



QAA
Scotland

Preparing for Enhancement-led Institutional Review

September 2017

Contents

Preface	1
Introduction	2
Using this guide	3
Thoughts from the sector	3
1 Engaging the wider student and staff community	4
2 Preparing the Reflective Analysis	7
2.1 What does a good Reflective Analysis look like?	7
2.2 A contextualised Reflective Analysis	8
2.3 Writing a Reflective Analysis	9
2.4 Design and navigation of the Reflective Analysis	9
2.5 Views from the sector	11
3 The Advance Information Set	12
4 Case studies	14
5 Preparing for the review visit	15
6 The review visit	17
7 After the review	18
Acknowledgments	20
Annex - Characteristics of effective practice	21

Preface

QAA commissioned Preparing for Enhancement-led Institutional Review, to draw on the sector's collective experience in carrying out self-evaluation and preparing for Enhancement-led Institutional Review. We are grateful to Professor Ian Pirie for his work in compiling and presenting the approaches contained in this guide, which we hope will be useful to all higher education institutions in Scotland.

The definitive guide to the current review method is the ELIR 4 Handbook, which is accompanied by a suite of Operational Guidance on a range of areas including submission of the Reflective Analysis and Advance Information Set. It is expected that Preparing for Enhancement-led Institutional Review will be used alongside the ELIR 4 Handbook and Operational Guidance.

Introduction

Scotland introduced Enhancement-led Institutional Review (ELIR) in 2003 as a then-radical approach to the external review of quality assurance and enhancement in our higher education institutions. In 2017, as we enter cycle four of the ELIR method, we can be rightly proud of what has been achieved here at home, and of the recognition and interest our approach has achieved internationally. Our review method is highly regarded and valued by all of our higher education institutions, which fully support the continuation of an enhancement-led approach. The review method in cycle four therefore aims to build upon previous experience and is deliberately evolutionary rather than revolutionary.

This 2017 guide builds on previous work and has been developed with significant contribution from colleagues across the Scottish sector representing students, academics and professional services - most of whom are responsible for preparing their own institution for review, as well as being experienced reviewers. This guide aims to share a synthesis of experience, practice and individual views; it does not seek to be prescriptive or formulaic. Each institution will continue to prepare for review as appropriate to their own strategy, mission and culture, and this will be even more pronounced with the expectation of a contextualised Reflective Analysis, which is a new development in ELIR 4. Drawing on the expertise of peers, this guide aims to provide insight on the characteristics and ingredients that are deemed to be most important, as well as providing practical advice on what makes for a good review experience, one where the institution derives most benefit.

In many cases, aspects of the guidance will appear very familiar to you, in which case it will simply provide reassurance. Sharing the expertise, experience and views of our colleagues, however, will hopefully be helpful and will stimulate your own thinking on your approach as you prepare for your forthcoming ELIR.

If I had a single piece of advice, it would be this: be clear, simple, honest and accurate, reflective and self-critically evaluative on the impact of the enhancements made. This authenticity and validity will be tested by the review team as soon as it opens its discussions with staff and students.

Ian Pirie
Emeritus Professor
University of Edinburgh

Using this guide

This guide is broken down into seven sections covering key stages in the preparation for ELIR, from the beginning to the end. Each section follows the same structure: a short introduction followed by characteristics of effective practice, reflections, and views from the sector. The statements and descriptions represent a synthesis of practice, experience and personal views from colleagues currently working in the Scottish higher education sector. Unless specifically indicated by quotation marks, the actual text has been written and reframed to capture and make explicit the views, approaches and processes that were shared by a number of the contributors. The Annex collects the characteristics of effective practice for reference.

- ✓ **Characteristics of effective practice**
The characteristics of effective practice are descriptions that highlight the various approaches and processes that would routinely be adopted in the sector and/or help institutions to optimise the value of ELIR.
- ✓ **Reflection**
Each section is followed by a question and quotation related to the section topic, which prompts you to reflect upon the extent to which your approach and preparations will enable you to evidence and answer the question posed effectively.
- ✓ **Views from the sector**
Provide a sample of current thinking and examples of practice that institutions and reviewers have found to be helpful in supporting and facilitating the ELIR process. In some cases, these represent practice that is commonly adopted across the sector; others highlight effective approaches that may be more specific to one or two institutions. These sections provide a variety of views and are not intended to be adopted in their entirety.

For a definitive guide to the ELIR method, please refer to the [ELIR 4 Handbook](#).¹

Thoughts from the sector

'The process of preparing the Reflective Analysis should enable an institution to take stock and reflect on where they are and is probably the most important and valuable part of an Enhancement-led Institutional Review when done well and an institution is fully engaged with the process.'

'It's about trying to tell the true and honest story of the enhancement journey that you have been on.'

'The ELIR is a point in time, the exercise, but the Reflective Analysis and the narrative around that is about the journey either side of that point in time.'

¹ Enhancement-led Institutional Review Handbook, fourth edition, available at: www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaas/reviewing-he-in-scotland/elir4-handbook-2017.pdf

1 Engaging the wider student and staff community

Student engagement is one of the five elements of the Quality Enhancement Framework, and the effectiveness of student engagement is a significant focus of ELIR. Similarly, institutions are encouraged to demonstrate how staff contribute to, and are routinely involved in, ongoing enhancement of the student experience.

1.1 Characteristics of effective practice	
Engaging the wider student and staff community	
a	Using a number of approaches, for example, conference-style events, workshops, focus groups, social media, web pages, interviews and/or presentations, short booklets or posters on the enhancement-led approach to quality assurance and enhancement to promote awareness and opportunities to participate in the preparation phase of an ELIR
b	Using a structured approach to student and staff representation across academic schools and/or departments, along with ensuring opportunities for direct contribution and engagement from across both academic and professional service communities
c	Working in partnership with the student association and the formal inclusion in the review process of the student president, elected officers, student committees and student association staff
d	Evidence of routine and wide engagement from students and staff across different levels of the institution, with identified mechanisms to contribute directly to assuring and enhancing the student experience
e	Involving as many students and staff as is possible in the review process itself and as appropriate to the scale of the institution
f	Ensuring that the preparation for review is not managed in isolation at a senior level or as an unrelated or separate activity to normal and routine business
g	Providing opportunities for all staff and students to discuss, contribute to and agree on the key themes and priorities selected as the focus for the review at relevant committees and fora, and at different levels within the institution
h	Implementing a formal and structured approval process for the completed Reflective Analysis that ensures that students and staff have had the opportunity to be fully consulted and encouraged to comment
i	Making the completed Reflective Analysis available to all students and staff in an appropriate form and effectively communicating where to access this or obtain a copy (some institutions provide all student representatives and staff directly involved in the ELIR with their own hard copy)

1.2 Reflection

How will you evidence and demonstrate to the ELIR team the level of whole-institution involvement in, engagement with and, importantly, the impact of an enhancement-led approach to continually improving the student experience, and to the wider assurance of quality and academic standards?

'If you approach it in a deep way, you would actually be using it as a learning process to start developing ideas and developing ways to enhance the institution's approach to policy, strategy or whatever: by the end of the Reflective Analysis process an institution should be able to say "We are really good at this and we should really focus on this" and then it will be interesting to see how those compare with an ELIR team's judgement.'

1.3 Views from the sector

Engaging the wider student and staff community

- ✓ Ongoing continuity between reviews and formally starting the preparation early is very important.
- ✓ Ensuring that the ELIR process is continually discussed and shared with the wider community via their representatives, for example through having standing items on the agenda of the relevant committees, which includes representation from students and professional services, as well as academic staff.
- ✓ Key themes are identified from face-to-face interviews with a range of staff and large-scale focus groups held with students.
- ✓ Review workshops, both general and school specific, discussion of the key themes, and presentations to the highest academic committees such as the senate, court and the executive are used to inform the university community about the ELIR process.
- ✓ Briefing papers are presented to all the senior committees and are also sent to heads of division, who are also requested to share these widely.
- ✓ An online survey is used with the programme leaders seeking their ideas, examples and contributions.

Engaging students

- ✓ As a minimum, the sabbatical officer, vice president education or the students' association president should be a member of the ELIR working group.
- ✓ It is important that the students' association staff member is also on the group to provide continuity; these two members (students' association staff member and sabbatical officer) would be the minimum level of formal representation required and provide a link to the wider student body.
- ✓ Ensuring structural representation via the class representatives and school officers across the whole institution is important; there are many opportunities then for class representatives to engage with the wider student body, for example through student conferences, focus groups and world café approaches.
- ✓ Students are not really interested in the ELIR process as such and existing methods such as learning and teaching conferences with class representatives, which focus on enhancing the student experience (in other words, routine and normal practice) is much more important and a more effective way to engage students.
- ✓ Student engagement should just be part of the normal way of operating. When an institution tries to engage students only and immediately prior to the review this is likely to be less successful.
- ✓ Student partnership agreements provide a very good platform for structured and planned student engagement.
- ✓ Significant support is provided by students' associations and student representative councils, which provided around 40-50 student members to contribute to the process.

- ✓ Paid-for student internal review representatives were appointed to read and feedback on sections of the Reflective Analysis.

Engaging staff

- ✓ It is very important that the principal (or vice-principal academic if not the principal) is fully engaged in the process; they effectively set the tone and nature of engagement for the review itself.
- ✓ In one example, one year before the review, a specific ELIR working group was set up to begin the collation and writing of the documentation set; calls for information were then targeted to schools, departments and key staff.
- ✓ The trend more recently in ELIR 3 has been a realisation that a smaller team needs to take responsibility for preparing for review.
- ✓ In a recent ELIR, communication and wide consultation was the key, starting with the smaller group and seeking contributions from key staff at all levels across the institution.
- ✓ Broad staff engagement was enabled through presentations and discussion at faculty assemblies.
- ✓ A significant amount of time was spent facilitating focus groups and interviewing key members of staff across the institution. The information gathered and responses were then used to inform the core content of the Reflective Analysis.

2 Preparing the Reflective Analysis

The following section focuses on four different aspects of the process of Reflective Analysis preparation, all of which are essential to achieving an effective completed document.

- ✓ What does a good Reflective Analysis look like?
- ✓ A contextualised Reflective Analysis - what needs to be considered?
- ✓ Writing a Reflective Analysis - who should be involved?
- ✓ Design and navigation of the Reflective Analysis - does it function effectively?

2.1 What does a good Reflective Analysis look like?

ELIR is an integrating force for the Quality Enhancement Framework, commenting on an institution's engagement with each element of the Framework. In doing so, ELIR provides a portfolio of outcomes, as follows.

- ✓ A clear statement of threshold/baseline effectiveness in quality and academic standards at each institution, along with areas for the institution to develop and areas where the institution demonstrates good practice.
- ✓ The opportunity for each institution to carry out a holistic evaluation of its policy and practice, along with the opportunity to have that self-evaluation peer reviewed, and to receive evidence-based feedback on the institution's approach to securing academic standards and enhancing the student learning experience.
- ✓ An intelligence base on which to build a programme of development and enhancement activity across the higher education sector.²

Characteristics of effective practice	
A Reflective Analysis	
a	The Reflective Analysis and supporting resources provides the ELIR team with the information required by the review method in order to effectively conduct the review
b	It conveys a real sense of the nature and culture of the institution and what the current vision, ambitions, strengths and challenges are
c	It reflects upon what has been achieved since the previous review and, as appropriate, how the commendations (positive practice) have been built upon and how effective the responses to the recommendations have been
d	The Reflective Analysis itself reflects that an enhancement-led institutional review focuses on a timeline of enhancement activities and presents future intentions as well as an evaluative analysis of past developments
e	The style and tone of the Reflective Analysis sets the context of the review and guides the desired nature of engagement and discourse with the ELIR team
f	The Reflective Analysis reflects widespread involvement, contribution and collective ownership, and aims to be a true representation of the institution as a whole

² Extract from the ELIR 4 Handbook, paragraph 52, available at: www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaas/reviewing-he-in-scotland/elir4-handbook-2017.pdf.

g	Most importantly, it is open, honest, analytical, self-reflective, critically evaluative and evidence based, and is not overly descriptive
h	The Reflective Analysis identifies challenges and how the institution is addressing them - just as importantly, an effective Reflective Analysis identifies the good practice it demonstrates along with the evidence it uses to support that view

2.2 A contextualised Reflective Analysis

What needs to be considered?

ELIR 4 places much greater emphasis on contextualising the review than previous versions of the method. This means that while the institution can still begin its preparation with a holistic evaluation of its strategy, policy and practice in relation to quality assurance and enhancement, the review itself will focus on those areas where there is likely to be greatest benefit. The identification of the areas of focus will involve the institution drawing on information about the nature and quality of its provision, both qualitative and quantitative. The sources of such information will, to a large extent, include existing forms of reporting, such as to the Scottish Funding Council and to the Higher Education Statistics Agency.³

The institution will set out and evaluate its contextualisation decision in the Reflective Analysis it submits to the ELIR team.⁴

Characteristics of effective practice	
A contextualised Reflective Analysis	
a	The key themes in the contextualised Reflective Analysis demonstrate current areas of strategic focus, and the rationale for their selection is clear and resonates with constituent student and staff communities
b	Reference points and evaluative evidence are used effectively in the contextualised Reflective Analysis to demonstrate a clear correlation between the key themes selected and the institution's metrics and performance data on the student experience
c	An effective Reflective Analysis will refer to the trends and outcomes evident from data that is externally reported and data that is internally evaluated - these trends and outcomes will provide support for the contextualisation decisions

Reflection

Would your student communities and their representatives recognise the priority themes selected as reflecting their own priorities and current challenges; were they consulted and involved, and did they help inform and/or jointly create them?

'I really think that is key to the ownership of not just the Reflective Analysis, but the whole of the ELIR process: if students feel that what the institution is saying about

³ Extract from the ELIR 4 Handbook, paragraph 22, available at: www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaas/reviewing-he-in-scotland/elir4-handbook-2017.pdf.

⁴ Extract from the ELIR 4 Handbook, paragraph 23, available at: www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaas/reviewing-he-in-scotland/elir4-handbook-2017.pdf.

the learning and teaching speaks to them then we can honestly say that it's owned by staff and students at the institution'.

2.3 Writing a Reflective Analysis

Who should be involved?

Current practice across the sector indicates that the final drafting of the Reflective Analysis is edited and authored by one person in a single voice, with a consistent tone, style and structure throughout. Paradoxically, developing the content for the Reflective Analysis is primarily viewed as a collective endeavour and it should not be written by one person on behalf of the institution in isolation from wide student and staff consultation (along with their direct engagement, contribution and comments).

Characteristics of effective practice	
Writing a Reflective Analysis	
a	The Reflective Analysis has a coherent narrative and consistent structure throughout
b	Developing the content for the Reflective Analysis is a collective and inclusive process with evidence of shared ownership and contribution
c	There is clear evidence of student consultation, engagement and opportunities for their direct involvement

Reflection

Is it easy to read, clear and unambiguous and are you able to evidence that the narrative and key statements set out in the Reflective Analysis around enhancement of the student experience truly reflect what respective student and staff communities believe to be the reality?

'The question that needs to be asked is "how do you know that what you are saying is actually what students believe or are thinking?"'

2.4 Design and navigation of the Reflective Analysis

Does it function effectively?

First and foremost, the Reflective Analysis is a working document and it needs to function efficiently and effectively in assisting all stakeholders involved in the review process to understand the institution and guide the reader through organisational structures, policies and procedures, and, importantly, to see where responsibilities lie. Clearly, the primary audience is the ELIR team, which will not necessarily understand the operating culture or know how the organisation functions, and it is critically important to design the structure, content and navigation of the document and its related supporting resources with this in mind.

Characteristics of effective practice

Design and navigation of the Reflective Analysis

a	The section headings and structure of the Reflective Analysis mirror the headings and structure of the ELIR Technical Report
b	It is easy to read and navigate, focused, succinct and of appropriate length to the scale and complexity of the institution
c	The Reflective Analysis, Advance Information Set and supporting resources function seamlessly as an integrated suite of information and are well-structured, cross-referenced, indexed, labelled, and, where possible and appropriate, are hyperlinked to each other
d	Clear signposting is used throughout and diagrams are used to illustrate the steps and responsibilities in key organisational structures, policies and processes: wherever possible, these are hyperlinked directly to more detailed source information
e	Accessible language is used throughout and the use of acronyms minimised, with a supporting glossary provided

Technical guidance: production of the Reflective Analysis

a	To maximise accessibility, the Reflective Analysis is ideally produced in both hard copy and in a digital hyperlinked PDF using a Sans Serif typeface at a minimum of 1.5 line spacing at 11 point type size
b	The PDF version should aim to make full use of hyperlinks from the contents page to navigate between the Reflective Analysis, Advance Information Set and to any additional information provided online and/or in a standalone digital form, for example via a USB flash drive
c	Where an PDF version has been created with hyperlinks and passwords to connect to online systems, the effectiveness of these should be tested off-campus and from outside the institution's network on a computer with none of the ELIR files stored locally to ensure reviewers can access the data remotely

Reflection

Can the reader easily access all of the key and summary information that is required by the review process while simultaneously gaining a clear understanding and sense of the institution's strategy, ambitions and challenges, along with their supporting organisational structures, responsibilities, policies and processes without having to rely extensively on access to online systems?

'Clear signposting to the right information is absolutely essential, not just for the student reviewer but for all reviewers'

'Indexing and labelling are of critical importance and, where hyperlinks are used, they should take you directly to the reference'

2.5 Views from the sector

The Reflective Analysis

- ✓ Relatively long lead-times are required for consultation to ensure that it is authentic and that any comments and contribution can be responded to and incorporated.
- ✓ In one instance, the university senate, academic committees and workshops were used as 'sounding boards' to ascertain if the Reflective Analysis 'felt like it was from our university'.
- ✓ A measure of the authenticity, 'buy-in' and support for the completed Reflective Analysis was evidenced subsequently by a number of people who have found it to be a useful document beyond the review itself, leading to comments such as: 'everything you need to know about learning and teaching and quality is in there'.
- ✓ A Reflective Analysis should not assume prior knowledge of the institution, as this is often unhelpful.
- ✓ In one instance, the core document set and sample online information were placed on a single USB drive and hyperlinked to each other so that there was no reliance on the internet or the university's intranet.
- ✓ In one instance, all hyperlinks were colour-coded and everything linked from the Reflective Analysis; one colour was used to link the Reflective Analysis to the Advance Information Set, another colour was used to link the Reflective Analysis to the reference document, and a third colour was used to hyperlink to web materials; the web materials were supplementary and were only needed if the reviewers wished to find out more about a particular topic.
- ✓ One-page briefing papers can be provided to cover all of the key learning and teaching policies, and key quality assurance policies and the briefing papers can be provided as a separate bound document.
- ✓ At the end of every chapter a summary page was provided, formatted differently so that there was a clear way of identifying what is thought to have gone well and what is still being worked on.
- ✓ Adopting an evidenced-based approach and using data effectively in the Reflective Analysis is important.
- ✓ Ideally, the Reflective Analysis is seen to be useful to the institution beyond the review itself.
- ✓ The evaluative areas in the Reflective Analysis were colour-coded for clarity to assist the ELIR team.

'It's not so much about the last five years but the next five years and a good Reflective Analysis should capture all of that'

3 The Advance Information Set

What should this aim to achieve?

The Advance Information Set that accompanies the Reflective Analysis provides the ELIR team with direct access to information about the institution's key processes for securing academic standards and assuring quality at an early stage in the review. This enables the ELIR team to see how the institution's key processes function in practice and supports the team's ability to reach the threshold judgement. Having this information at an early stage allows more time during the review visit for discussions relating to quality enhancement.⁵

One important component of the Advance Information Set is the mapping of institutional policy and practice to the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code). Where a comprehensive mapping was provided for ELIR 3, institutions can update that for ELIR 4, highlighting areas where policy or practice has changed, as well as areas where the institution has been challenged by the indicators and where the institution demonstrates good practice that could be disseminated in the sector.

Institutions often wish to provide additional material, supplementary to the Reflective Analysis and Advance Information Set. While this can be helpful for ELIR teams, institutions are cautioned against providing very high volumes of material. This is because the volume can be so great that it is simply not possible for the reviewers to read and evaluate it all in the time available. A very large suite of materials can also prevent the ELIR team from gaining a holistic sense of policy and practice at the institution.

Including clear signposting, with the use of diagrams and concise explanatory notes can be very helpful for the ELIR team. Some institutions hyperlink the diagrams and notes to online systems or folders of source information - while this can be useful, caution should be exercised to ensure the total volume of information provided is manageable and that it doesn't, inadvertently, obscure the key messages the institution is seeking to convey.

3.1 Characteristics of effective practice

The Advance Information Set

a	The Advance Information Set is primarily constructed around existing information and aims to assist the ELIR team to easily understand and navigate the processes and information routinely used by the institution
b	The Reflective Analysis and Advance Information Set demonstrate a clearly interrelated organisational structure through the use of signposting and cross-referencing between them and any additional resources, such as hyperlinks to online systems or digital media - although attention should be paid to the overall volume of material being presented
c	The Advance Information Set is used to demonstrate how key quality processes operate in practice and to share with the ELIR team the key topics being raised (and addressed) by external examiners and through student feedback

⁵ Extract from the ELIR 4 Handbook, paragraph 39, available at: www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaas/reviewing-he-in-scotland/elir4-handbook-2017.pdf.

3.2 Reflection

If a reviewer studied a diagram illustrating the steps in one of the institutions' quality assurance processes, how easy would it be for them to know where all the responsibilities lay, and to find a record and timeline of any discussions, decisions and/or actions taken at each stage?

'The Advance Information Set should aim to help the ELIR team understand our processes and demonstrate that we follow our procedures in the way in which they have been described'

3.3 Views from the sector

The Advance Information Set

- ✓ An open and positive approach in putting together the Advance Information Set would demonstrate a self-confident institution rather than one that might characterise a defensive and risk-averse mindset.
- ✓ A good Advance Information Set should be easy to navigate, it should be logical in the way it is organised and it should have a standard summary cover sheet to enable the reader to understand the structure and what the key points are.
- ✓ The Advance Information Set can be thought of as the audit component and needs to demonstrate that the institution has oversight of its whole quality framework and is 'sense checking' that it is doing everything properly.
- ✓ The mapping exercise to the Quality Code is a significant undertaking; it is clear, however, that there is significant value and benefit to the institution when conducted diligently and with a view to enhancement.
- ✓ Summary sheets are provided for the Advance Information Set: they are used to highlight key issues and what the enhancement response and actions are.
- ✓ The Advance Information Set also helps to give a context to the institution that maybe the Reflective Analysis does not, so the same institution can be looked at in two slightly different ways.

'There is nothing more unhelpful to an ELIR team than seeing published information that tells you one thing and a detailed Advance Information Set that tells you something else'

4 Case studies

Do we still need these?

Case studies are not a compulsory part of ELIR 4. If an institution wishes, it can submit material to the ELIR team in the form of a case study - but it is not a requirement.⁶ The text in this section is included to share learning from earlier cycles and to assist institutions that are considering submitting material in a case study format.

4.1 Characteristics of effective practice

Case studies

- | | |
|---|--|
| a | In previous ELIR cycles, case studies have been found useful to the review process when they are used to evaluate in depth an institution-wide initiative of strategic significance - in this context, case studies can provide an opportunity to demonstrate how the institution manages change, critically evaluates and reflects upon the impact made and the lessons learned |
|---|--|

4.2 Reflection

Is the case study presenting information that enables the review team to gain new or additional insight to the way the organisation manages change, evaluates impact, reflects upon their approach and incorporates lessons learned?

'A good case study enables the institution to highlight a specific area of practice, a project or a specific area of work and can be used to demonstrate an institution's strategic approach to enhancement over a longer period of time'

'It helped us to bring to life something that we say we do on an institutional level and also to illustrate how we engage staff and students in those activities'

4.3 Views from the sector

Case studies

- ✓ The approach to writing the case study should continue to demonstrate evidence-based analysis and critical reflection, as well as showcasing good practice and enhancement.
- ✓ The best use of the case study is to demonstrate how a process is managed and followed from beginning to end.
- ✓ There would be value in developing a case study if this could be truly reflective, discursive and benefit from the expertise of the ELIR team, in terms of feeding into some aspect of strategic importance for the institution.
- ✓ If a case study is included then it needs to be authentic, add value and should be owned and jointly developed by both students and staff.
- ✓ If case studies were owned and provided exclusively by the students they could become an interesting addition.

⁶ Extract from the ELIR 4 Handbook, paragraph 37, available at: www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaas/reviewing-he-in-scotland/elir4-handbook-2017.pdf.

5 Preparing for the review visit

What do we need to consider?

The duration and structure of the review visit has changed for ELIR 4 and now constitutes a one-day planning visit followed by the review visit, which may last between three and five days. For this guide it remains relevant to share the good practice and valued experiences from the previous cycle and, where appropriate, for the institution to incorporate aspects of these practices at the most appropriate point in their own review.

Experience drawn from the sector indicates that wide communication and engagement across all constituent student and staff communities is an important part of preparing for review, and that it is far more important for students and staff to be aware of the nature and purpose of the process rather than trying to anticipate or rehearse for the types of questions likely to arise in meetings with the ELIR team. Where the enhancement-led approach is fully embedded as part of routine business, this level of authentic engagement has proven to be far more beneficial to the institution and is clearly recognisable to the ELIR team.

5.1 Characteristics of effective practice

Preparing for review

a	Communications and briefings for students and staff focus on the nature of the review process and the priorities the institution has chosen to focus upon in the contextualised Reflective Analysis
b	A range of ongoing enhancement initiatives at various stages of their development should be presented in the Reflective Analysis to show that continual enhancement is routine practice within the institution
c	Preparations focus on evidencing and demonstrating the institution's every day, routine approaches to enhancing the student experience and assuring quality and standards

5.2 Reflection

How do you evaluate, evidence and demonstrate that all of the relevant stakeholder communities are authentically engaged and contributing to the enhancement-led approach to improving the student experience and assuring quality and standards?

'One thing we have stopped doing is over-briefing staff; the briefings are predominantly about process'

5.3 Views from the sector

Preparing for the review visit

- ✓ Preparing for an ELIR is a significant undertaking and staff resources should be specifically allocated to the core team to assist with the ELIR preparations; it is important, however, that they are already experienced administrators from within the institution and not a project officer recruited externally to assist, as it is important that the whole team knows how the organisation works.
- ✓ Having a team where there is no hierarchy and everyone has their own role is really important.

- ✓ There are quite specific times of the year when the institution can effectively engage with students; it is important to plan the drafting, and focus-groups or committee meetings, over an 18-month period before the review to accommodate this.
- ✓ Careful consideration needs to be given to the selection of staff who will be invited to meet the ELIR team; where possible they should have multiple areas of responsibility and wide experience of the institution.
- ✓ Careful attention needs to be paid to the selection of students (for the planning visit) to ensure that they represent the whole student community in terms of diversity, different identities or modes of study, gender balance and subject balance.
- ✓ It would be helpful to the ELIR team for an institution to provide the rationale for, and the process of, how students were selected to participate in the review discussions.
- ✓ Overall, the selection of students should broadly reflect the profile and demographic of the wider student community of the institution.
- ✓ It is of critical importance that any students and staff who are directly involved are made fully aware of the process and why the institution is being reviewed. This is far more important than rehearsing the kind of questions that might be asked.
- ✓ A general information leaflet could be developed and made available to staff and students to focus on the experience and outcome of earlier ELIRs. This could then be expanded upon in briefing sessions.
- ✓ Students selected to meet the ELIR team need to be completely informed about the nature and significance of the review. They should receive training and have full access to the Reflective Analysis, Advance Information Set and supporting resources.
- ✓ In one instance, everyone who was meeting the ELIR team was seen individually 'face to face' just to ensure that they were prepared.
- ✓ Never underestimate the amount of time that the operational matters and logistics take; for example, getting dates secured in people's diaries as far in advance as possible is a big task on its own and there are long lead times needed for all of this.

6 The review visit

Aims and reflections

The following represents a synthesis of the approaches used by the sector during ELIR 3 and highlights what was valued both by institutions and reviewers.

6.1 Characteristics of effective practice	
Review visits	
a	The planning visit sets the tone and context for the review and uses the opportunity to convey the ethos, culture and working practices of the institution
b	The desired nature of the engagement, expectations and relationship is shared with the ELIR team, and what the institution aims to derive and wishes to gain from the process is identified and explored
c	Discussion will include the approach adopted to develop the institution's current enhancement strategy, the evidence and data used to inform its priorities, the progress that has been made towards implementation and how its impact will be evaluated
d	The institution will be invited to discuss its approach to contextualisation and the ELIR team will outline any areas where it believes additional information is required to support the review outcomes

6.2 Reflection

How succinctly and effectively will you be able to convey how your priorities were identified, the approach adopted to developing and implementing the enhancements, who was involved, what the long-term goals are, and the evidence that has or will be used to measure and evaluate the progress and impact made?

'It is important to present the rationale as to why these topics and key themes have been selected and that students have been part of that process'

'I think you want people to have a sense of the coherence of the place, the personalities involved, the kind of leadership that is exercised, the general ethos, the approach to data and the approach to working with students'

6.3 Views from the sector

Review visits

- ✓ This should be an opportunity for the institution to set out its vision and the progress made in getting there - in ELIR 4 it will be the opportunity for the institution to highlight the rationale for its contextualisation decisions to ensure the review visit focuses on the areas that are likely to be of most benefit.
- ✓ It is also the time for the institution to identify, explore and discuss what they aim to derive from the process itself: it is not just about the review being an external requirement.
- ✓ It would be beneficial to have a dialogic approach where both students and staff are discussing the key priorities and enhancements in learning and teaching that they have both agreed and have been working on, rather than the students' association discussing what they do as if they were a separate and unrelated entity.

7 After the review

What happens next?

The enhancement-led approach is predicated on the basis of systematic, ongoing continual improvement. There is an expectation that, post-review, institutions will develop a plan of follow-up actions and contribute their experience more widely to the sector through sharing practice in a systematic and structured approach, for example as part of a Focus On project or in the Enhancement Themes. There is also an expectation of student partnership in the development of subsequent actions and shaping of enhancement priorities.

7.1 Characteristics of effective practice

After the review

a	The outcomes, recommendations, response and actions stemming from the review are effectively communicated and made available to all student and staff communities in an accessible and appropriate form
b	The outcome, recommendations and commendations from the ELIR result in the development of an agreed set of actions with student engagement, along with identified responsibilities and a timeline for their implementation
c	The action plan is formally reviewed as part of an annual cycle, and progress and outcomes are communicated effectively to student and staff communities (and discussed with QAA Scotland officers in the annual discussion meetings)

7.2 Reflection

How will you ensure that all student and staff communities have been effectively informed of the outcome and response to the review, consulted and enabled to contribute to the development of subsequent actions and setting of enhancement priorities?

'Don't regard it as a "sheep dip" that you do once every five years. This is an ongoing process and don't pay lip service to that'

7.3 Views from the sector

After the review

- ✓ Structured debriefing as a whole institution is a valuable, if not an essential, part of the process.
- ✓ It is important to feedback the outcomes of the review to the whole institution. It should then become a partnership and dialogue with all stakeholders around how actions are developed and progressed.
- ✓ If a small group was primarily responsible for preparing for ELIR, they are ideally placed in the first instance to analyse, evaluate and make recommendations on the report and outcomes of the review.
- ✓ Good communication of the outcomes and subsequent actions through the formal student representative structures, such as the class representatives, is essential.
- ✓ It may be that many students will never read the full report, so it is important to communicate the outcome of the review in an accessible and easily digestible format, for example as a leaflet or poster indicating 'what we do really well' and 'what we now need to work on'.

- ✓ In one instance, a single action plan that specifies who is responsible for addressing any particular issues/recommendations was created and communicated to schools and departments. This is reviewed twice a year by the institution's learning and teaching board - this should occur throughout the period between external reviews and not just for the year following the review itself.
- ✓ Areas that have been prioritised for improvement, and information about how students can become involved in contributing to these developments, should be clearly identified.
- ✓ In one instance, presentations are made to the institution's senate, executive and to all of the boards of the executive and senate; the actions taken in response to the outcomes of the report are also discussed and reported in these fora.
- ✓ It is of critical importance to thank all those involved in preparing for and participating in the review, and hopefully to celebrate the outcome.

'Thank the people who have got you there: and I think the goodwill that came from that internally was tremendous'

Acknowledgments

This guide, in addition to Guidance on Preparing a Reflective Analysis, could not have been written without the generous sharing of experiences and practice from our colleagues. This willingness to freely contribute their time and expertise towards a shared goal is very much a feature of the higher education sector in Scotland and is both appreciated and highly valued.

With grateful thanks to:

University of Dundee

Professor Karl Leydecker
Vice-Principal, Learning and Teaching

Dr Lesley McLellan
Director of Quality and Academic Standards

University of Edinburgh

Professor Jeremy Bradshaw
Assistant Principal, Researcher Development

Heriot Watt University

Professor John Sawkins
Deputy Principal, Learning and Teaching

Dr Maggie King
Head of Academic Quality

Helen Crosby
Quality Assurance Manager

Queen Margaret University

Professor Roni Bamber
Director, Centre for Academic Practice

Dawn Martin
Assistant Secretary, Governance and Quality

University of Stirling

Gavin Lee
Deputy Head of Policy and Planning

Glasgow School of Art

Mark Charters
Academic Developer

University of the Highlands and Islands

Professor Crichton Lang
Deputy Principal

Rhiannon Tinsley
Academic Registrar

Student Partnerships in Quality Scotland

Hannah Clark
Development Consultant

Annex - Characteristics of effective practice

1 Engaging the wider student and staff community

Engaging the wider student and staff community	
a	Using a number of approaches, for example, conference-style events, workshops, focus groups, social media, web pages, interviews and/or presentations, short booklets or posters on the enhancement-led approach to quality assurance and enhancement to promote awareness and opportunities to participate in the preparation phase of an ELIR
b	Using a structured approach to student and staff representation across academic schools and/or departments, along with ensuring opportunities for direct contribution and engagement from across both academic and professional service communities
c	Working in partnership with the student association and the formal inclusion in the review process of the student president, elected officers, student committees and student association staff
d	Evidence of routine and wide engagement from students and staff across different levels of the institution, with identified mechanisms to contribute directly to assuring and enhancing the student experience
e	Involving as many students and staff as is possible in the review process itself and as appropriate to the scale of the institution
f	Ensuring that the preparation for review is not managed in isolation at a senior level or as an unrelated or separate activity to normal and routine business
g	Providing opportunities for all staff and students to discuss, contribute to and agree on the key themes and priorities selected as the focus for the review at relevant committees and fora, and at different levels within the institution
h	Implementing a formal and structured approval process for the completed Reflective Analysis that ensures that students and staff have had the opportunity to be fully consulted and encouraged to comment
i	Making the completed Reflective Analysis available to all students and staff in an appropriate form and effectively communicating where to access this or obtain a copy (some institutions provide all student representatives and staff directly involved in the ELIR with their own hard copy)

2 Preparing the Reflective Analysis

A Reflective Analysis	
a	The Reflective Analysis and supporting resources provides the ELIR team with the information required by the review method in order to effectively conduct the review
b	It conveys a real sense of the nature and culture of the institution and what the current vision, ambitions, strengths and challenges are

c	It reflects upon what has been achieved since the previous review and, as appropriate, how the commendations (positive practice) have been built upon and how effective the responses to the recommendations have been
d	The Reflective Analysis itself reflects that an enhancement-led institutional review focuses on a timeline of enhancement activities and presents future intentions as well as an evaluative analysis of past developments
e	The style and tone of the Reflective Analysis sets the context of the review and guides the desired nature of engagement and discourse with the ELIR team
f	The Reflective Analysis reflects widespread involvement, contribution and collective ownership, and aims to be a true representation of the institution as a whole
g	Most importantly, it is open, honest, analytical, self-reflective, critically evaluative and evidence based, and is not overly descriptive
h	The Reflective Analysis identifies challenges and how the institution is addressing them - just as importantly, an effective Reflective Analysis identifies the good practice it demonstrates along with the evidence it uses to support that view

A contextualised Reflective Analysis

a	The key themes in the contextualised Reflective Analysis demonstrate current areas of strategic focus, and the rationale for their selection is clear and resonates with constituent student and staff communities
b	Reference points and evaluative evidence are used effectively in the contextualised Reflective Analysis to demonstrate a clear correlation between the key themes selected and the institution's metrics and performance data on the student experience
c	An effective Reflective Analysis will refer to the trends and outcomes evident from data that is externally reported and data that is internally evaluated - these trends and outcomes will provide support for the contextualisation decisions

Writing a Reflective Analysis

a	The Reflective Analysis has a coherent narrative and consistent structure throughout
b	Developing the content for the Reflective Analysis is a collective and inclusive process with evidence of shared ownership and contribution
c	There is clear evidence of student consultation, engagement and opportunities for their direct involvement

Design and navigation of the Reflective Analysis

a	The section headings and structure of the Reflective Analysis mirror the headings and structure of the ELIR Technical Report
---	--

b	It is easy to read and navigate, focused, succinct and of appropriate length to the scale and complexity of the institution
c	The Reflective Analysis, Advance Information Set and supporting resources function seamlessly as an integrated suite of information and are well-structured, cross-referenced, indexed, labelled, and, where possible and appropriate, are hyperlinked to each other
d	Clear signposting is used throughout and diagrams are used to illustrate the steps and responsibilities in key organisational structures, policies and processes: wherever possible, these are hyperlinked directly to more detailed source information
e	Accessible language is used throughout and the use of acronyms minimised, with a supporting glossary provided

Technical guidance: production of the Reflective Analysis

a	To maximise accessibility, the Reflective Analysis is ideally produced in both hard copy and in a digital hyperlinked PDF using a Sans Serif typeface at a minimum of 1.5 line spacing at 11 point type size
b	The PDF version should aim to make full use of hyperlinks from the contents page to navigate between the Reflective Analysis, Advance Information Set and to any additional information provided online and/or in a standalone digital form, for example via a USB flash drive
c	Where an PDF version has been created with hyperlinks and passwords to connect to online systems, the effectiveness of these should be tested off-campus and from outside the institution's network on a computer with none of the ELIR files stored locally to ensure reviewers can access the data remotely

3 The Advance Information Set

The Advance Information Set

a	The Advance Information Set is primarily constructed around existing information and aims to assist the ELIR team to easily understand and navigate the processes and information routinely used by the institution
b	The Reflective Analysis and Advance Information Set demonstrate a clearly interrelated organisational structure through the use of signposting and cross-referencing between them and any additional resources, such as hyperlinks to online systems or digital media - although attention should be paid to the overall volume of material being presented
c	The Advance Information Set is used to demonstrate how key quality processes operate in practice and to share with the ELIR team the key topics being raised (and addressed) by external examiners and through student feedback

4 Case studies

Case studies	
a	In previous ELIR cycles, case studies have been found useful to the review process when they are used to evaluate in depth an institution-wide initiative of strategic significance - in this context, case studies can provide an opportunity to demonstrate how the institution manages change, critically evaluates and reflects upon the impact made and the lessons learned

5 Preparing for a review visit

Preparing for review	
a	Communications and briefings for students and staff focus on the nature of the review process and the priorities the institution has chosen to focus upon in the contextualised Reflective Analysis
b	A range of ongoing enhancement initiatives at various stages of their development should be presented in the Reflective Analysis to show that continual enhancement is routine practice within the institution
c	Preparations focus on evidencing and demonstrating the institution's every day, routine approaches to enhancing the student experience and assuring quality and standards

6 The review visit

Review visits	
a	The planning visit sets the tone and context for the review and uses the opportunity to convey the ethos, culture and working practices of the institution
b	The desired nature of the engagement, expectations and relationship is shared with the ELIR team, and what the institution aims to derive and wishes to gain from the process is identified and explored
c	Discussion will include the approach adopted to develop the institution's current enhancement strategy, the evidence and data used to inform its priorities, the progress that has been made towards implementation and how its impact will be evaluated
d	The institution will be invited to discuss its approach to contextualisation and the ELIR team will outline any areas where it believes additional information is required to support the review outcomes

7 After the review

After the review	
a	The outcomes, recommendations, response and actions stemming from the review are effectively communicated and made available to all student and staff communities in an accessible and appropriate form
b	The outcome, recommendations and commendations from the ELIR result in the development of an agreed set of actions with student engagement, along with identified responsibilities and a timeline for their implementation
c	The action plan is formally reviewed as part of an annual cycle, and progress and outcomes are communicated effectively to student and staff communities (and discussed with QAA Scotland officers in the annual discussion meetings)

QAA1957 - Sep 17

© The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education 2017

Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786

<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/>