
Parameters for a tertiary approach to quality assurance and enhancement

1. We recognise elements of the current approaches that are strengths and absolutely want to retain these, while also looking at opportunities for aligning strengths across a tertiary landscape.
2. **Student partnership** will continue to be fundamental to our approach.
3. **An enhancement-led approach.** Currently this is defined as ‘taking deliberate steps to bring about improvement in the effectiveness of the learning experiences of students’. Enhancement is affected at all levels within institutions. One of the purposes of the common approach will be to support strategic approaches to enhancement within institutions and at sector level that builds on the work happening within institutions.
4. **Supporting standards and awarding processes.** We are not considering amending standards (HEIs), which continue to be a matter for autonomous institutions. Our intention is to continue to support academic standards and to use current approaches and mechanisms for doing this.
5. Colleges manage multiple awarding body relationships with skill and professionalism. We will seek discussion with the SQA as a principal awarding body for college qualifications to identify where we believe the structures and processes within colleges can support closer alignment and can provide a mature basis for supporting awarding decisions. We are keen to identify what opportunities exist with colleges. We are not, at this stage, seeking similar discussion with other awarding bodies active in the college sector, but could consider doing so in the future if this were felt to be both appropriate and helpful.
6. **Diversity.** We recognise that higher and further education is delivered in both universities and colleges and the new arrangements will reflect this diversity with elements that may apply to one type of provision only, wherever that is taught. There is already diversity of mission and institution type across the university sector served by a common approach and across the college sector served by a common approach. A common approach does not mean we think one size fits all.
7. **Reference points.** We are committed to ensure the new common approach meets (European Standards and Guidelines) criteria for universities, as this is vital to ensure Scotland's reputation for high quality higher education is maintained and enhanced.
8. We recognise the strengths of the UK Quality Code. We may need to fine-tune the Code in the future, to ensure it can encompass all aspects of the tertiary sector. This will be done in discussion with the other devolved nations to ensure that we maintain comparability through a common set of guidelines.
9. **Subject Benchmarks** – these describe the academic standard expected for specific

subject areas. They are written by subject specialists and institutions are expected to use them as reference points in designing, delivering and reviewing provision. They do not prescribe set approaches or curriculum, but they do set out what learners are reasonably expected to have achieved or understand by the end of their programme.

10. **Peer review** (external staff from other institutions to join review teams). This will continue to be a central feature of our approach to quality and is vital to the sharing of good practice and supporting institutions in their own quality assurance and enhancement activity.
11. **Cyclical review**. We will have a quality cycle which will include cyclical and periodic review points. Our intention is to look at clarifying and streamlining how we develop assurance of quality and quality enhancement across that cycle, clarifying the relationship between annual and longer-term elements.
12. **Qualification Frameworks**. We intend the new common approach to continue to support and work with the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) and the Framework for Qualifications of Higher Education Institutions in Scotland (FQHEIS) (which is also mapped to the SCQF). The approach taken will need to continue to support public confidence in standards through an accessible understanding of what qualifications represent in terms of achievement. Qualification frameworks will need to continue to provide institutions and external assessors and examiners with the reference points for setting standards and outcomes.
13. **Engagement style**. The style or approach to review will be appropriate to a professional learning, teaching and quality tertiary environment. It will support, and challenge, institutions based on their own institution-led, critical self-evaluation processes and outputs.
14. **Developments across the UK**. We are not intending to follow the Office for Student's approach to quality and standards. We are working with partners across the UK to look at how we can align and work together as our respective work develops. We also want to look at how existing high-quality data can enhance and demonstrate impact alongside periodic reviews against the UK Quality Code.
15. **Quality partners**. We intend to work with our partner quality agencies, QAA Scotland and Education Scotland, to develop the new methodologies.