Scottish Quality Concerns Scheme AY 2025-26

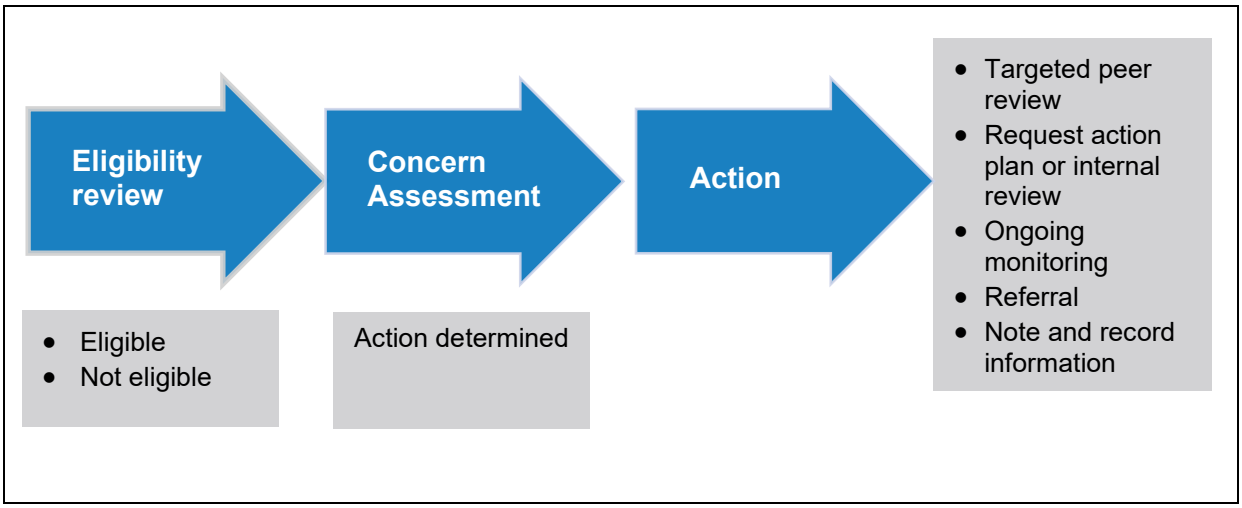
Introduction

1 This is a summary report on the Scottish Quality Concerns Scheme (SQCS) in AY 2025-26 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 2025-26, QAA received four applications to the SQCS within the period 1 August 2025 to 31 July 2026. The four cases were raised by students (SCQF Levels 11 and 12). The 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 four cases were rejected at the initial stage of scrutiny (Eligibility Review) for various reasons.

9 In the annual report for 2024-25, QAA reported that one case was still being progressed through the Scheme. As a result, this case was not reported on in the annual report for 2024-25; therefore, it is included in **Table 2** below.

10 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 (2024-25), there were four applications to the Scheme. A common theme between 2024-25 and 2025-26 includes complaints processes (see **Analysis of submissions and outcomes**).

Table 1: Reason for rejecting application

Reason for rejecting a submission to the scheme *NB: more than one reason can be cited for rejecting applications*	**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	D
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	C
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	B
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	B, C
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	
The concern does not indicate serious systemic or procedural shortcomings	B, C
The concern does not indicate serious inaccurate or incomplete information	C
The concern has not been raised with the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman	A, C
Ongoing	

Analysis of submissions and outcomes

11 The following themes were raised within concerns in 2025-26, with two cases relating to complaints processes and academic progression decisions. The overall themes were as follows:

- PGR award, supervision, experience, monitoring and progression
- Complaints and conduct processes
- Academic progression decisions
- English language proficiency of teaching staff.

12 Complaints have featured as a theme of several concerns raised since 2023-24. Concerns raised have specifically considered the potential for procedural failings in complaints processes, including a lack of fairness and transparency as well as the timeliness for managing complaints and associated communications.

13 Table 2 provides a summary of Concern Assessment outcomes over the past three sessions. A Concern Assessment for a case submitted in 2024-25 took place in 2025-26, with an outcome of a Targeted Peer Review.

Table 2: Summary of Concern Assessment outcomes

Action following Concern Assessment	Number of cases in 2022-23	Number of cases in 2023-24	Number of cases in 2024-25	Number of cases in 2025-26
Note and record information	2	0	0	0
Referral to other relevant body	0	0	0	0
Ongoing monitoring	0	1	0	0
Request for action plan and internal review	0	0	0	0
Targeted Peer Review	0	0	0	1

Targeted Peer Review

14 QAA undertook a Targeted Peer Review for the University of Glasgow in 2025-26, published in January 2026. The University subsequently submitted an action plan in response to the findings of the review. This Concern was submitted in 2024-25 with action taken in 2025-26.

Developing the Scheme

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

(a) Updating the key sector reference points, including reference to the the UK Quality Code (2024) and the QAA Characteristics Statements

(b) Updating the Targeted Peer Review process guidance, including removing references to the role of the Coordinating Reviewer that is no longer operated by QAA Scotland.

16 QAA will continue to manage the SQCS in 2026-27.

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