



Self-Evaluation and Action Plan Thematic Report

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Summary: The purpose of this publication is to present to the sector an overview of the development of the Self Evaluation and Action Plans and a thematic summary of the first submissions for 2023-24, submitted in December 2024.

FAO: Principals and directors, Quality managers and practitioners of Scotland's colleges and universities, and the general public.

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Self-Evaluation and Action Plan Thematic Report

Introduction and context

1. Institutional Self-Evaluation and Action Plans (SEAPs) are an important output of the internal quality assurance and enhancement activity that all institutions undertake. They are designed to enable institutions to report on these activities both internally and externally. Externally, the SEAPs form part of two of the key delivery mechanisms of Scotland's Tertiary Quality Enhancement Framework (TQEF) i.e. the annual quality engagements (AQE) with the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) and the institutional liaison meetings (ILMs) with the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA). They are also used to contribute to the evidence base for and action planning as a result of, the Tertiary Quality Enhancement Review (TQER).
2. The SEAP is (from AY 2024-25), the only annual reporting on quality submitted by institutions to the SFC for the High-Quality Learning and Teaching Outcome of the [Outcomes Framework and Assurance Model](#) (OFAM). The SEAP is one part of the evidence that will be used to evaluate and assure the "High Quality Learning and Teaching" outcome of the OFAM, and the annual quality engagement informs the monitoring thereof. Further discussions with Outcome Managers (OMs) are scheduled across the academic year and encompass data and evidence to support the other outcomes within the Outcome Framework.
3. The SEAP replaces both the annual report and statement of assurance on Institution-Led Review for universities, and the Evaluative Report and Enhancement Plan (EREP) which formed part of the *How Good is our College* framework for colleges. The SEAP also replaces the learning and quality aspects of SFC's Outcome Agreement process for both colleges and universities.
4. Institutions are not required to submit a SEAP in those years of the review cycle where they undergo a TQER. In those years colleges and universities will instead submit a Strategic Impact Analysis (SIA) to the QAA focusing on self-evaluation against the principles of the TQEF. The SIA complements the SEAP and is intended to support institutions to reflect on their effectiveness, specifically on the principles of the TQEF, on which the TQER is based.
5. For those institutions undergoing a TQER and so submitting a SIA to the QAA, SFC will gain assurance on quality for that year from the external review itself and from SFC's ongoing review of annual student data submissions and other routine monitoring information (e.g., student satisfaction surveys).
6. The SEAP guidance is based on the principles of the TQEF. In 2025, the guidance has been refreshed to address feedback from the first year of the process and can be found within the updated [SFC Guidance on Quality for Colleges and Universities](#). Guidance on the drafting of the SIA can be found in Annex D of the [TQER Guide for Institutions](#),

produced by QAA.

Background and preparation for first submissions

7. The first iteration of the SEAP guidance was developed by a sub-group of the Tertiary Quality Forum (TQF) and the College Development Network (CDN) College Quality Steering group, led by the respective chairs. This was then developed into two drafts which were presented to and discussed by the Tertiary Quality Steering Group (TQSG) at the September 2023 meeting. The feedback was collated and refined into a single draft which was piloted by five volunteer institutions i.e. Ayrshire College, Borders College, University of Edinburgh, University of St Andrews and Scotland's Rural College (SRUC).
8. On completion of the pilot, the submissions were evaluated by colleagues from SFC, QAA, Education Scotland (ES) and student partnerships in quality Scotland (sparqs) and following discussions with them and the pilot institutions, a further draft of the guidance was created and shared with TQSG members with a request that they gather further feedback from their institutions and networks. In June 2024 an updated version of the SEAP guidance, edited in response to the feedback gathered in April 2024 was presented to the TQSG for final consideration prior to publication in the [SFC Guidance on quality for colleges and universities AY 2024-25 to 2030-31](#), in July 2024.
9. SFC colleagues continued to support the sector in preparing for the first submission of the institutional SEAPs, through attendance at sector groups and committees, the CDN sharing practice session and two sector drop-in sessions, giving colleagues an opportunity to ask questions. The CDN session at the start of November was supported by Robin Ashton from Glasgow Kelvin College and Brian Connelly from the University of Edinburgh, both of whom shared their approach to completing the SEAPs and reflections on the process, which was well received by attendees.
10. In October 2024, sparqs published [SEAP \(Self-Evaluation and Action Plan\) Guidance](#) for students' associations and student officers. This guidance is designed to support meaningful student engagement throughout the SEAP process. The guidance includes an overview of the SEAP process; some suggestions of how students can be involved in the development of the SEAP; and suggested actions for students' associations. The guidance is particularly relevant to students' association representatives and staff but is also a useful resource for all institutional staff involved in the SEAP process.

SFC SEAP Review Process

11. The process for reviewing the SEAP submissions was discussed and agreed internally and with colleagues from the quality agencies and is set out below. Alongside the review of the individual submissions, SFC also conducted an evaluation of the guidance and the process to inform the review and update of the guidance for the next submission.
12. The deadline for the submission of the first SEAPs was 2 December 2024. SFC received

38 SEAPs by close of play on the date and a further three by a slightly extended deadline of 9 December. The extensions were discussed and agreed with SFC in light of extenuating circumstances.

13. The college SEAPs were shared with ES and both the university and college SEAPs were shared with the QAA as outlined and agreed within our operational processes.
14. Within SFC, the SEAPs were reviewed by the relevant institutional OM and a member of the Student Interests, Access and Quality (SIAQ) Team.
15. Feedback from all partners was collated, discussed and used to inform the preparations for the individual annual quality engagement meetings that OMs undertook with their respective institutions. These meetings serve the dual purpose of meeting the requirements of the TQEF and are also one of the quarterly engagements undertaken as part of the OFAM engagements.
16. As outlined in the guidance, during the annual quality engagements the focus is mainly on the institutional data highlighted in the SEAP and, particularly in the first cycle, the provision of feedback on the completion of the SEAP. In some instances, a member of the SIAQ team accompanied the OM to those meetings, for example, where the discussion was with a Regional Board and covered multiple institutions.

General feedback on the completion of the SEAPs

17. All institutions made a very good effort at completing their submissions in line with the guidance and the use of the principles to frame the narrative.
18. There were extensive examples of good practice occurring across the sector and across a range of topics, with student support standing out as a particular focus. It is evident that institutions and their staff are working hard to support their students effectively.
19. The quality of self-evaluation varied across the SEAPs, with some institutions demonstrating a very mature approach that resulted in a balanced assessment of key strengths and areas for development. However, some institutions will require additional support to develop an approach to self-evaluation that includes a greater focus on the evaluation of the outputs of internal quality assurance processes and leads to the identification of the themes arising.
20. There was some variation between college and university SEAPs, particularly in relation to student engagement and partnership as well as engagement with enhancement activity. This is to be expected given the differing approaches to these activities in the previous frameworks. We recognise that both these aspects will continue to develop as institutions engage with the new resources for student engagement and partnership from sparqs and as Scotland's Tertiary Enhancement Programme (STEP) starts to bed in across the tertiary sector.

21. The presentation and analysis of data varied considerably across the submissions and was a factor that was considered closely when reviewing the guidance, as it was suggested in several fora that the flexibility afforded to institutions in guidance, resulted in much of the variability that was seen in the submissions. This variability ranged from very little reference to and analysis of institutional data, to in-depth analysis supported by the inclusion of tables and charts, evidencing the areas of strength and areas for development highlighted in the narrative. While we recognise that the guidance allows institutions to include reference to aspects of activity that is of strategic importance to them, it is expected that data and evidence is an underpinning thread across all the principles and institutional performance in key metrics should therefore have a reasonable presence in the self-evaluation narrative.
22. The length of the self-evaluation reports (excluding the action plans) varied with the shortest being in the region of 4,000 words and the longest being over 13,500 words. It was clear, however, that most institutions worked hard to stay within the guidance for the word count with the majority falling between 4,500 and 7,000 words.
23. On reflection we recognise that a common factor in the feedback we received on the draft guidance was that the size of institution/student cohort might impact on the length of the submission. However, while we have identified that there are some outlier institutions with either very small or very large cohorts of students that require some flexibility in their submissions, it is clear that the 5,000 indicative word count specified in the guidance is sufficient for most to achieve the goals of the SEAP, noting that these are intended to be working documents and should not include specific case studies or descriptions of processes.
24. In most cases the action plans are linked well to the self-evaluation narrative, however it was noted that many institutions would benefit from making their actions more specific. Many actions were very general and lacked specific targets or timelines which would help institutions to measure progress against the actions in coming years.

Themes arising organised according to the principles

25. Following a review of the SEAPs and collation of the comments from SFC staff, QAA and ES, the below provides a brief summary of the effectiveness of the analysis of each principle and the themes arising across the submissions, highlighting good practice and areas for enhancement that institutions identified in their submission.

Principle 1: Excellence in learning, teaching and assessment

26. This principle was, understandably, covered in most detail by institutions with some institutions choosing to evaluate all of the sub-headings listed in the principle, while others focused on key areas of strategic importance, which we would encourage. As noted in the guidance, this principle should include consideration of a range of student outcomes data and it was here that the variability in the inclusion and analysis of the

data became apparent. We would encourage institutions to build on the strengths of institutional analysis of data and to include a high-level evaluation of the key outcomes with specific reference to metrics in which the institution is performing particularly well or where there is a declining trend as this will be triangulated with data held by SFC and included in the discussions at the annual quality engagements.

27. This section also provides a key opportunity to consider the “Externality” principle with reference to external independent advice and feedback from, for example: Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Body (PSRB) activity, External Examiners, External Verification activity and External Stakeholders. This was referenced in most of the reports, however in some instances, there was a missed opportunity to identify and address key themes arising from this feedback.

Good Practice

28. **Data:** Institutions are using data to analyse quality assurance processes and support curriculum planning. While the presentation and inclusion of data in the reports was very variable, it was clear from the annual quality engagement meetings that many institutions have well developed data reporting and evaluation systems in place, that these are being used to inform curriculum review and, in many instances, the strategic direction of the institution. A few institutions acknowledged that they have further work to do in this area and have included this in their action plans.
29. **Industry links:** Institutions are fostering strong industry connections and linking regional and industry skills needs as part of curriculum planning and delivery. These included examples of institutions undertaking extensive curriculum review activities including consideration of student outcomes, combined with consideration of regional skills needs and engagement with employers. There were few specific mentions of work-based learning activity; however, we are aware that colleges deliver large volumes of foundation and modern apprenticeships and there were some examples of successful partnerships with industry and good student outcomes mentioned, similarly we are aware of growth in the delivery of Graduate Apprenticeships in Universities. One university noted that they have developed their work-based learning and tertiary curriculum partnerships to meet regional skills needs and developed new programmes informed by sector benchmarking, external market research and industrial networks. The inclusion of further information about apprenticeships, where this is a priority area for institutions, would be beneficial going forward.
30. **Staff development:** Institutions are providing opportunities which will support the teaching of new skills and development of new teaching methods. Almost all institutions highlighted opportunities for continuing professional development, ranging from in-house sharing of practice and expertise to opportunities to engage in external development and formal teaching qualifications. Topics mentioned included embedding sustainability, developing new and innovative approaches to teaching and promoting greater awareness of, and engagement with, artificial intelligence. Few institutions

noted the level of engagement of staff overall, targets for uptake or the impact of the activities, which would enhance the evaluation of this aspect of institutional activities.

31. **Development Pathways:** Institutions provide support for staff through development pathways with routes including teaching streams, research streams and development streams for professional services staff. One institution noted that the research pathway may link well with STEP in future. Some colleges mentioned ongoing work to ensure that staff achieve General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS) registration which is part of the agreed national terms and conditions for college lecturers employed in Scottish colleges. Several universities mentioned implementing new professional development frameworks.

Areas of Enhancement

32. Institutions identified a number of areas that they are actively developing in response to existing or emerging challenges. As noted below there is a continued focus on digital, as institutions work to develop both their digital infrastructure and upskill staff and students to maximise the benefit of digital approaches. Similarly, assessment and feedback continue to be a theme that institutions are addressing, particularly with the emergence of artificial intelligence and the impact on assessment approaches and academic integrity.
33. **Digital Infrastructure:** Many institutions cited developments in their digital resources and learning provision including Virtual Learning Environments and delivery of provision through hybrid and distance learning models. Post-pandemic, institutions are continuing to develop and enhance their digital capabilities with some citing the development and implementation of new learning, teaching and digital strategies and many referencing further investment in digital resources and/or digital connectivity.
34. **Physical Infrastructure:** Some institutions discussed investment and development of physical facilities and campus spaces to support learning and teaching (teaching spaces, practical learning spaces, libraries etc.)
35. **Collaboration:** Institutions are developing the use of digital resources to support collaboration, for example External Examiner dashboards and in one college there was an excellent example of the development of a virtual school supporting joint working with secondary schools.
36. **Models of Assessment:** Institutions cited developing assessment models including exploring alternative modes of assessment, establishing clearer timeframes for feedback and establishing and piloting digital assessment platforms. Several institutions also noted further work underway around supporting staff to understand and implement academic standards and implement new academic integrity procedures.

Principle 2: Supporting Student Success

37. This was a wide-ranging theme with institutions showcasing initiatives and reflecting on their specific contexts in relation to student success. The content in this part of the report varied with some institutions focusing more on student support in terms of mental health, wellbeing and additional support needs, while others included more detail in relation to student success, including an evaluation of graduate outcomes, employability and/or skills development, depending on their institutional priorities. There was some consideration of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, however this aspect was covered in the least detail and there was little evidence of the analysis of data related to the outcomes of students with protected characteristics
38. As part of the review of the guidance, we have updated the reference to student outcomes in this section to include specific reference to key metrics which have been identified as part of the Student Interests, Access and Success outcome of the OFAM. Once again, as part of the self-evaluation of this principle, and in addition to the wider student support initiatives included, we would encourage institutions to undertake an evaluation of their student success outcomes (including those identified in the guidance) and make specific reference to metrics in which the institution is performing particularly well, where outcomes remain static, or where there is a declining trend. Institutions may also wish to reflect on student destinations and consider whether these present any areas of strength or development.
39. Many institutions referred to complaints processes being in place which is reassuring. Reference to these processes would be enhanced by the inclusion of any themes arising or lessons learnt/actions taken as a result.

Good Practice

40. **Investment in support services:** Many institutions cited investment in their student support services including introducing new staff roles and initiatives to support students. This additional investment is likely to be in direct response to the increase in disclosure among students of disabilities, mental health and additional support/learning needs, which many institutions mention and has resulted in support services also being cited as an area for development.
41. **Careers Support:** Institutions discussed the role of careers support for students in facilitating student success, including focuses on employability skills, linking students to local opportunities, working with businesses and opportunities for work-based learning. Careers support was also cited in discussions around graduate outcomes data.
42. **Staff training:** Institutions cited many examples of staff training to support students across a variety of specific topics including Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, mental health support, and conflict resolution. Examples of general training to support induction, including signposting to support services and wider pastoral care training,

were also provided by institutions.

43. **Cost of living:** Institutions cited actions they are implementing to tackle the challenges of the rising cost of living including food pantries, funding bus passes for placements, and addressing the cost of graduation. A college outlined a project to support care-experienced students with funding applications to avoid any delays in receiving funds.

Areas of Enhancement

44. Student retention is a broader sectoral issue with retention rates among Scottish domicile full-time first-degree entrants still below pre-pandemic levels although they have started to recover slightly, according to the most recent report¹. Similarly, although there have been changes in the method of calculating withdrawal rates for colleges, 20.6% of full-time further education and 17.1% of full-time higher education students withdrew from their course after the funding qualifying date in 2023-24². We welcome the focus under this principle on retention across the institutions, with clear examples of how institutions are trying to address this challenge. Allied to this is the focus on whole systems approaches to supporting students and using data to gain insights into how to identify at risk students and enhance student support services.
45. **Retention:** Both colleges and universities highlighted actions to address retention rates, with several institutions developing or extending initiatives to support retention throughout the student journey, from setting expectations during induction and transition support to continuous on-course support. Some institutions cite enhancing the use of data and digital systems to identify “at risk” students while others mention a variety of actions for example, regular retention meetings, compassionate communications, developing enhanced attendance and engagement policies and even a new retention strategy.
46. **Collaboration (whole system approach):** Many institutions are developing collaborative team approaches to student support, including teams with professional services and academic colleagues working together to ensure joined up approaches and reducing complexity in accessing support for students.
47. This focus on supporting students is further highlighted across the institutions as extensive reference was made to a range of initiatives that are in development including:
 - A number of colleges discussing their work to develop **trauma-informed practice** and both colleges and universities citing ongoing work to support student transitions. Several institutions also mention creating and appointing staff to new

¹ [Report on Widening Access 2023-24 - Scottish Funding Council](#)

² [College Student Outcomes 2023-24 - Scottish Funding Council](#)

support roles, including a new Assistant Principal for Improving Life Chances, a Suicide Preventions Project Co-ordinator and a Wellbeing Manager.

- In addition to mentioning mental health and wellbeing, there was also a particular focus on institutions development of and strengthening policies and support systems related to **Gender Based Violence**.

48. **Data for student support:** Institutions are developing the way they use data to inform development of student support, including developing dashboards and specific key performance indicators to focus improvements, using analytics and incorporating student voice into the consideration of how support services are developed and delivered. Linked to the use of data, institutions are developing early intervention mechanisms, where individual support needs are identified.
49. **(Meta) Skills development:** Some institutions discussed their work in relation to skills development and awareness particularly meta-skills and it was interesting to note that this was included under “Student Success” rather than within “Excellence in Teaching and Learning” suggesting that these skills have wider application and development than within the students’ specific subject area.

Principle 3: Enhancement and Quality Culture

50. This section of the reports tended to be relatively concise and focused on the key points listed in the principles diagram. As noted previously there was some variation between colleges and universities with respect to this section, which is attributable to the difference in previous external review and enhancement approaches across the sector. We anticipate that all institutions will reference their engagement in STEP in their next SEAP submission. We also welcome examples of enhancement that are outside of STEP, for example engagement with sector network activity or communities of practice.
51. Most institutions clearly included reference to their last external review in this section and included some narrative about the action they were taking in response to areas for development that were identified through the external review process. In future submissions, we expect to see all institutions referencing the outcomes of external review. We appreciate that for some institutions their next external review is some time away. In the interim, progress on actions from the last external review should be included where relevant until these are complete. For those institutions who have undergone TQER, this section should be used to describe progress on the commendations and recommendations identified through the review process.

Good Practice

52. **Embedding quality:** Various examples of the ways that institutions were seeking to embed quality culture across the organisation were included in SEAPs, including examples of situating quality as a ‘golden thread’, informing continuous quality improvement through the embedding of self-evaluation in course team meetings,

informed by student feedback and data, developing a new quality strategy and/or setting time set aside for colleagues to come together to have discussions about courses or programmes at specific points in the year. In addition, institutions identified the importance of embedding a culture of **enhancement as an iterative process** which is always developing.

53. **Collaboration and partnerships:** Many institutions reflected on collaborative work that they are engaged in both with other institutions and through relevant sector networks including showcasing leadership in these spaces and sharing good practice. Similarly, institutions highlighted local/ regional collaboration with businesses and local authorities to address regional skills needs.

Areas of Enhancement

54. **External review actions:** Most institutions discussed and reflected on how areas for development from external reviews (by both QAA and ES) were being embedded and taken forward through action plans. These varied according to the outcomes of their individual institutional reviews. Colleges referenced their last annual engagement visits (AEVs) while universities mentioned the last Quality Enhancement and Standards Reviews (QESRs) and some also included reference to the outcomes of their last Enhancement Led Institutional Review (ELIR).
55. **Developing and/or reviewing quality systems:** Institutions highlighted existing quality assurance and enhancement processes, outlining their approach to institution wide quality assurance, enhancement and improvement, with several highlighting that they are developing or reviewing their approaches. Examples of reviewed quality assurance and enhancement processes included: considering new approaches to quality enhancement and monitoring and the role of oversight committees, streamlining approaches to annual monitoring, introducing a risk-based approach to quality reviews of individual programmes and mapping institutional policies and procedures to the revised UK Quality Code (2024).

Principle 4: Student Engagement and Partnership

56. There was a lot of variation in institutional response to this Principle. Many institutions shared examples of good practice and highlighted exciting initiatives that are being undertaken. Additionally, some responses included honest reflection on the challenges institutions face. However, some SEAPs lacked detail and would have benefitted from greater reflection on the insights drawn from student feedback and the activity undertaken to address issues raised.
57. It is reassuring to note the focus on student surveys as an area of enhancement as this aligns well with the refreshed guidance, which now includes specific reference to key metrics associated with the National Student Survey (NSS) and the Student Satisfaction and Engagement Survey (SSES). Universities may also wish to include details about the

Postgraduate survey outcomes i.e., Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES) and the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) too.

58. Overall, there was little evidence included in the SEAPs to suggest that students had been involved in their production. It is worth noting that a college did specifically highlight that the student engagement and partnership section had been co-written with the Students' Association. One university noted that, for this year, student engagement with the SEAP was predominantly through the institution's underpinning quality processes, but that they would work towards more active engagement in producing the SEAP in the future. Through discussions at the AQEs, it became evidence that there was more student engagement in the preparation of the SEAPs than explicitly articulated within the reports.

Good Practice

59. **Student Learning Experience (SLE) Model:** Approximately half of the institutions made specific reference to the SLE model, either describing work already undertaken or referring to planned actions for the future. Examples of how the SLE model has been implemented included using the questions in new surveys, strengthening student feedback systems by embedding the SLE model into student representative systems, including training and meetings, and using the model to update student resources for institution-led quality review processes.
60. **Student input in the development of learning, teaching, and quality enhancement policy and practice** and the wider student experience: Examples of good practice included how students are being involved directly in the development of institutional policies and practice. One institution shared that Students' Association Officers were trained in service design approaches to enable them to co-create systems and processes that support students. Another institution highlighted how student groups were being engaged to review specific policies and processes, e.g., the academic calendar.
61. **Student Ambassadors/ Consultant roles:** The introduction of new paid roles for students was included in some institutional SEAPs. These opportunities varied from quality consultant type roles, where students were recruited to support curriculum review and wider quality activities, to intern roles, where students were given an opportunity to undertake paid work experience within the institution. Paid roles for students, including internships, are not only beneficial for the student but ensures that students can provide their perspective on the activities undertaken.

Areas of Enhancement

62. Scotland is renowned for student engagement in quality and the TQEF builds on that legacy, with further expectations for student engagement and partnership built into the framework and emphasised in the SEAP guidance. Given this renewed focus, it is not surprising that many institutions cited student partnership as an area for further development. We are also aware from sector and student feedback, that students have

many conflicting demands on their time which are impacting on their ability to engage with institutions and that institutions are exploring mechanisms to support effective engagement taking these factors into account.

63. **Student Partnership:** [Scotland's Ambition for Student Partnership](#) was published in October 2024, so it is understandable that very few institutions referenced this resource specifically. However, many institutions demonstrated that they are considering how to develop and strengthen student partnership at all levels and how to make partnership accessible and inclusive.
64. **Surveys and gathering student feedback:** Across the SEAPs there was a clear focus on surveys and exploring different approaches to gather student feedback effectively, with institutions seeking to embed approaches that increase the quantity and quality of returns across all levels including the SSES, NSS, PTES and the PRES and internal surveys. Further to this, institutions noted the steps they are taking to ensure that students can see the outcome of their feedback and the actions taken in response.
65. **Student engagement in training and meetings:** It was noted by several institutions that student engagement in representative training and meetings continues to be a challenge and is symptomatic of the pressures students are experiencing in trying to balance their commitment to study with work and home life. Some institutions are using alternative approaches to gathering the student voice, e.g., through whole class feedback sessions or bespoke focus groups instead of the traditional course rep meetings.

Underpinning Principles – Data and Evidence and Externality

66. Although “Data and Evidence” and “Externality” are separate principles within the TQEF, institutions are not expected to evaluate these separately within the SEAPs. Instead, it is expected that institutions cover the key aspects of these underpinning principles within the four main headline principles.
67. Specific reference has been made to the evaluation of data and how this can be enhanced within the relevant principles. We have also updated the guidance to clarify which outcomes are of specific interest, to enhance this aspect of the reports. However, we would also remind institutions that they should keep the underpinning evidence and data that they use for the preparation of the SEAP in an accessible repository so that it can be accessed again when preparing for external review.
68. In relation to the Externality principle, most institutions referred to external feedback in the “Excellence in Learning, Teaching and Assessment” principle and the “Enhancement and Quality Culture” principles. It was noted that some colleges relied heavily on the last Education Scotland reports, which will not be available for inclusion in the next submission. We would encourage all institutions to revisit their external feedback including, for example, from Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies and employers and consider how best to make use of this valuable source of information.

Feedback from the sector in relation to the guidance and the process

69. Feedback on the completion of the first SEAPs and the SEAP process has been collected through a range of mechanisms, including discussions with agency partners, feedback from the TQSG, Universities Scotland Learning and Teaching Committee, from individual institutions gathered through the AQE meetings, the SEAP survey and SEAP focus group meetings.
70. One of the strongest points of feedback that we heard through a number of discussions with institutions (and was re-iterated during the focus groups), was that institutions did not want to see wholesale changes to the guidance. Consequently, the focus has been on reviewing the guidance to provide greater clarity and address the points raised about the data outcomes. Not all points raised have resulted in amendments to the guidance. The rationale for not changing the guidance, in response to some points of feedback, has been included below.
71. **Scope:** A few institutions felt that the scope of the SEAP guidance could lead to ambiguity. Close consideration was given to the articulation of the scope of Scotland's Tertiary Quality Enhancement Framework (TQEF), Institution-Led Quality Review (ILQR) and the SEAP to ensure that we met the expectations of the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG). The draft narrative was discussed in some detail during 2023-24 with TQSG, where it became clear that the focus on SFC funded activity articulated in the original scope was in contradiction to some of the guidance in relation to non-funded activity. As a result, we have revisited the description and removed the reference to SFC funded activity, asking institutions instead to focus on key priorities when considering strengths and weaknesses, given that all provision will be subject to the same/similar quality processes. The guidance also includes a clarified expectation that it is the annual quality engagement meetings with SFC Outcome Managers that will focus primarily on SFC funded provision.
72. **Word Count:** The word count limit was subject to much discussion prior to the publication of the guidance. Feedback after the first submission has been mixed. Considering the variation in the size and context of our institutions and the word counts in the first submissions (which averaged in the region of 5,000 words- excluding a few outliers which were in the region of 10,000 words), we have retained the suggested 5,000-word limit but introduced some flexibility for shorter/longer submissions. However, where institutions wish to submit longer reports, this should be discussed with the institutional Outcome Manager prior to submission.
73. **Submission date:** A small number of institutions provided feedback via the survey that the timing of the guidance did not fit with their internal governance structures. We have also heard from a number of institutions that they have worked to align their processes to the new arrangements. Considering the need to find a balance, we have decided to retain the current submission date to give institutions further opportunity to align their calendars to the new process. It was also felt that a later submission would delay the

review of the SEAPs further, which would result in feedback to the institutions being even later in the academic year.

74. **Structure:** Most institutions found the suggested structure helpful. We have retained this approach. A few institutions noted that the inclusion of images (of the principles diagram) and annexes within the SEAP guidance (which is an annex of the main guidance) was not helpful. We have addressed both these points by adjusting the way the guidance is presented.
75. **Key Data:** A number of institutions fed back both during their AQE discussions and through the SEAP survey that they would welcome greater clarity on the outcomes that should be included, particularly if these are going to be discussed during the AQEs. The guidance now includes more specific details relating to the outcomes, however it remains for institutions to determine which are of relevance to their priorities. It should be noted that institutions must be prepared to discuss all areas at the AQE meeting.
76. **Student interests, access and success:** The additional clarifications in relation to the outcomes relate mainly to the measures that are included in the Student Interests, Access and Success (SIAS) outcome of the OFAM. Colleagues from across the Student Interests, Access and Quality Team work closely together on the review of the SEAPs as part of the assurance of the High-Quality Learning and Teaching outcome and the SIAS outcome. These updates will bring the monitoring of the two outcomes into greater alignment to streamline them, both for institutions and SFC.
77. **Action Plan template:** The action plan template was broadly welcomed by institutions, so we have not made any changes to the template. A note has been added to highlight that actions can be short, medium or longer term. We would ask that institutions try to make the actions more specific with clear targets and timelines (as is already mentioned in the guidance) so that they can measure progress on an annual basis.

Supporting the next SEAP submission

78. SFC have reviewed and refreshed the [SFC guidance on quality for colleges and universities](#), with the updated version published in July 2025. The guidance includes the refreshed SEAP guidance as Annex B.
79. CDN is leading the development of a [Tertiary Self-Evaluation Toolkit \(TSET\)](#) to enhance institutions' capacity for self-reflection in all aspects of the TQEF. The toolkit is being developed and delivered in partnership with SFC, QAA, sparqs, colleges and universities and is available on the CDN LearnOnline platform.
80. The toolkit includes examples of good practice drawn from the first round of SEAPs submitted by institutions and draws on the learning from the review of the SEAPs, including some useful hints and tips about what makes a good SEAP. The first iteration is now available via the CDN LearnOnline platform and will continue to be developed and expanded over time in collaboration with the sector.

81. sparqs is making a small update to the [SEAP \(Self-Evaluation and Action Plan\) Guidance](#) for students' associations and student officers for the AY 2025-26.
82. The next SEAP, reflecting on academic year 2024-25 is due for submission on the 30 November, but as this is a Sunday and the following Monday is a public holiday, the submission deadline will be 2 December. Institutions should submit their SEAPs to the SFC via the quality@sfc.ac.uk inbox.