



**Analysis of institutional annual statements on Institution-led Review
from the Higher Education sector**

Session 2021-22

November 2022

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About this report

1 This is an analysis of the session 2021-22 annual statements on Institution-led Review (ILR) submitted by each Scottish Higher Education (HEI) as required by the Scottish Funding Council (SFC). ILR is one of five components of the [Quality Enhancement Framework](#) that higher education institutions (HEIs) are partners in and operate under. In its [Quality Guidance](#)¹, SFC asks HEIs to ensure that their ILR processes operate over a six-yearly cycle, reviewing all their credit bearing provision and the contribution of the Professional Services to enhancing the student experience during this period. SFC's guidance asks HEIs to report annually on their ILR activity, asking institutions to cover a range of topics in their statements: ILR outcomes; student engagement in ILR; review of support services; professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRB) activity; relevant contextual information; and key messages derived from monitoring and analysis of data, including feedback from students. QAA Scotland (QAAS) is commissioned by SFC, as part of its Outcome Agreement, to complete an analysis of the 19 annual ILR reports submitted by institutions to SFC. This report provides QAA Scotland's (QAAS) analysis of, and insights on, these HEI annual reports. QAAS uses this analysis and a number of other sources intelligence as its evidence base to support its annual Statement of Assurance to SFC.

2 While the content of this report is similar to the QAA reports submitted previously, it is structured differently. A section of the report covers each of the SFC topics listed in paragraph 1, and at the top of each section is the relevant extract from the SFC guidance. Key findings and recommendations is a new addition to the report structure. Additionally, readers are encouraged to review the section relating to methods and caveats prior to engaging with the report.

3 In considering the next two years, when QAAS will work with SFC and the sector to co-develop and implement SFC's new Tertiary Quality Framework, QAAS has reflected constructively on: the current SFC guidance to institutions for producing their ILR annual report; the reporting itself; and QAAS's analysis, which have been in place since August 2017 over the duration of the ELIR 4 cycle. The methodological reflections and recommendations in this report are offered to support development of future guidance, reporting and analysis approaches in a tertiary landscape. In the spirit of openness, which underpins the Scottish approach to quality enhancement in higher education, QAAS have retained reference to institutions to support the continued sharing of practice and learning from one another.

4 This analysis is discussed in a range of sector forums including the Scottish Higher Education Enhancement Committee (SHEEC) and The Quality Forum (TQF). It informs development and enhancement activity in the sector, allowing examples of practice to be picked up and shared in greater detail as part of sector enhancement activity or by individual institutions.

5 The resources from the 'Professional Services Partnerships' Focus On project were published in July 2022 including those related to an in-person event held in April 2022. SHEEC have agreed the following work strand for the 2022-23 Focus On project, 'the future of learning and teaching: defining and delivering an effective and inclusive digital/blended offering.' This aligns with the SFC's tertiary enhancement topic of the same name. To support this work, the 2021-22 HEI SFC annual returns have been reviewed for references to digital, blended, online, hybrid keywords to identify HEI activity on this topic. This analysis will inform QAAS work on the tertiary enhancement topic.

¹ SFC Quality Guidance 2017-2022: [Scottish Funding Council guidance to higher education institutions on quality from August 2017-2022 \(sfc.ac.uk\)](https://www.sfc.ac.uk/guidance-to-higher-education-institutions-on-quality-from-august-2017-2022)

Key findings and recommendations

6 This section describes key findings and makes recommendations arising from those findings. These are split between findings and recommendations on the SFC guidance, reporting and analysis and those that are about practice within the sector.

Guidance, reporting and analysis

7 Institutions' reports reflect the way SFC guidance is interpreted leading to a range of report sizes and content. While variability allows the individual context of HEIs to be highlighted, the extent of variability does tend to act to hinder the analysis and interpretation underpinning this report and, in some instances, prevents conclusions being drawn about institutional achievement. As the sector works together to implement SFC's new Tertiary Quality Framework, and with a view to ensuring efficient and consistent sector-wide reporting, QAAS **recommends to SFC** that the following points are considered through one of its development projects, relating to the formulation and implementation of the new Tertiary Quality Framework:

- institutions report on the outcomes of ILRs carried out in the past year by reporting the instances of positive practice and the recommendations which were identified in these reviews. However, some institutions report these outcomes for each ILR carried out, while others report in a summary way at institutional level, typically by identifying only those outcomes which were common across all or many of the reviews carried out. This leads to inconsistencies in the analysis of ILR outcomes, and to the result that the findings of institutions who report on the outcome of each ILR are inevitably over-represented in our analysis relative to those who report at institutional level. The analysis of institutional reports would be aided if it was based on the individual outcomes of all ILRs in each institution. QAAS recommends that the SFC guidance on the manner and level at which ILR outcomes are reported is reviewed to support greater consistency of reporting and subsequent analysis of ILR outcomes. Should the revised approach require additional analysis this would be subject to the availability of capacity within QAAS
- while the SFC's guidance asks for 'key findings' and 'distance travelled' regarding ILRs, institutional reports frequently do not sufficiently identify the institution's considered views of key findings in outcomes of ILRs, nor any intended follow-up actions arising from them, nor the results of any actions taken following the previous year's ILRs. Clearer guidance on reporting findings and follow-up actions arising from ILRs, including clearer elucidation of the term 'distance travelled' would be beneficial. QAAS recommends that SFC should explore how institutions can report more effectively on their consideration of key findings and follow-up actions arising from ILRs
- institutional reports generally include discussion of the institution's annual monitoring of its provision. However, this is often reported without sufficient reference to any oversight of outcomes and actions, and without reference to any performance indicators. In consequence, the identification of themes and outcomes arising from analysis of performance indicators is hindered. Clearer guidance would be beneficial on the manner in which institutions are expected to report on the achievement of performance indicators and of key findings and follow-up actions arising from them
- almost all institutions do not report on the extent to which key performance indicators had been met during the past year. This means that it is not possible to draw conclusions about the extent to which, across the sector, goals for particular areas of institutional performance are being addressed or achieved. QAAS recommends that SFC reviews the value of institutions reporting in this report *vis a vis* what is required in Outcome Agreement reporting, particularly as the latter is not required until the start of December.

We offer this recommendation as we all aim to drive efficiencies and reduce duplication of reporting (see paragraph 37)

- many reports include extensive descriptions of internal quality processes and roles or responsibilities. Typically these offer limited insight into the effectiveness/impact of changed institutional arrangements for review or of the effectiveness of oversight of these arrangements. Reports should include descriptions of quality processes only where this is necessary to support the presentation of key findings
- all institutional reports include contextual information about the institution, often identifying areas for action or issues to be addressed. While this background is helpful in analysing reports, instances of lack of clarity about the status of identified actions and issues hinders effective analysis of steps being taken to meet institutional strategic priorities and of understanding of the effectiveness and suitability of its key performance indicators. In reporting contextual background, the standing with respect to its strategic priorities of any areas for action identified should be clarified
- with regard to bullets 2,3,4 above we recognise that the timing of the submission of institutional reports (end of September) may be too early for the inclusion of a complete summary of the outcomes of an annual quality cycle (with the appropriate institutional governance oversight). There should be consultation with the sector and SFC on the most appropriate date for reporting in order to enable reports to include a full analysis of key findings, outcomes and follow-up actions.

Practice within the sector

8 Some institutions have plans to move back to in-person ILR activity. QAAS **recommends** that in doing so, **institutions** consider how to retain the benefits of online approaches that were implemented to overcome pandemic lockdown restrictions (see paragraph 17).

9 Institutions are identified throughout this report to enable sharing of learning on both positive practice and areas for development. We **recommend** that **institutions** use the report to support benchmarking their practice and networking with sector colleagues on aspects of mutual interest.

Method and caveats

10 The SFC guidance to HEIs on quality states that the primary mechanism by which institutions assure and enhance the quality of provision is through processes of institution-led evaluation and review, referred to as 'Institution-Led Review' (ILR) and it is a matter for each institution to determine how it organises its internal processes for reviewing and evaluating provision, provided it follows the SFC guidance and the UK Quality Code. ILR is one of the five key elements of the Quality Enhancement Framework - the enhancement-led approach to quality in Scottish higher education. All aspects of the provision are expected to be reviewed systematically and rigorously on a cycle of not more than six years. This means that:

- the duration of ILR schedules adopted by HEIs vary to support their individual academic structures
- the unit of review used by institutions varies, for example some may conduct programme-level review, while others may use subject/discipline-level or school/faculty review, to support their academic structures. Organisational re-structuring may have an impact on both the ILR schedule and unit of review being used by an HEI. ILR activity may also be used to reflect a pan-institutional approach, focusing on a theme of particular interest

relevant to a broader range of provision within an institution: examples in 2021-22 were thematic reviews of work-based learning provision and of student mental health provision

- ILRs and their outcomes relate to particular subject areas or provision and not the whole institution – it is therefore possible that positive practice and areas for development can be identified at the same institution in the same year on the same topic.

11 The above means that the analysis of the themes emerging through ILR processes across the Scottish sector is not an exact measure of what is good or more challenging in the sector. Nevertheless, there is value in reflecting on the themes arising from the Institution-Led Reviews as a collection. This analysis also shares a range of practice identified within the institutions which we encourage colleagues in the sector to consider in reflecting on their own practice. QAAS believe that by including institutions' names, this report becomes more useful for sector colleagues as it assists with sharing practice.

12 The findings of this report are based on the information provided in each institutional report and on what each institution has chosen to report on. The contextual information provided in reports varies between different institutions. Hence examples of practice cited in this report may not be exhaustive because of variability in the topics which different institutions report on. It is possible that additional examples of practice could be found from wider engagement with the institutions.

Summary of ILR outcomes and reflective overview

SFC guidance: provide a summary of the ILR outcomes from the preceding academic year including main themes, recommendations and/or commendations.

SFC guidance: provide a reflective overview, which highlights key findings from the reviews in the preceding year, comments on 'distance travelled' and identified any significant outcomes or actions relating to development needs or to good practice resulting from ILR processes.

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Introduction

13 The volume of planned ILR activity in session 2021-22 was similar to that planned in previous sessions but with far fewer postponements, five in two HEIs. In session 2020-21, 23 of 99 planned ILR activities were postponed. In session 2019-20, 30 of 106 planned ILR activities were postponed.

14 Although variability in the approaches adopted by different institutions in the manner of reporting ILR outcomes impacts on consistent analysis, it is possible to discern a number of common themes and features arising from ILR outcomes across the sector and from the additional contextual text provided in institutions' reports.

15 In order to give emphasis to key areas, we have identified ten aspects of provision which gave rise to the greatest volume of ILR outcomes, as shown in Table 1. As a guide to the volume of ILR outcomes in respect of instances of positive practice and of areas for development identified in institutions' reports, the table shows the number of instances of each, and the number of institutions reporting in each case. QAAS note, however, that in some institutions these instances relate to individual ILRs, while in others they arise from the institution's summarised outcome from all of its ILRs. In addition to reviewing the relative volume of positive practice and areas for development, QAAS has also scrutinised the nature of those

outcomes, finding that while there are numerous instances of developmental recommendations there is no indication of more fundamental systemic issues.

Table 1: ILR outcomes, positive practice and areas for development

Topic	Number of instances of positive practice	Number of institutions identifying positive practice	Number of areas for development	Number of institutions identifying areas for development
Student support	25	13	10	7
Programme provision and curriculum structures	19	11	16	9
Learning and teaching	22	9	16	9
Communication with students, student voice, student representation	13	7	27	11
Building learning communities	17	12	10	6
Employability and links with industry	16	9	10	6
Equality and diversity	12	6	6	6
Assessment and feedback to students	4	3	15	8
Staff and staff development	10	4	22	12
Placements, work based learning	5	5	5	5

16 In previous reporting years QAAS have categorised topics as ‘positive’, ‘area for development’ or ‘mixed’ based on the balance of instances of positive practice and areas for development and number of institutions involved. We recognise the inherent subjectivity in this approach and have not made that final judgement for session 2021-22 topics. For completeness, we show the trends identified in reports from 2017-18 to 2020-21, in Table 2, which shows that seven of the above 10 topics have been reported in previous years of the ELIR 4 cycle.

Post-pandemic reviews

17 This year, most institutions (11 of 19) do not report on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the operation of their processes for ILR, suggesting that any impact has not been noteworthy. The eight institutions¹ that do report note that their ILRs have been carried out online in 2021-22: none of these institutions drew attention to any perceived detriment to the effectiveness or efficiency of the process as a consequence of its being conducted online. Of these eight institutions, four² report that they intend to revert to in-person ILRs from 2022 onwards, while the other four make no comment on their future intentions. At the peak of the pandemic (session 2019-20 to 2020-21) institutions report on some of the unanticipated benefits of moving ILR activity online. These include: enabling more opportunities for greater subject specialist engagement and the involvement of students who may be harder to reach, who may be studying: part-time; online; or on different campuses in different geographic locations which might be in different time zones. Institutions also note the opportunities which blended review approaches provide for easing the pressure on the estate for teaching space. QAAS **recommends** that in considering any move to in-person review activity, institutions consider how to retain the benefits of online approaches that were implemented to overcome pandemic lockdown restrictions.

Table 2: ILR outcomes trends over time

Session	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21
Equality and diversity			Mix	Mix

Employability and links with industry	Mix	Mix	Mix	Mix
Postgraduate student experience	Dev	Mix		
Engagement with review processes	Pos			
Institution-led review documentation and processes			Mix	
Academic and staff development	Dev	Mix	Mix	Mix
Student support	Mix	Mix	Pos	Mix
Assessment and feedback to students	Mix	Dev	Dev	Dev
Communication with students			Mix	Dev
Use of technology to support learning	Pos	Mix		
Professional services collaboration			Mix	Mix
Staff and physical resources	Dev	Dev	Dev	Dev
Quality and commitment of staff	Pos	Pos	Pos	Pos
Research teaching linkages	Pos			
Programme marketing and student	Dev			
Learning and teaching practices and curriculum design	Mix	Mix	Pos	Pos
Sense of community	Pos	Mix	Pos	
Programme provision and curriculum structures			Mix	
Organisation and management			Mix	
Placements, work based learning				
School strategy				

Table key: 'Pos' denotes positive practice, 'Dev' denotes an area for development, 'Mix' denotes a mix of positive practice and area for development, blank denotes topics which appear as being significant.

18 In describing their arrangements for the annual monitoring of provision, nine institutions³ note that they had made alterations to these arrangements because of the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, with a view to easing the burden on staff of reporting at programme and module level, describing this in one case⁴ as a 'light-touch' process. Of these nine institutions, five retained their altered arrangements for the cycle of monitoring in 2021-22.

Student support

19 Reports from 12 institutions⁵ draw attention to findings of positive practice in relation to support for students, while at seven institutions⁶ there are recommendations for strengthening practice. The positive features most frequently identified related (at seven institutions⁷) to the high levels of commitment and responsiveness of staff, both academic and support staff, to meeting student needs. Other, more specific, features of positive practice arise from the effectiveness of arrangements for mentoring and peer support for students⁸, and from the effectiveness of systems for personal tutoring⁹. In almost all cases, the recommendations for enhancement of arrangements in relation to student support relate to ensuring effective provision of personal tutoring (at three institutions¹⁰) and to ensuring sufficient information about, and the accessibility of, support systems (at three institutions¹¹). Two institutions draw attention to both positive features and the recommendations for enhancement in relation to the provision of personal tutoring, perhaps suggesting insufficient policy or oversight at institutional level. Through HEI reporting on session 2021-22 Enhancement Theme activity we know work that is being taken forward with regard to personal tutoring. For example, the establishment at the University of the West of Scotland of a student success hub development and plans for incorporating personal tutoring within the curriculum. Queen Margaret University used the April 2022 Focus On event to develop an Enhancement Theme project on its personal academic tutor system. By contrast, The Royal Conservatoire of Scotland is exploring coaching approaches as a

way of supporting student learning.

Programme provision and curriculum structures

20 A total of 11 institutions¹² identify positive comments in respect of programme and curricular structures arising from ILR reviews, while 9¹³ identify areas for development. Positive features include interdisciplinarity in programme design¹⁴, the extent of professional body accreditation achieved¹⁵, curriculum development in partnership with students¹⁶, and the inclusion of sustainability goals in the curriculum¹⁷. However at other institutions the reported outcomes of ILRs do not identify the features of programme and curricular structures which have led to positive comments. By contrast, areas for development are typically specific to the subject areas being reviewed, and hence there were no general themes arising. However, two reports¹⁸ draw attention in their contextual material to institutional reviews of programme and curriculum structures, intended in one case¹⁹ to lead to the launch of new programmes in 2023 and in the other²⁰ as part of an institutional strategy to modernise programme structures by 2025.

Learning and teaching

21 Aspects of provision relating to learning and teaching draw a total of 22 positive comments in ILR reports from nine institutions²¹; areas for development are identified also in nine institutions. The work of programme teams in maintaining high quality teaching and learning during the COVID-19 pandemic is a common positive feature, identified as such in eight reports²². In addition, growing support for online learning is recognised as a positive feature in three reports²³. Other common positive features²⁴ relate to the work of staff in developing methods of teaching to support students' academic and personal development. Additionally, in their contextual material, five reports²⁵ draw attention to the current implementation of institutional strategies for teaching and learning, commonly intended to build on innovative practice within the institution developed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The most commonly identified areas for development related to the development of technology to support learning, most particularly the use of online and digital resources²⁶, and to building on positive pedagogic practice developed during the COVID-19 pandemic²⁷.

Communication with students

22 While reports from seven institutions²⁸ identify positive features in relation to this aspect of provision, there are also a total of 27 developmental outcomes across 11 institutions²⁹. Positive features commonly relate to the responsiveness of programme teams to student feedback and to the quality and timeliness of information provided by teams to students³⁰. In seven institutions³¹, areas for development are related to the need for improvements in communication with students particularly in relation to the provision of information about timetabling, about changes to programmes and about institutions' responses to student feedback. A need for more effective student representation in deliberative committees or for more secure feedback on student views is identified in eight institutions³².

Building learning communities

23 Reports show widespread commendations in the development of learning communities, citing 11 institutions³³ in outcomes of ILRs. However, in many cases reports do not provide details on the practices which underpinned these developments, alluding instead to, for instance, a 'welcoming and inclusive environment for students' and to 'a tangible sense of community'. Practices which are mentioned as fostering a sense of community included: off-campus visits³⁴; the use of shared electronic discussion boards³⁵; and buddying or mentoring activities³⁶. At six institutions³⁷ the outcomes of ILRs include the identification of areas for development in relation to learning communities. In several cases these include suggested practices for achieving this, arising from the perceived need to foster a sense of community in the contexts of online learning or of alleviating a loss of community experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic. Session 2021-22 Enhancement Theme reporting identifies community building/building communities as a

common topic in Year 2 with activity reported in eight institutions³⁸. Heriot-Watt University has interesting project work on 'space and place' looking at community and resilience through the connections between spaces, places and people.

Employability and links with industry

24 Outcomes of ILR reviews at 11 institutions³⁹ include the identification of positive features in relation to links between the institution and employers or relevant industries. Examples of positive practice include: work-based or experiential learning⁴⁰, the use of subject-based professional advisory groups⁴¹ to enhance student employability by creating links between institutions and employers of graduates; and employers' input into curriculum design⁴². At five institutions⁴³, reports identify opportunities for further development in relation to employer and industry links; these generally relate to the perceived desirability of strengthening student awareness of employment opportunities and information about career development.

Equality and diversity

25 Positive practices in relation to equality and diversity are identified in ILR reports at six institutions⁴⁴. Examples of practice include: employability programmes for students from minority groups⁴⁵; subject-based working groups focusing on decolonising the curriculum⁴⁶; steps being taken to address gender diversity within the staff profile⁴⁷; and flexibility for students studying on a part-time basis⁴⁸. At seven institutions⁴⁹ ILR reports include recommendations relating to equality and diversity: these concern the perceived need for greater diversity in the student population, and strengthened communication to students and staff about steps being taken to enhance diversity and the inclusion of minority groups. Seeing equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) feature prominently in ILR outcomes is a reflection of the increasing emphasis on this aspect of practice, which will, in QAAS's opinion, be partly related to the Resilient Learning Communities Enhancement Theme. EDI has been one of the key drivers of the Enhancement Theme over the last two years. In addition to the sector-wide project on the Anti-Racist Curriculum there is a range of other work on matters such as: disabled students' transition to university; intersectionality; male students; misogynistic behaviours; gender based violence; care experienced students; and the health and wellbeing of non-traditional students.

Assessment and feedback to students

26 Positive practice in relation to assessment was identified at three institutions⁵⁰, and arose from innovation in the means of providing feedback on assessed work, clarity of mapping of learning outcomes to learning activities, transparency in the process of moderation of assessments and the use of tools to protect the integrity of assessment. At eight institutions⁵¹, ILR reports have resulted in a total of 15 recommendations concerning assessment policy and practice. Most instances relate to ensuring that practice in assessment aligns with norms commonly accepted across the sector including, in five cases⁵², the need for consistency and/or timeliness in the quality of feedback on assessed work. Additionally, one institution⁵³ draws attention to the desirability of offering examination practice for students returning to in-person examinations after a period of online examinations during the pandemic, while another instance⁵⁴ draws attention to opportunities for innovative forms of assessment including peer feedback. From surveys such as the National Student Survey, quality and timeliness of feedback on assessment continues to be flagged by students and appears to be a perennial issue for the whole of the UK sector – not just for institutions in Scotland.

Staff and staff development

27 At four institutions⁵⁵, ILR reports identify positive practice relating to the capacity, deployment and support of staff of the institution: the most common features of positive practice, identified at all four institutions, arise from the provision of opportunities for the professional development of academic staff new to teaching and the support for staff seeking to gain further qualifications. In addition, ILR reports from a total of 7 institutions⁵⁶ draw attention to the positive

and supportive relationships between staff and students as a feature supportive of student learning (see paragraph 19). At 12 institutions⁵⁷ there are recommendations from ILR reviews relating to the roles of staff. There are a total of 18 such recommendations: of these, eight, drawn from seven institutions⁵⁸, relate to the strengthening of, or the wider availability of, opportunities for the professional development of staff, and seven, drawn from four institutions⁵⁹, relate to the perceived burden of staff workloads.

Placements and work based learning

28 Approaches to the provision of industrial placements or other forms of work-based learning, either at institutional or at programme level, attract attention in ten reports⁶⁰, all of which show evidence of a commitment to the provision of the learning opportunities offered by work-based learning. Commendations relate to, for instance, the continuing, provision of placements during the COVID-19 pandemic⁶¹ and to the usefulness of placements in deepening the relationship between the institution and its industrial partners⁶². ILR recommendations in five institutions⁶³ in relation to this topic typically concern the enhancement of placement provision by offering opportunities to more students⁶⁴, by strengthening communication about placements⁶⁵ or by ensuring the effectiveness of operational processes to support placement students⁶⁶.

Student engagement in ILR

SFC guidance: indicate the role and nature of student engagement in ILR including at the self-evaluation stage during the academic year

29 A total of 15 institutions⁶⁷ describe the means by which students participate in their ILR processes, which are generally by means of student membership of review teams. In addition, reports confirm that student views inform the review process by means of meetings or focus groups of students with the review team (in eight cases⁶⁸), and by student contributions to a self-assessment document (in five cases⁶⁹).

30 Some institutions identify particularly positive features in relation to encouraging and supporting student engagement in reviews. One institution⁷⁰ notes a marked increase in engagement by students on review panels in the last year, attributing this to the internal devolution of processes and the institutional move to online feedback sessions. While most institutions noted that they provide training for student members of review panels, at one institution⁷¹ the full and equal membership of students on review teams is supported by briefing material intended specifically for students and parallel briefings for areas under review with guidance on how to involve students with reviews; another institution⁷² encourages student membership of review teams by offering payment to students who successfully apply to join a review team.

Review of professional support services

SFC guidance: indicate the ways in which support services were reviewed or included in review processes, with regard to their impact on teaching, learning and the quality of the student experience

31 All institutions except for one⁷³ report on the ways in which professional support services are reviewed, and show a range of approaches are adopted to meet guidance from SFC in relation to the internal review of professional support services. This is consistent with the findings presented in the reports of ELIR 4 reviews, which found that institutions were at different stages in their progress towards meeting this guidance. At the time of their ELIR 4 reviews, seven institutions⁷⁴ were recommended to take steps to establish arrangements for the internal review of professional support services, while ELIR 4 reports noted that four institutions⁷⁵ either already had established such arrangements or were likely to do so shortly. The outcomes of QAAS's 'Focus On: Professional Services Review' [report](#), published in April 2022², shows examples of the range of approaches adopted by institutions. The report identified these as: integrated, targeted and comprehensive:

- **Integrated:** a common approach is integrated review where professional services are represented or considered to varying extents in the ILR of a subject area or cognate group of programmes
- **Targeted:** targeted review is where an institution focuses review activity on one or more specific professional service(s), department(s) or unit(s). This is the predominant approach in the sector as identified in the ELIR 4 reports published from 2018 to 2021. Some institutions employ a targeted approach that spans multiple professional services, sometimes referred to as a 'holistic' approach by institutions, but not including all services and typically limited to student-facing areas
- **Comprehensive:** not undertaken by any institutions in the ELIR 4 period is the comprehensive approach to PSR where all professional services across an institution are reviewed in one major review activity.

32 Across the sector, progress on ensuring that the review of professional support services is a routine feature of institutional arrangements for quality assurance has continued since ELIR 4. Five institutions⁷⁶ report that the work of professional support services is integrated within arrangements for reviews of an academic subject area, and two⁷⁷ of these institutions refer to plans for future inclusion of professional support services in their ILR cycle. Six institutions⁷⁸ report that reviews of professional support services have already taken place within their normal cycle of internal review. A further five institutions⁷⁹ confirm that they have plans for the inclusion of support services in their cycles of internal reviews in future. One institution⁸⁰ notes that its methodology for the review of professional support services required considerable preparation over the six-month period prior to the review itself and expresses its view that this could not be sustained if the approach were to be embedded into institutional practice.

33 Reports draw attention to a number of features of arrangements for the review of professional support services which are particular to the institutions concerned. These include:

- a judgement for each service being reviewed⁸¹ of effectiveness in managing academic standards and enhancing the quality of the student learning experience
- consideration by the institution's⁸² senior deliberative committee of the outcomes,

² <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaas/focus-on/focus-on-professional-services-review.pdf>

commendations and recommendations of the review

- the creation of a ‘Student Support Board of Studies’ to oversee the work of support services⁸³
- recommendations for the adoption of performance indicators of success for support services aligning with institutional aims and strategies⁸⁴.

34 Four institutions⁸⁵ report that they have adopted, or intend to adopt, a different approach to reviewing the work of professional support services by carrying out broad thematic reviews of particular aspects of the student experience across academic schools and professional support services. In 2021-22, for instance, one of these institutions⁸⁶ carried out a thematic review of its personal tutoring arrangements, arising from a perceived need for a whole-institution approach to prevention of, and intervention in, student mental health.

Professional, statutory and regulatory bodies activity

SFC guidance: describes scope, nature and outcomes of PSRBs activities

35 All 19 institutions reported on outcomes of PSRB accreditations during 2021-22, as shown in Table 3. The data indicate that there continues to be widespread and positive engagement across the sector with relevant external bodies leading to continuing and new accreditation of programmes in a wide range of disciplines. There were a total of 119 engagements with PSRBs, a volume comparable with that of previous years: there were 145 such engagements in 2020-21, and 124 in 2019-20.

Table 3: PSRB Accreditations

	Number of accrediting bodies	Number of accreditations approved	Number of accreditations with outcomes not yet known
Abertay University	5	5	0
University of Aberdeen	10	4	6
University of Dundee	12 ³	10	0
University of Edinburgh	9	9	0
Edinburgh Napier University	4	4	0
University of Glasgow	5	4	1
Glasgow Caledonian University	10	6	4
Glasgow School of Art	3	2	1
Heriot-Watt University	10	10	0
University of the Highlands and Islands	3	3	0
Open University in Scotland	7	5	2
Queen Margaret University	3	1	2
Royal Conservatoire of Scotland	1	1	0
Robert Gordon University	8	8	0
University of St Andrews	3	2	1
Scotland’s Rural College	1	1	0
University of Stirling	4	4	0
University of Strathclyde	9	9	0
University of the West of Scotland	12	11	1

Contextual information and key messages from PI data

³ One was not approved, and one outcome was not stated in the report.

SFC guidance: relevant contextual information and key messages derived from monitoring and analysis of performance indicators, benchmarks and other collected data, particularly those relating to retention, progression, completion, attainment and achievement, and graduate destinations

Annual monitoring

36 Institutional reports generally include descriptions of the HEI's arrangements for annual monitoring of its academic provision. In considering the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on these arrangements, two institutions⁸⁷ report that they have reverted to the arrangements in place prior to the pandemic, while another two institutions⁸⁸ note their intention to continue to make use of revised arrangements put in place during the pandemic.

37 While many institutions acknowledge that they make use of key performance indicators in appraising progress towards institutional goals, only one institution⁸⁹ reports on the extent to which its performance indicators have been met during the past year. The widespread lack of such information means that it is not possible to draw conclusions about the extent to which, across the sector, goals for particular areas of institutional performance are being addressed or achieved. QAAS **recommends** that SFC reviews the value of institutions reporting in this report *vis a vis* what is required in Outcome Agreement reporting, particularly as the latter is not required until the start of December. We offer this recommendation as we all aim to drive efficiencies and reduce duplication of reporting.

38 A total of twelve institutions⁹⁰ report key findings of, or themes arising from, their cycle of annual monitoring. While there are no themes which appear to be sector-wide in these findings, aspects of provision which most commonly feature are teaching, learning and curricular issues (six institutions⁹¹ report positive practice while three institutions⁹² identify this as an area for development); assessment practice (four⁹³ report positive practice, three⁹⁴ report areas for development) and student support (four⁹⁵ report positive practice, three⁹⁶ report areas for development).

Strategic Priorities

39 Reports generally include contextual information about the institution's current strategic priorities and activities intended to address those priorities. While some reporting is merely descriptive of current practice, common themes in relation to institutional priorities include the following.

Teaching and learning

40 Nine institutions⁹⁷ report on potential changes to strategies for programme delivery. Of these, six⁹⁸ are about to implement a new institutional strategy for teaching and learning, supported in two cases⁹⁹ by investment in additional physical resources. A further two institutions report their intention to reflect on the experiences of programme delivery during the COVID-19 pandemic to inform planning for future developments: for instance, a multi-campus institution¹⁰⁰ intends to retain and adapt the teaching arrangements in place during the pandemic into lasting arrangements for remote delivery and assessment across its campuses.

Access and inclusion

41 A total of nine institutions¹⁰¹ report activity in relation to access and inclusion, typically by describing institutional aims or intended action plans rather than recent achievements. Four institutions¹⁰² report intentions for actions relating to increasing access and support for groups under-represented in higher education, while two institutions¹⁰³ report activities to support the goal of decolonising the curriculum. Although other reports provide less evidence of activity or achievement, one institution¹⁰⁴ reports a wide range of initiatives intended to further access and inclusion, including: its achievement of and commitment to 'University of Sanctuary' status; the Athena Swan Charter held by the institution as well as by each of its schools; its Carer Positive Employer award; its pilot status in the Emily Test Charter; its LGBT Charter award; its annual reporting of its gender pay gap and of its ethnicity pay gap; and the collaboration between students and staff in addressing colonialism in the curriculum.

Student engagement

42 The discussion of student engagement in many reports is descriptive of current arrangements typical of practice in the sector. Three institutions draw attention to developments in their practices: one institution¹⁰⁵ has taken action to strengthen the participation and effectiveness of student representatives on institutional committees and of sabbatical officers; arising from their Student Partnership arrangements, two institutions¹⁰⁶ have strengthened their approaches to student mental, physical and social health following the COVID-19 pandemic.

Graduate outcomes

43 Reports from five institutions¹⁰⁷ refer to their performance in surveys of graduate outcomes, but none of these institutions specifically provided information on trends in that data or on areas for action arising from them.

Feedback from students

SFC guidance: the key messages from qualitative and quantitative analysis of feedback from students (including the National Student Survey and external surveys of postgraduate students) and actions taken/planned as a result.

44 All reports describe outcomes of and responses to the National Student Survey, surveys of postgraduate students, and to internal surveys.

National Student Survey

45 Reports from 16 institutions¹⁰⁸ include summaries of outcomes of the NSS, in most cases offering an overall view of the level of student satisfaction as shown by these outcomes relative to the previous year and/or to the outcomes of other institutions seen as comparable. Of the 16 institutions, six¹⁰⁹ express a generally positive view about their outcomes, five¹¹⁰ express a negative view, and the remainder¹¹¹ express a neutral view. Key areas for action arising from NSS outcomes are identified by five institutions¹¹², the most frequent being linked to assessment feedback (in four cases¹¹³) and to organisation and management (in two cases¹¹⁴).

Postgraduate students

46 Outcomes of surveys of postgraduate students are summarised in 11 reports¹¹⁵. Of these, six report¹¹⁶ that the institution has participated in the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES), seven¹¹⁷ report participation in the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES), and others report internal surveys of postgraduate students. In describing the outcomes of surveys, two institutions¹¹⁸ note areas for action arising: in one case¹¹⁹ in relation to

assessment of research students, while the other¹²⁰ draws attention to a number of actions taken to improve the experience of research students across the institution.

Other surveys

47 In addition, 8 institutions¹²¹ refer to internal surveys of student views, of which one¹²² also identifies key actions taken during 2021-22 in response to its student surveys.

Annex 1: Institutions included in this report

48 The institutions included in this report and the abbreviated forms of their titles, as used in identifying them in the endnote of the report, are as shown in the following list.

ABD	University of Aberdeen
ABT	Abertay University
DUN	University of Dundee
EDI	University of Edinburgh
ENU	Edinburgh Napier University
CAL	Glasgow Caledonian University
GSA	Glasgow School of Art
GLA	University of Glasgow
HWU	Heriot-Watt University
OUIs	Open University (Open University in Scotland) ⁴
QMU	Queen Margaret University
RGU	Robert Gordon University
RCS	Royal Conservatoire of Scotland
SRC	Scotland's Rural College
StA	University of St Andrews
STI	University of Stirling
STR	University of Strathclyde
UHI	University of the Highlands and Islands
UWS	University of the West of Scotland

⁴ The OUIS is not reviewed in the ELIR method (engages with Quality Enhancement Review) but does participate in Enhancement Themes activity and provides an annual ILR report to the SFC.

Annex 2: SFC annual statements on quality

49 Each statement is endorsed by the relevant governing body. Institutions also share these statements with QAA Scotland officers to inform the review Institutional Liaison Meetings.

50 The SFC guidance asks HEIs to cover the following areas:

- providing a summary of the ILR outcomes from the preceding academic year (AY) including main themes, recommendations and/or commendations
- indicate the ways in which support services were reviewed or included in review processes, with regard to their impact on teaching, learning and the quality of the student experience
- indicate the role and nature of student engagement in ILR including at the self- evaluation stage during the AY
- provide a reflective overview, which highlights key findings from the reviews in the preceding year, comments on 'distance travelled' and identified any significant outcomes or actions relating to development needs or to good practice resulting from ILR processes
- relevant contextual information and key messages derived from monitoring and analysis of performance indicators, benchmarks and other collected data, particularly those relating to retention, progression, completion, attainment and achievement, and graduate destinations
- the key messages from qualitative and quantitative analysis of feedback from students (including the National Student Survey and external surveys of postgraduate students) and actions taken/planned as a result.

Endnotes (references to institutions)

- 1 ABD, EDI, GLA, GSA, HWU, QMU, RGU, UHI
- 2 ABD, ADI, GLA, GSA
- 3 CAL, DUN, EDI, GLA, HWU, RCS, StA, UHI, UWS
- 4 EDI
- 5 ABD, ABT, DUN, EDI, UWS, STR, ENU, CAL, STI, StA, QMU, UHI
- 6 ABD, DUN, ENU, CAL, GLA, HWU, STI
- 7 DUN, EDI, CAL, STI, STR, UWS, ABT
- 8 STR, STI, ENU
- 9 ABD, EDI, ENU
- 10 ABD, ENU, HWU
- 11 DUN, GLA, ABT
- 12 ABD, CAL, DUN, ENU, GLA, HWU, QMU, RGU, StA, STI, UWS
- 13 ABD, ABT, ENU, GSA, QMU, RGU, StA, STI, UWS
- 14 ABD
- 15 CAL
- 16 GLA
- 17 STI, StA
- 18 HWU, RCS
- 19 RCS
- 20 HWU
- 21 ABD, CAL, DUN, ENU, GLA, HWU, StA, STI, UHI
- 22 ABD, STI, DUN, ENU, CAL, STI, StA, UHI
- 23 CAL, GLA, STI
- 24 ENU, CAL, GLA
- 25 UHI, HWU, GSA, GLA, CAL
- 26 DUN, CAL, GLA, StA
- 27 DUN, UHI
- 28 ABT, DUN, EDI, ENU, GLA, StA, STR
- 29 ABD, ABT, CAL, DUN, EDI, GLA, HWU, OUIs, StA, STI, UHI
- 30 ABT, DUN, EDI, STR, StA
- 31 ABT, STI, GLA, HWU, OUIs, StA, UHI
- 32 ABD, ABT, DUN, EDI, CAL, HWU, STI, UHI
- 33 ABD, ABT, CAL, DUN, EDI, ENU, GLA, GSA, HWU, STI, STR
- 34 ENU
- 35 STI
- 36 STI
- 37 ABD, ABT, CAL, StA, STI, UWS
- 38 GSA, HWU, EDI, ENU, RGU, SRC, StA, STI
- 39 ABT, CAL, DUN, ENU, GLA, HWU, RGU, STI, STR, UHI, UWS
- 40 DUN, UWS, GLA
- 41 CAL, ENU
- 42 StA, UWS, GLA
- 43 ENU, CAL, HWU, STI, StA
- 44 ABT, CAL, ENU, GLA, StA, STI
- 45 ABT
- 46 GLA
- 47 STI
- 48 StA
- 49 ABD, CAL, EDI, ENU, GLA, GSA, STI
- 50 STR, GLA, HWU
- 51 ABT, DUN, CAL, STI, GLA, HWU, OUIs, QMU
- 52 DUN, CAL, STI (2), GLA
- 53 GLA
- 54 CAL
- 55 ABT, STR, GSA, CAL
- 56 ABD, ABT, EDI, CAL, STI, StA, RGU
- 57 ABD, ABT, CAL, DUN, EDI, GLA, GSA, HWU, RGU, StA, STR, UHI
- 58 ABD, ABT, EDI, GLA, GSA, HWU, StA
- 59 DUN, EDI, STR, CAL
- 60 STR, CAL, GSA, STI, QMU, RGU, UWS, ENU, StA, UWS
- 61 RGU
- 62 STR

63 STR, CAL, GSA, STI, RGU
64 StA, UWS
65 QMU
66 STI, UWS
67 ABD, ABT, DUN, EDI, ENU, CAL, GLA, HWU, QMU, RGU, SRC, StA, STI, STR, UHI
68 ABD, ABT, CAL, DUN, ENU, GLA, STR, UHI
69 ABD, HWU, SRC, StA, STI
70 ABT
71 EDI
72 ENU
73 OUiS
74 ABD, ABT, ENU, GLA, GSA, STI, UWS
75 HWU, RGU, STR, UHI
76 ABD, CAL, DUN, QMU, UHI
77 DUN, UHI
78 ABT, ENU, GSA, SRC, StA, STR
79 GLA, HWU, STI, UHI, UWS
80 ENU
81 ABT
82 GSA
83 SRC
84 GSA
85 CAL, QMU, STI, STR
86 CAL
87 DUN, StA
88 GLA, HWU
89 ABT
90 CAL, EDI, GLA, GSA, OUiS, QMU, RGU, SRC, StA, STR, UHI, UWS
91 CAL, OUiS, QMU, SRC, STR, UWS
92 GSA, RGU, SRC
93 EDI, GLA, SRC, UHI
94 OUiS, SRC, RGU
95 EDI, GLA, QMU, UWS
96 GSA, QMU, SRC
97 ABD, CAL, GLA, UHI, GSA, HWU, RGU, SRC, UWS
98 ABD, CAL, GLA, UHI, RGU, UWS
99 CAL, ABD
100 HWU
101 ABD, EDI, GLA, GSA, OUiS, QMU, RCS, StA, STR
102 ABD, EDI, OUiS, STR
103 GSA, StA
104 StA
105 StA
106 RGU, UWS
107 ABD, ABT, CAL, RCS, RGU
108 ABD, ABT, DUN, EDI, CAL, GSA, GLA, HWU, QMU, RGU, RCS, SRC, StA, STI, UHI, UWS
109 ABD, ABT, CAL, GSA, StA, STI
110 DUN, EDI, GLA, SRC, RCS
111 HWU, QMU, RGU, UHI, UWS
112 DUN, EDI, QMU, RGU, SRC
113 DUN, EDI, QMU, RGU
114 DUN, SRC
115 DUN, EDI, GLA, GSA, HWU, OUiS, QMU, StA, STI, UHI, UWS
116 DUN, EDI, HWU, StA, STI, UHI
117 DUN, HWU, OUiS, QMU, StA, STI, UHI
118 DUN, HWU
119 DUN
120 HWU
121 ABD, DUN, GLA, HWU, QMU, SRC, StA, UWS
122 HWU