Enhancement-led Institutional Review of Glasgow Caledonian University

Technical Report

November 2020

Contents

About the Enhancement-led Institutional Review method

The QAA website explains the method for [Enhancement-led Institutional Review (ELIR)](#) and has links to the ELIR handbook and other informative documents.[1] You can also find out more about the [Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA).](#)[2]

Further details about ELIR can be found in an accompanying [brief guide](#),[3] including an overview of the review method, information about review teams, and explanations of follow-up action.

About this review

This is the Technical Report of the ELIR conducted by QAA at Glasgow Caledonian University. The review took place as follows: Planning Visit on 6 February 2020 and Review Visit on 16-20 November 2020. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Review Visit was postponed from 23-27 March 2020. The review was conducted by a team of five reviewers:

- Professor Phil Cardew (Academic Reviewer)
- Professor Diane Meehan (Academic Reviewer)
- Mr Edward Pollock (Student Reviewer)
- Dr Kathleen Shennan (Academic Reviewer)
- Mr Peter Watson (Coordinating Reviewer).

In advance of the review visits, the University submitted a self-evaluative document (the Reflective Analysis) and an advance information set, comprising a range of materials about the institution's arrangements for managing quality and academic standards.

The impact of COVID-19 on this review

The Review Visit was originally scheduled to take place during March 2020. This was after the national lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which resulted in the Review Visit being postponed. In discussion with Glasgow Caledonian University and the Scottish Funding Council, the Review Visit was rescheduled to November 2020. QAA made some amendments to the ELIR process to accommodate the ongoing pandemic, most notable of which was that the Review Visit was conducted entirely online.

The ELIR was undertaken while the pandemic, and the University's response to it, was a key part of the context. Glasgow Caledonian University was given the opportunity to outline their arrangements in response to the COVID-19 pandemic in an update paper that was made available to the ELIR team prior to the Review Visit. Although this was part of the context of the review, the team considered the University's approach to quality and standards from the time of the last ELIR in 2015. It is acknowledged that the review took place at what was a very challenging time for the University, and the ELIR team and QAA Scotland are grateful to staff and students for their engagement during the review.

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[1] About ELIR:
www.qaa.ac.uk/scotland/en/reviewing-higher-education-in-scotland/enhancement-led-institutional-review
[2] About QAA: www.qaa.ac.uk/scotland
[3] Brief Guide to ELIR: www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/reports/brief-guide-to-elir-method.pdf

About this report

In this report, the ELIR team:

- delivers a threshold judgement on the current and likely future effectiveness of the University's arrangements for managing academic standards and enhancing the quality of the student learning experience.

The threshold judgement can be found on page 3, followed by the detailed findings of the review given in numbered paragraphs.

Technical Reports set out the ELIR team's view under each of the report headings. Shorter Outcome Reports are provided that set out the main findings of the ELIR for a wider audience. The Outcome Report for this review is on the QAA website.[4]

ELIR Technical Reports are intended primarily for the institution reviewed, and to provide an information base for the production of thematic reports that identify findings across several institutions.

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[4] Outcome Report:
www.qaa.ac.uk/reviewing-higher-education/quality-assurance-reports/Glasgow-Caledonian-University

Threshold judgement about Glasgow Caledonian University

Glasgow Caledonian University has **effective** arrangements for managing academic standards and the student learning experience.

This is a positive judgement, which means that the University meets sector expectations in securing the academic standards of its awards and enhancing the quality of the student learning experience it provides, currently and into the future. This judgement confirms there can be public confidence in the University's awards and in the quality of the learning experience it provides for its students.

1 Contextual information about the institution, student population and the review

1.1 Summary information about the institution, including strategic framework, organisational structure

1   Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU/the University) was formed by a merger of Glasgow Polytechnic and the Queen's College Glasgow in 1993, with a history dating back to 1875. The University has a particular commitment to widening participation which is reflected in the diversity of its student population. The University's main campus is in central Glasgow. There is also a small London campus, opened in 2010, called GCU London. GCU has also operated in New York since 2014, and as the sole member of Glasgow Caledonian New York College (GCNYC), established in 2017. GCNYC operates as a separate legal entity and does not award GCU degrees. Awards made in New York are accredited under US rules by the New York State Education Board of Regents (paragraph 145). In addition, the University has a portfolio of collaborative partnerships around the world where students are registered for GCU degrees (paragraph 142).

2   At the time of the ELIR, the strategic plan - *Strategy 2020* - was drawing to a close and the ELIR team heard that a wide-ranging consultation exercise was underway to develop *Strategy 2030*. *Strategy 2020* was based on five strategic goals: transforming lives through education; enriching cities and communities through research; innovating for social and economic impact; engaging globally; and aligning for the Common Good. Two goals were added following a mid-strategy review, covering sustainability and international student satisfaction. A major focus of *Strategy 2020* was improving the student experience and, from 2016, all work in this area has been brought together in the Student Experience Action Plan (SEAP) (paragraphs 91-93). The finalisation and launch of *Strategy 2030* was delayed because of the impact of COVID-19, with the team learning that *Strategy 2030* was scheduled to be approved and launched in January 2021.

3   The University is organised around three academic schools in Glasgow, each led by a Dean. A review in 2017 considered this structure and confirmed the continuation   of the three schools but decided to replace the then nine departments with 22 new ones. This change aimed to increase the visibility of academic disciplines and strengthen the accountability of the schools. This 'Schools Refresh' was implemented in 2018-19. GCU London was also an academic school led by a Dean - this status was reviewed in 2020. At the ELIR Planning Visit in February 2020, the team had confirmation that the University's plan was now to consider GCU London as a campus and not a school. By the time of the delayed Review Visit in November 2020, the ELIR team was able to confirm this plan has been implemented, with subject staff based in London becoming affiliate members of the relevant core discipline subject groups within the academic school and departments based in Glasgow.

4   This ELIR occurred during the COVID-19 global pandemic, with the Planning Visit conducted in person in February 2020, ahead of the UK government's decision to implement a nationwide 'lockdown' in March 2020. The ELIR was delayed by six months, resulting in the Review Visit being conducted online in November 2020. Inevitably, this resulted in the ELIR team hearing from staff and students regarding the impact of the pandemic on their work and studies, and the support given by the University to ensure its continued operation during the pandemic. Feedback from both students and staff was one of universal praise for the professional, caring and innovative ways in which the University supported students to study online, and staff to undertake their teaching and related work to support those studies. While there was a recognition of the problems and difficulties of the impact of the pandemic, the University was also able to see some benefits. The team learned, for example, that plans were at an advanced stage ahead of COVID-19, to improve support for online learning and GCU was therefore well placed to accelerate this work due to the circumstances of the pandemic (paragraphs 77-80).

1.2   Composition, key trends and anticipated changes in the student population, including information on retention, progression and outcomes

5   Based on 2019-20 figures, the University has a student population of 17,540 students (actuals) of whom 14,165 are undergraduate and 3,375 postgraduate - 2,930 of whom are postgraduate taught (PGT) and 445 are postgraduate research (PGR). Almost 19% of the overall student population study part-time (3,330 students) and some 1,310 students are international. These figures and proportions have been broadly the same over the past five years, with growth (4%) now seen in the UK-domiciled student population in 2019-20 from the previous session. The postgraduate taught and postgraduate research student populations both show a slight increase.

6   The University's student population includes a substantial number of students from Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD20) postcodes, amounting to 22% of its Scottish domiciled undergraduate entrants in 2018-19 (the latest published data available). This proportion has remained largely unchanged over the previous four years. The University is particularly proud of its tradition of successfully recruiting students from SIMD20 areas and the fact that these students are retained at virtually the same rate as that for the wider student population. In session 2018-19, 90% of SIMD20 full-time, first-degree students were retained into the second year compared with a retention rate of 92% for all the University's Scottish domiciled full-time, first-degree students. This trend has also remained fairly stable over the past four years. GCU also attracts and recruits a substantial proportion of mature students (44% of its Scottish domiciled undergraduate entrants in 2018-19 were over 21). The University also has a well-developed programme of articulation with over 1,000 students joining programmes with advanced standing. The new Graduate Outcomes survey of leavers from 2017-18, showed 91% of leavers were in employment and/or further study 15 months after graduation.

1.3   Commentary on the preparation for the ELIR, including confirmation of the nature and rationale for the contextualised range of topics included in the self-evaluation

7   The University's preparations for ELIR 4 were led by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Learning, Teaching and Student Experience), who chaired a cross-university steering group which comprised representation from the GCU Students' Association, and academic schools and professional support services staff. Full-Time Officers who met the ELIR team confirmed they were fully involved in the University's preparations for ELIR 4, including the selection of contextual themes, and that drafts of the Reflective Analysis (RA) were widely shared.

8   The University chose as contextualisation its focused work on the student experience undertaken over the past few years, which is coordinated through its Student Experience Action Plan (SEAP) which has four themes:

- Student Engagement and a Sense of Belonging
- Programme Organisation, Management and Delivery
- Assessment and Feedback
- Wider Student Experience

During the review, the ELIR team explored these themes with staff and were able to confirm that they did indeed reflect the strategic priorities and action underway at the University. The team was able to confirm that the use of SEAPs in departments and schools is well embedded and the themes were naturally part of university discourse (paragraph 91-93).

1.4   Summary of the institution's follow-up to the previous ELIR

9   The 2015 ELIR identified five areas for development. The ELIR team was able to confirm that the University had taken action in all five areas. The recommendations on specific issues such as the research student experience, and the work of Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) had been quickly addressed through the development of the 'Introduction to Teaching Skills' programme which must be completed before an employment contract is issued to GTAs (paragraph 71). The University confirmed work on assessment feedback was ongoing and the team explored the institution's plans and progress in this area (paragraphs 52 and 53). It was less clear to the team initially what action had been taken to address the off-campus student voice, but during the review the team was able to confirm progress in this area too (paragraph 134).

1.5   Impact of the institution's approach to engaging students in ELIR preparations

10   The University works closely with the GCU Students' Association and has an effective and valuable approach to partnership working. This was reflected in the strong involvement of the Students' Association and students from across the University in the preparations for this ELIR. Beyond formal university committees and representation on the ELIR steering group, the Reflective Analysis sets out that this engagement also included students being engaged in a series of small group exercises set up to plan, contribute to and review individual chapters of the RA. The ELIR team was able to confirm the effectiveness of this engagement. Issues and concerns that were priorities for students were reflected in the RA because the GCU partnership approach with students has reached a maturity whereby the University will naturally include student priorities in its actions (paragraphs 12-15).

2   Enhancing the student learning experience

2.1   Student representation and engagement, including responding to student views

11   The University has an integrated and effective partnership approach, working in close collaboration with the GCU Students' Association to ensure the student view is at the centre of its decision-making and strategy developments related to enhancing the student experience. Staff and students (including those studying at collaborative partners) who met the ELIR team reflected positively and consistently on the importance of this partnership. The positive impact of this close working relationship was demonstrated through the level of consultation and engagement with students on key university initiatives, achieved through both formal and informal representation mechanisms.

Student partnership working

12   The University and the GCU Students' Association have a long-standing embedded, and collaborative relationship which is based on genuine and effective partnership, working across all aspects of university life. The University routinely consults and works with the Students' Association and the wider student body to seek student views on key initiatives including the creation of *Strategy 2030*, the themes for the Student Experience Action Plan (SEAP), enhancements to its approach to academic advising, and ongoing developments to the University's virtual learning environment (VLE) - GCU Learn.

13   The Student Experience Action Plan (SEAP) plays a key role in supporting the achievement of this strategic commitment to partnership working and contains four overarching themes, which were identified in consultation with students. The overarching aims of the SEAP are: Student Engagement and a Sense of Belonging; Programme Organisation, Management and Delivery; Assessment and Feedback; and Wider Student Experience. Combined with the University's analysis of student survey and feedback data, the ELIR team confirmed that the SEAP is an effective mechanism which ensures that activities that drive enhancement to the student experience are coherent, consistent and well-focused across the University's schools and professional services areas (paragraphs 91-93).

14   The University's strategic commitment to partnership working with students and the Students' Association is also demonstrated through the existence of a Student Partnership Agreement (SPA). The Reflective Analysis (RA) states that the Agreement articulates the culture of partnership as a genuine community approach, rather than a list of actions. Through the RA and discussions with senior staff and student representatives, the ELIR team confirmed that the SEAP is closely aligned with the Student Partnership Agreement and the Students' Association Strategic Plan. As the University finalises its new *Strategy 2030* (paragraphs 2 and 89), senior and academic staff who met the team described a continued commitment to the student experience, with a planned refresh and realignment of the Students' Association Strategy, the SPA and SEAP to ensure their continued effectiveness.

15   The ELIR team was able to confirm that, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the University continued to demonstrate its commitment to consultation and partnership working with the Students' Association. The President and President-Elect joined the Executive Board COVID-19 meetings and operational meetings which make decisions on the University's ongoing response to the pandemic, including developing actions to student feedback obtained through the GCU Emergency Remote Learning survey, which was used by the University to shape decisions and changes to policies.

Student representation

16   The University has established effective representation structures which support high levels of engagement with over 500 class-level representatives at undergraduate and postgraduate level, 22 department representatives for undergraduates and school-level representatives for postgraduate taught students. For postgraduate research (PGR) students, there is a representative and deputy for each school in Glasgow and a London PGR representative (paragraph 72). The Students' Association sabbatical officers run for four open-remit roles, rather than being elected to a specific role, with the candidate with the most votes having the opportunity to become president, while the others become vice-presidents with responsibilities for one academic school and a portfolio of thematic areas.

17   Students who spoke with the ELIR team confirmed that these representative structures are embedded across the totality of the University's provision, including at its London campus and at collaborative partners. Undergraduate and postgraduate students

studying at the Glasgow and London campuses confirmed that the representation system is effective in ensuring that their voices are heard, and that appropriate and timely action is taken as a result of their feedback. Undergraduate and postgraduate taught students studying with collaborative partners also confirmed that effective student representation structures are in place, which, while not identical to those in place at the Glasgow campus, offer comparable opportunities for students to raise and resolve issues (paragraph 154).

18   Student representatives are appropriately engaged in university decision-making at all levels with membership of University Senate, key university committees with responsibilities for learning and teaching and the wider student experience, and programme and school boards. Student-Staff Consultative Groups (SSCG) meet regularly with discussions feeding into programme and school board meetings. The minutes of these Groups indicate good levels of student attendance. Students are also panel members in quality assurance and enhancement processes such as Enhancement-led Internal Subject Review (ELISR) (paragraph 120).

19   At the time of the 2015 ELIR, the Students' Association and the University had recently established the Student Action Group for Engagement (SAGE) to support genuine student participation in learning, teaching, quality and the enhancement of the wider student experience. During this review, through discussions with student representatives, the ELIR team confirmed that SAGE is now well-established and effective in ensuring students are consulted on proposed changes to quality processes and student-facing policies. In 2017, the University Senate approved a proposal which requires all student-facing policies to be presented to SAGE for consultation before consideration by Senate. Examples of topics discussed at SAGE include learning capture, the University's VLE and mechanisms to support closing the feedback loop.

20   The Students' Association supports the student experience through managing and training class representatives with support from Student Partnerships in Quality Scotland (sparqs), running clubs and societies at both campuses, hosting on-campus and virtual social events such as Freshers' Week, and providing confidential advice and support services. Students are also supported to develop graduate skills through initiatives such as the Student Leaders Programme run by the Students' Association. Students' Association Full-Time Officers also have the opportunity to participate in the University's Post Experience Certificate in Student Engagement - an early exit award of the Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice (PgCAP) (paragraph 104) - allowing elected officers the option of gaining Associate Fellowship of the HEA. The ELIR team noted from the Reflective Analysis that the Students' Association has received a National Union of Students (NUS) Quality Students' Unions Award. Students who met with the ELIR team reflected positively on the range of extra-curricular opportunities on offer.

Responding to student feedback

21   On balance, the ELIR team confirmed that GCU had an effective approach to gathering and responding to student feedback. Following the 2015 ELIR, the University undertook a review of its approach to student surveys, making a number of enhancements. The University has established a Survey Unit and the Student Survey Working Group (with representation from the Students' Association) which, the ELIR team was able to confirm, both support a centralised institutional approach to survey management and the dissemination of outcomes. Academic and professional services staff also confirmed to the ELIR team, the value of these developments which they stated provided oversight of student feedback, and a forum to develop questions in partnership with students and analyse the value of the surveys.

22   Students are provided with access to a range of internal feedback mechanisms including the New2GCU induction survey, Module Evaluation Questionnaires (MEQ) and the PGR GCU Experience Survey (PGR GCUES) (paragraph 73), as well as external surveys such as the National Student Survey (NSS) and Graduate Outcomes survey. In addition to these mechanisms, student representatives reflected positively on the value of the University's annual Student Experience Summit as an effective forum for staff and student discussion and consultation on key issues or proposals identified to enhance the student experience. Themes for each Summit are identified by Students' Association Full-Time Officers and university staff drawing on the key issues identified from the full range of student feedback data collected. Through this forum, the University has developed plans to support improvements to mental health services, student partnership working and responding to the student voice.

23   In 2019, in response to a small decline in student response rates to its surveys and a 54% satisfaction rate from students to NSS question 25 ('It is clear how students' feedback on the course has been acted upon'), the University introduced a pilot process in 2019-20, involving 1,800 students, which automates closing the feedback loop to students completing its Module Evaluation Questionnaires (MEQ). This system has been introduced to provide greater consistency of feedback to students in response to their comments and, at the time of the ELIR, had recently been rolled out across all Trimester B modules. With its relatively recent introduction, the ELIR team was unable to reach a view on the effectiveness of this system to provide a more consistent approach to responding to student feedback but viewed this development as positive.

24   Finally, the University also employs a range of approaches to support engagement and communication with students, including e-newsletters, social media, display signage and an induction app. It has established a Student Communication and Events team which offers strategic, centralised channels to promote campaigns and enhancements, with Student Communications and Engagement Assistants used to support communications in each school. The University also uses mechanisms such as its 'You Said, We Did' campaigns and 'Pause for Reflection and Feedback Week' to respond to student feedback and provide time for discussions with students during trimesters. Despite a variety of initiatives, a small number of students who met with the ELIR team stated that, in some instances, they continue to be unclear about how their feedback is actioned. Overall, while the ELIR team was reassured as to the effectiveness of the range of feedback mechanisms used by the University, it is encouraged to continue to reflect on and evaluate this suite of initiatives and ensure these include effective communication of actions taken to close the feedback loop, particularly to distance and collaborative students.

2.2   Recognising and responding to equality and diversity in the student population, including widening access and mode and location of study

Equality and diversity

25   The University has made significant progress in embedding inclusion across the institution and has effective arrangements in place which recognise and respond to equality and diversity matters across the diversity of its student population. This includes the development and implementation of a range of initiatives to support equality and diversity (paragraphs 26-32), the continued use of Equality Champions within schools and directorates to promote equality and diversity across the University, provision of an inclusive and supportive learning environment (paragraphs 74, and 77-80), targeted student support (paragraph 44) and its approach to curriculum design and delivery (paragraphs 31 and 90).

26   The University's strong commitment to equality and diversity is reflected in: its vision as the 'University for the Common Good'; its mission to make a positive difference to the

communities it serves; the *Strategy 2020;* and the *Strategy for Learning* (SfL). Its approach to equality and diversity is also underpinned by the embedding of dignity and respect behaviours in its GCU values and through the implementation of its Dignity at Work staff policy which outlines its commitment to the fair treatment of people, having an inclusive and supportive environment and a shared commitment to mainstreaming equality and diversity in its functions.

27   The People Committee oversees the University's approach to equality and diversity, through a range of university-wide groups to consider specific aspects of equality and diversity, including the Advancing Gender Equality Group and the Tackling Racism Group. The University's Equality Outcomes 2017-2021 meets its obligations under the *Equality Act 2010* and aligns with *Strategy 2020*.

28   The University's commitment to equality and diversity is further evidenced by the extensive range of initiatives currently undertaken including its approach to addressing Gender Equality as outlined in its SFC Outcome Agreement 2019-20 and the publication of its Gender Action Plan in 2017 (as required by the SFC). The Gender Action Plan aims to identify and address gender-related barriers to student participation and progression at the University and focuses on six academic subject areas where gender imbalance has been identified. The University uses its Data Analytics Shared Hub (DASH) (paragraphs 137) effectively to actively monitor gender equality, through its analysis of data on applications, enrolments, retention and progression. The University's 2017-18 HESA data indicates that, over 90% retention was achieved for male and female students. The University also currently holds an Athena Swan Bronze Award and as part of its activities has: supported approximately 70 female staff through the Advance HE Aurora programme; achieved a reduction in the gender pay gap among academic staff; and is embedding gender equality principles into recruitment and academic promotion processes.

29   The ELIR team considered the University's work on Gender Based Violence is of particular note including: establishing a Gender Based Violence Action Group; training First Responders to support and advise survivors of gender based and sexual violence; the running of campaigns such as 'Erase the Grey' which challenges stereotypical attitudes and behaviours and reiterates a zero tolerance policy towards gender-based violence; and participation in external initiatives such as Fearless Glasgow which aims to raise awareness of gender-based violence. Recognising the potential needs of trans and gender diverse students, the University has also developed and implemented a Trans Student Support policy.

30   The University is also addressing race inequality and the black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) student attainment gap. In 2017-18, the proportion of BAME students studying at the University was 10%, albeit with a positive retention rate of 95%. During the review, the ELIR team noted that while the University has now recruited a higher proportion of BAME students, grouped around nine or ten of its programmes of study, its analysis of data has shown that achievement among this group of students remains a concern for the University. Exploring this with staff, the ELIR team was informed that a short-life working group on Tackling Racism has been formed to develop recommendations for the University. Since the ELIR review visits, the short-life working group has become a permanent group, with the remit of supporting and advising the University on the implementation of the recommendations, including the development of action plans for each recommendation, as well as monitoring and evaluating progress. The team would encourage the University to continue with its work on developing plans in this area.

31   The University's *Strategy for Learning* (SfL) (paragraph 90) requires that curriculum design is underpinned by the values of equity and fairness, and academic staff who met the ELIR team were clear about how this approach supports student diversity. All staff are

expected to undertake Equality and Diversity Training which includes modules on 'Diversity in the Workplace' and 'Understanding Unconscious' bias (this module is compulsory for members of staff who conduct staff performance reviews). New staff complete the training as part of their induction to the University. Academic staff engagement with this training is monitored by the schools and is one of their key performance indicators (KPIs).

32   The ELIR team commends the University for the significant progress it has made to embed equality, diversity and inclusion in all aspects of university life, adopting an approach which is based on a genuine and respectful appreciation of the diverse needs of its students. This is demonstrated through the use of school and directorate-based Equality Champions, its approaches to tacking gender-based violence and racism, and a range of policy developments including the Dignity at Work and Study Policy, the Trans Student Policy and the Gender and Race Equality action plans. Progression and retention data provide evidence of its successful approach.

Student wellbeing and disability support

33   The University's Wellbeing team offers a comprehensive range of support and online resources for students, including a Disability Service, a Counselling Service, Mental Health Advisors and a Wellbeing Advisor, based at its Glasgow Campus. A comparable set of services is also offered at the University's London Campus through the GCU London Student Wellbeing, Counselling and Disabilities Service. The central Disability Service works in partnership with the school Disability Coordinators ensuring a consistent approach to supporting students, as well as providing updates on policy and procedures to staff. Students from both Glasgow and London spoke positively about the range of support mechanisms available through the Wellbeing teams. Students also stated that services had been highlighted to them during induction and that some students had been referred to these services by their personal tutors.

34   The ELIR team noted that during the current COVID-19 pandemic, all of these services continued and were offered online, with a range of additional online resources also developed and made available to students. During 2020, the Disability team provided a Summer Transition programme for students with a diagnosis on the autistic spectrum, a diagnosed mental illness or dyslexia and continues to work with students online and through dedicated student mentors. In August 2020, the University also launched 'TogetherAll' (formerly Big White Wall) which is a 24/7 online global community aimed at supporting students' mental health, where students can access support from trained professionals.

35   The University makes effective use of data to monitor trends in the number of students declaring long-term conditions, the types of support needs being requested by students and the volume of students making uses of services in this area. The University reflects on this data using it to inform changes to the services it offers - for example, in 2018-19, to address the increasing demand for support, the University appointed additional mental health advisors. All staff in the Wellbeing team are trained to deal with mental health issues. Following the establishment of a Student Mental Health task group in 2017, the University and the Students' Association, committed to developing an annual Student Mental Health Agreement. The Student Wellbeing Advisory Group which includes staff and student representatives from both the Glasgow and London campuses, is responsible for this work, developing and overseeing a Student Mental Health Action Plan, which runs in parallel with the University's Mental Health at Work Action plan (which is focused on staff support, development and training). A Project Officer has recently been appointed (2019-20) to work on the implementation of both plans and to work specifically with the Students' Association on the implementation of the Student Mental Health Action Plan. Students, academic and professional support staff who met the ELIR team, spoke very positively about the University's work in supporting mental health and the positive impact of its approach.

Widening participation and student retention

36   The University's strong and long-standing commitment to widening participation is reflected in its vision as the University for 'the Common Good' and the *Strategy 2020*. In 2017-18, 22% of the University's students came from SIMD20 backgrounds, with the percentage of this group being retained standing at 91%. This commitment to widening participation is evidenced throughout the student journey.

37   The University offers an extensive range of effective outreach initiatives, all of which involve sustained engagement with relevant communities and the use of student mentors. The academic schools also participate in a number of additional outreach activities designed to encourage attainment and progression to higher education subject areas such as engineering, science and mathematics. School-based widening participation managers meet regularly with the central University Outreach team ensuring activities are appropriately coordinated.

38   The outreach initiatives include the well-established Caledonian Club which works with local school pupils and communities and aims to raise aspirations in relation to progression to higher education and developing life skills. In 2017-18, the Club engaged around 1,900 pupils and 400 parents and family members in Glasgow, offering school pupils from nursery to S6, with the opportunity to engage in a range of programmes. Since the last ELIR, the Caledonian Club has expanded its programmes - for example, the University piloted a Celebrating Science project with its partner schools (2017-18). The ELIR team learned that the parallel GCU London Club, working with its local schools and communities, is now in its third year of operation. A number of students who met the ELIR team spoke very highly of their personal experience of the work of the Caledonian Club including the opportunity it provided for them to take on the role of Caledonian Club student mentors.

39   Another outreach initiative is the Advanced Higher Hub, based at the University's Glasgow Campus. The Hub aims to, and continues to succeed in, raising pupil attainment and confidence levels, and supports transition into higher education by, each year, providing around 100-150 S6 pupils from underrepresented communities, with the opportunity to study for Advanced Highers in a range of subject areas. School pupils have access to facilities at the Glasgow Campus and, over the course of the year, study to develop academic and interpersonal skills while gaining valuable experience of student life. In 2018-19, 110 pupils took part with an overall Advanced Highers pass rate of 91% achieved.

40   The School Connect programme works with 12 partner secondary schools across three core projects to break down barriers to progression to higher education. Similarly, Routes for All, which represents the University's contribution to the Schools for Higher Education Programme (SHEP) delivers a programme of activities designed to prepare school pupils to study Higher National qualifications at college.

41   The University's approach engages current students with paid work experience opportunities to support outreach activities as student mentors. Many of the students supporting outreach activities are themselves from a widening participation background. Students recognised these opportunities as providing a valuable experience in the context of their personal development, as well as the positive impact on prospective students, who are able to listen first-hand to individuals from similar backgrounds. Students highlighted their satisfaction with outreach support, citing the transition programme and mentorship schemes as being of particular value.

42   In order to support its widening participation aims the University's contextualised admissions policy, which includes minimum entry requirements, recognises different learner journeys and was revised for academic year 2018-19 to include students from SIMD20 and SIMD40 areas who have attended the Schools for Higher Education Programme (SHEP) in

Scotland, young carers and care experienced students.

43   During the review visit, the University shared with the ELIR team, its ambitions to continue to grow its widening participation and articulation activities. The team understands that, following a review of its widening participation activities in 2018-19, the University is currently developing a revised framework and detailed action plan for widening participation, in order to align with the aims of *Strategy 2030*. This work is expected to be completed during the current academic year (2020-21).

44   The University also provides a wide range of targeted support for specific student groups, including a dedicated team, who work with care experienced students, estranged students and young carers. The University's work with, and support for, care experienced students both pre and post-enrolment is extensive and proactive, providing financial, learning, wellbeing and accommodation support. The University's approach also includes: a Corporate Parenting Plan, assignment of a staff mentor; a long-term laptop loan scheme; a guaranteed interview should a care-experienced student wish to apply to be a student mentor; and signing of the Stand Alone Pledge. The Students' Association also has dedicated representatives and representation groups for care experienced students. These representatives feed into the Corporate Parent Steering group which oversees the University's Corporate Parenting Plan. In response to additional challenges arising from the current COVID-19 pandemic, the ELIR team learned the University had developed a new online transition module for care experienced students with the aim of building student confidence and familiarity with the institution.

45   Targeted support mechanisms are also in place for other student groups including a Student Carer Policy to support students with caring responsibilities, and support for veterans and their families to access education and employment. The ELIR team was able to confirm through their meetings with students, that the support provided to specific student groups is proactive. Students spoke very positively about the University's approach to recognising and proactively supporting its students, and valued the targeted and flexible support put in place to support their diverse needs.

46   The University's long-standing strategic commitment to widening participation has been effectively embedded in the institutional culture and represents excellent practice. Examples of effective outreach initiatives include the well-established Caledonian Club, the Advanced Higher Hub and the School Connect programme. The evidence-based approach taken ensures proactive interventions to support student success are evident at all stages of the student journey. This is demonstrated by the University's progression and retention data and the development of ongoing targeted support for the University's diverse student population which includes a dedicated team who work with care experienced students, estranged students and young carers.

2.3   Supporting students in their learning at each stage of the learner journey from pre-admission to post-graduation, including outreach, admissions, articulation, graduate attributes, assessment, employability, and enterprise and entrepreneurship

47   The University has an effective, holistic and student-centred approach to supporting students at each stage of their learner journey, providing a comprehensive range of services and activities from enquiry to graduation.

Articulation, transition and induction support

48   In addition to its extensive suite of outreach initiatives (paragraphs 37-42), the University also has a number of strategic articulation routes in place. The College Connect

Advisory Group, chaired by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (DVC) (Learning, Teaching and the Student Experience), oversees the development and monitoring of the University's college partnerships. The University provides an appropriate range of support to articulating students including: the College Connect Summer Transition programme; school, subject and programme-level initiatives like the School of Computing, Engineering and Built Environment's Maths Summer School; and pre-entry workshops and webinars provided by the University's Library team.

49   To support consistency, the University adopts a cross-institutional approach to the delivery of its student induction programme within the academic schools. Induction activities include the 'Getting Started @GCU' online course, an induction app for new students and an induction checklist for use by academics. In addition, the University provides induction activities for specific student groups - for example, cohort-based research student induction, where students from the London campus have the opportunity to visit the Glasgow campus (paragraph 67).

50   In 2020, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the University took steps to further enhance its approach to induction, offering an extended two-week induction programme, along with a Peer Assisted Learning Scheme (PALS) to connect students on their course through digital communication groups.

51   During the visit, the ELIR team learned from staff and students that the support and induction practices for collaborative students was variable and could, at times, be unclear to students. Some students at collaborative partners were also not aware particularly of the University central support services and resources available to them. The ELIR team would therefore encourage the University to continue to review the delivery of its induction activities and explore opportunities to apply examples of existing successful practice to more effectively support its collaborative and students studying at a distance.

Feedback on assessment

52   The University has recognised, as a theme in its Student Experience Action Plan (SEAP) (paragraph 13), the need to continue to take action to improve students' experience of assessment and feedback. At the time of the ELIR, the University was implementing a Digital Assessment Policy to move all assessment submission and feedback online (paragraph 78) and making enhancements to the Student Performance Feedback Policy to provide greater clarity of the expectations of staff and students with regard to engaging with feedback on assessments. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the ELIR team learned these developments had been accelerated to support the move to blended learning and a new GCU Going Digital Framework has been implemented (paragraph 80). The University had also implemented a new FAQs link to assessment and alternative assessment processes and guidelines to enhance practice and has a clearly defined Assessment Handbook (paragraph 126). This site also contains a range of resources including assessment and feedback pro formas, and videos and case studies on a range of approaches to provide feedback to students.

53   Staff spoke positively about the greater use of electronic assessments and the use of techniques such as audio feedback but also recognised occasional challenges in meeting the three-week turnaround policy for feedback on assessments. Students confirmed assessment feedback was not always returned within the stated turnaround period and assessment briefs could, on occasion, be vague. Students, including those at collaborative partners, also highlighted that the quality of feedback on assessments was not always consistent in volume and usefulness. However, students valued the culture of open dialogue with academics regarding their assessment feedback, stating that staff were very approachable and willing to provide students with further explanations when needed.

On balance, the ELIR team recommends that the University builds on progress made through a range of recent improvements in policy and practice relating to feedback on assessment, and should continue to work with students, across all modes of study, to address the improvements they would like to see around consistency in both the quality and timeliness of assessment feedback.

Academic advice and study support

54   In 2017-18, following a review of academic advising, the University made a number of changes to its approach, including revising role descriptors and guidance for staff and students, and changing the title of this activity from 'Academic Advising' to 'Personal Tutoring' to reflect the pastoral support provided to students. Staff confirmed that the University provided training for colleagues undertaking the personal tutor role. They also spoke positively about the clarity of the communications' approach adopted by the University regarding the role of personal tutors and viewed the ability of personal tutors to provide evidence for students' mitigating circumstances cases as a useful development. Students at both the Glasgow and London campuses were aware of the personal tutoring system, speaking positively about its impact on their personal wellbeing. However, students also highlighted variation in practice regarding the requirements for meeting with their tutors, with some students attending regular meetings and some students meeting only on a voluntary basis.

55   Academic study support for students is provided by the Learning Development Centres (LDC) which are located within each academic school. These centres offer training and resources on skills such as academic writing, ICT support, and study skills. Students spoke very positively about the support received from these centres. The ELIR team heard from staff that this school-based approach allows additional discipline specific support to be provided and, while some resources and booking systems are shared, the team noted there is variability between each of the school LDC webpages regarding how the information is presented to students and also the range of services offered. Overall, the ELIR team believe the support offered by the LCDs was comprehensive. However, the team would encourage the University to work with the LDC teams to explore opportunities to support the greater sharing of resources, particularly those available in a digital environment. This would ensure that students across all the schools get the opportunity to benefit from best practice.

Work-related learning and employability

56   The University provides students with appropriate opportunities to undertake placements or work experience across the majority of its undergraduate programmes, with these organised and facilitated at programme level. Industry links are fostered through programme advisory groups. During placements, a review is conducted after six to eight weeks to check the placement is as expected and involves the university academic placement tutor meeting separately with the student and their placement line manager. Students viewed the number of placements and work experience opportunities offered, and the open and transparent systems associated with their management, positively.

57   Since the last ELIR, the University has taken the strategic decision to adopt an institutional approach to apprenticeships, developing a model, approved by the Academic Policy and Practice Committee (APPC), outlining how programmes will be designed and delivered. The GCU apprenticeship model meets the Degree Apprentice (England) and Graduate Apprentice (Scotland) criteria and is informed by QAA guidance. The University has implemented effective support mechanisms for students undertaking Graduate Apprenticeship programmes including: regular link meetings between the University and the employer; and Graduate Apprenticeship Tutors working with each cohort to coach and support students in the workplace. Students also have access to all university support

services. Students studying on Graduate Apprenticeship programmes reflected positively on their experience, confirming they were able to regularly communicate with course staff. However, as perhaps expected with this type of programme, while confirming they were well supported, students did outline the ongoing challenges of balancing work and study commitments.

58   The University embeds its 'Common Good Attributes' within the curriculum, with this approach also being applied to provision delivered by all its collaborative partners. Examples of approaches to developing these attributes within the formal curriculum include the use of core employability, enterprise and entrepreneurship modules, design projects on some modules or interprofessional education activities. The development of 'Common Good Attributes' is also supported through a range of core and extra-curricular activities. Students recognised the value of these attributes to their education and articulated a strong connection to the four 'Common Good Attributes' themes (active and global citizenship, an entrepreneurial mindset, responsible leadership and confidence).

59   Students also have appropriate opportunities to develop their entrepreneurial skills through core and extra-curricular activities - examples include: attending enterprise seminars; participating in the annual Enterprise Fair; participating in lunchtime showcase events highlighting successful GCU entrepreneurs; and competing for enterprise funding. The University operates the UHatch enterprise incubator which has effectively supported over 45 new graduate start-up businesses. The University continues to actively engage with national entrepreneurial programmes including AccelerateHer, Scottish Edge and Entrepreneurship Scotland. The ELIR team believe there would be benefits to the University and its students in continuing to further develop and embed enterprise opportunities for students across the curriculum, so more of its students get the opportunity to develop skills in this area.

60   The University has appropriate mechanisms in place to support students with their career progression and employability, including career conversation events where employers host on-campus, informal drop-in sessions, more traditional careers fairs, self-access online resources and personal development programmes for students such as 'Grow', 'Aspire' and 'Lead (GAL)' which provides support to female students on confidence, leadership and skills development. During the review, the ELIR team learned that to provide additional support to its 2020 graduates, whose career prospects have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, the University launched its 'Mentoring, Internships, Networking and Talks (MINT)' initiative. Graduates can also join the online networking platform - GCU Connect - allowing them to link up with GCU graduates worldwide and which, from September 2020, has provided a series of online talks supported by industry experts. The team note from the Reflective Analysis that the University plans to focus its next Thematic Review on careers and employability to ensure alignment with the new *Strategy 2030*, providing it with the opportunity to reflect on challenges in the current employment market.

Student mobility

61   The University has appropriate arrangements in place for promoting, managing and supporting students who engage with Erasmus, study abroad and international exchange activities. International study experiences are managed by the Exchange and Study Abroad team. In line with the University's approach to widening participation and promoting the 'Common Good', it provides initiatives such as travel awards where students from disadvantaged backgrounds can access funding to undertake international opportunities.

2.4 Postgraduate taught and research student experience

62   Overall, the University has an effective approach to managing and enhancing the postgraduate student experience, with the support provided meeting sector expectations. The University has changed the way it elicits feedback from its postgraduate students to ensure their voice is heard more effectively. This is reflected in both its revised approach to conducting postgraduate student surveys and changes to the postgraduate representation systems. The University has also recognised the ongoing challenges of developing a postgraduate research student community and taken a number of positive actions to address this issue including establishing and delivering a one-day, cross-institutional induction programme.

Postgraduate taught students

63   The University delivers a comprehensive portfolio of taught postgraduate provision at its Glasgow and London campuses, with the latter predominantly being a postgraduate campus. A number of taught postgraduate programmes are also delivered through the University's collaborative partners. Postgraduate taught provision is managed by the academic schools and departments. Students from the Glasgow and London campuses confirmed that the support services offered by the University were accessible and appropriate for their needs. In particular, they spoke positively about the availability of support for developing academic writing skills and the range of support in place for international students including activities to support the development of English language skills. The students also confirmed that during the COVID-19 pandemic they were able to access learning and support services online. PGT students studying with collaborative partners confirmed to the ELIR team that they have access to appropriate local support services and can also access the University's VLE - GCU Learn - and online library services. The ELIR team considered teaching and assessment, student support and feedback, and representation arrangements for postgraduate taught (PGT) students to be comparable to those of undergraduates.

64   Following the University's decision to stop participating in the external Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES) - taken in 2018 - in addition to completing module evaluation questionnaires, PGT students had completed an annual internal postgraduate survey (PGT GCUES). The ELIR team noted that from 2018-19, module evaluation results are aggregated at programme level and the University had therefore decided to discontinue its internal student experience surveys for undergraduate and PGT students from session 2019-20. The University stated that issuing Module Evaluation questionnaires each trimester, provides more feedback points during the academic year and also supports targeted analysis and improvements to the student experience at a more granular level with the ability to review at module, programme, department, school and university level. The team would encourage the University to monitor the data provided from its Module Evaluation questionnaires to continue to satisfy itself that these do indeed provide it with appropriate information on the quality of the student experience at programme level. International PGT students also complete the International Student Barometer (ISB). The team understands that the University has taken the decision to withdraw from participating in the ISB. Overall student satisfaction in the 2019 PGT GCUES survey, which had a participation rate of 25%, was 81% compared to 76% in 2018. In discussions with the ELIR team, the University indicated that it had established its 'closing the feedback' initiative (paragraph 23) as part of the response to recognising that this participation rate was low. Outcomes from these surveys feed into the University's quality processes, such as annual monitoring (paragraphs 117-119). Postgraduate students who met the ELIR team expressed general satisfaction with the learning resources available to them. They also confirmed the increased importance of the University's VLE - GCU Learn - and the availability of online library resources during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Postgraduate research students

65   The University has around 445 research students, from 60 countries, studying on PhD, Professional Doctorate or Master of Research programmes, through full-time, part-time and distance modes of study. Postgraduate research (PGR) students are located in the three academic schools in Glasgow as well as at the London campus. Governance of the University's provision is overseen by the Research Degrees Committee (RDC). The Graduate School oversees the PGR student experience in partnership with the academic schools and professional support services. The Graduate School coordinates postgraduate research student induction, supports the administration of student progression arrangements, leads on the development of PGR regulations, develops and delivers training for supervisors and students, and supports the development of PGR students. The ELIR team confirmed that the Graduate School was effective in this role. Staff and postgraduate students who met with the team were also clear about the role of the Graduate School in supporting PGR students.

66   In response to a recommendation from the 2015 ELIR and a decrease in student satisfaction in the 2017 Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) - which resulted in 72% overall satisfaction (compared with 78% in 2015), with this score being 8% below the post-1992 sector benchmark at that time - the University undertook a Thematic Review of the PGR student experience. A short-life working group was then established with Students' Association and PGR student representation, to implement the resulting action plan approved by Senate in May 2019. Developments included: establishing a revised (PGR) representation system (paragraph 72,); the introduction of an internal postgraduate research student survey (PGR GCUES) (paragraph 73); and the provision of dedicated space in the library for PGR students. Some of the newer PGR students who met the ELIR team were aware of the review but not of its impact, while other students who had been at the University longer spoke positively about some of the changes, such as the introduction of dedicated study space in the library.

Support for postgraduate research students

67   Postgraduate research (PGR) students undergo a one-day induction programme organised and coordinated by the Graduate School, which is offered three times per academic year. Students stated they had found the induction useful and it had supported them to feel part of a cohort and research student community. The ELIR team learned that up until this academic session, students studying at a distance and at the London campus had the opportunity to attend induction in Glasgow, with the University providing support for this.

68   PGR students are appropriately supported by a supervisory team of at least two supervisors, headed by a Director of Studies who is their main point of contact. The research degree regulations clearly set out supervisory arrangements including the maximum number of students that Directors of Study can be allocated. In-house training is provided for supervisors by the Graduate School. This training is mandatory for new supervisors with no research degree completions and attendance must be confirmed before they are finally allocated to supervise a student. More experienced supervisors attend a minimum of one refresher training session every two years. Supervisors confirmed this training is in place, that they had found it useful to attend and that it provided peer support and networking opportunities. Additional support is available for PGR students through a system of school-level Senior PGR Tutors, subject/programme area PGR Tutors, school-level Associate Deans (Research), and research administrators. Students can approach any one of these staff as necessary which ensures students have other points of contact should they, for example, experience issues with their supervisors.

69   PGR students are also provided with a range of generic and specialist resources to support their studies. Student who met the ELIR team were generally satisfied with the resources available and spoke positively about library resources, IT facilities, support and study space. The ELIR team confirmed that relevant forms and arrangements for student progression are set out on the Graduate School website and managed through the Schools Research Progression and Award Boards. Students demonstrated a clear understanding of the progression process.

Development opportunities for postgraduate research students

70   The Graduate School provides postgraduate research (PGR) students with a workshop-based researcher development programme based on the four domains of the Vitae Researcher Development Framework. At the time of the ELIR, and in response to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, workshop sessions were offered online. Students welcomed the fact that they can select the workshop sessions to match their specific needs and aspirations. Students also confirmed they are expected to submit annual personal development plans and record the details of the development sessions they attend in these plans. In addition to the researcher development programme, students at both the Glasgow and London campuses confirmed they also have opportunities to participate in other development opportunities including: attending and presenting their work at in-house workshops and seminars; participating in three-minute thesis sessions; and receive funding to attend external conferences.

71   In response to a recommendation from the last ELIR, the University has revised its support arrangements for Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTA). All PGR students who undertake the GTA role must now complete the 'Introduction to Teaching Skills' programme prior to undertaking their teaching role. Employment contracts are not issued to students until they complete this programme. GTAs are encouraged and supported to become associate teaching fellows with Advance HE through completing the University's Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice (PgCAP) (paragraph 104). Students confirmed they had found the teaching skills programme helpful in preparing them for their teaching roles, including supporting them with the current requirement to deliver online. Students also confirmed that departmental support was in place to ensure they were familiar with any specialist equipment needed for their teaching.

Postgraduate research student representation and responding to feedback

72   The University gathers feedback from its postgraduate research (PGR) students in a number of ways including through the recently revised representation system and the new internal survey. From 2019-20, PGR students are now represented by one representative and one deputy per academic school in Glasgow and in London through a single PGR representative on the London School Board. These representatives sit on school boards and focus on thematic issues raised by PGR students. Students from both campuses confirmed the new representation system was effective in both supporting them to raise any issues of concern and ensuring matters were appropriately resolved. Through its discussions with PGR student representatives, the ELIR team was able to confirm that students had been consulted, as part of the University's response to COVID-19, through monthly meetings with the Pro-Vice-Chancellor Research and Enterprise.

73   Following a decision to withdraw from participating in the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES), the University developed a new internal, biannual, PGR survey (PGR GCUES), which ran for the first time in 2018-19. This feedback is considered by the Learning and Teaching Sub-Committee (LTSC). The University recognises the ongoing challenges of developing a PGR student community and has taken a number of positive actions to address this. Examples include: establishing a PGR-only library space; ensuring

PGRs are located close to their supervisory teams; offering cohort-based induction; and including postgraduate researchers in lunchtime seminars. At the London campus, a Research Club has been set up which allows PGRs to present their research. PGR students spoke very positively about their experience and were appreciative of the variety of support they receive. They also confirmed that their induction programme had allowed them to form a cohort with a real sense of community.

2.5   Learning environment, including the use of technology

74   The University has effective arrangements in place for managing and enhancing the quality of the learning environment it offers to students. The University sets out its commitment to providing 'a contemporary consistent physical and digital learning environment which meets student's needs and supports their development' in its Student Experience Action Plan (SEAP) (paragraphs 91-93) and digital technologies and blended learning are a central pillar in the University's *Strategy for Learning* (SfL) (paragraph 90). At the time of this ELIR, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the majority of students were studying online and the ELIR team heard from senior staff that the University's longer-term ambition is to continue to develop its blended learning approach.

75   The University's major development project - 'The Heart of the Campus', ongoing at the time of the 2015 ELIR, is complete and has resulted in a number of improvements in relation to the physical learning environment, its accessibility and connectivity. The project included several changes to the library including: improved connectivity to the rest of the campus; the reconfiguration of library space and the library collection; the introduction of a roving support model for students; the introduction of a laptop vending machine and the development of more online resources.

76   Student satisfaction with learning resources is measured in a variety of ways including through the internal and external surveys used by the University, with satisfaction levels across these surveys remaining fairly consistent. Students stated they were satisfied with the available learning and library resources, with the ELIR team learning that in response to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, library services are now fully online, including online library drop-in sessions.

77   The University's commitment to delivering enhancements to its digital learning environment is demonstrated in its Digital Strategy 2016-20. A Digital Learning Implementation Group was established in 2017 to develop and implement the Digital Learning Enhancement Plan. This plan outlines the University's digital priorities which include: curriculum design for online programmes; the electronic management of assessment; the development of staff digital skills and capabilities; the use of learning analytics; upgrades to learning technology systems; and integrated module evaluation. A number of these priorities have already been delivered - for example, activities undertaken to support staff to develop their digital skills and capabilities include establishing this requirement as a key priority within the Academic Development Framework (paragraph 103), offering a range of development opportunities to develop staff skills including lunchtime and breakfast training sessions which, since the pandemic, have been offered online and using learning technologists based in each school to support staff with their online teaching practices.

78   In relation to the Electronic Management of Assessment priority, the University's Digital Assessment Policy aims to 'encourage consistent and effective approaches to digital assessment practices across the University to enhance the student learning experience.' The policy seeks to move all submission, and marking and feedback on assessment online from academic year 2018-19. From 2017-18, the University's expectation has been that all suitable assignments are submitted online, with digital marking and feedback also being the

norm. The University recognises a gap in its use of learning analytics to improve its oversight of online submission and feedback at school level. With no information available in the RA regarding how the University aims to address this gap, the ELIR team believe there would be value to the University and its students from developing a plan and timeline to support the delivery this information. Students who met the team confirmed they submit their assignments online and that feedback is provided by staff electronically and were supportive of this approach, including its alignment with studying on a 'green' campus.

79   As part of its strategic approach to enhancing the digital learning environment, the University's virtual learning environment (VLE) - GCU Learn - has been updated and a minimum set of expectations and standard template for module content established. The ELIR team was also able to confirm that the University has developed staff guides and module templates to support a consistent approach. Overall, students were generally positive about their recent experiences of using online technology and perhaps unsurprisingly, given the timing of this ELIR, highlighted the increasing use, and importance of GCU Learn and other online resources to their student experience. The University has taken a number of positive steps to address the issue of digital poverty by providing students with relevant equipment, software and remote internet access, which was appreciated by students who met the ELIR team. However, while students spoke positively about the role of the VLE in supporting their learning, they did also acknowledge that some variability in content from module to module remains.

80   The ELIR team learned that as part of its response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the University has accelerated the implementation of its Digital Strategy and, to ensure a consistent approach to online and blended learning, developed the 'GCU Going Digital Framework', which was approved by Senate in July 2020. This Framework provides a set of pedagogic principles to guide curriculum design, assessment, learner support and staff development and is accompanied by a set of staff-facing principles. A network of departmental Digital Learning leads has also been established to identify and address the challenges that staff currently face as programme delivery rapidly shifted online. The ELIR team confirmed that a similar approach has been used to develop and provide online student support. Senior staff confirmed the University intends to retain this framework in order to meet its aim of utilising 'digital education and learning technologies to enhance student engagement, accessibility, flexibility and personalisation of the curriculum.' Recognising the rapid progress made by the University, the team believe there would be benefits to the University from undertaking a review of the impact of recent innovative developments in digital learning and the use of technology-based systems through the University's Going Digital Framework, which have supported online access for students to learning and support services during the current pandemic. The University is encouraged to consider how its approach will most effectively support its future ambitions to provide a blended learning experience and continue to support its aim of enhancing the experience of its diverse student body, regardless of mode of study and help develop a sense of community.

2.6   Effectiveness of the approach to enhancing the student learning experience

81   The University has an effective approach to enhancing the student learning experience. This is evidenced in its strategic commitment to providing an excellent student experience which is consistently reflected in its Strategy 2020, Student Experience Action Plan (SEAP) and *Strategy for Learning* (SfL). The University and GCU Students' Association have a long-standing, embedded, and collaborative relationship which is based on genuine and effective partnership working across all aspects of university life. This relationship brings a wide range of benefits to the student experience - for example, a well-established Student Partnership Agreement updated in partnership with students and the Students' Association

and representation structures that support the diversity of the University's student population. The Student Action Group for Engagement (SAGE) provides students, and their representatives, with the opportunity to play a full part in the development of university policy and practice associated with learning, teaching and the wider student experience. Students are clear that their contributions are valued and acted upon.

82   Overall, the ELIR team confirmed that GCU has an effective approach to gathering and responding to student feedback. Following the 2015 ELIR, the University undertook a review of its approach to student surveys, making a number of enhancements including establishing a Survey Unit and the Student Survey Working Group which support a centralised institutional approach to survey management and the dissemination of outcomes.

83   The University has made significant progress to embed equality, diversity and inclusion in all aspects of university life, adopting an approach which is based on a genuine and respectful appreciation of the diverse needs of its students. This is demonstrated through the continued use of initiatives such as school and directorate-based Equality Champions, its approaches to tackling gender-based violence and racism, and a range of policy developments including the Dignity at Work and Study Policy, the Trans Student Policy and the Gender and Race Equality action plans. Progression and retention data provide evidence of its successful approach.

84   The University's long-standing strategic commitment to widening participation has been effectively embedded in the institutional culture and represents excellent practice. Examples of effective outreach initiatives include the well-established Caledonian Club, the Advanced Higher Hub and the School Connect programme. The evidence-based approach taken ensures proactive interventions to support student success are evident at all stages of the student journey. This is demonstrated by the University's progression and retention data and the development of ongoing targeted support for the University's diverse student population which includes a dedicated team who work with care experienced students, estranged students and young carers.

85   The University recognises the need to continue with its commitment to improve the student experience of feedback on assessments. Recent developments include a Digital Assessment Policy which seeks to move all assessment submission, marking and feedback online and through enhancements to the Student Performance Feedback Policy. It is recommended that building on progress made through a range of recent improvements in policy and practice relating to feedback on assessment, the University should continue to work with students, across all modes of study, to address the improvements they would like to see around consistency in both the quality and timeliness of assessment feedback.

86   The University has an effective approach to managing and enhancing the postgraduate student experience. The University has recently changed the way it elicits feedback from its postgraduate students to ensure their voice is heard more effectively. This is reflected in both its revised approach to conducting postgraduate student surveys and changes to the postgraduate representation systems. The University has also recognised the ongoing challenges of developing a postgraduate research student community, taken a number of positive actions to address this issue including establishing a PGR-only library space, ensuring PGRs are located close to their supervisory teams and offering cohort-based induction

87   The University has effective arrangements in place for managing the quality of the learning environment. Improvements in its physical environment have occurred as a result of its now completed 'Heart of the Campus' project. Prior to the pandemic, it was working to ensure the implementation of its Digital Strategy priorities which, as a result of COVID-19, have been accelerated. Recognising the rapid progress made in response to the pandemic,

the team believe there would be benefits to the University from undertaking a review of the impact of recent innovative developments in digital learning and the use of technology-based systems through the University's Going Digital Framework, which have supported online access for students to learning and support services during the current pandemic. The University is encouraged to consider how its approach will most effectively support its future ambitions to provide a blended learning experience and continue to support its aim of enhancing the experience of its diverse student body, regardless of mode of study, and help develop a sense of community.

3   Strategy and practice for enhancing learning and teaching

3.1   Strategic approach to enhancement

88   The University has an effective strategic approach to enhancing learning and teaching and the wider student experience, achieved through its management and governance structures. This is evidenced through an inclusive and dynamic approach to engaging staff and students in the development of strategy and plans, and a systematic and effective approach to implementing and monitoring strategy at all levels.

89   The University has a clear mission and vision, articulated as 'the University for the Common Good', which is strongly embedded in all aspects of it strategic planning and implementation. This mission was a key driver in *Strategy 2020* and a strong influence in its *Strategy for Learning* (paragraph 90). The ELIR team found the 'Common Good' mission to be at the core of all aspects of university work and life, and it appears to be a central part of the University's culture. The University's approach to the development of strategies is genuinely consultative, and the ELIR team heard from both staff and students who confirmed they had been provided with the opportunity to contribute to the development of the new *Strategy 2030*. The strong link between the clearly understood mission and its articulation in strategies is due to the clear and consistent communication approach adopted. The team found the University's mission to be well understood by both staff and students.

90   The University's *Strategy for Learning* (SfL) helps supports the delivery of key elements of *Strategy 2020;* it is linked to learning and teaching and the delivery of an excellent student experience. The ELIR team understands the SfL will be reviewed again in line with development of *Strategy 2030* (paragraph 2 and 89). Strategic responsibility for teaching and learning is the remit of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (DVC) (Learning, Teaching and Student Experience) who chairs the Academic Policy and Practice Committee (APPC) - a sub-committee of the University Senate. This committee has responsibility for overseeing all aspects of the student journey, as well as the development of programmes, quality assurance and enhancement policies and processes, and the creation of teaching-related policy and regulations. Its sub-committee - Learning and Teaching Sub-Committee (LTSC) - is responsible for the effective implementation and monitoring of the University's quality assurance and enhancement processes.

91   The implementation of the SfL is supported by a university-level Student Experience Action Plan (SEAP) which is wide-ranging, with activity mapped to four main themes: student engagement and a sense of belonging; programme organisation, management and delivery; assessment and feedback; and the wider student experience. Each theme has a set of performance indicators which align to the University's Strategic Indicators. Chaired by the DVC (Learning, Teaching and the Student Experience) and with representatives from the Students' Association, the implementation of the SEAP is monitored by the Enhancing the Student Experience Steering Group (ETSE), which also reports to Executive Board, Senate and Court, on matters linked to learning and teaching and the wider student experience.

92   The ELIR team was able to confirm that schools and departments have their own local-level SEAPs, with activities overseen and actioned at school-level by programme and school boards, with regular reporting to ETSE required to support institutional oversight. The team understand that the implementation of local-level SEAPs allows tailoring to the needs and priorities of the school providing the actions identified remain consistent with the university-level SEAP themes. Professional service areas are able to access school and department plans to better design and enhance their services and produce their own action plans.

93   The team heard from staff that the 'Schools Refresh' (paragraph 3) has enhanced staff and student engagement with the SEAPs. The establishment of smaller academic departments provided greater ownership and accountability for implementing these action plans. Staff and students confirmed the SEAPs are well embedded across the University. Meetings with staff also confirmed that the SfL and SEAPs are considered in a number of the University's quality processes including curriculum development, Enhancement-led Institutional Subject Review (ELISR) and annual monitoring. The ELIR team commends the University for the effective use of SEAPs which ensure that activities that drive enhancement to the student experience are coherent, consistent and well-focused across the University's schools and professional services areas. These plans - which are dynamic, regularly reviewed and updated in partnership with students and the Students' Association - ensure ownership of institutional targets by staff at all levels and provide clear accountability for action.

94   The ELIR team noted from the Reflective Analysis update supplied by the University in autumn 2020, that GCU has undertaken some further restructuring. A Director has been appointed to lead a new department - Academic Development and Student Learning (ADSL) - which will now take responsibility for the development, delivery and design of learning, teaching, educational research and academic development. This department also now provides oversight of the University's Academic Development Framework. The Academic Quality (AQ) team, which was part of the previous Academic Quality and Development department has moved into the Academic Registrar's portfolio, and Academic Development and Education Research and Evaluation (ERE) are part of ADSL.

3.2   Impact of the national Enhancement Themes and related activity on policy and practice

95   The national Enhancement Themes are a key external reference point for the University and have impacted positively on its strategy, policy and practice development in learning and teaching, and the wider student experience. The University's stated approach is to link national Enhancement Theme activities to its strategic priorities. The ethos and priorities of the SEAP (paragraphs 91-93) aligned particularly well with the 'Evidence for Enhancement: Improving the Student Experience' Enhancement Theme (2017-20) resulting in work that was embarked upon for the SEAP contributing to this national Theme and vice versa. University engagement with the Themes extends from senior university staff supporting the leadership of the 'Evidence for Enhancement' Theme, to school staff engaging with the University's Enhancement Theme institutional plan and Theme collaborative cluster projects.

96   At the time of the review, the Educational Research and Evaluation (ERE) team was responsible for the organisation of Enhancement Theme activities, promoting SEAP Scholarship projects related to the Enhancement Themes, evaluating the impact of the various Themes-related initiatives undertaken, and the dissemination of their achievements and outputs. To foster staff engagement with the Enhancement Themes, the University funds projects to address cross-university challenges that align with each Theme. These Student Experience Scholarship projects are cross-school awards which must be

underpinned by student engagement and should support developments in academic policy and practice. During the review, the ELIR team saw evidence that work linked to the previous Theme on 'Student Transitions' had produced a positive impact on the development of university policy and practice which extended beyond the lifetime of that Theme.

97   Staff who met the ELIR team had variable knowledge and understanding of the national programme of Enhancement Themes. However, it was clear to the ELIR team that staff who did engage with Theme-related activities and projects valued the experience, making a positive impact on their professional development.

3.3   Approaches to identifying and sharing good practice

98   The University has an effective and systematic approach to identifying and disseminating good practice that is primarily embedded in the University's staff development and quality assurance and enhancement policies and processes. The Educational Research and Evaluation (ER&E) team supports the enhancement of teaching and learning across the University, supporting educational research and cross-institutional projects. This team have established a range of initiatives to support the sharing of good teaching and learning practice including an Educational Research and Evaluation Community - a seminar series involving university staff and external speakers and the production of a twice-yearly newsletter which advertises events and showcases projects undertaken through the Student Experience Scholarship scheme (paragraph 96). Communities of practice have also been developed, such as the mentoring community and the Senior Fellow community where staff can get together to share ideas. In addition, each of the schools holds annual teaching and learning events and offer school-specific workshops - for example, the School of Health and Life Sciences piloted a series of CPD workshops aimed at module leaders. Informal practice sharing sessions - for example, the lunchtime 'brown bag' sessions in the Glasgow School for Business and Society (GSBS) - also encourage a peer-learning approach.

99   The ELIR team heard from staff that the 'Schools Refresh' (paragraph 3) has resulted in greater opportunities to identify and disseminate good practice across the schools and departments. The School Associate Deans for Learning, Teaching and Quality (ADLTQs) and at the London campus, the Learning and Teaching Quality Lead, undertake an important role in ensuring the implementation of key university policies and priorities associated with academic quality, and learning and teaching at school-level and provide a pivotal link between central academic development opportunities and the schools. Working across the departments within their schools, they identify and facilitate the sharing of good practice and ensure this is reported at key university committees and groups including the Enhancing the Student Experience (ETSE) group and the Academic Policy and Practice Committee (APPC). The ELIR team was able to confirm that this approach has supported the University in the identification of enhancement activities which have then been implemented cross-institutionally - for example, its review of academic advising and the move to using personal tutors (paragraph 54). Staff spoke positively about the ADLTQ roles in ensuring consistency of practice and supporting the sharing of good practice and enhancement across the University.

100   A number of the University's quality monitoring processes - including annual monitoring, external examining, programme approval events and programme reviews - through their reporting templates, ask colleagues to report on examples of good learning and teaching practice. Each year, one meeting of the Learning and Teaching Sub Committee (LTSC), a sub-committee of APPC, specifically focuses on the annual monitoring reports and discusses the good practice highlighted in these. Common themes for development or instances of good practice identified at LTSC are reported at APPC, with the ELIR team able to confirm that this approach also supports the identification of enhancement activities which are then implemented cross-institutionally. Cross-university

membership of programme review panels and Enhancement-led Institutional Subject Review (ELISR) teams also provide an effective opportunity to learn of good practice from different areas of the University. The ELIR team confirmed that the University uses its Thematic Review process effectively, to reflect on whether good practice identified in one area, should be implemented cross-university.

101   Module tutors who support the delivery of the PgCAP (paragraph 104) identify good practice from the case studies used by staff. These tutors and the ADLTQs, use this knowledge to encourage and support interested staff to consider undertaking pedagogical projects/research and consider sharing their practice by presenting at events, including the University's Learning and Teaching Symposium, the Learning and Student Experience Week and annual school learning and teaching events and workshops.

3.4   Engaging, developing and supporting staff

102   The University has a range of formal and informal mechanisms in place which are effective in supporting staff to develop their learning and teaching practice. The University also offers a range of broader staff development opportunities which are consistent with supporting the delivery of its strategic aims - for example, training and support of staff in the area of equality and diversity (paragraph 31).

103   The Academic Development and Student Learning (ADSL) team has responsibility for staff development in learning and teaching and oversees the implementation of the Academic Development Framework (ADF). The ADF provides a structure for staff development and career progression with discrete pathways to follow depending on the experience of the staff member. New academic staff have the opportunity to complete an online orientation module that outlines the University's approaches to learning, teaching and quality and the principles of the *Strategy for Learning* (SfL). Engagement of staff in the professional recognition of teaching and learning is encouraged by linking recognition to the University's selection and promotion criteria.

104   The ADF framework supports staff to gain professional recognition across all levels of the UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF) and categories of fellowship with Advance HE. New staff are supported through the University's Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice (PgCAP), which is accredited by Advance HE. The PgCAP also has an early exit award (Post Experience Certificate in Student Engagement) which is available to non-academic staff in student-facing support roles and enables the award of Associate Fellow status. Full-Time Officers of the Students' Association also have the opportunity to complete this award (paragraph 20).

105   Staff with experience of completing the PgCAP or gaining fellowship through Advance HE, talked positively about their experience, acknowledging that the opportunities provided to reflect on their own teaching practice had been invaluable in developing their teaching. They also valued the opportunity and scope it had given them to undertake pedagogic projects. They spoke positively about the opportunity to undertake pedagogic research, to apply this research to their teaching practice, and disseminate their findings to other areas of the University. Staff who acted as tutors and mentors for colleagues working on fellowship applications for Advance HE and the PgCAP, attested to the clear development as educators that could be seen in staff undertaking these professional development programmes. Such is the perceived value of the PgCAP that staff outlined to the ELIR team disappointment that currently the programme only offers a single intake each year (in September) which was not considered useful for staff who were employed at other times in the academic session.

106	The University also offers a range of broader staff development opportunities which are consistent with supporting the delivery of its strategic aims. The University's *People Strategy 2020* commits to the principle of 'Working Well' and staff webpages contain a series of resources to support mental health and wellbeing, and also advertises events and training courses. During the review, the ELIR team learned from senior colleagues that a number of approaches, such as mandating 'No Teams Friday' and encouraging flexible working have been introduced during the pandemic to mitigate some of the pressures that staff were experiencing as a result of the move to blended learning and remote working. These measures are supported by a specific webpage giving wellbeing support and resources.

## 3.5	Effectiveness of the approach to implementing institutional strategies and enhancing learning and teaching

107	The University has an effective approach to enhancing teaching and learning and the wider student experience managed through its governance and committee structures. The University has a clearly articulated strategy and vision, which is effectively embedded as part of its culture. In particular, the University's desire to align all goals with its 'Common Good' mission is clearly articulated and consistently communicated, adopted by staff and well recognised by students.

108	The University has effective mechanisms for managing enhancement of teaching, learning and the student experience. The University makes effective use of Student Experience Action Plans (SEAPs) which ensure that activities that drive enhancement to the student experience are coherent, consistent and well-focused across the University's schools and professional services areas. These plans - which are dynamic, regularly reviewed and updated in partnership with students - ensure ownership of institutional targets by staff at all levels and provide clear accountability for action.

109	The University has an effective and systematic approach for identifying and sharing good practice links to learning and teaching and the broader student experience. School Associate Deans for Learning, Teaching and Quality (ADLTQs) and at the London campus by the Learning and Teaching Quality Lead, play an important role in ensuring the implementation of key university policies and priorities associated with learning and teaching at school-level and the sharing of good practice. The University also offers a comprehensive range of formal and informal mechanisms to achieve this.

110	The University also offers a wide range of staff development opportunities which support staff and enable it to achieve its strategic objectives. The University has a systematic approach to monitoring and identifying staff development needs.

# 4	Academic standards and quality processes

## 4.1	Key features of the institution's approach to managing quality and setting, maintaining, reviewing and assessing academic standards

111	The University has effective and systematic arrangements in place for managing quality which meets sector expectations. It also has effective processes in place for reviewing and securing academic standards which meet the Expectations of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code) and the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) guidance to higher education institutions on quality (2017-22).

University quality structures

112	The Academic Policy and Practice Committee (APPC), chaired by the DVC (Learning, Teaching and Student Experience), plays a key role in the management of quality

processes and academic standards. The Academic Quality Department (AQD) has responsibility for the operational management of the University's quality processes. To support a cross-school approach to managing academic quality and enhancement, the department has established a number of school-facing staff including the Academic Quality Business Partners (AQBPs). In addition, a Curriculum Quality and Accreditation (CQA) team is located within the Directorate of School Professional Services and staff within are allied to each of the academic schools. These teams work closely with school staff to ensure consistency in the implementation of quality processes and procedures and quality assurance monitoring. The ELIR team noted from the Reflective Analysis that the University has also established the Academic Quality and Development Advisory Group (AQDAG) and the Assessment Regulations Working Group (ARWG). These cross-university groups, with representation from the Students' Association, led developments in academic quality with examples including banded grading. Induction for new academic staff includes training on the University's quality processes delivered by the AQD.

113   At school level, oversight of academic quality assurance and enhancement is the responsibility of the Associate Deans Learning, Teaching and Quality (ADLTQs) (paragraph 99) who are also members of key university committees with responsibilities for teaching, learning and quality such as ETSE and APPC. The 'Schools Refresh' has given schools more autonomy and responsibility for quality and assuring standards, with the ADLTQs playing a pivotal role in ensuring central policies and practice are implemented consistently at a local level and advising on policy and process changes. The ELIR team heard from senior staff that an advantage of the 'Schools Refresh' has been greater staff ownership, engagement, understanding, responsibility and accountability for quality and enhancement processes at local levels.

114   Since the 2015 ELIR, the University has completed a review of its quality process and handbook, Academic Quality Policy and Practice (AQPP). This review was informed - in 2015-16 by a 'Back to Basics with Quality Assurance' continuing professional development programme; and the 'GCU Academic Pillars for Learning, Teaching and Quality' programme in 2016-17 - which were development programmes for staff. Feedback from these and the review prompted the University to streamline some of its quality processes including programme review, new programme approval, programme monitoring and external examiners. Approved by University Senate in 2018-19, the AQPP is comprehensive and applies to all of the University's provision including programmes delivered by collaborative partners and contains clear responsibilities of key teaching-related roles, such as module and programme leaders. Staff who spoke with the ELIR team were clearly aware of these responsibilities, noting these were considered to be the core responsibilities of the roles but stated there was scope for discipline contextualisation. Staff who met the ELIR team confirmed that the current arrangements and structures have resulted in increased consistency in implementation of quality processes.

Programme approval and review

115   The Reflective Analysis states that GCU is a 'programme-centred' university with modules belonging to a host programme. The University's detailed process for new programme approval meets sector expectations. In developing any new programme, a proposal document must firstly be approved by APPC demonstrating the programme is consistent with university and school portfolios and *Strategy 2020*. The Academic Quality Department (AQD) is responsible for the management of programme approval boards, with each board having appropriate external stakeholder involvement, as well as external subject specialists and student representation. Programme review and modification normally takes place as part of Enhancement-led Institutional Subject Review (ELISR) (paragraph 120) although provision exists to make changes out with the ELISR cycle - for example, to support minor changes to modules resulting from academic discipline developments. Such

changes are permitted where the overall programme learning outcomes remain unchanged.

116   The University's use of a programme specification pro forma includes a mapping of the programme to the University's SfL and to the 'Common Good' attributes, with an assessment matrix providing an overview of the workload for students and progression through the programme. The sample of programme specifications reviewed by the ELIR teams indicates variation in the completeness of this documentation, with the team questioning the relevance and specificity of some of the information included by programme teams. Drawing on its experience of the sector, the ELIR team considers some elements of the programme approval and review process are too generic and the process may be improved by focusing more on the programme-specific aspects of the documentation which would reduce the workload for the approval board without losing consideration of the specific features of the programme.

Annual monitoring

117   The University has a systematic approach to annual programme monitoring which requires detailed consideration of each programme. Annual programme monitoring reports reviewed by the ELIR team are detailed, requiring information, data and commentary on admissions, progression, analysis of student feedback, external examiner reports, consideration of how programmes fit into SfL, interactions with employers and other external stakeholders, areas of good practice and areas for wider department and/or school consideration. Information from the University's Data Analytics Shared Hub (DASH) (paragraph 137), is used effectively to support the annual monitoring processes, providing useful insights into student attainment and progression.

118   Annual monitoring is a multi-layered process, with individual programme reports reviewed and collated into a departmental annual monitoring report which, in turn, is reviewed and collated into a school annual monitoring report, prepared by the School ADLTQ. School annual monitoring reports, once approved by School Boards, are considered by the Learning and Teaching Sub Committee (LTSC) who identify school and cross-university issues, which are raised at Academic Policy and Practice Committee (APPC) (paragraph 112). The ELIR team recognised that this process supports the schools to highlight and disseminate examples of good learning and teaching practice and supports the University to identify where this best practice may be further developed cross-institutionally to enhance the student experience. However, in considering a sample of the reports associated with this process, the team found instances of duplication of information and too much condensing of key findings.

119   As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the ELIR team learned that during session 2019-20, the University had made some changes to reduce workload pressures on staff. This involved making some changes to the annual monitoring process for that session. These included moving reporting deadlines and trialling a shortened, more focused reporting template for departmental and school reports. Senior staff indicated the use of these new reporting templates would be evaluated with a view to determining whether there would be value in continuing to use them in future academic sessions.

Enhancement-led Institutional Subject Review (ELISR)

120   The University's Institution-led Review (ILR) process (ELISR) meets the requirements detailed in the SFC guidance to higher education institutions on quality and the Expectations of the Quality Code. Since the last ELIR and following the 'Schools Refresh', a greater number of academic departments now exist. This has allowed the University to refocus its unit of review from that of large multi-disciplinary departments to a single discipline focus (or, where relevant, a linked discipline) departmental approach. As part of its ELISR preparations, each department must produce a Self-Evaluation

Document (SED) which uses an extensive range of information and data to support each department to conduct a critical reflection of its provision and identify areas for development and specific examples of good practice. Staff with experience of participating in the ELISR process spoke positively to the ELIR team about the fact that the cross-institutional membership of ELISR teams provided good opportunities for dissemination of good practice in relation to learning and teaching and quality matters. The sample of SEDs considered by the ELIR team showed that while each contains very detailed information, some of this can be generic, stating university policy and processes without much evaluation of, or reflection on, how these are adopted and adapted in the department.

121   During the review, the ELIR team learned that in response to staff feedback, AQD had undertaken further work to review and streamline the University's quality-related processes. This work started in 2018-19, with the ELIR team being informed that this remains an ongoing priority for the University. While staff who met the team acknowledged that some streamlining of quality assurance and enhancement processes had indeed taken place, many still believed that the level of documentation required was still too onerous and resource and time intensive to complete. On balance, the team recommends that the University further reflect on the ways it can streamline its quality assurance and enhancement processes, which while ensuring these continue to maintain academic standards and assure the quality of the student learning experience, also provide greater discipline focus and deliver more effective ways of promoting enhancement. In parallel, undertake a programme of communication and consultation on resultant changes made to ensure ownership of quality processes by staff at all levels, in turn providing clear accountability for action.

External examiners

122   The University's external examiners play a pivotal role in securing and maintaining academic standards. They are asked to provide input from supporting initial approval of the programme through to the progression and degree-awarding processes. External examiners review module learning outcomes and assessments, ensuring they align and are at the appropriate level, and they are key members of programme/module assessment boards, giving assurance of academic quality and the maintenance of standards.

123   There are well-established processes for the nomination, approval and appointment of external examiners. The AQPP details the criteria and the processes for their appointment and also contains a handbook for external examiners which gives key information regarding their role, what is expected of them in terms of reporting, and background information on relevant assessment regulations. External examiners also receive induction training and have access to some online resources.

124   External examiner reports are submitted online system to AQD which provides institutional oversight of external examiner reports. AQD are responsible for forwarding the reports to the relevant school, where they are used to support module and programme leaders to complete their annual monitoring reporting and, as necessary, make changes to modules and programmes. Each school is responsible for disseminating external examiner reports to the relevant programme board for consideration, with these boards tasked with providing feedback to its external examiner(s) on any programme-specific issues. AQD respond directly to external examiners on behalf of the University where serious concerns regarding academic standards have been raised. Where such a response is required, AQD will provide this following consultation with the relevant school. The University's process for amending modules requires production of evidence that external examiners (or external subject specialists) have had sight of any proposed changes.

125   The AQD undertakes a cross-institutional analysis of the external examiner reports to identify areas of good practice, to identify key issues that may impact on academic standards and to identify common themes that require institution-level enhancement. This analysis is considered by the Learning and Teaching Sub-Committee (LTSC) (paragraph 90).

Assessment and feedback

126   The University has effective arrangements in place for managing its assessment and feedback processes. The Assessment Regulations Working Group (ARWG) has developed a staff handbook of assessment procedures. This is a comprehensive document containing a detailed description of the range of assessment procedures used with useful links to relevant associated regulations and policies. The handbook also sets out the responsibilities of module and programme leaders and external examiners in assessment and feedback processes. Assessment feedback information for students is located on the University's website and in module handbooks. Although external examiner reports reviewed by the ELIR team commented positively on the depth and quality of feedback provided to students on their assessments, students who met the team expressed conflicting views on the quality and timeliness of the feedback they had received suggesting that some inconsistencies still exist across the University (paragraphs 52 and 53).

4.2   Use of external reference points in quality processes

127   Overall, the University made effective use of external reference points in its quality processes and engaged with a variety of external stakeholders to ensure that the programmes offered are relevant, robust and that academic standards are being maintained.

128   Its quality and other student-facing processes have been mapped to the revised Quality Code and all programmes and modules are required to comply with the University's Qualifications Framework which is aligned to *The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications*. Programme specification pro formas require programme teams to indicate how programmes meet the relevant QAA Subject Benchmark Statements and, where relevant, accrediting professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRB) requirements. Enhancement-led Institutional Subject Review reports (ELISR) confirm that professional services, such as careers, are included in the reviews, therefore meeting the expectations set out in the SFC guidance to higher education institutions on quality in terms of Institution-led Review (ILR).

129   Programme approval boards, which consider proposals for new programmes and major changes to existing programmes, have external subject specialists and other external stakeholders, such as employers and Skills Development Scotland representatives for a new Graduate Apprenticeship programme as members. The University's ELISR panels also have appropriate external representation. Input from external examiners and external subject specialists is also required when making changes to modules. The effectiveness of the University's discussions with employers is exemplified by the discussions that took place to identify pressure points for students on an MBA programme which were impacting their learning as students.

Professional accreditation

130   Many of the University's programmes are accredited by a PSRB, which results, where appropriate, in module and programme learning outcomes and curricular content being mapped to the accrediting body requirements. A good example of such mapping is found in the programme approval documentation for a graduate apprenticeship programme in construction where the curriculum has been mapped to the undergraduate educational framework for the Chartered Institute of Building and to the competencies expected from the

Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors. Some programmes - for example, BA (Hons) International Marketing - benefit from being able to access professional lectures delivered by the accrediting body and the use of an industry panel to provide student feedback which has been commented on favourably by external examiners. Several university staff members are also involved with accrediting bodies in a number of ways - for example, being members of expert advisory groups or accreditation panels, or learning and quality assurance groups.

4.3 Commentary on action taken since ELIR 3 and identification of matters arising from the AIS not otherwise explored

131 The 2015 ELIR identified eight areas of positive practice and five areas for development. The current ELIR team agreed with the University that the areas of positive practice had all, to a greater or lesser extent, been developed further and embedded within the University's core policies and procedures. The team also confirmed that the University has made significant progress in the majority of areas for development and had worked to address them all. The University had made effective use of its Thematic Review process to focus on clarifying the support and enhancements required to the postgraduate research student (PGR) experience (paragraphs 65-73). The 2018 review focused on improving communication and commonality of approach to the management of processes linked to the research student experience across all schools/departments and the Graduate School. This Thematic Review has also addressed issues around the development and support of Graduate Teaching Assistants, with the ELIR team view being that the University had made significant progress in this particular area (paragraph 71).

132 The ELIR team recognised that, following the last review, the University has undertaken a range of activities to improve the students' experience of assessment and feedback. The University confirmed work on assessment feedback remained ongoing and during the review, the ELIR team explored the institution's plans and progress in this area. Feedback from students and staff suggests that the University, like many other institutions across the higher education sector, is still experiencing inconsistency in the quality of assessment feedback and its timeliness (paragraphs 52 and 53).

133 The ELIR team confirmed that the University had undertaken a range of activities to progress its focus and has a coherent approach to the implementation of strategy. Particularly positive developments include the Schools Refresh (paragraphs 3, 93, 99 and 113) which has supported the implementation of strategy in a way that is closer to the day-to-day operation of teaching, the introduction of the SEAPs at institutional and school level (paragraphs 2, 8, 13, 81, 91-93) and the introduction of a range of associate dean of school roles (paragraphs 68, 99, 109, 113 and 143).

134 The University has also undertaken actions to support it to further capture and reflect on the views of its increasingly diverse student population, including the views of students studying off campus. This work includes developing its centralised institutional approach to survey management and the dissemination of outcomes (paragraph 21); expanding its range of internal survey mechanisms (paragraph 22); and establishing a Student Communication and Events team which offers strategic, centralised channels to promote campaigns and enhancements to the student experience (paragraph 24).

4.4 Approach to using data to inform decision-making and evaluation

135 Overall, the University has an effective approach to using data to inform its decision-making and uses an appropriate range of both quantitative and qualitative information to support the development of strategy and inform enhancements to the student experience. Data underpins many of the University's quality processes, is available to support reflective analysis and is provided in a clear and consistent manner which supports

the development of a shared understanding of good practice as well as responsiveness to emerging issues.

136   The University has adopted a sound framework for the evaluation of performance based on Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) which supports the monitoring of the delivery of *Strategy 2020*, and which informs similar indicators at school and department level. These KPIs are evaluated by the Strategy and Planning team, who are responsible for regularly reporting on student data and performance to the University Executive Board, the Deans' group, Senate and other key university committees. The KPIs also inform the work of the Planning and Performance Forum, which reports to the Executive Board and has responsibility for undertaking an annual review of this data and an analysis of the University's performance against the SFC's National Outcome Agreement measures. Qualitative data, such as student feedback on modules and services and external examiner feedback, is shared through the use of online folders which support communication of planning goals between schools, and with professional service areas.

137   The University's interactive Data Analytics Shared Hub (DASH) uses Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) information and data from the University's student record system to provide reporting on a range of performance measures related to student outcomes. The DASH supports the University to undertake an analysis of this data from University down to module-level and facilitates comparative analysis both across different modules, subjects and levels, and time periods. DASH information underpins the University's annual monitoring process (paragraphs 117-119) and is used in analysis of outcomes at module level. The DASH provides the University with the capacity to analyse data by protected characteristic, to determine differential outcomes for students who share a particular characteristic. The ELIR team heard from a range of staff about examples of how such analysis had been used effectively in support of the University's work on widening access and participation - for example, in the analysis of the attainment gap for black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) students (paragraph 30).

4.5   Effectiveness of the arrangements for securing academic standards

138   The University has effective and systematic arrangements in place for setting and securing academic standards which meet the Expectations set out in the Quality Code and the SFC guidance to institutions on quality, making appropriate use of external reference points.

139   The University's Academic Quality Policy and Practice (AQPP) handbook comprehensively sets out all quality processes and references other policies, regulations and external reference points. University restructuring, and a number of staff development programmes delivered by AQC, a revised AQPP and the role of the Associate Deans for Learning, Teaching and Quality (ADLTQs) have been instrumental in ensuring staff at all levels are more aware of quality processes and their individual responsibility in maintaining them. The University makes systematic use of its external examiners, who play a key role in securing and maintaining academic standards across the University's portfolio.

140   While the documentation used to monitor quality and academic standards is extensive, the University is asked to further reflect on ways it can streamline its quality assurance and enhancement processes, which while ensuring these continue to maintain academic standards and assure the quality of the student learning experience, also provide greater discipline focus and deliver more effective ways of promoting enhancement. In parallel, undertake a programme of communication and consultation on resultant changes made to ensure ownership of quality processes by staff at all levels, in turn providing clear accountability for action.

4.6 Effectiveness of the institution's approach to self-evaluation, including the effective use of data to inform decision-making

141   The University is a self-reflective community which makes good use of data in supporting strategy development and decision-making. The development of the DASH suite of data supports a commonality of approach to the understanding of strengths and areas for development linked to learning and teaching and the wider student experience. Information available from the DASH is already informing key quality assurance and enhancement activities including Enhancement-led Institutional Subject Review and annual monitoring. There is a consistent use of data which supports self-reflection and analysis, which ensures that strategic goals and targets are clearly embedded at an operational level. This approach is understood by students and communicated effectively to a wide range of stakeholders.

5   Collaborative provision

5.1 Key features of the institution's strategic approach (to include collaborative activity, online and distance learning where delivered with others and work-based learning)

142   The University has an effective approach to managing its collaborative provision, including appropriate arrangements for securing academic standards and enhancing the student experience. The University has a wide range of partnerships that include 58 collaborative partnership arrangements (at programme level), a further 22 articulation arrangements and 13 transnational partnerships. These partnerships range from long-standing institutional relationships such as Caledonian College of Education in Oman, to memoranda of understanding, with Stony Brook University, New York which is currently focused on facilitating student exchange. In evaluating the University's overall arrangements for the management of collaborative activity, the ELIR focused on three long-standing arrangements which encompassed the range of activity undertaken currently by the University. These are the partnerships with the College of Engineering of the National University of Science and Technology (NUST); the African Leadership College, Mauritius; and Transnet Freight Rail, South Africa. During the review visit, the ELIR team met with staff and students from these partners, as well as University staff with operational responsibility for these partnerships.

143   The International Committee (IC) has lead responsibility for the University's Internationalisation Strategy (IS), which sets out its strategic approach. The overarching goal of the IS is 'to strengthen and enhance GCU's position as a globally networked community that is attractive to international students, academic staff and partner organisations in key areas around the world'. This positions the growth of transnational education as one of five 'key goals' to 'strengthen and enhance GCU's position as a globally networked community …'. Since the 2015 ELIR, the University has significantly expanded the scale and type of its academic partnership arrangements. This growth is based on the development of links with business and industry, as well as with other providers of education. Strategic leadership of internationalisation lies with the DVC (Strategy) and includes the TNE partnership arrangements which are led by the academic schools. For UK-based partnerships, once agreements are in place, responsibility for securing standards lies with the relevant academic school. For TNE, school-level associate deans (International) (ADI) lead on the development of school international partnerships, working with the Head of School and ADLTQ to maintain quality and standards. Each school operates an International Forum which is responsible for their school's international partnerships and collaborative arrangements and reports to the School Board. The International Director based at the London campus broadly mirrors the role of the school ADIs. Academic Quality also has a dedicated team who support TNE partnership activity and programme provision. APPC, has a primary role in the academic approval and monitoring of collaborative provision. The

University's partnership agreements are subject to regular review and are held centrally by the Directorate of Marketing, Recruitment and Admissions. Its partnership register is administered by the Partnership Administration team within that Directorate.

144   At the time of the review, information supplied in the RA and on the University's website included reference to the University's London Campus and to Glasgow Caledonian New York College (GCNYC). The ELIR team's view is that neither the University's London Campus nor GCNYC can be viewed as collaborative partnerships. During the review, the ELIR team learned that the London Campus had until recently operated as a separate school within the University. Plans were being implemented to support the further integration of the University's Glasgow and London schools, with senior staff outlining the anticipated benefits to staff and students from closer engagement and collaborative working. Some early gains include London-based guest lectures being made available to Glasgow students.

145   The ELIR team confirmed that GCNYC operates as a separate legal entity and does not award Glasgow Caledonian University degrees, its awards being accredited by the New York State Education Department Board of Regents. Its establishment supports GCU's Internationalisation Strategy and GCNYC is accredited to deliver Master of Science awards. The Principal and Vice-Chancellor of GCU is also President of GCNYC. Longer-term GCU plans to work with GCNYC to explore expansion of its provision in education and research and support students and staff to undertake international mobility opportunities. The ELIR review team noted the distinction between these arrangements and others cited as collaborative partnerships on the University's website and viewed that the presentation of information generally but specifically related to GCNYC, was unclear to current and future applicants. The University is, therefore, recommended to consider how, in the future, this area of activity is best presented to stakeholders so that the distinctiveness of awarding bodies, in particular, is completely transparent. The ELIR team asks the University to ensure care is taken across all forms of communications to ensure that the University is clear to staff, students and members of the public about what aspects of the student experience are common/shared (mission, culture) and those that are not (accreditation, GCU degree), with particular reference to the relationship between Glasgow Caledonian University and Glasgow Caledonian New York College.

Arrangements for managing quality and standards

146   The University's policy and framework for the development, approval, monitoring and review of TNE and academic partnerships is set out in the Academic Quality Policy and Practice (AQPP) handbook. This policy applies to all learning opportunities leading or contributing to a Glasgow Caledonian award or to specific credits of the University delivered and/or assessed through a formal agreement with a partner institution. The AQPP goes on to specifically qualify that these arrangements do not apply to 'non-credit bearing student exchanges, work-based learning […] or placement learning, distance learning, consultancy or commercial activities coordinated by the Department of Research, Innovation and Enterprise'. This policy sets out the typology of approved partnership mechanisms operated by the University. These are expressed in terms of complexity, which includes evaluation of the risks associated with particular forms of collaboration and describes the quality assurance requirements necessary for each form of arrangement. The AQPP handbook is clear in its designation of a risk-based approach to the establishment and management of partnerships. Partnership arrangements are subject to a specific range of KPIs which focus on the potential benefit of the partnership to the University, balancing financial contribution against research, pedagogical development and reputational criteria. There are clear stages for partner identification, strategic and academic approval and the implementation of the partnership delivery plan.

147   External examiners on collaborative provision are appointed within the remit of the Regulations for the Appointment and Responsibilities of External Examiners. The AQPP handbook states that external examiners should be capable of commenting on 'the effectiveness of assessment arrangements across locations (where this is applicable for the arrangement)'. It is the ELIR team's understanding that neither here, or in the regulations for the Appointment and Responsibilities of External Examiners is it entirely clear whether it is a requirement that the same external examiner be appointed to cover all iterations of a module, wherever delivered. As a result, the team believe there would be benefit to the University, in cases where different external examiners are responsible for iterations of the same module, of ensuring a comparative understanding of student achievement is possible wherever the module is delivered.

148   External examiners reports are considered at programme and school level and are subject to an overview report to the Learning and Teaching Sub-Committee. Although not explicitly referenced within these overview reports, it is clear that collaborative partnerships are covered therein. External examiner reports include commentary on the comparability of standards of the University's awards with those of other higher education institutions (paragraphs 122-125).

Programme delivery

149   As part of the approval and delivery processes, a comprehensive handbook is produced for each partnership which outlines the responsibilities of the University and its partners. These handbooks typically include information on: programme structures, admissions requirements and student induction; professional registration and accreditation; assessment setting, marking and feedback, and assessment boards; student engagement; staff recruitment, induction and development, and teaching responsibilities, student support and IT and library services; and the operation of programme boards, module and programme evaluation and monitoring. On reviewing a number of partnership handbooks, the ELIR team reached the view that partnerships use the standard quality assurance and monitoring arrangements specified in the University's AQPP, along with the University's assessment and any other associated regulations. Where differential practices are put in place, these reflect the nature of the collaborative engagement and are planned in such a way as to mitigate risk. Approval for such variation, which appears minimal, is made through the relevant approval mechanism.

150   Partnership documentation makes it clear that the University remains ultimately responsible for the quality and standards of its partnerships and partnership programmes. Direct engagement by the University with staff and students at its collaborative partners varies with the nature of the partnership and is not directly related to the type of collaboration but to the contract between the University and its partner. While delivery models vary across the partnerships, they tend to be based on blended delivery, with the University and the partner sharing the administration, support and delivery of programmes. Normally, a senior member of GCU staff acts as the academic link between the University and the partner, providing oversight of the quality of the education provision and ensures the academic standards of the programmes are maintained.

151   GCU staff lead on module planning, assessment arrangements, and the development of learning resources, with a 'flying faculty' model predominantly in use. The ELIR team learned that academic staff working at the University's collaborative partners are supported in the development of their learning and teaching practice as part of the University's 'flying faculty' model. University staff taking time during their visits, to train collaborative staff in university policy and processes, and in teaching and assessment practices. GCU has a role in the approval of partner staff who contribute to the delivery of teaching and learning on its programmes. In order to be granted associate lecturer status,

partnership staff CVs are reviewed and approved by the relevant head of school or a subject specialist. The Academic Quality and Development collate this information with these staff nominations going to LTSC for formal approval. Once granted associate lecturer status at GCU, academic staff from partners have access to key university resources such as GCU Learn, IT services and the library. While these vary, the ELIR team confirmed that appropriate induction and development opportunities exist for staff at each partnership as set out in the collaborative agreement and handbook. Staff at some of the University's collaborative partners have the opportunity to complete the University's Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice (PgCAP) (paragraphs 104 and 105).

152   Several collaborative staff who spoke with the ELIR team indicated they were undertaking master's degrees and PhDs with support from the University, stating these further study opportunities had proved helpful for developing their teaching practice. In some partnerships, staff also take the opportunity to undertake peer observation, particularly when GCU 'flying faculty' staff visited the partners for master's-level teaching. Collaborative partner staff who had participated in peer observation indicated they had found the experience useful for developing their teaching skills. The team also heard that staff members, who had experience of undertaking a 'flying faculty' teaching role, appreciated the opportunity this provided them to increase their cultural awareness and their knowledge of different teaching practices.

Enhancing the collaborative student experience

153   The University has effective arrangements in place for assuring and enhancing the quality of the student experience with collaborative partners with students reflecting positively on the support offered by GCU and its partners. Arrangements for students are set out in detail within each partnership agreement and handbook. Students studying with partners are registered with the University which allows them access to the complete range of the University's online services including GCU Learn, IT services and the library. Support provided to collaborative students varied between partners with a differing mix of services provided by partner institutions or by GCU centrally. Students reflected positively on the support from local academic tutors or advisors and where local academic support was not available, they felt they could approach GCU staff in Glasgow. However, students who met with the ELIR team spoke about different experiences accessing wider support and learning resources and were not aware of materials which may be available to them in Glasgow. The ELIR team would therefore encourage the University to evaluate the consistency of, and provide greater clarity to students regarding, the support available to them locally and that available centrally.

154   The University's strategic approach to student partnership extends to collaborative partners (see paragraphs 12-14). Strategically, collaborative arrangements align with the University's 'Common Good' attributes with curriculum and student experience designed to reflect this. Arrangements to gather feedback from students are outlined in the partnership documentation, with this feedback, as specified in the AQPP, being used to support programme annual monitoring activities. At the College of Engineering of the National University of Science and Technology (NUST), formal Student Staff Consultative Groups (SSCG) are in place and there is student representation on programme boards and the Student Council is formally linked to this CENU's Academic Council. Transnet Freight Rail has implemented a system of 'class captains' who coordinate feedback from students to the University. The ELIR team heard about a number of examples from both staff and students where, as a result of regular engagement with flying faculty, staff and students had made enhancements to the student experience. Students and staff also highlighted instances where based on student feedback, materials were contextualised by staff to the local environment to improve the learning experience. Some collaborative students highlighted that at times, they felt disconnected from the University and that there were limited

opportunities to make connections or interact with students in Glasgow and London. The ELIR team would encourage the University to continue with its ambitions to create a truly global community for its students and explore opportunities for international working between students studying with its collaborative partners and those based at its Glasgow and London campuses to enhance the student experience.

5.2 Effectiveness of the approach to managing collaborative provision including arrangements for securing academic standards and enhancing the student learning experience

155 The University has an effective approach to managing collaborative provision and has clearly assimilated this provision within its overall quality processes, ensuring the maintenance of academic standards and the enhancement of the student learning experience. It is clear that the University understands the risks associated with various categories of partnership and has established a typology of relationship which consider such risks and provides guidance on their management. The University has well-established processes for the approval, monitoring and review of collaborative partnerships and the long-standing nature of some partnerships points to their effectiveness. While the University is completely clear in its ambitions to develop this area of activity, the ELIR team has confidence in its ability to do so in a measured way without compromising existing partnership arrangements.

156 The University, understandably, wishes to present the broad scope of its activity within an overall context of international engagement. While recognising the complexity of this presentation within the broad range of activity undertaken, it is recommended that the University ensures care is taken across all forms of communications to ensure that the University is clear to staff, students, and members of the public about what aspects of the student experience are common/shared (mission, culture) and those that are not (accreditation, GCU degree), particularly with reference to the relationship between Glasgow Caledonian University and Glasgow Caledonian New York College.