



Scotland's Tertiary
Quality Enhancement
Framework

Tertiary Quality Enhancement Review (TQER)

Thematic Review 25-26

September 2026

This review method
is ESG compliant

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About the Tertiary Quality Enhancement Review method

The Tertiary Quality Enhancement Review (TQER) method was introduced in 2024-25. TQER is a key mechanism of the Tertiary Quality Enhancement Framework (TQEF) and is designed to support quality enhancement and improve the student experience across the sector. It is the first tertiary review method, encompassing all 43 Scottish colleges and universities on a periodic seven-year cycle.

By bringing together the full tertiary sector, TQER allows for cross-institutional learning and enhancement. Thematic analysis of review reports provides a sector-wide understanding of the strengths of the Scottish sector alongside the opportunities for collaborative enhancement work.

The thematic analysis

This report provides a thematic analysis of the areas of good practice and recommendations for action from the TQER reports across 2025-26. It also includes the two institutions who participated in TQER in 2024-25.

Institutions included in the thematic review are:

- Forth Valley College
- University of St Andrews
- Dumfries and Galloway College
- Edinburgh Napier University
- Royal Conservatoire of Scotland
- University of Aberdeen
- University of Strathclyde
- University of the West of Scotland
- West College Scotland
- West Lothian College

This report is structured according to the six TQEF principles and highlights the strengths of the Scottish tertiary sector alongside the areas for development.

Enhancement and quality culture

Institutional strategic vision was largely commended across TQER reviews, with seven institutions demonstrating good practice in this area. Reports highlighted clear strategic leadership leading to a positive, enhancement-led culture where staff engaged in systematic self-evaluation and took ownership of initiatives. For three institutions, recommendations highlighted a need for greater monitoring and oversight of strategic initiatives.

The most significant sector-wide recommendation was **the implementation of Institution-Led Quality Review (ILQR)**, with six institutions receiving recommendations in this area. For colleges, recommendations centred around implementing ILQR according to Scottish Funding Council (SFC) guidance and refining their processes through reflection. For universities, recommendations included strengthening professional services review and implementing review of PGR programmes.

Excellence in learning, teaching and assessment

A clear underpinning of excellent learning and teaching was **effective staff development**, which was commended in six of the ten reports. Several reports praised an overarching culture of staff development, while others highlighted specific initiatives, such as induction materials, peer observations, a 'Learning Champion' role, and a centralised staff development unit. In many cases, these initiatives were commended for their strategic approach to enhancing the student experience.

Several less prominent themes emerged from reviews, including **the learning environment** and **assessment and feedback**. Four institutions were commended for effective and inclusive learning environments, including the integration of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion initiatives and implementation of a diverse range of learning spaces. Specifically, virtual environments were highlighted three times, twice as areas of good practice and once as a recommendation. Assessment and feedback was raised three times as an area for development, primarily focused on consistency, including clear assessment criteria, equitable feedback, and adherence to feedback timelines.

Supporting student success

Comprehensive student support was highlighted as an area of good practice in nine reviews. Reports particularly praised holistic support provided across the full learner lifecycle, especially at key transition points. Several institutions were commended for their culture of care, evidenced through their focus on wellbeing, their agile response to students' needs, and their compassionate communication. A particular area of good practice noted across institutions was the partnership approach between curriculum areas and professional services, ensuring students received joined-up support.

Improving the postgraduate student experience was recommended in three reports (out of the six institutions offering postgraduate degrees). Two of these recommendations concerned providing strategic oversight for the postgraduate student experience to build community and ensure parity with undergraduates. The final recommendation required the full implementation of Institution-Led Quality Review of postgraduate research programmes.

Student engagement and partnership

Student engagement and partnership was the strongest cross-cutting theme across reports, with every institution receiving either a commendation or recommendation in this area and four reports including both good practice and areas for development.

Of the six reports which highlighted student engagement as an area of good practice, the most common commendation was **effective measures for listening to students**, including capturing the student voice through a bespoke survey and effective student representation at programme level. Crucially, institutions were commended for how their effective student voice mechanisms were matched by a commitment to meaningful change. Other areas of good practice included student involvement in peer observations and the embedding of Student Consultants in quality and enhancement activities.

Eight out of ten institutions received recommendations related to student engagement and partnership. Several of these concerned foundational engagement mechanisms such as supporting the Students' Association to improve the student representation system or improving methods for gathering and responding to student feedback. The majority of recommendations, however, encouraged **institutions to move beyond student consultation into genuine student partnership**. Recommendations included integrating student engagement into quality processes, championing a culture of partnership working,

and creating and/or communicating a strategic approach to student partnership.

Data and Evidence

The **use of data** was a feature of good practice in four reports. Two reports highlighted the use of data to deliver tailored student support, while three praised institutions' data-driven enhancement, including using data in curriculum management, quality assurance and monitoring, and in reflective practice.

In two cases where data appeared in review recommendations, the areas for development included the maintenance of accurate student record systems and the appropriate use of data within programme reviews.

Externality

There were several references to **external stakeholder engagement**, including one commendation for external involvement in quality processes and two recommendations (both for the same institution) concerning greater involvement of external examiners in cases of collaborative provision and within ILQR.

Although externality was not explicitly mentioned in most institutions' TQER outcomes, one of the most prevalent themes involved external stakeholders in the form of **employer engagement**. Employability and work-based learning was the clearest sector-wide feature of good practice, mentioned positively in seven out of ten reports, with no recommendations in this area. Review reports particularly commended the embedding of employability skills through work-based learning and direct engagement with employers to address regional skills needs. Several review reports also highlighted employability support provided by the institution, helping students articulate their skills development and transition into the workplace.

Conclusion

This report has highlighted the features of good practice and recommendations for action across the Scottish tertiary sector, based on review reports from the ten institutions to undertake TQER across 2024-25 and 2025-26.

Across the six TQEF principles, the findings point to a sector with strong foundations in student support and staff development, and clear strategic ambition. The most consistent area of good practice—identified in nine of ten review reports—was the quality and comprehensiveness of student support, with employer engagement and work-based learning also emerging as a distinct sector-wide strength. The most significant area for development was student engagement and partnership: while institutions demonstrated effective mechanisms for gathering student feedback, eight of ten received recommendations to move beyond consultation into genuine student partnership and co-production. The prevalence of recommendations relating to ILQR implementation across six institutions further indicates that embedding systematic self-review remains a sector-wide development priority.

Another eight institutions will participate in TQER in 2026-27, and a further thematic report will be produced.

In partnership with students and staff from across Scotland's tertiary sector, QAA Scotland will use the findings of this thematic analysis to shape upcoming enhancement work. In 2026-27, QAA Scotland will relaunch the Focus On enhancement programme, with two key workstreams based on themes identified in this thematic report.

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