



Enhancement-led Institutional Review of Glasgow Caledonian University



About the Enhancement -led Institutional Review method

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

F2.6 (i)doni

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

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

5 Based on 2019-20 figures, the University has a student population of 17,540 students (actuals) of whom 14,165 are undergraduate and 3,375 postgraduate - 2,930 of whom are postgraduate taught (PGT) and 445 are postgraduate research (PGR). Almost 19% of the overall student population study part-

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2 Enhancing the student learning experience

2.1 Student representation and engagement, including responding to

student views

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

at 11/02/2016

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

23 In 2019, in response to a small decline in student response rates to its surveys and a 54% satisfaction rate from students to NSS question 25 ('It is clear how students' feedback on the course has been acted upon'), the University introduced a pilot process in 2019-20, involving 1,800 students, which automates closing the feedback loop to students completing its M2 Tw 0.1.7 ((002 Tw 0.217 0 T)6 0 Td ()Tj.-35.685 6 (how4..002 Tc 5J -0.005 Tc 0.0S0J 0 Tcr0.783 0 T

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

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

Student wellbeing and disability support

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

34 The ELIR team noted that during the current COVID-19 pandemic all of these services continued and were offered online, with a range of additional online resources also developed and made available to students.

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

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

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

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

Feedback on assessment

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

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

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

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

59 Students also have appropriate opportunities to develop their entrepreneurial skills through core and extra-curricular activities.

Postgraduate research students

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

66 In response to a recommendation from the 2015 ELIR and a decrease in student satisfaction in the 2017 Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) - which resulted in 72% overall satisfaction (compared with 78% in 2015), with this score being 8% below the post-1992 sector benchmark at that time - the University undertook a Thematic Review of the PGR student experience. A short-life working group was then established with Students' Association

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

Development opportunities for postgraduate research students

70 The Graduate School provides postgraduate research (PGR) students with a workshop-based researcher development programme based on the four domains of the Vitae Researcher Development Framework. At the time of the ELIR, and in response to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, workshop sessions were offered online. Students welcomed the fact that they can select the workshop sessions to match their specific needs and aspirations. Students also confirmed they are expected to submit an annual progress report.

PGRs are located close to their supervisory teams; offering cohort-based induction; and including postgraduate researchers in lunchtime seminars. At the London campus, a

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

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

and representation structures that support the diversity of the University's student population.

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

processes and academic standards. The Academic Quality Department (AQD) has responsibility for the operational management of the University's quality processes. To support a cross-school approach to managing academic quality and enhancement, the department has established a number of

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

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

Annual monitoring

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

118 Annual monitoring is a multi-layered process, with individual programme reports reviewed and collated into a departmental annual monitoring report which, in turn, is reviewed and collated into a school annual monitoring report, prepared by the School ADLTQ. School annual monitoring reports, once approved by School Boards, are considered by the Learning and Teaching Sub Committee (LTSC) who identify school byng a Tw-(C)2.6 Tw

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

Assessment and feedback

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

4.2 Use of external reference points in quality processes

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

128 Its quality and other student-facing processes have been mapped to the revised Quality Code and all programmes and modules are required to comply with the University's Qualifications Framework which is aligned to *The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications*. Programme specification pro formas require programme teams to indicate how programmes meet the relevant QAA Subject Benchmark Statements and, where relevant, accrediting professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRB) requirements. Enhancement-led Institutional Subject Review rep2 Tc 0. (hav)8.is

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

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

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

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

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

5 Collaborative provision

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

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

143 The International Committee (IC) has lead responsibility for the University's Internationalisation Strategy (IS), which sets out its strategic approach. The overarching goal of the IS is 'to strengthen and enhance GCU's position as a globally networked community that is attractive to international students, academic staff and partner organisations in key areas around the world'. This positions the growth of transnational education as one of five 'key goals' to 'strengthen and enhance GCU's position as a globally networked community ...'. Since the 2015 ELIR, the University has significantly expanded the scale and type of its academic partnership arrangements. This growth is based on the development of links with business and industry, as well as with other providers of education. Strategic leadership of internationalisation lies with the DVC (Strategy) and includes the TNE partnership arrangements which are led by the academic schools. For UK-based partnerships, once agreements are in place, responsibility for securing standards lies with the relevant

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

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

Enhancing the collaborative student experience

153 The University has effective arrangements in place for assuring and enhancing the quality of the student experience with collaborative partners with students reflecting positively on the support offered by GCU and its partners. Arrangements for students are set out in detail within each partnership agreement and handbook. Students studying with partners are registered with the University which allows them access to the complete range of the University's online services including GCU Learn, IT services and the library. Support provided to collaborative students varied between partners with a differing mix of services provided by partner institutions or by GCU centrally. Students reflected positively on the support from local academic tutors or advisors and where local academic support was not available, they felt they could approach GCU staff in Glasgow. However, students who met with the ELIR team spoke about different experiences accessing wider support and learning resources and were not aware of materials which may be available to them in Glasgow. The ELIR team would therefore encourage the University to evaluate the consistency of, and provide greater clarity to students regarding, the support available to them clarit at. (r)-6 (age t)]TJ 0.009refo

opportunities to make connections or interact with students in Glasgow and London. The ELIR team would encourage the University to continue