

Operational Guidance: Tertiary Enhancement Topic (2022-24)

Purpose of the guidance

Quality Enhancement and Standards Review (QESR) and Institutional Liaison Meetings (ILM) make up Phase 1 of QAA Scotland's approach to the external review of quality enhancement arrangements for Scottish higher education institutions (HEIs) in the period 2022-24. The purpose of this operational guidance is to help institutions understand how the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) tertiary enhancement topic will be explored through both QESR and ILM in Phase 1.

Introduction

As part of the proposal for the development of a Tertiary Quality Enhancement Framework the SFC have, following liaison with relevant agencies, identified an enhancement topic that will:

- develop a shared understanding across the sectors
- co-create and develop impact in an area of common challenge, which supports outcomes for learners and staff
- help evaluate how a tertiary approach to sector-level enhancement could be created.

The tertiary enhancement topic is: **'The future of learning and teaching: defining and delivering an effective and inclusive digital/blended offering'**.

Background

Higher education providers have gone through several phases of delivery in the year since the first UK lockdown. Initially there was a shift to fully remote provision, followed by a period of intense planning for a mix of digital and in-person delivery. This was interrupted by the second national lockdown when some courses/programmes were forced to change to fully remote delivery, and then by the third lockdown most in-person teaching had to stop.

As a result of this move to digital, online and blended learning, which has continued in many institutions post pandemic, there have been questions about the effectiveness of provision delivered online and the impact that this has had on student outcomes. As a consequence, the tertiary enhancement topic will be considered through both QESR and ILM.

Quality Enhancement and Standards Review (QESR)

This operational guidance should be read in conjunction with the [Handbook for Scottish Quality Enhancement Arrangements \(Phase 1: 2022-24\)](#) which provides information in Annex 2. This guidance supplements the handbook to provide more information on areas for consideration as part of the tertiary enhancement topic and the documentation requirements.

As part of the QESR documentation, the institution is asked to provide a reflective summary outlining the institutional approach to effective and inclusive digital/blended offering. This summary should be no more than 2 pages and where applicable cross reference to other documentation submitted for QESR. For example, this could include:

- the current Learning and Teaching Strategy
- a Student Partnership Agreement or equivalent
- any changes or developments to quality assurance processes linked to digital/blended learning
- any changes to UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code) mapping in the context of digital/blended learning
- data used for oversight of retention and progression or degree outcomes to evaluate impact of digital/blended learning
- institutional analysis of student feedback in respect of digital/blended learning.

In addition, institutions may submit a supporting strategy or policy document related to digital/blended learning such as a digital learning strategy, policy or position paper.

The following sub-headings indicate areas for consideration by the review team and are suggested as a structure for the reflective summary:

Digital learning and teaching and strategic approach to enhancement

Areas for consideration

- Strategic developments linked to digital/blended learning, including identifying priorities and allocation of resources to achieve aims.
- What efforts have been made to address digital poverty to help ensure equity for all students with more learning online.
- The availability of learning materials for students to use in their own time.
- The use of enhancements such as online discussion forums, digital coursework submission and small group assignment to support learning and teaching.
- Development and support for students to help them to effectively develop their digital skills and ensure they are appropriately equipped to successfully engage with online and blended learning, teaching and assessment.
- Development and support for staff. How has the institution invested in staff development and digital to ensure they support the advancement of digital skills of educators and professional services staff, so they are equipped to develop and deliver high quality online and blended learning and support for students.

Digital learning and teaching and student partnership

Areas for consideration

- Arrangements for student representation, participation and engagement in their digital, online and blended learning experience.

Digital learning and teaching and the management of academic quality and standards

Areas for consideration

- The institution's approach to assuring academic quality and standards of digital and blended learning.

- Themes identified from institution-led review and/or annual monitoring on the delivery of digital/blended and any resulting actions.
- Consideration of any key themes for the institution arising from any appeals, complaints and academic misconduct cases in relation to digital, online and blended learning.
- Any areas where external examiners have highlighted areas of positive practice and areas for development related to digital, online and blended learning.

Digital learning and teaching and external reference points

Areas for consideration

- How the institution's digital, online and blended activity meets the expectations of the Quality Code and/or other external reference points, including where the institution considers that it displays positive practice and any challenges.

Digital learning and teaching and the use of data and evidence to inform approach

Areas for consideration

- Use of student feedback and student survey results to identify broad trends in student satisfaction with digital provision and highlight aspects of delivery that surveys suggest have had a positive effect.
- Institutional analysis of awards/attainment gaps and any trends in the data as they relate to digital, online/blended provision.

Digital learning and teaching: impact on the student experience

Recognising that the institution is taking a range of action, please provide an update on the impact of your approach on the student experience.

Engagement with the cross-sector Tertiary Enhancement Project 2022-24

In addition to outlining the institutional approach as described under the headings above, you should include a sentence or two about how the institution has engaged with the cross-sector Tertiary Enhancement Project 2022-24 - for example, by supporting the short research interviews conducted by QAA Scotland in May-July 2023.

Institutional Liaison Meetings (ILM)

The areas covered in the ILM align with the QESR process and there will be a particular focus on engagement in, and activity relating to, the current tertiary enhancement topic. The 2-page reflective summary of the institutional approach outlined above should also be included in the documentation submitted for ILM.

Published - 28 July 2023

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Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786

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