

FOCUS ON: Professional Services Review



Contents

Foreword by Scottish Funding Council (SFC)	1
Executive summary	2
Introduction	2
Background and scoping	4
Broad approaches to professional services review	4
Methodologies	6
Strategic principles for PSR	7
Institutional oversight	8
Review process and procedures	8
Externality	10
Use of data and evidence.....	11
Student engagement in PSR.....	12
Outcomes of reviews.....	13
Developmental considerations	14
Annex: Reflective questions to support PSR development	15

Foreword by Scottish Funding Council (SFC)

The role of professional services is integral to our core sector missions of learning, teaching and research. Professional support services are crucial to the overall quality of the student learning experience and can impact significantly on student and staff well-being. It is for this reason that our quality guidance to higher education institutions includes the expectation for all services contributing to the student experience to be reviewed as part of an institution's approach to Institution-Led Review (ILR).

Professional service staff are a part of an institution's human connection with students. They can provide a distinctive understanding of individual circumstances that can shape successful outcomes. They are often able to fix or remedy issues effectively so that negative impact on students can be limited. It is important to recognise that professional services matter to successful student outcomes.

Our guidance asks institutions to reflect on how their professional services promote a 'quality culture', engage students, and support a high-quality learning environment. The ability of professional services to adapt and to simplify accessibility, particularly over the past two years, highlights the critical role they have to play in the *design* as well as delivery of institutional processes and support for students and staff. Continuing to meet expectations of students and staff around flexibility and responsiveness is likely to emphasize this role. The broad range of approaches and methodologies for professional services review highlighted in this report, reflects how institutions are seeking to maximise the diverse contribution professional services have to make.

The Scottish Funding Council has ambitious commitments around student experience, digital and net zero, set out in the Review of Coherence and Sustainability for Tertiary Education. Our vision for a more responsive education, skills and research system can only be achieved through collaboration involving our professional services. This Focus On report, drawing on findings from ELIR and illustrating the range of practice in the sector, is well timed and provides a clear basis to build upon. We look forward to continued working with institutions in their review of professional services and seeing the outcomes of continuous improvement across the sector.

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Executive summary

The Focus On project for 2021-22 is Professional Services Partnership. The project has two strands: Understanding methodologies and approaches to professional services review, and Exploring, facilitating and communicating professional services partnerships. This report is the key outcome of the first strand of the project and serves to identify appropriate approaches and methodologies for professional services review (PSR).

The approaches to PSR within Scotland are 'integrated' where professional services are represented or considered to varying extents in the institution-led review (ILR) of a subject area, or 'targeted' where an institution focuses review activity on one or more specific professional service(s) or themes.

Taking into account development areas within the sector, seven aspects of PSR methodology are explored:

- strategic principles for PSR
- institutional oversight
- review processes and procedures
- externality
- use of data and evidence
- student engagement in PSR
- outcomes of reviews.

For each broad approach and aspect of methodology, reflective questions are provided to support institutions in their considerations when developing or enhancing their PSR processes. Examples of practice are additionally provided to illustrate each approach or aspect of methodology. The reflective questions provided within the report are collated in the Annex and will be published separately on the QAA Scotland website.

Introduction

QAA Scotland's Focus On projects aim to help higher education institutions (HEIs) and students' associations with work across key priority areas. Topics are chosen in liaison with the Scottish Higher Education Enhancement Committee (SHEEC) based on findings from Enhancement-led Institutional Reviews (ELIR). Focus On provides an opportunity to explore these findings to create developmental resources and events with which the whole sector can get involved. Focus On projects are designed to be timely and practical, and help colleagues make a real difference in a short space of time.

The Focus On project for 2021-22 is Professional Services Partnership. The project has two strands: Understanding methodologies and approaches to professional services review and Exploring, facilitating and communicating professional service partnerships. This report is the key outcome of the first strand and serves to identify appropriate approaches and methodologies for professional services review (PSR).

The Quality Enhancement Framework (QEF) is the enhancement-led approach to quality in Scottish higher education. The QEF has five pillars: ELIR, Enhancement Themes, institution-led review (ILR), student engagement and public information. ILR is the process by which institutions in Scotland take responsibility for reviewing their own academic subjects and professional services. Institutions have flexibility to design and manage ILR but they do need to meet the expectations of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education and the guidance published by the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) on quality for higher education institutions.

The [SFC guidance to higher education institutions on quality for the cycle from August 2017-2022](#) provides HEIs and stakeholders with general information on the QEF and technical guidance.

The SFC guidance for the 2017-22 cycle includes the following paragraph under guidance for institution-led review:

Contribution and role of support services

37. All services contributing to the student experience should be reviewed as part of an institution's approach. Support services are of crucial importance in determining the overall quality of the student learning experience and can impact significantly on student achievement and well-being. It is a matter for each institution to determine how this should be done. Whatever the approach taken, the evidence should allow the institution to reflect on the contribution of support services to the 'quality culture' within the institution, the ways in which the services engage with students to monitor and improve the quality of services, and the ways in which the services promote high quality learning and continuous quality enhancement.

For the purpose of this report, professional services are defined as:

Any non-academic service or department that contributes to the overall student learning experience.

Professional services may directly or indirectly impact the overall student learning experience. By the nature of being student facing, services such as careers, disability and welfare, library, and information technology generally have a direct impact on the student experience. In contrast, services with less direct engagement with students, such as finance, quality assurance and governance, have potential to have a significant, if indirect, impact on the student experience.

The aim of this report is to describe a range of broad approaches and methodologies for PSR that illustrate the range of practice in the Scottish higher education sector. The report does not intend to evaluate effectiveness or advocate one approach or methodology.

Given our enhancement approach in Scotland, some institutions are currently reviewing and/or developing their processes for PSR and, as a result, particular approaches or methodologies may change.

In order to provide a practical resource for institutions, the sections on broad approaches and methodologies are prefaced with reflective questions to support institutions' considerations. Examples of practice are then provided to illustrate given approaches and methods. These examples are presented in **blue text** to highlight their inclusion as current practice. In some instances, the language used by the institution to describe their approach or method may differ from broad descriptors used in this report. To provide clarity multiple descriptors are used in some cases (terms used consistently in the report and institutional terminology).

To enable the reflective questions to be used independently in considering processes for PSR, these are reproduced separately in the Annex.

Background and scoping

QAA Scotland undertook a scoping exercise between 25 June and 3 September 2021 to gauge interest in the developing strand around processes for PSR, explore some of the challenges faced by institutions in relation to their current or developing processes for PSR, excluding the specific challenges created by the COVID pandemic, and provide links to PSR processes on institutional websites. The key challenges identified are listed here:

- clarity on roles and responsibilities within PSR
- promoting the value and benefits of engagement in service review as an enhancement opportunity within an institution
- integrating quality monitoring and action planning across the academic and professional services spheres
- strengthening student engagement in the PSR process
- implementing an evidence-based approach to review and enhancement.

Given that ILR is a key feature of academic standards and quality processes reviewed in ELIR, the published reports from the fourth cycle of [ELIR](#) (ELIR 4: 2018-2021) provide a basis for the evidence in this report. This is supplemented by responses to the scoping exercise, published institutional processes where available on their website, annual reports on ILR for the SFC and institutional liaison meetings conducted by QAA officers. Of the 16 ELIR 4 reports published by the end of 2021, seven included recommendations relating to the review of professional services. There were no commendations directly related to PSR.

Outcomes and themes from ELIR are collated and analysed in thematic reports compiled by QAA Scotland and it is not the intention to replicate that activity within this report. However, to support the development of methods and approaches to PSR, it is useful to consider the recommendations made by ELIR 4 review teams specifically relating to PSR:

- be enhancement-led
- allow for effective institutional oversight
- incorporate appropriate external specialist expertise
- ensure a systematic and timely PSR process
- link effectively PSR to the ILR process for academic areas
- fully engage students.

Broad approaches to professional services review

- Does your approach to PSR take account of all professional services that contribute to the overall student learning experience?
- To what extent does your approach to PSR facilitate enhancement of the learning experience for all students?

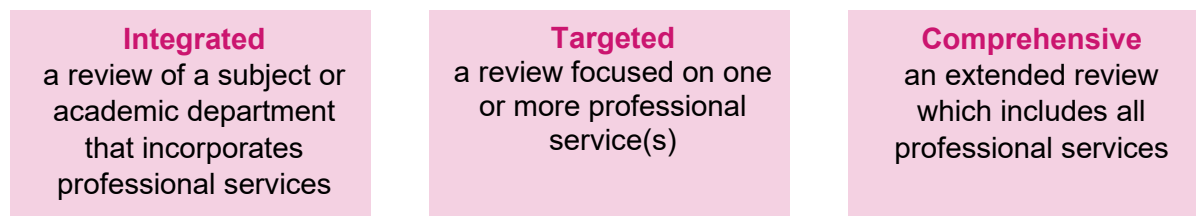
There are three broad approaches to review of professional services: integrated, targeted and comprehensive.

Integrated: A common approach is integrated review where professional services are represented or considered to varying extents in the ILR of a subject area or cognate group of programmes.

Targeted: Targeted review is where an institution focuses review activity on one or more specific professional service(s), department(s) or unit(s). This is the predominant approach in the sector as identified in the ELIR 4 reports published from 2018 to 2021. Some

institutions employ a targeted approach that spans multiple professional services, sometimes referred to as a ‘holistic’ approach by institutions, but not including all services and typically limited to student-facing areas.

Comprehensive: Not undertaken by any institutions in the ELIR 4 period is the comprehensive approach to PSR where **all** professional services across an institution are reviewed in one major review activity.



Note that the terms ‘integrated’, ‘targeted’ and ‘comprehensive’ are used here to describe these broad approaches and may not reflect the language used by institutions in their description of their approaches.

The **University of Dundee** uses an **integrated approach** to PSR through Periodic Programme Review. The University requires programme teams to consult with professional services, including the Registry, the Careers Service, the Academic Skills Centre and English for International Students, as part of the evaluation process.

The **University of Aberdeen** uses an **integrated approach** to PSR through its Internal Teaching Review (ITR) process. The ITR guidance states that the involvement of student-facing professional services in teaching and learning is an explicit part of the ITR process. Staff from relevant professional services, including the Registry, the Careers and Employability Service, Student Experience and Student Support engage in each school’s ITR to review the extent and quality of their interactions with a school and its students. ITRs should demonstrate strengths (and weaknesses, if any) of professional services in education-related matters.

Support services at **Scotland’s Rural College (SRUC)** participate in **targeted review** within a six-year cycle. This broad approach encompasses multiple student-facing services. SRUC has established a Support Services Board of Studies with a representative from each of SRUC’s Careers, Library Services, Digital Learning, Information & Digital Services, Student Journey and Students’ Association Development teams, in addition to Campus Academic Liaison Managers, an academic tutor and a pastoral student support tutor. The Board of Studies collects and analyses evidence for the support services review and develops the self-evaluation document.

Robert Gordon University uses a **targeted approach** to PSR that explicitly covers student-facing services: Student-Facing Support Services Review (SFSSR). A three-year programme of SFSSR themes/topics is developed in partnership with the student body to aid the enhancement of student-facing support services or departmental areas. The theme may focus on a particular aspect of the student experience or allow services to work on similar agendas within the context of their own environments.

Following a consultation with stakeholders in 2019, the **University of Strathclyde** agreed a **targeted approach** to professional services review which would enable the University to identify service connectivity, potential gaps and opportunities for enhancement. The first theme, focused on student mental health provision, involved many different service areas, as well as pastoral support from the faculties, departments and schools. The University is

planning a schedule of topics for the next five reviews, with the intention to hold review events in alternate years in order to allow adequate time for review preparation and for responding to the recommendations from each review.

At the **University of St Andrews**, student-facing professional service units are reviewed using a **targeted approach** that is similar to that in place for the academic schools known as University-led reviews of learning and teaching (URLT). They are reviewed on a five to six-year cycle agreed by the Academic Monitoring Group. The University's review schedule for 2020-2026 includes Student Services, Careers, Library and Students' Association.

Additionally, some institutions identify a theme or stage of the student journey for review. The review process involves professional services or departments that contribute to the theme or activity and may also include multiple academic departments. Themes that have been reviewed include mental health, induction and well-being. These cross-institutional reviews are described in this report as 'targeted' approaches to PSR.

The **University of Stirling** uses a **targeted approach** to review cross-institutional activities and has conducted reviews across themes such as induction, orientation and transition.

Using a **targeted approach**, at the **University of Edinburgh** the quality of the student experience is reviewed in relation to a particular theme or aspect of student support, rather than an individual service or academic area. Reviews since 2016 have considered Black and Minority Ethnic Students, Mature Students and Student Parents and Carers, and Mental Health Services.

Annual monitoring of both academic departments and support services is an integral part of most institutions' planning and resourcing cycles. Annual monitoring, as a stand-alone approach to review, is not included in this report because it does not fulfil the [SFC expectation](#) in relation to PSR.

Methodologies

Having identified three broad approaches to PSR, attention is now given to methodologies used within the sector. Consideration has been given to the specific nature and context of the recommendations made by ELIR 4 review teams linked to PSR. Accordingly, seven aspects of methodology are explored with examples of practice provided for each.

Aspects of methodology

- Strategic principles for PSR
- Institutional oversight
- Review processes and procedures
- Externality
- Use of data and evidence
- Student engagement in PSR
- Outcomes of reviews

Taking into account development areas within the sector, institutions may reflect on current methodologies used for PSR and consider whether their practice:

- is well aligned to institutional strategies
- has appropriate institutional oversight
- is clearly defined and articulated

- makes use and takes account of externality
- makes effective use of information and data
- has student engagement at the heart of their processes
- has effective consideration of review outcomes leading to enhancement of the student experience.

As provided above for the broad approaches to PSR, each of the aspects of methodology discussed within this section are prefaced with reflective questions to support institutions in their considerations of the methodologies that can be used when developing or enhancing their PSR processes. Examples of practice are then provided in **blue text** to illustrate particular aspects of methodology.

Strategic principles for PSR

- How does the approach to PSR align with and address institutional strategic priorities?
- Does the process for PSR include evaluation activities to ensure continued effectiveness in enhancing the student experience and meeting strategic priorities?

The rationale for reviewing professional services is typically agreed by an institutional senior committee or similar. A number of institutions cite compliance with SFC guidance as the reason for undertaking PSR. Achievement of institutional vision or mission is also cited, particularly linked to strategic objectives to provide a high-quality student experience.

The **University of Strathclyde** identifies its targeted PSR approach, Thematic Review of Student-facing Professional Services, as one of the ways to support the University's strategic objective to deliver an outstanding and distinctive student experience with high-quality student support throughout the learner journey.

In terms of selecting themes, departments or other support service areas for targeted review, a number of contributing factors are provided, including strategic priorities and annual programme monitoring.

Heriot-Watt University launched a strategic institutional project: Building Our Commonality (BOC) in 2019, intended to transform service provision within the University, regardless of services being delivered centrally or at school level. Following completion of the BOC project, a schedule will be devised for reviewing professional services under the University's Academic-Related Professional Services Review process, in which each professional service is reviewed on a five-year cycle.

Some institutions do not schedule targeted review of services that have been the subject of external audit or review, for example by a professional body to confer or confirm accreditation (see Externality below).

Institutional oversight

- Where does responsibility for the oversight of PSR processes sit within the institution?
- Does PSR oversight facilitate ongoing alignment with strategic priorities and support the effective dissemination of outcomes and subsequent action planning?

The role of institutional oversight in PSR varies across the sector. The nature of the oversight can support the extent to which PSR supports the delivery of strategic priorities and the effectiveness of sharing good practice across an institution. Where an integrated approach is adopted, the duration and scheduling of reviews often sits with senior academic committees. Typically in the Scottish sector, institutional oversight sits with a quality or student experience committee.

Glasgow Caledonian University operates an integrated approach to PSR through its Enhancement-led internal subject reviews (ELISR) which are operationally managed by the Department of Quality Assurance and Enhancement. Oversight is provided by the Learning and Teaching Sub-committee for consideration and approval of review reports on behalf of the Academic Policy and Practice Committee (APPC) and Senate. Any actions requiring university-level attention are considered by APPC. In the event that APPC considers any issues arising from an ELISR to be serious, these will be drawn to the attention of Senate.

Queen Margaret University (QMU) uses a targeted approach to PSR through its periodic review of professional services. Review reports are considered by the Student Experience Committee and/or other relevant senior committee(s), as agreed with the Deputy Principal and University Secretary. Committee members consider recommended actions and ways in which the professional service area might be supported to further enhance the quality of provision and its impact on the student experience. The Committee also considers how best to share any examples of good practice with colleagues across the University.

Providing a targeted approach to PSR, 'student support service reviews' at the **University of the Highlands and Islands** are overseen by the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee (QAEC). QAEC is responsible to Academic Council and has within its remit the responsibility to maintain oversight of quality enhancement requirements and ensure that these are addressed by appropriate groups and processes.

Review process and procedures

- Is the process used for reviewing professional services defined, clear, and systematic?
- How well are the process and procedures for PSR articulated and shared?

Depending on the institutional approach to PSR, guidance for staff, students and panel members may be included in review policy and/or procedures.

Detailed PSR guidance typically includes:

- aims of the review
- scope, frequency and timing of reviews
- roles and responsibilities, including panel convenor, as appropriate
- composition of the review panel, detailing student and external members, where included
- requirement for the production of a self-evaluation, reflective analysis or similar document
- supporting documentation – noting whether these are recommended or required, including use of data and evidence
- expectations around panel review of the documentation
- arrangements for the review panel/visit, including timescales, indicative meetings and student involvement
- review outcomes, including any judgements, such as commendations or recommendations
- the report format and with whom it will be shared, such as senior institutional group/committee, staff, students
- the requirements for an action plan, or similar
- any subsequent follow-up activity, including progress updates on the action plan
- wider student involvement in PSR.

The **University of the Highlands and Islands** uses a targeted approach to PSR through its 'student support services review'. The scope of the review includes all activities within a particular professional service which are student-facing and/or intended to enhance the student learning experience. Given the nature of UHI's delivery, which is achieved across its 'federation' of academic partners, its student support services review covers the relevant professional service across all of these partners, however it is provided and resourced, and recognises that the services support both higher and further education students. Student support services reviews are normally conducted on a six-year cycle, with the schedule of activity determined by the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee. Previous reviews have focused on ICT, mental health support and careers.

'Thematic Review' is the **University of Edinburgh's** targeted approach to PSR. The University produces Thematic Review Guidance for support service and academic areas which details planning, consultation, implementation and reporting stages. In the planning stage a review panel is selected by the Convenor of a sub-group of the Senate Quality Assurance Committee. The panel holds an initial meeting to discuss the scope of the review and agree a remit. The panel also determines the most appropriate methodological approach to the consultation stage of the review which may entail a day of scheduled meetings, a survey and/or a set of focus groups or interviews with key stakeholders.

Glasgow School of Art approved a new Student Facing Professional Services Review Policy in May 2021. The first targeted PSR using this policy, scheduled for spring 2022, will look at the University's Enterprise Studio which supports employability and enterprise in programmes and as stand-alone services for students and graduates. The University's policy document sets out the frequency and timing of reviews, the composition of the review panel, the requirement for a self-evaluation and other supporting documentation. There is also detailed information about the report and follow-up action, including committee oversight. The policy states that engagement with, and the participation of, students are vital components of the review process.

Externality

- To what extent is externality used in professional service review?
- Is externality appropriate in terms of specialist expertise for PSR?

Approaches to externality within PSR processes may be described as one of three types: internal review, internal review with external input, or external review.

Internal review: The PSR process uses input from one or more different academic or professional service areas within the institution to provide internal externality. This may, for example, be a targeted review of one professional service area with panel members from one or more other professional service areas within the institution. Alternatively, in an integrated approach, various professional services may contribute to a subject or programme-based ILR. The contribution of professional services may include providing input to the self-assessment; providing evidence directly to the review panel, in a written submission or through involvement in review panel meetings; and/or membership of professional service staff on the review panel.

The **University of Dundee** uses an integrated approach to PSR through its process of Periodic Programme Review (PPR). PPR is an example of internal review. PPR boards must include one representative from the University's External Relations department and at least two panel members from other professional services, including at least one of these from the Academic Skills Centre, Careers, English for International Students or the Library and Learning Centre. The aim is to maintain robust links with support teams and the diversity of input, while providing the opportunity for the school under review to seek guidance from whichever sources it deems the most valuable, according to the nature and needs of the programme(s).

Internal review with external input: The PSR process uses input from one or more academic or professional service staff external to the institution. This may be a targeted review of one professional service area with panel members from the same professional service area of another higher education provider. In integrated approaches to PSR, examples of the use of external professional service personnel are limited; where externality exists it is mostly through the use of one or more external academics in the field of the subject area under review.

The **University of St Andrews** uses 'University-led reviews of learning and teaching' (URLT) for both targeted PSR and review of taught programmes. The use of externality is clearly provided within the URLT handbook: two external experts are required – one from the Scottish sector and one from elsewhere in the UK. For PSR, the externals will apply their specialist knowledge and experience to the professional service area and benchmark against similar professional service areas in the sector. Externals will collaborate to provide a summary of their views for the evaluative report.

One of the principles of the **University of the Highlands and Islands'** student support service review process is that the review panel will include external representatives and a student member. The University regulations stipulate that the panel will include up to two external members: senior service managers with relevant experience from another UK university or college.

External review: An independent external review facilitated by a third party but managed by a central department such as Quality. This type of PSR is not reported through ELIR 4 except as examples of external audit. Usually, audit refers to the review of a professional services department by personnel employed by a commercial audit company rather than using peers working within the same or related area at another higher education provider. Typically, audit is used to focus on compliance rather than enhancement. Additionally, there are likely to be external reviews of some services, such as regulatory inspection of a university's nursery or PSRB-led review of professional services, such as careers or counselling.

Edinburgh Napier University's (ENU) Information Services are accredited for their Customer Service Excellence standard. The process for achieving and continuing to keep this external award involves providing evidence of meeting various UK-wide criteria and a visit by licensed accreditors. Accreditation runs on a four-yearly cycle, with reports received annually. The outcome from the review is a report that notes areas of good practice and anything that needs to be considered. Similarly, ENU's careers and employability service is accredited against a series of metrics within nine key pillars set out by AGCAS (Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Service).

Use of data and evidence

- What data and evidence are used in PSR to support critical self-evaluation?
- How do you ensure data and evidence that is used in PSR takes account of the diversity of your student population and is appropriate to the range of professional services provided?
- How do you ensure those undertaking professional service review balance the consideration of quantitative and qualitative data?

The use of data and evidence is central to ILRs in the Scottish sector. A targeted approach to PSR enables evidence and data to be focused on the professional service area under review. Alternatively, where PSR is integrated within subject review, evidence is predominantly provided by or for the academic area, resulting in evidence that tends to be limited to engagement of professional services with staff and students in the subject area under review.

There are numerous evidence bases that can and have been used within PSR. These may vary depending on the professional service under review and the method adopted by the institution.

Examples of data and evidence used to support PSR

Surveys – external surveys such as NSS and PTES; internal surveys such as HEIs' own annual student experience surveys; service-specific surveys led by a professional service/department – these may be annual surveys or bespoke to inform a review or the need for a review.

Focus groups – focus groups at institution, academic department or programme level or specific focus groups led by a professional service/department – these may be annual or other regular focus groups or bespoke events to inform a PSR.

User data generated by systems – this may be data around uptake of a service such as by the careers service; or number of loans or other library requests; or number of enquiries or students supported by services such as disability support or counselling.

External reports – such as accreditation reports from professional bodies or audit reports.

The ELIR 4 reports indicate that the responsibility for data collection and analysis is managed centrally or devolved to departments and professional services. Centrally managed information may provide a holistic view of data and trends across an institution.

Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU) has established a Survey Unit and a Student Survey Working Group, which includes student representation. These groups support a centralised and institutional approach to survey management and dissemination of outcomes. Access to this information supports communication of planning goals between schools and professional services. Student Experience Action Plans are used to ensure enhancement activities are coherent and consistent across schools and professional services and are considered as part of various university quality processes such as ELISR, supporting GCU's integrated approach to PSR.

The **University of Strathclyde** makes suites of data available to academic and professional services staff which are used to inform evaluation and decision-making, including the University's targeted approach to PSR. A Learner Experience Framework, which draws together information from academic departments and professional services into a range of indicators, guides an evidence-based approach to enhancing the learner journey. A Surveys and Metrics Working Group reports on student-related metrics and survey outcomes within the institution.

Edinburgh Napier University uses Student Closeness Groups as a student feedback mechanism for professional services that do not have ready access to other committees or meetings which include student representation. The Groups are informal consultation forums designed to gather feedback on the student experience and to measure the impact of university initiatives. The agenda for these biannual forums is determined through an open call for ideas from staff across the University and recent topics have included student survey fatigue, services offered by the library and the Personal Development Tutoring system.

The **University of the West of Scotland** uses an integrated approach to PSR, with engagement of professional services within ILR. The University has an extensive range of data and an integrated approach to the use of data in decision-making across both schools and professional services. The University has introduced a suite of strategic and operational business intelligence dashboards. The interactive dashboards are available to all staff and present data across a range of themes, including KPIs, operational performance, student experience and student forecasting and planning. The dashboards are referenced in the University's Quality Handbook as part of ILR guidance for staff in relation to evidence to support the reviews.

Student engagement in PSR

- Does the PSR process enable effective consideration of the student voice?
- Does the method of PSR allow for student engagement at all stages of the process?
- How do you measure the effectiveness of student engagement with PSR?

A key component of our enhancement approach within Scottish higher education is ensuring effective student representation and listening and responding to students. It is good practice to involve students in all stages of PSR and all institutions engage students using a range of methods and approaches.

Examples of student engagement in PSR

- Membership of the institution-level committee(s) that has oversight of reviews, including the body that agrees review schedules
- Involvement in the institution-level committee(s) that has oversight of routine student feedback (NSS, internal reviews, etc)
- Student feedback on the professional service under review, such as through user surveys and focus groups
- Membership of review panels
- Involvement in meetings with review panels
- Involvement in design of action plans
- Involvement in the institution-level committee(s) that receives review outcomes and action plans

Students at the **University of Stirling** contribute to Learning and Teaching Reviews as members of the review panels and in the meetings held with representative groups of students as part of the review programme. The process also includes provision for a student submission containing any points, issues or items of good practice that students from the subject discipline wish to bring to the attention of the Learning and Teaching Review panel. Preparation of the student submission is facilitated by the Students' Union Vice President Education, with contributions from the student Faculty Officers. The University also provides training to support students' effective engagement in the Learning and Teaching Review process.

The **University of Glasgow's** Student Experience Committee has student, academic and professional services staff representation. The committee ensures that requirements of academic and non-academic experiences of students are considered. It is responsible for determining progress and effectiveness of the review of student support services and the effectiveness of the Student and Academic Services Directorate. The Committee is tasked with developing thematic action plans based on key areas of focus.

Queen Margaret University's (QMU) targeted approach to PSR is its periodic review of professional services. QMU's guidelines for review of professional services states the inclusion of one student panellist. Student panel members for reviews are provided with specific training by the Students' Union and the Division of Governance and Quality Enhancement to ensure they can engage fully with the review process. QMU uses a range of external and internal student surveys to support evaluation activities and enhancement of the student experience. The two internal surveys are the QMU Student Survey for students not eligible to participate in national surveys such as NSS and PRES, and the Partner Organisation Student Survey for students studying on collaborative programmes.

Outcomes of reviews

- To what extent are the outcomes and resultant actions from PSR used to enhance the wider student experience?
- How are the outcomes of PSR communicated to staff, students and stakeholders?

In line with our enhancement-led approach in Scotland, professional services reviews should identify ways in which the student learning experience can be improved, even when threshold quality is secure. Where PSRs focus on a single service, department or subject, outcomes need to be considered more widely so actions for enhancement can be considered across the institution.

The **University of the West of Scotland** uses ILR as an integrated approach to PSR. ILR reports are scrutinised by the Academic Quality Committee, on behalf of the Education Advisory Committee (EAC), who will report on key themes and monitor follow-up action. Where necessary, an institutional action plan is developed and any wider University issues summarised for the attention of the Vice Chancellor's Executive Group. The EAC reports to Senate and has responsibility to be proactive in the strategic development and enhancement of teaching and learning and to disseminate good practice across all schools.

Based on **Scotland's Rural College's** Education Manual, ILR reports and action plans produced by the professional service area under review are scrutinised by the Programme Approvals and Academic Standards Committee (PAASC) with subsequent approval by the Learning and Teaching Committee. The action plan is monitored alongside the Support Services Board of Studies Quality Enhancement Plan for the academic session following the year of review. A progress report on the ILR action plan is submitted to PAASC approximately one year after the review. This scrutiny of the ILR report and the team's responses allows good practice to be more generally recognised and disseminated. Staff are encouraged to share good and innovative practice through staff development activities at department and campus level.

Abertay University uses an ILR process in an integrated approach to review of professional services. ILR reports and action plans are considered by the Academic Quality & Standards Committee and then the Teaching & Learning Committee for recommendation to Senate for approval. In the event of 'limited effectiveness' or 'not effective' judgements, Senate may impose further requirements in order to address any limitations of potential risk to the ongoing quality and standards of the taught provision.

Developmental considerations

This report provides an overview of approaches and methodologies for professional services review in use across the Scottish sector. Regardless of whether an integrated, targeted or comprehensive approach is adopted, PSR should enable institutions to monitor and improve the quality of professional services and enhance the student experience.

Following on from the ELIR 4 cycle, a number of institutions are considering their approaches to PSR in the context of paragraph 37 of the [SFC guidance](#). Recommendations from ELIR 4 can support these deliberations, especially when considered alongside current good practice in ILR. In particular, institutions should consider PSR approaches that:

- are enhancement-led
- have appropriate institutional oversight
- incorporate appropriate externality
- are systematic and timely
- fully engage students.

There is a wealth of good practice across the sector, including in relation to student engagement and partnership; use of data; and effectiveness of ILR for taught provision. Institutions are encouraged to identify good practice from within their institutions and across the sector when developing their processes for PSR – the description of current practice and institutional examples provided in this report will support this development activity.

The resources resulting from the 2022 Focus On: Professional Services Partnership event will be available on the QAA Scotland website to support institutions' deliberations around PSR development. Additionally, to support institutions' considerations, the reflective questions provided within this report are collated in the Annex and will be published separately on the QAA Scotland website.

Annex: Reflective questions to support PSR development

These reflective questions have been used in this report to provide a practical resource to institutions when developing or reviewing their processes for professional services review (PSR). The set of questions are not meant to be exhaustive. Further guidance may be found in the [UK Quality Code for Higher Education - Advice and Guidance: Monitoring and Evaluation](#).

Broad approaches to professional services review

- Does your approach to PSR take account of all professional services that contribute to the overall student learning experience?
- To what extent does your approach to PSR facilitate enhancement of the learning experience for all students?

Strategic principles for PSR

- How does your approach to PSR align with and address institutional strategic priorities?
- Does the process for PSR include evaluation activities to ensure continued effectiveness in enhancing the student experience and meeting strategic priorities?

Institutional oversight

- Where does responsibility for oversight of PSR processes sit within the institution?
- Does PSR oversight facilitate ongoing alignment with strategic priorities and support the effective dissemination of outcomes and subsequent action planning?

Review process and procedures

- Is the process for reviewing professional services defined, clear, and systematic?
- How well are the process and procedures for PSR articulated and shared?

Externality

- To what extent is externality used in professional services review?
- Is externality appropriate in terms of specialist expertise for PSR?

Use of data and evidence

- What data and evidence are used in PSR to support critical self-evaluation?
- How do you ensure data and evidence that is used in PSR takes account of the diversity of your student population and is appropriate to the range of professional services provided?
- How do you ensure those undertaking professional services review balance the consideration of quantitative and qualitative data?

Student engagement in PSR

- Does the PSR process enable effective consideration of the student voice?
- Does the method of PSR allow for student engagement at all stages of the process?
- How do you measure the effectiveness of student engagement with PSR?

Outcomes of reviews

- To what extent are the outcomes and resultant actions from PSR used to enhance the wider student experience?
- How are the outcomes of PSR communicated to staff, students and stakeholders?

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