

Operational Guidance: Institutional Liaison Meetings for 2021-22

Purpose

1 QAA Scotland (QAAS) will undertake work on behalf of the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) as part of their Outcome Agreement (OA) for academic year 2021-22. This guidance sets out our approach to Institutional Liaison Meetings for 2021-22 as part of the transition quality arrangements spanning the completion of the Enhancement-led Institutional Review (ELIR) 4 and development and introduction of a new method of review. The Institutional Liaison Meetings will form part of a programme of work which will enable QAAS to provide assurance to SFC to enable it to fulfil its statutory obligation under Section 13 of the *Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 2005* to secure that provision is made for assessing and enhancing the quality of fundable higher education provided by fundable bodies.¹ These arrangements aim to respond to and be consistent with SFC's view that session 2021-22 is a transition period for Scottish higher education because of the ongoing impact on the pandemic; and to allow the Scottish Government to respond to the recommendations of the [SFC Review of Coherent Provision and Sustainability](#) which have potential implications for quality arrangements in Scotland and the development of the next review method for the sector.

Introduction/Background

2 In normal circumstances, QAA would be commencing a review of ELIR 4 leading to a revised method, and associated guidance, being published in early 2022. However, it has been agreed with SFC that we will delay the development of a new review method so we can take full account of the outcomes and recommendations of the [SFC Review into Coherence and Sustainability](#) report. This report recommends that SFC takes forward the development of a tertiary quality framework for fundable further and higher education provision in Scotland, including the alignment of Education Scotland and other agencies as necessary. QAAS understands that SFC intends to work with the further education and higher education sectors during session 2021-22 on the development of this tertiary quality framework.

3 The QAAS Outcome Agreement (OA) for academic year 2021-22 with SFC requires QAAS to develop quality assurance and quality enhancement arrangements for session 2021-22 - which SFC has defined as a transition year. As most colleagues will be aware, even without SFC's Review report, there would always have been a development year for designing the new method, where no reviews take place between ELIR methods, which would have necessitated QAAS having to expand/develop arrangements in order to continue to provide the necessary assurances to SFC around the quality of higher education provision in Scotland.

¹ www.sfc.ac.uk/about-sfc/how-we-operate/sfc-governance/governance-sfc.aspx

4 Since the introduction of the enhancement-led approach in 2003, the Scottish higher education sector has adopted an informal protocol for sharing information, often referred to as 'no surprises'. Under the 'no surprises' arrangements, institutions can seek advice from, and provide information to, Quality Assurance Agency Scotland (QAAS) officers. This is also supported through the Annual Discussion with institutions.

5 As part of the transition year (2021-22), the QAA Outcome Agreement with the Scottish Funding Council requires QAAS to increase QAA liaison engagement. This will entail replacing the [current ELIR Annual Discussion](#) with two institutional liaison visits to better understand successes and challenges. Institutional Liaison Meetings are intended to be useful to the institution, and an opportunity to reflect on its management of quality and standards and therefore there is flexibility around the precise agenda and who attends. The institutional contact is asked to agree the agenda with the QAAS Officer and provide information to support the meeting, as indicated below.

Meeting 1: Quality processes

6 **Purpose:** To focus on institution-led quality processes, outcomes and themes from the processes and the institution's mapping to the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code).

7 **Timing:** The meeting will be scheduled between QAAS and the institution to take place at a mutually convenient date between October 2021 and February 2022. The meeting duration will be approximately 90 minutes and will be held online.

8 **Suggested attendees:** Head of Quality/Quality Officer from the institution; QAAS Liaison Officer.

9 **Topics for discussion:**

- Update on Institution-led Review (ILR) - this might include themes from the institution's annual report to SFC, outcomes from the reviews themselves, the method of review being employed, and any changes/revisions to the review schedule.
- Update on the institution's approach to annual monitoring including any changes to policies/procedures, any themes arising from these reports which are considered at an institutional level and expectations around addressing actions.
- Consideration of any key themes and areas of learning for the institution arising from any appeals, complaints and disciplinary cases.
- Institutional analysis of awards/attainment gaps and any trends in the data.
- Update on matters related to assuring and maintaining the quality of academic standards and learning and teaching - this might include items being discussed at the key institutional committees responsible for quality, learning and teaching, and student experience.
- Discussion on the institution's approach to maintaining its mapping to the Quality Code.
- Other matters that the institution may wish to discuss linked explicitly to quality assurance and enhancement matters - for example, the outcome of PSRB reports/visits.

10 **Supporting documentation:** The institution is not expected to prepare material specifically for the Institutional Liaison Meetings; rather, QAAS would encourage higher

education institutions (HEIs) to use reports/committee papers that have been produced for internal purposes. It is anticipated that the meeting will be supported by the following set of information submitted two weeks before the meeting:

- the definitive internal document(s) describing the approach taken to Institution-led Review, including information about the forward schedule of reviews
- the Institution-led Review reports completed since the previous annual discussion meeting and, where relevant, the follow-up from any previous ILR reports discussed at earlier annual discussions
- any internal documents analysing the outcomes from Institution-led Reviews or evaluating the approach used
- the annual institutional report to SFC regarding Institution-led Reviews and related matters for session 2020-21
- the definitive internal document(s) describing the approach taken to annual monitoring and any annual institutional reports considering the outcomes from this process for session 2020-21
- minutes from the meeting of the key institutional committee responsible for the oversight of quality and standards for 2020-21
- a mapping of the institution's policies and practices to the Quality Code
- the HEI's annual report/analysis of appeals, complaints and discipline cases
- institutional analysis of awards/attainment gaps - data for session 2020-21 and any trend analysis the institution has done over the last five years.

Meeting 2: Strategic developments and approaches

11 **Purpose:** To focus on strategic developments linked to learning and teaching, sector themes, student engagement and ELIR progress.

12 **Timing:** The meeting will be scheduled between QAAS and the HEI to take place at a mutually convenient date between February 2022 and beginning of July 2022. The meeting duration will be 90 minutes.

13 **Suggested attendees:** Deputy Principal (Learning & Teaching); Head of Quality; Student President; Student Vice-President (Education); QAAS Liaison Officer.

14 **Topics for discussion:**

- Update on strategic developments linked to learning and teaching, and sector themes - for example, these might include approaches to digital/online learning; equality, diversity and inclusion; ongoing support for student transitions and institutional support for students with disruptive learning.
- Current developments in student engagement at the institution - this might include progress with activity highlighted in the student partnership agreement or equivalent document.
- Progress with ELIR relevant to the institution's position in the cycle - this could include the Follow-up report, and/or progress with actions arising from ELIR.
- Progress and engagement with the current Enhancement Theme - a strategic update on the progress of work in the institutional plan and consideration of the budget.

- Discussion on the extent to which the institution makes use of materials developed through the Enhancement Themes, Focus On projects and other related activity. This would provide an opportunity to share information on the impact of the Themes and Focus On outcomes and resources.
- Information sharing on matters relevant to ELIR and the Enhancement Themes - this might include updating QAAS on strategic developments at the institution and/or sharing current sector activity.
- Student feedback and student survey results - this might include an annual summary and/or analysis of student feedback from internal and external surveys.
- Other matters to be followed up from Meeting 1.
- Other matters that the institution and/or students' association wish to discuss.

15 **Supporting documentation:** The institution is not expected to prepare material specifically for the Institutional Liaison Meetings; rather, QAAS would encourage HEIs to use reports/committee papers that have been produced for internal purposes. It is anticipated that the meeting will be supported by the following set of information submitted two weeks before the meeting:

- the institution's current Learning and Teaching Strategy or equivalent and any other supporting strategy and policy documents
- information relating to developments in student partnership working at the institution including any Student Partnership Agreement
- the institutional ELIR action plan(s)
- information relating to any changes in the institution's approach to quality enhancement
- the institutional annual summary and/or analysis of student feedback from internal and external student surveys linked to the quality of teaching and learning and the broader student experience, such as the National Student Survey.

16 During 2021-22, two institutions - the University of the Highlands and Islands and Abertay University - will be participating in their Enhancement-led Institutional Review; therefore, both institutions will only be required to participate in Liaison Meeting 2.

Outputs

17 Following both meetings, the QAAS Officer will write a short summary report which will be shared with the institution to:

- summarise the key topics explored and discussions that took place during the meeting
- confirm any action points
- record any observations or recommendations made by the QAAS Officer to the HEI
- confirm whether it is the QAAS Officer's view that the institution continues to have appropriate arrangements in place to assure itself that academic standards and quality are maintained.

