Annex A: Guidance on Institution Led Quality Review (ILQR)

1. SFC expects colleges and universities to operate systems of periodic review or Institution-Led Quality Review (ILQR) across all their provision and support services. The guidance below sets out the parameters for periodic review. Universities will already have in place systems to review their provision and support services and should continue to implement those. Colleges will also have existing systems in place and should consider how these can be mapped and/or adapted to the general requirements set out below, thereby developing arrangements that are appropriate to their own context and missions, and proportionate to the size of the institution

Scope and frequency of periodic review

2. All SFC-funded provision (credit-bearing and non-credit bearing) falls within the scope of ILQR for universities and colleges, although there may be differences between institutions in terms of the extent to which non-credit bearing activity will feature in ILQR.

3. To meet ESG compliance, ILQR for colleges and universities should include all higher education provision regardless of whether it is funded by SFC- this ensures that the TQEF is ESG compliant.

4. The mechanism for reporting the outcomes of ILQR to SFC is through the SEAP and therefore the scope of the SEAP, which is focused on priority areas in the context of the institution, is likely to be narrower than that of ILQR itself. It is for institutions to decide how they report ILQR internally.

5. All provision should be reviewed on a cycle of **not more than six years**, including all provision delivered in collaboration with others, work-based provision – including apprenticeships – and placements, online and distance learning, taught postgraduate awards, supervision of research students and transnational education.

6. Each institution is expected to produce a schedule for reviewing their provision, with some form of review activity taking place within each academic session. The review schedule does not have to be submitted to SFC but should be kept up-to-date and available for discussion on request by SFC or the QAA.

7. It is for institutions to determine the precise order and aggregation of programmes and subjects in ways which provide coherence and fit the organisational structure, mode of delivery and enhancement-led approach. The aggregation of programmes and subjects in the review process should have sufficient granularity to allow adequate scrutiny of programmes and disciplines including ensuring there is adequate external scrutiny at the

discipline level by the external panel member(s). Excessive aggregation should be avoided if it means the process cannot examine the 'fine structure' of provision and does not facilitate the identification of specific issues affecting programmes.

Institution-led quality review: subject areas

8. The ILQR method should be designed to allow constructive reflection on the effectiveness of an institution's annual monitoring and reporting procedures and the effectiveness of the follow-up actions arising from annual monitoring. Reporting at the course/module, programme, subject, or departmental level should identify actions to address any issues and activity to promote areas of strength for consideration at institutional level. ILQR should evidence the use of public information by institutions and how they seek to engage their students in quality and in their learning.

9. ILQRs should produce robust, comprehensive, and credible evidence that the academic standards of awards are secure, that learning, teaching and assessment is of the highest standard, that the curriculum is current, that student support is comprehensive enabling student success and that provision in Scottish institutions is of high quality and being enhanced.

10. ILQR should be designed to promote and support critical reflection on policy and practice. The method used should be central to quality enhancement by promoting dialogue on areas in which quality could be improved, ensure that any shortcomings are addressed, and identify good practice for dissemination within the institution and beyond.

Institution-led quality review: professional services

11. All services contributing to the student experience should be included in the ILQR schedule. Professional services are of crucial importance in determining the overall quality of the student learning experience and can impact significantly on student achievement and well-being. It is a matter for each institution to determine how this should be done and there may be variances in approaches or methodologies from the subject ILQR and may be thematic. Nevertheless, SFC expects that institutions' approaches to the review of professional services should be systematic, planned, and timely, covering all non-academic services or departments that contribute to the overall student learning experience and considering their effectiveness and interactions with subject areas and programmes within the six-year review cycle.

12. The arrangements for reviewing professional services should have sufficient granularity to allow for adequate scrutiny of each aspect of the services provision and include sufficient scrutiny by external panel members. Whatever the approach taken, the evidence should allow the institution to reflect on the contribution of professional

services to the 'quality culture' within the institution, the ways in which the services engage with students to monitor and improve the quality of services, and the ways in which the services promote high quality learning and continuous quality enhancement. It is expected that students will be engaged throughout the review of professional services.

Team size and composition

13. Review activity should provide an objective review of provision based on an understanding of national and international good practice and appropriate external reference points, including for example, subject benchmarks statements, professional, statutory and regulatory body (PSRB) requirements. Each review team should include a student and at least one member external to the institution with a relevant background. Such members may come from across the UK, from industry, professional practice or may have wider international experience and should be appropriately appraised of the institution's quality review processes. Team size and composition must take account of the range and volume of provision to be reviewed and the balance between understanding of specific context and broader critical perspectives. It is good practice to ensure that review teams can bring a range of experience to the process and hence are able to act as 'critical friends'.

14. ILQR activity should be designed to include an element of reflection on national, and where appropriate international good practice, such as a reflective statement from the institution on how its provision compares with similar practice outside the UK. Institutions are encouraged to consider how they can support such informal 'benchmarking'. SFC does not expect internal review teams to routinely include members from outside the UK although institutions are encouraged to actively consider the scope for this option.

Student engagement in ILQR

15. Institutions are expected to continue extending effective student engagement and partnership in quality in line with the Student Partnership ambition statement and features and by using the Student Learning Experience Model to support targeted discussions with students to identify priorities to enhance the quality of their learning experience. It is expected that students will be partners in all stages of the internal review process including the development of the self-evaluation, as full members of review teams, and in follow-up activity.

16. ILQR should gather additional specific information from students as part of the evidence base for reviews. Institutions have flexibility in deciding how to achieve this, taking account of the specific demographics of their student population and the characteristics

of their provision. Institutions are encouraged to use the buildings blocks of the [Student Learning Experience model](#) to support discussions with students. In line with previous guidance, it is good practice for ILQR to:

- Generate holistic evidence about student views of provision and of their learning experience.

- Differentiate between the views of different categories of students where these are likely to be significant (for example part-time and full-time, students from different levels of programme, entrants from school and entrants from further education etc).

- Allow identification of distinctive characteristics of provision.

- Take account of the views of recent graduates/leavers on the relevance of provision for their next step to a positive destination.

Use of external reference points

17. ILR should demonstrate that programme design and learning outcomes are consistent with appropriate external reference points. ILQR should include consideration of an institutions approach to credit rating and monitoring and demonstrate assurance of meeting the requirements outlined in the SCQF guidance. This aspect should be clearly documented in any ILR report outcome.

18. For universities, ILQR should explore the use of specific aspects of the UK Quality Code, and especially how Subject Benchmark Statements, Characteristics Statements and Credit and Qualifications Frameworks – as represented by the SCQF – are used in setting and maintaining academic standards. ILQR should demonstrate that programme design and learning outcomes are consistent with them.

19. ILQRs should support effective learner pathways through tertiary education, including embedding and developing the use of the SCQF. ILQR should be designed to promote scrutiny and discussion of the institution's approach to the SCQF. This should include consideration of strategies for articulation and advanced standing, for the recognition of prior learning and through flexible pathways to awards, including CPD and work-based learning.

20. For colleges, it is recognised that for much of their provision, and programme structures may be determined by the Awarding Bodies, or programmes of their own devising, often incorporating shorter duration national awards within their full course design. ILQR should be viewed as an opportunity to undertake a deeper evaluation of the delivery of teaching, learning and assessment, student outcomes and the associated support in

place for students. Where colleges are delivering national awards it is likely that there will be opportunities for shared learning as a result of the outcomes of ILQR and where the opportunity arises to feed into Awarding Body review of programmes. We would also encourage colleges to begin to explore the use of the Quality Code in developing ILQR.

Use of data and evidence

21. Both annual monitoring and ILQR should consider:

    - Themes arising from and responses to External Verifier and External Examiner reports.

    - Internal and external student survey data.

    - Performance data on recruitment, retention, progression and achievement; and data trends, particularly those data within the monitoring returns identified in SFC's OF and AM Guidance.

22. Data is likely to be benchmarked against other areas of the institution's activities as well as equivalent provision in other institutions.

Relationship with PSRB accreditation

23. A significant volume of provision in Scottish colleges and universities is accredited by PSRBs. SFC expects ILQR to reflect on the outcomes of relevant PSRB accreditations. Where possible, institutions are encouraged to engage with PSRBs to explore appropriate ways of aligning PSRB activity with ILQR. This might include the use of common documentation or joint processes which meet the needs of both ILQR and external accreditation.

Inter-relationship with ILQR and other elements of quality and enhancement arrangements

24. An enhancement-led approach is a fundamental characteristic of our approach to quality assurance, improvement, and enhancement in Scotland, and we encourage institutions to continue to develop ILQR processes which also:

    - Promote dialogue on areas in which quality might be improved and consider how developing the use of evidence can contribute to enhancing the student experience.

- Identify good practice for dissemination within the institution and beyond including engagement in current and past national enhancement topics.

- Encourage and support critical reflection.

25. ILQR processes are subject to scrutiny through TQER. ILQR should evidence the use of public information by institutions and evidence from external verification activities undertaken by awarding bodies, and how they seek to engage their students in quality and in their learning. The outcomes of ILQR should be incorporated within the SEAP.