Transfoming lives through education

The Students’ Association is identified as a key partner in the GCU 2020 Strategy to be ‘responsible partners in learning, responding to the feedback to enhance the student experience and increase opportunities and choices for students’. Our Mission is to ‘represent and enable GCU students to enhance all aspects of their student experience’.

The Students’ Association and University were commended for our partnership working in the last Enhancement-led Institutional Review (ELIR) with the Students’ Association featuring significantly in many case studies within the Reflective Analysis 2014. The University said in the ELIR Reflective Analysis (2014, p13 and 14) that there is ‘a highly productive relationship’ through ‘a genuinely collaboratively approach’ with the Students’ Association and that this is ‘key to retention and succession’. The ELIR Technical Report (2015, p10) said ‘the University’s partnership approach is evident through effective working relationship with the Students’ Association and student-led initiatives such as the teaching awards and Student Leadership programme’. This partnership approach crosses all academic schools and professional support departments within GCU.

The Students’ Association provides support for the recruitment, training and development of all student representatives on campus to ensure legitimate and evidence based representation (and campaigns) on behalf of all GCU students. Feedback on the student learning experience is a key component within the Enhancement-led Institutional Review, GCU Quality Assurance and Enhancement Strategy, Student Experience Framework and Strategy for Learning, where there is a ‘commitment to develop in students a sense of belonging to maximise learning and realise potential, as well as acknowledging students as partners in shaping and enhancing the student experience’. The involvement of our elected Officers, Class Reps, School Officers and Postgraduate Research Experience Reps on formal committees like Senate and its sub-committees to informal mechanisms like ENGAGE and Student Summit/School Conference ensure feedback from students is acted upon and this leads to ensuring high quality programmes. Students can search for their student representatives through our website. Students celebrate and value high quality teaching and learning from academics and support staff through our annual Student Teaching Awards.

The work that the Students’ Association undertakes to improve the student [learning] experience will be reflected in higher student satisfaction scores in the internal and external surveys, such as the National Student Survey (GCU KPI) and the International Student Barometer. The Students’ Association will in particular concentrate on the outputs from the National Student Survey and work to address, with GCU, the areas of poorer satisfaction. This will result in improving the GCU position on league tables, whilst most importantly providing a high quality student experience. The Students’ Association successfully campaigned for the formation of a Timetabling Policy Group, earlier production of timetables and personalised timetables. This is a clear example of campaigning for change that will improve the GCU student experience and lead to better scores within the National Student Survey (i.e Course Organisation).

The Students’ Association runs the Student Leaders Programme, a co-curricular work-related learning programme. This programme supports the development of leaders (and volunteers) within the University and within students’ own communities and as highlighted in the ELIR Reflective Analysis enhances the employability skills of students. The Student Leaders Programme supports meeting the draft GCU Career Development and Employability Framework and the strategies within AshokaU Changemaker Campus and UHatch through the delivery of social innovation and entrepreneurship workshops. Social entrepreneurialism is further enhanced through our societies, such as Bright Futures, GCU Innovation and Entrepreneurship Society (SIE), Hult Prize @ GCU and various course-based societies. The Student Leaders Programme and our student-led activities induce greater employability in students and will assist GCU in meeting its KPIs of 95% graduates in employment/study and 75% graduate level employment.

The Students’ Association are working with College and School Connect Outreach Team to support Caledonian Club activities on campus and in supporting the College Connect Strategy (Associate Students) and Widening Participation Strategy through induction and transition events specifically for articulation students. We believe this work could be extended to the
Advanced Higher Hub and Additional Articulation Place Scheme students. In addition to our minority and liberation Officers that campaign for improvements to the student experience, the Students’ Association organise specific events for ‘hard-to-reach’ students to aid with integration and provide a sense of belonging at GCU, this will include demographics within the postgraduate population, that will increase to 20% of the student population by 2020 (GCU KPI). This work supports the GCU’s deeper commitment to widening access and articulation, in maintaining a leading position for widening access (GCU KPI) and in meeting the Outcome Agreement and Equality Outcomes Framework.

In addition the Advice Centre supports students who are facing personal or academic difficulties whilst at GCU. The Advice Centre operates as a confidential drop in service for personal and academic problems and supports students with academic representation (MTIs, academic appeals, disciplinaries, complaints, harassment and fitness to practice). The Nightline Service offers a listening and information services during the night. The support work will aid in GCU improving its progression, retention and completion rates, and specifically the GCU non-completion target of 7% (GCU KPI). These services are complementary to the Wellbeing Services provided by University.

Our Vision is that all ‘GCU students will have an outstanding experience that will live with them forever’. Our Values of: Community, Participation, Fun, Support, Diversity and Leadership are embedded in all the activities we run. Having fun and socialising with other students is something that other GCU departments may not be able to do. We foster a welcoming and inclusive environment, allowing students to form and build upon strong, lasting relationships that contribute to an enjoyable and productive university life. We promote and provide the opportunity for widespread involvement through sports, societies and volunteering in all our activities, leading to a sense of belonging at GCU. The Students’ Association harnesses the talents and commitment of our students and their social and cultural capital. In representing GCU on the sports field, encouraging likeminded people to share ideas in our societies, to develop talent and employability through our student magazine and radio station and wellbeing and nightline volunteering. Through all our activities students undertake personal development, have fun and make friends. All this plays a huge part in improving the progression, retention and completion rates and 80% degree completion (GCU KPI), providing an outstanding student experience and leads to higher National Student Survey scores, GCU target currently at 90% satisfaction (GCU KPI). The Students’ Association plays a critical role in providing information to GCU on students extra-curricular involvement for HEAR.

The Students’ Association has achieved the Quality Students Union accreditation. This accreditation is recognised by the UK and Scottish Government, Universities UK and NUS. This demonstrates that GCU has a recognised high quality Students’ Association and this provides reputational value to GCU and a destination of choice for students. Our new website platform facilitates robust reporting of student engagement figures and demographic reporting to University Court and the Academic Schools.

Enriching cities and communities through research

The ELIR Report (2015, p4) recognises that GCU needs to ‘develop the research student experience in a range of ways including reviewing the effectiveness of the structures and systems in place aimed at establishing a research community’. The Students’ Association recognises the Research Strategy is intending to meet this challenge by improving the research community and research student experience. The Students’ Association acknowledges that it needs to further develop its representation and support structures for postgraduate research students. Effective representatives providing feedback will lead to higher satisfaction scores within the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey and GCU becoming a destination of choice for research students. An example of recent progress is in working in partnership with the Graduate School to appoint, train and support Postgraduate Research Student Experience Reps. Further works needs undertaken with the Graduate School and academic schools to ensure sustainability of PGR representation. We have also held monthly quizzes for postgraduate research students that are well attended, as part of our ‘hard to reach’ events, that we believe we can build upon.

Innovating for social and economic impact

The Students’ Association provides various opportunities for students to develop their social innovation and entrepreneurship that will assist in supporting the Business, Innovation and Enterprise Strategy. The Student Leaders Programme runs seminars and there are many student-led societies within this area, such as Bright Futures, GCU Innovation and Entrepreneurship Society (SIE), Hult Prize @ GCU and various course-based societies. We are keen to work with AshokaU Changemaker Campus and UHatch to develop further opportunities for students.
Working with the European Office, the Students’ Association was successful in securing a €430,000 ERASMUS+ grant, across four partners. This partners GCU with four institutions and their respective Student Representation Bodies across Europe. These partners include one university from the Ashoka U group and three from the Design for Social Innovation towards Sustainability Network of universities. The project focuses on creating open source materials for volunteer development. The bid includes funding to allow additional development of the Student Leaders Programme and for 25 students to participate in transnational exchange. Although there will be no drastic changes to the structure of the Programme, the biggest difference will be the ability to send students out into the local community to deliver social innovation workshops and projects.

Engaging globally

GCU has an ambitious Internationalisation Strategy that will support 15% of the student population being international in the UK (GCU KPI) and 5,000 transnational education students (GCU KPI). The work that the Students’ Association undertakes to improve the student [learning] experience will be reflected in higher student satisfaction scores in the International Student Barometer. The Students’ Association will in particular concentrate on the outputs from the International Student Barometer to address, with GCU, the areas of poorer satisfaction. This will result in improving the GCU position on league tables, whilst most importantly providing a high quality student experience for our international students.

Through the NUS: Internationalising Students’ Association audit the Students’ Association have demonstrated that we have a high level of international student engagement and representation (including INTO and GCU London) and is seen as good practice by NUS. Our student reps also continue to campaign for internationalisation embedded within the curriculum. The Students’ Association received a 94% satisfaction score in the latest International Student Barometer. The Students’ Association supports creating global graduates and citizens through the Student Leaders Programme, our global cafes, language cafes, cultural diversity events and our societies, such as Erasmus and international societies. We wish to continue to encourage integration amongst international students and home students. The Students’ Association provides a positive international student experience, through involvement activities, which provides a positive reputation for GCU and will encourage future students to attend GCU, assisting GCU to increase international numbers. The Internal Student Barometer recognises that one of the top reasons international students choose universities is their friends. If students enjoy their time at GCU we hope this would be reflected in increased international applications.

The ELIR Report (2015, p4) encouraged GCU to ‘consider the ways in which the existing arrangements could be developed further to capture and reflect on the views of the University’s students who are studying away from the Glasgow campus in order to inform institutional strategy and policy setting and implementation, with a view to enhancing the student experience overall’. With the rapid growth in transnational students the Students’ Association have expertise in representation and democracy and could support the University to develop within this area.

Aligning for the Common Good

The Students’ Association is currently writing its next four year strategic plan than will be implemented from August 2016. Our Trustee Board have confirmed that our strap line Be part of something…. Bigger will be central to our strategy and ensure a strong synergy to the GCU mission the University for the Common Good.

The Students’ Association has a Community Engagement Strategy that compliments the GCU Community Engagement Strategy. Throughout all our activities we encourage students to become leaders, to take pride in their university and fellow students, enabling them to be outstanding graduates. The Students’ Association supports the work of the Caledonian Club, Caledonian Connect and Open Days to inspire potential students to become students at GCU. The Students’ Association, through its Community Engagement Framework, for instance is developing a Glasgow wide Nightline with City of Glasgow potentially joining in 2016. Our Clubs, Societies and Groups do lots of fundraising and community initiatives (ie Foodbank, Soup Kitchen, Allister Boyd Ball) and providing social good.

The Students’ Association has achieved the NUS Green Impact at Gold Level and is aiming for Platinum level in 2016. Green Impact brings together students and staff to green campuses, curriculums and communities. The work of the Green Impact accreditation supports GCU achieving the EcoCampus Platinum Award and maintaining a high position on the People and Planet Green League.
The Students’ Association is working with the University to drive the GCU values to be meaningful for students into the Strategy for Learning, develop a Student Charter and supports the People Strategy. We hope to achieve the Investing in Volunteers accreditation in 2017.

The Students’ Association works with the GCU Communications and Marketing Department and the institution generally in enhancing the reputation of GCU for prospective and current students, for example with handbooks and prospectuses and helping students to feel a sense of belonging at GCU.