QAA SCOTLAND

Scotland's Tertiary Quality Enhancement Framework

# Tertiary Quality Enhancement Review (TQER)

## Operational Guidance for Institutions

This review method is ESG compliant

November 2026

1 Introduction ..... 1

2 Preparing evidence for TQER ..... 1

2.1 Strategic Impact Analysis ..... 1

2.2 Advance Information Set ..... 1

2.3 Submitting files ..... 3

3 Preparing participants for TQER ..... 4

3.1 Students ..... 4

3.2 Students' Association staff ..... 5

3.3 Staff ..... 6

4 TQER team requirements ..... 7

4.1 Meeting rooms ..... 7

4.2 Online meetings ..... 7

4.3 IT ..... 7

4.4 Printing ..... 7

4.5 Refreshments ..... 7

5 Post-review activity ..... 8

5.1 Review judgements ..... 8

5.2 Key outcomes letter and TQER report ..... 9

5.3 Producing the TQER action plan ..... 9

5.4 Institutional Liaison Meetings ..... 11

5.5 Evaluation ..... 11


| Version control | Date | Details |
|---|---|---|
| Operational Guidance version 1.0 | 07/11/2025 | Original version |
| Operational Guidance version 2.0 | 04/11/2026 | New section 'Preparing participants for TQER' added<br><br>'Post-review activity' |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | | section expanded |

# 1 Introduction

This guidance outlines the common arrangements that are useful for institutions to make in preparation for Tertiary Quality Enhancement Review (TQER). Specific arrangements should be discussed with your QAA Review Manager in advance of the visits. This guidance does not replace the TQER Guide for Institutions but is intended to augment and support institutions as they prepare for TQER. It is a living document that will be updated as and when other areas of guidance are identified through the delivery of TQER.

# 2 Preparing evidence for TQER

## 2.1 Strategic Impact Analysis

The Strategic Impact Analysis (SIA) acts as an overarching reflective piece which draws on the institution's available Self-Evaluation and Action Plans (SEAPs). The student body, through the Lead Student Representative (LSR), should be a key partner in the preparation of the SIA. The final SIA should be clearly signed off by the Institution Quality Contact (or accountable authority) and the Lead Student Representative, reflecting co-ownership. The evidence cited in the SIA should be specific and targeted and be clearly referenced to that included within the TQER Advance Information Set (AIS) (although it is not expected that the SIA references every document in the AIS). This enables the review team to understand the institution's systems, test the SIA's conclusions and gather information efficiently. The SIA should include information that contextualises the institution's provision and be evaluative.

- **Format:** The SIA should be structured around the principles of the Tertiary Quality Enhancement Framework (TQEF). Guidance for completing each section is provided in **Annex D** of the TQER Guide for Institutions. The SIA should be no more than 20 pages in length.

- **Referencing:** The SIA is a key document to help the review team understand your institution. Please use the SIA to reference relevant documents from within the AIS that support the SIA text, and that reviewers can draw on for additional information. For example: "The University of Scotland's 2030 strategy [AIS 0008] outlines our purpose, goals and values. In many of the National Student Survey (NSS) themes the University of Scotland's performance is strong [AIS 0405–0407]."

## 2.2 Advance Information Set

**Annex E** of the TQER Guide for Institutions provides detailed guidance on what should be included in the Advance Information Set (AIS). The guidance, and the TQER method, have been designed to apply to all tertiary institutions; therefore, some evidence types may be more relevant in further education (FE) or in higher education (HE) institutions. In preparation for the review, there will be some flexibility in what each institution provides to reflect its individual context. The QAA Review Manager will advise on this in the lead up to the review.

The AIS should, as far as possible, comprise a set of existing material, or information already prepared for other purposes; institutions are not expected to prepare bespoke material. Unlike the SIA, which is structured around the TQEF principles, the AIS should be organised against the UK Quality Code sector-agreed principles (as detailed in Annex E). This is because the SIA is the institution's reflective account of its approach to enhancement, while the AIS provides the underpinning evidence that sector-agreed principles for quality are being met, organised in a consistent way that review teams can navigate easily.

Each piece of evidence should be given a unique numerical identifier. The table below gives a suggested numbering convention in which the first two digits relate to the relevant principle of the UK Quality Code, and which avoids the need for extensive renumbering of the AIS if additional documentation is added. An index which lists the pieces of evidence should also be provided as part of the AIS. We recommend creating the index as an Excel file so it can be filtered and easily updated should additional evidence be added at a later stage.

| | |
|---|---|
| 0000 | Index |
| 0001 | Strategic Impact Analysis |
| 0002, 0003, 0004 etc. | General documentation such as an organogram, committee structures, lists of acronyms etc. |
| **01**00, **01**01, 0102 etc. | UK Quality Code Principle QC P1 (and so on)<br><br>Evidence to support Taking a strategic approach to managing quality and standards |
| **02**00, 0201, 0202 etc. | QC P2<br><br>Evidence to support Engaging students as partners |
| **03**00, 0301, 0302 etc. | QC P3<br><br>Evidence to support Resourcing delivery of a high-quality learning experience |
| **04**00, 0401, 0402 etc. | QC P4<br><br>Evidence to support Using data to inform and evaluate quality |
| **07**00, 0701, 0702 etc. | QC P7<br><br>Evidence to support Designing, developing, approving and modifying programmes |
| **12**00, 1201, 1202, 1203 etc. | QC P12<br><br>Evidence to support Operating concerns, complaints and appeals processes |
| **13**00, 1301, 1302, 1303 etc. | Additional evidence requested by the review team after the Initial Review Visit (IRV) and during the Main Review Visit (MRV). |

Coversheets may be used, but only for the purpose of supplying useful context for other pieces of evidence that the review team may not be able to gain from those pieces of evidence alone, for example, providing a historical note to a collection of policy documents and committee minutes that demonstrates their relevance to one another. Coversheets should be used sparingly and only to facilitate the review team's understanding of the evidence.

Institutions that are SCQF credit rating bodies are required to submit documentation for the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Partnership (SCQFP) analysis. These documents must be highlighted in the index so they can be easily identified and subsequently shared with SCQFP. **Annex E** of the TQER Guide for Institutions provides further guidance on this subset of the AIS.

Where evidence is provided in the form of hyperlinks to websites or to internal sharing sites (where access is provided to review teams), these should be clearly listed in the index and also provided with unique reference numbers. Any links should be 'one click' only (that is, going straight to the intended document). Use of Dropbox or any other cloud-based applications to upload information to QAA's secure portal is not supported. Links to internal sharing sites should only be used where the information or material is in a format that cannot be downloaded (for example, a data dashboard). Internal sharing site links should not be used to provide links to folders or documents in a format that could be uploaded individually. Hyperlinks must remain stable and accessible throughout the review period until the publication of the review report.

The review team may ask for additional evidence or documents after the IRV or during the Main Review Visit (MRV). No further evidence will be requested or accepted after the MRV. It is expected that these documents will already exist and will allow a line of enquiry to be completed and/or the review team to come to evidence-based findings. Any additional evidence requested should be uploaded so that it appears together at the end of the initial AIS submission. The same numbering protocol should be adopted, that is, 1300, 1301, 1302, 1303 etc. The index should be updated accordingly.

## 2.3 Submitting files

- Your SIA and AIS should be supplied in a **flat structure** (that is, all files together, with **no folders or subfolders or zipped files**) with documents clearly labelled.
- All pieces of evidence submitted should have a unique numerical identifier. The use of letters is **not** permitted, for example, 0101**a**, 0101**b**, 0101**c**.
- File names must not contain any of the following characters, or the upload will be blocked and you will receive an error message: **(`¬!£$%^&*+=][{}~#@':;,<>?/).**
- File names should be kept as short as possible (128 characters maximum). Files with the .msg extension are not permitted.
- Individual document file sizes should not exceed 50MB. If you wish to submit files in a larger or different format, please contact the QAA Review Manager, who will advise on how best to do this.

# 3 Preparing participants for TQER

The attendee list for meetings during TQER visits will include a variety of staff and students. It is important to hold time in diaries with key staff and student representatives as early as possible.

## 3.1 Students

TQER puts students at the forefront of the method. A function of the Initial Review Visit (IRV) is to ensure that the breadth of student voice is equal to that of institutional leadership in influencing the direction of the review. During the IRV, the review team will meet with up to four student groups (depending on the size and complexity of provision) to hear about the student learning experience across the institution's range of study. Student views shared during the IRV will be used to inform potential lines of enquiry for the Main Review Visit (MRV). The review team will normally also wish to meet with student groups at the MRV.

To support institutions in identifying student participants at an early stage, we recommend that institutions consider the indicative schedules in **Annex I** of the TQER Guide for Institutions and how student meetings can best represent the student population, for example, by including students from a range of programmes and levels of study, students studying at different campuses, student representatives, and students with experience of specific events, projects or initiatives that you reference in your SIA. We recommend having a larger pool of students than required, as some may withdraw from a meeting at short notice. You will have the opportunity to discuss potential student groups as part of your scoping and preparation meetings with your QAA Review Manager. If changes in student availability do occur, please advise your QAA Review Manager, giving as much notice as possible.

Students who are also employed as staff members (for example, academic or professional staff) at the institution should not be selected for student meetings at the review visits, as this would constitute a conflict of interest. This restriction does not apply to PhD students who may also have teaching responsibilities.

Student payments, including the use of vouchers, to encourage students to attend meetings during TQER visits are not permitted. QAA recognises that students and staff give up their time freely to participate in external review. However, payment could create, or appear to create, an obligation to give positive feedback, so it is not permitted, to protect the impartiality of the review. Institutions may acknowledge students' contribution in other ways, such as covering travel expenses and providing refreshments.

With students at the heart of TQER, QAA has considered how to support student participation as much as possible, while also maintaining the integrity of the method. We have adopted the following approach:

- Elected Students' Association/Union officers (or the LSR, if different) may attend student meetings in order to support students in an unfamiliar setting.
- Themes for student meetings will be provided in advance of the visits. These include broad themes such as 'assessment and feedback', 'engagement with student support services', and 'student representation'. Themes will be provided one week before the IRV and with the main lines of enquiry for the MRV, which are issued four weeks after the IRV.
- If the institution requests it, the QAA Review Manager will provide the questions for student meetings shortly before each meeting so that they can be printed and shared with students (see section 4.4).

- If a student or students have recognised additional support need(s), QAA will respect those arrangements and will work with the institution to put similar arrangements in place to support student participation at the meeting, including the attendance of a support worker where applicable. If students do not have a recognised additional support need, QAA would not normally expect a staff member to be present unless that person routinely accompanies the students.

- Students' Association (SA) staff members are **not** permitted to join student meetings, but may attend meetings with student representatives or student officers if the review team specifically requests this.

- LSRs will attend a range of meetings at both review visits to represent the student voice, and will normally attend without support from SA staff or other institutional staff.

## 3.2 Students' Association staff

For the purposes of this guidance, 'Students' Association staff' refers to permanent members of Students' Association (SA) staff and therefore excludes elected officers.

Students' Associations provide the student body with support across the whole student journey and therefore may be involved in parts of the TQER process. QAA recognises that timelines for the TQER may extend beyond the term of an LSR, and that SA staff may play a role in ensuring a smooth handover between LSRs, where appropriate.

The table below sets out how Students' Associations may be involved in different stages of TQER. It describes how SAs may be involved and does not place a requirement on SAs or institutions.

| **Timeline** | **TQER activity** | **SA involvement** |
|---|---|---|
| Year before review | Briefing/preparation events | A member of SA staff may join the QAA briefing and preparation event to learn more about TQER. |
| Approximately 8–10 months before the Main Review Visit | Scoping meeting | A member of staff from the SA may attend the scoping meeting to support the Lead Student Representative (LSR). This should be an SA member of staff who will be involved in supporting the LSR throughout the TQER. |
| Up to 10 weeks before the Initial Review Visit (SIA and AIS submitted 10 weeks prior to the IRV) | Preparation of Strategic Impact Analysis (SIA) and Advance Information Set (AIS) | Students, through the LSR, will be fully involved as key partners in the preparation of the SIA; this may be facilitated by the SA (staff or elected officers). The student body and the SA (staff or elected officers) may also contribute to the AIS where appropriate, for example to share documents relating to the approach to student partnership, such as samples of Staff-Student Liaison Committee minutes. |
| Initial Review Visit (IRV); Main Review Visit (MRV) – 6–8 weeks after the IRV | Review meetings | SA staff may attend meetings as part of a staff meeting, if requested by the review team. SA staff are not permitted to join student meetings or represent the student voice in meetings. SA staff may be involved in meetings with student representatives where specifically requested by the review team. |

| Timeline | TQER activity | SA involvement |
|---|---|---|
| 6 weeks after the MRV | Receipt of draft report | SA staff may support the LSR to provide feedback on the draft report, where appropriate. |
| 12 weeks after the MRV | Publication of report | SA staff may support the LSR to disseminate findings from the TQER to the wider student body. |
| 12 weeks after publication of report | Submission of action plan | SA staff may support the LSR to provide feedback on the institution's action plan, where appropriate. |
| N/A | Review communications (general organisation, schedules, outcomes) | The Lead Student Representative, Institution Quality Contact and Institutional Lead for Learning and Teaching are the key contacts for the review and will receive information related to the operation of the review from the QAA Review Manager and/or other QAA staff. SA staff are not included in review-related communications (for example, liaison on schedules for the IRV/MRV, or communications informing the institution that the Key Outcomes Letter or draft TQER report is available). |

sparqs has produced a TQER Practical Guide for Students' Associations and student officers, which should be read alongside QAA's TQER Guide for Institutions.

## 3.3 Staff

The IRV will include a 30-minute meeting with the head of the institution. We suggest that you hold this time in their calendar as soon as possible. Your QAA Review Manager will be able to advise on likely dates and timings at the scoping meeting.

When the institution is selecting participants for both review visits, please bear in mind that the review team will wish to meet as wide a range of staff as possible. While a small number of key staff may need to attend more than one meeting, the review team prefers not to meet individuals more than once.

Institutions are expected to take appropriate steps, including reasonable adjustments, so that all staff and students meeting the review team can participate fully. The QAA Review Manager will also explore with each institution during the preparation for the review visits how participants can best be supported to contribute meaningfully to the review.

# 4 TQER team requirements

## 4.1 Meeting rooms

The TQER team will need a room in which to base themselves during the visits. Ideally this would be a private room for the team, but, if necessary, this may be the same room in which meetings with staff and students are held (if the space is large enough). It is useful if the meeting room can be set up with a table in boardroom format. The TQER team will need access to a lockable meeting room between 08:30 and 18:30 hours during the review visits. Please advise the QAA Review Manager if there are any security requirements (for example, if the TQER team members require security passes) so that these can be addressed before the visits. Please provide name plates for the staff and students who meet the TQER team and for the TQER team members.

## 4.2 Online meetings

Where participants will join a meeting online while the TQER team is on site, please send the meeting invitation to the QAA Review Manager only, who will share it with the TQER team. As the QAA Review Manager will be using their laptop for notetaking, please provide a separate device in the meeting room to host the call (normally through Microsoft Teams).

## 4.3 IT

TQER team members will bring their own laptops with them. However, the institution should provide a screen in the meeting room that a laptop can be connected to. This will allow the team to work collectively on shared documents. Please arrange for guest wi-fi accounts for all team members before the IRV and MRV. The TQER team may need to access the institution's systems, for example the virtual learning environment and intranet. Institutions should arrange remote access for reviewers before the IRV so that the team can read materials before or between the two visits. If this is not possible, please liaise with the QAA Review Manager as soon as possible.

It can be very helpful for the Institution Quality Contact, Lead Student Representative and QAA Review Manager to have the contact details for IT support during the review visits. Please arrange for IT support to be available when the team first arrives for both the IRV and MRV.

## 4.4 Printing

Where the institution has requested printed questions for student meetings (see section 3.1), the QAA Review Manager will send the questions to the Institution Quality Contact (or another nominated member of staff) no later than 30 minutes before the meeting, so that they can be printed and shared with the students attending. Please let the QAA Review Manager know when confirming the schedule if you would like this arrangement.

## 4.5 Refreshments

The QAA Review Manager will inform the institution of any specific dietary requirements. The following is a guide to the usual catering arrangements:

- A supply of water available throughout the day.
- Morning and afternoon tea and coffee (or access to tea/coffee-making facilities).
- A simple buffet-style lunch.

# 5 Post-review activity

## 5.1 Review judgements

The TQER judgement is an 'effectiveness statement', which outlines whether the institution has effective arrangements for managing academic standards, enhancing the quality of the learning experience and enabling student success, currently, and has the quality assurance and enhancement arrangements in place to enable this into the future. The ways that judgements are expressed have been developed through extensive consultation with colleagues from colleges, universities and other stakeholders across the Scottish tertiary sector.

- A review team will make a judgement of 'effective' where all, or nearly all, applicable requirements and/or standards have been met. Requirements which have not been met do not, individually or collectively, present any serious risks to the management of standards, enhancement of quality or enabling student success. The judgement may be accompanied by a number of recommendations and features of good practice. With a positive judgement, the institution will normally be required to undergo an external review in the next seven years. The judgement will apply until the next external review or for a maximum period of nine years (to allow flexibility in the schedule for future cycles), whichever is sooner.

- A judgement of 'partially effective' is aimed at driving enhancement. Review teams will make this judgement where most applicable requirements and/or standards have been met. Requirements which have not been met do not, individually or collectively, present any serious immediate risks to the management of standards, enhancement of quality or enabling student success. This judgement will be accompanied by a number of recommendations and does not preclude identification of areas of good practice. A judgement of 'partially effective' in isolation should not damage public confidence in an institution: judgements, recommendations, the identification of good practice and the development of a credible action plan combine to confirm whether there can be public confidence in the institution's qualifications and in the quality of the learning experience it provides.

- 'Not effective' judgements indicate that several applicable requirements and/or standards have not been met, or there are major gaps in one or more of the applicable requirements and/or standards. Requirements which have not been met present serious risk(s), individually or collectively, to the management of standards, enhancement of quality or enabling student success. This judgement will be accompanied by a number of recommendations and does not preclude identification of areas of good practice. Recommendations at any level of judgement may relate to shortcomings in approaches to requirements, or to the underdevelopment of practices to drive improvement or enhancement.

The judgement matrix (detailed in **Annex J** of the TQER Guide for Institutions) helps guide a review team in coming to consistent judgements, especially in deciding between potential outcomes. This is important to ensure the robustness, reliability and integrity of review outcomes and fairness to institutions. An element of professional judgement will always be incorporated. As the judgement matrix is a guide, it supports but does not replace discussion by the review team with the QAA Review Manager. In addition, participation in QAA moderation processes supports QAA Review Managers in discussing potential outcomes and, in consultation with review teams, applying a consistent approach to those outcomes.

## 5.2 Key outcomes letter and TQER report

Institutions will receive a key outcomes letter two weeks after the MRV. This letter contains the overall judgement, and details of any recommendations and features of good practice. The two-week interval gives the review team time to consider its findings carefully and set out a clear, evidenced outcome.

Institutions receive a draft TQER report six weeks after the MRV. The draft report represents the review team's final considered position. The review team reaches its conclusions solely on the evidence considered during the review, so it will not revisit or add to its findings – including features of good practice – in response to representations made after the draft is shared. Institutions have the opportunity to comment on any matters of factual accuracy in the draft report. The institution should use paragraph numbers to direct the review team to areas requiring factual accuracy amendments and should not use tracked changes.

## 5.3 Producing the TQER action plan

All institutions are required to submit an action plan within a maximum of 12 weeks following the publication of the TQER report. QAA expects the action plan to have been developed with students. The format of the plan should be aligned with the Self-Evaluation and Action Plan (SEAP) so that it can be integrated into the SEAP at the point of next submission. Institutions are advised to share their initial draft action plan with their QAA Institutional Liaison Officer for feedback nine weeks after the publication of the TQER report. The QAA Institutional Liaison Officer will provide feedback within one week.

The TQER action plan should provide a clear and measurable response to the recommendations contained within the TQER report and demonstrate how the institution will build on identified features of good practice.

For each recommendation included in the TQER report, institutions should ensure that the action plan:

- includes the exact wording of the recommendation as per the TQER report
- identifies the actions that will be taken in response
- specifies responsibility for delivery
- includes realistic timescales and completion dates
- identifies how progress and success will be measured

Actions should be supported by a series of clear milestones that demonstrate how the planned outcome will be achieved and measured. Milestones should set out the key steps required, who is responsible for delivery, and the target date for completion.

To ensure actions are SMART and enable effective monitoring through Institutional Liaison Meetings (ILMs), institutions should consider:

- How will the institution know that the action has been successful?
- What evidence will demonstrate successful completion?
- How will achievement of the overall planned outcome be evaluated?
- What indicators will demonstrate that the intended enhancement has been achieved?

Institutions are also encouraged to include an overall completion date for each planned outcome, which may align with the date of the final milestone. This helps provide a clear indication of when the recommendation is expected to be fully addressed.

### Additional considerations

**Use clear language**

As action plans will be published, all acronyms should be written in full when first used. Alternatively, institutions may wish to include a glossary of acronyms.

**Update progress where appropriate**

If milestones have been completed before the final action plan is submitted to QAA, institutions may wish to indicate these as complete. Overall actions and outcomes will be reviewed and formally signed off through the ILM process.

**Building on features of good practice**

Action plans should also set out how the institution intends to sustain, develop or embed the features of good practice identified within the TQER report.

Where appropriate, institutions should:

- identify any actions arising from the feature of good practice
- describe the intended outcome
- explain how success will be measured
- identify the evidence that will demonstrate impact
- include appropriate timescales for delivery

**Considering encouragements**

The TQER report may include encouragements where the review team has suggested areas that the institution may wish to explore further. Inclusion of encouragements within the action plan is optional and is not a formal requirement.

**Making use of QAA Scotland support**

Institutions may wish to consider how ongoing engagement with QAA Scotland activities, events, resources and enhancement opportunities could support delivery of actions within the plan. Relevant opportunities can be discussed through the ILM process.

**Published action plans**

Several TQER action plans are published on the QAA website. Institutions may find it useful to consider these when preparing their own action plans.

**Head of Institution sign-off**

All TQER action plans must be formally approved by the Head of Institution prior to submission.

Institutions should provide a separate sign-off document containing the following statement:

As the Accountable Officer, I confirm approval of the submission of the Tertiary Quality Enhancement Review Action Plan for [institution name] and that the action plan has been developed with students.

The sign-off document should include:

- the signature of the Head of Institution
- the name of the Head of Institution
- their position/title
- the date of approval

An example template for the TQER action plan sign-off by the Head of Institution is provided below.

| | |
|---|---|
| Name of Institution | |
| Date of TQER visit | |

*As the Accountable Officer, I confirm approval of the submission of the Tertiary Quality Enhancement Review Action Plan for the **[insert name of institution]** and that the action plan has been developed with students.*

| | |
|---|---|
| Name of Head of Institution | |
| Position of the Head of Institution | |
| Signature of Head of Institution | |
| Date | |

## 5.4 Institutional Liaison Meetings

In addition to TQER, QAA will undertake a programme of Institutional Liaison Meetings (ILMs) with each of Scotland's colleges and universities. These will take place annually, except in those years where an institution is undergoing TQER, to consider developments in, and the impact of, an institution's enhancement approach, and progress since the last external review. ILMs – along with the regular contact QAA will have through the ad hoc provision of advice and guidance and QAA's sector-wide enhancement programme, Scotland's Tertiary Enhancement Programme (STEP) – will support an approach that enables trust, confidence and openness with institutions. ILMs will provide an opportunity for institutions to seek, and for QAA to provide, independent advice on matters relating to quality.

The QAA Review Manager will be appointed and will contact an institution 8–10 months before the Main Review Visit takes place. The member of QAA staff assigned to the institution as the main point of contact for queries and follow-up activity (the QAA Institutional Liaison Officer) will always be a different person from the QAA Review Manager. This ensures there is a distinction between the support provided for the institution on an annual basis and specific work undertaken to support the review – removing any conflict of interest or risk of unconscious bias. This supports the independence of the review in line with the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG). If an institution has concerns about the member of QAA staff assigned to a review as QAA Review Manager, this should be raised with QAA.

## 5.5 Evaluation

Evaluating the Tertiary Quality Enhancement Review process is an important part of QAA's monitoring of its own performance and the review method. Reviewers and institutions will be asked to complete a survey on the process covering the pre-review, review and post-review periods. In addition, institutions will be offered an optional follow-up meeting with QAA after the publication of their TQER report. This meeting will include their QAA Review Manager and will allow the institution to share any detailed feedback not captured by the survey.

Published – November 2026

© The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education 2026
Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786
www.qaa.ac.uk/Scotland