

Information about Enhancement-led Institutional Review (ELIR) to accompany Outcome Reports

What is the enhancement-led approach?

1 The enhancement-led approach was developed in partnership between the Scottish Funding Council, Universities Scotland, representatives of the student body and QAA Scotland. This partnership developed a Quality Enhancement Framework which has been in place in Scotland since 2003. It has five elements:

- a programme of Enhancement-led Institutional Review (ELIR) involving all Scottish higher education institutions being reviewed over a four-year period
- a comprehensive programme of review at the subject level, managed by the institutions, known as institution-led quality review
- an agreed set of public information about quality
- a greater voice for students in institutional quality systems, supported by a national development service (known as Student Participation in Quality Scotland, sparqs)
- a national programme of Enhancement Themes aimed at developing and sharing good practice in learning and teaching.

What is Enhancement-led Institutional Review?

2 Enhancement-led Institutional Review (ELIR) is an evidence-based method of peer review. Each ELIR team comprises: three senior academic reviewers, a student reviewer, an international reviewer, and a coordinating reviewer. Each ELIR is managed by a senior QAA officer.

3 Each ELIR results in two reports on the institution: an Outcome Report and a Technical Report. Outcome Reports contain the key findings from the review and are written with a wider public audience in mind. Technical Reports contain the detailed findings from the review and are written primarily for the institution reviewed. QAA will also produce Thematic Reports to highlight the findings from a number of ELIRs that have been carried out at different institutions in the same year. The individual Technical Reports will provide an evidence base for those Thematic Reports

What is an overarching judgement?

4 Each ELIR identifies positive practice and areas for development at the institution. In addition, each ELIR results in an overarching judgement on the current and likely future effectiveness of the institution's arrangements for managing academic standards and enhancing the quality of the student learning experience.

5 It is possible for the overarching judgement to be expressed in three levels which indicate that the institution's arrangements are:

- **effective**
- **of limited effectiveness**
- **not effective.**

6 **Effectiveness** indicates there is evidence that overall:

- the institution has rigorous arrangements, in line with sector expectations, for assuring and enhancing the quality of the student learning experience and for securing the academic standards of its awards, and is using these arrangements systematically, and
- the institution has the capacity and commitment to identify and address situations that have the potential to threaten the academic standards of its awards or the quality of the student learning experience, and
- the institution is meeting sector expectations in having a clearly identified, strategic approach to enhancing the student learning experience which it is implementing systematically, drawing on student views and external reference points to inform strategy formulation, implementation and evaluation.

7 **Limited effectiveness** indicates there is evidence that:

- the institution's arrangements for managing the quality of the student learning experience and/or securing the academic standards of its awards are limited currently or are likely to become limited in the future, such that the quality of the student learning experience and/or the academic standards would be placed at risk if the institution did not take action, and/or
- the institution's capacity and/or commitment to identify and address potential risks to the quality of the student learning experience or the academic standards of its awards is limited, or is likely to become limited in the future. The limitation may relate to the identification of weaknesses in the institution's procedures or in the implementation of the procedures, and/or
- the institution is not meeting the full range of sector expectations in relation to having a clearly identified strategic approach to enhancing the student learning experience, and/or the arrangements in place for implementing its strategic approach are not fully systematic such that the institution's capacity or commitment to enhance the quality of the student learning experience is limited.

8 **Not effective** indicates there is evidence that:

- there are serious and fundamental weaknesses in the institution's arrangements for managing the quality of the student learning experience and/or securing the academic standards of its awards such that quality and/or academic standards are at immediate risk, and/or
- the institution does not have the capacity and/or the commitment to identify and address risks to the quality of the student learning experience or the academic standards of its awards. There are likely to be serious absences or flaws in the institution's procedures themselves and/or serious weaknesses in their implementation, and/or
- the institution does not meet sector expectations in relation to having a clearly identified strategic approach to enhancing the student learning experience, and/or does not have systematic arrangements in place for implementing its strategic

approach such that the institution does not have the capacity or commitment to enhance the quality of the student learning experience.

Priority action

9 Where there is an overarching judgement in the **effective** category, it will be possible for the ELIR team to identify priority action which it considers the institution should take. This will be identified alongside the overarching judgement.

Scottish Funding Council response to judgements

10 If the overarching judgement is **effective**, the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) will expect the institution to engage with QAA as appropriate, and, one year after the publication of the review reports to provide a report, endorsed by its governing body setting out its response to the review.

11 If the overarching judgement is **limited effectiveness** or **not effective** SFC will require the institution to prepare and fulfil an action plan to address the shortcomings identified.

12 QAA will provide advice to SFC on the adequacy of the action plan and on how it is being implemented. SFC, taking in to account any advice from QAA, will normally require a formal follow-up review at an appropriate time, usually within no more than two years.

13 The relevant SFC guidance is [SFC/14/2012 Council guidance to higher education institutions on quality from August 2012](#).¹

Further information

14 The QAA website gives more information [about QAA](#) and its mission.² A dedicated page of the website explains the method for [Enhancement-led Institutional Review](#) of higher education institutions in Scotland and has links to the ELIR handbook and other informative documents.³

15 University sector institutions in Scotland also engage in systematic Enhancement Theme activity. Further information about that work, which has a sector-wide and institutional focus, can be found on the [Enhancement Themes website](#).⁴

16 Visit the [Scottish Funding Council website](#) for further information about the SFC.⁵

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¹ SFC/14/2012: www.sfc.ac.uk/newsinformation/Circulars/2012/SFC1412.aspx

² Further information about QAA: www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus

³ Further information about ELIR: www.qaa.ac.uk/institutionreports/types-of-review/pages/elir.aspx

⁴ Enhancement Themes website: www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk

⁵ Scottish Funding Council website: www.sfc.ac.uk