



Student guide to Institutional Liaison Meetings

October 2026





Introduction

As part of Annual Quality Engagements (AQEs), **Institutional Liaison Meetings (ILMs)** are one way in which Scotland monitors and enhances the quality of college and university education. They are an important opportunity for students' associations and student officers to highlight what is working well, raise issues and influence enhancement activity at institutional and national level. They happen once a year (except in those years where an institution is undergoing external review) and bring together the [Quality Assurance Agency \(QAA\)](#), institution staff and, importantly, **students and students' associations/unions**.

This guide has been created specifically for student officers and students' associations. It explains what ILMs are, why they matter, and how you can take part confidently and effectively. You do not need to be a quality expert to contribute; your insight, lived experience, and understanding of the student body are exactly what make your role so valuable. The guide was written using information from the QAA [Institutional Liaison Guidance for Institutions 2025–26](#) and will be updated as appropriate when QAA's guidance for 2026–27 is published.

This guide explains ILMs and highlights what students and students' associations do at each stage. Features of [Scotland's Ambition for Student Partnership](#) are highlighted throughout this guide to demonstrate how the Ambition can support engagement in ILMs. Staff and students can explore these features to enhance partnership working and participation within the ILM process.

Who is QAA?

Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) Scotland is part of [The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education \(QAA\)](#), a UK-wide, independent charity working to benefit students and higher education, and one of the world's experts in quality assurance. QAA Scotland leads the design and delivery of quality assurance and enhancement activities within Scotland's tertiary education sector, as part of the Tertiary Quality Enhancement Framework (TQEF).

Who is the QAA Institutional Liaison Officer?

Each college and university in Scotland is allocated an **Institutional Liaison Officer** from QAA. The QAA Institutional Liaison Officer is the institution's primary contact point for advice, guidance and queries on quality and academic standards, including the Tertiary Quality Enhancement Review (TQER). The QAA Institutional Liaison Officer will provide advice and guidance to the institution as part of institutional liaison meetings and is available for support and discussion outside of this annual engagement (for example, providing feedback on action plans arising from the TQER).

Annual Quality Engagement (AQE)

Annual Quality Engagement (AQE) is the term for the two key meetings outlined below, a mechanism of TQEF designed to support the delivery of high-quality learning in institutions. This guide focuses on the ILM part.

- The **Quality Assurance Agency (QAA)** meets with institutions to have **Institutional Liaison Meetings (ILMs)**.
- The **Scottish Funding Council (SFC) quarterly meetings** will include discussion of learning and quality and the outcomes of the Self-Evaluation and Action Plan (SEAP) with universities and colleges. This includes considering feedback and outcomes from student engagement activities through its Outcomes Framework and Assurance Model (OFAM).

Together, these activities support continuous improvement and help ensure that the student voice is considered in enhancing the quality of learning and teaching.



What are ILMs?

Institutional Liaison Meetings (ILMs) are annual meetings between your institution and QAA. They happen once a year (except in those years where an institution is undergoing external review) and bring together QAA, institution staff and, importantly, **students and students' associations/unions**.

They support continuous improvement and open discussion about quality, standards, and the Student Learning Experience.

They exist to make sure:

- Your college/university is continually improving.
- Progress is being made on the action plan from your institution's most recent external review (TQER).
- Students' experiences and voices shape quality enhancements.

ILMs follow a **"no surprises"** approach, meaning institutions and QAA maintain open communication throughout the year. This creates a supportive environment where challenges can be explored constructively, and good practice can be recognised. This approach is also taken by the SFC in the Outcomes Framework and Assurance Model (OFAM) quarterly meetings that institutions will also attend.

Why ILMs matter for students and students' associations

ILMs give students a real say in shaping the future of their institution. Through ILMs, students can:

- Influence how improvements are prioritised.
- Raise emerging issues early before they escalate.
- Celebrate successes and good practice.
- Strengthen student partnership practices.
- Ensure student voice is part of national quality assurance.

As part of the wider Tertiary Quality Enhancement Framework, ILMs help to build a national picture of the student experience. At an institutional level, they offer a structured opportunity to capture and present the student voice in learning and teaching.



Strategically planned

- There is a clear and understood strategic role for students within internal and external quality processes, including as partners within self-evaluation and enhancement planning. Student leaders report feeling ownership of self-evaluative activity and report having confidence that publications reflect the experiences of the students they represent.



What happens at an ILM?

An ILM is normally a **two-hour meeting** (approximately) held in spring (on campus or online) and led by your institution's assigned **QAA Institutional Liaison Officer**.

The meeting covers topics like:

- Progress on actions from the last external review (TQER).
 - Don't worry if your institution hasn't gone through its review yet. Where an institution has not yet undertaken a TQER, discussion will focus instead on outcomes from the previous QAA or Education Scotland reviews. You'll instead discuss outcomes from the last QAA review method (Enhancement-led Institutional Review (ELIR) or Quality Enhancement Standards Review (QESR) for universities; or How Good is Our College? reviews from Education Scotland for colleges).
- Updates from your institution's **Self Evaluation and Action Plan (SEAP)**.
- How the institution assures quality and academic standards.
- Student engagement and partnership activity.
- Positive developments, enhancements, and challenges.

The agenda is standardised but flexible to the needs of each institution and their priorities, which helps make meetings focused and purposeful – and makes it easier for students to prepare. (see [Appendix B](#) in the QAA ILM guidance).

What you need to do

The students' association officer attending the ILM will be expected to contribute to the discussions and the meeting as a whole. To prepare, students' associations and institutions should help the officer prepare by:

- Looking at the Student Partnership agenda item for the meeting and considering any points raised here for discussion.
- Reviewing the Action Plan from the institution's latest Tertiary Quality Enhancement Review (TQER) – if available.
- Reviewing the Self Evaluation and Action Plan (SEAP).
- Looking over any internal quality document outcomes and action plans (such as those related to Institution-Led Quality Review).
- Looking over any strategic policy documents related to student partnership (such as a key policy or Student Partnership Agreement).

When reading these documents, make sure the student officer has an up-to-date understanding of where actions are at. If you have new data, evidence, or observations – especially on any of the action plan items – be sure to share with the institution ahead of the ILM.



Effective students' association

- The students' association is an integral part of the institution's governance, quality development and decision-making processes.
- The students' association understands the institution's strategies, plans and quality reports and uses them to develop projects and plans alongside their own priorities.
- The students' association is able to articulate an independent student voice and can constructively disagree with and challenge an institution.

Where are students involved?

Student engagement is embedded within the ILM process. Students participate in the following ways:

1. Students help prepare for the meeting

Institutions are expected to **consult students and student reps in advance**, ensuring they:

- Understand the purpose of the meeting.
- Can contribute fully to discussions.
- Are briefed on key agenda topics.
- Are supported to interpret any data and evidence.

Often, this includes reviewing SEAP actions or gathering feedback from course reps. Preparation helps you feel confident and ensures student views are clearly represented. You are not expected to know everything – institutions and students' associations should support you with access to information and briefings.

A short planning meeting between the students' association and the institution's quality lead can be really helpful – it gives space to agree priorities, raise emerging issues and make sure student input is valued.

What you need to do

After reviewing the key documents, the students' association and the institution's quality lead should meet to discuss the ILM agenda. There should be regular discussion around any progress that has been made on key actions, new points that the students' association wants to bring up, and what additional work might need to be done prior to the ILM meeting. The institution should actively support and encourage students to be involved.

Genuine dialogue

- Self-evaluation and enhancement planning processes create opportunities and support for students and staff to work together to reach a joint understanding of institutional strengths and weaknesses and develop action plans.



2. Students' documents contribute to the evidence base

Student partnership activity is part of the formal ILM evidence. Your students' association will usually contribute documents such as the **Student Partnership Agreement**, helping ensure that partnership work is visible and recognised. (see [Appendix A](#) in the QAA ILM Guidance).

What you need to do

The students' association should help the institution's quality lead to submit the required documentation ahead of the review, making sure the most up-to-date versions are available.



Solution focused

- Students and staff have access to data and evidence about the student experience at a course, department, institutional and national level. Students are supported to analyse and interpret this information alongside staff to identify priority areas for change.
- There are clear examples of the student experience being improved as a result of student ideas and inputs.

3. Students can use sparqs resources

To help students prepare effectively and understand how they fit into the review process students can use:

- The [Student Learning Experience \(SLE\) model](#) (e.g. the SLE can help to align key discussion points with students to the building blocks. This can help to highlight areas of good practice or identify gaps).
- [Scotland's Ambition for Student Partnership](#) (e.g. the Ambition features and indicators of practice can support planning of partnership activities with the institution and/or students).
- The [Tertiary Quality Enhancement Review \(TQER\) - Practical Guide for students' associations and student officers](#) (e.g. the practical guide can help understand where the ILM fits into the wider TQER and TQEF process).

These tools are there to support you – you don't need to use them all, but they can help structure conversations and evidence impact.

What you need to do

Familiarise yourself with sparqs resources on the sparqs website. Reach out to your sparqs Development Consultant for support, advice and guidance ahead of and after your ILM.



Genuine dialogue

- The Student Learning Experience model helps frame discussions to identify areas of enhancement in both formal and informal spaces.



4. Students attend the ILM

Student attendees should include the President and/or Vice President Education (or equivalent). You will attend alongside senior institutional leaders (e.g. Head of Quality, Deputy/Vice Principal of Learning and Teaching), reinforcing that student perspectives are central to quality discussions.

Students' association staff are welcome to attend meetings alongside the student representative. They should be actively involved and valued for the expertise they bring as the permanent role in a students' association, supporting effective preparation for meetings and meaningful follow-up.

Training and professional development

- Student representatives at all levels are trained and supported to successfully undertake their roles and to represent their student body effectively.
- The students' association and the institution have an ongoing programme of training, support and development for senior student representatives, including induction and handover, attendance at external and national events, and support to contribute to formal decision-making spaces.

5. Students bring forward student voice

At the ILM, students:

- Share student perspectives on learning and teaching (e.g. using the Student Learning Experience (SLE) model).
- Highlight what's working well.
- Raise areas where students want to see improvement.
- Provide updates on partnership work (e.g. Student Partnership Agreement (SPA)).
- Reflect on themes from reps, surveys, or governance spaces.

Remember

You are an equal participant in the meeting. You can ask questions, respond to any agenda item and provide an independent student perspective across the discussion. Students provide a critical perspective on whether improvements are meaningful and timely. You're not limited to speaking only on the topics outlined above, although these may be helpful places to start if you're not sure how to approach the meeting

Diversity of student voices

- Students and staff understand the diversity of their student body and take steps to ensure that their approaches to decision-making and partnership utilise and consider this diversity.



What happens after the ILM?

After the meeting:

- QAA writes a brief note summarising the discussion and any actions.
- The institution can check the note for factual accuracy before it is finalised.

What you need to do

Student officers should review the note to ensure student contributions are accurately reflected. Following this, students' associations play a key role in communicating outcomes to the wider student body – closing the feedback loop and demonstrating how the student voice leads to change.

If the institution is progressing well with TQER actions, QAA may **close actions**.

If there are concerns, QAA may:

- Flag them for the next ILM.
- Arrange extra liaison activity.
- Notify the SFC.

Students can ask their students' association for updates, as the ILM notes will reflect student contributions.

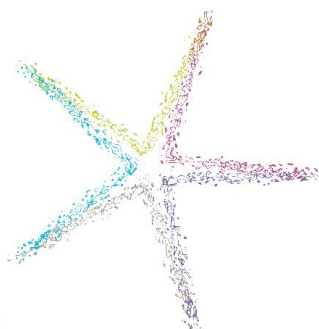
What you need to do

The students' association should communicate key updates emerging from the ILM to the wider student body. Explain what progress is being made on key actions that affect the student experience, and how student leaders are contributing to change and enhancements.



Communication of actions

- There is regular feedback and updates to the student body on actions being taken because of students' contributions to decision-making.





Overview of student role in ILMs

Stage	Student Role
Before ILM	Consultation, briefing, feeding in concerns and successes, reviewing student-facing documents.
During ILM	Attending the meeting, presenting student perspective, discussing partnership work, responding to QAA questions.
After ILM	Reviewing notes via the students' association/union, supporting follow-up actions, communicating outcomes to students.

Remember

Taking part in an ILM can feel daunting at first – but you already have what you need. Your experiences, your understanding of students, and your role in being a student representative are central to the process. ILMs work best when students are confident, supported, and empowered to engage.

