
TQEF Descriptive Briefing



Scotland's Tertiary Quality Enhancement Framework (TQEF)

The TQEF is Scotland's national framework. It assures academic standards and the quality of the student experience, and it ensures accountability for public investment in learning and teaching in our colleges and universities. The TQEF was launched in July 2024 and will operate its first cycle over a seven-year period until 2031.

TQEF Vision and Principles

The TQEF's vision is for a more coherent and streamlined tertiary education system from the student perspective that delivers the best learning experience for students. The TQEF's principles are the foundation on which quality assurance and enhancement are based and are designed to put students at the heart of the TQEF in Scotland. They are:

- Excellence in learning, teaching and assessment.
- Supporting student success.
- Enhancement and quality culture.
- Student engagement and partnership.
- Externality.
- Data and evidence.

How is the TQEF delivered

TQEF is made up of five interconnected "delivery mechanisms", which together provide assurance on the quality of provision and support institutional and sector wide enhancement.

- The Tertiary Quality Enhancement Review (TQER) is the external peer-led and enhancement focused review method for Scotland's colleges and universities. The programme is managed by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA).
- Annual Quality Engagement (AQE) is made up of two aspects; Institutional Liaison Meetings with QAA, focusing on TQER preparation and follow up, and SFC's annual

engagements on quality where SFC Outcome Managers discuss high-quality learning & teaching and student outcomes and feed into the SFC's Outcomes Framework and Assurance Model.

- Institution-led Quality Review (ILQR) reflects institutional responsibility and ownership of quality and the expectation that colleges and universities put in place mechanisms to annually monitor and periodically review their provision.
- Scotland's Tertiary Enhancement Programme (STEP) is a national programme of coordinated enhancement activity which brings together students and staff from all Scotland's colleges and universities to deliver innovation, improvement and enhancement. STEP is managed by QAA and College Development Network (CDN), with support from student partnerships in quality Scotland (sparqs).
- Use of data and evidence for reporting, recognises how each run through all aspects of quality assurance and enhancement and feeds directly into evidencing both.
- Self-Evaluation and Action Plan (SEAP)

Colleges and universities must submit an annual self-reflection and planning document called the SEAP. The SEAP supports institutions to identify good practice and areas for development, setting out an action plan for enhancement. The SEAP also forms part of an institution's evidence base for the TQER; supporting review teams to enhance their understanding of institutions strengths, areas for enhancement and enhancement plans.

The review of the SEAP feeds directly into the SFC's institutional AQE engagement and together with the TQER they are used to assure the quality of learning and teaching provision in Scotland's colleges and universities.

Roles and Responsibilities

TQEF Delivery Partners

The TQEF delivery partners (QAA, CDN, sparqs and Scottish Credit and Qualification Framework Partnership) have been commissioned by SFC to contribute to and deliver key aspects of the TQEF, and you can find out more in the SFC Guidance on Quality for Colleges and Universities

Students

As students are at the heart of the TQEF, they play a vital role in meeting the TQEF's vision and its activities. This includes:

- Taking part in TQER activities as external reviewers and meeting review panels to support them gathering evidence and shaping lines of enquiry.
- Taking part in and leading STEP enhancement projects across colleges and universities.

-
- Completing key surveys and data sources such as the National Student Survey and the College Student Satisfaction and Engagement Survey.
 - Representing and communicating the student experience as part of institutional-led quality review activity and in annual engagement with SFC and quality agency meetings.

To support students across colleges and universities, sparqs updated their Student Learning Experience model and developed Scotland's Ambition for Student Partnership, and are providing direct support to students, Students' Associations and colleges and universities.

Sector Engagement

Across the development and delivery of the TQEF, sector engagement has been critical. The Tertiary Quality Steering Group (TQSG), has helped shape and guide the co-creation of the TQEF, and will continue to help steer its ongoing development.

Along with TQSG, SFC engages with other key groups such as The Quality Forum, CDN Quality Steering Group, and Universities Scotland Learning and Teaching Committee amongst others.

October 2025