

# Enhancement-led Institutional Review of Glasgow School of Art

Technical Report

October 2020



## Contents

<b>About the Enhancement-led Institutional Review method</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>About this review</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>The impact of COVID-19</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>About this report</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>Threshold judgement about Glasgow School of Art</b> .....	<b>3</b>
1 Contextual information about the institution, student population and the review .....	3
2 Enhancing the student learning experience .....	7
3 Strategy and practice for enhancing learning and teaching .....	26
4 Academic standards and quality processes.....	32
5 Collaborative provision .....	41

## 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.<sup>1</sup> You can also find out more about the [Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education \(QAA\)](#).<sup>2</sup>

Further details about ELIR can be found in an accompanying [brief guide](#),<sup>3</sup> 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 School of Art (GSA). The review took place as follows: Planning Visit on 4-5 March 2020 and Review Visit on 26-30 October 2020.

The Planning Visit was conducted by a team of six reviewers:

- Dr Steve Halfyard (Academic Reviewer) (Planning Visit only)
- Cecilie Broch Knudsen (International Reviewer) (Planning Visit only)
- Professor Oren Lieberman (Academic Reviewer)
- Paul Probyn (Coordinating Reviewer)
- James Lee Slimings (Student Reviewer)
- Professor Gillian Thomson (Academic Reviewer).

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the review visit was postponed from 27 April-1 May 2020 to 26-30 October 2020. This postponement resulted in two changes to the review team which were agreed by GSA. The Review Visit was conducted by:

- Professor Hilary Grainger (Academic Reviewer) (Review Visit only)
- Professor Mark Hunt (Academic Reviewer) (Review Visit only)
- Professor Oren Lieberman (Academic Reviewer)
- Paul Probyn (Coordinating Reviewer)
- James Lee Slimings (Student Reviewer)
- Professor Gillian Thomson (Academic Reviewer).

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

## The impact of COVID-19

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

---

<sup>1</sup> About ELIR:

[www.qaa.ac.uk/scotland/en/reviewing-higher-education-in-scotland/enhancement-led-institutional-review](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/scotland/en/reviewing-higher-education-in-scotland/enhancement-led-institutional-review)

<sup>2</sup> About QAA: [www.qaa.ac.uk/scotland](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/scotland)

<sup>3</sup> Brief Guide to ELIR: [www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/reports/brief-guide-to-elir-method.pdf](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/reports/brief-guide-to-elir-method.pdf)

was conducted entirely online.

The ELIR was undertaken while the pandemic, and the institution's response to it, was a key part of the context. GSA outlined 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 institution's approach to quality and standards from the time of the last ELIR in 2014. It is acknowledged that the review took place at what was a very challenging time for GSA, and the ELIR team and QAA Scotland are grateful to staff and students for their engagement in the review.

## About this report

In this report, the ELIR team:

- delivers a threshold judgement on the current and likely future effectiveness of the institution'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.<sup>4</sup>

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.

---

<sup>4</sup> Outcome Report: [www.qaa.ac.uk/reviewing-higher-education/quality-assurance-reports/Glasgow-School-of-Art](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviewing-higher-education/quality-assurance-reports/Glasgow-School-of-Art)

## Threshold judgement about Glasgow School of Art

Glasgow School of Art (GSA) has arrangements for managing academic standards and the student learning experience which are of **limited effectiveness**. Limited effectiveness indicates there is evidence that GSA's arrangements for managing quality and securing academic standards are limited currently, such that the quality of the student learning experience and the academic standards of the awards it offers would continue to be placed at risk if GSA did not take action.

This judgement means GSA does not currently meet sector expectations in relation to the arrangements it has for securing the academic standards of the awards it offers and enhancing the quality of the student learning experience it provides. GSA is asked to take action in a number of areas to ensure that quality and academic standards are not put at risk in the future.

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

#### 1.1 Summary information about the institution

1 Glasgow School of Art (GSA) was founded in 1845 as one of the first Government Schools of Design, promoting good design for the manufacturing industries. It became the 'Glasgow School of Art' in 1869. GSA is an accredited institution of the University of Glasgow, which has validated GSA's programmes since 1992. GSA's purpose, as articulated in the Reflective Analysis (RA) is to contribute to a better world through creative practice, education and research.

2 GSA comprises three campuses: the Garnethill campus in central Glasgow; the Highlands and Islands campus near Forres; and the Singapore campus at the Singapore Institute of Technology (SIT), although the GSA courses offered at the latter were due to cease in summer 2021.

3 At the time of this ELIR, GSA comprised five schools: the School of Fine Art; the School of Design; the Mackintosh School of Architecture; and two - the Innovation School and the School of Simulation and Visualisation - which had been established since the previous ELIR in 2014.

4 GSA's development since the previous ELIR had been impacted significantly by the fires in the Mackintosh building in 2014 and 2018. The fires had wide-ranging implications for every aspect of GSA's activity, particularly estate management, senior leadership composition, staff and student experience, and curriculum design and location. A further consequence of the second fire had been the postponement of this ELIR from 2018-19 to 2019-20.

5 GSA identified 'Maintaining the student and staff experience and engaging in enhancement in the face of turbulence in the physical estate, as well as the practical, organisational and emotional challenges the School has faced since the last ELIR in 2014' as an area of contextualisation for the ELIR, citing that, 'the effects of the operational emergencies to which GSA has had to respond since 2014 dominate the period of this ELIR 4'.

6 GSA had been due to commence implementation of its 2018-21 Strategic Plan in academic year 2018-19. However, following the 2018 fire, the strategy was withdrawn by the Senior Leadership Group (SLG) and annual operational plans were put in its place to ensure continuity of service until a new strategic plan could be agreed. Each academic school had

also developed operational strategies for Learning and Teaching Enhancement (LTES), Research and Enterprise (R&E), and Internationalisation to support the 2018-21 Strategic Plan. The LTES and R&E strategies have continued to operate within each school; the Internationalisation Strategy is currently under review. At the time of this ELIR, GSA was preparing to develop a new Strategic Plan for the period to 2025.

7 Also at the time of the ELIR, responsibility for GSA's day-to-day management, policy and planning was vested in the Senior Leadership Group (SLG) comprising the Director; Deputy Director (Academic); Deputy Director (Research and Innovation); Registrar and Secretary; Director of Marketing, Communications and Strategy; Director of Development; Director of Human Resources; and Director of Finance and Resources. The SLG was established in November 2018 to facilitate operational needs following the second fire and the departure of the then Director. The SLG replaced a larger body - the Executive - which had included, in addition to all members of what became the SLG, significantly greater academic representation, including all Heads of School and the Heads of Learning and Teaching, and of Research and Enterprise.

8 Since 2018, GSA had been led by an Interim Director until the current Director took up her post in May 2020. The Deputy Director (Academic) left GSA in early 2020, and his replacement was not due to join the institution until December 2020. This combination of staffing changes meant that, during the period coinciding with this ELIR, GSA's capacity for senior academic leadership and strategic direction had been limited.

9 Ultimate authority for academic decision-making within GSA is vested in the Academic Council. Academic Council is advised on matters of quality and standards by the Undergraduate and Postgraduate Committee (UPC), which is in turn supported by the Learning and Teaching Committee (LTC) in respect of quality enhancement. Research degrees are overseen by the Research Degrees Sub Committee (RDSC), which reports to Academic Council via the Research and Enterprise Committee (REC).

10 At the time of this ELIR, the Learning and Teaching Committee had temporarily been suspended because of the COVID-19 pandemic. In its place, GSA-wide academic decision-making had been managed by an Academic Continuity Group (ACG), comprising the Heads of School, the Academic Registrar, and the Heads of Learning and Teaching, Technical Support, Library Services, IT Services, and Professional and Continuing Education. There was no student representation on the ACG. This Group reported to the Senior Leadership Group.

## **1.2 Composition and key trends in the student population**

11 In 2019-20, GSA had a total headcount of 2,622 students. Of these, 73.3% were undergraduate, 24.8% taught postgraduate, and 1.9% postgraduate research students. 2,396 students were based in Glasgow, 35 at the Highlands and Islands campus and 191 at the Singapore campus. Of these, 37.6% of students were classified as Scottish, 18.7% were from the rest of the UK, 15% were from the EU and 28.7% were non-EU international students.

12 93 students entering their first year in September 2019 were from Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) 20/40 backgrounds, against a target of 77 outlined in the Scottish Funding Council Outcome Agreement, with GSA outperforming their target. The number of students entering from further education with advanced standing doubled from 73 to 146 between academic years 2013-14 and 2017-18.

13 There has been an increase of around 24% in overall student numbers since the 2014 ELIR. This incorporates variable rates of increase in different components of the student body, with the greatest increase among taught postgraduate students. At the time

of the ELIR in autumn 2020, GSA had no plans for any further increase in student numbers; rather its intention was to consolidate numbers around current levels.

14 In 2018-19, 66.6% of students identified as female, 31.9% as male and 1.5% as other, and GSA offers several disciplines that do not currently meet the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) target that, by 2030, no discipline in a Scottish higher education institution should have an overall gender imbalance greater than 75:25. Although a number of actions had been identified at school level to start addressing this, at the time of the ELIR GSA did not have an institutional gender action plan.

15 The number of black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) students, including EU and international students, has increased in all five schools since the 2014 ELIR. GSA attributes the enhanced progression of Scottish-domiciled BAME students into undergraduate study to the work done on developing extensive outreach activities.

16 Since the 2014 ELIR, progression and retention rates for students have fluctuated in all five schools but are, as stated by GSA, 'above Office for Students calculated benchmarks'. In 2018-19, the percentage of students eligible to progress or graduate ranged from 83.1% in the School of Design to 98% in the Innovation School.

17 During the period since the last ELIR, the proportion of undergraduates awarded First or Upper-Second Class degrees was relatively stable, fluctuating between 48% and 54%, until 2018-19, when it increased to 67%; this included 29% of students being awarded First-Class degrees, compared with 31% in 2013-14.

18 Attainment gaps for BAME students are inconsistent across the period documented online but, overall, appear healthy in comparison with national averages, and have narrowed significantly since 2015-16. Gender shows a more mixed position, with the attainment gap favouring women in some years and men in others. The degree attainment gap between students who disclosed a disability, and those who did not, was 2% in favour of students who disclosed a disability in 2017-18. However, in 2018-19 this had reversed to a gap of 12% in favour of students who had not disclosed a disability. The most striking attainment gap is that between students from overseas in favour of those from Scotland and the rest of the UK, which has varied between 14 and 38 percentage points in the period from 2014-15 and 2018-19. There would be value in GSA considering the underlying reasons for gaps in attainment between different groups of students, and identifying strategies for addressing them.

19 A GSA-wide Admissions Target Group plans student numbers at programme level by fee status and widening participation status. This ensures that programmes recruit in accordance with their capacity, while GSA meets institution-wide targets. The ELIR team consider that GSA is effective in planning and managing its student population.

### **1.3 Commentary on the preparation for the ELIR, including contextualisation**

20 Pre-pandemic preparations for this ELIR were led by the Head of Learning and Teaching and overseen by the Learning and Teaching Committee, which includes the Deputy Director (Academic), all Heads of Schools and Professional Services Departments, and student representatives. A series of writing workshops were central to identifying the core themes of the Reflective Analysis (RA). These workshops, which involved all members of the Learning and Teaching Committee, were organised around a series of questions drawn from the documentary evidence that was being gathered in parallel, and aligned to each section of the RA. At the end of this process, a final workshop was held with Heads of School to clarify GSA's overarching strengths and challenges.

21 To facilitate effective student engagement in preparations for the ELIR, GSA's Learning and Teaching team held an away day with all Lead Representatives in December 2018 to capture their input. The Lead Representatives subsequently ran three workshops with 26 students from the wider student body to ensure these themes reflected the perspectives of students from across GSA. The Learning and Teaching team held a second workshop in November 2019 with Lead Representatives prior to the submission of the RA to ensure that the strengths and weaknesses outlined in chapter 2 of this document reflected student perceptions.

22 Staff were engaged in preparations for the ELIR through several avenues, including the Learning and Teaching Committee, Undergraduate and Postgraduate Committee, schools Boards of Studies and Academic Council.

23 As an outcome of this process, GSA agreed the following contextual themes:

- Maintaining the student and staff experience and engaging in enhancement in the face of turbulence in the physical estate, and the practical, organisational and emotional challenges GSA has faced since the last ELIR
- Exploring ways to improve student representation and engagement
- Engaging with equality, diversity and inclusion
- Developing cross-GSA strategic approaches to enhancement and change management.

24 Overall, the team concluded that GSA's preparation for the ELIR had been effective and inclusive, and that these themes represented key aspects of GSA's operational context, capturing topics which have had a substantive impact on the staff and student experience and enhancement activities.

#### **1.4 Summary of GSA's follow-up to the previous ELIR**

25 The 2014 ELIR identified positive practice in the following areas:

- student engagement
- student exchange
- student support
- employability initiatives
- professional development for academic staff
- identifying and sharing good practice
- GSA Singapore
- collaborative provision policy.

The RA described action taken since 2014 to consolidate these strengths, or planned activities designed to build upon them further.

26 The 2014 ELIR also identified seven areas for development:

- assessment and feedback
- Learning and Teaching Enhancement Strategy
- management of enhancement projects
- strategic approach to employability
- provision for postgraduate research students
- provision of information
- management information.

The RA described actions GSA had taken, which had varying levels of effectiveness, since 2014 to address these areas. The RA identified that assessment and feedback continued to present particular challenges, and that the effectiveness of GSA's practices in this area remained a focus of negative student perceptions. In respect of employability, while GSA had developed a strategic institutional approach, it remained a challenge to ensure that students recognised employability-related learning encounters within their programmes. These themes are discussed further in Section 2.

### **1.5 Impact of engaging students in ELIR preparations**

27 Engagement with student representatives, particularly Lead Representatives, and with the broader student body through student-led workshops (paragraphs 46 and 48) were significant factors in shaping the contextualised themes for the ELIR, and informing commentary and analysis throughout the RA. In particular, student perceptions fed into explicit summaries of strengths and weaknesses in the provision that concluded each chapter of the RA. Wider sources of student feedback, including the NSS and GSA's internal Student Experience Survey (SES), were also analysed to ensure direct feedback from students informed the RA. Meetings during the ELIR provided evidence that students, particularly Student Association officers and Lead Representatives, had a good understanding both of the process, and of the themes that formed the focus of the ELIR. Taken as a whole, the ELIR team considered these activities provided a range of opportunities for staff and students to engage with and influence the School's ELIR preparations.

## **2 Enhancing the student learning experience**

28 The effectiveness of GSA's arrangements for managing quality is limited currently, such that the quality of the student learning experience and the academic standards of the awards it offers would continue to be placed at risk if GSA did not take action. As a matter of priority, GSA should make demonstrable progress in particular in its work on partnership, communication and consultation with the student body, responding to student views, and ensuring that staff and students have a clear understanding of institutional expectations around assessment and feedback.

### **2.1 Student representation and engagement, including responding to student views**

#### **Student representation**

29 Throughout GSA's operational plans between 2014-19, there has been a commitment to explore ways of improving student representation and engagement. The institution identified this as an area of contextualisation for the ELIR, stating in the RA: 'before the first fire, GSA had identified the need to improve its student voice approach. Whilst it has remained clear since then that students value the community of GSA, the need to systematically engage with the students through renewed forms of student engagement has been a constant since 2014 and the majority of our enhancement activity has been in response to this'.

30 GSA recognises that, in particular, 'closing the feedback loop' has been an 'intractable concern' since 2014. Since 2016-17, NSS scores related to Student Voice and Organisation and Management have been poor, recorded at between 55.07-62% and 48.84-52.58% satisfaction respectively. In all student meetings during the Planning and Review visits, students indicated that communication, including responding to student feedback, remained a priority area for development.

31 GSA funds the Students' Association (GSASA) which supports a range of clubs and societies and coordinates student representative activities. In 2016, the GSA-led Student Voice initiative was launched, which comprised a collaborative review of the formal mechanisms for student representation. The new structure for student representation, introduced in 2018, includes remunerated Lead Representative posts for each school at undergraduate and taught postgraduate (PGT) levels, and a similar cross-school postgraduate research (PGR) post. Lead Representatives sit on each School Forum, programme-level Student-Staff Consultative Committees (SSCC) and Boards of Study, acting as a conduit between the student body and senior management. In turn, these Lead Representatives support class representatives, one for each year group per programme. Lead Representatives are supported through training from GSASA, in partnership with Student Partnership in Quality Scotland (sparqs) and the GSA Learning and Teaching team.

32 A full review and evaluation of the new representation structure was undertaken in partnership with sparqs in 2018-19. A one-day workshop, held in February 2019, attended by 20 staff and students from across GSA, acknowledged the opportunities that the new structure afforded students in having better access to decision-making, increased opportunities to offer feedback and increased representation on school-level committees. Key areas identified for further development included students' lack of clarity in how their feedback is considered and responded to, as well as challenges in the student representative recruitment cycle. It was agreed that Student Representative Recruitment, Training and Development activities would be revised, a set of actions designed to help close the feedback loop would be put in place, and a Student Voice Working Group would be established. Students who met with the ELIR team showed little awareness of the Student Voice initiative. During the ELIR, the team was told by staff that their ambition was to work in partnership with students in decision-making and that there was a need to change the culture around the student voice.

33 Lead Representatives reported that they feel central to their School. The team found that the Lead Representative system was viewed positively by staff and students, and was working 'reasonably well' but the support provided for student representatives could be enhanced. During the ELIR, student representatives reported that there were meetings with class representatives and programme leaders, but not with Heads of School, and cited an example of a Board of Studies where no training was provided and students were faced with 'piles of papers'. The ELIR team heard from senior staff that GSA was planning to hold meetings with GSASA and Lead Representatives prior to Boards of Study but, at the time of the ELIR, this initiative to prepare students effectively for their roles on committees had not yet commenced.

34 GSA's Annual Report to the Scottish Funding Council for 2017-18 notes that 'there was some concern that international students could feel isolated and that more could be done to assist with integration.' During the ELIR, student representatives who met with the team indicated that they would like there to be an additional, remunerated international representative to ensure that international students' views are fully represented within the student body. This was considered to be particularly important at the Forres campus, where most students are international. The ELIR team subsequently learned from additional information supplied by GSA that, from the beginning of academic year 2020-21, an additional Lead Representative had been appointed for the Forres campus.

35 The ELIR team was told by postgraduate students during the review, that the PGT Lead Representatives held regular meetings with staff, who operated an open-door policy, and that the system was working well. PGR students reported that their student representatives were effective in reporting concerns to the Head of Doctoral Studies. Although students viewed the system as being relatively effective at postgraduate level, they would welcome 'greater diversity' in student representation.

36 Although the introduction of Lead Representatives has been welcomed as a positive step, the ELIR team established that the overall student representation structure is not making an impact on the students' perception and experience of their relationship with GSA. Students expressed the view that, while programme level committees work well and staff are responsive, the institutional response is poor and, beyond Lead Representative level, undergraduate issues 'disappear into the ether'. The GSASA reported that problems become incremental because they are not addressed in 'a timely way.' A proposal for a remunerated 'Liberation Representative' had also been made by the GSASA to GSA and although the new Director had been in favour, at the time of the ELIR, this had not yet been initiated.

37 The President of GSASA is a member of Academic Council, the Undergraduate and Postgraduate Committee (UPG), the UPC Programme Approval Group (UPCPAG), the Programme Amendment and Course Approval and Amendment Group (PACAAG) and the Board of Governors. Student representatives who met with the ELIR team reported that more training was required to support the President in their role. GSA reported that it was currently reviewing student representation on the Board of Governors, to include another representative in addition to the President, and widening representation on Academic Council. These changes are to comply with the *Higher Education Governance (Scotland) Act 2016* and the *Scottish Code of Good Higher Education Governance (2017 edition)*, but at the time of the ELIR these changes were not yet implemented.

38 Building on positive progress made with the introduction of Lead Representatives, GSA should continue to embed effective arrangements for student representation. In particular, GSA should aim to promote a culture where student representatives are involved wherever possible, including in any groupings outside the formal committee structure, at all levels. GSA should also work with student representatives in a mutually-beneficial partnership to consider what tailored training and briefing would be most effective to allow them to contribute effectively to committees and groups, and ensure that representatives have the information they need to fulfil their roles with confidence.

### **Student partnership and engagement**

39 GSA aspires to effective partnership working between staff and students but recognises from student feedback that this is experienced more strongly at the level of the programme than it is at a broader institutional level.

40 GSASA and GSA have attempted to formalise a Relationship Agreement but this has never been finalised. During the ELIR, senior staff reported that a draft was produced in 2017, written principally by the Director of Finance but agreement was hampered by the liquidation of GSASA's commercial operation. The RA noted that the Relationship Agreement was nearing completion in 2019. GSA confirmed that the Relationship Agreement would not be finalised until after a new GSASA Executive Manager was appointed in November 2020. The ELIR team was not able to see the draft agreement as requested. GSA indicated that it was under negotiation and, at the time of the current ELIR, senior staff indicated that there were no agreed timescales in place for its resolution but that they expected this to be in the near future.

41 The ELIR team learned that the GSASA attributes the delay in finalising the Relationship Agreement to the changes and vacancies in the GSA management team. As a result, the GSASA feels itself held 'at arms' length' by GSA's senior management. GSASA representatives expressed a desire to see an agreement that sets out areas of mutual priority and makes clear that GSA and GSASA are equal partners, and it is not merely a 'mouthpiece for management'. The team heard that GSASA wishes to be recognised as a

mature and strategic vehicle to facilitate student engagement with the potential to support the institution.

42 A Student Voice Working Group (SVWG) was proposed following a workshop delivered by Student Partnerships in Quality Scotland (sparqs), in February 2019, which delivered a Student Engagement Analysis evaluation workshop of GSA's student engagement infrastructure. Attended by 20 staff and students from across the schools at GSA, it identified the need for student representatives to have better access to decision-makers, increased opportunities for students to offer feedback, and increased student representation on school-level committees. However, at the time of the ELIR, the SVWG had only met once, in the first semester 2019-20 and student representatives who met with the ELIR team seemed largely unaware of its existence. Minutes were not taken at the SVWG. The second planned meeting was cancelled as GSA responded to the COVID-19 pandemic. Staff reported that the ambition was to work in partnership with students and recognised the need to change the culture around the student voice and to involve students in decision-making, but reported that the SVWG was on hold until the arrival of the new Deputy Director (Academic).

43 GSA highlights that the Student Voice site hosted its virtual learning environment as a key part of its mechanism for facilitating student feedback via representation. The ELIR team noted that the site links to a blog written by the Deputy Director, where the front page contains the message, 'We are aware that in the past there has been a gap in how we have communicated our responses to your feedback: the impact that feedback has, how it is listened to, considered, and put into use. This new blog is a space in which we hope to start to address this and is one part of a series of steps that we are taking to make this information more available to you'. However, there have been no new posts to this blog since February 2019 and the ELIR team learned it had lapsed after the departure of the Deputy Director in 2020. The team considered that there would be value in ensuring that the Student Voice initiative, given its strategic nature, is owned and embedded at institutional level and operationalised through institutional committee structures, rather than being reliant on one individual staff member.

44 It is recommended that GSA works to establish a culture where students are seen as equal partners, engaged individually and collectively in the development and enhancement of their educational experience. This should include setting out an agreed approach which allows progress to be made on matters of mutual priority where GSA and its Students' Association work together to enhance the student experience - for example, making demonstrable progress in finalising the existing Relationship Agreement and developing a new Student Partnership Agreement which both codifies the ways of working and facilitates actions being taken.

### **Communication and consultation**

45 GSA recognises that processes for communicating with students appear to have suffered in the wake of the various institutional disruptions and is aware of the need to establish a sense of engagement with students in its communications rather than simply relaying information.

46 Students stated that they were not satisfied with the communication processes and consultation in the pre-pandemic period. In student-led ELIR workshops to identify positive feedback and areas to improve for inclusion in the RA, the following areas were identified: 'lack of cohesive communication between higher staff (senior management) and staff and therefore staff and students'; staff in general, 'not being aware of what is going on in other courses, and in some cases in regards to their own submissions and feedback, for example an essay due a few days after a studio submission or students being expected to continue

developing work without feedback after a submission'; and 'last minute/lack of communication' and 'lack of information provided to students (and staff) around crucial changes happening within GSA, for example the move to Stow building and the move of the administration staff'.

47 During the ELIR visits, students who met with the team reported that, while communication can work well at programme level, they considered there to be an issue at the institutional level. Students perceived that GSA presents itself to them in too corporate a manner, with emails sent out that present a picture of an institution concerned with reputation and perhaps more appropriate to those external to it rather than addressing issues that directly concern students - for example, the UCU staff strike in November 2019. Corporate or institutional language was perceived as a barrier to understanding important information by students.

48 In the summary report of the student-led ELIR workshops, written by students and presented to GSA LTC in June 2019, student views around communication included: the need for better organisation of information - be it on the virtual learning environment (VLE), email or printed posters; an over saturation of information both physically and digitally; and too many irrelevant emails and notifications. Students who met with the ELIR team, and those involved in student-led workshops in preparation for ELIR, indicated that a reliance on email and the VLE for institutional communications led to an overwhelming number of emails, and difficulty in differentiating between important information and generic marketing communications.

49 Students also reported a lack of capacity to communicate easily with each other via GSA mechanisms, citing an absence of student-run forums or groups on the VLE or the availability of email distribution lists, and stated that while committees on which students sit provide a platform for communicating directly with staff, they do not seem to have a significant impact. The student perception is that they give feedback but communication about how feedback is acted upon is sometimes missing.

50 The importance of establishing effective communication with students has been recognised by GSA and highlighted further recently as a priority area in feedback from GSA's Complaints Handling Procedure and submissions to the QAA Scottish Concerns Scheme following the cessation of face-to-face teaching and the closure of buildings in March due to the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>5</sup> A new strategy for communications is planned and will be taken forward by the incoming Deputy Director Academic and the Director of Communications. The ELIR team understand that the President of GSASA will be involved in ensuring student engagement in the development of this strategy.

51 It is recommended that GSA reviews (as planned), develops and implements a comprehensive and effective communications strategy, which includes all key stakeholders. In particular, in partnership with students, establish and embed effective and accessible communication channels which are responsive to student comment and engagement, and which foster a culture of mutual respect, openness and information sharing.

### **Responding to student feedback**

52 GSA collects student feedback through a variety of mechanisms: the National Student Survey (NSS); the internal Student Experience Survey (SES) for undergraduate students, which runs twice a year; an equivalent survey for postgraduate students (PGTSES) which replaced the external Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES) survey run by Advance HE, where responses had been low for many years; and an annual

---

<sup>5</sup> See also [Scottish Concerns Scheme investigation reports](#), Glasgow School of Art, October 2020.

postgraduate research student survey, results from which are considered alongside school and programme level feedback. Staff reported that the internal postgraduate survey was yielding useful data and was proving to be an effective tool. Results from these surveys have informed the development of various initiatives designed to improve the student experience including the development of the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Strategy and Student Voice Initiative (paragraphs 42-43).

53 GSA acknowledges that, despite a range of GSA-wide surveys related to the student experience and action taken in the light of analysis of the views expressed - both in internal and external surveys - results have witnessed a downward trend in student satisfaction scores. GSA identify the headline concerns in its NSS as: organisation and management; access to specialist equipment and resources; communication and closing the feedback loop; embedding of professional practice; and assessment and feedback.

54 In a summary report on the National Student Survey 2019-20 considered at its Undergraduate and Postgraduate Committee, GSA reported that overall satisfaction reduced from 68.6% in 2019 to 57.66% in 2020 and state that, 'this overall satisfaction result does not meet the sector average, nor the GSA target performance indicator, and represents a continued downward trend over the last five years'. Declines in satisfaction were seen across all eight main areas of the survey, with the biggest occurring in the following categories: student voice, organisation and management, academic support, assessment and feedback and teaching quality.

55 In the light of actions taken by GSA not prompting improvement in the NSS scores, GSA introduced a Student Experience Action Tracker (SEAT) in 2018 to facilitate a more rigorous approach to action tracking on cross-institutional issues and provide a means of communicating to students where progress stands on specific actions. The tracker was posted on the Student Voice Canvas site and updates were reported regularly to LTC. However, the ELIR team understands that work on the SEAT had been paused following the departure of the Deputy Director and the ongoing impact of the pandemic and, at the time of the ELIR, the SEAT had not been updated since November 2019. The SEAT has considerable potential as a vehicle for monitoring and communicating enhancement actions, and the team encourages GSA to ensure this work resumes.

56 GSA acknowledged that the way in which enhancement was currently approached was not effective and placed a burden on staff. In response, the new Director is developing a collaborative and transparent approach to manage GSA's response to the results and feedback it receives via the NSS. From meetings during the review, the ELIR team understand that the Director is taking personal responsibility for the reworking of the NSS action plan to take account of four areas: teaching and learning; assessment; organisation and management; and equality and diversity.

57 Students that met with the ELIR team considered that the Heads of Departments were very receptive to student feedback, but also believed there was a perceived unwillingness to make changes at school and institutional level. Students also expressed the view that course tutors did not always receive effective communication from more senior staff and that there was little interaction between senior management and the general student body.

58 It is recommended that GSA continues to develop an effective and systematic approach to understanding and addressing student feedback, drawing on the National Student Survey and institutional surveys, which allows for the identification and resolution of issues in sufficient detail, both at institutional and programme level, and which supports the effective sharing of good practice.

## 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

59 GSA identified 'Engaging with Equality, Diversity and Inclusion' as an area of contextualisation for the ELIR, citing that, 'operationally this has meant not just an increase in administrative mechanisms to drive change, but also a significant debate about curriculum and the way art, design, and architecture are fostered'. GSA state in their SFC Outcome Agreement Update 2019-20 that, 'Equality, diversity and participation are embedded within our Outcome Agreement and made explicit through our specific actions which can be evidenced through local-level Equality Impact Assessments, in relation to specific SFC aims and priorities. This is in line with the GSA's approach to mainstreaming equality'.

60 GSA has a diverse student population with students from 79 countries and strong international recruitment overall (paragraph 11). The student population at undergraduate level is predominantly white and female (paragraph 14), with between 20% and 30% of students identifying as BAME on most programmes - although most of this statistic is accounted for by overseas students; 10% of UK-domiciled students are from BAME backgrounds. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion training is mandatory for all staff through an online module introduced in 2018, completion of which is monitored by the Human Resources Committee and the Senior Leadership Group.

61 GSA has engaged in a comprehensive programme of writing and reviewing policy in relation to equality and diversity, with Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) Summary Reports both for processes and individual programmes published on its website. GSA reported that significant resources had been provided to support undertaking Equality Impact Assessments. There are five separate frameworks and each department uses the model that works best for them. Staff that met with the ELIR team considered the production of EIAs as a positive activity with genuine impact and reported that EIAs had guided a great deal of work in response to the changing student demographic, leading to the integration of inclusive practices, particularly relating to learning and teaching. Actions are identified on an ongoing basis through the EIA summary report action plans which are reflected upon in an iterative process through programme-level Quality Enhancement Action Plans (QEAPs) submitted as part of the Programme Monitoring and Annual Reporting (PMAR) process (paragraphs 188 and 189). QEAPs are discussed at SSCC meetings, which include student representation. School QEAPs bring together cross-school actions.

62 Students that met with the ELIR team stated that they were aware of GSA's approach to EIA but perceived little tangible change as a result, reporting their perception that too many EIAs were marked 'not applicable' (particularly during the period of the pandemic from March 2020) and they were 'generally not used as rigorously as they should be'. Students also stated their views that some areas of equality and diversity support are not yet sufficiently developed and that more could be done. During the ELIR, students cited examples of issues including: a lack of LGBTQ+ trained counsellors; considerable work needed from student representatives and the GSASA to have designated gender-neutral toilets and no functioning lifts being available for a significant period in some key student areas.

63 Staff and students are both aware that BAME groups are underrepresented among staff, with only 5% of staff indicating they are from a BAME background. The EIAs have been productive since 2015 in identifying areas for action, and positive initiatives for tackling underrepresentation at programme level have included talks and symposia. There is also a gender imbalance among both staff and students. The ELIR team learned that measures were being taken to address this on a course basis through annual monitoring and GSA is

about to work on a four-year plan, using EIAs, but this work remained at the stage of evidence gathering.

64 The GSASA organised responses to Black History Month, funded by GSA, and staff pointed to the Black Art Matters initiative. Students considered that GSA had not provided an adequate response to Black Lives Matter and Black History Month, and were concerned that they were not yet involved in the formulation of the institution's Race Action Plan. The ELIR team established that GSA is discussing a Race Action Plan at institutional level but acknowledges that work is still at a very early stage.

65 As a result of the mismatch in staff and student views on equality and diversity expressed during the review, it was the ELIR team's view that there would be considerable benefit in GSA continuing progress with plans to develop and embed the institutional approach to equality and diversity, introducing an effective mechanism to oversee and monitor GSA-wide action including implementation of recommendations resulting from Equality Impact Assessments.

### **Diversifying and decolonising the curriculum**

66 Diversifying and decolonising the curriculum are both areas that GSA has addressed at programme and institutional levels to some extent. Some of the work has been led by GSASA. Diversifying the curriculum has been tackled through broadening the scope of cultural reference and the matter of access and inclusivity through professional development for staff. Decolonising the curriculum has been approached via specific strategies, groups and events, such as: the GSASA-supported People of Colour Collective; the Race, Rights and Sovereignty public lecture series; and the renewal of course reading lists and library initiatives in relation to collections. Other initiatives included dedicated library resources, online packages on Equality and Diversity, and classes on related topics but this was considered to be 'a work in progress' by academic staff who met with the ELIR team. During meetings with the team, students attested that there was a will to address these issues (paragraphs 110-111).

### **International students**

67 GSA's campus at Forres, situated in a rural environment, has experienced a rapid increase in international students, leading the institution to consider how best to manage its community engagement. The Innovation School, which delivers programmes at Forres, is considering expanding the current programme offering at Forres, as it is considered that the campus is currently under-used. The ELIR team heard from staff about examples of excellent community building activity in the Forres campus with a large number of entrepreneurship and employment-related opportunities arising.

68 GSA's PGTSES identified language and cultural barriers as affecting the experience of some students. Students also reported that international postgraduate students would benefit from more support given there is only one language tutor in post. The ELIR team also heard that there was some inconsistency in the subtitling of pre-recorded lectures. There is a Chinese student assistant to support the high number of Chinese students. Students reported that this was an area which, in their view, could be improved. Staff reported that a pilot pre-session English course had been introduced in response to PGTSES which had been well attended and, as a result, students felt more confident.

### **Disabled students**

69 In 2018-19, 19% of students disclosed a disability. GSA has clear policies for understanding and providing support for students through the use of its Individual

Requirement Form. Students are aware that there are a large number of students with disabilities and specific learning difficulties within the population and felt that support services are stretched. Support for disabled students has been provided by the Learning and Teaching Support Team online during the pandemic. The library has implemented a neurodiversity guide to better support students with learning differences.

70 The number of students reporting a mental health condition has doubled from 2016-17 to 130 students in 2018-19. GSA provides Scottish Mental Health First Aid Training which is open to all staff, and Student Mental Health short courses which are open to academic staff. These have been seen as a very positive step by both students and staff and GSA may wish to consider further promotion and expansion of these activities.

### **Widening participation**

71 Of GSA's Scottish-domiciled students, 40% come from SIMD 20/40 postcode areas, with almost half of these from SIMD 20 areas. The institution's Equality Monitoring Report: Students, contains no data about attainment levels for this group. Students that met with the ELIR team acknowledged the excellent work of the Widening Participation department but stated that they were concerned about underrepresentation of these groups moving from undergraduate to postgraduate study.

72 GSA's widening participation work is not used as a recruitment tool but to encourage engagement with, and progression into, creative subjects in higher education. Current students are aware of the work being undertaken, but some feel it could be celebrated more publicly by GSA. It was evident to the ELIR team, that GSA has implemented a range of targeted activities in this area. 'Open Studio' provides the strategic framework to support widening participation and key outreach and partnership development opportunities. Initiatives include the development of GSA's approach to contextualised admissions, mock interview sessions, the implementation of an associate student scheme (paragraphs 81-83) and support for portfolio preparation. Portfolio preparation programmes work particularly well in targeting students for application and increasing the pool of students from the lowest quintile applying and successfully gaining places at GSA. The individual elements of GSA's widening access programme, as well as the programme as a whole, are evaluated annually.

73 GSA works with 90 partner schools across the West of Scotland through the Access to Creative Education in Scotland (ACES) programme. The programme of work with these pupils is designed carefully to progress from aspiration raising and developing technical ability at S4; fostering independent working and critical thinking at S5; to discipline-focused work at S6, designed to prepare pupils for development of a portfolio. As a measure of the impact of this activity, the applicant to offer conversion rate for ACES applicants has improved significantly since ELIR 3, and in both 2017-18 and 2018-19 the conversion rate for students from these widening participation (WP) target schools was higher than for other Scottish applicants.

74 A particularly successful collaboration is that between GSA and Castlehead High School where GSA has developed a collaboration in which it aims to apply the learning and teaching models of the studio across all subjects in order to raise pupil attainment and ambition. In 2018-19, GSA worked with 210 S1 and S2 pupils, bringing them onto campus to engage in studio-based work in a range of creative workshops. GSA also works with the school to engage teachers in developing creativity across the whole curriculum. This example of good practice has been recognised by Education Scotland, as well as demonstrated in an uptake in the number of pupils engaging with creative subjects.

75 GSA is also involved in a range of activities working with specific groups of young people rather than only with specific institutions: for example, the 'Architects in the Making' workshops are open to S5-S6 pupils in particular schools but also any other participants from SIMD 20/40 postcodes or with care experience. Former participants who have progressed to GSA act as mentors on such initiatives, with small but significant numbers of these participants applying and receiving offers from GSA and other higher education institutions (HEIs). GSA has an excellent track record with respect to its support for transitions into the institution. This includes a number of partnerships across Glasgow and the rest of Scotland's central belt. Many of the young people undertaking outreach activities delivered by GSA in their schools, enter other institutions across Scotland. Some of this partnership work includes research projects in the Equality and Diversity area and also teacher continuing professional development. Transitions workshops each September bring all WP applicants together for a programme just prior to matriculation. Individual components of work between schools and GSA are constantly evaluated and the number of positive destinations of the participants speaks for itself. Formal responsibility for retention and progression are discussed by the Admissions Target Group and WP staff maintain an oversight of the data. Data is reported in Programme Monitoring and Annual Reporting (PMARs) and are reflected in the Undergraduate and Postgraduate Committee PMAR for central oversight.

76 The team heard from students that widening access taster sessions were very well received. Students spoke positively about feeling welcomed and being made to feel part of the GSA community while still studying at college. This included orientation activities to introduce them to the different areas of the institution and the programmes of study available.

77 Retention is excellent with students in widening participation groups often at 100% and falling no lower than 92% in recent years. This is above the sector average and the support mechanisms in place to facilitate student transitions and the overall experience are to be commended.

78 GSA has worked hard to recruit students from SIMD 20/40 backgrounds, with a number of initiatives designed to target and support these students pre-application. The team commended GSA for its strategic and sustained commitment, evidenced by a range of targeted activities, to promote widening access which supports students to enter GSA or other higher education institutions. GSA has established a variety of successful long-standing school and college partnerships - notably with Castlehead High School - which raise the aspirations and achievement of young people. The ongoing support provided by GSA to widening access students contributes to high retention rates.

### **Articulation routes into higher education**

79 Since 2013-14, the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) has increased the number of funded places at GSA by 200. 86 of these have been allocated to students entering through an articulation route. In parallel, GSA's arrangements for articulating students have further developed since the 2014 ELIR. Analysis undertaken by GSA over the past two years has ensured that students now enter programmes at the correct academic level and students spoke enthusiastically about the support that they and their peers had received.

80 The ELIR team heard of the extremely positive impact of GSA's established articulation routes on the student profile. This has arisen, in part, due to the lessons learnt through the partnership with Singapore Institute of Technology and the experience gained therein with running 2+2 articulation arrangements. The success of the suite of articulation support arrangements in place was also evident in the ELIR team's meeting with undergraduate students, where students spoke positively about these. Positive impacts

have been observed in a number of areas, particularly in Fine Art, with the school working in conjunction with GSA's Progression Manager. This work continues and has included increased contact with the students prior to articulation into their chosen programme. Staff commented that this work to understand the needs of articulating students had been used to drive curriculum development, taking elements of diversity into consideration.

81 As part of its collaborative provision, in 2015 GSA instigated an Associate Student Scheme with the aim of ensuring successful integration of articulating students into the GSA community. Associate Students are able to access subject-specific support and transition workshops, and are supported by the Widening Participation team. The Associate Student Scheme (FE to HE articulation route) for direct entry into year two has been developed with Glasgow Clyde College and Forth Valley College. The ELIR team heard of the success of students matriculating through this route, including positive results on degree classifications. On the basis of its success, discussions are underway to extend formal articulations with Glasgow Clyde College and with programmes at City of Glasgow and Edinburgh Colleges. Additionally, a number of students from other colleges gain full credit for their previous learning and progress to the third year of GSA's undergraduate programmes.

82 Entry to GSA programmes is not guaranteed for Associate Students, however, all prospective students are entitled to an interview. This has had a positive impact on student recruitment to specific schools and has been a key part of growth in the School of Simulation and Visualisation. GSA clearly recognises that students entering via articulation routes have different academic needs and a wider range of social and personal issues. Students entering through these pathways are supported very well by the institution and there are a number of excellent initiatives which enhance the student experience.

83 It was the view of the ELIR team that GSA be commended for the effective support in place for students entering through an articulation route, and has made significant progress in supporting students to successful completion. In particular, the Associate Student Scheme provides college students with valuable access to the library and VLE, as well as enabling students to benefit from a range of engagement opportunities at GSA.

### **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**

#### **Student support**

84 GSA has an effective suite of support services available to students. During the ELIR, both students and staff praised the work of the staff within these services in supporting and enhancing the student learning experience. Each of these services is reflective, responds effectively to student feedback gathered specifically on its provision, and has managed the transition to online working well.

85 Student support services are well used and appreciated by the students. There has been a 97% increase in uptake in these services over a five-year period, with staff acknowledging that, during the pandemic these numbers have remained consistent, but anxiety among the student body has risen. The rise in concerns has led to the delivery of a specific anxiety-related workshop by the student support team to help students manage their anxiety. GSA has also appointed a full-time mental health adviser but students report that counselling services remain stretched.

86 In response to the pandemic, student support services moved all their resources online. Student counsellors have undertaken a diploma in online counselling in order to

better support students remotely and are working with the Mental Health Adviser to provide online workshops on a variety of topics. Support Services staff reported higher attendance with fewer students missing their appointments. Face-to-face appointments are not taking place but might be considered for emergencies. A space has been identified in line with the safe campus policy for students to engage in confidential counselling sessions on campus, but without face-to-face contact. Remote mindfulness sessions are also being offered online. Students welcomed the responsiveness of student support services during the pandemic, describing counselling as flawless, responsive and highly professional.

87 Learning support services are accessible and the ELIR team heard that they were appreciated by students. Workshops and one-to-one appointments, led by the Learning Support and Development team, are well attended by students. English as a second language training is offered to international students before the session begins, with a focus on the vocabulary of the studio environment. This focus on the practicalities of studio language was seen as an area of good practice by the team.

88 Health and safety in the studio, both for face-to-face and at home practice, is well supported by the Technical Support team. The use of online induction to workshop processes in order to maximise studio time while maintaining safety, has been effective during the transition to blended learning models in response to the pandemic. The work done GSA staff to facilitate safe working practices at home is recognised and appreciated by students.

89 GSA has developed a Digital Inclusion Strategy and has invested in assistive technology which students can access remotely. A short-term assistance grant is available for EU and international students who are unable to access other funding and £46k has been invested since the start of summer 2020. GSA invested in 388 laptops and the Digital Inclusion panel allocated these based on Student Awards Agency Scotland and similar UK criteria, rather than students being requested to produce onerous evidence of need. At the time of the ELIR, GSA planned that any surplus laptops would be placed in a pool for general access.

90 Student support services are reviewed through the Programme Monitoring and Annual Reporting (PMAR) process, feeding into Boards of Study across the schools. GSA is encouraged to undertake a periodic review of student support services, with input from external peers, to further assure and enhance the good practice in this area.

91 The ELIR team commended GSA on providing a range of support services that are successful and responsive in meeting evolving student needs. These services have been particularly effective in supporting students with the move to online provision. It is positive that a number of staff have completed qualifications focused on the provision of counselling services in a digital environment.

### **Personal tutoring**

92 The Personal Tutor Scheme was piloted in 2017-18 and was positively received by students and staff, but students that met with the ELIR team expressed concern about the impact the scheme has on the workload of already busy staff. The planned expansion of the scheme was paused in session 2018-19 due to the impact of the Mackintosh building fire, however, the ELIR team understands that implementation has resumed in 2020. The allocation of tutees is undertaken at local level.

### **Information about programme costs**

93 The presence of significant numbers of students (40% of Scottish domiciled students) from SIMD 20/40 backgrounds raises issues of equality of access to programme

materials and activities where students are required to bear the financial cost themselves. Following the loss of their graduation show work in the first fire, all 2014 School of Fine Art graduates received funding via a bursary and materials budget provided by the UK and Scottish governments, but there is no ongoing provision via bursaries or awards for materials and exhibition costs - only for financial hardship arising from expenditure on course requirements.

94 While GSA sends information to incoming students about part-time work, some students that met with the ELIR team expressed the view that they are 'judged' for having to take time out of their studies in order to work to financially support themselves during their studies. With extra costs for course materials, the students suggested this can create a disparity of student experience and the potential financial inequalities can militate against students who do not have additional family financial resources to draw on. Students that met with the ELIR team stated that there were bursaries, but these were difficult to get and depended on a student being in extreme financial hardship. Students reported a mixed picture in terms of GSA's response, varying from no help for material costs, to loans of the necessary equipment. Some students spoke positively about the cost of access to darkrooms having been reduced, but cited arrangements for camera loans were ineffective. Staff confirmed that there was no uniform GSA strategy and that each school approached the matter differently.

95 Students are briefed on the additional costs of study and this is outlined in an overarching proforma issued for programmes located on the GSA website. However, the team judged that this was not presented in a format that many students would find easily accessible; it was insufficiently comprehensive; and the degree of uniformity masked the range of additional costs that students might be exposed to in different programmes.

96 It is recommended that GSA develops a clear and effective process for identifying and communicating additional programme costs (building on the existing fees document) and develop an equitable institutional approach to support students in meeting these. In parallel, the team recommends that GSA continues to promote creative means of achieving learning outcomes in sustainable alternative ways through options that are made available to all students.

### **Assessment and feedback**

97 GSA has consistently poor NSS results for assessment and feedback. Scores sit in the lower quartiles of benchmarks with declines in satisfaction between 2014 and 2018 especially acute. ELIR 3 made detailed recommendations regarding assessment and feedback, and a series of actions were taken in response including the introduction of programme handbooks and clear programme specifications. GSA's own analysis of NSS results notes that 'a lack of clear assessment criteria is often identified along with a delay in feedback turnaround time'. Students continue to feel that assessment processes are often not clearly explained, nor provided early enough in the session and that the language used by staff to describe learning outcomes is not clear. These concerns are also consistent with GSA's internal student surveys which find that 'students identify a lack of clarity with assessment criteria and the assessment process within their programmes'. 'Headline' concerns from the PGT Student Experience Survey include unclear grading criteria and feedback turnaround times.

98 Students who met with the ELIR team expressed the view that assessment criteria should be standardised across all schools around a clear set of guidance. Students recognised the desire not to be prescriptive in the creative arts but indicated that there were often contradictions and uncertainty about what their tutors' expectations were in relation to assessment. They reported that each academic discipline grades differently and feel the

advice they are given is not always useful. Students commented on what they perceived to be reticence on the part of some staff to engage in discussion about assessment. Some students reported receiving positive formative feedback for work that then failed at the summative stage. Students expressed the view that marking criteria are vague and it is often not clear on what basis work is graded, or what was required in order to improve grades. Some students reported that formative feedback 'fell through the cracks' and they did not receive it in a timely manner.

99 GSA is aware of the need to improve in this area and have put in place a review of the Code of Assessment, which currently lays down minimal requirements in terms of assessment criteria and feedback. This review was intended to lead to a 'renewal of assessment and feedback processes across GSA', but progress was hampered by the second fire. The ELIR team understands the review is now close to completion. Senior staff who met with the team noted that having more explicit assessment criteria, as adopted by other institutions, would be inimical to GSA's culture. Academic staff who met the team were unaware of any expectations or requirements that GSA lay down for them to follow when defining assessment criteria for specific assignments or of any specific institutional requirements in respect of the feedback they provide to students on their work. The team also noted a reference in a PMAR to a view among teaching staff that many learning outcomes are written 'in non-accessible "academic speak" and as such are essentially meaningless to students when included as part of a brief'. Graduate Teaching Assistants who met the team also said that they found assessment criteria, against which they were expected to grade students, confusing.

100 External examiners have also commented on the need to improve the constructiveness of feedback for future learning, the timeliness of feedback and, in some areas, more explicit reference to assessment criteria. The RA referred to a model of good practice in assessment and feedback in the Mackintosh School of Architecture (MSA), but GSA was unable to provide any detail about this and it was unclear that staff outside MSA were aware of it.

101 It is recommended that GSA ensures staff and students have a clear understanding of institutional expectations around grading criteria and practices. GSA should also ensure that there are clearer expectations for feedback practice which are implemented effectively across the institution, so that all students receive timely, relevant and high-quality formative feedback on their progress at key points during their programmes. Students should be supported to understand how their assessed work relates to learning outcomes, how assessment criteria are used to make judgements about the achievement of learning outcomes, and how feedback should help their understanding of why a particular grade has been awarded. Feedback on formative assessment - for example, at the existing Mid-Year Review - should be shared with students on all programmes.

## **Employability**

102 GSA has considered how best to embed professional skills within the curriculum, and developed a suite of extra-curricular activities that enhance the student experience. Students who met with the ELIR team spoke of the self-directed nature of enterprise skills in their courses, and acknowledged the usefulness of Professional Practice lectures, but indicated that these sessions could place more emphasis on how to secure funding.

103 The Employability and Careers Service has been relaunched as the Enterprise Studio, with the aim of creating 'greater awareness of, and more cohesion between, careers and enterprise'. The careers advice offered to students was seen as helpful, timely and useful to students across programmes. The development of the Enterprise Studio Summer School in collaboration with partners, has received positive student feedback from those that

took part. While there are good informal links between the Enterprise Studio and academics, GSA could explore how positive practice can be embedded further throughout programmes.

104 As stated in the RA, GSA's most recent DLHE results, for 2016-17, give some cause for concern compared with other art schools. In that year, the percentage of graduates who were employed or in further study (or both) - among all those who were employed, unemployed, or studying - was 91.5%, having fallen from 93.3% two years previously.

## **2.4 Postgraduate taught and research student experience**

105 Postgraduate taught student numbers increased by 52% between 2014-15 and 2017-18, in line with the objectives outlined as part of the Strategic Plan 2015-2018. This increase in numbers has posed challenges to the GSA estate, given the impact of the two fires, and GSA has no current plans to increase the PGT number further.

106 In 2016-17, postgraduate students were commissioned as -co-creators of the PGT Student Experience Project, engaging with staff and students in evaluating the student experience at postgraduate level in GSA. This student-led project ensured support from the student body, and an accurate representation of the range of views and thematic issues across the whole PGT community was outlined in the resulting report. Recommendations included: increasing cross-school activity; creating a better sense of postgraduate community (in particular to avoid issues of isolation in particular groups); addressing the mismatch between student expectations of courses with resources available; improving dialogue between students and staff; communicating to students more effectively (including better use of the VLE) and improving access to technical services, studio and workshop space.

107 GSA offer a cross-school electives programme to postgraduate taught (PGT) students as a way to create a PGT community at GSA. A review of the electives programme was undertaken in 2016, informed by student feedback in the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES). The review of the electives programme took place in parallel with a move from 15/30 credit modules to 20 credit modules.

108 Responsibility for postgraduate research (PGR) programmes has been devolved from an institutional graduate school to the academic schools. While this has enhanced opportunities to interact with other researchers within their schools and has allowed school-wide PGR communities to form, students who met with the ELIR team expressed dissatisfaction at the lack of a cohesive PGR community across GSA. They commented that after the mandatory research skills training in their first year, which was praised by students as a valuable preparation for their studies, students feel 'abandoned' to 'isolated work'. Students felt that a dedicated space for PGR students would be of benefit, including project space for exhibitions and showcasing research. Research community was also highlighted as a developmental theme arising from PGR student survey results from 2018, with 20% of students disagreeing with positive statements relating to research community. GSA explain this dissatisfaction as being due to 'impacts resulting from the Mack fire, reducing opportunities for research sharing. This is being addressed through opening up staff research seminars to PGR students as well as reinstating the Research and Enterprise Sharing Knowledge and Insight (SKI) event series'. As part of the recommendations from the 2018-19 PGR periodic review undertaken by GSA, budget was allocated to support PGR community building events.

109 GSA has a developed Graduate Teaching Assistant scheme, with focused training and clear expectations that are well communicated to research students in advance of teaching undergraduate students. PGR students that had participated in the scheme

indicated that there is a wide range of teaching training available, and that teaching allowed PGR students to build connections and community within their school.

## **2.5 Learning environment, including the use of technology**

### **Library**

110 The GSA library has worked quickly to ensure that their collections are accessible in an online model of delivery, with students confirming that they have the resources they need for their course. The library carries out its own internal student surveys, and is quick to respond to student feedback regarding collections and the training needs of students and staff. The library is central to the institution's work on decolonising the curriculum with both students and staff speaking highly of the work that the library has done in this area.

111 The ELIR team commended the work of the GSA library towards decolonising the curriculum, as library staff have worked effectively to ensure library collections and reading lists better reflect GSA's multi-cultural environment.

### **Learning Technology**

112 GSA's virtual learning environment (VLE) is used extensively throughout the School. Staff work creatively using the VLE for their courses, as well as using it as a repository for course information. GSA state in the RA that student satisfaction with the VLE has been increasing (up 13% on the previous platform and at 54% in 2018-19, up from 46% in 2017-18), and both students and staff are offered training in its use. GSA has been able to effectively embed the use of the VLE throughout its courses, and good practice is shared internally at an annual showcase event.

113 At the time of the COVID-19 pandemic, GSA was operating with what they describe as a perceived deficit in staff skills in the use of online platforms while, at the same time, increasing the digital literacies of students was identified as a core objective of the Learning, Teaching and Enhancement Strategy. In response to the pandemic, GSA established the Digital Capacity Group which reported directly to the Academic Contingency Group and had a remit for increasing digital capacity, upskilling staff and students, and acquiring new software to enable a move to online learning. From summer 2020, the group was able to begin to provide remote access to course-specific software, and provide software licences for students to work at home. Students that met the ELIR team appreciated the institutional investment in these technologies that were supporting them to continue their studies remotely.

114 The Learning Technology team has provided online resources and bespoke training to staff based on staff surveys, as well as running webinars and ensuring all key texts were available electronically. The Learning Technology team also designed and implemented online inductions both to IT packages and to 'studio working' for staff and students which were received positively by both.

115 In parallel with increasing digital capacity, GSA's Digital Inclusion Strategy focused on ensuring that students were not disadvantaged through not having access to hardware such as laptops. At the start of the 2020-21 academic session, GSA invested in 388 laptop computers that would be distributed to those who needed them. While the timeline for this has been perceived to be slow by students, forcing some to rely on handheld devices, GSA indicated that they needed to ensure that those students who needed the technology the most were prioritised. The use of contextual data for this service, such as the Student Awards Agency Scotland and funding details, allowed students to apply without providing large amounts of evidence. While the application process opened shortly before the review visit, which was later than anticipated, staff moved quickly to distribute the laptops to those

selected, with any surplus being available for short-term loan to the general student population.

116 Accessibility of online materials has also been embedded as part of the Digital Inclusion Strategy, with the use of captioning and alt-text for all online materials. There were also examples of staff being aware of the increase in screen time for students, and the negative impacts this could have on certain students. While some progress has been made in this area, students indicated that there could be more creative solutions to the problems of online accessibility and GSA is encouraged to work in partnership with students regarding their experiences of online learning.

117 GSA purchased an institutional licence for an online platform to host meetings and classes, allowing all students and staff to host their own meetings or classes using the platform. While this has worked well for students, some voiced concerns regarding the privacy and security of the specific platform purchased with these raised through the rep system, with a perception that these concerns had not been fed back to those making the decisions. GSA are encouraged to consider student representation on the Digital Capacity Group.

118 The ELIR team commended staff from the Learning Technology and Learning and Teaching teams who have worked effectively together to support the upskilling of staff in online curriculum delivery. In addition, the team commended the Technical Support teams who have introduced a variety of initiatives to support students in producing work in an online environment. GSA has also made good progress, from summer 2020, in implementing a digital inclusion strategy to support students in producing work in an online environment.

### **Access to technical services and studio and workshop space**

119 Access to studio space continues to be an area of challenge for GSA. Managing student expectations on this matter has been a priority for the Technical Support Department. Work has been undertaken to ensure that workshop access is tailored to student specialisms. Outwith this, students can request access to resources for projects through a one-to-one tutorial with a member of the Technical Services Department. This student-centric approach, while heavy on staff time, allows the student to proceed in a supported manner and signposts students to the most appropriate studio resource.

120 Managing student expectations of workshop availability remains a challenge, and there would be considerable benefit in GSA continuing to work on communicating these expectations clearly to students in partnership with student representatives. Students that met with the ELIR team commented that resources can look good at 'surface level' and that the expectations of new students are higher than the reality when they arrive on campus.

121 Workshop space has seen increased usage over the last three years, with an average of 1,300 visits to a single workshop per month. Access to workshop space has been a developmental theme captured consistently in student feedback and annual monitoring and reporting, with GSA aware of the need to ensure that the quality of their offer, especially for PGR students, is commensurate with the rest of the sector. This has been of significant challenge for the School of Fine Art, whose exhibitions have historically been accommodated in the GSA Students' Association which, as a result of the dissolution of the commercial arm of the GSASA, is no longer available. Plans to develop the GSA estate further are underway, including the development of another 3D workshop in the Stow Building. The ELIR team considered that there would be considerable benefit in GSA undertaking a survey of workshop space as it relates to expected student utilisation to ensure that every student is provided with the opportunity to access the space required by their programme.

122 Since 2014, GSA has consistently underperformed against its benchmarks for student satisfaction with learning resources in National Student Survey results across all its subject areas. There was a reduction in student satisfaction in Learning Resources in 2020 from 2019 (70% compared to 64%), and the majority of free text comments (both positive and negative) were given in this field, indicating this issue is impacting on the student learning experience. This is consistent with GSA's Undergraduate Student Experience Survey results from 2018-19 where only 55.4% of students indicated that they were able to access course-specific technical resources when needed. Students who met the ELIR team confirmed these concerns. The team believe that there would be value in GSA considering the management of student perceptions of workshop space at every stage of the learner journey, by clearly outlining minimum expectations for each programme of study from advertising and pre-admission, through to graduation.

123 The ELIR team understands that GSA have plans to review the development of the technical estate as part of an estates masterplan. There would be value in GSA working in partnership with its student body to further consider its approach to studio and workspace allocation as part of this work in order to better understand and address the concerns of students raised through student surveys.

124 The ELIR team recommends that GSA ensures that processes to align the demands of curricula and the resources available to support students in achieving learning outcomes are effective and equitable. In parallel, establish and make clear to students before entry, minimum levels of studio availability and technical support that can be expected on each programme of study to ensure consistency and equity of provision.

## **2.6 Effectiveness of the approach to enhancing the student learning experience**

125 There is a strategic and sustained commitment, evidenced by a range of targeted activities, to promote widening access which supports students to enter GSA or other higher education institutions. GSA has established a variety of successful long-standing school and college partnerships - notably with Castlehead High School - which raise the aspirations and achievement of young people. The ongoing support provided by GSA to widening access students contributes to high retention rates.

126 GSA has effective support in place for students entering the School through an articulation route and has made significant progress in supporting students to successful completion. In particular, the Associate Student Scheme provides college students with valuable access to the library and VLE, as well as enabling students to benefit from a range of engagement opportunities at GSA.

127 GSA provides a range of support services that are successful and responsive in meeting evolving student needs. These services have been particularly effective in supporting students with the move to online provision. It is positive that a number of staff have completed qualifications focused on the provision of counselling services in a digital environment.

128 To support progress at GSA towards decolonising the curriculum, library staff have worked effectively to ensure library collections and reading lists better reflect GSA's multi-cultural environment.

129 Staff from the Learning Technology and Learning and Teaching teams have worked effectively together to support the upskilling of staff in online curriculum delivery. The Technical Support team has introduced a variety of initiatives to support students in producing work in an online environment.

130 To enable all students to engage in online study effectively during the pandemic, GSA has made good progress in implementing a digital inclusion strategy to support students with the transition to a blended model of learning.

131 To build on positive progress made with the introduction of Lead Representatives, GSA should continue to embed effective arrangements for student representation. In particular, GSA should aim to promote a culture where student representatives are involved wherever possible, including in any groupings outside the formal committee structure, at all levels. GSA should also work with student representatives in a mutually-beneficial partnership to consider what tailored training and briefing would be most effective to allow them to contribute effectively to committees and groups, and ensure that representatives have the information they need to fulfil their roles with confidence.

132 GSA should work to establish a culture where students are seen as equal partners, engaged individually and collectively in the development and enhancement of their educational experience. This should include setting out an agreed approach which allows progress to be made on matters of mutual priority where GSA and its Students' Association work together to enhance the student experience - for example, making demonstrable progress in finalising the existing Relationship Agreement and developing a new Student Partnership Agreement which both codifies the ways of working and facilitates actions being taken.

133 It is recommended that GSA reviews (as planned), develops and implements a comprehensive and effective communications strategy, which includes all key stakeholders. In particular, in partnership with students, establish and embed effective and accessible communication channels which are responsive to student comment and engagement, and which foster a culture of mutual respect, openness and information sharing.

134 GSA should ensure that processes to align the demands of curricula and the resources available to support students in achieving learning outcomes are effective and equitable. In parallel, establish and make clear to students before entry, minimum levels of studio availability and technical support that can be expected on each programme of study to ensure consistency and equity of provision.

135 GSA should develop a clear and effective process for identifying and communicating additional programme costs (building on the existing fees document) and an equitable institutional approach to support students in meeting these. In parallel, GSA should continue to promote creative means of achieving learning outcomes in sustainable alternative ways through options that are made available to all students.

136 It is recommended that GSA continues to develop an effective and systematic approach to understanding and addressing student feedback, drawing on the National Student Survey and institutional surveys, which allows for the identification and resolution of issues in sufficient detail, both at institutional and programme level, and which supports the effective sharing of good practice.

137 It is recommended that GSA progresses with plans to develop and embed the institutional approach to equality and diversity, introducing an effective mechanism to oversee and monitor GSA-wide action including implementation of recommendations resulting from Equality Impact Assessments.

138 GSA should ensure staff and students have a clear understanding of institutional expectations around grading criteria and practices. GSA should also ensure that there are clearer expectations for feedback practice which are implemented effectively across the institution, so that all students receive timely, relevant and high-quality formative feedback on their progress at key points during their programmes. Students should be supported to

understand how their assessed work relates to learning outcomes, how assessment criteria are used to make judgements about the achievement of learning outcomes, and how feedback should help their understanding of why a particular grade has been awarded. Feedback on formative assessment - for example, at the existing Mid-Year Review - should be shared with students on all programmes.

### **3 Strategy and practice for enhancing learning and teaching**

139 GSA's strategy and practice for enhancing learning and teaching is currently limited in its effectiveness. While there is an overarching institutional level Learning and Teaching Enhancement Strategy (LTES), significant responsibility for managing and embedding change, and establishing and implementing policy and practice, sits at school level. At the time of the current review, the ELIR team saw limited evidence that GSA could assure itself that institutional priorities for enhancing learning and teaching could be delivered effectively within the devolved school structure to assure parity of student experience. The team found that academic staff who they met had limited understanding of institutional priorities and expectations in key areas of the student experience, such as assessment and feedback, and that the School was working in an operational rather than strategically-driven way.

#### **3.1 Strategic approach to enhancement**

140 GSA has been impacted by two significant fires (paragraph 4) and, at the time of the ELIR, along with the rest of the UK higher education sector, was experiencing the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. The demands of maintaining the student experience in light of these extraordinary events, led GSA to respond, in its own words, in 'critical incident contingency mode' which appears to have limited GSA's ability to deliver fully on its ambitions for the enhancement of learning and teaching. GSA identified 'Maintaining the student and staff experience and engaging in enhancement in the face of turbulence in the physical estate, as well as the practical, organisational and emotional challenges the School has faced since the last ELIR in 2014' as an area of contextualisation for the ELIR (paragraphs 5 and 23), citing that, 'the effects of the operational emergencies to which GSA has had to respond since 2014 dominate the period of this ELIR 4'. GSA also recognised that it, 'had to prioritise some enhancement activities over others' and that, 'whilst...we have undertaken significant enhancement activities in relation to the student experience, we have not achieved all that we had hoped to achieve in the period since the last ELIR'.

141 A further area of contextualisation for the ELIR identified and recognised by GSA was, 'Developing cross-GSA strategic approaches to enhancement and change management' and the RA outlines that 'As well as periods of emergency planning, GSA has been attempting to develop methods of change which maintain the strengths of disciplinary identity at the same time as cross-GSA working. Managing such a strategy around how we operate was a theme before the second fire in 2018 and has continued to be so'.

142 GSA's Senior Leadership Group (SLG) withdrew the 2018-21 Strategic Plan in favour of Operational Plans following the 2018 fire. Senior staff that met with the ELIR team described a 'place-holder' approach, waiting for the appointment of a new Director, and that some elements of the Strategic Plan had become redundant. During the ELIR, the new Director stated that she recognised that the SLG had been operating in an operational rather than strategic way, and that GSA was now beginning to work towards the co-production of a new Strategic Plan, but at the time of the current ELIR, this had not yet begun.

143 Individual academic schools' operational strategies, aligned with the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Strategy (LTES) and the SFC Outcome Agreement, have been supporting systematic approaches to identifying, reporting on and evaluating the enhancement of learning. While this may have promoted change at school level, it has failed

to achieve consistent GSA-wide enhancement in areas of strategic importance to the student learning experience, such as assessment and feedback. As part of the emergent LTES (2015-18) (paragraphs 145), GSA in 2016 introduced the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Working Group (LTEWG). In 2017, GSA developed the LTEWG into a constitutional Learning and Teaching Committee (LTC) which reports directly to the Undergraduate and Postgraduate Committee (UPC) with regard to strategic approaches to enhancement.

144 The ELIR team viewed the establishment of the LTC at GSA as a positive development, which could enhance the strategic approach to learning and teaching across the institution, as it serves as the main means to achieve the work of the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Strategy. At the time of the current ELIR, the LTC had not met since the formation of the Academic Contingency Group in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, in March 2020. During the review, the ELIR team was told by the Director, that the LTC would be reinstated in December 2020 when the new Deputy Director (Academic) took up post.

145 The LTES is divided into two parts: an emergent strategy (2015-18) which was seen to be flexible with respect to recovering from the first fire, and the consolidating strategy, in which objectives were agreed for 2015-21 to 'demonstrate the effectiveness of [GSA's] strategic approach to enhancement'. The emergent strategy was 'co-created' with inputs from various members of academic staff, as well as from the Student President, the Student Engagement Officer, and the Head of Learning Resources. GSA identified seven top-level objectives for the emergent strategy which directed the focus of each academic school's enhancement of learning and teaching, including various activities like the First Year Experience, clarifying learning outcomes, developing approaches to employability and introducing the VLE. The consolidating strategy (2018-21) maintained the emergent strategy's values, and its focus on 'staff student dialogue, equality and diversity, widening participation, sustainability, progression, and innovation and enterprise', and looked to systematise enhancement under seven headings:

- 1 A renewed holistic curriculum (implementing strategies from the UG and PG space, particularly PGT credit structure and the new First Year Experience)
- 2 An improved student experience
- 3 A more systematic approach to supporting students and graduates to prosper, linked directly to the section of GSA's Research and Enterprise strategy that outlines the Enterprise Studio and Enterprise Framework
- 4 A supported staff body
- 5 A streamlined Programme Monitoring and Annual Report process
- 6 A new Internationalisation Strategy
- 7 Providing leadership in creative practices' education.

While there is an overarching institutional-level LTES, each school plans and prioritises its own enhancement activities against the core objectives of the LTES. Consequently, the ELIR team found the emphasis placed on individual school enhancement objectives varies across GSA, and when coupled with the variable approaches adopted - for example, to improving assessment feedback - the results are inconsistent and fail to impact sufficiently in areas where GSA has consistently underperformed.

146 In the period between the 2018 fire and the current ELIR, GSA operationalised its approach to enhancement through the use of annual operational plans, its Outcome Agreement with SFC (with senior staff stating during the ELIR that the 'thrust of the previous Strategic Plan became the Outcome Agreement'), the work of LTC and through its academic quality processes - in particular, Programme Monitoring and Annual Reporting (PMAR), periodic reviews and Quality Enhancement Action Plans (QEAPs).

147 The ELIR team understands from its reading of the RA that the LTES (2018-21), through its core objectives, was intended to link directly to other institutional strategies, as it sets out to 'ensure systematic enhancement of learning, teaching and assessment related to the Research and Enterprise Strategy and Internationalisation Strategy'. However, in the RA, GSA describe the Internationalisation Strategy as 'put on hold following the second fire and the decision by the Senior Leadership Group to focus on consolidation of the student body as part of a contingency response by SLG after the second fire'.

148 Staff who met with the ELIR team confirmed that work on the Internationalisation Strategy would resume as part of the forthcoming strategic planning cycle. Also, as noted by GSA, part of the Internationalisation Strategy involved decolonising the curriculum. While the library has worked effectively to ensure library collections and reading lists better reflect GSA's multi-cultural environment (paragraphs 110-111), progress with work on decolonising the curriculum is variable across the schools. The ELIR team believe there would be benefit to GSA in reviewing actions taken at school level and sharing good practice in order to benefit its overall institutional approach to internationalisation.

149 The Learning and Teaching Committee has been a key driver in beginning to progress with the following learning and teaching enhancements:

- Student Voice
- Piloting the Personal Tutor Pilot Scheme
- PGT Credit Reform
- PGT Electives Reform
- Programme Monitoring and Annual Reporting
- First Year Experience project.

150 The ELIR team recognised that the aspirations set out in the LTES were appropriate and acknowledged that the LTC was working hard to make progress in several areas, but the failure to make significant impact across the institution continues to be reflected in the results of the NSS and internal student surveys. GSA acknowledges that - for example, in assessment and feedback - 'students require more systematic improvements' but that 'managing disciplinary-orientated enhancements through a GSA wide framework' can be a significant challenge. For example, in respect of assessment and feedback, the RA notes that the 'distributed disciplinary nature' of GSA's interventions has not increased positive sentiment among students, although the Code of Assessment was intended to provide a GSA-wide framework. It was also noted by senior staff in a workshop preparing for ELIR, when reflecting on weaknesses in GSA's strategic approach that 'at times, there can be a lack of an institution-wide approach to issues. GSA can be too localised. These divergent practices need to be addressed. This is important when considering parity for students.' The ELIR team agreed with the conclusion drawn by GSA and would encourage greater consistency across all provision to enhance the student learning experience.

151 With LTC not operational from March 2020, and a number of areas of work from its remit were progressed by the Academic Continuity Group, GSA should ensure that LTC resumes its work once the new Deputy Director (Academic) is in post, and that priorities such as the Student Voice are effectively overseen by it. Similarly, the ELIR team would encourage GSA that the work of the Race Action Group, if it continues, should be integrated into the institutional committee structure, again ensuring that, in future, areas of strategic priority do not rely on individuals. The team also noted that, following the departure of the previous Deputy Director (Academic), only one of the seven members of GSA's Senior Leadership Group (SLG) was a senior academic. Following the appointment of a new Director and Deputy Director (Academic), there will be a stronger academic voice in the SLG, and the Director informed the team that this would be enhanced by the inclusion of all Heads of School at alternate meetings.

152 The ELIR team recommends that GSA should ensure that oversight and responsibility for taking action on matters of strategic priority are invested effectively in the institutional committee structure, avoiding overreliance on individuals. GSA should also reflect on the balance between institutional and school responsibilities for managing and embedding change effectively, and establishing and implementing policy and practice. This would enable GSA to assure itself that institutional priorities can be delivered effectively within the devolved school structure and that students have parity of experience. Related to the above, GSA should also monitor and review the effectiveness of the amended constitution of the Senior Leadership Group.

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

153 The institution has engaged with the national Enhancement Themes and emphasises their importance in shaping GSA's agenda. GSA has used the Enhancement Themes to try to understand the discipline-specific nature of learning and teaching enhancement within the creative arts. The Enhancement Themes have had a wide range of impacts on practice at GSA, including influencing on their policy approach to ensure effective student articulation and informing the approach to the First Year Experience project.

154 Developed as part of the Student Transitions theme (2014-17), the 'Transitions Out of Fine Art' project focused on the whole route of the student journey. GSA worked on preparation for incoming students, particularly on articulation from further education. It is evident that GSA have established some good practices in this area, having effective support in place for articulating students, and having made significant progress in supporting those students to successful completion on their courses (paragraphs 79-83).

155 During the Evidence for Enhancement Theme (2017-20), GSA, through its LTC chair, has taken a co-leadership role in establishing a creative disciplines' collaborative cluster (which represented all the creative disciplines in Scotland's higher education institutions) which looked at how to engage and manage evidence regarding the impact of enhancements in learning and teaching. A key driver for the work was to explore GSA's approach to the use of data in planning and decision-making. GSA had three aims: to build its own confidence in using metrics data to inform and evaluate strategic enhancements in the light of the NSS results; to look at using student voice mechanisms to understand (and if necessary mitigate) the impact of developing curricular enhancements (using the Student Experience Survey) and to explore gathering discipline-specific evidence (Fine Art) in the area of participatory art projects to evaluate student experience. It is clear that the engagement with the Evidence for Enhancement Theme, although aiding GSA's self-evaluation of its practice in the use of data and metrics, has not yet resulted in significant institutional shifts in the use of evidence (paragraphs 196-205). However, the ELIR team understands that GSA intends to engage strategically with the use of metrics, and the new Director has explicitly expressed their desire to strengthen staffing in this area. The team would encourage GSA to take forward these plans believing there would be considerable benefit to GSA from being able to interrogate data sets in an integrated way to support its enhancement agenda.

### **3.3 Approaches to identifying and sharing good practice**

156 GSA identifies good practice through its quality assurance processes, including explicitly in Programme Monitoring and Annual Reporting (PMAR) which asks staff to provide 'three aspects of good practice leading to staff and student successes' and comment on 'how these have led to enhancements within the curriculum'. PMARs are presented at Boards of Study annually, and good practice relating to programmes and schools is disseminated through the schools' PMARs which are considered at UPC. Good practice is

also shared in a systematic way through the Periodic Review and Revalidation processes. Additionally, through the Programme Approval and Validation processes good practice is identified within curriculum design and delivery modes, and this can be evidenced through approval panels' commendations (paragraphs 187-192).

157 The online Learning and Teaching Enhancement Hub was launched in 2017 on the VLE to provide a resource bank for staff. Resources include modules on Personal Tutoring and approaches to evaluating learning and teaching, and the student learning experience. In addition, in response to the pandemic and the move to online teaching, GSA developed a blog called GSA eLearning News: Glasgow School of Art's Learning Technology office blog. This is a very up-to-date, well-curated blog which has been extremely helpful with supporting staff to develop their knowledge of online learning and teaching. Staff who met with the ELIR team spoke positively about this development. There are posts called '2 Minute Tech Tips' and others which show examples of how to create video content. It was the ELIR team's view that this was an effective, well-used, live and updated resource.

158 While quality assurance processes and committee structures afford possibilities to disseminate good practice, GSA recognised that its structures rely on particular membership of those committees and best practice identified was not necessarily being disseminated as widely as was anticipated. The RA states that in response, in 2019-20, the Learning and Teaching team set out to produce summary bulletins of good practice emerging from quality processes and share these with staff through the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Hub. At the time of the review, the ELIR team could find no evidence of these bulletins, the posting of which would have supported GSA in its efforts to disseminate good practice identified through its quality assurance processes and committee structures. As a result, the team would encourage GSA to consider resuming this practice.

159 The Learning and Teaching conference which took place in 2015 provided an effective way to share good practice and was instituted, in part, in response to the commendation of the previous ELIR. GSA's ambitions to host a similar conference on a more regular basis have been derailed by the two fires and the ongoing pandemic. The ELIR team considered that there would be benefit to both staff and students from GSA giving due consideration to holding a sharing practice conference online to further disseminate good practice and support staff.

### **3.4 Engaging, developing and supporting staff**

160 GSA has an effective approach to staff development. One of GSA's key approaches to engage staff in the enhancement of their teaching and learning practice is through its MED suite (revalidated in 2018) which has various routes: the PG Certificate in Higher Education Learning and Teaching; the PG Certificate in Supervisory Practice; and the full MEd - Diploma in Learning, Teaching and Supervisory Practices. While completion rates have fallen off significantly (between 2014 and 2019), it is important to put this into perspective: since the previous ELIR, 43 staff completed the programme, and an additional 16 members of the professional support staff and GTAs completed Course 1 of the programme. Currently there are 22 staff members working towards completion.

161 The Learning and Teaching team also support school staff through the delivery of bespoke development opportunities which works well within the devolved GSA structure, and accommodates the high proportion of fractional staff employed. Of note is the work with the School of Simulation and Visualisation to support their new curriculum, and support provided to staff in the School of Design with assessment and feedback issues.

162 Other developmental opportunities for staff have been offered through GSA's hosting of sector-wide events, including: a 'Transitions Out' symposium in Fine Art; a Council

for Higher Education in Art and Design (CHEAD) Leadership in learning and teaching conference; an International Journal of Art and Design Education Annual Conference; and an Enhancement Theme collaborative round table meeting entitled 'Evidencing Enhancement in Art and Design'.

163 Developmental opportunities are provided not only for academic and professional staff, but also for doctoral candidates to support their engagement in teaching as part of their postgraduate experience. Introduced in 2015-16, the Graduate Teaching (GTA) Scheme supported GTAs at course/programme level to develop their teaching practice. In 2016-17, the Learning and Teaching team introduced 'Learning and Teaching in an Art School' - a formal short course to support GTAs. The day and half course built upon the QAA Focus On project - 'Training and support for postgraduate students who teach (PGWT)'. Feedback from students on the course is that they value it in preparing them for their teaching roles.

164 In the RA, GSA state that a key challenge to staff engagement in development activity is workload. In response to a recommendation at the last ELIR, GSA introduced an Activity Planning Model to support workload management. GSA's Activity Planning protocols enable staff to discuss with their line manager how their time is deployed across scholarship, research, teaching and administrative duties. This process takes place at annual Career Development Reviews, and is particularly important because of the large numbers of fractional staff which result in ongoing difficulties to schedule staff development activities on such limited contracts. To help facilitate staff engagement, GSA contractually protects development time through, for instance, by designating a pro-rata allocation of 0.1 day per week (per 1.0 FTE) for scholarship. GSA also reserves, for some cases, a small contingency fund to enable staff to work 'overtime' in order to attend key meetings and events. It was noted by staff during the ELIR that effort is taken to engage with careful workload planning particularly for staff on fractional contracts. Senior staff indicated that a new Workload Allocation Model was in development, and that this work would be taken forward by the incoming Deputy Director (Academic).

165 Following the Periodic Review of Postgraduate Research in September 2018, the Research and Enterprise team began to revise the Research Degrees Guidance documentation to better support the role of PhD supervisor; when complete, the documentation will act as a Supervisor's Code of Practice. Compulsory attendance (every three years) at an annual supervisor training session was to be implemented; however, during the review, the ELIR team could find no evidence that this was yet in place. One way that less experienced supervisors get 'training' is through acting as second supervisor. The team would encourage GSA to restart its work to formalise training for PhD supervisors and ensure its approach is documented and implemented.

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

166 In the last five years, GSA has found itself, due to a series of unforeseen circumstances, including two fires and more recently a global pandemic, necessarily operating in a more operational than strategic manner. Going forward, GSA is asked to ensure that oversight and responsibility for taking action on matters of strategic priority are invested effectively in the institutional committee structure, avoiding overreliance on individuals. GSA should also reflect on the balance between institutional and school responsibilities for managing and embedding change effectively, and establishing and implementing policy and practice. This would enable GSA to assure itself that institutional priorities can be delivered effectively within the devolved school structure and that students have parity of experience. Related to the above, GSA should monitor and review the

effectiveness of the amended constitution of the Senior Leadership Group

167 The institution has continued to try to promote and share good practice, notably through PMAR and the Learning Technology and Learning and Teaching teams, whose work includes timely blog spots on online technology tips, the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Hub and the MEd suite. There would be benefit in building on this work perhaps through re-establishing the Learning and Teaching Conference online.

## 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

168 Glasgow School of Art's arrangements for managing quality and securing academic standards are currently limited, such that the standards of the awards it offers would continue to be placed at risk if GSA did not take appropriate action. GSA should, in particular, ensure that the revised Memorandum of Agreement with the University of Glasgow is widely understood and its processes followed, and make progress on its planned changes to the GSA Code of Assessment.

#### Relationship with the University of Glasgow

169 GSA is an accredited institution of the University of Glasgow (UoG). GSA is responsible for the development, monitoring, evaluation and updating of its quality framework, while the Senate of the University of Glasgow has ultimate responsibility for GSA awards. University of Glasgow and GSA state that GSA has delegated authority for academic standards and quality assurance, and operates quality assurance and enhancement procedures agreed with the University. GSA's procedures are aligned with the University of Glasgow's own procedures, which in turn align with the expectations set out in the Scottish Funding Council guidance to higher education institutions on quality.

170 A revised Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) between GSA and UoG had been due to be implemented from 1 April 2020, as outlined in the Reflective Analysis. At the time of the ELIR (autumn 2020), it became apparent that the revisions to the MoA had not been concluded on schedule. The ELIR team heard that the revised agreement had now been signed off, but with a small number of 'minor points' to be finalised. The new agreement included new and revised sections including: Memorandum of Understanding; General Partnership Terms; Memorandum of Agreement for Taught Provision; Memorandum of Agreement for Research Provision; Joint Programme Framework Agreement; Data Processing Agreement; Service Teaching Agreement MLitt Art Writing and Service Teaching Agreement BEng/MEng Civil Engineering with Architecture. In the week following the ELIR, GSA indicated to the team that revisions to the MoA are in essence 'the creation of a more flexible legal structure in which the components are now housed and partly a simplification of the financial arrangements'. GSA confirm that the full suite of documentation associated with this MoA was considered and approved at the GSA Academic Council meeting on 13 May 2020 and then considered and approved at the 1 June 2020 meeting of the GSA Board of Governors. GSA confirmed that the entire process was overseen by the University-GSA Strategic Partnership Group, chaired by the University's Vice-Principal (Academic Planning and Technological Innovation). However, the ELIR team was unable to confirm with senior staff when the revised MoA had been or was to be approved by the University of Glasgow, but learnt subsequently that it had been signed by the University's Principal and Vice-Chancellor on 8 October 2020.

171 Since 2017, following negotiation with the University of Glasgow, GSA's Academic Council has acquired delegated responsibility for approving the appointment of

external examiners for all taught programmes. Responsibility for the approval of most new programmes and major programme changes has also been transferred to GSA from 2017-18.

172 GSA plans in response to the COVID-19 pandemic included cessation of all teaching on academic programmes and revisions to assessment processes which meant that 'no further work needed to be submitted for assessment and that the determination of Honours classification would proceed based upon work already produced'. In addition, GSA cancelled in-person degree shows and as an alternative launched its Graduate Showcase on 29 May 2020 in line with the published Degree Show opening date. The ELIR team heard that revised arrangements for assessment arising from COVID-19 were communicated to the University of Glasgow at the meeting of the Strategic Partnership Group on 15 April 2020, and that a paper outlining the changes to assessment was also presented to the May 2020 meeting of the GSA Academic Council. Academic Council membership includes two representatives from the University and the GSA Student Association President. In addition, the University's Academic Collaborations Office was also informed. Following the ELIR review visit, GSA confirmed that it would be providing a comprehensive update on assessment to the meeting of the University-GSA Joint Liaison Committee in spring 2021 as scheduled. However, the ELIR team could not confirm that the revised GSA COVID-19 assessment arrangements had been approved by the Senate of the University of Glasgow. The team noted this is a requirement of GSA's Code of Assessment, which states that any change to the scheme will be subject to the approval of the Convener of Academic Council (GSA) and the Clerk of Senate (Glasgow). An Equality Impact Assessment of any changes proposed must be also be submitted when seeking approval (paragraph 188). During the ELIR, in response to discussions between the team and senior staff regarding how GSA was engaging with the University of Glasgow (in preparation for academic session 2020-21) - for example, by providing any formal documentation for approval in line with the academic regulations set out above, senior GSA staff outlined that there are two University of Glasgow representatives on Academic Council who would be asked if they want to take any matters to UoG but that they were 'not altogether clear who has to approve what'.

173 Considering the approval and oversight arrangements with the awarding body (UoG), GSA is recommended to ensure that the respective responsibilities of both parties under the Memorandum of Agreement are clear and well understood by key GSA staff. In addition, and in the light of the QAA Scottish Concerns Scheme (SCS) investigations<sup>6</sup> conducted with GSA in October 2020, GSA is recommended to ensure that any significant changes to assessment, especially where these impact on student progression and/or degree awards and classification, are communicated and implemented following the agreed approval processes as detailed in GSA's Code of Assessment.

### **Management of assessment**

174 A need to review the existing GSA Code of Assessment had been identified as part of the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Strategy (LTES) (2018-21). Work was due to commence in 2020 for implementation in September 2020, however, development was effectively halted due to the 2018 fire and remained uncompleted at the time of the ELIR. In respect to the Code of Assessment, the ELIR team recommends that GSA ensures that the planned changes are clearly outlined in addenda to the GSA Code of Assessment and communicated to students in consultation with student representatives. In light of the recent SCS investigations conducted with GSA in October 2020, particular attention should be paid as to how to communicate assessment arrangements to staff and students to ensure

---

<sup>6</sup> See [Scottish Concerns Scheme investigation reports](#), Glasgow School of Art, October 2020

that they fully understand what they are required to do and by when.

175 GSA state in the RA that 'responsibility for the management and operation of programme assessment scheme rests with the relevant programme leader reporting to the Head of Academic School'. A key role of a programme leader is to emphasise the importance of ensuring that all staff are fully aware of GSA's assessment requirements and expectations. However, staff who met the team, including programme leaders, appeared to have limited understanding of GSA's requirements in this respect. The examiners for the assessment scheme are made up of the internal and external examiners. The GSA final Examination Board is convened by the Deputy Director (Academic) and includes the programme leader and head of school, its purpose is to determine the results of the assessment procedure. The Head of Academic Registry is responsible for managing appeals against the outcomes of assessment.

176 GSA operates a Code of Assessment based upon the University of Glasgow's Code, and which adheres to the principles of UK Quality Code for Higher Education. The purpose of the Code of Assessment is to assure parity of standards and degrees across programmes at GSA and across the degree awards of the University of Glasgow. The code includes descriptors for the attainment of intended learning outcomes, a definition of primary grades, secondary band grading, grade points and banding related to honours classification. Each approved GSA programme is intended to be assessed against the stated learning outcomes of the course, and assessment should include a combination of formative and summative elements. It is intended that assessment may only be changed through procedures approved by the GSA Academic Council and the University of Glasgow Senate. However, during recent Scottish Concerns Scheme investigations, it was learnt that this procedure was not followed in the period of the pandemic immediately after lockdown in March 2020.

177 The Code of Assessment also states that candidates will receive feedback to guide their subsequent learning. During the ELIR, GSA staff noted for postgraduate taught courses that formative assessment was designed to take place in the middle of a stage. Students would be assessed against learning outcomes and the indicative content of the course and would receive formal written feedback prior to the summative assessment. This process was designed to allow time for students to capitalise on strengths, address weaknesses and respond to advice on direction prior to summative assessment. They felt this was consistent with the cycle in PGT.

178 It was noted that in planned revisions to the Code of Assessment, GSA were looking at how all programmes are designed to ensure there are distinct assessment points to ensure evidence of achievement. Based on the earlier recommendations on assessment and feedback (paragraphs 101 and 138), the ELIR team would strongly encourage GSA to progress promptly on the implementation of these plans.

179 In light of the pandemic and the closure of the campuses in March 2020, GSA attempted to develop an equitable approach to assessment and the progression of all students across the institution. This approach was based upon the previous institutional experience from the emergency situations of the two fires. GSA senior staff confirmed that academic staff were asked to determine the extent of work students had submitted up to the point of lockdown and to analyse formative performance. Subsequently, programme leaders were asked to make an assessment on a pass/fail basis. To ensure academic progression or graduation, GSA agreed an assessment regime based upon their 'Teaching Intelligence' process, which GSA describes as based on creating an attainment trajectory informed by prior engagement between student and academic. In March 2020, in some cases, students had not begun the pieces of work they intended to submit for their final awards at the point at which GSA made the decision to stop teaching and stop receiving

any further work from students for assessment (albeit that the academic year began in September and that the students year-long development process was underway). This means that in some instances, academic staff had not had the opportunity to assess student work or were having to base their assessment decisions on a much smaller sample of the work than was the case following the 2014 and 2018 fires. This is compounded by the non-modular structure of the GSA awards in which the final assessment (including the final degree classification) depends to a substantial extent on assessment of the final work produced for the degree show.

180 Students who raised concerns through the QAA Scottish Concerns Scheme<sup>7</sup> indicated that they were unclear about how they would be assessed during the remainder of session 2019-20 - for example, they were not aware of the production of a Mid-Year grade or of any tutorial records or formal feedback, and were confused about how academic staff were in a position to make an assessment judgement in order to meet programme-level intended learning outcomes, given that they had submitted no work for assessment during the period between March and June 2020. In addition, during the ELIR review, some undergraduate and postgraduate students said that they were still unclear as to how they would be assessed, that there 'did not appear to have been an attempt to adapt the curriculum to an online format and that no attempt had been made to change the delivery methods' used by staff. In preparation for the 2020-21 academic session, GSA had developed a 'COVID-19 Response Student Guide' which was made available in August 2020 to returning and new students. However, due to the timing of the review, the ELIR team was unable to confirm if the new guide had or would be effective in dealing with earlier student concerns. The team found that some students remained unclear about how their course had and would be assessed, how summative assessments would be completed and, therefore, what the implications were for their progression and the calculation of final awards. Although the ELIR team was provided with some contingency proformas which were useful as a summary, the team did not see detailed assessment arrangements for 2022-21 during the review visit.

181 GSA stated that the arrangements for assessing the programmes were shared with the University of Glasgow via its representatives at GSA's Academic Council (paragraph 176). This was a line of enquiry in the [Scottish Concerns Scheme investigation](#) in the week preceding the ELIR, where, during a meeting with senior representatives from UoG, the investigating team was unable to confirm that UoG was aware, or had oversight of the details of the changes to the assessment of GSA awards, or that formal approval of the proposed arrangements (cessation of programme related teaching, learning and assessment) had been received by GSA from UoG, although reference was made to the 'force majeure' clause in the Memorandum of Agreement which allows for mutual reassurance by informal means. Minutes from the Strategic Partnership Group give no further detail of arrangements for assessment or for formal approval. Following the review visit the ELIR team was informed by the Director that GSA's approach to assessment had been reflected upon and had been codified in an addendum to the Code of Assessment which was to be considered by the Academic Council on 9 December 2020. At the time of the review, this was not available to the ELIR team.

182 In respect to assessment design the ELIR team would ask GSA to reflect on the structure of its degree programmes and revisit final end-of-year assessments, particularly in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the inability to deliver a physical degree show in 2020 due to government restrictions, and which could potentially happen again in 2021. In addition, and again in light of the continuing pandemic, the team recommends that GSA

---

<sup>7</sup> See [Scottish Concerns Scheme investigation reports](#), Glasgow School of Art, October 2020

explores alternative approaches to assessment that ensure the security of standards.

183 On assessment design, the ELIR team recommends that in view of the ongoing pandemic, GSA should continue to implement its timetabled plan to develop an approach to delivering alternative assessments, in particular for studio-based courses, that can be used online if necessary, and ensure students are able to demonstrate attainment of intended learning outcomes and achieve minimum threshold academic standards for their programmes. GSA should also consider its programme structure, including whether the distribution of formative and summative assessment allows adequate flexibility to assess student attainment fairly.

184 In respect to academic standards, the ELIR team, considering the continuing pandemic, also recommends that GSA implement the plan to establish acceptable minimum threshold standards for progression between stages, up to and including the final stage of programmes. GSA should be clear about the amount of credit being assessed for progression between stages and the minimum acceptable level of credit needed for the successful completion of each programme. The procedures developed should also demonstrate how external examiners will be involved in endorsing any future use of the 'Teaching Intelligence' model to ensure that assessment decisions are robust, valid and reliable. GSA should also ensure that external examiners are consulted in sufficient detail on any changes.

### **External examiners**

185 GSA provided the ELIR team with an 'Analysis of External Examiner Comments for 2017-18' which detailed both 'Positive Themes' and 'Developmental Themes'. Positive themes included: curriculum design and creative freedom; assessment and feedback; collaboration; academic support; professional practice; and tutors. The developmental themes included: organisation and management; assessment and feedback; learning resources including technical skills and access to specialist equipment; curriculum design, staff resource and professional practice. In discussion with GSA staff, the team heard that this overview report was specifically constructed for the team and therefore not routinely produced. The team believe that there would be value to the institution in routinely producing this type of overview report for UPC and the Academic Council, supporting GSA to identify key areas of good practice and themes for development, and support it to tackle key themes consistently across the School.

186 The ELIR team was informed that students meet periodically with external examiners as part of institution-led review visits and are provided access to their reports through SSCCs. In addition, the Academic Quality Office had been exploring options to make external examiner reports more readily available to the wider student population through the VLE, however, at the time of the ELIR, this work had not been fully concluded. Some students that met the team were unaware of how to access external examiner reports. GSA staff said that students are told they are available and occasionally ask to see them. The team would encourage GSA to reinforce with all students that the reports are published on GSA's VLE following conclusion of the Programme Monitoring and Annual Reporting (PMAR) exercise. This would enable all students to be given the opportunity to engage in discussion and consideration of this element of the assessment process.

### **Programme approval, monitoring and periodic review**

187 The Academic Council has ultimate responsibility for approval and oversight of GSA's quality framework, with the Academic Quality Office responsible for ensuring that quality assurance and enhancement processes are implemented. The UPC advises the Academic Council on quality and standards and in turn is supported by the Learning and

Teaching Committee which takes a lead in respect to Quality Enhancement. Research degrees are overseen by the Research Degrees Sub-Committee (RDSC), reporting to the Academic Council via the Research and Enterprise Committee. Academic schools are responsible for ensuring engagement with the quality framework. This takes place through membership of academic committees throughout the institution.

188 Since 2017-18, Programme Approval (Validation) and Programme and Course Amendment (major) have followed a two-stage process. The first stage involves consideration and approval of a Statement of Intent by the relevant GSA and University of Glasgow committees. The latter stage focuses on the Programme Information Document, Specification and also Course Specifications. The approval stage also requires an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) to be carried out. Programme Monitoring and Annual Reporting (PMAR) documentation was extensively reviewed in 2018-19, leading to a refinement of proformas and focusing on key areas of learning and the student experience. Staff consider EIAs have had a positive impact on programme development (paragraph 61). Professional statutory and regulatory body (PSRB) requirements act as an external point of reference in validation, monitoring and review processes for a small number of GSA programmes.

189 GSA places great emphasis on the PMAR process which is a key component of its quality assurance processes. It is also used to follow progress with programme and school-level actions arising from SFC Outcome Agreements, the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Strategy (LTES) and recommendations from Periodic Review. The PMAR process is overseen by UPC and comprises the Annual School Summary Report (ASR) for each school within the institution, Annual Programme Report (APR), Support Department Overview Report, Critical Friend Report (CFR) and the Quality Enhancement Action Plan (QEAP) which is linked to the Student Experience Action Tracker (SEAT) (paragraph 55). PMAR also takes into consideration information from Institution-led Review (six-year cycle), student survey data, reports from the Staff-Student Consultative Committees (SSCC) and external examiner reports. Staff who met with the ELIR team considered the revisions to the PMAR process to be positive, as a more reflective process had developed.

190 Periodic Review and Revalidation is carried out on a cycle of no more than six years and is managed by the GSA Academic Quality Office. The sample of Periodic Review and Revalidation documents (up to academic year 2017-18) considered by the ELIR team indicated that academic standards were being effectively monitored by GSA. Staff who met the team were familiar with the expectations of these processes and the connection to quality assurance at GSA. As part of the periodic review process, external subject experts are engaged.

191 A revision and enhancement of PGR regulations and guidance was reported as underway, led by the Head of Doctoral Studies, following the Periodic Review of PGR in 2018. However, at the time of the ELIR, the completion of key conditions and recommendations arising from the review remain outstanding.

192 Professional Support Departments report annually on their services as part of the PMAR process. The ELIR team heard that although the Professional Support Departments' reports were useful and had been commended in the past, there was no systematic periodic review of professional services. In respect to the identification and sharing of good practice across the institution, including professional services, the RA commented that 'further work could be done to enhance our approach, particularly in relation to dissemination'. The Learning and Teaching Committee review (2018) identified that institutional and school-level committees had a key role to play in sharing good practice, but that there was an 'overreliance on personal communication chains' given their limited membership. For the 2018-19 academic year, Professional Support Department actions had been included in the Student Experience Action Tracker (paragraph 55). The

ELIR team was informed that the incoming Director intended to adapt GSA's academic periodic review process to better align, and make more consistent, the review of student facing professional support services with that of the academic schools. The team learned that a revised review process would be approved in January 2021, with the first review scheduled to be completed by the end of the 2020-21 academic year. The team recommended that GSA implement its plan to introduce a systematic and effective mechanism for reviewing the contribution of the professional support services to the quality of the student experience, incorporating external specialist expertise and student engagement.

### **Independence in student-facing processes**

193 Through both the QAA [Scottish Concerns Scheme investigations](#) in October 2020 that preceded the ELIR, and during the review, the ELIR team became aware that several GSA processes did not refer explicitly to 'independence' in order to avoid conflicts of interest. For example, although GSA's Complaints Handling Procedure follows requirements set down by the Scottish Public Sector Ombudsman, GSA's processes do not ensure that those who investigate a complaint internally are not at the same time involved in contributing to key school-level strategic decisions around which the complaints could be based. In addition, students commented that the Good Cause procedures (the term GSA use to refer to regulations for making appropriate allowance for unforeseen or unavoidable circumstances which may affect student assessments), in their view, lacked transparency about the operation of the process, including which members of staff would be making the decision and who would have access to their personal circumstances. Therefore, to avoid potential conflicts of interest and aid transparency, the ELIR team recommends that GSA undertake a review of the extent to which there is independence of decision-making in the complaints handling process, in the Good Cause procedure for summative assessments, including the Good Cause Board, and similar procedures.

#### **4.1 Use of external reference points in quality processes**

194 Overall, GSA has an effective approach to using external reference points in managing its academic standards, including QAA Subject Benchmark Statements, qualification frameworks and the UK Quality Code for Higher Education. GSA engage with a variety of organisations such as the NESTA Policy and Evidence Centre, other enterprise bodies and relevant employers in the creative arts on areas of strategic importance to the institution. Additionally, GSA draws upon external information from Universities Scotland Learning and Teaching Committee, the Scottish Higher Education Enhancement Committee (SHEEC), and the Council for Higher Education Art and Design.

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

195 The 2014 ELIR identified seven areas for development and the current ELIR team agreed with GSA that some progress had been made in each area. However, key areas such as 'Assessment and Feedback' remain priority areas and require further development. Additionally, the evaluation of particular GSA-wide initiatives is hard to follow, as reporting in the devolved school model does not always allow for the systematic tracking of actions and follow-up at institutional level.

#### **4.3 Approach to using data to inform decision-making and evaluation**

196 GSA's approach to using data to inform its decision-making and support its evaluative processes is currently limited. Management information was identified as an area for development in the 2010 ELIR. At the time of ELIR 3, management information - in

the context of GSA's ability to monitor the numbers and roles of part-time staff on permanent and temporary contracts - was a continued area for development. At the time of the current ELIR, GSA recognised that its approach to using data strategically was an area that the institution would like to prioritise, and this was a particular area of focus outlined by the new Director.

197 The ELIR team heard that GSA had full confidence in the effectiveness of their approach to self-evaluation through their interaction with their quality processes and cycle and their use of data to inform decision-making. GSA stated in the RA that annual reporting through the PMAR process, the use of external examiners reports, and reporting from professional services provide clear evidence of the maintenance of quality and academic standards.

198 GSA uses a range of key metrics data including student demographics, progression and continuation, equality and diversity, grade distribution, and student satisfaction surveys. The ELIR team was informed of the leadership role that GSA had taken in the national Enhancement Theme 'Evidence for Enhancement' (2017-20), with this viewed by GSA as a positive move to building confidence in its use of data. Discussion of data, information and analysis takes place at Senior Leadership Group, Planning and Management Group, Undergraduate and Postgraduate Committee as well as by devolved interaction at Academic School and Professional Services level and through the PMAR process.

199 However, the RA identified that data analysis is not centralised but devolved to professional and academic services departments depending on the data set. For example, equality and diversity data sets are held by Registry, while student survey data sets are overseen by the Learning and Teaching team, and Graduate Outcomes and the PGR experience surveys data sets are overseen and analysed by the Research and Enterprise team. The ELIR team viewed this lack of a centralised approach to the analysis and consideration of data as a 'missed opportunity' for GSA, given the value that could be derived from the ability to analyse these datasets holistically. In addition, the team thought that GSA could more make better use of student feedback and student survey data and respond more effectively to students on actions made in response.

200 Some student data is captured centrally at enrolment to provide demographic information about protected characteristics. The student record system is key in monitoring and reviewing progression and achievement data which is considered through PMAR and which in turn is used to inform quality enhancement plans, and forms a key data set for Periodic Review and Revalidation. Students are surveyed through several internal and external surveys in order to capture feedback on their studies (paragraph 52). Data collected has driven decisions such as the reform of the first-year experience and the PGT system.

201 A small number of programmes have started to use the learning analytics functions in the VLE to monitor student engagement and identify students at risk of failure. However, in discussion with GSA, the ELIR team was informed by staff that 'Learning analytics were not on the GSA agenda due to student concerns about perceived 'surveillance'.

202 Annual Equality Monitoring is undertaken at an institutional level in order to analyse GSA's student and staff populations comparatively with sectoral benchmarks. Equality and diversity data are analysed through the PMAR process and at school level through the School Annual Summary report to identify trends in student attainment and progression. The analysis of data provides key reference points for Equality Impact Assessments, Equality Outcomes and Equality Action Plans.

203 The RA stated that one of GSA's challenges institutionally is that its methods for data analysis 'remain relatively uni-dimensional' and that the decentralised nature of the School make it more difficult to undertake cross-referencing and trend analysis, and that further work was required to improve data management. GSA recognise the challenges of the decentralised nature its current arrangements for data monitoring and analysis, and reported to the ELIR team that the use of academic school-wide data trend analysis within their devolved processes of data-gathering and reflection was challenging and currently in a basic state. During the review, staff who met with the ELIR team demonstrated limited understanding of using data to improve the student experience. The team agree with GSA's assessment and considered that data systems were not connected. GSA staff told the team that before the appointment of the new Director, there was limited appetite in senior management to look at data strategically.

204 GSA introduced the institution-level Student Experience Action Tracker (SEAT) in late 2018 (paragraph 55). Matters prioritised and monitored through the SEAT are identified from GSA's analysis of its performance in NSS, the internal Student Experience Survey (SES), the internal Postgraduate Student Experience Survey (PGTSES), and what GSA consider to be key priorities emerging from this intelligence. Up until March 2020, when the COVID-19 emergency procedures were implemented, the SEAT had been reported to the Learning and Teaching Committee (LTC) on a monthly basis and to the Academic Council, UPC, and the Planning and Management Group on a quarterly basis. Updating and reporting on the SEAT was led by the out-going Deputy Director (Academic) and, at the time of the ELIR, the SEAT had not been revised since his departure. During the ELIR, GSA staff expressed the view that actions to improve the institution's NSS results, the SEAT process, and in turn the impact on the student experience had been slow to be embedded and had lacked impact. For the 2018-19 academic year, Professional Support Department actions had been included in the SEAT.

205 However, it was the team's view that the institution's capacity for self-evaluation is restricted by its limited approach to using data. The ELIR team concluded that GSA does not have an overarching data strategy or approach to data management to enhance the student experience, and therefore recommends that GSA progresses with the development of a Data Strategy to facilitate the integration of data from diverse sources and inform institutional decision-making and the development of policy and practice for use across the entire School.

#### **4.4 Effectiveness of the arrangements for securing academic standards**

206 The institution's arrangements for securing academic standards at the time of this ELIR are limited due to issues identified in GSA's assessment policy, assessment standards and assessment design.

207 GSA should complete the work undertaken to date on the revisions to the Memorandum of Agreement with the University of Glasgow and ensure that the respective responsibilities of both parties are clear and well understood by key GSA staff. In addition, GSA should ensure that any significant changes to assessment practices, especially where these impact on student progression and/or degree awards and classification, are communicated and implemented following the agreed approval processes as detailed in GSA's Code of Assessment.

208 In view of the ongoing pandemic, GSA should continue to develop an approach to delivering alternative assessments, in particular for studio-based courses, that can be used online if necessary, and ensure students are able to demonstrate attainment of intended learning outcomes and achieve minimum threshold academic standards for their programmes. GSA should also consider its programme structure, including whether the

distribution of formative and summative assessment allows adequate flexibility to assess student attainment fairly.

209 GSA should also ensure that the planned changes to assessment policy are clearly outlined in addenda to the GSA Code of Assessment and communicated to students in consultation with student representatives. Particular attention should be paid to how to communicate arrangements to staff and students to ensure that they fully understand what they are required to do and by when.

210 In respect to academic standards, and in view of the continuing pandemic, GSA should implement the plan to establish acceptable minimum threshold standards for progression between stages, up to and including the final stage of GSA programmes. GSA should be clear about the amount of credit being assessed for progression between stages and the minimum acceptable level of credit needed for the successful completion of each programme. The procedures developed should also demonstrate how external examiners will be involved in endorsing any future use of the 'Teaching Intelligence' model to ensure that assessment decisions are robust, valid and reliable. GSA should also ensure that external examiners are consulted in sufficient detail on any changes.

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

211 GSA's arrangements for self-evaluation are of limited effectiveness due to the diverse nature of its data sources and lack of a data strategy to inform institutional decision-making for use across the entire School. The ELIR team recommends that GSA should progress with the development of a Data Strategy to facilitate the integration of data from diverse sources, and inform institutional decision-making and the development of policy and practice for use across the entire School.

212 As outlined in the Scottish Funding Council guidance to higher education institutions on quality, the ELIR team recommends that GSA should also implement a systematic and effective mechanism for reviewing the contribution of the professional support services to the quality of the student experience, incorporating external specialist expertise and student engagement.

213 In order to avoid potential conflicts of interest, transparency and perception of fairness, GSA should undertake a review of the extent to which there is independence of decision-making in the complaints handling process, in the Good Cause procedure for summative assessments, including the Good Cause Board, and similar procedures.

## **5 Collaborative provision**

### **5.1 Key features of the institution's strategic approach**

214 Strategic planning, including collaborative activity, has been significantly impacted by the second fire and changes in institutional leadership (paragraph 8). The ELIR team understands that work in this area is now progressing following the arrival of the new Director and the appointment of a new Deputy Director who will be in post in early December 2020.

215 The Internationalisation Strategy (2018-21) focuses on four key outcomes: Internationalising the Curriculum; Collaboration and Partnership; Research and Impact; and International Community. This strategy aims to 'develop, refine and strengthen international collaborative educational partnerships in order to deepen transcultural understanding, promote opportunities for students and staff, and enhance the international reputation of

the School'.

216 Key features of the strategic approach to collaborative partnerships included fostering disciplinary-driven relationships which build on the existing international profile and embedding articulation arrangements, inside and outside Scotland, to enable student mobility. A number of partnerships have arisen from individual school and research relationships.

217 During the risk assessment of a proposed collaboration, investigatory reports cover the possible risks and the Memorandum of Understanding is signed off by the Deputy Director, with the full legal agreement validated by the Director of the institution. GSA's Collaborative Provision: Risk Assessment Policy is used to assure quality and standards. For all new collaborations, a proposal, including a business case and academic rationale, must be approved by the Senior Leadership Group. All academic partnerships are reviewed after the first year and considered through the Programme Monitoring and Review (PMAR) (paragraphs 188 and 189) and Collaborative Review processes.

218 The ELIR team was informed by senior staff that the Internationalisation Strategy was on hold until the new Senior Leadership Group (SLG) was in place in second semester, 2020-21. However, it was confirmed that expanding GSA's overseas provision to other international partners will not be a priority in the near future.

219 The largest shift in strategy has been to show restraint in projects related to internationalisation, including development of international collaborations. Staff stated that it has been recognised that the institution is 'overly exposed to the Chinese market. The immediate focus of the SLG in this area is to be on the provision of scholarships to facilitate recruitment, and enhancement of the international student experience.

220 The Head of International Academic Development has responsibility to support, identify and form suitable partnerships in collaboration with academic schools. Academic proposals are approved by Academic Council. Other matters for approval follow GSA's relevant committee processes. The Board of Governors also consider partnerships with relevant strategic, legal, financial and governance implications.

221 At the time of the ELIR, GSA had one full transnational education partnership with the Singapore Institute of Technology (SIT) and a number of other international articulation agreements. Where taught input is provided from GSA, this is facilitated by GSA faculty or with local tutors teaching GSA materials, depending on the nature of the relationship. Staff undertaking this work are supported by GSA staff development processes.

222 The partnership with SIT has been in operation since 2012-13 and is a 2+2 programme with students entering the third year of GSA's BA programmes in Communication Design or Interior Design. Student representation and feedback takes place through student representatives from SIT feeding into Boards of Studies and SSCCs mirroring standard GSA practice. The SIT partnership is managed on a day-to-day basis by the Director of Programmes at GSA Singapore and the Academic Coordinator based in Glasgow. The curriculum design and quality assurance processes are managed and completed entirely by GSA, with the University of Glasgow being the validating institution and degree-awarding body. For example, a number of enhancements were made following recommendations from the Collaborative Review of GSA Singapore, the impact of which were realised in the 2018 Graduate Employment Survey.

223 The RA states that the campus in Singapore is central to GSA's strategic approach to collaborative partnerships, however, the ELIR team was informed by senior GSA staff that the partnership with SIT is ending and will conclude with the summer

graduations in 2021. An Interim Partnership Group to oversee the dissolution stages of the collaboration was established in August 2020, reporting to the Senior Leadership Group and to the Board of Governors, and reported annually to the University of Glasgow.

224 The ELIR team understands that no specific policy exists for the closure of collaborative provision, however, the team was informed that the latter stages of the partnership are operating in accordance with the information in the Memorandum of Agreement. All GSA staff in Singapore have opted to remain in post until the end of the teaching period and there is little, or no, change to teaching operation and student experience other than those, such as a reduction in contact hours, influenced through the adherence to strict public health guidelines in Singapore in the context of the current global pandemic. Contracted staff have been retained on 0.5 FTE contracts, the External Examiner's contract has been extended to cover the final year, and the Programme Director and the GSA Academic Co-ordinator are remaining in post until the withdrawal process is complete.

225 GSA started a new collaboration with Audencia Business School in Nantes in 2017-18 (MSc in Management and Entrepreneurship in the Creative Economy). Taught input is provided by staff from GSA's Innovation School. Part of this programme involves students from France spending two weeks at the Highlands and Islands campus as part of the annual Winter School. The ELIR team learned that Audencia had recently unilaterally withdrawn from the agreement. Recruitment to the programme has proved difficult and no students have been recruited this academic year.

226 Articulation agreements with institutions outside of the UK exist with Ljosmyndaskolinn - The School of Photography, Iceland and Taylor's University in Kuala Lumpur (Architecture), the School of Arts, Singapore (SoTA), and Reykjavik School of Visual Arts. These programmes normally follow either a 1+3 or 2+2 delivery format. The ELIR team was informed that the termination of the partnership with SIT would have no impact on that with SoTA as this was a stand-alone agreement.

227 Within the UK, GSA has two formal articulation agreements with Scottish colleges (Glasgow Clyde and Forth Valley) for Associate Student routes. These are 1+3 or 2+2 agreements dependant on the programme.

228 The strategic approach of GSA to collaborative activity in the UK also extends to an academic partnership with their accrediting body, the University of Glasgow. This partnership comprises six programmes spanning both undergraduate and postgraduate level.

229 The ELIR team learned that monitoring of provision and the student experience in collaborative partnerships is the responsibility of the individual schools. Information on school's collaborative partnerships is included in school PMARs and considered at the UPC PMAR as part of the overarching institutional process. Individual schools are also responsible for determining how the risk register will be used for regular review during the duration of the partnership. Schools are required to follow GSA processes in their monitoring, however, without effective institutional oversight this is a potential risk to quality and standards.

230 Management of enhancement and maintaining oversight of the student learning experience of collaborative partnership delivery is achieved via the School's academic approvals structure. This has included the establishment of a suite of policies and procedures used to assure the quality of provision and support the enhancement of the learning experience. A guidance document has been developed this year (2020) to summarise all processes associated with this provision.

231 Student feedback is gathered and considered through the established review and monitoring procedures. The RA details that class representatives of students studying in Singapore contribute to Student-Staff Consultative Committees as well as being surveyed through course questionnaires and an annual survey. Programme Directors in Singapore review and respond on behalf of GSA and raise any issues of concern through PMAR processes. In 2019-20, students were able to complete the Student Experience Survey. Student feedback is also gathered through the programme and school Boards of Studies which in turn is fed through the PMAR process and reviewed by UPC.

232 During the meeting with the ELIR team, student representatives commented on their perceptions relating to poor representation for students studying with SIT and indicated that they were not entirely clear how representatives from partnerships fitted in to the GSA committee structure (paragraphs 7 and 9). The team was later informed by academic staff that SIT students had representation via Boards of Studies. During the ELIR, students commented that activities intended to provide direct links between the Students' Association in Glasgow and students in Singapore - for example, the SA President travelling to Singapore annually to a speech at graduation - had not happened as planned.

233 A Collaborative Provision: Student and Staff Experience Policy, developed in 2014, outlines GSA's commitment to providing students with a comparable learning experience to that of students studying in Scotland. This includes a four-week Overseas Immersion programme in Glasgow designed to help support understanding of GSA approaches to teaching and learning. Feedback from students undertaking this programme is very positive.

234 Staff working at partner institutions are supported with their professional development in an equivalent manner to colleagues in Glasgow. Opportunities include registering to complete the PG Certificate in Higher Education Learning and Development on a distance-learning basis. GSA Singapore staff also have access to the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Hub (paragraph 157).

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

235 GSA has an effective approach to managing collaborative provision, including arrangements for securing academic standards and enhancing the student learning experience. All agreements follow standard approval processes. This is true of articulation agreements and is based on the use of institutional processes and the ability of students to feedback through standard processes.

236 Appropriate arrangements are in place to assure academic standards of GSA's collaborative provision. Programme-level collaborations are managed in accordance with the School's standard quality processes including programme approval, PMAR, external examining and Periodic Review, supported by external benchmarking. Collaborative provision links to the enhancement activity at GSA via the PMAR process. Processes and protocols governing collaborative provision have been introduced as the number of international and UK articulations has increased.

237 GSA recognise that balancing the strategic focus of the institution in regard to collaborative provision, with managing evolving partnerships at the school-level, presents challenges. Balancing the geographical spread of partnerships and considering how these can best be managed has also been recognised as a challenge. These matters will be considered as part of the forthcoming work on the Internationalisation Strategy.

**QAA2588 - R10969 - Apr 21**

© The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education 2021  
18 Bothwell Street, Glasgow G2 6NU  
Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786  
[www.qaa.ac.uk](http://www.qaa.ac.uk)