QAA SCOTLAND

Quality Enhancement and Standards Review

Glasgow School of Art

Review Report

June 2024

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 the Glasgow School of Art.

The review took place on 10 June 2024 and was conducted by a review team, as follows:

- Dawn Martin (Coordinating Reviewer)
- Professor Jeremy Bradshaw (Academic Reviewer)
- Luke Humberstone (Student 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 School of Art

The 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 1853. GSA is an accredited institution of the University of Glasgow, which has validated GSA's programmes since 1992.

The academic structure comprises four academic schools: the Mackintosh School of Architecture; the School of Design; the School of Fine Art; and the School of Innovation and Technology. The GSA comprises two campuses: the Garnethill campus in central Glasgow; and the Highlands and Islands campus near Forres.

In 2023-24, GSA has a total student population of 2,652 studying at the campuses in Glasgow (2,599) and Forres (53). There are 2,019 undergraduates; and 586 postgraduate taught and 47 postgraduate research students.

Findings

From the evidence presented, the review team is confident that the Glasgow School of Art 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**.

- **Strategic approach to the enhancement of learning and teaching:** The rigorous and coordinated approach to enhancing learning and teaching by developing, embedding and monitoring the impact and implementation of a range of key institutional strategies. This includes the close alignment of strategies at the institutional and local level, with clearly-defined actions that are closely monitored that enable effective delivery and create impact at the local level (paragraph 3).

- **Introduction and evolution of the Student Consultant role:** Working in partnership with staff and students, the student consultants have led on a number of initiatives aligned with strategic priorities, including changes to assessment and feedback, the curriculum review and the new Education Strategy, resulting in positive impact and strengthening the student voice in key institutional projects (paragraph 11).

- **Proactive and continuing development of quality processes:** The continued proactive development of core quality processes (including an increasing focus on data) and the oversight of key quality reports at an institutional level, which provides assurance and an effective means of sharing practice to enhance the student experience (paragraph 36).

Recommendations for action

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

- **Consistency and effectiveness of Student Staff Consultative Committees**: Building on the work undertaken through the development of the Student Engagement and Representation Policy, GSA should keep under review the operation of the Student Staff Consultative Committees in consultation with students to ensure a consistent and effective approach (paragraph 12).

Institutional approach to quality enhancement

Strategic approach to enhancement

1   The QESR team is confident that GSA has effective arrangements in place to monitor, review and enhance its strategic approach to enhancement. The team considered a range of documents including the Education Strategy and annual Action Plan, Outcome Agreement report to SFC, and minutes from meetings of key institutional committees with responsibilities for quality and academic standards, learning and teaching, and the wider student experience. In addition, the team met with staff and students.

2   The institution's approach to enhancing learning and teaching, including the metrics to be used to track progress, are defined in the Education Strategy 2023-27. This was approved by Academic Council in May 2023. The Education Strategy evolved from an Education Enhancement Plan that had been created partly in response to the Enhancement-led Institutional Review (ELIR 4) and ran for two years. The Education Strategy consolidates and embeds work started under this Plan and sets priorities for the future. It is closely aligned to the GSA Strategic Plan 2022-27 and presents a collective approach for both academic schools and professional support services. Academic and professional services staff expressed confidence in their understanding of the Education Strategy, explaining how it supports their day-to-day activities, capturing the routine work of GSA in readily accessible format.

3   The Education Strategy has five strategic objectives with associated success measures. The objectives are as follows: deliver an extraordinary student experience; transform models of creative education; support students to achieve their potential and make positive contributions; work in ambitious and creative partnerships with students; and strengthen and enhance practice. Implementation of the Education Strategy is directed by an associated annual Action Plan, which provides further detail and clearly-defined activities related to the strategic objectives. It describes 12 interlinked projects, each of which crosses over with schools and support services to ensure alignment of local activity with strategic ambitions. The QESR team saw a Year 1 Action Plan document that sets out how each workstream is intended to progress across the five years of the Strategic Plan and details the work that is to be carried out in the first year. Progress with the Action Plan is reported every two months to the Education Enhancement Planning Group (EEPG); an example Education Strategy tracking document demonstrates a rigorous approach to monitoring and coordination of the work, and shows significant progress with two of the Education Strategy projects - Assessment and Feedback, and Common Academic Framework. The Educational Enhancement Planning Group (EEPG) reports to the Education Committee and Academic Council through the Deputy Director (Academic). Annual reports are received by the committee in the autumn. There were updates to Academic Council on the Education and Digital Strategies March 2023 and a request for the Education Strategy to foreground creativity to reflect that it is a Strategy for an Art School. Overall, the QESR team found a rigorous and coordinated approach to enhancing learning and teaching by developing, embedding and monitoring the impact and implementation of a range of key institutional strategies. This includes the close alignment of strategies at the institutional and local level, with clearly-defined actions which are closely monitored, that enable effective delivery and create impact at the local level. Taken together, the QESR team considers this to be a **feature of good practice**.

4   The responsibilities of the EEPG ensures that work to deliver the Educational Strategy aligns with other strategic developments, such as the Digital Strategy, the Student Communications Strategy, the People Strategy, the Estates Strategy, and the Research Strategy. Oversight by EEPG ensures that the Educational Strategy and other strategic development are implemented together, and that work does not overlap or get duplicated

and that nothing is omitted. Minutes of the Academic Council reveal a strong intention to link strategies to each other. Minutes of Academic Council record that the members consider that the Education Strategy aligned well with the Research Strategy and GSA Strategic Plan. Together, the QESR team considered these provide evidence of effective oversight of the Educational Strategy and its underpinning projects.

5   Implementation of the Educational Strategy in each of the individual schools is planned and monitored through Quality Enhancement Action Plans and School Annual Summary reports. The QESR team learnt that planned developments to Programme Monitoring and Annual Reporting and Quality Enhancement Action Planning will include explicit reference to the Education Strategy to ensure alignment between activities and strategic objectives.

6   An annual report on progress will be submitted to the Education Committee and Academic Council in the autumn of each academic session. As the Education Strategy approaches the end of year one, plans are in place to review progress and to define the priorities for year two. While no decisions had been made at the time of the QESR visit, staff reported there would be continuing commitment to different forms of education, staff and student success, and the student experience, together with initiatives to build and strengthen staff through communities of practice. Going into year two, some of the year one projects will be deemed completed, some will be integrated into normal business, while a few will continue into year two and possibly beyond.

7   Based on the evidence and meetings with staff and students, the QESR team considers GSA has a systematic approach to enhancement, underpinned by established quality processes.

Student partnership

8   The QESR team is confident that GSA has effective arrangements in place to monitor, review and enhance its approach to student partnership. The team considered the Student Partnership Agreement; The Education Strategy; Student Partnership Project Fund; Student Engagement and Representation Policy; Periodic Institution-Led Review Policy; minutes from key institutional committees; and met with staff and students.

9   The Student Partnership Agreement (SPA), co-created between GSA and the Glasgow School of Art Students' Association, covers the period from 2022-23 to 2024-25. The Agreement includes three priority themes intended to enhance the student experience: Sustainability and Climate Literacy; The Equitable Art School; and Post-Pandemic Studio Practice. Each of these themes is designed to drive changes to practice across GSA - for example, changes to the curriculum, a better understanding of the student experience, and ensuring students have the necessary skills to operate effectively in a digital environment. The SPA also includes metrics that will be used to determine its impact. Targets include increasing appropriate and diverse student representation, enhancing induction and training for representatives, and improving participation rates for internal surveys and ensuring the student voice is heard and responded to. Progress on the SPA is monitored by the Student Partnership Group (SPG) which comprises students and staff and is co-chaired by the Deputy Director (Academic) and Student President.

10   The Student Partnership Project Fund offers funding for projects where students and staff come together to enhance learning, teaching and the student experience. The QESR team heard from students about some of these projects, including one that has improved the environment in the social areas and another where an event was held to explore redefining Glasgow as 'UK's first feminist city'. While formal evaluation by GSA of the Student Partnership Project Fund and its impact will not take place until the end of the current SPA, the QESR team learnt that early indications are that the initiative has had some success

supporting partnership working.

11   GSA has been using student consultants employed by the Learning and Teaching Team to co-lead on strategic enhancement projects at institutional level and within each of the four academic schools. The QESR team heard that the student consultants have led on a variety of projects and supported policy development on assessment and feedback, as well as curriculum review and student engagement as part of the Common Academic Framework and curriculum review and, more recently, projects linked to the Education Strategy. The team heard from students that they consider the consultant role to be positive and impactful. They welcomed the autonomy to deliver on student-led projects and the support from a staff member acting in a mentor role for what can be a challenging role. Academic and professional services and senior staff also acknowledged the significant contribution made by the consultants. Working in partnership with staff and students, the student consultants have led on a number of initiatives aligned with strategic priorities - including changes to assessment and feedback, the curriculum review and the new Education Strategy - resulting in positive impact and strengthening the student voice in key institutional projects, and the team considered this to be a **feature of good practice**.

12   GSA has recently approved a Student Engagement and Representation Policy which is being implemented from September 2024. The policy sets out GSA's approach to student engagement and partnership. In meeting with the students, the QESR team heard some differences in the experience of student representatives related to the effectiveness of Student Staff Consultative Committees (SSCC). In one example, students reported feeling well-supported through the SSCC and another example detailed how feedback was acted upon. However, the team also heard that this positive experience was not shared among all student representatives, with some students feeling unsupported and expressing a view that other methods of providing feedback and getting the student voice heard were more effective. The QESR team **recommends** GSA builds on the work undertaken through the development of the Student Engagement and Representation Policy and should keep under review the operation of the SSCC in consultation with students to ensure a consistent and effective approach to consistency and effectiveness.

13   The student voice is also well-represented in GSA's periodic review and revalidation process. The QESR team saw an example in one programme where engagement with students resulted in changes to the studio space, leading to a more conducive learning environment. The team also read in a Periodic Review Report about staff commenting on working with students to co-create a range of projects and initiatives - for example, co-curating research events. Students also reported awareness of external examiner reports, and some students noted that they had been able to meet with the examiner for their programme.

14   The QESR team learned that students based in Forres (the Highlands and Islands campus) felt disconnected from the Glasgow campus. However, the QESR team was satisfied from discussions with senior staff that efforts are ongoing to help the Forres-based students develop their own sense of community, with investment in property, events, services being advertised, visits from support staff and academics.

Action taken since ELIR 4

15   The QESR team is confident that GSA has put effective arrangements in place to monitor and review its actions taken in response to the recommendations from the following three reports: ELIR 4; concerns reports; and, more recently, the Re-review report from 2022. The QESR team considered a range of evidence, including strategy documents, committee papers, ELIR Follow-Up Reports and action plans, and met with staff and students.

16   In response to the three reports, GSA undertook a significant and structured plan of work to respond to the recommendations. GSA was re-reviewed by QAA Scotland in June 2022 with a positive judgement. The 2022 report described progress with each of the recommendations ELIR 4 and SCS investigations, and introduced four new recommendations. The new recommendations covered: development of a data strategy; development of a communications strategy; managing student expectations; and support for student Lead Representative. Following the re-review in June 2022, reports were submitted to the Education Committee in November 2022, plus the follow-up report in June 2023. In addition, there were quarterly progress meetings with QAA which ended in May 2024.

17   Most of the recommendations from the ELIR 4 and SCS investigations were acknowledged as being fully addressed in the Re-review Outcome Report 2022, while some other recommendations were fully addressed by June 2023, including the four recommendations from the 2022 re-review. The June 2023 Follow-up Report identified three remaining recommendations for which work was underway, which are considered in this QESR report. The three recommendations concerned assessment and feedback; assessment design; and assessment policy.

18   Work to address the three areas has been consolidated within the GSA Education Strategy 2023-27 to ensure appropriate oversight, monitoring and delivery moving forward. The Educational Enhancement Planning Group (formerly ELIR Recovery Group) has oversight of this work, with an annual progress report to the Education Committee and Academic Council. An Assessment and Feedback project was established in 2021-22 to enhance assessment and feedback practice across the institution, provide development opportunities for staff, and to ensure that the assessment policy, regulations and guidance were clear, consistent and easy to understand. The project included three stages - stage 1 was immediate action in summer 2021 to address the ELIR 4 concerns relating to academic standards and assessment practice. Stage 2 was a wider review and redevelopment of the Code of Assessment to provide clear, consistent and accessible regulations for assessment and feedback, which was approved in June 2022. The final phase - stage 3 - was the introduction of staff and student resources to support implementation of the new Code in September 2023.

19   An Education Strategy tracking document shows significant progress with the Assessment and Feedback project. A review by the Head of Learning and Teaching in summer 2023 identified substantial enhancements to the guidance and support for staff and confirmed that programme teams had introduced greater consistency in assessment design, information to students, and the sharing and understanding of assessment criteria within the assessment process. Following this review, four new workstreams were introduced: a Year 1 review of the Code of Assessment; an examination of students' experience of assessment and feedback supported by a student consultant; a review of assessment briefs and criteria aimed at developing institutional templates to enhance consistency; and development of a standard induction for staff to assessment and feedback, supported by an online resource site.

20   Work has started on each of these four workstreams, with progress to be monitored by the Learning and Teaching and Group and Educational Enhancement Planning Group. Evaluation activities with staff in relation to the Code of Assessment have concluded with an initial findings paper produced for the Learning and Teaching Group. The report presents the findings of a year one evaluation of the revised Code of Assessment, including a survey sent out to Heads of School, Programme Leaders, Heads of Department and Heads of Professional Support Services. Most respondents welcomed the amendments to the Code of Assessment, finding them clear, supportive and helpful in reviewing assessment across programmes and courses, and more closely aligned to practice. The report makes several recommendations that include the need to clarify the guidance available to students,

including clearer signposting to existing information. This was confirmed by students that met the QESR team, who reported some lack of clarity and inconsistency in language across courses. Students also described some inconsistencies in assessment rubrics, criteria and support from staff. In meetings with staff, the QESR team was satisfied that that these issues had been recognised by the institution and are being addressed through the Code of Assessment workstream.

21   Work also continues with the Common Academic Framework Implementation Project, with the next phase due to complete by September 2024. There is evidence of school engagement with the Common Academic Framework through Board of Studies minutes and reports to the Education Committee. The first batch of 17 programmes that submitted Major Programme Amendments to meet expectations within the Common Academic Framework were approved by Academic Council in May 2024 and will launch in September 2024. The remaining Major Programme Amendments will be submitted for validation in 2025 to complete the response to recommendation on Assessment Design.

22   Following the re-review report 2022 and the follow-up report 2023, the QESR team is confident that GSA has completed the recommendations from previous reviews, except for three ongoing actions. Based on the evidence the team considers that the remaining three recommendations, all on aspects of assessment processes, are being addressed through the Assessment and Feedback Project and the new Common Academic Framework in an effective and timely manner.

Sector-wide enhancement topic

23   The QESR team is confident that GSA has effective arrangements in place to monitor and review its approach to defining and delivering an effective and inclusive digital/blended offering. The team considered a paper that set out GSA's strategy and current enhancement priorities in relation to the Tertiary Enhancement Topic; Digital Strategy 2022-2027; Institutional Analysis of Programme Monitoring and Annual Reporting; PMAR, ILR and external examiner reports; minutes from key institutional committees; and met with staff and students.

24   GSA has set out its approach and current enhancement priorities in relation to the Tertiary Enhancement Topic, which include: digital learning and teaching; strategic approach to enhancement; student partnership; and the management of academic quality and standards. In its Digital Strategy, GSA sets out four educational ambitions: a connected campus; efficient business processes; digital literacy; and a digitally enriched curriculum. The Vision within the Strategy is to provide a digital experience, encouraging creativity and innovation. To implement its strategy, GSA uses a range of technology-enhanced learning and teaching approaches which support its predominantly studio-based learning and research. Most programmes include some form of blended learning - for example, extending learning through online resources and activities, flipped classroom/learning, and, in some programmes, a mixture of on-campus and online teaching, learning and assessment activities.

25   The QESR team learnt from speaking with staff, that a number of online electives and digital workshops are provided as an option for students, and this was one of the examples provided to illustrate how students at the Forres campus have an equivalent experience to those based in Glasgow. The QESR team also heard that students generally prefer campus-based learning but do recognise the advantages of online space. The QESR team was also confident from discussions with students that they knew how to navigate GSA's web-based virtual learning environment - the example provided relating to how to find information about external examiner reports.

26   As part of the digital learning and teaching and strategic approach to enhancement, recording equipment has been installed in key learning spaces, including the Reid Auditorium. In other efforts to support students and enhance their learning experience, equipment has been upgraded in key teaching spaces; the integration of data exchange between the Library management system and the virtual learning environment has been completed; and long-term loans of laptops are offered to students through the digital inclusion scheme.

27   The QESR team heard from senior staff that, at induction, students receive training and support on the use of virtual learning environment and standard office-use software, how to navigate the intranet, and other GSA systems. Should students require any further training, this is available from the Library and the Technical Support Department, or students are signposted to online resources. In addition, students can receive training in the use of programmes that are commonly used in the creative industries. In meeting with the Academic and Professional Services staff, the QESR team learned that Digital Skills development is delivered at an institutional and local level.

28   The QESR team found that external examiners noted the efforts made by GSA to improve the use of digital tools to support students' critical reflection, development of digital skills - including experience with digital curation, and the display of digital work. There were multiple examples of students using different digital tools. Based on the evidence available, the QESR team was satisfied that GSA has an effective approach to inclusive digital/blended learning.

Academic standards and quality processes

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

29   The QESR team is confident that GSA has effective arrangements for the monitoring and review of its approach to managing quality, and to setting, maintaining, reviewing and assessing academic standards. The team considered policy documents for Periodic Review and Revalidation, Professional Services Review, and Annual Monitoring, as well as a sample of quality process reports and minutes from key institutional committees. In meetings, the team heard from staff and students about the effectiveness and continuing evolution of these arrangements.

30   The QESR team found that GSA's arrangements for managing quality and setting standards meet the expectations of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code), the *Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework* (SCQF) and align with the guidance issued by the Scottish Funding Council (SFC). A detailed Quality Code mapping provides evidence of this. Procedures apply across the institution, with some extra requirements for partnership arrangements with the University of Glasgow. For example, programmes delivered jointly with the University of Glasgow are approved by the University of Glasgow's Academic Standards Committee.

31   GSA undertakes five-yearly periodic reviews of taught provision at the level of its four schools. Each review panel includes academic, student, external and professional services representation. Panel recommendations are considered and approved by Academic Council. The expectation is that within one month of the Academic Council meeting, the School will provide an action plan explaining how any conditions and recommendations have been met or will be met. An initial response to review outcomes is normally submitted within one month of the event. This response and subsequent action plan updates are considered by the Education Committee and Academic Council. A final progress report is normally submitted within one year of the report of the review event having been produced. The team was able

to view examples of this and related committee minutes, which confirmed a robust approach to the process.

32   Postgraduate research (PGR) provision is reviewed under a separate process, also on a five-year cycle. The most recent PGR review had recently concluded at the time of the review visit. The QESR team heard from students that there had been good opportunity for input to this process from the student body, resulting in positive actions including strengthening of the doctoral community in partnership with the GSA Students' Association.

33   GSA introduced a professional services review process in May 2021, closely mirroring the academic programme review process. There is an agreed schedule of reviews, conducted either as discrete service area reviews or thematic reviews. The QESR team was able to view follow-up action plans from the professional service review 2021-22 of the Enterprise Studio. The QESR team heard from staff that, at the most recent service review of Technical Support Department, the process had resulted in positive change, including the set-up of a regular student group to gather feedback. The first thematic review (Student Communications) is scheduled for 2024-25. GSA is considering how best to structure and manage this review, the outcomes from which will form part of the wider evidence base for enhancing the student experience.

34   Programme Monitoring and Annual Reporting (PMAR) is reported in semester one, with School Boards of Studies having oversight of PMARs and associated Quality Enhancement Action Plans (QEAPs). Following a specially convened annual meeting of the Board of Studies, each School produces a Self-Evaluation Report, School Annual Summary and QEAP. These are considered at an annual meeting of the Education Committee, where annual reports of professional services are also reviewed. The Annual Report on Research Degrees is considered by the Education Committee and Academic Council.

35   The QESR team reviewed a range of programme and school reports and associated QEAPs, including one example of a collaborative PMAR and QEAP. The team considered the reports to be comprehensive, evidence-based and action-oriented. The team heard that staff found the PMAR process to be a helpful and structured mechanism for reflecting on data and effecting positive change. Actions within the QEAP are revisited throughout the year, including at meetings of the Student Staff Consultative Committee (SSCC). Staff also reported that they welcome the 'critical friend' review section within the PMAR as a useful opportunity to share practice.

36   A delay was noted with the provision of HESA data in the sector due to the introduction of the HESA Data Futures for the 2022-23 reporting cycle. To ensure oversight of the data once available, an institutional analysis was undertaken as an additional measure with programme teams required to undertake analysis and reported to senior academic committees. The QESR team learnt that this approach worked well, and GSA will retain the additional institutional reporting, moving forward to strengthen oversight and make more visible the outcomes from data analysis within the PMAR process. Other examples include the enhancement of the external examiner summaries and development of complaints reporting. These examples of the continued development of GSA's quality processes, collectively contribute to the evidence base for enhancements to the student experience. The QESR team considers that the continued proactive development of core quality processes (including an increasing focus on data) and the oversight of key quality reports at an institutional level, which provides assurance and an effective means of sharing practice to enhance the student experience, is a **feature of good practice**.

37   Analysis of the outcomes from periodic review - cross-referencing with other review and monitoring activity - is undertaken and reported through the annual submission to the SFC and the annual report to the University of Glasgow's Senate. The minutes of the

relevant Education Committee meetings summarise the key themes, areas of good practice and recommendations emerging from PMAR. At the review visit, the team heard that Heads of School sit on senior committees, meaning they have oversight of the outcomes from PMAR and other quality processes and are well placed to share practice within their Schools.

38   The QESR team heard that the Periodic Review and Revalidation process will be subject to review in 2024-25 to allow for reflection on learning from the most recent round of school reviews. GSA does not currently have a published schedule for the wider review of policies, but this is in development. The QESR team considers that the planned approach, through which an annual update will be provided to the Education Committee, will further enhance oversight of the evolution of quality processes.

39   Arrangements for assessment and feedback are consistent with sector expectations and continue to evolve as an outcome from the previous ELIR visits. The QESR team's assessment of the effectiveness of these arrangements is covered earlier in this report, under the section on 'Action taken since ELIR 4' (see paragraphs 19-20). External examining arrangements are also covered separately in the section on the 'Use of external reference points in quality processes' (see paragraph 43).

Use of external reference points in quality processes

40   The QESR team is confident that GSA has effective arrangements in place to monitor and review its approach to the use of external reference points in quality processes. The team considered a mapping of the quality processes against the Quality Code, minutes from key institutional committees, and met with staff and students.

41   GSA developed a detailed mapping of policies and procedures to the advice and guidance of the Quality Code, including the Core and Common practices as part of the preparations for ELIR 4 in 2019-20. The mapping document also includes appropriate references to the *Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework* (SCQF) and Subject Benchmark Statements. In keeping with institutional policy, the mapping underwent 'light-touch' reviews in 2022-23 and 2023-24, in preparation for Institutional Liaison Meeting (ILM) and QESR respectively. However, GSA has recognised that this approach is proving to be unsustainable and that, in its current form, the mapping document is unwieldy and difficult for staff to use. The QESR team heard from senior staff that GSA plans to adopt a new approach following the launch of the revised Quality Code in June 2024. The aim will be to make the Mapping Document better suited for demonstrating how sector expectations are met, while also providing staff with clear guidance on how to make best use of external reference points. It is anticipated that the revised approach will produce a dynamic document that provides both assurance and guidance. Scoping activity for this exercise has already been undertaken based on the draft revisions to the Quality Code in 2023-24.

42   GSA's Periodic Review and Revalidation Policy includes a requirement that Periodic Review includes full consideration of Subject Benchmark Statements, the *Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework* (SQCF), and the Quality Code, including an evaluation of the alignment of the relevant external reference points against the programme. In meeting with the QESR team, academic staff provided examples of how they engage with external reference points and take part in sector networks to inform their work.

43   External examiners are required to report on the alignment with credit frameworks and Subject Benchmark Statements, and Periodic Review and Revalidation requires consideration of Subject Benchmark Statements, the SCQF, Quality Code and Quality Enhancement Framework (QEF). Schools are required to respond to external examiners by addressing the main issues requiring action raised in their reports. The responses are

shared with the external examiner, students and the individual School's Board of Studies. The Programme Monitoring and Annual Reporting process (PMAR), results in Annual Programme Reports where schools are required to reflect on the main themes and issues raised and describe how they were addressed. The Annual Programme Reports are shared with the individual School's Board of Studies and with the Education Committee. The QESR team saw evidence of the Annual Programme Reports informing the School Annual Summary Reports and Quality Enhancement Action Plans which are discussed at the PMAR meeting of Education Committee.

44   In addition, with the aim of further enhancing the usefulness of data, data visualisation software has been introduced and staff are being trained to use it to analyse programme data, including the reports from external examiners and providing comparison with the previous year's analysis. This information will then be included in each School's Self-Evaluation Report and inform the QEAPs developed for the PMAR process. Staff reported that both the positive themes and areas for development emerging through external examiner reports can be tracked in QEAPs and strategy action plans, thereby providing assurance that the systems are working effectively. Based on the evidence available, the QESR team was confident that effective arrangements are in place to monitor and act on external examiner reports.

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

45   The QESR team is confident that GSA 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 QESR team considered a range of documentation, including GSA's Annual Report to the Scottish Funding Council; HEI Data - Student Equality Monitoring 2022-23; a report on Complaints, Appeals and Conduct; analysis of student feedback; the GSA Data Strategy 2022 to 2027; minutes from key institutional committees; and met with staff and students.

46   GSA's Data Strategy (2022-27) sets out how GSA will use and manage data across all its activities and is a sub-strategy to the Digital Strategy. This is GSA's first institutional data strategy and is intended to support the implementation of the strategic plan by using data to inform decision-making. The Data Strategy sets out the intended impact, such as the use of data when reporting to the key quality committees on areas of risk and the delivery of enhancement initiatives. However, the Data Strategy does not include an action plan or an explanation of how progress will be monitored, other than reference to the main Digital Strategy which includes a plan for developments from 2022 to 2027.

47   From senior staff, the QESR team heard examples of how data is used to enable enhancement at school level, and that they are looking forward to using data dashboards that are under development. The team learnt that developing approaches to data had led to more focus on quantitative data especially when setting targets - for example, Key Performance Indicators - but without losing the overview of qualitative data. This includes the use of retention, progression and attainment data to identify risks and inform changes to policies and practice that have the potential to improve student outcomes. The team heard how programme teams use data to identify and support students from non-traditional backgrounds and inform practice for future cohorts. There was also evidence of data sets being used to identify areas of concern and guide future action as part of student equality monitoring.

48   National Student Survey (NSS) results are considered annually by the Education Committee and Academic Council, and action plans drawn up for individual programmes. GSA has a strategic approach to engaging with NSS led by the Deputy Director (Academic),

whereby programmes identified as at risk are required to produce an action plan and meet with the Deputy Director (Academic) and Head of Learning and Teaching to agree the approach. These programmes and their associated NSS action plans are then monitored through the Learning and Teaching Group alongside the standard annual programme monitoring process. GSA has approved a suite of Student Experience Performance Indicators (SEPI), introducing a RAG rating system to monitor programmes.

49   In addition to the NSS, GSA conducts a Student Experience Survey which mirrors the NSS questions. The introduction of the Student Survey Season has seen an increase in response rates for internal surveys from students. The QESR team also heard of professional service conducting their own surveys. For example, the QESR team heard about the library conducting its own survey about their services with the aim to provide feedback quickly by publishing 'You Said, We Did' style resources. Results on the PGR survey are considered through the annual research degrees report which goes to Academic Council in March each year. The QESR team saw evidence of the consideration of feedback from PGR students on supervision, programme management, and support and facilities.

50   The QESR team considered the reports and detailed analysis of papers related to Appeals, Complaints and Conduct. GSA has introduced new complaint themes with reporting aligned to the categories in the NSS and other common complaint themes so that reporting can be more effective, and trends can be identified. Data on student appeals, complaints and conduct is collected and is considered by the Education Committee and Academic Council. Based on the evidence available, the QESR team was confident that improved approaches to data analysis are contributing to the effectiveness of the complaints and appeals processes. In conjunction with this, the team heard about steps being taken to improve response times to individual cases through improved training, central support and extra guidance for staff.