

## **A TERTIARY QUALITY ENHANCEMENT FRAMEWORK**

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The Tertiary Quality Enhancement Framework (TQEF) is 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 academic standards and the quality of the student learning experience, and ensure accountability for public investment in learning and teaching.

The TQEF is founded on the following set of shared Principles that are designed to put students at the heart of the Framework:

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

There are five interconnected delivery mechanisms within the TQEF that, taken together, will provide the assurance on quality and support institutional and sector wide enhancement:

- Tertiary Quality Enhancement Review
- Annual Quality Engagement (AQE)
- Scotland's Tertiary Enhancement Programme
- Institution-led quality activity
- Institutional reporting on quality

Further information is available at [SFC Guidance on Quality for Colleges and Universities 2024-25 to 2030-31 - Scottish Funding Council](#).

### **Tertiary Quality Enhancement Review**

The TQER is the new external peer-led and enhancement focused review method for Scotland's tertiary sector. The TQER is a single method for colleges and universities, replacing both the How Good is our College (HGIOC) progress and/or annual engagement visits for colleges, and Enhancement Led-Institutional Review (ELIR) for universities.

The university has achieved positive judgements in all ELIR cycles. At the Quality Enhancement Systems Review in May 2024, the review team concluded that they were confident that the University of the Highlands and Islands is making effective progress in continuing to monitor, review and enhance its higher education provision to enable effective arrangements to be in place for managing academic standards and the quality of the student learning experience. The university's TQER is planned to take place in academic year 2026-27.

### **Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF)**

The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework set out a nationally recognised hierarchy of qualification levels and describes the general achievement expected of holders of the main qualification type at each of the levels.

SCQF uses two measures - the level of a programme and the number of credit points awarded. This supports understanding and comparison of Scottish qualifications, and the progression routes between them. SCQF levels are from 1-12, with Levels 7-12 recognised as higher education. All university programmes, including those awarded by SQA, are explicitly placed within the framework. Further details can be found at [www.scqf.org.uk/](http://www.scqf.org.uk/).

#### UK Quality Code for Higher Education

The Quality Code is a sector-led reference point which can be used in a range of flexible ways. It enables providers to evaluate their policies and practices with reference to Sector-Agreed Principles and it aligns with key international reference points including the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG).

Built on a shared understanding across the UK, the Quality Code enables providers to see what is expected of them and what they can expect of each other, irrespective of the specific regulatory framework in which they operate. It informs the public, protects students' interests and champions the UK's world-leading reputation for high-quality education provision.

A new edition of the Code was launched in June 2024. It comprises two elements: Sector-Agreed Principles and Key Practices. It is supported by a suite of Advice and Guidance. The Sector-Agreed Principles identify the fundamental nature of quality and standards in UK higher education. There are 12 Principles and each has a set of Key Practices which providers can follow to demonstrate how they are adhering to that Principle.

Further information about the UK Quality Code for Higher Education can be found at [UK Quality Code for Higher Education 2024](#).

A diagram showing the Principles and the framework on which to design, develop, implement and enhance the quality of provision can be found at [UK Quality Code for Higher Education 2024 - Sector-Agreed Principles](#).

#### Subject Benchmarks

These are used by external examiners, approval panels and reviewers across the UK to make judgements on national standards. Subject benchmarks define the expectations of the standards for the award of qualifications at Masters or honours degree level in a particular subject. They include guidance on the knowledge, skills and abilities expected of a graduate at that level. See [www.qaa.ac.uk](http://www.qaa.ac.uk) for full details of the subject benchmark statements.

## Academic Standards and Quality Regulations 2025-26

### Tertiary quality enhancement framework

#### UK Quality Code for Higher Education 2024 – Sector Agreed Principles

The UK Quality Code comprises 12 Sector-Agreed Principles which offer a framework on which to design, develop, implement and enhance the quality of provision regardless of regulatory approach, precise educational setting or level or mode of study. This document shows these 12 Principles.

See the [Quality Code 2024](#) for full information including the Key Practices that support these Principles.

Strategic approach	<b>Principle 1 – Taking a strategic approach to managing quality and standards</b> Providers demonstrate they have a strategic approach to securing academic standards and assuring and enhancing quality that is embedded across the organisation.		<b>Principle 2 – Engaging students as partners</b> Providers take deliberate steps to engage students as active partners in assuring and enhancing the quality of the student learning experience. Engagement happens individually and collectively to influence all levels of study and decision making. Enhancements identified through student engagement activities are implemented, where appropriate, and communicated to staff and students.		<b>Principle 3 – Resourcing delivery of a high-quality learning experience</b> Providers plan, secure and maintain resources relating to learning, technology, facilities and staffing to enable the delivery and enhancement of an accessible, innovative and high-quality learning experience for students that aligns with the provider's strategy and the composition of the student body.	
	<b>Principle 4 – Using data to inform and evaluate quality</b> Providers collect, analyse and utilise qualitative and quantitative data at provider, departmental, programme and module levels. These analyses inform decision-making with the aim of enhancing practices and processes relating to teaching, learning and the wider student experience.		<b>Principle 5 – Monitoring, evaluating and enhancing provision</b> Providers regularly monitor and review their provision to secure academic standards and enhance quality. Deliberate steps are taken to engage and involve students, staff and external expertise in monitoring and evaluation activity. The outcomes and impact of these activities are considered at provider level to drive reflection and enhancement across the provider.		<b>Principle 6 – Engaging in external review and accreditation</b> Providers engage with external reviews to give assurance about the effectiveness of their approach to managing quality and standards. External reviews offer insights about the comparability of providers' approaches and generate outcomes that providers can use to enhance their policies and practices. Reviews may be commissioned by providers, form part of a national quality framework or linked to professional recognition and actively include staff, students and peers. They can be undertaken by representative organisations, agencies or professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs) with recognised sector expertise according to the provision being reviewed.	
Evaluating quality and standards	<b>Principle 7 – Designing, approving and modifying programmes</b> Providers design, develop, approve and modify programmes and modules to ensure the quality of provision and the academic standards of awards are consistent with the relevant Qualifications Framework. Providers ensure their provision and level of qualifications are comparable to those offered across the UK and, where applicable, The Framework of Qualifications for The European Higher Education Area.		<b>Principle 8 – Operating partnerships with other organisations</b> Providers and their partners agree proportionate arrangements for effective governance to secure the academic standards and enhance the quality of programmes and modules that are delivered in partnership with others. Organisations involved in partnership arrangements agree and communicate the mutual and specific responsibilities in relation to delivering, monitoring, evaluating, assuring and enhancing the learning experience.		<b>Principle 9 – Recruiting, selecting and admitting students</b> Providers operate recruitment, selection and admissions processes that are transparent, fair and inclusive. Providers maintain and publish accurate, relevant and accessible information about their provision, enabling students to make informed choices about their studies and future aspirations.	
	<b>Principle 10 – Supporting students to achieve their potential</b> Providers facilitate a framework of support for students that enables them to have a high-quality learning experience and achieve their potential as they progress in their studies. The support structure scaffolds the academic, personal and professional learning journey, enabling students to recognise and articulate their progress and achievements.		<b>Principle 11 – Teaching, learning and assessment</b> Providers facilitate a collaborative and inclusive approach that enables students to have a high-quality learning experience and to progress through their studies. All students are supported to develop and demonstrate academic and professional skills and competencies. Assessment employs a variety of methods, embodying the values of academic integrity, producing outcomes that are comparable across the UK and recognised globally.		<b>Principle 12 – Operating concerns, complaints and appeals processes</b> Providers operate processes for complaints and appeals that are robust, fair, transparent and accessible, and clearly articulated to staff and students. Policies and processes for concerns, complaints and appeals are regularly reviewed and the outcomes are used to support the enhancement of provision and the student experience.	
Implementing the approach to quality enhancement and standards						