

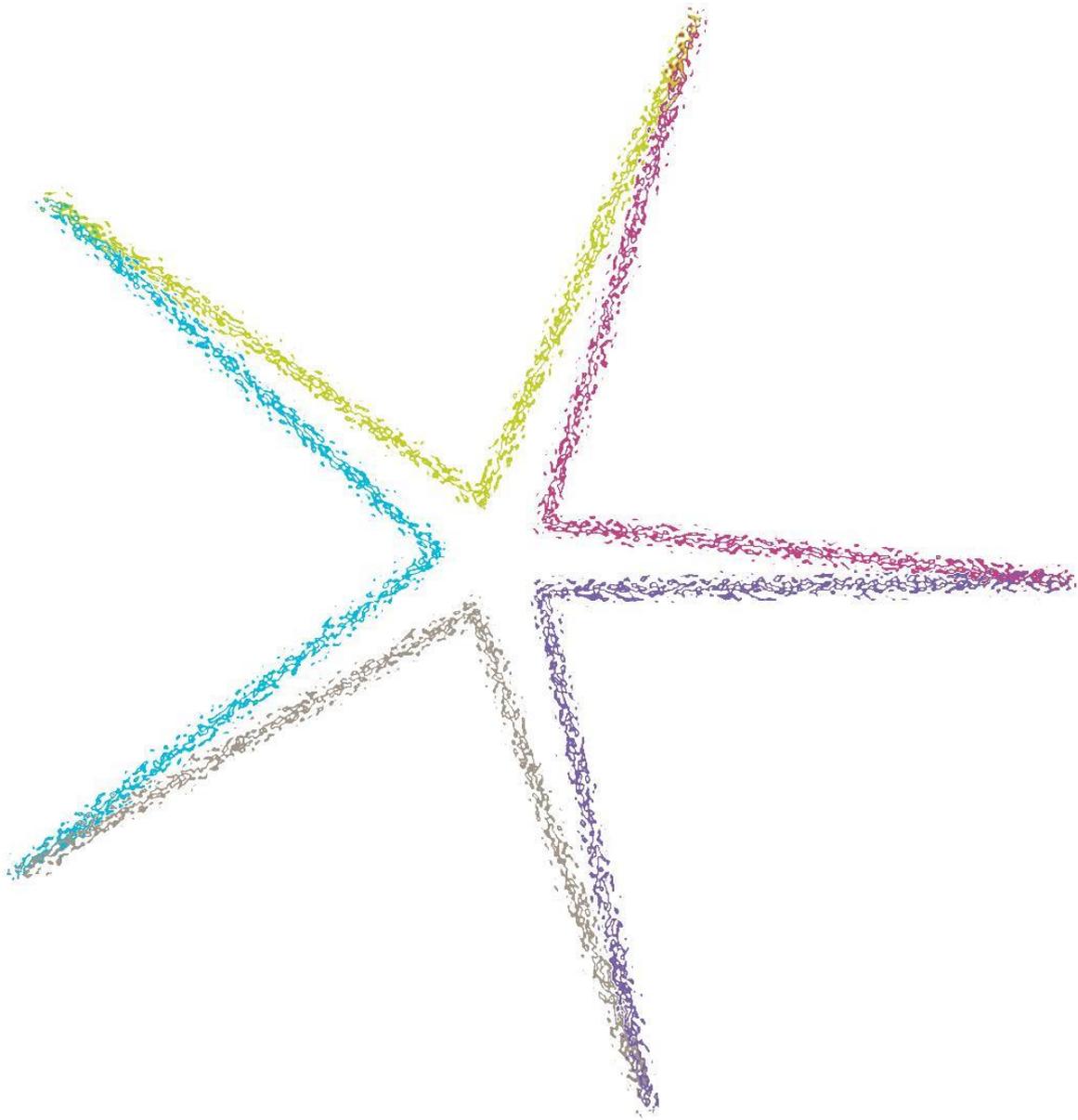
# **ELIR Cycle 4 Practice Guide**

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Acknowledgements

sparqs would like to thank the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) Scotland, and in particular a special acknowledgement to Ailsa Crum, for the support given to make this guidance possible.

### 1.2 Purpose of this guidance

This guidance has been produced for students' association representatives and staff in the higher education sector in Scotland. Since student engagement is a core part of the process, it is also recommended that students and institutional staff involved in the review read through this guide and consider how they will contribute to/facilitate this. The purpose of this document is to provide information about Enhancement-led Institutional Review (ELIR), and to support meaningful student engagement throughout the process. For definitive information about the ELIR method, see the QAA Scotland [ELIR 4 Handbook](#) and/or consult QAA Scotland staff.

Student engagement is a core principle for the sector and is threaded throughout quality arrangements in both the college and university sectors in Scotland. In universities, it is integral to the [Quality Enhancement Framework in Scotland](#) launched in 2003 and the effectiveness of student engagement is a significant focus of ELIR. Students also play a central role in Institution-led Reviews (ILRs) and sector activities such as the Enhancement Themes and are also represented on sector decision-making groups.

Reflection on the nature of the learning experience cannot be done effectively unless in partnership with students and by drawing upon their perspectives. The more we engage with students, the more likely we are to get it right for students, both individually and collectively. In addition, when students' associations work successfully in partnership with their institution, they can significantly affect the direction of their ELIR and how recommendations are implemented. This guidance focuses on what students' association staff and officers need to do in their roles.

### 1.3 Using this guidance

This guidance assumes that most student officers reading it may not have engaged with ELIR before. It provides context and background to the process and makes suggestions of 'what you need to do' at each stage of the process. These tips are built on good practice in the sector and the experience of sparqs and QAA Scotland. They are particularly relevant to students' association representatives and staff but are useful to consider for anyone involved in the review.

This document should be used in conjunction with the QAA Scotland [ELIR 4 Handbook](#), published in April 2017, and the [Preparing for Enhancement-led Institutional Review Guide](#), published in September 2017. If you have a specific query relating to the ELIR at your institution, you should get in touch directly with QAA Scotland.

*This document should be used in conjunction with the QAA Scotland ELIR 4 Handbook, published in April 2017, and the Preparing for Enhancement-led Institutional Review Guide, published September 2017.*

## 1.4 Introduction to ELIR 4

*The ELIR looks in depth at how students are engaged in shaping quality at each institution and how well students are engaged in ELIR itself.*

ELIR is the external review method for higher education institutions in Scotland and is one of the five elements of the [Quality Enhancement Framework in Scotland](#). The ELIR looks in depth at how students are engaged in shaping quality at each institution and how well students are engaged in ELIR itself. The main focus of the review is to consider the institution's approach to improving the student learning experience. ELIR has been QAA Scotland's review method since 2003 and there have been three review cycles since then. ELIR is one of the ways in which the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) fulfils its legal duty to review quality in Scottish higher education institutions.

This guidance is written for use in ELIR Cycle 4, which runs in the period 2017-22. The duration of the cycle is five years with the final year of the cycle (academic year 2021-22) designated a reflection and development year, with reviews taking place over the preceding four years.

There have been some notable developments to the ELIR process for Cycle 4; including greater institutional contextualisation of the review. This means that an institution's ELIR can focus on the areas that matter most to students and the institution, and ensures the review can provide the most benefit possible to all.

Student engagement in all stages of the ELIR process is essential to the success of the review. There is a renewed commitment to the value of the role of students in all elements of the process, as 'reviewees' (i.e. in terms of engaging with and informing the review), and as 'reviewers' (i.e. students as members of review teams) in ELIR 4. This means that students should be actively engaged in the institutional self-evaluation, the Review Visit, the follow-up and in Annual Discussions with QAA Scotland.

*Students should be actively engaged in the institutional self-evaluation, the Review Visit, the follow-up and in Annual Discussions with QAA Scotland.*

It is important to stress that ELIR is not a one-off event occurring every five years. Institutions are continuously working to assure and enhance the quality of learning and teaching. All institutions regularly conduct reviews of subject disciplines and support services (Institution-led Reviews, which will be explained briefly in this guide). Every institution will also have at least one committee whose remit is to oversee learning and teaching quality assurance and enhancement. In addition, every institution participates in national-level enhancement activity through the QAA Enhancement Themes. ELIR is the external review that evaluates the effectiveness of all of these processes: ensuring that they are encouraging the enhancement of the student experience.

## 1.5 ELIR: A key process for students' associations

***"Since the inception of the enhancement-led approach, it has become established practice that students should be partners in the formulation, operation and evaluation of the institution's approach to enhancement."***<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Enhancement-led Institutional Review Handbook, Fourth Edition, page 4-5* (Quality Assurance Agency Scotland, April 2017)

*The ELIR process presents an opportunity for institutions to engage in genuine dialogue and to work in partnership with the student body.*

*It is essential to familiarise yourself with the ELIR guidance to understand the process, and to map out all the key dates, meetings and deadlines.*

The ELIR process presents an opportunity for institutions to engage in genuine dialogue and to work in partnership with the student body. ELIR is an opportunity to look at a wide range of learning and teaching activities within the institution and to consider how policies and services are meeting the needs of students. The recommendations and commendations highlighted in the ELIR report will shape the institution's priorities, areas of key activity, and learning and teaching strategy for the coming years. By engaging in discussions about the institution's priorities, the students' association will ensure that the focus for change is on areas that matter to students.

ELIR is a high-level review of the whole institution and by having a meaningful and productive relationship with the institution, the students' association can engage with ELIR to affect the institution's direction and key learning and teaching priorities.

## **What you need to do**

### **Understand the process**

ELIR is useful for every students' association and student officer. It is essential to familiarise yourself with the ELIR guidance to understand the process and to help best understand where your role will fit in. Do ensure to provide new officer handovers and briefing throughout the cycle. This document should be used in conjunction with the QAA Scotland [ELIR 4 Handbook](#), published in April 2017, and the [Preparing for Enhancement-led Institutional Review Guide](#), published in September 2017. Find out who the link QAA Scotland officer is for your institution and contact them with any questions relating to your ELIR.

### **Map out key dates**

It is essential to map out all the key dates, meetings and deadlines throughout the ELIR cycle to ensure that the students' association and officers know exactly what's coming up. The relevant student officer for each year will support the ELIR, whether this is during the Planning or Review Visits, the preparation for the review, or the follow-up processes. Mapping out your key dates and knowing where you are in the review will determine what you will contribute to the process and what training is required, and will help you understand upcoming actions for your institution.

### **Utilise existing processes and knowledge**

ELIR presents a significant opportunity for the students' association to influence the student experience but it is important not to create unmanageable workloads. Look at how you can build ELIR preparation into existing activities such as course rep meetings and learning and teaching events. You can also use data and knowledge you already have through your learning and teaching representative activities, including your Student Partnership Agreement (SPA). In the early stages of an ELIR you should concentrate on identifying gaps in your understanding of the student experience, especially where these relate to emerging themes, and concentrate additional activity in these areas.

## Student Partnership Agreements

Many institutions now have Student Partnership Agreements (SPAs) or equivalent documents in place with their students' associations. Further information about SPAs is available in sparqs' [Guidance on the development and implementation of a Student Partnership Agreement in universities](#). SPAs set out the relationship between the students' association and the institution and identify a number of jointly-agreed priority areas for enhancing the student learning experience. These priority areas will have been decided upon as a result of looking at a range of evidence and will have gone through a process of consultation with students, and so should give a good indication of what matters to the student body.

SPAs can be used as evidence of the institution's approach to partnership working with students and also highlight some of the learning and teaching issues that are particularly important to students. As a result, they have a significant role to play in various stages of the ELIR 4 process. This includes, but is not limited to:

- In the early stages of **ELIR planning** to inform potential review themes (see pages 13-16).
- In the development of the institution's **Reflective Analysis** (see page 17).
- To inform agenda items and what to talk about at the **Annual Discussion** (see page 23).

*SPAs can be used as evidence of the institution's approach to partnership working with students and also highlight some of the learning and teaching issues that are particularly important to students.*

## What you need to do

### Familiarise yourself with your previous ELIR report and strategic documents

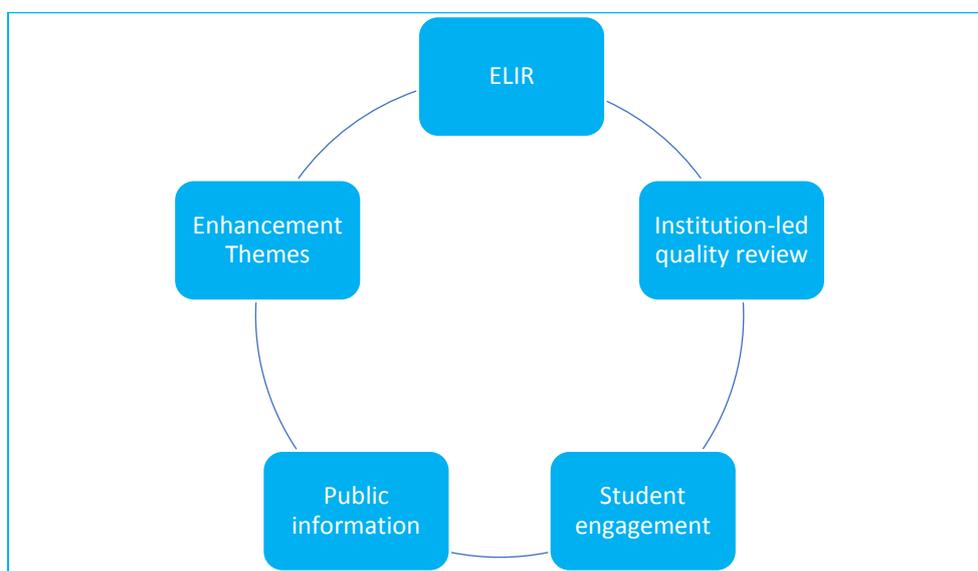
It is important to read and understand your previous ELIR report. These can be found on the [QAA Scotland website](#) and will highlight prior learning and teaching strategies, institutional priorities and what students said. It is vital to be familiar with the outcomes and how they can influence the institution's learning and teaching strategy. It is also useful to consider how far progress has been made against your last report and where the institution could progress next. Do enquire about how your institution is acting on the outcomes of their previous ELIR. Other key documents to familiarise yourself with include the ELIR 3 Follow-up Report, your institution's learning and teaching strategy and Outcome Agreement.

## Outcome Agreements

Outcome Agreements set out what colleges and universities plan to deliver in return for their funding from the SFC and how the institution meets Scottish Government priorities. Outcome Agreements are negotiated between the institution and an SFC Outcome Agreement Manager. There is an expectation that students are involved in the Outcome Agreement process. For more information on Outcome Agreements see the SFC's [Guidance for the Development of University Outcome Agreements: 2017-18 to 2019-20](#).

*Outcome Agreements set out what colleges and universities plan to deliver in return for their funding from the SFC.*

## 1.6 Put into context: Quality Enhancement in Scotland



External reviews (ELIR) are one of the five elements of the [Quality Enhancement Framework](#) (QEF), the system institutions use to know that their degrees, teaching and learning, and everything relating to the overall delivery and support of the learning experience is of the highest standard possible.

The Quality Enhancement Framework was developed and is owned through a partnership between:

- QAA Scotland.
- Scottish Funding Council.
- Universities Scotland.
- National Union of Students Scotland.
- sparqs.
- Advance HE.

*The Quality Enhancement Framework is underpinned by an enhancement-led approach to quality.*

The framework is underpinned by an enhancement-led approach to quality. This means institutions taking **“deliberate steps to bring about improvement in the effectiveness of the learning experiences of students”**.<sup>2</sup>

Key to quality enhancement is:

- Honest and open reflection.
- Identification of areas of strength and weakness for the institution.
- Planning for improvements.

<sup>2</sup> *Enhancement-led Institutional Review Handbook, Fourth Edition, page 3* (Quality Assurance Agency Scotland, April 2017)

The four other elements of the Quality Enhancement Framework are:

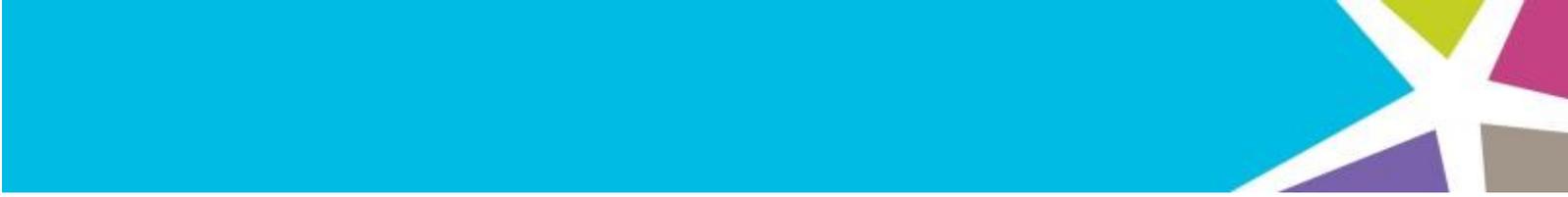
- 1. Institution-led Review (ILR)** – ILRs are periodic reviews conducted by institutions. This could be a review of academic subject areas, professional service departments, or thematic reviews of an institution-wide topic. Institutions have flexibility in designing the method they use, but they must meet SFC guidance which sets out a number of features all institutions are required to meet, such as: all provision should be reviewed on a six-year cycle; review panels must include at least one external member; and students should be engaged at all stages of the process. All Institution-led Reviews should have students (sabbatical or school/faculty officers) on the review panel. Institutions should also consider how best to support the students of the reviewed discipline or department to shape and input into the review. For more information about student engagement in ILR see the sparqs practice guide for universities and students' associations on [Engaging Students in Institution-led Review](#).

Engagement in ILR and an understanding of the outcomes is also important for ELIR and other quality projects. Institutions submit annual reports to SFC on the outcomes of ILR, which QAA Scotland analyses. Subsequently, institutions' ILR outcomes are discussed during ELIR Annual Discussions (see page 23). ILR was also the topic for a [Focus On project in 2016-17](#).

For more information on what higher education institutions are expected to do regarding quality, see the [Scottish Funding Council Guidance to Higher Education Institutions on Quality from August 2017-2022](#).

- 2. Enhancement Themes** – Enhancement Themes are unique to the Scottish higher education sector. They exist to improve the student learning experience by developing innovative strategy, policy and practice as well as sharing existing good practice from outside and inside the Scottish sector. The Themes involve encouraging institutional staff and students to work in partnership, recognising that the sector can gain more by working collaboratively. The focus of the Enhancement Themes are chosen by a committee of senior academic managers and student representatives called SHEEC (The Scottish Higher Education Enhancement Committee). They are managed by QAA Scotland on behalf of the sector as a whole, housed on the [Enhancement Themes website](#). The new Theme for 2017-2020 is [Evidence for Enhancement: Improving the Student Experience](#). The Theme is led by Professor Karl Leydecker, Vice-Principal (Learning and Teaching) at the University of Dundee. The Theme's two Deputy Leads are Professor Martha Caddell from Edinburgh Napier University and Professor Nicky Andrew from Glasgow Caledonian University. A student lead is identified from the student members of SHEEC. There is also the Theme Leaders' Group, a sector committee which meets three to four times a year and has equal staff and student membership.

Student engagement is fundamental to the Enhancement Themes and students have a significant role to play within institutional and national activity. Each institution usually has a team to oversee the work of the Theme within the institution, of which at least one student representative is a member (this is often a sabbatical officer but often school/faculty officers or interested course reps will be appropriate roles to consider). It is good practice that a students' association staff member is also included in the membership of this team. Students also shape the work of the Theme at a national level. There are four student members of SHEEC, the group that selects and directs the Theme at a strategic level. Students are also members of the Theme Leaders' Group which oversees the Theme at an operational level (the group comprises one student and one staff member per institution).

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- 3. Public Information on quality** – Public Information refers to all information that is published and available to the general public about the student experience. The SFC asks institutions to provide information for students (current and potential), employers and other stakeholders. Public Information includes both internally-gathered and externally-gathered information, for example:
- The institution’s own internal surveys.
  - Institutional-led Review reports.
  - Programme feedback.
  - National surveys such as the National Student Survey (NSS), Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES) and Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES).
  - Key Information Sets (KIS).
  - ELIR reports.
- 4. Student engagement** - Student engagement is not only an individual strand in the Quality Enhancement Framework, but is a fundamental part of every other element of the QEF. All students should have a responsibility and an opportunity to shape learning and teaching at their institution. [A Student Engagement Framework for Scotland](#) is a document endorsed and owned by all of the sector agencies and puts forward a sector-agreed understanding of student engagement. sparqs is the national agency which exists to support student engagement in universities and colleges in Scotland.

### 1.7 Focus On: following up on ELIR outcomes at a sector level

Institutions are also asked to participate in QAA Scotland’s **Focus On** activity. Every year SHEEC (The Scottish Higher Education Enhancement Committee) works with QAA Scotland to identify a topic for a national Focus On project. Focus On topics are informed by the themes arising from ELIR and aim to support the enhancement of policy and practice in the sector. At the start of each project, QAA Scotland consults with institutions and students’ associations to ensure the project is relevant and useful to staff and students across Scotland. Previous Focus On projects:

- 2017-18 Feedback from Assessment
- 2016-17 The Postgraduate Research (PGR) Student Experience
- 2016-17 Institution-led Review
- 2015-16 Collaborative Activity
- 2014-15 Assessment and Feedback

Student involvement in Focus On is key to the success of the projects. Student representatives and students’ associations have the opportunity to shape the direction of Focus On and each project generally has specific activities relating to student engagement. Student representatives and students’ association staff are encouraged to contribute to projects and attend Focus On events.

More information about [Focus On](#) and materials produced as a result of the projects are available on the QAA website.

## 2. ELIR

ELIR provides a periodic (currently, once every five years) external review of the institution, including considering how policies and services are meeting the needs of students. It is an important process as it results in a formal public judgement about the institution, which is considered by the SFC, who have a legal duty to review quality in universities and colleges. ELIR recognises that institutions are autonomous bodies and are therefore responsible for the academic standards of their awards and the quality of the student experience. The ELIR method results in a threshold judgement and a set of differentiated commendations and recommendations. The threshold judgement confirms that the institution is securing its academic standards and improving the student experience. The commendations and recommendations provide a rich resource which informs a programme of development and enhancement activity across the sector, including the Focus On projects and the Enhancement Themes.

*The scope of ELIR is broad: including the experience of all students regardless of level, location or mode of study.*

### 2.1 The purpose and scope of the review

ELIR considers the following areas:

1. Contextual information about the institution, student population and the review.
2. Enhancing the student learning experience.
3. Strategy and practice for enhancing learning and teaching.
4. Academic standards and quality processes.
5. Collaborative provision.

The scope of ELIR is broad: including the experience of all students regardless of level, location or mode of study. This means that the review will consider the experiences of full-time, part-time, undergraduate, postgraduate taught, postgraduate research, campus-based, work-based and distance learning students.

ELIR focuses on an institution's strategic approach to enhancement and its ability to evaluate its own strengths and weaknesses. The following questions help an institution to reflect on where it is and where it wants to go:

- Where are we now?
- Where do we want to be in the future?
- How are we going to get there?
- How will we know when we get there?

ELIR is a peer review process, meaning that review teams comprise students and staff from other institutions inside and outside Scotland. A collaborative ethos also encourages institutions to work together to tackle shared challenges and improve the student experience in its widest sense. It is also important to note that ELIR will explore student representation and engagement at the university. This provides an opportunity for the institution to reflect on the effectiveness of its relationship with the students' association and how it could be strengthened. A Student Partnership Agreement or equivalent (see page 7) will be useful for this. Institutions are expected to engage students as partners in the development, implementation and evaluation of quality assurance and enhancement. During ELIR the review team will look at how well that partnership works in practice.

*ELIR is a peer review process, meaning that review teams comprise students and staff from other institutions inside and outside Scotland.*

## 2.2 The ELIR process

ELIR is not just a one-off review visit but is made up of various component parts, all of which will be explained further in this guidance.

Further details of our 'what you need to do' suggestions are provided at the end of each component part.

Stage	Timing	Duration	What you need to do
<b>Early preparation and liaison with QAA Scotland</b>	12+ months before Review		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Read guidance and understand the process.</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Find out who the link QAA Scotland officer is for your institution and contact them with any questions.</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Map out key dates.</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Utilise existing processes and knowledge.</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Familiarise yourself with key strategic documents including your previous ELIR report.</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Agree the mechanisms for students' association involvement and support in ELIR.</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Consider your ELIR timeline, agree roles and responsibilities and who will be involved.</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Think about existing student engagement activities/gaps.</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Contribute to discussion on key themes and make-up of review team.</a></li> </ul>
<b>ELIR preparation and Reflective Analysis (RA) drafting</b>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Ensure student engagement in drafting the RA.</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Utilise existing ways of gathering student representatives or develop ELIR-specific methods.</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Ensure students recognise and endorse the content of the RA and AIS.</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Be aware of the content of early feedback.</a></li> </ul>
Submission of a contextualised RA and Advance Information Set (AIS)	Submitted 8 weeks prior to Planning Visit		
Early feedback on RA and AIS from QAA Scotland	2 weeks prior to Planning Visit		

Stage	Timing	Duration	What you need to do
<b>Planning Visit</b>	6-8 weeks before Review Visit	1 day	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Get the most out of your Planning Visit, think about what works well, what could be improved.</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Make RA, AIS and supporting evidence accessible and brief all involved.</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Think about who will be involved in the Planning Visit.</a></li> </ul>
Submission of additional material	2-3 weeks before Review Visit		
<b>Review Visit</b>		Up to 5 days	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Get the most out of your Review Visit, be prepared and brief all involved.</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Think about who will be involved at the Review Visit.</a></li> </ul>
ELIR Judgements and Reports	Drafts sent 1 week after Review Visit. Published 16 weeks after Review Visit		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Have sight of draft Outcome Reports and Technical Reports.</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Communicate the review outcomes to students.</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Consider how you can use findings from ELIR for future learning and teaching activities/strategy.</a></li> </ul>
Follow-up Reports	1 year after Review Visit		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Engage in action planning and production of the ELIR Follow-up Report.</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">New officer handover.</a></li> </ul>
Annual Discussions	Yearly		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Engage with Annual Discussions, contribute topics for consideration.</a></li> </ul>

### 2.2.1 Early liaison with QAA Scotland

The process of ELIR begins at least 12 months before the Review Visit when QAA Scotland begin discussions with the institution about the potential themes of the review and what the review team will look like. QAA Scotland and the institution will identify and agree early themes for the review based on the institution's context. ELIR 4 places more emphasis on contextualising the review and it will be important to identify key areas of focus which will have the greatest benefit for each institution. For ELIR 4 there is also additional emphasis on student engagement and **the views of students are key in shaping the focal points of the review.**

Contextualisation will affect the preparation for ELIR, including the nature of the Reflective Analysis, the composition of the review team, the focus of the topics included in the Review Visit and to some extent, the topics included in the ELIR report. A good starting point is the outcomes from previous ELIR and other existing reports, including ILR reports. At this stage, the discussion will be informed by:

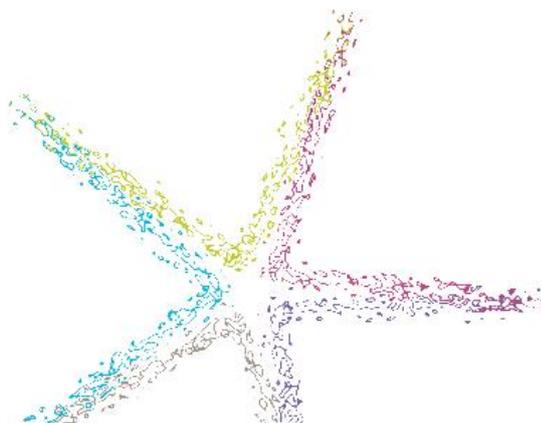
- Any outcomes/recommendations from previous ELIRs.
- The institution's strategy.
- The institution's Outcome Agreement with SFC (see page 7).
- Analysis of data (including what the institution is learning from analyses of surveys such as NSS, and the Teaching Excellence Framework, if it participates).
- Evidence of how the institution engages students in their learning and in the management of quality. This could include your Student Partnership Agreement or equivalent document (see page 7).

### 2.2.2 The Review Team

QAA Scotland manages the ELIR process. As mentioned earlier, for each ELIR there is a peer review team. There is some flexibility in the composition of the review team and this is negotiated between QAA Scotland and the institution. Each team will have a minimum of four and a maximum of six reviewers. All teams will include one co-ordinating reviewer (a senior institutional administrator), at least one student reviewer and at least two senior academic reviewers. Some institutions will choose to have an additional international academic reviewer or a reviewer from professional services. A QAA Scotland staff member is tasked to manage the process of the review, support the institution and advise the review team.

*The role of the student reviewer is essential. The student reviewer is a full member of the team.*

The role of the student reviewer is essential. The student reviewer is a full member of the team, which allows a level of student engagement in the entirety of the review. The student member adds considerable value and expertise to the work of the review team. They often ask questions which may not be obvious to other members of the team, rooted in their experience of studying at a Scottish institution. Student reviewers undergo thorough training and are supported in their role by QAA Scotland.



*It is important to read and understand your previous ELIR report.*

*You should be able to identify a key contact within the institution who will liaise with the students' association to ensure that your contribution is effective. Make contact with this person early on.*

*All officers should know what their role in ELIR will be during their term of office.*

## What you need to do

### **Familiarise yourself with key strategic documents including your previous ELIR report**

It is important to read and understand your previous ELIR report. This will highlight any prior learning and teaching strategies, institutional priorities and what students said. It is vital to be familiar with the outcomes and how they can influence the institution's learning and teaching strategy. It is also useful to consider how far progress has been made against your last report and where the institution could progress next. Other key documents include your Outcome Agreement (see page 7), learning and teaching strategy and the ELIR 3 Follow-up Report.

### **Agree the mechanisms for students' association involvement and support in ELIR**

Each institution approaches ELIR in its own way and you may find that different groups of staff and students are engaged at each stage of the ELIR process. However, in most institutions, there will be an **ELIR steering/working group** which is responsible for preparing for the review. It is normal practice for students (usually a sabbatical officer) and a students' association staff member to sit on this group. This group might also include the Vice-Principal for Learning and Teaching, some senior academics and representatives from Quality or Registry. You should be able to identify a key contact within the institution who will liaise with the students' association to ensure that your contribution is effective. Make contact with this person early on and maintain ongoing discussions about how you will be involved. Try to establish what the institution will be doing to support staff in engaging with ELIR. For example, will they be providing any training or briefing sessions? Discuss whether or not this support will be made available to yourself, key students' association staff and students and whether or not you need to plan additional training.

### **Consider your ELIR timeline and agree roles and responsibilities**

It is vital for student officers and the students' associations to know when the different stages of the ELIR process are occurring and to allocate adequate time and resources. It is important to bear in mind that the review process doesn't just run over one year. All officers should know what their role in ELIR will be during their term of office. Some officers will be involved in the preparation, whereas others will be involved in the review itself or the follow-up processes. Students' associations and officers will need to consider briefing and handovers for incoming officers throughout the process. Think about who will be involved early on. Although the main responsibility may fall within the remit of the education officer and the supporting staff member, the preparations will be most successful if there is engagement from a wide range of people in the students' association. Particular attention should be paid to involving your executive team, school/faculty officers and course reps.

*Student engagement is a significant focus of ELIR, both its effectiveness at an institutional level and engagement in the ELIR process itself.*

*Contextualisation of ELIR is a particular focus of ELIR 4. It is vital that you are involved in early discussions on what the key themes might be.*

## What you need to do

### Think about student engagement

Student engagement is a significant focus of ELIR, both its effectiveness at an institutional level and engagement in the ELIR process itself. It's useful to begin thinking about the ways that you can engage/demonstrate engagement with the wider student community, e.g. events, workshops, focus groups, social media; but remember to utilise existing processes and knowledge as well. In addition, consider how you demonstrate student engagement at a strategic level. Do you use Student Partnership Agreements or equivalent strategic plans? Are students formally included in strategic processes (including ELIR) through student committees and partnership between the students' association and institution? Are there areas for development? Could these arrangements be improved?

### Contribute to early discussions on key themes and review panel

The contextualisation of ELIR is a particular focus of ELIR 4. It is vital that you are involved in early discussions on what the key themes might be. There is also more flexibility over the make-up of the review panel. Consider whether you feel an international reviewer or second student reviewer would be useful to the review process.

### 2.2.3 ELIR preparation and Reflective Analysis drafting

The institution is then required to submit an **Advance Information Set (AIS)** and a **Reflective Analysis (RA)** to QAA Scotland, **eight weeks prior to the Planning Visit**. The AIS and RA provide the review team with important contextual information, including examples of the institution's approach to quality assurance and enhancement processes at an early stage in the review, to further determine the scope of the Review Visit.

***"The question that needs to be asked is "how do you know that what you are saying is actually what students believe or are thinking?"<sup>3</sup>***

#### Advance Information Set (AIS)

The Advance Information Set accompanies the Reflective Analysis and contains a suite of materials designed to demonstrate the operation and outcomes of the institution's quality processes. The purpose of this is to provide the review team with access to the processes and procedures for assuring quality. The fact that this information is available to the reviewer early on in the review means that the visits can focus on quality enhancement.

<sup>3</sup> *Preparing for Enhancement-led Institutional Review, page 9* (Quality Assurance Agency Scotland, September 2017)

*One element of the AIS is an overview of how student feedback was collected and analysed by the institution over the last year.*

The AIS includes a sample of recent Institution-led Review reports and annual monitoring reports. Another particular element of the AIS is an **overview of how student feedback was collected and analysed** by the institution over the last year. Student officers should be thinking about this early on. They will need to indicate whether they recognise themes emerging and may be involved in gathering the feedback, and/or commenting on it as it's considered in the institution's committee cycle. The institution must also provide evidence of how it meets the expectations set out in the [UK Quality Code for Higher Education](#). The Quality Code provides all institutions with a shared starting point for setting, describing and assuring the academic standards of their higher education awards and the quality of the learning opportunities they provide.

More information about what is likely to be included in the AIS is detailed in the [ELIR 4 Handbook](#) on page 10.

### **Reflective Analysis (RA)**

An institution must also submit a self-evaluation document, called a Reflective Analysis, in advance of the review. The RA is contextualised, which means it should be focused on the early themes identified for the review, which will have been informed by evidence and data. The RA should demonstrate how well the institution is able to be self-reflective and evaluate itself critically. In the document, institutions are encouraged to be as open and honest as possible about what they do well and the areas that they prioritise for development and/or enhancement.

**It is essential that students are involved in the process of developing and drafting the RA;** indeed, the impact and extent of student input in this process is something that will be considered by the review team. The drafting of the RA should be a collective and inclusive process, with demonstrable student engagement. In many cases, the writing of the RA is co-ordinated by one person but directed and overseen by the institution's ELIR steering/working group. As mentioned previously, it is normal practice for students (usually a sabbatical officer) and a students' association staff member to sit on this group.

*The drafting of the RA should be a collective and inclusive process, with demonstrable student engagement.*

You can find more information about the Reflective Analysis in the [Preparing for Enhancement-led Institutional Review Guide](#) on pages 7-11 and in the [ELIR 4 Handbook](#) on pages 10 & 22.

In previous ELIR cycles, institutions were asked to produce one or two case studies to illustrate its strategic approach to enhancement. This is no longer a formal requirement but some institutions may choose to include case studies with their RA on a voluntary basis.

### **After submission of the AIS and RA**

Two weeks before the Planning Visit, the institution receives early feedback on the AIS and RA from the review team. This will include any questions and themes to be explored in the Planning Visit, and any areas where the review team are requesting additional information or clarification.

*In terms of content of the AIS and RA, it is also important that students recognise what the institution presents about itself as accurate to their own experience. To ensure student ownership, meaningful consultation with students must be built into the development of the documents.*

## What you need to do

### Ensure student involvement in the RA

There are a number of ways to make sure students are engaged effectively in the drafting of the Reflective Analysis. Students' associations should work with their institutions to consider existing mechanisms to access students views in the period leading up to the drafting of the RA, e.g. are there scheduled meetings of your executive committee, student council, course rep conference or any other gathering of student representatives? Could you utilise existing groups, perhaps your Student-Staff Liaison/Consultative Committees to get student views to feed into the RA? Some institutions and students' associations also choose to conduct specific focus groups with students to gather student opinion to input into the RA. Another way for students to inform the content of the RA is through a Student Partnership Agreement or equivalent document (see page 7). An SPA can demonstrate the nature of partnership working between the institution and the students' association and highlight the key learning and teaching issues that are important to students. It is important that the students' association is confident that the RA is an accurate and balanced assessment of the institutional approaches, strengths and weaknesses and overall student learning experience. It is therefore vital that you provide critical input into the drafting process – helping shape the final document.

### Ensure students recognise and endorse the content of the RA and AIS

An analysis of student feedback is an essential element of the AIS, so it is vital for the students' association and student officers to interact with this as soon as possible. In terms of content of the AIS and RA, it is also important that students recognise what the institution presents about itself as accurate to their own experience. To ensure student ownership, meaningful consultation with students must be built into the development of the documents.

### Be aware of the content of early feedback

This will give you an idea about what will be explored in the Planning Visit, so that you can prepare the officers and students who will be involved. In addition, it is useful to know the areas where the review team has requested additional information and if you can provide support for that.

#### 2.2.4 Planning Visit

The Planning Visit is where the whole review team spend a day at the institution to meet with sets of predetermined staff and students. This is likely to involve three meetings with different groups over one day. The purpose of the Planning Visit is to determine the scope of the review and agree the themes to be explored in the Review Visit, specifically whether there is a need to explore anything that wasn't included in the Reflective Analysis. An [example agenda](#) can be found on the QAA website.

*The Planning Visit is another opportunity to confirm whether students felt the RA and its contextualisation reflects the key themes and opinions of the student body.*

*It's extremely important that a variety of representatives from the student body and students' association are present at the Planning Visit. Make sure that those involved are properly briefed and have an opportunity to reflect and ask any questions prior to the visit.*

During the Planning Visit, the review team will meet with a range of staff. They will also meet with a group of student representatives. The aim of this meeting is to determine how far students were involved in the contextualisation decisions and gather their views on this and on the topics that should be explored during the Review Visit. The staff and students involved in these groups will be agreed in advance by the institution following discussions with QAA Scotland.

The Planning Visit takes place approximately 6-8 weeks before the Review Visit. There is some flexibility in the exact length of time between the two visits and this is negotiated between QAA Scotland and the institution. A week after the Planning Visit, the institution will receive a draft programme for the Review Visit and confirmation of the themes the review team will explore during it. At this stage the institution will also be asked to provide any further documentation requested by the review team.

## **What you need to do**

### **Get the most out of your Planning Visit**

The Planning Visit is another opportunity to confirm whether students felt the RA and its contextualisation reflects the key themes and opinions of the student body. The review team will want to establish which topics students would like to be explored further in the Review Visit, so this is your opportunity to explore the issues that your work in preparing the RA has highlighted. You should make sure that whatever is highlighted is backed up by the evidence the students' association has available about what is important to students. For example, you could consider: feedback from course reps; Student-Led Teaching Awards data; students' association advice work; internal and external survey data; etc.

### **Ensure the RA, AIS and supporting evidence is accessible and brief all involved**

It is essential to the Planning Visit that student representatives are aware of the key issues highlighted in the RA, AIS and supporting evidence. Make sure that those involved are properly briefed and have an opportunity to reflect and ask any questions prior to the Planning Visit.

### **Think about who will be involved at the Planning Visit**

It's extremely important that a variety of representatives from the student body and students' association are present at the Planning Visit. The review team will be interested in meeting students who are broadly representative of the institution's whole student population and who, as a group, are capable of talking on behalf of the student body as a whole. It is good practice to consider the diversity of the group in terms of mode of study, gender balance and subject balance. The students' association can be asked to help identify the relevant students to talk to for this meeting. It would be useful to include representatives who have been involved in preparing for ELIR, those with experience of Institution-led Review or who have been involved in other institutional activity, such as members of the institutional enhancement team. You should carefully consider who the most appropriate people are and agree this with your institution, e.g. the President, VP Education, some engaged school/faculty officers, other sabbatical officers, etc.

*It is essential to the review that students are well informed about the process and they receive a comprehensive briefing on the process and purpose of the review and the kinds of questions the review team may want to ask them.*

*The review team will identify the characteristics they'd like to see to support the exploration of the themes they've identified as a team.*

## 2.2.5 Review Visit

The Review Visit is when the whole review team spend between three and five days at the institution, exploring the topics that have been jointly identified and agreed over the previous months.

During the Review Visit, the review team will meet with staff and students from the institution. There are no right or wrong answers for students to provide in discussions with the review team. They will want to hear what it is like to study at the institution – what works well and what could be improved for students. The team will also be interested in the ways the student body works in partnership 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 student views?

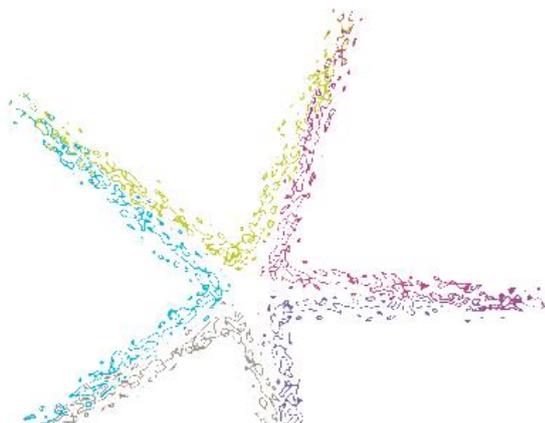
### What you need to do

#### Get the most out of your Review Visit - be prepared

Consider how you might prepare student representatives for the meetings. It is essential to the review that students are well informed about the process. For this reason, they should receive a comprehensive briefing on the process and purpose of the review and the kinds of questions the review team may want to ask them. Without providing answers to questions that they might be asked, it is also important for those involved to have access to the RA, AIS and supporting evidence and know about the key issues highlighted.

#### Think about who will be involved at the Review Visit

At the Review Visit, the review team will ask to meet one or more groups of students, very likely a group who are not formal student reps. The review team will identify the characteristics they'd like to see to support the exploration of the themes they've identified as a team, e.g. undergraduates, postgraduate taught/research, part-time students, distance learners. The students' association can be asked to help identify the relevant students to talk to for this meeting. All students invited to these meetings should be contacted as soon as possible to ensure they can participate.



## 2.2.6 ELIR judgement and reports

Following the Review Visit, the review team makes a judgement about the effectiveness of the institution's arrangements for securing academic standards and enhancing the student learning experience. This is informed by the institution's Reflective Analysis, Advance Information Set, discussing topics with students and staff during the Planning and Review Visits and analysing and reflecting on the information and discussions.

There are three possible categories of effectiveness: **effective**, **limited effectiveness** or **not effective**. In addition to the overarching judgement, ELIR reports will highlight **commendations** (good practice) and **recommendations** (areas for development for the institution) specific to the institution. Recommendations can be time-identified in line with the available evidence.

*It is good practice by the students' association to have sight of the draft reports and offer comment where relevant.*

Following the ELIR, the review team will produce two reports: an **Outcome Report** and a **Technical Report**. The Outcome Report presents the overarching judgement and sets out the main findings in summary form. Outcome Reports are short, accessible and designed to be understandable to student representatives. The Technical Report covers all of the topics in the scope of the review and provides more detailed information for the institution. The information in Technical Reports is also used by QAA Scotland to produce **Thematic Reports**, which identify themes from reviews across the sector.

An early draft of the Outcome Report is sent to the institution one week after the end of the Review Visit. The purpose is to provide early feedback on the review findings.

The draft Outcome and Technical Reports are sent to the institution eight weeks after the end of the Review 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 the draft reports and offer comment where relevant. The review team will consider any comments the institution makes on the drafts and finalise the text. The reports are published on the [QAA website](#) 16 weeks after the Review Visit.

*Student engagement should be evidenced in follow-up activity and preparation of the reports themselves.*

The reports may confirm some of the areas for development/focus that the institution has already begun to address. The review team may endorse the institution's thoughts and observations or they may advise the institution to reprioritise or undertake a different course of action. There is an expectation that the institution reflects carefully on the outcomes of ELIR and responds appropriately to enhance their policies and/or practice.

One year after the ELIR reports are published, the institution is required to produce a **Follow-up Report**. The aim of the report is to demonstrate that the institution has considered and reflected on the outcomes of the ELIR and to outline the steps it is taking to address these. Student engagement should be evidenced in follow-up activity and preparation of the reports themselves. **The Follow-up Report** has to be agreed and endorsed by the institution's governing body and will be published on the [QAA website](#).

## What you need to do

### Have sight of draft Outcome Reports and Technical Reports

Find out when the institution is due to receive the draft reports and ensure you are available to comment. It is good practice for the students' association to have sight of the draft reports and make comment where relevant. The institution has the opportunity to comment on the draft reports, to ensure they are factually accurate.

### Communicating the review outcomes to students

It is very important to ensure that students are informed about the outcomes of the ELIR. Make sure that everyone in the students' association is kept up to date. In particular, the Outcome Report should be shared with the whole of the executive team and with school/faculty officers. You should also share this information with the students who participated in the Review Visits so they can see how their participation had an impact on the review.

### Consider how you can use findings from ELIR

The outcomes of ELIR give students' associations an excellent basis for working on developing learning and teaching activities. They should be considered in discussions moving forward, for example when agreeing updates to Student Partnership Agreements or equivalent. You should also consider how you might use the findings from ELIR with your course reps, e.g. think about how you could incorporate some outcomes of the review into course rep training, conferences and other meetings. You may want to produce a short leaflet or video outlining the ELIR findings in an accessible way that could be used at course rep training or put on the VLE and students' association website.

### Engage in follow-up activities and reports

Student representatives and the students' association should be involved in any follow-up activity from the ELIR and in preparing the Follow-up Report. This is an opportunity for the students' association to reflect on what has happened since the ELIR – what has gone well and what the institution could be doing better.

Each institution will have working groups and committees to take forward the outcomes and recommendations from ELIR. It is essential that these groups include student representation and communicate regularly with the students' association, to ensure student engagement in shaping enhancement priorities and the development of follow-up actions and reports. It is also recommended that a students' association staff member attends these groups. A staff member will ensure continuity when there is student officer changeover and will support the student representative in their role. Some institutions choose to set up short-life working groups to work on specific areas for development highlighted in their ELIR. If there are lots of working groups, it is important to think about capacity and who is best placed to attend. Depending on the nature of the working group, it may be more appropriate for an executive officer, school/faculty officer or course rep to attend, rather than the sabbatical officer.

*It is very important to ensure that students are informed about the outcomes of the ELIR.*

*Student representatives and the students' association should be involved in any follow-up activity from the ELIR and in preparing the Follow-up Report.*

*The students' association should take time to plan the process and outcomes of ELIR into their handover.*

## What you need to do

### New officer handover

The outcomes of the ELIR will inform the institution's priorities over the coming years, along with its own strategic and operational plans, so it is essential that information acquired through the review process is accurately communicated to the new officer team. The students' association should take time to plan the process and outcomes of ELIR into their handover, so that the incoming officers can align their own priorities with the institution's where appropriate. Make sure that new officers meet with institutional staff involved in the ELIR as part of their induction. This will ensure that relationships with relevant staff are established early on in student representatives' terms in office.

### 2.2.7 Annual Discussions

The ELIR does not end with the review meeting. Every academic year QAA Scotland holds an Annual Discussion meeting with the institution. These meetings are important as they provide an opportunity for contact and information sharing between the institution and QAA Scotland. Annual Discussions are designed to be useful to the institution and so there is some flexibility in the format, who attends and the agenda of the meetings.

Generally, a QAA Scotland officer will meet with a select group of staff and student representatives from the institution. In general, the student officer with an education remit will attend. It is important to ensure that a students' association staff member is involved in the preparation for the meeting and is present on the day. The students' association staff member has a key role in supporting the student officer, but also in helping to provide continuity to the review process from the students' association's perspective. This ensures that the institutional memory built up over previous engagement in ELIR is not lost.

In advance of the meeting, QAA Scotland and the institution will work together to develop the agenda. It is crucial that the students' association is engaged in this process and that student representatives have the opportunity to contribute potential items for discussion. Effective student engagement at this stage will ensure that areas for discussion reflect the student body's learning and teaching priorities. Agenda items usually include, but are not limited to:

- Either progress toward, or any actions from, ELIR (depending on the timing of the ELIR).
- Outcomes from, and progress with, Institution-led Review.
- Progress on student engagement: this might include areas of activity highlighted in your Student Partnership Agreement.
- Information about the institution's approach to engaging with the Enhancement Themes and Focus On activity.
- Any other matters the institution, QAA Scotland or the students' association wish to raise.

*Effective student engagement at this stage will ensure that areas for discussion reflect the student body's learning and teaching priorities.*

There is more detailed information about Annual Discussions in the [ELIR 4 Handbook](#) and in the [ELIR 4 Operational Guidance](#) on the QAA Scotland website.

## What you need to do

### Engage with the Annual Discussion

Meaningful student engagement is integral to the Annual Discussion process and there will be an increased emphasis on this in ELIR 4. Students' associations and student representatives will have the opportunity to contribute topics for consideration at the meeting, ensuring that discussions are relevant to student priorities and concerns. Institutions are asked to raise agenda items that the students' association wish to discuss. Which member of staff at your institution is co-ordinating the meeting? Talk to them to make sure you're clear about the purpose of the meeting and discuss any items that the students' association would like to raise.

One of the potential items for discussion will be how the institution works in partnership with its students to enhance the student experience, e.g. the areas of development work detailed in a Student Partnership Agreement. This is a chance to highlight what you've been working on and what you would like the institution to prioritise over the coming year. The meeting is also a valuable opportunity for the students' association to establish contact with QAA Scotland and is a key date in the calendar of ongoing quality enhancement activity at the institution.

*There is a chance to highlight what you've been working on and what you would like the institution to prioritise over the coming year.*

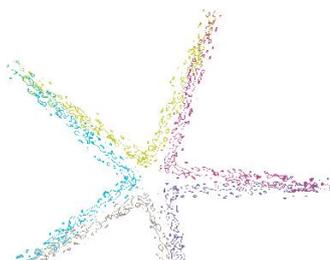


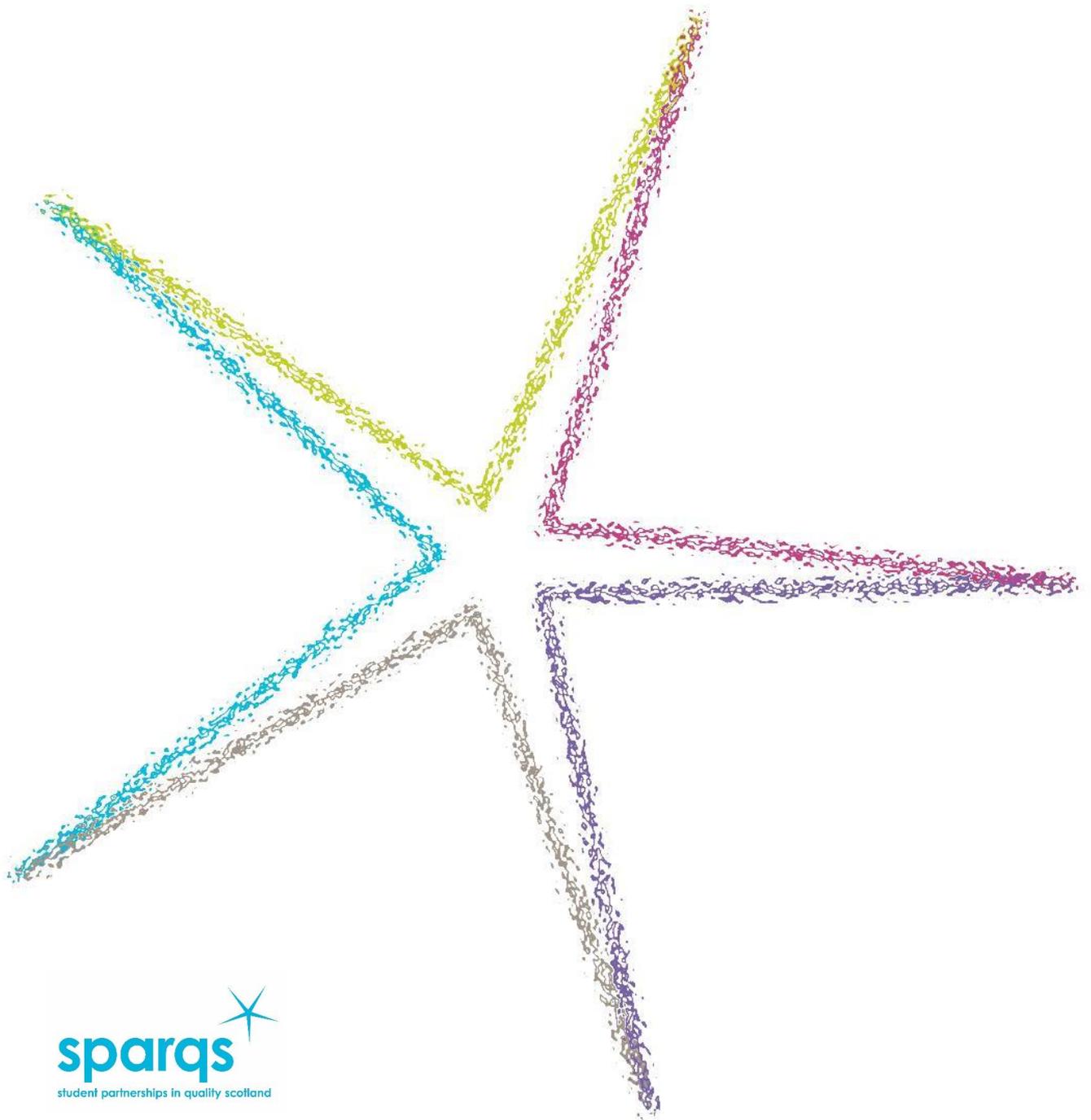
### 2.3 Review schedule 2017-2022

When	Institution
<b>Spring 2018</b>	Queen Margaret University
	Royal Conservatoire of Scotland
<b>Autumn 2018</b>	University of Aberdeen
	University of Dundee
<b>Spring 2019</b>	Glasgow School of Art*
	SRUC
	University of Glasgow
	University of Strathclyde
<b>Year 2019-20</b>	Edinburgh Napier University
	Glasgow Caledonian University
	Heriot-Watt University
	University of St Andrews
	University of the West of Scotland
<b>Year 2020-21</b>	University of Stirling
	The University of Edinburgh
	Abertay University
	Robert Gordon University
	University of the Highlands and Islands

\* At the time of writing (July 2018) Glasgow School of Art and QAA Scotland are in discussion about the timing of this ELIR.

N.B. The ELIR schedule can be subject to detailed adjustment. If you have any questions contact your link QAA Scotland officer.





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