

QAA Scotland: Strategic Directions 2017–20

Introduction

Scotland's higher education sector delivers world-class education and produces world-class research. It contributes significantly to our economy, in addition to playing a crucial role in our nation's cultural and social development. The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA Scotland) is proud of the part we play in supporting Scotland's universities and those who work and study in them. This short document provides an overview of QAA Scotland's vision and strategic priorities to 2020; it is designed to complement QAA's [Strategy 2017–20: Building on World-Class Quality](#), drawing out what we aim to deliver for Scotland.

Reflecting QAA's overall strategy, QAA Scotland is the expert independent quality agency for higher education in Scotland, delivering valued services and programmes of work that provide assurance and drive quality enhancement, part of a UK-wide organisation able to use our breadth of experience, our international reputation and partnerships to benefit of all of UK higher education.

Our purpose

QAA Scotland's purpose is to act as an expert authority on academic quality assurance and quality enhancement in higher education, and to be an effective catalyst for promoting and deepening quality cultures designed to support and enhance the delivery of excellent, responsive and inspiring learning.

While independent, QAA Scotland works closely with partners to deliver our purpose. Strong relationships between QAA Scotland, Scottish higher education institutions, their students, the Scottish Funding Council (SFC), Scottish Government, sparqs (Student Partnerships in Quality Scotland) and the National Union of Students (NUS) Scotland underlie the enhancement ethos in Scotland.

Our work

We work in support of the ambitions of the sector to deliver high quality, relevant education and an outstanding student learning experience; in support of Government priorities to widen access, support effective learner journeys and address equality challenges; and in support of the SFC's strategic goal 'to make Scotland the best place in the world to learn, to educate, to research and to innovate' (SFC Strategic Plan 2015–18).

Our defining priority

QAA Scotland's priority is to ensure that our enhancement-led approach delivers for Scotland and has greater impact beyond Scotland.

We will achieve this by:

- conducting effective and valued external reviews under the new Enhancement-led Institutional Review method (ELIR 4)
- developing and delivering agreed 'Focus On' projects, which are review and enhancement-related (Focus On continues to receive strong endorsement from the sector, indicating that this work results in beneficial change)
- managing Evidence for Enhancement: Improving the Student Experience, Scotland's 2017-20 Enhancement Theme, in support of the ambition to demonstrate the effectiveness of enhancement-led approaches for students, for institutions and for the higher education sector in Scotland
- promoting the strengths, values and effectiveness of enhancement-led approaches to quality in higher education across the UK and internationally, thereby supporting the reputation of Scottish higher education and QAA Scotland.

In doing this we will continue to be responsive to changes in the UK's quality landscape and to international development in quality assurance and enhancement. In all our work, we will seek to deepen and extend three things: student partnership and wider collaborative approaches, self-evaluation, and the commitment to enhancement with its pursuit of excellence.

QAA in Scotland: What's distinctive about the Scottish context?

QAA, as a UK-wide organisation, responds flexibly and effectively to the needs of different nations while maintaining the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, which underpins provision across the UK. Scotland and QAA Scotland is known and respected for its distinctive approach in terms of both policy and practice through:

- our coherent, integrated approach to assurance and enhancement, as part of the national Quality Enhancement Framework
- our commitment to promote and support enhancement, particularly through QAA Scotland's Enhancement Themes, and the work of the Scottish Higher Education Enhancement Committee, to address sector-wide strategic issues through collective and collaborative activity
- our strong commitment to student engagement at strategic and operational levels, with student reviewers, and student involvement in the Enhancement Themes and our committees, as well as our constructive liaison with NUS Scotland and sparqs
- our partnership approach to the development and implementation of policy, especially through our close links with the SFC, institutions, students and strategic bodies within Scotland
- our forward-looking strategic commitment to long-term transformational approaches to enhancing the quality of student learning
- our strong commitment to being outward looking and internationally connected - ensuring that we learn from good practice outside Scotland, engage and collaborate with relevant international partners, deploy international peers on all our institutional review teams, and support the sector in maintaining the high reputation of Scottish higher education overseas.

We will continue to develop new work and approaches to extend our reach and impact in support of innovation and enhancement in higher education in Scotland. We work collaboratively and cooperatively in the firm belief that, collectively, Scottish higher education can achieve much more by learning from each other than if each institution and agency worked in isolation.