Institutional Liaison Meetings (ILMs)

Guidance for Institutions

2026-27

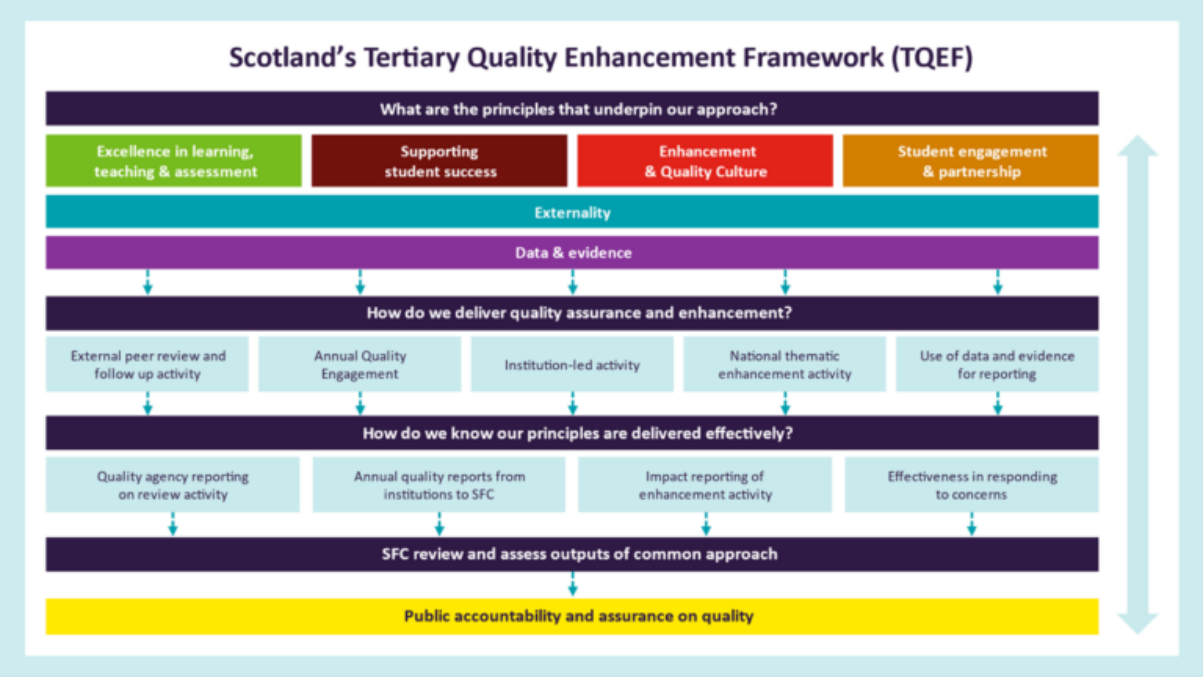
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1 Context

1.1 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 the Annual Quality Engagement (AQE), involving engagement with both the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) and the 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.

1.2 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, which is reviewed as part of the institution's annual Institutional Liaison Meeting (ILM).

2 Overview of Institutional Liaison

2.1 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 in the year in which an institution is undergoing external review.

The main purposes of ILMs are to:

- discuss progress against actions to address external review recommendations, including, where appropriate, agreeing actions as closed (see **Section** Closing off TQER actions**5.1 Closing off TQER actions**)
- discuss arrangements for an institution's upcoming external review (where appropriate)
- 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 Scotland's Tertiary Enhancement Programme - 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 and Document Index**). 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.

2.2 'No surprises'

Under the 'no surprises' arrangements adopted by the tertiary education sector in Scotland, 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 outcomes in relation to quality and/or academic standards - for example, critical outcomes arising from institution-led quality review (ILQR) processes, those identified from professional, statutory and regulatory body (PSRB) engagements, or issues that have been identified outwith standard processes such as through student feedback. 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. ILMs, along with

the regular contact the institution will have with QAA, including through institutional engagement with STEP, support the 'no surprises' approach.

3 Format of Institutional Liaison Meetings

ILMs will be held after the submission of Self-Evaluation and Action Plans (SEAPs), 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 the institution's 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 are[1]:

- Head of Quality (or equivalent)
- Deputy or Assistant Principal (Learning & Teaching) (or equivalent)
- An elected officer of the Students' Association/Union (or equivalent) with responsibility for education

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

4 Preparing for Institutional Liaison Meetings

Discussion at ILMs will be supported by an agenda and include a set of evidence comprised largely of existing material or information already prepared for other purposes.

[1] This list is indicative and does not preclude other relevant colleagues within the institution and its students' association/union (or equivalent) from participating in the ILM, although QAA suggests keeping meeting numbers to no more than 4-6 from the institution to allow for focused discussion.

- ILMs will be supported by the documentation detailed in **Appendix A: Institutional Liaison Pre-Meeting Submission and Document Index**
- An indicative agenda for ILMs can be found in **Appendix B: Institutional Liaison Meeting – Indicative AgendaAppendix 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 **six 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. The institution should notify its QAA Institutional Liaison Officer where information from previous years should be considered for the meeting.

Institutions that 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. See **Appendix A: Institutional Liaison Pre-Meeting Submission and Document Index.**

4.1 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 Learning 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. These resources are available from the sparqs website.

5 After the Institutional Liaison Meeting

The QAA Institutional Liaison Officer will create a brief note of the meeting and share this with the institution **no more than six weeks** after 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 two weeks after the draft ILM note is shared to provide feedback on any points of factual accuracy that it feels should be reflected in the final note.

5.1 Closing off TQER actions

The QAA Institutional Liaison Officer will record in the notes where evidence submitted before, and discussion during, the ILM demonstrate satisfactory progress against TQER (or

earlier external review) actions. This may include marking action(s) as 'closed'. In some cases, however, the QAA Institutional 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 Institutional Liaison Officer to complete after the meeting.

5.2 Potential escalation

ILMs are one of the mechanisms for QAA to provide assurance to 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 identify any matters to be followed up, and whether this will be at the next ILM, at an upcoming TQER or through additional liaison activity. In some cases, however, the QAA Institutional Liaison Officer may wish to engage in wider discussion with QAA colleagues before confirming matters to be followed up and the mechanism for doing so.

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, outside of the formal ILM, 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 example, other meetings may include specific discussion on an institution's approach to ILQR.

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 and Document Index

Evidence to support the ILM should be submitted by the institution **six 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. The institution should notify its QAA Institutional Liaison Officer where information from previous years should be considered for the meeting.

Please complete the final column of this table and submit it, separately, as document 000 with your ILM evidence. Number each document with a unique numerical identifier and a title that identifies your institution, for example:

000 Central College of Scotland Document Index

001 Central College of Scotland TQER action plan

Items in the third column need only be resubmitted if they have changed since your last submission. Institutions that underwent TQER in the previous academic year do not need to resubmit evidence already provided in their Advance Information Set.

Where no evidence is submitted, please give the reason (for example 'submitted in 2025-26', 'submitted as part of TQER (reference number(s))' or 'not applicable').

Institutions that 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 2026-27	Required only if not submitted in 2025-26, or if an updated version is available	Document reference(s) submitted / reason for non-submission
1. Self-Evaluation and Action Plan (SEAP)*	✓		N/A - *QAA receives SEAPs directly from the SFC

Documentation/evidence	Required for 2026-27	Required only if not submitted in 2025-26, or if an updated version is available	Document reference(s) submitted / reason for non-submission
2. Action plan(s) emerging from the last external review (including the National Review of Awarding Arrangements, if applicable)	✓		
3. Documents evidencing progress against external review actions (if applicable)	✓		
4. A copy of the current Student Partnership Agreement (or equivalent) with the Students' Association/Union (or equivalent)		✓	
5. A copy of the institution's current Learning and Teaching Strategy (or equivalent)		✓	
6. Action plan (or equivalent) supporting the delivery of the Learning and Teaching Strategy for the current academic session	✓		
7. A copy of the institution's approach to annual monitoring/self-evaluation		✓	

Documentation/evidence	Required for 2026-27	Required only if not submitted in 2025-26, or if an updated version is available	Document reference(s) submitted / reason for non-submission
8. A sample of 4–6 annual monitoring/self-evaluation reports from the last academic year, covering the different levels of monitoring (for example, course/programme, curriculum area/faculty), plus any summaries or analyses of annual monitoring activity from that year	✓		
9. A copy of the institution's approach and process for undertaking institution-led quality review (ILQR), including arrangements for student-facing professional services		✓	
10. Reports and follow-up from ILQRs undertaken since the last ILM, plus any summaries or analyses of the completed ILQRs	✓		

Documentation/evidence	Required for 2026-27	Required only if not submitted in 2025-26, or if an updated version is available	Document reference(s) submitted / reason for non-submission
11. Summaries of analysis of data used by the institution internally for oversight of student outcomes (for example, retention, progression, attainment, award), including any trends (for example, attainment gaps) over a minimum of a three-year period. (Existing documentation is welcome, for example papers for institutional committees)	✓		
12. The last available annual report(s) summarising complaints and appeals, and student disciplinary cases	✓		
13. Documentation outlining any recent changes to academic processes or regulations (if applicable)	✓		

8 Appendix B: Institutional Liaison Meeting – Indicative Agenda

Institution	
QAA Attendees	
Institution Attendees	
Date	

1. Welcome, introductions and apologies

2. Actions from the last ILM

3. Institutional approach to academic standards and quality
    a. Strategic priorities (institution and students' association/union or equivalent)
    b. Any relevant developments in the institution's approach to managing quality and setting, maintaining, reviewing and assessing academic standards
    c. The use of data and self-reflection in institutional quality processes.

4. External review
    - Progress since the last external review and update to action plan
    - Arrangements for TQER (where relevant)
    - National Review of Awarding Arrangements (where applicable).

5. Institutional approach to, and key features of, student partnership

6. Institutional approach to enhancement
    - Strategic approach to enhancement (institutional-level and national-level)
    - Institutional overview of engagement with national enhancement activity, including STEP (e.g. membership of the STEP Network, engagement with STEP Projects, attendance at STEP meetings and events, and any institutional work relating to the STEP Topic)

7. Any other matters
    - Matters relating to the SQCS (where applicable)
    - Discussion of any matters within the SEAP that are not covered above

8. Questions and close
    - Summary of agreed actions
    - Next steps and timeline for the note.