

Dear colleagues

We hope that you are safe and well and managing to adjust to the radical change and persistent challenges brought about by the ongoing COVID-19 (Coronavirus) outbreak. It is a period of great uncertainty for us all, the impact of which can be seen in so many aspects of our daily lives; and the Scottish higher education sector is no exception.

The sector's response to this crisis has been impressive. Institutions have swiftly adapted their provision and assessment practices in the transition from physical to online learning spaces. Senior academic managers, quality specialists, educational developers and learning technologists have readily shared their thinking, guidance and resources to support colleagues across the sector. Such displays of ingenuity and resilience have been particularly inspiring.

### **QAA's response**

At the Quality Assurance Agency, we are working rapidly to support the sector through the outbreak. On 8 April, we launched our [COVID-19 support and guidance](#) which includes:

- guidance on mitigating the impact on assessment, progression and graduation in the coming academic years
- supporting materials on priority topics
- regular webinars to support the sector in sharing practice
- hosting the QAA Quality Discussion Forum where colleagues can debate and discuss challenges as well as sharing what has worked.

Following the cancellation of all face-to-face meetings and events until 30 June 2020, QAA Scotland responded with the swift delivery of relevant practical information, resources and online support.

Featuring 'Ask the Expert' panel sessions and live presentations, our online 'Focus On: Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL) Sharing Practice' event on 1 April 2020 provided a timely forum for attendees to ask pressing questions about TEL and receive quick, practical advice. Highlights from the event, including links to several online resources, feature in this [Wakelet](#).

We also launched the exciting new [Focus On: TEL Resource Hub](#), which is full of relevant practice and tips from across the sector on using technology in learning and teaching. We will continue to develop this resource over the coming weeks and months, including the addition of new video resources and podcasts, and examples of international responses to the coronavirus outbreak.

We are very aware that a number of big questions still need to be answered. What will the start of the next academic year look like? How are universities responding to students who have less than ideal study environments at home? What about activities that cannot readily be moved online (for example, laboratory and practice or performance-based disciplines)?

And, what do we think the lasting impact of the COVID-19 outbreak is likely to be on higher education?

We are working hard and engaging with the sector to address these sorts of questions through a variety of channels. These range from discussions at the Scottish Higher Education Enhancement Committee (SHEEC) of the many mitigating factors currently in place and the impact on future learning, to the online delivery of the Teaching Quality Forum (TQF) to support quality professionals, including shared discussions between meetings. Opportunities for sharing across the UK are also being facilitated by QAA via our COVID-19 support and guidance webpages, which will continue to expand over the coming weeks.

In the meantime, we would ask that you continue to share your questions and concerns with us - as well as any steps you may be taking to help answer them - so we can continue to support the sector.

## **What does this mean for our work in Scotland?**

### **ELIR**

The four Enhancement-led Institutional Review (ELIR) visits scheduled for spring/summer 2020 had to be halted and we are now making plans to complete these in the autumn. This will impact the ELIR schedule we had previously agreed for 2020-21 and we are in discussions with each of the higher education institutions concerned about the extent to which their ELIR visit dates may be affected.

### **Institution-led Review**

We are also aware that Institution-led Review (ILR) schedules are likely to have been affected. Where adjustments to ILR plans mean that the six-year maximum cycle might be exceeded, institutions should notify the Scottish Funding Council, and QAA Scotland officers will happily support colleagues in thinking about necessary adjustments. Institutions are encouraged to consider the impact on annual monitoring activity and the likely impact of any changes in dates on their ILR schedules as a whole (not only the current year).

### **Enhancement Themes**

For the Enhancement Themes, we have taken the decision to implement a six-month extension to the submission of institutional reports and institutions' Theme evaluation reporting. Some collaborative cluster work will be affected and the Theme evaluation, while ongoing, will be affected by the change in institutional reporting deadlines. In light of these changes, there will be an explicit transition phase between Themes to allow us to complete reporting on the current Theme without losing time to plan and conduct detailed scoping for the new Enhancement Theme, which will run to 2023. Please note, details of revised timelines will be issued to SHEEC members and current Theme leads following the SHEEC meeting on 28 April 2020.

### **Enhancement Conference**

We are also excited to confirm that the 4th International Enhancement Conference will still take place in 2020! With plans for the alternative delivery of this event now well underway, we will be hosting two distinct online activities. The first of these, entitled 'Learning from disruption: exploring what counts in higher education', will feature a selection of live webinars alongside the launch of new digital resources on 3-4 June 2020. Sessions and resources will offer timely support to delegates, exploring what has been learned from the response to the pandemic and from the current Enhancement Theme which will support the sector to prepare for the future.

There will be a second online conference in autumn 2020 which will include a celebration of 'Evidence for Enhancement: Improving the Student Experience'. As well as showcasing the many innovative and influential projects undertaken as part of the Theme, the event will highlight expertise and practice from across the UK and internationally. Further information about each of these online activities will be published shortly.

### **What next?**

We firmly believe the collegiate partnership we have in Scotland has enabled us to share approaches and support each other as we work through these unprecedented times.

In that spirit, please be assured we remain available and eager to help our staff and student colleagues across the sector. Whether it's providing access to relevant resources and online spaces in which to discuss hot topics or simply picking up the phone and having a chat, please do keep in touch.

Take care

QAA Scotland