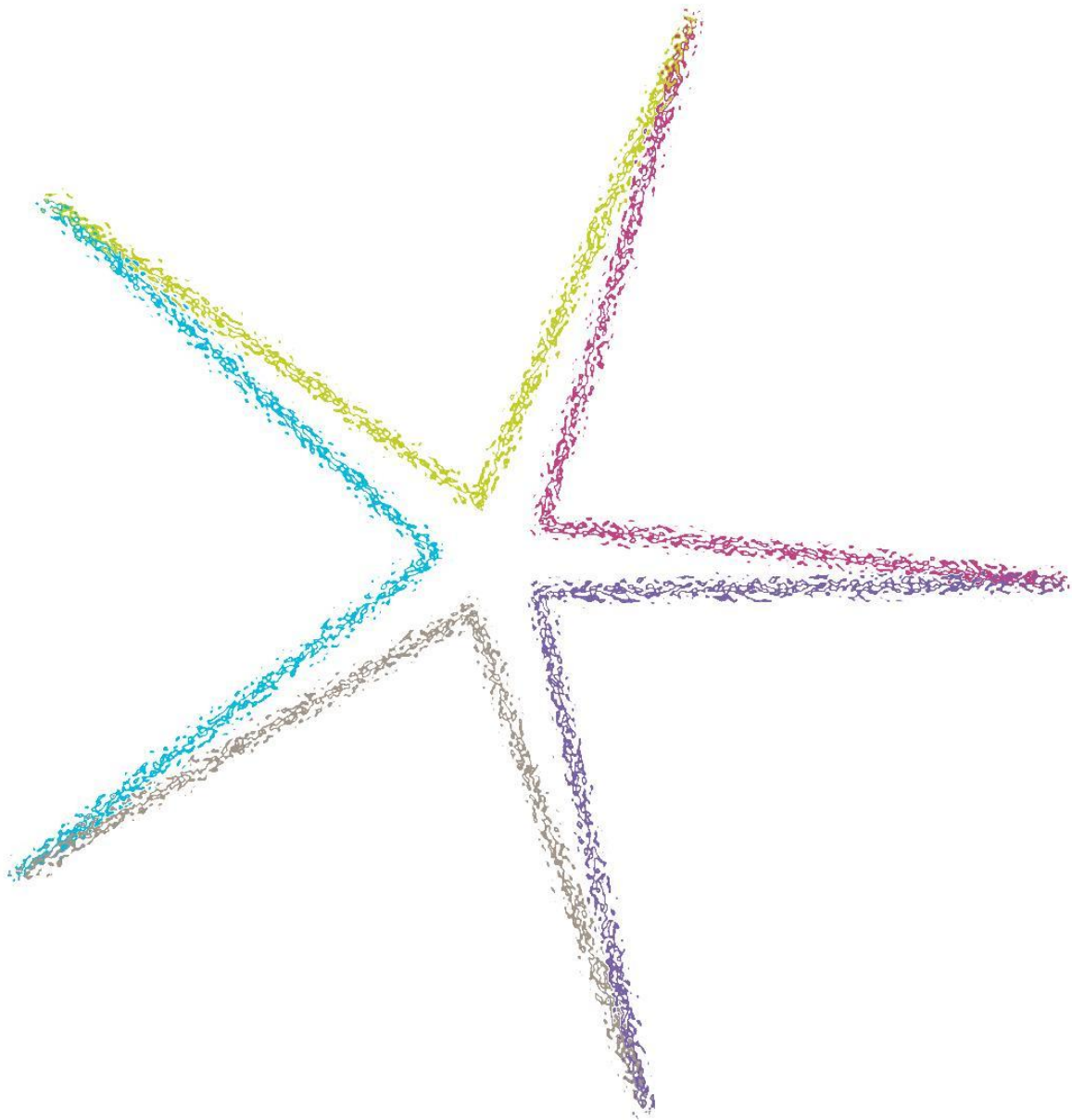# Tertiary Quality Enhancement Review (TQER) - Practical Guide for students' associations and student officers

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CONTENTS

1. Introduction

1.1 Purpose of this guide

This practical guide has been produced for students' association representatives and staff in the tertiary education sector in Scotland. It provides context and background to the Tertiary Quality Enhancement Review (TQER) process and makes suggestions of what you need to do at each stage. It is also encouraged that institutional staff involved in the review read through this guide and consider how they will contribute to student partnership in the process.

The purpose of this document is to provide information about TQER, and to support meaningful student engagement and partnership throughout the process. Student partnership is a key part of TQER and students are engaged in several different ways, including as Lead Student Representatives (LSRs), as attendees of meetings with the review team, and as student reviewers.

This document should be used in conjunction with the QAA Scotland TQER Guide and the QAA TQER FAQs, accessible on this webpage. If you have a specific query relating to the TQER at your institution, you should get in touch directly with your Institution Quality Contact.

This guide includes an overview of key parts of the TQER process, combined with suggestions as to how students' associations and the wider student body can be engaged in TQER at each stage. These 'top tips' are highlighted in blue 'what you need to do' boxes.

1.2 Introduction to TQER

TQER is the external review method for colleges and universities (institutions) in Scotland and is one of the delivery mechanisms of the Tertiary Quality Enhancement Framework (TQEF). TQER is designed to provide assurance on quality standards and the quality of the student experience in Scotland's institutions. It helps the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) to answer the central question of the TQEF: 'Is the provision delivered by Scotland's colleges and universities of high quality and is it improving?'.

The main focus of the review is to consider the effectiveness of the institution's approach to enhancing the quality of learning, teaching and the student experience; to facilitating student engagement and partnership; and to enabling students to be successful during their time at college or university. TQER has been QAA Scotland's review method since 2024. TQER is one of the ways in which the SFC fulfils its legal duty to review quality in Scottish institutions.

Flexibility has been built into TQER to accommodate the range of institutions within Scotland. The review team (4 to 6 reviewers) and the length of the review visit (2 to 5 days) will be proportionate to the size and scope of the institution. The review is tailored to the institution's context, so while ensuring consistency of the approach across the review method is critical, it does include consideration of how an institution's specific circumstances (such as its size or geographical location(s)) might influence that approach. It is also recognised that the level of engagement an LSR will have with TQER will vary depending on the nature and size of the institution and of the student body.

This document should be used in conjunction with the QAA Scotland TQER Guide and QAA TQER FAQs.

The main focus of the review is to consider the effectiveness of the institution's approach to enhancing the quality of learning, teaching and the student experience; to facilitating student engagement and partnership; and to enabling students to be successful during their time at college or university.

This guidance is written for use in the first cycle of TQER, which runs from 2024. The duration of the cycle is 7 years and every institution will be reviewed once within that cycle. The full schedule for this cycle of TQER can be found on QAA Scotland's website.

Institutions are continuously working to assure and enhance the quality of learning and teaching and it is important to stress that TQER is therefore not a one-off event occurring every 7 years. Every college and university has to complete an annual Self-Evaluation and Action Plan (SEAP), a document which enables institutions to reflect annually on institutional quality assurance and enhancement activities and outcomes. All institutions regularly conduct reviews of subject disciplines and professional services. In addition, every institution participates in national-level enhancement activity through Scotland's Tertiary Enhancement Programme (STEP). TQER is the external review that evaluates the effectiveness of all of these processes.

Student engagement and partnership is a fundamental part of the TQER process and essential to the success of the review.

Student engagement and partnership is a fundamental part of the TQER process and essential to the success of the review. There is a strong commitment to the value of the role of students in all elements of the process - students should be actively engaged in the institutional self-evaluation, the Initial and Main Review Visits, and the follow-up activity, including Institutional Liaison Meetings with QAA Scotland. Students should feel co-ownership of their college's or university's self-evaluative activity. Students who take part in reviews should report having confidence that key documents reflect the experiences of the students they represent.

1.3 TQER: A key process for students' associations

The TQER process presents an opportunity for institutions to engage in genuine dialogue and to work in partnership with the student body. Genuine dialogue should be an ongoing process between an institution and its student body and TQER should ideally reflect the relationships that already exist.

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TQER 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 features of good practice highlighted in the TQER 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.

TQER 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 TQER to affect the institution's direction and key learning and teaching priorities.

Scotland's Ambition for Student Partnership is a key sector reference point in TQER. When institutions and students' associations are developing processes to work together and to engage students in the review process, the Partnership Ambition is a useful tool you can use to evaluate your current approaches and to design new ways of working. The Partnership Ambition is underpinned by 8 features of partnership, which are all important to implement as part of the approaches to student engagement in TQEF.

In Scotland's institutions, we operate a 'no surprises' approach to quality. No one should be 'saving up' an issue for a review visit - instead, students' associations should be feeding into annual processes such as the SEAP, as well as engaging in ongoing conversations through the institution's committee processes and internal quality arrangements.

When review teams meet with students, this allows them to understand what it is like to be a student at the institution. The meetings are not for students to raise individual queries or issues – instead, institutions should be having ongoing, open and transparent dialogue with their students throughout the year.

What you need to do

Understand the process

You should familiarise yourself with the TQER guidance, in order to understand the process and to understand where your role will fit in. Even if there is not a review scheduled for your institution during your current term of office, it's still important to understand the purpose of TQER and what your role as an officer or students' association staff member is within the current stage of your review cycle. You should provide new student officers with an induction to TQER and include it in officer handover documents. Ask your Quality Manager who your Institution Quality Contact is and contact them with any questions relating to your TQER.

Map out key dates

It is essential to map out all the key dates, meetings and deadlines throughout the TQER cycle to ensure that students' association officers and staff know exactly what they need to be doing at each stage of the review.

It is essential to map out all the key dates, meetings and deadlines throughout the TQER cycle to ensure that students' association officers and staff know exactly what they need to be doing at each stage of the review. This includes key dates for the Initial and Main Review Visits, the preparation for the review, and the follow-up activities. Mapping out your key dates and knowing where you are in the review process will determine what you need to do to prepare for each stage and what support and training is required for students and students' association staff. The QAA Review Manager will provide the Institutional Quality Contact and the Lead Student Reviewer with some of the key dates at the scoping meeting. These dates should be shared with relevant internal stakeholders, including students' association staff who will be supporting review preparations.

Utilise existing processes and knowledge

TQER 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 TQER preparation into existing activities, such as course rep meetings. In the early stages of a TQER, you should concentrate on identifying gaps in your understanding of the student experience and concentrate additional activity in these areas.

1.4 Put into context: Scotland's Tertiary Quality Enhancement Framework

When we're talking about 'quality' in institutions, we're talking about how institutions safeguard and improve the experience of students.

Quality Assurance: Quality assurance is the process for checking that the standards and quality of education provision *meet agreed expectations,* e.g. does the course deliver the skills promised at the start, are assessments fair and fit for purpose?

Quality Enhancement: Taking deliberate steps to bring about *improvement* in the effectiveness of the learning experiences of students, e.g. what could make the course even better next year? How could the teaching and learning improve?

So how do we evaluate the quality of our institutions? We use Scotland's Tertiary Quality Enhancement Framework (TQEF), the approach to quality assurance and enhancement in Scotland's colleges and universities. The TQEF is based on 6 principles, with students at the heart of the whole approach.

1.5 Tools to work in partnership with students

TQER is focused on the quality of the student experience. sparqs has created two tools – the Student Learning Experience (SLE) model and Scotland's Ambition for Student Partnership – to support institutions to work in partnership with students to evaluate and enhance the student experience. Both the SLE model and the Partnership Model are reference points for review teams in TQER and the review team will explore the use of these models for enhancement during the review.

The Student Learning Experience (SLE) model

The SLE model is designed to sit at the heart of conversations with students, enabling students and staff to work together to identify priorities to enhance the quality of learning. It breaks down the wider concept of the student experience into 9 'building blocks'. The SLE model is underpinned by 3 'lenses'. These are areas of focus that can be applied across all 9 of the building blocks.

Each building block has an accompanying set of 10 reflective questions. The questions support dialogue between students and staff on various aspects of the building blocks. They will help develop an understanding between students and staff of strengths within the student experience, as well as areas for development.

There are many ways that institutions and students' associations can use the SLE model to collect evidence and data on the student experience. These include:

- To support student reps to gather meaningful feedback from the students they represent, at both course level and at institutional level.
- As a basis for discussions between students and staff, e.g. at student-staff liaison meetings, to prompt conversations on what is working well and what could be improved within the student experience.
- To collate evidence on the SLE at a course, institutional and national level, to support institutions in self-evaluative activity and enhancement planning.
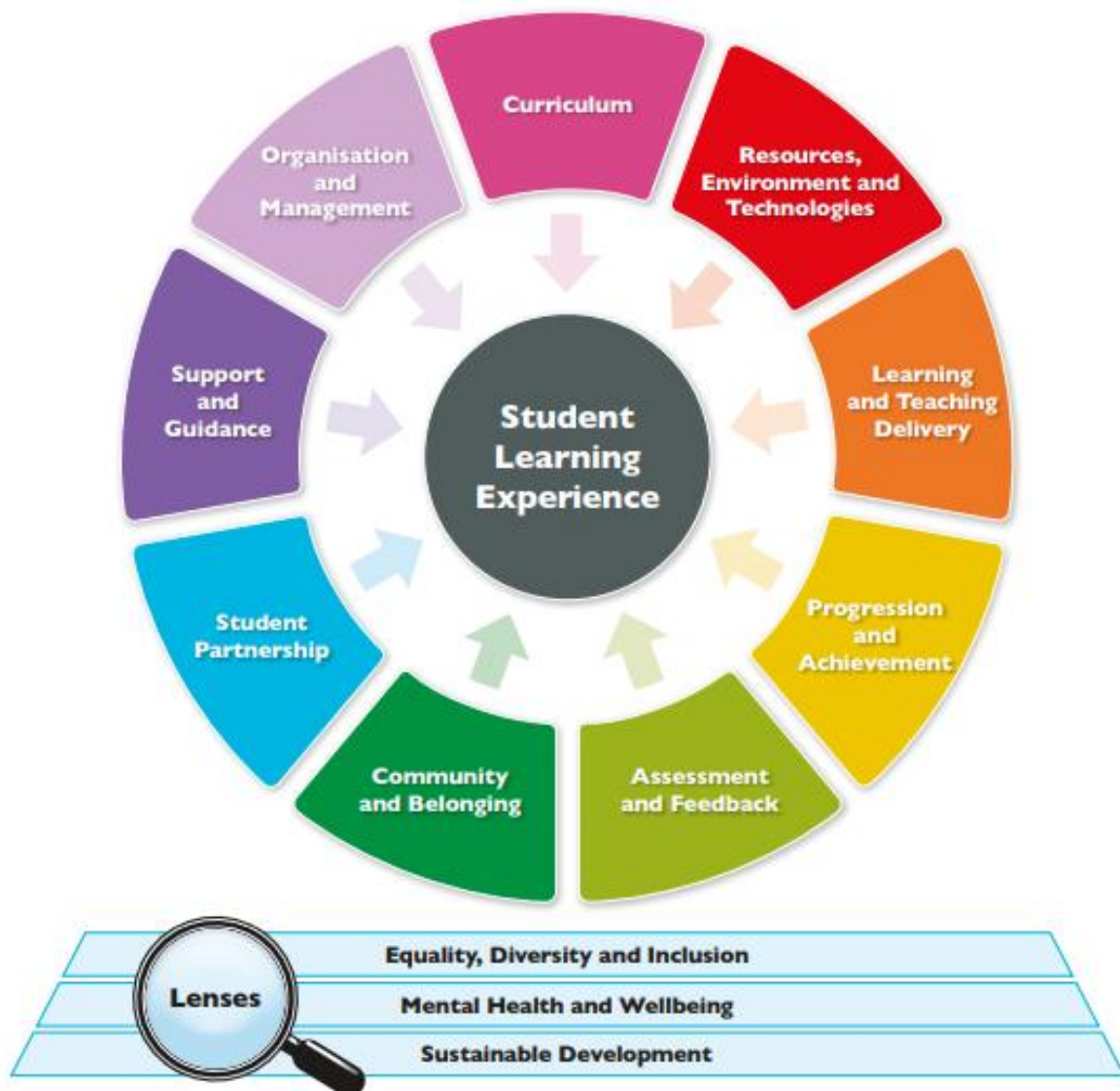
Scotland's Ambition for Student Partnership

Scotland's Ambition for Student Partnership, and its accompanying features and indicators, is a tool which supports institutions and students' associations to explore their approaches to student engagement and partnership. The ambition statement is aspirational. It is recognised that, whilst there is significant good practice across Scotland, to achieve our ambition will require continued enhancement activity and this will be a journey for individual institutions and the sector as a whole.

The Partnership Ambition statement:

Student partnership is embedded in Scotland's Tertiary Quality Enhancement Framework (TQEF).

Our ambition is to develop and mature this partnership, ensuring that students are central to shaping the quality of learning and making a positive impact on their own and others' experience, however and wherever they learn.

Student partnership is achieved when there is trust and mutual respect for both student and staff expertise, a robust representative system which is accountable to the diverse student body, and student and staff capacity to co-create and implement solutions. Central to this is an equal partnership where students are essential to all levels of decision making, self-evaluative activity, enhancement planning and quality processes.

The ambition statement is underpinned by **8 features**. We will know that we have achieved a culture of student partnership when these features are embedded into institutions' systems and processes.

Each feature of student partnership can be explored further through **indicators of practice**. These indicators are not designed to be a checklist – they are designed to be examples of practice which institutions and students' associations can use to identify their current best practice and opportunities for development. You can see the indicators of practice in sparqs' digital Partnership Ambition resource.

The ambition statement, features and indicators of practice are designed to be a practical tool for institutions to embed partnership working across their activities and processes. Ways to use the Partnership Ambition include:

- Undertaking a high-level evaluation of your partnership activities across the institution.
- Evaluating student partnership within a particular department or subject level.
- Choosing a specific feature and/or group of indicators to explore and evaluate in more detail.
- Using the tool as a sector benchmark when writing the 'Student Engagement and Partnership' section of your Strategic Impact Analysis.

1.6 sparqs' support and training for students' associations

In the year your institution is going through TQER, sparqs will invite the Lead Student Rep (LSR) and students' association staff supporting the review to attend our training programme.

In the year your institution is going through TQER, sparqs will invite the Lead Student Rep (LSR) and students' association staff supporting the review to attend our training programme. The training has two parts – the first session focuses on the scoping meeting and developing the Strategic Impact Analysis and the second session focuses on preparing for the Initial Review Visit and Main Review Visit. sparqs will be in touch with students' associations on a rolling basis to invite you to the training and will assign you to the appropriate session depending on your institution's TQER timeline.

All students' associations are invited annually to attend sparqs' That's Quality! training in August. This training is a key part of the support package available to students' associations, regardless of what stage you are at in the process. That's Quality! covers all elements of the TQEF and explores how students' associations can engage with the mechanisms and use quality processes to make change.

2. Tertiary Quality Enhancement Review (TQER)

2.1 The purpose and scope of the review

TQER will look at how effective an institution is at meeting the principles of the Tertiary Quality Enhancement Framework (TQEF). These are:

- **Excellence in learning, teaching and assessment** - How effective is the institution's approach for achieving excellence in learning, teaching and assessment, and for assuring and maintaining academic standards?
- **Supporting student success** - How effective are the institution's arrangements for supporting student success?
- **Student engagement and partnership** - How effective is the institution's approach to student engagement and partnership?
- **Enhancement and quality culture** - How effective is the institution in embedding an enhancement and quality culture across the institution?
- **Externality** - How effectively does the institution use external expertise across all principles?
- **Data and evidence** - How effectively does the institution use data and evidence across all principles?

These final two principles underpin the previous four principles. As a result, the TQER report is structured around the first four principles, with reflections on externality and data and evidence embedded in the other four areas.

TQER is concerned with the learning experience of all students, regardless of their location, level or mode of study. This includes part-time students, work-based learning students, students who are studying online, and students studying on campuses in other countries.

2.2 The TQER process

Here is a timeline outlining the key parts of the TQER process. For the complete timeline, see Annex H of QAA Scotland's TQER Guide.

	Timing	Activity
Before the Review Visits	**10 months before Main Review Visit**	QAA Review Manager makes initial contact with institution to request scoping meeting availability and to request key information which will inform the scoping meeting and the review specification.
	8 months before Main Review Visit	Scoping meeting This will inform the review specification, including: • Confirmation of proposed dates and length of Main Review Visit. • Size and profile of the review team. • Submission of evidence.

Continued on next page

	Timing	Activity
Before the Review Visits *contd.*	**10 weeks before the Initial Review Visit**	Institution submits: • Strategic Impact Analysis. • Any other documentation agreed in the scoping activity.
	4 weeks before the Initial Review Visit	QAA Review Manager provides draft schedule and participant requests for Initial Review Visit.
	2 weeks before the Initial Review Visit	Institution confirms participants.
Review Visits	**N/A**	Initial Review Visit (maximum of 1.5 days): To establish key lines of enquiry and inform any additional document requests. Typically comprising: • Half-day meeting with senior leaders; followed by • Up to 1 day of meetings with student groups.
	1 week after Initial Review Visit	Review team confirms any additional document requests. The review team provides an indicative Main Review Visit schedule and participants.
	4 weeks after Initial Review Visit	Review team confirms schedule, lines of enquiry and participants for Main Review Visit.
	1 week before Main Review Visit	Institution confirms attendees at each meeting for Main Review Visit.
	6-8 weeks after Initial Review Visit	Main Review Visit (2-5 days). To include meetings with a range of representatives and stakeholders, including students.
After the Review Visits	**2 weeks after Main Review Visit**	QAA Review Manager informs institution of provisional judgement(s) and finding(s) in a Key Outcomes letter.
	6 weeks after Main Review Visit	Draft of report to institution for comment on factual accuracy.
	9 weeks after Main Review Visit	Institution response on factual accuracy due.
	12 weeks after Main Review Visit	Publication of report.
	Within 12 weeks of publication of report	Institution completes an action plan on how they will address the recommendations.
	Ongoing	Follow-up activity, including updating the SEAP annually and attending Institutional Liaison Meetings.

2.2.1 Scoping meeting

Approximately 10 months prior to the Main Review Visit, a QAA Review Manager will be appointed. The QAA Review Manager will contact the institution to arrange a scoping meeting. At this meeting, key elements of the review process will be discussed, including the institution's mission, aims and strategy; the scope of the review; dates of the review visits; the size and profile of the review team; and student engagement in TQER. The institution and the Lead Student Rep (LSR) will have the opportunity to share any key information about the context of the institution and the student body that may be relevant to these decisions. At this stage, the students' association and the institution will also identify which student will take on the role of LSR [see below].

Approximately 8 months prior to the Main Review Visit, a QAA Review Manager will hold the scoping meeting with the institution. This will normally take place between a QAA Review Manager and the institution's key contacts for learning and teaching and quality management, including the Institution Quality Contact and the LSR.

Approximately 4 weeks after the scoping meeting, the QAA Review Manager will send the Review Specification to the institution. The review specification sets out the scope of the review and includes keys dates for the review visits. You can see an example Review Specification in QAA Scotland's TQER Guide. Within a further 4 weeks, the institution will be informed of the proposed members of their review team.

2.2.2 The Review Team

TQER is a peer review process. This means that review teams are made up of students and staff from other institutions.

There are three categories of reviewer:

TQER is a peer review process. This means that review teams are made up of students and staff from other institutions.

Reviewer: A staff member from another institution who has current or recent senior-level expertise, and experience in the management and/or delivery of further and/or higher education provision.

Student reviewer: A current or recent student or student officer who has experience of representing other students.

Specialist reviewer: A staff member or student with experience of industry, international work, or expertise in a specific topic, such as work-based learning.

The composition of each review team will be tailored to the institution in order to ensure the review team has the relevant knowledge and experience to undertake the review. This will take into consideration factors such as the type of institution, type of provision, and size of the institution.

The exact composition of the review team is flexible but teams will be made up of a minimum of 4 and a maximum of 6 reviewers. All review teams will contain representation from both colleges and universities. Every review team must have a student reviewer. The student reviewer is a full member of the team and the role is essential to the TQER process. Student and staff reviewers undergo thorough training and are supported in their role by QAA Scotland.

TQER teams will be managed by a QAA Review Manager who will attend the review with the review team. This is a member of QAA Scotland staff who will oversee the process and co-ordinate the review.

All institutions have nominated staff and students for the TQER Reviewer Pool. LSRs and students' associations are encouraged to find out which staff and students within their institution are QAA reviewers or have previously been a reviewer. Speaking with current or previous reviewers is a great way of understanding what reviewers are looking for when they are considering student partnership and engagement, and their approach to meetings with students.

2.2.3 Lead Student Rep

The Lead Student Rep (LSR) is the main point of contact between the review team and students studying at the institution. They will work closely with the Institution Quality Contact, a staff member from the institution who is the main contact for the review (usually the Head of Quality or equivalent).

The LSR is identified by the students' association and the institution in partnership. Usually, the LSR will be a senior students' association elected officer with responsibility for learning and teaching (e.g. a Vice President Education or a President). It is also possible for two students to share the role.

Key responsibilities of the LSR include:

- Contributing to the preparation of the Strategic Impact Analysis (SIA).
- Working with the Institution Quality Contact to ensure the wider student body is able to play an effective role in the review process.
- Taking part in any meetings or working groups related to the TQER process (e.g. the scoping meeting).
- Supporting the institution to identify students to meet the review team.
- Attending review visits (including the Initial Review Visit and the Main Review Visit).
- Reading the draft review report and sharing any comments on factual accuracy.
- Working with the institution in developing an action plan as a result of the review findings.
- Communicating outcomes of the review to students and supporting students to be involved in future action planning.

The LSR is a representative role and it is important that they aim to represent the whole of the student body when they support the development of the institution's SIA, collate and share evidence, and contribute to meetings.

Students' association staff have a key role to play in supporting the LSR. This will include helping the LSR to understand and contribute to key review documents; creating processes to support the identification of students to meet with the review team; and supporting the LSR to collate information on the student learning experience and to identify the data and evidence they want to share with the review team.

All institutions have nominated staff and students for the TQER Reviewer Pool. LSRs and SAs are encouraged to find out which staff and students within their institution are QAA reviewers or have previously been a reviewer.

The LSR is a representative role and it is important that they aim to represent the whole of the student body when they support the development of the institution's SIA, collate and share evidence, and contribute to meetings.

What you need to do

Familiarise yourself with your previous review reports and SEAPs

It is important to read and understand your previous review reports. As this is the first cycle of TQER, your institution won't have any previous TQER reports. This means that your last report will have been part of the previous review method. For universities, the previous review method was called Quality Enhancement and Standards Review (QESR). QESR reports can be found on the QAA website. For colleges, the previous review method was called How Good Is Our College? (HGIOC). HGIOC reports can be found on the Education Scotland website. It is useful to consider how far progress has been made against your last report and where the institution could progress next. Do ask your institution how they are acting on the outcomes of their previous review report.

You should also read your latest SEAP, which will give you an overview of the areas of improvement the institution has most recently identified and how they are working towards making these better. The SEAPs will also outline progress or intended progress on actions from the previous review. If you're not sure where to find your SEAP, talk to your institution's Quality Manager.

Identify a Lead Student Rep and design a package of support

The students' association and the institution should work together to identify a student to take on the Lead Student Rep role. It is important to consider what support the LSR will need throughout the process and to build this in from the start of the role. Consider the LSR's responsibilities throughout the review timeline and what the students' association and the institution can do at each of these stages to support them to undertake the role most effectively. In many cases, the LSR will change midway through the process as an elected officer's term of office comes to an end and a new student takes on the role. Ensure that you have designed a clear handover mechanism and that the outgoing and incoming LSRs both understand what they need to do to effectively share information. Students' association staff are a key part of this process as they can provide continuity during the handover process and provide any relevant historical context.

Agree mechanisms for the students' association involvement in TQER

Each institution approaches TQER in its own way. However, in many institutions there will be a TQER steering/working group which is responsible for preparing for the review. It is expected that the Lead Student Rep will sit on this group. This group might also include senior leaders with responsibility for Learning and Teaching and representatives from the Quality team. The Institution Quality Contact is appointed by the institution to facilitate the running of the review and be a key point of contact. Make contact with this person early on and maintain ongoing discussions about how the students' association will be effectively involved in TQER. Establish what the institution will be doing to support staff in engaging with TQER. For example, will they be providing any training or briefing sessions? Discuss whether or not this support will be made available to students' association officers and staff and whether or not you need to plan additional training. Consider which mechanisms and approaches will facilitate genuine partnership with students, rather than just gathering feedback or consulting with the student body.

You should read your latest SEAP, which will give you an overview of the areas of improvement the institution has most recently identified and how they are working towards making these better.

In many institutions there will be a TQER steering/working group which is responsible for preparing for the review. It is expected that the LSR will sit on this group.

2.2.4 Developing the Strategic Impact Analysis and Advance Information Set

At least 10 weeks prior to the Initial Review Visit, institutions will submit their Strategic Impact Analysis (SIA) and Advance Information Set (AIS) to QAA.

Strategic Impact Analysis

The Strategic Impact Analysis (SIA) is a key document which the institution provides to the Review Team. The institution evaluates itself against the 6 principles of TQEF, identifying what they are doing well and what could be improved. In the SIA, institutions are encouraged to be as open and honest as possible about what they do well and the areas that they prioritise for development.

There is an expectation that students, through the Lead Student Rep, will be fully involved as key partners in the preparation of the SIA. The drafting of the SIA should be a collective process, with demonstrable student engagement. In many cases, the writing of the SIA is co-ordinated by one person but directed and overseen by the institution's TQER steering/working group. It is normal practice for students (usually a sabbatical officer) and a students' association staff member to sit on this group.

The SIA is intended to be an honest reflection on what is going well and what can be improved. In some cases, this may include identifying issues on which the institution and the students' association have disagreed and have needed to negotiate and compromise in order to reach jointly-owned decisions. It is a sign of a mature approach to student partnership when the students' association can articulate an independent student voice and can constructively challenge an institution.

The students' association should feel that the SIA accurately reflects student views and that it jointly owns the SIA alongside the institution. The Lead Student Rep and the Institution Quality Contact will sign off the SIA, reflecting its co-ownership. If the students' association doesn't feel that the SIA accurately reflects the views of students, this should be raised with the Institution Quality Contact as early as possible. If, after raising concerns with the Institution Quality Contact, the Lead Student Rep still has concerns about the SIA, these concerns should be shared with the QAA Review Manager.

Advance Information Set

The Advance Information Set (AIS) accompanies the SIA and contains a set of documents which are designed to provide further context to the SIA and to demonstrate the institution's quality processes. While the institution is expected to create the SIA for the purposes of TQER, they are not expected to prepare new material for the AIS. Instead, it is expected that the AIS should be made up of a set of existing material. Documents included in the AIS could include the institution's strategic plan; minutes from key learning & teaching and quality committees; and analysis of student data such as recruitment, retention and achievement.

The AIS will also include evidence of the institution's and the students' association's existing student engagement and partnership activities. This may include:

- Diagram of student representative structure.
- Documents related to strategic approaches to student partnership e.g. Student Partnership Agreements; Student Voice Policies; Student Engagement Strategies.
- Any annual report or paper reflecting on the student partnership arrangements and/or student engagement in the quality assurance and enhancement of their experience, produced by either the students' association or the institution.
- Sample of minutes, outcomes or similar from student-staff liaison meetings or equivalent from the last two academic years.
- Evidence of use of sparqs' Student Learning Experience model and Scotland's Ambition for Student Partnership.

The students' association should consider what existing documentation it has which it can provide for the review team as part of the AIS.

What you need to do

Gather ongoing evidence and data on the student experience to input into the Strategic Impact Analysis

Remember that the SIA is based on the period of time since an institution's previous review. While there will be some benefit in collating current student views, historic or existing data on student voice should be used as the main evidence base. Students' associations should therefore be collating information on the student experience on a regular basis over multiple years and not just at the time of the review. This shouldn't be a separate process to your usual activity; instead, utilise existing mechanisms, such as your student-staff liaison committees, student council or course rep conferences, to gather student views throughout the year. Some institutions and students' associations also choose to conduct specific focus groups with students to gather student opinion to input into the SIA.

Ensure student engagement in the drafting of the Strategic Impact Analysis

There are a number of ways to make sure students are engaged effectively in the drafting of the SIA. 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 SIA, e.g. are there scheduled meetings of your executive committee, student council, course rep conference or any other gathering of student representatives? It is important that the students' association is confident that the SIA is an accurate and balanced assessment of the institutional approaches, strengths and areas for development, and overall student learning experience. It is therefore vital that you provide critical input into the drafting process and help shape the final document.

Contribute to the Advance Information Set

The AIS includes evidence on the institution's approach to student engagement and partnership. The students' association will have its own examples of practice which can be included in the AIS, including information related to student rep systems; summaries of key topics gathered from students on learning and teaching issues; strategic documents related to student partnership approaches; and examples of uses of sparqs' Student Learning Experience model and Partnership Ambition. This information should be identified as early as possible and shared with the staff member collating the AIS.

2.2.5 Initial Review Visit

The purpose of the Initial Review Visit is to give students an opportunity to shape the focus of the Main Review Visit. It takes place over approximately one and a half days and can be hybrid, online or on-campus (the format will be agreed with the institution at the scoping meeting).

The review team will want to meet with up to 4 student groups at the Initial Review Visit. They will want to hear about students' learning experiences and use these to shape the key areas of focus at the Main Review Visit. The review team will also meet with the institution's senior leadership. These meetings and the student views shared with the review team will inform potential 'lines of enquiry' in the Main Review Visit. They may also help to identify any additional documentation that the review team would like to see.

The Student Learning Experience model and Scotland's Ambition for Student Partnership will be key reference points and these will guide the review team's approach and conversations.

The QAA Review Manager will get in touch with the institution 4 weeks before the Initial Review Visit to share which groups of students the review team would like to meet with as part of the Initial Review Visit. Students' associations will have a key role in working with the institution to identify individuals who fit the criteria of the student groups the review team has requested to meet. This could be students from a particular level of study (e.g. apprentices, postgraduates), mode of study (e.g. online students), students from a particular demographic (e.g. international students), or students in particular roles (e.g. course representatives). Think about how your student population is structured. What is your student demographic? This will normally enable the LSR to identify the types of students the review team will want to meet with.

2.2.6 Main Review Visit

The Main Review Visit is when the review team spend between 2 and 5 days at the institution, engaging with a range of stakeholders and exploring the topics identified earlier in the TQER process.

During the Main Review Visit, the review team will meet with students and staff from across the institution. In meetings with students, the review team will want to understand what it is like to be a student at the institution. Students will have the opportunity to share their views on the student experience – what is working well and what could be improved. The review team will pick up key themes from the Initial Review Visit and explore these in more depth.

The review team will also want to understand how the institution works in partnership with students to improve the student experience. What are the ways for students to provide their views and how effective is the institution at harnessing these views and working with students on making positive changes?

What you need to do

Support the identification of students to take part in the reviews

For both review visits, the review team will want to meet with students. The Lead Student Rep and the students' association will be asked to help identify students to take part in these visits. Depending on when your visits are scheduled during the year, you may want to put in place a process where students can express an interest to take part earlier in the year. This means you have a bank of available students to select from, depending on which groups or levels of study the review team ask to meet. Often, the review team will want to meet with a group of course and/or elected reps and you will be asked to bring a cohort of this type together. Have a plan in place early of how you may identify and select students for the review in partnership with the institution.

Prepare for the Review Visit Meetings

Senior elected student officers (e.g. President, Vice President Education) will likely be invited to take part in one or more meetings with the review team. Ensure that you prepare for these and consider the key items you want to raise. These should be based on evidence about the student experience. Consider that time in the meetings is limited, so consider identifying your top priorities that you want to raise, to ensure that there is time for the reviewers to hear about these topics. Remember that the review team will want to hear about positive practice as well as areas of improvement. The review team will have set 'lines of enquiry' for each meeting. As timings are tight, they may need to move on when they feel that their question has been answered.

Support students to attend and contribute to the meetings

The students' association and the institution should consider how best to support students taking part in review visits. This may include arranging a written or verbal briefing so that students understand the purpose of the review and their roles within it. After the meetings, you may want to ask the students for feedback on their experience so that you can learn from this and consider any changes you may want to make between the initial visit and the main visit, or for future cycles of review.

2.2.7 TQER outcome and reports

After the review visits are complete, the TQER process will provide the institution with a report which contains a **judgement** and a set of **recommendations for action** (areas to improve) and **features of good practice** (areas that are working well).

The judgement is made on whether the institution has effective quality arrangements in place to manage academic standards, enhance the quality of the learning experience, and enable student success. The institution will be given a judgement of either effective, partially effective, or not effective.

Processes and timescales

2 weeks after the Main Review Visit ⟹	QAA sends the institution a letter which contains the key outcomes of the review.
6 weeks after the Main Review Visit ⟹	QAA shares the draft review report with the key contacts at the institution, including the Lead Student Rep. The institution has 3 weeks after this to identify any factual inaccuracies. It is expected that a single, agreed response will be sent back to QAA from the institution and its student body.
12 weeks after the Main Review Visit ⟹	The final report is published.

2.2.8 Follow-up activity

All institutions are required to complete an action plan within a maximum of 12 weeks following the publication of the TQER report. This action plan should be developed with students.

All institutions are required to complete an **action plan** within a maximum of 12 weeks following the publication of the TQER report. This action plan should be developed with students. This action plan will address the recommendations which have been made in the review and include clear actions the institution will take next as well as timescales of when these actions will be completed.

If the institution has received a judgement of 'partially effective' or 'not effective' then the institution will receive a **TQER re-review** within a maximum of 2 years. For 'partially effective' judgements, the review may be desk-based and just focused on the specific recommendations made in the original TQER review. For 'not effective' judgements, the institution will receive a repeat of the review process in full.

What you need to do

Read the draft report

Ensure that you read the draft report carefully and check if there is anything inaccurate. This doesn't mean arguing with a judgement that's been made! Instead, it's checking if anything is factually incorrect, e.g. is the name of a committee incorrect? Did the report state that a strategy was launched in 2023 when it was launched in 2024?

Engage in follow-up activities and reports

Student representatives and the students' association should be involved in any follow-up activity from the TQER and in preparing the action plan. Most institutions will have working groups and committees to take forward the recommendations from TQER. It is essential that these groups include student representation and communicate regularly with the students' association, to ensure student engagement in shaping the development of follow-up actions. 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 may choose to set up short-life working groups to work on specific areas for development highlighted in their TQER. 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 a school/faculty officer or an experienced course representative to attend, rather than the student officer.

Communicate the review outcomes to students

It is important to ensure that students are informed about the outcomes of the TQER. Make sure that everyone in the students' association is kept up to date. The final report should be shared with the students' association and the wider student body. In particular, you should share this information with the students who participated in the review visits so that they can see how their participation had an impact on the review. QAA publishes a press release on the day that each review report is published and this could be shared by the students' association.

Consider how you can use findings from TQER

The outcomes of TQER give students' associations a useful basis for identifying key areas of activity within learning and teaching. Recommendations from TQER should be included when developing the students' association's strategic plan and identifying new areas of work. You should also consider how you might use the findings from TQER 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 TQER findings in an accessible way that could be used at Course Rep Training and on the students' association website.

New officer handover

The outcomes of the TQER will inform the institution's priorities over the coming years, 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 TQER 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 TQER as part of their induction. This will ensure that relationships with relevant staff are established early on in student representatives' terms in office.

2.2.9 Annual discussions

Each year, the institution will have an annual meeting with QAA called an **Institutional Liaison Meeting (ILM)**. As part of these meetings, the institution will update on its progress on the action plan from the latest TQER. ILMs will usually be held in the spring. Each ILM will last approximately 2 hours and may be in person or online. Suggested attendees include the Head of Quality; the Deputy or Assistant Principal for Learning and Teaching; and a students' association elected officer with responsibility for Education (e.g. the VP Education or the President).

What you need to do

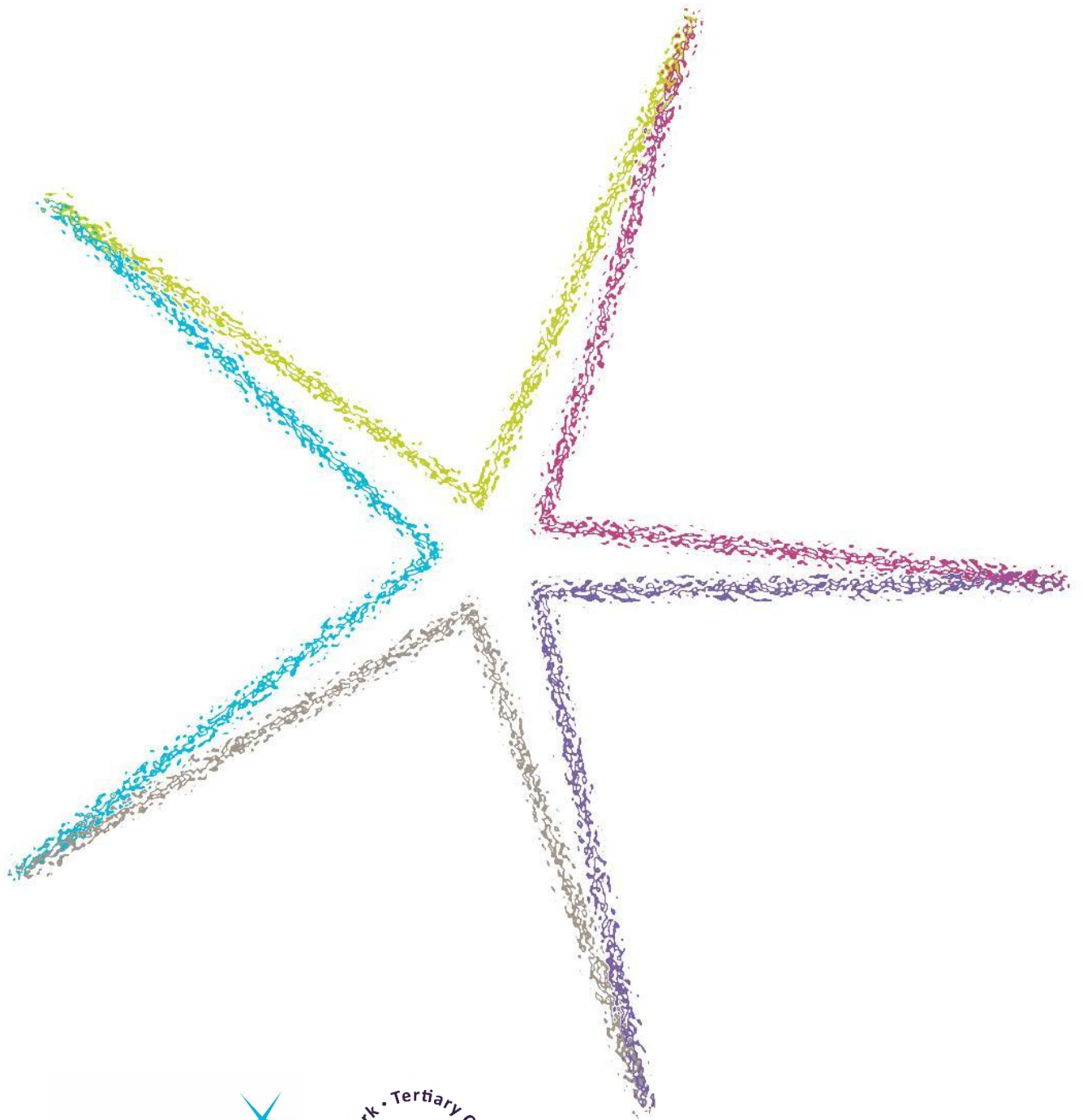### Engage with the Institutional Liaison Meeting (ILM)

The ILM is a chance to highlight what you've been working on as a students' association and what you would like the institution to prioritise over the coming year. Come prepared with updates on any items on the action plan which you have been involved in progressing over the past 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.

2.3 Review schedule

When	Institution (in alphabetical order)
2024-25	Forth Valley College University of St Andrews
2025-26	Dumfries and Galloway College Edinburgh Napier University Royal Conservatoire of Scotland University of Aberdeen University of Strathclyde University of the West of Scotland West College Scotland West Lothian College
2026-27	Edinburgh College Glasgow Kelvin College Queen Margaret University Robert Gordon University Scotland's Rural College (SRUC) UHI Inverness University of Dundee University of the Highlands and Islands
2027-28	City of Glasgow College Glasgow Caledonian University Glasgow School of Art New College Lanarkshire Newbattle Abbey College The University of Edinburgh UHI Moray UHI Perth
2028-29	Abertay University Borders College Glasgow Clyde College North East Scotland College South Lanarkshire College UHI Orkney UHI Shetland University of Glasgow
2029-30	Ayrshire College Dundee and Angus College Fife College Heriot-Watt University UHI Argyll UHI North, West and Hebrides University of Stirling

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