
Tertiary Quality Steering Group (TQSG): update bulletin

The ninth meeting of the TQSG was held on **4 March 2025**

Self-Evaluation and Action Plan (SEAP)

The first annual Self-Evaluation and Action Plans ([SEAPs](#)) were submitted to SFC in December. These documents support a number of important functions in the Tertiary Quality Enhancement Framework (TQEF) including providing evidence supporting SFC's [Outcomes Framework \(OF\) and Assurance Model \(AM\)](#) and the external institutional reviews ([TQER](#)) undertaken by QAA, and as important tools to support institutional reflection on performance and strategic enhancements.

All college and university SEAPs had been reviewed by the relevant institutional Outcome Managers (OMs) and members of SFC's Student Interests, Access and Quality (SIAQ) team. Additional feedback and insights were provided by Education Scotland HMI and the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) on college and university SEAPs respectively. These reflections have been captured and discussed, and institutions will receive feedback through their Annual Quality Engagement (AQE) meetings with SFC, scheduled to take place during March.

SFC confirmed that institutions would receive balanced feedback on their SEAPs from their OMs, identifying instances of good practice as well as areas where improvements could be made in subsequent years. SFC's SEAP Guidance had been drafted to ensure that the documents could be developed and adapted in a way that best supports each institution's own reflection and planning for improvement, and encourage institutions to 'make the documents work for them'.

In their discussion TQSG members noted that [spargs](#) had published [Guidance](#) to support meaningful student engagement and partnership in the SEAP process and they would hold summer training events for student officers. TQSG were also encouraged to hear that sector quality forums would come together to share learning from the experience and reflect on exemplars of good practice. SFC will also develop a high-level overview of themes to help inform what support and guidance can be put in place by SFC and its delivery agency partners for the next years submissions.

SFC confirmed that no significant changes to the SEAP process were planned, but that feedback from the sector would be used to provide additional clarification – including around the effective use of data – in refreshed guidance in the Summer.

A tertiary approach to concerns

In its [Guidance on Quality](#) published in July 2024, SFC made a commitment to work with our partner quality agencies and the sector to lead the development of a tertiary approach to concerns for implementation in AY2025-26. By concern we mean a systemic issue that has come to light outside regular review and oversight arrangements, related to academic standards or the quality of provision. While QAA has operated the [Scottish Quality Concerns Scheme](#) (SQSC) in the university sector since 2018, there is no equivalent in the college sector.

At their meeting in December TQSG had an initial discussion on scoping this work. In that discussion members cautioned SFC against creating additional layers of complexity and to carefully weigh the benefits of a tertiary approach against additional resource considerations for institutions. Members also advised SFC to engage with institutions to better understand the effectiveness of equivalent processes in the college and university sectors for identifying and addressing systematic concerns.

At its March meeting TQSG considered a revised approach and timeline for this work. Members were updated on recent initial engagement with sector groups, including the college sector Complaints Handling Group and the Scottish Public Service Ombudsman (SPSO), to establish how themes are identified through the model complaints handling procedures and what enhancements could be made to better identify systemic issues.

TQSG welcomed the proposal to extend the timeline for this work to allow for more in-depth analysis of the existing structures and processes in place to manage concerns across the sector. Alongside quality agency partners and sector colleagues, SFC were encouraged to engage students and institutions' academic registrars in developing their approach. Once SFC have established a clear evidence base on the effectiveness of the current arrangements, it will seek TQSG's advice on options for improvement at a future meeting, with any proposed changes implemented from AY2026-27.

Data analysis reports for TQER

Our last substantive discussion focused on the development of the SFC data analysis reports for the [Tertiary Quality Enhancement Review](#) (TQER) visits. As noted in the Quality Assurance Agency [TQER Guide for Institutions](#), SFC will share an **analysis** of key institutional data and evidence with the QAA and the TQER Review Team to support the TQER process. These reports will also be shared by QAA with the institution, but will not be published.

SFC colleagues have now completed and submitted the first two data analysis reports for the institutions undergoing TQER in AY2024-25. As a result of these submissions and feedback received from QAA, SFC has undertaken some revisions to the internal data analysis process that will support and enhance the reports going forward.

SFC has also agreed a process with QAA for the institutions to raise any significant concerns about the data analysis report via the TQER Review Manager and have added more detail to the report introduction to assist review teams to understand the context of the data analysis more clearly.

TQSG members noted that early feedback had indicated that the reports had provided useful insights to review teams in their preparations for forthcoming TQER visits, while others suggested that institutions planners had a role to play in ensuring data analysis reports were robust and ‘translated’ to ensure key messages are understood by institutional quality colleagues and senior teams. SFC are in the process of updating [Guidance](#) about the data analysis report to include some further methodological information about the report development, and following TQSG feedback, and will undertake some further consultation about the update prior to publication.

The next meeting of the TQSG is scheduled for the **21 May 2025**