

# Scottish Quality Concerns Scheme: Targeted Peer Review

University of Glasgow

Review Report

October 2025

## Contents

<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>About University of Glasgow .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Concerns raised .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Action under the SQCS .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The Targeted Peer Review Plan .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Outcomes and findings .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Explanation of findings .....</b>	<b>4</b>
Assessment regulations and award of credit .....	4
Extension request processes .....	10
Student communications .....	14
Mitigation of risk and institutional oversight .....	15
Student engagement in institutional change .....	21
<b>Next steps .....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Summary of recommendations .....</b>	<b>25</b>

## Introduction

1 This report sets out the findings of a Targeted Peer Review (TPR) of the University of Glasgow (the University) under the Scottish Quality Concerns Scheme (SQCS).<sup>1</sup> A TPR is an outcome of the SQCS where there is evidence of a significant issue relating to academic standards or the quality of the student experience at a Scottish higher education institution (HEI). The aim of a TPR is to support timely resolution of concerns raised and safeguard and improve the overall quality of Scottish higher education by exploring potential weaknesses and systemic risks to academic standards and the student experience.<sup>2</sup>

2 The SQCS sets out QAA Scotland (QAAS)'s remit as it relates to concerns about how Scottish HEIs manage their academic standards, the quality of learning opportunities, and the information made available about their provision.

3 QAAS received a submission to the SQCS from the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) on 2 July 2025, the outcome of which was that the Concern progress to a TPR. The TPR process took place from 4 September to 13 November 2025. A two-day on-site visit took place from 28 to 29 October 2025 and included eight meetings with staff (senior, academic, and professional services) and students, as well as a presentation delivered by the University. The University of Glasgow cooperated fully with the TPR.

4 This report presents findings based on the review of evidence made available from the time of the submission to the SQCS on 2 July 2025 to the submission of the final piece of evidence by the University on 13 November 2025.

5 The TPR was conducted by:

- Dr Claire Carney (Reviewer)
- Professor Matthew Leeke (Reviewer)
- Edward Pollock (Student Reviewer)
- Peter Watson (Reviewer).

## About University of Glasgow

6 The University of Glasgow is a research-intensive HEI with teaching and research degree-awarding powers. The University is organised into four colleges, 24 schools and 10 university services directorates.

7 The University's student headcount has increased from 29,549 in academic year 2019-20 to 35,537 in academic year 2024-25. The University delivers a range of professional and academic programmes and has approximately 4,500 live courses.<sup>3</sup>

8 Additionally, the University has three transnational education (TNE) partners across four campuses in China and Singapore, and validates degree programmes for The Glasgow

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1 SQCS: <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/scotland/reviewing-quality-in-scotland/how-to-raise-a-concern-in-scotland>

2 TPR process: [https://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaas/reviewing-he-in-scotland/targeted-peer-review-process.pdf?sfvrsn=a742aa81\\_4](https://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaas/reviewing-he-in-scotland/targeted-peer-review-process.pdf?sfvrsn=a742aa81_4)

3 University of Glasgow uses 'course' to describe a 'self-contained unit of study on a particular topic with defined level, credit value, aims, intended learning outcomes, mode(s) of delivery, scheme of assessment and possibly also pre- and co-requisites'. All references to 'course' in the report adhere to this definition.

School of Art (GSA), Scotland's Rural College (SRUC), and Edinburgh Theological Seminary (ETS).

## Concerns raised

9 The SFC submitted a Concern to the SQCS about the University of Glasgow on 2 July 2025. The Concern was submitted on the basis of maintenance of academic standards and the potential for systemic failure in following the University's assessment regulations. The submitter made a specific reference to the management of extension requests/*Good Cause* processes, the decision-making process of degrees (including exam boards), and communication mechanisms for notifying students of the outcomes of exam boards and supporting them in identifying their next steps following receipt of outcomes. The Concern was submitted following an internal investigation by the University in response to the death of a student. The internal investigation made recommendations for the University. This Concern is focused on the potential for systemic issues at the University and, as such, did not focus on the circumstances of the individual student.

## Action under the SQCS

10 In line with the SQCS process, QAAS undertook an Eligibility Review of the Concern, including assessing the evidence against the UK Quality Code 2024. The final eligibility criterion of the Eligibility Review, 'whether there is the potential for the matter raised to be systemic', was met. A Concern Assessment, to determine action to be taken, took place following confirmation of eligibility of the Concern for the SQCS. To support the Eligibility Review and Concern Assessment, QAAS used evidence from the submitter and the University, as well as drawing on previous external review reports (Quality Enhancement and Standards Review, 2023, and Enhancement-led Institutional Review, 2019) and the University's Self-Evaluation and Action Plan (SEAP).<sup>4</sup> Details of the process stages are available in the SQCS.<sup>5</sup>

11 The Concern Assessment concluded that a TPR was the most appropriate action to support timely resolution of the identified areas of potential weaknesses, to support the University to understand fully the potential systemic risks to academic standards and the quality of the student experience identified within the evidence to date, and to provide recommendations for action (where determined appropriate by the TPR team).

12 As part of the Eligibility Review and Concern Assessment, QAAS acknowledged, and considered, that the University had conducted its own internal investigation (dated 9 February 2025) and auditing in response to the tragic circumstances that prompted the submission of this Concern. The internal investigation was focused on the School of Geographical and Earth Sciences (GES), where the student had been studying. However, the internal investigation identified issues that extended beyond the scope of an individual school. The findings of the University's internal investigation in the School of GES include the following:

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4 The University's SEAP was submitted in December 2024 for academic year 2023-24, with an action plan for academic year 2024-25.

5 SQCS: <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/scotland/reviewing-quality-in-scotland/how-to-raise-a-concern-in-scotland>

- (a) A 'systemic problem', stated as such, in following the University's assessment regulations.
- (b) Inconsistent practice including:
  - (i) maladministration of an exam board (notably, lack of clarity in minute-taking);
  - (ii) communication/lack of clarity about communication of options for students who are at risk of not graduating as [they] expected;
  - (iii) multiple methods of extension requests (including *Good Cause Policy*);
  - (iv) overreliance on individual professional services staff ('professional non-academic' (PNA) staff) regarding extension requests (including *Good Cause Policy*) and communication with students;
  - (v) poor record-keeping/lack of a coherent system for managing individual student cases;
  - (vi) perception that individual students had responsibility to follow up their own individual cases if they had not received a response from the School [of GES] (via PNA staff).

13 As a result, the TPR, in part, considered the effectiveness of the action taken by the University following the internal investigation, including response to the recommendations, and plans for future actions. Evidence from all stages of the SQCS was shared with the TPR team.

## The Targeted Peer Review Plan

14 A TPR has a bespoke review plan setting out the approach to the review, information on the identified lines of enquiry, proposed (additional) sources of evidence, process milestones, and the key external sector reference points relevant to the lines of enquiry. The TPR Plan is developed by QAAS based on information available at the Eligibility Review and Concern Assessment. The review plan is shared with the institution and the review team, and any deviation from the plan must be discussed and agreed with QAAS.

15 Evidence submitted under the SQCS gave rise to several lines of enquiry and questions, which were identified due to the potential systemic risk to academic standards and the quality of the student experience. The lines of enquiry and associated questions are set out in each section of this report and formed the parameters of the TPR team's investigation.

16 The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF)<sup>6</sup> and the UK Quality Code 2024<sup>7</sup> were identified as the relevant external sector reference points for this TPR, with particular reference to the following sector-agreed principles (SAP) in the UK Quality Code (in the context of the lines of enquiry): SAP1: Taking a strategic approach to managing quality and standards; SAP2: Engaging students as partners; SAP3: Resourcing delivery of a high-quality learning experience; SAP7: Designing, developing, approving and modifying programmes; SAP10: Supporting students to achieve their potential; SAP11: Teaching,

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6 SCQF: <https://scqf.org.uk/>

7 UK Quality Code 2024: <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/the-quality-code/2024>. The Tertiary Quality Enhancement Framework (TQEF) was introduced in academic year 2024-25 and has been mapped to the UK Quality Code 2024.

learning and assessment; and SAP12: Operating concerns, complaints and appeals processes.

## Outcomes and findings

17 The TPR team identified areas for development and weaknesses in the areas reviewed, which indicate systemic risks at the University. The TPR team made recommendations for the University to address, which are set out in this report and summarised at **Summary of recommendations**.

18 The TPR team **recommends** that the University is subject to additional institutional liaison meetings in academic years 2025-26 and 2026-27 to monitor and report regularly on progress against all the recommendations within this report.<sup>8</sup>

19 The TPR team **recommends** that the University's next external peer review takes place in academic year 2027-28 and considers progress against all the recommendations contained within this report.<sup>9</sup>

## Explanation of findings

### Assessment regulations and award of credit

**Are the current assessment regulations (including Code of Assessment<sup>10</sup>) effective to ensure standards are maintained consistently (and awards made)?**

20 The TPR team found that the assessment regulations and the associated guidance set out a comprehensive and internally coherent framework of principles, roles and processes, although, in practice, the drafting is long, dense and complex, which staff find difficult to interpret consistently. The University acknowledges this position and has committed to reform. The Academic Standards Committee (ASC) considered an outline of an assessment regulation simplification programme in October 2025, which includes removal of the 75% rule (see paragraphs 33 and 34).<sup>11</sup> Consistency is also affected by how awards are

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8 Institutional liaison meetings (ILMs) form part of the Annual Quality Engagement (AQE) in the Tertiary Quality Enhancement Framework (TQEF). ILMs are delivered by QAAS: <https://www.sfc.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/SFC-Guidance-on-Quality-for-colleges-and-universities-AY2024-25-to-2030-31-refresh.pdf> (pp. 25-26).

9 At the time of the TPR visit, the University's Tertiary Quality Enhancement Review (TQER) was due to take place in academic year 2028-29: <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/scotland/en/reviewing-quality-in-scotland/scottish-quality-enhancement-arrangements/tertiary-quality-enhancement-review>.

10 The TPR team considered the 2024-25 version of the Code of Assessment and Guide to the Code of Assessment throughout this TPR. Therefore, all references to the Code of Assessment and Guide to the Code of Assessment in this report are to the 2024-25 version. **Note:** the Guide to the Code of Assessment is a replication of the Code of Assessment with worked examples.

11 The '75% rule' refers to the University's minimum requirement for the award of credit for a course and, ultimately, for a degree award. This rule forms part of how the University assesses whether a student meets the intended learning outcomes (ILOs) for their study and how credit is awarded. There are distinctions between honours and non-honours programmes and specific circumstances for students who have applied for 'Good Cause' (known as 'Extenuating Circumstances' from academic year 2025-26). This rule is set out in the University's (Guide to the) Code of Assessment under section §16.41. (*Footnote continues on next page*)

calculated across the University, with many calculation mechanisms maintained locally in schools. Evidence confirmed that schools use locally derived individualised spreadsheets, as demonstrated in the coverage record and a sample of exam board minutes. Staff and students who met with the TPR team reinforced this picture: senior staff confirmed multiple school-specific spreadsheet routes and described a central 'traffic-light' view of calculation mechanisms, and students reported confusion about how Grade Point Averages (GPA) were calculated prior to the introduction of a course aggregation<sup>12</sup> tool (phased introduction from September 2024). Furthermore, staff noted that the University's use of a 22-point scale for GPA was the most common area of external feedback on the Code of Assessment, underscoring the need for clearer calculation routes and communication. Evidence from external workshop outputs identified spreadsheet reliance as a risk and proposed actions to reduce it, while information about the course aggregation tool described the intended system-based route for course-level aggregation and auditability. Senior staff indicated an active roll-out and staged replacement of local processes. The University also records that its current approach to awarding credit is out of step with sector practice and that the final award and credit are treated as separate constructs, with this separation confirmed in meetings with senior staff. The TPR team explored the University's plans to extend the course aggregation tool to programme aggregation<sup>13</sup> and staff reported that the timetable for this extension depends on the regulation simplification programme.

21 The TPR team recognises that the assessment regulations and guidance provide breadth and structure but is of the view that the assessment regulations are not fully effective in securing consistent interpretation and decision-making across the University, and therefore pose a systemic risk to academic standards. Effectiveness is constrained by the convoluted Code of Assessment and a reliance on locally maintained calculation routes, both of which introduce variation and the possibility of error, further presenting a systemic risk to academic standards. The acknowledgement that current credit practice diverges from sector norms and that award and credit are handled separately adds to this variability until the planned changes are implemented. The University has articulated a regulation simplification programme with defined ownership, milestones and risk controls, and has set

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At course level, the minimum requirement for the award of credit is the submission of at least 75% of the course's summative assessment. At non-honours undergraduate and postgraduate taught courses, the 75% rule is applied on a course-by-course basis. Administrative grades, such as 'Credit Withheld', prompt a reassessment opportunity for students on non-honours undergraduate and postgraduate taught programmes.

At honours programme level, the application of the 75% rule differs. Completion of ILOs is reached as a percentage of the totality of summative assessed work across all courses (which represents a difference between the non-honours undergraduate and postgraduate taught courses). Where a student has completed more than 75% of the total summative assessed work across all their courses, they will be awarded the credit-bearing Grade H (0 grade points) for any missed assessment. This grade is then used for the honours aggregation process (the calculation of a student's outcome from the grades awarded for all their courses, including those that received a Grade H).

There are specific circumstances applied to the 75% rule where a student has submitted a 'Good Cause' (known as 'Extenuating Circumstances' from academic year 2025-26) claim. At senior honours level, if a student has completed 75% or more of all summative assessments but has had a 'Good Cause' claim accepted, the honours outcome will be based on the completed work (the credit-bearing Grade H is therefore not used for the assessment affected by 'Good Cause' within the calculations for the final outcome). Mandatory requirements for programmes, for example, the honours dissertation, cannot be excused by 'Good Cause'.

The University's (Guide to the) Code of Assessment states that schools may set different requirements for the award of credit, as set out in section §16.44. This could include differences mandated by Professional Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs) for professional programmes.

12 'Course aggregation' refers to the calculation of all grades on a course.

13 'Programme aggregation' refers to the calculation of grades on all courses for a programme of study.

out a route toward greater system use for the aggregation of course and programme marks. The TPR team endorses the University's proposed changes to reduce variability and strengthen assurance at exam boards.

22 The TPR team **recommends** that the University prioritises completion of the regulation simplification programme to enable implementation of an appropriate system for programme-level aggregation by academic year 2027-28.

### **How does the institution evaluate the effectiveness of its assessment regulations regularly?**

23 The University's evaluation activity is routed through formal committees, defined roles and external input. Minutes of the Academic Regulations Committee (ARC)<sup>14</sup> show specific regulatory issues being raised, discussed and progressed to further action. Evidence of the University's internal quality processes demonstrates external examiner reporting and sets out periodic review schedules, which create an evaluative loop across schools and programmes. Alongside this routine governance, the University has recently commissioned external workshops and produced cross-cutting outputs that link identified risks to concrete actions, named owners and indicative timelines. Senior leaders who met with the TPR team described scheduled policy reviews at Education Policy & Strategy Committee (EdPSC) and an ongoing Learning and Teaching Policy Group (LTPG), evidencing planned multi-year review points and escalation routes. The TPR team reviewed a decision trail, which evidences that evaluation has resulted in targeted amendments to the Code of Assessment and to associated guidance text, providing a visible line from issue to change.

24 The TPR team concludes that the evaluation arrangements for the University's assessment regulations demonstrate intent and meaningful activity across multiple sources, which aligns with work on consistency at exam boards and on aggregation of marks. Committee minutes, the analysis of external examiner patterns and the external workshop outputs show that issues are being surfaced and acted on. However, the evidence reviewed by the TPR team does not present a view of confirmed marks that quantifies sampling, confirms coverage by college and school, and records rechecks that demonstrate closure of findings in a repeating cycle. However, the decision trail provides a concrete example of evaluation leading to amendments in regulations, and the workshop actions provide a structured basis that can be integrated into the annual governance calendar.

25 The TPR team **recommends** that the University establishes and implements an annual assurance cycle owned by the Academic Regulations Committee (ARC) that specifies sampling frames, coverage by school, timelines for follow-up and a published synthesis of external examiner themes mapped to actions and owners.

### **How does the institution ensure consistency of application, interpretation and understanding of assessment regulations (across all courses, programmes and schools), and is this effective?**

26 In response to the internal investigation, the University issued written guidance for Assessment Officers and for Chairs of Boards of Examiners to support consistent practice at

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14 The University's Academic Regulations Sub-Committee (ARSC) has changed its name to Academic Regulations Committee (ARC). Evidence provided refers to both names of the committee. For consistency, the most recent name is used within this report and encompasses any activity undertaken by the previous ARSC or current ARC.



exam boards.<sup>15</sup> A formal role description for Assessment Officers reviewed by the TPR team sets out pre-board scrutiny by more than one person and defines documentation standards for exam board preparation and record-keeping. A central mailbox captures recurring questions from staff and records agreed interpretations of the Code of Assessment that can be shared across schools. A standard template for Board of Examiners meeting minutes is available to promote consistent recording of decisions, checks and the rationale for outcomes at exam boards. An audit of course handbook template uptake shows progress toward consistent student-facing information, which complements the focus on consistency at exam boards. Evidence includes briefings and training materials designed to build common understanding of the regulations and of recent changes to the Code of Assessment. The TPR team met with Assessment Officers and External Examiners, who reported limited or no formal training on the Code of Assessment and described reliance on local briefing and practice. Furthermore, the TPR team heard from student-facing and support staff that familiarity with the Code of Assessment is often on-the-job rather than through mandatory training.

27 The evidence made available to the TPR team showed that controls for consistent understanding and application of the University's assessment regulations exist, but the TPR team is not assured of their reach and usage. The Assessment Officer guidance and role definition set clear expectations, the mailbox supports shared interpretations, and the minutes template provides a common structure, but there is no single view that demonstrates comprehensive training coverage by role or routine monitoring of template use across schools. The University confirmed that there is no institutional record of training on the Code of Assessment. The handbook audit shows movement on student-facing consistency, and the training materials indicate an ongoing effort to embed common practice. Evidence from committees on translating quality outcomes into actions and the analysis of external examiner patterns provide routes to track whether interpretations are being applied consistently and corrected where needed. Staff who met with the TPR team confirmed variable training and school-level inconsistency, which supports the need for systematic reach and monitoring. The inconsistency and variability in methods for application, interpretation and understanding of assessment regulations identified by the TPR team indicates a systemic risk to academic standards. The findings discussed in this section support the recommendation made by the TPR team in paragraph 72 (see section ***Mitigation of risk and institutional oversight***).

#### **How does the institution ensure that award outcomes (including degree outcomes) are calculated and recorded consistently, and is this effective?**

28 The TPR team recognises that the University is moving from diverse, locally derived and maintained spreadsheets towards centrally supported routes for calculation and recording. Evidence of the course aggregation tool sets out the design for course-level aggregation and the associated audit trail. Programme-level aggregation practice remains mixed across schools, as evidenced by the coverage log demonstrating where U-PAS (Universal Programme Aggregation Spreadsheet), a programme aggregation tool created by the University, and related tools are used and where exceptions to the use of programme aggregation tools exist. Evidence reviewed by the TPR team shows that external workshop outputs identify reliance on non-centralised and manual spreadsheets as an institutional risk and list specific actions and owners for reducing that risk, including template packs and options for an assessment management system. Current recording practice is visible in a sample of exam board minutes. Project documentation links change in aggregation to the regulation simplification programme timetable, with dependencies and milestones that affect

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15 University of Glasgow use the term 'Boards of Examiners' for exam boards. Both terms are used within this report.

when local routes can be replaced. Staff who met with the TPR team confirmed that the course aggregation tool roll-out was planned over two years and that programme-level aggregation remains the higher-risk area, with senior staff confirming multiple spreadsheet routes outside of U-PAS (18 different spreadsheet formats, representing different calculation platforms, in total) and active prioritisation of 'red' risk programmes (see section **Mitigation of risk and institutional oversight**).

29 From the evidence available, the TPR team concludes that calculation and recording of grades is strengthening but remains in transition. There is evidence of the course aggregation tool improving standardisation and auditability at course level. There is no evidence of a single controlled route to programme aggregation across the University, and dependence on local spreadsheets varies by school. The TPR team considers that this variability introduces risk to consistency and traceability of outcomes and increases the burden on Assessment Officers and Chairs of Boards of Examiners during pre-board scrutiny and minuting. The linkage between aggregation and the regulation simplification programme is fundamental to progress, and the external workshop outputs show that the University is tracking movement against defined actions and milestones. Staff who met with the TPR team noted the exchange of spreadsheets on joint honours programmes and the status of roll-out of the course aggregation tool, which underscores the interim risk.

30 The TPR team concludes that the current arrangements for programme-level aggregation and recording remain weak and, accordingly, present a systemic risk to academic standards. Reliance on locally maintained spreadsheets and inconsistent routes to programme aggregation is evidenced in board minutes and meeting discussions and poses a risk to consistency and assurance at exam boards.

31 The TPR team **recommends**, as an immediate priority and before the next assessment diet in academic year 2025-26, that the University undertakes a rigorous review of all exam board spreadsheets currently in use, with institutional sign-off confirming that each is fit for purpose.

32 The course aggregation tool strengthens course-level standardisation, the project plan and milestones for the roll-out of this tool provide ownership and sequencing, and the external workshop actions give a practical route to reduce spreadsheet use. The TPR team **recommends** that the University continues with the planned harmonisation of mark aggregation and evaluation processes, including completing the scheduled roll-out of the course aggregation tool for courses in academic year 2025-26.

**How does the institution assure itself that intended learning outcomes are met when applying its assessment regulations, and is this effective? (For example, ensuring intended learning outcomes are met when awarding credit.)**

33 The relationship between schemes of assessment and intended learning outcomes is described in the Code of Assessment and the Guide to the Code of Assessment. Committee minutes record explicit discussion of the risk that intended learning outcomes can be missed under current rules and note actions to address that risk. The TPR team found that, currently, there is no formal mechanism that guarantees, at the point credit is awarded, that a student has demonstrated all intended learning outcomes for the course or programme, particularly where the 75% rule is applied. This gap is most visible where the 75% rule allows progression or award without demonstrating performance across the full set of assessed intended learning outcomes. Evidence reviewed by the TPR team on intended learning outcomes assurance and assessment rules sets out current handling and confirms the planned removal of the 75% rule as part of the regulation simplification programme (see paragraph 20). This was further confirmed by senior staff during the visit. The internal investigation emphasises the need for rules that are clear in operation and for moderation

that checks coverage and correctness in application of the assessment regulations when credit is awarded. Staff who met with the TPR team confirmed the TPR team's view and described ambiguity around thresholds and expectations. Students indicated uncertainty about how full intended learning outcome coverage is evidenced in practice.

34 The TPR team found evidence that demonstrates a clear policy intent but does not yet demonstrate consistent assurance across the University. The University acknowledges the risk, and confirmation that the 75% rule is being removed from the University's assessment regulations addresses evidence of the possibility that intended learning outcomes are not demonstrated at the point of award of credit. The TPR team found no evidence of sampled traces that follow outcomes from specification to assessed work and then to exam board decisions and confirmation of how exceptions are handled. The existing guidance for Assessment Officers and Chairs of Boards of Examiners and the standard minutes template provide structures that intend to record this check systematically, alongside the committee routes that translate findings into actions. The TPR team concludes that the arrangements in place at the time of the TPR visit do not provide assurance that, where the 75% rule is applied, all intended learning outcomes are met before credit is awarded. As a result, this signifies a systemic risk to academic standards and the TPR team endorses the University's plan to remove the 75% rule as part of the regulation simplification programme (see paragraphs 20-22).

**How does the institution ensure that school requirements for award of credit are in line with the institution-wide Code of Assessment, and is this effective?**

35 The TPR team found that the University expects any school-specific requirements for the award of credit to sit within the Code of Assessment and to be applied through defined roles at exam boards. Guidance for Assessment Officers and for Chairs of Boards of Examiners sets out the checks that should be visible in the record and clarifies responsibilities before, during and after an exam board. The Assessment Officer role description reinforces these expectations and lists the evidence that should be reviewed in advance, including local rules and their approval status. The minutes template provides a consistent structure that can surface explicit alignment checks, record rationale, and support later assurance work. Evidence of school-specific requirements describes how such requirements are proposed, approved and communicated within the Code of Assessment, which creates a basis for testing alignment in samples. The TPR team heard from staff that, outside of Professional Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRB)-mandated differences, staff regard the Code of Assessment as the principal framework for assessment. However, differences in local calculation routes and joint-programme arrangements can influence how alignment evidence is prepared and exchanged for exam boards, with support staff also observing variability between schools in interpreting deadlines and administrative rules.

36 The available evidence shows that alignment is well framed in policy and role guidance, but the TPR team concludes that evidence of consistent application across all schools has not been demonstrated and therefore presents a systemic risk to academic standards. The evidence describes the checks that should appear in the record and the routes by which misalignment should be escalated and acted upon. Periodic review schedules and external examiner patterns provide ways to test whether alignment is being maintained in practice, and the approval route for school-specific requirements gives a clear reference point for any sample-based verification. The TPR team found no routine evidence of meeting minutes capturing explicit alignment checks in representative samples or that committee follow-up closes any issues identified, especially where local overlays interact with calculation or presentation of marks at exam boards, further indicating a systemic risk to academic standards. Staff who met with the TPR team commented on joint honours processes and that school-level variability reinforces the need for systematic, cross-school verification.

37 The TPR team **recommends** that the University, by the 2026-27 academic cycle, strengthens scrutiny and oversight of exam boards by making the minutes template compulsory, introducing a short pre-board readiness checklist owned by the Assessment Officer, requiring explicit alignment statements where local or PSRB requirements apply, and regularly sampling minutes to verify that key checks are recorded.

## Extension request processes

**Does the proposed *Extenuating Circumstances Policy* effectively address the identified challenges with the previous *Good Cause Policy* and other extension request policies?**

38 The TPR team found that the University's previous *Good Cause (GC) Policy* (a process for students to report extenuating circumstances that may have affected the taking of exams, submission of other assessments, or their performance in assessments) and other extension request processes have been under active review since 2021. Students who met with the TPR team reported that several student representatives had sought reform of the *GC Policy* as part of their manifestos, signifying this as a key priority for the student body.

39 The TPR team learned that the challenges of the previous *GC Policy* were known to the University and included inconsistent application, leading to confusion for students. The internal investigation highlighted several different methods in place to deal with student extension requests across the University and the GC process was used by students in the School of Geographical and Earth Sciences (GES) to submit requests for all extensions. The evidence reviewed by the TPR team noted other challenges with the *GC Policy*, including students struggling to access appropriate support pathways; fragmented digital infrastructure, which created barriers for students seeking support and extensions; inconsistent operation of processes, outcomes and support across schools, colleges and campuses; potential for single points of failure; and complex evidence requirements for students seeking to submit GC claims or extension requests.

40 Staff who met with the TPR team explained that the timeframe required to develop and implement the new *Extenuating Circumstances (EC) Policy* approach was attributed to the University's decision to review the previous *GC Policy* within the broader context of institutional wellbeing policy development. Evidence reviewed by the TPR team indicated that this integrated approach was necessary to ensure alignment with wider institutional student support frameworks and strategic priorities. The aim of the new approach is to consolidate multiple related policies into a single framework, removing distinctions between extension request processes and the previous *GC Policy* and providing linkage to, and oversight of, *Interruption of Studies*, *Fitness to Study* and *Reasonable Adjustments* policies. The approach aimed to simplify the process for students and ensure that the new *EC Policy* was developed through a student wellbeing lens, with the intention of making it easier for students to navigate separate wellbeing procedures. Staff reported that the new *EC Policy* is supported by a central Transformation Team (a team governed by a Board to ensure executive oversight and institutional alignment, which drives change in a portfolio of areas over multiple years) and is a priority project for the University. Furthermore, the new policy was developed in consultation with multiple stakeholder groups and the Student Representative Council (SRC).

41 The TPR team learned that the new *EC Policy* was implemented from academic year 2025-26 and encompasses short-term extensions (up to five days) and that 'extenuating circumstances' refers to any situation that may affect a student's ability to complete any part of their course, such as attending an exam or submitting an assignment. The new approach aims to implement a single digital portal for all relevant EC claims. The University's platform for managing EC claims will incorporate case management functionality to enable progress

tracking of student claims and facilitate coordinated responses across schools and student support services. In addition, the case management system is intended to enhance the quality of data related to EC claims and improve the consistency of communications issued to students.

42 A central change in the new *EC Policy* is the introduction of a two-stage centrally managed case management system that separates the evaluation of personal circumstances from academic decision. Stage 1 was implemented in September 2025, with Stage 2 due to begin from semester 2 of academic year 2025-26. Evidence considered by the TPR team, at the time of the TPR visit, identified the following process:

- (a) Stage 1 (centrally managed with a wellbeing focus): Student Support Officers (SSOs), who are based in colleges, though managed by the Wellbeing Team, triage/review student EC claims, assess seriousness of issues raised and duration of the extension request, and connect students with wellbeing support or escalate to the Safeguarding Team as appropriate. This stage takes place within 24 hours of submission (excluding weekends).
- (b) Stage 2 (locally managed academic decision): schools decide the academic outcome (for example, a resit or extension) based on the outcome from Stage 1.

43 The TPR team found that the (centrally managed) Stage 1 functionality includes the introduction of a student-facing dashboard designed to enable transparent EC claim-tracking and standardised communication. This feature allows students to monitor the real-time status of their claims, with the intention of reducing single points of failure and promoting consistency in communications. The TPR team is of the view that this development addresses the challenge of single points of failure, inconsistency in communications with students, and limited visibility of claim status under the previous *GC Policy* process. Staff who met with the TPR team reported that, since Stage 1 implementation, more than 500 EC claims had been submitted at the time of the TPR visit.

44 The TPR team learned that involvement in triaging at Stage 1 is a new role for SSOs. As part of the University's Quality Enhancement and Standards Review (QESR) (2023), the QESR team recommended that the University *should ensure that the SSO role is understood and clearly signposted as being available to support all students, including postgraduate students*. During the visit, the TPR team found that the College of Arts and Humanities did not have an SSO in place but learned that recruitment of an SSO for the College is imminent. The TPR team welcomes the addition of the SSOs to the Wellbeing Team, providing an effective and useful 'hub and spoke' approach with the potential to provide a more consistent approach to Stage 1 of the EC process across schools. Given that the role of the SSO has expanded to include triaging in Stage 1 of the EC process, the TPR team **recommends** that, building on the QESR (2023) recommendation, the University ensures that the Student Support Officer role is clearly defined and fully communicated to, and understood by, staff and students at the University by the end of semester 2 of academic year 2025-26.

45 Staff who met with the TPR team expressed concern that resourcing of the wider team to support the new *EC Policy* was challenging, with specific reference to the capacity of the Safeguarding Team, following a recent increase in student referrals to the Wellbeing and Safeguarding Teams. Staff were unable to confirm if this reported increase reflected normal circumstances, because previous data on GC claims was not collected centrally under the previous *GC Policy*. The TPR team **recommends** that the University ensures adequate resourcing for the Wellbeing and Safeguarding Teams to meet the operational demands of the new Extenuating Circumstances process by the end of semester 2 of academic year 2025-26.

46 Evidence available to the TPR team demonstrated that short-term extensions (up to five days) are currently managed by individual schools, requiring students to contact their school to request an extension. The TPR team learned that under the new *EC Policy*, short-term extension requests will be integrated into an automated system from semester 2 of academic year 2025-26. This system will enable students to self-select the number of days required for an extension, thereby removing the need for school-level decision-making and streamlining the process. The TPR team noted, and endorses, that a key objective of the new system is to eliminate inconsistencies in extension management across schools. The automated nature of the system also presents an opportunity to collect data on students who request multiple extensions, enabling the University to identify those who may benefit from additional support interventions.

47 The TPR team found that the University accelerated the implementation of the *EC Policy* for academic year 2025-26. While this acceleration is welcomed, the TPR team advises that additional attention will be required for Stage 2 of the *EC Policy* implementation (locally managed academic decision) scheduled for semester 2 of academic year 2025-26. Staff and students who met with the TPR team expressed concern about the implementation timeline for Stage 2, indicating that central guidance and information was not currently available. Staff reported to the TPR team that upcoming workshops moving to a standardised system at Stage 2 were scheduled. Staff also indicated that three schools have created a common framework for Stage 2 decision-making, which is inclusive of elements that are semi-automated. The University anticipates that lessons from these three schools, combined with the planned workshops, will inform refinement of the system. Additionally, it was noted that while Stage 1 is a mandated process across the University, there will be nuances in local areas for Stage 2 for specific subject disciplines (Nursing was provided as an example). The TPR team **recommends** that the University monitors the Stage 2 process (locally managed academic decision) closely, as it is implemented from semester 2 of academic year 2025-26, responding promptly to any issues that emerge.

48 A further key element of the *EC Policy* is the introduction of Senate Assessors from academic year 2025-26. The TPR team learned that four Senate Assessors, who provide oversight and management of complex EC claims across the University, are currently in place. The University intends that the Senate Assessors will handle a small number of complex or 'precedent-setting' cases that require senior academic judgement, provide authoritative interpretations of regulations, and advise on cases involving multiple assessments or exceptional circumstances that fall outside of standard procedures; analyse trends in student claims and revise policy as appropriate; liaise with members of Senate, its committees, the SRC, and the wider community on issues and questions surrounding extenuating circumstances; and present an annual report to Senate. The TPR team heard that the University does not intend to provide training for Senate Assessors. Given the emerging nature and potential complexity of the information to be considered by Senate Assessors, the TPR team **recommends** that appropriate support, guidance, and continuing professional development is provided to ensure Senate Assessors are well prepared and fully aware of the potential academic and wellbeing implications for students, including possible impacts on qualification outcomes. The University should also ensure that appropriate systems are in place to record and monitor decisions that are made by Senate Assessors.

49 Overall, the TPR team endorses the development of the new *EC Policy*, as it provides institutional-level oversight of student wellbeing and promotes more consistent decision-making and communication across the University. Moreover, the TPR team concludes, from the evidence available, that the *EC Policy* addresses the challenges associated with the previous *GC Policy* at its stage of implementation at the time of the TPR visit.

**How does the institution ensure consistency of application, interpretation and understanding of assessment regulations with *Good Cause/Extenuating Circumstances Policy*, and is this effective?**

50 The TPR team found no evidence that the University was able to apply the previous *GC Policy* consistently across all schools at the University, which demonstrates a systemic risk to academic standards and the quality of the student experience under the previous *GC Policy*. A key reason for introducing the *EC Policy* was to address this issue by standardising processes, improving clarity, integrating student wellbeing while maintaining academic standards, and addressing the challenges highlighted in paragraph 39.

51 Evidence available to the TPR team demonstrated that, under the previous *GC Policy*, student claims were managed at school level, with each programme operating its own Good Cause Committee to determine action to be taken on a case-by-case basis. The TPR team is of the view that this decentralised model increased the likelihood of process replication and inconsistent decision-making across the University, therefore indicating a systemic risk to academic standards and the quality of the student experience under the previous *GC Policy*. The internal investigation further highlighted a range of different processes in place to manage student extension requests. Further evidence reviewed by the TPR team demonstrates communication between the SRC and the University regarding student experiences of the previous *GC Policy* and how it had been misinterpreted across different schools and individuals. Staff who met with the TPR team reported that the new centrally mandated system (Stage 1) had been introduced to prevent inconsistencies. The establishment of a centralised digital portal, combined with the role of Senate Assessors to oversee more complex cases at an institution level, is intended to minimise process replication and support consistent decision-making. In addition, a series of communications to staff, town hall meetings and workshops have been put in place to ensure that staff are aware of ongoing changes and where to access further information. Given the recent introduction of the *EC Policy*, it is not possible for the TPR team to evaluate its effectiveness.

**How does the institution intend to evaluate the new policy to ensure it is effective?**

52 Evidence reviewed by the TPR team outlines proposed structures and intended evaluation methods of the *EC Policy*. The effectiveness of the new *EC Policy*, as well as its continued assurance, will be monitored through strengthened institutional oversight and clearer accountability to Senate. This approach will draw on enhanced data collection processes and the formal involvement of dedicated Senate Assessors, as noted in paragraph 48.

53 The TPR team is of the view that centralising Stage 1 of the *EC Policy* decision-making will enable the University to gather data consistently from across the institution, including the number of claims, processing timelines, and associated outcomes. This data will form the basis of annual reports to Senate, coordinated by the newly appointed Senate Assessors for Extenuating Circumstances in collaboration with the Clerk of Senate and the Director of Academic Services. In addition, the Senate Assessors will maintain oversight of policy documentation, review referred cases and provide a structured route for ongoing Senate scrutiny.

54 The University intends to gather qualitative insights through staff and student surveys and the TPR team heard that the Transformation Team had completed user testing with staff and students on the new dashboard for EC claims. The user testing indicated that students have found it easier to use and staff have found it useful to have complete oversight of the number of claims, replacing previously used local methods to track claims. The University proposes that student perspectives will be routinely captured through an established consultation framework that includes targeted surveys of EC claimants. Operational

feedback will also be sought via monthly meetings with Chief Advisers of Studies. The TPR team **recommends** that an evaluation of the new *Extenuating Circumstances Policy* and process be undertaken at the end of academic year 2025-26, with ongoing monitoring in subsequent years. An evaluation framework should be established to actively track and monitor the impact of the new policy and process through defined metrics, regular review meetings, and the systematic collection of student and staff feedback, and put in place measures to address identified issues.

## Student communications

### How is the institution addressing the identified shortcomings in the standard of communications about award outcomes across the institution, and is this effective?

55 The University has acknowledged shortcomings in award outcome communications identified in the internal investigation, indicating that, currently, each school uses a series of local templates to communicate award or progression outcomes to students. The TPR team found that the University has initiated a new project to co-create (with students) the format and content of Board of Examiners outcome letters and Progression Committee letters through the Student Voice within the Quality Framework Working Group (SVQFWG). The SVQFWG is co-chaired by the Vice President Education from the Student Representative Council (SRC) with a university staff member. Students who met with the TPR team reported that the SVQFWG is highly consultative, engaging and reflective of student engagement and partnership. Evidence reviewed by the TPR team indicated that this student communications project is structured across five phases, leading to the delivery of the revised award outcome letters at the end of academic year 2025-26 and with formal adoption across the University in academic year 2026-27. The TPR team concludes that it is too early to assess the effectiveness of the new 'award outcomes letter'. The TPR team **recommends** that the University continues to adhere to the stated implementation timeline for the student communications project, with development of the revised award outcome letters by the end of academic year 2025-26 and formal adoption in academic year 2026-27.

56 The approach taken by the University is aligned with the ongoing *Extenuating Circumstances (EC) Policy* reforms (see section **Extension request processes**), ensuring that decisions and next steps are communicated consistently and include appropriate signposting to institutional wellbeing and support services.

57 The University has outlined an institutional commitment to 'compassionate communication'.<sup>16</sup> Evidence reviewed by the TPR team indicates that targeted guidance and training were delivered to staff with responsibility for Boards of Examiners within the School of Geographical and Earth Sciences (GES) in March 2025, following the internal investigation. While variations of this training have reportedly been delivered elsewhere in the University, the TPR team found no evidence of the extent of coverage, frequency, or scope beyond this school. Staff who met with the TPR team indicated limited awareness of this training and highlighted the absence of a shared standard for compassionate communication. Nevertheless, the TPR team is of the view that the training materials

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<sup>16</sup> 'Compassionate communication' is a concept adopted by some universities, including those in the Russell Group, to improve their interactions with students. The approach involves clear, empathetic, and supportive communication that aligns with values of kindness, respect, timeliness and inclusivity. This approach is a commitment to understanding student needs and ensuring that policies and communications are delivered in a way that is timely, thoughtful, and beneficial to all students (reference: <https://arc.ac.uk/student-commitment>).



provided set out clear principles that could provide a valuable framework for wider adoption.

58 Students who met with the TPR team noted that although the University strives to be compassionate, receiving formal University communications can, as noted by one student, feel 'daunting'. Furthermore, students described University correspondence as generally helpful and open, yet sometimes strong in tone. Similarly, staff reported that some communications lack empathy, noting finance-related correspondence as a specific example, with the Wellbeing Team observing the subsequent impact on students. Staff who met with the TPR team emphasised the importance of consideration of tone, timing, content, and speed.

59 The TPR team **recommends** that the University, from academic year 2025-26, develops and implements a coordinated approach to embedding 'compassionate communication' principles across all relevant academic and professional service areas, including consistent delivery of training, clear articulation of expected standards, and monitoring of uptake and impact. Related resources should also be made accessible institution-wide to support a shared understanding and ensure greater consistency of practice.

## Mitigation of risk and institutional oversight

### **Has the institution taken (timely) action to address the findings of the internal investigation, and does this action fully address the findings?**

60 The TPR team explored whether the University had taken timely action to address the findings of the internal investigation in the School of Geographical and Earth Sciences (GES) and whether this action had fully addressed the findings. Short-term recommendations included communication to staff clarifying how honours classifications should be calculated, with specific focus on how non-submitting elements of assessment on a course need to be handled; medium- to long-term recommendations included simplification of information on assessment and the ease of finding appropriate information; how students with particular non-completion status should be considered and contacted; format adaptations to exam board spreadsheets; consideration of how concerns about students should be noted and appropriate support put in place; and particular recommendations about action needed in the school where the internal investigation took place.

61 In response to the internal investigation, the University immediately carried out a 'thorough analysis and review' of exam board outcomes at honours level across all schools of the institution, focused on all students who had a *Credit Withheld (CW)* or *Credit Refused (CR)* administrative grade status and, finding no errors, concluded that the case in the School of GES was a one-off occurrence and that there was no indication of a systemic issue. A message to staff in February 2025 asked for four actions, spanning the individual school and the University:

- (a) for staff to re-read the Code of Assessment and ensure that they fully understand it;
- (b) for exam boards to pay particular attention to students given the outcome Credit Refused (CR) at honours and postgraduate taught level;
- (c) for schools to ensure consistency in handling and recording of cases of the (previous) *Good Cause Policy*, and for mental health concerns to be referred for appropriate support;
- (d) for schools to review the way they communicate with students to ensure consistency.

62 The University issued training and guidance materials for training and staff awareness-raising in the relevant areas of the Code of Assessment, the operation of Boards of Examiners, and compassionate communications. The TPR team explored the University's actions with staff and found that while staff received training and guidance materials, many schools did not run additional training. The TPR team heard from staff that this was because, having benchmarked their practice with the issued training and guidance, school staff concluded that they were in line with the University's expectations for the operation of Boards of Examiners. The University delivered training to support the implementation of the new *Extenuating Circumstances (EC) Policy*. To support the final operation of the previous *Good Cause (GC) Policy* in summer 2025, instructions on best practice were issued by the University to schools, however the TPR team found, and confirmed, that there was no random central auditing of practice and Good Cause Committees continued to operate at programme level.

63 As noted in paragraph 47, the University accelerated its long-standing work to review the *GC Policy* in academic year 2024-25 and brought forward planned implementation of the *EC Policy*, which went live on 15 September 2025. A course aggregation tool, noted in paragraph 20, is being introduced, which automates calculations and removes the need for multiple local and varied spreadsheets at course level. The introduction has been gradual since September 2024, with a major programme to implement this fully underway; the University expects 86% adoption of this tool in semester 1 of academic year 2025-26. At the time of the TPR visit, the TPR team learned that 17.6% of courses had adopted the course aggregation tool (there being circa 4,500 courses in operation in the University).

64 The TPR team found that manual programme aggregation will continue throughout academic year 2025-26 using varied local spreadsheets across schools (see paragraphs 28-32). At the time of the TPR visit, 18 different spreadsheet formats, representing different calculation platforms, were in operation across the University.

65 Evidence reviewed by the TPR team ahead of the visit stated that two colleges had standardised the use of a single spreadsheet template known as U-PAS (Universal Programme Aggregation Spreadsheet), which comprehensively mapped all required assessment regulations. It was later explained to the TPR team just before the visit that U-PAS was standard in one college only (College of Arts and Humanities, four schools) and in one school in another college. Following the visit, it was further explained that U-PAS is currently in operation in six schools across two colleges. In another college (College of Medical, Veterinary and Life Sciences, eight schools) a different but standardised spreadsheet is in operation in all schools.

66 The TPR team learned that the University evaluated U-PAS to be worthy of wider use across the University. However, staff who met with the TPR team confirmed that the University had not considered mandating the use of U-PAS across all schools in academic year 2025-26. The University was of the view that full adoption was not practical in the timeframe, and work was active to expand the use of the course aggregation tool to programme level, though the University was unable to commit to a specific timeline for implementation of an automated system at the time of the TPR visit as it wished to align this systems development with the assessment regulation simplification programme (see paragraphs 20-22).

67 The TPR team considers the fact that the University struggled to establish exactly which spreadsheets were in use and where over the period of this TPR to be indicative of the lack of institutional oversight and awareness previously taken in this area and a systemic risk to academic standards. The TPR team **recommends** that the University mandates greater standardisation of spreadsheet templates for the interim period before regulatory

simplification and systems development are complete, so that only institution-approved templates are used across all schools.

68 Evidence confirmed that the work on assessment regulation simplification will continue in academic year 2025-26 with a series of changes being considered, including changing the approach to the award of credit, the rules around honours degrees and their weighting, and the progression rules from junior to senior honours (see section **Assessment regulations and award of credit**). While the assessment regulation simplification programme has been underway since 2021, it is now taking on a more significant role, focusing on an ambitious series of changes with the aim to draw on best practice in the sector. Once the changes are agreed, the ambition is to align systems development with the implementation. In relation to Boards of Examiners, there are planned developments from January 2026 that aim to improve minutes through a standard template and put in place pre-board scrutiny meetings where these do not already take place. In addition, it is proposed to clarify the roles and responsibilities of members of Boards of Examiners. There are plans for exam board minutes to be submitted centrally, where they will be sampled and tested, however, at the time of the TPR visit, this was not yet in place (see paragraph 37).

69 The University undertook a review of exam board outcomes for honours-level courses and programmes following the internal investigation (paragraph 61). The TPR team was informed shortly before the visit, and it was clarified during the visit, that further investigations had been carried out specifically in the School of GES in a different area of assessment regulation application: that of the rules that apply to progression from junior to senior honours since academic year 2021-22. The University confirmed that the recent additional analysis was planned to follow the initial analysis that responded to the internal investigation. The University also confirmed that the ongoing investigation identified several cases at the time of the TPR visit, where errors had been made in exam board decisions, with serious consequences for the outcomes applied to the students affected. At the time of the TPR visit, there continued to be a lack of certainty over some of these cases, due to the lack of some key information, including component marks and administrative grades, being available. The TPR team learned that the University had, as part of the additional analysis, checked more than 700 student records at the time of the TPR visit, and confirmed two students with mistaken outcomes, and a further five students requiring further investigation before confirmation of errors. The TPR team confirmed with the University that no similar checks had been made in any of the other 23 schools at the institution. The University noted that an assessment was made on risk, and at the time of the TPR visit, the School of GES was the only 'high risk' school identified by the institution. The TPR team was informed that to carry out a whole-institution check of this nature would be a huge task. However, staff who met with the TPR team noted ongoing consideration of expanding the scope of this analysis beyond the School of GES to the whole institution. This ongoing work indicates a systemic risk within the University. Given that this analysis was incomplete at the time of the TPR visit (and therefore could not be scrutinised by the TPR team), the extent to which past, present and future awards are affected is unknown.

70 Given the complex and convoluted Assessment Framework in place, which includes challenges in interpreting the framework consistently (see paragraph 20), and with no computerised system support yet established, the TPR team concludes that the action taken following the internal investigation for the rest of academic year 2024-25 was appropriate and addressed the report's recommendations. The TPR team recognises that initiatives already underway were accelerated to put more substantive change in place for academic year 2025-26, and further changes are planned. Immediate focus has been on the new *EC Policy* implementation and flagging serious student concerns where they arise, and on improved communication with students. The TPR team concludes that the choices of prioritisation over this period (academic year 2024-25) were appropriate. The TPR team considers the long-term aims of the assessment regulation simplification programme, which

intends to address the underlying flaws in the University's Assessment Framework, also to be appropriate. However, in the interim period, the TPR team concludes that the measures in place at the time of the TPR visit are insufficient to safeguard the security of all award decisions in the University and, as a result, they demonstrate a systemic risk to academic standards. The TPR team **recommends**, as a matter of urgency, that the University continues the review of student awards across the institution and puts mechanisms in place to have oversight of all awards of credit made in its name.

71 The TPR team found the security of the Assessment Framework in operation at the time of the TPR visit to be weak, with an overreliance on individualised spreadsheets to calculate programme outcomes, and individual officers with roles to carry out checks, but no standardised and mandatory training in place. Consequently, this indicates a systemic risk to academic standards. The extra support put in place to ensure accuracy in the interim period before more major regulatory and system changes is marked by delegation to schools, encouragement to check understanding, and some degree of overall checking. The weakness of the Assessment Framework is marked by these features:

- (a) The inherent complexity and convoluted nature of the Code of Assessment;
- (b) A culture that allows for varied approaches in each school of the University;
- (c) The collation of grades in multiple varied and locally owned spreadsheets;
- (d) The lack of a process to monitor the outcomes of exam boards to ensure consistency across the University.

72 The TPR team **recommends** that the University develops, as a matter of urgency and before the next assessment diet, a standardised, mandatory cyclical training programme in support of the operation of the Assessment Framework. Training should ensure staff understand the Code of Assessment (particularly administrative grades), use spreadsheets appropriately, and operate exam boards effectively. The training should be designed around clear learning outcomes to address common misconceptions. Training must be mandatory for Assessment Officers, exam board Chairs, and key administrators, with a process to confirm and monitor completion. Expectations for refresher training should also be established.

### **How does the institution identify and mitigate risk, and is this effective?**

73 The University identifies and mitigates risks to academic quality through a structured, multi-layered approach within its Academic Quality Framework (AQF). Oversight is provided by the Academic Standards Committee (ASC), which monitors outcomes from key quality processes, including Periodic Subject Reviews (PSRs). PSR reports are scrutinised through multiple rounds within 8-10 weeks, and schools must provide progress reports on recommendations within six months. The ASC can request further follow-up if actions are delayed.

74 External examiner feedback is categorised (A-D) to prioritise responses, with category D concerns requiring immediate action with Heads of School to address issues and report back to Academic Policy and Governance within three months. Central oversight ensures thematic analysis and institution-wide monitoring. The Annual Quality and Enhancement Review (AQER) ensures information flows bidirectionally: the ASC identifies university-level issues, while outcomes and updates cascade to schools and colleges via College Quality & Enhancement Officers, who coordinate responses with professional support services, creating a closed feedback loop.

75 Student input is captured through course evaluations, where course teams produce Summary and Response Documents (SARDs) addressing concerns, posted on the virtual learning environment (VLE) for transparency and reviewed in PSRs. Technical solutions introduced in academic year 2024-25 aim to improve response rates, while the Student Voice within the Quality Framework Working Group (SVQFWG) explores further technological enhancements.

76 In the Assessment Framework, in the areas of marking, application of the Code of Assessment, operation of exam boards and communication of results, the TPR team found a less secure approach to risk assessment. The work of the Academic Regulations Committee (ARC) is effective, and there are examples of regulatory development (moderation/double-marking, limits on unreassessable assessment, result-code clarity) that respond to identified issues. However, there is no standardised and comprehensive approach in place to monitor the operation of assessment outcomes, which poses a systemic risk to academic standards. While the TPR team recognises that recent developments are positive progress, the TPR team is of the view that they are not sufficient to fully mitigate against the risk that erroneous outcomes might occur in the medium term, ahead of more major changes (see paragraphs 31-32).

77 The TPR team concludes that the approach to risk is effective in the Academic Quality Framework, but not in the Assessment Framework. The University would benefit from a more formulaic approach to monitoring risk in this area. The TPR team **recommends** that the University reviews its approach to risk management to ensure there are suitable monitoring and reporting mechanisms that apply to the operation of the Assessment Framework.

**How does the institution record and monitor multi-year policy developments, such as those described in this Concern, and is this effective? (For example, ongoing changes to assessment regulations, degree regulations, credit framework, and *Good Cause Policy*.)**

78 Multi-year policy developments in areas such as the Code of Assessment and regulations are monitored in committees such as the ARC and ASC. The regulation simplification programme is being considered by the ASC and the move from *Good Cause (GC)* to *Extenuating Circumstances (EC) Policy* was approved by Senate in June 2025. Monitoring of the implementation of the *EC Policy* is driven by the implementation team, and an overview will be taken to Senate. The *EC Policy* implementation was accelerated, and staff who met with the TPR team expressed concerns about the rapid pace of its introduction, with some issues arising as a result, as well as subsequently stating their confidence that these issues will, in time, be addressed.

79 The University has a Transformation Team, governed by a Board, that drives change in a portfolio of areas over multiple years, including the introduction of a course aggregation tool in academic year 2024-25 (and with plans for further implementation in later years). The work of the Transformation Team is marked by effective, well-organised, project management, with clear plans and roles, and risks monitored, categorised and action allocated as necessary. The TPR team heard that staff value this professional approach to these significant developments.

80 The TPR team found that multi-year policy developments in the institution are appropriately supported and monitored. The inherent risk that a policy may not be fully implemented, or be implemented differently in different schools, is something that the TPR team encourages the University to consider as it approaches the changes detailed in this report and more generally. The TPR team heard that senior staff are committed to finding the right balance between total standardisation and total delegation, with a shift to greater

standardisation (and sometimes total standardisation) where University practice has drifted out of line with sector norms. Examples were given where established delegated practices were replaced with greater standardisation with little concern among staff in recent years, such as the removal of discretion from exam boards and work on UK Visa and Immigration (UKVI) processes. The TPR team considers this approach to be worthy of further and more formal development. The TPR team **recommends** that the University develops an approach to policy and process implementation that strikes an appropriate balance between complete standardisation across the University and complete delegation to school level, with identified principles to be followed in arriving at an implementation plan for each policy.

**How does the institution identify themes for enhancement drawn from multiple data sources, including external review methods, and is this effective?**

81 Evidence available to the TPR team demonstrated that themes for enhancement are drawn from a synthesis of committee business (ARC/ASC), minutes from Boards of Examiners, external examiner commentaries, student-facing advice inputs, and scoped external reviews such as consultancy. The TPR team could identify examples of robust changes emerging from these sources, such as changes to the moderation and double-marking approach. The TPR team found that the monitoring and exploration of themes is appropriately covered by the work of the ASC.

**How does the institution ensure that actions resulting from quality processes are addressed effectively and in a timely way?**

82 The University's Academic Quality Framework is overseen by the ASC, which considers the majority of the outputs from quality processes. For example, Periodic Subject Review reports are scrutinised and cross-institutional issues requiring action are identified. External examiner reports are categorised (A to D), with D indicating immediate action is necessary by the Head of School. The Academic Policy and Governance team ensures these responses are sent to external examiners.

83 The replacement of the *GC Policy* with the new *EC Policy* came into effect from academic year 2025-26 and is covered elsewhere in this report (see paragraph 41). The TPR team notes that the *GC Policy* had been under active review since 2021 and, as noted elsewhere in this report (see paragraph 47), the implementation of the new policy was accelerated as a result of the internal investigation. The TPR team recognises that significant change was brought in after four years, and that the implementation timeline may have been longer had the internal investigation not occurred.

84 The TPR team reviewed reports from previous external reviews, which have made a recommendation on aspects of the University's operation - at times, relating to the same area in more than one visit. The University's Enhancement-led Institutional Review (ELIR) (2014) and ELIR (2019) both made recommendations in the area of consistency in the application of assessment rules around the use of discretion in exam boards. The University decided to remove the use of discretion in 2021. The Quality Enhancement and Standards Review (QESR) (2023) encouraged mapping against the revised UK Quality Code 2024 when it was complete. The Self-Evaluation and Action Plan (SEAP) (2024) indicated that a mapping and a review of internal processes was planned for academic year 2024-25. The TPR team heard that, at the time of the TPR visit, this had recently been completed. The QESR (2023) also recommended action relating to the roles of the Student Support Officers (SSOs), which is covered elsewhere in this report (see paragraph 44).

85 The TPR team concludes that the University appropriately monitors the outcomes of its quality processes and considers immediate and longer-term changes as necessary. The ASC is an appropriate and effective forum for exploring changes. Based on the evidence

provided, the TPR team is of the view that implementation of major changes is prolonged. The University can learn lessons about how it has prioritised actions over the period immediately following the internal investigation and apply these to its future management of multi-year changes.

**How does the institution operate within the context of the ‘no surprises’ approach in Scotland in highlighting risks and issues related to its quality and standards arrangements?**

86 The University conducted its own internal investigation into the School of GES in February 2025, and the report concluded that there had been a ‘systemic problem’ in following the University’s assessment regulations. A note in the SEAP refers to ongoing work to strengthen internal processes and oversight. The TPR team heard that issues that potentially require notification to the Scottish Funding Council (SFC), or any external body, would be explored by senior staff initially. Staff who met with the TPR team noted that, generally, the University would err on the side of caution and raise an issue if in doubt, even if this was later seen as unnecessary. Evidence of formal consideration of reporting to external bodies was not available to the TPR team, therefore the University is encouraged to strengthen the informal mechanisms described and align this to work on risk management.

## **Student engagement in institutional change**

**Has the institution engaged/is the institution engaging with students on the proposed changes within the scope of this Concern, and is this effective?**

87 In responding to areas within scope of the Concern, the University acknowledged sensitivities which impacted the extent to which they could involve students in the development of changes. The University informed student representatives at the Student Representative Council (SRC) of the tragic circumstances that led to the internal investigation by the University. When policy changes, such as the move from *Good Cause (GC)* to *Extenuating Circumstances (EC) Policy*, were accelerated, the University engaged with the SRC, and student representatives had the opportunity to contribute as part of student representation on committees such as Senate. The TPR team concludes that, in light of the sensitive circumstances, this approach to student engagement on the proposed changes within the scope of this Concern was appropriate.

88 The development of the course aggregation tool, which was underway prior to the submission of the Concern, has been recognised as a focus for responding to the areas within the scope of the Concern. During the development of this tool, students have been actively engaged as part of the project board, participating in user testing, and attended student panels to gather feedback and enhance the design of the system. The TPR team concludes that the involvement of students for this project demonstrates an effective approach to student engagement.

**How does the institution ensure assessment regulations are accessible to, and understood by, students, and is this effective?**

89 Evidence reviewed by the TPR team affirms that the Code of Assessment and Guide to the Code of Assessment (‘the Guide’) are viewed as the single source of authority on the University’s assessment regulations that students can access online. The University acknowledges that the Guide is primarily written for staff, but the use of worked examples within the Guide aims to make it accessible to students. Students who met with the TPR team were positive that, on their courses, they had information about how they were being assessed. However, some students highlighted that elements of the Code of Assessment were unclear. Multiple students raised a lack of clarity on how their Grade Point Average

(GPA) was calculated and that they found undertaking these calculations challenging, given that there was no central system to allow them to do this. The TPR team heard from student-facing staff that there is often misunderstanding from students about how grades are calculated. Student support staff in one college further noted that students seek advice from them on grade calculations, and that they must inform students that they are not Assessment Officers and therefore are not confident confirming if calculations they make for students are correct. Staff, including representatives from the SRC Student Advice Centre, also highlighted that the most common area of student confusion is understanding how grades are calculated (see paragraph 20).

90 Evidence available demonstrated that schools and programmes also have a responsibility to make assessment regulations accessible to students, with the most common approach being the use of a handbook. The production of handbooks is delegated to schools or programmes. The TPR team observed differing interpretations of handbooks and varying practice across schools, with some being comprehensive student guides, others focusing on assessment only, and some being at a course level. Students who met with the TPR team recognised handbooks as the key source of information for finding out assessment regulations and reported that handbooks were clear. College staff in support services recognised that approaches are inconsistent and that there had, historically, been intention for a degree of consistency. Central support staff reported involvement in contributing some content to handbooks each year. Staff who met with the TPR team were unaware of any central guidance on the development and content of handbooks and noted that course administrators often have responsibility for updating them. The use of links to central services webpages was intended to ensure up-to-date information is provided to students through the handbooks.

91 There is an additional online *Guide to the Marking System* made available to students which provides a brief description of some elements of the Code of Assessment. However, the TPR team observed that this is less comprehensive than more recently developed guidance for students, such as online information on the *EC Policy*. Other methods used to make students aware of assessment practices include production of videos by courses, the use of induction presentations and through support provided by the SRC Student Advice Centre.

92 The TPR team identified that there is misunderstanding among some students and staff regarding the interpretation of the Code of Assessment, in particular, grade calculation, and current methods are not fully effective in ensuring students understand assessment regulations. The TPR team **recommends** that, as part of the regulation simplification programme, the institution co-designs, in partnership with students, guidance and resources to ensure critical elements of the assessment regulations are communicated to students and staff in a way that is accessible, digestible and valuable, to be implemented in academic year 2026-27.

93 The TPR team recognises the value of handbooks as a tool for communicating critical assessment, policy and support information with students, but is concerned by the inconsistencies in practice and the risk that, without oversight, some handbooks could contain outdated information or omit valuable guidance on support services. The TPR team **recommends** that the institution considers the strategic approach to the production and use of handbooks (or other student-facing guidance mechanisms such as virtual learning environment templates) by academic year 2026-27. This could include facilitation opportunities for sharing best practice, support through centrally produced content or templates, and mechanisms for oversight to assure itself that required guidance to students is being delivered and is accurate.



**How does the institution ensure that student-facing policies, such as the extension request policies, are accessible to, and understood by, students, and is this effective?**

94 The University publishes policies on its website. Staff highlighted a variety of practice to ensure students are aware of policies, in particular, the new *EC Policy*, including induction materials, handbooks, and content on the VLE. Students who met with the TPR team reported that the change from *GC* to *EC Policy* was communicated by e-mail and students were confident about where to find information on the new policy. The TPR team heard from staff that policies were communicated through e-mails, slide packs given to lecturers explaining the new *EC Policy*, and use of the Student Support Officers (SSOs) to promote policies through local communication channels.

95 In launching the new *EC Policy*, the institution developed and launched a comprehensive webpage with student-facing guidance on the new policy, including detailed FAQs. Evidence reviewed by the TPR team included examples of local school and course communications which demonstrate the use of the VLE, slides and e-mails to inform students about the policy. The institution has also developed a new suite of wellbeing webpages and a *Student Support Finder* tool, which uses a short questionnaire to direct students to support including, for example, the *EC Policy*. Students who met with the TPR team reported and endorsed their involvement in consultation about this tool. Staff who met with the TPR team recognised that the *EC Policy* is newly launched and the first assessment window has not taken place since the launch. As a result, the TPR team concludes that the effectiveness of communication of the new policy cannot be fully evaluated at the time of the TPR visit. The TPR team recognises the variety of approaches taken to make students aware of the new *EC Policy*, with a particular focus on integrating wellbeing support. The University is encouraged to evaluate the effectiveness of the methods used to raise awareness of policies and ensure understanding of the information included in the policies. The University should consider how other student-facing policies can be communicated through similar mechanisms or initiatives.

**How does the institution engage with students on policy development and institution-wide changes, and is this effective?**

96 The Principal, who met with the TPR team, stated that the student voice was critical to making change and that the voice of students was not to be underestimated. The TPR team found that the University has embedded active mechanisms for engaging with students and gathering feedback. In partnership with the SRC, the University has nearly 800 class representatives across courses and schools attending meetings such as Staff-Student Liaison Committees, with surveys noting that 81% of representatives said it was easy to raise issues at these forums. Student representatives who met with the TPR team reported positive experiences of staff engagement with student voice at an institutional level but highlighted that there is less consistency and engagement with student voice at school and course level.

97 The SRC has a structure of representatives from school, college and institution-wide levels and these representatives participate in a significant number of the University's committees and working groups, including Education Policy & Strategy Committee (EdPSC) and the Learning and Teaching Committee (LTC). The TPR team learned that the SRC President acts as co-chair of the institutional Student Experience Committee (SEC), and students are involved in senior committees such as Senate and Court. Students who met with the TPR team reported an effective relationship between the SRC and University. The SRC runs an Academic Forum for student representatives, and in meetings with the TPR team, the University provided examples of how senior staff from Academic Services and the Academic Regulations Committee (ARC) attended these student-run meetings to discuss

policy developments such as the new *EC Policy*. The TPR team concludes, from the evidence available, that the University's formal approaches to student engagement and consultation are effective.

98 The University highlighted an example of students shaping policy developments through institutional committee structures regarding developing standardised Progress Committee outcome letters. Proposals for the outcome letters were raised by the SRC and debated through institutional committees, and a template was produced that has been submitted for institutional approval, with planned implementation across all colleges for academic year 2025-26. Furthermore, an ongoing project is working with students in partnership to co-create the format and content of Board of Examiners outcome letters and Progression Committee letters sent by the institution to students as another example of student partnership. The University established a Student Voice within the Quality Framework Working Group (SVQFWG) in academic year 2024-25 to outline the principles of how students will contribute to the institution. The University acknowledges its current approach is more consultative through formal mechanisms. The University is making a shift towards viewing students as active partners and co-creators. The SVQFWG is co-led by students to make recommendations to the LTC on how to incorporate and respond to the student voice, including looking at digital transformation on how to capture student feedback and evolve Staff-Student Liaison Committees to partnership forums to enable students to be co-creators. In the project plan for the assessment regulation simplification programme, the institution has committed to a series of focus groups to consult with students.

99 The TPR team recognises the University's commitment to student representation and the effective active structures in place. The TPR team **recommends** that the University continues planned actions to evolve its approach to student voice from a consultative to collaborative culture across all levels of the institution. The University should consider how it sets and communicates expectations around student involvement in enhancement design across schools, and outline methods to assure itself of the effectiveness of student voice mechanisms by academic year 2026-27.

## Next steps

100 The University will complete an action plan, which will outline how each recommendation made by the TPR team will be addressed. Under the Scottish Quality Concerns Scheme (SQCS), QAA Scotland (QAAS) can involve peer reviewers in the review of evidence, to support demonstration of progress against recommendations, as required. The action plan should be completed in a timely manner, and QAAS will report on progress against the action plan to the Scottish Funding Council (SFC).

101 Following the publication of this report, the University will submit a draft action plan to QAAS. QAAS and the University must agree that the planned actions fully address the recommendations within this report before the action plan is finalised.

102 The action plan will be monitored by QAAS through additional institutional liaison meetings to take place in 2025-26 and 2026-27, and the University's next external review (the Tertiary Quality Enhancement Review) will take place in 2027-28, which will consider action taken in response to the Targeted Peer Review, as detailed in the outcome of the TPR (see paragraphs 17-19).

103 The University will be required to notify QAAS when actions within the action plan are complete, and this will likely be accompanied by documentary evidence. Once QAAS and the University are satisfied that the action plan has been fully implemented, QAAS will write to the University and the SFC to confirm that the action plan is complete.

## Summary of recommendations

104 The TPR team **recommends** that the University is subject to additional institutional liaison meetings in academic years 2025-26 and 2026-27 to monitor and report regularly on progress against all the recommendations within this report (paragraph 18).

105 The TPR team **recommends** that the University's next external peer review takes place in academic year 2027-28 and considers progress against all the recommendations contained within this report (paragraph 19).

### Assessment regulations and award of credit

106 The TPR team **recommends** that the University prioritises completion of the regulation simplification programme to enable implementation of an appropriate system for programme-level aggregation by academic year 2027-28 (paragraph 22).

107 The TPR team **recommends** that the University establishes and implements an annual assurance cycle owned by the Academic Regulations Committee (ARC) that specifies sampling frames, coverage by school, timelines for follow-up and a published synthesis of external examiner themes mapped to actions and owners (paragraph 25).

108 The TPR team **recommends**, as an immediate priority and before the next assessment diet in academic year 2025-26, that the University undertakes a rigorous review of all exam board spreadsheets currently in use, with institutional sign-off confirming that each is fit for purpose (paragraph 31).

109 The TPR team **recommends** that the University continues with the planned harmonisation of mark aggregation and evaluation processes, including completing the scheduled roll-out of the course aggregation tool for courses in academic year 2025-26 (paragraph 32).

110 The TPR team **recommends** that the University, by the 2026-27 academic cycle, strengthens scrutiny and oversight of exam boards by making the minutes template compulsory, introducing a short pre-board readiness checklist owned by the Assessment Officer, requiring explicit alignment statements where local or PSRB requirements apply, and regularly sampling minutes to verify that key checks are recorded (paragraph 37).

### Extension request processes

111 The TPR team **recommends** that, building on the QESR (2023) recommendation, the University ensures that the Student Support Officer role is clearly defined and fully communicated to, and understood by, staff and students at the University by the end of semester 2 of academic year 2025-26 (paragraph 44).

112 The TPR team **recommends** that the University ensures adequate resourcing for the Wellbeing and Safeguarding Teams to meet the operational demands of the new Extenuating Circumstances process by the end of semester 2 of academic year 2025-26 (paragraph 45).

113 The TPR team **recommends** that the University monitors the Stage 2 process (locally managed academic decision) closely, as it is implemented from semester 2 of academic year 2025-26, responding promptly to any issues that emerge (paragraph 47).

114 The TPR team **recommends** that appropriate support, guidance, and continuing professional development is provided to ensure Senate Assessors are well prepared and fully aware of the potential academic and wellbeing implications for students, including

possible impacts on qualification outcomes. The University should also ensure that appropriate systems are in place to record and monitor decisions that are made by Senate Assessors (paragraph 48).

115 The TPR team **recommends** that an evaluation of the new *Extenuating Circumstances Policy* and process be undertaken at the end of academic year 2025-26, with ongoing monitoring in subsequent years. An evaluation framework should be established to actively track and monitor the impact of the new policy and process through defined metrics, regular review meetings, and the systematic collection of student and staff feedback, and put in place measures to address identified issues (paragraph 54).

### **Student communications**

116 The TPR team **recommends** that the University continues to adhere to the stated implementation timeline for the student communications project, with development of the revised award outcome letters by the end of academic year 2025-26 and formal adoption in academic year 2026-27 (paragraph 55).

117 The TPR team **recommends** that the University, from academic year 2025-26, develops and implements a coordinated approach to embedding 'compassionate communication' principles across all relevant academic and professional service areas, including consistent delivery of training, clear articulation of expected standards, and monitoring of uptake and impact. Related resources should also be made accessible institution-wide to support a shared understanding and ensure greater consistency of practice (paragraph 59).

### **Mitigation of risk and institutional oversight**

118 The TPR team **recommends** that the University mandates greater standardisation of spreadsheet templates for the interim period before regulatory simplification and systems development are complete, so that only institution-approved templates are used across all schools (paragraph 67).

119 The TPR team **recommends**, as a matter of urgency, that the University continues the review of student awards across the institution and puts mechanisms in place to have oversight of all awards of credit made in its name (paragraph 70).

120 The TPR team **recommends** that the University develops, as a matter of urgency and before the next assessment diet, a standardised, mandatory cyclical training programme in support of the operation of the Assessment Framework. Training should ensure staff understand the Code of Assessment (particularly administrative grades), use spreadsheets appropriately, and operate exam boards effectively. The training should be designed around clear learning outcomes to address common misconceptions. Training must be mandatory for Assessment Officers, exam board Chairs, and key administrators, with a process to confirm and monitor completion. Expectations for refresher training should also be established (paragraph 72).

121 The TPR team **recommends** that the University reviews its approach to risk management to ensure there are suitable monitoring and reporting mechanisms that apply to the operation of the Assessment Framework (paragraph 77).

122 The TPR team **recommends** that the University develops an approach to policy and process implementation that strikes an appropriate balance between complete standardisation across the University and complete delegation to school level, with identified principles to be followed in arriving at an implementation plan for each policy (paragraph 80).

## **Student engagement in institutional change**

123 The TPR team **recommends** that, as part of the regulation simplification programme, the institution co-designs, in partnership with students, guidance and resources to ensure critical elements of the assessment regulations are communicated to students and staff in a way that is accessible, digestible and valuable, to be implemented in academic year 2026-27 (paragraph 92).

124 The TPR team **recommends** that the institution considers the strategic approach to the production and use of handbooks (or other student-facing guidance mechanisms such as virtual learning environment templates) by academic year 2026-27. This could include facilitation opportunities for sharing best practice, support through centrally produced content or templates, and mechanisms for oversight to assure itself that required guidance to students is being delivered and is accurate (paragraph 93).

125 The TPR team **recommends** that the University continues planned actions to evolve its approach to student voice from a consultative to collaborative culture across all levels of the institution. The University should consider how it sets and communicates expectations around student involvement in enhancement design across schools, and outline methods to assure itself of the effectiveness of student voice mechanisms by academic year 2026-27 (paragraph 99).

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