Higher Education Review (Embedded Colleges) of Bellerbys Educational Services Ltd (Study Group UK)

Lancaster University International Study Centre

May 2016

Contents

About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review (Embedded Colleges) conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at Lancaster University International Study Centre. The review took place from 17 to 19 May 2016 and was conducted by a team of two reviewers, as follows:

- Mrs Catherine Fairhurst
- Dr Sylvia Hargreaves.

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided by Lancaster University Study Centre and to make judgements as to whether or not its academic standards and quality meet UK expectations. These expectations are the statements in the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code)[1] setting out what all UK higher education providers expect of themselves and of each other, and what the general public can therefore expect of them.

In Higher Education Review (Embedded Colleges) the QAA review team:

- makes judgements on
  - the setting and maintenance of academic standards
  - the quality of student learning opportunities
  - the information provided about higher education provision
- provides commentary on the enhancement of student learning opportunities
- provides a commentary on the selected theme
- makes recommendations
- identifies features of good practice
- affirms action that the embedded college is taking or plans to take.

In Higher Education Review (Embedded Colleges) there is also a check on Study Group's financial sustainability, management and governance (FSMG). This check has the aim of giving students reasonable confidence that they should not be at risk of being unable to complete their course as a result of financial failure of their education provider.

A summary of the findings can be found in the section starting on page 3. Explanations of the findings are given in numbered paragraphs in the section starting on page 4.

In reviewing Lancaster University International Study Centre, the review team has also considered a theme selected for particular focus across higher education in England and Northern Ireland. The themes for the academic year 2014-15 are Digital Literacies and Student Employability,[2] and the provider is required to select, in consultation with student representatives, one of these themes to be explored through the review process.

The QAA website gives more information about QAA and its mission.[3] A dedicated section explains the method for Higher Education Review (Embedded Colleges).[4] For an explanation of terms see the glossary at the end of this report.

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[1] The UK Quality Code for Higher Education is published at: www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code
[2] Higher Education Review themes:
www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=106
[3] QAA website: www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us.
[4] Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers):
www.qaa.ac.uk/en/ReviewsAndReports/Pages/Educational-Oversight-.aspx

Key findings

QAA's judgements about Lancaster University International Study Centre

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision at Lancaster University International Study Centre (LUISC).

- The maintenance of the academic standards of the awards offered on behalf of Study Group and of LUISC's degree-awarding body **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of student learning opportunities is **commended**.
- The quality of the information about learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.

Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following features of **good practice** at Lancaster University International Study Centre:

- the use of Ofqual descriptors to map programme learning outcomes to A Level outcomes, that extends the range of students' degree options (Expectations B1 and A1)
- the range of opportunities and high level of support for staff in the development of their professional practice (Expectation B3)
- the high level of support provided for students for their academic and personal development (Expectation B4).

Enhancement of student learning opportunity

Lancaster University International Study Centre's (LUISC) enhancement quality assurance process, especially annual and periodic programme review, are key mechanisms for the identification of areas for enhancement. LUISC's action plan is used effectively to capture and monitor progress on enhancement initiatives. Enhancement activity is progressed within the wider context of Study Group's 'themes'. LUISC makes effective use of staff and student feedback to identify areas for action to improve the quality of student learning opportunities.

Theme: Student Employability

CareersAhead is the central employability enhancement initiative of Study Group. Study Group intends to implement this across all the International Study Centres.

The students at LUISC have access to the career advice, guidance and resources of the Lancaster University Careers Service which includes workshops, career mentoring and psychometric testing. LUISC piloted a Personal Development Plan module with the University's MBA students on the Pre-sessional English course. It intends to extend this to the International Foundation Year programme during 2016.

Employability and transferable skills are embedded in module assessments and learning and teaching opportunities.

About Lancaster University International Study Centre

In 2007, Bellerbys Educational Services (Study Group) signed an agreement with The University of Lancaster (the University) to set up the Lancaster University International Study Centre. The contract sets out the academic and operational arrangements. The programmes

are approved by Study Group and endorsed by the University. Study Group is responsible for maintaining academic standards. The contact was renewed in 2011 for a further 10 years until 2021.

There are 335 students, which represents a slight decrease from the 419 enrolments in 2014-15 (a decrease of 20 per cent). Study Group marketing staff have explained the decrease to challenges in specific markets and currency exchange rates, which have led UK education to become more expensive. There are four full-time and 18 part-time teaching staff, making a total of approximately 10 full-time equivalent staff.

There have been no significant changes since the last review in May 2012.

LUISC identifies several key strategies, including building on strengths and continuing to enhance the quality of learning opportunities through initiatives outlined in the Centre Action Plan. These include: continuing to ensure high progression rates to the University, strengthening the academic and pastoral support for students, strengthening the Cause for Concern project, and regular reviews of the curriculum through modular reviews and pathway evaluations and student feedback from the Student Council and module questionnaires.

LUISC had an Embedded College Review for Educational Oversight, by QAA, in 2012 and two monitoring visits, also by QAA, in June 2013 and May 2015. Both monitoring reports concluded that LUISC was making commendable progress against the action plan from the 2012 Review. There are no outstanding issues to be addressed.

Explanation of the findings about Lancaster University International Study Centre

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

Terms that may be unfamiliar to some readers have been included in a brief glossary at the end of this report. A fuller glossary of terms is available on the QAA website, and formal definitions of certain terms may be found in the operational description and handbook for the review method, also on the QAA website.

Explanation of the findings about Lancaster University International Study Centre

1   Judgement: The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies

Expectation (A1): In order to secure threshold academic standards, degree-awarding bodies:

a) ensure that the requirements of *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* are met by:

- **positioning their qualifications at the appropriate level of the relevant framework for higher education qualifications**
- **ensuring that programme learning outcomes align with the relevant qualification descriptor in the relevant framework for higher education qualifications**
- **naming qualifications in accordance with the titling conventions specified in the frameworks for higher education qualifications**
- **awarding qualifications to mark the achievement of positively defined programme learning outcomes**

b) consider and take account of QAA's guidance on qualification characteristics

c) where they award UK credit, assign credit values and design programmes that align with the specifications of the relevant national credit framework

d) consider and take account of relevant Subject Benchmark Statements.

Quality Code, *Chapter A1: UK and European Reference Points for Academic Standards*

Findings

1.1   The International Foundation Year (IFY) programme, with its constituent pathways, is approved by Study Group and endorsed by The University of Lancaster (the University). Study Group has ultimate responsibility for academic standards. The programme was approved as part of the original contract in 2007 and re-approved by Study Group under its periodic review process (and subsequently endorsed by the University) in 2013. The periodic review process in place at that time incorporated scrutiny of the use of external reference points. The current Study Group programme approval/re-approval process is designed to ensure that programmes are at the correct academic standard, and that the learning opportunities for students are appropriate. The process explicitly requires approval panels to include an external member with knowledge and understanding of UK sector-agreed reference points, including the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code), for the maintenance of academic standards and assurance and enhancement of quality.

1.2   The programme specification template used by Study Group requires a statement of programme level. Individual pathway specification templates require referencing to appropriate subject benchmarking, through the mapping to Ofqual A Level learning outcomes.

1.3   The University external examiner template, which is used by LUISC, needs external examiners to confirm that the academic standards set are appropriate, consistent with national standards and address relevant Subject Benchmark Statements.

1.4   The process would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.5   The review team examined the effectiveness of the practices and procedures by reviewing contractual, re-approval and other documentation, including process documents, programme, pathway and module specifications, and external examiner reports. The team also held meetings with students, teaching and administrative staff, senior staff and University representatives.

1.6   Limited documentation relating to the initial approval in 2007 is available, but the review team was able to examine documentary evidence relating to the 2013 Study Group periodic review (and re-approval) of the IFY in 2013. The review report records scrutiny of levels, the use of subject benchmarking and programme and pathway learning outcomes. The panel included an external member with relevant experience.

1.7   The IFY is appropriately positioned at level 3 of the Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF) (formerly the National Qualifications Framework), as recorded in the programme specification. English for University Study module design is mapped to the appropriate levels of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. Over the past two years, LUISC has undertaken extensive work to benchmark the IFY curriculum and students' achievement to A Levels, as is evidenced by the mapping to Ofqual descriptors, set out in the pathway specifications. This benchmarking will allow students to draw equivalence of their IFY results to A Levels and apply for any degree available at the University (with the exception of courses that are dependent on local authority or NHS funding). (See also section B1, paragaph 2.8.)

1.8   External examiner reports confirm that the academic standards set are appropriate, consistent with national standards and address relevant Subject Benchmark Statements.

1.9   LUISC uses relevant external reference points to secure and ensure consistency in academic standards. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A2.1): In order to secure their academic standards, degree-awarding bodies establish transparent and comprehensive academic frameworks and regulations to govern how they award academic credit and qualifications.

Quality Code, *Chapter A2: Degree-Awarding Bodies' Reference Points for Academic Standards*

Findings

1.10   The Quality Assurance and Enhancement Group (QAEG), chaired by the Head of Centre, oversees academic standards and is responsible for the Centre Action Plan. QAEG has a standard agenda and submits minutes to Study Group's Regional Quality Assurance and Enhancement Group (RQAEG). The Teaching Review and Content Development Committee (TRCDC) reviews the quality of learning and teaching, twice a year. The bi-annual Steering Group meetings determine the strategic partnership between LUISC, the Study Group and the University. The quality assurance processes are supported through a calendar of regular meetings, and through the Annual Monitoring Reports (AMR) and the Periodic Review Process

1.11   The design of the process would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.12   The review team tested the Expectation through scrutiny of the university contract, the Study Group and LUISC's quality documents, external examiner reports and discussions with staff and students.

1.13   Study Group has detailed guidelines for programme development and approval at approved centres. This includes consideration of the demand for the provision, and ensures that assessment, teaching and learning are in line with the Quality Code. There are comprehensive and transparent assessment regulations approved by the University. The assessment regulations are reviewed at the bi-annual TRCDC. The moderation process ensures that a sample of module assessments are second marked. LUISC formally responds to the external examiners through the Head of Centre and responses are incorporated in the annual monitoring report (AMR).

1.14   LUISC has a coherent academic governance structure for its programmes. The academic frameworks and regulations are transparent and widely disseminated. This regulatory framework is accessible through the virtual learning environment (VLE) together with minutes of committee meetings. The teaching staff develop further understanding through specific staff development sessions. The detail in the Student Handbook and tutorials from the teaching staff, ensure that students are aware of the academic regulations. Module descriptors and assessment briefs clearly articulate the assessment requirements. Students and staff confirmed to the review team that they understand the regulations and know where they can be accessed. To ensure that academic frameworks are consistently and systematically applied they are monitored in the annual monitoring report and scrutinised in the Centre Review by Study Group. Key changes are recorded in a log which is circulated to LUISC staff and the University.

1.15   The review team concludes that LUISC, through its well-established relationships with the University and by the use of the Study Group's structures, operates within transparent and comprehensive academic frameworks and regulations which secure academic standards. The Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A2.2): Degree-awarding bodies maintain a definitive record of each programme and qualification that they approve (and of subsequent changes to it) which constitutes the reference point for delivery and assessment of the programme, its monitoring and review, and for the provision of records of study to students and alumni.

Quality Code, *Chapter A2: Degree-Awarding Bodies' Reference Points for Academic Standards*

Findings

1.16   LUISC develops, produces and maintains the programme specifications as the definitive record of a programme. The Courses Handbook contains the programme and module specifications which are completed using a Study Group template. This requires that learning outcomes are specified and reference is made to *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Irland* (FHEQ), the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) or the Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF) and Subject Benchmark Statements.

1.17   The design of the process would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.18   In testing the Expectation, the review team evaluated programme specifications, module specifications and course handbooks reports from annual monitoring and reviews. The review team also met senior staff, teaching staff and students.

1.19   Programme specifications detail the intended learning outcomes and the mapping of Ofqual's subject benchmarks to programme and module intended learning outcomes. There is also a detailed map of delivery and assessments with dates. The module specifications include aims, learning outcomes, syllabus, a curriculum map and references. Teaching staff and internal and external examiners use this as the definitive record for delivery, assessment and monitoring and review. The records are updated when any amendments to the programme, are made through the approval processes. In addition to the annual monitoring process the documentation is reviewed routinely at the Study Group's centre review.

1.20   The course handbook is available in hard copy and on LUISC's VLE. Students told the review team that they knew where to find information about their programmes and said they understood what is expected of them.

1.21   The review team concludes that the programme documentation provided by the LUISC is of sufficient detail to be used as the reference point for the delivery and assessment of LISC's programmes. The Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A3.1): Degree-awarding bodies establish and consistently implement processes for the approval of taught programmes and research degrees that ensure that academic standards are set at a level which meets the UK threshold standard for the qualification and are in accordance with their own academic frameworks and regulations.

Quality Code, *Chapter A3: Securing Academic Standards and an Outcomes-Based Approach to Academic Awards*

Findings

1.22   As noted in section A1, the IFY programme, with its constituent pathways, is approved by Study Group and endorsed by the University. The IFY, which in 2007 comprised three pathways - Business and Management, Engineering and Computing, and Law and Social Studies, was approved as part of the original contract in 2007 and re-approved by Study Group under its periodic review process (and subsequently endorsed by the University) in 2013.

1.23   A process for the approval of programmes and pathways, leading to endorsement by the University, was agreed between the partners and adopted in 2012. This process incorporates various stages including approval by Steering Group; Study Group approval, Link Tutor agreement andconfirmed by the University Registrar.

1.24   The current Study Group programme approval, re-approval and modification processes were approved by the Academic Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee (AQAEC) in September 2015. The approval and re-approval processes, which incorporate appropriate externality, are designed to ensure that programmes are at the correct academic standard and that the learning opportunities for students are appropriate.

1.25   The University external examiner template, which is used by LUISC, requires external examiners to confirm that the academic standards set are appropriate, consistent with national standards and address relevant Subject Benchmark Statements.

1.26   The process would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.27   The review team examined the effectiveness of the practices and procedures by reviewing contractual, validation, periodic review, programme modification and other documentation including external examiner reports and programme and pathway specifications. The team also held meetings with students, teaching and administrative staff, senior staff and University representatives.

1.28   Limited documentation relating to the initial approval was available, but the review team was able to examine documentary evidence relating to the 2013 Study Group periodic review (and re-approval) of the IFY in 2013 and the subsequent approval of the new Mathematics and Statistics pathway.

1.29   While the IFY periodic review and re-approval pre-dates the introduction of the current Study Group programme approval and re-approval processes in 2015, the review team found that the process employed was effective in ensuring that academic standards were set at the appropriate level. The panel which, through a teleconference that included two external members (one of these being from a another university with another Study Group embedded college), scrutinised the mapping of Ofqual benchmarks to intended programme learning outcomes, the mapping of modules to programme learning outcomes, programme regulations and assessment strategy. The programme was subsequently re-approved by AQAEC and endorsed by the University.

1.30   The programme and pathway specifications reference relevant national qualification levels and Ofqual subject benchmarks. External examiner reports confirm that the academic standards set are appropriate, consistent with national standards and address relevant Subject Benchmark Statements.

1.31   The approval of the Mathematics and Statistics pathway, which pre-dates the current Study Group programme modification process, was progressed in accordance with the process agreed by the partners in 2012, incorporating Steering Group approval, University faculty approval, AQAEC approval and University endorsement. The modification entailed the introduction of two new modules, but the programme learning outcomes, as approved at the earlier IFY periodic review, remained unchanged.

1.32   In response to student and staff feedback, a proposal to split the Law and Social Studies pathway was submitted to AQAEC in July 2015, following discussion with the relevant University departments and Steering Group approval. Like the earlier Mathematics and Statistics modification, this modification entails the introduction of two new modules, but the programme learning outcomes as approved at the IFY periodic review will remain unchanged. AQAEC approval (by the Chair's action) was obtained on 11 September 2015.

1.33   On 3 September 2015, AQAEC approved a new Study Group programme modification process, which provides that a proposal for a new pathway or route through a programme triggers a full re-approval process. Arguably, the Law/Social Studies proposal was not caught by this provision, since the programme modification was characterised as a 'more tailored alternative to an existing pathway' rather than representing a completely new pathway. It was also the case that the proposal was already being progressed at Study Group level, (though it had not been formally approved) when the new process was introduced. In any event, AQAEC approval provided confirmation that LUISC was entitled to proceed to formal University endorsement (which at the date of the review was still awaited), subject to formal approval of the two new modules. A proposal to introduce a pre-master's programme has been put on hold pending a review by Study Group.

1.34   The review team found that programme approval and re-approval processes ensure that academic standards are set at the appropriate level. The team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A3.2): Degree-awarding bodies ensure that credit and qualifications are awarded only where:

- **the achievement of relevant learning outcomes (module learning outcomes in the case of credit and programme outcomes in the case of qualifications) has been demonstrated through assessment**
- **both UK threshold standards and their own academic standards have been satisfied.**

Quality Code, *Chapter A3: Securing Academic Standards and an Outcomes-Based Approach to Academic Awards*

Findings

1.35   LUISC gives its students the opportunity to demonstrate achievement of the relevant learning outcomes through a wide range of assessments. LUISC operates this according to the assessment regulations. which are set through the programme approval process. LUISC is responsible for setting, marking, moderation and feedback of all assessments of the IFY. The Programme, Pathway and Module Specifications contain detailed maps related learning outcomes to assessment. External examiners attend Progression Assessment Boards and report on academic standards.

1.36   The design of the process would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.37   To test the Expectation the review team considered a range of evidence (including student and course handbooks, assessment briefs, external examiners' reports and approval documents), met staff responsible for assessment and oversight, and met students.

1.38   LUISC documentation describes relevant learning outcomes in detail at programme, pathway and module levels. The programme specification of the IFY describes the aims, the objectives and the learning outcomes of the programme. It also describes the objectives of different assessment modes and grade descriptors. The descriptors of each of the five pathways that student can study detail the intended learning objectives, the module outcomes mapped to the intended programme learning outcomes. There is an assessment and delivery map including assessment type, duration weighting and time.

1.39   Module specifications describes aims, learning outcomes, syllabus, learning outcomes mapped to mode of assessment and the assessment weighting. The students said that they are well informed about assessment requirements by their tutors, the module descriptors in their Programme of Study document and from the VLE.

1.40   Reasonable adjustments are made to assessment modes to avoid the risk of disadvantage to students with protected characteristics for example students are provided with lap tops in examinations and handouts printed in larger font for partially sighted students. These do not compromise academic standards.

1.41   Study Group has developed a staff development workshop on the creation of learning outcomes followed by a planned session on aligning assessments to learning outcomes. Staff have received training in assessment for disabled students and there is advice and a service agreement with the University's Student Well Being Service.

1.42   Staff confirmed that assessments are reviewed and verified before being confirmed. Following student submission, student work is first marked and moderated and then presented to the Module Assessment Board (MAB) which confirms the accuracy of marks. A sample of assessments and students' work is then sent to the external examiner for further

review. The Progression Assessment Board (PAB), chaired by the University Link Tutor or the Head of the University Overseas Programmes and attended by the external examiners, then confirms a student's marks. Results from all assessments are entered into the student information management system, which generates the set of results for MAB and PAB.

1.43   External examiners' reports demonstrate that they engage systematically, comment on module content and assessments. They confirm there are coherent and well-organised programmes which clearly allow students to achieve the stated learning objectives.

1.44   LUISC processes ensure that the achievement of learning outcomes is demonstrated through assessment and that its own and UK threshold standards are satisfied. The Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A3.3): Degree-awarding bodies ensure that processes for the monitoring and review of programmes are implemented which explicitly address whether the UK threshold academic standards are achieved and whether the academic standards required by the individual degree-awarding body are being maintained.

Quality Code, *Chapter A3: Securing Academic Standards and an Outcomes-Based Approach to Academic Awards*

Findings

1.45   Under the contractual arrangements with the University, LUISC is required to undertake annual programme monitoring, including review of student evaluation and external examiner comment and critical self-reflection by the programme team, and to submit an annual report to the University. LUISC must also comply with Study Centre's monitoring and review processes, comprising ongoing programme monitoring through centre action plans (CAPs), annual monitoring and Centre review.

1.46   Under Study Group processes, monitoring at LUISC level, recorded in AMRs, draws on module and programme reviews. Academic standards matters are addressed through the presentation and analysis of student progression, achievement and completion data, and analysis and commentary on external examiner reports. The processes require LUISC level oversight of programme monitoring to be maintained through Centre QAEGs.

1.47   The University external examiner template, which is used by LUISC, requires external examiners to confirm that the academic standards set are appropriate, consistent with national standards and address relevant Subject Benchmark Statements.

1.48   Centre Review is the process by which Study Group seeks to assure itself that each International Study Centre (ISC) is effectively managing academic standards, managing and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities and publishing reliable information. Heads of Centre report directly to AQAEC regarding Centre Review outcomes and their responses.

1.49   The CAP is designed to ensure the implementation of actions emanating from the review and monitoring of modules and programmes. The CAP, which is a live document recording continuous review, is monitored at LUISC level by QAEG, as well as at regional and Study Group levels, respectively by RQAEG and AQAEC.

1.50   The design of the process would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.51   The team explored the effectiveness of the arrangements by examining contractual and other documentation including process documents; monitoring and review reports; the CAP; internal meeting minutes; and external examiner reports. The review team also held meetings with students, teaching and administrative staff, senior staff and University representatives.

1.52   The review team examined the AMRs for 2013-14 and 2014-15, which are set out in the University template. The reports draw on a range of data sources including, with respect to academic standards, student statistical data maintained by the ISC and the university, examination board minutes, and external examiner reports. Clear student retention, progression and achievement data are presented together with analysis, including comparative analysis across pathways informed by module review, and commentary on actions taken in response. External examiner comment on standards-related matters (as well as comment on the quality of learning opportunities) is discussed and appropriately

addressed. External examiner reports confirm that academic standards are maintained at an appropriate level, in line with relevant external reference points.

1.53   The CAP, which, in accordance with the Study Group template, sets out actions identified at Study Group and LUISC levels, as well as those identified through QAA reviews and monitoring, is informed by the outcomes of annual programme monitoring and Centre Review, and external examiner comment. Completed actions are tracked and recorded. With respect to standards-related matters, of particular note is the CAP record of the effective action taken by the Centre to improve student retention and progression.

1.54   The LUISC QAEG maintains oversight of programme monitoring. Meeting minutes record discussion of student progression and achievement data and of ongoing progress on the CAP, though review of the AMRs themselves is not extensively documented.

1.55   The Study Group Centre Review conducted in 2013 considered how effectively LUISC fulfils its responsibilities for the management of academic standards, including the management of student assessment and the use of external reference points, external examiners and statistical information. The review report records comprehensive exploration of these matters. The CAP captures the outcomes of the review and tracks progress on the actions arising. The Head of Centre reported directly to AQAEC on LUISC completed and ongoing actions in response to the review findings including, with respect to academic standards, measures to improve student progression, which have now been implemented effectively, and the appointment of an additional external examiner.

1.56   Processes for the monitoring and review of programmes explicitly addressing whether academic standards are maintained at the appropriate level are established and implemented effectively. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A3.4): In order to be transparent and publicly accountable, degree-awarding bodies use external and independent expertise at key stages of setting and maintaining academic standards to advise on whether:

- **UK threshold academic standards are set, delivered and achieved**
- **the academic standards of the degree-awarding body are appropriately set and maintained.**

Quality Code, *Chapter A3: Securing Academic Standards and an Outcomes-Based Approach to Academic Awards*

Findings

1.57   LUISC uses external and independent expertise at three stages in setting and maintaining academic standards. In the programme approval process Study Group requires that the approval panel appointed by AQAEC must include an external subject specialist. External examiners are members of the Progression Assessment Board and submit written reports to the university secretariat. The Study Group's periodic Centre Reviews are chaired by an independent member and include a Head of Centre from another ISC. The University through its Faculty Deans and Link Tutors also contribute significant external expertise to the programmes which are approved by Study Group and endorsed by the University.

1.58   The design of the process would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.59   The review team tested the expectation by reviewing documentation and guidance in the Academic Quality Handbook and LUISC and Study Group Policies and Regulations on approval, monitoring, review and the role of external examiners. The team also reviewed LUISC documentation in relation to reports of periodic and centre reviews by Study Group, external examiner reports and the responses to them. The team discussed arrangements for the involvement of external and independent expertise in a range of meetings.

1.60   The University provides independent expertise by appointing link tutors who chair the PABs and ensure that internal requirements are being consistently implemented. They comment on draft assessments and proposed course modifications, advise on academic standards. The Steering Group, which approved the new pathways within the programme, was chaired by a senior member of the University. Any new programme subjected to Study Group's approval processes will be scrutinised by an external expert who is nominated by the centre but approved by AQAEC.

1.61   The external examiners who are employed by the University are members of the PABs and provide impartial advice and recommendations as to whether the assessments demonstrate that academic standards are achieved. They confirm that programmes comfortably adhere to relevant professional and regulatory standards and benchmarks.

1.62   Two external subject specialists were members of the panel for the Study Group's 2013 Periodic Review of the LUISC's programmes. The report of the 2015 periodic Centre Review demonstrates it was chaired by an external member and included a Head of Centre from another ISC of the panel for the periodic Centre Review in 2015.

1.63   The review team concludes that LUISC has transparent arrangements to use external and independent expertise at key stages of setting and maintaining academic standards for its programmes. The Expectation is met with a low level of associated risk.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered by itself: Summary of findings

1.64   In reaching its judgement about the maintenance of academic standards, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published Handbook.

1.65   LUISC uses its own and Study Group's processes effectively to maintain academic standards. These processes are supported by LUISC's own internal procedures and guidance.

1.66   All seven of the Expectations in this area are met and the associated levels of risk are low. The review team concludes that the maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of the University at LUISC **meets** UK expectations.

2   Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities

Expectation (B1): Higher education providers, in discharging their responsibilities for setting and maintaining academic standards and assuring and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities, operate effective processes for the design, development and approval of programmes

Quality Code, *Chapter B1: Programme Design, Development and Approval*

Findings

2.1   As noted in section A3.1, the IFY was approved as part of the original contract in 2007, and re-approved through Study Group's periodic review process in 2013. A process for the approval of programmes, agreed between the partners and adopted in 2012, and which leads up to endorsement by the University, requires confirmation of curriculum match by the University Link Tutor and the Registrar, as well as approval by Steering Group, the University faculty, and Study Group.

2.2   The current Study Group programme approval and re-approval process was approved by AQAEC in September 2015. The process incorporates appropriate externality and includes panel meetings with senior, administrative and teaching staff and students. It draws on an evidence base allowing an assessment of the quality of learning opportunities, including student, staff and LUISC handbooks, and programme and module specifications. Study Group programme modification process is discussed above and not addressed further in this section of the report (see also section A3.1).

2.3   The University external examiner template, which is used by LUISC, asks external examiners to comment on curriculum design and delivery; learning and teaching; strengths and innovative features; and good practice and enhancement.

2.4   The process would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.5   The review team examined the effectiveness of the arrangements by reviewing contractual, periodic review and other documentation including external examiner reports, programme specifications and internal meeting minutes. The team also held meetings with students, teaching and administrative staff, senior staff and University representatives.

2.6   The original contract sets out the respective responsibilities of the parties as to admissions, learning resources, facilities and student support, staffing, assessment processes and quality assurance. Although, limited documentation relating to the original approval in 2007 was available, the review team examined documentary evidence relating to the 2013 Study Group periodic review (and re-approval) of the IFY in 2013.

2.7   While the 2013 Study Group periodic review report is reasonably comprehensive in its coverage of academic standards matters, it is less so in its discussion of the quality of student learning opportunities. However, there is evidence that learning opportunities were explored. The review panel drew on an evidence base including the student and LUISC handbooks, and one of the approval conditions (confirmed as satisfied) concerned the incorporation of skills into module design.

2.8   The IFY programme specification addresses learning and teaching methods and strategies, student support, routes to progression to the University, and the role of the university link tutors. Over the past two years, the LUISC has undertaken extensive work to benchmark the IFY curriculum and students' achievement to A Levels. A new progression

process has been agreed with the University which will allow students to draw equivalence of their IFY results to A Levels and apply for any degree available at the University (with the exception of courses that are dependent on local authority or NHS funding). These arrangements, which are in place from this year, aim not only to increase the range of degree progression route available to students but also increase student diversity on the IFY. The use of Ofqual descriptors to map programme learning outcomes to A Level outcomes that extends the range of students' degree options is good practice.

2.9   Staff confirmed that they were involved in discussions on the IFY programme modifications covered in section A3.1, which is evidenced in internal meeting minutes. University faculty staff are consulted on programme development and design. External examiners comment favourably on the curriculum, and the integration of relevant skills, and report that they find significant evidence of good teaching.

2.10   LUISC operates effectively processes for the design, development and approval of programmes to ensure the quality of student learning opportunities. The team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B2): Recruitment, selection and admission policies and procedures adhere to the principles of fair admission. They are transparent, reliable, valid, inclusive and underpinned by appropriate organisational structures and processes. They support higher education providers in the selection of students who are able to complete their programme.

Quality Code, *Chapter B2: Recruitment, Selection and Admission to Higher Education*

Findings

2.11   Study Group is responsible for recruitment, selection and admission of students as agreed in the contract with the University. The Steering Group oversees the recruitment strategic priorities of the University and the Study Group and is currently reviewing targets for student numbers. Study Group's Admissions Policy describes the principles and structure of the central admissions function. The recruitment, selection and admission of students is managed centrally by Study Group through an Admissions Centres located in Singapore and Brighton. This is a new process and will be reviewed after a full cycle has occurred. The Singapore office manages the application through to offer-issuing phases and the UK manages the confirmation to the students phase. Trained admission staff assess all applications to ensure that they are academically qualified for the chosen course, their English Test Results meet the entry requirements, they conform to UK Visas and Immigration entry regulations and references are checked. Any borderline exceptional cases outside the entry qualifications criteria are referred to the Head of Centre for a decision. There is a formal Admissions Appeals and Complaints Policy.

2.12   The design of the process would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.13   In order to test this Expectation the review team examined the admissions policy, documentation and information on the website relating to admissions, and minutes of committees. The review team met senior staff as well as asking students about their admission experience.

2.14   The Admissions Policy provides a clear guide to the principles and policies and procedures for admissions. This enables admission processes to be conducted in a professional manner by authorised and competent staff. The selection processes are transparent with entry requirements maintained on centralised data bases. The Admissions Office refers prospective students to LUISC information through a web link. The LUISC website is accessible and provides an online application form with clear admissions requirements including the equivalents in a wide range of countries. Current students confirm that they had sufficient accurate information to make an informed decision about UK higher education.

2.15   The students confirmed that they had a smooth and efficient admissions experience. After their applications had been scrutinised they are offered a place at least within three weeks. LUISC provided the review team with examples of offers made within four days. The new students receive a comprehensive and helpful pre arrival document including example work sheets. On arrival they have a diagnostic test which may indicate they need further academic support. There is a comprehensive induction week when they meet University as well as LUISC staff and students from earlier cohorts. The students confirmed that these activities enable them to make a smooth transition from prospective student to current student.

2.16   There are clear and transparent procedures specifying the criteria for making an appeal against an admissions decision. The review team saw evidence that exceptional cases outside the entry criteria are considered formally and judiciously.

2.17   Study Group has clear and comprehensive policies and procedures for the recruitment, selection and admission of students. These adhere to the principles of fair admission and are applied transparently. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the level of associated risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B3): Higher education providers, working with their staff, students and other stakeholders, articulate and systematically review and enhance the provision of learning opportunities and teaching practices, so that every student is enabled to develop as an independent learner, study their chosen subject(s) in depth and enhance their capacity for analytical, critical and creative thinking.

Quality Code, *Chapter B3: Learning and Teaching*

Findings

2.18   LUISC has initiated the development of a distinct teaching, learning and assessment strategy, which is to be in place for 2016-17, as required by Study Group. LUISC's approach to learning and teaching, which is articulated in the programme handbook, focusses on learning and teaching methodology. These include mixed delivery techniques, including information technology, discussion and group work and self-directed learning. The provision of training and support to ensure that teaching staff are equipped with a range of delivery styles. This approach is supported by the systems in place to ensure the suitability of staff on appointment; to maintain and enhance teaching quality through teaching observation, appraisal and staff development; and to keep learning opportunities and teaching practices under systematic review.

2.19   The design of the process would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.20   The team explored the effectiveness of the arrangements by examining policy and process documentation and templates; staff and course handbooks; and completed staff development, appraisal and skills audit records. The team also viewed LUISC's online continuing professional development (CPD) site and held meetings with students, teaching and administrative staff, senior staff and University representatives.

2.21   Staff recruitment processes, comprising interviews and checks on references, work effectively to ensure that all teaching staff have suitable academic qualifications and appropriate teaching qualifications or experience. The most recently appointed staff whom the review team met, said that they received helpful information and support at induction and subsequently through informal mentoring by line managers and colleagues.

2.22   Peer-to-peer and management lesson observation systems, as articulated in LUISC's formal policy documentation and detailed templates, are firmly embedded in teaching practice. The peer-to-peer lesson observation system has been enhanced through the introduction of interdisciplinary peer observations ('teaching triangles'), with which numerous tutors have engaged. Lesson observation systems operate well in enabling staff to reflect on their practice, formulate personal development plans and share good practice. Annual staff appraisal, which already operates effectively for full-time teaching staff, is to be extended to all teaching staff, with appraisals scheduled for completion before the end of this academic year.

2.23   LUISC's planned and systematic approach to staff development and support is demonstrated by the extensive audit of staff skills and knowledge that was undertaken earlier this year, and the staff development put in place to address areas for further work. The audit explored individual staff skills levels in the use information technology to prepare and deliver teaching, to support assessment processes and to track student attendance and progression. Staff understanding of quality assurance processes, including processes relating to learning, teaching and assessment. The detailed audit findings led to the provision of additional support through staff development on processes and procedures.

2.24   Staff development records and staff comment in meetings with the review team provided clear evidence of a wide range of development opportunities available to LUISC staff, both within the Centre and externally, as a well as high levels of staff attendance at these. LUISC's online CPD site contains a wealth of helpful information in further support of learning and teaching delivery, such as guidelines on the use of mobile phone and interactive whiteboard technology, flipped learning and action research. The establishment of the e-Champion role has added momentum to LUISC's continuous drive to enhance the student learning experience. The range of opportunities and high level of support available for staff in the development of their professional practice is **good practice**.

2.25   Teaching and learning practices and enhancements are monitored and reviewed on an ongoing, annual, and periodic basis, respectively through the CAP, annual programme monitoring and Centre Review (see also section B8). Students confirmed that the teaching provides the opportunity for class discussion and group work and, more generally, effectively supports their learning.

2.26   LUISC articulates and systematically reviews and enhances the provision of learning opportunities and teaching practices. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B4): Higher education providers have in place, monitor and evaluate arrangements and resources which enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential.

Quality Code, *Chapter B4: Enabling Student Development and Achievement*

Findings

2.27   LUISC has in place a range of mechanisms to support students, prepare them for progression to degree study and enable them to develop their academic and personal potential. These operate at pre-entry, on induction and throughout the programme. There are processes for the allocation of learning resources. The LUISC Student Welfare Officer and Academic and Welfare Advice (AWA) tutors engage with the students systematically, to identify any academic or welfare concerns. The effectiveness of these measures can be seen in the analysis of effectiveness of interventions in the first term for the current academic year where Cause for Concern referrals by tutors and intervention by LUISC staff resulted in 74 per cent of students referred being able to progress to term 2 of the IFY and a further 18 per cent having the opportunity to restart with the January 2016 cohort.

2.28   The design of the process would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.29   The team explored the effectiveness of the arrangements by examining pre-arrival, induction and other support information for students; student and staff handbooks; Centre Review documents; and student progression reviews, progression tracking and record of interventions. The team also held meetings with students, teaching and administrative staff, senior staff and university representatives.

2.30   Student support is in place pre-entry through the provision of extensive pre-arrival information. A pre-arrival booklet provides helpful and practical advice on matters such as arrival and travel in the UK, registering with a doctor, opening a bank account and LUISC activities during the first week. This general information is supplemented by subject-specific pre-arrival taster exercises, worksheets and suggested website research and reading.

2.31   After arrival, the week-long induction provides students with the opportunity to meet Centre staff and students, register with the University, tour the campus, receive course and administrative information, purchase text books and complete diagnostic tests and administrative procedures. The Induction Booklet sets out useful, practical information and tips, and makes clear LUISC's expectations of students, as well as what students can expect from LUISC.

2.32   In their meeting with the team, students were very positive about the pre-arrival information and their induction. Students also clearly valued the high level of academic and pastoral support throughout their programme. They confirmed that tutors are readily contactable in person or via email and set meeting appointments promptly, as appropriate. The formal Academic and Welfare Advice programme incorporates both weekly and one-to-one sessions with tutors, and is supplemented by support available from LUISCs Academic Welfare Officer.

2.33   LUISC has rigorous processes for monitoring student progression and for supporting students deemed at risk of falling behind in their studies. These processes were further strengthened and enhanced through the implementation, in 2014-15, of LUISC's progression improvement plan, which was successful in restoring lower than expected progression rates for 2013-14 to previous levels in the following year.

2.34   Tutors closely monitor individual students' progress, which is documented in formal individual end-of-term progress reports providing commentary on each subject area, with

action required. The outcomes feed into LUISC's progression tracker, which records a RAG-rating for each student. The data is viewed by LUISC senior staff and the Academic Welfare Officer, who identify any students to be referred for support under the Cause for Concern scheme. Subsequent meetings with each student establish the interventions required, with follow-up progress meetings where necessary. LUISC provides additional English classes and associated one-to-one counselling to maintain and improve student attendance at these sessions, particularly for January starters, who have been identified as being at greater risk in this respect.

2.35   Disability support needs are identified on application/enrolment, or subsequently through tutor reports. LUISC works closely with the University support services and, under a formal service agreement, LUISC meets the cost of disability advice, guidance and (where applicable) full assessment of individual needs. LUISC funding is made available to support students with disabilities, who (as international students) are not eligible for external funding; reasonable adjustments put in place recently have included additional time for examinations and moving classes to rooms providing disability access. LUISC staff have taken up opportunities to attend disability training provided by the University.

2.36   Students are well prepared for progression to the University and degree study, through the development of independent learning skills, particularly through the research project module. University taster lectures and Open Days provide further support for students. LUISC offers sessions on choice of degree, the University application process and writing the personal statement. LUISC provides comprehensive support for students including rigorous monitoring of student progress, the use of the cause for concern scheme, additional English language skills, one-to-one counselling, disability support and assisting students in their transition to the University. The high level of support provided for students for their academic and personal development is **good practice**. This support includes monitoring student progress, the Cause for Concerns scheme, added English language classes, one-to-one counselling, and support for the transition to the University.

2.37   Students have access to full range of university resources. Students expressed satisfaction with resource provision. Student support, staffing and physical resource provision are effectively scrutinised, monitored, evaluated and reviewed through annual programme monitoring, the CAP and Centre Review.

2.38   There are effective systems and processes for the provision, monitoring and evaluation of arrangements and resources which support student development and achievement. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B5): Higher education providers take deliberate steps to engage all students, individually and collectively, as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience.

Quality Code, *Chapter B5: Student Engagement*

Findings

2.39   LUISC engages students in education enhancement and quality assurance through student representation and module evaluation. The Student Council, comprising all student representatives, is established to provide the forum for students to raise matters to be brought to the Staff Student meetings held each term. Students are represented at QAEG meetings, which include a standing agenda item covering feedback from the Student Council and from Staff-Student Committee (SSC) meetings. All students have the opportunity to feed back on their learning experience through online evaluation questionnaires.

2.40   The design of the process would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.41   The team explored the effectiveness of the arrangements by examining the student handbook, annual programme monitoring reports, and analysis of student module evaluations questionnaires. The review team also held meetings with students, teaching and administrative staff, senior staff and University representatives.

2.42   The Student Handbook provides information about student feedback and representation, including the role of the Student Council, the SSC and QAEG. Student representatives, one for each teaching group, are elected by their peers. The student representative role is explained to students through their teaching groups, as the appointment process begins. This information is supplemented by a briefing sheet covering the representative role and the function of the Student Council and the SSC; and providing examples of the kinds of matters that might well be addressed through the representation system. Once appointed, student representatives receive a briefing on their role from the Head of Centre at the first SSC meeting of the year.

2.43   Student representatives meet together as the Student Council to receive feedback gathered from their groups and to identify matters to be taken forward to the termly SSC meetings. SSC meetings, which are formally minuted, are well attended by students and staff. Discussion covers learning and teaching matters, as well as the typical range of housekeeping items. The records show appropriate consideration of student feedback and comment, with updates on action taken in response.

2.44   Student representatives are invited to attend QAEG meetings, by rotation. Minutes generally record their attendance, though the extent of their active participation in discussion is unclear from the minutes. Students confirmed that they have attended QAEG meetings and received the CAP for perusal in advance.

2.45   Students are encouraged to complete termly online module evaluation questionnaires (MEQs), providing feedback on teaching, support, assessment and feedback and personal development. Annual programme monitoring reports are informed by completed MEQs and the minutes of SSCs. Matters arising and identified for action are captured and followed through the Centre Action Plan.

2.46   Students reported that their voice is heard and that LUISC responds appropriately. They offered examples of action taken by LUISC in response to their feedback: adjustments made to class scheduling, and the extension of assessment deadlines to ensure (in one isolated case, in exceptional circumstances) that associated material had been fully addressed in class.

2.47   Through student representation and formal feedback systems, LUISC takes deliberate steps to engage all students as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B6): Higher education providers operate equitable, valid and reliable processes of assessment, including for the recognition of prior learning, which enable every student to demonstrate the extent to which they have achieved the intended learning outcomes for the credit or qualification being sought.

Quality Code, *Chapter B6: Assessment of Students and the Recognition of Prior Learning*

Findings

2.48   LUISC's assessment regulations policies and processes are based on expectations of the Study Group. These are approved by the University and aligned to its regulations to ease students' progression to university study. LUISC is responsible for designing, conducting and marking the assessments, with associated record keeping as defined in the contract.

2.49   The contract with the University and the assessment regulations define the composition and powers of the assessment boards. The MAB, chaired by the Head of Centre, receives, confirms and reports the end of term results and determines whether students are able to move through to the next stage of the course. The PAB reviews students' final marks and determines their progression to the University. The PAB is chaired by a University link tutor attended by the external examiners. There is also an Academic Impropriety Panel (AIP) and a Personal Mitigating Circumstances Board (PMCB). There are three external examiners appointed and employed by the university.

2.50   The design of the process would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.51   The review team scrutinised regulations, policy and strategy documents, minutes of, assessment boards, external examiners reports, link tutor comments and staff development resources The team met a range of staff and students and viewed an example of assessment related information for students on the VLE.

2.52   The assessment policies and regulations are explicit, transparent and accessible. Students show an understanding of the regulations and say they can access the full assessment regulations in the student handbook and on the VLE. Personal tutors explain and reinforce these regulations. There is no credit awarded for the recognition of prior learning. The minutes of all the assessment boards and the external examiners reports demonstrates that LUISC applies the regulations fairly and consistently.

2.53   LUISC staff design a variety of modes of assessment to enable students to demonstrate the extent to which they have achieved the learning objectives. These include examinations, essays, posters and presentations. English language modules use a central bank from Study Group for revision purposes. LUISC has recently introduced synoptic assessments, which integrate students' subject-based assessment with their English language studies.

2.54   The teaching staff consistently operate processes for marking assessments and for moderating marks. All summative assessments are on a clear brief with assessment criteria and marking scheme. There is internal standardisation and double marking of a sample of summative assessments for each assessment before being reviewed by the external examiner.

2.55   Students receive constructive and developmental assessment feedback on standard cover sheets within 10 days, although the students say it is usually within a week. They also receive feedback on their examination performance.

2.56   Students reported that they understand how to avoid unacceptable academic practices and the penalties. They are provided with extensive advice and guidance on plagiarism and referencing at induction and in taught modules. They submit their assignments and receive feedback through plagiarism-detection software. The staff development programme includes the use of electronic feedback and assessment design.

2.57   The University link tutors report that assessment is rigorous and at the appropriate level. The external examiner reports have commended LUISC for its robust processes for setting, marking, standardisation and double marking of assignments and examinations papers. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B7): Higher education providers make scrupulous use of external examiners.

Quality Code, *Chapter B7: External Examining*

Findings

2.58   The University, which has explicit policies and regulations, appoints and employs three independent external examiners. The roles and responsibilities of the external examiners are described in the Assessment Regulations. The external examiners report verbally at the PAB and submit a written report to the university secretariat on the university template. The reporting form includes sections on comparability of standards, curriculum design and delivery, assessment methods and procedures, student feedback and achievement and a section on good practice/areas for improvement. External examiner reports are made available to staff and students on the VLE and are submitted to the University Secretariat. The Head of Centre's response to the reports is incorporated in the AMR, which is submitted to the Head of Overseas Programmes and is considered at the University's Collaborative Provision and Oversight Committee; Study Group has oversight through the report being submitted to its RQAEG.

2.59   The design of the process would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.60   To test the Expectation, the review team examined LUISC assessment, AMR reports, external examiners' reports, policies and procedures. The team also looked at the Study Group's regulations and committee minutes. The team met staff and students to establish the use made of external examiners by LUISC.

2.61   LUISC uses external examiners to secure academic standards for all its International Foundation Year pathways even though they are all at Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) (Regulated Qualifications Framework from September 2015) level 3. There is an external examiner for English and the Research Project modules, for Business and Management and Law and Social Studies pathways, and for the Science and Engineering and Maths pathways. The reports are not all on the University templates. Those seen for English and Skills for University Study have a section for general comments, specific comments and comments from students.

2.62   These reports demonstrate that external examiners give LUISC impartial and independent advice, as well as comment on the assessment processes, the academic standards and on the achievement of students. External examiners are informed about the assessment practices and procedures and they understand importance of their contribution to quality assurance and enhancements. Their reports also confirm that they have sufficient evidence to fulfil their role effectively. The AMR and committee minutes show a thorough analysis of the external examiners reports, the subsequent responses. and that programme teams address the issues raised in the external examiners' reports. LUISC staff act as external examiners and reviewers at other institutions. The students confirmed that they know that external examiners' reports are published on the VLE.

2.63   Through its well established relationship with the University and with Study Group oversight, scrupulous use is made of the external examiners. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B8): Higher education providers, in discharging their responsibilities for setting and maintaining academic standards and assuring and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities, operate effective, regular and systematic processes for monitoring and for review of programmes.

Quality Code, *Chapter B8: Programme Monitoring and Review*

Findings

2.64   As noted in section A3.3, under the contractual arrangements with the University, LUISC is required to undertake annual programme monitoring, including review of student evaluation and external examiner comment and critical self-reflection by the programme team, and to submit an annual report to the University. LUISC must also comply with Study Group's monitoring and review processes, comprising ongoing programme monitoring through CAPs, annual monitoring and Centre Review.

2.65   Monitoring at LUISC, recorded in AMRs, addresses the quality of student learning opportunities. Typically, AMRs cover learning, teaching and assessment, student support, feedback from students, staffing and staff development.

2.66   Through the Centre Review process, Study Group seeks to assure itself that each ISC is effectively managing academic standards, managing and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities and publishing reliable information. Heads of Centre report directly to AQAEC regarding Centre Review outcomes and their responses.

2.67   The CAP is designed to ensure the implementation of actions emanating from the review and monitoring of modules and programmes. The CAP, which is a live document recording continuous review, is monitored at LUISC level by QAEG (as well as at regional and provider levels, respectively by RQAEG and AQAEC).

2.68   The design of the process would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.69   The team explored the effectiveness of the arrangements by examining contractual and other documentation including process documents; monitoring and review reports; the CAP; and internal meeting minutes. The team also held meetings with students, teaching and administrative staff, senior staff and University representatives.

2.70   The review team examined the AMRs for 2013-14 and 2014-15. These provide evidence of systematic and effective programme monitoring. They are informed by student feedback, including module evaluation and the minutes of staff-student meetings, a broad range of other internal meeting minutes, and external examiner reports. With respect to the quality of student learning opportunities, the reports provide commentary and analysis of teaching, learning and assessment; student engagement and feedback. They refer to external examiner comments, resources and staff development. The reports track completed and ongoing actions, which are generally also captured in the CAP, recording good practice as well as progress on actions identified the previous year. They set out an action plan for the coming year.

2.71   The Study Group Centre Review conducted in 2013 considered how effectively LUISC fulfils its responsibilities for managing and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities. The review report records comprehensive scrutiny of teaching, learning and assessment, student engagement and support. There were positive comments on resources, staff development, and recruitment and admissions. The CAP captures the outcomes of the review and tracks progress on the actions arising. The Head of Centre

reported directly to AQAEC on LUISCs completed and ongoing actions in response to the review findings relating to aspects of learning and teaching and student support.

2.72 The processes for monitoring and review, which provide an effective mechanism for assuring and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities, are implemented systematically and consistently. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B9): Higher education providers have procedures for handling academic appeals and student complaints about the quality of learning opportunities; these procedures are fair, accessible and timely, and enable enhancement.

Quality Code, *Chapter B9: Academic Appeals and Student Complaints*

Findings

2.73   LUISC has an Appeals, Complaints and Disciplinary Policy and Procedures which is contained in the Assessment Regulations. The appeals and complaints procedures are based on Study Group's Academic Related Complaints and Appeal Policy, approved by AQAEC. They are approved by the University and are in accordance with its procedures. The policy and procedure describes the operational details and the time limits for resolution of complaints and appeals. The Student Handbooks outline the appeals and complaints policies. Further details are available on the VLE for students and staff.

2.74   The design of the process would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.75   To test the Expectation, the review team evaluated documents that describe the procedure for handling academic appeals and student complaints about the quality of learning opportunities. The team also reviewed documents relating to a grade appeal meeting. The review team also met senior staff, teaching and support staff and students

2.76   The complaints and appeals procedures are accessible, timely and offer opportunities for early informal resolution of complaints. LUISC's complaints policy defines and explains the difference between informal and formal complaints. The procedure to move between levels of complaint is also made clear. Students are encouraged to resolve issues informally through dialogue before instigating a formal complaint. There are clearly defined timescales for the submission and eventual conclusion of the complaints process. The student Welfare Officer advises students.

2.77   The appeals procedure clearly defines the grounds for academic appeal and emphasises that matters of academic judgement are not open to review. The students confirm that information relating to both non-academic complaints and academic appeals is available on the VLE. Tutors describe both procedures during student induction and in student/course handbooks. The students reported that if they had a complaint or an academic appeal they would talk to their tutors or the Student Welfare Officer. They confirmed that they know the formal system, but had not used it as issues tended to be resolved informally. The students are members of Lancaster University Students' Union from where they can seek impartial advice.

2.78   LUISC has procedures for handling academic appeals and student complaints about the quality of learning opportunities that are fair, accessible and timely. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

2.79 In reaching its judgement about the quality of learning opportunities, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published Handbook.

2.80 All nine Expectations are met with low levels of risk. LUISC has effective systems in place for programme approval, admissions, learning and teaching, student support, student engagement, assessment, programme review, complaints and appeals. There are three good practices: the mapping of Ofqual descriptors to A Level outcomes, the support for staff development and the high level of support for students.

2.81 There are no recommendations in this area. LUISC has plans to enhance this area further and students are engaged in the management of quality. The management of student needs is a clear focus of LUISC's strategies. The review team therefore concludes that the quality of student learning opportunities at LUISC is **commended**.

3 Judgement: The quality of the information about learning opportunities

Expectation (C): UK higher education providers produce information for their intended audiences about the higher education they offer that is fit for purpose

Quality Code, Part C: Information about Higher Education Provision

Findings

3.1 Study Group requires each embedded college to produce or update annually documents, handbooks, programme and module specifications and a Calendar of Business for the academic year and marketing brochure The documents and templates are in the Provider Academic Quality Handbook, although they can reflect local arrangements. Regional Directors are responsible for reporting annually to AQAEC that all documents are in place for each centre in their region. There is a prospectus which contains information about the programmes including the modules, progression requirements and degree options and term dates. This information is managed centrally, by Study Group's Academic Manager.

3.2 There is a dedicated website with a link from the University and a download facility for the prospectus. This is managed by the Study Group's Marketing and Creative Services teams, using specialist software. The Head of Centre, and University's Publications Office and College and Residence Office check the accuracy of the information, for both web-based and hard-copy material. The contract with the University states that all documentation issued bearing the University's brand is subject to the University's prior approval.

3.3 The design of the process would allow the Expectation to be met.

3.4 In testing the Expectation, the review team evaluated a range of documents including handbooks and minutes of meetings demonstrating oversight as well as the website and the VLE. The review team also met senior staff, teaching and support staff and students.

3.5 LUISC produces a Student Handbook, Staff Handbook, Courses Handbook and the full assessment regulations. The Head of Centre confirmed that he is responsible for this information. Any changes are recorded in a log which is circulated to staff and the University. The link from the University's website gives a comprehensive range of information on LUISC including the process for application and admission to the programme, information about English Language support teaching, assessment and module details to help prospective students select their pathway.

3.6 On arrival, students receive a Student Handbook, which contains reference to the Full Assessment Regulations, Programme Specifications and Programmes of Study which contains the module-level learning outcomes and details of assessments. These are also available on the VLE.

3.7 The responsibilities for public information are clearly understood at LUISC. The students the review team met reported that they had been given accurate information before commencing the programmed commented that their learning experiences exceeded their expectations. They also confirmed that the information they receive at induction and during the programmes is useful, accessible and accurate

3.8 LUISC produces clear and accurate information to prospective and current students. This enables them to select their pathway with an understanding of the academic

environment. LUISC, with the University and Study Group, has appropriate procedures in place to check that information is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy. Therefore, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

The quality of the information about learning opportunities: Summary of findings

3.9   In reaching its judgement about the maintenance of academic standards, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published Handbook.

3.10   LUISC, working with Study Group and the University, has effective systems in place to ensure that the information it produces is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy.

3.11   The review team concludes that the quality of information produced by LUISC **meets** UK expectations.

4   Commentary on the enhancement of student learning opportunities

Expectation (Enhancement): Deliberate steps are being taken at provider level to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities

Findings

4.1   LUISC describes its ethos as a focus on improving the student experience, with a commitment by all staff to put students first. Quality assurance process, especially annual and periodic programme review, are key mechanisms for the identification of areas for enhancement. Within these processes, student and staff feedback, external examiner reports and student progression data, in particular, provide the catalyst for Centre-driven enhancement activity. The CAP is used effectively to capture and monitor progress on enhancement initiatives.

4.2   Enhancement activity is progressed within the wider context of Study Group's themes which will form the basis of the Provider Enhancement Strategy, currently under development. This is exemplified by two particular enhancements which resonate with Study Group's 'working with externality' theme: LUISC's extensive work on benchmarking the IFY curriculum and students' achievement to A Levels and the extension of the range of assessment modes in response to external examiner feedback.

4.3   Other enhancement activity, such as the split in the Law and Social Studies pathway to enhance students' academic and professional potential discussed in section A3.1, paragraph 1.32, demonstrates the Centre's use of staff and student feedback to identify areas for action to improve the quality of student learning opportunities.

4.4   As discussed in section B4, paragraph 2.33, LUISC's analysis of student progression data for 2013-14, together with the associated recommendation of the 2013 Centre Review, gave rise to decisive action by LUISC to enhance the processes for supporting students at risk. The progression improvement plan was established and subsequently implemented effectively to support students, resulting in the restoration of progression rates to previous levels.

5   Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability

Findings

5.1   CareersAhead is the central employability enhancement initiative of Study Group. This has been piloted at the Sussex International Study Centre and enables students to develop a CV, a personal statement and a career development plan as well as being aware of the employment environment. Study Group intends to implement this across all the International Study Centres.

5.2   The students at LUISC have access to the career advice, guidance and resources of the University Careers Service which includes workshops, career mentoring and psychometric testing. Students whom the team met said that they use this service. The University careers/employability team give a presentation to the students on career choices and on how to start preparing for the job market.

5.3   LUISC piloted a Personal Development Plan module with the University's MBA students on the Pre-sessional English programme. It intends to extend this to the International Foundation Year programme during 2016.

5.4   The students and the teaching staff confirm that employability and transferable skills are embedded in module assessments and learning and teaching opportunities, for example, group work and presentations assessed in the Business Studies and management skills in the Project and Research Skills Module.

Glossary

This glossary is a quick-reference guide to terms in this report that may be unfamiliar to some readers. Definitions of key operational terms are also given on pages 24-27 of the Higher Education Review (Embedded Colleges) handbook

If you require formal definitions of other terms please refer to the section on assuring standards and quality: www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality

User-friendly explanations of a wide range of terms can be found in the longer **Glossary** on the QAA website: www.qaa.ac.uk/Pages/GlossaryEN.aspx

Academic standards
The standards set by **degree-awarding bodies** for their courses (programmes and modules) and expected for their awards. See also **threshold academic standard**.

Award
A qualification, or academic credit, conferred in formal recognition that a student has achieved the intended **learning outcomes** and passed the assessments required to meet the academic standards set for a **programme** or unit of study.

Blended learning
Learning delivered by a number of different methods, usually including face-to-face and e-learning (see **technology enhanced or enabled learning**).

Credit(s)
A means of quantifying and recognising learning, used by most institutions that provide higher education **programmes of study**, expressed as numbers of credits at a specific level.

Degree-awarding body
A UK higher education provider (typically a university) with the power to award degrees, conferred by Royal Charter, or under Section 76 of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992, or under Section 48 of the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 1992, or by Papal Bull, or, since 1999, granted by the Privy Council on advice from QAA (in response to applications for taught degree awarding powers, research degree awarding powers or university title).

Distance learning
A course of study that does not involve face-to-face contact between students and tutors but instead uses technology such as the internet, intranets, broadcast media, CD-ROM and video, or traditional methods of correspondence - learning 'at a distance'.
See also **blended learning**.

Dual award or double award
The granting of separate awards (and certificates) for the same **programme** by two **degree-awarding bodies** who have jointly delivered the programme of study leading to them. See also **multiple award**.

e-learning
See technology enhanced or enabled learning

Embedded college
Colleges, often operating as part of a network, that are embedded on or near the campuses of two or more UK higher education institutions (HEI) and that primarily provide preparatory programmes for higher education

Enhancement
The process by which higher education providers systematically improve the quality of provision and the ways in which students' learning is supported. It is used as a technical term in our review processes.

Expectations
Statements in the **Quality Code** that set out what all UK higher education providers expect of themselves and each other, and what the general public can therefore expect of them.

Flexible and distributed learning
A programme or module that does not require the student to attend classes or events at particular times and locations.
See also **distance learning**.

Framework
A published formal structure. See also **framework for higher education qualifications**.

Framework for higher education qualifications
A published formal structure that identifies a hierarchy of national qualification levels and describes the general achievement expected of holders of the main qualification types at each level, thus assisting higher education providers in maintaining academic standards. QAA publishes the following frameworks: *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and *The Framework for Qualifications of Higher Education Institutions in Scotland* (FHEQIS).

Good practice
A process or way of working that, in the view of a QAA review team, makes a particularly positive contribution to a higher education provider's management of academic standards and the quality of its educational provision. It is used as a technical term in QAA's audit and review processes.

Learning opportunities
The provision made for students' learning, including planned study, teaching, assessment, academic and personal support, and resources (such as libraries and information systems, laboratories or studios).

Learning outcomes
What a learner is expected to know, understand and/or be able to demonstrate after completing a process of learning.

Operational definition
A formal definition of a term, establishing exactly what QAA means when using it in reviews and reports.

Programme (of study)
An approved course of study that provides a coherent learning experience and normally leads to a qualification.

Programme specifications
Published statements about the intended **learning outcomes** of programmes of study, containing information about teaching and learning methods, support and assessment methods, and how individual units relate to levels of achievement.

Public information
Information that is freely available to the public (sometimes referred to as being 'in the public domain').

Quality Code
Short term for the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, which is the UK-wide set of **reference points** for higher education providers (agreed through consultation with the higher education community, and published by QAA), which states the **Expectations** that all providers are required to meet.

Reference points
Statements and other publications that establish criteria against which performance can be measured.

Subject Benchmark Statement
A published statement that sets out what knowledge, understanding, abilities and skills are expected of those graduating in each of the main subject areas (mostly applying to bachelor's degrees), and explains what gives that particular discipline its coherence and identity.

Technology enhanced or enabled learning (or **e-learning**)
Learning that is delivered or supported through the use of technology.

Threshold academic standard
The minimum acceptable level of achievement that a student has to demonstrate to be eligible for an academic **award**. Threshold academic standards are set out in the national **frameworks** and **subject benchmark statements**.

Virtual learning environment (VLE)
An intranet or password-only interactive website (also referred to as a platform or user interface) giving access to **learning opportunities** electronically. These might include such resources as course handbooks, information and reading lists; blogs, message boards and forums; recorded lectures; and/or facilities for online seminars (webinars).

Widening participation
Increasing the involvement in higher education of people from a wider range of backgrounds.