



Scotland's Tertiary
Quality Enhancement
Framework

Institutional Liaison

Guidance for Institutions

2025-26

December 2025



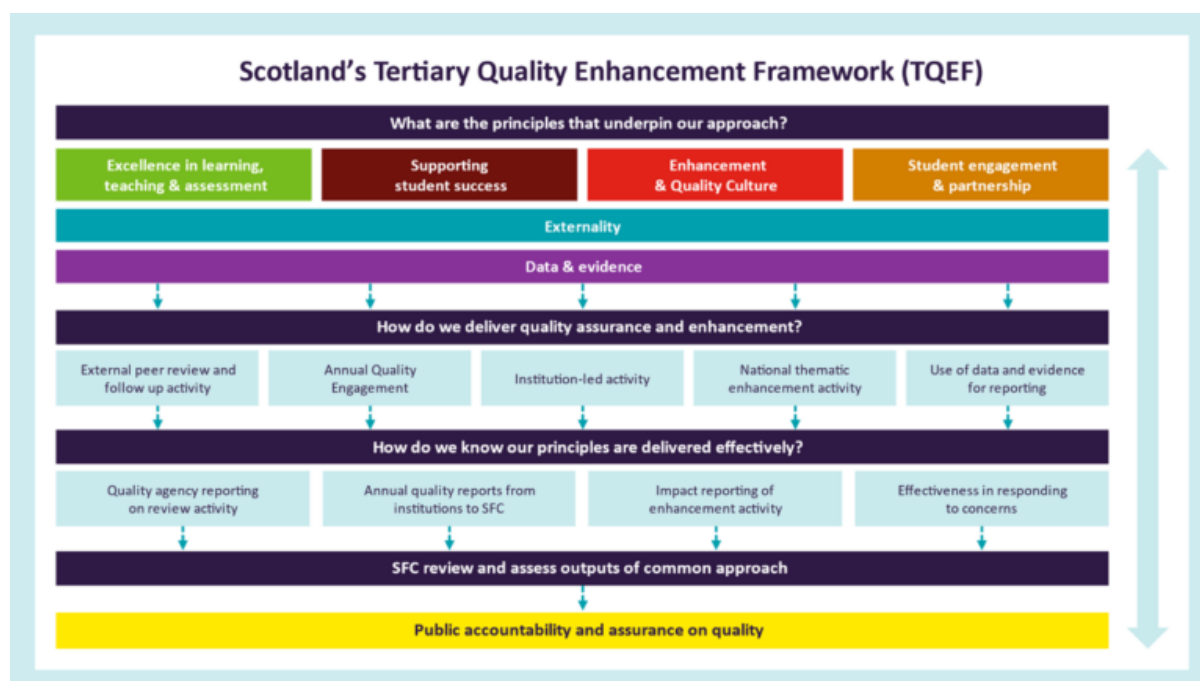
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1 Context

Institutional Liaison and TQEF

Institutional liaison is an element of Scotland's [Tertiary Quality Enhancement Framework \(TQEF\)](#) which is the quality assurance and enhancement framework for further and higher education provision delivered by Scotland's colleges and universities. The TQEF seeks to answer the question: *'Is the provision delivered by Scotland's colleges and universities of high quality and is it improving?'*. Institutional liaison plays a key role in answering that question.



Institutional liaison is one component of Annual Quality Engagement (AQE) involving engagement with both the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) and Quality Assurance Agency (QAA). Further information about the role of Annual Quality Engagement can be found in the [SFC Guidance on Quality for colleges and universities AY2024-25 to 2030-31: refresh](#).

Institutional Liaison and TQER

Tertiary Quality Enhancement Review (TQER) is the external peer-led and enhancement-focused review method for Scotland's tertiary sector. All outcomes from TQER include follow-up activity. Each institution will submit an action plan, as part of TQER follow-up activity, that are reviewed as part of their annual Institutional Liaison Meeting (ILM).

2 Overview of Institutional Liaison

Purpose of Institutional Liaison Meetings (ILMs)

QAA undertakes an annual programme of Institutional Liaison Meetings (ILMs) with each of Scotland's colleges and universities (except the year in which institutions are undergoing external review).

The main purposes of ILMs are to:

- discuss progress against actions to address external review recommendations, including agreeing actions as closed
- discuss arrangements for an institution's upcoming external review
- discuss developments in an institution's approach to managing quality and academic standards
- consider developments in and the impact of an institution's approach to enhancement (including engagement with STEP)
- consider developments in and the impact of an institution's approach to student engagement and partnership
- provide a formal opportunity for institutions to seek, and for QAA to provide, independent advice on matters relating to quality
- monitor progress against any matters arising from the Scottish Quality Concerns Scheme (SQCS)

The meetings will be supported by a set of documentation (see **section 4 Preparing for Institutional Liaison Meetings** and **Appendix A: Institutional Liaison Pre-Meeting Submission**). The supporting documentation includes the institution's Self Evaluation and Action Plan (SEAP) which will form the basis of a key part of the discussion.

'No surprises'

ILMs along with the regular contact the institution will have with QAA, through the ad hoc provision of advice and guidance and institutional engagement with Scotland's Tertiary Enhancement Programme (STEP) activity, support the 'no surprises' approach that the Scottish tertiary education sector has adopted. Under the 'no surprises' arrangements, institutions should seek advice from QAA about approaches they might adopt to avoid potential risks to quality and standards. Institutions should also inform QAA of any potentially adverse outcome in relation to quality and/or academic standards - for example, critical outcomes arising from institution-led quality review (ILQR) processes or from professional, statutory and regulatory body (PSRB) engagements. The 'no surprises' approach means that institutions can seek advice from and share information with QAA in relation to quality matters, engendering trust, confidence, and openness.

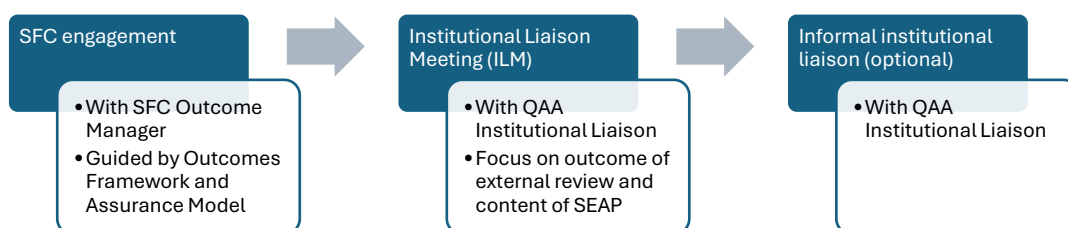
Institutional Liaison and sector learning

ILMs are key mechanisms through which QAA can facilitate sector-wide learning by:

- identifying areas of effective practice in relation to quality and enhancement
- gathering sector intelligence that will enable us to identify key risks, issues and challenges institutions are facing across the Scottish tertiary sector
- supporting the sector at an institutional and national level through the provision of advice and guidance, links into networks of practice, or signposting to resources and other institutions

3 Format of Institutional Liaison Meetings

ILMs are undertaken on an annual basis, except in those years where an institution is undergoing external review. ILMs will normally take place following the annual quality engagements with SFC. ILMs will usually be held in the spring with most engagements being completed by the end of May. Each institution has been assigned a QAA Institutional Liaison Officer, who will schedule and coordinate the ILM. The QAA Institutional Liaison Officer will be their primary contact point for advice and queries outwith the TQER.



The ILM is held between the QAA Institutional Liaison Officer and a small group of staff and student representatives from the institution. Suggested attendees from the institution are¹:

- Head of Quality (or equivalent)
- Deputy or Assistant Principal (Learning & Teaching) (or equivalent)
- Students' Association/Union Vice-President (Education) (or equivalent)

Each ILM will be scheduled for approximately two hours and conducted either as an in-person visit or online.

¹ This list is indicative and does not preclude other relevant colleagues within the institution and its students' association/union from participating in the ILM.

4 Preparing for Institutional Liaison Meetings

Discussion at ILMs will focus on a set of discussion points, supported by a set of evidence comprised largely of existing material or information already prepared for other purposes.

- ILMs will be supported by the documentation detailed in **Appendix A: Institutional Liaison Pre-Meeting Submission**.
- An indicative agenda for ILMs can be found in **Appendix B: Institutional Liaison Meeting – Indicative Agenda**.

Institutions may also choose to submit additional documentation where they feel this may support ILM discussions.

Evidence to support the ILM should be submitted by the institution **two weeks** in advance of the meeting. Institutions will receive the agenda at least **one week** in advance.

Evidence submitted for the ILM will not need to be resubmitted in subsequent years, unless there are changes from this initial submission.

Institutions who have undergone TQER in the **previous academic year** are not required to resubmit evidence for the ILM that was already provided as part of their Advance Information Set.

Student involvement in Institutional Liaison Meetings

Student involvement is a key part of the ILM process. In addition to student attendance at the meeting, institutions are expected to consult with their student representatives to ensure there is an understanding of the purpose of the meeting and to support students' contribution to the discussion. The indicative agenda can support institutions to prepare students for the meeting. sparqs have also produced the Student Learner Experience (SLE) model, which is designed to support student engagement with a range of quality processes, including TQER and ILMs, and a student-facing practical guide to TQER 2025. These resources are available from the [sparqs website](#).

5 After the Institutional Liaison Meeting

The QAA Institutional Liaison will create a brief note of the meeting and share this with the institution **within three weeks** of the meeting. The ILM note will include a record of pertinent discussion points from the meeting and any follow up actions or ongoing monitoring agreed. The institution will have the opportunity to provide points of factual accuracy that it feels should be reflected in the final note.

Closing off TQER actions

Where the QAA Liaison Officer is satisfied that the evidence submitted prior to, and the discussion during, the ILM, demonstrates that the institution is making satisfactory progress

against TQER actions, this will be recorded in the notes. This may include marking action(s) as 'closed'. In some cases, however, the QAA Liaison Officer may wish to engage in wider discussion with QAA colleagues before making the decision to close any action(s). Where this is the case, it will be recorded in the notes as an action for the QAA Liaison Officer to complete after the meeting.

Potential escalation

ILMs are one of the mechanisms for QAA to provide assurance to the SFC of the ongoing maintenance of academic quality and standards between cyclical external reviews. Where concerns arise about the timeliness or effectiveness of actions being undertaken in response to external review outcomes, these will be discussed at the meeting along with any rationales or mitigations put in place by the institution. At the ILM, QAA will highlight any matters to be reviewed: at the next formal ILM, an upcoming TQER or through additional liaison activity if this is required.

QAA will also consider whether any escalation is required including notification to SFC. Any information provided to SFC will use the notes from the meeting which the institution will have seen and have had an opportunity to comment on for factual accuracy. From this information, SFC may wish to instigate further action where there is unsatisfactory progress.

6 Informal Institutional Liaison

There is also the opportunity for other meetings or contact to take place between institutions and QAA across the year. QAA can provide advice and guidance on quality matters and can create a structured opportunity for institutions to share emerging developments and issues with QAA under the 'no surprises' approach.

For any questions related to this document, please contact your QAA Institutional Liaison Officer or nations@qaa.ac.uk.

7 Appendix A: Institutional Liaison Pre-Meeting Submission

Evidence to support the ILM should be submitted by the institution **two weeks** in advance of the meeting. Institutions will receive the agenda at least **one week** in advance.

Evidence submitted for the ILM will not need to be resubmitted in subsequent years, unless there are changes from this initial submission.

Institutions who have undergone TQER in the **previous academic year** are not required to resubmit evidence for the ILM that was already provided as part of their Advance Information Set.

Documentation/evidence	Required for 2025-26	Optional
Most recent Self Evaluation and Action Plan (SEAP)	✓	
A copy of the full report and action plans emerging from the last external review	✓	
A copy of the current Student Partnership Agreement (or equivalent) with the Students' Association (or equivalent)	✓	
A copy of the institution's current Learning and Teaching Strategy or equivalent, supported by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Action plan (or equivalent) supporting the delivery of this Strategy for the current academic session Evaluation of previous session's action plan (or equivalent) 	✓	
A copy of an institution's approach to annual monitoring supported by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A sample of annual monitoring reports from the last academic year (up to four) Any summaries or analyses of annual monitoring activity 	✓	
A copy of the institution's approach and process for undertaking institution-led quality review (ILQR), including arrangements for considering Professional Services review, supported by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A copy of reports and follow up from ILQR undertaken since last ILM Any summaries or analyses of the completed ILQRs 	✓	

Data used by the institution internally for oversight of:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • retention and progression • outcomes • complaints and appeals • student disciplinary cases <p>These should include analysis of any trends and attainment gaps for the last five years</p>	✓	
Paper from academic governance committee outlining any recent changes to academic processes or regulations	✓ (if applicable)	
Enhancement topic-related activity (including STEP)		✓

Appendix B: Institutional Liaison Meeting – Indicative Agenda

Institution	
QAA Attendees	
Institution Attendees	
Date	

1. Welcome, introductions and apologies
2. Overview of ILM purpose and role in TQEF
3. Institutional approach to academic standards and quality
 - Strategic priorities (institution and student's association/union)
 - Any relevant developments in the institution's approach to managing quality and setting, maintaining, reviewing and assessing academic standards
 - The use of data and self-reflection in institutional quality processes
4. External review
 - Progress since last external review and update to action plan
 - Arrangements for TQER (where relevant)
5. SEAP
 - Discussion of matters within the SEAP that are not covered by 4, above
6. Institutional approach and key features of student partnership
7. Institutional approach to enhancement
 - Strategic approach to enhancement (institutional-level and national-level)
 - Institutional overview of engagement with national enhancement activity, including STEP
8. Any other matters
9. Questions and close