Enhancement-led institutional review

Glasgow School of Art

MARCH 2010

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Introduction
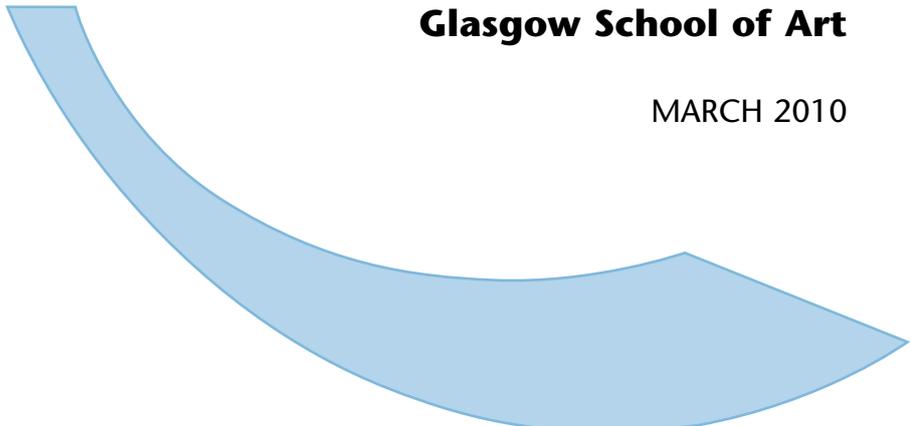
1   This is the report of an Enhancement-led institutional review (ELIR) of the Glasgow School of Art (GSA or the School) undertaken by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA). QAA is grateful to GSA for the willing cooperation provided to the ELIR team.

ELIR method and report

2   The ELIR method was revised during 2007-08 following extensive consultation with the Scottish higher education sector. Full detail on the method is set out in the *Enhancement-led institutional review handbook: Scotland (second edition) 2008* which is available on QAA's website.

3   ELIR reports are structured around three main sections: the management of the student learning experience; institution-led monitoring and review of quality and academic standards; and the strategic approach to quality enhancement. Each of these three sections leads to a 'commentary' in which the views of the ELIR team are set out. The three commentaries, in turn, lead to the overarching judgement on the level of confidence which can be placed in the institution's management of academic standards and the quality of the student learning experience. A summary report is also available in printed form (from QAA) and from the QAA's website.

Method of review

4   GSA submitted a Reflective Analysis (RA), which provided the focus for the review. The RA was supported by a number of accompanying documents including a case study which featured the Common Academic Framework, an infrastructure operating across all GSA's taught provision and which supports the design, delivery, assessment and management of academic programmes. The ELIR team also received the report of GSA's previous ELIR, which took place in 2005.

5   GSA established an ELIR Planning Group, which was convened by the Deputy Director and supported by the Head of Academic and Student Services. The group included a wide range of staff, the President of the Students' Representative Council and a postgraduate student representative. The group reported to the GSA Executive Group, Academic Council and the Board of Governors. The RA was drafted by a small writing team, supported by a consultant who acted as a critical friend.

6   The ELIR team visited GSA on two occasions: the Part 1 visit took place on 10 and 11 February 2010 and the Part 2 visit took place in the week beginning 15 March 2010.

7   The ELIR team comprised: Ms Jessie Buchanan, Professor Rae Condie, Dr Tina Harrison, Professor Kerri-Lee Krause, Mrs Nicola Milton and Professor Monica Shaw. The review was managed on behalf of QAA by Ms Stella Heath, Assistant Director, QAA Scotland. Professor Kerri-Lee Krause was unable to attend the Part 1 visit in person. However, she had access to all documentation, participated in private team meetings by teleconference, and, at the start of the Part 2 visit, was provided with a context-setting meeting with the institution.

Background information about the institution

8   GSA was established in 1845 as one of the first Government Schools of Design outside London, and from 1968 operated as an independent Associated Institution of the University of Glasgow. Since 1992 the School's undergraduate and postgraduate degrees have been validated by the University of Glasgow and in 1997 the University conferred Accredited Institution status on the School. Under the terms of the Accreditation Agreement, while the University of Glasgow

Senate has responsibility for awards, maximum responsibility is delegated to the School for its own quality assurance procedures.

9   The School is one of four designated Small Specialist Institutions in Scotland, and its estate is located mainly in the Garnethill area of Glasgow, around the renowned Mackintosh building. Students are distributed across the Mackintosh School of Architecture, the School of Design, the School of Fine Art and the Digital Design Studio, which has recently moved to new facilities in Glasgow's Digital Media Quarter at Pacific Quay on the banks of the River Clyde.

Institution's strategy for quality enhancement

10   The School set out the main focus of its approach to quality enhancement as being to foster a shared quality culture based on: appropriate staff and student support systems and structures; a shared concept of student-centred learning; and an 'enabling' quality assurance infrastructure, which supports the aim of enhancement. At the time of the current ELIR the School's Quality Enhancement in Learning and Teaching Strategy was due to be reviewed. GSA intends that an updated strategy, which will take account of the outcomes of the current ELIR, will be prepared for consultation and consideration through its committee structure in 2010.

Management of the student learning experience

Key features of the student population and the effectiveness of the institution's approach to managing information about its student population

11   The student population for the academic year 2009-10 comprises 1,625 undergraduate students and 306 postgraduate students. The majority of students (95.3 per cent) are full-time and the gender balance is 60 per cent female and 40 per cent male. Part-time students comprise 25 undergraduate, 43 postgraduate and 23 distance learners. The School has a strategic priority to increase the growth of postgraduate student numbers from 15.8 per cent to 20 per cent of the total student population by 2014.

12   The School is committed to establishing an increasingly diverse student body. Currently the majority of students (54 per cent) are aged 18-20 at the point of entry, but there is a sizeable group of 325 undergraduates (17 per cent of the total student population) who are aged 21 years and over at entry. Postgraduate students mostly fall into two main age groups, 136 in the 22-24 age group and 146 in the 25-39 age group. The majority of students are white, and the School has 207 students registered with a disability (11 per cent) of the total student population), the majority of whom are registered with dyslexia.

13   The Student Record System is the main data system used for: making returns to the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA); reporting to the Scottish Funding Council (SFC); updating student information on the virtual learning environment and the Library Management System; informing discussions during Annual Programme Monitoring; and providing data on performance indicators to inform the annual strategic planning process.

The effectiveness of the institution's approach to engaging and supporting students in their learning

Student representation and feedback

14   The School regards effective student representation as being central to its quality assurance and enhancement mechanisms and students are represented at all levels of the School's committee structure. Student Staff Consultative Committees (SSCCs), which have an elected student representative system, operate within the School of Design, the School of Fine Art, and the Department of Historical and Critical Studies, and there is a comparable Student Forum in the School of Architecture. SSCCs operate at subject level and meet at least once each term. They are viewed by the School as the main vehicles for students to provide feedback on their learning.

Each school (Fine Art, Design, Architecture, and the Digital Design Studio) has a Board of Study, and there is also a Board of Study for Postgraduate Research Students. The model is one of feeding matters upwards from SSCCs and the Student Forum to the Undergraduate and Postgraduate Committees and then to the Boards of Studies. Student representatives sit on the boards of studies and on undergraduate and postgraduate programme committees for their respective programmes.

15   In undergraduate programmes each subject area elects two class representatives for each year of study. In postgraduate studies there is often only one representative if there is a small cohort of students. Representatives are elected by peers and attend the SSCCs and Student Forum meetings. Other attendees include programme leaders, heads of department, head technicians and course tutors and, whenever possible, the Students' Representative Council President. GSA considers the School of Architecture's Student Forum to be an effective student-led initiative supported by staff, and this view is shared by students. The Student Forum meets and reports on action points on a monthly basis, and allows discussion of the wider learning and teaching context with reference to, for example, accommodation and facilities. GSA will use the Student Forum as a basis for the future development of student engagement.

16   Student representatives receive training developed with support from student participation in quality Scotland (sparqs) and delivered in partnership by the Students' Representative Council and the Academic Services Department. They are also provided with a Student Representative Handbook and access to the Calendar of Meetings. The Handbook outlines the role and procedures, and provides guidance on how to be an effective representative. Although the Handbook provides a useful and informative guide to the role, not all students were aware of the availability of training. Student representatives were clear about their responsibilities but considered that their effectiveness was inhibited by a number of factors, in particular the decentralised system for students to provide feedback which, while encouraging action to address issues at the programme level, limits opportunities for identifying shared issues across the School.

17   Since 2004-05 the School has undertaken an institution-wide Student Satisfaction and Experience Survey which provides an overview of general issues and themes. The School also entered the National Student Survey (NSS) for the first time in 2009. GSA is undertaking work to consider the apparent differences in the outcomes of the SSES and NSS, and has identified a number of actions in response to the NSS results. The issues raised and action taken will now be included as part of the Annual Programme Monitoring process.

18   Across the schools GSA has devolved responsibility for gathering and analysing student feedback to the programme level in order to maximise the academic benefit to programmes and to enable a rapid response to any problems that may be identified, and a variety of approaches is taken to obtaining student feedback. Representation is effective at the subject level in dealing with operational matters which impact on the delivery of programmes and which are dealt with within the Student Staff Consultative Committee and Student Forum structure.

19   Beyond Board of Study level it is the responsibility of the President of the Students' Association to represent the views of all students on central committees. These are the Undergraduate Committee, the Postgraduate Committee, the Academic Council and the Board of Governors. This represents a heavy workload, which clearly limits the President's time to engage in significant dialogue with the student body, and representation is more effective within the school and departmental structure than it is at the institutional level.

20   Students highlighted a number of changes that had occurred without full consultation, such as studio and site closures and the late notification of timetable changes, and expressed the view that not all issues were sufficiently well addressed or outcomes clearly communicated. In recognition of the heavy workload of the President of the Student's Association, and the impact this has on his availability to engage with the student body, GSA is planning to establish a series of meetings with all Student Representatives to support more effective communication.

21   The School will be conducting a strategic review of student feedback during 2009-2010, for implementation in 2010-2011. The School is encouraged to progress this review and to ensure that there are effective formal feedback processes at all levels throughout the institution, and that there is effective communication with students in relation to action taken beyond the subject level.

Arrangements for providing feedback to students on their assessed work

22   The School regards assessment as a key area of academic support, and is reviewing its approach to assessment in the context of the Undergraduate Common Academic Framework, which will introduce a unitised programme structure. Currently students receive formative feedback throughout the academic year. This feedback is qualitative, and is not linked to interim summative assessment points. Summative assessment has traditionally taken the form of a single process at the end of each academic year.

23   The School operates a variety of assessment practices, which include written work, projects and critiques. Critiques provide a forum for debate and feedback in which individuals or groups present and defend their ideas and work. Although conducted variably across the School, these integral forms of assessment and formative feedback appear to work well in individual programmes and students are generally satisfied with the range of assessment practices. Students also considered that feedback provided in tutorials was effective. In particular they highlighted the value of feedback provided during critiques, in which peer assessment of their work is a strong feature, and which helps them to learn and to develop crucial self-reflective skills and the ability to evaluate their own work.

24   Overall, students are unclear about the way in which descriptive indicators of progress link to summative grade outcomes, and in general undergraduate students are unable to see how formative feedback would enable them to improve on their final grade, and the School is strongly encouraged to consider ways in which it can enable students to develop a clearer understanding of the role of assessment in contributing to final degree outcomes.

Support for student learning

25   GSA identifies creativity as the defining characteristic of the student academic experience, with an emphasis on problem-solving and group critique to engender self-reflection. The School regards the integration of criticism, theory and practice as being key to the learning experience for all students, whatever the discipline, and seeks to provide a high-quality education through its studio culture, specialist departments, workshops, collaboration between academic and technical staff, favourable staff-student ratios, and high-quality academic, technical and support service staff. Students are very positive about their experience of studio-based learning, and value in particular the accessibility, approachability and commitment of teaching staff, as well as the support provided by technical staff.

26   All the School's postgraduate taught programmes have a common research methodologies core, some aspects of which are shared with postgraduate research students. Student learning is enhanced by cross-school events such as talks, workshops and exhibitions. Since the last ELIR there has been an increase in the number of staff working within the department of Research and Postgraduate Studies and students are supported by accessible teaching staff and a postgraduate infrastructure including the Postgraduate Coordinator, appointed in 2008, the Research Degrees Coordinator, a role introduced in 2005, and by PhD Coordinators in the subject areas. Students expressed a high level of satisfaction with their programmes and the School has created an infrastructure which is beginning to support a strong community for taught postgraduate students.

Arrangements for managing the research student experience

27   The School has recently grown its research student numbers to 41 and plans to have 55 research students by 2014-15. Research students are supported by infrastructure developments for research degree provision which have been established through the sharing of good practice with the University of Glasgow. These developments include the appointment of a Research Degrees Coordinator (now Lecturer Research) in 2005 and a PhD Coordinator in 2006.

28   Students are informed about their rights and responsibilities via an extensive Postgraduate Research Student Handbook which is based on the University of Glasgow regulations. This clearly stipulates the role of supervisors and the support which students can expect from the School. Supervision arrangements work well and the School has developed a Postgraduate Certificate (PgCert) in Research Supervision in Creative Practices which has contributed to a growth of more than 40 qualified supervisors by 2008.

29   The School recognises that there is a stronger sense of community for taught postgraduate than research students, and will continue to explore ways in which to develop a more integrated research community across GSA.

The effectiveness of the institution's approach to promoting the development of graduate attributes, including those relating to employability, in all of its students

30   The School's Employability Steering Group was formed in 2005 and maintained an overview of activities linked explicitly to employability, including personal development planning (PDP). The School has now recognised that the original strategic approach and remit of the Employability Steering Group would benefit from closer alignment with the Graduates for the 21st Century Enhancement Theme. Consequently, the Employability Steering Group has been disbanded, and former members have now joined the Steering Group for the Theme.

31   The School recognises that across undergraduate provision a more strategic approach is needed towards the articulation of graduate attributes and employability, and the review of the employability strategy, which is an institutional priority for 2009–2010, should help to address this.

32   In relation to PDP, the School highlights the development of self-reliance skills, such as self-awareness, self-promotion, action planning and negotiation, as an important aspect of the School's management of the student experience. GSA notes that, while these skills are developed through curriculum-based activities such as shows and exhibitions, the way in which they are acquired may not be clearly articulated in course descriptors.

33   The School is currently reviewing its approach to PDP, recognising that it is most effective where the reflective process is explicit, as in the Design Process Portfolio aspect of the M.Des programme. In this programme the Design Process Portfolio runs alongside the thematic and structured Studio Practice course. It emphasises the value for each student of understanding their individual design process, and enables students to understand and articulate the process as it evolves.

The effectiveness of the institution's approach to managing the learning environment

Learning resources

34   All students are supported by a Learning Resources Department which comprises the Library, Computer Centre (including e-learning support) and Archives and Collections. The Learning Resources Department aims to provide inclusive access to learning resources and gathers feedback from students on the effectiveness of its services via online user surveys and a student library forum. The Library, in particular, provides a responsive range of services, including

InfosmART, an online information and research skills package, which it has developed in response to student feedback. Accessed through the virtual learning environment, InfosmART is a suite of interactive modules designed to support students in developing and improving their research capabilities and information handling skills.

The virtual learning environment

35   The virtual learning environment (VLE), introduced in 2006, is now well established. Its primary function is to support teaching, but it is also widely used across the School for internal communication. All academic and support services now have sites on the VLE, a Learning Technologist post was established in 2006 to manage its development, and staff are supported by a comprehensive introductory manual. Across the schools, use of the VLE varies between discipline and between tutors, with pockets of good practice but also limited use in some areas, and GSA considers that a more strategic approach to VLE development is necessary. GSA has identified a number of limitations with the existing VLE and is currently considering the case for enhancing the platform by replacing the version of the software currently in use with a later version that offers additional functionality.

Developments in the estate

36   Since 2005 major work has been undertaken to restore the fabric of the Mackintosh Building. Plans are at an advanced stage to redevelop the site opposite the Mackintosh Building and a new site has been established at Pacific Quay, on the River Clyde, housing the Digital Design Studio. A new building will be erected opposite the Mackintosh Building housing enhanced lecture and seminar facilities, exhibition spaces, catering and informal learning areas, design studios and enhanced accommodation for the Students' Association. The building is due to be completed by the start of the 2013-14 academic year.

37   Detailed plans are in development for decanting students and staff from those buildings which will be demolished. The School has established an Estates Development Department to manage this process and to ensure that disruption of the School's operations is minimised. The School is encouraged to ensure effective communication with the student body about its estate development plans, particularly in relation to the decant process.

38   The effective management of studio facilities and workshops is central to the GSA student experience. The School recognises the challenge of maintaining and renewing the wide range of specialist resources necessary to support creative education and is planning to implement the recommendations of its recent Technical Facilities Review, which outlines proposals for the improved central management of workshops, by September 2010.

The effectiveness of the institution's approach to promoting equality of opportunity and effective learning for all of its students

39   The School's approach to equality is overseen by the Diversity and Equity Group, which is convened by the Director and supported by the Head of Student Support and Development. The Student Support and Development department encompasses the Careers Service, the Learning Support and Development Service, the Welfare Advisory Service and the Student Counselling Service. The Learning Support and Development Service provides specialist support for students with disabilities, as well as to students whose first language is not English. Students are well informed about the available services, regard learning support as good and, in particular, commend the support for students with dyslexia. Induction arrangements and ongoing additional support for international students are also positively regarded.

40   Increased recruitment and retention from underrepresented groups is a strategic objective for GSA and the School has led on a number of widening participation activities in the west of Scotland. Although there has been a rise in the number of applications from underrepresented groups, this has not been matched by the numbers of students admitted from these groups.

GSA is attempting to address this by, for example, referring applicants who are rejected to a Progression Advisory Session, which gives feedback on their application and provides information and advice about alternative entry routes such as the Portfolio Preparation Programme.

The effectiveness of the institution's approach to supporting and developing staff to promote effective learning for their students

41   The School provides a formal induction for new members of staff, which includes an introduction to facilities and central support services. At the school level induction processes are informal and variable. Some heads of school provide a relatively structured induction; more commonly, however, the process relies on informal peer support, guidance from senior colleagues, and the use of resources such as programme handbooks, programme information on learning outcomes, and staff information and updates on the VLE.

42   New staff are subject to a probationary period of one year, and during this period feedback on progress is largely informal. Probationary staff undergo a formal review at the end of their first year. Arrangements for supporting experienced staff to undertake new roles, such as that of Programme Leader, which is recognised by the School as being key to enhancing learning and teaching, are variable. Induction to a new role may be given by the predecessor if available, via informal co-mentoring or might rely on the new role-holder to request guidance as needed. There may be benefit in GSA reflecting on more effective and equitable support arrangements for staff new in post or undertaking new roles.

43   The School has successfully supported a wide range of staff to undertake the PgCert Learning and Teaching run by the Centre for Learning and Teaching in Art and Design (CLTAD) at the University of the Arts, London, which is a requirement for new academic staff. The School has now validated an in-house PgCert in Learning and Teaching, which did not run in 2009-2010 because of the departure of the Learning Enhancement Coordinator. It will commence in 2010-11. A part-time route for those on contracts of less than 0.5 full-time equivalent (FTE) has been negotiated for the PgCert Learning and Teaching, and an associate route is being developed for support staff and research students. The take-up of the CLTAD PgCert Learning and Teaching by significant numbers of staff is a feature of positive practice at GSA.

44   In common with other small specialist institutions, GSA employs a significant number of part-time staff, which is considered to be important in meeting the professional needs of the programmes. The School provides part-time staff with the same right of access to staff development opportunities as full-time staff, but acknowledges that more may need to be done to enable part-time staff to participate in staff development events, for example by reimbursing them to attend. GSA is encouraged to ensure equity of access to staff development opportunities for all staff groups.

45   A successful record of teaching is included as a supporting criterion for promotion to a personal professorship through the University of Glasgow. GSA does not otherwise have a promotional route for learning and teaching. The School is therefore encouraged to consider the development of formal structures to support and reward excellence in learning and teaching as part of a clearly articulated staff development policy.

The effectiveness of the institution's management of the student learning experience on collaborative programmes

46   The School has a small number of collaborative programmes with the University of Glasgow, including undergraduate programmes with an integrated Masters in Product Design Engineering, which is accredited by the Institution of Mechanical Engineers. Students on this programme are enrolled at both institutions, and have access to the learning resources and support services of each.

47   In 2009 the School established an articulation agreement with Cardonald College, Glasgow, to provide direct entry to Year 2 of the BA (Hons) Design programme. GSA offers a summer school for these direct entry students, and also provides support through its Widening Participation Office.

Institution-led monitoring and review of quality and standards

Key features of institution-led monitoring and review at the institution, and the extent to which these arrangements meet sector-wide expectations

Approval and review of undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes

48   Under the terms of its Accreditation Agreement with the University of Glasgow, the School's programmes are approved for a fixed period of six years and are subject to review and revalidation. The approval and review processes are similar and subsequent reports and recommendations arising from these processes are presented to the relevant committee (the Undergraduate Committee or the Postgraduate Committee) for consideration, before being forwarded to the GSA Academic Council and to the University of Glasgow for approval.

49   The Undergraduate Committee and the Postgraduate Committee also monitor progress in addressing recommendations (using a standard template developed in response to comments made at the last ELIR) and this is reported to the Academic Council. Analysis of the review reports since the last ELIR suggests that the process has identified a wide range of important issues for consideration by programme teams and at institutional level, and an institution-wide overview report on general issues or trends arising from approvals and reviews is prepared annually and informs the School's annual report to SFC on the conduct of internal reviews. A commentary is also provided in the School's annual report to the University of Glasgow. However, while the Undergraduate Committee and the Postgraduate Committee are the key lines for consideration of recommendations, it is unclear at what event or in what forum staff across the school engage in discussion about the strategic implications of key learning points. GSA is encouraged to consider ways of disseminating key learning points and sharing good practice from internal reviews across the School.

50   Approval procedures were revised in 2007-08 and 2008-09, primarily to allow for the introduction of new courses and pathways within programmes without the need for full programme revalidation. The new procedures established three possible approval routes depending on the scale and nature of the proposal. Route 1 concerns proposals for new programmes, new named pathways comprising 50 per cent or more new content and new named pathways delivered in partnership with another institution or external body. Route 2 concerns proposals for new courses, new named pathways comprising less than 50 per cent new content, major changes to the format or delivery of a programme, modification of an award title, the introduction of a part-time route and any modification involving a new partnership that falls outside of Route 1. Route 3 covers all other proposed modifications. The key differences between Route 1 and Route 2 are that Route 2 permits approval without the University of Glasgow or other external participation at the event itself, but it is a requirement that the approval documentation includes evidence of consultation with at least one external assessor. UGC and PGC have agreed that this evidence must be included in Route 2 panel reports. In addition, a Route 2 approval panel need not include a student member, but the documentation must provide evidence of appropriate consultation with students.

51   The School indicated that it is currently piloting an online virtual validation system to speed up the validation of new postgraduate electives that have not yet been validated. There was no documentation available at the time of the ELIR on this approval route. The School is encouraged to clarify the relationship between this and the three approval routes outlined above and also to clarify whether this approval route applies to courses or pathways. In developing an

online validation system, the School should ensure that it is robust and that academic standards are not compromised in an effort to speed up approval routes.

52   The School's review procedures were rewritten in summer 2009 to include more comprehensive guidance on the content of self-evaluation documents and a greater emphasis on external benchmarking and statistical analysis. A check was also made on adherence to the *Code of Practice*, resulting in a number of minor modifications. The revised procedures came into effect from 2009-10 and they have yet to be fully embedded. In particular the terms validation, revalidation and review are still used interchangeably. The School is encouraged to clarify the differences between its validation and review processes, and to publicise them widely in order that all staff are familiar with them. The School indicated that its arrangements and procedures for institution-led monitoring and review of quality and standards are overseen by Academic Council and would be published in an Academic Handbook. However, at the time of the current ELIR the Academic Handbook was unavailable. The School is strongly encouraged to finalise publication of the Handbook.

53   All programme approval and periodic review panels normally include two representatives of the University of Glasgow Senate and two other external members (with the exception of Route 2 approvals: see paragraph 50). Usually, at least one of the external members is drawn from outside Scotland. Since 2004-05, a student member has been appointed to all approval and periodic review panels (except Route 2 panels: see paragraph 50).

54   Overall, the School has arrangements for the approval and review of taught provision which work well and are effective in ensuring that academic programmes remain innovative, relevant and externally engaged.

Review of support departments

55   The School has a forward schedule for reviewing its support department and the first review, of Marketing and Communications, is due to take place in spring 2010. There would be benefit in the School considering the interaction between the outcomes of its reviews of teaching programmes and those of support departments to promote understanding of the wider student experience. There would also be benefit in the outcomes of the support department reviews linking with the Annual programme monitoring (APM) process.

Annual programme monitoring

56   The last ELIR commented positively on the School's APM process, and this continues to develop. The intention of the APM process is to encourage reflection on the operation of programmes, to share good practice and to maintain an overview of academic standards and quality. APM reports originate from programme leaders and are discussed at boards of studies. Heads of school prepare overview reports for the APM meeting, which is a joint meeting of the Undergraduate and Postgraduate Committees and support departments. Annual reports of support departments are also discussed at the APM meeting, apart from the report on postgraduate research programmes, which is discussed at the Research Degrees Sub-Committee. The APM report informs the School's annual report to the University of Glasgow Senate, and a Senate representative and another external member attend the APM meeting.

57   The APM process has been enhanced by the addition of Quality Enhancement Plans (QEPs). Each of the schools has produced a QEP, as have the support departments. Progress reports are submitted as part of the Annual Programme Monitoring process, and most of the QEPs follow a standard template, indicating who is responsible for specific actions, the timescale for action and the relationship to GSA's strategic plan. While the plans follow a similar format, the specific areas for attention vary considerably. Although this inevitably reflects developmental needs at the school and programme level, it can make it more difficult to monitor progress against institutional targets.

58   The APM process is robust and thorough, and there are a number of examples of good practice: external links; the joint overview of undergraduate and taught postgraduate provision; and the inclusion of support departments in the process. However, there are indications that some staff perceive the APM process as bureaucratic, with a focus on assurance rather than enhancement. It is also considered that reviewing all programmes at once during the annual APM meeting can be burdensome, leaving insufficient time to explore enhancement opportunities in any depth. It has also been recognised that the timing of the APM meeting does not allow an adequate opportunity for evaluation and report preparation for taught postgraduate programmes which finish in September. The School recognises that there would be benefit in reviewing the APM arrangements relating to its taught postgraduate portfolio, and it is encouraged to carry out that review, paying particular attention to the timing and organisation of taught postgraduate reviews.

59   Overall, the School has processes in place which enable it to secure academic standards and assure quality. The APM process is working at a local level in terms of reflection on and development of individual programmes. The School is encouraged to clarify the mechanisms by which outcomes from APM are considered in planning processes. GSA is also encouraged to further develop the QEPs to ensure that they have an enhancement rather than an operational focus, and to consider ways in which to share good practice and address enhancement issues in the wider context of the School.

The extent to which the institution's monitoring and review arrangements include consideration of all students

60   Since 2004-05 a student member has been appointed to all approval and periodic review panels, except Route 2 approval panels (see paragraph 50). The School should keep under review the proportion of approvals that are carried out via Route 2 to ensure that, if students are not involved, there is a mechanism in place that allows for the systematic gathering of student feedback. Since the last ELIR periodic review has been strengthened by requiring self-evaluation documents to include an analysis of student feedback, and feedback from students is also an integral part of the APM process.

61   General monitoring and review procedures do not distinguish between different groups of students. However, the planned review of support departments is expected to provide additional information on how specific student needs are being met at the institutional level. Involving support departments in the annual APM event is beneficial in this respect, but there is also a need to ensure that equality and diversity issues are considered at programme level.

The effectiveness of the institution's approach to self-evaluation including the use made of external reference points

62   The School is satisfied that its approach to self-evaluation is effective and notes that external participants at the APM meeting have commented on the growing maturity of the School's approach to self-evaluation. The School identifies APM as an effective process for reflection, and also sees the Annual Report to the University of Glasgow Senate as an opportunity to reflect on and evaluate learning, teaching and quality matters.

63   The School uses a range of external reference points when evaluating the effectiveness of its academic provision, including the Academic Infrastructure, the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF), and links with practitioners and professionals. Although the School states that all programmes are designed, validated and reviewed in the context of the relevant subject benchmark statements, and that they have all been aligned to the SCQF, there is no explicit reference to these reference points in the revised procedures for the design, approval and modification of programmes. Some programme handbooks provide detailed information about links to SCQF levels along with associated learning outcomes, but this is not consistent across all handbooks. Additionally, validation and review reports do not explicitly discuss alignment with these reference points. The School should review its process documentation to ensure it takes appropriate account of the Academic Infrastructure and other relevant reference points.

The effectiveness of the institution's approach to the management of information to inform the operation and evaluation of its monitoring and review activity

64   The Student Record System, while providing basic information which is fit for purpose, does not enable monitoring of differentiated groups of students and is not used routinely to track cohort progression at the programme level for all students. There is considerable scope for the improvement of data definition, management and data flows to users.

65   The management information data produced centrally on an annual basis for APM is also used as the basis for periodic review, with programme teams reflecting on five-year trends. The School is aware that it needs to improve its centrally produced data, particularly the use made of external comparators, and it is encouraged to progress the planned review of data management and reporting, which is due to report in September 2010.

The effectiveness of the institution's approach to setting and maintaining academic standards including the management of assessment

66   Under the terms of the Accreditation Agreement, the University of Glasgow retains responsibility for the academic standards of its awards while delegating maximum responsibility to GSA for its own quality assurance procedures. Academic standards are set during programme design and approval. Development teams are required to take note of external reference points (see paragraph 63), and programmes are also expected to adhere to the GSA Code of Assessment and the Common Academic Framework (CAF). Fulfilment of the requirements is tested during the validation and review processes.

67   The key elements of the School's approach to setting and maintaining academic standards comprise: the Common Academic Framework, the Code of Assessment, the Academic Calendar, Academic Misconduct and Mitigating Circumstances and external examiners.

68   The CAF is an infrastructure which, when fully implemented, will operate across all the School's taught provision, and which supports the design, delivery, assessment and management of academic programmes. The CAF is fully implemented for postgraduate programmes but not yet for undergraduate programmes, where agreement on a common assessment strategy has not yet been achieved, particularly in relation to formative and summative assessment.

69   All taught postgraduate programmes are now fully aligned with the Postgraduate Common Academic Framework (PG:CAF) (with the exception of the M.Res in Creative Practices which is due for revalidation in 2010-11). Alignment means the adoption of a 15-credit structure, common and shared courses, a consistent annual timetable, the adoption of the same assessment criteria, and a common examination board for all taught postgraduate programmes to facilitate the sharing of good practice.

70   The Undergraduate Common Academic Framework (UG:CAF) uses a 10-credit structure which is intended to facilitate the continued collaboration with partner institutions, whereas the PG:CAF uses a 15-credit structure, which presents challenges in translating common courses across the undergraduate and postgraduate streams. However, the CAF contains mechanisms to adjust credit, based on the modification of learning outcomes. The School should ensure that any such modifications adhere fully with the SCQF and are formally approved.

71   The introduction of the UG:CAF has led to considerable discussion about the implications for highly specialist programmes, and these discussions have been productive in securing a shared understanding of how such programmes will be developed. As a result, however, the introduction of the UG:CAF has been slower than that of the PG:CAF and GSA is strongly encouraged to fully implement the Common Academic Framework for all of its provision as a matter of priority. This includes completing the unitisation, credit-rating and revalidation of all undergraduate programmes.

72   The School is continuing to review its approach to assessment in the context of the unit-based system of programmes required by the CAF, and has made a number of changes to the management of assessment since the last ELIR. A common Code of Assessment was introduced in 2005-06 for undergraduate programmes and extended to taught postgraduate programmes in 2006-07. The Code is based on the University of Glasgow Code of Assessment and is not an assessment strategy but rather sets the parameters for assessment practices. If consistently followed, it provides a secure basis for the maintenance of academic standards. GSA is encouraged to build on the Code of Assessment by supporting staff in considering a range of assessment practices in order to gather evidence on which to base formative feedback and aid summative decision making. The Code establishes a common approach to assessment, including common grade descriptors and a standard methodology for undergraduate degree classification. The impact of the GSA Code on assessment practice is clear in Fine Art, where staff commented that it has prompted reflection on the nature of particular honours classifications, and it has opened up the range of marking. Further work is required to embed the Code across all schools in order for it to have a broader impact on assessment practice at the programme level.

73   GSA recognises that for many programmes the assessment strategy has been for a single summative assessment to take place at the end of the academic year, with a variety of informal and formal opportunities for formative feedback during the year (see paragraph 22). The introduction of the CAF will mean that programmes will be more explicitly structured into credit-bearing units, which will require the introduction of interim summative assessment throughout the year. The School is encouraged to consider the balance of formative and summative assessment of credit-bearing units, and to clarify the way in which formative assessment relates to a summative decision on performance.

74   External examiners are appointed by the University of Glasgow on the recommendation of GSA, and all external examiners are required to undergo an induction at GSA. External examiner reports are considered at various levels within the School. Issues requiring a response are noted by Academic Services and forwarded to the relevant Programme Leader, Head of School and, in the case of undergraduate programmes, the Director and Deputy Director. For postgraduate programmes, Academic Services send the matters requiring a response to the Head of Research and the Postgraduate Coordinator, in addition to the Programme Leader and Head of School. Programme leaders are required to make formal written responses, and Academic Services produces a report on matters raised by external examiners, which is also forwarded to the University of Glasgow. External examiner comments form an important information source for the APM process, thus contributing to the maintenance of academic standards. Heads of school are responsible for confirming that a detailed review of academic standards and external examiner reports has taken place at the programme and school level.

The effectiveness of the institution's approach to managing public information about quality and academic standards, including the linkage with the institution's monitoring and review arrangements

75   Public information about the quality and standards of the School's provision is published in the prospectus and on the website. Production of the prospectus is overseen by Marketing and Communication in liaison with the academic schools and the Registry. The website is also overseen by Marketing and Communication, although responsibility for the accuracy of content rests with the individual schools and departments. The School recognises the current limitations of the website in terms of both presentation and accessibility of information, and has identified the development of a new, enhanced site as an institutional priority.

76   The School seeks the views of applicants and new students on the accuracy of the information they receive. In general, feedback is positive and has informed incremental enhancements. The School is aware that there have been particular instances where information on the website has not been updated. The School should therefore implement effective processes

for assuring the accuracy of information deriving from schools and departments, and for ensuring that the information on the website is kept up to date.

Transcripts

77   All graduating students are provided with a transcript at the end of their final year but work to produce full European Diploma Supplements (EDS) has been slower than expected. It is anticipated that an EDS will be issued to all graduating students at the end of 2009-10.

The effectiveness of the institution's approach to linking its monitoring and review processes to its enhancement arrangements

78   The School has introduced Quality Enhancement Plans as a regular part of the APM reports, which is positive, although there is a need to develop their enhancement focus (see paragraph 59). Preparation for the APM meeting is seen as an opportunity to reflect on and share good practice. The APM process could contribute more to the enhancement agenda if the outcomes of programme monitoring, particularly details of developments and initiatives intended to enhance the student experience, were channelled, deliberately and consistently, back into the strategic planning processes. GSA does not, otherwise, have systematic arrangements for identifying and sharing the enhancement activity that takes place at the programme and academic school level. GSA is aware that, as it develops the next Quality Enhancement in Learning and Teaching strategy, there would be considerable benefit in strengthening the links between quality assurance and enhancement.

The effectiveness of the institution's approach to monitoring and reviewing its collaborative activity

79   In broad terms, the School's approach to monitoring and reviewing collaborative activity mirrors that used for internal provision. Some differences occur for specific partnerships, for example the articulation arrangement with Cardonald College requires the preparation of an annual report to the Undergraduate Committee. Programmes offered in collaboration with the University of Glasgow are monitored mainly through Joint Boards and are subject to the APM process.

Strategic approach to quality enhancement

Key features of the institution's strategic approach to quality enhancement

80   GSA's strategic approach to quality enhancement is set out in two key documents: the Strategic Plan, GSAfuture; and the Quality Enhancement in Learning and Teaching (QELT) Strategy, which is an integral component of the Common Academic Framework (CAF).

81   The Strategic Plan is comprehensive regarding the School's ambitions for learning and teaching, and it is underpinned by a desire to establish a reputation for international excellence. In order to achieve the Strategic Plan, four key areas for development have been identified: internationalisation; an increased number of postgraduate students (both research and taught); increased engagement with research; and further curriculum development at undergraduate level. There would be benefit in GSA considering how its vision for international excellence can be shared more widely across the School.

82   The CAF is described in a variety of ways by GSA. One description indicates that the CAF is a facilitating framework comprising five main elements: the external context and the need to be responsive to specific reference points or drivers; roles and responsibilities of staff; the QELT strategy; the Academic Calendar; and procedures for programme structures and development. A contrasting description is that the CAF consists of five main tools: the Academic Calendar; the Code of Assessment; the QELT Strategy; the UG:CAF; and the PG:CAF. The fact that the five

tools are not the same as the five elements leads to uncertainty regarding the nature and purpose of the CAF. GSA is encouraged to consider the terminology used and to clarify the interrelationships between the various components of the CAF.

83   Despite these inconsistencies, properly implemented, the five elements of the CAF provide a sound basis for enhancement, with the potential to benefit all students. The CAF has a number of features which would allow greater flexibility, interdisciplinarity and, generally, more creative approaches to curriculum design, all of which have the potential to enhance the student learning experience.

84   The QELT Strategy has been in operation from 2006-09 and is due for review during 2010. The QELT Strategy 2006-07 to 2009-10 included an agenda for: providing greater flexibility and student choice; developing a cross-institutional approach to employability and personal development planning; supporting research-teaching linkages; and articulating a clear set of graduate attributes. GSA acknowledges that not all of the proposed developments have been achieved within the original timescale. Following the planned review, a new QELT strategy will be developed during 2010, and it is intended that this will address outstanding issues as well as the outcomes of the current ELIR.

85   The QELT Strategy is currently located within the CAF, and it is constrained by being situated within this structural framework. The School recognises the need to undertake further work to develop a culture of enhancement within the institution, and has identified the QELT Strategy as having the potential to be a significant driver for this. GSA is encouraged to progress its planned review of the QELT Strategy in order to support the development of a quality enhancement culture.

86   There are planning mechanisms and documentation which have the potential to support the development of an enhancement culture within the School. However, these are not coordinated, and therefore development plans at different levels (the institution; the schools; departments and programmes) are not aligned. As a result, it is difficult to determine the extent to which activity within the constituent parts contributes cumulatively to the overall aims of the institution. This may be why key committees and processes, such as boards of study and the Annual Programme Monitoring process, do not appear to focus on monitoring progress towards common institutional targets, but instead focus on quality assurance and operational matters. Consequently, there would be benefit in GSA considering the strategic planning processes, and the roles and remits of committees, as part of its forthcoming review of the QELT Strategy, in order to raise the profile of enhancement of the student experience across the School.

The effectiveness of the institution's implementation of its strategies and policies for promoting quality enhancement across the institution

87   For a period following the 2005 ELIR GSA created a full-time post of Learning Enhancement Coordinator, with responsibility for promoting the enhancement agenda across the School. This replaced four 0.2 FTE Learning and Teaching Coordinator posts which were based within the schools. The Learning Enhancement Coordinator introduced a number of initiatives, notably the Learning and Teaching Forum (LTF) and the Learning and Teaching Innovation Fund (LTIF). These initiatives were intended to support staff in developing new and innovative practices in line with the national Quality Enhancement Framework and, in particular, the national Enhancement Themes. The LTIF provided resources to support an action research approach to introducing new ways of working with students, and the LTF provided a forum for staff to discuss effective practice. Those who received funding from the LTIF were required to provide a report and make a presentation to other staff at the conclusion of the project. The online information skills package, InfosmART, is a good example of a project developed by a LTIF recipient (see paragraph 34).

88   The Learning Enhancement Coordinator role was subsequently replaced by the post of Undergraduate Coordinator, and this role combines aspects of both quality assurance and enhancement. However, some staff indicated that the new role of Undergraduate Coordinator may dilute the previous post's emphasis on enhancement, particularly in view of the fact that both the LTF and LTIF have been suspended as a result of the need for the new appointee to the role of Undergraduate Coordinator to focus on preparations for ELIR. GSA indicated that it has plans to reinstate the LTF and LTIF as soon as possible, and is encouraged to progress this as well as confirming the intention for the Undergraduate Coordinator to have responsibility for coordinating these initiatives.

89   There are examples of enhancement activity at the school level, including practice-based design research in the School of Architecture and work-related projects in the School of Design, which are undertaken in partnership with local industry or business and have a focus on enhancing student employability. Such initiatives are operating well at the programme level, however enhancement initiatives and activities do not appear to be coordinated centrally in line with institutional priorities and the learning points are not disseminated systematically in order to provide opportunities for all students to benefit. Furthermore, since the withdrawal of the LTIF there are no mechanisms in place to recognise or reward staff for innovative learning and teaching practices, and the development of those depends on goodwill and personal motivation. GSA is encouraged to reflect on the way in which it supports the development and sustainability of practices that enhance student learning across the School.

90   A more coordinated approach to enhancement is evident at the postgraduate level. This is due in part to the small size of the School's postgraduate population, which helps support consistency across programmes. The Postgraduate Coordinator has fewer course directors within his remit and, through regular meetings with these staff, is able to support the sharing of good practice and identification of developments to enhance the postgraduate student experience.

The effectiveness of the institution's use of external reference points in its approach to quality enhancement, including the extent to which the institution's approach is informed by national and international practice

91   The School emphasises the importance of staff engagement in external professional activities, and staff work with a wide range of external groups including professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs), subject associations, and other higher education institutions both in the UK and overseas. Staff also engage with QAA work, such as the current International Benchmarking project relating to student support. There is a commitment to community and industry engagement, and there are examples of the ways in which employability and industry awareness are being integrated into the curriculum, such as the Interact 2010 project in the School of Architecture, where third year students work in teams to replicate the collaborative process involved in building design.

92   While there is evidence of strong engagement with the national Enhancement Themes by individual staff, engagement across the School is variable, for example not all programmes complete the section of the APM template relating to engagement with the Themes. The School recognises the need to undertake further work to develop a culture of enhancement, and might wish to consider developing more formal and consistently applied approaches to recording and sharing the ways in which the activities of individual staff impact on the curriculum and the quality of the student learning experience more generally. In particular, the School acknowledges that it needs to communicate and contextualise the Enhancement Themes more effectively in order to engage a broader range of staff.

The effectiveness of the institution's approach to identifying, disseminating and implementing good practice in the context of its strategic approach to enhancement

93 Staff identified a wide range of informal opportunities for sharing good practice within programmes and across the School. GSA recognises that finding appropriate mechanisms to share good practice more effectively and to link informal and formal processes is an area for further development. There is evidence of effective sharing of good practice among postgraduate course directors and programme teams, which has been facilitated by the Postgraduate Coordinator. This has resulted in the development of an agreed common research module for all taught postgraduate students.

94 Overall dissemination of good practice is effective at an informal level, and GSA is encouraged to put mechanisms in place to support a more formal and structured approach to the dissemination of good practice across the School.

The effectiveness of the institution's approach to enhancing collaborative provision

95 Collaborative activities have played an important role in informing the School's internationalisation strategy, and international exchange programmes operate with a number of overseas partner institutions. The defining aspects of the School's four-year Bachelor of Design (B.Des) and five-year integrated Master of European Design (MEDes) programmes are their international dimension and a focus on foreign language competency and social science research methods. Both programmes operate through a partnership network of European design schools, and MEDes students undergo two one-year academic exchanges at institutions within the network.

Conclusion

Effectiveness of the institution's management of the student learning experience

96 Overall, students are positive about their experience at GSA. They highlight the studio-based approach to learning and particularly value the accessibility, approachability and commitment of the teaching and technical staff. GSA identifies creativity as the defining characteristic of the student experience and regards the integration of criticism, theory and practice as being key to the learning experience for all students.

97 Although the Student Record System provides basic information which is fit for purpose, it does not enable monitoring of differentiated groups of students, nor is it used routinely to track cohort progression at the programme level for all students, and GSA is encouraged to progress the current review of its approach to data management and reporting.

98 Student representation and feedback mechanisms are more effective within the school and departmental structure than at the institutional level. At the subject level, representation is effective in dealing with operational matters which impact on the delivery of programmes. Communication beyond school level is not as effective, and students highlighted a lack of consultation in relation to broader institutional agendas such as estate development plans. GSA is encouraged to ensure that there are effective formal feedback processes at all levels throughout the institution, and to ensure that there is effective communication with students in relation to action taken beyond the subject level, including in relation to the decant process, which is linked to the GSA's forthcoming estate development plan.

99 Students are generally satisfied with the various ways in which they are assessed and highlight the value of the feedback they receive on their work during critiques, in which peer assessment helps to develop self-reflective skills and the ability to evaluate their own work. However, there is lack of clarity about the purpose of and relationship between formative and summative assessment and, in particular, a lack of understanding about the relationship of descriptive indicators to summative grade outcomes. GSA is strongly encouraged to consider the

ways in which it can enable students to develop a clearer understanding of the role of assessment in contributing to final degree outcomes.

100   All students are supported by a Learning Resources Department which comprises the Library, Computer Centre and Archives and Collections. The Library, in particular, provides a responsive range of services, including InfosmART, an online information and research skills package. Taught postgraduate students expressed a high level of satisfaction with their programmes, which have a common research methodologies core, some aspects of which are shared with postgraduate research students. Postgraduate provision is well supported and coordinated by the Postgraduate Coordinator.

101   GSA has successfully supported a wide range of staff to undertake a PgCert in Learning and Teaching, and the wide range of staff undertaking this qualification is a feature of positive practice. Although part-time staff have the same right of access to staff development opportunities as full-time staff, GSA acknowledges that more could be done to enable part-time staff to participate, and the School is encouraged to pursue this. A successful record of teaching is included as a supporting criterion for promotion to a personal professorship through the University of Glasgow. GSA does not otherwise have a promotional route for learning and the School is encouraged to consider the development of formal structures to support and reward excellence in learning and teaching as part of a clearly articulated staff development policy.

Effectiveness of the institution's arrangements for institution-led monitoring and review of quality, and academic standards of awards

102   GSA has processes in place which enable it to secure academic standards and assure the quality of the student experience. The Annual Programme Monitoring process in particular is robust and thorough, and has been enhanced by the addition of Quality Enhancement Plans. GSA is encouraged to develop these Plans further to ensure they have an enhancement rather than an operational focus. GSA is also encouraged to clarify the process by which outcomes from Annual Programme Monitoring are considered in the strategic planning process.

103   New periodic review procedures have been introduced with effect from 2009-10 and have yet to be fully embedded. In particular, GSA is encouraged to clarify the distinctions between its validation, revalidation and review arrangements. GSA intends to publish its procedures for institution-led monitoring and review in the Academic Handbook, which would be a positive step in ensuring that staff are aware of the revised arrangements that GSA is strongly encouraged to pursue.

104   Since the 2005 ELIR, a common Code of Assessment has been introduced. Further work is now required to embed the Code in order for it to have an impact on assessment practice at the programme level. GSA also recognises the need to review its approach to assessment in the context of its Common Academic Framework. The Framework is not yet fully implemented for undergraduate programmes, where agreement on a common assessment strategy, particularly in relation to formative and summative assessment, has not yet been achieved. GSA is strongly encouraged to consider the balance of formative and summative assessment of credit-bearing units, and to clarify the way in which formative assessment relates to a summative decision on students' work. GSA should also complete the unitisation and credit-rating of its undergraduate programmes in line with the Framework, and proceed with their revalidation as a matter of priority.

Effectiveness of the institution's implementation of its strategic approach to quality enhancement

105   GSA recognises the need to undertake further work to develop a culture of enhancement within the School. It has identified the Quality Enhancement in Learning and Teaching (QELT) Strategy as having the potential to be a significant driver for quality enhancement if it is re-prioritised in the School's strategic framework. GSA is therefore encouraged to progress its planned review of the QELT Strategy.

106   A variety of enhancement activities are evident within the academic schools but these are not coordinated centrally or linked to institutional priorities. There is also a need to identify and disseminate the key learning points arising from good practice adopted by individual staff to ensure this can provide opportunities for all students to benefit. GSA is encouraged to reflect on the way in which it supports the development and sustainability of practices to enhance the student learning experience across the School.

107   There is strong engagement with the national Enhancement Themes by individual staff but engagement across GSA is variable and the School acknowledges that it needs to communicate and contextualise the Themes more effectively in order to engage a broader range of staff. Similarly, dissemination of good practice is effective at an informal level, and GSA is encouraged to put mechanisms in place to support a more formal and structured approach to the dissemination of good practice across the School.

Overarching confidence judgement

108   The findings of the ELIR indicate that there can be **confidence** in GSA's current, and likely future, management of the academic standards of the awards it offers and the quality of the student learning experience it provides. This level of confidence is contingent upon the School fully implementing the Common Academic Framework for all of its provision as a matter of priority.