



Scottish Funding Council
Comhairle Maoineachaidh na h-Alba

SFC GUIDANCE

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SFC GUIDANCE TO COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES ON QUALITY FOR AY 2022-23 AND AY 2023-24



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SUMMARY: The purpose of this guidance is to inform Scotland's colleges and universities on quality arrangements for Academic Year (AY) 2022-23 and AY 2023-24. The paper is in four sections. **Section 1** provides overview and context. **Section 2** outlines shared expectations for the period of the guidance. **Section 3** provides an overview of arrangements for colleges, and **Section 4** provides an overview of arrangements for universities.

FAO: Principals and CEOs of Scotland's colleges and universities; Quality managers and practitioners at Scotland's colleges and universities; and the general public

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SFC GUIDANCE TO COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES ON QUALITY AY 2022-23 AND AY 2023-24

PURPOSE

1. The purpose of this 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 and thematic review. Full details of these arrangements will be published separately by Education Scotland on their website. Colleges also work to undertake reflection on curriculum and support services as part of quality arrangements. Separate arrangements exist for quality assurance processes required by awarding bodies.
3. For universities, the information set out in this Guidance outlines arrangements for external institutional review (Quality Enhancement and Standards Review and Institutional Liaison Meetings - outlined below), Institution-led Review (ILR), Enhancement Theme activity, 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 Scotland (QAAS) to be delivered across two phases (see paragraphs 53-57) to ensure continued compliance with European Standards and Guidelines (2015)¹. 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) will be published separately by QAA Scotland on their website.

¹ [Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area \(ESG\)](#)

SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

OVERVIEW

4. The Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 2005 sets out the 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.
5. The SFC meets this statutory obligation through the two current frameworks for quality in the college and university sectors. *How Good is our College* (HGIOC)² and the Quality Enhancement Framework (QEF)³ are used to support 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 supports institutions to manage the quality of student learning experience and provide public confidence in academic quality and standards. Evidence from the quality arrangements contributes to broader SFC interactions with colleges and universities, in particular, Outcome Agreement discussions.
6. SFC has worked with ES and QAAS to develop quality arrangements for AY2022-3 and AY2023-4 that give 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 (see paragraphs 8-11 below).
7. SFC will review this Guidance in advance of AY 2023-24 to consider any developments related to the proposed single tertiary quality framework and refresh as necessary for AY 2023-24.

CONTEXT - SFC REVIEW OF COHERENCE AND SUSTAINABILITY

8. The final report of SFC's Review of Coherence and Sustainability⁴ 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

² [How Good is our College \(HGIOC\)](#)

³ [Quality Enhancement Framework \(QEF\)](#)

⁴ [Review of Coherent Provision and Sustainability \(sfc.ac.uk\)](#)

and research.

9. 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’

10. SFC wishes to see a more coherent approach to quality assurance, improvement and enhancement across the college and university sectors that supports public level 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.
11. 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.
12. SFC has worked with Education Scotland and QAA Scotland to develop quality arrangements for AY 2022-23 and 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.

SECTION 2: SHARED SECTOR EXPECTATIONS FOR AY 2022-23 AND 2023-24

QUALITY CULTURE

13. 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 are 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 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.
14. Institutions should reflect, at institutional level, on strategic issues arising from their regular quality processes and to make use of this information as part of their overall strategy and strategic approach to quality assurance, improvement and enhancement.
15. 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.
16. 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.
17. 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

18. 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)⁵ assists and supports students, students' associations and institutions to improve the effectiveness of student engagement in quality assurance, improvement and enhancement across Scotland.

19. The Student Engagement Framework for Scotland⁶ 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 encourages institutions to be ambitious in seeking opportunities for student partnership in the co-creation of learning; for empowering students to use evidence to enhance their own learning; for extending engagement to new groups of students; and developing the role and capacity of Student Association staff to build sustainability and maintain continuity of support for student officers.
20. SFC will seek assessment from sparqs, ES and QAAS on the effectiveness of how students and student representatives are engaged in quality arrangements for AY 2022-23 and AY 2023-24.
21. SFC will also work with sparqs in AY 2022-23, 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.

TERTIARY ENHANCEMENT TOPIC

22. SFC recognise 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. However, based on review work from our quality agencies in AY2021-22, SFC recognises that there are also areas of commonality that would benefit from a joint approach and where the opportunity for collaboration is a chance to contribute to improvement and enhancement activity at a tertiary level. As a result, SFC has asked its quality agency

⁵ [Student Partnerships in Quality Scotland \(sparqs\)](#)

⁶ [sparqs Student Engagement Framework](#)

partners to lead on a Tertiary Enhancement Topic.

23. Based on the review work in AY2021-22, 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. There is also potential alignment with the work SFC has commissioned through Jisc on a Scottish level standard (or standards) for online and blended learning.
24. In AY 2022-23 and AY2023-34, QAAS, ES and sparqs will work closely with institutions, academic staff, support staff and students from across the college and university sectors on the topic, '**The future of learning and teaching: defining and delivering an effective and inclusive digital/blended offering**'. 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. SFC's quality agency partners will develop a detailed project plan in Autumn 2022 and will be in touch with institutions about their contribution to this activity.

SECTION 3: ARRANGEMENTS FOR COLLEGES AY 2022-23 AND AY 2023-24

25. 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 2022-23 and, subject to review, AY 2023-24.
26. 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

27. 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, to development and capacity building needs of each college, and the nature of individual colleges' response to improvement and enhancement.

ANNUAL ENGAGEMENT VISITS (AEV)

28. 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, light touch 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.
29. AEV dates will be planned collaboratively between the college and the link HM Inspector.
30. 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.
31. 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.
32. AEV outcomes will inform future engagement approaches with individual colleges.

PROGRESS VISITS (PVS)

33. 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 2022.
34. 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.
35. PVs will usually be carried out across two to three days and a visit schedule will be agreed with colleges in advance.
36. 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.
37. 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.
38. 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.
39. 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

40. In order to support improvement in aspects of college sector performance, HM Inspectors will undertake a programme of thematic reviews. These will evaluate the following:
- Education and training pathways.
 - Curriculum planning, support and delivery.
 - The impact of evaluation on improving outcomes for learners.
41. 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 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.
42. 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 whilst building on existing strengths.
43. 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.
44. The approach seeks to strengthen the collective knowledge of providers 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.
45. 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.
46. Aspects for exploration, timing and participation in thematic reviews will be agreed with SFC and colleges in advance.

OUTCOME AGREEMENTS

47. SFC Outcome Agreement guidance asks colleges to set out their high level, contributions, impact and outcomes with respect to securing high-quality learning, teaching and support for students. This provides assurance on and accountability for the use of SFC funding. Colleges should undertake a process of critical assessment and appraisal which will support both the Outcome Agreement self-evaluation reporting and Education Scotland engagement and review work.

CREDIT RATED PROVISION

48. For colleges with credit rated provision (credit rated programmes on the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF)⁷ database), the quality assurance of credit rating activities is carried out by SCQF Partnership through a four-year cycle of review work.

⁷ [Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework \(SCQF\)](#)

SECTION 4: ARRANGEMENTS FOR UNIVERSITIES AY 2022-23 AND AY 2023-24

49. 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 2022-23 and AY 2023-24.
50. During AY 2022-23 and 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 website⁸.
51. A summary report of each ILM will be shared with the institution and made available to SFC on request 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.
52. 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 in paragraphs 58 to 82 below.

EXTERNAL INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW: QUALITY ENHANCEMENT AND STANDARDS REVIEW (QESR) AND INSTITUTIONAL LIAISON MEETINGS (ILM)

53. QAA Scotland is developing 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 will look at each institution's strategic approach to

⁸ [QAA Scotland](#)

quality assurance, improvement and enhancement.

54. QESR and ILM in the period 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 AY2024-25 when new tertiary quality arrangements are anticipated to come into place.
55. 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.
56. 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).
57. The outcome for Phase 1 will be presented as findings based on the evidence provided and consider the institution's ongoing approach to quality assurance, improvement and enhancement. The findings of Phase 1 will help inform the schedule for Phase 2 review activity, commencing in AY2024-25.

INSTITUTION-LED REVIEW

ANNUAL AND PERIODIC REVIEW

58. 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 Code⁹.

⁹ <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code>

59. 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.
60. 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).
61. 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

62. 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.
63. 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.
64. 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

65. 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.
66. 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

67. 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. 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 paragraph 13), 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 AY2021-22 Focus On project in AY2021-22 and are available

on the QAAS website¹⁰.

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT IN ILR

68. Institutions are expected to continue extending student engagement and partnership in quality in line with the Student Engagement Framework for Scotland.¹¹ 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.
69. 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 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

70. 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 SCQF¹² – are used in setting and maintaining academic standards. ILR should demonstrate that programme design and learning

¹⁰ [Professional Services Partnerships - QAA Focus On](#)

¹¹ [Student Engagement Framework for Scotland](#)

¹² [Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework](#)

outcomes are consistent with them.

71. 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

72. 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

73. 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

74. 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 including engagement in current and past national Enhancement Themes.
 - Encourage and support critical reflection.
75. 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.

ENHANCEMENT THEMES

76. Enhancement Themes are part of the QEF. They aim to enhance the student learning experience in Scottish higher education by identifying specific areas for development, which are shared across all institutions. The Enhancement Themes are selected by the Scottish higher education sector, and they provide a means for institutions, academic staff, support staff and students to work together in enhancing the learning experience. The Themes encourage staff and students to share current good practice and collectively generate ideas and models for innovation in learning and teaching. The work of the Enhancement Themes is planned and directed by the Scottish Higher Education Enhancement Committee (SHEEC) and their operational delivery is managed by the Theme Leaders' Group (TLG).
77. SFC expects all institutions to continue to actively contribute to the Enhancement Themes at the national level, and to benefit from them by supporting enhancement within their own institutions and fully engaging with the evaluation of the work undertaken and its impact.

PUBLIC INFORMATION ABOUT QUALITY AND THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE

78. Public information is one of the five elements of the QEF. 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.
79. 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.
80. SFC expect 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 Authority¹³.
81. The UK funding bodies continue to collect data at course-level and to publish this on Discover Uni¹⁴, 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.
82. Universities are expected to continue to participate in the National Student Survey (NSS) as a condition of funding.

¹³ [Higher education: consumer law advice for providers - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/higher-education-consumer-law-advice-for-providers)

¹⁴ [Discover Uni](https://www.discoveruni.org/)

INSTITUTIONAL REPORTING ON QUALITY FOR AY 2022-23 AND AY 2023-24

CONTENT AND SCOPE OF ANNUAL REPORT AND STATEMENT OF ASSURANCE ON INSTITUTION-LED REVIEW

83. 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 higher education institutions.
84. SFC does not publish these institutional annual 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 these 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.
85. Each institution should provide an annual report by 30 September in 2023 and 2024, 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.
86. The purpose of the 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.
87. The format of the annual 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.
88. The annual 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.
89. Across the full range of provision, the 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, and graduate destinations.
 - 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.
90. 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

91. The 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 the Council that the academic standards and the quality of the learning provision at this institution continue to meet the requirements set by the Council.

HOW SFC AND QAAS USE ANNUAL REPORTS

92. 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 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.
93. Institutions are expected to discuss their annual reports as part of QESR activity and during ILM meetings with QAA 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.

REPORTING ON THE INSTITUTION'S RESPONSE TO OUTCOMES OF EXTERNAL REVIEW

94. The ELIR 4 cycle visits concluded during 2021. Institutional follow-up reporting from this cycle responding to the matters identified in the ELIR Outcome Report should be discussed with QAA Scotland officers and will be published on the QAA's website. The report, endorsed by the institution's governing body, should also be sent to SFC as confirmation of engagement with ELIR.

ISSUES OF CONCERN, ACTION AND REPORTING

95. Where external review and intelligence (including QESR, ILM, ELIR, and the Scottish

Quality Concerns Scheme¹⁵) identifies issues of significant concern, the 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.

¹⁵ [Scottish Quality Concerns Scheme](#)