



Bellerbys Educational Services Ltd

Embedded College Review for Educational Oversight by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education

May 2012

Annex 5: Lancaster University International Study Centre

Introduction and background

The Lancaster University International Study Centre (ISC) was established in 2007. It delivers an International Foundation Year (Business and Management Studies; Engineering and Computing; Law and Social Studies; Life Sciences) and an English Language Preparation Programme. Students who successfully complete the international foundation year programme and achieve the required progression grades will progress to an undergraduate programme at the University.

The responsibilities of the respective parties are set out in the inter-institutional agreement. Bellerbys Educational Services Ltd, through the ISC, is responsible for academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities, but the agreement makes no explicit statement about this. The University has approved the International Foundation Year programme, but does not make awards for it. The University is ultimately responsible for public information.

Key findings

Academic standards

As a result of its investigations, the review team considers that there can be **confidence** that academic standards at the Lancaster University International Study Centre are managed appropriately and in accordance with the policies and procedures of Bellerbys Educational Services Ltd (and of the University where appropriate).

Quality of learning opportunities

As a result of its investigations, the review team considers that there can be **confidence** that the quality of learning opportunities at the Lancaster University International Study Centre is assured and enhanced appropriately and in accordance with the policies and procedures of Bellerbys Educational Services Ltd (and of the University where appropriate).

Public information

As a result of its investigations, the review team considers that **reliance can** be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the Lancaster University International Study Centre is responsible for publishing about itself and the programmes it delivers.

Good practice

The review noted the following **feature of good practice** at this embedded college:

- use of the virtual learning environment to enhance programme delivery (paragraph 11)
- the focus on tracking students' academic progress (paragraph 13).

Recommendations

The review team makes the following recommendation in relation to this college.

The review team considers that it is **advisable** for the Lancaster University ISC to:

- review the use of the term 'credit' in connection with the international foundation year programme (paragraph 2).

Detailed findings

How effectively do Bellerbys Educational Services Ltd and Lancaster University ISC fulfil responsibilities for the management of academic standards at this college?

1 Bellerbys Educational Services Ltd fulfils its responsibilities for the management of academic standards at this ISC with variable effectiveness. The review team found a lack of clarity about the status of the programmes and, thus, of responsibility for academic standards. Some of this obscurity is linked to uncertainty about the meaning of standards-related terminology in the inter-institutional agreement and other documentation.

2 The International Foundation Year programme is not an award of the University and does not offer academic credit. However, the programme specification, student handbook, and the transcript issued to students explicitly refer to credit. The review team concluded that these references have the potential to mislead students and other stakeholders about the status of the international foundation year programme offered at this ISC. Bellerbys Educational Services Ltd is advised to review the use of the term 'credit' in connection with the International Foundation Year programme.

3 The International Foundation Year programme was initially developed by Bellerbys Educational Services Ltd and validated by the University of Sussex; it was approved by Lancaster University in 2007. The Life Sciences pathway was approved subsequently. The proposal was framed by Bellerbys Educational Services Ltd and considered initially by the Lancaster University ISC Steering Committee, which referred it to the relevant Faculty Learning and Teaching Committee at the University. This committee considered the appropriateness of the curriculum content and made a recommendation to the Steering Committee, which gave ultimate approval. The review team was informed that there is no formal approval process other than this. The team considered that a formal process should be set in place for the approval of all new programmes which are not validated by partner higher education institutions. See main report, paragraph 1.11.

How effective is the management of student assessment?

4 Bellerbys Educational Services Ltd fulfils its responsibilities for managing the assessment of students at this ISC with variable effectiveness. The review team was informed that the programme-level assessment regulations do not conform to the University

regulations but are ISC regulations; they are specified in the student handbook. However, the team found that assessment regulations are routinely provided to students only at module level. Staff at the ISC were unable to supply a definitive set of programme-level assessment regulations. There was no evidence of a regulation stating that it is not possible for students to resit any module if they have failed more than two modules in any term, even though this regulation had previously been used to withdraw students from the programme. See main report, paragraph 1.16 - 1.17.

5 The team was informed that for a number of modules the coursework was a time-constrained assessment completed under examination conditions. For example, the team was told that in some Law modules the coursework element is assessed through an open-book examination, for which students are permitted to bring in their coursework notes. In contrast, the final assessment is a closed-book examination. When a student fails a module, or alternatively elects to retake the module to improve his or her grade, this is assessed solely through resitting or retaking the final examination, and the new mark replaces both the previous coursework and final examination mark. According to this regulation, it is possible for a student to raise their overall assessment mark within a module even if their performance in the final examination has not improved, or has deteriorated. The team considered that this undermined a general principle of assessment that the awarded grades must reflect student performance. See main report, paragraph 1.18.

How effectively are UK external reference points used in the management of academic standards?

6 UK external reference points are generally used effectively in the management of academic standards. See main report, paragraphs 1.22 - 1.26.

How effectively are external examining, moderation, or verification used to assure academic standards?

7 Bellerbys Educational Services Ltd makes effective use of external examining, moderation, or verification to assure academic standards. See main report, paragraphs 1.27 - 1.33.

How effectively is statistical information used to monitor and assure academic standards?

8 Bellerbys Educational Services Ltd makes effective use of statistical information to monitor and assure academic standards. See main report, paragraphs 1.34 - 1.39.

How effectively are responsibilities for managing and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities fulfilled?

9 Bellerbys Educational Services Ltd fulfils its responsibilities for managing and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities at this ISC effectively. See main report, paragraphs 2.1 - 2.4.

How effectively are external reference points used in the management and enhancement of learning opportunities?

10 Appropriate sections of the *Code of practice* are used effectively in the management and enhancement of learning opportunities. See main report, paragraphs 2.5 - 2.6.

How effectively do Bellerbys Educational Services Ltd and Lancaster University ISC assure themselves that the quality of teaching and learning is being maintained and enhanced?

11 Bellerbys Educational Services Ltd assures itself effectively that the quality of teaching and learning is being maintained at this ISC. See main report, paragraphs 2.7 - 2.11. At this ISC, the virtual learning environment (VLE) is used particularly effectively to enhance programme delivery. This effectiveness is supported by the provision of staff development for use of the VLE, and particularly the designation of a member of staff as a VLE Champion to advise and support staff in this area. The review team identified the use of the VLE to enhance programme delivery as a feature of good practice.

How is student feedback used to assure and enhance the quality of learning opportunities?

12 Bellerbys Educational Services Ltd's expectations with regard to student feedback are met through the effective use of questionnaires and students' elected representatives. See main report, paragraphs 2.12 - 2.16.

How effectively do Bellerbys Educational Services Ltd and Lancaster University ISC assure themselves that students are supported effectively?

13 Bellerbys Educational Services Ltd fulfils its obligations for the support of students at the ISC effectively. See main report, paragraphs 2.17 - 2.21. The ISC strengthens the high level of pastoral care provided to students through its effective mechanisms for the tracking of student progress. These include the use of Academic and Welfare Advice classes to monitor student performance; where a 'cause for concern' is identified, it is followed up by the Deputy Head of Centre or the Head of English. Students who met the review team particularly commended the high level of support at this ISC. The team identified this focus on tracking students' academic progress as a feature of good practice.

How effectively does Lancaster University ISC manage the recruitment and admission of students?

14 Recruitment and admission of students to the ISC are managed centrally by Bellerbys Educational Services Ltd, and these processes are generally effective. See main report, paragraphs 2.22 - 2.26.

What are the arrangements for staff development to maintain and/or enhance the quality of learning opportunities?

15 Bellerbys Educational Services Ltd's arrangements for staff development are applied effectively at this ISC. See main report, paragraphs 2.27 - 2.32.

How effectively do Bellerbys Educational Services Ltd and Lancaster University ISC ensure that learning resources are accessible to students and sufficient to enable them to achieve the learning outcomes?

16 Bellerbys Educational Services Ltd, through its agreement with the University, manages the provision of learning resources effectively. See main report, paragraphs 2.33 - 2.37.

How effectively does Bellerbys Educational Services Ltd's public information communicate to students and other stakeholders about the higher education it provides at this college?

17 Bellerbys Educational Services Ltd's public information communicates effectively to students and other stakeholders about the higher education it provides at this ISC. See main report, paragraphs 3.1 - 3.3.

How effective are the Bellerbys Educational Services Ltd's arrangements for assuring the accuracy and completeness of information it has responsibility for publishing at this college?

18 Bellerbys Educational Services Ltd generally works effectively with the University to assure the provision of accurate information about its higher education provision at this ISC. See main report, paragraphs 3.4 - 3.7.

Action plan

Lancaster University International Study Centre action plan relating to the Embedded College Review for Educational Oversight May 2012						
Good practice	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation
The review team identified the following areas of good practice that are worthy of wider dissemination within the provider:						
<p>• use of the virtual learning environment to enhance programme delivery (paragraph 11)</p>	<p>Continue to share best practice within the centre through training delivered by our E-learning Champion (Deputy Head of Centre), and across ISC network through Teachers' Conference, Teaching and Learning Committee, and heads of centre conferences and e-learning team meetings</p> <p>Ensure continuing and increased staff</p>	In progress; ongoing through 2012-13	Deputy Head of Centre, Head of Centre, E-Learning Technologies Coordinator, Deputy Principal, Principal	Improved use of the virtual learning environment to enhance programme delivery within the centre and across the ISC network; increased use of the virtual learning environment as shown by usage statistics; positive feedback at staff and staff-student meetings	Teaching and Learning Committee ISCQAEC TRCDC Lancaster University Steering Committee	Lesson observations and staff and student feedback incorporated into academic and operational report submitted to Steering Committee

	participation during transition to use of virtual learning environment					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the focus on tracking students' academic progress (paragraph 13) 	<p>Continue to share best practice within the centre through regular staff meetings, regular review of student progress, and close collaboration between academic staff and administrative staff</p> <p>Share best practice across ISC network through ISC teachers' conferences, heads of centre conferences, Teaching and Learning Committee</p>	Ongoing through 2012-13	Head of Centre, ISC Management Team	Maintained/improved monitoring of students' academic progress leading to improved learning outcomes	Regional Director TRCDC ISCQAEC Teaching and Learning Committee Deputy Principal Principal Lancaster University Steering Committee	Student performance/ progression data; student feedback reported in annual monitoring report and academic and operational report
Advisable	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation
The team considers that it is advisable for the provider to:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> review the use of the term 'credit' in 	Agreement at Programme	31 July 2012: update	Regional Director,	Updated documentation	Lancaster University	Annual monitoring report; programme

<p>connection with the international foundation year programme (paragraph 2)</p>	<p>Assessment Board to remove references to credit in relevant documentation, including transcripts</p> <p>Handbooks and programme specifications to be updated accordingly</p> <p>Inform staff and students at next ISC staff and staff-student meeting</p> <p>Include in induction for students in October and January intakes</p>	<p>handbooks and other relevant documentation, including revised sample transcript for 2012-13 cohorts</p>	<p>Head of Centre, Deputy Head of Centre</p>	<p>providing greater clarity for staff and students regarding the status of international foundation year programme; transcripts issued to students at end of programme will have no reference to credits</p>	<p>Head of Overseas Programmes</p> <p>Steering Committee</p> <p>Deputy Principal, Principal</p>	<p>review</p>
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Key to Action Plan:

ISCQAEC: International Study Centres Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee

TRCDC: Tutors' Review, Content and Development Committee

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