



Scottish Quality Concerns Scheme AY 2023-24

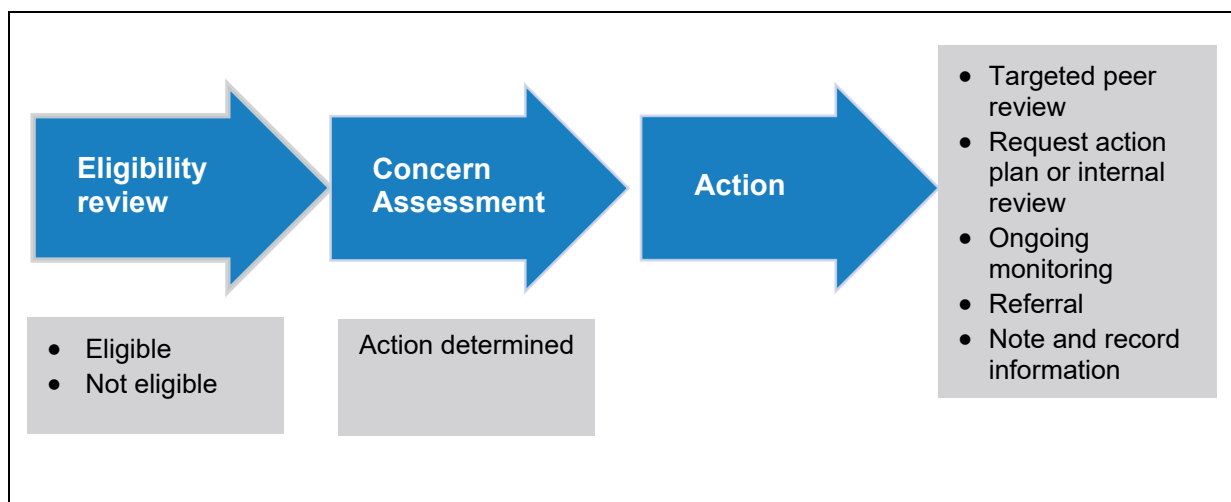
Introduction

1 This is a summary report on the [Scottish Quality Concerns Scheme](#) (SQCS) in AY 2023-24 and is produced under QAA's Outcome Agreement (OA) with 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 in itself, involving the in-depth scrutiny of evidence provided by the party raising the concern and response from the institution (typically with additional evidence). Following Concern Assessment, the options are:

- Targeted Peer Review.
- Request for 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.

SQCS applications

7 In AY 2023-24 QAA received five applications to the SQCS within the period 1 August 2023 to 31 July 2024. All cases were raised by undergraduate students in different subject disciplines: one student raised two separate cases. Three cases related to one institution and the other two cases related to one other institution.

8 The five cases in the report will be referenced as A to E. Reasons for rejecting applications to the Scheme are listed in table 1. Three of the five cases were rejected at the initial stage of scrutiny (Eligibility Review) (Cases A, B and E). There were multiple reasons why the three cases were rejected. The fifth case (Case D) is suspended because of ongoing legal proceedings. Case C was taken through a Concerns Assessment following Eligibility Review.

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 (2022-23), there were three applications to the Scheme. No trends have been identified between AY 2022-23 and 2023-24.

Table 1: Reason for rejecting application

Reason for rejecting a submission to the scheme <i>NB: more than one reason can be cited for rejecting applications</i>	Number of cases
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	Case A, B
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	Case B
The concern is linked to individual cases and requests for remedy or tuition fee refunds	Case A
The concern is linked to grievances against individual staff	
The concern is linked to problems that the HEI has already rectified	Case E
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	Case E
The concern does not indicate serious systemic or procedural shortcomings	Case E
The concern does not indicate serious inaccurate or incomplete information	

Analysis of submissions and outcomes

10 There was no commonality on the matters forming the basis of applicants' cases, which were as follows:

- inconsistent feedback; issues with appeals process; department/university lack of concern for issues raised
- allegation of victimisation due to the student's personal views

- integrity and effectiveness of the university's complaints process
- non-recognition of the award (health discipline) by the country in which the degree was delivered and in which the graduate wishes to practise
- handling of the outcome of a misconduct appeal.
- related to management of academic standards.

11 Table 2 provides a summary of Concerns Assessment outcomes over the past two sessions. There was one Concerns Assessment in 2023-24 (Case C) and the outcome of this was ongoing monitoring.

Table 2: Summary of Concerns Assessment outcomes

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

Targeted Peer Review

12 QAA was not required to complete any Targeted Peer Reviews in the 2022-23 or 2023-24 academic sessions.

Developing the Scheme

13 QAA is committed to regularly evaluating the effectiveness of the SQCS and its supporting processes. QAA did not identify any changes required to the SQCS in 2023-24.

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.

Published – July 2025

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Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786

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¹ Only one moved beyond the first stage of eligibility review.