers, the 'no surprises' ethos was supported during the ELIR method through an Annual Discussion with institutions. As part of the transition year in 2021-22, the Annual Discussion was replaced with Institutional Liaison meetings (ILM) that took place across two meetings and were informed by a set of documents submitted by the HEI and which illustrated the institution's approach to enhancement-led quality management. The concept of the ILM as a complementary component of Scottish external quality arrangements will continue during Phase 1 of this method, providing an important opportunity for information sharing between QAA Scotland and the institution.

76   One ILM will take place between a QAAS officer and representatives of the institution during the period 2022-24, in the year when the HEI is not engaged in a QESR. This meeting will be scheduled for approximately two hours and conducted either as an in-person visit or online. Suggested attendees from the institution include: the Head of Quality, Deputy Principal (Learning & Teaching) and Students' Association/Union Vice-President (Education), although this does not preclude other relevant colleagues within the institution and its students' association/union from participating. In order to support student engagement, students' association/union staff members are also often included.

77   Student involvement continues to form a key part of the ILM process. In addition to student attendance at the meeting, institutions are expected to consult with their student representatives to ensure there is understanding of the purpose of the meeting and to support students' contribution to the discussion. This is to ensure that matters that are relevant to the student interests are covered.

78   The institution is not expected to prepare bespoke material for the ILM. It is anticipated that the meetings will be supported by a set of existing material, or information already prepared for other purposes. Moreover, the evidence set is intended to reflect that ILM is complementary to QESR in Phase 1 and institutions will not be required to resubmit material such as institutional policies and processes unless there have been changes since the previous submission.[4] Where changes have been made, an HEI should discuss with their QAA officer in advance whether the full document should be resubmitted or whether a brief exceptions update indicating changes is more appropriate.

79   Documentation is submitted by the institution two weeks in advance of the visit and is set out in Table 3 below:

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[4] The previous submission will be considered to be either the one made for the ILM process of 2021-22 or the submission for QESR, whichever is the more recent for the HEI

Table 3: Documentation for ILM

Documentation/evidence	Required	Updates only
Annual Report to Scottish Funding Council (most recent submission)	✓	
Annual Outcome Agreement Self-Evaluation Report (most recent submission)	✓	
Update to ELIR 4 follow-up report (including response to QESR where this has taken place)	✓	
Enhancement topic-related evidence	✓	
A copy of the HEI's current Learning & Teaching Strategy (or equivalent), supported (where appropriate) by: • any action plan (or equivalent) supporting the delivery of this Strategy for the current academic session • evaluation of previous session's action plan (or equivalent)	✓ ✓	✓ (if submitted previously)
Data used by the HEI internally for oversight of: • retention and progression • degree outcomes • complaints and appeals • student disciplinary cases These should include analysis of any trends and attainment gaps for the last five years	✓	
The HEI's current mapping to the UK Quality Code and information on when this was last updated		✓
A copy of the HEI's approach and process for undertaking institution-led review, including arrangements for considering Professional Services review		✓
Follow-up from any previous ILR reports discussed at the 2021-22 ILM	✓	
A copy of the HEI's approach to annual monitoring		✓
Institution-level analysis of: • annual monitoring • institution-led review • external examiner feedback • student feedback	✓	
A copy of the current Student Partnership Agreement (or equivalent) with the students' association		✓ (if submitted previously)

80   It is important to note that an institution's context or particular circumstances may require some additional evidence to be submitted. Where this can be anticipated in advance - for example, if an institution has an action plan in place following a concern - then this will be confirmed at the same time as dates for ILMs wherever possible.

81   As indicated in the documentation list provided in Table 3, the topics covered in the ILM align with the QESR process but the ILM takes an 'exceptions reporting approach', under the 'no surprises' approach in Scotland and in recognition that HEIs have mature arrangements in place for the maintenance of quality and standards. Institutions will be invited by the QAAS officer to identify any particular topics which they would like to discuss during the ILM. Topics for discussion will be determined to some extent by the institution's context and submission. However, there is likely to be a particular focus on:

- updates to the ELIR 4 and, if relevant, QESR actions, including evaluation of those actions and their impact
- how the institution is continuing to enhance its approach to the management of quality and standards and the student learning experience
- institutional analysis of key data, including appeals, complaints and disciplinary cases and awards/attainment gaps, with observations on any trends
- current developments in student engagement, including any reflections on student feedback and survey results
- the institution's approach to maintaining its mapping to the UK Quality Code
- engagement in, and activity relating to, the current sector enhancement topic(s)
- other matters that the institution and/or students' association wish to discuss.

82   The QAAS Officer will chair the meeting and explore a range of topics and questions arising from the documentation, in discussion with HEI representatives. These will consider follow-up from the previous ILM or QESR; the institutional approach to enhancement (including student partnership and engagement in sector-wide enhancement topic(s)); and management of academic standards and quality processes (including use of external reference points and use of data and evidence to inform self-evaluation and decision-making). HEIs may also propose additional topics that they consider are of particular importance or relevance to them.

83   Following the meeting, the QAAS officer will provide a summary of the key topics explored and confirm any action points and observations. Action points will relate to actions agreed in the meeting such as the provision of additional information. Observations will include references to areas that will be followed up at the next meeting, highlighting areas for ongoing development or areas of reflection by the institution. This summary will be shared with the institution who will have the opportunity to confirm points of factual accuracy, and would be made available to SFC on request to provide context for any advice or assurance they may seek from QAA.

84   As part of QAA Scotland's formal in-year meetings with SFC, QAAS will provide an update on the outcomes of recent QESRs and ILMs. In the case of either a QESR or an ILM indicating that there may be a serious issue that could impact on the HEI's ability to meet expectations on the management of academic quality and standards, the HEI will first be alerted to the need to report this to the SFC. QAAS will also include reflections on QESR and ILM on an annual basis as part of formal reporting. This will comprise a summary including some Thematic work reflecting on what has been learnt from the sector in terms of topics that are being prioritised and provide confirmation on the enhancement-led approach to the management of academic quality and standards.

Section 7: Monitoring and evaluation

Purpose and principles of monitoring and evaluation

85   QAA Scotland is committed to continuous improvement. An important aspect of institutional review is ongoing monitoring of review operation and undertaking regular evaluation of its effectiveness, including our own role in its implementation. This is intended to support QAA Scotland in delivering the method effectively and to inform the ongoing development of methods in the wider context of the developing tertiary quality arrangements.

86   Learning from effective practice to address any operational shortcomings and supporting stakeholder engagement in seeking and responding to their views are important. Monitoring and evaluation activity should, therefore:

- be regular and timely
- ensure higher education institutions, student representatives and reviewers and the Scottish Funding Council can provide structured feedback
- support the training and continuing development of reviewers
- encourage active reflection and dialogue on the design and development of the method to ensure it continues to be fit-for-purpose.

Monitoring and evaluation in practice

87   There are three elements to the monitoring and evaluation of Phase 1 (QESR and ILM):

- **Review evaluation** - encompasses both the QESR and ILMs and all aspects of both processes as follows: preparation for QESR visits and ILMs; outcome and reporting arrangements; follow-up and related activities. At the end of each QESR and ILM, evaluation forms are sent to institutions, students and the reviewers (QESR only) to enable a check that the method is working as intended and to identify what is working well and where potential improvements can be made. The questionnaires seek comment on operational aspects as well as broader questions relating to the effectiveness of the method. Information gathered through the monitoring questionnaires is accumulated to inform the wider process of evaluation, particularly at the end of both the phase and the cycle

- **Annual monitoring** - review evaluations are analysed annually by QAA and a short annual monitoring report considered by the Assessment and Reviews Group to enable QAA to be assured that each method is working effectively, that timely remedial action is taken when necessary, and to provide information on matters arising from different methods

- **Method evaluation** - this builds on the review evaluation and monitoring activity and involves collating and analysing the review evaluations (from both QESRs and ILMs over both years). Method evaluation has a retrospective, reflective element to enable QAA to gather evidence of the impact of the review method over time and it has a forward-looking element to contribute to the shaping of the next iteration of external review and therefore feeds into the consultation of the subsequent method. An evaluation of Phase 1 will feed into the Phase 2 method development.

88   Where further exploration of the qualitative survey feedback is considered valuable, this is achieved through focus group activity.

89   The findings from monitoring and evaluation activity help to inform the training and development provided for reviewers to ensure that they are effectively prepared and supported in undertaking their roles. It also informs the future development of methods.

Annex 1: Definitions of key terms

Key term	Definition
Bologna Process	An intergovernmental higher education reform process that seeks to enhance the quality and recognition of European higher education systems and support exchange and collaboration within Europe and internationally.
Enhancement-led Institutional Review (ELIR)	The method of review that has been delivered in Scotland for four cycles from 2003 to 2022.
Enhancement Themes	Programme of activity involving the whole higher education sector in Scotland, in which staff and students collaborate to improve strategy, policy and practice.
European Standards and Guidelines (ESG)	The Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area provide the framework for internal and external quality assurance.
Higher education institutions (HEIs)	For the purposes of this Handbook, the universities and providers of higher education that are funded by the SFC.
Institution-led Review (ILR)	One of the five components of the QEF. This is the sector-level term used to describe subject reviews in institutions.
Institutional Liaison Meeting (ILM)	One of two complementary components of Phase 1 of the review method.
Outcome Agreement	The agreement between SFC and colleges and universities that sets out what the institution plans to deliver in return for their funding from SFC.
Quality Enhancement Framework (QEF)	The enhancement-led approach to quality in Scottish higher education, comprising five key elements working coherently a with a focus on the whole student learning experience.
Quality Enhancement and Standards Review (QESR)	One of two complementary components of Phase 1 of the review method.
Scottish Quality Concerns Scheme	A formal mechanism to consider concerns about academic standards and quality in Scottish HEIs raised by staff, students and other parties.
Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF)	The national qualifications framework for Scotland.
Scottish Funding Council (SFC)	A Non-Departmental Public Body of the Scottish Government that operates at 'arms-length' from the

	Government. Established by the *Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 2005.*
Scottish Higher Education Enhancement Committee (SHEEC)	A cross-sector committee supports and promotes quality enhancement of the student learning experiences within Scottish higher education institutions.
Student Partnerships in Quality Scotland (sparqs)	A publicly funded agency for Scotland's university and college sectors which aims to support student engagement in the quality of the learning experience.
Student Partnership Agreement (SPA)	An agreement between a students' association and HEI setting out how they are working together on key priorities to enhance the student experience.
The Quality Forum (TQF)	A sector-led group that provides support to members on policy and practice in areas of mutual interest broadly relating to quality in learning and teaching, allowing expertise to be shared and developed.
UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code)	A key reference point for UK higher education, enabling providers to understand what is expected of them and what to expect from each other.
UK Standing Committee for Quality Assessment (UKSCQA)	This committee provides sector-led oversight of higher education quality assessment arrangements that continue to be shared across the UK.

Annex 2: Documentation for QESR and ILM

QESR and ILM are two complementary components that, together, comprise Phase 1 of this method. For ease of reference and to support transparency of how the two fit together in terms of the documentation, the table below is provided, enabling comparison across the two components.

Documentation/evidence	Quality Enhancement and Standards Review	Institutional Liaison Meeting
Annual Report to Scottish Funding Council (most recent submission)	✓	✓
Annual Outcome Agreement Self-Evaluation Report (most recent submission)	✓	✓
Update to ELIR 4 follow-up report (including response to QESR where this has taken place)	✓	✓
Enhancement topic-related evidence	✓	✓
A copy of the HEI's current Learning and Teaching Strategy (or equivalent)	✓	Updates only (if submitted previously)
Any action plan (or equivalent) supporting the delivery of the current Learning and Teaching Strategy for the current academic session and evaluation of previous session's action plan (or equivalent)	✓	✓
Data used by the HEI internally for oversight of: • retention and progression • degree outcomes • complaints and appeals • student disciplinary cases These should include analysis of any trends and attainment gaps for the last five years	✓	✓
The HEI's current mapping to the UK Quality Code and information on when this was last updated	✓	Updates only
A copy of the HEI's approach and process for undertaking institution-led review, including arrangements for considering Professional Services review	✓	Updates only
Institution-led review (ILR) reports since submission for ILM in 2021-22	✓	x
Follow-up from any previous ILR reports discussed at the 2021-22 ILM.	✓	✓

A copy of the HEI's approach to annual monitoring	✓	Updates only
Sample to illustrate annual monitoring in operation through different levels of scrutiny from the most recent cycle	✓	x
Institution-level analysis of: • annual monitoring • institution-led review • external examiner feedback • student feedback	✓	✓
Minutes from meetings of key institutional committee(s) responsible for the oversight of quality and standards from the last academic session	✓	x
A copy of the current Student Partnership Agreement (or equivalent) with the students' association	✓	Updates only (if submitted previously)

Annex 3: QESR Report headings

1   Findings - recommendations and good practice

2   Institutional approach to quality enhancement

       a   Strategic approach to enhancement
       b   Student partnership
       c   Action taken since ELIR 4
       d   Sector enhancement topic

3   Academic standards and quality processes

       a   Key features of the institution's approach to managing quality and setting, maintaining, reviewing and assessing academic standards
       b   Use of external reference points in quality processes
       c   Use of data and evidence to inform self-evaluation and decision-making

Annex 4: Indicative schedule for review visit

Indicative structure for Quality Enhancement and Standards Review Visit

Note: this structure - including timings, number of meetings and proposed attendees at meetings - may be adjusted according to the specific areas of focus that the review team identifies for discussion. The expectation is that the review visit will normally take place virtually. However, in the event of a physical site visit, start and close times are when an institution could expect a review team to arrive and depart.

Time	Activity
08.45	Review team arrives/joins virtually and any technology requirements are tested
09.00	Review team holds first team meeting to review and confirm agendas
09.30-10.00	Meeting with HEI key contact(s) *This will vary between HEIs but would typically involve:* • *HEI quality lead* • *Vice-Principal with responsibility for learning & teaching* • *Student Association Vice-President (Education) or nominee*
10.00-11.00	Team reflects on any additional context/clarifications from meeting with HEI key contact(s)
11.00-12.00	Meeting with students *This would typically be with a group of students reflecting a range of characteristics. Depending on what a review team would like to explore, these may be drawn from all or any of:* • *student association sabbatical officers* • *students in representative roles (whether at HEI-level, within schools/departments or for courses)* • *students who do not hold a formal representation position*
12.00-13.30	Team debriefs from student meeting and prepares for staff meeting - includes working lunch
13.30-14.30	Meeting with staff (1) *This would typically be with a range of staff, potentially drawn from both academic and professional services, who have experience of quality management processes*
14.30-14.45	Short break
14.45-15.30	Meeting with staff (2) *This would typically be with senior management and academic staff in lead roles*
15.30-17.30	Team debriefs from staff meeting and confirms they have all the evidence required to write the report, including opportunity for any final clarifications with HEI key contact(s). QAAS officer attends from 4.00pm
17.30	Close

Annex 5: Outcome criteria

The criteria that review teams use to come to their conclusions are set out below.

From the evidence presented, the review team is **confident** that the institution is making effective progress in continuing to monitor, review and enhance its higher education provision to enable effective arrangements to be in place for managing academic standards and the quality of the student learning experience.	From the evidence presented, the review team is **not confident** that the institution is making effective progress in continuing to monitor, review and enhance its higher education provision to enable effective arrangements to be in place for managing academic standards and the quality of the student learning experience.
There will be evidence of progress from ELIR 4; and all or most external requirements (including those of the UK Quality Code) and/or academic standards are being met.	There will be limited or no evidence of progress from ELIR 4; and/or gaps with regard to other external requirements (including those of the UK Quality Code) and/or academic standards.
Recommendations may relate to: • identified opportunities for further enhancement or reflection • insufficient emphasis or priority given to assuring standards or quality • occasional lapses in the rigour with which the institution follows its own quality management processes • some weaknesses in the institutional approach to enhancement.	Recommendations may relate to: • an ineffective approach to requirements and/or standards • failure by the institution to follow its own quality management processes • an ineffective approach to institutional enhancement.
Other indicators include: • identified examples of good practice shared by the institution • an approach to self-evaluation that enables the identification of areas for development • evidence-based monitoring and evaluation that informs effective action • managing the needs of students is a clear focus of the institution's strategies and policies • student engagement is supported.	Other indicators include: • ongoing limitations in taking appropriate or timely action in response to external review activities • a lack of awareness of, and/or appropriate action in response to the identification of a significant issue in relation to academic standards and/or the student learning experience • little evidence of support for student engagement.

Annex 6: Appeals and complaints

Appeals and formal complaints procedures are designed to ensure that there is no conflict of interest throughout and are both handled by QAA's Governance team to avoid any conflict of interest. No one involved will have had previous involvement with the matter.

Appeals

An appeal is a challenge by an institution to the outcome of a QAA review or to another decision made by QAA.

QAA has a Consolidated Appeals Procedure, published on the QAA website.

A number of methods have tailored appeals procedures where a regulator requires specific elements that differ from the consolidated procedure. These are available on the same page of QAA's public website. Where there is no specific procedure, the consolidated procedure applies.

The appeal procedures state when an appeal can be made, the deadline by which an appeal must be made to be valid, what is an appealable judgement and the grounds for appeal. The procedures set out the process, timescales and potential outcomes.

Complaints

A complaint is an expression of an individual's dissatisfaction with their experience of dealing with QAA. It may be on behalf of the individual's institution.

Please note that if a formal complaint is received at the same time as an appeal, the complaint is stayed until the appeal has been concluded.

In common with most complaints procedures, QAA would encourage anyone dissatisfied with its service to first speak to the person that they have been dealing with at QAA, so that they can try to assist and to find a resolution. If you wish then to pursue a complaint you should refer to QAA's Complaints Handling Procedure, which is available on the QAA website. This details who you should contact and how your complaint will be handled, indicative timescales and outcomes.

Annex 7: Criteria for the selection of reviewers

All QESR reviewers are selected by QAA Scotland on the basis of the criteria set out below. Nominations are welcomed from institutions across the UK, with every Scottish institution encouraged to make at least one nomination to each reviewer role. Student reviewers may be nominated by Scottish student representative bodies, or Scottish higher education institutions.

The qualities required in QESR reviewers are detailed below. Student reviewers are required to have current or recent (within three years) direct experience of study at a Scottish higher education institution. Coordinating reviewers and UK-based senior academic reviewers are drawn from across the UK. Every attempt is made to ensure that the total pool of QESR reviewers reflects the characteristics of the Scottish higher education sector, including taking account of equality and diversity strands.

All reviewers are given training by QAA Scotland to ensure that they are familiar with the QESR method, the ESG and the wider enhancement-led approach.

Qualities required in all reviewers

All reviewers are expected to demonstrate the ability to:

- understand a range of perspectives
- relate to a range of individuals including students and senior managers
- lead discussions about strategic and operational approaches to the management of quality and academic standards in general, and the enhancement of the student learning experience in particular
- assimilate a large amount of disparate information and analyse it to form reliable, evidence-based conclusions
- communicate clearly, orally and in writing
- work productively and cooperatively in small teams delivering to tight deadlines
- maintain the confidentiality of sensitive matters.

Additional qualities required in UK-based academic reviewers

In addition to the qualities required in all reviewers, UK-based academic reviewers are expected to demonstrate:

- current or recent (within three years) wide experience of academic management at the institutional level in the UK, preferably relating to quality assurance and enhancement of the student learning experience; consideration will also be given to candidates with substantial experience of working in a senior capacity in a professional support service within a higher education provider (for these purposes we are seeking individuals with at least five years' experience of working in a role which gives them an institution-wide perspective)
- personal and professional credibility with staff, including senior managers, heads of institutions, and staff currently engaged in learning and teaching.
- knowledge and understanding of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code) and other key reference points, including the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework and the Enhancement Themes
- awareness of the distinctive features of the Scottish higher education system in general, and the enhancement-led approach in particular (QESR training will seek to emphasise this, but some initial awareness is expected).

Additional qualities required in student reviewers

QAA Scotland actively encourages applications from students from all backgrounds and with experience of a wide variety of study modes and levels.

In addition to the qualities required in all reviewers, student reviewers are expected to demonstrate:

- current or recent (within three years) experience of study at a Scottish higher education institution, equivalent to a minimum of one year's full-time education
- experience of representing students' interests at institutional (including faculty or school) level
- general awareness of the diversity of the Scottish higher education sector beyond their 'home' institution, and awareness of the arrangements for quality assurance and enhancement in Scotland (QESR training will provide further information on this and QAA Scotland is looking for applicants who have the ability to build on their existing experience).

Additional qualities required in coordinating reviewers

In addition to the qualities required in all reviewers, coordinating reviewers are expected to demonstrate:

- current or recent (within three years) experience of senior academic administration at institutional (including faculty or school) level in UK higher education
- wide experience of working with senior committees in UK higher education
- awareness of the distinctive features of the Scottish higher education system in general, and the enhancement-led approach in particular (QESR training will seek to emphasise this, but some initial awareness is expected)
- ability to retain an effective overview of complex tasks, and to proactively support and manage a small team in achieving those tasks
- ability to keep a reliable record of discussions, summarise the key outcomes, and produce coherent text in a specified format to tight deadlines
- experience of drafting, collating and editing complex reports.

Annex 8: ESG Part 1 alignment

QESR and ILM will consider institutions mapping to the UK Quality Code and accordingly will cover ESG part 1 as outlined in the Map of Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area to the UK Quality Code for Higher Education. Due to the specific remit of Phase 1, the areas of particular focus have been highlighted in grey below and will inform Phase 2.

ESG standard	Phase 1	Phase 2	
1.1 Policy for Quality Assurance	√	√	Phase 1 will consider key quality processes and policy, in particular the annual monitoring and institution-led review processes as well as the mapping to the UK Quality Code
1.2 Design and approval of programmes	√	√	Addressed in Phase 1 through the Quality Code mapping
1.3 Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment	√	√	Phase 1 will particularly consider learning and teaching strategies and action plans of the University
1.4 Student admission, progression, recognition and certification	√	√	Phase 1 will particularly consider student progression and outcomes
1.5 Teaching staff	√	√	Addressed in Phase 1 through the Quality Code mapping
1.6 Learning resources and student support	√	√	Addressed in Phase 1 through the Quality Code mapping
1.7 Information management	√	√	Addressed in Phase 1 through the Quality Code mapping
1.8 Public information	√	√	Addressed in Phase 1 through the Quality Code mapping
1.9 Ongoing monitoring and periodic review of programmes	√	√	Phase 1 will consider the institution's process and analysis of monitoring and periodic review of programmes
1.10 Cyclical external quality review	√	√	Phase 1 will particularly consider the progress since the ELIR 4 review

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