



National Review of Awarding Arrangements

Guide for Institutions

April 2026

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Introduction and Background

- 1 The purpose of this document is to provide information about the [National Review of Awarding Arrangements](#) (National Review), specifically Phase 3. Due to the systemic risks identified by the [Targeted Peer Review](#) (TPR) of the University of Glasgow that was undertaken in October 2025, SFC, in accordance with its statutory duties is seeking additional assurance, beyond that which is provided by existing quality assurance mechanisms, that the issues identified through the TPR at the University of Glasgow do not represent a systemic issue within the Scottish tertiary education sector. SFC has commissioned the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) to undertake a national review of awarding arrangements in Scotland to provide that assurance. The National Review is designed to be rigorous, proportionate and provide assurance on matters relating to academic awarding arrangements.
- 2 The National Review is being delivered by QAA across four phases. This guide provides detail on phases one through three, and high-level information on phase four. The National Review Guide is intended to be used by Scottish higher education institutions (HEIs), staff and student associations to prepare for any involvement that they may have with the review. Colleges may also use the guide for information.

Phase 1 – Review of existing evidence

- 3 The first phase was a review of existing evidence held by QAA to identify current risks regarding awarding arrangements. The objective of this phase was to provide SFC with a summary of where matters similar to those identified in the TPR of University of Glasgow have been considered or observed at other HEIs. The first phase covered all HEIs in Scotland and concluded at the end of April 2026. This was a comprehensive information gathering exercise, based on the evidence currently available, across all HEIs to identify potential trails for further exploration in subsequent activity.
- 4 The desk-based review of existing documentary evidence aimed to identify references to specific themes such as:
 - reference to awarding practices
 - changes to degree classification arrangements
 - changes to academic governance and academic regulations
 - changes related to the academic administration of awarding arrangements.
- 5 Information that can be used as evidence regarding assurance and the current exposure to risk with regard to awarding arrangements includes available information such as:
 - Minutes/notes from Institutional Liaison Meetings (ILMs)
 - The content of Self-Evaluation and Action Plans (SEAPs)
 - Academic award regulations
 - Quality Enhancement and Standards Review reports
 - Enhancement Led Institutional Review 4 reports
 - Tertiary Quality Enhancement Review (TQER) reports.

- 6 The output of this work, which provides a sector level summary of existing evidence, highlights where further exploration may yield helpful information about practices across the sector to support further enhancement.
- 7 This activity was undertaken from February to April 2026. QAA provided the summary report to SFC in April 2026.

Phase 2 – Development of a thematic deep dive approach

- 8 The second phase comprised the development of a review methodology for deep-dive reviews into a sample of HEIs. QAA developed the specific methodology for review, drawing upon the methodology of the TPR and other review methodologies utilised within the UK.
- 9 QAA recognises that, noting both the ‘no surprises’ and enhancement led approach that is a feature of the quality assurance arrangements in Scotland, some HEIs may wish to voluntarily undergo the deep dive review. There will be no guarantee that a volunteer would be accepted, for example if sampling suggested other HEIs have a greater number of features that are preferred for exploration. The invitation to volunteer is contained within Annex 1.
- 10 It is vital to stress that including an institution in the sample does not mean that a concern has been identified.
- 11 The reviews will focus on lines of enquiry adapted from the University of Glasgow TPR, including those directly relating to assessment regulations and awarding arrangements. A number of lines of enquiry have already been identified and may be added to, following the completion of phase one of the project.
- 12 The lines of enquiry include:
 - Are the institution’s current assessment regulations effective to ensure standards are maintained consistently (and awards made) for the provision it delivers?
 - How does the institution ensure consistency of application, interpretation and understanding of assessment regulations (across all courses and its internal structure such as schools or faculties) and is this effective?
 - How does the institution review its assessment regulations and procedures and is that review process effective?
 - How does the institution ensure that award outcomes (including degree outcomes) are calculated and recorded consistently and is this effective?
 - How does the institution assure itself that intended learning outcomes are met when applying its assessment regulations and is this effective? (e.g. ensuring intended learning outcomes are met when awarding credit).
 - Where an institution operates both local arrangements (e.g. within a school, faculty, or similar) and an institution wide approach for the setting and implementation of regulations, how does the institution ensure that requirements for award of credit are in line with the institution-wide regulations or requirements and is this effective?
 - If the institution works in partnership with other organisations, are the arrangements and responsibility for awarding arrangements clear and effective?

- 13 In determining which institutions are selected for review, further evidence relating to assurance and the current exposure to risk with regard to awarding arrangements will be considered (referred to as selection criteria). This includes:
- Decentralisation of academic arrangements
 - Where the HEI operates provision where awards are likely to be made to students across different academic units (for example Business and French, English and History etc.)
 - The extent of the HEI's awarding body activity (by volume of students) for HE provision in the Scottish college sector (with greater numbers being preferred for inclusion)
 - Where QAA/SFC are aware there have been recent (last 3 years) changes of a substantive nature to assessment regulations
 - The proportion of student complaints received by a HEI in the last 3 years where those complaints relate to matters regarding assessment and awarding practice.

Phase 3 – Thematic deep dive review activity

- 14 The third phase will comprise the delivery of the deep-dive reviews of 8-10 individual institutions focused on the key lines of enquiry identified. These reviews will include an evidence submission (Annex 2) by the HEI under review, a desk-based analysis of that evidence by a peer review team (including a student reviewer), an on-site review visit, and the production of a report. Should QAA identify significant concerns within any single HEI during the third phase, the institution will be referred to the Scottish Quality Concerns Scheme. The third phase will run from May to November 2026. SFC will also consider, based on evidence derived to this point, whether further work is needed more widely across the tertiary sector.
- 15 QAA will conduct review activity between May and late September 2026 with the logistics of arrangements being determined immediately following the conclusion of phase 2. An individual report, which will not be published, will be prepared for each HEI setting out the review team's findings that will include recommendations for action to address any areas for development or weaknesses, and the identification of areas of good practice, as well as a published summary report that will name all participating institutions but not detail their individual outcomes.
- 16 The reviews will involve peer reviewers, including student reviewers, who may focus on more than one HEI as part of their engagement. QAA will develop bespoke training for reviewers for this activity and appoint QAA officers to manage each individual activity, which is in common with QAA's general approach.
- 17 Five HEIs will undergo a TQER in the 2026-27 academic year. QAA recognises that any further assurance activity may represent a challenge and burden where the HEI is also preferred for inclusion in the sampling exercise. Directing TQER reviewers to specifically consider these matters represents a risk as there is the possibility that this may skew a review team to consider these factors at the expense of others in the limited time available for a review, creating a new risk that full assurance is not gained with regard to all aspects of the Tertiary Quality Enhancement Framework. It is also important that the TQER methodology should be consistent across the review cycle. For these reasons, the National Review will be treated separately.
- 18 To widen the assurance given to SFC, during all 2026 ILMs (at both HEIs and colleges) QAA will explicitly address whether, having become aware of the findings

of the TPR in January 2026, there are any areas of their own provision or activity that HEIs and colleges are looking into further.

Phase 4 – Learning and enhancement activity

- 19 In line with the culture within Scotland's tertiary sector, it is important that the whole sector can learn from the assurance activity that has been conducted. Learnings from this work will be fed back to the sector through both the publication of the summary report and a sector-wide discussion on practice in this area.
- 20 At the end of the National Review process, QAA will design a programme of enhancement activity to facilitate sector-wide discussion on assessment regulations and awarding arrangements, which will be open to all of Scotland's colleges and universities.
- 21 However, we encourage enhancement to take place throughout the review process where it is beneficial, for example the TPR report includes a recommendation to the University of Glasgow to implement '*a coordinated approach to embedding 'compassionate communication' principles across all relevant academic and professional service areas*'. The report makes specific reference to the Academic Registrar Councils (ARC) resource [Compassionate Communications in Higher Education](#).
- 22 QAA Scotland has subsequently identified 'compassionate communication' as a key priority area for the sector as a whole and a project has commenced to facilitate the sharing of good practice and to support institutions to enhance their activities in this area, in order to improve the student experience for all learners in Scotland's tertiary sector.

Review Methodology

Background

- 23 The focus of this review is to determine whether an institution's arrangements for the awarding of qualifications are being applied consistently, effectively and transparently, and that academic standards are being maintained. Secondary considerations include how institutions ensure assessment regulations are accessible to and understood by students, and that communications to students regarding assessment and award outcomes are accurate, appropriately sensitive, and clear about the meaning of any outcomes.
- 24 The review, carried out by a small team of three trained peers including a student reviewer, will take the form of an onsite visit by the review team. Each review team will include at least one peer reviewer with experience of the Scottish sector. The review will be managed by a QAA officer. The responsibilities of the key roles within the review team are set out in Annex 3. HEIs will be advised of the membership of the review team and will be asked to confirm that there are no conflicts of interest with proposed team members before the team is confirmed.
- 25 The outcome of National Review will not result in formal judgements about the academic standards of the institutions' awards but will result in the identification of recommendations for action to address any areas for development or weaknesses and areas of good practice.
- 26 HEIs subject to the review are unable to appeal against the recommendations but can make representations on the grounds of procedural irregularity on the part of QAA. A complaint of this nature should be raised through QAA's Complaints Procedure.
- 27 The indicative timings for the National Review process are set out in Annex 4.

The approach

- 28 Phase 3 of the National Review will use a sample methodology based on the outcomes of Phase 1 and the criteria set out in paragraph 13. The review sample will be constituted of institutions who meet a significant number of the selection criteria and institutions who have volunteered to be in the sample. The deadline for volunteers is Friday, 8 May 2026, following which QAA and SFC will consider all institutions against the criteria for inclusion with additional consideration of those who have volunteered. Those institutions who have been selected for inclusion in the sample will be notified on Monday, 18 May 2026.
- 29 For each institution in the sample, QAA will schedule a bespoke proportionate review with identified lines of enquiry (paragraph 12). Lines of enquiry will be refined from the institution's outcomes of phases 1 and 2 of the National Review along with the review team's scrutiny of evidence submitted with the completed self-evaluation document set out in Annex 2.
- 30 The self-evaluation document should be completed with responses that are clear, concise and comprehensive. The timescale for this is outlined in Annex 4. Supporting evidence that institutions draw on to support the claims set out in the self-evaluation document should be listed in the final section. QAA expects institutions to liaise with its Student Associations for the completion of question 8 in the self-evaluation document.

- 31 The lines of enquiry will be considered in line with the reference points appropriate to the regulation of HEIs in Scotland. Some of these reference points will be common to all Scottish institutions, such as the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) guidance to institutions on quality and the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF). Some reference points will be UK-wide, such as the UK Quality Code for Higher Education incorporating Subject Benchmark Statements, and others will be international, such as those developed through the Bologna process. Institutions will also have regard to Part 1 of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) and to the UK Professional Standards Framework for Teaching and Supporting Learning.

Key stages in Phase 3 of National Review

- 32 Full details and timings can be found in Annex 4.
- 33 QAA will normally give institutions three weeks' formal notice of the date of submission of the self-evaluation document and supporting evidence. The notification will include the length of the review visit, which is likely to be one or two days and will depend upon the size and/or complexity of the institution. At this time QAA will also inform the institution of the composition of the review team and ask that the institution confirms that there are no conflicts of interest with proposed team members
- 34 The review team will undertake a desk-based analysis of the evidence base and meet to discuss their findings. As part of the discussion the review team will draw up a visit schedule and the lines of enquiry, which will be shared with the institution. The review team may also make a request for additional evidence to support it in coming to its findings. The review visit which will be in person will take the form of several meetings at the institution, including with students and Student Association representatives.
- 35 The specific days and details of the schedule for the visit will be for the QAA officer to agree with the institution in consultation with the review team. The schedule will include a private team meeting in advance of meetings with the HEI and a private team meeting following completion of meetings with the HEI to allow the review team to discuss and agree the findings for the report, based on the documentary evidence and meetings at the institution.
- 36 If the QAA officer becomes aware of issues that might affect delivery of the review or other areas of concern outside of the scope of the plan, these will be discussed with senior staff at QAA.

Outcomes and findings

- 37 Following completion of the review, the team will normally make recommendations for action to address any areas for development or weaknesses, as well as highlighting good practice. These will not be shared with the institution until the evidence-based findings report is drafted.

Reporting

- 38 After the review, QAA will prepare an evidence-based national report, drawing on the

individual institutional reports and will include the following:

- brief description of the review process and those involved
- description of the lines of enquiry
- findings related to the lines of enquiry
- recommendations for action to the HEI to address any areas for development or weaknesses
- areas of good practice.

39 Four weeks after the review, QAA will send the draft report to the institution and offer a two-week period in which any factual inaccuracies may be identified.

Follow-up

- 40 Where the overall outcome of the National Review results in recommendations for action, the institution will be required to submit an action plan, which will not be published. The action plan should be submitted to QAA for approval four weeks after the final version of the report has been received by the institution. The Action Plan will be followed up within the normal cycle of SEAPs, Institutional Liaison Meetings and/or TQER.
- 41 Following the National Review, QAA will undertake an evaluation of the review process, seeking feedback from the QAA officer, reviewers and the institution.

Annex 1: Invitation to volunteer to participate in National Review

National Review of awarding arrangements in Scotland

Background

SFC commissioned QAA to undertake a national review of awarding arrangements in Scotland to provide assurance that the issues identified through the recent Targeted Peer Review (TPR) of the University of Glasgow do not represent a systemic issue within the Scottish tertiary education sector.

As previously communicated, the national review will be delivered across four phases. The first phase was a review of existing evidence held by QAA to identify current risks regarding awarding arrangements. The objective of this phase was to provide SFC with a summary of where matters similar to those identified in the TPR have also been considered or observed at other higher education institutions (HEIs).

The second phase comprised the development of a review methodology for deep-dive reviews into a sample of Scottish HEIs. These reviews will focus on lines of enquiry adapted from the University of Glasgow TPR, including those directly relating to assessment regulations and awarding arrangements. QAA has developed a sampling methodology to determine a shortlist of HEIs to include in the third phase.

SFC agreed that HEIs are to be given the opportunity to put themselves forward to be included within the sample. The reviews will include an evidence submission by the HEI under review, a desk-based analysis of that evidence by a peer review team (including a student reviewer), an on-campus review visit, and the production of a report.

Invitation to volunteer

QAA is inviting HEIs to express interest in participating in Phase 3 of the national review.

It is important to note that submitting an expression of interest does not guarantee selection. Institutions will be chosen based on criteria including capacity, diversity, and alignment with the review's objectives.

If your institution would like to volunteer to participate, we would ask you to submit an expression of interest by Friday the 8th May 2026. The expression of interest should come with an endorsement from the Principal's office.

We look forward to working collaboratively with participating institutions.

Annex 2: Self-evaluation document

Please complete this self-evaluation document with responses that are clear, concise and comprehensive. When you draw on supporting evidence to support or inform your answers, please collate this and provide a clear list in the final section of the pro-forma. Question 8 should be completed with input from the HEI's Student Association.

Name of institution:	
Name of person and their job role completing this document:	
Date:	
1. How do you know the institution's current assessment regulations are effective and ensure standards are maintained consistently for the provision it delivers?	
2. How does the institution ensure consistency of application, interpretation and understanding of assessment regulations (across all courses and its internal structure such as schools or faculties) and how do you know if this is effective?	
3. How does the institution review its assessment regulations and procedures and is that review process effective?	

4. How does the institution ensure that award outcomes (including degree outcomes) are calculated and recorded consistently?
5. How does the institution assure itself that intended learning outcomes are met when applying its assessment regulations and is this effective? (e.g. ensuring intended learning outcomes are met when awarding credit
6. Where an institution operates both local arrangements (e.g. within a school, faculty, or similar) and an institution wide approach for the setting and implementation of regulations, how does the institution ensure that local requirements for award of credit are in line with the institution-wide regulations or requirements and is this effective?

<p>7. If the institution works in partnership with other organisations to award HE qualifications, are the arrangements and responsibility for awarding arrangements clear and effective? How often are the arrangements reviewed? [If not relevant please enter N/A]</p>		
<p> </p>		
<p>8. How does the institution ensure assessment regulations are accessible to, and understood by students, and that communications to students regarding assessment and award outcomes are accurate, appropriately sensitive, and clear about the meaning of any outcomes, and are these arrangements effective? [This question should be completed with input from the HEI's Student Association]</p>		
<p> </p>		
<p>9. How many appeals have the institution received on assessment and awarding and how many have been upheld over the last three years</p>		
AY	Number of Appeals related to assessment and awarding	Number of those Appeals Upheld
2024/25		
2023/24		
2022/23		
<p>10. How many complaints have the institution received on assessment and awarding and how many have been upheld over the last three years</p>		
AY	Number of Complaints related to assessment and awarding	Number of those Complaints Upheld

2024/25		
2023/24		
2022/23		

11. Do you have any further comments?

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12. Please list reference material/documents used:

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Annex 3: Key roles

QAA officer

A QAA officer assigned to each National Review. This is the person appointed by QAA to manage the process and the review team for each specific National Review.

Key responsibilities of the role are:

- liaising with the institution to agree details of the review
- acting as the primary contact for the institution during Phase 3 of the National Review
- coordinating the review team's activities throughout the process, including an appropriate division of responsibilities among team members
- ensuring the review is conducted in accordance with the process
- supporting the reviewers in identifying evidence and maintaining an ongoing record of the evidence
- ensuring the review team's conclusions are evidence-based
- editing the findings report to ensure alignment with QAA house style.

Reviewers

In addition to the QAA officer, the review team will include three reviewers, which includes one student reviewer. At least one reviewer will have experience of the Scottish sector.

Key responsibilities of the role are:

- reading and analysing the documentation provided
- participating in the review visits
- reaching conclusions based on the information gathered during the review
- contributing to and commenting on the review reports (and action plan as appropriate).

The student reviewer brings a learner perspective to the review.

Annex 4: Indicative schedule for Phase 3 National Review Visit

The schedule for each onsite National Review will be documented in the review plan and the timeline determined on an institution-by- institution basis. The table below provides an indicative timeline.

Working Weeks	Activity
0	QAA formally informs individual institution of the date of the review and requests that the self-evaluation document is completed. QAA informs institution of proposed review team
+1 week	Institution confirms agreement of the review team after checking for potential conflicts of interest
+3 weeks	Institution uploads self-evaluation document and supporting evidence to QAA's electronic folder
+4 weeks	Review team completes initial desk-based analysis
+5 weeks	Review team holds private online meeting to discuss initial findings, request additional evidence and agree a schedule, participants for the review meetings and finalised lines of enquiry.
+6 weeks	QAA officer sends the schedule, agreed lines of enquiry and request for additional evidence to the institution
+ 7 weeks	Institution uploads additional evidence. Institution confirms review visit meeting participants. Review team continues desk-based analysis.
+8 weeks	The onsite visit to the institution takes place
+9 weeks	Review team completes draft findings report
+10 weeks	QAA officer edits draft report
+11 weeks	Report moderated within QAA Scotland
+12 weeks	Draft report to the institution to check for factual inaccuracies (to be shared with Students' Associations)
+14 weeks	Institution's comments on factual accuracy are returned to QAA
+15 weeks	Review team reviews report in response to institution's comments
+16 weeks	Copy of the final report is sent to the institution and SFC
+20 weeks	If relevant, the provider submits an action plan to QAA

Annex 5: Data protection

QAA complies with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) (EU) 2016/679, the Data Protection Act 2018, and any other applicable data protection legislation in relation to personal data. QAA only processes personal data for the purposes of conducting its review activities and, in this case, ensuring data shall only be accessible to those who require access to carry the requirements of the Targeted Peer Review.

QAA is committed to ensuring and maintaining the security and confidentiality of personal and/or special category data, and all members of staff are responsible for handling data in accordance with QAA's Data Protection Policy so that personal and special category information is processed compliantly.

All QAA staff and reviewers undergo GDPR training on an annual basis.

How QAA gathers and processes personal information, the individual's rights and QAA's obligations are set out in QAA's Privacy Notice. There is a Data Protection Incident Reporting Policy and procedure for reporting, assessing and managing incidents.

QAA stores personal data and non-personal data securely and ensures the data is only accessible to those who require access to it to carry out the Targeted Peer Review. No data or information extracted from it will be passed to any party unless agreed in writing by QAA. All data or all copies or extracts made from it will be destroyed in line with QAA's records retention policy.

QAA is ISO27001 certified for information security management

The National Review, commissioned by SFC, is a thematic review focussed on awarding arrangements in Scotland and does not constitute an assessment against the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)

Post publication amendments	Date	By

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