

## 2022 European Quality Assurance Forum

### Shaping or sharing? QA in a value-driven EHEA

Hosted by West University of Timisoara, Romania  
17-19 November 2022

#### Call for contributions: Paper submission form

**Deadline 22 July 2022**

*Please note that all fields are obligatory. For a detailed description of the submission requirements and Frequently Asked Questions please consult the Call for Contributions.*

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#### Short bio (150 words max):

As Director of sparqs [www.sparqs.ac.uk](http://www.sparqs.ac.uk), Eve is responsible for managing the agency on behalf of the Scottish Funding Council (SFC). She provides strategic direction and management support to the sparqs team and maintains close links with other sector agencies in Scotland, across the rest of the UK and internationally. Eve took up her post within sparqs in July 2010. Previously, she was Education and Welfare Manager at Heriot-Watt University Students' Association for eighteen years, managing their non-commercial activities including their extensive work on academic representation. Eve is a member of the SFC Working Group on Tertiary Quality Arrangements looking at the development of new tertiary quality arrangements for Scotland.

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Debra Macfarlane leads the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) Scotland's work on the national [Enhancement Themes](#). Having joined QAA Scotland in 2013, Debra has extensive experience of [Enhancement-Led Institutional Review](#) (ELIR) and related activity. Her previous experience includes academic and professional services roles within higher education, leading on policy and practice in assessment and feedback, employability and work-related learning, as well as human resources and training and development roles in the private sector. Debra is a graduate from the University of St Andrews and an alumna of Emory University, Atlanta where she was a Bobby Jones Memorial Scholar. She has also completed qualifications with the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development and gained her Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice with the University of Glasgow. Debra is currently on secondment to the Scottish Funding Council working on the development of new tertiary quality arrangements for Scotland.

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**Short bio (150 words max):**

Professor Clare Peddie's career has been focused on education at the University of St Andrews. In the School of Biology, she was the Director of Teaching, and then Head of School before taking up the role of Vice Principal Education at the University of St Andrews. When pandemic conditions allow, she still teaches marine biology in the field at Undergraduate and Masters level and has interests in the role of experiential learning in effective teaching. Clare is an enthusiastic advocate of quality enhancement and, in addition to leading the current national Enhancement Theme in Scotland, she supports the QAA in Scotland as an Enhancement-led Institutional Review Academic Reviewer. Clare is a member of the SFC Working Group on Tertiary Quality Arrangements looking at the development of new tertiary quality arrangements for Scotland.

***If there are several authors, please copy and fill in the fields for each author and indicate who is the corresponding author and who will be responsible for presenting the paper at the Forum.***

*IMPORTANT: If you are submitting a proposal, please do not register for the event until the results of the selection process have been announced. Papers selected for EQAF 2022 will benefit from one reduced fee per contribution, which will be applied through a special registration process.*

*During the Forum, the full text of all papers presented at the Forum as well as the associated Powerpoint presentations will be published on the Forum website. If you do not wish your paper to be published, please indicate so here. This has no consequences on the selection of the papers. Please however note that all Powerpoint presentations will be published, regardless of whether the full paper is published.*

### Proposal

**Title:** Student Partnership at the Heart – Quality Assurance and Enhancement in Scotland

**Abstract (150 words max):**

Since 2003, the Scottish Quality Enhancement Framework (QEF) has focussed on enhancement, collaboration and partnership in managing quality. 20 years on, a new tertiary approach to quality will bring together arrangements for universities and colleges (which provide 20% of higher education provision in Scotland) providing an opportunity for quality to support seamless learner journeys, access to higher education and to enable a student-centred approach to enhancing the student learning experience.

The Scottish Funding Council has asked sparqs to lead on work with students alongside the quality agencies and institutions to identify key elements of an effective student learning experience and support the sector to further build partnership into the structures and processes of the quality arrangements at institutional and national levels.

Intended outcomes of the project include a shared sector reference point for evaluating the effectiveness of the student learning experience and approaches to student partnership in quality arrangements.

**The corresponding sub-topic of the proposal:** Student participation in governance and quality assurance of higher education

**Has this paper previously been published/presented elsewhere?** No

**Text of paper (3000 words max):**

### **Background – The Quality Enhancement Framework 2003-2022. Key Elements**

The Quality Enhancement Framework (QEF) is the enhancement-led approach<sup>1</sup> to quality in Scottish higher education that has been in place since 2003. Collaboration and partnership are at the heart of the method. The QEF supports institutions in managing the quality of the student learning experience and provides public confidence in academic standards and the quality of the student experience.

Partners in the QEF included SFC, Scottish Government, Universities Scotland, QAA Scotland, the National Union of Students and sparqs (student partnerships in quality Scotland). This partnership approach engenders a commitment from all to a 'quality culture' with a focus on the whole learning experience.

The QEF included 5 key elements: Enhancement-led Institutional Review (ELIR); Enhancement Themes; Institution-led Review; Public Information and Student Engagement.

From the inception of the QEF in Scotland 2003, student engagement has been one of its key elements and is also expected to take place routinely in the other 4 elements outlined below.

1. **Enhancement-led Institutional Review (ELIR)** - [Enhancement-led Institutional Review](#) (ELIR) is an evidence-based method of peer review, meaning that staff and students from other institutions join a team of reviewers to assess what each higher education institution does. ELIR results in a judgement and a set of commendations and recommendations relating to the way the institution is securing academic standards and improving the student experience.
2. **Enhancement Themes** - The national programme of [Enhancement Themes](#) is led by the [Scottish Higher Education Enhancement Committee \(SHEEC\)](#) and managed by QAA Scotland. Each Theme aims to improve the learning experience of students studying within the Scottish higher education sector. This is achieved by the sector identifying and agreeing to work on specific areas (known as Themes). Within each Theme, institutions, academic staff, support staff and students are encouraged to work together to generate ideas and find innovative ways to enhance the learning experience of students. Each Theme allows the sector to share and learn from current and innovative national and international practice.

Each Theme has student-led projects as a key element of activity. During the current [Resilient Learning Communities](#) Theme, QAA Scotland are working in partnership with sparqs to support this activity and student-led projects have included, '[Promoting the Equity of the Student Learning Experience](#)' and '[Digital Student Communities](#)'.

3. **Institution-led Review** - Institutions in Scotland are responsible for self-evaluation and review of their own academic subjects and professional services. This is known as institution-led review (ILR). Institutions have flexibility to design and manage ILR but they need to meet the expectations of the [UK Quality Code for Higher Education](#) and [guidance published by SFC on quality for higher education institutions](#).

The SFC guidance identifies requirements for ILR including:

- reviewing all subject provision in a maximum of a six-year cycle
- using trained reviewers
- involving students at various stages of the process including as full members of review panels
- involving at least one reviewer from outside the institution
- making use of external reference points when evaluating and reporting on subject provision
- reviewing the contribution of professional services.

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<sup>1</sup> Enhancement is defined as 'taking deliberate steps to bring about improvement'.

#### 4. Public Information

SFC requires all institutions to make information available about the quality of their teaching and learning. It must be clear, accurate and accessible to the public and provide:

- assurances about the quality and standards of provision,
- information to inform student choice, and to assist employers and other stakeholders to clearly understand the nature of the Scottish university sector,
- information which helps current students to understand, engage with and make best use of institutional systems for quality improvement, and
- information about the institution's educational processes which stimulates reflection on academic practice and the sharing of good practice within the institution and more widely.

#### 5. Student Engagement - In Scotland, students are encouraged to take an active role in shaping the quality of their education. This is an important element of the QEF. There are many ways to encourage effective engagement from students, for example:

- every ELIR team includes a student member who is an equal member of the team in all respects including responsibility and pay. This supports the review process and provides an emphasis on the student perspective.
- student representation is expected at every level in institutions.
- students take part in ILRs.
- effective support for student representation is made available through appropriate training, usually provided by the institution. Sector agencies like sparqs also provide support and development for institutions and students.
- information on the student experience is made available through national, institutional and longitudinal student experience surveys.

#### **The new tertiary landscape – 2022 onwards**

Scotland's reputation for excellence in quality is built on students being at the heart of what we do and engaged across the whole range of our quality arrangements, alongside effective external peer review and institutional self-evaluation, both of which combine to provide accountability and enhancement.

In addition, our approach to enhancement and working together as a sector to proactively and collaboratively improve the effectiveness of the student learning experience through work in priority areas, underpins our aims and helps us stay at the forefront of educational development.

Building on previous quality arrangements, key elements of an effective framework for Scotland are likely to include:

- coherence - the design should allow all elements to work together
- an emphasis on enhancement, not only quality assurance
- a student-centred focus on the whole learning experience.

Twenty years after the inception of the QEF, Scottish Government has asked SFC to develop a tertiary approach to quality. This will build on the strengths we currently have in our two frameworks (Scotland's colleges have been reviewed within the '[How Good is Our College](#)' framework) across our 19 Scottish Higher Education Institutions and 27 colleges.

This focus on a tertiary sector follows [SFC's Review of Coherent Provision and Sustainability](#), published in June 20212 with the overarching ambition to make Scotland the best place to be a student at college or university. One of the recommendations was to:

- develop a single quality assurance and enhancement framework for tertiary education, to uphold academic standards, and enhance the learning experience of all students.

Post-16 education has undergone significant change in the design and delivery of provision prompted by changes in public policy, technological advances, the needs of employers, and accelerated by the response to the pandemic. There is also greater focus on online and digital learning, work-related and

work-based learning, and the enhanced use of data and analytics. Students are a far more diverse group, accessing learning in more diverse ways, and with different expectations of their learning experience.

Responses to SFC's consultation found that some aspects of our quality arrangements were held in high regard, both in the UK and internationally (e.g., enhancement and student partnership) and we remain committed to these. Nevertheless, feedback during the review consultation period suggested that improvements could be made and that a tertiary framework could deliver:

- clearer links between our quality arrangements and student outcomes;
- better support for student transitions and more seamless pathways for learners from senior phase and between colleges and universities;
- timelier and better-quality data in key areas to support self-assessment, review, and accountability;
- better alignment and integration of quality processes with the reporting requirements of awarding bodies, skills agencies, PSRBs, etc., to reduce the administrative and reporting burden;
- increased oversight of some aspects of provision for learners that are currently not well covered (e.g., work-based learning, higher-education provision in colleges, micro-credentials, etc.);
- enhanced opportunities to share learning; and
- an improved understanding by students, government and the wider public about our quality assurance processes.

Importantly, the existence of two separate and distinct quality frameworks for post-16 education in Scotland – with the quality of the 20% of higher education provision delivered by colleges reviewed in a different way from provision in the university sector – was seen as confusing and inconsistent by many. And with pathways between college and university that acknowledge prior learning and help support access to higher education for disadvantaged learners becoming a more prominent feature of our education landscape, the development of a single tertiary quality framework was viewed by many as a natural and necessary development.

Also, quality practitioners from both sectors were not as informed about each other's quality arrangements as they could be, despite closer engagement to support learner pathways in recent years.

As a result, the SFC Review outlined the need to:

- ensure that our quality arrangements remain fit-for-purpose in a changed and changing learning environment;
- support the enhancement of student-centred learning within individual institutions and across the sector as a whole;
- ensure better integrated, more streamlined and rational quality arrangements across the college and university sectors to eliminate inconsistencies, avoid duplication, address gaps, and support learner journeys;
- ensure more effective sharing of learning, innovation and best practice across both sectors to support enhancement; and
- support the development of more effective, rational, and timely accountability mechanisms, establishing a clear line of sight between public investment in learning and teaching, and impact and outcomes.

### **Opportunities for innovation in student partnership**

Partnership with students is a fundamental commitment within Scotland's approach to the design and delivery of learning, teaching and the wider student experience in both the college and university sectors. It is a key element of both HGIOC and the QEF. Building on current good practice, we are seeking to refresh and enhance our model of student partnership within our developing tertiary context.

The development of a tertiary approach to quality will seek to assure and enhance the quality of both academic standards and the student learning experience. It is important to understand what an effective student experience looks like to students in 2022 and beyond, necessitating a dialogue with students around learning and teaching and the range of professional services that support it.

As a result, in 2022-23 we are undertaking a project to build on and extend Scotland's approach to student engagement and partnership. Working with students we aim to co-create an approach that is 'fit for purpose' and recognises a changing student demographic and new approaches to teaching and learning and supporting the student learning experience.

There is also a need to understand how best to ensure that there are opportunities for student partnership across our tertiary institutions and that the structures and processes for student representation are effective.

SFC are working with sparqs, Scotland's quality agencies (QAA Scotland and Education Scotland) and sector institutions to:

1. Identify and detail the key elements of an effective **student learning experience** through a series of focus groups and workshops.
2. Build on previous work supporting the sector to explore **partnership** and help identify how partnership approaches can be further built into the structures and processes within quality arrangements at institutional and national levels.

This approach will generate:

- A clearer understanding of students' views on what an effective student learning experience is in 2022, supporting future change.
- Co-creation leading to shared sector understanding of what an effective student learning experience is and how to evaluate provision.
- Shared sector understanding of effective approaches to embedding student partnership within quality arrangements at institutional and national level.

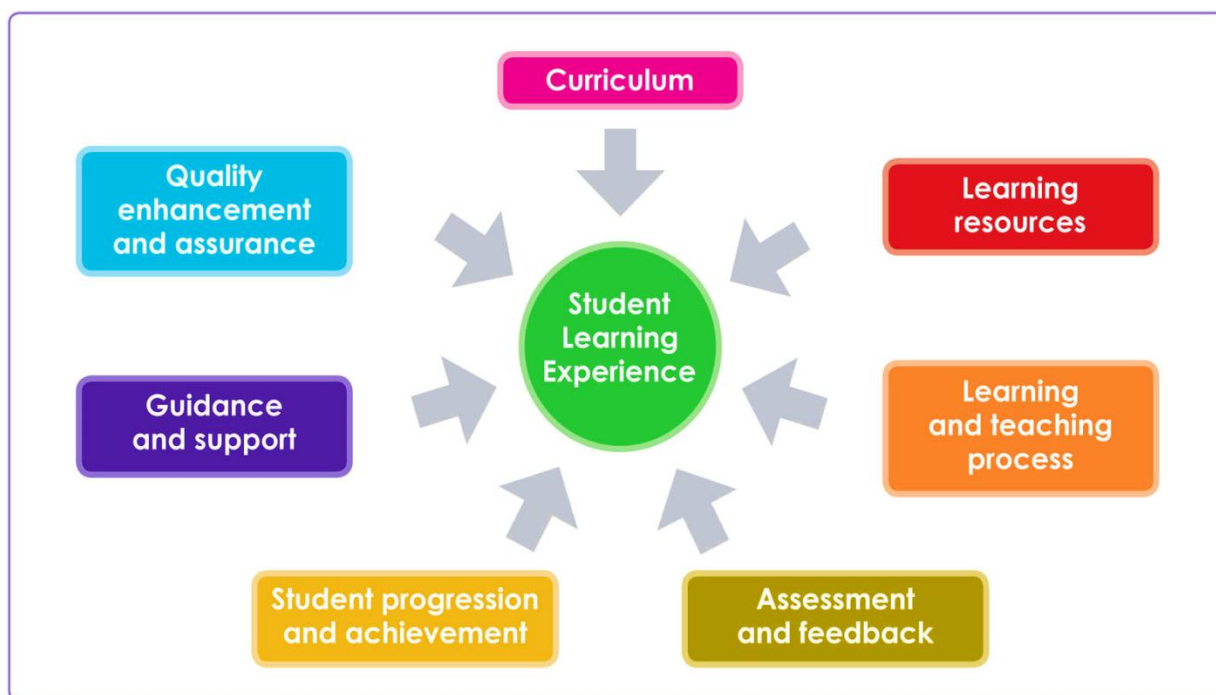
Outputs will be one student learning experience model and one student partnership model with supporting resources.

### ***Student Learning Experience Model***

Work has already begun on the project. In developing the Student Learning Experience (SLE) model, sparqs will build on their existing SLE tool. The existing tool is used widely across colleges and universities and is the foundation of the training that sparqs delivers to student course representatives.

The current SLE tool looks like this:





The tool breaks the SLE into several building blocks and facilitates dialogue with a series of prompt questions, which help students explore their experiences within each building block. The aim of the current project will be to review these building blocks and their accompanying questions to create a shared tertiary sector reference point which is focused on the views and needs of students studying in Scotland and shaped by a range of research and discussion between students and staff.

To develop the tool, sparqs has already undertaken a piece of desk-based research exploring a range of existing sector reference points and research that explore the Student Learning Experience and set out principles for the type of activity that contributes to excellence in the student experience. Reference points used include the UK Quality Code, Our Best Future (Education Scotland), a range of student surveys (including the National Student Survey (NSS), Student Satisfaction and Engagement Survey (SSES) and Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES)) and international reference points including the European Students' Union Student Centred Learning Toolkit and the European Forum for Enhanced Collaboration in Teaching's Ten European Principles for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching.

This desk-based research has suggested the following key areas constitute the major building blocks of the Student Learning Experience:

- Curriculum.
- Learning resources, environment and technologies.
- Learning, teaching and research process/approaches/pedagogy.
- Assessment and feedback.
- Progression and attainment/learner journey/transitions/pathways.
- Academic and pastoral support and guidance.
- Quality enhancement and assurance/monitoring and evaluation.
- Student voice/engagement/partnership.
- Learning/academic/research community.
- Personal and professional skills development.
- Organisation and management.
- Equality, diversity, inclusion and wellbeing.

To complete the project and finalise the model and accompanying resources sparqs will:

- Work with students to identify the principles and approaches to the SLE that matter most and narrow down and refine the building blocks and accompanying resources that make up the tool.
- Establish student and staff writing groups to take this research forward and draft sections of the model.
- Consult widely with the sector on the content and format of the model and propose a SLE model be incorporated into the tertiary quality arrangements.
- Consult on key aspects, such as how the model should address the diversity of the student body, including whether one model can be used for all modes of study.
- Work with institutions to pilot approaches to using the model within quality processes and, subsequently, to develop support materials for institutions and explore how we could draw on outcomes from these approaches at a national level.
- Work with colleagues to explore how the model can be built into staff development activities.

Through establishing a shared reference point for dialogues around the Student Learning Experience across the tertiary sector, we hope to build a body of evidence through which we can explore what matters most to students across their learner journey.

The model can be used to facilitate conversations with students in different modes and levels of study and/or with students from particular demographic groups. This could include students who may face additional barriers to access and success in tertiary education and/or students who are part of cohorts traditionally underrepresented in post-16 education. For example, the model can be used to facilitate discussions with students across an articulation route, sharing information between college and university staff and students reviewing and developing a programme, or to support discussions around school-college partnerships. It can also be used to explore topics such as the provision of work-based learning or supporting mental health and wellbeing.

### ***Student Partnership in Quality Assurance and Enhancement Model***

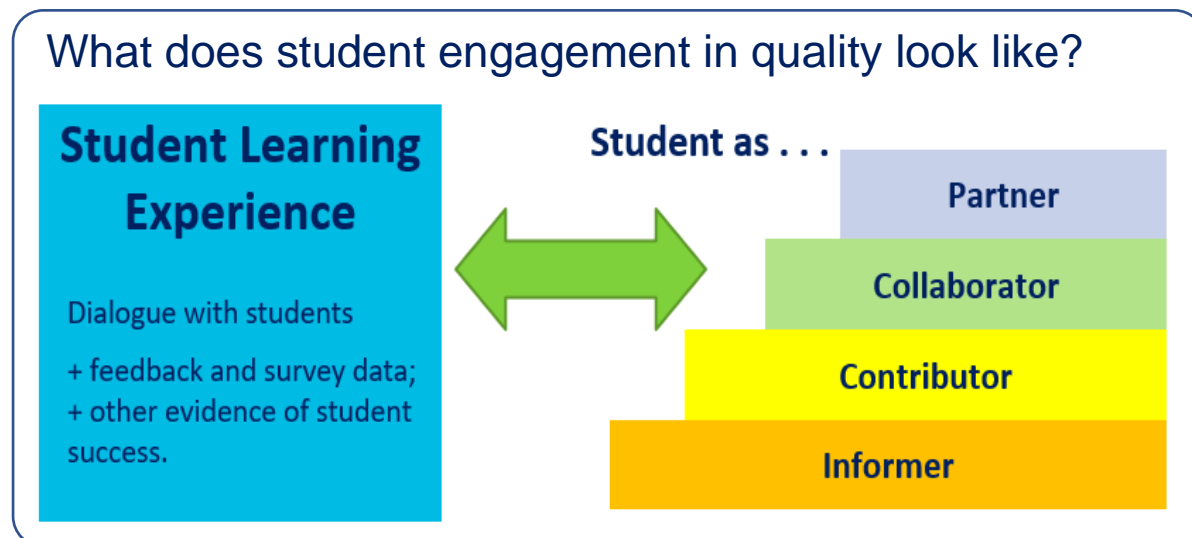
Alongside the SLE model, SFC intends to provide a further model that explores the way in which students play a role as partners specifically in the quality assurance and enhancement arrangements. sparqs will build on their previous work supporting the sector to explore partnership and help identify how partnership approaches can be built into the mechanisms and processes within quality arrangements at institutional and national levels.

The nature of partnership will look different across the Scottish sector. The model intends to promote, support, and explore effective partnership working between students and staff, whilst not defining a single methodology or approach.

sparqs has reviewed several existing models and produced a draft model that could work with the tertiary approach to quality, incorporating the emphasis on understanding the Student Learning Experience through dialogue with students.



## Student Engagement and Partnership in Quality Arrangements (draft)



**Partner:** Students are actively engaged and involved on an equal basis in all aspects of the process, from co-design to implementation.

**Collaborator:** Students are recognised as having a role in shaping processes and can identify areas that they have influenced. They will support the generating and using of evidence and data in development, analysis, and action planning.

**Contributor:** Students are identified as key providers of insight for specific projects and generate clear objectives that shape change.

**Informer:** Students are aware of, and understand, the opportunities that exist to provide feedback and engage in those processes.

The model describes various levels of student engagement in quality processes. Although student engagement will be happening across all levels, the expectation is that more activity will take place at the partner level. It is not hierarchical to be used like a ladder, where you move up from informer to contributor and so on; rather the levels are like building blocks, focusing on the importance of building a partnership approach, but recognising that students will continue to engage at every and all levels, sometimes simultaneously.

To complete the project and finalise the model and accompanying resources, sparqs will:

- Consult widely to develop the model and reach consensus with students and staff around terms, descriptors, etc.
- Work with SFC, the quality agencies and students and staff to apply the model to the different aspects of the quality arrangements as they develop. The intention would be to produce a clear description of what student engagement in each element of the arrangements might look like and ways in which we can strive for a partnership approach.
- Work with SFC to incorporate this shared vision of what student partnership might look like and produce an accompanying Guide to Student Engagement and Partnership within the developing Scottish tertiary quality arrangements.

It is intended that the outcome of the project will be a shared sector reference point for evaluating and measuring the effectiveness of the student learning experience and approaches to student partnership in quality arrangements which will be used within the new tertiary approach to quality to enhance the student learning experience.

### **Discussion questions for the session**

- How can we re-imagine our commitment to student engagement in quality assurance and enhancement 20 years on from the inception of the Quality Enhancement Framework (QEF) in Scotland?
- How can we develop a shared understanding of what partnership means and the benefits of this approach to developing a student-centred approach to enhancing the quality of the student learning experience **and** make further innovations on our partnership working with students?
- What factors do we need to consider in developing a shared sector reference point for evaluating and measuring the effectiveness of the student learning experience and approaches to student partnership in quality arrangements?

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*Please submit your proposal by sending this form, in Word format, by 22 July 2022 to [egaf@eua.eu](mailto:egaf@eua.eu). The file should be named using the last names of the authors, e.g. Smith\_Jones.doc. Please do not send a hard copy or a PDF file.*