

Brief Guide to the Enhancement-led Institutional Review (ELIR) Method

QAA Scotland carries out Enhancement-led Institutional Reviews at [Scottish higher education institutions](#).

What is Enhancement-led Institutional Review?

Enhancement-led Institutional Review (ELIR) is an evidence-based method of peer review, meaning that staff and students from other institutions join a team of reviewers to evaluate the quality of what each higher education institution does. ELIR results in a threshold judgement and a set of commendations and recommendations relating to the way the institution is securing academic standards and improving the student experience. Detailed information about the method is set out in the [ELIR Handbook](#).

How does ELIR work?

ELIR is now in its fourth cycle in Scotland (known as ELIR 4). ELIR 4 places much greater emphasis on contextualising the review than previous versions of the method. This means that, while the institution still carries out a holistic evaluation of its strategy, policy and practice in relation to quality assurance and enhancement, the review will focus on those areas where there is likely to be greatest benefit to the institution and its students.

The institution undergoing ELIR submits a self-evaluation document called a Reflective Analysis (RA). The ELIR team uses this document and initial meetings with staff and students to develop topics for exploration during the review visits. These topics are explored in discussion during meetings with staff and students, and through reading the institution's documents and other resources.

After visiting the institution, the ELIR team writes two reports (an Outcome Report and a Technical Report) setting out the review findings. The final version of these reports is published on the [QAA website](#).

ELIR teams

Each ELIR 4 team includes at least four reviewers:

- one student reviewer
- two senior UK-based academic reviewers
- one coordinating reviewer.

ELIR teams can include up to six reviewers so that institutions can also include:

- an international reviewer
- an academic reviewer with experience of professional support services
- an additional academic reviewer
- an additional student reviewer.

Each ELIR is managed by a senior QAA officer who is not a member of the ELIR team but does advise both the institution and the team on how the method should be carried out.

Reports and outcomes

At the end of the review visits, the ELIR team produces a short Outcome Report and a more detailed Technical Report.

Outcome Reports are short and are written for an informed lay audience. They set out the threshold judgement, the differentiated commendations and recommendations, and provide brief information about the nature of the institution.

Full definitions of the threshold judgement are set out in the [ELIR Handbook](#) (pages 13 and 14). An explanation of the threshold judgement relating to the particular institution is set out on page 3 of each Outcome Report, followed by the commendations and recommendations.

Technical Reports contain the detailed findings from the review and are written primarily for the institution reviewed. ELIR reports are contextualised to the main themes of the review but all Technical Reports are structured to cover five broad areas of institutional activity:

- contextual information about the institution, student population and the review
- approach to enhancing the student learning experience
- strategy and practice for enhancing learning and teaching
- academic standards and quality processes
- collaborative provision.

QAA also produces Thematic Reports to highlight the findings from a number of ELIRs that have been carried out at different institutions in the same year and across all the years in the ELIR cycle. The individual Technical Reports provide an evidence base for those Thematic Reports.

What happens after an ELIR?

One year after publication of the Outcome and Technical Reports, each institution is asked to produce an ELIR Follow-up Report indicating how they have responded to the outcomes of their ELIR. These are published on the QAA website.

In addition, institutions engage in an ELIR annual discussion with a senior QAA officer. These meetings involve staff and students from the institution and consider: outcomes relating to ELIR along with a range of other activity including outcomes from institution-led review, engagement with national Enhancement Themes, and student partnership activity.

Across the sector, ELIR outcomes are used to inform enhancement and development activity, for example frequently occurring topics in ELIR are addressed through [Focus On](#) projects where institutions work together to improve policy and practice with the aim of enhancing the student experience overall.

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