

ELIR Cycle 3 Guidance

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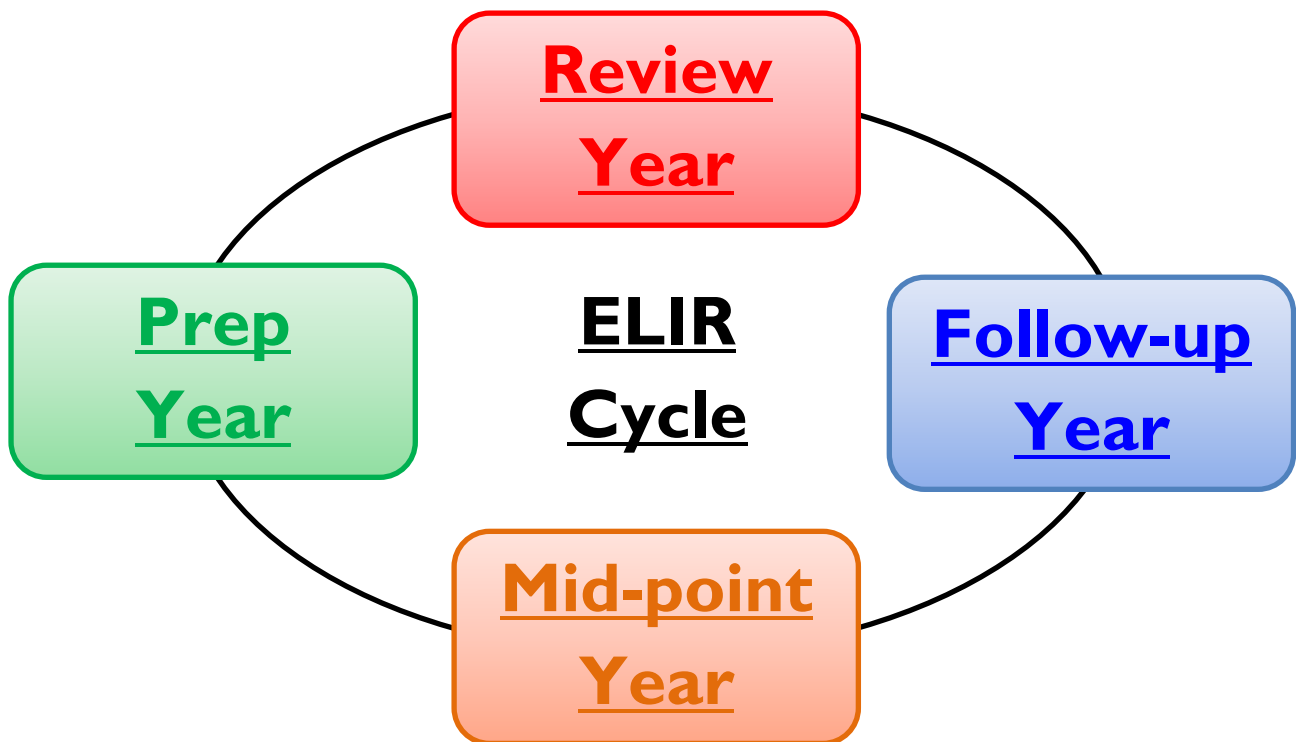


This guidance has been designed to be dipped in and out of, depending on what stage of the Enhancement-led Institutional Review (ELIR) cycle you are in. You may find when reading through the guidance that some sections are very similar to each other, this is because each year of the cycle may repeat certain activities.

The tabs in the cycle diagram below can help guide you to the relevant section. However, the section titled 'ELIR Cycle' gives a generic description of the components of ELIR and some of the terminology. This makes the ELIR Cycle a good place to start.

The contents pages will also help guide you to the relevant sections within each chapter.

See [Appendix 1](#) to check your institution's review date.



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ELIR – All Four Years

Who we are and what we do

sparqs

[sparqs](#) (student participation in quality Scotland) is an agency which, as our name suggests, puts students at the heart of decisions being made about the quality and governance of the learning experience.

We are funded by the [Scottish Funding Council](#) (SFC), hosted and managed on their behalf by National Union of Students (NUS) Scotland, and directed by a Steering Committee with sector-wide membership.

sparqs' vision is "students making a positive and rewarding difference to their own and others' educational experience, helping shape the nature of learning and contributing to the overall success of Scotland's universities and colleges."¹

sparqs supports this vision through [A Student Engagement Framework for Scotland](#) - by supporting students through training and development, one to one institutional support, cross institutional and national projects; and by supporting sector agencies to encourage student contribution to sector discussions, and nurturing a culture of engagement.

QAA Scotland

[Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education \(QAA\) Scotland](#) is a UK-wide organisation with a mission to safeguard academic standards and improve the quality of UK higher education.

QAA Scotland is responsible for developing the quality assurance and enhancement requirements specific to the Scottish sector. QAA Scotland develops and implements the external review process for institutions, manages the Enhancement Themes, and supports institutions with their own quality assurance and enhancement processes.

QAA Scotland is funded by the Scottish Funding Council and by institutional subscription.

Special thanks: sparqs would like to thank QAA Scotland for the amount of work and support they have given to make this guidance possible. In particular, a special acknowledgement to Ailsa Crum, who has worked alongside sparqs to complete this guidance.



Purpose of this guidance

This guidance was written for students' association staff and officers, as well as appropriate members of institutional staff, to explain the process of Enhancement-led Institutional Review and how students' associations, when working with their institution, can have a massive impact on the outcomes of ELIR. In addition, when the students' association and institution are working in an effective partnership, the students' association can significantly affect how ELIR recommendations are implemented.

This guidance highlights the many components of the Quality Enhancement Framework, of which ELIR is one element.

How to use this guidance

This guidance is written for university students' associations to equip them to engage fully with the Enhancement-led Institutional Review process and not just the review itself. This guidance does not replace the [QAA ELIR handbook](#), but gives more operational advice and tips to students' associations. If you have a specific query relating to the ELIR at your institution, you should get in touch with QAA Scotland direct.

Tips on getting the most out of each stage in the process are built on good practice in the sector and the experience of sparqs and QAA Scotland. These tips can be found at the end of every section to help direct your work.

Introduction to ELIR

Enhancement-led Institutional Review is one of the five elements of the [Quality Enhancement Framework in Scotland](#). The other four elements are Institution-led Reviews, Enhancement Themes, Public Information and Student Engagement. More detail on most of these elements can be found throughout this guidance.

A number of agencies work together and have different roles in ensuring the five elements of the Quality Enhancement Framework are delivered. The agencies include: NUS Scotland, Universities Scotland, SFC, QAA Scotland and sparqs.

The Scottish sector has defined "**enhancement as taking deliberate steps to bring about improvement in the effectiveness of the learning experiences of students.**"² This is set out in [the ELIR Handbook](#), page 3. Central to an enhancement-led approach is self-evaluation. It is vital that any institution evaluates its strengths and weaknesses, and students have a key role. Students' views are central to helping the institution identify what works well now, what could be better and/or how things could be changed in the future.

The ELIR Cycle

ELIR – why is it important?

Enhancement-led Institutional Review is important because it is a chance to look at a wide range of learning and teaching activities at the institution and to consider how policies and services the institution provides are really meeting the needs of students. It is also a chance to review how the institution is working with its student body, and whether it is working with its students' association in a partnership. This provides an opportunity for the students' association and institution to reflect on how well they are working together and where the relationship could be strengthened. The students' association can discuss with the institution the future and how the student body can participate in developing the institution's vision.

ELIR has a broad scope including the experience of all students, whether those students are full-time, part-time, under-graduate, post-graduate, distance learning, from traditional entry routes, international, or from the rest of the UK.

The recommendations from the ELIR reports will help to shape the institution's priorities and areas of key activity over the coming years. The students' associations can work with their institutions to take forward recommendations, offer possible solutions and work together in partnership to make those solutions a reality.

Currently, we are in our third cycle of ELIR, commonly referred to as ELIR 3. ELIR 3 has evolved from the first two cycles. The methodology for ELIR 3 is similar to ELIR 1 and ELIR 2, but there are many differences. One difference is ELIR 3 uses statements of effectiveness, rather than confidence which the earlier cycles use. Another is an increase in the documents submitted in advance of the review. The style of reporting on ELIR activity is different from the institutions' perspective and how the ELIR team reports back. There is also a change in the follow-up ELIR activity, which takes place in the years after the review. All of these changes are explained further in the guidance.

The recommendations from the ELIR reports will help to shape the institution's priorities and areas of key activity over the coming years.

ELIR – not just one big review

The Enhancement-led Institutional Review method is carried out by QAA Scotland. QAA is independent of the Government, institutions and the SFC. ELIR is one of the ways in which the SFC fulfils its legal duty to review quality in the Scottish higher education institutions.

The ELIR method involves review teams, which consist of UK and international academics, a senior administrator from the UK and a student, to make a judgement about the effectiveness of the institution's arrangements for securing academic standards and enhancing the quality of the student learning experience. A QAA Scotland officer will manage the process of the review, support the institution and give advice to the ELIR team. The QAA Scotland

There are activities relating to ELIR that happen every year. This means it is more accurate to view ELIR as a state of being, rather than a one-off event.

The institution has a variety of ways to assure and enhance the quality of the student experience.

officer is able to support and advise the students' association about how best to work with the ELIR review team, what areas the institution may be focusing on and how to effectively engage with the ELIR process.

Although ELIR is a big review that happens about every four years at each Scottish higher education institution, there are activities relating to ELIR that happen every year. This means it is more accurate to view ELIR as a state of being, rather than a one-off event. It also means every year is important to student officers and their students' association as well.

The institution has a variety of ways to assure and enhance the quality of the student experience, which are happening all the time. Although institutions may have slightly different ways of working, all institutions will carry out some form of regular internal subject or discipline reviews. These internal reviews are referred to as [Institution-led Reviews](#) and are part of the [Quality Enhancement Framework](#). They are required by the SFC, which has produced guidance for the Scottish higher education institutions which, amongst other things, sets out the required elements of Institution-led Reviews, for example, the requirement for those review teams to include students and members external to the institution. The [guidance](#) is available on the SFC website.

Institutions may also have quality assurance committees, quality enhancement committees, or learning and teaching committees with quality enhancement and assurance as an embedded topic. In addition, institutions participate in the [Enhancement Themes](#) which are managed and supported by QAA Scotland. Other parts of the institution, as well as academic departments, review their services and facilities. For example, student support services are reviewed, since those services often have a significant impact on students' experience. All of these quality assurance and enhancement activities happen all the time as part of the institutions' academic life cycles.

ELIR is the external review that looks at all of these processes. ELIR checks that they are fulfilling their purposes and encouraging enhancement to the student experience. In this way, almost all of the activities that an institution engages in can be linked back to ELIR – providing ample opportunity for students' associations to be involved in ELIR.

ELIR – more than an individual review

Annual Discussions

Every year there is a meeting between a QAA Scotland officer (usually an Assistant Director or the Head of Reviews) and the institution. At least one student representative is expected to attend.

The purpose of the meeting is to ensure there are productive relations between the institution and QAA Scotland, and to provide an opportunity for keeping up to date on matters that are relevant to ELIR. It is a useful opportunity for the student representative to establish contact with QAA Scotland and to participate in the institution's ongoing quality activities.

The agenda for the meeting will be agreed in advance between the institution and the QAA Scotland officer. The student representative should also have the opportunity to contribute to the agenda. Matters for discussion include:

- Progress for, or action from ELIR (depending on the timing of the ELIR).
- Outcomes from and progress with institution-led quality reviews.
- Progress on student engagement.
- The institution's use of data.
- Any other matters the institution, QAA Scotland or the students' association wish to raise.

Further details about Annual Discussions are set out in the [ELIR Handbook](#) and in the [ELIR Operational Guidance](#) on the QAA website.

Tips for getting the most out of Annual Discussions:

- Find out when the Annual Discussion meeting is likely to take place – your institutional contact will know this or can find out – and turn up! Or arrange for another rep to be there on your behalf.
- Find out who your QAA Scotland officer is – although most of the liaison is carried out between QAA Scotland and the institutional staff, you can also contact QAA Scotland direct with specific queries.
- Think about what you would like to see included on the agenda – is there a project you have had particularly close involvement with that you want to share with QAA Scotland? Is there something you are hoping the institution will prioritise? Are you wondering whether other institutions are also working in this area?
- Unsure about the point of the Annual Discussion? Contact QAA Scotland and ask!

The point at which each institution begins preparing for the ELIR review will depend on their circumstances but it is usually at least a year in advance.

Self-evaluation in advance of ELIR

The ELIR method places considerable emphasis on the institution's ability to evaluate its own strengths and weaknesses. The point at which each institution begins preparing for the ELIR review will depend on that institution's circumstances but it is usually at least a year in advance of the review visits. During ELIR preparations, it is likely that the institution will have increased contact with the QAA Scotland link officer.

There should also be opportunities for the student representatives to get involved in these discussions with QAA Scotland and, particularly, student representatives should be closely involved with the institution's preparations.

The institution is required to submit documents to QAA in advance of ELIR to show the QAA review team:

- The institution's priority areas of work.
- Changes made since the last ELIR.
- The institution's strategic direction.
- How the institution manages its own quality assurance and enhancement processes.
- How the institution is engaging students in their learning and in the management of quality.

Documents submitted in advance of the ELIR visits:

The **Reflective Analysis** (RA) is the key document in which the institution sets out its strengths and challenges across the full scope of ELIR. That includes topics relating to: the strategic management of enhancement; the student learning experience; and internal monitoring and review.

The institution is also asked to submit one or more **case studies** to illustrate its strategic approach in action.

Each institution is asked to submit an **advance information set** which contains a suite of material designed to demonstrate the operation and outcomes of the quality processes. Part of the advance information set should include an overview of the student feedback collected and analysed by the institution in the last year. This material is submitted to the ELIR team in advance of the visits and should mean, amongst other things, that the team has a clear understanding of the main views expressed by students across the institution.

Further detail on the nature and purpose of the RA, case studies and advance information set can be found in the [ELIR Handbook](#). Student representatives can and should be involved in preparing any or all of this advance material.

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Getting the most out of ELIR

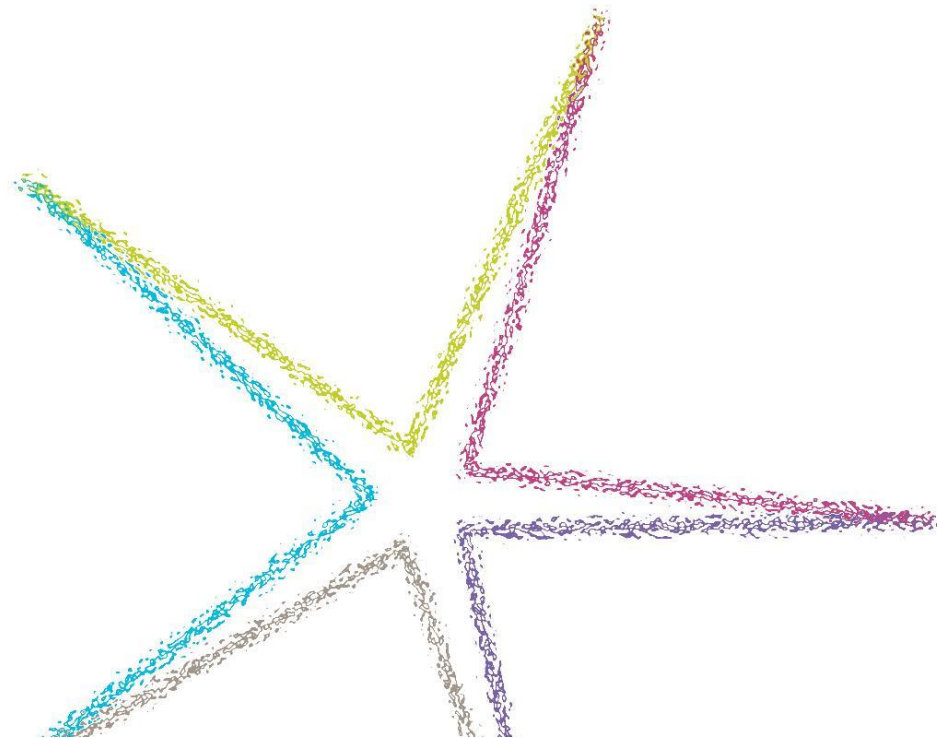
ELIR is a powerful process. It results in a formal judgement about the institution which is considered by the SFC, and the ELIR reports are published on the QAA website. Institutions take the ELIR findings very seriously. By having a meaningful relationship with the institution, student officers can engage with ELIR to affect the direction and priorities of the institution, working with the institution to bring about positive change. It is important for student reps to keep being proactive – keep thinking about the initiatives the students' association is trying to progress. Keep in mind the priorities of your institution, and how involved students have been in making those changes happen.

It is worth considering which student officers are involved with ELIR preparations. Although the main responsibility may be left with the education officer or relevant staff member, the preparations will be more effective if there is engagement from other areas of the association, because ELIR does look at all aspects of the student learning experience.

ELIR is a powerful process.

Tips for getting the most out of ELIR preparation:

- Find out how your institution plans to prepare – are there ways you could get involved with identifying student views, e.g. running focus groups or other activities? Is there a planning/steering group co-ordinating the preparations? If so, there should be at least one student member on that.
- When it comes to drafting the RA, will you have a role in writing any of the text or commenting on it? It is expected that students are involved in producing the RA; the precise way that happens is for you to agree with your institution but the RA needs to identify how students were involved in ELIR preparations and what the impact of that involvement has been.
- In ELIR 3, institutions are asked to identify what they would like to achieve from the ELIR. You should have the opportunity to discuss that with the institution, considering whether there is any work on student engagement that you would like to ask the ELIR team to place a particular focus on. You can also get advice on this from QAA Scotland.
- Find out what the institution intends to submit as its case studies. Would you want a case study to cover an aspect of the student learning experience? Is there a way you could provide text or material to support the case study?



Review Year

Purpose of the review

ELIR considers a wide range of aspects of the institution's management of learning and teaching.

Enhancement-led Institutional Review considers a wide range of aspects of the institution's management of learning and teaching. You can see all of the headings that need to be covered in Annex 1 of the [ELIR Handbook](#).

In reality, there are three main areas of interest: the institution's strategic approach to enhancement; internal monitoring and review; and management of the student learning experience. The focus on the student learning experience includes "the learning opportunities the institution provides for its students; and extent to which the students are engaged with the management of quality and are, therefore, able to act in partnership with the institution in its effective management of the student learning experience."³

ELIR also considers: the institutional context and strategic framework; enhancement in learning and teaching; academic standards⁴; self-evaluation and management of information; and collaborative activity.

Preparing for the ELIR visits

The ELIR team is responsible for setting the agenda for the visits, using the themes arising from the RA to inform it. The ELIR team will begin identifying themes from the RA and other material submitted in advance. About a week before the Part 1 visit, the QAA Scotland officer will share the ELIR team's early themes with the main institutional contact.

Part 1 Visit

The purpose of the Part 1 visit is for the ELIR team to explore in depth, the early themes identified with the institution. The Part 1 visit aims to concentrate on the quality assurance aspects of the review documents.

The Part 1 visit follows a fairly standard programme – an [example](#) can be found on the QAA website. The ELIR team meets the day before coming to the institution and then spends two days at the institution. The preparation day allows the reviewers to discuss their views of the RA and other documents submitted in advance, and to help them prepare for the meetings at the institution.

The institution is able to design the programme of activities for the first morning the ELIR team spends at the institution. It is good practice for the students' association to be involved in designing the programme and for student officers to meet the ELIR team during the first morning. Institutions have designed different programmes but typical activities include: a welcome from the principal, presentations to illustrate the

The Part 1 visit includes a meeting with a group of student reps.

case studies or other strategic initiatives, presentations from the students' association, and a tour of some particular aspect of the institution (such as the students' association, the library, or to sample learning and teaching activities). The tours are sometimes led by students.

The Part 1 visit includes a meeting with a group of student representatives. The ELIR team will be particularly interested in speaking to students and discovering more about the learning experience at the institution. The team may ask about your involvement with preparing the RA and ask if you agree with the views identified within it. The team will also be interested in any matters affecting the student body, positive or negative, because they will be trying to gain an understanding of the main issues affecting the students, and to get a sense of how responsive the institution is to identifying and addressing student needs.

It is often the responsibility of the students' association to identify students for the meeting. It is good practice to run an event of some sort that introduces students to ELIR, the process and the review itself. Some students' associations have given a copy of the RA to the students who will meet the ELIR team, to give them some background knowledge of the areas where there may be questions. The students' association can also take the opportunity to highlight aspects of the RA and any of the other information submitted; this might include areas where there has been particular work carried out, where more development is needed or where there have been successes.

There are no right or wrong answers for students to provide in discussions with the ELIR team. The team is interested in the students' views of the institution: what works well and less well.

Part 2 Visit

The aim of the Part 2 visit is to focus on the enhancement activities the institution is undertaking or planning to do. By the end of this visit, the review team will begin to draft their report, including recommendations, to the institution.

The Part 2 visit lasts between three and five days, with visits typically lasting four or five days. By the Part 2 visit, the ELIR team will have identified the particular topics it wants to explore with the institution. The team is very likely to meet with at least one group of students but most likely these will be students who are not formal student reps. The ELIR team identifies the groups of staff and students that it wishes to meet at the end of the Part 1 visit. The institution and the QAA Scotland officer will liaise over finalising the Part 2 visit programme.

There are no right or wrong answers for students to provide in discussions with the ELIR team. The team is interested in the students' views of the institution – what works well and less well. The team will also be interested in the ways the student body works with the institution – what are the ways for students to provide their views, either through student feedback or student rep arrangements, and how good is the institution at listening and responding to those views?

Tips for getting the most out of the ELIR visits:

- Make sure you are involved in designing the programme for the ELIR team's first morning at the institution. You may be invited to make a presentation to the team on aspects of the students' association's work, or on a student engagement initiative you have worked on with the institution. There may also be informal opportunities for you to meet the ELIR team (e.g. over coffee during the morning).
- Be proactive in identifying student reps to include in the Part 1 visit meeting with the ELIR team. Consider how you might prepare those reps for the meeting, not providing answers to the questions they may be asked but ensuring those who'll meet the team understand the ELIR process and their part in it. It may be a good idea to ensure the reps know the main areas you have highlighted in the RA.
- You may be able to help the institution to select students for the Part 2 visit.

ELIR Reports

The ELIR team makes a judgement about the effectiveness of the institution's arrangements for securing academic standards and enhancing the student learning experience. Information about the nature of the judgement is provided in the [ELIR Handbook](#). In addition to that overarching judgement, each ELIR highlights positive practice and areas for development at the institution.

The institution is formally notified of the judgement, and the main areas in which there will be positive practice and development points highlighted, in a 'key themes' letter. This letter is drafted by the QAA Scotland officer and agreed by the ELIR team. It is sent to the institution one week after the Part 2 visit. It is good practice and encouraged for the students' association to see a copy of the letter; however sharing the letter is the responsibility of the institution.

In ELIR 3, there are **two** reports on the ELIR at each institution: an **Outcome Report** and a **Technical Report**. The Outcome Report presents the overarching judgement and sets out the main findings in summary form, including the positive practice and the areas for development. The Outcome Report is designed to be read by those who do not need to know the detail of the whole ELIR review but are interested in seeing the highlights. The Outcome Report is short and should be understandable to student reps. The Technical Report will cover all of the topics within the scope of ELIR and will provide more detailed information for the institution. The information in Technical Reports will also be used by QAA Scotland to produce 'thematic reports' which will identify the themes arising from reviews carried out at more than one institution.

It is good practice for the students' association to have sight of those draft reports, especially the Outcome Report.

The students' association should be aware of both the outcome and Technical Reports.

The draft Outcome and Technical Reports are sent to the institution by QAA Scotland eight weeks after the Part 2 visit. At that point, the institution has the opportunity to comment on the draft reports, to ensure they are factually accurate. It is good practice for the students' association to have sight of those draft reports, especially the Outcome Report. The ELIR team will consider any comments the institution makes on the drafts and finalise the text. The reports are published on the QAA website sixteen weeks after the Part 2 visit.

The students' association should be aware of both the Outcome and Technical Reports. The Outcome Report should be shared with any of the executive team who were not as involved in ELIR as the president or education officer.

Tips for getting the most out of ELIR reports:

- Find out when the institution will receive the draft reports – you can be proactive and ask the institutional contact for a copy of the key themes letter (which they receive one week after the Part 2 visit). The institution will know the date well in advance of the ELIR.
- Ensure you are available to comment on the draft reports.
- When the reports are published, share at least the Outcome Report with the students' association officers and, if possible, with other student reps to ensure they are aware of the areas the institution is likely to be prioritising.

Handover

It is extremely important that all relationships and information gained from going through an ELIR process is passed on to any succeeding officers. The outcomes of the ELIR review will inform the institution's priorities over the next years, along with its own strategic and operational plans. The students' association should take time to plan the process and outcomes of ELIR into their handover, so that the incoming officers can align, as much as possible, their own priorities as quickly as possible with the institution's priorities.

Tips for getting the most from review year:

- Be prepared. Start talking to your institution early on, find out what the dates are, when the materials have to be turned in, when the visits are going to be.
- Think about how you've been involved in the process and what you want to tell the review team when they meet representatives of the students' association.
- Put time aside for consulting with students about matters that may be raised in the Reflective Analysis.
- Be sure to comment on any draft materials that come your way.

Follow-Up Year

Using outcomes of ELIR report

The ELIR will result in an overarching judgement about the effectiveness of the institution.

The Enhancement-led Institutional Review will result in an overarching **judgement** about the effectiveness of the institution. The reports, Outcome Report and Technical Report, will also identify areas of positive practice and areas for development or improvement. The reports may end up repeating or confirming some of the things the institution already knows and which the institution has already begun addressing. This is important because ELIR draws on the institution's self-evaluation of its strengths and weaknesses.

The ELIR team may endorse the institution's thoughts/observations or they may advise the institution to undertake different action or to re-prioritise its activities. There is an expectation in the university sector that the institution will reflect very carefully on the outcomes of ELIR and respond as best it can. There is flexibility for the institution to identify the precise ways in which it will respond to the ELIR outcomes. QAA Scotland officers discuss the institution's response to ELIR and the SFC also receives reports on the extent to which the institution has responded appropriately to its ELIR outcomes. SFC requires that the institution's year-on ELIR response is agreed by the institution's governing body.

Since the institution will take their ELIR reports seriously, it is likely that the institution will use the recommendations to form part of their future strategic plan or their learning and teaching strategy.

If the students' association has been actively or prominently involved in the ELIR process, either writing the Reflective Analysis or the other information sets or contributing to the visit(s) with the ELIR team, there is a good chance that some of the concerns of the students' association will feature in the reports. This would provide the students' association with a catalyst to improve the student experience at their institution.

Since the institution will take their ELIR reports seriously, it is likely that the institution will use the recommendations to form part of their future strategic plan or their learning and teaching strategy. These plans will determine the institution's priorities for the coming years. By participating in the discussion about the institution's priorities the students' association will be able to help ensure that the focus for change is on those areas that are important to students.

Each institution is different, but many institutions will have working groups or focus groups to take forward new ideas or projects from ELIR. These focus groups should have some student representation. It does not have to be a full-time officer, but could be a committee member or part-time officer. What is more important is that the students' association is in a place to support the student officer. Depending on the nature of the working group there may be a particular student that has campaigned for that issue or is very interested. This approach would allow more students to become involved in all aspects that the students' association is working on and will be less work for the sabbatical officers.

It is important to inform students why change is happening and the difference this change is aiming to achieve.

For ELIR 3, institutions will also be asked to participate in a follow-up event.

There may be links between the ELIR outcomes and the Student Partnership Agreement, if your institution has one. If your institution does have a [Student Partnership Agreement](#) with its students' association then that is another way to support and influence the institution's priorities. Student Partnership Agreements also allow students' associations and institutions to discuss what progress has been made in certain areas, what has been a success and what still needs to be improved. These conversations allow the students' association to continue establishing priorities and checking on progress with its institution.

ELIR is a high-level review of the whole institution, and many students will be unaware of its existence. It is important to inform students why change is happening and the difference this change is aiming to achieve. This is a difficult task, however the students' association could use its own class and departmental representative structures to inform other students and influence the institution's decisions or plans.

The institution is required to produce a [year-on follow-up report](#) one year after publication of the ELIR reports. The QAA Scotland officer will discuss a draft of the report with the institution, perhaps during the Annual Discussion meeting, if the timing is suitable. It is good practice and encouraged for the students' association to be involved in preparing that report.

For ELIR 3, institutions will also be asked to participate in a follow-up event. This will involve a team of staff and students from the institution sharing with one or more teams from other institutions how they have responded to the ELIR findings. There will be an opportunity for the institutional teams to discuss their respective action plans, asking questions and sharing views. The intention is to share institutions' responses more widely and to promote enhancement as practice is shared around the sector. It is expected that the institutional teams will include student members, providing another important opportunity for the students' association to become involved.

Annual Discussions

Every year there is a meeting between a QAA Scotland officer (usually an Assistant Director or the Head of Reviews) and the institution. At least one student representative is expected to attend. The purpose of the meeting is to ensure there are productive relations between the institution and QAA Scotland, and to provide an opportunity for keeping up to date on matters that are relevant to ELIR. It is a useful opportunity for the student representative to establish contact with QAA Scotland and to participate in the institution's ongoing quality activities.

The agenda for the meeting will be agreed in advance between the institution and the QAA Scotland officer. The student representative should also have had the opportunity to contribute to the agenda.

Matters for discussion include:

- Progress for, or action from ELIR (depending on the timing of the ELIR).
- Outcomes from and progress with institution-led quality reviews.
- Progress on student engagement.
- The institution's use of data.
- Any other matters the institution, QAA Scotland or the students' association wish to raise.

Further details about Annual Discussions are set out in the [ELIR Handbook](#) and in the [ELIR Operational Guidance](#) on the QAA website.

Unsure of what the ELIR reports are asking the institution to do? Contact QAA Scotland who will be happy to help.

Tips for getting the most out of Annual Discussions:

- Find out when the Annual Discussion meeting is likely to take place – your institutional contact will know this or can find out – and turn up! Or arrange for another rep to be there on your behalf.
- Find out who your QAA Scotland officer is – although most of the liaison is carried out between QAA Scotland and the institutional staff, you can also contact QAA Scotland direct with specific queries.
- Think about what you would like to see included on the agenda – is there a project you have had particularly close involvement with that you want to share with QAA Scotland? Is there something you are hoping the institution will prioritise? Are you wondering whether other institutions are also working in this area?
- Unsure of what the ELIR reports are asking the institution to do? Contact QAA Scotland who will be happy to help.

Handover

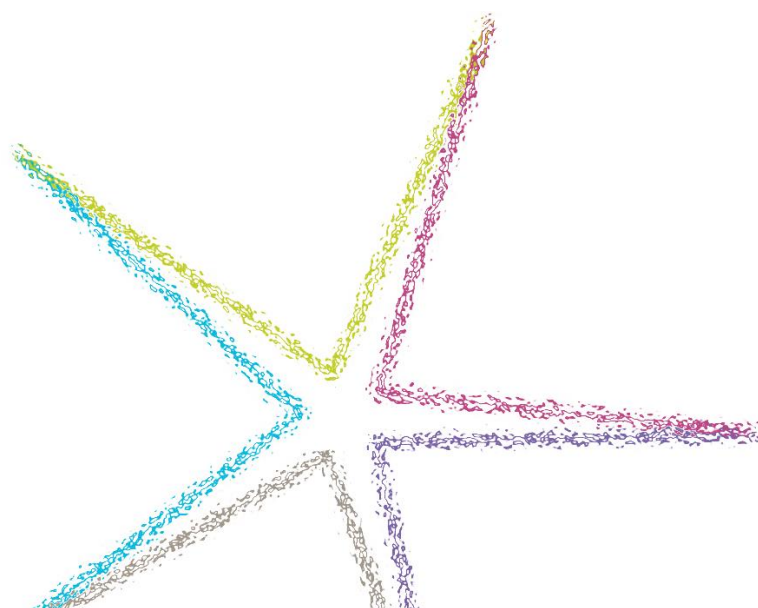
A good handover is essential for consistency within the students' association and its relationship with the institution. There will have been a lot of change happening in the past year because of the outcomes of ELIR, so it will be important to tell any successors what was present before the change and what process the institution went through before deciding on a specific action. There are several examples of institutions having intensive reviews to discover where things may not have been working as well as intended and to consider what steps are needed to make improvements. Any changes will occur within a context and handover provides an opportunity to set the context properly.

This will help any successors to understand why the institution is acting in a particular way or why it has prioritised particular areas or actions.

Handover is also a time for the students' association to celebrate any successes it may have had. It is also key to explain to successors any interaction the students' association has had with the institution in making these decisions. It is likely that the priorities of the students' association will change with new officers but informing them of the work the institution is doing may help them line up their priorities in a way that will have maximum effect or success for their year in office.

Tips for getting the most from the follow-up year:

- Ensure you have a copy of the ELIR reports. You can get them from the institution or from the [QAA website](#).
- Get involved in the institution's discussions about responding to the ELIR outcomes, including contributing to writing the year-on follow-up report.
- Get involved in the institutional team that will attend the follow-up event.
- Integrate institution and students' association priorities into the representative structure to support reps to be active participants in decision making meetings.
- Contribute to the planning on the Annual Discussion and attend.
- Start planning content of handover early to provide all the necessary context.
- Unsure of what the ELIR reports are asking the institution to do? Contact QAA Scotland who will be happy to help.



Mid-Point Year

Check up on progress

An institution will reach its midway point in the ELIR cycle around two years after its ELIR review. This midway point is an appropriate time to stop and review the changes that have taken place since ELIR. It is most likely that the officers involved in the last ELIR are no longer at the students' association. The students' association should have kept a record of the conversations, steps and changes that have happened in the past couple of years between it and the institution – perhaps through the handover discussions or in the [Student Partnership Agreement](#), if your students' association has one. This will make the midway review easier and more productive.

The first step would be to look at the original ELIR report and read what were the areas of positive practice and the areas for development that the institution was asked to consider. Next, the students' association will need to evaluate, based on its experiences, how the institution has progressed with those recommendations. It may be a time to revise the Student Partnership Agreement or equivalent document to update the projects the students' associations and the institution are working on together. This is also a great time to ask the institution how they think they are progressing and what still needs to be done to reach their own goals.

It is equally important to evaluate the level of student engagement within the institution.

It is equally important to evaluate the level of student engagement with the institution. If the level is not satisfactory then it is a time to question why student engagement is not as effective as it could be. It may be a work-in-progress and the students' association may ask itself where it wants to be and how it will get there. Another possibility is that the institution is not engaging with the students' association, which then becomes a conversation to discover why that is and how can it be changed.

Annual Discussions

Every academic year there is a meeting between a QAA Scotland officer (usually an Assistant Director or the Head of Reviews) and the institution. At least one student representative is expected to attend. The purpose of the meeting is to ensure there are productive relations between the institution and QAA Scotland, and to provide an opportunity for keeping up to date on matters that are relevant to ELIR. It is a useful opportunity for the student representative to establish contact with QAA Scotland and to participate in the institution's ongoing quality activities.

The agenda for the meeting will be agreed in advance between the institution and the QAA Scotland officer. The student representative should also have had the opportunity to contribute to the agenda.

Matters for discussion include:

- Progress for, or action from ELIR (depending on the timing of the ELIR).
- Outcomes from and progress with institution-led quality reviews.
- Progress on student engagement.
- The institution's use of data.
- Any other matters the institution, QAA Scotland or the students' association wish to raise.

Further details about Annual Discussions are set out in the [ELIR Handbook](#) and in the [ELIR Operational Guidance](#) on the QAA website.

Tips for getting the most out of Annual Discussions:

- Find out when the Annual Discussion meeting is likely to take place – your institutional contact will know this or can find out – and turn up! Or arrange for another rep to be there on your behalf.
- Find out who your QAA Scotland officer is – although most of the liaison is carried out between QAA Scotland and the institutional staff, you can also contact QAA Scotland direct with specific queries.
- Think about what you would like to see included on the agenda – is there a project you have had particularly close involvement with that you want to share with QAA Scotland? Is there something you are hoping the institution will prioritise? Are you wondering whether other institutions are also working in this area?
- Unsure of what the ELIR reports are asking the institution to do? Contact QAA Scotland who will be happy to help.

Students are expected to participate in the annual event.

Annual events provide an opportunity for those institutions to come together and share their experiences of responding to their ELIR outcomes.

Annual events

In most years, there is a mini-conference which is currently known as the ELIR sector event. During that event, a number of institutions are invited to present an area of activity they have progressed since their ELIR. There is usually a presentation highlighting the main themes identified through the ELIRs run to date – this can provide an opportunity for institutions and students' associations to gauge how their institution's priorities relate to those in the rest of the sector. The event is open to all staff and students in the Scottish university sector and is free to attend. New for ELIR Cycle 3 is the follow-up event: an event for those institutions which were reviewed around the same time. This provides an opportunity for those institutions to come together and share their experiences of responding to their ELIR outcomes. Every institution attending is encouraged to share some examples or case studies of how they have taken forward the recommendations from the ELIR reports to enhance their institution's policies and practices. Students are expected to participate in this event.

Each year, the Enhancement Themes conference is held and this may provide an opportunity for staff and/or the students' association to present or run a workshop on an area of activity. More information on the conference is available on the [Enhancement Themes](#) website.

Tips for getting the most out of annual events:

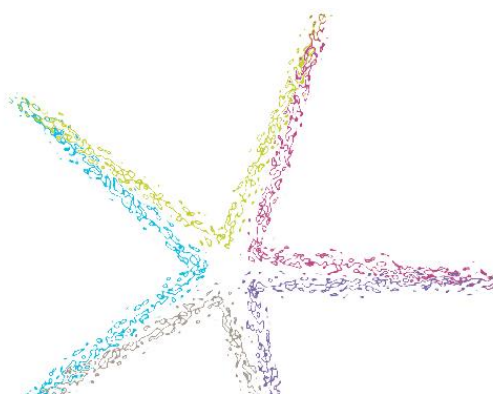
- Find out early what your institution is planning to do for the ELIR follow-up event. Some institutions may have a committee or working group – if so, there should be student representation on this.
- Suggest that students are co-presenters or lead a case study themselves at the event.
- Plan what you would like to present as a case study, in partnership with your institution.

Handover

A good handover is essential for consistency within the students' association and its relationship with the institution. There will have been a lot of change that has continued from the ELIR report and its outcomes two years ago. It will be important to tell any successors what was present before the change and what process the institution went through before deciding on a specific action. There are several examples of institutions having intensive reviews to identify improvements that could be made and the steps needed to make those changes. The handover provides an opportunity to set the context properly. This will help any successors to understand why the institution is prioritising particular activities or why it is taking action in a particular way.

Handover is also a time for the students' association to celebrate any success it may have had, even as small as getting the institution to consider a particular matter. It is also important to explain to successors any interaction the students' association has had with the institution in making these decisions. It is likely that the priorities of the students' association will change with new officers but informing them of the work the institution is doing may help them line up their priorities in a way that will have maximum effect or success.

It will be important to tell any successors what was present before the change and what process the institution went through before deciding on a specific action.



Tips for mid-point year:

- Discover what progress the institution and the students' association have made since the ELIR reports.
- Discuss in the students' association how effective its relationship with the institution is as a whole unit.
- Take part in a self-evaluation conversation with the institution about effectiveness of the students' association and student engagement at all levels.
- Use these conversations to prompt the institution to reprioritise if necessary or highlight areas of improvement.
- Become involved in any event or showcase the institution may be participating in.
- Not sure what the ELIR reports said or how you could get involved? Contact QAA Scotland.



Prep Year

Gearing up for ELIR

The institution will be looking at how much progress has been made in different areas of the institution, especially those areas which were identified in the previous ELIR reports as needing improvement.

This is the year when a lot of the preparation for Enhancement-led Institutional Review will happen ahead of the review. The institution will want to show how much improvement has been made since the last ELIR. Ideally student officers and students' associations have been involved in conversations with the institution over the years so preparation for ELIR should not come as a surprise, but it is helpful to know what institutions will be focusing on in the run up to ELIR.

The institution will be looking at how much progress has been made in different areas of the institution, especially those areas which were identified in the previous ELIR reports as needing improvement. The students' association should review the most recent ELIR reports and any notes or minutes from the Annual Discussions because this will provide a context and direction of where the institution is most likely to focus its activities. It will also give the students' association a chance to evaluate all the work that it and the institution have done over the past three years, taking stock of how much has changed and what needs to change more. All of these observations will form part of the conversation with QAA Scotland and the institution, and it is important that the students' association is involved.

Relevant documents to support ELIR

The purpose of Feedback Analysis is for the ELIR team to determine whether the institution is collecting feedback from its students as intended and what action they are taking because of that feedback.

There will be some specific documentation that the institution will be required to submit as part of the pre-ELIR information set. One of those documents will be an analysis of student feedback for the preceding twelve months. The purpose of this Feedback Analysis is for the ELIR team to determine whether the institution is collecting feedback from its students as intended and what action they are taking because of that feedback. The Feedback Analysis should be collected and put together by the institution, not the students' association in isolation.

The kind of things that could be included in the Feedback Analysis are:

- Results to internal student surveys and subsequent actions taken.
- Papers by student representatives (stating issues and concerns from students, along with possible solutions) to particular boards which could range from Academic Senate to departmental meetings.
- Evidence of course representative conferences influencing the opinion of learning and teaching committees.
- Student Partnership Agreements, if they are in place.

This is a great opportunity for the students' association to say with confidence that the institution is taking its concerns seriously and working with the students' association for workable solutions. Alternatively, there are other ways to show that the institution has taken student feedback into account, such as forming a working group with student representatives to work on a particular issue or project.

There will be other additional pieces of information that will need to be submitted, such as an analysis of the external examiner comments which the institution will have kept on file.

The students' association could suggest some case studies that the institution may want to consider, for instance any projects that have been jointly agreed on since their inception.

The institution will also need to provide a mapping of the institution's policies and process against the [UK Quality Code for Higher Education](#) and all the reports for [Institution-led Reviews](#) in the previous twelve months. The theory behind supplying this information to the ELIR team in advance of the visits is to demonstrate how the quality arrangements work in practice, which should allow assurance matters to be resolved early in the visits, leaving more time for discussions about the enhancement activities at the institution.

Another piece of information that needs to be given beforehand is case studies. Case studies are designed to be a tool to give the institution an opportunity to provide detailed information about a particular activity which demonstrates its strategic approach working in practice. At this point, the institution will only be considering which cases they want to include for the ELIR team.

The students' association could suggest some case studies that the institution may want to consider, for instance any projects that have been jointly agreed on since their inception. Case studies do not need to have a 'happy ending' but can explain a situation where a solution was tried and possibly did not work or did not produce the desired or intended effect. The case study simply needs to be reflective and evidence-based.

Annual discussions are a useful opportunity for the student rep to establish contact with QAA Scotland and to participate in the institution's ongoing quality activities.

Annual Discussions

As noted in previous chapters, every year there is a meeting between a QAA Scotland officer (usually an Assistant Director or the Head of Reviews) and the institution. At least one student representative is expected to attend. The purpose of the meeting is to ensure there are productive relations between the institution and QAA Scotland, and to provide an opportunity for keeping up to date on matters that are relevant to ELIR. It is a useful opportunity for the student representative to establish contact with QAA Scotland and to participate in the institution's ongoing quality activities.

The agenda for the meeting will be agreed in advance between the institution and the QAA Scotland officer. The student representative should also have had the opportunity to contribute to the agenda.

In this year, the Annual Discussion will have a particular focus on what the institution would like to achieve through the upcoming ELIR and its preparation.

Matters for discussion include:

- Progress for, or action from ELIR (depending on the timing of the ELIR).
- Outcomes from and progress with institution-led quality reviews.
- Progress on student engagement.
- The institution's use of data.
- Any other matters the institution, QAA Scotland or the students' association wish to raise.

In this year, the Annual Discussion will have a particular focus on what the institution would like to achieve through the upcoming ELIR review and its preparation.

Further details about Annual Discussions are set out in the [ELIR Handbook](#) and in the [ELIR Operational Guidance](#) on the QAA website.

Tips for getting the most out of Annual Discussions:

- Find out when the Annual Discussion meeting is likely to take place – your institutional contact will know this or can find out – and turn up! Or arrange for another rep to be there on your behalf.
- Find out who your QAA Scotland officer is – although most of the liaison is carried out between QAA Scotland and the institutional staff, you can also contact QAA Scotland direct with specific queries.
- Think about what you would like to see included on the agenda – is there a project you have had particularly close involvement with that you want to share with QAA Scotland? Is there something you are hoping the institution will prioritise? Are you wondering whether other institutions are also working in this area?
- Unsure of what the ELIR reports are asking the institution to do? Contact QAA Scotland who will be happy to help.

It is a good idea to introduce and go through the institution's vision and strategic plan with any incoming sabbaticals.

Handover

The handover to new sabbatical officers will be important this year; they will be the ones that actually take part in the ELIR. It is necessary for them to be aware of all the activities the institution and the students' association have initiated over the past three to four years. Some of these projects may already be evident, other projects may just be beginning, but whatever stage they may be at, it is important to recognise and celebrate them. It is a good idea to introduce and go through the institution's vision and strategic plan with any incoming sabbaticals. This will provide them with a good context to explain why the institution has made certain changes.

Becoming familiar with the institution's strategic plan will also provide a good foundation to anticipate where the institution is going and what they may focus on throughout their ELIR.

Becoming familiar with the institution's strategic plan will also provide a good foundation to anticipate where the institution is going and what they may focus on throughout their ELIR.

Just as it is important to highlight all of the activities the institution and students' association are doing well together, it is also important to acknowledge where mistakes have been made and what was learned from the experience. The incoming officers should be aware of things that have been tried and did not work, and have some knowledge about why they did not work. That way the new officers will not waste time trying an approach that has already been tested. The ELIR team will be looking for examples of how the institution has approached working with the students' association and vice versa.

The incoming officers will have the opportunity to help change or set the direction of the institution and its priorities in the coming years, therefore it is crucial that all incoming officers are given adequate information and support to make these changes happen. Think about ELIR not as a giant review but as a catalyst for change, and how the students' association will use this catalyst effectively to ensure the best student experience possible at their institution today and in the future.

Think about ELIR not as a giant review but as a catalyst for change, and how the students' association will use this catalyst effectively to ensure the best student experience possible at their institution today and in the future.

Tips for prep year:

- Be aware of when the institution will draft material for ELIR.
- Be prepared to take part in the drafting phase and have particular examples to include.
- Develop a coherent handover to ensure any successors can confidently use the ELIR process for change.
- Not sure of the ELIR submission or visit dates? Your institutional contact should have this information but you can also contact QAA Scotland to talk these through.



Other quality processes that can lead to change

There are many other ways, through different sections of the [Quality Enhancement Framework](#), that the students' associations could be involved to affect change at their institution. Below are two specific activities that the students' association should consider and be involved in.

Institution-led Reviews

Institution-led Reviews, are a requirement for the institution to carry out – the detailed guidance can be found in the [SFC Guidance to higher education institutions](#). Universities have a lot of flexibility around what they do for an Institution-led Review. This could be a review of subjects or disciplines, reviewing a particular topic that has many dimensions. For example, this could be a review of all the support services; a review of the post-graduate taught experience; or review of the curriculum. The institution can more or less do whatever it wants as long as they meet the overall SFC guidance, which will be covered in its annual report to the SFC. During ELIR, the review team will consider the Institution-led Reviews which have happened or are ongoing. All Institution-led Reviews should have students on the leading group. If a panel is reviewing a subject or discipline, there will be a student reviewer on the panel.

Students' associations can use these reviews to gain a better idea of what is going on in departments or across the whole institution.

Students' associations can use these reviews to gain a better idea of what is going on in departments or across the whole institution. Students' associations can use the information gained from reviews to discover where they can become more involved. The reports and outcomes from reviews should be published to the student body. The effectiveness of the review method used by institutions is considered during ELIR, as well as the outcomes from the individual reviews themselves.



Tips for getting the most from Institution-led Review:

- Find out when the institutional reviews will take place – there may be several departmental/school/faculty reviews happening within the same academic year.
- Students are often involved in preparing the self-evaluation document submitted for the review, and will definitely be involved in meeting the review panel.
- Ensure that you have students as part of the review panel, and that they have received training before being on the review panel.
- Make sure that you receive the review report after it has been written.
- Work in partnership with the institution to take forward the recommendations within the report – this could be a role for department/school/faculty representatives.
- Communicate to students in the department/school/faculty the changes that are happening as a result of the review.

Enhancement Themes

[Enhancement Themes](#) are another method of practicing enhancement and they are unique to the Scottish higher education sector. The principal idea behind the Enhancement Themes is that it is beneficial for the Scottish sector as a whole for institutions to work together, sharing their experiences and practices with each other. The focus or topics of the Enhancement Themes are chosen by a committee of senior academic managers and student representatives, and they are managed by [QAA Scotland](#) on behalf of the sector as a whole.

The institution will engage with the Enhancement Themes to work on particular areas and the ELIR team will ask how the institution is using the themes to influence activity within the institution. Within every institution there is a steering committee for the Enhancement Themes work which has at least one student representative as a full member.

The Enhancement Themes work has produced a substantial resource, including international practice. These resources are fully searchable on the Enhancement Themes [website](#).



Tips for getting the most from Enhancement Themes:

- Ensure you know the current Enhancement Themes.
- Find out which student sits on your institution's Enhancement Themes committee, commonly the Student President or VP Education.
- Make sure that the student rep is aware they are part of the [Enhancement Themes Student Network](#), and can get support through sparqs or QAA Scotland for their role and work with Enhancement Themes.
- Your institution will have a variety of ways to engage with Enhancement Themes, make sure that students are involved in the different aspects as much as possible, through the student member on the institution's Enhancement Themes committee.

Other agencies

[Scottish Funding Council](#): is the national, strategic body that is responsible for funding the teaching and learning provision in Scotland. The SFC is the body that ultimately the universities and agencies such as QAA Scotland and sparqs report to. The SFC is also responsible for the negotiation of Outcome Agreements.

[NUS Scotland](#): National Union of Students Scotland, represents students in Scotland, from college to university, and is recognised by the Scottish Government as the key voice for students. NUS Scotland was instrumental when the Quality Enhancement Framework was conceived and set up. NUS Scotland continues to raise students' issues around the quality of the education they receive, as well as succeeding at many other campaigns.

[Universities Scotland](#): Universities Scotland is the body which represents the principals of the universities in Scotland. Universities Scotland provides the sector with a lot of research about upcoming changes that will affect universities, for instance past reports have been Curriculum for Excellence and Widening Access.



When's Your Review?

Appendix 1

<u>2012-13</u> Queen Margaret University Royal Conservatoire of Scotland	<u>2014-15</u> Edinburgh Napier University Glasgow Caledonian University Heriot-Watt University University of St. Andrews University of the West of Scotland
<u>2013-14</u> Glasgow School of Art Scotland's Rural College University of Aberdeen University of Dundee University of Glasgow University of Strathclyde	<u>2015-16</u> The Robert Gordon University The University of Edinburgh University of Abertay Dundee University of Stirling University of the Highlands and Islands



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http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Documents/ELIR_Handbook_3.pdf

³ *Enhancement-led Institutional Review Handbook, Third Edition, page 6* (Quality Assurance Agency Scotland, May 2012).

http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Documents/ELIR_Handbook_3.pdf

⁴ Academic standards are the minimum threshold which must be achieved by the student to receive an academic award. It is up to the institution to maintain the appropriate level of academic standards, as set out in the *UK Quality Code for Higher Education Part A: Setting and Maintaining Academic Standards* (Quality Assurance Agency, October 2013).

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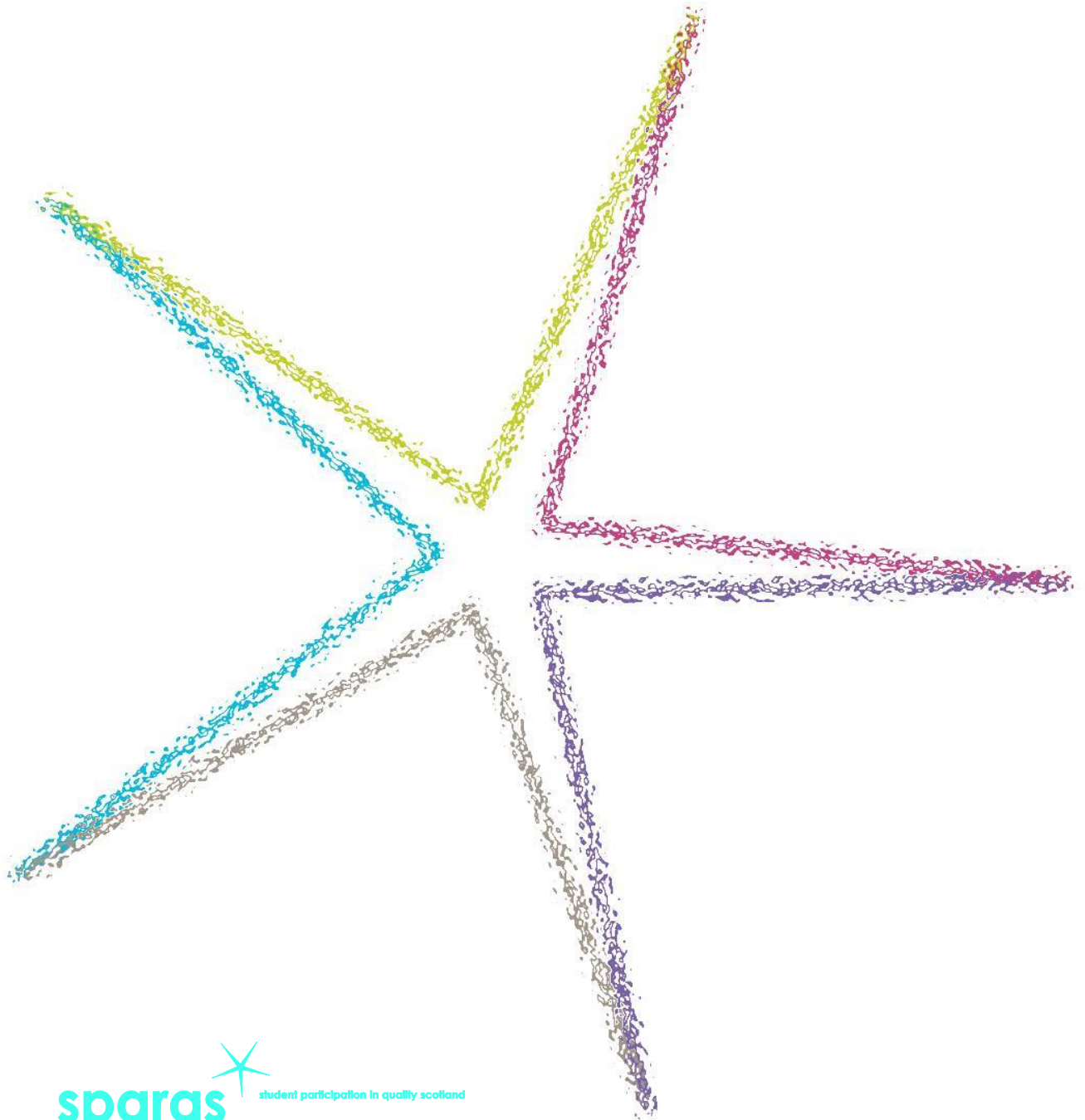
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