

Update from Tertiary Quality Steering Group on 10/06/24

1. The Tertiary Quality Steering Group met on 10 June 2024 to discuss Scotland's Tertiary Quality Enhancement Framework and the ongoing activities that will support its implementation in AY2024-25. Members acknowledged that there remains much detail still to come, but there were some very helpful insights shared and reassurance on several key concerns was provided. These notes are arranged according to the substantive items on the agenda and intended to support TQSG members in talking with colleagues about the matters discussed and considered at the meeting.

Chairs report

2. Refreshed commission – SFC presented the revised commission that has been agreed with QAA, outlining the key changes, including the extension of the previous five-year timeframe described for the review cycle, to support flexibility in the planned approach for the first review cycle. QAA confirmed that the approach being proposed is compliant with the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG), including the proposal that the first cycle of external reviews will be based on a seven-year timeframe, with an expectation that subsequent cycles will be six years.
3. Communications update – the new branding for the TQEF was shared with the group and an update provided on the ongoing communication activity, including plans for updating the website and the release of additional resources to coincide with the publication of the SFC Guidance on quality for colleges and universities.

SFC Outcomes Framework (OF) and Assurance Model (AM)

4. An abridged version of the presentation that was shared with the sector on 28 May was presented to the group. The focus of the presentation was on explaining how the OF and AM has been created, by drawing together much of the existing activity undertaken by SFC and incorporating the new TQEF, which will address the “High Quality Learning and Teaching” outcome within the new approach. The outline of the new approach has now been published on the SFC website and can be accessed here: [Outcomes Framework and Assurance Model - Scottish Funding Council \(sfc.ac.uk\)](https://www.sfc.ac.uk/outcomes-framework-and-assurance-model).
5. The presentation of the OF and AM and subsequent discussion enabled members of the TQSG to consider the Learning and Quality elements of that as a whole for the first time, which was agreed to be helpful.
6. As part of the OF and AM, there will be thematic reviews that are undertaken by SFC each year. There will likely be no more than two or three per annum and not all OF outcomes will be covered by thematic review in any one year. The focus of these reviews are to support the wider OF and will not duplicate activity or enhancement theme work in the TQEF. The format will be determined by the topic, i.e. in some instances this may be an examination of the data that SFC already collects rather than



asking institutions for additional data or information. This will be the subject of further discussion with the sector as the implementation of the wider OF and AM is developed in the coming months, so that (a) we don't introduce duplication between agencies and SFC on thematic reviews and (b) there is no undue burden on the sector. Details to be determined.

7. As part of the OF and AM, SFC has articulated the range of existing interventions that are already in place and are applied if concerns arise. These interventions apply across the whole of the OF and AM and are not focused solely on the quality of provision.

Scotland's Tertiary Quality Enhancement Framework (TQEF) and SFC guidance on quality for colleges and universities

8. The TQEF was presented to the Steering Group in the context of the SFC guidance on quality for colleges and universities. The guidance is arranged in six sections that broadly align to the context, development, principles, delivery mechanisms and outputs of the TQEF.
9. The guidance covers the whole of the first planned review cycle, i.e. AY2024-25 to AY2031-32, and sets out the high-level detail of the quality assurance and enhancement approach for the period. The approach will be reviewed as it is implemented, and updates made as necessary and appropriate (see future role for TQSG below).
10. The detail relating to the two delivery mechanisms led by QAA, i.e. the Tertiary Quality Enhancement Review (TQER) and Scotland's Tertiary Quality Enhancement Programme (STEP), will be published by QAA once finalised.
11. SFC clarified that Annual Quality Engagements will be comprised of two parts:
 - SFC will continue to have discussions with institutions about performance, data and evidence that are relevant to quality and to other outcomes, e.g., funding, student success and widening access. This will ensure continued engagement with SFC for universities and colleges on these areas and will remove the duplication that exists for colleges, who also currently discuss these matters with Education Scotland. The focus of these discussions will be the SFC-funded provision.
 - QAA will have Institutional Liaison Meetings with institutions to support preparation for and follow up to external review, relationship building and the provision of ongoing advice and guidance. Annual meetings are not required for compliance with the ESG, as follow-up activities to external review can take any form. It is clear that the sector values regular engagement with QAA and wishes it to continue and so this is forming part of the agreed approach. The focus of these discussions will be all relevant provision (see below) and not be limited to SFC-funded provision.
12. The TQSG appreciated the clarification and has asked for more detail to members in

sharing the implications with others in their respective sector.

13. The guidance for the Self-Evaluation and Action Plan (SEAP) will be included as an annex in the main quality guidance and published at the same time.
14. The expectations for institutions in relation to institution-led quality activity is also included in the SEAP and there was some discussion about the introduction of Institution-Led Quality Review (ILQR) for colleges. SFC are updating this section of the guidance to ensure that there is greater clarity and read across to the quality assurance and enhancement activities that are already undertaken in colleges. TQSG members noted that this activity already takes place in colleges and the guidance will be drafted to support college colleagues in understanding how what they already do fits into the activity described in the guidance.
15. TQSG members were particularly keen that requirements of the current (QEF, HGIOC) and future (TQEF) quality frameworks are mapped to confirm that there is no additional burden being placed on the sector through the introduction of the TQEF.
16. Clarifications included that:
 - SFC will share the updated quality guidance following feedback from the meeting with TQSG members for further consideration ahead of publication and with the intention to publish in July. Although this is later than planned, it will enable further valued review and feedback from TQSG members and their colleagues.
 - The SEAP will be shared with SFC *and* QAA following submission by institutions to SFC.
 - Although the SEAP submission itself will cover all of an institution's provision, the SFC's interest in and annual engagement around the SEAP will focus only on the SFC-funded activity and specifically, data, outcomes, access and skills etc. Institutions will be accountable to SFC only for things they are funded for. It is assumed that the learning and quality arrangements in institutions are common to both funded and non-funded provision, but there will be no focused discussion with SFC beyond the funded provision. The inclusion of all relevant provision (funded and non-funded) in the SEAP is intended to support institutions' own enhancement activity as well as QAA's external review.

Self-Evaluation and Action Plan (SEAP)

17. The revised guidance and template for the SEAP was provided to members, along with a detailed cover paper highlighting the revisions as a result of the feedback gathered from members and their wider networks in April 2024. There was a discussion around three key issues:

- The **scope of activity** to be included (i.e., what counts as relevant provision for the SEAP) – further consideration is being given to how to define relevant provision to be included in the SEAP and to ensure that this is transparent for colleges and universities given the different terminology that is used in different institutions.
- The inclusion of **data relating to placements and work-based learning** – the requirements for data and evidence in relation to placements and work-based learning are being reframed in the guidance to ensure clarity about expectations. TQSG members will have the opportunity to comment on this again when the updated quality guidance is circulated.
- The **date for the submission** of the first SEAPs in November 2024 - institutions will be asked to submit their SEAP by the 30 November (or first working day thereafter) but any institution that believes it will not be able to achieve that deadline in the first year is asked to get in touch with SFC as soon as possible to discuss their individual situation.

18. Clarifications included:

- It is clear that the SEAP will take into account all relevant provision, but the specific definition and boundaries of that are to be clarified in particular, with respect to non-credit bearing activity so that there isn't undue burden but to enable pertinent activity (particularly in the colleges) is included. This recognises that extending the SEAP into non-credit bearing activity would be very onerous for universities and is not SFC's intent.

Oversight and review arrangements for the TQEF

19. SFC proposed an extension to the lifespan of the TQSG to provide advice and guidance on the further development of the TQEF through implementation and subsequent review. The membership was supportive of the proposal and it was agreed that this would be followed up individually to confirm members' preferences for continuation on the group.

20. Clarifications included:

- The TQSG meetings will continue during the first year of the new arrangements as a minimum, and there has been agreement about the importance of building in opportunities to consult through sector groups. In addition, the advisory nature of the TQSG was acknowledged, noting that the group is not a decision-making body and clarifying where decisions are made.

Tertiary Quality Enhancement Review (TQER)

21. QAA gave a brief presentation outlining the approach to TQER that will be consulted on



with the sector. There was some discussion about the impact of the pre-election period on the planned consultation and the implications thereof which are still being worked through and will need to be discussed with the two institutions that have volunteered to be reviewed first in the cycle.

22. Clarifications included:

- QAA is developing detailed guidance on the Review Method but is currently unable to consult during the pre-election period. Further details will be shared in due course with an undertaking that the opportunity for consultation will be maintained despite the time constraints.
- Given this activity will take place over the summer period, TQSG will meet to continue the required reviews/discussions and members will work with their representative bodies / groups / colleagues to engage as much as possible over the summer period.
- The TQEF will not adopt a risk-based approach to setting the TQER schedule. The institutional review cycle will be agreed at the start of the cycle (as was the case with ELIR) and changes to that schedule will not be made because of concerns within / about any one institution. Any concerns / issues within an institution will be considered through other channels such as annual engagement or other instruments available to SFC and indeed QAA.

Student Partnership and Student Engagement

23. Sparqs gave a brief update on the Student Partnership ambition statement and features and highlighted that this work would be ongoing over the summer and into the next academic year.