QAA Scotland

GUIDE

Who we are and what we do
WHO WE ARE

QAA Scotland is part of the UK-wide Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA): the independent body entrusted with monitoring, and advising on, standards and quality in UK higher education.

QAA Scotland has devolved responsibilities for the work of QAA in Scotland. Our office is located in Glasgow and headed by our Director, Rowena Pelik. The QAA Scotland Committee has overall responsibility for our work.

www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us/scotland
OUR ROLE IN THE SCOTTISH HIGHER EDUCATION SECTOR

QAA Scotland plays a key role in Scottish higher education, both as an independent guardian of quality and standards, and as a catalyst for change and development.

We safeguard the interests of students, taxpayers and other external stakeholders, and support the work of our partners through our emphasis on peer review, quality enhancement and the student learning experience. We are committed to building and maintaining strong and effective relationships with our partners, with student representative bodies, and with other agencies.

Much of our work relates to the distinctive Scottish approach to quality - the Quality Enhancement Framework (QEF). Established in 2003, the QEF embodies the partnership approach that defines the distinctive nature of quality assurance and enhancement in Scotland. The QEF represents world-leading practice and we will continue to work in partnership to ensure it remains fit for purpose, responsive and innovative.
THE QUALITY ENHANCEMENT FRAMEWORK: AN INTEGRATED APPROACH

The QEF is based on the principle that quality activities in an effective higher education system should not focus solely or primarily on threshold issues of quality assurance, but on the sector’s aspirations for high quality and the ongoing enhancement of provision.

The framework has five elements, each of them involving QAA Scotland.

- We manage Enhancement-led Institutional Review (ELIR) which embraces the periodic external reviews of Scotland’s higher education institutions, published reports, annual discussions and a series of follow-up activities.

- Our national Enhancement Themes is a programme of organised activities involving all Scottish higher education institutions.

- We engage with institutions on an annual basis to reflect on the outcomes of institution-led quality reviews. Consideration of the effectiveness of the approach at each institution is a core part of ELIR.

- Student engagement in quality is central to our approach in Scotland and embedded in our culture. Students are at the heart of our system and we involve them as partners. We play an active role in supporting student engagement, through the inclusion of student members in all ELIR review teams, through student involvement in the Enhancement Themes, and as members of our committees and working groups.

- We produce public information on quality, particularly through reports on the outcomes of ELIR reviews. We also draw on public information in the conduct of ELIR reviews.
Enhancement Themes

Enhancement Themes enable the sector to explore a specific area (Theme) in depth through both sector-wide, collective activity and programmes of work within each institution. Together we achieve far more than institutions could individually, encouraging innovation and the sharing of effective practice with the aim of enhancing the student learning experience in Scottish higher education.

Managed by QAA Scotland, the Enhancement Themes have had a positive impact on the Scottish higher education sector since their launch in 2003 and attract interest from around the world. Practice is shared each year at the Enhancement Themes Conference.

The current Enhancement Theme is Student Transitions, which will run until 2017. Previous Enhancement Themes have included: Developing and Supporting the Curriculum; Graduates for the 21st Century; Employability; and Research-Teaching Linkages.

Enhancement Themes are overseen by the Scottish Higher Education Enhancement Committee (SHEEC). Each higher education institution in Scotland is represented, as are students. SHEEC also commissions projects seeking to learn from international practice.

A wide range of resources - toolkits, case studies, presentations and workshop materials - are available at the Enhancement Themes website.

www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk
Enhancement-led Institutional Review (ELIR)

ELIR is the process we use to review and report on how institutions in Scotland maintain the academic standards of their awards and enhance the quality of the student learning experience. Each review team consists of three senior academic reviewers, a student reviewer, an international reviewer and a coordinating reviewer.

ELIR not only involves periodic review, but also incorporates an annual discussion and a follow-up event.

An Outcome Report is produced after each review which summarises the findings. A longer Technical Report is produced for the institution. Both reports are published on the QAA website.

www.qaa.ac.uk/elir
Other areas of our work

We carry out a range of work to support flexibility, innovation and effective learner journeys into, through and out of higher education.

**Recognition of prior learning (RPL)** – our work is part of the broader approach to widening participation in higher education in Scotland, by making it more accessible to non-traditional learners, encouraging different forms of flexible learning paths, and engaging a more diverse student body.

**Flexible curriculum** – as part of the Developing and Supporting the Curriculum Enhancement Theme we have developed a toolkit to help programme teams consider approaches to flexible curriculum design.

**Enterprise and entrepreneurship** – the Scottish Government has highlighted the importance of the education system in helping to develop Scotland as a world leader in innovation and entrepreneurship. We have commissioned work in response to this, *Creating Entrepreneurial Campuses*, accompanied by illustrative case studies from Scottish higher education institutions.
QAA Scotland has forged strong international links to identify and share good practice. We seek to highlight interesting and relevant practice in other countries that has a bearing on the needs of the sector and students in Scotland.

Our Learning from International Practice projects aim to inform teaching and learning practice in Scotland, focusing on areas such as Student Support Services, the 21st Century Doctorate and the Taught Postgraduate Student Experience.

Our work in Scotland attracts interest from across the globe. We regularly host study visits and present at a range of international workshops and events.