



QAA
Scotland

Effective approaches to evaluation in the Scottish university sector

Improving the student experience depends on institutions recognising their strengths and weaknesses.

Scottish higher education institutions carry out evaluative activity on an ongoing basis, annually and periodically.

**But what makes
self-evaluation
work?**

Key points at a glance

Institutional self-evaluation is more likely to be effective when:

Processes are
trusted

Quality and
academic structures
are aligned

Appropriate training
and support
are in place

Processes are informed
by reliable information
and external
reference points

Feedback loops
are closed

Processes are trusted

- Giving confidence to, and gaining the trust of, external and internal stakeholders: balancing assurance and enhancement.
- Being able to identify the wider purpose (answering the 'so what?' question) for staff and students.
- Facilitating teamwork and gaining the support of senior management.
- Supporting open communication between reviewers and reviewed.
- Engaging a wide spectrum of students as reviewers and providers of evidence.

Quality and academic structures are aligned

- Putting academic values at the centre of the quality system, framing evaluation as a scholarly approach to professional learning and development and/or institutional research.
- Making evaluation a team activity which recognises and develops the desire of good teachers to reflect on and improve their professional practice.
- Being flexible, recognising differences in culture and practice between disciplines.
- Using coherent subject groupings which make sense to academic staff, and allow sufficient depth of scrutiny and discussion.
- Explicitly relating evaluation to improving the learning experience of students.

Appropriate training and support are in place

- Providing easily understandable information and guidance on the quality assurance and enhancement arrangements in place at institutional level and, in devolved structures, at faculty/college/school level.
- Ensuring subject teams are led by academics who have developed skills in facilitating effective, inclusive self-evaluation and ensuring they are supported by strong institutional networks.
- Encouraging and supporting individual staff members and course teams to develop analytical self-evaluation skills.
- Training and supporting student representatives to be effective members of review panels and ensuring other reviewers are briefed on how to work effectively with student members.
- Ensuring external reviewers receive information, training and support which enable them to participate as effective panel members.
- Using guidance and support available from outside the institution, such as from [Student Participation in Quality Scotland \(sparqs\)](#) or the [Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education \(QAA\) Scotland](#), and considering other institutions' approaches to evaluation.

Processes are informed by reliable information and external reference points

- Providing comprehensive, relevant, accurate, accessible and standardised management information/data.
- Using management information to support evidence-based evaluation.
- Using an agreed set of external reference points, such as [subject benchmark statements](#), the [Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework](#), the [UK Quality Code for Higher Education](#) and engagement with the [Enhancement Themes](#) (current sector expectations are set out in the [Scottish Funding Council Guidance](#)).
- Using relevant performance indicators.

Feedback loops are closed

- Asking: What's working? What's not? What needs to change?
- Ensuring that the findings from self-evaluation, monitoring and review inform institutional strategic planning.
- Developing enhancement plans with SMART targets and effective feedback - don't produce more results from internal evaluations than can be acted upon.
- Ensuring monitoring and review processes are linked to [Enhancement-led Institutional Review](#) preparation, and are themselves regularly reviewed.

The information in this leaflet draws on the outcomes of a project commissioned by QAA Scotland to explore effective approaches in institutions' self-evaluation.

An electronic version of this leaflet and further information on the project outcomes is available on the QAA website:

www.qaa.ac.uk/InstitutionReports/types-of-review/pages/effective-approaches-evaluation.aspx

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