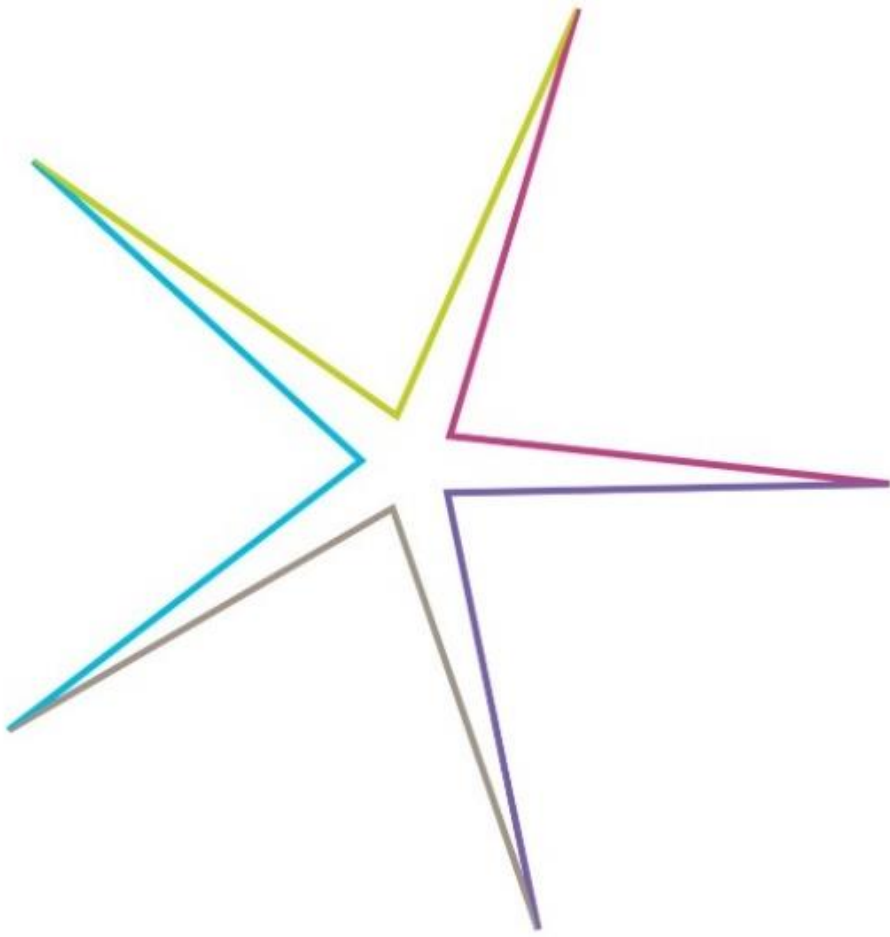


University Quality Handbook 2019





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1. Understanding the Landscape

1.1 Sector Agencies

In your role, you will encounter a number of different sector agencies, all of whom have a remit, or aspects of their work, relating to quality assurance and enhancement. Your interaction with these agencies will vary; you may have regular contact with some, and more limited contact with others, but it is useful for you to know who they are and what they do.

We asked four of the main agencies three questions (and also completed them for sparqs) to help you get to know us all better:

1. Who they are and their overall role and remit.
2. Their role in quality and why it is important.
3. The role of students within their work.

student partnerships in quality Scotland

Who we are

student partnerships in quality Scotland (sparqs) is a publicly-funded agency for Scotland's university and college sectors which aims to support student engagement in the quality of the learning experience. We are funded by the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) to advance education by promoting an environment where students are able to make a positive and rewarding difference to their own and others' educational experience. We support students to shape the nature of their learning and contribute to the overall success of learning provision, regardless of wherever and however they learn.

Our role in quality

Quality is at the heart of everything we do; our mission states that we want to "*ensure that students are able to engage as partners at all levels of quality assurance and enhancement activities.*" As such, our work focuses on empowering and supporting students to be partners in all aspects of quality. We provide training for student officers and students' association staff to help enable this, as well as a number of resources, including guidance and toolkits to help support them in their roles. We have representation on most sector committees that have a quality remit (see page 8 for details). We maintain strong working relationships with other sector agencies, e.g. our work with QAA Scotland supports their work with the Quality Enhancement Framework (QEF), particularly around Enhancement-led Institutional Review (ELIR), Institution-led Review (ILR) and the Enhancement Themes.

The role of students

Students play a key role in the work of sparqs; we have student members on our University Advisory Group and College Advisory Group, as well as our Members' Steering Group, which guides the direction of sparqs and our work. Our work is developed with students in mind, to help support them in their role and to enable them to be partners in their own education. We work closely with other sector agencies to facilitate student engagement with the QEF and sector committees. We also support students and institutional staff from universities and colleges across Scotland and internationally to develop stronger partnership working within their own institutions.



Quality Assurance Agency Scotland

Who we are

The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) Scotland is a UK-wide body with responsibility for safeguarding standards and improving the quality of UK higher education, wherever it is delivered around the world. QAA Scotland is Scotland's quality body for higher education. It is an independent guardian of quality and standards with drive for change and development, with a responsibility to safeguard the public interest, the interests of students and of other external stakeholders. We support the work of our partners through peer review, quality enhancement and the student learning experience. Our responsibilities include managing the Quality Enhancement Framework (QEF), which includes ELIR and the Enhancement Themes.

Our role in quality

QAA Scotland build and maintain strong and effective relationships with universities and other higher education providers, funding bodies and students' organisations. We share universities' aspirations to provide excellent learning opportunities for all students and create innovative and tested ways to allow institutions to learn from each other.

QAA support Scotland's enhancement culture and oversee the Scottish Higher Education Enhancement Committee (SHEEC) and the Teaching Quality Forum (TQF). QAA are responsible for managing the Enhancement Themes, a multi-year programme of work that enables the sector to explore a specific area in depth. We deliver the external quality review of institutions through Enhancement-led Institutional Review (ELIR). This is the process used in Scotland to maintain academic standards and enhance the quality of the student learning experience. We do this on behalf of the university sector and the SFC. We also manage the Focus On projects and each year determine a topic in collaboration with SHEEC. The projects aim to support the enhancement of policy and practice in the sector. We also provide a link between the outcomes of ELIR and the enhancement of practice.

The role of students

Engaging with students is integral to the work of QAA. Every ELIR team includes a full student member, trained and supported in their role by QAA. We also include student representatives on all QAA working groups and committees, and work closely with institutions and associations to ensure active and engaged student involvement in their work. QAA also work closely with National Union of Students (NUS) Scotland and sparqs.

Scottish Funding Council

Who we are

The Scottish Funding Council (SFC) is a public body which invests around £1.8 billion of public money each year on behalf of the Scottish Government. SFC's funding enables Scotland's colleges and universities to provide education opportunities for over half a million people, and to invest in research and innovation. SFC has a range of statutory functions, which include a specific statutory responsibility for quality assurance in colleges and universities.

Our role in quality

SFC has a statutory responsibility for quality assurance in colleges and universities. This involves ensuring that baseline quality standards are being met in all publicly-funded colleges and HE institutions in Scotland. We hold colleges and universities to account for their performance. We report to Scottish Government, students and the public on the performance of institutions overall, including the quality of provision.



SFC contracts QAA Scotland to provide external assurance and support enhancement in the higher education sector; and Education Scotland to provide external assurance and support improvement in the college sector. All institutions in Scotland are above baseline quality standards, as Scotland has an excellent system of further and higher education, and SFC's expectation, therefore, is that colleges and universities will strive to continuously enhance their provision. SFC works in partnership with the sectors and learners to support continuous improvement of the quality of all aspects of the learner experience.

The role of students

A partnership approach with learners is a fundamental expectation of SFC's approach. We work at national level with sparqs and NUS on all aspects of the learner experience, and also provide funding to sparqs. We expect institutions to fully involve their students in all aspects of the learner experience.

National Union of Students Scotland

Who we are

The work of NUS Scotland has been crucial in shaping public life in Scotland. We strive for an education system in colleges and universities that supports students to enjoy their time, succeed in their chosen field and to be partners in their education.

NUS Scotland is the national campaigning organisation for students in Scotland – we represent over 500,000 students at college and university in Scotland. We promote, defend and extend the rights of students, and work to develop and champion strong students' associations. Whether that's through providing a chance for you to network with your peers across Scotland, celebrating best practice through the NUS Scotland Education Awards, or by leading the fight against TEF in Scotland to defend our unique quality arrangements. NUS Scotland is the collective movement that makes change happen.

Our role in quality

NUS Scotland passionately believes that the learner voice and partnership with students drives positive change and innovation in teaching and learning. Along with our member students' associations, we're fighting to defend Scotland from the effects of the marketisation of education that we've seen in England. We reject the increase in metrics and fees that we've seen in other parts of the UK, and continue to advocate to keep the learner voice at the heart of our education system.

To us, a good education system goes beyond just getting student feedback, and instead asks learners to co-design, co-produce and co-evaluate their environment, moving beyond learning and teaching to encompass the whole institution. In a changing education landscape we must create and drive the development of new models of learner voice that deliver quality, underpinned by principles of partnership and collectivism. We want to achieve a culture shift that puts learners at the heart of teaching and learning. The idea that students are experts in their learning, and in their wider lives, underpins all of our work. We believe that students should be supported to positively change their experiences both in the classroom, and outside of it.

Over the last few years we have:

- Campaigned to diversify the curriculum, highlighting the need for an end to reading lists which do not reflect the diverse student body.
- Won an extra £21million per year investment in student bursary support.



- Received funding to develop strong, sustainable, college students' associations.
- Supported students to engage in Gender Action Plans – tackling the gender imbalance in our education system.

The role of students

All of our work is led by students. Every year students from colleges and universities across Scotland gather together to discuss and debate policy and elect their student leaders at a national level. This is a chance for students to shape our work by bringing forward their ideas about the work that should be taken forward nationally, and how we should deliver on those objectives.

Universities Scotland

Who we are

Universities Scotland is a membership organisation working for the Principals and Directors of Scotland's 19 higher education institutions. We develop and influence higher education policy, and campaign on issues where our members have a shared interest, with the aim of securing a policy and funding landscape which best supports the continued success of the Scottish higher education sector. We cover almost all aspects of higher education activity in Scotland, from learning and teaching, widening access and employability, to research, innovation, internationalisation, and governance and funding. Higher education is devolved to the Scottish Parliament, with policy and funding decisions affecting higher education taken primarily by the Scottish Government, Scottish Parliament and the SFC. Working closely and constructively with all three organisations is a major focus of our time. We also work closely with Universities UK on matters that are reserved to Westminster (such as immigration policy) or governed by UK bodies (such as the Teaching Excellence Framework) but directly affect universities in Scotland. Founded in 1992, Universities Scotland is an autonomous national council of Universities UK.

Our role in quality

Universities Scotland is a partner in the Quality Enhancement Framework (QEF) and, on behalf of Scottish higher education institutions, we work with the other QEF partners to develop and oversee the arrangements for quality assurance and enhancement in Scotland.

We also work with partners at a UK level to influence developments in UK-wide quality arrangements with a potential impact on the Scottish higher education sector (for example, in recent years, the introduction of the TEF and changes to the Quality Code).

Our role is important in providing a collective voice for Scottish university leaders, within Scotland and beyond. Our policy positions on quality matters are developed through working closely with practitioners in the sector, our Learning and Teaching Committee (of Vice Principals or equivalents with responsibility for learning and teaching issues) and our Main Committee (of Principals and Directors).

The role of students

All of our members are committed to working closely with their students as partners in quality assurance and enhancement, and this commitment is reflected in Universities Scotland's policy positions on quality matters. Universities Scotland also co-operates with NUS Scotland and sparqs to ensure our work is informed by student perspectives.



1.2 Sector Committees

There are a number of committees that you may have the opportunity to get involved with, all of which have different responsibilities relating to quality across the sector. As well as the committees detailed below, it is worth keeping an eye out for any short-life working groups that sparqs, NUS Scotland or QAA may run as additional opportunities to get involved.

SHEEC – Scottish Higher Education Enhancement Committee ensures that higher education in Scotland continues to be considered as being at the forefront of developing and enhancing the student learning experience and student success. Every Scottish institution has a representative on the committee. Committee members are senior colleagues from across the sector who have institutional responsibility for learning and teaching. They have a key role in supporting the embedding of effective enhancement-led approaches to managing quality in their higher education institutions. The committee is supported by the QAA.

Student membership – four student members, including a Theme Student lead, nominated by their institution.

TLG – Theme Leaders' Group is central to delivering the QAA's Enhancement Themes. The group determines, directs, supports and evaluates the work undertaken for each Theme. Every Scottish higher education institution is represented on TLG by a member of staff and a student. The TLG staff member leads their institution's work on the Theme, working with their Institutional Team. Institutional Teams typically comprise a mix of academic staff, professional services staff and students. Sector agency representatives also attend TLG meetings.

Student membership – one student member per higher education institution.

TQF – Teaching Quality Forum is a network for university quality staff and provides an opportunity to discuss sector issues and feed back to other meetings/committees making decisions. It is also a chance to update people on sector developments or research. A representative from TQF will feed back Forum views to SHEEC on issues being discussed – for example changes to ELIR, etc. The Committee is supported by the QAA.

Student membership – there are no individual student members, sparqs is an observer on the group.

Student Strategic Advisory Committee provides an opportunity for informed discussions between students and the QAA around developments in the higher education sector, and as an opportunity for students to share best practice and to have input into the work of QAA. The Committee plays a role in QAA's governance, as a board subcommittee, with an enhanced role in advising the organisation, its leadership and board of directors.

Student membership – six student members and three students' association staff.

QASHE - Quality Arrangements for Scottish Higher Education

QASHE provides a neutral forum for debating matters relating to the quality arrangements across the UK and their impact on the Scottish Quality Enhancement Framework with the intention of ensuring the sector representative on the UK Standing Committee for Quality Assessment (UKSCQA) is well informed of Scottish sector views.

Student membership – there are no individual student members, but NUS Scotland and sparqs are sector body representatives.



LEC – Learning Enhancement Committee

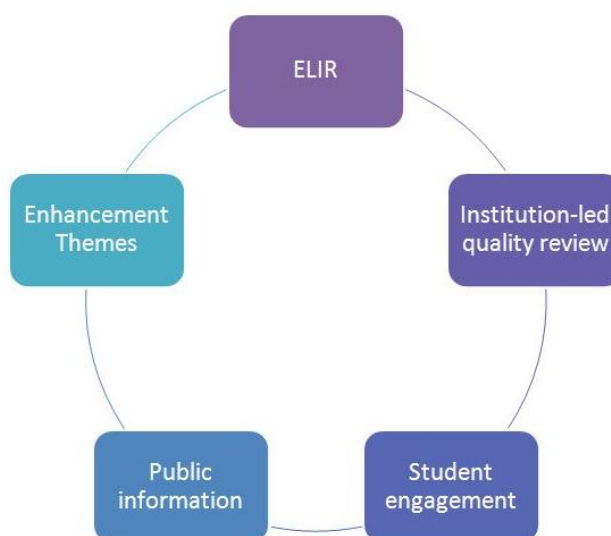
LEC is committed to enhancing the student learning experience in Scotland’s colleges and universities. The purpose of the LEC is to provide advice and guidance to the Scottish Funding Council board on strategies for ensuring that students receive an inspiring, high quality education, which equips them with the knowledge and skills to participate effectively to Scotland’s economic, social and cultural success.

Student membership - there are no individual student members, but NUS Scotland and sparqs are sector body representatives.

1.3 The Quality Enhancement Framework

The Quality Enhancement Framework (QEF) is the enhancement-led approach to quality in Scotland. Collaboration and partnership are at the heart of this innovative method.

The QEF is a set of national arrangements agreed between the SFC, QAA Scotland, NUS Scotland and Universities Scotland. The QEF supports higher education institutions in managing the quality of the student learning experience. It also provides public confidence in academic standards and the quality of the student experience. There are five key elements to the QEF, which are outlined below.



1. **Student engagement** - Student engagement is not only an individual strand in the QEF, but is an important part of every other strand within the QEF. Student involvement in the other parts is integral to the success of the QEF. All students should have a responsibility and an opportunity to improve learning within their institution. [A Student Engagement Framework for Scotland](#) (available in the Resource Library on the sparqs website) is a document endorsed and owned by all the sector agencies and representative bodies in the university and college sectors. The framework consists of five key elements of student engagement, and six features of effective student engagement.
2. **Institution-led Review (ILR)** – ILRs are internal reviews which the university conducts itself. Universities have a lot of flexibility around what they do for an Institution-led Review. This could be a review of subjects or disciplines, or reviewing a particular topic that has many dimensions. This could be a review of all the support services; a review of the post-graduate taught experience; or a review of the curriculum. All ILRs should have students on the review panel. If a panel is reviewing a subject or discipline, there will be a student reviewer on the panel. The outcomes of all ILRs should be published and made available to staff and students. For further information on engaging students in ILR, see the [sparqs ILR Practice Guide for Universities and Students’ Associations](#) (available in the Resource Library on the sparqs website).



3. **Public information on quality** – Public information refers to all information that is published and available to the general public about the student experience. An institution is required to display all information it thinks is relevant to provision of its programmes, accommodation, extra-curricular activity, etc. This information must be aimed at its students (current and potential), employers and other stakeholders. Public Information includes internal and external information, for example:

- The university's own 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); Which? University; ELIR Review Reports. (See more information about surveys and data on page 16 of this handbook).

It's also important to note that universities are also subject to **Competition and Markets Authority (CMA)** guidance regarding their compliance with competition law. This includes what information is transparent to students and how it is presented. More information about CMA and universities' obligations in this area are detailed on the [Office for Students website](#), or have a look at the guidance from the CMA on [consumer protection law](#).

4. **Enhancement Themes** – They aim to improve the learning experience of students studying within the Scottish higher education sector. The sector achieves this by identifying and agreeing a specific area to work on (known as a Theme). The Themes encourage institutions, staff and students to work together to develop new ideas and models for innovation in learning and teaching and to collaborate on one or more topics to improve strategy, policy and practice. Each Theme also allows the sector to share and learn from current and innovative national and international practice.

The focus or themes of the Enhancement Themes are chosen by SHEEC (The Scottish Higher Education Enhancement Committee), which is made up of senior academic managers and student representatives. The themes are managed by QAA Scotland on behalf of the sector as a whole.

The current Theme, running from 2017-2020 is titled ***Evidence for Enhancement: Improving the Student Experience***, and launched in October 2017. The Theme will consider the information that is available within the Scottish sector to help us understand what we do well and what we could improve. We aim to identify any issues that will benefit from intervention, help prioritise interventions for the student experience, and evaluate the effectiveness of those interventions. This will include reporting on the ways in which the student experience is improving. There is also a dedicated student-led project which is related to student feedback for 2018-19.

Previous themes include Student Transitions, Developing and Supporting the Curriculum and Graduates for the 21st Century.

More information on Enhancement Themes can be found on QAA Scotland's [Enhancement Themes website](#).

5. **Enhancement-led Institutional Review (ELIR)** – ELIR is an external review process that looks in depth at how students are engaged in shaping quality at each university, and how well students are engaged in ELIR itself. The main focus of the review is to consider the university's approach to improving the student learning experience. ELIR has been QAA Scotland's review method since 2003 and there have been 3 review cycles since then. ELIR is one of the ways in which the SFC fulfils its legal duty to review quality in Scottish higher education institutions.



In 2016, the length of the cycle was extended to 5 years (reviews over 4 years and a year of development) and the ELIR 4 cycle will run from 2017-2022.

ELIR 4 places much greater emphasis on contextualising the review than previous versions of the method; this means that, while the institution still carries out a holistic evaluation of its strategy, policy, and practice in relation to quality assurance and enhancement, the review will focus on those areas where there is likely to be greatest benefit to the institution. The institution undergoing ELIR submits a self-evaluation document called a Reflective Analysis (RA). The ELIR team uses this document and initial meetings with staff and students (known as the planning visit) to develop themes for exploration during the review visit. These themes relate to the contextualised areas identified by the institution. External review panels are made up of academic, professional service and student reviewers. After visiting the institution, the ELIR team writes two reports (an Outcome report and a Technical report) setting out the review findings. These reports, as well as previous ELIR reports are all published on QAA Scotland's website.

Student engagement in all stages of the ELIR process is essential to the success of the review and 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.

You can find [QAA's Guidance for ELIR 4](#) on their website and sparqs' [ELIR Cycle 4 Practice Guide](#), is accessible via the Resource Library on the sparqs website.

Another key area of QAA's work is **Focus On**. 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 include:

- 2018-19 Graduate Skills
- 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

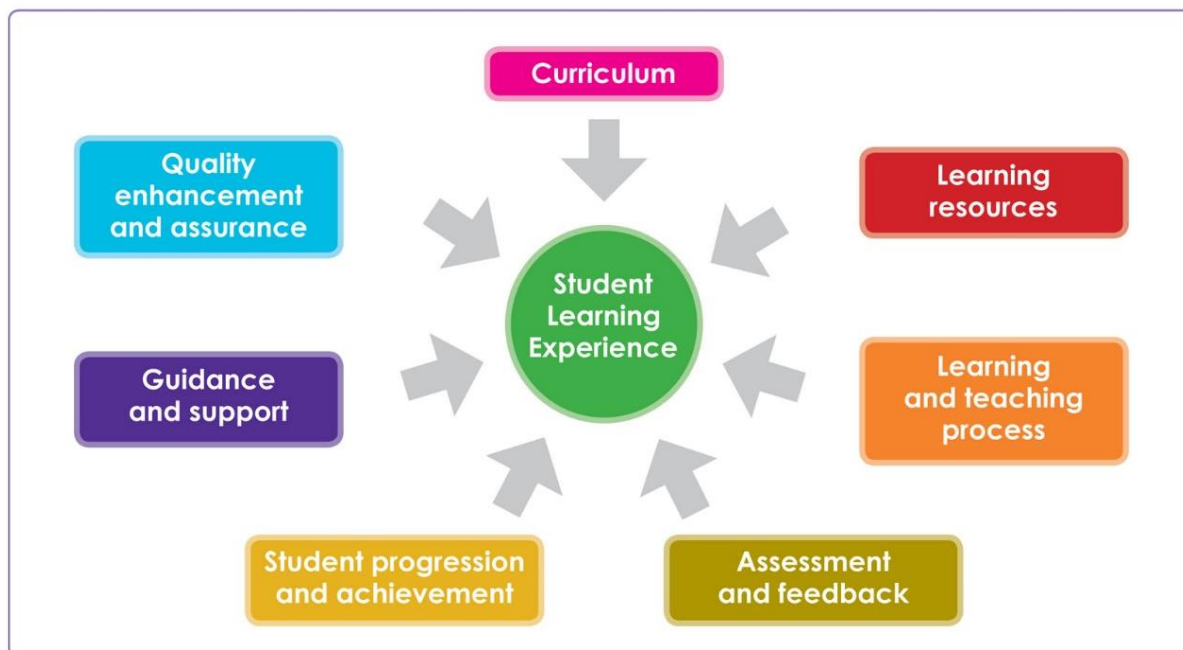
Student involvement in Focus On is key to the success of the projects. Student representatives and students' associations have the opportunity to shape the direction of Focus On and each project generally has specific activities relating to student engagement. Student representatives and students' association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



2. Quality in Action

2.1 The Student Learning Experience

The [Student Learning Experience](#) (SLE), developed by sparqs and a key component of Course Rep Training, refers to all elements of a student's experience during their time at their institution. There are seven elements: Curriculum, Learning Resources, Learning and Teaching Process, Assessment and Feedback, Student Progression and Achievement, Guidance and Support, Quality Enhancement and Assurance (*available in the Resource Library on the sparqs website*).



2.2 Outcome Agreements

Outcome Agreements set out what colleges and universities plan to deliver in return for their funding and how the institution meets Scottish Government priorities. They are managed by the SFC, on behalf of the Scottish Government. SFC Outcome Agreement Managers are responsible for working with institutions to negotiate the agreements, and it is expected that students are involved in the process. You can find out who your institution's Outcome Agreement Manager is [on the SFC website](#).

Ministers have called for the 'intensification' of the Outcome Agreement process to continue in 2019-20 to secure greater progress with priority outcomes, and indicated that this should include:

- The setting of more ambitious and challenging targets.
- Encouragement of engagement and collaboration.
- Improved transparency and accountability on institutional performance.
- More dynamic allocation of funding to drive and incentivise improvement.



[The Ministerial Letter of Guidance](#) (July 2019) sets out the Scottish Government's strategic objectives for the Scottish Funding Council. Its ambition is of a fully aligned and coherent education and skills system which delivers the best student experience. It states that the SFC should ensure education is accessible to learners from all backgrounds, gives them a high-quality learning experience, supports them to succeed in their studies, and equips them to flourish in employment, further study and fulfilling lives. Some examples of priority areas over the coming year include:

- Fair access to education for people from the widest range of backgrounds, including continued progress on implementing the recommendations of the Commission on Widening Access and addressing gender balance among student intakes for some key subjects.
- Supporting student mental health and wellbeing. This includes all institutions developing a mental health strategy and working with their students' association, and the NUS Scotland Think Positive project to develop a Student Mental Health Agreement.
- Student Engagement - develop further the engagement of students' association representatives in the development of 2020-21 Outcome Agreements, to ensure the lived experience of students informs, and is embedded in, individual Outcome Agreements and their monitoring.

Universities are required to consult with their students' association; in line with this, the SFC expect universities to summarise how – from the outset of the process and throughout – their Outcome Agreements have been developed in consultation with students, the university's students' association, staff, and trade union representatives.

Your role will include involvement in conversations with key staff when your institution's Outcome Agreement is being discussing and developed; this may include attending meetings to find out more about the process, or how your institution is reviewing activity relating to the previous Outcome Agreement.

You should also be able to see drafts of the Outcome Agreement as it is developed and attend meetings with your institution's Outcome Agreement Managers where possible. You might find it useful to view your institution's previous Outcome Agreements, which you can find on the SFC website.

SFC also produce guidance for Universities on Outcome Agreements; ['Guidance for the development of University Outcome Agreements: 2019-2020 to 2021-22'](#)

2.3 Student Partnership Agreements

Many institutions now have Student Partnership Agreements (SPAs) or equivalent documents in place with their students' associations. SPAs set out the relationship between the students' association and the university 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.

Further information about SPAs is available in sparqs' [Guidance on the development and implementation of a Student Partnership Agreement in universities](#) (*accessible in the Resource Library on the sparqs website*).



2.4 Gender Action Plans

In 2016, the SFC published its Gender Action Plan (GAP), setting out ambitious targets for tackling the long-standing problem of gender imbalance within colleges and universities. It stipulates that, by 2030, no individual subject at a Scottish college or university shall have a gender imbalance greater than 75:25, and that the gap between overall male and female participation in undergraduate study shall be reduced to 5%.

Meaningful and sustained student participation throughout the GAP process is key to ensuring that colleges and universities are bold and creative in their approaches, and put the needs of their students at the centre of the process. In July 2017, each institution was required to publish a GAP, detailing its plans for meeting the SFC's targets. A review of these institutional GAPs indicated that student engagement in the process had been patchy and inconsistent, and there was significant scope for improvement.

In 2018, sparqs and NUS Scotland designed and delivered a joint project to improve student engagement in GAPs; building on the learning from the project, we developed a [Benchmarking and Development Tool](#) to improve student engagement in institutional Gender Action Plans. It provides an accessible way for you to benchmark your current activity and practical suggestions for improving it. In partnership with Advance HE, Equate Scotland, and NUS Scotland, we also developed an [Intersectionality checklist](#), a tool to help you adopt an intersectional approach to your work on GAPs (and any other student engagement work!) to ensure it reflects and addresses the multiple forms of disadvantage faced by the diversity of women. *(both the tool and the checklist are accessible in the Resource Library on the sparqs website).*

Further information on GAPs, including SFC's initial GAP and subsequent technical report, can be found [on the SFC website](#).

2.5 Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF)

The TEF is a national exercise, introduced by the UK Government, which monitors and assesses excellence in teaching at universities and colleges, and how well they ensure excellent outcomes for their students in terms of graduate-level employment or further study. Participating institutions are awarded a rating to indicate the level of teaching quality that they provide, either bronze, silver, or gold. Institutions in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland can also take part.

When TEF was first introduced in 2016-17, assessments were made at an institutional level. In 2017-18 subject-level TEF was carried out for the first time, and throughout 2018-19 a subject-level TEF pilot exercise to test a single model took place; it is expected that this will be fully introduced from 2020.

The TEF measures teaching excellence in three areas, and there are assigned metrics to each of those areas:

- Teaching quality: teaching that stimulates and challenges students, and maximises engagement with their studies – NSS metrics.
- Learning environment: resources and activities (such as libraries, laboratories, and work experience) which support learning and improve retention, progression, and attainment – NSS/HESA metrics.
- Student outcomes and learning gain: the extent to which students achieve their goals, in particular, those from disadvantaged backgrounds – previously DLHE, but now Graduate Outcomes Survey metrics.
- Supplementary metrics: degree classification trends and LEO (longitudinal education outcomes).



Participating institutions also submit a written submission that provides contextual information and supports their case.

There is currently an independent review of the Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework being conducted, which will report in Summer 2019, with recommendations considered before the full implementation of subject-level TEF.

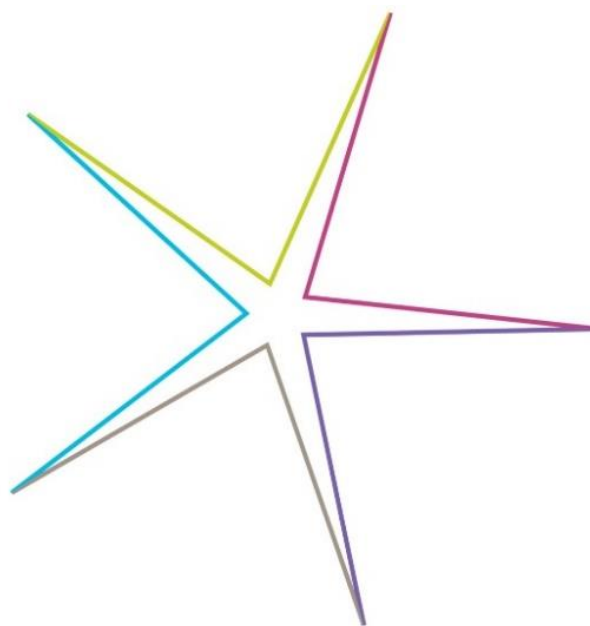
For more information on TEF 4 see the [TEF Guidance](#) on the Office for Students website.

For Scottish institutions, participation in TEF is voluntary. Up to now, five Scottish institutions have decided to participate, with all gaining their awards in June 2017. These awards are valid until 2021.

Institution	Award
Robert Gordon University	Gold
University of St Andrews	Gold
University of Dundee	Gold
Abertay University	Silver
Heriot-Watt University	Silver

2.6 UK Quality Code

The UK Quality Code for Higher Education defines and sets out the expectations all providers of UK higher education are required to meet. The Quality Code gives all higher education providers a shared starting point for setting, describing, and assuring the academic standards of their higher education awards and programmes and the quality of the learning opportunities they provide. The Expectations and Practices of the revised [UK Quality Code](#) was published on 27th March 2018 after undergoing a significant redevelopment. The [Advice and Guidance chapter on Student Engagement](#) provides more information to institutions on student engagement. It is important to note that while institutions in Scotland (and Wales and Northern Ireland) are required to meet the Expectations as well as the Core and Common Practices, English providers do not have to evidence adherence to the Common Practices.





2.7 National Surveys

What?	Purpose	Access	Analysis/Use
NSS			
<p>The National Student Survey is aimed at final year students and asks 27 questions relating to 8 aspects of the student experience. The questions changed in 2017 after a consultation process and review, so there are only three years' worth of comparative analysis (2017, 2018 and 2019)</p>	<p>NSS can be used by universities as a marketing tool for prospective students. It is also used in-house to establish areas for improvements, as well as best practice examples. There is a drive in the Scottish sector to see how NSS can be used as a tool for enhancement, in line with the current Themes work.</p>	<p>Institutions access their results via the National Student Survey Results Portal; your students' association should have their own log-in to also access the site. Make sure you check who has access (it might be a students' association staff member) or ask your institution if you don't think you currently do. The results are also published on the Office for Students website (although not the free text comments).</p>	<p>Your institution will do a deep analysis of the results and this will go to university and school-level committees. Some SAs also do their own analysis, particularly within the Student Voice section. Several public sites, such as Wonkhe, will also produce analysis reports. Departments will usually develop action plans in response to NSS results; consider how your SA and your reps can be engaged in these, both developing and actioning activity. Also, are their areas of development that have been identified that the SA can lead on?</p>
PRES			
<p>The Postgraduate Research Experience Survey is the only UK higher education sector-wide survey to gain insight from postgraduate research students about their learning and supervision experience. Institutions can choose to do the survey annually or ever two years.</p>	<p>PRES is used by universities to enhance the research community and environment through providing key information to support strategic decisions and target areas for improvement.</p>	<p>Institutions access their results via the Online Surveys tool; you'll need to check with your planning team, or survey unit if you have one, to get access to the data. Advance HE (previously the Higher Education Academy) produce detailed Excel reports with benchmarking data to allow institutions to compare themselves against the sector. Specific institution results are not published, but institutions are told which quartile they rank in.</p>	<p>Similarly, to the NSS results, your institution will do a deep analysis of the results and this will go to relevant university and school-level committees, such as research committees, or graduate school. It may be useful for you to consider how you can engage PG reps in the analysis of PRES, and any action planning or outcomes of the results.</p>



What?	Purpose	Access	Analysis/Use
PTES			
<p>The Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey is the largest sector-wide survey aimed at gaining insight from taught postgraduate students about their learning and teaching experience.</p>	<p>PTES enables higher education institutions to gather important information about the experience of any taught postgraduate student on a Masters, Postgraduate Certificate or Diploma course and act accordingly.</p>	<p>Institutions access their results via the Online Surveys tool; you'll need to check with your planning team, or survey unit if you have one, to get access to the data. Advance HE (previously the Higher Education Academy) produce detailed Excel reports with benchmarking data to allow institutions to compare themselves against the sector. Specific institution results are not published, but institutions are told which quartile they rank in.</p>	<p>Similarly, to the NSS results, your institution will do a deep analysis of the results and this will go to relevant university and school-level committees, such as research committees, or graduate school. It may be useful for you to consider how you can engage PG reps in the analysis of PRES, and any action planning or outcomes of the results.</p>
Graduate Outcomes Survey			
<p>The new Graduate Outcomes survey was completed for the first time in December 2018, and the first data to be published will be Spring 2020. Instead of completing 6 months post-graduation, the new survey asks graduates 15 months after they have left.</p>	<p>The survey looks to understand where graduates have ended up (whether in employment, further study or doing something else) and to what extent the qualification played a part in that outcome. The survey aims to gain insight into whether the student experience delivered what was promised to students, from a learning and potential employment perspective.</p>	<p>Institutions will be sent their results by the Higher Education Statistical Agency (HESA).</p>	<p>Institutions will use the information for research and statistical purposes to help them improve the outcomes, and to research the outcomes of different courses and the effectiveness of career services. The results will also be used by HESA, and funding bodies, such as the Scottish Funding Council, to understand the outcomes from higher education and for their statutory and/or public functions including funding, regulation, and policy-making purposes.</p>
QAA Scotland Thematic Reports			
<p>A rich source of quantitative and qualitative data, QAA Scotland produce thematic reports on common topics that come out of ELIR outcome and technical reports.</p>	<p>The reports aim to support learning from ELIR at the sector level, covering areas of positive practice and areas for development. Topics are chosen to inform and support other development work across the sector, including Focus On and the Enhancement Themes.</p>	<p>All the reports are available on QAA Scotland's website to read and download.</p>	<p>The reports may be of use if you are keen to do your own analysis of certain areas of work, such as ILR or Graduate Attributes. They can help inform institutions of sector practice, and are a useful tool for establishing commonalities in practice with other institutions.</p>



What?	Purpose	Access	Analysis/Use
Internal Surveys/Focus Groups			
<p>Variety of surveys that institutions or students' associations run; could include induction/first impressions surveys, student satisfaction surveys (like NSS) but for 1st-3rd years, or run focus groups/surveys on the provision of service areas, such as the library or catering facilities.</p>	<p>Internal surveys are a great way to gain insight from specific cohorts, or about specific areas, decisions, or changes that affect your institution.</p>	<p>Depends on who is leading or overseeing the survey; you'd be best to contact the relevant staff member and ask if you can have access to any results if you wouldn't automatically see them. You will already have access to any SA surveys or other data collection exercises, either the raw data, or maybe presented in an analysis or report produced by SA staff.</p>	<p>Some institutions run a survey like the NSS but for other year groups to identify issues earlier on, rather than a few weeks before a student is leaving, as is the case in the NSS. The analysis of this can be useful to see if there are problems or challenges affecting all year groups or a programme, or only 4th years, as well as identifying themes across the year groups. SA-led surveys are useful to gain first-hand knowledge of particular areas that the SA lead on.</p>
Student Rep Feedback			
<p>This comes in many formats; this could be the data that reps capture through consultation with their peer group and fellow classmates. It could also be the feedback from Student-staff committees that rep report back on. It could also be a more quantitative based data set, such as the number of reps reporting certain issues and how that is captured. Reps might also do their own surveys or focus groups that could be an excellent source of data.</p>	<p>Student reps are one of the richest sources of data and feedback across an institution, from grassroots to senior management. By utilising the data, they are gathering, and harnessing and presenting it in a meaningful way, you can use it to challenge for change.</p>	<p>In terms of the feedback reps are gather, utilise your course rep meetings (or equivalent) to access that data. You could consider what tools you have available to you to curate feedback from reps, such as a database or dashboard. You should also be able to ask for access to student-staff committee minutes if you want to be able to see feedback from these meetings, or again, capture that via your reps.</p>	<p>There are several ways you can analyse and use student rep feedback. You could produce a thematic report of rep feedback at student-staff committee to identify themes or topics that come up regularly, or across programmes. The feedback could feed into other data analysis, such as the NSS or student-led teaching awards. Student rep feedback can also help inform SA campaigns and activities, or the work the SA undertake with the institution, either through an SPA, or maybe a wider campaign.</p>



3. Tools of the Trade

3.1 Acronym Buster

API	Alternative Provider Institution
CoWA	Commission on Widening Access
CPD	Continued Professional Development
DfE	Department for Education
DLHE	Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education
ELIR	Enhancement-led Institutional Review
GAP	Gender Action Plan
ILR	Institution-led Review
KPI's	Key Performance Indicators
LEO	Longitudinal Education Outcomes
NSS	National Student Survey
NUS	National Union of Students
OfS	Office for Students
PRES	Postgraduate Research Experience Survey
PSRB	Professional, statutory or regulatory body
PTES	Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency
QEF	Quality Enhancement Framework
REF	Research Excellence Framework
SAAS	Student Awards Agency for Scotland
SEF	Student Engagement Framework
SFC	Scottish Funding Council
SLE	Student Learning Experience
SMG	Senior Management Group
SPA	Student Partnership Agreement
TEF	Teaching Excellence Framework
TSEP	The Student Engagement Partnership
UUK	Universities UK
UCU	Universities & Colleges Union

Each institution will also have their own acronyms, such as SSCC (Student Staff Consultative Committee), but these will vary from institution to institution, so it is best you familiarise yourself with the ones relevant to you.



3.2 Key sparqs contacts

To email a member of staff use the following format: firstname.surname@sparqs.ac.uk

Simon Varwell, Senior Development Consultant

Colleges - all of the UHI colleges, North East Scotland College and SRUC.

Universities - Edinburgh Napier University, SRUC, The Open University in Scotland and University of the Highlands and Islands.

Hannah Clarke, Senior Development Consultant

Colleges - City of Glasgow, Glasgow Clyde and Glasgow Kelvin.

Universities - Glasgow School of Art, Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, University of Glasgow and University of St Andrews.

Stef Black, Development Consultant

Colleges - Fife College, Forth Valley College, New College Lanarkshire, South Lanarkshire College and West Lothian College.

Universities - Heriot-Watt University, The University of Edinburgh, University of Dundee and University of Stirling.

Megan Brown, Development Consultant

Colleges - Borders College, Dumfries & Galloway College, Edinburgh College and West College Scotland.

Universities - Glasgow Caledonian University, University of Aberdeen and University of the West of Scotland.

Justin Walker, Development Consultant

Colleges - Ayrshire College, Dundee and Angus College and Newbattle Abbey College.

Universities - Abertay University, Queen Margaret University, Robert Gordon University and University of Strathclyde.

3.3 Where to find out more

WonkHE (pronounced wonky) – subscribe to their Monday morning briefing email <http://wonkhe.com/>

Times Higher Education
www.timeshighereducation.com

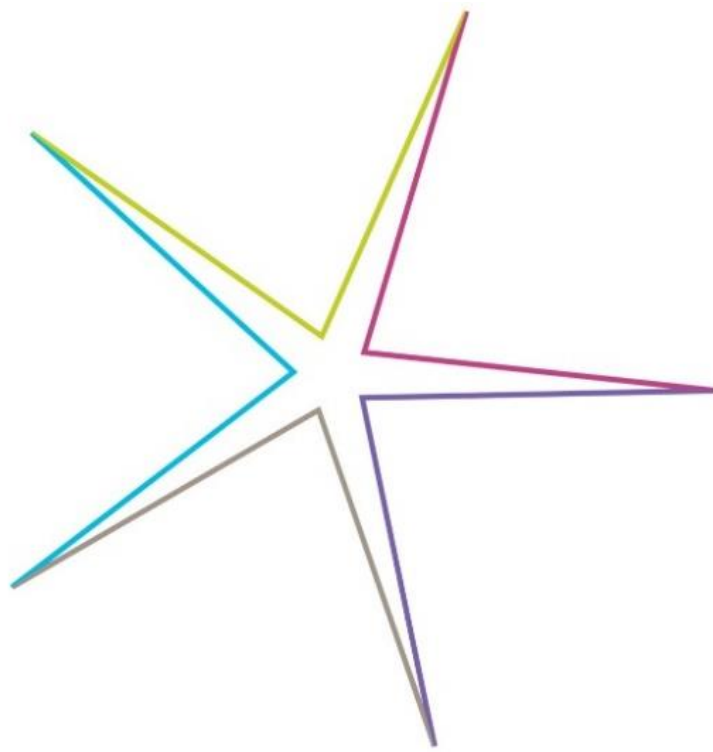
Guardian Higher Education
<https://www.theguardian.com/education/higher-education>

University World News
<http://www.universityworldnews.com/>

Higher Education Policy Institute Blog
<http://www.hepi.ac.uk/category/blog/>



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student partnerships in quality scotland (sparqs) is a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation.
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