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Preface

The publication of this *Handbook* marks an important stage in the development of our new approach to quality in Scottish Higher Education. Over the period of 2001-03, the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council, Universities Scotland, the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, and representatives of the student body have worked closely together on the development of this new approach through our joint Quality Working Group.

The new strategy has five main elements:

- a comprehensive programme of subject reviews, to be run by institutions themselves;
- institution-level review, which is the subject of this *Handbook*, and which will involve all Scottish HE institutions over a four-year cycle;
- improved forms of public information about quality, based on addressing the different needs of a range of stakeholders including students and employers;
- a greater voice for student representatives in institutional quality systems, supported by a new national development service;
- a national programme of enhancement themes, aimed at developing and sharing good practice in learning and teaching in higher education.

We believe that this collaborative approach to quality is unique in many respects - in its balance between quality assurance and enhancement; in the emphasis which it places on the student experience; in its focus on learning and not solely on teaching; and (perhaps most importantly) in the spirit of cooperation and partnership which has underpinned all these developments. We are confident that this new approach places Scotland at the forefront of international good practice in this area.

The new approach will be fully implemented from 2003-04. This will raise a new set of challenges. Not least, we need to ensure that our new approach is perceived by staff and students to be relevant to their needs, and that it supports continuous quality enhancement of learning and teaching in the Scottish HE sector. The *Handbook for enhancement-led institutional review: Scotland* provides strong evidence of our commitment to these objectives, and we commend it to you.

April 2003

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Section 1

Background and context

1 The process of enhancement-led institutional review has been designed by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (the Agency) in collaboration and consultation with Universities Scotland (US) and its member higher education institutions, the student bodies in Scotland, and the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council (SHEFC). It has been designed as an integral element of the new approach to the enhancement of quality and maintenance of standards in Scottish higher education.

2 Over the past decade the higher education sector in Scotland has participated in a range of initiatives in the external assurance of quality and standards. These initiatives have included:

- a complete round of teaching quality assessments at the subject level;
- 75 academic reviews at the subject level;
- a complete round of audits of institutional management of quality;
- 13 second round, continuation audits.

The outcomes of these activities have demonstrated that, in general, Scottish higher education institutions had in place effective quality management systems relating to the experience of students and the standards of their awards, and that the subject provision experienced by students was highly satisfactory or better.

3 Building on these foundations, national and institutional activities in relation to managing quality and standards have been changing to focus more explicitly on the enhancement of the learning experience of students. As part of this process, in 2000-01, SHEFC conducted an extensive consultation on the characteristics of a high quality higher education sector (*HEC07/00*). This debate involved significant contributions from individual higher education institutions as well as from the Universities Scotland Learning & Teaching Committee and the SHEFC Learning and Teaching Committee and student bodies. The debate concluded (*SHEFC HE11/2001*) that the key characteristics of a high quality sector are:

- a sector which is flexible, accessible, and responsive to the needs of learners, the economy and society;
- a sector which encourages and stimulates learners to participate in higher education and to achieve their full potential;
- a sector where learning and teaching promotes the employability of students;
- a sector where learning and teaching is highly regarded and appropriately resourced;
- a sector where there is a culture of continuous enhancement of quality, which is informed by and contributes to international developments.

4 This shared thinking on the key aspects of a high quality sector informed the subsequent debate on the design of the new national strategy in Scotland for the continuing assurance and enhancement of quality and standards in higher education. In this debate, a strong consensus emerged among the student bodies, the higher education institutions, US, SHEFC, and other key stakeholders that:

- institutions in Scotland manifestly take a responsible approach to the maintenance of quality and standards;
- ownership of quality and standards issues rests with the institutions and not with SHEFC or the Agency;
- institutions are committed to the principle of continuous quality enhancement;
- students should have a major involvement in internal and external quality processes;
- students and other stakeholders should have access to relevant public information about the nature and quality of provision.

5 This shared understanding, together with the agreed statement of the key characteristics of a high quality higher education sector, form the foundations on which the new approach has been constructed.

The elements of the new enhancement model

6 The new enhancement model consists of the following five inter-related elements:

- A comprehensive framework of internal review at the subject level within the higher education institutions. The nature of internal reviews will be decided by individual institutions but will share certain agreed features including the use of trained reviewers and also externality within review teams. The SHEFC Guidelines on internal review at the subject level are included in this *Handbook* as Annex 5.
- An agreed set of public information provided by the institutions.
- The effective involvement of students in quality management through a variety of mechanisms including:
 - a the involvement of student members in review teams within the new institutional review process;
 - b the systematic representation of students at all levels within institutions;
 - c the effective training and support for student representatives through both internal mechanisms, existing external structures and through a new national Student Development Service; and,
 - d better information on the student experience through national surveys both of the student experience within institutions and also longitudinal surveys of student and graduate cohorts.
- Quality enhancement engagements. These take the form of a structured programme of engagements each year which will involve the sector in a series of developmental activities on themes selected by the sector. These themes may be drawn from the outcomes of internal and external reviews and the outcomes of these engagements are likely to impact on the reflections of institutions as they consider their own quality enhancement strategies.
- The institutional review process. This is an enhancement-led peer review process which, while providing information on the security of the institution's management of quality and standards, is focused on the institution's strategic management of quality enhancement.

7 It is important to note that all these elements are closely inter-related. For example, the quality enhancement engagements will include areas highlighted through internal reviews at subject level and the institutional review processes. Both review processes will use the enhancement engagements as one set of reference points. The effective involvement of students in the internal management of quality will play an important part in both review processes. The review processes will both contribute to, and underpin the authenticity of the information provided for stakeholders.

The required characteristics of institutional review within the new model

8 In order to meet the agreed requirements of SHEFC, US and the student bodies, the design of the institutional review methodology has embraced a focus on the strategic management of enhancement; a focus on the effectiveness of student learning; the use of a range of reference points including the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF), the Agency's *Code of practice* and subject benchmark information; appropriate reference to employer and international perspectives; the inclusion of a student (or representative of students) within the audit team; and, a published report which includes commentary on:

- the ability of the institution's internal review systems to monitor and maintain quality and standards at the level of the programme or award. This commentary leads to a judgement on the level of confidence which may be placed in the institution's management of quality and standards;
- the institution's arrangements for ensuring that the information it publishes about the quality of its provision is complete, accurate and fair;
- the effectiveness of the institution's approach to promoting an effective learning experience for students;
- the combined effect of the institution's policies and practices for ensuring improvement in the quality of teaching and learning;
- the effectiveness of the institution's implementation of its strategy for quality enhancement.

9 In line with the above requirements, it is important to emphasise five important themes that have underpinned the development of the new approach to review.

Enhancement includes assurance

10 The overarching theme of institutional review is the strategic management of standards and the enhancement of the quality of the student learning experience. Section 2 of this *Handbook* outlines how enhancement is interpreted in the review context. However, it is important to emphasise at the outset that a key element of an effective enhancement strategy involves knowing where one is starting from, ie how does the institution assure itself that standards and quality are being appropriately maintained (see below, paragraph 30). This can then be linked to the related element of the management of enhancement - improving the effectiveness of student learning, seeking to learn from current activities, reference points and good practice, and to make the most effective use of resources to support learning.

Looking forward

11 The focus within the review process will be on how an institution learns from the past in order to inform the future.

Enhancement and risk

12 Enhancement is the result of change which may include innovation. Change and innovation will frequently involve risk. Institutions are required to manage this risk in a way that provides reasonable safeguards for current students. The review process will recognise and support effective risk management and adopt a supportive and not punitive role in this context.

Supporting diversity

13 The review process will support the rich diversity of higher education institutions in Scotland. While there are commonalities of purpose, each higher education institution in Scotland has its own unique mission and will seek to meet the needs of its own particular students in its own particular ways. The enhancement strategies of individual institutions will therefore have their own particular characteristics and the review process will consequently engage with the enhancement of the particular learning experiences of students in the context of the particular institution.

The UK and international context

14 Institutions in Scotland operate and compete in a global environment. The review process will support institutions in this context. Key outcomes from the review process will be directly comparable with outcomes from related processes elsewhere in the UK. Some of the key reference points for quality and standards used by institutions and the review process will be common across the UK. In general, institutional enhancement strategies, the review process and related elements in the overall enhancement model, will draw on good practice, not only across the UK, but internationally. In addition, the review process and its outcomes will be used proactively to promote the high standing of Scottish higher education internationally.

15 In the light of the above factors, the new review process is referred to as enhancement-led institutional review (ELIR).

Section 2

Interpreting the enhancement focus within enhancement-led institutional review

16 For the purposes of ELIR, enhancement is defined as **taking deliberate steps to bring about continuous improvement in the effectiveness of the learning experience of students**. The **deliberate steps** at an institutional level will be strategic and will manage enhancement in a planned way. Enhancement does not necessarily imply the application of additional resources. Enhancement strategies will seek to optimise the deployment of resources in the development of effective student learning. The commonly used phrase, **continuous improvement**, refers to the ongoing nature of enhancement strategies, ie the notion that no matter where one is starting from, it is always possible to seek improvement. In operational terms, the process cannot literally be continuous, but will involve a cycle of planned phases including reflection, planning, implementation and evaluation. The emphasis on **the effectiveness of the student learning experience** reflects one of the important characteristics required of ELIR referred to above (paragraph 8). This is discussed more fully below.

Taking deliberate steps to bring about continuous improvement

17 In order to **take deliberate steps**, an institution (and its constituent departments, faculties, schools etc) will ask itself:

- **Where are we now?** How effective is the current learning experience of our students?
- **Where do we want to be in the future?** What are the patterns and mechanisms of supporting learning which the institution wishes to develop in order to enhance the learning experience of its students?
- **How are we going to get there?** How are we as an institution going strategically to manage the processes of enhancement that will allow us to move towards meeting our aspirations?

18 In addressing these questions the institution will make use of a wide variety of reference points. Some of these reference points, such as the Agency's quality framework, will be common to all institutions while others may be limited to particular institutions or groups of institutions. Some reference points will be largely determined externally (eg professional body guidelines) while others will be internally defined (eg institutional strategic plans). Some reference points will be national while others will be international (eg from international learned societies). It is likely, therefore, that while there will be very significant elements of commonality, the particular combination of reference points used by individual institutions may vary widely. There is also likely to be significant variation in the way reference points are used both within and between institutions.

19 Some of the most common reference points are likely to include:

- base-line reference points that tell the institution about the current learning experience of students - eg outcomes from internal reviews at the subject level; reports from Professional and Statutory Bodies (PSBs); external examiner reports; information from student feedback mechanisms; and, information from employer feedback mechanisms;
- the Agency's quality framework - SCQF; subject benchmark information; and the *Code of practice*;
- guidelines and reports from PSBs;
- experience gained through participation in Scottish quality enhancement engagements (see above, paragraph 6);

- reports and publications from the Learning and Teaching Support Network (LTSN), the Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (ILTHE), and other similar bodies;
- publications and guidelines from learned societies and subject associations - both UK and overseas;
- reports from employers - employment sector specific and general, national and international;
- relevant government and EC publications;
- guidelines, frameworks and legislation for promoting equal opportunities;
- institutional policies and strategies;
- international reports and guidelines on good practice.

20 One of the reference points used by institutions (and its component parts) will be the vision agreed by the sector and other stakeholders in Scotland of the meaning of a high quality higher education sector referred to above (paragraph 3), namely:

- a sector which is flexible, accessible and responsive to the needs of learners, the economy and society;
- a sector which encourages and stimulates learners to participate in higher education and to achieve their full potential;
- a sector where learning and teaching promotes the employability of students;
- a sector where learning and teaching are highly regarded and appropriately resourced;
- a sector where there is a culture of continuous enhancement of quality, which is informed by and contributes to international developments.

Aspects of the learning experience of students

21 The learning experience of students is an extremely broad concept. The focus within ELIR will be on those aspects of the student learning experience for which the institution bears a direct responsibility. It is recognised that there will be significant variation in both the actual and desired learning experiences of students both within and between institutions and between students in different types of programme eg taught and research.

22 The aspects of the student learning experience to which ELIR will relate will normally include the inter-related elements of:

- the curriculum - structure, aims, intended learning outcomes and assessment;
- promoting and supporting effective learning.

23 In relation to the curriculum, enhancement refers to the processes used to sustain and develop the currency of the curriculum outcomes in the light of developments in knowledge and understanding, professional practice, employer and other stakeholder expectations and other appropriate reference points. In addition to subject-related outcomes, this will also relate to more general outcomes expected from higher education related, for example, to employability and life-long learning. Enhancement in this context also refers to the improvements in assessment policy and practice and the alignment of appropriate assessment tools and approaches with learning strategies and intended learning outcomes.

24 In relation to promoting and supporting effective teaching and learning, enhancement embraces all the structures and processes used by an institution to support effective student learning in all the contexts in which learning takes place. This would include, for example, support through lectures, tutorials, research supervision work-based learning, independent

learning, e-learning and distance learning. It would also relate to the role of 'support' services in supporting effective learning. For example, the way in which institutional careers services impact on the effective learning experience of students through influencing curriculum selection and the development of employment related skills. It would also relate to the support of effective learning through counselling and other support services of the institution and to the provision of libraries and information services and the institution's IT infrastructure. In general, supporting effective learning relates to the way in which an institution identifies and addresses the learning support needs of its particular students.

25 A key aspect influencing the learning experience of students is the role played by students themselves. Students are active partners with shared responsibilities for their own learning and achievement. Indeed, one of the defining characteristics of higher education is the extent to which it relies on this active participation in, and student ownership of, the learning process. The ELIR process will wish to engage with how this partnership is defined, managed and reflected on by institutions and their students. It will also wish to engage with how, in general, students both exercise their responsibilities for effective learning as well as how they contribute to the monitoring and enhancement of their learning experience.

Enhancing quality and maintaining standards

26 As discussed above, changes in the curriculum will reflect developments in knowledge, professional practice, and general employer and stakeholder expectations. Within this dynamic context, institutions will maintain the standards of their awards through their processes for defining awards, validating programmes, and assessing learning outcomes achieved. The ELIR process will engage with the effectiveness of these institutional processes for maintaining standards of awards taking account of appropriate reference points.

27 It is important not to confuse the maintenance of standards of awards with the standards of outcomes achieved by students. Improving the student learning experience will, potentially, improve the standards of outcomes achieved by students and result in an increase in the number of students progressing and achieving awards or achieving higher grades of awards.

Enhancement, complexity and risk

28 It follows from the above discussions, that enhancement is a complex process involving significant elements of risk and uncertainty. It is also the case that the strategic management of enhancement in the sense used by ELIR is a relatively new approach for many institutions. The general expectations within ELIR will therefore be of a growing maturity of approach over the first cycle of its operation. Indeed, it is hoped that one of the outcomes of the operation of ELIR will be to support institutions in this new context. It is recognised that both the ELIR process and the development and operation of institutional strategies for enhancement will mature during the cycle. This will be recognised, particularly in the context of institutions involved in the early years of the cycle (see, for example, paragraph 36 below). The Agency therefore recognises the challenge facing institutions involved in reviews early in the first ELIR cycle, and will provide appropriate guidance and support to institutions and briefing to review teams.

29 It is also important in this context to emphasise that enhancement is the result of change, often involving innovation. Some forms of innovation will be relatively straightforward and risk free. However, other forms of innovation are likely to involve some element of risk. Institutions manage this risk in a way that will provide reasonable safeguards for current students. The ELIR process and reporting will recognise and support effective risk management in relation to change and innovation and will adopt a supportive and not punitive role in this context. It is inevitable that some changes will be more successful than others and often more can be learned in the long run from analysing the reasons for less successful outcomes.

Enhancement and the assurance of quality and standards

30 It follows from the above discussions that the base line for enhancement is systematic awareness of the current learning experience of students, the standards of their achievements and the standards of the institution's awards. The outcomes from the institution's internal reviews at the subject level, utilising appropriate sets of reference points, will be fundamentally important in providing the institution with this information. Through ELIR's engagement with the efficacy of these and related processes, it will be able to provide a well-founded view on how effectively the institution assures itself that standards and quality are at least being maintained in line with national expectations. Within the ELIR approach, this base-line assurance represents only the initial phase of engaging with the enhancement processes and will not form the main focus of the ELIR activities or its reporting.

Section 3

The enhancement-led institutional review process

Scope of ELIR

31 The scope of ELIR includes the mechanisms to support all award bearing provision within the institution. An award in this context includes the award of credit. ELIR therefore relates to the learning experience of all students on credit bearing provision: undergraduate and post-graduate students; taught and research students; full-time and part-time students; initial higher education students and those involved in credit-bearing continuing professional development; campus-based, work-based, distance-learning students (including those supported wholly or in part using information technology); students entering HEIs from school, through wider access initiatives from FE colleges and from the work-place; and students who are publicly funded and students who are privately funded.

32 ELIR will include within its processes provision leading to the award of the institution (including credit) but delivered elsewhere, such as through a college of further education or employer organisation. In cases where the delivering institution is itself a Scottish higher education institution, the delivering institution will receive an ELIR review in its own right. Responsibility for the standards of awards offered through such arrangements, however, remains unambiguously with the awarding institution. Where provision is made in conjunction with an overseas partner, ELIR will relate to the arrangements in place in the Scottish institution for managing the quality of the learning experience and standards of the awards. The security of the Scottish institution's arrangements as they operate in the location of the overseas partner will continue to be audited through separate processes. The outcomes from any such overseas audit reports should form useful reference points.

The ELIR Process

33 One of the hallmarks of ELIR is that it is designed to support institutions in reflecting on the past in order to improve the future. The underlying ELIR inquiry is therefore to ask the institution: *'how do you learn from your current and past activities in order to improve the learning experience of your students?'*

In this context the ELIR process will seek to explore with the institution:

- In what ways does the institution seek to understand the quality of the current learning experience of its students?
- What reference points does the institution use to manage its quality enhancement strategy and how does it use these reference points?
- How does the institution ensure that its quality enhancement strategy continues to be informed by experience?

34 In seeking to explore these matters, the ELIR process will seek to:

- be open and transparent;
- support the sector, individual institutions and their staff and students in enhancing effective learning;
- be forward looking;
- relate to the wider model of quality enhancement in Scotland;
- be conducted in a collaborative spirit, avoiding surprises.

35 The ELIR process consists of four integrated elements: an annual discussion with each institution; once in the cycle, the submission of a Reflective Analysis (RA); a review visit following the submission of the RA; and, each year, sector-wide feedback on the learning points from ELIR activity across the sector.

Annual ELIR discussion

36 In order to facilitate the review process, an annual meeting will be held between a member of staff of the Agency and a small group which is likely to comprise senior colleagues of the institution and a representative of the student body. The meeting will provide an important opportunity for the sharing of information between the Agency and the institution. Annual meetings will not result in any judgements or any public reporting. It is anticipated that, particularly in the early years of the cycle, the annual meeting will play an important role in supporting institutions in their engagement with the ELIR process.

37 A particular focus of the annual meetings will be discussion of the institution's approach to internal review at the subject level and what the institution is learning from the outcomes of its internal review in that year. There may be other activities which the institution would wish to share in the context of these annual discussions eg the outcomes of visits by professional or statutory bodies; significant developments in the institution's approach to quality enhancement; the institution's experience of quality enhancement engagements.

38 The recorded outcome of the annual discussion will be an institutional profile which will be agreed each year with the institution. The profile will contain key descriptive information about the institution and its approach to internal review at the subject level together with a summary of outcomes of review activity. There will also be a section of the profile in which the institution can provide any information it wishes in relation to developments in that year. The profile will be updated and agreed each year with the institution. It will not be published by the Agency but will remain confidential to the Agency and the ELIR team appointed to work with the institution. The profile, along with the RA will form the basis for briefing the ELIR team on the institution's approach to internal reviews at the subject level and the use of the outcomes of these, and related processes.

39 The annual discussion should not require the preparation of any additional material by the institution. To support the annual discussion, institutions will be requested to submit each year:

- copies of the reports of internal reviews at the subject level for the previous 12 months (with any sections confidential to the institution removed, for example, where an institution includes financial matters in such reviews and reports). By submitting these reports annually, the institution will not require to re-submit them in association with their ELIR visit;
- a copy of the definitive internal document(s) describing the approach of the institution to review at subject level;
- a copy of any additional existing documents relating to changes in the institution's approach to quality enhancement that the institution would wish to share.

Preparation and submission of a Reflective Analysis

40 The RA will be submitted once in the cycle, in advance of the ELIR visit. The RA will discuss the institution's reflections on its management of quality enhancement through addressing the matters identified in paragraph 33 above and discussed more fully in Section 2. Essentially, the RA will be a reflection by the institution on what processes and reference points it is using to manage enhancement (including the reference points shared by all the institutions in Scotland); what the use of these processes and reference points indicates; and how the institution is using the outcomes from these processes to further enhance the effectiveness of the learning experience of its students. The most important aspect of the RA is the reflection on experience. What has worked well? What has not worked so well? How can we spread good practice? The RA will indicate the sources of evidence on which the institution has based its analysis.

41 The RA will also include an annex including one or more case studies of effective enhancement of learning which the institution views as being of particular significance in illustrating its strategic management of enhancement and which it is willing to share more widely. This will be valuable material for the review team illustrating the operation of the institution's enhancement strategy. The case study will outline the good practice itself (which might be generic or subject-related) together with the ways in which the example illustrates the institution's approach to supporting enhancement. These case studies will inform both discussion during the ELIR visit and, potentially, future Scotland-wide quality enhancement engagements and other activities (see paragraph 51 below).

42 The expectation is that the process of compiling the RA will be inclusive of all appropriate interests within the institution. In particular, institutions will be asked to indicate how student views have been incorporated within the process.

43 Annex 1 provides a suggested outline for the RA.

The ELIR visit and report

44 Aspects of the potential agenda for the ELIR visit are shaped initially during the annual discussion between the Agency and the institution as reflected in the institutional profile (see paragraph 36 above). This is described as influencing the 'potential agenda' because these discussions are held with officers of the Agency and the peer ELIR team must ultimately have the freedom to determine its own agenda.

45 This is followed by a part 1 visit to the institution by the ELIR team, normally lasting two days. The purpose of the part 1 visit is to:

- ensure that the ELIR team has a sound understanding of the institution and its approach to the strategic management of enhancement as laid out in the RA;
- identify the ELIR themes which are of particular interest to the team;
- share with the institution the ELIR themes;
- identify the most appropriate programme of activities for part 2 of the visit;
- identify additional evidence, referred to in the RA, to which the team would wish access.

46 In order to fulfill these purposes, the part 1 visit will normally start with up to a half day of meetings, discussions and/or presentations with agendas and personnel determined by the institution but discussed in advance with the Agency. The objective of this half day will be to facilitate the understanding of the ELIR team as to the nature of the institution and its strategies for managing quality enhancement. This will be followed by a series of meetings to follow agendas developed by the team in the light of the RA and the initial meetings/presentations, normally, over a period of 1.5 days. These meetings will include a meeting with senior staff, a meeting with student representatives, and meeting(s) with a sample of staff and students associated with the institution's internal review activity at the subject level. The part 1 visit will conclude with a meeting between the ELIR team and the senior member of institutional staff responsible for the management of quality to agree the programme and themes for part 2 of the visit.

47 The length of the part 2 visit will vary between three and five days, depending largely on the size and complexity of the institution. The part 2 visit will follow the programme agreed at the conclusion of the part 1 visit. The team will wish to meet with a broad range of staff, students and, potentially, associated employers. The focus of these discussions will be on what the institution in different ways and at different levels is learning through the operation of its enhancement strategy including its use of reference points; how it is maintaining quality and standards; how it understands the effectiveness of the current learning experience of students; how good practice is identified and shared; how less effective practice is identified and improved; how staff are supported in their exploration of new strategies for developing effective learning etc. Discussions will also refer to the ways in which the case study material presented in the RA illustrates the embedding of institutional mechanisms for promoting and supporting effective learning.

48 A letter will be sent to the institution following the conclusion of the part 2 visit which will summarise the provisional key themes of the ELIR teams report.

49 A draft of the report will be sent to the institution for comment within an agreed period of the conclusion of part 2 of the visit. The institution will be asked to provide comment following which the Agency will finalise and publish the final reports (see also Section 4).

50 Annex 2 provides an outline of the main report sections.

Sector-wide feedback and workshops

51 The Agency will conduct an annual analysis of the main themes emerging from the ELIR activities across the sector. This analysis, together with material drawn from the case studies of good practice in the strategic management of enhancement will form the basis of publications, workshops and other activity. Publications associated with these activities may be distributed nationally and internationally. These activities will also integrate with the other enhancement engagements in Scotland.

Section 4

The review report

Purposes and audiences

52 The purposes of review reporting are:

- to promote and support the strategic management of quality enhancement within the individual institution;
- to support the strategic management of quality enhancement within the sector;
- to support the operation of the related elements of the enhancement-led model of quality and assurance within Scotland;
- to provide a formal record of the ELIR process including the presentation of evidence-based commentary and conclusions;
- to provide public information;
- to promote the high international standing of Scottish higher education.

53 The audiences for review reporting include:

- the diverse audiences within the individual institution;
- audiences within the wider higher education sector including US;
- current and future students and student bodies;
- public bodies with an interest in quality management, including SHEFC;
- audiences within the school and further education and training sectors;
- PSBs and learned societies with an interest in quality assurance and enhancement;
- employers.

54 To achieve these purposes for these audiences, a full report will be produced and published. The full report will form the complete, formal and public record of the ELIR process including the evidence-based commentaries and conclusions of the review team. In addition, for the audiences for whom the detail of the full report would be inappropriate, the summary sections of the full review report will be extracted and be available separately. A digest of the learning points raised by individual reports will also be published periodically (see above, paragraph 51).

Reporting requirements and report outline

55 The full report will meet the information requirements identified in paragraph 8 above, namely:

- the ability of the institution's internal review systems to monitor and maintain quality and standards at the level of the programme or award. This commentary leads to a judgement on the level of confidence which may be placed in the institution's management of quality and standards;
- the institution's arrangements for ensuring that the information it publishes about the quality of its provision is complete, accurate and fair;
- the effectiveness of the institution's approach to promoting an effective learning experience for students;
- the combined effect of the institution's policies and practices for ensuring improvement in

the quality of teaching and learning;

- the effectiveness of the institution's implementation of its strategy for quality enhancement.

Conclusions and judgements within the report

56 The full report will focus on the institution's approach to the enhancement of its students' learning experience and achievements using the framework outlined above and expanded in Section 2 (Interpreting the enhancement focus within ELIR). This focus will include commentary on the effectiveness of the institutional arrangements for the assurance of quality and standards. An outline of the proposed main sections of the structure of the full report is provided in Annex 2.

57 Given the principles, purposes and context of ELIR, it would be inappropriate to come to summative judgements in relation to quality enhancement. Rather, the various sections of the report will comment on the evidence drawn from the ELIR process and offer commentary on the operation of the institution's strategy for quality enhancement within the areas identified. There will not be a 'formula' within which the team will express its conclusions either in relation to individual sections or to the overall operation of the institution's strategy for quality enhancement.

58 The one area in which there will be a summative conclusion will be in the area relating to the effectiveness of the institution's systems for maintaining quality and standards at an acceptable level. In order to provide public reassurance, to meet statutory requirements and to provide a key element of UK-wide comparability, the conclusions of the ELIR team in this context will take the form of a judgement expressed in a standard format. The judgement will be preceded by a standard phrase indicating that: the review had been conducted using a process which focused on the institution's approach to the enhancement of its students' learning experience and achievements, and that, within this process, the team had considered the effectiveness of the institutional arrangements for the assurance of quality and standards. The judgement will then follow indicating: the degree of confidence that can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's procedures for the present and likely future management of the quality of its programmes and the academic standards of its awards. It is, however, important to stress that, although this aspect will be reported as a summative conclusion, it will be presented as only one aspect of the report alongside all other aspects of enhancement, and it will not be headlined or presented as the summation of the whole report. There will be no impression given, either in terms of the words used or in the position of this aspect within the report, that this element has been set apart from other aspects of enhancement. The focus of the overall report will be very clearly on the management of enhancement in all its aspects.

59 Teams will be asked to express their level of confidence in one of three standard forms: **broad confidence**; **limited confidence**; or, **no confidence**. The statement of confidence is, in essence, a judgement of probability: it cannot be unconditional. In general terms, where the ELIR team judges that the institution is managing quality and standards soundly and effectively and that its future capacity for maintaining quality and standards appears good, broad confidence will be expressed. Where the team has doubts, about either the current assurance of quality and standards, or about the institution's capacity to maintain quality and standards in the future, it will express limited confidence. Very occasionally, a team may make a judgement of no confidence. The team will be required to indicate clearly the areas of concern that have given rise to any limitation of confidence and the reasons for its judgement. It is important to remember that the entire new model of quality assurance in Scotland is predicated on the agreed set of assumptions highlighted above (paragraph 4). These assumptions include the recognition that 'Scottish institutions manifestly take a responsible approach to the maintenance of quality and standards'. There is therefore an initial

expectation that ELIR teams will be able to express broad confidence in most cases and the main focus of activities and reporting will be focused on the wider aspects of quality enhancement discussed in Section 2 of this *Handbook*.

60 The wording of the judgement relates to the institution's management of both standards and quality, and to confidence in the capacity of the institutional arrangements to manage quality and standards both currently and in the future. While the level of confidence of the ELIR team may be the same in each of these aspects, it is possible in some circumstances that the team may wish to express different levels of confidence in different aspects. Teams will have the freedom to differentiate their judgement in these respects.

61 The full ELIR report will comment on the effectiveness of institutional arrangements 'to ensure that information published by the institution about the quality of its provision is complete, accurate and fair'. The analysis and commentary on this important aspect of managing enhancement will flow naturally from the ELIR processes and will be provided in the text of the ELIR report, summarised, along with the other main aspects, in the report conclusions.

Providing summary points for reflection

62 At appropriate places throughout the full report, the ELIR team will provide summaries and commentaries. These will be gathered together in the final section of the report (and also published separately in the report summary). Given the nature of enhancement and the focus and principles of ELIR, the concept of recommendations is not particularly appropriate, and thus the reports will conclude with a 'summary of matters raised in the review'. These matters will not be prioritised. The text itself will indicate the significance of particular matters. Where matters are raised that, in the view of the team, threaten to undermine the effective operation of the institution's maintenance of quality and standards, these will be indicated in the context of the judgement. If the team concludes that it has limited or no confidence, it will be required to state clearly and explicitly the factors that have led to this particular conclusion. Where the team concludes that it has broad confidence, it would be open to the team to identify in the text matters that nonetheless, in its view, had made the decision marginal (However...). In this way, full public information will still be provided, but in a form less susceptible to misrepresentation than reporting styles used in previous quality assurance exercises.

Follow-up to the ELIR report

63 In general, there will be two elements to following up the ELIR report. At the annual discussions following the publication of the ELIR report, the reaction and follow-up activity within the institution will be discussed ie the ELIR report will become one of the reference points discussed. For the annual meeting following the first anniversary of the publication of the report, the institution will be asked to provide the Agency with a written response to the report which will become part of the agreed profile.

64 SHEFC will receive a copy of the full published report. As a matter of course, SHEFC may wish to provide a commentary to institutions following receipt of reports. Where the judgement on the maintenance of quality and standards provides less than broad confidence, SHEFC may wish to request institutions to undertake follow-up action in specified areas.

Comparability in reporting across the UK

65 In addition to the added value of the ELIR approach, comparability of reporting on base-line quality and standards across the UK is provided through:

- the use of key UK-wide reference points both by the institutions and the ELIR process (including the *Code of practice*, the subject benchmark information, and the aligned qualifications frameworks);
- the use of ELIR teams that include members from across the UK (see below, section 5);
- the provision of overlapping public information sets across the UK provided through audited institutional mechanisms.

66 It is important to note also that the ELIR approach will draw on international comparability both through encouraging and supporting the use of international reference points within the institutions and disseminating internationally outcomes from the ELIR process and the related enhancement engagements.

Section 5

The team

ELIR Teams

67 ELIR teams comprise five individuals: one student reviewer (or reviewer representing student interests), three reviewers who are not students, and one review secretary. Throughout the review process, ELIR teams will act together and decisions relating to the commentaries and conclusions within the resulting ELIR reports will be taken collectively by the reviewers. There will be no lead reviewer for the purposes of the ELIR process, although team members will, in rotation, chair the discussions during the ELIR visit. The chairing role is to facilitate the discussions and does not imply any individual team member taking a leading role in the dialogue.

68 All reviewers will have responsibility for: reading and analysing the RA and any other documentation prepared by institutions; participating in the visits to institutions in order to discuss, explore and test the views of the staff and students; and to reach conclusions on the basis of the dialogue with the institutions and the documentation provided. All reviewers will also have responsibility for contributing to and commenting on the compilation of the review report.

69 The student reviewers will have particular, although not exclusive, responsibility for pursuing lines of enquiry relating to the student experience and the effectiveness of student involvement in institutional processes for the strategic management of quality enhancement.

70 Review secretaries will have responsibility for: ensuring that the reviewers have access to adequate documentation during the review visit; taking notes of the meetings held with staff and students; facilitating the team's identification and re-evaluation of the key themes to be pursued during the review; and commenting on the compilation of the review report.

71 Each review will be co-ordinated by an assistant director of the Agency. In the period preceding the review visit, the assistant director will provide advice to the institution on its preparations for the review, and will work with the ELIR team on the initial analysis of documentation. The assistant director will accompany the team during part 1 of the review visit and for some of part 2 of the review visit, providing advice as appropriate. It is the responsibility of the assistant director to test that the team's commentaries are supported by adequate and identifiable evidence, and to edit the draft reports of the reviewers to ensure that the ELIR reports provide information in an appropriate, succinct and readily accessible form.

Selection criteria for reviewers and review secretaries

72 All members of ELIR teams, reviewers and secretaries, will be selected by officers of the Agency according to the criteria identified in Annex 3 and having regard to the timetable for reviews in Scotland.

73 Student reviewers will be recruited annually with the recruitment being targeted towards the reviews scheduled in each academic year. Student reviewers will be eligible to undertake reviews for as long as they continue to meet the selection criteria, in particular provided it is not more than three years since they had experience of study in a Scottish higher education institution.

74 Reviewers other than students will be recruited on an ongoing basis. Individuals who are existing auditors with the Agency will be eligible and can apply using a streamlined process. Institutions across the UK will be invited to nominate reviewers. Scottish institutions will be encouraged to each nominate at least one candidate.

75 Scottish institutions will be encouraged to nominate at least one candidate each to fill the role of review secretaries. Applications from outside Scotland will also be invited. Existing review secretaries will be eligible to apply using a streamlined process.

Induction and training of ELIR teams

76 All members of ELIR teams, including those trained in other Agency methodologies, will be required to have undertaken induction and training in the ELIR approach and methodology. In addition to initial induction and training, all potential members of ELIR teams will be expected to participate in annual continuing development and information seminars. In general, all induction, training and continuing development/information events will involve reviewers (including student reviewers) together with review secretaries. Where appropriate, particular programmes will involve branching to deal with particular aspects of the specific roles.

77 Induction and training in the ELIR method will be provided to new members selected to review teams each year. This is to enhance effectiveness by minimising the gap between training and reviews taking place. Review secretaries and reviewers other than students will undergo a two-day training programme. Student reviewers will undergo a three-day training programme, with the first day immediately preceding the two-day programme for other review team members in order that all members may then attend training together.

78 The training will be designed and managed by the Agency but aspects of the programme may be delivered by external trainers. Training will include elements related to the philosophy and methodology of ELIR which will be delivered by the Agency. Some aspects of the related skills-based activities may be delivered by external trainers managed by the Agency. Where appropriate, the external trainers will include individuals drawn from the sector in Scotland.

Continuing development and information sessions

79 In order to share experience of the ELIR method with a wider cohort and to maintain the knowledge of experienced reviewers, a wider group of individuals will be invited to participate in annual information sessions. This wider group will include all reviewers (including student reviewers) and those review secretaries who have been active in reviews together with those allocated to teams for the following year. The Agency will seek also to include a broader involvement of the sector in annual information sessions.

Section 6

Monitoring, reflective overview and evaluation

Purpose and principles of monitoring and evaluation

80 The Agency will monitor, on an ongoing basis, the operation of ELIR, conduct a reflective overview of the effectiveness of ELIR in meeting its objectives, and also contribute to the broader evaluation of the effectiveness of the enhancement-led approach to quality assurance in Scotland. The overall purpose of monitoring and evaluation is four-fold:

- to assist the Agency in effectively executing its role in delivering the agreed methodology of ELIR;
- to support the Agency in delivering the objectives of ELIR;
- to inform the development of the ELIR method into the next cycle of review;
- to inform the development of the overall enhancement-led approach to quality assurance.

81 The underlying requirements of monitoring, review and evaluation are that the processes should:

- be regular and timely;
- support the credibility of the method;
- support ongoing improvement of the Agency's performance;
- ensure participants can provide structured feedback;
- support the ongoing training and continuing development of those involved in the review process;
- encourage active reflection and dialogue on the design and improvement of the ELIR approach.

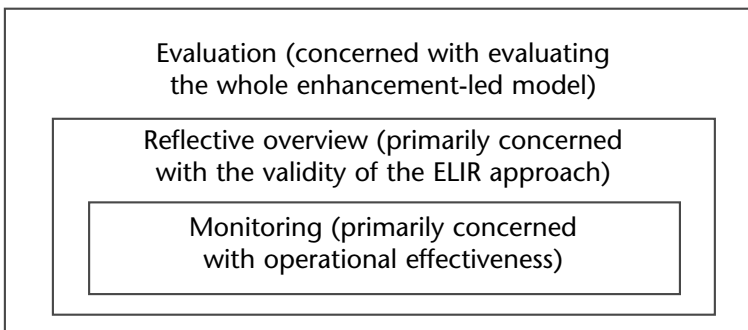
A framework for monitoring, reflective overview and evaluation

82 The framework for monitoring, reflective overview and evaluation relates to all the aspects of ELIR. The major roles for the Agency will be in relation to the monitoring and reflective overview of ELIR, although it will also collaborate with SHEFC and US in the wider evaluation process.

83 The monitoring process will be the most narrowly focused of the elements, being primarily (although not exclusively) concerned with the operational effectiveness of ELIR. Through effective monitoring, the Agency will seek to ensure that the method of review is being carried out in accordance with this *Handbook* and associated protocols.

84 The reflective overview will be built up over the four year cycle with an initial report being produced in year 3. The reflective overview will consider the effectiveness of ELIR in meeting its objectives.

85 The evaluation is the broadest of the three elements and encompasses the ongoing process of external evaluation of all aspects of the enhancement-led approach to quality assurance being undertaken by SHEFC.



Monitoring

86 Monitoring activities will encompass all stages of the review process:

- annual discussion;
- ongoing Agency support for the review;
- preparation of the RA;
- parts 1 and 2 of the visit;
- notifications of outcomes and reporting arrangements.

87 Inputs to the monitoring process will be sought from all those engaging in ELIR: the institution, reviewers (including the student reviewer), and the assistant director responsible for managing the review. Inputs into the monitoring process will be both formal and informal.

88 Formal feedback will be sought in two ways:

- Through monitoring questionnaires which all participants in ELIR will be asked to complete (HEI, reviewers, assistant director). The questionnaires will seek comment on both operational aspects of the review and broader questions relating to the 'value' of the method. The latter will allow ongoing accumulation of information/evidence to inform the wider process of 'reflective overview'.
- Through use of 'monitoring events'. When a number of reviews have been completed and the questionnaires and other input relating to these reviews have been analysed, monitoring events will be held with a sample of reviewers and representatives from institutions. The purpose of the monitoring events will be to encourage reflection on the outcomes of both formal and informal feedback on both the operational aspects of ELIR, and the extent to which review is meeting its objectives.

89 Informal feedback will also be encouraged. The assistant director responsible for a review will be the main focus for communication of feedback from institutions and reviewers and will also have their own observations to contribute. Informal feedback will also continue to be sought from groups with which the Agency liaises, including the US Quality Forum and QAA Scotland's Student Forum.

90 The Agency will also include an element of 'external' observation of the process in action in the first year of ELIR operations, in order to provide a further and more 'independent' element of feedback. The Agency will invite the Independent Observer (IO) to sample all

elements of the process across the reviews operating in year one, and the IO will report to the Agency. The outcomes of the IO's observations will be made available to the sector and SHEFC along with the outcomes of the Agency's own monitoring processes.

91 The outcomes of monitoring will be disseminated through a number of fora and in varying levels of detail. These will include Agency groups, US, SHEFC, and student representative bodies.

92 The findings from monitoring will help to inform the ongoing training and development of ELIR teams, to ensure that they are effectively prepared and supported in the execution of their roles.

Reflective overview of ELIR

93 Reflective overview is concerned with evaluating the effectiveness of the method in achieving its objectives. Thus, the overall purpose of reflective overview is to 'stand back' and take stock of the effectiveness of the ELIR method. This will pose macro questions such as: Does ELIR meet its objectives? What aspects of the method work well? What aspects of the method need to be improved? and How could aspects of the review be improved?

94 It is anticipated that the reflective overview process would build up during the first cycle of review, thus informing the planning of the future arrangements, and the refinement of the ELIR process. To fit in with SHEFC's wider timetable, the main drawing together of the reflective overview will take place during 2005-06.

95 The methodology underpinning the reflective overview of ELIR will be designed to fit into the independent evaluation of the enhancement-led model, and will be informed by the expectations of that broader evaluation.

96 In conducting the reflective overview the Agency will involve fully the sector, the student community and other stakeholders in different fora, to actively participate in this process. A number of consultation events, specifically to focus on reflective overview, will be organised by the Agency.

Evaluation of the whole enhancement-led model

97 SHEFC will commission an ongoing process of external evaluation of the enhancement-led quality assurance model, to begin by the start of academic year 2003-04 and to run through the first cycle of review (ie until 2007). The intention is to identify some key indicators of the success of the approach, against which to periodically evaluate progress. This process of external evaluation will be designed to assist SHEFC, the Agency and the sector in further developing the approach to meet its overall objectives. The Agency's reflective overview will be designed to inter-relate with this evaluation.

Complaints and representations

98 The procedures for making complaints on any aspect of operation of the ELIR process, or representations in respect of reported judgements, are available on the Agency's web site.

Annex 1: Suggested outline for a reflective analysis

1 Introduction

- Background information about the institution, including identification of scope of provision.
- Statement of the institution's strategy for quality enhancement.

2 Internal monitoring and review of quality and standards and public information

Outline of:

- the institution's internal arrangements for assuring the quality of programmes and maintaining the standards of its academic awards and credit;
- the use made by the institution of external reference points for assuring quality and standards including: the academic infrastructure (including reports of the SCQF in particular), external examiners and PSBs;
- the institution's approach to ensuring that the information it publishes about the quality of its provision is complete, accurate and fair.

The institution's view of:

- the ability of its internal review systems to monitor and maintain quality and standards at the level of the programme or award - highlighting strengths, limitations and plans for further development;
- its arrangements for ensuring that the information it publishes about the quality of its provision is complete, accurate and fair.

3 The student experience

Outline of:

- the institution's approach to engaging students in the assurance and enhancement of the quality of teaching and learning;
- the institution's approach to the promotion of effective student learning, and to providing an appropriate learning experience for all its students;
- the institution's approach to the promotion of employability of its students.

The institution's view of:

- the effectiveness of its approach to promoting an effective learning experience for students - highlighting strengths, limitations and plans for further development.

4 Effectiveness of the institution's strategy for quality enhancement

Outline of:

- the institution's approach to managing improvement in the quality of teaching and learning;
- the linkage between the institution's arrangements for internal quality assurance and its enhancement activity;
- the institution's approach to recognising, rewarding and implementing good practice in the context of its strategy for quality enhancement.

The institution's view of:

- the combined effect of its policies and practices for ensuring improvement in the quality of teaching and learning - highlighting strengths, limitations and plans for further development;
- the effectiveness of the implementation of its strategy for quality enhancement.

5 Appendices

The appendices to the Reflective Analysis will include:

- case studies;
- list of evidence referred to in the body of the RA.

Annex 2: Suggested outline for the full report

1 Introduction

- Standard statement about the purpose and conduct of the ELIR process, including the scope of the review.
- Background information about the institution.
- Statement of the institution's strategy for quality enhancement.

2 Internal monitoring and review of quality and standards and public information

Overview of:

- the institution's internal arrangements for assuring the quality of programmes and maintaining the standards of its academic awards and credit;
- the use made of external reference points for assuring quality and standards including: the academic infrastructure (including reports of SCQF in particular), external examiners and PSBs;
- the institution's approach to ensuring that the information it publishes about the quality of its provision is complete, accurate and fair.

Commentary on:

- the ability of the institution's internal review systems to monitor and maintain quality and standards at the level of the programme or award;
- the institution's arrangements for ensuring that the information it publishes about the quality of its provision is complete, accurate and fair.

3 The student experience

Overview of:

- the institution's approach to engaging students in the assurance and enhancement of the quality of teaching and learning;
- the institution's approach to the promotion of effective student learning, and to providing an appropriate learning experience for all its students;
- the institution's approach to the promotion of the employability of its students.

Commentary on:

- the effectiveness of the institution's approach to promoting an effective learning experience for students.

4 Effectiveness of the institution's strategy for quality enhancement

Overview of:

- the institution's approach to managing improvement in the quality of teaching and learning;
- the linkage between the institution's arrangements for internal quality assurance and its enhancement activity;
- the institution's approach to recognising, rewarding and implementing good practice in the context of its strategy for quality enhancement.

Commentary on:

- the combined effect of the institution's policies and practices for ensuring improvement in the quality of teaching and learning;
- the effectiveness of the institution's implementation of its strategy for quality enhancement.

5 Summary

- Overview of the matters raised in the review.
- Commentaries on:
 - i the ability of the institution's internal review systems to monitor and maintain quality and standards at the level of the programme or award. This commentary leads to a judgement on the level of confidence which may be placed in the institution's management of quality and standards;
 - ii the institution's arrangements for ensuring that the information it publishes about the quality of its provision is complete, accurate and fair;
 - iii the effectiveness of the institution's approach to promoting an effective learning experience for students;
 - iv the combined effect of the institution's policies and practices for ensuring improvement in the quality of teaching and learning;
 - v the effectiveness of the institution's implementation of its strategy for quality enhancement.

Annex 3: Criteria for the selection of reviewers and secretaries

General

1 Reviewers, including student reviewers, and review secretaries will be selected by the Agency on the basis of the criteria set out below, and, with the exception of student reviewers, generally from nominations made by institutions. Student reviewers will be nominated by student representative bodies. All reviewers and secretaries will be provided with induction and training to ensure that they are familiar with the aims, objectives and procedures of the ELIR process and their own roles within it.

2 The qualities required in reviewers and review secretaries are outlined below. Student reviewers require to have current or recent direct experience of a Scottish higher education institution. Other reviewers and review secretaries will be drawn from across the UK. Every attempt will be made to ensure that the cohorts of reviewers and review secretaries reflect appropriate sectoral, geographical, gender and ethnic balances.

3 Neither reviewers nor review secretaries will be appointed to teams reviewing their own institutions, or any other institution with which they have a conflict of interest.

4 Training for reviewers and review secretaries is provided by the Agency. The purpose of the training is to ensure that all:

- understand the aims and objectives of the ELIR process;
- are fully familiar with the procedures involved;
- understand their own roles and tasks, the importance of team coherence, the Agency's expectations of them, and the rules of conduct governing the process;
- have an opportunity to explore and practise the techniques of data assimilation and analysis, the development of programmes for visits, the construction and testing of hypothesis, the formation of commentaries, conclusions and judgements and statements of confidence, and the preparation of reports.

Qualities required in all reviewers

5 All reviewers will be able to demonstrate the ability to:

- understand a range of perspectives, to relate to a range of individuals including students and senior managers, and to hold discussions at a high level about strategic and operational approaches to the management of quality and standards in general and the enhancement of the student learning experience in particular;
- assimilate a large amount of disparate information; to analyse and draw reliable conclusions about complex arrangements; and to undertake research and investigation into documentary and oral information in order to arrive at discursive conclusions and to form evidence-based commentaries, conclusions and judgements;
- communicate clearly, orally and in writing;
- work productively and co-operatively in small teams delivering to tight deadlines;
- maintain the confidentiality of sensitive matters.

Additional qualities required in reviewers other than students

- 6 All reviewers, other than students, will be able, in addition, to demonstrate:
- current or recent (within three years), wide experience of academic management, quality assurance and enhancement at the institutional level in the UK;
 - personal and professional credibility with staff including senior managers and heads of institutions in the higher education sector;
 - knowledge and understanding of the Agency's standards infrastructure, including the *Code of practice*, SCQF, and the subject benchmark information;
 - awareness of the distinctive features of the Scottish HE system in general and the enhancement-led approach of SHEFC in particular, including the SHEFC and US vision for the sector in Scotland. It should be noted that the training will build on this.

In addition to the qualities outlined above, the Agency will be interested in reviewers identifying other relevant experience that they may have, for example: experience of good practice in quality assurance and enhancement in an international setting or experience of institutional mechanisms to manage employer and industrial links.

Additional qualities required in student reviewers

- 7 All student reviewers will be able, in addition, to demonstrate:
- current or recent (within three years), experience within a higher education institution in Scotland amounting to a minimum of one year's full time study (or its equivalent). The Agency is keen to receive applications from students representing the broad spectrum of higher education students in Scotland, including: part-time students; those who have not entered higher education institutions direct from school; as well as those studying in 'traditional' full-time mode;
 - experience of representing students' interests at institutional (including faculty or school) level;
 - general awareness of the diversity of the Scottish higher education sector, beyond their 'home' institution and awareness of the arrangements for quality assurance and enhancement in Scotland. It should be noted that the training will build on this and, in the first instance, the Agency is primarily looking for applicants who have the ability to build on experience they already have (which may have been gained from a variety of sources) and to assimilate new information that will be provided during induction and training.

In addition to the qualities outlined above, the Agency will be interested in student reviewers identifying their other relevant experience.

Qualities required in review secretaries

- 8 Review secretaries will be able to demonstrate:
- current or recent (within three years) experience of senior academic administration at institutional (including faculty or school) level in UK higher education;
 - wide experience of working with senior committees in UK higher education;

- awareness of the distinctive features of the Scottish HE system in general and the enhancement-led approach of SHEFC in particular, including the SHEFC and US vision for the sector in Scotland. It should be noted that the training will build on this;
- ability to assimilate a large amount of disparate information, and to analyse and make reliable judgements about complex arrangements;
- ability to keep a reliable record of discussions; to summarise the key outcomes; and to draft notes in a specified format to set deadlines;
- ability to work productively and co-operatively in small teams delivering to tight deadlines;
- ability to maintain the confidentiality of sensitive matters.

Annex 4: The Agency's operational principles and process standards (applies across the UK)

1 The Agency's approach to undertaking institutional reviews draws upon the practices and process standards developed and enhanced by its predecessor bodies. Since those bodies began their work, good practice in reviewing (guided by published standards of reviewing/auditing practice) and requirements relating to accountability and reporting, have developed considerably. The Agency recognises that some of the process standards it has observed in the past have been implicit rather than explicit, and that the ELIR process should be underpinned by a more explicit statement on operational principles and process standards.

2 In developing its operational principles and process standards, the Agency has taken note of the principles underpinning the AA1000 series accountability standard and the Seven Principles of Public Life developed by the Nolan Committee.

Principles

3 The Agency seeks to observe and promote several general principles within both the strategic and operational levels of its work. The principles are:

- **Inclusiveness** - taking into account the needs of all stakeholder groups and facilitating their participation in aspects of the Agency's work.
- **Openness** - transparency in the work and methods of the Agency, to build trust and confidence among stakeholders, and to provide information about the Agency's work to the wider public.
- **Accountability** - demonstrating that the Agency is using its resources to good effect and with probity; conducting its work with integrity and impartiality; and ensuring that stakeholders are able to depend on the information provided.
- **Timeliness** - the need for regular, systematic and timely action in all reporting processes to support the decision-making of the Agency and its stakeholders.
- **Comparability** - using experience drawn from within the Agency and other organisations as a means with which to inform future work.
- **Relevance** - ensuring that the information provided by the Agency is useful to, and understood by, all stakeholders.

4 These principles have been used to develop explicit service standards for ELIR, the details of which will be published on the Agency's web site.

Quality assurance mechanisms

5 The Agency is committed to the regular monitoring and evaluation of its policies, procedures and processes, to ensure their ongoing credibility and to continuously improve its performance in response to the results. In respect of institutional audit, this commitment includes providing the opportunity for participants in the process, including students, to provide structured feedback on their experiences.

Annex 5: SHEFC Guidance to institutions on the characteristics of internal (subject) review

Introduction

The aim of this document is to provide guidance to institutions on the process of internal review, in order to ensure that:

- internal review is consistent with the principles described in SHEFC's consultation document on quality;
- there is clarity throughout the sector on institutions' scope for flexibility in the design and operation of internal review; and
- institutional audit can engage fully and consistently with the evidence generated by internal reviews, with no clash of expectations over the nature of internal review processes.

This document has been considered and agreed by the members of SHEFC's Quality Working Group.

Internal review is a key component of SHEFC's new enhancement-led approach to quality, which has been derived in partnership with the sector, the QAA Scottish Office, and the student body in Scotland. This guidance should be interpreted within the broader context of this new approach and the full range of activities which it encompasses.

Characteristics of internal review

In its consultation HEC 02/2002, issued on 28 February 2002, the SHEFC identified a range of characteristics of effective internal reviews. We believe it may be helpful to expand on these characteristics.

All provision should be reviewed on a cycle of not more than 6 years

It is a matter for each institution to decide how to schedule and aggregate its provision. However, good practice would be to ensure that programmes and subjects are aggregated in ways which provide coherence (eg reviewing all programmes in a subject at the same time; reviewing all programmes within a department at the same time). Excessive aggregation would mean that the process cannot examine the 'fine structure' of provision and may not be able to identify specific issues affecting a small number of programmes; large groupings may also become unwieldy if they involve too many members of staff. We suggest that the typical level of aggregation should be at department level.

Although the primary focus of internal review is likely to be on undergraduate degree programmes, we expect institutions to include within the review programme all taught provision in the subject area(s) being reviewed, including postgraduate awards, CPD, collaborative and overseas provision, supervision of research students, online and distance learning and provision (such as extra-mural courses) which provide only small amounts of credit. It will be a matter for institutions to decide how to aggregate such provision (eg by subject, mode of delivery, or level).

The timescale of six years was intended to provide continuity with the schedule which had been set in 1999. However, institutions may now wish to take advantage of the greater flexibility now available for aggregation and this may lead to a truncation of the cycle length. It would not be good practice to compress reviews into (say) a period of three years, followed by three further years of inactivity. We expect that internal review will inevitably identify a range of

developmental issues and there is benefit to the institution from generating such insights on an ongoing basis. We therefore propose that, however the timetable is constructed, there should normally be some form of internal review activity taking place within each academic session.

Reviews should take full account of benchmarks and the code of practice

Benchmark statements provide a useful guide to national expectations about the characteristics of programmes in different subjects. We accept that benchmarks are less helpful in considering curricula and learning outcomes in interdisciplinary programmes and in modular structures which offer wide choice between options. Internal review processes should be designed in such a way as to establish that providers have engaged with relevant benchmarks and are able to demonstrate that programme design and learning outcomes are consistent with relevant benchmarks.

The QAA *Code of practice* contains a section on programme approval, monitoring and review. Institutional auditors will look for evidence that this *Code* has been embedded in institutional systems. More generally, the *Code* contains helpful guidance on a wide range of institutional functions, and internal review processes should be designed in such a way as to effectively monitor the implementation of the *Code* at the programme or subject level.

Significant amounts of provision in Scottish HEIs is accredited by professional and statutory bodies (PSBs). We would encourage institutions to engage with PSBs to explore appropriate ways in which the burden of audit might be further reduced, for example through the use of common documentation, or through joint processes which meet the needs of both internal review and external accreditation. We would also look to institutions to reflect on the outcomes of relevant PSB accreditations within internal reviews.

At a wider level, we would encourage institutions to take full advantage of activities (such as SHEFC's new quality enhancement engagements) which provide opportunities for reflection on their performance and how it might be usefully compared with that of others.

Reviews should take full account of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework

The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) has been identified as a key strategic element in Scotland's education system, and the HE sector has been highly influential in its development. We look to institutions to actively engage with SCQF. SHEFC has stated its intention to move to a credit-based measurement system, with a view to later consideration of credit-based funding.

Internal review should be designed in order to promote scrutiny and discussion of the provider's approach to SCQF, with an expectation that providers will have adopted a proactive approach aimed at exploiting the flexibility which SCQF provides. This should include consideration of:

- strategy for recognition of prior learning, eg through articulation arrangements with FE providers and/or general statements about criteria for entry with advanced standing;
- consistency in the allocation of credit and level;
- approach to credit-rating of non-standard learning components, eg work placement; and
- flexible pathways to awards.

Reviews should provide an objective review of provision based on an understanding of national and international good practice: each review team should include at least one external member with a relevant background

It will be a matter for institutions to determine the composition of review teams and hence to select appropriate external member(s). Institutions will wish to select members who are able to appreciate the specific context in which programmes are presented. However, good practice would be to ensure that review teams are able to bring a range of experience to the process and hence are able to act as 'critical friends' to the institution. Team size and composition must also take account of the range and volume of provision to be reviewed. We suggest that institutions should consider more extensive use of external members, eg one from another Scottish institution and at least one from outside Scotland.

We do not expect internal review teams to routinely include members from outside the UK (although, where this can be achieved, it may be valuable). However, review processes should be designed to include some element of reflection on international good practice, such as a reflective statement from the provider on how their provision compares with similar practice in some other countries. Institutions may wish to consider how they can support such informal 'benchmarking' at a central level.

Internal processes should take full account of student feedback, and include procedures to obtain student views of the provision being reviewed

We expect all institutions to have ongoing processes of obtaining student feedback; SHEFC is actively considering ways in which it can support institutions to develop good practice in this area. Institutional processes for student feedback will be explicitly considered as part of institutional audit. Internal review should be designed in order to explore the ways in which providers have generated, considered and acted on feedback from their students in the design and operation of their programmes and the organisation of students' learning environment. We also propose, as a separate measure, that each internal review process should gather additional specific information from students as part of the evidence base for reviews. An appropriate methodology would be one which:

- generated holistic evidence about student views of provision and of their learning experience;
- differentiated between the views of different categories of students where these are likely to be significant (eg part-time and full-time, junior and senior, entrants from school and entrants from FE, etc);
- allowed identification of distinctive characteristics of major subsets of provision; and
- took account of the views of graduates on the relevance of provision for their careers.

SHEFC has indicated that institutional audit teams will include a student or someone nominated by the student body. There is no equivalent requirement for internal review teams to include student members. However, it is a key factor of SHEFC's new approach to quality to seek ways of involving students in quality processes and we would encourage institutions to follow a similar approach. Specifically, we would encourage institutions to consider the potential merits of including student members on internal review teams, and also to put in place mechanisms to engage effectively with their student body during internal reviews.

Internal reviews should consider the effectiveness of annual monitoring arrangements and follow-up action for programmes covered by the review

We expect each institution to operate systems of annual monitoring across the full range of provision; this is likely to include not only student survey data, but also performance data on recruitment, progression and achievement. Good practice in such monitoring would be to include mechanisms which allow some benchmarking of provision against other areas of the institution's activities, as well as equivalent provision elsewhere. Institutions should also make appropriate use of external reference points including external examiners' reports. A key element of quality assurance and enhancement is the extent to which the outcomes of such monitoring are scrutinised and acted on in order to address shortcomings and spread good practice. Internal review processes should be designed in a way which allows reflection on the effectiveness of monitoring and follow-up, eg by following audit trails of previous monitoring outcomes and considering processes in place to reflect and act on feedback and performance data.

At the institutional level, SHEFC expects institutions to reflect on strategic issues arising from regular monitoring, and to make use of this information in its strategy for continuous quality improvement. This will be explicitly considered during institutional audit; however, institutions may wish to consider how they can best design internal review processes in order to facilitate institution-level reflection on the outcomes of monitoring. Good practice would be to have reporting procedures at the programme, subject or department level which passed on relevant issues for consideration at institutional level. Internal review processes should be designed to allow constructive reflection on the effectiveness of these procedures.

Assurance and enhancement

The primary purpose of internal reviews is to provide assurances about the quality and standards of provision. Since there will no longer be a programme of external subject reviews, it is vital that internal reviews provide robust, comprehensive and credible evidence that standards and quality of provision in Scottish HEIs are being maintained. However, SHEFC's new approach gives a central role to quality enhancement, and we would therefore encourage institutions to develop internal review processes which also:

- promote dialogue on areas in which quality might be improved;
- identify good practice for dissemination within the institution and beyond (such as quality enhancement engagements); and
- encourage and support providers' efforts to reflect critically on their practice.

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