

Enhancement-led Institutional Review of Glasgow School of Art

Outcome Report

October 2020



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About the Enhancement-led Institutional Review method

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

Further details about ELIR can be found in an accompanying [brief guide](#),³ including an overview of the review method, information about review teams, and explanations of follow-up action.

About this review

This is the Outcome Report of the ELIR conducted by QAA at Glasgow School of Art (GSA). The review took place as follows: Planning Visit on 4-5 March 2020 and Review Visit on 26-30 October 2020.

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

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

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

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

This report sets out the threshold judgement formed by the ELIR team on:

- the current and likely future effectiveness of the institution's arrangements for managing academic standards and enhancing the quality of the student learning experience.

The threshold judgement for this report can be found on page 3, followed by commendations and recommendations.

A more detailed [Technical Report](#) is also available for this review.⁴ The Technical Report sets out the team's findings under each heading in the ELIR 4 method.

¹ About ELIR:

www.qaa.ac.uk/scotland/en/reviewing-higher-education-in-scotland/enhancement-led-institutional-review

² About QAA: www.qaa.ac.uk/scotland

³ Brief Guide to ELIR: www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/reports/brief-guide-to-elir-method.pdf

⁴ Technical Report: www.qaa.ac.uk/reviewing-higher-education/quality-assurance-reports/Glasgow-School-of-Art

About Glasgow School of Art

Glasgow School of Art (GSA) was founded in 1845 as one of the first Government Schools of Design, promoting good design for the manufacturing industries. It became the 'Glasgow School of Art' in 1869. GSA is an accredited institution of the University of Glasgow, which has validated GSA's programmes since 1992.

GSA's stated purpose is to contribute to a better world through creative practice, education and research.

The academic structure comprises five schools: the School of Fine Art; the School of Design; the Mackintosh School of Architecture; and two - the Innovation School and the School of Simulation and Visualisation - which had been established since the previous ELIR in 2014.

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

GSA has been impacted significantly by the fires in the Mackintosh Building in 2014 and 2018. The fires had wide-ranging implications for every aspect of GSA's activity, particularly estate management, senior leadership composition, staff and student experience, and curriculum design and location.

Threshold judgement about Glasgow School of Art

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

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

Commendations

- 1 The School is commended for the following areas of good practice.
- 2 **Widening access** - there is a strategic and sustained commitment, evidenced by a range of targeted activities, to promote widening access which supports students to enter GSA or other higher education institutions. GSA has established a variety of successful long-standing school and college partnerships, notably with Castlehead High School, which raise the aspirations and achievements of young people. The ongoing support provided by GSA to widening access students contributes to high retention rates.
- 3 **Support for articulating students** - GSA has effective support in place for students entering the School through an articulation route and has made significant progress in supporting students to successful completion. In particular, the Associate Student Scheme provides college students with valuable access to the library and virtual learning environment (VLE), as well as enabling students to benefit from a range of engagement opportunities at GSA.
- 4 **Student support services** - GSA provides a range of support services that are successful and responsive in meeting evolving student needs. These services have been particularly effective in supporting students with the move to online provision. It is positive that a number of staff have completed qualifications focused on the provision of counselling services in a digital environment.
- 5 **Decolonisation of the curriculum** - to support progress at GSA towards decolonising the curriculum, library staff have worked effectively to ensure library collections and reading lists better reflect GSA's multi-cultural environment.
- 6 **Technology support** - staff from the Learning Technology and Learning and Teaching teams have worked effectively together to support the upskilling of staff in online curriculum delivery. The Technical Services teams have introduced a variety of initiatives to support students in producing work in an online environment.
- 7 **Digital inclusion strategy** - to enable all students to engage in online study effectively during the pandemic, GSA has made good progress in implementing a digital inclusion strategy to support students with the transition to a blended model of learning.

Recommendations

8 The School is asked to consider the following recommendations.

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

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

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

12 **Communication and consultation** - review (as planned), develop and implement a comprehensive and effective communications strategy, which includes all key stakeholders. In particular, in partnership with students, establish and embed effective and accessible communication channels which are responsive to student comment and engagement, and which foster a culture of mutual respect, openness and information sharing.

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

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

15 **Institutional progress with equality and diversity** - progress with plans to develop and embed the institutional approach to equality and diversity, introducing an

effective mechanism to oversee and monitor GSA-wide action including implementation of recommendations resulting from Equality Impact Assessments.

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

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

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

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

20 **Using data to enhance the student experience** - progress with the development of a Data Strategy to facilitate the integration of data from diverse sources, and inform institutional decision-making and the development of policy and practice for use across the entire School.

21 **Review of student-facing professional support services** - implement a systematic and effective mechanism for reviewing the contribution of the professional support services to the quality of the student experience, incorporating external specialist expertise and student engagement.

22 **Responding to student feedback** - continue to develop an effective and systematic approach to understanding and addressing student feedback, drawing on the National Student Survey and institutional surveys, which allows for the identification and resolution of issues in sufficient detail both at institutional and programme level, and which supports the effective sharing of good practice.

23 **Independence in student-facing processes** - to avoid potential conflicts of interest and aid transparency, GSA should undertake a review of the extent to which there is independence of decision-making in the complaints handling process, in the Good Cause procedure for summative assessments, including the Good Cause Board, and similar procedures.

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

What happens next?

25 QAA Scotland will continue to engage with Glasgow School of Art about the arrangements for follow-up to the ELIR.

Further information

26 A more detailed [Technical Report](#) is also available for this review. The Technical Report sets out the team's findings under each heading in the ELIR 4 method.

27 This review and its findings relate to the institution as a whole and do not provide information about individual programmes of study or subjects. For further information about those, contact the institution or [visit its website](#).

28 University sector institutions in Scotland also engage in systematic Enhancement Theme activity. Further information about that work, which has a sector-wide and institutional focus, can be found on the [Enhancement Themes website](#).

29 Further information about QAA Scotland and the enhancement-led approach, including the ELIR method, can be found on the [QAA website](#).

30 For further information about the Scottish Funding Council see www.sfc.ac.uk

QAA2588 - R10969 - Apr 21

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