

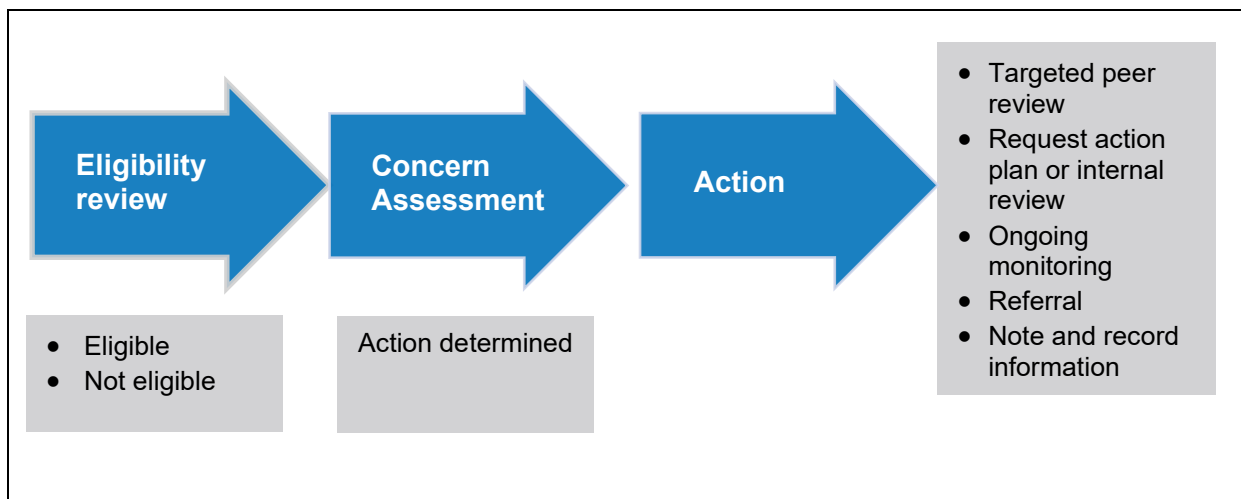


# Scottish Quality Concerns Scheme AY 2024-25

## Introduction

- 1 This is a summary report on the [Scottish Quality Concerns Scheme](#) (SQCS) in AY 2024-25 and is produced under QAA's Funding Agreement (FA) with the Scottish Funding Council (SFC).
- 2 The SQCS provides an opportunity for students, staff and other parties to raise concerns about the quality and standards of Scottish higher education to the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) Scotland. The aim of the SQCS is to promote confidence in the Scottish higher education sector by offering a responsive means for exploring issues brought to QAA Scotland's attention outside regular review arrangements. The process is designed to be proportionate and to enable issues to be resolved as early as possible.
- 3 Quality concerns raised under this Scheme relate to how higher education institutions (HEIs) in Scotland manage their academic standards, the quality of learning opportunities and the information that they make available about their provision. QAA Scotland considers concerns raised under the Scheme to safeguard and improve the overall quality of Scottish higher education by addressing weaknesses within a particular HEI. The SQCS looks at systemic issues and, accordingly, potential outcomes of the Scheme include the initiation of process changes and improvements rather than individual redress.

**Figure 1: Overview of the SQCS process**



- 4 SQCS is a three-stage process:
  - Eligibility Review
  - Concern Assessment
  - Action (which includes a Targeted Peer Review option).
- 5 When a concern has been deemed to fall within the scope of the SQCS following its Eligibility Review, it is assessed to determine the next steps. The Concern Assessment is a rigorous process, involving the in-depth scrutiny of evidence provided by the party raising the concern and response from the institution (typically with additional evidence). Following a Concern Assessment, the options are:
  - Targeted Peer Review
  - Request for an institutional action plan or internal review
  - Ongoing monitoring
  - Referral to other relevant body
  - Note and record information.
- 6 The Targeted Peer Review element is normally undertaken where there is an accumulation of evidence in respect of the matter raised and in relation to the level of risk identified to quality and standards. The process for a Targeted Peer Review includes provision of documentation, analysis of data and documentation, and a review visit including meetings with staff and students as appropriate. A Guide to [Targeted Peer Review](#) is available.

## SQCS applications

- 7 In AY 2024-25, QAA received four applications to the SQCS within the period 1 August 2024 to 31 July 2025. One application is ongoing and therefore details are not included in this report. The three closed cases were raised by students (SCQF Levels 9, 10 and 11 respectively). The closed cases related to three separate institutions.
- 8 The four cases will be referenced as A to D. Reasons for rejecting applications to the Scheme are listed in table 1. The three closed cases were rejected at the initial stage of scrutiny (Eligibility Review) (Cases A, B and C). There were multiple reasons why the three cases were rejected. The fourth case (Case D) is ongoing and therefore not referenced against the rejection criteria.
- 9 QAA maintains a log of all submissions to the Scheme and monitors these for trends and patterns. Where a trend or pattern is indicated, QAA evaluates the need for appropriate actions with the institution(s). In the previous academic year (2023-24), there were five applications to the Scheme. No trends have been identified between AY 2023-24 and 2024-25.

**Table 1: Reason for rejecting application**

<b>Reason for rejecting a submission to the scheme</b> <i>NB: more than one reason can be cited for rejecting applications</i>	<b>Number of cases</b>
The concern is not related to a provider that QAA can look at	
The concern is not about an HE course	
The concern has not gone through all internal procedures operated by the HEI	B, C
The concern is linked to matters of academic judgement, such as assessment results and assessment board decisions and requests for assessed work to be remarked	A
The concern is linked to individual cases and requests for remedy or tuition fee refunds	
The concern is linked to grievances against individual staff	
The concern is linked to problems that the HEI has already rectified	
The concern is linked to isolated mistakes or occurrences of bad practice	
The concern is linked to historic issues where there is no evidence in relation to ongoing impact or repeat concerns raised by the same individual on the same issue	
The concern is unrelated to standards, quality, or information about HE provision	
The matters outlined in the concern are in line with the expectations of the UK Quality Code	A
The concern does not indicate serious systemic or procedural shortcomings	A
The concern does not indicate serious inaccurate or incomplete information	
Ongoing	D

## Analysis of submissions and outcomes

10 There was no commonality on the matters forming the basis of applicants' cases in

2024-25, which were as follows<sup>1</sup>:

- allegation of victimisation due to the student’s personal views
- handling of the outcome of an academic misconduct appeal
- potential systemic failure in assessment design, marking standards and a lack of transparency in data access for assessment review
- potential procedural failures in appeals and complaints processes
- potential failure in duty of care (disability and wellbeing services)

11 Table 2 provides a summary of Concerns Assessment outcomes over the past three sessions. There was one Concerns Assessment in 2023-24 (Case C) and the outcome of this was ongoing monitoring. One Concern from 2024-25 is still ongoing and will be reported in the summary report for 2025-26.

**Table 2: Summary of Concerns Assessment outcomes**

Action following Concern Assessment	Number of cases in 2022-23	Number of cases in 2023-24	Number of cases in 2024-25
Note and record information	2	0	0
Referral to other relevant body	0	0	0
Ongoing monitoring	0	1	0
Request for action plan and internal review	0	0	0
Targeted Peer Review	0	0	0

## Targeted Peer Review

12 QAA was not required to complete any Targeted Peer Reviews in the 2022-23 or 2023-24. The three closed concerns in 2024-25 did not require a Targeted Peer Review.

## Developing the Scheme

13 QAA is committed to regularly evaluating the effectiveness of the SQCS and its supporting processes. In 2025-26, QAA will make minor amendments to the SQCS including:

- (a) Updating relevant references to the UK Quality Code (2024)
- (b) Changing the name of the **Targeted Peer Review** to **Targeted Peer Assessment**, to reflect that the term ‘review’ is normally used by QAA for cyclical methods that are fully compliant with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the

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<sup>1</sup> Case D is ongoing therefore matters raised as part of this Concern are not included in this list.

European Higher Education Area (ESG).<sup>2</sup>

14 QAA will continue to manage the SQCS in 2024-25 and 2025-26. Alongside management of SQCS, QAA will contribute to the SFC-led development of a tertiary quality concerns scheme in 2025-26 for implementation in the following academic session.<sup>3</sup>

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2 As governed by QAA's Internal Quality Assurance Manual.

3 SFC Guidance on Quality for Colleges and Universities AY 2024-25 to AY 2030-31: refresh, p. 18: <https://www.sfc.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/SFC-Guidance-on-Quality-for-colleges-and-universities-AY2024-25-to-2030-31-refresh.pdf> (Accessed: 02.10.25)

