



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

University of Leicester International Study Centre

May 2016

Contents

About this review	1
Key findings	2
QAA's judgements about University of Leicester International Study Centre	2
Good practice	2
Recommendations	2
Enhancement of student learning opportunities	2
Theme: Student Employability	2
About University of Leicester International Study Centre	3
Explanation of the findings about University of Leicester International Study Centre	4
1 Judgement: The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies and/or the provider	5
2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities	16
3 Judgement: The quality of the information about learning opportunities	35
4 Commentary on the enhancement of student learning opportunities	38
5 Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability	39
Glossary	40

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 University of Leicester International Study Centre (ULISC). The review took place from 25 to 26 May 2016 and was conducted by a team of two reviewers, as follows:

- Professor Brian Anderton
- Dr Jenny Gilbert.

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided by University of University International 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 a 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 2. [Explanations of the findings](#) are given in numbered paragraphs in the section starting on page 5.

In reviewing University of Leicester 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 2015-16 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.

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 University of Leicester International Study Centre

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

- The maintenance of the academic standards of the awards offered on behalf of Study Group and of ULISC's degree-awarding body **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.
- 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 University of Leicester International Study Centre.

- The effective operation and use of the Link Student scheme to support and facilitate student transitions (Expectation B4).
- The holistic and integrated approach to the support for students that empowers learners to develop their academic, personal and professional potential (Expectation B4).

Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendations** to University of Leicester International Study Centre.

By April 2017:

- develop and implement a consistent and comprehensive approach to the reporting by external examiners on the approved programmes (Expectation B7)
- ensure internal consistency in the framework for dealing with academic appeals (Expectation B9).

Enhancement of student learning opportunities

The Centre's documentation says that ULISC continues to develop and implement strategies to enhance student learning opportunities. The enhancement process is linked to robust information generated from a range of stakeholders. Documentation identifies a number of ways in which the student learning experience and opportunities have been enhanced within ULISC. ULISC takes an active approach to quality enhancement and sees itself at the forefront of enhancement working with Study Group. Collective staff effort is central to the approach. The Centre Action Plan records actions identified locally and for Study Group. It provides a record of actions and their implementation, many of which have an enhancement agenda.

Theme: Student Employability

There are plans to introduce CareerAhead next year and to develop the personal tutorial framework to focus specifically on employability skills. However, modules do develop students' interpersonal and transferable skills by encouraging them to participate in classroom-based activities and group work sessions. There is development of employability

skills for ULISC alumni through the partnership with the University and the role of Link Students. IY1 students attend a two-hour Talent Academy session at the University as part of their course. This introduces students to the concept of transferable skills and team working and communication. It also includes a timed group challenge, a debrief and individual and collective reflection. It signposts students to the University Career Development Service and optional employability workshops.

About University of Leicester International Study Centre

Bellerbys Educational Services Ltd (Study Group) signed a Heads of Agreement document with the University of Leicester in 2008 to set up the University of Leicester International Study Centre (ULISC). The final version of the Agreement was signed in 2009 covering intakes from 2008 to 2012 and one further intake in January 2013. A variation to the Agreement was signed in 2011, extending the contract to 2017, with one further intake in January 2018. The Agreement covers the approved programme, the International Foundation Year (IFY) and the validated International Year One programme (IF1).

From 2012 to 2015, the total number of students has remained within the 212 to 256 range. In 2014-15, there were 212 students, a drop of 17 per cent from the 256 students in 2013-14. There was a further drop of 23 per cent in 2016. ULISC has eight teaching staff (six full-time equivalent), one Head of English, one Student Welfare Officer, two administrative officers and the Head of Centre.

The only major change since the last review is the move to St George's Tower in September 2014.

The key challenge facing ULISC is to increase student numbers. ULISC intends to work closely with the University, sales and marketing at Study Group to ensure that student numbers grow especially from countries that have seen a downturn in confirmations.

The last monitoring visit by QAA in 2014 resulted in a commendable outcome, which indicated that all recommendations from QAA's review in 2012 were addressed. There was no monitoring visit in 2015 due to the commendable outcome. However, ULISC has picked up and responded to textual comments from the report through its Action Plan of February 2016.

Explanation of the findings about University of Leicester 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.

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

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 (FHEQ)* 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 Since it was established in 2008, ULISC has offered the International Foundation Year (IFY) programme, with four pathways: Economics and Management; Engineering and Technology; Science; and Society and Culture. The IFY programme is approved by Study Group, which is responsible for academic standards. The IFY is endorsed by the University of Leicester (the University). The IFY is established as a Level 3 programme enabling students who meet the designated standard in their academic subjects and English language to progress to year 1 of a relevant undergraduate programme at the University. The International Year 1 (IY1) in Management Studies was developed in 2015, recruiting its first cohort of students in January 2016. The IY1 programme is a validated award of the University and is located at Level 4 in the FHEQ. Successful completion of the IY1 programme leads to the award by the University of a Cert HE Management Studies, and allows students direct entry to year 2 of the University's BA Management Studies. The University has ultimate responsibility for academic standards on the IY1 programme.

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

1.3 The review team read the responsibilities checklist, the agreements with the University, the IFY re-approval event email, and the IFY re-approval report. It also met senior, teaching and support staff.

1.4 Examination of programme documentation demonstrates alignment with the FHEQ, with the IFY designated as a Level 3 programme, and the IY1 designated as a Level 4 programme. Both the IFY and the IY1 have programme specifications containing standard information, including mapped learning outcomes and grade descriptors. The programme specifications identify external reference points used in programme development, including the Quality Code for both programmes, and the *Subject Benchmark Statement Business and Management* in the case of the IY1. It is not clear how Subject Benchmark Statements have been used in the case of the IFY, though technically they do not apply at Level 3. Both programmes are credit-rated using the standard formula of 10 notional learning hours equalling one credit. This is explicit in the documentation for the IY1, but implicit in the case of the IFY.

1.5 In relation to English language provision on the programmes, the English and Skills for University Study (ESUS) modules have been developed with reference to The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), which is an international standard for describing language ability.

1.6 ULISC, working with the University, takes account of the FHEQ. The review team concludes 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

1.7 ULISC delivers five courses within the IFY and this programme, together with the English Language Preparation, is approved by Study Group. These programmes are also endorsed by the University, though responsibility for the maintenance of academic standards rests ultimately with Study Group.

1.8 The IY1 programme in Management Studies is validated by the University. The teaching and assessment of the programme are delivered by ULISC and the University validates the award through the provision of a Cert HE in Management Studies. Therefore, the responsibility for the maintenance of academic standards for this programme rests ultimately with the University. Standards are assured through the University's quality assurance mechanisms, such as annual review, external examiners' reports, adherence to Senate Regulations and monitoring through the Academic Management Board.

1.9 There is a checklist outlining the responsibilities of ULISC, the University and Study Group. The Heads of Agreement document was originally signed in 2008, setting up the relationship. The most recent Heads of Agreement document was agreed in 2011 and extends to the January 2018 intake. The amendments in this second document relate mainly to changes to the financial settlement.

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

1.11 The review team tested the Expectation by studying Heads of Agreement documents, validation documentation and programme specifications, and by exploring the application of awarding body regulations through discussion with senior and academic staff.

1.12 A Study Group re-approval event was held in September 2015 to reapprove the IFY for another five years. Panel members included a colleague from another ISC and representatives from universities not in partnership with Study Group. In June 2015, the IY1 was validated by the University and the conditions from that event were signed off in October 2015 to enable recruitment for a January 2016 start date. Students are able to progress directly into year 2 of BA Management Studies at the University, subject to meeting the progression criteria.

1.13 ULISC academic staff work with link tutors at the University. The recent re-validation of IFY included a recommendation to continue to build on the strengths of the link tutor scheme. Some students have had the opportunity to meet the relevant link tutor. The link tutor for the recently launched IY1 programme was involved with ULISC staff.

1.14 ULISC staff understand and operate within University and Study Centre regulations and there is evidence of improving collaboration with link tutors. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A2.2): 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

1.15 ULISC has responsibility for definitive programme information about the IFY programme that is approved by Study Group. This includes the programme specification and the pathway handbook. Study Group also maintains a central library of these documents, together with module and student handbooks. For the IY1 programme validated by the University, the production of definitive programme information is the responsibility of both ULISC and the University. This includes the programme specification and the pathway handbook. The programme specification for the programmes, in both instances, is presented on a standard template with a University logo.

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

1.17 The review team examined the Heads of Agreement, the Centre Handbook and the University's Academic Quality and Standards website.

1.18 There are clear records for all programmes. Students on the IFY programme are informed of the progression grades they need to make the transition to a university programme. They are notified of their marks on a term-by-term basis and receive their final marks from ULISC following external examiner sign-off. The University Collaborative Partnerships Register lists Study Group as a partner for IYF progression to University.

1.19 For the IY1 programme, as the University validates the award, students who progress to year 2 at the University receive a university transcript. A student who achieves a pass grade but does not meet the requirement to progress to year 2 of the BA Management Studies is awarded a Certificate in Higher Education in Management Studies.

1.20 As described above, the responsibility for meeting this Expectation rests partly with ULISC and partly with the University. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A3.1): 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

1.21 The IFY programme is approved by Study Group, which is responsible for academic standards. As such, the process for approval of the IFY is that laid down, and its operation managed, by Study Group. The IY1 in Management Studies is a validated programme of the University, successful completion of which leads to the award by the University of a Cert HE Management Studies. The University has ultimate responsibility for academic standards on the programme. The process for approval is, therefore, that laid down and managed by the University.

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

1.23 The review team had access to Study Group's documentation relating to procedures for programme approval. It also had access to documentation relating to the re-approval of the IFY programme at ULISC in 2015, and to the approval by the University of the IY1 programme in January 2016. The review team discussed with relevant staff the way in which ULISC approached the re-approval of the IFY programme and engaged with the University in the approval of the IY1.

1.24 The responsibility checklist contains a clear statement that Study Group has responsibility for academic standards of the ULISC IFY programme, and the review team sought confirmation of the locus of responsibility for academic standards within ULISC. In this respect, it found some ambiguity. Senior staff confirmed that the locus of responsibility for academic standards on the IFY programme was the ULISC Quality Assurance and Enhancement Group (QAEG). However, examination of the terms of reference for the QAEG and for the Academic Management Board (AMB), which is a University committee with ULISC membership, showed an ambiguous position. The terms of reference of AMB recognise that Study Group, through ULISC, has responsibility for academic standards on the IFY programme, and AMB has responsibility for overseeing the attainment of academic standards by students completing the IFY. However, in the terms of reference for QAEG, it is said to be a ULISC-based quality-focused forum chaired by the Head of Centre, which addresses matters relating to the maintenance and security of academic standards and the assurance and enhancement of quality in relation to the student experience. The review team was satisfied that senior staff had a clear view that QAEG was the locus of responsibility for academic standards on the IFY, reporting through the Study Group committee structure, but it would be clearer for this to be formally stated in the terms of reference for the ULISC QAEG.

1.25 ULISC uses the same processes for both initial approval and subsequent re-approval of the IFY programme. The review team examined the documentation relating to the re-approval of the IFY in 2015, and asked staff how they had managed this process. The report of the re-approval evidences a process which follows Study Group's academic policies and procedures, and which was conducted with rigour and effectively. Conditions and recommendations were generated by the approval panel, which included external academic advisers, and ULISC responded to these incorporating its responses into its Centre Action Plan. Although the University managed and was responsible for the approval

process relating to the IY1, ULISC engaged appropriately and effectively with the University's approval process.

1.26 ULISC has effective processes in place for the approval of programmes and works well with the University for the validation of programmes. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A3.2): 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

1.27 ULISC's programme specifications, either validated by the University or approved by Study Group, indicate the intended programme learning outcomes and the modules designated within each programme. Module learning outcomes are then mapped to assessments. The ESUS programme is delivered across all centres. Within the module outline, the learning outcomes are mapped to assessments and assessment criteria are included. Programme and module learning outcomes form the threshold standards for achievement at programme and module level.

1.28 The University endorses assessment regulations and any significant changes to assessment regulations require approval through the Study Group committee approval process (AQAEC) and through the AMB of the University. There are differences between the assessment regulations for IFY and IY1 as the IY1 regulations must align with the University regulations.

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

1.30 The review team examined assessment information and regulations are included in the student handbooks for each programme. The IY1 Quality Assurance Handbook and the Centre Handbook clearly explains assessment processes.

1.31 ULISC ensures that assessment policies and processes are both clear and easily accessible by providing the information in hard copy and on the virtual learning environment (VLE). Additionally, ULISC has developed innovative storyboard messages to explain to students certain aspects of assessment and other general information.

1.32 Study Group provides guidance to ULISC, through the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Framework, the Assessment Criteria Framework and the draft Assessment Framework. ULISC is expected to, and does, consider the framework documents and ensure that their practices are in line with the guidelines by September 2016.

1.33 ULISC ensures that students' achievement of learning outcomes are demonstrated through assessments. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A3.3): 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

1.34 For its IFY programme, ULISC operates annual monitoring through preparation of the Programme Self-assessment and Action Document (PSAAD), which is overseen by the Head of Centre. This provides analysis of detailed statistical data relating to student progression and achievement, including comparisons with previous years. It includes the ULISC's responses to external examiners' reports. There is consideration of student feedback and the student experience. It includes evaluation of previous action plans as well as identifying areas on which to focus in the future management of standards on the programme. Although it is too early for the new IY1 programme to have undergone annual monitoring, when it does so it will be undertaken by the University using its own quality assurance processes for the annual review of University award-bearing programmes.

1.35 Programme review is conducted periodically for the IFY using Study Group's approach as laid down in its Quality Handbook. This is essentially a re-approval process using the same procedures as employed in initial programme approval. It includes external academic advisers as panel members. The IFY programme was subject to review and re-approval during 2015. Review of the IY1, as a University award-bearing programme, will be undertaken under the University's academic regulations.

1.36 The Quality Assurance and Enhancement Group (QAEG) within ULISC, chaired by the Head of Centre, considers both the outcomes from annual monitoring (PSAAD) and periodic programme review and re-approval. It reports through the Regional Quality Assurance and Enhancement Group (RQAEG) and ultimately to the provider level Academic Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee (AQAE). This gives Study Group oversight of the management of academic standards within ULISC. However, both the annual PSAAD and the report from periodic programme re-approval go to AMB for consideration and formal approval.

1.37 ULISC operates within Study Group's framework with respect to both annual monitoring and programme review, though the format of the annual monitoring report (PSAAD) is different from that used in other ISCs. Procedures for both annual monitoring and periodic review of programmes have the potential to give assurance that academic standards are being maintained. Ultimate responsibility for approval of the outcomes of both annual monitoring (PSAAD) and programme re-approval lies with the University-chaired AMB.

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

1.39 The review team examined Study Group's procedures for annual monitoring and periodic programme review. It also had access to ULISC's completed PSAAD documents for 2013-14 and 2014-15, and the report from the re-approval of the IFY in 2015. Discussion with staff informed the review team's conclusions.

1.40 Examination of the PSAAD documents for both 2013-14 and 2014-15 shows that ULISC has a rigorous and effective process for undertaking the annual monitoring of the IFY

programme. The PSAAD incorporates a comprehensive statistical analysis of student progression and achievement, together with analysis at pathway level and by September and January cohorts. It supports a comparison with the previous year's student performance, and forms a basis for analysis of the underlying factors. There is also careful consideration of and responses to external examiner reports. The student experience and mechanisms for achieving student feedback are considered and evaluated. The PSAAD process supports the effective identification of areas on which to focus in the future management of standards on the IFY, and their incorporation into the CAP.

1.41 Documentation relating to the re-approval of the IFY in 2015 shows a robust and effective process for programme review. The re-approval proposal was considered by a panel chaired by the Director of Learning and Teaching, and including two external panel members from universities unconnected with Study Group. This panel held discussions with the academic team about the programme and the related student experience, and with senior managers about quality assurance arrangements, staffing and other learning resources. The formal panel recommendation for re-approval of the IFY for a further five years was made to the Programme Approval and Validation Subcommittee (PAVC). Re-approval was subject to the fulfilment of two conditions, and the panel also made recommendations, commendations and identified good practice. The outcomes from the re-approval panel event were discussed at QAEG, and the ULISC's response has been incorporated into the CAP. Overall, ULISC has a robust and effective approach to programme review which ensures academic standards on the Centre's programmes are maintained. One slight anomaly related to the formal approval of both the outcomes from annual monitoring (PSAAD) and programme re-approval. Although the IFY programme is an approved provision for which Study Group has sole responsibility for academic standards, and although the re-approval panel formally makes its recommendations to PAVC, a Study Group committee, it is the University-chaired AMB that formally approves both the PSAAD and the re-approval report.

1.42 ULISC has in place and implements effectively processes for both programme monitoring and programme review. 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

1.43 The University Programme Validation Panel is constituted in line with the Quality Code and includes an external adviser to confirm the academic standards of the proposed award. For programmes approved by Study Group, the programme approval process requires two independent externals to be on the approval panel. A standard nomination form checks for suitable expertise and any conflicts of interest.

1.44 In the IY1 provision, validated by the University, external examining complies with the University's procedures. In the case of the IYF programme, Study Group publishes a set of minimum expectations that can be used to augment the University's procedures and applies this to its approved provision. On appointment, external examiners are provided with a student handbook detailing relevant regulations and assessment weightings and patterns.

1.45 Study Group policy requires that external examiners have appropriate knowledge and experience and no conflict of interest. External examiners at ULISC are appointed to provide assurance that the assessment process is properly applied and is fair and equitable for all students, and to provide impartial and independent advice and informative comment on academic standards and student achievement. The policy document for external examiners indicates that their role includes ensuring that the academic standard for each programme and its element is set and maintained at the appropriate academic level and that student performance is properly judged in accordance with relevant external benchmarks.

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

1.47 To test the Expectation in practice, the team studied University and Study Group policies and committee minutes and read external examiner reports.

1.48 The minutes of the validation event for the recently introduced IY1 programme confirm that panel membership included an external adviser from a university that does not have a relationship with Study Group. A Study Group re-approval event was held in September 2015 to reapprove the IFY for another five years. The approval event involved two external panel members and a colleague from another ISC.

1.49 External examiners' reports for IY1 are produced in a standard template that confirms that UK threshold academic standards are appropriate and that the achievement of students for each award is comparable with that at other institutions. There is no template for the IFY programme (see Expectation B7) though in most cases external examiners make direct reference to the achievement of threshold academic standards for level 3 provision.

1.50 The processes ensure that external and independent expertise is used at key stages. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies and/or the provider: Summary of findings

1.51 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.

1.52 ULISC effectively follows the requirements of the University to maintain academic standards. These processes are supported by ULISC's own internal procedures and guidance.

1.53 All seven of the Expectations in this area are met and the associated level of risk is low. The review team concludes that the maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered **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 and Approval

Findings

2.1 Study Group lays down a policy and procedures for the approval of new programmes. The same procedures also apply in the case of programme re-approval. This process involves an approval panel reviewing documentation and holding on-site discussions with ULISC staff, and the panel includes external advisers. Strategic oversight of programme approval at Centre level is provided through the Study Group-level PAVC which is responsible, on behalf of AQAEC, for overseeing all programme approval and re-approval events and ensuring appropriate support for partner university programme validation and revalidation events. It maintains oversight of the development of new Study Group-approved programmes at all levels, supports and coordinates the development and approval of all new programmes. PAVC receives the report from the panel and signs off the approval of new programmes once the approval conditions have been met, reporting approval to AQAEC.

2.2 A Study Group-level policy and procedures also governs modifications to programmes. This gives a classification of the level of change being proposed, and matches it to an appropriate level of approval. Type A small-scale changes require approval by RQAEG, Type B changes (for example module changes) must be approved through AQAEC, while Type C changes (for example the introduction of a new pathway) invoke the programme re-approval process. Teaching and support staff are fully conversant with the operation of the programme modification policy.

2.3 In the case of the IY1 programme, as a validated award of the University this was approved under University regulations in a process owned and managed by the University. ULISC contributed through its involvement in the development of the programme and participated in the University approval event.

2.4 ULISC is able to involve students in programme development through its student engagement strategy. It is also able to use inputs from alumni students through its Alumni Group and Alumni Survey. Staff are able to input to programme development through termly full staff meetings and the ULISC Internal Review process in which staff meet in academic groups. The framework for programme approval is laid down by Study Group for Study Group-approved programmes, in the case of ULISC the IFY.

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

2.6 The review team considered the programme approval process through access to Study Group-level documentation and committee minutes. It was also able to review the effectiveness of the implementation of this process at ULISC through examination of the re-approval of the IFY in 2015, and through reading of the report from the approval event, following the outcomes of approval through the committee structure and in discussions with ULISC staff.

2.7 There is evidence of the Study Group-level oversight of the approval and re-approval of programmes, in the case of the IFY programme at ULISC in 2015 by AQAEC as this was prior to the inception of its subcommittee PAVC.

2.8 The re-approval process for the IFY in 2015, as evidenced in the Report from the Programme Re-approval event, shows a rigorous and effective implementation of Study Groups' framework for programme approval/re-approval. The re-approval panel was chaired at a senior level of Study Group by the Director of Learning and Teaching for UK and Europe. The panel also included two external assessors and the Head of Centre from another centre. The panel received programme documentation in advance to support the re-approval event. It also held meetings on-site with the programme team and other relevant staff. Discussion considered not only the programme itself, which was confirmed to be largely unchanged, but also student support and engagement, resources and engagement with the University. The outcome was re-approval of the IFY programme for a further five years subject to fulfilment of two conditions. The panel report also included a list of recommendations to ULISC and one to Study Group, together with identification of commendations and areas of good practice. The report was received and formally approved by the University-chaired AMB. It was also discussed at QAEG and actions were identified for inclusion in the CAP.

2.9 The IY1 programme was subject to an approval event in September 2015, for first student recruitment in January 2016. This is a University-validated provision and award. The development and approval of the programme was overseen by the Joint Steering Committee of the University and ULISC. The approval panel was convened by the University, which managed the process through to final approval within its own committee structure. However, Study Group, through the Head of Centre at ULISC, has responsibility for the management of the programme, development of the content, assessment and student support. It is clear that, although this is a University award, ULISC was extensively involved in the design of the IY1 programme. External reference points, notably the *Subject Benchmark Statement Business and Management*, informed development of the IY1 programme. The approval of the IY1 supports the judgement of ULISC as effective in operating processes for the design, development and approval of programmes, working in partnership with the University.

2.10 Both the re-approval of the Study group-approved IFY and the approval of the University-validated IY1 programme demonstrate that ULISC has effective processes for the design, development and approval of programmes. The review 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

Findings

2.11 Study Group holds responsibility for recruitment for IY1 and recruitment and admission procedures for IFY. Enrolments are processed in the Brighton and Singapore Admissions Centre. Admission to the programme is by application through the Admissions Centre which is responsible for admissions for all Study Group programmes.

2.12 The Admissions Centre has expertise in the evaluation of international qualifications. It also has at least one native language speaker in each region. Applicants are checked for academic qualifications, standard of English, progression route to the university selected, visa requirements and any UK references. Applications are also evaluated on basis of genuine intention to study.

2.13 Entry requirements for the ULISC's course are agreed with the University at validation. Any changes to entry requirements must be agreed with the University. In most cases admissions staff make the decision to offer a place but in borderline cases they discuss their concerns with the Head of Centre.

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

2.15 The review team examined handbooks, admissions procedures and the website. The team met students and staff to discuss their experiences of the admissions process.

2.16 The ULISC website is clear and provides information about courses and accommodation; it also allows pre-arrival guides to be downloaded. Many students are recruited through agents. Some students have families and friends who had studied in the UK. The students found the information provided during admission and at induction to be accurate and the pre-arrival guide was helpful. There is a week-long induction process for all students registering regardless of their entry date. One late joiner had received a personalised induction. Students confirmed that they understand the grades required for progression to university courses and meet link tutors from these courses at mini-fairs.

2.17 A condition of the IY1 approval event was that applications to the IY1 programme are referred to the University International Office for input and that ULISC works with the International Office to ensure that appropriate School and University input is available for the consideration of individual student applications. The University Partnership Manager for the IY1 course confirmed that he sees all applications.

2.18 Recruitment and admissions procedures are transparent, valid, inclusive, and are underpinned by appropriate organisational processes. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of 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

2.19 ULISC has its own Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy, which is articulated to staff through the Centre Handbook, and to students through the Student Handbooks. The strategy is built on the development of three areas of student skills - participation, self-directed learning, and academic skills. At the same time, senior staff are aware of the Teaching, Learning and Assessment frameworks being developed by Study Group and the need to align the Centre's strategy with the framework.

2.20 Learning is supported through the VLE. The ULISC has specified minimum structure and content for modules on the VLE to ensure equity of treatment for students.

2.21 ULISC has a system for annual staff appraisal. It includes teaching observations by the Head of Centre, the outcomes from which feed into the appraisal process. New staff are provided with an induction to teaching at ULISC. There is also a peer-observation scheme and this has included an arrangement for cross-curricular as well as departmental observation as a way of enhancing teaching practice.

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

2.23 In order to test the Expectation, the review team read documentation relating to the approach to learning and teaching at ULISC, and gained information through meetings with senior staff, teaching staff and students.

2.24 Students have a thorough understanding of the learning opportunities available to them. Their rights and responsibilities, including in relation to teaching and learning, were articulated through the new Student Charter which is incorporated in student handbooks. The physical learning and social environment has been enhanced through the transfer of ULISC to St George's Tower, with its modern well-equipped teaching space and social learning space. Students are also supported by full access to the learning resources of the University. They strongly endorsed the quality of academic support they received from staff, and they particularly valued their access to staff through the personal academic tutor scheme, staff office hours and the open-door policy operated by staff at ULISC.

2.25 ULISC uses student feedback, through the Staff Student Liaison Group (SSLG), to initiate change, for example of the delivery model from three-hour to two-hour teaching sessions. Students confirmed the effectiveness of arrangements through which they receive feedback on their assessments and academic progress. They stated that the approach to teaching and learning at ULISC was giving them a good preparation for transition to the University. Alumni students, who had experience of studying at the University, commented very positively on the effectiveness of the preparation they had received at ULISC. In particular, they valued the confidence their studies at ULISC had engendered, and the sense of empowerment they had going forward to their University programme. ULISC has developed effective ways of monitoring how well its approach to teaching and learning prepares its students for transition to the University through its Alumni Survey, Alumni Group

and the link student scheme, and from information available through AMB on how well ULISC students are progressing at the University.

2.26 Teaching and support staff confirmed that they are subject to an annual appraisal process and that, as part of this, staff teaching is observed and commented on by the Head of Centre. Appraisal is the principal route through which staff development needs are identified and articulated. Newly appointed staff have an induction to ULISC, which they judged to have been helpful. New staff appointed on very short-term contracts also had their teaching observed by the Head of Centre.

2.27 The Study Group Centre Review (November 2015) had reviewed staff continuing professional development. Staff said they would welcome more staff development opportunities both within the Study Group network and externally. In particular, they would welcome the development of subject-based peer group activities across the ISC network to enable the sharing of good practice between subject staff in the different centres, and especially where staff are working in very small subject teams. The recommendation from the Centre Review Report relating to this was incorporated as an action point in the ULISC Centre Action Plan, and the Head of Centre has commenced discussion with the Heads of Centre in Sheffield and Lancaster ISCs. ULISC staff have the same access to University-based CPD activities as University staff. Teaching may be observed on several occasions during their first year. The annual appraisal process drives staff development, opportunities for which may be provided internally or externally including through the University.

2.28 The Head of English has responsibility for oversight of the peer-review process, which was undertaken in terms 1 and 2 in 2015-16. The model used at ULISC is designed to be objective and to be data rather than judgement-based. Staff are asked to find a peer to review them, and this is logged with the Head of English to ensure full participation. The observed member of staff identifies teaching tasks on which they wish to be observed from a list of defined tasks. The observer gives confidential feedback to the observee, and staff are asked to identify the learning points generated through their observation to be shared with other staff.

2.29 The ULISC has a clear strategy for learning and teaching, there is a comprehensive appraisal system, including teaching observation, and learning and teaching is critically reviewed. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and 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

2.30 The Student Charter contains a statement of the obligations for supporting student learning and personal development. It also includes the obligations of students actively to engage in their own learning and personal development. ULISC has a number of mechanisms whereby it enables student development and achievement. It ensures that students are made aware of these opportunities through induction and through the student handbooks, which are available in hard copy and electronic formats. Students are also informed and supported through the VLE and by the use of 'storyboard messages' designed to clarify key messages (such as assessment regulations and student engagement) so that students understand their obligations.

2.31 ULISC has systems in place for student support and guidance, providing learning resources for students and monitoring student progression. The assessment process is designed to ensure that feedback on assignments contributes to student learning. These arrangements and resources are reviewed annually.

2.32 The design of the processes would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.33 To test whether the Expectation is met in practice, the review team examined student handbooks, the Student Charter, minutes of ULISC committees. It held meetings with staff and students of ULISC and alumni students who have progressed to the University.

2.34 ULISC uses its Student Charter to make clear its approach to enabling student development and achievement - that it has obligations to provide support and resources, but that students have an obligation actively to engage in their own learning and personal development. It effectively communicates the range of support it provides for students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential notably through student handbooks, the VLE and through induction. Students confirmed the same comprehensive week-long induction programme was available to support both September and January cohort students. Students met by the team exhibited a wide-ranging knowledge of the support mechanisms and resources available to them.

2.35 Arrangements for academic and personal support for students are integrated and effective. Staff have an induction on the personal tutor role and Study Group provides a training package. A strength of the personal tutoring scheme is that it is linked to delivery of a component of the IFY programme - the Project Study - so that personal tutors have regular weekly contact with their tutees. ULISC also provides a standard schedule of activities to ensure consistency of student experience across different personal tutors. The support from personal tutoring has been enhanced during 2015-16 by the introduction of staff office hours when students know they are able to access staff on a drop-in basis. The new role of Student Welfare Officer has significantly enhanced the effectiveness of personal and pastoral support for students. Academic support arrangements, notably arrangements for timely and effective feedback on assessments, were also confirmed by students. Overall, students met by the team said the support they received from all staff at ULISC, in relation to their academic and personal development, was the single most positive aspect of their experience at ULISC.

2.36 Students receive appropriate support for the transition to the University. They receive a grounding in study skills and are able to develop their confidence and said that they felt empowered by their experience at ULISC to go forward into their University programme. Overall, the holistic and integrated approach to the support for students that empowers learners to develop their academic, personal and professional potential is **good practice**.

2.37 A particular strength of student support arrangements at ULISC is the use made of alumni students, notably those who have been appointed to the role of Link Student. Staff at all levels were able to point to the value of the link student scheme, both in relation to the effective support of current students, and as a means of evaluating the effectiveness of ULISC programmes in preparing students for successful progression through their subsequent University programme. The scheme has been set up jointly with the University and has been operating for three years. Link students assisted with the induction of new students, to whom their experience of going through the programme of studies at ULISC and on to the University was invaluable. Link students attend mini-fairs with University link tutors to help students understand what their University programme will involve when they progress, to act as a link between their University academic department and ULISC, and to provide individual support and guidance to students making the transition to the University. More broadly, the Alumni Group made up of link students provides a forum to enable ULISC to evaluate the effectiveness of its provision, and also to advise on proposed new developments at ULISC. Link students also provide a student input to the joint University/ULISC AMB. The effective operation and use of the link student scheme to support and facilitate students' transition is **good practice**.

2.38 The learning environment and learning resources which support student development and achievement are well regarded by students. The move to the new premises in St George's Tower had prompted concerns that students might feel less integrated into the University, and ULISC resolved to monitor student opinion on this. The Centre Review in November 2015 asked students about this issue, but found that students were very positive about the move and recognised that they were closer to the University and its resources than many university students who did not live on campus.

2.39 The VLE supports student learning and development effectively. Individual modules have a VLE presence, and ULISC lays down minimum standards in relation to the content of modules on the VLE. Students confirmed that the VLE was their principal source of information about their programme, and constituted a valuable learning resource.

2.40 The Progresso management information system enables ULISC to monitor student progress during their time at ULISC. It enables students at risk to be identified and supported. It also supports an analysis of student progression to the University and issues that may adversely affect progression rates as part of its annual monitoring process, PSAAD. The MIS data supports analysis of progression by individual pathway and performance in each module of each pathway, and progression by nationality. It also identifies students who meet the requirements but do not register with the University.

2.41 For 2014-15, 67 per cent of the students who were admitted to ULISC progressed to the University. Of the students who started, 10 per cent terminated their studies, mainly for academic reasons. Of the students who met the progression requirements, 12 per cent chose not to register at the University. This was a deterioration relative to 2013-14 where 70 per cent of students who entered ULISC progressed to the University. There is significant variation at pathway level. Two pathways have rates of progression to the University lower than the average for the Centre: Engineering and Technology (50 per cent) and Economics and Management (62 per cent). Two pathways exceeded the ULISC average for progression to the University: Society and Culture (80 per cent) and Science (73 per cent).

2.42 In its current Action Plan, ULISC has a series of actions identified to improve progression and retention. The University's International Office provides AMB with data relating to the performance of ISC students on their University programme, and a comparison with other international students and all students at the University. AMB believes the data as presented is comprehensive but not conducive to effective analysis, and it has asked the International Office to review its methodology prior to the presentation of data to the spring term meeting of AMB. Overall, trends in the data suggest that degree outcomes for ULISC students are comparable to those of other students, though generally ULISC students have above average representation at lower-second and third-class honours. The IY1 programme only commenced in 2015-16, and no progression data is available yet.

2.43 ULISC has robust systems in place to enable students to progress academically, personally and professionally. These systems are evaluated and developed on a regular basis. 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

2.44 ULISC presents a wide range of opportunities for current students to engage in the quality assurance and enhancement of their educational experience. It does so in two main ways: through student representatives on various committees and various student surveys. In addition, ULISC undertakes surveys of its alumni students who have progressed to the University.

2.45 The principal survey is for the evaluation of modules undertaken by both the September and January cohorts, using an online questionnaire created by ULISC. This informs the process of module review. In addition, Study Group undertakes a number of surveys of student views in all of the centres, using its electronic survey system 'SPARK', and including a post-orientation survey of student views on induction. Findings from surveys are incorporated into annual monitoring (PSAAD), shared with QAEG and discussed at AMB.

2.46 The Student Council has elected representatives from each class. It is chaired and minuted by the students themselves, supported by the Student Council Link Tutor. Student issues are raised with the Head of Centre by the Chair of the Student Council and the Student Council Link Tutor, and the Head of Centre formally responds to issues raised. There is a SSLG for each foundation pathway, and these incorporate student representatives together with lead tutors. The SSLG has an academic remit, acts as a forum for discussing student-related matters, and providing opportunities for communication between students and staff on such things as feedback on teaching, learning and assessment relating to subjects and pathways. It reports to the AMB and informs the PSAAD process.

2.47 The Student Experience Group (SEG) is a University/ULISC forum which includes student representatives drawn from the Student Council, and which focuses on matters related to the relationship with the University and how integration with University life may be enhanced. ULISC provides some training for student representatives, but wishes to see more formal training for the role and is in discussion with the University's Students' Union to create an online training package for student representatives.

2.48 The QAEG is a ULISC-based quality-focused forum chaired by the Head of Centre, with membership comprising the key members of ULISC's academic and professional services and support staff. There is no student representation in the terms of reference and membership of QAEG in the Centre Handbook. However, the Centre Review November 2015 recommended student representation should be introduced from spring 2016, and both staff and students confirmed that there is now student representation on QAEG. There is no current student representation on the joint University/ULISC Academic Management Board, but alumni students are members.

2.49 ULISC also seeks to involve its alumni students who have progressed to the University in assuring the quality and enhancement of the student experience at ULISC. It has introduced an Alumni Survey to ascertain the views of students who are completing their first year of study at the University. It has operated the link student scheme with the University for the last three years which involves alumni students in the ongoing work of the

ISC, and it has also undertaken ad hoc surveys of alumni student views relating to specific issues, for example the recent ESUS Focus Group.

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

2.51 In order to test whether the Expectation is met in practice, the review team examined a range of documentation through which ULISC defines and communicates its approach to student engagement. It also had the opportunity to meet staff and students to ascertain the effectiveness of ULISC's approach to student engagement.

2.52 ULISC creates a culture that encourages students to be involved in quality assurance and enhancement of their programme. It also believes student engagement has brought demonstrable enhancements to the student educational experience. There is comprehensive evidence of the serious and effective approach adopted by ULISC to ensure students engage fully with opportunities for giving feedback and having effective representation of their views. There is a commitment in the Student Charter that ULISC is actively seeking student participation in its decision-making and committees. The structure, purpose and importance of student engagement are spelled out in the student handbooks, and supported by the 'story board' presentations on student notice boards and a leaflet promoting the role and purpose of student engagement. In particular, students are encouraged to become representatives on the Student Council through promotional literature, a quiz on the role of the Student Council and its members, and recognition for students who undertake the role of representative through the issue of Student Councillor Certificates of participation.

2.53 The three committees/groups with student representation (Student Council, SSLG and SEG) have clearly defined and distinguished roles, and this was well understood by students. Minutes of both the Student Council and the SSLG showed that their business was consistent with their stated purpose. In relation to module surveys, participation rates in these online surveys was relatively low, and ULISC was investigating ways in which this might be enhanced, for example the timing of when surveys were undertaken. Students reported that the systems employed by ULISC to secure student engagement were effective, and they supported the view that students have opportunities to become student representatives and to give feedback. They also confirmed that they had received training and were supported by a handbook in their role as student representatives.

2.54 ULISC is particularly effective in the engagement of its alumni students in the assurance and enhancement of the quality of the student educational experience. Alumni students are able to take a view on the effectiveness of their learning experience at ULISC and its preparation for transition to the University, from the perspective of having studied on a University programme subsequent to leaving ULISC. This input is secured through the Alumni Student Survey, the role of the link student, and through ad hoc surveys and informal processes.

2.55 Current students are now involved at all organisational levels, with the recent inclusion of current student representatives on QAEG, ULISC making use of student feedback in its annual monitoring and other quality processes. 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

2.56 ULISC subject tutors produce examination and course work assessments, together with detailed mark schemes. It is the module leader's responsibility to ensure alignment of the syllabus, learning outcomes and assessment criteria. Examinations for IFY are approved by the external examiner.

2.57 The assessment setting and marking and moderation process for IY1 is clearly set out in a flowchart in the IY1 Student Handbook. ULISC module leaders pass the assessment materials and marking schemes to the Head of Centre and to the University Partnership Manager for distribution to university module leaders who offer comment and approval. If changes are required, the materials are sent back to the ULISC module leaders for action. Once changes have been made and approved by university module leaders and the IY1 Partnership Manager the materials are forwarded to the external examiner for approval.

2.58 Marking is conducted by tutors and module leaders at ULISC. All examination scripts are distributed to markers and marked anonymously; other ULISC tutors second mark 20 per cent of exam scripts and essays, including all borderline scripts. Additionally, there is an in-centre verification procedure to ensure that all assignments have been marked thoroughly in accordance with the mark scheme and that marks have been correctly added and recorded with the Head of Centre running a final check. Additionally, all exam scripts and 50 per cent of coursework assignments are passed to the external examiner for moderation.

2.59 Students are informed of the process and penalties for academic misconduct in the Student Handbook; they have to sign a declaration that each assessment is their own work. All academic misconduct offences are considered at the Academic Misconduct Panel. All outcomes are reported at the next Module Assessment Board and a summary is recorded in the minutes and brought to the attention of the external examiners prior to the relevant Programme Assessment Board.

2.60 Mitigating circumstances are detailed fully in the Centre Handbook and in the Student Handbooks and are dealt with by the Personal Mitigating Circumstances Panel. Cases are reported to the Programme Assessment Board and may impact on progression.

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

2.62 In order to test its application, the review team reviewed handbooks, assessment regulations and spoke to academic, support staff and to students.

2.63 The late submission policy has recently been simplified but remains complex. However, it aligns with the University's process, is documented clearly in the handbooks and is understood by staff and students.

2.64 Students are guided through the grading criteria for assessments. Past papers with mark schemes are made available on the VLE. Feedback for assessments is given within

seven working days. This includes comments from the tutor and marks together with assessment. If students have any questions regarding their work or grade, they can arrange a one-to-one meeting with the tutor or discuss the matter through email.

2.65 There is a wide range of types of assessment and there is normally at least a mid-term assessment and an end-of-term examination. Assignment briefs are clear and generic and individual feedback is available; some students interpret this discussion as an opportunity to challenge their marks, though the team was informed that this is not permitted under the appeals process (see Expectation B9). Students submit either in hard copy and receive grades and comments on this, or electronically and checked through software for plagiarism; they are not able to check their own work for plagiarism.

2.66 Module Assessment Boards consider and endorse module marks and consider student progression; marks are compared with previous years and advice to students is formulated. The Programme Assessment Board is attended by the external examiners and the final statement of results for students is presented.

2.67 ULISC has in place effective procedures to ensure equitable, valid and reliable processes of assessment. 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

2.68 There are three external examiners for IFY, the first one focuses on ESUS across all IFY pathways, the second focuses on Science and Engineering and Technology and the third on Economics and Management, Society and Culture. With the introduction in January 2016 of the new IY1 in Management Studies, the University has just appointed a fourth external examiner.

2.69 The University's External Examiner Handbook describes the assessment board and the responsibilities of external examiners. The University also provides an online induction process and at the same web location is a flowchart describing the internal University processes and the external examiner actions required. The nomination process is described on the website and the nomination form ensures that no external examiner is appointed where there is a conflict of interest. The University approves all external examiner appointments to ULISC for both validated and approved programmes.

2.70 ULISC provides external examiners with the relevant student handbook and other necessary documentation including regulations and assessment weightings and patterns for each module. External examiners then scrutinise 50 per cent of students' work, provide oral reports and make comments that are reviewed at the PAB. External examiners attend PABs. Detailed findings, conclusions and recommendations are drawn together into the external examiner report. These reports are then summarised in the Programme Self-Assessment and Action Document (PSAAD) and used to generate sections of an action plan.

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

2.72 In order to test the Expectation, the team consulted a number of procedural documents, and external examiner reports and discussed the role of external examiners with staff and students.

2.73 Study Group maintains a list of all the external examiners allocated to each centre, for both approved and validated provision; this list indicates centre, programme and pathway; tenure start and finish dates; and name and institution of the examiner. This log has been recently collated and is not yet a full record.

2.74 Examinations and mark schemes are sent to external examiners for approval prior to examinations. Once external examiners' reports are received the module leaders each produces a response to them and these responses are collated by the Head of Centre and forwarded to the relevant examiner.

2.75 External examiners are required to use the University template for reports for the IY1 programme, but there is no Study Group or ULISC template for the IFY programme and each external examiner produces a report using an individual format. There is therefore no consistency across external examiners' reports and, in a few cases, there are no comments made on key aspects. The team **recommends** that ULISC develops and implements a consistent and comprehensive approach to the reporting by external examiners on the approved programmes.

2.76 External examiner reports are shared with staff on shared drive and with students on the VLE. ULISC responses are also shared. Students and staff are aware of the role of external examiners and know where to access their reports.

2.77 ULISC has a rigorous process and publishes a detailed account of how external examiners are used, and it shares this with students. The 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

2.78 ULISC discharges its responsibilities for monitoring and review of its IFY programme through a framework consisting of the Study Group-led programme approval and review process, the centre-led annual monitoring process, (PSAAD) and module review and evaluation, which supports the PSAAD process. The annual monitoring report (PSAAD) is submitted to the University chaired AMB for approval and it is also routed through the Centre QAEG to the RQAEG. Similarly, the report arising from programme review is approved at AMB and goes through the QAEG/RQAEG Study Group quality committees. Actions arising from both monitoring and periodic programme review are incorporated in the CAP. Responsibility for monitoring and review of the IFY lies with the University.

2.79 Centre Review is a process undertaken by Study Group to assure itself each ISC is effectively managing academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities. Review outcomes are reported to AQAEC, and recommendations feed into the CAP. ULISC was last reviewed in 2015, and recommendations from the review were incorporated into the CAP.

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

2.81 The review team examined documentation relating to systems for annual programme monitoring and programme re-approval. It was also able to examine two PSAAD reports for 2013-14 and 2014-15, and the report from the re-approval of the IFY programme in 2015 to ascertain how the systems operated in practice. This was supplemented by meetings with staff to discuss the management and implementation of programme annual monitoring and re-approval. It was also possible to trace the consideration of both annual monitoring reports and the programme re-approval report through the committee structures.

2.82 In relation to annual review, the Centre Handbook outlines the process that ULISC undertakes to support annual programme review. All the material relevant to the operation of the programme during the year under consideration, including detailed progression data, reviews of each module including results from the module evaluation surveys, issues raised by external examiners in their reports and the Centre's responses to them, and issues raised through the SSLG are collated by the Head of Centre. He also produces a self-assessment and appraisal of the previous 12 months. The resulting document is the Programme Self-Assessment and Action Document (PSAAD). This is a different reporting format from that used by other ISCs. The PSAADs for 2013-14 and 2014-15 provide evidence of this process being effectively implemented by the Centre. The PSAAD identifies key issues which are then incorporated into the Centre Action Plan, which in turn supports the future development of the Programme and has the potential to enhance quality. Although the IFY is an approved provision of Study Group, formal approval of the PSAAD is routed through the University-chaired AMB. The evidence seen by the review team satisfied it that ULISC operates an effective system of annual programme review in relation to its IFY programme.

2.83 The re-approval process for the IFY in 2015, as evidenced in the report from the Programme Re-approval event, supports the judgement that ULISC operates a rigorous and effective approach to periodic programme review, operating within Study Group's framework for programme approval/re-approval. ULISC uses external academic staff from other higher education institutions as members of the re-approval panel. The programme re-approval

report for the IFY review in 2015 showed careful scrutiny of the programme by the panel, and the identification of conditions and recommendations, as well as commendations and good practice. Outcomes from the review were discussed at QAEG, and responses to the conditions agreed. The report had gone forward to AMB for formal approval.

2.84 Study Group is currently reviewing its procedure for approval of programme withdrawal in centres, and there has not been a recent programme withdrawal at ULISC. However, low student numbers have meant that ULISC needed to suspend recruitment to the IFY Science Pathway in January 2016. ULISC does not lay down a minimum number of students for a pathway to be considered viable, but makes a judgement during the recruitment process whether the pathway will be allowed to run, and the provider-level Programme Approval and Validation Committee (PAVC) makes the formal decision, as it did in the case of the Science Pathway.

2.85 ULISC operates an effective, regular and systematic process for the monitoring and review of programmes. 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

2.86 The responsibility checklist indicates that for the IFY programme Study Group and ULISC both have responsibility for dealing with complaints and appeals. The Study Group's set of rules and regulations for appeals and for complaints confirms this escalation of the process to Study Group. The ULISC Student Complaints and Appeals Procedure (Academic) contained within the IFY Student Handbook aligns with this and has a fourth stage that involves the Study Group Regional Director. However, the Student Complaints Procedure (non-academic) is a three-stage process and does not refer to the escalation to Study Group. The ULISC nomenclature for the two procedures is confusing.

2.87 For the IY1 programme, Study Group, ULISC and the University share responsibility for complaints and appeals. The ULISC Student Complaints and Appeals Procedure (Academic) contained within the IY1 Student Handbook aligns with this and has a fourth stage that involves the Study Group Regional Director and a fifth stage that refers the appeal to the University. However, the Student Complaints Procedure (non-academic) does not refer to the escalation to Study Group, but passes an unresolved complaint from ULISC directly to the University.

2.88 Study Group has a set of rules and regulations for appeals which indicate that appeals will only be considered on grounds of procedural irregularity or mitigating circumstances. It reinforces this by the statement that appeals against academic judgement will not be heard. The University Appeal Procedure permits appeals on ground of circumstances materially affecting the student's performance that were not practicable for student to make known beforehand; procedural irregularities and evidence of prejudice or bias. An appeal that questions the academic or professional judgement is not permitted. The Appeals Procedure in the IY1 Student Handbook restates the same conditions as the University's conditions. However, the Appeals and complaints section in the IFY Student Handbook states that 'students have the right to appeal in certain circumstances against the award of marks by teaching staff for any coursework assignments or examination scripts that count towards your final assessment'. The circumstances are not spelt out and there is no reference in this handbook to not permitting appeals against academic judgement.

2.89 The early stages of an appeal for both the IFY and IY1 programme focus on re-marking work and do not address dealing with procedural irregularity or mitigating circumstances. Both of these situations would have to progress to the final stage of an appeal panel.

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

2.91 The review team consulted the centre handbook, the IY1 quality assurance handbook and the student handbooks, and Study Group and University procedures and clarified the operation with students and staff.

2.92 The review team was informed that in the case of both a complaint and an appeal for the IFY programme at ULISC, it will be dealt with at the centre under the ULISC procedure and if not resolved it will be passed to Study Group to make a final decision under the Study Group Procedure. The documentation does not confirm this (see above).

2.93 ULISC describes strong tutorial processes that it contends resolve most complaints informally, thus reducing the need to use its appeals and complaints procedure. Students informed the team that providing their assessment has not been second marked and confirmed by the external examiner, they are able to challenge an assessment mark. At the point that students are given one-to-one feedback on their assessment a number of students believe that they can appeal their mark with the tutor and challenge the tutor's academic judgement. Academic staff gave ambiguous and contradictory responses in relation to changing marks following the marking and moderation period. Senior staff assured the team that any re-marking has to follow stage 1 of the Student Complaints and Appeals Procedure (Academic) which requires the concern to be raised with the Head of Centre.

2.94 The lack of consistency between appeals procedures and the lack of clarity of student and staff's understanding of the procedures led the team to **recommend** that ULISC should ensure internal consistency in the framework for dealing with academic appeals.

2.95 Despite the review team's concerns about inconsistency with the framework, appeals and complaints procedures are in place to handle students' appeals and complaints. If they are not resolved there is a process to refer them to the University. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and associated level of risk is moderate.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

2.96 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.

2.97 All nine expectations are met, with low levels of risk in eight and a moderate risk in one. ULISC has effective systems in place for programme approval, admissions, learning and teaching, student support, student engagement, assessment, programme review, complaints and appeals. There are two good practices concerning student support and the use of link tutors. There were two recommendations relating to external examiners and the framework for academic appeals.

2.98 The review team concludes that the quality of student learning opportunities at ULISC **meets** UK expectations.

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, accessible and trustworthy.

Quality Code, Part C: Information about Higher Education Provision

Findings

3.1 Study Group requires each embedded college to produce or update annually a series of key centre documents that have a range of audiences including applicants, students and staff. The documents required are set out in Study Group's Academic Quality Handbook. Each centre produces programme and module specifications and a Calendar of Business for the academic year. ULISC also produces a marketing brochure; this is produced centrally by Study Group with the Head of Centre responsible for confirming the accuracy of the information prior to publication. ULISC is supplied with templates by Study Group for key handbooks and the contents lists are indicative.

3.2 Study Group is currently developing an enhanced information system whereby key data about an ISC and its provision will be stored centrally, validated as complete and accurate by the Deputy Centre Director, and can only be amended following approval by the PAVC.

3.3 The Marketing Manager of Study Group, the University and the Head of Centre work closely to review and update public-facing documents like the ISC prospectus and the ISC pages on the University's webpages, to ensure that information is accessible, up to date and relevant for the audience.

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

3.5 In order to test the effectiveness, the team studied the website and discussed the effectiveness of the practices and procedures for the publication of information with students and senior academic and professional support staff.

3.6 The team received confirmation that the Head of Centre and the University sign off to ensure the accuracy of publicly published material. The University holds the programme specification for the IY1 programme. There are minimum expectations for the information held on the VLE and this is checked by the Head of Centre. A new 'e-champ' has recently been appointed.

3.7 The prospectus is available online. It is attractive and well illustrated with helpful detail provided. The website is easily navigable and the centre promotes the fact that the accommodation is in the same block as teaching, in the centre of the city. The student submission indicates that students feel the website provides detailed information on all of the courses and pathways and helps prepare students for arrival. It also clearly states the progression requirements that students have to fulfil in order to progress to their chosen university degree.

3.8 Students who met the team confirmed the accuracy and helpfulness of the recruitment information provided and welcomed the course information provided in handbooks, on the VLE and in assessment briefs once they commence the course. Student handbooks are extensive and detailed and include considerable information about assessment and useful information about studying in the UK.

3.9 The information produced by ULISC is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy. 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

3.10 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.

3.11 ULISC, 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.

3.12 The review team concludes that the quality of information about learning opportunities **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 ULISC continues to develop and implement strategies to enhance student learning opportunities. It links this to robust information generated from a range of stakeholders. ULISC documents identify a number of ways in which the student learning experience and opportunities have been enhanced within ULISC. It is not always clear that these are the outcome of a systematic approach.

4.2 ULISC takes an active approach to quality enhancement and sees itself at the forefront of enhancement working within Study Group. Collective staff effort is central to the approach. A range of information sources are used to inform ULISC's approach to enhancement including module reviews, student feedback, and external examiner reports. Lead tutors take this information forward to QAEG for discussion and action. QAEG has responsibility for identifying and disseminating good practice.

4.3 The CAP records actions identified locally, through Study Group and as an outcome from QAA reviews and monitoring visits. It provides a record of actions and their implementation, many of which have an enhancement agenda. ULISC uses information from students, external examiners and annual reviews to identify the need for enhancements. It also makes use of its alumni students who have progressed to the University.

5 Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability

Findings

5.1 At present, ULISC does not have a strategic approach to developing students' employability skills. There are plans to introduce CareerAhead next year and to develop the personal tutorial framework to focus specifically on employability skills. However, modules do develop students' interpersonal and transferable skills by encouraging them to participate in classroom-based activities and group work sessions. Students report that they see the value of the varied types of assessments and consider that group assessments help them to develop their team-working skills; however, a small number are concerned about group work assessment contributing to their overall grade.

5.2 There is development of employability skills for ULISC alumni through the partnership with the University and the role of Link Student. Former ULISC students are paid by the University to maintain links with current ULISC students. This initiative has been in place since 2013 and there are currently 12 link students across the University. Both current students and link students speak highly of the initiative.

5.3 IY1 students attend a two-hour Talent Academy session at the University as part of their course. This introduces students to the concept of transferable skills, team working and communication. It includes a timed group challenge, a debrief, and individual and collective reflection. It also signposts students to the University Career Development Service and optional employability workshops.

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.

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