QAA SCOTLAND

Quality Enhancement and Standards Review

Glasgow Caledonian University

Contents

Introduction

This is a report of a review under the [Quality Enhancement and Standards Review](#) (QESR) method conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) as part of Phase 1 of the Scottish Quality Enhancement arrangements at Glasgow Caledonian University.

The review took place on 6 December 2023 and was conducted by a review team, as follows:

- Gülçe Baskaya (Student Reviewer)
- Professor Phil Cardew (Academic Reviewer)
- Donna Taylor (Coordinating Reviewer).

QESR is Phase 1 of a two-phase approach that enables the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) to fulfil its statutory obligation under Section 13 of the *Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 2005* to ensure that provision is made for assessing and enhancing the quality of fundable higher education provided by fundable bodies for academic quality and enhancement between 2022-24. The second phase of QAA's external quality review arrangements starts in 2024-25 to coincide with the implementation of new tertiary quality arrangements.

The main purpose of this review was to:

- provide assurance about the provider's management of its responsibilities for academic standards to inform an enhancement-led full institutional review in Phase 2

- provide assurance about the provider's management and enhancement of the quality of learning opportunities for students to inform an enhancement-led full review in Phase 2

- report on any features of good practice

- make recommendations for action.

About Glasgow Caledonian University

Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU/the University) was formed by a merger of Glasgow Polytechnic and the Queen's College Glasgow in 1993, with a history dating back to 1875. It comprises three academic Schools with the main campus in central Glasgow and a smaller London campus known as 'GCU London'. GCU has also operated in New York since 2014 by way of Glasgow Caledonian New York College (GCNYC), although this is a separate legal entity and awards made at GCNYC are accredited under USA rules. At the time of the review, GCU was seeking to withdraw from GCNYC.

The University has a clear mission and vision, articulated as the 'University for the Common Good'. In 2023-24, GCU has around 1,680 (1,520 FTE) staff. The student population is 21,835 (18,410 FTE) students - of which, 13,810 (13,230 FTE) are undergraduate; 7,570 (4,920 FTE) are postgraduate taught (PGT); and 460 (255 FTE) are postgraduate research (PGR).

Findings

From the evidence presented, the review team is confident that Glasgow Caledonian University is making effective progress in continuing to monitor, review and enhance its higher education provision to enable effective arrangements to be in place for managing academic standards and the quality of the student learning experience.

Good practice

The QESR team found the following **features of good practice**.

- **Challenges of artificial intelligence:** The University's proactive response to the challenge presented by generative artificial intelligence (AI). This encompasses close engagement and partnership-working with both students and staff, a positive communications strategy and appropriate development and training provision. Furthermore, the QESR team noted the carefully planned ways in which the University's work around the challenges of generative AI is being moved into the classroom to enhance student understanding and knowledge as the challenges rapidly evolve (paragraphs 12, 26 and 34).

- **Support for mental health and wellbeing:** The University's strong commitment to student wellbeing, with a number of initiatives developed within a structured Mental Health and Wellbeing Framework. This includes implementation of the Mental Health Charter, and partnership working with external organisations and the GCU Students' Association to improve support for mental health and a more consistent, open and holistic approach to wellbeing that is embedded throughout the student experience (paragraph 14).

Recommendation for action

The QESR team makes the following **recommendation for action**.

- **Postgraduate research students:** Satisfaction among postgraduate research students is relatively low, particularly on the University's London campus (GCU London). This is a consequence of challenges related to tutoring responsibilities, lack of suitable study spaces and inconsistent experiences related to supervisory teams. The University should address the support for, and expectations of, postgraduate research students to ensure common levels of provision and consistency of experience within all Schools and subjects (paragraph 15).

Institutional approach to quality enhancement

Strategic approach to enhancement

1 The QESR team is confident that the University has effective arrangements in place to monitor, review and enhance its strategic approach to enhancement. The team met with staff and students from across the University and considered a wide range of documentation, including: GCU Strategy for Learning 2030, Implementation Roadmap 2030 and Gap Analysis; SFC Annual Report and Annual Outcome Agreement; GCU Delivery Principles; evidence relating to the Transforming Assessment Project; and minutes of key institutional committees with responsibility for quality and standards, learning and teaching, and the wider student experience.

2 The QESR team considers that the University has a clear and systematic approach to enhancement, which builds on its vision and mission as the 'University for the Common Good'. The QESR team learnt that this approach is founded on a strong sense of student partnership and has been effectively communicated at all levels, ensuring engagement from staff across all areas of delivery and support.

3 The University's Strategy for Learning 2030 iterates a values-based grounding for enhancement. This enabling strategy supports the overall strategic direction of the University laid out in the 2023 Strategy Document. The Strategy seeks to deliver Transformative Education through: excellence in learning, teaching and assessment; inclusive, research-led and enquiry-based pedagogies and practice; and outstanding student support. These are set within the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals. The Strategy reflects a number of key outcomes measures which provide a basis for the understanding of the effectiveness of implementation, and which are closely aligned to a number of the outcomes reported annually to the Scottish Funding Council. These include SIMD20 intake and retention, National Student Survey results, degree completion and graduate outcomes. The foundation for the Strategy for Learning provided by the University's 'Common Good' mission ensures that there is a close focus upon equality of opportunity and support for all, with equality of participation and attainment for all students appearing as the first priority intention of the Strategy and providing the context for the other four.

4 Implementation of the Strategy for Learning has been set out in a 'roadmap' which establishes annual actions throughout its lifecycle. Taking six key intentions of the Strategy for Learning 2030, the roadmap breaks these down further into contributing sub-themes, each of which is informed by a number of time-limited specific priority actions which will be assessed through identified measurable indicators of success. For example, delivering excellence in teaching and the student experience to deliver a transformational education experience includes a sub-strand of specific actions that will focus on enhancing students' sense of belonging and engagement in their learning, the success of which will be measured through a number of quantitative data sources. This implementation plan has also been mapped against Schools' and Services' Learning and Teaching-Related Enhancement plans, ensuring that actions taken locally will contribute to the overall implementation of the Strategy for Learning and the achievement of its objectives.

5 Implementation of the Strategy is further supported through direct investment in projects which support the Strategy. This is evidenced both within strategic initiatives such as the Transforming Assessment Project and also through the wider range of more local projects supported through the Strategy for Learning Innovation Fund. The University plans to assess the impact of these projects, and progress against KPIs during the 2023-24 academic year.

6 The overall strategic link between the University's 2030 Strategy and the 2030

Strategy for Learning influences the way that the principles of these documents have been implemented at an operational level. For example, the GCU Delivery Principles have supported a common approach to teaching and learning as the University has re-emerged from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. This is further iterated within the overarching theme of 'transformative education' which has, more recently, drawn upon such areas as the emergence of generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools and their use by both students and staff. This, in turn, supports another core university focus upon effective student engagement, through partnership with students (particularly the Students' Association) in raising awareness regarding effective use of generative AI (see paragraphs 12, 26 and 34).

7   The effective implementation of the Strategy for Learning, and its impact upon the day-to-day enhancement of learning and teaching at the University was clear through the meetings held by the QESR team with both staff and students. Through the documents provided, and in meetings with staff and students, the QESR team was afforded with strong evidence that the University's strategic approach to enhancement is sound and well understood at all levels.

8   The University has used the opportunity for reflection following the return to face-to-face teaching after the pandemic, to focus upon resilience within its learning and teaching community, and to put into place a number of strategies focused on supporting students and staff to engage and respond to this new environment. This was evidenced through the GCU Enhancement Theme final report on the Resilient Learning Communities Theme and also reflected in some of the Strategy for Learning Innovation Fund projects - for example, a project specifically considering *Barriers to learning and solutions discovered from Lockdown and Post Lockdown: How to strengthen SfL,* which explored issues related to the sector Enhancement Theme, relating them to GCU to inform and strengthen the University's own strategy.

Student partnership

9   The QESR team is confident that the University has effective arrangements in place to monitor, review and enhance its approach to student partnership. Evidence that the QESR team considered included the Student Partnership Agreement, SFC Annual Outcome Agreement Self-Evaluation Report, and minutes from key institutional committees. The team also met with staff and students to explore their perspectives.

10   The QESR team saw evidence that the University is working proactively with students as partners to keep students at the heart of decision-making processes. This includes the development of a range of mechanisms intended to enable effective engagement across the diversity of the student body. The University has incorporated within its governance structures, a number of forums that are designed partly to evaluate student satisfaction but also to enable early consultation with students. These include the Student Action Group for Engagement (SAGE), Student Staff Consultative Groups (SSCGs), school and department-level student representatives, and the Students' Association - all of which are used to inform University decision-making through various processes. The QESR team considered that the approach taken by SAGE was notable for the effective way in which it seeks to provide a dedicated student-led forum for the consideration of proposals for change relating to policies or practices that affect students, thereby ensuring robust and transparent student consultation throughout the process. Furthermore, SAGE provides a useful communication channel between the Pro Vice-Chancellor Learning and Teaching and the Students' Association Student Officers in reaching an agreed outcome.

11   The QESR team heard evidence from students, noting the value of SSCGs as an effective method for feedback and as providing a productive forum for speaking with staff. An example of responsiveness to student feedback includes the current work to rebrand the

SSCGs as 'Student Partnership Forums' following comments from some students that 'Student Staff Consultative Group' was perceived as too formal. The new name has been agreed by the University and student body in partnership, and is intended to be simpler and clearer. The students also noted that the University is continuing to develop support and encouragement for student engagement - for example, in relation to chairing Student Partnership Forums. The QESR team was satisfied that GCU is continuing to consolidate the good practice around student partnership, and specifically the Student Action Group for Engagement, that was identified through the Enhancement-Led Institutional Review (ELIR 4) in November 2020.

12   In addition to these mechanisms, the Learning Enhancement Sub-committee (LESC) and Education Committee (EC) have a strong focus on student experience, indicating further that students are at the centre of decision-making in key governance mechanisms. The QESR team considered that the University's work around academic integrity, and particularly in relation to the rapidly evolving challenges of generative artificial intelligence (AI), provides an example of effective student partnership working. Students noted the importance of understanding how to use AI effectively in the workplace and welcomed the University's proactivity in working with the student body around how to design understanding and skills around AI into the curriculum while also supporting them in recognising the limits of ethical use. This contributed to the QESR team's identification of the University's work around AI as a feature of **good practice** (see paragraph 26).

13   Although Student Voice performs above the University's provider-level benchmark in the National Student Survey (NSS), it remains GCU's lowest score in the NSS 2023. GCU is actively working to increase opportunities for the student voice and student engagement beyond the formal opportunities and committee structures. In line with its partnership approach, the University and the student representatives are working together on the adoption of new strategies to increase engagement. These strategies include the use of new technologies such as social media platforms. In meetings, some students referenced survey and email 'fatigue' and so the QESR team encourages the University to continue to explore a diverse range of channels and media, and to develop a communication strategy that supports this. In doing so, the University should remain alive to the pressures on student representatives and seek to ensure that this does not result in additional burden on them.

14   The QESR team commended the University's strong commitment to student wellbeing. This was evidenced through the work of the Student Wellbeing Advisory Group and a number of initiatives relating to mental health. These include the implementation of the Mental Health Charter, partnership working with the Scottish Association for Mental Health (SAMH) to improve mental health support in the University, and the implementation of a Student Mental Health Agreement with the Students' Association. Further specific examples of developments around student wellbeing include GCU's implementation of the Suicide Safer Policy and Gender-Based Violence Prevention as part of the Mental Health and Wellbeing Framework. In meetings, members of the University described the positive impact of these activities in supporting a more consistent, open and holistic approach to wellbeing that is embedded throughout the student experience. The QESR team considered the University's strong commitment to student wellbeing, with a number of initiatives developed within the structured Mental Health and Wellbeing Framework, to be **good practice**.

15   The QESR team noted that the satisfaction of postgraduate research students as indicated through the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) 2023 was relatively low for the sector in a number of areas, including overall satisfaction. Low satisfaction was particularly marked for PGR students based on GCU's London Campus. Issues that emerged from evidence included challenges related to tutoring responsibilities (both in marking and assessment and demand from some students for pastoral support which was outwith PGR students' responsibilities), lack of suitable study spaces, and

inconsistent experiences related to supervisory teams, including within subject areas. The QESR team **recommends** that the University should address the support for, and expectations of, postgraduate research students to ensure common levels of provision and consistency of experience within all schools and subjects.

Action taken since ELIR 4

16   The QESR team is confident that the University has effective arrangements in place to monitor and review its actions taken in response to ELIR 4. The team considered the most recent progress update report on the ELIR 4 action plan, the follow-up report, GCU's annual report to SFC and self-evaluation on the outcome agreement, and minutes and papers from key institutional committees, and followed up on key areas in meetings with staff and students.

17   The University's ELIR 4 report presented a range of good practice (particularly of a strategic nature) and some focused recommendations, relating to feedback on assessment, streamlining quality assurance and enhancement processes, and approach to communication. The University's update on progress since ELIR 4 sets out both a clear set of actions aimed at addressing these three areas of recommendation, and also reflections upon ways in which areas of good practice may be both further enhanced and used as models for development across all Schools and professional services.

18   This approach to responding to the ELIR 4 report is further evidenced through the Strategy for Learning 2030 (developed after ELIR 4 and showing response to the recommendations of that review) and in such strategic initiatives as the Transforming Assessment Project (TAP). TAP is a three-year project aimed at enhancing and developing assessment and feedback practices aligning with key principles in the Strategy for Learning. The QESR team also noted other efforts designed to strengthen feedback and assessment, including a dedicated space created for staff to share and reflect on assessment and feedback topics, and encouraging publicity of this allocated space within the Learning and Teaching Hub to support increased interaction and maximise its potential benefits. At the time of the review, GCU was also piloting a Banded Grading Framework to address issues around the consistency in the quality of assessment feedback.

19   While progress has been made on the other two recommendations (quality assurance and enhancement processes, and approach to communication), there are aspects of each of these which continue as works in progress. First, the streamlining of quality processes has some notable achievements - for example, a fully-implemented curriculum management system is now in place, and the revision of the Enhancement-Led Internal Subject Review, Programme Approval and Review, and Annual Monitoring processes is in the final stages of implementation. Action against this recommendation is planned to continue for some time, however, and forms a background to much developmental work (see section on Academic Standards and Quality Processes below).

20   The second area relates to a more generic issue around communication at all levels across the University. While there is clear evidence (such as in the 'Common Good' principles and the University's strategy, more widely) that much work has been done on enhancing communication, there were reflections in some meetings that communication could be better targeted in some areas, and the University will wish to continue to build on successes in this area and to support further the effective communication of both strategic and operational priorities at all levels.

21   Overall, however, the University has made progress in responding to the ELIR 4 review and has demonstrated clear and consistent engagement with its outcomes. Notably, the University has continued to build on identified strengths around equality, diversity and

inclusion, particularly with regard to supporting student wellbeing (see paragraph 14 above) and student partnership (see paragraphs 9-11 above).

Sector-wide enhancement topic

22   The QESR team is confident that the University has effective arrangements in place to monitor and review its approach to defining and delivering an effective and inclusive digital/blended offering. The QESR team considered the GCU's paper providing a reflective summary of the University's approach, documents setting out the University's strategy, minutes and papers from key institutional committees, and met with staff and students.

23   In response to the current SFC tertiary enhancement topic - The future of learning and teaching: defining and delivering an effective and inclusive digital/blended offering - the University has built upon the work it had already been doing to develop online delivery and support following the COVID-19 pandemic, which includes a structured digital learning approach. From the evidence available, the QESR team is confident that GCU has a successful, inclusive and comprehensive approach to digital learning. There was evidence that the University is aware of the need for digital accessibility for the whole University body, taking account of a range of circumstances.

24   GCU has used learning from the pandemic to tailor its communication strategy around digital learning. In meetings with the QESR team, students were positive about support for different modes of learning. The University has implemented a pedagogical framework entitled Going Digital, constructed around 12 pedagogic principles underpinned by four enabling pillars. Other tools include the Responsive Curriculum Design & Development Toolkit (which supports staff by way of a set of digital resources and an online community) and GCU Go (which supports students in the development of key skills to support their learning.) Further digital tools and platforms that support student engagement and are intended to enhance the student experience include SIMS (a student information management system that enables students to manage key aspects of their experience by way of an online portal), DASH (a Data Analytics Shared Hub which provides key data to staff in a more accessible and user-friendly way) and Collaborate Ultra (an online learning tool to support an inclusive digital learning approach). There is also a student app receiving high usage which supports GCU's aim to put students at the heart of digital learning. The QESR team considered that the University had a diverse range of well-planned initiatives in place to define and deliver an effective and inclusive digital/blended offering, and was continually progressing developments in this area.

25   The increase in digital learning in higher education has raised questions about how to ensure academic integrity in the digital and online environment. The Senate Disciplinary Committee Annual Report provided to the team was for 2021-22 and highlighted a small number of cases classified as 'Academic Misconduct/Contract cheating/Ghost-writing'. In response, a Plagiarism, Academic Integrity, Cheating and Collusion (PAICC) working group has developed a range of resources to educate students on the importance of academic integrity. The 'Don't Cheat Yourself' resources include a video and form part of an enhanced academic induction activity - *Student Induction Essentials*. Students confirmed to the QESR team that they found these resources and the University's work in this area helpful.

26   Related to this, the QESR team found evidence that the University is working rapidly and proactively to meet the challenges presented by generative artificial intelligence technology, including incorporation of guidance to staff in the Transforming Assessment Project in January 2023. An holistic view of GCU's approach to digital assessment is planned for the 2023-24 academic session, focusing on evolving artificial intelligence in use for education and the development of employability skills, as well as misuse and more general policy and operational practice. Working groups, which include students, have been

established to create appropriate guidance and a roadmap. GCU is focusing on how to develop good practices, informed by key studies on AI and development sessions with people from industry working in innovative sectors. The University's aim is to frame the use of AI as a positive skill that can be developed and used in an ethical way. The QESR team considered that the University's proactive response to the challenge presented by generative AI, encompassing close engagement and partnership-working with both students and staff, to be a feature of **good practice**. In particular, this relates to the way that the University has moved the challenges in to the classroom with the aim of educating and upskilling for employability. The work has also been supported with a positive communications strategy and appropriate development and training provision (see also paragraphs 12 and 34.).

Academic standards and quality processes

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

27   The QESR team is confident that the University has effective arrangements for the monitoring and review of its approach to managing quality and to setting, maintaining reviewing and assessing academic standards. The QESR team considered the University's Academic Quality Policy and Practice (AQPP) document, Enhancement-Led Internal Subject Review (ELISR) reports, programme review, thematic review, annual monitoring approaches, module quality enhancement and assurance, student evaluation and feedback, Transnational Education (TNE) and academic partnership, minutes from key institutional committees, and met with staff and students, including representation from GCU's London Campus.

28   The QESR team confirmed that the University's arrangements for managing quality and setting standards meet the Expectations of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code) and align with the guidance issued by the Scottish Funding Council (SFC). Procedures and institutional guidance are clear and comprehensive, and in line with sector guidance, illustrating an embedded approach to drive improvements. A recent remapping of the Quality Code identified areas for improvement, many being progressed by annual review activities linked to the Education Committee's work plan. Institutional policies relating to programme and course development and approval are aligned to sector expectations expressed in the Quality Code, take account of relevant Subject Benchmark Statements, the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) and relevant qualification frameworks. There was a high level of consistency between sources of evidence considered by the QESR team, which demonstrated processes that were well understood and had clear outcomes.

29   The Pro Vice-Chancellor Learning and Teaching has executive responsibility for academic quality. The PVC Learning and Teaching works closely with the Department of Quality Assurance and Enhancement (QAE) which operates under the line management of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor Operations, collaborating with others to provide guidance and support for all processes relating to academic quality, enhancement and assurance. Schools are responsible to Senate for ensuring effective implementation of the quality processes to enhance quality and standards of academic provision and for the implementation of the University's Strategy for Learning/Strategy 2030. Within the Governance framework, School Boards feed into Senate, as does the Education Committee (formerly Academic Policy and Practice Committee (APPC) until mid-2023) which operates four sub-committees - the Assessment Regulations Sub-Committee, the Admissions Sub-Committee, the Exceptions Sub-Committee and the Learning Enhancement Sub-Committee (LESC) - each with distinct roles. The LESC is well-established and continues to operate effectively in consideration of learning and teaching and wider student experience themes. The continued commitment to

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI), with transformative education ambitions, was observed by the QESR team and an example of how GCU has endeavoured to build on the good practice identified in ELIR 4.

30   The University's annual monitoring and programme approval/review, and Enhancement- Led Internal Subject Review (ELISR) are considered central to the University's internal quality assurance arrangements. The QAE department coordinates ELISR activity with the process culminating in an outcome report highlighting strengths and achievements, and including recommendations to enhance the student experience. Programme approval and review are undertaken in conjunction with departmental ELISR and, where practical, joint ELISR meetings held across multiple departments within Schools. The Schools respond to all recommendations arising from ELISR and programme approval/review through departmental action plans; as confirmed in the annual report to SFC. The subject area responds accordingly where outcome reports and responses are considered by LESC on behalf of the Education Committee and Senate. Momentum is retained by defined follow-up activity, reinforcing the thorough approach taken by QAE. Quality assurance mechanisms for collaborative partnerships are generally embedded into ELISR methodology. The QESR team confirmed ELISR reports provided a robust process with good evidence-based reflection and outcomes.

31   Annual monitoring processes are clearly outlined in QAE guidance, with an emphasis on the student voice in processes to make deliberate improvements. However, the annual monitoring practices still remain under review following the ELIR 4 recommendation, with a consultation taking place early 2023-24 to shape the revised approach, which is anticipated to be more data and evidence-based driven. The QESR team considers that the timing of annual monitoring in terms of analysis should be considered as part of the review. The team found that the April 2023 LESC considers Annual Reports for academic session 2021-22 and suggests that this interval is too long and earlier consideration of the reports would be beneficial.

32   The QESR team welcomed the Overview of ELISR, Programme Approval and Review activity 2022-23 which evidenced robust quality assurance processes outlining key themes and issues for LESC, drawing out commendations and areas for improvement. Continued reflection embedded within annual monitoring and ELISR as well as approval/review procedures takes account of feedback received. Monitoring of London campus provision is seamlessly embedded into existing quality processes. For example, ELISR identified recommendations around students' sense of belonging in London and the wider community, which has prompted actions. QAE undertakes a cross-institutional analysis of the external examiner reports to identify good practice, and any issues which may impact academic standards for the attention of the LESC.

33   The overall approach to the management of assessment requirements and associated policies is overseen by the Assessment Regulations Sub-Committee which monitors related policies and guidance. The QESR team was satisfied that the required functions are carried out diligently with continual reflection.

34   The University is commended for the continuous work in progress in response to the exponential growth of AI technology within the education sector and the publication of AI guidelines to facilitate assurance of academic standards and reduce misuse; the PAICC working group being instrumental. The institutional work leading to this commendation embraces student partnership at its best with excellent collaborative working (see also paragraphs 12 and 26).

35   The University adopts a two-pronged approach to Professional Services Review (PSR): (i) integrated approach through ELISR; and (ii) individual reviews often with a broader

thematic review. One notable example is the 2022-23 review of Disability Support. Deliverables include development of an action plan to deliver a refreshed university model of disability support to include a revised triage system with accelerated use of reasonable adjustment forms.

36   The University's approach to oversight of its collaborative activities is outlined in the comprehensive TNE and Academic Partnerships section of the Academic Quality Policy and Practice document. A Register of Collaborative Provision is retained with clear information on the wide-ranging types of partnerships. Collaborative provision is subject to the same quality processes as on-campus provision, embedded into ELISR methodology. GCU's partnerships currently include 32 collaborative partnership arrangements, 10 transnational partnerships, and many articulation agreements.

37   In addition to these collaborative activities, there exists a Glasgow Caledonian New York College (GCNYC) site which operates as an independent college and a separate legal entity, with the New York State Education Department conferring degree-granting authority. The QESR team understood that GCU held no responsibility for academic standards of GCNYC awards while acknowledging that the GCU Academic Registrar also held the role of Registrar for GCNYC. The QESR team noted the University had recently agreed to end its financial and service obligations and exit from GCNYC, and the running out of the formal arrangement would conclude shortly.

Use of external reference points in quality processes

38   The QESR team is confident that the University has effective arrangements in place to monitor and review its approach to the use of external reference points in quality processes. Evidence that the team considered included a comprehensive mapping of quality processes against the UK Quality Code, institution-led reports, key papers and minutes from institutional committees, annual reporting to SFC, and meetings with staff and students.

39   The University has recently updated its mapping of quality processes to the UK Quality Code to take account of the Code's Advice and Guidance. This was provided to the QESR team as a single document which provided a thorough mapping of the Expectations of the Quality Code against all of the University's core quality processes by way of the guiding principles within the 12 themes of the Advice and Guidance. This provided comprehensive assurance that all expectations had been considered and were responded to through the University's processes. Through this, GCU has also identified opportunities for enhancement and proposes that, going forwards, progress against these will be reviewed annually through the formal governance mechanisms. Based on this work and the University's intended use of the mapping as a live document, the QESR team considers that the approach is robust and the University is well-prepared for the impact of discussions upon the future structure and content of the Quality Code and well-placed to carry out a similar approach to any further developments in the Code and to respond appropriately.

40   Many courses carry accreditation from Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs). Processes of approval and review of such accreditation remain within the context of individual courses and their home schools, and are reflected in internal review reports at school-level. Engagement with PSRBs is also reflected in annual monitoring processes.

41   The University also demonstrates clear engagement with external examiners and overall outcomes of the external examiner process are reported upon annually. QAE undertakes a cross-institutional analysis of the external examiner reports to identify areas of good practice, key issues that may impact on academic standards and identify common themes that require institutional-level enhancement, producing a report for institutional-level attention. This report and the identified themes are then considered by the Learning

Enhancement Sub-Committee (LESC) in April, once reports for all cycles of study have been received. The QESR team also saw evidence through the Annual Monitoring reports that external examiner comments were used locally at programme, department and school-levels in the annual reflection processes.

42   The QESR team confirmed that there is appropriate external engagement in course approval and review processes. The concept paper early in the programme approval process requires evidence of consideration of external benchmarks, including Subject Benchmark Statements and PSRB requirements (where appropriate). Reports from ELISR showed a diligent approach to the use of external experts, with panels including academic and industry representatives. There is also wider stakeholder engagement through the Student Partnership Agreement.

Use of data and evidence to inform self-evaluation and decision-making

43   The QESR team is confident that the University has effective arrangements in place to monitor and review its approach to the use of data and evidence to inform self-evaluation and decision-making. The team considered GCU's reports to SFC, the University's use of data on retention and progression, degree outcomes and complaints and appeals, feedback from students (including the National Student Survey) and external examiners, and feedback on the use of data from GCU staff members.

44   A range of data contributes to the annual monitoring process - from module level through to institutional level. These data include: internal mechanisms (such as Module Evaluation Surveys); external student surveys (including National Student Survey, Postgraduate Research Experience Survey and International Student Barometer); undergraduate and postgraduate taught performance reports showing completion and continuation; degree classification trends; graduate outcomes; SFC data on widening access; and student casework outcomes (complaints, appeals and disciplinary cases). University staff are supported in understanding and using data effectively through a Data Analytics Shared Hub (DASH). The QESR team saw examples of how programme, department and school-level annual monitoring built on each other. The team also observed consistency in approach across campuses and partner providers.

45   At institutional level, the University's main committees consider overviews of a range of data and evidence. Oversight of quality is devolved by Senate to the Education Committee (formerly the Academic Policy and Practice Committee) and its Learning Enhancement Sub-committee. The Education Committee and LESC between them consider annual reports on Honours Degree Classification Trends, Graduate Outcomes, an overview of external examiner reports, annual monitoring, the consolidated report for institution-led reviews, student performance data, the NSS and the annual review of academic appeals, with some of these reports taken by both committees (for example, postgraduate taught completion and continuation). Annual analysis papers for complaints and disciplinary cases are considered by the Senate. From the documentation and meetings, the QESR team was satisfied that GCU drew extensively on internal and external data and evidence across a range of levels, and used that information to inform action and enhancement activity.

46   The QESR team noted the University's consideration of student feedback through a range of modes, including the National Student Survey (NSS) and internal module evaluation. There was evidence that GCU identifies and explores areas eliciting red flags, informing evidence-based short-term and long-term actions. Closing the feedback loop is a recurrent issue but the QESR team saw evidence that the University is aware of this and actively working to address this issue.

47   Although the Complaints Annual Report for 2021-22 indicates an increase in the number of complaints, this is from a low base and, in the context of the total number of students, staff and stakeholders, remains relatively small, particularly in terms of complaints that progress from stage one (frontline resolution) to stage 2 (complaint investigation). The annual report includes 'lessons learned', 'future work' and 'recommendations' for consideration by Senate. The QESR team received evidence of the University's process identifying an issue and working proactively to address it. This included recognition that the number of students with a disability is increasing and the introduction of a triage system to advise schools more efficiently regarding any necessary adjustments. Overall, the QESR team was reassured that the University has an effective complaint resolution system and is conscientious in analysing and learning from complaints and taking appropriate action.

48   The University has a Code of Student Conduct and the Senate Disciplinary Committee has responsibility for considering and investigating any serious formal allegations made against a student under the terms of that Code. The Senate Disciplinary Committee submits an annual report to Senate. As discussed above in paragraph 25, the largest proportion of the disciplinary cases relate to academic misconduct and GCU is working in partnership with its student body on a range of preventative mechanisms to educate students on academic integrity. In addition to the thoughtful approach towards student discipline set out in the Code and report, the QESR team noted that GCU proposed to review the Code of Student Conduct to enhance it further, taking account of the need for fairness, clarity and external interest.