

# Evaluation Report

## Enhancement-led Institutional Review (ELIR 4)

2017–22



## Contents

<b>Executive summary .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Methodology.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Findings .....</b>	<b>6</b>
Meeting the aims and objectives of ELIR 4.....	6
Revisions to the ELIR 4 process .....	7
Tailored review team and visit programme.....	10
The gap between the Planning Visit and the Review Visit can be adjusted during the date-setting stage .....	11
<b>Other aspects of review .....</b>	<b>12</b>
Reflective Analysis, Advance Information Set, case studies and Quality Code mapping .....	12
Review visit.....	13
Student engagement .....	14
Reporting .....	15
Annual discussion .....	16
Follow-up activity: Focus On projects .....	16
Review teams and QAA Scotland officer .....	16
Administrative and other support for review.....	17
<b>Conclusion and recommendations .....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Acknowledgements .....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Appendix 1: ELIR 4 participating institutions .....</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Appendix 2: Focus group questions for reviewers and institutional quality contacts.....</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Appendix 3: Questions for the sparqs' Student Engagement Staff Network.....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Appendix 4: Contextualised themes .....</b>	<b>25</b>

## Executive summary

Evaluation is an important aspect of the Enhancement-led Institutional Review (ELIR) method and is intended to help inform decision-making about the future direction of external review. Reaching the end of the fourth iteration of this review method (ELIR 4) marks a particularly significant point in time as the Scottish higher education sector considers its response to the major Scottish Funding Council Review report - *Coherence and Sustainability: A Review of Tertiary Education and Research*.

Extending over five sessions, from 2017-18 to 2021-22, this fourth cycle of review has faced a period of extraordinary disruption because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite this, institutions and QAA Scotland have worked collectively to adapt processes and deliver on the method, successfully holding the last two Review Visits at the end of 2021.

ELIR 4 introduced a number of changes, most notably implementing a contextualised approach aimed at further strengthening the enhancement focus of the method. We undertook an analysis of formal evaluation feedback through surveys completed by institutions and reviewers on completion of the review. Drawing on these survey returns, we explored five key topic areas through a series of stakeholder focus and discussion groups: balance between quality assurance and quality enhancement; contextualisation; documentation; outcomes and reporting; and processes. Our discussions gave us rich and comprehensive feedback from institutions, reviewers, student association/union engagement staff, the Scottish Funding Council and QAA Scotland officers.

We also undertook detailed desk-based research using institutions' Reflective Analyses, ELIR 4 Outcome and Technical Reports, and other documentary evidence which helped us examine areas such as: student engagement with contextualisation; the duration of Review Visits; mapping against the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (UKQC); and the gap between conducting the Planning and Review Visits.

Our overarching finding is that the ELIR 4 method continued to deliver an enhancement-led approach to improving/developing the student learning experience and assures the maintenance of academic standards. Areas highlighted for attention were more focused on making adaptation to the existing process with a continued emphasis on the enhancement-led approach.

We found that the principle of contextualisation was well received but did not result in maximum benefit to all institutions. While changes to the review team composition worked well, the contextualised approach had varied success. There was found to be a lack of a shared understanding about identifying and applying the contextualised approach throughout the review process.

Institutions have made progress in their use of data to inform their decision-making and the analysis of their strengths, challenges and priorities. This progress and focus needs to be maintained and the report recommends the continued use of data in enhancement-led approaches to developing the student learning experience.

The ELIR 4 method allowed a balance between providing confidence on aspects of assurance while maintaining an emphasis on enhancement. Further examination of the relationship between the Review Visits and annual liaison points is needed to ensure the balance is achieved in the most efficient and effective way.

As we enter a new era in Scotland, this reflection of the last five years of the ELIR 4 method sets the groundwork in looking towards the next review method. The report makes recommendations for consideration, including improving understanding of contextualisation, improving the use of data in review, developing reporting and follow-up, and student engagement.



## Introduction

1 This report details the evaluation of the ELIR 4 cycle, which ran from session 2017-18 to session 2021-22 (the cycle was expected to complete in 2020-21 but was delayed because of the COVID-19 pandemic). The report provides information on the evaluation methodology, key findings, and recommendations.

2 Evaluating each cycle has been an important part of the process to refine and improve the ELIR method from one cycle to the next. The end of ELIR 4 marks a significant time in the Scottish tertiary education sector as it responds to [Coherence and Sustainability: A Review of Tertiary Education and Research](#)<sup>1</sup> - a major Scottish Funding Council (SFC) review.

3 ELIR is one of the five elements of Scotland's [Quality Enhancement Framework](#) (QEF).<sup>2</sup> It is a cyclical institutional review method and the key components are: the Planning and Review Visits and associated Outcome and Technical Reports; follow-on report; annual discussion and follow-on ([Focus On](#))<sup>3</sup> activity. The ELIR 4 method is explained in a [Handbook and supported by operational guidance](#).<sup>4</sup> The Handbook states that 'ELIR acts as an integrating force for the Quality Enhancement Framework, commenting on the institution's engagement with each element of the Framework'. Other aspects, such as thematic review, are part of an overall quality approach in Scotland, which is responsive to significant questions or concerns.

4 The strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) analysis of ELIR 4 undertaken for the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) review (anticipated in 2023), demonstrates that the ELIR process meets the obligations of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) in respect of compliance with the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG). Particular strengths of ELIR relate to thematic analysis, embedding a quality culture, approach to designing and reviewing the method, process implementation and guidance, reviewer recruitment, and team composition and reporting. Possible development opportunities linked to ESG compliance of any future review method could include consideration of how use of part 1 of the ESG could be expanded in respect of reviewer training, extending the follow-up approach within the method and providing additional opportunities for reviewer continuing professional development.

5 The findings from this evaluation report are intended primarily to support the development of the next review method in Scotland but are likely to be of wider interest to other jurisdictions operating similar review methodologies.

---

<sup>1</sup> *Coherence and Sustainability: A Review of Tertiary Education and Research*: [www.sfc.ac.uk/review/review.aspx](http://www.sfc.ac.uk/review/review.aspx)

<sup>2</sup> Quality Enhancement Framework: [www.gaa.ac.uk/scotland/quality-enhancement-framework](http://www.gaa.ac.uk/scotland/quality-enhancement-framework)

<sup>3</sup> Focus On: [www.gaa.ac.uk/scotland/focus-on](http://www.gaa.ac.uk/scotland/focus-on)

<sup>4</sup> ELIR 4 Handbook and Guidance: [www.gaa.ac.uk/scotland/reviewing-higher-education-in-scotland/enhancement-led-institutional-review/handbook-and-guidance](http://www.gaa.ac.uk/scotland/reviewing-higher-education-in-scotland/enhancement-led-institutional-review/handbook-and-guidance)



## Methodology

6 All higher education institutions in Scotland take part in ELIR except the Open University in Scotland, which is subject to the [Quality Enhancement Review](#)<sup>5</sup> method. To date, 16 institutions have completed the ELIR 4 cycle with both [Outcome and Technical Reports published](#). Two institutions completed their Planning and Review Visits in the last quarter of 2021 (Abertay University and the University of the Highlands and Islands) and reports will be published in spring 2022.

7 Upon publication of the Technical Report, QAA Scotland (QAAS) sends the institutions and the ELIR review team members questionnaires for completion. The questionnaires are one of the key methods for evaluating the ELIR approach. They are extensive, comprising 37 questions with a mix of free text and Likert scale question types, and cover all aspects of the ELIR method (scope, method changes including contextualisation, ELIR team size and composition, communication and outcomes, annual discussion, ELIR team performance, training and support, the role of QAA Scotland, institutional self-evaluation, follow-up activity). The questionnaire responses were collated and, to support this evaluation of the method, a gap-mapping activity identified topics where further exploration of issues raised was considered necessary and valuable.

8 Seven focus/discussion groups were set up (three involving institutional quality contacts, two with a cross-section of reviewers, one with QAA Scotland staff who manage review activity, and one with Scottish Funding Council colleagues) to probe the five topics listed below:

- the balance between quality assurance and quality enhancement
- contextualisation
- documentation (Reflective Analysis (RA), Advance Information Set (AIS), Case Studies, Quality Code mapping)
- outcomes and reporting
- processes.

Further information on the question set used with reviewers and institutional quality contacts can be found in [Appendix 2](#)

9 A discussion activity was also run jointly by sparqs and QAA Scotland at the sparqs' Student Engagement Staff Network (SESN) session in December 2021 (see [Appendix 3](#)). The current approach to evaluating the ELIR method immediately following the Review Visit, does not include students directly and this activity provided a way to reach out to hear from staff who work closely with their student communities.

10 The timing of the Abertay University and University of the Highlands and Islands reviews precluded the institutional and review questionnaire responses being included in this evaluation activity but insights from them will be considered as the new review method is developed. Colleagues from both Abertay University and the University of the Highlands and Islands did, however, participate in the focus group work.

---

<sup>5</sup> Quality Enhancement Review: [www.qaa.ac.uk/reviewing-higher-education/types-of-review/quality-enhancement-review](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviewing-higher-education/types-of-review/quality-enhancement-review)

11 In addition to the focus/discussion group work, desk-based research was also completed and this covered:

- identifying how institutions engaged students in decisions on their contextualised themes
- identifying how many institutions included case studies as part of their ELIR 4 submission
- identifying any adjustments made to the duration of the Review Visit and the gap between the Planning and the Review Visits
- confirmation that a mapping to the UKQC<sup>6</sup> was part of the preparation for the development of the Reflective Analysis.



---

<sup>6</sup> UK Quality Code for Higher Education: [www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code)

## Findings

### Meeting the aims and objectives of ELIR 4

12 [ELIR 4](#)<sup>7</sup> was designed to meet three key objectives:

- promote holistic, evidence-based evaluation by institutions and the opportunity to engage in discussion on the outcomes of that evaluation with a team of peers
- deliver a clear statement on baseline quality and academic standards, and beyond that providing a suite of differentiated commendations and recommendations
- help whole-sector enhancement and developmental activity to be conducted, drawing on thematic information about strengths and challenges of the institutions reviewed.

Moreover, ELIR 4 sought to:

- be open and transparent, forward-looking and conducted in a collaborative spirit
- support the sector to secure academic standards and enhance the student learning experience
- reflect the principles of self-evaluation
- relate to the wider Quality Enhancement Framework in Scotland.

13 The questionnaire responses show that the current principles are still valued by institutions and reviewers. There is nothing in the feedback to indicate that the aims are not current or appropriate or need updating. However, if a new focus or direction is adopted in the new review method, it would be sensible to review the wording and look at changes of emphasis or any new aims that need to be introduced.

14 A response to the questionnaire did raise the question of potential tension between the enhancement-led approach and the need to assure academic quality and standards. This issue is also highlighted by potential changes resulting from a report published by SFC in June 2021. *Coherence and Sustainability: A Review of Tertiary Education and Research* makes a wide range of recommendations, including a set linked to the development of a tertiary quality enhancement framework for Scotland which is likely to have implications for the way institutional reviews will be conducted in the future.

15 The reviewer focus groups did not reveal any major concerns or strong opinions that the balance is too skewed towards enhancement although some of the changes, such as contextualisation, marked a shift to a more enhancement-led approach. The view from the reviewer and institutional quality contacts focus groups was that the balance between quality assurance (QA) and quality enhancement (QE) was about right and that effective questioning by the review team will allow both areas to be covered. The point was made that the institutional quality assurance arrangements are set out in the Advance Information Set (AIS) and any obvious concerns about the quality assurance arrangements would be flagged in these documents and, therefore, there is more time to consider quality enhancement. Most reviewers thought that there was a good balance between QE and QA in the Review Visit week although some considered that enhancement had higher visibility because

---

<sup>7</sup> ELIR Handbook (fourth edition): [www.qaa.ac.uk/scotland/reviewing-higher-education-in-scotland/enhancement-led-institutional-review/handbook-and-guidance](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/scotland/reviewing-higher-education-in-scotland/enhancement-led-institutional-review/handbook-and-guidance)



threshold assurance is more of a given based on the information in the AIS.

16 QAAS officers noted that the balance between the emphasis on QA and QE may shift between one review and the next. The consensus of QAAS officers was that it would be important to maintain the balance of QE and QA and that because of the review logistics any move towards more reporting on assurance should become part of annual liaison meetings rather than detracting from the current focus of ELIR visits.

17 While the SFC expressed overall confidence in the ELIR process it suggested that the robustness and rigour of the method was perhaps not readily apparent to a lay audience. In addition, SFC suggested it would be helpful to explore what adaptation could be introduced to ensure that a future review process can respond in a more timely manner if concerns are identified about an institution.

18 In discussing the value of ELIR with colleagues at the SESN session, one institution identified the value of ELIR in benchmarking against practice and performance of other institutions. Two institutions reported that ELIR had improved partnership working with students with one describing the effect as a cultural shift towards more structured student involvement.

## **Revisions to the ELIR 4 process**

### **Contextualisation**

19 ELIR 4 introduced several changes to the process against the ELIR 3 method, the most significant being the explicit emphasis placed on contextualisation. The introduction of a greater focus on contextualisation aimed to help institutions to focus on those areas where there is likely to be greatest benefit and to help ensure that the institution gains optimal value from its preparatory self-evaluation and the Planning and Review Visits.

20 Overall, the questionnaire feedback from institutions about contextualisation was mixed. Positive comments were mainly about the role contextualisation played in preparation for the review, including reviewing evidence and self-evaluation, and focusing on the most important priorities for the institutions. However, there was some confusion about how the concept should operate in practice. Institutions and reviewers recognised the value of contextualisation, and its role in the broader strategic approach to quality assurance and enhancement, but the intended practice/outcomes did not always materialise. From the questionnaire feedback it was not always clear why this was the case but included: a lack of a clear understanding about the concept; why discussions about context at the planning stage did not, in some cases, feed through into the Review Visit meetings and the final report; and the extent to which students have been involved in decision-making around contextualisation. It was suggested that more emphasis could be placed on the contextualised themes at the Review Visit with meetings dedicated to the areas identified by the institution.

21 We explored the idea of contextualisation in more detail through the focus groups. From the perspective of the reviewers, we learned that while there is support for the concept and the intention behind it, in practice there is a mismatch between the theory and the practice. On a positive note, the contextualised themes help the reviewers gain a better initial understanding of the institution under review and support recognition of differences between institutional priorities and mission. However, there were several comments from the reviewers including that the themes chosen did not always reflect the institution's current strategic priorities, and that themes raised by the institution as a strategic priority in meetings with the review team were not reflected in the institution's review documentation. There were also many similarities between the themes chosen by institutions over the duration of the

ELIR 4 cycle - for example, student engagement - which reflected a more general set of themes rather than themes specific to a particular institution ([see Appendix 4](#)). Also, themes were often not reflected throughout the Reflective Analysis produced by institutions and, in some cases, this gap persisted through the Review Visit and into the Technical Report. However, this shift in emphasis in the review does demonstrate a flexibility within the review method which was also considered valuable.

22 In focus groups with institutional quality contacts, it was clear that the identification of contextualised themes plays an important role in helping institutions focus on their strategic priorities and where the enhancement focus lies within an institution and how this should be reflected in the Reflective Analysis (RA) document. One institution expressed the view that contextualisation was an opportunity to engage the ELIR team in a consultative manner on ongoing developments and challenges. In some instances, the ease and confidence in selecting contextualised themes appeared to be associated with an institution's strategic review cycle. Two higher education institutions commented specifically about the identification of contextualised themes that closely aligned to themes emerging through recent strategic review activities. If this timing is important then it might have some bearing on the scheduling of institutions within the next review method. The institutional quality contacts also value being able to explain the institutional context to the review team at an early stage, which can then form the basis for discussion throughout the review process. Contextualisation provides a focus, for the review team, on what the institution considers to be important while the broader context should come through in the AIS and the RA. In terms of the contextualised themes running through the review into the final report, there was mixed experience with some themes coming through more strongly than others. It was noted that an understanding of contextualisation within the method developed over time and, that as a concept/approach, it was clearer for the institutions going later in the review cycle. The value of case studies was highlighted as a means of demonstrating the specific context of an institution.

23 There was a view from both reviewers and institutional quality contacts that while contextualisation is a positive development, it has not quite worked as anticipated and needs further development to embed the idea, making it more visible, or front and centre, rather than it appearing as it did, on some occasions, as an add-on to the process. One suggestion from the reviewers included increasing the duration of the Planning Visit from one day to two days to allow more time dedicated to discussing the contextualised themes. Another suggestion was that the contextualised themes are addressed through all the sections of the Reflective Analysis to provide a more consistent narrative. To support this, it was suggested that further guidance on the scope of contextualisation or examples may be helpful. Another suggestion was that during the Review Visits some meetings could focus more explicitly on the contextualised themes so there was less unpredictability about the coverage of the themes at the review.

24 In discussion, QAAS officers acknowledged that while contextualisation had been a positive development, with the intention of providing added value to institutions, its implementation had not been entirely successful. In addition to a lack of shared understanding or definition, QAAS officers also highlighted the tension between fulfilling the considerable scope of ELIR, while at the same time addressing contextualisation; the former tended to dominate, contributing in some instances to more patchy or insufficient coverage of contextualised themes. QAAS officers considered that the homogeneity of contextualised themes may partly relate to the requirements and priorities of the SFC's Outcome Agreement activity with higher education institutions across the sector. Contextualisation needs to be meaningful, consistently applied and understood, and operate in a way that maintains a balance between quality assurance and enhancement.

## **Early-stage discussions**

25 A change was made to the fourth iteration of the ELIR method to introduce and allow more detailed discussions about the scope and focus of the review at an early stage in the review timeline. This included discussions with the QAA Scotland officer managing the review and provided an opportunity for the institution to set out and evaluate its contextualisation decisions in advance of submitting the Reflective Analysis to the review team. While the questionnaire feedback did not include detail about the early-stage discussions, the indications provided suggested that institutions found it useful to engage at an early stage with QAAS, not least to begin discussion internally in preparation for the Review Visit.

26 Focus group discussions with institutional quality contacts identified how much the early support of QAA officers was valued in identifying contextualisation themes. The QAAS officer focus group emphasised that there was value in helping institutions understand the approach to contextualisation and how this should be reflected in the review documentation. It was also an early opportunity to discuss the composition of the review team so that it reflected the context in which the institution was operating - for example, the inclusion of an international reviewer or a reviewer from a small specialist provider or one which reflects the institution's approach to widening access.

## **Early feedback from review team**

27 Another innovation was to encourage feedback from the ELIR review team on the contextualisation decisions in advance of the Planning Visit. Following the submission of the Reflective Analysis, reviewers are asked for their comments on the proposed themes and whether there are more areas that the institution might be asked to include as one of the focal points of the ELIR. All of this was captured in what is known as the 'Early Themes' document. Questionnaire responses showed that the Early Themes document allows the institution and review team to discuss the decisions around contextualisation in more detail at the Planning Visit. The reviewer focus groups considered the Early Themes document to be a good way of identifying the main areas of interest and a useful reference point throughout the review process, although some reviewers cautioned against getting too fixed on the contents at such an early stage of the review as it was important to keep an open mind and a flexible approach. Similarly, the institutional quality contacts generally found the Early Themes document useful as a means of closer dialogue with the review team and supporting openness in the process.

## **Use of data in decision-making**

28 Another change was greater focus on the institution's use of data to inform its decision-making and the analysis of its strengths, challenges and priorities. The evaluation activity found that the feedback from institutions about the use of data was a welcome, positive development and one to be taken forward and strengthened in the next review method. This aspect of ELIR 4 is discussed in more detail in the section below on the [Reflective Analysis and Advanced Information Set](#). However, from feedback provided by the reviewer focus groups, there was a sense that while the use of data had become more overt in institutions' quality assurance arrangements, there was more to be done to consolidate the consistent use of data. At its best, reviewers saw that some institutions had a firmer grasp of the evidence, which had helped institutions to target the needs of different student groups.

29 The feedback from institutional quality contacts was an acknowledgement that the use of data for internal assurance was developing across a range of institutions. It was noted

that in the 2017-20 Enhancement Theme, [Evidence for Enhancement: Improving the Student Experience](#),<sup>8</sup> the role of data helped support the push towards greater integration between evidence/data and improvement within institutions. Institutions have engaged with the resources made available through, for example, the [HE Data Landscape Resource](#)<sup>9</sup> - one of the Theme outputs. Some examples of institutional data developments included greater use of dashboards and the development of more sophisticated use of learner analytics. However, it was noted that some institutions felt they had made significant progress in this area but this was not reflected in review reporting.

30 Greater use of data was also an area highlighted in discussions with the SFC who are keen to work with both the sector and QAAS to make more use of the data they hold on institutions in a way that helps inform the review process and provides greater confidence in an institution's ongoing management of quality and standards.

### **Tailored review team and visit programme**

31 In several other respects, ELIR 4 also introduced the option of greater flexibility, outlined in paragraphs 32 to 37.

### **The size and composition of the ELIR team can be varied to fit the institutional context**

32 Overall, the questionnaire responses reported that this aspect worked well with comments reflecting the positive impact of institutions being able to negotiate review team composition, including encouraging early self-reflection to identify what the institution wanted to gain from ELIR and how the review team could help the institution gain most value. One respondent welcomed the opportunity to request an international reviewer to join the review team. Focus group institutional quality contacts welcomed the ability to make suggestions about the ELIR team composition in terms of relevant background to help ensure a better understanding of an institution's context - for example, when looking at a multi-campus institution. The question of whether an international reviewer should be optional or a requirement on a review team was also discussed. The consensus among the institutional contacts was to maintain the option of an international reviewer where it fits better with the institution's operational context. The importance of maintaining an international perspective was highlighted in discussions with the SFC who emphasised the value of that external perspective in supporting an outward looking sector. This was a view shared by QAA Scotland officers. Another aspect for consideration raised in the questionnaire response was for further consideration to be given to the value of including a review team member from industry/commerce/professional practice.

### **The duration of the Review Visit can be adjusted**

33 The ELIR 4 Handbook anticipates that the Review Visit will last between three and five days, depending on the themes emerging from the Reflective Analysis and Planning Visit. In practice, 17 reviews were of five days duration. The one exception was a four-day review for a small specialist institution. The duration of the reviews was not raised as an issue in the feedback from the post-review questionnaire. However, given that the option of a shorter time span is possible as part of the ELIR 4 process, it was worth exploring.

---

<sup>8</sup> Evidence for Enhancement: Improving the Student Experience: [www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/completed-enhancement-themes/evidence-for-enhancement](http://www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/completed-enhancement-themes/evidence-for-enhancement)

<sup>9</sup> HE Data Landscape Resource: [www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/en/completed-enhancement-themes/evidence-for-enhancement/defining-and-capturing-evidence/data-landscape-resource](http://www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/en/completed-enhancement-themes/evidence-for-enhancement/defining-and-capturing-evidence/data-landscape-resource)

34 The duration of a review is often linked to the complexity of provision under review and what is likely is that the review teams considered that to do justice to the themes (both the themes arising from review of the ELIR documentation, and the contextualised themes highlighted by institutions) and evidence base to be explored, they would need the full five days. When we tested this assumption with the reviewers through the focus groups, we found that reviewers confirmed the supposition, and that the length of the review was driven by the number of areas that had to be covered in the Technical Report. One international reviewer on the focus group noted that, in their experience, reviews in other countries were shorter - for instance, three days - but that teams had less time to reflect on the evidence, meetings with different types of students were amalgamated into one meeting or a 'by exception' approach was adopted so that areas identified following the Planning Visit that were not a concern would not be covered at the Review Visit.

35 There was a general view shared by most institutional quality contacts and reviewers that five days was about right for a Review Visit because of the scope of the review and also to provide sufficient time for the review teams to make robust judgements and institutions to have the opportunity to demonstrate both their approach to quality assurance and quality enhancement. Discussion with QAAS officers also reinforced that in most cases five days was right in order to do justice to the amount of work undertaken by the institution in preparing for the review and also to give as many staff and students as possible an opportunity to meet with the review team.

### **The gap between the Planning Visit and the Review Visit can be adjusted during the date-setting stage**

36 The desk-based review of the Technical Reports found differences between reviews in the gap between the Planning Visit and the Review Visit. Most reviews (12 from 18) opted for a gap of six weeks between reviews. The reason for this is unclear but an assumption can be made that this fitted better with the institutions' academic timetables in conjunction with the availability of QAAS resources. In three of the 11 cases, the gap between the Planning Visit and Review Visit (as originally planned) was extended by several months due to delays caused by COVID-19 restrictions and uncertainties.

37 Of the remaining reviews, three opted for an eight-week gap between the Planning Visit and the Review Visit and three opted for a seven-week gap. Therefore, based on the evidence in the review reports, the aim of greater flexibility between reviews was met.





## Other aspects of review

### Reflective Analysis, Advance Information Set, case studies and Quality Code mapping

38 Many aspects of ELIR 4 built on previous iterations of the review method and so institutions continued to prepare and submit a Reflective Analysis (RA) and an Advance Information Set (AIS) which includes key quality assurance documents.<sup>10</sup> The RA should demonstrate the institution's capacity for self-reflection and critical evaluation. The evaluation will be evidence-based and students will be involved in preparing the RA.

39 The AIS provides the ELIR team with direct access to information about the institution's key processes for securing academic standards and assuring quality, including a mapping of the institution's policies and practices to the UK Quality Code. The desk-based review of the Technical Reports, supported by evidence from the RAs, found that all institutions had undertaken a mapping of their quality framework against the UKQC. In a limited number of cases the Technical Reports also detailed where the mapping had highlighted areas for development. The value of the mapping was explored in the focus groups. In the reviewer group it was found that the mapping documents provide a useful summary of how the institution is meeting the threshold expectation in line with sector expectations. In the focus groups with the institutional quality contacts the value of the mapping against the UKQC was more mixed. For some it is still highly valuable and an exercise in testing out alignment with the Quality Code. For others, less so because of changes made to the Quality Code in its most recent iteration. These include the move to a less detailed, higher level set of expectations which makes mapping institutional processes against the Quality Code more challenging.

40 The questionnaire asked institutions about including greater emphasis on the institution's approach to using data to inform its decision-making and what impact it had. The responses generally welcomed this development as it was recognised that more emphasis on data will increasingly feature in QE/QA activity. Four institutions chose data/evidence focused topics as part of their contextualised themes. Other comments included the benefits of aligning the structure of the AIS with the RA for ease of reference and more clarity about the documents needed for the AIS. One institution observed that the submission of both the RA and the AIS facilitates core quality assurance elements of the review being largely considered and dealt with in advance, and therefore the Review Visit sessions being more enhancement focused. However, it appears that not all institutions had the same experience with the focus on enhancement lessening as other areas covered by the review were addressed and received greater attention.

41 The ELIR 4 Handbook states that case studies will no longer be needed when submitting a Reflective Analysis, institutions are able to submit a case study if they wish to present information in that format. While the desk-based review of the Technical Reports did not find any clear evidence of case studies being submitted, a review of the Reflective Analyses and evidence indicated that seven institutions did include case studies in their submissions. This suggests that the use of case studies can still be considered a useful

---

<sup>10</sup> The AIS is expected to comprise the following kinds of information: a mapping of the institution's policies and practices to the Quality Code; a sample of recent institution-led review reports and the responses to them; SFC annual returns for the period since the previous ELIR; a sample of annual monitoring reports; an analysis of the external examiner comments for the preceding academic year; an analysis of student feedback for the preceding academic year ([ELIR 4 Handbook para 40](#)) [www.qaa.ac.uk/scotland/reviewing-higher-education-in-scotland/enhancement-led-institutional-review/handbook-and-guidance](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/scotland/reviewing-higher-education-in-scotland/enhancement-led-institutional-review/handbook-and-guidance)

means by which institutions can provide evidence to review teams and that the flexibility is welcome. However, some reviewers considered the RA to be too long and unwieldy with too much description and not enough evaluation of effectiveness. It was suggested that imposing a word limit could help focus the drafting of the RA by institutions. Beyond ELIR activity, institutions have used the RA in recruiting and inducting senior staff, professional/statutory and regulatory body accreditation, and Teaching Excellence Framework submission. One institution made an interesting point about the value of the RA to it prior to the ELIR visits; the institution's approach to developing the RA had established a community around ELIR and helped to identify early on the staff that might meet with the ELIR team. For this institution, the process of RA development was considered as valuable as the document itself.

42 At the reviewer focus groups it was noted that the RA and AIS were most useful when there was cross-referencing between the two documents to demonstrate the interplay between the routine quality assurance processes and the approach to quality enhancement. QAAS officers echoed the reviewers' comments on the importance and quality of the AIS. In discussing the relationship between the RA and the AIS, the institutional quality contacts generally dismissed the view made by some questionnaire respondents that the AIS was predominantly QA focused and RA largely QE focused.

43 One point raised by reviewers was that what was missing from the review documentation was a focused and transparent action plan addressing the actions taken by the institution to demonstrate progress against the recommendations in response to its previous ELIR review. This would provide confidence that an institution has addressed all the previous issues and that review teams do not have to spend time addressing recommendations made at the previous review. In response to this suggestion, at the focus groups for institutional quality contacts, it was pointed out that the 'year-on' follow-up report is intended to demonstrate progress against the recommendations. Some institutional contacts expressed the view that an action plan running for the full review cycle may not make sense as institutions will look to address the recommendations in the aftermath of the review and then move on to other priorities. It was also noted that 12 months can be a relatively short period when implementing change and being able to demonstrate the impact through evidence. It was suggested that the timeline for the year-on report should be extended to two years to allow time for actions to be considered through all the formal governance structures with evidence of impact. To some extent, the more extended monitoring of progress is addressed in the annual meetings between QAAS and the institution but a more formal record of progress against actions taken submitted at the time of the ELIR may help strengthen this process.

44 QAAS officers noted that the follow-on report came 12 months after publication of the review reports, which were published 16 weeks after the Review Visit. Officers emphasised the importance that time-bound recommendations are followed up and that recommendations are actioned and fulfilled before the next ELIR or that there is an appropriate explanation why this has not happened. It was suggested that a table updated annually, and considered as part of annual liaison with institutions, would simplify the reporting of action against recommendations and improve transparency.

## **Review visit**

45 Based on the questionnaire responses the comments were mainly positive about the scope of the ELIR. In the focus groups there were minimal comments about the conduct of the Review Visit with all institutional quality contacts generally content with the way the Review Visit had been conducted.

46 Review Visits scheduled between March 2020 and December 2021 were conducted online and the response from institutions was generally positive with many viewing reviews conducted online as equally effective as in-person reviews. Colleagues at the SESN session highlighted that online review meetings with students facilitated attendance and engagement by students with caring/dependent responsibilities who may not have participated had they been required to attend on-campus meetings. However, there were some caveats raised by reviewers, and recognised by the institutional quality contacts, about the missed opportunities for nuanced discussion and a review team's overall appreciation of the campus, for instance, although the latter could be mitigated by a virtual tour. It was noted that a hybrid approach with some participants meeting the team in-person and some online during the same meeting would not work well.

## **Student engagement**

47 The ELIR 4 Handbook states that the effectiveness of student engagement is a significant focus of the review and will look at the extent and effectiveness of that partnership in the approach institutions take to engaging students in their own learning.

48 For ELIR 4 there was an intention for more emphasis on student engagement in determining the focal points for the ELIR as part of contextualisation. Findings from the desk-based analysis indicated that institutions were engaged with including students in their decisions about contextualisation. The desk-based review of the Technical Reports found that, overall, the institutions being reviewed engaged students in the development of the Reflective Analysis and the associated contextualised themes. In all cases the institutions being reviewed formed a steering group to oversee the production of the RA and engaged students in a variety of methods including membership of the steering group and any sub-groups formed to support it. Other methods of student engagement included the use of focus groups and surveys to collect student views on the RA and the themes under consideration. In four of the Technical Reports there was explicit reference to the role of students in the selection of contextual themes. There was only one report where the role of students in the decisions around the selection on themes was not highlighted although the review team did confirm that the university had adopted an effective approach to preparing for ELIR with the RA.

49 The reviewer focus groups confirmed that there was student engagement throughout the ELIR 4 process, including identifying contextualised themes. Institutional quality contacts confirmed that student engagement was an important aspect of the review process. The extent to which students were involved varied; in some cases involvement went beyond the key student association sabbatical officers and included school-level student officers. One institution had successfully involved students in RA writing groups. Another institution actively fed back to students at each stage of the ELIR process. QAAS officers confirmed that while all institutions provided engagement opportunities, the extent of uptake was patchy.

50 In discussion with colleagues at the SESN session, while there was confirmation of student engagement in the different aspects of ELIR, contribution was often limited to one or two key sabbatical or student officers. Institutions and student associations/unions have used different approaches in trying to engage a larger body of students in ELIR but this is an ongoing challenge. There was a view expressed that students do not necessarily fully understand the role of quality enhancement and quality assurance within their learning experience. One colleague indicated that successful engagement was partly about conveying to students the value of their investment of time and effort in ELIR. Another challenge highlighted in SESN discussions was the recognition that as the ELIR cycle extends over a number of years students may be involved in one or two aspects but it is

difficult for students to be familiar with the bigger picture. There is a need for further collective effort to secure more consistent, meaningful student engagement and contribution.

## Reporting

51 The reporting of review outcomes is in the form of an Outcome Report and a Technical Report. The ELIR Handbook identifies the institution as the primary audience for the Technical Report, which has a key function of providing the underpinning evidence for the Outcome Report (and may also be of interest to quality assurance contacts at other institutions and key agencies within the sector). The Outcome Reports are aimed at an informed lay audience such as lay members of governing bodies and student representatives. Questionnaire feedback from institutions was largely positive about the format of the reports and their use in disseminating ELIR outcomes and informing strategic discussions. However, it was noted that there was not always a clear link between the themes identified as part of the process of contextualisation and the reports. Despite this, the reviewers from the focus groups considered the Technical Report a useful document based on the level of detail about the context for the findings included in the report. This view of the Technical Report was generally supported by the institutional quality contacts although it was acknowledged that the use of the Technical Report was limited beyond key quality and senior staff and it was suggested that the report could be improved by clearer signposting of issues within the reports so that summary sections clearly indicate recommendations made by the review teams.

52 In terms of the review outcomes, the reviewers' view was that there is a reluctance to use too many formal recommendations because this feels at odds with a positive judgement. Therefore, there is a tendency to include language that reads like a formal recommendation but is not recorded as such. Similarly, there is an apparent reluctance to use priority actions or time-identified actions in reports because they are perceived as representing greater concern than other recommendations rather than a legitimate call for timely action to address an issue that has been identified by the review team. One issue raised against the use of priority actions was that the issue identified may require longer term action to implement and that does not fit with the specified timescale in the report. However, this misses the most important point of a time-limited recommendation and that is to make it an institutional priority. Equally, it was noted that there is value in having the option of a priority action and, at the same time, not over complicating what is already a technical document.

53 Reviewers also commented on some cases where there has been limited progress on a recommendation from the previous ELIR resulting in a very similar recommendation in a subsequent ELIR. This reinforces the point in paragraph 43 about the benefits of an action plan (or similar) submitted as part of the AIS demonstrating progress against actions from the previous review. Another observation was that institutions with the same threshold judgements may have great variation in the number of commendations and recommendations.

54 Institutional quality contacts recognised that the fuller Technical Report contained suggestions and also aspects of positive practice that were not recorded as formal outcomes (recommendations or commendations) but were nevertheless valuable in supporting an institution's development and focus. Organising these statements in a collective grouping in the Technical Report was suggested.

55 It was clear from the discussions at the SESN that students did not engage with the fuller Technical Report but student association/union staff did. Student engagement with the Outcomes Report was more routine, which is written for a lay audience.

56 The style of reporting was also an area discussed with the SFC who indicated that there may be benefit in future reports offering a style that is more designed for an external audience and presents the findings and recommendations in a more straightforward way, with greater clarity to help explain the relative level of concern about what may be complex issues.

## **Annual discussion**

57 Annual discussions are an important feature of the review process and provide an important opportunity for information sharing between QAA Scotland and the institution. In ELIR 4, there is an increased emphasis on student involvement in the annual discussions, which in the questionnaire responses was described as very helpful for students to gain a better understanding of the wider context. For many institutions the value of the annual discussion is the relationship it develops between the institution and QAAS. The greater insight it provides into institutional developments helps make preparation for the Review Visits more straightforward for both the institution and QAAS. One institution summarised it as, 'a helpful checkpoint in the academic year that we are continuing the development of teaching and the institution in an enhancement-led way'.

58 Suggestions from the questionnaire to improve the annual discussion included adding to the agenda a regular student-led item about their interaction with the institution and areas for improvement. In the focus group with institutional quality contacts there was a general recognition of the usefulness of the meeting but some frustration that as an annual event it does not have the benefits of ongoing regular engagement to build a better understanding of developments within institutions. Institutional quality contacts also highlighted the variability of student engagement with annual liaison with QAAS. However, there was an expectation that having two separate annual discussion meetings in session 2021-22, with one including a specific emphasis on students, might help to improve student engagement.

59 The annual discussion also featured in discussions with the SFC who view it as an opportunity to follow up on any potential concerns identified through either the ELIR process or more broadly, in a timely way. The annual discussion may also be the opportunity to focus more on quality assurance aspects, recognising that much of ELIR is focused on enhancement and contextualised themes.

## **Follow-up activity: Focus On projects**

60 The [Focus On](#) projects aim to help institutions and students' associations/unions with work in their key priority areas. The topics come out of the recommendations and commendations from ELIR. Focus On ties these outcomes to developmental activities, resources and events that the whole sector can get involved in. The responses from the questionnaire were very supportive of the Focus On projects described generally as a success with participation in projects seen as a great benefit allowing for reflection followed by action. The Focus On projects were also highlighted by the institutional contacts as a positive contribution to enhancement of learning and teaching within the individual institutions and across the sector.

## **Review teams and QAA Scotland officer**

61 QAA Scotland allocates reviewers to ELIR teams. The composition of the ELIR team is flexible and should address the nature of the institution and the scope of the review, in line with contextualisation. Feedback was very positive about this aspect of the review process and covered in the comments above about the size and composition of the ELIR team.



62 Currently, each ELIR is managed by a senior QAAS officer, who provides advice to the institution on its preparations for the review and supports the ELIR team in its initial analysis of documentation. The QAAS officer accompanies the ELIR team during the Planning Visit and for the last day of the main Review Visit. The questionnaire feedback welcomed the flexible approach adopted and the effective communications that allowed the review work to continue even during the difficulties caused by COVID-19.

63 One area that has emerged is whether the review process would be more effective if the QAAS officer joined the review team for the whole of the Review Visit, in addition to participating in the Planning Visit. Currently, the coordinating reviewer role includes keeping the review team on track and ensuring that the review team operate in accordance with the published review method. However, in feedback it was suggested that the QAAS officer managing the review could be an observer during the Review Visit. This would have the benefit of the QAAS officer being closer to the actual review activity and ensuring that areas such as contextualisation are reflected more in the activities of the review team and the final report. There was a mixed response to this suggestion from the focus groups with some reviewers welcoming the idea of more support for the team and others more cautious over the potential impact on the peer-led process and the value placed on the QAAS officer acting as a neutral arbiter on the final day of the review.

64 In discussing this potential change with QAAS officers, they saw this as an opportunity to attend the review to better understand the thinking of the review team so that at the final meeting they are better informed about how recommendations and the final overall judgement had been reached. Being present throughout the process would be helpful for the development of the final report. Attendance of the QAAS officer would need to be considered carefully particularly with regard to the role of the coordinating reviewer. ELIR is a peer review process and the QAAS officer being present has the potential to cause tensions here if it is not well managed.

### **Administrative and other support for review**

65 The general feedback in the questionnaire about the administrative and other support available during the ELIR process was positive. There were calls for more information and support in a range of areas, including a brief summary of ELIR, to be shared more widely with colleagues not directly involved in the preparations for review. More information that clarifies the expectations of the review team was also highlighted as being helpful. There was also a suggestion from reviewers for more information on the Quality Enhancement Framework and how that links to the broader culture of enhancement. It was suggested that the briefing event for institutions should include sabbatical student officers and not just institutional staff; however, generally this event was viewed positively in terms of starting to prepare for review and the formation of steering groups, and development of the contextualised themes.

## Conclusion and recommendations

66 The main findings include the following:

- The overall feedback from the questionnaire and focus groups is that the ELIR 4 method continued to deliver an enhancement-led approach and strengthened in several aspects of practice including: promoting discussions about institutional priorities and actions; the role of students; and enhanced use of data.
- The feedback suggests that the ELIR continues to provide assurance about the enhancement of the student learning experience and how institutions maintain academic standards.
- The comments from the questionnaire and focus group discussions were more focused on making adaptation to the existing approach to ensure continued emphasis on the enhancement-led approach in a future review methodology rather than suggesting that wholesale change is required to the method and approach.
- Areas for further consideration include developing a more consistent understanding of the application of the principle of contextualisation in order that the benefits of the approach can be maximised. Other areas for consideration include developing the use of data/evidence, the role of the QAAS Officer, the role of institutional liaison meetings, student engagement and the follow-up after a Review Visit.

The recommendations are:

<b>Meeting the aims and objectives of ELIR 4</b>	If a new focus or direction is adopted in the new review method the aims and approach should be reviewed (see paragraphs 13 and 14).
<b>Balance between assurance and review</b>  <b>Contextualisation</b>	To help maximise the value of contextualisation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• review terminology and provide further guidance, drawing on the suggestions made within the focus groups (see paragraphs 19-24)</li> <li>• consider the value and feasibility of a sector-wide review schedule that accommodates the timing of an institution's strategic review (see paragraph 22)</li> <li>• review the purpose of QAAS annual liaison with institutions and explore how these could be used to provide greater ongoing confidence about assurance and standards, allowing more space for the emphasis on contextualisation at Review Visits (see paragraphs 16, 59).</li> </ul>
<b>Use of data</b>	Strengthen the greater focus on the institution's use of data (see paragraphs 28-30) which might include guidance and support on effective critical self-evaluation.  Work with the SFC to determine how its data and data expertise might enhance the next review method in support of developing the ELIR documentary submission, and ongoing discussion about evidence and data at annual touch points with institutions (see paragraph 30).

<b>ELIR team size and composition</b>	<p>Continue to tailor the review team composition to reflect each institution's context including maintaining the option of an international reviewer (see paragraph 32).</p> <p>Consider the addition of a team member from commerce/business/professional practice (see paragraph 32).</p>
<b>ELIR documentation</b>	<p>QAAS to work with institutions to offer additional support and guidance on Quality Code mapping (see paragraph 39).</p> <p>Establish an indicative word limit for the Reflective Analysis (see paragraph 41).</p>
<b>Review Visits</b>	<p>Apply learning from the increased use of digital technology during the pandemic to support as effectively as possible meetings at Planning and Review Visits (see paragraph 46).</p> <p>Consider the attendance of the QAA Scotland officer throughout the duration of the review as an observer (see paragraphs 62 and 63).</p>
<b>ELIR outcomes and reporting</b>	<p>Review the format of ELIR reporting considering (see paragraphs 51-56):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the relationship between recommendations, commendations, priority actions and overall judgements</li> <li>• utility/accessibility beyond quality specialists.</li> </ul>
<b>Follow-on report</b>	<p>Extend the submission timeline of the follow-on report from one year to two years (see paragraphs 43 and 44).</p> <p>Consider the use of a simple table format, updated annually, to help track progress (see paragraph 44).</p>
<b>Student engagement</b>	<p>Work with sparqs and institutions to identify ways to increase contribution to, and engagement with, a wider group of students including in evaluating the different components of the review method (see paragraphs 49, 50, 58).</p>

## Acknowledgements

We are grateful to all our colleagues - from institutions, reviewers, sparqs, the Scottish Funding Council and officers from within QAA Scotland - who shared so openly their insights and reflections on the ELIR 4 method.

## **Appendix 1: ELIR 4 participating institutions**

University of Aberdeen

Abertay University

University of Dundee

Edinburgh Napier University

University of Edinburgh

Glasgow Caledonian University

Glasgow School of Art

University of Glasgow

Heriot-Watt University

University of the Highlands and Islands

Robert Gordon University

Queen Margaret University

Royal Conservatoire of Scotland

Scotland's Rural College

University of St Andrews

University of Stirling

University of Strathclyde

University of the West of Scotland



## Appendix 2: Focus group questions for reviewers and institutional quality contacts

The questions below were used as the key prompts in discussions with reviewers (R) and institutional quality contacts (IQC).

### Contextualisation

- 1 To what extent do you think the concept of contextualisation is well understood? What does it mean to you? (R, IQC)
- 2 What would it mean in practice to operationalise the concept of contextualisation - is a definition needed? How can the contextualisation approach be more effective? (R, IQC)
- 3 To what extent did discussions about context at the planning stage feed through into the review meetings and the final report? (R, IQC)
- 4 To what extent would QAAS officer attendance during the review week, to provide guidance to the review team about how to make more use of the contextual information, help? (R)

### Documentation

- 5 How do you view the relationship between the Reflective Analysis (RA), Advance Information Set (AIS) and case study submissions? Some feedback suggests colleagues see the AIS as quality assurance focused and the RA as quality enhancement focused. Do you agree with that view? How might that view affect how ELIR is delivered? (R, IQC)
- 6 What is the most effective way for higher education institutions (HEIs) to demonstrate progress/direction of travel from one ELIR to the next - should this be evident through the ELIR action plan? Would it be helpful to HEIs to comment against each section of their previous ELIR Technical Report? What might be ways to achieve this? (R, IQC)
- 7 What value does the RA have to institutions beyond ELIR? What would increase the value? (IQC)
- 8 What is the value of the Quality Code mapping to the review process/institution? (R/IQC)
- 9 There was a deliberate move for ELIR 4 to include greater emphasis on the institution's approach to using data to inform its decision-making and the analysis of its strengths, challenges and priorities - to what extent was this achieved? Was it reflected in reports? How could this aspect be improved? Any examples? (R, IQC)

### Processes

- 10 Main visit duration - ELIR Handbook allows for flexibility but of 16 reviews, all except one were five days - how can the duration of the main visit be shortened? What changes to the way ELIR operates might affect this in terms of the use of the Planning Visit and ELIR documentation? (R, IQC)

- 11 To what extent has the ELIR 4 method delivered on its ambition to continue championing student engagement in all stages of the process including through ongoing annual discussion meetings? (R, IQC)
- 12 How could more time be carved out for team discussion with students during the Planning Visit and Review Visit? (R, IQC)
- 13 Annual discussion - how can students be more effectively involved - a different style of session (workshop versus meeting), student-led item? Would briefing notes and an HEI pre-meeting briefing be helpful? (IQC)
- 14 What's your view on in-person versus online review? (R)

### **Outcomes and reporting**

- 15 How useful did you find the early themes document and how could its use be improved? (R, IQC)
- 16 What is the value of the Technical Report and how could they be improved? Are the Outcome and Technical Reports written in a way that makes them easily understood by students? (IQC)
- 17 To what extent are you satisfied with the approach to outcomes: overall judgement; commendations and recommendations and priority actions? What changes would you make? (R, IQC)

### **Assurance and enhancement**

- 18 Overall, to what extent have the developments to ELIR 4 method met their intention of strengthening the enhancement focus of the method? In what ways do you feel this is most evident? How/where could this be improved? (R, IQC)
- 19 Overall, to what extent do you consider ELIR strikes the right balance between assurance/academic standards and enhancement? How would you change the process to move the emphasis? (R, IQC)
- 20 To what extent did you manage and conduct the review with an enhancement as well as an assurance focus? (R)

### **Appendix 3: Questions for the sparqs' Student Engagement Staff Network**

- 1        What has been the value of ELIR 4 in improving the student learning experience?
- 2        To what extent did the review feel like your review about your institution's learning experiences, and not just a process that could be applied anywhere?
- 3        To what extent did the whole ELIR cycle (Planning Visit, Review Visit, annual discussion, follow-on, Focus On) involve students?
- 4        How useful are the Outcome Reports and Technical Reports to current and prospective students?
- 5        What might be the best ways to capture the student view in evaluating different aspects of the next review method?

## Appendix 4: Contextualised themes

Overarching theme	Contextualised themes identified in institutional Technical Reports
Student engagement, support and experience (13 HEIs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student engagement (DU)</li> <li>• Student engagement (HWU)</li> <li>• Student engagement and a sense of belonging (GCU)</li> <li>• Student engagement in quality (ENU)</li> <li>• Student support and engagement (GU)</li> <li>• Student support (EU)</li> <li>• Exploring ways to improve student representation and engagement (GSA)</li> <li>• Student community and student voices (EU)</li> <li>• Student voice and feedback (SRUC)</li> <li>• Student feedback (including student voice) (SU)</li> <li>• Wider student experience (GCU)</li> <li>• Student experience strategy (QMU)</li> <li>• Quality of student experience for students not on the Edinburgh campus (ENU)</li> <li>• The direct entrant student experience (ENU)</li> <li>• Student voice (UHI)</li> <li>• Student experience (AB)</li> </ul>
Student population changes and characteristics (9 HEIs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Significant increases in the number of PGT students, reflecting University strategy (AU)</li> <li>• A growth in student numbers studying online, as the University expands this type of provision (AU)</li> <li>• The impact of the decline in the energy sector on recruitment to disciplines such as Engineering and Geosciences (AU)</li> <li>• A rebalancing of student numbers to meet the SFC target that no subject should have a gender imbalance greater than 75:25 (AU)</li> <li>• The potential impact of Brexit on recruitment of EU students (AU)</li> <li>• The nature of the student population (RCS)</li> <li>• Engaging with equality, diversity and inclusion (GSA)</li> <li>• Diversity (StA)</li> <li>• Widening access (ENU)</li> <li>• Widening access (RGU)</li> <li>• Widening access and participation (SU)</li> <li>• Widening participation (EU)</li> <li>• Increased numbers of students from SIMD20 and 40 postcodes, in accordance with the University's commitment to widening access (AU)</li> <li>• Access to education (AB)</li> </ul>

Facilitating success, infrastructure and community (9 HEIs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fostering partnership cultures and communities; retention: supporting student success (HWU)</li> <li>• Student-centred (student success, support, enhanced curriculum) (UWS)</li> <li>• Skills to succeed (AB)</li> <li>• Student journey: progression and pathways (SRUC)</li> <li>• Learning and teaching infrastructure and study-space development (GU)</li> <li>• Campus environment (STU)</li> <li>• Online, digital and work-based learning (SU)</li> <li>• Campus and community (multi-campus, widening access, global reach) (UWS)</li> <li>• Programme organisation, management and delivery (GCU)</li> <li>• The curriculum and quality processes (RCS)</li> </ul>
Employability/entrepreneurship (5 HEIs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employability - students are ready to succeed and thrive in the professional world (ENU)</li> <li>• Employability, enterprise and entrepreneurship (QMU)</li> <li>• Student skills and employability (EU)</li> <li>• Employability (RGU)</li> <li>• Enterprise (StA)</li> <li>• Employability and employer engagement (UHI)</li> </ul>
Working in partnership - students, industry/employers, PSRBs (4 HEIs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaborations and partnerships (STU)</li> <li>• Engagement and partnership (employers, industry/PSRBs, students) (UWS)</li> <li>• Student partnership at the core of decisions and at the heart of the institution (RGU)</li> <li>• Working with students (STU)</li> </ul>
Staffing and development (4 HEIs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff development and engagement (GU)</li> <li>• The proportionately large numbers of part-time staff (RCS)</li> <li>• Teaching and academic careers (EU)</li> <li>• Professional discussion of learning and teaching (SRUC)</li> </ul>
Scottish HE overseas (3 HEIs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The development of transnational education (TNE) with particular focus on the Doha campus (AU)</li> <li>• Internationalisation (DU)</li> <li>• Global learning and teaching (HWU)</li> </ul>
Using evidence and data (4 HEIs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Using evidence to enhance the student experience (QMU)</li> <li>• Business information and reporting (SRUC)</li> <li>• Using data to enhance provision and student experience (RGU)</li> <li>• Use of data to enhance the student experience (UHI)</li> </ul>



Assessment and assessment feedback (2 HEIs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assessment and feedback (GCU)</li> <li>• Assessment and feedback (GU)</li> </ul>
Change management (1 HEI)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintaining the student and staff experience and engaging in enhancement in the face of turbulence in the physical estate, and the practical, organisational and emotional challenges GSA has faced since the last ELIR (GSA)</li> <li>• Developing cross-GSA strategic approaches to enhancement and change management (GSA)</li> </ul>
Other (7 HEIs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Graduate School (QMU)</li> <li>• One Dundee (DU)</li> <li>• Health and wellbeing (STU)</li> <li>• Degree awarding powers (SRUC)</li> <li>• The role as a national conservatoire (RCS)</li> <li>• The extensive pre-HE provision (RCS)</li> <li>• Learning and teaching enhancement strategy - development, implementation and impact (UHI)</li> <li>• Digital technology (AB)</li> </ul>

AU=University of Aberdeen; AB=Abertay University; DU=University of Dundee; ENU=Edinburgh Napier University; EU= University of Edinburgh; GU=University of Glasgow; GCU=Glasgow Caledonian University; GSA=Glasgow School of Art; HWU=Heriot-Watt University; UHI=University of the Highlands and Islands; QMU=Queen Margaret University; RCS=Royal Conservatoire of Scotland; RGU=Robert Gordon University; StA=University of St Andrews; SRUC=Scotland's Rural College; STU=University of Stirling; SU=University of Strathclyde; UWS=University of the West of Scotland

© The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education 2022  
18 Bothwell Street, Glasgow G2 6NU  
Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786

Tel: 0141 572 3420  
Web: [www.qaa.ac.uk/scotland](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/scotland)