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SFC Guidance to Colleges and Universities on Quality AY 2022-23 and AY 2023-24: Refresh



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Summary:	This guidance is to inform Scotland's colleges and universities of refreshed quality arrangements for AY 2022-23 and AY 2023-24.
FAO:	Principals of Scotland's colleges and universities, Quality managers and practitioners at Scotland's colleges and universities, and the general public.
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Contents

SFC Guidance to Colleges and Universities on Quality AY 2022-23 and AY 2023-24: Refresh	5
Purpose	5
New for AY 2023-24.....	5
Section 1: Introduction.....	7
Overview	7
Context: SFC Review of Coherence and Sustainability	7
Section 2: shared sector expectations for AY 2023-24	9
Quality culture.....	9
Student partnership	9
Tertiary Enhancement Topic continuation in AY 2023-24	10
Tertiary external review method and enhancement approach	11
Ad hoc requests on information about the way institutions are securing academic standards and the student learning experience	11
College and university reporting on quality for AY 2023-24	11
Outcome Agreements	12
Section 3: Arrangements for Colleges AY 2023-24	13
On-going engagement with a link HM Inspector	13
Annual Engagement Visits (AEV)	13
Progress Visits (PVs)	14
Supporting enhancement and improvement: Thematic reviews.....	14
Credit rated provision.....	16
Section 4: Arrangements for Universities AY 2023-24	17
External institutional review: Quality Enhancement and Standards Review (QESR) and Institutional Liaison meetings (ILM)	17
External institutional review: Transnational Education (TNE)	18
Institution-led Review	19
Annual and periodic review.....	19
Scope, frequency and unit of review	19
Team size and composition.....	20
Contribution and role of support services.....	20
Student engagement in ILR.....	21

Use of external reference points	21
Use of data and evidence	22
Relationship with PSRB accreditation	22
Inter-relationship with other elements of quality and enhancement arrangements	22
Public information about quality and the student experience	23
Section 5: Universities reporting on quality for AY 2022-23	25
Content and scope of annual report and statement of assurance on institution-led review (ILR) ..	25
Governing body provision of annual statement.....	26
How SFC and QAAS use annual reports	26
Issues of concern, action and reporting	27

SFC Guidance to Colleges and Universities on Quality AY 2022-23 and AY 2023-24: Refresh

Purpose

1. The purpose of this refreshed guidance is to inform Scotland’s colleges and universities and other stakeholders of the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) guidance on quality for AY 2022-23 and AY 2023-24.
2. For colleges, the information set out in this Guidance is developed with Education Scotland (ES). This Guidance outlines arrangements for external institutional review and thematic review. Full details of these arrangements will be published separately by Education Scotland. Colleges are also expected to consider curriculum developments and the contribution of support services to the student experience as part of their own self-reflection on quality. Separate arrangements exist for quality assurance processes required by awarding bodies. We have also set out information on engagement with the Tertiary Enhancement Topic and scoping for future enhancement activity from AY 2024-25.
3. For universities, the information set out in this Guidance outlines arrangements for external institutional review, QESR (Quality Enhancement and Standards Review and Institutional Liaison Meetings, outlined below), Institution-led Review (ILR), engagement with the Tertiary Enhancement Topic and scoping for future enhancement activity from AY 2024-25, public information on quality and the student experience and institutional reporting on quality. The arrangements for external institutional review have been developed by Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) to be delivered across two phases (from paragraphs 60) to ensure continued compliance with [European Standards and Guidelines](#) (2015). SFC has committed to ensuring compliance with ESG as part of its developing tertiary quality arrangements. Full details of arrangements for external institutional review (Phase 1 of QAA Scotland’s arrangements) are available on the [QAA Scotland website](#).

New for AY 2023-24

4. SFC has reviewed and updated this guidance in advance of AY 2023-24 to reflect and respond to the development of new tertiary arrangements for quality assurance and enhancement to be implemented from AY 2024-25. Recognising that this Guidance covers a period of transition for both sectors, we have made only a small number of necessary changes and clarifications for AY 2023-24. These are highlighted below for ease of reference:

- Update on progress with developing student partnership models and reference points, [paragraphs 20-23](#).
 - Expectations around engaging with the design and delivery of a new approach to external review and a new approach to impactful enhancement activity across the tertiary system, [paragraph 27](#).
 - Ad hoc requests on information about the way institutions are securing academic standards and the student learning experience, [paragraph 28](#).
 - Updated guidance for colleges and universities on reporting on quality for AY 2023-24, [paragraph 29](#).
 - Update on revised Outcome Agreement guidance for AY 2023-24, [paragraph 31](#).
 - New guidance for universities on external institutional review of transnational education, (TNE) for AY 2023-24, from [paragraph 65](#).
 - Clarification around SFC's expectations for professional support services review as part of institutional-led review in the university sector for AY 2023-24, [paragraph 79](#).
5. Regular updates on progress with the development of the Tertiary Quality Project will be provided on the Tertiary Quality Project [website](#) throughout the coming year.

Section 1: Introduction

Overview

6. The Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 2005 sets out SFC's duty to secure coherent, high-quality fundable further and higher education, and to ensure provision is made for assessing and enhancing the quality of this provision.
7. Up until 2022 the SFC met this statutory duty through two frameworks for quality in the college and university sectors. *How Good is our College* ([HGIOC](#)) and the *Quality Enhancement Framework* ([QEF](#)) supported self-assessment, improvement and enhancement, and the sharing of good practice in the college and university sectors, respectively, in Scotland. It is through these frameworks that SFC supported institutions to manage the quality of student learning experience and uphold public confidence in academic quality and standards. Evidence from the quality arrangements contributed to broader SFC interactions with colleges and universities, in particular, Outcome Agreement discussions.
8. This guidance outlines interim quality arrangements for AY 2022-23 and AY 2023-24, developed in partnership with ES and QAAs, and gives our colleges and universities clarity and consistency while also allowing appropriate flexibility for continued development of a tertiary approach to quality outlined in SFC's Review.

Context: SFC Review of Coherence and Sustainability

9. The final report of SFC's [Review of Coherence and Sustainability](#) published in June 2021 sets out our response to Scottish Ministers' request that we review how we might best fulfil our mission to secure coherent, good quality, and sustainable tertiary education and research.
10. The overarching ambition outlined in the review report is to make Scotland the best place to be a student at college or university. To support this ambition the review report makes a specific recommendation to:

'develop a single quality assurance and enhancement framework for tertiary education, to uphold academic standards, and enhance the learning experience of all students'
11. SFC wishes to see a more coherent approach to quality assurance, improvement and enhancement across the college and university sectors that supports public confidence and reflects our ambition for a more integrated tertiary system supporting seamless learner journeys. It is also our ambition to foster closer collaboration and joint working between and across partner agencies to support this.

12. The Scottish Government has welcomed SFC's proposed development of a single quality framework that:
 - Strikes the appropriate balance between assuring and enhancing the quality of tertiary provision.
 - Recognises the distinct contribution as well as the interconnectedness of each part of the tertiary education system.
13. SFC has worked with ES and QAAS to develop quality arrangements for AY 2022-23 and AY 2023-24 which will support quality assurance, improvement and enhancement while also allowing flexibility to work with stakeholders and the sectors to develop a new single tertiary approach over the same period. This will allow SFC and its partner quality agencies to co-create, test and adjust any new arrangements with the sector, and will provide sufficient lead-in time for colleges and universities to make the required preparations for the new approach.
14. New arrangements for a common approach to quality assurance and enhancement across colleges and universities are expected to commence in AY 2024-5.

Section 2: shared sector expectations for AY 2023-24

Quality culture

15. Institutions should demonstrate a strategic approach to quality assurance, improvement and enhancement which has a clear focus on outcomes for students. This approach should be supported by a 'quality culture' throughout the institution where responsibility for provision and outcomes for students is not only the responsibility of staff with quality roles but is shared institution-wide. A quality culture can further be defined as demonstrating clear alignment between the institution's strategy on quality assurance, improvement and enhancement and day-to-day practice, where buy-in across the institution from staff and students is evident and where this culture informs activity at all levels.
16. Institutions should reflect, at institutional level, on strategic issues arising from their regular quality processes and make use of this information as part of their overall strategy and strategic approach to quality assurance and enhancement.
17. Institutions have flexibility in the precise manner of addressing this expectation, but it is expected that a culture of quality assurance, improvement and enhancement should be clearly evidenced across an institutions' policies and practices.
18. As part of their engagements with institutions, SFC has asked ES and QAAS to explicitly consider, through external institutional review and supporting activity, the ways in which institutions demonstrate a quality culture.
19. SFC expects each institution to engage with its quality agency partners in an open and transparent way. Institutions should share good practice and success and should also share and address challenge areas at the earliest opportunity within the quality review process, demonstrating a commitment to an effective quality assurance, improvement and enhancement approach.

Student partnership

20. Student partnership and engagement in quality processes is a fundamental characteristic of our approach to quality assurance, improvement and enhancement in our colleges and universities in Scotland. *Student Partnerships in Quality Scotland* ([sparqs](#)) assists and supports students, students' associations and institutions to improve the effectiveness of student engagement in quality assurance, improvement, and enhancement across Scotland.

21. The sparqs [Student Engagement Framework for Scotland](#) is endorsed and owned by all the sector agencies and representative bodies in the college and university sectors. It sets out expectations and features of student engagement. SFC's expectation is that all institutions will work with the Framework in their own context and will develop their partnership approaches with students and student representatives to enhance student partnership. Institutions should ensure that there is a coherent and effective strategy in place for this activity. SFC expects institutions to be ambitious in seeking opportunities for student partnership in the co-creation of learning; to empower students to use evidence to enhance their own learning; to extend engagement to new groups of students; and to support and develop the role and capacity of Student Association staff to build sustainability and maintain continuity of support for student officers.
22. SFC will seek assessments from sparqs, ES and QAAS on the effectiveness of how students and student representatives are engaged in quality arrangements for AY 2023-24.
23. SFC will also work with sparqs in AY 2023-24, in the context of our Review recommendation for quality, to strengthen student partnership in quality and to develop sector reference points with students for use within the new tertiary quality arrangements. In AY 2022-23, SFC commissioned sparqs to refresh its Student Learning Experience and Student Partnership models with a view to these being integral to the tertiary quality arrangements being implemented from AY 2024-5. During AY 2023-24, sparqs will test these models across the tertiary sector and work with the quality agencies to consider how best to integrate these within the new common approach to quality assurance and enhancement.

Tertiary Enhancement Topic continuation in AY 2023-24

24. SFC recognises that the college and university sectors undertake a variety of improvement and enhancement activity, both within institutions and at a sector-wide level. Arrangements for next year will continue to support these activities.
25. Based on review work in AY 2021-22, in AY 2022-23, SFC's quality agency partners outlined aspects of the digital learning environment as continuing to require focus. In addition, Education Scotland highlighted links between aspects of digital learning and student outcomes, retention, and attainment.
26. During AY 2023-4, institutions will be expected to continue to engage in the Tertiary Enhancement Topic, *'The future of learning and teaching: defining and delivering an effective and inclusive digital/blended offering'*, that commenced in AY 2022-23. It is intended that this work, as well as having sector-wide benefit, will be of value to individual institutions, supporting enhancement and allowing for the development of a

sector-wide evidence base to inform improvements to learning opportunities and to enhancement of the student experience. QAAS, ES and sparqs will continue to work closely with institutions, academic staff, support staff and students from across the college and university sectors on the Tertiary Enhancement Topic.

Tertiary external review method and enhancement approach

27. SFC has commissioned QAA (working closely with Education Scotland) to lead on the development of a multi-year quality cycle involving peer-led external review of colleges and universities, and the development of effective ways of designing and delivering impactful enhancement activity across the tertiary system. Colleges and universities will be expected to proactively engage with this work to help shape how external review and tertiary enhancement are delivered within the new tertiary quality arrangements from AY 2024-25. These new arrangements will be outlined in the SFC Guidance to colleges and universities on quality published in AY 2024.

Ad hoc requests on information about the way institutions are securing academic standards and the student learning experience

28. Exceptional circumstances arise that have the potential to significantly impact on the way institutions are securing academic standards or the student learning experience, for example the marking and assessment boycott. In such cases SFC may request, either directly, or through the quality agencies, such information from institutions necessary to meet its statutory duties as set out in paragraph 6, or to respond to requests for advice from the Scottish Government. In these cases, the SFC will work with relevant stakeholders to ensure that requests are proportionate and timely.

College and university reporting on quality for AY 2023-24

29. As part of the development of the new common approach to quality assurance and enhancement, all colleges and universities will be expected to complete a Self-evaluation and Action Plan (SEAP) for submission to SFC and the quality agency by the 30 November 2024. The specific detail of these reports and an associated template is under development and is being led by the respective Chairs of The Quality Forum (university) and CDN Quality Network (college). They are, however, likely to include a summary of institutional quality assurance and enhancement activities; an evaluation of key data and evidence; and a strategic action plan identifying areas for improvement and enhancement. It is intended that the SEAP will replace some other forms of reporting to SFC and so reduce the reporting burden on institutions. It is also intended that they will be used to facilitate annual engagements between institutions and the quality agency and form part of the documentary evidence for the periodic external peer reviews.

30. Following an initial pilot with volunteer institutions in Autumn 2023, the final template and guidance will be shared in Spring 2024. For university reporting on quality in the current academic year (2022-23) please see guidance at Section 5 of this document.

Outcome Agreements

31. SFC's revised [Outcome Agreement guidance for AY 2023-24](#) asks colleges and universities to provide a summary on how they will demonstrate that students at all levels experience a high-quality, safe, and supportive learning experience that enables them to succeed. This should include information on student participation and engagement in their educational experience and their plans to enhance the student experience, considering the evidence for enhancement.

Section 3: Arrangements for Colleges AY 2023-24

32. This section outlines the approach to support quality assurance, improvement and enhancement in the college sector. It sets out how Education Scotland will plan and implement external quality reviews, public accountability, and enhancement in Scotland's colleges in AY 2023-24.
33. SFC expects that colleges will continue to undertake appropriate quality monitoring processes required by the awarding bodies for the qualifications that they offer, and report on high-level commitments, impacts and outcomes around high-quality learning, teaching and support in their Outcome Agreements with SFC.

On-going engagement with a link HM Inspector

34. Education Scotland HM Inspectors (of Education) will continue to engage with all colleges to provide tailored support and challenge. This may be undertaken either virtually or through in-person visits as required. This engagement will also provide valuable insight into the challenges faced by the college sector, the development and capacity building needs of each college, and the nature of individual colleges' response to improvement and enhancement.

Annual Engagement Visits (AEV)

35. Education Scotland HM Inspectors will undertake AEVs in colleges where, based on the outcomes of previous engagement with HM Inspectors, there is clear progress against priorities, or where SFC and/or HM Inspectors have not identified any aspects of performance requiring further exploration. AEVs will be short visits lasting typically one day on-site. AEVs will be undertaken by the college link HM Inspector, supported by HM Inspector colleagues, Associate Assessors (AA), and Student Team Members (STM) as appropriate.
36. AEV dates will be planned collaboratively between the college and the link HM Inspector.
37. On conclusion of the AEV, colleges will receive an initial verbal report. For multi-college regions, a representative of the Regional Strategic Body (RSB) will be invited to attend.
38. A subsequent written report will be produced and shared with the college and SFC. For multi-college regions the report will also be shared with the RSB. At this point, a short statement confirming the outcomes of the AEV and any next steps will be published.

39. AEV outcomes will inform future engagement approaches with individual colleges.

Progress Visits (PVs)

40. PVs will be undertaken in colleges where areas for improvement and enhancement requiring further progress were identified during previous engagement with HM Inspectors, or where both SFC and HM Inspectors identify aspects of performance requiring further exploration. PVs will identify what is working well and where further improvement may still be required. They will also consider key indicators of performance, and their impact on the learning experience. PVs will commence in Autumn 2023.
41. PVs will be managed by a lead HM Inspector accompanied by HM Inspector colleagues, one of whom will be the college link Inspector. AAs and STMs will also support PVs. The size of team and duration of the visit will be adjusted to recognise the context of the college.
42. PVs will usually be carried out across two to three days and a visit schedule will be agreed with colleges in advance.
43. PVs will be planned collaboratively between the college, HM Inspectors and SFC. Prior to the visit, colleges will have the opportunity to provide relevant PV updates, identified through self-evaluation, to reflect the progress made and highlight any changes in circumstances. PV planning will be intelligence-led. Pre-visit planning discussions will be held with SFC and sparqs and will consider a range of evidence.
44. Throughout the visit, team members will involve managers and staff in professional dialogue, with the aim of supporting improvement. Through this approach HM Inspectors will work with college staff and should ensure that the visit experience is a collaborative process.
45. On conclusion of the PV, the college will receive an initial verbal report of their findings. For multi-college regions, a representative of the RSB will be invited to attend.
46. A subsequent written report will be produced and shared with the college and SFC. For multi-college regions the report will also be shared with the RSB. At this point, a short statement confirming the outcomes of the PV and any next steps will be published. PV outcomes will inform future engagement approaches with individual colleges.

Supporting enhancement and improvement: Thematic reviews

47. In order to support improvement in aspects of college sector performance, HM Inspectors will undertake a programme of thematic reviews.

48. Thematic reviews may be carried out at college, regional or national level. The footprint of each thematic review will be adjusted to take account of the scale and reach of institutions. This will support the evaluation of approaches and impact, providing depth of intelligence about the individual organisations involved, along with providing information to inform capacity building and future approaches to improvement and enhancement. The thematic reviews will provide opportunities for collaborative working with partner quality bodies, for example QAA Scotland in evaluating the quality of provision and capacity for improvement.
49. The symbiotic relationship between tertiary education providers in contributing to the education and skills pipeline is a key component of the proposed arrangements. Early implementation of the thematic assignments will support an incremental approach to strengthening arrangements between providers to avoid unnecessary duplication while building on existing strengths.
50. The proposed arrangements are designed to enable post-16 providers and national bodies that have a locus in assuring and improving the quality of provision, to adjust and adapt to future arrangements.
51. The approach seeks to strengthen the collective knowledge of institutions to meet current and projected economic priorities at local, regional and national levels. The findings of HM Inspectors and other bodies will be instrumental in developing the focus and scope of reviews. The approach also seeks to build incrementally the capacity of practitioners across tertiary organisations to engage collaboratively in implementing future arrangements to improve outcomes for learners. In the longer term, the approach will ensure a coherent and sustainable national approach that is founded on continuous improvement and avoidance of unnecessary duplication.
52. HM Inspectors will also seek to identify and share examples of highly effective practice, highlight what is working well and make recommendations about what needs to improve.
53. Aspects for exploration, timing and participation in thematic reviews will be agreed with SFC and colleges in advance.
54. A written report will be produced for each thematic review and shared with the college(s) and SFC. National thematic review reports will be published on Education Scotland's website.

Credit rated provision

55. For colleges with credit rated provision (credit rated programmes on the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework ([SCQF](#)) database), the quality assurance of credit rating activities is carried out by SCQF Partnership through a four-year cycle of review work.

Section 4: Arrangements for Universities AY 2023-24

56. This section outlines the approach to support quality assurance, improvement and enhancement in the university sector. It sets out how QAA Scotland (QAAS) will plan and implement external quality reviews, public accountability, and enhancement in Scotland's universities in AY 2023-24.
57. During AY 2023-24 QAAS will undertake the following activities in universities: Quality Enhancement and Standards Review (QESR) and Institutional Liaison Meetings (ILM) (see paragraphs 53-55). The full details of these arrangements will be made available on the [QAA Scotland website](#).
58. A summary report of each ILM will be shared with the institution and made available to SFC to provide context for any advice or assurance sought from QAA Scotland. As part of QAAS's formal in-year meetings with SFC, QAA Scotland 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 university's ability to meet expectations on the management of academic quality and standards, the university will first be alerted to the need to report this to the SFC. QAA Scotland will also include reflections on QESR and ILM on an annual basis as part of formal reporting to SFC. QESR reports are published on the [QAA website](#).
59. SFC also has expectations of universities in undertaking regular quality processes as part of their strategic approach to quality assurance, improvement and enhancement. These expectations are set out below.

External institutional review: Quality Enhancement and Standards Review (QESR) and Institutional Liaison meetings (ILM)

60. QAA Scotland developed a new external institutional review method following the completion of the fourth cycle of Enhancement Led Institutional Review (ELIR), delivered between 2018 to 2022. This includes, as part of Phase 1, Quality Enhancement and Standards Review (QESR) which looks at each institution's strategic approach to quality assurance, improvement, and enhancement.
61. QESR and ILM in the period AY 2022-24 constitute Phase 1 of the next external institutional review cycle, in which activity will take place to inform a second stage, Phase 2, that will begin in AY 2024-25 when new tertiary quality arrangements are expected to commence.
62. Phase 1 is taking place across a period of two years, AY 2022-23 and AY 2023-24. In each of the two years, approximately half of the institutions will undergo QESR with

the remainder engaging in an ILM led by QAAS. QESR and ILM dates will be planned collaboratively between QAAS and universities.

63. Key features of Phase 1 will include:
- Self-evaluation by each higher education institution.
 - Engagement informed by sector reference points.
 - The involvement of peer and student reviewers on at least one occasion, including a site visit. (Note, site visits can be conducted online or in person).
64. The outcomes for Phase 1 will include published reporting on QESR based on the institution's ongoing approach to quality assurance, improvement, and enhancement. A summary of key themes and action points will be shared by QAA with the institution after each ILM. The findings of Phase 1 will help inform the schedule for Phase 2 review activity, commencing in AY 2024-25.

External institutional review: Transnational Education (TNE)

65. In July 2020, Universities UK (UUK) and GuildHE commissioned QAA to develop a new approach to reviewing and enhancing the quality of UK TNE. In consultation with the sector, QAA developed its new method for the Quality Evaluation and Enhancement of UK transnational education ([QE-TNE](#)). The method is a UK-wide enhancement-led approach.
66. The process is designed to provide confidence for the wide range of international stakeholders, showing the care the UK has for the quality of the student experience and consistent standards of UK awards.
67. The review programme consists of a published schedule of country-specific activity, while the quality enhancement approach is designed to identify shared challenges, areas for development and effective solutions, through highlighting innovative and effective practice. This approach will complement internal and external quality assurance within the UK and provide confidence for the wide range of stakeholders, both in the UK and internationally.
68. Universities participating in QE-TNE will also be listed on the QAA website as participants of the Scheme, and they, and their international TNE partners, will be eligible to use QAA's QE-TNE Kite Mark as a public statement of their commitment to quality.
69. SFC encourages all Scottish degree awarding bodies engaging in TNE to participate in QE-TNE from AY 2023-24. SFC will make participation in QE-TNE a requirement for

Scottish degree awarding bodies engaging in TNE from AY 2024-25. The cost of participation should be met by institutions.

Institution-led Review

Annual and periodic review

70. The primary mechanism by which institutions assure and enhance the quality of provision is through processes of institution-led evaluation and review, referred to generically as 'Institution-led Review' (ILR). It is a matter for each institution to determine how it organises its internal processes for reviewing and evaluating provision, provided it follows this SFC guidance and the [UK Quality Code](#).
71. SFC expects each institution to operate systems of annual monitoring and periodic ILR across the full range of its provision. ILR should consider the effectiveness of annual monitoring arrangements and the effectiveness of the follow-up actions arising from annual monitoring. Reporting at the course/module, programme, subject or departmental level should identify action to address any issues and activity to promote areas of strength for consideration at institutional level. The ILR method should be designed to allow constructive reflection on the effectiveness of an institution's annual monitoring and reporting procedures.
72. All aspects of provision are expected to be reviewed systematically and rigorously on a cycle of not more than six years to demonstrate that institutions meet the expectations set out in the UK Quality Code, and the standards set out in part 1 of the European Standards and Guidelines (2015).
73. It is vital that ILRs continue to produce robust, comprehensive and credible evidence that the academic standards of awards are secure and that provision in Scottish institutions is of high quality and being enhanced. ILR should be designed to promote and support critical reflection on policy and practice. The method used should ensure that any shortcomings are addressed, and it should give a central role to quality enhancement by promoting dialogue on areas in which quality could be improved and identify good practice for dissemination within the institution and beyond.

Scope, frequency and unit of review

74. All credit bearing provision should be reviewed on a cycle of not more than six years, including all undergraduate and taught postgraduate awards, supervision of research students, provision delivered in collaboration with others, transnational education, work-based provision, and placements, online and distance learning, and provision which provides only small volumes of credit.

75. Each institution is expected to produce an ILR review schedule. However, the timetable is constructed, there should normally be some form of ILR activity taking place within each academic session.
76. There is flexibility for institutions to determine the precise order and aggregation of programmes and subjects in ways which provide coherence and fit the organisational structure, mode of delivery and enhancement-led approach. The unit of review in the ILR process should have sufficient granularity to allow adequate scrutiny of programmes and disciplines including ensuring there is adequate external scrutiny at the discipline level by the external panel member(s). Excessive aggregation should be avoided if it means the process cannot examine the 'fine structure' of provision and does not facilitate the identification of specific issues affecting programmes.

Team size and composition

77. ILRs should provide an objective review of provision based on an understanding of national and international good practice and appropriate external reference points, including for example, subject benchmarks statements, professional, statutory and regulatory body (PSRB) requirements. Each review team should include a student and at least one member external to the institution with a relevant background. Such members may come from across the UK, from industry, professional practice or may have wider international experience and should be suitably trained in the institution's ILR process. Team size and composition must take account of the range and volume of provision to be reviewed and the balance between understanding of specific context and broader critical perspectives. It is good practice to ensure that review teams can bring a range of experience to the process and hence are able to act as 'critical friends' to the institution.
78. ILR should be designed to include an element of reflection on national and international good practice, such as a reflective statement from the institution on how its provision compares with similar practice outside the UK. Institutions are encouraged to consider how they can support such informal 'benchmarking'. SFC does not expect ILR teams to routinely include members from outside the UK although institutions are encouraged to actively consider the scope for this option.

Contribution and role of support services

79. All services contributing to the student experience should be reviewed as part of an institution's approach. Support services are of crucial importance in determining the overall quality of the student learning experience and can impact significantly on student achievement and well-being. It is a matter for each institution to determine how this should be done. Nevertheless, SFC expects that institutions' approaches to the review of professional support services should be systematic, planned and timely, covering all non-academic services or departments that contribute to the overall

student learning experience and considering their effectiveness and interactions with academic units. The arrangements for reviewing professional support services should have sufficient granularity to allow for adequate scrutiny of each aspect of the services provision and include sufficient scrutiny by external panel members. Whatever the approach taken, the evidence should allow the institution to reflect on the contribution of support services to the 'quality culture' within the institution (see section at page 9), the ways in which the services engage with students to monitor and improve the quality of services, and the ways in which the services promote high quality learning and continuous quality enhancement. It is expected that students will be engaged throughout the review of support services. Resources to support the development of Professional Services Partnerships were developed by QAAS in the AY 2021-22 Focus On project in AY 2021-22 and are available on the [QAAS website](#).

Student engagement in ILR

80. Institutions are expected to continue extending student engagement and partnership in quality in line with the [Student Engagement Framework for Scotland](#). It is expected that students will be engaged at all stages of the ILR process including the development of the self-evaluation, as full members of ILR teams, and in follow-up activity.
81. ILR should gather additional specific information from students as part of the evidence base for reviews. Institutions have flexibility in deciding how to achieve this, taking account of the specific demographics of their student population and the characteristics of their provision. In line with previous guidance, it is good practice for ILR to:
 - Generate holistic evidence about student views of provision and of their learning experience.
 - Differentiate between the views of different categories of students where these are likely to be significant (for example part-time and full-time, students from different levels of programme, entrants from school and entrants from further education, and consider issues relating to equality and diversity, etc).
 - Allow identification of distinctive characteristics of provision.
 - Take account of the views of recent graduates on the relevance of provision for their careers.

Use of external reference points

82. ILR should explore the use of specific aspects of the UK Quality Code, and especially how Subject Benchmark Statements, Characteristics Statements and Credit and Qualifications Frameworks – as represented by the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework ([SCQF](#)) – are used in setting and maintaining academic standards. ILR

should demonstrate that programme design and learning outcomes are consistent with them.

83. ILRs should continue to support effective learner pathways through higher education, including embedding and developing the use of the SCQF. ILR should be designed to promote scrutiny and discussion of the institution's approach to the SCQF. This should include consideration of strategies for articulation and advanced standing, for the recognition of prior learning and through flexible pathways to awards, including CPD and work-based learning.

Use of data and evidence

84. Both annual monitoring and ILR should consider: themes arising from, and responses to, external examiner reports; internal and external student survey data; performance data on recruitment, progression and achievement; and data trends. Data is likely to be benchmarked against other areas of the institution's activities as well as equivalent provision in other institutions.

Relationship with PSRB accreditation

85. A significant volume of provision in Scottish universities is accredited by professional, statutory, and regulatory bodies (PSRBs). SFC expects ILR to reflect on the outcomes of relevant PSRB accreditations. Institutions are encouraged to engage with PSRBs to explore appropriate ways of aligning PSRB activity with ILR. This might include the use of common documentation or joint processes which meet the needs of both ILR and external accreditation.

Inter-relationship with other elements of quality and enhancement arrangements

86. An enhancement-led approach is a fundamental characteristic of our approach to quality assurance, improvement and enhancement in Scotland, and we encourage institutions to continue to develop ILR processes which also:
 - Promote dialogue on areas in which quality might be improved and consider how developing the use of evidence can contribute to enhancing the student experience.
 - Identify good practice for dissemination within the institution and beyond.
 - Encourage and support critical reflection.
87. ILR processes are subject to scrutiny through external institutional review. ILR should evidence the use of public information by institutions and how they seek to engage their students in quality and in their learning.

Public information about quality and the student experience

88. It is SFC's intention to develop and enhance the use of data and evidence in how we account for public investment in Scotland to deliver high quality learning, and to consider this as a new tertiary approach is developed. The established guiding principles for Public Information about the quality of educational provision and the student experience are to provide:
- Assurances about the quality and standards of provision.
 - Information to inform student choice, and to assist employers and other stakeholders to clearly understand the nature of the Scottish university sector.
 - Information which helps current students to understand, engage with and make best use of institutional systems for quality improvement.
 - Information about the institution's educational processes which stimulates reflection on academic practice and the sharing of good practice within the institution and more widely.
89. Information should be:
- Accurate and honest.
 - Accessible and tailored to the needs of the intended user.
 - Updateable on appropriate timescales (which may vary from annually to daily in different contexts).
 - Re-usable so that, ideally, information can be entered once and used in a range of contexts.
90. SFC expects institutions to continue to produce information that meets the needs of a range of stakeholders including:
- Prospective students and their families.
 - Current students.
 - Employers and employer organisations.
 - Professional, statutory and regulatory bodies.
 - SFC, QAA, the National Union of Students, and other interested bodies or agencies, as proxies for Ministers, taxpayers, and the general public.
 - [Competition and Markets Authority](#).
91. The UK funding bodies continue to collect data at course-level and to publish this on [Discover Uni](#), the official source of information for students in the UK using official statistics about higher education courses taken from national surveys and data collected from universities and colleges about their students.

92. Universities are expected to continue to participate in the National Student Survey (NSS) as a condition of funding.

Section 5: Universities reporting on quality for AY 2022-23

Content and scope of annual report and statement of assurance on institution-led review (ILR)

93. SFC asks institutions to provide an annual report on ILR and enhancement activities, signed off by the governing body. QAA Scotland will continue to provide an annual summary of key themes from these reports to the SFC, covering all fundable education institutions.
94. SFC does not publish annual ILR reports, although under the terms of the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002 we may be obliged to consider releasing information in response to a request. SFC uses ILR reports to inform its overall understanding of how institutions are managing quality, and as evidence to provide assurance to Ministers on the effective use and impact of public investment in learning and teaching at the institutions we fund. It is our intention to strengthen this aspect of our quality arrangements and we will engage with institutions on the development of our approach.
95. Each institution should provide an annual ILR report by 30 September 2023, endorsed by its governing body, which describes the scope, nature and outcomes of ILR activities, as well as of reviews by PSRBs, which have taken place in the previous academic year, including commentary on actions taken to address issues identified and highlighting good practice identified for dissemination.
96. The purpose of the ILR report is to give a high level, concise analysis of activities, highlighting the key findings, institutional actions and the impacts of these, sufficient to provide assurance to SFC that the institution is effectively managing quality assurance and delivering on enhancement.
97. The format of the annual ILR report is a matter for each institution to determine. We recommend that this should be a concise overview report, typically 6-10 pages, highlighting outcomes, impact and responses.
98. The annual ILR report should:
 - Provide a summary of the ILR outcomes from the preceding 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 identifies any significant outcomes or actions relating to development needs or to good practice resulting from ILR processes.
99. Across the full range of provision, the ILR report should summarise:
- 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, graduate destinations, and equality, diversity and inclusion.
 - Reflection and 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.
100. Institutions should provide an annex listing subject/programme areas which were reviewed by other bodies, for example, by PSRBs, during the academic year; and a copy of the institution’s planned schedule of ILRs preferably for the full six-year cycle.

Governing body provision of annual statement

101. The ILR report should be considered by the governing body and include the formal annual statement of assurance to the SFC. The Chair of the governing body should sign off the statement of assurance and indicate when it was endorsed. The template for the statement of assurance statement is:

On behalf of the governing body of [name of institution], I confirm that we have considered the institution’s arrangements for the management of academic standards and the quality of the learning experience for AY [year just elapsed], including the scope and impact of these. I further confirm that we are satisfied that the institution has effective arrangements to maintain standards and to assure and enhance the quality of its provision. We can therefore provide assurance to SFC that the academic standards and the quality of the learning provision at this institution continue to meet the requirements set by SFC.

How SFC and QAAS use annual reports

102. Annual reports on ILR are the main source of information on quality and learning and teaching in institutions provided to SFC, and SFC uses these reports principally to understand how institutions are managing quality. The ILR reports also assist SFC to

gain a more holistic understanding of how institutions are addressing policy priorities, such as widening access, progression and attainment. Institutions may therefore wish to draw on the information in their annual Quality Reports to inform their Outcome Agreements. QAA Scotland provides SFC with an analysis of these reports, and draws more broadly on them, alongside other evidence, as part of its annual reporting to Council. SFC uses this evidence as assurance and to inform broader discussions including Outcome Agreements. SFC will continue to ensure that the use of evidence from both processes is aligned, and that unnecessary reporting is avoided.

103. Institutions are expected to discuss their annual ILR reports as part of QESR activity and during ILM meetings with QAAS officers. In addition, institutions are encouraged to share information about current issues not only in the annual report, but also, where appropriate, through ad hoc briefings on a 'no surprises' basis. This might be particularly helpful where there is follow-up action to address any issues arising from an institution-led/PSRB review but might also deal with other issues which may emerge from time to time.

Issues of concern, action and reporting

104. Where external review and intelligence (including QESR, ILM, ELIR, and the [Scottish Quality Concerns Scheme](#)) identifies issues of significant concern, SFC will require institutions to prepare a detailed action plan to address the deficiency(ies) and to take urgent action, as necessary. Given the importance of governance and accountability in these cases, any such action plan should include commentary on how the governing body will be involved in the implementation and monitoring of the plan.