
Annex E: A guide to Tertiary Quality Enhancement Framework (TQEF) related acronyms

AQE (Annual Quality Engagements)

AQE refers to two related but distinct forms of annual engagement on quality with institutions. QAA undertakes Institution Liaison Meetings (ILMs) as part of the TQER method, focusing on review follow-up, progress with actions and quality enhancement activity. SFC undertakes annual engagement on quality through OFAM, drawing on SEAP evidence, relevant data and wider TQEF evidence to support assurance.

CDN (College Development Network)

CDN is the national enhancement and improvement agency for Scotland's colleges, working with the college sector to develop their people and deliver better outcomes for students. CDN will co-manage STEP (jointly with QAA) and support the staff and leadership of the college sector to build their capacity and ensure that they can fully participate in all aspects of the TQEF.

ESG (Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area)

ESG provide the framework for internal and external quality assurance across the countries of the European Higher Education Area. The TQEF has been developed to ensure continued alignment with ESG. The current version of the ESG were developed in 2015 and is currently under review.

ELIR (Enhancement Led-Institutional Review)

ELIR is the process of cyclical external quality assurance review for the university sector delivered by the QAA. ELIR ran for four cycles from 2003-04 to 2021-22. From AY 2024-25 it will be replaced by TQER.

ENQA (European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education)

Established in 2000, ENQA promotes European cooperation in the field of quality assurance in higher education. It aims to contribute to the maintenance and enhancement of the quality of European higher education, and to act as a major driving force for the development of quality assurance across all the Bologna Process signatory countries, including the UK and Scottish Governments.

ES (Education Scotland)

ES was the Scottish Government executive agency responsible for supporting curriculum, learning, teaching and improvement across Scottish education. Inspection functions previously carried out within ES transferred to the newly established HMIE, creating a clearer separation between national improvement support and independent inspection.

FES (Further Education Statistical return)

The FES return is the main student data return submitted by Scotland's colleges to SFC. It provides information on college students, activity and outcomes, and supports SFC's use of data for funding, published statistics, assurance and enhancement under the TQEF.

HESA (Higher Education Statistics Agency)

HESA collects and publishes UK higher education data submitted by universities and other higher education providers. SFC is a statutory customer of HESA and uses HESA data, alongside other sources, to inform analysis, assurance and public reporting on Scotland's university sector.

HGIOC (How Good is our College)

HGIOC is the quality assurance framework for the college sector that integrated the assurances sought through ES's evaluative activities and SFC's Outcome Agreement process. HGIOC was replaced by TQEF from AY 2024-25.

HMIE (His Majesty's Inspectorate of Education)

HMIE was established as Scotland's independent education inspectorate under the Education (Scotland) Act 2025. It took on inspection functions previously carried out within Education Scotland, assessing quality, supporting improvement and providing independent evidence across education sectors, including colleges.

ILQR (Institution-led Quality Review)

Describes the systematic process for how institutions evaluate and review their own provision. It is for institutions to determine their own quality arrangements within the parameters and guidelines set out in SFC Guidance for ILQR.

ILR (Institution-led Review)

The systematic process for how universities reviewed their own provision under the QEF. Now superseded by ILQR within the TQEF.

LEO (Longitudinal Educational Outcomes)

LEO brings together education and employment data to provide information on learners' outcomes after study. SFC may use LEO data, where relevant, alongside institutional

evidence and other national data sources to support analysis of student outcomes, progression and the wider impact of learning.

MCHP (Model Complaints Handling Procedure)

The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) has developed MCHPs with the college and university sectors respectively. The MCHPs provide a standardised approach to dealing with complaints in each sector. It is a requirement of the MCHP that all complaints are recorded to ensure accountability and provide information for improvement.

NUS (National Union of Students) Scotland

NUS Scotland is the national union representing university and college student interests across Scotland.

NSS (National Student Survey)

The NSS is the UK-wide survey of final-year undergraduate students, used to gather students' views on the quality of their course and wider learning experience. Universities are expected to continue participating in the NSS as a condition of funding, and SFC uses NSS outcomes alongside other evidence to support assurance and enhancement under the TQEF.

OFAM (Outcomes Framework and Assurance Model)

The Outcomes Framework and Assurance Model is the SFC approach to assurance and accountability from AY 2024-25. The Outcomes Framework sets out what outcomes SFC expect institutions to deliver in return for the funding they receive. The outcomes are broad, forward looking and not bespoke to a particular institution. The Assurance Model tells SFC what and how institutions have delivered against these outcomes through monitoring and engagement.

PSED (Public Sector Equality Duty)

The PSED is the legal duty on public bodies, including colleges and universities, to eliminate unlawful discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations. Within the TQEF, evidence from PSED activity can support institutions' evaluation of student success, access and the quality of the student learning experience.

PSRB (Professional, statutory, and regulatory body)

PSRBs accredit a significant volume of provision in colleges and universities. SFC expects institutions to reflect on the outcomes of relevant PSRB accreditations as part of the internal and external review activity. Institutions are also encouraged to explore ways of aligning PSRB activity with ILQR to reduce duplication and burden.

QAA (Quality Assurance Agency)

QAA is UK's independent higher education quality assurance that works in partnership with SFC and the sector to assure and enhance the quality of higher education in Scotland. QAA delivers key aspects of the TQEF including TQER and STEP (jointly with CDN). Its independence from government ensures continued compliance with the ESG.

QEF (Quality Enhancement Framework)

The QEF was the enhancement-led approach to quality assurance for the Scottish university sector. QEF will be replaced by TQEF from AY 2024-25.

QS (Qualifications Scotland)

QS is Scotland's national awarding and accreditation body, replacing the Scottish Qualifications Authority in February 2026. It is responsible for qualifications and accreditation across schools, colleges, training providers and other learning settings, with an increased focus on engagement with learners, educators and stakeholders.

SASP (Scotland's Ambition for Student Partnership)

SASP is a sector reference point developed by sparqs to support effective student partnership across Scotland's colleges and universities. It describes the features of strong partnership working and is used within the TQEF to help institutions and student associations reflect on, develop and evidence meaningful student engagement.

SCQFP (Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Partnership)

The SCQFP is the independent body set up to maintain and develop Scotland's National Qualifications Framework. SCQFP works with awarding bodies, professional bodies and other programme owners to ensure that a wide variety of learning is recognised on the Framework.

SDS (Skills Development Scotland)

SDS is Scotland's national skills body, supporting people and businesses to develop and apply the skills needed for Scotland's economy. It administers Scottish Apprenticeships on behalf of the Scottish Government, including Foundation, Modern and Graduate Apprenticeships. Under the Tertiary Education and Training Funding and Governance (Scotland) Act 2026, responsibility for funding and administration of national training programmes, including apprenticeships and other work-based learning provision, will transfer from SDS to SFC.

SEAP (Self-Evaluation and Action Plan)

The SEAP is an annual self-evaluative report, framed against the principles of the TQEF, that institutions will be required to submit to SFC. The report should be a high-level summary of the outcomes of institution led quality assurance and enhancement activities and should identify areas of strength and areas for development or enhancement at a strategic level. It should include an action plan detailing how institutions will address areas for enhancement or development and any actions arising from the commendations and/or recommendations arising from external review.

SFC (Scottish Funding Council)

SFC is Scotland's tertiary education and research authority. SFC is a non-departmental public body that is directly accountable to Scottish Ministers of c£1.9 billion of public investment annually to support high-quality learning provision and research in Scotland's colleges and universities. SFC has a statutory duty to secure provision for quality assurance and enhancement of SFC-fundable provision delivered by fundable bodies (colleges and universities) in Scotland. It does this through the TQEF.

SIA (Strategic Impact Analysis)

SIA is an overarching periodic commentary on an institution's journey in the period between TQER reviews, outlining institutions' current context, trends over this timeframe, challenges, opportunities and successes to support the upcoming review. Alongside the annual SEAPs, the SIA will be used as part of the evidence base in advance of TQER review visits.

SPSO (Scottish Public Service Ombudsman)

The SPSO is the final stage for complaints about public services in Scotland. Its remit covers colleges and universities and government agencies such as SFC. SPSO has developed a model of complaints handling procedures for the college and university sectors respectively that provide a standardised approach to dealing, recording and reporting on complaints.

sparqs (Student Partnership in Quality Scotland)

sparqs is the SFC-funded agency that supports college and university students engage as partners in the decisions made about the quality of the learning experience. sparqs has led the development of a Student Learning Experience Model and Student Partnership Ambition Statement. These feature as key sector reference points for effective student engagement and partnership in the TQEF. Sparqs' ongoing work directly supports students and Students' Associations to enhance their capacity to take part in internal and external quality review and in enhancement activity.

SLE Model (Student Learning Experience Model)

The SLE Model is a sparqs resource that supports structured discussion between students and staff about the quality of the student learning experience. It is used within the TQEF as a practical reference point for student partnership, including in SEAP preparation, ILQR activity and student engagement in review and enhancement.

SSES (Student Satisfaction and Engagement Survey)

The SSES is SFC's survey of college student satisfaction and engagement, supporting colleges to gather student feedback on the quality of their learning experience. SFC uses SSES outcomes alongside institutional evidence, SEAPs and wider TQEF evidence to support assurance and enhancement in the college sector.

SQCS (Scottish Quality Concerns Scheme)

The QAA-managed scheme provides an opportunity for students and staff from the university sector in Scotland to raise concerns about academic standards and quality in higher education institutions to the QAA. Only concerns which indicate serious systemic weaknesses in an institution's approach to the management of quality and standards are investigated under the SQCS.

STEP (Scotland's Tertiary Enhancement Programme)

The sector-owned national programme of co-ordinated thematic activity across a cycle of four years. STEP will enable Scotland's colleges and universities to work together to deliver innovation, improvement and enhancement of learning, teaching student experience and staff development across tertiary provision. STEP is jointly managed by QAA and CDN on behalf of colleges and universities.

TET Act (Tertiary Education and Training Funding and Governance (Scotland) Act 2026)

The TET Act gives effect to Scottish Government reforms to post-16 education and skills. It transfers responsibility for the funding and administration of national training programmes, including apprenticeships and other work-based learning provision, from SDS to SFC, with implementation taking place over the transition period.

TQEF (Scotland's Tertiary Quality Enhancement Framework)

From AY 2024-25, the quality assurance and enhancement framework for Scotland's colleges and universities. It comprises a shared set of principles, delivery mechanisms, and outputs that can be applied to the different contexts of our colleges and universities, to give assurance on – and enhancement of – academic standards and the quality of the student experience, and ensure accountability for public investment in learning and teaching.

TQER (Tertiary Quality Enhancement Review)

The peer-led and enhancement focused external review methodology for colleges and universities. Managed by QAA, it is one of the key delivery mechanisms of the TQEF and ensures there is independent, robust assurance about quality and about enhancement of quality in Scotland's colleges and universities.

UCAS (Universities and Colleges Admissions Service)

UCAS manages applications to higher education across the UK and publishes data and analysis on applications, offers and acceptances. SFC uses UCAS data as part of its wider evidence base on demand, access and entry patterns in Scotland's university sector.

TQSG (Tertiary Quality Steering Group)

The TQSG provides advice and guidance to SFC on the co-creation of a tertiary approach to quality assurance and enhancement in Scotland. The TQSG is made up of leaders and practitioners from Scotland's colleges and universities, and student representatives alongside SFC's TQEF delivery partners.